

Policy and Procedure for the Destructive Sampling of Objects Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford

Date approved by Pitt Rivers Museum Executive Board:

Date approved by Pitt Rivers Museum Board of Visitors: 20 May 2025

Date at which policy is due for review: May 2030

The Museum's statement of purpose is:

As given in the University of Oxford's regulations, the Museum's purpose is 'to assemble, preserve and exhibit the Pitt Rivers Collection and to promote the public understanding of anthropology and world archaeology, and their teaching and research, based on the Museum's collections.' see Council Regulation 4 of 2019 <https://governance.admin.ox.ac.uk/legislation/council-regulations-4-of-2019#collapse1421161>

The Museum's mission statement:

The Pitt Rivers Museum wants to become a welcoming space to all where stories are shared by many voices. Working collaboratively and creatively with staff, volunteers, and communities we will transform how our iconic collections are engaged with, both online and in the museum. In an increasingly disconnected world, we want to inspire empathy and deepen cross-cultural understanding.

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1. Introduction

The Pitt Rivers Museum is the University of Oxford's museum of anthropology and world archaeology. To pursue its mission, the Museum seeks both to preserve and to increase access to its collections. The desire to make artefacts available for scientific research, including destructive sampling, needs to be balanced against the need to preserve and conserve the collections.

This procedure aims to ensure that destructive sampling is only carried out:

- a. when scientifically necessary and beneficial;
- b. under conditions of best practice;
- c. in such a manner as to minimise long-term damage to the collections;
- d. giving due attention to any cultural or ethical considerations;

2. Making a request

2.1 Researchers should first establish the existence and accession number(s) of the artefacts they wish to sample by interrogating the online version of the Museum's database, available at <https://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/collections-online#/search>

2.2 They should then send the information requested below, and any references or supporting documents, to: Head of Collections, Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, South Parks Road, Oxford, OX1 3PP. Requests can also be emailed to objects.colls@prm.ox.ac.uk

- a. Name(s) of applicant(s), institutional affiliation(s), and full contact details.
- b. Summary of the proposed research, including:
 - I. details of the artefacts it is proposed to sample;
 - II. the purpose of the sampling;
 - III. the proposed methodology;
 - IV. similarities to and differences from other studies;
 - V. whether authorisation has been sought from the relevant Indigenous community body;
 - VI. funding sources; -
 - VII. time frame;
 - VIII. proposed outputs.
- c. Qualifications -the applicant for the research (publications; previous experience). Destructive sampling will normally only be permitted for doctoral-level research or above.
- d. Name and contact details for a referee who may be consulted about the proposed work.
- e. Rationale: how does gaining the knowledge sought through destructive sampling justify the alteration or destruction of museum specimens? Why are these artefacts in this collection the most appropriate for the study?

3. The decision process

3.1 All requests for sampling will be reviewed by the Museum's Director, the Heads of Collections and Conservation and other appropriate staff. The final decision will be made by the Museum's Board of Visitors. The Museum's decision will be based on the following criteria:

- a. The request should not duplicate previous research work carried out in this or any other collections.
- b. The scientific, historical, and cultural significance of the artefacts from which samples are requested.
- c. Any cultural and ethical issues, including the interests of communities of origin or descent. The Museum may request that the researcher contacts a community directly for guidance and approval and without this may not proceed. The Museum may also ask for advice from acknowledged experts.
- d. The needs of future users of the artefacts.
- e. The demonstrated ability of the researcher to perform the work.
- f. The demonstrated value of the research to the broader research community.

4. Taking the samples

4.1 All sampling is normally undertaken in the Museum's conservation lab. Unless specific permission has been given by the Head of Conservation to do otherwise, all sampling will be done by a member of the conservation team.

5. Financial Support and Charges

5.1 The Museum reserves the right to make appropriate charges where necessary. The staff time needed to retrieve specimens from display and/or storage, to conserve and photograph them, and to supervise researchers can be considerable.

5.2 Where appropriate, researchers are requested to make provision in grant applications for funding to meet facilitation fees (or in large-scale projects for the backfilling of Museum posts). Any grant applications should be discussed with the Museum prior to submission.

5.3 Charges will be made if samples are taken for commercial purposes.

6. Ownership and copyright

6.1 Samples taken from Museum artefacts and any materials subsequently produced or extracted from them may not be transferred to a third party without written permission from the Museum.

6.2 Unused samples must be returned to the Museum. Prior to their return samples must be numbered and/or clearly labelled so that their relationship to the original artefacts is clear.

7. Publications

7.1 Any reference to an artefact (or a sample) in a publication of any kind (including thesis, dissertation, poster, book, journal article, data bank) must be accompanied by the relevant accession number.

7.2 Authors must acknowledge the Museum for any permissions granted for sampling and analysis.

7.3 Copies of any and all publications arising from any sampling must be forwarded to the Museum for deposit in the Museum's documentation system and/or Balfour Library and for possible citation in the Museum's annual report. These should be sent to: Head of Collections, Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, South Parks Road, Oxford, OX1 3PP; objects.colls@prm.ox.ac.uk.

8. Review of this document

8.1 This document will be published on the Museum's website and will be made available for visitors to the Museum to view on request.

8.2 This document will be reviewed at least once every five years.

8.3 Relevant Museum staff will be made aware of this policy during induction or specific meetings. Curatorial, collections and conservation staff should be familiar with this policy.