

Trowbridge Museum Documentation Policy

Approved:

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Introduction

Keeping the documentation of Trowbridge Museum's collection up to date is essential if the organisation is to offer a quality service to all its stakeholders. This policy needs to be implemented alongside other policies relating to the Museum's collection, since reliable documentation underpins them all.

Aims and objectives

"The aim of the Trowbridge Museum Documentation Policy is to establish guidelines ensuring that every object in the Museum's collection is recorded accurately, securely and in an accessible fashion."

Accountability

Museum documentation should clarify the status of the object, its legal ownership and, if on loan, the criteria governing that loan. An Accession Register is to be maintained, both digitally and in hard copy, containing basic information about the object's provenance, and a Box Check must be carried out on a rolling programme to ensure that any missing or misplaced objects are recorded as such, and efforts are made to trace them. This is done by managing our backlog and missing list with regular checks by volunteers and staff.

Ethics and legislation

Trowbridge Museum embraces the Museums Association Code of Ethics and has a clearly defined Collections Development Policy which ensures that the Museum does not collect anything to which the donor has no legal title.

Efforts are made to protect the identity of the owners and lenders in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 but also bearing in mind guidelines laid down in the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Researchers are not given access to donor's names and addresses, nor is this information made available online. Entry to the MODES database is protected by passwords which allow different levels of access, thus ensuring that no significant information is made available to the general public or museum volunteers.

Standards

Trowbridge Museum aims to meet the standards set out for documentation by SPECTRUM. Detailed information on how this is achieved can be found in the Trowbridge Museum Documentation Procedures Manual.

- The Museum also aims to enhance documentation by adding images to any record which historically was not photographed, and our database will be immediately updated with new and temporary locations as soon as they are removed from their original box.
- In some cases, early recorders have bulk-catalogued items. In order to make such items more accessible, and to flag up their importance in the collection, retrospective accessioning needs to be an ongoing part of documentation practice. Recent examples of this have been the individual documentation of cloth samples from Trowbridge mills, the documentation of labels from Aplins the chemist and the individual cataloguing of a number of protest posters produced by a single artist in the 1960s and 1970s. The necessity to augment records is usually discovered during the Box Check and is initiated by the Collections and Exhibitions Officer.

Access to collections information

The Museum conducts research on behalf of enquirers, or offers viewing and database research sessions by appointment.

- All staff must be given training on how to retrieve data from the MODES Complete database currently in use.
- The Museum is committed to sharing more information about its collections on its website.
- The Museum has a collection of specialist works relating to woollen cloth production and aims to make this more widely available to researchers. This project will be initiated by recording all relevant books and pamphlets according to the Dewey library system, in addition to the regular MODES record.

Security of collections information

The MODES database, the images file and oral history audio files all reside on the Town Council server. Access to the files is limited to staff and a few trained volunteers. Each has an individual password for accessing the system. Any volunteers who work on the database have been checked and inducted by Town Council staff and have limited access level. Only staff who have been properly trained are given access levels which enable them to manipulate or edit the data, and the Collections and Exhibitions Officer retains control of Administrator access to the programme.

Passwords for accessing the Town Council system must be changed regularly. The Collections Officer controls the passwords used for accessing MODES at its different levels. It is important to lock all relevant computers when the operators leave their desks.

Safety of collections information

The MODES database is automatically backed up every night by the Town Council server which is kept at The Civic (i.e. on a different site to the Museum).

The Accession Register should be printed out at the end of every calendar year as a hard copy and stored in a fireproof metal cabinet in the collections room. The MODES grid should also be printed out at the end of each calendar year and filed in the same place. Additionally, the Museum Development Officer from the County Museums Advisory Service makes a separate backup copy of the MODES data to keep at their base in Chippenham. This is completed at least once a year. The Museum aims to install the latest version of the MODES programme at the earliest opportunity, to guard against obsolescence.