



SOCIETY OF
ANTIQUARIES
OF LONDON

Society of Antiquaries of London

Collections Access

Policy

for Museum Collections at Burlington House

Governing Body: Council (The Society of Antiquaries of London)

Policy approval date: 14 December 2023

Policy review procedure: This policy will be reviewed at least once every five years. All policy reviews and associated changes must be communicated to, and approved by, the Library and Collections Committee and Council.

Policy review date: 14 December 2028

Version: 2

This policy will be shared with internal and external stakeholders via email and will be published on our website to ensure availability to users and potential users.

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1. Mission, Vision, and Strategy

Our Royal Charter from 1751, which acts as a mission statement, encapsulates the Society's purpose:

The encouragement, advancement and furtherance of the study and knowledge of the antiquities and history of this and other countries.

This mission statement informs the Society's vision for 2023-2033:

To understand how humans live through the things that humans have created.

This vision drives the Society's strategic aims, objectives, and priorities, which are arranged into four pillars: 1 Nourish our current and future communities, 2 Stimulate our sector, 3 Excite the world, 4 Organise to deliver. The strategy for the Library, Archive and Museum falls into pillars 2 and 3:

Pillar 2	Stimulate our sector
Strategic Aim	The global independent forum on heritage
Long term priority	Offer catalysing resources through our library and collections
Mid-term priorities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Progress digitisation and cataloguing programme to ensure that collections and documents are fully accessible, globally 2. Ensure our collections are relevant, reviewed regularly and cared for appropriately to inspire the curious and support research 3. Create an ecosystem with our community whereby research is supported and encouraged through our collections 4. Ensure our professional standards support our ambitions as a key contributor to the sector
Pillar 3	Excite the world
Strategic Aim	The place where exciting new ideas are shared first
Long term priority	Open up our places by opening up BH to the public and expanding our work at KM
Mid-term priorities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase our engagement with new audiences as well as Fellows and Affiliates to create a diverse and thriving community 2. Amplify recognition as a key player in the sector through exhibitions and loans to museums and galleries worldwide 3. Ensure all our communications (tone of voice) and engagement are increasingly modern and inclusive and support the diverse audiences in our community 4. Actively collaborate with like-minded organisations to support our strategic aims

2. Widening access and communication

As part of our strategy for the next 10 years, we remain committed to welcoming visitors at Burlington House and sharing our collections in a way that is inspiring, educational, and sustainable. We used the Museum Development South East's Access Review Toolkit to carry out an access audit in 2023 and this has informed our Access Policy, our Forward Plan and our Access Plan. We aim to make any reasonable adjustments possible to improve physical and intellectual access to our buildings and collections in line with the Public Sector Equality Duty and the Equality Act 2010. We will also adhere to all national and international statutes of law, including specifically in relation to access, but not exclusively the Freedom of Information Act 2000, Data Protection Act 1998, and the Disability Discrimination Act 2005. We will follow national standards, ethical codes and best practice guidelines including, but not exclusively, PAS 197:2009 *Code of practice for cultural collections management*.

We are improving access to our collections at Burlington House despite the acknowledged constraints of resources, the structural limitations and operational function of the building, and the conservation needs of our collections.

We have ambitious plans to continue to increase access, broaden our audience and expand our outreach. This will be achieved through various initiatives set out in the Library, Archives, and Museums Strategic Plan and the BH Museum Forward Plan. Our key aim is to make our building more welcoming and accessible, to share a greater proportion of our collections through a combination of physical and online displays, to encourage more visits to the library and museum collections by students, early career researchers and the public, and to reach out to community groups and schools.

We promote access and we communicate and engage with our audiences through a variety of channels including our website and, more specifically our collections portal and collections webpages; our social media platforms; the Society e-newsletter SALON; Fellowship News; our public lecture series and public tours; our ordinary meetings and lectures; and our events and displays programme.

3. Identifying user needs

The Society identifies the differing needs of users in several ways in order to provide access for them.

- Focus groups. We work with "Family Focus Group", a paid initiative supported by the Museum Development London Family Friendly grant scheme. We invited six families of all shapes and sizes from local schools to attend our first "Family Fun Friday" event and act as critical friends, for us to improve future sessions and ensure that our family activities are tailored to our local audiences. We also consult with young people from external organisations to ensure that what we offer aligns with what they need and want for their future skills development for university and beyond. Additionally, we consult a teacher panel working with Classics for All to shape our first A Level Classical Civilisation and Ancient History Study Day, scheduled for Summer 2024.

