



SIR JOHN  
SOANE'S  
MUSEUM  
LONDON

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## ACQUISITION AND DISPOSAL POLICY (COLLECTIONS DEVELOPMENT POLICY)

### SIR JOHN SOANE'S MUSEUM

**Please note:** all Accredited Museums are required to use the Template supplied by ACE for this document. For purposes of Accreditation this policy is referred to as our Collections Development Policy.

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**Name of governing body:** The Trustees of Sir John Soane's Museum

**Date on which this policy was approved by governing body:** 9 November 2021

#### 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:** November 2026

ACE (as administrators of the Accreditation Scheme) will be notified of any changes to the Collections Development (Acquisition and Disposal) Policy, and the implications of any such changes for the future of existing collections.

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

##### 1.1. The Museum's Statement of purpose is:

Sir John Soane's Museum comprises his own collections and personal effects, acquired between the 1780s and his death in 1837. The Museum (13 Lincoln's Inn Fields) was his residence which he designed to house and display his collections. The 1833 founding Act of Parliament stipulates that the arrangements within the house be kept in perpetuity as they were at the time of his death.

*Acquisitions and Disposals Policy SJSM: first approved 2008; v. approved by Trustees Nov 2021  
Master copy held on the Trustees drive*

The aims and objectives of the Trustees today embody Soane's general aims as defined in the 1833 Act and in the 1969 Order which superseded it and are published in Sir John Soane's Museum's *Annual Report and Accounts*. They are as follows:

The principal aim of the Trustees is to maintain the integrity of Soane's vision for the Museum while extending this, where appropriate, so that the Museum can play an increasing role in educational and recreational life in this country and beyond.

The Trustees' main objectives are as follows:

1. To maintain and improve the conservation and maintenance of our Grade I listed buildings and works of art so that they will be accessible to present and future generations. Soane's 1833 Act stipulated that his house and museum (No.13 Lincoln's Inn Fields) should be kept 'as nearly as circumstances will admit' as it was in 1837. The Trustees' strategy is to maintain the historic fabric of the three Soane houses, Nos 12, 13 and 14 Lincoln's Inn Fields, and, when possible, to restore objects and interiors to their Soane arrangement and appearance.
  2. To allow the public free access to the Museum.
  3. To encourage the public to appreciate and explore all aspects of the Museum and its manifold collections, and of Sir John Soane, his life and works, whether as visitors or at a distance.
  4. To inspire curiosity and creativity by means of an imaginative programme of events so that the Soane remains a 'living' museum.
  5. To provide opportunities for education in its broadest sense in all aspects of architecture and the history of art, doing honour to Soane's intention to develop his House and Museum as 'an Academy for the Study of Architecture'.
  6. To ensure that the Museum's staff, administration and finances are effectively managed.
- 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

Sir John Soane's collection was put together in his lifetime (1753-1837) and arranged by him in a series of unique interiors in the home that he designed at No. 13 Lincoln's Inn Fields which are preserved as they were at the time of his death in 1837 as required by the Soane Museum Act of Parliament, passed in 1833. Amongst his collections were c.30,000 architectural drawings which were at his death not on display but housed in drawers and cupboards throughout his house. These were brought together in the 1920s to create a 'Research Library' collection which is now housed in No. 14 Lincoln's Inn Fields.

Few items have been added to the collections since 1837 although there have been some significant acquisitions by gift, most notably of works by Joseph Michael Gandy (presented to the Museum by his descendants). Items acquired since Soane's death are not displayed in the Museum's historic interiors which are preserved as they were in 1837. Some are hung in No. 14 Lincoln's Inn Fields, the Soane house next door, acquired by the Museum in 1996 but most form part of the Research Library collection, available to view by appointment. On rare occasions in the past small items from the fabric of other Soane buildings have been acquired (for example, a tile or a brick) and these are housed with the Museum's own building archive. On occasion, since the late 1980s, the Museum has purchased historic items such as lamps or kitchen equipment to replicate Soane's own arrangements where objects do not survive.

## 3. An overview of current collections

The collections include two celebrated series of Hogarth paintings (*A Rake's Progress* and *An Election*), 3 paintings by Canaletto, 3 by JMW Turner and the Egyptian sarcophagus of King Seti I, as well as an important collection of early 19th century English paintings and sculpture and approximately 30,000 architectural drawings.

