

WEST SOMERSET STEAM RAILWAY TRUST

GAUGE MUSEUM

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Version 1.0

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DOCUMENT CONTROL

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0.4	18 April 2008	Comments from David Holmes included and update to the numbering system.
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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Gauge Museum at Bishop’s Lydeard has built up a collection of artefacts but has lacked the documentation and procedures to ensure that the collection is properly catalogued and conserved.

- 1.2 This document details outline procedures for the following:
 - a. Acquisitions policy to help decide when artefacts should be acquired or disposed of and help to ensure that the collection grows in an appropriate (rather than indiscriminate) manner.
 - b. Entry procedures when artefacts are acquired. This will provide a receipt for the depositor, establish under what conditions the object is being left with the museum and allow the WSSRT to exercise due diligence in acting responsibly for objects in its care. Importantly, the entry procedure will establish legal title of the object.
 - c. Numbering systems for entries and accessioning (cataloguing).
 - d. Indexing and cataloguing to ensure that the collection can be searched in a robust fashion and that adequate metadata¹ is recorded about an object so that it is uniquely identified, and its provenance can be proven.
 - e. Loan procedures (both in and out) to ensure that items loaned to the museum are properly cared for to minimise the association’s liability for borrowed items.
 - f. Movement control as artefacts are moved around the museum and in/out of storage to ensure that objects can be located at any time;
 - g. Exit records when artefacts are disposed of.

¹ Metadata is the data that will be recorded about objects, such as the date of acquisition or the name of the depositor.

2. Introduction

1.1. The Gauge Museum has developed over the last few years and has established a sizeable collection of artefacts. It is important that adequate documentation is maintained so that the object's metadata is recorded for use now and for many years in the future. This document outlines standards that should be applied to the various operations in the museum. The policies listed below will enable the museum to comply with the SPECTRUM standard.²

1.2. In summary, these operations can be seen as:

- a. Acquisitions policy to help decide when artefacts should be acquired or disposed of;
- b. Entry procedures when artefacts are acquired;
- c. Numbering and accessioning;
- d. Indexing and cataloguing;
- e. Loan procedures (both in and out);
- f. Movement control as artefacts are moved around the museum and in/out of storage;
- g. Exit records when artefacts are disposed of.

3. Acquisitions Policy

1.3. This is the key document that supports the museum's operation and defines its character. A sensible and appropriate acquisitions policy will:

- a. Provide guidance on exactly which artefacts should be acquired both in an active fashion (e.g. by attending auctions) or passively when prospective donors offer unsolicited objects;
- b. mean that the budget can be properly spent on appropriate objects;
- c. help judge which objects can be considered for disposal to free up space and to realise funds for other acquisitions;
- d. give a reason for the museum and allows the museum collection to have a coherence rather than being a random collection of objects that has been acquired at personal whims;
- e. help the museum exercise due diligence in acquiring items that have not been stolen or acquired illegally.

1.4. Bishop's Lydeard Gauge Museum is based on an ex-Bristol and Exeter / GWR / British Railways Western Region branch line in Somerset and the museum should focus on B&E / GWR / BRWR / Somerset railway history.

1.5. The acquisitions policy is therefore as follows:

Bishop's Lydeard is a museum of Somerset railway history. The criteria governing the collecting policy is to display, interpret, preserve and conserve a representative collection of objects, documents and photographs in the following priority order:

² SPECTRUM is the UK Museum Documentation Standard. It is recognised both nationally and internationally as the 'industry standard' for documentation practice.

- a. Artefacts that are linked directly to the railway from Taunton to Minehead and the West Somerset Mineral Railway in the period to 1971.
 - b. Artefacts that are linked to the present West Somerset Railway in the period from 1971 to the present date.
 - c. Artefacts that are linked to the wider railway's environment of Somerset, the Bristol and Exeter Railway, GWR or BR (Western Region).
 - d. Artefacts of historic value that may be of operational use to the railway (e.g. an engine whistle or a set of sack trucks).
 - e. Any other artefacts that do not fit with the above criteria solely on the condition that that can be sold by the WSSRT in order to raise funds to acquire higher priority items.
- 1.6. Objects are only accepted into the museum that comply with the agreed acquisitions policy. However, that does not mean that all artefacts that comply with the policy will be accepted – it may not be practical or financially viable for the WSSRT to become the owner of certain items. Where objects are accepted that later prove to be not viable, then the WSSRT reserves the right to return the artefacts to the owner or to dispose of them in accordance with the disposals policy.
- 1.7. Policy on replica items: All museums need to have a certain number of props (in the theatrical sense) to supplement the collection. Display boards with reprints of photographs, models etc are examples. As these are essentially ephemeral items, they are to be normally recorded as part of the collection. Where replica items are acquired to be used as such props (e.g. reprints of posters) then they are treated as such and not recorded. However, where replica items are acquired in their own right as artefacts and have intrinsic value in their own right (e.g. a replica nameplate might fall into this category) then they will be recorded and treated as part of the main collection.
- 1.8. The museum will act in close liaison with other museums on the railway to avoid duplication and competition.
- 1.9. Objects will not be accepted either as loans, donations or bequests where there is significant doubt over the vendor's or donor's rights of ownership.
- 1.10. The museum will have the aim of making all artefacts available for public view under proper, controlled conditions. For example, paperwork will only be available in a designated reading room and will only be handled by members of the public under certain conditions. Depositors may require that an artefact is kept closed for a certain period of time (e.g. WSR commercial records) or some artefacts may be deemed by the curator as being too fragile for public handling.
- 1.11. The acquisitions policy will be reviewed at regular intervals by the WSSRT Board.

