

Oxfordshire Museums Service

Collections Development Policy 2013 – 2018

Name	Oxfordshire Museums Service
Governing Body	Oxfordshire County Council
Date approved by Governing Body	16th September 2013
Date for review of policy	September 2018

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The Oxfordshire Museums Service aims to inspire real meaning to belonging to Oxfordshire through the acquisition, care and creative use of the Museum Collections, its buildings and sites.

1. CONTEXT

The purpose of this policy is to comply with the requirements of the Accreditation scheme concerning Acquisition and Disposal and development of collections and to encourage public confidence in the Museums Service as a suitable repository. 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.

The Oxfordshire Museums Service is governed by Oxfordshire County Council. It works in partnership with a number of other museums in Oxfordshire, which are governed by or supported by other local authorities including Oxford City Council, other District Councils, Abingdon Town Council and the Vale and Downland Museum Trust. A specific role of the Museums Service is the care of collections and this is carried out with the financial support of the other museums and authorities through service level agreements and annual service plans. Each of the partnership museums is required to adopt this Collections Development Policy through the formal approval of its governing body.

2. OVERVIEW OF CURRENT COLLECTIONS

2.1 Archaeology

- a. All collections relate specifically to the modern county of Oxfordshire.
- b. The Archaeology collections cover a broad time span from the Palaeolithic to the 17th century. The County Museums Service is the official repository for archaeological material and archives and most of the collections are acquired following assessment and excavation in advance of development. Individual finds are either donated by landowners or acquired through the Treasure process.
- c. Geographically the collections come from throughout Oxfordshire.
 - i. **Vale of White Horse:** Abingdon collections are of national interest with outstanding prehistoric and Saxon material. The cemeteries at Shrivenham and Watchfield are key site to the interpretation and understanding of beliefs and social organisation amongst early Anglo-Saxon communities in the fifth and sixth centuries.
 - ii. **South Oxfordshire:** Dorchester was a centre of national importance in late Neolithic/early Bronze Age and sub-Roman periods; the Anglo-Saxon site archives from Berinsfield, Cuddesdon, Bix and Dorchester of national significance.

- iii. **West Oxfordshire:** the Standlake and Stanton Harcourt areas provide collections of nationally significant evidence for Neolithic/Bronze age settlement and ritual activity. The medieval Eynsham Abbey archive is of outstanding quality.
- iv. **Cherwell:** in addition to the prehistoric, North Oxfordshire hill forts and Grim's Ditch sites, the earlier and more recent excavations from Banbury Castle and medieval town are of considerable interest.
- v. **Oxford:** archaeological archives illustrate the prehistoric importance of the Oxford area. The Roman pottery industry is well represented. The medieval and post medieval collections are of national significance.

2.2 History

The History collections have been built up by careful acquisition over almost 50 years.

Donations from members of the public make up the majority of the collection and the Museums Service provides an important social and cultural function in caring for this material, which illustrates the lives of ordinary people in Oxfordshire over the last 400 years.

The collections are strong for the period between 1850 and 1920. The collections illustrating personal and domestic life are particularly good, with significant collections of toys and games, smoking and drinking items. Domestic life is well illustrated by collections of furniture, ornaments and domestic utensils.

Specific collections of note:

a. Working Life

- i. The strength of the collection is the agricultural and associated food processing and craft material illustrating the period 1850-1940.
- ii. Woodland industries are well represented. They include chair bodging, tent peg and ladder making from the Chilterns, and brush making. The timber 'bob' from Buscot and timber carriages are of national interest.
- iii. The Stonesfield slate collection is important and supported by excellent documentation.
- iv. The textile industry is represented by important collections from the blanket manufacturers Smith's and Early's of Witney, as well as material from the tweed industry in Chipping Norton and the plush industry in Shutford.
- v. Other rural crafts represented in the collections include masons' and stone working tools, blacksmithing and tin-smithing, leather working

(including saddlery, harness and boots and shoes), gloving. Pottery products are represented by the brick industry (e.g. Nettlebed) and country pottery makers (e.g. Leafield).

- vi. Brewing is particularly well represented, including items from Morrell's, Morland's, Hall's, Brakspear's and Hook Norton breweries.
- vii. Car manufacturing is well- represented by tools and equipment from Morris Motors and MG.
- viii. Retail activity is represented by collections from Cape's of Oxford, Banbury's and Brotherton's of Woodstock, and Rathbone's of Banbury.
- ix. Contemporary working life has been recorded at USAF Upper Heyford, Banbury Cattle Market and Early's of Witney, all before they closed; and to a limited extent by collection at the Rutherford Appleton Laboratories and Harwell.

b. Textiles

- i. The collection covers a range of men's, women's and children's dress from the 17th century to the 20th century, together with some costume accessories and textiles. Most of the collection is based on items relating to local use or manufacture, however, some items are included as comparative pieces. While many items individually are of local importance, when grouped together some form sub collections of regional significance. There are also a small number of items of national importance.
- ii. Groups of particular interest and importance include women's dress 1820 -1940, with an especially good concentration of printed cotton dresses of the early to mid-19th century, women's hats, men's and women's working dress (particularly smocks), a small collection of 18th century men's waistcoats and collections relating to local trades, such as corsetry, plush weaving, wool weaving (especially the Witney blanket industry) and gloves.
- iii. One-off pieces of greater significance, counted of national importance, include a 17th century cavalier's outfit; the Stonesfield embroidered carpet; a group consisting of an 18th century baby's cap and pocket, found secreted in a building; a late 18th century guidon for the Abingdon Volunteers; an 18th century corset, and a dress which belonged to William Morris' daughter, May.

c. Decorative Arts and Crafts

- i. Decorative arts and crafts are represented by historic material in our main collections and through The Contemporary Craft Collection, formerly the Southern Arts Crafts Collection, which was transferred to the ownership of Oxfordshire County Council in 1998. The core of this collection was formed by Southern Arts, the Regional Arts Board, through purchase over a period of around 30 years. The collection features a broad survey of craftwork covering a range of different media (including wood, silver, metalwork, ceramics, textiles and paper) from a national arena of crafts people. It is of regional significance overall, but includes a variety of pieces made by crafts people of international standing such as David Leach, John Makepeace, Michael Brennand-Wood and Alan Caiger-Smith.
- ii. Transfers have been made to the Contemporary Craft Collection of material of quality and value that was bought for the former Schools Loans Service, but which no-longer required by the Museums Service's Learning and Access team.

