

Blake Museum
Bridgwater

Acquisition and Disposal Policy

2009

Adopted 15 July 2009

Acquisition and Disposal Policy

Name of museum

Blake Museum Bridgwater

Name of governing body

Bridgwater Town Council

Status of Governing Body

Legal Entity as Owner of Museum Buildings and Museum Collection

Regulating Instruments

s.12 (1) of Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964 (c75)

Agreement between Bridgwater Town Council and Sedgemoor District Council effective 1 April 2009 ("the Agreement")

Date on which this policy was approved by governing body

15 July 2009

Date on or before which this policy is due for review

31 March 2013

Preamble

This policy sets out the principles that provides the governing body and volunteers of the Blake Museum with a framework for the scrupulous and ethical acquisition and disposal of collections using clear procedures and decision-making processes common to UK museums in the Accreditation Scheme.

Implementing the policy enables the Blake Museum to demonstrate the public benefit in its actions relating to the acquisition and disposal of the collection. It provides a basis for open and transparent decision-making and an informed dialogue between the governing body, donors, funding bodies and other stakeholders.

1. Museum's statement of purpose

The Statement of Purpose 2009 embodies the Reasons for Establishment proclaimed by Mayor Walter Deacon at the inaugural opening of the Museum on Thursday 15th April 1926

The Blake Museum Bridgwater is established:

to rescue from loss and destruction the relics of our ancestors;

to collect, conserve and to show relics of history relating (principally but not exclusively) to Bridgwater and its immediate surroundings;

to show visitors that Bridgwater is not indifferent to its own history;

to interest visitors in what has happened in Bridgwater since it was granted its first Royal Charter in the reign of King John;

to give the townspeople of Bridgwater pride in their past;

to reveal that great events have taken place within the town and adjacent areas and set them in the context of the history of England;

to honour the lives of great men who have lived or been associated with the town, and, in particular but not exclusively, Robert Blake.

2. Existing collections, including the subjects or themes and the periods of time and /or geographic areas to which the collections relate

2.1 Existing Collections

Those items acquired by transfer from Sedgemoor District Council (the former owners of the collections) on 1 April 2009 and listed in Schedule 2 of the Agreement.

2.2 Subjects

Archaeology

The collection consists mainly of finds (and chance finds). The principal source for much of the collection has been from the fieldwork of Bridgwater and District Archaeological Society. The collection also includes plans, drawings and some archive material. Approximately 50% of the material is from Bridgwater itself and the remaining half from the surrounding area. The period represented is from the Prehistoric period to post mediaeval.

Archive, Printed Ephemera and Photographs

The material held by the museum supports the social, industrial, and military history collections.

The Archive and Ephemera contain letters of Admiral Blake and the Duke of Monmouth, trade catalogues and carnival and political posters, electoral registers and pamphlets.

The Photograph Collection is extensive but poorly catalogued. It represents the work of several local photographers and extends to subjects outside the collections area but is retained as their oeuvres. The material includes glass plates, negatives, original prints from the 1860s and later, transparencies and colour prints.

Social & Industrial History

The existing material has been divided into four categories: domestic, agricultural, maritime and industrial. The collection contains a number of typological groups, such as Friendly Society Brasses, Horse Brasses and Constables' Staves and Truncheons, as well as individual items of particular note; e.g. the L'Escopette Camera (one of only three known in existence, it has a Bridgwater association). Domestic life includes artefacts associated with the home, laundry, preparation of food, and leisure pursuits. Items that reflect community life include that from educational establishments, societies, churches and public houses, local Guy Fawkes Carnivals. Rural Life is represented by a small collection of agricultural machinery and tools, blacksmiths' bellows, saddlers' tools and dairy equipment. Industrial material includes an extensive brick and tile collection (much of which is on loan and displayed at the Brick and Tile Museum), brewing, glass making, bell founding, and the port trades of shipbuilding and rope and sail making. The maritime collection, includes a sizeable collection of model ships, a model representing Bridgwater Docks circa 1900, various documents, and a selection of craft tools from associated trades.

The period covered is from Tudor to the present.

Costume and Textiles

The collection, largely collected during the 1980s, consists mainly of women's garments dating from the nineteenth century, with some examples of twentieth century items. Menswear is under-represented, but there is a stronger selection of underwear and children's garments, and fashion accessories of the Victorian period. There is a small collection of samplers which includes some eighteenth century examples, and lace making paraphernalia. In 2000 the Museum acquired material to represent the products produced by the textile industries in Bridgwater in the 20th Century. Much of this material is of national significance, in particular products made by S. Leffman and Son (later Baird Clothing) and shirt and collar manufacturers. The collection is severely constrained by storage and display space, which is inappropriate for much of the material.

Decorative Arts

The Museum has a small collection of Decorative Art items, which are illustrative of its major themes, in particular furniture and artefacts, associated with the seventeenth century and with Robert Blake. Of particular note are Blake's sea-chest, and a stained

glass panel by Edward Frampton dated 1889 depicting Blake's funeral. On loan from the Alford family are items of personal effects connected with three Somerset families. The Museum also has a small collection of presentation silver and artefacts associated with the Borough of Bridgwater. Of individual interest is a nineteenth century replica of the Alfred Jewel, as well as several clocks made in the town.

