

# COLLECTIONS ACCESS POLICY

November 2020



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# 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The archives of Parliament are a rich and exciting resource for exploring local, national and international history from the fifteenth century to the present day. The collections provide an unparalleled window into Parliament itself, including its architecture, administration and functions.
- 1.2 The Parliamentary Archives enables current and future generations to access unique documentary evidence and research its history by collecting, preserving and making accessible relevant digital and physical records of the House of Commons, the House of Lords and the Parliamentary Digital Service (PDS). By maintaining a record of past actions and decisions the Archives also supports the wider openness and transparency agenda, and act as Parliament's long-term memory.
- 1.3 This policy is part of a suite of policies which direct and inform the acquisition, preservation and management of, and access to collections, including:
- Parliamentary Information Management Policy
  - Authorised Records Disposal Practice
  - Collections Development Policy
  - Collections Information Policy
  - Preservation policy

The policy also supports the implementation of Parliament's Information and Data Strategy.

# 2. Purpose

- 2.1 The provision of access to our collections is a fundamental part of what the Parliamentary Archives does and is key to enabling engagement with the history and work of Parliament. This policy describes the range of ways in which the Archives provides access to collections, whether onsite or online, through enquiry and imaging services, engagement activities, exhibitions and displays, loans, digital engagement, talks, tours and media work. It also makes clear a commitment to providing access to everyone.
- 2.2 This policy will be reviewed at least every five years and approved by the Director of the Parliamentary Archives. Supporting policies and procedures will also be reviewed and updated on a regular basis.

### **3. Equality of Opportunities Statement**

The Parliamentary Archives is committed to supporting the ambitions of both Houses of Parliament to be inclusive and diverse places in which to work and visit.

We promote equality and accessibility in everything we do.

We strive to be inclusive and value difference.

This means that:

- We want to attract, recruit, develop and retain staff from all sections of the community
- We ensure that all our staff understand their responsibility to promote equality and diversity and to challenge inappropriate behaviour in order to create an environment and culture that treats everyone with dignity and respect
- We work to ensure that our collections and services are relevant and accessible to all communities
- We strive to reach audiences that in the past have been under-represented in our activities
- We want our customers to feel supported and welcome when they interact with us

### **4. The Collections**

4.1 The collections are a rich and exciting resource for exploring local, national and international history from the fifteenth century to the present day and can be broken down into five main groups:

- House of Commons and House of Lords
- History, art and architecture of the Palace of Westminster
- Societies, libraries and Staff
- Private Papers
- The UK Parliament Web Archive

4.2 More details are provided on the Archives' website <https://archives.parliament.uk/> and in the Collections Development Policy. Access is also provided to printed sessional papers and to Hansard (Parliamentary Debates) online or in hard copy.

## **5. Access Gateway**

- 5.1 The Parliamentary Archives website <https://archives.parliament.uk/> provides the starting point for users wishing to access collections and includes the Archives' online catalogue. The Archives recognises that the ability of users to be able to undertake meaningful searches of the collections is a vital step in their journey of exploring archival resources. This is particularly vital for those who are unable to visit Westminster and who need to order copies for their research. It is also a key part of deciding whether to plan a visit to the Search Room or whether to access resources online.
- 5.2 The Archives' website complies with Web Content Accessibility guidelines (WCAG 2.1.)
- 5.3 Details of some collections including private papers can also be accessed via the Discovery catalogue on The National Archives website:  
<http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>.
- 5.4 Information for internal users is provided on the Parliamentary intranet.

## **6. Consulting Records**

### **6.1 Access restrictions and closure periods**

- 6.1.1 Parliamentary records are not Public Records as defined by the Public Records Act 1958, but Parliament seeks to follow best practice as defined by The National Archives in the management of its archives. Parliament's information and collections are subject to the following legislation:
  - General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), as supplemented by the Data Protection Act 2018
  - Freedom of Information Act, 2000
  - Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, as amended
- 6.1.2 Collections acquired by the Parliamentary Archives are open unless they are subject to certain access restrictions or closure periods as determined by Freedom of Information or Data Protection legislation, by advice and guidance from The National Archives and the Information Commissioner's Office or which relate to the context, processes and guidance of the creating organisation. Closures and restrictions imposed by depositors are checked by IRMS or Archives staff at the point of deposit.
- 6.1.3 Requests to view restricted information are considered in the light of Freedom of Information exemptions and Data Protection legislation. Please email [archives@parliament.uk](mailto:archives@parliament.uk) and supply the catalogue references wherever possible.

