

# **North Hertfordshire Museum**

## **Collections Development Policy**

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North Hertfordshire District Council  
Museums Service  
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## 1: Introduction

- 1.1 The museum's statement of purpose is:
  - 1.1.1 The Museum Service of North Hertfordshire District Council aims to increase the understanding and enjoyment of the culture, heritage and environment of North Hertfordshire, using our collections to tell the stories of the area and the people who have lived and worked here. Our vision is to create a welcoming museum that plays an active role in the life of the District.
  - 1.1.2 The governing body will ensure that both acquisition and disposal are carried out openly and with transparency.
- 1.2 By definition, the museum has a long-term purpose and holds collections in trust for the benefit of the public in relation to its stated objectives. The governing body therefore accepts the principle that sound curatorial reasons must be established before consideration is given to any acquisition to the collection, or the disposal of any items in the museum's collection.
- 1.3 Acquisitions outside the current stated policy will only be made in exceptional circumstances.
- 1.4 The museum recognises its responsibility, when acquiring additions to its collections, to ensure that care of collections, documentation arrangements and use of collections will meet the requirements of the Museum Accreditation Standard. This includes using SPECTRUM (The UK museum collections management standard) primary procedures for collections management. It will take into account limitations on collecting imposed by such factors as staffing, storage and care of collection arrangements.
- 1.5 The museum will undertake due diligence and make every effort not to acquire, whether by purchase, gift, bequest or exchange, any object or specimen unless the governing body or responsible officer is satisfied that the museum can acquire a valid title to the item in question
- 1.6 The museum will not undertake disposal motivated principally by financial reasons.

## 2: History of the collections

- 2.1 The collections of North Hertfordshire Museum comprise items accessioned to the Museum since 2014 and, in the case of objects accessioned before this date, the collections of the former Letchworth and Hitchin Museums, the Herts Medical & Pharmaceutical collection (from the Herts Medical & Pharmaceutical Trust administered by the Hitchin Historical Society) and the Hertfordshire Yeomanry Collection.
- 2.2 Letchworth Museum was built in 1914 to house the collections of the Letchworth and District Naturalist Society, who initially ran and owned the collections. The first honorary and general curator was William Percival Westell (1874-1943), who later became the first paid curator. He was Science master at Caldicott (preparatory) School, Hitchin; Curator (1914-1943) of Letchworth Museum and Art Gallery and a well-known author of works on natural history and archaeology. He wrote 84 books and gave 145 radio talks for the BBC, mostly on natural history. He was also known as "Uncle Tadpole" on BBC Radio children's hour. In the 1930s he established one of the country's first museums loan services.
- 2.3 The Letchworth and District Naturalists ran into financial difficulties, and the building and collections were transferred to Letchworth Urban District Council – the building in 1926 and the collections in 1939.
- 2.4 The early collections at Letchworth Museum were added to by a variety of collectors and donors.
  - **Mary Hope Greg (1850-1949)**, wife of Thomas Greg, a well known ceramics collector
  - **Col Marlborough Pryor**

- **John Major Bull**
- **William Percival Westell**
- **Lady Cory**
- **William Ratcliffe**
- **Margaret Thomas**

