

CARE AND CONSERVATION POLICY

Library – Special Collections

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Introduction

The Royal College of Music Library supports teaching, performance and research at the College. In addition to its lending collection, the RCM Library holds internationally significant Special Collections related to western art music of the last 500 years, with a specific focus on British musical life since the 18th century.

This policy specifically relates to the Special Collections which include more than 20,000 manuscripts, 40,000 early printed editions, 140 personal archives and 700,000 concert and opera programmes. The Special Collections also includes the College Archive which holds information about former staff, students and the history of the College. These collections are embedded in the identity and activity of the College, a worldwide leading institution in performance and research, which supports academic and practice-based research both internally and externally.

The Royal College of Music Library commits to:

- Publish, implement and regularly review a forward-looking collections policy approved by its governing body, which specifies standards of care of its Special Collections.
- Protect all items from loss, damage and physical deterioration, wherever they are.
- Pay due regard to safeguarding collections and the public's right of access at all times.
- Make provision for safeguarding collections whenever buildings housing them are closed or isolated, whether this is planned or unexpected.

Conservation Staff

1. The RCM does not employ a conservator or binder for the Library's Special Collections. External conservators and specialists are consulted and appointed as required.

Guiding Principles

2. The Care and Conservation Policy is based on a combination of preventive conservation (measures to slow down or minimise deterioration of library material) and remedial conservation (measures which involve treatments to stabilise or improve the condition of material).
3. The Care and Conservation Policy is to be read in conjunction with the library's other policies.
4. The Care and Conservation Policy is to be read in conjunction with the library and College's emergency procedures.
5. The Care and Conservation Policy will be reviewed by the Collections Committee regularly and at least once every five years.
6. A Conservation Management Plan accompanies this policy.

Aims of the Care and Conservation Policy

7. Take steps to slow down deterioration and prevent damage to collection items.
8. Provide systems and process that monitor individual collection items.
9. Provide systems and equipment that monitor the environment and the buildings in which they are stored.
10. Where appropriate control and improve the environment and the buildings in which they are stored.
11. Seek professional advice, where necessary, from appropriate external specialists.
12. Ensure that all members of staff working with the library's Special Collections are aware of and follow all policies and procedures.

Collections Conditions Overview

13. The Librarian and wider library team will survey and visually inspect the condition of collection items in the stacks, when they're being consulted and when on display to identify areas for improvement in line with best practice as defined by but not limited to the international standards listed in Appendix 1.

Preventive Conservation

14. The Royal College of Music will provide suitable conditions in which its Special Collections can be kept for their long-term preservation.
15. Library staff and the RCM maintenance team have responsibility to monitor the conditions each day, including environmental control and basic housekeeping.
16. The Royal College of Music will commission a regular survey of the care and conditions of the collections and the stores by an approved external expert. This should be incorporated into the planning for each library strategy.

Handling, Movement and Transportation

17. All library staff are trained to handle Special Collections items. When items are loaned outside the College, if necessary, we shall consult RCM museum colleagues and/or external specialists with help packing and transportation. Procedures relating to the packing and transport of items that are being loaned outside of the College are outlined in the RCM Loans Procedures.

Emergency Planning

18. The Library's Emergency Plan and the wider RCM Incident Management and Recovery Plan are reviewed every year.
19. The library is a priority member of Harwell Restoration (www.harwellrestoration.co.uk). This membership covers all library Special Collections, the loan collection and paper based material in the college.

Remedial Conservation

20. Members of the library team are trained to undertake the basic cleaning, maintenance and minor conservation treatments. The Library can rely on external conservators for more advanced treatment or advice.

Signatories and document history

Librarian

Peter Linnitt

January 2020, October 2025

Policy reviewed by

Collections Management Committee

February 2020, October 2025

Approved by

Collections Committee

April 2020, December 2025

Appendix 1

The following is a list of current standards and frameworks to which this policy endeavours to align its preservation practices, procedures and guidance. This list will be reviewed and updated as necessary.

- BS 4971:2017 – Conservation and care of archive and library collections
- BSI PAS 198:2012 – Specification for managing environmental conditions for cultural collections
- BS 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
- BS ISO 11799:2015 – Information and documentation – Document storage requirements for archive and library materials
- ISO/TR 19814:2017 – Information and documentation – Collections management for archives and libraries
- BS ISO 14721:2012 – Space data and information transfer systems, Open archival information system (OAIS)
- The Institute of Conservation's Code of Conduct and Professional Standards