



RHSV Collection Policy

1 Policy title

RHSV Collection Policy ("Policy")

2 Policy purpose

To guide members, employees and volunteers of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria Inc, ("Society") including members of its Council, its committees and working groups, on the management of the Society's collections.

3 Document history

Previous versions of this Policy were adopted by the Society in 2005 and in February 2014.

This revision (17 October 2016) has been drafted in order to:

- Incorporate relevant suggestions for improvement from staff, volunteers and the Collections committee
- Ensure that a complete Deaccession policy is incorporated within the Collection Policy
- Provide a high-level guide for the future development of administrative procedure documents about specific aspects of collection management (see the Notes incorporated below as 'flags' for future work. The Notes themselves are not intended as part of this Policy.)

4 Alignment

This Policy is aligned with:

- a) The Purposes of the Society, and in particular the Purpose defined in clause 2.3 of the Constitution (www.historyvictoria.org.au/about-us/council):

To establish and maintain library, archive and museum collections, having a focus on the Victorian experience, and to expand such collections through purchase, donation or other means deemed suitable by the Council of the Society.

- b) The Mission of the Society (www.historyvictoria.org.au) which derives from the Purpose defined in clause 2.2 of the Constitution:

To promote among our members, member societies, and the wider public, an interest in and understanding of Australian history, with a focus on the Victorian experience, to act as the peak body on behalf of local and specialist historical societies throughout Victoria, and as the historical society for the City of Melbourne.

- c) The Objectives of the Society (www.historyvictoria.org.au/about-us/society-objectives):
 - *To encourage the study of Australian and especially Victorian history by establishing a public museum, art gallery, library and archives.*
 - *To promote the preservation, proper organisation and publication of authentic historical records.*
 - *To acquire and preserve for the use of the Society and the public, objects and materials that illuminate the history of Victoria.*
 - *To undertake historical research into people, sites, buildings, event or issues and to participate in activities aimed at promoting, commemorating and/or, where relevant, preserving and conserving them.*
 - *To promote the dissemination of information by lectures, seminars, workshops, excursions of historic and geographic interest, and exhibitions.*
 - *To encourage the establishment of societies with aims consistent with these purposes, to support their activities and to promote a network of regional associations to link them to each other and to the Society.*
 - *To publish relevant newsletters, journals and other material.*
- d) Museums Australia's *Code of Ethics for Art, History and Science Museums* (1999) (www.museumsaustralia.org.au/userfiles/file/Governance/maethics.pdf). Alignment with the *Code* is a requirement of the Society's accreditation under the Museum Accreditation Program of Museums Australia (Vic).
- e) The *National Standards for Australian Museums and Galleries* (current version is 1.5 (2016) – see: www.mavic.asn.au/assets/National_Standards_1_5.pdf). These standards underpin the Museum Accreditation Program of Museums Australia (Vic).
- f) The *Income Tax Assessment Act 1997* in relation to the Society's obligations as a Deductible Gift Recipient and as an organisation entitled to receive donations of items under the Cultural Gifts Program.

5 WHAT THE SOCIETY COLLECTS

5.1 HISTORIC PERIOD

The Society will collect research material relating to Victoria from European settlement to the present day with a particular emphasis on Melbourne.

5.2 KEY THEMES

Architecture and the built environment	Contact history	Domestic life
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Education	Ethnic groups	Local history
Natural environment and geography	Political life	Recreation and social life
Religion	Transport	Working life

5.3 ITEMS TO BE COLLECTED

Subject to the Society's strategic directions and practical capacities (including the matters defined in clause 6, below), items will be collected to develop the RHSV collection.

Items can be in physical or digital format. Physical items may be two-dimensional or three-dimensional.

5.4 ITEMS WHICH ARE NOT COLLECTED

Items which are not related to Victorian history will not normally be collected.

Hazardous materials will not normally be collected.

Large items are not accepted unless there is a strategic reason to acquire them.

If the Collections Committee rejects an item offered to the Society, it may suggest a more appropriate repository to the owner.

