

City of Westminster Archives Centre

Conservation - Preservation Policy

January 2009



City of Westminster

Contents

Introduction

The City of Westminster Archives
The Importance of a Conservation-Preservation Policy

The City of Westminster Archives Centre Mission

1. **Aims of the Conservation- Preservation Policy**
2. **Principles of the Conservation- Preservation Policy**
 - a. Management
 - b. Accessibility
 - c. Priorities
 - d. Preservation-Conservation Issues
3. **The Environment**
 - a. The Building
 - i. Environmental Monitoring and Control
 - ii. Pest and Infestation Management
 - iii. Security
 - b. Storage Facilities and Packaging
 - c. Cleaning – Housekeeping
 - d. Health and Safety
 - e. Pollution
4. **Collection Care**
 - a. Acquisitions Policy
 - b. Appraisal of Collections
 - c. Exhibitions and Loans
 - d. Display Cases
 - e. Search Rooms Practice and Transportation
 - f. Preservation Leaflet
 - g. Volunteers
5. **Reprographics**
 - a. Microfilming
 - b. Scanning service
 - c. Photocopying
 - d. Other Methods
6. **Disaster Preparedness**
 - a. Emergency Disaster Plan
 - b. Flooding and Leaks
 - c. Fire Precautions and Fire Alarm Evacuation Procedures
7. **Monitoring and review**

Bibliography

INTRODUCTION

The City of Westminster Archives

Archives are special collections that house the records of organizations, governments, businesses, etc. representing our culture, community or personal identity. They also contain collections of personal papers of individuals or families, photographs, pamphlets, sketches, drawings, maps, plans, newspaper clippings etc.

All these materials have been selected for preservation either because of their importance to the body in question or for their broader historical value.

The City of Westminster Archives (hereafter "COWAC"), which incorporates over 5 kilometres of shelving, houses extensive collections relating to Westminster past and present.

The archives are generally administrative records that are selected for permanent preservation. Records were either inherited from the Council or acquired by gift, purchase or deposit on indefinite loan from churches, estates, businesses, schools etc. They date mainly from the 16th century onwards (parish registers, vestry minutes, churchwardens' accounts, rates).

The Importance of a Conservation- Preservation Policy

The very nature of archives requires the longest and best possible preservation of their contents; however threats to both their longevity and original condition are numerous. The causes of damage to archival objects are varied and complex. All paper collections tend to natural deterioration over time. But they can also further deteriorate or be destroyed by several inter-related factors, such as unstable environmental conditions, acidity, light, pollution, biological enemies, poor handling and storage, theft, fire and flood.

Preservation for library and archives' materials is an important issue and a conservation and preservation plan assists in a variety of ways.

- a. It sets out appropriate practice for the care and management of the collection and guidance for the preparation of master plans and detailed management plans.
- b. Its existence and evidence of its application reassures outside agencies that conservation issues are handled in an organised and responsible manner.

For maximum effectiveness, the plan is circulated to managers and staff as appropriate.

THE CITY OF WESTMINSTER ARCHIVES CENTRE MISSION

“...archives are a treasure house for the nation.”

(Re:source, *Developing the 21st Century archive: An Action Plan for United Kingdom Archives*, 2001).

“Archives are the bedrock of historical research ... but however great the fascination of history, this is only a secondary purpose and significance of archives. As evidence, archives are the basis for our rights –for society and as individuals. They underpin democratic accountability, individual freedom, intellectual and property rights and security –making it vital to safeguard archives for all, and for ever.”

(London Archives Regional Council, *Out of the Past into the Future: Priorities for Archive Development in London*.)

In line with national policy, the COWAC aims to be a centre of excellence, where archives and local studies materials are acquired, preserved and made accessible in order to raise the profile of Westminster’s unique irreplaceable heritage within a global context and to stimulate the sense of community identity called for by Westminster’s *One City Programme*. The COWAC aims to record the built environment and significant events, organisations and individuals who have contributed to Westminster’s remarkable life, both past and present.

1. AIMS OF THE CONSERVATION-PRESERVATION POLICY

This Conservation-Preservation Policy (hereafter “PCP”) provides a report on the care of materials held by the COWAC.

The PCP will function as a set of guidelines in principle for COWAC staff and volunteers especially those working on Conservation and Preservation projects, with the following aims:

- a. To ensure preservation and conservation practice following the highest standards with the ultimate commitment of keeping the collections open and accessible.
- b. To raise preservation awareness amongst staff, users and other departments.
- c. To seek and adopt where relevant the latest research and techniques specially adapted to the COWAC material with the aim to further promote its accessibility and exposure to the public.

