



Museum Development North West
Collections Care and Management Programme
2014-15

Evaluation Report



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Introduction

The Manchester Partnership delivered the collections care & management programme in 2014-15 with Museum Development North West (MDNW) as part of its Arts Council England (ACE) Museum Development funding programme for 2015-2018. This programme was designed to support museum staff from varying museums in the region to achieve, maintain and improve collections care & management requirements detailed in Section 2 of the ACE-managed Museum Accreditation Standard.

It was targeted at museums that showed commitment to tackling their Accreditation areas for improvement and could attend the programme of [five workshops](#) focusing on four key areas:

1. Policies, plans and procedures and how to use them
2. Collections management
3. Environmental data analysis and control
4. Collections care

Workshops

Each session was designed to provide museums with skills and information to help build and sustain good levels of provision across these four areas over a five month period and into the future with the aid of equipment kits. The sessions were also designed to help each participating organisation identify areas for improvement in procedures and care provision for collections as well as future staff training needs. "Homework" was suggested for completion between workshops to support delegates to implement learning.

Session 1: Policies, plans and procedures, November 2014

Facilitators: Jennie Pitceathly (Accreditation Advisor), Lynsey Jones (MDNW)

This day provided participants with an introduction to the programme and an overview of:

- Collections care & management policies, plans and procedures
- Resources, templates and toolkits
- Latest standards relating to collections care and management
- Benchmarks in Collections Care self-assessment checklist

Homework: Complete Benchmarks in Collections Care assessment for next session.

Session 2: Collections management, December 2014

Facilitators: John Peel, Sian Millar (MAG). In attendance: Clare Grundy (MAG)

The session explored best practice in documentation procedures including:

- Object location and movement control
- Collections management documentation
- Digitisation

Delegates were given the chance to draw up action plans based on their organisational priorities.

Homework: Implement action plan. Collect environmental data for next session.

Session 3: Environmental data analysis and control, January 2015

Facilitators: Jenny Discombe (MM), Sarah Potter (Whitworth)

This day gave delegates support in:

- Understanding purpose and function of environmental guidelines
- Analysing data collected from environmental monitoring procedures
- Good storage and display practices
- Pest monitoring and control

Homework: Review practices in environmental monitoring and control for sensitive collections. Develop an action plan or procedures for improvement.

Session 4: Collections care, February 2015

Facilitators: Clare Grundy (MAG), Julia Jackson (MAG), Sam Sportun (MM)

This session looked at:

- Housekeeping and preventive conservation principles
- Object handling and assessment
- Cleaning – why, when and how
- Professional advice and resources

Homework: develop handling guides for staff or continue to implement session 3 action plan

Session 5: Collections care Q&A session, March 2015

Facilitators: Ann French (Whitworth), Clare Grundy (MAG), Julia Jackson (MAG), Sam Sportun (MM)

This session gave delegates the opportunity to bring specific collections care and conservation problems to share and review with conservators. A tour of the Whitworth's new storage and collection access facilities was also included.

Programme evaluation

This section of the report is based on:

- Attendance statistics
- Evaluation forms from individual workshops
- The evaluation of the impact of the programme six months on

Attendance and scope

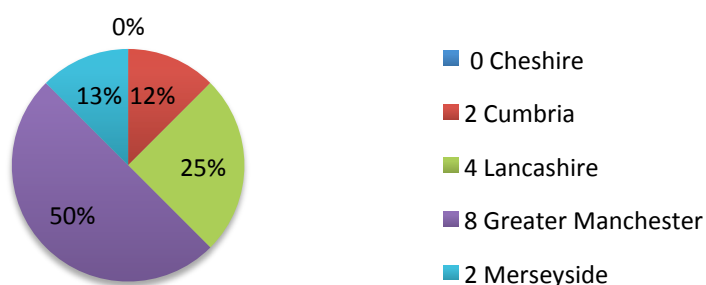
Attendance for the whole programme was high at 89%. Sessions were held at Lancashire Conservation Studios, Manchester Museum, The Whitworth and Manchester Art Gallery, delivered over five months.

25 delegates from 16 museums benefited from the sessions. Some museums ensured shared learning and full commitment to the programme by including multiple staff from their organisations.

Delegate profile

The delegates were required to apply for a place on the programme by completing a learning needs analysis survey to gauge level of knowledge, skills and equipment. They also needed senior management consent, where appropriate, for workshop attendance to ensure they were committed to supporting their staff to undertake the course.

