

Acquisition and Disposal Policy

Geffrye Museum Trust

Date approved by governing body: 19 July 2005

Date at which policy due for review: 19 July 2008

1. Existing collections, including the subjects or themes for collecting

The collection is primarily concerned with the history and development of English, urban, middle-class interiors from 1600 to the present day. The focus is principally the main living space, as opposed to kitchen, bedroom or bathroom. The collections are decorative arts (furniture, textiles, ceramics, metalwork and glass) and paintings and prints. Some of the individual objects are of national importance, but the real significance of the collection lies in its extensive coverage of the material culture of English homes over the past 400 years.

1.1 Object Collections

The object collections may be summarised as follows: -

Furniture: dating from the 16th century to the present day; includes items of national importance, such as the Guilbaud writing cabinet, c.1700, the earliest known English piece of furniture to bear a trade label, and a significant collection of pieces bearing original upholstery.

Paintings: historically the collection has been made up of oil paintings dating from the 17th to 20th centuries with a broad range of subject matter. The focus since the mid-1990s has been on representations of domestic interiors and gardens. Recent acquisitions include *View of the Garden at 17 Grove End* by James Tissot and *The Appointment* by Rebecca Solomon.

Prints: the museum holds a wide range of prints after artists including Hogarth, Baxter, and Boydell, but like the paintings collection the focus for new acquisitions since the mid 1990s has been on prints representing domestic interiors.

Textiles: from samplers and 19th-century linen, to carpets by Marian Pepler and a large collection of 1950s curtain fabrics. The 20th-century items are of particular interest to researchers and students of art and design and there has been a recent emphasis on establishing a collection of furnishing textiles for research and reference.

Ceramics and Glass: this is a relatively small collection, ranging from 17th-century delftware to late twentieth-century tableware. Currently research is being carried out to improve the quality of the items in the collection in the areas of tableware and decorative glass.

Metalwork: comprising domestic equipment, mostly from earlier museum displays, which included an open-hearth kitchen. Recent acquisitions include a silver vase by CR Ashbee and a copper and brass coffeepot by Christopher Dresser.

Ephemera: mainly comprising packaging, stationery, writing equipment, household cleaning items and biscuit tins. There is also an important collection of Utility material.

Domestic Appliances: a representative range of radio and stereophonic equipment from 1890-1960, as well as domestic lighting, vacuum cleaners and sewing machines.

Treen: notably a fine collection of 18th and 19th-century tea caddies and workboxes.

Christmas Archive: the museum has a significant and increasing number of objects relating to the celebration of Christmas, chiefly Christmas decorations and related ephemera such as Christmas crackers and Christmas cards.

Objects for Almshouse 14: The 1780s and 1880s almshouse period rooms contain furnishings appropriate to their period and function, including cooking and food preparation equipment, bedroom furniture and accessories and objects relating to storage and recreation.

Tools: an extensive collection of 19th century and earlier cabinetmaking and woodworking tools, including complete tool chests and small machines such as lathes and jig-saws. The museum no longer actively collects objects in this area.

Architectural Items: including several 17th and 18th century panelled rooms in oak and deal, a complete 17th century staircase, carved wood and marble fire surrounds, cast iron fire grates and firebacks, and examples of 18th and 19th century joinery. Lead water butts and a brick niche are displayed in the museum gardens.

Handling Collection: the Education department uses a number of objects, designated as a handling collection for demonstrations to school and other groups. The objects are mainly Victorian and are fully accessioned objects.

Objects on Long Term Loan

The museum is currently displaying or storing 21 objects on long-term loan from the Victoria and Albert Museum, and over 50 from the Horniman Museum. There are also several items on loan from private individuals. The museum will seek to return any of these loans not required for display.

1.2 Library and Archive

The library and archive are part of the collection and are generally governed by the same policies of care and access that apply to the rest of the museum's collections. They may be summarised as follows: -

Trade Catalogues: a collection of material ranging from 1760 to the present day and including handbills, trade catalogues, stock lists, store catalogues, mail-order catalogues, manufacturers catalogues, price lists and associated promotional information relating to household goods and furnishings.

