

Museum Accreditation Scheme

National Railway Museum Collecting Policy

Governing Body: The Board of Trustees of the Science Museum

Date approved by governing body: 2 March 2010

Date at which policy due for review: March 2015

1. Museum's Statement of Purpose

The National Railway Museum [NRM] is part of the National Museum of Science & Industry whose purpose is set down in the National Heritage Act 1983 to 'care for, preserve and add to the objects in its collections, to secure that the objects are exhibited to the public, secure that the objects are available to persons seeking to inspect them in connection with study or research, and generally promote the public's enjoyment and understanding of science and technology and of the development of those subjects'.¹

The Museum uses its collections to fulfil its current strategy statement:

'Our mission is to be a world class museum where people from all walks of life choose to explore how railways help shape our world. Using its collection, it enables its audiences to explore the technological, social and cultural impact of the railways to understand how they reflect and shape lives and the world in which we live. This helps people to understand and participate in their heritage, find knowledge for themselves and have a say in the issues that shape their future'

2. Existing collections, including the subjects or themes and the periods of time and/or geographic areas to which the collections relate

The National Railway Collection is Britain's largest single body of historic railway material. The museum collections come from a variety of sources, and have their origins in the collections of historic objects assembled by railway companies in the mid nineteenth century. Following nationalisation in 1948, the British Transport Commission established a preservation policy bringing the collections together under a single owner and the collections continued to expand. In 1975 the NRM took over the British Railways collection, which has subsequently been significantly developed to cover all areas of railway history. This encompasses a wide variety of material from unique icons to everyday objects, revealing the importance of railways and their impact on the human and physical environment and they range from locomotives to uniform buttons. The Museum also holds considerable related library and archives collections, which cover most relevant subjects and include the records and photographs of the railway industry and preservation movement, technical drawings, and private papers of key figures in railway history.

The Museum now collects across five broad subject areas: the Origins of Railways; How Railways Shape our Lives; How Railways Shape our World; How Railways Shape our Culture and the Science of Railways.

¹ National Heritage Act, 1983, chapter 47, section 9.

3. **Criteria governing future acquisition policy including the subjects or themes, periods of time and/or geographic areas and any collections which will not be subject to further acquisition**

Collecting to support the National Railway Museum's strategy and vision and to develop the collections

The NRM already has rich collections of historic material that have developed over the past hundred and fifty years, with objects dating from the earliest known railways, c1804 to the present. Geographically, the main focus of the collections is based on the railways of Britain and the British railway industry, which incorporates material exported overseas. However, as the focus of railway history changes and as our transport choices are increasingly seen to have a global impact, the Museum's collecting has become increasingly international in scope. Continued collecting ensures that the Museum can fulfil this mission into the future.

In line with this policy curators propose new items – 'icons', everyday items and their supporting material – for the collections because they:

- enable us to provide our audiences with life enhancing experiences through our cultural programme
- represent key new technologies or contemporary practice on the railways
- represent key human stories in railway history
- represent inventions that are specific to railways which do not have an application in other fields

The Museum collects in five main subject areas:

- The Origins of Railways;
- How Railways Shape our Lives;
- How Railways Shape our World;
- How Railways Shape our Culture and the
- Science and Technology of Railways.

Collecting is primarily governed by narratives and its broad direction is determined by key themes that are periodically reviewed (see Appendix 1).

Focus on Active Collecting

The NRM collects both actively and reactively. The Museum is moving to an active mode of collecting, which is achieved through individual acquisition projects; collecting for major exhibition programmes; collecting via the Railway Heritage Committee and other expert associations; and commissioning. Reactive collecting takes selective advantage of the hundreds of unsolicited donations that are offered each year and also responds to opportunities offered by specialist auctions and private vendor sales.

The Museum collects both for use within the planned projects of our Cultural Plan and for posterity. In the period covered by this edition of the policy, it will be especially concerned to broaden the collections' coverage in the areas covered by the

redevelopment of the NRM Great Hall. Where the NRM collects without specifying use, the Collections Development Group weighs potential future use; collecting for posterity guarantees the collections' continuing national and international significance and value and this material can be made available on request through the Museum's study and research facilities. All new acquisitions are measured against four basic criteria: significance, use, condition and provenance.

