



THE COLLEGE OF
OPTOMETRISTS

**BOA Museum
Care and Conservation Policy
2019-2024**

July 2019

Introduction – a Duty of Care

The College of Optometrists is the Professional, Scientific and Examining Body for Optometry in the United Kingdom, working for the public benefit. It was formed in 1980 by an amalgamation of the British Optical Association, the Scottish Association of Opticians and the examining function of the Worshipful Company of Spectacle Makers. It is registered as a charity and was granted a Royal Charter of Incorporation in 1995.

The College inherited the British Optical Association (BOA) Museum (founded 1901) from its predecessor body. The BOA Museum's *Mission Statement* is:

The collections of the British Optical Association Museum are a nationally important resource for learning about the history and practice of optometry, ophthalmic optics and related subjects, promoting the optometry profession and raising public awareness of its past and present importance to society.

This document sets out the museum policy of the College by which it will be guided in its provision of access to its collections and associated information.

This is the College's second Care and Conservation Policy. The first was approved in 2014 and this plan is a revision of that. The adoption and regular review of this policy is a requirement of the Accreditation Scheme for Museums in the United Kingdom (*Accreditation Standard*, November 2018, section 6.1) but conservation of ophthalmic antiques has long been a distinctive component of the museum's work. The museum is already working towards the minimum requirements of the SPECTRUM 5.0 standard for Collections Care and completed a benchmarking exercise in collections care during 2011. The necessary improvements stemming from this exercise were implemented prior to 2014 and the implementation of further discretionary changes is envisaged as part of the *BOA Museum Forward Plan* (Section 4).

The purpose of this policy is to ensure a professional approach to collections care and conservation, to ensure that this links to the museum's core purpose and meets ethical commitments and legal requirements. The Museum is responsible for the long-term preservation of the College's inherited collections and it seeks to do so in a manner sympathetic with the historic surroundings in which the collections are currently housed, although it is not responsible for the fabric of the building.

This policy outlines the preventative and remedial collections care measures that the College will take to maximise access to the museum collections for present and future users. It aims to ensure that a range of these preventative and remedial conservation measures are identified and resourced. This policy works within the College's overall approach to risk management but does not cover material held in the College Library.

It operates alongside, and is to be read in conjunction with:

BOA Museum Forward Plan 2019-2021
BOA Museum Care and Conservation Plan 2019-2021
BOA Museum Collections Development Policy 2019-2024
BOA Museum Documentation Policy 2019-2024

Name of museum: British Optical Association Museum (no 2069)

Name of governing body: The Board of Trustees, The College of Optometrists

Date on which this policy was approved by governing body: 17 July 2019

Policy review procedure: The care and conservation policy will be published and reviewed from time to time, at least once every five years. It should be noted that there is considerable debate within the museum world on many aspects of conservation and standards and guidelines are continually being reviewed. Consequently it is essential that this policy is itself reviewed regularly.

Date at which this policy is due for review: 17 July 2024

Arts Council England will be notified of any changes to the collections development policy, and the implications of any such changes for the future of collections.

Any amendments made since the last full review are listed below:

July 2019

- Introduction re-written
 - Updating of cross-references to other museum plans and policies
 - Policy review procedure moved to start of document
 - Expansion of paragraph 1.7 – ‘Conservation treatments will, in many cases, be highlighted in a dedicated section of the museum website’.
 - New paragraph 1.10 detailing sources of specialist expertise and advice.
 - Expansion of paragraph 2.1.
 - Expansion of paragraph 3.1.
 - Addition of clause to paragraph 5.7 – ‘delivered either verbally or in writing’.
 - New paragraph 5.8. (Reflects existing practice, now enshrined in policy).
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1. Key principles and sources of expertise and advice

- 1.1. The museum is committed to slowing down or minimising the physical deterioration of the objects in its care.
- 1.2. Furthermore, in the light of its status as an object-rich collections-driven museum, the museum is committed to exploring issues of material decay in the interpretation of its collections (whether through physical displays or online).
- 1.3. Once an item has been accepted into the collection (or is received into the museum on loan for the purposes of display or assessment) the museum has a duty to look after that material to professional standards.

