Collections access policy

City of London
London Metropolitan Archives
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**Introduction**

London Metropolitan Archives (LMA) aims to provide as wide an access to its rich collections as possible to inspire and enable people of all backgrounds to access and use our resources effectively and creatively, on and off site.

We aim:

- To work with all enquirers to provide access in a safe and secure environment.
- To provide equal opportunities for all users of the collections.
- To consult with and be responsive to the needs of our users, staff and stakeholders.
- To work in partnership to achieve our aims.
- To develop a constantly improving enquiry service which strives to meet user needs.
- To employ effectively new technologies to deliver remote access to our holdings.
- To raise awareness of the relevance and significance of the collections both now and in the future.

**Policy**

**1.1 Collections**

The archives held by LMA are the primary source for historical information on London and its citizens. We hold records relating to the work of successive local government bodies; from the Middlesex Justices of the Peace in the 16th century, and the historic Commissions of Sewers; to the records of the Greater London Council (GLC) and the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA).

The earliest City of London records include charters dating from 1067-1957, and custumals from the 13th century; administrative records of the government of the City (1275 to date) including judicial records from the 13th century, and financial records, dating back as far as 1381. In addition, there are architectural plans and drawings of City bridges, markets, prisons, civic buildings and admissions to the freedom of the City of London from 1681 onwards. Deposited records of the City include the archives of the wards and most of the City livery
companies, and several organisations which originated in the City such as Christ’s Hospital and Trinity House.

A wide variety of organisations continue to pass their records to LMA for safe keeping. These include the Diocese of London and St Paul’s Cathedral, over 800 Church of England parishes in the London area, as well as courts, hospitals, prisons, charities and businesses. The archive holdings are complemented by the photographic collection which consists of over 2 million images, the reference library of over 100,000 books, a collection of 1,500 artefacts including a number of architectural models, and the map and print holdings consisting of 10,000 printed maps, 40,000 prints and 1 million plans.

Housing, transportation, migration, health, education, crime, business and commerce, and architecture are all key themes reflected by the documentary sources. LMA maintains around 100 kilometres of archives, making it the largest local authority record office in the United Kingdom. The acquisitions policy of LMA is outlined in our Collections Acquisition and Management policy.

### 1.2 Access to LMA for all

London Metropolitan Archives is free to use and open to everyone. We aim to provide as wide an access to our holdings as possible and we welcome visitors with a diverse range of interests and research needs. All users are asked to sign our visitors’ book on arrival (which signifies acceptance of our user regulations).

Our staff have received disability awareness training and aim to make all visits to LMA pleasant and comfortable. Please see our website for detailed information about access arrangements and contact us with any further questions before visiting.

We endeavour to explain our holdings, services and conditions of access clearly and as simply as possible, avoiding jargon. We use the International Council on Archives (ICA) multilingual database of archival terminology. Staff have received, and delivered, detailed training on our sources and customer care. We welcome feedback from users about our spoken and written communications.

All users can:

- Use our visitors’ lounge facilities.
• Enjoy our changing exhibitions in our display space, which include original documents and multimedia.

• Attend free regular talks, tours and workshops to help make the most of our research facilities and collections.

• Consult digitised records in our information area (we have digitised many of our most popular sources and they can be viewed for free at LMA).

• Search the internet and use varied electronic resources and databases without charge (please see our Internet Acceptable Use policy).

• Get informed advice and assistance from our helpful staff.

• Browse catalogues; information leaflets and our open access library books.

• Explore an unparalleled collection of films, maps and images of London and Londoners in our Mediatheque.

1.2.1 Access with a History Card

History Cards are valid for three years and are free. Full details on the registration process, acceptable documents for registration and terms and conditions can be found on our website or on application to staff. History Cards can be renewed with proof of identity and address.

Users with a History Card can additionally:

• Access original documents in our Archive Study Area, including advance online ordering.

• Print out from microfilms and electronic resources including the internet by adding credit to their card.

• Access library books which are kept in our stores.

• Make the most of the advanced search features of our catalogue.

1.2.2 Remote access to our collections

Access to our collections is of paramount importance. We recognise that not all current and potential users can come to LMA. Our online catalogue can be accessed remotely via our website and several archive partnership portals (e.g. AIM25 and The National Archives website). Advance orders for documents can be placed via our catalogue by History Card holders. In order to increase access to documents, we collaborate with different partners to digitise our
sources, especially our major family history sources. Details are available on our website and from staff.

