

Collections Development Policy for Amersham Museum

Name of museum: Amersham Museum

Name of governing body: Amersham Museum Ltd

Date this policy was approved: July 2024

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: *June 2029*

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.

I. Relationship to other relevant policies/plans of the organisation: This policy forms part of the museum's Collections Management Policies. These include the Documentation Policy and Collections Care Policy.

I.I The museum's statement of purpose is: Amersham Museum Limited was established to:

'advance public education in relation to the history of Amersham and the surrounding area, principally by the operation of a museum.'

Amersham Museum Limited has established the following vision for the museum:

Amersham Museum brings local history to life to inspire, surprise and engage people, helping them to explore the significance of the area's past, appreciate the present, and imagine the future.'

- 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** The museum will not undertake disposal motivated principally by financial reasons

2 History of the collections

2.1 Amersham Museum opened to the public in 1991 in part of a restored, Grade II listed, timber-framed hall house, built c.1480. The building had been saved by The Amersham Society and a group of volunteers who had fund-raised to purchase the building in 1985 and undertake the major repairs required. The focus of the building work was to make the building safe, retain as much as possible of the original structure and remove inappropriate modern fittings so that the building could be appreciated by visitors in close to its original form.

2.2 Collecting for a museum was started by The Amersham Society before 1983, when no building had been identified as a location for the museum. The collection has primarily been focused on items relating to the history of Amersham, particularly the old town. It was amassed by local volunteers and was located in the British Legion Hall. A catalogue of the collection appears to have been commenced in 1983 as some items simply have 'before 1983' as the date they were acquired. At first index cards were used to record objects, photographs and documents in the collections. The catalogue on index cards was partially transferred to the Catalist computer catalogue in 1995. In 2006, the Catalist records were upgraded to MODES, and the opportunity was taken to simplify the structure of the catalogue. In 2014 MODES for Windows was upgraded to MODES Complete, allowing higher resolution images of photos and objects in the collection to be added as well as audio files and PDFs.

2.3 The museum's collection now includes around 3,000 objects (including artworks), around 2,700 documents, around 6,000 photos, over 120 oral history interviews, around 660 publications, and a reference collection.

2.4 In 2017 a capital project was completed, which included the development of two dedicated stores for the collection. The ground floor store contains the social history collection (objects) and the upstairs store contains photographs, documents, maps and book as well as a workstation for cataloguing.

2.5 The 'A New View' project (2023/24) increased the collections storage for large objects through the upgrading of an outdoor storage area, and increased the museum's capacity to display objects from its collections in a new temporary exhibition gallery and timeline display.

3 An overview of current collections

3.1 The museum's collection focuses on the history of Amersham and the surrounding area. The locality of Amersham is usually considered to be within circa five miles of Amersham Museum and includes:- Amersham (Old Town), Amersham-on-the-Hill, Chesham Bois, Coleshill, Gore Hill, Holmer Green, Hyde Heath, Little Chalfont, Little Missenden, Mantles Green, Mop End, Penn Street, Shardeloes, Winchmore Hill, and Woodrow High House.

We do not collect material that falls within Chesham Museum's collecting remit.

3.2 The museum collection ranges from Mesolithic and Neolithic flint and stone tools to modern material commemorating Amersham history. The main grouping of objects include:-

- Personal and domestic objects
- Late 19th to mid 20th century industrial and agricultural tools and products
- Photographs, primarily dating from the late 19th to mid 20th century
- 19th & 20th century documents and maps
- 20th century artworks

3.3 The collection also features items relating to national events as they were commemorated in Amersham and the surrounding area.

The collection is catalogued under four headings:-

3.4 Amersham Objects Collection

The Objects Collection comprises around 3,000 objects and artworks with a strong link to the history of Amersham and the immediate locality, that were made or used in the Amersham area; associated

with local people, shops or industries or are illustrative of national events (e.g. wartime or Royal events).

This collection includes a small number of archaeological items found in the local area by field walking, small-scale excavations, or during building work. Any items found during planned archaeological excavations are deposited with the Buckinghamshire County Museum.

The majority of this collection includes a wide range of personal, domestic and decorative items from the 19th and 20th centuries; tools and products of local craft industries such as straw plait, lace making, chair making, blacksmithing and agriculture; memorabilia from Weller's brewery and manufacturing industries including World War II barrage balloon manufacture, Brazil's meat processing and Goya toiletries; and items linked to local organisations, the civic and religious history of Amersham.

