

# COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Approved by Collection Committee on 22 October 2024  
Due for revision in October 2029



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## 1. Document history and review: Collection Development Policy

**Name of museum:** Royal College of Music Museum

**Name of governing body:** The Council of the Royal College of Music, delegated to the Collections Committee

**Date on which this policy was approved by governing body:** 22 October 2024

**Policy review procedure:** The collections development policy will be published and reviewed at least once every five years. It will be published on the Museum website.

**Date at which this policy is due for review:** Collections Committee, October 2029

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.

*This document follows the template developed by Arts Council England and issued in July 2014.*

## 2. Relationship to other relevant policies/plans of the organisation

2.1. The museum's Mission Statement reads:

The Royal College of Music Museum manages, preserves, interprets and displays a Designated collection of musical instruments, paintings, sculptures, early prints and drawings, photographs and memorabilia relating to music.

The museum supports formal and informal learning through heritage, promoting onsite and online access to the RCM's collections for the RCM's student and professorial body, as well as reaching new and wider audiences locally, nationally and internationally.

Through partnership and collaboration, the Museum undertakes, promotes and supports research and knowledge exchange on the collections and in the field of music and material culture.

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

2.3. 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.

2.4. Acquisitions outside the current stated policy will only be made in exceptional and motivated circumstances.

2.5. 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.

2.6. 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.

2.7. Disposal will not be motivated principally by financial reasons. The RCM Council will not normally undertake disposal unless it can be demonstrated that all the following circumstances are met in full:

- 2.7.1. the disposal will significantly improve the long-term public benefit derived from the remaining collection;
- 2.7.2. the disposal will not be undertaken to generate short-term revenue (for example to meet a budget deficit);
- 2.7.3. extensive prior consultation with sector bodies has been undertaken;
- 2.7.4. the item under consideration lies outside the museum's established core collection.

## 3. History of the Collections

The main constituent collections have been built from gifts since the foundation of the College under the direction of Sir George Grove in 1894 and all are of international importance. The major collection of performance ephemera and that

of prints, engravings and photographs were substantially created from 1970 onwards. The RCM Museum also includes several acquisitions that have been purchased with the aid of external grants and donations.

The collection of works of art was initiated by donations by Sir George Donaldson (1894) and was substantially enhanced by gifts from Arthur F. Hill (portraits of musicians, 1917–39). As a whole the collection of iconography is of international importance in quality and musicological significance. The main classes of material are representations of musicians and music-making in works of art in portraits, prints, and photographs.

## 4. An Overview of the Current Collections

The musical instrument collection consists of over 1,000 items and comprehensively covers the production of British makers since the seventeenth century. It includes an exceptional collection of English viols that represents every important maker active in London between the late sixteenth and the early eighteenth centuries, as well as an extensive collection of over 400 British woodwind instruments. It also incorporates the large collection formed by Sir George Donaldson in the mid-nineteenth century – one of the oldest surviving collections of musical instruments in Britain, which includes the oldest surviving guitar (Belchior Dias, Lisbon, 1581) and the earliest keyboard instruments with strings (Anon, Ulm?, c. 1475).

The iconography collection a comprehensive selection of over 13,000 portraits of all major figures in the history of British and European music. These include well-known paintings by Highmore, Reynolds, Lawrence, Shee, Watts, Herkomer, Burne-Jones and Singer Sargent. A recent acquisition of over 1,300 sketches by Milein Cosman (1921–2017) documents the history of music-making in Britain during and after the Second World War.

## 5. Themes and priorities for future collecting

5.1. The RCM Museum will continue to acquire

5.1.1. Musical instruments, accessories and documents that illuminate the development of European music and instrument building with particular reference to British making and a focus on London; acquisitions will strive to fill gaps in existing holdings and seek to collect further material providing evidence of makers' practice, amateur and professional music making and interaction between makers, composers and performers; they will aim to develop an archive of British instrument makers' records.

5.1.2. Original works of art, prints, photographs, and other objects that directly inform the study of the science and art of music and that provide insights into the practice of music.

6. In the immediate future, the RCM Museum will continue to collect with the utmost care in view of its very restricted display and storage capacity. Thus, any acquisition will be carefully considered, irrespective of size, quality and value, and objects will only be accepted if they substantially enhance the research or educational value of the collection and if additional space can be found.

