

# **City of Westminster Archives Centre**

## **Access Policy**

**February 2016**



**City of Westminster**

## **1. Introduction**

1.1 Westminster City Archives is part of the Libraries & Culture division of Westminster City Council and is committed to eliminate all forms of discrimination and are committed to promoting equality of opportunity in all aspects of the service. A key objective of the Archives service is improving access to the resources in its care to all communities. Access is the means by which records are offered for use either directly or indirectly, including both physical and intellectual access, onsite and remotely.

## **2. Legislation and Standards**

2.1 Westminster City Archives subscribes to the principles of the **Standard for Access to Archives (2008)** (National Council on Archives: Public Services Quality Group) and the **Public Library Standards** (Department for Culture, Media and Sport)

2.2 The statutory framework for access to information is listed below:

- Local Government (Records) Act 1962
- Local Government Act 1972 (s. 224)
- Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985
- Public Records Acts 1958 and 1967
- Data Protection Act 1998
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Environmental Information Regulations (EIRs) 2004
- Church of England Parochial Registers and Records Measure 1978, amended 1992
- The Law of Property (Amendment) Act 1924
- Manorial and Tithe Documents Rules issued under the Law of Property Acts 1922 and 1924 and the Tithe Act 1936
- Library byelaws for the City of Westminster (under section 19 of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964)
- Representation of the People Act 2000
- Equality Act 2010

## **3. On-site Access**

3.1 Westminster City Archives places access to its collections at the heart of its services. The Archives Centre welcomes visitors to its service points where they can expect:

- A range of opening hours outside standard 9-5 office hours, including Saturday opening

- Fully Disability Discrimination Act compliant premises
- Direct public access, free of charge and without the need for an appointment or reservation
- Lockers to be provided for security of possessions while in the search room
- A study environment that is pleasant, clean and safe
- The name of the manager to be on display
- Staff who are clearly identifiable through the wearing of name badges
- An excellent level of service from polite, helpful and suitably trained staff
- Knowledgeable and appropriately qualified staff on duty in the Searchroom to provide accurate and appropriate advice on material held by Westminster City Archives and resources available elsewhere
- Advice and guidance on suitable handling of original local studies and archival material
- A comprehensive range of catalogues and finding aids, including onsite access to online catalogue WESTCAT
- To browse information leaflets and books on shelves
- Self service microform readers and copiers
- Free internet access and use of varied electronic resources and databases through the Westminster Libraries gateway
- To consult digitised records forming the Westminster Collection on Find My Past and free access to sites such as Ancestry.com, which normally involve a subscription
- Free Wifi access available in all public areas
- Viewing copies of digitised film collection made available in Searchroom on DVD
- Retrieval of first item from on-site secure areas to be completed within 15 minutes of a request. If the material is unavailable for conservation reasons or there is likely to be a delay in production the customer will be informed of this
- A range of reprographics services that meet the needs of the customer, without placing documents/items at risk of damage
- Protection of their personal data in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998
- Access to groups for visits based on particular themes or general introductions to the archive service
- Access to a regular programme of talks promoting the collections

#### **4. Remote Access**

4.1 Westminster City Archives encourages users who are unable to visit the Centre in person to contact it directly for information or to use our remote information services.

4.2 Those contacting Westminster City Archives remotely can expect

- The telephone to be answered promptly and politely and the member of staff answering to identify themselves by name, in line with Westminster City Council's Telephony Policy
- Emails, letters and faxes to be answered within **10** working days. If there is to be a further delay to answering the query the customer will be told why and given an indication of the length of the delay
- Access to a paid Research Service to undertake local history, building history or Gillow furniture history research
- Ability to purchase a range of publications
- Access to advice and guidance by trained staff

#### **5. On-line access**

5.1 Westminster City Archives makes information about its collections and services available via a dedicated website (<https://www.westminster.gov.uk/archives>)

- Online catalogue WESTCAT including digitised images
- Full Guide To Holdings to all archival collections
- Range of themed Information Sheets aimed at family historians
- Online exhibition galleries
- Details of all local history books accessed through online Libraries Catalogue
- Facebook page and blogs

5.2 Key collections digitised through partnership with an external provider to promote online access and preservation of collections.

5.3 Westminster City Archives contributes to regional and national archive networks and initiatives, such as the National Register of Archives (NRA) and TNA Discovery

#### **6. Restrictions to access**

6.1 At Westminster City Archives, the following may restrict access to archives:

- Data Protection Act 1998
  - Freedom of Information Act 2000
  - Physical condition of unique and irreplaceable records
  - Owners' permission
- 6.2 In situations where restrictions apply, users can expect a clear explanation from staff as to why we are unable to provide access.