

Vale & Downland Museum Documentation Policy

Date on which this policy was approved 5 September 2022

Date at which this policy is due for review 5 September 2027

Introduction

Documentation underpins every aspect of museum activity. Recording collection information is central to being accountable for the collections, their accessibility, management, research, study and use.

Our policy for the documentation of the collections is to ensure that the information we hold relating to the collections is accurate, secure, reliable and accessible.

Aims and Objectives

The aim of this Policy is to ensure that we fulfill our guardianship, stewardship and access responsibilities. Through implementation of this policy, our objective is to:

- Improve accountability for the collections;
- maintain at least minimum professional standards in documentation procedures and collection information and attain the very highest standards wherever possible;
- Extend access to collection information;
- Strengthen the security of the collections.

Accountability

The museum will follow the accountability principles defined by the Museums and Galleries Commission;

"to enable museums to fulfill 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)

Levels of Documentation

The museum is committed to record significant information about the objects in our care so that each object we are legally responsible for (including loans as well as long term collections) can be identified and located.

For the majority of our collections, curatorial staff will document to individual item level. However, for certain collections, such as non-accessioned items or handling collections, we have a basic 'inventory' record for all identified items and groups within the collection; whilst some items will be documented to a more detailed 'catalogue' level.

We will document our collections to either Inventory or Catalogue level, as described below:

- Inventory level: This includes sufficient key information to allow any object(s) in our care to be individually identified and verified. All accessioned items, loans inward and outward, and any other unaccessioned objects as appropriate are documented at this level.
- Catalogue level: We will identify the collections/objects that merit further, more detailed, documentation, thus raising the standard of information to catalogue level. Such documentation will include the known history of an artifact, and references to any relevant publication etc.

Digitsation of Records

The museum uses Modes to record the accessioned and handling collections of objects. The photographic collection, library book collection and reference archive are also catalogued onto Modes.

The MODES data is stored on the Curator's PC. From there it is automatically backed up each night to the Museum's central network data store. From there in turn it is automatically backed up to Internet cloud storage.

In order to ensure that our Modes system does not become obsolete, the museum will remain informed of technological advances and ensure the long term accessibility of the information held.

Controlled Access to Sensitive Information

All requests for information will be considered in terms of compliance with the Freedom of Information Act (2000) and Data Protection Act (1998) and the Environmental Information Regulation (2004). 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.

Security Against Loss of Irreplaceable Collection Information

We have measures in place to ensure the physical security and long-term preservation of all documentation records, whether paper or computerised. We will update all manual and computerised records as appropriate. Regular backups will be made to secure digital data. Where collection information is wholly computerised and managed centrally we will make backup copies of all key files, and where considered appropriate, house them securely off-site.