

# Collections Development Policy

## Museum nan Eilean Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

### Two sites;

Museum nan Eilean

Lews Castle

Stornoway

Isle of Lewis

Outer Hebrides

HS2 0XS

Museum nan Eilean

Sgoil Lionacleit

Lionacleit

Isle of Benbecula

Outer Hebrides

HS7 5PJ



March 2016

## **Background to the policy**

This policy sets out the principles that will provide Museum nan Eilean with a framework for the acquisition and disposal of its collections using clear procedures and decision-making processes.

Implementing the policy will enable the Museum to demonstrate the public benefit in its actions relating to the acquisition and disposal of collections. It provides a basis for open and transparent decision-making and an informed dialogue between the governing body, donors, funding bodies and other stakeholders.

This policy applies to:

- material which the Museum owns and has accessioned into the collection or intends to own and accession into the collection.
- material which the Museum manages and stores on behalf of other trusts

The acquisition, management and disposal of collections will flow from:

- the Museum's statement of purpose
- the legal basis on which the collections are held
- the public benefit derived from the effective use and management of the collections
- an assessment of the needs of the museum's collections
- the criteria of the Collections Committee
- the collections held by other museums and organisations collecting in the same or related geographic areas or subject fields.

This policy supersedes all previous and existing practices and policies, formal or informal, relating to the acquisition of items for the collections of Museum nan Eilean and to the disposal of items from the collections of the museum.

**Name of museum:** Museum nan Eilean

**Name of governing body:** Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

**Date on which this policy was approved by governing body:** 30 March 2016

**Policy review procedure:**

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:** 30 December 2020

**Museums Galleries Scotland** 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:**

*To collect; record; care for; promote understanding and appreciation of; and support the history, culture and heritage of the Outer Hebrides for the benefit of local communities, schools and visitors to the area.*

**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**

Museum nan Eilean was established in 1983. It is the local authority Museum Service for the Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western Isles Council) and forms part of the Cultural and Information Services section within the Development Department. For the most part the Collections were built up following the establishment of the Museum Service in 1983, with two significant exceptions

1. The earliest collection material was from the Lewis Museum, run by the Lewis and Harris Museum Society, and established in the 1950s. In 1983, an agreement with The Lewis Museum Trust led to Museum nan Eilean taking on the care and management of this collection.

2. In 1999, the Calbost Collection was brought into the care and management of Museum nan Eilean by a similar agreement to that made with The Lewis Museum Trust. This is a highly significant social history collection built up by Angus Macleod for his private museum at Calbost, over a long period of time.

Soon after the establishment of the Museum Service, the collections were re-located to Stornoway Town Hall, where display galleries were developed. In 1988 a smaller satellite accredited museum was established on Benbecula, as part of a new Community School at Sgoil Lionacleit with material from Museum nan Eilean relating to the Uists and Benbecula displayed there. A Museum Development Post based in Uist was also created at this time to care for these collections and work with the Comainn Eachdraidh.

Richard Langhorne was the curator from when the museum was established in 1983 until 2008. He was a key figure in expanding the island wide collections, attaining Registration and then Accreditation for the museum, expanding the professional team to include a Conservation Officer, Islands Archaeologist and Archivist. As a Monument Fellow, funded by the Museums Association's Knowledge Transfer programme, he drafted the Documentation Policy and was instrumental in the establishment of the Collections Committee.

In 2013 an archivist was employed by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, following on from the 3 year ERDF funded Tasglann project. At this time, the Comhairle archives were transferred to the care and management of the Archive service. In 2015 these records were moved to the new store at Lews Castle although the CnES Libraries still retains the collection of school log books local to each area.

In 2015 a new museum and archive at Lews Castle replaced the Francis Street museum but the Lionacleit facility continues as an integral part of the heritage service. The new facilities at Lews Castle are housed in a modern extension linked to Lews Castle. The museum displays focus on inter-related themes of the land, the sea, the way of life and Gaelic-rich culture of the people of the Outer Hebrides. A unique Gaelic-led approach to interpretation reflects the bilingual nature of the islands with objects, archives, oral, audio-visual and interactive displays helping to make the information and key messages accessible to all.

Museum nan Eilean, Sgoil Lionacleit is used for a changing exhibitions programme from our own collections but also for touring exhibitions, community and schools projects and for national loans. The Activity Programme for the Lews Castle Project extends throughout the Outer Hebridean islands from Barra to Ness.

There has been no major change in focus for the collections and no key disposals. The majority of the museum collections are stored in Marybank depository in Stornoway and Torlum Museum Store in Benbecula with other items being exhibited at the Museum nan Eilean, Lews Castle, Stornoway and Museum nan Eilean, Sgoil Lionacleit, Benbecula.