- Advocacy groups, including Classics for All, Westminster City Lions and Art History Link Up. These groups all advocate and lobby for increased access to heritage collections and cultural capital development for children and young people from disadvantaged and underrepresented groups. Through consultation both with charity representatives and stakeholders from the audiences they represent and aim to reach, we are able to ensure the best possible experience for all participants in our programming for schools.
- Working with charities that run arts and heritage tours and activities for visitors with special needs, such as visual impairments. Charities we are currently working with include VocalEyes and We Are Beams, who work to ensure that people with a wide variety of needs are able to access and enjoy heritage and cultural organisations.
- Expert advice from a freelance exhibition designer on best practice when creating new interpretation and wayfinding signage.
- Feedback from school, family, and community groups attending outreach sessions, through evaluation forms from teachers and parents, facilitated creative evaluation activities for participants and verbal feedback from all parties.
- Evaluation from university students attending open days, workshops, and seminars.
- Feedback from visitors on Open House Fridays, through paper and digital feedback forms.
- Feedback forms and emails from those attending our lectures, seminars, and conferences.

4. Types of access

The Society recognises the following types of access:

4.1 Physical access at Burlington House

Despite a lack of permanent exhibition galleries at Burlington House, the Society has found different ways of making its collections accessible.

The Society launched a programme of triennial summer exhibitions at Burlington House in 2014 (converting meeting rooms into temporary exhibition spaces during the summer recess), allowing the public to see the collections and learn more about the Society. This exhibition programme allowed for an expanded visitor offer and greater opportunities for public access and engagement.

Today, the Society and its collections are accessible all year round. The Society showcases key pieces from the library and museum collections throughout the year with a programme of rotating temporary displays on the ground floor of Burlington House. Our building is open five days a week and a wide range of visitors can access these displays:

- Members of the public can book visits to Burlington House to see and study the museum and its collections.
- The entire ground floor of Burlington House is open to the public on Fridays without the need to book.
- Special interest groups can book private tours of Burlington House or staff-led collections seminars and workshops.
- We offer a regular outreach programme of collections-based workshops for schools, families, and community groups in Greater London. We offer both onsite visits for

schools and community groups and outreach workshops, through participation in activities such as the regular Westminster Abbey Family Fun Days.

- We organise two 'Courtyard Lates' a year. These are free themed evening events delivered jointly with other Burlington House courtyard societies where visitors can participate in activities and learn more about our collections from experts.
- We organise open days and seminars for undergraduate and postgraduate university students, which are aimed at introducing new researchers to our collections.
- We welcome visitors to the entire building during Open House London.
- Members of the public can attend our weekly lecture series either in person or online. Those attending in person can view our ground floor displays.
- All our conferences and seminars are open to the public, both in person and online. Those attending in person can view our ground floor displays.

There are inevitable physical limitations that come with a Grade II listed building:

- There is no step-free access.
- Burlington House has a lift that can be used to access all floors, but it is not large enough to accommodate a wheelchair user and a carer.
- Mobility scooters are welcome within the ground floor, but our lift is not large enough to accommodate them.
- There are no adapted toilet facilities.

These limitations are mitigated in a variety of ways:

- The ground floor of Burlington House is accessible to wheelchair users via a removable ramp at the main entrance.
- While access to the collections for wheelchair users is mainly limited to the ground floor of the building (depending on the size of the wheelchair), many highlight objects from the collection are on display in this area (the entrance hall, Meeting Room, and Council Room).
- Should a visitor wish to see a specific object in the collection, or wish to study a series of objects, the Museum Collections Manager will assess the conservation needs of the object and, if feasible, make objects available to a wheelchair user in one of the ground floor rooms.
- Wherever possible, pre-booked visits will be adapted to suit the needs of the visitor. School and community groups are consulted in advance of their visit to ensure that all access, mobility and SEND needs are catered for, to ensure that all participants have the best possible visit in line with their needs.

4.2 Intellectual and sensory access

Information regarding Burlington House opening times, services, facilities, and access to collections is available via our website <https://www.sal.org.uk/>, our social media channels, our printed leaflets, and by telephone or email.

The Society recognises that people have different learning preferences and for exhibitions, tours, and events held at Burlington House, we aim to provide interpretation that is responsive and adaptable to these varied learning preferences where possible.

We aim to use short object labels and longer interpretive panels in our displays. We play introductory videos in our entrance hall and have a sound loop installed in our meeting room.

We offer regular tours, engage story tellers for special events, and are working to increase our digital exhibitions offer.

We are also in the process of developing an “Access Toolkit” for visitors with sensory processing and neurodiverse needs. The toolkit will include a pop-up tent, ear defenders for adults and children, and fidget toys, along with cushions and books, in a “Cosy Corner” for visitors requiring a quiet space.

Working with VocalEyes, a charity that runs arts and heritage tours and activities for the blind and visually impaired, the Society hosted an early morning Open House tour before the pandemic where participants were able to learn of the history of the Society and its collections through a specially adapted audio-tour and object handling sessions. Staff at the Society have since received training to continue offering these tours on a regular basis. The Society has also created a range of audio guides for visually impaired visitors.

