



# Royal Museums Greenwich Research Strategy (with appendix)

## Research Strategy, 2018–22

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# Royal Museums Greenwich: Research Strategy, 2018–22

## Introduction

The scope for research and public engagement at RMG is extraordinary. Our collections span more than 500 years, from Sir Francis Drake to the Falklands War, from fine art to ship's biscuits, astrolabes to love tokens. The stories that research allows us to unlock are correspondingly diverse. RMG covers a range of human experience from naval heroes to astronomers, migrants to merchants, enslaved people in Caribbean plantations to sovereigns. We are a portal into worlds of scientific enquiry and artistic achievement, and the custodians of a maritime icon in *Cutty Sark*. At the same time, these elements (and the sites in which they are located) work together to provide our visitors with an understanding of British histories and global perspectives that few institutions in this country or anywhere else could match.

## What is RMG research?

Research allows all of our audiences to engage with the Museum's collections and the stories we use them to tell. It also helps us to define and communicate the purpose and public offer of RMG and its component sites. This strategy therefore defines research as the use of our rich and varied collection resources and multiple areas of expertise within and beyond the institution in order to champion innovative approaches; to further our international reputation for excellence; and to promote our corporate mission. Research is thus the work of many hands and is fundamental to ensuring that the Museum remains original, relevant and accessible. It is a multi-faceted resource that we deploy from answering a visitor enquiry through to planning a new gallery.

## What are the aims of RMG research?

This research strategy (which is designed to be read in conjunction with our Collections Development Policy) identifies six overarching priorities for our research activities within and beyond the period 2018-22:

- To enable all of our visitor groups to engage with the Museum's collections and themes
- To help provide RMG with a clearer understanding of its identity, mission and potential
- To advance the vision, values and mission articulated by our corporate plan
- To focus squarely on our collections in order to deliver outcomes that directly benefit the Museum as a whole

- To maximize the museum's potential to generate funding bids and development income, and to promote the cultivation of new and established partners and stakeholders
- To enhance and disseminate the Museum's national and international reputation for excellence, and support its IRO status

These are joined by the following more specific RMG research strategy aims:

- To inform RMG master-planning for displays of every kind
- To help the Museum engage with new audiences and communities
- To develop major research bids in conjunction with corporate priorities
- To expand significantly our research networks and collaborations, and to ensure that these associate us with a wide range of disciplines, museum/heritage contexts and community groups
- To work to enhance and redefine our relationships and profile within the museum sector
- To promote collaborative work within and across RMG departments through a shared understanding of and engagement with research projects and objectives
- To retain and enhance the centrality of research in the display, interpretation and preservation of our collections
- To ensure, in conjunction with the premises established by the new Collections Development Policy, that strategic research goals and RMG collecting policies are mutually informing
- To raise the profile of collections that have lacked routes to public display
- To promote research by our conservation department, and to ensure that these findings inform and shape collection-based activity, opening up new and important avenues of investigation
- To align research with the Collections Information Plan, which sets out cataloguing priorities and timetables for upgrading records

## **What are the site-related priorities for RMG research?**

### **1. ROG: towards 350 and beyond**

This key strand will develop research programmes to inspire and inform projects leading up to and beyond the 350th anniversary of the Royal Observatory Greenwich in 2025–26. It encompasses the Museum's interest in navigation, precision timekeeping and astronomy as well as the history and function of the Observatory buildings. The ROG's global networks and significance, and the 20th-century history of the Observatory have been identified as particular priorities.

### **2. Queen's House: beyond 400**

This strand will develop four key areas: art, architecture, royal history, and female narratives. The central short-term focus is the Armada Portrait of Elizabeth I and research to support projects associated with the activity plan. In the longer term, research across the four identified areas will extend the Museum's scholarly reach, helping to reposition the Queen's House and develop its audiences.

### **3. National Maritime Museum: building on Endeavour**

With the Endeavour galleries opening in September 2018, we are now working across departments to align the research strategy themes with NMM forward programming. This process has made considerable progress and will be further developed. Simultaneously, staff expertise will continue to inform the Endeavour project and enhance the impact of the new galleries once opened.

### **4. Cutty Sark: 150th anniversary of launch**

A major conference is scheduled for 2019/20 to coincide with this anniversary milestone. Research is planned that will promote greater understanding of this currently less connected RMG resource, and that will also build on its status as a memorial to the Merchant Navy.

