

Galway City Museum

Spanish Parade, Galway

Collections Policy 2016-2020

1. INTRODUCTION

This policy statement regulates the acquisition of objects to the collections of Galway City Museum. The adoption and implementation of this policy by the management of Galway City Council is a requirement of the Heritage Council's Standards and Accreditation Scheme for Museums in Ireland (MSPI).

This policy represents the current mission and focus of Galway City Museum and supersedes all previous and existing practices and policies, relating to the acquisition of objects. The policy will be assessed on an annual basis with the Museum governing body, Galway City Council, and a detailed review will be undertaken at five-year intervals.

2. MISSION STATEMENT OF GALWAY CITY MUSEUM

'To be a centre of learning, inspiration, engagement & enrichment for all our visitors by collecting, preserving & displaying the material heritage of Galway'

3. MUSEUM BACKGROUND, HISTORY AND COLLECTION PRACTICE

3.1 Galway City Museum (GCM) was established in 1971 and opened in 1972 in Comerford House beside the historic Spanish Arch, which previously had been home to the artist Clare Sheridan. The Museum began with a residual collection of medieval stones from the city, acquired by Sheridan. Over the years, and curated by Etienne Rynne, Michael Keaney, Bill Scanlan and Jim Higgins (amongst others), the Museum built up a general folk life, industrial and militia collection, mainly through the donation of objects. A small number of purchases were made when funds were available. The Museum at Comerford House closed in 2004. In 2006 a new purpose-built Museum was opened, just across from the site of Comerford House. The new Museum incorporates the collections from Comerford House, as well as objects acquired since the re-opening.

3.2 The Museum at Comerford House did not, as far as it is known, have a Collections Policy in place. A Collections Policy was devised for the new Museum in 2009. This policy is now out-dated as Museum management has amended the Mission Statement of the Museum. This current policy

now includes the new Mission Statement, and the current status of the Permanent Collections and objects on loan.

3.3 In February 2010 Galway City Museum received designated status under the National Cultural Institutions Act, 1997. This means that Galway City Museum is now legally entitled to retain archaeological objects for and on behalf of the State. All archaeological objects found with no known owner are State property and must be reported to either the National Museum of Ireland or to a designated museum. As a designated museum we are also available to provide advice on any queries related to archaeological heritage.

4. STATEMENT OF TYPE AND QUANTITY OF THE COLLECTIONS

The collections at Galway City Museum includes objects inherited from the previous Museum at Comerford House which collected for a period of almost thirty years, as well as objects acquired since the current museum building opened in 2006. The majority of the collections are held on-site, either on display in the galleries or in one of two collection rooms. The Museum also has two off-site storage facilities for larger objects and collections: one of which has been provided by Galway City Council, the other which is currently being leased.

The Permanent Collections (owned by Galway City Museum) includes approximately 2600 objects relating to various periods of history (this excludes the Circus Collection until its future is decided). Galway City Museum also retains approximately 450 objects on loan from a number of institutions in and around Ireland and from individuals.

4.1 The Permanent Collection can be categorised under the following headings;

Archaeology - approximately 10% of the entire collection

History (Social, Economic, Maritime, Political & Military) - approximately 88% of the entire collection

Art - approximately 2% of the entire collection

Archaeology

A collection of stone tools dating to the Mesolithic and Neolithic periods and architectural fragments from Galway City dating to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, including chimney pieces, corbels, armorial plaques and heraldic panels. The collection also includes a complete fireplace and the Athy Doorway dating to 1577. Many of the pieces are from buildings no longer in existence, and which are associated with the families of the 'Tribes of Galway'. Objects are acquired into this collection in accordance with the National Museum of Ireland requirements.

Importance: Local and national

History

There are a number of discrete collections which fall into this category:

Military Collection

This includes objects related to the Connaught Rangers which had a depot based in Galway the Great War. Also included are weapons associated with the 1913-23 period of Irish history e.g. a Welby Mark VI revolver and Mauser rifle.

Importance: Local and national

DJ Murphy Collection

This collection comprises over three hundred objects - mainly farm and industrial implements but also some rare straw items objects relating to traditional Irish rural life. The collection is mainly from Galway County and was purchased by the late Etienne Rynne (in the 1980s?) when it was envisaged that the Museum may have had a county-wide remit.

Importance: Local

Industrial Galway

Objects relating to nineteenth and twentieth century shops, public houses and businesses in Galway, including: Persse's whiskey distillery, Young's Mineral water works, Hynes and O'Gormans clay pipe factories, Galway gaol, medical halls, the Galway-Dublin and Galway-Clifden railway lines and the Galway-Salthill tram.

