



ACCESS POLICY

1. Introduction

This policy has been drawn up in compliance with the Public Services Quality Group Standard for Access to Archives.

2. Who We Serve

Northumberland Archives (Woodhorn and Berwick-upon-Tweed) serves all those individuals, communities and organisations interested in the archives of the County of Northumberland. This includes supporting the day to day work of Northumberland County Council officers and members.

3. Our Purpose

Our Mission Statement is:

Northumberland Archives actively seeks to acquire and preserve appropriate archives relating to the county of Northumberland and to make this resource accessible for public use.

4. Making Our Collections Available

4.1 Our Searchrooms

- 4.1.1 Our searchrooms at Woodhorn and Berwick-upon-Tweed provide extensive indexes and catalogues to help visitors identify collections or parts of collections that may support their research. Many catalogues can be accessed through our online catalogue at <https://www.northumberlandarchives.com/catalogue/> and via The National Archives Discovery catalogue at <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk>. Archives staff are available to provide advice about catalogues.
- 4.1.2 To view original archives in our searchrooms at Woodhorn and Berwick-upon-Tweed visitors must be in possession of an Archives Card – see <https://archivescard.com/>. This is provided on production of specific forms of official identity providing name and address. All visitors are expected to sign our Visitors Books and by doing so agree to adhere to our Searchroom Rules. A printed Code of Conduct is available in both searchrooms and is applicable to both searchroom visitors and Northumberland Archives staff.

- 4.1.3 Original archival material can be requested in both searchrooms. Collections recorded as held at Northumberland Archives - Woodhorn are held on site and can be quickly produced for users. Expectations around production times are set out in our Service Standards. Collections held at Berwick-upon-Tweed are held off-site and need to be requested one week in advance of any searchroom visit. In some instances, users at both service points will be expected to consult surrogate formats of records, usually digital or microfilm copies.
- 4.1.4 Public access computers are available to provide internet access to local and family history websites and staff can provide advice around online resources.
- 4.1.5 Members of staff are always on-hand to help with enquiries about finding aids and collections. A charged for Mentor Service is available for visitors who may benefit from an extended period of staff advice.
- 4.1.6 Access to the Search Room is free. However, there are charges for publications, reprographic services and our Research Service. All our fees and charges are reviewed annually and published in both hard-copy and web-based formats.
- 4.1.7 Depending on the condition and format of the documents, Northumberland Archives can provide photocopies of archives at A4 and A3 sizes. Where photocopying of an original document is not possible, we offer a digital copying service (most sizes available) which allows the provision of a copy images by e-mail or the provision of a paper copy. Pricelists are available in our searchrooms and on our website and orders can be placed in person or via post, e-mail or telephone. Estimates for copying items can be requested.
- 4.1.8. Self-photography of certain classes of record is permitted. Further information about this is available in our searchrooms and on our website. Daily, weekly or annual self-photography passes can be purchased.
- 4.1.9 Northumberland Archives staff can provide basic information from our indexes and catalogues free-of-charge and can suggest possible avenues of research. However, if enquires are more complex it may be necessary to use our charged for Research Service. Details of this service are available in our searchrooms and on our website. We aim to respond promptly and efficiently to enquiries by telephone, letter and e-mail. All enquiry responses are monitored and are required to meet the standards listed in our Service Standards.
- 4.1.10 We produce a series of Information Leaflets to assist users with their research. These are available free of charge in our searchrooms and can be downloaded from our website.

5. Access Restrictions

- 5.1 While most archives are available under the normal production system provided by Northumberland Archives some documents are subject to closure restrictions. These restrictions apply to some classes of Public Records, including the records of magistrates' courts, county courts, coroners' records, former Coal Companies and hospital records and other records that contain personal data. Most restrictions are highlighted in the searchroom catalogues.
- 5.2 Northumberland Archives follows restricted access procedures as required under the Data Protection Act, 1998 and the Freedom of Information Act, 2000 which may permit access to certain pieces of closed information under relevant guidelines. Northumberland Archives staff are pleased to advise on procedures around gaining access to closed records.
- 5.3 In common with many Local Authority Archives Northumberland Archives has a substantive cataloguing backlog. For security reasons, we do not allow general access to uncatalogued collections. Requests to access such collections should be made in writing to the Head of Collections.

