

Whittlesey Museum Collections Development Policy

Name of museum: Whittlesey Museum, Town Hall, Market Street PE7 1BD

Name of governing body: Whittlesea Museum Trust

Date on which this policy was approved by governing body: September 2014

Policy review procedure: The collections development policy will be published and reviewed from time to time, at least once every five years.

Arts Council England will be notified of any changes to the Collections Development Policy, and the implications of any such changes for the future of existing collections

Date in which this policy is due for review: September 2019

1. Relationship to other relevant policies/plans of the organisation:

1.1. The museum's statement of purpose is:

"The aim of Whittlesey Museum is to collect, care and interpret the natural and cultural heritage of Whittlesey Museum and the surrounding area: Coates, Eastrea Pondersbridge and Turves for the benefit and enjoyment of students, local people and visitors."

1.2. The governing body will ensure that both acquisition and disposal are carried out openly and with transparency.

1.3. By definition, the museum has a long-term purpose and holds collections in trust for the benefit of the public in relation to its stated objectives. The governing body therefore accepts the principle that sound curatorial reasons must be established before consideration is given to any acquisition to the collection, or the disposal of any items in the museum's collection.

1.4. Acquisitions outside the current stated policy will only be made in exceptional circumstances.

1.5. The museum recognises its responsibility, when acquiring additions to its collections, to ensure that care of collections, documentation arrangements and use of collections will meet the requirements of the Museum Accreditation Standard. This includes using SPECTRUM primary procedures for collections management. It will take into account limitations on collecting imposed by such factors as staffing, storage and care of collection arrangements.

1.6. The museum will undertake due diligence and make every effort not to acquire, whether by purchase, gift, bequest or exchange, any object or specimen unless the governing body or responsible officer is satisfied that the museum can acquire a valid title to the item in question.

1.7. The museum will not undertake disposal motivated principally by financial reasons

2. History of the collections

The collections of Whittlesey Museum have been gathered in entirety since the idea of the museum was first suggested within the Whittlesea Society circa 1974.

When the museum first opened in 1976 the foundation contents were a mixture of donation and loan items from local individuals, as a result of this the museum was strongly focused on domestic and social history items of the preceding forty years. Records of items entering the museum were kept using a card index system and later also recorded in a book, items did not undergo an accession process but were allocated sequential numbers in appropriate subject categories. Many loan items were subsequently returned to their owners, leaving gaps in the early parts of these sequences in the current museum collection.

Over the next two decades the museum collections increased, primarily by gift of items (and documents/photographs) held by local individuals. Some replica or prop items were also created for display and absorbed into the collection. Early acquisitions were not tightly controlled to the current geographic remit and the museum was still rapidly expanding. In 1989 Whittlesey Museum joined the new Registration system for museums.

Formal accessioning and acquisition control began in 1994, although many museum items from the previous system have since been retrospectively accessioned. New acquisitions continue to be assigned a category number in addition to their accession number.

In the 21st Century, restrictions on storage capacity and gallery space have begun to affect the museum and the collections development policy has developed an increasingly narrow focus onto immediately local items which fill gaps in the existing collection. The current primary collection management system is MODES.

3. An overview of current collections

Existing collections, including the subjects or themes and the periods of time and for geographic areas to which the collection relate:

The collection of the museum encompasses the entire history of the settlements in and around Whittlesey. At least 90% of the collection originates from the last two hundred years. The themes of the collection have been broken down into the following sub sections

Agriculture - *small farming tools / ploughs*

Sir Harry Smith - *artefacts relating to the famous Victorian general Sir Harry Smith*

Notable people - *famous present and former residents of Whittlesey*

Archaeology - *clay pipe / bronze age remains / replica sword / prehistoric fossils*

Military ("War") - *tools of war (pointed weapons, trench periscope) / personal effects (compass, ration cards) / commemorative items (trophy made from downed Nazi plane)*

Household - *domestic appliances / manuals for appliances / decorative items for household / large items (washing machines, dolly tubs)*

Sports and Pastimes - *trophies and other awards / sporting equipment /*

Photographs - *encompasses the various themes, although primarily focused upon local architecture and people*

National Landmarks ("Commemorative") - *bunting and other effects from celebrations / commemorative memorabilia (mugs/plates) / souvenir editions of printed publications*

Books - *local history / histories of world wars and local regiments / fiction books / local trade directories*

