

# The Egham Museum Trust

## Code of Ethics & Statement of Intent

### Dates

First Approved: July 2020	Signed (on behalf of TEMT):
Updated Approved:	
Next Review: May 2025	Date:

### Introduction

The Egham Museum Trust recognises that it has a responsibility to behave ethically, sensitively, and appropriately when not only acquiring items for the collection (see our Collection Development Policy) but also when interpreting these items and engaging with individuals and groups.

The Museums Association's 'Code of Ethics' states "Museums are public-facing, collections-based institutions that preserve and transmit knowledge, culture and history for past, present and future generations. This places museums in an important position of trust in relation to their audiences, local communities, donors, source communities, partner organisations, sponsors and funders. Museums must make sound ethical judgements in all areas of work in order to maintain this trust."<sup>1</sup>

As such, this document outlines our commitment to the MA's Code of Ethics and agree to uphold the following principles throughout our work: Public Engagement & Public benefit; Stewardship of Collections; and Individual & Institutional Integrity.

This document particularly addresses the 'public engagement & public benefit' principle focusing on interpretation and storytelling. It also outlines practical and immediate implications of how and when these codes can be put into practice.

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<sup>1</sup> Museums Association, 2012, <https://www.museumsassociation.org/download?id=1155827>

## **Strategic Statements:**

Vision *“A museum for all, valued by our diverse local community and at the heart of our cultural lives”*

Mission *“Through our collections, exhibitions and outreach programmes, we provide a centre of life-long learning that raises awareness, shares knowledge and promotes enjoyment of local history”*

Our website further echoes this: *“Serving the communities of Egham, Egham Hythe, Englefield Green, Thorpe and Virginia Water, we explore the history of the local area from its earliest settlers in the Neolithic and Bronze Ages to the present day.”*

## **Our Approach**

In order to be a museum for all, and to serve our local communities well, it is important for us to consider how we approach storytelling in a wide range of contexts.

We do not intend to avoid or censor any topic because it is difficult or uncomfortable, instead, we are an inclusive organisation and deal with all stories sensitively and with respect while collaborating openly and transparently with

Museums are not neutral spaces; by their very nature of how they developed and by who, instils an unconscious bias in the collections and therefore the perspective of its interpretation. But, as outlined in the MA's Code of Ethics, museums can “support freedom of speech and debate” if we acknowledge and challenge this bias transparently. This enables us to have the potential to be relevant, socially-engaged and safe spaces in our communities, acting as agents of positive change.

The Egham Museum aims to tell stories in a way which sensitively remembers and commemorates the communities or individuals of the past. This should be done without celebrating or condoning actions or events.

## **Practical Implementation**

Some key questions this document starts to address are:

1. How might we deal with racist items in our collection?
2. Should we be *celebrating* events such as VE Day or Remembrance Day?
3. What is the best way of telling stories pertaining to a particular (minority) group, if they are not represented in our workforce?
4. How can the museum's collecting policies evolve, while respecting the work of those who came before us?

### **1. How might we deal with racist items in our collection?**

As perceptions of what is appropriate changes over time, it might be that images or objects within the museum collection are now deemed as inappropriate. This might include racist images but extends to other derogatory imagery.

In the first instance, if an item is deemed to be racist it should be clearly identified as such in the catalogue. Any racist language used in the catalogue previously should be acknowledged by clearly stating that the Museum does not use this terminology now. If this item is to be used for exhibition or outreach work, it should be clearly stated that the image/item is racist, and this discussion should be given the appropriate coverage.

### **2. Should we be *celebrating* events such as VE Day or Remembrance Day?**

There are many anniversaries which are marked by the nation. This can be an emotive topic but is also one which can be controversial as some see modern VE Day events or similar as a celebration of war.

It is clear that war has had a huge impact on the local community, including but not limited to WW1 and WW2, so it is important that we tell these stories. National or global anniversaries are a good opportunity to do this, but the stories should not be glorified or overly simplified. We will therefore 'mark' these anniversaries and 'commemorate' them, being careful not to use the term 'celebrate'.

### **3. What is the best way of telling stories pertaining to a particular (minority) group, if they are not represented in our team?**

While we are working to diversify the museum team (staff/trustees/volunteers), we do not represent all sections of our diverse community. For this reason, there are instances where we will need to seek advice from people who do represent

a relevant minority group. Equally, one individual should not be used to speak for an entire community.

Examples of this might include working with the LGBT society at Royal Holloway on an exhibition about local LGBT people of the past.

#### **4. How can the museum's collecting policies evolve, while respecting the work of those who came before us?**

When the Museum was founded, and for the majority of its history, it was managed by a team of passionate and dedicated volunteers. Items were collected with the primary aim of preserving the history of the rapidly changing town.

Over time the collecting policy has evolved, and a variety of factors have resulted in a more precise outline of what the museum will accept. Not only is this guided by National Accreditation Standards but also by wider museum practices and moves towards be more representative and co-created. Our Collection Development Policy also acknowledges this in terms of how we collect for future generations but also, how we rationalise and remove some existing items from the collection.

When we talk about this publicly, during the podcast for example, it is with the understanding that this change is a natural evolution and not a reflection of the work of our predecessors.