QiB Policy: Collections Development

"Quakers in Britain" or "QiB" is used throughout this document as the name for: Britain Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers).

1. Purpose

1.1. This policy statement will outline QiB's approach to collections development and the principles behind it.

1.2. In order to maintain a co-ordinated approach to collections management, this policy sits alongside separate policies for collections information, collections care, and access and engagement. We will integrate our development work in all these areas and review the policies as required. The policies will guide us in directing our resources effectively and in developing a collaborative approach with other organisations where appropriate.

1.3. When the early Quakers built the church in the 17th century, they intentionally preserved a record, but they had a focus on their current work and priorities in doing so. The core part of our collections today is a result of that work. Our aim in collections development is to adapt that approach to the needs of Quakers now and in the future.

1.4. QiB is the custodian of material of national and international significance, both to Quakers and to wider society, which we have inherited from past generations of Quakers in Britain. We seek to enable the accessibility of this material, which supports the national community of Quakers in Britain by providing context to their work and lives and illustrating their values. The QiB collections are the result of an evolving approach over many decades and there are legacy issues for us to address. We need to take a robust approach to collections development and we will use this policy to support that work.

2. Scope

2.1. This policy applies to all staff with collections management responsibilities working for QiB. Compliance with it is expected, though it is not a condition of employment with QiB.

2.2. The policy covers all the collections held or owned by QiB, which are stored in two buildings: Friends House in London, and Swarthmoor Hall in Cumbria.

3. Policy principles

The following principles support QiB's approach:

3.1. Collections development supports QiB's work by ensuring that the charity is well-governed, and that there is a continuing record of Quaker life, faith and witness.

3.2. Our collections development should be "distinctively Quaker". We should prioritise the material that is our distinct responsibility to preserve and that enables impact in line with our organisational priorities.

3.3. We should work in a collaborative way with other organisations and not seek to have a "complete" physical collection of all Quaker material. Our priority is to enable the

accessibility of information and material culture relating to Quaker faith and experience, in the most appropriate and sustainable way, wherever it can be found

3.4. We will address legacy collections management issues in a prioritised way to support QiB's work

3.5. We are committed to making our collections accessible to the public. The ways in which we do that will change and evolve in line with our organisational priorities.

3.6. We are committed to managing our collections in line with the core values that Quakers live by: peace, equality and justice, truth and integrity, and simplicity and sustainability.

3.7. In using this policy, we will be mindful of the context within which our collections have developed over the last 350 years and of the needs of Quakers in Britain today. We will seek to build and maintain meaningful engagement with stakeholders to inform our collections management.

3.8. We will not collect material if we judge that we do not have appropriate facilities and resources for storage, cataloguing and access and we will not accept items with conditions attached that restrict our ability to manage them appropriately.

4. Policy statement

4.1. The purpose of the collection

Quakers in Britain is a registered charity and our purpose in developing and maintaining collections is to support our charitable purpose, which is defined under four headings:

- Sustaining church and faith
- Supporting Quaker communities
- Promoting Quakerism
- Faith in action

The QiB Trustees are responsible for the work, assets and property held by the Yearly Meeting and as such they are responsible for ensuring the legal basis for the charity in developing and maintaining collections.

In 2020 **(minute BYMT-2020-06-04)**, the Trustees agreed a new mission statement for collections management. This replaced a previous statement of purpose that had been in place for many years and was intended to update the purpose of the collection to reflect how QiB is evolving as an organisation.

Mission

To develop, preserve and share collections relating to Quakers and the Quaker faith, in order to support the life of the church in the present and future and to support a wider understanding of our faith and practice.

Aims

We aim to develop collections that support a sense of shared history and identity among Friends, and our shared commitment to truth, and that represent Quaker values being active in the world.

We seek to achieve high standards of good practice and innovation in our preservation and management of the collections and to work collaboratively within the Quaker community, and with other libraries, archives and museums in the UK and worldwide, to ensure that the dispersed body of knowledge around the world about Quakers and their history is preserved and can be discovered.

We will share our collections as widely as possible and enable people to discover and engage with them in a variety of ways, to support our vision that Quakers are well known and widely understood.

4.2. History of the collection

The foundations of the collections

The early Quakers actively engaged with writing and publishing, to support the faith to flourish, and consciously sought to build a central collection of the writings they published, expressed in a decision recorded in 1673 that two copies of books written by Friends should be acquired and kept together, along with one copy of books written against them. This resulted in Meeting for Sufferings actively building a collection which is the foundation of the QiB collections today.

John Whiting produced the first catalogue of Friends books in 1708. Meeting for Sufferings directed frequent reviews and updates of the catalogue during the 18th and 19th centuries, aiming to keep their collection up to date as new works were published. They accepted collections of books from individual Friends, including from Thomas Broadbank, of Tottenham, in 1780, from Morris Birkbeck in 1817, and from Thomas Thompson of Liverpool, in 1814 and 1831.

In 1871, Meeting for Sufferings confirmed that they were actively collecting manuscripts as well as published works – but that if they couldn't get originals, they would take copies instead. In practice, they had actually been collecting key manuscripts for many years at that point, but this confirmed it as a formal policy.

In 1876, the Printing Committee asked Joseph Smith and Edward Marsh to rearrange the library, to amalgamate the different collections, and to produce a new single catalogue. Following this, they agreed that the library was sufficiently complete that only one copy of new publications would now be required.

1900 – 1950

By the end of the 19th century, the Library and Printing Committee recognised that the scale of growth of the collection meant that more resources were needed and the first Librarian, Norman Penney, was appointed in 1901.

This signalled a new era of development in the collections during the 20th century. There was significant collections growth in objects and framed art as well as library and archive material. This was added to in 1924 when the London Friends Institute, with its own library and picture gallery, became the responsibility of the Yearly Meeting under the Literature Committee.

