

STROUD DISTRICT (COWLE) MUSEUM SERVICE

Guidelines for Conducting Research Using the Collections of the Museum in the Park

Museum: The Museum in the Park

Name of governing body: The Stroud District (Cowle) Museum Trust (owner of the collections) in partnership with the Stroud District Council (collection manager & museum service provider)

Date at which this document is due for review: January 2023

CONTEXT & BACKGROUND

The Stroud District (Cowle) Museum Service (the 'museum') must be a reliable source of information and a responsible manager of its collections. Research helps us to understand these collections and archives more, and aids in consolidating their value as a learning resource. For the Museum research generates a greater understanding of its collections and related material, its services, users and potential users.

Research is for everyone. It is a powerful tool to develop better collection outputs for learning and understanding across all communities.

Research may be conducted by:

- Museum staff & volunteers for Museum purposes
- Museum staff & volunteers for external users / enquirers
- External consultants on behalf of the Museum
- External researchers (academic, community, schools, individuals or organisations) for their own purposes or agendas

All research is likely to add to the understanding of the collections and/or audiences and/or services, but the reasons and priorities may vary. With this in mind occasionally decisions have to be made about priorities and resources.

The purpose of this Research Policy is to provide a framework and guidance to manage:

- internal research
- public enquiries
- external research requests
- requests for destructive research and research on human remains (which may be internal or external)

Research activity will take place at several levels and includes:

- the capture of known information and of new knowledge about collections, subjects and audiences
- research which contributes to public understanding and engagement e.g. exhibition research
- the encouragement of self-directed research by users
- co-directed museum/archive/academic research projects which support museum/archive practice.

All research proposals or requests will be considered with the following factors in mind:

- **The capacity of the Museum team to adequately facilitate and supervise the research being proposed**
- **The technological limitations of our museum database and the complications in allowing access to collections data ref. GDPR etc.**
- **The value of the potential outcomes of the research (for the museum, the museum's audience or the wider community) versus the input required from staff in facilitating it**

RESEARCH BY STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS (INTERNAL RESEARCH)

Museum-driven research relates to the museum's projects, exhibitions, events and activities as outlined in the Forward Plan and forms part of the day-to-day role of staff and volunteers. It includes areas such as research to:

- add to knowledge about individual museum objects or collections
- develop knowledge needed for exhibits, displays, interpretation and labels
- develop informal or formal learning programmes
- develop knowledge for special events
- develop personal skills or knowledge that will improve an individual's contribution to service delivery
- create publications
- develop talks, lectures or conference presentations

Additional research may include:

- research into history, archaeology, fine & decorative arts, natural history, or other subjects, adding to the personal development of staff or volunteers to improve their ability to deliver services to the public
- personal research towards a recognised qualification as part of an agreed Personal Development Plan (for example AMA)
- research as part of local, sub-regional, regional or national programmes driven by external organisations in partnership with the Museum, such as publications or surveys
- research into history, archaeology, fine & decorative arts, natural history, or other subjects, not connected directly with activities of the service, but adding to the general body of knowledge in that subject

The following work is considered normal, and not subject to this Research Policy:

- Research to answer enquiries or inform the offer process not exceeding 1 hour
- Research requiring less than 7 hours (1 day) of work time in total
- Individual involvement in research already agreed as part of wider programmes – including giving talks, market research, routine development work and project evaluation, or as part of a larger project

If staff or volunteers are undertaking deeper or longer-lasting research, especially if it involves a financial commitment from the service, fieldwork and/or visits to other museums or archives, the following issues should be considered:

- relevance of the research to the museum
- resources and/or facilities required for research
- balancing competing priorities

- committing to appropriate levels of research for the task
- deciding on the appropriate person to undertake the research
- deciding when to outsource the research
- making best use of our volunteers
- impact on the integrity or future survival of the collections or related information

It is important that a Preliminary Research Proposal (Appendix 1) is completed for all longer-lasting research and discussed with the Museum Manager. In the case of destructive research (sampling and analysis), the proposal will be considered as if it were an external request.

