

## Researching the RE MLA Collection

The Royal Engineers Museum, Library and Archive (RE MLA) is a private charity. Our main objectives, as stated in our mission statement, are the preservation, presentation and provision of access to our Designated Collection.

To this end the RE MLA ensures that all items of the collection are available for public viewing, whether in the gallery displays or by appointment in our Reading Rooms. We are open to the public six days a week, fifty-one weeks of the year. If you are a UK taxpayer you may Gift Aid your ticket making it valid for 12 months.

The RE MLA is not an official government repository for archives and records of the Corps. Our collection has been developed over 200 years and reflects both the general interests of past Royal Engineers and the work undertaken by the Corps through its history. The Library and Archive were established in 1813 to support the training of serving Royal Engineers whilst the Museum developed from a collection of mementoes gathered from across the world by NCOs of the Royal Sappers and Miners as well as members of the Institute of the Royal Engineers.

A research visit to the RE MLA will allow you access to the appropriate original material held in our collections. Members of our curatorial team will also be on hand to assist with any queries you may have. There are a number of rules which we ask visitors to respect; these are in place primarily for the safety and security of our collection but also a stipulation of our landlord the Ministry of Defence. A copy of these is below.

Also, find attached five information sheets providing an overview of our holdings.

1. Records, archives and general resources of use to family historians.
2. Records and archives holding information on the history of Royal Engineer units.
3. Information resources on technical equipment and developments in military engineering.
4. General Corps and British military history.
5. Picture library and reproduction.

## **1. Records, archives and general resources of use to family historians.**

The RE MLA collection does not include the service histories of past or serving Royal Engineers. These can either be found at The National Archives (for men serving up to 1920) or are still held by the Ministry of Defence (for men serving from 1921 to the present). The personal information of military personnel is subject to the Data Protection Act.

The RE MLA does, however, hold a number of records which may be of interest to those researching service histories, including medal awards.

1. Some enlistment records dated 1908-1915 for the Punjab, Malakand, Samana, Tirah, Sierra Leon, Sudan and China.
2. Register of transfers into the Corps from other Army units dated 1881-1904.
3. Discharge Register dated 1921-1980.
4. Registers of officers in Survey Companies dated 1866-1937, 1871-1946, 1927-1952.
5. Register of officers in Tunnelling Companies.
6. Seniority and Nominal Roll of Foremen of Works dated 1925-1946 and 1927-1952.
7. Nominal Roll of Clerks and Draftsmen dated 1925-1949.
8. Seniority roll of Draftsmen of Works dated 1925-1945.
9. Seniority Roll of Mechanics dated 1927-1952.
10. Full set of Army Lists for Commissioned Officers.
11. RE Lists for Commissioned Officers dated to the present day. *Note that some of this material is unavailable to the public as it falls under the Data Protection Act.*
12. Lists of Company and Squadron Commanding Officers (listed in Company Skeleton Histories). *Note that these are listed by unit so you must know which of these the officer was serving in.*
13. Register of Marriages dated 1934-1937.
14. List of Deserters dated 1872-1886.
15. Chelsea Pensioners Effects List.

16. Parents and Orphans claims.
17. Casualty Rolls for the Crimean War, Indian Mutiny, Zulu and Basuto War, World War One, Bomb Disposal, Singapore, Korean War, Malaysia, the Falklands and Scots who died 1941-1982. *Note that many of these are not official rolls but the product of research by staff and other individuals.*
18. Casualty cards dated 1939-1960. These give details of injury, cause of death, service number and unit.
19. World War Two Tracer Cards. These are the old MOD catalogue cards for the service records of Royal Engineers serving in World War Two. They vary in how much information they contain but in general will provide information on postings and give a service number. *Note these are only accessible to staff and not available to researchers for browsing.*
20. Medal Rolls and cards for most campaign medals and some gallantry. *Note that these will not include citations but we do have a run of the London Gazette from 1939- today in which award notifications and citations were published.*

**Note: None of the material listed above is available online and no computer indexes are available.**

21. Personal effects including papers, medals, photograph albums, mementoes. Most of this material has been donated to the RE MLA by the families of past Royal Engineers. *Note that speculative searches (when researchers do not definitely know that family material was donated) usually prove fruitless.*

## **2. Information on the history of the Corps of Royal Engineer and its units.**

The collection as a whole reflects the history of the Royal Engineers and contains many records relating to the companies, squadrons and regiments, as well as any other formations related to or making up the Corps.

