

Bristol Archives

Access and engagement policy



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1. Background and mission

As part of Bristol Culture, the mission of Bristol Archives is to be Excellent, Inclusive, Resilient and Valued.

Our values:

- We believe in being professional, efficient, accessible, welcoming in all ways and always acting with integrity
- We are an organisation which is creative, challenging, resourceful and vibrant
- We are conscious of our remit to reveal the past and the present, and use this to direct our future
- We take pride in providing an excellent service for the public as well as being a leading organisation within the cultural sector
- We seek to make a difference, to put Bristol on the map, and to improve communities' wellbeing through engagement with their cultural provision

In creating access to the archive collections, we serve the people of Bristol and surrounding area, as well as anyone else interested in the history of the city. We aspire to provide an innovative, creative and customer-focused service that inspires users to learn about and enjoy the story of Bristol and its people.

In caring for the British Empire & Commonwealth Collection, we also serve anyone seeking to find out about the history of the British Empire and Commonwealth.

2. Aim of policy

We seek at all times to provide wide access to collections, by a variety of means, whilst ensuring that records are preserved for future generations.

This policy explains how collections can be accessed and how we aim to engage diverse audiences with both the Bristol and British Empire & Commonwealth Collections.

3. Customer service

We aim to deliver a consistently high standard of customer service, for both searchroom users, remote researchers and anyone who attends events or otherwise connects with our service.

We employ appropriately qualified staff to care for the archives and we provide a courteous, knowledgeable and efficient service in order to advise users on accessing records for research, personal interest or other reasons.

We welcome user feedback on our collections, services and facilities.

4. Access to collections

4.1 Onsite access

4.1.1 Public searchroom

The Bristol Archives searchroom is open to anyone wishing to access the collections in our care. No appointment is required to visit the searchroom.

All visitors are asked to register on arrival and to follow our visitor guidelines. As part of this, we ask everyone to watch the Bristol Archives searchroom induction video, 'Welcome to Bristol Archives'. This can also be viewed on our website in advance of visiting.¹

4.1.2 Handling archives

The Bristol Archives collections are unique and irreplaceable and need to be handled carefully by both staff and visitors to safeguard them for future generations.

Use of original archival material is always supervised by archives staff. Information about handling archives is included in the video and guidelines mentioned above. Staff will also give guidance on handling material as needed.

4.1.3 Surrogate copies

Bristol Archives provides surrogate copies to allow access to records which are in high demand (such as parish registers) or which are considered to be fragile or significant (such as medieval charters) or may become technologically inaccessible (such as magnetic tape sound recordings). These surrogates may be provided as microform or digital copies.

We also use surrogate versions in exhibitions (and provide them for exhibitions elsewhere), if display of the original item risks damage or if an enlarged version of the original is required.

4.2 Remote access: enquiries and search service

We respond to enquiries received in a variety of ways, including by email, telephone, letter and social media, to provide brief information about the Bristol Archive collections. We aim to answer enquiries within 10 working days and we spend up to 20 minutes on each enquiry.

For longer enquiries, we provide a limited paid search service. Staff will search archival records to look for specific information and provide a written report of all findings.

¹ The video and guidelines are available on the Bristol Archives website at www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/bristol-archives/your-visit

For more detailed research, we recommend that researchers hire a professional researcher, such as a member of the Association of Genealogists & Researchers in Archives (www.agra.org.uk).

4.3 Remote access: catalogues and online resources

Bristol Archives shares information and collections online for the benefit of local and remote audiences.

Key information about collections, service and facilities is available on our website. More detailed information about the collections is published via separate online catalogues for the Bristol collections² and the British Empire & Commonwealth Collections³.

We digitise images for both preservation and access, particularly large image collections. Where available, these are published on the relevant online catalogue.

Access to maps, images and historical data is also available on the Know Your Place website⁴ and information about the collections is shared elsewhere via social media, blog posts and other online means.

5 Audience engagement

We seek to share our collections widely with people interested in the history of Bristol and the British Empire & Commonwealth. We aim to raise awareness of the archives by reaching not only existing service users but also non-users and non-traditional users. We encourage people to engage with the collections through both traditional archival research and alternative means of access.

