Introduction

Curating Profusion: Caring for the Future and Assembling Value in Homes and Smaller Museums

What is the study about?
Curating Profusion is a four year project being conducted by Professor Sharon Macdonald, Dr Jennie Morgan and Harald Fredheim at the University of York. The project is exploring what people keep for the future, how and why. We are researching this in two contexts: households and museums. Our aim is to learn about what is (and is not) kept for the future; how things being saved for the future are cared for; and the decisions, emotions and values involved.

Who is funding the study?
The project is part of the bigger Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded ‘Heritage Futures’ research programme, which also has researchers working on related projects at University College London, the University of Exeter and Linnaeus University in Sweden. We are looking at different ways in which the past is drawn on to resource the future in the face of contemporary global challenges. If you would like more information please see the project website: heritage-futures.org

What will you be asked to do?
Taking part in the research is voluntary but you must be at least 18 years of age. We are asking you to answer a survey about how your museum collects social history objects and other things from the recent past. At the end of the survey, you will be asked whether we may contact you for a follow-up interview and whether you are interested in knowing more about our knowledge exchange event for curators that will be held in York in September. Together, the survey and knowledge exchange event will inform a report that will be available free of charge. Please provide your contact details at the end of the survey if you would like to receive more information about the event and report.

Are there any possible benefits or risks of taking part?
There are no perceived risks in taking part in this study. By contributing to the Heritage Futures research you will be taking part in one of the largest studies of heritage to have ever been undertaken.

**Once you take part, can you change your mind?**
Yes! After you have read this information, you will be asked for your consent to participate. If you want to ask any questions before participating, please get in touch with us. If at any time before, during, or after the research activities you wish to withdraw from the study you can do so by contacting us (our details are below). You will not have to explain your reasons why, and information related to you will be destroyed (although we cannot destroy information after it has been published).

**What will happen to the information I provide?**
All personal information will be collected, used, and handled in line with the General Data Protection Regulation (2018). Research materials will be securely stored following University guidelines. Your answers may reveal your own identity, but we will anonymise your responses to minimise the risk of them being traceable back to you. Findings and materials from the research will be used in a range of project outputs (print and online publications, presentations, reports, exhibitions, short films, websites), and may be used for further research by the team.

**If you have any more questions?**
Please contact us using the details below

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If you are not happy with how the research was conducted please contact the University of York ELMPS ethics committee:
c/o Debbie Haverstock, Research Centre for Social Sciences, 6 Innovation Close, Science Park, University of York, Heslington, York YO10 5DD

Would you like to participate in this study and do you give us permission to use your responses as outlined above?

- [ ] Yes
Questions about your museum

The following questions are about your museum.

What is the name of your museum?
(If part of a museum service, please provide either your site or service and answer the rest of the questions accordingly)

Which of the regional Museum Development Networks does your museum fall under?

- Museums Galleries Scotland
- Museum Development North East
- Museum Development North West
- Museum Development Yorkshire
- Northern Ireland Museums Council
- SHARE Museums East
- Museums Development East Midlands
- Museum Development West Midlands
- Welsh, Museums, Archives and Libraries Division
- Museum Development London
- South East Museum Development
- South West Museum Development

Would you describe your museum as urban, rural or coastal?
(Please select all that apply)

- [ ] Urban
- [ ] Rural
- [ ] Coastal
- [ ] Optional Comment
What type of museum is it?

- English Heritage
- Historic Environment Scotland
- Independent
- Independent former local authority
- Local authority
- Military
- National
- National Trust
- National Trust for Scotland
- University
- Other

Is your museum accredited?

- Yes
- No
- Optional Comment

How many full-time equivalent paid staff members do you have at your museum?

- No full-time paid staff
- Less than 5
- 5 - 20
- 20 - 50
- 50 - 100
- More than 100
- Optional Comment

On average, what is the total number of hours contributed by unpaid staff and volunteers at your museum per month?

- Less than 20
In this survey we will ask you about your "social history collection" and "social history objects", please understand both of these as including other objects you have from the recent past that are not formally classed as "social history".

Approximately how many social history objects do you have in your collection?

