

MUSEUM SERVICE

WELWYN HATFIELD



WELWYN
HATFIELD

Collections Care and Conservation Policy

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Collections Care and Conservation Policy

Our Collections Care and Conservation Policy is based on a combination of preventive and remedial conservation methods and practices, designed to ensure the long-term preservation of our collections and buildings.

Collections care and conservation will be taken into consideration when formulating all our policies and plans. All staff (paid and volunteer) have read and agreed to abide by the policy. New staff have access to the policy in their induction pack.

The policy describes the principles and activities of the care and conservation of:

- collections (both preventive and remedial)
- working machinery
- the archaeological monument
- Mill Green site buildings.

The Collections Care and Conservation Plan sets out the way this policy will be put into action and should be read in conjunction with the Business Plan, the Emergency Plan, and any other plans affecting the collections and the museum buildings.

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Purpose of this Policy

The aim of this policy is to state the principles and activities that guide the care and conservation of collections at the museum. It sets a framework for:

- The preservation of the collections and buildings in the care of the museum in line with national guidelines, including Benchmarks in Collections Care and Spectrum Procedures
- Preventive and remedial conservation of the collections
- The safe use of and access to collections

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People

The care of the collections is the responsibility of everyone who works in or visits the museum. Any concerns regarding the collections should be reported in writing to the Curator.

The museum trains all staff and volunteers who handle the collections in the course of their work. No untrained personnel are permitted to handle items from the accessioned collection. Researchers or other visitors working with the collections will be briefed on how to handle the items they are working on and will be supervised at all times.

The museum will check the suitability of conservators chosen to work or advise on the collections. A professionally accredited conservator or a conservator listed on ICON's Conservation Register will normally be chosen.

No item in the collections will be modified or altered until advice has been obtained from a suitably qualified conservator. Only suitably trained and qualified conservators will carry out remedial treatment on objects.

The museum will keep detailed records of all treatments carried out on objects, including the name and contact details of the person or company.

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Preventive Conservation

Preventive conservation covers the measures necessary to monitor, slow down or minimise the deterioration of museum objects through the careful management of their environment. These measures are indirect, the material and structure of objects are not altered in any way.

Our preventive conservation activities include:

Housekeeping – exhibition and stored collections areas are regularly monitored, vacuumed and dusted on a scheduled basis.

Quarantining - any new accessions are assessed and monitored for evidence of damage likely to affect or transfer to existing collections, for example pest and mould damage. Any items deemed to be at risk or displaying active infestation or degradation are quarantined, and if appropriate, frozen. Access to a freezer is available through Hertfordshire Association of Museum's annual subscription to Harwell.

Integrated Pest Management – pheromone blunder traps and hanging moth traps are located in exhibition galleries and stores. Monitoring is carried out on a monthly basis when traps are inspected and replaced, pests identified and results recorded. A contract for further pest monitoring, specifically moths and rodents, is managed by Woolmer Pest Control who attend on a monthly basis.

Environmental monitoring – exhibition galleries and stores are spot-checked for temperature and humidity on a weekly basis using a handheld monitor (Rotronic A1 Hygrometer), which is regularly calibrated.

Temperature and Relative Humidity Readings are taken at 10-minute intervals by five TinyTags, with data downloaded once a month for analysis. Every 6 months the data is further analysed to assess seasonal drift. The five tags are located in the stores, galleries and at the bath house.

A dehumidifier operates in Gallery 1 and is monitored and maintained by museum staff. Dehumidifiers are in operation at the bath house.

Light levels – exhibition galleries and stores are spot-checked on a weekly basis using a handheld light meter (Amprobe LM-120), which is regularly calibrated. Lights are kept off in the stores when unattended.

Handling – staff and volunteers who handle collections are training and/or receive guidance in the safe handling of items. Supplies of nitrile gloves are available and should be worn when handling all materials, other than paper and books, when clean dry hands are sufficient.

Packaging – where possible items suitable for boxing are stored in acid-free boxes and plastic containers and packed with conservation grade materials such as acid-free tissue and polyethylene foam (Plastazote®). Paper and photographic collections are boxed and stored in polyester film sleeves (Melinex®) where appropriate. Textile costumes are stored on padded hangers beneath unbleached calico covers. Oversized items are boxed or wrapped in appropriate conservation grade materials.

