



Archives and Research Collections

Collections Access Policy

This policy sets out the basis for providing access to the collections in our care. This policy encompasses access to collections held by the Borthwick Institute for Archives, the University of York Rare Books Library, and the University Art Collection. Separate policies exist for access to collections held at York Minster Library, overseen by the Chapter of York.

1. Policy

1.1 Access Statement

Access is the primary purpose for which we develop and preserve our collections. We seek to provide the maximum access possible, balanced against statutory protections, contractual constraints, and the preservation needs of the collections.

We will provide access to the archives in our care to everyone unless:

- We judge that access is likely to cause harm to items in our collections
- There are legal or ethical safeguards that prevent or limit access
- The owner of a collection has placed a legitimate restriction on access

Where any of these circumstances apply we will explain what the circumstances are and, wherever possible, endeavour to remove the access barrier encountered.

We work to remove barriers restricting access to our collections, be they physical or intellectual. We observe the University's policies and practices concerning [equal opportunities](#).

Access to information about collections in our care

1.2 We facilitate access to information about the archives as per the legislation and standards in [Appendix A](#), our Collections Development Policies and Collections Information Policy. Further information will be created per associated plans.

1.3 We provide information about our services and collections through our website, social media, printed guidance and in response to individual enquiries. We aim to keep the information we publish about our services accurate and up to date.

1.4 The Borthwick catalogue ([Borthcat](#)) and the University of York Library catalogue ([Yorsearch](#)) are the primary and authoritative sources of information about the archives and rare books collections in our care. The primary finding aid for the University Art Collection can be found at <https://artcollection.york.ac.uk/artcollection/>. We keep them accurate and up-to-date within resource constraints. Both Borthcat and Yorsearch are harvested by online collections information aggregators and Internet search engines.

1.5 We disseminate information about our holdings as widely as possible, in as timely a manner as resources allow, and as appropriate to the collections in question. We encourage and facilitate the publication by others of information about our holdings, of studies of our holdings, and studies using our holdings.

1.6 We report information about the collections we receive to appropriate sectoral bodies, including the National Archives, SCONUL and ArtUK.

1.7 We provide in-person physical access to the collections in our care to everyone during our published hours. We publish changes to these opening hours (for reasons including staff meetings, training and Bank Holidays) annually using the University academic year, and add information about irregular changes as soon as they are known to us. Unforeseen changes are published on our website, social media and elsewhere, as appropriate to the circumstance, in a timely manner.

1.8 We will consult with researchers if we plan to make permanent changes to our opening hours.

1.9 The Borthwick building is accessible and we assist researchers with physical or sensory impairments. This includes the provision of high-contrast surrogates, hearing loops, adjustable furniture and interpreting records in our care. Where researchers have more complex needs we are happy to work with them to implement further reasonable adjustments as appropriate. We also work closely with digital service providers and developers to push for features that better conform with accessibility guidance.

1.10 We provide trained and qualified staff to assist researchers to access, use and understand the archives and the facilities available to access them ([see Appendix B](#)).

1.11 We do not provide legal advice on the content of records.

Fees and charges

1.12 Access to the Borthwick building, online finding aids, display places, and in-person access to the records is free. We charge for value-added services, which may include

providing copies of records, self-service photography, permissions to publish, media work and commissioned research. Our service charges are published on our website and reviewed annually by the Archives and Research Collections Leadership Team.

1.13 Where access to records is through a statutory provision, other charges may apply.

Access to information via original items

1.14 We provide appropriate space and facilities designed to meet the preservation needs of the collections, the needs of researchers, and the requirements of legislation and standards. A list of these spaces and facilities is given in [Appendix B](#).

1.15 We provide researchers with access to original archives and rare books in our searchroom. Items from the art collection may be seen in our searchroom, or in their current displayed location.

1.16 We provide educational groups, volunteer groups, community groups and the media with public access to items from our collections in our Lifelong Learning Rooms, searchroom or the Yorkshire Room, depending on their needs.

