

**THE ROYAL AIR FORCE MUSEUM'S POLICY FOR ACQUISITION AND
DISPOSAL OF ARTEFACTS TO AND FROM THE COLLECTION**

CONTENTS	Page no.
INTRODUCTION	2
ACQUISITION	2
Title	3
Illicit Trade	4
Spoliation	5
Repatriation and Restitution	5
Authorisation	5
Conditions of Acquisition	5
Accessioning	6
DISPOSAL	6
Title	7
Authorisation	7
De-accessioning	8
DOCUMENTATION	8
REVIEW	9
SCHEDULE 1	10

THE ROYAL AIR FORCE MUSEUM'S POLICY FOR ACQUISITION AND DISPOSAL OF ARTEFACTS TO AND FROM THE COLLECTION

INTRODUCTION

1. The purpose of the Royal Air Force Museum is to collect, preserve, display and provide for scholarship, material relating to the history of the Royal Air Force, its predecessors and air forces associated therewith, and aviation generally where a link with the Royal Air Force is established, for the public benefit in perpetuity.
2. The Museum's Collection includes aircraft and associated artefacts, uniforms, medals and decorations, printed material, film, photographs and fine art, and archives.
3. As the Museum holds 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). The Museum also aims to meet the standards outlined within The National Archives Standard for Record Repositories (1st ed., 2004).
4. The Museum's Collection comprises:
 - a) The Collection displayed or stored at the RAF Museum London;
 - b) The Collection displayed, stored or undergoing conservation at the RAF Museum Cosford;
 - c) The Reserve Collection at RAF Museum Stafford;
 - d) Artefacts on loan from the Ministry of Defence, industry, public institutions and private individuals;
 - e) Artefacts from the Collection on loan to other institutions, industry and individuals.
5. For a detailed account of the Museum's collections and future collecting policies refer to Collecting Statement RAFM/DCM/2/6/22.

ACQUISITION

6. The Museum's Collection may be enhanced by the purchase, bequest, gift, exchange or, in special circumstances, loan of an additional artefact in accordance with the RAF Museum Collecting Statement.
7. Authorisation for the initial consideration of the acquisition of an artefact by whatever means, will be given as follows:
 - a) For an artefact not exceeding £1,000, by the appropriate Head of Department;
 - b) For an artefact whose value lies between £1,000, and £9,999, by the Director General;
 - c) For an artefact valued at £10,000 or more by the Board of Trustees.

- d) Any novel or contentious item, regardless of value, may be referred to the Board of Trustees for approval and/or advice.

8. When considering the acquisition of an artefact under paragraphs 4b and 4c, 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. Specific reference is made to the following museums:

- Museum of Army Flying
- Imperial War Museum
- Manchester Museum of Science and Industry
- Science Museum (London)
- Fleet Air Arm Museum
- National Army Museum
- Royal Naval Museum

9. The Museum may acquire artefacts by the exchange of accessioned artefacts with other UK museums, publicly-funded bodies, or in exceptional circumstances with private individuals. This will necessarily involve a disposal to effect the exchange; as such the Museum will observe the correct disposal procedures as detailed in paragraphs 30 to 44 of this policy.

10. Acquisitions outside the current stated policies (see Collecting Statement RAFM/DCM/2/6/22) 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.

11. 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.

12. Where acquisitions involve copyright¹ the status of that copyright is to be formally established and recorded. Whenever possible, copyright should be secured for the Trustees of the Royal Air Force Museum.

Title

13. When receiving artefacts as bequests or gifts the Museum will seek to receive from the executor or donor, as appropriate, written confirmation, or other documentary evidence that the donor or the person making the bequest has title of ownership and that the title is being transferred to the Trustees of the Royal Air Force Museum.

14. In some cases where signed Transfer of Title cannot be obtained, for example anonymous donations or a lack of response from a written request to sign a Transfer

¹ The term "copyright" in this document includes all intellectual property rights such as Design rights, patent rights etc.

of Title form, the Museum will seek to establish whether it is legally able to acquire the item.

15. Where artefacts are offered to the Collection but validity of title to ownership is obscure, the Trustees will seek expert legal advice.

16. 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.

Illicit Trade

17. The Museum must ensure that any artefact 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).

18. 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.

