

The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge

Acquisition and Disposal Policy

Governing Body: The Syndicate of the Fitzwilliam Museum

Date approved by Syndicate: 9 May 2005

Date at which policy due for review: 2010

I. Existing collections, including the subjects or themes for collecting

The Fitzwilliam Museum is the principal museum of the University of Cambridge. It owes its foundation to Richard, VII Viscount Fitzwilliam of Merrion, who in 1816 bequeathed his works of art and his library to the University together with the funds to house them. The Museum opened to the public in 1848: from that date to the present, the founding collection of paintings, prints, books and manuscripts, has been repeatedly extended through bequest, gift and purchase.

There are five curatorial departments.

- The **Department of Antiquities** is responsible for the material culture of Ancient Egypt and the Sudan, Greece, Rome, Cyprus and the Ancient Near East. The main periods and cultures of these ancient civilisations are represented through a wide variety of objects and media, from marble sculpture to pottery, bronzes, textiles, gold, glass and engraved seal-stones.
- The **Department of Applied Arts** has extensive collections of British and Continental ceramics and glass, silver, jewellery, pewter, arms and armour, sculpture in ivory, bronze, terracotta and marble, furniture, clocks and watches, textiles and fans. It is also responsible for substantial collections of Islamic and Oriental decorative arts, including ceramics and glass, bronzes, tsuba, snuff-bottles, jade, lacquer, rugs and other textiles, fans and weapons.
- The **Department of Coins and Medals** has major collections of Greek, Roman, Oriental, Medieval and Modern coins, along with notable collections of tokens, paper money and medals. These derive from all parts of the world and date from the second millennium BC to the present day.
- The **Department of Manuscripts and Printed Books** houses one of the finest collections of illuminated manuscripts in this country, rare printed books, manuscript and printed music, literary autographs and correspondence. It is also responsible for the Museum's archives and for the reference library, which is open to the public.
- The **Department of Paintings, Drawings and Prints** maintains a superb collection of British and European paintings, drawings and prints, including an important group of British portrait miniatures. There is also an interesting group of American art and a fine collection of Japanese prints and drawings. Persian and Indian miniatures are also represented.
- The Fitzwilliam Museum's collections are designated. In each Department works of national and sometimes international significance are to be found, including numerous individual works and groups of superlative quality, artistic or historical importance.

2. Criteria governing future collecting policy, including the subjects or themes for collecting

All five Departments actively seek to extend the collections through judicious acquisitions, whether by gift, bequest or purchase. The Museum's curators advise the Syndicate on collecting within the areas of the collections, as outlined above (1). They are pro-active in seeking to build on existing strengths, and to fill perceived 'gaps' in the established collections; they also react opportunistically to pursue potentially advantageous acquisitions as and when they arise.

3. Period of time and/or geographical area to which collecting relates

See 1 above. The collections are truly international in their geographical scope. Chronologically, they range from the twelfth millennium BC to the present day.

4. Limitations on collecting

The museum recognises its responsibility, in acquiring additions to its collections, to ensure that care of collections, documentation arrangements and use of collections will meet the requirements of the Accreditation Standard. It will take into account limitations on collecting imposed by such factors as staffing, storage and care of collection arrangements.

The Syndicate is also constrained in its collecting by the terms that restrict the various trust funds at its disposal.

5. Collecting policies of other museums

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. It will consult with these organisations where conflicts of interest may arise or to define areas of specialisation, in order to avoid unnecessary duplication and waste of resources.

Specific reference may be made to other museums, galleries and libraries, in particular: within the University of Cambridge, to the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology and the University Library; outside Cambridge, to the Ashmolean Museum and the Bodleian Library, Oxford, and the major national collections of art and culture, notably the National Gallery, the National Portrait Gallery, the Tate(s), the Victoria and Albert Museum, the British Museum, and the British Library.

6. Policy review procedure

The Acquisition and Disposal Policy will be published and reviewed from time to time, at least once every five years. The date when the policy is next due for review is noted above.

