

## **Collection Policy for Clare Museum**

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2014 - 2019

# **Draft Collection Policy for Clare Museum**

## **Introduction**

This document sets out the regulations governing the acquisition of objects for the collection at Clare Museum. The policy shall be discussed internally on an annual basis and formally reviewed every five years to ensure that it remains fit for purpose, and any revision shall be submitted to the Council for its adoption.

### **1. Statement of Purpose**

- 1.1 'The mission of Clare Museum is to collect, preserve, interpret and display the material culture relating to the history of County Clare, both in the museum building and online, as an educational resource and a socially inclusive cultural service for the people of Clare and visiting tourists.'
- 1.2 This policy is intended to help the museum achieve its mission through focussed collecting. It recognises the collection as its greatest resource and seeks to be socially inclusive while at the same time providing accountability and greater value for money to the taxpayer.

### **2. Background**

In 2002 acquisition guidelines copied from a similar document in Cavan County Museum were placed upon the Clare Museum website to assist members of the public wishing to donate objects to the museum. However, no formal collection policy has ever been adopted by either Ennis Town Council, prior to its abolition in June 2014, or Clare County Council. The formal adoption of a Collection Policy is a requirement for accreditation under the Heritage Council's Museum Standard's Programme for Ireland.

### **3. The Type and Quantity of Collections**

- 3.1 Clare Museum was established in 2000 in a section of a convent building purchased in 1994 by Ennis Urban District Council. The collection currently stands (to the end of 2013) at about 4,768 objects relating to the local history, prehistory and natural history of County Clare. Included in this figure are objects on display in the permanent exhibition that are on long-term loan from the National Museum of Ireland (367) or from private individuals (93). 9.7% of the collection is on loan to the museum. One item is on loan to the National Museum of Ireland.

- 3.2 These collections cover a wide range of categories including archaeology, folklife, social and political history and natural history. There is a broad spectrum of object types: documents and photographs (3,468), Stone (274), Textile (58), Metal (526), glass and ceramic (123), Wood (102), Leather (37), Film and Tape (18), and miscellaneous (162). Thirty-one items are considered to be of National importance, while the remainder are locally important.
- 3.3 The collection includes the items transferred to Clare Museum from the de Valera Library Museum for which there is no clear evidence of title and very little documentation. Some of these items were transferred to the library from a local authority museum that existed in Bindon Street for a number of years in the 1960s.
- 3.4 The Hillery Collection comprises about 50% of the museum collection and is the largest single collection owned by the museum. These are objects, documents and photographs relating mainly to the Presidency of Dr Patrick Hillery and were donated to the museum before his death. The cataloguing of this collection will allow it to be harnessed for the benefit of the public.
- 3.5 As far as is known, the condition of the collection is fair to good. There are only two items in need of remedial conservation at present. When they are conserved their records will be kept on file.

#### **4. Scope of the Collection**

- 4.1 The essential nature of the material to be collected is any historical or archaeological object or document, regardless of date, which will aid the museum in achieving its mission.
- 4.2 Clare Museum acknowledges that the Clare County Archives and Clare County Library also collect archival and photographic collections respectively within the county. The Museum also acknowledges that the National Museum of Ireland also collects in the same geographical area. The museum will work with those named to ensure that material is preserved in the place most appropriate, given the nature of the items, their provenance and storage requirements.
- 4.3 Clare Museum will collect items that exist in or can be provenanced to County Clare, or objects made in or at some point used within, or otherwise provenanced to County Clare, regardless of their location at the time of acquisition. Where this involves the collection of items from a place within the collecting area of another museum, a principle of open actions and good communications will apply.

- 4.4 The museums' acquisition policy is an active one. A summative evaluation survey has identified a gap in the museum collection regarding objects from more recent decades and this will be addressed by seeking appropriate donations from 1960 to the present day. Collecting will be socially inclusive and conscious of representing those often under-represented in museum collections, including the role of women, the travelling community, immigrants and the disabled.

## **5. Rules Regulating Acquisition**

- 5.1 These regulations will govern the acquisition of objects for the collections at Clare Museum. The adoption and implementation of such a policy by Clare County Council is a requirement of the Heritage Council's Museum Standards Programme for Ireland under which Clare Museum is seeking accreditation.
- 5.2 The Museum will not acquire, whether by purchase, gift, bequest or exchange, any item, unless the Curator, on behalf of the Council, is satisfied that valid title of the item in question can be acquired. In particular no item will be collected which has been acquired in, or exported from, its country of origin including the Republic of Ireland, or an intermediate country in which it may have been legally owned, in violation of the country's laws.
- 5.3 Where items have been collected in the past as a gift in good faith but where no clear transfer of title has been secured or where title is ambiguous, the Curator will attempt to contact the donor to secure title. If following reasonable effort, the Curator is unable to contact the donor and title is not secured, a detailed note of the process shall be held in the object history file.
- 5.4 The museum has no history of purchasing items for its collection and there is no grant available for the purchase of items at this time. This situation is unlikely to change before the review of this policy.
- 5.5 The Curator can refuse the acquisition of any item that would result in significant financial implications in respect to storage, conservation, display or security.
- 5.6 Items offered to the Museum as gifts or bequests will not normally be accepted if they are subject to restrictive covenant or special conditions, such as that they be displayed in a particular way or at a particular time or place. In exceptional circumstances, if the Curator feels the item or collection in question are of over-riding importance, he/she will approve the acquisition of a specific item to which conditions are attached. A general exception to this rule will be deemed to exist in respect of restrictive covenants or conditions intended only to assure the permanent protection of the item concerned in

the Museum's collections. Under such circumstances, the Curator may agree to accept the gift or bequest in question.

