

Appendix 2 Collection Management Policy - Overview

WILLIAMSON ART GALLERY & WIRRAL MUSEUMS SERVICE.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The first comprehensive document establishing a collection policy for the Williamson Art Gallery & Museum was prepared in 1989. This is a revised version of that document and it applies also to other venues within the authority that come within the Wirral Museums Service.
- 1.2 Birkenhead's Art Gallery and Museum was founded in 1913 and originally housed within the town's old library. The opening of the Williamson Art Gallery in 1928 expanded the possibilities offered by the service. With a purpose-built museum and art gallery the range and size of collections continued to expand. The reorganisation of local government in 1974 broadened the role of the gallery, now providing a museums service for the whole of the Wirral Metropolitan Area. The Wirral Museums Service in 2009 operates a range of venues sometimes known as the 'Birkenhead Heritage Trail', including Wirral Museum at Birkenhead Town Hall, Birkenhead Priory & St Mary's Tower, Shore Road Pumping Station, Wirral Transport Museum & Birkenhead Tramways. Up until 2007 it also incorporated the Wirral Archives Service, now operated by the Finance Department from Cheshire Lines Building.
- 1.3 This policy provides an overview of the Wirral Museums Service collections, explains their use and care, and is to be used alongside the Acquisition & Disposals Policy, and any other more detailed documents that may deal with specific areas but will fall within the policies defined herein. This document is intended for the use of the public and the authority.
- 1.4 Nearly thirty years ago a comprehensive cataloguing programme was been almost completed at the Williamson Art Gallery & Museum. This is under review and new documentation guidelines are being drawn up which will guide the future development of those procedures.
- 1.5 A checklist of watercolours and drawings was published in 1980 followed by one for oil paintings in 1986. An illustrated 'highlights' catalogue from the watercolour collection was published in 2004 at the time of a major loan exhibition to Italy and an illustrated catalogue of the Wilson Steer collection was published in 1998. The Knowles Boney catalogue of Liverpool porcelain was published some 40 years ago. There is herein a stated intention to supplement printed catalogues with web-based information to ensure wide dissemination.

2.0 EXISTING COLLECTIONS

2.1 FINE ART

2.1.1 BRITISH WATERCOLOURS

By means of a series of bequests and prudent purchases, notably in the period 1920-1935, the gallery has a significant collection of 18th and 19th century watercolour paintings and drawings by British artists. It is unrivalled in the area, representing most major figures in this medium. Since the publication of the

watercolour collection checklist in 1980 it has generated substantial professional interest which was further promoted by the 2004 exhibition and catalogue.

Given the natural restriction created by the high prices now realised by many paintings in this category, it is not considered necessary to acquire work by artists already represented in the collections - unless offered on favourable terms e.g. bequest, gift or modest price. There are however certain areas where the collections are weak - notably important 20th century artists. Additions in this category will be a priority. Pre-Raphaelite artists are poorly represented, but other Merseyside collections do feature them strongly.

2.1.2 THE LIVERPOOL SCHOOL

Merseyside produced a large number of significant artists in the period 1810 - 1910. This "Liverpool School" is well represented in the Williamson collections and has been for over 25 years enhanced by a private loan collection, mostly on permanent gallery display. There are examples in oils and watercolours and additions to this collection will be sought, particularly where artistic merit is combined with local interest (e.g. topography and/or maritime history).

2.1.3 PHILIP WILSON STEER

Philip Wilson Steer was born in Birkenhead in 1860. He left the town as a child and has become especially important in the artistic heritage of the Wirral. Consequently, the Williamson has built a collection of his work that is of national importance, including donations from the National Art-Collections Fund (the Art Fund) and a major bequest from the artist's nephew. A catalogue of the collection was published in 1998. Further examples of his work will be sought where they contribute to the interpretation of his artistic development and broaden the significance of this collection.

2.1.4 LOCAL PAINTINGS

The Williamson Art Gallery & Museum is the virtually the only institution on Merseyside actively researching and supporting local historic and contemporary painters. This important role has produced, through extensive research, much material evidence on the Royal Cambrian Academy, the Wirral Society of Arts etc. Such artists are represented in the collections and such links will be pursued in the future.