4.3 Digital access

The Society provides digital access to its collections in a variety of ways:

- Objects are gradually becoming searchable and visible through an online portal <https://collections.sal.org.uk/home>
- There is extensive information and images on key objects in the Collections highlights section of our website <https://www.sal.org.uk/collections/explore-our-collections/collections-highlights/>
- An online exhibition platform where groups of objects are brought together to tell stories <https://stories.sal.org.uk/>
- Around 5000 museum objects and drawings are also searchable via an online catalogue hosted by the Archaeology Data Service https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/SoA_images/
- The Society’s oil paintings at both Burlington House and Kelmscott Manor also feature on the Art UK paintings website, providing the opportunity to enhance and extend accessibility to our art collection. As a free online resource this also encourages wide social access. <https://artuk.org/visit/collection/society-of-antiquaries-of-london-2055>
- The Society engages with a wide and diverse audience via its social media accounts, using Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest to share activities, events, and collections. The Society also actively participates in national social media events such as #Museumweek.
- We also use the Smartify mobile app which scans artworks and returns information about them. By partnering with this app and joining the Smartify network, we have helped to open up our collections both digitally and for our physical visitors. We have added artworks on the ground floor of our building to the app, which means those attending our events and Open Fridays can access information about our collections easily through their mobiles by simply scanning the selected artwork using the app. We have also placed QR codes in each room which lets users access the information on Smartify through a web browser, which means those without the app on their phone can see the same information too. Our venue on Smartify can also be accessed with a link through a web browser, so anyone, regardless of their location, can learn about us and our collections. We will also use the app to create digital exhibitions and showcase otherwise unseen parts of our Collections.

4.4 Social, geographical, and financial access

The Society recognises that admission charging can act as an economic barrier to public access. Although as an independent charity with no Government funding the Society has to charge for some of its services and events in order to generate income for the care and conservation of its collections, it also ensures that economic barriers to the access and enjoyment of its collections are acknowledged and, where possible, discounts or free access are offered to key visitor/user groups or for specific services. The following are offered free of charge:

- Research visits
- Open Fridays
- Collections-based workshops for schools and community groups in Greater London
- Open House London
- Lectures both in person and online
- Conferences and seminars both in person and online
- Courtyard Lates (attendance to talks is free but there is a small cost for refreshments and some activities)

The following are offered at a low or discounted cost:

- Open days and seminars for undergraduate and postgraduate university students, which are aimed at introducing new researchers to our collections.
- Private group tours of Burlington House or staff-led collections seminars and workshops.
- Fundraising events.

The Society is also committed to sharing its collections beyond its London premises and has an active lending programme, with long-term and temporary loans to national and regional museums in the UK, in Europe and America. This includes loans to the British Museum, the National Gallery, the V&A, Stonehenge Visitor Centre and Tate Britain in the UK, and the National Gallery of Art (Washington DC), Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), Musée d'Orsay (Paris), Museum Villa Stuck (Munich), and the Museo del Prado (Madrid), among many others. Approximately 400 objects from the Society's museum collections at Burlington House are on loan to national and regional museums with free entry. These include:

- The British Museum
- The Museum of London
- The National Gallery
- National Museums Wales
- Jewry Wall Museum, Leicester
- The Great North Museum
- Royal Armouries, Leeds
- Maidstone Museum, Kent
- The Science Museum
- Manchester Museum

4.5 Emotional access

The Society strives to ensure that all visitors feel welcome and comfortable in our buildings, and that they receive a good standard of care and consideration.

The Society's Staff Handbook includes a section titled 'common responsibilities', which outlines the Society's commitment to ensuring professional and personal courtesy and integrity among its staff, and towards Fellows, members of the public and other visitors.

The Society has a safeguarding policy and associated procedures, which staff are trained on, and is committed to ensuring the safety and welfare of children and adults at risk who visit our premises or engage with our collections and activities online.

4.6 Cultural access

The Museum will continue to monitor feedback from our visitor surveys to inform us whether visitors would welcome resources / key object label labels translated into other key languages going forward and will develop resources as time and resources will allow when needed.

5. Enquiries and research visits

The Society has guidelines for researchers who wish to visit Burlington House. All research visits need to be pre-booked in advance due to the practical constraints of space, time, the availability of staff to assist, and the need to ensure the safety and security of all objects in our care.

- The Society will aim to respond to any enquiry about the Burlington House museum collection within 10 working days.
- An enquirer will generally be able to secure an appointment within 14 working days of applying to the Society's museum for research access or to book a museum visit. It may sometimes however take up to four weeks to secure an appointment due to staff availability.
- An enquirer with an appointment to visit for research purposes will be able to consult all available documentation (with the exception of confidential information) relating to the collections and associated archives where appropriate.
- Access to the library to research the museum collections is also encouraged.

References

A number of other policies outline restrictions or limitations on collections access with regards to conservation and collections care, sensitivity of materials, and the current state of collections documentation and information. The Access Policy should therefore be read in conjunction with:

- Strategic Plan for the Library, Archives, and Museums of the Society of Antiquaries of London 2023/24 to 2024/25
- 2023 BH Museum Access Plan
- 2023 BH & KM Museum Development Policy
- 2023 BH & KM Museum Documentation Policy
- 2023 BH Museum Care & Conservation Policy
- SAL Human Remains Policy