The collections continued to grow and expand after they moved from Devonshire House, on Bishopsgate, to Friends House on Euston Road, in the 1920s, with the Meeting for Sufferings collections moving into a purpose-built library space. The concept of an outward-facing reference library developed further. Individual reference libraries maintained by different committees within the Yearly Meeting began to be housed alongside the original collection, beginning with the Industrial and Social Order Committee library in 1929, the Marriage and Parenthood Committee in 1932, and the Penal Reform Committee in 1933. Others followed later: these had originally remained largely separate libraries but in the decades that followed they were mostly amalgamated into the main library collection, bringing a range of different subject areas into the collection.

1950 – 2000

During the second half of the 20th century, significant organisational change and development in QiB ran in parallel with the development of the collections. In 1953, John Nickalls, the Librarian, presented a report to Library Committee, in which he analysed the significant growth of the collections since Norman Penney's appointment, as well as the increased focus on accessibility. He proposed that they now needed to re-assess the concept of having a "complete" collection and should take a more selective approach to collecting in future.

Also in the 1950s, Swarthmoor Hall, in Cumbria, was purchased by the Yearly Meeting. This had been the home of Margaret Fell, one of the founders of the Quaker movement, and there had been increasing interest in it since it had been purchased in 1912 by Emma Clarke Abraham, one of Margaret Fell's descendants. Roger Warner, a Friend who was an antiques dealer by trade, was commissioned by the Yearly Meeting to build a collection of furniture and objects to "dress" the building. This work continued for some years and there was also a collaborative approach, with some items of furniture being moved from Friends House to Swarthmoor Hall to add to the collection there.

During the later decades of the 20th century, collecting practice in Friends House seems to have edged back towards the pursuit of completeness, to the extent that a narrative developed that QiB ran a "Quaker British Library", and backlogs of appraisal and cataloguing developed as the collections grew.

Central archives and records management developed gradually from the 1970s onwards, alongside the development of QiB as a national charity, through a succession of structural changes which brought together a range of departments and committees that had previously functioned largely separately.

There was further accumulation of material from other charities within the Yearly Meeting, including the local and area meetings in London, and refurbishments around Friends House led to departments clearing out their offices. The Friends Institute was dissolved in 1979 and pictures that had previously been on display around Friends House were moved into the library along with material that had been stored in offices, where space was now at a premium.

The QiB collections we have today are therefore the result of a gradual accumulation of material within Friends House and Swarthmoor Hall, representing a range of different collecting approaches, with a mixture of intentional strategy of building a physical collection, and passive accumulation in the Friends House library as the secure storage space in the building.

Further information about the history of the collections can be found in two key articles in the Journal of the Friends Historical Society:

- "Devonshire House Reference Library", Anna L. Littleboy, Journal of the Friends Historical Society, vol. 18, nos. 1 and 3 (1921)
- "Friends Reference Library, 1901-1959", Muriel A. Hicks, Journal of the Friends Historical Society, vol. 49, no. 3 (1960).

4.3. Description of the collections

As a result of the gradual evolution of our collections development and documentation work over the last 350 years, the collections held by QiB currently encompass a wide range of formats and types of material, which is outlined below.

QiB central archives and records management

The organisational archive of the charity and of the national church in Britain comprising:

- Minutes of the Yearly Meeting in session and committees from the 1660s onwards
- Administrative records of departments in QiB, and former departments/organisations for which the charity is the successor body
- Archive copies of official publications produced by QiB, e.g. Yearly Meeting proceedings, books of discipline, Advices & Queries, etc.

A large proportion of our organisational archive, both in paper and born-digital format, is currently awaiting appraisal and either transfer to the archive, or confidential destruction (either in line with retention schedules or as a consequence of appraisal).

In line with our Collections Information Policy, a new process of retrospectively creating consistent inventory-level information for our organisational records began in 2025 and is ongoing, for both paper and born-digital records, to enable appraisal, arrangement, and cataloguing.

We are in transition from entirely paper-based records management towards effective creation, capture and preservation of born-digital records. We do not currently have appropriate infrastructure to enable ingest and preservation of born-digital records but we are starting to work with internal stakeholders to develop our capability for this.

Archives and manuscripts

Our archives and manuscripts, beyond the core organisational archive, encompass a wide range of material, from documents dating back to the earliest development of the Quaker faith in the 17th century, to 21st century records of Quaker organisations. They contain some of the core archive material for the history of the Quaker faith, with both national and international significance.

The material largely falls into one of the following categories:

- Early manuscripts from the 17th to the 19th centuries
- Personal papers of, or collections associated with Quaker individuals and families
- Organisational archives of independent Quaker organisations in Britain or individuals associated with these groups

Some of the earlier material includes

- the letters and papers of early Friends such as George Fox and Margaret Fell, dispersed from Swarthmoor Hall in the 18th century and then gathered together by various individuals in the 19th and 20th centuries
- significant personal and antiquarian archives from Quakers in the 18th and 19th centuries, such as Elizabeth Fry and Thomas Thompson of Liverpool, who also donated books for the library collection
- loose manuscripts bound together for ease of storage by the early Librarians in the 20th century, including documents that are part of the formal QiB archive.

As a result of historic collecting activity and broader interpretations of our collecting remit in the past, we hold some archives that fall outside our formal collection scope, including:

- some records of Quaker meetings outside Britain, e.g. Congenies in France
- non-Quaker archives relating to conscientious objection in World War I and World War II, including the archive of the Central Board for Conscientious Objectors and personal papers of conscientious objectors who were not Quakers, particularly people who served with the Friends Ambulance Unit, which was established and run by Quakers but open to all who objected to military service.
- personal collections relating largely to secondary research in Quaker history, comprising research notes, draft or unpublished chapters and articles, transcripts, etc.

