



St Edmundsbury  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

# B259

## Cabinet 20 October 2010

### Heritage Service: Acquisition and Disposal Policy

**Museum / Service:** St Edmundsbury Borough Council Heritage Service

**Governing Body:** St Edmundsbury Borough Council

**Date approved by governing body:** ..... 27 June 2006

**Date at which policy due for review:** .....2010

#### 1. Introduction

This policy outlines the principles governing the acquisition and the disposal of material by St Edmundsbury Heritage Service. It is a revised version of the policy adopted by the Leisure Committee of St Edmundsbury Borough Council, the service's governing body, in October 1996 and readopted in 2001. It incorporates certain policy statements specifically required to bring the Heritage Service into compliance with the Accreditation Scheme for Museums and Galleries in the United Kingdom.

The Museums Association has defined a Museum as follows:

*A Museum is an institution which collects, documents, preserves, exhibits and interprets material evidence and associated information for the public benefit.*

The mission statement for St Edmundsbury Heritage Service is:

*To provide an excellent Heritage Service which will develop, preserve and explain the collections held by St Edmundsbury Borough Council for as wide an audience as possible, to foster the region's diverse cultural, natural and archaeological heritage, and to improve the quality of life for the borough's residents and visitors.*

The Acquisition and Disposal policy set out in this document is intended to meet the requirements contained in these definitions and to enable the achievement of their objectives.

Any acquisitions or disposals under this policy will be made within the context of law applying to the particular object or collection.

#### 2. St Edmundsbury Heritage Service

St Edmundsbury Heritage Service currently holds important collections of material in the following areas: Archaeology, Social History, Natural History, Fine and Decorative Art (including Horology and Costume and Textiles). These collections are displayed at Moyse's Hall Museum and West Stow.

Moyse's Hall became a museum in 1899 when the collections of the Suffolk Institute previously displayed at the Athenaeum were re-located there. Some of the horological, fine and decorative art and textile collections are also displayed there, together with part of the collections belonging to the Suffolk Regiment. West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village incorporates museums devoted to the display of the Saxon material excavated on the site or in Bury St Edmunds and other West Suffolk sites.

The Haverhill and District Local History Centre is supported by the Borough Council through the provision of premises and curatorial support. The Haverhill and District Local History Group are the legal owners of the artefacts on display; therefore those items do not form part of this policy.

### **3. Existing collections, including the subjects or themes for collecting**

#### **Horology**

The Horology Collection includes the Gershom-Parkington Collection, the Allen Collection, and other bequests and acquisitions.

It includes English clocks, early European clocks, watches, sundials, American Clocks, examples of public timekeepers such as turret clocks, and certain replicas and models that illustrate key points in the development of timekeeping.

#### **Fine and Decorative Art**

The Fine and Decorative Art Collection consists of pictures, furnishings, ceramics, metalwork and glass and includes the Cullum Collection of paintings and objets d'art.

#### **Costumes and Textiles**

The Costume and Textile Collection includes The Irene Barnes Collection of 1920s and 30s beaded costume, other material from the 17-20th centuries, with particular strengths in the period 1850-1950 and a particular emphasis on surface decoration.

#### **Archaeology**

The Archaeology Collection includes a wide range of both excavated material and chance discoveries from St Edmundsbury and the historic county of West Suffolk, as well as some material from outside the area. The collection extends from prehistoric times to the post medieval period.

It includes: extensive early prehistoric lithic collections, later prehistoric pottery and metalwork including the largest Bronze Age hoard in Europe, Roman and Anglo-Saxon collections, most notably from West Stow, as well as medieval and later material.

## **Local History**

The Local History Collection includes any material that throws meaningful light on an aspect of local life (e.g. locally made and used firearms).

## **Natural History**

The greater part of the Natural History Collection dates from the 19th Century; it comprises geological specimens, biological material including stuffed birds and mammals, fish and reptiles, birds eggs, Lepidoptera and other insects, and a plant collection or herbarium.

