**The Powell-Cotton Museum Research Policy:**

**A framework for internal and external**

**collections and information-based research**

**PURPOSE OF THE POLICY**

1. Research is an active process of exploration and discovery aimed at finding, interpreting and revising knowledge about our collections.
2. The Powell-Cotton Museum (hereafter ‘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 and to consolidate their value as a learning resource.
3. For the Museum it generates a greater understanding of its collections and related material, its services and its users and potential users.
4. Research is for everyone. It is a powerful tool to develop better learning and understanding across all communities.
5. Research may be conducted by:
6. Museum staff & volunteers conducting research for Museum purposes
7. Museum staff & volunteers conducting research for external users / enquirers
8. external consultants conducting research on behalf of the Museum
9. external researchers (academic, community, schools, individuals or organisations) conducting research for their own purposes or agendas
10. All research is likely to add to the understanding of the collections and/or audiences and/or museum services, but the reasons and priorities may vary. Decisions must be made about priorities and resources.
11. The purpose of this Research Policy is to provide a framework and guidance to manage:
12. internal research
13. external research requests
14. public enquiries
15. working with higher education institutions
16. requests for destructive research and research on human remains (which may be internal or external)

**RESEARCH BY STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS (INTERNAL RESEARCH)**

1. **Museum-driven research** relates to the Museum’s projects, exhibitions, events and activities as outlined in the Museum’s Strategic Plan and Collections Management Plan and forms part of the day-to-day role of staff and volunteers. It includes areas such as research to:
2. add to knowledge about individual museum objects, natural history specimens, archaeological material or other accessioned Item(s) in the Museum’s care.
3. add knowledge about the Powell-Cotton family as collectors, their associates and to contextualise these individuals within their historical setting
4. add knowledge about the development of the Museum and its exhibits and the history of taxidermy display
5. develop knowledge needed for exhibits, displays and all forms of interpretation for all ages
6. develop informal or formal learning programmes
7. develop knowledge for special events
8. develop personal skills or knowledge that will improve an individual’s contribution to delivery of the Museum’s objectives
9. create publications (academic articles, blogs, press etc.)
10. develop talks, lectures or conference presentations
11. **Business-related research** includes applied research to:
12. measure the impact of Museum services or projects
13. evaluate the work of the Museum
14. improve standards of delivery, including:
15. visitor surveys
16. research into exhibit design
17. website user research
18. environmental research to improve standards of care for the collections
19. non-user research
20. **Additional research** may include:
21. personal research towards a recognised qualification as part of an agreed Personal Development Plan (for example AMA or MA)
22. 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
23. The following work is considered normal, and not subject to this Research Policy:
24. Research to answer enquiries not exceeding 1 hour
25. Public enquiries and commercial request as identified and outlined below
26. Individual involvement in research already agreed as part of wider programmes – including market research, routine development work and project evaluation
27. If staff or volunteers are undertaking deeper or longer-lasting research, especially if it involves a financial commitment from the Museum, fieldwork and/or visits to other museums or archives, the following issues should be considered:
28. relevance of the research to the Museum, its objectives and business plan
29. resources and/or facilities required for research
30. balancing competing priorities
31. committing to appropriate levels of research for the task
32. deciding on the appropriate person to undertake the research
33. deciding when to outsource the research
34. making best use of our volunteers
35. impact on the integrity or future survival of the collections or related information
36. It is important that for all longer-lasting research projects the potential researcher clearly sets out all issues listed in Section 12 and has the full agreement of their line manager.
37. It is the responsibility of the researcher’s line manager to identify when research proposals require further approval. Examples of such major work may include:
38. Research involving absence from the workplace for several weeks
39. Research involving significant financial costs (even if externally-funded)
40. Research running over a significant period
41. Research which supports an individual’s CPD, but which does not fit with the Museum’s priorities
42. 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**

1. **Purpose of the Service:** The Museum offers a public enquiries service relating specifically to the Collections and Archives, where external researchers can expect a level of information to be provided by staff.
2. The Museum does not provide valuations.
3. 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 Museum to increase its collections-based knowledge.
4. **Managing Public Enquiries:** answering enquiries for the public is an important service. Within Thanet no other Museum holds such extensive collections of Natural History or World Cultures material. As such, the Museum is a unique point of enquiry for the region.
5. 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 a one-hour period to answer, the enquirer should be informed. The options available may be:
6. a lower level of information is supplied
7. the enquirer is provided with support to find information themselves, including planning and organising an on-site research visit if necessary (see below)
8. the enquirer is referred to other organisations with greater specialist knowledge or resources (such as larger museums with more specialist staff)
9. Enquiries from commercial entities (such as media outlets) will be dealt with as any other enquiry with the following additional terms:
10. If the enquiry relates to the use of photographic or film footage from the Museum’s archive or is in relation to the shooting of new footage within the Museum, refer to the photograph and film policy and price list for commercial usage
11. If the enquiry requires in-depth research (for television or radio, for example), the Museum will treat the enquiry as a long-lasting research project (see section 12) and may require the enquirer to provide funding to cover the cost of staff time and resources in relation to the enquiry.
12. The service will be monitored continuously, and opportunities identified to both improve the service and make it more efficient. This will include:
13. FAQs on the Museum’s research website, to help direct enquiries more efficiently
14. A commitment to providing a first response to enquiries within a week and a full response within four weeks
15. A long-term commitment to providing a publicly accessible online collections database, so that individuals might undertake their own independent collections research.

