

# **Surrey History Centre: Archives And Local Studies Access And Engagement Policy**

## **1. Introduction and Background**

Surrey History Centre collects and rescues archives and printed materials relating to Surrey's past and present, so that present and future generations can discover the history of the county and its people. Though based on one site in Woking, we are a county-wide service with a global audience.

We recognise and celebrate the diversity of people and communities and welcome everyone. We seek to identify and eliminate all forms of discrimination and are committed to promoting equality of opportunity in all aspects of the service. We strive to make our information and services more accessible to the people we serve, involving members of the public in activities to help them discover, preserve and celebrate their heritage.

We support Surrey County Council's strategic goals of wellbeing and improved resident experience by ensuring that every child and adult has an opportunity to engage in cultural and heritage activity. We use heritage as a non-confrontational platform for promoting cohesion, health and wellbeing in safe and stronger communities.

## **2. Scope of this Policy**

Surrey History Centre holds for the purpose of learning and discovery records deemed to be of permanent historic value created by Surrey County Council, district, borough and parish councils and their predecessors, local courts, hospitals and health authorities, schools and colleges and other public bodies, as well as records deposited or donated by private organisations and individuals.

Visitors to the Centre have free access to original records or, in some cases, copies of records in our public searchroom. This policy sets out how we enable both visitors to the Centre and remote users to access our collections and the information they contain. It also explains how we work to enhance the understanding and enjoyment of Surrey's heritage, and encourage participation in all aspects of that heritage.

## **3. Legislative and Regulatory Framework**

For information about what records and local studies material we collect and the regulatory framework in which we operate see our **Archives and Local Studies Collecting Policy**.

The information contained in most records in our care is freely accessible to visitors to Surrey History Centre and for those unable to visit we offer a paid research service.

However, Surrey History Centre is obliged to meet the requirements of current legislation concerning access to certain categories of information, including:

- The Data Protection Act, 2018
- The Freedom of Information Act, 2000
- The Representation of the People Act, 2002

- Environmental Information Regulations, 2004

In such cases, access to information is provided in accordance with this legislation and related guidance and decisions issued by the Information Commissioner, The National Archives, Surrey County Council Information Governance Officer and other appropriate authorities.

Surrey History Centre is also obliged to honour any agreements made with owners of records applying restrictions on access to their records.

For further information, please refer to our **Access to Records Policy**.

#### **4. Access to the building**

We provide public access to Surrey's archive and local studies collections, free of charge and without the need for an appointment, in the Heather D Hawker public searchroom at Surrey History Centre in Woking. Trained staff help visitors to find the information they need and can assist in handling, reading and interpreting the collections.

The building is fully accessible for disabled people. There are loop systems in our foyer, at the searchroom help desks and in our conference rooms to assist those with a hearing impairment. We also have a CCTV scanner to provide text enhancement facilities for people with visual impairment who find it difficult to read some of the archive material. We have a range of accessible IT equipment, including large text keyboards, accessible 'mice' etc, to assist customers with specific requirements. We are committed to the ongoing review and enhancement of our accessibility provision.

Our foyer includes a reception desk for welcoming visitors, a cloakroom and locker area, and a refreshment room with a drinks machine where visitors can eat their own food. Soft drinks and snacks are also available for purchase at our reception desk. There are seating areas in our foyer, a small lending library of local and family history books (part of Surrey Libraries) and Surrey Libraries computer terminals for public use. Leaflets and brochures are on display in our Tourist Information Point. We have an accessible toilet and a small shop selling books, gifts and greetings cards. Our foyer also includes a family area with books and toys for children to enjoy (supervised by a parent or carer).

Our searchroom is open to the public 36 hours per week. Our full address, contact details and opening times are listed on our website:

<https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/heritage-culture-and-recreation/archives-and-history/surrey-history-centre/visiting-surrey-history-centre/surrey-history-centre-opening-hours>

#### **5. Access to the archive collections**

##### Access for Visitors to Surrey History Centre

We provide public access to the archive collections in accordance with our **Access to Records Policy**, our **Code of Conduct** and relevant national legislation (see Section 3, Legislative and Statutory Framework, above).

