



SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM
DOCUMENTATION POLICY and PLAN 2014

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Approved by Museum Management Working Group: Date
[checked by two members of MMWG for Accreditation submission, to go to MMWG on 18
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DOCUMENTATION POLICY

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Saffron Walden Museum is the public museum service for Uttlesford District, in north-west Essex. It is operated by Uttlesford District Council under the terms of a lease and a management agreement with Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd (charity 1123209) which owns the buildings on the Saffron Walden sites and the collections.
- 1.2 Saffron Walden Museum aspires to the standards set out by the Accreditation Scheme and by SPECTRUM for documentation.
- 1.3 The Museum recognises that to care for, develop and enable access to our collections, we require accurate and effective documentation of the objects we hold.

2. Purpose

- 2.1 The purpose of this documentation policy is to guide the work of the Museum in the field of collections documentation. It will ensure that the Museum:
 - improves accountability for its collections;
 - strives towards best practice for collections documentation, whilst maintaining at the least the minimum professional standards;
 - extends access to collections information to the workforce and beyond, primarily through improvements to the computer database;
 - strengthens the security of the collections through improved location and movement control and other documentation.

3. Context

- 3.1 The Documentation Policy should be read in conjunction with the Forward Plan (2013-2018), the Collections Development Policy (2013), the Documentation Procedural Manual (2014) and the Access Policy Statement (2013). Key Aim 2 of the Forward Plan (2013-2018) is to “improve management, accessibility and display of collections by developing the collections database”.
- 3.2 This policy will be reviewed every five years or following any significant change.
- 3.3 This policy is informed by relevant legal and ethical frameworks. Saffron Walden Museum is bound by, and adheres to, the Data Protection Act, the Freedom of Information Act and any additional legislation relevant to the storage of data and information. We abide by and follow the Museum Association Code of Ethics.

4. Cataloguing

- 4.1 Saffron Walden Museum is committed to creating and maintaining good quality, up-to-date information about the objects in our collections, which conforms to appropriate standards wherever possible. We record sufficient information that allows us to identify and locate all objects in our collections, including objects that are on loan to the Museum and objects which are loaned by the Museum to other venues.
- 4.2 We strive towards best practice for collections documentation, whilst maintaining at least the minimum level of documentation for all objects for which we are legally responsible. We are committed to following SPECTRUM and meeting the minimum standards for the eight SPECTRUM primary procedures:
- Object Entry
 - Acquisition
 - Location and Movement Control
 - Cataloguing
 - Object Exit
 - Loans In
 - Loans Out
 - Retrospective Documentation

Further information about meeting the standards for the SPECTRUM primary procedures can be found in the Documentation Procedural Manual (2014).

- 4.3 Details of gaps and backlogs of documentation are kept and a plan for completing these gaps is in place and progressing as resources permit. Further information on documentation backlogs and plans can be found in the Documentation Plan below.
- 4.4 To avoid increasing the documentation backlog, we aim to accession all objects within 3 months of acquiring them. In the case of large assemblages (e.g. archaeological site archives, cabinet of natural history specimens) a group record will be created within 3 months of acquisition and a phased plan will be made to complete more detailed cataloguing.
- 4.5 All staff and volunteers responsible for collections documentation receive appropriate training and are required to comply with the Documentation Procedural Manual 2014.

5. Access to Collections Information

- 5.1 We are committed to extending access to collections information for our staff and volunteers and for researchers, enquirers and visitors.
- 5.2 The primary way in which we aim to extend access to collections information is through improving our collections database (using software Modes Complete) as stated in Key Aim 2 of our Forward Plan (2013 -2018). We aim to increase the number of database records, by transferring information from card indices and paper records to the database, and improve the quality of those database records that already exist. Priority here will be to audit and edit or create computer database

records for all objects and specimens which have moved store from 2014 onwards, when the new off-site store at Shirehill in Saffron Walden becomes operational.

- 5.3 All objects and specimens accessioned from April 2014 will be catalogued directly onto Modes and catalogue cards will no longer be created. Location card systems operating in some stores will be phased out as collections are catalogued on Modes.

