

**Documentation Policy
Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford**

Date approved by Pitt Rivers Museum Executive Board: 21 May 2024

Date approved by Pitt Rivers Museum Board of Visitors: 25 February 2025

Date at which policy is due for review: February 2030

The Museum's statement of purpose is:

As given in the University of Oxford's regulations, the Museum's purpose is 'to assemble, preserve and exhibit the Pitt Rivers Collection and to promote the public understanding of anthropology and world archaeology, and their teaching and research, based on the Museum's collections.' see Council Regulation 4 of 2019 <https://governance.admin.ox.ac.uk/legislation/council-regulations-4-of-2019#collapse1421161>

The Museum's mission statement:

The Pitt Rivers Museum wants to become a welcoming space to all where stories are shared by many voices. Working collaboratively and creatively with staff, volunteers, and communities we will transform how our iconic collections are engaged with, both online and in the museum. In an increasingly disconnected world, we want to inspire empathy and deepen cross-cultural understanding.

1. Introduction
2. Aims of the Documentation Policy
3. Policy
 - 3.1 Improve the accountability of collections
 - 3.2 Maintain minimum professional standards in documentation and, where staff time and resources permit, meet the highest possible standards
 - 3.3 Extend and maintain global access to collections information
 - 3.4 Strengthen the security of the collections
4. Policy publication and review procedure

1. Introduction

1.1 Documentation is the key to making the most of the Pitt Rivers Museum's collections by the greatest diversity of users, both by preserving and enhancing the information that makes objects interesting and useful and by enabling staff to manage the collections effectively.

1.2 The Museum acknowledges that complete and professionally recognised documentation procedures are fundamental to maintaining accountability for the care and management of collections and seeks to lead in the sector in terms of the quality and accessibility of its collection documentation.

1.3 This policy demonstrates the Museum's commitment to ensuring that the information it acquires, creates and holds relating to collections is accurate, reliable, secure and appropriately accessible. We are committed to maintaining at least the minimum level of collection documentation that will allow us to identify and locate all items for which we are legally responsible.

1.4 The Museum obtains information from many sources including representatives of originating and descent communities, donors, visitors, students, researchers and, as well as through research by staff and volunteers. The policy outlined below will ensure that the Museum can provide appropriate public access to this information and that it is permanently associated with the relevant items in the Museum's collection.

2. Aims of the Documentation Policy

2.1 The aim of this policy is to ensure that the Museum fulfils its responsibilities for collections in relation to security, management and access to the collections and associated information.

3. Policy

The Pitt Rivers Museum is committed to managing its collections in accordance with the Arts Council England Accreditation Scheme (<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/supporting-arts-museums-and-libraries/uk-museum-accreditation-scheme>) and the Museums Association's Code of Ethics 2015 (<https://www.museumsassociation.org/download?id=1155827>), as well as legal frameworks in relation to Data Protection and Freedom of Information.

The Museum will:

3.1 Improve the accountability of collections

The Museum will record sufficient information about the objects in its care to ensure that each object that it is legally responsible for (including both short- and long-term loans) can be identified and located. The Museum defines accountability in line with the original Museums and Galleries Commission's (MGC) definition: 'To enable museums to fulfil their fundamental responsibility for collections and the information associated with them. The principles are that a museum should know at any time exactly for what it is legally responsible and where each item is located, including loans as well as permanent collections.' (MGC, 1993)

3.2 Maintain minimum professional standards in documentation and, where staff time and resources permit, meet the highest possible standards

3.2.1 The Museum will maintain Accreditation standards in relation to the Spectrum Collections Management Standard, specifically by meeting the minimum standards for the nine Spectrum primary procedures: Object Entry, Inventory, Acquisition and Accessioning, Cataloguing, Object Exit, Loans In, Loans Out, Location and Movement Control, and Documentation Planning. Procedures are set out in the Documentation Procedural Manual. The Museum aims to meet the complete standard wherever possible, given staff and resource constraints.

3.2.2 The Museum's documentation procedure will also be guided by the following codes of ethics: Museums Association *Code of Ethics*; *Code of Practice on Archives for Museums and Galleries in the UK*, 2002; DCMS *Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums*, 2005; Department for Culture, Media and Sport *Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums*, 2005; University of Oxford *Policy on Human Remains held by the University of Oxford's Museums*, 2006; Arts Council England Restitution and Repatriation Guidelines, 2023.

3.2.3 The Museum recognises that it has a backlog of collections not documented to the minimum SPECTRUM standard. The Museum will ensure that it will work toward eliminating this backlog through the implementation of the Documentation Plan. Although bulk accessioning might be considered a method to speed up the processing of backlogs, this is not normally used by the Museum (see Documentation plan for detailed explanation as to why this method is not used).

3.2.4 The Museum recognises that there are items of unclear ownership within the collections such as legacy/historic loans. The work on establishing the ownership of these loans is ongoing and the Museum will work with other Oxford University colleagues including GLAM staff and staff from Legal Services Oxford to do this. This work will be informed by information supplied by the UKRG and by the Collections Trust. See Legacy Loans Plan within the Documentation Plan.

