

Roman Baths Collections Development Policy

2024-2029

Name of museum:

The Roman Baths

Name of governing body:

Bath and North East Somerset Council

Date on which this policy was approved by governing body:

Insert date

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:

2029

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:

The Roman Baths is here to enrich people's lives by preserving, developing and making accessible the ancient monument, historic building and Designated collection held in trust by the Council. It also contributes positively to cultural life, learning and the local and regional economy by making available a nationally significant resource to a very wide range of audiences in an inspiring and sustainable way.

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

The origins of the museum date to 1727 when Minerva's Head was discovered and displayed at the Guildhall along with further archaeological discoveries. In 1790 the Pump Room was extended and included the display of the Gorgon's Head and other key objects from Roman Bath and the surrounding area.

The museum was opened to the public in 1897 following the discovery of the Roman

bathing complex in the 1870s and records mention the display of the Gorgon's Head beneath the Concert Hall adjacent to the Roman Baths. Photographs show Roman stonework, leadwork and building materials from the excavations placed around the baths. From this time onwards, objects have been put on display to augment the understanding of the site for visitors to the Roman Baths.

During the 20th century, the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution transferred assets including archaeological objects from Bath and the region to Bath City Council as the institution's buildings were requisitioned and used by the Admiralty until 1959. The Roman Baths collection steadily grew over the following years as further excavations in Bath and the region revealed more archaeology, and other institutions and individuals transferred or donated items to the museum. The rich archaeology of Bath and North East Somerset gave rise to Bath Archaeological Trust, which became the primary excavator of archaeological sites up until the early 2000s, when the company was dissolved. At this time the entire archive of material and documentary finds from hundreds of excavations was deposited with the Roman Baths, giving rise to the documentation backlog that still exists today.

It is not clear what means of identifying the first objects in the collection was used as no form of documentation was used in the museum prior to 1962. A card index was then set up which briefly recorded (and sometimes misidentified) some 2340 archaeological objects in the museum, marking objects with RB numbers, some of which survive today. There are no records in the Museum archives about the objects in the collection during these years, but ongoing research into the City Archives held at Bath Record Office will provide further information.

Between 1977-9 a new scheme was introduced with the MDA prefix of BATRM and cataloguing with MDA cards. Some of the RB-numbered objects were renumbered with A numbers (A standing for archaeology). Only 1267 objects were catalogued on object cards and sheets which were later bound. Corresponding RB numbers also were recorded at this point. The current system of accessioning and numbering by years was introduced in 1978 and has been continued to the present. In 1992 bound archival quality accession registers took over from the loose leaves used previously.

In the late 1980s the collection management database, Micromusee, was acquired but few objects were recorded until 1998, when a review of the documentation procedures highlighted gaps and consequently new procedures and record sheets were introduced. Since this time, a programme of cataloguing and digitisation of archaeological boxed collections and digitisation of the numismatic collections has ensured the ongoing documentation of the collection, a process that was halted during the Coronavirus pandemic due to the staffing capacity, a pause in Collections volunteering and the subsequent retirement of the Collections Manager.

Management of the collection first became curatorially led in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the museum's management was remodelled to form Heritage Services, a division of Bath and North East Somerset Council. Prior to this the site ran primarily as a visitor attraction, but this restructure allowed for the recruitment of a formal curatorial position. In 1990, the museum became a Registered museum and in 1999 the collection was Designated by Resource (Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries) as having a collection of national significance. In 2004, Registration

became Accreditation. In 2014 'The Roman curse tablets from Bath – Britain's earliest prayers' were the first objects from Roman Britain to be added to the UK Register of the Memory of the World by UNESCO.

As of 2022 the collections and curatorial staff at the Roman Baths are all new in post following the retirement of the Head of Service, Roman Baths Manager, and Collections Manager in 2021-22. This Policy maintains and looks to build on the existing high standard of collection management and museum best practice that the previous management team worked to develop over their tenure, in line with the new Heritage Services Strategy and the Roman Baths Forward Plan.

