
Collections Development Policy

Acquisition and disposal
of collections



PittRivers
MUSEUM

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Collections Development Policy

Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford

Governing body: The Visitors of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

Date approved by governing body: 4th April 2016

Date at which policy is due for review: 4th April 2021

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

1 Relationship to other relevant policies/plans of the organisation

1.1 The Museum's statement of purpose

Mission statement:

'The Pitt Rivers Museum aspires to be the best university museum of anthropology and archaeology in the world, using its unique galleries as a focus for exemplary teaching and research and as an inspirational forum for the sharing of cultural knowledge amongst the widest possible public.'

According to University of Oxford statute, 'The purpose of the Pitt Rivers Museum is to assemble, preserve, and exhibit the Pitt Rivers Collection and to promote the public understanding of anthropology and world archaeology, and their teaching and research, based on the museum's collections.'¹

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that the Museum accepts (and disposes of) material according to a recognised strategy that is in compliance with national standards, and to act as a guide for curatorial decision-making. In doing so, it will encourage public confidence in the Museum as a suitable repository for collections and their future stewardship

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 <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/statutes/regulations/528-122.shtml>

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 Museum was founded in 1884, when General Pitt-Rivers gave some 30,000 artefacts to the University of Oxford. Since that date, artefacts, photographs, books and other archival material have continuously been added to the collections, so that the Museum now holds one of the most important, comprehensive, and best-documented ethnographic and archaeological collections in the world. (see section 3 for details of significant collections).

3 An overview of the current collections

3.1 Size, coverage and significance of current collections

The Museum's collections comprise artefacts from all parts of the world from prehistoric times to the present day, along with major manuscript, photograph, sound and film collections. In 2015 the collections numbered over 550,000 artefacts (including objects, photographs and sound recordings) and 81 collections of manuscripts. All collections are Designated as of national or international significance, reflecting the fact that the Museum has one of the most significant archaeological and ethnographic collections in the world.

Collections are used for research and teaching in the University of Oxford, and by scholars and students nationally and internationally, as well as in the Museum's award-winning programme of public outreach and educational activities. The Museum is committed to making its collections accessible to the widest possible audience, as detailed in the Museum's Access Policy. Displays are open to the general public daily.

The collections are managed, documented and displayed according to the Museum's Documentation Policy and Procedural Manual, Collections Care and Conservation Policy, and Access Policy. Backlogs in documentation are being addressed according to the Museum's Documentation Backlog Plan.

3.2 Strength and significance of collections

3.2.1 Ethnographic collections

Selective highlights of the ethnographic collections include the Forster collection of Pacific artefacts from Captain Cook's Second Voyage (1772–75), one of the great collections of eighteenth-century Pacific art and material culture; rich collections from central Australia donated by pioneer ethnographers W. B. Spencer and F. J. Gillen; great depth of nineteenth- and twentieth-century collections from South Sudan, including those of eminent anthropologist Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard; the Hopkins collection, made by the Governor of the Hudson's Bay company in 1841–2, containing rare examples of painted and quilled Northern Plains war shirts, which have become benchmark references for scholars; European music collections, including a virginal by Marco Jindra (dated 1552) – the oldest keyboard instrument in Oxford, as well as musical boxes and mechanical musical instruments; the collection made in 1825–28 by F. W. Beechey and E. Belcher, officers on the sloop HMS *Blossom*, among the earliest Inuit collections in the world; the contents of the private museum of the Second Rajah of Sarawak, donated to the Museum in 1923; exceptional Naga holdings (more than 6,000 objects) many collected by J. H. Hutton and J. P. Mills between 1915 and 1945 and constituting one of the best-documented collections in the world; the collection of European firearms (General Pitt-Rivers' original interest), which includes many early and type examples of great significance to firearms specialists.