Museum Locations



25 delegates on the programme represented 16 different museums from across the North West, 11 of which are independent museums, four local authority managed and one National Trust. Some used it as a refresher course and for some as essential career development. The roles held by delegates ranged from curators and collections managers to museum volunteers.

The Museums were:

Astley Hall, Chorley	Museum of Wigan Life
Gawthorpe Textile Collection	People's History Museum
Kendal Museum	Prescot Museum
Keswick Museum	Rochdale Pioneers Museum
Liverpool Medical Institute	Rufford Old Hall
Manchester Art Gallery	Salford University Art Collection
Manchester Museum	Stockport Museums
Museum of Transport	The Whitaker, Rossendale

Delegate feedback

The delegates held various roles across the represented museums including volunteers, trainees, curators, collections assistants and collections managers with a range of knowledge and experiences. Some came with basic knowledge and wanted to learn new skills to apply at work, some had on-the-job experience but wanted official training and some came for a refresher and to improve knowledge on the latest standards.

Comments from delegates are included in each section.

Personal development

Some delegates gained skills and confidence to add to their personal as well as professional development. The "homework" in-between sessions helped support delegates to take what they had learned and put it in to practice with workshop facilitators giving support during workshops. This increased the impact of the programme.

"I do feel more confident about preventative conservation, this is a key part of our conservation care and now I have got my head around it I have been able to train others on how to take readings and interpret them! Object handling is much easier, as I am no longer petrified of doing damage. I know how to handle different materials and assess them. I have built my own object handling table to help me with this!"

"Just to say thank you to everyone that was involved on the course – I learned a lot, and was just amazed at how much is involved in museums – although everyone else on the course seemed to have academic qualifications both in sciences and museums, I did not feel too much out of my depth and really enjoyed the chance to learn more"

Policies, plans and procedures

“I have a better understanding for the need to have policies, plans and procedures, and am more aware of why we have them”

“I re-visited our Collection Care and Conservation Plan and Documentation Procedural Manual and have made changes in the light of what I learned on the course”

Collections management

“The accessioning toolkit has completely changed the way we accession our objects, we are now working to best practice which can be felt through the whole organisation”

“The workshop definitely gave me the confidence to make sure my documentation was up to date, to find the ‘temporarily lost’ items, get them accessioned and catalogued”

Environmental data analysis and control

“This session highlighted how vulnerable the collection is to environmental fluctuations. As a result of this, I have recently been successful in applying for funding to install thermostatic valves to the radiators. Understanding the purpose and function of environmental guidelines prompted my decision to apply for the funding”

“We have increased pest monitoring, cleaning and good housekeeping routines in the stores as these are areas we have more control over”

Collections care

“I completed the Benchmarks in Collections Care during the course and have used this as the basis to plan a programme of improvement in collection storage and preventive conservation”

“We have planned in some training for our volunteers on object handling using the resources learned about on the course”

“Seeing other storage areas during the course was of extreme help – some very useful ideas”

“I am more aware of how weather plays its part on collections and buildings, something I was never aware of before! We are constantly aware of the threat of flooding so storage is adapted to this ”

Learning evaluation

Eight delegates completed a survey six months after the end of the programme highlighting what they had learned and what plans they were taking forward. Some of those survey results are documented here as quotes and case studies.

“The course was brilliant, we have learned a lot as an organisation and feel there is a definite level of support available to us should we need it in the future. Thank you!”

“This course was invaluable for me to revise up to date practice and procedure. Especially to be able to pass this on to staff and students working on our occupational Museum and Gallery Skills course”

“I have shared the knowledge gained on the course with individuals from my own organisation, and we are already seeing changes implemented, particularly around our processes when acquiring new material”

Amy Dearnaley, **Astley Hall, Lancashire**



Astley Hall is a Grade I listed building set within the beautiful Astley Park, which includes historic woodland, a lake and a fully renovated Victorian walled garden. The Hall is perhaps best known for its stunning Jacobean plasterwork ceilings and the house is built around an internal Elizabethan courtyard.

“Policies, plans and procedures

The benchmarking tool was really useful and highlighted many areas for improvement. I will continue to work through this as part of my development in working with collections.

Collections management

This session really highlighted the way that location and movement control was dealt with at Astley Hall. There is obviously continuous tension between the hall being used for events/weddings and its function as a historic house museum. More work is needed in this area, especially with regards to furniture on permanent display, although as a result of this session more care is taken and movement control has improved.