The Regional Agency for the East of England will be notified of any changes to the Acquisition and Disposal Policy, and the implications of any such changes for the future of existing collections.

7. Acquisitions not covered by the policy

Acquisitions outside the current stated policy will only be made in very exceptional circumstances, and then only after proper consideration by the Syndicate of the museum itself, having regard to the interests of other museums.

8. Acquisition procedures

a. 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 Syndicate or responsible officer is satisfied that the museum can acquire a valid title to the item in question.

b. In particular, 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).

c. 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 Syndicate will be guided by the national guidance on the responsible acquisition of cultural property issued by DCMS in 2005.

d. 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.

e. The museum will not acquire archaeological antiquities (including excavated ceramics) in any case where the Syndicate or responsible officer has any suspicion that the circumstances of their recovery involved a failure to follow the appropriate legal procedures, such as reporting finds to the landowner or occupier of the land and to the proper authorities in the case of possible treasure as defined by the Treasure Act 1996 (in England, Northern Ireland and Wales) or reporting finds through the Treasure Trove procedure (in Scotland).

f. Any exceptions to the above clauses 8a, 8b, 8c, or 8e will only be because the museum is either:

acting as an externally approved repository of last resort for material of local (UK) origin;
or

acquiring an item of minor importance that lacks secure ownership history but in the best judgement of experts in the field concerned has not been illicitly traded; or

acting with the permission of authorities with the requisite jurisdiction in the country of origin; or

in possession of reliable documentary evidence that the item was exported from its country of origin before 1970.

In these cases the museum will be open and transparent in the way it makes decisions and where relevant will act only with the express consent of an appropriate outside authority.

g. Full records of the process of each acquisition will be created, in accordance with SPECTRUM procedures.

9. Spoliation

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

10. Repatriation and Restitution

The museum's Syndicate, acting on the advice of the museum's professional staff, may take a decision to return human remains, objects or specimens to a country or people of origin. The museum will take such decisions on a case-by-case basis, within its legal position and taking into account all ethical implications.

11. Management of archives

As the museum holds and collects archives, including photographs and printed ephemera, its Syndicate will be guided by the Code of Practice on Archives for Museums and Galleries in the United Kingdom (3rd ed., 2002).

12. Disposal procedures

- a. By definition, the museum has a long-term purpose and should possess (or intend to acquire) permanent collections in relation to its stated objectives. The Syndicate accepts the principle that, except for sound curatorial reasons (if, for example, the item in question is a duplicate coin), there is a strong presumption against the disposal of any items in the museum's collection.
- b. The museum will establish that it is legally free to dispose of an item. The terms of the Founder's Bequest render this part of the collections by inference inalienable. Any decision to dispose of material from any other part of the collections will be taken only after due consideration.
- c. 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.
- d. Decisions to dispose of items will not be made with the principal aim of generating funds.
- e. Any monies received by the museum Syndicate from the disposal of items will be applied for the benefit of the collections. This normally means the purchase of further acquisitions but in exceptional cases improvements relating to the care of collections may be justifiable. Advice on these cases will be sought from MLA.
- f. 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), will be the responsibility of the Syndicate of the museum acting on the advice of professional curatorial staff.
- g. Once a decision to dispose of material in the collection has been taken, priority will be given to retaining it within the public domain, unless it is to be destroyed. It will therefore be offered in the first instance, by gift, exchange or sale, directly to other Accredited Museums likely to be interested in its acquisition.
- h. If the material is not acquired by any Accredited Museums to which it was offered directly, then the museum community at large will be advised of the intention to dispose of the material, normally through an announcement in the Museums Association's Museums Journal, and in other professional journals where appropriate.
- i. The announcement 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.

j. Full records will be kept of all decisions on disposals and the items involved and proper arrangements made for the preservation and/or transfer, as appropriate, of the documentation relating to the items concerned, including photographic records where practicable in accordance with SPECTRUM Procedure on de-accession and disposal.

Approved by the Syndicate of the Fitzwilliam Museum at their meeting 9th May 2005 (Item XII)