

## Dr Johnson's House

## Collections Development Policy

Completed By: Celine Luppo McDaid 25th May 2016

Date of next review: 15th June 2017

To be reviewed: Annually and as changes to existing conditions necessitate, with formal ratification every three years

Approved by: Accreditation Sub-Committee in advance of Annual General Meeting 13th July 2016

**Name of museum:** Dr Johnson's House

**Name of governing body:** Dr Johnson's House Trust

**Date on which this policy was approved by governing body:** Approved by Accreditation Sub-Committee 25<sup>th</sup> May 2016 in advance of formal ratification at the Annual General Meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> July 2016

### **Policy review procedure:**

The collections development policy will be published and reviewed annually

**Date at which this policy is due for review:** 15th June 2017

*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.

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

#### **1.1. The museum's statement of purpose is:**

The purpose and key aims of Dr Johnson's House Trust are:

1. To preserve for the use and benefit of the public, Dr Johnson's House; and
2. To advance learning and scholarship.

#### **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**

Dr Johnson's House collections consist of materials relating to Dr Samuel Johnson and his circle of friends. The collections can broadly be defined as: the library (a collection of over 1,000 books by or relating to Samuel Johnson); the accessioned objects (258) consisting of 100 prints, 20 oil paintings, 27 water-colours, some furniture with provenance relating to Johnson, and ephemera; and the archives 44 eighteenth-century manuscripts and organisational archives, relating to the history of the house as a museum since 1911.

The House, along with a modest library collection and some period furniture, was opened to the public over 100 years ago, following the purchase and restoration of 17 Gough Square in 1911 by Cecil Harmsworth MP. He later established the Trust which continues to be responsible for the House. In these early years, the collection grew in large part out of the generosity of the Harmsworth family, who donated relevant objects at their own expense, and the generosity of fellow enthusiasts and later trustees, including the author J. M. Barrie, who gave a collection of prints to the House in 1929. Other notable early benefactors include the American collector Edward Newton and the great Johnsonian R. B. Adams, who both contributed notable volumes to the library, including manuscript material in Johnson's own hand (donated 4th September, 1928). Harmsworth had a clear policy guiding how the House, its furnishings and collections should be presented from the outset, which were formally laid out in the Deeds of the Trust, established in 1929. The House and its collection must represent Johnson and his circle of friends, and reflect the relative poverty of Johnson during the period of his residency. It is also stated that the House should not to become a generic Georgian townhouse filled with 'irrelevant bric-a-brac'. As such, a generous offer of contemporary Chippendale furniture was politely refused on these grounds in the early 1920s.

A further major contributor to the House and its collection was Mary Eccles, a prominent Johnson collector and former wife of Donald Hyde. In 2003 Mary Eccles bequeathed \$1 million to the House to contribute to its preservation, which to this day also funds the Donald Hyde Curator's position. She also contributed at this time some notable artwork, including a collection of 19th-century watercolours depicting Johnson's various London addresses.

Specialist advice has been sought from librarians, conservators and prominent Johnsonian academics amongst other stakeholders throughout the House's history. In 2011, the House established a patrons' group, the Gough Square Club, whose subscription fees have funded acquisitions as well as exhibitions and displays. The focus of our acquisitions policy since 2013 has become concentrated on developing a collection of early dictionaries with the advice of a

Governor of the House, who is an expert in antiquarian books. These dictionaries would have been known to Johnson and his contemporaries, and would have influenced him in the compilation of his own. Acquisition of historic material of any sort is inevitably opportunistic depending on material becoming available on the market or through donations. The intention is to allow greater contextualisation of Johnson's *Dictionary* so that our visitors and students may better understand the lasting significance and importance of Johnson's contributions to our understanding of the English language to this day. In consultation with the Curator, a 'wish list' was prepared as a guide to acquisitions (2015). The House is fortunate in recent years to have been donated some of these works by a private collector of early dictionaries who supports the House's activities (and who wishes to remain anonymous). These include: the *Glossographia; or, a dictionary interpreting the hard words of whatsoever language, now used in our refined English tongue* (1656) by Thomas Blount (donated in February 2013) – this work is significant because it was the first dictionary to include illustrations (two woodcuts of heraldic devices), the first to include etymologies, and the first to cite sources for the words being defined; and the *Etymologicon linguæ Anglicanæ*, (1671) by Stephen Skinner - another seminal work in the field of etymology (donated in January 2014).

The House's intention is to focus on developing our collection of these early wordbooks for the benefit of our visitors in keeping with our key aims of encouraging learning, with the secondary, long-term intention of becoming a notable collection for linguistic research.

### 3. An overview of current collections

3.1 The Dr Johnson's House collections consist of materials relating to Dr Samuel Johnson and his circle of friends. There are 258 accessioned items on the register consisting of: 100 prints, 20 oil paintings, 27 watercolours, some furniture with provenance relating to Johnson, 44 eighteenth-century manuscripts, a selection of ephemera and miscellaneous items including ceramics, and organisational archives, relating to the history of the house as a museum since 1911. The House also holds over 1000 books by or relating to Samuel Johnson in our modest but important library collection, nearly 600 of which are historic, with the rest constituting our research library.