Importance: Local

Claddagh and Maritime Collection

This collection includes objects relating to the Claddagh, shawls etc. and the way of life in nineteenth century Galway including an original Galway Hooker, 3 fishing boats, Aldis lamp, and the boat building tools of John Reney, regarded as the last of the Claddagh boat builders. Reney's boat building yard was formerly adjacent to the site of the new Museum.

Importance: Local

Dominican Collection

A collection of embroidered textiles produced by the Dominican Sisters, Galway, who established an order here in 1644. This collection of textiles date from the seventeenth to twentieth centuries is one of the best textile collections in the country - it includes altar frontals, chausables, chalice covers and lectern veils. One of the earliest pieces is a chalice veil made by Sr. Bridget Kirwan (whose brother fought at the Battle of Aughrim, 1691) and dated to 1683. The veil was most likely made in Spain and brought back to Ireland in 1686 by Srs Mary Lynch and Julian Nolan - the sisters had fled to Spain during the Cromwellian occupation of Galway in 1651/2. Other exceptional pieces include an altar frontal made by Sr Margaret Joyce in 1726 which was used at the Slate Nunnery, Kirwan's Lane.

Importance: Local, national and international

Comerford Collection

A collection of fourteen eighteenth and nineteenth century sets of rosary beads - made from silver, others from fruit stones and coral.

Importance: Local and national

O'Conaire Collection

Including objects connected to the Galway born writer Padraic Ó'Conaire (1882-1928), this collection includes a christening gown which was reputedly used at O'Conaires christening, a copy of his marriage certificate and a number of his publications.

Importance: Local and national

Killanin Collection

A collection of material which belonged to Lord Killanin (1914-1999), Spiddal House, Galway and his friend, the Hollywood movie director John Ford (1894-1973), whose family originated in Galway. Killanin was instrumental in Ford filming 'The Quiet Man' in the west of Ireland. The collection includes Killanin's set of smoking pipes, a typewriter, camera and a briefcase. The Ford objects include a cap, cinemascope viewer and a pair of cufflinks which were given as a gift to Ford by the former President of the USA, Richard Nixon.

Importance: Local, national and international

McKenna Collection

A collection of costumes and props which were used by Siobhan McKenna (1923-1986) throughout her theatrical career from plays including Juno and the Paycock, Deirdre of Sorrows, The Plough and the Stars and Finnegans Wake. McKenna's archival collection is currently with the Special Collections at the James Hardiman Library, National University of Ireland, Galway. The Museum intends to seek advice on how best to display/make available this collection to the public; possibly a collaboration with Galway City Museum and the NUI Galway Special Collections and Drama Departments.

Importance: Local and international

Garvey Collection

Collection of circus memorabilia including flyers, posters, clown dolls etc.

Importance: Local and national

Newell Collection

Collection associated with Michael Newell (1877?-1958) who was active in Galway during Easter Week 1916 and subsequently in the War of Independence. The collection includes his 1916 and War of Independence medals, weapons and papers.

Importance: Local and national

Art

The art collection includes work by the artist Clare Sheridan (1885-1970) including a painting entitled 'Tiger Lillies' and a carving of the 'Madonna and Child', and most recently a purchase of a watercolour painting: 'Ruins of Templeland Castle, Co. Galway' by Cecilia Margaret Nairn (née) Campbell 1791-1857.

Importance: Local

4.2 There are also number of collections on Loan to Galway City Museum; approximately 450 objects, from a number of institutions and individuals:

Galway City Council

Objects on loan from Galway City Council Collection:

- The Civic Sword and Mace - the sword dates from the Charter of King James I, which gave authority in 1610 for the carrying of such a weapon before the Mayor. Edward Eyre, Mayor of Galway, presented the Mace to the town in 1712. It was manufactured in Dublin in 1710.
- Statue of Pádraic Ó'Conaire (1882-1928) carved by Albert Power. Originally on display in Eyre Square, Galway City Council voted that the statue should be moved to and displayed at Galway City Museum.
- Royal Arms (stone) from the former Town Court House, now the Town Hall Theatre.

