

SECURITY IN RECORD OFFICES: THE COUNTY ARCHIVE RESEARCH NETWORK

We are pleased to publish this note from the Association of County Archivists.

Custodians and users of record offices alike must be aware of the increasingly high profile which security is having to take in archive repositories. As search rooms have become busier out of all proportion over the last decade or so it is no longer so easy for a supervisor to maintain low-key control by seemingly casual glances round the room. But more than this, a growing market for certain documents, many of them small and easily removable, has greatly increased the temptations to dishonesty. The old assumptions that those interested in archives could by that very fact be assumed to be intrinsically honest have alas gone for ever.

All security measures are liable to impede freedom of access and to be irritating and time-consuming to the user, as indeed they are to the custodian. Archivists are very aware of their dependence on the good will of the public and particularly of their users, and there is considerable concern that this good will and co-operation should not be lost in the new security drive. The most important consideration, for all concerned with archives and their future, must be safety of the documents, and it is hoped therefore that by sharing this area of concern archivists and honest users — the vast majority — can work together to combat the problem.

Almost all record offices require searchers to sign a register on each visit, but it has been rare for the validity of this signature to be checked in any way. One approach to the improvement of security considered by a number of offices has therefore been to introduce a readers ticket which would be issued after a check of the authenticity of the name and address given. This seemed set to weigh down the wallets of multiple office users with a variety of tickets all issued on slightly differing criteria and used in varying ways.

To avoid (or at any rate palliate) this the Association of County Archivists has introduced a readers ticket valid in 20 county record offices. These are Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Cleveland, Cornwall, Cumbria, Essex, Gwent, Hampshire, Hereford and Worcester, Hertfordshire, Kent, Lancashire, Lincolnshire, Greater Manchester, Norfolk, Nottinghamshire, Suffolk, East Sussex and Wiltshire. It is likely that other offices will join the Network and a bilingual ticket for the Welsh counties is under active consideration. Tickets can be issued in any of the participating offices. A registration form is completed by the applicant with name, address, phone number and signature. Means of identification showing name and address must be shown. Preferably they should be included in a single official document such as a driving licence, but failing this a document such as a bankers card can be accepted backed by an official communication such as a rates demand showing the address. The ticket, which is also signed by the applicant, is valid for four years.

The ticket is used in varying ways according to the lay-out and practices of the participating offices. It will normally be used to validate signatures in the daily register. In many offices the ticket will also be surrendered by searchers

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Readers Ticket registration form

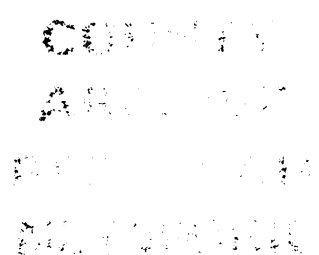
J4509

For completion by applicant	For completion by office
Name	Issuing office
Address	Ticket number
Phone Number	Date of issue
Address in this country (until) (to be completed by overseas visitors only)	Date of expiry
Signature	Nature of identification examined

when documents are produced to them, and will only be returned when all their documents have been returned and checked. Practices also vary on the issue of temporary tickets if a searcher does not have acceptable means of identification on a first visit.

COUNTY RECORD OFFICE

READER'S TICKET

	NAME:	
	ADDRESS:	
	No.:	EXPIRY DATE:
	SIGNATURE:	

Many offices will introduce the ticket as part of a package of new security measures. Increasingly documents will be counted out in small numbers rather than be issued as bundles; bags and briefcases will be excluded, and security barriers will make an appearance. Record office users are asked to exercise patience and restraint. If there are particularly strong reasons why a regulation impedes research, it may be worth discussing the problem with a member of staff to see whether there is any way round it. It is hoped that the Network itself will be welcomed as a move towards greater uniformity of practice between county record offices, and a relatively hassle-free measure which should result in a perceived improvement in security.