3. An overview of current collections

The Roman Baths collections are principally archaeological, but also include a diverse local history collection and a major collection of numismatics which together tell the story of 7,000 years of human activity around the hot springs at Bath. The collection is Designated in its entirety by ACE as one of outstanding national significance. The museum collection is recorded on the Collections Management Database, Mobydoc Micromusee. To date, there are 89,498 records on the database, which represent an estimated 182,899 objects as some bulk archaeological collections are catalogued at group level.

3.1 Archaeology

In the prehistoric collections there are flint and other stone objects, mostly from the downs to the north and south of Bath but including a small but distinctive group of Mesolithic flint tools found in excavations in and around the hot springs in Bath, and further finds from the site of the Southgate shopping development, together making a significant assemblage from the southwest. There is also Bronze Age metalwork, the most significant pieces being from the Monkswood Hoard. There are small quantities of prehistoric pottery, human and faunal remains including objects from the Iron Age hillfort at Little Solsbury, and Iron Age roundhouses at Batheaston

In the Roman collection, the bulk of material relates to the Baths and Temple site in which the museum is situated, consisting of building blocks, architectural fragments, sculptural reliefs, inscriptions, ceramic building material and lead and bronze plumbing fittings. There are also thousands of coins and many smaller objects from the Sacred Spring thrown in as offerings to the goddess Sulis Minerva. Amongst these are fragments of over 130 curse tablets, the largest group known from within the Roman Empire and the first objects from Roman Britain to have been added to the UNESCO Memory of the World register of intangible cultural heritage.

Roman objects from sites elsewhere in Bath include architectural fragments, tomb sculptures and stone coffins, as well as personal, domestic, and industrial objects. These include objects of copper alloy, iron and bone as well as substantial quantities of pottery, tile, human and animal bone and samples

of wall plaster, mosaic tesserae and window glass. Notable is the Beau Street hoard of Roman silver coins, one of the largest from any town in Roman Britain.

From elsewhere in Bath and North East Somerset there are objects from the Roman villa at Combe Hay and an important collection of material from Keynsham, including Roman objects and a nationally significant mosaic from the Durley Hill Roman villa and the Somerdale Roman house now believed to be part of the Roman settlement of Trajectus.

The post-Roman collections include remains from a Saxon cemetery at Bath, and from the medieval settlement at Eckweek excavated in 1988 in advance of the Peasedown St. John by-pass. Important objects from the Medieval Abbey site at Keynsham include monumental stonework, building materials and a range of small finds representing life at the Abbey. The post-medieval objects in the collection are principally ceramic and glass, with material from Saw Close representing the lower socio-economic residents of Bath in the Georgian and Victorian periods. The collection includes stonework and industrial objects recovered from the Combe Down stone mines during archaeological recording that took place prior to the stabilisation project completed in 2009.

The Roman Baths Museum is one of only two museums in the former County of Avon approved by Historic England for the deposition of excavation material and their associated archives. Much of the archaeological material excavated prior to the early 2000s was transferred from the Bath Archaeological Trust, and consists of the object and documentary archives of the Trust's work in the region. The archaeological collections are added to continually through receipt of excavation material from development archaeology as well as occasional stray finds and through purchase via the Treasure Act.

3.2 Numismatics

The numismatic collection consists of approximately 30,000 objects. Most significant amongst these are the collection of Roman coins of which the most noteworthy are those excavated from the Sacred Spring at the Roman Baths and the Beau Street Hoard, both collections of national significance.

There are a number of ancient coins (mostly Roman) from various sites around Bath and unprovenanced sources. Numismatics from later periods include coins from the Saxon mint at Bath and a representative collection of English coinage from the Saxon period to the 20th century, miscellaneous foreign coins, commemorative medals, jettons and reckoning counters.

The collection includes a very comprehensive collection of local 17th, 18th and 19th century tokens, tickets, inn checks and banknotes from Bath and North East Somerset.

3.3 Local History

The local history collections consist principally of objects relating to the city and immediate environs of Bath. They include an important collection of Spa-related equipment rescued in the 1980s from the defunct Spa Treatment Centre, which was enhanced in the 1990s by the creation of an oral history archive for the Spa, and a large group of weights and measures transferred from Trading Standards.

