



Didcot Railway Centre

Collections development policy



Version 4.1
March 2023

Name of museum: Didcot Railway Centre

Name of governing body: Great Western Society Limited

Date on which this policy was approved by governing body: 25 March 2023

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: March 2028

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 constituent bodies of the Great Western Society (the Museum) who are parties to the Collections Development Policy agree that they will only undertake actions in relation to their own collections as follows:

- 1.1.1. Great Western Society [buildings and historic plant]
- 1.1.2. Great Western Preservations [locomotives, coaches and wagons]
- 1.1.3. Great Western Trust ['Small Relics' and paperwork items]

1.2. The museum's statement of purpose is:

- 1) To preserve, restore and operate as a permanent public exhibition and museum, steam and other railway locomotives, rolling stock and equipment, both for historical and educational purposes
- 2) To make available for public reference the history, equipment and operation all with reference to both the former Great Western Railway, its predecessors and successors since nationalisation on 1 January 1948.

Our Vision is to recreate the golden age of the Great Western Railway.

Our mission is:

- To be a nationally accredited independent organisation
- To develop and maintain Didcot Railway Centre as a working museum dedicated to the Great Western Railway
- To provide suitable facilities to demonstrate restoration and maintenance of the Collection
- To be open to the public for the enjoyment, benefit and education of the community.

Our challenge is to become a more commercially orientated organisation in order to achieve the Vision.

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

1.4. 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.

- 1.5. Acquisitions outside the current stated policy will only be made in exceptional circumstances.
- 1.6. 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.
- 1.7. 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.
- 1.8. The museum will not undertake disposal motivated principally by financial reasons.

2. History of the collections

The Great Western Society was founded in 1961 and incorporated as a company limited by guarantee and a charity in 1967. The GWS was founded to preserve a steam engine that was typical of local steam services and purchased GWR No 1466 in 1964. During the 1970s and 1980s the Society acquired a large collection of steam engines, carriages, wagons and small objects. The GWS moved to the former steam depot at Didcot in 1967 and has since developed Didcot Railway Centre as an accredited museum and visitor attraction.

Subsequently, Great Western Preservations was set up to hold the collection of railway rolling stock (engines, carriages and wagons) and Great Western Trust to manage the smaller items and archive.

The collections have grown by donations, bequests and purchases.

In 2015, the objects of the GWS were amended to include the successors of the Great Western Railway, which has extended the scope of our collecting policy.

3. An overview of current collections

The museum collects objects and artefacts pertinent to the Great Western Railway (GWR) Company, constituent companies, absorbed companies and joint undertakings, British Railways, predominantly Western Region and its successors – this is the Core Collection.

The Core Collection comprises a representative collection of:

- locomotives [original, rebuild or replica]
- carriages and wagons [original, rebuild or replica]
- road vehicles [original, rebuild or replica]
- buildings and structures [original, rebuild or replica]

- permanent way [original, rebuild or replica]
- 'Small artefact' items, such as locomotive nameplates, number plates, documents, maps, posters, photographs, books, tickets, cast iron signs, station signs, clothing, cutlery, crockery, furniture, stationery, models, social history items, trolleys, horse drays and signalling equipment, etc.
- items of particular historical significance, both in the general and specific sense, to the Didcot locality plus local railways such as the Didcot, Newbury & Southampton Railway, Lambourn Valley Railway, Abingdon Railway, located in the counties of Oxfordshire and Berkshire.
- items and memorabilia which reflect the impact and influence of the Railway Age upon the public at large and upon social history. These include both children's toys and books on social and railway history not limited to those directly referring to the Great Western Railway, newspapers and film archives of a transport nature.

Documentation will distinguish between original, rebuild and replica items.

The Great Western Trust is also the custodian of the records etc of the Great Western Society itself under the generic title "GWS Heritage", including the GWS's own Heritage Archive.

4. Themes and priorities for future collecting

Future collecting of items will be undertaken by the museum, as appropriate in line with Para 1.1, to supplement and enhance the collection.

Collecting of items that enhance the study, display and enjoyment of the collection by the public and members of the Great Western Society will continue. Acquisitions in this context will be assessed on their individual merit, the pursuit of such material will not generally be given precedence over the key focus of the collection.

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 as disposal is not currently a priority. Disposals will only be undertaken for legal, safety or care and conservation reasons.

5 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):

- National Railway Museum [York]
- STEAM – Museum of the GWR [Swindon]
- Kidderminster Railway Museum (Severn Valley Railway)
- Bluebell Railway Museum
- Isle of Wight Steam Railway
- London & North Western Railway Society

8 Archival holdings

8.1 As the 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 (third edition, 2002).

9 Acquisition

9.1 All acquisitions will be undertaken with reference to the SPECTRUM Primary Procedures on acquisition.

9.2 For GWS, the collection is substantially complete and acquisitions will only be made in exceptional circumstances. The case for such acquisitions is a matter for discussion and approval by the GWS Board.

9.3 For GWP, the collection is substantially complete and acquisitions will only be made in exceptional circumstances. The case for such acquisitions is a matter for discussion and agreement by the GWP Board, and for formal approval by the GWS Board, as governing body.

9.4 For GWT, the trustee nominated as Collection Manager reviews all acquisitions to ensure they are in line with the GWT deed, taking into account the following policies:

- Policy on Authorising Purchases for our Core Collection
- Policy on Accepting Models (scale) into our Core Collection.
- Goals for acquiring Locomotive plates for the Core Collection
- Signal Box Nameboard Collecting Policy

The full Board of Trustees must agree to accepting future Bequests.

9.5 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).

9.6 The museum will only accept redundant historic artefacts from Network Rail with the approval of the appropriate bodies, ie Network Rail, Department for Transport or Railway Heritage Designation Advisory Board. The process for acquiring historical artefacts from Network Rail is as follows:

9.6.1 Identify the artefact and its location, and take photographs.

- 9.6.2 Provide historical supporting rationale as to why the artefacts are "redundant" and provide a justification as to why the item is worthy of preservation away from their current locations.
- 9.6.3 Pass the information to a nominated person within GWT & GWS. The nominated persons are the Chairman, GWT, and the Secretary, GWS.
- 9.6.4 Nominated person to review the historical significance of the artefacts and advise the GWT & GWS Board if it meets our historical requirements and should come to DRC. The relevant Board will approve the acquisition as outlined in 9.2 to 9.4 above.
- 9.6.5 If the acquisition is approved, contact the appropriate person within Network Rail.
- 9.6.6 Fill in the Redundant Assets Disposal Form (copy available on the shared system) and provide photographs. Send to the appropriate person within Network Rail.
- 9.6.7 Await further instructions from the Network Rail contact.

9.7 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

10.1 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 (not applicable)

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.
- 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 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.
- 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.