

Vale & Downland Museum Collections Development Policy

Date on which this policy was approved by governing body: 5 September 2022

Date on which this policy is due for review: 5 September 2027

Policy review procedure: The collections development policy will be published and reviewed at least once every five years.

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.

1. Relationship to other relevant policies/plans of the organisation:

1.1. The museum's statement of purpose is:

The purpose of the museum is to hold for the benefit and education of the Vale's inhabitants and visitors, the collection and ensure that it is housed in safety, conserved, curated, researched and exhibited.

The collection aims through its breadth and quality to capture the characteristics of the town and its people through cultural, creative and natural objects. It does not aim to be a definitive repository of objects relating to the place or to overlap with other regional collections.

The role of the collection in achieving its purpose is to be made available for exhibition and appropriately developed and supervised learning activities by the staff of the Vale & Downland Museum.

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, 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.

1.7 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 embryo of the museum first appeared in 1968 when local historian Kathleen Philip, rescued the 18th century 'Minutes of the Governors of the Town Lands' from being used as a door stop and presented them to the town for safe keeping. She inspired enthusiasm and support for the town's heritage and an appeal for objects was launched. The collection grew through donations of items. And as it grew, a fixed and permanent home was sought for it. To collect objects and devote money for this purpose, the Urban District Council had to become a Museum Authority. A Museum sub-committee was created with Mary Whipple as its chairwoman. She remained an active member of the Management Committee until her death in 1992. For some years the collection was displayed in the Urban District Council Offices. In the mid 1960s it was, at times, in the Victoria Cross Gallery. When the UDC proposed building the Civic Hall, a room on the ground floor was designed for the museum.

When local government was re-organised in 1974, the Museum joined the Oxfordshire Museum Service area. Their Director, Nancy Hood, secured the part-time permanent employed post of Curator for Wantage Museum. The uncertainty surrounding the re-organisation of boundaries at the time led the Museum Committee to wish for a measure of independence. The Vale & Downland Museum Trust was established in 1972, with Don Alexander as Chairman. Dr Dick Squires was a member of the Trust and introduced the idea of using the Old Surgery in Church Street as a permanent site for the Museum. There followed a long period of fundraising, negotiation, and physical hard work. The New District Council was persuaded to purchase the building and lease it to the new Museum Trust, and the Carnegie Trust gave £10,000 towards the cost of the displays. The Museum was transferred to its present site in Church Street in July 1975. In 1983 the Vale & Downland Museum was opened by Her Grace the Duchess of Devonshire.

In 1999 The Museum was awarded a £300,000 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund towards a £500,000 refurbishment. The extension work refurbished the existing galleries with innovative approaches including hands on activities, multimedia displays and a children's discovery gallery. Improvements were made to visitor facilities for those with disabilities and additional needs.

In 2012 the museum was obliged to vacate Legges Cottage that had housed the Café kitchen and office/storage facilities, when the leasing arrangement came to an end. An extension to replace these facilities was constructed at a cost of £500,000.

Also in 1975, a service agreement was made between Wantage Town Council, Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) and the Vale & Downland Museum Trust. The 'founding collection' (Wantage Town Council Collection) of objects were now accessioned under the number 1975.160. An agreement was made that future objects with a Wantage provenance would belong to Wantage Town Council. OCC collections would be made

available to the Vale & Downland Museum and the OCC would be responsible for the collecting policy, caring for collections, providing a curator, conservation, storage, exhibitions, security etc.

Over the next 40 years the details of service agreement between OCC and the VDM Trust became complicated. On 31 December 2014 the VDM separated from the OCC. All items from the founding collection that were being stored at OCC were returned to VDM in 2015. Objects on display at VDM belonging to OCC were transferred to a loan agreement. All conservation services previously supplied by OCC are now outsourced to relevant professionals.

3. An overview of current collections

The museum's accessioned collection comprises of nearly 8000 objects and broadly consists of social history items relating to the people, trades and domestic life of the town of Wantage and the surrounding villages in the Vale. The accessioned collection can be broken down into the following categories:

General Domestic and Working Life of People in the Vale

These collections do not make a comprehensive group at any period, although the Victorian period is well represented in the Victorian Kitchen display. Domestic life is generally represented through unrelated items which do not form coherent groups reflecting life in a particular decade or era.

Crafts, Trades and Industries

Particular areas which are quite well represented are:

- Local industries such as Nalder & Nalder and Wantage Engineering Company.
- Tools from Lloyds wheelwright's workshop.
- Arbery's department store; shop furniture, papers, artefacts from shop.
- Papers from the Ormond family who lived in Wantage in the late 1800's.
- Wantage Fire Brigade, including uniform, photographs and cart.
- Lord and Lady Wantage.
- Bottles from local breweries, Clegg's chemist and milk bottles from local producers. There are also a good collection of medical bottles.

Agriculture

The collection includes agricultural tools, crafts and associated objects.

Textiles

- A small collection of costume, mostly rural wear, agricultural workers clothes, a Wantage fire brigade uniform, and general accessories – shoes, hats, and shawls. Of note is the collection of dressing up costumes relating to the Lockinge Revels (1885)
- Dresses from the 19th and 20th Century.
- A collection of samplers from the Convent Embroidery School.

Military History

- A growing collection of personal items, photographs and records relating to servicemen who lived in and around Wantage

Transport

- Wantage Tramway related objects and documentation, including tickets and timetables.
- Photographs and documents relating to Wilts and Berks Canal, Wantage wharf, and its recent development.