All the archives in our collections contain both unique archival material, and ephemera or reference material with little archival value, including photocopies and transcripts, that would not be collected as archives now or would ideally be weeded during initial appraisal. The extent to which appraisal has been done in the past isn't always clear and it may not always have been consistently done. For a significant proportion of the holdings there is either only very high-level documentation, which does not align with current standards for archival description, or no documentation at all.

Records of national and international Quaker organisations

As outlined above, the library in Friends House became a place of storage for records from organisations with a national or international focus, which are not legally part of QiB, but have a governance or other close relationship with the charity.

The relationships vary, but in some cases the organisations grew out of a piece of work within QiB and therefore record series or collections are shared between the separate organisational archive and the QiB archive.

In some cases, records were transferred to Friends House for safekeeping as an informal arrangement, neither accessioned as part of the QiB collections or subject to a formal loan or deposit agreement. In others, there are some legacy arrangements where we are providing an active records storage and retrieval service without a deposit or service-level agreement in place, or arrangements for records review and transfer to an archive service, whether here or elsewhere.

These organisations include:

- Friends Trusts Ltd. (FTL)
- Friends Foreign Mission Association Trust Corporation (FFMATC)
- Quaker International Educational Trust (QuIET)
- Quaker Housing Trust (QHT)
- Young Friends General Meeting (YFGM)
- Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC)

We previously held some records of the Quaker United Nations Office, Geneva (QUNO), which originated within the work of a QiB predecessor organisation and were transported to QiB from Geneva as a records management transfer. The ownership of the records was not clarified when it became a separate organisation. In 2025 we worked with QUNO Geneva to resolve this and to identify the appropriate archive service for those records. We will use this as a case study for similar legacy arrangements.

London Quaker meeting records

We hold the records of area and local meetings in London and the London Quakers Property Trust (formerly Six Weeks Meeting), on loan (deposit) as a result of a legacy arrangement from 1962, when Six Weeks Meeting appointed Edward Milligan, then the Librarian at Friends House, as the Archivist for Six Weeks Meeting. The arrangement was continued in an increasingly informal way with his successors. This is an anomaly, as records of meetings in other parts of Britain are mostly deposited with local or university archive services.

Area meetings in London have continued to deposit their records in Friends House under this historic arrangement, although we have not previously established deposit agreements that would align with current standards.

These records remain in the ownership of the relevant area meeting, with the exception of the records of the London and Middlesex General Meeting, which was laid down in 2007. In their final meeting, they agreed to donate their records to QiB. There was no formal list produced at the time to specify which records this related to, so it has been subsequently interpreted by staff to include a small number of Quaker meetings in London that had closed down prior to 2007. This information will be recorded clearly in the collections information we create for these records.

Graphic and visual material

We have a wide range of visual material, which has historically been stored separately as a distinct collection, although this material is effectively part of the archives and manuscripts collections. It includes entire collections of artworks, such as photographs and watercolours, donated by

individuals, or individual visual items, such as photographs, separated out from larger archives when they were acquired. We will undertake inventory work of this material, in line with our Collections Information Policy, and appraisal, consolidation and cataloguing alongside our other archive collections.

There is some material which is non-archival, including negatives and lantern slides made by previous staff as duplicate access copies, and photographs cut out from books, journals or other publications, for reference.

Library

Our core collections of rare books and pamphlets

We hold unique and distinctive collections of rare books and pamphlets. These are our foundation collections, originating in the 17th century policy of keeping a central collection of approved publications, which Meeting for Sufferings oversaw from then up to the 20th century.

We generally consider the rare books and pamphlets in our collections to be those dated before 1850, but there will be later titles that were produced for limited circulation, either as a result of national Quaker work in the 20th century or as private publications, which are rare and have significant value for QiB's history, many of which will be identified through collections review work and will eventually form part of our core collections.

The collections include:

- adverse tracts (early publications produced to attack or argue against Quakers)
- a large collection of pamphlets relating to the abolition of the slave trade
- a large collection of broadsides and other early printed ephemera.
- named collections of published material, including non-Quaker books, associated with individuals:
    - Richard Hawkins (died 1735), whose private library was bequeathed to Westminster Monthly Meeting and donated to QiB in 2005
    - The library of Richard Richardson (died 1689), Recording Clerk from 1681
    - Morris Birkbeck (1734 – 1816), a Quaker bibliographer and collector
    - Joseph Bevan Braithwaite (1818 – 1905): a collection of works relating to various controversies which was bequeathed to London Yearly Meeting in 1907.

Most pre-1850 books and pamphlets have been catalogued to a detailed level, although there is scope for ongoing improvement of the catalogue data in future, in line with our Collections Information Policy and wider professional good practice.

This material is a priority for us in terms of collections care and accessibility, but this is largely a closed collection: active collections development is not a priority for us and we expect to undertake little collecting of pre-1850 material in future.

In addition to the collections at Friends House, there is a small collection of rare books at Swarthmoor Hall. The original collection may have been owned by the previous owners of the Hall, Emma Clarke Abraham and Edward Mitford Abraham, and subsequently added to by donations from individuals and Quaker meetings.

