UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Libraries

Archives Access Policy

Cambridge University Library

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1. Introduction

This policy sets out how Cambridge University Library (CUL) provides access to its archival collections for research, teaching and learning, public engagement and outreach. It refers to both analogue and existing digital collections. Currently born-digital records are not made accessible. The development of an access approach is part of the Digital Preservation project and is planned to be developed in Year 4 (June 2024-May 2025) of the project.

This policy is subordinate to the Cambridge University Library mission statement.

2. Principles

CUL is committed to providing access to its archival collections, resources and facilities to everyone over the age of 16 who wants to make use of them, irrespective of gender, sexual orientation, disability status, nationality, ethnic or cultural origins, religious belief (or non-belief) or social background.

We aim to treat all users equally while recognizing that some users may need additional assistance. Depositors may have certain rights regarding the collections they have deposited.

We aim to make access as unrestricted as possible, while taking into consideration constraints on resources and the need to preserve and secure collections on a permanent basis.

Access to collections is subject to statutory and legal requirements, including the Data Protection Act 2018, the UK General Data Protection Regulation, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Equality Act 2010, and copyright and other relevant legislation. Access to archives is guided by the Public Service Quality Group, *Standard for Access to Archives* (2008).

We are committed to identifying and trying to remove obstacles to access to our collections and facilities and to examining whether any of our potential users or stakeholders are not benefiting fully from our services.

3. Our Communities

CUL recognises that its collections are of use and interest to multiple overlapping communities locally, nationally and internationally, including:

- University of Cambridge students and staff (both academic and administrative)
- University of Cambridge alumni and retired staff
- Students and staff of other academic institutions internationally
- Donors and depositors of collections and their heirs and representatives
- Partner organisations of the University of Cambridge and CUL, including Cambridge colleges, schools, sixth form colleges, museums, charities and businesses
- University of Cambridge supporters and donors, including the Friends of Cambridge University Library
- Media, arts and cultural organisations
- The general public, including local and family historians, special interest groups, local history and community groups, independent and commercial researchers and exhibition visitors

4. Access

4.1 Reading room access

Registered users may consult archives in person in the Manuscripts Reading Room under staff supervision. The room is open from 09:30 until 18.50 on Monday to

Friday, and from 09:30 until 16.30 on Saturday. Access to archival collections is available for free to all readers holding a University of Cambridge ID card or CUL reader's card.

To register to obtain a reader's card requires university or personal photographic ID and current proof of home address. Temporary tickets valid for one week within any twelve-month period are free of charge. A £5.00 administration charge for 1 month, £15.00 for 6 months, £30.00 for 1 year or £90 for 3 years applies to applicants from non-UK universities and the public. Full details of the admission procedures are available on the Reader Registration department's webpages.

For material stored on site, it is not necessary to make an appointment to view items in the Manuscripts Reading Room. Registered users and those intending to register may order items in advance by email or phone or on the day of visit. It is advisable to check the availability of items before visiting. Staff fetch requested items generally within 30 minutes. No fetching is available between 12:45 and 14:00 on weekdays; and users must submit last orders by 12:30 for consultation over the lunch period. No fetching is available after 18:20 or after 16:15 on Saturdays. For material stored off site, access requests are facilitated by designated staff and may take 24 hours to fulfil. Catalogues contain details of location and request procedure.

Staff are always available in the reading room to answer enquiries and to provide guidance on handling material. All readers are required to abide by the rules of the reading room when accessing material. Trained staff assist readers to handle collections appropriately and intervene where necessary.

4.2 Enquiries

Staff respond to enquiries regarding archives in person, by phone, post, email or via social media channels. A generic email address (mss@lib.cam.ac.uk) is publicised alongside the email addresses of specialist staff on Library webpages. Specialist staff respond to complex enquiries submitted to the generic address. The time taken to respond to enquiries varies depending on the nature of the enquiry and the workload and working patterns of individual staff members but we are committed to responding to enquiries within ten working days. Time-sensitive enquiries receive highest priority.

The enquiry service is free for all users; CUL does not offer a paid enquiry service. There are limits on the amount of time available for individual enquiries; users with more complex in-depth enquiries requiring extensive research to answer are encouraged to visit in person or employ a private researcher.

4.3 Reprographics

Reading room users are permitted to make their own copies free of charge of material from most archival collections for non-commercial research and private study. Full guidelines are available on the Library website.

The Library's Cultural Heritage Imaging Laboratory produces digital copies of archival material for a charge. Staff and students of the University of Cambridge can request free low resolution digital scans for research purposes. Details of the reprographic services available and costs are available on the Library website.

4.4 Access for teaching and learning

Supporting teaching and learning is a key element of CUL's mission and archival collections are a key resource. We collaborate closely with staff and students to enhance access to collections for teaching and learning. Activities include designing and delivering seminars and workshops, providing space for classes to work with collections, digitising collection items, providing opportunities for student engagement e.g. through blogging or assisting with the curation of exhibitions. Training sessions on using and handling archival collections are available as standalone modules open to all Cambridge staff and students.

