



# CARING FOR COLLECTIONS

A POLICY TO PROTECT  
SIGNIFICANCE

2019

For the *love* of Scotland

# Caring for Collections: A Policy to Protect Significance

Approved by Board of Trustees, 27 March 2019

Review date: 27 March 2024

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## 1. Why we care for our collections

We care for collections to fulfil both parts of our mission: to preserve what is special about Scotland's heritage and to do this for the enjoyment of all.

## 2. What we mean by 'our collections', 'collections care' and 'collections conservation'

Collections held by the Trust are the things we have purposefully selected to keep for the future and include a broad representation of material culture of value to Scotland. We use the word 'collection' to include our collections of material culture, archives, books, and photographs. We exclude from this term, anything that cannot be moved, such as buildings and monuments (with the exception of portable archaeology and heavy sculpture). The Trust also uses the term 'collection' to describe our living plant collections. The living plant collections are not covered by this policy.

By *collections care* we mean the full range of activities intended to protect our collection (such as implementing organisational policies, providing secure storage, cleaning, maintenance, handling, scientific investigation, environmental monitoring and control and emergency planning)<sup>1</sup>. Caring for collections sometimes involves specialist advice but more generally is

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<sup>1</sup> PAS 197:2009, 2.10 'Code of Practice for Cultural Collections Management'

something that we can all do to protect significance.<sup>2</sup> Collections care is also known as preventive conservation.

In its broadest sense, 'collections conservation' means maintaining or enhancing significance through condition. In a physical sense, this is done by achieving stabilisation in order to extend the useful life of the collection item to ensure its continued availability. Many aspects of conservation are specialist activities but, with appropriate training and supervision, non-specialists play a crucial part in the process.

### **3. Our approach to collections care**

The Trust prioritises activities to prevent deterioration, considers what it is that we are trying to conserve and what our goals are, and, wherever possible demonstrates openness and transparency (NTS Conservation, Learning, Access and Enjoyment Principles, No. 6: Open).

#### **a. We prioritise prevention**

Preventive conservation incorporates the measures necessary to slow down or minimise deterioration. It is a responsible, cost-effective and efficient way of delivering material collections conservation and care.

The Trust's principal methods of preventing damage, managing risk and slowing down deterioration are to:

- draw up and implement robust and sustained housekeeping regimes;
- provide stable and appropriate internal environments (temperature, humidity, visible light, UV radiation) for collections on display and in storage;
- implement a sustained programme of Integrated Pest Management

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<sup>2</sup> The Trust's definition of significance is cited in its Conservation, Learning, Access and Enjoyment Principles (2018), '[significance] represents both the meaning of the place in the Trust's perception and how the Trust's ascribes value to that meaning. The significance of a place or feature is assessed using the Trust's own process of evaluation, with or without prior external recognition. As an indication of the importance of a place or object, significance can include many different types of value (including cultural, natural, aesthetic, historical, scientific and social)'.

- ensure that all staff working with collections are well trained in their handling and care and that conservation is recognised as a vehicle for education and engagement;
- put in place protective measures and practices to mitigate risk of physical and accidental damage; and
- identify collection and site-specific risks, for example theft, fire and flood, and put in place appropriate measures for their mitigation such as response, salvage and recovery plans and adequate training for staff.

Generally speaking, in carrying out conservation there will be a presumption of minimum intervention and the retention of historic materials.

## **b. We consider significance**

The objective of collections conservation is to maintain or enhance an object's significance through condition. All conservation work will be informed by significance (Principle 3, NTS Conservation Principles 2018) which is determined for each object by a curator (see *Developing Collections: A Policy to Reflect and Enrich Lives*, Section 9.1).

Significance may derive from an object's original or subsequent use. The Trust cares for collections and objects that are still operational and used. Among these are archives, books, furniture, rugs, carpets, clocks, musical instruments, vehicles and farming tools as well as printing, weaving and milling equipment.

