

Breckland Area Museums Committee

18 March 2019

Review of the Collection at Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse

Report by the Assistant Head of Museums

Summary

This report sets out the background to the ongoing review of collections at Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse and recommends deaccessioning a group of social history items in accordance with the NMS Collections Management Strategy 2018-22, which incorporates the NMS Collections Development Policy (Appendix 1). The Collecting Policy for Gressenhall Farm & Workhouse is outlined (Appendix 2).

1. Background

- 1.1 Collecting and rationalisation within the NMS is undertaken in accordance with the Collections Development Policy approved by the Joint Museums Committee (Appendix 1). This policy 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 NMS undertakes regular reviews of its collections to ensure that material is properly classified and adequately housed. Objects that are deemed unsuitable for retention as past of the core collection are identified and alternative homes found.
- 1.2 To summarise the collections review process, material is proposed for rationalisation which:
 - Does not fall within the current collecting policy.
 - Is loan material no longer required for display
 - Is of good quality but would fit better into another organisation's collections (including those of Norfolk Record Office and Norfolk Library & Information Service).
 - Does not provide important information about Norfolk and its history.
 - Has no reasonable expectation of being useful for display or research.
 - Has been unethically acquired.
 - Is unprovenanced (i.e. has no background information to provide a context).
 - Is of poor quality compared with other examples in the collection.
 - Has deteriorated beyond any useful purpose (e.g. through decay or infestation. This might be a natural history specimen that has suffered pest infestation).

- Poses a threat to other objects or people (e.g. by contamination. This might be WW2 gas masks with degraded asbestos filters or radioactive geological specimens).
- Is an unnecessary duplicate.
- Offers no reasonable expectation that NMS will be able to provide suitable levels of curation or collections care.

Meeting one of the above criteria does not automatically condemn any object. Each will be considered on its merits. There may well be good reasons why objects that fall into one or more of the above categories should be kept, but they will be critically examined and justified in line with the NMS Collections Development Policy and the Museums Association Code of Ethics.

1.3. Options for disposal:

There are several ways in which material that is not suitable for the NMS core collections might continue to fulfil a useful purpose including:

- Transfer to another Accredited museum by gift
- Transfer to another public institution by gift
- Return to donor or lender
- Repatriation to country of origin
- Charitable donation
- Set dressing or adapted to repair working objects
- Sale on the open market, or
- Destruction (as a last resort)

Any income generated by sales of objects is allocated to a ring-fenced fund for the purchase of new collections or the care of existing collections.

1.4 Once Committee has agreed the list of proposed disposals the following steps will be taken:

- As required by the conditions of the Museum Accreditation Scheme, and the Museums Association Code of Ethics a notice will be placed in the Museums Journal or on-line equivalent, and any other appropriate specialist publication, advertising the availability of significant material to other Accredited museums.
- Direct contact will be made with any Accredited museums or other public institutions that would have a particular interest in any of the objects.
- If no Accredited museum is interested and the material was donated within the last 20 years, attempts will be made to contact the donor to return the item.
- Non Accredited museums will be considered for potential rehoming of objects, this will be reviewed on a case by case basis by the NMS Rationalisation Committee

- Material in which no interest is expressed will be either returned to the core collections, sold at auction or destroyed; these options are reviewed on a case by case basis by the Rationalisation Committee.
- Complete records of all transactions and processes will be kept.

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 objects that are duplicated in other museums, of poor quality and now require large conservation resources to be of display standard. Most 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 Collections Development Policy of the museums service today.
- 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 (Appendices 2-5) has been identified for deaccessioning and subsequent transfer, dispersal, disposal or destruction.
- 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 quality and lack of provenance of the objects, destruction of some the objects may be the only realistic outcome of the rationalisation process.
- 2.5 The objects listed in Appendix 3 have been identified by the curator as candidates for deaccessioning and dispersal if possible. The list has been scrutinized by the NMS' internal Rationalisation Committee, which comprised the Collections Development Manager, the Senior Conservation Officer, Registrar, Documentation Officer and the Chief Curator. Where possible these objects will be found a home in another accredited museum or public institution.

3 Resource Implications

- 3.1 **Finance:** a small budget may be required to pay for removal firm's charges and possible destruction or rubbish disposal. NMS staff based

in Norwich or other sites may be required to visit Gressenhall for advice and their transport costs paid for.

4 Equality Impact Assessment

- 4.1 NMS 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 Arts Council England. 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 NMS Collections Development Policy for reference.
- The list has been scrutinised by the NMS's Internal Rationalisation Committee, which comprises the Collections Development Manager, the Senior Conservation Officer, Registrar, Documentation 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 Appendix 3 are deaccessioned.

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