



ROYAL ENGINEERS
MUSEUM

Acquisition and Disposal Policy 2005-2009

Introduction.

The Museum's mission is to administer and use the Designated Collection to tell the story of the Corps of Royal Engineers, from its origins and in its widest context of military and civil endeavour, in peace and war, in order to promote esprit de corps, education and military efficiency within the Royal Engineers and the positive reputation, experience and opportunities of the Corps and the Army to schools and the General Public.

The collection is central to the mission of the Museum and, as such, its integrity and development is a fundamental responsibility of Trustees and their staff.

This document defines the process of decision making behind the acquisition of artefacts for the collections (Primary and Secondary or 'Handling' collections) and procedures to be followed. It also lays down strict rules on the disposal of artefacts from the collection, when such disposals will be countenanced and the procedures to follow the Museum Association's Code of Ethics (2002) and ensure that:

- items are acquired honestly and responsibly.
- the long term public interest in the collections is safeguarded
- the interests of people who made, used, owned, collected or gave items in the collection are recognised

This Policy supersedes the Acquisition and Disposals Policy compiled as a requirement to Phase 1 Registration (1995) and re-adopted for Phase 2 Registration (2001). It is written in reference to Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) Accreditation Standard (2005) and Best Practice procedures used as a template, format and wording published by the MLA.

Detailed documentation procedures for the acquisition and disposal of artefacts are available in the Museum's Documentation Procedures Manual and Plan. The Museum holds a separate Loans Policy, also updated in 2005.



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1. Existing collections, including the subjects or themes for collecting

The broad subject of the Museums collecting is defined in its mission:

...to tell the story of the Corps of Royal Engineers, from its origins and in its widest context of military and civil endeavour, in peace and war...

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 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 the Primary Collection. Now, in 2005 there are over 30, 000. Object types are listed below:

- Personal archives
- Official archives
- 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.



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2. Criteria governing future collecting policy, including the subjects or themes for collecting

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.
- Artefacts relating to the daily life, work and training of members of the Royal Engineers, their predecessor units and other British and colonial units of military engineers.
- Artefacts 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 and actual equipment illustrating engineering and scientific techniques of relevance or interest to military engineers.
- Artefacts 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.
- Artefacts for use in the Learning and Education programme of the Museum.

Specific areas to which collecting is targeted are listed below:

- Engineering equipment used by members of the Royal Engineers, their predecessor units and other British and colonial units of military engineers during the 18th and 19th centuries.
- Artefacts 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 18th and 19th centuries.



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- Items of uniform worn by members of the Royal Engineers, their predecessor units and other British and colonial units of military engineers during the 18th and early 19th centuries.

3. Period of time and/or geographical area to which collecting relates

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.

4. Limitations on collecting

The museum recognises its responsibility, in acquiring additions to its collections, to ensure that care of collections, documentation arrangements and use of collections will meet the requirements of the Accreditation Standard. It will take into account limitations on collecting imposed by such factors as inadequate staffing, storage and care of collection arrangements.

Specific areas for which collecting is limited are listed below:

- The Museum will not accept items which duplicate those already held in the collection unless they relate to specific units, events, campaigns or individuals significant to the heritage of the Corps previously unrepresented or underrepresented in the collection. Duplicate material includes officially issued forms and personnel papers providing an insignificant amount of additional information on their subject.

Material duplicating that held in the Primary Collection may be acquired for the Handling Collection.



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- The Museum will not accept Ministry of Defence material of a restricted or secret nature without confirming its release and declassification from the appropriate authority.
- The Museum will not accept large items of equipment, including vehicles, unless a realistic method of display or storage exists or is included as a condition of acquisition.
- The Museum will not accept items 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 not collect 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.

5. Collecting policies of other museums

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 specialisation, in order to avoid unnecessary duplication and waste of resources.

Specific reference is made to the following museum(s):

- The National Army Museum
- 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



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6. Policy review procedure

The Acquisition and Disposal Policy will be published and reviewed from time to time, at least once every four years. The date when the policy is next due for review is noted below.

The Regional Agency / Museum Council / CyMAL will be notified of any changes to the Acquisition and Disposal Policy, and the implications of any such changes for the future of existing collections.

7. Acquisitions not covered by the policy

Acquisitions outside the current stated policy will only be made in very exceptional circumstances, and then only after proper consideration by the governing body of the museum itself, having regard to the interests of other museums.

8. Acquisition procedures

a. The Museum will exercise 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.

b. In particular, 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).

c. 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 DCMS in 2005.

d. 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



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Kingdom or any other country, except with the express consent of an appropriate outside authority.

e. The Museum will not acquire archaeological antiquities (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, such as reporting finds to the landowner or occupier of the land and to the proper authorities in the case of possible treasure as defined by the Treasure Act 1996 (in England, Northern Ireland and Wales) or reporting finds through the Treasure Trove procedure (in Scotland).

f. Any exceptions to the above clauses 8a, 8b, 8c, or 8e will only be because the Museum is either:

acting as an externally approved repository of last resort for material of local (UK) origin; or

acquiring an item of minor importance that lacks secure ownership history but in the best judgement of experts in the field concerned has not been illicitly traded; or

acting with the permission of authorities with the requisite jurisdiction in the country of origin; or

in possession of reliable documentary evidence that the item was exported from its country of origin before 1970.

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.

9. 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.

10. Repatriation and Restitution

The Museum's governing body, acting on the advice of the museum's professional staff, may take a decision to return human remains, 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.



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11. Management of archives

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 (3rd ed., 2002).

12. Disposal procedures

- a. By definition, the Museum has a long-term purpose and should possess (or intend to acquire) permanent collections in relation to its stated objectives. The governing body accepts the principle that, except for sound curatorial reasons, there is a strong presumption against the disposal of any items in the museum's collection.
- b. If seeking to dispose of an item the Museum will establish that it is legally free to do so. Any decision to dispose of material from the collections will be taken only after due consideration by Trustees or their delegated managing committee.
- c. 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.
- d. Decisions to dispose of items of the Collection will not be made with the principal aim of generating funds.
- e. Any monies received by the museum governing body from the disposal of items will be applied for the benefit of the collections. This normally means the purchase of further acquisitions but in exceptional cases improvements relating to the care of collections may be justifiable. Advice on these cases will be sought from MLA.
- f. 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), 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 of the collection acting alone.
- g. Once a decision to dispose of material in the collection has been taken, priority will be given to retaining it within the public domain, unless it is to be destroyed. It will therefore be offered in the first instance, by gift, exchange or sale, directly to other Accredited Museums likely to be interested in its acquisition.



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h. If the material is not acquired by any Accredited Museums to which it was offered directly, then the museum community at large will be advised of the intention to dispose of the material, normally through an announcement in the Museums Association's Museums Journal, and in other professional journals where appropriate.

i. The announcement 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.

j. 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 de-accession and disposal.