

# **LIMERICK MUSEUM**

## **1.5 COLLECTION POLICY**



**Date Approved:**

**Date to be Discussed Annually:**

**Review Period: 5 Years**

**Review Date:**

## **1.5 COLLECTION POLICY (Subject to formal approval)**

### **Introduction**

This policy statement regulates the acquisition of objects to the collections of Limerick Museum. This policy represents the current mission and focus of Limerick Museum and supersedes all previous and existing practices and policies, relating to the acquisition of objects. The policy will be assessed on an annual basis with the Museum governing body, Limerick City and County Council, and a detailed review will be undertaken at five-year intervals.

### **Mission Statement**

To collect, preserve and exhibit objects that illustrate and provide insight into the history and cultural heritage of Limerick City and County, creating a vibrant and accessible space that promotes learning, understanding and appreciation among our community and visitors to Limerick.

### **Museum Background, History and Collection Practice**

Limerick Museum was founded in 1907 and was opened to the public in 1916. Its original location was in the City Library, which was then in the Carnegie Building in Pery Square, and the librarian of the day was its curator.

In keeping with most museums of the time, Limerick Museum initially collected a wide ranging variety of objects and accordingly our early collection contains exotic natural history artefacts such as a two hundred year old ostrich egg and many other historical items not specifically related to Limerick. These collections reflect Irish exploration of the world from the eighteenth-century to the present day, as well as the role of the Irish within the British Empire.

From the 1940s, the Museum developed a more refined Collections Policy and began collecting objects which related specifically to Limerick and its surrounding environs.

Under the National Cultural Institutions Act, 1997, Limerick Museum received designated status. This means that Limerick Museum is legally entitled to retain archaeological objects for and on behalf of the State. All archaeological objects found with no known owner are State property and must be reported to either the National Museum of Ireland or to a designated museum. As a designated museum we are also available to provide advice on any queries related to archaeological heritage. All objects acquired under designation is undertaken after due consultation with the National Museum of Ireland.

Limerick Museum is dedicated to the memory of Jim Kemmy, historian, writer, activist and the former Democratic Socialist Party and Labour Party TD for Limerick East, and two-time Mayor of Limerick.

### **Statement of type and quantity of collections**

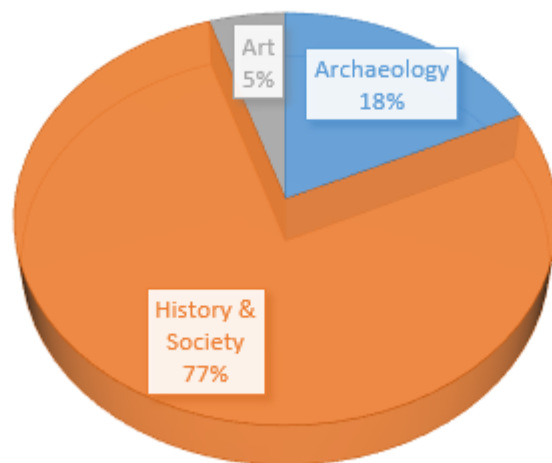
The permanent collection of Limerick Museum can be categorised under the following headings:

Archaeology: Approximately 18% of the entire collection.

History & Society: Approximately 77% of the entire collection.

Art: Approximately 5% of the entire collection.

**LIMERICK MUSEUM COLLECTION :**



### **Archaeology:**

Limerick Museum has a wide variety of archaeological artefacts dating from the Mesolithic period to the Early Modern era. These include polished stone axes, the Newgarden hoard of Late Bronze Age implements, a number of rotary querns, Viking silver ingot weights, medieval ecclesiastical sculptures from lost monastic sites and a rare medieval mether or communal drinking cup. Importance: Local and national.

Limerick Museum also has a large repository of archaeological artefacts and samples from a number of excavations undertaken in the historic core of Limerick city during the 1980s and 1990s. Importance: Local and national.

Limerick Museum's collection contains a number of antiquarian glass slides and photographs from the George Fogerty and Ernest Bennis Collections which are invaluable records of archaeological sites in late 19th and early 20th century Ireland. Importance: Local and national.

Archaeological artefacts that are acquired into this collection are done so in accordance with the requirements of the National Museum of Ireland and liaising with the Limerick City and County Archaeologist.

#### History & Society:

This category comprises the largest grouping in our collection and can be subdivided into three main themes.

