

How might the Data Protection Act affect my research at Northamptonshire Record Office?

If you are researching someone who lived and died within the last 100 years then you might find that some of the records you need to look at have restricted access. The Data Protection Act, 1998, makes provision for restricted access to records that contain personal details about living individuals and which may cause substantial damage and/or distress.

What is the Data Protection Act?

The Data Protection Act, 1998, protects the personal information (data) of living individuals, and applies to electronic and manual records. The Act is retrospective, so applies to records created before 1998.

What does 'restricted access' mean?

This means that most documents containing personal information, and are less than 100 years old, cannot be viewed in our search rooms. Access to information contained within such documents is via our Research Service or the Data Protection Team only, once the necessary procedures have been followed. Sometimes, records cannot be produced even if we know that the person has died, because they contain third-party information.

Please note that school logbooks and registers, and other registers that contain personal information, such as date of birth, and are less than 100 years old, are on restricted access, and cannot be viewed in the Search room.



What is third-party information?

This term refers to information about other individuals mentioned in a document. For example, a report on person A might also contain personal information about Mr B and Mrs C. In this example person A is known as the Data Subject, and the information about Mr B and Mrs C would be third-party information.

What about coroner's records and magistrate's records?

These records have set closure periods. Court records are closed for 35 years and coroner's records are closed for 75 years. If you would like to access information from these records, then you will need to write directly to the Coroner or Magistrate's Court to get their written permission first.

What advice can you give me about accessing records less than 100 years old?

It would be useful to have the person's death certificate to prove that the person has died, and that their information is not covered by the Act. However, the information you require will often be contained in documents that do not conveniently have what you need separated from other people's information. It would, therefore, be appropriate for you to contact us prior to your visit to discuss how best to proceed with your research. We understand that restrictions to accessing records can be frustrating, but we are here to help, so please do not hesitate to contact us to discuss your enquiry.

I want to find out about someone who received hospital treatment. Can I access their information?

Medical records that are over 100 years old are on open access, so you can carry out the research yourself. However, all records containing medical information, and which are less than 100 years old, are on restricted access and cannot be viewed in the searchroom. We do, however, have a procedure in place to help you obtain the information you require, which will need you to complete a research request form and supply a copy of the patient's death certificate as part of the process. Please contact us for more information.

What if I want information about myself?

Under the Data Protection Act you are entitled to ask for a copy of any personal information that we hold about you. This is called a Data Subject Request, and must be made in writing and be accompanied with proof of identification. There will be an administrative charge of £10. Further information, and a copy of the application form, can be found on the County Council's website. Alternatively, please contact

The Access to Records Officer, FOI/Data Protection Team, Northamptonshire County Council, PO Box 136, County Hall, Northampton NN1 1AT.

Northamptonshire Record Office's contact details

Address: Northamptonshire Record Office, Wootton Hall Park, Northamptonshire. NN4 8BQ

Email: archivist@northamptonshire.gov.uk

Website: www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/recordoffice