
INTERNATIONAL TRAINING PROGRAMME

2022 ANNUAL PROGRAMME



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ITP Annual Programme e-Learning

Session guidelines

Collections management

The British
Museum

Collections management

Session guidelines - collections management; documentation

The Museum's collection of more than eight million objects spans the history of the world from Prehistoric times until the present day. Objects range from early stone tools to complete mosaic pavements, 20th century prints, and credit cards. The collection is divided across three sites: Bloomsbury, Blythe House, and Orsman Road in London. Furthermore, a new partnership development with the University of Reading - the British Museum Archaeological Research Collection (BM_ARC) – means the Museum will have a new storage and research facility, managed by staff in the eight curatorial departments and in the central Collections Services team.

The British Museum's collection database offers unparalleled access to objects in the collection. This innovative database is one of the earliest and most extensive museum search platforms in the world. When complete, the database will contain a record of every object in the Museum's collection, with associated conservation and scientific reports where available.

The database is an inventory of the Museum's collection and aims to record what is known about it. It is primarily designed to support curatorial and research work, and much of the text is specialised in nature and terminology.

The database is the result of 35-years work but is still in its early stages. The Museum's staff continue to improve the information recorded in it on a daily basis and changes are being fed through regularly. In many cases it does not yet represent the best available knowledge about the objects. This is being added as fast as possible but will take many years.

Collections management; documentation

Introduction

During this module fellows will broaden their understanding of how to develop, manage and deliver a documentation system to help manage their collections. The module will look at the benefits and challenges of effective documentation.

Objectives

- Introduction to museum documentation
- What is documentation?
- Challenges and benefits of good documentation

- Documentation tools
- Plans, policies and procedures
- Using standards and principles to improve documentation
- Documentation systems
- Collections Management Systems (CMS)
- How to choose a CMS that is appropriate for your institution
- Associated management tools: DAMS, Bibliographic systems

Collections management; storage

Introduction

Storage, documentation and access to the collection are key aspects of the Museum's role.

The Collections Care department manage Museum-wide storage projects, including the collection moves linked to the building of the World Conservation and Exhibitions Centre (WCEC).

The Museum collection is available to researchers of all different levels through its study rooms. Each of the Museum's curatorial and research departments has public facilities – a Study Room – managed by the collections department's staff.

Objectives

- Introduction and explanation of the Museum's approach to collection management and storage.
- How the Museum manages its stores, controls access to them and handles the constraints of the Museum building.
- Best practice in collections storage and how it can include innovative ways of delivering solutions at very low cost.
- The importance of regularly monitoring a collection, using sensors and insect traps to identify environmental problems and potential conservation threats.
- Challenges of storage management at the Museum.

Collections management; libraries

Introduction

The Museum's collection is available to researchers of all different levels through its galleries, libraries and study rooms, as well as online.

The British Museum contains several libraries which vary in size, content and readership and catalogues for all of the Museum's libraries can be searched online.

Central Library

The Central Library provides a core collection of resources to support the work of everyone in the Museum, from curators to administrative staff. It contains around 12,500 books and 100 current journals. It holds a large number of works relevant to the history of the Museum, including old guides and synopses dating back to 1778 as well as works of fiction that feature the Museum.

Anthropology Library and Research Centre

The Anthropology Library is now part of the new Centre for Anthropology situated near the north entrance of the Museum. The library is one of the world's major specialist anthropological collections with its origins in the 19th century. Its holdings were greatly enhanced by the gift of the Royal Anthropological Institute Library to the Ethnography Department Library in 1976.

Other departmental libraries

There are specialist libraries in all of the curatorial departments. Departmental libraries are mainly used by Museum staff and scholars studying the collections. Access varies according to each department, and visitors have to apply to each individually.