Work by leading local artists will continue to be purchased from the Wirral Spring Exhibition of Art & Photography and other gallery exhibitions. A programme of commissions established with the assistance of substantial sponsorship will be encouraged, involving the support of local arts organisations including the Friends of the Williamson Art Gallery & Wirral Museums.

Paintings of the topography of Wirral provide an invaluable interpretative resource for local history. Examples will be acquired which provide adequate information, regardless of artistic merit, but subject to suitable price and available finance.

2.1.5 HISTORIC BRITISH PAINTINGS

Apart from the categories above, the remaining British paintings in this collection are mixed. The earliest dates from c1670, some are by major artists, some are extremely trivial. Additions by purchase will not be considered unless within one of the above specified classes.

2.1.6 CONTEMPORARY BRITISH PAINTINGS

The collection of contemporary British work will be increased to include artists, styles or themes that aid the interpretation of modern painting. The support of the Contemporary Art Society (CAS) and the Art Fund has added some important examples to the Williamson. The gallery has successfully renewed its membership for the CAS distribution scheme and will work with them on future collection development in this area.

2.1.7 FOREIGN PAINTINGS

Works by foreign paintings have been acquired in a random way and do not form any coherent group. There is no intention to seek additional items.

2.1.8 PRINTS

Based upon several large and important collections (John Finnie, Seymour Haden, Watson bequest and the Symes Bromoils), the prints provide an interesting and important representative collection. Its main strength represents British printmaking of the first half of the 20th century. Over the last forty years a collection of contemporary prints has been accumulated by purchase and commission - this policy will continue.

2.1.9 PHOTOGRAPHS

The gallery has actively encouraged the recent promotion of better photography on the Wirral, with local and national exhibitions. Photographic prints will not be usually purchased unless,

- a) They coincide with one or more of the above categories e.g. local history
- b) They form part of a special commission highlighting a particular aspect of local/social history
- c) They are/were produced by major local photographic printmakers
- d) They are designated for addition to archive resources rather than fine art collections.

2.1.10 SCULPTURE

Original plans for the Williamson provided for a sculpture/entrance hall. It has long ceased to serve that function. Sculpture once displayed at the exterior of the buildings has long since been removed in the 1930s due to vandalism. The larger items in the existing collection provide problems for storage and movement.

Additions will not be considered unless the work fits into an established area of interest (e.g. a local sculptor or subject) and the gallery staff feel confident that the item can be adequately cared for within the conservation/storage policies and resources.

2.2 DECORATIVE ARTS

2.2.1 LIVERPOOL PORCELAIN

Several factories were producing porcelain of various types and quality in Liverpool between c.1750 and c.1800. The Knowles Boney collection of some 300 pieces at the Williamson is very comprehensive and was presented some 50 years ago. It has remained on almost continuous display as a condition of the gift.

Whilst it is noted that some 10% of the total is not of Liverpool origin, it remains as one of the most important study collections of English 18th century porcelain. The retention of the Knowles Boney display intact is an essential part of their use and interest. Additions will only be sought for particularly important pieces and kept separate from the Knowles Boney collection.

2.2.2 DELLA ROBBIA POTTERY

The collection of Della Robbia Pottery at the Williamson Art Gallery & Museum forms an unrivalled addition to the history of Merseyside ceramics. Produced in Birkenhead 1894–1906 it is natural that the Williamson should add to its growing Della Robbia collection (presently some 260 items). Items purchased in the 1920s from the founder Harold Rathbone form the basis of this comprehensive collection. There is a significant number of important pieces of high quality while others document individual workers or styles, some of which are in poor condition.

The Gallery has made public its interest and consequently the collection has grown significantly in the period since the publication of an "Interim Report" on the history of the Della Robbia Pottery to coincide with a major exhibition in 1981, 75 years after the closing down sale. The book has since been reprinted together with a facsimile of the Pottery's 1896 catalogue.

It is intended to add selected new items where they are of very high quality or are unique examples by individual potters and interesting research items (evidence of documentation, unusual artists, techniques, designs etc). Poor condition would be acceptable in the latter category. Major exhibitable pieces should be selected carefully, as the glazes flake easily - whilst low quality or items in poor condition will be added to the reference collection at low cost.

