

Collection Management Policy 2023-2028



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Reading Museum (Reading Borough Council)
COLLECTION MANAGEMENT POLICY 2023-2028

[Section 6.0 of Reading Museum Collection Manual]

**Collections are at the heart of what we do:
caring for them and making them accessible to people**

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1.0 STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Reading Museum's collections are at the heart of what we do. There are almost 500,000 objects covering art, archaeology, natural history, social history and world cultures. The documentation and care of our collections is central to delivering our statement of purpose and aims particularly 'providing opportunities for high quality object-based learning and creativity' and 'caring for our collections..., and encouraging physical and digital access to them'¹.

1.1 Previous Policy

There are only minor changes to this policy since its last review in 2017. These include an updated section 1.0 Statement of purpose to reflect the Museum's Forward Plan 2020-2025, a revised section 2.3.4 as the Museum has now eliminated its historic documentation backlog, the wording of 4.6 to reflect the declaration of a Climate Emergency by Reading Borough Council (RBC), and some other minor factual updates.

2.0 DOCUMENTATION

2.1 Commitment to Documentation

Reading Museum is committed to ensuring that all its collections and loans are documented on our collections database (currently Modes Complete) to the UK Museum Accreditation Standard and are Spectrum compliant².

2.2 Policy Aims

The aim of the policy is to ensure that Reading Museum fulfils its responsibility to care for its collections and to make them accessible to the public. Our documentation policy will ensure that the information we hold relating to the collections is accurate, secure, reliable, consistent and accessible. Through implementing this policy our objectives are to ensure that we:

- improve accountability for collections
- maintain at least minimum professional standards in documentation procedures and collection information
- extend access to collection information
- strengthen the security of the collections

2.3 Documentation policies

The following individual documentation policies will ensure that we achieve the above aims and objectives.

¹ Reading Museum Forward Plan 2020-2025, adopted at Reading Borough Council Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee on 6th July 2021, www.readingmuseum.org.uk/explore/about-reading-museum

² Spectrum is the UK collection management standard

2.3.1 Cataloguing standards

The Museum recognises that cataloguing is the process of managing the information that gives our collections meaning. It is not an end in itself but records and allows us to retrieve what is known about our objects, and to make use of our collections.

Information and knowledge about objects might come from anywhere and anyone, not just museum staff and volunteers. Cataloguing is an open-ended, inclusive, and flexible activity for recording and linking to a wide range of information about an object, that serves the needs of users as well as the needs of the Museum.

Our collections will be catalogued to either inventory or catalogue level:

Inventory

This is a basic accession record for an individual object or a group of closely related items (usually acquired from the same source and quantifying the number of items or boxes in the case of bulk archaeology) that is required during the second stage of retrospective documentation for Accreditation.

All accessioned objects must be documented to this level so they can be identified and verified and can be made fully accessible to users.

This documentation level is the minimum required for items to be considered to be *Accessioned*, the standard required under Accreditation.

The record for each object or group must contain (in the Modes field order):

- accession number (object number)
- the number of items or parts described in this record
- curatorial responsibility (e.g. the department or section);
- simple object name
- a brief physical description
- acquisition history (method, date and source information) or where not known it should be recorded as found in a documentation backlog as an 'untraced find' and as 'old stock'.
- the object's location
- information about the creation of the record (e.g. information source, recording date);

Every item or group must be marked/labelled with its accession number (at least marked on its packaging for a group) using the appropriate marking or labelling technique.

Catalogue

All new acquisitions will require a more detailed record for each object, or group of bulk archaeological material and natural history fieldwork material. This must include everything at inventory level, plus any of the following, depending on the information available and the type of object:

- Other historical reference numbers;
- Identification information (e.g. title, full classification);
- Object description information (e.g. physical description, dimensions, inscriptions, colour, material, sex, age, phase);
- Production information (e.g. maker, technique). In some instances, e.g. natural sciences, this will include objects derived from or modifying an original object;
- Content and subject information;
- Field collection information (e.g. excavator, site);
- Other historical information (e.g. use, associations);
- References to collections management information;
- References to published bibliographic information;
- Reproduction (e.g. digital image files).

Where relevant documentation will include supporting images, oral history, or archival material for inclusion in the object extension file and/or attachment to the object or group record.

Key relevant procedures or documents

Acquisition; Documentation procedural manual; Object Movement; Collection Management Plan

2.3.2 Documentation of new acquisitions

The Museum will not create a documentation backlog. The Collection Development Policy prohibits the Museum obtaining collections that it is unable to document to a catalogue level within a reasonable period, certainly within 3 months.

