

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?

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 holds over twelve million documents, a figure which is increasing all the time. The oldest document dates from about 1090 and the most recent was completed only months ago. They are kept in optimum conditions for their long-term preservation and are managed by professionally qualified archivists and conservators, as well as experienced searchroom, education and outreach staff. Every year, the Norfolk Record Office is visited by 17,000 people and attracts over 12,000 enquiries from all over the world. The collection of archives held by the Norfolk Record Office has been 'Designated' by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council as having outstanding national and international importance. It includes many exceptionally important historical manuscripts, but it is the depth and range of Norfolk's archives that makes them outstanding: you may have records which could extend their range still further.

Types of records held by the Norfolk Record Office

If you have records that provide an insight into Norfolk's past and would like them to be preserved for ever and made accessible to future generations, then please contact the Norfolk Record Office. We aim to collect documents that form a unique or representative record of a Norfolk organisation, person, place or activity, and which contain evidence that might be of interest to anyone (present or future) researching the county.

Records suitable for preservation can vary greatly in size, content, quantity and age. They may also be of different formats, such as maps, photographs, papers, parchments, rolls or volumes. The vast majority of our existing holdings are traditional textual records made of paper or parchment. However, we welcome non-traditional items such as sound recordings and born-digital electronic documents.

The Norfolk Record Office's formal collection policies are available on our website. If items fall outside our collection policies we may be able to advise on who would be able to receive them. If you are unsure whether your records are suitable for permanent preservation, please ask us for advice.

We also welcome donations of relevant books and other publications for our searchroom library.

Transferring documents

If the collection is large or there is doubt over its suitability for permanent preservation we may arrange for an archivist to assess the documents *in situ*. If it is not convenient for you to bring them in, we may be able to collect them. Records can also be transferred *via* King's Lynn Borough Archives, which are staffed by the Norfolk Record Office one day a week.

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, whilst deposit (or loan) means that you retain ownership and we hold the documents according to our general conditions and terms of deposit, which are available upon request. Record Office staff can discuss with you which is more appropriate. 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.

Accession and receipt

Once we have agreed to add a document, or a group of records, to our holdings, we will accession them. This means that we give them a unique accession number as well as recording their receipt, the name of the donor or depositor, the terms of deposit or donation and any known information about the collection's previous ownership, custody or content. If you already have a summary list of some or all of the records, this can be a useful supplement to them. Information about copyright can also be invaluable. We will give you a signed receipt for the records either immediately or within ten days of receiving them.

After transfer

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 Standard Institution's *BS 5454 (2000): Recommendations for the Storage and Exhibition of Archival Documents* (London, 2000). We use archive-quality boxes, folders and envelopes to store and protect documents.

Terms of public access

Members of the public can consult documents free of charge in the Record Office's professionally 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

Professionally qualified archivists produce catalogues of the Record Office's holdings. The catalogues comply with internationally recognised standards designed to allow the national and international sharing of information about archival collections.

Cataloguing involves the arrangement of documents using the archival principles of provenance and original order, describing each item and assigning it a unique reference number, and inputting this description into our archive management system. Once completed, we send a copy of the catalogue to the donor or depositor as a final receipt. Members of the public can access our catalogues in our searchroom and online *via* a variety of websites, including our own. We aim to catalogue documents as soon as possible after receiving them. However, as we receive a large number of new accessions each year, we have to prioritise collections for cataloguing, considering factors such as their size and anticipated public interest. In cases where there is likely to be a long delay before a final catalogue can be produced, we may suggest alternative means of ensuring that the public is aware of the collection, e.g., by compiling a brief outline of the collection. All new accessions are reported annually in summary form to the National Register of Archives and the descriptions are searchable on the Internet *via* their website <<http://www.nra.nationalarchives.gov.uk>>.

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 detailed handling and storage procedures to ensure the long-term preservation of documents in their care. If an item is so fragile that continued handling could lead to the loss of information, Record Office staff will mark it 'unfit for production'. This restricts access until conservation work is carried out.

The Record Office's conservation staff are professionally trained in parchment and paper conservation and have the use of a fully equipped conservation studio. Fragile documents can be conserved here so that they can be consulted or copied. We prioritise 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. The professionally accepted format for such copies is microfilm, which we can usually do in-house. For preservation reasons, members of the public are not allowed to consult originals of which surrogate copies have been made.

Copying and using the records

In most cases, provided the condition of the original permits, the Record Office supplies copies of documents in its care on request for private research and for educational and other non-commercial use. Researchers are also permitted 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 supply further copies of them without consulting the Record Office.

The publication of documents within the Record Office's custody, whether printed or posted on the Internet, makes them accessible to more people and better known. Provided the publisher acknowledges the Norfolk Record Office and cites any document references, we generally waive reproduction fees for non-commercial publications.

The Norfolk Record Office has a purpose-designed exhibition gallery, designed to meet international museum standards for the display of archives, and runs a programme of changing exhibitions. It will also consider favourably requests from other institutions with similar standards and facilities for the loan of Norfolk Record Office documents as part of exhibitions elsewhere



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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