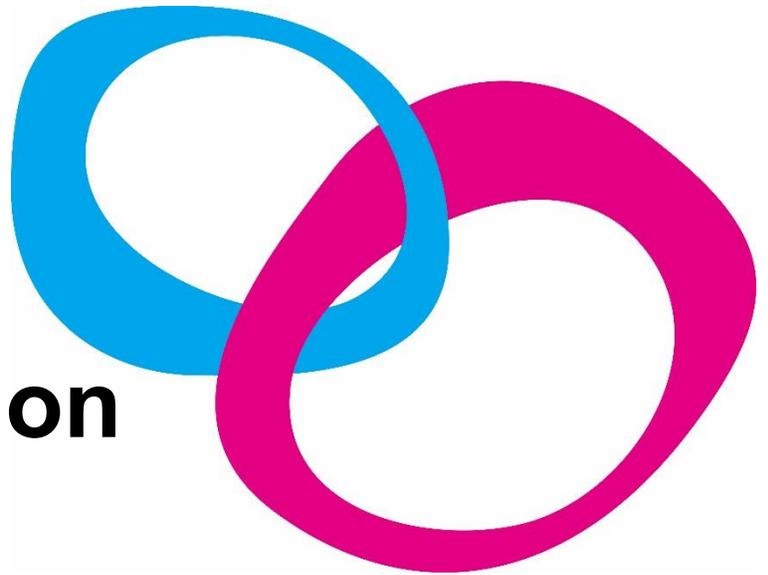


Copeland Borough Council – The Beacon Museum

Collections Documentation Policy



2016 – 2021

Version 3: approved 5/4/2016



Proud of our past. Energised for our future.

Name of museum: The Beacon Museum, Whitehaven

Name of governing body: Copeland Borough Council

Date on which this policy was approved by governing body: 5/4/2016

Policy review procedure: The Collections Documentation Policy will be published and reviewed from time to time, at least once every five years.

Date at which this policy is due for review: March 2021

1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this Policy is to set out the Beacon's specific aims and objectives, 2016 – 2021 in relation to the documentation of its collections. Accurate and up-to-date, documentation is a pre-requisite of making our collections available to everyone through permanent display, temporary exhibitions, loans, handling and learning activities and online. In this way this plan supports the Beacon's wider aims (Forward Plan 2016 – 2018) and mission statement.

1.1 Statement of Purpose

“To enable everyone to explore Copeland's unique history by collecting, preserving, interpreting and displaying artefacts for inspiration, learning and enjoyment.”

This policy will help us to deliver access to our collections for the inspiration, learning and enjoyment of all users as we will preserve information which facilitates physical, virtual, and intellectual/emotional access. It also allows us to be accountable for the collections in our care, which we preserve for the public.

1.2 Relationship to other policies, plans and procedures

This policy must be also considered in conjunction with The Beacon's Forward Plan 2016 – 2018 (and subsequent years), Collections Development Policy, Collections Care & Conservation Policy & Plan, Emergency Plan, Access Policy, and Documentation Manual, and in the strategic context of Copeland Borough Council's Corporate Strategy and underpinning suite of policies.

This policy also takes cognisance of Copeland Borough Council's vision:-

“Copeland Borough Council is a commercially focused organisation with a national reputation for high quality services.”

Within the Council's Corporate Strategy 2016-20, this policy especially relates to the ambitions and objectives:

Ambition 1: Town Centre Regeneration.

Strategic Outcome 1: For our towns, villages and streets to reflect the prosperity of the area.

Ambition 2: Commercialisation.

Strategic Outcome 2: Grow the commercial activity of the Council to benefit the people of Copeland, ensuring the wealth generated in Copeland stays in Copeland.

Ambition 3: Employment, Skills and Social Wellbeing

Strategic Outcome 3a: Attract businesses, professionals and entrepreneurs to Copeland and retain our talented young people.

Strategic Outcome 3b: Work with partners to support the most vulnerable in our borough.

Ambition 4: Strengthen the way we operate.

Strategic Outcome 4: Continually review our services to ensure they meet the needs of the people of Copeland and ensure they are efficient, effective and accessible.

Strategic Outcome 5: Maximising our opportunities for growth, within the council and with our strategic partners.

