

# Galway City Museum

Spanish Parade, Galway

## Disposal Policy

2020-2021

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This policy statement regulates the de-accessioning and disposal of objects from the collections of Galway City Museum. The adoption and implementation of this policy by the management of Galway City Council is a requirement of the Heritage Council's Standards and Accreditation Scheme for Museums in Ireland (MSPI).

This policy supersedes all previous and existing practices and policies, relating to the de-accessioning and disposal of objects. The policy will be assessed on an annual basis with the Museum governing body, Galway City Council and a detailed review will be undertaken at five-year intervals.

One of the core functions of Galway City Museum is the collection and preservation of objects of historical and cultural significance. Galway City Museum hereby confirms its acceptance of the principle that its collections are held in trust for future generations, and that there is a strong presumption against the disposal of objects in the museum's collection. It is however incumbent on the Museum to periodically assess the continuing relevance of objects in its collections. Galway City Museum accepts that sound curatorial reasons for disposal must be established before consideration is given to the disposal of any objects in the museum's collection. Disposal can only occur in exceptional circumstances. This policy covers the circumstances in which de-accessioning and disposal may take place and the procedures to be followed.

### DEFINITIONS

**De-accessioning** is the formal removal of accessioned objects from the Museum's permanent collection, while remaining in the ownership of the museum. De-accessioning should not imply that an object will be disposed of by the Museum but reflects a formal change in the recorded status of an object. This may, for example, occur if an object is transferred to the museum's handling collections.

**Disposal** is the act of removal from museum ownership of an object or a collection of objects. Methods of disposal include transfer to another institution, return to the donor, or in the case of an object too badly damaged to be of use, destruction.

## **2. REASONS FOR DE-ACCESSIONING AND DISPOSAL**

2.1 To improve the standard of care afforded to the Collections retained by the Museum, through the de-accessioning of duplicate or un-provenanced material, considered to be of little or low relevance to the Museum's Collections Policy and Mission Statement.

2.2 To remove from the Collections any object which is too badly damaged or deteriorated, as assessed by Galway City Museum's consultant conservator, to be of any further use to Galway City Museum.

2.3 When the institution is unable to continue to store and care for the object; to move an object to a facility better suited to its preservation and/or future use and development.

2.4 Inherited material which is inappropriate and serves no useful purpose in the collection, exhibition or research programmes of the museum.

2.5 Where Galway City Museum does not hold 'legal title' to an object.

2.6. A lost, stolen or destroyed object.

2.7 The repatriation of objects of cultural patrimony. Decisions regarding such objects will be based on all available evidence, ethical considerations, best current professional practice, legislative constraints and consideration of opportunities and options.

## **3. CRITERIA GOVERNING DE-ACCESSIONING AND DISPOSAL**

3.1 Objects donated will not normally be disposed of without prior consultation with the original donors or their immediate families (first generation) and wherever possible their approval will be obtained to the course of action proposed. This is, however, a matter of courtesy rather than a legal requirement. The Museum Director shall be entitled to waive this step where all reasonable efforts to trace a donor have failed and where no details of the donor exist.

3.2 Where it is intended to dispose of an object, which was acquired by purchase, the Museum Director will take all reasonable steps to discover whether the original purchase was grant assisted. Where it is known or discovered that such a grant was made, the body concerned or its successors will be notified of the Museum's intentions so that any relevant conditions attached to the original grant may be fulfilled.

3.3 Handling collections can benefit from the inclusion of objects de-accessioned from the Museum's collections. Galway City Museum will consider such use of de-accessioned items, but will not de-accession objects simply in order to enable them to be transferred to a handling collection.

3.4 Objects may not be sold; this is in keeping with the ethos of Galway City Museum and general museum practice. Galway City Museum will not permit members of staff, members of our governing bodies and members of their families or close associates, to acquire, by

purchase or otherwise, objects that have been de-accessioned from the Museum's collections.

#### **4. AUTHORITY FOR DE-ACCESSIONING AND DISPOSAL**

4.1 Specific authority for the de-accessioning and disposal of museum objects lies with Galway City Council, as the governing body and owner of the collection. Such a decision is the responsibility of the Council, acting on the advice of the Museum Director who has delegated authority to select objects to be de-accessioned and/or disposed.

4.2 Where recommendations concerning the de-accessioning/disposal of Museum objects are to be made, it is understood that certain preliminary investigations will be made by the Museum Director before reporting to Galway City Council. This may include such matters as seeking the views of donors and making contact with other interested museums. The Museum Director will also seek advice and recommendations from external sources (heritage specialists).