Reference collection of post-1850 published monographs, pamphlets, and journals

The monographs and journals in our collections broadly encompass the following categories:

- Publications about Quaker thought or aspects of Quaker history
- Biographies of Quakers
- Published research drawing on the collections

- Publications on topics with which British Quakers have been concerned, either now or in the past, e.g. peace and social reform
- Publications on local and family history which have considerable Quaker content (e.g. focusing on a Quaker family, or members of a local Quaker community)
- Publications by Quakers on non-Quaker topics, including art, fiction, poetry and music
- Reference works originally collected to support the work of yearly meeting committees in the early 20th century, which may include many works with no specific Quaker content.
- Key Quaker journals from Britain and around the world, including The Friend and The Friends Journal
- Serial publications produced by various Quaker organisations, both in Britain and around the world
- Some non-Quaker serials focussing on related subject areas, such as “Gandhi Way” and “Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society”

This represents a broad collecting remit that was our stated policy for many years, as we sought to build a comprehensive physical collection representing all aspects of Quaker work and topics in which Quakers had a concern, and to provide a specialist public library and information service.

In practice, new collecting in some of these areas has decreased in recent years and we have gradually taken a more selective approach, while continuing to retain the full range of titles previously acquired. Our default approach has been the permanent retention of everything we have collected in the past and we have not historically carried out monitoring of changes in user needs or research practices to inform collections development.

In 2024 – 2025, we undertook a formal review of the monographs and journals, which has resulted in some proposals for a more active collections development approach. This is outlined in this policy and will be detailed further in our forward plans.

Based on the data gathered through this review, we have at least 17,841 monographs and around 2300 journal titles, approximately 48 of which are current.

The post-1850 monographs and journals in the collections are largely catalogued and accessible, with some small backlogs awaiting review.

Limited circulation printed material, grey literature and ephemera

We hold some printed ephemera, informal publications and Quaker printed material from across Britain and around the world. Some of this material is published and widely available, some has been made available to the public but on a very limited basis, and some is entirely unpublished:

- Printed material from local and area meetings and other Quaker communities in Britain, including newsletters and printed lists of members
- Printed material produced by other yearly meetings around the world, e.g. books of discipline, yearly meeting proceedings, etc.
- Pamphlets produced by Quaker organisations in Britain and around the world, including Quaker Social Action, American Friends Service Committee and Friends World Committee for Consultation
- Theses and dissertations researched using our collections
- Research papers and lectures from Quaker and non-Quaker conferences, unpublished drafts, texts of talks or speeches, etc.
- Self-published books and pamphlets, usually with a limited circulation
- One-off articles on Quaker topics from journals not held in our collections
- Printed ephemera, e.g. flyers, handouts, postcards, etc. produced by Quakers or Quaker organisations, or relating to areas of Quaker concern, and photocopies
- Academic prospectuses from Quaker schools and colleges in the UK and around the world

- Hospitality guides, event programmes and delegate packs from Quaker-run events
- Scrapbooks
- Press cuttings acquired from commercial cuttings agencies

Library collections growth

We have not historically monitored the annual growth of the library collections in terms of newly-published material but some recent analysis indicates that there has been a gradual decrease in the number of new material coming into the collections over the last 10 years.

Objects, art and furniture

We have objects, art and furniture in both Friends House and Swarthmoor Hall.

At Friends House, we hold a group of 1670 items that are not physically stored as part of an archive. We undertook a formal inventory and collections review of these items in 2025, as a result of which we have much improved information about the collection, which encompasses the following categories:

- Costume
- Framed artwork
- Ethnographic collections
- Decorative Arts and Social History
- Dolls
- Jewellery, Badges and Hair
- Coins and Medals
- Other Textiles
- Ceramics
- Printing Blocks
- Sculpture
- Furniture and Equipment
- Archaeology

Some collections development recommendations have been made as a result of the collections review. Our proposed approach is set out in this policy and will be outlined in more detail in our forward plans.

We will be carrying out a similar collections review of the objects and art stored at Swarthmoor Hall in 2026, following which we expect to have improved information about this part of the collections. At present, we estimate that there may be around 400 items there, largely comprising furniture purchased or donated to dress the Hall in a period style, but without a specific Quaker connection. There is a small number of objects with a reputed link to early Quakers such as George Fox or Margaret Fell and some further objects associated with the national community of Quakers in Britain, such as objects from meeting houses or donated by Quaker families and individuals. There are also some archaeological items from past excavations on the Swarthmoor Hall site.

4.4. Our collections development approach and priorities

In this section, we outline our general approach and priorities including:

- Our priorities for active collecting
- Criteria to guide our decision-making when we are offered new items for the collections
- An outline of how we are addressing legacy issues with inventory, review and appraisal.

We will produce detailed forward plans outlining our work to implement this policy.

As set out in our policy principles above, we will take a selective and sustainable approach to new collecting, in line with the remit agreed by the Trustees. We have strong historic core collections and our priority is to improve their accessibility, adding new material to the collections only where necessary to support the core collections and our charitable purpose.

Our principal collections development priority is the QiB organisational archive. That is our primary responsibility and represents a continuation of the historic approach of ensuring that a record of our work is preserved.

Specific elements of our approach relating to the different parts of our collections are outlined below.

QiB archives and records management

We will take a proactive approach to records management, to ensure that we continue to preserve a reliable and authentic archive for QiB. We will produce a plan to sit alongside both this policy and our Records Management Policy, outlining our proposed work in the next 3 years.

This will include a high-level inventory and audit of all material held awaiting review and appraisal, in both paper and born-digital format, leading to a range of actions including appraisal, consolidation, and transfer to archive or confidential destruction in line with retention schedules or following appraisal.

We will also focus on developing our capacity and infrastructure for the creation, capture and preservation of born-digital records. We aim to manage born-digital material effectively in its digital format, without needing to print it out. We do not currently have appropriate infrastructure in place for this but we will explore options to establish a proportionate and sustainable approach that aligns with organisational priorities for our governance and core infrastructure.

Archives and manuscripts

We are regularly offered a range of archive material to add to the collections, including:

- Papers of Quaker families
- Personal papers of Quaker individuals involved in central Quaker work
- Archives of Quaker Recognised Bodies

While we have accepted archives on loan (deposit) in the past, we no longer accept archives on that basis and will now only accession archives where they are offered as a donation (where ownership is legally transferred to QiB).