3.2.2 Archaeological collections

Selective highlights of the archaeological collections include the magnificent collections of Neolithic and Bronze Age materials from the Swiss Lake Villages exposed during the droughts of 1853–4; important Cypriot material; an impressive collection of Danish Neolithic and Bronze materials, as well as some of General Pitt-Rivers's own archaeological collections; part of the mid-nineteenth-century Bowker collection; the earliest known collections of stone implements from South Africa (and probably from anywhere south of the Sahara); some of the oldest human artefacts from the lowest levels of Olduvai Gorge, and large and important collections of Acheulian artefacts donated by Louis Leakey in the 1940s. The Museum's South American archaeological collections include more than 500 ancient Peruvian textiles, as well as the Acland collection of Peruvian mummified material.

3.2.3 Photograph collections

Selective highlights of the photograph collections (many of which have associated object collections) include: the C. F. Wood collection of over two hundred photographs (wet collodion plates and albumen prints) of Fiji, Solomon Islands, Kiribati and Samoa (1872–3), some of the earliest from the region; the C. W. & F. Dammann collection (c.1872–5) of over one thousand photographs compiled for the comparative study of race; R. G. Woodthorpe albums of watercolours and photographs (c.1872–6) from Assam and Northeast India; the R. S. Rattray collection of photographs relating to 1920s Ghana, taken by a distinguished colonial administrator and ethnographer; R. Hottot collection (1908–9) of nearly 600 verascope stereo positives from ethnographic and hunting expeditions to the Congo; Evans-Pritchard collection (1926–36) of photographs from fieldwork in South Sudan; H. Richardson collection (1936–1950)

of photographs of Tibet charting a long involvement with the country; and the Wilfred Thesiger collection (1930s–1980s) of 38,000 negatives and 74 albums relating to the Middle East, Arabian Peninsula, Asia and East Africa taken by the travel writer and photographer.

3.2.4 Manuscript collections

Selective highlights of the manuscript collections include: correspondence on the early days of the Museum; E. B. Tylor Papers, correspondence and notes 1877–1916, from one of the founders of British anthropology; Pitt-Rivers Papers, including correspondence and notebooks of the Museum’s founder; correspondence and notebooks of W. Baldwin Spencer 1892–1928 from a key figure in early anthropology in Australia; South Sudan, especially the papers of Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard, Godfrey Lienhardt and Jean Buxton; Henry Balfour Papers, especially field diaries from Africa (1905, 1910–30) and Assam (1922); Beatrice Blackwood Papers, especially a candid set of field diaries from North America (1924–7) and Melanesia (1929–37).

3.2.5 Film collections

The Museum has a small but interesting collection of original films, most of which either accompanied donations of artefacts or photographs, or else were acquired for teaching and research purposes. Much of the material is unique and of significant historical importance, such as the films of Frederick Spencer Chapman made from the 1930s onwards in Tibet, Greenland and Africa, Beatrice Blackwood in Papua New Guinea in 1936 and Ursula Graham Bower in India in 1939.

3.2.6 Sound collections

The Museum's sound collections contain unique historical field recordings, most of which are directly related to collections of objects and photographs held by the Museum. The sound collections exist in a variety of historical formats, such as wax cylinders recorded as early as 1910, reel to reel tapes, and audio tapes. The Museum completed a major project to digitize these field collections in 2012 and a selection of the recordings along with information about the collections is available via the *Reel to Real* project website. Selected highlights include the largest archive of Bayaka music in the world, recorded by Louis Sarno over 30 years in Central African Republic and Diamond Jenness’s wax cylinder recordings from the D’Entrecasteaux Islands in 1911-12.

3.3 Material not accepted for permanent collection (handling collection)

The Museum may occasionally, and with the written agreement of the donor or person transferring the material, acquire items that are not intended to be retained for the permanent collection. These items may be used as part of educational or school handling activities, to supplement student teaching or for destructive research.

These acquisitions will be recorded separately outside the main accession record of the Museum and shall not be treated as part of the permanent collection since their intended use implies that preservation cannot be guaranteed. A record will be kept of how and when any material is disposed of.

4 Themes and priorities for future collecting

4.1 General collecting principles

The Museum will in principle, and subject to the qualifications set out below, acquire any material which falls within its areas of interest and merits preservation. Material will be acquired primarily for its ethnographic, archaeological, or historical importance. Real duplication in acquisition is avoided but material that shows the extension over time or space of a technique or a style is acquired.

