



Museum of London Acquisition and Disposal Policy

JULY 2011 (amended September 2015)

1. Summary and key points

- 1.1. This Policy covers all collections held by the Museum of London, including items stored and displayed at the Museum of London at London Wall, at the Museum of London Docklands, at the Museum of London Archaeological Archive, Mortimer Wheeler House and at other Museum stores.
- 1.2. The Museum collects in order to further its mission to document and explore the past and present cultures and people of London for public benefit. The Museum is empowered to develop its collections under the terms of the Museum of London Acts, 1965 and 1986 (amended by the GLA Act 2007). The collecting remit is not defined but is customarily understood to be the metropolitan district of Greater London, ie the City of London and the 32 London boroughs.
- 1.3. The Museum's collections cover all periods of time, from prehistory to the present day. It includes a wide variety of items, including images, artefacts, human remains, archives, analogue and digital sound and screen-based recordings, 'born digital' works.
- 1.4. For the Museum of London the archaeological and historical context of an item, together with the information associated with it, is of fundamental importance. It is this that determines the item's value to the Museum rather than aesthetic or technological criteria alone. Normally, items are only acquired when they can satisfy the requirement of a strong London context.
- 1.5. All potential acquisitions are assessed by a cross-departmental Collections Committee which usually meets monthly and is chaired by the Director of Content. This committee has delegated powers to approve acquisitions and recommend disposals. All new acquisitions are reported to the Museum's Board of Governors annually (usually at its summer meeting). All disposals must be approved by the Board before any action is taken.
- 1.6. Acquisitions outside the policy guidelines set out below will only be made in very exceptional circumstances and then only after proper consideration by the Board, having regard to the interests of other museums, libraries, archives or comparable collecting bodies.

2. General Principles

2.1. Spoliation

The Museum will use 'Spoliation of Works of Art during the Holocaust and Second World War period: Statement of Principles and Proposed Actions', issued by the National Museum Directors' Conference in 1998, and report on them in accordance

with the guidelines. The Museum also uses the guidance produced by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport on the *Dealing in Cultural Objects (Offences) Act, 2003*.

2.2. **Repatriation and Restitution**

The Board, acting on the advice of the Museum's staff, may take a decision to rebury human remains, or return 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 obligations and taking into account all ethical implications. With regard to any claims for human remains the Museum will adopt the procedure laid out in 'Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums' issued by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in 2005.

2.3. The Museum observes the UK Museum Association's Code of Ethics in its dealings with donors, vendors or other external parties.

2.4. The following paragraphs are formally recommended by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council for incorporation in the acquisitions and disposal policy of accredited museums.

- a) The Museum will exercise due diligence and make every effort not to acquire, whether by purchase, gift, bequest or exchange, any object or specimen unless the Board or responsible officer is satisfied that the Museum can acquire a valid title to the item in question.
- b) The Museum will not acquire, whether by purchase, gift, bequest, or exchange, any object or specimen unless the governing body or responsible officer 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).
- c) 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 1 November 2002, and the Dealing in Cultural Objects (Offences) Act 2003, the Museum will reject any items that have been illicitly traded. The Board is guided by the national guidance on the responsible acquisition of cultural property issued by DCMS in 2005.
- d) The Museum will not acquire antiquities in any case where the Board or responsible officer has any suspicion that the circumstances of their recovery involved a failure to follow the appropriate legal procedures, such as reporting finds to the owner or occupier of the land and the proper authorities in the case of possible treasure as defined by the Treasure Act 1996 (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) or reporting through the Treasure Trove procedure (in Scotland).
- e) So far as any 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.

- f) Any exception to the above clauses a, b, c, d or e will only be because the Museum is either:
- (i) acting as an externally approved repository of last resort for material of local (UK) origin; or
 - (ii) acquiring an item of minor importance that lacks secure ownership history but in the best judgement of experts in the field has not been illicitly traded; or
 - (iii) acting with permission of authorities with the requisite jurisdiction in the country of origin; or
 - (iv) in possession of reliable documentary evidence that the item was exported from its country of origin before 1970.

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.

- 2.5. The Museum has a formal Acquisition and Disposal Procedure. This requires all potential acquisitions to be assessed by a cross departmental Collections Committee. In most cases the Committee is the decision-making forum, but it is accepted that this is impractical for some categories of material: Archaeological Archive deposits, for example.
- 2.6. Acquisitions are reported to the Board of Governors annually. Except in exceptional circumstances, all disposals have to be first approved by the Board of Governors,
- 2.7. Objects are not accepted on long term loan, other than in exceptional circumstances, for example as key items for display in the galleries; or as part of archive deposits.