It is the responsibility of the Museum Manager to identify when research proposals require further approval. Examples of such major work may include:

- Research involving absence from the workplace for several weeks
- Research involving significant financial costs (even if externally-funded)
- Research running over a significant period
- Research which supports an individual's CPD, but which does not fit with Service priorities

Once a research project is agreed, it will form a key part of an Individual's Work Plan and may also form part of a person's Personal Development Plan.

PUBLIC ENQUIRIES

The Stroud District (Cowle) Museum Service offers a public enquiry service where external researchers can expect a level of information to be provided. The Museum does not provide valuations.

The enquiry service provides a personal interface between staff and the public. It enables learning and provides an opportunity for the public to engage with the museum and its collections more closely. It also provides an opportunity for the service to increase its body of knowledge and may sometimes result in new acquisitions of great importance.

The answering of enquiries for the public is an important and popular service. All enquirers are our customers and should expect the highest standard of customer service. However, some enquiries may require considerable resources to answer. If enquiries require more than one hour to answer, the enquirer should be informed. The options available may be:

- a lower level of information is supplied
- the enquirer is provided with support to find information themselves
- the enquirer is referred to other organisations with greater specialist knowledge or resources (e.g. Gloucestershire Archives or a larger museum with specialist staff)
- the enquirer is offered the opportunity to contribute financially to the cost of a member of staff carrying out the research on their behalf¹

Commercial requests for information will be charged at the agreed rates.

The service will be monitored continuously and opportunities identified to both improve the service and make it more efficient. This may include:

¹ Common sense must prevail here as the over-riding principles are of good customer care and considering the possible 'value' of new research, not just income generation.

- More information on the website to answer common queries, or links to suitable pages
- Information sheets for the most common enquiries

Going forward it is anticipated that a new Collections Management System will enable people to research their own enquiries to both the Museum collection and the library collection to a certain point.

EXTERNAL RESEARCHERS

External researchers approach the Museum because of the collections or knowledge we hold. The research may or may not contribute directly to the objectives of the organisation, but will usually add to knowledge about the collections or the service. Some of this research may be academically driven, but much will be informal, for individual interest, personal development or for cultural enrichment.

Museums and archives hold collections in trust on behalf of society. Making these collections available and accessible for research is a fundamental part of our service to the public in support of lifelong learning and personal improvement.

Individual staff will deal with a variety of enquiries and requests that fall outside this Research Policy. For example, one-off visits to see a particular item, casual enquiries from visitors and group visits are unlikely to be classified as research. However, it is essential that any informal visits that escalate into research work must be considered under this policy.

There is often no clear line between a research project and a research enquiry though it is important that both are logged as research via the enquiries database. Detailed research proposals will not be required for simple enquiries but may be requested if it seems that enquiries are turning into projects.

The following facts would tend to support the need for a formal Preliminary Research Proposal (Appendix 1)

- The researcher will work on collections unsupervised
- The researcher will return for two or more visits
- The research is part of a formal course of study

All researchers are required to feedback their research outcomes and findings to the Museum where appropriate. We are committed to enabling research wherever possible, however issues to be considered before agreeing to a research proposal are:

- support time needed from staff
- physical accessibility of collections requested (the majority are not at the Museum in the Park)
- resources and/or facilities required for research – especially considering the limited space available in stores and at the museum for working with large objects/setting up photographic equipment etc.
- the need for training in the use of systems, equipment or ICT to enable users to pursue their research
- security issues in relation to collections and their use

In some cases, a more detailed research proposal may be required.

This will be the case for:

- long-term or very detailed research on a particular collection
- research which compromises the integrity or future survival of the collections or related information
- research which impacts on existing or planned museum-driven research or collaborative projects
- requests to perform destructive research (see below)
- research with social, religious, political, racial or other ethical or legal implications or connotations (see below)

In the case of overlap with museum priorities a collaborative approach will be offered.