4. Entry Procedures

- 4.1 Museums are expected to take care of all the objects lodged with them whether they are owned by the WSSRT or on loan. With this in mind, sound entry procedures are essential to

guard against situations where the WSSRT could be held liable for loss of or damage to objects that are on loan to it.

- 4.2 Entry records will log EVERY item that is left in the care of the museum from the time of its arrival. This documentation is needed for all objects even if they will remain with the museum for a short time. The documentation will:
- a. Establish and document the terms and conditions under which objects are received.
 - b. Uniquely identify the newly received object.
 - c. Ensure the WSSRT can account for objects left in its care.
 - d. Provide a receipt for the depositor.
 - e. Help establish the extent of WSSRT liability.
 - f. Enable objects to be returned to owners.
 - g. Establish who has legal title to objects in the museums care.
 - h. Provide the depositor with the opportunity to detail any stipulations which may apply to the deposit (such as disposal, display, public access or storage).
- 4.3 Blank entry forms are kept at all locations where donors are likely to leave objects. As a minimum this will be within the museum itself and in the WSRA offices. An entry form must be completed in duplicate immediately an object is left and, very importantly, in the presence of the depositor. Ideally, only authorised members of staff would receive items, but in reality, in a volunteer organisation, an appropriate member of staff may not be available. Any record of a receipt is better than no record, so it is proposed that any available staff member who is aware of the procedures will be able to receive items.
- 4.4 The entry form will include as a minimum:
- a. a unique and reasonably detailed description of the object.
 - b. a statement of the physical condition of the deposit.
 - c. Whether it is it an outright gift or a loan for a stated fixed term (NB indefinite long-term loans should not be taken).
 - d. a declaration of legal title by the depositor.
 - e. a declaration of the passing of legal title to the WSSRT in the case of gifts.
 - f. Provide a space for the depositor to state any special conditions (e.g. disposal or privacy conditions).
 - g. A statement of the WSSRT disposal policy.
- 4.5 Entry forms should still be filled in for unsolicited items that arrive in the museum and when depositors leave without completing a form. It is important to be able to account for all material that has entered the museum and to record if items arrive unsolicited or if the owners name and address are not known.
- 4.6 Where an item has been accepted that is not in accordance with the acquisitions policy, then it may be disposed of in accordance with the disposals policy.

5. Numbering

- 1.12. The museum has a numbering system whereby a unique reference is attached to every object that will link it from entry records, through documentation files and computer catalogues through to disposals.
- 1.13. The entry numbers will be a simple running number sequence, starting from 1.
- 1.14. The accession number is the number that is automatically allocated by the computer database system. This accession number is a code for identification and cross-reference. The numbering will be a category code (e.g. 'Sg' for signalling items) followed by a sequential number starting from 100. The full list of categories is held in the database.

6. Cataloguing and Indexing

- 1.15. Cataloguing is the process of accessioning artefacts and recording metadata about them. Cataloguing information must:
- a. Provide a level of description sufficient to identify an object or group of objects and its differences from other, similar objects;
 - b. Allow groups of objects to be recorded as a group to retain the provenance
 - c. Provide an historic archive relating to an object or cross-reference to sources where information can be found;
 - d. Be held in a system that allows convenient access using indexes, free-text retrieval etc.
 - e. Record access restrictions (e.g. an object may be deposited with the museum on condition that it is closed to public access for a predetermined period. This can typically apply to sensitive business records).
 - f. Record the physical location of an object and its movement history.
- 1.16. Indexing is the preparation of lists or computer files that allow the catalogue to be searched in a variety of different way, e.g. to answer the question such as 'which enamel signs have we got'.
- 1.17. The museum catalogue is a Microsoft Access relational database.
- 1.18. The database allows artefacts to be catalogued under a variety of keywords to allow the widest search capabilities.
- 1.19. MS Access provides many built-in interactive search methods that means that the catalogue can be searched flexibly. Pre-written queries can be provided to aid computer novices. A basic set of queries is available to help museum staff manage the collection. Other queries can be developed as experience about the type of queries most frequently asked is built.
- 1.20. All objects should be catalogued as soon after acquisition as possible, using the entry form as a starting point. The catalogue will provide a unique reference number which must

be marked on the artefact in a way that does not damage the article while being robust enough not to be erased over time.

