Society of Antiquaries of London

Documentation Policy

for Museum Collections at Burlington House and Kelmscott Manor

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: 1

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.

Contents

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 new 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	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	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. Purpose of the Policy

Collections documentation is concerned with the development and use of information about the objects within the Society of Antiquaries of London's Museum collections and the procedures which support the management of the collection.

The policy aims to ensure that the Society of Antiquaries of London fulfils its responsibilities in relation to collections access, accountability, standards, security, and management by:

- Clearly establishing the Society's legal rights and responsibilities towards the objects in its care.
- Improving and extending accessibility to the collections and to collections information, both physically and intellectually for its community of users.
- Improving transparency and accountability with regards to the collections.
- Ensuring documentation procedures comply with at least the minimum professional standards, in compliance with SPECTRUM 5.1 (see section 3).
- Strengthening the security and long-term preservation of documentation records, whether paper or digital including backup and storage.

In addition, it is the Society's hope that managing and documenting the collections in this way will support its wider strategic pillars & long term aims:

- Create a sound foundation in order to explore future digital and remote access initiatives.
- Facilitate and contribute towards other services relating to the museum's collections, such as the Society's loans, exhibition and publications programmes.
- Allow for all the museum collections to feature on a publicly accessible database.

This policy will guide the work of the Society of Antiquaries of London in the field of collections documentation and will provide a framework around which future *Documentation Plans* can be shaped.

To comply with Accreditation requirements, this Policy will be associated with a *Documentation Plan*, which will be regularly reviewed and will reflect the Society's documentation management aims, as well as its strategic aims and intentions and its available resources. The *Documentation Plan* should be read in association with the Society's *Documentation Procedural Manual, Collections Development Policy, Collections Care and Conservation Policy* and the Society's *Forward Plan*.

3.   General Statement

The Society accepts that the nature of its collecting (with acquisition of material beginning in the early 18th century) has created a diverse museum collection with variable levels and quality of associated documentation.

The Society is committed to ensuring that all new acquisitions comply with the key documentation management aims outlined in this policy, and that a *Documentation Plan* will help to achieve these aims for objects in the museum collection acquired prior to the implementation of this policy.

The Society's documentation system comprises paper and digital records managed by the Head of Library and Museum Collections and the Museum Collections Manager at Burlington House, and the Curator at Kelmscott Manor.

Appointed staff responsible for carrying out each procedure and for maintaining collections documentation standards, as well as details of every documentation procedure and expectations on quality of records are specified in the *Documentation Procedural Manual.*

4. Standards

Collections information will be acquired, managed, maintained and used in line with the standards outlined in the Museum Association's *Code of Ethics for Museums* (2015), *Benchmarks in Collections Care 2.1* (2018), the (PAS 197) *Code of practice for cultural collections management* (2009), and will be guided by the 9 Primary Procedures of the SPECTRUM 5.1 standard as a minimum (2022).

4.1   Collections information will be recorded in compliance with legal requirements, including the UK General Data Protection Regulations (2018) and the Freedom of Information Act (2000).

4.2   The Society is committed to following SPECTRUM, the UK Museum Collections Management Standard, and in particular, fulfilling the SPECTRUM 5.1 primary procedures as the minimum level of documentation:

- Object entry
- Acquisitions and accessioning
- Location and movement control
- Inventory
- Cataloguing
- Object exit
- Loans in (borrowing objects)
- Loans out (lending objects)
- Documentation planning

The necessary steps for achieving the above primary procedures are outlined in detail in the Society's *Documentation Procedural Manual* and this is available to all collections- based staff and will inform all collections staff training.

4.3   The Society takes a common-sense approach towards documentation. The aim is to document to individual item level. However, for some collections of material it is neither feasible, practical, or possible to document to this level of detail and so group documentation may be used to ensure collections at least possess basic inventory level records. Examples include: archaeological archives, or large collections of small but similar objects from the same donor.

5. Accountability

The Society will maintain a level of documentation that will allow it to identify and locate all objects for which it is legally responsible including new acquisitions, accessioned objects, and items deposited for research, identification, and loan.

5.1   All items entering the collection will be recorded on an Entry Form and assigned a unique entry number/ loan in reference number. For all new acquisitions, the information recorded on the object Entry Form will also be recorded in the Society's hard-copy Collections Trust accession register and the Collections Management System CollectionsIndex+.

5.2   All objects entering the collection as acquisitions will be accessioned by the application of a unique identification number, preceded by the prefix/collection identity code LDSAL (for objects held at Burlington House) or KM (for objects held at Kelmscott Manor). Each object (or in some cases groups of objects) will have a unique database record created, and all physical records relating to the object's history and acquisition will be held in an Object History File.

5.3   Object information will be stored together in one place on the Collections Management database system, CollectionsIndex+, so that all relevant information can be easily searched, accessed, and updated as and when required. This CMS system is backed-up on a nightly basis, with a monthly back-up of all systems archived and held for 6 months.

5.4   Regular inventory checks will be carried out to ensure that the Society can locate any given object, and collections documentation will be audited annually by spot-checking 5% of items. Actions arising as a result will be carried forward into documentation action planning.

6. Access to the collections

The Society provides access to collections information and documentation to a wide range of audiences in a variety of ways, as outlined in the Society's Collections Access Policy.

6.1   Collections documentation, research, and development will be communicated to Trustees through the appropriate Committees, and to staff via staff meetings and through the appropriate Committees. Communication to Fellows, volunteers, researchers and members of the public will be made through printed and online

resources, and through events, talks and meetings wherever possible and practical to do so.

6.2   The Society is committed to improving access to collections information and will continue to work to enhance its online resources in order to further promote its collections and make associated information more accessible to a worldwide audience in accordance with our strategy priorities in Pillar 3.

7. Security of collections information

7.1   The Society is committed to ensuring the physical security of its records. Operational procedures ensure access restrictions are in place to limit and control physical access to areas in which collections records are stored and maintained.

7.2   Access to internal electronic systems are controlled and only staff members who have received appropriate training have access to them.

7.3   Collections documentation and records will be kept as up-to-date and accessible as possible. The Society uses a SPECTRUM compliant Museum Collections Management Database system in order to ensure that its electronic systems remain workable and reliable, ensuring the long-term accessibility of the information held.

References

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following documents:

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