Imperial War Museum Acquisition and Disposal Policy
This policy was approved by the Board of Trustees on: March 2011
Date at which this policy is due for review: March 2016

1 Our Purpose
1.1 Imperial War Museum (the Museum) enriches people’s understanding of the causes, course and consequences of modern war and conflict
1.2 IWM explores world conflict from contemporary perspectives with a focus on Britain and its former empire
1.3 IWM is a museum rather than a memorial: but we can also be a place of commemoration and reflection
1.4 IWM is a war museum rather than a military museum: we concentrate on people’s experience of war and its impact on society

2 Our key messages and outcomes
Our key messages are:
- War reveals people at their best and their worst
- War amplifies human dilemmas
- War is one of the most destructive force in history – but can be immensely creative
- War is an extreme human experience
- War drives people to bear witness to their experiences

We want our audiences to:
- Understand human behaviour
- Relate to human dilemmas
- Explore the dynamics between creative and destructive forces
- Debate how people and societies deal with war and conflict
- Understand how the indescribable can be expressed

3 Our approach
3.1 We will present war and conflict by making use of and showing the historical processes of:
3.2 Chronology - Unevenness of time/events; living graph; sense of time/period; characteristic features of periods/societies; can be used to present/test hypotheses
3.3 Change and continuity - A turning point; a catalyst; progression; stagnation; regression; continuity
3.4 Interpretations - How historians/others form interpretations; how and why interpretations differ (range of media); evaluating interpretations for validity
3.5 Significance - Revealing; remarked upon; remembered; resonant; resulting in change
3.6 Diversity - Different ideas, beliefs, attitudes, experiences of different people (not just a shorthand term for ethnic minorities – much wider than this); how they have shaped the world
3.7 Cause, course and consequence - Reasons for, results of, historical events, situations, changes
4 Acquisition Policy Purpose and Definitions

4.1 The Collection is defined as the total body of culturally significant items, or part thereof, held by the organisation.

4.2 Acquisition is the process of obtaining responsibility for an item, associated due diligence, rights management and transfer of title.

4.3 Items may be held at Acquisition to deliver the Explore History facility and other parts of the Museum’s interpretive and research roles for as long as they fulfil these aims. Items held at Acquisition will, for example, include modern books and periodicals, and surrogates of content held by the Museum.

4.4 Accession is a status afforded to those items (art, material culture and artefact collection items, archives of documents, film, video, photographs and sound records, rare books and special library collections) that the Museum deems to be of such significance that they merit permanent retention and preservation on behalf of the Nation.

4.5 Disposal is defined as the permanent physical removal of material from the Museum’s collection by gift, sale, exchange, or planned destruction. Accessioned items must be deaccessioned before they can be disposed of.

4.6 The collections contain a number of items that are considered to be duplicates. The rigour applied to the disposal of duplicate material is lower than that applied to other items as the disposal of duplicates will be approved by the Board of Trustees without reference to the Secretary of State. Further detail is provided in Appendix One to this document.

4.7 This statement defines the Acquisition and Disposal Policy of the Trustees of the Imperial War Museum. The Policy applies to all sites and all branches of the Museum.

4.8 The primary purpose of this Policy is to assist the Board of Trustees to fulfil the statutory requirements of the Museum; the Policy is also intended to meet the requirements of the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council’s (MLA) Accreditation Scheme and to be a public document as required.

5 Related Policy Areas

5.1 Two areas of Policy and Procedure are directly related namely, Entry and Loans.

5.2 The Museum’s Entry Policy and Procedure controls the management and documentation of items and groups of items within the Museum’s custody for which the Museum has not taken ownership through transfer of title. These items are held at Entry temporarily pending appraisal to determine whether they should be acquired, accessioned or exit the Museum. Where possible the assessment is undertaken before the items’ arrival at the Museum.

5.3 The Museum’s Loans In Policy and procedure controls the subset of items within the Museum’s custody for which the Museum has taken temporary responsibility for an agreed and fixed duration and no transfer of title has taken place. This policy does not apply to items leaving the Museum for Loans Out whether short or long term; that is controlled by the Loan Out Policy and procedure.

6 Existing collections, including the subjects or themes and the periods of time and/or geographic areas to which the collections relate
6.1 The Imperial War Museum (IWM) was founded in 1917 to record the story of the Great War and the contributions made by the peoples of the Empire and Dominions to it. The Museum and its governing body, the Board of Trustees, were formally established by the Imperial War Museum Act, 1920. The Museum's powers of lending were further enhanced by the Imperial War Museum Act of 1955 and further amended by the Museums and Galleries Act of 1992, Schedule 8. The Museum operates on five sites: IWM London, the Churchill War Rooms, IWM Duxford, HMS Belfast and IWM North.

