



# Archive acquisition and disposal policy

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## Policy statement and purpose

The purpose of this policy is to state and communicate the principles that guide the acquisition and disposal activities of the archives and manuscript collections.

## Mission statement

The Royal College of Physicians of London (RCP) archives selects, collects, preserves, promotes, and provides access to non-current records that demonstrate the developing role of the RCP or that uniquely demonstrate the experiences of physicians or their patients. The RCP archives service and collection provide informational, educational, evidential and experiential value to internal and external users, and help inform the identity of the RCP.

## Scope

This policy applies equally to digital and physical records. Archive, Heritage Library and Museum Services (AMS) has formal structured procedures for digital archives and is in the process of developing such procedures for records management. When these are in place, this and other relevant documents will be updated accordingly.

## Principles

The RCP archives acquire material through internal transfer, bequest, donation, or purchase in exceptional circumstances. Collections should be accepted as gifts rather than as long-term loans. The RCP archives acquire material on the understanding that the material will be made available to members, researchers and the public, subject to agreed closure periods, to aid and enhance research on the history of the RCP and the history of medicine. Material held by the RCP archives is subject to data protection and intellectual property rights legislation.

## Standards

The archives are managed to recognised professional standards, both national and international, including:

- PD 5454:2012 Recommendations for Storage and Exhibition of Archival Documents
- ISO 1472:2012 Open Archival Information System (OAIS) Reference Model
- BS 4971:2002 Recommendations for Repair and Allied Processes for the Conservation of Documents
- BS 1153:1992 Recommendations for Processing and Storage of Silver-gelatine type Microfilm
- Society of Archivists Best Practice Guideline Preservation and Conservation 1997.

The staff who perform the core collection management tasks hold recognised qualifications in archives and information management.

### **Links with other policies and procedures**

This policy is to be read in conjunction with the following policies:

- Archive collections care and conservation policy
- Archive collections information and access policy
- Museum collections development policy
- Museum loan policy
- RCP data protection policy
- Records management programme policy.

This policy is complemented by the following documents:

- Archive cataloguing manual (latest version)
- [Permanent collections data processing statement](#)
- Gift agreement form
- Deposit agreement form
- AMS decolonising collections statement

### **Acquisition criteria**

Providing it meets the selection criteria below, the RCP archives collect the following material:

#### *Records of the RCP*

- Signed minutes of Annual General Meeting, Comitia, Council, Finance & General Purposes Board, Trustees Board and all other RCP committees and working parties (this category includes agendas and related papers).
- Policy documents and records relating to changes in constitution and bye-laws.
- Auditor's signed copy of the Annual Report and Annual Accounts including accounts of JCHMT, MRCP (UK), trusts and pension funds.
- Original legal deeds and documents for property, trusts, pension schemes, etc.
- Plans, maintenance agreements and guarantees for assets and utility supplies.
- Records deemed to be of significant historical interest for future researchers and which document the decisions and activities of the RCP.

#### *Records of other organisations*

- Records of defunct or extant organisations that do not fall within the collecting remit of another repository and demonstrate significant contributions by physicians to the practice or study of medicine (within a medical field represented by RCP, now or in the past), or demonstrate significant experiences of patients of physicians. Such organisations may include, but are not limited to, charities, businesses, clubs, societies, working parties or political groups.

#### *Records of individuals*

- The personal and professional papers of physicians who have had a close association with the RCP.
- The personal and professional papers of physicians who have made significant contributions to the practice or study of medicine (within a medical field represented by the RCP, either now or in the past).
- The personal papers of patients, which significantly demonstrate experiences related to a medical field represented by the RCP, either now or in the past.

### **Collecting priorities**

To redress systemic imbalances in the existing collection, the RCP archives currently seeks to acquire, in particular, the following:

- Records created by patients (which meet the above acquisition criteria).
- Records of, and particularly created by, physicians or patients from underrepresented or marginalised groups (which meet the above acquisition criteria). Such groups include, but are not limited to: working class people, women, black and global majority people, LGBTQ+ people, disabled people, and neurodivergent people.

