

Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists

ARCHIVE COLLECTIONS DEVELOPMENT 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

The RCOG receives new additions to the Archive through internal transfer (such as official College records), external donation and (very occasionally) deposit or purchase. This policy sets out:

- an overview of the Archive and its purpose
- the criteria which inform decisions on what material to collect, priority areas for collecting and limitations on collecting
- the terms and conditions governing the Archive's collecting activities
- the conditions under which certain material may be deaccessioned or disposed of.

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.

Criteria and priorities for acquisition

Archive material is chiefly acquired through:

- transfer from administrative departments within the RCOG and RCM in accordance with the [RCOG's retention schedule](#). Records are selected for permanent preservation by the Archivist following appraisal, which concentrates on the historical evidential value (how the record documents the history, structure and functions of an organisation) and informational value (value in providing research material on persons, places and subjects) of records.
- external donations and deposits from the membership, other institutions and the general public, subject to fulfilling the criteria for acquisition outlined below. This material is managed under the same policies as the permanent institutional collections.

The Archive seeks to acquire material to demonstrate and illustrate the following areas, paying particular attention to filling gaps in the collection:

- the administration of the RCOG and RCM as an historic account of the two colleges' governance, strategic planning, policy decisions, organisational structure and functions. The criteria for selecting this material is detailed in the [RCOG's retention schedule](#)
- standard-setting and quality improvement within the colleges' specialties and the development of training and overseas initiatives, as evidence of activities in the study and advancement of the science and practice of obstetrics, gynaecology and midwifery
- copies of each publication issued by the RCOG and RCM
- historic records of organisations with a strong administrative or organisational link (e.g. organisations that are, or have been, based physically within the colleges, those that have shared their administrative systems, or are predecessor or successor bodies to functions of the colleges)
- historic records of other organisations in the field of obstetrics, gynaecology and midwifery. Priority is given to material that builds on existing collection strengths and/or is in danger of neglect or destruction. Where the Archive cannot itself undertake physical custody of such collections, it will work in partnership with other organisations to encourage good collections management and/or endeavour to find another suitable place of deposit
- personal papers of past Presidents, CEOs, Officers and members of the RCOG and RCM where they have a strong relationship to the corporate history of the colleges or their specialties, or where they illustrate representative careers in obstetrics, gynaecology and midwifery
- personal papers that show a close relationship to existing holdings (priority will be given to those in danger of neglect or destruction)
- personal papers of midwives
- records relating to patients' experiences
- records relating to practitioners and patients from previously underrepresented groups
- Rare Books (i.e. printed books and pamphlets older than 100 years) relating to the specialties of obstetrics, gynaecology and midwifery, which are rare and/or complement existing holdings.

Records are considered for selection irrespective of media, with the exception of material listed below.

Decision-making

- Acceptance or rejection of small donation offers (defined as 5 boxes or fewer) may be decided directly by the Archivist in consultation with colleagues across Research and Information Services
- Large, complex or potentially sensitive acquisitions, or those with significant financial implications (e.g. for conservation, preservation and storage) are referred for discussion and approval to the Heritage Committee and RCOG Executive Committee, by email or at the next scheduled meeting.

Limitations on collecting

The RCOG recognises its responsibility, in acquiring additions to its collections, to ensure that care, documentation and use of those collections meets the requirements of the [Archives Service Accreditation Standard](#). It takes into account limitations on collecting imposed by such factors as staffing, storage and care of collection arrangements.

Large collections of records are only collected as far as space permits. For reasons of space, framed archive material may be removed from its frame, which are disposed of with permission, or returned to the donor.

Material relating to institutions, organisations or individuals other than those summarised above will be acquired only if there is a clear relationship between the creator of the material and the collecting areas summarised above, or with material already held.

Material is not acquired if:

- it has not reached the end of its specified retention period as specified in the [RCOG's Retention Schedule](#) (this applies to internal transfers only)
- it duplicates material already held in the collections
- it records information which is adequately recorded or summarised in another form of records held in the archives (such as day-to-day accounting records where audited annual accounts have been prepared)
- it is ephemeral or has limited informational and research value
- it belongs more appropriately in another repository.