6.2 In 1939 the remit of the Board of Trustees was extended to include the Second World War and in 1953 the terms of reference were further expanded to include all military operations in which British or Commonwealth forces have been involved since August 1914. The Museum is thus the national museum of conflict involving British and Commonwealth forces from the First World War onwards.

6.3 The Museum is the official repository for relevant film and photographs under the terms of the Public Records Act 1958.

6.4 The Museum records and interprets all relevant aspects of modern war, and of the individual's experience of war and wartime life, whether allied or enemy, service or civilian, military or political, social or cultural.

6.5 In order to explain the causes of the First World War onwards, the Museum collects from 1900 to the present day.

6.6 The Museum delivers its Mission through the acquisition, public access and interpretation of diverse holdings; art, material culture and artefact collection, archives of documents, film, video, photographs and sound records, and a library with reference materials and publications.

7 Aims of the acquisition programme

7.1 The aims of the acquisitions programme are to:

7.1.1 ensure the continuing selective development of the collection to provide well-balanced and up-to-date coverage of the Museum's remit

7.1.2 support major exhibitions at all sites and online

7.1.3 provide access to primary evidence and key secondary sources for research, publishing, broadcasting and public needs

8 Approach to acquisition and disposal

8.1 Collecting may result from proactive projects or in response to the offer of material by members of the public or other institutions. In both instances collecting will be a focused outcome of the formal review of the existing collection. Collection Reviews will be undertaken in consultation with staff of all branches to support priority exhibitions and learning programmes having particular regard to the remit of the branches. The result will be targeted areas for acquisition and disposal.

8.2 The priority for proactive collecting is Contemporary Conflict involving British and Commonwealth forces. This will be managed as part of an organisation-wide Contemporary Conflicts Project, supported and contextualised by official audio-visual transfer material. The Project will give priority to complete mixed media collections that reflect strong personal stories and represent all aspects of an individual's
experience of conflict, and so help to reveal or illustrate broader, generic themes. The Contemporary Conflicts Project will be augmented by commissions (for example, through the Art Commissions Committee) and acquisitions that explore the broader context of modern conflict. A key part of this initiative is the War Story Project (2009 to 2012) that will diversify the type of material collected (for example, exploiting digital social media) by proactively engaging contributors.

8.3 The priorities for Collections Review are:

8.3.1 The First and Second World War Collections. The context of the review will be the ability of the Collection to support redevelopment of the galleries for the centenary of the beginning of the First World War, informed by up to date research and new academic interpretations. Given the strengths of the Collection relating to operational history this will focus on the international and social context (e.g. the impact on children, the role of those recruited from Asia, Africa and the West Indies and other minority groups). The First World War Collections will be reviewed first followed by the Second World War.

8.3.2 It is anticipated that these reviews will be followed by assessment of all items on display, the broader social history context of post 1945 conflicts, the Cold War, post Cold War conflicts, decolonisation and the impact of conflict and its role in shaping the modern world.

8.4 The priorities for Collections Review are also the priority areas when considering offers of material from the public or other institutions. Until such time as the Collections Reviews are completed future acquisitions will be limited to those items that are of exceptional quality, significance, provenance, and afford sufficient public access rights to support the Museum’s Mission. The Collections Review Committee will review all acquisitions that have substantial resource limitations (clause 9.1), require broad assessment e.g. mixed media collections and all disposals. The Committee is chaired by the Director of Collections and Research and includes members from the departments of Collections, Collections Access, Collections Management, Exhibitions and Learning and Interpretation.

9 Limitations on collecting

9.1 The Museum recognises its responsibility, in acquiring additions to its Collections, to ensure that care, documentation and use will meet the requirements of the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) Accreditation Standard. It will take into account limitations on collecting imposed by such factors as staffing, storage and care of collection arrangements.

10 Collecting policies of other museums

10.1 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 when making significant acquisition, accession and disposal decisions. 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.

10.2 Specific reference is made to the museums listed in Appendix Two.

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11 Policy review procedure

11.1 The Acquisition and Disposal Policy will be published and reviewed from time to time, at least once every five years. The date when the policy is next due for review is noted above.

