THE TANK MUSEUM

ARCHIVE & OBJECT COLLECTIONS RESEARCH GUIDE

WORLD WAR II 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.

During the First World War the advent of trench warfare introduced unprecedented tactical challenges and produced an argument for a new form of combat vehicle capable of traversing war-torn terrain while offering both protective and offensive capabilities.

Responding to these demands, the British War Office established the Landship Committee, under which William Tritton and Walter Wilson pioneered the development of the first tank, with the Mark I tank entering service in September 1916 during the Battle of the Somme.
Post war Britian's development of tanks and armoured vehicles expanded in the inter-war period with organisations such as Vickers Armstrong making advancements in their design during their use across British colonial forces abroad. Later the push for mechanisation established the Experimental Mechanised Force and later brought together cavalry regiments and the existing Royal Tanks Corps to form the Royal Armoured Corps.

In the late 1930s with the threat of war becoming more likely the national rearmament programme left the British army at a loss for more modernised tanks, parts, and trained crew.
As a result, in the early stages Second World War, British armour as part of the British Expeditionary Force became heavily outmanoeuvred by German forces exposing serious weaknesses in design, production and doctrine.

The need to quickly reequip the army with tanks following the losses in France led to the continued production of obsolescent vehicles. The rushed design and production of new vehicle design rapidly proved to be unreliable or unsuitable for active service which further hindered British forces.

As systemic issues behind British armoured doctrine and production became apparent, official attitudes towards tank design and development began to change. In response to lessons learnt from early wartime experience, particularly those of the British Expeditionary Force and the North African campaign, British tank policy gradually adapted. Supported by the integration of American produced tanks and the emergence of the 'universal tank' concept, Britain became progressively more capable of producing reliable armoured vehicles able to contend with their German counterparts.





THE TANK MUSEUM COLLECTION.

PRIMARY SOURCES

The Tank Board Minutes:

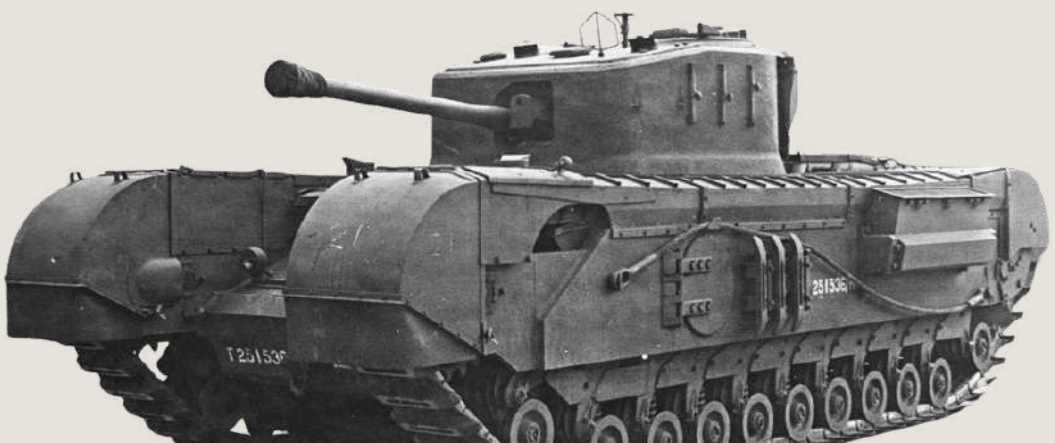
Formed in the aftermath of the Dunkirk evacuation and replacing the existing Department for Tank Design the Tank Board served as an advisory body consulting on tank design and development and was responsible for coordinating military and ministerial policy.
This extensive collection of minutes from the Tank Board meetings, from their formation in June 1940 to the board's dissolution in early 1946 provides chronological insight into Britains bureaucratic approach towards armoured development. Covering topics such as tank design, production details, policy and supply, the collection provides perspective into the developmental processes on the evolution and manufacture of British armoured vehicles throughout the Second World War.

The Papers of Sir John Dodd:

During the Second World War Sir John Dodd was Major in the 47th Royal Tank Regiment and held the position of Tank Production Advisor to the Ministry of Supply.
This collection of formal and informal documents on British tank production, drawn from the personal papers of Sir John Dodd, includes correspondence, reports, and other official and private papers from the early years of the Second World War relating to his work as adviser to the Ministry of Supply on tank production.

E2003.4321 (Appendix B) – Field Marshall Montgomery's Memorandum on Armour No2:

Written in collaboration with commanders of the 21st Army Group, this 'Memorandum on British Armour' provides insight into Field Marshall Montgomery's views on British armoured fighting vehicles. Consisting of the memorandum, correspondence and replies from the Tank board this document includes tabulated data, comparisons between British and German armour, and Montgomery's own thoughts on future tank design and policy, including early concepts of the Main Battle Tank under the name 'Capital Tank'.



The Royal Armoured Corps Half Yearly Progress Reports:

This collection of eleven half-yearly reports offers a comprehensive chronological account of the organisation and development of the Royal Armoured Corps during the Second World War. Covering early subjects such as mechanisation and the operations of the B.E.F., the British Tank Mission to the U.S.A> and the 1945 armistices; these reports document changes in the corps' composition, tactical doctrine and the progress of AFV development, supply and production across the course of the war.