Fine Art

This is almost exclusively confined to two-dimensional graphic art, and comprises maps and prints of a local and topographic nature, watercolours and oil paintings dating from the seventeenth century.

The material includes pencil drawings, pictures and silhouettes of three Somerset families, on loan to the museum. Over 300 drawings, paintings and water colours by John Chubb (1746-1818) represent a substantial proportion of the work of the Bridgwater-born artist. The collection is complemented by nineteenth century prints of his sketches of the town.

Military History

The collection consists mainly of material from the Civil War period, the Battle of Sedgemoor and the two World Wars.

Numismatics

The collection includes coins, military commemorative medals of local significance, a small number of Somerset bank notes and about forty public house and trade tokens of local provenance.

2.4 The Geographic Area of the Collections

The Museum has acquired items originating from, used in, or having connections with, principally, but not exclusively the Town of Bridgwater and the parishes of the former Rural District comprising: Ashcott, Bawdrip, Bridgwater, Bridgwater Without, Broomfield, Burtle, Cannington, Catcott, Chedzoy, Chilton Polden, Chilton Trinity, Cossington, Durleigh, East Huntspill, Edington, Enmore, Fiddington, Goathurst, Greinton, Lyng, Middlezoy, Moorlinch, Nether Stowey, North Petherton, Othery, Otterhampton, Over Stowey, Pawlett, Puriton, Shapwick, Spaxton, Stawell, Stockland Bristol, Thurloxton, Wembdon, West Huntspill, Westonzoyland, Woolavington and, in the District of West Somerset, Stogursey. The Museum has also collected items relating to Burnham and Highbridge Carnival which relate to Bridgwater Carnival Clubs.

3. Criteria governing future acquisition policy including the subjects or themes, periods of time and/or geographic areas and any collections which will not be subject to further acquisition.

Archaeology

The Museum will seek to acquire

a) Items actively collected through fieldwork of a high standard, by the Bridgwater and District Archaeological Society, and others

b) Well documented items associated within the defined collecting area from members of the public.

Archive, Printed Ephemera and Photographs

The Museum will seek to acquire archive, ephemera and images relating to local history, landscapes, buildings, activities, personalities, customs and lifestyles. Priority will be given to digitising the material and making the content publicly available. Once digitised, original material may be loaned to the Somerset Record Office for better conservation and storage.

Social & Industrial History

The Museum will seek to acquire well documented and provenanced items and pictorial records, which reflect the life and work of the population of the defined area.

Costume and Textiles

Collecting in this area will be restricted to exceptional items that develop the strong social and industrial themes in the collection and with strict adherence to clause 4 below

Decorative Arts

The Museum will seek to build selectively on the existing collection, with particular emphasis on material associated with people and organisations, and that produced by manufacturers working within the collecting area.

Fine Art

The museum will seek to acquire fine art illustrative of, or associated with, the area.

Military History

The museum will seek to acquire only those items which build on the existing collections, with particular emphasis on the seventeenth century.

The holding of weapons will be limited to those needed to support displays. Licensable firearms will not be kept. Priority will be given to material that illustrates military life in the seventeenth century, during the Civil War period and the Monmouth Rebellion.

Numismatics

The museum will seek to acquire numismatic material made in or for a specific use in the district.

3.2

The Museum will continue to collect from the geographical area given in 2.4 above

3.3

The Museum will not acquire material which is not in conformity with its statement of purpose except where such material enhances the interpretation of material already held in its collections.

4. Limitations on collecting

The museum recognises its responsibility, in acquiring additions to its collections, to ensure that care of collections, documentation arrangements and use of collections will meet the requirements of the Accreditation Standard. It will take into account limitations on collecting imposed by such factors as staffing, storage and care of collection arrangements.

The Museum will not seek to acquire any item which in the opinion of the Governing Body or its designated representative is likely to be beyond its capabilities and resources adequately to house, to conserve and to document.

5. Collecting policies of other museums

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 specialisms, in order to avoid unnecessary duplication and waste of resources.

Specific reference is made to the following museums and archive collections based in the County of Somerset:

Axbridge and District Museum

Somerset Brick and Tile Museum

Museum of Somerset (formerly Somerset County Museum)

Somerset & Dorset Railway Trust

Gauge Museum Bishops Lydeard

Somerset Record Office

Somerset Rural Life Museum

6. Policy review procedure

The Acquisition and Disposal Policy will be published and reviewed from time to time, at least once every five years. The date when the policy is next due for review is no later than 31 March 2013 .

The MLA will be notified of any changes to the Acquisition and Disposal Policy, and the implications of any such changes for the future of existing collections.

7. Acquisitions not covered by the policy

Acquisitions outside the current stated policy will only be made in very exceptional circumstances, and then only after proper consideration by the governing body of the museum itself, having regard to the interests of other museums.