Environmental data analysis and control

This session highlighted how vulnerable the collection is to environmental fluctuations. As a result of this, I have recently been successful in applying for funding to install thermostatic valves throughout Astley Hall. Understanding the purpose and function of environmental guidelines prompted my decision to apply for the funding.

Collections care

This session of the course was the most useful for me. Having attended the course I now feel more confident when handling collections. I was also able to accession a group of objects after the course by applying knowledge I had gained, something that I hadn't done before.

Future plans

I intend to attend a training course next year which will support me in documenting objects and digitising the collection.”

Rachel Terry, **Gawthorpe Textile Collection, Lancashire**



Gawthorpe Hall is owned by the National Trust and managed by Lancashire County Council.

Gawthorpe Textile Collection is housed in Gawthorpe Hall and governed by an independent trust. The charity was created after the death of the founder, Miss Rachel Kay-Shuttleworth (1886-1967) to care for her collection of textiles.

“Policies, plans and procedures

I completed the Benchmarks in Collections Care during the course and have used this as the basis to plan a programme of improvement in collection storage and preventive conservation. I recently reviewed the Benchmarks to see where we had improved over the last year and also where we currently need to improve and have used this to help support a bid to AIM for some preventive conservation work on the collection. I revisited our Collection Care and Conservation Plan and Documentation Procedural Manual and have made changes in the light of what I learned on the course.

Collections management

We have now set up clearer in/out procedures for items, a better system for loans paperwork and movement registers for the stores.

Environmental data analysis and control

I feel confident in interpreting the data, but the course has made us realise that we need to take more proactive control over gathering the data. We have asked Lancashire County Council/National Trust to set narrower parameters for their monitoring of the stores based on information from the conservators on the course and have asked for low level heating. We have increased pest monitoring, cleaning and housekeeping routines in the stores as these are areas we have more control over. Our Friends of Gawthorpe group have agreed to part fund a freezer to help us improve pest management of items coming into the collection.

Collections care

We have planned in some training for our volunteers on object handling using the resources learned about on the course.

Future plans

We would really like to do some more specific area monitoring of temperature/humidity of areas within the store... and also some monitoring within the cases and library cupboards.”

Margaret Martindale, **Keswick Museum, Cumbria**



The Museum & Art Gallery is managed by Keswick Museum & Art Gallery Management Limited, a registered charity since 2014 at the time of its renovation and reopening. The collections reflect the local area through themes of landscape and natural history, the domestic and community lives of local people, social and industrial history and local art, artists, writers, crafts and crafts people.

“Policies, plans and procedures

I have a better understanding for the need to have policies, plans and procedures, and am more aware of why we have them.

Collections management

Seeing other storage areas during the course was of extreme help – some very useful ideas.

Environmental data analysis and control

I am more aware of how weather plays its part on collections and buildings, something I was never aware of before! We are constantly aware of the threat of flooding so storage is adapted to this.

Collections care

The course has certainly made me feel more confident – many thanks. The visit to the Conservation Studios at Preston was very interesting.

Future plans

The team at Keswick Museum have recently completed an entire store rearrange, which was a great opportunity to repackage and reorganise the store.”

Steph Fletcher, **University of Salford (UoS): New Collection of Chinese Contemporary Art, Greater Manchester**



The partnership between UoS and the Centre for Chinese Contemporary Art works to co-commission and acquire exceptional artwork to build a collection of Chinese contemporary art at the University of Salford that is available for loan to museums and galleries nationally and internationally.

“Policies, plans and procedures

The workshops were crucial in helping us complete our Accreditation return. Our current policies were mostly up to date, but have been amended with reference to the latest standards. Going through the Benchmarks exercise also helped us assess our strengths/weaknesses.

Collections management

Our documentation manual will be reviewed with minor updates.

Environmental data analysis and control

Although most of our procedures are basic, it was interesting to know more of the science behind the facts and figures that we collect! Current conditions and monitoring are good – however again this is a crucial area with regards to our store move.

Collections care

...advice on preventative principles and how/why/where/when to seek a conservator all very helpful!

Future plans

We are planning a relocation and expansion of our art store on campus – hopefully during 2016 - and will refer to the Benchmarks throughout this process.

We are also researching extra equipment (cost-dependent) to help monitor new exhibition areas and to take readings overnight.

We would like to improve our briefings with other University staff, particularly regarding object handling.”

