

Collecting 20th Century Rural Culture Project

This four year project began in the autumn of 2008 supported by Lottery funding of £95,000. The purpose was to acquire material that builds, decade by decade, a picture of the countryside in the twentieth century. We looked for signal items that speak powerfully of their day and illustrate the wider cultural influence of the countryside on English society.

We collected over four hundred objects, ranging from Glastonbury Festival programmes and Corgi toys to Arts and Crafts furniture and industrial chemical advertising signs. As well as filling in gaps in the ‘timeline’ of objects at The MERL, Collecting 20th century rural cultures has enriched the collections with objects that have a greater focus on ideas, opinions and perceptions within and about rural places and people.

A major output of the project was a temporary exhibition which can be loaned to other institutions. It drew out five themes – interactions, inspiration, representations, modernisation, and conflict – through interpretation banners which can complement each Museum’s selection of objects from their own collections and from The MERL’s.

The Heritage Lottery Fund’s Collecting Cultures scheme is designed to help support acquisitions, curatorial skills, research and increased public involvement. The MERL project is one of 22 that was sponsored in museums and galleries across the UK.

To find out about the objects acquired as part of the project, go to the [Collecting Rural Cultures project blog](#).

The objects are also catalogued on the [online database](#). Search using the phrase ‘collecting 20th century’