There are two taxidermy items in the social history collection, a cockatoo and a *Glis glis* (both specimens have links to local history). There is also a *Glis glis* skeleton found during building work and a small number of fossils found locally. It is not the intention of the museum to acquire further biological specimens for the collection.

3.5 Amersham Document Collection

This collection of printed and manuscript material on paper or parchment includes around 2,700 original documents, letters, newspapers, maps, architectural drawings, magazines, minute books and ledgers that directly relate to people and property in Amersham and the immediate locality.

When appropriate, items are offered/transferred to the Buckinghamshire Record Office in Aylesbury.

3.6 Amersham Photograph Collection

This collection of photographs relates specifically to Amersham and the surrounding villages. Although predominantly printed photographs, a growing number of items in this collection are digital scans of original prints that are retained by their owners, and modern digital images taken by local residents. There are nearly 6,000 images in the collection.

A special group within this collection are the original glass plate negatives taken by local photographer George Ward.

3.7 Oral History Collection

The oral history collection consists of over 120 interviews with local people, with the oldest dating back to the 1970s. Most of the interviews have written summaries and some have full transcripts.

3.8 Book Collection

The collection of accessioned books are key local reference materials and/or were written for and by local residents.

3.9 Reference Collections

The following collections held by the museum are used for reference and are not listed in the Accessions register.

- Reference collection of photocopies or digital scans of documents, maps, newspaper cuttings and articles from magazines etc. relating to Amersham.
- Book collection of reference books and journals on open access in the museum office for use by researchers and volunteers.

4 Themes and priorities for future collecting

- 4.1 Amersham Museum is conscious that the size of the museum within an historic listed building with limited storage necessitates discretion when acquiring new objects for the collections. In 2013 Amersham Museum Limited purchased the adjoining building, number 51, and opened an expanded museum in 2017. This project resulted in more storage and display space. The 'A New View' project has created some additional storage for larger robust objects. There are, however, still limitations to storage and display (also see collections care and access policies). Exploring potential off-site storage options forms part of the museum's forward planning.
- 4.2 Through our collections, we continue to seek to represent both the 'old town' and Amersham-on-the-Hill, and the surrounding area.
- 4.3 We will continue to capture people's memories of the 20th century (and associated industry and events) before they are lost, through oral history recordings and pro-active collecting.
- 4.4 Inspired by the recent donation of six works by Austrian émigré artist Marie Louise von Motesiczky (1906-1996) and research, publication and exhibition projects linked to the history of women in the area, especially their experiences in the twentieth century, the museum is keen to continue this theme in its collecting where possible.
- 4.5 Through our collections, we continue to seek to represent residents in past and present Amersham from a broad range of backgrounds, to attempt to better reflect the diversity of past and current populations.
- 4.6 Where more appropriate, potential acquisitions will be referred to Buckinghamshire County Museum, Buckinghamshire Record Office, Chesham Museum, Chiltern Open Air Museum, Wycombe Museum, or other specialist collections. Amersham Museum is aware of the Portable Antiquities Scheme guidelines regarding metal detector finds and Treasure Trove and will report any items brought to its attention to the appropriate authorities.

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.

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: Buckinghamshire County Museum, Buckinghamshire Records Office, Chesham Museum, Wycombe Museum, and the Chiltern Open Air Museum.

8 Acquisition

8.1 The policy for agreeing acquisitions is:

When an item is offered to the museum and appropriate information has been gathered, details are considered by the Collections Manager and Director, according to this policy. The Collections Trustee and wider board of trustees are consulted in cases of significant expenditure in relation to the collections budget or overall budget and/or complex acquisitions. At each board meeting, the trustees are presented with a proposal for acquisitions received in the previous quarter.

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

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

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 Disposal procedures

14.1 All disposals will be undertaken with reference to the SPECTRUM Primary Procedures on disposal.

14.2 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.

14.3 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.

14.4 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.

14.5 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.

14.6 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, and not of the staff acting alone.

14.7 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.

14.8 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).

14.9 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.

14.10 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.

14.11 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.

14.12 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.

14.13 Disposal by exchange

The museum will not dispose of items by exchange.

14.14 Disposal by destruction

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

14.15 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.

14.16 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.

14.17 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.

14.18 The destruction of objects should be witnessed by an appropriate member of the museum workforce. In circumstances where this is not possible, eg the destruction of controlled substances, a police certificate should be obtained and kept in the relevant object history file.