



COLLECTIONS DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Name of museum: Samuel Johnson Birthplace Museum (SJB), Accredited Museum 767

Name of governing body: Lichfield City Council (LCC), as sole trustee of the Dr Johnson Birthplace Trust, Charity No. 500046

Introduction

This Collections Development Policy provides information to museum staff and wider stakeholders of the criteria, principles, standards and legislation for responsible and ethical acquisition (and disposal) of collections.

The purpose of the Collections Development Policy is to identify SJB's position and approach to:

1. The Museum's statement of purpose
2. Relationship(s) to other relevant policies/plans of the organisation
3. The History of the collections
4. An overview of current collections
5. Themes and priorities for future collecting
6. Themes and priorities for rationalisation and disposal
7. Legal and ethical framework for acquisition and disposal of items
8. Collecting policies of other museums
9. Archival holdings
10. Acquisition
11. Human remains
12. Biological and geological material
13. Archaeological material
14. Exceptions
15. Spoliation
16. The Repatriation and Restitution of objects and human remains
17. Disposal procedures

1. Museum's statement of purpose

- 1.1 The covenant under which the building was acquired in 1900 remains our fundamental mission: *"...to remain in perpetuity as a memorial to the life, work and personality of Samuel Johnson, his Lichfield connections and his friends and contemporaries."* The Birthplace Trust, established in 1974, expanded this to refer to the care of the building and provision of a public service: *"...to preserve the Birthplace as a place for historic interest and to maintain the same as a public museum and for public exhibitions."*

2. Relationship(s) to other relevant policies/plans of the organisation

- 2.1 The governing body will ensure that both acquisition and disposal are carried out openly and with transparency.
- 2.2 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.
- 2.3 Acquisitions outside the current stated policy will only be made in exceptional circumstances.
- 2.4 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 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.
- 2.5 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.
- 2.6 The museum will not undertake disposal motivated principally by financial reasons.

3. History of the collections

- 3.1 The Birthplace building opened as a museum to Samuel Johnson in 1901. The collections have been gradually built since opening, mainly through donation, with the majority of significant Johnson-owned items and manuscripts being donated in the early years. Two significant donations form the major part of the book collection: the Hay Hunter (1901) and the Blum Library (1990). A small number of core manuscript and art collection items were purchased in the 1970s-90s with grant aid assistance. Recent acquisitions have been primarily donations, and the purchase of a Samuel Johnson autograph manuscript in 2023.

4. An overview of current collections

- 4.1 The Samuel Johnson Birthplace Museum (SJBm) collection has been gradually acquired since 1901 and includes over 8,000 items of Johnson personalia, fine art, furniture, manuscripts, books and ephemera. Books form approximately half of the collection. Collections represent Johnson and nationally important figures from his circle, including Joshua Reynolds, Josiah Wedgwood, and Sarah Siddons, as well as items associated with the history of Lichfield. The manuscript collection is particularly strong, with several Johnson signature letters and c.100 letters relating to the Lichfield poet Anna Seward. The libraries mainly contain editions of the works of Johnson and his contemporaries, association copies, biographies and critical studies of Johnson and his circle. Material related to general eighteenth century studies and local studies is also represented, as well as comparative contemporary dictionaries.

5. Themes and priorities for future collecting

- 5.1 The policy of the museum is to acquire collection items relating to the life, work and personality of Samuel Johnson and material to support other areas of the collection, including:

- Printed material and manuscripts written by or about the life and work of Johnson and his circle.
- Personal artefacts which once belonged to Johnson, his family/household, or his circle of friends.
- Paintings and prints of Johnson, his family/household and friends and other images including photographs relating to artefacts, buildings and places associated with Samuel Johnson, his family or circle, representing views or people not already included in the collection.
- Commemorative items such as artefacts, ephemera, paintings and prints celebrating Johnson's life and works.
- Printed ephemera and manuscript material relating to Johnsonian organisations and studies, and the history of the museum.
- Domestic items of the eighteenth century and trade tools relating to bookselling and binding for period room displays and/or handling and demonstration purposes where appropriate.
- Replica and reproduction material for display and/or handling/demonstration purposes.
- Publications which place Johnson's work into context (e.g. comparative Dictionaries).
- Objects and library reference material relating to eighteenth-century Lichfield and the existing collections, with consideration to the collecting policies of neighbouring institutions to ensure that material is deposited in the most appropriate collection (see below 'Paragraph 8. Collecting policies of other museums).

