

Bath Record Office: Archives & Local Studies **Access and Engagement Policy**

1. POLICY FRAMEWORK

1.1 Mission Statement

Bath Record Office: Archives and Local Studies collects and keeps safe archives and local studies collections relating to Bath & North East Somerset and its people, it provides access to archives and local studies materials, promoting them for the benefit of the community, and it is the permanent home of the Council's archive.

1.2 Statutory and legal status

Bath Record Office: Archives and Local Studies is the authorised archive service for the custody of the official records of Bath & North East Somerset Council and its predecessor authorities under the Local Government Act, 1972.

It is an approved 'Place of Deposit' under the Public Records Acts 1958 and 1967 for a number of classes of Central Government records held locally (Public Records).

It has been empowered to acquire archives by deposit, gift or purchase and to preserve and make them available under The Local Government (Records) Act, 1962 (c.56). Section 4 of this Act also permits the allocation of resources to persons looking after such archives.

1.3 Council Corporate Strategy

The Council's Corporate Strategy priorities are to:

- Address the climate emergency
- Prepare for the future
- Deliver for local residents
- Focus on prevention
- Give people a bigger say

1.4 Service aims

Bath Record Office: Archives and Local Studies forms part of Heritage Services under the Economy & Growth Directorate of Bath & North East Somerset Council. Heritage Services' statement of purpose is 'For learning, inspiration and enjoyment', which informs its aims:

- to enhance the quality of life for residents of Bath & North East Somerset
- to maximise public enjoyment of the Council's world class heritage
- to enable people to learn from the activities and achievements of past and present societies
- to promote understanding and appreciation of different cultures
- to contribute to the district's economic prosperity through our Business Plan

2. PURPOSE

2.1 BRO aims to provide wide access to collections, by a variety of means, whilst ensuring that records are preserved for future generations.

2.2 This policy sets out how collections can be accessed and how we aim to engage diverse audiences with the archives and local studies collections.

3. ACCESS TO COLLECTIONS

On-site access

3.1 We provide free access to the public search room at the Record Office, located within the Guildhall in central Bath. Our opening hours are Tuesday – Friday, 9am-1pm and 2pm-5pm (closing at 4.30pm on Fridays). No appointment is required to visit the search room. We ask that visitors apply for a membership card, if they have not already done so, or to verify their membership card at the enquiries desk. We will issue membership cards on production of proof of ID and address such as a recent utility bill, driving licence or bank statement.

3.2 The Record Office is located in the Guildhall, which has steps up to the main entrance door. There is a level-access entrance to the left of the steps, just inside the entrance to the covered market. Inside the Guildhall, the Record Office is situated in the basement, and access is via stairs. For users who require level access, we have the facility to use a ground floor room if contacted in advance.

3.3 There is a lift which visitors who find stairs difficult may use, but in the event of a fire alarm the lift cannot be used, and all visitors need to leave the building by a short flight of stairs. An accessible toilet is available on the ground floor of the Guildhall.

3.4 All public areas are covered by CCTV, which is clearly stated with signage, and lockers are available to use. Further details regarding access and locating the Record Office are available on our website.

3.5 We make our collections available unless:

- there is a statutory exemption prohibiting access
- the depositor of the collection has placed a restriction on access
- access is likely to cause physical harm to the item
- there is a surrogate or other alternative copy available

3.6 The BRO collections hold Arts Council England Designated status. They are unique and irreplaceable and need to be handled carefully by both staff and visitors to safeguard them for future generations. Use of original material is always supervised by Record Office staff. Search room rules and handling guidelines are provided on our website and in the search room. New visitors must agree to the guidelines before being issued with a membership card.

3.7 BRO provides surrogate copies which are considered to be fragile or significant or may become technologically inaccessible. These surrogates may be provided as microform or digital copies.

3.8 Visitors can request copies of material for a fee unless copying is restricted. They are permitted to photograph items, with permission, and on completion of requisite

documentation. Any reproduction of copies of our records must be agreed in advance by completion of the appropriate request form. A reproduction fee may be charged.

3.9 BRO provides access to microform viewer/scanner/printers and PC points. This enables free on-site access to subscription websites such as Ancestry, Find My Past and the British Newspaper Archive. Documents on microform may be printed or scanned for a fee.

3.10 There is free wi-fi coverage in the search room where visitors can use their own devices.

Remote access

3.11 BRO responds to enquiries received in a variety of ways, including by email, telephone, letter and social media. Staff aim to answer enquiries within 10 working days and may spend up to 30 minutes on each enquiry.

3.12 For longer enquiries, BRO provides a paid research service. Staff will search the records to look for specific information and provide a written report of all findings. Details of this service are published on the BRO website.

3.13 BRO shares information and collections online for the benefit of local and remote audiences. Information about collections, service and facilities is available on the website. Catalogues for the archives and local studies are currently hosted on separate websites, which are clearly linked to via the BRO website.

3.14 BRO also provides access to a number of databases which have been compiled and indexed from the collections. These include Bath Ancestors, Bath Burial Index and Georgian Newspapers.

3.15 Catalogues and accession records are available on The National Archives' Discovery database (Archives and Local Studies manuscripts collections only). Local Studies printed collections are available on the LibrariesWest website.