**A summary list of the holdings** is as follows (we also have five items on long-term loan not listed here):

### Asia:

- Chinese ceramics (18th century), 42
- Chinese export dinner service, 228
- Chinese blue and white tiles, Kangxi, 377
- Indian miniatures, in a bound volume (17th & 18th century): 37
- Sculpture, bronzes etc., 15

**Egypt:**

Egyptian and Graeco-Egyptian antiquities: 38

Gems (Egyptian scarabs): 3

**Europe (mainly English):**

Architectural fragments:

Stone & marble: 44

Other materials: 32

Architectural models:

Models of antique buildings (plaster & cork): 34

Soane models: Bank of England: 44

Other buildings: 84

Miscellaneous models (including full-size models of ornaments other than plaster casts): 100

Arms (weapons): 5

Ceramics: 39 (this does not include Soane's domestic china)

Clocks, barometers & timepieces: 11

Furniture (Soane period, post-Soane and replica: 320

Gems (Greek & Roman provincial, Hellenistic, Etruscan, Roman, Early Christian, Medieval, Renaissance, Neo-Classical & miscellaneous gems): 320

Greek and Roman marbles including architectural and decorative fragments (candelabra, furniture, ornaments etc.), major frieze and relief fragments, Greek votive and funeral reliefs, sarcophagus fragments, cinerary urns, funerary vases and statuary (including fragments, figures, heads and busts): 413

Greek and Roman bronzes: 31

Greek and Roman terracottas, mosaics and miscellaneous: 47

Greek and Roman vases: 59

Italian and Northern Renaissance bronzes (figures & plaques): 24

Jewellery: 3

Medals (Napoleonic, Soane & others): 166

Medieval objects (including architectural fragments, fragments of woodcarving, tiles, pottery, glass & miscellaneous items): 70

Paintings and drawings (excluding architectural drawings):

Oil paintings 16th-19th centuries: 68

Watercolour, chalk, pencil etc.: 266

Miniatures: 4

Plaster casts (from antique and renaissance buildings or works of art): 442

Sculpture by named English Sculptors:

John Flaxman: 57

Other sculptors: 38

Sculpture based on antique or renaissance models (mostly in plaster): 24

Sculpture, miscellaneous:

Stone, marble, alabaster, terracotta & Coade Stone: 39

Plaster (including stucco manufacturer's specimens): 58

Wax: 6

Seals (engraved seals): 202

Silver (not including cutlery), 10

Stained glass (16th- and 17th-century stained-glass panels), 104

**Human remains:**

A male skeleton and an ancient Egyptian mummified head): 2

**Natural objects** (i.e. fossils, mummified cats &c.): 30

**Oceania:**

Australian bird's nest 1

New Zealand *taiaha* 1

Asbestos cloth 1

**South America:**

Peruvian Pottery: 12

**Research Library collection:**

Architectural drawings and prints:

Bound Volumes of Italian drawings: 1430

Bound volumes of English drawings: 831

Bound volumes of drawings by Adam, Brettingham, Playfair, Rysbrack, Sandby, Reveley, Repton & others: 1,635

Soane drawings (37 Volumes): 2,523

Miscellaneous engravings in volumes: 168

Volumes of drawings from the Office of Robert and James Adam: 8,856

Drawings by Sir William Chambers: 789

Drawings by George Dance: 1,303

Sir John Soane's drawings (framed and loose sheets - including lecture diagrams): 8,044

Drawings by James Playfair: 286

Miscellaneous architectural drawings and prints: 931

Pennant's London, extra illustrated copy: 1,531

Books (including illuminated and other manuscripts and early printed books as well as Soane's wide-ranging collection of early 19th century publications, more than half of which concern art, architecture, topography etc.): 6,393

Soane Archives: Soane's extensive archive of personal and business papers

**The Building Archive:** an extensive building / collections archive of items such as sash fasteners too decayed to be retained in use; fabric samples from re-upholstering projects, samples of fixings, museum labelling and signage etc. The Building Archive expands each year and currently comprises just over 2,300 items.

For the avoidance of doubt, modern models, furniture or plaster casts made for exhibition or other purposes since 1990 and given to/retained by the Museum are not considered collection items and are bought by/given to/retained by the Museum on the basis that this may not be permanent and that they may be de-acquisitioned as long as this has been approved by the Director and the Deputy Director in consultation as necessary with the Exhibitions Curator. A record will be kept of all such de-acquisitions.

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

- 4.1** Acquisitions are rare and there is no acquisitions fund (the Soane was bequeathed to the nation as a closed collection).
- 4.2.** Acquisitions might include items associated with Soane's life, family, and architectural practice, for example, portraits, letters, design drawings by Soane himself or his sons or office pupils, photographs of Soane's buildings or related buildings. Items acquired might also relate to Soane's museum and its historic interiors or to past Curators of the Museum, for example, portraits, photographs, furniture, lamps, drawings, or archive material. The Museum might also collect photographs, design drawings, portraits etc. relating to the major holdings of architectural drawings in its collection and in particular to the work of Robert and James Adam and George Dance the Younger.
- 4.3.** Future acquisitions may come from any time period or geographical area, providing they are related to Soane's life and work or his museum and collections. In general when acquisitions are made, they relate to the period 1753-1837, the lifetime of Sir John Soane or to the long eighteenth century. However, in exceptional circumstances an item may be acquired that relates to a work of art in the collection dating from another period or which relates to the history of the Museum i.e. the period from 1837 to the present day.
- 4.4** Acquisitions not covered by this policy:
- 4.4.1.** Acquisitions outside the current stated policy will only be made in very exceptional circumstances and then only after proper consideration by the governing body of the Museum, having regard to the interests of other museums.