National Museum of Ireland

Galway City Museum currently has two large loans from the National Museum of Ireland:

- Antiquities Division - featuring a display of prehistoric tools, weapons and pottery in 'Prehistoric Galway: Routes to the Past' and an exhibition about medieval Galway 'Galway: Within the Walls' with objects from the Galway City Excavations Project 1987-1998 including nine coins (Philip II Spanish; two Elizabeth I Irish 1601 pennies; James II Irish gun money 1s or 6d; William III Irish 1696 half penny; George III Irish 1805 half penny; James II Irish gun money 1690; half penny token Dominick French 1664; George II Irish 1741 half penny); pottery (Saintonge, Portuguese faience, Meridia ware); wine bottles and artillery (cannon ball and musket shot).
- Art and Industry Division: this loan features in the exhibition 'Revolution in Galway 1913-23' and features objects associated with Liam Mellows, Fr Michael Griffin and Eamonn Ceannt.

Dominican Order, Galway

An important collection of eighteenth century church silverware including chalices, candlesticks, altar cruets, a host box and a reliquary casket of St Ursula made by Richard Joyce. Richard Joyce is regarded by some as the creator of what is today known as the Claddagh ring.

Individual loans

The Galway and the Great War, Revolution in Galway, 1913-23 and Galway Hooker exhibitions currently running rely heavily on loans from individuals – includes folklife objects, weapons, military medals, textiles, etc.

5. STATEMENT OF ACQUISITION BRIEF

5.1 The Museum seeks to collect objects that are associated with, or help to illustrate the cultural heritage of Galway city with respect to archaeology, social, political and industrial history and folklife. That includes objects

made in Galway city, at some point used in Galway city, or otherwise provenanced to Galway city and its associated heritage regardless of location at the time of acquisition.

Galway City Museum relies primarily on donations as acquisitions to the Collections. On occasion and where funds are available there may be a possibility that objects can be purchased. In 2015 provision was made to include an Acquisitions budget of €10,000 for 2016. This budget may be reviewed for 2017.

Galway City Museum will consider all potential acquisitions and whether they are consistent with its Collections Policy and whether Galway City Museum is the most suitable place for the material.

At the discretion of the Director, objects already well represented in the collection may be taken in to form part of a 'handling collection' used as part of the education/outreach and research service provided by Galway City Museum.

Once an acquisition is formalised, the Museum must obtain immediate physical possession of the object.

All acquisitions are to be outright and unconditional.

All donations to the Museum's collection are irrevocable upon their formal and physical transfer to the Museum. Once donated, Galway City Museum retains full copyright and ownership of the object. The treatment and display of the object is at the discretion of Galway City Museum.

Objects offered to the museum as donations or bequests will not normally be accepted if they are subject to any special conditions regarding display, etc. In exceptional circumstances, if the Museum Director feels that the object/s in question are of over-riding importance he/she can approve the acquisition of a specific object to which conditions are attached.

5.2 Currently, the Museum is particularly interested in acquiring political and military objects associated with the 1916 to 1923 period, i.e. objects with a Galway connection associated with the 1916 Rising, War of Independence and Civil War in Ireland. It is likely that many of the objects on loan which are included in the Revolution in Galway 1913-23 exhibition may be donated at the end of the loan periods.

As part of its strategic plan and future development, Galway City Museum is considering extending its Prehistoric and Medieval galleries and hopes to source material both locally (under Designation) and from the National Museum of Ireland Collections.

5.3 Galway City Museum confines the extent of its collecting area to the city of Galway as defined by the Local Authority. As there is no museum in Galway County, Galway City Museum may act as a repository in

circumstances where a collection may be at risk within the county area, after due consultation with county heritage representatives, County Heritage Officer etc.

Galway City Museum acknowledges the role of the other Local Authority Museums throughout Ireland and will work with these organisations to ensure that objects are preserved in the place most appropriate, given their nature and provenance. Objects offered by donors to the Museum outside of the Galway city/county jurisdiction will generally be directed towards a museum within the relevant geographical area.

There are a number of archives collecting in the area of Galway City. As such, Galway City Museum works with other institutions to ensure the most appropriate repository for archival collections.

Works of art, including paintings, sculpture etc., will only be acquired in consultation with the Arts Officer, Galway City Council.

As mentioned above, Galway City Museum is designated by the National Museum of Ireland under the National Cultural Institutions Act, 1997. Galway City Museum is legally entitled to retain archaeological objects for and on behalf of the State. All objects acquired under designation is undertaken after due consultation with the National Museum of Ireland.

