

# The Devonshire Collections Archives & Library Access Policy

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## Introduction

The Devonshire Collections Archives & Library team are committed to providing and improving physical and intellectual access to the Archive and Library holdings both on site and remotely. The Archives & Library team is positioned within the wider Collections Department. Our role is to acquire, document, preserve and provide access to the unique documentary heritage generated by the family and estate over more than 500 years, along with associated collections. We also curate the printed book collection, which represents one of the finest private libraries in the country.

This Policy outlines the principles which guide our provision of access to the collections, and the methods by which we aim to provide access to a range of audiences. In our provision of access we are guided by the Devonshire Group's Core Values, the Chatsworth Brand Values, the Chatsworth House Trust's charitable objectives and strategic priorities, and our own departmental mission statement. We aim to activate the archives and library for all, continuously seek new ways of improving access to the collections, and to engage the widest possible audience.

This policy applies exclusively to the archives and printed book collections. The Devonshire Collection's fine and decorative arts holdings are managed separately and are subject to different access conditions.

## 1. Principles

1. We are committed to making the collections available to a wide audience. The stakeholders we serve are:
  - The Chatsworth House Trust and the wider Devonshire Group.
  - The Cavendish family.
  - External donors or depositors of collections.
  - Academics from UK and overseas institutions.
  - Students, from those on undergraduate courses to those engaged in advanced research.
  - Independent researchers, including those exploring family and local history, and anyone with a strong subject interest relevant to the collections.
  - Visitors to Chatsworth House and Estate.
  - Digital audiences who engage with the archives through the website, social media and other digital channels.

Whilst we would consider applications for access to the collections from individual A-Level students, generally archival engagement for schools and those aged under 18 is delivered through the programmes of the Education Department, and the Visitor Experience team.

2. Access to the collections in our Study Room is free of charge to anyone who abides by the Conditions of Access.
3. We aim to make as much of the archive as possible available to researchers, but parts of the collection are subject to restrictions or closures, for reasons including family and donor wishes,

legislative requirements, confidentiality, business sensitivity, the physical condition of the material, and its level of documentation; completely uncatalogued collections are not made available.

4. We make books available to researchers who have a particular reason to consult the specific copies we hold at Chatsworth, e.g. because of their rarity or uniqueness, annotations, provenance, or binding. Ours is not a library of first resort, and where our copy of a book has no distinctive features, and copies of the same edition are available in public, national or university libraries, we would refer researchers to those copies in the first instance.
5. In accordance with the principal aim of the Chatsworth House Trust, we are committed to ensuring the long-term preservation of the collections for the benefit of the public; whilst constantly working to improve access to the collections, we must balance this with ensuring that the preservation and conservation needs of the collections are always taken into account when considering access methods.
6. We recognise and embrace the potential of digital platforms to engage with wide audiences and transform access to the archives and library, and we aim to continuously improve our digital offer.
7. We are committed to providing a high-quality customer service to all our stakeholders, and seek to improve in light of feedback.

## 2. Onsite access to the collections

1. We offer free access to the Archive & Library collections in our Study Room. Access is strictly by appointment only and we ask researchers to submit their application for access at least two weeks before they wish to visit. Opening hours are Mondays-Wednesdays 10.30am-4.30pm, with a one-hour closure for lunch between 1.00-2.00pm. The Study Room is closed on public holidays and for the week between Christmas and New Year.
2. We can accommodate a maximum of three researchers per day in our Study Room, depending on the size and quantity of material being consulted.
3. Whilst we always try to accommodate researchers on their day of choice, we are a small team and sometimes staff absences and other commitments mean that we have to close the Study Room on particular dates or for specific periods of time.
4. We ask all researchers wishing to consult material in the Study Room to submit a completed Application for Access form in the first instance. This should provide a clear outline of a researcher's reason for accessing the collection. By signing this form, researchers also agree to abide by the Conditions of Access which help to ensure the safekeeping of the collections for future generations.
5. We ask for a minimum of one month's notice from any researcher wishing to access material which is less than 100 years old (see Section 9 for guidance on access restrictions). This is to enable the Archives Team to check through the material and make decisions about any closures which should apply.

