

# 1. Collections Development Policy

Revised April 2018



**Name of museum:** *Royal Engineers Museum, Library & Archive*

**Name of governing body:** *Royal Engineers Museum, Library & Archive Committee*

**Date on which this policy was approved by governing body:** *May 2018*

**Policy review procedure:**

**The collections development policy will be published and reviewed from time to time, at least once every five years.**

**Date at which this policy is due for review:** *April 2023*

**Arts Council England will be notified of any changes to the collections development policy, and the implications of any such changes for the future of collections.**

## **1. Relationship to other relevant policies/plans of the organisation:**

### **1.1. The museum's statement of purpose is:**

The Royal Engineers Museum, Library & Archive's (hereafter the Museum) mission is to curate the Designated Collection and develop the galleries, facilities and services in order to preserve and present the military and civil heritage of the Royal Engineers, promote scholarship and provide an excellent, accessible, relevant and stimulating education experience for today's audience, including the public, students, schools, the Armed Forces and the Corps and to contribute to the recruitment, motivation and inspiration of today's soldier.

1.2. The governing body will ensure that both acquisition and disposal are carried out openly and with transparency.

1.3. By definition, the museum has a long-term purpose and holds collections in trust for the benefit of the public in relation to its stated objectives. The governing body therefore accepts the principle that sound curatorial reasons must be established before consideration is given to any acquisition to the collection, or the disposal of any items in the museum's collection.

1.4. Acquisitions outside the current stated policy will only be made in exceptional circumstances.

1.5. The museum recognises its responsibility, when acquiring additions to its collections, to ensure that care of collections, documentation arrangements and use of collections will meet the requirements of the Museum Accreditation Standard. This includes using

SPECTRUM primary procedures for collections management. It will take into account limitations on collecting imposed by such factors as staffing, storage and care of collection arrangements.

- 1.6. The museum will undertake due diligence and make every effort not to acquire, whether by purchase, gift, bequest or exchange, any object or specimen unless the governing body or responsible officer is satisfied that the museum can acquire a valid title to the item in question.
- 1.7 In exceptional cases, disposal may be motivated principally by financial reasons. The method of disposal will therefore be by sale and the procedures outlined below will be followed. In cases where disposal is motivated by financial reasons, the governing body will not undertake disposal unless it can be demonstrated that all the following exceptional circumstances are met in full:
  - the disposal will significantly improve the long-term public benefit derived from the remaining collection
  - the disposal will not be undertaken to generate short-term revenue (for example to meet a budget deficit)
  - the disposal will be undertaken as a last resort after other sources of funding have been thoroughly explored
  - extensive prior consultation with sector bodies has been undertaken
  - the item under consideration lies outside the museum's established core collection

## **2. History of the collections**

Sergeant Major J Forbes can be credited as the first collector of Corps memorabilia when, in 1839, he ran an appeal for exhibits at the Royal Sappers and Miners Depot in Woolwich. The Woolwich Depot closed in 1856 and this collection was merged into the Model Room of the Royal Engineers Establishment in Chatham. Holding examples of engineering equipment and training models, this Model Room had been established by Major Charles Pasley to support the curricula at the RE Establishment.

A separate collection of geological and scientific specimens was established in 1873 when the Royal Engineers Institution launched an appeal in the RE journal for members to donate examples for displays in the new Institution building. In 1882 the Institution made the decision to formally establish a 'Museum' and their collection was combined and housed with the Model Room displays. From time to time Royal Engineer officers would classify and arrange the exhibits and in 1890 control of the Model Room passed again to the School of Military Engineering (SME).

The centenary celebrations of the foundation of the SME in 1912 marked a decisive point in the history of the Museum. In 1910 in a committee under the Chairmanship of General Sir Richard Harrison had suggested that the Model Room become the Royal Engineers Museum and display campaign

trophies and peace-time relics of the Corps. A Curator, Mr Wiffen, was appointed and in July 1912 the Museum was opened to members of the Corps and the general public. Mr Wiffen finally retired in 1944 having seen the collection put into safe storage for the duration of World War Two.

The Museum remained in the Old Model Room until 1984 when it moved to its current location in the Ravelin Building. This new building provided three times as much display space and the initial development phase saw award winning galleries filling 24 rooms and covering over 300 years of Corps and military engineering history. In the early 1990s it was decided, however, that more space was required and a huge project to roof the Ravelin Building Courtyard was undertaken. This allowed for the creation of Cold War displays and the Museum moved into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century with a remit to collect, preserve and present the history of the Corps of Royal Engineers to service personnel and the general public.

