Norfolk Record Office Information Leaflet 50

Adding to Norfolk’s Archives

Do you have records relating to Norfolk’s past or present?

Would you like these records preserved for future generations?

Would you like to make them accessible for research?

About the Norfolk Record Office

We collect and preserve records of historical significance for Norfolk and make them accessible to everyone. We are a joint service of the county and district councils of Norfolk.

The Norfolk Record Office is an accredited archive service. It is the official repository for records of the County Council and the district and parish councils in Norfolk, and a legal place of deposit for public records. It is also designated as the diocesan record office for the Diocese of Norwich, and as the diocesan record office for most west Norfolk parishes in the Diocese of Ely.

The Norfolk Record Office holds over twelve million documents, dating from about 1090 to the present day. They are kept in secure, environmentally-controlled strongrooms, fitted with an automatic fire protection system. The Collection includes many exceptionally important historical manuscripts, but it is the depth and range of Norfolk’s archives that makes them outstanding. Your documents could extend their range still further.

What records do we collect?

We collect documents of historical value relating to Norfolk. They are documents which form a unique or representative record of a Norfolk organization, person, place or activity. They contain evidence that might be of interest to anyone (present or future) researching the county.

We aim to reflect all aspects of Norfolk and its people, past and present. We especially welcome records from groups which are under-represented in our collections (e.g. records of minority ethnic or marginalised groups).

We collect the following types of documents:

- records of Norfolk organisations, such as businesses, societies, charities, schools, and churches of all religions and denominations;

- records of Norfolk families and individuals (including diaries, correspondence and financial records);

- sound recordings (including oral history and radio broadcasts);
records of local authorities (including Norfolk County Council, Norwich City Council, and the district and parish councils of Norfolk);

records of public bodies (including hospitals, magistrates’ courts and coroners).

Records suitable for preservation can include volumes, papers, parchments, maps, architectural plans, photographs, sound recordings and digitally-created documents. We accept documents of any date; modern records are also of interest.

If you are unsure whether your records are suitable for permanent preservation, please ask us for advice. Our formal Archive Collection Policy and Norfolk Sound Archive Collecting Policy are available on our website or on request. We do not normally accept printed material, duplicates, documents with no connection to Norfolk, family trees, research notes, objects and films. We may, however, be able to suggest a suitable repository for such items.

If you know of any documents at risk of being lost or destroyed, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Arranging transfer
Contact us, giving details of the records, so that an archivist can assess whether they are suitable for preserving at the Norfolk Record Office. Please give information about the content, dates and quantity of the documents if possible. If you have a list of the records, please include this too. If we decide to accept the records we will arrange an appointment with you to transfer them. Normally we ask people to bring documents to the Record Office, but if this is not possible we may be able to collect them.

If the collection is large, or if we are unsure whether it is suitable for permanent preservation, an archivist may visit you to assess the documents. Alternatively, we may suggest that you deposit the records with us for an archivist to look through. If we identify items which we do not wish to keep, we will consult you. Any documents which you do not want returned can be destroyed as confidential waste.

Donation or deposit?
You can transfer documents to us by donation or on deposit. Donation (or gift) means that ownership is granted to the Norfolk Record Office. Deposit (or loan) means that you retain ownership and that we hold the documents according to our General Conditions for Deposit of Archives. Record Office staff can discuss with you which is more appropriate. Donation, however, is the most certain way of ensuring that your documents will be permanently preserved and available for research.

If you want to keep personal papers for the time being, but wish to safeguard them for the future, another option is to bequeath them to the Record Office in your will.
Transferring documents

We will ask you to sign an accession agreement, which covers issues like ownership and copyright. You can download our Accession Form Agreement and Accession Form - guidance for completion from our website. The agreement will be countersigned by a member of staff, to act as your receipt. The accession form states your documents' accession number: this is the unique reference which we use to identify the records until they have been fully catalogued.

Please let us know if the documents contain sensitive or confidential information; if this is the case, public access can be restricted for a suitable period.

There is no charge for depositing documents with us, but we welcome donations to support our work of collecting and preserving archives.

Assessment and storage

Archivists assess the physical condition of all new accessions. We refer documents in poor condition to our professionally-trained conservators. All documents are kept in our purpose-built archive store, which fully complies with the British Standards Institution’s PD 5454: 2012, Guide for the Storage and Exhibition of Archival Materials (London, 2012). We use archive-quality boxes, folders and envelopes to store and protect documents.

Public access

Members of the public can consult documents free of charge in the Record Office’s supervised searchroom. Here, staff are always on hand to assist researchers and also to help ensure the security and physical safety of documents in our care.

Cataloguing

An archivist will catalogue the documents and add the descriptions to NROCAT, our online catalogue (http://nrocat.norfolk.gov.uk). People from across the world can search NROCAT via our website. Our catalogues comply with internationally-recognized standards designed to show the archival context of documents (who created them, and for what purpose). They also allow the national and international sharing of information about archival collections.

Cataloguing involves sorting, arranging, describing and numbering the documents. We arrange each collection of documents by its archive creator, and try to preserve the original order of the records where possible, because this can provide essential information about how records were created, kept and used. It is best, therefore, not to re-sort documents before transferring them to us.

If you already have a list of some or all of the documents (whether electronic or on paper) this can be very useful. Any information you have about the people or organization which created the records can also be extremely helpful. This may include biographical details about the people who created the records, historical information about organizations involved in their creation, and/or information about the records’ previous ownership or custody. Such information can be essential for understanding the content and history of the records.
Cataloguing is time consuming and, owing to the quantity of records which we receive each year, may take some time to complete. If this is the case, we normally aim to add a summary description of the records to NROCAT in the meantime.

**Sensitive or confidential information**
The Record Office provides public access to records according to current legislation, including the Freedom of Information Act and the Data Protection Act. The latter controls access to, and the use of, sensitive information relating to living individuals. In addition, we can agree to specific closure periods being placed on particular records. We are able to discuss and advise on conditions of public access.

**Long-term preservation**
Record Office staff follow careful handling and storage procedures to ensure the preservation of documents in the long term. If an item is so fragile that continued handling could lead to information in it being lost, we will mark it 'unfit for production'. This restricts access until conservation work can be carried out by our professionally-trained conservation staff. We prioritize which items are conserved, taking into account factors such as their importance, likely usage and available resources.

If documents are in heavy demand or in poor condition, we may consider preservation copying. To help preserve documents for the future, members of the public are not usually allowed to consult originals if surrogate copies are available.

**Copying and using the records**

If you own copyright in the documents, or you know who the copyright owner is, please provide details on the accession form agreement. Copyright owners can either retain their copyright or can opt to assign it to the Record Office.

In most cases, we will supply copies of documents when they are requested for private research and for educational and other non-commercial use, provided the condition of the original permits. Researchers are also allowed to take their own photographs in the searchroom. People receiving or making copies sign a copyright declaration, and are also required not to publish documents or to supply further copies of them without consulting the Record Office.

The publication of documents held at the Record Office (whether printed or online) makes them accessible to more people and better known. Provided the publisher acknowledges the Norfolk Record Office and cites document references, we generally waive reproduction fees for non-commercial publications.
Conclusion
We produce these separate guides, which are available on our website or on request:

Parish Council records
Church of England parish church records
School records.

For more information about sound recordings, please see the Norfolk Sound Archive webpages.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any further queries.

If you need this leaflet in large print, audio, Braille, alternative format or in a different language, please contact the County Archivist on 01603 222599 and we will do our best to help.

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