



SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM

**Uttlesford District Council &
Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd**



COLLECTIONS CARE & CONSERVATION POLICY 2020-2025

Contents	Page
1. Introduction: Ethical & legal framework	3
2. Standards of Care	4
3. Expertise & Advice	7
4. Collection-specific Needs	7
5. Communicating Collections Care	10

Name of museum: *Saffron Walden Museum*

Name of governing body:

Uttlesford District Council & Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd

Date on which this policy was approved by Museum Management Working Group for recommendation to Cabinet:

30 October 2019

Date on which this policy was approved by Cabinet of Uttlesford District Council:

November 2019

Policy review procedure:

The collections development policy will be published and reviewed from time to time, at least once every five years.

Date at which this policy is due for review:

July 2025

Introduction: ethical, legal and professional framework

- 1.1 The Museum's statement of purpose is to give people inspiration and a sense of place in Uttlesford district / north-west Essex, through exploration of our wide-ranging collections and the histories they represent. High standards of care and long-term preservation of the collections and associated information are therefore essential to achieving this aim.
- 1.2 The collections and buildings (Museum and Shirehill store) are owned by Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd and leased to Uttlesford District Council which operates the museum service under the Management Agreement 2014 between the Museum Society and Council. The Council is responsible for maintaining the buildings and contents, including the collections.
- 1.3 The Museum undertakes to fulfil its legal responsibilities to protect collections and the people handling them or working in proximity to them. These include the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974, COSHH regulations, and other specific issues such as presence of asbestos, radioactive specimens, drugs and firearms. (See Section 4 Specific needs of collections).
- 1.4 The Museum will act in accordance with the Museums Association's *Code of Ethics* and ethical guidance for collections, including issues of particular sensitivity, such as cultural and interpretative issues associated with world cultures (ethnography) and human remains (archaeological collections). It will use *Benchmarks in Collections Care* 2.1 and other professional guidance for specific types of collection in the care and conservation of objects and specimens. In the case of human remains, this includes *Guidance for best practice for treatment of human remains excavated from Christian burial grounds in England*, The Church of England and English Heritage, 2005; *Guidance for the care of human remains in museums*, DCMS, 2005; Human Tissue Act 2004 and appropriate sources of advice such as subject specialist networks.
- 1.5 This policy covers both preventative conservation, which aims to minimise damage to or deterioration of collections, and remedial conservation, which aims to stabilise or improve the condition of collections, or enhance its significance through extraction of additional information.

Standards of Care

Saffron Walden Museum strives to provide appropriate levels of care for the wide-ranging collections which it holds.

Preventative Conservation

- 2.1** The Museum will ensure that a stable physical environment is maintained for the collections and regularly monitored, with appropriate levels of temperature and relative humidity (RH) for the materials in question, protection from particulate pollution, insect pests and other physical damage, and from potentially harmful light (including UV) for light-sensitive specimens and materials.
- 2.2** The Museum buildings where collections are housed must be maintained and equipped to foster stable environments and appropriate standards of collections care. Regular inspection, maintenance and repairs are undertaken by the Council's Property Surveyor in collaboration with the Museum Security & Premises Officer and other Museum staff. The Museum is a historic grade II listed brick building constructed in 1834 and requires special attention to its condition, internal environment and ingress of insect pests. The Council's Property Surveyor manages a programme of work which since 2018 has been addressing issues with the building and maintaining the fabric into best possible condition. The Shirehill store is a new purpose-built store in 2014, fitted out 2015 and collections have been moved in from 2016 onwards. It is of steel and masonry construction with high-level floor loading (for mobile racking) on both floors, and is insulated to provide a buffered and windowless secure environment for collections in storage areas. It will however need routine inspections and maintenance in the long-term.
- 2.3** Security of collections (in store, on display, in research rooms or in transit) will be maintained at all times through:
 - Intruder and fire alarm systems with dedicated phone lines to the monitoring station, for out-of-hours emergencies
 - Additional alarms on sensitive display cases and fire exits
 - CCTV to record people entering and leaving Museum buildings, track routes through the galleries and cover exhibits which could be high-risk targets for theft
 - Control of keys, which are to be kept in a locked cabinet and accessed only by Museum staff
 - Supervision of volunteers, researchers and contractors in all storage and research areas by Museum staff