2. PRINCIPLES OF THE CONSERVATION- PRESERVATION POLICY

The COWAC objectives acknowledge the necessity of a comprehensive conservation-preservation strategy, following recommendations of British Standard 5454:2000 [hereafter “BS 5454”: full air-conditioning (stable temperature of 15-16° C, stable relative humidity of 50-60%), separate air-handling units per floor and back-up generator, eight air changes per hour, 10% intake of fresh air, intruder alarm linked to police, fire alarm linked to fire brigade, panic alarm, video entry phone, and CCTV system].

2. a. Management

The responsibility for conservation-preservation matters is in the hands of the Conservator who decides on issues of policy and practice through productive cooperation with other senior staff members. The Conservator, in collaboration with the Senior Archivist, is also responsible for the Ten Years Conservation Plan, which deals with long term preservation-conservation and improving storage of the collections.

2. b. Accessibility

The COWAC is open to the public Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday 10.00 am-7.00 pm and Friday-Saturday 10.00 am-5.00 pm. Its central London location, a few minutes walk from the Houses of Parliament, is accessible by several means of public transport, bus, underground, or trains.

The COWAC is fully wheelchair accessible and complies with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

2. c. Priorities

Items selected for Conservation-Preservation will fall under the following priorities:

- a. Historical significance of the item.
- b. Anticipated level of use.
- c. Condition.
- d. Cost.

2. d. Conservation- Preservation Issues

The term **conservation** refers to the treatment of materials in order to stabilise them physically, ensuring their survival as long as possible in their original form. The term **preservation** refers to the broader activity of collections’ care associated with maintaining materials for use either in their original form or in some other format.

High-standard conservation and preservation facilities are housed in a generously proportioned studio within the COWAC premises.

When it comes to deciding the conservation of materials, prioritising is based on the assessment of every individual case and the following criteria:

- a. New materials are examined and treated, if needed, before joining the collections in storage.
- b. Materials about to be microfilmed or loaned to exhibitions are evaluated and steps are taken towards the stabilisation of their condition.
- c. Items requiring attention before being handled by users are subjected to minimum preventative treatments to ensure their safety.
- d. Depending upon funding resources, wider conservation projects are carried out by external conservators.

Every treatment effected on COWAC materials is documented to serve as future reference.

Conservation-Preservation Projects carried out in-house or by external conservators will be based on the following principles:

- a. All materials must be of archival standards
- b. All repairs must be reversible
- c. All repairs should respect the integrity of the original object
- d. No repairs should conceal documentary evidence
- e. No repairs should attempt to restore missing information
- f. No repairs should attempt to restore to an original condition

Adhesives used in conservation must have the following properties:

- a. Sufficient strength
- b. No tendency to discolour
- c. Reversibility
- d. No acidity
- e. Long shelf life
- f. Ease of preparation

3. THE ENVIRONMENT

3. a. The Building

The COWAC building was purpose-built in 1994 and arranged over five and a half floors with ground floor area of 21 m x 21 m (441 sq. m. approximate total floor area of building is 2,136.7 sq. m.) and is maintained by Seaflame.

3. a. i. Environmental Monitoring and Control

The three floors dedicated to storage of materials are devoid of openings that could allow external contamination and exposure to light. Temperature, relative humidity, dust and large particle pollutants are screened by a computerised Building Management System (hereafter "BMS"); BMS is checked and maintained by SYSCOM. Only staff offices, conference and reading rooms are fitted with heating. Existing windows, fluorescent tubes as well as all the display cases have ultraviolet protection film installed.

3. a. ii. Pest and Infestation Management

The risk of infestation is relatively low, as the building is constructed and maintained according to high standards. Although there are no signs of infestations, preventative measures are carried out, including regular monitoring and setting of traps. All new acquisitions are appraised by the Senior Archivist and suspect materials are forwarded to the Conservator and treated, if necessary, in dedicated area.

3. a. iii. Security

Public access to the building is continuously monitored by an intruder alarm system linked to the police and the Reading Room is supervised during opening times. Access to storage areas is restricted to staff only. The coded passenger lift allows public access from the ground floor to the Search Room located on the 5th floor.

3. b. Storage Facilities and Packaging

The present storage facilities adhere to high standards, following BS 5454, and suffice for the near future. Mobile metal shelving is in use throughout the storage areas which is free of buckling, twisting, corrosion or other signs of deterioration and is in full working order. Access aids appropriate to the shelving (e.g. ladders or kick-stools) are provided that meet health and safety requirements.. Items enjoy secondary protection according to their format with most of them boxed. All materials used for the packaging of COWAC collections are of archival quality and provide protection from the perils of handling, contact with potentially damaging surfaces, environmental fluctuations, water, smoke and fire.

3. c. Cleaning - Housekeeping

The employment of strict environmental controls makes regular housekeeping in storage areas unnecessary, but all staff have been trained to exercise caution regarding the tidiness of all spaces within the building.

