

# The Heath Robinson Museum



## Collection Development Policy

Name of museum: Heath Robinson Museum

Name of governing body: HRM Management Board

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## **I. Statement of Purpose**

The Museum provides a centre for the understanding and appreciation of the life and work of Heath Robinson (1872-1944) and for the wider study of the history of illustration.

- The Museum provides a home for a nationally important collection and allows the public to explore it through lively interpretation, combining original artwork with books, photographs, film, digital media and hands-on activities.
- The Museum presents a programme of special exhibitions that relate to Heath Robinson's work, and to illustration more widely.
- The collection engages people in many different ways, inspiring inventiveness, social and historical commentary, storytelling, art and the history of illustration. It provides a valuable learning resource for schools, adult education providers and the University of Westminster's BA Illustration course and provides work experience for young people and volunteering opportunities for people of all ages.
- Through online and outreach activities, the Museum makes the collection accessible to those unable to visit.

Purpose of the policy:

- To provide a framework for the future development of the collection.
- To provide an agreed basis that will inform decision-making concerning the acquisition and disposal of material.
- To ensure the collections management approach is consistent, and reflects a high level of professional and ethical standards.
- To create a sustainable collection where the needs and objectives of the Trust and Museum are balanced against the resources available.

## **2. Current Collection**

The Museum houses the collection of works by William Heath Robinson belonging to The William Heath Robinson Trust.

The Trust started with the collection of pictures, books and other items that had belonged to the artist's daughter, Joan Brinsmead. This collection comprised:

- 401 published illustrations and humorous drawings;
- 56 unpublished watercolours and drawings;
- 58 "Mr Spodnoodle" cartoon strips;
- 16 sketch books;
- 2 trial panels for the Empress of Britain murals;
- 8 pieces of nursery china with Heath Robinson designs;
- 2 portraits of Heath Robinson;
- 47 books illustrated by W Heath Robinson, 33 of them with Heath Robinson inscriptions or limited or special editions;
- 4 biographical works, 2 of them with relevant inscriptions;
- 10 advertising items with drawings by Heath Robinson;
- 50 items of ephemera including proofs, prints, cuttings, photographs etc.; and 25 folders of letters.

Between 1992 and 2023 the Trustees made a number of acquisitions to fill perceived gaps in the collection as opportunities arose. These have included three

book illustrations from the period before 1900 and a coloured illustration from Andersen's *Fairy Tales* (1913), filling significant gaps. Other important acquisitions were a late watercolour of the view from his studio window in Highgate, a major watercolour illustration of King Lear from an unpublished set made for Jonathan Cape in 1922, and a large and very fine watercolour illustration made for *Nash's Magazine* in 1934. Acquisitions of humorous drawings have included an important contemporary parody of the Futurist Movement, the preliminary sketch for a humorous drawing already in the Trust collection, and the "other half" of a pair of drawings for a double-page spread of which the Trust already had the first half. In 1934 Heath Robinson made a set of drawings entitled *Railway Ribaldry*, for the Great Western Railway to celebrate the company's centenary. When the complete set of drawings came up for sale in March 2010 the Trust was able to purchase one of the best of them. In February 2011 the Trust accepted a generous gift of eight pieces of original art work by W Heath Robinson which strengthened the collection in the areas of book illustration, humorous drawings and watercolours. The gift also included a watercolour by his niece, Madeleine. A small number of books have been purchased to fill key gaps and gifts accepted of advertising material and books of humorous drawings.

In March 2015, with the help of the National Heritage Memorial Fund and the ArtFund, the Trust was able to purchase the largest collection of Heath Robinson's work remaining in private hands. The collection was owned by Simon Heneage, co-founder of the Cartoon Museum, and was offered for sale following his death.

At the heart of the collection are 67 of Heath Robinson's published full-page humorous drawings for magazines. Of these, about half relate to the two World Wars and many contain his popular "contraptions". There is also an almost complete set of drawings made for *How to build a new World*, a book published in 1941 which reflects the hopes and aspirations of Britain in the second year of the Second World War. The works are almost all humorous, and as such are a perfect complement to the Trust's original collection, the greatest strength of which lies in its original drawings for illustration.