### **3. An overview of current collections**

#### OVERVIEW OF CURRENT COLLECTIONS

The Collecting Area for the Museum is the area of the Outer Hebrides as defined by the Local Government (Scotland) Act, 1994 and both inhabited and non-inhabited islands within this boundary

The following subject areas are represented in the museum collections

- Archaeology
- Social history
- Local photographs, ephemera and paintings
- Natural History

The museum collections currently comprise some 14,400 items or groups of items; of these some 20% are on loan. These loans are mostly made up of two collections, Lewis Museum Trust collection and the Calbost Collection. These collections are placed in the care of Museum nan Eilean under formal management agreements with the respective trusts. Another small number of approximately 80 items are on loan from National Museums of Scotland plus a smaller loan from the British Museum.

#### Archaeology

There are several hundred objects from stray finds as well as a growing number of site assemblages from recent evacuations which have been allocated via the Treasure Trove process. Material held by Museum nan Eilean can now be considered of national and even international significance. Items from these collections are used regularly by lecturers at the University of the Highlands and Islands (Stornoway campus) in tutorials and lectures.

#### Industry and Commerce (including Maritime)

This includes items relating to the Harris Tweed Industry including domestic weaving tools as well as ones from the mills. The fishing industry is also well represented with a Grimsay boat being a significant object along with a number of boat models, particularly HMS Lively and the Muirneag .

#### Domestic Life (including Crofting, Costume, Textiles)

Much of this material comes from the Calbost Collection and includes a collection of crofting hand tools, many of which would have been handmade. Included in this is a portable anvil used by itinerant travelling people to repair these tools. Along with a few other tin items, this object reflects the important part that these craftsmen had in Hebridean society. This item was in poor condition when it was received and has been conserved prior to being put on display. A distinctive characteristic of this collection is the necessity for recycling and reusing.

#### Decorative and Applied Art and Fine Art

The museum has a small art collection of 450 pieces (387 Decorative and Applied Art and 64 Fine Art) and a small number are of national importance. The small visual arts collections reflect the limited place of the pictorial arts in the local culture in the past. Most artwork in the collection relates to the topography and history of the Outer Hebrides. In 2006, with assistance from the Art Fund, the museum purchased the painting "*Stornaway with a Shooting Lodge on the Isle of Lewes*" by James Barret. Painted in 1798 this is one of the earliest known oil paintings of the Outer Hebrides and shows the development of Stornaway town since then.

#### Accessioned Archival Material

Museum nan Eilean holds a collection of postal history and subsequent postal history acquisitions made up of a number of albums of letters, postmarks, stamps, envelopes, postcards with a date from the late 18th century to present day; postcards and photographs which comprises several hundred original items supplemented by over 1000 copy prints and accompanying negatives of material in private possession. The Gibson collection is comprised of letters, medals, journals, certificates and writings collected by William J Gibson, the first Rector of the Nicolson Institute. Of particular interest is the collection of letters written to him by ex-pupils during World War 1. These letters are from young men serving at the front and also from female pupils who have gone into nursing and domestic service on the mainland. As a whole, these letters give much information on domestic and foreign affairs of the time. This collection is accessed regularly by researchers and has been partly transcribed to make the content available for study and display by local groups and schools.

## **4. Themes and priorities for future collecting**

The Collecting Area for the Museum will be the area of the Outer Hebrides as defined by the Local Government (Scotland) Act, 1994 and both inhabited and non-inhabited islands within this boundary.

Museum nan Eilean will seek to collect material illustrating the prehistory, history and culture of the Outer Hebrides. It will collect material dating from the time of the earliest human settlement in the Outer Hebrides until the present day. Although our present collections are broad ranging they do not document any area in depth. Not only are there significant gaps in such themes covered, there are many areas which are not covered in any way and these gaps will be our priorities.

The following classes of material may be defined as suitable for inclusion within the museum collections (accessioned, handling and research collections):

- i. Original artefacts, as a central feature of any museum's activity.
- ii. Where original artefacts are no longer available, suitable and accurate replicas.
- iii. Records relating to relevant artefacts held in other collections.
- iv. Photographs, plans, drawings, descriptions of sites, monuments, buildings, man-made features of landscape as non-mobile aspects of the material culture of the Western Isles.
- v. Photographs, plans, drawings, paintings and other visual representations of the Western Islands, the topography, people, sites, monuments, buildings, artefacts etc, historic or contemporary, original or copies.
- vi. Ephemera relating to the social, domestic, economic, industrial, commercial and religious life and public services.
- vii. Audio or video material; either carried out by or commissioned on behalf of the museum, original material from other sources, or copies from other collections.
- viii. Film material; historical or contemporary; as a general principle and in view of its particular conservation needs, original archival material will be lodged with the Scottish Film Archive and copies retained by the Museum.
- ix. Gaelic place-name information.
- x. Gaelic material culture names, names for processes, activities, weather and sea conditions, etc.
- xi. Custom, belief, folklore and tradition, information, references, etc relating to this.