5.5 SUB-COLLECTIONS

The RHSV collection has several sub-collections. Its divisions are:

- A. Library materials – i.e. published items (books and serials / journals) that are not classified as belonging to one or more of the sub-collections listed in 5.5(B).
- B. All other materials. These are retained with a presumption of permanence, and are currently classified as follows:
 - i. Archives
 - ii. Databases
 - iii. Directories
 - iv. Ephemera (housed in the Vertical Files)
 - v. Historical Society publications, including newsletters and other records
 - vi. Images
 - vii. Manuscripts
 - viii. Maps
 - ix. Newspapers
 - x. Objects
 - xi. Pamphlets (housed in the Vertical Files)
 - xii. Rare Books

6 ACQUISITION

Acquisitions can be made through purchase or by gift. A gift may be in the form of a donation, bequest, exchange or transfer.

With regard to acquiring items the following criteria must be considered:

- a) The item must have relevance to the purpose and objectives of the Society and to this Policy as a whole
- b) The item should have relevant historical significance
- c) The item should have clearly documented provenance where possible
- d) The item should be a worthy example of its type
- e) The item should have the potential to be used in the research, exhibition, communication and interpretation activities of the Society
- f) The condition of the item should be such that the Society can adequately conserve and care for it
- g) Legal title to the item should be available to the Society (i.e. permanent loans shall not be accepted)
- h) The item should be available to the Society without encumbrances or conditions

When acquiring an item the Society must give due consideration to the resources required to house and maintain this work for posterity. The Society will only accept an item if adequate and appropriate storage is available.

When acquiring items for the Library sub-collection, preference will be given to items that are directly relevant to the Library's historic and current collection strengths. Relevant works that are not readily available elsewhere in Victoria in either physical or digital form will be prioritised.

The Society will document all acquisitions to facilitate identification, provenance and research.

7 CONTRACTURAL TERMS FOR GIFTS

- a) The Collections Committee is authorised to decide on behalf of the Society whether to accept an offered item.
- b) The Collections Committee must be guided by this Policy and must base its decision on the criteria set out in clause 6.
- c) Gifts should be unconditional unless the requested conditions requests are deemed by the Society to be reasonable and fair.
- d) No commitment can be made by the Society to permanently display any item in the collection.
- e) The Society undertakes to include an appropriate credit line to acknowledge the gift, as and if requested, whenever the item is displayed or otherwise published.

- f) The Society will not display material if, in the opinion of the Collections Manager or other relevant professional, the condition of that material would be seriously impaired.
- g) Following the Collections Committee's decision to accept an item, a Deed of Gift form must be co-signed by the donor and a responsible member of the Society (e.g. the Collections Manager or Executive Officer) in order to ensure the transfer of legal ownership of the item to the Society.
- h) If an offered gift is not accepted, the person offering it will be informed in writing of this decision and the reasons for it.

8 REMOVAL OF ITEMS FROM THE COLLECTION

8.1 STRATEGIC PURPOSE

The Society recognises that the well-considered and formal removal of an accessioned item from its permanent collection is a strategic method for strengthening the collection so that the collection supports the purposes and objectives of the Society.

Removal can be undertaken either via the process of *deselection* (see clause 8.2) or via the process of *deaccessioning* (see clause 8.3).

8.2 DESELECTION OF LIBRARY MATERIALS

Items in the Library sub-collection (as defined in clause 5.5(A)) may be 'deselected' or 'weeded', as is frequently done with regard to circulating stock and duplicates in most public libraries.

Deselection decisions should be guided by the criteria provided in clause 8.4.

Recommendations for deselection should be prepared by the Collections Manager (or another responsible member of the Society's staff or volunteers) for consideration by the Collections Committee.

Each deselection recommendation should include the proposed method(s) of disposal; these should either:

- o relate to the guidance provided by clause 8.6; or
- o specify an internal transfer to another of the Society's sub-collections (e.g. when an item in the Library sub-collection is identified as rare, it should be transferred to the Rare Books sub-collection).

The Collections Committee is authorised on behalf of the Society to approve deselections and transfers from the Library sub-collection.

The Collections Manager is authorised to dispose of duplicate items from the Library sub-collection in accordance with clause 8.4(a) and without consultation with the Collections Committee, providing that the title is retained in the catalogue and continues to be represented in the collection.

8.3 DEACCESSIONING OF NON-LIBRARY MATERIALS

Items in any of the sub-collections defined in clause 5.5(B) are subject to this clause and to any related policy and procedure.

Deaccessioning decisions must be based on the criteria provided in clause 8.4.

Recommendations for deaccessioning may be based on information received via consultation (including with the former owner, if appropriate).

Recommendations for deaccessioning should be prepared by the Collections Manager (or another responsible member of the Society's staff or volunteers) for consideration by the Collections Committee.

