

RHS Statement on Ethics

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There has been a marked growth in concern about ethical matters over recent years. In many professions, practitioners are regulated by codes of conduct. There is an associated trend towards the use of legal solutions to solve conflicts around professional behaviour. The historical profession is far from isolated from such trends. Historians are increasingly prominent in public life, for example, in appearing as expert witnesses in trials. The dramatic rise of popular history and historical websites raises significant issues concerning the evaluation of arguments, claims and evidence. With such exposure comes public scrutiny. Historians may want to use this situation to reflect on their own practices.

The RHS is mindful of these trends. It 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. The following statement indicates the main areas that touch on historical practice. The goal of what follows is to draw attention to the key issues and to encourage their discussion, both with colleagues and students. The RHS hopes these matters will become an integral part of the history curriculum.

Statement:

The RHS expects its Fellows and Members to observe the highest 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, whatever form it takes;
- understanding and following copyright laws being mindful to 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 they use
- being aware of conservation issues concerning materials they use and produce eschewing plagiarism, fabrication, falsification and deception in proposing, carrying out and reporting the results of research;
- declaring any interests, including financial ones that bear on professional life 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;
- following the most rigorous procedures for the citation of sources, including materials obtained from the internet;
- 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
- representing credentials accurately and honestly;
- behaving with integrity, for example, through developing an awareness of one's own bias, disclosing qualifications to arguments and making supporting documentation available to others.

This statement makes no attempt to be comprehensive and we invite comments which should be sent to: enquiries@royalhistsoc.org.