1.3 Aims

- To ensure the collections are fully documented and kept up-to-date.
- To maintain at least minimum standard in documentation procedures and collection information and work towards best practice as far as our resources permit
- To provide the greatest level of access possible to Copeland's museum collections and associated information
- To strengthen the security of the collections
- To improve accountability for collections

2.0 Background

From 1975 to 1989 collection documentation was based on an accession register system, with information transferred from a daily diary to the register on a regular basis. With the departure of the then Assistant Curator, all formal accessioning stopped and as an interim measure between 1989 and 1994, labels detailing the donor's names and addresses were left with objects for acquisition.

Great progress has been made since that time; between 1994 and 1997 a substantial documentation project was undertaken and subsequently all objects entering the collections have been recorded.

3.0 SPECTRUM standards

SPECTRUM is recognised internationally as the leading standard for collections management. It contains detailed procedures for managing the processes that an object goes through during its lifecycle in a museum.

The Beacon will continue to maintain SPECTRUM Minimum Standards for the following Primary Procedures:

- Object Entry
- Acquisitions
- Location & Movement Control

- Cataloguing
- Object Exit
- Loans In
- Loans Out
- Retrospective Documentation

The Beacon's Documentation Manual (Version 6, 2016) contains full details of the current documentation processes, which follow SPECTRUM minimum standards.

4.0 Accession Register

The Accession Register is up-to-date, and a security copy of the register on archival paper is created and maintained by curatorial staff and stored off-site.

5.0 Electronic Collections Management Systems

During the mid-1990s information began to be recorded on computer using MODES software (later MODES Plus and MODES for Windows). The Beacon currently uses MODES Complete.

The total collection numbers around 30,000 items and records for all of these are available on MODES. All new and current donations and associated computer cataloguing will be completed within three months of deposit.

6.0 Retrospective Documentation

While the Beacon has no known documentation backlog for its own collection, like every museum we occasionally come across objects which are not accessioned or catalogued. Retrospective documentation for these objects will be completed within 3 months of discovery. The Beacon will follow the SPECTRUM procedures for 'Retrospective Documentation'.

The Beacon has a backlog relating to Loan In documentation. This will be addressed by following the SPECTRUM procedures for 'Retrospective Documentation'.

The Beacon has a plan (Documentation Plan, 2016 – 2021) to deal with this backlog. Please read this in conjunction with this policy.

7.0 Staff

Entering and editing of records in both the Accession Register and MODES collections management database is only carried out by trained staff. MODES is available for use by trained staff to assist colleagues, visitors and researchers with enquiries.

8.0 Accountability

The Beacon is committed to following SPECTRUM minimum standards in all areas of its documentation, as this will allow us to identify and locate all objects for which we are legally responsible. This includes the responsibility for objects on loan to the Beacon.

9.0 Ethics and legislation

When documenting collections, the Beacon will adhere to the following legislation and ethical guidelines:

- The Data Protection Act 1998
- The Freedom of Information Act 2000
- The Museum Association's Code of Ethics 2015

10.0 Access

The Beacon will ensure that our documentation allows access to collections information for all users, including staff, researchers, and other users such as visitors.

10.1 Online Access

A project began in 2005 to digitise the collections for public use on a computer-based gallery interactive and via the Beacon's website (collections online hosted by MUA), making Copeland's collections available on the internet for the first time. The Fine Art, Decorative Arts and Archaeology collections were available online via www.thebeacon-whitehaven.co.uk.

Due to a period without curatorial staff following the death of the Beacon Manager in 2013, there is no current knowledge of this project, or online access to any of the Beacon's collections. Curatorial staff will work towards making the collection records available online.

11.0 Security of collections information

The Beacon will ensure the physical security of our collection records by creating a regular back up of the MODES database and keeping an up-to-date security copy on archival paper of all Accession Registers off-site.

The Beacon is committed to regularly reviewing the provision of our electronic documentation systems in the wider context of technological change and possible future obsolescence to ensure long term accessibility of the information held.

12.0 Policy Awareness

To achieve maximum understanding and awareness, the approved version of this document will be issued to all team members.

Curatorial staff will attend the Executive Committee and any related preliminary meetings to tackle any queries raised by elected members relating to this policy.

In addition to hard copy versions being available at The Beacon, this document will also be available in alternative formats, languages and print sizes as well as downloadable from the museum's website www.thebeacon-whitehaven.co.uk.

13.0 Policy Review

This Documentation Policy requires adoption by Copeland Borough Council via Executive Committee after formal review every 5 years.

This document will be reviewed and submitted to Copeland's Executive Committee by March 2021, or sooner as required.