

CHESTER BEATTY LIBRARY COLLECTIONS POLICY

1. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND MISSION STATEMENT

This policy outlines the legal framework within which the Chester Beatty Library operates, the history and nature of the Collections, and how the museum displays and interprets the Collections in its role as the pre-eminent Irish National Cultural Institution for the understanding of world cultures.

To maintain and preserve the collections of the Library and to make them available in the most appropriate ways for the use and enjoyment of the public and for scholarly study and research, in order to promote a wider appreciation and understanding of the international cultural heritage embodied in the collections and to foster relations between Ireland and the peoples whose cultures are represented in the collections.

The *Collections Policy* is to be read in association with the *Statement of Strategy: 2016-20*; *Collections Care and Conservation Strategy*; and *Acquisitions, Disposal, Exhibitions, Loans, Learning policies and Procedural Manual*.

2. ROLE AND MANDATE OF THE CHESTER BEATTY LIBRARY

The Chester Beatty Library (hereinafter referred to as the Chester Beatty), is a public charitable trust established under the will of the late Sir Alfred Chester Beatty, which was granted probate in 1969. The Chester Beatty is in the ownership of a Board of Trustees, appointed under the terms of the will of Sir Alfred Chester Beatty (1875-1968), as modified by an order of the High Court in 1997, who hold it for the use and benefit of the public.

While the Chester Beatty was originally the private library of Sir Alfred Chester Beatty, today it is one of Ireland's National Cultural Institutions and functions as a museum that is open free-of-charge to visitors all year round. While the Chester Beatty is an autonomous body, it is over 85 percent funded by a grant from the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. Staff are public servants and the Chester Beatty is a National Cultural Institution under the Act of the same name of 1995. As a charitable institution the Chester Beatty is also legally answerable to the Commissioners of Charitable Donations and Bequests.

The role of the museum is to protect, preserve and make available to the public in the form of exhibitions, publications, lectures and other events the heritage enshrined in the Collections and to provide the world of scholarship access to this internationally important resource. The purpose of the Chester Beatty, having regard to its duty of care, is therefore to contribute value to the cultural life of Ireland at home and in its relations with peoples and cultures everywhere.

The museum has seen a steady increase in visitor numbers since it moved to Dublin Castle in 2000. It enjoys consistently good reviews and feedback from its various stakeholders – visitors, scholars, funders, members and volunteers – and in articles and reviews published internationally. Through its permanent and temporary displays, its intercultural learning programme and broad variety of public activities for all ages and backgrounds, it is a vibrant, engaging and welcoming space for the appreciation and understanding of world cultures.

We are committed to continuing this trend by adhering to our mission, and by implementing our *Strategy 2016-2020* which sets out how we intend to move incrementally towards achieving our vision for the Chester Beatty.

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3. HISTORY OF THE COLLECTION

3.1 Sir Alfred Chester Beatty

Alfred Chester Beatty was one of the greatest financial entrepreneurs and art collectors of the 20th century who is today best remembered as the founder of the Chester Beatty Library.

Born in New York in 1875, the youngest of three sons, Beatty graduated as a mining engineer from Columbia University. He moved to Colorado and quickly rose from a pick and shovel underground worker to mining engineer, establishing a highly successful mining consultancy in New York in 1908.

In 1900, he married Grace Madeline (Ninette) Rickard and they had two children, Ninette and Chester Junior. In 1911, Ninette died of typhoid fever. Shocked by the death of his young wife and suffering from ill health himself, Beatty left the busy world of mining in the USA and settled in London. There he founded a new company called Selection Trust which grew to become one of the largest mining enterprises in the world. In May 1912 he bought Baroda House at 24 Kensington Palace Gardens, London, and the following year he married Edith Dunn of New York.

A collector of minerals, Chinese snuff bottles and stamps since childhood, as an adult Beatty began to collect more widely, buying European and Persian manuscripts. His interests found a new direction when, in 1914, he and Edith visited Egypt and bought some decorated copies of the Qur'an in the bazaars. The dry climate suited Beatty and he built a house near Cairo, where he was to spend many winters.

His collecting interests expanded even further during a family visit to Asia in 1917. His eye was drawn to richly illustrated material, fine bindings and beautiful calligraphy of Japanese and Chinese works, but he was also deeply committed to preserving texts for their historic value.

