

REPORT ON INVENTORY PROJECT AT THE HELENA THOMPSON MUSEUM ON BEHALF OF ALLERDALE BOROUGH COUNCIL

1.0 PREAMBLE

- 1.1 This report follows a meeting at The Helena Thompson Museum (HTM) on 23rd March 2005 with members of the Workington Heritage Group (WHG), Philip Crouch of Allerdale Borough Council (ABC) and Paul Fraser Webb (PFW) in order to discuss the proposed inventory project.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The HTM, comprising of both the building and collections within it, was given to the burgesses of Workington in the mid twentieth century. Its ownership and management was eventually passed to ABC. It has been without a curator for the past 10 years, but has maintained good standard of collections management with the considerable efforts of the WHG. It has achieved Registration II standard and fully intends to achieve Accreditation Standard when it is invited to apply (in 2008 according to the current schedule).
- 2.2 HTM currently has approximately 8,000 users pa, of which approximately 3,000 are visitors to the museum.
- 2.3 On 1st April 2005 the management of the HTM, both its building and contents (including museum collection) will be passed from ABC to the care of WHT, although the freehold of the building and legal title to the collection will reside with ABC. ABC will provide to WHG an annual grant.
- 2.4 WHG has long term ambitions for both HTM and for the nearby historic building, Workington Hall. Finance has been secured for a feasibility study into the restoration of Workington Hall with the eventual aim of the HTM to relocate into the restored sections of the hall. The proceeds of the sale of the freehold of the building currently housing the HTM will be used towards the restoration project. These aims are supported by ABC.

3.0 THE INVENTORY PROJECT

- 3.1 Due to the handover of the management of the collection of HTM to WHG, WHG requires assurance of what its liabilities extend to. To this end it has requested that ABC provide an inventory of the collection at the point of hand over.
- 3.2 In addition to these aims, the inventory will also need to meet the long-term objectives of the HTM, specifically it should meet the requirements of Accreditation. It should also have the potential to provide the basis of complete electronic catalogue system sometime in the future.
- 3.3 Due to the current hand over of the HTM to WHG it is essential that the inventory is completed both quickly and accurately. However, it has been acknowledged that whilst both ABC and WHT are strongly committed to the project, there are considerable constraints on the amount of time and money that is available to complete the inventory.

4.0 THE COLLECTION

- 4.1 The collection can be split into four distinct areas each. The latter part (the object collection) can be further subdivided.
- 4.2.1 **THE OBJECT COLLECTION:** This collection forms the core of the museum. It comprises approximately 7000 to 8000 objects made up of costume, ceramics,

local history and industry and furniture.

- 4.2.2 The greater part of the collection is in the public galleries with the remainder held in two attic stores. The objects in the public galleries are both contained within museum display cases as well as on open display. The stores are equipped with metal shelving and a considerable proportion of the collection is stored within unbuffered archive standard boxes.
- 4.2.3 There are a variety of different documentation systems that apply to this collection.
- 4.2.4 The "New Index". This is the most recent set of documentation and contains current and definitive information. It is based on a series of IRGMA style catalogue cards. The cards are stored according to the location of the object. For objects in the galleries the location is the room in which the object is held. This information is not recorded on the card. More detailed information is recorded for objects in store location.
- 4.2.5 The cards also record the object's Accession Number where it is known. Accession numbers are also marked on the objects. Where no accession number for an object is existent or apparent then no unique number (either accession number or temporary number) has been assigned to the object.
- 4.2.6 The card also records a Simple Name for the object and in many cases a brief description is also recorded. This information is sufficient to link the catalogue card to the object.
- 4.2.7 All of the objects on display in the galleries have a catalogue card in the New Index, as do the majority of the objects in store. It is estimated that at least 75% of the collection is recorded in this catalogue card system.
- 4.2.8 The Object Inventory. This document is comprised of a series of printed A4 sheets which duplicate the information contained within the New Index. It is stored in location order. It has considerable value as a security copy of the New Index. No soft (or computerised) copy of the inventory is in existence.
- 4.2.8 The "Old Index". This is a series of catalogue cards which pre-date the creation of the New Index. This index covers the objects which have not been included (to date) in the New Index. A catalogue card exists for all objects not included in the New Index. No location information is recorded in the Old Index.
- 4.2.9 Accession Information files. A series of ring binders exist which contain further details about the objects. No inspection of these was made during my visit.
- 4.2.10 1992 Inventory. This is a computer printed catalogue of the collection. It is not thought to be complete or current. It is thought that this may have originated from a MODES type catalogue of the collection, although neither members of WHG or ABC know where the soft copy of this catalogue now resides, or indeed whether it still exists.
- 4.3.1 THE PHOTOGRAPHY COLLECTION: This is by far numerically the largest collection, comprising in the region of 20,000 photographic prints and negatives. By far the greatest part of the collection is stored in a dedicated Photographic room in Secol style photographic hangers contained in a series of lockable metal filing cabinets. Approximately 5000 of the photographs have been catalogued in MODES for Windows. Of the remaining photographs a number have been issued with Accession Numbers in advance of cataloguing. The photographs and negatives are stored in Accession Number order. A small quantity of photographs are stored outside this sequence in the attic store.

