

# Collections development policy

Revised May 2023

**Name of museum:**

The Nicholson Museum & Art Gallery  
The Nicholson Institute  
Leek  
Staffordshire Moorlands ST13 6DW

**Name of governing body:**

Staffordshire Moorlands District Council  
Moorlands House  
Stockwell Street  
Leek  
Staffordshire Moorlands ST13 6HQ

**Date on which this policy was approved by governing body:**

*Insert date.*

**Policy review procedure:**

The collections development policy will be published and reviewed from time to time, at least once every five years.

**Date at which this policy is due for review:**

*Insert date.*

Arts Council England will be notified of any changes to the collections development policy, and the implications of any such changes for the future of collections.

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## **Relationship to other relevant policies/ plans of the organisation:**

**1.1** The museum's statement of purpose is:

The aim of the Nicholson Museum & Art Gallery is to collect, preserve and interpret objects to celebrate the unique history and culture of the Staffordshire Moorlands and to provide a high-quality, inclusive, audience-led service that inspires, educates, entertains and informs, supporting life-long learning, contributing to community cohesion and providing a welcoming visitor attraction.

**1.2** The governing body will ensure that both acquisition and disposal are carried out openly and with transparency.

**1.3** 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.

**1.4** Acquisitions outside the current stated policy will only be made in exceptional circumstances.

**1.5** 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 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.

**1.6** The museum will undertake due diligence and make every effort not to acquire, whether by purchase, gift or bequest, 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.

1.7 In exceptional cases, disposal may be motivated principally by financial reasons. The method of disposal will therefore be by sale and the procedures outlined below 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.
- extensive prior consultation with sector bodies has been undertaken.
- the item under consideration lies outside the museum's established core collection.

## 2

## History of the collections

The Nicholson Institute is a grade II\* listed building that opened in 1884 as a free library, picture gallery, museum, and art school. It was paid for and donated for the benefit of the people of Leek by local textile mill owner Joshua Nicholson. Many of the early exhibitions featured works on loan from the South Kensington Museum (now the V&A). The original collections of the Nicholson Museum & Art Gallery comprised artworks and curiosities donated by the Nicholson family and other local people including industrialists such as Thomas Wardle. Many paintings displayed in temporary exhibitions were later purchased by the Library Committee and Urban District Council and one was acquired by contributions from the Leek Amateur Operatic Society.

The history of the building and the contents of the museum from 1910 to 1940 are poorly documented. Post-WWII the Nicholson Institute was developed as an Arts Centre, opening in 1949. At that time the room originally designated as the museum became the Arts Club Room.

The functions of the Nicholson Institute remain consistent with the terms of the original Trust document that states it must be used *as a public library, public museum, school of science, art gallery and school of art for the use and benefit of the inhabitants of the town of Leek*. Staffordshire County Council are responsible for the building and operate the Leek library service, the Museum & Art Gallery and associated collections are managed by Staffordshire Moorlands District Council. The art gallery closed for refurbishment in 2005, re-opening in 2008. The Arts Club Room reverted to its original function as museum and re-opened in 2010.

There is no comprehensive surviving documentation of the Nicholson collection prior to 1994 when it was accessioned. No objects appear to have

been accepted between 1994 and 2011, a small number of accessions were made between 2011 and 2013. Objects were collected between 2013 and 2022, some have entry forms but others have no paperwork, none were accessioned. The original accession register is missing and the first electronic catalogue (using Modes software) has also been lost. The Modes catalogue was recreated in 2022/23 using information from index cards dated 1994 and an insurance valuation schedule prepared in 2009. A new accessions register was started in 2022.

## An overview of current collections

The accessioned collections of the Nicholson Museum & Art Gallery comprise:

### 3.1 Fine Art

The collection includes examples of paintings in oil, watercolour and acrylic, prints, etchings, and drawings. There are works depicting the Staffordshire Moorlands topography, local scenes, and examples by local artists. It also includes works by renowned artists of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries such as Richard Jack and William Wyld.

### 3.2 Decorative Arts & Crafts

The Decorative Arts & Crafts are represented by:

- Textiles, including hand-stitched samplers and pieces created by the Leek Embroidery Society in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- Ceramics, 18<sup>th</sup>, and 19<sup>th</sup> century decorative and table wares made in nearby Stoke-on-Trent donated by the Nicholson family.
- A rare surviving 17<sup>th</sup> century decorative plasterwork ceiling in two large sections, recovered from a local property before demolition in c.1897.

