

Great North Museum:
Hancock Library



Library Collections Management Policy

Policy consists of:

Library Collection Management Policy

Appendix A – Cowen Collection

Appendix B – NHSN Collection

Appendix C – SANT Collection

Appendix D – Children's Collection

Appendix E – Museum Collection

Policy applies to:

All North East Museums staff and volunteers

All NHSN staff, trustees and volunteers

All SANT staff, trustees and volunteers

Relevant staff at Newcastle University Library and
School of History, Classics and Archaeology

Supporting Documents

This policy should be used in conjunction with other GNMH Library, GNMH, NEM, NU, NHSN and SANT policies and documents, including Equality Policies, Data Privacy Notices, Safeguarding Policies, Collections Development Policies.

NHSN's North East Nature Archive (NENA) is guided by its own Collections Development Policy.

Adoption Date

01/2026

Review Date

Every five years, or earlier if needed.

1. About this Policy

The purpose of this policy is to provide a statement and summary of the Great North Museum: Hancock (GNMH) Library's approach to collection development and management. It is a general statement guiding all collections held within the Library.

This policy is an internal document to provide guidance to GNMH and society staff and volunteers who work with the collections in the selection of material, to assist with focus on user needs and to aid in the orientation of new staff and volunteers. It also works as a public document to provide information on existing collections and future collecting activity.

We all have a responsibility to comply with appropriate legal, ethical and sectoral standards and best-practice guidance in relation to collection care, documentation and use. As such, this policy draws on the Chartered Institute of Information and Library Professionals' (CILIP) best-practice guidance and policy statements on collection management, North East Museums' (NEM) policies, Great North Museum: Hancock policies.

This policy also reflects NEM's Mission and Commitments (2024):

Our mission is to welcome and connect people to the past, present and future of the North East through stories, shared spaces and experiences.

We will help people understand and act on local and global challenges:

- **Equality** – we will provide a warm welcome to everyone, break down barriers caused by inequality and discrimination and share diverse stories.
- **Wellbeing** – we will use our spaces and services to support people's physical and mental health.
- **Social Mobility** – we will deliver learning experiences, volunteer opportunities and pathways for personal development for people of all ages and backgrounds.
- **Climate** – we will raise awareness about the environment and encourage people to act for a sustainable future.

- **Place** – we will celebrate North East England, inspire local pride and use our resources to support research, innovation and economic regeneration.

1.1

Language and Abbreviations

The term 'Library' will be used to include all collections held within the space, as well as for the space itself. Exceptions and society-specific arrangements will be outlined in the appendices.

The following abbreviations will be used:

CA

Controlled Access

(staff access only area within the Library)

CILIP

Chartered Institute of Information and Library Professionals

DCMS

Department for Culture, Media and Sport

DGM

David Gardner Medwin room (locked archive store in the Library)

EDI

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

GNMH

Great North Museum: Hancock

MA

Museum Association

NCC

Newcastle City Council

NEM

North East Museums

NENA

North East Nature Archive

NHSN

Natural History Society of Northumbria

NU

Newcastle University

NU-HCA

Newcastle University School of History Classics
and Archaeology

PA

Public Access (main Library area open to the
public)

RC

Resource Centre (Library store at Discovery
Museum)

SANT

Society of Antiquaries Newcastle upon Tyne

2.

Our Collections

2.1

Introduction

The Library contains collections from the Natural History Society of Northumbria (NHSN), The Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne (SANT) and Newcastle University's School of History, Classics & Archaeology (Cowen). It contains books and journal titles on topics relating to natural history, local history, and archaeology. It also has a small children's section with books relating to the Museum's collections. The Library is also developing a collection for GNMH staff and volunteers based on current museum practice and issues around decolonisation, repatriation, and equity, equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI).

The Library houses the North East Nature Archive (NENA), which is managed by NHSN.

2.2

History of the Library

The Library was purpose-built during the Museum's refurbishment in 2009 when the three collections were brought together into one library. However, the libraries of SANT and NHSN can both be traced back to the early 19th Century, shortly after both societies originated from Newcastle's Literary and Philosophical Society.

The Library is managed by North East Museums (NEM) and Newcastle University (NU). A professional librarian is employed by NEM/NCC.

The Library is open to the public and is free for all to use as a reference library during the Library's opening hours. Members of NU, NHSN and SANT have borrowing rights to their respective societies'/institution's collections.

2.3

Core Collections

The Library is made up of three core collections and two support collections. The core collections are ultimately managed by their respective institutions.

2.3i

Cowen Collection

The Cowen Collection belongs to Newcastle University's School of History, Classics and Archaeology (NU-HCA). With material from the 18th century to the current day, the Cowen Collection includes over 9000 books and a range of journals and offprints. It provides an excellent research resource for students, academics and general study.

2.3ii

NHSN Collection

NHSN began acquiring material for its library from its foundation in 1829. The NHSN Collection now contains over 10,000 books and around 500 journal titles, around 100 of which are still current. It is an impressive and comprehensive collection dedicated to the natural world.