4. Limitations on collecting

The NRM recognises its responsibility, in acquiring additions to its collections, to ensure that care of collections, documentation arrangements and use of collections will meet the requirements of the Accreditation Standard (and other professional standards). It will take into account limitations on collecting imposed by such factors as inadequate staffing, storage and care of collection arrangements.

NRM collections acquisitions will be resourced through donation, application of the collections purchase fund, specific grant aid and, occasionally, through public appeal. The Trustees will set a level for the annual contribution to the collections purchase fund and limits of authority for Museum Directors in the field of collecting.

The NRM's collections will be limited in overall volume in line with long-term resource capabilities. There will be no overall limit on size because partnerships and loans will create additional capability. However, the Trustees will expect the Directors to deliver collections that can be housed in the organisation's existing storage facilities in London, York, Bradford, Wroughton, Shildon and with collections partners.

5. Collecting policies of other museums

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 specialisms, in order to avoid unnecessary duplication and waste of resources.

The Museum will consider all potential acquisitions in the wider national context, and will liaise with other significant collections in the United Kingdom to avoid duplication and to coordinate policy.

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

Partner museums of the NMSI: Science Museum; National Museum of Photography Film and Television. Fellow members of the Subject Specialist Network for Inland Transport (SSNIT) including Glasgow Transport Museum; the Scottish Railway Preservation Society; Ulster Transport Museum; London Transport Museum; National Tramway Museum; Steam: The Museum of the Great Western Railway.

The Museum will also refer to the Railway Heritage Partnership Registers for railway rolling stock to check potential acquisitions against material preserved elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

6. Policy review procedure

The Acquisition and Disposal Policy will be published and reviewed at least once every five years. The date when the policy is next due for review is noted above.

The review will take place in consultation within the NMSI family of museums, with the NRM Advisory Board and with the Railway Heritage Committee.

MLA will be notified of any changes to the Acquisition and Disposal Policy, and the implications of any such changes for the future of existing collections.

7. Acquisitions not covered by the policy

Acquisitions outside the current stated policy will only be made in very exceptional circumstances, and then only after proper consideration by the governing body of the museum itself, having regard to the interests of other museums.

8. Acquisition procedures

Exclusions

- a) The NRM will exercise 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.
- b) In particular, the NRM 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).
- c) 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 NRM 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.
- d) So far as biological and geological material is concerned, the NRM 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.
- e) The NRM will not acquire archaeological antiquities

(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

In England, Northern Ireland and Wales the procedures include reporting finds to the landowner or occupier of the land and to the proper authorities in the case of possible treasure as defined by the Treasure Act 1996.

In Scotland, under the laws of bona vacantia including Treasure Trove, the Crown has title to all ownerless objects including antiquities. Scottish archaeological material cannot therefore be legally acquired by means other than by allocation to the NRM by the Crown. Where the Crown chooses to forego its title to a portable antiquity, a Curator or other responsible person acting on behalf of the Board of Trustees of the Science Museum, can establish that valid title to the item in question has been acquired by ensuring that a certificate of 'No Claim' has been issued on behalf of the Crown.

- f) Any exceptions to the above clauses 8a, 8b, 8c, or 8e will only be because the NRM is either:
- acting as an externally approved repository of last resort for material of local (UK) origin; or
 - acquiring an item of minor importance that lacks secure ownership history but in the best judgement of experts in the field concerned has not been illicitly traded; or
 - acting with the permission of authorities with the requisite jurisdiction in the country of origin; or
 - in possession of reliable documentary evidence that the item was exported from its country of origin before 1970.

In these cases the NRM will be open and transparent in the way it makes decisions and will act only with the express consent of an appropriate outside authority.