Beatty became one of Winston Churchill's backroom advisers in World War II and made a significant contribution to supplies of strategic raw materials, for which he was later knighted. In 1950, he decided to move to Ireland and built a library for his art collection on Shrewsbury Road which opened in 1954. In 1957 Chester Beatty became Ireland's first honorary citizen.

When he died in 1968, he left his library to the Irish people, who honoured him with a state funeral. Today, his legacy thrives in the refurbished setting of the Clock Tower Building of Dublin Castle.

3.2 The Chester Beatty Library from 1969 to present day

The Chester Beatty Library and museum is the pre-eminent Irish institution promoting the appreciation and understanding of world cultures, and engagement with the peoples whose cultures are represented in our Collections.

Since its move to Dublin Castle in 2000, the Chester Beatty has gone from strength to strength. In its original location on Shrewsbury Road in the suburbs of Dublin, the Library was able to accommodate scholars and had modest facilities at its disposal to display elements of Chester Beatty's Collection for the public's enjoyment. On average, the Library attracted 6,000 visitors a year. By contrast, within seven years of moving to Dublin Castle, visitor numbers had increased to more than 250,000 and in 2016 welcomed over 370,000 visitors. Facilities for the Collections and exhibitions, and the public were greatly enhanced and in 2002 the CBL won the European Museum of the Year Award.

Today, the Chester Beatty is one of the nation's most favoured National Cultural Institutions. Through international collaborations (such as *Leonardo: the Codex Leicester*, *Rembrandt*, *Telling Images of China*, *The art books of Henri Matisse* and *Seven Treasures: Japanese Cloisonné Enamels* from the

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Victoria and Albert Museum, London), it has brought extraordinary temporary exhibitions to the public, drawing from the permanent Collections (such as *Dürer, Muraqqa' and Heroes and Kings of the Shahnama*, *Chester Beatty's A to Z* and *Gift of a Lifetime*) and by borrowing from international collections.

The Chester Beatty has also broadened its services to our many audiences. We act as a research library to scholars from all over the world; through our public programmes we engage with Irish audiences and international visitors to the country; in addition, we have carved a unique role among the National Cultural Institutions by reaching out to the new immigrant communities in Ireland. By drawing upon and interpreting our extraordinary Collections, we seek to engage with, and forge relationships with, the newest members of our society.

Given the global appeal of Chester Beatty's Collections, the museum has a strong international profile, primarily among the scholarly community, but increasingly also among the general public, in no small part thanks to the development of digital resources and social media. To mark the 50th anniversary of Beatty's extraordinary gift to the nation in 2018, the Chester Beatty launched a new website and searchable database of high-resolution digital images from the museum's collection. This ambitious initiative will eventually result in the entire collection being fully digitised and open to all.

4. CHESTER BEATTY COLLECTIONS

4.1 Ownership and Types of Collections

The Collections are owned by the Chester Beatty and held in trust by the Board of Trustees. Collection objects are administered and cared for by the professional staff in accordance with the policies and guidelines outlined in the Procedural Manual.

The Collections are made accessible to the public by way of permanent rotating exhibitions, temporary displays and providing access to the material for researchers and scholars. The Chester Beatty develops and interprets the Collections for the public by way of exhibitions, audio-visuals, interpretative leaflets in a number of languages, website, online resources, and a regular programme of public lectures and workshops to complement the exhibitions. The Chester Beatty publishes research on the Collections and collaborates on new research with scholars of the various specialisms contained in the Collections.

4.2 Overview of the Chester Beatty Collection

Beatty's collection has been described as the finest collection of manuscripts and books made by a private collector in the 20th century. It includes representative samples of the world's heritage (artistic, religious and secular) from about 2700 BC to the present century. There are over 20,000 items listed in the collection management database (Adlib) and 4,500 items listed on the rare book database (Libero).

The Islamic Collections

The Islamic Collections are amongst the finest of their kind in existence and are internationally renowned for the overall high quality and scope of the material. The manuscripts that comprise the Collections range in date from the 8th century to the early years of the 20th century. They derive primarily—though not exclusively—from the Arab world, Iran, Turkey and India, and include some of the greatest documents of Islamic art and culture.

