

Shropshire Archives

Access Policy

November 2015



Gateway to
the history of
Shropshire
and Telford



1 Introduction

1.1 Overview and history

1.1.1 History of the Service

Shrewsbury Corporation established a borough library and museum in 1885, largely through the efforts of the Shropshire Archaeological Society. In 1898 a Records Committee was set up by Salop County Council, initially to report on the records of the clerk of the peace, but an honorary archivist was appointed only in 1934. In 1947, Salop County Council created a Record Office to organise their Quarter Session records and large estate, parish and other official collections, and this appeared to duplicate some of the work of the Shrewsbury Borough Library and Museum. A guide to these holdings was produced in 1952.

The Borough Library became part of the County Library Service in 1974 and its extensive collections formed the basis of a local studies library with a county-wide role. The County Record Office continued to be organised independently but became the principal repository for the vast collection of manuscript material deposited with the County Council. The re-organisation of County Council services in 1988 led to the creation of the Leisure Services Department and the County Record Office and Local Studies Library were finally administratively united as the Records and Research Unit.

1.1.2 Shropshire Archives and the Records Management Service

Further re-organisation in 1995 led to the creation of Shropshire County Council's Information and Community Services Department which funded the £1.8 million project to build the Records and Research Centre. Located in Castle Gates, Shrewsbury, the purpose-built centre has four levels with a total floor space of 1,500 square metres. At the same time a Records Management service was established at Shirehall to manage the records and information created by Shropshire County Council. Following local government reorganisation in 1997, an agreement between Shropshire County Council and Telford and Wrekin Council secured funding to maintain the Service's remit over the historic county.

In 2004 following public consultation, the service was renamed Shropshire Archives, gateway to the history of Shropshire and Telford. In 2009 Shropshire became a unitary council and inherited large quantities of archives and records from the former Borough and District Councils. This meant that additional storage space was required and an out store was established to house both records and archives in 2012.

1.2 Mission Statements

Shropshire Archives will take the lead in preserving and improving access to Shropshire's archives and local history collections in order that individuals and communities can better understand, research and appreciate their heritage.

The Records Management Service will work to ensure that Shropshire Council manages its information and records sources in an appropriate, efficient and economic manner.

1.3 Service Objectives

1.3.1 Objectives –Shropshire Archives

- To fulfil a custodial role in the preservation, acquisition and cataloguing of Shropshire's archives and local history collections
- To promote and provide opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to use Shropshire's archives and local history collections to better understand, and appreciate their heritage

- To develop and to promote best practice in the preservation, enhancement and use of Shropshire's archives and local history collections
- To develop and to support sustainable partnerships and to enable communities and people to engage, explore, conserve and enjoy their own heritage

1.3.2 Objectives – The Records Management Service

- To ensure that information and records sources are retained only for as long as is necessary for legal compliance and administrative need.
- To develop and promote best practice and legal compliance in the creation, use, maintenance and disposal of information and records sources.
- To co-ordinate the selection and offering of records and material to Shropshire Archives, thereby contributing to the corporate memory of Shropshire Council.
- To work with the Information Governance team and the Information Governance Group to ensure Shropshire Council's compliance with legislation relating to information and record keeping.

2 Policy Aims

The document sets out the Access Policy for Shropshire Archives and shows how access will be provided to the collections both on-site and remotely. It also documents any charges or restrictions on access. It supports the services' mission statement above and should be seen in conjunction with the Outreach and Education policy and other relevant policy documents.

3 Statutory Position.

Shropshire Archives is a recognised place of deposit for public records, and a diocesan record office for records from the Shropshire parishes of the dioceses of Hereford and Lichfield. It is also licensed to hold Manorial and Tithe records, and records of local government and other public and statutory bodies. The service provides a local studies library service under the Public Libraries Act 1964.

The service works to ensure that Shropshire Council complies with the following legislation:

- The Local Government Act 1972 (s.224) which states the Local Authority needs to 'make proper arrangements with respect to any documents that belong to, or are in the custody of the council of any of their officers'.
- The Public Records Acts 1958 and 1967. These relate to those records created by central government and designated as 'public records' which may be held locally. These Acts place an obligation upon services to 'permanently preserve' the original records.
- The Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2005.

4 Access at Shropshire Archives

Shropshire Archives and its collections are free to use and open to everyone. Visitors are asked to sign in on arrival to confirm their agreement to our customer regulations. These guidelines are also available on our website.