3. Scope of the collections

- 3.1. The Museum collects objects in all media and from most traditional museum categories: archaeology, fine and decorative arts, science and technology, human history, archive material, recorded media. The Museum does not collect natural history, geology or palaeontology specimens other than as environmental evidence and samples retrieved from archaeological contexts.
- 3.2. The size of the collections is estimated as 2 million items, (excluding the 6 million in the Archaeological Archive).

	Estimated no of core items
Archaeological Archive	
Site archives	5,000 sites
Human Remains	c. 17,000 skeletons and bone items
Archaeology Collections	
Prehistoric	11,300
Roman	27,000
Medieval	15,000
Tudor and Stuart	33,000
History Collections	
Dress and textiles	24,200
Decorative art	17,000

Paintings, prints and drawings	20,000
Historic photographs	c. 280,000
Oral History and recorded media	1,800 (7,000 hours)
Printed Ephemera	c.100,000
Social and working history	61,000
Port and river	30,000
Library and Archive Collections	
Port of London Authority Archive	120,000
Other archive material	5,000
Rare books	5,000

- 3.3. The Museum defines its collections in ways that reflect its institutional history and current organisational structure. The collection falls into four groups, each curated by specialist staff.

A. The Archaeological Archive

- 3.3.1. The Museum opened the Museum of London Archaeological Archive in 2002 as a regional resource. It aims to provide an appropriate level of archaeological, curatorial, conservation and collections management expertise for London's exceptionally complex and rich archaeological heritage.
- 3.3.2. The Archaeological Archive holds the archaeological finds and records generated by scientific archaeological excavation work in London over the last 100 years: comprising finds and environmental samples plus paper and photographic records from around 5,000 sites in the Greater London area. It is estimated to hold around 6 million individual items, and as such is a primary resource for the study of London's early history by non-documentary means.
- 3.3.3. The Archaeological Archive reflects the government advice enshrined in Planning Policy Statement 5 (PPS5 - formerly 'PPG16'), which allows for archaeological excavation and building recording in advance of development where remains cannot be preserved *in situ*. Under the guidance of PPS5, the excavating body preserves the archaeological evidence from a site in the form of records and finds made during excavation.
- 3.3.4. Human remains from archaeological excavations are stored and curated separately in the **Centre for Human Bioarchaeology**. This collection currently numbers some 17,000 skeleton assemblages and is of significant international research value. Use of the collection is governed by the Museum's own 'Policy for the Care of Human Remains'.
- 3.3.5. Human remains are held under licence from the Home Office, in arrangement with the Ministry of Justice. Following English law, the remains are not owned by the Museum, but held in care.

B. The Archaeology Collections

- 3.3.6. These collections cover the human history of the London region from prehistory to the 17th century, and largely derive from the Museum's two parent Museums: the London Museum and the Guildhall Museum.
- 3.3.7. The 85,000 individual items in these collections are largely archaeological in provenance, but not exclusively. Non-archaeological collections include decorative art items with a strong London connection, in such fields as

ceramics, jewellery, numismatics and metalwork. The collections include artefacts unearthed through 19th- and 20th-century building works in the London area, together with chance finds from the Thames and elsewhere.

- 3.3.8. The Museum is a member of the Portable Antiquities Scheme and has a long-standing relationship with the Thames 'Mudlarkes', whose finds are recorded and regularly deposited with the Museum.

C. The History Collections

- 3.3.9. These collections cover the human history of London from the 17th century to the present day. The core of these collections also derives from the London and the Guildhall museums, but the greatest growth occurred after the establishment of the Museum of London in 1976. Contemporary collecting accounts for significant current growth.

- 3.3.10. These collections include over 500,000 individual items, comprising: 20,000 paintings, prints and drawings; over 100,000 items of printed ephemera (ranging from large advertising posters to theatre tickets); over 200,000 historic and contemporary photographs; 7,000 hours of recorded media (oral history, film and video); 20,000 items of costume and textiles; 200,000 items of general material culture, decorative arts, social and working history including items related to London's port and river.

D. The Library and Archive Collections

- 3.3.11. The Museum's printed ephemera collection has long held material loosely described as 'archives': the Suffragette Archive, for example. However, a more formal interest in archives has developed in recent years, following the deposit of the Port of London Authority Archive with the Museum of London, Docklands and the opening of the Sainsbury Study Centre in 2003.
- 3.3.12. The Museum holds other isolated archive collections relating to subjects explored in the Museum's Docklands galleries; together with the large Sainsbury Archive. The latter is held under a separate arrangement, and is not governed by this policy framework. The Museum's archive collections are publically accessible through the Sainsbury Study Centre.
- 3.3.13. The Museum's Library is primarily an information resource for staff but does hold special collections of rare books, such as the Tangye Collections of Cromwelliana. Special collections also include the Port of London Authority Library. Books acquired as historical artefacts in their own right, are subject to the Museum's acquisition procedure and policy, as set out here.

