

Renovation of Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository: Implications for Reading Room Users

Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository is currently undergoing a major renovation project, which has an effect on the accessibility of their holdings.

Due to the extensive nature of the renovations, it was decided on the advice of the Conservator in charge of preservation at National Archives, to move the archivalia off-site before the on-site renovations commence. This will ensure that the holdings are not exposed to any risks associated with the renovations. The archivalia started being moved in September 2009 and the final items are expected to be moved out by the end of March 2010.

Naturally, this has had an effect on service delivery as the items cannot be accessed whilst they are being packed for removal and once at off-site storage they will not be available for consultation on the same day on which they are ordered.

The physical packing and removal of the archivalia is being done on a strongroom-by-strongroom basis. A packing team from the off-site storage provider packs each item, and records the relevant details before it is removed to the facility. Once there, the items are placed on the shelving and the information is captured on their electronic tracking system. This process takes approximately 2 weeks to do and during that time access to the affected holdings will be restricted. A programme detailing the removal schedule is available in the Reading Room of the Repository but it should be regarded as a guide only: the order in which the holdings are being packed is being adhered to, but the exact dates tend to differ according to any complicating factors that arise.

Once the archivalia is off-site, researchers will have to place an order for the archivalia that they wish to consult. They will then be contacted by the Archives staff once the items that were requested have arrived from off-site storage.

The renovation project is expected to commence in April or May 2010 and should be completed by early 2011, after which all the holdings will be returned to the repository. Given the fact that we currently hold approximately 15 kilometres of archivalia, the return of the archivalia will also take several months to accomplish.

The Archives is very aware of the effect that the renovation project will have on accessibility. Ultimately, however, the safety of the archivalia was the deciding factor in the decision to store the holdings off-site. The company contracted to provide the service has been very co-operative in meeting our requirements for the accommodation and supply and we are in continuous contact with them - both to assess conditions at the facility as well as to monitor supply.

Potential researchers planning to visit the Archives are advised to contact our Reading Room staff beforehand. This will enable them to advise you of the status and accessibility of the archivalia that you wish to consult. If you have the reference details for the items that you would like to consult, we could arrange to have the items available for you on the date of your visit. We suggest that you contact us at least 5 working days before your planned visit.

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Issued by the Head of the Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository

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