



Collections development policy

Revised 2022, written using ACE's 2014 template, reprinted November 2018.



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:

TBC – to be presented for approval on 14 November 2022

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:

TBC – 14 November 2027

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.

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, 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 the United States and Britain, 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.

Prior to this, in 1911 Sir Charles Dilke bequeathed his collection of books, letters and artefacts relating to Keats to Hampstead Borough Council. The Council subsequently transferred this collection to Keats 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 and serve as a branch library, opening on 17th July 1931.

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 19th century upright parlour piano manufactured by Charles Cadby, another resident of the house; and an Italian genre painting by Keats's friend Joseph Severn. In 2011, a letter from John Keats to Fanny Brawne, written at the house in March 1820, was purchased at auction, with financial support from The V&A Purchase Grant Fund and The Friends of the National Libraries. In February 2020, a watercolour painting of 'Wentworth Place, Ham[p]stead' by Fred Holland Day, was purchased with funding from the Keats House Reserve, as part of the Keats200 bicentenary programme.

The collections described above were catalogued by London Metropolitan Archives from 1999. Since then there have been no significant disposals from the collections. We continue to actively add to the collections, when items of particular interest which meet our priorities for future collecting become available.

3

An overview of current collections

The Keats House collections consist of three main categories:

The **Provenance Files** are 3,994 records, comprising artefacts, manuscripts, books, prints and paintings relating to the poet John Keats (1795-1821), his work and his circle of family, friends and

associates, including a small number of items from other Romantic writers such as Percy Bysshe Shelley and Mary Shelley. Later 19th and 20th century material reflects the emergence of Keats as a major English poet and the development of the charity. The provenance files contain historically important 'sub-collections' (e.g. the Buxton Forman collection) which throw light on the historiography and provenance of the collection.

The **Keats Memorial Library** has 6,437 records, comprising books of poetry, biography, criticism, bibliography, periodicals and journals, etc. on Keats and other Romantic poets, particularly Shelley and Lamb.

The **Pamphlet Collection** is 4,391 records of published and non-published cuttings, postcards and photocopies.

The overall strength of the Keats House Collection, as summarised above, is on items relating specifically to Keats and his circle and the history of Keats House.

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's 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.

Between 2022 and 2027, our major collections development theme will be material and records relating to the history of the house in the 19th century, the saving of the house and its opening to the public in the 1920s, the establishment of the Keats House Charity, and its subsequent history.

This approach supports our charitable objective 'as a museum and live memorial to John Keats'.

The acquisition of new material for the collections will be informed by our ability to display or use it for educational purposes and the finances of the charity, including fundraising where relevant.

5

Themes and priorities for rationalisation and disposal

- 5.1** The museum recognises that the principles on which priorities for rationalisation and disposal are determined will be through a formal review process that identifies which collections are included and excluded from the review. The outcome of review and any subsequent rationalisation will not reduce the quality or significance of the collection and will result in a more useable, well managed collection.
- 5.2** The procedures used will meet professional standards. The process will be documented, open and transparent. There will be clear communication with key stakeholders about the outcomes and the process.

During the period covered by this policy the museum intends to conduct a high-level review of items in the Keats Memorial Library to inform their future management. The aim of the review is to improve our understanding of the scope of the collection, including its strengths and weaknesses, the way it is catalogued, and identify duplicate copies and material which may benefit from conservation or be considered for disposal. The recommendations of this high-level review will be used to inform our Collections Development Policy from 2027 – 2032.

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)/organisation(s):

8

Archival holdings

The collections include material which, by its nature, could be seen as archival holdings, e.g. manuscripts, letters and research materials. All items in the Keats House collections have been accessioned and catalogued as museum objects, regardless of whether they are artefacts, books or archival material.

The collections not on display are stored at and conserved by London Metropolitan Archives, which is also governed by the City of London Corporation and is an Accredited Archive Service.

9

Acquisition

9.1 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 external funding is available. Acquisitions over £10K must be approved by the Divisional Director, and any acquisitions over £50K must also be referred to the Culture, Heritage & Libraries Committee for approval. Funding for expensive acquisitions beyond the resources of Keats House budgets 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.

We also liaise and work closely with our colleagues in London Metropolitan Archives, where the collections not on display are stored, regarding practical issues of storage, security, and preservation and conservation of our collections, including any new acquisitions.

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 1 2002, and the Dealing in Cultural Objects (Offences) Act 2003, the museum will reject any items that have been illicitly traded. The governing body will be guided by the national guidance on the responsible acquisition of cultural property issued by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in 2005.

10

Human remains

10.1 As the museum holds or intends to acquire human remains from any period, 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 archaeological material (including excavated ceramics) in any case where the governing body or responsible officer has any suspicion that the circumstances of their recovery involved a failure to follow the appropriate legal procedures.

12.2 In England, Wales and Northern Ireland the procedures include reporting finds to the landowner or occupier of the land and to the proper authorities in the case of possible treasure (i.e. the Coroner for Treasure) as set out in the Treasure Act 1996 (as amended by the Coroners & Justice Act 2009).

13

Exceptions

13.1 Any exceptions to the above clauses will only be because the museum is:

- acting as an externally approved repository of last resort for material of local (UK) origin
- acting with the permission of authorities with the requisite jurisdiction in the country of origin

In these cases the museum will be open and transparent in the way it makes decisions and will act only with the express consent of an appropriate outside authority. The museum will document when these exceptions occur.