We will take a selective approach to accepting new archives into the collections and will prioritise material which has strong evidential value relating to the work of QiB, which might include:

- archives that support the formal QiB archive, providing additional context or value by demonstrating the full breadth of a piece of work. An example of this might be the personal papers of an individual involved in a piece of work discerned and led by a national committee.
- papers relating to an individual's actions demonstrating their witness (e.g. campaigning for climate justice), where it is clearly connected to national work supported by QiB.
- Archives of Quaker Recognised Bodies working within Britain, particularly where they are working on topics which relate to QiB work

We will take account of the collecting policies of other archive services. Where there is an overlap between our collecting remit and that of another organisation, we will advise the owner that there is an alternative service for the material and proceed through discussion with them and the other service(s).

Where material has a specific local focus, we will usually advise that it should be offered to the relevant local archive service, including material predominantly about personal or family history.

We will consider accessioning archival material which has the potential to restore original order, or add further historic value and context to an existing collection but we will not automatically acquire new material relating to existing collections. Where archive collections relating to one creator sit across different archive services we will manage our approach on a case-by-case basis. We will consider the most appropriate repository for the collections and improve our collections information to make appropriate links between archives held in different services.

We may also, following appraisal and discussion with other services, decide that archives held by QiB would more appropriately sit as part of a larger collection with related material held elsewhere. In these cases, we may propose deaccessioning archives if it improves their coherence and accessibility.

Our approach will be informed by the need to ensure that our collections support our charitable purpose, through an integrated process of review, appraisal, improved collections information and collaboration with both internal and external stakeholders and the resources available to appropriately enable accessibility. We aim to maintain a sustainable balance between ensuring a coherent collection that aligns with our remit and purpose, and our ability to ensure appropriate accessibility.

Archives appraisal and collections review

Our current priority in relation to the archives and manuscripts is to retrospectively create consistent inventory-level information about the archives we hold, in line with our Collections Information Policy, as the creation of this information has been inconsistent in the past and there are significant gaps.

This will include identifying and capturing ownership and provenance information where it exists, or clearly identifying gaps in such information, to support appraisal and accessibility.

We will also carry out systematic appraisal across all our archives, to ensure that we are retaining unique material with evidential value in its appropriate archival context, and to address a lack of clarity about where and how consistently appraisal has been done in the past.

Historically, our collecting remit was interpreted broadly and the appraisal work will include re-appraisal and retrospective appraisal of material held for many years, both material for which there is some high-level collections information as well as entirely uncatalogued material.

We will undertake this work with the aim of better aligning the collections with our charitable purpose and enabling accessibility.

We will review collections held on loan, mostly as a result of historic arrangements and without appropriate deposit agreements which align with current good practice, and establish clear agreements or review whether the collections fit within our collecting remit.

Appraisal will result in a range of subsequent actions, including

- consolidation and cataloguing
- weeding of copies, ephemera and other non-archival material
- proposals for deaccessioning
- seeking to negotiate donation or a new deposit agreement for material which we currently hold on loan

We may propose deaccessioning for various reasons, including

- where we identify that there is an overlap with the collecting policy of another archive service, which may be a more appropriate location for those collections

- collections which we currently hold on loan where the owners wish to retain ownership, if we feel that we cannot make the collection accessible in line with good practice.

We will seek to ensure that material remains in the public domain, although that may not always be possible where material is not owned by us. We will assess these situations and weigh up the potential impact on a case by case basis.

Records of Quaker organisations with a close governance relationship with Quakers in Britain

We will work with relevant stakeholders to review the collections we already hold for other Quaker organisations, which have a national or international focus or a governance relationship with QiB. This includes records we hold on loan, or where we may be providing an informal records management service, and those which have been donated to us.

We will establish the situation with regard to ownership, coherence and accessibility of the records, and the relationship between QiB and the organisation, including possible overlaps with the collecting remit of other archive services.

Reviews will include inventory, consolidating collections information, physical consolidation, and cataloguing, as well as consideration of suitable arrangements for future records management and accruals to the archives.

London Quaker meeting records

We will work with local and area Quaker meetings in London to review both the records we hold and the records, in both paper and born-digital format, remaining in their custody. We will also work with them to establish suitable arrangements for their ongoing records management and preservation of their archives, including appropriate management of born-digital records.

Library

Core collections

As outlined above, we consider our core collections of pre-1850 rare books, pamphlets and journals to be largely closed and we do not expect to acquire many new items in this category.

The exceptions might be copies that contain significant provenance information, annotations or other unique information that adds to or supports our existing core collections. We will consider acquisitions like this on a case-by-case basis, including engagement with relevant stakeholders. Management Meeting approval will be required before new rare books or pamphlets are added to the collections, to ensure that this supports our charitable purpose.

There is some early non-Quaker material which we might consider deaccessioning following collections review, including Bibles, copies of books which were owned by Quakers, but are not on Quaker topics, or significant early works by Quakers on non-Quaker topics, such as medicine and botany, which do not otherwise relate directly to Quaker history and would be more appropriately held elsewhere.

We have some remaining backlogs of pre-1850 material acquired in the past but not yet appraised, accessioned, or catalogued. We will review this material and take a selective approach to what we retain, weighing up any possible alternative homes, copies held in other libraries, and the staff time and resources involved in responsible disposal.

We will undertake inventory and research into the rare books at Swarthmoor Hall, alongside the development of the interpretation of the Hall, which could result in proposals for disposal or deaccessioning of some of the collection.

Reference collections of post-1850 monographs and journals

Our remit now, in line with QiB's charitable purpose, is not to maintain a "complete" collection of material written by and about Quakers, but to prioritise the material that we have a particular responsibility to preserve. Therefore, we will pursue a more sustainable approach to this part of the collections, to develop it as an active support collection to the core collections.