19. 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.

20. The Museum will not acquire any archaeological material.

21. Any exceptions to the above clauses 16, 17, 18 or 20 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.

22. The Museum will report any suspicion of criminal activity to the police.

Spoliation

23. The Museum will use 'Spoliation of Works of Art during the Holocaust and World War II period: Statement of Principles and Proposed Actions', issued by the National Museum Directors' Conference in 1998, and report on them in accordance with the guidelines.

Repatriation and Restitution

24. The Museum has a small holding of human remains, and has taken the decision not to acquire material of this nature in the future.

25. 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.

Authorisation

26. The purchase of any artefact requires authority according to the value of the artefact as follows:

- a) If the value does not exceed £2,000 purchase may be on the authority of the Director Collections Division;
- b) If the value lies above £2,000 agreement of the Director General and a Trustee on behalf of the Board (usually the Chairman) is required.

Conditions of Acquisition

27. The Museum will not normally acquire artefacts by purchase, bequest, gift, exchange or loan, where conditions of acquisition, relating for example to display, disposal or access, are such as to constrain the Museum in fulfilling its purpose, which is to collect, preserve, display and provide for scholarship the artefacts for which it is responsible. This will be brought to the notice of donors/executors of bequests prior to acquisition. Any exceptions will require the approval of the Director General prior to acquisition.

28. The Museum will, from time to time, accept a donation comprising several artefacts, some of which will be surplus or not applicable to the requirements of the Collection. The Museum will not accession these artefacts. When accepting a donation the Museum will advise the donor that it intends to sort through the donation, item by item, and will either return to the donor, dispose of, or destroy any unwanted material. The donor will be asked at the time of making the donation to sign a declaration accepting these conditions and indicating the action the Museum is to take regarding unwanted artefacts. The process of selection is to be completed before any artefacts are accessioned into the Collection.

29. The Museum has in its Collection artefacts which are human remains. Such material will be kept separate from other material and cared for in a sensitive manner. Access is to be restricted to those with a legitimate interest, that is to say, students, scholars and others with a *bona fide* reason to see the material.

Accessioning

30. To accession is to include formally an artefact in the permanent inventory of the Museum's Collection, and to assign to that artefact a particular level of care. The Museum will accession all those artefacts it acquires, to which it has obtained title, and which it considers are appropriate to its permanent collections, including those which it acquired after referral to the Director General under the terms of paragraph 10 above.

DISPOSAL

31. 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. However, disposal may be considered as a course of action in the following cases:

- a) To eliminate unnecessary duplication of accessioned or unaccessioned artefacts (at whatever level is set within any one part of the Collection);
- b) To exchange accessioned or unaccessioned artefacts from within the Collection so as to be able to obtain artefacts of greater importance to the Collection;
- c) To remove from the Collection any artefact whose condition has become such that it is no longer a viable constituent of the Collection;
- d) To remove from the Collection any artefact that is irrelevant to past and present collecting policies.

32. The Museum will establish that it is legally free to dispose of an item. Any decision to dispose of material from the collections will be taken only after due consideration.

33. 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.

34. Decisions to dispose of items will not be made with the principal aim of generating funds.

35. Any monies received by the Museum from the disposal of artefacts will be applied for the benefit of the Museum Collection. This will normally be by the purchase of artefacts for the Collection; in some cases improvements relating to the care of the Collection may be considered. Advice on these cases will be sought from MLA.

Title

36. The Museum will not normally dispose of any artefact, accessioned or un-accessioned, to which it cannot prove title. If the Museum wishes to dispose of material to which it cannot prove title, the approval of the Director General will be required. Disposal method will be in accordance with paragraphs 36 to 44 of this policy.

Authorisation

37. Assuming the Museum is free to dispose of an artefact, for example by virtue of permission from the Charity Commissioners, or the terms under which the artefact was gifted or bequeathed, authority to dispose is required:

- a) If the value does not exceed £2,000 disposal may be on the authority of the Director Collections Division;
- b) If the value lies above £2,000 agreement of the Director General and a Trustee on behalf of the Board (usually the Chairman) is required.