The Heneage collection includes a large number of rough sketches that Heath Robinson made to show editors new ideas for humorous subjects. Those that were approved would have been worked up into finished drawings. They offer an insight into his working practice and into the way that he developed his ideas. A number of them match up with pictures owned by the Trust.

Whilst he earned most of his living from his humorous drawings, Heath Robinson always regarded himself as a serious artist. In his autobiography he wrote that "whenever I found opportunities, and fortunately there were many, I indulged my old love of landscape painting". We are therefore delighted to have added 24 examples of his unpublished "serious" paintings, including some very good ones, to the Trust's collection.

More recently, the Trust has acquired a range of further works including a full page drawing from *The Works of Rabelais*, the frontispiece of *The Talking Thrush*, 16 illustrations from *I'll Tell You Everything* in *Nash's Magazine*, 16 further cartoons from various publications, an original picture from *Twelfth Night* and a gift from the Brinsmead family of several watercolours and two cut paper collages.

Collecting criteria will also take account of:

- Whether there is adequate provision for the conservation of material, if treatment is required.

- Whether there is adequate provision for storage and/or display.
- All necessary due diligence and provenance checks. Due diligence and provenance checks will also be carried out prior to the acceptance of any material on loan.

### **3. Themes and priorities for future collecting**

The Trust has identified three key areas that require development with regards to collections in order to meet the core aims and objectives of the museum:

#### **Main collection**

Over the next five years the aim will be to develop the main collection so that the story of Heath Robinson's life and work can be told more effectively. Subject to available funding and staff resources, the Trust will also seek to expand the collection so that a sequence of fresh and exciting exhibitions can be mounted at West House while continuing the programme of touring exhibitions. This will be achieved through acquisitions to the main collection and through temporary loans from museums, galleries and private collections.

Collecting efforts will be concentrated on strengthening the Museum's holdings of works in areas not currently well represented, while also acquiring material to augment those already held. Eight key gaps or scarcities have been identified in the collection that will serve as the Museum's focus for its collecting activities:

- Examples of original drawings for advertising work.
- A drawing from the 1899 Andersen that the three Robinson brothers illustrated for J. M. Dent
- A full-page illustration from *Professor Branestawm*
- An illustration from *The Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*, 1900
- An oil painting from Heath Robinson's time painting landscapes on Hampstead Heath
- Further full page works from *Rabelais*
- A full page black-and-white illustration from *Bill the Minder*

#### **Learning collection**

The Trust must also ensure that suitable materials are available to support the learning plan without risk to the primary collection. This will be achieved through the development of a learning collection. The learning collection will comprise printed material that can be handled and utilised as part of the learning plan, alongside digital resources. A number of suitable books and prints have already been donated by the public and further such donations will be invited. Volunteers are keeping an eye out for suitable material in charity shops and online which may be purchased at a reasonable price. Where published collections of Heath Robinson's humorous work or facsimile editions of his illustrated books are in print, publishers will be invited to donate copies to the learning collection.

#### **Reference library**

A reference library is being established relating to the life and work of Heath Robinson, the influences that shaped him, and to illustration more widely through the period in which he lived. The Museum will therefore seek to acquire material to

support the development of the reference library in order to encourage research and wider understanding of Heath Robinson's life, work and influence on the arts the social and cultural context of his work. The reference library will be built up over time from donations and opportune purchases.

All acquisitions will comply with the Museums Association Code of Ethics (2015).

#### **4. Themes and priorities for rationalisation and disposal**

By definition, the Trust has a long-term purpose and should possess (or intend to acquire) a permanent collection in relation to its stated objectives. The Trustees accept the principle that, except for sound curatorial reasons, there is a strong presumption against the disposal of any items in the museum's collection. It is currently envisaged that any disposals will relate to printed material with the aim of improving the quality of the example held or removing unnecessary duplication.

#### **5. Limitations on collecting**

The William Heath Robinson Trust was established to assemble and preserve pictures, books, manuscripts, designs, models, constructions, and other chattels considered by the Trustees to be of artistic, educational or historic merit, created by Heath Robinson or by any other artist or designer of sufficient merit whose work may in the opinion of the Trustees be displayed in conjunction with that of Heath Robinson. His work is poorly represented in other public collections. His original artwork commands high prices, so the major constraint on collecting such work will be the availability of funds. The Trustees working with the Management Board of the Museum will take care in setting priorities for acquisition and will need carefully to assess the opportunity to acquire material against cost of any purchase.

