



# **Keats House Collections Development Policy**

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Keats House is provided by the City of London Corporation as part of its contribution to the cultural life of London and the nation

**Name of museum:** *Keats House*

**Name of governing body:** *City of London Corporation – Culture, Heritage and Libraries Committee*

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

**Policy review procedure:** *This document will be reviewed at least every 5 years.*

**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:** *October 2021*

**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 museum's statement of purpose is:**

Keats House is a registered charity (for which the City of London Corporation is the sole trustee) whose object is 'to preserve and maintain and restore for the education and benefit of the public the land with the buildings known as Keats House as a museum and live memorial to John Keats and as a literary meeting place and centre'.

- 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**

Keats House, originally known as Wentworth Place, was built between 1814 and 1816, originally as two separate houses. John Keats lived in one of the houses as a lodger between 1818 and 1820, during which time he wrote much of his most important poetry. Keats died in Rome in 1821 and the house remained in private ownership, being knocked through to create a single dwelling in the 1830s. In 1920, it was threatened with demolition to make way for a row of flats. The property was offered for sale at £3,500 and a Memorial Committee was formed to raise the £10,000 necessary to buy the house, repair it, and maintain it as a memorial to Keats. After a successful fundraising effort in Britain and the United States, the property was formally acquired on 24th March 1921, and in April of the following year the Committee resolved to offer the house to Hampstead Borough Council. Keats House opened to the public on 9th May 1925.

Sir Charles Dilke bequeathed his collection of books, letters and artefacts relating to Keats to Hampstead Borough Council in 1911. The Council subsequently transferred this collection to the Keats Memorial House, along with numerous books and prints held by the Borough that were selected as relevant to Keats, Hampstead and the Romantic Poets. The books formed the basis of the Keats Memorial Library. A building was erected next to Keats House to display the collection, opening on 17th July 1931. As well as housing the collection, part of the building was used as a branch library.

The core of the collection was established in the 1920s and 1930s. Further gifts from Sir Charles Dilke's estate were supplemented by numerous items relating to Keats's circle of friends, including gifts from the descendants of George Keats, Fanny Keats, Leigh Hunt, Charles Brown, Joseph Severn and Fanny Brawne, including the engagement ring given to her by Keats. Other major gifts at the time were from scholars and collectors, such as Harry Buxton Forman and his son Maurice, Edmund Blunden, George Ambrose Potter, Louis A. Holman and the photographer Fred Holland Day. The poet Edmund Blunden also helped to expand the Keats Memorial Library. Among the significant additions to the collection at this time were Anne Whitney's marble bust of Keats, Joseph Severn's deathbed portrait of Keats, prints of Hogarth's 'Rake's Progress'

that were at the house in Keats's time, and a copy of Milton's 'Paradise Lost' with Keats's signature.

Fred Edgcumbe, the first curator of Keats House, was particularly active in promoting and expanding the collection, but his efforts were interrupted by the Second World War. During the war the collection was removed for safekeeping to Wales.

Gifts continued to arrive in the 1950s and 1960s, particularly from the descendants of Charles Brown and Fanny Keats. Fanny Brawne's biographer, Joanna Richardson, was active in persuading her descendants to gift items to the collection. The number of items purchased for the collection also increased. Another significant purchase in 1968 was a large collection of letters relating to the Keats Memorial House Committee in the early 1920s. This correspondence helped to document the history of the house as many records were lost during the war when Hampstead Town Hall was bombed.

In the 1970s various pieces of Regency and Victorian furniture were purchased for the refurbishment programme, which was completed in 1975. More items from the descendants of Charles Brown and Leigh Hunt arrived in the 1980s. Two major purchases at this time were a portrait of Charles Wentworth Dilke and Joseph Severn's 1849 memorial painting of 'Keats Listening to the Nightingale on Hampstead Heath'. Both paintings are now displayed in the house.