We will collect and retain titles only where we can clearly demonstrate that they support our charitable purpose and stakeholder needs, and that this can only be achieved by us holding the item in our collections.

Therefore, we do not expect our post-1850 reference collections to grow significantly in future. Selected new publications may occasionally be collected as follows:

- Monographs about Quaker studies that clearly support or add context to the QiB archive, or which have resulted from extensive research using our collections
- Some core Quaker journals and regular publications produced by national and international Quaker organisations

We will prioritise key titles that support our core collections and which have evidential value in documenting Quaker faith and work in Britain.

Published material may not be retained in the collections permanently: we will be responsive to organisational and stakeholder needs.

Following collections review, we may undertake deaccessioning and disposal in some key areas, as follows:

- Duplicate copies of titles that are widely available elsewhere, apart from items which we identify as forming part of our core collections
- Subject areas and classifications that do not relate directly to Quaker faith and work in Britain (e.g. classifications originating in, or largely comprising the reference libraries of former national committees in the Yearly Meeting)
- Journals that are widely available elsewhere or online or are on non-Quaker topics

We will develop a collaborative approach, monitoring new publishing in Quaker studies and its accessibility alongside ongoing monitoring and evaluation of our access and engagement activity, to enable us to understand more clearly where we should prioritise our collecting to support the national community of Quakers in Britain.

Where material is available in other libraries or online we will engage with creators and publishers to confirm whether there is a need for us to continue to maintain physical collections of these titles (e.g., for Quaker Recognised Bodies, as part of their wider archive).

We will undertake formal collections reviews every three years.

Pamphlets, limited circulation printed material, grey literature and ephemera

We will carry out a formal collections review of this part of the collections and we expect to significantly reduce our collecting in this area in future.

Review and appraisal of this material may result in the identification of items that constitute part of our unique and distinctive collections, or proposals for rationalisation, consolidation with archives, deaccessioning and disposal. We may also identify material to be retained for short-term reference purposes, but not long-term preservation as part of the collections.

Collections review will involve liaison and consultation with the creators of material that has historically been collected in this category, as well as with stakeholders, including local and area meetings in Britain, Quaker organisations in Britain and around the world, and our partners in other

Quaker libraries. We will monitor new material that might previously have been collected and assess the impact of us no longer collecting it, engaging with the Trustees and stakeholders. We will also monitor collections usage and access and engagement activities, so we can consider user and stakeholder needs in future.

We will deaccession material that is out of date, superseded, widely available elsewhere, or where it presents compliance issues with the UK GDPR and Data Protection At 2018, or with copyright legislation.

We will carry out appraisal of some unpublished material alongside similar material in the archives and manuscripts, as a result of which it may be consolidated with the archives. Copies, duplicates or material without continuing evidential value may be weeded or deaccessioned alongside similar material in the archives.

We have historically collected theses through an informal system, where some students who have used our collections in their research have donated copies to us as a recognition of our contribution to their work . To support our sustainable and accessible collections, and out of courtesy to the students who previously donated copies to us, we will retain our current collection, but in future we will not accept theses and dissertations. Students are usually required to deposit one electronic and one physical copy of their theses in the repository of that institution; therefore collecting these does not align with our remit and priorities.

Instead, as part of our engagement strategy, we will develop collaborative activities with researchers which will bring us awareness and knowledge of Quaker scholarship and the Quaker topics that will in turn guide our current collections now and in the future.

Objects, art and furniture

We will develop forward plans to take forward the recommendations from our formal collections review of the objects, art and furniture stored in Friends House in 2025. The recommendations include proposals for deaccessioning and disposal, for reasons including:

- Items in such poor condition that they are beyond repair and may damage other material in the collections
- Items that do not fit within our collecting remit for the collections to be “distinctively Quaker”
- Items that have multiple duplicates with no unique history, which might include objects like bonnets
- Items for which we cannot provide appropriate storage or enable accessibility

In future, the collections should largely consist of two areas:

1. Objects British Quakers have used as part of their witness and worship. This might include objects created by Quaker projects, objects worn or used by Friends doing Quaker work, or objects Quakers have used to express their beliefs.
2. Objects that depict or record British Friends, their buildings, their worship and their witness, particularly as it relates to the national community of Quakers in Britain.

The objects in these two areas largely form part of our core collections, supporting the central QiB archive and core Quaker texts, and enabling us to present a rounded and truthful depiction of the lives and culture of British Quakers and QiB’s work, now and in the past. We will work towards improved accessibility of this material.

Like the rest of the core collections, this will now be a largely closed collection and we do not expect any new collecting in this area.

A formal collections review of the objects and art at Swarthmoor Hall is currently underway, in line with the previous review done at Friends House. When that is complete, a plan will be produced to implement the recommendations of both reviews.

4.5. Material which is out of scope for future collecting

We have indicated above the criteria that will guide our decision-making in adding to our collections and the type of material that we will prioritise. We have also stated that we intend to reduce the amount of material we add to our collections and that we will take an increasingly selective approach in future. We will take most decisions on a case-by-case basis but, for clarity, material that we consider to be out of scope for future collecting includes the following:

Archives

- Digital copies, photocopies or transcripts of archive material remaining in private hands
- Archives of other Yearly Meetings and Quaker organisations based or operating outside Britain
- Personal papers of people who were not Quakers, although they may have worked with Quakers in Britain on topics or projects of shared concern
- Archives of non-Quaker organisations focussing on related topics of concern to Quakers in Britain, such as peace campaigning or climate justice
- Archives of local and area meetings in Britain outside London

Library

- Monographs on general subject areas relating to areas of Quaker work, past and present, such as peace, social reform, climate justice, etc.
- Material written and published by Quakers on non-Quaker topics
- One-off articles or chapters on Quaker topics, from journals or books not in our collections
- Material which is substantially of local interest within Britain, and is (or could be) held in local services alongside, or within, the relevant meeting records

4.6. Collections review and appraisal

We have not historically undertaken collections reviews or deaccessioning. Our collections development approach has progressed over the last 350 years on the basis of how the original intentions of the early Quakers in the 17th century have been interpreted by successive generations. During the 20th century, the approach varied with different librarians but came to be characterised by a sense that we would indefinitely maintain a comprehensive archive of all Quaker publications from around the world.

