



COLLECTIONS DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Topsham Museum Society

(hereinafter called "the Society")

Governing body: **The Council of Topsham Museum Society** *(hereinafter called "the Council")*

Date policy was approved by the Council: **January 2017**

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

Next review: **January 2022**

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 Society's statement of purpose is:
Topsham Museum (hereinafter called "the Museum") is a volunteer run Museum that serves both the local community and visitors to the Town. The Museum's purpose is to enable members of the public to explore the history of Topsham and the Exe Estuary, to learn about its wildlife and to visit a typical Topsham Merchant's house of 1680-1750.
- 1.2. The governing body will ensure that both acquisition and disposal are carried out openly and with transparency.
- 1.3. By definition, the Society 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 Society's collection.
- 1.4. Acquisitions outside the current stated policy will only be made in exceptional circumstances.
- 1.5. The Society 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 Society 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 Society 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 Society's established core collection

2. History of the collections

The collection is based on Miss Dorothy Holman's private collection donated to Topsham residents together with other items acquired since the Museum was opened as a registered charity in 1986. This includes a number of River Exe Estuary boats acquired from the Exeter Maritime Museum on its closure and some important individual purchases and donations.

3. An overview of current collections

The central theme underlying all our collections is the Exe Estuary: its natural history and the history of the settlement of Topsham.

The Society Collections are in three different sections:

- a. Natural History: the natural history of the Exe valley and the estuary. The surrounding area includes nature reserves and is an important international site for birds. Museum collections provide information about local birds and their habitat. The salmon fishing industry is highlighted.
- b. Local History: the history of Topsham including its maritime history. Attention is paid to the importance of the town as a port serving Exeter for the export of woollen cloth and its international trade as well as the considerable ship building industry.
- c. Merchant's House:
 - Furnished Period rooms, 1680-1750, illustrating the life style of a typical merchant and family of the period
 - Items reflecting the Holman family and in particular the Museum founder, Miss Dorothy Holman
 - Vivien Leigh memorabilia relating to Dorothy Holman's sister-in-law, Vivien Leigh
 - The Old Kitchen – containing early 20th century household objects

Additionally, documents, photographs, works of art, oral and audio visual recordings and books relating to the above are collected.

4. Themes and priorities for future collecting

Geographical Boundaries

a. Natural History: the valley of the Exe from Woodbury Common on the East to Haldon on the West and the River Exe from Countess Wear to the coast at Exmouth on the mouth of the Estuary.

b. Local History: first those cited in Aethelstan's Charter 937 AD and later within the ecclesiastical and civil boundaries of the Parish of Topsham which included the 'hamlet of Wear'.

Chronological

The Period Rooms relate primarily to the period 1680-1750, with additional objects and material related to Dorothy Holman, 1888-1983, and her sister-in-law Vivien Leigh, 1913-1967, and for the Old Kitchen, objects primarily 1930-1960.

Other Collections are not date limited.

Current collection interests include:

- objects relating to the recently discovered wreck of the Topsham-built HMS Terror
- objects to enhance displays in the period rooms of the Merchant's House

5. Themes and priorities for rationalisation and disposal

Disposal of Collections is not a priority for this policy period and will only be undertaken for legal, safety or care and conservation reasons (for example infestation).

6 Legal and ethical framework for acquisition and disposal of items

The Society 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 Society 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 museums:

Royal Albert Memorial Museum and Art Gallery, Exeter
Exmouth Museum
Dawlish Museum

8 Archival holdings

Substantial holdings of archival material will only be accepted after consultation with South West Heritage Trust and, in the case of archives controlled by legislation, with the National Archives (previously the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts). A list of all archival acquisitions will be sent to the above noted National Archives and to South West Heritage Trust. As the Society holds, and may acquire archival material, including photographs and printed ephemera, it 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 for agreeing acquisitions is:

All potential acquisitions are considered by the Acquisition and Disposal Committee on behalf of the Council. The committee is composed of the Volunteer Collection Manager, the Secretary to the Council and at least one other person familiar with the Collection. The committee meet from time to time as required or may communicate by email or telephone if the matter is urgent.

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

9.2 The Society will not accept any object or specimen unless it is satisfied that the object or specimen can be safely and appropriately displayed or stored.

9.3 The Society 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).

9.4 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 Society 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

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

11 Biological and geological material

So far as biological and geological material is concerned, the Society 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 Society 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

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 Society 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 Society will document when these exceptions occur.

14 Spoliation

The Society 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 Society 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 Society'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 Society 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 Society 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 Society 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 Society 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 Society 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 Society'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.

15.14.1 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.

15.14.2 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.

15.14.3 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.

15.14.4 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.

Signed by the Chairman of the Council of Topsham Museum Society

John Dunsford

January 2017