6. Security

- 6.1 Security of collections information is taken very seriously. This includes the information contained in the collections themselves as well as the information held about them in hard copy and digital form. Security refers to both the physical security of the information and data and its long-term preservation.
- 6.2 Paper documentation is stored in the secure museum store-rooms and in the Documentation and Natural Sciences offices, which are locked when museum staff are absent. Accession registers are stored in a fire-proof safe and a security microfilm copy is kept off-site.
- 6.3 Electronic records are stored on Uttlesford District Council's central servers and are backed up every night. Archaeological contractors depositing archives will be required to deposit digital archives with the Archaeological Data Service for long-term preservation of the digital records and migration to new software for public access.
- 6.4 We are committed to regular reviews of our documentation systems to ensure that they are fit for purpose and that collections information is safeguarded against potential future obsolescence of the systems.

7. Future Developments

- 7.1 During the period of this policy, the plans for documentation will focus on these objectives for Key Aim 2 of the Forward Plan (2013-2018):
- Auditing and re-editing the locations of all objects and specimens that are moved to new storage areas once the new off-site store at Shirehill in Saffron Walden becomes operational (by end of 2014).
 - Digitising collections that are not yet on computer, focusing on archaeology, local history and geology.
 - Editing and enhancing content of records already on computer, including standardising data and terminology and adding images.
 - Providing an appropriate level of public access to the collections database in the Museum for specific collections where there will be a high public demand, such as local history photographs.

Further information about future developments relating to documentation can be found in the Forward Plan (2013-2018) and the Documentation Plan below.

DOCUMENTATION PLAN

1 Forward Plan Key Aims

The relevant Key Aims from the Forward Plan are:

1. Improve and rationalise the storage of collections in off-site storage and in the Museum, through the construction of a new off-site store and a revised collections policy [Stage I]
2. Improve management, accessibility and display of collections by developing the collections database [Stage I and Stage II]

2 Estimates and Collections Summary

2.1 Current types of record

The primary records of the collections are the series of Accession Registers A – Q and other registers (e.g. early loans registers and subject indices) which cover the entire history of the Museum's collections from its foundation in the 1830s until the present. Location card indices are kept in the stores for the contents of that store, or in the Natural Sciences office. These are gradually being superseded by catalogue entries on the computer database (software: Modes Complete) with images where appropriate. Location cards and Modes records form the basis in which the state of documentation is assessed below. There are numerous other historic card systems, lists etc. from the Museum's 179 years of existence but these have been discounted for the purpose of this assessment.

2.2 Summary of Collections

The table below summarises the estimated size of the current collections by broad subject area, and indicates how much is covered by manual card catalogues and how much by catalogue entries on the collections database (Modes Complete). In recent years, the return of a large historic loan of ethnographic objects to the Cuming Museum and small scale rationalisation of some other collections (unaccessioned / duplicate maps and coins) has very slightly reduced the potential backlog, but not significantly in terms of the total.

For minimum estimates, accessioning and cataloguing by group has been used for:

Natural Sciences – large collections of fossils, insects etc recorded by box or drawer where appropriate. An inventory of the natural sciences collections has continued since 1994 when the first Natural Sciences Officer was employed at the Museum. Large collections of specimens (geology, insects, molluscs, bird's eggs) housed in cabinets and boxes have been documented on computer by drawer/box, collector/provenance and by the groups of specimens that they contain e.g. wasps, clam shells, birds' eggs. Therefore it is possible to locate objects that are not catalogued to individual specimen level via the Modes database. Work will continue to document specimens as resources permit.

Archaeology – archives from fieldwork recorded at site level (global accession number for whole site). Individual small finds from excavations (which are stored separately), together with other finds (antiquarian, casual finds, metal detector and treasure finds, lithics collection) are recorded individually.

For maximum estimates, a fuller level of cataloguing would include bulk finds and environmental remains from archaeological excavations by context bag or box, and this is shown in blue in the table. Another factor is the large quantity of excavation archives to be deposited in the new store, which has been taken into account as far as possible, however accurate estimates of archive size and contents are currently unavailable for most of the

large archives to be deposited. Development in the district is also expected to result in an increase in archaeological excavations in the medium term.

