

**National Museums Scotland
Collections Development Strategy**

1.0 Introduction

This strategy covers the wider responsibilities of NMS in relation to collection development and its national and international role. It also sets out the strategy for increased recognition of the scope and calibre of the collections and their pivotal role in the delivery of current and future aspirations. NMS has mature, encyclopaedic collections which make it Scotland's leading museum of material culture and natural science. These collections are international in scope and link the history of Scotland with the Scottish diaspora. The museum is also Scotland's centre for curatorial expertise across its range of disciplines.

2.0 NMS national and international role

- 2.1 As the national museum of Scotland and as the holder of collections of international importance, National Museums Scotland has a particular role to play in the life of the nation. Its collections are a significant part of the culture of the Scottish nation, held in trust for the benefit of the Scottish people.
- 2.2 NMS has an international role as it reflects the Scottish nation to international perception through demonstrating the scope, breadth and calibre of its collections to an international audience and through recognition as an international centre of excellence.
- 2.3 NMS's vision is the achievement of *a world class museums service that informs, educates and inspires*. The national collections provide the means whereby we can fulfil our mission to *preserve, interpret and make accessible for all, the past and present of Scotland, of other nations and cultures, and of the natural world*. They are essential to the fulfilment of NMS role as a major flagship of Scottish culture.
- 2.4 Through the display and interpretation of collections audiences gain both insight and enjoyment. Objects are used to convey information or construct meaning, to inspire by their aesthetic or spiritual value, or to provide an important link with the past. Through its displays and interpretation in multiple forms of dissemination, NMS promotes dialogue with audiences which secures and benefits the cultural and scientific value of those objects and thus the collections as a whole.

3.0 Collection Development

- 3.1 NMS seeks to enhance its role in cultural life through the development of its collections and thus contribute to the intellectual, social and economic life of the nation. It also wishes to enhance its international standing with its peers in the profession and its international reputation with the general public.
- 3.2 A key strand of development will be through selective acquisition to the collections in line with the Acquisitions and Disposals Policy. Additions to the collections offer the extension and sharing of knowledge for the public benefit and provide the opportunity to refresh the public offer through programmes of exhibition, events and education. They also allow rotation of items on show for their proper care and preservation. However, given the scale of existing collections, acquisition is only one strand of their development.

4.0 Collection Development and Access

- 4.1 Within the next five years, 2007 – 2012, NMS will be developing new ways of accessing its collections for its audiences. These will enlarge its present audience and enable NMS to engage in greater dialogue with existing and potential audiences.
- 4.2 The main strands of this new collection development within the Museum will be through:
 - a) multi-disciplinary and audience-focused approach to permanent and temporary exhibitions. Permanent exhibitions include the 16 new galleries for the first phase of Royal Museum Masterplan Project, due to be completed in 2011, and the Museum of Flight Development Plan. Temporary exhibitions will draw on NMS and international collections to articulate especial strengths (e.g. Silver: Made in Scotland in 2008), to participate in the international professional community and to build audiences.
 - b) the development of digital access to the collections on the NMS web site, with the aim of including information about the individual objects in the new permanent displays. This will greatly extend intellectual access to the collections and provide opportunity for wider professional collaboration as well as bringing awareness to NMS to a potential global audience.
 - c) the opening up of access to stored collections at the National Collections Centre, to demonstrate in particular the strengths of the Science and Technology, Natural Sciences and Dress and Textile collections.
- 4.3 Externally facing activities will build and extend existing strands through:
 - a) Loans - National
NMS engages in an extensive external loan programme covering short and long term loans for the benefit of the Scottish museum

sector and public and to allow the wider display of the national collections. For instance, the restored steam engine *Morayshire*, lent to the Scottish Railway Preservation Society is one of several hundred items on long-loan. NMS makes regular seasonal loans to smaller museums, supports the development of new museums (eg Shetland museum, Tarbat museum) and makes loans to temporary exhibitions across Scotland. As the RMP impacts on capacity for loans, a strategy has been developed to manage expectations by keeping potential borrowers as well informed as possible and to clarify collections which are, with sufficient notice, available.

