

Museum Glossary

Word or term	Definition
Ancient	Belonging to the very distant past and no longer in existence e.g. Ancient Egypt.
Ancient Egypt	Historical period in the region of modern Egypt. C. 3100 BC (BCE), and ending with the death of Cleopatra VII in 30 BC (BCE).
Ancient Greece	Historical period in the region of modern Greece: Greek Archaic Period c.800 – 480 BC (BCE) Greek Classical Period c.480 - 323 BC (BCE) Greek Hellenistic Period c.323 - 31 BC (BCE)
Anglo-Saxon	Historical period in England and Wales from the 5th to the 11th century – ending with the Norman conquest in 1066 AD(CE).
AD (CE)	AD is an acronym for the Latin phrase <i>anno domini</i> - in the year of the Lord meaning the year Jesus was born. CE meaning Common Era is an alternative to AD.
Archaeologist	Someone who excavates or investigates and studies objects belonging to people from the past e.g. pottery, tools, and structures.
Archaeology	The study of past human life.
Archives	A collection of paper/film/recorded information about the past e.g. photos, documents, maps.
Archivist	Someone who works with, and cares for, archives.
Art	Objects whose purpose is to be beautiful or full of meaning.
Artefact	An object that is of cultural or historical interest.
Audience	The people who visit a museum.
BC (BCE)	Before Christ. BCE meaning Before Common Era is an alternative to BC .

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Behind the Scenes	Areas of a museum that are generally closed to the public.
Benin	Benin is a country in West Africa. It is bordered by Nigeria, Togo, Burkina Faso and Niger. The Kingdom of Benin flourished in Africa from 900-1300 AD (CE). In the 1600s the <i>Obas</i> (rulers) started to lose their power and control over the country and the people. By the 1800s Benin was no longer strong or united. The kingdom came to a sudden end in 1897, when the British army invaded and it became part of the British Empire.
Botany	Study of plants
Bronze Age	Historical period in Britain between 2500 - 800 BC (BCE). It was preceded by the Neolithic period and was followed by the Iron Age.
CE	See AD.
Civilisation	The society, culture, and way of life of a particular area.
Collection	A group of paintings, documents, or artefacts grouped together by a theme.
Colonialism	The policy or practice of taking full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically.
Community	A group of people who live in the same area, have shared interests or shared characteristics e.g. ethnicity, religion.
Community Officer	Someone who works with communities on museum projects.
Conservator	Someone who cares for, repairs and protects museum and archive collections.
Conservation	The department in which a conservator works.
Contemporary	Of or belonging to the present time - current, modern.

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Costumed interpreter	Someone who wears historical costume and acts out a historical role in order to share information about a museum and its collections.
Cultural	Relating to the arts and to intellectual achievements.
Curator	Someone who oversees and manages a museum collection. They may manage a specific kind of collection e.g. art, geology or manage multiple collections. Their remit is dependent on the size and type of museum. e.g. Bristol Museum is a large museum with several buildings and collections and specialist curators manage their own specialist collections. In a small museum a curator may be responsible for a diverse number of collections.
Designer	A person who makes or draws plans for creating something. This might include physical objects or structures, signage, marketing material.
Display case	A clear container used to display objects from a museum collection.
Document	Paper documents kept in a museum or archive.
Documentation	Museum Documentation is a vital part of museum management. It is a written, examined, authentic and accurate recording of information about objects or specimens that have been acquired by a museum. Previously such information was kept in a ledger or card index but is now kept on a computer.
Donation	Something given to help a museum or to extend its collection e.g. an object or money.
Early Islamic Civilisation (including Baghdad)	Historical period in the region of modern Iraq starting in c. 900 AD (CE). Its end is disagreed upon but it can be approximately dated to the period of the European crusades 1097-1291 AD (CE). It is also referred to as the Islamic Golden Age.
Empire	A large group of states or countries ruled over by a single monarch, an oligarchy, or a sovereign state e.g. the British Empire.
Era	A period of time in history.