- 2.5 In 1972, Letchworth Garden City Corporation bought a house in Norton Way South from Mabel Parker, which had been the offices of Parker and Unwin. The Corporation and the Council planned to work together to turn this building into a museum. This became the First Garden City Heritage Museum, housing and displaying objects and documents relating to the establishment and growth of Letchworth, the world's first Garden City, and to the Garden City movement in general. By 1973, the Heritage Museum building was also used for occasional exhibitions.
- 2.6 Hitchin Museum was founded in 1939 by the Hitchin & District Regional Survey Association, in a house built in 1825 for John Kershaw, who ran a Hitchin to London coach service. The building opened in 1939 as a public library, and in 1941 the top floor opened as a museum. From 1966 until closure in 2012 the museum occupied the whole of the old building. The museum's collections covered local and social history, art, costume, pharmacy and militaria, including the collection of the Hertfordshire Yeomanry.
- 2.7 The social history collection relates mainly to the lives of Hitchin people, although there is material from around the District. The art collections comprise works by local artists, especially the Quaker brewers Samuel Lucas the Elder (1805-1870), and his son Samuel (1840 - 1919) with a good collection of etchings by Frederick Griggs. The costume collection of around 4000 items is the largest in Hertfordshire, with a core collection from the 1840s trousseau of Elizabeth Mary Burrowes. The Hertfordshire Yeomanry collection covers the Regiment from its inception as a defence against Napoleonic invasion in 1805 right up until World War Two, and consists mainly of weapons and uniforms.
- 2.8 The Pharmacy Collection comprises some 2,700 items. It is owned by the Hertfordshire Medical & Pharmaceutical Museum Trust, now under the care of the Hitchin Historical Society, and was established to care for the collection of Vi Lewis, of Messrs. Perks & Llewellyn, pharmacists and distillers who had grown and distilled lavender in the town from the 1790s. The furniture and fittings of their shop were installed upstairs at Hitchin Museum, from the 1990s until closure and the fixtures and fittings are now recreated in both North Hertfordshire Museum and Hitchin Lavender.
- 2.9 Letchworth Urban District Council and Hitchin Urban District Council were absorbed into North Hertfordshire District Council following Local Government reorganisation in 1974. Both Letchworth and Hitchin Museums came under the management of NHDC. Over the years, there had been good relations between the two museums. Now that they formed a single Museum Service, they were able to strengthen their areas of expertise by combining their collections and staff. A new Natural History Department was formed by amalgamating the Natural History sections of both museums. The two museums' collections were transferred between the museums to reflect the new vision for each area of the service. Hitchin Museum 'specialised' in local history and Letchworth Museum in archaeology.
- 2.10 The Heritage Museum was extended in 1977 and had its unofficial opening, followed by an official one the following year to coincide with Letchworth's 75th Anniversary. The Heritage Museum held the collections relating specifically to Letchworth Garden City, and came under the control of the Curator of Letchworth Museum, with the Local History Assistant in charge. In the early 1980s, Letchworth Garden City Corporation decided that they wanted to run the Heritage

Museum themselves, and so the museum was transferred to their control in 1984. A long-term loan was agreed with North Hertfordshire District Council to allow the Heritage Museum to retain on loan the large collection of objects relating to the founding and development of the Garden City, which had been donated to and collected by the original Letchworth Museum. It was also agreed that the two museums would have very different collecting policies from now on, to ensure there was no duplication. North Herts Museum Service continues to loan these items to the Heritage Museum, and Letchworth Museum's displays and collections reflected the wider district of North Hertfordshire.

- 2.11 Since the closure of Letchworth and Hitchin Museums in September 2012, the Museum Service has been consolidated on a single site, North Hertfordshire Museum in Brand Street, Hitchin. The new museum opened on 4 July 2019.

### 3: An overview of current collections

- 3.1 Date range: The collection dates from Prehistory to the present day.
- 3.2 North Hertfordshire Museums Service holds collections relating to the following subject areas:  
 Archaeology (objects, paper and digital archive), Art, Coins, Costume, Documents, Military items, Natural Sciences, Pharmacy, Photography, Local History, Social History.

Estimated size of collection:

Collection subject areas	Hitchin	Letchworth	Total
Archaeology (small finds)	0	5,000	5,000
Archaeology (estimate, incl. objects, paper and digital archive)	0	250,000	250,000
Art	2,000	600	2,600
Decorative art (eg ceramics and glass)	200	600	800
Coins	200	5,000	5,200
Costume	4,000	550	4,550
Documents	20,000	0	20,000
Militaria	400	20	420
Football Collection	650	0	650
Natural Sciences (estimate including archive)		349 on display; remainder stored at Museum Resource Centre	100,000
Newspaper Collection	300	200	500
Pharmacy (loan in)	2,800	0	2,800
Photography	650,000	100	650,100
Social History	20,000	2,000	22,000
<b>Total</b>		263,870	<b>1,063,470</b>
<b>Education Loans Collection</b>			c.3000

<b>Loans to other institutions:</b>			
Loan of Garden City material to Heritage Museum: Incl		Poss 35000	
Prints, plans and drawings		c4300	c4300
Art		c50	c50
Social History		c150	c150
<b>Storage</b>			
The Fine and Decorative Art collections, Costume, Photography and Documents are stored on site at North Hertfordshire Museum. The Natural History, Archaeology and Social History collections are stored in an offsite store, the Burymead Resource Centre. Some social history and art collections are stored at the former Letchworth Museum.			