Key relevant procedures or documents

Object Movement; Deposit; Acquisition; Documentation procedural manual; Collection Development Policy

2.3.3 Documentation of loans

All loans in and loans out of the Museum will be documented following the appropriate procedures.

Key relevant procedures

Deposit; Loans In; Loans Out

2.3.4 Eliminating the retrospective documentation backlog

Since the mid-1990s the Museum has been working on eliminating a considerable historic documentation backlog. This backlog was finally eliminated in 2022 as part of the project to relocate the Museum's main storage facility.

The Museum will continue to resolve discrepancies between Inventory level records and existing documentation and will ensure that all objects or groups of objects eventually have a Catalogue level record (see 2.3.1).

Key relevant procedures or documents

Collection Management Plan; Documentation procedural manual

2.3.5 Collection Review

The Museum will continue to assess and review collections during documentation and storage projects to identify possible items for transfer or disposal following the Collection Development Policy and procedures.

Since 1996 the rationalisation and improvement of the Museum's stores has resulted in the review of large parts of the collection. The majority are still relevant to the Museum's aims and objectives, but this process has led to the transfer and disposal of some objects following the Museum's disposal policy and process. This constant assessment is part of a responsible collection management strategy and should continue across all collections.

Now that basic retrospective documentation is complete, collections (particularly bulk materials) can be re-assessed from a position of knowledge.

Where objects cannot be matched to existing registers, ledgers, or other records during the reconciliation process, this will be noted on the object record to make clear that the process has been followed and completed.

Key relevant procedures or documents

Collection Management Plan; Collection Development Policy

2.3.6 Continued development of collection management procedures

The Museum's collection manual closely follows the Spectrum procedures. We will review and update the manual as appropriate to keep it up to date with developments to Spectrum and to ensure continual improvement of accuracy, security, reliability, and accessibility.

Key relevant procedures or documents

Collections management manual

2.3.7 Security of data and back-ups

The Museum will have measures in place to ensure the physical security and long-term preservation of all documentation records, whether paper or digital. We will update manual or digital records as appropriate.

Daily back-ups are made of digital databases. Back-up copies are made of all digital records held on portable media (e.g. CDs) and held at a different site to the originals.

Key manual (paper) records have microfiche, microfilm and/or scanned copies that are held at a different site to the originals. Security copies are maintained of Accession Registers and held at a different site from the originals.

We will maintain our computerised database system (currently Modes Complete) to ensure it does not become obsolete. We will ensure that program updates are applied as they become available from the software supplier (though not beta versions; only fully tested versions or security patches will be applied), so that we have full technical support from the supplier.

Key relevant procedures or documents

Record preservation procedure

2.3.8 Controlled access to sensitive data

The Museum recognises its responsibility to make information about its collections accessible to museum users; however, some information will always be treated as confidential, such as donor information, valuations, or site details. All requests will be considered in terms of compliance with applicable legislation including Freedom of Information and Data Protection Acts, and any legal agreements, conditions of gift, copyright, or oral history use restrictions. The Museum will work within the framework of Reading Borough Council's Information Governance and Cyber Security policies.

2.3.9 Increase of digital images and online records

Digital images are linked to and accessible through the Museum's Modes database. There has been a steadily increasing rate and quality of images attached to object records. This has benefited both collection management and electronic access including websites, blogs and social media. Since 2014 the Museum has been making objects accessible through its Collections Online website (<http://collections.readingmuseum.org.uk/>). We will maintain this progress on digital access.

Key relevant procedures or documents

Collection Management Plan; Collections management manual

2.3.10 Increasing access through partnership working

We encourage work with appropriate partners on projects that will improve basic levels of documentation, increase public access and research on the collections, and lead to more objects being accessible on the Museum's Collections Online website. These can include national initiatives, collaboration with other museums (especially as part of Museums Partnership Reading), research institutions or local community groups. Documentation and research projects can also be suitable for volunteer and student placements (including object-based dissertations).

These provide positive community participation and co-production with the Museum's collections and services.

When volunteers, students and others work on collection-based projects for the Museum, we will ensure that the copyright is transferred to the Museum (RBC). We will ask that students deposit copies of coursework or

dissertations resulting from study of the collections with the Museum. (See section 4.5.)