## **4. Criteria governing future collecting policy, including the subjects or themes for collecting**

The Heritage Service holds collections with these aims:

### **Horology**

The aim of the Horology Collection is to cover the development of timekeeping from its earliest origins to recent times with particular emphasis on technological and decorative features of historical significance in Britain, Europe and America.

The Horology Collection collects internationally, with emphasis on British, European and American timekeeping (see section five below). Where possible, any new acquisitions would have a local connection.

The existing collections will be assessed against the collection criteria and items not meeting the criteria may, subject to legal constraints, be deaccessioned or put forward for disposal on curatorial grounds.

### **Fine and Decorative Art**

The aim of the Fine and Decorative Art Collection is to reflect the artistic achievements and tastes of the people of St Edmundsbury and the historic county of West Suffolk from post medieval times to the present day.

The existing collections will be assessed against the collection criteria and items not meeting the criteria may be deaccessioned or put forward for disposal on curatorial grounds.

### **Costume and Textiles**

The aim of the Costume and Textiles Collection is to reflect the evolution of costume and textiles in terms of changing methods of production and tastes and to the historic county of West Suffolk from post medieval times to the present day.

Within the period of special interest 1850 - 1950 the Heritage Service will collect internationally. Other material will be collected in accordance with the criteria governing the acquisition of Fine and Decorative Art (see section five below). Where possible, any new acquisitions would have a local connection.

The existing collections will be assessed against the collection criteria and items not meeting the criteria may be deaccessioned or put forward for disposal on curatorial grounds.

### **Archaeology**

The aim of the Archaeology Collection is to outline the social, economic and cultural development of life in the area from its earliest origins until historic times; to preserve and make available the evidence on which this knowledge is based; and to foster a proper appreciation of the archaeological heritage.

The Archaeology Collection is bound by the limits of St Edmundsbury and of the historic county of West Suffolk. No material from outside the area will be collected without due professional consultation. Material already in the collection from outside the area will be considered for disposal to an appropriate museum, but due attention will be paid to the original circumstances of acquisition, and to the research or educational value of the material under consideration.

The existing collections will be assessed against the collection criteria and items not meeting the criteria may be deaccessioned or put forward for disposal on curatorial grounds.

### **Local History**

The aim of the Local History Collection is to illustrate the lives, industries, and culture of the people of St Edmundsbury and the historic county of West Suffolk.

The Local History Collection is of material made and used locally, or otherwise of direct local significance, though examples from outside St Edmundsbury and the historic county of West Suffolk will be sought to interpret wider issues that have local relevance.

The Local History Collection does include a number of items which may be duplicates within the collection. The Heritage Service will identify duplicate material and assess whether deaccessioning to the education and handling collections or disposal to other accredited museums with appropriate resources for the reception of such material should be actively pursued.

### **Natural History**

Some of this material is either:-

- (1) in poor condition, requiring remedial conservation; or
- (2) may constitute a threat to other collections; or
- (3) has little relevance to the natural and social history of the area.

The Heritage Service will identify the material matching some or all of these criteria. Disposal to other accredited museums with appropriate resources for the reception of such material will then be actively pursued.

The Heritage Service Services does not actively collect Natural History specimens owing to the lack of any Natural Sciences staff. However, the growing importance of conservation and environmental issues make this area of great significance for

the future, as well as contributing to the understanding of the Archaeology and Social History of the area.

The Heritage Service will therefore collect Natural History material in accordance with the following criteria:

The aim of the Natural History Collection is to explain the geological origins and natural environment of the area, how it has influenced and been influenced by human activity from early prehistory to the present day, and to foster a proper regard for the local natural heritage.

The Natural History Collection should reflect the geological and biological diversity of St Edmundsbury and the historic county of West Suffolk, using specimens from within this area. Specimens from outside this area will be considered for disposal to other accredited Heritage Service.

## **5. Period of time and/or geographical area to which collecting relates**

### **Horology**

- (i) to assemble a representative selection of English and European watches from 1600 to 1930;
- (ii) to collect English clocks from 17th -20th Centuries;
- (iii) to collect examples or replicas of early European timekeepers from the 15th to the 18th Centuries;
- (iv) to collect portable and, occasionally, fixed sundials;
- (v) to collect American clocks that display particular technological features in contrast to their European counterparts; and
- (vi) to collect items that have general significance for understanding the technological and social history of timekeeping from its earliest origins to the present day, including electric, electronic, and other devices as appropriate.