This has become less appropriate as the ways in which information is created, shared, and retrieved have changed and because, as a charity, QiB needs to ensure that its work supports its charitable purpose.

All publications produced in the UK and Ireland should be deposited in the British Library and many Quaker organisations around the world either maintain their own archives, or deposit them formally in other libraries and archives.

Therefore, in line with our remit, that we should not seek to develop or maintain a “complete” collection of all Quaker material, we have embarked on a major programme of collections review and appraisal across the collections, as indicated in the various sections above. The aim of this is to bring the collections in line with the remit approved by Trustees and to enable us to focus on the accessibility of the significant material of which we are the custodians.

We have carried out two major collections reviews (objects and art, and post-1850 monographs and journals). We will carry out further collections reviews in other parts of the collections and in all cases, review and appraisal may result in proposals for rationalisation, consolidation, improved cataloguing, or deaccessioning or disposal.

We will carry out all collections reviews and appraisal programmes according to a formal methodology, clearly setting out our aims and objectives.

Our overarching objectives in doing collections reviews are

- to ensure that our collections align with our purpose and mission
- that we are maintaining collections that we can reasonably make accessible, within QiB's wider priorities
- to inform our collections information, collections care and access and engagement planning.

We will undertake disposals and deaccessioning in line with this policy and relevant legislation and professional ethical standards, and in relation to our mission and the charitable purpose of QiB, not from financial motivation. All deaccessioning will follow from an agreed process and in line with the authority and decision-making set out below.

4.7. Ethical and legal approach/considerations

We recognise our responsibility to work within relevant professional standards and codes of ethics, including:

- Archives and Records Association (UK and Ireland) code of ethics
- Museums Association code of ethics
- Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) code of ethics
- Spectrum, the UK standard for Museums (managed by the Collections Trust)
- Standards and guidance from Arts Council England and The National Archives
- Standards and guidance from the International Council on Archives (ICA)

We will undertake due diligence before acquiring new items for the collections, and ensure that we have reason to believe that we can acquire legal title to them. We will not collect material where we cannot establish appropriate provenance or proof of legal title. If we are offered material by an intermediary, we will seek to establish contact with the owners of the material before accepting it.

We seek to comply with all relevant legal requirements in relation to acquisition of, and illicit trade in, cultural property.

We will not collect material if we judge that we do not have appropriate facilities and resources for storage, cataloguing and access.

We have an access procedure in place to enable us to comply with relevant legislation and regulatory requirements, including the UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018. Donors of archives will be informed about this when the donation is considered. Where possible, we seek to acquire the copyright when we acquire new material for the collections. We will not accept material with conditions attached that restrict our ability to manage them appropriately.

4.8. Authority and legal basis for collections development

The Trustees are responsible for ensuring that the collections align with QiB's charitable purpose, through this policy.

QiB staff responsible for collections management have authority to add new material to the collections in line with the approach outlined in this policy. They are accountable to BYM Trustees for collections management, through Management Meeting and will report to BYM Trustees at least annually, to ensure accountability for their decision-making.

When adding new material to the collections, we will seek to acquire the legal title to it and therefore only to add to the collections through one of these methods:

- internal transfer, in the case of the Britain Yearly Meeting archive
- donation
- bequest
- purchase or subscription, in the case of new books or journals

We will not accept any new archive collections on loan (deposit).

Where we have legacy arrangements of archives held on loan as a result of past collecting practices, following review in line with this policy, we will seek to establish new agreements covering collections which we do not own, or we may seek to deaccession collections where we do not feel that we can manage them or provide access to them appropriately.

We do not seek to buy material at auction and the decision to bid for material through an auction requires prior authorisation from Management Meeting.

4.9. Engagement and collaboration with stakeholders

We aim to monitor the needs of relevant stakeholders on an ongoing basis, and to consider them when implementing and reviewing this policy.

When we consider deaccessioning material from archive collections, we will take into account whether it has previously been available for research and weigh up the potential impact.

We will monitor our collecting remit and priorities in relation to other organisations with related or overlapping collections. We will seek to work collaboratively with them to find the most appropriate place for Quaker collections to be held, and the most appropriate way to make them accessible. These include:

- Quaker libraries in the USA and Ireland
- Brotherton Library, University of Leeds
- Borthwick Institute, University of York
- Local authority archive services
- Specialist archive services with collection strengths in subject areas relevant to Quaker work, including peace and disarmament.

4.10. Disposals and deaccessioning

General principles

We will not undertake disposal solely due to lack of space, or for financial motivation. We will dispose of or deaccession material in accordance with this policy, in relation to our purpose and remit. Appraisal and collections reviews will be undertaken by the staff responsible for the day-to-day management of the collections.

We will undertake disposal and deaccessioning in accordance with relevant good practice as set out in:

- Deaccessioning and disposal: guidance for archive services, The National Archives, 2015
- "Off the Shelf: a toolkit for ethical transfer, reuse and disposal", The Museums Association
- Disposals policy for rare books and manuscripts, CILIP Rare Books and Special Collections Group, 2015

We will also liaise with the Trustees to ensure that we work in line with both the guidance listed above and relevant charity legislation.