d. Fine Art

- i. The collection includes paintings, prints and drawings that are either by Oxfordshire-based artists or depict aspects of Oxfordshire. The works represent both well-known artists and also lesser-known individuals whose work is nonetheless of historical significance. In recent years significant additions have been made to the collection by purchases supported by grant aid from the National Art Collection Fund, Victoria and Albert Museum Purchase Grant Fund and Heritage Lottery Fund with support from the Friends of the Oxfordshire Museum.
- ii. The following are some of the better known artists and/or collections: works by Michel Angelo Rooker (1746-1801) including a view of Oxford Castle; a small but significant selection of works by William Turner of Oxford (1789-1862); a watercolour of a view near Banbury by Thomas Rolandson (1756-1827); a series of watercolours of Oxford by James Shuffrey (1859-1939); a series of watercolours of Oxfordshire public houses by Carl Woods (1950s); a single work, The Jungle, acrylic on canvas, by Terry Frost (1915-2003); a set of 12 prints published by the Penn Print Room of the Cotswold countryside by Robin Tanner (1904-1988); a series of watercolours of Banbury by Maurice Draper (1908 - 2012); a series of watercolours of Cogges by Nina Carroll (1932-1992).

- iii. The collection also includes a number of naive works, notably two views of Abingdon by Robert Howes (c1830) and a view of Church Green, Witney, artist unknown (c1800).
- iv. A portrait of Henry North of Woodstock, by Sir William Beechey (1753 - 1839) is the most significant recent addition to a collection of portraits of Oxfordshire people .

e. Photographs

The collections include a number of framed photographic prints that have been collected, catalogued and stored at the Museums Resource Centre owing to the lack of suitable storage space for such objects at the History Centre, as well as a large number of unframed photographs, mainly inherited from our Partner museums.

2.3 Natural Sciences

The natural science collections have undergone an extensive review since 2008 in line with the Disposal Procedures outlined in the 2006 - 2011 Acquisitions and Disposal Policy.

As part of the limitations on its collecting identified in the previous policy, the Museums Service considered the long term care and preservation of this collection and concluded that the retention of the complete collection required a disproportionate amount of curatorial and conservation management time to maintain its safety. It was also considered that this collection in particular presented a potentially serious threat through increased risk from infestation, to other sensitive collections, particularly costume and textiles.

The collections were transferred into the ownership of other organisations as outlined below:

- i. The collections, comprising of reference, voucher and reserve collections, have been audited and reviewed by experts in the field and material transferred to suitable museums and educational establishments that have appropriate facilities to care for the collections such as .the Oxford University Museum of Natural History, The British Museum, The River and Rowing Museum.
- ii. Other material, originally collected to support wider educational work, and not part of the main collection, was transferred to the Service's handling collections and to other museums and educational establishments in the County such as The Hill End Centre, The Northmoor Trust, and a number of schools.
 - iii. Geology: This collection consists of some 5,000 specimens, primarily of Jurassic fossils, but also including borehole samples of the older rocks underlying Oxfordshire. The British Geological Survey has accepted

cores for the national collection and the Oxfordshire Geological Trust has expressed an interest in curating and providing access to the handling collection currently retained in storage by the Museums Service.

- iv. Vertebrates (birds' eggs): This comprised most notably of the Jourdain Society's 'A' collection which although comparatively small at some 38 cabinets was of national significance. Following discussion with the Society and other public museums holding nationally significant, publically accessible collections, the collection was returned to the Jourdain Society. The Society then undertook the transfer of these collections to the British Museum - Natural History in order to safeguard physical and intellectual access. Augmented collections from private donors were returned to the donor or their family.
- v. All transfers and disposals have been recorded according to the standards required for accreditation and in accordance with SPECTRUM Procedure on de-accession and disposal.

2.4 Handling Collections

The Museums Service also holds collections which consist of items that are acquired and maintained solely for handling and other educational purposes. These objects are not collected for their Oxfordshire provenance and are not subject to this policy. Their management is governed by the Museums Service's Learning and Access Policy and follows best practise for the documentation and care of collections as is appropriate in respect of a collection of this nature.

3. THEMES AND PRIORITIES FOR FUTURE COLLECTING

- a. Future collecting will concentrate on developing existing strengths by updating and extending collections.
- b. It is important that any collected material does not duplicate existing holdings without good reason. Where possible, the display needs of museums should be fulfilled from existing holdings rather than by further collecting. It is recognised that sometimes this may not be the same as sourcing an object locally, as the public perceive that they are donating to a local museum, not the County's Museums Service, but it reduces duplication of effort and waste of resources.
- c. As additional storage space at the Museums Resource Centre is not available there is a presumption against collecting items which will not be put on display, unless they are of sufficient artistic or historical value to justify their preservation; when assessing objects for acquisition, an attempt should be made to estimate their likely interest to future generations.

- d. Progressive collecting will have at its centre the theme of working life, to provide a continuous narrative of the county's rural and industrial past.
- e. Consideration will be given to geographical areas identified as under-represented. For example areas that are not serviced by another local museum collection such as Bicester and Faringdon.
- f. Collecting should, where possible, be focussed and systematic rather than passively relying on offers from the public. It should preferably be based around a community project, an exhibition or research project.
- g. Consideration should be given to developing and improving collections by disposing of poorer examples if better ones are available.
- h. The Museums Service will no longer acquire Natural Science collections.

3.1 Archaeology

- a. The Service will continue to receive archaeological material and archives from excavations in advance of development throughout Oxfordshire.
- b. Other material will be acquired which
 - i. has a proven and documented association with Oxfordshire;
 - ii. complements the existing collection;
 - iii. results from a programme of research.
- c. Deposited archives of material from archaeological sites should always be supported by documentary archives created to the appropriate professional standard. All deposited archives should conform to the Museum Service's current Archaeological Archive Transfer Procedures.
- d. Archaeological units should be encouraged to identify material within site archives that is unlikely to have long-term historical value and to dispose of as much of this as possible prior to deposit.
- e. The Museums Service may, from time to time, require depositors to limit the collection of building material and animal bone to a representative sample.
- f. Archaeological archives should contain all relevant supporting documentation as specified in the Museums Service's current Archaeological Archive Transfer Procedures
- g. Other collecting will be in response to consultation with users and non-users and partners, and appropriate reference will be made to the Ashmolean Museum and the British Museum.