5.4 The acquisition of objects into the collection at Galway City Museum is active. Objects are currently acquired through donation or purchase, with most being acquired through donations. A regular check is made on the various auction sites within Ireland and Britain for any objects that may have an association with Galway. If an object deemed important is put on sale, an effort is made to secure funds with approval, from Galway City Council.

Collecting however, is subject to the limited suitable storage space available to the Museum.

5.5 The Museum has a staff member responsible for the collation of documentation associated with the acquisition and borrowing of objects. All objects are recorded once they enter the Museum. All documentation is retained on file. All objects accessioned are allocated an individual supporting documentation file.

5.6 To date the Museum has considered its remit to lie within the boundaries of Galway City as determined by the Galway City Council administration. There is currently no local authority museum in the county region. It is possible the current remit of Galway City Museum may be re-considered in the future to incorporate a county-wide remit. This will however, require discussion with all relevant stakeholders at a local authority/political level and the assessment of resources (pre-existing and future) in terms of staffing, storage facilities etc. There is currently no agreed timescale regarding discussions.

5.7 The Museum Director in consultation with the Documentation Officer and on occasion, with a consultant Conservator assesses all objects deposited with the Museum as a proposed donation for acceptance into the permanent collections. Once a decision is reached, the Museum will contact the potential donor to inform them of same. Objects not being acquired will be returned to the owner. Efforts however may be made by Galway City Museum on behalf of the potential donor (with their permission) to locate a similar institution who may be in a position to acquire the object(s)

5.8 The acquisition of object(s) is generally limited to the area within the boundaries of Galway City as determined by Galway City Council.

5.9 All funds are provided by the Museum governing body, Galway City Council – with a set budget for acquisitions as outlined above.

Previously, grants have been obtained from the Heritage Council and the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht to assist with the conservation and display of objects for exhibitions including Prehistoric and Medieval Galway and Revolution in Galway, 1913-23.

5.10 The Museum Director as Galway City Museum's senior museum professional has delegated authority and responsibility from Galway City Council for the Collections Policy and Acquisition Brief, and with that, to accept or reject potential donations to the Museum and make recommendations on the purchase of material. The Documentation Officer and Technician advise the Museum Director in this responsibility. All decisions taken regarding the acquisition of objects are recorded by the Documentation Officer and approved by the Museum Director at meetings held as necessitated when objects are offered to the Museum or made available for sale.

5.11 The acceptance of objects on loan, for a finite period for display or specific study, may be authorised by the Museum Director. In exceptional cases, a privately owned object of major importance that falls within the scope of this policy may be accepted on a finite long-term loan, whether or not it is required for immediate display or study. No object will be accepted on 'Permanent Loan', a term which has no legal status. The period of all loans will be agreed in writing between the Museum Director and the owner of the object at the time of deposit. Where the term of a loan has expired, it may be renewed or extended for further finite periods, at the discretion of both the owner and the Museum Director.

Similarly to the objects in the permanent collection, objects taken in on loan are generally to have an association with the city of Galway. In circumstances where the object may complete a gap in archaeological/historical record, objects from outside of this geographical area may be borrowed.

6. LIMITATIONS

6.1 Galway City Museum will abide by any law regarding archaeological sites and artefacts, including the National Monuments Act 1930 and its amendments in 1954, 1987, 1994 and 2004; the National Cultural Institutions Act 1997; and any subsequent Acts that come into law. The Museum recognises the authority of the statutory bodies and their responsibilities.

Where an object is offered as a donation, in good faith, and the prospective donor is uncertain of the identity of the legal owner/s and the Museum is unable to find this out as a result of its own reasonable efforts, the Museum Director shall be permitted to accept the object, provided a permanent and detailed record of the circumstances and known facts is made at the time of its acceptance.

With regard to biological and geological material, 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 of the Republic of Ireland or any other country, except with the express consent of an appropriate outside authority.

6.2 Galway City Museum will acquire objects from both past and contemporary collections.

6.3 Galway City Museum acknowledges that the National Museum of Ireland, the National Gallery of Ireland, the National Library of Ireland and the Local Authority museums have specific areas in which they collect. The Museum will work with the above-specified institutions to ensure that material is preserved in the place most appropriate, given the nature of the objects and their provenance.

6.4 The acquisition of objects is to a certain extent, determined by the availability of suitable storage space, as mentioned above. Where the acquisition of any object would result in significant implications in respect of storage, conservation or display and/or significant financial implications the matter will be referred to an external professional party for advice. The Museum will generally not acquire objects that the Museum Director considers to be impractical to house in the Museum's existing limited storage facilities.