A favoured method of acquisition is to finance collecting or photographing in the field by graduate students or others doing ethnographic and archaeological fieldwork. This is economical and the resulting collections are thoroughly and expertly documented. Material is also accepted by donation, bequest, or purchased at auction or from dealers and private sources as funds allow.

With the exception of short-term loans for temporary exhibitions, the Museum does not normally now acquire specimens on loan. In exceptional circumstances—such as where it is legally impossible for title to be transferred from the present owner of a specimen to the Museum and taking into account the safeguards under section 1 and 9—a loan may be accepted for a specified period, if that specimen is of particular relevance to the Museum's collection.

The main constraints relating to collections development are the lack of space for storage, which also suffers from being dispersed at a number of off-site locations, and the availability of staff to carry out both cataloguing and de-accessioning procedures. A joint University of Oxford museums' off-site facility for collections is in the early stages of planning. This we hope will provide high quality storage for the Museum's reserve collections as well as facilities for research staff and visitors.

The Museum is continually seeking external funding to expand the scope of its stewardship work, also providing opportunities for volunteers to assist with such work as specified in its Volunteering Policy. Volunteers are engaged and managed through the Oxford University Museums Volunteer Service.

4.2 Areas of future collecting interest

4.2.1 Complementary contemporary artefacts

The Museum continues to acquire contemporary artefacts through anthropological fieldwork and collaborative research with source communities when relevant opportunities arise. The aim is to build on existing historic collections by adding contemporary artefacts that provide insights into current practice as well as different perspectives on early collections. Recent examples of this are the purchase of Naga textiles through an anthropologist working in Nagaland and a collection of quillwork made by a Blackfoot artist.

4.2.2 Fieldwork photography

The Museum will continue to focus on the acquisition of well-documented and high quality fieldwork photography collections through its Centre for Anthropology and Photography, which works with anthropologists on the digitization and cataloguing of donated material.

4.2.3 Contemporary practice

A strategic collecting area is contemporary photographic practice, especially the work of documentary photographers and indigenous photographic or digital artists. Such material has the potential to present and interpret indigenous perspectives on the Museum's historic collections to our current and future audiences, as well as document the contemporary social and cultural experiences of the communities whose material the Museum holds.

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 not reduce 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. There will be clear communication with key stakeholders about the outcomes and the process.

5.3 In keeping with the Museum's educational aims, and mindful of the generosity of those who have contributed to the Museum's permanent collections over many years, there is a continuing strong presumption against disposal. Disposals will however be considered under certain circumstances as outlined below.

5.4 It will consider de-accessioning accessioned objects that are of limited educational, scientific, historical or cultural value, where this will allow more effective use of the Museum's space and resources.

5.5 Holding duplicate specimens enriches the value of the collections for research, but in exceptional circumstances the Museum will consider transferring selected duplicate specimens by gift or exchange, in order to enhance the collection of another institution holding Accredited or equivalent status. (see also 16.13)

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 into account 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 ethnographic, archaeological, university and local museums:

The British Museum

The Horniman Museum

The Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (CUMAA)

University of Oxford museums (Ashmolean Museum, History of Science Museum,

Museum of Natural History (OUMNH), Bate Collection)

Museum of English Rural Life, Reading University

The Museum of Oxford and other Oxfordshire - based museums are consulted in relation to archaeological or folk life material of local origin.

8 Archival holdings

Since the Museum has significant holdings of photographic, manuscript and sound recording material, its curatorial staff and governing body (the Visitors) will be guided by the Code of Practice on Archives for Museums and Galleries in the United Kingdom (third edition, 2002).

8.1 The function of the Museum's photograph, manuscript, film and sound collections is to acquire and preserve material that has the historical potential to contribute to the interpretation and understanding of the Museum's object collections, the intellectual and political frameworks in which the collections have developed, and the documentation of social and cultural phenomena in keeping with the Museum's scope and areas of interest.

