

Hertford Museum Documentation Policy



HERTFORD MUSEUM
Inspiring Generations

Adopted by the Trustees of Hertford Museum on...6th February 2020.....

Signed.....

Review date...February 2023.....

Written using template developed by Susanna Hillhouse of Collections Management Network

Contents

1 Introduction

2 Ethics and legislation

2.1 Museum Association Code of Ethics

2.2 The Data Protection Act (1998)

3 Accountability

4 Standards

4.1 Object entry

4.2 Acquisition

4.3 History Files

4.4 Labelling and Marking

4.5 Loans in

4.6 Loans out

4.7 Cataloguing

4.8 Location and Movement Control

4.9 Object Exit

4.10 Retrospective Documentation

5 Access to collections information

6 Security of Collections information

7 Keeping records up to date

1. Introduction

The aim of this documentation policy is to:

- Ensure that Hertford Museum fulfils its responsibilities in relation to security, management and access of collections.
- Ensure accountability for collections.
- Maintain at least minimum professional standards in documentation.
- Extend access to collection information.
- Strengthen the security of the collections.

The museum's documentation system is made up of a set of elements (Accession number, Accession register, computerised files, etc.) that are related to each other and to the museum environment and which are organised in order to manage the objects in the museum's collection.

The different information media of a museum's documentation system are interdependent and enable cross-reference searches to be carried out. The information they contain is often duplicated, but organized in a different way.

2. Ethics and legislation

Hertford Museum's documentation system operates within the guidelines of the Museum Association's Code of Ethics and the Data Protection Act (1998). Any changes to these ethical & legal guidelines will be reflected in this the Documentation Plan. This policy will be updated every five years to ensure it remains in line with current guidance.

2.1 Museum Association Code of Ethics

Hertford Museum's Documentation system was written with reference to the Museum Association Code of Ethics particularly sections:

- **3.14** Assist everyone who makes a reasonable request for information. Give public access to all documentation and other information held by a museum, unless the information was imparted in confidence, or it can be shown that the wider public interest demands that access be restricted (for example to protect collections or prevent abuse of sites of historic or scientific importance).
- **5.0** Museums develop collections using long-term plans that are socially responsive. They reject items with dubious provenance. Museums regularly review, publish and adhere to acquisition policies agreed by the governing body that are realistic in terms of the resources required to sustain them. These policies address issues of the context and legitimacy of acquisitions, due diligence, long-term care, documentation and relevance to overriding, institutional aims. Items are acquired on the basis that they will be retained in the public domain.
- **5.11** Reject any item that lacks secure ownership history, unless there is reliable documentation to show that it was exported from its country of origin before 1970, or the museum is acting as an externally approved repository of last resort, or in the best judgment of experts in the field concerned the item is of minor importance and has not been illicitly traded.
- **6.16** Openly communicate and document all disposals and the basis on which decisions to dispose were made.
- **9.11** Keep records and presentations as accurate and up to date as possible. Record differences of expert opinion. Correct errors in documentation or presentations without delay, when they are brought to light.

2.2 The Data Protection Act (2018)

All data collected by Hertford Museum including for the documentation system will follow the Act's 'data protection principles' which ensure that information is:

- used fairly, lawfully and transparently
- used for specified, explicit purposes
- used in a way that is adequate, relevant and limited to only what is necessary
- accurate and, where necessary, kept up to date
- kept for no longer than is necessary
- handled in a way that ensures appropriate security, including protection against unlawful or unauthorised processing, access, loss, destruction or damage

3. Accountability

The Museums and Galleries Commission have defined the essence of accountability as follows:

"to enable museums to fulfil their fundamental responsibilities 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 (this includes loans as well as permanent collections), and where each item is located." (MGC 1993)

All requests for information will be considered in terms of compliance with the Data Protection Act (2018). We will review requests for confidential data such as donor information, environmental 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.

We have in place measures to ensure the physical security and long-term preservation of all documentation records, whether paper or computerised. We will update all paper and computerised records as appropriate. Nightly backups are made to secure digital data and where collection information is wholly computerised and managed centrally we will make backup copies of all key files including monthly backups to a secure off-site location. Important paper records will also be copied regularly and stored in an off-site location.

Hertford Museum is committed to ensuring that its documentation is kept up to date and in a readable format.

4. Standards

Documentation will be acquired, stored, managed and used in compliance with the Museum Association's Code of Ethics for Museums and to SPECTRUM Standards.