### **Selection criteria**

When material is being considered for inclusion in the archives, staff will take into consideration all of the following:

- *Legitimacy, authenticity and provenance*  
The RCP archive will only acquire material from individuals or organisations that appear to have the legitimate right to offer the material. RCP archives staff will make reasonable attempts to establish the authenticity of material before acquiring, and may decline material if authenticity is in doubt. If little or no information is known about the provenance of material, this may significantly diminish its value and may be a reason for declining material.
- *Originality*  
The RCP archive seeks to acquire original records, whether physical or born-digital, as opposed to copies. This is because the evidential and experiential value of a copy is significantly less than that of an original record. The RCP archive will only acquire copies if their informational content is of particularly high value, or if the original records are at imminent risk of being destroyed or have already been destroyed, and if they satisfy all other selection criteria.
- *Informational, educational, evidential and experiential value*  
It may be more historically significant to acquire papers of a relatively obscure physician whose papers are of great informational value, rather than an item of poor informational value related to one of the better-known figures. Advice should be sought from experts on the acquisition of material, as necessary.
- *Condition and hardware/software requirements*  
RCP archives staff may decline material if its informational and evidential value is not judged to be high enough to warrant the time and effort required to conserve the material, convert it to an accessible medium, or acquire and maintain the technology to access the material.
- *Monetary value*  
RCP archives staff will make efforts to assess the likely commercial value of material offered for sale, to ensure a fair purchase price. The commercial value of donated items will only be assessed in terms of insurance and security requirements.
- *Ownership*  
If the current owner wishes to loan or deposit material, rather than gifting or selling, this would usually be refused, unless there were special circumstances or a formal hosting arrangement was agreed. If significant content is still in copyright and this cannot be transferred by the current owner, this may significantly diminish its value and may be a reason for declining material.

- *Completeness*  
The RCP archives seek to acquire sets of records as opposed to single items or parts of records. This is because the informational and evidential value of a record relies heavily on demonstrating its context within a records system. The RCP archives will only acquire single items or parts of records if they complement our existing collections, or if they provide significantly high value even when isolated from their set of records.
- *Other repositories' collecting policies*  
The RCP archives will make every effort not to conflict with the acquisition remits and policies of other repositories. For example, where records relate more heavily to medical disciplines represented by other organisations with professional archives services, such as the Royal College of Surgeons or the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, we will give first refusal to these organisations. In cases where records relate strongly to creators or subjects that are well represented by the collections of other organisations, such as the Wellcome Collection or university archives with medical collections, we will liaise with the relevant organisation(s) to determine the most suitable place of deposit.

### **Acquisition methods**

#### *Acquisition by bequest, donation/deposit*

When material is offered, there are a further two criteria for acceptance. The first is that there is sufficient storage for such a collection. Secondly, it should be a permanent donation, transferring ownership, and not a loan.

Loaned collections may be accepted under exceptional circumstances.

#### *Acquisition by internal transfer*

Institutional records of the RCP are normally acquired internally, either via direct transfer or via the records management programme. Apart from instances where there is a legal requirement to retain records, material is selected with the intention of maintaining a full history of internal and external activities and administration.

Once material is transferred to the archives it cannot be recalled by the originating department in the same manner as a semi-current record in the records management programme. Ownership has been transferred to the archives and future access is determined by archival policy.

#### *Acquisition by purchase*

Items may be acquired by purchase if they are judged by archive staff to be of very high informational or evidential value.

### **Appraisal/selection**

Material will be initially appraised and a decision taken as to whether or not the material will be accepted into the archive.

If material is rejected at this stage, it may be offered to other repositories before final disposal. If rejected material was donated, it will be offered back to the donor (unless disposal has been agreed with them), before being disposed of.

#### *Accession records*

All new collections of material will be accessioned. The accession record will detail the provenance and provide a summary description of the contents.