8. Acquisition procedures

- 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 governing body or its designated representative is satisfied that the museum can acquire a valid title to the item in question.
- b.** In particular, 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).
- 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 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 or successor.
- d.** 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.
- e.** The museum will not acquire archaeological antiquities (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 including reporting finds to the landowner or occupier of the land and to the proper authorities in the case of possible treasure as defined by the Treasure Act 1996 or subsequent legislation.
- f.** Any exceptions to the clauses 8a, 8b, 8c, or 8e above will only be because the museum is either:

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

acquiring an item of minor importance that lacks secure ownership history but in the best judgement of experts in the field concerned has not been illicitly traded; or

acting with the permission of authorities with the requisite jurisdiction in the country of origin; or

in possession of reliable documentary evidence that the item was exported from its country of origin before 1970.

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.

g. As the Museum already holds human remains from any period before 1900, it will follow the procedures in the “Guidance for the care of human remains in museums” issued by DCMS in 2005 or succeeding guidance. The Museum will not acquire further human remains.

h. Wherever possible, the Museum will seek to acquire items through outright gift bequest or purchase.

i. Items loaned to the Museum will be subject to the agreement of both parties in writing. No items will be accepted by loan unless they are free of any requirement to be displayed. The period of loan will be for a specified period, and may be extended by mutual consent.

9. 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., notwithstanding the Museum's intention to avoid acquiring material to which this guidance applies.

10. The Repatriation and Restitution of objects and human remains

The museum’s governing body, acting on the advice of the museum’s delegated persons, and the appointed Curatorial Adviser 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 12a-12d, 12g and 12s below will be followed but the remaining procedures are not appropriate.

The disposal of human remains from the Museum will follow the procedures in the “Guidance for the care of human remains in museums”.

11. Management of archives

As the museum holds and intends to continue to acquire archives, including photographs, printed ephemera and digital media its governing body will be guided by the Code of Practice on Archives for Museums and Galleries in the United Kingdom (3rd ed. or successor, 2002).

12. Disposal procedures

Disposal preliminaries

a. The governing body will ensure that the disposal process is carried out openly and with transparency.

b. By definition, the museum has a long-term purpose and holds collections in trust for society in relation to its stated objectives. The governing body therefore accepts the principle that sound curatorial reasons for disposal must be established before consideration is given to the disposal of any items in the museum's collection.

c. The Museum will confirm that it is legally free to dispose of an item and agreements on disposal made with donors or with Sedgemoor District Council as previous owners of the Museum Collection will be taken into account.

d. 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. Any conditions attached to the original grant will be followed in as far as practicable. This may include repayment of the original grant and a proportion of the proceeds if the item is disposed of by sale.

Motivation for disposal and method of disposal

e. When disposal is motivated by curatorial reasons the procedures outlined in paragraphs 12g-12s will be followed and the method of disposal may be by gift, sale or exchange.

f. The museum will not undertake disposal motivated principally by financial reasons.

The disposal decision-making process

g. Whether the disposal is motivated either by curatorial or financial reasons, 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 the 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. External 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.

Responsibility for disposal decision-making

h. 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 assessed extreme risk to health and safety), will be the responsibility of the governing body of the museum acting on the advice of the Curatorial Adviser or other expert professional adviser and not of the designated person in control of the

collection acting alone.

Use of proceeds of sale

i. Any monies received by the museum governing body from the disposal of items will be applied 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 where the monies are intended to be used for the care of collections will be sought from MLA or its successor.

j. The proceeds of a sale will be designated within the Town Council's accounts so as to be demonstrated that they are to be spent in a manner compatible with the requirements of the Accreditation standard, and in accordance with local government audit standards.

Disposal by gift or sale

k. Once a decision to dispose of material in the collection has been taken, priority will be given to retaining it within the public domain, unless it is to be destroyed. 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.

l. If the material is not acquired by any Accredited Museums to which it was offered directly 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 an announcement in the Museums Association's Museums Journal, and in other specialist journals where appropriate.

m. 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 Governing Body may consider disposing of the material to other interested organisations in the public domain, but shall not dispose to any individual.

Disposal by exchange

n. 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.

o. 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 12a-12d and 12g-12h will be followed as will the procedures in paragraphs 12p-12s.

p. 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.

q. If the exchange is proposed with a non-accredited museum or with another type of organisation the museum will make an announcement in the Museums Journal and in other specialist journals where appropriate. An exchange with an individual will not be considered.

r. 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.

Documenting disposal

s. 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.

13 Loans out

a. Where objects are loaned, such loans shall normally only be to accredited museums, local government libraries, record offices, properly-constituted bodies within the public domain, registered charities or to members of the Friends of Blake Museum

b. Loans out to members of the Friends of Blake Museum shall be made at the discretion of the Town Clerk or his appointed representative

Other loans out shall be subject to the agreement of the Governing Body, acting upon the recommendation of the Town Clerk or his appointed representative, and subject to current conditions in force.

c. All loans out shall be for a fixed period and shall be subject to an annual review.

Approved by minute 08
Bridgwater Town Council
Museum sub-Committee

signed AH

dated 15 July 2009

Town Clerk of Bridgwater