Collections information will be recorded on Hertford Museum's collections management system (currently Modes Complete). In order to preserve the database, the system will be maintained through subscription to the MODES Users Association.

The system will be automatically backed up every night and will be manually backed up and taken to an off-site facility (currently the Museum Store in the Seed Warehouse) on a monthly basis or after major changes.

A facsimile of the Accession Registers will be maintained and stored in a secure off-site location (currently the Museum Store in the Seed Warehouse)

4.1 Object entry

Deposits of material for Hertford Museum will be accepted for the following purposes:

- Consideration for accessioning into the collections.
- Objects on loan for display or identification.

An entry form must be completed for all deposits. These are stored in folders in a locked cabinet in perpetuity as a record of the object. In addition, we are now scanning digital copies of entry forms which are stored in a password protected file.

A deposit will be returned if:

- The object is deemed not suitable for accessioning into the collections.
- The loan period, for display or identification, has ended.

Objects that are not accepted into the collections should be returned to the depositor. If the depositor cannot be contacted after a period of no less than 3 months and after formal notice in writing, the object will be disposed of in accordance with the procedures set out in the Collections Development Policy.

Loans and identifications that are not collected / returned after a period of no less than three months from the end of the agreed loan period will be disposed of in accordance with the procedures set out in the Collections Development Policy and after seeking appropriate legal advice.

4.2 Acquisition

See Collections Development Policy

4.3 Collection Files

Hertford Museum will collect and store contextual and historical information relating to objects in the collection. The information will be cross-referenced with the object and details stored or referenced on the Modes Complete catalogue.

4.4 Labeling and Marking

Hertford Museum will label and / or mark all objects in the collections in order to maintain a connection between an object and its associated information.

Labeling and marking techniques will be:

- Appropriate for the object
- Durable yet reversible

4.5 Loans in

Loans in may be accepted for the following purposes:

- Exhibition or display
- Photography or publication
- Research

Loans in will be accepted for a minimum of 1 week and a maximum of 5 years. Loans in can only be authorised by the Curatorial Team.

The lender's title to the object will be established using due diligence.

Hertford Museum will be responsible for the 'nail to nail' insurance of the object(s) and they shall be insured at the valuations advised by the lender.

The object(s) borrowed will normally be housed in secure storage areas or displayed in securely locked and glazed cases or, if two-dimensional works, securely fixed to the wall. The object(s) will be housed in areas of appropriate temperature and relative humidity and in appropriate lux and UV levels at all times.

The object(s) loaned will not be taken to any address other than Hertford Museum. 18 Bull Plain, Hertford or Hertford Museum Store, The Seed Warehouse, Dolphin Yard, Hertford without the prior consent of the lender.

No label or other identifying marking will be moved or obliterated. No object will be cleaned, conserved or treated by the borrower under any circumstances whatsoever without the prior written consent of the lender.

The object(s) will not be handled unnecessarily. On return, the loan will be packed in the same way as it was received.

Acknowledgement will be made to the lender in a form and style agreed with the lender.

Access to the loaned object(s) will be allowed at all reasonable times to any properly authorised officer of the lender.

Hertford Museum shall immediately inform the lender of any damage to, deterioration in the condition of, or loss of any object on loan. This notification will be confirmed in writing.

Taking of photographs using non-flash photography for non-commercial use is permitted for Hertford Museum staff. Hertford Museum permits members of the public to take photographs in the galleries using non-flash photography provided it is solely for personal use and not for publication unless the lender specifies otherwise.

Hertford Museum considers requests to take photographs of, or film objects for, commercial purposes on a case by case basis. If the request relates to borrowed objects permission will be sought from the lender

It is the lender's responsibility to inform Hertford Museum of any change of contact details or circumstances. Hertford Museum do not accept any responsibility to trace the lender should circumstances change and reserve the right to dispose of the objects(s) after a period of three months from the end of the agreed loan period as set out above.

If an owner has died, Hertford Museum will contact the executor if known, or seek legal advice with a view to either acquiring or disposing of the object(s) as set out above.

4.6 Loans out

Requests for loans out will be considered provided that the object(s) are in a suitable condition or that the borrowing museum will undertake all conservation costs and that the objects are not required for display or other use by Hertford Museum.

Objects may be loaned to other Accredited museums. Objects may also be loaned to conservators as and when necessary for work to be carried out. Objects may be loaned for exhibition tours.