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<th>Option</th>
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<td>less than 1 000</td>
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<td>1 000 - 5 000</td>
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<td>more than 100 000</td>
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<td>Optional Comment</td>
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Would you say you accession more than you deaccession?

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<tr>
<th>Option</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definitely yes</td>
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<td>Probably yes</td>
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<td>Might or might not</td>
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<td>Probably not</td>
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<td>Definitely not</td>
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Roughly how many social history objects do you accession each year?

Roughly how many social history objects do you deaccession each year?
Have these numbers changed during your time working at the museum?

- Definitely yes
- Probably yes
- I don't know
- Probably not
- Definitely not

In what way?

Questions about you

The following questions are about you.

What is your job/role title?

How long have you been in this job/role?

- Less than 1 year
- 1 - 5 years
- 5 - 10 years
- 10 - 20 years
- More than 20 years
- Optional Comment

How long have you been at your museum?

- Less than 1 year
How long have you been involved in collections decisions in museums?

☐ Less than 1 year
☐ 1 - 5 years
☐ 5 - 10 years
☐ 10 - 20 years
☐ More than 20 years
☐ Optional Comment

Questions about your collections development policies

The following questions are about your museum's collections development policies and your own opinions about them.

Does your museum have formal collections development policies (acquisition/disposal policies)?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Optional Comment

Please upload any of your policies you are willing to share.

Do you find that your collections development policies help you make better collecting and disposal decisions?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Optional Comment
How do they help you make better decisions?

How do you wish they were different?

Does your museum use formal "assessments of significance" to aid decision-making about acquisition and disposal?
Assessments of significance aim to identify objects' meanings and values and often follow a template with fixed categories such as "provenance", "visual impact" and "condition".

- Yes, for both acquisition and disposal
- Yes, for acquisition
- Yes, for disposal
- No

Please upload any of your significance assessment guidance documents you are willing to share.
Do you find that your process for assessing the significance of objects helps you make better acquisition and disposal decisions?

- Definitely yes
- Probably yes
- No view either way
- Probably not
- Definitely not

Do you find formal assessments of significance most helpful in reaching or justifying your acquisition and disposal decisions?

- Reaching Decisions
- Justifying Decisions
- Optional Comment

How do you wish they were different?

How do you think these would help you?

Do you wish your museum had formal collections development policies?

- Definitely yes
- Probably yes
- No view either way
- Probably not
- Definitely not

How do you think these would help you?
Do you wish your museum had formal guidance documents for significance assessments?

- Definitely yes
- Probably yes
- No view either way
- Probably not
- Definitely not

How do you think these would help you?

How do you solicit donations?

- Yes
- We used to, but don't anymore
- No
- Optional Comment

Does your museum purchase social history objects for your collection?

- Yes
- We used to, but don't anymore
- No
- Optional Comment

Do you accept object donations to your social history collection from members of the public?

- Yes
- We used to, but don't anymore
- No
- Optional Comment

How do you solicit donations?
How do you collect provenance information?

Which commitments do you make to donors with regard to the futures of donated objects?

Museums keep objects for the future. Do you think the time-frames social history objects are kept for should be approached differently to those of objects in other types of collections, such as art, natural history or archaeology?

- Definitely yes
- Probably yes
- No view either way
- Probably not
- Definitely not

In what way?
Do you hope your museum will accept social history donations from members of the public in the future?

- Definitely yes
- Probably yes
- No view either way
- Probably not
- Definitely not

Why not?


Do you think social history donations should be accepted primarily to benefit donors or collections?

- Collections
- Donors
- Optional Comment

Questions about the future of your collection

The following questions are about your own opinions about the future of your collection.

What do you consider your curatorial responsibilities to be with regard to future curators and publics?
Do you think your perception of these responsibilities changed over time?

- Definitely yes
- Probably yes
- Might or might not
- Probably not
- Definitely not

In what way?

[Blank field]

Do you feel it should be made easier to dispose of objects from social history collections?

- Definitely yes
- Probably yes
- No view either way
- Probably not
- Definitely not

Why (and if yes, how)?