11.2 MLA Council 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.

12 Acquisitions not covered by the policy

12.1 Acquisitions outside the current stated policy will only be made in very exceptional circumstances, and then only after proper consideration by the Collections Review Committee, which will recommend a course of action to the Board of Trustees, having regard to the interests of other museums.

13 Acquisition procedures

13.1 The Museum will exercise due diligence and make every effort not to acquire, whether by purchase, gift, bequest, exchange, deposit (under the Public Records Act) and transfer (from government departments such as the Ministry of Defence (MOD)) any object or specimen unless the Board of Trustees or responsible officer is satisfied that the Museum can acquire a valid title to the item in question.

13.2 In particular, the Museum will not acquire any object or specimen unless it is satisfied that the object or specimen 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).

13.3 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 Board of Trustees will be guided by the national guidance on the responsible acquisition of cultural property issued by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in 2005.

13.4 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.

13.5 The Museum will not acquire archaeological antiquities (including excavated ceramics) in any case where the Board of Trustees or responsible officer has any suspicion that the circumstances of their recovery involved a failure to follow the appropriate legal procedures.

13.6 In England, Northern Ireland and Wales the procedures include reporting finds to the landowner or occupier of the land and to the proper authorities in the case of possible treasure as defined by the Treasure Act 1996.

13.7 In Scotland, under the laws of *bona vacantia* including Treasure Trove, the Crown has title to all ownerless objects including antiquities. Scottish archaeological material cannot therefore be legally acquired by means other than by allocation to a Museum by the Crown. Where the Crown chooses to forego its title to a portable antiquity, a
Curator or other responsible person acting on behalf of the Museum, can establish that valid title to the item in question has been acquired by ensuring that a certificate of ‘No Claim’ has been issued on behalf of the Crown.

13.8 Any exceptions to the above clauses 13.1 to 13.7 will only be made when the Museum is:

13.8.1 acting as an externally approved repository of last resort for material of local (UK) origin; or

13.8.2 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 stolen or illegally exported; or

13.8.3 acting with the permission of authorities with the requisite jurisdiction in the country of origin; or

13.8.4 in possession of reliable documentary evidence that the item was exported from its country of origin before 1970; or

13.8.5 maintaining possession of an object subject to an ownership dispute until the dispute is resolved.

13.9 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.

13.10 As the Museum holds human remains under 100 years old, it will maintain the necessary licence under the Human Tissue Act 2004.

14 Spoliation


15 Human remains

15.1 The Museum’s Board of Trustees, acting on the advice of the Museum’s professional staff, may take a decision to return human remains (unless covered by the Guidance for the care of human remains in museums issued by DCMS in 2005), 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 and available guidance. This will mean that the procedures described in 18.1 to 18.4, 20.1 and 24.1 below will be followed but the remaining procedures are not appropriate.

15.2 The disposal of human remains from museums in England, Northern Ireland and Wales will follow the procedures in the Guidance for the care of human remains in museums.

16 Management of archives

16.1 As the Museum holds archives, including film, video, photographs and printed ephemera, its Board of Trustees will be guided by the Code of Practice on Archives for Museums and Galleries in the United Kingdom (3rd ed., 2002).
17 Disposal Policy

17.1 Disposal is the permanent removal of an item accessioned into the collection from the ownership of Museum’s Board of Trustees by the process of gift, sale, exchange or planned destruction (in the case of an item too badly damaged or deteriorated to be of any use or on the grounds of health and safety).

18 Disposal preliminaries

18.1 The Board of Trustees will ensure that the disposal process is carried out openly and with transparency.

18.2 By definition, the Museum has a long-term purpose and holds collections in trust for society in relation to its stated objectives. The Board of Trustees therefore accepts the principle that sound curatorial reasons for disposal must be established before consideration is given to the disposal of any items in the Museum’s collection.

18.3 The Museum will confirm that it is legally free to dispose of an item and agreements on disposal made with donors, depositors and transferors will be taken into account.

18.4 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 and a proportion of the proceeds if the item is disposed of by sale.

19 Motivation for disposal and method of disposal

19.1 When disposal is motivated by curatorial reasons the procedures outlined in paragraphs 20.1 to 24.1 will be followed and the method of disposal may be by gift, sale, exchange or planned destruction.

19.2 In exceptional cases, the disposal may be motivated principally by financial reasons. The method of disposal will therefore be by sale and the procedures outlined below in paragraphs 20.1 to 23.4.2 and 24.1 will be followed. In cases where disposal is motivated by financial reasons, the Board of Trustees will not undertake disposal unless it can be demonstrated that all the following exceptional circumstances are met in full:

19.2.1 the disposal will significantly improve the long-term public benefit derived from the remaining collection,

19.2.2 the disposal will not be undertaken to generate short-term revenue (for example to meet a budget deficit),

19.2.3 the disposal will be undertaken as a last resort after other sources of funding have been thoroughly explored.

