THE TANK MUSEUM

ARCHIVE & OBJECT COLLECTIONS RESEARCH GUIDE

WORLD WAR I TANK DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

THE TANK MUSEUM
ARCHIVE AND OBJECT COLLECTIONS

INTRODUCTION.

ARCHIVE AND OBJECT COLLECTIONS

The Tank Museum's Archive & Object Collections are the world's foremost research centre on the subject of armoured warfare.
The resources it holds are directly related to the Royal Armoured Corps, The Royal Tank Regiment and its predecessors.

ARCHIVE

The Tank Museum's Archive is designated as a Place of Deposit and has been accredited by The National Archives.

The Archive holds over 90,000 documents relating to armoured warfare. These include photographs, technical drawings, maps, moving images, books, and journals.

The Tank Museum Archive also houses the Museum's reference library, a repository of secondary research material such as regimental histories, military strategy guides, and historical accounts.

OBJECT COLLECTIONS

The Object Collection houses over 23,000 items. It spans four stores and includes uniforms, medals, flags, weapons, ammunition, models, art, radios, and technical instruments.

THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF ARMOURED WARFARE

The concept of providing mobile protection and firepower to soldiers is deeply rooted in military history. From Roman siege towers and armoured wagons to chainmail, the evolution of armoured warfare has spanned centuries.

However, the advent of trench warfare during the First World War introduced unprecedented tactical challenges highlighted by Maj Gen Ernest Swinton, and produced an argument for a new form of combat vehicle capable of traversing war-torn terrain while offering both protective and offensive capabilities.

In response to these demands, the British War Office established the Landship Committee, under which William Tritton and Walter Wilson pioneered the development of the tank. This innovation represented a combination of several key technologies laid the foundation for a new era in mechanised warfare. which most notably the internal combustion engine, which enabled the mobility of heavily armoured vehicles and the Caterpillar tracks, which distributed weight evenly and allowed traversal of rough terrain.

The first prototype, Little Willie, led to the creation of HMLS Centipede, later known as Mother. Following secret trials at Hatfield Park in January 1916, the Mark I tank was deployed later that year to the British C and D Battalions of the Heavy Section Machine Corps in September during the Battle of the Somme.

The tank's effectiveness was further demonstrated at the Battle of Cambrai, solidifying its strategic value. As demand increased, production expanded, and new models were introduced. The concept quickly gained international traction, with France developing the Renault FT and Germany introducing the A7V, both of which played significant roles in the latter stages of the war.

THE TANK MUSEUM COLLECTION.

PRIMARY SOURCES

The Tritton Collection

A collection associated with Sir William Tritton and Walter Wilson.
Tritton, the managing director of William Foster & Co, a company that specialised in agricultural machinery and Walter Wilson, who served with the Royal Naval Air Service as an engineer, both worked on the test vehicle little willy and later the Mark I prototype 'Mother'.
The collection comprises of reports, letters, memorandums, illustrations and notes, and one drawing related to the development of the first tank. It includes references to the evolution of the continuous track propulsion system and tank trials conducted at Hatton Park; all illustrated through their attempt to argue their contribution to the creation of the tank and secure its patient.

E1958.25 - The Evolution of the 'Tanks' Notes for lecture Given by W. Rigby, Chief Engineer of William & Foster co 1919

In November 1919, William Rigby of William Foster & Co. delivered a detailed lecture tracing the development of the tank at the Free Trade Hall in Manchester. Featuring an array of materials, including annotated slides, dated charts, technical schematics, and photographs of armoured vehicles both British and foreign; this lecture showcases the chronological story of the tank from the Foster Daimler Tractor to armoured cars concepts such as the 15ft Wheel Machine, to adaptations such as the Tadpole Tail.