4. Acquisition Criteria

- 4.1. Acquisitions to all categories of collection must meet two fundamental requirements: relevance to London, and high-quality contextual information. For the Museum of London the archaeological and historical context of an object, together with the information associated with it, is of fundamental importance. It is this that determines the object's value to the Museum rather than aesthetic or technological criteria alone. Normally, objects are only acquired when they can satisfy the requirement of a strong London context.

4.2. The significance of all potential acquisitions is formally assessed through the Museum's acquisitions procedure. Staff must demonstrate that the item or collection has significance and value to the Museum because of its:

- a) relevance to themes, issues, events, people of importance to London's past and present, and/or
- b) relevance to subjects identified in the strategic plan for collecting or programme activity, and/or
- c) Relevance to scholarship or the public understanding of London's past and present histories and cultures.

The following criteria are also addressed:

- a) **Provenance** - the origin and/or subsequent history of the object or collection is thoroughly documented and authenticated to the highest standards
- b) **Originality or rarity** – the object or collection is unique or relatively rare, a fine example of its type, or not well represented in other museum collections
- c) **Research value** – the object or collection has high research value, including the significant enhancement of existing collections
- d) **Display value** – the object or collection has high display value
- e) **Conservation qualities** – the object or collection is suitable for long term storage and preservation with minimal resource outlay.
- f) **Information value** - the information attached to the object or collection is able to be used in the public domain for public benefit.
- g) **Public value for money** – acquisition costs are appropriate for a public institution and the acquisition does not duplicate holdings easily accessible in other public collections (also see 9.2 – 9. 3).

4.3. **Specific criteria for the Archaeological Archive**

4.3.1. The key condition for depositing material at the Archaeological Archive is that the depositing body prepares archives to the Museum's standards, which includes a formal transfer of ownership and copyright. These conditions are explained in detail in 'General Standards for the Preparation of Archaeological Archives deposited with the Museum of London', available on the website. The Museum reserves the right to alter these conditions, which are designed to ensure that only material of lasting archaeological value enters the Archive.

4.3.2. The Museum will consider acquiring archaeological archives which fall outside PPS5 and the planning system, or are not able to meet the deposit standards for whatever reason (for example archives generated by local archaeological societies). These will be considered on a case by case basis.

4.3.3. The acquisition of human remains is governed by the Museum's 'Policy for the Care of Human Remains'. The value of the remains for research and other uses is constantly reviewed and skeletons not deemed of value are reburied.

- 4.3.4. The Museum aims to work in close partnership with London's archaeologically-active borough museums, accepting that some will want to retain local finds in local stores.
- 4.3.5. Where material is found to be of no research value because it has no associated records, was un-stratified when collected, or is of a mundane or repetitive nature, the Museum will dispose of material from the Archaeological Archive in an appropriate and responsible way. Disposal can include use of the material for teaching or public interpretation purposes.

4.4. **Specific criteria for the Archaeology and History Collections**

- 4.4.1. The main criteria for these collections are as set out above in 4.1. – 4.2. More detailed aspirations for particular collections are set out in a series of collections statements (see website). These are reviewed and updated by staff when necessary: or, typically, when new curators arrive.
- 4.4.2. The archaeology and history collections include certain discrete collections that were useful when acquired but are now seen as less central to the Museum's activities. In some cases this is because other institutions have established collecting initiatives in these fields. The following collections are considered to be closed, although this does not preclude individual items from these groups being acquired as special cases or as part of archaeological groups.
- Church plate
 - Coins, medals and tokens in comprehensive runs
 - Military material
 - Postage stamps
 - Miscellaneous single items without a clear archaeological context, eg: un-retouched prehistoric flints, shreds of pottery or glass, clay pipe stems.
 - Royal personalia (now referred to the Historic Royal Palaces Agency)
 - Theatrical ephemera (now referred to the Theatre Museum).
- 4.4.3. Contemporary collecting remains a high priority for the Museum. The Museum has a strong track record in this area and a repertoire of methods for bringing other voices and perspectives into the collecting process: commissioning work; collecting related to exhibitions; community inclusion projects; oral history or video projects.
- 4.4.4. It is accepted that decisions about contemporary material are sometimes best made at the point of collection, rather than the Collections Committee. However, collecting projects should have Committee approval, and the acquisition procedure must be followed. The Committee is always responsible for allocating the purchase fund and assessing the object against the potential cost of collecting.
- 4.4.5. Oral history or other 'life-story' recorded media are acquired with due regard to the codes of practice and ethical guidelines established by the Oral History Society and comparable professional bodies.