Fashion and Everyday Clothing ("Costume") - *military uniforms / clothing for notable family events / fashion / everyday clothing*

Trade - *hand tools / clothing and other effects relating to a local professions eg ratting*

Bricks - *locally produced bricks / bricks to commemorate notable occasions / non-Whittlesey bricks produced in Britain*

Coins and Medals - *sporting / military service / military gallantry / school*

Ephemera

Education

Family History

Geology

Maps- *surveys of local area /*

Pictures and Prints- *aerial photographs of the local area / painted and photographic portraits / painting and photographic images of local events or landmarks*

In addition to this, the museum also holds a small archive with the following subsections:

War

Local History

Household

Bricks

Architecture

Buildings

Law

Public Houses

Public Utilities
Newspaper Cuttings

4. Themes and priorities for future collecting

Criteria governing future collecting policy, including the subjects or themes, periods of time and/or geographic areas and any collections which will not be subject to further acquisition.

The future collecting policy is to collect items which relate to the history of Whittlesey, Coates, Eastrea, Pondersbridge and Turves.

The critical situation in the museum's collection stores have meant that only items of particular significance and interest can be collected at the present time. A collection audit is currently underway and the museum is exploring avenues for additional collection storage (off-site or by making space in existing stores through site development). The former project involves systematically processing the collection held in store rooms 1 and 2 (see appendix 1). The objectives and outcomes of this can be seen below (some of these action points also feature on the Documentation Plan and in the museum Forward Plan):

Objectives of Collection Audit

- i. Catalogue every item from index card to MODES collection management system
- ii. Identify all missing items and errors in recording of what is in collection
- iii. Transfer multiple sets of records and folders listing items onto MODES so that one concise and coherent database is kept and updates
- iv. Dispose of damaged, dangerous or duplicated items which can be of no further use to the collection (e.g. through use in handling collection)
- v. Where possible improve the storage conditions of the collection
- vi. Create digital images to accompany the record of each artefact on MODES
- vii. Improve environmental conditions in the collection store

Outcomes of Collection Audit

- i. Create more space in the collection store allowing continued collection
- ii. Enable a coherent picture to be created of what the museum holds in order to aid the Trustees and Curator in deciding what should be collected by the museum
- iii. Hold a sustainable collection with transparent and coherent management which will promote easy access as well as improving the reputation of the museum amongst the public.
- iv. Create a safer store for staff and the collection through the identification of risk (mould on artefacts / weak shelving units / poor environmental monitoring procedures)

These actions should ensure that the museum is able to resume a fuller collection of items relating to the local areas by some point in 2016.

Limitations on collecting

The museum is strictly enforcing the policy to only collect items which directly comply with the organisation's collection policy. As the acceptance of artefacts bring with it a requirement to care for the item to Accreditation Standard levels, items may also on occasion not be accepted because it would not be possible to store and care for the artefact to the level required.

In addition to these limitations, items will not be collected if they are considered to be harmful to the collection (e.g. pest infestations) or staff (e.g. contain asbestos).

5. Themes and priorities for rationalisation and disposal

5.1 The museum recognises that the principles on which priorities for rationalisation and disposal are determined will be through a formal review process that identifies which collections are included and excluded from the review. The outcome of review and any subsequent rationalisation will not reduce the quality or significance of the collection and will result in a more useable, well managed collection.

5.2 The procedures used will meet professional standards. The process will be documented, open and transparent. There will be clear communication with key stakeholders about the outcomes and the process.

5.3 Themes and priorities for rationalisation and disposal:

Priority - Dispose of damaged, dangerous or duplicated items which can be of no further use to the collection (e.g. through use in handling collection)

Themes - Museum collections to tightly focus on objects related to Whittlesey, Coates, Eastrea, Pondersbridge and Turves. Therefore items relating to national or international events with no link at all to the local area (including local use or ownership) may be considered for disposal to accredited museums where they would be of greater relevance.

6 Legal and ethical framework for acquisition and disposal of items

6.1 The museum recognises its responsibility to work within the parameters of the Museum Association Code of Ethics when considering acquisition and disposal.

7 Collecting policies of other museums

7.1 The museum will take account of the collecting policies of other museums and other organisations collecting in the same or related areas or subject fields. Whittlesey Museum will consult with these organisations where conflicts of interest may arise or to define areas of specialism, in order to avoid unnecessary duplication and waste of resources.