2.3iii

SANT Collection

SANT has been acquiring material for its extensive and unique library since 1813. The collection contains over 10,000 books, the earliest dating back to the 17th century, and more than 300 journal titles, a number of which are still current. Also available is an extensive map collection with over 1000 maps, as well as over 1800 tracts which include a wide range of fascinating pamphlets, and other ephemera on a diverse range of subjects. The collection is particularly strong in the areas of local history and archaeology incorporating a rich collection of material on Hadrian's Wall, Roman Britain and the heritage of Tyneside.

2.4

Support Collections

The Library has collections that supplement the wider Museum collections and activities. The support collections are managed by the GNMH Library Co-ordinator.

2.4i

Children's Collection

We have a small collection of children's books within the Library that relate to the Museum. It contains reference books about history, archaeology, science and nature, as well as picture books. Books within this collection are aimed at younger visitors who might want to find out more or just have a moment of quiet in the Museum.

2.4ii

GNMH Museum Collection

The GNMH Museum Collection is a small collection centred on themes of museums and EDI, including decolonisation. This collection is available within the Public Access area of the Library, but with borrowing rights to NEM staff and volunteers.

3.

How We Collect

3.1 Collecting Principles

The Library collections are unique and distinctive in their range and variety. The Library will continue to value the varying content, context and materiality of its collections.

While the Library contains ‘legacy’ collections, all efforts should be employed to widen the information, voices, stories, histories and discoveries of new acquisitions.

Please see appendices for the collecting principles of each collection housed within the Library.

3.2 Ethical and Legal Considerations

The Library recognises its responsibility to ensure that care of collections, collections arrangements and use of collections will meet the requirements of the relevant standards, advice and guidelines for museums, libraries and archives.

It is the responsibility of all to work within the parameters of legal requirements and relevant professional codes of ethics, specifically:

3.2i Spoliation

The Library will use the statement of principles set out by the National Museum’s Director’s Council (2021) *Spoliation of Works of Art during the Nazi, Holocaust and World War II period*: www.nationalmuseums.org.uk/what-we-do/contributing-sector/cultural-property/spoliation/spoliation_statement/

3.2ii Combatting Illicit Trade

The Library follows DCSM’s (2005) *Combatting Illicit Trade: Due diligence guidelines for museums, libraries and archives on collecting and borrowing cultural material*: https://archive-media.museumsassociation.org/combatingillicittrade_dcsm.pdf.

The Library will not acquire any item, specimen or collection unless it is satisfied that it has not been acquired in, or exported from, its country of origin (or any intermediate country in which it may have been legally owned) in violation of that country’s laws (for the purpose of this paragraph ‘country of origin’ includes the United Kingdom).

We do not accept any item or collection which has been illicitly traded, in accordance with the provisions of the UNESCO 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, which the UK ratified with effect from 2002, and the Dealing in Cultural Object (Offences) Act 2003.

3.2iii CILIP’s Ethical Framework

The Library adheres to CILIP’s *Ethical Framework* (2018), which also includes a code of conduct and set of commitments: https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.cilip.org.uk/resource/resmgr/cilip/policy/new_ethical_framework/cilip_s_ethical_framework.pdf

3.2iv Museum Association’s Code of Ethics

As part of GNMH, the Library will also follow the Museums Association’s *Code of Ethics* (2014-15), which is currently under review: <https://www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/ethics/code-of-ethics/#>

3.2v Intellectual Freedom

The Library is guided by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (1999) statement on libraries and intellectual freedom: <https://repository.ifla.org/items/72090712-b389-450b-94df-e05fd6c582d4>

3.2vi Harmful Content

The Great North Museum: Hancock Library acknowledges the potential for the existence of harmful content included in its collections.

As libraries have a responsibility to carry the widest variety of materials it should be clear that the inclusion of work in the GNMH Library's collections, on its shelves or in its catalogues, is not to be taken as in any way an endorsement of the views expressed within the work or a mark of approval of the work's author(s).

3.3 Responsibility for Collecting

It is the responsibility, including financial, of NHSN and SANT to acquire new material under the guidance of this collections policy.

Procurement, management and care of active journals, either by subscription or exchange, are the responsibility of NHSN and SANT.

The Cowen Collection is not an active collection in terms of acquiring new books. As such, there is no NU budget associated with this collection. However, new items may be added at the Library Coordinator's discretion.

The Children's Collection and GNMH Museum Collection fall under the responsibility of the Library Coordinator, in collaboration with relevant teams, committees and societies. Additions to this collection are at the Library Coordinator's discretion.

3.4 Limitations on Collecting

The Library has limited and finite space. Each collection has dedicated shelf space within the Public Access, Controlled Access, David Gardner-Medwin archive areas and at the Discovery Museum (Resource Centre).

Other limitations include the Library's environment, limited opening hours, staffing and arrangements for care of the collections.

