

ACQUISITION AND DISPOSAL POLICY

RCM Library – Special Collections

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Relationship to other relevant policies/plans of the organisation

1. 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.
2. All donations to the library are treated as gifts to the lending collection unless the material is of historic value and falls within the collecting criteria outlined in section 4 below. Donations to the lending collection are covered by a separate acquisition & disposal policy.
3. This policy specifically relates to the Special Collections which comprise the following types of material: manuscripts, early printed editions, archives, concert and opera programmes, and the college archive.
4. 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.
5. The governing body will ensure that both acquisition and disposal are carried out openly and with transparency.
6. The Royal College of Music has a long-term purpose and its library holds collections in trust for the benefit of the public in relation to its stated objectives. The governing body accepts the processes outlined in this policy that inform the acquisition or the disposal of any items in the library's Special Collections.
7. Acquisitions outside the current stated policy will only be made in exceptional circumstances.
8. The library recognises its responsibility, when acquiring additions to its collections, to ensure that care of collections, documentation arrangements and use of collections will meet the requirements of the RCM and its community. It will take into account limitations on collecting imposed by such factors as staffing, storage and care of collection arrangements.
9. The library will undertake due diligence and make every effort not to acquire; whether by purchase, gift, bequest or exchange; any item unless the librarian or governing body is satisfied that the college can acquire a valid title to the item.
10. The Royal College of Music will not undertake disposal motivated principally by financial reasons.

History of the Collections

11. When the Prince of Wales, the future King Edward VII, proposed the foundation of the Royal College of Music in 1882, he wanted it to "be to England what the Berlin Conservatoire is to Germany, what the Paris Conservatoire is to France, or the Vienna Conservatoire is to Austria – the recognised centre and head of the musical world". His vision for the new College encompassed not only instrumental and vocal teaching but also the establishment of historic collections of manuscripts, early printed editions, instruments and portraits to support the student experience.
12. The founding collections included the libraries of the Concerts of Antient Music and the Sacred Harmonic Society. These were joined by many individual gifts including the autograph manuscripts of Mozart's Piano Concerto in C minor K 491, Haydn's String Quartet op 64 no 1, Schubert's incomplete Symphony in E major D729. Over the years, these collections have continued to grow, most notably with manuscripts by composers associated with the College, so that the holdings of the RCM are among the richest of any conservatoire.

An Overview of the current Collections

13. The Special Collections comprise the following types of material:

- Manuscripts – the library holds more than 20,000 manuscripts. There are a large number of copyist scores from the 18th and 19th centuries (especially from the libraries of the Concerts of Antient Music, Sacred Harmonic Society and the Novello Hire Library). The library also has an internationally important collection of composer autograph scores including Mozart's Piano Concerto in C minor K 491, Haydn's String Quartet op 64/1, Chopin's Waltz op 64/1 ("Minute"), Elgar's Cello Concerto and Vaughan Williams' Fifth Symphony. The library has particularly strong holdings of manuscripts by British composers, especially RCM alumni & teachers including Charles Villiers Stanford, Hubert Parry, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, Herbert Howells, Frank Bridge, and Henry Walford Davies.
- Early printed editions – the library holds more than 40,000 early printed editions. Again the oldest editions came to the Concerts of Antient Music and the Sacred Harmonic Society and the College has continued to add to these collections.
- Treatises and Methods – the library holds many treatises including the oldest clarinet method in English.
- Archives – the library holds archives (including letters, diaries and business papers) of over 140 individuals, businesses and organisations. These include the archives of the musicologist Marion Scott, the performing group the Chaplin Sisters, the composers Herbert Howells and Thomas Dunhill, the business ledgers for the London offices of Erard harps and Bechstein pianos, the Society of Women Musicians and the Tonic Sol-Fa Society.
- Concert and opera programmes – the library holds over 700,000 programmes covering the period from the late 17th century to the present day. There are particular strengths in music making in Britain, especially London, eg Crystal Palace Programmes from the 19th century.
- College Archive – the institutional archive that holds information about former staff, students and the history of the College.

Themes and priorities for future collecting

14. The collection focuses on the following themes and priorities:

- Documenting the history of music, with a particular focus on music making in Britain since the 18th century in the western art music tradition.
- Documenting the development of musical training, through treatises on music and performance practice. This mirrors the museum's collections of early instruments.
- History of the Royal College of Music as an institution, including its place in the development of music and music education in Britain.
- Members of the RCM, including former staff and students

15. The RCM always collects with the utmost care in view of its restricted storage capacity. This is most likely to affect the agreement to take on extensive archives. These will only be accepted if they substantially enhance the research or educational value of the collection and if the required space can be found.