1.17 If the searchroom is not available or is not appropriate for the collection items in question our staff will endeavour to provide other appropriate space for researchers to consult those collection items, taking into account the use, security and preservation of the records and their status as originals or surrogates.

1.18 Access to archives and rare books collections in our care is contingent upon the researcher agreeing to our rules and regulations for the preservation and security of collections. Our rules and regulations are included as part of our online booking process; published in our searchroom; and are available on our website.

1.19 Staff may deny access to collection items or the Borthwick building following our published guidelines on withdrawal of access to records ([Appendix C](#)).

1.20 We encourage researchers to request records for their research in advance of a visit to make the best use of their time with us. It is not necessary to make such requests except as described in 1.22, 1.23 and 1.24. Archives and rare books are retrieved from the strongrooms at regular intervals as specified in searchroom notices and on our website. Artworks will be retrieved from stores with prior arrangement. Where it is not possible due to the size, format or condition of the work, access will be facilitated via digital means.

1.21 We endeavour to retrieve archives and rare books within 15 minutes of receiving a valid request to see them. If we think a request will take longer than this we will inform researchers as soon as possible and keep them updated as to the status of their request.

1.22 Collections without finding aids present particular access problems. Where researchers require access to unlisted archives they are asked to contact us in advance of their visit so that we can make appropriate arrangements to facilitate access, while ensuring appropriate safeguards in terms of material subject to legal, ethical or preservation requirements.

1.23 Some of our collections require cold storage to maximise their lifespan, such as photographs, film, slides and videotape. Items in such storage must be requested at least 24 hours in advance of a visit so that we can allow them to acclimatise to searchroom conditions.

1.24 Digital records may require technical processing before they can be consulted by researchers. Where researchers require access to digital records that have not already been made available by us online, researchers are required to contact us in advance of their visit so that we can make appropriate arrangements.

1.25 Access points for digital records vary depending on the records in question. Solutions range from free and open online access to on-site access via a dedicated terminal in the searchroom. Decisions are based on technical, legal, and ethical considerations. In some instances, the Borthwick may contract with outside service providers to enable access to digital records. In all cases:

- Access to digital records is free of charge;
- The Borthwick catalogue (Borthcat) serves as a central point of discovery;
- Access solutions are clearly documented and staff trained in their use;
- User guides, help documentation, and other resources are available to support users.

1.26 Some of our collections are stored offsite with secure storage providers. Items stored in these locations will require up to 7 days' notice before they can be consulted or digitised onsite. Some of our artworks are currently displayed in spaces to which there is no general public access. In these cases, prior notice will be required to facilitate access.

Access to collections via surrogates

1.27 We make copies (surrogates) of items to increase access to them and to secure the preservation of the archives in our care, where legal and ethical restrictions allow.

1.28 We will use any appropriate format available to us to create surrogates and make them available for use. Examples of formats we use include digital imagery, microfilm, microfiche and physical copies (such as photocopies, transcriptions by staff, the public, record societies and other clubs and societies).

1.29 We provide free onsite access to online digitised records.

1.30 We are not responsible for the accuracy or quality of surrogates or index entries created by external bodies.

Creating surrogates for research

1.31 We supply physical and digital copies via our Reprographics service and in line with our Digitisation Policy.

1.32 Our ability to provide copies of items in our collections is governed by preservation status, copyright and information laws, terms of licences, terms of deposit, technical capacity and staffing availability.

1.33 We provide advice about copying options available on a case-by-case basis. Researchers will be advised of charges before submitting orders. We aim to complete all requests within 20 working days of receipt of payment where the medium in question allows.

1.34 Researchers may make copies of records in the searchroom subject to payment of the applicable fee and the provisions of our Care and Conservation; and Digitisation Policies.

Access for researchers based remotely

1.35 We welcome enquiries via email, telephone, post, in person and via social media. We respond to enquiries within 10 working days.

