

St Osyth Museum / St Osyth Historical Society Collection Policy – SOHS 1

This document is a tool for Museum staff to help them maintain and improve the quality of the Museum's collections and as a guide to people wishing to donate to St Osyth Museum.

Introduction

The Museums Association's definition of a museum says this:

A Museum enables people to explore collections for inspiration, learning and enjoyment. It is an institution that collects, safeguards and makes accessible artefacts and specimens, which it holds in trust for society.

As agreed at the Museums Association AGM 1998

The collection is the essential difference between a museum and other 'heritage' or historical institutions. The Museum's collection is therefore the core from which all its other activities are derived.

This document is a tool for staff of the Museum to help them to maintain and improve the quality of the Museum's collections. Its aim is to allow for the measured and gradual extension of the collections which should enable the Museum as a whole to function more efficiently.

St Osyth Museum, like most Museums has collections of varying quality, both in terms of relevance to St Osyth and display/research potential. Continual improvement in the quality of the collections can only lead to the Museum service improving its ability to be more relevant to the lives and interests of the people of St Osyth, whom it seeks to serve.

Conditions of acquisition

Legal requirements

In collecting material for the Museum collections the Museum will adhere to all current relevant legislation or agreed conventions including the following: UK laws; if applicable, the law of the country of the item's origin; international law and international conventions on the protection or export of cultural property or natural history conservation (whether the UK government is a signatory to the treaty or not).

Any object accepted should be the property of the donor/vendor. The object should not be acquired if there is any reason to think that the current owner does not have the right to transfer title to the Museum.

Extra conditions as laid down in the current Resource/SEMS Guidelines -

1. 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 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 the 'country of origin' includes the United Kingdom.)
2. 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).
3. So far as British or foreign archaeological antiquities (including excavated ceramics) are concerned, in addition to the safeguards under sub-paragraph a. 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 monuments or other known archaeological sites, or involved a failure to disclose finds to the owner or occupier of the land, or to the proper authorities in the case of a possible Treasure Trove (in England, Wales and Northern Ireland) or Bona Vacantia (Scotland).

Perpetuity

When accepting any item for the Museum's main collection it is for perpetuity.

The Museum should believe it can provide adequate and continuing care of and access to the item, without jeopardising the care of and access to the existing collection. Long and short term resource implications must always be considered before taking the final decision to add something to the collection. Resources in this case include staff time in processing the acquisitions, cost of storage materials and space and conservation cost.

Geographical area

The Museum will collect material that has been made or used in St Osyth or immediately nearby. This includes all communities lying within St Osyth Parish and any material made or used outside St Osyth but impacting or affecting St Osyth Parish, St Osyth residents or St Osyth the saint.

Limitations on collecting

The Museum recognises its responsibility, in acquiring material, to ensure adequate conservation, documentation and proper use of such material and takes into account limitations on collecting imposed by such factors as inadequate staffing, storage and conservation resources.

Collecting policies of other institutions

The museum will take due account of the collecting policies of other institutions collecting in the same or related areas or subject fields and will consult with such organisations where conflicts of interest may arise or to define areas of specialisation, in order to avoid unnecessary duplication and waste of resources.

Due to the nature of the collection being area specific, and there being only one general museum in the village there is little likelihood of conflict with other museums. However the Martello Tower at Point Clear houses a small Air Museum and the Martello Tower at Jaywick concentrates on Napoleonic era defences and public events. Other outlying locations are possible subject for conflict or duplication, in which case the museums at Clacton, Brightlingsea, Wivenhoe, Colchester, Walton or others are contacted as required.

The museum's governing body (The St Osyth Historical Society) will be guided by the Code of practice on Archives for Museums in the United Kingdom (1996) with respect to printed ephemera and photographs. It will also aim to meet the standards outlined in the Royal Commission on Historic Manuscripts - Standards for Record Repositories (1990)

Condition of items

The cost of conservation needs to be taken into account when considering anything for the collection. If an item is in need of significant conservation expenditure in order to be suitable/safe for display or storage it should not be accepted unless funds are available to pay for the work.

Duplication

The Museum should not accept duplicate items nor even items that are similar to some already held. The aim of the collection is to be representative not comprehensive.

Loans

Items will only be accepted for the collection if the title is transferred. Long term loans will not be considered unless there are exceptional circumstances.

Future Use

Consideration must be given to how new acquisitions will be used by the Museum in future.

Likelihood of display is one important criterion. Some material may be collected for research purposes but the Museum's limited facilities for researchers should be born in mind and alternative repositories e.g. the Essex County Record Office considered.

Material which does not fulfil all policy guidelines

The Museum maintains the right to refuse items offered for its collection whether by gift or bequest, although it will endeavour to suggest other museums as appropriate. Acquisitions outside the current stated policy will only be made in very exceptional circumstances, and then only after consultation by the governing body of the museum itself, having regard to the interests of other museums.

Collection types

Set out below are the key aims within each discipline. All are subject to the conditions of acquisition in 2. In addition the Museum will attempt to be representative in each of these areas where possible, in terms of sex, race, age and ability.

Archaeology

To collect archaeological material from this area from the earliest times. This will be through organised excavation work or through casual finds. Archaeologists will be consulted in order to help decide what finds should be preserved.

Conditions will be stipulated in the case of organised excavations about how the material should arrive at the Museum, i.e. it should be washed, marked bagged, boxed and written up.

It should also be accompanied by the site paper archive.

'Collection' of archaeological material will not always be necessary, if the sites of any finds are notified to the County's Archaeological Unit for inclusion on the County Sites and Monuments Record.

Applied art

To collect works of applied art of all periods which depict local scenes, is locally produced or is produced by artists with direct local connections, provided the work is of more than local significance.