2.2.3 OTHER MERSEYSIDE CERAMICS

The Williamson Art Gallery & Museum has a significant collection of Seacombe Pottery, the little known factory purpose-built in 1852 to produce wares mainly for export. Examples are rare and would be pursued unless they already exist in the collection. Liverpool tin and lead glazed creamwares are poorly represented in the permanent collections. Additions will be acceptable at low prices or by donation only.

Herculaneum pottery was the only major factory to continue manufacturing in Liverpool in the first half of the 19th century. The Williamson houses some half dozen items attributed to Herculaneum (some unmarked) and small number on loan. Additional items, although not a priority will be sympathetically considered.

2.2.4 BRITISH CERAMICS

A good collection of 18th and 19th century British ceramics exists albeit with some important omissions. Additions will fill these gaps or act as background reference to the major collections (eg. Merseyside ceramic history, Della Robbia).

The history of the 20th century industrial ceramics is poorly represented in the collections. Some purchases have added to acquisitions in the 1920s and the intention is to acquire a range of items illustrating ceramic design the last century.

2.2.5 CRAFTS

The Williamson has a commitment to exhibit contemporary crafts on a regular basis. This extends to collection policy and items have been acquired through the CAS and by purchase through the region's foremost exhibitions.

Acquisitions will reflect the diversity of craft materials and techniques. Suitable items will be selected from appropriate exhibitions and early 20th century examples will be sought to extend interpretive displays.

2.2.6 ORIENTAL

Since the early Williamson bequest (1916) there has been a small oriental collection, mainly ceramics, but including, lacquer, jade, cloisonné, bronze, woodblocks, prints and paintings. Whilst there is a small number of superb exhibits the majority of the collection, though decorative, is not significant. The addition of a good quality cohesive group would add substance but piecemeal acquisitions should not be considered.

2.2.7 CONTINENTAL

There is a small number of continental items in the collections, mostly ceramics (Meissen and Sevres). It is not an area considered for expansion in the future except where individual items refer to other British collections e.g. Cantagalli/Della Robbia; Oriental/Liverpool porcelain.

2.2.8 LEE TAPESTRIES

When A.H. Lee and Sons Tapestry Works closed in Birkenhead's North End in 1970 the Williamson acquired a small amount of machinery, a quantity of sample materials and extensive archival material, representing an unrivalled picture of the company and its products. The Victoria and Albert Museum acquired some early material at that time and examples to fill gaps in the company history will be sought

Priority will be given to supplementing existing records and collections with fabrics, photographs and related social history. This will strengthen archival history of the workforce and the factory and highlight the local and national significance of Lee's.

2.2.9 TEXTILES & COSTUME

No cohesive or representative collections have been formed at the gallery. Such acquisitions would be actively sought only for use as part of the education service or as material for use as part of period displays, in a Victorian room, for instance. There is no intention to create a large collection of costume but rather interesting items which reflect social history and specific uses eg. uniforms, mechanics' overalls, military, ladies' and gent's accessories.

A small reference collection of textiles is included in the Lee Tapestry archives (2.2.8 above). This includes oriental braids, 18th century crewelwork, Berlin wool work, samplers and other embroidery. This is not a new group and other acquisitions will not be considered unless of specific interest to other areas of the collection.

2.2.10 GLASS

Existing collections include 17th century Venetian glass, a strong group of 18th century drinking glasses, Irish glass and 19th century decorative glass. Additions will not be sought except for English drinking glasses not presently represented in the collections and 20th century examples which will coincide with contemporary craft policy (see 2:2.5).

2.2.11 METALWORK

Civic Silver forms the major part of metalwork included in gallery collections. This includes Mayoral regalia from Wirral and those Boroughs that existed before local government reorganisation in 1974. There are other utilitarian objects with little artistic merit together with a small pewter collection.

Apart from pieces of local interest or by local craftsmen and women it is not anticipated that new acquisitions will be sought.

2.2.12 JEWELLERY

The jewellery collection is very small and ancillary to costume. Items have also been acquired as part of the craft acquisition policy (2.2.5). Jewellery with local significance is of interest either through contemporary craft manufacture or local historical value.

