Cambridgeshire Archives and Local Studies at Ely:  
Frequently Asked Questions: updated December 2018

1: What services will be moving to the Ely building?

Cambridgeshire Archives, currently based at Shire Hall in Cambridge, will be moving to the new building. The new archives centre will contain a public searchroom, a conservation studio, a digitisation studio, and an archives cataloguing room.

All records currently held in the basement of Shire Hall and at our outstore at Cottenham will be moving to the new building.

Because all the civil registers of births, marriages and deaths will be stored at Ely, there will also be a meeting room for members of the public to have appointments with Registration staff.

The searchroom will be available for use as a venue for Registration ceremonies, but only at times when it is not already in use for archives.

Huntingdonshire Archives will remain at its current location in Huntingdon Library, and the Cambridgeshire Collection (local studies material) will remain at its current location at Cambridge Central Library.

2: When is the move likely to take place?

Coulson Building Group began work on-site to adapt the interior of the building in June this year. Handover of the completed building to the County Council is expected to be in June 2019, so the move of the archives will take place as soon as possible thereafter.

The archive move will itself take some time. Currently we expect the building to open in the early autumn of 2019. We will update this FAQ when we have more details.
3: How long will the archives be unavailable during the move process?

Both Cambridgeshire Archives and Huntingdonshire Archives are now closed to the public.

All of the records in Shire Hall basement need to be cleaned and properly packaged before the move. If this work is not done, then the service runs a high risk of damaging or misplacing records during the move. We will, however, work to minimise the disruption this closure will cause.

We will not be able to keep Huntingdonshire Archives open because the whole of our team will be required to work on the move preparation; if we tried to divert staff to keep Huntingdonshire Archives open then even a six month closure at Cambridgeshire Archives would not be long enough.

We have recruited extra staff to assist the team with the cleaning and packaging work, and we will look to see whether there may be volunteer opportunities for members of the public to help us too.

However, both Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire Archives will be open for one day a month during the closure period.

Cambridgeshire Archives will be open one day a month for researchers needing to access Public Records transferred to us under section 4(3) of the Public Records Act 1958. A list of the records is available online on our website. Researchers must make prior appointments to see these records, because space is very limited and un-booked arrivals on the day cannot be accommodated.

Huntingdonshire Archives will be open one day a month with a full public service. Thanks to the generosity of the Huntingdonshire Local History Society, who are financially supporting the opening, these days are not limited to Public Records only. Prior booking is not mandatory but we strongly recommend that searchers book in advance because we expect the days to get very busy.

A list of the dates when the offices will be open is available on our website.

**Huntingdonshire Archives will reopen on Monday 3 June 2019.** Cambridgeshire Archives will reopen at Ely in the early autumn of 2019.
4: Where can I carry out my research while you are closed?

The Cambridgeshire Collection in the Central Library, Cambridge, contains many historical resources for the county.

While we are closed, our complete set of transcripts of Church of England parish registers is being held at the Cambridgeshire Collection. Our set of probate microfilms is there too.

Our set of transcripts for Huntingdonshire parishes is held at the Norris Museum in St Ives.

5: What is the difference between Cambridgeshire Archives and the Cambridgeshire Collection?

Cambridgeshire Archives and the Cambridgeshire Collection are currently two distinct resources.

Cambridgeshire Archives comprises unique, original historical records. It is what is sometimes called a “record office” and is located in Shire Hall in Cambridge. There are many miles of historical documents in total, dating from as far back as the 13th century. They include records of the County Council, its predecessor bodies, and records of many other organisations on deposit, including parish churches, local businesses and other local authorities. Cambridgeshire Archives is regularly inspected by The National Archives (TNA), based at Kew, under Public Records Acts legislation.

The Cambridgeshire Collection is the Local Studies collection located in the Central Library in Lion Yard. It contains printed and published materials including maps, books, articles and newspapers, as well as some original records acquired before the archives service was set up. It is part of the library service under the Public Libraries Act, and it is not inspected by TNA.

6: How did the proposal to relocate these resources to Ely come about?

The vast majority of the historical records in the Cambridgeshire Archives are stored in Shire Hall’s basement. The earliest mention of archives being stored in the basement dates from before the Second World War; since then the collections have outgrown space in the basement. The environmental conditions there are not suitable for the storage and preservation of archives. Water pipes in the basement have occasionally led to small floods,
as recently as April 2015; the temperature and humidity levels are generally too high and mould has resulted.

Since the 1990s the Council has sought to identify and acquire new accommodation for Cambridgeshire Archives. Over that time 44 locations or buildings have been identified and explored. Some of these options (such as on the new Arbury development and Foster’s silo near Cambridge train station) were substantially developed before being abandoned, mainly because they were unaffordable.

Following an inspection in 2011, TNA imposed a deadline on the Council to find new accommodation for the Cambridgeshire Archives. Failure to find suitable new accommodation by that date would have resulted in Cambridgeshire Archives losing its status as a place of deposit for public records. TNA would then have removed the Cambridgeshire public records from our care, and would have had the right to charge the County Council indefinitely for the storage, preservation and packaging of those records.

Initially the County Council worked to achieve a partnership with the University of Cambridge to build a joint building in Cambridge. However when this did not prove feasible for the University in our timescale, a new search for suitable and affordable accommodation was urgently undertaken. The Ely building (former Strikes Bowling Alley) was identified as a suitable option, providing an affordable building that could be readily adapted for the purpose, with on-site parking and good access to public transport and the facilities of the city on hand. Council Members unanimously approved the acquisition of the building in September 2014.

Finally, it is also worth noting that the County Council will be leaving the Shire Hall building sometime in 2020. The Archives Service would therefore have had to have found new premises anyway, irrespective of the environmental conditions in Shire Hall basement.

7: Why do you think the Strikes bowling alley is suitable for archives?

The building is suitable for conversion to a records repository because it is already constructed in two halves. One half contains facilities that lend themselves to public and staff use – containing windows, water pipes, IT ducting and other utilities - and the other half, (which is currently used for bowling lanes) has a level concrete floor, no windows, good usable height, and no water pipes or other ducting. The overall site has excellent public access, with its own dedicated car park and proximity to Ely railway station.
The suitability of the metal fabric of the building has been questioned. The County Council will, however, carry out any works necessary to achieve full compliance with national standards (PD5454:2012). The result will be a secure store with full four-hour fire resistance, a fire suppression system, and correct environmental conditions.

Our ultimate aim is to create an archives repository which will enable Cambridgeshire Archives to remain a place of deposit for public records and achieve Archive Service Accreditation, the UK-wide standard for archive services. We believe the Ely building will be a wonderful local asset that will introduce many new users to the value of research and will attract families, school students and other visitors to the area.

If you have any further questions regarding issues relating to Cambridgeshire’s archives and local studies provision which are not covered in these FAQs, please contact Archives and Local Studies Manager Alan Akeroyd on alan.akeroyd@cambridgeshire.gov.uk or by telephone on 01223 699489.

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