



Royal College  
of Surgeons  
of England

ADVANCING SURGICAL CARE

# Royal College of Surgeons of England Museums

## Collections Care and Conservation Policy April 2022

**Collections:** The Museums of The Royal College of Surgeons of England, including the Hunterian Collection (RCSHC); the College Museum Collection (RCSHM); the Historical Instrument Collection (RCSIC); the Special Collections including portraits, busts and furniture (RCSSC); the Odontological Collection (RCSOM) the Anatomy Collection (RCSAC); the Pathology Collection (RCSPC); the Microscope Slide Collection (RCSMS) and associated reserve collections.

**Governing bodies:** The Council of the Royal College of Surgeons of England/  
The Board of Trustees of the Hunterian Collection

**Previously approved by Trustees of the Hunterian Collection:** 10 April 2019

**Date Reviewed and approved by Trustees of the Hunterian Collection:** 9 February 2022

**Date Reviewed and approved by Library Museums and Archive Committee:** 24 March 2022

**Date Approved by College Council:** 14 April 2022

**Date for review:** March 2027

## 1. Scope and purpose of the policy

- 1.1. The Royal College of Surgeons of England (RCSEng) holds collections of outstanding medical, scientific, historical and cultural significance. It aims to use these collections:
  - 1.1.1. To enhance the RCSEng's reputation by raising awareness of surgeons and their work in society.
  - 1.1.2. To aid the professional work of the RCSEng by providing training resources.
  - 1.1.3. To facilitate and generate excellent medical, scientific, historical and other research.
  - 1.1.4 To support public engagement with, and understanding of, surgery, it's history and practice and related arts and sciences.
- 1.2. The aim of this policy is to outline preventive and interventive collections care measures that will maximise access to the collections for present and future users.
- 1.3. This policy works within the College's overall approach to risk management, as articulated in the Risk Register.
- 1.4. Under the terms and conditions with which Parliament entrusted the Hunterian Collection to the Company of Surgeons in 1799, "the Preparations shall be kept in a state of Preservation, and the Collection in as perfect a state as possible".
- 1.5. This policy does not cover material held in the RCS Library and Archive Collections.
- 1.6. This policy complements and expands upon the *RCS Museums Collections Development Policy (2022)* and will be realised by the activities detailed in the *RCS Museums Collections Management Plan* (reviewed annually) and the *RCS Collections Care and Conservation Plan (2022)*.

## 2. Conservation principles

- 2.1. The RCS takes a strategic, risk management approach to collections care by carrying out regular assessments of collections and identifying priorities from their outcomes; and by taking into account relevant standards and frameworks such as the Collections Trust 'Benchmarks in Collections Care', BSI PAS 198 'Specification for managing environmental conditions for cultural collections' and SPECTRUM.
- 2.2. The RCS 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 specimens, and accessibility to staff and external users.
- 2.3. Conservation treatments are prioritised within the framework of resources available and are guided by:
  - COSHH Regulations 2002
  - Department for Culture, Media and Sport *Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums* (2005)
  - Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974
  - Human Tissue Authority (HTA) Code C: Anatomical examination (2021)
  - Human Tissue Authority (HTA) Code C, Standards and Guidance (2021)
  - Human Tissue Authority (HTA) Code of Practice D: Public Display (2021)
  - Human Tissue Authority (HTA) Code D, Standards and Guidance (2021)
  - The Institute of Conservation (Icon) Code of Conduct
  - Museum Association (MA) Code of Ethics (2015)

- 2.4. All conservation treatments carried out on objects are documented in the Collection Management System (CMS).
- 2.5. Collections care is the responsibility of all staff. The RCSEng will employ professional, qualified conservation and curatorial personnel and provide appropriate training, risk assessments and standard operating procedures for them and for properly supervised volunteers when working on collections. Where skills are not available in house for a particular process or material, resources will be provided for external expertise. External conservators will normally be included on the Institute of Conservation's (Icon) Conservation Register and where possible accredited.
- 2.6. Collections care needs, risks and activities will be communicated within the Museums teams. If required they will be reported through the Director of Museums and Special Collections to the Board of Trustees of the Hunterian Collection and the Library, Museums and Archives Committee (LMAC).

