

Collections Development Policy

This should be read alongside the Museum's Collection Development Strategy.

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:

First approved: 4 January 2021

Policy review procedure:

The Collections Development Policy will be published and reviewed at least once every five years.

Date at which this policy is due for review: Full review due by November 2024.

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 follows:

The Fitzwilliam Museum aims to:

- touch people's lives by engaging powerfully, thoughtfully and pleasurably with as wide a public as possible;
- produce and promote innovative, relevant, and interdisciplinary research of the highest quality around our collection

The Fitzwilliam Museum is widely considered the world's outstanding university art collection. We care for works of art and material culture from Europe, Egypt and Asia of exceptional international importance, works that connect people across cultures and time. Founded in 1816 'for the increase of learning', the Fitzwilliam has long been both a

great public cultural asset and an extraordinary scholarly resource: local, regional, national and global. The Museum is also a place of enormous potential; we must now build on our achievements, bringing them together in ways that will be truly transformational.

All our work begins with the people who experience our great collection. Through our displays and public programmes, we provide opportunities to discover major works by some of the most famous artists of all time, as well as an abundance of objects documenting lives that otherwise went largely unrecorded. The Fitzwilliam has other extraordinary assets: our remarkable record of pioneering research and, just as important, of innovative public engagement. The passionate loyalty of the Museum's current visitors matches the energy and talent of our expert and committed workforce. We are proud of our striking Grade I listed buildings from the 19th and early 20th centuries, with some of the finest museum interiors in Britain. These features of our appearance and tradition that make us so special for so many will be the starting blocks for our future initiatives.

Now we must successfully engage a much broader and more diverse audience and develop our collection in ways that better reflect the backgrounds and interests of all our visitors. Simultaneously, the Fitzwilliam Museum is developing its relationship with the rest of the University of Cambridge and its great resource of enquiring minds, particularly through the Strategic Research Initiative *Collections – Connections – Communities*. By fully unifying our public benefit roles and our collaborative research activity, we will play an ever more crucial role in the University of Cambridge's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence. To make this possible, we must develop robust systems of revenue generation to support our operating costs and to reflect our growing ambitions.

The full Museum Mission Statement can be downloaded [here](#).

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, 7th 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. The Museum also has important holdings of contemporary art and craft, acquired through purchase and donation.

3 An overview of current collections

The Museum collections are designated in their entirety, and include works of national and international significance, including numerous individual works and groups of superlative quality, artistic or historical importance.

The collections comprise the following major areas:

- **Antiquities** from the ancient Nile Valley and Mediterranean, including significant holdings from Egypt, Sudan, Greece, Turkey, Italy, Cyprus, North Africa, the Near East and China, comprising sculpture, ceramics, metalwork, textiles, glass and engraved seal-stones;
- **Coins, banknotes and medals** from ancient states through to contemporary monetary issues;
- **Graphic arts**: British and European paintings, prints and drawings including portrait miniatures; complemented by North American Prints and Japanese prints and drawings;
- **Decorative & applied arts**: including British, European, Central Asian and East Asian ceramics and glass, metalwork, arms and armour, sculpture, furniture, clocks and watches, textiles and fans;
- **Manuscripts**: a major collection (bound and unbound) of illuminated manuscripts from Western Europe, Iran and India;
- **Archives**: printed music, literary autographs and correspondence; archives relating to the history of the museum;

- **Printed Books:** a collection of rare early printed books from Western Europe, along with important 19th and 20th century holdings relating to art history and archaeology.

4 Themes and priorities for future collecting

Objects and artworks acquired will be assessed against the following criteria:

- Offer ways of telling new and complex narratives, whether by our staff, or collaborating audiences and researchers;
- Enhance the range and quality of the collection, or be of exceptional interest;
- Impactful in terms of research, teaching, learning and other public engagement aims;
- Suitable for display and research, in terms of condition and conservation needs;
- Sustainable: sufficient resources and expertise to purchase, conserve and store the object or artwork;
- There no ethical or legal impediments, including as regards the provenance of the object and the associated sources of funding.

Alongside objects and artworks, this might also encompass archives and other records that reflect the conception, production, use, reception and transformation of artworks. We would also retain the right to consider only acquiring some parts of offered gifts.

The Museum's collections development in the coming period will follow principles set out in the Collections Development Strategy, which also defines four approaches to collecting: reactive, proactive, creative and reflective.

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

The museum recognises its responsibility to work within the parameters of the Museum Association's 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 may be made to other museums, galleries and libraries, in particular:

within the Cambridge:

- the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology;
- Kettle's Yard;
- Cambridge University Library;
- Relevant college collections and libraries.

outside Cambridge:

- Ashmolean Museum and Bodleian Library, Oxford;
- National Gallery;
- National Portrait Gallery;
- Tate Galleries;
- V&A Museum;
- The British Museum;
- British Library.

Where appropriate the Fitzwilliam Museum is willing to seek opportunities for potential joint acquisitions with other museums, galleries or libraries, subject to considerations of resource and governance.

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 as follows:

Potential acquisitions are recommended to the Collections Development Group, chaired by the Director, which will consider how the proposed objects or artworks support the Collections Development Strategy, whether they are consistent with the Collections Development Policy, what additional support would be needed to complete the acquisition (e.g. for research, due diligence) and approve the proposed source of funding.

Acquisitions over a value of £50,000 will require approval by Syndicate, with approval delegated to the Collections Development Group for those of lower value. Information on all acquisitions will be circulated to Syndicate.

The Acquisitions Group will comprise the Director (chair), two Syndics nominated by the Chair of Syndicate, representatives from curatorial, conservation, collections management, development, finance, learning and front of house teams at the Fitzwilliam Museum, the Museum's representative on University of Cambridge Museums

Changemakers Action Group and a member of the Fitzwilliam Museum Friends. We will ensure that it includes early career staff. Other individuals can be co-opted as and when specific expertise is required.

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. Evidence of the due diligence on object provenance undertaken prior to acquisition must be presented to the Syndicate as part of the justification. 'Country of origin' includes the United Kingdom, and relevant laws include the 2018 Ivory Act as well as the UK international treaty obligations as outlined in 9.3 below, and HMRC declarations.

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

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, and will refer cases to the Spoliation Advisory Panel where relevant.

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.

The Director and Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum