

Appendix 2 Gressenhall Farm & Workhouse

2. History of the collections

Curator Bridget Yates set up the Norfolk Rural Life Museum in 1976, having worked since 1970 on sourcing the rural life collections which would be its foundation. At its creation a significant number of rural items from the Norwich social history collections of the Museum of Norwich at the Bridewell (formerly the Bridewell Museum) and Strangers' Hall were transferred to the new museum.

Bridget was curator of the rural life collections for 18 years, collecting throughout the county, often at a prolific rate – at times 500 objects per week were collected. Another major influence on the collection was Dick Joice, who advised and supported the collection during its formative years in his role as Chairman of the Friends of Gressenhall. Collecting slowed in the 1980s and 1990s but continued to be focussed on rural crafts, trades and agriculture. The significant Taylor's Collection from a seed merchant's shop and warehouse, numbering over 5000 items, was collected in 1982.

During the early part of the 21st century there was a gradual change in collecting policy with a shift in focus to collecting specific crafts, trades and industries currently missing from the collection rather than the broader sweep of earlier years. From 2006 the Curator and Assistant Curator with the support of Bridget Yates (via a Monument Fellowship funded by the Museums Association) have worked to standardise collections management. Collecting now focuses on objects with a context. Significantly, it was not until 2014 that items relating to Norfolk's workhouses were actively accessioned.

3. An overview of current collections

The accessioned collections are focussed on Norfolk's rural life. They encompass around 60,000 objects with a broad geographical spread from across the county and a chronological span from the late 17th to the mid-20th century, with particular focus on the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

There are specific strengths in vernacular furniture, printed material, agricultural engineering, rural clothing, village shops and grass roots societies, in addition to the more obvious farming collections. The museum buildings, being a workhouse and associated farm, are also key collection items in themselves. Several of the museum's specialist collections, for example in rural trades and union activity, are nationally significant. The collections clearly match the key aim of the museum to reflect the changing nature of Norfolk as a rural county.

A rationalisation programme is identifying a range of objects that sit outside the museum's current collecting policy, mainly duplicate items or those in poor condition or which have no Norfolk connection, but there are no significant parts of the collection that are not relevant to the museum's purpose.

Some historical items, such as those related to the working farm, object handling or set dressing are not accessioned as their use implies they will eventually be discarded due to wear and tear. Such items are duplicates of those in the main collection and/or have no connection to Norfolk or wider national significance. The museum always ensures donors of objects used in this way are clear that the donated objects are not part of its accessioned collections.

4. Themes and priorities for future collecting

Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse aims to collect material which reflects the changing character of rural Norfolk. Collecting should concentrate on what is special and unique about this area and is carried out for the benefit of local people and visitors to the area.

Geographical area

The area covered by the collecting policy of Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse is the whole of Norfolk. However, the museum will in general not seek to collect from the following areas but will instead refer material to the relevant NMS museums:

- The conurbation of Norwich
- King's Lynn and district
- Great Yarmouth and district
- Cromer
- Thetford

Subject areas

Social history – general

Collecting will concentrate on material and associated information that reflects the changing character of rural life in Norfolk, including 20th and 21st century developments. This will encompass material relating to community life, domestic life, personal life and working life as outlined below. General principles applying to collecting are:

1. Collecting focuses on objects that have a context. These are accompanied by photographs of the owner, maker and/or user and where information can be recorded about the object, its' use, role and significance. Oral histories will be recorded, where possible, to accompany objects when the item is transferred to the museum. These are stored in the Norfolk Sound Archive at the Norfolk Record Office.
2. We will collect evidence of topographic change across the county using two dimensional material – photographs, prints etc.
3. There is a small unrepresentative collection of “general” social history objects with no special Norfolk links. This collection will not be expanded except for handling material for schools or for “set dressing” displays.

Collecting will exclude the following:

- Military material. The Royal Norfolk Regimental Museum has such a collection.
- Material associated with urban areas of Norfolk
- Material relating to railways, aviation or maritime and water transport

Community Life

1. Collecting will aim to build a picture of the lives of people in rural Norfolk within living memory and contemporary life, in consultation with these communities.
2. The Women's Land Army and Timber Corps in Norfolk is an active area of collection.
3. Religious life.
4. Political life – including local government, trade unions and Friendly Societies, particularly agricultural unions.
5. County-wide services provided by local government including education, law and order and public health excluding Norwich, King's Lynn and Yarmouth. Norfolk's workhouses are a collecting priority. The collection includes material from a wide range of Norfolk's 22 workhouses encompassing paper ephemera, oral histories and objects. This is an area of active collection and we are actively seeking material relating to the entire history of workhouse buildings within the county. Archival material from Norfolk's workhouses is accessioned by and stored at the Norfolk Record Office.
6. Community costume and textiles, including trade union, community groups and uniform. Duplication with the Costume & Textile collection will be avoided.
7. Architecture: limitations of space preclude further collecting of architectural fittings or expansion of the Norfolk brick collection. The Norfolk County Council Historic Environment Service has a good record of historic building techniques and materials.