- b) Loans – International
NMS participates fully in the realisation of major international exhibitions through lending from its collections. While resource constraints are recognised, these are balanced against the benefits of increased knowledge and recognition for NMS collections. Material from collections such as the Ancient Egyptian, Roman, Viking, has been lent internationally in the past and more recently, more material from the world cultures collections has been in demand. There are particular benefits in terms of building and sharing knowledge within the professional community and the increased access for the public benefit.
- c) Partnerships - National
NMS is committed to working in collaboration and selected partnerships with other museums, organisations and stakeholders within Scotland for mutual benefit. Strategies in this area are intended to realise the full potential of the national collections and of collections throughout Scotland and beyond through a network of advice and support. Activities include formal partnerships, touring exhibitions, informal collaborations, knowledge exchange and provision of advice and support. It is intended to develop five strategic partnerships in Scotland within the five year period, building on the two already in place in 2007 with East Ayrshire Museum Services and the Western Isles Museum Services.
- d) Partnerships - International
NMS seeks to build a network of particular partnerships for mutual benefit to consolidate its international position. Such partnerships could benefit from alignment with the international strategy of the Scottish Executive and/or reflect common initiatives and opportunities for sharing resources amongst national multi-disciplinary museums. Alternatively, they could be directed towards a single partner and programme such as the recent exhibition collaborations on exhibitions with the Hermitage. Already partnerships between NMS and collections source communities, museums and academic institutions have demonstrated the benefits of the articulation of historical collections in new contexts.

4.4 Research

- a) Research Framework
In its Research Framework 2004, NMS recognises that a strong research programme enhances our profile as a national museum and our contribution to the intellectual life and international reputation of

Scotland. It results in a robust collections knowledge base with which in turn helps achieve high quality collection development. NMS staff are committed to a high level of scholarship and to its dissemination, leading to academic recognition and collaborations at national and international level. This in turn makes a creative contribution to NMS's public-facing activities; exhibitions, education programmes and publications. Output supports collecting, exhibitions, events and publication of peer reviewed material which averages 80 items per year. Research is the underlying fundamental to informed development and use of collections.

A particular aspiration for the next five years is to extend recognition from the UK Research Councils as an Independent Research Organisation. The Natural Environment Research Council already recognises NMS as an Independent Research Organisation (IRO), which allows NMS to apply for Research Council grants. NMS also wishes to achieve IRO status with the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

b) Research Programme

NMS has defined four major themes for its research programme. The aim is to have a programme of work that encourages and focuses collections- based scholarship, discriminating collecting, and extends the profile of NMS collections. The research programme is particularly relevant to collection through field work in the areas of archaeology and natural sciences as field work is the main source of acquisition.

The themes are deliberately broad in order to cover the encyclopaedic nature of collections and the national and international reach of the collections.

They are:

- i) Collections and collecting
This examines the impetus and results of collecting and covers national, organisational and individuals' practice. An important secondary theme is investigation into the preservation of collections through scientific analysis.
- ii) Understanding the natural world
This examines areas of natural science with particular emphasis on current concerns in biodiversity, climate change and endangered species. The bulk of activity is within Natural Sciences where the collections' focus on geology and zoology drives research activity but there is some cross over to other collections such as archaeology. The main sub- themes are:
 - 1) Understanding biodiversity; through describing new species and revising old taxonomies for specific groups.
 - 2) Changing environments; the study of climate change through changes in the distribution of species and communities. Palaeontological research looks at environmental change in deep time, including events in Scotland that were crucial to the continuing

- development of life on Earth from the earliest land plants and air-breathing animals to pioneering land tetrapods.
 - 3) Conservation, population management and ecology; via studies in taxonomy and systematics contributing to studies on biodiversity including rare and endangered species.
 - 4) Ageing and age-related diseases; investigation of ageing process and disease in animals which can be relevant to human ageing and disease.
 - 5) Scotland's mineral and geological wealth; analysis in the fields of mineralogy, gemmology, petrology and geological processes.
- iii) **Material culture: creation and use**
 This looks at the relationship between objects and social relations in different areas such as visual culture, cultural heritage and memory, and anthropology of art. It allows the assessment and communication of NMS collections as they were and as they are now perceived. It ranges across national and international collections from analysis of archaeological finds, to studies in Scottish engineering, work on specific Scottish decorative art collections and modern dress design to studies on ancient Egypt and more recent Pacific cultures.
- iv) **Identities and cultural contacts**
 This explores how objects can enable us to understand past identities and cultural contacts. It also examines how objects from the past can influence present identities and cultural contacts. It has an international range but is linked intimately to the Scottish diaspora and Scottish history. It includes work on Scotland's military history, as well as Roman and native interaction, the aborigine collections from the Canadian Great Lakes and the ethnomusicology collection assembled by Jean Jenkins.
- c) **Research loans**
 Loans for research purposes from the Archaeological collection and the Natural Science collection are an accepted way of access to material within the scholarly community. As part of this community NMS participates fully in making material available on request to bona fide scholars.

