The Royal Engineers Museum Collection and Database

The REM Collection
The Royal Engineers Museum (REM) can be said to have started in 1839 when Sgt Forbes became the first collector of Corps Memorabilia, after he ran an appeal for exhibits at the Royal Sappers and Miners Depot in Woolwich. As the collection grew and the depot closed this collection moved to the Model Room at the School of Military Engineering in Chatham. Continuing to grow and diversify in the material it collected an official Museum was formed in 1882. The collection continued to grow and in 1912 a Curator, Mr Wiffen, was appointed and the Museum opened to the public displaying what the Corps described as 'campaign trophies and peace-time relics of the Corps'. In 1984 the Museum moved from the SME to its current location in the Ravelin Building. This allowed the collection to continue to grow, as it provided more gallery space and new stores.

The Museum collection is comprised of the Object Collection, an Archive collection, a Photography Collection and a library. The material spans the history of the Corps with material dating back to the 1700s. The collection includes but is not limited to: armoured vehicles, medals, military uniform, weapons, equipment, personal ephemera, diaries personal/official, personal letters, books, documentation, reports, 1000s of loose photographs and hundreds of photograph albums dating back to the birth of photography.

Since their official beginnings in the 18th Century, The Royal Engineers have been involved in wars, peace-time operations and postings throughout what was the British Empire. As such the REM has a collection of Ethnographic material from countries and cultures including but not limited to China, India, Africa and First Nations People of Canada.

The material in the REM collection has been curated and catalogued by a mixture of staff, from serving/retired Military personnel with no Museum experience through to Museum Professionals. The former's cataloguing skills were limited with descriptions solely focusing on the objects relation to the Corps. For ethnographic materials this meant that the item was generally recorded in relation to the battle, war or operation it was linked to, with no discussion of its context, use or cultural importance. The Museum is now rectifying this by participating in projects such as Making *African Connections* which will allow REM to diversify our cataloguing and gallery text, creating descriptions and records that are relevant to today's audience and the wider issues arising in the World.

History of the documentation system at REM.
Over the years since the setting up of the museum there have been many changes in the documentation system. The earliest documentation records are those kept in the Accession Registers. These have been maintained with various degrees of accuracy and detail since the collection was first brought together. Many references in the early books date back to the time, prior to 1912, when the old museum was the SME Model Room.

In the mid-1970s new elements were added to the system. These were Accession Sheets, Index cards and Object History Files.

- The Accession sheets were handwritten records of all relevant information regarding a particular object.

- Index cards referenced by donor, associated person, simple name, campaign, unit and place were created using the information from the Accession sheets. These were discontinued in the mid-1990s as computer documentation systems were introduced. The last index cards were filled out in 1998.

- Object History files were created to hold all correspondence relating to donations, but before the 1950s very little in the way of information was kept. These files are still maintained.

In 1990 the first version of the MODES computerised documentation system was implemented in the museum. Over the next few years an effort was made to all input all collections information into this system.

In 2007 the documentation system for the Royal Engineers Library and Archive was merged with the REM documentation system.
In 2008 the implementation of a new computerised documentation system; Adlib, was undertaken. This system included an Archival and Library module so all collections could be kept on the same database. In 2010 the information on the Library DataEase system was incorporated into Adlib. In 2011 all of the documentation relating to the Museum, Library and Archive collection was made available on this one computerised system.

The Museum continues to use Adlib as it complies with the SPECTRUM guidelines for the cataloguing of objects as well as ISAD-G for archival cataloguing. As much information is recorded as possible from a physical description through to the owner, who they served with, and where if known. The Museum is also now expanding and developing its descriptions of Ethnographic material to include contextual information about the use, location and people whom the object is associated with.

REM Numbering System
Until 1957 objects were accessioned according to subject, rather than date order. Thus items relating to India were numbered I1, I2, I3 etc., whilst those relating to Crimea were numbered CR1, CR2 etc.

After 1957 objects were accessioned according to date of accession. Thus the 10th item donated in September 1986 would be numbered 8609.10. All items accepted before 1957 were given numbers in the new system. These range from 1201 to 5712, but do not have the same date significance as the newer numbers as they were arbitrarily assigned to create a uniform system.

Museum object numbers had after 1957 been prefixed with the letters CHARE: for Royal Engineers Chatham. This prefix was removed from all records in 2012.

Material catalogued in the Archive catalogued will be assigned an accession number as described above, for example 202003.1, but will also be given a differing reference number depending on what part of the archive it will be placed in.

10/	Photograph albums
23/	Loose photographs
20/	Mounted photographs
26/	Scrapbooks
30/	Reports with photographs

Printed or handwritten archive material has a growing list of initial codes, this depends on what type of material it is. For example a personal diary will be catalogued with the prefix PA for Personal Archives. A report written by a Royal Engineer Unit will have the prefix COY/55 for 55 Field Company.

An example of some of the other codes in use can be seen below:

BMOC	British Military Operations and Campaigns
REFC	Royal Engineers Football Club
RN	Research Notes
UPM	Unpublished manuscripts

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