

# **The Old Operating Theatre Museum**

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## Policy document

### **Acquisitions and Disposal Policy**

#### ***REVISION HISTORY***

20th November 1992, 23 April 1992, 23 November 1995, 25 June 1996, 23 August 2001, 6<sup>th</sup> November 2001; 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2003

#### ***COLLECTIONS***

The museum has a small collection of objects illustrating medical history, and the history of St. Thomas's and Guy's Hospitals.

This consists of collections on:

- Anatomical teaching aids
- Prosthetic aids
- Obstetrics
- Midwifery
- Surgical Instruments
- Cupping and Bleeding
- Nursing and Patient Care
- Anaesthetics
- Antiseptics
- Apothecaries and Herbal Medicine
- Objects relating to the history of the Parish of St Thomas'

A small number of objects are on loan from:

- Wellcome Trust
- Colchester Hospital

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MR R Horne  
MR Edward Williams

## **COLLECTING POLICY**

The collecting policy of the museum is derived from the museum's aims and all objects acquired should contribute to the understanding of the development of medical knowledge with particular emphasis on the history of the Old Operating Theatre, the Herb Garret, and the history of St Thomas' and Guys Hospitals. The museum may also, on occasion, acquire objects connected with the history of St. Thomas' Church, its parish, and Southwark.

The museum will adopt an active though small-scale collecting policy and will ensure that it can document, store, display and adequately preserve any objects it has or acquires.

The museum will endeavour to coordinate its collecting policy with other institutions such as the Florence Nightingale Museum, the Wellcome Museum at the Science Museum, the Gordon Museum and other medical museums.

Where objects are of local history importance it will liaise with the Museum of London and the Cuming Museum Southwark when appropriate.

Staff of the museum will not collect medical objects on their own behalf unless explicitly given permission by the Lord Brock's Trust.

## **PRIORITIES**

Objects acquired should be consistent with the aim of the museum as expressed in the Museum Policy Statement. Priority will be given to objects dating to before the closure of the Operating Theatre in 1862. Priority should also be given to objects, which can be displayed, as storage space is not sufficient to maintain a large reserve collection.

The following objects are considered a priority for purchase:

Illustrated Medical Textbooks dating prior to 1862  
Ticket for Surgical Operation  
Large Apothecary Jars and Carboys

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Apothecary drawers  
Ointment and Pill tiles  
Tablet Mould  
Alembics  
Dissection Kit  
Anatomical teaching aids  
Prosthetic aids (disability related objects)

### ***Handling Collection***

The Museum will maintain a small handling collection of objects for which there are duplicates in the display, and which are not rare to use in demonstrations and lectures. These will not be accessioned into the permanent collection.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The following paragraphs are inserted in the document on the advice of Resource: (formerly the Museums and Galleries Commission). They make this policy accord with the Code of Practice for Museum Authorities (1987) and the Code of Practice for Museum Governing Bodies (1994).

a. The museum will not 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, and that in particular it has not been acquired in, or export from, its country of origin (or any intermediate country in which it may have been legally owned. (For the purposes of this paragraph 'country of origin' includes the United Kingdom).

b. 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 (e.g. a British court in the case of a specimen seized from a third party under the Protection of Birds Acts).

c So far as British or foreign archaeological antiquities (including excavated ceramics) are concerned, in addition to the safeguards under sub-paragraph c. above, the museum will not acquire objects in any case where the governing body or responsible officer has reasonable cause to believe that the circumstances of their recovery involved the recent unscientific or intentional destruction or damage of ancient monument, or other known archaeological, or involved a failure to disclose the finds to the owner or occupier of the land or to the proper authorities in the case of a possible Treasure Trove (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) or Bona Vacantia (Scotland).

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d By definition a museum has a long-term purpose and must possess (or intend to acquire) permanent collections in relation to its stated objectives. The governing body accepts the principle that there is a strong presumption against the disposal of any items in the museum's collection except as set out below.

e. In those cases where the museum is legally free to dispose of an item (if this is in doubt, advice will be sought) it is agreed that any decision to sell or otherwise dispose of material from the collections will be taken only after due consideration. Decisions to dispose of items will not be made with the principal aim of generating funds. Once a decision to dispose of an item has been taken, priority will be given to retaining the item within the public domain and with this in view it will be offered first, by exchange, gift or sale to Registered museums before disposal to other interested individuals or organisations is considered.

f. In cases in which an arrangement for the exchange, gift or sale of material is not being made with an individual Registered museum, the museum community at large will be advised of the intention to dispose of material. This will normally be through an announcement in the Museums Association's Museums journal and other professional journals if appropriate. The announcement will indicate the number and nature of the specimens or objects involved, and the basis on which the material will be transferred to another institution. A period of at least two months will be allowed for an interest in acquiring the material to be expressed.

g. A decision to dispose of a specimen or object, whether by exchange, sale, gift or destruction (in the case of an item too badly damaged or deteriorated to be of any use for the purposes of the collections), will be the responsibility of the governing body of the museum acting on the advice of professional curatorial staff, and not of the curator of the collection acting alone. Full records will be kept of all such decisions 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.

h. 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 but in exceptional cases improvements relating to the care of collections may be justifiable. Advice on these cases may be sought from Resource:

The Museum will endeavour to maintain its archives, including photographs and printed ephemera in accord with the Code of Practice on Archives for Museums in the United Kingdom.

Proposals for acquisitions falling outside these guidelines will only be agreed in exceptional circumstances, only after proper discussion and agreement of the Trustees and having regard to the interests of other museums.

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## **Closure**

In the event of closure or the winding up of the Trust objects owed by the Museum should be:

1. Offered to the Charitable Foundation of Guys and St Thomas under the control of the Art Director
2. To other Medical Museums in the London Museums of Health and Medicine Museums group
3. Offered via the Museums Journal to other museums
4. Disposed of by Sale only in the last resort

## ***Conflict of Interests***

Staff or volunteers of the museum should not operate as collectors of objects associated with the Museum (medical objects) unless explicitly given permission by the Museum Director. Any such permission should be reported to the Trustees.

## ***COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT***

All objects will be adequately documented on computer. All new acquisitions will be recorded in the museum's register, and catalogued. Transfer of title forms should be sent to and signed by the previous owner for all Gifts to the Museum. All objects will be documented to ensure that they can be identified in the case of loss or damage, and if possible photographed or videoed. Indices to the collection will be provided including a locations index. The museum will endeavour to improve its documentation as outlined in its Documentation Development Plan.

## ***Review Date***

This policy will be reviewed every 5 years – the next review date (after the 2001 review) being 2006. Resource and London Museums Agency shall be notified of any changes to the acquisition and disposals policy and the implications of any such changes for the future of the existing collections.

Kevin Flude

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Approved June 1996 revised 6th November 2001.