#### **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.
- 5.2.** Disposal and rationalisation is not permitted by the governance conditions of Sir John Soane's Museum.
- 5.3.** Disposals would only be undertaken in exceptional circumstances for legal or safety reasons (for example, spoliation, radiation, infestation).

#### **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 specialisation, in order to avoid unnecessary duplication and waste of resources.
- 7.2.** Specific reference is made to the following museums/organisations:
- 7.2.1.** V&A (Prints and Drawings)
  - 7.2.2.** RIBA Drawings Collection
  - 7.2.3.** Other members of ICAM (International Confederation of Architectural Museums, a sub-group of ICOM) as required by the ICAM rules

## **8. Archival holdings**

- 8.1.** As the museum holds / intends to acquire archives, including photographs and printed ephemera, its governing body will be guided by the Code of Practice on Archives for Museums in the United Kingdom (3rd ed. 2002).

## **9. Acquisition**

- 9.1** The policy for agreeing acquisitions is that potential acquisitions are recommended by Curators to the Director, with a written report, and by the Director to the Trustees (if they involve expenditure of sums outside our modest departmental annual budgets). In the case of purchases requiring fundraising, the Director, in consultation with the Director of Development and Communications and the relevant Curator(s), will identify suitable or potential sources of funding. All such purchases must be authorised in advance by the Trustees. In urgent cases (for example if an item is coming up for auction before the next Trustees meeting) permission may be sought from Trustees via email between meetings. When considering any potential acquisition, its current and projected needs in terms of conservation and storage will be considered, along with curatorial capacity.

**9.1.1.** For the avoidance of doubt: modest items of ephemera (under £200) such as copies of out-of-print guidebooks, postcards or individual photographs may be acquired from departmental budgets for research files outside this policy.

**9.1.2.** For the avoidance of doubt: gifts to the collection will be considered under the terms of this policy (whereas gifts of other kinds are covered by the Museum's *Declaration of Interests and Gifts and Hospitality Policy*).

- 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 1st 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** As the museum holds human remains over 100 years old, it will follow the procedures in the 'Guidance for the care of human remains in museums' issued by DCMS in 2005.

**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 (9.1-12.1) 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
- acquiring an item of minor importance and low value that lacks secure ownership history but in the best judgment of experts in the field concerned has not been illicitly traded; or
- in possession of reliable documentary evidence that the item was exported from its country of origin before 1970.

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 'Spoliation of Works of Art during the Holocaust and World War II period: Statement of Principles and Proposed Actions', issued by the National Museum Directors' Conference in 1998, and report on them in accordance with the guidelines.



## **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 subject to its legal position and taking into account all ethical implications and available guidance. This will mean that the procedures described in 16.1-5 below will be followed but the remaining procedures are not appropriate.
- 15.2.** The disposal of human remains from museums in England, Northern Ireland and Wales will follow the procedures in the 'Guidance for the care of human remains in museums'.

## **16. Disposal procedures**

- 16.1.** The 1833 Soane's Museum Act and the 1969 Soane Museum Order stipulate that nothing shall leave the collection. Disposals from Soane's original collections as bequeathed to the nation on his death in 1837 are therefore prohibited. Disposals of items acquired since Soane's death are subject to the procedures set out in the following rules.
- 16.2.** All disposals will be undertaken with reference to the Spectrum primary procedures on disposal.
- 16.3.** 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.
- 16.4.** 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.
- 16.5.** 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.
- 16.6.** 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.

- 16.7.** 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.
- 16.8.** 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.
- 16.9.** 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).
- 16.10.** 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.
- 16.11.** 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.
- 16.12.** 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.
- 16.13.** Full records will be kept of all decisions on disposals and the items involved and proper arrangements for the preservation and/or transfer, as appropriate, of the documentation relating to the items concerned, including photographic records, where practicable in accordance with the SPECTRUM Procedure on de-accession and disposal, will be made.

For purposes of clarification it should be noted that modern/historic items acquired for temporary exhibitions (frames, models, desks/pedestals etc.) or for office/education use

(including for the handling collection) are not part of the Museum collection but may be subject to separate restrictions if they have been grant-funded or given to the Museum. For the avoidance of doubt: the Building Archive of elements of fabric retained on completion of projects at the Museum is not subject to a full record being kept of items that are not retained. Items deemed of interest are kept and other materials disposed of on a case-by-case basis decided by curators with the Museum's architect, making a reasonable assessment of significance and what may be of future interest.

### **Disposal by exchange**

**16.14.** The museum will not dispose of items by exchange.

### **Disposal by destruction**

**16.15.** If it is not possible to dispose of an object through transfer or sale, the governing body may decide to destroy it.

**16.16.** 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.

**16.17.** 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.

**16.18.** 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.

**16.19.** The destruction of objects should be witnessed by an appropriate member of the museum workforce. In circumstances where this is not possible, e.g. the destruction of controlled substances, a police certificate should be obtained and kept in the relevant object history file.

**END**