Total Collections Estimates

On current estimates, using the minimum standard for calculations, the total collection is around **124,000** items. 79% are on the Modes database and 87% are on location cards in the stores with a large degree of overlap between the two. It is estimated that **over 90% of the collections have at least a basic record on a card and/or Modes**, the backlogs existing mainly in archaeology (site archives and recent small finds) and social history (mainly documents, prints, ephemera and glass plate photos).

Taking into account the full impact of archaeological depositions over the next few years and development of a fuller catalogue of excavated bulk finds by context bag / box, the total rises to around **154,000**.

If 10% contingency is added to allow for underestimates and additional unnumbered objects found in store, as well as other new acquisitions, 170,000 may be a more realistic working estimate for the total collections anticipated by the end of the current Forward Plan 2013-18.

Collection	Estimated No.	% on Cards	% on Modes	Notes
Geology	17,383	100%	100%	Specimen, or to box/drawer level
Natural History	52,836	100%	100%	Specimen, or to box/drawer level
Archaeology: site archives (evaluations to large excavations) Minimum estimate	172 Another 133+ to be deposited in new store =305	0	16%	Accession number allocated to site and basic paper record in file awaiting transfer to Modes database
Archaeology: individual small finds (antiquarian, casual, excavated) Minimum estimate	15,000	73%	20%	May be some overlap between cards and Modes.
Archaeology: bulk finds by context/bag, including archives to be deposited. Maximum estimate	Approx 30,000	-	-	Bulk finds and environmental remains by context box / bag or box.
Numismatics: coins, tokens, seals (mainly antiquarian collection)	6,700	96%	0	Excludes excavated coins treated as small finds in archaeological site archives, but includes hoards acquired through Treasure Act
Social / Local History	25,638	59%	48%	Includes textiles, documents, prints, photos etc
Decorative Arts	2,462	89%	100%	New acquisitions & updates only
World Cultures	4,058	71%	100%	New acquisitions & updates only
Total estimated minimum standard	124, 382	87% of all collections	79% of all collections	Estimate over 90% covered by card /or Modes record
Total including fuller catalogue of bulk finds	154,382			

3 Recent and Current Documentation

3.1 In 2008 the Museum was awarded a £1m Heritage Lottery Fund grant for the Heritage Quest Centre project, which would have provided a new off-site resource centre (store with some public access) and staff and budgets for 3 years to tackle documentation backlogs. This project had to be abandoned due to a series of difficulties beyond the Museum's control and a more basic but purpose-built off-site store (funded by Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd and Uttlesford District Council) is now due for completion in 2014. This will provide a much better facility for care of collections. The resources to tackle documentation backlogs remain an issue.

3.2 However, in recent years some progress has been made where funding and/or suitable volunteers have been available:

- Local history photos digitised (project funded by Museum Society 2011-12)
- Map collection rationalised and maps retained are listed on Excel spreadsheet (which can be transferred into the Modes database to create basic inventory records)
- Local history documents listed and being put on Excel (long-term project with two experienced volunteer local historians) to be transferred into Modes database
- Miscellaneous coins sorted and backlog accessioned, stored and location cards completed (part of long-term project 2013- with experienced volunteer from Essex Numismatics Society)

3.3 The Documentation & Exhibitions post underwent a period of frequent staff changes for a variety of reasons and was then frozen June 2013 – March 2014 due to cuts and an impending restructure. This post has been revised as Collections Officer (Human History). There is a small backlog of recent acquisitions to be catalogued as a result, though acceptance of new acquisitions was temporarily suspended December 2013 – April 2014 to control this while there was a temporary lack of staff to deal with human history collections and associated services.

3.4 Due to recent staffing circumstances, the emphasis has been on keeping up with current acquisitions and not letting new backlogs develop.

Human history – there is an estimated backlog of around 100 objects to be accessioned, which is currently being worked through by Collections Officer (Human History). These objects are given full records. Existing documentation is currently being improved on an ad-hoc basis (for example, when objects are taken out of storage for display or research).

Natural sciences – documenting recent acquisitions and offers, converting records in Access to Excel and transferring data to Modes database, improving the quality / completeness / standardising format of existing Modes records, documenting protected species in the collections on Modes (now a requirement of international, European and UK laws). Documentation is carried out by the Natural Sciences Officer and Support Worker (under supervision).

