



Blake Museum  
**Blake Museum, Bridgwater  
Collections Development Policy**

**Name of museum:** Blake Museum

**Name of governing body:** Bridgwater Town Council

**Date on which this policy was approved by governing body:** 16th March 2015

**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:** March 2018

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.

**1. Relationship to other relevant policies/plans of the organisation:**

The Blake Museum Forward Plan, Documentation Policy, Care and Conservation Policy and Care and conservation Plan.

1.1. The museum's statement of purpose is:

**The Blake Museum Bridgwater is established:**

- to rescue from loss and destruction the relics of our ancestors;
- to collect, preserve, conserve and to show relics of history relating (principally but not exclusively) to Bridgwater and its immediate surroundings;
- to show visitors that Bridgwater is not indifferent to its own history;
- to interest visitors in what has happened in Bridgwater since it was granted its first Royal Charter in the reign of King John;
- to give the townspeople of Bridgwater pride in their past;
- to reveal that great events have taken place within the town and adjacent areas and set them in the context of the history of England;
- to honour the lives of great men and women who have lived or been associated with the town, and, in particular but not exclusively, Robert Blake.

- 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, 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.
- 1.7. The museum will not undertake disposal motivated principally by financial reasons

## **2. History of the collections**

Blake Museum was founded by Bridgwater Borough Council in 1926, and initially concentrated on General-at-Sea Robert Blake and the Battle of Sedgemoor to the exclusion of pretty-well everything else. From the 1950s Social History was included. In 1957 No 7 Blake Street was purchased, allowing the Museum to expand towards the Mill at the end of Blake Street. In the 1960s when the local brickworks closed down, a number of artefacts were acquired. In 1974, the local government changes meant the museum's building and contents were transferred to Sedgemoor District Council. In 1983 a Museum Custodian was appointed by the District Council and later the Council tried to close the museum. Following protests, the museum was run by volunteers, but funded by the Council, with a voluntary administrator. He was succeeded by a paid Museum's Officer. In the early 1990s the Bridgwater Museum Trust was formed to purchase the Mill to allow for expansion of the museum, but in 1995 an arson attack destroyed the upper floor of the Mill, but without material damage to the museum collections. In 2000 a full-time education officer was appointed. In 2002 a new Museum Officer was appointed on the retirement of the earlier one. On the autumn of 2007, the District Council announced it was to close the museum, disperse the collection and redevelop the site.

After comprehensive negotiations, the District Council, agreed to transfer the museum and contents to the Bridgwater Town Council, and it would be run by volunteers from the Museum Friends. The transfer was effected on 1 April 2009. For the next four years serious work was undertaken in the museum to bring the building up to modern standards.

### **3. An overview of current collections**

3.1. Existing Collections Those items acquired by transfer from Sedgemoor District Council (the former owners of the collections) on 1 April 2009 and listed in Schedule 2 of the Agreement.

#### 3.2. Subjects

##### **Archaeology**

The collection consists mainly of finds from archaeological digs, and chance finds. The principal source for much of the collection has been from the fieldwork of Bridgwater and District Archaeological Society. The collection also includes plans, drawings and some archive material. Approximately 50% of the material is from Bridgwater itself and the remaining half from the surrounding area. The period represented is from the Prehistoric period to post mediaeval. The collection includes 2 Mesolithic skulls, found at Greylake, near Othery. A significant collection of local Roman material, forming the Tarrant collection, includes numerous examples of cast brooches.

##### **Archive, Printed Ephemera and Photographs**

The material held by the museum supports the social, industrial, and military history collections. The Archive and Ephemera contain letters of Admiral Blake and the Duke of Monmouth, trade catalogues and carnival and political posters, electoral registers and pamphlets. The Photograph Collection is very extensive and has been catalogued. It represents the work of several local photographers and extends to subjects outside the collections area but is retained as their oeuvres. The material includes glass plates, negatives, original prints from the 1860s and later, transparencies and colour prints. Some of the museum's archive material is housed in the Somerset Record Office

##### **Social & Industrial History**

The existing material has been divided into four categories: domestic, agricultural, maritime and industrial. The collection contains a number of typological groups, such as Friendly Society Brasses, Horse Brasses and Constables' Staves and Truncheons, as well as individual items of particular note; e.g. the L'Escopette Camera (one of only three known in existence, it has a Bridgwater association). Domestic life includes artefacts associated with the home, laundry, preparation of food, and leisure pursuits. Items that reflect community life include that from educational establishments, societies, churches and public houses, local Guy Fawkes Carnivals. Rural life is represented by a small collection of agricultural machinery and tools, blacksmiths' bellows, saddlers' tools and dairy equipment. Industrial material includes an extensive brick and tile collection, brewing, glass making, bell founding, and the port trades of shipbuilding and rope and sail making. The maritime collection, includes a sizeable collection of model ships, a model representing Bridgwater

Docks circa 1900, various documents, and a selection of craft tools from associated trades. The period covered is from Tudor to the present. A large collection of the museum's brick and tile material was transferred to the Brick & Tile Museum at Bridgwater in the 1990s. Some Carnival material was transferred to the Bridgwater Carnival Centre in 2010.

### **Costume and Textiles**

The collection, largely collected during the 1980s, consists mainly of women's garments dating from the nineteenth century, with some examples of twentieth century items. Menswear is under-represented, but there is a stronger selection of underwear and children's garments, and fashion accessories of the Victorian period. There is a small collection of samplers which includes some eighteenth century examples, and lace making paraphernalia. In 2000 the Museum acquired material to represent the products produced by the textile industries in Bridgwater in the 20th Century. Much of this material is of national significance, in particular products made by S. Leffman and Son (later Baird Clothing) and shirt and collar manufacturers. The collection is severely constrained by storage and display space, which is inappropriate for much of the material.