2.2.13 FURNITURE

The acquisition of furniture has been and is restricted because of limitations in space and adequate environmental control. Existing collections are of local interest - Arrowe Park furniture and work by local craftworkers. Other items are useful for the display of decorative arts such as oriental ceramics in an oriental cabinet. It is not envisaged that this collection will expand except for work within the contemporary crafts. The policy of commissioning from contemporary makers for items combining specific function and innovative design with construction should continue to be explored where possible.

Apart from locally significant items there is no plan to expand the existing clock collection

2.3 MARITIME

2.3.1 MODELS

The Williamson displays a large number of maritime models: ferries, tug boats, cargo and passenger vessels and associated items such as engines and half-block

builder's models. Most concentrate on Birkenhead's link with Cammell Laird, the River Mersey and Birkenhead's dockland history.

A natural restriction on new acquisitions has been space. Priority will be placed on the acquisition of models that interpret Wirral's shipbuilding industry and the peninsula's industrial and pre-industrial maritime history.

2:3.2 PICTURES

An archive collection of paintings, prints and photographs related to locally-built vessels is housed at the gallery. This will be expanded to include as many Wirral-built ships as is possible.

2:3.3 ARTEFACTS

These items are used to interpret life at sea, the economic and social impact of shipping on Wirral's history, techniques of navigation and construction etc. New acquisitions will relate to these areas - particularly items of local significance.

2:4 SOCIAL HISTORY

These are items that, while shedding light on other items of the collection do not fit readily into that category. These include toys, domestic equipment, office equipment etc. Particular emphasis is placed on the educational use of sometimes relatively humble material and will be acquired with the schools service in mind.

2:4.1 DOMESTIC

The value of such items may not be immediately evident but provided the practicalities of space and conservation allow, these items should be considered of great importance. This is particularly evident of items with local significance since such items normally originate from local sources.

2:4.2 COMMERCIAL

With the decline of heavy industry on the Wirral many business premises are being vacated and/or demolished. This includes the basic patterns of housing and shopping and the development of modern shopping centres and housing estates etc.

Many small businesses still retain their original fittings and equipment that are disposed of or destroyed when they move or cease to trade. Such items provide an opportunity to preserve much of the heritage of Wirral life, particularly of the period between the two World Wars.

Many non-profit making organisations exist to harness such items at risk. Gallery staff should ensure that wherever possible heritage artefacts should be acquired by the authority (where space, conservation and storage facilities permit) or taken into the custody of a responsible organisation. This should be done to preserve the rights of the public for the display and safety of such artefacts. In this way large or damaged examples can be acquired, subsequently cared for, restored and made available to areas where museum services are limited.

2.5 NATURAL SCIENCES

The gallery collections contain no significant natural history specimens. Items of special interest were transferred to Rawtenstall Museum as early as 1916. What remains have been re-catalogued but are in poor condition, have little or no associated source information or have deteriorated through poor storage or display. It is not anticipated that the collection will be added to. What remains is currently used as source material for schools and colleges.

2.6 ARCHAEOLOGY

2.6.1 LOCAL

Items of local archaeological sources are of natural interest to the gallery. Staff have liaised with specialists at the National Museums Liverpool whose skills permit the responsible monitoring of Wirral finds and excavations. This co-operation will continue along with such acquisitions that avoid conflict of interests.

Staff cannot ignore the activity of metal detectors, whatever may be felt about the dangers and irresponsible damage to sites caused by the worst offenders. Wherever possible it is the policy of the gallery staff to encourage members of the public to make their finds known to curatorial staff without actively furthering damage to existing sites. Attention is drawn to the conditions imposed upon acquisition where damage has been caused to ancient monuments (Acquisitions & Disposals Policy).

Acquisition by donation will be encouraged with emphasis upon the preservation of Wirral finds for the public benefit.

2.6.2 NATIONAL & INTERNATIONAL

A number of smaller collections include items from various periods, eg. prehistoric, Cypriot, Roman and Pre-Columbian etc. There is no intention of seeking further additions but rather to consolidate and research existing items in the gallery.

2.7 ETHNOGRAPHY

The collections documented during the re-cataloguing programme have revealed a modest collection sufficient for present resource purposes. There is no intention of adding new items.

