

# DORSET NATURAL HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

## DOCUMENTATION POLICY

**Name of Museum:** Dorset Museum

**Name of Governing Body:** Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society

**Policy approved by the Board of DNHAS:** 28 July 2022

**Policy review date:** July 2027

### 1. Introduction

This policy guides the collections documentation work of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society (DNHAS). Documentation (where it relates to work with museum collections) is defined by the Collections Trust as:

*Gathering and recording information about objects, their histories and associations and the processes they undergo within the organisation. The purpose of documentation is to account for, manage and use objects to achieve the stated aims and objectives of the holding organisation.*

This policy applies to all objects under the care of collections in the Museum, including any accessioned objects in the Learning Handling collection and to every object and collection on loan to the Museum.

To support the policy, in line with ACE Accreditation requirements, the Museum has a Documentation Plan which is regularly monitored and updated.

### 2. Definitions

#### **SPECTRUM**

The UK standard for collections management and documentation, used by all accredited museums.

#### **Accessioned**

To take legal ownership of an object and create a unique number to identify the object as part of the Museum collection.

#### **Inventory**

Basic item level documentation of objects in the museum collection. This includes accession number, object title, brief description and current object location.

#### **Full Catalogue**

Retrieving and recording more in depth information about an object to improve the object history information and to enhance the object's capacity for education and interpretation.

#### **CMS**

Collections Management System, at Dorset Museum this refers specifically to Collections Index+ hosted by System Simulation Ltd (SSL).

### **Retrospective documentation number**

Applied to objects where ownership status is unclear, or absent, in order that the object meets the SPECTRUM primary standards of documentation and the object can be tracked through the Museum system. For example; when an object is found to be without an attached accession number, and its provenance is unclear, it is retrospectively documented with an identifying number, with the prefix "RD".

### **3. Aims and Objectives**

The aim of the DNHAS Documentation Policy is to ensure that the Museum fulfils its responsibilities in relation to security, management and access to collections. It does this through ensuring that:

- The Society, where relevant, has documentary proof of legal title.
- There is an accurate record of the object in the appropriate Accessions Register.
- There is an accession number, or a retrospective documentation number, attached to the object which uniquely identifies it.
- The Museum has an accurate and up-to-date record of the object's location.
- Documentation procedures meet the primary SPECTRUM standards.
- Loaned objects are accurately recorded and the information stored securely.
- That these aims are met for all new acquisitions and will plan to achieve them for all objects acquired prior to the date on which this policy commences.

### **4. Documentation in Practice**

Documentation underpins every aspect of museum activity related to the collections and should incorporate the nine primary SPECTRUM procedures. Good quality documentation practice enables the Museum to:

- Uniquely identify each object in the collection
- Provide proof of provenance and legal title to the collections under its care
- Employ appropriate collection care and conservation
- Facilitate research access to collections
- Support an effective enquires service
- Utilise collections for engagement and interpretation

Our policy for collections documentation ensures that all objects are traceable and partnered with accessible and, to the best of our knowledge, accurate information.

### **5. Documentation Activities**

DNHAS follows a series of procedures to ensure best documentation practice. These are outlined below.

- **Object Entry**

Object Entry forms are completed when an object enters the Museum for acquisition or loan. The form is signed by both the depositor and a Museum signatory. An Entry number is assigned to the object and the form filed. Please see the Procedural Manual for further information.

- **Object Exit**

The Object Exit form is usually completed for the return of loans, objects allocated for offsite conservation treatment and object deaccessioning or disposal. The original entry form should be completed with details of the exit where necessary, for example, when a Loan In is being returned to the owner. Please see the

Procedural Manual for further information.

- **Acquisition**

The Museum obtains legal title through purchase, gift or transfer. The objects are recorded in the Museum's Accession Register and assigned a unique accession number.

- **Loans In and Loans Out**

DNHAS will loan material to Accredited museums or centres which demonstrate the equivalent standards in Collections Management. Loans are covered by the appropriate forms and filed within the respective Loans In or Loans Out filing system. Objects owned by the Museum have their records appropriately updated to track location.

- **Location and Movement Control**

A record of up-to-date locations should be maintained for all objects in the collection and this should be logged appropriately in the CMS.

- **Inventory and Cataloguing**

New acquisitions should be accessioned no later than three months after Object Entry and inventory level catalogue information added to the CMS as soon as possible thereafter.

- **Documentation Plan**

Clear objectives for the future of documentation practice in the Museum are outlined in the Documentation Plan. This includes improving existing catalogue records, adding objects to the CMS, addressing an historic backlog, disposals and object reconciliation using the Museum's historic documentation resources.

- **Collections Management System (CMS)**

All object records are added to the CMS, Collections Index + and all new acquisitions will be added to the CMS within three months of accessioning. We will endeavour to ensure all terms are inclusive and contextualised using standardised terminology so that DNHAS can facilitate research and interpretation of the collection.

## **5 Disaster protection and recovery (backups)**

DNHAS ensures the security and backup of its documentation through the following measures:

- Digital copies of the earliest accession registers have been created and saved digitally to the Museum's shared drive.
- There are paper photocopies of all accession registers.
- SSL guarantee all information on the digital CMS is hosted and backed up by an external server.
- A remote server provided by Compact Solutions ensures the long term security and preservation of our digital records located on the Museum drives.
- Paper and digital records will be updated when and where appropriate.
- Paper documentation records will be stored in fireproof cabinets and digitally copied with new acquisitions as per the date on which this policy commences.
- Paper documentation records (such as object Entry/Exit) will be digitally copied and attached to the digital CMS record.

## **6 Controlled Access to Sensitive Information**

The Museum adheres to GDPR regulations regarding personal data relating to acquisition and collection information. Donor information, object locations and valuations will not be visible to researchers and external parties.

## **7 Associated documentation**

This policy should be read in association with the following documents and guidelines:

DNHAS Documentation Plan

DNHAS Conservation and Collections Care Policy

DNHAS Collections Development Policy

DNHAS Access Policy

Museum Association Code of Ethics

SPECTRUM 5.0 – Collections Trust

General Data Protection Regulation, 2016