

Access Policy

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Introduction

Gwent Archives collects, preserves and makes accessible archives relating to the old administrative county of Gwent. We are committed to providing the broadest access to the collections and our services and to maintaining high standards of customer services.

We aim to provide access to people from all sectors of the community in ways which meet and go beyond its statutory obligation to eliminate unlawful discrimination. We aim to make its Collection accessible to people in all areas but in particular to people in the five local authority areas we serve.

Onsite Access

Gwent Archives provides access to its Collections in the research room at,

The General Offices
Steelworks Road
Ebbw Vale
NP23 6AA.

Access is free, and there is not usually a requirement to make a booking or to order documents in advance (a temporary booking system is currently in place to comply with coronavirus restrictions and some resources may not be available). We

welcome anyone who wishes to find out more about Gwent and its people, who wants to volunteer with us or would like to deposit records at Gwent Archives.

The General Offices is very accessible, and further information can be found in our [Disability Access Policy](#).

Security

To protect our unique and irreplaceable collections for future generations security measures are in place, these include:

- Signing up to the Archive Card scheme
- Locking bags and coats in the locker room
- Agreeing to abide by our rules and regulations
- Staff invigilation of the Research Room

Looking after the records

Staff will be proactive in monitoring use of the archives and will intervene where necessary to provide advice on handling materials including use of book supports, cushions, weights and other equipment. Where documents are in a poor condition the conservator may be called upon to take remedial action or to assist in making the document accessible. Surrogates or alternative resources may be recommended if the item is too fragile to be used.

Making copies

Copies of original documents can be made by self-service photography using the customer's own camera or by using our in-house digitisation service, providing the document is in good condition, that copyright legislation permits the taking of copies and that the depositor has agreed to copies being taken. Copyright Declaration forms will be distributed by staff, and must be signed where appropriate, and [charges](#) are in place.

Access Restrictions

We aim to make the collections as open as possible, but there are certain instances where access may be restricted:

1. Legal reasons

Some of our records are closed for up to 100 years under the Data Protection Act 2018, which protects the personal information of living individuals. There are processes in place for those wishing to access information about themselves (contained in school records, for example) and staff will provide guidance on this as well as accessing closed records for research purpose. Information on closure period can be found in our [guidance on access to restricted records](#).

2. Donors and Depositors

Most of the collections in our care are owned by private individuals or organisations. Very occasionally the owner of the items may have requested a fixed period of closure before they can be used. This could be to protect confidential or sensitive information. If a collection is closed this will be specified in the catalogue entry.

3. Preservation

To ensure that the Collection is available to future generations, access needs to be provided in a sustainable way. Therefore, the needs of access must be balanced against the needs of preservation as detailed in the Gwent Archives Collections Care and Conservation Policy. Access to some items may be restricted if they are too fragile and further use would cause damage to the item.

4. Uncatalogued Collections

Access to catalogued collections is provided on demand, as the content is known and any closed or fragile items have been identified. Collections that have not yet been catalogued can still be requested, though 7 working days' notice in advance of a visit is required to allow staff to review the contents of the collection.

5. Digital Records

Digital records can be accessed in the Research Room and access is usually provided via a copy memory stick or hard drive on one of the public computers. To allow time to make a copy 7 working days' notice is needed.

Where items cannot be issued, staff will:

- Explain why it cannot be issued
- Suggest other suitable sources or alternatives for use
- Where possible, advise on how to apply for permission to view the item

Offsite Access

Gwent Archives aims to be innovative in its approach to providing offsite access to its Collections. We provide learning and outreach activities across Gwent, including to children, young people, families, and life-long learners. These take the format of formal learning, such as workshops, lectures and talks, as well as informal activities such as historical walks. We aim to maximise the use of partnerships to enhance opportunities for access offsite.

We also provide a remote enquiries service as well as a digitisation service for those unable to visit. Information about our collections and our services is always given

free of charge, whilst copies and / or searches involving access to original archives, microfilm, websites or secondary sources will be charged. Charges are given in our annual [Fees and Charges](#) document. We aim to respond to all enquiries within 10 working days.

Projects for volunteers to take part in remotely are being developed for those able or who wish to contribute from home.

Online Access

In addition to onsite access at The General Offices, we aim to make information available online:

- information about our collections will be available via our online catalogues and indexes as well as in online resources and research guides
- information on our collections, services, resources, facilities and events will be available on our website. The website will be reviewed regularly to ensure the accuracy of information
- We will use Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube) to highlight some of our collections and stories from the archives, to provide up to date news and promote events
- We will work in partnership with other archive services and commercial organisations to make popular collections available online
- We will use online platforms for creative engagement with our collections and our services, including learning and outreach events

Staff

Access to the collections is provided by our friendly, knowledgeable and experienced staff. We treat all customers with courtesy and respect and make every effort to make interaction with us a positive and pleasant one. We are very happy to advise on the collections, our rules and procedures as well as how to access the collections in person or remotely.

Feedback, Comments and Complaints

To assist in ensuring Gwent Archives is responsive to user demand, feedback and reacts to any issues systems for recording user feedback are in place:

- Comments cards are available in the Research Room
- Evaluation is carried out during events
- Gwent Archives uses the [comments and complaints procedure](#) of Torfaen County Borough Council, our Host Authority
- Gwent Archives participates in visitor and distance user surveys undertaken by the Archives and Records Association

Review

This policy was approved by Gwent Archives Joint Committee in March 2022. It will be reviewed in April 2025 or sooner if circumstances dictate.