

Roman Baths Collections Documentation Policy

2024-2029

Name of museum:

The Roman Baths

Name of governing body:

Bath and North East Somerset Council

Date on which this policy was approved by governing body:

Insert date

Date for Policy Review: 2029

1. Introduction

Documentation underpins every aspect of museum activity. Recording collection information is central to being accountable for the collections, their accessibility, management, research, study and use.

The Roman Baths policy for the documentation of the collections is to ensure that the information the museum holds relating to the collections is accurate, secure, reliable and accessible.

This policy forms part of a Collection Management framework for sound management of the Roman Baths museum collections alongside the Roman Baths Collections Development Policy and the Roman Baths Collections Care and Conservation Policy. The Roman Baths Documentation Plan sets out the way the policy will be put into action. Detailed methodologies for the policies below are outlined in the Collections Documentation Procedural manual.

This Policy is supported by other procedural documents and Plans that have an impact on collections, including the Roman Baths Forward Plan, Emergency Plan and Heritage Services Business Plan.

2. Statement of Purpose

The aim of this Policy is to ensure that we fulfil our guardianship, stewardship, and access responsibilities. The Documentation Policy sets out a framework:

- For the documentation of the Roman Baths Museum collection to SPECTRUM standards
- To aid the use of and access to the Roman Baths Museum collection and all information relating to it
- To enable best practice in all aspects of the documentation of collections care procedures and improve accountability for the collections.
- To know at any time exactly what items the museum is legally responsible for (this includes loans as well as permanent collections), and where each item is located.
- To strengthen the security of the Roman Baths Museum collection.

The museum is committed to the ongoing input of historic paper-based data alongside new collections information onto the Collections Management System (CMS). Alongside ongoing documentation of a historical backlog of material and new acquisitions, the Collections Documentation Plan outlines a phased process to audit and clean the data currently recorded on the CMS. This is following recommendations made by the Collections Trust based on a data quality report produced in 2023.

Due to the nature of the collection, the museum takes a practical approach as to the level to which we document material. For the majority of the collections we will document to individual item level. For archaeological archives and bulk material, it is accepted that this is not a feasible or practical method and items such as pottery sherds are documented to group level.

3. Definitions

SPECTRUM is the UK standard for collections management and documentation, used by all accredited museums and set by the Collections Trust. This Policy addresses individual SPECTRUM procedures in section 5.

Collections Management System (CMS) is the digital database on which all museum collections information is hosted. At the Roman Baths this refers to Mobydoc Micromusée.

4. Documentation Security

Measures are in place to ensure the physical security and long-term preservation of all documentation records, whether paper or computerised. The CMS is maintained by Mobydoc and managed by the Bath and North East Somerset Council IT department. To ensure data security and prevent data loss, the CMS is replicated nightly, backed up nightly to another site, and backed up monthly from immutable storage to tape which is stored securely for one year by the IT Department.

Digital copies of the accession registers have been created and are saved digitally to a secure Bath and North East Somerset Council shared drive. Physical copies are made and stored separately. Both paper and digital records are updated when and where appropriate. The Collections Documentation Plan outlines the ongoing requirement to copy new acquisition and cataloguing data, and the need to digitise paper documentation records (e.g. object Entry/Exit) to be linked to the CMS record.

5. Documentation Procedures: Definition and Policy

5.1 Object entry

Definition: Logging all objects coming into your care for whatever reason, including loans, enquiries and potential acquisitions.

Policy: Entry forms are completed in triplicate for all objects coming into the museum, with copies given to the depositor and retained in supporting files.

5.2 Acquisition and accessioning

Definition: Taking legal ownership of objects, especially (but not always) to add to your long-term collection through the process of accessioning: the formal commitment by your governing body to care for objects over the long term.

Policy: Acquisitions are issued with a unique accession number and details recorded in the Accessions Register and on the CMS. Transfer of Title forms are completed, with copies given to the previous owner and retained in supporting files. Objects are marked with their accession number.

5.3 Location and movement control

Definition: Keeping a record of where all the objects in your care can be found, and updating the location each time an object is moved.

Policy: Item locations are accurately recorded on the CMS and updated when objects are moved. Paper movement records are completed in triplicate and retained with location, object, and movement record files.

5.4 Inventory

Definition: Making sure you have the basic information to be accountable for the objects in your care, and tackling the backlog if you do not.

Policy: Objects are recorded to basic item level, and at group level for bulk material e.g. archaeological pottery. This includes accession number, object identification, brief description and current object location. The backlog is recorded at inventory level with a view to full cataloguing as part of the ongoing documentation plan.

5.5 Cataloguing

Definition: The ongoing process of recording and managing information about collections, often from multiple perspectives, to meet the needs of a range of users.

Policy: The museum creates records that identify and describe every object in its care on the CMS, and captures peripheral, historic and new information about objects and specific collections. Cataloguing of the collection is a continuous process informed by the documentation procedures described in this Policy.

5.6 Object exit

Definition: Recording when objects leave the buildings you are responsible for and pass out of your direct care.

