A PRACTICAL GUIDE

DOCUMENTATION HANDBOOK

Photography • description • digitisation • oral history • archiving

A handbook for residents, teachers, volunteers and people documenting the craft traditions and history of Sokołowsko. It supports reliable contributions to the digital heritage archive at sokolowsko.org.

Why document heritage?

- To preserve information about reliefs, murals, metalwork, family photos and local memories.
- To separate what we actually observe and know from what we only suspect.
- To ensure records can be found, checked and shared responsibly.

Four basic steps

1. OBSERVE

Inspect objects without touching or altering them.

2. RECORD

Write down location, date, features and sources.

3. PROTECT

Keep original files; establish permissions and rights.

4. SHARE

Publish only after checking facts and accessibility.

Examples are educational and do not establish the authorship or date of any specific object.

01 / PREPARING FOR DOCUMENTATION

BEFORE YOU START

Your field kit

- A charged camera or phone, sufficient storage space and a notebook.
- Observation sheet, pencil, and optionally a scale ruler and colour reference card.
- List of sites, organiser’s contact details and information about accessible routes.

Working around objects

- Keep a safe distance; do not climb railings, roofs or walls or enter hazardous road areas.
- Never touch, clean or remove fragments from a heritage object or take samples.
- Do not enter private land without permission; respect residents’ privacy.

Before the first photo

- Record the date, address, name or temporary description of the object and photographer.
- Check sharpness and avoid strong reflections or backlighting.
- Consider wet surfaces, wind, darkness, traffic and other hazards.

If observation poses a risk, stop and report the issue to the responsible person.

02 / FRAMING AND LIGHT

PHOTOGRAPHING DETAILS

A basic record uses three views: overview, context and close-up. Without a wide view it may be impossible to locate the detail later.

01 OVERVIEW

Show the entire building or object and its surroundings.

02 CONTEXT

Show where the detail sits on the facade, entrance or public space.

03 DETAIL

Show form, texture, joints, cracks and surface layers.

Settings and quality checks

- Use even daylight, and try oblique light to reveal textures.
- For a reference shot, include a scale and colour card when feasible without disturbing the object.
- Do not dramatically change colours or remove visible damage from the archival original.
- Preserve the original and create a separate version for web publication.

A documentary photo should convey evidence, not merely look attractive.

03 / MINIMUM RECORD FIELDS

DESCRIBING AN OBJECT

A record should let someone else identify an object, locate its photos and understand the evidence behind the description.

Core fields

- Working title and category: e.g. metal grille, relief or painted decoration.
- Location: town, street address and, if verified, map coordinates.
- Appearance: composition, motifs, colours and approximate dimensions where safe to measure.
- Materials and technique: mark preliminary identifications as such.
- Maker and date: use “unknown” when no reliable evidence exists.
- Condition: visible cracks, losses, corrosion, dirt or repainting.
- Context: practical and decorative functions, relationship to the surroundings.
- Sources, photographer, documentation date and publication rights.

Three levels of certainty

OBSERVED FACT

Two vertical sections of railing are visible in the photograph.

HYPOTHESIS

The element may be hand-forged; further analysis is needed.

NOT ESTABLISHED

Neither its date nor the maker has been confirmed.

04 / OBSERVATION, NOT DIAGNOSIS

CONDITION WITHOUT INTERVENTION

Condition records help compare objects over time. They do not replace a conservator’s or structural engineer’s assessment.

What to notice

- Plaster and reliefs: cracks, detachment, losses, damp patches and repainting.
- Painted decoration: peeling, streaks, fading and deposits.
- Metal: corrosion, damaged coatings, distortion and repair traces.
- Surroundings: water runoff, vegetation, physical impacts and frequent contact.

Simple observation form

Object identification / address:

Date / name of recorder:

Visible condition and changes:

Photo reference / number:

Does this require a report to the owner? To whom and when?

Avoid unsupported technical diagnoses. Prefer: “visible crack; specialist assessment recommended”.

05 / PHOTOS, LETTERS AND PAPERS

DIGITISING FAMILY ITEMS

Before scanning

- Ask the owner about provenance, approximate date, people shown and conditions of use.
- Never peel photos from albums, force brittle pages flat or attempt to clean them.
- Handle fragile or valuable items as little as possible; seek specialist advice if needed.

Scanning and photographing

- For paper documents, a common starting point is 300 dpi; consider 600 dpi for small photos or fine text.
- Keep a lossless archival master (e.g. TIFF/PNG) and a smaller separate web copy.
- Photograph papers evenly, without glare or perspective distortion; record the reverse and any notes.
- Record who supplied the item and what may be published; ownership of a physical print does not necessarily confer copyright.

After digitisation

- Return the original in the agreed condition and timeframe; record return if it was entrusted temporarily.
- Do not disclose the owner’s private contact details without an appropriate legal basis.

Example: “Family photograph, possibly 1960s; date unverified; privately supplied; publication rights to be clarified”.