The Library was established in 1813 to support the training and wider interests of the Corps. By 1862 the Library had 16 UK branches, including one at Horse Guards which was founded in 1847 and constituted the Army's main library. Reflecting the spread of Royal Engineer postings throughout the Empire were 19 overseas Libraries. These Libraries closed as Britain withdrew from its Empire with the books returning to England or being disposed of locally.

During World War Two plans were made to relocate the Horse Guards Library to Chatham and merge the remaining smaller Libraries with it and that of the Chatham Headquarter Officers' Mess. The RE Institution funded the conversion of the central lecture hall in the Institution building and the new Library opened in 1951.

With the introduction of new training methods during the Cold War and the ever greater emphasis on combat engineering, as well as the reduction of the Corps and closure of its schools of architecture and fortification, the Library gradually became a research collection and an archive rather than a teaching aid. The establishment of the Technical Information Centre RE in the 1980s saw redirection of training manuals, war diaries and classified MOD material away from the historic charity funded library. Its readership gradually expanded from the officers to the NCOs and eventually the whole Corps and the general public. The Museum formally took over the management of the Library collection in 2009.

### **3. An overview of current collections**

The broad subject of the Museum's collecting is defined in its Charter:

*...to memorialize and promote the work, deeds and history of the Corps of Royal Engineers and to advance public education therein. It will acquire, conserve and exhibit material evidence of military engineering, the work of the Corps and individuals connected with the Corps....*

The story of the Corps is taken to mean the history of the development of the Royal Engineers and the smaller regiments, companies and squadrons

making up the whole as a military unit. The 'story' also includes the social and biographical histories of the men and women serving in the Royal Engineers as well as the history of their role, responsibilities and experiences within the British Army and the development of British military engineering.

The Corps was founded in 1716, however the Museum's collection also includes items relating to the earlier, pre 1716, history of British military engineering and engineering as a more general discipline of warfare. This helps to explain and set into context the establishment of the Corps as a unit of the army, its role in the army and the technical developments surrounding this role.

In 1986, when the Museum moved to its current location in the Ravelin Building, Brompton Barracks, there were approximately 15, 000 accessioned artefacts or groups of artefacts in its Primary Collection. Now, in 2018 there are over 35,000 items in the Primary Collection. The Library & Archive collection, founded in 1812 and held in a separate building to the Museum, comprises at least 400,000 items.

Object types are listed below:

- Personal archives
- Official archives
- Printed books
- Technical plans and drawings
- Maps
- Prints and drawings
- Ephemera
- Memorabilia
- Photographs
- Medals and decorations
- Badges
- Uniform
- Textiles
- Ethnographic objects
- Small military equipment
- Large military equipment
- Military vehicles
- Models
- Weapons

The Museum also maintains a Secondary or 'Handling' Collection composed of material available to users of the Museum's Education and Learning Service. The Museum is also planning on developing a tertiary handling collection based on specific conflicts and time periods for use by Corps units and for events and open days. This will enable a greater reach for the museum and its collection without impacting on the Education programme.

#### **4. Themes and priorities for future collecting**

The period of time to which the collecting of the Museum relates is not restricted. A larger part of collecting does and will focus on a period beginning with the formation of the Corps of Engineers in 1716 and ending with the present day. However, the Museum also aims to discuss the development of military engineering in Britain and as a more general discipline of war. As a result, the Museum seeks to collect a limited amount of material relating to the early history of military engineering which can be dated back to the ancient world.

The geographical area to which the collecting of the Museum relates is not restricted. The Royal Engineers operated in all areas of the British Empire and were often seconded to countries independent of British rule. Many of the engineering units in Commonwealth armies are direct descendants of the Royal Engineers and a limited amount of material relating to these will be collected. Additionally, for the reasons given above, the Museum aims to collect a limited amount of material relating to the very early history of military engineering on a worldwide scale.

The Museum will collect artefacts and specimens as detailed below:

- Items of uniform, weapons, medals, decorations and equipment issued to, worn or used by members of the Royal Engineers, their predecessor units and other British and colonial units of military engineers.
- Artefacts or natural or scientific specimens used, made or collected by members of the Royal Engineers, their predecessor units and other British and colonial units of military engineers.
- Items relating to the daily life, work, professional interest and training of members of the Royal Engineers, their predecessor units and other British and colonial units of military engineers.
- Items relating to military operations, civil and semi-civil projects and emergency operations, colonial and other policing and administrative duties and other activities in which members of the Royal Engineers, their predecessor units and other British and colonial units of military engineers have had involvement.
- Artefacts including models, actual equipment and written academic works illustrating engineering and scientific techniques of relevance or interest to military engineers.