7.2 Specific reference is made to the following museums:

Chatteris Museum, March and District Museum, Peterborough Museum, Ramsey Rural Museum, Thorney Heritage Museum, Wisbech and Fenland Museum.

8 Archival holdings

8.1 As the Museum holds archives, including photographs and printed ephemera, its governing body will be guided by the Code of Practice on Archives for Museums and Galleries in the United Kingdom (3rd edition, 2002).

9 Acquisition

9.1 The museum policy for agreeing acquisitions is:

All decisions relating to acquisitions must be ratified by the governing body of Whittlesey Museum.

The Museum will exercise due diligence and make every effort not to acquire, whether by purchase, gift, bequest or exchange, any object or specimen unless the governing body or responsible officer is satisfied that the museum can acquire a valid title to the item in question.

Acquisitions outside the current stated policy will only be made in exceptional circumstances, and only after proper consideration by the governing body of the Whittlesey Museum. Such exceptions will only be made when in the best interest of the museum.

9.2 The museum will not acquire any object or specimen unless it is satisfied that the object or specimen has not been acquired in, or exported from, its country of origin (or any intermediate country in which it may have been legally owned) in violation of that country's laws. (For the purposes of this paragraph 'country of origin' includes the United Kingdom).

9.3 In accordance with the provisions of the UNESCO 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, which the UK ratified with effect from November 1 2002, and the Dealing in Cultural Objects (Offences) Act 2003, the museum will reject any items that have been illicitly traded. The governing body will be guided by the national guidance on the responsible

acquisition of cultural property issued by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in 2005.

10 Human remains

10.1 As the museum holds or intends to acquire human remains from any period, it will follow the procedures in the 'Guidance for the care of human remains in museums' issued by DCMS in 2005.

11 Biological and geological material

11.1 So far as biological and geological material is concerned, the museum will not acquire by any direct or indirect means any specimen that has been collected, sold or otherwise transferred in contravention of any national or international wildlife protection or natural history conservation law or treaty of the United Kingdom or any other country, except with the express consent of an appropriate outside authority.

12 Archaeological material

12.1 The museum will not acquire archaeological material (including excavated ceramics) in any case where the governing body or responsible officer has any suspicion that the circumstances of their recovery involved a failure to follow the appropriate legal procedures.

12.2 In England, Wales and Northern Ireland the procedures include reporting finds to the landowner or occupier of the land and to the proper authorities in the case of possible treasure (i.e. the Coroner for Treasure) as set out in the Treasure Act 1996 (as amended by the Coroners & Justice Act 2009).

13 Exceptions

13.1 Any exceptions to the above clauses will only be because the museum is:

- acting as an externally approved repository of last resort for material of local (UK) origin**
- acting with the permission of authorities with the requisite jurisdiction in the country of origin**

In these cases the museum will be open and transparent in the way it makes decisions and will act only with the express consent of an appropriate outside authority. The museum will document when these exceptions occur.

14 Spoliation

14.1 The Museum will use the statement of principles 'Spoliation of Works of Art during the Nazi, Holocaust and World War Two period', issued for non-national museums in 1999 by the Museum and Galleries Commission.

15 The Repatriation and Restitution of objects and human remains

15.1 The Museum's governing body, acting on the advice of the Museum's professional staff, if any, may take a decision to return human remains (unless covered by the 'Guidance for the care of human remains in museums' issued by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2005), objects or specimens to a country or people of origin. The Museum will take decisions, on a case by case basis, within its legal position and taking into account all ethical implications and available guidance. This will mean that the procedures described in 16.1-5 will be followed but the remaining procedures are not appropriate.

15.2 The disposal of human remains from museums in England, Northern Ireland and Wales will follow the procedures in the 'Guidance for the care of human remains in museums'.

16 Disposal procedures

- 16.1 All disposals will be undertaken with reference to the SPECTRUM Primary Procedures on disposal.**
- 16.2 The governing body will confirm that it is legally free to dispose of an item. Agreements on disposal made with donors will also be taken into account.**
- 16.3 When disposal of a museum object is being considered, the museum will establish if it was acquired with the aid of an external funding organisation. In such cases, any conditions attached to the original grant will be followed. This may include repayment of the original grant and a proportion of the proceeds if the item is disposed of by sale.**
- 16.4 When disposal is motivated by curatorial reasons the procedures outlined below will be followed and the method of disposal may be by gift, sale, exchange or as a last resort - destruction.**
- 16.5 The decision to dispose of material from the collections will be taken by the governing body only after full consideration of the reasons for disposal. Other factors including public benefit, the implications for the museum's collections and collections held by museums and other organisations collecting the same material or in related fields will be considered. Expert advice will be obtained and the views of**

stakeholders such as donors, researchers, local and source communities and others served by the museum will also be sought.

