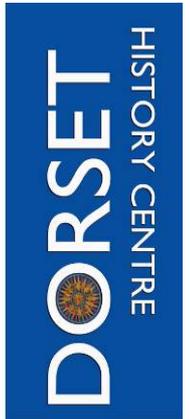


Access Policy

June 2020

Dorset History Centre
Bridport Road
Dorchester
DT1 1RP



Service Description

The **Joint Archives Service (JAS)**, based at **Dorset History Centre (DHC)** is operated on behalf of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) Council, and Dorset Council. Partnership between the two authorities as delivered through the joint service sits at the heart of JAS activities and underwrites the protocols and processes by which DHC preserves material.

Archives are documents (hand-written, printed items, maps, plans, slides, postcards, photographs, audio-visual material, digital records and comparable items in diverse physical formats) from all dates. They are items that have been selected through a process of appraisal as being worthy of permanent preservation.

DHC is the sole local authority archive within the county with Accredited status as conferred by The National Archives.

Vision and Mission

DHC is the physical and virtual hub for the archival heritage of Bournemouth, Christchurch, Dorset and Poole in both hard copy and digital formats. The JAS aims to acquire, preserve and make accessible the archives of Bournemouth, Christchurch, Dorset and Poole and so promote cultural, economic, educational and social well-being.

1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 The JAS is a publicly funded archive service. It was established as Dorset Record Office in 1955 with three key purposes; the acquisition of important archival material relating to the wider county of Dorset, including Bournemouth and Poole, its preservation and the provision of access to that material by the public. These three core functions still remain.
- 1.2 DHC makes this material accessible to visitors, onsite as well as providing worldwide access online and through a range of off-site activities.
- 1.3 The service holds over 10,000 separate collections with well over 100 new collections added every year. Archive material held at DHC dates back to 965; material consists of documents, maps, plans, photographs, film and sound.
- 1.4 These records are used by a wide variety of people and for a variety of reasons. This includes not only leisure pursuits such as family history but also use for official and legal purposes as well as for education purposes.
- 1.5 The JAS provides access in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act, 2000 and the General Data Protection Regulation, 2018. As a result, in a small minority of cases, there will be restrictions on the access to some records which contain sensitive personal information covered by the terms of the Data Protection Act, e.g. coroner's courts or hospital records.

- 1.6 Some materials may be deemed 'unfit for production' due to their fragile condition. Wherever possible it would be the intention of the JAS to make these items available in digital surrogate form instead.
- 1.7 Some records may have a 'closure' period which was negotiated with the depositor at the point of transfer to DHC. It would always be the preference of the service to try and reach an accommodation between the need for confidentiality where it exists and a genuine request for information from a member of the public.

2. Aim and Purpose

- 2.1 This policy provides a framework for the JAS in providing access to collections onsite, off-site and online. It is also intended as a statement of the service's commitment to opening up the collections within its custody to as many people as possible, both current users and new audiences.

3. Scope

- 3.1 Access applies equally and inclusively to archives and local studies material from all the collections in DHC.
- 3.2 All staff at DHC work in one capacity or another to promote access to the collections held by the service. This ranges from the front of house team welcoming visitors to the building, to digitising content to go online through to cataloguing archives so making them accessible.
- 3.3 The service has active programmes of cataloguing, conservation and digital preservation to complement its work in preserving and making accessible hard copy archives in accordance with the Collections Care and Conservation Policy (2020) and the Digital Preservation Policy (2020).
- 3.4 Access to the collections is also provided through the community outreach and learning activities of the service in accordance with the Learning and Public Engagement Policy (2020).

4. Equality and Diversity

- 4.1 The JAS completed an Equalities Impact Assessment in 2019 which has been published online. In essence this delivered a positive review of the JAS's attempts to provide access for all, but it also highlighted some areas where further work was required.
- 4.2 The JAS continually reviews its access provisions and is dedicated to ensuring that equitable access to archives is provided to all users whatever their socio-economic background or geographical provenance. Dorset's rural topography with isolated pockets of population suggested that the service would need to try and ensure that it facilitated access to these groups as well as populations living in larger urban areas.

5. Access on-site

- 5.1 The DHC building is broadly compliant with the Equalities Act, 2010. It has wide level access doorways including through automatic doors at the main entrance, and audio loop systems at reception desks and in the Lecture Room, an accessible toilet and a lift to the first floor.
- 5.2 A team of fully trained and welcoming staff are available to assist the public in identifying the most suitable potential sources for their research. Support is provided for using the computer sources and advice in handling the documents and in carrying out research is also available. We have a large key keyboard computer and an electronic magnification device for people with visual impairment or low vision.

- 5.3 In addition to personal visits, staff deal with enquiries by telephone, post and email.
- 5.4 The JAS welcomes feedback on its performance and any suggestions as to how we might improve the service for customers by providing customer feedback forms and participating in the Archives and Records Association surveys of archive users run by CIPFA.
- 5.5 Access to archives at DHC is free. DHC is a member of the Archive and Record Association's Archives Card scheme and those users wishing to view original documents need to register. Access to the local studies library and the family history sources (microform, transcripts and Public Access computers) does not require any form of registration.
- 5.6 Access to collections information is presented in both hard-copy catalogues available in the searchroom and online, along with guides to particular types of record or areas of research.

6. Access off-site

- 6.1 In accordance with the Learning and Outreach Policy (2020) the JAS undertakes a programme of outreach and community engagement to encourage the understanding and enjoyment of archives for private research, professional and leisure purposes.
- 6.2 The JAS supports a range of small organisations and partner bodies in project work and grant applications. The service is inherently disposed to collaborative activities and welcomes opportunities for partnership working across Bournemouth, Christchurch, Dorset and Poole.
- 6.3 Off-site activities include talks, exhibitions, workshops, work with community groups as well as schools and colleges and project activities such as oral history training and research support.

7. Access online

- 7.1 The JAS provides worldwide access to a large quantity of its genealogical resources via Ancestry.co.uk. Access to this resource is free on-site at DHC.
- 7.2 The JAS provides online access to the catalogues of its collections. The online catalogue is hosted on the Dorset Council website. As cataloguing of the material is undertaken these are regularly updated with new collections-related information.
- 7.3 DHC will continue to increase digital resources and aim over time to make as much of its collections-related material (both catalogues and content) available online.
- 7.4 The JAS maintains a web presence on Dorset Council's website with pages that provide information on how to access and use the service along with guides to particular types of record or areas of research. The web pages and social media are used to showcase interesting aspects of the collection and to promote the JAS services and to raise its profile.

8. Volunteers

- 8.1 The JAS recruits volunteers who are a vital form of additional capacity and expertise within the JAS's range of activities. Volunteers at DHC learn skills and work within a sociable context and the JAS benefits from their input which helps the service to promote access to more of the collections.
- 8.2 The JAS is also supported by the Dorset Archives Trust (DAT). This charitable body carries out fundraising to support projects, assists with collections

development and advocates on behalf of the service. DAT also holds events which relate to the collections held at DHC to raise awareness of the service and the collections.

9. Review of the Policy

- 9.1 The policy will be reviewed in consultation with interested organisations, stakeholders and individuals every 3 years to take into account any new legislation, regulations, guidance, or business practices. The date for the next review of the policy will be June 2023.

10. Further information or comment

- 10.1 Copies of this policy are available in large print.
- 10.2 To comment on this policy or for further information about it, contact the Service Manager for Archives at:

Dorset History Centre, Bridport Road, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1RP

Tel: 01305 250550

E-mail: archives@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Website: www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/dorsethistorycentre