6. Themes and priorities for rationalisation and disposal

6.1 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.

6.2 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.

6.3 All approved disposals will be conducted in accordance with disposal procedures outlined in section 17.

6.4 A small amount of active disposal is included in the current planning cycle:

- Minor ephemeral accessioned archived items including: photocopies of articles available; correspondence about collections better placed in object history files; modern newspaper articles and book reviews.
- Modern reference books unrelated to the collection, where copies are readily available to access elsewhere in the city.
- Items of furniture held in storage long-term in poor condition, with no association to Johnson and where the condition of the items presents a risk to other collections and the building.

7. Legal and ethical framework for acquisition and disposal of items

7.1 The museum recognises its responsibility to work within the parameters of the Museum Association (MA) Code of Ethics when considering acquisition and disposal.

8. Collecting policies of other museums

8.1 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.

8.2 Specific reference is made to the following museum(s)/organisation(s):

- Erasmus Darwin House
- The Staffordshire Regiment Museum
- Lichfield Record Office and Library.
- For material relating to David Garrick: The Garrick Club, The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust (Garrick's Jubilee), the Victoria and Albert Museum Theatre Collections.
- Dr Johnson's House, Gough Square, London (considering the very close collecting aims, joint fundraising would be considered where opportunities arise for major purchases).

9. Archival holdings

9.1 SJBM holds a small collection of documents and photographs dating from the nineteenth-century onwards directly relating to Johnson, the history of Lichfield and the Birthplace Museum. Given the existence of the local record office, SJBM will only collect further archive material where it forms part of, or is directly relevant to, a group of objects in the collection, to Johnson and his circle or the history of the Museum. The record office will be informed and offered copies of such archival material.

10. Acquisition

10.1 The policy for agreeing acquisitions is:

The Museums and Heritage Officer (MHO) has authority for accepting donations where the object can be easily stored and cared for within the current resources of the Museum. In cases where a donated object will present an immediate additional financial commitment (e.g. conservation, new storage materials) or where an object is available for purchase, the Town Clerk should be consulted, and a decision may be taken to the Johnson Birthplace Advisory Committee (JBAC) or full Council in some cases. An object entry procedure is in place, and documentation explains that the museum reserves the right to decline an offer if a gift, bequest, or loan does not meet our collecting policy. The museum will explain any declined offers with reference to this policy.

10.2 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).

10.3 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.

11. Human remains

- 11.1 As the museum holds or intends to acquire human remains (only eighteenth-century human hair already held) from any period, it will follow the procedures in the 'Guidance for the care of human remains in museums' issued by DCMS in 2005.

12. Biological and geological material

- 12.1 The museum will not acquire any biological or geological material.

13. Archaeological material

- 13.1 The museum will not acquire any archaeological material.

14. Exceptions

- 14.1 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.

15. Spoliation

- 15.1 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.

16. The Repatriation and Restitution of objects and human remains

- 16.1 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'.

17. Disposal procedures

- 17.1 All disposals will be undertaken with reference to the SPECTRUM Primary Procedures on disposal.
- 17.2 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.
- 17.3 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.
- 17.4 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.

- 17.5 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.
- 17.6 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, if any, and not of the curator or manager of the collection acting alone.
- 17.7 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.
- 17.8 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).
- 17.9 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.
- 17.10 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.
- 17.11 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.
- 17.12 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

17.13 The museum will not dispose of items by exchange.

Disposal by destruction

17.14 If it is not possible to dispose of an object through transfer or sale, the governing body may decide to destroy it.

17.15 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.

17.16 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.

17.17 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.

17.18 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.

Date on which this policy was approved by governing body: 10 March 2025

Policy review procedure: This 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: March 2030.

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.