The Collections Committee is required to submit its recommendations for deaccessioning to the Council for approval.

Only the Council of the Society can approve the deaccessioning of an item.

The Council of the Society should not act unilaterally but should be guided in each deaccessioning decision by advice received from the Collections Committee.

8.4 CRITERIA FOR REMOVAL FROM THE COLLECTION

Items may be removed from the collection when one or more of the following conditions apply:

- a) The item is a duplicate of one that is:
 - o already owned by the Society and held in the collection; and
 - o in better condition and / or holds greater significance.
- b) This Policy has been revised since the item was acquired and the item has been found to be non-compliant with the current Policy.
- c) The item can no longer be suitably maintained / used / stored by the Society.
- d) The Society has discovered that the item was originally acquired unethically or illegally.
- e) The item is subject to contractual donor restrictions that the Society can no longer meet.
- f) An Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or other community / cultural group has laid claim to the item, and the Society is willing to acknowledge the merits of their claim for repatriation.
- g) A rightful owner has laid claim to the item, and the Society is willing to acknowledge the merits of the claim for restitution.
- h) The item has been damaged or has deteriorated, and the costs of conservation outweigh the value to the collection.
- i) The item is inherently hazardous, or contains hazardous materials.
- j) The item has been lost or stolen, and the Society (and its insurers) has determined that recovery is highly unlikely.

- k) The item is in the Library sub-collection, is of marginal relevance to the Society, and is readily available elsewhere in Victoria in physical or digital form.

8.5 COOLING-OFF PERIOD

No cooling-off period applies to the *deselection* of items from the Library sub-collection.

To avoid hasty decisions based on personal whim or rapid changes in fashion and taste, the Society may require a cooling-off period of 12 months between a decision to *deaccession*, and any implementation of that decision.

The cooling-off period is, however, inappropriate when the Society must respond without unwarranted delay – for example, when a hazardous item needs to be removed quickly because of the danger it represents to people (visitors and staff) and perhaps to the environment.

A cooling-off period is likely to be recommended when deaccessioning is recommended for reasons relating to criteria (a) to (e) in clause 8.4.

A cooling-off period is likely to be superfluous or inappropriate when deaccessioning is recommended for reasons relating to criteria (f) to (k) in clause 8.4.

The Collections Committee, when making a deaccessioning recommendation to Council, will also recommend whether or not a cooling-off period should apply, and what the duration of such a cooling-off period should be.

8.6 ETHICAL DISPOSAL FROM THE COLLECTION

The Society acknowledges that, in accordance with the Museums Association's *Disposal Toolkit: Guidelines for Museums* (revised edition, 2014), p. 7 (available via: www.museumsassociation.org/collections/disposal-toolkit), ethical disposal has the following characteristics:

- It is determined within the framework of this Policy and contributes strategically to the development of the collection
- It is done on the advice of a range of people (not an individual)
- It is done with the intention that, wherever possible, items remain within the public domain
- It is unlikely to damage public trust in the Society
- It is likely to increase the public benefit derived from the Society's collection

When formal approval has been given to deselect or deaccession an item from the collection, it may be:

- offered to another organisation by gift, transfer or exchange;
- repatriated or restored to a rightful claimant;
- sold;
- recycled;
- destroyed; or

- returned to the donor / previous owner.

No member, employee or volunteer of the Society, or any person associated with the Council or the Collections Committee, should receive an unfair advantage if purchasing the item.

The Collections Manager, when making a *deselection* recommendation to the Collections Committee, will also recommend the proposed method(s) of disposal, and the priority in which different methods should be used.

The Collections Committee, when making a *deaccessioning* recommendation to Council, will also recommend the proposed method(s) of disposal, and the priority in which different methods should be used.

Where the Society has acquired items subject to conditions of disposal, these requirements must be complied with.

Where the Society has received financial assistance for acquisitions from an outside source, disposal may require the consent of all parties who had contributed to the purchase or controlled the funding.

Any monies received by the Society from the disposal of items must be applied solely for the upgrading of the collection either by purchase or by conservation.

The Society will document all deselection and deaccessioning decisions, and all consequent disposal activities. At a minimum:

- *Deselections* should be documented via the Minutes of meetings of the Collections Committee; and
- *Deaccessions* should be documented via the Minutes of meetings of the Collections Committee and the Council, and in the catalogue database(s).

9 Review

The Collections Committee will review this Policy every three years, or as required.