Ella Cole, **The Whitaker, Lancashire**



The Whitaker (previously Rossendale Museum & Art Gallery) is set in a beautiful park at the centre of the Rossendale Valley in Lancashire. The museum collections include local history, paintings and Victorian natural history collections. The main galleries have been newly refurbished and the museum has plans to develop the site further.

“Policies, plans and procedures

It was useful to revisit [Benchmarks in Collections Care] as we are currently half way through the three year Accreditation procedure, it allowed me to re-examine what we had achieved so far, where there are gaps and where we want to go. We already have a policy in place, but the Benchmarking will inform a review of that policy.

Collections management

The workshop definitely gave me the confidence to make sure my documentation was up to date ...accessioned and catalogued. I looked also at how I catalogued as I currently operate a paper based system, I reviewed the classification method employed and decided when we get to digitise the collection we will keep the same methodology.

Environmental data analysis and control

I have to say pest monitoring and control is not my favourite part of the job but I feel now I understand why it is so important, the bug traps are replaced more regularly and I now know in detail what I am looking for in specific item checks. I have... been able to demonstrate how environmental change affects collection care to senior management. This has enabled me to gain the confidence to go for funding to replace UV window film, have special blinds installed and replace some lighting with LEDs.

Collections care

I do feel more confident about preventative conservation, it's a key part of our conservation care and now I have got my head around it I have been able to train others. Object handling is easier, as I am no longer petrified of doing damage. I know how to handle different materials and assess them."

Future plans

The Whitaker have plans to develop the site and are working on plans for a funding bid. Ella is focusing on the care of the collections elements of the bid.

Additional support

Delegates were asked what they would need to continue their progress in collections care and management at their sites. They said:

- Site specific advice on collection documentation to meet Accreditation standards
- Contacts for companies that can make digital copies of accession registers
- Information on grants available for purchasing monitoring equipment or any museums wishing to dispose of older equipment
- Support and practical knowledge in pest monitoring, identification and treatment
- A hands-on course focusing on housekeeping, object handling and assessment
- Training sessions in digital documentation for volunteer teams
- Support with new policies and procedures for Accreditation
- To see good practice in other museums and how collections management systems can lead to better curation and exhibitions
- Help with analysing environmental control data when a problem arises
- Simple basic science courses based on museums and art
- Digitisation courses (photographic especially)
- Resources and guidance on digital and new media collections
- Training in object handling for volunteers and staff

Future support

MDNW are committed to supporting museums care and manage collections. Below are some highlights of what we will be delivering over the next few years:

2015-16

- Collaborating with Collections Trust on a two day workshop on digitisation
- Begin delivery of rolling programme of Accreditation training days
- Develop a list of resources for delegates to fulfil some of the requests identified on the follow up surveys, including training providers and information for further reading

2016-17

- Working with the Manchester Partnership and Cumbria Museum Consortium to deliver a series of workshops on collection specialisms
- Supporting the Cumbria Museum Consortium curatorial skills programme
- Supporting numismatic and natural history collections reviews

2017-18

- Work with Major Partner Museums, national museums and other agencies to develop a regional "Loan Ready" programme

More information

Thank you to the trainers: **Amanda Wallace**, Deputy Director at Manchester Art Gallery; **Nicola Walker**, Head of Collections Care and Access at The Whitworth; **Sam Sportun**, Collections Care Manager at Manchester Museum; **Ann French**, Collections Care Manager/Conservator (Textiles) at The Whitworth; **Clare Grundy**, Senior Conservator (and Works on Paper Conservator) at Manchester Art Gallery; **John Peel**, Collection Information Officer at Manchester Art Gallery; **Sian Miller**, Loans Manager at Manchester Art Gallery; **Jenny Discombe**, Conservator at Manchester Museum; **Sarah Potter**, Conservator (Preventive) at The Whitworth; **Julia Jackson**, Painting Conservator at Manchester Art Gallery; **Jennie Pitceathly**, Head of Learning, Lakeland Arts (formerly Accreditation Advisor for ACE).

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Follow our blog for information, updates and training opportunities from the sector: <https://museumdevelopmentnorthwest.wordpress.com>

Images:

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Title page - Gawthorpe Textile Collection

p9 Astley Hall

p10 Gawthorpe Textile Collection

p11 courtesy of Keswick Museum & Art Gallery

p12 *Haze and Fog* (2013) – Cao Fei, at the Centre for Chinese Contemporary Art, photograph courtesy of Paul Hermann, University of Salford Art Collection

p13 courtesy of The Whitaker