- 3.3 The Education Department has its own collection of objects suitable for sending to schools and for handling. The majority of these items are not accessioned.
- 3.4 The following collection is on loan to North Hertfordshire Museum:  
Herts. Medical & Pharmaceutical collection, from the Herts. Medical & Pharmaceutical Trust.
- 3.5 The following collection is on loan from North Hertfordshire Museum Service to the First Garden City Heritage Museum: Architectural drawings, photographs, ephemera, Art and social history objects relating to the First Garden City.
- 3.6 Geographic area: the vast majority of items in the collections relate in some way to the North Hertfordshire District, in that they were produced, used or collected within the area; however there are a few exceptions. North Hertfordshire Museum does not generally hold Letchworth material dating to post 1903 aside from fine art and a small amount of display material to tell the story of North Hertfordshire to our visitors. As 20th century Letchworth material is held by the First Garden City Heritage Museum. The Natural Sciences collections are almost all British, relating to Hertfordshire and specifically North Herts.

#### 4: **Themes and priorities for future collecting**

- 4.1 North Herts Museums Service collects items made in/used in/ found in/ made by people from/ or otherwise reflecting the history and culture primarily of the District of North Hertfordshire.

##### 4.2 **Archaeology**

- 4.2.1 The current collection is particularly strong in the Iron Age and Roman periods. Material from all periods from the district of North Herts should be collected; under planning legislation, North Herts Museums is the official repository for archaeological archives generated through the planning process (i.e. developer-funded fieldwork).

##### 4.3 **Decorative Art**

- 4.3.1 There is a small collection of 18<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> century glass and ceramics collected by Letchworth Museum. Further collections of decorative art will be confined to items that help to tell the story of North Hertfordshire.

#### 4.4 **Coins**

- 4.4.1 Coins found in the North Herts district. English coins and tokens of all periods used by people in the North Herts district. British service and commemorative medals and British orders from people with a link to North Hertfordshire.

#### 4.5 **Costume and textiles**

- 4.5.1 Costume or textiles with a story to tell about the North Hertfordshire area and its people e.g. the clothing of a leatherworker from a local firm.

#### 4.6 **Documents**

- 4.6.1 Documents will generally be referred to HALS (Hertfordshire Archive and Local Studies). However, written and printed ephemera relating to businesses and social activities within North Herts, in particular the villages may be collected.

#### 4.7 **Fine Art**

- 4.7.1 Oil paintings, watercolours, drawings, pastels, prints and sculpture representative of artists with a connection with North Hertfordshire or depictions of places in North Hertfordshire.

#### 4.8 **Military items**

- 4.8.1 Items relating to the Hertfordshire Yeomanry; items related to people with a North Hertfordshire connection who served in the military.

#### 4.9 **Natural Sciences**

- 4.9.1 As there is currently no permanent curator, collecting will be passive rather than active and limited to important local specimens and voucher specimens of local material. The Museum holds the County Herbarium and the botanical collections therefore remain an active area for acquisition of voucher material via the county recorders. An exception is also made for material relating to objects already in the natural history collections.

#### 4.10 **Pharmacy**

- 4.10.1 Passive collection of items related to the Perks and Llewellyn pharmacy only.

#### 4.11 **Photography, film, video and audio**

- 4.11.1 Recordings and images relating to North Herts, particularly the villages and people that are less well represented. Media reflecting the cultural diversity of the District, everyday life and trades. Local and national events and celebrations.

#### 4.12 **Social History**

- 4.12.1 Objects relating to the towns and villages in the district and their residents [not otherwise covered by the archaeology collection]. Objects appropriate to life in North Herts. A particular focus of interest is to increase representation of the lives of those currently not well represented in the museum collection, such as disabled people or Black people. Further consideration will be



given to collection of material relating to smaller less well represented places, like the villages and hamlets, in the North Hertfordshire District.

## 4.13 Ethnology

4.13.1 There are a few items of ethnology in the collections, but these items are no longer actively collected.

4.14 All potential acquisitions are considered in relation to the criteria set out. Staff must demonstrate that the item or collection has significance and value to the Museum because of its:

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

4.15 The following criteria are also addressed:

### Relevance

Does item match the current collecting policy and mission? Would it be more appropriate to another museum's or organisation's collection?

### Condition

Has item deteriorated beyond use? Is the object or collection suitable for long term storage and preservation with minimal resource outlay?

### Originality or rarity

Is the object or collection unique or relatively rare, a fine example of its type, or not well represented in other museum collections. Is the object, or something closely like it, already among our collection.

### Safety

Is item a threat to people or other objects (e.g. through infestation or health and safety concerns)?

### Usefulness

Is the item likely to be useful for display or research?

### Context

Is item unprovenanced (i.e. has insufficient background information to provide a context)?