Despite the size of the collection there are a relatively small number of Accession Groups. A single Accession Group, The Lawrie Collection, is comprised approximately 5000 prints, 3000 glass negatives and 500 film negatives. The second largest collection is The Jeffrey Collection of 35mm film negatives which is comprised approximately 10,000 single images. The remainder of the Photographic Collection is made up of a small number of smaller Accession Groups. Each of these smaller groups has an entry form.

- 4.3.2 The collection management of this collection is well in hand and each collection can be quickly located. Where an individual photograph has been catalogued then this photograph can be quickly located.
- 4.4.1 THE LIBRARY COLLECTION: This collection of books is stored in a single Library and Research room. Each book has been issued with a single running number unique inventory number and an inventory of the books has been produced. This inventory records the books inventory number, its title and its ISBN. This inventory is complete and is up to date. The books are stored on shelves in running number order.
- 4.4.2 Two boxes of books which do not form part of the HTM's collection are also held in the library. There is no inventory of these books and their ultimate fate is not yet known, although they may eventually form part of the HTM's book collection.
- 4.5.1 THE RESEARCH COLLECTION: This collection is made up of paper materials that have been collected to enable research. This is a collection of secondary materials and contains no original artefacts. It is stored in lockable metal filing cabinets. There is a thematic index to the collection as well as an inventory which lists all items.

5.0 THE PROPOSAL

- 5.1 It is important that the inventory does not exist in isolation, but should build on existing resources and have a life beyond its current purpose. I therefore propose the following:
- 5.2 Since WHG intends to meet the Accreditation Standard in the future, the inventory should be based on the standard demanded in that standard, i.e.

“Each inventory must contain an accession number (if this has already been allocated) or a temporary number, a simple object name or brief description, and the object's location. Every un-numbered item, or group of items, listed in the inventory museum be labelled with a temporary number”

(MLA Accreditation Standard, paragraph 4.4.3
www.mla.gov.uk/documents/accreditation_standard.pdf)

the fields in the inventory will therefore be the following:

Accession Number
Temporary Number
Simple Object Name
Brief Description
Location
Notes

- 5.3 The existence of separate fields for Accession Number and Temporary Number rather than the two existing in the same field will enable the retention of the Temporary Number if a formal Accession Number is found or assigned to the

object at a later date. This may prove useful in future collection management tasks.

5.4 Due to the financial and time constraints on this project it is not recommended that ABC or WHG purchase any dedicated museum cataloguing software. Procurement of such software is an involved task if the software is to match the long-term ambitions of the museum and it can prove expensive. Instead it is recommended that a common computer software package that is suitable for the task is used, such as MS Access or MS Excel. The popularity of this software will also help with training.

5.5 Before the Inventory is fully active I will ensure that the field names are Dublin Core compatible. This will assist in any data transfer should this inventory form the basis of a full catalogue.

6.0 THE OBJECT COLLECTION

6.1 Since the New Index is both comprehensive and up to date it makes sense to base the inventory of the collection around this.

6.2 It is proposed that the inventory will tackle the objects in location order since this is the way that the New Index is organised.

6.3 Each room will be inventoried in sequence and dealt with as a discrete part of the project. Only when one room is complete will the next room begin. This will also assist in location control since each room can be identified as 'Active' for the purposes of the inventory and no objects should leave or enter the room while inventory is taking place.

6.4 Once a room has had its inventory completed then location control methods will come into force with a 'Location Movement Form' being completed for every object entering, leaving or being moved within the completed room. The details entered into the form can be transferred into the inventory to ensure the inventory is kept current.

6.5 Since not all objects have had their accession numbers identified it will be necessary for unique Temporary Numbers to be issued to many objects. Temporary Numbers will be a single number taken from a sequence with a 'T' prefix to denote its purpose. This number will be recorded on the inventory and will be attached to (not marked on) the object. Tie on labels, markings on boxes and bags etc are suitable methods of attachment. Some form of control will be provided to ensure that no repetition of temporary numbers occurs.