In 2013 the archive collection was transferred to the care and management of the Archive Service (Tasglann nan Eilean Siar). Responsibility for collecting original archival and documentary material will now reside with Tasglann nan Eilean Siar. However mixed donations will be dealt with on a case by case basis – please refer to Documentation Manual.

Recent sustained programme of excavations throughout the islands have resulted in a substantial body of assemblages awaiting allocation through the Scottish Archaeological Finds Allocation Panel (SAFAP) and the museum will seek to have them allocated locally as a priority, depending on storage and capacity.

The museum particularly acknowledges the work of the Comainn Eachdraidh throughout the Western Isles and the development by them of collections representative of their own locality. The museum is committed to working with the Comainn Eachdraidh to ensure the co-ordinated development of collections within the Western Isles representative of the place, its social, economic and cultural characteristics and its regional differences. Through mutual co-operation the museum will seek to avoid unnecessary collection duplication and to ensure the appropriate location of material given the nature and significance of items.

## **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.**

An inventory of the Torlum store has been completed and an inventory is underway at Marybank store. Information gathered during these inventories will allow us to identify areas which may be suitable for rationalisation.

### Archaeology

The archaeological assemblage collection may be rationalised to create more storage space and to make the collection easier to access and research. Examples of material which may be considered for rationalisation include: unprocessed environmental samples, undiagnostic items, unstratified material and bulk soil samples. Any rationalisation would be carried out in partnership with the Island's Archaeologist and in consultation with HES and TT/ FDP.

### Social History & Natural History

The inventory will look at duplicates, relevance and condition and a decision on rationalisation will be taken by the Collections Committee once this is complete. Any rationalisation of collections stored and managed by MnE will be completed in consultation with relevant Trusts.

## **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):**

- o Ness Heritage Centre*
- o Bernera Museum*
- o Comann Eachdraidh Uibhist a Tuath*
- o Kildonan Museum*
- o The National Museums of Scotland*
- o The National Galleries of Scotland*
- o Glasgow Life*
- o High Life Highland*

## **8 Archival holdings**

ERDF funded the Tasglann nan Eilean Siar project which ran from 2010-2013. This three-year project established the archive service and focussed on creating a brand, scoping archives held by public authorities, businesses, individuals and historical societies, bringing this information together into a website and archive catalogue database. In 2013, the Governing body of Museum nan Eilean, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar incorporated Tasglann nan Eilean Siar (Hebridean Archives) into the Heritage Service to formally manage the archive collections of the Council body. The archive collection relating to pre 1975 local government in the islands has been transferred to Tasglann nan Eilean Siar along with a series of smaller archive collections. These collections were previously deposited at the Museum but not formally accessioned.

Responsibility for collecting original archival and documentary material will now reside with Tasglann nan Eilean Siar.

## **9 Acquisition**

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

Final decisions on which items are accessioned lies with the Collections Committee and all new items should be presented at a committee meeting for formal agreement. They will make their decision based on the Collections Development Policy guidelines.

The person responsible for inputting data into the Acquisitions Register is the Collections Officer or another person nominated by the Heritage Manager. The format for acquisition is laid out in our Documentation Procedure Manual.

The Collections Committee will make decisions on purchasing of items for accession and will look for internal and external methods to fund these. If the funding is to come from internal sources outwith the MnE budgets then Comhairle Committee permission would be required.

### **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, 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 guidelines in the 'Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Scottish Museums' issued by Museums Galleries Scotland in 2011.**

## **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 Scotland, under the laws of bona vacantia including Treasure Trove, the Crown has title to all ownerless objects including antiquities, although such material as human remains and environmental samples are not covered by the law of bona vacantia. Scottish material of chance finds and excavation assemblages are offered to museums through the treasure trove process and cannot therefore be legally acquired by means other than by allocation to *[museum name]* by the Crown. However where the Crown has chosen to forego its title to a portable antiquity or excavation assemblage, a Curator or other responsible person acting on behalf of the *[name of governing body]*, can establish that valid title to the item in question has been acquired by ensuring that a certificate of 'No Claim' has been issued on behalf of the Crown.

## **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 Scottish Museums” issued by MGS in 2011) , 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 Scotland will follow the guidelines in the ‘Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Scottish Museums’ issued by Museums Galleries Scotland in 2011.**

## **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 Museums Galleries Scotland.

- 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 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.