

THE ROYAL AIR FORCE MUSEUM'S POLICY FOR COLLECTIONS CARE AND CONSERVATION

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THE ROYAL AIR FORCE MUSEUM'S POLICY FOR COLLECTIONS CARE AND CONSERVATION

Name of museum: Royal Air Force Museum

Name of governing body: Trustees of the Royal Air Force Museum

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INTRODUCTION

1. This document articulates the RAF Museum's policy toward the on-going care and preservation of the collection. It acknowledges current shortfalls in provision and will act as an aid to long term planning to improve collections care.
2. The management and care of the collections is central to the mission of the Royal Air Force Museum:

“to ensure the Royal Air Force's story endures and enriches future generations”
3. Collections care involves a range of strategies designed to prevent deterioration or loss of access to objects, and may also be referred to as preventive conservation. Conservation treatments may also be carried out on museum objects if deemed necessary. These activities are defined below in paragraphs 8 and 9.
4. With specific reference to those areas of the collection covered by dedicated in-house conservation programmes (aircraft, land vehicles and marine craft), treatment of these objects may also involve restoration and/or reconstruction. These activities are defined in paragraphs 10 to 11.
5. Separate policies will be developed dealing with the specific approaches to the care and preservation of those collections described in paragraph 4.

DEFINITIONS

Preservation

6. All actions taken to retard deterioration of, or to prevent damage to, cultural property. Preservation involves controlling the environment and conditions of use, and may include treatment in order to maintain a cultural property, as nearly as possible, in an unchanging state¹.
7. Preservation encompasses a range of activities including, but not limited to, the maintenance of an accurate inventory of the collection, the provision of adequate

¹ The International Institute for Conservation - Canadian Group, Canadian Association of Professional Conservators, Code of Ethics and Guidance for Practice, 1986, IICCG/CAPC, Ottawa, Canada. (reproduced in MGC Standards series 1994)

storage, protection from theft, disasters such as fire and flood, and mechanical damage and deterioration resulting from poor environmental conditions. It also includes the need to stabilise objects - limiting their natural tendency to deteriorate with time – and to undertake remedial work for objects that have deteriorated (or have been received in poor condition), and occasionally restoration and/or reconstruction.

Preventive conservation

8. Preventive conservation consists of indirect action to retard deterioration and prevent damage by creating conditions optimal for the preservation of cultural heritage as far as is compatible with its social use. Preventive conservation also encompasses correct handling, transport, use, and storage and display. It may also involve issues of the production of facsimiles for the purpose of preserving the original².

Conservation

9. Conservation consists mainly of direct action carried out on cultural heritage with the aim of stabilising condition and retarding further deterioration³.

Restoration

10. Restoration consists of direct action carried out on damaged or deteriorated cultural heritage with the aim of facilitating its perception, appreciation and understanding, while respecting as far as possible its aesthetic, historic and physical properties⁴.

Reconstruction

11. All actions taken to recreate, in whole or in part, a cultural property, based upon historical, literary, graphic, pictorial, archaeological and scientific evidence. Reconstruction is aimed at promoting an understanding of a cultural property, and is based on little or no original material but clear evidence of a former state⁵.

COLLECTIONS CONDITION OVERVIEW

12. The Museum will survey and visually inspect objects in the collection and the conditions in which they are kept to determine priority areas for improvement in line with best practice, using a combination of methods described below.

² European Confederation of Conservator-Restorers' Organisations (E.C.C.O.) professional guidelines, Brussels, 1 March 2002, as endorsed by the UK Institute of Conservation (ICON)

³ European Confederation of Conservator-Restorers' Organisations (E.C.C.O.) professional guidelines, Brussels, 1 March 2002, as endorsed by the UK Institute of Conservation (ICON)

⁴ European Confederation of Conservator-Restorers' Organisations (E.C.C.O.) professional guidelines, Brussels, 1 March 2002, as endorsed by the UK Institute of Conservation (ICON)

⁵ The International Institute for Conservation - Canadian Group, Canadian Association of Professional Conservators, Code of Ethics and Guidance for Practice, 1986, IICCG/CAPC, Ottawa, Canada. (reproduced in MGC Standards series 1994)

Benchmarking surveys

13. The Museum has previously carried out the 'Benchmarks in Collections Care' survey (Museums, Libraries and Archives Council) and the Preservation Assessment Survey (National Preservation Office). These surveys will be repeated in order to measure performance.