E2023.2082 -The Evolution of the Tank Idea & Trench Warfare Deadlock and Suggested Solution

Trench Warfare Deadlock refers to armoured Caterpillars Tractors, how to make them amphibious, advantages and answers any potential objections.
The Evolution of the Tank Idea as seen by R F Macfie Mechanical and Aeronautical Engineer. Formerly Lieutenant Armoured Car Brigade. An article giving Macfie's view of the tank development and how he invented it.

The Tank Corps Journal Collection

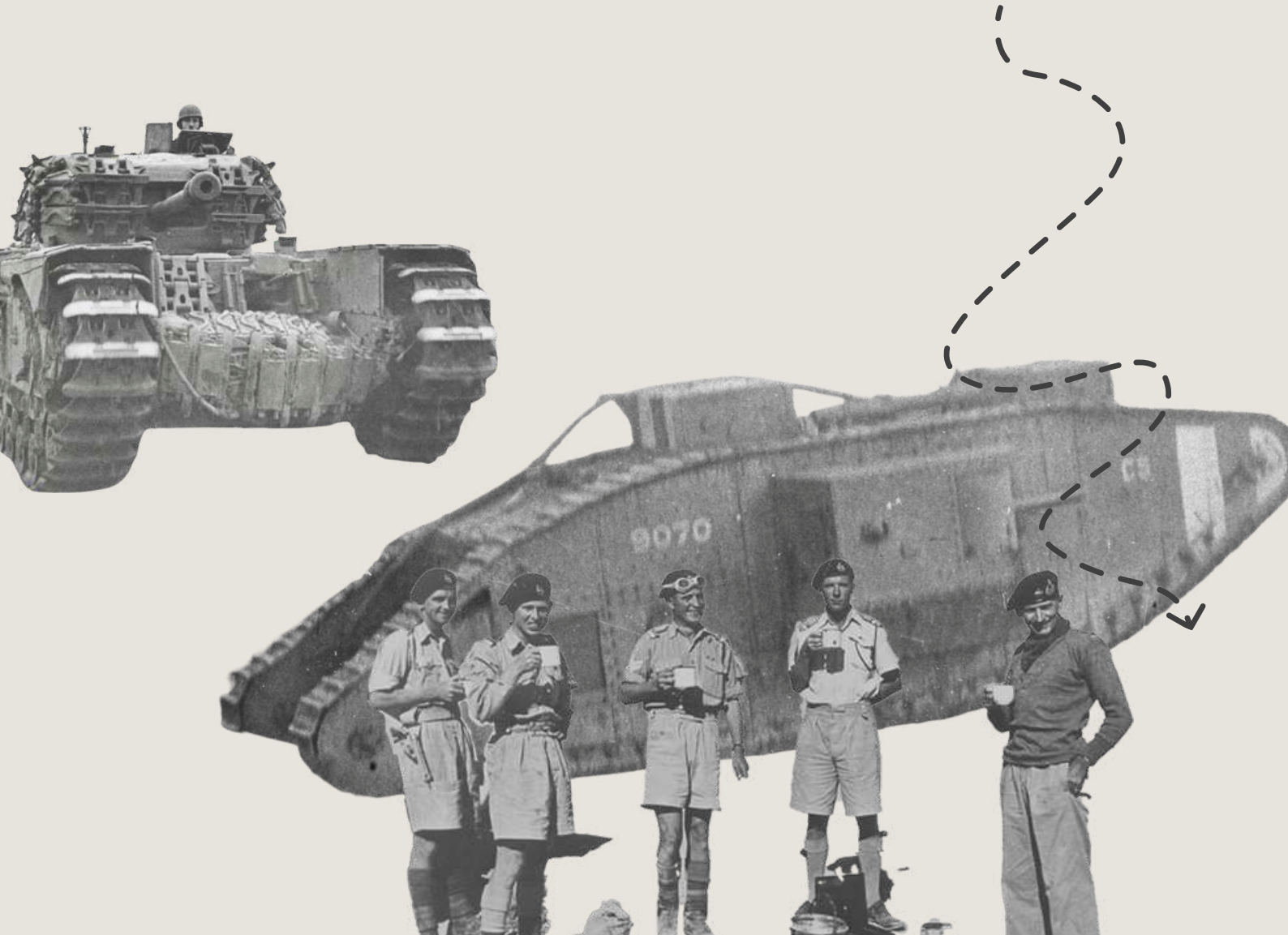
First published in 1919, the Tank Journal collection consists of monthly publications produced by the Tank Corps, and later by the Royal Tank Regiment. The Tank Corps issues provide insight into armoured warfare. They covered a wide range of topics, including tank design and strategy, updates on regimental activities, and personal stories from servicemen. Whether during wartime or peacetime, the journal offered insights into the evolving role of tanks and the experiences of those who operated them.