4 Accreditation Backlog, New Storage Locations and Other Priorities

4.1 Accreditation standards and minimum estimates

From the table in 2.2, most of the collections are covered by card and / or Modes (computer database) records to the minimum SPECTRUM standard (see Documentation Procedural Manual 5.1.2):

Object Number	Acquisition (method, date, source)
Object Name	Location
Number of Items	Recorder's name
Brief Description	Date recorded

to which we will also add

Condition note

Conservation element group

to record Lab numbers, conservation treatments or recommendations where appropriate

However, movement of collections to the new off-site store (Forward Plan Phase I) and subsequent improvements envisaged for the Museum (Forward Plan Phase II) will mean that location records for a large proportion of the collections will need updating, making existing location cards redundant, and requiring an audit and update of collections against catalogue entries on the computer database (Modes Complete). The obvious solution is to get all collections onto computer at minimal inventory level as part of this process to meet Accreditation requirements and lay the foundations for improving access to collections, their care, management and use in displays, research and learning activities. This process should include adding digital images where required.

There are some sub-collections where statutory licensing or other important conditions require more detailed, specific information to be recorded on the catalogue record. This needs to be dealt with by curatorial staff and is already in progress for Natural Sciences (updating records for CITES and other wildlife legislation). There are discrete sub-collections in human history which need tackling (e.g. firearms; archaeological treasure)

4.2 Improving Collections Management and Insurance Valuations

Condition and Conservation notes will be included where appropriate in Modes catalogue entries, including the Lab number to link with existing conservation records which consist of notes, drawings and photos on a manual card system (Care & Conservation Policy 8.6).

The long-running issue of providing up-to-date insurance evaluations for all collections could be tackled once it is possible to generate lists and comprehensive inventories from computer-based records (as already done with the ceramics collection). In particular this affects social history and elements of the archaeology and natural science collections. Updating insurance valuations would still require some additional financial resources to pay for the services of external valuers, but this could be targeted where most needed and phased according to budget available.

4.3 Gallery re-displays, research and public access

The proposed extension of the Museum (Forward Plan phase II) and re-display of local history and archaeology galleries requires considerable investment of staff time and a sound database which enables staff to research collections and associated information to create new story-lines and display briefs. This will require catalogue entries on the computer database to be developed for key objects and specimens, where extended entries do not exist already, but this should be integral to work on displays and increasing

public access and will be targeted at specific collections (this has already happened where small-scale projects have permitted e.g. digitisation of the local history photo collection).

Options on improving future public access to collections include:

- On-line searching via Museum's website
- Touch-screens in galleries for exploring aspects of the collections in greater depth
- Production and marketing of reproductions and learning materials, e-publications, research publications and souvenir guides

5 Documentation Assessment and Plan

The table quantifies the work needed to address

- Accreditation backlogs (archaeology and social history)
- Updating of storage locations for new store and development of the Museum

It also prioritises projects for developing fuller catalogue records on the Modes database according to identified priorities.

Priorities for Natural Science collections

The next priorities for cataloguing natural science collections to specimen level are:

- Geology collection
- Birds' eggs
- Non-flowering plants

For new acquisitions, such as a cabinet of natural history specimens, a group record will now be created within 3 months of acquisition and a phased plan will be made to complete more detailed cataloguing.

Priorities for Human History collections

The immediate priorities are:

- Archaeological site archives
- Archaeological treasure and small finds (mix of location updates and new records)
- Firearms and edged weapons
- Local and social history documents, ephemera and prints

Other themes for fuller cataloguing will be developed by work for re-display of the galleries and significant groups which are under-utilised e.g. the historic autograph collection.

