

STOCKTON COUNCIL MUSEUM COLLECTIONS RATIONALISATION POLICY 2009-2012

1. INTRODUCTION

Stockton's collections comprise about 65,000- 100,000 objects, spread across more than 20 on- and off-site stores, including major warehouse accommodation in Billingham. The bulk of collections comprise social history but with notable fine art and archaeology elements (the latter mostly cared for via a Service Level Agreement by Tees Archaeology). In addition we have two sizeable bequests, Spence and Clephan. Poorly managed collecting, changes in collection targets and insufficient prioritisation of collections management - resulting in poor documentation and weak collection care - have all combined to produce an extensive collection, with variable quality and much duplication, which does not adequately tell the story of the Borough of Stockton-on-Tees.

The Museum Service's object collections fall into five groups: (from *Egeria* Museum Strategy , June 2005, p 16) (Recommendations pp 51-52)

- Material of interest and worth, but with little direct connection to Stockton Borough
- Objects unique to, or with significance to, Stockton Borough
- Generic mass-produced social history objects in general use
- Objects collected outside Stockton, for the aborted Street Development
- Paper and documentary records

As part of continually improving the service it provides to the people of the Borough, and seeking to work in new, more dynamic and flexible, ways, Stockton-on-Tees Museum Service will be re-examining and re-assessing its collections over the next five years. This is being done to raise the quality of collections; to ensure that the Service has collections it can best use in telling the story of Stockton; and also that it has collections it can use in providing a Service to the people of the Borough. As part of this process items will be identified which Stockton Museum Service no longer wishes to retain. This document sets out how such items will be identified, reviewed, processed and ultimately dispersed or disposed of.

2. USING COLLECTIONS

Stockton-on-Tees Museum Service collects and cares for material that helps to tell the story of the Borough and its people. Collections need to be used and to be useful in order to deliver this mission. Core collections are in the following three groups:

1) *Display material*

The best and most significant items in the collection should be available to the general public, through displays.

2) *Reserve collections*

Material should be made available through study areas or open display to follow up interest arising from displays.

3) *Long term research*

Material of significance kept in less accessible storage, viewable by appointment or kept as evidence for current or future research.

Less significant material falls into the following three categories:

4) Working or demonstration material

Items of working equipment or machinery that can be used, providing care is taken.

5) Education, handling, loan collection

Low grade items from areas where the collection has large numbers of duplicates. This may result in the item's ultimate destruction through use.

6) Set dressing and cannibalisation

Items that may be exposed to risk of damage or parts used to restore other objects.

Items not included in the above categories can be considered as candidates for **dispersal** to another museum or **disposal**. Consideration may also be given to their security needs and access circumstances.

3. OVERVIEW & ASSESSMENT OF COLLECTIONS

Estimated size of current collection types, and possible levels of rationalisation, are suggested below:

Collection category	Estimated size	Estimated rationalisation
Archaeology (not TA)	32	-
Fine Art	500	-
Decorative Art	1,000	20
Costume	15,500	5,000
Commercial & Industrial	11,000	1,000
Ceramics - local	300	20
Toys & Games	4,725	500
Fishing	60	20
Social & Domestic	15,500	7,500
Road Vehicles	70	20
Bicycles	20	5
Hand Carts	8	2
Ship Models	12	-
Railway items	TBC	-
Weaponry & Militaria	830	200
Loans	150	50
Local Studies/Archive	50,000	10,000
Total	99,707	25,000

4. RATIONALISING COLLECTIONS

4.1 Principles governing rationalisation

Museums collect, care for - and enable people to explore – collections, which they hold in trust for society. This has to date included a strong presumption against disposal of items from the collection. However, there are circumstances in which it may be the appropriate course of action. Every disposal must clearly demonstrate long-term public benefit. The Museum's Accreditation Scheme requirements notes the following:

- Disposals must only take place for sound curatorial reasons
- Raising money must not be the main reason for disposal
- Any money raised through disposal must benefit the remaining collections
- The decision to dispose must be taken by the governing body
- Full records of the disposal process must be kept
- The disposal process, as set out in the scheme, must be followed by all museums

These points are included in Stockton's Acquisition & Disposal Policy.

4.2 First steps in the Rationalisation process

This document comprises the first step in Rationalisation, providing:

- An overview of, and background to rationalisation within the Service (Sections 1 & 2);
- An assessment of the collections, including size and need for rationalisation (Section 3);
- Principles governing rationalisation (Section 4.1);
- Recommendations for rationalisation (Section 4.3)
- Disposal options and procedure (Sections 4.4 & 4.7), and
- Setting out a **Delivery Plan**, in Sections 4.2 & 4.3, including
 - Overall methodology
 - Timescales
 - Sequence & selection
 - Identification of the resources necessary

The rationalisation process will be managed at a senior level, overall by the Service Manager and on a day-to-day basis by the Interpretation & Access Co-ordinator, using dedicated staff recruited specifically for the process. These comprise:

- Collections' Rationalisation Worker (at Curator level)
- Project Assistant

Funded through the existing Service budget, and savings.

Other staff to involved will include Collections Access & Outreach Worker, Collections' Assistants, and – as necessary- other non-collections staff, including Learning. Although the recruited Officer has subject expertise and experience across at least part of the collection range, it may also be necessary to draw upon additional appropriate subject specialists.

The project will be carried out from 2009 to 2012. Initially the Project staff will need to consolidate and develop the collections' overview, and confirm:

- Collections type, number, location
- Describe the collection area, including spread, concentration, duplicates, absent material
- Documentation status of collections
- Carry out an initial match with inventory 2005-7

- Desktop survey per area, looking at
 - % contribute to collections (Section 4.4, a-e)
 - % poor quality etc (f-k)
 - % problematic (l,m)
 - % loans not on display

Appropriate documentation strategy will be used (and included in the *Documentation Procedural Manual*) for recording de-accessioned items, and full record keeping (including imaging) will ensure transparency.