### 3. Preventive measures

- 3.1. Preventive conservation covers the measures necessary to reduce the risk of or slow down the deterioration of objects, specimens and structures. The necessary preventive measures are based on a thorough understanding of how objects and specimens react to their environment and deteriorate physically or chemically. A preventive conservation strategy is the primary objective in the RCSEng's approach to collections care, supported by interventive approaches where necessary.
- 3.2. The RCSEng will provide sufficient secure space in a suitable condition to store the collections
- 3.3. Access to stores will be limited to museum staff, suitably trained volunteers, and essential maintenance personnel. Where access is necessary for the latter, the Museum Department will be consulted and access will be supervised. If bringing material to researchers elsewhere in the College is impracticable or will involve unacceptable risk of damage to collections, such external users will be granted supervised access to the stores.
- 3.4. Cleaning of display and storage areas will be undertaken by, or overseen by, museum staff.
- 3.5. Appropriate levels of security will be provided, including closed-circuit television in museum and reading areas and authorised key allocation systems.
- 3.5. Objects will be displayed and stored in an environment that minimizes their rate of deterioration. Accordingly, all stores, display areas and galleries will be monitored continually for temperature and relative humidity (and if necessary, UV light and pollution), and data extracted monthly to ensure the correct environmental conditions are being met and maintained.
- 3.6. Appropriate storage materials will be employed (for example, acid-free boxes).
- 3.7. Pest control measures will be deployed, and pest risks monitored.
- 3.8. Hazardous material will be segregated, and appropriate risk signage displayed.
- 3.9. Human remains will be stored in defined areas, in accordance with the Human Tissue Authority (HTA) regulations and most recent governmental guidelines, for example, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport *Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums* (2005). Visual assessments will be regularly undertaken for both human remains on display and in store.
- 3.10. Measures will be taken over and above those necessary for the day-to-day protection of the collections to provide emergency arrangements and facilities in the event of disastrous damage to the collections, as detailed in the *Museums Disaster Plan (2022)*, with which all staff will be familiar.

#### **4. Interventive conservation**

- 4.1. Prioritised conservation plans will be devised for each collection and the highest-risk items treated within available resources each year.
- 4.2. Appropriate safe facilities will be provided for hazardous material work.
- 4.3. External funding will be sought for high priority treatment that is beyond existing staff resources.
- 4.4. Only suitably qualified and experienced and where possible accredited external professionals will be engaged to treat the collections.
- 4.5. Staff time and other resources will be dedicated to researching and improving conservation methods in appropriate areas.

#### **5. Use and movement**

- 5.1. Object/specimens will be condition assessed before they are used/handled e.g. for display/research.
- 5.2. Object movement and handling guidelines (for example in the *Museums Documentation Procedural Manual*) will be followed, and in addition:
  - 5.2.1. Details of hands-on access for researchers can be found in the RCSEng *Museums Research Policy* (2022).
  - 5.2.2. Use of HTA material will be used and moved in line with HTA guidelines, licence agreements and RCSEng's internal procedures; and will be treated respectfully.
  - 5.2.3. Standard handling and storage procedures are followed when specimens are deployed for training and learning within the College wherever feasible.
- 5.3. Users will be provided with relevant equipment (for example, gloves, bookrests) and information (for example, handling guidelines and risk assessments) to minimize risk of damage during use.
- 5.4. Material will be withdrawn from use if deemed at risk (in which case, it will be assessed and if treatment is needed, added to conservation priorities). If material is no longer suitable for use, physical or digital copies, will be considered to ensure continued access.
- 5.5. Material will be assessed before movement, and appropriate measures taken to protect the material and the handlers: for large material, external operatives may be necessary, and resources will be provided to this end.

#### **6. Loans and acquisitions**

- 6.1. Conservation or curatorial staff will undertake conservation reports, risk assessments and photography of material prior to acquisition, display and loans out; loans in will be assessed upon arrival and compared with the lender's condition report (see also the *RCSEng Collections Development Policy 2022* and the *RCSEng Museums Loans Policy 2022*). Material may be withdrawn from the proposed use at any time (for example, the loan or acquisition rejected) if the risk to objects/specimens is unacceptably high.
- 6.2. Incoming material will be kept separate from collections until suitably quarantined to ensure there is no pest or mould activity.
- 6.3. The Conservation staff will not carry out work on any loaned objects/specimens without securing written permission from the legitimate title holder.
- 6.4. Destructive techniques of study should be taken only when no suitable alternatives exist; see also the *RCSEng Museums Research Policy* (2022).

## References

Collections Trust 'Benchmarks in Collection Care

<https://collectionstrust.org.uk/resource/benchmarks-in-collections-care-2-0/>

Collections Trust SPECTRUM

<https://collectionstrust.org.uk/spectrum/>

COSHH Regulations 2002

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/nanotechnology/coshh.htm>

Department for Culture, Media and Sport *Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums* (2005)

<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/http://www.culture.gov.uk/images/publications/GuidanceHumanRemains11Oct.pdf>

Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/legislation/hswa.htm>

[Human Tissue Authority](#)

[Codes of Practice | Human Tissue Authority \(hta.gov.uk\)](#)

The Human Tissue Act 2004

<https://www.hta.gov.uk/guidance-professionals/hta-legislation/human-tissue-act-2004>

The Institute of Conservation (Icon) Code of Conduct

[https://icon.org.uk/system/files/documents/icon\\_code\\_of\\_conduct.pdf](https://icon.org.uk/system/files/documents/icon_code_of_conduct.pdf)

Museum Association (MA) Code of Ethics (2015)

<https://www.museumsassociation.org/ethics/code-of-ethics>