

Collecting Policy

2009-2012

Background

Hackney Museum is required to have a collecting policy by the terms of the Museum Accreditation Scheme. Museum Accreditation is a scheme run by MLA the government agency for Museums, Archives and Libraries, which aims to set minimum standards for museums across the country. It is good practice for museums to regularly review and update their collecting policies. We therefore aim to have a clear, publicly available definition of what we can and cannot collect.

The museum has access to professional standard storage facilities, but this storage space available is finite and we need to ensure that our collecting plans are sustainable over the long term.

The museum has permanent displays with a clear, well-defined theme – the history of immigration and settlement over the last 1000 years. We have also internally committed to retaining this theme in any subsequent re-displays. We therefore need to do ongoing work to ensure that our collections are in keeping with that theme so that they are a useful resource for future study, interpretation and display within the museum.

The museum also needs to view its collecting activity within the context of collecting carried out by other museums, particularly in London but also within the wider museum community. There is considerable duplication of material across museums as a whole, particularly in the field of the social history of the past 150 years. We therefore aim to focus our collecting activity on acquiring things that relate specifically to this area and which relate to our unique theme of immigration and settlement.

Collecting focus

In the past Hackney Museum's collecting has been largely passive, the majority of our acquisitions have been the result of unsolicited offers from the public. Passive collecting will continue to play a role in the growth of the museum's collections. However we need to ensure that the objects we do collect in this way actively contribute to an understanding of the subject of the museum – immigration and settlement in Hackney. In 2002 our collecting remit was therefore amended to focus more tightly on the immigration theme.

Hackney Museum will only collect:

- items which have a strong local connection – i.e. which were made/used in Hackney.

- Items that have a strong connection with the history or culture of individuals or groups resident in the borough, including material that illustrates the world wide roots of those communities.

Hackney Museum will not collect any further 20th century domestic or industrial objects that duplicate items in other collections.

- We will only collect 20th century domestic or industrial items if they are under-represented in London museum collections, if they have a strong personal association, or relate to an under-represented community.

We aim to collect good documentation and provenance information, including personal information, stories and recollections, for all newly accessioned items.

- Where an item is offered or considered for purchase without such associated information, it will only be acquired if it can be used to illustrate a strong local story, such as an oral history recording mentioning a similar item that we have not been able to collect from the person concerned.

Rationalisation of the collection

As a professionally managed museum Hackney Museum has a commitment to the preservation of the collections in perpetuity, and maintains a strong pre-disposition against removal of objects from its collections. However, there may be situations in which certain items may be considered for disposal.

Therefore Hackney Museum will dispose of

- Duplicates
- Items damaged beyond reasonable repair

Hackney Museum will also continue to consider rationalisation within the context of London-wide planning of collections.

Strategic collecting with community involvement

The museum has adopted a commitment to active collecting in collaboration with local communities, and this commitment is maintained into the current period.

Where gaps in the collections have been identified, objects will be deliberately sought out by museum staff, working in collaboration small 'Collecting Panels' made up of volunteers from the local community who will advise and assist museum staff in acquiring relevant material. This has in the past proved a very successful method of acquiring high quality material and background information and the museum service is very keen to extend this process. Hackney Museum's work in developing this process of community involvement in collecting decisions is highly regarded as innovative work within the museum community.

Where Hackney Museum staff are working with local community groups or individuals for other purposes, for example in preparing temporary or Platform exhibitions, staff will again consult with relevant people to identify appropriate objects to collect. Given the changing programme of exhibitions, this will provide an efficient way of bringing a wide range of material from a wide range of communities into the collection. Care will be taken when selecting objects that can be expected to have long term value as part of the museum collections.

Ethical Collecting

Hackney Museum Service maintains its commitment to ethical collecting and disposal in accordance with the Museums Association Code of Conduct for Museum Authorities.

Handling Collection

In addition to the main collections, Hackney Museum also holds a handling collection. This is managed by the Schools & Family Learning Officer, and is used for educational handling purposes.

New donations offered to the museum, but inappropriate for the main collection, will be considered for the handling collection.

Items may also be specifically purchased or collected for the handling collection if required.

Items will only be accepted into the handling collection if they fulfil at least one the following criteria:

- Provide a good illustration of Hackney's history
- Have strong links with a National curriculum topic
- Can be a strong tool for learning
- Are in good condition and safe for visitors to handle.

Objects that cannot be handled by the public will not be accepted into the teaching collection, unless they provide exceptionally good teaching opportunities and can be demonstrated by a member of staff or appointed workshop leader.

Recommendations

That Hackney Museum defines its collecting remit as outlined above.

That Hackney Museum collecting activity continues to comply with the terms of the Museum Association's Code of Ethics and within the frame of reference determined by Accreditation.

That Hackney Museum Service creates new collecting panels as required.

That Hackney Museum Service work with current partners on other projects to also consider material for collection.

That Museum staff collaborate with colleagues across London on the debate about the rationalisation of collecting activity.

That this policy be reviewed and updated as required in three years time, in September 2012.

Related Policies

Contemporary Collecting Policy

Acquisition & Disposal Policy