

Russell-Cotes Art Gallery & Museum Disposals Plan 2021-2022

Introduction

In 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 – especially before the adoption of Collecting Policies by the museum sector as a whole. 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 the Core Offer.

The Strategy identified areas for development and continued collecting as well as disposal. It also laid 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 2021-2022

This plan sets down the collection disposal activities and objectives for 2021-2022.

Areas of the Collection Identified for Disposal in 2021-2022

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

1. Social/Local History Collections stored in the shipping container

The shipping container used for storage as 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.

Following previous rounds of disposal activity, the contents of the shipping container are largely social/local history unrelated to the Russell-Cotes family and their activities and therefore fall outside the Core Offer.

It is hoped that the container will be disposed of by the end of 2022.

2. Ship Models

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

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) was sought as to the collection's quality and intellectual value. Each model was given a rating (Excellent, Good, Acceptable and None) as to its quality. Those models of the highest ratings, Excellent and Good, were put through the disposal process in 2019-2020. Those of a step down in quality, Acceptable and None, are the items under consideration as part of this plan

Schedule of Activity

Date	Action
2.2021	Disposals Plan 2020-2021 posted on RCAGM website
3.2021	Disposal Reports for ship models and remaining shipping container contents written with a desired course of action indicated to RCAGM Acquisitions and Disposals Panel for approval. Once approved a listing of material to be disposed of (showing the proposed action to be taken) to be posted on RCAGM website.
4.2021	Disposal reports presented to RCAGM Management Committee for final approval.
5.2021	Material deaccessioned and the RCAGM records amended.
6.2021	Material advertised to wider museum community via Museums Association. Specific direct contact made with public

	collections that might have a strong interest in acquiring relevant items.
8.2021	After a duration of two months for the Museums Association notice the material will be disposed of via auctioneers or skip as deemed appropriate.

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 Bournemouth.

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.