Sources of Creative Commons licensed content - Museums and cultural organisations

April 2021

This factsheet is an adaptation of "Wealth of Licensed Images Available from UK Museums and Cultural Organisations" blog by Debbie McDonnell, Senior Consultant, March 2020.

We all value creative content, that's why we want to use images and videos in our presentations, blogs and websites and tell our friends and colleagues about the latest film, video game, work of art or book we've enjoyed. Copyright protection encourages us to stop before sharing content and consider the value of creative input. If we share copyright protected content without permission or the legitimate use of an exception to copyright, this can lead to reputational impact, penalty fines and possible legal proceedings.

The good news is that there are an increasing number of images available from many UK museums and cultural organisations under the terms of open content licences such as Creative Commons where you don't need to seek permissions. This means that you have more certainty than usual that the organisation has the right to grant open licences – they are either the copyright holders themselves or have liaised with the rights holders to enable them to grant licences for you to reuse their content.

Of course, you still need to check the licence, understand any restrictions and give credit where required. It's worth familiarising yourself with Creative Commons licensing terms[i], there are only four conditions used in different combinations.

Here are our top sources for fantastic images to enliven blogs and presentations:

1. **Art UK** [ii]– the online home for every public art collection in the UK. You can refine your search to images with open or Creative Commons licences which includes in copyright as well as out of copyright where the artist died before 1950.
2. **British Library**[iii] – easy to use catalogue on Flickr.com, including book illustrations, maps and illuminated manuscripts. The copyright status and licence is displayed under the image.
3. **Wellcome Trust Foundation**[iv] - thousands of freely licensed digital books, artworks, photos and images of historical library materials and museum objects.

Other cultural organisations offering licensed images for online and/or educational use:

Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery[v] offers images of all out of copyright works on a Creative Commons CC-0 Public Domain licence.

British Cartoon archive[vi] offers cartoons which can be used for teaching purposes including academic seminars and conferences.

Imperial War Museums[vii] offers images of some works in its collection on a non commercial licence, mainly ones out of copyright.

National Gallery[viii] offers images of some works in its collection on a Creative Commons CC-BY-NC-ND licence, mainly ones out of copyright. It currently states that non-profit publications, personal websites, blogs, and social media are defined as non-commercial use.

National Portrait Gallery[ix] offers images of some works in its collection on a Creative Commons CC-BY-NC-ND licence, mainly ones out of copyright. It currently states that Creative Commons images can be used online in scholarly and non-profit publications and websites, blogs, local society newsletters and family history.

Royal Shakespeare Company images[x] have a large selection of images from RSC productions available to use in a classroom or for an educational activity.

Science Museum[xi] offers images of works in its collection on a Creative Commons CC-BY-NC-SA licence and you can refine your search to non commercial use only.

Tate[xii] offers images of some works in its collection on a Creative Commons CC-BY-NC-ND licence, mainly ones out of copyright. You can refine your search results to artworks with Creative Commons licences.

Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A)[xiii] have images from its collections available for specific permitted uses including non-commercial websites and for five years online use by charities and non-profit organisations.

York Museums Trust[xiv] offers images of works in its collection on a Creative Commons CC-BY-SA or Public Domain licence.

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[i] https://creativecommons.org/use-remix/cc-licenses/

[ii] https://artuk.org/

iii https://www.flickr.com/photos/britishlibrary/

iv https://wellcomecollection.org/works

v https://www.birminghammuseums.org.uk/collection/picture-library

vi https://archive.cartoons.ac.uk/

vii https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections

viii https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/search-the-collection

ix https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/

x https://images.rsc.org.uk/action/viewHome

xi https://collection.sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk/search

xii https://www.tate-images.com/

xiii https://collections.vam.ac.uk/

xiv https://www.yorkmuseumstrust.org.uk/collections/search/

Helpful resources

- **Naomi Korn Associates resources** – A collection of free and openly licensed copyright, licensing and data protection help resources. www.naomikorn.com/resources

- **Intellectual Property Office (IPO)** – Intellectual property rights resources, information and updates on UK legislation. www.gov.uk/government/organisations/intellectual-property-office

- **Heritage Digital guide: Working with volunteers: Copyright considerations** – A guide providing information on best copyright practices when it comes to managing or supervising volunteers. This resource includes an editable template Deed of Copyright Assignment that you can use with your own volunteers. www.charitydigital.org.uk/resources/digital-guide-working-with-volunteers-copyright-consideration

- **Heritage Digital guide: Heritage Organisations and Exceptions to Copyright** – A guide providing an essential overview of the various UK copyright exceptions that can be used by heritage organisations to support their digital strategies. www.charitydigital.org.uk/resources/resources/digital-guide-heritage-organisations-and-exceptions-to-copyright

- **Heritage Digital guide: A Guide to Copyright and Working with Suppliers to Create Digital Content** - Best practice steps and guidance to help heritage organisations manage copyright effectively when working with suppliers (for

example freelancers, web developers, photographers or commissioned artists). www.charitydigital.org.uk/resources/resources/digital-guide-working-with-suppliers-to-create-digital-content

- **Heritage Digital guide: Brexit, Intellectual Property Rights and Heritage: What you Need to Know** - Information and guidance for heritage organisations about IP changes following the UK's departure from the EU. www.charitydigital.org.uk/resources/resources/digital-guide-brexit-intellectual-property-rights-and-heritage

- **Copyright User** - A website providing guidance and resources about using copyright resources www.copyrightuser.org

- **Creative Commons** – Details about the different types of CC licences and sources of CC licenced content. www.creativecommons.org

- **Publication: Information Law: Compliance for librarians, information professionals and knowledge managers, by Charles Oppenheim, Adrienne Muir and Naomi Korn** – A book presenting the tried and tested 'Compliance Methodology' for organisations seeking to navigate the complex legal landscape of the information professions. www.facetpublishing.co.uk/page/detail/?k=9781783303663*

Disclaimer: The contents of this resource are based on the assessment of Naomi Korn Associates Ltd at the time in which the resource was created (April 2021). The contents should not be considered legal advice. If such legal advice is required, the opinion of a suitably qualified legal professional should be sought.