

Museum Accreditation Scheme National Railway Museum Collecting Policy

Museum: National Railway Museum

Governing Body: The Board of Trustees of the Science Museum

Date approved by governing body: 10 July 2007

Date at which policy due for review: 10 July 2012

1. Existing collections, including the subjects or themes for collecting

The National Railway Collection is Britain's largest single body of historic railway material. The museum collections come from a variety of sources, and have their origins in the collections of historic objects assembled by the 'pre-grouping' railway companies in the mid nineteenth century. Following nationalisation in 1948, the British Transport Commission established a preservation policy bringing the collections together under a single owner and the collections continued to expand. In 1975 the National Railway Museum took over the British Railways collection, which has subsequently been significantly developed to cover most areas of railway history ranging from locomotives to uniform buttons. When the National Railway Museum was set up as, it also inherited the rail transport collection from its parent body, the Science Museum which include some of the key icons from the Industrial Revolution, such as the original *Rocket* and *Puffing Billy*.

The National Railway Museum now has a collection of over 300 items of full-sized railway rolling stock, dating from the early 19th century to the present. This is supported by an excellent and almost comprehensive collection of railway models, representing classes not represented by the rolling stock collection and by a collection of over 50,000 small objects cover all aspects of railway life and work

The National Railway Museum also has major library, archive and image collections comprising:

- Over 1.5 million photographs from the early days of photography in the 1850s to the present day;
- Over a million engineering drawings of railway vehicles from 1820 to the present;
- The UK's most comprehensive railway library;
- Sound and oral history archives;
- A growing digital video record of today's railway industry;
- Personal and business archives from key figures and organisations in the British railway industry;
- The UK's most comprehensive collection of British railway posters, graphic art and advertising material from the 1820s onward;
- The NRM's own archives, including archives from our predecessor museums at York and Clapham.

2. Criteria governing future collecting policy, including the subjects or themes for collecting

As a museum with mature collections the role of acquisition in the NRM is essentially to build on existing holdings and provide new means of interpreting railway history and technology. Therefore, we will generally select new items for the collections because:

- they represent key new work and significant new products
- they represent key human stories in railway history
- enhanced understanding of history and current practice persuade us that we need to tell new types of stories that the existing collections are unable to support
- our audiences look to us to understand and represent new areas of railway history and technology.

Alternatively, new acquisitions may be made to fill gaps in existing collections that are almost comprehensive, and will be accompanied by significant disposals of duplicated or inappropriate material.

The National Railway Museum has made a strategic decision to place a new emphasis on serving broader audiences. The majority of acquisition activity will accordingly be targeted at use with audiences via exhibition, web products, broadcast, outreach, public events and published scholarship and through our Research Centre.

There is a limit to the resources that the Museum can expend on collecting, caring for and communicating about collections. The demands of good custodianship therefore demand that we alter the balance of our collecting away from collecting objects for unspecified and merely potential use in the future – which has dominated collecting over the last 30 years – towards that intended for more immediate use.

We consider that any object worth adding to the collections is worth making accessible as soon as is practicable to the public by one means or another, for example by mounting photographs on the Museum's *Ingenious* website. We cannot, however, allow resource limitation to prevent us from collecting interesting, significant and rare items for unspecified future use and we recognise that we risk losing the opportunity to acquire objects we may require for future projects. This means that we will still collect some significant and rare items for future use. A duty therefore rests on curators and the Collections Development Group to balance these factors as they consider new acquisitions.

Criteria for acquisitions

Potential acquisitions must meet four basic criteria of relevance, use, condition and provenance:

Relevance:

We are concerned with engaging people in a dialogue about the past, present and future of human ingenuity in the field of railways and transport. We are also concerned with the impact of developments in the fields we represent, where impact may be cultural, social, environmental, economic, intellectual or psychological. New acquisitions will be assessed in terms of their capacity to act as a focus for interpretation, discussion, debate or research with particular audiences in ways that respond to the findings of

audience research, for example ensuring a stress on social history and human-focussed stories.

The Museum's subject strategies guide selection of new acquisitions. We are not concerned to build an archive of objects for its own sake, but for the communicative work it enables now or in the future. For collecting policy, our active mode of curatorship shifts the balance away from "wish lists" towards an acquisitive mode alert and sensitive to the extra work that new acquisitions can do in conveying our chosen themes and in supporting projects, illustrating significant narratives and working within our Corporate Plan to deliver the Museum's cultural programme.

Use:

The object must have the capacity now or in the future to tell a story in one of the media used by the National Railway Museum, including, but not limited to, exhibitions, web-products, broadcasts and popular and scholarly publications. To facilitate this as much associated information as possible should be collected at the same time as the object, with particular emphasis being placed on the collection of the associated human stories.

