

How to find and use nursing images

Image collections in the RCN archive

Alongside written documents, researchers will find images throughout the RCN archive collections.

The RCN archive has a wide-ranging collection of photographic prints. The majority are from the 1920s up to the 1980s with some earlier material dating back to the 1880s. There are few colour images, most are black and white. More recent images are mainly digital rather than prints.

Print images appear in personal papers collections donated by nurses. They can be formal group images and portraits or informal personal photos and come from both the UK and overseas. Many of this type of photograph can be found in the catalogue records of individual nurses. For example, the collection of Rosa Cassels includes many photographs <https://rcn.epexio.com/records/C986> A selection of images from personal collections can be viewed online at <https://rcn.access.preservica.com/archive>

Photographic prints also appear in Royal College of Nursing corporate collections. These are prints obtained from press and photo agencies, used by the College in its work, representing the interests of nurses and professional nursing in the UK. For example, trade union activism, campaigns, meetings and conferences etc. These are mainly in copyright which does not belong to the RCN.

Few photographic collections are catalogued and rights-cleared. Sadly, images which are not catalogued and rights-cleared, cannot be accessed at present.

Postcard collections also provide useful images. These are mainly donated as complete collections, compiled by enthusiastic collectors, often nurses themselves. Postcard collections range mainly from the early to late twentieth century but include some 'cartes de visite', small-format photographs affixed to card stock, popular in the mid-19th century. The collections mostly show hospital images (exteriors and interiors), with portraits of nurses. The early cards are black and white, with some colourized images. Later images are in colour.

Boardman Postcard Collection catalogue <https://rcn.epexio.com/records/BM>

Biley Postcard Collection catalogue <https://rcn.epexio.com/records/BP>

Reprographic services

A selection of images is available via the website of our partners at the Mary Evans Picture Library (<https://www.maryevans.com/>) who manage licence agreements and fees. Requests for high quality images for reproduction may be referred to MEPL. To search go to, <https://www.maryevans.com/search.php> .

Photographic images may be subject to restrictions under copyright and data protection law. Data protection laws protect an individual's right to privacy while copyright laws protect a creator's ability to benefit from their work. In cases where there are no restrictions, access to and copies of images can be provided. However, the RCN does not offer a specialist reprographics service.

Access to and use of images includes exhibition and presentations and is subject to a licence agreement. The Archive service (archives@rcn.org.uk) can respond to simple

enquiries about images. Many rights-cleared images can be found on the RCN digital archive, <https://rcn.access.preservica.com/>

In some cases, photographs that are closed can be viewed on-site as part of a supervised research visit. Information on how to book a trip to the archives can be found in the “help” section of this website, <https://rcn.epexio.com/help> .

Using images for research and family history

Information in images

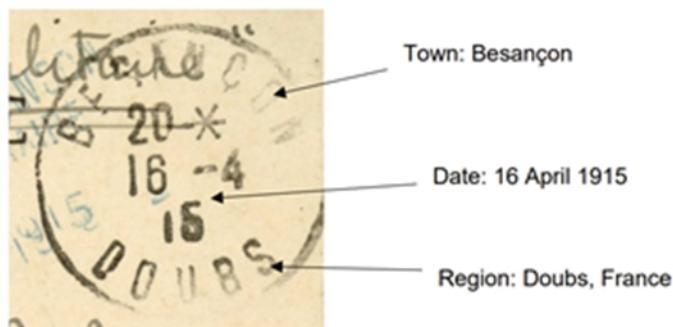
Images of nurses can be used as a source of information in identifying workplaces and eras in which they have worked. Details such as nursing badges, styles of uniform and hairstyles can help with this. It is worth remembering that styles that we may think of as being typical of a particular decade often only became mainstream in the middle of that time period; for instance, shorter skirts being widely adopted by the mid-1920s. You can find more information about the history of nursing uniforms here, [INSERT LINK TO UNIFORM RESEARCH STARTER]

You can find more information about tracing individual nurses and family history research here, <https://rcn.epexio.com/guides/tracing-nurses-3.pdf>

Dating postcards

The postcard collections include cards which have been through the postal service and have writing on the back as well as a postmark. The information on these postmarks can be used to help date these images. Dates on postmarks usually have a DD-M-YY format.

Postmarks can also be used to determine the location from which the postcard was sent. This generally includes the town/village (top) and the region (bottom.) Please see below for an example.



Alternate sources of nursing images

Journals

Historical nursing journals contain contemporary images of nurses and nursing, complete with descriptions, names, places and dates. Dating from the 1880s, specialist nursing journals were published weekly. One of the UK’s best nursing journal collections is held by the RCN Library and Heritage Centre. Contact rcn.library@rcn.org.uk for more information.

Journals from this collection are digitised and available to academic researchers via institutional membership of GALE (<https://www.gale.com/intl/primary-sources>).

RCN staff and members can access the GALE collection of Historic Nursing Journals online via the RCN Library website (<https://www.rcn.org.uk/library/Books-journals-and-databases/Search-Books-and-Journals>).

Please note that the image copyright belongs to the publication or photographer. GALE have permissions in place to display the journals online, but do not hold copyright of images.

Archives and Libraries

The Wellcome Library collections focus on the history of medicine but also include some nursing images. The catalogue can be found at <https://wellcomecollection.org/search/images?query=Nursing%20images>

If you are interested in nurses from a particular geographic area, it is worth contacting local archives to see if they hold relevant images. To find an archive in a UK location use the National Archive search webpage at <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/find-an-archive>

Images from film

For moving images of nurses contact one of the national or regional film and TV archives across the UK which are listed (with catalogue and website links) on the British Film Institute webpage at <https://www.bfi.org.uk/bfi-national-archive/bfi-replay/bfi-replay-partner-archives>

Please note that the RCN Archive only collects RCN copyright films. Access to older films is not always possible - analogue film on reel and cassette requires digitisation before it can be accessed. Researchers may enquire about any film on the catalogue (https://rcn.epexio.com/search/all:records/0_50/all/score_desc/v%2F%2A)

However, if digitisation is required (and is possible given the condition of the item) a charge will be made for the digitisation, and there will be an access delay while this is completed. Any item digitised remains the property and copyright of the RCN.