Key relevant procedures or documents

Access policy; Volunteer Policy; Forward Plan

2.3.11 Learning and exhibition programmes

The timing of some documentation projects will be dictated by the needs of the Museum's learning and exhibition programmes, including the development of school sessions, loan boxes, reminiscence, community projects, Collections Online, website, blogs, gallery developments, displays and temporary exhibitions. This will ensure that limited resources are directed towards immediate public outcomes that provide improved access to our collections.

Key relevant procedures or documents

Access policy; Forward Plan

3.0 COLLECTION CARE

3.1 Commitment to Collection Care

Reading Museum is committed to ensuring that all its collections and loans are cared for to nationally recognised standards of best practice including the Accreditation standard.

3.2 Policy Aims

The aim of the policy is to ensure that Reading Museum fulfils its fundamental duty to care for its collections based on a combination of preventive and remedial conservation, within the resources available.

3.3 Preventive Conservation policies

Preventive conservation is defined as the planned and controlled change to the environment and surroundings of an object to reduce or eliminate, as far as possible, the object's deterioration. This is the best and most resource efficient way to care for collections, minimise waste and reduce the impact on the environment.

The following measures will be implemented to achieve this:

3.3.1 Collection overview

The Museum will survey, benchmark and visually inspect the conditions in which collections are kept to determine priority areas for improvement in line with good/best practice as defined by Spectrum procedures. Reading Museum will use *Benchmarks 3 Conservation Management Planning Tool August 2021* to assist in this process.

Key relevant procedures or documents

Collection Management Plan

3.3.2 Provision of suitable building conditions

The Museum is currently operated from three sites that are robust and fit for the purpose of housing collections.

Operations staff at each site will be responsible for the provision and maintenance of suitable building conditions and will work closely with collection staff to achieve the best possible conditions for the collections, making full use of defect reporting systems.

Collections are safeguarded through the management of the following systems:

- Building Maintenance
- Mechanical and Electrical (M&E) Maintenance
- Building Management Systems
- Intruder Alarms
- Fire and Evacuation Systems

All relevant M&E systems will be covered by service contracts and inspected periodically. Any M&E maintenance work will include considering collection care and collection staff will be involved in any decisions concerning alterations to the status quo e.g. changes to type or numbers of lights.

When capital developments are planned collection care will be considered and collection staff will be involved in the planning process.

Key relevant procedures or documents

Collection Management Plan

3.3.3 Environmental monitoring

The Museum will:

- Monitor the environment in storage and display areas, to measure and record relative humidity (RH), temperature, visible light and ultraviolet radiation (UV) where applicable.
- Collect environmental data using continuous recording systems and hand held meters.
- Collate, utilise and act upon data to provide stable and appropriate collection environments, within the constraints of building management systems.
- Monitor, manage and eradicate pests through good housekeeping.
- Balance the consumption of food and drink in its buildings as part of users' experience with ensuring these do not put collections at risk.

Key relevant procedures or documents

Collection Management Plan; Food & drink in galleries policy

3.3.4 Environmental control

The Museum will store and display collections in suitable environments that minimise their rate of deterioration, while recognising that it is not always possible to control one or more of the environmental factors within a store or display location.

Control factors and methods:

- **Relative humidity (RH) and temperature:** Due to the nature of the Museum building and its heating, RH tends to be low and temperature high compared with the ideal for general mixed media collections (40-60% RH with less than a 10% fluctuation in any 24 hour period and 18-25° centigrade). Riverside Museum is opposite. The stores are generally within the desired limits for RH, although after less than one year's occupation the new store appears to have similar issues to the Museum.
- **RH and temperature controlled locations:** In areas that are controlled using air conditioning equipment, RH is held to 53% +/-2%. A dehumidifier operates in the Metals store to hold the RH below 35%. Dehumidifiers in the textiles, taxidermy and organics stores hold the humidity below 55%. Riverside Museum is heated to reduce the RH.

- **Visible light:** 50-250 lux, depending on the light sensitivity of the object and duration of its annual light exposure; controlled by use of blinds and shutters to eliminate daylight and by use of appropriate artificial lighting.
- **UV radiation:** less than 75mW/lm (microwatts per lumen), controlled by eliminating unfiltered daylight and using light sources that do not emit UV.
- **Uncontrollable locations:** Proactive controls in some areas would be impractical both financially and environmentally so 'Do nothing' is the only option. The environment will dictate the type of material that can be placed in these locations, for example the Atrium has high visible light levels that cannot be controlled so only ceramics and mosaics can be displayed.
- **Display case construction:** where appropriate, objects on display will be cased, which buffers against damaging environmental fluctuation. Internal case environments may be tailored to suit the objects within, for example silica gel buffering material or other internal controls may be used, where necessary, to maintain a higher or lower RH. Lighting will be controlled to prevent heat build-up and excessive light levels. Case environments will be inert in accordance with case specifications produced by collection team. Case fabrics will be selected to ensure they are suitable and do not release pollutants.
- **Storage:** where practicable, stored collections will be housed in cupboards, inert crates or boxes to protect against dust and light. Store areas should be suitable for purpose with good physical access.

