

West Sussex Record Office



Searchroom Leaflet No 10:

Safe Handling of Documents

West Sussex Record Office acquires, preserves and makes publicly accessible the written and recorded heritage of the county of West Sussex both for current and for future users.

Archives are by their nature unique and irreplaceable. One reason they have survived for centuries is because they have not been frequently used. Please remember their importance as heritage items and the damage that careless handling can cause. You can help us to preserve our heritage by following these simple rules when handling documents.

Security

The door between reception and the searchroom is kept locked (except in emergencies) - please ask the staff on your side of the door when you want to be let through. A green light glows when the door is unlocked for you.

No bags of any sort are allowed in the searchroom. Lockers are available for your convenience.

Closed circuit television cameras are in operation in the searchroom.

Searchroom staff oversee the safe handling of documents, and can advise you on good practice.

Please note you may only request three documents at a time.

Safe handling

Please ensure that you have clean hands before handling documents. If you have just eaten please wash your hands as grease, chocolate, vegetable matter, etc. can stain and damage documents.

Do not eat or drink anything in the searchroom. Even cough sweets and chewing gum leave traces of sugar and grease on your fingers that will harm our collections.

Original documents should not be consulted in the microform and computer areas, but only on the tables provided near the searchroom supervisor's desk. Maps should be consulted on the large map table near the entrance to the searchroom. This will give you enough room to consult the document in safety.

Only use a pencil when writing notes. Any ink will permanently disfigure a document and ruin its historic integrity. Use pencil sharpeners away from the documents.

Please do not trace directly on a document. A clear barrier sheet will be provided for this.

Please handle documents as little as possible. Turn pages carefully. Avoid creasing, folding or bending the documents.

Please do not lean or rest anything on documents.

Avoid disturbing the original arrangement of the documents. Do not rearrange loose papers, even when they appear to be out of order.

Do not remove paper clips, staples, clips or string tags from documents.

Please be careful when removing packaging as the documents may have become damaged over time. For example parchment and paper may have dried out and become brittle.

Volumes may not open to their full extent so please never try to force open the binding of a volume.

We provide foam supports for volumes that will hold the covers and text block at an angle unlikely to cause further damage. This will also allow a comfortable height and angle for reading. Snake weights are provided to hold pages flat while reading. We have a range of pillows to accommodate other types of document.

We provide a range of weights to hold rolled or awkward documents flat. Do not try to flatten out items that are heavily creased.

Handle unprotected photographs with nitrile gloves — please ask staff for a pair. Please be careful as gloves can reduce manual dexterity.

Records that can be consulted on microfilm will not normally be produced from the strongrooms.

Not all of the documents can be safely photocopied. Even modern books and documents may suffer damage by photocopying. Please ask staff about copying options.

If you have any concerns over the material you are using or are unsure about the safest way to handle a document, please speak to a member of the searchroom staff, or ask to see the conservator, who will be happy to help. Please report any damaged material to the staff.

Please help us to preserve the archival heritage of West Sussex by following these guidelines.

Our heritage is in your hands.

A large-print version of this leaflet is available in a special folder in the searchroom.