

# Collections Development Policy

February 2016

Version 1

**Name of museum:** The Postal Museum and Museum of the Post Office in the Community

**Name of governing body:** The Postal Heritage Trust through powers delegated to the Collections Sub-Committee

**Date on which this policy was approved by governing body:** April 2016

**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:** April 2018

*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:

British postal services helped to shape the modern world. The Postal Museum works to connect people through this human story of communication, industry and innovation by making it accessible to all.

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 In exceptional cases, disposal may be motivated principally by financial reasons. The method of disposal will therefore be by sale and the procedures outlined below will be followed. In cases where disposal is motivated by financial reasons, the governing body will not undertake disposal unless it can be demonstrated that all the following exceptional circumstances are met in full:

- the disposal will significantly improve the long-term public benefit derived from the remaining collection
- the disposal will not be undertaken to generate short-term revenue (for example to meet a budget deficit)
- the disposal will be undertaken as a last resort after other sources of funding have been thoroughly explored
- extensive prior consultation with sector bodies has been undertaken
- the item under consideration lies outside the museum's established core collection
- that due regard is given to relevant Charity Commission guidance

## **2. History of the collections**

The Collections of the Postal Museum began within the Post Office. A number of small yet often significant collections were made on a local basis under regional initiative. In 1966 a National Postal Museum was opened as a stamp museum to display a large collection of Victorian stamps that were left to the nation by Reginald M Phillips, the museum was officially opened by The Queen in 1969 and gradually expanded its collection to include some of the regionally collated objects. Other artefacts began being added to the collection including non-stamp material related to the postal service. This museum operated within the Post Office until 1998 when it was closed after which the building in which it was housed was sold off. The Collection was put into storage and the operation and management of the Collection merged with the management of the business Archive of the Post Office which had existed separately.

In 2004 an independent charity, the Postal Heritage Trust, was established and the museum collection was transferred to that charity. The Archive manages the records of Royal Mail and Post Office which are designated public records under section 10 (1) and the First Schedule of the 1958 Public Records Act. The Lord Chancellor designated the Archive as a place of deposit under section 4 (1) of the 1958 Act. Since 2011 Royal Mail and Post Office Limited have become legally separate companies. Post Office Limited continue to produce public record material but records Royal Mail produced since 2013 are no longer public record, although are still cared for in the Royal Mail Archive. Royal Mail and Post Office Limited are responsible under the act for the public records and Postal Heritage Service Limited manage these records on their behalf. Both organisations approve policies related to the Archive holdings and it is legally separate from the Trust owned Museum Collection governed by this policy.

### **3. An overview of current collections**

Artefacts within the holdings range from paper-based two-dimensional items such as song sheets, greetings cards, postmarks, private stamp collections and personal ephemeral material relating to postal history, through postal operational equipment and tools such as handstamps, sorting machinery and furniture to large artefacts such as horse drawn and motorised vehicles, train carriages, items associated with the Post Office underground railway and the national collection of letter boxes. Some significant items in the collection include paintings by acclaimed artists, a Victoria Cross awarded to a postal worker in the First World War, firearms and a major collection of postal markings spanning in excess of 400 years.

The collection is of both national and international interest and significance and as a social history collection, provides insight into how postal services have touched people's lives and provided and maintained easily accessible communications around the world. The Royal Mail Archive and the Museum Collection support and complement one another. The Archive is a Designated collection and the holdings from 1636 to 1969 have been entered onto the UNESCO Memory of the World Register in recognition of their importance.

The Archive collection does not form part of this policy as these records are managed separately. The majority of the Archive is public record material although the Archive can do occasionally collect non-public record material most especially that created by Royal Mail after 2013.

### **4. Themes and priorities for future collecting**

The principal objective of the Collections Development Policy is to ensure that the museum properly reflects the breadth of activity, organisation and impact of Royal Mail, Post Office, mail competitors and postal communication generally.

In furtherance of this principal objective, acquisition will seek to reflect the unique contribution of postal services to the social, cultural, economic and technological development of the nation and its global role in communications. To satisfy this aim both Archive and Museum Collection will continue to work closely together to plan and execute strategic acquisition within the Postal business of today, collecting material to reflect the wider postal market.

The Postal Museum will strive to achieve the best professional practice in relation to its acquisition activity, with particular reference to guidelines and codes of conduct issued by Arts Council England and the Museums Association.

## **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 maintain the quality and 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. Where appropriate, there will be clear communication with key stakeholders about the outcomes and the process.
- 5.3 As the Postal Museum develops and opens in 2017, continued review of the collection for relevance will take place. Priorities for rationalisation relate to material in very poor and unsafe condition or that do not have a part to play in telling the story the Museum aims to communicate. Duplicate material will also be identified and reviewed with material possibly being disposed of in line with the standards of this policy.

## **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 and will work to lead in museums best practice with regard to this.

## **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. Where appropriate, 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, whilst maintaining a national remit.
- 7.2 Specific reference is made to the following museum(s)/organisation(s):

- The Porthcurno Telegraph Museum
- The Science Museum Group
- Bath Postal Museum
- Victoria & Albert Museum
- BT Archives

## **8 Archival holdings**

The Museum does not hold archives but is managed alongside the Royal Mail and Post Office Limited Archive, which is a largely public record Archive governed by the Public Records Act 1958 and separate management policies under the National Archive's Accreditation scheme.

## **9 Acquisition**

9.1 The policy for agreeing acquisitions is:

The decision to acquire material for the collections is made by the curatorial team headed by the Senior Curator. The Head of Collections oversees all acquisitions and acts as final decision maker in case of dispute. The Collections Sub-Committee are kept informed of new Accessions.

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 The museum does not hold or intend to acquire any human remains.

## **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 Disposal procedures**

- 15.1 All disposals will be undertaken with reference to the SPECTRUM Primary Procedures on disposal.
- 15.2 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.

- 15.3 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.
- 15.4 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.
- 15.5 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.
- 15.6 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.
- 15.7 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.
- 15.8 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).
- 15.9 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.

- 15.10 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.
- 15.11 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.
- 15.12 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*

- 15.13 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.
- 15.13.1 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.
- 15.13.2 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.
- 15.13.3 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).

- 15.13.4 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*

- 15.14 If it is not possible to dispose of an object through transfer or sale, the governing body may decide to destroy it.
- 15.15 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.
- 15.16 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.
- 15.17 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.
- 15.18 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.