2.8 GEOLOGY

The Geology collection comprises a single large range of samples amassed by Charles Chambres. This represents an interesting and cohesive group and, being well catalogued is used in conjunction with specialists for the education authority. There are no plans to expand this collection.

2.9 MILITARY

There is a small collection relating to the local regiments in particular the Cheshire Rifles. This includes banners, swords, uniforms, guns, badges and archives. There

are also a few weapons from the first and second world wars as well as the Boer war.

New acquisitions will give priority to:

1. Items that trace the history of local regiments.
2. Items that highlight the daily routine of the common soldier and civilians in the two world wars. This is intended to accompany the fine art collections that include the work of war artists in particular those of Thomas Burke and Albert Richards whose archive collection was purchased some years ago.
3. Wilfred Owen was educated in Birkenhead and items that relate to the First World War are being collected towards the foundation of a permanent tribute to the war poets. These items as 2 above will reflect the daily life and routine of the common foot soldier.

2.10 TRANSPORT

Wirral Borough Council formerly expressed a long term commitment towards the development of a heritage trail embracing a transport museum with particular emphasis on the Wirral's heritage. The Museums Service worked to collect vehicles and associated information, memorabilia and museum items with particular emphasis as follows.

- 2.10.1 In 1860 Birkenhead was the first town in Europe to develop a street tramway. The Museums Service has an interest in items that relate to the history of the Wirral tramways including related material (tickets, uniforms, posters etc). In addition, Wirral Museums Service now operates Birkenhead Tramways, which were initially sub-contracted to Blackpool Council. The trams belonging to Merseyside Tramway Preservation Society (MTPS) are operated alongside those of Birkenhead Tramways. A long-term loan of a tram from NML was taken on in 2007 for MTPS to undertake restoration & conservation work.
- 2.10.2 The Baxter collection (former Lark Lane Motor Museum) was on display at the Williamson Art Gallery from 1988 to 2003. It then mostly moved to Wirral Transport Museum in Taylor Street. The authority had negotiated a long-term loan of the collection and purchased selected motor vehicles and motorcycles from the collection.
- 2.10.3 Wirral's association with Mersey Ferries has existed since the granting of the original rights of passage in 1330. The Museums Service will continue to collect models and associated items tracing the history and use of the Mersey Ferries.
- 2.10.4 Shore Road Pumping Station is still used today for the evacuation of water from the Mersey Railway tunnel. A small museum was developed around the restored steam engine which formerly supplied part of the power. The Museums Service aimed to collect material to interpret the history and use of the Mersey underground railway system.
- 2.10.5 In the light of the decision quoted at 1.4 above, an appropriate future for both Wirral Museums Service collections and loaned material will be sought. There is insufficient secure storage and maintenance capability for transport items in the

Museums Service without the space and expertise provided by staff and volunteers at Wirral Transport Museum.

2.11 ARCHIVES

Wirral Museums Service no longer incorporates Wirral Archives Service, but continues to hold some documentary material related to shipbuilding, arts organisations and the Lee's Tapestry Works. The management and use of these collections will be guided by the Code of Practice on Archives for Museums in the United Kingdom, and material will be addressed for suitability to transfer to Wirral Archives and, similarly, transfer of museum material may be requested in return.

3.0 SUMMARY OF PROJECTED COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT

Fine Art

British watercolours

Additions where weak – 20th century, Pre-Raphaelite

Liverpool School

Additions, especially if artistic merit combined with local interest

Philip Wilson Steer

Additions sought if contribute to demonstration of development

Work by local artists

Continue regular purchase of contemporary work, including commissions, & historic Wirral topography; also acquisition of work in depth and appropriate archive material related to significant artists

Historic British paintings

Not to be purchased unless also fitted into another category

Contemporary British paintings

Continue collection to contextualise local purchasing

Foreign paintings

Not to be sought unless also fitted into another category

Prints

Continue to trace development of print as an artistic medium

Photographs

Not to be sought unless also fitted into another category

Sculpture

Not to be sought unless also fitted into another category and within the resources of the Museums Service to store & conserve as appropriate