Condition:

The object must be in a reasonable state of completeness and in good condition. It must not require significant resources for conservation and/or storage, nor must it present any unacceptable hazards, either in storage or on display. Items in poor condition will be considered only if they are unique and are of sufficient significance to warrant their acquisition.

Provenance:

The object must come with good title, and be properly documented regarding its provenance and authenticity. It should be free from any onerous restrictions or special conditions, and ideally, come with its intellectual property rights (for example copyright).

3. Period of time and/or geographical area to which collecting relates

Collecting dates from the earliest known railways, c1804 to the present. Geographically, the main focus of the collections is based on the railways of Britain and the British railway building industry, which incorporates material exported overseas. However, as the focus of railway history changes our collecting has become more international in scope.

4. Limitations on collecting

The National Railway Museum recognises its responsibility, in acquiring additions to its collections, to ensure that care of collections, documentation arrangements and use of collections will meet the requirements of the Accreditation Standard. It will take into account limitations on collecting imposed by such factors as inadequate staffing, storage and care of collection arrangements.

Making the collections sustainable

The Museum is committed to making its collections sustainable, a wish that relates to issues of affordability, efficiency and effectiveness:

- Collecting in a national museum implies that certain standards of care will be met. Therefore, when we collect, we will ensure that the facilities are in place to deliver those standards.
- We will be guarded in our collecting and will address the associated resources required at the time of acquisition.
- We assess the costs of each acquisition as well as the benefits and seek extra resources to support the storage, conservation, documentation and interpretation of new acquisitions.
- We will continually review our collections and propose for deaccession near duplicates when new acquisitions are recommended. We will also ensure that rationalisation becomes a standard component of collections-based projects. Such activity will be carried out within the terms of our governing legislation, the National Heritage Act.
- We will explore collecting in partnership with other organizations to ensure that key items can be preserved where storage cannot be allocated on our own sites.
- We will seek to incrementally improve our collections management facilities to ensure sustainable collecting into the future.
- We will seek to collect or create surrogates for original items where this is appropriate. For example, with large civil engineering structures, we may collect photographs or models.
- We will ensure that the knowledge generated about objects and collections in the course of project work is electronically archived (via collections databases and web products) as a standard part of all projects.
- Collections material and information that exists only in digital form and its associated metadata will be preserved in a format that is sustainable in the long term.

5. Collecting policies of other museums

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

The National Railway Museum will consider all potential acquisitions in the wider national context. We will liaise with other significant collections in the United Kingdom to avoid duplication and to coordinate policy.

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

Partner museums of the NMSI: Science Museum; National Media Museum, Sedgefield Borough Council. Fellow members of the Subject Specialist Network for Inland Transport (SSNIT) including Glasgow Transport Museum, the Scottish Railway Preservation Society and the Ulster Folk & Transport Museum or London's Transport Museum, National Tramway Museum.

We will also refer to the Railway Heritage Partnership Registers for railway rolling stock to check potential acquisitions against material preserved elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

We will also work with the Railway Heritage Committee, in line with the RHC/NRM Memorandum of Understanding, on matters relating to the acquisition of material from the railway industry and to the disposal of material acquired directly from the railway industry.

6. Policy review procedure

The Acquisition and Disposal Policy will be published and reviewed from time to time, at least once every five years. The date when the policy is next due for review is noted above.

The Review will take place in consultation within the NMSI family of museums, with the NRM Advisory Board and with the Railway Heritage Committee.

MLA will be notified of any changes to the Acquisition and Disposal Policy, and the implications of any such changes for the future of existing collections.

7. Acquisitions not covered by the policy

Acquisitions outside the current stated policy will only be made in very exceptional circumstances, and then only after proper consideration by the governing body of the museum itself, having regard to the interests of other museums.

8. Exclusions

- a. The National Railway Museum will exercise due diligence and make every effort not to acquire, whether by purchase, gift, bequest or exchange, any object or specimen unless the governing body or responsible officer is satisfied that the museum can acquire a valid title to the item in question.
- b. In particular, the National Railway 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).
- 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 National Railway Museum will reject any items that have been illicitly traded. The governing body will be guided by

the national guidance on the responsible acquisition of cultural property issued by DCMS in 2005.

