So, what is it like to be an artefact?

Julie Brierley – Head of Access and Learning

Never in a million years would I have ever imagined that I would become a Museum exhibit, and certainly not displayed next to the founder of the Royal Air Force!

Why am I an exhibit you may ask? Well...

In May 1990, I took the steps to join the RAF as an Avionics Mechanic. There were not many woman in ground crew roles but I had always loved engineering so my journey began. Below is a picture of me based at RAF Cosford!
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In March 1991, the squadrons at RAF Coltishall were to be deployed to Turkey - some of the groundcrew had not long returned from the Gulf War to their families so they were looking for volunteers in other areas of the station. At the time, I worked in the Aircraft Servicing Flight and asked if we could go but being a female, we would not have been allowed. However, after some questioning and work, it was decided that we would be able to go with the squadron! We were deployed with women from other stations and we also had to have a “minder”

As it turns out, we were the first women groundcrew to be deployed on active service. It was not easy and we were watched constantly!

Not long after that I was posted to RAF Bruggen to a frontline squadron. Again, I was the first female Avionics Mechanic on the squadron! I was then deployed to Saudi Arabi and many other places.
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My proudest moment was being awarded my Air Operations Iraq Medal - not for bravery but for being part of that operation.

I served for ten years in total and I am now the Head of Access and Learning at the RAF Museum Cosford. My life size cut out takes pride of place in the Museum next to 1st Viscount Hugh Trenchard, the father of the Royal Air Force. Seeing a cut-out of me at work is surreal – there is some debate as to which is taller though!

So, being an exhibit makes me feel slightly old and sometimes I feel a bit like it was someone else's life - but I could not be prouder!