

museum

National Museum of Ireland

Ard-Mhúsaem na hÉireann

Collections Acquisition Strategy

Irish Antiquities Division

Strategy No: NMI-STR-DEV-001	Version No: 2019-10-07-v2-FINAL
Date Approved: 21-11-2019	Approved By: Board
Number of Pages: 5	Signature:
Review Period: 2 Years	Division Responsible: Irish Antiquities Division
Implementation Date: 21-11-2019	Review Date: 21-6-2023

Collections Acquisition Strategy of the Irish Antiquities Division

This acquisition strategy is predicated upon the provisions of legislation and nothing in the strategy outlined here negates the statutory functions of the Director of the National Museum of Ireland under the relevant acts (*National Monuments Act, 1930 to 2014, National Cultural Institutions Act, 1997; Merchant Shipping (Salvage and Wreck) Act, 1993*).

This strategy operates within the framework of the NMI Collections Acquisition Policy as determined by the Board of the National Museum of Ireland.

Introduction

The Irish Antiquities Division is responsible for the curatorial care and management of its collection of Irish and foreign archaeological objects and their associated archives. It also has responsibility for caring for the Museum's collection of foreign ethnographical objects. In addition to a core collection, the Division holds growing collections of finds from archaeological excavations. Archaeological objects are acquired for the most part in accordance with the relevant sections of the National Monuments legislation, *i.e.* they are claimed on behalf of the State by NMI. The Irish Antiquities Division is also guided by various policies and EU directives (see below). In addition, the Irish Antiquities Division carries out a range of duties relating to the protection of the portable heritage of Ireland laid out in the National Monuments (Amendment) Acts 1930 to 2014. The legal definition of 'an archaeological object' is broad and can include objects that ordinarily would have little historical or archaeological value:

Under the National Monuments (Amendment) Act 1994 (Section 14) an archaeological object is defined as "any chattel whether in a manufactured or partly manufactured or an unmanufactured state which by reason of the archaeological interest attaching thereto or of its association with any Irish historical event or person has a value substantially greater than its intrinsic (including artistic) value, and the said expression includes ancient human, animal or plant remains."

Irish Antiquities - Collection

The Irish Archaeological Collection is the primary repository of ancient Irish artefacts and is indispensable to research into the development of Irish civilisation from prehistoric times until the end of the Middle Ages and beyond. The collection is significant in extent, diversity and quality and four areas are of acknowledged international standing. These are the prehistoric gold collections, ecclesiastical metalwork and personal ornaments of the medieval period, the collection of Iron Age bog bodies and the Viking Dublin assemblage. While the cut-off point for material collected by the division is around the year 1550, material of later date may be collected where it has sufficient archaeological find context. Some antiquities of post-medieval date have been deposited in the Irish Folklife Division.

Irish Antiquities – Acquisition strategy

Legislation forms the basis of the acquisitions strategy of the Irish Antiquities Division. Under the National Monuments Acts 1930 to 2014 archaeological objects found in Ireland without a known owner are property of the State. Objects deemed by the Director to be of primarily local importance may be deposited with designated museums (see below under *Designated Museums*)

Wherever the opportunity arises, the Irish Antiquities Division will also attempt to acquire (by donation or purchase or otherwise) Irish archaeological objects from private collections formed prior to the Supreme Court ruling on the State's ownership of archaeological objects.

It is the strategy of the Irish Antiquities Division to acquire all objects found in Ireland that are deemed to have a sufficient level of archaeological, historical, scientific or artistic merit attaching to them. This can be taken to mean all archaeological objects other than:

- 1 Objects that are damaged beyond usability
- 2 Objects of low scientific or cultural value
- 3 Relatively modern mass-produced objects that are without a meaningful archaeological or historical context or that are artistically or otherwise unexceptional
- 4 Objects for which other more suitable repository exists

Of particular importance in terms of acquisition is recording the provenance of the object and details of the discovery so that the full archaeological context can be understood. In the case of recent finds, this will generally require fieldwork to be undertaken, where the IAD officer (often accompanied by a member of the NMI Conservation Department) will meet the finders, inspect the find-spot and record the particulars pertaining to the discovery. It has been observed over many years that one visit by an NMI officer to a particular area will generally cause other archaeological objects to be reported, and fieldwork is therefore considered to be of utmost importance in the Acquisition Strategy of the Irish Antiquities Division.

- 1 The IAD will seek to gain as much contextual information relation to an acquisition as possible
- 2 This may include survey work, and from time to time excavation
- 3 All contextual information is retained in the IAD file relating to the object and is an important element of curatorial work vital to the understanding of the archaeological object and allows for broader studies to be undertaken

Excavated Finds – Collection

The National Museum of Ireland is the legal repository of all finds from licensed archaeological excavations. This is a fast-growing collection particularly in the light of the increase in the amounts of archaeological excavations being carried out on major infrastructural projects in recent years and poses particular challenges to NMI. This collection marks the Irish Antiquities Division out as the curatorial department with the fastest growing collection within the National Museum.