Domestic Life

Collecting will focus on material representing life in rural communities, excluding material relevant to Strangers' Hall.

Personal Life

1. Collecting focuses on objects that have a 'personal context', and collections relating to people with a role specific to rural life in Norfolk are a priority. These should be accompanied by photographs of the owner, maker and/or user and information should be recorded about the object's relationship to the person, its use, role and significance. Oral histories will be recorded, where possible, to accompany objects when items are transferred to the museum. These are stored in the Norfolk Sound Archive at the Norfolk Record Office.
2. George Edwards: material associated with George Edwards, particularly his active role within Norfolk Methodism, trade unions and his political life.

Working Life

Collection of working life objects is a priority for the following areas:

1. New rural developments (20th and 21st century collecting), for example tourism and use of migrant labour.

2. Rural working costume and textiles (particularly agricultural clothing). The prime NMS collection of this type of material. Duplication with the Costume & Textile collection will be avoided.

Collecting in this area has been a priority in the past, and a wide ranging collection has been built up. Consequently only particularly significant objects or items will be considered in the following areas:

3. Agriculture and horticulture
4. Rural crafts
5. Retail trades
6. Transport (excluding railway, aviation and maritime/water transport material)
7. Rural industries only excluding Norwich, King's Lynn, Great Yarmouth and Thetford.

Archaeology

Collecting will be restricted to workhouse archaeology from Norfolk workhouse's only. Limited collecting of prehistoric material for educational purposes in consultation with the NMS Archaeology department.

Fine Art

1. Collecting will focus on developing the existing collection of naive works by local artists with subjects appropriate to other areas of the collecting policy.
2. Art work reflecting specifically Norfolk's rural life – example Norfolk breed animal portraits from Norfolk farms, building on existing collection.
3. Fine art depicting Norfolk workhouses is a current collecting priority.

Limitations on collecting

Museum storage space, especially for large objects, is limited which is a constraint on collecting significant material. This makes it essential at present to be very selective when adding to the collections. This lack of space needs to be addressed; relocation of some material may be possible.

The contemporary collection of objects relating to rural life is complex, especially when considering changes in agricultural technology that involve the collection of extremely large items of machinery. This is well recognised by the Rural Museums Network. Contemporary collecting must take into consideration the long term preservation of the item and whether suitable storage space is available for large objects. It must also consider the necessity for contemporary collecting to be indicative of how life in rural Norfolk is different to elsewhere. The museum does not collect items that demonstrate the generalities of contemporary English rural life, but rather objects that illustrate the specifics of how life in rural Norfolk is different to other English counties.

5. Themes and priorities for rationalisation and disposal

The stores and external storage space at Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse contain a large number of social history objects. These were brought into the collections during the 1970s at a time when museums were generally actively collecting items

in a relatively uncontrolled manner, without reference to an official collecting policy or quality control. As a result many collections contain duplicate objects, objects that are duplicated in other museums and/or poor quality objects that now require large conservation resources to be of display standard. Some of the objects have little or no provenance and some have no known relevance to the local history of the area. As a result these fall outside the Acquisition Policy of the museum today.

Some social history objects take up large areas of floor space and are in many cases heavy and cumbersome. As a result access to other stored and better provenanced collections has been made difficult and on occasion, impossible for health and safety reasons. In some cases appropriate storage for very large items is not available and consequently items have been stored in external areas.

Priorities for rationalisation and disposal at Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse are:

1. duplicate objects within the collections
2. objects that are duplicated in other museums, both NMS and the wider sector
3. poor quality objects that now require large conservation resources to be of display standard
4. objects with little or no provenance
5. objects with no known relevance to the local history of the area
6. very large items in poor condition with no appropriate storage facilities, which also meet at least one of the other rationalisation criteria

7. Collecting policies of other museums

As well as the considerations for NMS as a whole, Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse will make special consideration and reference to the collecting policies of the Museum of East Anglian Life, Denny Abbey Museum and Museum of English Rural Life. Reference to the collecting policies of members of the Museums Norfolk Group will also be made where material may have a more suitable local museum.

In cases where local material is perceived to be significant to the collections of specialist NMS departments or museums it should be accessioned there but made available on loan to Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse for display if required.