We will ensure, before disposing of any material, that we can demonstrate that we have the right to do so, either through owning the legal title to it, or having obtained appropriate permission in writing from the owner.

Archival appraisal is a routine activity and involves reviewing the contents of an archive prior to cataloguing, in order to select material for long-term preservation, and to weed out non-archival material, such as ephemera, duplicates and other material with no unique evidential or informational value.

We will do this on receipt of a collection, or retrospectively, as outlined above, where there is no obvious evidence of appraisal having taken place when the archive was originally received, or if it appears to have been done inconsistently.

We will dispose of non-archival material weeded out of archives as part of this process, and this process will be documented appropriately during cataloguing. When we are acquiring new archives in line with this policy, we state our intention to undertake appraisal in our accession documentation so that donors are aware of it and can opt for material to be returned to them if they wish.

Decision-making for disposal and deaccessioning

There is delegated decision-making in place in relation to deselection, deaccessioning and disposal of material from the collections, or in our custody (which may not have been formally accessioned). We will produce appropriate procedures and plans to implement this policy in relation to collections reviews and other processes outlined above.

The formal approval of BYM Trustees will be required for deaccessioning material that would fall within the parameters of the guidance documents listed above:

- Archives
- Objects and art
- Rare books or pamphlets.

Appropriate consultation must be undertaken with stakeholders and legal advice may be required. The QiB Communications Team should also be informed.

We will automatically treat anything published before 1850 as a rare book, although books published after 1850 can still be considered rare, depending on various criteria, including availability in other libraries and archive services. If in doubt, we will act in accordance with the guidance on disposal of rare books and manuscripts, referred to above.

Library deaccessioning

A primary function of an existing library collection involves reviewing items and then making decisions based on the current policy. We will pursue a clear and ethical approach to deselection and deaccessioning in our collections of books, pamphlets and journals, ensuring that the following are in place:

- An agreed decision-making process for deselection and deaccessioning.
- The means of how we go about deselection
- A clear procedure for deaccessioning from start to finish
- Ensuring clear accountability and sign-off for the material that is being deaccessioned.

Deselection is the process of identifying and removing unwanted items from the active collection (i.e. the collection management activity), in line with the Collections Development Policy. Deaccessioning is the formal, permanent removal of those items from the library's official holdings (i.e. the administrative process).

The Head of Library and Archives has the authority to deselect and deaccession:

- Published general reference sources that are no longer current
- Duplicates of printed and published works, including pamphlets, monographs and journals
- Items that are badly deteriorated or damaged and are beyond reasonable repair.

Decisions to deselect and deaccession other material from the collections require sign-off from Management Meeting, including:

- Books that are assessed by staff to be superseded or biased, misleading, factually inaccurate or are no longer considered authoritative
- Books that are widely available in other libraries which have greater collections strength.
- Books we assess to have significance beyond Quaker studies and we no longer wish to keep in our collections
- Books with low or no usage which may be better in another library
- Decline in subject popularity amongst our users and stakeholders

All deaccessioning will be documented and the Head of Library and Archives will report routinely to Management Meeting on action taken.

General deaccessioning and disposal

The Head of Library and Archives has authority to dispose of or deaccession the following types of material which may be found throughout the collections:

- Printed and three-dimensional ephemera, including items such as plastic or cotton bags, mugs, balloons, etc.
- Non-archival material such as photocopies, transcripts, copies of photographs, etc.
- Drafts of works which were later published
- Research notes and unpublished drafts. We will assess these on a case-by-case basis in relation to whether we feel we are in a position to make them fully available, whether they have sufficient evidential value, and significance within the context of the overall collections, including connections to published works
- Material which is duplicated elsewhere in the collections (e.g. personal copies of minutes where we also hold the official copy)

These types of material may be identified for deaccessioning or disposal following appraisal or collections reviews in line with this policy.

Where there is any doubt about the nature of the material proposed for deaccessioning and the authority for decision-making, the Head of Library and Archives will consult Management Meeting, who may in turn refer decisions to BYM Trustees for approval.

The Head of Library and Archives will report annually to BYM Trustees on all disposals and deaccessioning undertaken, as part of routine reporting on collections management work.

5. Legal/regulatory and governance context [if relevant]

This policy is grounded in legislation and regulations applicable in England, Wales, and Scotland and established best practice relating to this policy area.

Key references include:

5.1. UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018
5.2. Copyright legislation in the UK
5.3. Relevant legislation relating to charity governance
5.4. BS EN 17820:2023 Conservation of Cultural Heritage – Specifications for the management of moveable cultural heritage collections
5.5. Archive Service Accreditation Standard (The National Archives)
5.6. Spectrum, the UK standard for Museums (Collections Trust)

6. Related QiB policies and governance documents

Processes, procedure documents, other policies and governance documents relating to this policy, which may be modified and updated independently of it, are available here:

6.1. QiB Records Management Policy
6.2. QiB Collections Information Policy
6.3. QiB Collections Care Policy
6.4. QiB Collections Access and Engagement Policy
6.5. All procedures developed relating to this and the policies listed above

Policy Ends

Policy Management Information

Review

This policy is subject to review every 3 years, but may be reviewed earlier if, for example:

- there is an incident within the policy area OR there are external changes (eg regulations or legislation) which warrant it;

OR

- the policy is found to have been materially breached.

Policy governance

The following chart sets out the governance framework around this policy:

Responsible	QiB collections staff
Accountable	Head of Library and Archives
Consulted	Management Meeting
Informed	All other QiB staff

Governance Review, Approval & Monitoring	BYM Trustees

Document control

Author: Libby Adams

Role for QiB: Head of Library and Archives

Date Last Reviewed: January 2026