- i. Civic administration, military history and politics
- ii. Social life, religion and recreation
- iii. Manufacturing and trade

#### Civic administration, military history and politics:

Civic administration: This category includes mayoral robes and chains of office from mayoralty prior to the amalgamation of Limerick City and Limerick County Councils in 2014 as well as more historic items such as the four civic maces, an example of the mace-bearers uniform and the civic sword that was granted to the city by Queen Elizabeth I in 1575. The Museum also has an elaborately illustrated charter of the city granted by Charles II. Importance: Local and national.

The Museum collection contains a curious object called 'the Nail', a brass topped stone pediment onto which payments were publicly made in the old Exchange building. Reputedly, it is from this that the phrase 'to pay on the nail' derives. Importance: Local and national.

Military history: The motto of Limerick City 'Urbs Antique Fuit Studisque Asperrima Belli', an ancient city well versed in the art of war, is well represented in the Museum's collection. A vast array of cannonballs, mortars and gunmoney in our collections are testament to the tumultuous period in 17th century Limerick when the city endured successive Cromwellian and Williamite sieges. Importance: Local and national.

Items of British military uniforms, swords, medals, and buttons highlight the period from 1691 until 1922 when Limerick was known colloquially as ‘Garrison Town’. Importance: Local and national.

The revolutionary period, recently commemorated by the ‘Decade of Centenaries’ is well represented in Limerick Museum’s collection - the tricolour that draped the coffin of George Clancy - one of the Mayors murdered by Crown forces in 1921 being one of the most poignant items. The Museum has a collection of 291 items relating to the erection of the 1916 memorial on the 50th anniversary of the Easter Rising. Importance: Local and national.

There are also a number of collections donated by descendants of those who fought on both sides of the conflict: Dargan collection, Slattery Collection, Conway Collection, and the Michael Colivet collection which contains 1,077 items. These collections include uniforms, letters, photographs and a number of items made during internment, such as spoons made from animal bones and medals made from coins. Importance: Local and national.

Political history: The Museum collection has over 1,400 political newspapers and magazines dating from the mid-19th century through to the mid-20th century, detailing the complexities of political history during that period. Importance: Local and national.

Our collection contains a series of 25 mid-19th century political cartoon prints from the graphic satirist John Doyle depicting Limerick politicians. Importance: Local and national.

The Jim Kemmy collection contains 1,375 objects relating to his political career as local activist, city councillor, TD and Mayor of the city. A keen historian this collection also contains a vast array of photographs, billheads and memorabilia from his personal collection. Limerick Museum is dedicated to the memory of Jim Kemmy. Importance: Local and national.

Social life, religion and recreation:

Social life: The social activities and daily life of the people of Limerick are well represented in the Museums’ collection of nearly 4,000 postcards. This collection not only focuses on Limerick City & County, but on holiday areas frequented by Limerick people, such as Ballybunion, Kilkee and Killaloe. Importance: Local and national.

The Father John Leonard collection of 549 objects contains letterheads, billheads and ephemera relating to Limerick – including a large collection of souvenir trinkets that would have been

bought by visitors to the city in the late-19th to mid-20th centuries. Importance: Local and national.

The 'From Limerick With Love' collection of over 25,000 photographs from the Limerick Leader newspaper archives dating to the 1970's gives a unique insight into the social life of local people during this period. Importance: Local and national.

Religion: The museum collection has a large number of religious adornments (albs, surplices etc.) made of Limerick lace, which will be detailed below. The Robert Vere O'Brien collection of 351 letters, reports, accounts and correspondences provide an insight into the restoration programme undertaken at Saint Mary's Cathedral in the late 19th century. Importance: Local and national.

The collection of the Redemptorist Archconfraternity (a men only laymen society with over 8,000 members locally), contains 645 items ranging from pamphlets, letters and medals, to the multitude of banners and flags that once adorned Mount St Alphonsus church at their weekly meetings. Importance: Local and national.

Recreation: Limerick's sporting history is well represented in Limerick Museum's collections. The Gerry Piggott collection of GAA memorabilia includes a number of rare early photographs of the Limerick hurling team, scrapbooks and the hurl used by Mick Mackey in the 1940 All Ireland final which Limerick famously won. Importance: Local and national.

Limerick Museum has over 100 objects relating to Munster Rugby ranging from modern programmes, tickets to the fabled 1978 match against the All-Blacks and a Young Munster cap from the 1931-32 season. Importance: Local, national and international.

Limerick Museum contains a wealth of material pertaining to water sports – a key recreation for a city located on the River Shannon. These include photographs, trophies and programmes from the Limerick Boat Club, the Athlunkard Boat Club, the Shannon Rowing Club, and material relating to the Limerick Annual Regatta which originated in 1870. Importance: Local and national.

