

Whittlesey Museum Documentation Policy

1. The Whittlesey Museum Documentation Policy should always be considered in association with the Whittlesey Museum Documentation Plan, the Forward Plan and the Documentation Procedures Manual.
2. Whittlesey Museum recognises the central importance of effective museum documentation and is committed to ensuring the maintenance of reliable, clear, up-to-date information relating to all objects, archives and photographs within its collection, both recent and retrospective.
3. The priority of the documentation programme is to maintain a single unified recording system with robust backups, enabling good oversight of the status of the collection as a whole, the easy identification of specific information about individual objects, and which allows gaps in collections and collections information to be reliably identified and addressed. To do this, Whittlesey Museum undertakes to document the museum collections in accordance with SPECTRUM standards for documentation (as published by the Collections Trust) and the requirements for Accreditation (as published by the Arts Council). The current primary collections management system (museum database) used by the museum is MODES.
4. In addition to collections information, Whittlesey Museum also undertakes to maintain good records relating to the history and administration of the museum itself, including the creation, ratification, publication and review of policies and plans relevant to Accreditation. Such policies are to be drafted by a museum professional and approved by the museum governing body. They should be stored within the museum in both hard copy and digital form for the greatest possible accessibility, made available to volunteers and staff members, and published on the museum website (where appropriate – sensitive information such as security recommendations should not be made public).
5. Full details of recommended documentation procedures at Whittlesey Museum can be found in the Documentation Procedures Manual. However, the guiding documentation policies relating to the eight Primary SPECTRUM Procedures required by Accreditation are:

- Object entry

Object entry documentation to be carried out using MDA entry forms, which are to be filed on museum premises. Method of entry, provenance and planned future ownership of entered items to be of particular note.

- Acquisition

New acquisition to be carried out only according to the Collections Development Policy under the oversight of the governing body. New acquisitions to be recorded in the accession register and details of the item(s) to be entered onto the museum database.

- Location and movement control

Location changes to be captured on museum location lists at the time of transfer, and recorded on the individual object records in the museum database in a timely fashion thereafter. Boxes of items in the museum stores to have up-to-date lists of their contents attached to the outside and enclosed within to minimise the need to disturb object wrappings, these lists to be updated at the time of any changes to the box contents.

- Cataloguing

Each museum object to have an individual object record within the museum database, to be the central repository for information relating to that object. This database to be initially populated with information taken from other record-keeping systems such as the original museum card index, accession registers, entry forms, relevant correspondence, conservation records, location lists etc, and maintained with new information such as new conservation actions undertaken on the object or location changes as required.

Museum objects may be identified by either their accession number or the unique category number which they have been assigned (relating to their subject). For historical reasons, the category number is the number which is marked onto the items.

- Object exit

Any object exit and disposal to be carried out only according to the Collections Development Policy under the oversight of the governing body. All changes in the status of museum objects to be recorded on their individual object records in the museum database. A register of disposals to be kept for inspection if required.

- Loans in

At the present time Whittlesey Museum does not accept new incoming object loans.

Pre-existing loaned items should be clearly distinguished from owned items within the collections management system.

Informal loans and provision of museum objects without following formal object entry procedures should be strongly discouraged as such loans would have no legal status or recognition within the museum documentation system.

- Loans out

At the present time Whittlesey Museum does not loan out museum objects other than those handling items contained within the Schools Loan Boxes. Schools Loan Box movements are recorded using a form signed by the recipient at the point of collection and drop-off and the current position of all the Loan Boxes is monitored by the Loan Box volunteer.

- Retrospective documentation

Whittlesey Museum is committed to reducing its documentation backlogs.

The backlog will continue to be addressed in a systematic manner, in accordance with the levels of staffing and resources available at the time and as described in the current Documentation Plan and Forward Plan.

Documentation Policy created: September 2014

Date Documentation Policy last reviewed: September 2014

Date Documentation Policy next due for review: September 2019