We make archive collections available to people who:

- hold a current Archives Card or Surrey Libraries Card
- have completed and signed our Visitors' Book
- agree to comply with the Code of Conduct

We can issue Archives Cards or Surrey Libraries Cards on production of proof of ID and address such as a recent utility bill, driving licence or bank statement

We make archive collections available unless:

- there is a statutory exemption prohibiting access
- the owner of the collection has placed a restriction on access
- access is likely to cause physical harm to the archives
- there is a surrogate or other alternative copy available

Visitors to Surrey History Centre to use the archive and local studies collections may:

- use a variety of guides, lists and indexes to identify archive collections relevant to their research.
- consult original archive material. This can be ordered via our searchroom computer terminals and we aim to produce the material from our secure strongrooms within 15 minutes of a request. Visitors will be informed if, for any reason, the material is unavailable.
- use surrogate copies of archives that are in high demand or likely to be damaged by over handling. Some material is available in microform, but we also make archives available via digital surrogates. Some of these, notably tithe maps, are only available onsite or on CD-Rom; other more popular archives are available via pay-per-view websites such as Ancestry and Find My Past (freely available at Surrey History Centre and across the Surrey Library network).
- use printed books, maps and illustrations in the local studies collection to enhance their research.
- view copy archive film on either VHS video or DVD.
- access the internet free of charge in connection with their research, including free access to some pay-per-view sites such as Ancestry and Find My Past.
- consult staff about the archive collections, research skills, and other avenues of research.
- order copies of archive material (for a fee).
- print out copies of microform and some digitised records (for a fee).
- take their own photographs of archive material (for a fee).
- arrange for a tailored session as a group to meet their needs (for a fee).

### Access for Remote Users

People wishing to use our archive and local studies collections from a distance may:

- view our website to find information about the service and the collections and to search lists and indexes online.
- search our online catalogue ([www.surreyarchives.org.uk](http://www.surreyarchives.org.uk)) to identify archive collections which may assist their research.
- use The National Archives' Discovery portal to identify Surrey archive collections which may assist their research.
- view some Surrey records online through Ancestry and Find My Past.
- write, email or telephone with an enquiry about our archive collections or for general information about the service.
- write, or email to request copies of archive material.

- choose to employ our in-house paid research service to carry out research on their behalf.

We respond to enquiries about the archive collections received by letter, email and telephone in accordance with Surrey County Council's published Customer Promise, <https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/finance-and-performance/our-performance/customer-promise>

#### Access to copies of material from the archive collections

We supply copies of archives to people who have received a quotation for the cost of the copies, have paid in advance for all the copies they require and have completed and signed a copyright declaration form for each item requested.

We make and supply copies of material from archive collections unless:

- there is a statutory exemption prohibiting copying
- the owner of the collection has placed a restriction on copying
- copying is likely to cause physical harm to the archives
- copying is likely to cause an infringement of copyright legislation

Visitors can photograph records themselves using their own cameras, having purchased a photography permit and subject to any deposit or copyright restrictions.

Any reproduction of copies of our records must be agreed in advance by completion of the appropriate request form. A reproduction fee may be charged.

#### Access for groups of people

We welcome visits from groups of adult learners, community groups or leisure interest groups and welcome enquiries from schools, colleges and universities. There may be a fee for group visits if a tour behind the scenes and display of documents is requested. Details of the format of visits we offer and costs are given in our leaflet, 'Surrey Heritage Talks, Workshops and Tours'.

#### Access to archives containing personal information

We deal with subject access requests under the Data Protection Act (2018) and requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act (2000) in accordance with relevant legislation and Surrey County Council procedures. For full details, see our **Access to Records Policy**. We refer the request to the appropriate data controller or information officer and inform applicants about the progress of their requests. Where access to information from records not yet fully open is granted by the data controller or information officer, we may supply copies of the information for a fee.

