

## **Review of the Collection at Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse**

Report by the Head of NMAS

### **Summary**

This report sets out the background to the review of collections at Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse and recommends deaccessioning a group of social history items that are in poor condition or duplicated and outside the NMAS Acquisition and Disposal policy.

### **1. Background**

- 1.1 Collecting within the NMAS is undertaken in accordance with the Acquisition and Disposal Policy approved by Committee, This is reviewed every five years and sets out the strengths of the collections, areas for future collecting and constraints on collecting, such as resources, space and expertise.

As part of a responsible collections management strategy the NMAS undertakes regular reviews of its collections to ensure that material is properly classified and adequately housed. Objects that are deemed unsuitable for retention as part of the core collection are identified and alternative homes found. The process to be followed was agreed by Committee in 2002 following a Best Value Review of collection and collections management.

- 1.2 To summarise, the core collections basically fall into three categories with different levels of access:
1. **Display material** represents the best or most significant items in the collections and is easily accessible by all people visiting the museums.
  2. **Study collections** provide depth for people who want to learn more about a specific subject. The emphasis is on presenting as many objects as possible for study. Objects are either freely accessible when the museum is open, in open storage (easily accessible with an appointment or on regular open days) or in study rooms (open on set days a week).
  3. **Long-term research material** is needed as evidence for current or future research and only needs to be available on an

appointment basis. This can be contained in high-density storage, thereby making the most cost effective use of space.

1.3 Items not retained for the Core Collection are categorised as follows:

4. **Working or demonstration material** objects are put to working use or demonstration use at or on behalf of the museum eg agricultural equipment.
5. **Education, handling and loan collection** objects are included for educational reference material only, including loans. There is an implied deterioration through usage over time.
6. **Set dressing and cannibalisation** items are used as set-dressing for on-site activities of the museum.
7. **Dispersal** objects are found alternative homes where they will be put to good use. We follow Museums Association and Accreditation good practice guidelines. There will be a presumption that objects remain in the public domain and offered initially to similar institutions at whichever location provides the best balance of care, context and access.
8. **Disposal** following Museums Association guidelines if no other home can be found, objects are sold at auction or scrapped.

## 2 Review of social history collections at Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse

2.1 The stores and external storage space at Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse contain a number of social history objects. These were brought into the collections during the 1970s at a time when museums were generally actively collecting items in a relatively uncontrolled manner, without reference to an official collecting policy or quality control. As a result many collections contain duplicate objects, objects that are duplicated in other museums and/or poor quality objects that now require large conservation resources to be of display standard. Some of the objects have little or no provenance and some have no known relevance to the local history of the area. As a result these fall outside the Acquisition Policy of the museums service today.

Some social history objects take up large areas of floor space and are in many cases heavy and cumbersome. As a result access to other stored and better provenanced collections has been made difficult and on occasion, impossible for health and safety reasons. In some cases appropriate storage for very large items is not available and consequently items have been stored in external areas.

- 2.2 A review of these collections has been undertaken in order to:
- Improve access to the collection as a whole
  - Release storage space and resources to allow improved collections management
  - Remove threats posed by possible insect infestation
  - Remove threats posed by inappropriate storage conditions
- 2.3 Following the agreed process the attached list of objects (Annex 1) has been identified for deaccessioning and subsequent dispersal or disposal. These objects are in extremely poor condition or are duplicated within Gressenhall's collections. As a result they fall outside the Collecting Policy of NMAS.
- 2.4 While finding a new home for the objects in another museum will be the ideal first priority, it may be that because of the poor condition of some of the objects, destruction may be the only realistic outcome of the rationalisation process.
- 2.5 The objects listed in Annex 1 have been identified by the curator as candidates for deaccessioning and dispersal if possible. The list has been scrutinised by the NMAS' internal Rationalisation Group, which comprises the Collections and Information Manager, the Senior Conservation Officer and the Chief Curator. Where possible these objects will be found a home in another museum or cultural institution.

### **3 Resource Implications**

- 3.1 **Finance:** a small budget may be required for chemical disposal.

### **4 Equality Impact Assessment**

- 4.1 NMAS puts diversity, equality and community cohesion at the heart of service development and service delivery. It aims to ensure that activities included in the service plan are accessible to diverse groups in Norfolk and that all policies, practices and procedures undergo equality impact assessment. These impact assessments help the service focus on meeting the needs of customers in relation to age, disability, gender, race, religion & belief and sexual orientation.

This report has no equality implications.

### **5 Section 17 – Crime and Disorder Act**

There are no Section 17 implications.

### **6 Risk Implications/Assessment**

There is a risk that signification collections will be inadvertently be deaccessioned, or that material acquired with external funds will be disposed of without permission. These risks have been managed in the following ways:

- The collections review has been undertaken following good practice guidelines set out by the Museums Association and the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. This ensures that any legal considerations and the public interest, such as past donors or funders, have been taken into account.
- The Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse Curator has used their knowledge to identify objects of lesser interest to the museum, using the NMAS Acquisition and Disposal Policy for reference.
- The list has been scrutinised by the NMAS's Internal Rationalisation Group, which comprises the Collections and Information Manager, the Senior Conservation officer and the Chief Curator.
- The status quo involves risk as retaining material of poor quality, potential infestation and in poor storage conditions increases risk to other valuable collections and to the public.

## **7 Conclusion**

This collections review is proposing to remove items that are of minimal interest in interpreting the history of rural Norfolk and will free up space and resources for the benefit of the remaining collections and the visiting public.

## **8 Recommendation**

Members are asked to agree that the objects listed in Annex 1 are deaccessioned.

### **Background Papers**

MLA Museum Accreditation Standard

MA Good Practice Guidelines on Acquisition and Disposal

NMAS Acquisition and Disposal Policy

(<http://www.museums.norfolk.gov.uk/default.asp?Document=900.020.010x1>)

NMAS Rationalisation Strategy

### **Officer Contact**

If you have any questions about matters contained in this paper please get in touch with:

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