6. Researchers are required to bring a piece of photographic ID with them on the first day of their visit to the Study Room.
7. An overview of our archives, grouped into [Family Papers](#) and [Estate Papers](#), is available on the website along with item-level catalogues of some collections, and we have also begun to submit item-level catalogues to the [Archives Hub](#) and [The National Archives Discovery](#). Finding aids for many further collections are available on request; if a researcher cannot find relevant information on the website, they are encouraged to contact us on [Archives@chatsworth.org](mailto:Archives@chatsworth.org).
8. We ask all researchers to order in advance the collection items they would like to consult, by listing them on our Application for Access form. Our archives are extensive and are housed in several different stores which are a considerable distance from the Study Room. We therefore regret that we cannot retrieve material for researchers which is ordered on the day of their visit. However, if a researcher is using the Study Room for consecutive days, orders can be made for material to consult the following day.
9. We usually issue a researcher with one folder or bundle of collection material at a time. Material is assessed by a member of the team before being issued and checked again on its return. We are happy to provide advice and guidance on handling rare and unique material, including the use of book cushions, weights and foams. We encourage people to ask a member of the team if they are unsure about the safe handling of any collection item.
10. We do not usually provide access to original documents where a surrogate is available, e.g. a hard-copy or digital edition, or facsimile. However, we recognise that certain types of research necessitate consultation of the original document, e.g. study of paper/watermarks, seals, handwriting, signatures, annotations, and we are happy to provide access where a researcher can demonstrate a need to see the original.
11. We have an extensive collection of maps, many of which are extremely large and in very poor condition. We are unable to retrieve more than five maps for any one researcher per day.
12. Our Study Room is located on the first floor of the building up two short flights of stairs. If researchers have any special access requirements, they are encouraged to contact us in advance; access can be arranged via a lift on the house visitor route.
13. Researchers may take their own photographs of collection items for the purposes of private study or personal research using a camera, phone or tablet. Up-to-date charges for such self-service photography can be found on our website; the charge is payable by cash, cheque, or bank transfer.
14. Up-to-date information on access for researchers will be maintained on the Chatsworth website.

### 3. [Access to the collections through our enquiry service](#)

1. We provide an enquiry service via email, post and telephone, and contact details are made available on the website.

2. We aim to respond to enquiries within three weeks where possible, but we are not always able to respond fully within that timeframe. We give highest priority to enquiries received from within the Devonshire Group, e.g. to support ongoing business. We do not have staffing to spend longer than an absolute maximum of one hour on any single enquiry, and we do not offer a paid research service.
3. We will assess enquiries on receipt, and if we believe our collections may yield useful results for a given enquiry but only with detailed research that will take longer than one hour to undertake, we recommend that the enquirer either visits the Study Room to undertake their own research, or contacts the [Association of Genealogists and Researchers in Archives](#) who can undertake the necessary work for a fee. We will also advise enquirers when we do not think our collections are likely to contain relevant information for their enquiry.
4. We cannot answer enquiries which relate to collections which are uncatalogued.
5. We receive many enquiries from family historians who believe their ancestors may have worked at Chatsworth or other Cavendish properties, or lived on one of the Devonshire estates. Our freely available [Staff and Servants database](#) has been compiled over many years using a wide range of archival sources and currently contains information about nearly 4,500 individuals. We plan to continue developing this resource, but at the present time if a person's name is not recorded in the database, we regret that we will not be able to supply information about them.
6. We are unable to answer enquiries relating to the history of individual estate (or former estate) properties. We hold the surviving records of several estate offices, but the quality and extent of these records is highly variable. The archives do not contain information about dates of construction for individual buildings, and there are no historic photographs of estate properties. Many of our estate archives are not fully catalogued, and extracting even very basic information about individual properties can be extremely time consuming. We therefore regret that we are unable to undertake this kind of research.

#### 4. Access to the collections through our Reprography service

1. The Archives and Library team can provide images for non-commercial research and private study purposes, on receipt of a completed copying order form.
2. All copies are made at the discretion of curatorial staff, depending on the condition of the material. Examples of material we cannot supply copies of include documents which are in fragile or otherwise poor condition, and folded parchment documents which would need to be forced flat.
3. Scanning is undertaken by our Collections Assistant on one day per week. This means that larger orders are likely to have a longer turnaround time. We can supply an estimate of how long the work may take on request.
4. Up-to-date information about charges for digital images can be found on the website. Payment for images is by cash, cheque, or bank transfer.

5. We do not photocopy original material. We can supply hard copy prints taken from digital images up to A3 size at the same cost as supplying the digital image; if the order is a large one, we will also charge for postage and packing.
6. In some cases, we may be able to supply high-resolution TIFF images suitable for publication; requests are managed on a case-by-case basis.
7. Reproducing images of documents for reasons other than non-commercial research and private study requires a license; all licensing enquiries should be directed to [photo.library@chatsworth.org](mailto:photo.library@chatsworth.org). Any licensing fee charged is in addition to the fee charged for supplying high-resolution images. While much of the material in our collections remains in the copyright of Chatsworth House Trust, a large proportion is also subject to third-party copyright. It is the responsibility of researchers to obtain permission both from Chatsworth House Trust, and from any other rights holders, before reproducing material for purposes other than non-commercial research or private study.