It should be noted that the limited storage availability at Galway City Museum has been an ongoing issue and has had an impact on the collection of objects, particularly those of a large scale. An off-site facility has recently been assessed by an external consultant and recommendations have been made for the modifications needed to convert it into a long-term storage facility with the optimum conditions for the collections to ensure preventative conservation. The recommendations are currently being costed for approval at Galway City Council level.

6.5 The acquisition of objects, which are archival in nature, will be in consultation with the county archivist and the Special Collections Dept. at the James Hardiman Library, National University of Ireland, Galway. There is currently no archivist within Galway City Council.

The Museum does not collect human remains or objects associated with natural history, zoology or geology - flora or fauna, geological specimens, insects, marine life etc.

In the past there have been occasions when the Museum's ability to acquire an object was limited by the funds made available. This usually occurs in an auction situation when the Museum has competition from private individuals. Generally, the Museum will not compete against another Museum for the purchase of an object, as it may be made available for loan at a future point.

7. OBLIGATIONS

Galway City Council, the governing body for Galway City Museum, accepts the general principle that it is their responsibility to ensure, to the best of their ability, that all of the collections in their care are adequately housed, conserved and documented. Galway City Council through Galway City Museum is obliged to provide the necessary resources to ensure the long-term care and documentation of the collections. In order to ensure that the collections are properly cared for a range of support facilities is in place.

7.1 Galway City Museum has a dedicated member of staff responsible for the documentation and archiving of the entire collection. It is the Museum's policy to keep all files relating to acquisitions and possible acquisitions up-to-date on an on-going basis. Museum staff will complete all documentation relevant to its acquisitions, including entry forms, proposed acquisitions forms, permanent donation forms, Accessions Register and Catalogue. Objects taken in on loan are included in the Loans Database and a Loan Agreement is completed with the Lender. All documentation, including any correspondence, is filed in a fire-proof, lockable cabinet on-site.

7.2 The Museum practices preventative conservation in both its display and storage areas. Objects are kept in environments suitable to their material and condition, which are continually monitored. The Museum endeavours to have any objects that are acquired and which are in need of urgent treatment, professionally conserved as a matter of priority. It is the practice of Galway City Museum to consult with the National Museum of Ireland before the conservation of archaeological artefacts takes place, as licenses will have to be applied for. Minor conservation work is carried out on-site. More specialist conservation work is out-sourced to a consultant conservator

7.3 The safety and security of the collections at Galway City Museum is the prime responsibility of the Museum, with procedures in place to ensure that the building is secured at all times. The galleries and storage areas are alarmed and the alarm system is monitored by a security company. Off-site storage areas which contain museum collections are continually locked and alarmed and are only accessed by Museum staff. Galway City Museum has a disaster plan in order to identify the threats to the Museum collections and determine how the Museum can minimise the risk through disaster preparedness.

7.4 Galway City Museum endeavours to give as much access to the collection as is safe to do so, considering its staffing and space constraints. Currently all objects in the collection, with the exception of any that may be on loan, are available to researchers and members of the public for examination by appointment. The Museum only permits material to be examined within the Museum building during normal working hours and under staff supervision. A person who may require extensive access to the collection may be required to present a letter of reference and must give at least one month's notice before the intended period of research.

7.5 Galway City Museum is committed to providing interpretative displays to the public. Objects, either from the Museum's collection, or those borrowed from other institutions, or individuals comprise the displays. The displays generally use the city of Galway and its people, past and present, as the inspiration for its exhibitions. While the Museum is not in a position in terms of space or finance to display all of its collection at any one time, it does endeavour to change exhibitions on a regular basis. All objects put on display are accompanied by a label containing the following information: object name; its history and date and the donor or lenders name – if requested, donors/lenders names can be omitted from the label. In its programme of temporary exhibitions the Museum strives to include objects from its own collection where suitable.

7.6 Galway City Museum is committed to using its collections for research leading to publications through the Museum website (www.galwaycitymuseum.ie), a community website managed by the National Museum of Ireland (www.ouririshheritage.org) a section of which is maintained by the Museum - Mo Ghailimh Féin / My Own Galway and the locally produced Heritage Magazine (published by the Heritage Office, Galway City Council). Social media is also used to communicate information on the collections, objects borrowed, etc. The material that is published and the areas of the collection that are researched by Museum staff are strategically tied to their individual expertise. The staff also actively encourages and assists Museum volunteers and external researchers to research and publish material from the Museum's collection.