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The Islamic Collections consist of five sub-collections. The Qur'an Collection includes more than 260 Qur'ans and Qur'an fragments and is one of the most important collections of Qur'ans outside the Middle East. The gem of the Collection—and indeed one of the most treasured objects of the entire museum—is the splendid Qur'an copied in Baghdad in the year 1001 by Ibn al-Bawwab, one of the three greatest medieval Islamic calligraphers.

The Persian Collection consists mainly of copies of the works of the great Persian poets— Firdawsi, Nizami, Sa'di, Hafiz and Jami, to name but a few. Highlights of the approximately 330 manuscripts that make up the Collection include illustrated folios from the so-called Great Mongol (Demotte) Shahnama, or Book of Kings, of about 1335, and a fragmentary copy of this same text made in the late 16th century for the Safavid ruler, Shah 'Abbas the Great.

The Mughal Collection is comprised of both illustrated manuscripts and a breathtaking array of almost one thousand individual paintings, produced in India during the period of Mughal rule for Islamic, Hindu and also European patrons. The Collection is of especial renown and encompasses some of the finest examples of painting produced under the guidance of the emperors Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan.

The Turkish Collection consists of just over 160 manuscripts, making it the smallest of the Islamic Collections. Nevertheless, it too is extremely important. Patronage of the arts, including the arts of the book by the Ottoman sultans of Turkey peaked in the 16th century. The Turkish Collection includes some of the greatest manuscripts produced in this period, such as a rare, illustrated volume of the Life of the Prophet Muhammad and an illustrated History of Suleyman the Magnificent.

Most of the manuscripts of the Qur'an, Persian, Mughal and Turkish Collections have exquisite calligraphy and are magnificently illustrated and illuminated. In contrast to these manuscripts, however, is the approximately 2650 manuscripts of the Arabic Collection, few of which contain any decoration at all. These were collected by Beatty for their texts, and many are unique, preserved only in the Chester Beatty. They embrace a vast range of topics, including religion, jurisprudence, history, geography, medicine, astronomy, mathematics and linguistics, to name but a few, as well as many early translations into Arabic of the works of the ancient Greeks.

The East Asian Collections

Chester Beatty became involved with the arts of East Asia early in his collecting career. A childhood interest in minerals is said to have attracted him to Chinese snuff bottles carved from precious stones, and he is known to have built up substantial collections of Chinese and Japanese decorative arts by the early years of the 20th century. A trip to Asia in 1917 added Chinese and Japanese painting to his interests, and over the subsequent decades he expanded his collections to include manuscripts, paintings, printed material and decorative arts from Tibet, Mongolia, Nepal, India, Sri Lanka and the Southeast Asian countries of Thailand, Burma (Myanmar) and Indonesia.

Important Chinese treasures in the Chester Beatty include one of the world's largest collections of carved rhinoceros horn cups; a unique group of imperial jade books, some inscribed in the hand of the 18th-century Qianglong Emperor; early Buddhist sutras from Dunhuang; three volumes of the Great Encyclopaedia of the Yongle Emperor; a small collection of silk dragon robes; and over 200 high quality paintings and prints dating from the 17th to 19th centuries.

The Far Eastern painting tradition is also well represented in the Japanese Collection, which is particularly renowned for its painted handscrolls and albums of the type known as 'Nara Ehon' (Nara picture books). These include a rare 16th-century Tales of Ise and several versions of the Tale of Genji.

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The Japanese paintings are complemented by over 800 ukiyo-e woodblock prints and privately published prints known as surimono. A very early example of Japanese printing is the Hyakumanto darani, a Buddhist charm originally housed in a wooded stupa and dated to AD 768. Japanese decorative arts include a number of fine netsuke belt toggles, inro lacquered containers, tsuba sword guards and lacquer portable shrines.

Other outstanding objects in the East Asian Collections include vividly illustrated folding books from Thailand and Burma; Batak bark books from Indonesia; books, ritual objects and thangka hanging scrolls from Tibet; and a selection of Hindu, Jain and Buddhist manuscripts from India and Nepal.

The Western Collections

The Western Collections contain the earliest items in the museum with examples of inscribed cuneiform clay tablets, (c. 2700-2300 BC) and a large collection of papyrus rolls and codices (bound books) from Antiquity (c. 1160 BC-AD 400).

The Egyptian papyri include important Hieratic texts from the 21st Dynasty including several Love Poems and The Contendings of Horus and Seth. The Demotic and Hieroglyphic papyri relate to administrative practices and burials.