8.2 The Museum normally collects original or unique material, especially the product of fieldwork or otherwise informed and coherent observation, historical (vintage) material that documents historical modes of representation of societies and cultures, or else having clear denotative ethnographic content.

8.3 The Museum does not normally add to its collections copy material, pamphlets or mass-produced ephemera, maps, or published material (unless acquired by the Balfour Library), unless such material forms an inseparable part of any collection acquired conforming to 8.2 (above).

8.4 The Museum does not routinely retain administrative records or other internal documentation for archival purposes, which are either retained within the relevant collections management systems for collections, or transferred to Oxford University Archives.

8.5 The Museum will normally seek copyright of manuscript and photographic material that is given to the Museum in order to facilitate open access to the collection. This will not, however, affect restrictions to access in accordance with the Data Protection Act, 1998. In exceptional circumstances, and where in the Museum's opinion it is justified, the acquisition of such material might not come with an immediate transfer of copyright, but will be formally agreed as pending until such time as it is bequeathed to the Museum.

8.6 In all other general terms, the Museum will follow the same considerations regarding acquisition and disposal regarding archival collections as it does with other types of material.

9 Acquisition

9.1 The policy for agreeing acquisitions is:

Potential acquisitions are considered by the Museum's Policy and Planning Committee, comprising of the Director, Administrator, curators and section heads, with final authorisation through the Director and governing body (the Visitors of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford). The Museum will not, except in very exceptional circumstances and then only with the agreement of its governing body (Visitors), acquire any specimen or collection if any restrictions governing the way it can be stored, displayed, documented or used are imposed as a condition of the donation, bequest, sale, transfer or exchange.

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 2005.²

² 'Combating illicit trade: due diligence guidelines for museums, libraries and archives on collecting and borrowing cultural material', Department for Culture Media and Sport Cultural Property Unit, October 2005.

10 Human Remains

10.1 As the museum holds human remains under 100 years old, it will obtain the necessary licence under the Human Tissue Act 2004 and any subordinate legislation from time to time in force.

10.2 As the museum holds human remains from any period, it will follow the procedures in the 'Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums' issued by DCMS in 2005 and adhere to the 'Policy on Human Remains Held by the University of Oxford's Museums' (2006)³.

11 Biological and geological material

11.1 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.

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 either:

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

³ Available at www.ox.ac.uk/gazette/2006-7/supps/2_4787.pdf

14 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.

15 Repatriation and restitution of objects and human remains

15.1 The Council of the University of Oxford, acting on the advice of the Museum's professional staff and its governing body, 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. Council 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 means 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' and adhere to the 'Policy on Human Remains Held by the University of Oxford's Museums' (2006)⁴

16 Disposal procedures

Disposal preliminaries

16.1 All disposals will be undertaken with reference to the SPECTRUM Primary Procedures on disposal and MA Disposals toolkit. (details in Pitt Rivers Museum procedural manual).

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.

⁴ Available at www.ox.ac.uk/gazette/2006-7/supps/2_4787.pdf

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 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's governing body from the disposal of items will be applied solely and directly for the benefit of the collections. This will normally mean the purchase of further acquisitions. In exceptional cases, improvements in relation 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 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 disposal 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-accessioning and disposal.

Disposal by exchange

16.13 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.

16.13.1 In cases where the governing body wishes for sound curatorial reasons to exchange material directly with Accredited or unaccredited museums, with other organisations or with individuals, the procedures in paragraphs 16.1 – 5 will apply.

16.13.2 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.

16.13.3 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 and in other specialist publications and websites (if appropriate).

16.13.4 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

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, eg the destruction of controlled substances, a police certificate should be obtained and kept in the relevant object history file.

16.19 Destructive sampling of specimens will follow the Museum's procedures for destructive sampling as set out in its Collections Care and Conservation Policy, with special regulations applied to human remains in line with current legislation. In exceptional circumstances the size of sample required for research would result in the destruction of an entire specimen. Total destruction will only be considered after a full evaluation by relevant curatorial staff of the merits of the research, the scientific, historical and cultural importance of the specimen, and the legal and ethical issues as they relate to it, as well as approval by the Museum's governing body.

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