Internal checks

14. The aircraft and vehicle collections receive regular condition checks in the course of the programme of inspections, co-ordinated at RAFM Cosford by the Manager of Conservation and at RAFM London by the Airframe Technician.

15. Objects in the Film and Sound collection are subject to regular checks to monitor acetate deterioration.

16. Condition checking schemes to monitor vulnerable items in other areas of the collection will be developed.

17. The results of the activities outlined in paragraphs 13 to 16 will be used to define and support the development of a Collections Care Action Plan for improvement.

18. Data gathered from all these activities will be recorded and retained.

ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING

19. The Museum will monitor relative humidity (RH) and temperature in storage and display areas, in accordance with Environmental Monitoring Policy - RH and Temperature (RAFM/DCM/2/6/25/1).

20. The Museum will monitor visible light and ultra violet radiation (UV) and temperature in display areas in accordance with Environmental Monitoring Policy - Light (RAFM/DCM/2/6/25/4).

21. The Museum will monitor pollutants in areas where there are health and safety concerns.

22. Data gathered will be used to develop improvements wherever possible to the environments where collections are housed.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROL

23. The Museum aims to store and display collections in managed environments that minimise their rates of deterioration, according to the control factors for RH, temperature, visible light and UV detailed in the relevant policies [see Environmental Monitoring Policy - RH and Temperature (RAFM/DCM/2/6/25/1) and Environmental Monitoring Policy - Light (RAFM/DCM/2/6/25/4)].

Showcases

24. The Museum aims to provide items on display with showcase environments appropriate for the preservation of the items within. New showcases will be procured in accordance with showcase specifications produced by the Department of Collections Management. Recognising that many existing showcases do not meet this specification, a programme will be developed to make improvements as resources allow.

PROVISION OF SUITABLE BUILDING CONDITIONS

25. The Building and Services Manager will be responsible for the provision and maintenance of suitable building conditions and will work with Collections Management and Conservation staff in aiming to provide the best possible conditions for the collections.

26. Collections are safeguarded through the following systems:

- a) risk assessment and management
- b) building maintenance
- c) mechanical and electrical maintenance
- d) building management systems
- e) environmental monitoring systems
- f) intruder alarms
- g) fire and evacuation systems

27. All systems are managed by the Building and Services Manager and are covered by appropriate service contracts.

28. All systems are inspected periodically by Museum staff and service contract providers, with the exception of environmental monitoring systems, which are managed by the Department of Collections Management

Storage

29. The Museum aims to store archival collections in accordance with BS 5454:2000 incorporating guidance set out in PD 5454:2012, and digital media in accordance with BS 4783:1988. This will be reviewed as new guidelines become available and archive standards are brought in line with PAS198.

30. Where possible, stored 3D collections will be housed in cupboards, crates, boxes, covered racking or covered pallets to protect against dust.

31. The Museum will aim toward the development of segregated areas for particularly vulnerable and/or deleterious material (eg plastics) as time and resources permit.

HOUSEKEEPING

Cleaning

32. Surface cleaning of collections will be carried out using methods appropriate to the preservation of the objects, and staff will receive appropriate training.

33. Objects on open display (aircraft and vehicles) are cleaned by volunteers according to an established programme.

34. Objects in showcases will be cleaned by staff and on a risk assessed basis, as time and resources permit. A programme will be developed to institute regular cleaning of these areas.

Pests

35. Objects coming in to the collection are checked for the presence of insect pests in accordance with the Museum's Entry Procedure (RAFM/DCM/2/6/4/2).

36. Clothing items coming in to the collection are routinely sent to the Stafford site for freezing.

37. Currently no dedicated quarantine areas are in place at RAFM London or RAFM Cosford. This will be remedied as a high priority in due course.