The Royal Tank Regiment 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 and cover 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 served with them.

War Diaries 1939-1945:

The War Diary collections are descriptive records which comprise of daily entries from regiments and units of The Royal Armoured Corps, The Royal Tank Regiment, and also armoured squadrons during the Second 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.



THE TANK MUSEUM COLLECTION.

SECONDARY SOURCES

B2022.8 - The Great Tank Scandal British Armoured of the Second World War, David Fletcher, 1989/2021

Covering the initial years of the Second World War and supported by original archival documentation, this publication draws from reports, minutes, and correspondence between politician's tank builders and the Army to illustrate the story of bureaucratic indecision stubborn industrialisation and military vacillation regarding tank design, development and production.

B2022.8 - The Universal Tank British armour in the Second World War, David Fletcher, 1993/2021

A continuation of the Great Tank Scandal this book continues on the subject of British tank doctrine in the later stages of the Second World War. Focussing on the conception of the universal tank this publication uses the regimental war diaries of the Royal armoured Corps to illustrate the journey of what came before and Britian's response to technological development in armoured warfare.

B2014.65 - British Tank Production and the War economy, Benjamin Coombs, 2013

Exploring the experiences of the British tank production this book explores the various demands placed on British industry before and during the second world war. Looking into political, military and strategic pressures the author compares the British tank programme to other international industries by examining the experience of individual production firms' productivity and standardisation.

B2021.1058, The Second World War Tank Crisis, Dick Taylor

Supported by production and data, this book offers an assessment of Britain's wartime tank output from the interwar period through the Second World War. Explaining the technical and organisational shortcomings of early-war British armour, this book analyses the structural, industrial and doctrinal factors that impeded effective development. Including comparisons with German production and the RAF aircraft procurement system, the study exposes the systemic weaknesses within Britain's armoured programme.





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.

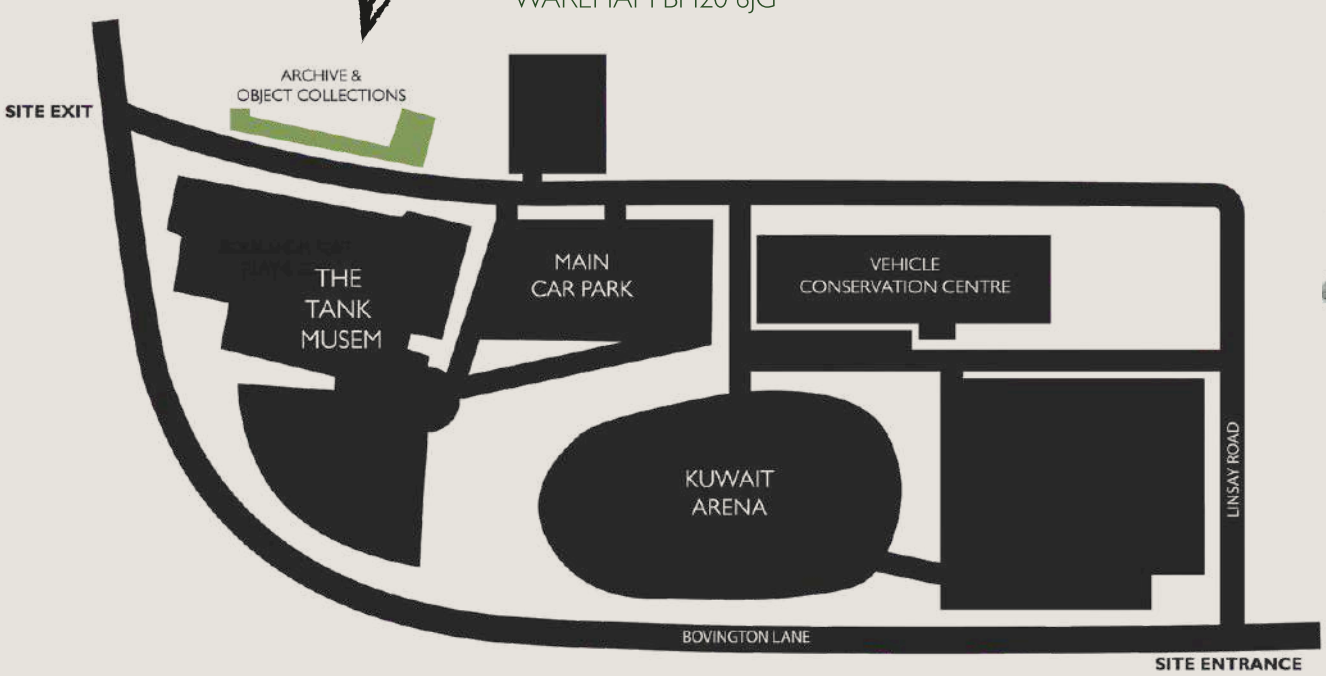
Visits to the reading room are by appointment only and are offered in half day or full day sessions from **10:00-13:00** & **13:30-16:30** Monday to Friday excluding bank holidays.

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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