They are:

- Africa, Oceania and the Americas, including the Anthropology Library and Research Centre
- Egypt and Sudan
- Asia
- Britain, Europe and Prehistory
- Coins and Medals
- Conservation
- Greece and Rome
- Middle East
- Prints and Drawings
- Scientific Research

Objectives

- We will provide overview of the BM's approach to managing the Museum's collection of books.
- We will give a history of libraries within the Museum.
- You will be given an introduction to the management structures and teams who work in the sections and how they 'fit' within the larger museum structure.
- We will explain importance of making our libraries available to the public – both in person and online.
- You will be given an overview of best practice in library management.
- We will share the biggest challenges facing our library collections, including how COVID-19 has affected the libraries.
- We will look at the future of the British Museum library collections.

Digital resources

Following this session you will have complimentary access to the digital resources through the library system, (<https://login.bmus-ezproxy.koha-ptfs.co.uk/login>). The library team have created accounts for you for a period of one year.

To access the account, please use the following:

Login = BMITP

Password = mu5pr0

If you have any problems accessing the account or need any guidance, please don't hesitate to let us know.

Collections management; archives

Introduction

The Museum's Central Archive largely relates to the administrative records of the Museum and includes Trustees' records and minutes of meetings, Principal Librarian records and correspondence, departmental reports, gallery and exhibition records, excavation records, photographs, deeds and plans and other papers and documents which relate to the Museum and its building, going back to the 1740s.

It contains administrative records of the Museum dating back to its foundation in 1753 and holds limited information on the Museum's Collection. These records are generally held by the Museum's curatorial departments (with some exceptions). For archival enquiries about Museum objects, you should therefore contact the relevant department.

Archive material held by the British Museum Department of Manuscripts (usually with references beginning 'Add') and some other Museum records (before 1973) are now held by the British Library. Central Government records concerning the administration of the Museum, including various records of the Museum building, are held by the National Archives. Access to the Archive is by appointment only.

The Museum is in the process of cataloguing this large and diverse collection as well as advising other departments how to manage and catalogue their archival collections. We are working towards producing an online archive catalogue of the Museum's archive collections.

Objectives

- We will introduce you to our museum's archives – looking at the scope and depth of the collection.
- We will explain our approach to managing the Museum's collection of archives.
- You will learn more about best practice in archive management.
- We will consider the importance of making our archives available to the public – both in person and online.
- We will look at the biggest challenges facing our archive collections.
- We will share with you our plans for the future of the Museum's archive collections.

Course facilitators

Sara Kayser, Museum Consultant, KulturIT

I have 18 years' experience working with and providing training on museum documentation. Mainly in Cairo, Egypt, where I provided training on cataloguing archaeological sites, objects and photographs and offered guidance on professional documentation standards and procedures.



I was the British Museum Project Curator for the Egypt Documentation Project from 2014-2018. In this project I worked with colleagues from the Ministry of Tourism & Antiquities to digitise and create a catalogue of glass negatives from the 19th and 20th centuries. I provided training on documentation and cataloguing of photographs and objects to archaeologists and archive staff from the Ministry of Antiquities and supervised their daily documentation work.

I am currently working for KulturIT, a Norwegian company owned by museums in Sweden and Norway, which manages and develops common digital solutions for the cultural heritage sector. As Museum Consultant, I provide training and advice on the use of the collections management system Primus. I am also responsible for ensuring that it complies with the latest Spectrum standard and work with museums to implement the standard in their daily documentation work.

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Euan Shearer, Training and Development Advisor: Collection

I started with the British Museum as a Museum Pathways apprentice, after which I joined the Greece and Rome department as one of two Assistant Collection Managers. After working in Collection Management for a few years, I took on the role of Training Project Coordinator for the new Collection Management Training Programme.

With the implementation of that programme, I became the Training and Development Advisor: Collection, providing ongoing Learning and Development support for Collection Care staff at The British Museum. This includes everything from Project Management to Welding to Firearm Handling and Care.



Louise Ellis-Barrett, Librarian: Acquisitions and Projects, Collection, Project, Resource

I joined the British Museum in October 2017 as Library Assistant in the Department of Egypt & Sudan. In April 2018 I was appointed Ann el-Mokadem Librarian in the same Department. Following an internal restructure, I was appointed to my current role and now work across all the Museum's 9 libraries.

