

# Collections Care and Conservation Policy

The Bishop's Palace

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# Collections Care and Conservation Policy

The Bishop's Palace, Wells, Somerset

Governing body: The Palace Trust

Our mission is to provide a place of hospitality for spiritual reflection, Christian ministry and learning, whilst conserving and developing the only living and breathing Bishop's Palace and Gardens open to everyone.

## 1. Introduction and statement of purpose

The Bishop's Palace has been the residence of the Bishop of Bath & Wells since the early 13<sup>th</sup> century. As such, inhabitants of the Palace have been transitory leaving very little artefacts to tell the Palace's story. The Palace strives to preserve its limited collection in the best possible condition for its audiences today and for future generations. It does this through a combination of preventive and remedial conservation, and through increasingly high standards of collections management and security.

A dedicated Property and Collection Manager will manage all collection care and conservation onsite.

Preventive conservation is the most effective means of preserving the diverse range of materials in the collections. The aim of preventive conservation is to minimize deterioration and damage by managing risks to the collection.

The monitoring of the Palace's environment (temperature, relative humidity) and pest management is carried out by the Property and Collection Manager.

Remedial conservation treatments are required for some objects to stabilize them and improve their long-term preservation.

Housekeeping, building maintenance and security are conducted by the Property and Collection Manager and their team.

Emergency Planning, and the training of staff in disaster recovery procedures, are also vital to the care of the collections.

## 2. Long term objectives

2.1 The Palace Trust aspires to apply the most up-to-date international standards of best practice to the care, collections management and conservation of its collections.

The Palace will:

- continue to raise standards in the conservation, storage and display of collections, using the Collections Trust's Benchmarks in Collections Care for Museums, Libraries and Archives to periodically review progress.

- develop fundraising opportunities in line with the collection’s stewardship needs, with a view to increasing staff levels, upgrading documentation standards and accessibility, and caring for specific collections.
- address backlogs in the documentation of collections according to the Palace’s Collections and Archive Strategy.
- transfer historical conservation records to a new collections database and create online access to collections images and data..
- develop the collections through acquisition and disposal according to the Palace’s Acquisition and Disposal Policy in order to maximise their value for research life-long education and wider public enjoyment
- build staff knowledge, and share staff expertise with the wider museum community;
- build on collaborative relationships with various stakeholders, particularly Wells Cathedral, Wells and Mendip Museum, Glastonbury Abbey and Downside Abbey.

### 3. Legal framework and standard of care

3.1 The Palace will comply with all relevant Health and Safety legislation, including, but not limited to, the Health and Safety at Work Act (1974) and Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (2002).

### 4. Staffing, personal development and knowledge sharing

4.1 The Palace recruited an experienced Property and Collections Manager to oversee the care and management of the Palace Trusts collections in 2023.

4.2 New staff will receive appropriate induction training and supervision and must comply with this Policy. The skills of all staff that work with collections will be developed through annual staff development reviews (SDR) and continuing professional development (CPD) training such as attendance at seminars and conferences.

4.3 All new staff, volunteers, interns, students, visiting researchers, and others working with collections will be trained in health and safety matters, object handling, and be made aware of any risks associated with the collections, as well as receiving on-going supervision from conservation and collections staff.

### 5. Preventive conservation

5.1 The Property and Collection Manager will be consulted on a regular basis to ensure that all buildings are well maintained, and any defects are remedied promptly. Any faults that threaten unacceptable environmental conditions, for example water leaks, will be remedied as a priority.

- 5.2 Monitoring of environmental conditions (temperature and relative humidity (RH)) in the Palace buildings, will be undertaken by the Property and Collection Manager, using regularly calibrated telemetric and stand-alone systems. Ongoing monitoring will take place, with results evaluated and acted upon.
- 5.3 Temperature and RH conditions will be managed by controlled opening of all external windows and doors, monitored use of the Palace's storage heaters and underfloor heating. Light levels will be managed through controllable lighting and the elimination of natural light where relevant. UV filters will be maintained on all relevant windows. The environmental needs of an object will be part of the evaluation for any kind of use.
- 5.4 The threat from pests is managed by the Property and Collection Manager. Insect pests will be monitored using traps, spot-checks of high-risk zones, and the vigilance of all staff. Insect pest prevention will be maintained through good housekeeping, restriction of eating areas, removal of potential pest breeding spaces, and quarantine of incoming material. Infestations will be treated promptly by isolation, deep-freezing or manual cleaning as appropriate for the material, to be followed by regular checking. External contractors, under the direction of the Property and Collection Manager, will undertake the monitoring and control of rodent pests.
- 5.5 Handling of objects will be kept to a minimum, and staff and volunteers will be guided by the Property and Collection Manager. Manual handling training will be provided by the University Safety Office via the Departmental Safety Officer for all staff involved in moving large or heavy items.
- 5.6 Damage to collections while in transit, whether within the Palace site or from off-site facilities, will be mitigated by the packing methods employed by well-trained and equipped staff (see Guidelines for Handling Objects).
- 5.7 Good housekeeping, and the use of display cases or storage enclosures, will be used as methods to control dust levels. Cleaning routines in the Palace will follow a strict rota and be carried out by trained staff or volunteers under the supervision of the Property and Collection Manager. Collections on display will only be cleaned by, or under the supervision of, trained collections staff or volunteers.
- 5.8 Pollutants will be managed by the choice of materials used for packing objects in the reserve collection, new display cases, storage furniture, mounting methods and construction or finishing of areas containing museum collections.
- 5.9 Physical and chemical damage to collections will also be mitigated wherever possible by accurate identification of materials.
- 5.10 All display and storage of archival material will be guided by BSI PD5454:2012 Guide for the Storage and Exhibition of Archival Materials. The display and storage of object collections will be guided by PAS 198:2012 Specification for Managing Environmental Conditions for Cultural Collections.