Decisions to approve or refuse research requests will normally be made within ten working days from the receipt of a formal written or e-mailed request.

Researchers making use of Museum Collections must agree access times with the Museum team. Researchers must adhere to directions given in relation to handling, photography and equipment permitted in the research area.

Destructive research (sampling and analysis)

All research requiring physical samples to be taken, removal of parts from objects or exposure of items to potentially destructive or damaging agents or procedures (including gases, solvents, vacuums, X-rays, heaters, freezers, strong light, electromagnetic or particle radiation, physical agitation or scanners) must include a Sampling and Analysis Proposal Form (Appendix 2) as part of the research application.

The proposal will be considered by the Museum team with input from external advisors where appropriate. Where destructive research is approved it is especially important that the results of the research are made available to the Museum. This may remove the need to repeat the research in future and may negate requests to do so.

Sensitive material

Some items may have culturally important protocols associated with them in relation to their handling or use. Research proposals must respect these protocols or research access may be refused.

Some archives also contain information which could be considered confidential or sensitive – these individual documents may have restricted access per the Documentation Procedural Manual.

Sampling or Analysis of Human remains or tissue samples

Human remains constitute a special case when sampling or analysis are required for research.

The scope of collections falling within the description 'human remains' follows definitions in the document Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums (DCMS: 2005) as

Bodies and parts of bodies of once living people from the species Homo sapiens (defined as individuals who fall within the range of anatomical forms known today and in the recent past)

As far as this Museum's collections are concerned this includes

- Osteological material (whole or part skeletons, individual bones or fragments of bones and teeth)
- Any of the above that may have been modified in some way by human skill and/or may be physically bound-up with other non-human materials to form an artefact composed of several materials

It does not include hair or nails although these may be of importance in a cultural context.

Appendix 5 sets out the Research and Sampling Guidance from the DCMS (2005) report.

Researchers wishing to sample human remains in the collections must submit a form (Appendix 2) a minimum of three months before the start of the proposed research.

FRAMEWORK FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Overview of Collections & their Research Potential

The Museum's Collections number some 58,000 items, which are held for public benefit. In keeping with its mission and corporate aims, the Museum encourages the responsible use of its collections for learning, teaching, and research. The Museum is also committed to superior standards of collections care and professional ethics, as set out in the Museums Association's Code of Ethics for Museums.

Important collections which are known or thought to be of potential interest to researchers include:

- The Holmes Herbarium
- Wortley Villa Archaeological Archive
- Jurassic reptile collections – megalosaur, cetiosaur etc.
- The Redler Archive and Collection
- The 'Fisher' Lace Collection
- The Kings Stanley Moated Manor archaeological archives 1960s – 1980s

Hidden History

The museum is also committed to uncovering its own hidden history, and to using the collections, and the gaps therein, to expose stories of exclusion, discrimination, protest & unrest etc.

Research by museum staff has shown that the museum and its early trustees and donors have no known links to the practice of slavery, and were not descended from those who directly profited from the trade in slaves.

There are no artefacts in the collections which are known to have been stolen or looted from their origin countries or communities. There are objects which reference Britain's role as a colonial superpower, such as coins from India, South Africa etc. and it may be that there are a small number of objects whose acquisition resulted from an imbalance in power within those colonies. The collections do reference the campaigns for and against the abolition of the slave trade in the 19th century, and there are objects whose production is allied to the trade in slaves and associated commodities such as tobacco boxes and tokens relating to e.g. The East India Company.

However, it must be acknowledged that the museum was formed within a society whose wealth and status was built upon the colonisation of other nations.

With this in mind, we recognise that there may be objects, labels or other information held within our collections which reference Britain's legacy as a colonial power, or which are otherwise biased by the background against which they were collected or written.

