

The Royal Society of Tasmania Collection Development Policy



Collection Vision

The mission of the Royal Society of Tasmania is the advancement of knowledge. The RST strives to collect, preserve, promote, and make accessible rare, archival and/or primary source materials that advances historical, scientific, cultural, and technological knowledge for the benefit of Tasmanians. The RST's Library and Art Collections were built upon the original foundations of the Society. The Society now builds its collections based on existing strengths and identified opportunities for growth as determined by institutional priority and anticipated future significance. The Society will increase its impact through internal and external collaborative initiatives, which seek to raise awareness, improve access, and expand the use of the collections.

The Society acknowledges that past practices of collection, description and representation of Tasmanian Aboriginal people and their material culture by the Society contributed to beliefs that continue to be misleading and destructive. We acknowledge that material within our collections contains historical records, publications and artworks that reflect social and individual attitudes throughout Tasmania's history since colonisation. They contain words, descriptions and information that may be insensitive or inappropriate and may be upsetting.

Sub-collections

The Royal Society of Tasmania Collection is divided into two distinct sub-collections, the Library and Art collections.

1: The Library Collection

The RST Library, on long-term loan, and stored at the University of Tasmania, is comprised of five collection categories - books, journal titles, private archival collection material, maps, and the archival records of the Society itself.

The RST book collection retains a substantial proportion of the library amassed during the formative years of the RST. The associated records for the library books have been retained in the Society's administrative archive. The map collection illustrates the connections of colonial Tasmania to its British connections.

The RST journal collection comprises local, national and international periodicals on a range of subjects, with an emphasis on the sciences. The Society's exchange programme with Museums, Universities & other Societies, has resulted in 1452 journal titles in the collection, however with the advent of digital publishing, and the increasing online availability to full text journals, the number of active print journals has dramatically declined to 64 titles. Those titles considered historically significant due to their rarity have been moved to the rare book collection store.

The private archival collection category is predominantly early nineteenth century material that documents and illuminates Tasmanian colonial life. Subject matter includes Tasmanian Aboriginals, natural history, early colonial settlement, commerce and business, engineering, shipping, and surveying.

The archival records of the Society itself define and showcase the organisation, provide evidence of transactions and decisions essential to the functions of the society; and include materials and memorabilia which support the Society's significant contribution to the State.

In 2015, the University of Tasmania commissioned, with financial support from the National Library of Australia, a Significance Assessment of its Special & Rare Collections, and the RST Library Collection. The Report included a **Statement of Significance** asserting that:

The Royal Society of Tasmania Collection, owing to the organisation's status as the first non-British society of this nature has significance on a national, if not international scale. With some notable exceptions, the best of the books in its collection are not of great rarity – although many are scarce enough and individually valuable, and many have association value – but the collection itself could be classed as rare. It has high significance as the reflection of the work of an early colonial body of scientific enquiry, located at the very edge of the world (at least the world as it appeared to the European). Many of the members of the RST did pioneering work in the rapidly developing natural sciences in the 19th century, collecting samples for British scientists and/or maintaining regular correspondence with them on these topics, describing numerous species new to science and publishing the results of this work in the RST Papers & Proceedings. The archival record of the Society itself, and the private papers deposited into its care, provide a wealth of material for research of both a scientific and historical nature.

2: The Art Collection

The RST Art Collection is housed at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery on long term loan under an agreement in June 2022.

The works are primarily nineteenth century watercolours, the majority of which were collected at the turn of the twentieth century just prior to federation. They were collected to record the history of early European settlement of Tasmania.

In 2022, the RST received funds under the National Library of Australia's Community Heritage Grants to commission a Significance Assessment of the collection. The **Statement of Significance** reports, in part:

The Royal Society of Tasmania art collection is of National and International Significance primarily in the categories of 19th century Tasmanian women's art, (both professional and amateur), and for original works of art representing the First Peoples of Tasmania.

The RST art collection contains extensive groups of works by seminal professional and amateur artists working in Tasmania from c1830–1860. The works by Meredith, Nixon, Stanley and de Wesselow, represent the largest and more important groups

of these artist's works held anywhere. Without the RST Art Collection, no understanding of those artists could be achieved.

