



### Museums and Archives Conservation and Collections Care Policy

**Collections:** The Museums and Archives of The Royal College of Surgeons of England, including Deposited and Corporate Archives; the Hunterian Collection; the College Museum; the Wellcome Museum of Anatomy and Pathology; the Odontological Collection; the Historical Instrument Collection; the Special Collections and associated reserve collections.

**Governing body:** The Council of the Royal College of Surgeons of England ('the College') /  
The Board of Trustees of the Hunterian Collection

**Date approved by Trustees of the Hunterian Collection:** 4 July 2012

**Date approved by College Council:** 12 July 2012

**Date for review:** June 2017

#### 1. Scope and purpose of the policy

- 1.1. The College holds collections of outstanding medical, scientific, historical and cultural significance. It aims to use these collections:
  - 1.1.1. To enhance the College's reputation by raising awareness of surgeons and their work in society.
  - 1.1.2. To aid the professional work of the College by providing training resources.
  - 1.1.3. To facilitate and generate excellent medical, scientific, historical and other research.
- 1.2. The aim of this policy is to outline preventive and interventive collections care measures that will maximise access to the collections for present and future users.
- 1.3. This policy works within the College's overall approach to risk management, as articulated in the Risk Register.
- 1.4. Under the terms and conditions under which Parliament entrusted the Hunterian Collection to the Company of Surgeons, "the Preparations shall be kept in a state of Preservation, and the Collection in as perfect a state as possible".
- 1.5. This policy does not cover material held in the College's Library and Surgical Information Services.
- 1.6. This policy complements and expands upon the *Museums and Archives Collections Management Policy (2012)* and will be realised by the activities detailed in the *Museums and Archives Collections Management Plan* (reviewed annually).

#### 2. Conservation principles

- 2.1. The College takes a strategic, risk management approach to collections care.
- 2.2. The College strives to provide an appropriate climate of temperature, relative humidity and light levels in a pollution and pest-free environment that achieves a satisfactory balance between the long-term preservation of the objects and specimens, and accessibility to staff and external users.
- 2.3. Conservation requirements/treatments are prioritized within the framework of resources available.
- 2.4. All conservation treatments carried out on objects are documented in the collection management system.

- 2.5. Collections care is the responsibility of all staff. The College will employ professional, qualified conservation, curatorial and archival personnel and provide appropriate training, risk assessments and standard operating procedures for them and for properly supervised volunteers when working on collections. Where skills are not available in-house for a particular process or material, resources will be provided for external expertise.
- 2.6. Collections care needs, risks and activities will be communicated within the Conservation Unit (weekly) and/or Museums and Archives (weekly). They are reported to the Board of Trustees of the Hunterian Collection (quarterly) and the Museums and Archives Committee (triannually).

### 3. Preventive measures

- 3.1. Preventative conservation covers the measures necessary to reduce the risk of or check the deterioration of objects, specimens, archives and structures. The necessary preventative measures are based on a thorough understanding of how objects, archives and specimens react to their environment and deteriorate physically or chemically. A preventive conservation strategy is the primary objective in the College's approach to collections care, supported by interventive approaches where necessary.
- 3.2. The College will provide sufficient secure space in a suitable condition to store the collections (and for archival material strive to achieve storage facilities as recommended in PD 5454: 2012 *Guide for the Storage and Exhibition of Archival Materials*).
- 3.3. Access to stores will be limited to Museums and Archives staff, suitably trained volunteers, and essential maintenance personnel. Where access is necessary for the latter, Museums and Archives will be consulted and access will be supervised. If bringing material to researchers elsewhere in the College is impracticable or will involve unacceptable risk of damage to collections, such external users will be granted supervised access to the stores.
- 3.4. Cleaning of display and storage areas will be undertaken by, or overseen by, Museums and Archives staff.
- 3.5. Appropriate levels of security will be provided, including closed-circuit television in museum and reading areas and authorised key allocation systems.
- 3.5. Objects will be displayed and stored in an environment that minimizes their rate of deterioration. Accordingly, all stores, display areas and galleries will be monitored continually for temperature and relative humidity (and if necessary, UV light and pollution), data extracted monthly to ensure the correct environmental conditions are being met and maintained.
- 3.6. Appropriate storage materials will be employed (for example, acid-free boxes).
- 3.7. Pest control measures will be deployed, and pest risks monitored.
- 3.8. Hazardous material will be segregated, and appropriate risk signage displayed.
- 3.9. Human remains will be stored in defined areas, in accordance with the Human Tissue Authority regulations and most recent governmental guidelines, for example, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport *Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums* (2005). Visual condition assessments will be undertaken at least monthly for human remains on display and at least annually for human remains in store.
- 3.10. Measures will be taken over above those necessary for the day-to-day protection of our collections to provide emergency arrangements and facilities in the event of disastrous damage to the collections, as detailed in the *Museums and Archives Disaster Plan*, with which all staff will be familiar.

#### 4. Interventive conservation

- 4.1. Prioritized preservation plans will be devised for each collection area and the highest-risk items treated within available resources each year.
- 4.2. Appropriate safe facilities will be provided for hazardous material work.
- 4.3. External funding will be sought for high priority treatment that is beyond existing resources.
- 4.4. Only suitably qualified and experienced external professionals will be engaged to treat the collections.
- 4.5. Staff time and other resources will be dedicated to researching and improving conservation methods in appropriate areas.

#### 5. Use and movement

- 5.1. Use will be risk assessed and standard operating procedures followed for common functions.
- 5.2. Object movement and handling guidelines (for example in the *Museums Documentation Procedural Manual*) will be issued and followed. In addition:
  - 5.2.1. Details of hands-on access for researchers can be found in the *Museums and Archives Research Policy (2012)*.
  - 5.2.2. Specimens in the Wellcome Museum of Anatomy and Pathology may be handled with care.
  - 5.2.3. Standard handling and storage procedures are followed when specimens are deployed for training and learning within College wherever feasible.
- 5.3. Users will be provided with relevant equipment (for example, gloves, bookrests) and information (for example, handling guidelines and risk assessments) to minimize risk of damage during use.
- 5.4. Material will be withdrawn from use if deemed at serious risk (in which case, resources will be sought to address these conservation needs as a priority). If so, the generation of surrogate copies, either physical or digital, will be considered wherever possible to ensure continued access.
- 5.5. Appropriate staff or suitably trained volunteers will undertake conservation reports, risk assessments and photography of material prior to acquisition, display and loans out; loans in will be assessed upon arrival and compared with the lender's condition report (see also the *Museums and Archives Acquisition and Disposal Policy 2012* and the *Museums and Archives Loans Policy 2012*). Material may be withdrawn from the proposed use at any time (for example, the loan or acquisition rejected) if the risk is unacceptably high.
- 5.6. Incoming material will be quarantined where necessary.
- 5.7. Acquired human remains (see the *Museums and Archives Acquisition and Disposal Policy 2012*) will be initially assessed by the Conservation and Curatorial teams and triaged according to conservation priority.
- 5.8. The Conservation Unit will not carry out work on any objects/specimens without securing permission from the legitimate title holder.
- 5.9. Material will be assessed before movement, and appropriate measures taken to protect the material and the handlers: for large material, external operatives may be necessary, and resources will be provided to this end.
- 5.10. Where relevant, removal of tissue for histological diagnosis will be carried out by a suitably qualified member of staff.
- 5.11. Otherwise, destructive techniques of study should be taken only when no suitable alternatives exist; see also the *Museums and Archives Research Policy (2012)*.