

Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums

Documentation Policy

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1. Introduction

This policy will guide the work of Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums in the field of collections documentation.

TWAM understands museum documentation to be as that set out by the Documentation Committee of the International Council of Museums (ICOM-CIDOC):

‘Museum documentation is concerned with the development and use of information about the objects within a museum collection and the procedures which support the management of the collection.’

The aim of the documentation policy is to ensure that the museum fulfils its responsibilities in relation to security, management and access of collections

- Improve accountability for collections
- Maintain at least minimum professional standards in documentation
- Extend access to collection information
- Strengthen the security of the collections

This policy to be used in conjunction with Collections Development Policy, Documentation Plan, Collection Management Procedures, Collections Care & Conservation Policy.

2. Ethics and legislation

Collections information will be recorded in compliance with all legal requirements, including the Data Protection Act and the Freedom of Information Act.

Collections information will be acquired, stored, managed and used in compliance with the Museum Associations Code of Ethics for Museums and to SPECTRUM standards.

3. Accountability

The museum will maintain a level of collections documentation which will allow it to identify and locate all items for which it is legally responsible, including loans.

- Each object in the collection should have an entry record.
- Each object in the collection should be entered in the accessions register, and have assigned a unique identifying number such as an accession number.
- Each object in the collection should be marked or labelled with its accession number in accordance with SPECTRUM & PAS 197 guidelines.

- Records will be kept detailing the location and movement of all objects in the collection; exit records (i.e. loan out receipts, deaccession records) must be kept for any object that leaves the museum premises.
- Collection records must be securely stored. A duplicate record should be maintained at a separate site from the original as a security measure. Automated data must be backed up regularly.
- Where there are incomplete or absent records, the museum will develop a plan to address and eliminate the backlog.
- The curatorial staff has responsibility for the creation, maintenance and enhancement of collections records. The Documentation Officer has responsibility for the systems and platforms on which these records are made accessible for management and public use and for monitoring the updating of records. Mechanisms for the auditing of records are outlined briefly in TWAM's Documentation Plan.

4. Standards

SPECTRUM: The UK Collections Management Standard sets out a series of procedures to ensure good practice in all aspects of documentation for collections management. Accreditation requires that the minimum standards for the SPECTRUM primary procedures are met.

TWAM is committed to meeting SPECTRUM, the UK Collections Management Standard primary procedures:

- Object Entry
- Acquisition
- Loan In
- Loan Out
- Location and Movement Control
- Cataloguing
- Object exit
- Retrospective Documentation

In addition TWAM will ensure that new collections material will be accessioned and inventory level descriptions will be added to EMu as soon as possible but not later than three months after the acquisition date.

TWAM will endeavour to follow SPECTRUM digital asset management guidelines.

4.1 Object Entry

Deposits of material to TWAM will be accepted for the following purposes:

- Accessioning into the collections
- Loan for display or identification

An Object Entry form will be completed and signed by the depositor and a museum signatory for all items, or group of items entering the museum.

The item or group of items will be identified with an entry number. A record of the entry will be made in the Acquisitions module of EMu.

A deposit will be returned once the loan period, for display or identification, has ended.

Objects should not be left with the museum without a relevant curator's prior agreement. This includes for identification, consideration for acquisition or loans.

4.2 Acquisition

See Collections Development policies

4.3 Loans In

Lending and borrowing objects is an integral part of TWAM's work, to make its collections accessible to a wide range of audiences.

TWAM accepts material on loan for temporary exhibitions and to supplement permanent gallery displays. Loans are approved by the Museum Manager on recommendation of curatorial staff. Loans will not be agreed for more than five years at a time. Permanent loans are not accepted by TWAM nor are items taken on loan with no intent for display. Any loan taken in for more than one year should be assigned an accession number by the responsible curator and an entry created on EMu.

All loans in will be covered by written loan agreements. All loans in will have a condition check when they enter TWAM and before their return. Conservation work on loaned items will only be arranged in exceptional circumstances, in full co-operation with the lender. All objects loaned to TWAM will receive the same standards of care as that of TWAM's own collections. A valuation for each object borrowed for exhibition should be calculated as part of the exhibition planning process and appropriate insurance put in place. Objects may be insured under the Government Indemnity Scheme if necessary.

Full details of planned loans in to be provided to the Documentation Officer in advance of the loan period. The Documentation Officer has responsibility for the creation and maintenance of loan records, creation of loan agreements, securing insurance and monitoring the status of loans. Curatorial staff to inform the Documentation Officer immediately of anything which may affect the loan.

4.4 Loans out

The Museum will loan material to accredited museums or public exhibition venues that can demonstrate equivalent standards in care, both nationally and internationally. Loans are approved by the Building Manager on recommendation of the relevant member of the conservation team. The borrowing institution must provide information about transport and environmental and security conditions in the exhibition. The condition of the object, when measured against this information, will determine the approval of a loan. Loans out are for a fixed period of time not greater than 5 years, agreed in advance with the borrowing institution.

