

'Collections' purchased by the Friends

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Over the years, many collections of objects have been purchased for and by Birmingham Museums. Some are weird, some are wonderful, and some are really important. Below are a selection of collections of objects which the Friends either contributed to or bought outright.

The first collection, which I mentioned in my article in the November 2017 - January 2018 edition of 'Artefacts', was purchased in 1932, consisting of 21 whips ranging from Ladies' carriage whips to a bullock team whip (Accession numbers: 1932F212-1932F233).

In 1933, a rather macabre collection of Hair Jewellery was purchased by the Friends. This included 25 pieces, mostly bracelets, but also a pair of earrings (Accession numbers: 1933M375-1933M396).

A huge and really important collection of coins, medals and tokens, amassed by a collector called Henry Samuel Gunn, was purchased in 1939. It comprised 133 Roman coins, and also Mediaeval and other British and foreign coins (Accession numbers: 1939C390-549 & 1939N433-622).

When the William De Morgan ceramics factory closed, all the artefacts housed there were purchased for Birmingham Museums. These are mostly tiles but also household articles and pattern books. A very important archive (Accession numbers: 1981M10-1981M219) – see adjacent images.



Top right: Earthenware Vase by William De Morgan & Co; 1981M46. Above right: 'Wall Tile' - William De Morgan Collection, 1873-1888, designed by William De Morgan, manufactured by Architectural Pottery Co.; 1981M75C. Above left: Sketchbook by William De Morgan; 1981M315. All from the William De Morgan collection and purchased with the assistance of the Friends of Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery and the Victoria & Albert Purchase Grant Fund, 1981.

James Watt junior was a great collector, and his collection was purchased from Sotheby's in 2002. It is varied and wide ranging, including wood samples from all over the world, numerous fob watch chains, chatelaines, some of his furniture, his Coalport dinner service, and many other items (Accession numbers: 2003.007).

Another purchase was 12 railway posters with a difference, as they were French, and designed by Salvador Dali (Accession numbers: 2005.3309.1-.12). In 2010 Adam Jaffer, the Ethnography curator, asked the Friends to buy an important collection of African printed textiles. This collection shows the adaptation of traditional to new forms (Accession numbers: 2011.0046.1-.28).

Hopefully, in the future, Friends will be able to access all these collections through the Friends' website [Editor's Note: which, as of 2022, we now can! <https://fbmt.org.uk/publications/friends-acquisitions-history/>].