3.2 History

- a. Following the review in 2009- 2011 of the Social History collection, the focus of collecting will aim to improve the quality and depth of existing collections from all periods. This will include acquiring material in better condition and with stronger provenances than that currently held and with an emphasis on 18th and 20th century material. Progressive contemporary collecting will concentrate on items from the 1960s to the present and will have at its centre the theme of Working Life as this reflects most specifically the nature of change in Oxfordshire.
- b. Material will be acquired which:
 - i. has a proven and documented association with Oxfordshire and its communities;
 - ii. complements the existing collection.
- c. Whenever possible acquisitions will be supported by oral testimony, photography and/or other recording methods to ensure that background information about each object is obtained. Other collecting will be in response to consultation with users and non-users and partners. Care will be taken, particularly with generic and mass-produced material, to ensure that the local associations and available supporting information is of sufficient interest and quality to justify their collection.
- d. Future acquisitions within the scope of the existing collections should only be undertaken when examples have a strong local provenance and supporting information, or consist of particularly good specimens (especially those that can be used to replace poorer examples).
- e. Appropriate reference will be made to other Oxfordshire museums when acquiring collections.

3.3 Working and Rural Life

- a. Collections representing the industries of Oxfordshire, especially the Witney blanket industry and science and technology industries, should be systematically collected. Material relating to the Cowley motor works should be collected in cooperation with the Oxford Bus Museum.
- b. Material relating to changes in domestic and working life in Oxfordshire should be identified and systematically collected and represent the diversity of cultures within the county.
- c. Collections illustrating and documenting changes in rural life in Oxfordshire since 1945 should be acquired, with the exception of large items of machinery unless they are of particular historical importance.

3.4 Science and Medical

- a. Collecting should seek to systematically expand the existing holdings, in particular material generated after 1929 (at which date the collecting policy of the University Museum of History of Science stops); material from the Rutherford Appleton Laboratories and Harwell; other examples of significant innovation or manufacturing originating in Oxfordshire, such as Darvik artificial hearts.
- b. Collecting will be in response to consultation with users, non-users and partners, including advice from the Oxford Trust and other organisations on what is particularly relevant to Oxfordshire in this field.
- c. Appropriate reference will be made to other museums when considering acquisitions.

3.5 Textiles

- a. Everyday dress is of particular relevance in the 20th century, and the textiles collections from this period are generally weak; collecting should seek to systematically extend the holdings in this area.
- b. Representation of the costume and textiles of ethnic minority groups is a current weakness and collecting should seek to systematically extend the holdings in this area.
- c. Collections of women's dress will be continue to extend and develop holdings pre-1840 and post-1940 (lower priority will be given to material from within these dates).
- d. Working dress will be collected, especially that relating to local trades such as brewing and the waterways, also that relating to the newer occupations that play a distinctive role within the County.
- e. A priority will be given to items relating to, or providing a comparison with, local products such as corsetry (plus related costume showing the changing shape of dress), gloves, plush (with a priority for costume items made of plush) and wool weaving (especially household textiles such as blankets).
- f. Appropriate reference will be made to other museums when considering acquisitions.

3.6 Decorative Arts and Crafts

- a. The Museums Service has ceased to actively collect pieces to extend the Contemporary Crafts Collection, formerly Southern Arts Crafts Collection. It will undertake a collections review of the collection, with a view to transferring the collections to a more appropriate institution. The service will be working closely with the Crafts Council <http://www.craftscouncil.org.uk> and the Crafts Study Centre <http://www.csc.ucreative.ac.uk/> to ensure that the integrity of the collections is given due consideration in the transfer process. Material

acquired for the former Schools Loans Service that is not required by the Museum Service's Learning and Access team will also be part of this review.

- b. The Museums Service will from time to time continue to collect works that represent significant historic examples of decorative arts and crafts which have a direct Oxfordshire association, either through topical reference or through a significant Oxfordshire maker.
- c. Careful consideration must be given to works containing materials that will not prove durable. Work will be acquired with supplementary preparatory material whenever possible to assist with its interpretation.

3.7 Fine Art

- a. The Museums Service will continue to collect topographical work of relevance to the County, particularly the work of significant artists and of artists who have a close association with Oxfordshire. Portraits of Oxfordshire people will also continue to be acquired.
- b. Other works of art will be acquired where a clear relationship with the County or the collections can be established. In particular works from the following artists will be collected: J.B. Malchair, J. Buckler, William Turner of Oxford, Thomas Rowlandson, Sir William Nicholson, Paul Nash, and works by members of the Oxford Art Society.
- c. All works should be of an artistic quality or historic interest sufficient to justify their collection. Careful consideration should be given to works that are unique for whatever reason, especially if this means that they cannot easily be exhibited.
- d. Watercolours may be an exception to the requirement that objects are collected for display only as their nature does not permit them to be displayed for long periods of time, provided that the works themselves are of sufficient quality to justify their acquisition.
- e. Appropriate reference will be made to the Ashmolean Museum when considering acquisitions.

3.8 Photographs and Archives

- a. Photographic works will be forwarded to the History Centre as the appropriate repository, unless the items in question are part of an offered or existing collection of objects and add to the historical value of and knowledge about those objects.
- b. An exception may be made with framed photographic works which have been historically collected and stored at the Museums Resource Centre due to lack of storage space at the History Centre.
- c. Archives will not be collected but referred to the Oxfordshire Record Office (History Centre).

3.9 Historical and Geographical considerations

- a. Specimens and objects will be acquired to illustrate all periods of time in Oxfordshire.
- b. The geographic area to which the collection relates is Oxfordshire. All acquisitions must have a proven association with the county. Specimens and objects will be acquired with an Oxfordshire provenance; they will have been found or made in Oxfordshire, used by a person or people in Oxfordshire, or illustrate a place or activity or person associated with Oxfordshire.

4. LOANS

Inward Loans

- i. The Museums Service will use its own collections for display and community access wherever possible and has a presumption against procuring items on loan. Should a loan be required to complement and enhance interpretation, the Service will treat the loan according to the conditions stated in the loan agreement and according to all professional standards it subscribes to for its own collections.

ii. Outward Loans

The Service is committed to give the widest possible access to its collections and therefore welcomes requests for loans from other organisations. In order to ensure that the museum objects do not come to any harm, the lender must agree to and be able to fulfil conditions set by the Museums Service through a formal loan agreement. The Service has the right to refuse a loan. It expects that the costs incurred in preparing the loan will be met by the lender. These may include producing condition reports, photography, any necessary conservation work, independent valuation, insurance, framing, glazing or mounting of items, packing and transport and, in certain circumstances, installation.