- g) Should the NRM acquire human remains from the last 100 years it will follow the procedures in the Human Tissue Act, 2004. Otherwise, it will follow the DCMS *Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums* issued in 2005.
- h) The NRM is committed to maintaining a safe environment for staff and visitors alike. The Museum complies with all relevant Health & Safety legislation relating to our collections and considers the potential hazards of acquisitions with respect to the possible risks they pose to peoples and other objects in their acquisition, handling, storage and disposal.

To facilitate this, it will apply particularly close scrutiny to proposed acquisitions that contain any of the substances on the following list. The Museum recognises however that the additional costs of acquiring and holding such objects will sometimes be justified by their significance and interpretive value.

- Radioactive materials
- Asbestos
- Hazardous chemicals

- Objects that contain hazardous materials, such as asbestos or mercury
- Biological hazards
- Controlled substances, namely dangerous drugs and scheduled poisons

The Museum also holds the necessary licences to ensure that hazardous objects are safely managed and maintained.

Acquisitions procedures

The NRM's Collections Development Group manages the process of acquisition and adding to the museum's collections. The Group comprises key museum professionals from curatorial, cultural planning, learning, conservation and collections care, and the corporate and collections information departments,

Once a curator has completed the NRM's case for acquisition, the Collections Development Group considers the case and approves or rejects the object for acquisition.

The acquisition case includes:

- **Relevance:** cultural, social, environmental, economic, intellectual or psychological impact; relationship to new trends and developments; capacity for interpretation, discussion, debate or research with particular audiences
- **Use:** capacity to tell a story – now or in the future - by exhibitions, web-products, broadcasts, popular and scholarly publications and other means; emphasis on human stories.
- **Condition:** state of completeness and condition; resources required for collections care and management; hazard content.
- **Provenance:** compliance with due diligence; ownership; origin; copyright and intellectual property rights; authenticity; any special conditions that might apply

Once an acquisition has been approved transfer of ownership is arranged, and once effected, the object is accessioned into the Museum's permanent collection. The arrival of the acquisition is then instigated, with all new objects condition checked by the conservation team before being paced within the designated museum location. The labelling or marking of objects with their accession number and record photography is also carried out.

Modifications to this procedure which enhance our capacity for relevant and responsible collecting will be discussed and, where appropriate, approved at the Collections Development Group. The NRM Advisory Board will be informed of such changes where appropriate

9. Spoliation

In caring for its collections and considering acquisition and disposal the NRM will use 'Spoliation of Works of Art during the Holocaust and World War II period: Statement of Principles and Proposed Actions', issued by the National Museum Directors' Conference in 1998, and report on these activities in accordance with the guidelines.

10. Repatriation and restitution

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 the 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. In particular when dealing with human remains it will consider the Human Tissue Act, 2004 and DCMS *Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums* issued in 2005). This will mean that the procedures described in 12a-12d, 12g and 12s below will be followed but the remaining procedures are not appropriate.

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".

11. Management of archives

As the NRM holds *and* intends to acquire archives, including photographs and printed ephemera, its governing body will be guided by the Code of Practice on Archives for Museums and Galleries in the United Kingdom (3rd ed., 2002).

In addition, the NRM will be guided by relevant international and UK archival professional standards as prescribed by the International Council on Archives, the National Council on Archives and the Society of Archivists.

12. Disposal procedures

Museum policy

The Museum's governing legislation, the National Heritage Act 1983, embodies a presumption against disposal; by definition, the NRM has a long-term purpose and holds collections in trust for society in relation to its stated objectives. Where the Museum's Trustees decide that they do wish to dispose of material, they will do so in an open and transparent manner, following ethical and legal guidelines in line with MLA procedure (as outlined below) and current NMSI Disposal procedure.

- a. The governing body will ensure that the disposal process is carried out openly and with transparency.
- b. By definition, the Museum has a long-term purpose and holds collections in trust for society in relation to its stated objectives. The governing body therefore accepts the principle that sound curatorial reasons for disposal must be established before consideration is given to the disposal of any items in the museum's collection.
- c. The museum will confirm that it is legally free to dispose of an item and agreements on disposal made with donors will be taken into account.