## **How can research make RMG more than the sum of its sites?**

Research can do far more than help to articulate the distinctive personalities, stories and collection strengths of each RMG site. It can also define and strengthen the themes that bring them all together. The following mutually reinforcing strands all demonstrate this potential, and will be advanced during the period 2018-22.

### **1. Britain in global contexts**

Our sites have always told rich and fascinating stories about British histories, Britain's diverse communities and their relationship with the wider world. From the Prime Meridian and Greenwich Mean Time to the Armada Portrait of Elizabeth I, and from Nelson's Trafalgar coat to the *Cutty Sark* – a touchstone of our national maritime past – these visions remain significant within our visitor experience. We are in a unique

position to bring these national and global narratives to life with and for the public, and to explore them from innovative, alternative and challenging perspectives. Our great strengths in maritime history, the history of art and the history of science allow us to do this from varied and complementary directions.

## 2. RMG and the period 1800 to the present

This strand places RMG research emphasis on the period from 1800 to the present. The modern era that this date range defines is under-represented across all aspects of RMG's public offer, while at the same time comprising the majority of the Museum's collections. In short, our public-facing stories and our collections have not always moved in the same direction, and in terms of research a strategic realignment is now necessary. All four of our sites have identified a need to address the post-1800 period in much greater depth. Moreover, this process should bring dividends for reaching new audiences and communities, integrating sites and content, aligning research, gallery master-planning, strategic collecting and revenue generation. An enhanced ability to communicate modern and contemporary subject matter will also raise the Museum's national and international research profile. This area of priority is also recognised through the weight placed by the Collection Development Policy on 20th- and 21st-century collecting.

A year of intensive preliminary work has already been devoted to this strand. The result is the most comprehensive understanding of RMG's post-1800 holdings that the Museum has ever possessed, based on a dataset comprising more than 150,000 objects. This information is being shared across all teams and departments so that it can inform future work in the broadest fashion.

## 3. Integrating RMG research themes

A further research strand has been working to identify key themes that connect all RMG sites, and through which we can organize the stories we tell and the collection resources at our disposal. The themes have been developed both as research categories and as accessible areas of human experience through which we can engage directly with audiences. They extend across RMG's entire chronological remit, and they are sufficiently broad to accommodate the specific characteristics of each site, while also promoting initiatives between sites. Twelve themes have been identified to date, which future work can extend and refine. They are: diversity; science and technology; trade; migration; exploration; gender; national identity and monarchy; war; leisure; navy; environment; and popular culture.

Most importantly, these themes represent doorways into our public offer through which all of our audiences, from world-leading academics to

school groups, can see the relevance of our holdings. Taking possession of these themes, and presenting RMG as an institution that advances them through research and public engagement, should bring major, Museum-wide dividends. At the same time, it is not envisaged that the Museum would forge ahead simultaneously with all of them. The purpose is to create a palette of options from which we can prioritize a much smaller number during the period 2018-22, or indeed devise a themed and rolling research programme across a longer period. In their current form, the themes have been trialled across all RMG departments, and have received strong support. The same thematic structure has also been built into the 'RMG 1800 to the present' project outlined above.

#### 4. RMG, architecture, and the World Heritage Site

The final perspective is that of RMG, architecture and the World Heritage Site. These dimensions present an important resource in their own right, and one where further research has much to contribute in terms of our scholarly profile and public offer. This strand runs from the pioneering classical architecture of the Queen's House to Sir Christopher Wren's work on the Royal Observatory, and onwards to the major 19th-century additions to our site that repurposed it for naval training. Research in this area would draw on the architectural and historical relationship of our sites to the Old Royal Naval College and the Royal Park and would speak directly to our place within British history and, of course, global history given the international dimensions of royal dynasties and architectural styles.

#### **Disseminating RMG research**

The outcomes of research must be widely and appropriately disseminated to achieve maximum impact and to further the Museum's mission and reputation. RMG displays, publications, programmes and online content should be directly informed by and showcase the latest research. In addition, staff should be encouraged and supported to develop projects for scholarly publication in peer-reviewed journals and major edited collections to meet DCMS targets and enhance RMG's profile, and to maintain our vibrant culture of conferences, symposia, lectures and public talks. RMG also furthers scholarship through the *Journal for Maritime Research*, which is published twice a year by Taylor and Francis.