Where possible, any new acquisitions would have a local connection.

### **Fine and Decorative Art**

#### **Fine Art**

- (i) to acquire works and associated material by local artists from within the area of St Edmundsbury and the historic county of West Suffolk. A "local artist" should be: born within the area, or have been resident for a number of years, or have made a significant contribution to the art of the area, or have some important association with it;
- (ii) to collect local (as in section four above) topographical material illustrating urban and rural scenes by any artist;

- (iii) to collect portraits of local people; and
- (iv) to collect other local subject matter as appropriate.  
Decorative Art
- (v) to collect ceramics, furniture, furnishing, glass, metalwork and other objets d'art that were either made or used locally, or otherwise of direct local significance; examples from outside St Edmundsbury and the historic county of West Suffolk may be acquired to interpret wider issues of taste and design which have local relevance.

### **Costume and Textiles**

- (i) to collect textiles and costume with a special emphasis on the period 1850 - 1950;
- (ii) to collect material from any period which has local (as in section four above) associations or illustrates and contributes to the understanding of local tastes and fashions; and
- (iii) to collect material that helps demonstrate and explain principles in the manufacture and use of the above.

Where possible, any new acquisitions would have a local connection.

### **Archaeology**

- (i) to acquire material that has been collected through fieldwork conducted to appropriate standards of planning and recording so that objects, samples and records are maintained as an integrated archive;
- (ii) to acquire occasional finds when details of provenance can be supported by appropriate documentation; and
- (iii) to seek to agree a policy with Suffolk County Council, who through the County Archaeology Service are responsible for most excavations within the county, for an integrated approach to excavation archive management within St Edmundsbury and the historical county of West Suffolk.

### **Local History**

- (i) to collect material from local sources that have shaped people's lives (e.g. local industries);
- (ii) to collect material from specific events or periods that have had a significant impact on local life (e.g. Second World War); and
- (iii) to collect material that has a universal relevance to everyday life with particular reference to local circumstances (e.g. childhood, school days, sport).

## **Natural History**

- (i) to retain existing collections only in the case that they satisfy the criteria set out in section four; and
- (ii) to seek to develop a strategy for interpretation appropriate to the resources available in conjunction with the Parks Section, or other relevant advisory bodies.

## **6. Limitations on collecting**

The Heritage Service 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 inadequate staffing, storage and care of collection arrangements.

The Heritage Service may place some restraints on future acquisitions. However, the service will continue to make relevant additions, where possible, in the areas defined by this policy. As a general principle the Service will not seek to acquire material whose terms and conditions are unduly restrictive either for legal or physical reasons.

## **7. Collecting policies of other museums**

The Heritage Service 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.

Specific reference is made to the following museums:-

- (1) Mildenhall Museum;
- (2) Ipswich Borough Council Museums; and
- (3) Suffolk County Council Records Office.

As a general principle, the Heritage Service will seek agreement with other heritage based organisations at both local and regional levels, notably the 'Hub' museums, with a view to establishing a coherent strategy for the acquisition and management of collections. This is a widely recognised gap in existing policy making, but one which the Heritage Service should be proactive in addressing.

## **8. 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 noted above.

The Regional 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.

## **9. 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 Cabinet as the executive function of the governing body of the Heritage Service itself, having regard to the interests of other museums.

St Edmundsbury Borough Council predominantly collects in the borough of St Edmundsbury and historic county of West Suffolk. Where this conflicts with the collecting area of Mildenhall Museum and the Haverhill Local History Group the Heritage Service will endeavour to reach an agreement based on the specialist collecting areas of each body.

St Edmundsbury Borough Council holds two different collections of objects and artefacts: the Heritage Service Collection and the Borough Collection. This policy relates to those items accessioned to the Heritage Service Collection or those held by the Service in an unaccessioned state as part of the educational collection only. The Borough Collection consists of the ceremonial collection of the Borough and includes a number of pieces of artwork.

