



NORTHAMPTON
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Northampton Museums & Art Gallery Documentation Policy

Equality Impact Assessment

The Council strives to ensure equality of opportunity for all both as a major employer and as a service provider.

The Access Policy has been equality impact assessed to ensure fairness and consistency for all.

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Version 2		
Version 3		
Version 4		

Northampton Museums and Art Gallery Documentation Policy

1. Introduction

Good documentation is a fundamental duty of NMAG and underpins all aspects of the Museum's collections activity. As highlighted in our mission maintaining a record of all collections and associated use ensures legal accountability and supports collections care and conservation. Most importantly it enables access and use of collections by our audiences. Best practise in documentation is essential to achieve the ambition of an international centre of excellence for shoe heritage as detailed in our vision.

Vision: To be a focus for Northampton's arts, heritage and culture and the international centre of excellence for shoe heritage, valued and enjoyed by all.

Mission: Using our collections, knowledge and expertise, we engage people with Northampton's rich history, culture, art and our world class shoe collection.

2. Scope

This policy covers documentation of all collections including accessioned and non-accessioned objects (including handling collections) and collections on loan. This policy covers collections in all buildings managed by NMAG and collections on loan to other organisations. Collections include physical objects, archival material, reference material (including books) and digital material. Digital collections require a virtual and physical approach to ensure they are appropriately documented. The collections include the shoe collection which has Designated status from Arts Council England. Given the significance of this collection the scope includes the opportunity to develop best practise in terminology and documenting this collection.

3. Purpose

This policy defines and provides a framework for how we document our collections with the aim of recording knowledge of the collections and their use (including commercial) to ensure that the collections are accessible to staff/volunteers and our audiences. It does so by recognising barriers, including financial resource and capacity, and the need to achieve best value and prioritise across the physical and digital Museum. This policy defines the principles and minimum standard as defined by Spectrum which apply to collections documentation but we will aim to achieve best practise. Spectrum is the UK collections management standard developed by the Collections Trust.

4. Definition of terms

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.' Documentation Committee of the International Council of Museums (ICOM-CIDOC)

Levels of cataloguing are defined as follows:

- 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 un-accessioned 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 object, and references to any relevant publication and exhibition records, rights recording and collections use etc.

5. Responsibility

NMAG acknowledges that documentation crosses all service areas and everyone has responsibility to ensure good practise in collections documentation. All members of permanent, temporary and freelance staff, contractors and volunteers working for NMAG must be aware of and adhere to this policy. The development of staff/volunteer knowledge and skills is the responsibility of management. The collections function of the Museum has responsibility to ensure that documentation adhere to Spectrum principles.

6. Policy

6. 1. Guiding principles

NMAG will undertake to achieve the best possible standards for all incoming material and retrospective documentation to at least the basic standard laid down in Spectrum and will work towards bringing documentation up to the highest standards within the resource available.

NMAG documentation is focussed on:

- Enabling and improving access to the collections and engaging our audiences through use of collections.
- Encouraging audiences to understand documentation processes and raising profile of audience activity.
- Ensuring that NMAG is accountable for all digital and physical objects in the collection and can locate them as per legal and ethical requirements. Maintaining an audit record for insurance/legal purposes.
- Protecting collections through condition checking and recording collections care and conservation activity.
- Monitoring audience interest in collections by recording collections used in public programming, audience research and learning.
- Improving the documentation of our shoe collection to ensure it is fit as a Designated collection
- Supporting emergency procedures and situations
- Helping with research and enquiries particularly regarding the Designated shoe collection
- Recording use and intellectual property rights for commercial purposes

Documentation priorities are established based on the following criteria:

- An emergency situation
- Maintaining legal records
- Mitigating/minimizing risk of information loss
- Audience interests and public programming requirement
- Acquisition and loan requirement
- Required for a curatorial project, significant treatment or research
- Delivering documentation plan (including projects such as rationalisation and significance assessment)

6.2. Standards

NMAG will commit to maintain minimal professional standards as laid out in Spectrum including:

- **Entry:** There will be a unique record of any item that enters the Museum through an object entry form, whether for identification, loan or as a potential acquisition.
- **Accession records:** The Museum will maintain an accessions register which records the formal acceptance of items into the museum's permanent collection, allocates a permanent identity number, and provides sufficient information for collections management.
- **Location/movement recording:** The location and movement of items within the museum will be recorded using object movement tickets and updating the Modes system. The location and movement of objects external to the Museum will be maintained through loan agreements which will include courier/transport requirements.
- **Inventory:** We maintain the ability to produce an inventory of each object in the collection including information on the specific collection area they belong to.
- **Cataloguing:** Every object or group of objects (as in the case of archaeological excavation) will be documented to inventory or catalogue level. For most objects in the collection we will aim to document to a catalogue level. The levels of cataloguing for the shoe collection will be significantly higher than other collections to meet the requirements of the Shoe Resources Centre. New objects will be catalogued as soon as possible and within three months of acquisition (excluding large donation groups which will be treated as projects).
- **Object exit:** Object exit occurs as a result of return of unwanted gifts, loans in, objects left for identification, loans out and transport to another organisation, transfer to another organisation, deaccession / disposal (including destruction). Entry forms, loans agreements and exit forms should be used to control exit.