Acquisitions outside the current stated policy are made in very exceptional circumstances, and then only after proper consideration by the Heritage Committee, having regard to the interests of other archive repositories.

Terms and conditions

1. The RCOG does not compete for archive material with other recognised archive repositories. It welcomes the strength and diversity found in national and international archival provision for the history of medicine, and will work co-operatively with other repositories in order to determine the most appropriate place of deposit for records relating to the history of obstetrics and gynaecology
2. Records in any format are considered for acquisition, including plans, drawings, photographs and electronic records. Material is not, however, acquired where adequate storage, preservation, cataloguing and access cannot be achieved with the RCOG's existing or

foreseeable resources. This in particular applies to material in media formats where equipment for preservation and access and digitisation resources are unavailable.

3. The RCOG will not acquire any item unless it is satisfied that the donor or depositor has the appropriate authority to give or transfer it to the College and, in the case of a donation, that the College can acquire a valid title to the item.
4. The RCOG will not acquire by purchase, gift, bequest or exchange any item unless it is satisfied that it has not been acquired in, or exported from, its country of origin in violation of that country's laws.
5. Donors of archive material are required to sign a formal Transfer of Title agreement, placing in writing the terms of the gift, as agreed with the Archivist.
6. The RCOG generally requires legal ownership of all accessions to the College. Long-term deposits or loans of material are considered but only under exceptional circumstances, and under terms formally agreed with the owners prior to transfer.
7. The RCOG formally assert the title in all Archive collections, agreeing terms of copyright and reproduction rights with donors, authors, makers and the RCM where appropriate.

Deaccessioning and disposal

The RCOG accepts the principle that there is a strong presumption against the disposal of any material in its custody. By definition, the Archive should comprise collections intended for permanent preservation.

In some cases, large groupings of records may be transferred to the Archive following the conclusion of their specified retention period, as set out in the [RCOG's retention schedule](#). These records may require further 'weeding' of records to remove duplicates and records not found to be of historical interest, as defined above. Processing and any subsequent disposal of records will be carried out with due regard to:

- the business functions of RCOG, and the value of the information to the College and any likely successor organisations
- legislative retention requirements
- the technology that supports the information.

There are also occasions where the RCOG may de-accession material from legacy collections as part of the College's collections management process. Such circumstances include:

- if the material is ephemeral/of low intrinsic value, or is a duplicate of material already in the collections
- if the material belongs more properly in another recognised repository
- if the material is irrelevant to the colleges
- if the RCOG is unable to provide proper, permanent care for the material
- if the material has deteriorated beyond repair or use, or carries health and safety risks.

Where disposal of objects or archives is the appropriate course of action, all disposals are carried out openly and transparently, and in accordance with the Heritage Collections Deaccessioning and Disposal Procedure. The Heritage Committee to confirm it is legally free to dispose of an item and agreements on disposal made with donors will be taken into account where appropriate.

Procedures

Please see:

- [Heritage Collections Deaccessioning and Disposal Procedures \(Appendix 3\)](#)

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 receiving and processing (appraisal, accessioning, cataloguing and rehousing) new acquisitions of Archive material.

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

The **Heritage Committee** is responsible for approving significant offers of donation (as defined above).

The **Records and Information Governance Officer** is responsible for liaising with the Archivist about internal transfers of RCOG records which have passed their retention period.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Glossary of Terms

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

Appendix 3: [Heritage Collections Deaccessioning and Disposal Procedures](#)

Appendix 4: [Heritage Collections 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.
- **Appraisal** is the process of assessing records to determine their long-term value. This concentrates on the historical evidential value (how the record documents the history, structure and functions of an organisation) and informational value (value in providing research material on persons, places and subjects) of records.
- **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.

- **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.
- **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.
- A **Repository** is a storage facility (whether physical or electronic) in which records with archival value are permanently preserved.
- A **Retention period** is the length of time records should be kept in a certain location or form for administrative, legal, fiscal, historical or other purposes.