## 6.2 Search Room

### Access

- 6.2.1 The Parliamentary Archives provides free access to its Search Room which is open by appointment for the consultation of original records.
- 6.2.2 Because of its location on the Parliamentary Estate visitors to the Search Room are asked to book a seat in advance. Photographic identification is also required and a security check is undertaken on arrival. Details about how to plan a visit are provided on the website: <https://archives.parliament.uk/visit-us/>
- 6.2.3 The Search Room is accessible to wheelchair users and there is a gender neutral accessible toilet nearby. The lift closest to the Search Room is an accessible evacuation lift. Staff have compulsory training in disability awareness and the Archives endeavours to make its services as accessible as possible within the constraints of the building.
- 6.2.4 All Search Room visitors are asked to sign a visitors' book on arrival in order to signify acceptance of the regulations. The latter together with guidance for searchers are described on placemats in the Search Room. The Archives reserves the right to withdraw services and exclude visitors from the Search Room at its discretion. CCTV is in use in the Search Room.

### Ordering and viewing records

- 6.2.5 Visitors are asked to pre-order documents up to a set limit in advance of their visit. In addition further orders can be placed at set times during the visit.
- 6.2.6 In certain cases access to original documents may be restricted as follows:
- Fragile and vulnerable material. In some instances this may be possible with support from the Collection Care team.
  - Material which is held offsite. In such cases visitors may be asked to view surrogates or to order records in advance of their visit.
  - Material which is marked as closed on the catalogue. Requests for access will be considered under Freedom of Information legislation.
  - Documents which are of outstanding historical importance. In these instances access will be provided to digital surrogates.
  - Records which are not fully catalogued. These will be made available at the Archives' discretion.
  - Records which present access difficulties on account of their format. These will be made available at the Archives' discretion.
- 6.2.7 Visitors are also able to browse a range of printed materials kept in the Search Room and adjoining corridor.
- 6.2.8 Search Room visitors are welcome to use cameras to capture images of documents for research purposes. A daily fee is charged for camera use and cash or credit card payments are accepted. The use of flash and handheld scanners is not permitted. Further information is set out in the 'Use of personal technology devices for copying records in the Parliamentary Archives', available in the Search Room.

## **Help from staff**

- 6.2.9 Search Room supervisors and Collection Care staff assist visitors during the course of their visit and in particular are happy to answer questions about the records and the history of Parliament.
- 6.2.10 All staff have received Disability Confidence and Diversity and Inclusion training and also receive training in document handling from the Collection Care team.

## **Facilities**

6.2.11 Facilities available to visitors to the Search Room include:

- Lockers and hangers for bags and coats
- Gender neutral washrooms
- Free tea, coffee and drinking water
- The Readers' Lounge which is a dedicated space for visitors to take a break from their research and to consume refreshments.
- Free wifi and public terminals.

## **Feedback**

6.2.12 Visitors are able to comment on the Archives' services onsite through periodic national visitor surveys and by means of a feedback form in the Search Room. The Archives is committed to listening to, and subject to the constraints of the building, acting on, this feedback.

## **6.3 Online Access**

- 6.3.1 The majority of born-digital departmental acquisitions are still within their closure periods. However, a significant minority of born-digital records are accessible via the catalogue.
- 6.3.2 Requests for access to closed born digital records will be considered under Freedom of Information legislation.
- 6.3.3 Web crawls are made available on [webarchive.parliament.uk](http://webarchive.parliament.uk).
- 6.3.4 In order to provide wider access to hard copy documents or for preservation reasons the Archives digitises physical records which are popular with users, particularly those which are of national and international significance, are photographs or which relate to family history. These research quality images can be accessed via the catalogue. Details are available on the website: <https://archives.parliament.uk/online-resources/records-online/>.

## **7. Enquiry and Imaging Service**

- 7.1 The Archives answers enquiries about the records and history of Parliament by email, telephone and letter in accordance with access restrictions and closure periods described in section 6.1.

- 7.2 The aim is to answer enquiries within 10 working days. The Archives cannot undertake research but aims to direct enquirers to possible sources of interest. Answers to *Frequently Asked Questions* are available at: <https://archives.parliament.uk/help/faqs/>
- 7.3 Users are able to periodically provide feedback on the enquiry service via national surveys.
- 7.4 Orders for digital or hard copies of records can be placed through the enquiry service or via the Search Room. The Archives reserves the right to copy original records using the copying process or processes which will minimise risk of damage to the records. We may refuse copying of records where the risk of damage to these documents is deemed high. We aim to dispatch copies within 10 working days from payment, subject to the size and complexity of the order.
- 7.5 Details of charges for our imaging services and the policy which informs them are available on the website. Copies supplied by the Parliamentary Archives may only be used for non-commercial research or private study, and/or other exceptions to copyright, as outlined within the Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988, as amended and revised. Other uses of copies must be licenced separately.