5. THEMES AND PRIORITIES FOR RATIONALISATION AND DISPOSAL

- a. Critical evaluation and collections reviews are an integral part of all collections management activities, and should be considered when developing existing strengths, when auditing or enhancing collections records or reorganising object storage.
- b. The advice of object specialists will be sought in addition to curatorial considerations when looking to rationalise a collection.
- c. Rationalisation and disposal will be driven by the aim of improving the overall quality and care of collections.
- d. Objects identified for rationalisation and disposal should fulfil one or more of the following conditions.

- i. constitute a health and safety risk to staff, the public or other collections.
 - ii. have no documented or obvious Oxfordshire provenance or other historical or scientific value that merits their retention.
 - iii. be in such poor condition that they could not be effectively made accessible to the public *and* have no significant historical or scientific value that merits their retention.
 - iv. would be more appropriately cared for elsewhere, such as the records office, or another museum.
 - v. duplicates another object in the collections and has no documented or obvious Oxfordshire provenance or other historical or scientific value that merits its retention.
- e. Items may be considered for rationalisation or disposal with the aim of improving the overall quality of collections, i.e. to allow items of greater historical or scientific importance to be collected, *provided that*:
- i. the selection conditions outlined above are met and that the accepted material is approved by the Collections Management Team as being of greater significance than the material selected for disposal.
 - ii. the staff time and resources required to generate space for new acquisitions is not disproportionate compared with the significance of the acquisitions.
 - iii. wherever possible, community and expert involvement should be sought in selecting objects for disposal and for recommending acquisitions to be collected in their stead.
- f. Archaeological object archives present a particular disposal problem due to their size and volume, and the fact that certain parts of the archive may be valuable for long-term retention while others may not. Selection of all or part of an archive for disposal should follow the Archaeological Archives Forum disposal guidelines.
- g. Collections reviews have already been completed in the following areas:
- i. Large agricultural items;
 - ii. Natural History collections;
 - iii. Archaeology :Pottery;
 - iv. Archaeology Building material.
- h. Further areas for consideration for review with a focus on rationalisation should concentrate on the following collections areas:
- i. Agricultural implements
 - ii. Archaeology - animal bone

- iii. Archaeology - large stone

6. LIMITATIONS ON COLLECTING

- a. The Museums Service 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 Museum Accreditation Standard. It takes into account limitations on collecting imposed by such factors as inadequate staffing, storage and care of collections arrangements.
- b. In particular, the Museums Service will only acquire objects that it does not have the resources to properly care for and make accessible to the public if such objects are of outstanding historical or scientific importance, and the possibility exists that the objects can be cared for and made accessible within a definite period of time.
- c. Care must be taken when acquiring objects to ensure that they are suitable for long-term preservation and access, and especially that they will not impose a risk to the health and safety of staff and the public or to other collections.
- d. The Museums Service should take special care not to acquire duplicates of items already in the collections unless there is a compelling reason for doing so, for example:
 - i. an item that is in better condition than one already in the collections;
 - ii. one that has a significantly better provenance or related history.
- e. In such cases, careful consideration must be given to disposal of the original object giving due regard to the disposal procedures outlined below.

7. COLLECTING POLICIES OF OTHER MUSEUMS

- a. The Museums Service 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.
- b. Specific reference is made to the following museums:
- c. Ashmolean Museum (archaeology, fine art, Oxford University related material).
- d. British Museum (archaeology).
- e. Other Oxford University museums (anthropology, history of science, music, natural history, printing).

- f. River and Rowing Museum (Henley and rowing material).
- g. Other independent museums in Oxfordshire (these collect material associated with their immediate locality unless otherwise specified):
 - Bampton Museum
 - Bloxham Village Museum
 - Champs Chapel Museum, East Hendred
 - Chipping Norton Museum
 - Churchill and Sarsden Heritage Centre
 - Combe Mill
 - Didcot Railway Centre (Great Western Railway)
 - Dorchester Abbey Museum
 - Hook Norton Brewery Museum
 - Hook Norton Village Museum
 - Nuffield Place (Lord Nuffield-related collections)
 - i. Oxford Bus Museum (road transport collections, including Morris Motors)
 - Soldiers of Oxfordshire Trust (military collections)
 - Swinford Museum
 - Thame Museum
 - Tolsey Museum, Burford
 - Tom Brown's School Museum, Uffington
 - Wallingford Museum
 - Waterperry Gardens Museum
 - i. Witney and District Museum (some Witney blanket industry collections).
- h. Reference is also made to the following Oxfordshire County Council organisations:
 - i. Oxfordshire County Council History Centre (oral history, photographs and ephemera, with the exception of framed works).
 - ii. Oxfordshire Record Office (archives and documents).

8. 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 Museums Service itself, having regard to the interests of other museums.

9. ACQUISITION PROCEDURES

- a. The Museums Service 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.
- b. In particular, the Museums Service 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).
- c. 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 Museums Service 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 Department of Culture, Media and Sport in 2005.
- d. The museum will not acquire any biological or geological material.
- e. The Museums Service 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.
- f. Any exceptions to the above clauses a,b,c or e will only be because the Museums Service is either:
 - i. acting as an externally approved repository of last resort for material of local (UK) origin
 - ii. 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
 - iii. acting with the permission of authorities with the requisite jurisdiction in the country of origin
 - iv. in possession of reliable documentary evidence that the item was exported from its country of origin before 1970

- g. In these cases the Museums Service will be open and transparent in the way it makes decisions and will act only with the express consent of an appropriate outside authority.
- h. 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 Department of Culture Media and Sport in 2005.
- i. Gifts and bequests will only be accepted on the basis that any conditions are approved by the governing body of the Museums Service, and in all cases reference will be made to the limitations on collecting as specified in the policy. The governing body of the Museums Service will reserve the right to refuse any offer of material.

9. SPOILIATION

The Museums Service 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.

10. THE REPATRIATION AND RESTITUTION OF OBJECTS AND HUMAN REMAINS

- a. The Museums Service'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 the Department of Culture, Media and Sport in 2005) , objects or specimens to a country or people of origin. The Museums Service will take such decisions on a case by case basis; within its legal position and taking into account all ethical implications and available guidance and following the principles laid down in the Oxfordshire County Council Human Remains Policy 2011(Annex 3 to this document).
- b. 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'.

11. MANAGEMENT OF ARCHIVES

As the museums service holds / intends to acquire 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 (third edition, 2002).

12. DISPOSAL

12.1 Disposal preliminaries

- a. The governing body will ensure that the disposal process is carried out openly and with transparency.
- b. By definition, the Museums Service has a long-term purpose and holds collections in trust for society in relation to its stated objectives. The governing body therefore accepts the principle that sound curatorial reasons for disposal must be established before consideration is given to the disposal of any items in the Museum Service's collection.
- c. The Museums Service will confirm that it is legally free to dispose of an item and agreements on disposal made with donors will be taken into account.
- d. When disposal of a museum object is being considered, the Museums Service 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.