**EXTERNAL RESEARCHERS**

1. **Overview of External Research:** The Powell-Cotton Museum holds internationally significant Natural History and World Cultures collections. External researchers approach the Museum because of the collections and 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 Museum more widely. Some of this research may be academically driven, but much will be informal, for individual interest, personal development or for cultural enrichment.
2. 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.
3. The Museum is an independent charitable organisation required to generate its own income. As such, bench fees are set for the use of the collections by visiting researchers.
4. These fees provide necessary income and are reflective of staff time and expertise needed to support external research visitors
5. All bench fees are provided in advance to any prospective researcher and can be viewed via the Museum’s research website
6. Bench fees are reviewed annually
7. There are no exceptions to bench fees (such as student discounts) unless the Museum is an active partner in the research project being undertaken and bench fees are being waived as an ‘in kind’ cost
8. Collections staff may deal with a variety of enquiries and requests that fall outside this Research Policy. For example, one-off visits to see a particular item or 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 refer back to this policy.
9. A public enquiry can build into a piece of research. It may not be necessary to record both in detail, but a system of recording researcher visits should be in place to catch the broadest range of ‘research’ visits. The Museum uses a simple Microsoft Excel document to record researchers visiting the collections and basic information about the research they are conducting.
10. **Decisions about External Research Requests:** All potential researchers are required to fill in a research form, which captures the important details of their project, which collections they wish to use, and their methodology and equipment needs. We are committed to enabling research wherever possible, however issues to be considered before agreeing to a research proposal are:
11. support time needed from staff both in preparation for a research visit and during the visit itself
12. physical accessibility of collections requested
13. resources and/or facilities required for research
14. the need for training in use of systems, equipment or ICT to enable users to pursue their research
15. the need for training in the handling of collections, or proof of prior experience in handling the type of collections being researched
16. security and/or health and safety issues in relation to collections and their use
17. long-term or very detailed research on a particular collection and the impact this might have on other researchers/the Museum accessing the collection
18. research which compromises the integrity or future survival of the collections or related information
19. research which impacts on existing or planned museum-driven research or collaborative projects
20. requests to perform destructive research (see destructive sampling policy)
21. research with social, religious, political, racial or other ethical or legal implications or connotations (see below) or research that is in opposition to the Museum’s values and ethos
22. Collections staff will continue a dialogue with the potential researcher to find ways to accommodate their request whilst prioritising the care and security of the collection. In some instances this will not be possible and a clear reason why will be given.
23. The Collections Department will make decisions about research requests. In the case of overlap with museum priorities a collaborative approach may 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 via the Museum’s Research Request form.
24. Researchers making use of Museum collections must agree to the Museum’s conditions regarding access, equipment and conduct within the collections stores.
25. **Decisions about destructive research (sampling and analysis):** The Museum has a specific Destructive Sampling policy, which should be read in conjunction with this document.
26. 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 Destructive Sampling form as part of the research application.
27. The proposal will be considered by the Head of Collections and Engagement with input from the Collections Department and external advisors where necessary.
28. Where destructive research is approved it is especially important that the results of the research are made available to the Museum. For natural history samples taken for DNA analysis, results should be made available via the GenBank database. This may remove the need to repeat the research in future and may negate requests to do so.
29. **Culturally 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.
30. In the case of a dispute or disagreement, or where it is felt that the Museum has insufficient evidence or experience, expert external support will be sought as required.
31. **Sampling or Analysis of Human remains:** Human remains constitute a special case when sampling or analysis are required for research.
32. The Museum’s human remains (defined as per the **Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums** (DCMS: 2005) relate specifically to osteological material recovered as part of archaeological excavations along the Thanet coastline and a small amount of material held in the World Cultures collections that includes human remains 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.
33. It does not include hair or nails, although these may be of importance in a cultural context.
34. Due to limited staff and resources the Museum does not currently allow the sampling of Human Remains.

