

CHESTER BEATTY LIBRARY

Collections Care and Conservation Strategy

Introduction

The main purpose of the Collections Care and Conservation Strategy is ***to ensure the long term preservation of the collection*** and to support the Library's key strategic priority to ***safeguard, manage and develop the Collections*** (See *Statement of Strategy 2016-2020*).

The Collections Care and Conservation strategy aims to strike a balance between the long term preservation of the collections and the provision of access; achieved through the management of risk to the collections, prioritisation of conservation treatments and training of staff.

The Strategy clearly defines three key objectives for the next five years (2013-2018).

Objectives:

1. To ensure that all Collections within the responsibility of the Library are cared for to the highest appropriate standards
2. To recognise the need for preventative conservation measures to promote the long-term preservation of the Collections
3. To define levels of practical conservation appropriate to the needs of the Collections and the organisation

Collections Care and Conservation at the Library

The enduring mission of the Chester Beatty Library is *to maintain and preserve the Collections of the Library and to make them available in the most appropriate ways for the use and enjoyment of the public and for scholarly study and research, in order to promote a wider appreciation and understanding of the international cultural heritage embodied in the Collections and to foster relations between Ireland and the peoples whose cultures are represented in the Collections.*

The Chester Beatty Library has a dedicated Conservation Laboratory that specialises in book and paper conservation which was established in 2000 when the Library moved to its current location within Dublin Castle. It became fully operational in 2003, when generous funding from a private patron made it possible to appoint an in-house conservator to manage it. Currently, the conservation laboratory has two permanent members of staff, the Head of Conservation (this member of staff took on the additional role of Head of Collections in 2014) and a Book & Paper Conservator (appointed 2017). Invaluable support is provided by a Senior Book Conservator on a fixed five-year contract (appointed 2015) and an annual externally funded internship programme.

Conservation staff play a vital role in protecting the artistic and cultural heritage of Chester Beatty's remarkable Collections. They not only ensure that the Collections are safeguarded during handling, transport, storage and display, but also work closely with curators on major projects to conserve material of particular importance. The Conservation staff are involved in almost every aspect of museum activities, from working on loans and exhibitions and undertaking important research to organising public lectures and tours and providing training for staff, volunteers, interns and summer placement students.

All conservation treatments are governed by a policy of minimum intervention to ensure the historical integrity of the object is maintained. Due to the wide variety of material in the Library, specialist conservators are consulted to treat materials such as textiles and ceramics. All work is carried out in accordance with a strict professional code of conduct. Staff undertake technical examination and research, and attend conferences and workshops, all of which contributes to a better understanding of the Library's objects and the development of practical conservation techniques. This information is disseminated through training interns, professional publications, lectures and the Library's education programme.

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Situation Review

A full situation review of Collections Care was carried out by the Head of Conservation in 2011, in preparation for the Library's application for accreditation through the Museums Standards Programme for Ireland (MSPI). Standards were assessed against those outlined in the MSPI template and UK's Collections Trust *Benchmarks for Collection Care* checklist. The provision of care for the Library's Collections was considered in reference to the following key areas: building maintenance, environmental conditions and monitoring, documentation, handling and storage, exhibition and disaster planning. The results of the review resulted in the following actions being taken in 2011 and 2012:

- Accurate record keeping of the Library's annual building maintenance schedule
- Development of a Labelling and Marking Policy and an Environmental Conditions and Monitoring Policy
- Drafting of a Documentation policy and backlog plan
- Purchase of additional shelving and boxes for Collections Storage
- Agreement of salvage priorities in the event of an Emergency

The same checklists were employed to review Collections care in 2013 and the results have been used to formulate the key objectives for this strategy and to prioritise the actions listed in the implementation plan.

The Strategy clearly defines three key objectives for the next five years (2013-2018).

Objective 1: To ensure that all Collections within the responsibility of the Library are cared for to the highest appropriate standards

Actions

- To complete the Heritage Council's Museums Standards Programme for Ireland (MSPI).
- To complete the full condition survey of the Collections.
- To ensure that all staff within the organisation are aware of their roles and responsibilities for caring for the collections.

Objective 2: To recognise the need for preventative conservation measures to promote the long-term preservation of the Collections

Actions

- To maintain the Library's Emergency Response Plan (ERP).
- To continue improving existing collection housing in storage.
- To continue improving existing storage facilities for the collections.
- To improve existing storage facilities for non-collection material off-site.
- To maintain stable environmental conditions in all exhibition and storage areas.

Objective 3: To define levels of practical conservation appropriate to the needs of the Collections and the organisation

Actions

- To maintain high level of preservation for all items on display.
- To address lack of staffing in Conservation and seek to ensure that there is a long-term complement of staff to ensure continuity of expertise.
- To complete and formalise a Conservation Treatment Policy for the Library.
- To maintain accurate records on all condition assessments and treatments carried out and the activities of the conservation staff.

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Strategy Implementation

A detailed implementation plan has been drawn up listing actions required to meet the three objectives within the five year time frame of the Collections Care and Conservation strategy (2013-2018). The actions are all championed by the Library's Head of Conservation. Performance indicators are used to break each action into a specific task. The plan includes a target completion date for each task and key members of staff who will assist in achieving them. Many of the actions outlined in the implementation plan can and will be met using existing staff and available funding; however the plan below also highlights actions that cannot be addressed without the investment of additional resources.

Approval/Revision History

This Collections Care and Conservation Strategy is version 1, issued in September 2013 and formally approved by the Trustees on 16 October 2013.

This Strategy is for a five year period 2013-2018, however it will be reviewed annually by the Head of Conservation. Review dates for actions are not listed in the implementation plan as progress will be monitored by the Head of Conservation through regular department meetings with conservation and curatorial staff; any delays in meeting the target completion dates will be highlighted to the Collections management team. Following adoption of the Library's *Statement of Strategy: 2016-2020*, key actions are now annually included in the Library's Strategic Implementation Plan.