The collection includes historic furniture pieces produced by local makers during the 17th and 18th centuries for the buildings and venues in the care of Bath and North East Somerset Council, and notably the Tompion Clock made by clockmaker Thomas Tompion for the Pump Room.

The collection also includes a significant and substantial collection of old photographs, postcards and glass negatives, mostly of the Roman Baths and Bath, as well as nearby villages.

Title to the collection of civic regalia and silver of the former Bath City Council was transferred to the Charter Trustees upon local government re-organisation in 1996, but curatorial advice is still given to the Trustees by the Roman Baths Museum when required.

4. Themes and priorities for future collecting

4.1 Archaeology

As the recognised archaeological repository for Bath and North East Somerset the museum will continue to collect archaeological archives from developer led projects and other excavations, and finds offered to the museum through the Treasure Act. The museum's Conditions for Depositing Archaeological archives outline the detailed requirements for this process including rationalisation and disposal prior to deposition.

The museum will only normally collect within the boundaries of Bath and North East Somerset. In those parts of North East Somerset where another museum has a particularly strong tradition of collecting (i.e. Bristol Museum at Camerton) a decision to collect will only follow consultation with that other museum and consideration of such matters as the wishes of the donor, ease of access for students and scholars, potential for public display, access to conservation resources and grant-aid.

4.2 Numismatics

The museum will continue to develop its collection of locally associated objects from the whole district of Bath and North East Somerset.

4.3 Local history

The museum will take a leading role in promoting the acquisition of objects of local and social historical significance by appropriately accredited museums and other organisations in Bath and North East Somerset by:

- a) itself collecting objects and other media relating to the City of Bath and its environs, particularly the history of the Spa and the Pump Room and other public buildings belonging to or managed by the Council.
- b) offering professional advice and encouragement and alerting other museums and kindred organizations in the district to opportunities to develop and sustain community-based collections of local history.
- c) working together with Bath Record Office to support the development of collections reflecting the nature and diversity of local communities within Bath and North East Somerset through both historical objects and intangible media.

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.

5.3 The Roman Baths undertook rationalisation of its collections in 2000 and 2001 when a collection of cast iron objects and architectural fragments was dispersed to other more appropriate institutions. Since then some duplicate material from the historic furniture collection has also been disposed of. These disposals followed procedures recommended by the national agencies in being at the time and were the subject of specific reports approved by the relevant Cabinet member. Further review of the historic furniture collection is included in the Collections Care and Conservation Plan following changes in storage location and the return of the Assembly Rooms to the National Trust.

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):

- The Museum of London
- National Museums of Scotland
- The British Museum
- South West Heritage Trust
- Bristol Museum and Art Gallery
- Radstock Museum
- Bath Preservation Trust
- The Holburne Museum
- Museum of Bath Stone
- Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution

8. Archival holdings

8.1 As the Museum holds and intends to acquire supporting archives, including photographs and printed ephemera, the governing body will be guided by the Code of Practice on Archives for Museums and Galleries in the United Kingdom (third edition, 2002).

9. Acquisition

9.1 The policy for agreeing acquisitions is:

All items considered for acquisition by the museum will first be assessed on a case-by-case basis against the criteria outlined in section 4 (Themes and priorities of future collecting) of this policy by the Roman Baths Collections Manager and escalated for approval by the Roman Baths Manager and the Engagement and Curatorial Team as required.

Where a donor is asked to sign a transfer of title document that document will transfer title to Bath and North East Somerset Council.

Archaeological object and documentary archives will be acquired according to the Roman Baths Conditions for the Preparation and Deposition of Archaeological Archives. The museum will not accept archaeological archives without a signed transfer of title from the previous owner obtained by the depositor prior to deposition.

All acquisitions with a purchase price under £5,000, where the costs can be met from within existing budgets, or are externally funded, are to be raised at Engagement and Curatorial Team and recorded in the minutes.

Purchases of over £5,000 or those that require additional funding, are to be discussed at Engagement and Curatorial Team and if the group agrees on the acquisition, then a report should be submitted to Senior Leadership Team for final approval. The report should state the overall cost, how it satisfies the collecting policy and what fundraising is being sought to support the purchase.

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, e.g. the destruction of controlled substances, a police certificate should be obtained and kept in the relevant object history file.