Archives Information Policy

## Purpose

The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) Archives supports the organisation’s mission to explore, conserve and explain the world of plants by collecting, cataloguing, curating, preserving and providing access to relevant information and materials. This policy aims to support this by detailing what information we capture, when and why.

## Scope

The policy sets out how the Archives seeks to provide and maintain intellectual access to archive holdings for staff and users for the purposes of research and management.

This policy covers all of the records in whatever format held at RBGE. It encompasses the work of Library and Archives staff as well as any volunteers under their direction.

## Background

The Archives are a relatively recent addition to the RBGE collections. It appears they originated as collections of correspondence and manuscripts and material collected to fill gaps in our history. Our former Regius Keeper Sir Isaac Bayley Balfour is now credited as being the first to start pulling this material together to form what is now our Archives collection. This collection was made searchable in the 1980s(?) by the physical alphabetical ordering of the material with cross-reference cards to find associated material placed elsewhere in the sequence; and by the production of various box lists and correspondence indices.

With the introduction of the AtoM cataloguing system in 2014, a unified cataloguing standard, based on ISAD(G), was introduced for all analogue records. A volunteer project was run at the time which saw the existing box list of archival holdings, alongside the set of cross-reference cards used as a finding aid within the Archives, converted into basic catalogue records. The content of the AtoM catalogue was then made available through the RBGE website and in our Library Reading Room at Inverleith in Edinburgh. The process of converting a box list combined with cross-reference cards has led to some imperfections in our catalogue, which we have accepted with the aim of them being reducing as cataloguing becomes more detailed. Continuous improvement to the catalogue is ongoing.

## Standards

The Archives aims to adhere to the National Archives Archive Accreditation Standard.

The Archives uses the General International Standard Archival Description (ISAD(G)) in its cataloguing.

The Archives aims to conform to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018.

## Principles

The Archives’ principles are that information captured is proportionate to that necessary to keep the collections and any rights within them safe; that collections information supports service activities, including planning and prioritisation of work; that the default position is that information about archives will be retained in perpetuity; and that information is accurate.

## Accessioning Information

The Archives began as a collection of information about the history of RBGE held by various individuals within the organisation. As such, there was no recording of provenance for many of our holdings which has led to uncertainties over ownership and copyright holders. Now, we aim to capture as much information as possible about the provenance of the archives we collect. This will inform potential future questions on subjects such as legal ownership and control. Essential information recorded includes terms of acquisition, identity of the person or institution transferring or donating the material, and the nature and contents of the records.

Accessions are documented in a paper Accessions Register and the AtoM Accessions module, the latter allowing an accession record to be turned into a catalogue record. Any associated correspondence or supplementary information concerning ownership or access conditions is retained in in hard copy in the Accessions file.

## Cataloguing Information

Information about the collections in the Archives is captured so that the collections can be catalogued to enable them to be searchable and available for research. In the work of cataloguing its archive holdings, RBGE adheres to an in-house cataloguing standard which follows ISAD (G) and is implemented through the electronic cataloguing application, AtoM.

All cataloguing information is made publicly available and may also be shared with third parties such as the Archives Hub in order to increase awareness and findability of our holdings.

RBGE catalogues all of its accessioned collections to collection level, but aims to catalogue all collections to either file or item level. In practice, this would mean that an individual record entry is our catalogue might be a volume, a bundle of papers, a file or a single sheet of paper.

The aim of cataloguing is to provide a researcher with the best reasonable means of locating the information they are seeking. It should also, by implication, suggest to researcher where not to look. The catalogue further provides a level of security for the records as it provides intellectual control of the collection and will also aim to record the presence of particularly noteworthy documents.

## Intellectual Property Rights (IPR)

RBGE adheres to copyright legislation. Where necessary and appropriate, the Archives catalogue will identify IPR residing in a collection, with an indication of the rights owner.

## Preservation and Conservation

All new accessions are assessed for conservation issues on receipt or shortly after, and collection care programmes are in place to ensure continual monitoring of the condition of RBGE holdings. Although the storage environment is known, stable and managed, conservation knowledge about collections that predate this practice is not comprehensive.

Ongoing cataloguing, surveys and collection audits all identify conservation issues and inform programmes of work. Where records are found to be unsuitable for public inspection because of their physical conditions, this will be noted in the catalogue. Every effort is made to keep the catalogues up- to date but it can happen at the point of production, that records will be found to be unfit and so subject to restriction or temporary withdrawal from access. In these situations, staff will maintain dialogue with the reader and will try to facilitate access to such records where possible, whether by supervised access or by seeing whether suitable repairs may be expedited. Conservation resources are costly and finite, however, and the long term preservation of the records must be paramount. Consequently there will be occasions when access is not possible and has to be refused.

## Storage and Movement

Information is captured about the location of Archive materials in the Store. Currently this centres around knowing what shelf a collection is located on; this information may be identified on the Archives Catalogue, and also on a spreadsheet updated by Archives staff. In future it is anticipated that we will use a barcode system, each box being given a unique reference/barcode, to allow for collections to be split to encourage more efficient storage; this information also being available via the catalogue and a spreadsheet.

## De-accessioning

Although rarely done, de-accessioning of archive materials forms part of the RBGE collection management practice. Ideally, RBGE would normally expect a depositor to have identified and removed any material not required for permanent preservation prior to donation to RBGE. When this has not happened, de-accessioning will be utilised where permission has been given by donors to destroy duplicate or other unimportant material that it was impracticable to sift out before receipt. In cases where such work is significant, RBGE reserves the right to cover its costs by negotiating funding from the donor.

RBGE may de-accession where a review of the administrative or historical value of all or part of a collection indicates there is no longer a case for retaining or collecting it, or it is no longer compatible with RBGE’s Collection Development Policy.

De-accessioning supports the transfer of records which were accessioned by RBGE at a time when a more suitable archive didn’t exist, or was not located, but now does or has been.

Deaccessioning can be used where the physical condition of the record makes it more appropriate to make and preserve a surrogate rather than continued preservation of the original. This would be a highly rare occurrence.