# WHAT'S THE REAL DEAL?

## CHALLENGES FACING THE DIGITAL MUSEUM COLLECTION

### Posters of Conflict Project


IWM PST 2734, Alfred Leete, 1914

## THE BACKGROUND

The poster collection at the Imperial War Museum (IWM) is the largest and most comprehensive collection of its type in Britain comprising 15,000 items. It documents the social, political, ethnic and cultural aspirations of the involved nations during two world wars. During most of the twentieth century the poster collection has remained an untapped resource. At the beginning of the project less than 25% of the collection was available for study.


IWM PST 5162, Anonymous, 1915

## OBJECTIVES

To CATALOGUE and DIGITISE a selected 10,000 posters from the IWM poster collection.

To make the IWM poster collection ACCESSIBLE through web publication as a searchable database available through the AHDS and the IWM websites.

To develop interpretation of the collection for EDUCATION and PUBLIC use.

## THE PARTNERSHIP

In 2003 The Posters of Conflict Project was established as a joint venture between the Manchester Institute for Research and Innovation in Art and Design (MIRIAD) at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) and the Art Department at IWM. The project obtained funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). The Arts and Humanities Data Service (AHDS) publishes the database online. The database is also available on the IWM website.


IWM PST 10423, Anonymous, 1918

## METHODOLOGY

The project team consists of the Project Manager, two Documentation Officers and a Photographer who research, catalogue, and digitise the poster collection preparing it for web publication and archival storage. The Project Manager reports to the Project Director, the IWM Documentation Manager and the Management Committee in quarterly meetings.

**POSTER LIFE CYCLE**
1. The poster is accessioned and researched.
2. A record of the poster is created and added to the database.
3. Posters needing conservation are selected.
4. The poster is photographed digitally.
5. The poster copyrights are cleared.

**CATALOGUING AND PHOTOGRAPHY.** On average the Documentation Officers catalogue 11 posters each per day. The photographer produces 26 images per day including image processing and storage.

**QUALITY ASSURANCE.** 25% of the image output is subject to Quality Assurance and 10% of the records are edited by the Curator of Documentation at IWM.

**COPYRIGHTS.** A majority of the posters were published through Her Majesty's Stationery Office (HMSO), and Crown Copyright will therefore apply. In all other cases the posters are published according to AHDS guidelines.
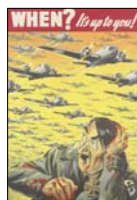
**DIGITAL STORAGE.** The digital collection is currently stored on CD-Rom but is due to be transferred on to the museum server


IWM PST 0281, Frank Brangwyn, 1918


IWM PST 13873, Anonymous, 1939-1945


IWM PST 14219, Anonymous, 1939-1945

## Results in Numbers

At the beginning of year 3 app. 7,000 posters have been completed and the team is confident that the target of 10,000 posters will be reached by the deadline in May 2006.

**CONSERVATION.** The condition of each poster is recorded and added to the database. By the end of the third year of the project app. 350 posters will have undergone conservation ensuring that the collection is in overall good condition.
**TRANSLATION.** App. 2500 foreign language posters have been translated as part of the project and the translations have been added to the relevant records improving access and facilitating future research.
**EXHIBITIONS.** The project has made it possible to curate a major poster exhibition at IWM London in 2007. The last major exhibition based entirely on the IWM poster collection took place in 1972. Three online exhibitions are due to launch on the IWM website in Autumn 2005.
**ACCESS.** App. 6500 posters are available online at IWM and AHDS. The Project also uses the email lists and newsletter of the IWM Marketing Department, which is sent out monthly via email to 7000 people.
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IWM PST 5125, Anonymous, 1915


IWM PST 5895, Bert Thomas, 1918

## Results: From Passive to Active

- A complete OVERVIEW of the contents of the collection is now available.
- The poster collection is now an ACTIVE collection to be researched and used.
- WORLDWIDE ACCESS to the collection via the IWM and AHDS online databases.
- The curator can add new ACQUISITIONS to the collection.
- The collection can now be included in IWM's EDUCATIONAL activities.
- The collection can PROMOTE the museum and form part of commercial initiatives.
- Excess posters can be set aside for DISPOSAL.
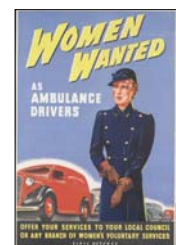

IWM PST13857, Anonymous, 1939-1945

## CONTINUATION BID

The project has successfully brought together expertise and specialist knowledge from MMU and IWM creating a cross-institutional collaboration which has proven beneficial for all involved and everyone who benefits from using the database. Therefore a continuation bid has been put forward to the AHRC in order to obtain resources for completing digitisation of the remaining 5,000 posters that were not included in the first stage of the project.


IWM PST 0509, Ludwig Hohlwein, 1914
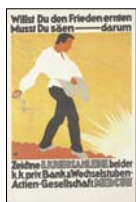

IWM PST 0442, Franke, 1918


IWM PST 14266, Anonymous, 1939-1945

## Results: The Digital Challenge

The Posters of Conflict Project has achieved its objectives but it has also raised a number of issues which the museum institution must consider. The project has found that digitisation influences museum practice, museum policy and staff development needs.

- **Skills.** Museum staff must acquire new skills in order to maintain and use the digital collection. Visitors must have the skills to access the database.

- **Image Management Policy.** On screen images are small and appear different from the original object. The quality of a digital image varies between computers. To create an image which is attractive and engaging when viewed on screen, image manipulation is necessary. The museum must therefore consider developing a policy for how images are displayed online and what should be the limit for image manipulation.

- **Data Management.** The museum must commit to managing the digital collection and keeping the technology up to date. This presents a financial and technological challenge not faced by museums before. The museum must decide how it intends to care for its digital collections and funding bodies must consider this new aspect of collection management.

- **Database Management.** The Poster collection is now available on two different databases which present the material in two different ways. Does a museum need to consider how its collection is presented by third parties?

- **Museum Policy Changes.** The posters in the collection are fragile and difficult to handle and the digital collection allows the researcher and the public to access the image without any risk of damage to the object. However the digital collection must not become an excuse not to exhibit the collection. IWM is currently defining its policy for the inclusion of the digital collection into its collection.

## CONTACT DETAILS FOR POSTERS OF CONFLICT PROJECT

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