**WORKING WITH UNIVERSITIES**

1. As part of the Museum’s founding ethos and current vision, we strive to ensure we support the researchers of the future. Working in collaboration with universities, offering access to our collections for teaching in a variety of ways and supporting student placement are just some of the ways we are opening up the collections to universities and their students.
2. The Museum provides access to our historic collections for teaching sessions. These sessions can be bespoke and designed in collaboration with tutors. We have built up relationships with course tutors and provide regular sessions as part of specific degree courses.

**FRAMEWORK FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

1. **Overview of Collections and their Research Potential:** The Museum’s Collections include
   * 1. 6,000 mammal specimens
     2. 18,000+ world cultures objects
     3. 80,000 archival and manuscript items, including 30,000 photographs
     4. For a complete breakdown of the collections please see the Museum’s Collections Development Policy
2. In keeping with the Museum’s objectives and vision, the Powell-Cotton Museum encourages the responsible use of its collections for learning, teaching and research.
3. The Museum is committed to superior standards of collections care and professional ethics, as set forth in the Museums Association’s *Code of Ethics for Museums.*
4. Important collections which are known to be of interest to researchers include:
5. The primate collection, including world-renowned collections of Lowland Gorilla and Chimpanzee specimens, already extensively used by the international research community
6. The Museum’s historic natural history dioramas
7. The collections of Antoinette and Diana Powell-Cotton of 3,000 objects, archival records, photographs and film footage, made in Angola in 1936-37.
8. The collections of Percy and Hannah Powell-Cotton of objects, archival records, photographs and film footage, made in South Sudan in 1932-33.
9. The Powell-Cotton family’s historic collection of firearms, dating from the late 17th century onwards.
10. **Priorities for Research:** The Museum’s own priorities for research, where potential collaborations have been identified, or where there is significant public interest include:
    1. Decolonising the Museum: examining the colonial encounters of the Powell-Cotton family and how we might rethink coloniality within our displays. Working with partners and source communities to provide a space for source community voices to be heard within the collections and displays. Making the colonial encounter visible in our natural history displays. This is a new long-term project that is anticipated to provide the context for the future development of all the Museum’s displays and the foundations for further research projects. This will be led by the Head of Collections and Engagement but will pull in all Collections and Visitor Services staff. The project will challenge staff and visitors to think about the collections differently.
    2. Great Ape collections: current research by the Curator of Natural History is providing detailed catalogue records for this world-class collection and exploring its historical context. This project will allow us to better support researchers using the collection (our most used by the research community) and will feed into both the Museum’s ‘Decolonising the Museum’ project and any future reinterpretation of the primate displays. Outcomes of this research are also being shared via conferences and the Museum’s research website.
    3. The archaeological collections of Antoinette Powell-Cotton: This is a long-term project to examine, document and make publicly available a vast archaeological archive of material from the local area (Minnis Bay) from the Bronze Age to the Medieval Period. Over a 40-year period, Antoinette Powell-Cotton undertook excavations with the support of local archaeologists, amateurs, and support from national collections, such as the British Museum. Entirely unpublished, Museum volunteers are four years into a project to make her notes and finds accessible through a series of free PDF books, each documenting a different period in history. So far, books have been produced for the Bronze Age, Late Iron Age, and Early Iron Age periods. These will be freely available via the Museum’s research website.
    4. Making African Connections in Sussex and Kent Museums: De-colonial futures for colonial collections: This is a collaborative project led by the University of Sussex in partnership with the Powell-Cotton Museum, Brighton Museum, and the Royal Engineers Museum, running from January 2019-December 2020 and funded by the AHRC. This interdisciplinary project will research historic African collections held in Sussex and Kent Museums with the aim of furthering both conceptual and applied debates over ‘decolonising’ public institutions. Within the Powell-Cotton Museum, research will focus on the Angolan collections of Diana and Antoinette Powell-Cotton. A more detailed description of the project and its impacts can be found here: <https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=AH%2FS001271%2F1>
11. In cases where the Museum is developing plans for its own projects, we would expect to work closely with potential researchers to ensure that any use of collections is in collaboration with the Museum’s own work, rather than duplicating or pre-empting such studies.
12. **Other Important Frameworks**

It is important that the Museum’s work remains relevant and resonant in the wider museum network. Knowing the priorities of the sector will be key to future research.

* 1. **Empowering Collections: Collections 2030** is the Museums Associations 10 year strategy for collections. Many of the practices and ideas the Powell-Cotton is implementing/hopes to implement in the coming years align with this national development strategy.

1. **Current and Potential Partners**
   1. University of Sussex, School of Global Studies
   2. University of Kent, School of Anthropology and Conservation
   3. The British Museum, Africa Department
   4. Christ Church Canterbury University, School of Human and Life Sciences