

Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists

ARCHIVE COLLECTIONS INFORMATION POLICY 2023

Introduction

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists ('the RCOG' or 'the College') maintains an archive collection ('the Archive') which comprises:

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

The Archive is Accredited under [The National Archives' Archive Service Accreditation scheme](#).

Purpose and scope

This policy covers all information created about the Archive collections held at the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists ('the RCOG' or 'the College'). This includes accessioning, cataloguing, de-accessioning, disposals and location management. The policy outlines:

- an overview of the Archive and its purpose
- how the College obtains, documents, maintains and makes available information about its Archive collections
- a commitment to provide and maintain a public-facing catalogue through upgrade or procurement of a collections management system
- a description of collections documentation procedures through the use of cataloguing manuals and procedural documents.

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

Policy

Scope of the collections

Records of the RCOG

The Archive is the custodian of the historic records created by the RCOG since its foundation in 1929 to the activities of the present day. These records include:

- material relating to the founding of the British College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists
- all Council and committee minutes
- papers, special reports, surveys and projects conducted or supported by the RCOG
- records of lectureships, research awards, travel grants, scientific meetings and conferences
- documentation of the College's role as an advisor to external professional bodies, as well as collaboration with other medical colleges
- photographs of past Presidents, members and other eminent physicians, and of the College and its various activities



- scrapbooks of press cuttings relating to the College and to the specialty.

Records of the Royal College of Midwives

The records of the Royal College of Midwives (RCM) have been managed by the RCOG since 2011 under a Service Level Agreement. This collection comprises:

- Council and committee minutes, agendas and reports
- correspondence and papers of the College President and the General Secretary
- departmental records, photographs and printed material relating to the activities of, and prominent individuals involved in, the Royal College of Midwives, as well as the campaign for the registration, training and education of midwives, pregnancy, childbirth, contraception and abortion, dating from the foundation of the organisation in 1890 (then known as the Midwives Institute) to the present day.

Special collections

The Archive also holds donated or deposited collections ('special collections') of personal or private records related to the specialties. Significant collections include:

- personal papers of RCOG founders Professor William Blair-Bell and Sir William Fletcher Shaw
- personal papers of past Presidents and Fellows
- 18th- and 19th-century notes of midwifery lectures
- records of the societies and institutions, including the Gynaecological Visiting Society, the Women's Visiting Gynaecological Club, the Fothergill Club, the Royal Maternity Charity and the British Lying-In Hospital
- the personal papers of midwives, including case registers, notebooks, diaries and photographs.

Purpose of the Archive

The Archive:

- aims to support the strategic aim of the RCOG 'to set standards to improve women's health and the clinical practice of obstetrics and gynaecology in the British Isles and across the world' and its charitable objectives to 'encourage the study, and advance the science and practice, of obstetrics and gynaecology'
- provides the College's staff, membership and the public with a centre for resources for the history of women's healthcare, midwifery, obstetrics and gynaecology, as well as records of the work of the RCOG and RCM, their associated groups and bodies, and historic members
- is managed within the Research and Information Services team at the College, and supports the activities of the RCOG and RCM by documenting their administrative, educational and cultural histories and preserving examples of their material culture, achievements and research
- is governed by the Heritage Committee, which ensures that both acquisition and disposal are carried out openly and with transparency
- seeks to abide by all current archival and information governance legislation, as well as national and international archive standards and best practice
- holds Accredited status [under The National Archives' Archive Service Accreditation scheme](#). This is a national standard which defines good practice and agreed standards for archive services across the UK. The Accreditation process evaluates an organisation's ability to



develop, care for and provide access to its archive collections, and those areas such as resources and planning which underpin those activities. The Archive was reviewed in 2018 and retains its Accredited status, with the next full re-application due in August 2023.

Accessioning

All records entering the RCOG Archive are entered on an Accessions Register spreadsheet and the Accessions module of the Archive catalogue, as per the Heritage Collections Acquisitions and Accessioning Procedures.

Essential information recorded includes:

- a unique accession number (which is subsequently linked to catalogue reference numbers)
- date and terms of acquisition (whether as a purchase, transfer, deposit or gift)
- identity of the person or organisation transferring the records
- a description of the records and their provenance
- any access or copyright restrictions
- information concerning the physical condition of collections, such as any conservation needs.

This information informs potential future questions on subjects such as legal ownership and control, as well as cataloguing and conservation priorities.

A Transfer of Title form is completed for all new gifts or deposits from an external source. Related information (such as correspondence with donors) is permanently retained in a designated filing system either in physical form (in a secure strongroom) or electronic form (on a backed-up server).

Information about accessions is transferred to The National Archives via their annual survey of accessions to repositories.