- Items relating to the social, political and military history of the Medway Towns and the surrounding area where these in some way reflect the presence of a military garrison in the towns.
- Medals and decorations awarded to members of the Women's Royal Army Corps serving with the Royal Engineers Postal and Courier Service during World War Two.
- Items for use in the Learning and Education programme of the Museum.

Specific areas to which collecting are targeted are listed below and are selected based on gaps in the current collection, especially in areas where further interpretation is planned.

- Items illustrating the work and daily life of the Royal Engineers and associated Regular and Territorial Army engineer unit during the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- Contemporary items illustrating the work and daily life of the Royal Engineers and associated Regular and Territorial Army engineer.
- Items which support the training of the contemporary Corps, as and when they do not conflict with material held in MOD or other Corps sponsored repositories and official MOD and Government archives.
- Engineering equipment used by members of the Royal Engineers, their predecessor units and other British and colonial units of military engineers during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- Items relating to the daily life, work and training of Other Ranks and NCOS of the Royal Engineers, their predecessor units and other British and colonial units of military engineers during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- Items relating to the everyday social history of the those associated with serving members of the Corps of Royal Engineers, their predecessor units and other British and colonial units of military engineers during the 18<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- Items and material relating to female members of the Corps of Royal Engineers.
- Items of uniform worn by members of the Royal Engineers, their predecessor units and other British and colonial units of military engineers during the 18<sup>th</sup> to mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.
- Items of uniform worn by NCO's and Other Ranks of the Royal Engineers, their predecessor units and other British and colonial units of military engineers during the 18<sup>th</sup> to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

## 5. Themes and priorities for rationalisation and disposal

- 5.1 The museum recognises that the principles on which priorities for rationalisation and disposal are determined will be through a formal review process that identifies which collections are included and excluded from the review. The outcome of review and any subsequent rationalisation will not reduce the quality or significance of the collection and will result in a more useable, well managed collection.
- 5.2 The procedures used will meet professional standards. The process will be documented, open and transparent. There will be clear communication with key stakeholders about the outcomes and the process.

Responsible, curatorially-motivated disposal takes place as part of a museum's long-term collections policy, in order to increase public benefit derived from museum collections<sup>1</sup>. All disposal will be carried out in line with clauses 16 *Disposal Procedures*.

Specific areas for rationalisation and disposals are listed below:

- The Museum will seek to reduce the number of duplicates items it holds, unless they are of specific individual historical providence and interest.
- The Museum will dispose of items which are in a relic condition and/or in need of extensive remedial conservation unless of an extremely significant nature to the history of the Royal Engineers.
- The Museum will dispose of material relating to units of the British Army derived from the Royal Engineers, e.g. The RFC or the REME, after their foundation date unless reflecting the combined history of the units.
- The Museum will dispose of material relating to units of the British Army which have no significant link or relevance to the Royal Engineers.
- The Museum will consider disposing of items that have no provenance if a similar item is offered with proven provenance, eg George V cap badge belonging to a Military Cross winner would be collected in favour of a George V cap badge with no known owner.

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<sup>1</sup> See Museums Association 'Disposals Toolkit' pg 5.



## **6 Legal and ethical framework for acquisition and disposal of items**

- 6.1 The museum recognises its responsibility to work within the parameters of the Museum Association Code of Ethics when considering acquisition and disposal.

## **7 Collecting policies of other museums**

- 7.1 The museum will take account of the collecting policies of other museums and other organisations collecting in the same or related areas or subject fields. It will consult with these organisations where conflicts of interest may arise or to define areas of specialism, in order to avoid unnecessary duplication and waste of resources.

- 7.2 Specific reference is made to the following museum(s)/organisation(s):

- The National Army Museum
- The National Army Museum Contemporary Collecting Policy
- The Imperial War Museum
- The Royal Air Force Museum
- The Tank Museum
- The Royal Artillery Museum, Firepower
- The Royal Signals Museum
- The Museum of Army Flying
- The Royal Logistics Corps Museum
- The Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers Museum
- The Royal Naval Air Service Museum
- The Royal Naval Submarine Museum
- The Guildhall Museum, Rochester
- Chatham Historical Dockyard Trust
- RE Technical Information Centre
- RSME Technical Libraries (those at both the Construction and Combat Engineering Schools)
- Medway Council Archives Service
- The National Archives.
- The Directorate of Corporate Information (formerly Army Historical Branch)

## **8 Archival holdings**

As the museum holds / intends to acquire archives, including photographs and printed ephemera, its governing body will be guided by the Code of Practice on Archives for Museums and Galleries in the United Kingdom (third edition, 2002).

