



Conservation & Collections Care Policy

National Museum of the Royal Navy, 2020

Version 1.0

For review by Collections, Research, Learning and Access Committee, 25th November 2020

Approved by Board of Trustees:

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 This policy shall supersede the Care & Conservation Policy of 2015, which was due for review in September 2020. The policy has been renewed in light of the expanded Conservation resource within NMRN, and the new structure of the Conservation & Collections team, implemented November 1st 2020.

1.2 The NMRN group of museums, comprising the National Museum of the Royal Navy, the Royal Navy Submarine Museum, The Royal Marines Museum, Explosion! Museum of Naval Firepower, the Fleet Air Arm Museum, NMRN Hartlepool and HMS Caroline, share a goal to promote public understanding of the Royal Navy, its constituent branches, past, present and future. Central to achieving this goal is the conservation and care of our collections across all our sites, enabling us to facilitate public engagement with our collections through physical, intellectual and digital means.

2.0 Purpose of policy

2.1 This policy describes the principles of working within Conservation and Collections Care, as informed by risk management and the standards that guide our work. This policy is one of several within the overarching Collections Management Framework, which also encompasses Collections Development, Collections Information, Loans and Access. This policy reflects the importance placed on the care of our collections as laid out in the Corporate Plan, and supports the strategic aims therein.

3.0 Definitions

3.1 The following definitions are set out in the British Standard PAS197:2009 'Code of practice for cultural collections management':

3.1.1 Collections care (Preventive conservation): the range of activities intended to safeguard a collection. Note: these can include organisation policies, security, storage, cleaning, maintenance, handling, scientific investigation, environmental monitoring and control, conservation, provision of surrogates and emergency planning.

3.1.2 Conservation: interventive techniques applied to an item to achieve chemical and physical stabilisation for the purpose of extending the useful life of the item and to ensure its continued availability for exhibition and study.

4.0 Standards

4.1 This policy is informed by national and international professional standards, followed and described by the Institute of Conservation (Icon) and the Museums Association, as well as ethical guidelines for museum professionals. The following standards are relevant:

- BS PAS 197:2009 Code of practice for cultural collections management
- BS PAS 198:2012 Specification for managing environmental conditions for cultural collections
- BS EN 16853:2017 Conservation process: decision making, planning and implementation
- BS EN 16085:2012 Methodology for sampling from materials of cultural property
- Spectrum 5.0 2017
- Icon Ethical Guidance June 2020
- Museums Association Code of Ethics 2016

5.0 Conservation principles

5.1 Conservation treatments shall be carried out by suitably qualified persons in accordance with professional best practice and ethical guidelines. Students, volunteers and apprentices engaged in conservation will be supervised by qualified conservation staff.

5.2 Interventive conservation treatments shall be prioritised for collections items that require stabilisation to prevent loss or damage, and for items required for display or other access needs. This will be informed by ongoing assessment of the collections and by public programming.

5.3 Only materials that are tested and safe for conservation use shall be employed in the conservation treatment of collections items. Materials used should have minimal impact on objects and be reversible, wherever possible.

5.4 All conservation works shall be documented by written and photographic record, and the records will be stored appropriately so that they are accessible, whether via the collections management database Adlib or via facilities management software CAFM.

5.5 When external conservation services are required, practitioners will be appropriately qualified and experienced, with a preference for Icon-accredited conservators.

5.6 Where heavily interventive conservation works, such as to a historic ship or aircraft, are deemed appropriate, there will be a clearly reasoned and justified case made for these interventions.

5.7 Conservation of very large or complex objects, such as historic ships or aircraft, shall be guided and managed through specific conservation management plans.

6.0 Collections care principles

6.1 NMRN will take measures to prevent damage to the collections, by reducing risk of deterioration as far as practically possible, to all items whether stored, in use, displayed, in operation or on loan.

6.2 NMRN aims to provide suitable environments for display, storage and use of its collections, and to identify areas where improvements are required. Assessment of conditions shall continue on an ongoing basis.

6.3 Guidelines on appropriate environmental conditions for different types of collection material are available to all staff and referenced in the standards named in section 4 above.

6.4 Monitoring systems shall be put in place and maintained in working order to allow environmental conditions to be measured and tracked, and areas of inadequate conditions identified.

