Birmingham Museums

Birmingham Museums Trust

Collections Management Framework

Appendix 2.1 Documentation Policy 2025-2030

1. INTRODUCTION

This document provides an overview of Birmingham Museum Trust's (BMT) policy regarding care and conservation of the collection. This policy was agreed by Birmingham Museum Trust's Board of Trustees on 11 July 2025, and by Birmingham City Council on 15 July 2025. This policy replaces any previous versions of the policy and covers the period 15 July 2025 – 31 March 2030.

This Documentation Policy will be published and reviewed from time to time, at least once every five years. The next date for review will be no later than 31 March 2030.

This policy forms part of the Collections Management Framework for BMT, which supports BMT to achieve its charity objects, vision and strategic aims. These are:

Birmingham Museums Trust Charity Objects

To advance education by the operation, maintenance, development and promotion of museums, galleries and libraries in Birmingham together with associated facilities and related programmes of outreach and research, fostering knowledge, understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of the arts, history, science and technology by residents and visitors to the City of Birmingham.

Vision

A radical reinvention of the museum as a catalyst of cultural and social change.

Mission

Bring Birmingham out by shining new light on people's stories, collections and creativity.

Strategic Aims

1. **Experience** – to create fun, meaningful, involving experiences for the full diversity of our communities and their uses of our collection and services.

2. **Infrastructure** – to be at the heart of Birmingham's communities, providing inclusive access to the peoples' sites and collections, including digital access

3. **People** – to be a boldly progressive organisation, increasingly rooted in and porous to Birmingham's communities, with the skills and culture to engage with its audiences

4. **Financial** – to be a sustainable, more independent organisation that provides affordable, surplus-generating paid services and experiences that add social and economic value to Birmingham, and will have secured funding to support its priority capital projects

2. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Birmingham City Council's museum collection is managed on its behalf by Birmingham Museums Trust (BMT). This policy will guide BMT's work in the area of collections documentation. Documentation underpins all aspects of museum activity. Recording collection information is key to BMT being accountable for the collection, its accessibility, management, research, study and use.

The collection includes both physical and digital objects. Information about the collection and associated intellectual property is key to enabling public access to the collection in support of learning, creativity and enjoyment.

Information about the collection is currently recorded in a variety of formats:

- Digitally on the collections management system, KE EMu
- Paper based records in object history files
- Accession Registers
- Inventory cards
- In a variety of other manual records such as site files, artist files, stock books etc.

BMT's Collections Management System, KE EMu, is SPECTRUM Compliant, with the exception of the Natural Science collection, the majority of BMT documentation conforms with the latest SPECTRUM standard– the UK Standard for Collections Management and the British Standard BS EN 17820:2023 Conservation of Cultural Heritage – Specifications for the Management of Moveable Cultural Heritage Collections (see Appendix 2.2 BMT Documentation Plan 2025-2030 for backlog details).

3. AIMS

The aim of the Documentation Policy is to ensure that BMT fulfils its responsibilities in relation to security, management and access of the collection. It aims to:

- Improve accountability for the collection and the management of related data
- Maintain at least minimum professional standards in documentation and seek to attain the very highest standards wherever possible
- Extend access to collection information
- Strengthen the security of the collection

BMT is committed to maintaining at least the minimum level of collections documentation that allows it to identify and locate all items for which it is legally responsible, including loans.

4. ETHICS & LEGISLATION

Collections information will be recorded in compliance with all legal requirements, including the Freedom of Information Act (2000), and have been reviewed for compliance with the Data Protection Act (2018) and the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR 2019)

Collections information will be acquired, stored, managed and used in compliance with the Museum Association's Code of Ethics for Museums and to the latest SPECTRUM Standards.