4.5. **Specific criteria for the Library and Archive Collections**

- 4.5.1. Archives are only acquired in exceptional circumstances. The Museum has a limited capacity to look after archives and only acquires business, personal or institutional archives where it is able to manage these archives and make them accessible to a standard consistent with professional archival practice. The Museum has no aspiration to develop its archive holdings to rival London's existing Archives and Record Offices and will only acquire specific items on a case by case basis.
- 4.5.2. Archives considered for acquisition must relate to the Museum's existing archive collections, or the subject interests and development aspirations of the Museum of London, Docklands. The interests of relevant local archives, such as Tower Hamlets', will be respected. This scope includes:
- London's port and river
 - Slavery, the sugar trade and London's Caribbean connections
 - The multicultural communities of the East End
 - Additions to existing archives held in the printed ephemera collections (for example, the Suffragettes).
- 4.5.3. More general archive material is referred to London Metropolitan Archives or the appropriate borough record offices. However, this does not preclude the Museum's curatorial staff acquiring photographs, items of printed ephemera and recorded media material, which are classed by the Museum as 'museum objects' rather than 'archives'.
- 4.5.4. Where the Museum holds or intends to acquire archives it is guided by the Code of Practice on Archives for Museums in the United Kingdom (2002).
- 4.5.5. The Library has a limited capacity to look after special collections. It does not collect rare books or other historic printed items that are better housed elsewhere: it seeks not to duplicate items that are easily accessible in other public collections.

5. **Support Collection**

- 5.1. 'Support Collection' is the generic term used to describe objects of all types which are not part of the permanent collections but are acquired or produced to support public or museum activities, such as handling sessions, furnishing for displays and reproductions, or for reference purposes.
- 5.2. It is recognised that these objects may have a limited life span or relevance to the Museum and their long term retention may be uneconomic. Therefore objects acquired for these purposes are accounted for separately and not necessarily subject to the high standards of care and documentation that govern the treatment of objects in the permanent collections. In certain circumstances objects considered for acquisition or disposal may be accepted into the Support Collection, following the guidelines set out in the Acquisition and Disposal procedures.

6. Learning collections

- 6.1. 'Learning Collections' are defined as collections of objects specifically chosen for handling and teaching purposes. They are a mixture of accessioned objects and objects from the Support Collection, and are stored separately from the permanent collection. Visitors are allowed to touch and handle these objects under supervision by trained museum or freelance staff.
- 6.2. The Learning Collections Policy outlines the policies and procedures for the acquisition, care, storage, management and use of the Learning Collections. Anyone wishing to add items to the Learning Collections should contact the Learning Collections Manager as there is limited space in the collections and specific selection criteria for acquiring Learning objects, which are outlined in the Learning Collections Policy.

7. Collecting generated by community or learning projects

- 7.1. The Museum has a strong interest in community engagement and a track record of successful partnership projects with community-based organisations and individuals. Where projects have specific contemporary collecting aims, items will be added to the permanent collection, as for any other collecting project. Artefacts, images, photographs and digital recordings generated through other community work is initially presumed to have the status of 'support collection' i.e. the Museum may wish to keep these items, but not as part of the permanent collection.
- 7.2. This does not preclude any such item subsequently be proposed as a permanent collection acquisition. Curators are generally responsible for steering such proposals through the acquisitions procedure.
- 7.3. Material acquired for the permanent collection from community projects is subject to the same standards of care, management and documentation that apply to material from any other source.

8. Limitations on Collecting

- 8.1. The Museum recognises its responsibility to ensure that care of collections, documentation arrangements and use of its collections meet the requirements of the Accreditation Standard. It will take into account limitations on collecting imposed by such factors as inadequate staffing, storage and care of collection capacity.
- 8.2. The Museum does not collect:
 - Objects in unacceptable condition which cannot be cost effectively conserved, or are infested with pests or other hazardous materials which cannot easily be removed
 - Objects or collections for which there is not sufficient space to house them safely and securely in appropriate conditions
 - Objects which present an unmanageable risks to staff or visitors or other collections
 - Objects on long-term loan, other than in exceptional circumstances, for example as key items for display in the galleries or as important reference collections where there is a proven public benefit.