It has been identified through the Heritage Review that a number of items from the Borough Collection may have been mistakenly accessioned as part of the Heritage Service Collection. A review of items in both collections will be undertaken and any misplaced items returned to their relevant collection.

## **10. Acquisition procedures**

The Heritage Service will continue to rely heavily on private individuals and charitable organisations to make additions to the collections. It will seek to make the fullest use of grant aid for proposed purchases and will emphasise to potential benefactors that the Accredited status of the Heritage Service provides safeguards against the unethical or unlawful disposal of collections.

The Heritage Service will assess any bequest or gift made to the Service against two criteria, (1) does it meet the criteria set out for acquisitions, and (2) does the gift place burdens, either now or in the future, which the Council cannot sustain?

- a. The Heritage Service 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 responsible officer is satisfied that the museum can acquire a valid title to the item in question.
- b. In particular, the Heritage Service 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 Heritage



Service 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 of Culture Media and Sport in 2005.

d. So far as biological and geological material is concerned, the Heritage Service 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 Heritage Service 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. In England, Northern Ireland and Wales the procedures include 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.

f. Any exceptions to the above clauses 10a, 10b, 10c, or 10e 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 concerned has not been illicitly traded; or
- (iii) acting with the 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.

g. As the Heritage Service holds or intends to acquire 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.

h. The Heritage Service may acquire items which are not intended to be retained as part of the permanent collections. These items may be used for education or handling collections. Documentation will clearly show the proposed use of the object and the donor will be made aware of this when the object is deposited with the Heritage Service. Such items will not be recorded as part of the permanent collections.

## **11. Spoliation**

The Heritage Service 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.

The Heritage Service also reserves the right to refer any such case to the Spoliation Advisory Panel.

## **12. The Repatriation and Restitution of objects and human remains**

The Heritage Service's governing body, acting on the advice of the Heritage Service's professional staff, 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 Heritage Service 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 14a-14d, 14g and 14s below will be followed but the remaining procedures are not appropriate. 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".

## **13. Management of archives**

As the Heritage Service holds archives, including photographs and printed ephemera, its governing body will be guided by the Code of Practice on Archives for Museums and Galleries in the United Kingdom (3rd ed., 2002).

## **14. 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 Heritage Service 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 Heritage Service will confirm that it is legally free to dispose of an item and agreements on disposal made with donors 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. 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.

## **Motivation for disposal and method of disposal**

e. When disposal is motivated by curatorial reasons the procedures outlined in paragraphs 14g-14s will be followed and the method of disposal may be by gift, sale or exchange.

f. In exceptional cases, the disposal may be motivated principally by financial reasons. The method of disposal will therefore be by sale and the procedures outlined below in paragraphs 14g-14m and 14s will be followed. In cases where disposal is motivated by financial reasons, the governing body will not undertake disposal unless it can be demonstrated that all the following exceptional circumstances are met in full:

- the disposal will significantly improve the long-term public benefit derived from the remaining collection,
- the disposal will not be undertaken to generate short-term revenue (for example to meet a budget deficit),
- the disposal will be undertaken as a last resort after other sources of funding have been thoroughly explored.

## **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 Heritage Service'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 Heritage Service 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 health and safety), will be the responsibility of the governing body of the Heritage Service acting on the advice of professional curatorial staff, if any, and not of the curator of the collection acting alone.

## **Use of proceeds of sale**

i. Any monies received by the Heritage Service's 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 on those cases where the monies are intended to be used for the care of collections will be sought from MLA.

j. The proceeds of a sale will be ring-fenced so it can be demonstrated that they are spent in a manner compatible with the requirements of the Accreditation standard.

### **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 museum may consider disposing of the material to other interested individuals and organisations giving priority to organisations in the public domain.

### **Disposal by exchange**

n. The nature of disposal by exchange means that the Heritage Service 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 14a-14d and 14g-14h will be followed as will the procedures in paragraphs 14p-14s.

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, with another type of organisation or with an individual, the museum will make an announcement in the Museums Journal and in other specialist journals where appropriate.

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.

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