- d. 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.

Motivation for disposal and method of disposal

- e. When disposal is motivated by curatorial reasons the procedures outlined in paragraphs 12g-12s will be followed and the method of disposal may be by gift, sale or exchange.
- f. In exceptional cases, the disposal may be motivated principally by financial reasons. The method of disposal will therefore be by sale and the procedures outlined below in paragraphs 12g-12m and 12s 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.

The disposal decision-making process

- g. Whether the disposal is motivated by curatorial or financial reasons, 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 the 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. External 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.

Responsibility for disposal decision-making

- h. 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 a Board of Survey (which is comprised of museum professional staff) and not of the curator of the collection acting alone.

Use of proceeds of sale

- i. Any monies received by the museum governing body from the disposal of items will be applied 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 MLA.
- j. The proceeds of a sale will be ring-fenced so it can be demonstrated that they are spent in a manner compatible with the requirements of the Accreditation standard.

Disposal by gift or sale

- k. Once a decision to dispose of material in the collection has been taken, priority will be given to retaining it within the public domain, unless it is to be destroyed. It will therefore be offered in the first instance, by gift, exchange or sale, directly to other Accredited Museums likely to be interested in its acquisition.
- l. If the material is not acquired by any Accredited Museums to which it was offered directly 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 an announcement in the Museums Association's *Museums Journal*, and in other specialist journals and media where appropriate.
- m. 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.

Disposal by exchange

- n. 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.
- o. In cases where the governing body wishes for sound curatorial reasons to exchange material directly with Accredited or unaccredited museums, with other organisations or with individuals, the procedures in paragraphs 12a-12d and 12g-12h will be followed as will the procedures in paragraphs 12p-12s.

- p. 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.
- q. If the exchange is proposed with a non-accredited museum, with another type of organisation or with an individual, the museum will make an announcement in the Museums Journal and in other specialist journals where appropriate.
- r. 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.

Documenting disposal

- s. 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.

Appendix 1

Subject strategies

The railways have social and cultural impact, as well as technological. They have played an important role in the development of the world as we know it and continue to have a significant influence on our lives and our environment.

We will seek to help people to explore the ways in which individuals and communities interact with, or are affected by, the railways, and how choices are made about forms of travel and transport at a variety of levels, from the personal to the institutional.

1. Origins

Railways started in the UK and spread worldwide.

The opening of the Liverpool & Manchester Railway was a pivotal moment that shaped the future of the world. It was the culmination of years of exploration and experimentation and the coming together of the right elements with the right people at the right time.

- How did we travel before trains?
- It started with coal
- Invention, innovation and creativity
 - Early pioneers
 - Entrepreneurship

2. Shaping our Lives

Railways brought choice and freedom to people's lives.

How have railways affected individual lives in the past and still impact on personal lifestyle choices we make today?

- Travelling by train:
 - Travelling for leisure and pleasure
 - Travelling for work
 - Passenger comforts and safety
 - Planning your journey
- Providing services
 - Services have changed over time
 - Early services
 - Quest for speed
 - Competition from road and air
 - An integrated transport system
 - Road
 - Air
 - Sea
 - Electrification and modernisation
 - Railway time
 - Marketing the service

- Corporate identity
 - Railway ephemera
 - Railway art (posters etc)
 - Livery and heraldry
- Moving Goods
 - Food/nutrition/health
 - Water supply
 - Rapid transport of perishable goods
 - Railways a common carrier
 - Goods vehicles to suit the need
- Works and workers
 - Working lives
 - Labour relations
 - Being part of the railway family
- Ensuring our safety
 - Signalling and telecommunications
 - Safety systems
 - Training and development
- Running the railway
 - Engineering and maintenance
 - Operating trains

3. Shaping our World

From global states and empires, to local cuttings and tunnels, railways have made their mark on our landscape. Their spread across the globe has resulted in unity and division, supply and exploitation, liberation and control.