Policy: Records are made of any object leaving buildings the museum is responsible for on the CMS and using a triplicate Exit form, with copies retained by the remover/recipient and retained with supporting files.

5.7 Loans in (borrowing object)

Definition: Managing objects you borrow for a fixed period of time and for a specific purpose.

Policy: Every Loan In to the museum is documented with a Loan In Agreement. Copies of the Agreement are retained in a Loans In file and issued to the lender. An Entry form with a unique number is issued on arrival of objects on Loan.

5.8 Loans out (lending objects)

Definition: Assessing requests for you to lend your objects and managing the lending process until loans are returned to you.

Policy: Every Loan Out made by the museum is documented in a Loan Out Agreement and recorded on the CMS. Copies of the Agreement are retained in a Loans Out file and issued to the borrower. An Exit form with a unique number is issued on exit of objects on Loan.

5.9 Documentation planning

Definition: Making your documentation systems better and enhancing the information they contain as an ongoing process of continual improvement.

Policy: The museum has an up to date and ongoing Documentation Plan that is a regularly reviewed working document. This Plan addresses the outstanding backlog in documentation, the need to enhance existing data on the CMS following a data quality assessment by the Collections Trust, and the continual requirement to maintain the documentation procedures outlined in this Policy.

5.10 Use of Collections

Definition: Managing and recording how collections and associated data, including images and other reproductions, are used, whether by you or anyone else.

Policy: The museum keeps records of every way in which objects in the collections are used. This includes exhibition and display, education handling collections and the operation of objects, research and enquiries, reproduction and the commercial use of objects and associated documentary archives. Users include staff (and volunteers) or the public, whether in person, by letter, telephone or any other means of communication.

5.11 Condition checking and technical assessment

Definition: Documenting the make-up and condition of objects, and noting any resulting recommendations.

Policy: The condition of objects is assessed on entry to the museum, prior to display, and before and after movement, use or loan. Objects are regularly condition checked while in store or on display according to the Collections Care and Conservation Plan. Condition assessments and recommendations are recorded where relevant on the CMS, and paper records are retained in supporting files.

5.12 Collections care and conservation

Definition: Managing and documenting any conservation work on particular objects, such as treatments to slow decay, repair damage or improve appearance.

Policy: Specific requirements for object preservation, remedial action taken following condition assessment, and interventive conservation treatment is recorded on the CMS and paper records are retained in supporting files.

5.13 Valuation

Definition: Documenting the financial value of objects, whether your own or borrowed.

Policy: The museum maintains an up-to-date valuations for the objects in its care, recorded securely on the CMS. Regular review of valuations are obtained at suitable intervals where market values may fluctuate and new acquisitions are made.

5.14 Insurance and indemnity

Definition: Ensuring your own objects, loans and other objects left in your care have appropriate cover against damage or loss.

Policy: Bath & North East Somerset Council provides insurance cover for the museum collections. Objects received on Loan In are insured through the Council's own policy or the Government Indemnity Scheme. Documentary proof of borrowers' insurance policies are received and filed before any objects for Loan Out leave museum premises.

5.15 Emergency planning for collections

Definition: Managing information about potential risks to all the objects in your care, and the action to be taken in emergency situations.

Policy: The museum identifies potential threats to the museum collection and documents its planned responses in the Roman Baths Emergency Manual.

5.16 Damage and loss

Definition: Responding to damage to, or the loss of, objects in your care.

Policy: The museum documents the process of loss or damage to objects in its care. All decisions and actions taken in response to loss and damage to objects is recorded and retained in the relevant Accession File and the CMS updated regarding object condition and location accordingly.

5.17 Deaccessioning and disposal

Definition: The formal decision by a governing body to take objects out of its accessioned collection ('deaccessioning'), and managing the disposal of those objects through an agreed method.

Policy: The museum fully documents the process of deaccessioning disposal to ensure openness and transparency. Deaccessioning and disposal is managed on a case-by-case basis following an approved procedure.

5.18 Rights management

Definition: Managing the intellectual property rights and data protection rights associated with objects, reproductions and information.

Policy: The museum maintains records of copyright information about objects and documentary material in its care and records relevant references on the CMS.

5.19 Reproduction

Definition: Managing and recording the creation of images and other kinds of reproduction of objects, including digital copies.

Policy: The museum will limit reproduction to objects for which the intellectual property rights are held by the museum.

5.20 Collections review

Definition: Managing and documenting any formal assessment of collections that follows a stated methodology.

Policy: The museum will carry out Collections reviews if required based on results of other procedures such as Audit and Condition checking and technical assessment, as well as priorities outlined in the Roman Baths Forward Plan e.g. museum redevelopment and proposed storage moves.

5.21 Audit

Definition: Systematically checking the accuracy and completeness of the information you have about the collections in your care.

Policy: The Roman Baths Museum undertakes regular checks to verify the location, authenticity, accuracy and relationship of objects in the museum collection and facilitates audits by the Bath and North East Somerset Audit Department.