



The Royal College of Surgeons of England

Museum Acquisition & Disposal Policy

1 Purpose of the Acquisition & Disposal Policy

- 1.1 The purpose of this policy is to comply with the requirements of MLA's Museum Accreditation Scheme concerning the Acquisition & Disposal of collections and to encourage public confidence in the museum as a suitable repository.
- 1.2 It also defines the present state and use of the collections and reviews the current policy of acquisition and disposal. It ensures material is accepted according to a recognised strategy and serves as a reference document to guide curatorial decisions.

2 Items covered by this Acquisition and Disposal Policy

- 2.1 All surviving items acquired by or for the former Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons and by or for the public museums founded since 1950. Historic items acquired by the College and associated with the history of the College and the surgical profession.
- 2.2 The Hunterian Collection consists of 3850 specimens and artefacts prepared or owned by the anatomist and surgeon John Hunter. The majority of the collection (approximately 3600 specimens) consists of preserved specimens of human, animal or plant tissues. Of these, 800 are dry preparations of varnished soft tissues or prepared bones. The remainder is preserved as wet tissue specimens. The collection also includes a small number of surgical instruments, personalia and items of furniture, as well as paintings by William Hodges, George Stubbs and Benjamin West. It includes items purchased by Hunter, such as a collection of 200 microscope slides prepared by William Hewson in the 1780s. Hunter's published works, surviving manuscripts and casebooks are held in the College Library.
- 2.3 The Hunterian Collection was designated in December 1999 by the Museums & Galleries Commission, now MLA, as a collection of outstanding national importance.

- 2.4 The College Museum Collection comprises items added to the College Museum since 1799. A few items pre-date Hunter – for example, a set of four anatomical tables showing dissections of the nerves, veins and arteries brought back from Italy in 1648 by the diarist John Evelyn. The majority of the collection consists of wet and dry preparations of human and animal tissues prepared for the College Museum by conservators such as Richard Owen and Arthur Keith. There are a number of specimens from the collections of significant surgeons, scientists and antiquarians, including material acquired from Sir Hans Sloane, John Heaviside and William Blizard. Among the artefacts in the collection are a series of wax anatomical models made by Joseph Towne in the mid-nineteenth century and a collection of English and European ceramic apothecary jars from 16th –19th centuries.

The Odontological Museum Collection contains over 10,000 specimens relating to human and comparative dental anatomy and pathology. It contains important anatomical preparations donated by some of the founding figures of British dentistry in the mid-nineteenth century, as well as examples of pathological conditions such as ‘phossy jaw’ – a bone necrosis common among Victorian matchmakers. The collection also contains a comprehensive series of vertebrate skulls, including an extensive collection of primate crania, which demonstrate normal and pathological dentitions.

- 2.6 The Microscope Slide Collection contains approximately 30,000 slides. As well as the Hewson slides from the Hunterian Collection there are extensive series of preparations from the early nineteenth century including approximately 11,000 slides prepared by John Quekett in the 1830s and '40s. The collection also contains numerous slides made from Hunterian and later specimens which are no longer extant.

- 2.7 The Historical Surgical Instrument Collection contains approximately 7000 surgical instruments and other items of medical equipment, principally from the 19th-20th centuries. It includes 3170 instruments on long-term loan to the Science Museum. The collection includes the instruments and experimental apparatus of Joseph Lister, the pioneer of antiseptic surgery.

- 2.8 College Art Collection
The close links between art and science is well demonstrated through the fine art collection of approximately 550 items. There are examples of the work of leading portrait artists of the day - Hans Holbein, William Hogarth, George Dance, Joseph Nollekens, George Romney; Sir Thomas Lawrence, and Sir Francis Chantrey. Surgeons often commissioned artists to draw specimens for them or to paint people and animals with unusual conditions as can be seen by J.L Agasse paintings of horse-breeding experiments or the famous pastel drawings of facial injuries made during the First World War by Sir Henry Tonks for Sir Harold Gillies. Surgeons also learnt drawing in order to record material for themselves for scientific or artistic reasons as in William Cheselden's paintings of arrangements of skulls or Sir Richard Owen's drawings of animal specimens. The history of the College itself and the evolution of its building in Lincoln's Inn Fields is represented by the drawings of George Scharf and others.

3 Future collecting

3.1 The Hunterian Collection is a closed collection.

3.2 The College Museum Collection is subject to active collecting in the following areas:

- artefacts associated with surgical research or training (including the basic surgical sciences of anatomy, pathology, physiology and histology) since 1800, particularly where these are related to the College's own activities;
- instruments and other artefacts relating to the practice of surgery since 1745 which are closely associated with important figures in the history of the College and/or the Company of Surgeons;
- other artefacts associated with the history of the College and the Company of Surgeons.