4.5 Collection Development in Scotland

National Fund for Acquisitions

Through its administration of the National Fund of Acquisitions on behalf of the Scottish Executive, NMS is charged with supporting acquisitions for non-national collections throughout Scotland. Given the constraints on resources for purchase at local level, this is a high-impact role for NMS and a key element in its relations with the Scottish museum sector.

5.0 Managed collecting

- 5.1 NMS recognises that collecting lies at the heart of what we do and who we are as an organisation. The continued development of the national collections is vitally important if we are to remain dynamic and responsive to the changing needs of our audiences. Refreshment and development of the collections are critical if we are to retain existing audiences, continue to attract new ones and maintain a strong programme of research.
- 5.2 The future development of the national collections will be guided by an acknowledgement of the long-term costs of collecting beyond acquisition – conservation, documentation, storage, display and interpretation - and our storage capacity. Given the need to build cohesive collections and make informed choice, future collecting will be primarily focused on those areas which are relevant to major projects such as the Royal Museum project. However it is also recognised that advantage must be taken of opportunities as they occur to extend the range and quality of collections in general.
- 5.3 NMS is also committed to developing managed access to its stored collections which are primarily kept at the National Museums Collection Centre at Granton. It also seeks to take advantage of any opportunities to develop and/or extend the site in conjunction with other national bodies, provided these are of mutual benefit.

6.0 Size and scope of NMS collections

- 6.1 In sum the collections number some 4 million items but are very differently constituted. The largest collections consist of scientific specimens, scientific samples and archaeological finds. In descending order, these are, within Natural Sciences 2.7 million items including the entomology collection with c2 million specimens, the geology collection with some 200,000 items and within Archaeology, c1 million items. The remainder, 300,000, are distributed across the cultural, technical and social history collections.
- 6.2 They have been built up over more than two centuries and encompass archaeology, world cultures, natural sciences, science and technology, decorative and applied arts, and Scottish history and culture. The continuity of their history has resulted in an extraordinary range of subject matter. This multi-disciplinary collection is recognised internationally for its scope, quality and depth. While there exist many comparable collections in individual disciplines, the breadth within NMS is its major strength.
- 6.3 In particular, the Scottish collections, resulting from the amalgamation of the two museums in 1985, are unrivalled in breadth and depth. While there exist many comparable collections for individual disciplines in other major institutions, the comprehensiveness of NMS's coverage, and the way this supports the Scottish collections and the role of Scotland and the Scots in the world, is unique.

7.0 Collecting priorities

For the next five years collecting will be directed towards

- (a) alignment with current priorities for exhibition such as the Royal Museum project, and the Museum of Flight development plan.
- (b) focus on the contemporary collecting, particularly of Scottish material culture and in science and technology
- (c) securing high quality items of significance which enhance the overall calibre and standing of NMS collections and their international renown.
- (d) extend collecting of world cultures collections to enhance existing collections to represent the contemporary and build relations for knowledge exchange with present day institutions, communities and artists as appropriate
- (e) link the enhanced knowledge and understanding of the collections gained from the research programme to inform collecting

8.0 Individual Collections

8.1 Archaeology

The Archaeology collection covers Scottish material culture from the earliest times to the medieval era. Its origins lie with the work of the Society of Antiquaries for Scotland founded in 1780 giving it a remarkable scope and depth in its coverage. It is one of the most important collections of British archaeological material in existence. At least half the known specimens for many artefact types from Scotland are held by NMS making the collection an invaluable research tool.

The Early Prehistory collections encompass Europe north of the Alps and span at least 50,000 years, ranging from the Palaeolithic to the end of the Bronze Age. The majority of the objects are from Scotland and date from between the eighth and the early first millennia BC. Iron Age, Roman and Early Historic collections cover the period from c800BC to AD1100 which includes the formative centuries of Scotland as a nation. It includes some spectacular treasures such as three examples of fine Roman parade helmets, the Hunterston brooch, showing Anglo-Saxon decorative work, and 11 of the famous Lewis chessmen, found in Lewis in 1831, and originating in Scandinavia in the late 12th century.

8.2 Scottish Culture and Society

The Scottish cultural and social collections, dating from the medieval era to the present, are unrivalled and include national treasures, such as jewellery that belonged to Mary Queen of Scots, and the sword, targe (shield) and other items associated with Prince Charles Edward Stewart. The collections reflect changes in Scottish society such as the impact of the renaissance on Scotland in the fifteenth century, the pervasive

influence of religion throughout Scottish history and the consistent theme of military service.