The collections can briefly be described under the following headings:

- \* Printed material written by or about Johnson
- \* A collection of early dictionaries in order to contextualise Johnson's own lexicographical contribution to the English language
- \* Printed material and manuscripts about his work, his life, his family and friends
- \* Objects once owned by Johnson, his family or circle
- \* Paintings and prints of Johnson, his family, his circle, or of objects, buildings and places associated with them
- \* Objects, paintings and prints designed to celebrate Johnson or his works
- \* Printed and manuscript material relating to The Johnson Club, The Johnson Society, and other organisations devoted to the memory of Johnson
- \* Items of furniture suitable for furnishing the rooms in Dr Johnson's House but without a Johnsonian provenance (not accessioned as have no direct connection to Johnson or his circle)

The collections have been carefully assembled over many years, and contain many valuable and important items, notably several of the oil paintings, documents and personal items, which are irreplaceable. The library collection contains rare volumes and many first editions of Johnson's published works. The collections, their presentation and interpretation at the House

allows the Trust and its staff to meet our second key aim of providing an environment which encourages learning and advances scholarship. Access to these collections, our resources and expertise remains one of the House's main priorities and its greatest strengths, ensuring its enduring relevance.

### 3.2 The Handling Collection

The handling collection consists of small objects and printed ephemera, small domestic appliances, ordinary household and decorative items from the eighteenth century acquired by gift and by purchase, for instance from junk shops. The items have not entered into the accessioned register owing to a lack of direct provenance to Johnson or his circle, but allow the House to contextualise the 18th century for our visitors and students, and therefore better understand Johnson's material world. The collection is used in the school, academic and public education programmes and is available for handling. Items in this collection are not held in perpetuity and are not subject to the same criteria for Acquisition and Disposal as the House's main collection.

### 3.3 The Digital Collection

Our in-house Picture Library holds a digital image of all accessioned objects, labelled accordingly. Images are also held of significant archival material, which is of particular value and used in the interpretation of the House where relevant.

## 4. Themes and priorities for future collecting

Specialist advice continues to be sought from librarians, conservators and prominent Johnsonian academics amongst other stakeholders in order to establish priorities for future collecting. A 'wish list' of priority items to acquire was developed in 2015 by a Governor, an expert in antique books, and the Curator, which concentrated on developing a collection of early dictionaries, volumes which would have been known to and had an influence on Johnson in the compilation of his own. The intention is to allow greater contextualisation of Johnson's *Dictionary* so that our visitors and students may better understand the lasting significance and importance of Johnson's contributions to our understanding of the English language to this day. The House's intention is to focus on developing our collection for the benefit of our visitors and with the secondary, long-term intention of becoming a notable collection for linguistic research. The collections and their presentation at the House will allow the Trust and its staff to develop existing educational and interpretive materials and so meet our second key aim: of providing an environment which encourages learning and advances scholarship.

## 5. Themes and priorities for rationalisation and disposal

5.1 The museum does not intend to dispose of collections during the period covered by this policy. However, the museum has the intention in this period of evaluating the opportunity and setting a longer-term timeframe to appoint a professional archivist to begin cataloguing the organisational archives, resulting in a list of potential items for rationalisation and disposal. During this process the museum recognises that the principles on which priorities for rationalisation and disposal are determined will undergo 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.

## **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:**

- The Samuel Johnson Birthplace Museum, Lichfield

## **8 Archival holdings**

Organisational Archives:

The House has a collection of archival material relating to the history of Dr Johnson's House Trust, and printed and manuscript material relating to The Johnson Club, The Johnson Society, and other organisations devoted to the memory of Johnson. These organisational documents are each recorded but not professionally catalogued as yet. There is no intention to acquire further archival material. These existing materials illuminate our understanding of the history of Dr Johnson's House, its Trust and operations, as distinct from Dr Johnson and his circle. These collections of organisational materials are important to hold at the House, to better understand our long history as an Historic House Museum within the wider context of historic house practice across the UK. The long-term intention over the next decade is to fundraise and recruit a qualified archivist to catalogue the collection professionally and make recommendations for the Trust's consideration for the disposal of items where appropriate. These collections do not form part of the core collection though remain relevant. The completed professional catalogue will allow for relevant material, e.g., original architectural drawings for the restoration of the House and building of the Curator's Cottage, to be accessioned and enter into our core collection.

## **9 Acquisition**

### **9.1 The policy for agreeing acquisitions is:**

Expert advisors among the Governors and Trustees, along with the Chairman and Curator, discuss and evaluate the relevance and significance of potential acquisitions or

donations. Provenance and costs are considered at this level, and a report provided for the Board of Trustees' reference in reaching a final decision, always with regard to the Collections Development Policy. At all times reference is made to the Museum Association Code of Ethics when considering acquisitions and donations.

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**

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

## **11. Biological and geological material**

11.1 The museum will not acquire any biological or geological material.

## **12. Archaeological material**

12.1 The museum will not acquire any archaeological material.

## **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.

## **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.

### ***Disposal by exchange***

- 16.13 The museum will not dispose of items by exchange.

### ***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.

**Ratified by the Trustees**

**Date:** 13th July 2016

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_

Lord Harmsworth, Chair of Trustees