

## Session notes

### 'In conversation' Condition/record photography

'In conversations' focus on a particular theme or current issue in the culture and heritage sector. They work alongside our e-learning modules and will add an extra dimension to your 'core skills' sessions. They are informal discussions with colleagues across the sector and while we can't deliver 'live' sessions the ITP team aim to ask the questions you would be asking if you were in the room with us!

In this 'in conversation' Claire Messenger talks to John Williams, Head of Photography and Imaging at the British Museum. We will be learning more about the Museum's photography department and discussing the importance of condition/record photography for documenting and managing your collections.



### Introduction

Photography at the British Museum has its roots as far back as 1843 when William Henry Fox Talbot photographed the front of Montagu House which was the precursor to Sir Robert Smirke's building we see today.

The first official British Museum photographer was Roger Fenton from 1852 – 1859, but it wasn't until 1927 that the BM decided to employ its own salaried photographer.

Photography and Imaging, as part of the Collections Care department at the British Museum, work to provide high quality professional images to those who need them.

Their role is to produce creative and informative photography to enhance and promote access to the Museum's collections. They are also at the forefront of scientific processes working with infrared, ultraviolet photography, RTI (Reflectance Transformation Imaging), Photomacrography and Time Lapse Photography to support the Museum's research.

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Increasingly the photographers work to supply images to the Museum for its exhibition, publications, and display programmes. Photographers work to design briefs around the UK and abroad to find contextual images to help illustrate curators' and designers' visions. Also, they work with other museums to photograph objects from other collections intended for exhibition loan to the BM to ensure a consistency of style and approach.

The department also offers practical and technical support to collections staff so that they can achieve the best possible result with their own record photography.



### Course resources

The links below will provide you with more information on the theme of the session. Additional resources are provided with this session which aim to give you reading material that you may find useful – both now or in the future.

Working from a well-equipped central studio, our highly-experienced photography team produces 2D and 3D high-end images.

<https://www.britishmuseum.org/our-work/departments/collection-care/photography-and-imaging>

Photography at the Museum: a developing story

Photography is not even 200 years old, and yet has changed the way we think about the world. Archivist Francesca Hillier and Senior Photographer Kevin Lovelock reveal the intriguing history of photography at the British Museum.

<https://blog.britishmuseum.org/photography-at-the-museum-a-developing-story/>

British Museum Picture Library [www.bmimages.com](http://www.bmimages.com)

Equipment and software used by the British Museum Photographic Department

Digital sensor back [www.phaseone.com](http://www.phaseone.com)

Camera [www.sinar.ch](http://www.sinar.ch)

Lights and flash equipment [www.elinchrom.com](http://www.elinchrom.com)

Computers [www.apple.com](http://www.apple.com)

Image software, particularly Photoshop [www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com)

Professional Museum Photography Associations

ImageMuse

The website contains guidelines and standards for digital reproduction of fine art.

[www.imagemuse.org](http://www.imagemuse.org)

Association for Historical and Fine Art Photography

An organisation for image professionals in the cultural heritage sector in the UK

[www.ahfap.org.uk](http://www.ahfap.org.uk)

Useful information on all forms of Photography

[http://www.tabletopstudio.com/HowTo\\_page.html](http://www.tabletopstudio.com/HowTo_page.html)