Particular strengths are the dress and textile collection which ranges from the sixteenth century to the present and includes the entire archive of the Scottish born designer, Jean Muir; and the silver collection which holds the earliest known examples of Scottish silver and represents the development of the Scottish silver-smithing tradition up to the present day. The Scottish musical tradition is strongly represented with a comprehensive collection of bagpipes and associated instruments. Collecting in the modern field has built up a fine representation of contemporary crafts.

Broadly grouped into applied arts, dress and textiles, numismatics, militaria and social history, the collections provide a comprehensive record of the life, times and achievements of the people of Scotland at home and abroad. Although designated 'Scottish', much of their content, for example in areas such as numismatics and dress and textiles, has in fact a wide range of nationality and context, giving them an international dimension and reputation.

8.3 Science and Technology

The Science and Technology collections comprise one of the most important collections of scientific and technological material in Europe. Originating in the collections of the Industrial Museum of Scotland, they form a critical part of the history and evolution of Scottish involvement in the advancement of science. Individual items of national and international significance represent important scientific and technological innovations and make the collection one of most comprehensive of its kind. They demonstrate Scotland's legacy of innovation through scientists, inventors and engineers.

Examples include the earliest known European astrolabe of c1026, showing the positions of the sun and stars, important examples of the development of steam power and significant innovations in the history of flight from Britain's oldest surviving aeroplane to Concorde.

8.4 European Decorative Arts

The European collections represent one of the largest and most important holdings of European decorative art in the UK, with individual items of outstanding international quality and rarity. They cover sculpture, metalwork, woodwork, ceramics and glass.

They reflect Scotland's strong links with Europe and the activities of Scottish collectors such as Alexander, 10th Duke of Hamilton who, in the early 19th century amassed one of the most magnificent collections ever assembled. Its dispersal resulted in some outstanding acquisitions for NMS, including a substantial part (the remainder is in the Louvre) of the splendid silver gilt tea service, created by the silversmith Biennais on the occasion of the Emperor Napoleon's marriage to Marie-Louise of Austria and the complete travelling toilette service also by Biennais in silver gilt, owned by Napoleon's sister, Princess Pauline Borghese.

These have been further enhanced by the acquisition of items such as Lennoxlove toilet service which belonged to Francis Theresa Stuart, Duchess of Richmond and Lennox and believed to have been a gift to her from Charles 11.

8.5 World Cultures

The extensive World Cultures collection relates to countries and cultures from every continent. The greatest strengths are in collections from China, Pacific and Ancient Egypt but other outstanding collections originate in the Middle East, India, Japan and the Arctic and Canadian sub-Arctic. They are the legacy of the Scottish diaspora and originated from the work of explorers, entrepreneurs, soldiers, civil servants, missionaries and businessmen.

The collection of Chinese lacquer is the finest in Europe and NMS holds the largest collection in the UK relating to the Ainu people of Japan, as well as an important Japanese archaeological collection. The collection of material from Ancient Egypt is regarded as internationally important, including a complete Middle Kingdom burial group excavated by Sir Flinders Petrie at Qurneh in 1908. The collections from early exploration of the Pacific are internationally important and include some material from the voyages of Captain James Cook. There is an especially significant collection of Athapaskan material from the Canadian sub-Arctic systematically collected by Scottish traders for the museum.

8.6 Natural Sciences

The Natural Sciences collections date from the beginnings of scientific study in Scotland in the seventeenth century and are worldwide in scope. They focus on geology and zoology and do not include biology except within palaeontology.

Highlights include zoological material from the great collecting expeditions of the nineteenth century, often providing the first documentation of fauna in particular parts of the globe, and important geological collections including one of the finest existing collections of Middle Old Red Sandstone fish.

The collection ranges from type and figured material - the actual specimens from which species were originally described and recognised within the scientific community - to specimens representing recent scientific innovation in cloning. It includes examples of some of the earliest forms of life preserved as fossils, as well as finds from explorers such as Charles Darwin and an extensive mineral collection including examples of Scottish gold.

9.0 Summary

NMS has mature multi-disciplinary collections which are fundamental to the full realisation of its national and international role and to the engagement and extension of its audiences. It also has the benefit of a specialist staff. They offer potential to extend NMS role further through disciplined acquisition, current development projects, extended research programmes and collaborative working.

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