3.16 BRO publishes research guides in both print and downloadable formats including subjects such as Family History, House History and Public Health sources, as well as collections guides.

3.17 Digitised material is available via external websites such as Know Your Place and Bath in Time or at the Record Office. Some of the maps collection can be accessed by ordering copies either in person or remotely.

Restrictions to access

3.18 BRO endeavours to balance the needs of access against the needs of the preservation.

3.19 BRO is committed to making its collections accessible to as wide an audience as possible. However, some records may be subject to restricted access for a variety of reasons, including legislation or their physical condition. For further information, please refer to the Collections Management Policy.

3.20 Records subject to access restrictions are clearly stated on the online catalogue. Researchers wishing to access a restricted record should contact us for further information and advice.

3.21 Access to the collections is also subject to statutory or legal requirements, notably the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 2018 and copyright legislation.

3.22 Depositors may request restrictions on public access to their collections. These restrictions will be clearly indicated on the online catalogue.

3.23 Access to uncatalogued material is facilitated wherever possible but is not guaranteed.

4. USER FEEDBACK

4.1 BRO encourages feedback from its users with regards to all aspects of access to its collections.

4.2 BRO takes part in annual PSQG (Public Services Quality Group) surveys and analyses this data along with other feedback received in person, by email, phone or social media.

4.3 Where possible BRO uses this feedback to improve the service it offers.

5. ENGAGEMENT

5.1 BRO aims to reach not only existing service users but also non-users and non-traditional users. This forms the basis of an ongoing outreach and engagement strategy and plan. Please refer to the Collections Development Policy which relates to this policy. BRO is committed to engaging a diverse range of audiences in its collections through a variety of activities:

5.2 Engagement activities and events

- Giving talks, running tours, workshops and other events either at the Guildhall or at other venues to the general public and stakeholder groups.
- Running training sessions for colleagues within Bath & North East Somerset Council and external groups.
- Providing lectures and workshops for schools, college and universities and lifelong learning groups.
- Taking part in larger events such as Family History fairs, World Heritage Days, Heritage Open Days, Genealogy Days and other similar events.
- Working with partners to develop education and community history projects.

5.3 Working with communities

- BRO supports and works with Local History Societies in developing their collections and encouraging their deposit at the Record Office.
- BRO develops relationships with community groups including those which are under-represented within its collections in order to raise awareness of the collections which in turn encourages the preservation, deposit and use of the archives and local studies collections.

- BRO work with Heritage Services Learning and Participation team to develop a wide range of learning resources using its collections.
- BRO provides work placements and volunteering opportunities for young people and those in higher education to discover the rich potential of archives and heritage for their current studies or future career pathways.
- BRO contributes to the wellbeing of the local community by providing a wide range of
 - o opportunities for people to volunteer here as part of the volunteering programme.
- BRO actively seeks external funding for specific projects that will improve access to:
 - o archive collections and at the same time provide imaginative opportunities for community involvement in volunteering and other activities.

5.4 Online communication

- BRO uses social media (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram), the BRO website and other digital platforms to reach new audiences and to share news about its events and projects.
- BRO works with internal and external partners (Heritage Services, Library Services, South West Heritage Trust and others) to widen communication channels.

5.5 Exhibitions and displays

- BRO produces temporary displays for special events.
- BRO works with local, national and international museums and galleries to facilitate loans of original documents from its collections for exhibitions in order to extend its reach as much as possible.
- BRO creates online exhibitions which are available on the BRO website.

5.6 Promotion

- BRO works closely with Heritage Services Marketing team to promote the collections through press releases, improvements to its digital platforms and through print and digital literature.
- BRO invites interest from the press and media where this promotes its collections in a positive light.

6. EVALUATION

6.1 BRO considers evaluation and impact assessment to be vital towards improving its access and engagement activities and reaching wider and more diverse audiences. It does this through:

- Quarterly meetings with Heritage Services Learning & Participation Team
- Collecting data on those who took part or attended engagement events
- Studying analytics from our websites and social media channels
- Encouraging feedback at all events we hold or participate in
- Monitor new acquisitions in terms of which communities are represented and identify gaps in our collecting.

7. CUSTOMER CARE

7.1 BRO aims to meet the Standard for Access to Archives, (Public Services Quality Group for Archives, 2008).

7.2 BRO considers its customers to include everyone who uses or participates in the archives service, and future users on whose behalf it preserves the archives.

7.3 BRO encourages and welcomes feedback, comments and suggestions about the service. It participates in the annual PSQG surveys and analyse these results and identify areas in which it can improve or develop the service.

7.4 BRO is committed to the development of policies and activities which promote equal opportunities in the delivery of services regardless of race, ability, gender, religion, sexual orientation or age. It is committed to removing barriers and social exclusion and support the use of our collections by everyone for research, learning and enjoyment.

8. REVIEW

8.1 This policy will be reviewed every 3 years in consultation with Heritage Services Public Services Team, stakeholders and Bath & North East Somerset Equality Team.

VERSION CONTROL

Version	Date	Detail
1.0	28/04/2020	Succeeds previous Bath Record Office Access Policy drafted in 2018
1.1	09/11/2020	Reworked for Cabinet member approval. Decision made 20/11/2020