[Blank field]

Are there accessioned social history objects in your collection you wouldn't accession if you were building your collection from scratch?

- Definitely yes
- Probably yes
- I don't know
Is the sustainability of your collection practices a topic of discussion at your museum?

- Probably not
- Definitely not
- Yes, often
- Yes, sometimes
- I don't know
- Yes, but only very rarely
- No, never

What, if any, are your most pressing concerns about the sustainability of your social history collecting practices?


Have these concerns led you to think about approaching social history collecting differently? If yes, in which ways?


What do you think the main strengths and weaknesses of your social history collection and social history collecting practices are?


What, if anything, keeps you from addressing these weaknesses?
The Museums Association's "Disposal Toolkit" describes a range of different ways museums may dispose of objects. They advocate offering objects to other museums and public institutions, but note that it may sometimes be appropriate to remove objects from the public domain.

Have you ever disposed of social history objects from your collection out of the public domain?

☐ Yes regularly
☐ Yes, in the past five years
☐ Not recently
☐ No, never
☐ Optional Comment

Have you ever disposed of social history objects from your collection through re-use, recycling or destruction?

☐ Yes, regularly
☐ Yes, in the past five years
☐ Not recently
☐ No, never
☐ Optional Comment

Have you ever disposed of social history objects from your collection through re-use, recycling or disposal for any reason other than an object's poor condition?

☐ Yes, regularly
☐ Yes, in the past five years
☐ Not recently
☐ No, never
☐ Optional Comment
How did you go about disposing of social history objects through re-use, recycling or destruction?

How did you go about disposing of social history objects through re-use, recycling or destruction for any reason other than an object’s poor condition?

Do you think of collection decisions as being permanent?

- Definitely yes
- Probably yes
- Might or might not
- Probably not
- Definitely not

Do you think your experiences with disposal have impacted how permanent you consider collection decisions to be?

- Definitely yes
- Probably yes
- Might or might not
- Probably not
- Definitely not

In what way?
Would you consider disposing objects from your collection through re-use, recycling or destruction in the future?

- Definitely yes
- Probably yes
- Might or might not
- Probably not
- Definitely not

Why?

Questions about public participation in your decision-making processes

The following questions are about public participation in your museum's decision-making practices and your own opinions about involving the public in collections development.

Who is involved in making decisions about the acquisition and disposal of social history objects at your museum?

Are you happy with this arrangement?

- Definitely yes
How would you change it if you could?

How does your museum ensure that acquisition and disposal are carried out openly and transparently?

Have you ever invited members of the public (through open calls or individual/group invitations) to inform your acquisition or disposal decisions?

- Yes, both acquisition and disposal decisions
- Yes, acquisition decisions
- Yes, disposal decisions
- No, never
- Optional Comment

Did you find public participation in acquisition decisions helpful?

- Definitely yes
- Probably yes
- No view either way
- Probably not
- Definitely not
In what way?

Did you find public participation in disposal decisions helpful?

- Definitely yes
- Probably yes
- No view either way
- Probably not
- Definitely not

In what way?

Do you hope your museums invites members of the public to participate in your acquisition decisions in the future (through open calls or individual/group invitations)?

- Definitely yes
- Probably yes
- No view either way
- Probably not
- Definitely not

Do you hope your museums invites members of the public to participate in your disposal decisions in the future (through open calls or individual/group invitations)?

- Definitely yes
- Probably yes
- No view either way
Why do you feel this way about public participation in acquisition and disposal decisions?

Are your museum's collections development meetings open to the public?

- Yes
- No
- Optional Comment

Do you think they should be?

- Definitely yes
- Probably yes
- I don't know
- Probably not
- Definitely not

Why?

Questions about staying in touch

May we contact you to arrange an interview for follow-up questions about your responses to this survey? (This does not commit you to an interview, but gives us
We are organising a knowledge exchange event for curators in York in September. Are you interested in receiving more information about this event?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

Please provide your email address below. We will not share your details or use them for any purpose other than to contact you about this research.

[Insert email address]

If you have any comments or additional information you would like to share with us, please let us know below.

[Insert comments]

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