

## **Care and Conservation Policy Roman Baths Victoria Art Gallery February 2015**

### **Policy Framework**

This policy applies to the collections held in the Council's museums at The Victoria Art Gallery and the Roman Baths and is brought forward to meet current Arts Council England (ACE) Accreditation requirements.

Appropriate policy statements for the Fashion Museum were approved in 2014 as part of its Forward Plan.

This format of this document is consistent with current ACE guidance.

This document is part of a Collection Management framework for sound management of the Council's museum collections that also includes policies on Collection Development (last reviewed in 2013) and on Documentation.

The statements of Policy in this document are supported by other procedural documents and Plans that have an impact on care and conservation. These include Forward plans, Emergency (business continuity) plans and Environmental Sustainability plans.

Through this Policy a framework is provided for:

- the preservation of the collections in care
- preventative and remedial conservation of the collections
- safe use of, and access to, the collections

### **Policy Review**

ACE has advised that the next review of Accreditation for all three of the Council's museums will take place in 2018. This policy will therefore be brought forward for review in 2017, with the inclusion of the Fashion Museum, to harmonise policy documents for all three museums in preparation for that process.

### **Introduction**

Good quality care and conservation is fundamental to sound collection management. It protects the collections from unfavourable environments and the hazards associated with display, public engagement and storage. Recording care and conservation activity provides a basis for understanding objects that will be helpful to future curators who will hold responsibility for them and to investigators and scientists who may want to gather more information about them.

The care and conservation of collections is documented according to *Spectrum* standards – a national standard for museums – with records held on a collection database. That database is backed up frequently and security copies of records from one collection are held off site at a different museum.

The museums aim to improve the care and condition of the collection in accordance with

- *Benchmarks in Collection Care* (Chris Woods, Director of the National Conservation Service)
- *Signposts* (Wiltshire County Council for MLA)
- SPECTRUM
- *Standards in the Museum Care of Archaeological Collections* 1992 MGC and *Standards in Action Book 4 Managing archive collections in museums* MDA 2002
- BSI PD5454 'Recommendations for storage and exhibition of archival documents'
- BSI PAS 198 'Specification for managing environmental conditions for cultural collections'

all within the limits of Heritage Services' resources.

## **Overview of current collection care and conservation arrangements**

### **1. Victoria Art Gallery**

#### **General**

All objects in the collection are displayed, handled, transported and stored in ways that protect them against damage and ensure their long term survival.

#### **The Gallery Building**

The Victoria Art Gallery was built circa 1900, with a small extension added in 1922. The extension is brick, the rest of the building brick faced with stone. The floors are wood. The roof is of timber, slate and glass.

There is no loading bay. Large objects are brought into the building via double doors to Bridge Street. Small objects come in through the front door. Storage areas are in the basement, display areas on the ground and first floors. Objects are transported between stores and display areas in a lift.

The emergency services are notified by an automatic alarm system. The fire station is half a mile away.

The building is maintained through a five-year rolling Building Maintenance Plan informed by a periodic condition survey.

#### **Preventive conservation**

The main galleries are fitted with environmental control managed by a building management system.

Paintings, drawings and prints not on display are kept in air-conditioned stores. Most oil paintings and all those of good quality are stored in the dark, on racks, not touching one another, high enough off the floor to avoid the risk of flood damage.

Most prints and drawings are stored in acid-free Solander boxes and documentation records whether mounts are acid-free or not. Old mounts are replaced with new acid-free ones as resources allow.

Most items in the collection have been photographed and digital images added to the collection database. Digital images are used wherever possible for research purposes and study visits to minimise object handling.

Volunteers engaged in hands-on work with the collection are trained in object handling and the fundamentals of collections care to minimise the risk of accidental damage.

Inert items such as ceramics and glass are stored in secure cupboards. Items are generally stored not touching each other. Plates stacks are not more than 4 items high, each separated by acid free tissue or bubble wrap. Only items in sound condition are stacked.

Archival quality storage materials are always used for collection storage, and cupboards and racking are inert.

### **Environmental monitoring and control**

Temperature and relative humidity are recorded by thermohygrographs and data loggers, plus weekly spot checks with a sling hygrometer. Light-levels and UV levels are recorded by hand-held machine. Temperature and humidity are monitored by sensors connected to a building management computer.

Thermohygrographs are regularly checked against a Vaisala electronic humidity meter which is calibrated yearly by saturated salt method.

Environmental conditions in the Watercolour Store, Oil Paintings Store and exhibitions gallery are maintained by an air conditioning system. The Upper Gallery, where oil paintings are on permanent display does not have air conditioning, but humidifiers are used to bring environmental conditions up to the standard required for Government Indemnity. Automatic blinds in the Upper Gallery regulate light levels.