14

Spoliation

14.1 The museum will use the statement of principles 'Spoliation of Works of Art during the Nazi, Holocaust and World War II period', issued for non-national museums in 1999 by the Museums and Galleries Commission.

15

The Repatriation and Restitution of objects and human remains

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; 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.

15.2 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 All disposals will be undertaken with reference to the Spectrum primary procedures on disposal.

16.2 The governing body will confirm that it is legally free to dispose of an item. Agreements on disposal made with donors will also be taken into account.

16.3 When disposal of a museum object is being considered, the museum will establish if it was acquired with the aid of an external funding organisation. In such cases, any conditions attached to the original grant will be followed. This may include repayment of the original grant and a proportion of the proceeds if the item is disposed of by sale.

- 16.4** When disposal is motivated by curatorial reasons the procedures outlined below will be followed and the method of disposal may be by gift, sale, exchange or as a last resort – destruction.
- 16.5** The decision to dispose of material from the collections will be taken by the governing body only after full consideration of the reasons for disposal. Other factors including public benefit, the implications for the museum's collections and collections held by museums and other organisations collecting the same material or in related fields will be considered. Expert advice will be obtained and the views of stakeholders such as donors, researchers, local and source communities and others served by the museum will also be sought.
- 16.6** A decision to dispose of a specimen or object, whether by gift, exchange, sale or destruction (in the case of an item too badly damaged or deteriorated to be of any use for the purposes of the collections or for reasons of health and safety), will be the responsibility of the governing body of the museum acting on the advice of professional curatorial staff, if any, and not of the curator or manager of the collection acting alone.
- 16.7** Once a decision to dispose of material in the collection has been taken, priority will be given to retaining it within the public domain. It will therefore be offered in the first instance, by gift or sale, directly to other Accredited Museums likely to be interested in its acquisition.
- 16.8** If the material is not acquired by any Accredited museum to which it was offered as a gift or for sale, then the museum community at large will be advised of the intention to dispose of the material normally through a notice on the MA's Find an Object web listing service, an announcement in the Museums Association's Museums Journal or in other specialist publications and websites (if appropriate).
- 16.9** The announcement relating to gift or sale will indicate the number and nature of specimens or objects involved, and the basis on which the material will be transferred to another institution. Preference will be given to expressions of interest from other Accredited Museums. A period of at least two months will be allowed for an interest in acquiring the material to be expressed. At the end of this period, if no expressions of interest have been received, the museum may consider disposing of the material to other interested individuals and organisations giving priority to organisations in the public domain.

- 16.10** Any monies received by the museum governing body from the disposal of items will be applied solely and directly for the benefit of the collections. This normally means the purchase of further acquisitions. In exceptional cases, improvements relating to the care of collections in order to meet or exceed Accreditation requirements relating to the risk of damage to and deterioration of the collections may be justifiable. Any monies received in compensation for the damage, loss or destruction of items will be applied in the same way. Advice on those cases where the monies are intended to be used for the care of collections will be sought from the Arts Council England.
- 16.11** The proceeds of a sale will be allocated so it can be demonstrated that they are spent in a manner compatible with the requirements of the Accreditation standard. Money must be restricted to the long-term sustainability, use and development of the collection.
- 16.12** Full records will be kept of all decisions on disposals and the items involved and proper arrangements made for the preservation and/or transfer, as appropriate, of the documentation relating to the items concerned, including photographic records where practicable in accordance with Spectrum procedure on deaccession and disposal.

Disposal by exchange

- 16.13** The nature of disposal by exchange means that the museum will not necessarily be in a position to exchange the material with another Accredited museum. The governing body will therefore ensure that issues relating to accountability and impartiality are carefully considered to avoid undue influence on its decision-making process.
- 16.13.1** In cases where the governing body wishes for sound curatorial reasons to exchange material directly with Accredited or non-Accredited museums, with other organisations or with individuals, the procedures in paragraphs 16.1-5 will apply.
- 16.13.2** If the exchange is proposed to be made with a specific Accredited museum, other Accredited museums which collect in the same or related areas will be directly notified of the proposal and their comments will be requested.
- 16.13.3** If the exchange is proposed with a non-Accredited

museum, with another type of organisation or with an individual, the museum will place a notice on the MA's Find an Object web listing service, or make an announcement in the Museums Association's Museums Journal or in other specialist publications and websites (if appropriate).

- 16.13.4** Both the notification and announcement must provide information on the number and nature of the specimens or objects involved both in the museum's collection and those intended to be acquired in exchange. A period of at least two months must be allowed for comments to be received. At the end of this period, the governing body must consider the comments before a final decision on the exchange is made.

Disposal by destruction

- 16.14** If it is not possible to dispose of an object through transfer or sale, the governing body may decide to destroy it.
- 16.15** It is acceptable to destroy material of low intrinsic significance (duplicate mass-produced articles or common specimens which lack significant provenance) where no alternative method of disposal can be found.
- 16.16** Destruction is also an acceptable method of disposal in cases where an object is in extremely poor condition, has high associated health and safety risks or is part of an approved destructive testing request identified in an organisation's research policy.
- 16.17** Where necessary, specialist advice will be sought to establish the appropriate method of destruction. Health and safety risk assessments will be carried out by trained staff where required.
- 16.18** The destruction of objects should be witnessed by an appropriate member of the museum workforce. In circumstances where this is not possible, eg the destruction of controlled substances, a police certificate should be obtained and kept in the relevant object history file.