Display – objects may be displayed on external open display on our grounds, open display in our galleries, or in display cases. Our display cases are glazed and lockable. Displayed objects are regularly condition checked and removed from display should any deterioration of condition be identified.

Hazardous materials – all new acquisitions are checked for potential hazardous status. Objects containing asbestos are known to be present within the existing stored collections. An audit of the entire collection was carried out in 2019 by independent specialists, which highlighted a number of objects containing asbestos, some of which have since been disposed of. Those that remain are clearly identified with labels and information about their hazardous status is stored on MODES. These objects are carefully managed to minimise disturbance.

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Remedial Conservation

Remedial conservation involves the interventive treatment of an object to repair or stabilise its condition. These treatments may alter the material structure of an object by removing agents of deterioration. A minimally interventive approach should be taken where possible and the historical integrity of an object should be upheld. Treatments should be fully reversible where practicable.

Our remedial conservation practices include:

Basic remedial treatments – some remedial conservation activities may be carried out by collections staff and volunteers, where they are deemed safe and appropriate to do so by our Curator. Previous examples include woodworm treatment and rust removal to machinery on exterior display.

Advanced and complex treatments – where objects require complex treatment advice is sought by a conservator registered with ICON's Conservation Register. The conservator should be a specialist in the relevant material or object requiring treatment and must supply documentation on completion of the treatment.

Conservation documentation – notes are maintained on MODES of all major conservation work that is undertaken, so that future activities can be carried out, or reversed, with the full knowledge of the work that was carried out previously.

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Caring for historic machinery

Professional millwrights conduct an inspection of the mill every five years to assess maintenance issues and advise on major repairs or renewals of parts. The most recent inspection was conducted in October 2023. The report was good with no major issues identified.

We consult with millwrights when carrying out any remedial work on the working watermill machinery. Only experienced millwrights registered with SPAB (Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings) carry out repairs such as works to gears (replacing teeth), maintenance to the bearing, and redressing stones. Funding may be sought from WHBC, or external sources when maintenance work is required.

Maintenance of the sluice is carried out in-house by trained staff who turn the screw periodically to prevent it ceasing up. The sluice was replaced in 2015 and the supporting masonry is likely to require repair or replacement in the next few years.

All other maintenance issues are conducted in-house by trained staff. Risk assessments are in place for these activities.

Further advice and guidance from SPAB (Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings) Mills Section may also be sought.

We are registered with the Soil Association who complete an annual inspection of the mill to ensure our Organic Status is maintained. This status requires full traceability of our grain as well as adhering to stringent regulations around the chemicals used for pest control in the mill.

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Caring for an archaeological monument

The temperature and humidity of the bath-house monument is monitored with a TinyTag, which takes readings at 10-minute intervals. Data is downloaded on a monthly basis for analysis.

Regularly serviced dehumidifiers are in operation at the bath house to prevent raised humidity levels. Visual checks of the monument are carried out regularly to ascertain overall condition and any evidence of mould growth. Following installation of the dehumidifiers, mould prevention spray treatment (Wykamol's Wykabor) has no longer been necessary.

In addition to in-house expertise, we also seek professional archaeological advice and support from WAS (Welwyn Archaeological Society) and bodies such as English Heritage when required.

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Buildings Maintenance

The Museum recognises that the maintenance of its buildings is fundamental to the preservation of both the building and collection and endeavours to keep the buildings in a suitable condition.

All Museum Service buildings are monitored by museum staff on a weekly basis and the Council's buildings maintenance department on a regular basis.

Equipment is regularly maintained and repairs are made where reasonably practicable. Large scale repair and maintenance is dependent on the availability of resources.

The collections store at Mill Green was built in 2002 and the majority of accessioned items are kept there.

Archaeological collections are housed in the Stable Block at Mill Green where there are known building maintenance issues. A structural inspection was undertaken in 2018 by independent specialists who concluded the eastern wall is bowing significantly and is unstable. Recommendations were made and the works have been completed to make the building structurally sound.

Welwyn Roman Baths, located beneath the A1 motorway, is assessed every two years by the Highways Agency to check that the steel-lined vault it is housed in is secure.