

Special Collections

Access Policy

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Our Stakeholders

The Special Collections' mission statement is to curate unique collections for teaching and research. The statement reflects the role of Special Collections in acquiring, preserving, and making accessible specialist collections of published and unpublished material for the purpose of learning, teaching and research.

Special Collections primarily serves the staff and students (both undergraduate and postgraduate) of Oxford Brookes University. The archive service's collecting themes were chosen to support teaching and research within the University, and the institutional archive serves as the University's corporate memory. However, as a University, Oxford Brookes encourages external engagement - locally, nationally, and internationally - and because of this, Special Collections welcomes visitors from around the world.

The University and our depositors and donors are key stakeholders; without the collections and their support, the service would not exist. The service has a duty to preserve and make accessible the collections that have been placed in its care.

With regard to our users:

Internal users fall within the following categories: Students and academic staff members who wish to consult the collections for their coursework or research; non-academic staff who require information relating to the history of the University (e.g. the Communications, Development, and Estates teams); students attending a class in Special Collections as part of their course (organised by the Course Tutor and the relevant Academic Liaison Librarian).

External users include researchers from other academic institutions, authors and journalists, brewers, alumni, and visiting groups.

The Reading Room is also occasionally used to host non-Special Collections events (e.g. poetry readings, and academic launch events).

Access provision

Special Collections' mission is to curate unique collections for teaching and research. The service therefore provides opportunities to use the collections for individual study or teaching classes. Walk-in access is provided 13.00-17.00 Monday to Friday during semester, with additional access available by appointment. Classes can be booked via the Academic Liaison Librarians.

The Archivist, the Special Collections Library Assistant, and the Academic Liaison Librarians responsible for the collections answer enquiries that are received from distance users, and a paid scanning service is available, which widens access for distance users and visitors who have limited time to view the original records.

The Library is committed to delivering digitally, and this aim has been encompassed in the Special Collections Forward Plan. Born digital or digitised records, for which copyright permission to publish has not been obtained, are made accessible in the Reading Room on a pc that has been configured to prevent unauthorised copying. Digital records that are out of copyright, or for which copyright permission has been obtained, may be made available online via the University's Research And Digital Asset Repository (RADAR). Digital copies may be made available online where copyright permission has not been obtained, if the copyright owner is un-traceable; if contact is subsequently made with the copyright owner, and the owner does not wish the copy to be made available, the digital copy in question will be removed. Potential digitisation projects are identified in the annual Special Collections Work Plans, which feed into the bi-annual Forward Plan.

Separate online catalogues, the Library Catalogue and the Archive Catalogue, exist for the book/journal material and archival material in the collections respectively. Collection-level descriptions are also published on the Archives Hub (<https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/>). Uncatalogued books/journals are kept in the Reading Room and are available for browsing, but uncatalogued archive material is kept in the Archive Room and is unavailable for browsing. Those archival collections that have not yet been catalogued, but have an interim finding aid (e.g. a box list), will be made accessible to users on request where possible.

Access information

Information on how to access the collections is included on the Special Collections web pages (<https://www.brookes.ac.uk/library/special-collections/>). Opening hours, including notice of planned closures, details of registration procedures, details of the scanning service, policies and regulations, and contact details are included on the web pages. The pages also include a link to the University's maps and travel information web pages, which provide information on accessing the campus by car and public transport, disabled parking and wheelchair access routes.

Opening hours are also displayed by the Reading Room entrance, and Reading Room regulations and copyright guidelines for personal photography are displayed on the study tables. Contact details and opening hours are also listed on The National Archives Discovery web pages and the Archives Hub contributor web pages.

Links to the Library and Archive Catalogues are available on the Special Collections web pages, as are video tutorials containing guidance on how to use the catalogues. The Archive Catalogue also has a number of help pages on the catalogue homepage including a user guide, FAQs, and a glossary of archival terms. Information regarding embargoes, and closure periods, is included on the relevant collection records pages.

Legislation and University Policy

The University is committed to identifying and complying with all relevant legislation. The University's policies on Equality, Accessibility, and Freedom of Information are available on the University's web pages (<https://www.brookes.ac.uk/about-brookes/structure-and-governance/policies-and-financial-statements/>).

Freedom of Information (FOI) and Data Protection (DP) enquiries are processed by the University's Information Compliance Team, and Special Collections staff are occasionally called upon to provide information for enquiries.