1.2.3 Access to original documents

We provide free access to original documents in our Archive Study Area within our published opening hours to holders of our History Cards. Some restrictions are, however, inevitable because of the nature, contents or physical condition of the unique and irreplaceable records we look after.

Access to confidential material may be restricted for a term of years under Data Protection legislation or may be subject to the owner’s permission. Some especially valuable items will only be produced (after special application) by appointment in our special consultation area.

Heavily used material may be produced only in the form of surrogate copies, such as microfilm or digital, to minimise wear and tear. We have systems in place to enable users to request access to uncatalogued or unfit records. We will work with enquirers to endeavour to find a solution which allows access to the required information, as an original document if possible, otherwise in a surrogate or different form.

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. Our conservation staff run document handling sessions for the public on a regular basis and train LMA staff in further detail. Staff will monitor document handling within the Archive Study Area and will offer advice to users on correct document handling on request or as necessary. Continued access to study original documents depends on users handling documents correctly. Behind the scenes tours of our conservation studio and other areas are regularly offered and show the importance of this work.

See the Appendix at the end of this document for more information about which records are closed and why.

LMA is committed to making the collections it holds freely available to users, both onsite and online. It is unusual for open material to be subsequently reclosed or taken down, but LMA recognises that there are legitimate circumstances when this may be necessary. Please see LMA’s Reclosure and Takedown Policy which sets out why and how records held, preserved and made available by LMA may need to be
closed to further public access, or taken down from view on our public websites.

1.3 Copying records

1.3.1 Copies for private research

Users can request copies of records for use in private research subject to the current Copyright act and on payment of our current charges. However, copies will not be made of records where there is a risk of damaging them.

Users can photograph records themselves after paying for a photo pass and filling out a copyright form. This facility is designed only for a modest number of photographs to aid research because of the inherent risk of poor document handling and copyright violation posed by large-scale copying. Visitors who wish to copy large amounts of original documents should discuss their requirements at an early stage and will be guided towards the best solution. Please ask to see LMA’s Copying Guidelines for further information.

Facilities are provided for the public to make copies from microfilms and/or digital resources at our current self-service copying charge. Information on copying charges and services offered can be downloaded from our website or on application to staff.

Users can ask about copies of documents via our enquiry service, ask.lma@cityoflondon.gov.uk. These copying enquiries take up a great deal of staff time as the condition, suitability and size of the document/s all have to be assessed and therefore LMA charges a fee for the cost of carrying out this work, over and above the charge for copying the documents. Details are given on our website.

1.3.2 Copies for publication or official uses

Any publication of copies of our records must be agreed with LMA in advance and special conditions apply. Archives are clearly protected under copyright legislation and may not be reproduced without permission. Please ask staff or enquire via ask.lma@cityoflondon.gov.uk.

We provide official copies of certificates and memoranda of conviction for many purposes, for a fee. Please enquire via ask.lma@cityoflondon.gov.uk.
1.4 Enquiries

LMA aims to provide free accurate information and friendly and helpful advice on our collections and access to them to members of the public in response to personal, written and telephone enquiries. We receive many thousands of enquiries each year, so in order to answer each enquiry accurately and helpfully, we undertake to answer enquiries within ten working days. Our preferred forms of enquiry are in person or by email via ask.lma@cityoflondon.gov.uk. We may ask telephone enquirers to email us and we will usually answer letters by email if an email address is given.

We will always try to identify LMA sources which appear to be relevant to the enquiry but we will not consult documents or microfilms as part of our free service. We prefer that enquirers visit to do their own research but appreciate that this is not always possible.

We will sometimes recommend the use of record agents to carry out research work on the enquirer’s behalf. We do not recommend or list individual record agents but offer lists compiled by national institutions who have assessed individuals’ competence in this area.

Our paid Research Service carries out limited and specific searches in specified records. We require people who would like to commission paid research to contact us in advance of payment so that we can see whether there are any relevant sources which we can search for you. We will only refund 75% of the fee paid if no prior contact was made.

The nature of archive research means that paid research may often find no answers. We do not refund where we have searched in the agreed sources but found no information. We therefore reserve the right to turn down requests for paid research where we consider that no specific relevant source has been identified or that, in our view, the chances of finding any relevant information are slight.

1.5 User involvement

Users are invited to contribute suggestions, comments and complaints about our services through comment forms and talking to staff. Senior management regularly consider these contributions. We run regular surveys of our personal visitors and distance enquiry users, as part of a national survey of users of UK archives. We analyse the results and look
for areas for improvement. Wherever possible, comments, suggestions and complaints are acted upon to improve our service and changes made as a result are communicated to users and to staff.