Excavated Finds- Acquisition Strategy

Under the National Monuments Act the National Museum is the legal repository of finds from excavations carried out in the state, and the Museum is charged with care and maintenance of this material. In recognition of the fact that the NMI is the end-user in the archaeological excavation process, the Director of the NMI has a statutory consultative role in excavation licensing and the IAD carries out this function on behalf of the Director. This enables NMI to comment on finds retrieval strategies to ensure that comprehensive and appropriate strategies are employed by licence-holders. NMI is the state repository for all archaeological objects found in Ireland and accepts these

into its collections once the full excavation report has been submitted finds appropriately conserved and packed, and listed in the prescribed manner. Details of these are available on the IAD's *Advice Notes for Excavators* document, which is available online. Faunal material, palaeobotanical material and archaeometallurgical waste material are not automatically accepted into NMI collections and their acceptance will depend on the specific recommendations of the specialist and will be in accordance with best practice. It is the role of the IAD to inspect, from time to time, premises where objects found during excavations are stored, and to provide advice on finds retrieval amongst other matters.

European Archaeology – Collection

The Irish Antiquities Division holds a relatively small collection of around 1,000 British and European antiquities that were acquired mainly for comparative purposes.

European Archaeology –Acquisition Strategy

The Irish Antiquities Division does not aim to acquire objects in these areas, but will on occasion acquire material that has a particular connection with an Irish historical person or event or which provides a significant addition to our knowledge of the existing collections.

Classical and Egyptian - Collection

The Irish Antiquities Division's holdings include collections of foreign archaeology, including Egyptian and Classical material from the ancient Mediterranean. There are around 3,000 objects in the Egyptian collection, 1,000 Roman antiquities, about 600 Greek objects, mainly vases, and around 500 Cypriot antiquities. These collections are not being added to currently.

Classical and Egyptian – Acquisitions Strategy

The Irish Antiquities Division does not aim to acquire objects in these areas, but will on occasion acquire material that has a particular connection with an Irish historical person or event or which provides a significant addition to our knowledge of the existing collections.

Foreign Ethnography - Collection

The Ethnographical collections number around 11,000 objects, which were acquired mainly during the period between 1760 and 1914 and represent a range of cultures. The collections reflect Irish exploration of the world from the 18th century to the present day, as well as their role within the British Empire. The main collections come from Oceania and the Pacific (3,600 objects), West and Southern Africa (4,500 objects), the Americas (1,700) and South and East Asia (1,100). There is some overlap with the Art & Industrial Division with regard to material of Asian, Classical and Egyptian origin.

Foreign Ethnography – Acquisitions strategy

The Division does not aim to acquire objects in these areas, but will on occasion acquire material that has a particular connection with an Irish historical person or event or which provides a significant addition to our knowledge of the existing collections.

Designated Museums

By agreement with the National Museum of Ireland, museums designated under *The National Cultural Institutions Act, 1997* may acquire archaeological objects that are State property and which are predominately of local rather than national interest. The Designated County Museums are as follows (2019): Donegal County Museum, Monaghan County Museum, Cavan County Museum, Louth County Museum, Carlow County Museum, Waterford Treasures, Cork Public Museum, Kerry

County Museum, Clare County Museum, Limerick Museum, Galway City Museum and Tipperary County Museum.

Where archaeological objects having a Northern Ireland provenance become available for acquisition, it is the strategy of the National Museum of Ireland to allow the Ulster Museum first option to purchase.

ACQUISITIONS – Legislation and Policy Documents

The activities of the National Museum of Ireland are subject to the provisions of statute law, official policy, international conventions and European Union regulations and directives:

Statute Law

The National Monuments Act, 1930 (Amended 1954, 1987, 1994, 2004; Local Government Reform Act 2014)

The Merchant Shipping (Salvage and Wreck) Act, 1993

The National Cultural Institutions Act, 1997

Several other statutes that regulate terrestrial or maritime development and exploration also include measures to protect the archaeological heritage

Policy Documents

Framework and Principles for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage, Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands, 1999

Policy and Guidelines on Archaeological Excavation, Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands, 1999

National Heritage Plan, Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands, 2002

International Conventions

UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, Paris, 1970, (ratified by Ireland 1992)

UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage, Paris, 2001

European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage, Valetta, 1992, ratified by Ireland in 1997

United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), Montego Bay, 1982, ratified by Ireland, 1997

UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects, Rome, 1995

European Union Regulations and Directives

European Union, Council Regulation on the export of cultural goods, 9 December 1992 (EEC No 3911/92).

European Union, Return of Cultural Objects Regulations, 1994.

European Union, Council Directive on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment (85/337/EEC). (1985.06.27) (EIA Directive) 06/27/1985.

European Union, Council Resolution on cooperation between cultural institutions in the field of museums, 24 November 2003 (2003/C 295/01).