5. DOCUMENTATION STANDARDS

5.1 BMT is committed to following SPECTRUM, the UK Collections Management Standard, and to meeting the minimum standards for the SPECTRUM primary procedures in relation to:

- Object entry
- Acquisition and accessioning
- Location and movement control
- Inventory
- Cataloguing
- Object exit
- Loans in
- Loans out
- Documentation planning

5.2 BMT's Minimum and Target Levels for Documentation

Fields	Inventory Standard	Enhanced Standard	IMu / Web Minimum	Accreditation Minimum	SPECTRUM Minimum
Object Number	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Collection	✓	✓	✓		
Object Status	✓	✓	Not published on web		
Number of Objects (only if a group of objects)	✓	✓	✓		
Simple Name	✓	✓	Searched, not displayed	✓	
Full Name	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Title / Taxonomy / Technical Name*	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Provenance		✓	Not published on web		
Maker(s) / Collector(s)	✓	✓	✓		
Maker Role*		✓	✓		
Production / Collection Date / Period - enter period only of dates are unknown		✓	✓		
Production Place / Collection Locality (enter known unknowns)		✓	✓		
Associations / Excavation Notes / Inscriptions / School Style / Medium Technique*		✓	✓		
Dimensions & Date	✓	✓	✓		
Weight	✓	✓	✓		

Condition	✓	✓	Not published on web		
Materials		✓	✓		
Hazardous Materials	✓	✓	Not published on web		
Current Location & Date	✓	✓	Not published on web	✓	✓
Valuation	✓	✓	Not published on web		
Credit Line		✓	✓		
Themes		✓	✓		
Keywords		✓	✓		
Multimedia	✓	✓	✓		
Mark or Label object	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

* This information is not always applicable or available

For all new acquisitions and through programmes of retrospective cataloguing and collections auditing, BMT aims to ensure that:

- Every object has documentary proof of legal title that also meets ethical standards
- Every object has the transfer of title and acquisition proposal forms stored on KE EMu
- Every object has an accurate record in the appropriate Accessions Register
- Every object has an accession number which uniquely identifies the object with that register entry
- Every object has an accession number that is labelled or otherwise marked on the object
- Every object has a robust link with all associated documentation
- Every object has an accurate and up-to-date record of location

All staff responsible for recording and documenting collections information must firstly receive the necessary training in the relevant data standards and Collections Management System (CMS), KE EMu, to enable accurate and consistent input and retrieval of collection information. Staff will not be granted access to the CMS if they have not received this training. All data entered onto the CMS will be traceable through an audit trail function within the KE EMu software, showing who created or modified such data.

All staff responsible for recording collections information must comply with BMT's guidelines for Inventory Standard and Enhanced Standard documentation. The table above defines BMT's minimum, mandatory level for Inventory Standard compared to its ideal, target level for documentation (Enhanced Standard). This is compared to minimum SPECTRUM and Accreditation standards, for which it exceeds both. All objects must adhere to BMT's Inventory Standard. For all new acquisitions and through targeted, annual programmes of more detailed documentation in specific collection areas, BMT aims to raise the standard of collection information to its Enhanced Standard.

5.3 Object Entry

All objects entering Birmingham Museums Trust must be documented on KE EMu to at least the BMT Inventory Standard, with the exception of short term loans in (max. 12 months) which must be documented to at least the minimum SPECTRUM standard. Any object received by BMT for any given time period, whether prior to formal acquisition or for any other reason, will be treated as a Loan In and have the relevant associated paperwork completed and signed.

- Object entry for new acquisitions must have a completed Transfer of Title form and an Object Entry Receipt
- Object entry for Loans In, whether short or long term, require a completed Conditions of Loan form and an Object Entry Receipt

5.4 Object Exit

All objects exiting BMT must firstly be documented on KE EMu in line with the Object Entry procedures. There are 3 different forms to be used for the purpose of object exit, depending on the related procedure.
Electronic templates are currently in use which are scanned and saved to a central shared folder, with originals kept in the Object History Files or Loans Files once completed.