### **Housekeeping**

Routine housekeeping tasks are carried out by the Collections Assistant, according to a task list that lays out the jobs that need to be done and their frequency

- Stores are checked monthly by curatorial staff for general cleanliness and tidiness.
- More detailed visual inspection of objects in store is carried out annually
- Public areas are checked daily by front-of-house staff
- Bug traps are checked monthly and changed regularly by curatorial staff
- Any insects trapped are identified and researched
- Any items displaying signs of infestation are isolated and dealt with appropriately, depending on the type and extent of infestation
- Display areas are cleaned daily by cleaning staff.
- Storage areas are cleaned quarterly by curatorial staff
- New acquisitions are examined for signs of insect infestation

### **Public Access**

Public access is provided through:

- Displays and Exhibitions: Oil paintings and sculptures from the collection are on display in our Upper Gallery and the 'Public Rooms' (Guildhall, Assembly Rooms and Pump Room).
- There is 'Open Storage' in public display areas for around 90 of the most popular works on paper and about half of the decorative art collection.
- Digital Access: Oil paintings from the collection can be viewed on the BBC 'Your Paintings' website; selected works from the collection can be viewed on our own website. 90% of the collection has been digitally photographed, meaning that images can be emailed to enquirers.
- Study Visits: Members of the public are welcome to view objects in store, by appointment. Where enquirers wish to see a large number of items, they are encouraged to consult the collection database and view digital images. Any enquirer who needs to see an actual work of art is always welcome to do so.
- Store Tours: Monthly tours of the art stores are provided for members of the public who wish to see more of the collection and find out about how we care for it.
- Special tours: are sometimes arranged, adapted for visitors with specific disabilities.

### **Oil Paintings**

Remedial conservation treatment has been carried out on most of the best paintings. Almost all works of good artistic quality and of interest are now in a fit state to be displayed.

The condition of paintings and their frames is recorded on the collection database, together with their priority ranking for conservation treatment.

All oil paintings in the collection are, when not on display, stored in a dark, air-conditioned environment. 95% of oil paintings in store hang on racks. Conserved paintings are stored to minimise the risk of damage; those awaiting treatment will not deteriorate as they are stored in stable conditions.

### **Works of Art on Paper**

A minority of works on paper are stored in frames. Most are stored in mounts or in Solander boxes. Around 3000 are glued into bound volumes dating from the 19th century. These were treated with de-acidification spray in 2010.

A paper conservator carried out a condition survey of the collection in 1999 and in subsequent years this has been used to plan conservation treatment and improve storage conditions.

Details of which items are in acidic mounts are recorded on the collection database. Priority items for remounting and conservation treatment are identified according to art historical significance and exhibition requirements.

### **Ceramics and Glass**

In 2002 a decorative art 'Open Storage' area was created for roughly 50% of our decorative art, increasing public access to the collection and creating more space, enabling conditions to improve.

During 2012-13 a programme of cleaning ceramics in store began. This project is ongoing.

## 2. Roman Baths

### General

All objects in the collection are displayed, handled, transported and stored in ways that protect them against damage and ensure their long term survival.

### The Roman Baths building

The Roman Baths is an archaeological site museum that opened to the public in 1897. It expanded significantly during the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and is managed seamlessly with the public in a site known as the Pump Room complex that contains vestiges of several ancient buildings built around Britain's only hot springs. A wide range of materials have been used in its construction.

There is no loading bay. Large objects are brought into the building via double doors to Abbey Church Yard. Small objects come in through other doors. Access for large objects to one store is via a street hoist. Most storage areas are in the basement, but there is a sensitive store on the second floor. Display areas are at basement level and on the ground floor. Objects are transported between stores and display areas, depending on their size, by lift, stairs, hand or trolley.

The emergency services are notified by an automatic alarm system. The fire station is a mile away. As it is a very high profile building within the city the Fire Service visits regularly for training purposes and has held several exercises in the building, including regional major incident training.

The building is maintained through a five-year rolling building maintenance Plan informed by a periodic condition survey.

### Nature of collections

The Roman Baths collections are Designated by ACE. A special group of objects within them, *The Roman Curse Tablets from Bath – Britain's Earliest Prayers*, were added to the UK Memory of the World Register by UNESCO in 2014.

The collections consist of archaeological, numismatic and local historical material with a range of environmental requirements. Collections are separated by material and environmental requirement. The collections are distributed widely, in eight locations, both on-site and in external stores and display settings, not just in Bath but also in Council-run premises in Keynsham.

The objects include a significant proportion of relatively low sensitivity materials – stone, bulk ceramics and building materials. More sensitive collections include metal, wood, bone and mixed material artefacts such as furniture and spa equipment.

### Environmental monitoring and control

On site in Bath collections are monitored using a Hanwell telemetric system, and in some stores and outstations revolving thermohygrographs and dial hygrometers are also used. UV monitors are used, but the great majority of artefacts have low sensitivity to light.