The RST art collection is comprised primarily of works on paper, reflecting the immediacy and efficiency of that medium for accurate artistic documentation/production. This is part of the significance of the whole.

The most important works within the RST Art Collection are those works representing the first peoples of Tasmania, Palawa, by Margaret Legge, and Francis Simpkinson de Wesselow. No other 19th century works by a female European artist survive, of Palawa people. These works are of enormous cultural importance to present day Palawa. They are therefore of international significance for their ability to contribute to an understanding of changed ways of life of First Peoples, and the ongoing impact of Empire/European settlement on Palawa.

Collecting Principles

Collecting is directed by the following principles:

- **Significance** – The object has historic, aesthetic, scientific or research, and/or social or cultural significance (as per *Significance 2.0*) that:
 1. Relates to the vision, statement of significance and the collecting areas outlined in this document.
 2. Relates to content areas nominated as collection development priorities
 3. Will assist in making a lasting contribution to understanding and interpreting the ideas, movements, individual and events of the Royal Society of Tasmania.
- **Provenance** – The origin and/or subsequent history of the object or collection is thoroughly documented and authenticated to the highest standard and consistent with legal and ethical requirements. The Society does not acquire material reasonably suspected to have been looted or stolen.
- **Originality or rarity** – The object or collection is unique or relatively rare, a fine example of its type, or not well represented in the Society's collection, or in other cultural institution's collections.
- **Research value** – The object or collection has potential to hold evidence of what existed in the past, to add to associated stories, or to be used in comparison with other similar objects or collections.
- **Display & Interpretation value** – The object or collection has a high potential to communicate meaning or add to the presentation of ideas and stories.
- **Condition** – The object or collection is suitable for long-term storage, preservation and display with appropriate and sustainable resource outlay, and consideration of whole-of-life costs.

Collection Development Approaches

The Royal Society of Tasmania develops its collections by seeking significant objects that document and represent the ideas, movements, individuals, and events of the Society. RST takes a selective approach to developing its collections, and actively engages with its community to target specific collection needs. Strategic collecting ensures we collect today the objects that will be important for telling our history in the future.

The RST Collections are developed through:

- **Donation** – RST receives offers from the public of objects or collections for donation. In some cases, the Society receives donation offers made under the Cultural Gifts program, administered by the Ministry for the Arts, which offers tax incentives to encourage people to donate items of cultural significance to public cultural organisations. All donations are assessed to ensure acquisitions meets RTS's collection priorities outlined in this document.
- **Purchase** – RST purchases objects at auction; through commercial vendors; by agreements with private vendors; and by commissioning the creation of objects including replicas for the purpose of display. Purchased objects are assessed to ensure acquisitions meet the collecting principles and priorities outlined in this document.
- **Transfers from the RST Council** – Materials that document the activities and administration of the Society are to be transferred via the Secretary of the Society on an annual basis as agreed by the Council minutes.
- **Deaccessioning** – RST selectively deaccessions objects from the collections if reasons to do so are justified. Deaccessioning is a considered and deliberative process, and an important part of refining and developing the collection. Deaccessioning involves the analysis of objects using RST's Collecting & Deaccessioning Principles & Collecting categories outlined in this document.
- **Journal Exchange program** – Institutional & organisational periodicals are exchanged for the Society's annual periodical, *RST Papers and Proceedings*. Exchanges are not assessed according to the collection principles, however as the shift towards electronic titles increases globally, the addition of printed copies to the journal collection decreases.

Deaccessioning Principles

Deaccessioning is the act of lawfully removing an object from an institution's collections. The deaccessioning of an object should be undertaken with a full understanding of its significance, its character and any loss of public trust that might result from such an action. In no event should the potential monetary value of an object be considered as part of the motive for determining whether or not to deaccession.

Deaccessioning is directed by the following principles:

- The object is no longer consistent with the collecting vision and principles of the Society.
- The authenticity or attribution of the object is determined to be false or fraudulent, and the fraudulent object lacks sufficient aesthetic, historical and/or scientific value to warrant retention.
- The object is a duplicate that has no added value as a part of series.
- The object is of poor quality and lacks aesthetic, historical and/or scientific value for exhibition or study purposes.
- The object is of a hazardous nature which may pose a serious occupational health and safety risk.
- The physical condition of the object is so poor that the cost of restoration is disproportionate to the significance of the object.
- The Society is unable to care adequately for the object because of its particular requirements for storage or conservation.
- Objects of a particular genre of which the Society possesses better examples.

