

Norfolk Record Office Information Leaflet 56

Exhibiting Archives in Norfolk Parish Churches

Introduction

The care of parish church records is governed by the *Parochial Registers and Records Measure*, passed by the General Synod in 1978 and amended in 1993. The *Measure* allows churches to withdraw their records temporarily for exhibition, provided that the Diocesan Archivist is satisfied that the records will be kept in 'a suitable and safe place' (see section 17).

In accordance with the *Measure*, the Norfolk Record Office can provide churches with small exhibitions of their documents for special events, such as heritage days or flower festivals. We also have nine table-top exhibition cases which are available for loan, free of charge. Please note that we can only provide exhibitions for the Parochial Church Council which owns the documents, and that exhibitions should normally be held in the church. Only documents from the parish church's own collection may be included (these will have references starting 'PD' in our catalogues). Before agreeing that documents may be withdrawn for exhibition, Record Office staff need to be confident that the documents will not be at undue risk of damage or loss.

Planning an exhibition

Withdrawing records for exhibition exposes documents to risks which they would not encounter if they remained at the Record Office. Before deciding to exhibit original documents, parishes should seriously consider the risks that will be involved in transporting and displaying unique and irreplaceable records, and should minimize these risks as far as possible. The British Standard, *Recommendations for the Storage and Exhibition of Archival Documents* (BS 5454) states that archives should be displayed only in secure cases, where light, temperature and humidity are carefully controlled. The text of this British Standard is available online at your local library. Showcases, such as those which the Record Office supplies, protect documents from handling and give some limited degree of security, but do not provide environmentally-controlled conditions.

Anyone withdrawing documents from the Record Office will be asked to sign a declaration stating that he or she accepts full responsibility for the condition and safety of the documents, and undertakes to meet the cost of any conservation treatment which may be necessary as a result of damage incurred during the period of loan, or the costs of any other losses, damage or injuries resulting from the loan.

To avoid the risks involved in displaying original documents, you could consider using copies. These might be put on permanent display in the church, or could be reused for other events.

Print-out copies may be made from microfilms of most pre-1900 parish registers and many other parish records. You can also photograph many documents in the Record Office's searchroom. Although we normally charge for photography permits, we waive this fee for document owners who are copying their own records. You will need to bring with you a letter, signed by the incumbent, churchwarden or PCC secretary, stating that the photography is on behalf of the PCC. When exhibiting copies of documents, we ask that you include their reference numbers and state that the originals are held at the Norfolk Record Office. This is so that anyone wishing to see the original documents can easily locate them.

Requesting an exhibition

If the PCC decides that it wishes to proceed with a display of original documents, it is best to reserve exhibition cases as soon as you have fixed a date. The cases are often in heavy demand, especially over the summer months. We will also need time to choose suitable documents, check that they are in good enough condition to be displayed, prepare any mounts needed and write descriptive labels. To allow time to prepare an exhibition, we advise you to contact us at least a month before your event.

Choosing documents

Please let us know if there are particular documents which you would like us to include in your exhibition. Otherwise, an archivist will select some suitable documents. Bear in mind that we usually loan out four or five showcases for each event and that each case will normally accommodate one, or at most two, documents. The cases measure approximately 75 cm x 50 cm (30 inches x 20 inches).

Some documents are not suitable for display. These include items too large to fit into a case (e.g., most maps); original photographs, which are easily damaged by too much light (copies may be displayed instead); and items marked 'fragile' or 'unfit for production' in our catalogues. Before agreeing which documents may be included in your exhibition, conservation staff will check that the records are in good enough condition to be displayed.

Displaying documents

You must adhere to the following rules:

1. Documents must be displayed in locked showcases.
2. Showcases offer protection from handling, but can easily be broken or carried away. There should therefore be someone invigilating exhibitions at all times.
3. You should site display cases and their contents away from radiators and other direct heat sources, and out of direct sunlight. They should be

located away from areas where people may be eating and drinking, and any other possible hazards.

4. Many documents cannot be safely displayed to good effect without some prior preparation. Volumes may need supports to avoid damaging their bindings and pages may have to be restrained so that books will remain open. Loose papers generally need to be put into protective polyester sleeves. The Record Office's qualified conservators will prepare documents for display. Do not remove documents from their protective sleeves or mounts because you may damage documents.
5. You should not attempt to mount or secure documents yourself without consulting Record Office staff. Never use pins, staples, Blu-Tack, glue or self-adhesive tape, or laminate original documents.
6. When not on display, documents must be kept in a secure place, preferably in the church safe. The *Parochial Registers and Records Measure* states that documents should be kept in the church and not in a private house.

Collecting your exhibition

The person collecting the exhibition needs to bring a letter signed by the incumbent, a churchwarden or the PCC secretary, authorizing him or her to withdraw the documents. We cannot release the documents without such authorization.

Cars and vans are insecure and subject to rapid changes of temperature and humidity which damage documents. It is therefore important not to leave documents in a vehicle for longer than is absolutely necessary and never to leave records unattended.

The showcases have glass lids. Bring blankets or something similar to help protect the cases whilst they are in transit.

Care of showcases

Do not touch the inside of the glass, because it has been treated to filter out harmful ultra-violet rays. You can use a soft duster and glass cleaning liquid to clean the outside of the glass, but please do not use liquid cleaners whilst documents are inside the cases in case of any spillages. Borrowers will be liable for the loss of keys and for any damage to the showcases. Borrowers are also liable for any losses, damages or injuries which may arise from the loan of documents, showcases and mounts.

Returning exhibitions

Please return the documents and cases on the agreed date, as the cases may well be booked for another exhibition.

Charges

The Record Office does not make a charge for preparing documents for exhibition and loaning out showcases, but donations are always welcome.



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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