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Ethnography	The scientific description of peoples and cultures and their traditions, way of life, and differences. e.g. how they celebrate special days such as birthdays.
Exhibit	An object that is displayed in a museum.
Exhibition	A public display of works of art or items of interest held in a museum for people to go and see.
Finds	Objects found by an archaeologist.
Fossil	The remains or traces of a living animal or plant from a very long time ago. Fossils are found in earth or rock.
Gallery	A room in which a museum collection is displayed.
Georgian	Historical period between 1714 and 1837 AD (CE).
Geology	The study of the physical structure of the earth and how it has changed over time. Geologists gain this knowledge by studying rocks. Some geologists study other planets.
Gift Shop	A shop in a museum where visitors can buy items related to the museum collection e.g. books, cards, toys, jewellery.
Heritage	Heritage is all the qualities, traditions, or features of life in a area or country that have continued over many years and have been passed on from one generation to another.
Iron Age	Historical period in Britain between about 800 BC (BCE) to the Roman invasion of 43 AD (CE). It comes after the Bronze Age.

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Interpretation	Information for museum visitors that helps them to understand and find out more about objects on display. Interpretation might be written, pictures, spoken, film or in some other accessible form.
Label	A label provides information about objects on display. It might include – what it is, where it came from, how it was used, who made it, when it was made, what it was made from, who owned/owns it.
Learning Officer	People who enable learning about a museum and museum objects. They might work with nurseries, schools, colleges, universities, families and the community.
Local history	The history of the local area.
Marketing	A way of encouraging people to visit a museum or museum exhibition. This might be through posters, advertising in magazines and newspapers, online, letters, email, invitations to exhibitions and other marketing methods.
Marketing Officer	Someone who encourages people to visit the museum and museum exhibitions.
Mayan civilisation	Historical period in Central America between c. 250 AD (CE) and the 16 th century. The Classic Maya period is dated from 250 – 900 AD (CE).
Medieval	Medieval means the Middle Ages. In Britain it dates from the end of the 5th century -1485 AD (CE).
Mesolithic	The Middle Stone Age period from about 10,000 to about 8,000 BC (BCE). It comes between the Palaeolithic and the Neolithic periods and is characterised by the use of small flint tools set in bone or wood.

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Museum store	A place where museum objects not on display are kept or stored.
Natural sciences	There are two strands to this: Life sciences: botany, zoology, palaeontology Physical sciences: physics, chemistry, astronomy, Earth sciences.
Neolithic	The end part of the Stone Age, from about 8,000 to about 3,500 BC (BCE). It comes after the Middle Stone Age and is characterised by the use of polished stone tools and the beginnings of farming.
Object	Any item in a museum collection.
Palaeontology	The science that studies animal and plant fossils.
Palaeontologist	A person that studies animal and plant fossils.
Palaeolithic	The earliest period of the Stone Age, from about 2 million BC (BCE) to about 10,000 BC (BCE). It comes before the Middle Stone Age and is characterized by the use of primitive stone tools.
Preservation	To maintain something in its original or existing state.
Record	To document objects in a suitable permanent form such as writing, photo, drawing etc. for later reference.
Replica	A good copy of a real object. Replicas are used in place of real objects which are often too valuable or fragile to handle.
Romans (in Britain)	Historical period in Britain between 43 - 410 AD (CE).
Specialist	A person who has an in-depth knowledge of a specific subject

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Social History	History about everyday life in the past.
Text	The words that appear on an object label.
Guide	An informed person who shows visitors around the museum and tells them about the museum and its collection. They are often volunteers.
Trail	A guided walk around the museum that might include information about objects or fun activities to do in the museum.
Tudor	Historical period between 1485-1603 AD (CE).
20 th century	Historical period between 1900-1999 AD (CE).
Victorian	Historical period between 1837-1901 AD (CE).
Virtual museum	A collection of digitally recorded images, sound files, text documents, and other data of historical, scientific, or cultural interest accessed through electronic media. A virtual museum does not house actual objects.
Visitor assistant	Someone who helps visitors to the museum by for example giving them directions, providing information about the museum, and help if they have a problem.
Visitor	A person who visits a museum.
Volunteer	A person who offers to work for or help a museum without being paid.
World cultures	Refers to the way people live in different parts of the world and the shared characteristics that define their way of life.
World War I	Historical period between 1914-1918 AD (CE). Also referred to as the First World War.
World War II	Historical period between 1939-1945 AD (CE). Also referred to as the Second World War.
Zoology	Study of animals

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