- The Society's possession of the object is inconsistent with applicable law or ethical principles. For example, the object was, or may have been, stolen or illegally exported or imported, or the object may be subject to other legal claims for return or restitution.

Before proposing to deaccession an item/items the legal status of the object/s should be reviewed so that the Society can determine that it can be deaccessioned within the Society's legal and ethical principles. The following should be considered:

- The object's authenticity
- The object's legal status of ownership
- Any restrictions or conditions made by the donor of the object
- All the available provenance of the object, including prior ownership, sale, exhibition and import/export history
- Any other conditions and restrictions made at the time of acquisition.

Disposition Principles

Once an object has been deaccessioned from the Society's collection, it is still the property of the Society until ownership has been transferred legally and the object leaves the custody of the Society. Depending on the nature of the deaccessioned object and the rationale for removing it from the collection, the disposition is directed by the following principles:

- Objects that were donated, and where the original donor is still contactable, may be returned to the donor. (Note: exception is where the object was gifted under the Australian Government's Cultural Gift Program, it cannot be returned to the donor as the donor has received the benefit of a tax deduction for the gift).
- Objects that have a significant cultural value, but which do not conform to the Collections Development policy should, wherever possible, be placed with the most appropriate collecting institution, by means of gift, sale or exchange.
- Objects that do not have a significant cultural value but do have a market value may be disposed of by public auction or tender.
- Objects whose trade and movement are governed by any applicable laws or agreements, should only be disposed of in accordance with such laws or agreements.
- Objects that are degraded to the point where they are no longer recognisable or restorable, and which do not have any saleable value, may be destroyed or recycled for materials or components if all other avenues have been exhausted.
- Disposal of hazardous objects or material must only be undertaken after liaison with the relevant government agency and by certified contractors.

Collecting Categories Priorities

1: Library

The RST Library Collections (books, historic journal titles, private individual & company archives, maps) are primarily of historical significance as collections illustrating the connections of a colonial state to its British connections. The early date, longevity and scale of the collections reinforce this significance. This category has no priorities for additional collecting. The Society will refer owners of

archival and library collections or objects deemed outside its collecting principles to specialist archival agencies or collecting institutions.

2: Art

The Royal Society of Tasmania's Art Collection is rare, and unique to Australia. It is a coherent and focussed group. The majority of the artworks were collected around 1900, when, fearing that Tasmania might lose its individual identity after Federation, the RST set about collecting artworks, publications and other material they considered illustrated Tasmania's unique history. This category has no priorities for additional collecting. The Society will refer owners of artworks deemed outside its collecting principles to specialist collecting institutions.

3: Archival material relating to the Society

This collection comprises historical records of the RST from its foundation to the present day. This archival collection reflects activities and development of the Society – correspondence, subject files, minutes, reports, records of events or special projects, member and committee records, accession records, historical financial records, and visitor and notes books for the Botanical Gardens. This is an active collection. Material is transferred via the Secretary of the Society on an annual basis as agreed by the Council minutes.

4: Journals

As per the Society's journal exchange program, printed copies of periodicals are added to their journal run as they are received by the Society or by UTAS on the Society's behalf. Since the shift to electronic titles, activity within the current journal titles is declining year on year. This category has no priorities to add new journal titles to the existing collection.

Governance

RST's collection development is governed in accordance with the RST Strategic Plan 2020-2025.

The Society respects the moral rights of the creators of works acquired for the collections by ensuring the integrity of use and proper attribution of those works. The Society recognises the principles in the:

- *Australian Best Practice Guide to Collecting Cultural Material* (2015) from the Australian Government Ministry for the Arts.

The Society and associated collection staff abide by the codes of ethics of the International Council of Museums (ICOM), Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Materials (AICCM) and Australian Museums and Galleries Association (AMaGA).

Evaluation and Review

Approved at RST Council meeting December 2024

The Collection Development policy will be reviewed in 2028.