Cataloguing

The RCOG catalogues its records to protect the integrity of its collections, enable staff to effectively manage the information retained for permanent preservation and make the records discoverable and accessible by internal and external users as appropriate. Cataloguing is planned and managed by the Archivist, who may also allocate tasks to project staff, placement students and volunteers according to the complexity of the tasks required, the nature and condition of the material and the skills and experience of the individual.

All cataloguing conforms to current professional standards, using the principles and mandatory elements of the [International Council on Archives' General Standard of Archival Description \(ISAD\(G\)\)](#). Information captured in the catalogue comprises, at the minimum: an identifier reference, title, extent and date, together with any restrictions on access due to condition or content (e.g. material which falls under data protection legislation).

The following standards are followed when creating controlled access terms:

- [UK Archival Thesaurus](#)
- [International Standard Archival Authority Record for Corporate Bodies, Persons and Families \(ISAAR, CPF\)](#)
- [National Council on Archives, Rules for the Construction of Personal, Place and Corporate Names](#)
- [Medical Subject Headings \(MeSH\) thesaurus](#).



Born-digital material is currently catalogued to the same standards and principles as analogue records. However, further development is needed as regards the specific cataloguing needs for born-digital material.

The RCOG's Archive Cataloguing Manual describes the processes and procedures involved in cataloguing archives and documents the house style. The current priorities for legacy cataloguing can be found in the Archive Collections Information Plan. A cataloguing priorities spreadsheet is used to highlight legacy cataloguing projects, priorities and potential volunteer or placement projects.

The RCOG currently does not have a public-facing catalogue, but it is intended that this will be possible following either an upgrade of the current Adlib database or the procurement of a new collections management system. Fonds- and sub-fonds level descriptions were submitted regularly to the Archives Hub website until 2015, and it is intended that this practice should be reinstated on a six-monthly basis (or at the completion of a major cataloguing project) until a public-facing catalogue is in place.

Locations and movement control

The RCOG keeps full intellectual and physical control over the records in its custody. During accessioning, the location of the new accession is recorded on the Accessions Register and the Accessions module of the Adlib database. When accessions are catalogued, boxes are relabelled and new locations are updated accordingly.

The Heritage R&QR log captures the following information each time an item/box is retrieved from onsite or offsite storage for consultation in the Reading & Quiet Room:

- Date of appointment
- References of records being produced
- Collection (whether RCOG or RCM)
- Reader name
- Date of reshelving/return to offsite storage

A two-part location slip is used when items are being removed on a medium- to long-term basis (e.g. for display or loan purposes), with one copy remaining at the item's original location in the repository, and one with the item. These are then all reconciled when documents are returned, and the retrievals log updated. If an item is on loan, this is recorded in the Archive catalogue, which is updated once the item is returned.

If an item is found to be missing, this is recorded on the catalogue, which is updated if/when the item is located.

De-accessions and disposals

Information will be captured about archives that are no longer part of the RCOG's collections. This is to record information about their exit from the RCOG's care. All de-accessions and disposals are carried out in accordance with the Heritage Collections De-accessioning and Disposal procedures and are recorded in both the Accessions Register and the Accessions and Catalogue modules of the Archive catalogue.

Procedures

Please see:

- Heritage Collections Acquisitions and Accessioning Procedures (Appendix 3)



- Heritage Collections Deaccessioning and Disposal Procedures (Appendix 4)
- Archive Cataloguing Manual (Appendix 5)

Governance

The Archive, along with the Museum, is 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 **Archivist** is responsible for the RCOG Archive, including accessioning, cataloguing, de-accessioning, disposals and location management.

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

The **Heritage Committee** is responsible for approving significant acquisitions and signing of on deaccessioning and disposal proposals.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Glossary of Terms

Appendix 2: [Archive Collections Information Plan](#)

Appendix 3: [Heritage Collections Acquisitions and Accessioning Procedures](#)

Appendix 4: [Heritage Collections Deaccessioning and Disposal Procedures](#)

Appendix 5: [Archive Cataloguing Manual](#)

Appendix 6: [Transfer of Title form](#)

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.
- **Analogue** records refer to records in a physical format, e.g. in paper form.



- **Born-digital** records are those which are produced in digital form, rather than having been converted from analogue equivalents.
- **Deaccessioning** is the formal, documented removal of a collection or item from the custody of the Archive.
- **Disposal** is the physical act of transferring the collection or item from the Archive to another destination. This includes transfer to another repository, return to depositor or donor and, as a last resort, destruction.
- **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.
- A **Repository** is a storage facility (whether physical or electronic) in which records with archival value are permanently preserved.