- Collections in transit to be accompanied by Museum staff, in keeping with insurance requirements (exceptions may occur when an approved carrier is used to transport loans between museums, provided that insurance cover is maintained)
 - Opening, closing and lone working procedures, which require a minimum of 2 staff for opening, closing and working in the Museum, and lone working procedures to safeguard staff working at the Shirehill store and those undertaking outreach work.
- 2.4** For incoming objects and specimens, there will be a visual inspection and quarantine period in the conservation freezer for all organic objects and specimens to eliminate risk of insect pests. For large items unable to fit in the freezer, a COSHH-approved woodworm or other approved form of treatment should be used and advice sought from conservators at appropriate museums. In the event of emergencies or major projects, the Museum would consult with conservators, other museum facilities in the region and specialist contractors to identify suitable options such as large walk-in freezers, thermal treatment or fumigation, depending on the problem and the materials to be treated.
- 2.5** Areas where collections are kept (stores and galleries) will be monitored regularly to check that temperature and RH are within the appropriate parameters, to check for insect pests, and identify areas where further action is needed. Manual equipment for monitoring the environment will be upgraded, subject to resources, to a digital system for greater accuracy and efficiency.
- 2.6** Display cases are to be of appropriate construction to provide secure and stable environment for collections, using conservation-approved materials. The proposed development of the Museum (2020-25) will provide an opportunity to improve climate control and security in cases where necessary. Additional security measures e.g. internal alarms, high-grade locks and construction materials) will be considered for exhibits assessed at especially high risk of theft, damage or deterioration. The Museum's CCTV network is maintained, reviewed and updated, to cover all actual and potential exits to the Museum and galleries, collections at highest risk of theft and visitor reception/shop.
- 2.7** Light is excluded from stores or controlled by blinds. The Museum development plan will investigate measures for UV and reducing unwanted heat, and reducing environmental impact for instance by greater use of LED lighting, and use of timers to allow viewing of sensitive displays. Light-sensitive materials e.g. costume, tapestries, important and irreplaceable natural history specimens, it is policy to rotate exhibits every 5 years.

- 2.8** Cleaning of stores and gallery displays will take place regularly, aiming to cover all area annually (more frequently if a particular need arises), subject to availability of staff and volunteers. Storage areas display a notice stating parameters for environmental control, specific collection risks and a checklist for regular monitoring and cleaning.
- 2.9** Pest management: there is regular (quarterly) monitoring and reporting of potential pests trapped or found. Vulnerable areas are sprayed with a COSHH-approved insecticide in to reduce the risk of infestation.
- 2.10** Condition checking of collections is undertaken in conjunction with repacking, audits and documentation. Cleaning of displays and stores is to be regularised as far as circumstances permit. Work on the Museum's development plan 2020-25 will increase this as we move from basic storage and documentation work towards redisplay of galleries.
- 2.11** Use of photography and scanners is controlled to prevent potentially harmful exposure to light for light-sensitive objects and specimens, especially documents, photographs and artworks. Scanning should be done once at high resolution, to provide an archive digital copy. Photography should be done without flash if possible for light-sensitive objects, or use of lights and strong daylight kept to the minimum necessary.
- 2.12** The Museum will provide and use surrogate digital copies of fragile, light-sensitive and / or frequently-used items, including accession registers and other historic records, wherever possible, to reduce unnecessary risks from handling originals. It is accepted that sometimes originals need to be inspected but unnecessary handling will be avoided. We will seek to extend the availability of digital copies in tandem with documentation.
- 2.13** Digital media (CDs, DVDs) acquired as part of archives (e.g. oral history projects, archaeological fieldwork) will be appropriately stored with records of software and file formats, and location of duplicate or printed copies. The Museum is unable to take on the task of continually migrating digital media to new formats and applications, therefore steps should be taken to ensure that significant files are either uploaded and attached to the collections database (Modes Complete) so that they will be regularly backed-up and incorporated in future upgrades, or are preserved through other organisations and/or by printed hard copy. For local and social history, the Essex Record Office and East Anglian Film archive are appropriate sources of advice. For archaeological archives, excavators are expected to have deposited digital records with the Archaeological Data Service (ADS) as stated in the *Guidelines for Deposition of Archaeological Archives in Essex* (2015).

