THE ROYAL AIR FORCE MUSEUM’S POLICY FOR DIGITISATION

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THE ROYAL AIR FORCE MUSEUM’S POLICY FOR DIGITISATION

Name of museum: Royal Air Force Museum
Name of governing body: Trustees of the Royal Air Force Museum
Delegated authority given to the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) by the Board of Trustees for Collections related Policies and Procedures
Date on which this policy was approved via SLT delegation: 20 June 2017
Date at which this policy is due for review: 2 Years

SCOPE AND PURPOSE

1. This document communicates the RAF Museum’s policy toward the digitisation of its collection.

2. This policy will remain in constant development, subject to the evolution of best practice within the sector, Museum finances, availability of equipment, as well as staff and volunteer levels.

3. Digitisation involves various processes and techniques which capture objects in digital form. These activities and the products produced are defined below.

4. The Museum conducts on-going digitisation in order to populate its Collections Management System (CMS). This is referred to in this policy as ‘digitisation activities’.

5. The Museum plans and carries out digitisation projects. These are currently formed around a particular collection, access project or exhibition.

JUSTIFICATION

6. Digitisation is used for preserving and enabling worldwide direct access to the Museum’s collections which is essential to its vision, purpose, values and current strategic priorities.

OBJECTIVES

7. Digitisation projects and activities carried out by the Museum will:

   a. Improve public access to the Museum’s Collection.

   b. Assist in the preservation of Collections by reducing the need to handle objects.

   c. Showcase the diversity of the Museum’s collections.
d. Broaden the Museum’s audience, attract curiosity and inspire learning.

e. Support research, learning and exhibition programmes within the Museum.

f. Where possible, generate income through the sale and licensing of digital copies from the Collection.

DEFINITIONS

Digitisation

8. “Digitisation has come to signify the various activities through which physical (analogue) cultural content, such as books, artifacts, records and other cultural material are translated into a digital form, described and made accessible through digital channels such as the Internet.”¹

9. Digitisation is a process of obtaining a digital representation of an original through scanning, digital photography or digital recording and video devices.

Digital Asset/Object

10. A digital asset (also known as a digital object) is a digital file considered to have value. It can either be born digital or be a digital surrogate. This policy will use the term ‘digital objects’ in order to refer to digital surrogates of the Museum’s Collection.

Digital Surrogate

11. Digital surrogates are electronic or digitised copies of original documents, photographs, film, sound recordings or other material.

Preservation Copy

12. The Preservation Copy is the high resolution/quality and uncompressed version of a digitised object. Any alterations to or editing of the file must only be made if deemed necessary to improve the quality of the digital file, otherwise it should remain unaltered and the best digital representation of the physical item digitised.

13. Stored with restricted access within a designated digital vault for preservation purposes, Preservation Copies are the source from which an Access Copy and other digital versions can be produced.

Access Copy

14. A user friendly version of a Preservation Copy, with wider access privileges stored separately from the Preservation Copy.

Reference Copy

15. A digital object which does not adhere to Preservation or Access Copy standards. These are edited files which are not a full representation of the physical object. For example, a face cropped from a group portrait or a sound bite from an oral history recording.

CMS Image

16. An image with a maximum file size of 180KB which represents an object on the Vernon CMS.

RESPONSIBILITIES

17. In order to ensure the employment of best practice, the Digitisation Officer and the Museum Photographer should be consulted on proposed digitisation projects.

18. Curators and Curatorial Assistants will carry out or arrange for the digitisation of their respective collections in relation to cataloguing and public enquiries with the support of the Digitisation Officer and Museum Photographer.

19. Copyright and Data Protection Officer(s) should be consulted to ensure digitised objects adhere to data protection principles and intellectual property law especially where digitised material will be made publicly accessible.

PRINCIPLES

20. Digitisation projects and activities will usually be carried out within the Museum in order to minimise loss or damage to the collection being digitised. In some instances, however, outsourcing the digitisation process may be necessary.

