

# Fashion Museum Bath Collections Development Policy

2025-2030

**Name of museum:**

Fashion Museum Bath

**Name of governing body:**

Bath and North East Somerset Council

**Date on which this policy was approved by governing body:**

**Date for Policy Review:**

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:  
**Vision:** To champion fashion's transformative power as a global industry and expression of creativity, culture and identity.  
  
**Mission:** To craft a groundbreaking museum that brings fashion to life for local and global audiences, reshaping Bath for the future.
- 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**

Fashion Museum Bath (FMB) opened its doors at the Assembly Rooms, Bath on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1963. Originally known as the Museum of Costume, it was the brainchild of writer, costume designer and fashion historian, Doris Langley Moore (1902-1989), who gifted the City of Bath the Museum's founding collection and served as its inaugural curator.

Langley Moore began collecting fashion in 1928 after receiving an 1870s dress from

her mother-in-law. She went on to become a prominent scholar in the emerging field of dress history, publishing her book *The Woman in Fashion*, in 1949, which featured images of many of the pieces in her collection photographed on live models such as actress Vivien Leigh and ballerina Margot Fonteyn.

Quickly amassing over 5,000 pieces, she began exploring opportunities to show her collection. Parts of the collection went on display at Eridge Castle, Kent in 1955 and then at Royal Pavilion in Brighton in 1958 before coming to Bath, first as a temporary exhibition before being gifted to the city to found the Museum of Costume in 1959.

In preparation for the opening of the Museum, Langley Moore wrote to her friends and acquaintances to seek additional pieces for the collection. These pieces represent some key early donations and long-term loans to the Museum, including:

- 1962 Lady Curzon collection, gifted by Lady Metcalf and Lady Ravensdale
- 1963 Porter Bateman loan
- 1964 Silver Tissue Dress and collection of early dress from Captain Vaughan (now Vaughan Family Trust)

Langley Moore also established *Dress of the Year*, a unique collecting scheme for contemporary fashion where each year the Museum invites a leading figure from the fashion industry to select an outstanding look or looks from the past year. The first *Dress of the Year* was for 1963, and the look chosen was a design by Mary Quant, selected by the Fashion Writers' Association.

Since this time the Collection has continued to grow, predominantly through donation, although there have been notable key loans and purchases, including the purchase of the 1760s Fashion Doll's Dress in 1993, the purchase of two dresses by 1930s designer Madeline Vionnet in 2009, as well as the significant long-term loan of the collections of The Glove Collection Trust, now numbering around 2,300 items, which has been at the Museum since the 1980s.

In 1974 the Fashion Research Centre was established at 4 Circus. It operated as part of the Museum of Costume but was distinct to the Museum at the Assembly Rooms. Initially it drew material from objects from the original Museum of Costume collection, but also began collecting itself, establishing a 'study collection' and reference library, which also included patterns, photographs, fashion plates and periodicals. In 2003 the Centre's activities, and collections, were transferred to the Assembly Rooms, and are now all managed together by the Fashion Museum Bath at the Collections Centre in Warminster.

### **3. An overview of current collections**

The Fashion Museum Bath Collection is recognised by Arts Council England's Designation Scheme as being of outstanding national importance. It contains collection areas and individual items that are exceptional amongst worldwide public collections in their breadth, depth and quality, from the late sixteenth century to the twenty-first, with particular strengths in European, especially British, fashion. The collection includes clothing, accessories and paper materials related to fashion for

men, women and children across the production spectrum from haute couture through to ready-to-wear, home dressmaking and high street. It's estimated the collection comprises around 100,000 objects, with 80,241 currently inventoried and work ongoing. It comprises:

### **Garments (Approx 18,600)**

From outerwear to underwear the collection includes clothing designed and worn for a wide range of occasions, from daywear to court dress, mourning, sportswear and fancy dress. It includes rare early pieces, such as the Silver Tissue Dress c. 1660, on long-term loan from The Vaughan Family Trust, as well significant examples from leading fashion houses, from the House of Worth to Alexander McQueen.

The contemporary collection includes the *Vogue 75 years* collection and the *Dress of the Year* collection, started in 1963. Designers chosen over the years include Giorgio Armani, Tom Ford, John Galiano, Christopher Kane, Karl Lagerfeld, Alexander McQueen, Jean Muir, Gareth Pugh, Kenzo Takada, Donatella Versace and Vivienne Westwood.

Other discrete collections include the 'wardrobe' collections, which refer to a series of garments and accessories worn by a specific individual over a period of time. Prominent wearers include Mary Curzon, Baroness Curzon of Kedleston (1870-1906), Dame Margot Fonteyn (1919-1991), Molly, Rani of Pudukkottai (1894-1967) and Sir Roy Strong (b.1935).

### **Accessories (Approx 20,500)**

The collection includes a range of fashion accessories, including shoes and hats, gloves, parasols, bags and vanity cases, scarves and handkerchiefs, fans and costume jewellery.

Significant discrete collections in this area include collections of The Glove Collection Trust which has been on loan to the Fashion Museum since the 1980s and the Hull-Grundy Collection – around 200 pieces of costume jewellery and dress accessories from 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Works-on-Paper (Approx 33,000)**

Informally called the 'archive', the Museum holds a sizeable and varied collection of works-on-paper, including fashion photographs and drawings, cartes des visites, knitting and dressmaking patterns, catalogues, designers' archives and dress historians' papers.