### **Manufacturing and trade:**

The history of Limerick's long history in trade and manufacturing is well represented in Limerick Museum's collections. The collection has circa 300 trade tokens dating from the mid-17th century through to the late 19th century which provide an overview of the varying local trades and businesses in Limerick during that period. Importance: Local and national.

Our collection of over 1,500 billheads provide an invaluable insight into the day to day workings of businesses in the city and county. These are also often the only extant record of certain trades and businesses. Importance: Local and national.

Limerick Museum's collection includes a number of the ceremonial accoutrements relating to the old guilds of Limerick. These include - ceremonial aprons, sashes and banners of the Guilds of Painters, Stonecutters, Masons, Slaters, Tanners Bakers and Coopers. Importance: Local and national.

Limerick's flour milling heritage is represented in the 262 objects in the Ranks collection, containing photographs, artefacts and digitised interviews with ex-Ranks staff undertaken for the publication of *Ranks Mills, The Industrial heart of Limerick city* in 2012. Importance: Local and national.

The Museum has a collection of 140 objects relating to the former Geary's Sweet & Biscuit factory, which was demolished in the 1980s to make way for the development of the new Civic offices on King's Island. This collection of advertising, sweet wrappers and sweet moulds is complemented by the Cleeve's collection of circa 60 objects from the Cleeve's condensed Milk Factory which contains items such as Cleeve's Toffee tins and enamel signs. The Geary's and Cleeve's collections are some of the most popular and evocative assemblages in the Museum's collection. Importance: Local and national.

Limerick is synonymous worldwide with a number of trades and produce, namely Limerick silver, Limerick lace, Limerick ham and Limerick gloves.

Limerick silver is one of the rarest and most prized provincially made silvers in Great Britain and Ireland. In the 18th and early 19th centuries, silversmiths such as Jonathan Buck, Samuel and Joseph Johns and John Robinson created vessels and utensils of immense quality and craftsmanship that are today much sought after. It is estimated that a mere 400 or so pieces of Limerick silver from this period survive. Just under half of these pieces are housed in Limerick Museum, making our collection arguably the most important in the world. Our silver collection was amassed largely by former curator of Limerick Museum, Larry Walsh (curator 1977-

2012). The collection is comprised of numerous examples of spoons, ladles, sieves, sauce boats, bowls and shoe buckles. Limerick Museum's collection notably contains one of only three known Limerick silver coffee pots in existence. Limerick Museum's silver collection is much prized and is of international importance. Importance: Local, national and international.

The modern Limerick Lace industry was introduced to Limerick by Charles Walker in 1829, and at its height employed 2,000 women and girls in the city. Under the curatorship of our present curator, Dr Matthew Potter, Limerick Museum has become a renowned centre of Limerick lace, and the Museum's collection of Limerick lace and lace patterns is most likely the largest known collection in the world. Our collection consists of approximately 200 pieces of lace, in the form of shawls, veils, collars and cuffs, as well as religious adornments such as albs, surplices and altar-fronts. In addition to this - our collection contains approximately 560 lace pattern sheets. There are two main collections of Limerick lace in the museum, the Florence Vere O'Brien collection and the recently donated Maude Keaney collection. Importance: Local, national and international.

The bacon curing industry in Limerick of the late-19th to mid-20th centuries was one of the largest industries in the city - an association so renowned – it earned Limerick the moniker 'Pigtown'. At the height of its popularity, Limerick bacon became the most famed in all of the British Isles – and was favoured by Queen Victoria. Limerick Museum has a collection of over 200 items relating to the four big bacon factories, namely, J. Matterson & Sons, Shaw & Sons, J. O'Mara & Sons and Denny's & Sons. Importance: Local and national.

Popular in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Limerick calfskin gloves were famed for their delicate nature. Made of a pale yellow leather they were so thin that a pair could be folded up and placed inside a walnut shell. Owing to their delicacy many Limerick gloves only survived one wear and accordingly extant examples are rare. Famous wearers included Princess Charlotte who owned a pair made by the famed Limerick glovemaking James Lyons. Limerick Museum has a pair of these exceedingly rare gloves, together with their accompanying walnut shell. Importance: Local, national and international.

In addition to the above collections – Limerick Museum contains a diverse selection of unique artefacts pertaining to the City and County – most famously, including one of only two known desiccated cats from medieval Ireland, and a piece of the largest meteorite shower that ever fell across the British Isles.

At Limerick Museum we are proud to be Limerick centric and firmly embrace this as our *modus operandi* – while museums worldwide house and display artefacts of a similar nature and origin – we are distinctly Limerick orientated. While you can see example of Picasso’s work at various repositories worldwide - if you want to see a Georgian Limerick silver coffee pot – you have to come here – to the home of Limerick history.