- Civil Engineering solutions
- Changing technologies for railway building
- Expansion and contraction of networks
- Government intervention
 - Nationalisation
 - Rationalisation
 - Privatisation
- Railways and war
- International railway links
- Building railways overseas
 - Empire
 - Export
- Different approaches in different places
- Impact of railways on the environment
 - Landscapes and cityscapes
 - Slum clearances
 - Sustainability and green issues

4. Shaping our Culture

Railways have become part of our culture and we react to them in a personal way. This is reflected in a variety of ways.

- Film/TV/Literature/Art
- Design/Style/Fashion

- Image making
- Nostalgia
- Language
- Heritage
- The Grand Terminus

5. The Science and Technology of Railways

Railways rely on science, technology and maths for their development and operation and they evolve as new ideas and technology are developed.

- How are railways different?
 - Friction/Adhesion
 - Streamlining
 - Forces
- Technologies
 - Power
 - Steam (fire into power)
 - Diesel
 - Electric
 - Speed
 - Safety

Appendix 2: Governing Principles

The following is a list of legislation, guidelines and standards which the NMSI must adhere to when dispensing its core functions and activities, and which govern or influence the policy set down in this document. Further, specific information about the scope and relevance of this legislation may be found on-line:

- National Heritage Act (1983)
- The Railway Heritage Act (1996)
- Museum's Association Code of Ethics (2007)
- MLA Accreditation Standard
- Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (UNESCO, 1970)
- Dealing in Cultural Objects (Offences) Act 2003
- Treasure Act 1996
- Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums (DCMS, 2005)
- Spoliation of Works of Art during the Holocaust and World War II period: Statement of Principles and Proposed Actions (NMDC, 1998)
- Code of Practice on Archives for Museums and Galleries in the United Kingdom (3rd ed., 2002)
- Health & Safety at Work Act (1974)
- Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations (2006)
- Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (2002)

Appendix 3: Note on objects containing asbestos or radioactive materials

In particular, the National Railway Museum will not normally increase its holdings of material containing asbestos or radioactive holdings by knowingly acquiring any objects containing any form of asbestos or radioactive material or containing radioactive sources. All objects intended for acquisition will be checked initially by thorough research, inquiry and physical monitoring. A strong case giving the justification from the relevant acquirer, in consultation with Health and Safety representatives, and an assessment of the resource implications from the Collections Team, summarising funding strategies in place to sustain purchase or future activities, will need to be submitted for discussion before any decision is made or the object is brought onto museum premises.

If any object is considered to present too great a risk to the public to store or display safely and the resource implications of doing this are too high, it will not be recommended for acquisition. The final decision will be made by the Head of Museum in consultation with the Collections Development Group.

If any object known to contain asbestos or radioactive materials is acquired for the collection, it will be managed in accordance with the legal requirements in line with the NMSI Asbestos Management Policy and the NMSI Management Policy for Radioactive Materials.

Appendix 4: Note on Restitution and Repatriation.

The National Railway Museum's Policy on Restitution, Repatriation and Human Tissues covers all sensitive and controlled objects ranging from human tissues to objects containing no human remains that the Museum may wish to collect or dispose of, or which may be the subjects of restitution (non-human) or repatriation (human remains) claims. The museum will comply with the license requirements as set out in the Human Tissue Bill for all holdings of human tissues and human remains. Government guidelines on the retention of indigenous materials, and requests for restitution or repatriation act as the catalyst for considering whether the disputed object(s) should remain in the collections. If, on investigation, any object turns out to have been illegally gained, as defined by the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Prevention of the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, then the Museum will return the object to its rightful owner. If not, then the Museum will consider how the contested object best fits with the acquisition and disposal guidelines. The policy suggests a series of issues that need to be considered to help this decision-making. If the Museum decides that it wishes to retain the contested object then the request for restitution or repatriation will be refused. If the Museum decides to dispose of the object, then restitution or repatriation is considered alongside other options for disposal. The policy gives a second series of criteria to guide curators through this decision.