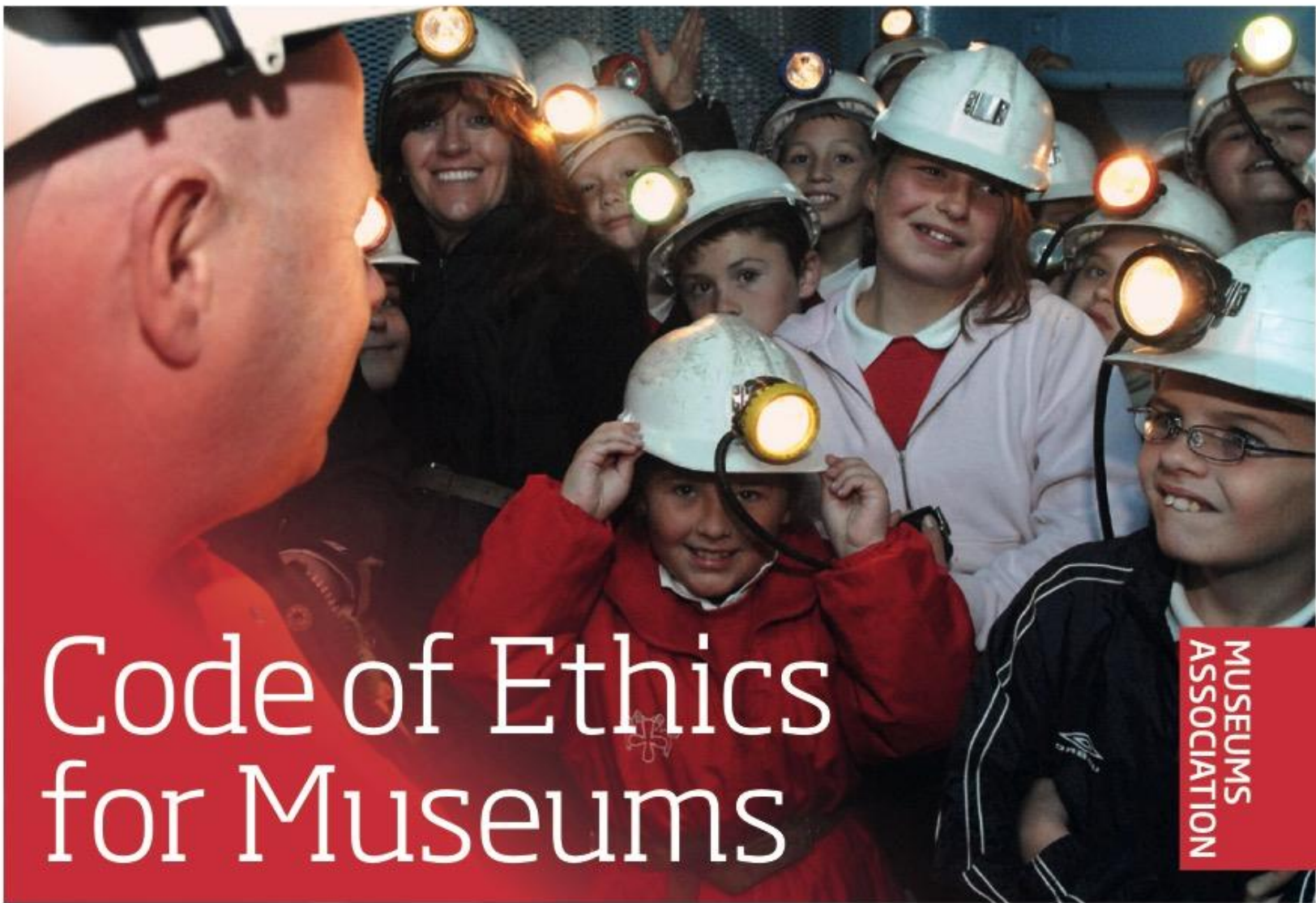


Alistair Brown
Policy Officer
The Museums Association

Alistair@museumsassociation.org

Twitter: @acbrown511



Code of Ethics for Museums

MUSEUMS
ASSOCIATION

Disposal – a taboo subject?

- Museums traditionally ‘don’t sell off the family silver’
- But why?
- Are collections ‘sacred’?
- Do we always maintain public trust by avoiding disposal?

