

CITY OF LONDON

Libraries, Archives and Guildhall Art Gallery Department

GUILDHALL LIBRARY MANUSCRIPTS AND LONDON METROPOLITAN ARCHIVES

Access and Interpretation Policy

Archives Access and Interpretation policy

VISION STATEMENT

Guildhall Library Manuscripts and London Metropolitan Archives aim to provide as wide an access to its holdings as possible in an environment of transparency, learning and fun in which a rich variety of opportunities exist to inspire and enable people of all backgrounds to access and exploit archive and library resources effectively and creatively, on and off site.

We aim:

- ❖ To adhere to the highest standards of access, interpretative and educational practice;
- ❖ To provide equal opportunities for all users of the collections through cultural, physical, sensory, financial and intellectual access;
- ❖ Actively to encourage and develop a sense of ownership on the part of users;
- ❖ To consult with and be responsive to the needs of its users, staff and stakeholders;
- ❖ To work in partnership to achieve our aims;
- ❖ To offer unique learning opportunities available through archive collections;
- ❖ To facilitate formal and informal learning through participation, a wide range of activities, accurate and accessible information and appropriate guidance;
- ❖ To provide opportunities which are highly responsive to all London's diverse communities
- ❖ To develop a constantly improving enquiry service which strives to meet user needs
- ❖ To contribute actively to and implement regional and national Access and Interpretation policies and practices;
- ❖ To employ effectively new technologies as learning tools;
- ❖ To raise awareness of the relevance and significance of the collections both now and in the future

Archives Access and Interpretation policy

POLICY

Statement of Objectives: Guildhall Library Manuscripts and London Metropolitan Archives are fully committed to the provision of learning opportunities for all through Access and Interpretational activities. The Access and Interpretation policy will provide the means by which all users can have an enriching learning experience.

Management of Access and Interpretation: We have and will continue to support clear lines of responsibility for Access and Interpretation matters to a senior management level.

Service Liaison: Communication between the Access and Interpretation staff and the rest of the archive is seen as essential in achieving learning objectives. Ideas that contribute to the user learning experience are actively sought and welcomed. Staff are encouraged to participate in different learning activities, either to assist or as experts. Learning is a central element of the archive's function.

External Relationships: Networking with potential partners and establishing key contacts is an essential and powerful element of Access and Interpretation provision. As an archive with distinct local collections we actively pursue working with London's diverse communities in stimulating, active and inspiring learning activities. We collaborate with and seek advice from a wide range of regional and national organisations.

Staff Training: We actively support the training of all staff in Access and Interpretation and value the wide range of expertise existing amongst our employees. Staff are supported in attending conferences, professional training courses and to access information which keeps them abreast of new developments in formal and informal learning provision. Staff also exchange expertise through in-house training and secondments to different sections of the department.

Learning Environments: We recognise the vital role of suitable learning environments and aim to provide access, stimulating displays, well-planned room arrangements, modern equipment and comfort for users and participants in activities on or off the premises.

Resources Development: We are committed to developing new ways of communicating the collections to current and potential users. Access and Interpretation staff are active in creating a wide range of materials including study packs, exhibitions and website content which support formal and informal learning and access. These resources are developed in consultation with users.

Users: We identify our users, seeking out and acting upon their opinions and ideas, and responding to their diverse learning needs. Users are central to the shaping of learning experiences. Access and Interpretation staff are committed to involving all users in the shaping of policy and evaluation of activity. Current user groups include family historians, primary and secondary schools, FE colleges, HE institutions, professional historians, architects, lawyers and social workers. Users are currently invited to contribute through questionnaires, visitor surveys, comment sheets and

Archives Access and Interpretation policy

talking to staff. We will use evaluation processes to maintain and improve all aspects of Access and Interpretation.

Access to Documents and Conservation: Users are free to access available documents to enable and promote learning. In order to facilitate public use, opening hours outside normal office hours – late nights and Saturdays – are maintained. Original materials will always be provided where it is appropriate to do so, allowing users to participate in exciting discovery and making contact with primary sources. Some restrictions on access are inevitable because of the nature, contents or physical condition of the records. Systems are in place to enable users to request access to uncatalogued collections or unfit items. Users are entitled to make use of their research as they wish within the law of copyright and local restrictions. Information and guidance will be available to support individual learning when and where it is required.