3.5 Methods of Collecting

Material will be acquired for all collections through a range of methods:

- Donated material
- Purchase from booksellers and other reputable sellers
- Bequest
- Collection from events
- Exchanges
- Subscription

All items donated to the Library will be the property of the collection to which it is donated.

Potential donors will be informed that if their donation is not wanted for the Library then it will be subject to disposal.

Where appropriate, items acquired should be in good condition and require minimal conservation treatment.

3.6 What We Do Not Collect

The Library will not normally collect:

General

- Material that poses a risk to the collections and/or staff and Library users
- Material on which donors place unreasonable restrictions
- Material for which the appropriate permissions have not been acquired and/or the approved legal and ethical standards have not been followed
- Biological or geological specimens/material.
- Archaeological artefacts
- Public records as defined by the Public Records Act
- Digital data sets
- Material for which we do not have the correct storage facilities or expertise to properly care for

Printed and Published Materials

- Duplicate copies of prints that are not parts of a larger collection
- Duplicates or variant editions which do not contain any significant annotations or have relevant provenance
- Published or printed items which are available and easily accessible in other libraries, unless they fill obvious gaps in coverage
- Published or printed items from organisations that have sufficient infrastructure and capacity such that they might reasonably be expected to care for, and provide access to, their own archival heritage
- Items that are in poor condition or require extensive conservation treatment
- Items that are freely available online

3.7

Collecting Policies of Other Libraries

Collection policies at other libraries should be taken into account when collecting in the same or related areas or subject fields. Other libraries and organisations should be consulted where any conflict of interest may arise or to define areas of specialisms, in order to avoid unnecessary duplication and waste of resources.

Specific reference is made to the following organisations:

- North East Museums
- Newcastle University Library and Special Collections
- The Lit & Phil Library
- The Mining Institute Library
- Newcastle City Library

The Library should aim to collaborate rather than compete with other collecting organisations.

3.8

Acquisitions not covered by the Policy

Acquisitions outside of the current stated policy will only be made in exceptional circumstances. Such decisions will be made after proper consideration by relevant society members and Library staff.

3.9

Cataloguing our Collections

Newcastle University Library Service hold the responsibility for creating, maintaining and managing GNMH Library records through their Library Management System.

Items from all three collections currently in the Library should have a record and be searchable using Newcastle University's Library Search.

It is the responsibility of the individual societies to generate new stock information for creating library records. This shall be done in collaboration with the GNMH Library Coordinator, who facilitates record creation with Newcastle University Library's Content and Discovery Team.

Where there are items awaiting addition, or a backlog of items to be added to the Library Management System, a searchable record should be made available to the Library Coordinator.

4.

Collections Review, Appraisal and Disposal

4.1 Reviewing and Appraising Our Collections

The Library may identify and remove unwanted items as part of the collecting and cataloguing process. This may be to remove duplicate material, but may also involve removing material that is outside the scope of the Library's collecting or which is not suitable for long-term preservation.

The Library will ensure that disposal is carried out openly and with transparency.

Review and appraisals will be done by, or in consultation with, the societies and NU-HCA and Newcastle University Library.

4.2 Disposal Principles

Material may be removed from the Library for a number of reasons. The main ones are:

- It does not meet the collecting criteria
- It could find a better audience if housed elsewhere
- It may be freely available online
- The wider landscape has changed since acquisition
- It poses a risk to our collections and/or staff and users.
- It is damaged and its rarity does not merit repair
- It is damaged beyond repair
- It is deemed lost

The societies and NU-HCA are responsible for disposal decisions.

The societies and NU-HCA will ensure that the full authority to dispose of material is in place before a decision is made.

The Library Coordinator will consult on any material under consideration for disposal with the societies, the academic community, Newcastle University Library and users of the material itself.

Catalogued items identified for disposal should be listed and sent to Newcastle University's Content and Discovery Team for processing before items are removed from the shelves. Further checks are required for Cowen items.

Appropriate records should be kept of all disposals from our collections.

Deaccessioned material should be marked as such, so that the fact of their legitimate sale and their provenance are clearly recorded in the item itself.

Once a decision to dispose of material in a collection has been taken, priority will be given to retaining it within the public domain, unless it is to be destroyed. It will therefore be offered in the first instance directly to other libraries likely to be interested in its acquisition.

When disposal of an item is being considered, the societies will establish if it was acquired with the aid of an external funding organisation or bequest fund. In such cases, any conditions attached to the original grant or bequest will be followed. This may include repayment of the original grant and a proportion of the proceeds if the item is disposed of by sale.

4.3 Disposal by Gift, Sale or Destruction

Materials may be disposed of by gift, sale or destruction (in the case of an item too badly damaged or deteriorated to be of any use for the purposes of the collections or for reasons of health and safety).

The Library does not undertake disposal motivated primarily by financial reasons or for the sole purpose of raising funds.

Any monies received by the societies from the disposal of collection items by sale will be applied for the benefit of the collections. This normally means the purchase of further acquisitions or improvements relating to the care of collections.

Items will not be disposed of by exchange.