5.1 Engagement activities

We offer many ways for people to engage with our collections, by:

- Running talks, tours, workshops and other events for the general public and stakeholder groups, held at Bristol Archives, other Bristol Culture sites and other locations
- Displaying archive material in exhibitions at Bristol Archives and elsewhere
- Providing archive workshops for schools, colleges and universities, adult learners, community organisations and other groups
- Working with partners on education and community history projects
- Publishing research and information about the collections
- Using social media, the Know Your Place website and other digital platforms to share collection highlights and news about our events and projects
- Encouraging publication and broadcast of material from the collections

² Available at archives.bristol.gov.uk

³ Available at museums.bristol.gov.uk

⁴ Available at www.kypwest.org.uk

5.2 Audience development

We actively seek opportunities to attract new audiences to discover the archive collections.

We work to reach non-traditional audiences, particularly by working with a wide range of partner organisations. Through working with people connected to Bristol's communities, we aim to understand and address barriers to access to the archives, as well as developing new ways to engage people and groups with the collections.

We use online platforms (particularly Know Your Place) to share our collections with people who are actively interested in local history but not traditional archive users.

We aim for the collections in our care to represent and document Bristol's diverse communities as widely as possible, as noted in our Collection Development & Acquisition Policy (section 4.3.4).

We are also working to develop new audiences for the British Empire & Commonwealth Collection, by raising awareness of the material amongst potential researchers (including universities, nationally and internationally), working with community groups and contributing to film festivals and networks.

Charges apply for group visits but we encourage anyone planning a funded project to contact us at the application stage to discuss how we can work together.

5.3 Education and learning

We work to engage with children, young people and students of all ages by providing access to the archives for educational institutions and groups.

In conjunction with Bristol Culture's Learning team, we offer provide a learning package of workshops, in-school activities and online resources for children in Year 5 and 6.

We also run ad hoc sessions for other groups.

Charges apply for all educational sessions, either paid by the organisation or funded through partnership work.

6 Display and publication

6.1 Exhibitions and displays

Bristol Archives produces an annual programme of exhibitions to display material from the collections.

Material from Bristol Archives is also displayed in the permanent galleries at M Shed (and temporary displays at M Shed and Bristol Museum & Art Gallery) so that significant documents from the city's history can be readily accessed by visitors.

6.2 Loans policy

Bristol Archives may loan items to other museums, collections and individuals as this can be important in increasing access to archives. The process however can place archives at considerable risk from many different sources and therefore requires suitable environmental conditions and control measures that are appropriate and robust.

For details of Bristol Archives' loan conditions, see section 9 of our Collections Management Policy.

6.3 Copying, publishing and broadcasting material

Bristol Archives can supply either photocopies or high quality digital images of archival material, for a fee. Alternatively, visitors to the searchroom may photograph material after purchasing a camera licence.

Any copies, printouts or photographs of material from the archives can only be made or supplied for use in non-commercial research or private study unless otherwise agreed. Before supplying copies, we ask all researchers to complete a copyright declaration confirming that they will not be used for any other purposes.

Written permission should always be obtained from Bristol Archives before material from the collections is shared, published, broadcast or otherwise reproduced, including on social media. Permission fees and/or copyright restrictions may apply.

7. Legal status of Bristol Archives

Bristol Archives is part of Bristol City Council, on behalf of which we hold records of the city and county of Bristol. The archives' legal status is in accordance with a statutory and policy framework for local record offices laid out by the Local Government Acts, Public Records Act and other legislation. These are documented in section 2 of our Collection Development & Acquisitions Policy.

8. Restrictions on access to records

We accept collections only on the basis that they will become accessible to the public in due course, subject to current information legislation (see section 4.1.13 of our Collection Development & Acquisition Policy). We are committed to providing access to the records we hold wherever possible.

In a small number of cases, access to items may be restricted, to comply with information legislation, to ensure records are managed ethically, to protect the physical condition of the

material or in accordance with the wishes of the depositor. For more information, see our Restricted Records Policy.

9. Equality and physical access to the archives

Bristol Archives is committed to Bristol City Council's Equalities Policy and Bristol Culture's Equalities Action Plan. Our services are open to all.

We work to meet the needs of all service users. B Bond Warehouse has disabled parking and step-free access. All of our public areas, including the searchroom, are wheelchair accessible and there is a disabled toilet. The searchroom is equipped with a push-button door, hearing aid loop, magnified microform reader and magnifying glasses.

Our occasional behind-the-scenes tours involve walking, standing and using a lift, although we can provide access via stairs and extra seating if requested. Unfortunately, tours are not suitable for anyone who would not be able to use stairs independently in the event of an emergency. We also cannot admit assistance dogs or prams.

To comment on this policy or for further information, please contact the City Archivist:

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