Providing Research Tools: We are committed to providing all users with the means of researching and analysing documents. High quality research standards are central to the full and proper historical analysis of documents. Users will be provided with accurate information and guidance in rigorous research methods to enhance their learning experience and enjoyment. We also aim to provide leaflets and guides to make the records more accessible and comprehensible.

Training in Handling and Conservation Skills: We support training of all staff and users in the correct handling of documents as a central part of conserving the collections for use by others now and in the future. Access and Interpretation staff will work closely with Conservation, Image and Design and external support in using alternative media, enabling greater access to documents for all users.

Partnership and Projects: We build partnerships with external organisations as they make a significant contribution to Access and Interpretation provision. There is a history of developing and maintaining successful partnerships with London, UK and Internationally based organisations. Access and Interpretation staff will continue to form partnerships with schools, colleges and universities, educational organisations, funding bodies, government departments, advisory groups, users, professional associations, museums, libraries, galleries and archives.

Different Usage: We value the importance of different types of user activity. All those who use our resources are valued as participants in historical exploration, regardless of the nature of their research. Access and Interpretation will endeavour to meet the diverse requirements of all learners.

Constraints on Using Collections: We will protect collections for which there are access constraints. In a small number of cases, access restrictions are applied in conformity with such legislation as Data Protection. Where material is too fragile to be handled, we will strive to provide an alternative medium by which it can be viewed within the existing Conservation and Image and Design timetables.

Documents as Objects: The importance of art, craft, conservation science and the diverse materials used in the creation of documents is as significant as content. Our documents are objects, which tell the physical history of record keeping. They reflect

Archives Access and Interpretation policy

upon the material cultures of the past. The process of making documents is as revealing as the information they contain in words or image and learning opportunities will support this important area of our work.

Using Collections as Inspiration for Diverse Activity: We want our collections to inspire other areas of activity. The documents held by us can and do provide rich resources for artists, writers, designers, historians, reminiscence projects, community activities, drama activities, literacy, numeracy and family historians. Diversity and imagination fuelled by lateral thinking will broaden the ways in which documents are used, open up unexpected and surprising opportunities and encourage new users to make the most of the archives.

Supporting Document Study: We aim to provide accurate information and friendly and helpful advice to members of the public in response to personal, written and telephone enquiries. We aim to provide additional assistance to enrich the experience of using documents by the provision of leaflets, formal talks, exhibitions and access to knowledgeable staff to ensure that users are given a breadth of learning experience, which adds to their enjoyment and enthusiasm.

The Work of the Archive: We regard the management of document collections as a central part of the users learning experience. An understanding of the storage and conservation of documents is vital in raising awareness of the significance of our work. Exhibitions and tours behind the scenes add an extra dimension to the learning experience.

Digital Resources and facsimiles: Access to the collections is of paramount importance. We recognise that not all current and potential users can come to the archive. In order to increase access to documents, off-site exhibitions, web-site developments, and learning resource packs are constantly being developed. A quarterly electronic newsletter is also published which aims to make the work of the archive and its holdings more widely known.

Our commitment:

The City of London provides a unique and diverse range of services to the residents, businesses, workers and visitors in the City of London and beyond. We are committed to being proactive in providing services fairly to all our potential service users. Promoting equal opportunity for all is one of our core values.

Our policy is to treat all service users, and anyone else we come into contact with, equally and with dignity and respect and not to discriminate on grounds of age, disability status, employment status, ethnic or cultural origin, gender, marital status, nationality, religious belief or non-belief, responsibility for dependants, sexual orientation, social background, or any other grounds which cannot be shown to be justified. We will recognise, respect and value difference and diversity.

In partnership with our employees, our residential communities and stakeholders, we will work hard to meet our obligations under the relevant anti-discrimination legislation, codes of practice and good practice guidelines.

Archives Access and Interpretation policy