#### **Building and sustaining the RMG research culture**

The Museum funds external research through its Caird and Sackler-Caird fellowships. These provide opportunities for visiting scholars and practitioners to advance research on the Museum's collections and related subjects, and to feed back their outcomes through programming, catalogue enhancement and wider public dissemination. In addition, the Museum also offers a series of paid internships, allowing focused work on particular collections and even individual objects. This strategy will help

to guide the work of Museum fellows and interns to ensure their work advances our core priorities, and to diversify the projects we support.

Through the Collaborative Doctoral Partnership (CDP) scheme of the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), the Museum undertakes the supervision of Ph.D. candidates working on its collections and subjects with an academic partner. The current scheme is set to end in 2018 (with awards for individual candidates ceasing in 2023). The Museum has now successfully applied to the successor scheme (CDP3), leading a new consortium bid entitled REACH (Revisiting and Enhancing Approaches to Collections and Heritage), comprising the National Trust, British Film Institute, National Portrait Gallery, and Historic Royal Palaces.

This strategy emphasizes the need for RMG to support and benefit from research in many different disciplines, from history and the history of science to art history, material culture studies, museology, conservation and heritage studies, practice-based work and participatory community-focused projects. It is noted that in order to showcase RMG research and highlight the work of individual researchers – staff, volunteers, community groups, external scholars, doctoral students and interns – a greater web presence is required.

### **Governance of RMG research**

This strategy will be delivered through an annual research plan, setting targets for outputs, timetabling research-related activities and ensuring medium- and longer-term projects maintain momentum. The research plan will be scrutinised and monitored by the biannual Collections and Research Committee meeting.