20 The disposal decision-making process

20.1 Whether the disposal is motivated either by curatorial or financial reasons, the decision to dispose of material from the Collections will be taken by the Board of Trustees only after full consideration of the reasons for disposal. Other factors including the public benefit, the implications for the Museum’s Collections, Public Programme and collections held by museums and other organisations collecting the same material or in related fields will be considered. External expert advice will be obtained and the views of stakeholders such as donors, researchers, local and source communities and others served by the Museum will also be sought.
21 Responsibility for disposal decision-making

21.1 A decision to dispose of a specimen or object, whether by gift, exchange, sale or destruction, will be the responsibility of the Board of Trustees of the Museum acting on the advice of the Collections Review Committee and not of any Archivist, Collections Manager, Curator, or Librarian acting alone.

22 Use of proceeds of sale

22.1 Any monies received by the Museum from the disposal of items will be applied for the benefit of the collections. This normally means the purchase of further acquisitions. In exceptional cases, improvements relating to the care of collections in order to meet or exceed Accreditation requirements relating to the risk of damage to and deterioration of the collections may be justifiable. Any monies received in compensation for the damage, loss or destruction of items will be applied in the same way. Advice on those cases where the monies are intended to be used for the care of collections will be sought from MLA.

22.2 The proceeds of a sale will be ring-fenced so it can be demonstrated that they are spent in a manner compatible with the requirements of the Accreditation standard.

23 Disposal by gift or sale

23.1 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 or sale, directly to other Accredited museums likely to be interested in its acquisition.

23.2 If the material is not acquired by any Accredited museums to which it was offered directly as a gift or for sale, 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 or Find an Object website, and in other specialist journals where appropriate.

23.3 The announcement relating to gift or sale 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 giving priority to organisations in the public domain.

23.4 The Museum may consider disposal by sale in the following circumstances:

23.4.1 Where it has not been possible to identify an appropriate public domain recipient after following the Museum’s disposal procedure and it is considered in the public interest to realise the market value of the object.

23.4.2 If an object being considered for disposal was purchased with restricted funds from one of the Museum’s Trust Funds; trust law requires fair market value be realised. Any proposal to disposal of an object by sale will be given full and careful consideration by the Board of Trustees and requires approval from the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport.

23.5 The nature of disposal by exchange means that the Museum will not necessarily be in a position to exchange the material with another Accredited museum. The Board of
Trustees will therefore ensure that issues relating to accountability and impartiality are carefully considered to avoid undue influence on its decision-making process.

23.6 In cases where the Board of Trustees wishes for sound curatorial reasons to exchange material directly with Accredited or unaccredited museums, with other organisations or with individuals, the procedures in paragraphs 18.1 to 18.4 and 20.1 to 21.1 will be followed as will the procedures in paragraphs 23.7 to 24.1.

23.7 If the exchange is proposed to be made with a specific Accredited museum, other Accredited museums which collect in the same or related areas will be directly notified of the proposal and their comments will be requested.

23.8 If the exchange is proposed with a non-Accredited museum, with another type of organisation or with an individual, the Museum will make an announcement in the Museums Journal or Find an Object website and in other specialist journals where appropriate.

23.9 Both the notification and announcement must provide information on the number and nature of the specimens or objects involved both in the Museum’s collection and those intended to be acquired in exchange. A period of at least two months must be allowed for comments to be received. At the end of this period, the Board of Trustees must consider the comments before a final decision on the exchange is made.

24 Documenting Acquisition and Disposal

24.1 Full records in accordance with SPECTRUM will be kept of all items and decisions involved and the records preserved in accordance with the Museum’s Archives and Records Management Policy. With specific regard to disposal proper arrangements will be made for the preservation and/or transfer, as appropriate, of the documentation relating to the items concerned, including photographic records where practicable.

25 Authorisation of Acquisition and Disposal

25.1 The Board, being responsible on the advice of the Director-General for the Museum’s disposal policy, has determined that all acquisitions and disposals will be reported formally to it and that authorisation of disposals shall be delegated in accordance with 25.3 and 25.4.