Decorative Arts

Liverpool Porcelain

Additions only sought for exceptional pieces

Della Robbia Pottery

Additions to complete areas of collection, including for purposes of reference or comparison and exceptional pieces

Other Merseyside ceramics

Seacombe Pottery to be actively pursued, others to be considered a low priority

British ceramics

Additions in 20th century industrial ceramics or to contextualise existing collections only

Contemporary crafts

Acquisitions by local craftspeople and to reflect diversity of materials & techniques

Oriental

Not considered a priority

Continental

Not considered a priority unless to contextualise existing collections

Lee Tapestries

Additions to complete areas of collection, including for purposes of reference or comparison and exceptional pieces

Textiles & costume

Not considered a priority unless to contextualise existing collections

Glass

Not to be sought unless also fitted into another category

Metalwork

Not to be sought unless also fitted into another category

Jewellery

Not to be sought unless also fitted into another category

Furniture & clocks

Not to be sought unless also fitted into another category

Maritime

Models

Additions only to complete areas of collection, including for purposes of reference or comparison and exceptional pieces

Pictures

Additions sought for locally significant items

Artefacts

Additions sought for locally significant items

Social History

Additions sought for locally significant items, especially with educational/handling potential

Domestic

Additions sought for locally significant items, especially with educational/handling potential

Commercial

Additions sought for locally significant items, especially with educational/handling potential

Natural Sciences

Not to be sought unless also fitted into another category

Archaeology

Local

Donations sought where no conflict with other local collections

National & international

Not to be sought unless also fitted into another category

Ethnography

Not to be sought unless also fitted into another category

Geology

Not to be sought unless also fitted into another category

Military

Not to be sought unless also fitted into another category

Transport

Not to be sought unless also fitted into another category

4.0 CONSERVATION & STORAGE

- 4.1 The authority will maintain its access to professional conservation advice through its liaison with the National Museums Liverpool and freelance conservators.
- 4.2 Staff will maintain a programme of environmental monitoring and control in display as well as storage areas. The authority will seek to improve the heating and humidifier equipment as recommended by curatorial staff and conservation advice.
- 4.3 Staff will maintain a programme of lighting monitoring and control consistent with the preservation and maintenance of the collections.
- 4.4 A programme will continue to replace perishable and dangerous materials used in the presentation and storage of the collections. Staff will continue to ensure that alternative materials will be consistent with good conservation practice.
- 4.5 Staff will maintain a record of all conservation work undertaken used in conjunction with museum documentation procedures in use at the time.

5.0 EXHIBITION & PUBLIC SERVICES

- 5.1 A temporary and permanent exhibition policy will include periodic display of all items in the collection where condition, and time to research, permit. Exhibitions in non-gallery venues will be encouraged, provided suitable conditions are available (to be determined by qualified staff), originated internally and from suitable agencies such as other Accredited museums, Arts and Crafts Councils.
- 5.2 Adequate interpretative facilities will be ensured for permanent and temporary displays.
- 5.3 Subject to adequate notice and staff supervision any member of the public will be given controlled access to any stored item and related information.
- 5.4 Photography will be permitted only after prior consultation with staff. Fees may be requested for publication etc.
- 5.5 It will be the policy of gallery staff to publish information from research programmes and permit public access to such information wherever is reasonably possible.
- 5.6 Loan applications will be sympathetically considered. The advice of conservation and curatorial staff will determine the feasibility of such applications. Staff will ensure that items loaned will be fully documented, insured and that agencies are fully equipped to provide transport, security and display conditions.

6.0 INSURANCE

6.1 Adequate insurance provision will be maintained and a valuation list will be reviewed at regular intervals. Items will be classified according to valuation i.e.

	£
Group J – items	up to 50
Group H – items	51 – 250
Group G - items	251 – 1,000
Group F – items	1,001 – 5,000
Group E - items	5,001 – 10,000
Group D – items	10,001 – 20,000
Group C - items	20,001 – 50,000
Group B - items	50,001 – 100,000
Group A - items above	100,000

7.0 IMPLEMENTATION

7.1 All staff will be expected to carry out the above recommendations to the best of their ability. Wirral Borough Council will ensure the provision of adequate resources for the care, storage and display of collections.