Remedial Conservation

- 2.14** For basic cleaning of common types of object and specimens, curatorial staff have a professional grounding in day-to-day collections care in their specialist area but must be aware of the limitations of their expertise. Light conservation cleaning is undertaken where no risk is posed to the object or specimen, or to the person undertaking the cleaning. Specialist advice and services will be sought for all other situations (see section 3).
- 2.15** Plans for prioritising objects and specimens for assessment and treatment will be drawn up by curatorial staff as needs are identified, prioritised by urgency and potential impact on use (e.g. required for display, identified during research or documentation audits in store).
- 2.16** The Museum maintains an Emergency Plan for salvaging collections and business continuity in the event of a disaster at the Museum or Shirehill store. Copies will be kept in both locations and off-site with key staff for instant reference in the event of an emergency.

Investigative Techniques

- 2.17** Occasionally items from the collection may be considered for other forms of scientific treatment, for instance chemical analysis, radio carbon dating or DNA testing. In assessing the case for any such treatment, and especially if the technique involves destroying or altering a sample from the object or specimen, the Museum will consider each on a case-by-case basis against two criteria:
- That the technique itself is appropriate and viable for the object in question, and
 - That there is sufficient reason to indicate that meaningful and significant information would be gained

The use of destructive techniques and sampling will be referred to the Board of Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd (owners of the collections) for approval.

3

Expertise & Advice

- 3.1** As the Museum does not have conservation facilities or employ a conservator, it will seek expertise and advice from appropriately-qualified specialists in the remedial and preventative treatment of collections. Advice will be sought from appropriately qualified specialists, SHARE, Subject Specialist Networks, ICON and large regional museum services with conservation departments.
- 3.2** Museum staff responsible for collections will undertake training to

develop and update their essential knowledge and skills in handling and care of collections as appropriate, and recognition of issues which require expert intervention.

- 3.3** Museum volunteers who work with collections will receive in-house training in essentials for handling and checking collections, and work under supervision of the appropriate member of curatorial staff.

4

Collection-specific Needs

- 4.1 Archaeology** mainly of local provenance (but also including small collections of Ancient Egyptian and Classical Antiquities)

4.1.1 Human remains received from archaeological contractors will be acquired if prepared and packed to appropriate standards for long-term storage in secure static storage units dedicated to human remains. Human remains from historic excavation archives should be assessed and improvements made to their packing and storage to comply with modern standards as far as possible.

4.1.2 Where asbestos is proven or suspected of being present in exhibits, specialist services will be sought to assess and seal displays. In archaeology, this currently applies only to the Roman-period Egyptian mummy of a boy, where naturally-occurring asbestos is present in some wrappings.

4.1.3 Metalwork, especially ironwork, requires a low-humidity environment and a small store equipped with a dehumidifier will be provided for this purpose. Collections currently held in the very small metalwork store in the Museum will be moved to a more spacious storage area at Shirehill when this has been equipped and a low-humidity environment will be maintained (<45% RH).

4.1.4 Archaeological 'treasure' (objects acquired under the Treasure Act 1996) and coins are at relatively high risk of theft being small, portable and often desirable to collectors (though not all treasure is necessarily of high financial value). Additional security measures on display should include high-specification cases, internal case alarms and location within range of a CCTV camera as appropriate.