12.2 Disposal procedure

- a. All items recommended for disposal should be presented to the Museums Service's Collections Management Team, which meets monthly.
 - i. Individual items up to £1,000 estimated value may be disposed of by the Team without further reference to the Museums Service's governing body provided that there is a compelling reason for so doing and that the procedures outlined above are followed.
 - ii. Individual items up to £5,000 estimated value may be disposed of by the Cultural Services Manager under delegated powers without further reference to the Museums Service's governing body, following a recommendation from the Collections Management Team detailing why the material should be disposed of and provided that there is a compelling reason for so doing and that the procedures outlined above are followed.
 - iii. Individual items above £5,000 estimated value must be referred to the Museums Service's governing body, along with a recommendation detailing why the material should be disposed of.

- iv. Items that pose a significant health and safety risk to people or collections should be dealt with as soon as possible according to the appropriate legislation and guidelines. Wherever possible the disposal guidelines outlined above must be followed but it is recognised that it may not always be possible to reconcile these with the requirements of maintaining a safe working environment. Nonetheless, all disposals must still be fully documented.
- b. Some items may be designated as suitable for transfer to the Learning and Access Service or Handling Collections. This is considered a disposal from the collections, as the use of any object for handling implies that it will be destroyed or rendering unfit for purpose by the wear.

12.3 Motivation for disposal and method of disposal

- a. When disposal is motivated by curatorial reasons the procedures outlined in paragraphs above will be followed and the method of disposal may be by gift, sale or exchange.
- b. The museum will not undertake disposal principally motivated by financial reasons.

12.4 The disposal decision-making process

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 the 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. External expert advice will be obtained and the views of stakeholders such as donors, researchers, local and source communities and others served by the museums service will also be sought.

12.5 Responsibility for disposal decision-making

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 of the collection acting alone.

12.6 Use of proceeds of sale

- a. Any monies received by the museums service governing body from the disposal of items will be applied 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.

- b. The proceeds of a sale will be ring-fenced so it can be demonstrated that they are spent in a manner compatible with the requirements of the Accreditation standard.

12.7 Disposal by gift or sale

- a. 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 or sale, directly to other Accredited Museums likely to be interested in its acquisition.
- b. If the material is not acquired by any Accredited Museums to which it was offered directly 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 an announcement in the Museums Association's Museums Journal, and in other specialist journals where appropriate.
- c. 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 museums service may consider disposing of the material to other interested individuals and organisations giving priority to organisations in the public domain.
- d. The Museums Service will not dispose of items by exchange.

12.8 Documenting disposal

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.

13 POLICY REVIEW PROCEDURE

- a. The Collections Development 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 on the title page.

- b. 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 existing collections.
- c. Minor changes to the Policy (such as alterations to the phrasing required to meet Accreditation standards) may be approved by the Head of Community Services (or other officer) under delegated powers.
- d. Major changes to the Policy (such as revised definitions of collection or disposal) must be approved by the Museums Service's governing body.

14. DEFINITIONS

Accreditation

The Museum Registration Scheme was established in 1988 to support museums across the UK to focus on standards and identify areas for development. In 2004, the scheme was renamed Accreditation to better reflect its purpose. Currently administered by Arts Council England, the scheme defines good practice and identifies agreed standards, thereby encouraging development. It is a baseline quality standard that helps guide museums to be the best they can be, for current and future users. The scheme was reviewed and a revised standard issued in October 2011 for phased implementation from 2012 onwards.

Archaeological archive

The complete deposit of material from an archaeological investigation, including all the documentation (paper and electronic) as well as the finds.

Collections Management Team

The Collections Management Team is responsible for the acquisition and disposal of objects from the Museums Service's permanent collections. The Team is composed of the Director of the Oxfordshire Museum, Collections Officer, Curators, the Registrar and a Conservator and from time to time Curators from the Museum Service's Partner museums.

The Team may also invite other members as they think fit, such as representatives of special interest or community groups who would be able to contribute expert information. Such members should be instructed in the principles and ethical standards required in the acquisition and disposal of museum collections.

Governing body

The governing body of the Museums Service is the Cabinet of Oxfordshire County Council.

Handling collections

These consist of objects suitable for supervised or unsupervised handling by public primarily for educational purposes. The long-term destruction of such objects through wear and tear is implied.

Permanent collections

Those collections of the Museums Service that are designated as worthy of long-term preservation for their intrinsic historical or scientific value. Handling of these items, except by trained staff, is not normally permitted.

SPECTRUM

SPECTRUM is the industry standard for the management of collections and sets out how museums systems and processes can be used to manage key functions such as acquiring new material, assessing risk, managing copyright or making and receiving loans.

Appendix1

Oxfordshire Museums Service

**Collections Care and Conservation Policy
2013 – 2018**

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The Oxfordshire Museum service has a duty of care for the collections within its remit. This policy defines the principles which the service adopts to ensure that the collections are cared for to the highest appropriate professional standards, whilst at the same time balancing the needs of access with those of long term preservation of the collections.

Collections care and conservation has the following key objectives:

- To ensure that staff, volunteers and users of the museum service are aware of the roles and responsibilities in caring for the collections.
- To recognise the need for preventive conservation measures to promote the long-term preservation of the collections.
- To define levels of practical conservation appropriate to the needs of the collections and the organisation.

The purpose of this Policy is to comply with the requirements of the Accreditation Scheme concerning collections care and conservation and to encourage public confidence in Oxfordshire County Council as a suitable repository. The policy defines the current approach to collections care and conservation and serves as a reference document to guide curatorial decisions.

1. Governance

The Oxfordshire Museum Service is governed by Oxfordshire County Council.

A specific role of the Museums Service is the care of the collections that is carried out with the financial support of the other museums and authorities through service agreements and annual service plans. Each of the partnership museums is required to adopt this Collections Care and Conservation Policy through the formal approval of its governing body.

2. Responsibilities

3.1 Oxfordshire County Council has a devolved responsibility for the welfare of the museum collections in its ownership and those it has accepted as a loan.

3.2 The Museums Service, and in particular the Collections Officer, has overall responsibility for the care of the collections ensuring that the Service adheres to the standards of good stewardship for the collections and recommending strategic development of collections care.

3.3 The Collections conservation team, and in particular the Collections Conservator, is responsible for leading on conservation and collections care, and for ensuring that

issues relating to the well-being of the collections in the care of the Museums Service are managed and executed to an appropriately high standard.

