National Railway Museum Collecting Policy Statement

Governing Body: Board of Trustees of the Science Museum

Date for approval: 25 November 2009
Date for review: November 2014

This is a brief statement of why and how the National Railway Museum (NRM) adds new items to its collections; our MLA-Accreditation Acquisition and Disposal Policy gives full details (including collection history, governing legislation, limitations and procedures). The NRM's Collections Development Group will normally review this statement along with the longer document on a five year cycle, in collaboration with NMSI Collections Group and in consultation with the Museum's Trustee Advisory Committee. The NMSI Board of Trustees and MLA Council will be notified of any significant changes to policy or procedure.

Collecting is a core responsibility of subject curators, is supervised by the Collections Development Group, and involves staff from Corporate & Collections Information and Conservation & Collections Care in its practical implementation.

Policy

The NRM 's 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.

The NRM has rich collections of historic material that have developed over the past hundred and fifty years. Continued collecting ensures that we can fulfil this mission into the future. In line with this, curators propose new items – both 'icons' and supporting material or more everyday items – for the collections because:

- they enable us to provide life enhancing experiences through our current cultural programme
- they represent key new technology or contemporary practice on the railways
- they represent key human stories in railway history
- they represent inventions that are specific to railways and 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 of Railways. Collecting is governed by narratives (rather than gap-filling), and its broad direction is given by key themes that are periodically reviewed (see appendix 1).

We collect actively and reactively. We are moving to an active mode of collecting, which is achieved through individual acquisition projects; collecting for major exhibition projects; collecting via the Railway Heritage Committee and other expert associations; and commissioning. Reactive collecting takes selective advantage of the hundreds of unsolicited donations that we are offered each year and responds to opportunities offered by specialist auctions and private vendor sales. The NRM has an annual Purchase Fund, which allows us to purchase important material offered for sale.

We collect both for use within the planned projects of our Cultural Plan and for posterity. In the period covered by this edition of the policy, we will be especially concerned to broaden the collections' coverage in the areas covered by the redevelopment of the NRM Great Hall. Where we collect 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.

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.

Key Themes

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
 - o 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:
 - o Travelling for leisure and pleasure
 - Travelling for work
 - Passenger comforts and safety
 - o Planning your journey
- Providing services
 - o 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
- o Railways a common carrier
 - Goods vehicles to suit the need
- Works and workers
 - o Working lives
 - Labour relations
 - Being part of the railway family
- Ensuring our safety
 - Signalling and telecommunications
 - Safety systems
 - o Training and development
- Running the railway
 - o 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
 - o Empire
 - Export
- Different approaches in different places
- Impact of railways on the environment
 - Landscapes and cityscapes
 - Slum clearances
 - o 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/Stye/Fashion
- Image making
- Nostalgia
- Language
- Heritage
- The Grand Terminus

5. The Science 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?
 - o Friction/Adhesion
 - Streamlining
 - o Forces
- Technologies

- o Power
- Steam (fire into power)
- o Diesel
- o 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)