### Ethics

Has item been unethically acquired or are there other ethical concerns surrounding its ownership and use?

4.16 Items may be accepted as handling objects or for the Education Department, with the approval of the staff concerned.

4.17 Collecting relates mainly, although not exclusively, to the North Hertfordshire District geographical area.

4.18 Future acquisitions will be sought from prehistory to the present.

## 5: **Rationalisation and disposal**

- 5.1 The museum recognises that the principles on which priorities for rationalisation and disposal are determined will be through a formal review process that identifies which collections are included and excluded from the review. The outcome of review and any subsequent rationalisation will not reduce the quality or significance of the collection and will result in a more useable, well managed collection.
- 5.2 The procedures used will meet professional standards. The process will be documented, open and transparent. There will be clear communication with key stakeholders about the outcomes and the process.

## 6: **Legal and ethical framework for acquisition and disposal of items**

- 6.1 The museum recognises its responsibility to work within the parameters of the Museum Association Code of Ethics when considering acquisition and disposal.

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

- 7.1 The museum will take account of the collecting policies of other museums and other organisations collecting in the same or related areas or subject fields. It will consult with these organisations where conflicts of interest may arise or to define areas of specialism, in order to avoid unnecessary duplication and waste of resources.
- 7.2 Specific reference is made to the following museum(s)/organisation(s):
- Ashwell Museum
  - Baldock Museum
  - Royston Museum
  - The Garden City Collection
  - Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies

## 8: **Acquisition**

- 8.1 When offered an object in donation curators must consider 4.14 and 4.15 of this policy and assess the offer with these aspects in mind. If the offer of donation is taken up, curators must work with the donor to complete the entry form, recording the following:
- Museum name and address
  - Form number
  - Depositor or owner contact details
  - Description of object or collection (with curators gathering and relevant or interesting detail at this stage for future cataloguing).
  - Reason for entry
  - Additional transfer of title agreement
  - Museum signatory

These entry forms are in triplicate and the curator must issue the depositor the pink copy to act as their “receipt” of the transaction for their own records.

8.2 The museum will not acquire any object or specimen unless it is satisfied that the object or specimen has not been acquired in, or exported from, its country of origin (or any intermediate country in which it may have been legally owned) in violation of that country's laws. (For the purposes of this paragraph 'country of origin' includes the United Kingdom).

8.3 In accordance with the provisions of the UNESCO 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, which the UK ratified with effect from November 1 2002, and the Dealing in Cultural Objects (Offences) Act 2003, the museum will reject any items that have been illicitly traded. The governing body will be guided by the national guidance on the responsible acquisition of cultural property issued by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in 2005.

## 9: **Human remains**

9.1 As the museum 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 (Department of Culture Media and Sport) in 2005.

9.2 There is a specific Policy for the treatment of human remains within the Museum Service.

## 10: **Biological and geological material**

10.1 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.

## 11: **Archaeological material**

11.1 The museum will not acquire archaeological material (including excavated ceramics) in any case where the governing body or responsible officer has any suspicion that the circumstances of their recovery involved a failure to follow the appropriate legal procedures.

11.2 In England, Wales and Northern Ireland the procedures include reporting finds to the landowner or occupier of the land and to the proper authorities in the case of possible treasure (i.e. the Coroner for Treasure) as set out in the Treasure Act 1996 (as amended by the Coroners & Justice Act 2009).

## 12: **Exceptions**

12.1 Any exceptions to the above clauses will only be because the museum is:

- acting as an externally approved repository of last resort for material of local (UK) origin
- acting with the permission of authorities with the requisite jurisdiction in the country of origin

12.2 In these cases the museum will be open and transparent in the way it makes decisions and will act only with the express consent of an appropriate outside authority. The museum will document when these exceptions occur.

## 13: **Spoliation**

13.1 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.

## 14: **The Repatriation and Restitution of objects and human remains**

- 14.1 The museum's governing body, acting on the advice of the museum'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 museum will take such decisions on a case by case basis; within its legal position and taking into account all ethical implications and available guidance. This will mean that the procedures described in 16.1-5 will be followed but the remaining procedures are not appropriate.
- 14.2 The disposal of human remains from museums in England, Northern Ireland and Wales will follow the procedures in the 'Guidance for the care of human remains in museums'.