- 1.4. The museum takes a strategic, risk management approach to collections care.
- 1.5. The museum strives to provide an appropriate climate of temperature, relative humidity and light levels in a pollution and pest-free environment that achieves a satisfactory balance between the long-term preservation of the objects and accessibility to staff and external users.
- 1.6. Conservation requirements/treatments are prioritised within the framework of resources available.
- 1.7. All conservation treatments carried out on objects are documented in the museum's collections management system (currently MIMSY XG). Conservation records will be maintained for all objects and these will be used to keep an account of condition, treatment and any special requirements or circumstances pertaining to the object. Conservation treatments will, in many cases, be highlighted in a dedicated section of the museum website.
- 1.8. Preservation has many facets and includes, *inter alia*, the maintenance of an accurate inventory of the collection and the provision of adequate housing with protection from theft, disasters such as fire and flood, 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, to undertake remedial work for objects that have deteriorated (or have been received in poor condition) and occasionally restoration; the process of returning an object to some known earlier state.
- 1.9. The museum's preference is for preventative conservation wherever possible. Objects will be given stabilising or remedial treatment if they are under threat of loss of originality or integrity, but only if they can then be returned to stable storage conditions which meet the requirements of preventative conservation.
- 1.10. The museum will take advice from appropriate experts and/or appoint specialist advisers where deemed necessary or useful. As of July 2019 the museum's specialist advisers are:
 - Paintings and works of art on paper: Mrs Jennifer Ridd (qualified art conservator and restorer).
 - Ophthalmic instrumentation: Mr Richard Keeler (also Honorary Curator to the Royal College of Ophthalmologists).
 - Spectacles and vision aids: Mr Ronald MacGregor (author of *Restoring Ophthalmic Antiques*)
 - Real tortoiseshell materials: Mr Walter Berwick
 - Contact lenses: Mr Andrew Gasson (former President of the British Contact Lens Association) and Mr Gordon Jones.

Specific consultation may also be had with the Worshipful Company of Spectacle Makers or the Worshipful Company of Scientific Instrument Makers, in each case via the Clerk.

- 1.11. Where specific expertise is required that falls outside of the College's in-house expertise, external advice will be sought from suitably qualified conservators identified via the *ICON Conservation Register*. <http://www.conservationregister.com/>

2. Preventative Conservation

- 2.1. Preventative conservation covers the measures necessary to slow down or minimise deterioration of museum objects. The museum prefers to avoid the need for remedial conservation or restoration by preventing deterioration as far as possible, although it is recognised that some processes of deterioration are inevitable, for instance the breakdown of cellulose-based plastics as found in many spectacle frames, and the best that can be managed is to retard deterioration. The success of this strategy hinges largely on the provision of good, and more importantly stable, environmental conditions in both display areas and storage areas, minimising unnecessary movement or handling of the objects.
- 2.2. The College will provide the museum with sufficient secure space in a suitable condition to store the collections (and for archival material it will strive, in the longer term, to achieve storage facilities as recommended in PD 5454: 2012 *Guide for the Storage and Exhibition of Archival Materials*).
- 2.3. Whenever reasonably possible, storage of museum collections will be sited in areas separate from other College functions and will be made secure. Access to locked cabinets will be restricted to museum staff.
- 2.4. Objects will be displayed and stored in an environment that minimises their rate of deterioration. Accordingly, the museum will monitor the environment of key display and storage areas utilising Hanwell Humbug dataloggers, a lux meter and a UV meter. Readings will be logged, checked regularly for extreme fluctuations and the data analysed formally on an annual basis.
- 2.5. As the museum's ability to influence controls on the environment of the building is very limited, it will concentrate on the provision of stable micro-climates through boxing. If an object is found to be at risk in an unstable environment and that environment cannot be adequately controlled (e.g. if the dictates of a working office require higher temperatures) the object will be moved to a safer environment.
- 2.6. Appropriate storage materials will be employed (for example, acid-free boxes or powder-coated steel racking). As much as possible storage furniture and racking will be constructed from inert materials to minimise risk from off-gassing. Items on shelves will be cushioned where necessary by standing them on conservation-grade foam board such as *Plastazote*. Where items must be packed we will use only conservation-grade materials such as acid free tissue, Tyvek bags, Melinex sleeves, unbleached calico and acid-free card.
- 2.7. Pest control measures will be deployed (for example sticky traps), and pest risks monitored.
- 2.8. Hazardous material will be segregated, and appropriate risk signage displayed.
- 2.9. A cleaning regime is in force. Generally the College cleaners have been instructed to avoid museum objects. Such objects will normally be cleaned only by the curator, a volunteer overseen by the curator or a specialist contractor. As the College building is known to have a very dry environment, particular attention will be given to the regular moisturisation and re-polishing of tortoiseshell items. The museum will not, however, engage in the routine replenishing of saline solution for storing soft contact lenses, except where those items are on display and replenishment will not cause damage to the outer packaging.
- 2.10. All storage areas are equipped with fire detection and appropriate extinguishers.
- 2.11. A *BOA Museum Emergency Plan* (disaster plan) has been prepared.