3.4 Curatorial collections and museum staff have responsibility for ensuring that:

- Staff are familiar with the need for caring for collections by promoting and fostering good collections care practices.
- Work under their control is not putting collections at risk and ensuring that any potential risks are fully managed by consultation at the earliest opportunity with the Collections Conservator.
- Their staff are familiar with their roles within the disaster plans for collections.
- Due consideration is taken to the physical security of collections that are in their care.

3.5 All staff and volunteers have responsibility for ensuring that

- They do not put collections at risk and have attended the relevant training or have received instruction to minimise that risk.
- They report any issues relating to collections care to the Collections conservator, or through the correct communication channels.

3. STANDARDS

4.1 General Principles

The Collections team will lead on auditing the welfare of all the collections and their environs on a regular basis through the implementation of the Collections Management Plan. The Museums Service will endeavour to maintain a level of collection care, across all collections as following the framework of 'Benchmarking in Collection Care for Museums, Archives and Libraries, 2011 to at least the 'basic' standard, with the expectation to achieve higher levels where financially and operationally viable. Collections care will also be guided by the BSI: PAS198 Code of Practice for Environmental Management 2011

<http://www.collectionslink.org.uk/programmes/benchmarks-for-collections-care/691-benchmarks-in-collection-care-for-museums-archives-and-libraries>

<http://www.collectionslink.org.uk/discover/environmental-control/726-draft-bsi-pas198-code-of-practice-for-environmental-management>

Strategic priorities for collections care will be set out in the annual Collections Management Plan.

3.2 Standards in Collections Care

The Museums Service will:

- Ensure that a qualified ICON accredited conservator leads staff and volunteers in the implementation of preventive conservation measures.
- Work with relevant internal and external stakeholders to ensure the collections are stored and displayed to agreed environmental standards for temperature, relative humidity and dust/pollution.
- Put in place procedures to mitigate against the harmful effects of light and UV and to implement measures to rotate light sensitive items on display.

- Manage the Integrated Pest Management protocols at the Museums Resource Centre and The Oxfordshire Museum, and at Partner Museum sites, to ensure that collections are safeguarded from pest damage through mitigating procedures and training of all staff in the organisation.
- Manage the safe and secure movement of collections within and between museum sites and document movement of collections for loans and exits.
- Ensure staff, who handle collections receive appropriate training.
- Ensure collections are stored to appropriately high standards, and identify and lead on implementing agreed storage improvements.
- Manage procedures for access to stores and ensuring staff, contractors, and other personnel are made aware of safe access procedures.
- Ensure that collections containing hazardous materials are appropriately managed to meet all relevant health and safety regulations and that all staff are aware of their obligations in this matter.
- Ensure that collections are displayed to appropriately high standards, taking into account the duration and location of the display and the requirements of any external loans being displayed.
- Manage the welfare of collections during events through planning and implementation of mitigating procedures.
- Ensure that agreed protocols and procedures are adhered to for the physical research, analysis and sampling of collections
- Agree protocols and procedures for the dismantling, use and working of individual objects.
- Ensure that collections care standards cited in the Guidelines for the Deposition of Archaeological Archives are observed by archaeologists preparing archaeological material for deposition with the Museums Resource Centre.
- Manage and take the lead on the welfare of collections in all other circumstances not covered by the above policies and standards.

4.3 Standards in remedial conservation:

The Museums Service will:

- Ensure that all conservation treatments are assessed, carried out or led by a qualified ICON accredited conservator and that appropriate expertise is employed in the conservation of its museum collections.
- Ensure that the level of conservation work will be carried out to agreed standards with stakeholders input, where appropriate.
- Ensure all conservation work will be carried out in accordance with appropriate ethical standards and will aim to retain the integrity, cultural significance, and/or artist's intention of the collections being treated.
- Manage and coordinate all conservation treatment services, internally and externally.
- Ensure that student placements, interns and volunteers will receive appropriate and sufficient training to allow them to work supervised on the collections.
- Ensure that any work carried out on the collections, from treatments to analysis, is fully documented.

Oxfordshire Museums Service

Documentation Policy 2013 – 2018

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Oxfordshire County Council is committed to ensuring that all the collections in its care are documented, that this information is gathered, stored and made available and is accurate and reliable. Documentation of the museum collection is essential to establish and to maintain legal title to the collections and to meet Arts Council England Accreditation standards.

Collections documentation and the management of information about collections provide the key to an object's authenticity and history. Documentation is at the centre of every aspect of museum activity.

The aim of this policy is to ensure that the Oxfordshire County Council Museums Service commits to the appropriate level of object documentation in order to fulfil its responsibility in relation to the security, management and access to collections information.

1. Key objectives:

Documentation practices work to the following key objectives:

- Ensure accountability for all the collections.
- Maintain at least minimum professional standards in documentation procedures and collections information, with the expectation of achieving higher levels where financially and operationally possible.
- Provide widest possible access to the collections through the provision of information, digitisation, particularly through digital media.
- Maintain the security of the collections data.
- Provide audit and insurance information for Oxfordshire County Council.

2. Standards

The Museums Service has adopted the documentation standards and procedures, known as SPECTRUM 4 standards as recommended by the Museums Documentation Association and Collections Trust
<http://www.collectionslink.org.uk/spectrum-standard>

3.1 Cataloguing standards

We will catalogue our collections to either Inventory or Catalogue standard as outlined below:

- a. Inventory level
The inventory level is a basic accession record for an individual object or group of objects. This will allow any object in our care to be individually identified and verified. All accessioned items, loans and any other un-accessioned objects as appropriate are documented at this level.
- b. Catalogue level
The majority of objects will have full catalogue records for individual items. We will continue to add digitised images to the database to improve access.

3. Responsibility

3.1 Oxfordshire Museum Collection

The County Council through the Museums Service is responsible for the maintenance of the documentation systems. The Museums Service will maintain the digital documentation system for its own collections according to the standards mentioned above.

3.2 Collections owned by other organisations

The Museums Service is committed to keep accurate records of ownership and responsibilities for the collections where these are held on behalf of other partner organisation through a Service agreement. The documentation of collections from Partner organisations, such as Abingdon Town Council and the Vale and Downland Museum Trust, held by the Service as part of the stored or displayed collections, is the responsibility of each individual organisation. In order to maintain the integrity of the database all documentation must comply with the Spectrum 4 standards.

4. Method

- 4.1 Collections will be documented onto a collections management system, currently Modes Complete, to SPECTRUM 4 standards. The system is maintained by Oxfordshire County Council's ICT department and through subscription to the MODES User Association. Detailed operational guidelines concerning documentation procedures are recorded in the Documentation Procedures Manual.