1. The History of the Corps of Royal Engineers. This is the 11 volume official history of the Corps, written by past officers of the Corps.
2. The History of the Royal Sappers and Miners. Three volume history written in by QMS TWJ Connolly, the first Corps historian.
3. The History of the Indian Sappers and Miners, written by Lt Col EWC Sandes RE.
4. The Military Engineers in India. Two volumes written by Lt Col EWC Sandes RE.
5. War Diaries recording the day to day activities of companies and squadrons, usually written by the Commanding Officer or another senior officer. The RE MLA holds copies of most World War One units, about 20 World War Two units and a few from the Korean War, Northern Ireland, the Gulf War and Bosnia.
6. Unit files containing records relating to the activities of specific units and compiled from material sent to the Library by units.
7. Letter Books from major UK and overseas Royal Engineer garrisons dated 1780c-1860c. These contain manuscript copies of correspondence entering and exiting the garrison headquarters.
8. Formation table of RE Volunteer and TA Units providing details of when and where volunteer units were raised.
9. Unpublished unit histories and memoirs.
10. Personal papers and diaries of Royal Engineers dating back to the foundation of the Corps and donated to the RE MLA by soldiers and their families.
11. Royal Engineer Journal dating from 1871 to today (including the Supplement from 1905), contributed to by members of the Institution of Royal Engineers and containing articles of professional relevance, many giving detailed accounts of unit involvement in particular operations and exercises.

12. Sapper Magazine dating from 1895 to today, this magazine was written for the whole Corps, including other ranks. Provides a good record of the social history of the Corps including match reports from Corps sports clubs, station news, anecdotes as well as items of professional interest.

**Note: None of the material listed above is available online and only a few are listed on basic indexes or catalogues.**

13. Skeleton Unit Histories. These list Company/Squadron locations and dates of arrival at new postings, they also list Commanding Officers. They were compiled by the RE MLA from a number of sources of varied reliability. *Note that these are available on the RE MLA website, [www.remuseum.org.uk/rem\\_his\\_units.htm](http://www.remuseum.org.uk/rem_his_units.htm).*

### **3. Information resources on technical equipment, techniques and developments in military engineering.**

The collection reflects the work that the Corps has undertaken throughout its two hundred year history and includes many items on the equipment and systems used by the Corps.

1. Training material from the foundation of the Engineering Establishment in 1812.
2. Field Engineering manuals and pocketbooks dating from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.
3. Manuals on equipment ranging from the Chieftain AVRE (tank) to water purification units.
4. Equipment specifications. Over 150 boxes of mostly un-catalogued Specifications, for example, SP0001 Loose specification Booklet (a) Lof C 7-28 No 277(a), Pattern Number RE 134. Bell alarum, polarized L with magneto generator, 9 pages & 2 loose illustrations (b) Lof C 7-28 No 277(b), Pattern Number RE 134. Bell alarum, polarized L with magneto generator, 9 pages & 2 illustrations.
5. Photographs of equipment, mainly bridge and vehicle, trials dating from the 1850s. *Note that our catalogue for the photograph collection is not that accurate, identifying specific marks/type of equipment from the catalogue is rarely possible.*
6. Vehicle Record Cards dating from the 1940s and detailing the service career of RE vehicles. *Note these are listed in registration number order and are not a complete record of all RE vehicles.*
7. Professional Papers dating from the 1860s are collections of technical papers, including many good quality illustrations, written by Royal Engineer officers on a range of subjects as varied as the qualities of different draft animals during the Peninsular War and the ventilation system in Pentonville prison.
8. Royal Engineers Journal dating from 1871 and containing a variety of articles focusing on all activities of the Corps throughout its entire history.
9. Actual equipment, uniforms and vehicles either on display or in storage and available to study.