3.3 The Odontological Collection is a closed collection.

3.4 The Microscope Slide Collection is a closed collection.

3.5 The Historical Surgical Instrument Collection is subject to active collecting in the following areas:

- instruments associated with the development of surgical practice, research or training since 1950.

3.6 The College Art Collection will acquire portraits of important people connected with the College and exceptionally in the wider surgical profession. It will also acquire representations of British surgeons at work.

3.7 Historical anatomical and pathological preparations are collected only if:

- they are over 100 years old
- they demonstrate important surgical procedures
- they have other significant connections with the history of anatomy, surgery or pathology
- we can demonstrate they have been acquired and will be kept in accordance with the terms of the code of practice for historical human remains, cf. also section 5 of this policy

3.8 Modern anatomical and pathological preparations less than 100 years old will be collected only if:

- they demonstrate important surgical procedures or conditions
- or they are required for teaching purposes within the College
- we can demonstrate they have been acquired and will be kept in accordance with the terms of the Human Tissue Act 2004, cf. also section 5 of this policy.

3.9 Limitations on collecting

The museum 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. It will take

into account limitations on collecting imposed by such factors as inadequate staffing, storage and care of collection arrangements.

3.10 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.

Specific reference will be made to the following museums:

- Museums within the London Museums of Health & Medicine Group
- Thackray Medical Museum
- Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh Museum

3.11 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.

4. Acquisition procedures

4.1 The museum 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.

4.2 In particular, 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).

4.3 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 DCMS in 2005.

4.4 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.

4.5 The museum 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, such as 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 England, Northern Ireland and Wales) or reporting finds through the Treasure Trove procedure (in Scotland).

4.6 Any exceptions to the above clauses 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, or 4.5 will only be because the museum 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 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.

4.7 Spoliation

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.

5 Human remains

5.1 So far as human remains are concerned, the College Council will acquire human material only in accordance with current UK legislation, (including the 2004 Human Tissue Act or any subsequent legislation in connection with the acquisition, retention, disposal and use of human remains) or of any international legal regulation regarding the exportation and importation of human remains.

5.2 So far as human remains are concerned, the College Council will not dispose of any specimen in contravention of any relevant UK legislation (including the 2004 Human Tissue Act and any subsequent legislation in connection with the acquisition, retention, disposal and use of human remains,) or of any international legal regulation regarding the exportation and importation of human remains.

5.3 So far as human material derived from named individuals is concerned the College Council will consider requests for its return received from close relatives sympathetically, provided that (i) they can furnish legal evidence of the relationship, (ii) the wishes of the named individual are not contravened and (iii) provided the return does not involve contravention of any relevant British regulation (including the 2004 Human Tissue Act) or of any international legal regulation regarding the exportation and importation of human remains. Any decision to return such material can be taken only after due consideration by the governing body of The Royal College of Surgeons of England and in the case of

any material from the Hunterian Collection with the permission of the Board of Trustees of the Hunterian Collection.

- 5.4 So far as human remains and other artefacts of indigenous inhabitants of North America, Australia and New Zealand are concerned, the College Council will consider sympathetically requests for the return of material for which accurate geographical provenance exists provided that:
- The request originates from a representative body recognised as such under relevant regional, state or national legislation covering the return of human remains
 - Ownership of the remains is not contested between two or more recognised representative bodies
 - Return does not involve contravention of any relevant local or British or international legal regulation regarding the treatment or transport of human remains.
- 5.5 In the event of such a request being received, the College Council, and in the case of any material from the Hunterian Collection, the Board of Trustees of the Hunterian Collection, will seek opinion of the scientific and historical value of the specimens concerned, together with the views of the indigenous community from whom the request is made. This information will be taken into consideration when deciding whether to grant any such requests.

6 Disposal procedures

- 6.1 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 governing body accepts the principle that, except for sound curatorial reasons, there is a strong presumption against the disposal of any items in the museum's collection.
- 6.2 The museum will establish that it is legally free to dispose of an item. Any decision to dispose of material from the collections will be taken only after due consideration.
- 6.3 .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.
- 6.4 Decisions to dispose of items will not be made with the principal aim of generating funds.
- 6.5 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 will be sought from MLA.
- 6.6 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), 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.

- 6.7 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.
- 6.8 If the material is not acquired by any Accredited Museums to which it was offered directly, 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 professional journals where appropriate.
- 6.9 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. 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.
- 6.10 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.

7 Management of archives

- 7.1 As the museum holds 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) and in consultation with the College's archivist.

8 Policy review procedure

- 8.1 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 noted below. ALM London 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.

Date of approval by the Council of The Royal College of Surgeons of England:

Date of endorsement by the Board of Trustees of the Hunterian Collection:

Date of next review: 1/11/2010