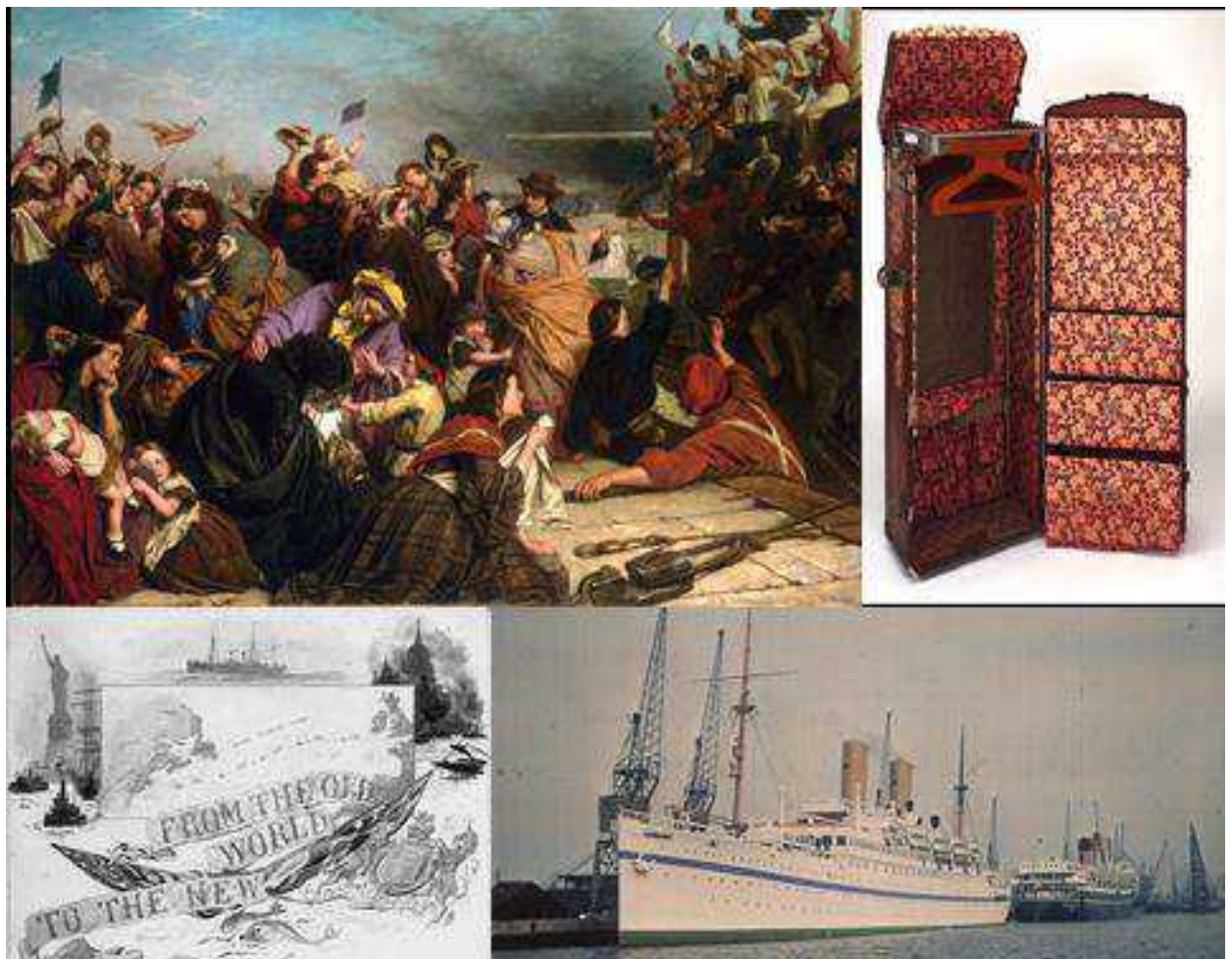
# Royal Museums Greenwich

## Appendix to the research strategy, 2018-22

### 1. Integrating RMG research themes

The research strategy proposes the following twelve overarching themes which relate to all of our sites and run across RMG's entire chronological remit:

**Migration:** discovering a human tapestry from family histories and colonial postings to mass trans-oceanic movements of people to and from the UK

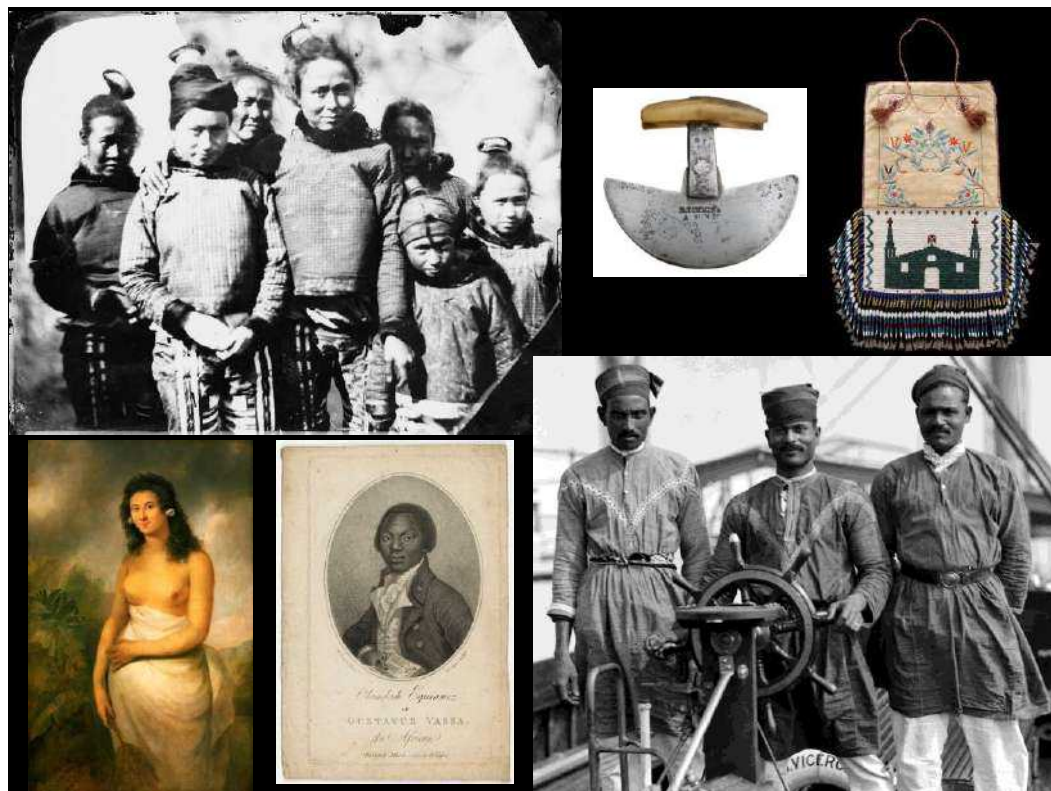




**Science and technology:** from the social, cultural, economic and political impact of changing technological realities to the realms of astronomy



