

Collections Development Policy

Name of museum: Ely Museum

Name of governing body: The Trustees of Ely Museum

Date on which this policy was approved by governing body: 18th May 2026

The collections development policy will be published and reviewed from time to time, at least once every five years.

Date at which this policy is due for review: May 2031

***Arts Council England* will be notified of any changes to the collections development policy, and the implications of any such changes for the future of collections.**

In this policy Acquisition covers items entering the museum's accessioned collection and the museum taking long-term responsibility for them. This does not include items acquired for handling, events or props.

In this policy Disposal refers to the removal of items from the museum's accessioned collection. Disposal may consist of many options such as passing the item to another collection, back to its donor, to a community group, sale or destruction, depending on the best option for that object.

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

1.1. The museum's statement of purpose is:

Through our collections, Ely Museum will gather, preserve and share the stories of the Isle of Ely and the surrounding fens. We will promote engagement with and pride in our heritage, for the benefit of our local community past, present and future.

1.2. The governing body will ensure that both acquisition and disposal are carried out openly and with transparency.

1.3. By definition, the museum has a long-term purpose and holds collections in trust for the benefit of the public in relation to its stated objectives. The governing body therefore accepts the principle that sound curatorial reasons must be established before consideration is given to any acquisition to the collection, or the disposal of any items in the museum's collection.

1.4. Acquisitions outside the current stated policy will only be made in exceptional circumstances.

1.5. The museum recognises its responsibility, when acquiring additions to its collections, to ensure that care of collections, documentation arrangements and use of collections will meet the requirements of the Museum Accreditation Standard. This includes using SPECTRUM primary procedures for collections management. It will take into account limitations on collecting imposed by such factors as staffing, storage and care of collection arrangements.

1.6. The museum will undertake due diligence and make every effort not to acquire, whether by purchase, gift, bequest or exchange, any object or specimen unless the governing body or responsible officer is satisfied that the museum can acquire a valid title to the item in question.

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

2. History of the collections

The collection (approximately 4000 items), largely donated by local people, consists of a wide-ranging selection of objects made of contrasting materials, such as bone, wood, metal and pottery. Recent acquisitions have included several archaeological items purchased through the Treasure Scheme.

3. An overview of current collections

Rocks and fossils illustrating the geology of the Isle of Ely; tools and weapons of Neolithic, Bronze and Iron Age settlers; Roman pottery and metal artefacts; collection of Saxon artefacts from local settlements. Artefacts of Medieval and post medieval periods including collections of ice skates, farming tools, fishing equipment and three muniments chests. Collection of Fenland drainage tools.

Artefacts illustrating the social history of Ely and surrounding villages including collections from local breweries, wildfowlers, basket makers and coopers. Rare collection of local trading tokens. Collection of domestic Victorian and Edwardian furniture and household appliances. Artefacts of local life and entertainment including societies, cinemas and schools and industries.

Collection of uniforms, equipment, medals and memorabilia of The Cambridgeshire Regiment, Royal Air Force Hospital and the second world war airbases at Witchford and Mepal. Extensive collection of local photographs. Local funeral bier, hand ambulance and communal Bath chair.

4. Themes and priorities for future collecting

Future collecting will be conducted to expand and augment the current collection, following the aims of the Mission Statement and Forward Plan.

Area: The catchment area of Ely Museum is that covered by the district of East Cambridgeshire, as of May 2026. Consideration will be given to objects which originate in areas in close proximity to this catchment area, provided it does not conflict with collecting policies of other museums (see point 7.)

Themes: Ely Museum's collection covers the landscape and way of life of people who have lived in this area throughout time.

Periods: Ely Museum's collection covers the history, archaeology and geology of the area throughout history. Current collecting priorities are the Iron Age, Anglo-Saxon period, the Medieval and post Medieval periods and the 20th and 21st centuries.

Duplicate material will not be collected unless the duplicate may fulfil a significant need e.g.: more stable condition or link to an individual or story.

When taking objects into the collection the following points should be considered in addition to the above:

Security requirements (cost)
Conservation requirements (cost)
Displayable (cost)
Sufficient space - in store and on display
Themes or subjects of association
Provenance
Duplication
Copyright

Items will be accepted into the collections by agreement of the Trustees, taking into account advice from the Curator and Deputy Curator, according to the Collections Development Policy.

5. Themes and priorities for rationalisation and disposal

- 5.1 The museum recognises that the principles on which priorities for rationalisation and disposal are determined will be through a formal review process that identifies which collections are included and excluded from the review. The outcome of review and any subsequent rationalisation will not reduce the quality or significance of the collection and will result in a more useable, well managed collection.
- 5.2 The procedures used will meet professional standards. The process will be documented, open and transparent. There will be clear communication with key stakeholders about the outcomes and the process.

