



COLLECTIONS DOCUMENTATION POLICY

Name of museum: Samuel Johnson Birthplace Museum (SJB), Accredited Museum 767

Name of governing body: Lichfield City Council (LCC), as sole trustee of the Dr Johnson Birthplace Trust, Charity No. 500046

Introduction

This policy guides the work that the Samuel Johnson Birthplace Museum (SJB) does in the field of collections documentation. Documentation is defined as all the information we can hold about the items in our care, and the act of collecting, recording and storing this information. Collections information could include: physical information about the object and how it should be looked after; how it was acquired, where it came from and has been in its life; how it was produced and its cultural and historical context. SJB recognises the importance of this information and is committed to maintaining and developing our documentation to the best standard possible within available resources.

The aim of this Documentation Policy is to ensure that SJB fulfils its responsibilities in relation to security, management and access of the collections. It will set out / identify approaches to:

1. The Museums statement of purpose
2. Applicable Ethics, standards, and legislations
3. Accountability for Collections
4. Maintaining professional standards
5. Extending access to collection information
6. Security of collection information
7. Strengthen the security of the collections

1. Museum's statement of purpose

The covenant under which the building was acquired in 1900 remains our fundamental mission: *"...to remain in perpetuity as a memorial to the life, work and personality of Samuel Johnson, his Lichfield connections and his friends and contemporaries."* The Birthplace Trust, established in 1974, expanded this to refer to the care of the building and provision of a public service: *"...to preserve the Birthplace as a place for historic interest and to maintain the same as a public museum and for public exhibitions."*

2. Applicable Ethics, standards, and legislations

Collections information will be recorded in compliance with all legal requirements, including the Freedom of Information Act (2000), and have been reviewed to adhere to the Data Protection Act (2018).

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

3. Accountability for Collections

SJBM is committed to maintaining at least the minimum level of collections documentation that will allow us to identify and locate all items for which we are legally responsible, including loans.

The museum will follow the accountability principles defined by the Museums and Galleries Commission:

"to enable museums to fulfil their fundamental responsibilities for collections and the information associated with them. The principles are that a museum should know at any time exactly for what it is legally responsible (this includes loans as well as permanent collections), and where each item is located." (MGC, 1993)

4. Maintaining professional standards

SJBM is committed to following SPECTRUM, the UK Collections Management Standard, and ensuring that our primary procedures remain SPECTRUM compliant in relation to:

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

We will achieve this by:

- Regularly reviewing and updating our Documentation Procedural Manual.
- Ensuring that all staff and volunteers working on collections documentation are trained to uphold these standards.
- Developing and maintaining accurate, high-quality, and up-to-date information on our collections management database, ensuring it aligns with relevant national and international standards for collection items.
- Aiming to address any documentation backlogs in a planned and measurable programme (see also the SJBM Documentation Plan and Forward Plan) and prioritise recording (at minimum) inventory information about all objects for which the museum is legally responsible, ensuring they can be located and identified.
- Completing annual reviews of objects on display and all outstanding loans in and loans out.
- Conducting regular inventory checks to ensure the Museum can locate any object.

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

- We have documentary proof of legal title to the collections that meets ethical standards.
- Objects have an accurate record in the appropriate accessions register.

- Objects are assigned and labelled with a unique accession number.
- Objects have an accurate and up-to-date record of location.
- We update basic records as additional information becomes available through research and the use of the collection.

5. Extending access to collection information

SJBM has indexed and retrievable basic catalogue information available to staff, volunteers and museum library users for all collection items on a Modes database, and further retrievable information in paper files. SJBM is committed to regularly reviewing and improving collections management systems, undertaking and facilitating research, and extending basic access online in the current planning cycle.

All information requests will be assessed for compliance with the Freedom of Information Act (2000), the General Data Protection Regulation, and the Environmental Information Regulations (2004). Requests involving confidential data, such as donor information, environmental information, valuations, or site specifics, will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, in line with relevant legislation and any legal agreements or conditions of gift.

6. Security of collection information

SJBM is committed to ensuring the physical security of our collections, the records in our documentation systems, and the long-term preservation of those records.

We will achieve this by:

- Regularly updating the security copy of our accession register, which is housed off-site in a fireproof cabinet.
- Regularly backing-up our electronic data.
- SJBM and Lichfield City Council will ensure that computer hardware is up to date and any updates to the collections management database are adopted to ensure perpetuity of collections information.
- Ensuring that the museum is equipped with up-to-date, well-maintained intruder alarm system, fire system, and CCTV.
- Regularly reviewing, updating, sharing, and testing our Emergency Plan and related risk assessments to ensure our building, collections, and collections information are protected from disaster. In the event of an emergency, the Museum will link with Lichfield City Council and local museums for support.

Date on which this policy was approved by governing body: 10 March 2025

Policy review procedure: This Collections Care and Conservation Policy will be reviewed at least once every five years.

Date at which this policy is due for review: The next date for review is March 2030.