Where resources permit, academics and students from other universities may also access these services without charge.

4.5 Online access

4.5.1 Discovery

Catalogue data about our archival collections is available online via ArchiveSearch, the catalogue for the majority of Cambridge archives. Hard copy catalogues of selected collections are available in the Manuscripts Reading Room.

4.5.2 Website

Up to date information about services and facilities and about significant archival collections is available via the Library's webpages.

4.5.3 Digitised Collections

Free public access to digitised collections is available via the Cambridge Digital Library. High quality descriptive metadata that conforms to international standards (TEI, EAD or MODS) makes digitised collections discoverable.

All digitised content includes a statement of copyright, including end-user rights. Wherever possible we make our digitised collections available for re-use and adaptation under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License. Where copyright restrictions apply, we seek agreement to make content available under this or another Creative Commons License.

4.5.4 Digital communications and social media

Our archives service is promoted nationally and internationally in partnership with the Library's External Engagement Directorate.

Engaging content is produced for the University Library and wider University webpages with the digital storytelling platform 'Shorthand'. Along with detailed digital features for each exhibition, stories about archival research, discovery and acquisitions are promoted to digital visitors and to the global media. Our archival collections are also highlighted on Google Arts & Culture. The archival collections are shared with international audiences via the Library's social media channels, including X (@theUL, @theULSpecColl), Instagram (@cambridgeuniversitylibrary), Facebook, Linked In and TikTok, and via the Special Collections blog.

4.6 Public engagement

Our Exhibitions, Public Programmes, and Participation activities enable public audiences to engage with our archival collections.

4.6.1 Exhibitions

Each year, the University Library hosts two major public exhibitions from its collections in the Exhibition Centre. Exhibitions are based on research happening on the collection and feature archival materials in a high proportion. The archives service also supports public exhibitions on the North and South corridors, where facsimiles of archival material may be displayed, and supports temporary displays to accompany Library events.

The archive service also collaborates with other institutions to loan items for exhibition.

The Library's public events programme has a wide reach, and the archival collections are frequently celebrated when we participate in University and other Cambridge and national festivals (including the Cambridge Festival, Summer at the Museums, Heritage Open Days, Open Cambridge and the Alumni Festival). The archives service supports annual University Library events including the Sandars Lectures, events hosted by the Friends of the Library, other fundraising events, and talks and tours relating to current exhibitions and significant anniversaries and campaigns, such as LGBT History Month and Black History Month.

5. Restrictions on access

Access to collections is restricted for a variety of reasons. Restrictions are set by professional archivists, often in consultation with other professional staff or experts. The principal categories of restriction are:

5.1 Legislation

Most archival material is freely accessible. However, some is subject to access restrictions under the relevant legislation, including the Data Protection Act 2018, the UK General Data Protection Regulation and the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Catalogues contain details of access restrictions.

Where access is requested to certain material containing personal information about living individuals, archivists discuss their research with readers and decide whether complete, redacted or no records can be released. In doing so, they seek to ensure the right balance between openness and safeguarding individuals' right to a private life. If access is provided, users sign a Data Protection undertaking acknowledging their legal responsibilities.

5.2 Accession agreements

Some archival material may be restricted or subject to access controls by agreement with the donor or depositor of the material. In entering into such agreements, the Library will have regard to Freedom of Information legislation and will attempt as far as possible to keep to a minimum the period of restriction or control, subject to meeting the legitimate concerns of the donor or depositor.

5.3 Preservation

If an item is unfit for handling in the reading room, access is restricted. The Library's Conservation department prioritizes high demand items considered unfit for production for treatment. Where possible, arrangements are made to provide alternative means of accessing the item, e.g. by digital surrogate or by conservator handling.

5.4 Uncatalogued material

Access may be permitted to uncatalogued material on a discretionary basis. The criteria for assessing access is based on the nature of the material, the needs of the stakeholder and the feasibility of providing access.

6. Consultation and feedback

Feedback and comments are encouraged via the Library website and via the comment cards prominently displayed in the Manuscripts Reading Room and throughout the Library.

There are also consultation channels with various stakeholder groups including:

- Syndics of the University Library (representing the Vice-Chancellor, faculty, students, staff and peers)
- CUL Advisory Board (representing members of the community)
- Cambridge Archivists Group (representing archivists working in Colleges and Departments across the University of Cambridge)

- The University Archivist meets regularly with University officers including the Information Compliance Officer.

7. Acknowledgements

This policy draws on:

Public Service Quality Group of the National Council on Archives, *Standard for Access to Archives* (2008)
Access Policy for Special Collections at the University of Bradford (2022)
University of Leicester Archives and Special Collections Access Policy (2017)
Churchill Archives Centre, *Access Policy* (2023)

Version	Authors	Date	Date of last review	Date of next review
1.0	**Suzanne Paul, Katrina Dean**	**November 2017**	**November 2017**	**November 2019**
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