3. d. Health and Safety

Two members of staff have been trained to provide first aid in the event of minor accidents to staff and public within the building.

3. e. Pollution

Pollution may come from both internal and external sources, such as:

- a. Volatile organic emissions from new decorations and existing contents, such as ageing paints, glues and pigments.
- b. Emissions from the objects themselves.
- c. Traffic pollution.

Carbon filters installed in the Building Management System aim to remove large particles pollutants and dirt from the supply air in the storage rooms. Within the public search room the Carbon Dioxide levels are monitored in order to control the fresh air and re-circulated air to maintain comfort levels.

4. COLLECTION CARE

4. a. Acquisitions & Collections Development Policy

The COWAC receives donations of documents and buys both new and second hand materials. Any items deemed fragile, mouldy or otherwise at risk are assessed by the Conservator. An Acquisitions & Collections Development Policy is available.

4. b. Appraisal of Collections

Condition and collection surveys of holdings are of paramount importance because they contain useful information about access, use, accommodation, condition and usability, value and importance, artefact type and type of damages.

Through regular checks and surveys, the materials are classified as "Fit," "Unfit" and "At Risk" and thereafter a strategy can be implemented for the remedy of problems recognised. "Unfit" items are not available for public access. "At Risk" items are only available under close supervision.

In addition "Conservation Notification Forms" are in use by all staff to identify damaged items.

4. c. Exhibitions and Loans

There is a programme of temporary exhibitions drawn from the COWAC collections, for which display cases in the Search Room are used. They are rotated on a bimonthly basis.

Materials requested for loans to temporary exhibitions outside the COWAC are conserved by the Conservator when necessary before their dispatch. The Conservator is responsible for the objects' safe transportation and accompanying documents. Borrowing institutions are required to provide written information as to their compliance with the BS Standards for exhibitions before approval of the loan. Guidelines are available in the **Agreement for Loans to Temporary Exhibitions 2007**.

All materials requested for publication in various media are previously assessed and treated if necessary.

4. d. Display cases

Display cases are the single most important aid to the preservation of materials on show. The existing cases are constructed of inert materials, lined with UV filter, with locks fitted. Exhibitions of materials rotate every two months. This helps to decrease the cumulative effect of light exposure to the collection.

4. e. Search Room Practice and Transportation

Most readers in the COWAC are researching family history, but also buildings, local and social history *etc.* The 258.7 sq. m. Search Room at their disposal is equipped with architect-designed furniture, a dedicated space for consulting oversized documents, adequate microfilm and microfiche readers, and free internet access. There is a passenger lift with coded controls and fire escape steps. The Search Room is protected by 3M security system and there are electronic security book tags for individual items.

Readers are supplied with written guidelines and staff take active role in assisting them in the safe handling of documents while in the reading rooms. High standards of preservation are maintained through acid-free page markers, a variety of cushions and weights to support books, exclusive use of pencils and an ordering system by request slip for security. There are also copying restrictions although photography, digital scanning reader printer and photocopy facilities are provided. Special trolleys, operated by staff and a dedicated lift is provided for the transportation of materials from storage to other areas of the building.

4. f. Preservation Awareness

Preservation awareness is promoted to the general public through printed guidance materials, a specially designed preservation leaflet, open days, tours, and talks. The Conservator is actively involved in providing relevant advice to the

libraries and other departments of the Council as well as individuals and organisations.

Refresher training in handling archival materials is provided to staff twice a year. In addition, staff from Westminster libraries who deal with special collections are invited to attend. New members of staff receive training soon after they are assigned their responsibilities.

4. g. Volunteers

The Conservation Studio offers in its premises experience to 14 volunteers carrying out preservation work. Our diverse team consists of NADFAS volunteers (National Association of Decorative and Fine Arts Societies); university students from Foreign Academic Programmes, conservation students, high school students doing their work experience, adults who wish to develop further their professional qualifications as well as Westminster residents. Volunteers receive beforehand appropriate training and their work results under constant supervision. A specially-designed leaflet provides guidance related to their work.

Volunteers work is extremely valuable to the Archives as they are willingly spending their free time to complement our services. In return we dedicate a lot of our personal effort to help them in employability, in gaining new and interesting skills, in enhancing their communication abilities and building their teamwork confidence. This is achieved not only through training and supervision in-house but also with an innovative programme of activities, such as cultural days out in order to bond the team together.