Loans can be for up to 5 years, after which they may be considered for renewal, if appropriate.

Loans can only be authorised by the Curatorial Team.

Conditions:

Applications for loans should be submitted not less than 3 months before the date for which the loan is requested (or as agreed in writing with the Curator).

The borrower shall be responsible for all costs as a result of the loan, including transport from and to Hertford Museum.

Hertford Museum may determine that a member of staff will act as a courier and supervise the unpacking / mounting and subsequent dismounting / packing of the object(s) in the borrower's institution, in which case the costs of travel, accommodation and subsistence of the courier will be met by the borrower.

The borrower shall be responsible for the insurance of the object(s) if required by Hertford Museum. Unless otherwise stated on the Outward Loan Form the borrower shall insure the object(s) loaned at a valuation determined by Hertford Museum against all risks 'nail to nail', throughout their absence from and return to Hertford Museum.

The object(s) will not be released to the borrower until evidence of insurance cover is produced. The valuation for insurance purposes will be stated on the Outward Loan form or an aggregate thereof.

The object(s) must be housed in areas of appropriate temperature and relative humidity and in appropriate lux and UV levels at all times.

The object(s) borrowed for exhibition must normally be housed or displayed in securely locked and glazed cases or, if two-dimensional works, securely fixed to the wall.

Any special protective measures that Hertford Museum may require shall be provided by the borrower.

The object(s) loaned must not be taken to any address(es) other than specified on the Outward Loan Form.

No label or other identifying marking will be moved or obliterated. No object is to be cleaned, conserved or treated by the borrower without the prior written consent of the Curatorial Team.

The object(s) will not be handled unnecessarily. On return, the loan must be packed in the same way as it was received and in its original packing materials.

Acknowledgement will be made to 'Hertford Museum' in the display, exhibition notices and literature in a form and style specified by the Curatorial Team. Hertford Museum will also be supplied with a copy of any publication issued in connection with the loan.

The object(s) will not be reproduced in any medium, including photographs, without the prior written consent of the curatorial and, if applicable, the copyright holder.

Access to the loaned object(s) will be allowed at all reasonable times to any authorized officer of Hertford Museum.

Hertford Museum shall be immediately informed of any damage to, deterioration in the condition of, or loss of any object on loan. This notification must be confirmed in writing.

Requests to renew, transfer or cease the loan should be made in writing to Hertford Museum at the earliest opportunity.

The borrower indemnifies Hertford Museum and its officers against all claims or losses, howsoever caused, arising out of the loan of the object(s) specified on the Outward Loan Form and for so long as the object(s) are in the custody of the borrower.

4.7 Cataloguing

New acquisitions will be catalogued as soon as possible. We aim to do this within six months of acquisition.

Each record will include:

- Accession number
- Simple Object Name
- Brief Description
- Acquisition method and date
- Permanent location & Date
- Condition
- Photograph/Reproduction

If appropriate, each record will also include:

- Entry Form Number
- Classification
- Further description information, e.g. dimensions, inscriptions, material, date (under description)

- Any field collection information (under field collection)
- Production information, e.g. maker, technique (under production)
- Other historical information, e.g. previous use or associations (under association)
- References to published bibliographic information (under references)
- References to collections management information e.g. loans in or out, condition check, conservation, exhibition, reproduction, rights
- Name and date of recorder

4.8 Location and Movement Control

- No person should move an object or access or amend a location record without the authorisation of the Curatorial Team or Museum Support Assistants.
- A record of up-to-date locations must be maintained for all objects.
- All storage areas must be locked at all times and only accessed under the authorisation of the Curatorial Team or Museum Support Assistants.
- Objects on display must be within locked or screwed shut display cases or secured to the wall with security fittings.
- A record of all previous locations of an object should be maintained on the Modes Complete database, to act as an audit trail.

4.9 Object Exit

Object exit occurs during:

- Return of unwanted gifts
- Return of loans in
- Return of objects left for identification
- Loans out
- Transfer to another organisation
- Deaccession / disposal (including destruction of the object)

Any object exit must be authorised by the Curatorial Team. Disposals should be authorized following agreement from the board of Trustees.

4.10 Retrospective Documentation

In the event of a documentation backlog, this will be addressed as soon as possible using a retrospective documentation plan, detailing the appropriate timescales and staff resources. The retrospective documentation plan will ensure that the documentation backlog meets Spectrum Standards.