Themes and priorities for rationalisation and disposal

16. The Royal College of Music recognises that the principles on which priorities for rationalisation and disposal are determined will be through a formal review process that identifies which collections are included and excluded from the review. The outcome of review and any subsequent rationalisation will not reduce the quality or significance of the collection and will result in a more useable, well managed collection.

17. The procedures used will meet professional standards. The process will be documented, open and transparent. There will be clear communication with key stakeholders about the process and its outcomes.

Legal and ethical framework for acquisition and disposal of items

18. The college recognises its responsibility to work within the parameters of the Museum Association Code of Ethics when considering acquisition and disposal.

Collecting policies of other libraries

19. The RCM Library will take account of the collecting policies of other libraries and other organisations collecting in the same or related areas or subject fields. It will consult with these organisations where conflicts of interest may arise or to define areas of specialisms, in order to avoid unnecessary duplication and waste of resources. Specific reference is made to the following libraries: British Library; Bodleian Library, Oxford; Cambridge University Library; Royal Academy of Music, London; Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester; Royal Conservatoire of Scotland; and the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama.

Archival Holdings

20. As the RCM holds archives, including its own institutional archive, its governing body will be guided by the Framework of standards produced by the National Archives.

Acquisition

21. The RCM Library will exercise due diligence and make every effort not to acquire, whether by purchase, gift, bequest, loan or exchange, any item unless the governing body or responsible officer is satisfied that the RCM can acquire a valid title to the item in question.
22. In particular, the RCM Library will not acquire any item unless it is satisfied that the item has not been acquired in, or exported from, its country of origin (or any intermediate country in which it may have been legally owned) in violation of that country's laws. (For the purposes of this paragraph 'country of origin' includes the United Kingdom).
23. In accordance with the provisions of the UNESCO 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, which the UK ratified with effect from November 1 2002, and the Dealing in Cultural Objects (Offences) Act 2003, the RCM Library will reject any items that have been illicitly traded. The governing body will be guided by the national guidance on the responsible acquisition of cultural property issued by DCMS in 2005.
24. With respect to any gifts to the RCM Library we will work from the assumption that the material will be used within the lending collection, unless the nature of an item is better suited to the Special Collections. In all cases we will be clear to the donor of our policy.
25. Acquisitions to the Lending Collections are covered by the separate acquisitions policy.

Human remains

26. The RCM Library does not hold or intend to acquire any human remains.

Biological and geological material

27. The RCM Library will not acquire any biological or geological material.

Archaeological material

28. The RCM Library will not acquire archaeological material (including excavated ceramics) in any case where the governing body or responsible officer has any suspicion that the circumstances of their recovery involved a failure to follow the appropriate legal procedures.
29. In England, Wales and Northern Ireland the procedures include reporting finds to the landowner or occupier of the land and to the proper authorities in the case of possible treasure (i.e. the Coroner for Treasure) as set out in the Treasure Act 1996 (as amended by the Coroners & Justice Act 2009).

Exceptions

30. Any exceptions to the above clauses will only be because the RCM is:
 - Acting as an externally approved repository of last resort for material of local (UK) origin
 - Acting with the permission of authorities with the requisite jurisdiction in the country of origin.
31. In these cases the library will be open and transparent in the way it makes decisions and will act only with the express consent of an appropriate outside authority. The library will document when these exceptions occur.

Spoliation

32. The RCM will use the statement of principles 'Spoliation of Works of Art during the Nazi, Holocaust and World War II period', issued for non-national Museums in 1999 by the Museums and Galleries Commission.

The Repatriation and Restitution of objects and human remains

33. The RCM Council, acting on the advice of the RCM Library staff may take a decision to return human remains, objects or specimens to a country or people of origin. The RCM will take such decisions on a case by case basis, within its legal position and taking into account all ethical implications and available guidance. This will mean that the procedures described in 16.1-5 will be followed but the remaining procedures are not appropriate.

Disposal procedures

34. By definition, the RCM Library has a long-term purpose and should possess (or intend to acquire) permanent collections in relation to its stated objectives. The governing body accepts the principle that, except for sound reasons, there is a strong presumption against the disposal of any items in the Library's Special Collections.
35. All disposals will be undertaken with reference to the Spectrum procedures on deaccessioning and disposal.
36. The governing body will confirm that it is legally free to dispose of an item, this includes checking any agreements on disposal made with donors.
37. When disposal of a Library item is being considered, the library will establish if it was acquired with the aid of an external funding organisation. In such cases, any conditions attached to the original grant will be followed. This may include repayment of the original grant and a proportion of the proceeds if the item is disposed of by sale.
38. A decision to dispose of an item, will be the responsibility of the governing body of the library acting on expert advice and not of the librarian or manager of the collection acting alone.

