Documentation Policy

Pitt Rivers Museum Policy and Planning Committee, February 2015

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

Pitt Rivers MUSEUM

Contents

Documentation Policy
Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford

Governing body: The Visitors of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.
Date approved by governing body: 20 April 2015 (via circulation)
Date at which policy is due for review: April 2020

Mission

"The Pitt Rivers Museum aspires to be the best university
museum of anthropology and archaeology in the world, using its
unique galleries as a focus for exemplary teaching and research
and as an inspirational forum for the sharing of cultural
knowledge amongst the widest possible public."

1   Introduction

Documentation is crucial to making effective use of the Pitt Rivers Museum's collections, preserving the historical and contextual information that makes objects useful and interesting to visitors and researchers alike. It also enables staff to manage and care for the collections and facilitates their use by others.

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.

The Museum obtains information from many sources including donors, visitors, students, researchers and representatives of source and descent communities, 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.

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 collections documentation.

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

2   Aims of the Documentation Policy

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. Through the implementation of this policy our objectives are to:

- improve the accountability of collections
- maintain minimum professional standards in documentation and, where staff time and resources permit, meet the highest standards
- regularly evaluate the efficiency of plans, procedures, systems and workflows in order to achieve the highest standard of documentation possible
- extend access to collections information, as appropriate
- strengthen the security of our collections documentation

3   Accountability

The Museum defines accountability in line with the original Museums and Galleries Commission's (MGC) definition.

'To enable museums to fulfil their fundamental responsibly 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)

As such, 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.

4   Standards and ethics

SPECTRUM is the recognised documentation standard for museums in the UK. To meet and exceed this standard the Museum has developed a Documentation Procedural Manual covering the following SPECTRUM procedures:

- Pre-entry and Acquisition
- Object Entry
- Loans in
- Loans out
- Location and movement control
- Cataloguing
- Inventory control procedures

The Museum also aims to meet the complete standard wherever possible, given staff and resource constraints.

The Museum recognises that it has a backlog of collections not documented to the minimum SPECTRUM standard. We are committed to working toward eliminating this backlog through the implementation of the Museum's Documentation Backlog Plan, 2015.

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

5   Access to collections information

The Museum is committed to extending access to collections information for staff, researchers and other users in order to ensure the management, security and use of its collections is accurate and reliable. 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, 2015 as well as its Interpretation Guidelines for Display, Labelling and Access, 2012.

The Museum provides online access to its collections records, many with illustrative images, via its website (http://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/databases.html). 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, 1998
- 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.

6   Security of collections information

The Museum is committed to ensuring the physical security of its paper and digital documentation records and their long-term preservation. Historical documentation relating to collections is held in fire-proof cabinets and in secure and environmentally stable conditions. Electronic data are regularly and securely backed-up, both on-site and off-site. 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 access. Off-site access to the Museum's databases is provided via online web published versions only.

7   Policy publication and review procedure

This Policy will be published on the Museum's website (www.prm.ox.ac.uk/governance.html), and will be made available for visitors to the Museum to view on request. The Museum will regularly review its electronic systems against the risk of obsolescence in order to ensure long-term accessibility of the information held. Museum staff will be mindful of new developments in documentation standards and will review this policy at least once every five years. Funders and other key stakeholders will be notified of any changes to the Museum's Documentation Policy, and the implications of any such changes for the Museum's information management.