Responsible, curatorially-motivated disposal may take place as part of a programme of review and rationalisation in order to increase public benefit derived from the collections. Disposals would be considered where one or more of the following criteria apply:

- Items have been damaged or have deteriorated beyond the Museum's ability to repair them
- Disposal of duplicate or unprovenanced material of low intrinsic relevance to the Collections Development Policy to improve the curatorial care of the collections
- Items are discovered to pose a threat to health and safety
- Items have been identified as spoliated during the Nazi, Holocaust and World War II period
- Items have been subject to a request for repatriation or restitution

Where disposal is being considered this will be carried out in accordance with the disposal procedures, outlined below in clauses 13 (a) to 13 (o). The Museum will also be guided by the MA code of Ethics and Museums Associations 'Disposal Toolkit', 2008.

6. Legal and ethical framework for acquisition and disposal of items

- 6.1 The museum recognises its responsibility to work within the parameters of the Museum Association Code of Ethics when considering acquisition and disposal.

7. Collecting policies of other museums

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

7.2 Specific reference is made to the following museum(s)/organisation(s):

Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. The Stained Glass Museum, Ely. Wisbech Museum. March Museum. Burwell Museum. Cromwell Museum, Huntingdon. Chatteris Museum. Museum of Cambridge. Prickwillow Drainage Engine Museum, The Farmland Museum, RAF Witchford and Mepal Museum. Cambridgeshire Archives.

8. Archival holdings

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 (third edition, 2002).

9. Acquisition

- 9.1. The policy for agreeing acquisitions is: The Curator will bring objects offered for acquisition to the Trustees if they fit within the Collections Development Policy. The Trustees will decide if the item is to be accepted into the collection.
- 9.2. The museum will not acquire any object or specimen unless it is satisfied that the object or specimen has not been acquired in, or exported from, its country of origin (or any intermediate country in which it may have been legally owned) in violation of that country's laws. (For the purposes of this paragraph 'country of origin' includes the United Kingdom).
- 9.3. In accordance with the provisions of the UNESCO 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, which the UK ratified with effect from November 1 2002, and the Dealing in Cultural Objects (Offences) Act 2003, the museum will reject any items that have been illicitly traded. The governing body will be guided by the national guidance on the responsible acquisition of cultural property issued by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in 2005.

10. Human remains

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

11. Biological and geological material

- 11.1 So far as biological and geological material is concerned, the museum will not acquire by any direct or indirect means any specimen that has been collected, sold or otherwise transferred in contravention of any national or international wildlife protection or natural history conservation law or treaty of the United Kingdom or any other country, except with the express consent of an appropriate outside authority.

12 Archaeological material

- 12.1 The museum will not acquire archaeological material (including excavated ceramics) in any case where the governing body or responsible officer has any suspicion that the circumstances of their recovery involved a failure to follow the appropriate legal procedures.
- 12.2 In England, Wales and Northern Ireland the procedures include reporting finds to the landowner or occupier of the land and to the proper authorities in the case of possible treasure (i.e. the Coroner for Treasure) as set out in the Treasure Act 1996 (as amended by the Coroners & Justice Act 2009).

13. Exceptions

- 13.1 Any exceptions to the above clauses will only be because the museum is:
- acting as an externally approved repository of last resort for material of local (UK) origin
 - acting with the permission of authorities with the requisite jurisdiction in the country of origin

In these cases the museum will be open and transparent in the way it makes decisions and will act only with the express consent of an appropriate outside authority. The museum will document when these exceptions occur.

14. Spoliation

- 14.1 The museum will use the statement of principles 'Spoliation of Works of Art during the Nazi, Holocaust and World War II period', issued for non-national museums in 1999 by the Museums and Galleries Commission.

15 The Repatriation and Restitution of objects and human remains

- 15.1 The museum's governing body, acting on the advice of the museum's professional staff, if any, may take a decision to return human remains (unless covered by the 'Guidance for the care of human remains in museums' issued by DCMS in 2005), objects or specimens to a country or people of origin. The museum will take such decisions on a case by case basis; within its legal position and taking into account all ethical implications and available

guidance. This will mean that the procedures described in 16.1-5 will be followed but the remaining procedures are not appropriate.

- 15.2 The disposal of human remains from museums in England, Northern Ireland and Wales will follow the procedures in the 'Guidance for the care of human remains in museums'.