## **9 Acquisition**

### **9.1 The policy for agreeing acquisitions is:**

The Museum has a Collections Committee that meets each month to discuss donations offered to the Museum. Prior to the meeting the Assistant Curator collates all offers, checks them against the Collections Development Policy to ensure they are in line with the policy. The Assistant Curator will then check the items against our holdings catalogued on Adlib. The findings are then presented to the Committee that consists of the Director, Collections Manager, Visitor Engagement Officer, Learning Officer and others that the Museum see fit, including but not limited to members of the Corps of Royal Engineers or subject specialists. Each donation offer is discussed and a decision made based on the findings. Items are looked at for the main collection, education collection and in the future for the tertiary handling collection. At times the Museum will also purchase items for the collection. These items are either decided on by the Director or Trustees of the Museum or put through the same process as donation offers from the public.

- 9.2 The museum will not acquire any object or specimen unless it is satisfied that the object or specimen has not been acquired in, or exported from, its country of origin (or any intermediate country in which it may have been legally owned) in violation of that country's laws. (For the purposes of this paragraph 'country of origin' includes the United Kingdom).
- 9.3 In accordance with the provisions of the UNESCO 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, which the UK ratified with effect from November 1 2002, and the Dealing in Cultural Objects (Offences) Act 2003, the museum will reject any items that have been illicitly traded. The governing body will be guided by the national guidance on the responsible acquisition of cultural property issued by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in 2005.
- 9.4 Items taken into the ownership and care of the Royal Engineers Museum Charity become the property of the Royal Engineers Institution. The Museum, Library and Archive collection of the Corps of Royal Engineers is owned by the Institute of Royal Engineers. The development, management and care of this collection is undertaken by the Royal Engineers Museum Charity. This relationship is defined under the Royal Charter of the Institute of Royal Engineers.

## **10 Human remains**

- 10.1 As the museum holds or intends to acquire human remains under 100 years old, it will obtain the necessary licence under the Human

Tissue Act 2004 and any subordinate legislation from time to time in force.

- 10.2 As the museum holds or intends to acquire human remains from any period, it will follow the procedures in the 'Guidance for the care of human remains in museums' issued by DCMS in 2005.

## **11 Biological and geological material**

- 11.1 So far as biological and geological material is concerned, the museum will not acquire by any direct or indirect means any specimen that has been collected, sold or otherwise transferred in contravention of any national or international wildlife protection or natural history conservation law or treaty of the United Kingdom or any other country, except with the express consent of an appropriate outside authority.

## **12 Archaeological material**

- 12.1 The museum will not acquire archaeological material (including excavated ceramics) in any case where the governing body or responsible officer has any suspicion that the circumstances of their recovery involved a failure to follow the appropriate legal procedures.
- 12.2 In England, Wales and Northern Ireland the procedures include reporting finds to the landowner or occupier of the land and to the proper authorities in the case of possible treasure (i.e. the Coroner for Treasure) as set out in the Treasure Act 1996 (as amended by the Coroners & Justice Act 2009).

## **13 Exceptions**

- 13.1 Any exceptions to the above clauses will only be because the museum is:
- acting as an externally approved repository of last resort for material of local (UK) origin
  - acting with the permission of authorities with the requisite jurisdiction in the country of origin

In these cases the museum will be open and transparent in the way it makes decisions and will act only with the express consent of an appropriate outside authority. The museum will document when these exceptions occur.

## **14 Spoliation**

The museum will use the statement of principles 'Spoliation of Works of Art during the Nazi, Holocaust and World War II period', issued for non-national museums in 1999 by the Museums and Galleries Commission.

## **15 The Repatriation and Restitution of objects and human remains**

- 15.1 The museum's governing body, acting on the advice of the museum's professional staff, if any, may take a decision to return human remains (unless covered by the 'Guidance for the care of human remains in museums' issued by DCMS in 2005), objects or specimens to a country or people of origin. The museum will take such decisions on a case by case basis; within its legal position and taking into account all ethical implications and available guidance. This will mean that the procedures described in 16.1-5 will be followed but the remaining procedures are not appropriate.