Decisions on the conservation and use of particular objects will be taken on a case-by-case basis and will consider:

- the significance of the item, its associations and its function;
- the context of the property's specific display strategy and conservation approach to collections and interiors;

- the desire to balance long-term preservation of our collections with the provision of public access and enjoyable visitor experiences, including functions and events;
- the need to support property staff to manage the balance of income generation and conservation;
- the need to mitigate any risks, identified through a risk assessment process, that continued use may pose to the object and original historic features;
- the recognition that, in some circumstances, continued use may actually contribute to the preservation of the object and help to retain, preserve or rediscover user skills;
- the additional maintenance required to preserve functionality;
- the need to review the decisions made for each object periodically, as required, in order to assess changes to the object and its needs.

When a decision is made to return an object to working order, the recommended treatment may require a higher level of intervention than would normally be accepted. Treatment should follow historically accurate methods where appropriate, preserve the integrity and original fabric of the object as far as possible, and may be detectable while not necessarily conspicuous.

### **c. We are goals-focused**

Our approach to conservation takes account of the views of stakeholders and users, professional advice, and the needs of the collection, in order to define and meet a clearly-defined goal. In arriving at a conservation decision we will look at technical considerations but also ask the following types of questions:

- Who is this for?
- Why is it being done?
- Who else cares about this?

- What does this object / collection mean to other people?

Setting goals, like decision making, is an important part of collections care and is best done collectively to ensure balance between different interests. The Trust's *Conservation, Learning, Access and Enjoyment Principles* (2018) describe what happens when there is discord but pragmatic goal-setting is an important way of avoiding this.

#### **d. We are open and inclusive**

We are as open and inclusive as possible to ensure that conservation is a collective undertaking and learns from new research and past activity. In order to do this we keep records to ensure that all conservation decisions and activities may be shared with others and inform future activities.

Wherever possible, we will involve key stakeholders in decision-making, and others in the work of conservation (such as conservation-in-action). As well as fulfilling our mission, making conservation activity apparent and participatory is likely to build support for the work of the Trust, improve the visitor experience and provide meaningful education activities.

In order to build support for collections care we communicate in a way which is positive, friendly, and easy to understand.

### **4. Ethics, standards and legislation**

In caring for and conserving our collections, the Trust will adhere to the following legislation, standards, and codes of ethics:

All relevant Health and Safety legislation including, but not limited to:

*Health and Safety at Work Act* (1974)

*Control of Substances Harmful to Health (COSHH)* (2002)

*Control of Asbestos Regulations* (2012)

*General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)* (EU) 2016/679

*Museum Association Code of Ethics* (2016)

*Institute of Conservation (Icon) Code of Conduct (2014)*

*Professional Accreditation of Conservator-Restorers (PACR), Institute of Conservation (Icon), revised (2008)*

*BS 4971:2017 Conservation and care of archive and library collections*

*Benchmarks in Collection Care 2.1, Collections Trust (2018)*

*Spectrum 5.0, Collections Trust (2017)*

*PAS197:2009 Code of Practice for Cultural Collections Management*

*BSI PAS 198 Specification for managing environmental conditions for cultural collections*

*BS EN 16853:2017 Conservation of cultural heritage. Conservation process. Decision making, planning and implementation*

## **5. When this policy will be reviewed**

This Policy will be reviewed every five years or as required to reflect the continuous development of, and changes to, internal standards and procedures.

## **6. References**

*Advancing Access: A Policy for Audiences and Collections (2018)*

*Developing Collections: A Policy to Reflect and Enrich Lives (2019)*

*Sharing Collections: A Policy on Lending and Borrowing (2019)*

*For Info: A Policy to Build and Share Information about Collections (2019)*

*Conservation, Learning, Access and Enjoyment Principles (2018)*

*Respecting Remains: A Policy on the Treatment of Human Remains (2019)*

*NTS Equality and Diversity Policy (2012)*

*NTS Collections & Interiors Review (2017)*

*NTS Experiencing Collections (2017)*

*NTS Experiencing Things (2018)*

*NTS Acquisitions Policy (2019)*



## *OUR VISION*

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Scotland's heritage is valued by everyone and protected now and for future generations

## *OUR OBJECTIVES*

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To protect and care for Scotland's heritage

To provide opportunities for everyone to experience and value Scotland's heritage

To promote the benefits of heritage

To create an efficient and sustainable business which supports our conservation needs

## *OUR VALUES*

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*VIBRANT*

*CARING*

*INCLUSIVE*

*CURIOUS*

*BRAVE*

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