- 5.7 The acceptance of items on loan, normally for a finite period of display or specific study, may be authorised by the Curator. In exceptional cases, a privately owned item of major importance that falls within the scope of this policy may be accepted on a finite long-term loan, whether or not it is required for immediate display or study. No item will be received on 'permanent loan', a term which has no legal status. The period of all loans will normally be agreed in writing between the Curator and the owner of the item at the time of deposit. Where the term of a loan has expired, it may be renewed or extended for further finite periods, at the discretion of both the owner and the Curator.
- 5.8 An examination period of 40 days can be requested to allow the Curator to consider items for acquisition under the criteria laid down in this policy.
- 5.9 Under no circumstances shall the Museum provide an appraisal of value of a donation. It may only offer suggestions concerning outside appraisal services.
- 5.10 No biological or geological specimen will be acquired unless the Curator is satisfied that it has not been collected, sold or otherwise transferred in contravention of any Wildlife or Conservation Law of the Republic of Ireland or any other country, unless the acquisition has been specifically authorised by an appropriate outside authority, such as a court.
- 5.11 The Museum and its staff will abide by the National Monuments (Amendment) Act 1994 and the Cultural Institutions Act 1997 in relation to archaeological objects.
- 5.12 The Museum shall at all times be aware of and sensitive to the concerns of all communities and traditions when considering the acquisition of artefacts and other material.
- 5.13 The Museum will not acquire any object that already exists in the collection unless it is deemed by the Curator to be of importance to the collection. An exception will be archaeological objects acquired under the National Monuments (Amendment) Act 1994, or items acquired to form part of a 'handling collection', to be used for educational or outreach purposes.
- 5.14 The Council hereby confirms its acceptance of the principle that the collections of Clare Museum are held in trust for future generations. Only under exceptional circumstances, as outlined in the Museum's Disposal Policy, will de-accessioning or disposal of any item from the collections be permissible.

- 5.15 All Acquisitions are to be outright and unconditional. All donations to the Museum's collections are irrevocable upon their formal and physical transfer to the Museum.
- 5.16 The museum shall extend to any donor the right of anonymity.
- 5.17 Within available resources the museum will place photographs of items on the museum website to provide access to collections in storage and to help reduce handling.

## **6. Commitments and Responsibilities in Respect of Collections**

- 6.1 The Museum is committed to maintaining an archive of all documentation relating to its collections. In doing so it acknowledges the need for an ethical approach to acquisition and collection management that it is also central to efficient use of the collection for museum activities.
- 6.2 The Curator, as Clare Museum's senior museum professional, will normally have delegated authority and responsibility for accepting or rejecting potential gifts or bequests to the Museum, in accordance with this Policy.
- 6.3 All legal instruments of conveyance and warranty of title, signed by a donor setting forth an adequate description of the items involved and the precise conditions of transfer shall accompany all acquisitions.
- 6.4 All items whether on loan or donated must be accompanied by relevant supporting documentation which will be maintained by the Museum. The museum will seek to obtain title for the small number of items on 'permanent loan' to the museum but which is in storage, or otherwise return the items to their owner.
- 6.5 All items accepted by the Curator into the collection of the Museum on behalf of the Council shall be accessioned to standards outlined by the Museum Standards Programme for Ireland.
- 6.6 It is policy that a movement and location control system to track the location of objects when taken from the museum stores will be maintained.
- 6.7 The suitability of items with a view to display for public exposure/benefit will drive this policy. This prioritises fine examples, but at the discretion of the Curator who, will take into account the cost of conservation, display and rarity of the object.
- 6.8 All measures will be taken to ensure that the collections are secure both while on display and/or in storage.

- 6.9 All objects will be stored in accordance with best practice as outlined by the Museum Standards Programme for Ireland, at either the off-site store at Beechpark or in the store in the museum building. This includes appropriate packing, maintenance, security and monitoring of appropriate environmental conditions.
- 6.10 The museum will endeavour to make all of its collections available for the public to study wherever possible. While space for the physical display of objects is limited, all accessioned objects will be photographed and placed online in the Recent Acquisitions section of the museum website.
- 6.11 The Museum is committed to providing interpretative displays to the public. These displays can include items from either the Museum's collection, or those borrowed from other institutions and will generally be informed by the Mission Statement.
- 6.12 At present the Museum's staff consists of a Curator, two attendants and a volunteer. The Museum will provide training for museum staff in object handling and preventive conservation through the Heritage Council to help safeguard collections and to utilise the staffing resources more effectively.
- 6.13 The Museum will seek to replace items on long-term loan in the Riches of Clare exhibition with equivalent items from the reserve collection in storage.

## **References**

County Museum, Dundalk Acquisition Policy

Donegal County Museum Draft Collection Policy

Galway City Museum Draft Acquisitioning/Collections Policy

Monaghan County Museum Collections Policy

National Museums Liverpool Acquisitions and Disposal Policy

South Tipperary County Museum Acquisition Policy