



North East Museums

Collections Care and Conservation Policy

Name of Governing Body: North East Museums Strategic Board

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1. Introduction

This policy will guide North East Museums (NEM) in carrying out collections care and conservation to the highest possible professional standards. The policy relates to physical objects and analogue archives and does not cover our digital collections.

1.1 Definition and Scope

Collections care and conservation refers to the practice of managing the safe preservation of collection objects (in both the archive and museum collections). Caring for the collections is a fundamental duty for all museums and archives. This policy includes a combination of preventative and remedial conservation measures, designed to ensure long-term preservation:

- Preventative conservation covers the measures necessary to slow down or minimise the deterioration of museum objects and specimens and structures.
- Remedial conservation involves a treatment to an object or specimen to bring it to a more acceptable condition or state in order to stabilise it or enhance some aspects of its cultural or scientific value.

1.2 Mission and Values

Our mission is to welcome and connect people to the past, present and future of the North East through stories, shared spaces and experiences.

We will help people understand and act on local and global challenges:

- **Equality** – we will provide a warm welcome to everyone, break down barriers caused by inequality and discrimination and share diverse stories.
- **Wellbeing** – we will use our spaces and services to support people's physical and mental health.
- **Social mobility** – we will deliver learning experiences, volunteering opportunities and pathways for personal development for people of all ages and backgrounds.
- **Climate** – we will raise awareness about the environment and encourage people to act for a sustainable future.
- **Place** – we will celebrate North East England, inspire local pride and use our resources to support research, innovation and economic regeneration

Collections care and conservation at NEM aims to underpin NEM's mission and commitments.

- **Equality**
The sharing of diverse stories, facilitated by the conservation of our varied collections of national and international importance, is an enriching experience which is open to all.
- **Wellbeing**

The Conservation department aims to engage and enhance people's lives through making it possible to access our collections and tell their stories

- **Social mobility**

The Conservation department delivers learning experiences to the public, institutions and members of staff. It is committed to nurturing understanding and development through close contact with the local universities and colleges. The department endeavours to support and train students and volunteers of all ages and backgrounds.

- **Climate**

Through careful management of resources, such as minimising unnecessary waste, the Conservation team supports NEM's commitment to Climate. The energy used to control the environments within stores are from renewable sources. More information can be found in NEM's Environmental Responsibility Policy.

- **Place**

The work of the conservation department underpins the commitment to Place by ensuring the preservation and safe access to the collections which belong to, inspire and represent the region. This work allows NEM to acquire temporary loans which bring visitors to the region and give a sense of civic pride.

Although collections care and conservation does not always contribute directly to all commitments, it maximises access to NEM's outstanding collections, allowing staff, visitors and scholars to have meaningful interactions with our collections.

1.3 Related Documents

This policy is part of NEM's Collections Management Framework. It should be read alongside: Documentation Policy; Documentation Procedural Manual; Documentation Plan; Care of Working Objects Policy; Collections Access Policy; Emergency Plan and Archives Collections Information Policy.

The Environmental Responsibility Policy should also be consulted.

2. Legal and ethical considerations

Collections care and conservation at NEM will comply with all relative legislative and ethical standards including but not limited to

- Institute of Conservation Code of Conduct
- Institute of Conservation Professional Standards
- Museum Association Code of Ethics
- Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974

- Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012
- The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (COSHH) 2002
- Archives Service Accreditation Standard (2018)
- Archives and Records Association Code of Ethics (updated 2024)
- British Standard 4971:2017; 'Conservation & Care of Archive & Library Collections'.
- All care, conservation and use of human remains will conform to the Policy on Human Remains, and the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums (2005).
- NEM is bound by the Ionising Radiation Regulations 2017. Collections which fall under these regulations are registered with the HSE
- NEM seeks additional advice from an external independent Radiation Protection Advisor (Peak RPA)

3. Professional Standards

The following professional standards will guide collections care and conservation at NEM:

- **Storage**
NEM aims to store museum collections in accordance with PAS198:2012. Archival collections will take additional guidance from BS:4971:2017 as well as EN:16893:2018 for heritage collections and BS 4783:1988 for digital media. This will be reviewed as new guidelines become available.
- **Conservation Work**
Work undertaken by NEM's conservators will conform to the standards set down in the Code of Ethics of the Institute of Conservation (ICON) Code of Conduct and Professional Standards and to BS 4971:2017 'Conservation and Care of Archive and Library Collections' 'Recommendations for Repair and Allied Processes for the Conservation of Documents'.
- **Documentation of Conservation Work**
All treatments will be photographed and documented on EMu (museum objects) as per Spectrum 5.1 guidance. Archival interventive treatments are currently recorded in internal logs, however, future treatments will be recorded in the new archival Collections Management Software (to be procured in 2025).
- **Benchmarking Standards**
NEM will continue working towards meeting and improving on basic benchmarking standards in all of its stores as per the Collections Trust Benchmarks in Collections Care version 2 (2018): A Self-assessment Check List.