- 1.21. The catalogue entry must have a traceable link back to the entry record.
- 1.22. It is important to record the physical condition of the item on receipt, to attempt to determine a market value and to photograph the object for insurance purposes.
- 1.23. The museum catalogue is regularly backed up. Periodically, the entry forms should be scanned and held as part of the database.
- 1.24. the database will be available on line for users to access remotely.

7. Loans

- 1.25. The museum needs to manage and document the process of borrowing objects for which the WSSRT will become responsible for a specific period of time and for a specified purpose, normally display but may also include research, education or copying.
- 1.26. The museum may wish to consider loans out to other organisation that can satisfy certain conditions. Normally, this will only be to other registered museums.
- 1.27. Objects that are sent away for restoration will be recorded as a 'loan out'.
- 1.28. There is no such concept of a 'permanent loan'. Loans will either be of short term (less than 6 months) or longer term (for up to 5 years). In both cases they will be reviewed at the end of the period of time for the loan which will be agreed upon in writing between the museum and the lender.
- 1.29. Where so-called 'permanent loans' are already part of the collection, every effort will be made to trace the owners and convert the agreement into a fixed term loan or gift.
- 1.30. Loans can be initiated by either the museum or by the lender. All loans will be booked in as for permanent donations as detailed in paragraph 4 above. All correspondence and additional information will be kept in a related file, accessible at least by lender and loan number record references.
- 1.31. For loans in, an additional 'loans in record' must be made. This will be cross-referenced to the entry record and should list as a minimum the following additional information:
 - a. Cross reference to the entry record;
 - b. The lenders object number and description (where the loan is from another catalogued collection);
 - c. A valuation by the owner;
 - d. Its condition. This should be completed in some detail to avoid later disagreements about damage caused during the loan period;
 - e. Its display recommendations;
 - f. Any environmental conditions;

- g. Any additional terms and conditions as agreed with lender.
- 1.32. The Gauge Museum has an information sheet for lenders. This would include a description of the museum (or other venue where the object would be display/stored) and specify the responsibilities of the borrower during the loan period. This document would not supersede any terms set out by the lender but would merely demonstrate the borrower's duty in safeguarding the loan.
- 1.33. Loans from private individuals may require separate or additional guidance for individuals who have not loaned to the WSSRT before, stating responsibilities for both parties and asking the lender to confirm title and provenance of the loaned object if necessary.
- 1.34. Loans in should be monitored for condition and environment, providing access to the lender (or their representative) when requested to do so.
- 1.35. The WSSRT will write to the owners of objects at the end of a loan period and will either:
- a. Arrange return of object to lender *or*
 - b. request an agreed extension to the loan period.
- Where a lender does not respond to a request to return a loan, the WSSRT will give three month's notice for the owner to collect the object. The WSSRT retains the right to dispose of objects (in accordance with the agreed disposal policy) not collected by the depositor by this or another jointly agreed date.

8. Disposal Policy

- 1.36. Disposal is the permanent removal of an item from a museum's permanent collection. Every disposal must clearly demonstrate a long-term public benefit.
- 1.37. By definition a museum has a long-term purpose and must possess (or intend to acquire) permanent collections in relation to its stated objectives. The WSSRT accepts a strong presumption against the disposal of any items in the museum's collection except as set out below.
- 1.38. In those cases where the museum is legally free to dispose of an item (if this is in doubt, advice will be sought) it is agreed that any decision to sell or otherwise dispose of material from the collections will be taken only after due consideration by the WSSRT Board. Decisions to dispose of items will not be made with the principal aim of generating funds except for those items that have been specifically donated for this purpose. Once a decision to dispose of an item has been taken, priority will be given to retaining the item within the public domain and with this in view it will be offered first, by exchange, gift or sale to other registered museums before disposal to other interested individuals or organizations is considered.

- 1.39. Artefacts will not be disposed of for scrap unless the WSSRT Board considers the artefact is beyond any reasonable prospect of restoration by any organization now or in the future.
- 1.40. A decision to dispose of a specimen or object, whether by exchange, sale, gift or destruction (in the case of an item too badly damaged or deteriorated to be of any use for the purposes of the collections), will be the responsibility of the WSSRT Board acting on the advice of professional curatorial staff, and not of the curator of the collection acting alone. Full records will be kept of all such decisions 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.
- 1.41. Any money received by the museum from the disposal of items and from insurance claims will be applied for the benefit of the collections. This normally means the purchase of further acquisitions but in exceptional cases improvement relating to the care of collections may be justifiable.

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