

# **COLLECTIONS RESEARCH STRATEGY**

2023-2028

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## 1. Introduction

Collections research is one of the main ways by which the Royal Armouries fulfils its obligations under the National Heritage Act (1983), of *maintaining and exhibiting a national collection of arms and armour*. Research, by which the museum means a systematic process of investigation which generates original knowledge, may be conducted on various scales, by individuals from a range of backgrounds. While this strategy is primarily concerned with how the museum promotes and engages with cutting-edge scholarly and academic research related to its collection, the museum both acknowledges and supports a much broader community of interest in the objects it safeguards. As such, it encourages those working with the frame of this strategy to consider the potential for research co-creation with appropriate stakeholders. Likewise, it stresses the importance of research dissemination, to share knowledge and generate real-world impact from the work that is done.

Research has been a vital element of the Royal Armouries since before it was a museum. Under the Board of Ordnance, the body based at the Tower from which the museum traces its lineage, the Royal Armouries were more than a simple stockpile of war material. Through the establishment of the Royal Brass Factory for artillery in 1716 or the Royal Manufactory of Small Arms at Lewisham in 1807, the Board advanced techniques of arms production; by its supervision of the Royal Observatory, the Ordnance Survey, and the Geological Survey, it advanced human knowledge in much wider fields. In the nineteenth century, pioneering antiquarians such as Sir Samuel Rush Meyrick, Robert Porrett, John Hewitt, and James Robinson Planchè shed new light on the historic arms and armour held by the Tower, transforming it from a storehouse of curiosities to a systematically catalogued and curated collection. Today, research remains integral to the museum's understanding of the objects it holds, the context in which they were created, collected, and catalogued, and the way in which the museum presents its collection to the public, whether physically or digitally. The museum

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takes great pride in its status as an Independent Research Organisation, as both an acknowledgement of the existing standard of research at the museum and a gateway to larger and more transformative projects than it has previously been able to undertake.

The combination of internationally recognised collections and extensive object-based expertise also means that the Royal Armouries is uniquely placed to provide a forum for the collaborative study of many aspects of the human experience. It offers an extraordinary environment in which museum professionals, academics, scientists, artists, makers, and practitioners can work together to develop new approaches to the study and understanding of arms and armour and wider material culture.

**2. Purpose**

This strategy reaffirms our commitment to conducting and supporting research of the highest quality, to ensure that the collection can inspire, inform, and challenge our audiences now, and in the future.

The Strategy builds on the Royal Armouries' historic strengths and sets out its ambitions for the next five years. It complements the Royal Armouries' policies and strategies relating to collections development and management, digital outputs, partnership working, and public programming, and provides direction to Keepers, Heads of Department and other members of staff – as well as to our academic stakeholders and those seeking to work with the museum.

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### 3. Strategic objectives

These objectives have been determined by situational analysis of the museum's research since the implementation of the 2019 Collections Research Strategy, and will frame the museum's research activities over the next five years:

- a. Quality: The Royal Armouries wants to increase the proportion of its research publications that would be recognised by external peers as making a substantial contribution to the field of arms and armour.
- b. Skills: The Royal Armouries wants to ensure that staff have the appropriate skills, experience, and time to develop, deliver and undertake or supervise high-quality research projects.
- c. Partnerships: The Royal Armouries wants to work with key strategic partners, both institutions and individuals, to conduct, support, and promote collections-focused research.
- d. Public Programme: The Royal Armouries wants to embed the results of research into the way in which the museum interprets and presents its collections, both physically and digitally.

### 4. Research priorities

In order to pursue these strategic objectives, and to direct the research output both of current staff and prospective collaborators, the museum has identified the following five research priorities. Research proposed to the museum should highlight how it meets one or more of the following priorities.

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- a. Innovation – projects which adopt new techniques and expand the museum's skills base.
- b. Funding – projects whose value is acknowledged by external grant-awarding bodies, through their willingness to contribute towards their costs.
- c. Impact – projects which contribute to society beyond the field of academia, whether that be through enhancing the museum's public programme, shaping legislation and contributing to the implementation of policy, influencing the broader public debate around particular issues, or benefitting individuals, organisations or nations in ways not specifically enumerated here.
- d. Global – projects which set developments in arms and armour in their broader international or transnational context.
- e. Modern – research which studies the military and civilian use of arms and armour during and after the Second World War, up to the present day.

## 5. Measuring Success

To supplement the Key Performance Indicators set in the Corporate Plan, the success of this strategy will be assessed through:

- The amount, type, range, and quality of publications produced in the period.
- The amount, type, range, and quality of research funding secured in the period, both directly by the museum and by external projects which the museum supports.
- The impact that collaboration has on the museum, on collaborating organisations, and on individuals directly engaged with those collaborations (so

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far as it is possible to measure this over a short time-frame). In the case of the museum, this will encompass the impact research has on public engagement and understanding in displays, education and activity programmes.

## 6. Implementation and Governance

Accountability for implementing the Strategy will lie with the Director of Collections, Research, and Learning, with the Research Manager taking responsibility for any actions necessary to further the strategic objectives listed in section 3. Such actions may include assessing the quality of research and identifying avenues for improvement; providing staff with the appropriate resources and skills to conduct research, including securing training or outsourcing to bridge skills gaps; identifying key strategic partners and forming formal or informal relations with them; and connecting the museum's research output to the public programme.

Progress against these goals will be monitored by the Research Steering Group; at least annually, the Group will review the measures of success listed in section 5. Research proposed to the Group will be evaluated against the research priorities listed in section 4 above.