## 8. Social media

- 8.1 The Archives seeks to utilise social media tools to increase the breadth of audience reach and engage users with the collections. A Twitter account @UKParlArchives and a Facebook account are used to highlight collection items and provide links to other online resources. Contributions are made to the main Parliamentary social media accounts including the UK Parliament Instagram account and the House of Lords twitter account.
- 8.2 A blog, Inside the Act Room, <https://archives.blog.parliament.uk/> is used to provide deeper interpretation and exploration, provoke discussion and to support narratives around anniversaries.
- 8.3 Video resources relating to the Archives' work, outreach activities and collections are posted on the UK Parliament YouTube account. Videos are also created with partners which are available through the relevant YouTube accounts. This work enables the leverage of external academic expertise in the interpretation of collection items.

## 9. Engagement and learning

- 9.1 The Archives employs a range of approaches to make resources available for community based outreach activity and seeks to reach broad and diverse audiences:
- *Partnerships:* The Archives works with regional archives, museums, other institutions and organisations to deliver community outreach activities, often in connection with touring exhibitions and displays. Connections are sought between Archives' collection items and communities. Where possible the results of these activities are made available on the web.

- *Project support:* Where they match priorities for engagement and audience development and provide appropriate outcomes and benefits the Archives supports outreach and learning projects devised by other institutions and charitable bodies through the provision of financial support, staff time, digital resources and access to Parliament.
- *Parliamentary support:* Advice and support is provided to other teams in their delivery of onsite and offsite learning and engagement activity. This includes the provision of content and expertise for online learning resources.

## 10. Talks and tours

10.1 Talks and tours are an important way in which information about Archives' services, collections and the historical context are communicated to Members, staff and the public. Depending on circumstances these can be physical or virtual and can take the form of the following:

- Talks organised by the Archives to support exhibitions and displays and to promote Parliament's heritage.
- Talks delivered by Archives' staff in support of events and programming organised by other Parliamentary teams. These can include group visits to the Archives where staff explain the significance of selected collection items.
- Talks organised in conjunction with partners such as regional archives and the History of Parliament Trust. Speakers include Archives' staff and subject specialists and reflect partnership programming.
- Responses to requests to speak at events organised by bodies such as archives and museums, academic projects, institutions, societies, and professional organisations.
- Tours of the Archives upon application for external groups such as local and family history societies, heritage groups and public sector employees. Due to the historic nature of the building these tours are not suitable for some physically less-able people. In exceptional circumstances it may be possible to make alternative arrangements using another room outside the Victoria Tower. Similar tours are available for members and staff of both Houses and are advertised internally.

## **11. Exhibitions and Displays**

### **11.1 Onsite exhibitions and displays**

- 11.1.1 The Archives mounts small accessible displays of items from the collections in display cases which can be viewed by visitors on the public line of route as well as by Members and staff. These provide an opportunity to link records with specific anniversaries or themes and are changed periodically. When possible they are supplemented by digital content on a touch table.
- 11.1.2 Larger exhibitions and displays are occasionally mounted on the Estate by the Archives. These allow for wider exploration of a subject with a combination of images and a narrative, and, when environmental and security considerations preclude the display of original material, digital resources. They are designed to be fully accessible and can be accessed by visitors to the Palace including those on tours and by Members and staff.
- 11.1.3 The Archives supports displays on the estate by other offices though the supply of images and where appropriate, archival material. It also seeks to use pop up displays on various areas of the Parliamentary Estate as a promotional tool.

### **11.2 Travelling displays**

- 11.2.1 Where possible content from larger onsite displays and exhibitions is re-purposed in order to create travelling image based displays which are loaned to regional venues in the UK at the Archives' expense. These displays, which highlight collections within the context of engaging narratives, are installed in venues which help to extend and broaden audience reach. When appropriate bilingual versions are provided. As part of these partnerships the host institution provides access to the display and facilitates associated outreach activity.

### **11.3 Online galleries**

- 11.3.1 Where possible the Archives creates galleries using content from our exhibitions and displays and make this available online.

## **12. Loans**

- 12.1 The Archives is committed to enabling and broadening access to our collections through responding to loan requests from prospective borrowers including museums, libraries, galleries and archives. These can be in the UK or overseas and in the public or private sectors. Borrowers are expected to meet the costs associated with the loan. Details of the loans policy can be found at: <https://archives.parliament.uk/our-services/loan-requests/>. Loans to external exhibitions and displays makes it possible for original items from the collections to be placed within a range of different contexts and narratives and to be exposed to broad and diverse audiences.
- 12.2 In addition to responding to loan requests the Archives also wishes to be proactive in lending collection items to other institutions in instances where there is a particular record it wishes to highlight and an audience it wishes to reach. In such cases the

Archives contributes to the expenses of the loan and works in partnership with the borrower who provides facilities for displaying and interpreting the item and promotes and provides access as well as organising associated outreach activity.

## **13. The Media**

- 13.1 The Archives welcomes the opportunity to promote its records in the press and on film, television and radio. Details and the terms and conditions for filming and recording are available on the website.
- 13.2 Applications to film and record are also subject to the prevailing access conditions for the Parliamentary estate and the Archives' own priorities as well as available staff resources. Location and supervision fees are payable.