I oversee the acquisition of our printed and electronic monographic holdings, managing the related budgets. I am responsible for projects across the Library remit. I work, on a daily basis, with the team to ensure the Library supports both internal and external users and their research interests when using the unique reference collection we hold.

I have responsibility for the line management of a team of 4 Assistant Librarians including but not limited to their daily tasks, requests for their assistance from across the Library team and their continuing professional development

My own research interests currently lie in the field of the emergence of British Egyptology in the 1820s with a particular focus on the work of Sir John Gardner Wilkinson. I am currently undertaking this study for my PhD.

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Ashley Kelleher, Librarian: Digital Services and Projects

I joined the British Museum in 2017 to administer the library systems for all of the staff who used the library, as well as for researchers and students who frequented the study rooms of the Museum's curatorial departments. Since then, we have been able to re-launch a new Library Catalogue, migrating to the Open Source platform, KOHA, for the Library's 350 000 volume research collections. Today, we are also preparing to launch the Museum's first Open Access platform for sharing more of the research being published by esteemed colleagues, which will be made available, where possible, through the platform for free, for the first time, including the British Museum Research Publications Series, now with over 200 volumes.

My interests focus on the development of open media practices, and of sharing, inter-systems infrastructure for cultural heritage, and am one of many who believe that new media formats including 3D visualisation, LIDAR scanning, and other visual media can help to illuminate and share the lives of objects in new ways.

I previously worked in administering library, archive, and collections systems for UK Crafts Council, and as a web editorial assistant for Pratt Institute when I was a student there. My first role in cultural heritage was as a gift shop attendant in a rural woodworking museum in Canada, where I am from.

I am also a lifeguard and enjoy swimming wherever there is water, nearby. See you online!

@ashleymaerie



Francesca Hillier, Senior Archivist

I began working in the British Museum in 2006, initially in the Department of Britain, Europe and Prehistory as PA to the Keeper and Departmental Secretary.

Part of my role in that position was to manage the departmental archives, and I began a programme to sort and catalogue the archival collections of the department. This was a considerable task and further complicated as they were the result of more than 250 years of accumulations and several reincarnations of different departments.

I then took a professional qualification in Archive Administration and moved to the position of Museum Archivist in 2014. In March 2019 I took on the role of Senior Archivist with responsibility for the Museum's archive collections from across the entire Museum estate.

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Course resources

The links below will provide you with more information on the theme of the session. Additional resources are provided with this session which aim to give you reading material that you may find useful – both now or in the future.

Documentation

Object registration and documentation

The British Museum's policy on acquisitions

<http://www.britishmuseum.org/pdf/Acquisitions.pdf>

The British Museum's policy on de-accessioning objects

<http://www.britishmuseum.org/pdf/Deaccession.pdf>

The Collections Trust helps museums capture and share the information that gives their objects meaning. Their standards and advice are used around the world to make museum collections accessible <https://collectionstrust.org.uk/>

UNESCO Handbooks

Cultural Heritage Protection Handbooks for printing

Documentation of artefacts' collections

English/Arabic: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001514/151447a.pdf>

French/Arabic: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001514/151447f.pdf>

English/French: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001514/151447e.pdf>

Libraries and Archives

British Museum research repository

<https://britishmuseum.iro.bl.uk/>

British Museum library catalogue

<https://library.britishmuseum.org/>

UNESCO Handbooks

Cultural Heritage Protection Handbooks for printing

Care and handling of manuscripts

English/Arabic: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001484/148463E.pdf>

French/Arabic: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001484/148463A.pdf>

English/French: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001484/148463F.pdf>

Welcome to the Hazards in Collections eTool

This tool will help you learn about commonly encountered health hazards found in some museum collections.

<https://hazardsincollections.org.uk/>

National Archives

Central Government records concerning the administration of the Museum, including various records of the Museum building, are held by the National Archives.

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>

British Museum libraries and archives

<https://www.britishmuseum.org/resources/library-and-archive>

The British Library

<http://www.bl.uk/>

Q&A

At the end of a session, if you have any questions or need any further clarification on an issue or topic discussed, please e-mail the ITP team at itp@britishmuseum.org and we will do our best to provide you with the additional information you need.