**Diversity:** a local, regional, national and global theme about identities, power, empire and cross-cultural encounter



**Gender:** revealing the range of male and female identities and sexualities reflected in our heritage and collections

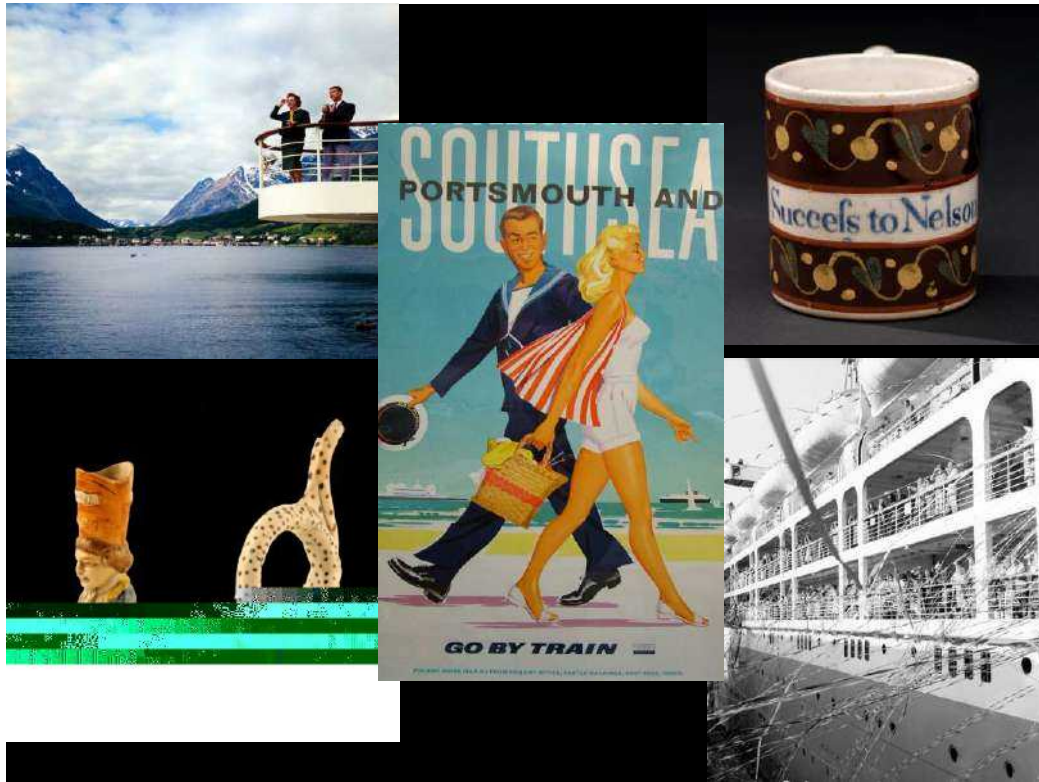


**War:** capturing the changing realities of conflict encountered by male and female, naval and mercantile participants of all backgrounds





**Leisure:** tracing the engagement of varied groups with established and novel forms of recreation, from mighty Cunarders to seaside resorts



**Navy:** revealing the less familiar faces of a fighting institution, from class and status to ceremony, fleet reviews and royal spectacle



**Exploration:** the agendas, encounters and legacies that lie within the journeys of discovery and endurance represented in our collections



**National identity and monarchy:** how our collections and sites tell evolving stories of Britishness, and the engagement of diverse social groupings with changing ideas of 'belonging'





**Environment:** human exploitation of the maritime world and the threats posed by man-made environmental change



**Popular culture:** how maritime identities have entered the bloodstream of British culture, from tankards and prints to music hall and fashion



**Trade:** exploring a complex and relevant British and international story concerning goods, wealth, employment, exploitation and globalisation. This theme necessarily involves the history and legacies of the slave trade.