- Loans Out, whether long or short term, require a completed Conditions of Loan form (which could be a BMT form or a copy of a form provided by the borrowing institution) and an Object Exit Receipt
- Return of Loans In require a signed Object Exit Receipt
- The exit of an object through deaccessioning, transfer or disposal must have a completed Object Exit Receipt in addition to a completed Transfer of Title form (where relevant) citing the new owner

5.5 Acquisition

All objects that have been acquired must firstly be entered into KE EMu and must include the acquisition source, a full provenance and Due Diligence check, details regarding the object's significance, potential use, and how the object(s) support BMT's Collections Development Policy, as well as associated costs and a proposed plan for fundraising where relevant. In 2025-2030 BMT plans to develop the CMS so that in addition to completed acquisitions, acquisition proposals can be entered into KE EMu whether they are approved or not.

All acquisition proposals are assessed at a monthly 'Collections Circle' (the former 'Collections Committee'), chaired by the Director of Collections & Estate, before being recommended to and approved by BMT's Co-CEOs and Senior Leadership Team. Objects of a high value will need further approval by BMT's Board of Trustees and Birmingham City Council.

Approved acquisitions must have an individual Object History File created where signed paperwork is filed, alongside any other relevant correspondence and information. A new acquisition must be catalogued in line with BMT's second level documentation standards within 3 months of being formally received into the Collection. Acquisitions are audited annually by the Collections Access Manager to ensure that the procedure is strictly adhered to.

- **Accession Registers:** until 2003 paper accession registers were kept by all departments which assigned a unique Accession Number to objects and recorded basic catalogue and donor details. Receipts and letters confirming the process of acceptance of items are kept in separate historical files for each object or group of objects. From 2003 - 2012, all acquisition proposals were recorded on the former CMS, MINISIS, and since 2013 on KE EMu by the Curatorial Team. As of 2024 all primary accession registers have been digitised and are available to staff.
- **Accession records:** a record must be created for all objects entering the Collection, describing each item, or group of items, and listing them by a unique identifying number. The Curators are responsible for ensuring that the relevant data for each object is in KE EMu. The Collections Access Manager is responsible for ensuring that the data is accurate and that an accessions register is produced.
- **Marking / Labelling Procedure:** all new acquisitions must be individually marked or labelled with their unique accession number. Marking / labelling is conducted in accordance with SPECTRUM guidelines and is part of the Accessioning & Cataloguing procedure. The Conservation team provide guidance and training in physical object marking to all new curatorial and collections care staff.

All new acquisitions must comply with the Collections Development Policy and related procedures and will be catalogued to BMT's Enhanced Standard as part of this process.

BMT will provide a printed accessions register annually, produced by the Collections Access Manager, which records the formal acceptance of objects acquired into the Collection.

5.6 Location & Movement Control

Prior to 2003, object locations were recorded in various manual systems. Ongoing collection relocation and auditing projects have resulted in the majority of objects receiving a current location on the CMS or on original paper lists stored by the collections management team.

Any new object movements must be entered on to KE EMu and their insurance valuation updated. Internal movements between BMT sites require a completed Shipping Note and Insurance Note. The member of staff responsible for commissioning the movement of objects between BMT sites is responsible for updating their location records on KE EMu in accordance with the Movements & Shipping procedure.

The Curatorial and Collections Access teams are responsible for the inventory level record of each collection object in KE EMu. The Collections Access Manager is responsible for the maintenance and control of the data. The inventory level contains the legal status and an accurate and up to date location for each object that BMT is legally responsible for on behalf of Birmingham City Council. These fields are part of BMT's minimum Inventory Standard documentation requirement.

Entry and exit documentation is maintained for all collection objects, or groups of objects, and other items that BMT is legally responsible for, as part of linked Collections Management procedures. The source of the object, the terms of receipt and the location of the object is recorded.

No object movement, entry or exit is complete until the relevant linked Collections Management procedure is in process via KE EMu.

The Collections Access Team will conduct minimum spot checks and audits to verify the accuracy of data and the maintenance of Collection Management procedures at regular intervals throughout the year.

