

## **PORTSMOUTH MUSEUMS AND RECORDS SERVICE: ACQUISITION AND DISPOSAL POLICY (MUSEUM COLLECTIONS)**

### **1. Background**

This policy incorporates wording required by the Museums Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) for the Accreditation Standard which supersedes the MGC registration scheme.

The purpose of this policy is to comply with the requirements of the Museums Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) Accreditation Standard concerning acquisition and disposal of collections and to encourage public confidence in the museum service as a suitable repository.

It also defines the present state and use of the collections and reviews the current policy of acquisition and disposal. It ensures material is accepted according to a recognised strategy and serves as a reference document to guide curatorial decisions.

It establishes relationships with other museum bodies in the area with regard to acquisition of material for the collection and transfer of objects.

The Regional Agency, SEMLAC, 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.

### **2. Policy Statement – Principal Service and Departmental Objectives**

The Museums and Records Service exists to deliver, through the relevant and innovative use of the collections, services that involve all the people and communities of Portsmouth in the history and heritage of their city for the benefit of the individual resident and visitor.

The Portsmouth Museums and Records Service is fully committed to:

- (i) Helping the city council realise its corporate objectives and in particular the improvement of the quality of life of the resident community
- (ii) Enhancing access to the city council's collections, in a variety of innovative ways, for the benefit of the broadest possible resident audience and visitors to the city

- (iii) Ensuring that the city council's collections are effectively and efficiently managed and developed to the highest standards to facilitate their use.

The Culture Group has the following Vision Statement:

We will work to maximise community involvement in and engagement with a rich variety of high quality cultural services.

## **2.1 Existing Collections**

The existing permanent collections are archaeology, art, local history, military history and natural science. The Schools Loans collection by its nature is not part of the permanent collections. The archives collection and the Arthur Conan Doyle Collection – Lancelyn Green Bequest are subject to separate acquisitions and disposal policies.

### Archaeology

The archaeological collections have primarily been collected from sites within a fifteen mile radius of Portsmouth Guildhall. The date range is from the Lower Palaeolithic to the Post Medieval periods. There is also a small collection of Cypriot pottery from the Cypriot Bronze Age to the Classical Hellenic period.

Approximately 240,000 items.

### Art

The art collections cover fine and decorative art – paintings, prints, sculpture, ceramics, glass, metal work, furniture and furnishing textiles. The earliest items are from c1450 and collecting in all fields extends to recently produced contemporary works. A small collection of items relating to Dickens, his life and work is held at the Charles Dickens Birthplace Museum.

Approximately 8,000 items.

### Local History

The collections consist of material that focuses on the local and social history of Portsmouth from 1650 to the present day through a range of material including paintings, prints, costume and textiles, domestic

items and vehicles particularly public service vehicles. Oral history tapes are also collected by the section.

Approximately 23,000 items.

### Military History

Two main areas are covered: material relating to D-Day and the Battle of Normandy in 1944 and material from the military heritage of Portsmouth particularly reflecting its roles as a fortified garrison town.

Approximately 10,000 items.

### Natural Science

The natural science collections consist of zoological, botanical and geological material representative of the flora and fauna (living and extinct) found in and around Portsmouth and South East Hampshire and adjoining areas. Small amounts of exotic material are included, mostly from local collectors.

Approximately 114,000 items.

### Significant Loan

The Overlord Embroidery at the D-Day Museum is held by our Service on a 99-year lease from the Overlord Embroidery Trust (loan signed on 31 October 1983).

## **2.2 Subjects and Themes**

The Service will collect objects under the following headings:

- a. Fine and Decorative Art
- b. Contemporary Crafts
- c. Archaeology
- d. Local Social and Industrial History
- e. Military History
- f. Natural Sciences

g. Arthur Conan Doyle collection

Date range: from pre-history up to and including the present day, contemporary as well as historic, in order to best interpret the policy statement.