4.2 Social & Local History, World Cultures, Fine & Decorative Arts, Costume & Textiles

4.2.1 Collections Items containing hazards, such as asbestos, radioactivity or pharmaceutical products will be assessed by a specialist and measures taken to ensure they are either disposed of or, stored or displayed in a safe and legal manner, with appropriate precautions

and hazard labelling.

- 4.2.2 Particular care will be taken with handling, displaying and storing fragile materials such as works on paper and textiles, as well as organic material (e.g. animal glue, bark cloths, animal hair and teeth in the World Cultures collections).
- 4.2.3 Collections are packed and supported with appropriate types of racking and conservation grade packing materials, and open storage items are raised off the floor to protect them from flooding (with the exception of the hand-drawn and horse-drawn vehicles which cannot be palletted).
- 4.2.4 Surrogate and digital copies of fragile, light-sensitive and/or heavily used collections (e.g. local history photos) and historic records (e.g. registers) will be provided wherever possible to reduce unnecessary handling. For local and social history, the Essex Record Office and East Anglian Film archive may be appropriate sources of advice or repositories.

4.3 Geology (Rocks, minerals and fossils mainly of East Anglian and British origin, with some specimens from across the world)

- 4.3.1 Specimens containing asbestos or radioactive material will be assessed by specialists and measures taken to ensure they are either disposed of, or stored or displayed in a safe and legal manner, with appropriate precautions and hazard labelling.
- 4.3.2 All geology specimens are handled with gloves to prevent damage from skin contact and to protect people from the specimens.
- 4.3.3 Ferrous geology requires a low-humidity environment (see archaeological metalwork above).
- 4.3.4 Geological material at the Shirehill store is kept in a humidity-controlled environment between 45% and 55% relative humidity. Temperature is maintained above a 15°C minimum. These limits may be amended to reflect modern best practice guidelines, energy efficiency considerations and legal workspace requirements.

4.4 Natural History (Plant and animal specimens from Britain and around the world)

- 4.4.1 Type Specimens are securely stored to minimise the risk of theft or damage by disaster incidents such as fire or flood.
- 4.4.2 Natural history items entering the Museum for any reason are to undergo freezing and quarantine as part of Integrated Pest Management procedures. Separate freezers are used for deadstock

storage and conservation purposes to minimise the risk of pest transferal to Museum objects.

4.4.3 The Natural Sciences store at the Museum is a temperature- and humidity-controlled environment. Temperature is maintained below 19°C, and humidity is maintained below 59% relative humidity. These limits may be amended to reflect modern best practice guidelines, energy efficiency considerations and legal workspace requirements.

4.3.4 All biological specimens are handled with gloves to prevent damage from skin contact and to protect people from any hazards in the specimens.

5

Communicating Collections Care

- 5.1** Collections care policy and procedures are communicated and shared through a variety of channels and different means, appropriate to the audience:
- With Museum staff, through monthly staff meeting agendas, notices in stores, the procedures manual, provision of PPE and by sharing best practice and updates from training and Subject Specialist Networks.
 - With volunteers and researchers, through induction and supervision for volunteers, supervision and guidance, and by providing appropriate PPE. Volunteers can assist staff in basic housekeeping and cleaning tasks.
 - With Museum Society and the Council, through the Quarterly report to the Museum Society Board and the Museum Management Working Group, and through the Newsletter, talks and presentations to Society members.
 - With visitors and other service users, and the public at large, through a variety of media, and wherever possible demonstrating a positive and proactive approach in explaining and sharing good practice with the public.
- 5.2** Signage and labelling in galleries will aim to engage visitors and explain rather than being purely prohibitive. 'Good practice' examples of collections care can be good subjects for newsletters, social media and website, talks and workshops.
- 5.3** Demonstrations and behind-the-scenes tours to small groups include reference to the importance of collections care and conservation.