5.7 Cataloguing

Pre-2003, catalogue cards are indexed by various categories depending on Collection Type. Information regarding individual objects can also be found in Accession Registers and Object History Files. On KE EMu, objects must be catalogued to BMT's minimum Inventory Standard (see section 4.2). All cataloguing must adhere to BMT's Accessioning & Cataloguing procedure which covers BMT's documentation standards, guidance on data entry, marking / labelling objects and creating Object History Files. KE EMu users (BMT's trained staff) catalogue objects to varying degrees based on their roles and user access privileges. This data must be quality checked by the Collections Access Manager at regular intervals throughout each year.

The history of every object in the collection and a record of any Collections Management procedures associated with it must be kept and stored safely and securely (both digital and paper based documentation). Appropriate indexes to catalogue records should be provided.

Details of gaps and backlogs in documentation and cataloguing must be maintained by the Head of Collections supported by the Collections Access team, with a clear Backlog Plan in place to address outstanding collections cataloguing (see Documentation Plan 2025-2030).

An object which has been found uncatalogued or unaccessioned, or has a BMT accession number but no KE EMu record, must be formally accessioned and catalogued following BMT's procedures for Retrospective Documentation.

BMT aims to create a digital image for every newly acquired object or group of objects. BMT aims to increase the digitisation of the collection and subsequent online access to collections information through an annual programme of collections photography targeting previously acquired collection objects.

Curatorial and Collections staff must take a reference 'snap shot' photography of objects not photographed, as part of the annual documentation programme, to improve object identification.

5.8 Loans In & Out

Since 2003, all Loans In and Loans Out have been recorded in the collections management system, including the length of loan and return details where appropriate. During the CMS migration in 2014, not all loans data were transferred to KE EMu, and the process continued to be managed through both the CMS and paper-based records. The migrated historical data is currently undergoing review and data cleaning as part of the ongoing CMS project, and as part of the fully established new loans workflow on EMu introduced in 2022.

The Loans Registrar currently records all loans data using a separate system which will be imported into KE EMu once the loans module has been configured. Long Loans normally run for a maximum term of three years, renewable subject to review and agreement by both BMT and the Lender/Borrower.

Objects on loan to BMT only receive a full catalogue record if they are classed as 'long term' (over 12 months). Short term Loans In, which are not on site for longer than 12 months, are recorded on KE EMu following a formal procedure but do not receive a BMT Object Number.

Long Loans In are reassessed as a rolling programme with a view to renewal or return by the Collections Access Officer (Loans) and Curatorial & Participation teams. The Collections Access Team audit loans in for insurance and collections management purposes. All potential loans are reviewed and assessed at the monthly Collections Circle. The procedure for loaning objects to other museums in the UK and internationally is rigorous and ensures the safety and security of the object(s) (see Appendix 3.2 Lending Guidelines and Procedures).

5.9 Retrospective Documentation

Retrospective documentation must be undertaken in accordance with BMT's Accessioning & Cataloguing procedure which can be found in the 'Accessioning & Cataloguing KE EMu Procedural User Manual'. Previous and large-scale collections relocation / audit projects have thrown light on areas that need further attention. All records created during this period, whether on paper lists or on the CMS, exceed SPECTRUM Minimum Standards for Accreditation. However, this Plan serves to address the audit backlog of paper lists, making sure all object movements are recorded on KE EMu with an up-to-date location, and the documentation backlog, where feasible.

6. ACCESS TO COLLECTIONS INFORMATION

BMT is committed to providing access to the collection and its related information for learning, creativity and enjoyment. It is committed to offering the widest and most appropriate forms of access to collection information, expertise, facilities and services. BMT will support access to collections information for staff, researchers and the wider public in the following ways:

- For staff: direct access to collections information held on KE EMu (if trained) or via IMU and DAMS for all staff. Access to object history files and other paper records through the support and advice of curatorial and collections care staff.
- All staff also have access to IMU, the web-based KE EMu interface, re-developed in 2019
- For researchers: access to collection information (where it complies with Data Protection) via BMT's public enquiries programme; via facilitated visits or longer research placements/programmes supported by Curatorial and Collections staff; access to online collection information via BMT websites (such as www.birminghammuseums.org.uk) and through independent collection websites supported by BMT (such as https://artuk.org/)
- Access also via BMT's Digital Asset Management System (DAMS) http://dams.birminghammuseums.org.uk/
- For general public: access to collection information (where it complies with Data Protection) via BMT's public enquiries programme; or access to online collection information via BMT websites (such as www.birminghammuseums.org.uk) and through independent collection websites supported by BMT (such as https://artuk.org/) ; in addition to DAMS (http://dams.birminghammuseums.org.uk/)
- Onsite and online opportunities for engagement with the collection by the public through the Dynamic Collections 10 year programme 2022-2032.

