

1. MISSION AND COMMITMENT

TWAM's collections are at the heart of the organisation, they are both its unique selling point and its raison d'être. They number approximately two million items. The Art, Natural Sciences and Science and Industry collections are Designated as being of outstanding national and international importance. The management and care of the collections is central to the corporate aims and key activities which underpin the mission of Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums (TWAM) **to help people determine their place in the world and define their identities, so enhancing their self respect and their respect for others.**

The 2004-2009 TWAM Corporate Plan states in strategic aim 4.2 that TWAM will:

'Maximise access to our outstanding collections and other resources through conservation, documentation, research, scholarship, lively interpretation and innovative use of new technologies.'

This strategic aim will be achieved through two key activities. TWAM will:

'5.2: Maximise public use of our museums, collections and other resources by providing a varied programme of high quality exhibitions and programmes and promoting these to users.'

'5.8: Manage our collections to the highest possible standards.'

The Collection Services team will co-ordinate collections care through preventive and interventive conservation across TWAM in line with the mission and Corporate Plan, whilst promoting access for service users.

2. COLLECTIONS CONDITIONS OVERVIEW

TWAM will survey, benchmark and visually inspect the conditions in which collections are kept to determine priority areas for improvement in line with best practice as defined by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council's (MLA's) *'Benchmarks in Collections Care for Museums, Libraries and Archives Self Assessment Checklist'* (re:source, 2002). This process will be supported by action plans to guide and measure levels of improvement. Condition for all TWAM's collections will, as a minimum, meet the MLA's 'basic level' requirement.

3. PREVENTIVE CONSERVATION

Preventive conservation is defined as the planned and controlled change to the environment and surroundings of an object to reduce or eliminate, as far as possible, the known aspects of that object's deterioration. The following measures will be implemented to achieve this:

3.1 Provision of suitable building conditions

Building managers, supported by Museum Services staff, will be responsible for the provision and maintenance of suitable building conditions and will work closely with conservation staff to achieve the best possible conditions for the collections, making full use of defect reporting systems. The owners of buildings managed by TWAM (local authorities and the University of Newcastle) are responsible for inspecting buildings on a regular basis and undertaking repairs as required.

Collections are safeguarded through the management of the following systems:

- Building Maintenance
- Mechanical and Electrical (M&E) Maintenance
- Building Management Systems
- Intruder Alarms
- Fire and Evacuation Systems

All relevant M&E systems will be covered by service contracts and inspected periodically.

When capital developments are planned the care of the collections will be taken into account and Collection Services staff will be involved in the planning process.

3.2 Environmental monitoring

TWAM will:

- Monitor the environment in storage and display areas, to measure and record relative humidity (RH), temperature, visible light, ultra violet radiation (UV) and atmospheric pollutants where applicable
- Collect environmental data using continuous recording systems and hand held meters
- Collate, utilise and act upon data to provide stable and appropriate collection environments
- Monitor, manage and eradicate pests.

3.3 Environmental control

TWAM will store and display collections in a managed environment that minimises their rate of deterioration, using the following control factors and methods:

3.3.1. Control factors:

- **Relative humidity (RH):** for general mixed media collections, 40-60% RH with less than a 10% fluctuation in any 24 hour period
- **Temperature:** 18 – 25 ° centigrade
- **Visible light:** 50 – 250 lux, depending on the light sensitivity of the object
- **UV radiation:** less than 75 mw/lm (micro watts per lumen)
- **Display case construction:** where appropriate, objects on display will be cased and the internal case environments tailored to suit the objects within. Case environments will be inert in accordance with case specifications produced by TWAM's Collection Services team. Case fabrics will be tested to ensure they are suitable and do not release pollutants. Art sorb silica gel buffering material will be used, where appropriate, to maintain a stable RH. Lighting will be controlled to prevent heat build up and excessive light levels
- **Storage:** where practicable, stored collections will be housed in cupboards, inert crates, boxes, covered racking or covered pallets to protect against dust.

