



Royal Historical Society Statement on Ethics

October 2020

(Originally published December 2004, revised January 2015, October 2020)

The Royal Historical Society (RHS) seeks to represent the interests of historians, to promote the value of historical scholarship and to support the highest possible standards, not just in publications and institutions but also in the conduct of individual historians and in the teaching of the discipline. This 'Statement on Ethics' sets out guidance on the Professional and Ethical Standards which the RHS expects of its Fellows and Members in order to remain in good standing with the Society. It should be read in conjunction with Clause VIII of the Society's bylaws.

The RHS will seek to conduct itself in line with these professional and ethical standards in all of its work. This statement makes no attempt to be comprehensive and we invite comments which should be sent to: enquiries@royalhistsoc.org.

If you consider the Society's Statement on Ethics to have been breached, please consult the bylaws which explain the Society's complaints procedures.

Professional Standards

The RHS expects its Fellows and Members to observe the highest professional standards in the conduct of their research, teaching and administration.

Historians work not only within national laws, for example, covering data protection, the use of human remains and copyright, but within the regulations of institutions, such as archives and libraries, where they undertake research. They also work within the norms of good practice of teaching institutions that generally have rules concerning plagiarism. The RHS recognises the need for academic freedom of speech and writing. Since ethical standards are not constant, there is a need to eschew anachronistic value judgments when investigating and describing the past.

The maintenance of high professional standards includes:

- being acquainted with best practice in the use and evaluation of evidence, in whatever form it takes;
- understanding and following copyright laws;
- being mindful of intellectual property issues;
- taking particular care when evidence is produced by those still living, when the anonymity of individuals is required and when research concerns those still living;
- observing the ethical and legal requirements of the repositories and collections being used;
- being aware of conservation issues concerning materials that historians and those working in the heritage sector use and produce;
- eschewing plagiarism, fabrication, falsification and deception in proposing, carrying out and reporting the results of research;
- following the most rigorous procedures for the citation of sources, including materials obtained from the internet;

- observing the law of the land, and not committing, planning or colluding in the deliberate breaking of the law.

Ethical Standards

The RHS expects its Fellows and Members to observe the highest ethical standards in the conduct of their research, teaching and administration. Historians should be guided by a robust approach to the integrity of their work. They should adequately acknowledge intellectual debts and seek to present material in an honest way in all communications and publications.

The maintenance of high ethical standards includes:

- declaring any interests, including financial ones, that bear on professional life and giving due and appropriate acknowledgement of assistance received, whether this concerns financial help, access to materials or an academic contribution. Particular care is to be exercised when more than one author is involved;
- reporting any conflict of interest. For example, individuals should normally refuse to participate in the formal review of work of anyone for whom they feel a sense of personal obligation or enmity;
- observing fairness and equity in the conduct of research, teaching and administration, and representing credentials accurately and honestly;
- behaving with integrity, for example, through developing an awareness of one's own biases, disclosing qualifications to arguments and making supporting documentation available to others;
- acting with integrity where summarizing, interpreting or translating material for publication or communication so as not to misrepresent the historical record. This should ensure that

historians are not party to concealing, falsifying or perverting historical records, but rather aiming for accuracy, fairness and rigour in their work and professional lives.

Readers may also wish to consult the American Historical Association's [Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct](#) and the European Commission's guide to [Ethics in Social Science and Humanities](#). We echo the encouragement within the AHA document for "all historians to uphold and defend their professional responsibilities with the utmost seriousness, and to advocate for integrity and fairness and high standards throughout the historical profession."

Find out more:

This statement, and the RHS by-laws, are available on the RHS website at www.royalhistsoc.org/about/.

The RHS *Data Protection and Historians in the UK* guide is available at www.royalhistsoc.org/policy/.

The Royal Historical Society
University College London
Gower Street
London WC1E 6BT

020 7387 7532
www.royalhistsoc.org