With this in mind as of February 2020 a De-accessioning Board was established with the aim of assisting to implement Galway City Museum's Disposal Policy 2016 when needed. The three members have agreed to sit on the board for an initial period of a year after which their inclusion will be reviewed on a yearly basis.

The board comprises of:

Jim Higgins – Galway City Heritage Officer, Galway City Council, Galway City

Rosa Meehan – Curator, Museum of Country Life, NMI, Turlough Park, Castlebar, County Mayo

Dr. John Tunney – Lecturer, Heritage Studies, GMIT, Galway City

Within the terms of this policy, it is understood that the Museum Director has authority to act in this way, without prejudice to the Council's eventual decision.

#### **5. PROCEDURE FOR DE-ACCESSIONING AND DISPOSAL**

5.1 Once a decision to de-accession/dispose of material in the collection has been taken by Galway City Council, priority will be given to retaining it within the public domain, unless it is to be destroyed. It will therefore be offered in the first instance to the National institutions, National Museum of Ireland, National Library, National Gallery and the other Local Authority Museums within Ireland, preferably those participating on the Heritage Council's Museum Standards Programme for Ireland (MSPI). If the offer is not accepted, the intended disposal shall be made known to the museum community at large, by notifying the members of the Irish Museums Association (IMA). This notification must indicate the nature and number of museum objects involved and the basis on which transfer would be made. A period of at least two months must be allowed between notification and the implementation of any decision.

5.2 If more than one museum responds to this notification, care must be taken to avoid a situation where museums are competing with each other. In such cases, it will usually be

appropriate for the parties concerned to be informed of each other's interest, and time allowed for open discussion before the transfer is finalised.

5.3 If, after two months, no suitable museum has declared an interest in acquiring the objects, they may be given to an appropriate organisation. Priority should be given to organisations in the public domain. This may also be done if a museum, which has previously expressed an intention to acquire the object, is unable to fulfil this undertaking within a reasonable period, normally six months. If there is no expression of interest from the public domain, Galway City Museum will attempt to offer the item(s) back to the original donor(s) or their descendants.

5.4 If the donor, their family or descendants do not declare an interest in receiving the object, Galway City Museum may consider the sale of the object as an option. In the event of a sale, any proceeds would be used to further develop the collections.

5.5 If the disposal of a museum object by all other means has proven to be impossible, and disposal is regarded as absolutely essential, in exceptional cases, Galway City Museum may authorise its destruction.

## **6. DISPOSAL BY DESTRUCTION**

6.1 The destruction of a museum object will only be acceptable if its retention in the collections would not be appropriate and no alternative public or private home can be found for it.

6.2 Destruction is acceptable if material has decayed, been infested or is beyond conservation, and presents a threat to other collections. In some cases, where infestation may threaten the safety of other objects or specimens, it may be imperative to remove the infested object or specimen immediately, wherever possible placing the material in quarantine until formal approval for disposal is received.

6.3 Loss of material is rare, but it is possible; for example, objects or specimens might disintegrate due to biological or chemical failure or adverse environmental conditions. All material that has disintegrated will be subject to a conservation report. Galway City Museum will maintain full records, and make attempts to rescue material for scientific or educational use.

6.4 In some cases part of an object or specimen may be retained on the advice of a Conservator, where future techniques may prove to be of value. The destruction of items will be seen as a last option and will only be used in extreme circumstances.

6.5 Destruction of an object or specimen may occur in the course of scientific analysis. There is a presumption against destruction of this kind and it is only acceptable in certain specific circumstances.

6.6 Any disposal/destruction will be carried out in a discreet, confidential and permanent fashion.

## **7. PROCEDURE FOLLOWING DE-ACCESSIONING AND DISPOSAL**

7.1 Full object records including (a) the reason for de-accessioning and/or disposal, (b) that the object has been disposed of, (c) method of disposal and new location of object, if relevant, (d) date of disposal, (e) signature of staff responsible will be kept, along with photographs of all museum items that have been de-accessioned and disposed of from the Museum collection. The accessions register, object database and all relevant documentation must be annotated to record the disposal.

7.2 Where a museum object is transferred to another suitable museum, all associated documentation will accompany the object or follow within a period of one month. Galway City Museum will retain on file copies of documentation for future reference.