Key relevant procedures or documents

Collection Management Plan

3.3.5 Housekeeping

The Museum will continue the following housekeeping processes:

- **Cleaning**
Housekeeping programmes will be established and followed in line with action plans. Staff and volunteers will be trained to clean storage and display areas in a way that is not detrimental to the collections. Chemical-based commercial cleaning products will be avoided in favour of dry cleaning methods. Vulnerable areas, such as the textile store, the organic store, the archive store, the taxidermy store and the entomology store will have dedicated cleaning materials and equipment to prevent the potential introduction of pests from other areas.
- **Quarantine procedures**
All new acquisitions and incoming materials will be visually inspected to ensure there are no signs of pest infestation. If there are any indications or suspicions of pests the material will be held in quarantine pending freezing to prevent insect pest infestation of other collections. Items to be frozen will be sealed in polythene and held at

-30°C for 72 hours to eradicate pests. Only then will such objects be introduced into stores or displays containing other collection items.

- **High risk organic material**

Collections that are particularly vulnerable to insect infestation, e.g. feathers and fur, will be segregated to prevent the rapid spread of an infestation in the event of an outbreak. They will be stored in clearly marked boxes that are easily identifiable for regular visual inspections.

- **Integrated Pest Management**

Integrated Pest Management is a holistic approach to pest control which emphasises prevention as a front-line response to the threat of pests. Control of the physical environment in collection areas reduces the incidence of infestation and the need for hazardous (to people, objects and the environment) chemical treatments.

Areas containing vulnerable collections will be monitored regularly using insect traps and random visual checks. Should pests be detected, the trap contents will be recorded, and the area monitored rigorously to locate and eradicate the source.

Key relevant procedures or documents

Collection Management Plan; Pest Management Strategy

3.3.6 Handling, moving and transport

Museum objects are particularly at risk when being moved or handled. The Museum will:

- Assess whether the moving or handling an object is necessary and could be avoided.
- Move its objects safely and securely in accordance with the guidance contained in the Museum's Object Handling guidelines.
- Plan and risk-assess the movement of large or awkward items. Method statements will be produced by the responsible curator.
- All objects that are transported will be suitably wrapped or crated to give them the most suitable protection, as specified by the responsible curator.
- Ensure that manual handling equipment is risk-assessed and well maintained.

Key relevant procedures or documents

Collection Management Plan; Object Handling guidelines

3.3.7 Larger and working objects

The care of large and working objects is resource intensive. There is a presumption that the Museum will not acquire such items due to the difficulty of providing adequate maintenance, storage and display.

3.3.8 Emergency planning and staff training

The Museum will produce an emergency plan covering all venues housing museum collections. These will be regularly reviewed and updated where necessary. Staff will receive training as appropriate following amendments and at regular intervals to ensure they are aware of procedures and their individual responsibilities.

Key relevant procedures or documents

Emergency plan

3.3.9 Security

The Museum will risk assess security arrangements at least every five years. This is a requirement of the Museum Accreditation scheme. The Museum will act on the assessment and draw up an action plan. The Museum will risk assess the security of objects being put on display with particular consideration to objects on open display in unmanned public areas.

Key relevant procedures or documents

Security Assessment and action plan

3.4 Remedial conservation policy

Remedial conservation is the active treatment of an object to stabilise its condition, or to enhance its condition, or some aspect of its significance for study and interpretation.

The first priority is always preventive conservation; remedial conservation is the last resort.

3.4.1 Criteria for remedial conservation

Remedial conservation will be prioritised based on three criteria:

- Is there **active decay or risk** to a collection and/or an object?
- Is the current condition a **barrier to public access**?
- Is it of high monetary or research **importance**?

3.4.2 Requirements for remedial conservation

Where remedial work is necessary the Museum will work in accordance with the following principles:

- **Suitably qualified and experienced staff**
Only appropriately qualified and experienced conservators and collections care staff will be employed to carry out conservation work. If a student conservator undertakes work as part of a project they should be supervised by a professionally qualified conservator. External conservators should be accredited with The Institute of Conservation's Conservation Register and where available a professionally accredited conservator should be used. Other criteria that will be considered include experience of conserving similar material; feedback from recent clients; having appropriate storage

and premises; and possession of the appropriate type and level of insurance.

