



ACCESSING SENSITIVE ARCHIVAL MATERIAL

Introduction

This guidance is for researchers who would like to access and/ or photograph sensitive archival material, including material that is not publicly available.

Steps to take prior to visiting the archives

Researchers should familiarise themselves with, and comply with, the archive's rules and regulations, including any conditions of access. It is important to allow sufficient time for requests to view material with restricted access to be processed by archives (in some cases more than a month may be required). Some archives require researchers to provide references as part of their application process. It is a good idea to allow more time at the archive than you think you might need.

If researchers wish to photograph restricted material it is important to disclose this when requesting access. Archives are likely to have their own policies about whether they permit photographing of restricted material. When applying to view and photograph restricted material it is necessary to explain how the photographs will be kept secure. It is worth thinking through the practical arrangements in advance, including steps to take to keep your data secure.

Preservation

It is important to consider preservation issues when handling and digitising material. Archives may have policies on wearing gloves or on handling fragile items, you may need to take your own gloves. If there is a risk of damage to the materials, steps should be taken to minimise the risk of damage. This risk should also be made explicit in the ethics application so that it can be taken into consideration during the review of the overall risks and benefits of conducting the research.

Keeping the material secure

Devices should be encrypted and/ or password protected, with automatic back-up to the cloud turned off. Refer to CUREC's Best Practice Guidance 09 on Data collection, protection and management¹ and the [Information Compliance website](#) for further guidance. Any conditions the archive has placed on accessing the material must be followed. It may be necessary to refrain from recording any material which might identify individuals (eg photographs of faces, names or contextual details). Researchers should consult the relevant archivists about the best way to do this without damaging the material.

There may also be conditions placed on the information that can be transferred or taken away from the archive, including as notes taken. If the material is being transferred between countries, refer to the Information Compliance Team's guidance on international data transfers².

¹ <https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/governance/ethics/resources/bpg>

² <https://compliance.admin.ox.ac.uk/international-transfers>

Although researchers may want to take photographs on their (encrypted and password-protected) smart phones, it is important that the data is not uploaded to devices, such as laptops and PCs, through third-party software such as iCloud or DropBox. The [research ethics data management FAQs](#) contain further guidance.

In order to minimise the risk of data being inadvertently shared with third parties, researchers wishing to transfer photographs between devices – irrespective of whether they were taken on a digital camera or a smart phone – will need to download the photographs directly to the device. It is important that the device on which the photographs are stored is encrypted.

Researchers using computers provided by the University of Oxford are encouraged to contact their faculty IT Support Staff who can ensure that their machine is covered by Whole Disk Encryption. For researchers using a private computer there are other available solutions like Bitlocker (Windows), Filevault (OSX), or Truecrypt. For further details, please see <https://researchdata.ox.ac.uk/keeping-working-data-safe> and IT Service's guidance on [encryption and backup security](#).

Finally, it is important to ensure that any photographs taken of restricted archival material are securely backed up using the University's <https://help.it.ox.ac.uk/hfs>. Backing up data can protect researchers against the accidental loss of data, corruption, hardware and operating system crashes. Backing up University work-related data on a regular basis helps mitigate this issue by allowing researchers to restore a previous version if necessary.

Further guidance

Copyright: <https://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/ask/how-to-guides/copyright>

Research Support: Research ethics research data management FAQs: <https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/governance/ethics/faqs-glossary/faqs#tab-269816>

CUREC's Best Practice Guidance 09 on Data collection, protection and management: <https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/governance/ethics/resources/bpg>

Information Security: <https://infosec.web.ox.ac.uk/secure-my-research-information>

Research Data Oxford: Keeping working data safe: <https://researchdata.ox.ac.uk/keeping-working-data-safe>

Research Data Oxford: Post-project data preservation: <https://researchdata.ox.ac.uk/post-project-data-preservation>

Research Data Oxford: Criteria for selecting a research data archive: <https://researchdata.ox.ac.uk/post-project-data-preservation#collapse1827146>

Research Data Oxford: Ethical and legal issues: <https://researchdata.ox.ac.uk/ethical-and-legal-issues>

Information Compliance: International data transfers: <https://compliance.admin.ox.ac.uk/international-transfers>

UK Data Archive: <https://www.data-archive.ac.uk>

Managing and Sharing Research Data <https://uk.sagepub.com/en-gb/eur/managing-and-sharing-research-data/book262873>

Oral History Society: <https://www.ohs.org.uk/legal-and-ethical-advice>

British Library: <https://www.bl.uk/help/how-to-request-archive-and-manuscript-items>

British Library guidelines for photographing and scanning archival material:
<https://eap.bl.uk/sites/default/files/Guidelines%20for%20photographing%20and%20scanning%20archival%20material%20%202017.pdf>

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