We welcome research requests which propose reviewing the collections to these ends and in the light of, for example:

- Stories relating to those with ethnic minority backgrounds in the Stroud District
- Stories relating to LGBTQIA+ individuals or communities in the Stroud District

- Stories relating specifically to women's history, with special reference to women's health, maternity, suffrage etc.

We also welcome researchers whose area of interest is in discovering gaps within museum collections on a local, regional or national basis, and/or whose specific area of research is focussed around the subject of under-representation in museum collections.

Appendix 1

Preliminary Research Proposal

Your preliminary research proposal should include the following detail:

- Proposer's name & organisation
- Project title
- Research aims for the project
- Brief description of project
- Proposed start and finish dates for research
- Estimated time required
- Estimated costs
- What will the research deliver? (exhibition, publication, display etc)
- Names and links to any associated projects/ work programmes
- Names and affiliations of any collaborators/ partners
- Which other people may you need support from for the research?
- Is it likely that the research will involve:
 - Sampling & analysis
 - Photography or video of objects
 - Collection items leaving the museum
 - Work on human remains

Appendix 2

APPLICATION FOR SAMPLING AND ANALYSIS

1. In keeping with its mission and corporate aims, the Museum encourages the responsible use of its collections for learning, teaching, and research. The Museum is also committed to superior standards of collections care and professional ethics, as set forth in the Museums Association's Code of Ethics for Museums.
2. This application form must be filled in by anyone requesting permission to carry out scientific analysis on the collections of the Museum, including sampling from objects and destructive analysis, which is here defined as analysis that will alter the physical nature of the sample obtained or of the object itself. If the object(s) leave the Museum for analysis, a Loan Agreement must also be in place.
3. Before any sampling or analysis can occur, this application form must be completed, submitted to the Museum, and approved by the Museum team. Where the sampling will materially affect an individual museum object, approval will be sought from the Museum Trust, with external advice as required. Researchers should therefore allow at least 3 months from submission of the application for the Museum to reach a decision.
4. Analytical techniques and the collection and preparation of samples must minimize the level of risk to objects in the collections of the Museum
5. Wherever possible, samples should be taken at the Museum and in the presence of the staff. The Museum will require that an experienced and qualified researcher carries out the sampling.
6. Samples and any remains from analysis must be returned to the Museum within 6 months of the procedure being carried out. Samples should be returned in a format appropriate for long-term storage, except in cases where the facilities of the Museum are unsuitable for the material in its post-analysis state.
7. Researchers must provide the Museum with a copy of all images in original format (X-ray, transparency, print, digital, etc.), and any data sets, analytical results, report, thesis, or publication (or the relevant parts thereof) arising from research and analysis carried out on objects from the collections of the Museum. These will become part of the archival records attached to each object and must be sent to the Museum within 6 months of preparation (for results and reports), submission (for theses), or publication. In the case of DNA sampling, researchers must submit the DNA sequence to an approved database such as GenBank or EMBL-Bank, and provide us with the accession numbers of computer-readable copies of sequence data following consultation with and approval by the Museum.
8. All reports, theses, and publications must credit the Museum and cite objects by their Museum accession numbers. Permission to reproduce images of objects from the collections of the must be sought separately, and a reproduction fee may apply.
9. The Museum reserves copyright and all other commercial, moral, and intellectual property rights to material in its collections. This includes samples extracted from these materials by any third party.
10. The Museum retains all rights to DNA sequences derived from specimens in its collections. The research and the results of the research may not be commercially exploited in any way without the prior written agreement of the Museum. Material can only be passed to third parties with the approval of the Museum.
11. English law shall apply.

Applicant Details

Name

Academic position

Institutional affiliation

Institution carrying out analysis, with contact details

Grant supporting body

Your contact details (address, email, phone/fax)

If student, course details and name of supervisor, with contact details

Project Information

Project title

Names and affiliations of any collaborators

Brief description and research aims

How will the collections of the Museum contribute to your research aims?

