# THE ROYAL AIR FORCE MUSEUM’S POLICY FOR DOCUMENTATION OF COLLECTIONS

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Version 1: March 2014
The Royal Air Force Museum’s Policy for Documentation of Collections

Name of museum: Royal Air Force Museum

Name of governing body: Trustees of the Royal Air Force Museum

Date on which this policy was approved by governing body: March 2014

Date at which this policy is due for review: March 2016

Introduction

1. This policy covers how the Royal Air Force Museum obtains, records, maintains and makes accessible information about its collections.

2. The Royal Air Force Museum’s collection includes both the physical collection and its related documentation. This documentation includes, in addition to historic and technical data, information relating to collections management activities. This information is the key to unlocking the Museum’s collections.

3. Access to the Museum’s rich and diverse collections is the key driver behind documentation. This access is facilitated by accurate, accountable and accessible information recorded through the most efficient and effective means. Effective documentation adds value to the collections and thus benefits the Museum and its audience.

Definitions

4. The Museum distinguishes between two different classes of object within the collection, which are treated separately in regard to documentation.

Documentation

5. Documentation (or Collections Information) is the information the Museum collects, creates, holds and maintains about its collections.

Accessioned

6. Accessioned objects are those that have been formally accepted into the permanent collection. Accessioned objects fall into two sub-classes:
   a) Old Accessions (1965-1998) which are recorded on the Collections Management System (CMS) at Inventory level
   b) New Accessions (1998-present) which are recorded on the CMS at Full Catalogue level

Unaccessioned

7. Unaccessioned objects are not considered part of the permanent collection and have not been formally accepted therein. Around two thirds of the collections on the Museum’s premises were identified as being un-accessioned in a survey in 2009.
These objects are currently being recorded through the Museum’s Un-accessioned Inventory project, which commenced in 2010.

8. The Museum documents objects according to both their class and their status (e.g. the quality of existing documentation at the time of electronic recording). Those objects which are New Accessions (since 1998) receive Full Catalogue records on the CMS. Those objects previously accessioned on paper (1965-1998) receive Inventory records on the CMS, while those un-accessioned, with no existing documentation, receive Inventory records in Excel prior to Collection Review (rationalisation).

Full Catalogue

9. Catalogue is defined in SPECTRUM¹ as: 'The compilation and maintenance of key information, formally identifying and describing objects. It may include the provenance of objects and also collections management documentation, e.g. details of acquisition, conservation, exhibition and loan history.' The Museum uses the status Full Catalogue in order to register those objects or groups of objects which have been fully recorded on the CMS. These records incorporate more detail than Inventory level and include such details as Measurement details, Condition, Valuations, History, more detailed descriptive information and more in depth subject indexing.

Inventory

10. Inventory is defined in SPECTRUM² as: 'The maintenance of up-to-date information accounting for and locating all objects for which the organisation has a legal responsibility. This may include objects on loan, un-accessioned or previously undocumented items, temporarily deposited objects and support collections.' This includes sufficient information about an item to make it identifiable – including Object Number; Object Name; Title; Brief Description – and traceable through Current Location; Cataloguer; Catalogued Date; Object Status.

Aims and Objectives

11. The aim of the Museum’s Documentation Policy is that for every object or group of objects in the Collection the Museum has:
   a) documentary evidence of legal title, whether held under the Museum’s title or by individuals or organisations that lend material to the Museum;
   b) all objects labelled or marked with accession numbers that uniquely identify them, and can be correlated with the information recorded on the CMS and in the Accession Register;
   c) effective links between objects and all other associated records documentation;
   d) accurate object records in the form of a Collections Management System (CMS) and Accession Register;
   e) an accurate and up-to-date record of location and movement transactions;

¹ Spectrum: The UK Museum Collections Management Standard; © 2011 Version 4.0 Collections Trust - p. 40
² Spectrum: The UK Museum Collections Management Standard; © 2011 Version 4.0 Collections Trust - p. 30
f) an accurate and up-to-date record of loan-out agreements and disposal/dispersal activity

12. Collections will be recorded in accordance with written policies and procedures (see item 15) and documentation standards in the form of Cataloguing Rules and Style Guide. The Cataloguing Rules are based on SPECTRUM standards.

13. The Museum will maintain a Documentation Plan to support this policy. This plan will be reviewed annually and incorporated into the Museum’s Strategic Plan.

14. The major objective of the Documentation Plan will be the documentation of all objects or groups of objects held in the Museum’s custody – both accessioned and unaccessioned collections.

Policy

15. This Documentation Policy should be read in conjunction with the following policies and procedures:

a) Acquisition & Disposal Policy and Procedures;
b) Entry Policy and Procedure;
c) Exit Policy and Procedure;
d) Loans-In Policy and Procedure;
e) Loans-Out Policy and Procedure;
f) Accessioning Policy and Procedure;
g) Labelling & Marking Policy and Procedures;
h) Movement & Transportation Policy and Procedure.

16. Objects or groups of objects are documented through the following forms of record:

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<tr>
<td>Movement</td>
<td>Object Record on CMS</td>
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17. All objects of intrinsic heritage value taken into the Museum’s care and held on its premises will be documented in accordance with the Museum’s Entry Policy and Procedure.

18. An electronic object record will be created on the CMS for all objects or groups of objects accessioned into the permanent collection, following transfer of title, and loans-in. These records must list each object/group by accession number, give a full description, enable each item to be located, enable each item to be retrieved through indexes and provide details relating to the acquisition.
19. For the purpose of administration the Museum has adopted three levels of object record in order to facilitate the Collection Inventory and Collection Review (rationalisation):
   a) CMS Full Catalogue (all new accessions will be recorded at this level);
   b) CMS Inventory (a reduced catalogue record for the inventory of accessioned collections);
   c) Excel Inventory (for unaccessioned collections pending Collection Review).

20. All documentation must be accurate and well maintained. Any additions or changes to object records on the CMS must be made according to the Cataloguing Rules and Style Guide and be adequately verified and monitored in order to ensure consistency.

21. A printed Accessions Register will be produced annually by the Museum Registrar. This will record the formal acceptance of items into the Museum’s permanent collection and will be signed by the Museum Registrar.

22. Written evidence relating to each acquisition and disposal will be filed by the relevant collecting department and made accessible to the Museum Registrar as and when required.

23. Gaps and backlogs in documentation are monitored by the Museum Registrar. Programmes to complete cataloguing gaps will be instituted by the heads of collecting departments in order to ensure accuracy and completeness in the Accession Register.

24. Access to object information will be provided where possible. Such access will take into account the confidentiality or security implications of some types of information. Access to information will also be provided to the public through electronic communications where possible.

25. Documentation must be physically secure. The Accession Register should be made using archival quality materials. Duplicate records should be made and maintained at a separate site from the originals.

26. The Museum will ensure the long term accessibility of documentation held in electronic form. Information will be protected from the impact of potential obsolescence in electronic systems. Where documentation is held in electronic systems, a copy should be kept in a secure place, protected from fire and water.

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