3.3.2. Control methods to be used:

- **Relative Humidity (RH):** localised art sorb buffering material, humidifiers, dehumidifiers, air conditioning
- **Temperature:** air handling units and localised heating and cooling
- **Visible light:** daylight exclusion, blinds, filtering films, controllable fibre optic lighting, Light Emitting Diodes
- **UV Radiation:** filtering films, daylight exclusion.

3.4 Housekeeping

3.4.1 Cleaning

Housekeeping programmes will be established and followed in line with benchmarking action plans. Staff and volunteers will be trained to clean storage and display areas in a way that is not detrimental to the collections. Chemical-based commercial cleaning products will be avoided in favour of dry cleaning methods. Vulnerable areas, such as the costume and textile store, will have dedicated cleaning materials and equipment to prevent the potential introduction of pests from other areas.

3.4.2 Quarantine procedures

New acquisitions and incoming materials will be held in quarantine pending full inspection and freezing to prevent insect pest infestation of other collections. Items to be frozen will be sealed in polythene and held at -30°C for 72 hours to eradicate pests. Only then will such objects be introduced into stores or displays containing other collection items.

3.4.3 High risk organic material

Collections that are particularly vulnerable to insect infestation, e.g. feathers and fur, will be segregated to prevent the rapid spread of an infestation in the event of an outbreak. They will be stored in clearly marked boxes that are easily identifiable for regular visual inspections.

3.4.4 Pest monitoring

Areas containing vulnerable collections will be monitored using insect traps that are checked at least once every month. Should pests be detected, the trap contents will be recorded and the area monitored rigorously to locate and eradicate the source.

3.5 Handling, moving and transport

- Museum objects are particularly at risk when being moved or handled. TWAM will move its museum objects safely and securely in accordance with the guidance contained in the Collection Services team's Object Handling Guide
- The movement of large or awkward items will be planned in accordance with advice from the Collection Services team. Such moves will be risk-assessed and method statements will be produced
- All objects that are transported will be suitably wrapped or crated to give them the most suitable protection, as specified by the Collection Services team
- Items that are transported abroad will be accompanied by a courier, who will be either a member of TWAM's staff or a delegated representative from another museum.

3.6 Disaster planning

Disaster plans for all venues housing museum collections will be regularly reviewed and updated where necessary.

4. INTERVENTIVE CONSERVATION

Interventive conservation is the active treatment of an object to stabilise its condition, or to enhance its condition, or some aspect of its significance for study and interpretation. TWAM will work in accordance with the following principles:

- 4.1** Only appropriately qualified and experienced conservators and collections care staff will be employed to carry out conservation work.
- 4.2** Conservation work should be underpinned by knowledge and understanding of the object. Critical to this is documentation of its condition and treatment, and a long term plan for the care of the object.
- 4.3** Conservation work should be planned and carried out in consultation with curatorial staff and undertaken by an appropriately qualified person, or under the supervision of an appropriately qualified person.
- 4.4** Work undertaken by TWAM's conservators will conform to the standards set down in the code of ethics of the United Kingdom Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (UKIC) and will be in line with the Health and Safety at Work Act.
- 4.5** All treatments will be photographed and documented on MODES and records will be maintained in accordance with SPECTRUM standards.

5. EXPERTISE, ADVICE AND SERVICES

- 5.1** TWAM is committed to continuing professional development of its staff and to the building of relevant knowledge and expertise.
- 5.2** Caring for the collections is the responsibility of all staff. The Collection Services team is committed to training and to raising awareness of collections care issues. By promoting these to staff members, paid and voluntary, TWAM will communicate the message that safe handling and use of the collections will preserve them for the future and in doing so allow access to them for longer.
- 5.3** All guidelines and information relating to collections care practices and procedures will be held on a central computer network drive which will be accessible to all staff via the TWAM network.
- 5.4** The Collection Services team will provide advice and information to the public and to other museum professionals regionally, nationally and internationally.
- 5.5** TWAM will make available selected conservation services and training to its North East Regional Museum Hub partners.

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A large print version of this policy is available from
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