4. Principles of Collections Care and Conservation at NEM

4.1 Collections Conditions Overview

NEM will survey, benchmark and visually inspect the conditions in which collections are kept, to determine priority areas for improvement in line with best practice.

4.2 Environmental Monitoring

NEM will:

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

4.3 Environmental Control

NEM will store and display collections in managed environments that minimise their rates of deterioration.

4.4 Care of Working Objects

See Care of Working Objects Policy.

4.5 Conservation Treatments

Conservation work will only be undertaken by an appropriately qualified person, or under the supervision of an appropriately qualified person.

Conservation work should be underpinned by knowledge and understanding of the collection item. Critical to this is documentation of its condition and treatment, and a long-term plan for the care of the collection item.

Conservation work should be planned and carried out in consultation with curatorial staff and/or archivists.

4.6 Conservation Staff Training and Development

NEM is committed to continuing development of its staff and to the building and updating of relevant knowledge and expertise. In particular, it is committed to the ongoing renewal of health and safety related training.

4.7 Freelance Conservation Staff

Where NEM works with freelance conservators, due diligence will be carried out in checking relevant qualifications, experience and gaining references.

4.8 Advice

Caring for the collections is the responsibility of all staff. The Conservation Team is committed to training and to raising awareness of collections care issues.

By promoting these to staff, volunteers and researchers NEM 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.

Guidelines and information relating to collections care practices and procedures will be accessible to all staff.

The Conservation Team will provide advice and information to the public and to other museum and archives professionals regionally, nationally and internationally.

4.9 Access

NEM will promote good practice in handling collections and provide suitable environments and equipment to protect them while in use e.g. gloves, supports, weights, polyester sleeves as appropriate.

NEM will provide microfilm or digital access to collections and information about collections as appropriate/possible.

NEM may withdraw collections from public access if they are identified as at serious risk from handling or display. Where possible, access under supervision will be facilitated.

4.10 Environmental Responsibility

NEM will carefully balance collections care and environmental responsibility with the aim of reducing environmental impact, where possible and appropriate, while providing the best possible care for our collections.

See Environmental Responsibility Policy

5. Health and Safety within the collection

All hazardous materials within the collection will be identified and made safe where possible, this includes objects containing radioactive sources, asbestos and poisons such as arsenic, mercuric chloride, and lead among others. This also includes collections stored in chemicals such as formaldehyde and industrial methylated spirits.

EMu will be used to record hazards within the Museum collection. Each new object entering the collection should be given a hazard tag including where there are no hazards present. Where possible all objects with a known hazard should also have their specific hazards tagged. If an object (as will be the case for the majority of records) does not have a hazard tagged, then a risk assessment should be completed before that object is accessed. Hazards identified within the Archive collection are reported to the Archives Lead and recorded on the Archive CMS. New hazards are monitored at collections intake. Radioactive collection items are managed in accordance with the Ionising Radiation Regulations 2017. All collection items which fall into this category are assessed and monitored by an external Radiation Protection Advisor (Peak RPA) and NEM's Radiation Protection Supervisor.

All asbestos containing collections fall under the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012 and should be inspected on a regular basis, arranged by the manager responsible for each building housing such collections.

NEM will run in house training on identifying and working with hazardous items within the collection for all new staff who will work with the collections and will provide refresher training periodically.

Risk assessments should be completed before accessing objects in the stores. Following visual risk assessments within display cases, formal risk assessments may be required if a potential hazard is noted.

6. Users of this Policy

Care of the collection is the responsibility of all staff at NEM.

The Conservation Team are the primary users of this policy. Curatorial, Documentation and Archive staff should also implement it in their work.

All staff who come into contact with the collection have a responsibility to be mindful of the condition of and potential hazards inherent in objects and are responsible for completing the relevant risk assessment. If they have any doubts, they should immediately consult a member of the Conservation Team.

This policy is available to all staff, volunteers and freelancers in the following location [Collections Care & Conservation Policy 2024.docx](#). It will be shared with new staff as part of their induction and revised versions will be distributed to all staff.

Contact details for the Conservation Team can be found here:

<https://www.twmuseums.org.uk/collections/conservation>