## 6. Remedial conservation

- 6.1 Remedial conservation will be carried out by qualified conservators, guided by the Institute of Conservation's (Icon) Code of Conduct and Professional Standards (2015).

- 6.2 Prior to any remedial conservation the object will be fully examined, and a condition assessment made. Past treatment records, currently not available digitally, will also be consulted.
- 6.3 Remedial conservation treatments will involve the appropriate stabilization of objects rather than restoration. The principal of minimum intervention will be adhered to.
- 6.4 No object will be altered, nor material removed from it, without justification. When such removal or alteration is required, the object will first be documented in its original state and any removed material will be kept, labelled and filed.
- 6.5 All remedial treatments will be fully documented with a written and photographic record on the applicable collections management databases.

## 7. Auditing and monitoring collections

- 7.1 The Palace Trust has developed its procedures and methods for accessioning of collections, locations indexing and movement recording and is carried out according to SPECTRUM standards.
- 7.2 Monitoring of collections for problems relating to conservation and care is carried out systematically throughout the year via regular surveys of vulnerable objects, storage upgrade projects, and during the process of accessing the collections for research and answering enquiries.
- 7.4 Assigning condition reports to objects is part of the induction process for new staff working with collections. These assessments form part of the permanent record kept for the collection.

## 8. Use of Palace collections for research and loan

- 8.1 All acquisitions and disposals (including disposals due to irreparable decay or damage), will follow the Palace's Acquisition and Disposal Policy.
- 8.2 All proposed uses of the collections in relation to research and loans will be balanced against their historical, cultural as well as insurance value, and decisions will be made by senior collections staff, taking advice from other subject specialists where necessary.
- 8.3 The majority of the Palace Trust's core collection is on public display 350 days of the year. Researchers viewing artefacts are briefed by collections staff regarding appropriate handling and are asked to wear gloves to minimise risk to artefacts. Such visits are supervised by collections staff at all times who also assist with handling. Where deemed necessary, conservation staff may be asked to advise on or to assist with handling, either in preparation for a visit or during it.
- 8.4 Outgoing loans will be managed according to the Palace's Conditions for Loans signed by the borrower. In addition, a customised Loan Agreement is developed for each loan, specifying environmental conditions for individual artefacts, particular security needs, display requirements and insurance valuations. The Loan Agreement is signed by both parties.
- 8.5 All incoming loans must be accompanied by a formal loan agreement between the Palace Trust and loaning individual or institution and will be treated according to that agreement. Condition

assessments will be carried out by the Palace if not supplied by the loaning institution and will be repeated when the loan is returned.

- 8.6 All objects agreed for loan (subject to meeting the Palace's loan conditions) will receive any necessary conservation treatment before they leave the Museum. Condition assessments, packing, packing instructions and the briefing of couriers on the packing and handling of the objects will be carried out by the Property and Collection Manager, who will also advise on the suitability of mounting and display methods. Collections staff will carry out the administration of the loan.

## 9. Security and emergency response

- 9.1 Security of the Palace is overseen by the Property and Collection Manager as a site resident. All security systems are maintained by companies with the appropriate accreditation. Security reviews are carried out annually.
- 9.2 Security of collections is paramount. Display cases will be kept securely locked, and objects on open display monitored by trained front of house staff and volunteers. Visitors to collections areas are supervised at all times. Any theft or unaccounted loss will be reported to the police.
- 9.4 Recruitment procedures for all staff and volunteers are according to formal Palace procedures that require disclosure of unspent convictions, Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks and references.
- 9.5 The Palace's Emergency Plan and the Palace's Emergency Call-out Cascade will be reviewed annually and revised where necessary to ensure documents remain relevant.
- 9.6 Emergency training exercises/scenario planning events are carried out at least annually, coordinated by the Palace's Property and Collection Manager.
- 9.7 Emergency response equipment in the Palace buildings is maintained and checked by the Property and Collection Manager on an annual basis.

## 10. Policy publication and review procedure

This policy will be made available for visitors to the Palace to view on request. It will be reviewed periodically and at least every five years. Any funders and stakeholders for whom this policy is directly relevant will be notified of any changes to the content and the implications of any changes for the management of the Palace's collection.