



Digital Preservation Policy

Royal Pavilion & Museums Trust

2020-25

1. Introduction

Royal Pavilion & Museums (RPMT) is both a collector and producer of digital media. It creates digital surrogates and documentary and narrative information about its collections, and may acquire born-digital material or objects¹ in accordance with its Collection Development Policy. Aside from its collections, RPMT also produces research data, business records and other digital content which may need to be preserved on an indefinite or permanent basis. These digital formats require RPMT to develop new methods of management, care and access alongside existing practices for physical material.

This Policy is a declaration of RPMT's recognition of this need, and its commitment to developing the skills, processes, IT infrastructure and other resources to provide care and access, and ensure the longevity of this digital material. Alongside its physical collections, RPMT recognises that this digital material is an important long-term asset for its workforce and the public benefit. This Policy also embodies the principles underlying the care of digital material and relates directly to the RPMT Collections Development Policy, RPMT Collections Documentation and Information Policy, RPMT Care and Conservation Policy and RPMT IPR and Reproduction Policy.

2. The Need for this Policy

RPMT's mission is to preserve the past to inform the present. One of the five aims in its 2018-22 Business Plan is to be more strategic in caring for and developing its natural, scientific and cultural resources for present and future generations. When in digital form, these cultural resources can be in a massive array of formats and media which creates complex preservation issues. These include:

- 'Bit rot' in which data slowly degrades in its storage medium, often as a result of environmental factors
- Obsolescence or scarcity of equipment to play back or retrieve old digital formats

¹ The term born-digital refers to material or objects that originate in a digital form.

- Mechanical failure of storage media, such as hard drives
- Proprietary formats, which may be unsupported by vendors
- Ease in which digital media can be changed or deleted without necessarily leaving an audit trail of the changes

These inherent problems with digital media may also be exacerbated by other conditions:

- Digital media is often voluminous, making it difficult to pinpoint and pull out those documents of archival value.
- It is often poorly managed, making it difficult to assess collections or confirm provenance or authenticity.
- There can be a lack of high-level organisational support to resource and implement digital preservation.
- There can be a lack of digital literacies in the workforce.

For these reasons the digital record is much more fragile and transitory than its paper equivalent.

3. Purpose of the Policy

The purpose of the Digital Preservation Policy is to:

- State the principles that will guide RPMT's work in digital preservation.
- Provide the basis for future planning, whenever digital preservation is a part of collection management or information management activity.

4. Scope of the Policy

This Policy covers all digital material of historic value, including:

- Born digital accessioned collections;
- Collections information in digital form;
- Digital material or objects created out of the digitization of analogue records.

It also corresponds to the procedures, standards and best practice set out in the RPMT policies referenced in section 1 above.

5. Digital Preservation Principles

- i. RPMT recognises that preserving digital content is intrinsically linked with collections knowledge, documentation and care, and enabling access to that material and in a way that is appropriate to individual audiences.

- ii. RPMT recognises the importance of digital preservation and will provide high level support for its implementation and operation.
- iii. RPMT understands that preserving digital content demands active, constant management and sustainable, sufficient resourcing.
- iv. RPMT will use international standards and best practice to meet its preservation responsibilities.
- v. RPMT will, in some circumstances, have to be mindful of technology in its acquisition decisions. It recognises that there are, and will be, digital content that is easier to preserve due to the form that it is created in. Where possible it will seek to have content deposited in these preferred forms, while retaining the integrity of the content.
- vi. Preservation actions will always result in new versions of the digital content. In the case of born-digital material or objects in the collection, this will not directly affect the original item. As a matter of course the original bit stream will also be preserved.
- vii. RPMT understands that functionality and context can play a role in the comprehension of content and will make every effort to maintain that functionality (or a description of that functionality).
- viii. RPMT will endeavor to make all reservation actions transparent and auditable.
- ix. Digital content will be separated from its physical carrying media and migrated to new storage. Where appropriate, the physical media will be preserved separately.
- x. With the exception of born-digital material or objects that are accessioned into RPMT's collections, digital material produced or acquired by RPMT may be shifted to new formats on a lossless basis i.e. there is no degradation to the quality of the material.
- xi. RPMT will endeavour to record relevant rights and uses data with the assets.

6. Implementation

This Policy states RPMT's aspirations and approach towards the preservation of digital content in its care.

This Policy will be implemented through the development of procedures to create a practical framework within which the long-term preservation of digital content can take place and implemented through phased and measurable activity.

This policy will be implemented with reference to professional guidelines and requirements, such as Museum Accreditation, and in compliance with relevant legislation, such as data protection regulations.

As digital preservation is a nascent area of practice, with relatively little guidance for museums, RPMT will work with reference to other organisations such as the Collections Trust, Museums Association and Oral History Society, as well as with local partners such as the Keep, and the universities of Sussex and Brighton, to

develop new practices for digital preservation, and to incorporate and contribute to the development of professional practice in the wider heritage sector.

7 Roles and Responsibilities

Ensuring the preservation of digital documentary heritage materials is the responsibility of all RPMT's workforce.

The day-to-day business of preservation in born-digital material or objects is led by the professional staff in Collections and Conservation at the RPMT who will work to develop and implement digital preservation solutions.

The digital preservation of documentary and narrative information, and other forms of records and digital media will be the responsibility of RPMT's Digital Manager and Head of Royal Pavilion & Museums, as appropriate.

8 References

- 'Is your oral history legal and ethical?' guidance, Oral History Society, 2012
- British Library AV conservation policy also. <https://www.iasa-web.org/iasa-publications>
- IASA-TC 03 (2017) The Safeguarding of the Audiovisual Heritage: Ethics, Principles and Preservation Strategy
- IASA-TC 04 (2009) Guidelines on the Production and Preservation of Digital Audio Objects
- IASA-TC 05 (2014) Handling and Storage of Audio and Video Carriers DPC Digital Preservation Handbook; Society of American Archivists Glossary; University of Michigan Library glossary; Digital Curation Centre
- National Digital Stewardship Alliance (NDSA) preservation levels (NDSA, 2013)
- Collections Trust; MLA Renaissance East Midlands (2008) Digital preservation guidelines for museums