21. Staff and volunteers carrying out digitisation will receive training in accordance to the project or activity’s requirements.

22. Objects and collections should only be digitised once, adopting the Create Once Publish Everywhere (COPE) strategy. This strategy not only contributes to staff efficiency but also significantly reduces the handling and exposure of an object to the stressful processes of digitisation.

23. Re-digitising a collection should only be necessary if there is a definite shortfall in the standard and quality required of the Preservation Copy.

24. In accordance with the Museum’s digitisation standards, all digitisation projects and activities will produce Preservation Copies in the first instance saved in an open file format. Access Copies and CMS images will then be created through batch processing.

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2 http://paulrowe.net/create-once-publish-everywhere/ Accessed 12/08/2015
25. All digitisation projects will have a Digitisation Project Plan document to outline clear workflows and roles.

26. Matters of collections care, copyright, data protection, metadata and an appropriate capture process must be addressed and clarified as part of the planning process before digitisation is carried out.

27. All digitisation activities will assess and accommodate the preservation needs of the original object or collection to ensure no damage is caused through the digitisation process. The format and condition of the original item will inform the choice of equipment and process to be used. If necessary, conservation of the item will be carried out prior to digitisation if this achieves the best capture.

28. Storage for digital objects produced by digitisation projects will be planned for in advance before digitisation takes place.

29. All digitisation projects and activities will undertake indexing tasks, recording metadata within the process.

30. All digitisation projects and activities will employ quality assurance processes to ensure standards are adhered to and that digital objects are not corrupted, and remain as authentic as possible to the physical object.

31. Preservation Copies resulting from digitisation are to be considered to be of the same cultural value as accessioned collections and will, therefore, be cared for in order to maintain their longevity.

PRIORITIES

The priorities for the digitisation of the collection are as follows:

32. **Preservation of Collections**
   Objects and collections identified as being fragile or actively degrading are to be digitised at the earliest opportunity as a priority. Preserving them digitally and making them accessible digitally will reduce the need for handling and therefore the risk of total loss.

33. **Significant material**
   The Museum has within its holdings many unique and culturally important items, the digitisation of which would not only enable public access but also promote the breadth and diversity of the collection.

34. **Access**
   Broadening and promoting access to the Museum's collection is the greatest motivation to digitise collections. Access to the digital collection is provided through a number of online outlets including:
   - Royal Air Force Museum main website [rafmuseum.org.uk](http://rafmuseum.org.uk)
   - Royal Air Force Museum Photo Store [rafmuseumphotos.com](http://rafmuseumphotos.com)
   - Navigator Online Collections [navigator.rafmuseum.org](http://navigator.rafmuseum.org)
Digital collections are also accessed through digital terminals placed within the gallery spaces.

Access will also be provided by the Digital Asset Management System.

It will also be possible, with the employment of middleware software, for digital collections to be accessed through various digital applications developed by the Museum.

35. **Exhibitions**

Objects and collections may be digitised for use in exhibitions. Objects destined for physical display should ideally be digitally captured beforehand in order to maintain a minimum level of access to the information they contain.

36. **Public enquiries**

Objects and collections are regularly digitised in response to enquiries from the public. These should be digitised to preservation standard to populate the Museum’s digital collections and then copied to the requirements specified by the user in accordance to appropriate licensing and copyright rules. These can then be stored as Reference Copies for reuse, ensuring the work is not lost and supports efficiency of future enquiries.

37. **Cataloguing**

Fully catalogued objects and collections should have images attached to their CMS record. A CMS image can be created from the Preservation Copy which will populate the CMS record. Digitising to preservation standard in the first instance will enable high quality Access Copies to be made. This should prevent the need to revisit the collection or object to re-digitise it in the event of a public request or exhibition.

**POLICY DEVELOPMENT**

38. As new technology develops and becomes attainable, this policy, together with its procedures, will be reviewed and updated in accordance with best practice within the museum and heritage sector.