### **Decorative Arts**

The museum has a small collection of Decorative Art items, which are illustrative of its major themes, in particular furniture and artefacts, associated with the seventeenth century and with Robert Blake. Of particular note are Blake's sea-chest, and a stained glass panel by Edward Frampton dated 1889 depicting Blake's funeral. On loan from the Alford family are items of personal effects connected with three Somerset families. The museum also has a small collection of presentation silver and artefacts associated with the Borough of Bridgwater. Of individual interest is a nineteenth century replica of the Alfred Jewel, as well as several clocks made in the town.

### **Fine Art**

This is almost exclusively confined to two-dimensional graphic art, and comprises maps and prints of a local and topographic nature, watercolours and oil paintings dating from the seventeenth century. The material includes pencil drawings, pictures and silhouettes of three Somerset families, on loan to the museum. Over 300 drawings, paintings and water colours by John Chubb (1746-1818) represent a substantial proportion of the work of the Bridgwater-born artist. The collection is complemented by nineteenth century prints of his sketches of the town.

### **Military History**

The collection consists mainly of material from the Civil War period, the Battle of Sedgemoor and the two World Wars. Some Battle of Sedgemoor material is on loan to the Battle of Sedgemoor Heritage Centre at Westonzoyland.

## **Numismatics**

The collection includes coins, military commemorative medals of local significance, a small number of Somerset bank notes and about forty public house and trade tokens of local provenance.

### **3.3 The Geographic Area of the Collections**

The Museum has acquired items originating from, used in, or having connections with, principally, but not exclusively the Town of Bridgwater and the parishes of the former Rural District comprising: Ashcott, Bawdrip, Bridgwater, Bridgwater Without, Broomfield, Burtle, Cannington, Catcott, Chedzoy, Chilton Polden, Chilton Trinity, Cossington, Durleigh, East Huntspill, Edington, Enmore, Fiddington, Goathurst, Greinton, Lyng, Middlezoy, Moorlinch, Nether Stowey, North Petherton, Othery, Otterhampton, Over Stowey, Pawlett, Puriton, Shapwick, Spaxton, Stawell, Stockland Bristol, Thurloxton, Wembdon, West Huntspill, Westonzoyland, Woolavington and, in the District of West Somerset, Stogursey. The Museum has also collected items relating to Burnham and Highbridge Carnival which relate to Bridgwater Carnival Clubs.

## **4. Themes and priorities for future collecting**

The museum does not intend to change the existing themes and priorities for future collecting

## **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.

The museum holds a collection of costumes and textiles in storage which cannot be displayed or conserved in a proper manner. It is therefore proposed that costumes and textiles which are of no local interest, will be disposed of in accordance with agreed procedure.

The museum also holds a number of landscape, portrait and seascape paintings that have no local interest. It is therefore proposed to dispose of those so identified, in accordance with agreed procedure.

## **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 museum(s)/organisation(s):

Axbridge and District Museum  
Somerset Brick and Tile Museum  
Museum of Somerset  
Somerset Record Office  
Somerset Rural Life Museum  
Bridgwater Carnival Centre  
Battle of Sedgemoor Heritage Centre  
Westonzoyland Engine Trust

## **8 Archival holdings**

The Museum holds a limited amount of archival material, mostly paper, and consults with the Heritage Service and Somerset Archives on matters of conservation. Some of the Museum's archive is held in the County Archive Office

## **9 Acquisition**

- 9.1 The policy for agreeing acquisitions is:

Acquisitions are authorised by the Curator, following consultation with the Curatorial team. The chief criterion is that the objects must relate to the collecting area, See 3.3 above.

- 9.2 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).
- 9.3 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.

## **10 Human remains**

- 10.1 As the museum holds or intends to acquire human remains from any period, it will follow the procedures in the 'Guidance for the care of human remains in museums' issued by DCMS in 2005.

## **11 Biological and geological material**

- 11.1. 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.

## **12 Archaeological material**

- 12.1 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.
- 12.1 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).

## **13 Exceptions**

- 13.1 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.

## **14. Spoliation**

- 14.1 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.

## **15. The Repatriation and Restitution of objects and human remains**

- 15.1 The museum's governing body, acting on the advice of the museum's professional staff, if any, may take a decision to return human remains (unless covered by the 'Guidance for the care of human remains in museums' issued by 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. This will mean that the procedures described in 16.1-5 will be followed but the remaining procedures are not appropriate.
- 15.2 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'

## **16. Disposal procedures**

- 16.1 All disposals will be undertaken with reference to the SPECTRUM Primary Procedures on disposal.
- 16.2 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.
- 16.2.1 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.
- 16.3 When disposal is motivated by curatorial reasons the procedures outlined below will be followed and the method of disposal may be by gift, sale, exchange or as a last resort - destruction.
- 16.4 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.



- 16.5 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 professional curatorial staff, if any, and not of the curator or manager of the collection acting alone.
- 16.6 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.
- 16.7 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).
- 16.8 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.
- 16.9 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.
- 16.10 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.
- 16.11 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 de-accession and disposal.

## **Disposal by exchange**

16.13 The museum will not dispose of items by exchange.

## **Disposal by destruction**

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

16.15 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.

16.16 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.

16.17 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.

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

Signature: Graham Granter  
Chair of MSC

Date: 16 March 2015

Certified: Alan Hurford  
Town Clerk

Date: 16 March 2015