39. The decision to dispose of material will be taken by the governing body only after full consideration of the reasons for disposal. Expert advice will be obtained and the views of stakeholders such as donors, researchers, local and source communities and others served by the RCM will also be sought.
40. The decision to dispose of any item should only be motivated by collection development or public benefit, ie where an item would be more appropriately housed in another collection.
41. The RCM will not dispose of any items for financial reason alone.
42. Methods of disposal may be by gift, exchange, sale, or as a last resort destruction.
43. Once a decision to dispose of material in the collection has been taken, priority will be given to retaining it within the public domain. It will therefore be offered in the first instance, by gift exchange or sale, directly to other libraries or organisations likely to be interested in its acquisition.
44. The announcement relating to gift, exchange or sale will indicate the number and nature of specimens or objects involved, and the basis on which the material will be transferred to another institution. Preference will be given to expressions of interest from other libraries or organisations collecting in the same or related areas or subject fields. A period of at least two months will be allowed for an interest in acquiring the material to be expressed. At the end of this period, if no expressions of interest have been received, the college may consider disposing of the material to other interested individuals and organisations giving priority to organisations in the public domain.
45. If an exchange is appropriate, a proposal will be prepared by the Librarian for the governing body. This will include descriptions and independent valuations of the items to be exchanged.
46. Any monies received by the College from the disposal of items will be applied solely and directly for the benefit of the library Special Collections. This normally means the purchase of further acquisitions. In exceptional cases, improvements relating to the care of the collection may be justifiable.
47. Full records will be kept of all decisions on disposals and the items involved and proper arrangements made for the preservation and/or transfer, as appropriate, of the documentation relating to the items concerned, including photographic records where practicable in accordance with the Spectrum procedure on deaccession and disposal.
48. If it is not possible to dispose of an item through gift exchange or sale, the governing body may decide to destroy it.
49. It is acceptable to destroy material of low intrinsic significance (duplicate or common items which lack significant provenance) where no alternative method of disposal can be found.
50. Destruction is also an acceptable method of disposal in cases where an item is in extremely poor condition, has high associated health and safety risks or is part of an approved destructive testing request identified in an organisation's research policy.
51. Where necessary, specialist advice will be sought to establish the appropriate method of destruction. Health and safety risk assessments will be carried out by trained staff where required.
52. The destruction of items should be witnessed by an appropriate member of the college staff. In circumstances where this is not possible, eg the destruction of controlled substances, a police certificate should be obtained and kept in the relevant item history file.

Acquisitions not covered by the policy

53. Acquisitions outside the current stated policy will only be made in very exceptional circumstances, and then only after proper consideration by the governing body, having regard to the interests of other libraries.

Loans to the College

54. The RCM will only accept material on loan where the item is of exceptional interest to the College, whether for research or an exhibition. Any loan will be agreed in writing by the lender and the RCM Library, including allocation of responsibilities for insurance and transport arrangements and shall be for a specific fixed-term only, renewable in writing. Use of the term 'permanent loan' shall be avoided and items will not be accepted on this basis.
55. Once a loan has been returned any paperwork relating to the loan will be kept by the library for a period of 5 years, then destroyed.

Loans by the College

56. The RCM Library will consider all requests for loans from the collection individually. Decisions will be taken with proper consideration of the condition of the item, as well as the means of transportation, security and display conditions of the institution making the request and will be documented according to an agreed procedure.
57. Once a loan has been returned any paperwork relating to the loan will be kept by the library for a period of 5 years, then destroyed.

Signatories and document history

Librarian

Peter Linnitt

October 2012, February 2020, October 2025

Policy reviewed by

Collections Management Committee

February 2020, October 2025

Approved by

Collections Committee

October 2012, April 2020, December 2025

Appendix 1

The following is a list of current policies, standards and frameworks which inform this policy. This list will be reviewed and updated as necessary.

- British Library Acquisitions Policy
<http://vll-minos.bl.uk/aboutus/stratpolprog/coldevpol/index.html>
- National Archives Framework of standards
<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/archives/framework-of-standards.pdf>
- Collection Trust
<https://collectiontrust.org.uk/>
- Collection Trust – Spectrum
<https://collectiontrust.org.uk/spectrum/>
- Spoliation of Works of Art during the Nazi, Holocaust and World War II period
<https://collectiontrust.org.uk/resource/spoliation-of-works-of-art-during-the-nazi-holocaust-and-world-war-ii-period-issued-for-non-national-museums/>
- Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) – Code of Ethics
<https://www.cilip.org.uk/page/ethics>
- Museum Association – Code of Ethics
<https://www.museumsassociation.org/ethics/code-of-ethics>