3. Remedial Conservation

- 3.1. Remedial conservation is required for items which have suffered deterioration to the point that there is a serious risk to their integrity. It involves the treatment of an object to bring it to a more acceptable condition or state, to stabilise it or enhance some aspects of its cultural or scientific value. In such cases our strategy will be to draw up an individual specification for the work required on each object, based on specialist advice where necessary. We will then carry out the work either with our own staff - where they have the required specialist skills, materials and facilities - or through specialist contractors. The museum has an established list of conservators with whom it has worked for over twenty years. In instances where a new contractor is required reference will be made to the *UK Conservation Register* whilst noting that the highly specialist nature of many ophthalmic items may require the services of an expert not on that register and not necessarily a specialist in historical artefacts. Once an object has received remedial conservation it will be returned to a preventative conservation regime.
- 3.2. Some items may require treatment to arrest some active process of deterioration. This could be a simple matter of transfer to good storage, but some conditions (e.g. insect infestation) will require specific treatment. We will endeavour to treat such objects according to current best professional practice. It is accepted that in some areas the action we take will be restricted by limited resources; many hundreds of items in the Museum's two-dimensional collection, for example, are likely to suffer at some stage from being printed on acidic paper. These will be monitored carefully. If and when this deterioration begins the museum will draw up a priority list of objects in the greatest need of treatment. Otherwise action will be taken as required if and when an object has reached the point when it cannot be used without risk to its integrity.
- 3.3. In the case of processes of deterioration that cannot be prevented including, for example, the decomposition of some synthetic rubbers and plastics the Museum will investigate action which will slow the process down (e.g. storage at low temperatures or strict controls on handling), where this is practical. In the last resort the Museum will record as much detail as possible about the material (specification, chemical composition, trade information, etc.) and the form of the item (or component) which is deteriorating so that we retain, at the least, a comprehensive record of the object even if it should decompose completely.
- 3.4. There are also a small number of items in the collection which could potentially incorporate hazardous materials including (for example) luminous paint on dials. In such cases we will take all possible action to retain the material *in situ* - so as not to compromise the integrity of the object - subject only to the condition that the objects can be handled and viewed with safety.
- 3.5. The Museum Curator will make regular checks on the condition of objects, including whenever an item is retrieved from the store for study, display or loan. These checks will also include a random sampling exercise to be conducted at least annually. Condition reports will be maintained with the museum's collections management system (currently MIMSY XG) and items in poor condition prioritised for future conservation treatment.

4. Restoration

- 4.1. The term 'restoration' will be taken to mean the process of returning an item to some known earlier state. This will often require remedial and preventative conservation, together with the replacement or reconstruction of badly damaged or missing parts.
- 4.2. The museum recognises that restoration carries the risk of compromising the integrity of an original object, and in general, restoration will only be undertaken to meet display or demonstration needs, where the benefits are judged to outweigh this risk. Where restoration work is undertaken, however, our policy will be to retain as much original material as possible, commensurate only with the safety and integrity of the object. It is our policy that original parts removed from an object during restoration, where the process of removal has not led to their destruction, should be preserved as part of the Collection.

5. Operation and use of museum objects

- 5.1. The main aim of this section is to address the issues raised by the operation of objects such as sight-testing equipment or manufacturing machinery. It may also apply to the demonstration or wear of spectacle frames.
- 5.2. The museum acknowledges that unrestrained display, access, operation and demonstration of objects will prejudice their originality and compromise their long term preservation. It is recognised, however, that a *raison d'être* of the Museum is to exploit the collections for the public benefit, and that there are considerable interpretive benefits which stem from operation and use. Hence, the Museum will give access, display, demonstrate and operate items from the Collection, but subject to the following conditions:
- 5.3. The only acceptable reason for displaying, giving physical access or operating an object will be to show or demonstrate the object for the public benefit, in line with the Museum's *Mission Statement* and interpretive objectives.
- 5.4. The museum may hold duplicates of some objects which although generally given the same level of care may be regarded as ultimately expendable. These will be used as a first choice for demonstration, operation or public handling and will not be accessioned as part of the permanent collections.
- 5.5. If an object from the permanent collection appears to have deteriorated beyond acceptable limits, that object will be withdrawn from display or operation or otherwise subject to a strategy that will halt further wear and tear. A handling object may be withdrawn from use if its condition or appearance is deemed likely to give a poor impression of the museum's collections care or if it has become unstable or unsafe through wear and tear.
- 5.6. Returning an object to display or recommencing demonstration or operation may be achieved by replacing worn components, but only if the substitution of a replacement component does not, in the view of the curator, significantly compromise the integrity and status of the entire object, or the reclamation or refurbishment of the worn component has been considered and found impractical or unacceptable (possibly on the grounds that refurbishment of the component would itself entail the destruction of evidence) or the worn component was designed for periodic replacement under its original normal operating conditions, such as nose pads, chin-rest papers etc. and (especially) saline fluid with respect to the storage of contact lenses, or the component can be replaced with an authentic replacement component or the worn out component is retained as part of the object, albeit removed, and preserved separately.
- 5.7. Staff or researchers using the permanent collections will be provided with relevant equipment (for example, gloves, bookrests) and information (for example, handling

Item 14: Annex F - BOA Museum Care and Conservation Policy 2019-2024

guidelines and risk assessments, delivered either verbally or in writing) to minimise the risk of damage occurring during use.

This policy will be published online as part of the museum website.

Submitted for approval by the Board of Trustees on
17 July 2019

I confirm that the above plan was so approved

Dr Mary-Ann Sherratt
Chair of the Board of Trustees