16 Disposal procedures

- 16.1 All disposals will be undertaken with reference to the SPECTRUM Primary Procedures on disposal.
- 16.2 The governing body will confirm that it is legally free to dispose of an item. Agreements on disposal made with donors will also be taken into account.
- 16.3 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 and a proportion of the proceeds if the item is disposed of by sale.
- 16.4 When disposal is motivated by curatorial reasons the procedures outlined below will be followed and the method of disposal may be by gift, sale, exchange or as a last resort - destruction.
- 16.5 The decision to dispose of material from the collections will be taken by the governing body only after full consideration of the reasons for disposal. Other factors including public benefit, the implications for the museum's collections and collections held by museums and other organisations collecting the same material or in related fields will be considered. Expert advice will be obtained and the views of stakeholders such as donors, researchers, local and source communities and others served by the museum will also be sought.
- 16.6 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 or for reasons of health and safety), will be the responsibility of the governing body of the museum acting on the advice of professional curatorial staff, if any, and not of the curator or manager of the collection acting alone.
- 16.7 Once a decision to dispose of material in the collection has been taken, priority will be given to retaining it within the public domain. It will therefore be offered in the first instance, by gift or sale, directly to other Accredited Museums likely to be interested in its acquisition.
- 16.8 If the material is not acquired by any Accredited museum to which it was offered as a gift or for sale, then the museum community at large will be advised of the intention to dispose of the material normally through a notice on the MA's Find an Object web listing service, an announcement in the Museums Association's Museums Journal or in other specialist publications and websites (if appropriate).
- 16.9 The announcement relating to gift or sale will indicate the number and nature of specimens or objects involved, and the basis on which the material will be transferred to another institution. Preference will be given to expressions of interest from other Accredited

Museums. A period of at least two months will be allowed for an interest in acquiring the material to be expressed. At the end of this period, if no expressions of interest have been received, the museum may consider disposing of the material to other interested individuals and organisations giving priority to organisations in the public domain.

- 16.10 Any monies received by the museum governing body from the disposal of items will be applied solely and directly for the benefit of the collections. This normally means the purchase of further acquisitions. In exceptional cases, improvements relating to the care of collections in order to meet or exceed Accreditation requirements relating to the risk of damage to and deterioration of the collections may be justifiable. Any monies received in compensation for the damage, loss or destruction of items will be applied in the same way. Advice on those cases where the monies are intended to be used for the care of collections will be sought from the Arts Council England.
- 16.11 The proceeds of a sale will be allocated so it can be demonstrated that they are spent in a manner compatible with the requirements of the Accreditation standard. Money must be restricted to the long-term sustainability, use and development of the collection.
- 16.12 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.
- 16.13 The nature of disposal by exchange means that the museum will not necessarily be in a position to exchange the material with another Accredited museum. The governing body will therefore ensure that issues relating to accountability and impartiality are carefully considered to avoid undue influence on its decision-making process.
 - 16.13.1 In cases where the governing body wishes for sound curatorial reasons to exchange material directly with Accredited or non-Accredited museums, with other organisations or with individuals, the procedures in paragraphs 16.1-5 will apply.
 - 16.13.2 If the exchange is proposed to be made with a specific Accredited museum, other Accredited museums which collect in the same or related areas will be directly notified of the proposal and their comments will be requested.
 - 16.13.3 If the exchange is proposed with a non-Accredited museum, with another type of organisation or with an individual, the museum will place a notice on the MA's Find an Object web listing service, or make an announcement in the Museums Association's Museums Journal or in other specialist publications and websites (if appropriate).
 - 16.13.4 Both the notification and announcement must provide information on the number and nature of the specimens or objects involved both in the museum's collection and those intended to be acquired in exchange. A period of at least two months must be allowed for comments to be received. At the end of this period, the governing body must consider the comments before a final decision on the exchange is made.

Disposal by destruction

- 16.14 If it is not possible to dispose of an object through transfer or sale, the governing body may decide to destroy it.
- 16.15 It is acceptable to destroy material of low intrinsic significance (duplicate mass-produced articles or common specimens which lack significant provenance) where no alternative method of disposal can be found.
- 16.16 Destruction is also an acceptable method of disposal in cases where an object is in extremely poor condition, has high associated health and safety risks or is part of an approved destructive testing request identified in an organisation's research policy.
- 16.17 Where necessary, specialist advice will be sought to establish the appropriate method of destruction. Health and safety risk assessments will be carried out by trained staff where required.
- 16.18 The destruction of objects should be witnessed by an appropriate member of the museum workforce. In circumstances where this is not possible, eg the destruction of controlled substances, a police certificate should be obtained and kept in the relevant object history file.