In order to comply with the General Data Protection Regulation (2018), the following practices have been put in place:

- Accessions and depositor details are stored securely and not made available to the public.
- Personal data collected in registration and scanning forms is kept securely and disposed of confidentially after an appropriate retention period specified by the Records Management Retention Schedule (<https://www.brookes.ac.uk/it/information-management/records-management>).
- Archive material is assessed for personal data at the point of cataloguing. Uncatalogued material is assessed by the Archivist before being made accessible to researchers.
- Statements regarding the presence of personal data in the collections are included in every accession record, and document opening/closing decisions.
- Closed records are physically removed from the open records, and a note made of the reasons for closure and the expected expiry date of the embargo. Records, whose embargo periods have expired, are re-integrated into the open collections every January.
- To aid transparency, the Special Collections Acquisitions, Access, Collections Management, Preservation, Digital Preservation, and Volunteering and Work Experience Policies are available on the Special Collections web pages (<https://www.brookes.ac.uk/library/special-collections/policies-and-regulations>)

In order to comply with good practice with regard to safeguarding, visitors under the age of 18 may use the Reading Room if accompanied by a responsible adult (i.e. a parent/guardian/teacher, or in the case of undergraduate students who are under 18, a peer who is over 18). If external visitors, a registration form will be completed with the personal details of the responsible adult and two cards be filled in - one for the adult, and one for the child which will include the date after which the child can visit unaccompanied.

With regard to accessibility, there are good public transport links for accessing the campuses, and although parking is limited, staff can book spaces on behalf of visitors. Students can register with the University's Disability and Dyslexia/SpLD Service, which will allow them access to the University's Assistive Technology Suite, situated in the Library. The Library also has a dedicated web page for users with a disability that lists useful services, such as alternate formats, coloured paper, and the library's enquiry service. The Special Collections Reading Room itself is wheelchair accessible, with accessible toilets on the same floor, and has two height adjustable study tables.

Stakeholder care and requirements

The Library is committed to Customer Care and Special Collections has staff guidelines for welcoming and settling users when they first visit the Reading Room. Feedback is important to the Library, and an annual survey of Library-wide users is conducted in order to reflect on and improve services. Special Collections also provides the opportunity for users to give feedback by way of a visitors' book, a rolling survey form, and suggestion cards on the study tables.

Special Collections user information is gathered through the sign-in sheets (user name, academic department/external status, collections used, times in and out), and registration forms for external users (forms ask for contact details, reason for use, and how the user heard about Special Collections). Internal users are not required to register as their details have already been captured by the Library system during enrollment/recruitment. Special Collections web page statistics can also be acquired as necessary. The information gathered is used for gathering KPIs for annual reports, and reviewing opening hours and collections usage.

Depositor contact details are requested on depositor agreements and entered onto the Calm depositor database, which is linked to the accession and catalogue records. The degree of contact with depositors varies. Some depositors are actively involved in the management of the collection (e.g. the National Brewing Library Committee, which consists of members of the Institute of Brewing and Distilling, Brewery History Society, and the University), whilst no further contact is generally made with depositors of small one-off accessions following the handover of materials (e.g. items donated by former staff/students to the institutional archive). The Library is committed to fostering good relationships with its depositors and works with them when opportunities arise (e.g. digitisation projects, anniversaries).

Promotion of access and engagement

The key component of the Special Collections mission statement is making collections available for teaching and research, and the Special Collections Group actively looks for opportunities to promote the collections internally and externally for this purpose.

Student engagement with the collection is encouraged by incorporating Special Collections into teaching classes. Academic Liaison Librarians work with Course Leaders to provide teaching sessions in the Reading Room that use the collections. This is a service that the Group is keen to expand.

With regard to internal promotion, articles featuring items in the collections, or promoting new services are regularly published in staff newsletters. A programme of displays, within the Library and the Reading Room, has been established and includes an annual exhibition that takes place in semester two. Items from the collections are occasionally featured on the Library's Twitter and Instagram accounts. The Group also seeks opportunities to contribute to wider University events, such as conferences and festivals.

With regard to raising awareness externally, Special Collections contributes annually to The National Archives' Accessions to Repositories register, and has uploaded collection-level descriptions to the Archives Hub. Additionally, for certain collections, reciprocal website links have been established with relevant organisations (e.g. National Brewing Library links on Brewing History websites).

Eleanor Possart

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