06 / MEMORY AS A SOURCE

ORAL HISTORY

Interviews record personal experiences and the history of a place. Memories are valuable evidence, but not every claim is independently verified.

Before an interview

- Explain the purpose, recording process, retention and intended publication; obtain the relevant permissions.
- Use a quiet location, test recording quality and note the date and participants.

Open questions

- What is this keepsake, and where did it come from?
- What event or place in Sokołowsko does it relate to?
- Who used the item or took the photograph? How do you know?
- Do you remember local crafts, workshops or craftspeople?
- Are there other photos, letters or people who could add details?

After recording

- Label each file with the participant’s name or pseudonym, date, theme, duration and consent status.
- Prepare a transcript and summary; flag unclear passages.
- Check publication permissions for the voice, image, name and quotations.

Participation is voluntary. Never pressure a contributor or promise unconditional removal of material already lawfully published.

07 / RESPONSIBLE PUBLICATION

CONSENT, RIGHTS AND ETHICS

Separate permissions

- Agreement to take part in an interview is not automatically permission to publish voice, image or name.
- Permission to photograph an owned item does not by itself settle copyright in the work depicted.
- For minors, follow the organiser’s safeguarding, permission and data-protection procedures.

What should a permission form explain?

- Who handles the information and for what purposes.
- What is recorded and which details may be published, and where.
- The scope of any use permission or licence.
- How to contact the organiser and access the privacy information.

Before web publication

- Check provenance, rights, permissions, third-party likenesses and personal information in metadata.
- Never assume that material found online is free to reproduce.

This is educational guidance, not a universal consent form or legal opinion. The organiser must approve forms for their actual uses.

08 / STORAGE AND NAMING

FILES AND METADATA

Each item needs its source file, a consistent identifier, descriptive metadata, rights information and reliable backups.

Example filename

2026_sokolowsko_glowna-42_detail_01_v01.tif

Year + place + location/reference + type + sequence + version.

Core metadata fields

- Title and short content description.
- Photographer, interviewer or record creator, if known.
- Date of the historic object and date of documentation, recorded separately.
- Location, keywords, technique and information sources.
- Item owner, copyright and permissions, and publication scope.

Safe workflow

- Retain source files unchanged; edit working copies with version numbers.
- Keep at least two independent backups, one in a different location; test recovery periodically.
- Store public files separately from consent forms and contact information with restricted access.

Avoid spaces and special characters in working filenames; use natural, correct language in public descriptions.

09 / PREPARING FOR PUBLICATION

CAPTIONS AND ACCESSIBILITY

Example photo caption

Detail of a metal balustrade, Sokołowsko. Photo: [author], [year].

Only add maker, technique or date after checking reliable evidence.

Alternative text (alt text)

- Describe the useful visual information and relationships without starting with “photo of”.
- Example: “Close-up of a metal railing with repeated vertical bars and scattered reddish deposits on the surface”.

Accessible web content

- Use logical headings, legible text and strong contrast; do not hide essential information inside pictures.
- Provide transcripts for audio and suitable captions for video.
- Create a plain-language summary and English versions of key descriptions.
- Link to the relevant object record on sokolowsko.org.

Editorial check

- Do the object name, address and captions match the pictures?
- Are photo credits and rights recorded?
- Can someone understand the description without seeing the image?

Use “unknown” and “requires verification” rather than filling gaps with guesses.

10 / BEFORE AND AFTER

PRINTABLE CHECKLISTS

Before the field visit

- [ ] Location and lawful access confirmed.
- [ ] Camera, storage space and note-taking materials ready.
- [ ] Safety and non-intervention rules explained.

After taking photos

- [ ] Overview, context and detail shots captured.
- [ ] Date, location, photographer and object label recorded.
- [ ] Sharpness and captions checked.

Before publication

- [ ] Facts, authorship and sources checked; uncertainty flagged.
- [ ] Copyright and publication permissions confirmed.
- [ ] Alt text and key language versions prepared.
- [ ] Originals backed up; sensitive personal information protected.

Practical task

Choose one architectural detail or keepsake. Make three photos or scans, write a description of up to 100 words, add metadata and a source list, and identify gaps in knowledge.

Documenting an object does not automatically grant permission to publish it.

11 / QUICK-REFERENCE TOOLS

GLOSSARY AND RECORD SHEET

Mini-glossary

- Metadata / metadane — information describing an item, such as author, date, place and rights.
- Attribution / atrybucja — assigning authorship based on available evidence.
- Digitisation / digitalizacja — creating a digital representation of an analogue item.
- Relief / relief — decoration raised from or recessed into a surface.
- Transcript / transkrypcja — written record of spoken material.
- Preventive care / prewencja — steps reducing the risk of damage without altering the object.

Reusable record sheet

Object / item title:

Town / location:

Documentation date / recorder:

Description and technique (facts / hypotheses):

Photo / scan / recording filenames:

Sources / copyright / permissions:

The Sokołowsko digital heritage archive is available at sokolowsko.org.