We constantly recognise and cherish their contribution and as a centre of excellence we have the awareness, capacity and expertise to provide an excellent volunteering environment. Ensuring that our activity promotes equality, diversity and community cohesion, we measure the impact of volunteering through exit feedback form. Examples are as quoted:

“My experience at the Westminster Archives Centre was life-changing. I came here at a cross-road in my life and career and found a new direction. I really enjoyed working with Georgia, her patience and skills are inspirational. My voluntary work at the Archives has taught me many invaluable skills that will no doubt prove beneficial to me in my future endeavours”. Summer 2008

Susan McLean
Senior, Mills College – History of Arts
626 Masonic Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94117

“I am gaining voluntary experience in archives prior to beginning a M.A degree in Archives Management. This placement is invaluable as it offers a rare opportunity to gain skills in conservation and the handling of archives which will be essential in my course”. Summer 2008

Gill Disley – Age 43, BA Hons English

5. REPROGRAPHICS

5. a. Microfilming

Written specifications following the highest standards of preservation are provided for the microfilming process of COWAC material, which is carried out by contractor companies. The selection of materials to be microfilmed is under the responsibility of the Senior Archivist and is dependent upon the frequency of use, the value of the item, as well as health and safety issues (e.g. heavy volumes *etc.*) and available funding.

For business continuity the master negative microfilm collection (a total of 1089 microfilms) are stored off site.

5. b. Scanning service

An in-house scanning service is offered to members of the public supplying copies as either digital prints or files. Only material up to A3 that can lie flat on the scanner can be scanned. Details of the standards of scanning service are contained in the **Conservation Policy for Digitisation 2007**.

5. c. Photocopying

Written guidelines for the correct use of materials and equipment are on display in the vicinity of the photocopying machine.

5. d. Other Methods

The most popular records have been preserved on microfilm/fiche, e.g. parish registers, censuses and rate books.

6. DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

6. a. Emergency disaster plan.

A disaster can be an act of vandalism, fire, earthquake or flood and can cause significant damage. The best protection against any kind of disaster is prevention.

The six goals of a disaster plan are:

- a. To identify hazards and to take all possible actions to eliminate or minimise the risk of occurrence.

- b. To ensure that staff receive adequate training. To ensure training is updated.
- c. To provide necessary emergency equipment and ensure it is regularly maintained.
- d. To ensure the building and facilities are regularly inspected so that compliance and best practice are observed.
- e. To maintain links with outside agencies (emergency services, utilities and all service providers) advising them of appropriate action required in the event of various disaster scenarios.
- f. To re-establish normal activities quickly and efficiently.
- g. To learn from past problems in order to prevent recurrence.

The overriding priority in a disaster is towards people, but there is also a disaster plan which includes arrangements for salvaging items and a floor plan. Through a contract with Document SOS Limited (disaster recovery and restoration company) and practical in-house "disaster response exercises" we try to minimise risks in the event of a disaster. In addition, Emergency Equipments are stocked within the building.

6. b. Flooding and Leaks.

A leak alarm situated at conservation studio detects water leakage throughout the 4th floor offices and staff room.

The storage rooms below are of a special water sealed construction in order to minimize risks of leaks and floods.

6. c. Fire Precautions and Fire alarm evacuation procedures

Arrangements are in place to ensure that the Fire Brigade is familiar with the layout, contents and purpose of the building.

Fire alarm evacuation written procedures are available to all staff and volunteers. Staff and volunteers also receive practical training.

The strong rooms and search room are monitored by Stratos high sensitivity smoke detectors, and all areas are equipped with smoke detectors. There is a Redcare link to the Chubb monitoring station.

7. MONITORING AND REVIEW

Although the PCP lays out guidelines for the safest possible future and accessibility of the COWAC collections, there are further steps to be taken towards the following objectives:

- a. Increased awareness among staff and users with regards to preservation and conservation practices.
- b. Expanding of materials' accessibility through preservation surrogates, improvements of storage and the use of condition surveys.

The PCP is an annually updated document. The next review date is January 2010.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

National Preservation Office, Building Blocks for a Preservation Policy
NPO Preservation Guidance, (2001) Preservation Series

National Preservation Office (2000) Guidance for exhibiting library and
archive materials

National Preservation Office (2000) Photocopying of library and archive
materials

British Standards Institution: BS 5454:2000 "Recommendations for the
Storage & Exhibition of Archival Documents"

British Standards Institution: BS 4971:2002 "Repair and Allied Process for the
Conservation of Documents"

Cassar, M Environmental Management, Guidelines for Museums and
Galleries, Routledge (1995) p.p 33-118

Knell, S Care of Collections, Routledge (1994) pp. 107-122, 246-279

London Metropolitan Archives Preservation Policy 2006
http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/Corporation/leisure_heritage/libraries_archives_museums_galleries/lma/aims_policies/#policies

Swartzburg, S Preserving Library Materials, A Manual, The Scarecrow Press,
Inc. (1995) pp. 61-113

The National Archives Preservation Policy 7th March 2007
http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/preservation_pol.pdf

Vossou, G Dissertation for MA degree with title: Conservation Management
Policies and the Saint Catherine Monastery-Mount Sinai, Egypt (2001)
Unpublished