Coins

- Romano British coins to coins of the 20th century, trade tokens of the 17th and 19th centuries; military and commemorative medals relating to the people of the Vale.

Archives

- 20th Century printed ephemera e.g. guide books, posters, menus etc.
- Original archive material such as bills and account books from Wantage families and businesses.
- Reference Library of books

Photographs

The museum has a collection of photographs, transparencies and postcards of Wantage and the Vale. The general themes include personalities, places, landscapes, aerial photographs and significant events.

Archaeology

The Oxfordshire County Museum Service is the approved repository of all archaeology in the County, however the museum holds a small amount of archaeology that was collected historically.

- 56 Romano British items including 44 Romano British coins and 2 nearly complete Romano British vessels, one from Barwell, one from Belmont.
- 19 pottery items 1 Anglo-Saxon fragment, 1 Bronze Age fragment, 2 Iron Age fragments and 10 Romano British fragments.
- 34 of the items have local provenance, the remaining 50 have no documented provenance and were most likely donated to the collection when it first started.

Geology

- A small number of geological specimens, mostly fossils from the wider Vale.

Subsidiary Collections:

Handling Collection

The museum holds a collection of approximately 1,500 objects solely for the purpose of handling and education sessions. These are all logged on our Modes database. These are not accessioned and can be disposed of when no longer of use.

Research and Photograph Archive

The museum holds a collection of approximately 3,000 non-accessioned items of archive material which are maintained for research and case dressing. In addition to this there is a collection of 600 non accessioned photographs for the same purpose.

Oral History

The museum has a small collection of oral history recordings, related to specific projects or exhibitions, for example, World War 2. This material is currently not accessioned but is catalogued.

4. Themes and priorities for future collecting

The museum is not able to collect or acquire collections unreservedly. The following guidelines will be taken into account when collecting:

- Relevance to the defined area of Wantage and the surrounding villages. The area of collection will be bounded by the Hendreds to the east, Charney Bassett to the north, Ashbury and Uffington to the west and South Fawley to the south.

Material will be collected which has a proven and documented association with the collecting area and with specific relevance to:

- Future display and interpretation plans of the Vale & Downland Museum
- Strengths and weakness of existing collections available to the Museum.
- Physical space for display and storage.
- Environmental and security considerations of display, storage or handling.
- Cost or revenue implications of storage or display.

Social History

The Museum will continue to collect material relating to the social, economic, cultural, domestic, community and recreational activities of the communities of Wantage and the Vale.

Photographs

The photograph collection will be added to selectively, ensuring nothing is duplicated.

Printed Ephemera

Identify areas of strengths and collect with particular relevance to existing collections.

Costume

The museum has a policy of restricted collecting to items of local significance.

Coins and medals

Collect only local coins, tokens and medals which relate to the social history of the Wantage and the Vale area.

Pottery and glass

Bottles and jars from Wantage and Vale industries and businesses will not continue to be collected.

General Working and Domestic Life

Continue to collect only material relating to businesses, people, and leisure and cultural activities from Wantage and the Vale which build a picture representing living and working in and around the town.

Agricultural collection

No additions to agricultural collections will be made, except smaller items which can be stored with the rest of the collection which were made or used in Wantage or which are also examples of local industry.

Industrial collection

Items relating to industry in the town will continue to be collected to build a representative collection of 20th century industry in Wantage, including contemporary industries. Large objects will not be collected due to display and storage space limitations.

Oral history

The museum would like to expand upon the Oral History collection but will only be able to do so when resources allow.

Art

Historic prints and paintings of topographical images and images of people of local significance will be considered for collection.

Handling Collection

The Museum is actively collecting for the Handling Collection, in particular items that will help the Learning Officer to develop and delivery sessions relating to the National Curriculum, as well as provide a broad offering of topics for adult learning sessions.

Rapid Response Collecting

The Museum is actively collecting material relating to 21st Century events as they happen e.g. Covid 19 pandemic, the Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations etc.

5. Themes and priorities for 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.

There is currently no intention to rationalise or dispose of items from the accessioned collection.

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):

*Oxfordshire County Museum Service
Museum of English Rural Life
Abingdon Museum
West Berkshire Museum
Tom Brown's School Days Museum, Uffington
Champs Chapel, East Hendred
Wallingford Museum
Abingdon Museum*

8 Archival holdings

The Museum will not normally acquire archive material, but will pass items onto Berkshire and Oxfordshire Record Office as relevant, unless the archive material is part of a collection of other material and/or complements existing collections.

The museum will acquire ephemera, (e.g. posters, pamphlets, catalogues, cards), related to local individuals, organisations, places, events and activities and to objects in the collections which reflect living and working in Wantage and changes to the town.

9 Acquisition

9.1 The policy for agreeing acquisitions is:

All offers for acquisition are considered by the Curator, Assistant Curator and Volunteer Collections Manager before acceptance. The Curator informs the Board of Trustees of any significant additions to the collection at their bi-monthly meetings. The Board includes a nominated representative from the Wantage Town Council.

- 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.

10 Human remains

- 10.1 If the museum intends to acquire human remains under 100 years old, it will obtain the necessary licence under the Human Tissue Act 2004 and any subordinate legislation from time to time in force.
- 10.2 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 in 2005.

11 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.

12 Archaeological material

- 12.1 The museum will not acquire any archaeological material.
- 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).

13 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.

14 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.

15 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.
- 15.2 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'.

16 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, exchange 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, 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.
- 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

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

- 16.16 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.
- 16.17 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.
- 16.18 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.