## 15: **Disposal procedures**

- 15.1 All disposals will be undertaken with reference to the SPECTRUM Primary Procedures on disposal.
- 15.2 The governing body will confirm that it is legally free to dispose of an item. Agreements on disposal made with donors will also be taken into account.
- 15.3 When disposal of a museum object is being considered, the museum will establish if it was acquired with the aid of an external funding organisation. In such cases, any conditions attached to the original grant will be followed. This may include repayment of the original grant and a proportion of the proceeds if the item is disposed of by sale.
- 15.4 When disposal is motivated by curatorial reasons the procedures outlined below will be followed and the method of disposal may be by gift, sale, exchange or as a last resort - destruction.
- 15.5 The decision to dispose of material from the collections will be taken by the governing body only after full consideration of the reasons for disposal. Other factors including public benefit, the implications for the museum's collections and collections held by museums and other organisations collecting the same material or in related fields will be considered. Expert advice will be obtained and the views of stakeholders such as donors, researchers, local and source communities and others served by the museum will also be sought.
- 15.6 A decision to dispose of a specimen or object, whether by gift, exchange, sale or destruction (in the case of an item too badly damaged or deteriorated to be of any use for the purposes of the collections or for reasons of health and safety), will be the responsibility of the governing body of the museum acting on the advice of professional curatorial staff, and not of the curator or manager of the collection acting alone.
- 15.7 Once a decision to dispose of material in the collection has been taken, priority will be given to retaining it within the public domain. It will therefore be offered in the first instance, by gift or sale, directly to other Accredited Museums likely to be interested in its acquisition.
- 15.8 If the material is not acquired by any Accredited Museum to which it was offered as a gift or for sale, then the museum community at large will be advised of the intention to dispose of the material normally through a notice on the MA's (Museums Association) Find an Object web listing service, an announcement in the Museums Association's Museums Journal or in other specialist publications and websites (if appropriate).
- 15.9 The announcement relating to gift or sale will indicate the number and nature of specimens or objects involved, and the basis on which the material will be transferred to another institution. Preference will be given to expressions of interest from other Accredited Museums. A period of at least two months will be allowed for an interest in acquiring the material to be expressed. At the end of this period, if no expressions of interest have been received, the museum may consider disposing of the material to other interested individuals and organisations giving priority to organisations in the public domain.

- 15.10 Any monies received by the museum governing body from the disposal of items will be applied solely and directly for the benefit of the collections. This normally means the purchase of further acquisitions. In exceptional cases, improvements relating to the care of collections in order to meet or exceed Accreditation requirements relating to the risk of damage to and deterioration of the collections may be justifiable. Any monies received in compensation for the damage, loss or destruction of items will be applied in the same way. Advice on those cases where the monies are intended to be used for the care of collections will be sought from the **Arts Council England**.
- 15.11 The proceeds of a sale will be allocated so it can be demonstrated that they are spent in a manner compatible with the requirements of the Accreditation standard. Money must be restricted to the long-term sustainability, use and development of the collection.
- 15.12 Full records will be kept of all decisions on disposals and the items involved and proper arrangements made for the preservation and/or transfer, as appropriate, of the documentation relating to the items concerned, including photographic records where practicable in accordance with SPECTRUM Procedure on deaccession and disposal.

### 15.13 **Disposal by exchange**

- 15.13.1 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.
- 15.13.2 In cases where the governing body wishes for sound curatorial reasons to exchange material directly with Accredited or non-Accredited museums, with other organisations or with individuals, the procedures in paragraphs 16.1-5 will apply.
- 15.13.3 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.
- 15.13.4 If the exchange is proposed with a non-Accredited Museum, with another type of organisation or with an individual, the museum will place a notice on the MA's Find an Object web listing service, or make an announcement in the Museums Association's Museums Journal or in other specialist publications and websites (if appropriate).
- 15.13.5 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.

### 15.14 **Disposal by destruction**

- 15.14.1 If it is not possible to dispose of an object through transfer or sale, the governing body may decide to destroy it.
- 15.14.2 It is acceptable to destroy material of low intrinsic significance (duplicate mass-produced articles or common specimens which lack significant provenance) where no alternative method of disposal can be found.

- 15.14.3 Destruction is also an acceptable method of disposal in cases where an object is in extremely poor condition, has high associated health and safety risks or is part of an approved destructive testing request identified in an organisation's research policy.
- 15.14.4 Where necessary, specialist advice will be sought to establish the appropriate method of destruction. Health and safety risk assessments will be carried out by trained staff where required.
- 15.14.5 The destruction of objects should be witnessed by an appropriate member of the museum workforce. In circumstances where this is not possible, e.g. the destruction of controlled substances, a police certificate should be obtained and kept in the relevant object history file.