The Museum will only use DEFRA registered taxidermists.

- **Documentation of condition and treatment**

Conservation work should be underpinned by knowledge and understanding of the object. Critical to this is documentation of its condition and treatment, and a long-term plan for the care of the object.

All conservation work carried out by external conservators should be undertaken to a written brief produced by the responsible curator. The conservator should provide a written specification (or preliminary report) for the proposed work that must be agreed by the curator before work can begin. A full final report must be provided on completion of the conservation work; full payment will be withheld until a full report has been provided after conservation.

All treatments will be photographed and documented on Modes and records will be maintained in accordance with Spectrum standards.

Key relevant procedures or documents

Collection Management Plan

3.5 Expertise, advice and services

Reading Museum is committed to continuing professional development of its staff and to the building of the relevant knowledge and expertise.

Caring for the collections is the responsibility of all staff. The collection team is committed to training and to raising awareness of collections care issues. By promoting these to staff and volunteers, the Museum will communicate the message that safe handling and use of the collections will preserve them for the future and in doing so allow access to them for longer.

All guidelines and information relating to collections care practices and procedures are held on the network drive which is accessible to all staff.

4.0 ETHICAL, LEGAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

4.1 Care of Human Remains

The Museum has human remains in the archaeology, ethnography and natural history collections. In October 2005 the Department for Culture, Media and Sport issued *Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums*. To meet this guidance there is dedicated shelving for all human remains in the organics store. This is away from the main activity of the store and is only accessible by museum staff.

Except in exceptional circumstances (e.g. size, particular conservation requirements) all human remains should be stored in this area. All individual remains should be packaged into inert storage boxes.

The Museum does not hold and will not acquire human remains that are under 100 years old that would require a licence from the Human Tissue Authority (HTA) under the Human Tissue Act 2004 (see Collection Development Policy).

Key relevant procedures or documents

Collection Development Policy; Collection Management Plan; Object Handling guidelines

4.2 Museum Firearms Licence

The Museum is required to hold a Museum Firearms Licence under the Fire Arms (Amendment) Act 1988 for any firearms and ammunition that would normally require a firearm or shotgun certificate.

The grant of the licence is subject to security conditions agreed by Thames Valley Police.

Firearms requiring a licence are identified on Modes in the 'Administration, ItemCategory' field as Type 'legal status' Keyword 'Museum Firearms Licence'.

4.3 Wildlife protection

The Museum will hold an Article 30 certificate (for scientific institutions undertaking commercial activities in connection with specimens of internationally endangered species under EC Commission Regulation EC 939/97).

The Museum will operate under the terms of possession licence WML Gen-L02, a general licence for possession of dead specimens of any plants or animals that feature on the European Protected Species list and were obtained after 1994, for museums, research and educational establishments.

Specimens requiring a licence will be identified on Modes in the 'Administration, ItemCategory' field as Type 'legal status' Keyword 'CITES' or 'European Protected Species' respectively.

The Museum will monitor any post-Brexit changes in relevant legislation and licence requirements.

4.4 Health & Safety

The Museum has a duty of care to avoid exposing staff, volunteers and visitors to health and safety risks. All staff and volunteers will be made aware of our Health and Safety policy and any practical safety issues as part of their induction.

The Museum will ensure it provides a safe environment for staff, volunteers and visitors working with or accessing its collections, including collection storage and study areas. It will ensure that the use of chemicals and specialist equipment, such as manual handling equipment, is risk-assessed and use restricted to those with appropriate training.

4.5 Copyright and intellectual rights

The Museum respects the rights of copyright and intellectual rights owners and seeks to clarify and document any restrictions or permissions at the time of acquisition. Where full rights are not transferred to the Museum, the following will be recorded on the object's Modes record as required: the copyright holder; any licence to make copies (whether for exhibition, marketing, educational use, preservation, sale or merchandising); and the credits to be given.

4.6 Environmental sustainability

The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019. The Museum will be conscious of the environmental and climate impact of its collection care policies and procedures. Our approach is to minimise waste and reduce our effect on the environment by avoiding, where possible, energy hungry environmental controls and the use of chemicals. The move to a smaller and more energy efficient store in 2021 and LED lighting improvements in galleries between 2018 and 2022 has already reduced the Museum's environmental footprint.