Acquisition of published material by gift or purchase will need to be carefully controlled, ensuring that items accepted are really needed and that there is space to house them. The Trust's approach is to ensure that collecting does not jeopardise the long term security and sustainability of the collection and wider museum services.

In addition, the Trust recognises its responsibility, in acquiring material, to ensure that care, documentation and use of collections will meet the requirements of the Accreditation Standards and the Museum Association Code of Ethics (2015). It will therefore take into account limitations on collection by factors such as available budget, staffing, storage and care of collection arrangements that may exist now or in the future.

#### **6. Collecting policies of other museums**

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. Specific reference is made to the following museum(s):

The Cartoon Museum  
The Victoria and Albert Museum



In recognising the collecting policies of other museums, the Trust hopes to maximise cooperation and ensure the best use of resources among institutions in the UK with shared collections interests and focuses.

## **7. Policy review procedure**

The acquisition and disposal policy will be published and reviewed from time to time, at least once every five years. The date when the policy is next due for review is noted above.

Arts Council England will be notified of any changes to the acquisition and disposal policy, and the implications of any such changes for the future of existing collections.

## **8. Acquisitions not covered by the policy**

Acquisitions outside the current stated policy will only be made in very exceptional circumstances, and then only after proper consideration by the governing body of the museum itself, and having regard to the interests of other museums.

## **9. Acquisition procedures**

a. The museum will exercise due diligence and make every effort not to acquire, whether by purchase, gift, or bequest, 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.

b. In particular, 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).

c. 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.

d. The museum will not acquire any biological or geological material.

e. The museum will not acquire any archaeological material.

f. Any exceptions to the above clauses 9a, b, c, or e will only be because the museum is:

- acting as an externally approved repository of last resort for material of local (UK) origin
- acquiring an item of minor importance that lacks secure ownership history but in the best judgement of experts in the field concerned has not been illicitly traded

- acting with the permission of authorities with the requisite jurisdiction in the country of origin
- in possession of reliable documentary evidence that the item was exported from its country of origin before 1970

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.

g. The museum does not hold or intend to acquire any human remains.

## **10. Spoliation**

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.

## **11. The Repatriation and Restitution of objects and human remains**

Not applicable.

## **12. Management of archives**

As the museum holds archives, including photographs and printed ephemera, its governing body will be guided by the Code of Practice on Archives for Museums and Galleries in the United Kingdom (third edition, 2002). The Museum will also adhere to best practice guidelines in the care of its archive material, including AIM’s ‘Successfully Managing Archives in Museums’ (2015).

## **13. Disposal procedures**

a. The governing body will ensure that the disposal process is carried out openly and with transparency.

b. By definition, the museum has a long-term purpose and holds collections in trust for society in relation to its stated objectives. The governing body therefore accepts the principle that sound curatorial reasons for disposal must be established before consideration is given to the disposal of any items in the museum’s collection.

c. The museum will confirm that it is legally free to dispose of an item and agreements on disposal made with donors will be taken into account.

d. 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.

e. When disposal is motivated by curatorial reasons the procedures outlined in paragraphs 13g-13s will be followed and the method of disposal may be by gift, sale or exchange.

f. The museum will not undertake disposal motivated principally by financial reasons.

g. Any 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 the 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. External 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.

h. 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 of the collection acting alone.

i. Any monies received by the museum governing body from the disposal of items will be applied 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.

j. The proceeds of a sale will be ring-fenced so it can be demonstrated that they are spent in a manner compatible with the requirements of the Accreditation standard.

k. Once a decision to dispose of material in the collection has been taken, priority will be given to retaining it within the public domain, unless it is to be destroyed. 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.

l. If the material is not acquired by any Accredited Museums to which it was offered directly 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 an announcement in the Museums Association's Museums Journal, and in other specialist journals where appropriate.

m. 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.

n. The museum will not dispose of items by exchange.

o. 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.