Performance against specific measures listed as Key Performance Indicators in the museum's Annual Operating Plans which relate to research will be monitored by the museum's Executive Board as well as by Trustees.

## 7. Review

This document will be reviewed annually and updates in corporate policy and plan, legislation and international conventions will be amended or added where relevant.

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This document will be reviewed by the Director of Collections, Research and Learning and approved by the Director-General and Master of the Armouries.

**8. Risk Management**

The associated risk of non-compliance with this strategy is:

Impact of non-compliance: High

Likelihood of non-compliance: Medium

**9. Effective date**

This strategy is effective from the date of signing.

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Director General & Master of the Armouries

Date.....

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## Appendix A: Research Areas for 2023-28

Following a review of the current research base at the Royal Armouries and external research initiatives in the sector, the research areas over the next five years at the Royal Armouries are:

- a. Society – For projects which explore the social and cultural context of arms and armour. As a literal matter of life and death, arms and armour are strongly reflected in society, art, and popular culture at large. This research area examines their influence, from prehistoric aspects of folklore and mythology, through perennial topics of identity and status, to modern day cinema and video games.
  
- b. Makers and Collectors – For projects which explore primarily human stories behind the design and curation of arms and armour. The ability to shape raw materials into tools to kill or to protect has given a quasi-mythical status to craftsmen since prehistory – a status which is perpetuated in figures such as Hans Seusenhofer, Sir William Armstrong, Goro Nyudo Masamune, or Mikhail Kalashnikov. Similarly, arms and armour collectors from all over the world have built and curated significant collections.
  
- c. Threat and Response – For projects which explore the use and effect of arms and armour. For many centuries physical threats to humanity have driven the development of new types of weapons and armour, and changes to materials and manufacturing technologies. This thematic area draws out the technological factors behind the design of arms and armour, the skills and techniques involved in their use, and the effect that their use has on bearer and opponent alike.

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- d. The History of the Royal Armouries Collection and its Public Role – For projects which set the Royal Armouries as an institution in its historical or museological context. The museum has passed by stages from a medieval storehouse to a national collection with satellite museums across the UK. Understanding this changing public role sheds light on broader social and cultural trends as well as helping the museum to look to the future.
  
- e. Enhancing and Preserving the Collection – For projects which seek primarily to establish technical or museological contributions to the display, interpretation, conservation, and care of the collection. As one of the UK's national collections, the museum is well-placed either to generate innovations or to act as a testbed for new developments in the way in which collections are presented to the public and preserved for future generations.

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## Appendix B: Museum research assets

For those considering collaboration with the museum, there follows a brief summary of some of the most significant assets the museum has to offer.

- a. The National Collection of Arms and Armour – The museum holds one of the most significant collections of arms and armour in the world, spanning both civilian and military use, and running chronologically from antiquity to the present day. Many of the objects have previously been the subject of intensive research, which can therefore provide the basis for detailed investigation into wider social, cultural, or technological issues. However, the size of the collection means that there are many objects whose true significance remains to be discovered. Fuller details of this collection, including its major sub-divisions and key objects held in each area, can be found in section 6 of the museum's Collections Development Policy 2019, while a searchable catalogue is maintained at [collections.royalarmouries.org/](http://collections.royalarmouries.org/)
  
- b. Conservation facilities – To maintain the collection, the museum has a breadth of specialist equipment and skills related to the preservation of objects. Specific facilities include a Walk-in X-Ray facility, which can handle large objects in its lead-lined chamber limited only by the size of a standard door; X-ray Fluorescence machinery; and a Walk-in Freezer, which provides the ability to quarantine larger organic objects that pose the risk of biological contamination when introduced to a museum collection. In addition, the museum has access to a firing range that offers a potential stage for experimental work.
  
- c. Archives and Library – The museum holds both a variety of primary source material (with major holdings detailed in section 6b of the Collections

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Development Policy) and secondary material. The latter focuses on the history of arms and armour, warfare, heraldry, and museology, and contains a range of relatively obscure material, not often found outside copyright libraries, in a variety of languages. Searchable catalogues can be found at:

- o [collections.royalarmouries.org/#/archives](https://collections.royalarmouries.org/#/archives) (archives)
- o [collections.royalarmouries.org/#/library](https://collections.royalarmouries.org/#/library) (library)
- o <https://library.royalarmouries.org/> (library)

d. The Museum – The museum is one of twenty national museums in the United Kingdom, and one of only six headquartered outside London. The museum welcomed over 2 million visits to its three sites in the year to 31 March 2020. It has in-house education and interpretation teams, the latter addressing both the way in which the static gallery displays are presented to the public, and live interpretation, re-enactment and combat display. The museum's staff, particularly the curatorial team, have extensive knowledge, experience, and networks on which projects and researchers can draw.

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## Appendix C: Research Steering Group terms of reference

Due to length of document, appended separately.

## Appendix D: Procedure research

Due to length of document, appended separately.

## Appendix E: Associated forms

All appended separately due to length.

<b>Form</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Use</b>
A	Research Proposal Form	To submit a project for review by the museum's Research Steering Group.
B	Progress Report Template	To provide periodic updates on the status of active museum research projects.
C	Research Project Scope Extend/ Update Form	To request an amendment or extension to the scope of a project.
D	Research Project End Report	To review the success of concluded museum research projects and to identify potential improvements.
E	Imagery support form	To request support for the costs of licensing images from the museum on the grounds of academic significance.

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