6.5 The risks of damage to the collection through pest activity are recognised and should be managed through identification of risk, knowledge of the condition of the collections, identification of pest activity and the implementation of integrated pest management strategies. Training for staff to ensure the required skills resource will be carried out.

6.6 All staff will follow agreed procedures for handling, use and storage of the collection, and shall oversee students, apprentices and volunteers in same. Any damage to items in the collection will be reported and recorded.

6.7 Materials, methods and equipment used for packing and/or exhibition purposes shall be appropriate for use alongside collections items, with regards to exposing collections items to light, UV, vapours, or other forms of physical or chemical harm.

6.9 NMRN shall ensure that conditions required by lenders can be met, to prevent damage to any items on loan to the museum. Institutions entering into agreements to borrow NMRN collections items should provide written acceptance of the NMRN Conservation and Collections Care Policy.

6.10 Collections items required for research or study shall be made accessible as far as possible by managing the extent of handling, display or other use of the items in consideration of the condition of those objects and risks from same. Risk assessments around same will be produced and reviewed regularly.

6.11 NMRN shall maintain an Emergency & Salvage Plan with external supporting resources by contractor to ensure that risks to the collections and buildings from disaster or other unpredictable events such as fire, flood, pandemic etc. are minimised.

7.0 Working and outdoor objects

7.1 NMRN collections include many large and very large objects that by necessity are stored/displayed outdoors, such as historic ships and ordnance. Condition of these items will be subject to regular review and an appropriate maintenance programme put in place.

7.2 Intangible heritage value will be taken into consideration when reviewing collections items displayed outdoors.

7.3 Appropriate guidance will be sought and considered when approaching conservation and/or operation of large objects, such as the ABTEM Large & Working Objects Guidelines and guidance distributed by National Historic Ships.

7.4 NMRN will seek to operate some objects where this is considered to be of educational value or critical to public understanding of the object. Such objects may require more heavily interventive conservation work than static collections items, but this will be done with the aim of minimising damage to, or loss/replacement of, original fabric through such use or operation. No such work will be carried out without consultation with conservation staff.

7.5 Any operation of working objects will be supervised by appropriately qualified or experienced persons.

7.6 Records will be kept to log the operation/use of objects and any resultant conservation works required. Use of the objects shall be reviewed at agreed intervals to ensure the long-term preservation of the object.

7.7 Risk assessments and COSHH procedures will be completed before any such use or operation is undertaken.

8.0 Hazards in the collection

8.1 Hazards within the collections will be identified and managed appropriately by a qualified member of staff and/or external professionals as required. This includes (but is not limited to) radioactive materials, asbestos, heavy metals and toxic substances.

8.2 Legal obligations will be complied with where applicable.

8.3 Risk assessments will be produced around any tasks involving the handling, movement or treatment of hazardous materials or objects known to contain same.

8.4 Training for staff will be provided to ensure the appropriate level of knowledge and awareness within the team to allow safe working practices.

9.0 Research and sampling

9.1 Research into the collections shall include scientific and technical analysis of objects, materials and degradation products, in order to inform and improve the conservation strategies and approaches adopted.

9.2 Sampling, including destructive sampling, of collections items will be carried out according to accepted standards (see section 4 above) and only when deemed appropriate and valuable in terms of information to be gained.

9.3 Results of research and sampling shall be recorded and reported on, both internally and externally to NMRN, to share this knowledge with the wider conservation and heritage profession.

10.0 Environment and sustainability

10.1 NMRN will seek to minimise impact on the environment from conservation works and to observe local regulations at each of its sites.

10.2 Where possible and effective, methods of pest eradication and prevention will be non-toxic.

10.3 Hazardous materials and substances hazardous to health will be controlled and managed according to health and safety requirements and legal obligations complied with.

10.4 NMRN will seek to reduce energy consumption in Collections Care, for example in storage of collections that are reliant on artificial environmental control.

10.5 NMRN staff shall follow the hierarchy of waste, to reduce, reuse and recycle, to minimise our impact on the environment.

11.0 Collaboration and advisory capacity

11.1 NMRN shall seek to establish academic partnerships for the purposes of research, collaborative working and training, engaging with external professionals, students and apprentices in the conservation and heritage professions.

11.2 NMRN conservation staff will not advise the general public on carrying out conservation treatments. Advice may be offered to other institutions or organisations responsible for the care of historic collections, where this is appropriate within ethical guidelines.

Diana Davis.

Date for review November 2025.