In all cases the recommendation for disposal is to be presented to the Museum's Acquisitions and Disposals Committee by a curator responsible for the artefact(s). Where condition is a factor, or where the disposal method will be destruction, the curator must be accompanied in inspecting the artefact by a senior curator from a separate department and a report of the inspection is to be provided to the Acquisitions and Disposals Committee. The Committee will refer the disposal of valuable or contentious artefacts to the Trustees. Disposals from the Museum cannot be made to past or present members of staff or Trustees.

38. 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.

39. 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.

40. 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.

41. The Museum may wish to dispose of artefacts internally, for example to the Education department for use as a handling collection, or for conservation research. The Museum thereby decides to apply a particular standard of care to those artefacts and recognises that such items may not be held in perpetuity. Artefacts will be de-accessioned and responsibility for managing and recording them passed to the receiving department.

42. Where items recommended for disposal are subject to legal restrictions, such as those imposed by the Official Secrets Acts, Data Protection Acts, or privacy agreements, the Museum will only dispose of the items to an organisation authorised by the relevant legislation to hold such material. If no suitable organisation can be found, and it is not possible to remove the restrictions (for example by requesting downgrading) then the material will be destroyed in an approved manner.

43. The Reserve Collection of 3-Dimensional Artefacts, part of the Royal Air Force Museum Collection, includes a large number of unaccessioned spare parts related to aircraft or associated equipment, which the Museum does not wish to retain for the permanent collection. These spare parts are valuable for the purpose of exchange for other spare parts or services required either to enhance the Collection, or for use in the restoration of the Museum's aircraft or equipment. The Director General may therefore authorise exchanges with private or public organisations or with individuals in the United Kingdom or abroad, having received an assessment and recommendation by the senior specialist curator. Although artefacts exchanged or used in this way will not be accessioned they will be documented and the transaction recorded.

44. The Museum possesses a large quantity of unaccessioned material relating to all its sub-collections. During the Museum inventory exercise, the treatment of these artefacts will be considered on a case by case basis, and unwanted material will be disposed of without being accessioned. Such disposals will be documented.

De-accessioning

45. When the Museum disposes of an accessioned artefact, it will also de-accession that artefact, recording the fact that the artefact is no longer part of the permanent Collection.

DOCUMENTATION

46. All de-accessioning and disposal transactions will be fully documented in accordance with SPECTRUM Procedure on de-accession and disposal.

47. The disposal decision will be made in quarterly meetings of the Museum's Acquisitions and Disposals Committee². Full records will be kept of all decisions, including a note in the meeting minutes and reference on the Museum's Collections Management System (CMS).

48. All acquisition and disposal transactions will be recorded on the CMS and designated Museum forms including, but not limited to, Entry, Transfer of Title and Exit documents. These, together with other supporting documentation, are to be carefully retained as part of the Museum's archive.

49. When an artefact is disposed of a copy of the Transfer of Title document together with associated documentation, including photographic records where practicable, will be made available to the new owner.

² *The Acquisitions and Disposals Committee is made up of at least three senior curatorial staff (including the Director General) and an advisor from the Department of Collections Management.*

50. In order that Trustees are aware of the scope and volume of acquisitions and disposals they are to be provided, twice yearly, with a summary of acquired and disposed artefacts. This will comprise total numbers of artefacts acquired and accessioned by each department and a description of artefacts de-accessioned with their disposal reason and method.

REVIEW

51. This document will be published and reviewed at least once every two years. The next review will take place in or before the year 2009.

52. MLA 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.

53. The Acquisition and Disposals policy will be made available to those authorities and institutions listed at Schedule 1 and to any others upon request. Authorities and institutions listed at Schedule 1 will also be issued policy amendments covering changes made during review.

54. Any comments concerning the contents of this document are to be addressed to the Registrar at the Royal Air Force Museum.

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Schedule 1 to the Royal Air Force Museum's Policy for Acquisition and Disposal.

List of Authorities and Institutions to receive copies:

- British Aviation Preservation Council
- Fleet Air Arm Museum
- House of Commons Library
- House of Lords Library
- Imperial War Museum
- Manchester Museum of Science and Industry
- Ministry of Defence (Air)
- Museum of Army Flying
- Museums Libraries and Archives Council (MLA)
- National Army Museum
- The National Archives (HMC)
- Royal Naval Museum, Portsmouth
- Science Museum, London