We have regular meetings with representatives of family history bodies and academic institutions and networks where we discuss proposed LMA improvements, additions and projects, explore issues of importance to our users and hear about new initiatives from a wide range of family history and academic bodies.

We warmly welcome volunteers (who have years of experience in family history) to support our staff in helping users with family history problems during our open Saturdays. LMA’s use and position on volunteering is set out in our volunteering policy.

Our events and news about collections and access to them are publicised through our events calendar and electronic newsletter. Please see website for details and to sign up to our electronic newsletter. Our newsletter editor welcomes contributions from users and volunteers about their use of LMA collections.

We publicise news about our collections, interesting usage of our holdings, forthcoming events and any access issues via social media as well as on our website and we respond to user Facebook posts and tweets.
Appendix to Collections Access policy

Closures under the UK Data Protection Act 2018

Under the above act any records containing personal information about individuals are not routinely made available to the public. Records affected by Data Protection are subject to restricted access for 100 years from the date of birth of the subject of the information. Where there are multiple subjects, for example a register, the following rules are applied:

- If the subjects are all known to be adults a minimum age of 16 is implied and the record is closed for 84 years.
- If the subjects are all known to be children a minimum age of 7 is implied and the record is closed for 93 years.
- If the subjects include babies or very young children, or if the subjects may be a mixture of adults, children and babies, the record is closed for 100 years.

Any records which contain personal information may be subject to these closures but the main classes of LMA’s records affected are as follows:

- School admission and discharge registers are closed for 93 years from the last date in the register.
- Hospital registers may be closed for 84, 93 or 100 years depending on the specialism of the hospital. Exceptions to this are classes of records where the subjects of the information are known to be no longer alive, for example post-mortem registers, in which case the records are available for consultation.
- Poor law records may be closed for 84, 93 or 100 years. Exceptionally, some material, which has been scanned and made available on the Ancestry website, is available for consultation.

People seeking their own records (i.e. the data subject under the Data Protection Act 2018) may still apply for access subject to provision of two forms of proof of identity.

Other closures

Under Section 32 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 court registers, including coroners, magistrates, county courts and quarter sessions, are subject to an absolute exemption. All records of this type
are subject to a restriction on access. Until 2014 this restriction was for 30 years but between 2015 and 2024 the restriction is reducing by one year every year. From 2024 onwards the restriction will be for 20 years.

Magistrates court registers dealing with adults are considered to be open after the 30/20-year restriction, as the personal data they contain is not subject to data protection restrictions because the information was provided in open court. However, other magistrates’ court records will be subject to Data Protection restrictions after the 30/20-year restriction as follows:

- Where a register deals with juveniles access is also restricted for 93 years as it will contain sensitive information about children
- Other court records (i.e. not registers) which may contain personal data will be closed for 84 years for information about adults or 100 years for information about children. Examples of these records include case files or court recorders’ note books

Coroners’ inquest papers are restricted for 75 years. Enquirers wishing to access restricted Coroners’ records will be referred to the coroner, who will decide whether to grant access. If access is granted the file will be made available via the coroner’s office.

Some depositors, whose collections are held at LMA on long-term loan, have asked for all or part of their collections to be restricted for a set number of years. These collections are not subject to the Freedom of Information Act.

**Feedback**

Please complete a comment form or email us at ask.lma@cityoflondon.gov.uk if you wish to give feedback on this policy.

This policy will be reviewed at least every two years to make sure it remains timely and relevant.

**London Metropolitan Archives mission statement**

London Metropolitan Archives is owned, funded and managed by the City of London Corporation on behalf of London and the nation. It is London’s archive service, collecting, preserving, celebrating and sharing the stories of London and Londoners and its many communities through collaboration, innovation and learning. It is responsible for 100
kilometres of the capital’s documentary heritage dating from 1067 to the present day, from parchment rolls to digital files.

**Our vision**

Our vision is to ensure as many people as possible now and in the future have access to the archives in our care on site and digitally, safeguarding knowledge, improving understanding, inspiring participation, and supporting good public governance. We aim to provide a world class service aspiring to the highest standards that is open and engaging, innovative, inclusive, secure and sustainable. As one of the leading archive services in the UK we also have a responsibility to provide leadership within the London, national and international archive sectors.

**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.

The Collections Access Policy is one of a complete suite of policies for the archive service function delivered by London Metropolitan Archives for which an Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out and which is available to view on request.
About this leaflet

This leaflet was revised in August 2018 by London Metropolitan Archives, 40 Northampton Road, London, EC1R OHE

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