**Note: None of the material listed above is available online and only a few are listed on basic indexes or catalogues.**

#### **4. General British history.**

Whilst there is an obvious emphasis on the history of the Corps of Royal Engineers and the development of military engineering, the collection holds much of use and interest to those interested in general military history, local history, social history of the armed forces, photograph and ethnography. A small example of this being:

1. The Peninsular War Collection. The RE MLA has a fine collection of archival material from serving Royal Engineers in Spain and Portugal, as well as correspondence and orders from the Duke of Wellington. The Library also holds a large section of books, including many first editions, covering this period.
2. The Zulu War Collection. As well as a good collection of published material on the War the collection also includes the original orders sending Lt Col. A Durnford to Isandlwana, material on the inquest into the defeat at Isandlwana, reports on Lt John Chard VC and correspondence from other Royal Engineers serving in South Africa.
3. The General Gordon Collection. This includes some of his last letters from Khartoum as well as a large printed book collection on his life.

## 5. Picture Library and Reproduction.

1. The RE MLA has a growing library of digital photographs and copies of items in the collection. At the present time, however, it does only hold a few hundred images from a collection numbering over a million items. This image library is currently only accessible to RE MLA staff but there is a long term aim of making sections available online.
2. We do offer a reproduction service for items in the collection, including those not yet held on the image library. However, when set against our Reading Room facilities and other curatorial priorities, this is only a secondary service - we do not have a professional photographer, studio or equipment.
3. We are only able to copy items which will not be damaged by the process and are only able to produce publishable images of flat items which are smaller than A3 (we are able to scan these). We are able to issue 'snap shot' photographs of larger 2D and 3D items but do not guarantee that these are of any reliable quality. A charge of £13.50 per image applies for all reproductions.
4. We are happy for individuals to arrange for a professional photographer to photograph items in the collection but this must be done at the Museum. Additionally, the photographer will be asked to complete an agreement ensuring that the copyright of the photograph remains in the RE MLA's ownership.
5. No images are released for use before a disclaimer or licensing agreement has been signed by the purchaser.
6. The RE MLA will photocopy material for researchers but only if it will not damage the item concerned. We are unable to copy complete works and must have a signed disclaimer stating that the purpose of copying is for research only. Prices for copying are 36p for A4 and 48p for A3 per sheet.
7. No reproduction or copying, whether digital scanning or photocopying will be undertaken unless the researcher has identified the specific material required. RE MLA staff will not research and identify pictures that answer requests for general imagery relating to a subject, place or individual. Researchers are able to view any relevant material in our Reading Rooms and make their choice in person.

8. Procedure for requesting reproductions:

- i. Identify the material you wish to have copied, either by arranging a visit to view the collection or from prior knowledge of what we specifically hold in the collection.
- ii. Complete an order form and request a disclaimer for non-commercial image use or a license agreement for publication of images.
- iii. The RE MLA will then issue an invoice for the images.
- iv. Payment should be returned with the signed and dated disclaimer or license.
- v. On receipt of payment and completed form reproductions will be made and issued either on a CD or in hard copy.

**Note: As stated above, this is not a priority service and backlogs in processing requests do occur. We advise that any orders are placed well in advance of deadlines –by at least two months.**

## Reading Room Rules

1. Readers must complete a 'Research Form' giving their name, address and an accurate description of the purpose of their research before gaining access to the RE MLA collection.
2. Readers accessing the Library and Archive will have to go through MOD security on the main gate of Brompton Barracks. Photographic ID (passport or driving license is required).
3. Food and drink is not permitted.
4. Pens are not permitted, pencils are provided.
5. When removing material from the shelves **do not pull** the spine but reach behind and push the book from the centre of the text block.
6. Photocopy can be undertaken but only if it will not damage the item concerned. We are unable to photocopy complete works and must have a signed disclaimer stating the purpose of copying is for research only. A charge will be made for this service.
7. Photography for reference is permitted on some items in the collection and RE MLA staff will give advice as to what is acceptable (e.g. object handling techniques and the use of flash photography). This must be 'snapshot' photography as camera stands, tripods and additional light sources are forbidden. A disclaimer stating that the purpose of copying is for research only must be signed before this work is undertaken.

**Research Form**

This form must be completed before any access to the RE MLA collection is allowed.

**Name:**

**Address:**

**Tel. No:**

**Date of visit:**

**Reason for research:**

**Items to consult:**

**Accession No:**

**Description:**

**Other:**

Continued overleaf

**I have read and agree to abide by the RE Museum Reading Room Rules.**

**Signed:**

**Printed:**

**Dated:**

**Duty Curator:**