Estimating Time Needed

Level of Documentation Required	Records edited or created per hour
Update location for existing Modes record	30 (2 minutes per record)
Inventory level (SPECTRUM min. Standard) on Modes database	12 (5 minutes per record)
Full catalogue record on Modes This will vary greatly according to the amount of research needed in old registers and other records, consultation of reference works and published reports, and amount of detail needed.	1 which may rise to 5 (12 minutes per record) when cataloguing a group of similar objects or specimens

To calculate approximate no. of days, 1 day = 7 hours

COLLECTION With current location and comments	NEW STORAGE LOCATION (and Forward Plan Phase)	ACCREDITATION BACKLOG and/or LOCATION UPDATED after moving store Min. Standard: Spectrum inventory with digital image where appropriate Accession by group for 'bulk' finds and specimens Est. no. of items to enter / edit Days work		FULLER CATALOGUE DEVELOPED more detailed catalogue entry on computer, acc. to research and display needs and opportunities Priority and est. no. of items Days work	
Geology & Fossils (Newport), mainly local / Essex but also British and worldwide elements. Total collection 17,383 but most catalogued to inventory level by box.	Shirehill I	17,126 Update location records after move to new store.	81 = 16 weeks	15,047 fossil, rock and mineral specimens need individual inventory records on Modes. Local material will be the priority. Specialist identification assistance is needed.	179 = 36 weeks
Natural History (Museum / Newport) Total 52,836 of which 32,325 will be at Shirehill. Flora already 88% catalogued. Zoology collections catalogued except for birds' eggs and invertebrates which are inventoried to box / drawer level.	Shirehill I	32,325 Update location records after move to new store.	153 = 31 weeks	1,647 non-flowering plants, 6,958 birds' eggs and 27,589 invertebrate specimens need individual inventory records on Modes. Will need some specialist identification assistance.	20 83 328 = 86 weeks
Archaeology (Newport), site archives from excavations already deposited + to be deposited	Shirehill I	305 New records on new template for Site file, estimate average 3 per hr	15	30,000 bulk finds and environmental remains by context bag / box, inventory level	360 = 72 weeks
Archaeology small finds (non-metals at Newport and metals at Museum)	Shirehill I	15,000 estimated total of which 3,000 on Modes need location edit 12,000 need inventory on Modes	14 143	Full catalogue entries for 3,000 selected objects and themes, prioritised for display and learning,	86 = 17 weeks
Numismatics (Museum) Options on moving to Shirehill with archaeology or retaining in Museum with Firearms and Edged Weapons	Option: Museum or Shirehill I	7,000 estimated total which all need Modes inventory record with new storage location	83	Full catalogue entries for around 2,000 on extended coin template. Essex tokens, hoards and priority areas like Ancient British and Anglo-Scandinavian coins.	57
Social History (Newport) Large objects, tools, horse-drawn vehicles, agricultural equipment.	Shirehill I	1,250 need inventory on Modes	15	Worley's saddlers tools (665) Displayable groups of craft, trade and agricultural tools (450)	19 13
Social History (Organics, Schoolroom building) Organic materials, including carved wood, wall painting samples, framed oil paintings and large rolled textiles.	Shirehill II Small element may go to	3,680 to edit location and add images.	18	1,500 domestic objects (5 per hour) prioritised for display and learning	43

3680 (all objects) currently on Modes.	Museum?				
Social History (Museum, '2D' store and Workroom), prints, maps, documents, letters, ephemera, Museum archive. About 800 documents are not on up-to-date card indexes and are an Accreditation backlog priority. Box contents have been listed by volunteers and are being put on Excel spreadsheets which can be read into Modes.	Shirehill II	800 priority for inventory on Modes 10,000 other items needing inventory on Modes	10 120	300 autographs (5 per hr) Selected 2,000 items for display and learning themes (Local history researchers are also likely to add more depth to existing records)	9 58
Social History (Inorganics, Museum) Objects mostly small and boxed or shelved, domestic, personal and some trade and militia. 1780 objects on location cards; 482 currently on Modes.	Museum (elements may be transferred to Shirehill)	482 to audit, edit location and add images 1298 to inventory on Modes, with images.	2.5 16	Selected topics and groups for display and learning, say 600 (5 per hour)	17
Social History (Firearms and Edged Weapons) 46 firearms and about 50 edged weapons. Firearms are listed for licence purposes, but not on computer database.	Move within Museum to modified Arch Metal store	46 firearms and 50 weapons to inventory on Modes, with images.	1.5	Historic research notes and correspondence need incorporating into catalogue records (allow 3 per hr)	5
TOTAL		Priority Backlog and Location Edits	672 = 135 weeks	Further Desirable Work to Develop fuller records for key collections and themes	1,277 = 255 weeks

6 Resources and Action Plans

6.1 Resources for Priority Backlog and location edits, estimated at 135 weeks

The Museum should aim to complete this within 2 years, by the end of 2016.

