

RRM Collections Transfer FAQs

Definitions

1. What does 'collections transfer' mean?

Collections transfer or disposal is sometimes used as shorthand in the museum sector for all methods of **ethical transfer, reuse or destruction of objects**. Ultimately, it just means taking the decision to remove an object from a museum's permanent collection. Methods of disposal can range from transfer of objects to organisations with a similar focus on public access (i.e., the process we are currently undertaking) to creative reuse, or in limited cases and as a last resort, to destruction of an object. The [Museum Association's toolkit for ethical transfer, reuse and disposal](#) provides in depth explanations of each of those processes, and the ethics supporting them.

2. What does 'accessioned' mean?

The **accessioned collection** is the main museum collection, holding the objects which are central to the purpose, philosophy and activities of the Museum. Material in this collection is held in perpetuity for the public good, and we are only considering the deaccessioning of this collection because we are closed and no longer able to provide public access.

The **reference collection** is 'unaccessioned', which means that while we have full ownership of these items, we are not committed to holding them in perpetuity. Usually, objects that are placed in the reference collection are either mass-produced, reproductions or otherwise non-unique. As the reference collection is unaccessioned, there is no formal process for removing and disposing of them, however we still prefer to follow the same ethical processes as the accessioned collection.

We also have an **unaccessioned handling collection**, which encompasses the objects that are used by the education department in school visits. As our education work is still continuing on an outreach basis, we are not including the handling collection in this process.

Transfer Procedure

3. What will the transfer process be?

In this first phase of work, we are seeking expressions of interest from museums and other organisations with a similar public access purpose who are interested in taking whole or large parts of the collection. We will also accept expressions of interest from museums and other organisations with a public access purpose who are only interested in small parts or individual objects in the collection.

If you represent a museum or other organisation with a commitment to public access to collections that is interested in the collection, please in the first instance contact curatorial@rrm.co.uk to have an informal discussion prior to the formal expression of interest.

4. How can I make an expression of interest?

Formal expression of interest will be gathered by filling out [this form](#).

After receiving all expressions of interest, we will review these against our preferred outcomes and ethical principles to ensure we find the best possible home for the objects we care for.

5. When will you make decisions?

We would like to receive all formal expressions of interest by the 6th of February 2026. If you require more time please let us know and we will do our best to accommodate.

6. How will you decide who takes an object?

All decisions will be based on how closely the interested party can align with our four preferred outcomes. These outcomes are that the collections will:

- Be available for long-term public access
- Be cared for to appropriate standards
- Be kept together as far as practicable
- Be owned by organisations that are properly constituted in line with Museum Accreditation requirements (or equivalent for archives)

You can read more how we will make decisions in our ethical framework, located [on our website](#).

7. Who will make the final decision?

Responsibility for signing off on all final decisions will be held by the Board of Trustees, on advice from staff and sector bodies.

8. What will happen to the Museum building?

The building is currently for sale, and you can read more about this process [here](#).

While outcomes for the building will likely influence our future direction as a charity, the collection will be managed and safeguarded separately. For instance, if the sale of the building necessitates the charity to vacate the current building quickly, we have separate off-site storage facilities that we can use to house the collection whilst we consider its future.

9. Who is responsible for logistics/cost of removing objects from the collections?

This will depend on the specifics of each case, and we will work closely with interested parties to find practical solutions.

10. How will you keep people updated on future destinations of objects?

We aim to use our collections website to update the public about who has taken on the ownership of an object, where feasible and appropriate.

Receiving objects

11. Who can take objects?

Ideally, recipients would be accredited museums, or museums working towards accreditation. There may also be other public or not-for-profit organisations that can provide suitable standards of long-term care and public access. Private organisations or individuals would only be considered where legally binding guarantees can be made about public benefit and long-term care and public access.

12. I/My relative donated an object to the museum; can I have it back?

Please email curatorial@rrm.co.uk to discuss this on an individual object basis.

Please note that if a Transfer of Title form was signed, then ownership of the object was transferred to the museum and if it was also accessioned then

the object was agreed to be held by the museum in perpetuity for the public good. As such, for objects that are accessioned and have a signed Transfer of Title form, we will be seeking a new home in a museum or other public body, to meet our preferred outcomes. We are also trying to keep the collections together as far as possible

We will consider returning objects to donors in certain circumstances, such as if no other museum or public body is interested in taking on the object, or if there was demonstrable evidence that the object was never intended as a donation, if no Transfer of Title form was ever signed.

We will not be able to make immediate decisions to return to donors, as we will need to carry out appropriate due diligence checks to ensure that it is the most ethical option for the object and that we have the legal right to return it to the donor. Please expect this process to take some time.

13. I/My relative loaned an object to the museum; can I have it back?

We are seeking to return all loaned objects to their rightful owners. Please email curatorial@rrm.co.uk with the following details if known:

- Name of lender
- Rough date loan began
- Object descriptions
- Photos of the objects if you have them
- Whether you can collect the objects in person, can nominate a third-party to collect, or need us to arrange delivery on your behalf.

Ethics

14. What legal or ethical frameworks are you following?

We are closely following guidance from the Museums Association and Arts Council England, namely the MA's Code of Ethics and the ACE Museum Accreditation scheme. We also recognise that some objects might be subject to individual regulations surrounding restricted materials such as ivory or health and safety standards such as asbestos hazards, and we will ensure that we work in accordance with those regulations where it is required.

15. Will you sell objects?

As per our four preferred outcomes for the collections, we are seeking new homes for objects in other museums or not-for-profit public organisations. We are not seeking private sale at this stage. As per Principle 1 in our Ethical framework (available [on our website](#)), if it is deemed necessary any sale of collections will not be financially motivated.

16. Will you throw objects away?

Throwing an object away, or in other words destroying an object, would only ever happen after all other possible methods of removing an object from the collection and finding an appropriate home had been exhausted, **or** if an object poses a hazard to people, to other objects, is damaged beyond repair, or there is some other legal imperative to destroy it.

17. What will happen to the Henley collection?

We recognise that the objects that form the Henley collection are integral to the heritage of this town and are of great importance to the local community. We are working with Henley Town Council to explore how maintaining this can be best achieved, including the possibility of a new museum in Henley. That is why we are not offering the Henley collections during the initial expression of interest phase.

Nearly 300 objects from the Henley collection belong to Henley Town Council and are with us on loan, so ownership of these 300 objects will remain with the Council.

18. What is happening to the Wind in the Willows exhibition?

As truly special as the exhibition is to us, the displays themselves are not part of our accessioned collection and so are not part of this process. We do appreciate how beloved the display is and are looking into ways that we can keep the exhibition in the local area. At this time, no decisions have been made.

19. What happens to objects for which the museum received external funding?

We are working closely with external funding and sector bodies who have helped us acquire objects in the past to make sure we handle the future of these objects in line with their expectations and funding terms. Usually, this

will mean making sure these objects are transferred to appropriate organisations such as an accredited museum.

All information true as of 01.12.2025