1.36 We undertake research about the information contained in collections in our care at the charges published on our website. We aim to complete such work within 20 working days of receipt of the appropriate fee and will advise if a request might take longer than 20 days to complete.

1.37 We provide online access to the collections in our care, to the information we know about them, and to the services we provide. We provide access online via

- Our [website](#), which is the primary and authoritative source of information about our services, operations, history, staff and projects. It is regularly maintained and hosts up-to-date information on our opening times, charges and contact details.
- Borthcat, through which we provide fonds-level information for all our archives within 3 months of an archive being acquired; and create detailed sub-fonds and lower-level information and links to copies of records following our strategy and plans thereafter.
- Yorssearch, for which we provide bibliographic and copy-specific information for items in the University Rare Books Library and York Minster Library collections.
- Archive information providers, such as Archives Portal Europe, the UK Archives

Hub, TNA's Discovery and general internet search engines, with which we share our Borthcat information.

- Library information providers, such as JiscHub and ESTC with which we share our Yorsearch Information.
- Art content aggregators, such as ArtUK.
- Content providers, such as the University of York, the Humanities Research Institute, FindMyPast and Ancestry, through which we provide access to surrogates of records in our care.
- Social media of every appropriate kind, through which we aim to provide informative and entertaining access to the Borthwick's activities and archives.

1.38 We promote our activities and collections via a wide range of means, including:

- Conferences
- Lectures, seminars, talks and podcasts
- Teaching and learning related to our collections and the skills needed to interpret them
- Escorted visits to the Borthwick
- Attendance at local and national history fairs and events
- Engagement with media organisations
- Exhibitions, on-site and off site

1.39 We welcome opportunities to collaborate with schools, community groups and educational bodies, following our Learning and Outreach Policy.

Restrictions on access

1.40 We may restrict access to, and use of, collections items due to the physical condition of a collection item, the technical environment that a record requires, legal restrictions relating to information in a record, or adverse behaviour by a researcher, following our Guidelines on withdrawal of access to records ([Appendix C](#)).

1.41 We may permit access to restricted personal information where research accessing such information is conducted solely for historical or statistical purposes, will not support measures or decisions with respect to particular individuals, or be likely to cause damage or distress, and the researcher agrees to conditions consonant with Data Protection laws, including making the results of the research available only in an anonymised form.

1.42 Where we judge that collections items are in poor physical condition and at risk of further damage we may restrict access to them in line with our Collections Care and Conservation Policy. In such circumstances, we will endeavour to facilitate access by other means, including via surrogate copies.

1.43 Applicable access conditions will be indicated in Borthcat, Yorsearch and art collection finding aids.

Feedback

1.44 We welcome feedback on our services, holdings and policies and will review all feedback by the appropriate people at the appropriate time.

1.45 We participate in customer satisfaction sampling and surveys. Such surveys might include surveys administered by TNA, Archives for Yorkshire, the Archives and Records Association and the Archives and Records Association National Surveys Group.

Complaints

1.46 We manage and respond to complaints following our [Complaints Process](#).

2. Scope

2.1 This policy covers access to our

- Archives in any format or media
- Surrogates in any format or media
- Services of any kind provided by Archives and Research Collections staff
- Items from our Rare Books Collection
- Artworks in the University Art Collection

2.2 All researchers accessing collections, surrogates or services are covered by this policy.

3. Oversight

3.1 Overall responsibility for Access is with the Keeper of Archives and Research Collections.

3.2 The Archives and Research Collections Leadership Team is responsible for overseeing policy implementation.

4. Policy implementation documents

4.1 This policy is supported by the following policies and implementation documents:

- Borthwick Institute policy and terms definitions guide
- Collections Information Policy
- Care and conservation policy, plan and procedures
- Digital preservation policy and procedures
- Reprographics procedures
- Digitisation policy, plan and procedures

- Access plan and procedures
- Learning and Outreach Policy
- Forward plans
- University of York Information Security Policy
- University of York Data Protection Policy
- University of York Freedom of Information Publication Scheme

Document history and status

August 2017	Information Services SMT	Approved
July 2023	Library Archives and Learning Services Leadership Team	Approved

Review cycle: 5 years

Scheduled for review: September 2028

Appendix A

Legislation and standards

We provide access to the archives in our care within the following statutory, contractual and standards framework. We will adapt our services to meet any applicable legislation introduced over the lifetime of this policy.

