

Introduction to the Archives

Purpose Statement

The Archives of Christ's College Cambridge document the history of the college as an institution. The Archives exist as a repository of information about the college's possessions and its members over the centuries since the foundation, including the earlier foundation of God's House out of which Christ's grew. In addition to updating and preserving the collections, it is the work of the Archivist to answer enquiries, both from members of college and the public, about matters relating to college history, and to provide access as appropriate to relevant documents, as described below under 'Access'. There is no college Records Manager, so current enquiries should be addressed to the appropriate department: for example, information about recent students should be addressed to the Tutorial Office.

Scope of the Collection

Material preserved in the archives includes documents from the foundation of God's House in 1439 and the refoundation as Christ's in 1505 onwards. Material that pre-dates the foundation, going back in some cases to the early thirteenth century, recording grants of land that subsequently entered into college ownership, are also preserved in the archives. Records in various formats – including charters, ledgers and plans – are preserved in the Muniments collection, which broadly documents the history of the college. Records of college societies and sporting clubs are also kept in the college archive. Semi-current records, however, remain with the creating department, for example records relating to recent students are kept by the Tutorial Office.

Some personal papers of past fellows and old members are preserved in the Fellows Papers collection, and a Picture Collection also exists, including pictures of college buildings, portraits of past members and formal photographs of students and college groups from the modern era. An online, searchable database of these images is maintained by the Archivist. The college's collection of plate is curated by the College Fellow who is appointed Keeper of Plate, but the records of plate – comprising inventories, correspondence and some photographs – are part of the archive collection. Most of the archives remain undigitized, although Charles Lesingham Smith's diaries for 1873 and 1874 are available to browse through the Cambridge Digital Library, and other documents are in the process of being added to CDL. A '**Collections Policy**' is under review, outlining in further detail the criteria to be applied for determining whether material is eligible and suitable to be preserved in the archive. It will incorporate elements of a 'Donations Policy' and will set out in further detail the procedure followed when donations are offered.

Access

The college aims to provide opportunities to view the archives where possible, provided the justification for seeking access is genuine and reasonable. Readers are asked to request access to the archives two weeks in advance of their visit and, for larger projects (involving the consultation of more than three separate sources), a minimum of one month's notice should be given. A clear list of the materials requested should be sent to the Archivist by email or in writing. All researchers wishing to use the archives are asked to produce photographic ID in the form of a passport or driver's license

on the day of their visit. Please contact us in advance of your appointment if there are any adjustments that you require, and we will endeavour to meet them to help you make the most of your visit. If you require step free access, please inform us in advance when booking an appointment as we will be happy to book a suitable room.

Requests for the Archivist to provide images of documents or items will be handled on a case by case basis. Where low-resolution, informal photographs are acceptable and the user requires them for personal research purposes only, these may be provided free of charge, although the researcher may be asked to complete a form declaring that the image or images are for personal research only. Where higher quality images are required, for example for publication in a book or journal, then there will be a form to complete and a charge will be made.

Donations

Donations to the College Archive are always welcome, provided the material is suitable to be added to the collection. The acceptance and processing of archive donations, is the responsibility of the Archivist, as outlined in the 'Donations' section of the forthcoming 'Collections Policy' (currently under review). Copies of catalogues will be supplied to donors.

Responsibilities

All items held in the college archive, whether recently acquired or with longstanding connection to the college, are treated as preservation priorities. In other words, their storage and physical condition will be carefully monitored so as to ensure their endurance in perpetuity. Preservation and storage methods will be selected according to the medium and format of the item. Care will also be taken to ensure the security of the items so that they are not at risk of theft or other kinds of tampering. For example, all visitors to the archive will be invigilated (by the Archivist or a librarian) while they consult the material. Material produced for consultation will have been reviewed for suitability in accordance with data protection and sensitivity, and a very small number of items in the archive are 'closed'.

Another responsibility of the Archivist is the task of updating catalogues on a regular basis. This is so that current information about the collections is readily and publicly available, and new accruals are advertised. Information about the collections can be found both on the college website and on Archive Space, a search portal linked through from the Cambridge University Library's website. Also on the Cambridge University Library's website, there is a link to Cambridge Digital Library, a space where digitised images of some archive material are displayed. Digitisation of selected, key documents of general interest is a goal, and it is the responsibility of the Archivist to review and recommend items for digitisation (when the opportunity arises) so that the riches of the college collection can be more widely enjoyed.

17th March 2026