The early Christian, Manichaean and Coptic papyri include many unique texts as well as some of the earliest examples of the Gospels. There are also manuscripts from the first Pachomian monastic Library (c. AD 345-c. AD 600). There is a representative collection of medieval and Renaissance illuminated manuscripts from Western Europe (c. 1000-1500) as well as later fine calligraphic material (1600-1930). The Christian Orient is represented by Byzantine, Syriac, Armenian, and Ethiopic manuscripts, many of which are illuminated or in fine bindings. The Library of early printed books (approximately 4500 volumes) is rich in fine illustrated books or fine bindings, particularly German and Italian (15th-16th centuries), Flemish and Dutch (17th century), French (17th-18th centuries) and English (19th century). The illuminations and illustrations found in the manuscripts and printed books are further enhanced by the collection of Old Master prints (including works by Dürer, Rembrandt and Callot).

Long-term Loans

There are five long-term loans from the National Museum of Ireland and private collections that are on permanent display, to provide context for the Chester Beatty Collections.

5. CARE OF THE COLLECTIONS (commitments and responsibilities in respect of the Collections)

The Chester Beatty maintains a stable and appropriate climate for all objects in its Collections and on loan, both on public view and in storage. The Collections are protected from excessive light, heat, humidity and dust.

The Chester Beatty is entrusted with the preservation of the Collections and is guided by an absolute respect for the integrity and conservation of the works of art.

The Chester Beatty will provide appropriate security and fire detection systems and maintain a formally approved written Emergency Response Plan.

The Chester Beatty is charged with the long-term preservation of the Collections through the development of wide-ranging preservation strategies, it will ensure the highest standards when handling and exhibiting the Collections. The conservation department will maintain exact documentation on all examination and treatment work.

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(See *Collections Care and Conservation Strategy*)

6. Records/Documentation

The Chester Beatty maintains a *Procedural Manual* that sets out the documentation procedures and practices of the museum to ensure accountability, consistency and continuity of practice.

- a) The Registration office, Collections and Conservation Departments at Chester Beatty maintain accurate, up-to-date records on the objects in the collection as well as record and document on-going activities such as exhibitions, loans, research and correspondence with donors and scholars. These records are kept in accordance with the policies on *Records Management Policy* and *Data Protection*.
- b) All documentation involving provenance, acquisition, and all other information pertaining to the history of the object will also be retained and maintained.
- c) All records created or received in the transaction of the Chester Beatty's proper business are the property of the Chester Beatty and must not be dispersed or destroyed except in accordance with its *Records Management* policy. The Chester Beatty will review inactive records and will, as appropriate, transfer those of continuing interest to the Archive, maintain them for reference use, or discard them in accordance with the *Records Retention Schedule*.
- d) The Chester Beatty will make available to authorised persons (including qualified researchers and scholars) materials relating to the Collections, including incoming and outgoing loans unless they are confidential or too fragile to be handled.
- e) The Collection is regularly inventoried under the supervision of the Head of Collections and the Registrar, and the resulting inventories must be maintained, corrected, and updated on a continual basis.

7. Incoming Loans

From time-to-time, in exceptional circumstances, works may be accepted on long-term loan to supplement or add context to the permanent displays.

The Chester Beatty will provide the same standard of care for borrowed works of art as it does for its own Collections.

Long-term loans to the Chester Beatty will be periodically monitored and contact maintained with the lender, as appropriate under the circumstances.

8. Outgoing Loans

In furtherance of its Mission, the Chester Beatty will cooperate with other institutions through loans in order to increase public access to objects in the Collections, provided that long-term conservation and the Museum's educational, research and exhibition needs are not compromised.

Loan requests must be evaluated taking into consideration the art-historical and scholarly value of the exhibition for which the loan is requested; as well as the condition of the object and the need to incorporate it into the Museum's own programme.

The borrowing institution must be able to ensure the safety of the loan and a current facilities report must be provided before a loan is approved.

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All loan requests must be approved by the Board of Trustees. Their decision is based upon the recommendation of the Director after consultation with the appropriate conservation and curatorial staff. (See *Conditions of Loan* and *Loan Policy*)

9. Approval/Revision History

This Collections Policy is version 1.2, it was formally approved by the Trustees on 14 December 2018. This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis by the Collections Management Team, while a full revision will take place every five years.