9. Copyright and Title

- 9.1. The Museum will assert title in all its collections. It will formally agree terms of copyright and reproduction rights with copyright holders, where appropriate. The Museum has a detailed copyright policy.
- 9.2. The Museum will only acquire works in copyright for which it can also obtain non-commercial rights: except in exceptional circumstances or in the cases of orphaned works.

10. Regional role and partnerships

- 10.1. It is recognised that the capital's cultural heritage is preserved in a network of museums and other public collections, notably: bodies run by the City of London - the Guildhall Art Gallery, Guildhall Library and London Metropolitan Archives; London's borough museums; national museums and cultural bodies such as the British Film Institute.
- 10.2. The Museum seeks to work in partnership with these bodies and will consult where possible conflicts of interest may arise. The Museum strives to avoid unnecessary duplication of collections and waste of public resources.
- 10.3. For objects or collections of demonstrable local interest, there is a presumption in favour of London borough museums, which are assumed to have 'first refusal' rights for objects from their areas. Where appropriate, the Museum will actively draw the attention of borough museums to such objects or direct potential donors to their local museum.
- 10.4. The Museum has a formal regional role for the storage of archaeological material but not for any other type of item. It nevertheless supports strategic regional collecting initiatives, for example through 'Renaissance' programmes or subject-based networks such as London's Screen Archives and Photo London. The Museum recognises that regional benefit may become a stronger factor in future collecting-decisions.

11. Disposal

- 11.1. Under the terms of the Museum of London Act 1965, the Board has powers to sell, exchange, give away or otherwise dispose of any object comprised in the collection if it is a duplicate or is for any reason not, in the Board's opinion, required for retention, provided this is not inconsistent with any trust or condition attached to the object. Similarly, the Board may transfer any object, with any trust or condition attached thereto, to a national museum as listed in the National Heritage Act 1992.
- 11.2. In exercising these powers the Board will do so in line with the following paragraphs recommended by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council for incorporation in the acquisitions and disposal policy of Accredited museums:
 - 11.2.1. By definition the Museum has a long-term purpose and should possess (or intend to acquire) permanent collections in relation to its stated objectives. The Board accepts the principle that, except for sound curatorial reasons,

there is a strong presumption against the disposal of any items in the Museum's collection.

- 11.2.2. The Museum will establish that it is legally free to dispose of an item. Any decision to dispose of material from the collections will be taken only after due consideration.
- 11.2.3. When disposal of an item 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.
- 11.2.4. Decisions to dispose of items will not be made with the principal aim of generating funds.
- 11.2.5. Any monies received by Board from the disposal of items will be applied for the benefit of the collections. This normally means the purchase of further acquisitions but in exceptional cases improvements relating to the care of collections may be justifiable. Advice on these cases may be sought from MLA.
- 11.2.6. A decision to dispose of a specimen or object, whether by exchange, sale, gift or destruction (in the case of an item too badly damaged or deteriorated to be of any use for the purposes of the collections), will be the responsibility of the Board acting on the advice of professional curatorial staff and not of the curator of the collection acting alone.
- 11.2.7. Once a decision to dispose of an item has been taken, priority will be given to retaining the item within the public domain, unless it is to be destroyed. It will therefore be offered in first instance, by gift, exchange, or sale directly to other accredited museums likely to be interested in its acquisition.
- 11.2.8. If the material is not acquired by any accredited museums to which it was offered directly, then the museum community at large will be advised of the intention to dispose of material, normally through an announcement in the Museums Association's *Find an Object* website, and in other professional journals where appropriate.
- 11.2.9. The announcement will indicate the number and nature of the 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. If no expressions of interest have been received at the end of this period, the Museum may consider disposing of the material to other interested individuals and organizations: this may take the form of selling items, transferring items to the Learning Collections or even returning items to donors.
- 11.2.10. 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.

12. Review

- 12.1. This policy will be reviewed at least every five years. The next review will be due in 2016. MLA, or any successor body will be notified of any changes, and of the implications of any such changes for the future of the Museum's existing collections.
- 12.2. This revision was approved by the Board at its meeting of 6 July 2011.

Related documents

Date approved	July 2011
Approved by	Board of Governors
Version	Version 4.1
Master file location	G:\Collections and Learning\IRS\Documentation\Procedures\Acquisition\Policy\Acquisition_&_Disposal_Policy_2011_amended_8_September_2015.doc
Supersedes	Acquisition and Disposal Policy 2011 Version 4 Acquisitions and Disposal Policy 2006
Related procedures	
Related policies	
Related Guidance, Legislation and Codes of Practice	
Policy Owner	Information Resources
Lead Contact	Director of Content
Policy review date	July 2016