In what format will the outcome of your research be presented?
(e.g. conference paper, peer-reviewed publication, dissertation or thesis)

Please provide references to any published work relating to your project's aims or techniques:

Please provide the name and contact details of an academic or scientific referee for your project:

Object Information and Technical Details

For each object or sample requested, please provide the following information:

Accession number

Object description

Material

When is the sample or analysis required?

Size of sample(s) required

Weight of sample(s) required

How much and which part of the object(s) will be affected by sampling?

Method of sampling (e.g. x-ray, scalpel scrape, drilling)

Please state who will take the samples and what qualifications or experience of sampling s/he has:

Method of storing sample(s) after analysis

Method of analysis (including non-destructive techniques, e.g. radiography)

How will the sample or object be affected during analysis?

Please state who will carry out the analysis and what experience of the procedure s/he has:

Applicant Signature

If permission for sampling and analysis is granted, I agree to undertake the following:

- To provide a copy of my results to the Museum as soon as they become available prior to publication;
- To provide a copy of any thesis or publication (or relevant parts thereof) arising from my analysis to the Museum within 6 months of submission or publication date; and
- To return samples to the Museum within 6 months of the analysis.
- To adhere to conditions given at the start of this form, where appropriate.

Failure to comply will prejudice future requests from researchers and their institutions.

Signature

Date

If student, signature of supervisor or course co-ordinator

Date

Comments of supervisor or course co-ordinator:

Appendix 3 – from Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums (DCMS: 2005)

2.9 Research and sampling

Research on human remains may benefit from analysis requiring sampling, which in some cases may be destructive. Such actions should only be undertaken to the highest standards by appropriately qualified staff and students who will be able to remove the smallest quantity of material necessary for the scientific purpose.

All holding institutions should ensure that the scientific justifications for the removal of samples from human remains are made in advance and placed on file. Such justifications should be robust and reasons for approval given should be fully recorded. Justifications with the application, sample location and size, the sampling process and eventually the full records of the results of analysis are to be kept with the records for the particular remains sampled. In particular:

- Can the research question(s) be addressed using non-destructive techniques? Destructive sampling should only be contemplated if this is not so.
- Any programme of destructive analysis on human remains should take place within a planned research programme and should have a realistic prospect of producing useful knowledge.
- If the feasibility of a technique is questionable, but it is nevertheless deemed worthy of further investigation, consideration should be given to conducting a pilot study on a small number of samples before permission for a full programme entailing destruction of larger amounts is given.
- Only the quantity of material considered necessary to address the research questions should be taken as a sample. Any material removed but not destroyed during analysis should be retained in the collection.

All sampling should be fully documented so future researchers will know what has been taken. The skeletal element sampled should be fully recorded and measured prior to sampling. Under some circumstances (for example if the skeleton is intended for museum display or further metric work might be compromised) consideration should be given to producing a cast of parts that will be damaged or destroyed.

Research agendas, frameworks and strategies

Any museum holding human remains for research reasons should construct and make public a clear research framework for their use, or show how remains relate to an existing research framework. It would be normal to review these frameworks regularly and ensure they stay relevant. Research potential will relate to both in house research by staff and students, and research carried out by the scientific community more widely (such as visiting researchers.) This framework would normally include, although not necessarily organised in this way: a Resource Assessment that identifies the nature of holdings and the current state of knowledge for the research fields to which they relate (this will draw upon the inventory, below); a Research Agenda that states the areas of research that the material is considered to have the potential to address; and a Research Strategy that identifies priorities and methods for undertaking research. Many existing regional and national research frameworks exist to which individual museums may wish to refer or become linked.

Research Register

Museums should maintain a publicly accessible research register. It should include:

- Project name
- Research objectives
- Date of research
- Outputs – publications and data holdings
- Research involving sampling