6. Outreach

Northumberland Archives aims to work with communities across Northumberland and beyond by offering charged for group visits to our searchrooms, talks on set topics to community groups in Northumberland, participation in county fairs and similar events and by offering advice and consultancy services to community groups. Requests for involvement in outreach activity should be sent to archives@northumberland.gov.uk.

7. Support For Education Projects

Northumberland Archives offers support to schools, higher education institutions and lifelong learners via source guidance, production of digital resources and face to face sessions. Digital content is made available via our LEARN platform – see <https://www.northumberlandarchives.com/learn/>. Requests for involvement in education work should be sent to learnarchive@northumberland.gov.uk.

8. Audience Development Plan

Our Audience Development Plan 2020-2023 sets out our plans to engage with audiences over the next three years. The Plan can be viewed on our website.

9. Our Website

User information for both Woodhorn and Berwick-upon-Tweed can be accessed via our website - www.northumberlandarchives.com Information provided includes:

- Opening hours
- Details of our enquiry, mentor and reprographic services.
- Policies and strategies relating to our service.
- Information about collections and their location.
- Information leaflets and details of other publications.
- Information about events and other details to help visitors and remote enquirers use our services and facilities.
- Link to our electronic catalogue
- LEARN – our online digital education platform

The website is continually being updated.

9. Auditing Our Service

- 9.1 Northumberland Archives produces an annual Forward Plan that sets out specific work specific work targets for acquisitions of archives, their preservation, cataloguing and indexing, public searchroom standards and activity and learning and outreach activities. The Plan is published on our website and is monitored by the Head of Archives and the Berwick Archivist.
- 9.2 In 2018 Northumberland Archives at Woodhorn was awarded Archive Accreditation status. This is a national programme of peer reviewed accreditation managed by our sectoral lead – The National Archives. As a recognised Place of Deposit it is essential that we meet standards that will allow our service to be accredited. We are currently working towards accredited status for Berwick-upon-Tweed Record Office.
- 9.3 Northumberland Archives regularly participate in the national PSQG (Public Services Quality Group). Published survey results allow some benchmarking against similar services.
- 9.4 Northumberland Archives participates in the annual CIPFA Archives Survey. Published survey results allow some benchmarking against similar services.
- 9.5 Northumberland Archives undertakes evaluation of many aspects of its activities, including talks, workshops and project work.

10. Public Service Standards

- 10.1 Our Service Standard document pledges us to meet the highest possible standards of public service. A copy of this document is available in hard copy format in our searchrooms and can be viewed on our website. We aim to ensure prompt response times to enquiries and requests for copies of documents, efficient document production times and high levels of public advice.
- 10.2 We have a procedure for user comments and complaints which guarantees a response within 5 working days. Forms are available in our searchrooms at

Woodhorn and Berwick. Users may write to or e-mail the Head of Archives or Berwick Archivist. All comments or complaints are monitored and responses are reviewed annually.

11. The Media

Northumberland Archives welcomes interest from the media in its work. Contacts with the media are regulated through a Media Policy which is available in our searchrooms, by e-mail and on the Northumberland Archives website.

12. Access, Equality & Social Inclusion

Northumberland Archives is committed to the development of positive policies and activities to promote equal opportunities in employment and in the delivery of services regardless of race, disability, gender, religion, sexual orientation or age. It is also committed to identifying and removing barriers of social exclusion that may prevent access to its services and facilities.

13. Review

This policy will be reviewed every three years, and if appropriate, amended to maintain its relevance.

Date: May 2010

Reviewed: June 2016

Reviewed: July 2017

Reviewed: June 2021