

Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists Archive Access Policy

VERSION CONTROL			
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[In this document, mention of 'RCOG Archives' and 'the Archives' shall be taken to include the archive collections of the RCM which are under its care.]

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1. Policy Aim

The heritage collections held at the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists are comprised of unique and historical published books, objects and artefacts, and unpublished archival material relating to the specialty of obstetrics, gynaecology and midwifery.

The Research and Information team is responsible for the care of this heritage collection, which includes providing access to the collection to recognised professional standards. The aim of this policy is to ensure consistency in the level of access to and care for the heritage collection provided by the Knowledge Management team.



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Reading room guidelines and regulations for visitors and researchers are available and should be used by staff in combination with this policy.

2. Access policy

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists recognises that public access to archives is essential for an informed society. Although there is no legal obligation to open the archives of the RCOG to external users, the College recognises that its institutional records and personal papers, as well as other aspects of the heritage collections, have significant value for understanding social, community and personal history, specifically in the area of women's healthcare.

The RCOG recognises that allowing public access to its institutional records helps maintain institutional transparency and improve public understanding of its unique history and contributions to the healthcare profession. Most College records older than twenty years are available for consultation by external researchers, with other files made available on application to College senior members of staff via the heritage team. All College records are available for consultation by College Officers, Fellows and Members.

Restrictions on collections will be shown in catalogues to the collections available in the RCOG Library and online. These restrictions will take into consideration Data Protection issues and conditions imposed by external donors of special collections, and will follow national guidance in terms of closed periods. All restrictions will be subject to regular reviews.

Heritage Collections are available on equal terms of access and recognition is made of the different categories of users and their different requirements. Although the College is not legally obliged to provide information under Freedom of Information, it seeks to abide by the terms of the Act.

Material from the heritage collections may be subject to temporary closure for conservation and cataloguing work, and the heritage team will provide information regarding such closures.

Appeals against denial of access to material from the heritage collections should be made to the Head of Information & Governance, who will commit to replying within two working weeks.

The RCOG will commit to promoting material from the heritage collections to widen access to stakeholders, using social media and online tools.

3. Physical access to the heritage collection

Appointments are necessary for all visitors having access to material from the heritage collection via the Archivist (archives@rcog.org.uk).

- Shortage of space in the Library and of staff to provide supervision make this an essential proviso. There will always be visitors who arrive without an appointment, and these should be accommodated where possible, but it must be understood that this may not always be feasible.

All collections must be ordered in advance of a visit via the Archivist (archives@rcog.org.uk).

- Not all collections are available for access by visitors who are not Members or Fellows of the College or staff, and sufficient notice must be given so that restrictions can be examined. Shortage of staff may also mean that supervision of visitors is not possible if staff are required to retrieve items from storage.

All heritage items retrieved for a visitor must be tracked using Heritage Collections Location Slips

- This applies to all museum, archive and semi-current material and printed books normally held in the secure store. Slips come in three parts: the white copy stays with the item, the blue stays in the original shelf or box location and the yellow slip stays with staff as a record of loans and to track returns back to their original locations.

No visitor who has access to heritage material is to be left unsupervised in the Library at any time

- Professional archive and museum standards require that invigilation of visitors is required at all times. Invigilation is understood to be a physical presence in the Library with clear views of all visitors.

All visitors must complete an undertaking prior to having access to heritage material

- this is necessary for security, copyright and statistical reasons

All new researchers must be given a copy of the reading room guidelines and regulations

4. Security of the heritage collection

No large bags are to be taken into the Library by visitors consulting heritage material

- Staff may choose to offer to store large bags and cases in the office areas, or guide visitors to the public areas offered by the College.

No items from the heritage collection may be removed from the Library by visitors at any time

All items should be returned to a member of staff by the visitor prior to leaving the Library

- Staff should physically check items being returned by visitors.

5. Handling of heritage materials

All material must be consulted at one of the tables available in the Library

Appropriate weights and book rests should be provided for visitors consulting large volumes

- These are available in the Archive Office or beneath the display cabinet in the Library.

Pencils only may be used for making notes

- This is to avoid irreparable damage being caused to books and documents.

No heavy weights should be used on documents or volumes

- This can damage volumes and papers.

No food or drink is to be consumed by users of heritage material in the Library

Photographs and plans must be retained in their protective plastic sleeves while being examined

6. Copying of the heritage collection

Photocopying of heritage material is no longer permissible, either by staff or users, in order to protect sensitive and fragile material. Digital scanning is available on request



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to the Archivist, and will incur a fee for sending this off site to professional consultants.

Users may use their own cameras and devices in order to make digital copies for research purposes only. There is no fee chargeable for this, but details of material copied must be noted on the Heritage Digital Copying form. Staff reserve the right to disallow any copying which may incur risk to the material being copied.

This policy should be reviewed every two years or where significant changes to the Heritage Service occur.