5.2 The documentation system involving the passage of an object from acceptance to storage or display will be part of the training programme for all front of house and site manager staff at all museums.

5. Object Entry

Oxfordshire County Council Museum Service will record all items entering any of its sites, whether potential acquisitions, loans, enquiries or other deposits. This information will be recorded on a Deposit form.

6. Acquisition

The acquisition and disposal of objects from the collections is covered by the current version of the Collections Development Policy.

Each accession will be allocated a unique number and this will be marked onto the item whenever practicable. In the case of bulk archaeological material a number will be allocated to a whole site. This information is recorded in an accessions register which is maintained by the documentation staff.

7. Loans

All loans in and loans out of the Museums Service will be recorded following the appropriate procedures compliant with Spectrum 4. This information is recorded on a paper form and onto Modes Complete.

8. Security of Data

Measures are in place to ensure the physical security and long term preservation of all documentation records, whether paper or computerised. The accessions registers are held in a fireproof safe within an alarmed building in securely locked storage room which is behind two further security doors. Access to the room is controlled. The digital data is held on a server in another building by the Oxfordshire County Council ICT department. It is regularly backed up centrally and occasionally backed up locally after significant changes.

9. Sensitive data

Collections information will be recorded in compliance with all legal requirements, including the Data Protection Act (1998) and the Freedom of Information Act (2000). We will review requests for confidential data such as donor information, valuations or site details on a case by case basis, and in accordance with the applicable legislation and any legal agreements or conditions of gift.

10. Access

Objects will always be documented with a view to making the information accessible to the public. There will be an increased emphasis on digitisation ensuring objects are photographed or scanned to a high standard. The service will seek to publish collections online through the Heritage Search database and provide collections information to enhance our exhibitions and community engagement programme. The standards applied to cataloguing and digitisation will ensure that our collections information can be integrated into partnership projects using shared digital platforms.

11. Documentation Backlog

The Museum Service is committed to reducing its documentation backlogs. We will continue to work to resolve discrepancies between inventory records and existing documentation. Any accessioning backlog will continue to be addressed in a systematic manner, in accordance with the levels of staffing and resources available at the time. This will be reflected in the current Documentation Plan.

Oxfordshire Museums Service

Human Remains Policy 2011

Approved by Cabinet 12/12/11

Introduction

The Museums Service has developed a human remains policy according to the recommendations of the Code of Practice published by the Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) in October 2005. This policy gives guidance to those seeking to submit a claim for the return of human remains on the circumstances in which a claim may be accepted. It also sets out how the Museums Service curates, researches and displays the human remains in its care.

In the UK, the practice of excavating historic and prehistoric human remains, studying them and including them in museum collections is well-established. These remains are of great scientific interest in the fields of population, genetics, dietary studies and the history of disease in relation to ancient and historical societies. The Museums Service recognises that human remains are regarded as culturally sensitive.

County collections

The Museums Service holds collections of Social History and Archaeology relating to Oxfordshire, built up by bequest, purchase and gifts over the past fifty years. It uses them for education, inspiration and enjoyment through public displays at the Oxfordshire Museum and Partner Museums, loans to independent museums, and web-pages. The Oxfordshire Museum receives approximately 167,000 visitors per year. The Museums Resource Centre at Standlake houses the reserve collections and is the designated repository for archaeological site archives for the County. It is used for research mainly by external specialists.

Acquisition

All human remains held by the Museums Service are from archaeological contexts in the County. The Museums Service uses them for display and universities use them for teaching and scientific research. For these reasons the Museums Service intends to retain its collection of human remains and will continue to acquire them through the deposition of archaeological archives.

Definition of human remains

The definition used in this policy refers to skeletal and soft tissue parts of Homo sapiens, including hair and nails, and artefacts made of human and other components.

Type and quantity of human remains in the County collections

Types of human remains in the Museums Service's archaeology collections are unmodified skeletal remains and cremated remains from Oxfordshire sites excavated since the 1960s. They are of prehistoric, Roman and medieval date. These remains are catalogued on the Museum's database and, although not available on-line, the information can be made available to the interested public on request. At time of writing, there are 422 entries of human skeletal remains on the data-base. The Social History collections do not contain human remains.

Policy on human remains

Acquisition

In accordance with its acquisition policy and as the repository for site archives, the Museums Service will continue to acquire human remains as long as it is satisfied that it can hold them lawfully, their provenance is known and the remains are of potential value for research. The Museums Service expects that it will continue to acquire human remains from excavations in Oxfordshire and the transfer of these remains will be conducted in accordance with legal requirements and published professional standards of archaeological investigation. The Museums Service does not expect to acquire human remains that are less than 100 years old which would in any event be subject to legislation set out in the Human Tissue Act 2004.

Storage, conservation and collection management

The Museums Service will store human remains professionally and respectfully. Premises will be secure, clean and free of vermin and the storage environment will be stable and regularly monitored. Human remains will be stored in a designated part of these premises, access to which will be limited to museum staff and visitors by special arrangement. Where possible, the remains of each individual will be stored in a separate container.

Handling will be kept to a minimum and, where appropriate, conservation standard gloves will be worn. Where conservation is necessary, treatments will follow the principle of minimum intervention and be as removable as possible. The wishes of museum staff preferring not to see and handle human remains will be respected.

Loans

If requested by independent museums or university departments, human remains may be loaned for display or teaching purposes provided the borrowing institution meets the considerations set out in the DCMS Code of Practice and provides written assurances.

Display

Careful consideration will be given to the purpose and circumstances of displaying human remains whether by the Museums Service or by a borrowing institution. Such displays will be accompanied by explanatory and contextual information to heighten public appreciation and understanding. Where some special significance of particular human remains has been established, then particular sensitivity would be appropriate. Further consideration will be given to prepare visitors for the display, so that the remains are viewed respectfully and can be avoided by those who do not wish to see them. Borrowing institutions should provide the Museums Service with written assurances of agreement in this respect.

Access for research

Research on human remains may require destructive sampling. The Museums Service's agreement to such actions will depend on the condition of the remains, the credentials of the applicant, the merits of the project and the benefits that might accrue from it. Those given access will be reminded of the ethical obligations with regard to human remains and guidelines will be provided.

In due course, researchers are expected to make the results of their research publically available by depositing them with the Museums Service. As part of its documentation procedures the Museums Service will maintain a research register detailing all requests as well as research carried out. The register will list the project name, its research objectives, methodology, date, research results and outputs.