- 16.6 A decision to dispose of a specimen or object, whether by gift, exchange, sale or destruction (in the case of an item too badly damaged or deteriorated to be of any use for the purposes of the collections or for reasons of health and safety), will be the responsibility of the governing body of the museum acting on the advice of professional curatorial staff, if any, and not of the curator or manager of the collection acting alone.**
- 16.7 Once a decision to dispose of material in the collection has been taken, priority will be given to retaining it within the public domain. It will therefore be offered in the first instance, by gift or sale, directly to other Accredited Museums likely to be interested in its acquisition.**
- 16.8 If the material is not acquired by any Accredited museum to which it was offered as a gift or for sale, then the museum community at large will be advised of the intention to dispose of the material normally through a notice on the MA's Find an Object web listing service, an announcement in the Museums Association's Museums Journal or in other specialist publications and websites if appropriate.**
- 16.9 The announcement relating to gift or sale will indicate the number and nature of specimens or objects involved, and the basis on which the material will be transferred to another institution. Preference will be given to expressions of interest from other Accredited Museums. A period of at least two months will be allowed for an interest in acquiring the material to be expressed. At the end of this period, if no expressions of interest have been received, the museum may consider disposing of the material to other interested individuals and organisations giving priority to organisations in the public domain.**
- 16.10 Any monies received by the museum governing body from the disposal of items will be applied solely and directly for the benefit of the collections. This normally means the purchase of further acquisitions. In exceptional cases, improvements relating to the care of collections in order to meet or exceed Accreditation requirements relating to the risk of damage to and deterioration of the collections may be justifiable. Any monies received in compensation for the damage, loss or destruction of items will be applied in the same way. Advice on those cases where the monies are intended to be used for the care of collections will be sought from the Arts Council England.**
- 16.11 The proceeds of a sale will be allocated so it can be demonstrated that they are spent in a manner compatible with the requirements of the Accreditation standard. Money must be restricted to the long-term sustainability, use and development of the collection.**

Disposal by exchange

- 16.12** The nature of disposal by exchange means that the museum will not necessarily be in a position to exchange the material with another Accredited museum. The governing body will therefore ensure that issues relating to accountability and impartiality are carefully considered to avoid undue influence on its decision-making process.
- 16.12.1** In cases where the governing body wishes for sound curatorial reasons to exchange material directly with Accredited or non-Accredited museums, with other organisations or with individuals, the procedures in paragraphs 16.1-5 will apply.
- 16.12.2** If the exchange is proposed to be made with a specific Accredited museum, other Accredited museums which collect in the same or related areas will be directly notified of the proposal and their comments will be requested.
- 16.12.3** If the exchange is proposed with a non-Accredited museum, with another type of organisation or with an individual, the museum will place a notice on the MA's Find an Object web listing service, or make an announcement in the Museums Association's Museums Journal or in other specialist publications and websites if appropriate.
- 16.12.4** Both the notification and announcement must provide information on the number and nature of the specimens or objects involved both in the museum's collection and those intended to be acquired in exchange. A period of at least two months must be allowed for comments to be received. At the end of this period, the governing body must consider the comments before a final decision on the exchange is made.

Disposal by destruction

- 16.12** If it is not possible to dispose of an object through transfer or sale, the governing body may decide to destroy it.
- 16.13** It is acceptable to destroy material of low intrinsic significance (duplicate mass-produced articles or common specimens which lack significant provenance) where no alternative method of disposal can be found.
- 16.14** Destruction is also an acceptable method of disposal in cases where an object is in extremely poor condition, has high associated health and safety risks or is part of an approved destructive testing request identified in an organisation's research policy.

- 16.15 Where necessary, specialist advice will be sought to establish the appropriate method of destruction. Health and safety risk assessments will be carried out by trained staff where required.**
- 16.16 The destruction of objects should be witnessed by an appropriate member of the museum workforce. In circumstances where this is not possible, eg the destruction of controlled substances, a police certificate should be obtained and kept in the relevant object history file.**

Appendix One

Floor Plan Whittlesey Museum