In 1997 Camden Council passed the house to the Corporation of London (now the City of London Corporation). After 1999 the collection was moved off site to London Metropolitan Archives in Clerkenwell and catalogued. Significant additions to the collection since then include the deposit of a portrait of the actress Eliza Jane Chester (resident in the house from 1838 to 1848); a gold expanding bracelet that belonged to Fanny Brawne; a letter from Keats's friend John Hamilton Reynolds; Joanna Richardson's research papers; correspondence between Edmund Blunden and Fred Edgcumbe; a 19<sup>th</sup> century upright parlour piano manufactured by Charles Cadby, another resident of the house; an Italian genre painting by Keats's friend Joseph Severn; and in 2011 the purchase at auction of a letter from John Keats to Fanny Brawne. This was the last remaining letter by John Keats still in private hands. Written at the house in March 1820, it complements two other letters in the collection: one to Fanny from May 1820 when Keats was living nearby in Kentish Town and his letter to Mrs Brawne written in Naples in October 1820 in which he says goodbye to Fanny for the final time.

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

The Keats collections consist of manuscripts, books, prints, paintings and small items of personal memorabilia relating to the poet John Keats (1795-1821), his work and his circle of family, friends and associates. Later 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>- century material reflects the emergence of Keats as a major English poet and there are a few items from other Romantic writers such as Percy Bysshe Shelley and Mary Shelley. The printed book collection continues these themes with periodicals, bibliographies and catalogues; and critical works on the Romantics of which a significant number relate to Keats, Shelley and Charles Lamb. The personal memorabilia consists most significantly of a small number of items from Keats, his family and circle and Fanny Brawne, his fiancée

at the time of his death. The collection also has some other items of interest, including a painting of Keats, from his close friend Joseph Severn.

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

Keats House will continue to build upon its existing collections both in subjects and theme, focussing particularly on the life and works of John Keats and his circle.

Collecting will focus on the period of John Keats' own life (1795-1821) and the lifetimes of his circle (roughly the first half of the nineteenth century) based in the UK, mainly around Hampstead and London where Keats spent the majority of his life.

#### **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.**

Disposals will only be undertaken for legal, safety or care and conservation reasons (for example, spoliation, infestation, repatriation).

#### **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):**

Keats-Shelley Memorial House in Rome

#### **8 Acquisition**

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

Donations and acquisitions with a value up to £10K are discussed by the Keats House Curatorial and Interpretation Teams and may be approved by the Principal Curator provided that appropriate internal or external funding is available. Acquisitions over £10K must be approved by the departmental Director, and any acquisitions over £50K must also be referred to the Culture, Heritage & Libraries Committee for approval. Funding for expensive acquisitions beyond the available Keats House revenue budget may be sought from the

central funds of the City of London Corporation, and/or from external sources, with decisions taken on a case by case basis as appropriate.

**8.2 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).**

**8.3 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, 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.**

## **9 Human remains**

**9.1 The museum does not hold or intend to acquire any human remains.**

## **10 Biological and geological material**

**10.1 The museum will not acquire any biological or geological material.**

## **11 Archaeological material**

**11.1.1 The museum does not hold or intend to acquire any archaeological material.**

## **12 Exceptions**

**12.1 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.**

## **13 Spoliation**

**13.1 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.**

## **14 The Repatriation and Restitution of objects and human remains**

**14.1 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; 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 Disposal procedures**

- 15.1 All disposals will be undertaken with reference to the SPECTRUM Primary Procedures on disposal.**
- 15.2 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.**
- 15.3 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.**
- 15.4 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.**
- 15.5 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.**
- 15.6 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.**
- 15.7 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.**

- 15.8** 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.
- 15.9** 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.
- 15.10** 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.
- 15.11** 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.
- 15.12** 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*

- 15.13** 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.
- 15.13.1** 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 15.1-5 will apply.

- 15.13.2** 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.
- 15.13.3** 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.
- 15.13.4** 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***

- 15.14** If it is not possible to dispose of an object through transfer or sale, the governing body may decide to destroy it.
- 15.15** 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.
- 15.16** 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.
- 15.17** 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.
- 15.18** 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.