**Alcoholics Anonymous Great Britain Archive**

**At the Borthwick Institute for Archives, University of York**

**Access Policy**

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**i) Purpose**

This policy sets out the specific terms and processes for users wanting to access and use the archive of Alcoholics Anonymous Great Britain held at the Borthwick Institute for Archives at the University of York [https://borthcat.york.ac.uk/aa]. It will provide information about the archive’s access levels, and details about the access procedure.

**ii) The Anonymity Tradition in Alcoholics Anonymous**

Just as the 12 Steps of Recovery lay the spiritual path of recovery for individual members, the 12 Traditions provide the principles that retain the informal structure of the Fellowship, and keep it focused on its primary purpose of helping suffering alcoholics. Number 12 of the 12 Traditions concerns anonymity and is written as: “Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities”.

The pamphlet ‘Understanding Anonymity’ (official AA literature) states that anonymity serves two equally important functions:

* At a personal level, anonymity provides protection for all members from identification as alcoholics, a safeguard often of special importance to newcomers.
* At a public level of press, radio, TV, films and other media technologies such as the Internet, anonymity stresses the equality in the Fellowship of all members by putting a brake on those who might otherwise exploit their AA affiliation to achieve recognition, power, or personal gain.

**iii) Anonymity and the Alcoholics Anonymous Great Britain Archive**

In both cataloguing and providing access to the AA GB Archive, the anonymity of AA members, both alive and deceased, must be strictly maintained. Aside from instances where prominent members have waived their anonymity (e.g. Bill Wilson, Grace Oursler, Philip Dundas), full names or identities of members are not given in the catalogue. When individuals are referred to, it is either by their position within the Fellowship (i.e., General Secretary, Alcoholic Trustee), using AA’s naming tradition (i.e., George R) or using a common pseudonym (i.e., Canadian Bob).

In the archive itself, full names of members and other identifying information is present across all of the archive material. As a result, access controls are necessary to ensure the anonymity of all members mentioned in the archive, in accordance with AA traditions. Access must also be managed to protect confidential information about the operations of the registered charity the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous Great Britain (Limited).

In order to manage how AA GB archive material is accessed and used, the Archives Subcommittee, General Service Board, and Borthwick Institute have developed an access procedure which is intended to balance the needs of users, the anonymity of users, and the Fellowship’s responsibilities towards its history and legacy.

**iv) Access levels explained**

There are three levels of access for materials in the AA GB Archive:

**1. Open access**

**2. Restricted access**

**3. Confidential access**

**1. Open Access materials**

This material is available for research purposes without special conditions, though researchers still need permission from the General Service Office, acting on the authority of the General Secretary as DPO, and access is subject to relevant data protection legislation.

Examples of Open Access material: Reports to the General Service Board and General Service Conference, literature, newsletters, magazines, and journals, publications, press, some photographs of individuals and locations, and objects and artefacts.

**2. Restricted Access materials**

Access to this material is restricted by the General Service Board of AA GB, and is normally permitted only for relevant research purposes. Enquiries regarding access will be handled in the first instance by the Borthwick Institute, who will forward requests for access to the General Secretary as DPO, or staff at GSO acting on their behalf.

Examples of Restricted Access material: Region and Intergroup minutes, subcommittee minutes, directories, audio-visual recordings.

**3. Confidential Access material**

This material has been classified as confidential by the General Service Board, and access will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances. Enquiries regarding access will be handled in the first instance by the Borthwick Institute, who will forward requests for access to the General Secretary as DPO and the Trustee chair of the Archives Subcommittee. In some instances the material may have to be reviewed by trustees before a decision regarding access is made.

Examples of Confidential Access material: General Service Board minutes and related

material, AA GB telephone helpline logs, some Prison Service material (e.g. correspondence).

**v) Access Procedure**

Users wishing to access the material should complete an **ACCESS PERMISSIONS FORM** [see below]. These forms are available from the Borthwick Institute or via the Alcoholics Anonymous Great Britain website. The purpose of the form is for users to provide details about what material they would like to access, and for what purpose. Once completed, users should submit the form directly to the General Service Office or to the Borthwick, who will forward the request to GSO. In most cases, a decision regarding access will be made within two working days. In some instances this may take longer, for example if AA GB needs to review the material in-person to assess its content before granting access.

Users can also use the access permissions form to request copies or reproductions of archive material. Only in exceptional circumstances will material that contains names or other identifying information about members will be allowed to be copied or reproduced.

A right of appeal process exists for users who feel they have been unduly denied access to the archive, or specific archive material. This right of appeal will be managed by a Board Trustee appointed by the Chair of the Board of Trustees.

**Policy review**

This policy should be reviewed annually by the archive sub-committee and when there are changes to the data protection law.

6-05-2023

**vi) ACCESS PERMISSION FORM**

Access Permission Form for the Alcoholics Anonymous Great Britain Archive

This form is for users wishing to access the AA GB Archive for research purposes. Once complete, you can submit it directly to General Service Office of AA GB [aainformation@gsogb.org.uk] or via the Borthwick Institute for Archives [borthwick-institute@york.ac.uk] The GSO will endeavour to answer every enquiry within 48 hours, but this may take longer if the requested material needs to be reviewed before a decision can be made

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Researcher/user name:

Organisation/Address:

Email: Telephone:

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Reference code: AA/

Title:

Description of material:

Purpose of research:

Do you want to copy or reproduce any material: Y/N

If so, please provide details about your purpose for reproducing this material:

Signature: [can be typed] Date:

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For Purposes of Alcoholics Anonymous Great Britain

Alcoholics Anonymous Great Britain grants / denies permission to the named researcher to access the aforementioned archive material for their stated research purpose.

Reason for denial of access:

Additional comments

Signature: [can be typed] Date:

Position within AA GB