
FITZWILLIAM MUSEUM

COLLECTIONS DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Name of museum: The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

Name of governing body: The Syndicate of the Fitzwilliam Museum

Date on which this policy was approved by governing body: 23 November 2015

Policy review procedure:

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

Date at which this policy is due for review: October 2020

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 collections.

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

1.1 The museum's statement of purpose is:

As the principal museum of the University of Cambridge, the Fitzwilliam Museum's mission is to contribute to society through the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence, by preserving and extending its world-class collections and by offering exhibitions and public programmes to engage as wide an audience as possible. This policy is intended as a guide to the principles and the practical procedures underlying and informing the development of the Museum's collections. It is designed for the use of both members of the Syndicate and all staff involved or potentially involved in the processes of acquisition or disposal. It is available for public consultation on the Museum's website.

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 Fitzwilliam Museum 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 for a building in which to house them. The Museum opened to the public on its current site 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. Notable additions over the last 200 years include the Disney collection of Classical sculpture, the McClean collection of coins and manuscripts, the Glaisher collection of European ceramics, John Charrington's print collection and the wide-ranging assortment of fine and applied arts and antiquities bequeathed by Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon. In recent years there has been a considerable focus on extending the collection of contemporary art and craft, from paintings and prints to ceramics, glass and furniture.

3 An overview of current collections

The Museum collections are curated in five departments.

- The **Department of Antiquities** is responsible for the material culture of Ancient Egypt and 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.
- 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 a substantial group of North American Prints 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.

4 Themes and priorities for future collecting

All five Departments actively seek to extend the collections through judicious acquisitions, whether by gift, bequest or purchase. The Museum's Director and Curators advise the Syndicate on collecting within the areas of the collections, as outlined above (3). The collections are truly international in their geographical scope; chronologically, they range from the twelfth millennium BC to the present day. Curators 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.

5 The museum does not intend to dispose of collections during the period covered by this policy.

The Museum holds its collections in trust for society in relation to its stated objectives. Sound curatorial reasons for disposal would need to be established before consideration were given to the disposal of any items within the museum's collection, and it is not anticipated that the question of disposal is likely to arise in the next five years. A high proportion of the collection is in any case inalienable, through the terms either of its bequest or gift, or in the case of purchases, through the terms attached to funds raised for acquisition.

The most likely ground for disposal of an individual object would be proof that an object had been spoliated and could therefore legally be claimed by its rightful owner (see 14, below) .

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. It 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 museum(s)/organisation(s):

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.

Where appropriate the Fitzwilliam Museum is willing to seek opportunities for potential joint acquisitions with other museums, galleries or libraries.

8 Archival holdings

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).

9 Acquisition

9.1 The policy and procedure for agreeing acquisitions is:

Potential acquisitions are recommended by Curators to the Director, and by the Director to the Syndicate, or in some cases directly by the Director to the Syndicate. In the case of purchases the Director in consultation with the relevant Curator(s) and if appropriate the Development Director and Accounts Manager, will identify suitable or potential sources of funding. All purchases must be authorised in advance by the Syndicate: in urgent cases (for example if an item is imminently coming up for auction before the next Syndicate meeting) agreement in principle may be sought by the Director from the Chair of the Syndicate. Purchases made with funds donated by the Friends of the Fitzwilliam are at the discretion of the Director; but in common with all gifts or bequests these too must be accepted by the Syndicate. When considering any potential acquisition its current and projected needs in terms of conservation and storage will be taken into account, along with curatorial capacity.

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 human remains (one ancient Egyptian mummy and small numbers of other Egyptian mummified human body parts) 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 The museum will not acquire any biological or geological material.

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 II period’, issued for non-national museums in 1999 by the Museums 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 DCMS in 2005), 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 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.
- 16.12 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 deaccession and disposal.

Disposal by exchange

16.13 The Museum will not dispose of items by exchange

Disposal by destruction

- 16.14 If it is not possible to dispose of an object through transfer or sale, the governing body may decide to destroy it.
- 16.15 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.
- 16.16 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.
- 16.17 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.
- 16.18 The destruction of objects should be witnessed by an appropriate member of the museum workforce. In circumstances where this is not possible, e.g. the destruction of controlled substances, a police certificate should be obtained and kept in the relevant object history file.