## **6. Access Standards**

Surrey History Centre aims to meet The National Council on Archives Public Services Quality Group Access Standard 2006. We are committed to giving a high standard of service at all times in accordance with Surrey County Council's published Customer Promise.

If you visit Surrey History Centre in person we will:

- be friendly and helpful at all times
- inform you of relevant policies, procedures and charges

- protect your personal data in accordance with the Data Protection Act
- provide lockers for the security of your personal possessions and papers that are not allowed into the secure area of the searchroom
- provide lists, indexes, guides and reference books to help you identify, use and understand the records you need
- assist you to identify the records you need to consult, and do our best to answer your questions
- provide professional advice about the archives we hold and how to use them for your research
- produce documents on demand throughout the day until 30 minutes before closing time, aiming to produce documents within 15 minutes of your request or to tell you why we are unable to
- provide copies of documents for you, wherever possible, for a fee, in accordance with our copying policy and current Table of Fees and Charges, or explain to you why an item is unsuitable for copying
- give all first-time visitors a welcome pack with information about using our facilities and a feedback form so that you can provide us with information which will help us to improve our service in the future

If you contact us by letter, email, Surrey County Council's online request form or Exploring Surrey's Past comments facility, we will:

- acknowledge your enquiry within 2 working days of receipt and respond within 20 days
- suggest alternative appropriate avenues of research if we are unable to help
- respond to your enquiry in compliance with relevant legislation

If you contact us by phone we will:

- respond in a friendly and professional manner and tell you to whom you are speaking
- answer basic enquiries at once or phone you back within an agreed time
- invite you to forward more complex enquiries by letter or email, or to visit in person

If you visit Surrey History Centre we expect you to:

- bring your Archives Card each time you visit. You need this in order to use original documents
- follow our Searchroom Rules and **Code of Conduct** and sign the visitor's book each time you visit to show that you agree to observe them
- handle all documents and books with care in accordance with our **Caring for our Collections** leaflet
- tell us what you hope to find. We can only help you if you give us enough information to understand and answer your enquiries
- treat us as courteously as you would like us to treat you
- help us to improve our service by telling us what we do well and not so well

Our staff are identified by name badges and are available to help customers, provide advice about our collections and explain the services we offer. All staff receive induction training and regular on-going job related training.

If you are unhappy with any aspect of our service we want to know. Please talk to the duty archivist or librarian who will try to provide a remedy. If you are still not

satisfied, please ask to speak to the Public Services and Engagement Manager, or write to them at Surrey History Centre, 130 Goldsworth Road, Woking, GU21 6ND (email: [shs@surreycc.gov.uk](mailto:shs@surreycc.gov.uk)). If you feel that your complaint has still not been resolved please ask for Surrey County Council's Complaints, Compliments and Comments form or email [contact-centre@surreycc.gov.uk](mailto:contact-centre@surreycc.gov.uk).

You can also make any compliments, comments and complaints about our service through the Surrey County Council website: <http://www.surreycc.gov.uk/contact-us>

## **7. Widening Access and Engagement**

We are committed to widening enjoyment and understanding of Surrey's archives and local studies collection in all sectors of the community, and encouraging and retaining new users through a range of innovative activities:

### Displays

- We hold a wide variety of outreach events and displays to promote the archive collections and to encourage new people to enjoy and explore their heritage. These are often linked to national events such as Black History Month, LGBTQ+ Month, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month, Holocaust Memorial Day, Mental Health and Disability Awareness campaigns as well as local events such as Surrey Museums Month.
- Displays of copies of documents are held in our foyer throughout the year, celebrating local history events and anniversaries.
- 'Marvel of the Month' displays in our foyer, linked to a display of original material in our searchroom, highlight particular items from our collections. These are also posted on our website.
- We also host displays in our foyer by national and local groups and societies. Many of these are also hosted as exhibition pages on our Exploring Surrey's Past website, <http://www.exploringsurreypast.org.uk/>
- We work with local, national and international museums and galleries to facilitate loans of original documents from our collections to their exhibitions