6.6 It is noted that, in the public galleries, the location system used only provides detail of which room the object is located. It is proposed that more detailed location coding is undertaken and that (at a minimum) display cases and wall are given unique codings.

6.7 The inventory should also be completed in location order in the objects stores. The objects which appear on the New Index are recorded first and as each shelf location is completed it should be marked as being so. Locations which hold objects which are not on this index should be noted. When a location holds a mixture of objects which are and are not recorded on the New Index then the objects not in the index should be removed and stored separately (unless there are overriding reasons not to do so).

6.8 Before the inventory process starts New Index cards should be reunited with the relevant object, all new information should be entered onto the card (e.g., Temporary Number, location coding) and any temporary object marking should

take place. It should be ensured that all objects have been assigned their card and that there are no objects without cards and no cards without objects. Any discrepancies should be reconciled. Once this exercise has been completed then the New Index cards can be gathered together and information entered into the inventory.

- 6.9 Once all of the objects on the New Index have been inventoried then those not in the New Index should be tackled using as similar process as that outlined above as possible, using the relevant cards on the Old Index to gather the information.

7.0 THE PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION

- 7.1 Within the constraints of this project it is not deemed feasible to provide a detailed inventory of the entire photographic collection. It is recommended to apply the principles of bulk accessioning as outlined on the mda Bulk Accessioning Spectrum Factsheet (<http://www.mda.org.uk/404.htm?404>; <http://www.mda.org.uk/bulk.htm>).

- 7.2 Each Accession Group held within a single location should be treated as one object with a single entry in the inventory. The brief description should contain sufficient information to identify the objects and (ideally) it should contain reasonably accurate information on the number of individual items in that group.

- 7.3 Where a group is held in more than one location then each separate location should have a separate inventory record, although a single accession number should be shared between the two locations.

8.0 THE LIBRARY COLLECTION

- 8.1 Since a listing and a numerical sequence for the books is already in existence it is not necessary to repeat the exercise for the benefit of this inventory. Instead it will be sufficient to undertake a brief quality control exercise in order to verify the listing. A copy of list can be then appended to the printed copy of the inventory when it is completed.

9.0 THE RESEARCH COLLECTION

- 9.1 Due to this collection being made up of non-original and secondary material it is not deemed necessary for this part of the collection to be included in this inventory exercise.

10.0 EQUIPMENT REQUIREMENTS

- 10.1 Temporary object marking equipment (labels, bags, pens, tissue and masking tape) will be provided by PFW, as will white cotton gloves for handling objects.
- 10.2 ABC will need to provide one lap top computer with either MS Access or MS Excel. A digital camera would also be of benefit.

11.0 PERSONNEL REQUIREMENTS

- 11.1 Due to the excellent work that has been undertaken on the "New Index" by WHG it is possible to separate the data collection part of the project from the data entry part (as indicated in section 6 above). As such it will be only be necessary for one person to undertake the majority of the inventory work, rather than the team of two I originally suggested. Alternatively, a number of people could work independently and concurrently to complete the project in a quicker time.

- 11.2 The work could be expedited if ABC could supply secretarial support to the recruited person. If the New Index cards are used to gather all of the necessary

information then these cards could be passed to a third party and the data can be entered onto the database at a remote location.

- 11.3 The exception to this pattern will be the Object Collection objects which do not appear on the New Index. Due to the higher requirements of these objects it will be necessary for a team of two people to work together (one object handling and one data entering concurrently).
- 11.4 Whilst the WHG are undoubtedly hugely committed to this project I do not feel that it will be feasible to request that this commitment is stretched further by requesting that they shoulder the majority of the burden of this project (as originally suggested in my letter dated 2nd February), however I would like to explore the possibility of them assisting in providing the second pair of hands for the part of the project which addresses the objects not included in the New Index. I will also dedicate a proportion of my time to this part of the project.
- 11.5 We will therefore have to recruit one person to undertake the majority of the work. I suggest three options:
- (1) We make enquiries to acquire a recent Museum Studies graduate volunteer. As the academic year is shortly coming to a close then this is an ideal opportunity to recruit such a person. The project would be all the more attractive if it were possible for ABC to provide accommodation for this volunteer and I would welcome the views of ABC on this. I will be able to assist in the recruitment of such a volunteer.
 - (2) Funds to employ a suitable person are located, possibly from regional development funds. PFW would provide training to this person. Since ABC has the local knowledge on this matter I would welcome their advice on this matter.
 - (3) A member of ABC staff be seconded to this project.
- 11.6 As stated in my original proposal I will undertake all necessary training for the project.