3.2.5 The Museum will regularly evaluate the efficiency of plans, procedures, systems and workflows in order to achieve the highest standard of documentation possible.

3.3 Extend and maintain global access to collections information

3.3.1 The Museum will extend access to collections information by providing and maintaining a collections management system (Museum+ and Collections Online), and by continuing to seek to improve public awareness of and access to the information. Barriers to access may include physical, sensory, social, cultural, intellectual, technological or financial constraints, and the Museum's strategies for addressing these barriers are outlined in the Museum's Access Policy as well as its Interpretation Guidelines for Display, Labelling and Access, 2012 (under review). The Museum provides online access to its collection records, many with illustrative images, via its website <https://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/collections-online#/search>

3.3.2 In managing our documentation, and in providing access to this information, the Museum will ensure that compliance with the following regulations is considered and adhered to: Data Protection Act, 2018, General Data Protection Act 2018, Freedom of Information Act, 2000, Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988. The Museum will review all requests for documentation information that could include confidential data such as donor information, environmental or security information, valuations or site details on a case-by-case basis, and in accordance with the applicable legislation and any legal agreements or conditions of gift.

3.3.3 Where possible and appropriate, the Museum will respect the wishes of representatives of originating and descent communities in relation to recording and making accessible information regarding artefacts, photographs and archival documents in the Museum's care.

3.3.4 The Museum's online catalogue does not show images of the ancestral remains in its collection.

3.3.5 At the beginning of each browser session on the Museum's online catalogue a cultural safety warning displays to users. The warning alerts users that the database may contain information about, and photographs of, objects associated with ritual or ceremonial activity yet to be classified as public. There may also be images, voices or names of deceased persons in photographs, film, audio recordings or printed material. Some records will also document research about peoples and cultures using scientific research models and language that are outdated and may be offensive. Users are able to opt in or out of this cultural safety warning.

3.4. Strengthen the security of the collections and their documentation

3.4.1 The Museum will maintain and review the security of the collections in order to ensure that key paper records are securely stored in environmental conditions that will ensure their physical security and long-term preservation. Computerised records will be similarly held and backed up regularly with regular reviews and checks.

3.4.2 Historical documentation relating to collections (including but not limited to related documents files and accessions registers) is held in fire-proof cabinets and in secure and environmentally stable conditions. All historical accession volume entries have been transcribed into individual database entries on the Museum's collection management system MuseumPlus (M+). The mid-20th century card catalogue system using the Beatrice Blackwood System of Documentation which enables objects to be accessed by both geographical or typological feature is stored in a secure area within the Museum.

3.4.3 Electronic data are regularly and securely backed-up, both on-site and off-site. The Museum holds two main digital catalogues – the collections management system for collections data and the digital asset management system (DAMS) which is the primary repository for digital assets. These are integrated systems. For computerised records there are two levels of backups. CMS: Supplier backups are taken daily and weekly and held for three months. These backups are not held on the same server as the CMS database. They are located in Berlin. The University also holds local backups. These are held for a year and administered by the University IT department (GMIT). DAMS: The DAMS is stored on Enterprise cloud, with their own dedicated hardware physically present in the London Docklands. Backups are performed nightly, and are stored in a data centre in Cambridge. The systems have RAID redundancy and nightly remote off-site backup, offline backup and disaster recovery. We are able to request a full copy of the system at any point, which is provided as a password-protected TAR file. Both Montala (the supplier) and the data centres they use have ISO 27001 certification.

3.4.4 In accordance with the University of Oxford's *Information Security Policy*, 2012, the Museum does not allow confidential information to be stored or transported insecurely, and all databases are password and network protected for on-site and off-site access. The Museum's CMS is accessed online. Access is controlled by personalised account permissions.

3.4.5 The Museum will regularly review its electronic systems against the risk of obsolescence in order to ensure long term accessibility of the information held. Both the CMS and the DAMS systems are managed by external suppliers. Prior to contract renewal normally every 2 years (DAMS) and 3 years (CMS) the Museum completes documentation to confirm whether the systems still meet expectations and requirements.

3.4.6 Perform an annual spot-check of the collections and the robustness of the locations management systems with the number of objects checked to be in line with current University of Oxford GLAM guidelines. The results of this annual spot-check will be documented and presented to the Museum's Executive Board and Board of Visitors. Security of collections has been significantly

improved with the introduction of the M+ CMS which records when any change has been made to the database including a change to the location. A digital footprint is created by each member of staff which cannot be removed.

4. Policy publication and review procedure

4.1 This Policy will be published on the Museum's website and will be made available for visitors to the Museum to view on request.

4.2 Relevant Museum staff will be made aware of this policy during induction or specific meetings. Curatorial, collections and conservation staff should be familiar with this policy.

4.3 Museum staff will be mindful of new developments in documentation standards and will review this policy at least once every five years.