25.2 The Board is empowered to dispose of duplicate items without the consent of the Secretary of State. The definition of duplicate items is set out in Appendix One. Authority to approve the disposal of duplicate items is delegated by the Board of Trustees according to value as set out in clause 25.3 and 25.4. The motivation for disposal will be assessed and documented as set out in clause 19 and the relevant subsequent procedures will be followed.

25.3 Authority Limit for all acquisitions and disposals:

25.3.1 Head of the Department of Collections; or Head of the Department of Collections Access; or Head of Interpretation and Collections Duxford £2,000

25.3.2 Director of Collections and Research £25,000

25.3.3 Director-General £100,000

25.3.4 The Board over £100,000
25.4 Disposals of accessioned material (other than duplicate items) require the consent of the Secretary of State, Department for Culture, Media and Sport or their designated authorities. Such consent will be sought by the Director-General with the approval of the Board, on the recommendation of the Collections Review Committee, relevant Head of Department as listed in 25.3.1 above and Director of Collections and Research, or in the case of the Aircraft and Vehicle collection, both the Director of Collections and Research and Director IWM Duxford. The Board of Trustees will be notified of all disposals through the usual quarterly Board reporting procedures.

26 Complaints with respect to Acquisition and Disposal

26.1 Members of the public wishing to register a complaint with regard to an acquisition or disposal decision should, ideally, do so in writing - by letter, fax or email. They should be addressed to the Complaints Officer, Imperial War Museum, Lambeth Road, London SE1 6HZ. The Complaints Officer will investigate the matter further in line with the Museum's Complaints Procedure.
27 Appendix One

27.1 The definition of duplicate applied to art, material culture and artefact collection items, rare books and special library collections will be: one or two or more specimens of a thing exactly or almost identical.

27.2 The definition of duplicate applied to modern books and periodicals will be items that are exactly like something already existing as it was produced in large numbers.

27.3 The definition of duplicate applied to archives of documents, special library collections, film, video, photographs and sound records is the most complex. The nature of preservation for these collections is to copy the 'content' of the collection onto a stable and accessible media, in line with archival standards. This is done in recognition of the deterioration, destabilisation and potential health and safety risks of some original materials.

27.4 An original archival format may need to be destroyed if it has deteriorated, is unstable or is a risk to health and safety or other collection items or is an obsolete format that the Museum can no longer afford to support.

27.5 Where the ‘content’ of the item has been retained in a stable and accessible format the original item will be considered to be a duplicate (albeit the copy of the item previously afforded the status of being accessioned by the Museum and/or regarded as the original) and may therefore be authorised for deaccessioning in accordance with the clause 25.2 to 25.3.

27.6 The destruction of obsolete formats, following the copying of content onto a stable and accessible medium will first be subject to appraisal to determine whether:

27.6.1 The items should be retained as original material with significance, (for example original 78rpm records, camera negatives of significant film or photographs),

27.6.2 The items are of high financial value (for either the item or the total set of items identified as obsolete) or for which special restrictions have been applied (such as personal medical records).

27.6.3 In instances where items are identified for retention as original material with significance, consideration will be given to the transfer of items to organisations whose primary focus is the technical development of the media in question.

27.6.4 The items may have added value or even unique status by reason of changes made to it – for example, a photographic print or collection carrying censorship markings or instructions.

27.7 Original audio-visual material will be retained for as long as it remains viable, in recognition of the fact that the content held in such originals will be of higher quality than that in derived copies produced using most existing forms of reproduction.

27.8 The removal of all 'content' from the collections (copies, versions and formats) on a given theme will always be subject to the full implications of the Disposal Policy. In instances where a collection is held on deposit under the Public Records Act 1958 this will be subject to approval of The National Archives prior to commencement of the disposal procedure.

27.9 The Archival departments produce and commission surrogate copies from masters held within their collections, to be used as long term substitutes for the originals to protect them from damage, for example through handling by researchers. Surrogate copies are made to suffer heavy usage and are discarded as they wear out. For this
reason surrogate copies cannot be considered as accessioned and are not subject to the measures outlined in this policy.
28 Appendix Two

British Library
Explosion – the Museum of Naval Firepower
FIAF - International Federation of Film Archives
Firepower – the Museum of the Royal Artillery
Museums and Galleries of Northern Ireland
National Army Museum
National Maritime Museum
National Museum of Science and Industry
National Museum of the Royal Navy
National Museums and Galleries of Wales
National Portrait Gallery
National War Museum of Scotland
Royal Air Force Museum
Royal Armouries Museum
Royal Engineers Museum
Royal Logistic Corps Museum
Tank Museum
Tate
UK Film Archive Forum
Victoria and Albert Museum

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