- **Loans in:** Inward loans will only be accepted for specific purposes and for fixed terms, usually not exceeding three years. Whilst inward loans have a role in broadening the range of material on public display there is a presumption against the use of long-term inward loans as a mechanism for augmenting permanent collections.
- **Loans out:** Whilst outward loans from the collections provide an important mechanism for broadening access to the collections, the safety and long term preservation of the items concerned must be regarded as being of primary importance. Requests to borrow material will be considered on their individual merits
- **Documentation planning:** NMAG has a documentation plan detailing and prioritising documentation activity including backlog. Retrospective documentation must be undertaken in accordance with NMAGs various cataloguing procedures.
- **Digitisation:** NMAG collections are documented with a combination of both physical cards and digital databases and spreadsheets including Modes and Excel. NMAG is working to digitise cards and ensure that all objects (or groups) in the collection have a record conforming to Spectrum requirements as a bare minimum. The shoes in the NMAG shoe collection are also digitised with high resolution images and updated records.
- **Accessibility:** NMAG is committed to improving public access to collections and information, and engaging wider audiences with collections. NMAG will facilitate access while ensuring that security and preservation of the collections are not compromised and will facilitate access to collections information and knowledge taking into account legal and ethical issues. The museum is planning to improve access through collections on-line, through public programming activity and reviewing current restrictive documentation system. To this end all object research, including that by external researchers will be added to records where possible. Access to catalogues improves collections care by reducing un-necessary handling. All requests for information will be considered in terms of compliance with relevant legislation relating to freedom of information, Data Protection and copyright will be adhered to. Access to Modes is limited to Museum staff and trained volunteers.
- **Security against information loss:** We have measures in place to ensure the physical security and long-term preservation of all documentation records, whether paper or digitised. Regular backups will be made to secure digital data as NMAG is part of NBC. Where possible back-ups of paper archive will be stored off-site. All registers are stored in a fire resistant safe and copies are kept off-site. Staff and volunteers who work directly with the Collection and have undergone necessary training. The majority of users input as well as retrieve data. Data entry and procedural data management is carried out in accordance with detailed guidelines written in the Documentation Procedures Manual.
- **Future proofing:** All data is backed up by NBC and hard-drive and cloud storage for digital imagery. In order to ensure that our current electronic system does not become obsolete, the museum will remain informed of

technological advances and ensure the long term accessibility of the information held.

7. Relationship to Other Policies, Plans, Standards and Ethics

This policy supports the NMAG Forward plan and should be considered alongside the Care and Collections Plan, Care and Collections Policy, Documentation Plan and Emergency Plan and Collections Documentation Procedures Manual, Collections Documentation Process Catalogues. The standards adopted by the service will be based on those noted below , but will be tailored to the requirements of our collection specifically the Designated Shoe collection where we will aim for best practise standards and develop standards in this area. Basic standards we must achieve for conservation and collection care include:

- Spectrum procedures
- BS EN 16893:2018 Conservation of Cultural Heritage
- BS5454/pd5454 'Recommendations for storage and exhibition of archival documents'
- Benchmarks in Collections Care
- DCMS Guidance for the Care of Human Remains 2005
- PAS 197:2009 Code of practice for cultural collections management
- Arts Council England Accreditation
- International Council of Museum (ICOM) Conservation Standards, United Kingdom Institute for Conservation (now ICON) Code of Professional Practice
- Institute of Conservation Code of Conduct
- Institute of Conservation Professional Standards
- Museum Association Code of Ethics
- Health and Safety at work (1974)
- Control of Asbestos regulations (2012)
- COSHH regulations (2002)
- The National Archives Digital standards.

These standards are the minimum that we should aspire to. NMAG aims to raise standards above these levels where possible particularly in relation to the shoe collection.

8. Resources

Resources and expertise

NMAG will balance the available resources against the needs of documentation in the forward/business planning process. NMAG aims to make sustainable use of resources in local/regional/global contexts and where possible support local suppliers. Documentation requires specific recording systems based on Spectrum standards and staff involved in documentation require knowledge and understanding in this area. NMAG will employ qualified and experienced staff to implement the

policy, training them as necessary in documentation and Spectrum. NMAG will train supportive volunteers enabling them to develop skills and experience in these areas. Only those trained on Modes can edit records. Costs must be included in planning for permanent and temporary exhibitions and rationalisation of specific collections if external specialists are required to undertake significance assessment. Commercial advice is provided internally. Digital advice is sought from ICT, Modes and external digital consultants. As part of the Shoe Resources Centre specialised on-line catalogues required to ensure access to the collection will be planned and developed requiring external resource.

Finance

There are limited resources to cover documentation including subscriptions to the current cataloguing system Modes or future content management system. Where objects require documentation to support public programme activity including movements for exhibitions and events then this capacity requires planning. Exhibition projects and site developments must include a budgetary provision for preventive and remedial conservation. This should also include consideration of mounting and supporting collections for display, safe movement and packaging materials and as noted above the potential use of external specialists. NMAG will seek external funding for specific on-line documentation projects and catalogues including collections on line and the Shoe Resources Centre catalogue. When acquiring large collections, NMAG will seek endowments for their housing, care and conservation including a charge on archaeological archive storage.

Partnerships and Advice

NMAG will seek to develop partnerships with organisations such as the Northampton Record Office in the documentation of archives and other paper-based collections and seek advice accordingly. NMAG will seek to develop other appropriate partnerships around the documentation of collections including the Collections Trust and will also consult with audiences regarding prioritisation.