

Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists

HERITAGE COLLECTIONS CARE AND CONSERVATION POLICY 2023

Introduction

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists ('the RCOG' or 'the College') maintains Heritage Collections which comprise:

- the Archive, Rare Book and Museum collections of the RCOG
- the Archive, Rare Book and Museum collections of the Royal College of Midwives (RCM), which are managed by the RCOG under a Service Level Agreement
- Archive and Museum collections of bodies and individuals associated with both colleges and their specialties.

These collections are managed by the Heritage Team, who comprise a professionally qualified Archivist and Curator. The Archive is Accredited under [The National Archives' Archive Service Accreditation scheme](#).

Purpose and Scope

The aim of this policy is to provide a clear summary of the conservation and collections care activities and plans regarding the Heritage Collections of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists ('the RCOG' or 'the College') whilst on display, in storage and on loan to its regional partners or other borrowing institutions.

100% of the Museum collections and 60% of the Archive collections are stored in a bespoke store in the College's Union Street building.

Since 2018, 40% of the Archive collections have been stored offsite in the Deepstore facility at Winsford, Cheshire, in preparation for the move from Sussex Place to Union Street

This policy is governed and delivered in accordance with the Heritage Strategic Plan and Archive and Museum Forward Action Plans.

Policy

Storage

The RCOG works towards meeting the standards detailed in [EN 16893:2018 Conservation of Cultural Heritage – Specifications for location, construction and modification of buildings or rooms intended for the storage or use of heritage collections](#).

Storage for most of the Museum and onsite Archive collections is in an environmentally controlled storage area situated in the basement of Union Street. This is accessed via swipe access only and is

windowless. Access is restricted to the Heritage, Library and Buildings teams. Other staff members and external maintenance contractors are accompanied at all times when working in these areas.

Some artworks and objects are stored in a lockable art store also located in the basement of Union Street. This is not environmentally controlled but continuously monitored via the environmental monitoring system, which confirms that the conditions are sufficiently stable.

Archive storage shelving is EN 16893:2018 compliant, and most is mobile, with some additional static shelving.

The College's offsite storage provider, Deepstore, state that their storage exceeds BS EN 16893:2018 compliance.

A [Benchmarks in Collection Care](#) audit is carried out by the Heritage Team on a biannual basis.

Building security

The Union Street premises are monitored and patrolled by the Buildings team, including security staff. CCTV monitoring is also in place.

Fire and security systems are inspected, tested and serviced in line with College procedures.

Environmental monitoring

The temperature and relative humidity of the basement stores and display cases are monitored using an environmental monitoring system provided by [Meaco](#).

The Heritage Team produce monthly reports which include relative humidity and temperature readings from storage areas and display cases and any issues encountered and actions taken to address these.

The presence of pests is monitored using sticky insect traps.

All environmental monitoring activities are carried out in accordance with the Heritage Collections Environmental Monitoring & Control procedures.

Collections handling

Material from the Heritage Collections is only handled by the Heritage Team or else by RCOG staff, volunteers or supervised researchers to whom they have given appropriate guidance and/or training.

Handling training is given to all volunteers, interns and placements working within the Heritage Team.

When necessary, external art handlers and movers are employed under the supervision of the Heritage Team.

Conservation

Items are assessed and identified for conservation needs upon accessioning, cataloguing, retrieval for research appointments, displays and external loans.

Material requiring conservation is sent offsite for work by accredited conservators (sourced through the [ICON Conservation Register](#)), as per the Heritage Collections Care and Conservation Plan and Procedures 2023.

Preservation

On accessioning, Archive collections are rehoused in acid-free folders and acid-free boxes. Paper clips, pins, treasury tags and other metal fixings are removed and replaced with brass paperclips as required. Loose photographs and any fragile single sheets of paper are placed in Melinex polyester sleeves.

The Archivist routinely checks the condition of items before and after researcher access, re-packaging if necessary.

On accessioning new Museum items, the Curator notes the condition and packages items in appropriate museum-grade storage.

Loans

Any items requested for loan by an external organisation are condition-checked before approval is sought, with details of condition recorded on exit and return as per the [Heritage Collections Loans Policy](#).

