

Elgin Museum Policy and Procedure for Deaccessioning and Disposal of Objects

SPECTRUM 5.1 Standard: Definition of deaccessioning and disposal

The formal decision by a governing body to take objects out of its accessioned collection ('deaccessioning') and managing the disposal of those objects through an agreed method.

Policy (excerpt from Collections Development Policy 2018v.2)

The Museum's statement of purpose is: The Moray Society, a membership organisation, owns and manages the Elgin Museum. The purpose of Elgin Museum is to conserve and display the objects and archive in its care, to act as a focus for learning and enjoyment for all and to support the appreciation of the natural history, culture and heritage of Moray and to maintain the buildings in its ownership.

The Board will ensure that both acquisition and disposal are carried out openly and with transparency.

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 Moray Society Board (MSB) and Elgin Museum Management Committee (EMMC) therefore accept 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.

Procedure

1. General guidance

Use this procedure to dispose of objects that belong to the Museum. Reasons might include:

- objects damaged beyond further use
- repatriation of human remains or sacred objects
- transferring duplicate objects to another museum as part of curator-led rationalisation.
- transfer from the collection of accessioned objects to a handling collection of non-accessioned ones.
- items that belong to the Museum but have not been accessioned.
- certain types of bulk material from archaeological and natural history fieldwork, after such material has been analysed and the results published and archived.

'Accessioning' has a very specific meaning: a formal commitment by a museum governing body to accept objects into its long-term collection. Accessioning brings with it ethical responsibilities, as does the reverse process.

2. Deaccessioning and disposal must take place with reference to:

2.1. The Museum's current versions of other relevant policies:

- Elgin Museum Collections Development Policy
- The Moray Society Articles of Association (Constitution)
- Restitution and Repatriation Policy

2.2. The current ethical consensus on museum disposal from:

- Museums Association (Off the Shelf): 'responsible disposal takes place as part of a museum's long-term collections development policy and starts with a curatorial review.' Financially motivated disposal is still considered unethical and is likely to result in sanctions from professional and funding bodies
- Accreditation standards
- Museums Galleries Scotland Repatriation and Restitution Working Group
- International Council of Museums

3. Deaccessioning and Disposal Procedure

3.1. Collections Management Group (CMG) (as authorised body) - identification of potential objects and related research (see 4.0), maintenance of audit trail.

3.2. CMG submits to EMMC any documentation relating to 3.1 above.

3.3. EMMC reports to MSB with comments or additional supporting information.

3.4. MSB makes recommendations to The Moray Society members at AGM/EGM in line with The Moray Society Articles of Association for final decisions.

3.5. If decision is against a proposed disposal, record the decision, close the file and end the procedure.

3.6. If the disposal is approved, record the decision and note the Document location i.e. EGM/AGM Minutes.

3.7. CMG to complete formal update of records of approved deaccessions and their disposal methods in the hard copy Accessions Register, Object Exit (Permanent) form and update all other relevant records, e.g. MDA cards, Excel collections and Inventory lists, Store, box lists and off-site lists. (Location and Movement Control) See 8.2.

4. Research – documented to demonstrate due diligence

4.1. Proof of ownership citing the relevant document/s.

4.2. Any specific risks, costs or other relevant constraints relating to disposal by destruction. Legal disposal of hazardous objects e.g. asbestos and other public health risk. Note professional advice. (See SPECTRUM 5.1 Disposal by Destruction Note1)

4.3. Objects of high intrinsic or monetary value - seek curatorial advice on the significance of the objects and valuation from a subject specialist. Record.

4.4. Objects of cultural significance, human remains - seek curatorial advice on the significance of the objects and procedure advice from a subject specialist. Record.

4.5. Check all possible sources of information about the objects:

- Object Entry records, for donor and any constraints on disposal
- Loan agreements, to return a loan or request permission for disposal (as non-accessioned object) in line with Loans-in Policy
- Accession registers.
- Minutes of meetings at which acquisitions were considered or reported
- Catalogue records: MDA cards, Excel spreadsheets for Object Entry, Collections and Inventory
- Object history files
- Present or former staff and volunteers, Accreditation Mentor

4.6. Research relating to possible transfer of ownership and potential agreements to date, or proposed method of disposal by sale or destruction.