### 3.3 Social History

The Social History collection includes objects representing domestic, community and civic life and the development of trade and industry in the Staffordshire Moorlands, largely from the 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. These include:

- Everyday items of domestic and personal life, including clothing and accessories.
- Items relating to the police, fire, and military services, and to local government and religious organisations.
- Items relating to local trade and industries, in particular the textile industry, including trade directories, sample books, and woven silk labels.

- Photographs, postcards, maps, and documents.

### 3.4 Natural Science

The Natural Science collection includes framed examples of silk moths and native British moths, butterflies and insects, a collection of shells, fossils, and a taxidermy wallaby the last remnant of a small community that escaped a private zoo during WWII and survived in the local countryside until the 1990s.

3.5 **World Cultures** are represented by a small number of items presumed to have been acquired as souvenirs and donated in the early days of the museum including a group of items of African origin.

3.6 **Archaeological items** include two locally found burial urns and a cup and ring marked stone all dating from the Neolithic to Early Bronze Age, and two medieval objects associated with the local monastic house Dieulacres Abbey.

3.7 Although not accessioned there are a number of items that have been on permanent loan from the Royal Collection since 1936. These include an embroidered silk picture, an Arts & Crafts wooden box and various scrolls with their decorative containers presented to George V during royal visits abroad.

## 4

## Themes and priorities for future collecting

4.1 Key priorities for future collecting will support the service objectives set out in the statement of purpose. All new acquisitions will be guided by service policies and procedures that are informed by current professional and ethical standards and best practice. In all cases, we will consider the significance of the object and whether it meets our areas of collecting interest.

4.2 All objects will have a strong connection to the Staffordshire Moorlands, either in provenance or relevance.

4.3 The Nicholson Museum & Art Gallery will only collect objects for which suitable storage and/or display facilities are available.

4.4 As the museum has no in-house conservation resources it will generally only acquire objects which are in fair, good or excellent condition. In exceptional circumstances objects which are in poorer condition may be considered for acquisition if resources are available to carry out any necessary conservation works and/or they are extremely important unique items.

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## **Themes and priorities for rationalisation and disposal**

- 5.1** The museum does not intend to dispose of collections during the period covered by this policy.
- 5.2** Rationalisation and disposal are not a priority for this policy period and will only be undertaken if unforeseen legal, safety or care and conservation reasons should arise (e.g. infestation, water damage, repatriation).

## 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 museums/organisations:

- The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery
- Staffordshire Arts and Museum Service
- The Silk Museum, Macclesfield
- Cheddleton Flint Mill
- Brindley's Mill and the James Brindley Museum

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### Archival holdings

- 8.1 Archives including photographs, documents and printed ephemera are held in accordance with the guidance provided in the Code of Practice on Archives for Museums and Galleries in the United Kingdom (third edition, 2002).



## Acquisition

9.1 The policy for agreeing acquisitions is:

- All potential acquisitions will be considered against the terms laid out in the Collection Development Policy.
- Documentation will be completed and formal approval given by the appropriate officer, i.e. Cultural Services Officer or deputising officer.

9.2 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).

9.3 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.

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## **Human remains**

**10.1** The museum does not hold or intend to acquire any human remains.

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## **Biological and geological material**

**11.1** 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.

## Archaeological material

- 12.1** 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.
- 12.2** 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).

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## Exceptions

13.1 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

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.

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## Spoliation

14.1 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.

## The Repatriation and Restitution of objects and human remains

- 15.1 The museum's governing body, acting on the advice of the museum's professional staff, if any, 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.

## Disposal procedures

- 16.1 All disposals will be undertaken with reference to the Spectrum primary procedures on disposal.
- 16.2 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.
- 16.3 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.
- 16.4 When disposal is motivated by curatorial reasons the procedures outlined below will be followed and the method of disposal may be by gift, sale or as a last resort – destruction.
- 16.5 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.
- 16.6 A decision to dispose of a specimen or object, whether by gift, 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, if any, and not of the curator or manager of the collection acting alone.

- 16.7** 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.
- 16.8** 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 Find an Object web listing service, an announcement in the Museums Association's Museums Journal or in other specialist publications and websites (if appropriate).
- 16.9** 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.
- 16.10** 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.

**16.11** 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.

**16.12** 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.

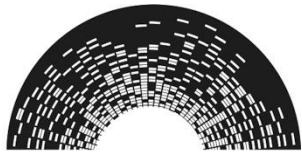
### **Disposal by exchange**

**16.13** The museum will not dispose of items by exchange.



## Disposal by destruction

- 16.13** If it is not possible to dispose of an object through transfer or sale, the governing body may decide to destroy it.
- 16.14** 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.
- 16.15** 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.
- 16.16** 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.
- 16.17** 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.



**MUSEUM**  
ACCREDITATION

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Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