All loan requests must demonstrate appropriate security and environmental conditions for the duration of the loan, and during transit.

Digital preservation

Digitised and born-digital records are managed in a system which broadly complies with the [Open Archival Information System \(OAIS\) model](#), underpinned by an Archive Digital Preservation Policy (in development).

At ingest, digital records are virus- and fixity-checked.

Digital files are kept in a dedicated storage area on the College's shared drive.

Preservation copies are stored with their associated checksums and metadata. Access copies are created and stored separately. Access copies are made available to readers only on a dedicated stand-alone laptop in the Reading & Quiet Room.

The same processes are followed for born-digital accessions and for digitised copies of analogue originals created to preserve the content of at-risk or loaned material.

Disaster response and recovery

A Heritage and R&IS Emergency Plan is in place and is underpinned by the College's Business Continuity Plan, which is tested on an annual basis. Training is provided to relevant staff, chiefly within the R&IS and Buildings teams.

The RCOG subscribes to the Harwell Document Restoration Services Priority User service.

Emergency kits are in place in the basement stores.

Procedures

Please see:

- Heritage Collections Care and Conservation Procedures (Appendix 2)
- Heritage Collections Environmental Monitoring & Control Procedures (Appendix 3)
- Heritage Collections Acquisitions and Accessioning Procedures (Appendix 4)
- Heritage Collections Access Procedures (Appendix 5)
- Non-R&IS Access to Display Case for Operational Items Procedures (Appendix 6)
- Heritage and R&IS Emergency Plan (Appendix 7).

Governance

The Heritage Collections are overseen by a Heritage Committee made up of RCOG and RCM staff and members, as well as external heritage professionals. The Heritage Committee reports to the F&GPC of the Board of Trustees. Its function and purpose include:

- Providing official governance for the Heritage Collections
- Showing due diligence with decision making
- Discussing and ratifying policies, plans and procedures and programming pertaining to the Heritage Collections
- Discussing acquisitions and disposals where appropriate
- Advocating for the Heritage Collections internally at the RCOG, and to the heritage community and general public – this will in turn bring attention to, and public awareness of, the RCOG's current work and goals;
- Ensuring that professional standards of management, care, access and interpretation of the collections are maintained;
- Ensuring that the management of the collections meets the requirements of the national Arts Council's Museum Accreditation scheme and The National Archives' Archive Service Accreditation scheme.

Roles and responsibilities

- The **Buildings Team** are responsible for the maintenance of the Union Street building, including monitoring the overall environment, carrying out repairs and responding in emergency and disaster incidents.
- The **Heritage Team** (Archivist and Curator) are responsible for the care of the Heritage Collections, which includes providing access to the collections to recognised professional standards. The aim of this policy is to ensure consistency in the level of care for the collections.

- The **Head of Information and Governance** is responsible for this policy and accompanying procedures.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Glossary of Terms

Appendix 2: [Heritage Collections Care and Conservation Plan and Procedures](#)

Appendix 3: [Heritage Collections Environmental Monitoring & Control Procedures](#)

Appendix 4: [Heritage Collections Acquisitions and Accessioning Procedures](#)

Appendix 5: [Heritage Collections Access Procedures](#)

Appendix 6: [Non-R&IS Access to Display Case for Operational Items Procedures](#)

Appendix 7: Heritage and R&IS Emergency Plan

Appendix 1: Glossary of Terms

- **Accessioning** is the process of transferring physical and legal custody of records into the Archive, including recording details about the records into an archive cataloguing system.
- **Born-digital** records are those which are produced in digital form, rather than having been converted from analogue equivalents.
- **Checksums** are blocks of data comprising sequences of numbers and letters generated in order to check data for errors.
- **Conservation** is the active protection of archive material using professional conservation processes and techniques and, where necessary, chemical treatment in order to prevent further deterioration.
- **Preservation** is the passive protection of archive material where there is no direct physical intervention or chemical treatment of the item. This includes rehousing records in archival-quality enclosures such as acid-free folders and boxes.
- **Rare Books** are defined as books and pamphlets which are over 100 years old and which are distinguished by their early printing date, their limited issue, the special character of the edition or binding or their historical interest.