5. Specific information to be supplied to support deaccessioning/disposal:

- Core inventory information about the objects in question, including images where possible
- An evaluation of the significance of the objects in the context of our collection and our Collections Development Policy
- Disposal of objects that seem to duplicate others in our collection - cite details of the other comparable items
- Disposal of objects because they are hazardous - a condition report and technical assessment from an expert advisor
- Cost estimates for ongoing conservation, maintenance and storage of the object if you were to retain object/s, including a condition report by a conservator, if appropriate
- Valuations provided by a third party
- The relevant clauses in our Collections Development Policy which support the decision to dispose

- The proposed method of disposal

6. Disposal by gift, exchange or sale

Approach potential recipients directly or advertise the disposal appropriately, e.g.:

- UK Museums Journal
- NorthEast Scotland Heritage Network or Museums Heritage Highland
- National museums e.g. National Museums Scotland, The British Museum, the Natural History Museum
- Accredited museums
- Other community organisations that may also be able to use them for public benefit

7. Information provided to potential recipients to include:

- The number of objects involved, or approximate number if a bulk disposal
- A description of the objects concerned (or subjects covered if a large number of similar items), including dimensions, images, preservation/state of repair
- The preferred method of disposal
- The terms of disposal

Allow a minimum period of two months for an interest in acquiring the material to be expressed.

8. Disposal stage

8.1. If the disposal is by exchange or sale, agree the terms of the deal. Even if giving the objects away, a need to agree such issues as who is responsible for collecting or delivering them, any conservation work or packing needed, insurance, costs, timings and other practical matters. This should be agreed in writing by both parties, as should the transfer of legal title stating that your museum has handed over ownership of the objects to the recipient.

8.2. Object Exit (Permanent) File:

Record:

- Relevant EGM/AGM Minutes.
- The date of disposal
- The method of disposal (use a standard term).
- Disposal reason (use a standard term).
- The person authorising the disposal – i.e. MS President or Vice-President (The signature of the person with overall responsibility for the decision to dispose).
- The date of the authorisation.
- Any restrictions that were applied to the disposal.
- Deaccession date.

And, if the disposed objects were transferred to someone else:

- The name and contact details of the recipient of the disposed objects:
- Disposal recipient (use a standard form of name).
- Address.
- The new number of the object in the recipient's collection (if relevant)
- If sold, add sale price

Update all documentation – see 3.7

8.3. Do not remove the Museum's numbers from the object(s), as this forms part of the item's history.

8.4. Arrange for the objects to be collected or delivered, along with relevant original documents, retaining copies including images if deemed necessary. e.g. a copy of all non-confidential information you have about the objects, any relevant original documents relating to their history (e.g. operating manuals, associated correspondence, and conservation records).

Agreed CMG (for EMMC): 24/9/2025

Agreed MSB: 29/9/2025

Date for review: 29/9/2030

Guidance notes

Note 1: Destroying objects

Only destroy objects in exceptional circumstances such as:

- Where an object poses a serious conservation threat to other items in the collection and cannot be countered by treatment or isolation from other objects.
- Where an object creates a serious health and safety risk to staff, volunteers or the public which cannot be overcome in an acceptable way.
- Where an object has deteriorated or become broken beyond reasonable repair, and no part or sample has any identifiable use or viability.
- Where you have had no interest shown by another organisation or interested individual after advertisement, and the object is unsaleable.
- For certain categories of bulk archaeological or natural history material, from fieldwork, may be destroyed provided that the material has been fully analysed and published and all relevant records deposited with the site archive. Where applicable, an adequate and representative sample should be retained for future research.
- Objects which have been identified as a hazard should be destroyed according to applicable legislation and regulations.

Note 2 Standard terms (see 8.2)

Reason

- Duplicate
- Beyond repair
- Out with current Collections Development Policy
- Public health hazard
- Archaeological or Natural History assemblage (bulk material)
- Repatriation/Restitution
- Greater significance to another institution
- Transfer to Learning & Outreach education collection

Proposed method

- Transfer to handling box (of non-accessioned items)
- Sale
- Exchange
- Donation
- Repatriation/Restitution
- Destruction
- Transfer to another institution