### **Statement of Acquisition Brief**

Limerick Museum seeks to collect objects that are associated with, or help to illustrate the cultural heritage of Limerick with respect to archaeology, social, political and industrial history and folklife. That includes objects made in Limerick, at some point used in Limerick, or otherwise provenanced to Limerick City and County and its associated heritage regardless of location at the time of acquisition.

Limerick Museum has gathered some sixty-five thousand objects since its foundation in 1907. The acquisition of objects into the collection of Limerick Museum is active. Objects are usually acquired through donation or reporting. Limerick Museum does not have a designated acquisitions budget and purchases are only made on occasion when funds permit. Purchases are usually made from auction houses or from individuals. A regular check is made on the various auction sites within Ireland and Britain for any objects that may have an association with Limerick City and County. If an object is deemed significant, an effort is made to secure funds with approval from Limerick City and County Council.

Limerick Museum will consider all potential acquisitions and whether they are consistent with its Collections Policy and whether Limerick Museum is the most suitable place for the material. Other considerations made before an object is acquired include: the condition and conservation needs of the object, the potential of displaying the object, the safety of the object if not acquired, and the long term storage and care of the object. Collecting is subject to the limited suitable storage space available to Limerick Museum.

Once an acquisition is formalised, the Museum must obtain immediate physical possession of the object.

All acquisitions are to be outright and unconditional.

All donations to the Museum’s collection are irrevocable upon their formal and physical transfer to the Museum. Once donated, Limerick Museum retains full copyright and ownership of the object. The treatment and display of the object is at the discretion of Limerick Museum.

Objects offered to the Museum as donations or bequests will not normally be accepted if they are subject to any special conditions regarding display, etc. In exceptional circumstances, if the Museum Curator feels that the object/s in question are of over-riding importance he/she can approve the acquisition of a specific object to which conditions are attached.

There are a number of archives collecting in the area of Limerick City and County. As such, Limerick Museum works with other institutions to ensure the most appropriate repository for archival collections.

If an object is deemed not to be appropriate for acquisition by the Museum, then alternative options will be outlined to the donor/seller to ensure that the most suitable home for the object is found.

Limerick Museum will generally not acquire a duplicate of an object that already forms part of our collection unless it is deemed by the Museum Curator/Assistant Curator to be of importance to the collection. An exception will be archaeological objects acquired under the National Monuments (Amendment) Act, 1994, or items acquired to form part of a 'handling collection' to be used for educational or outreach programmes.

Limerick Museum does not provide appraisals regarding the monetary worth of objects. It may, where appropriate, offer suggestions concerning outside appraisal services.

Limerick Museum acknowledges the role of the other Local Authority Museums throughout Ireland and will work with these organisations to ensure that objects are preserved in the place most appropriate, given their nature and provenance. Objects offered by donors to the Museum outside of the Limerick City/County jurisdiction will generally be directed towards a museum within the relevant geographical area.

The Museum Curator/Assistant Curator, and on occasion, and as required, with a consultant Conservator/Archaeologist assess all objects deposited with Limerick Museum as a proposed donation for acceptance into the permanent collections. Once a decision is reached, the Museum will contact the potential donor to inform them of same. Objects not being acquired will be returned to the owner.

The acquisition of object(s) is generally limited to the area within the boundaries of Limerick City and County as determined by Limerick City and County Council.

All funds are provided by the Museum's governing body, Limerick City and County Council.

The Museum Curator as Limerick City and County Council's senior Museum professional has delegated authority and responsibility vested by Limerick City and County Council over the Museum's Collections Policy and Acquisition brief, and with that to accept or reject potential donations to Limerick Museum and make recommendations on the purchase of material.

It is the Museum's policy generally not to accept material on loan from individuals in cases where donation or purchase is clearly the more appropriate option. Loans are generally only made for a finite period for exhibition or study purposes. In the case of exhibitions, the Museum recognises that it is preferable to borrow from other publicly funded institutions, before it borrows from private organisations or individuals. Only in very special circumstances will material be accepted on loan for reasons other than exhibition or study, as such loans have an impact on the Museum's resources and finances and are a liability. No object will be accepted on 'Permanent Loan' a term which has no legal status. The period of all loans will be agreed in writing between the Museum Curator/Assistant Curator and the owner of the object at the time of deposit. Where the term of a loan has expired, it may be renewed or extended for further finite periods, at the discretion of both the owner and the Museum Curator/Assistant Curator.