BMT is committed to increasing the amount of collection information available online to the wider public, supported by its annual programme of documentation in targeted collection areas to reach Enhanced Standard, compliant for web use. BMT's previous CMS provided very restricted levels of web access to collections data, this has been improved through BMT DAMS and KE EMu which was purchased with online collections potential in mind. BMTs intention currently is to create its first publicly accessible online collections platform over the next 7 years through the Dynamic Collections Programme too.

Please see Appendix 3.1 Collections Access Policy.

7. SECURITY OF COLLECTIONS INFORMATION

BMT is committed to ensuring the physical security of collection records in its various documentation systems (paper based and digital) and the long-term preservation of those records, including a regular back up of electronic data and security copying of key records such as accession registers.

KE EMu is backed up daily, with a twenty-eight-day retention period. Back-ups are kept monthly for 12 months and then annually in line with BMT's retention policy. Original accession registers are kept on-site in a fireproof safe, along with paper copies of new accessions since 2003. There are also electronic accession registers, exported annually by the Collections Access Manager, held on a shared drive since 2003. All primary registers are also now digitised as of 2024.

KE EMu is accessed by all BMT employees who work directly with the Collection and have undergone the necessary training. The majority of users input as well as retrieve data. Data entry and procedural data management is carried out in accordance with detailed guidelines written in procedural user manuals. User access rights are tailored on an individual basis so that staff only have access to the parts of the system and the information that they require for their job role.

8. KEEPING RECORDS UP TO DATE

Around 75% of the collection has some form of paper-based documentation. Around 60% of the collection is documented on KE EMu to varying levels, all to the Accreditation minimum standard, either with an individual Object Number or as a bulk accession.

Bulk accessions are uncommon. However, there are particular parts of the collection where it has been deemed necessary and acceptable to bulk accession collection areas, until such time when expertise and resources will allow for these bulk accession collections to be broken down into part numbers with meaningful information given to each individual object. Bulk accessioned objects include archaeological excavation archives, large but discrete natural science collections such as the herbaria of individual collectors, and other large collections formed by and acquired from individuals including the philately collection.

BMT are committed to addressing the collections documentation backlog. Based on the current staffing resource at BMT our Collections Documentation Backlog activities / programme would run for 16 ½ years for the completion of records to Spectrum Inventory level by 30 September. We have aspirations, however, to significantly accelerate this programme by securing additional resources through our grant funded Dynamic Collections programme 2022-2032. Please see Appendix 2.2 Documentation Plan 2025-2030 Section 3.2 for a detail of these programmes.

BMT is committed to ensuring that the Collections Management System, KE EMu, is the primary tool for creating and managing collections information, processes and items for which BMT is legally responsible. This includes in-house digital asset management. All systems follow back-up procedures as set out in Section 4 Acquisition: Security Copy.

BMT will review, update and improve paper based object history files and associated records as part of its annual collections documentation and cataloguing programme.

BMT will carry out regular reviews of these systems and procedures to ensure they are fit for purpose and that collection information is appropriately safeguarded against potential future obsolescence.

9. RELATED DOCUMENTS

In addition to the documents that comprise the Collections Management Framework, the Conservation Policy is also supported by procedural manual.

10. POLICY REVIEW PROCEDURE

This Documentation Policy will be published and reviewed from time to time, at least once every five years. The next date for review will be no later than 31 March 2030.

11. CHANGE CONTROL

Issue	Date	Author	Comments