

# CARE AND CONSERVATION POLICY

## 1. Museum's statement of purpose

The Charles Dickens Museum's collections of object, archive and library material are considered to be the world's most comprehensive repository of material related to the life and works of Charles Dickens. Care and conservation of the collections are shaped by the Museum's mission: 'to establish the Charles Dickens Museum as the world's leading centre for the study, appreciation and enjoyment of Charles Dickens's life and works.'

The purpose of the Policy is to serve as a guide for staff, Trustees and other stakeholders, and the public, concerning the professional standards the Museum will apply to the objects in its care. It seeks to reassure the public that the Museum is operating within an ethical framework and is publicly accountable.

The Charles Dickens Museum's Care and Conservation Policy aims to ensure it fulfils its responsibilities in caring for its collections based on a combination of preventative and remedial conservation, both designed to ensure long-term preservation.

The Charles Dickens Museum is housed in Grade I and Grade II listed buildings which require specialist care. Whilst this Policy is applicable to the buildings, specific conservation information about these historic properties are detailed in *The Museum Gazetteer* and the *Conservation Management Plan*. These list all fixtures and fittings in the houses, their date and significance.

This document should be read in association with *The Museum Gazetteer* and the *Conservation Management Plan*, as well as the Museum's *Collection Development Policy*, *Forward Plan*, *Health & Safety Policy Statement*, *Environmental Policy Statement*, *Documentation Policy*, *Plan and Procedural Manual* and *Emergency Plan*.

The *Care and Conservation Plan* explains what we plan to do in order to deliver the statements made in this Policy. The *Care and Conservation Procedural Manual* details how we plan to do it.

## 2. Ethics, standards and legislations

The following guidelines and standards will direct the Museum in the area of care and conservation of collections:

- Museum Association Code of Ethics

- Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974
- COSHH Regulations 2002

In undertaking care and conservation activities, staff are made aware of the Museum's commitment to minimising environmental impact, as explained in the *Environmental Policy Statement*.

The Museum uses the Collection Trust's SPECTRUM standards and *Benchmarks In Collection Care* as a framework for this Policy.<sup>i</sup>

### **3. Preventative Conservation**

The Museum understands preventative conservation as covering all measures necessary to slow down and minimise deterioration of museum objects and structures.

#### **3.1 Collection Condition overview**

The condition of the collections and our buildings will be regularly assessed, and condition records maintained.

Staff training in preventative conservation practice (such as environmental monitoring and basic cleaning) will be kept up to date.

A check of objects on display (including their fixings and mounts) will occur annually, with a focus on light-sensitive or vulnerable objects. Where appropriate, objects will be rotated according to a schedule agreed by the Curator, in order to be sympathetic to interpretation in the Museum's guide books and audio guides.

#### **3.2 Suitable Building conditions**

The Museum will seek to ensure that all collections are housed in buildings that meet agreed minimum standards of construction and condition. This includes the Museum's offsite store.

The Museum will work with external contractors to ensure that the best possible conditions in the building are maintained for the collections.

Collections are safeguarded through the following systems:

- Risk assessment and management
- Building Maintenance
- Mechanical and Electrical (M&E) Maintenance
- Building Management Systems
- Environmental Monitoring Systems
- Intruder Alarms
- Fire and Evacuation Systems

### **3.3 Environmental Monitoring and Control**

The Museum is committed to maintaining environmental conditions that comply with PAS 198 Guidelines and prioritises storing collections in stable environments without excessive light levels or fluctuations in temperature and/or humidity.

Humidity and Temperature data is recorded and controlled via the Museum's Building Management System (BMS), which is managed by Electrical Control Engineering Ltd. The Museum will monitor the environment of the storage and display spaces by collecting, measuring and recording relative humidity (RH), temperature, visible light and ultraviolet (UV) radiation, using the Museum's BMS and handheld devices. It will act on its findings if appropriate.

The Museum is committed to maintaining appropriate light levels in the Museum and keeping blinds down and lights off when the Museum is not in use.

The Curator maintains an awareness of issues that could arise through environmental changes caused by building works within the Museum or in neighbouring properties.

### **3.4 Housekeeping**

A daily, weekly, seasonal and annual housekeeping maintenance schedule will ensure there is regular cleaning in the Museum with a focus on storage spaces, the library and the public spaces of 48 Doughty Street.

The Museum accepts that there will be a level of pest presence in the house; it will monitor this through fortnightly checking of pest traps situated around the house. Following professional consultation, conservation grade pesticide (Constrain) and freezing will be used to treat spaces and objects if necessary.

When packing and storing objects, the Museum will ensure the materials used are of a conservation grade.

### **3.5 Storage, Moving and Transport**

When moving objects within the building, from the offsite store or to other locations, the Museum will move its collections safely and securely in accordance with the guidance contained in its *Care and Conservation Procedural Manual*.

Objects will always travel with a trained courier. In the case of loans and in other appropriate circumstances, the Museum may employ art handling professionals to pack, transport and install objects.

### **3.6 Emergency Preparedness**

The Museum is committed to ensuring it has up-to-date emergency plans and that its staff are regularly trained in what to do if there is an incident. The Museum will link with local museums for support in the event of an emergency.

## **4. Remedial Conservation**

Remedial conservation covers all treatment to an object 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.

Remedial conservation will be undertaken on objects according to acuteness of need and exhibition requirements, subject to funding.

All such work will only be undertaken by an appropriately qualified individual and only after discussions with the Curator and other relevant members of staff, with an understanding of the object, its significance, and how (or if) it will be displayed.

All work will be photographed and documented, with information recorded according to SPECTRUM standards within the Museum's Collection Management System, Museum Index+.

## **5. Expertise and Advice**

Caring for the collection is the responsibility of all staff. Care and conservation of the collection is overseen by the Curator and it is his/her role to ensure that staff and volunteers are aware of the relevant policies, plans and procedures.

The Museum seeks professional advice and receives support, resources and training on collection care and conservation from the London Regional Collection Care Development Team.<sup>ii</sup>

Contract professional conservators (those listed on the Institute of Conservation's register, with relevant expertise and where possible professionally accredited) will be employed for specific projects.

## **6. Access**

The Museum recognises that caring for its collections is a fundamental duty. It seeks to strike a balance between long-term preservation of the collection and the provision of access to the public. It acknowledges that exhibition and research needs, staff resources and urgency of care will influence conservation maintenance schedules and remedial conservation work.

The Museum will promote good collection handling practices by providing suitable guidance, environments and equipment for staff, volunteers and researchers who have access to the collection.

The Museum 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 or substitute copies made if appropriate.

The Museum will promote digitisation and making available online records as a means of making the collection accessible whilst minimising handling or display.

#### **4. Policy review procedure**

The Care and Conservation Policy will be published and reviewed from time to time, at least once every five years. The date when the Policy is next due for review is noted above. Arts Council England will be notified of any changes to the Care and Conservation Policy, and the implications of any such changes for the future of existing collections.

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.collectionstrust.org.uk/benchmarks-in-collections-care/benchmarks-in-collection-care-for-museums-archives-and-libraries>

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/corporate/about-us/museum-development-in-london/training-programmes/collections-care-training/>

This Policy was approved by Board of Trustees on 28 May 2015