The Museums Association toolkit will also be used, as appropriate, to help with the detail of the rationalisation process.

4.3 Sequence, timings & resources

The detail of the Rationalisation process will be the responsibility of the Project Officer (CRW), and will need to take account of internal & external pressures and circumstances, including:

- Costs of external costume storage, currently at Dickens Self-Store (DSS)
- Major development bid at Preston Hall & Park (September 2009 – August 2011)
- Need to progress development plans – e.g. emptying on-site stores, de-accessioning of unwanted road transport items

However, as an initial suggestion, the suggested sequence and timescale for subject rationalisation is as follows, per collections' type:

SEQUENCE & TIMINGS – 2 Year Programme

<i>Collection type</i>	<i>Action</i>	<i>Duration</i>	<i>Timing</i>
All	Collections' overview	3 months	May – August 2008
Transport/Road vehicles	Overview & research of interest	2 weeks	August 2008
Costume	Overview	3 weeks	September – October 2008
	Rationalise	6 months	January 2009 - June 2009
All	Admin	2 weeks	June 2009
Social & Domestic	Overview	3 weeks	June -July 2009
	Rationalise	6 months	July – December 2009
All	Admin	2 weeks	December 2009

Collection type	Action	Duration	Timing
Commercial & Industrial	Overview	2 weeks	January 2010
	Rationalise	2 months	February - March 2010
Militaria	Overview	1 week	March 2010
	Rationalise	1 month	April 2010
All	Admin	1 week	May 2010
Loans	Overview & rationalise	1 month	June 2010

SEQUENCE & TIMINGS – Year 3 of Programme

Collection type	Action	Duration	Timing
Toys	Overview	1 month	July 2010
	Rationalise	1 month	August 2010
Archives	Overview	2 months	September - October 2010
Archives rat	Rationalise	6 months	November 2010 - April 2011
All	Admin & Project Summary	1 month	May 2011

Based on the above workplan and timings, (and the processing of an estimated 20 objects per person per day) resources for the programme have been estimated, for both a two and three year programme. The two-year programme allows for the processing of part of the collection; in the third year of the programme the entire span of the collection, including Archives, will be covered.

4.4 Identify material for rationalisation

Items will be considered for disposal within the following categories, where material:

- a) does not match the current collecting policy
- b) has been unethically acquired
- c) does not help us to tell the story of the Borough of Stockton-on-Tees
- d) is irrelevant to the collection
- e) is not likely to be useful for display or research
- f) is un-accessioned (i.e. has not been correctly recorded)
- g) is un-provenanced (i.e. has insufficient background information to provide a context)
- h) is of poor quality compared with other examples
- i) has deteriorated beyond use
- j) is a threat to people or other objects (e.g. through infestation or health and safety concerns)
- k) is a duplicate
- l) cannot in all probability be cared for or used by the Stockton-on-Tees Museum Service

- m) would be more appropriate to another museum's or organisation's collection (e.g. Hartlepool Pottery items, or archives at Teesside Archives)
- n) Loan material no longer required for display will also be included.

4.5 Options for Disposal

As an institution which holds objects in trust for the public, when making a decision to dispose of an object the onus is on the Museum Service to keep material in the public domain: *dispersal* is always preferable to disposal. Options for disposal, in descending order of preference, are

- Transfer by gift, exchange or loan to another museum (or public institution, such as Teesside Archives).
- Sale to a private collection or individual
- Destruction

4.6 Decision Process

Decision making in the disposal process is time-consuming, but necessary and important to ensure

- that all legal responsibilities are fulfilled
- that the sensibilities of those who have gifted the items are respected
- that the public retain confidence in Stockton Museum Service and Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council as trustees of the Borough's heritage and history.

4.7 Selection of Material for Disposal

- The Project team will identify objects for rationalisation, assisted by appropriate subject specialists, as necessary
- Object records will be checked to verify that Stockton Museum Service is legally able to dispose of such items (e.g. bequest etc)
- Ownership status will also be checked from object records
- Permission to dispose will be sought from the Governing body, based on curatorial advice
- A publicity and communication strategy will be produced and implemented, in order to raise understanding of the positive nature of the process, minimise any adverse publicity, and retain public trust
- If material was acquired or conserved with grant aid, the funding body will be contacted for their needs and views on the posited disposal; unless material is transferred by gift to another Accredited museum, any grant-aid must be reimbursed.

4.8 Process for disposal of accessioned material

When Council has agreed the list of proposed disposals the following will be followed:

- Where possible the original donor will be contacted for possible return of the item
- As required by the Accreditation Scheme, and Stockton's A & D Policy, an advert will be placed in the *Museums Journal* for expressions of interest
- Any Accredited museums or other public institutions who have expressed an interest in such items will be contacted directly
- Material in which there is no interest will be either sold or destroyed
- Complete records will be made and kept of all transactions

5. FUTURE COLLECTING

5.1 Principles governing collecting

Future collecting will need to be monitored and regulated to ensure that a similar situation does not arise i.e. that items require future rationalisation. To ensure this, the 2006 Acquisition and Disposal Policy should be adhered to rigidly. Until some areas of the collection (for example, costume & toys) are rationalised, as a broad principle no further additions should be made to the collection, only in exceptional circumstances.

Additionally, other criteria should be applied to object offered, including

- No duplicates
- Only items in good condition
- Acceptance for handling collection – state on form at time of donation

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