## 5. Digital Access

1. We provide information about access and the services we offer on the Chatsworth website. An overview of our [Family Papers](#) and [Estate Papers](#) is also available on the website, with links to detailed item-level catalogues in some cases. We have also begun contributing item-level catalogues to the [Archives Hub](#) and [The National Archives Discovery](#) database. Many further collections have digital item-level lists to various degrees of detail which can be provided on request.
2. We ensure that the Archives and Library are regularly featured on the Chatsworth [blog](#). Core staff contribute blog posts, and we also encourage all our volunteers and student placements to contribute to the blog, as well as our long-term researchers.
3. We also contribute to the Chatsworth Art Instagram account which features stories about our fine and decorative arts collections and exhibitions as well as the archives and library.
4. We have made significant progress with digitising some of our key archives. Currently we do not have a means of making these digitised images available online. However, the wider Collections Team is committed to online delivery of catalogues and digital images, and the Archives and Library will play a key part in developing this service.

## 6. Access via exhibitions, events and public programmes

1. The archives and archival research underpin all the exhibitions at Chatsworth, and we also ensure that books and archival documents are displayed in all our major temporary exhibitions.
2. We loan books and archival documents for display by other institutions where appropriate environmental and security conditions can be met, as specified in our loan agreement.
3. Via participation in relevant project and working groups, we ensure that the Archives and Library feed into, or are represented in, interpretation projects and related initiatives both in the House and gardens.

4. Members of the archive and library team also deliver themed tours and talks as part of the annual events programme at Chatsworth, at other Devonshire sites such as Bolton Abbey, and to external audiences such as local history or arts societies.

## 7. Academic partnerships

1. We maintain ongoing partnerships with the University of Sheffield, the White Rose College of the Arts and Humanities (a consortium involving Sheffield, York and Leeds Universities), the University of Derby and the University of Oxford. These take various forms, but particularly pertinent to access are the long-term collaborative doctoral projects we have been engaged in which have fed directly into talks, events and interpretation. We are committed to continuing these partnerships and building on the foundations laid by our first three collaborative doctoral students.

## 8. Access restrictions

1. The Freedom of Information Act 2000 applies to information held by or on the behalf of a public authority. Neither the Chatsworth archives nor any archival collections known to be held by Chatsworth are subject to FOI legislation.
2. We are committed to providing access to the collections, but this is balanced with the requirements of preservation, family and donor wishes, confidentiality, business sensitivity, and documentation status.
3. The following access restrictions apply to the collections:
  - a. Access may be denied to certain collection items at the discretion of the archives team if they are judged to be in such poor condition that handling and access in the Study Room would put them at risk.
  - b. Access will not usually be granted to uncatalogued archival material.
  - c. Estate records are closed to researchers for a minimum of 30 years from creation and access to post-1950 estate records is limited: the Archives team must seek approval from the Estate Office before access is granted to post-1950 estate records.
  - d. Estate records relating specifically to rental or ownership of property, or otherwise relating to clients or customers of the estate (individuals, institutions and companies) are closed to researchers for 100 years from creation.
  - e. Family papers dating from 1950 onwards are closed to researchers; any material less than 100 years old will be assessed by curators prior to being issued in the Study Room, and closures applied where deemed necessary for purposes such as Data Protection, confidentiality and sensitivity.
  - f. The Mitford Papers are closed to researchers until 2064 and we regret that we cannot answer enquiries about this collection.

- g. All staff records which contain sensitive information, e.g. relating to wages, pensions, National Insurance and similar, are closed to researchers for 100 years from creation.
- h. Other staff records and non-sensitive personal papers of individuals other than family members, and of staff, are generally closed for 70 years from creation.
- i. The National Archives and Archives and Records Association have published a [Guide to Archiving Personal Data](#) to assist those working with the provision and exemptions for archiving found in the Data Protection Act 2018. The Devonshire Archives will adhere to the principles and guidance set out in this document. In particular we will ensure that no data is released which is likely to cause substantial damage and distress to a living individual. All researchers consulting material that may pertain in some way to living people will be required to fill in a Data Protection declaration form.
- j. We will not usually make available any books which are readily available in public, national or university libraries; we permit access to books where a researcher has a genuine need to see the Chatsworth copy, e.g. because of their rarity, uniqueness, annotations, provenance or binding.

## 9. Policy communication and review

This policy was written in 2019 and approved by The Duke of Devonshire, Chatsworth House Trust and the Trustees of the Chatsworth House Settlement. Minor revisions were made in March 2020; further revisions were made in May 2021 and August 2022. The policy is published on our website, publicised within the Devonshire Group, and made available to researchers where relevant. The policy will be reviewed every five years or as changes to our service occur.