

Russell-Cotes Art Gallery & Museum Disposals Plan 2017-2018

Introduction

In Spring 2010 Bournemouth Borough Council initiated a fundamental review of the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery & Museum (RCAGM) which aimed to transform it into a flagship cultural resource and visitor attraction for Bournemouth and beyond, fit-for-purpose, affordable, sustainable, and delivering an efficient and value-for-money service.

The Core Offer

It established the concept of the Russell-Cotes 'Core Offer' (see Appendix) which established that the collection should focus on Merton and Annie as late-Victorian art collectors, their house, collections, passions and interests and the context within which they lived and collected.

Historically, however, the RCAGM has been subject to the collecting passions of various Curators and Directors with personal interests. The museum was also once part of a much broader museums service for Bournemouth. Thus, it has material no longer relevant to the Core Offer which is unlikely to ever be shown as part of the RCAGM public programme of exhibitions and events

The review resulted in an understanding that current storage has exceeded its capacity and the current cramped conditions are causing active damage to the collections.

The RCAGM also understands and acknowledges that to continue caring for its collection to the highest standards, rationalisation and disposal needs to take place.

RCAGM Collections Development Strategy

In April 2013, the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum Collections Development Strategy was agreed (updated in September 2015). This strategy outlined the Core Offer and scoped all of the collection, highlighting the strengths and significance of aspects while also identifying those collections or parts of collections which were no longer relevant to that Core Offer.

The Strategy identified areas for development and continued collecting as well as disposal. It also lays out the policy and procedure for disposals, in line with Museums Association Code of Ethics which always seeks to keep disposed material within the public domain. Sale of disposed material is seen only as a method of last resort if no other public collection holding body is interested in the material concerned.

Disposals Plan 2017

Within the framework of the Development Strategy and now with a Management Committee in place, the Russell-Cotes can proceed on implementing a planned and prioritized system of disposals.

This plan sets down the collection disposal activities and objectives for 2017-2018. They should also be viewed as a test of the new systems and procedures as well. It is possible that some changes or modifications to the RCAGM Disposals Procedures may be required in the light of this experience.

Areas of the Collection Identified for Disposal in 2017-2018

Two areas have been prioritised from within the RCAGM Collection Development Strategy:

1. Post-1960 Art, Social/Industrial History Collections stored in the shipping container

The shipping container used for storage at the RCAGM Study Centre has become a pressing priority due to its worsening condition.

Purchased in 2010 as a temporary solution to the problem presented by the cost of renting space at the Bournemouth Borough Council Southcote Road Depot the fabric of the container is beginning to fail. Weathering is leading to rust and it is only a matter of time before it starts to leak. Additionally, the extremes of heat and cold throughout the year is beginning to affect the material held within it even though the items placed inside, mostly social/industrial history, were selected for their ability to withstand such changes and their obvious lack of relevance to the RCAGM Core Offer.

The shipping container does present a security risk in so much as there have been attempts by members of the public to break into it. Although discreetly placed, the container is beginning to look unsightly and is a cause of friction with our neighbours.

The contents of the shipping container are largely post-1960 art, social and industrial history and therefore fall outside the Core Offer.

2. Ship Models

The collection of ship models, part of former curator Graham Teasdill's¹ interest in maritime material, has been identified as particularly irrelevant. It is also expensive in terms of storage space at the Study Centre. The high-density storage of material has been identified as a direct cause of damage to the collections. Divestment of this collection will free up vital space.

Given the lack of RCAGM curatorial expertise in the field of ship models, outside input from the Royal Museums Greenwich (formerly the National Maritime Museum) has been sought as to the collection's quality and intellectual value.

¹ In post as Curator 1966-1988

Schedule of Activities

Date	Action
8.2017	Disposals Plan 2017-2018 posted on RCAGM website
9.2017	Disposal Reports for contents of RCAGM shipping container written with a desired course of action indicated
9.2017	Reports presented to RCAGM Acquisitions and Disposals Panel for approval
23.10.2017	Listing of material to be disposed of (showing the proposed action to be taken) to be posted on RCAGM website
1.12.2017	Disposal reports presented to RCAGM Management Committee for final approval
From 12.2017 onwards	Relevant action to dispose taken. Material de-accessioned, records amended and on-line listing updated.
4.8.2017	Curators of Ship Models from Royal Museums Greenwich to inspect RCAGM collection and give opinion as to quality and intellectual worth.
2.2018	Disposal Reports written on the RCAGM ship models taking into consideration the Royal Museums Greenwich input with a desired course of action
3.2018	Reports presented to RCAGM Acquisitions and Disposals Panel for approval
2.4.2018	Listing of material to be disposed of (showing the proposed action to be taken) to be posted on RCAGM website
18.5.2018	Disposal reports presented to RCAGM Management Committee for final approval
From 6.2018 onwards	Relevant action to dispose taken. Material de-accessioned, records amended and on-line listing updated.

Appendix

The RCAGM Statement of Purposes - Our Core Offer

Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum is an outstanding celebration of late-Victorian art collectors; their passions and achievements; how they lived and encountered the world; and how they presented their collections to enrich the lives of others.

We are entrusted to present the Russell-Cotes' personal vision and legacy in the most authentic way possible, and to enable learning, enjoyment and access to the house and collections for residents and visitors to Bournemouth.

The 'core offer' is focused on the historic building, East Cliff Hall, its stunning seafront setting, and its internationally-known collections, which attract and

astound visitors. However, this is only part of the offer. In addition to the original house, we also have four art galleries added in the early 1900s. We will use this offer to:

1. Explain the story of the Russell-Cotes, the Victorian /Edwardian house and world cultures/art collections, putting it into local, national and international context
2. Encourage use of the galleries, collections, and unique energy and atmosphere of the house to inspire great art, and to stimulate creativity and curiosity
3. Explore aspects of the human condition, which were recognised by the Victorian innovators, philanthropists and social reformers, and which matter to communities today.

Finally, the spaces available at Russell-Cotes Art Gallery & Museum are not the exclusive domain of the Victorians. We are developing a vibrant cultural programme which, while rooted in the era of our founders, will be a stage for wider participation and engagement. We will continue in the spirit of two of Bournemouth's most forward-thinking citizens by striving to make a significant contribution to the development of the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum as a cultural flagship for Bournemouth².

We want our art gallery and museum to do what the very best galleries and museums do: to be spaces where the past, present and future come together in an irresistible mix of life, culture and heritage - a place where everyone can feel at home with a world of art.

² See RCAGM Museum Business Transformational Strategy, 2012