### Working with Communities

- We create long-term partnerships with community groups, including Woking MIND, the Halow Group, the Freewheeler's Theatre and faith groups such as the Shah Jahan Mosque and Surrey's Ahmadiyya community.
- We support the work of colleagues within SCC's Cultural Services to develop heritage interpretation in new ways, for example through the visual arts, music and drama.
- We encourage and support local communities in developing sustainable projects and partnerships to explore, celebrate and preserve their heritage.
- We encourage visits by mental health, learning disability and dementia support groups to explore our collections for their own projects and provide resource packs for these groups to use in care homes, drop-in centres etc.
- We offer a venue for community groups to meet and organise their own events, which increases knowledge of our collections, services and activities.
- We work closely with Surrey's schools to increase knowledge of both our collections and those held by Surrey's museums so that they can be embedded in learning resources and activities linked to the requirements of the National Curriculum.

- We work with Looked After Children, young people Not in Education, Employment or Training and participate in Surrey County Council's apprenticeship scheme.
- We provide work placements, internships and volunteering opportunities for young people and those in higher education to discover the rich potential of archives and heritage for their current studies or future career pathways.
- We actively seek external funding for specific projects designed to improve access to particularly important archive collections and at the same time provide imaginative opportunities for community involvement in volunteering and other activities.
- We support communities making their own bids for funding for projects to explore and celebrate their own heritage.
- We contribute to the wellbeing of our community by providing a wide range of opportunities for people to volunteer with us but also to 'connect, be active, keep learning, give and take notice' through their engagement with Surrey's archives.
- We maintain and develop relationships with the county's seven Local History Centres and with museums and other heritage groups to support their interest and engagement in Surrey's heritage, and through partnership with them, reach a wider audience. Further details of these Local History centres are available at <https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/culture-and-leisure/local-history-centres>

### Promoting our Work

- We involve and inform elected members and colleagues across Surrey County Council about heritage activities.
- Family learning activities with a heritage theme are held in our Events Room during school holidays and there is a family area with history books and toys in our foyer enabling us to welcome younger families to the History Centre.
- Each year we organise a Surrey Heritage Showcase, a one-day event in a particular Surrey town or village, working with local and county-wide family and local history societies to promote the history of that area with stalls, displays, short talks, 'meet the expert' sessions and family activities.
- We offer an extensive list of talks about our collections to outside groups (for a fee). These are listed in our leaflet, **Surrey Heritage Talks, Workshops and Tours**.
- We offer a talk with a handling collection of documents for the visually impaired.
- We run regular workshops for groups and individuals (for a fee) on researching family history, safe handling and packaging, best practice in oral history projects and using digital copies of Ordnance Survey and tithe maps.
- Many of our volunteer projects focus on the preparation of indexes and finding aids to collections that would otherwise be hard to access, such as Board of Guardians' Minute and Application Books, early mental hospital case books and Surrey newspapers.

### Communicating

- We embrace the internet and social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Pinterest) to reach new audiences, provide information about our services and collections and promote our activities and events. Our Exploring Surrey's Past website provides a portal to access finding aids to both our collection and those of Surrey's museums and also provides specialist pages on

particular topics in Surrey's history, notable people, exhibitions and topics, all of which have a feedback facility to enable people across the world to comment, link up and engage with Surrey's past.

- We welcome interest from the media. Facility and publication fees may be payable and an acknowledgment will be required. Fees, terms and conditions for filming at Surrey History Centre are given in our **Filming Policy**. All press enquiries are discussed with Surrey County Council's Media Team and any press releases are issued through them.

## **8. Improving our Service**

We welcome the views of all our users, potential users and other stakeholders and monitor and evaluate feedback to improve service delivery and to meet their needs. We seek their views in a variety of ways including feedback and evaluation forms for our service and activities, annual Archive and Records Association Surveys of Visitors and Remote Users and comments books for foyer exhibitions.

## **9. Date of Publication and Review**

This policy was first published in 2017.  
Reviewed and updated July 2020.  
Next review: 2023.