East London Furniture Makers Archive: a large and unique collection of trade catalogues, as well as secondary material - files on individual cabinet-makers and manufacturing companies, mainly in or near Shoreditch.

Former Shoreditch Library - Furniture Collection: in 2001 the Shoreditch Library collection relating to the furniture industry was passed to the Geffrye Museum from Hackney Council. The collection is an important asset to the museum enhancing its ability to serve as a research centre on London's furniture trade as well as on English interiors and decorative arts.

Household Manuals Collection: a useful archive of home management and decoration manuals.

Periodicals Collection: the museum also collects periodicals relating to home furnishing and lifestyle, such as Elle Decoration, Wallpaper and Homes and Gardens and has early runs of magazines like Ideal Home, House and Garden and Decorative Art (1890s).

Library and Archive: contains general and specialist publications on the history of the domestic interior, furniture, glass, textiles, fine art, food and drink, social history and demography, household management, Christmas, architecture, gardens, design and designers. Also held by the museum is a great deal of material essential to the research of the domestic interior and the history of the museum itself. The department also retains and collects the following: an extensive reference resource of representations of domestic interiors; an extensive collection of domestic inventories, mainly transcriptions but including original documents; a number of interior decoration surveys and supporting material such as oral histories; an extensive garden history archive, publications about London almshouses and research papers relating to the Geffrye almshouses; the Molly Harrison Archive of museum educational material.

2. Criteria governing future collecting policy, including the subjects or themes for collecting

Acquisitions will be sought primarily to enhance and develop the museum's displays. In certain areas the museum will also collect in order to form or enhance a study collection as a primary resource for research relating to one of the museum's key themes.

The museum is primarily concerned with:

- urban, domestic interiors of the middle classes from 1600 to the present day, mainly London and mainly relating to the living room;
- gardens of the urban middle classes and their function as domestic spaces;
- the London furniture industry, particularly that of East London;
- vernacular furniture from the regions of England and its place in regional material culture;
- the history of the Geffrye Almshouses.

Study collections where further collecting is undertaken are:

- furnishing textiles, original upholstery, wallpaper;
- paintings, prints, drawings and photographs of interiors and gardens;
- documents and published material relating to interiors;
- trade catalogues and archives relating to the London furniture industry;
- vernacular furniture and related archival material.

3. Period of time and geographical area to which collecting relates

As defined in paragraphs 1 and 2 above.

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 inadequate staffing, storage and care of collection arrangements.

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:

Victoria and Albert Museum, Design Museum, Hackney Museum, Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture, Museum of London.

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 noted above.

ALM London 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 Trustees and Director are 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 Trustees will be guided by the national guidance on the responsible acquisition of cultural property issued by DCMS in 2005.

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 Trustees or Director has any suspicion that the circumstances of their recovery involved a failure to follow the appropriate legal procedures, such as 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 (in England, Northern Ireland and Wales) or reporting finds through the Treasure Trove procedure (in Scotland).

f. Any exceptions to the above clauses 8a, 8b, 8c, or 8e 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.

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.

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.

10. Repatriation and Restitution

Not applicable.

11. Management of archives

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

12. Disposal procedures

a. 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 Trustees accept the principle that, except for sound curatorial reasons, there is a strong presumption against the disposal of any items in the museum's collection.

b. 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.

c. 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.

d. Decisions to dispose of items will not be made with the principal aim of generating funds.

e. Any monies received by the Geffrye Museum Trust 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 will be sought from MLA.

f. 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), will be the responsibility of the Trustees acting on the advice of the Director and professional curatorial staff

g. 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, exchange or sale, directly to other Accredited Museums likely to be interested in its acquisition.

h. 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 the material, normally through an announcement in the Museums Association's Museums Journal, and in other professional journals where appropriate.

i. The announcement 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.

j. 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.