The public areas include:

- The Reading Room with reference books, computers, microfilm and fiche
- The Search Room for consulting archives, photographs, electoral registers and fragile or rare books.
- Tea/Coffee room where visitors can eat their own food

- Accessible toilets
- Small shop

Everyone using the Search Room must have a Shropshire Archives Reader's Ticket. These are valid for five years and are free. Proof of address and signature and two passport size photographs are required.

Prior booking is strongly encouraged for the Search Room as we have limited capacity. Advance ordering of documents is also encouraged. If the items requested are unnumbered or very large, access will be at the discretion of the duty professional and will depend on how well access can be supervised.

Because of the need for greater staff supervision when original documents are being consulted, there are times when the Search Room is closed, although the rest of the building remains open.

The Search Room contains hard copies of catalogues. The vast majority of these are also available online at www.shropshirehistory.org.uk.

5 Staff

Our courteous trained staff are available to help customers and to explain the services on offer. Staff are identified by name badges. All staff receive induction training and regular ongoing job-related training.

In addition from 10am-1pm volunteers from the Family History Society have a help-desk in our Reading Room to provide advice to customers.

6 Security

In order to protect the collections, all visitors must observe our security measures. Before entering the Search Room, researchers must have Shropshire Archives Reader's Tickets and lock bags and coats in lockers.

CCTV cameras both inside and outside are used for the security of our collections and the Shropshire Archives building.

7 Good handling practice

All researchers must adhere to our Handling Guidelines which are displayed in the Search Room. A copy of the guidelines is available in laminated format.

Staff are available to offer advice on handling materials including the use of book supports, cushions, weights and other equipment. All staff are trained in the correct handling of documents as a central part of conserving the collections for use by others now and in the future.

In order to protect originals surrogate sources of documents will be issued, where available, on microfilm, microfiche or as digitised images.

8 Restrictions on access

Occasionally, access to some documents may be restricted due to:

- the fragility of the originals

- incomplete cataloguing
- the nature of information contained in them
- restrictions which have been applied by the owner.
- There are certain legal requirements governing access to some records such as the Public Records Act, the Data Protection Act, the Sexual Offences Act, the Children's Act etc. Further information is given in our *Restricted Access Guidelines*.

If access is denied, then staff will:

- Explain the reason for any access restriction
- Advise where to apply for permission if this is possible
- Seek specialist conservation advice if appropriate
- Advise on alternative sources or surrogate copies of fragile material if these exist

9 Copying of records and use of cameras

All copying is subject to copyright and preservation restrictions. Customers can request copies of records for use in private research subject to the current Copyright Act and on payment of our current charges. We can provide copies in a wide range of formats from in person and remote enquiries.

Customers can photograph records themselves using their own cameras, purchasing a photography permit and filling in a copyright form. We need to ensure documents are handled correctly – for this reason we may not allow very large amounts of documents to be photographed. Lighting and conditions in the Search Room are not suitable for publication standard photographs. Our Image Service can provide high quality digital images or prints. Our *photography in the search room* leaflet gives more information.

All photocopying is done by staff but customers can print out from the computers/microfilm and fiche for themselves at the current copying charges. A price list is on our website.

Any reproduction, including online reproduction, of copies of our records must be agreed in advance and special conditions apply. A reproduction fee may be charged. See also *Information for the media guidelines*

10 Enquiries by telephone, post or email

We aim to answer or acknowledge all postal, fax or email enquiries within 10 working days. Telephone calls are taken by the Customer Service Centre, who can take bookings and will pass other queries onto staff at Shropshire Archives.

Basic queries regarding bookings, the availability of documents and general advice on types of records held will be answered free of charge.

If the request involves searching in documents, books or online, there is likely to be a fee through our research services. For further information on the research service see our guidance and order form.

11 Online access to our collections

In addition to on-site access at Shropshire Archives we aim to enhance remote access by making information and resources available via a variety of media. The Shropshire Archives

website provides information on a wide range of sources such as parish registers as well as place guides to a number of Shropshire parishes.

Our online catalogue is linked to our website and contains some watermarked images of documents and photographs.

We work with partners, such as FindMyPast to provide access to heavily used sets of records such as parish and non-conformist registers.

12 Use of social media

Shropshire Archives use a variety of social media to provide up to date information to a wide variety of customers. These include Facebook, Twitter and Flickr.

This policy was written in November 2015 and will be reviewed in November 2020 or sooner if circumstances dictate.