The Weekly Tank Notes Collection

A series of weekly pamphlets published by the War Office overing affairs of the Tank Corps including tank operations, anti-tank tactics, prisoner statements, notes on the evolution of the tank, views on the value of tanks.
See:
Extract, A short History of the Evolution of Tanks in the Great War.
(E1949.124) - No. 21 4th January for notes on the evolution of the tank

War Diaries 1916-1919

The War Diary collections are descriptive records which comprise of daily entries from the battalions of The Heavy Branch Machine Gun Corps, The Tank Corps, and also Armoured Car Companies during the First World War.
Whilst some are more descriptive than others, the records can include intelligence summaries, maps and other material pertinent to the unit. However, confidential maps and other appendix mentioned within were removed before the records become publicly available and are absent from the document.
For war diaries covering the first tank actions
see the transcribed war diaries of **3/C & 4/D Heavy Section Machine Gun Corps**



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SECONDARY SOURCES

The Tank Corps: Major Clough Williams-Ellis, M.C. 1919

Drawing from firsthand testimonies, official dispatches, and operational directives, The Tank Corps is a comprehensive account of World War I tank warfare, written by Major Clough Williams-Ellis, M.C., in collaboration with his wife, Amabel Williams-Ellis. Released in the aftermath of the war, the book traces the emergence and advancement of tank technology, its tactical integration on the battlefield, and their role in key military engagements.

The Tank at Flers, Trevor Pidgeon 1995

Drawing on war diaries, operational orders, plans, field maps, correspondence, first-hand accounts and photographs from both sides, this book details the historical accounts of the first use of tanks in warfare during the battle of Flers Courcelette on September 15th, 1916. The book cites maps, and personal accounts from both sides of the conflict to tell the story of the men of the worlds first tank unit.

The Devils Chariots - The Birth & Secret Battles of the First Tanks, John Glanfield, 2001

In this account of the birth of the Tank and its early years, The Devils Chariots examines the pioneers of tank development. Including text on the appalling conditions in which early tank crews fought and experimental tanks and weaponry that never made it to the front. The Devils Chariots expand upon the creation, production and development of the tank, and on the individuals who built them during the first world war.

Landships - British tanks in the First world war, David Fletcher, 1984

An illustrated book exploring the initial experimentation and development of the tank, their expansion and battlefield performance.

SERVICES.

PRIMARY SOURCE RESEARCH PACKS

The Archive offers bespoke research information packs featuring carefully selected digitised materials from our collection. These packs are designed for individuals pursuing higher education in military history or those with a focused interest in specific periods of armoured warfare. Each pack consists of primary sources and citing information organised to develop subject-specific knowledge and to facilitate further exploration of the materials and resources within the Tank Museum Archive.

READING ROOM

The reading room is open to everyone and is a designated space to provide in-person access to The Tank Museum's Archive and Object Collections. During your visit the collections team will be on hand to offer guidance and can assist in locating relevant materials to support a wide range of research and enquiry.

Use of the reading room is by appointment only; bookings can be made by emailing archive@tankmuseum.org or by telephone.