- d. So far as biological and geological material is concerned, the National Railway 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.
- e. The National Railway Museum will not acquire archaeological antiquities (including excavated ceramics) in any case where the governing body or responsible officer has any suspicion that the circumstances of their recovery involved a failure to follow the appropriate legal procedures, such as reporting finds to the landowner or occupier of the land and to the proper authorities in the case of possible treasure as defined by the Treasure Act 1996 (in England, Northern Ireland and Wales) or reporting finds through the Treasure Trove procedure (in Scotland).
- f. Any exceptions to the above clauses 8a, 8b, 8c, or 8e will only be because the National Railway Museum is either:
 - acting as an externally approved repository of last resort for material of local (UK) origin; or
 - acquiring an item of minor importance that lacks secure ownership history but in the best judgement of experts in the field concerned has not been illicitly traded; or
 - acting with the permission of authorities with the requisite jurisdiction in the country of origin; or
 - in possession of reliable documentary evidence that the item was exported from its country of origin before 1970.

In these cases the National Railway 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.

- g. Safety Issues:

The National Railway Museum is committed to maintaining a safe environment for staff and visitors alike. To ensure this, we shall apply particularly close scrutiny to proposed acquisitions that contain any of the substances on the following list. We recognise however that the additional costs of acquiring and holding such objects will sometimes be justified by their significance and interpretive value.

 - Radioactive materials
 - Hazardous chemicals
 - Objects that contain hazardous materials, such as asbestos or mercury
 - Biological hazards
 - Controlled substances, namely dangerous drugs and scheduled poisons

Please see Appendix 2 regarding objects containing asbestos and radioactive materials.

Improvements to Acquisition Process

Modifications to this procedure that enhance our capacity for relevant and responsible collecting will be discussed and, where appropriate, approved at the Collections Development Group. The National Railway Museum Advisory Board will be informed of such changes where appropriate

9. Spoliation

The National Railway Museum will use 'Spoliation of Works of Art during the Holocaust and World War II period: Statement of Principles and Proposed Actions', issued by the National Museum Directors' Conference in 1998, and report on them in accordance with the guidelines.

10. Repatriation and Restitution

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, 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.

Also see Appendix 3.

11. Management of archives

As the National Railway Museum holds *and* 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 (3rd ed., 2002).

12. Disposal procedures

a The criteria for retention of objects in our collections are different from those governing acquisition. This is partially because reasons for display of objects in the present and future often differ from the reasons for their initial acquisition. It is also because our governing legislation embodies a presumption against disposal; by definition, the NMeM has a long-term purpose and should possess permanent collections in relation to its stated objectives. The governing body accepts the principle that disposal of any items in the museum's collections should be for sound curatorial reasons.

Sound curatorial reasons may include our relationship, as the National Museum in several media subjects, with the remainder of the museum and historical preservation communities.

b. The Museum will establish that it is legally free to dispose of an item. Any decision to dispose of material from the collections will be taken only after due consideration.

c. 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.

d. Decisions to dispose of items will not be made with the principal aim of generating funds.

e. Any monies received by the Museum's governing body from the disposal of items will be applied for the benefit of the collections. This normally means the purchase of further acquisitions but in exceptional cases improvements relating to the care of collections may be justifiable. Advice on these cases will be sought from MLA.

f. A decision to dispose of a specimen or object, whether by gift, exchange, sale or destruction (in the case of an item too badly damaged or deteriorated to be of any use for the purposes of the collections), will be the responsibility of the governing body of the Museum acting on the advice of a Board of Survey (which comprises of Museum professional staff) and not of the curator of the collection acting alone.

g. Once a decision to dispose of material in the collection has been taken, priority will be given to retaining it within the public domain, unless it is to be destroyed. It will therefore be offered in the first instance, by gift, exchange or sale, directly to other Accredited Museums likely to be interested in its acquisition.

h. If the material is not acquired by any Accredited Museums to which it was offered directly, then the museum community at large will be advised of the intention to dispose of the material, normally through an announcement in the Museums Association's Museums Journal, and in other professional journals where appropriate.

i. The announcement will indicate the number and nature of specimens or objects involved, and the basis on which the material will be transferred to another institution. Preference will be given to expressions of interest from other Accredited Museums. A period of at least two months will be allowed for an interest in acquiring the material to be expressed. At the end of this period, if no expressions of interest have been received, the museum may consider disposing of the material to other interested individuals and organisations.

j. 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.

Appendix 1

Subject strategies

The National Railway Museum has developed a strategy that includes a summary message and a series of key themes. These outline the broad stories we tell, via projects, about travel and transport in a variety of media. Acquisitions arising from projects therefore tend to reflect these themes. Equally, they are used to aid selection from amongst the unsolicited offers of material we receive.

The railways have social and cultural impact, as well as technological. They have played an important role in the development of the world as we know it and continue to have a significant influence on our lives and our environment.

We will seek to support dialogue and reflection about the ways in which individuals and communities interact with, or are affected by, the railways, and how choices are made about forms of travel and transport at a variety of levels, from the personal to the institutional.