All material received from a single source on a particular occasion will normally be treated as a single collection and have a single accession record. Where material is received in batches from a single source, it may be treated as either one collection or several, depending on the situation and the content.

#### *Catalogue records*

Once a collection of material is in the process of being catalogued, further appraisal and weeding will take place. Any material rejected at this stage will be disposed of or offered back to the donor. When the catalogue is complete, no further weeding will take place. There may be additions to an existing collection, if relevant material is donated, purchased or transferred on a future occasion.

#### **Other collections**

Library and museum holdings are managed separately by the relevant professional staff in AMS and are not applicable to this policy. The acquisitions of archives by the Museum including photographs and printed ephemera, will be guided by the Code of practice on archives for museums and galleries in the United Kingdom (3rd ed., 2002). Such items will usually be added to the RCP archive and guidance on this will be sought from the RCP archive manager.

Photographs or printed items that depict portraits of individuals or show artistic representations of the subject matter will be considered for the museum collection. Items of a documentary nature will be considered for the archive collection. Items where a printed work has no specific significance for the museum or archive collection will be considered for the library collection.

In instances where it is unclear which of these categories an item fits into, the relevant professional staff will consult with the archive manager and assistant archivist to determine which collection would be most suitable.

See also the museum collections development policy.

#### **Finding aids**

Appropriate finding aids will be created by using suitable data from the catalogue.

### **Transfer of collections between repositories**

Collecting policies of repositories change over time. If it becomes appropriate to transfer ownership of a collection to another repository, full details of the transfer process should be recorded and permanently retained.

If it becomes appropriate to transfer ownership of a collection to the RCP from another repository, full details of the previous catalogue references and transfer process should be recorded and permanently retained.

### **Disposal of archives**

The archivist shall have authority to weed records during processing and to securely destroy or return to the donor items identified as not appropriate for permanent preservation. Items which are appropriate for permanent preservation will not be disposed of unless it is considered that they belong more properly in another repository, in which case they may be transferred there. Items will only be offered to repositories which are managed to professional standards by staff who hold recognised qualifications in archives and information management. See section 4 of the Archive Cataloguing Manual for more information about disposal.

### **Privacy**

We are committed to ensuring that all personal data collected and stored as part of the management and care of collections is processed in accordance with the principles of the UK General Data Protection Regulation. All personal data which directly relates to institutional memory, the history of medicine or collection management will be retained permanently in accordance with Article 89.

### **Definitions**

#### *Records*

- Physical or digital objects that provide evidence of actions taken, or decisions made, by individuals or organisations. In the context of the RCP archives, records will usually be in the form of documents, i.e., will contain written, pictorial, or audio/visual information.
- Records may be current, semi-current, or non-current.
- Current records are those that are still in use for the purpose for which they were originally created. For example, a contract may be current while the relationship between the parties is ongoing.
- Semi-current records are those that are no longer needed for day-to-day business use, but are being retained for a defined period of time for specific legal or administrative reasons. For example, a contract may be retained once the relationship has expired in case of a subsequent dispute between the parties.
- Non-current records are those that are no longer of any core business use. Most non-current records are destroyed at this stage, but those that are processed for permanent preservation become archival records. For example, parties' recourse to dispute may expire a certain number of years after the expiry of the relationship; at this point, the contract may be destroyed or, if it meets the required criteria, permanently preserved.

### *Archives*

- Managed collections of archival records.
- The institution or team that manages the collections, and provides associated services.
- The spaces where these services are provided.

### *Archival value*

- Evidential value is the extent to which records provide unique evidence of an action being carried out or a decision being made, and evidence for the factors influencing that action or decision. Evidential value can be found in the content, format, or physical nature of records.
- Informational value relates to the quantity and quality of unique information about a subject provided by the content of records.
- Experiential value is the extent to which interaction with records has the potential to help users engage with and better understand the creator, a particular subject, or the context of the records' creation.
- Educational value is the extent to which records have the potential to clearly and effectively illustrate one or more themes or concepts.

### **Policy review**

This policy document is due for revision in October 2028