## 7. Themes and priorities for rationalisation and disposal

7.1. 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.

7.2. 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.

## 8. Legal and ethical framework for acquisition and disposal of items

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

## 9. Collecting policies of other museums

9.1. The RCM Museum will take account of the collecting policies of other libraries, 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.

9.2. Specific reference is made to the following libraries and museums:

- Bate's Collection, Oxford University
- Bodleian Library, Oxford University
- British Library, London
- Edinburgh University Collection of Historical Musical Instruments
- Horniman Museum and Gardens, London
- National Portrait Gallery, London
- Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford University
- V&A, London
- York Gate Collections & Library, Royal Academy of Music, London

## 10. Archival Holdings

As the RCM Museum holds archives, including photographs and printed ephemera, its governing body will be guided by the Code of Practice on Archives for Museums and Galleries in the United Kingdom (3rd ed., 2002).

## 11. Acquisition

11.1. The policy for agreeing acquisitions is:

11.1.1. The RCM 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 RCM Museum can acquire a valid title to the item in question.

11.1.2. In particular, the RCM 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).

11.1.3. 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 RCM 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.

11.2. Due to the nature of the RCM Museums' activities, the institution may occasionally acquire certain items which are not intended to be retained for the permanent collections. These items may be used for educational purposes.

11.3. In the case of such material, documentation will clearly show the intended use of the object and donors will be made aware of this possibility at the time of entry and informed as soon as a decision has been made regarding the destination and purpose of the intended donation. These objects will be recorded separately outside the main accession record and shall not be treated as part of the permanent collection since their intended use implies that preservation cannot be guaranteed. All decisions about their disposal will be the responsibility of the Curator in consultation with the Director of the RCM.

## 12. Human remains

The museum does not hold or intend to acquire any human remains.

## 13. Biological and geological material

The museum will not acquire any biological or geological material.

## 14. Archaeological material

- 14.1. 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.
- 14.2. 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).

## 15. Exceptions

- 15.1. 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.

## 16. Spoliation

The RCM 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.

## 17. The Repatriation and Restitution of objects and human remains

The RCM Council, acting on the advice of the RCM Museums' professional staff, if any, may take a decision to return human remains, objects or specimens to a country or people of origin. The RCM 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.

## 18. Disposal procedures

- 18.1. All disposals will be undertaken with reference to the SPECTRUM Primary Procedures on disposal.
- 18.2. 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.
- 18.3. 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.

- 18.4. 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.
- 18.5. 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.
- 18.6. 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.
- 18.7. 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.
- 18.8. 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).
- 18.9. 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.
- 18.10. 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.
- 18.11. 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.
- 18.12. 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.
- 18.13. The museum will not dispose of items by exchange.
- 18.14. If it is not possible to dispose of an object through transfer or sale, the governing body may decide to destroy it.
- 18.15. 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.
- 18.16. 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.
- 18.17. 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.
- 18.18. 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.
- 18.19. By definition, the RCM Museum has a long-term purpose and should possess (or intend to acquire) permanent collections in relation to its stated objectives. The governing body accepts the principle that, except for sound curatorial reasons, there is a strong presumption against the disposal of any items in the RCM Museum.

## 19. 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 RCM Senate, having regard to the interests of other museums and libraries.

## 20. Loans Policy

20.1. The RCM Museum will only accept material on loan for the purposes of exhibition or copying or where the item is of exceptional interest to the RCM Museum. Any loan will be agreed in writing by the lender and the RCM Museum, including allocation of responsibilities for insurance and transport arrangements and shall be for a specific fixed-term only, renewable in writing. Use of the term 'permanent loan' shall be avoided and items will not be accepted on this basis. Documentation of loans is according to the recommendations of the MDA and SPECTRUM guidelines, and procedures are according to those recommended in the *MLA Standards in the Museum Curation of Musical Instruments* (2005).

20.2. The RCM Museum will consider all requests for loans from the collection individually. Decisions will be taken with proper consideration of the condition of the object, as well as the means of transportation, security and display conditions of the institution making the request and will be documented according to agreed procedure.

20.3. Loans to external exhibitions will normally be made solely under the provisions of the Museum loan guidelines.

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