Disposal – a new era?

- Disposal of museum objects increasingly debated
- We need to distinguish between:
 - Financially Motivated Disposal
 - Curatorially Motivated Disposal

How do we manage Disposal?



Managing Financially Motivated Disposal

Code of Ethics, Para 2.9:

All those who work in and with museums should recognise the principle that **collections should not normally be regarded as financially negotiable assets** and that financially motivated disposal risks damaging public confidence in museums. Refuse to undertake disposal principally for financial reasons, except where it will significantly improve the long-term public benefit derived from the remaining collection. This will include demonstrating that:

- the item under consideration lies outside the museum's established core collection as defined in the collections development policy
- extensive prior consultation with sector bodies and the public has been undertaken and considered
- it is not to generate short term revenue (for example to meet a budget deficit)
- it is as a last resort after other sources of funding have been thoroughly explored.

Watts Gallery



Sold two paintings for £1.5m in 2008 – the first financially motivated disposal under new rules

Northampton Museum



Northampton Borough Council sold the Old Kingdom Egyptian statue 'Sekhemka' for £15.8m in 2014 – against the advice of the MA Ethics Committee

However, this case is the exception – not the rule

Managing Curatorially Motivated Disposal

- Curatorially Motivated Disposal viewed as part of good collections management
- Code of Ethics encourages curatorially motivated disposal, provided that it is in line with museums' internal Collections Development Policies, and that it follows the guidance that the MA sets out in our Disposal Toolkit.

Managing Curatorially Motivated Disposal

Disposal Toolkit encourages museums to think about disposal in terms of the **outcomes** of the process. The primary outcomes of a curatorially motivated disposal should include as many as possible of the following:

- improved care for the item
- improved access to the item; increased enjoyment of and engagement with the item by the public
- improved context for the item
- continued retention of the item within public museum collections or the wider public domain
- removal of any hazard posed by an item (e.g. through contamination).

Museum of London



Embarked on a huge curatorial review of social history collections in 2015 leading to thousands of objects being marked for disposal.

Museum of London

MWH REVIEW & RATIONALISATION - SIGNIFICANCE ASSESSMENT TABLE

PROVENANCE/ACQUISITION	RARITY/UNIQUENESS	CONDITION	HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE	EXPLOITABILITY – for research, education, display, visual impact
<p>Is the object accessioned?</p> <p>Do we know who created, made, owned or used it?</p> <p>Do we know when it was made or produced?</p> <p>Is its place of origin or manufacture known and/or documented?</p> <p>Is there a well-evidenced chain of ownership and use?</p> <p>Is the object unusually well-provenanced/documentated for its class or type?</p>	<p>Is the object the only or one of the best examples of its class or type?</p> <p>Do we have other identical examples in the collections?</p> <p>If this is a duplicate item, identical to others in the collection is there a reason why duplicate examples may be useful/significant for future displays e.g. a row of identical typewriters or industrial sewing machines in a display would create an important visual impact representing how common these items once were in the workplace?</p> <p>Is it one of a kind, unique, rare or unusual?</p>	<p>Is the object in good condition for its type?</p> <p>Is the object displayable?</p> <p>Is the object in a condition to realise its potential as a research resource?</p> <p>Does the object include hazardous materials?</p> <p>Is the object intact/complete?</p> <p>If the object is dismantled do we have documentation to show how it could be reassembled?</p>	<p>Is the object associated with an important event, person, family, group, period, activity or theme relevant to London's social and working history?</p> <p>Does the user, maker, creator or designer of the object have a strong London connection?</p> <p>Is the object an example of a cultural or social activity specific to London?</p> <p>Is the object an example of a London specific domestic or working life activity?</p> <p>Does the object embody or symbolise beliefs, ideas,</p>	<p>How does the object relate to the Museum's collecting policies?</p> <p>Does the object support the Museum's Content Framework?</p> <p>Does the object have a strong visual impact?</p> <p>Does the object have the potential to 'stretch thinking'?</p> <p>Is the object's visual impact /interpretation in a display context dependent on the display of other related items. e.g. a pharmacist's shop fitting/shelf originally used for the display of a</p>

Disposal – what next?

- We need to continue to protect collections from unethical financially motivated disposal
- BUT we also need to manage huge public collections better and for public benefit
- We need to change attitudes within sector about curatorial disposal

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