

PE1502/A

National Museums Scotland's response to:

**PUBLIC PETITIONS COMMITTEE CONSIDERATION OF PE1502
QUESTIONS / ISSUES ARISING FROM COMMITTEE MEETINGS**

TUESDAY 14 JANUARY 2014

Scottish Government—

National Museums Scotland—

- *What consideration was given to purchasing the Ecurie Ecosse collection?*
- *Please provide an overview of (1) the collections policy with regard to items of Scottish or historical significance and (2) the acquisition process.*
- *How is Scottish or historical significance assessed?*
- *What funding streams exist to acquire individual items or collections for the nation?*

1. What consideration was given to purchasing the Ecurie Ecosse collection?

National Museums Scotland was aware that the collection was due to be auctioned. It considered the possibilities for acquisition in terms of the significance, price and potential display at the Museum. Its conclusion was that in this instance the collection was very expensive, that the Museum had limited capacity to display any of it, and that none of the individual cars was significant enough as historical objects to justify acquisition at the prices sought. For example, none of the cars on sale were the ones with which Ecurie Ecosse won in the Le Man 24 hour race in 1956 and 1957.

2. Please provide an overview of:

(i) The collections policy with regard to items of Scottish or historical significance

National Museums Scotland Collection Development Strategy is approved by its Board of Trustees, conforms to professional requirements for Accreditation, and is published on its website. It is subject to review every five years and takes as its starting point The National Heritage (Scotland) Act 1985 which established National Museums Scotland. The Act empowers the Board of Trustees as follows

So far as practicable and subject to the provisions of this Act, the Board shall-

- a) care for, preserve and add to the objects in their collections,*
- b) secure that the objects are exhibited to and interpreted for the public,*
- c) secure that the objects are available to persons seeking to inspect them in connection with study or research,*
- d) Generally promote the public's awareness, appreciation and understanding of matters agricultural, archaeological, architectural, artistic, cultural, environmental, historical, industrial, military, scientific and social both by means of the Board's collections and by such other means, including collaboration with other institutions, as they consider appropriate and*
- e) Provide education, instruction and advice and carry out research.*

In carrying out their functions, the Board shall have due regard to the Scottish aspect of the matters mentioned in sub-section (1)(d) above.

(ii) The acquisition process

We acquire items in a number of different ways and have limited funds for purchase allocated to us by the Scottish Government; for 2013/14, our grant was £200,000. As funds have declined steeply in recent years, any major purchase requires us more than ever to seek supplementary funds from non-government grant-giving bodies such as the Art Fund and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

3. How is Scottish or historical significance assessed?

At present it is one of our stated priorities to build our Scottish collections, especially those reflecting contemporary Scotland, with a view to the eventual renewal of our Scottish galleries. We have of course, extremely rich holdings already. The Scottish history collections are the largest and most significant of their kind and reflect the history of the nation from its formative centuries. Their strength and diversity is demonstrated in the displays in the National Museum of Scotland, the National War Museum and the National Museum of Rural Life. They are especially strong in their coverage of the Scottish decorative arts, military and social history as well as numismatics, and also reflect the experience of Scots abroad. In addition, the archaeology collections are the uniquely comprehensive ranging from early pre-history to the formative centuries of Scotland as a nation. It is against this background that possible additions must be considered. We assess items for acquisition against a matrix of criteria: what they represent in terms of history; how important is that aspect of history; what interpretation they require; what condition they are in; and what potential they have for display. In the case of very large items, we would expect to be able to identify a display strategy as a priority to maximise the public benefit of their acquisition.

4. What funding streams exist to acquire individual items or collections for the nation?

Please see the response to 2(ii) above.

**Jane Carmichael
Director of Collections
07 February 2014**