Geographical range: the Portsmouth area shall generally be defined for this purpose as that area within a 15 mile radius of the Guildhall, including all properties and districts owned or administered by the city council. For natural sciences it is taken as the Hampshire basin and coastal plain.

Environment: objects will be collected from both the natural and man-made environments, past and present.

## 2.3 Criteria

The Service 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. Only objects which satisfy the following criteria will be acquired (AS Appendix 6, para 4):

- a. Objects originating from the Portsmouth area
- b. Objects produced, collected, or used by persons having a substantial Portsmouth connection.
- c. Objects originating elsewhere, but which have a relevance to the Portsmouth area.
- d. Objects relating to Operation Overlord and the Battle of Normandy.
- e. Objects which, in the case of human artefacts, illustrate the materials, techniques and evolution of similar objects held in the collections, or, in the case of natural science objects, which illustrate the structure or development of examples held in the collections.
- f. Objects which the Service can adequately conserve.

- g. Objects for which adequate storage facilities are or can be made available.
- h. Objects to which staffing resources (in-house or contracted) can be allocated to deal with their conservation, storage and documentation.
- i. Objects will not be acquired when they fall within the collecting policies of the organisations listed in Section 9 or indeed any other museum or kindred institution that has a better claim.

#### 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 governing body of the museum itself, having regard to the interests of other museums.

## **2.4 Legal Title**

The Service 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.

In particular, the Service 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).

In accordance with the provisions of the UNESCO 1970 Convention of 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 Service 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 DCMS in 2005.

So far as biological and geological material is concerned, the Service 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.

The Service will not acquire archaeological antiquities (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, 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).

Any exceptions to the above clauses 8a, 8b, 8c or 8e will only be because the Service 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 or 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 Service 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 Service will use the statement of principles 'Spoilation 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.

Due to the nature of the Museums and Records Service's activities, the service may occasionally acquire certain items which are not intended to be retained for the permanent collections. These items may be used as educational or school handling collections, or, in the case of industrial or transport material, as spares or consumable working parts.

In the case of such material, documentation will clearly show the intended use of the object and donors will be made aware of this possibility at the time of entry and informed as soon as a decision has been made regarding the material. These objects will be recorded separately outside the main accession record and shall not be treated as part of the permanent collection since their intended use implies that preservation cannot be guaranteed.

Material not originally accepted for the permanent collection as above is not normally treated as part of the permanent collection. Original material taken in under these criteria is disposed of however in accordance with the criteria outlined above with first refusal being given to the permanent collections of the Museums and Records Service.

The governing body of the Museums and Records Service will not normally accept material on loan unless for the purpose of temporary exhibition or copying, or where the item is of exceptional interest to the museum. Any loan will be agreed in writing by the lender and the Museums and Records Service, including allocation of responsibilities for insurance and transport arrangements and shall be for a specified fixed term only, renewable in writing.

### Collecting Policies of Other Museums

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

## **2.5 Disposals**

By definition, the Service has a long-term purpose and should possess (or intend to acquire) permanent collections in relation to its stated objectives. The governing body accepts the principle that, except for sound curatorial reasons, set out below, there is a strong presumption against the disposal of any items in the Service's collection.

- a. Where they do not meet the criteria of the acquisitions policy.

- b. Where they cannot be conserved, documented, stored, displayed or insured to an acceptable standard and disposal would be beneficial to their preservation.
- c. Where, although meeting the criteria or the acquisitions policy, there is excessive duplication of objects.

### Disposal Procedures

The museum will establish that it is legally free to dispose of an item. Any decision to dispose of material from the collections will be taken only after due consideration.

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.

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.

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 Service may consider disposing of the material to other interested individuals and organisations.

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 governing body of the Service acting on the advice of professional curatorial staff, if any, and not of the curator or the collection acting alone.

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.

All disposals will be made in accordance with relevant legislation, accords and accepted procedures for the restitution of cultural property and the CITES legislation.

Any monies received by the Service governing body 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.

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

When disposal of a museum object is being considered, the Service 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.

Decisions to dispose of items will not be made with the principal aim of generating funds.

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