All loans out will be covered by written loan agreements provided by TWAM in advance of the loan period. All costs associated with the loan e.g. transport, will be covered by the borrower. Only objects in a stable condition will be loaned out. A condition check will be made before the object is loaned, and on its return. If any conservation treatment is required for an object to be loaned, the costs will normally be met by the borrower.

The curatorial staff has responsibility for arranging and carrying out packing and shipping of objects. Where appropriate, specialist art handlers may be used. Handling standards should be stipulated as part of the contract in consultation with the Conservation Team. Where required, loan objects should be photographed before exit.

Full details of proposed loan are provided to the Documentation Officer in advance of the loan period. The Documentation Officer has responsibility for the creation and maintenance of loan records and supporting documentation such as loan agreements and insurance documents, and monitoring the status of loans. Curatorial staff inform the Documentation Officer immediately of anything which may affect the loan.

The Documentation Officer and the Governance team are responsible for adhering to National Import Reliefs Unit. The curatorial staff is responsible for export licenses.

4.5 Location and Movement Control

A record of up-to-date locations must be maintained for all objects in the collection and added to the Emu database to meet minimum standards. A record of all previous locations of an object should be maintained on the Emu database, to act as an audit trail. Where staff or volunteers move an object and are unable to update a location they must inform the curator of its new location.

4.6 Cataloguing

New acquisitions will be catalogued on the Emu database as soon as possible and within not more than three months after acquisition.

Each record will include:

- Accession number
- Acquisition method
- Acquisition source/vendor
- Physical description
- Condition (as assessed by the curator)
- Current location
- Jurisdiction
- Material (where practical)
- Measurements (where practical)
- Simple name
- Photograph (where practical)
- Department and collection

4.7 Object Exit

Object exit occurs as a result of:

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

The original object entry form should be completed for all objects exiting the museum, and is signed by a member of the Curatorial or Collections Management Team and the remover. Where an original object entry form was not completed (for historic reasons) a new object entry form should be completed as evidence of the object exit. Where an object is exiting due to the start of a loan out, a loan out receipt should be completed.

4.8 Retrospective Documentation

As Documentation Plan.

Regular assessments will be made of the documentation backlog, and measures put in place to deal with this.

Old records (such as day books, loan books, purchase invoices, object history files) will be collated and digitised to ensure accountability of the collections and avoid the risk of loss.

5. Access to Collections information

TWAM is committed to providing public access to collections and collections information, while ensuring that security and preservation of the collections are not compromised.

Providing access to detailed catalogue information, including images, increases access while reducing unnecessary handling of original objects, and will be encouraged.

TWAM enables access to collection information for staff, researchers, academics, volunteers, artist's student placements and the general public.

- Further work is to be done digitising paper files related to individual collection items.
- All exhibition text will be added to the object record on EMu.
- TWAM will endeavour to capture any research carried out on objects by either TWAM staff or external researchers and add this to the object record on EMu.

Donor information, location, valuation and other sensitive areas will not be made available to the public. Access to this information will be disabled on the collection management system when viewed by researchers and visitors and the public using our online search facilities.

Access may be made through the museum's collection management system (Emu) or the online catalogue collectionssearchtwmuseums.org.uk. Appropriate security measures (i.e. only selected fields are accessible) have been built into computerised systems that are made available to the public.

All relevant legislation relating to freedom of information, Data Protection and copyright will be adhered to.

6. Security of collections information

Collections information is recorded on the museum's collection management system (KE EMu). This is backed up by NCC on a regular basis at a remote site. The museum will endeavour to make sure all information held in accession registers and object history files is recorded on the collection management system.

7. Keeping records up to date

The museum will endeavour to regularly check paper and electronic records, and security copies of them, to make sure that they are not becoming obsolete. The museum will also conduct spot checks of objects and spot checks of records to monitor this.

8. Expertise and Advice

8.1 Expertise

TWAM is committed to continuing development of its staff and to the building of relevant knowledge and expertise.

For a detailed breakdown of TWAM's Documentation Team please refer to TWAM's Documentation Plan.

Only people who have received training from the Documentation Team will be able to edit EMu.

8.2 Advice

Caring for the collections is the responsibility of all staff. The Documentation Team is committed to training and to raising awareness of documentation issues. By promoting these to staff, volunteers and researchers TWAM will communicate the message that correct use of the documentation procedures will enable the collections to be better cared for and accessed.

Guidelines and procedures relating to documentation procedures and practise will be accessible to all staff via the TWAM shared drive.

The Documentation Team will provide advice and information to the public and to other museum and archive professionals regionally, nationally and internationally.

This policy is available to all staff, volunteers and freelancers in the following location G:\Corporate Policies. It will be shared with new staff as part of their induction and revised versions will be distributed to all staff via email.