Of particular note is the Worth Paquin Archive, as well as other archive collections of significant designers or fashion houses, including Lachasse, Mattli, Bellville Sassoon, Victor Edelstein and Jan van der Velden. The archive collections also include the Ernestine Carter Collection of fashion photographs from the 1960s and 1970s.

There is also a sizeable collection of fashion periodicals and magazines. This includes 19<sup>th</sup>-century fashion plates and 20<sup>th</sup>-century fashion, women's and trade magazines, from *Vogue and Harpers and Queen* to *Tailor and Cutter* and *Woman*

*and Home*. The fashion periodicals also include newspaper articles and features on fashion.

In addition to the core collection at specific periods the following material has also been acquired:

- **Haberdashery:** sewing boxes, tools, trimmings, fastenings, buttons and ribbons
- **Dolls:** An important collection of fashion dolls with associated garments, including the Fashion Dolls Dress (France, 1760s) and Miss Virginia Lachasse, made by the fashion house Lachasse in 1954.
- **Mannequins:** The collection includes a significant number of fashion mannequins, from early 20<sup>th</sup>-century wax busts to historical display mannequins. Highlights include pieces by Pierre Imans of Paris and the collection of the Dress of the Year mannequins by Adel Rootstein from the 1960s to the 2000s.
- **Fashion Museum Ephemera:** furniture, ceramics and glass and other household ephemera, including, for example, a hip bath and a collection of cricket bats and hockey and croquet sticks. This material was collected originally for the purpose of props for display.

## 4. Themes and priorities for future collecting

4.1 The aim of the acquisitions programme is to:

- Ensure the focused development of the Fashion Museum Bath Collection
- Support the development of the new Fashion Museum Bath (opening 2030), enhancing the content available in the galleries, exhibitions, displays and online

4.2 FMB engages in 'passive' and 'active' collecting. The former typically occurs in response to an offer of donation, and the latter the result of strategic approach to fill a gap identified as part of a project (e.g. exhibition planning). Objects acquired via either process go through an approval process. In addition to collecting priorities (outlined in 4.4), FMB will continue to engage in passive collecting to fill gaps in the collection. We recognise that our understanding of our collection's strengths and gaps will continue to evolve as a result of on-going cataloguing and research.

4.3 FMB's collecting policy is informed by the following principles:

- Preference will be given to objects which:
  - Have strong provenance
  - Belonged to known individuals
  - Represent narratives and techniques not currently exemplified
  - Are in good condition
  - Have strong display potential
- Significant consideration will be given before acquiring objects which

have large storage or resource implications, including large archives and 'wardrobe' collections; outsized objects and objects made of materials which are actively degrading.

- We will not acquire objects if the donor/vendor/executor/artist places conditions on the acquisition which we believe are impractical
- We will make it clear to any owner of a prospective acquisition that, in accepting an object, we do not undertake to place it on permanent display

4.4 FMB reviews collecting priorities annually, in line with strategic priorities, opportunities and resources. Overarching priorities for the period covered by this policy (2025-2030) are:

- Strengthening our early collections: focused on 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century fashionable dress, accessories and archival material
- Re-dressing absent narratives— ensuring our collection reflects the diversity of society, and people can see themselves represented. This includes but is not limited to designers, makers and wearers from the Global Majority, identifying as LGBTQIA+, or disabled.
- Contemporary Edge – continuing to build our 21<sup>st</sup>-century collection, from across the world.
- Sustainably Minded – collecting historic and contemporary examples of sustainable fashion practice and innovation.
- Dress of the Year – continue the unique collecting scheme with annual acquisitions
- British *Vogue* – continuing to collect a monthly copy of British *Vogue* to ensure an unbroken run.

## **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 Museum is undergoing a major documentation and re-housing project. It is anticipated this will reveal clear priorities for rationalisation and disposal. In these cases, a formal review using a recognised review methodology will be carried out.

Areas where we anticipate rationalisation and disposal include:

- Unaccessioned material that is currently subject to a documentation backlog review
- Replica and prop items which should not have been accessioned
- Fashion archives – ephemeral material held within large individual archive

- collections
- Textiles
- Haberdashery

## **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):
- Victoria and Albert Museum
  - Manchester Art Gallery, Gallery of Costume
  - The London Museum
  - National Museum Scotland
  - Bowes Museum
  - Bath Preservation Trust Museums

## **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 a Collections Manager, and escalated for approval by the Senior Curator. This rationale will be documented in the acquisition proposal and saved in the acquisition file.

Purchases over £5,000 – the Senior Curator recommends acquisition to SLT which is considered at the weekly meeting. If a decision is time-sensitive it can be approved directly by Director of Culture & Heritage or Fashion Museum

Project Director if Director of Culture & Heritage is unavailable.

For all acquisitions, legal title will transfer to Bath and North-East Somerset Council.

- 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 under 100 years old, it will obtain the necessary licence under the Human Tissue Act 2004 and any subordinate legislation from time to time in force.
- 10.2** 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** So far as biological and geological material is concerned, the museum will not acquire by any direct or indirect means any specimen that has been collected, sold or otherwise transferred in contravention of any national or international wildlife protection or natural history conservation law or treaty of the United Kingdom or any other country, except with the express consent of an appropriate outside authority.



## **12. Archaeological material**

**12.1** The museum will not acquire any archaeological material.

## **13. Exceptions**

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.