Key Themes

1. Introduction to Railways?

We shall explore why the railways developed based on developments in society, politics and the economy in Britain and the rest of the world: This will encompass the motivation behind the movement of people and goods and the means by which it has been enabled.

- **Origins**
- Why do we travel and what effect does travel have on mobility?
- How did we travel before trains?
- Changing society/economy
- Invention, innovation and creativity
 - Industrial Railways
 - Miniature Railways
 - Model Railways
- Where do we move to?
- How do we move?

- **Roles**
- Transport/communication/moving goods
- Sustainability
- Links with other transport systems
 - Canals
 - Air transport
 - Road Transport
- Shrinking the planet

2. What are Railways?

We shall look at the infrastructure of the railway and how it is different from other forms of transport. We shall explore the creativity and ingenuity in engineering and construction as it changes to face the challenge of meeting the changing requirement for travel and transport.

- **How are railways different?**
 - Track/adhesion
 - Routes/function
- **Technologies**
- Changing technology: early railways; horse-operated railways; Welsh plateways; alternative guided transport (Maglev, monorails etc)
- Civil Engineering (railways in the landscape)
 - Power
 - Steam (fire into power)
 - Diesel
 - Electric
 - Speed
- **Publicity and marketing**
 - Corporate identity
 - Railway ephemera
 - Railway art (posters etc)
 - Livery and heraldry

3. Railways and culture

We shall explore the impact of the railways on our cultural life.

- Film/TV/Literature/Art
- Design/Style/Fashion
- Image making
- Nostalgia

4. Socio-economic impact of railways:

We shall explore the impact of the railways on our society and economy, looking at changes that have taken place and the resulting developments.

- Women/gender
- Class/social division
- Luxury/penury/misery
- Works and workers
- Animals
- Leisure
- Travelling by train
- Family history
- Safety/accidents
- Food/nutrition/health
- Railways and time
- Migration
- Crime
- Royalty
- Railways and war
- Economy
- Construction

- Industry
- Finance

5. Railways and the world

We shall look at the effect that the development of the railway in the UK has impacted on world developments and how that in turn has impacted on the UK.

- Empire
- Export
- The effect on indigenous peoples
- Globalisation: railways the first modern globaliser?

6. Railways and the Environment

We shall capture and represent the impact the railways have on the environment, making comparisons with the impact of other forms of transport.

- Railway landscapes
- Sustainability and 'green' issues
- York and the East Coast Main Line

7. Railways present and Future

We shall examine the ongoing developments in the railway industry and its likely impact on our world.

- What is the role of rail in the years to come?
- Privatisation
- Changing Technology
- Freedom (physical/social/cultural)

Appendix 2

Note on objects containing asbestos or radioactive materials

In particular, the National Railway Museum will not normally increase its holdings of material containing asbestos or radioactive holdings by knowingly acquiring any objects containing any form of asbestos or radioactive material or containing radioactive sources. All objects intended for acquisition will be checked initially by thorough research, inquiry and physical monitoring. A strong case giving the justification from the relevant acquirer, in consultation with Health and Safety representatives, and an assessment of the resource implications from the Collections Team, summarising funding strategies in place to sustain purchase or future activities, will need to be submitted for discussion before any decision is made or the object is brought onto museum premises.

If any object is considered to present too great a risk to the public to store or display safely and the resource implications of doing this are too high, it will not be recommended for acquisition. The final decision will be made by the Head of Museum in consultation with the Collections Development Group.

If any object known to contain asbestos or radioactive materials is acquired for the collection, it will be managed in accordance with the legal requirements in line with the NMSI Asbestos Management Policy and the NMSI Management Policy for Radioactive Materials.

Appendix 3

Note on Restitution and Repatriation.

The National Railway Museum's Policy on Restitution, Repatriation and Human Tissues covers all sensitive and controlled objects ranging from human tissues to objects containing no human remains that the Museum may wish to collect or dispose of, or which may be the subjects of restitution (non-human) or repatriation (human remains) claims. The museum will comply with the license requirements as set out in the Human Tissue Bill for all holdings of human tissues and human remains. Government guidelines on the retention of indigenous materials, and requests for restitution or repatriation act as the catalyst for considering whether the disputed object(s) should remain in the collections. If, on investigation, any object turns out to have been illegally gained, as defined by the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Prevention of the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, then the Museum will return the object to its rightful owner. If not, then the Museum will consider how the contested object best fits with the acquisition and disposal guidelines. The policy suggests a series of issues that need to be considered to help this decision-making. If the Museum decides that it wishes to retain the contested object then the request for restitution or repatriation will be refused. If the Museum decides to dispose of the object, then restitution or repatriation is considered alongside other options for disposal. The policy gives a second series of criteria to guide curators through this decision.