

THE GWYNEDD MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES SERVICE'S

CONSERVATION AND PRESERVATION POLICY

SCOPE

This policy covers the principles and practices to be observed in Museums. It outlines the key considerations for dealing with objects and related materials.

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally museums have focused their efforts on treating individual objects that have deteriorated. There are however too many objects, too few resources and conservators to continue conserving material in this way. Today conservation encompasses both preventive and remedial measures. This is reflected clearly in the Museums and Galleries Commission (M.G.C.) Registration Scheme for Museums which sets minimum standards for museum management. Refer to Registration Guidelines Section 6 for further details regarding conservation.

1. PREVENTIVE CONSERVATION

This considers the whole environment around all objects, attempting to make that environment one which fosters long term preservation. Preventive conservation can be carried out by trained conservators and/or trained museum staff. Different types of collections need different forms of care. What is appropriate, for example, for metallic objects is not necessarily appropriate for textile or photographic collections. With comprehensive preventive conservation the need for individual treatment can, over time, be reduced to more manageable levels.

All objects are subject to deterioration through physical, biological and chemical changes. Different materials deteriorate at different rates and in different ways. Understanding the causes of deterioration is essential in the planning of preventive conservation programmes. See Appendix 1.

2. PRESERVATION CONSIDERATIONS

Documentation

The Gwynedd Museums Service will endeavour to document the condition of all items in its collections and those on loan to the Service. It will further ensure that all object location and movement records are continually updated.

Environmental Monitoring

Storage and display areas must have controlled temperature and relative humidity levels appropriate for various materials. Storage areas will remain unlit when access is not required whilst ensuring that light levels are appropriate for items on display. All areas will be regularly monitored for pest infestation.

Building Maintenance

Routine building maintenance is essential at all museums and storage areas for assisting in providing the best possible environmental conditions.

Storage and Display

All storage and display areas will be secure, clean and well organised. All materials used in storage areas and especially for display purposes (wood, fabrics, paints, adhesives, shelving etc.) will be checked for suitability and tested where appropriate.

Marking and Labelling

The Gwynedd Museums Service will undertake the marking and labelling of items within its collections as part of its security precautions.

Packaging

The Gwynedd Museums Service will endeavour to package/repackage collections in ways considered to provide optimum protection using materials known to be either chemically benign or actively beneficial to objects they contain.

Handling

Handling by museum staff is the commonest cause of damage to objects. The risks will be minimised through restricted handling and training courses on handling as provided by the Council of Museums in Wales.

Disaster Planning

The Gwynedd Museums Service will maintain and update as necessary a comprehensive Disaster Plan.

3. REMEDIAL CONSERVATION

This is specialist work carried out by trained conservators. Damage and deterioration are treated and repaired using techniques which are reversible.

Gwynedd Museums Service will only use external conservators who are trained and registered with the Museums and Galleries Commission Conservation Unit to carry out remedial work on or off site. It will take advice as necessary concerning conservators from the Conservation Manager, Council of Museums in Wales and the Conservation Unit of the M.G.C.

Collections audits and condition surveys will prioritise objects in need of remedial treatment. The importance of the object and display needs are additional considerations reflecting the views of the curator, conservator and the public.

4. CONSERVATION CONSIDERATIONS

Conservation Document

The Gwynedd Museums Service will retain all documentation provided by conservators relating to:

- a) the history and condition of an item
- b) any treatment carried out
- c) recommendations for future care.

Continuity of Care

The Gwynedd Museums Service will ensure that appropriate standards of secure storage and constant environmental conditions should be adhered to by conservators treating objects off site.

5. SERVICE STATEMENT

Best advice on general care of objects will be given to external institutions and the public and must be given with professional judgement at all times.

6. STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Initial and on going training for staff is integral in developing an effective preventive conservation programme. Training, advice and monitoring of preventive conservation programmes will be sought from recognised institutions such as the Council of Museums in Wales.

7. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - "Nine Agents of Decay"

Appendix 2 - Materials.

APPENDIX 1

CANADIAN CONSERVATION INSTITUTE - FRAMEWORK FOR THE PRESERVATION OF MUSEUM COLLECTIONS

"NINE AGENTS OF DECAY"

1 DIRECT PHYSICAL FORCE: such as unnecessary and/or incorrect handling incorrect mounting for display, overcleaning

2

a) THIEVES

b) VANDALS

c) DISPLACERS - object being lost due to poor collections management

3 FIRE - also secondary damage from smoke and heat

4 WATER - flood, leaking roofs, fire suppression

5 PESTS - insects and vermin, mould and microbes

6 CONTAMINANTS - gases such as sulphur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide liquids such as acid rain, more typically various acids in sweat when handling objects dirt and dust

7 LIGHT - visible and ultraviolet

8 TEMPERATURE - incorrect or fluctuating which causes more damage

9 HUMIDITY - relative humidity (indication of the amount of water in a given amount of air) incorrect or fluctuating humidity which causes most damage)

APPENDIX 2

MATERIALS

1 CLEANING AND MAINTENANCE

- * Magnetic wipe dusters
- * Selection of quality brushes
- * Industrial vacuum cleaner
- * Specialist museum vacuum cleaner for objects
- * Cotton and latex gloves

- * Renaissance wax good quality furniture wax (Fiddes)
- * Other polishes as recommended by conservators
- * Synperonic N liquid for cleaning objects
- * Other cleaning materials as requested by conservators

2 STORAGE AND DISPLAY

- * Acid free boxes
- * Acid free tissue
- * Acid free mounting card
- * Acid free envelopes
- * Inert polyester envelopes and mounting strips (Melinex)
- * Plastic boxes and bags
- * Silica gel and/or Artsorb - for humidity control in display microclimates within storage boxes
- * Nylon fishing line
- * Inert foam Plastazote - for lining shelving and storage boxes
- * Unbleached calico
- * Dust sheets.

3 MARKING AND LABELLING

- * Tyvek labels
- * cases, creating
- * Acid free polypropylene twine
- * Unbleached cotton tape
- * Bamboo quilts
- * Ink - black and white
- * Rotring pens and ink
- * Paraloid B-72 - varnish as base for marking accession number and protective top coat
- * Permanent ink marking pens

4 ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING

- * Radio telemetry environmental monitoring system linked to computers
- * Portable light and ultra violet meter
- * Portable temperature and relative humidity meter e.g. Rotronic will calibration capabilities to check and re-calibrate other equipment
- * Static temperature and relative humidity thermohygrograph - immediate graphic information
- * Ultra violet filters for fluorescent lights
- * Humidifiers
- * De-humidifiers
- * Humidity indicator strips for display case
- * Insect monitoring traps