Legislation

- The Law of Property (Amendment) Act 1924
 - Manorial Documents Rules 1926 and 1959, The Manorial Documents (Amendment) Rules, 1963 and 1967, and Statutory Instruments 1959 No. 1399, 1963 No. 976, 1967 No. 963.
- Tithe Act 1936
 - Tithes (Copies of Instruments of Apportionment) (Amendment) Rules 1960-1963 (SI 1960/2440) and (SI 1963/977)
- Public Records Act 1958, amended 1967
- Parochial Registers and Records Measure 1978, amended 1992 and 2003
- Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988
- Access to Health Records Act, 1990
- Data Protection Act 2018
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (SI 2004/3391)
- Equality Act 2010

Standards

- National Council on Archives Public Services Quality Group (PSQG) Access Standard 2008.
- EN 17820:2023 Specifications for the management of cultural heritage collections.
- BS 4971:2017 Conservation and care of archive and library collections.

Appendix B

Spaces and Facilities

- Searchroom
 - 24 spaces for consulting records
 - 1 height-adjustable desk
 - 1 space for consulting outside records
 - 1 public access terminal
 - Portable hearing loop

- Microform room
 - 3 digital microform readers for 35mm and 16mm film, fiche and card
 - 2 public access terminals
 - 11 35mm microfilm readers
 - 1 microfiche reader

- Lifelong learning rooms 1 & 2
 - 30 seating spaces with tables (when divided, each room has a capacity of 12)
 - 40 seats set in lecture style
 - 2 projectors and associated speakers
 - 2 whiteboards
 - Hearing loop

- Samuel Storey Family Exhibiton Gallery
 - 4 table-style glass exhibition cases
 - 4 column-style glass exhibition cases

- Raymond Burton Library Foyer
 - 4 table-style glass exhibition cases

- The Yorkshire Room (LBU/002)
 - 18 seats
 - Large screen

Appendix C

Guidelines on withdrawal of access to items in our collections

1. We will provide access to items in our collection unless:

- We judge that providing access is likely to cause harm to an item, following our Care and Conservation Policy
- There is a legal bar to access
- The legal owner of a collection has placed a restriction on access
- A researcher does not abide by our rules and regulations
- A researcher behaves in a manner which is threatening, abusive, aggressive or otherwise inappropriate toward staff or other researchers
- A researcher behaves in a manner that in the opinion of staff poses a threat to the ongoing preservation of collections in our care.

2. Where any of these circumstances apply we will explain what the circumstances are and endeavour to remove the access barrier encountered.

3. Where we withdraw access to an item because access to it is likely to cause harm to that record, or because of a researcher's behaviour, we may require that the researcher accesses the record by means of a surrogate to be created at cost to the researcher following our published charges, through a third party, or through the Borthwick's paid research service.

4. Where researcher behaviour is the prime cause of withdrawal of access to an item, we may also withdraw access to the Borthwick building.

5. The Keeper of Archives and Research Collections will normally decide on withdrawal of access to the Borthwick building. Where the Keeper is not available the decision to withdraw access may be made by any member of the Archives and Research Collections Leadership Team; a member of the Library, Archives and Learning Services Leadership Team; or a member of the Student & Academic Services Directorate Management Team.

6. Where access to the Borthwick building is withdrawn we will tell the researcher in writing why the decision has been made, who has taken the decision and what steps must be taken to access the building in future.

7. Researchers may challenge decisions made under these guidelines by contacting the Director of Library, Archives and Learning Services.