DIGITISATION SERVICES

The Archive and Object Collections department offers digitisation services to scan and prepare digital copies of material within our collection, with exception for certain materials due to GDPR and preservation considerations, digitisation allows the museum's archival collection to be available to remote audiences allowing access to those to those unable to visit in person.
Digitisation services and digital copies are subject to charge and are for personal research only unless licencing agreements have been obtained prior to reproduction.

LOCATION & OPENING HOURS

The Archive and Object Collections team invites visitors to view the material within the Museum's reading room.

Visits to the reading room are by appointment only and are offered in half day or full day sessions from **10:00-13:00** & **13:30-16:30** Monday to Friday excluding bank holidays.

Visits are subject to a charge of £15 per half day (£15 full day charge for students). Other charges may apply (reproduction, photocopying, etc), including a consultancy fee if your visit is for commercial purposes.

You are welcome to bring pencil and paper or a laptop into our reading room, and we provide lockers for bags, food and drink.

If you would like to take photographs for personal use, a daily camera licence is available for £10 per visit.

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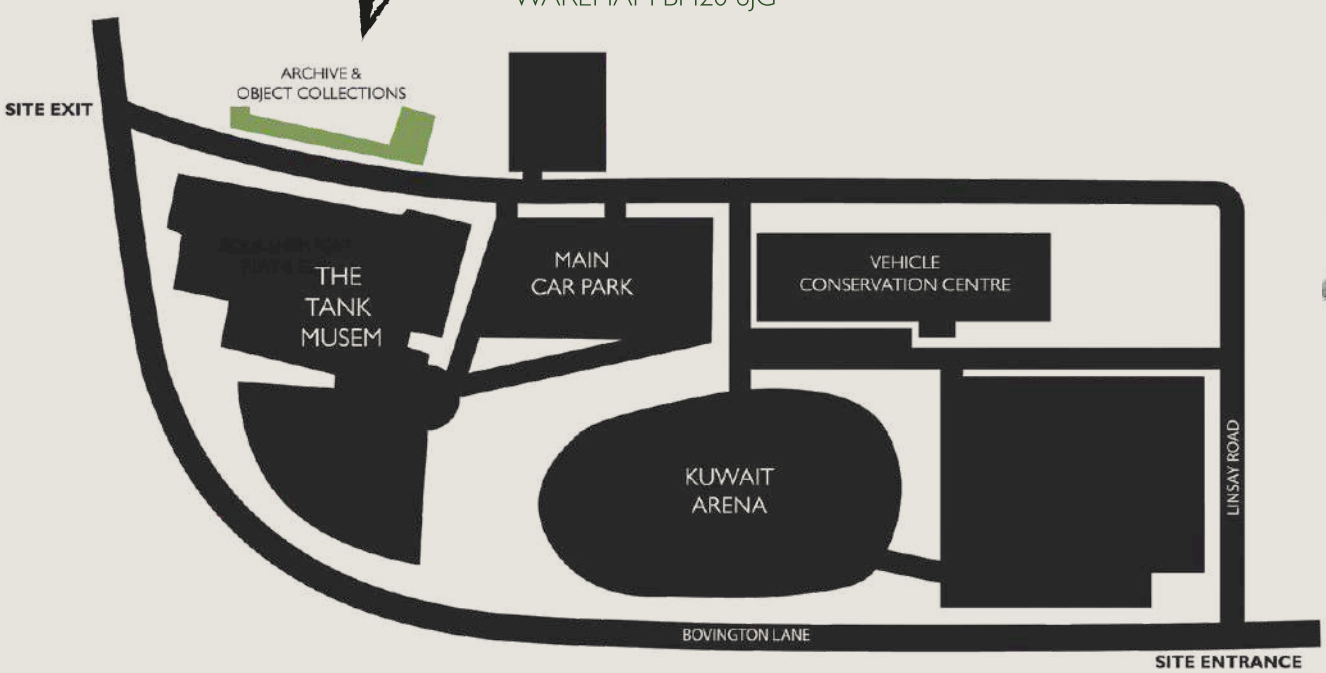

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