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- 15.2 The disposal of human remains from museums in England, Northern Ireland and Wales will follow the procedures in the 'Guidance for the care of human remains in museums'.

## **16 Disposal procedures**

- 16.1 All disposals will be undertaken with reference to the SPECTRUM Primary Procedures on disposal.
- 16.2 The governing body will confirm that it is legally free to dispose of an item. Agreements on disposal made with donors will also be taken into account.
- 16.3 When disposal of a museum object is being considered, the museum will establish if it was acquired with the aid of an external funding organisation. In such cases, any conditions attached to the original grant will be followed. This may include repayment of the original grant and a proportion of the proceeds if the item is disposed of by sale.
- 16.4 When disposal is motivated by curatorial reasons the procedures outlined below will be followed and the method of disposal may be by gift, sale, exchange or as a last resort - destruction.
- 16.5 The decision to dispose of material from the collections will be taken by the governing body only after full consideration of the reasons for disposal. Other factors including public benefit, the

implications for the museum's collections and collections held by museums and other organisations collecting the same material or in related fields will be considered. Expert advice will be obtained and the views of stakeholders such as donors, researchers, local and source communities and others served by the museum will also be sought.

- 16.6 A decision to dispose of a specimen or object, whether by gift, exchange, sale or destruction (in the case of an item too badly damaged or deteriorated to be of any use for the purposes of the collections or for reasons of health and safety), will be the responsibility of the governing body of the museum acting on the advice of professional curatorial staff, if any, and not of the curator or manager of the collection acting alone.
- 16.7 Once a decision to dispose of material in the collection has been taken, priority will be given to retaining it within the public domain. It will therefore be offered in the first instance, by gift or sale, directly to other Accredited Museums likely to be interested in its acquisition.
- 16.8 If the material is not acquired by any Accredited museum to which it was offered as a gift or for sale, then the museum community at large will be advised of the intention to dispose of the material normally through a notice on the MA's Find an Object web listing service, an announcement in the Museums Association's Museums Journal or in other specialist publications and websites (if appropriate).
- 16.9 The announcement relating to gift or sale will indicate the number and nature of specimens or objects involved, and the basis on which the material will be transferred to another institution. Preference will be given to expressions of interest from other Accredited Museums. A period of at least two months will be allowed for an interest in acquiring the material to be expressed. At the end of this period, if no expressions of interest have been received, the museum may consider disposing of the material to other interested individuals and organisations giving priority to organisations in the public domain.
- 16.10 Any monies received by the museum governing body from the disposal of items will be applied solely and directly for the benefit of the collections. This normally means the purchase of further acquisitions. In exceptional cases, improvements relating to the care of collections in order to meet or exceed Accreditation requirements relating to the risk of damage to and deterioration of the collections may be justifiable. Any monies received in compensation for the damage, loss or destruction of items will be applied in the same way. Advice on those cases where the

monies are intended to be used for the care of collections will be sought from the Arts Council England.

- 16.11 The proceeds of a sale will be allocated so it can be demonstrated that they are spent in a manner compatible with the requirements of the Accreditation standard. Money must be restricted to the long-term sustainability, use and development of the collection.
- 16.12 Full records will be kept of all decisions on disposals and the items involved and proper arrangements made for the preservation and/or transfer, as appropriate, of the documentation relating to the items concerned, including photographic records where practicable in accordance with SPECTRUM Procedure on deaccession and disposal.

### ***Disposal by exchange***

- 16.13 The museum will not dispose of items by exchange.

### ***Disposal by destruction***

- 16.14 If it is not possible to dispose of an object through transfer or sale, the governing body may decide to destroy it.
- 16.15 It is acceptable to destroy material of low intrinsic significance (duplicate mass-produced articles or common specimens which lack significant provenance) where no alternative method of disposal can be found.
- 16.16 Destruction is also an acceptable method of disposal in cases where an object is in extremely poor condition, has high associated health and safety risks or is part of an approved destructive testing request identified in an organisation's research policy.
- 16.17 Where necessary, specialist advice will be sought to establish the appropriate method of destruction. Health and safety risk assessments will be carried out by trained staff where required.
- 16.18 The destruction of objects should be witnessed by an appropriate member of the museum workforce. In circumstances where this is not possible, eg the destruction of controlled substances, a police certificate should be obtained and kept in the relevant object history file.