Natural Sciences collections: 47 weeks equivalent

Human History collections: 88 weeks equivalent

The audit and editing or creation of comprehensive inventory records on computer for collections moving into the new off-site store will require an immediate and concentrated project with a dedicated workforce, managed and supervised by curatorial staff with fixed-term project staff and volunteers to undertake the bulk of routine data inputting.

Curatorial staff will be able to spend Mondays working at the Shirehill store (when the Museum is closed) which will afford the opportunity to set up regular collections working parties with volunteers. However the spread of responsibilities covered by the small staff team place limitations on the amount of time permanent staff can spend on documentation.

Staff	Contribution to documentation (rough estimate, average week)
Curator	1 day per week on documentation, targeted at small high-priority projects (archaeological sites, treasure, firearms) and supervising temporary staff and volunteers on archaeological documentation projects.
Collections Officer, Human History	2 days per week Targeted at high priority social and local history projects and new acquisitions and supervising temporary staff and volunteers on documentation projects.
Natural Sciences Officer	2 days per week With Support Worker, could tackle some updating of location records (equivalent of 47 weeks total) but will need additional help from temp staff and/or volunteers.

Documentation can be broken into a number of small projects for different collections, which could facilitate short-term posts or grant-aided projects.

Potential sources of assistance to be investigated include:

- One-off capital project or matching funding for external grant (Council, Museum Society)
- Grants from external source, e.g. HLF Our Heritage, AIM, subject specialist organisations
- Internships for documentation assistants (may suit recent graduate students)
- Volunteers (with Museum Society assistance)

The creation of a collections volunteer workforce (summer 2014) to assist with the move into the new store may identify some volunteers to help with documentation, however it is not always easy to find volunteers who are willing and able to edit Modes database records, and both the new Collections Officer and Curator need some additional training on Modes before undertaking large-scale documentation exercises.

6.2 Action Plan for Priority Backlog 2014-2016

What	When	Who
Investigate potential sources of funding	June – July 2014	Curator and all curatorial staff
Purchase documentation materials: labels, archival pens, marking kits, object movement forms and tickets (museum budget) for store move	June – July 2014	Collections Officer
Modes Administrator training	July 2014	Collections Officer
In-house refresher training on Modes	Aug-Sept 2014	Curator / Collections Officer
Recruit and train volunteers, form collections task force, identify volunteers for documentation projects	July-Aug? (dependent on timetable for move to new store)	Curatorial staff and Museum Society with Council support (H&S)
Apply for funding for short-term documentation assistant posts and projects	Autumn 2014 onwards	Curator with Collections Officer and Natural Sciences Officer

6.3 Action Plan for Developing Fuller Records after 2016

Natural Sciences collections: 122 weeks equivalent

Human History collections: 133 weeks equivalent, of which social history 33 weeks and archaeology 89 weeks, numismatics 11 weeks

Key areas for human history display work will need to be considered from 2015 onwards as plans for extending the Museum and redisplaying the ground floor galleries (archaeology and local history) advance. More staff time (Curator and Collections Officer) will have to be allocated to researching and preparing display briefs once the Priority Documentation is in hand, but some additional assistance will be needed to help work up documentation for key display and learning topics in:

Archaeology – about 17 weeks equivalent

Social History – about 30 weeks equivalent

Some or this could be linked to funding applications for re-display of the archaeology and local history galleries (Forward Plan Stage II)

Cataloguing archaeological bulk finds and environmental remains by context (estimated at 72 weeks equivalent) would be suitable for tackling as a series of discrete projects with volunteers, work experience students and local history societies (by site or by parish), coupled with re-boxing and sorting some older archives. Some incoming archives may have lists on digital format which could be read into the Modes database, with some editing, thus saving time.

Other social history, numismatic and natural sciences documentation will need varying degrees of specialist help, either voluntary or paid, to be assessed independently.