38. Areas containing vulnerable collections will be monitored using insect traps, and appropriate action will be taken as required, in accordance with the Pest Monitoring Policy (RAFM/DCM/2/6/27/1) and the Pest Monitoring Procedure (RAFM/DCM/2/6/27/2).

39. Public areas and site perimeters are monitored for the presence of rodents by an external contractor under the management of the Building and Services Manager.

EMERGENCY PLANNING

40. Emergency plans are in place for RAFM London and RAFM Cosford, and will be reviewed as necessary. Currently there is no emergency plan covering the stored collections at RAFM Stafford, and this will be developed in due course.

PLANNED PROGRAMME

41. A Collections Care Action Plan will be developed to improve collections care provision, according to priorities determined by activities described in this policy and with particular with reference to any shortfalls identified above.

CONSERVATION

42. The conservation needs of objects within the Museum's collections are assessed and treatment is co-ordinated by the Head of the relevant Curatorial Department:

- a) preventive conservation, such as cleaning and safely storing objects, is undertaken by curators within departments;
- b) routine conservation of Aircraft and Exhibits is undertaken by the Airframe Technician at RAFM London and by staff at the Michael Beetham Conservation Centre (MBCC) at RAFM Cosford;
- c) remedial conservation of aircraft is undertaken by the MBCC with the Manager of the MBCC acting as advisor on treatments and handling required. Where necessary, the Manager of Conservation at the MBCC will choose and monitor external contractors to work with aircraft;
- d) conservation of all other collections is contracted to qualified professionals drawn from the Conservation Register.

43. During conservation treatment of aircraft and other 3D exhibits, original material is retained wherever possible; material contemporary to the object's production is used as a secondary alternative; and material produced using methods contemporary with the object's production is used as a third alternative.

Documenting conservation treatment

44. All conservation work will be documented in accordance with the Spectrum⁶ minimum standard. The following information must be recorded:

- a) The dates the work started and finished;
- b) The type of work (e.g. conservation treatment, condition report, loan condition report);
- c) The action carried out (location, procedure, method, materials used, duration, result);
- d) The reference numbers of any reports, photographs, drawings, or other types of image;
- e) Any new or revised handling, packing, storage and display recommendations;
- f) The packing or support instructions if part of the work;
- g) Any updates to the care and maintenance plan if appropriate;
- h) The date of any follow up care activity if appropriate;
- i) The new or reproduction parts fitted to an object should be fully documented.
- j) The name of the conservator(s) and organisation as appropriate;
- k) The contact name at the organisation if appropriate.

⁶ Spectrum: The UK Museum Collections Management Standard; © 2011 Version 4.0
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45. Detailed records are kept of conservation and restoration work carried out in-house by staff at the MBCC and the Airframe Technician at RAFM London which encompass 44 a – i above. These records are retained in the Aircraft History and Maintenance Log Books at RAFM London and the MBCC at RAFM Cosford.

46. Conservation treatment records will **not** be required for the routine preservation of material in other collections, for example binding or microfilming. Where remedial conservation treatment is necessary a treatment report containing the information detailed in paragraph 44 will be sought.

47. All conservation records will be retained permanently.

TRAINING AND AWARENESS

48. All staff and volunteers directly engaged in conservation work will receive the appropriate training, either in-house or by using external professionals where required.

49. Currently the collections care work of the Department of Collections Management is communicated to curatorial staff where these activities impact on their area of responsibility. However it is recognised that general awareness of preservation issues amongst all staff should be improved, and an appropriate programme will be developed to achieve this.

For consultation

Environmental Monitoring Policy - RH and Temperature RAFM/DCM/2/6/25/1

Environmental Monitoring Policy – Light RAFM/DCM/2/6/25/4

Entry Procedure (RAFM/DCM/2/6/4/2)

Pest Monitoring Policy (RAFM/DCM/2/6/27/1)

Pest Monitoring Procedure (RAFM/DCM/2/6/27/2)

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