Costume and textiles

To collect a representative selection of costume and textiles made, worn or purchased locally, of all periods including current fashion and textiles.

Fine Art

To collect works of fine art depicting local scenes or people, of any period. To also collect the work of local artists with direct local connections if their work is of more than local significance.

Natural sciences

To collect only such specimens as are needed to maintain a small local reference collection and to provide adequate displays of local natural science in the Museum.

Industry and technology

To collect items which illustrate the development and products of local industries. The collection of objects will be supplemented by photographs, printed ephemera, books, plans, sound recordings etc. as appropriate.

Social history

To collect items which were made or used in St Osyth and which illustrate the way of life of the people who live/lived here.

Photographs

To collect photographs of the best available quality of the village and surrounding area which can be used for research, exhibition and publication. The Museum will aim to keep to the Code of Practice on Archives for Museums in the United Kingdom (1996) with respect to the photograph collection.

The Museum has an extensive collection of images given to the Museum. New images should be quality original prints.

Preference will be given to black and white images because of the slower rate of their deterioration when stored.

Photographs taken into the collection must be accompanied by background information on the content of the shot.

Copyright of original will be transferred to the Museum, any exceptions will be recorded and kept with the photograph.

Digital Images

To collect of the best available quality of the village and surrounding area which can be used for research, exhibition and publication.

Digital Images will be stored wherever possible with background and source information.

To aid research and record keeping all photographs held at the Museum will be scanned.

If it is necessary to make alterations to images, then the original copy and the altered version will be retained and filed.

The use of digital images from the museum is at the discretion of the Museum and the copyright of all images is retained by the Museum. Conditions will apply.

The museum will respect the wishes of people appearing in images with respect to publication, display or exhibition.

Twentieth and twenty-first century collecting

All the criteria in section 3 apply but the wealth of twentieth century material available has led to a more specific policy, especially in the case of furniture both domestic and retail.

Large objects

St Osyth Museum has very little space for large objects such as large furniture and will only accept these under very special circumstances at the discretion of the Management Committee.

Contemporary collecting

The ephemeral nature of much of modern society means that contemporary material needs to be collected while it is still current.

Collecting strategy

There is no complete strategy for routinely collecting contemporary material, largely because of the limits of our resources in terms of time, staff, storage and money. Instead a watching brief will be kept on events and activities within the village.

Material will be collected which relate to any which seem to be significant e.g. the Millennium Celebrations in 2000 or any particular fashion trend.

Disposals policy

This policy is formulated according to the Museums Association Code of Conduct for Museum Professionals and the Museums Association Code of Practice for Museum Authorities. In addition it includes detail required by Resource in order to meet the requirements of the Museum Registration Scheme, phase 2.

Presumption against disposal

When an object has been given to St Osyth Museum (via a formal Transfer of Title form) it is the responsibility of the Museum to preserve that object as far as is possible.

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

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 principle 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.

Grants from external funding bodies

Where a museum object has been acquired with the aid of an external funding organisation, permission from that organisation will need to be sought before the object is deaccessioned or transferred to another museum. If the object is sold repayment of the original grant may be required.

Reasons for disposal

Disposal may be considered for one or more of the following reasons:

- The object is in such bad condition that it has become useless for display or research purposes.
- The object is a duplicate of something already in the collection.
- The object is not of sufficient relevance to the history of St Osyth or the immediately surrounding area.
- Photocopies of original documents, cuttings from newspapers, or local leaflets would have to be of great significance to justify being kept in the collection.
- The Museum's governing body, acting on the advice of the museum's professional staff, may take a decision to return human remains, 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. Under such circumstances it is recognised and accepted that it would be inappropriate to apply the standard procedure outlined in this policy.

Notification

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 appropriate professional journals if appropriate.

The announcement will indicate the number and nature of 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.
(Relates to MGC Guideline 4.2.5f)

Exceptions:

- Material is in the care of the museum but has not been accessioned e.g. Education collection material or donations which have not yet been accessioned.
- Items which are being de-accessioned because they are photocopies of original documents or cuttings from newspapers.
- The object is in such bad condition that it has become useless for display or research purposes.

Specialist advice

Specialist advice should be sought on the possibility of disposing of objects from the collection. This will include referring to outside specialists in other museums when there is no relevant expertise at St Osyth Museum.

Authority

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 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, if any, and not of the curator of the collection acting alone. At St Osyth this means any object being considered for disposal has to be agreed between Archivist and Museum Committee. It then has to be agreed with St Osyth Parish Council.

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 circumstances improvements relating to the care of the collections may be justifiable. Advice on these cases will be sought from Resource.

Method of disposal

The following methods of disposal can then be considered.

They should be considered in the following order, except if the object is in such bad condition that it has become useless for display or research purposes:

- Transfer to a relevant registered museum
- Transfer to another relevant collection
- Return to donor
- Donation to school or charity
- Destruction

Records

Records will be kept of all disposal decisions and the items involved and proper arrangements made for the transfer, as appropriate, of the documentation relating to the items concerned.

Policy review procedure

The Acquisition and Disposal Policy will be published and reviewed from time to time, at least once every five years. The date when the policy is next due for review is 2024.

The Area Museum Council or its successor body 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.

Appendix Definitions

Definitions of words used in the above document and in a museum context.

Collection:

A collection is an organised assemblage of selected material evidence of human activity or the natural environment, accompanied by associated information. As well as objects, scientific specimens or works of art held in the museum building, a collection may include buildings or sites.

Safeguarding:

Safeguarding includes undertaking conservation, security and collections management.

Making accessible:

Making accessible includes undertaking interpretation, education, exhibition, outreach, documentation, research and publication within or outside the museum's own building.