The Museums Service will not allow access to any human remains while the outcome of a claim for their return to a source community is pending, unless it is with the agreement of the claimant.

De-accessioning

Human remains may be de-accessioned if they do not meet the Museums Service's collecting criteria or in response to approved claims for return. In such cases, in accordance with its status as an accredited museum, the Museums Service is required to satisfy itself that the remains will be dealt with appropriately.

Claims for the return of human remains

The Museums Service presumes that its collections should stay intact for the benefit of the wider community, but it will give serious consideration to the return of human remains to a source community if a very close geographical, religious and cultural link can be demonstrated. For any claim to be considered, the claimant would have to establish a sound evidential base for a prima facie claim.

Procedure for making and processing a claim

The Museums Service wishes to be open and transparent with regard to approaches from claimants wishing to see the return of human remains to communities of origin. It will try to ensure that its actions are consultative and its negotiations are as equitable as possible.

Requests should be submitted in writing to the County Museums Officer. The request should include as much information as possible about the remains being claimed, the community making the claim, the reasons for the claim and the evidence that substantiates it. The County Museums Officer will be the single point of contact for claimants and other interested parties throughout the process and all enquiries should be submitted to him/her.

The claim will be formally acknowledged in writing including an indication of how long it is likely to take the Museums Service to process the claim and who will be consulted during this process. The time taken will depend on the quality of the information submitted with the claim, the timing of meetings and internal work pressures.

Claims will be assessed against criteria set out in the Appendix below, reflecting official guidance provided by the DCMS, English Heritage, faith communities and museums organisations.

Each claim will be discussed at the first Collections meeting following the receipt of the claim. The Collections Management Team is responsible for the acquisition and disposal of items from the Museums Service's permanent collections. The Team is composed of the County Museums Officer, the Curators and one representative

each from the departments of Conservation and Documentation based at the Museums Resource Centre. Having consulted those who excavated the remains and representatives of the community making the claim, the Collections Management Team may make a decision based on that information. Alternatively, it may request advice from external consultees such as relevant faith or community groups and the Oxfordshire Architectural and Historical Society, in which case it will be discussed at the next meeting of the Oxfordshire City and County Archaeological Forum (OCCAF).

Decision making

The timescale of decision-making and consultation will depend on relevant meeting cycles (for example, Collections meetings are held at two month intervals, OCCAF meetings at approximately four month intervals).

After the first meeting the dossier of the case will be made publicly available, giving an opportunity for all with an interest to comment. Any advice requested by the County Museums Officer or comments made to him/her will also be made publicly available. An open dialogue will take place with the claimants with regard to the claim and criteria against which the claim will be assessed.

In reaching a decision, the Collections Management Team will take account of the details of the claim and the advice of the Curator of Archaeology and all consultees in seeking a solution that as far as possible accommodates all interests.

Once a decision has been made a written report explaining how the decision has been reached will be sent to the claimant and then published on the Museums Service web-site. If the decision is taken to return the human remains then the Curator of Archaeology will begin discussions with the claimant as to when and how this will take place. Once the transfer is completed, the documentation of the detailed arrangements made will be lodged as part of the Museum Service de-accessioning records and in the remaining site archive.

Appeals against decisions

The arrangements for consultation and objective of seeking consensus are intended to minimise grounds for challenging a decision once reached. Appeals will only be considered on the basis that the procedures set out above have not been followed properly and should be made through the County Council's non-statutory complaints procedure.

APPENDIX

The criteria that the Museums Service will consider

The status of those making the request

Genealogical descendants. Under normal circumstances the wishes of claimants will be seriously considered if they can demonstrate a direct and close genealogical link to the human remains being claimed. However, claimants should do everything that

they can to ensure that they are the only possible claimants, and, if they are not, that there is agreement over who has the right to make the claim.

There may be exceptional circumstances where remains would not be returned to genealogical descendants, for example if the remains are deemed to constitute evidence in a criminal investigation. However, it is expected that in the majority of cases human remains would be returned to genealogical descendants.

In practice, individuals who died more than 100 years ago may have many descendants from more than one community, such that genealogical descent alone may not be a sufficient criterion.

Community of origin. Where a claim is submitted by a cultural community the Museums Service will seek to verify that the claimants have the authority to submit a claim for the return of the human remains; or where there is more than one group of claimants that they are fully supported by the other claimants.

For a group to be recognised and their claim for human remains considered the Museums Service would expect that claimants are able to demonstrate a continuity of belief, location and customs between themselves and those of the community from which the remains originate.

It would be unusual for the Museums Service to consider a claim from a community which did not either occupy the land from which the remains came, practise the same religious beliefs, or share the same culture.

The cultural and spiritual significance of the human remains

It would be expected, but not regarded as essential, that the claimant group should demonstrate that the human remains and their treatment have a particular cultural or spiritual significance to their community. Examples might include the fact that the human remains were removed outside the laws and normal practices of the community at the time, or that the correct “laying to rest” of remains was not followed. Demonstration of a very strong cultural or spiritual significance of the human remains, whose continued holding by the Museums Service perpetuates a strong feeling of grief amongst claimants, will be duly considered by the Museums Service when making a decision.

The age of the human remains

Archaeological and historical studies have shown that in the vast majority of cases it is very difficult to demonstrate clear genealogical, cultural or ethnic continuity far into the past. For these reasons the Museums Service accepts the view of the DCMS Code of Practice that the older the remains are the less likely they are to be returned, but whatever the age of the remains it will give primary consideration to:

1. the claimant demonstrating a legitimate locus to make a request
2. how best to accommodate the strength of both scientific interest and personal, cultural or religious values and sensitivities.

The potential public benefit of the human remains

When considering a claim the Museums Service will assess the research potential and public benefit of the human remains in question. This assessment will include a

review of the research on the human remains that has taken place in the past and an assessment of the potential contribution that the human remains can make in the future based on the current understanding of the appropriate research field.

The human remains in question may also be utilised through display and teaching to further our understanding of humanity and this fact will also be taken into consideration.

Documents consulted

Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2005, Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums

The Manchester Museum: Policy on Human Remains

University of Oxford: Policy on Human Remains held by the University of Oxford's Museums

The British Museum: Policy on Human Remains

English Heritage, 2005, Guidance for best practice for treatment of human remains excavated from Christian burial grounds in England

Bodies consulted

English Heritage

Society of Museum Archaeologists

Advisory Panel on Archaeological Burials in England

Oxfordshire Museums Joint Working Group

Oxford City and County Archaeological Forum

Esther Cameron 8/02/2011