The more environmentally sensitive collections on display are contained in silica gel buffered cases, whilst those in store are sorted by material type in environmentally managed environments. The museum has temperature control and in some cases humidity control managed through a building management system. In places this requires careful management as collections are displayed close to their point of discovery on the archaeological site for interpretive reasons. Consequently the conservation needs of collections have to be managed alongside the conservation needs of the ancient monument - which are not always coincident.

Light is managed in storage areas and pest control measures are in place in relevant stores.

Collections in store are arranged to minimise the risk of damage from flooding.

### **Housekeeping**

The principal storage areas for the Roman Baths collection are on the second floor of the Pump Room building and within the basement areas of the complex, and all are cleaned as part of a rolling programme quarterly by Roman Baths collections staff. The external stores for the Roman Baths located in St John's, Newbridge and Pixash Lane, Keynsham are cleaned twice a year by collections staff and volunteers. All volunteers are trained in Roman Baths housekeeping by collections staff. Display areas in the Roman Baths are cleaned daily by the Operations team. Showcased displays are cleaned by the collections team when displays are changed and annually.

Records are kept during the programme, and remedial action planned if necessary.

New acquisitions made of wood are quarantined pending inspection for pests.

Bug traps are checked regularly.

Any items displaying signs of infestation are isolated and dealt with appropriately, depending on the type and extent of infestation.

Display areas are cleaned daily by cleaning staff.

No food or drink is allowed in the stores.

### **Public Access**

Public access is provided through:

- Displays and exhibitions: in Bath and Keynsham.
- Digital Access: A large number of coins has been photographed digitally meaning that images can be emailed to enquirers. A limited number of objects can be viewed on the website.
- Study Visits: Members of the public are welcome to view objects in store, by appointment.
- Store Tours: Monthly tours of the collection in store are provided for the public who wish to see more of the collection and find out about how we care for it.
- Open days: are held in out-stores at St John's, Newbridge and Pixash Lane, Keynsham.
- Talks and lectures sometimes focus on collection care and special Conservation Days and even Conservation Day Schools are sometimes arranged at which professional conservators demonstrate on site.

- Ancient monument conservation takes place during public opening periods and safety and work patterns permitting conservators are encouraged to spend time explaining their work to the public.
- Tunnel tours: are held monthly and include a sight of reserve collection areas.

## **Collection Care and Conservation policy**

### **Buildings**

*Policy: The museum collections are kept in buildings which are appropriate to and which aid the care of the collections and where conditions do not physically or chemically cause or pose risk of harm to objects.*

### **Personnel**

*Policy: The care of the collections is the responsibility of everyone who works or volunteers at the museums and their off-site stores, acting under the guidance of professionally trained collections staff. Conservation work will be carried out whenever possible by trained conservators with ICON registration or equivalent.*

### **Collections**

#### Environmental monitoring

*Policy: The collections are kept in a monitored and managed environment where conditions do not physically or chemically cause harm to objects, where steps are taken to manage risk, and environmental records are kept.*

#### Cleaning and housekeeping

*Policy: The areas in which collections are stored are cleaned regularly on a planned and managed housekeeping programme. Objects are monitored and conservation dusted if on open display or storage.*

#### Interventive conservation

*Policy: The museums will seek advice when required from a conservator or collection care adviser, or other appropriately qualified/experienced person on the museum's approach to collection care activities. Remedial conservation work shall be carried out by or under the supervision of an appropriately qualified conservator or suitably experienced collections staff. Objects will be prioritised for conservation treatment according to:*

- *Exhibition & display requirements*
- *Art or historical significance*
- *Vulnerability to damage and decay*

#### Documentation

*Policy: Records are made of condition checks, conservation work, and hazards or damage to objects and kept either filed on paper in the supporting object files and/or on the collection database.*

#### Storage

*Policy: The collections are housed in appropriate storage areas using methods which in themselves pose no risk of harm to the objects.*

#### Display

*Policy: The collections are displayed using methods which in themselves pose no risk of harm to the objects.*

#### Handling

*Policy: The collection is handled only by, or under the supervision of, or those trained by, collections staff.*

#### Transportation

*Policy: The collection is transported only by approved carriers, and always under the supervision of collections staff.*

#### Loans out

*Policy: The collections will normally be loaned out to Accredited museums, or equivalent, for specific and short-term exhibitions providing that the borrowing institution can fulfil appropriate loan conditions. In exceptional circumstances or for special occasions other venues and exhibition projects may be allowed to borrow, subject to a case by case assessment of risk.*

#### Loans in

*Policy: The museums borrow objects for specific displays, and afford the same care to objects on loan as to their own collections.*

#### Workforce training

*Policy: The museums ensure that all staff and volunteers have basic training in collection care procedures and practise.*

#### Review

*Policy: The Procedural Statements and Care and Conservation Plans which support this Collection Care and Conservation Policy will be reviewed annually by the Head of Heritage Services to ensure they continue to reflect best practice and respond to available resources.*