Similarly, to the objects in the permanent collection, objects taken in on loan are generally to have an association with Limerick City and County. In circumstances where the object may complete a gap in the archaeological/historical record, objects from outside of this geographical area may be borrowed.

### **Limitations**

Limerick Museum will abide by any law regarding archaeological sites and artefacts, including the National Monuments Act 1930 and its amendments in 1954, 1987, 1994 and 2004; the National Cultural Institutions Act 1997; and any subsequent Acts that come into law. The Museum recognises the authority of the statutory bodies and their responsibilities.

Where an object is offered as a donation, in good faith, and the prospective donor is uncertain of the identity of the legal owner/s and the Museum is unable to find this out as a result of its own reasonable efforts, the Museum Curator shall be permitted to accept the object, provided a permanent and detailed record of the circumstances and known facts is made at the time of its acceptance.

With regard to biological and geological material, the Museum will not acquire by any direct or indirect means, any specimen that has been collected, sold or otherwise transferred in

contravention of any national or international wildlife protection or natural history conservation law of the Republic of Ireland or any other country, except with the express consent of an appropriate outside authority.

Limerick Museum acknowledges that the National Museum of Ireland, the National Gallery of Ireland, the National Library of Ireland and the Local Authority Museums have specific areas in which they collect. The Museum will work with the above-specified institutions to ensure that material is preserved in the place most appropriate, given the nature of the objects and their provenance.

The acquisition of objects is to a certain extent, determined by the availability of suitable storage space, as mentioned above. Where the acquisition of any object would result in significant implications in respect of storage, conservation or display and/or significant financial implications the matter will be referred to an external professional party for advice. The Museum will generally not acquire objects that the Museum Curator considers to be impractical to house in the Museum's existing limited storage facilities.

As Limerick Museum does not have a conservator on its staff, it will not acquire objects where there is a conservation need that would have a cost implication beyond the means of the Museum.

## **Obligations**

It is the Museum's policy to keep all files relating to acquisitions and possible acquisitions up-to-date on an on-going basis. Museum staff will complete all documentation relevant to its acquisitions, permanent donation forms, and any additional documents that may need to be completed in order to transfer the title of an object at the time an object's acquisition. For objects taken in on loan, a Loan Agreement is completed with the Lender. All documentation, including any correspondence, is filed in a fire-proof filing cabinet on-site.

The Museum practices preventative conservation in both its display and storage areas. Objects are kept in environments suitable to their material and condition. The Museum endeavours to have any objects that are acquired which are in need of urgent treatment professionally conserved as a matter of priority. It is the practice of Limerick Museum to consult with the National Museum of Ireland before the conservation of archaeological artefacts takes place as licenses have to be applied for. More specialist conservation work is out-sourced to a consultant conservator.

The safety and security of the collections at Limerick Museum is the prime responsibility of the Museum, with procedures in place to ensure that the building is secured at all times. The galleries and storage areas are alarmed and the alarm system is monitored by a security company. Off-site storage areas which contain museum collections are continually locked and alarmed and are only accessed by Museum staff.

Limerick Museum endeavours to give as much access to the collection as is safe to do so considering its staffing and space constraints. Currently all objects in the collection, with the exception of any that may be on loan, are available to researchers and members of the public for examination by appointment. The Museum only permits material to be examined within the Museum building during normal working hours and under staff supervision. A person who may require extensive access to the collection may be required to present a letter of reference and must give at least one month's notice before the intended period of research. The use of images from and references to Limerick Museum's collections must first be approved by the Museum Curator/Assistant Curator, and in each and every case, attribution given to Limerick Museum as laid down in Limerick Museum's copyright form. Failure to do so will result in a breach of copyright.

Limerick Museum is committed to using its collections for research and we have a strong online presence in this capacity. Limerick Museum, for example, was the first Local Authority Museum to have a fully searchable online catalogue. Additionally, online exhibitions - curated or commissioned by Limerick Museum are shared on our website – please see <https://www.limerick.ie/limerick-museum>. Social media is also used on a weekly basis to communicate information on the collections.

Limerick Museum is committed to providing interpretative displays to the public. Objects either from the Museum's collection or those borrowed from other institutions or individuals comprise the displays. The displays generally use Limerick City and County – its people, past and present as the inspiration for its exhibitions. While the Museum is not in a position in terms of space or finance to display all of its collection at any one time, it does endeavour to rotate exhibitions on a regular basis. All objects put on display are accompanied by a label containing the following information: object name; its history and date and the donor or lenders name – if requested, the donors or lenders name will be omitted from the label. In its programme of temporary exhibitions the Museum strives to include objects from its own collection where suitable.