

Collections Care and Conservation Policy

MonLife Heritage Museums 2024-2029

Abergavenny Museum, Caldicot Castle,
Chepstow Museum,
Shire Hall Museum, Monmouth (*formerly Monmouth
Museum / Nelson Museum and Local History Centre,
Monmouth*)

Date which this policy was approved by governing body:

Date at which this policy is due for review: January 2029

1. Background

This policy will guide the activities of Abergavenny Museum, Chepstow Museum and Shire Hall Museum, Monmouth (formerly Monmouth Museum/The Nelson Museum and Local History Centre) and the accessioned collections of Caldicot Castle. It has been developed with reference to MonLife Heritage Museums Collections Development Policy and Collections Documentation Policy

Nationally recognised guidelines and standards have also been consulted including:

- PAS:198.2012: Specifications for Managing Environmental Conditions for Cultural Collections,
- PD:5454. 2012 Guide for the Storage and Exhibition of Archival Material,
- *EN 16893: 2018 Conservation of Cultural Heritage. Specifications for location construction and modification of buildings or rooms intended for the storage or use of heritage collections,*
- Benchmarks in Collections Care,
- PAS 197:2009 Code of Practice for Cultural Collections Management,
- SPECTRUM 5.1 procedures,
- The Institute of Conservation's Professional Guidelines.

2. Purpose of Conservation and Collections Care Policy

- 2.1** Monmouthshire County Council (MCC) recognises that caring for its collections is a fundamental duty for all museums. This Care and Conservation Policy acts as a statement to guide our approach to delivering the care of our collections.
- 2.2** This policy recognises the role which MonLife Heritage Museums' collections have in creating dynamic museums that play a role in place making and support and contribute to well-being, social justice and cultural diversity.
- 2.3** It is acknowledged that appropriate care and conservation of collections is required to enable collections to be utilised to connect the past with the present to inform and shape the future.
- 2.4** In guiding the activities of MonLife Heritage Museums, this policy seeks to maximise the care of, use and development of our collection held in trust for society and the benefit of current and future generations.
- 2.5** MonLife Heritage Museums recognises its role of promoting the conservation ethic to a wider audience through communicating and teaching the principles and methods of conservation.

- 2.6** This policy relates to all staff of MonLife Heritage Museums. Any contractors engaged by MonLife who may have impact on the Museums' buildings and collections should also be made aware of this policy.

3. General Principles

- 3.1** This Care and Conservation Policy covers the preservation of items of moveable cultural heritage which form the collections of Abergavenny Museum, Caldicot Castle, Chepstow Museum and The Shire Hall Museum Monmouth (formerly Monmouth Museum/ Nelson Museum and Local History Centre (Monmouth Museum)). These museums combine to form MonLife Heritage Museums Service which is part of the Monmouthshire County Council.
- 3.2** Responsibility for delivery of the care of MonLife Heritage's Collection lies primarily with the service's Museum Management and collection staff. This consists of Museum and Art Manager, Community Museums Curator and Collections Management Officer. MonLife's front of house and Learning staff should also have a commitment to preservation and an awareness of this policy. There are also two Collections Officers, two Engagement staff and the Shire Hall Lotter Project team on short term contracts. Who should also be aware of the policy.
- 3.3** Any staff involved in the care or conservation of collections must be aware of and acknowledge the limits of their understanding and ability.
- 3.4** The Collections covered by this policy are housed within Grade I and II Listed buildings or Scheduled Ancient Monuments. Reference is only made to the care of the building where it has direct impact on the preservation of the Museums' Collection. It is noted that responsibility for the care and conservation of these buildings lies with Monmouthshire County Council's Property Services Department. Consequently, guiding the approach to the care of these buildings lies outside the remit of this policy.
- 3.5** Within MonLife Heritage Museums long term preservation of the collections is achieved through a combination of preventative and remedial conservation measures. Preventative conservation covers the measures necessary to slow down or minimise deterioration of museum objects and specimens and structures. Remedial conservation involves a treatment to an object or specimen to bring it to a more acceptable condition or state in order to stabilise it or enhance some aspects of its cultural or scientific value.

- 3.6** This Care and Conservation Policy has been drawn with consideration of the resources currently available within MonLife Heritage Museums at the time of writing. The Policy will be reviewed annual to take account of any changes. Where change does occur, we will aim to continue achieving policy recommendation.

4. Buildings and Museum Environment

- 4.1** MonLife Heritage Museums collections are housed within secure, watertight buildings. It is recognised that the maintenance of a building's fabric and services is fundamental to the preservation of both buildings and collections. To achieve this staff will liaise with Monmouthshire County Council's Property Services Department to ensure these buildings are appropriately maintained and any faults reported immediately.
- 4.2** The majority of MonLife Heritage Museums collections are housed in secure, collections only, storage rooms or gallery displays within each Museum. Where necessary, the environment in these spaces is controlled to ensure nationally approved standards are met.
- 4.3** A minority of oversized and bulk insensitive archaeological finds are currently housed in an additional storage unit at an Industrial Estate in Caldicot. As the environment in this store is not controlled or routinely monitored, storage is limited to collections considered to be of low risk.
- 4.4** The environment within the Museums buildings is constantly monitored using MEACO telemetric software to ensure the climate within the buildings is understood and changes efficiently acted upon to prevent damage to the collection. Short term localised monitoring is also deployed using Tiny Tag Monitors. Environmental monitoring equipment will be calibrated annually.
- 4.5** MonLife Heritage Museums is mindful of its environmental impacts and environmental control within the museums is delivered with consideration of this. Environmental impacts should be identified when considering future developments and possibilities of passive environmental control explored.
- 4.6** Parameters for environmental control have been set through understanding of the collections and the museum's natural environment and by consulting nationally recognised standards including PAS198 and PD 5454.

- 4.7** Once objects have reached equilibrium within the museum environment, they will not be exposed to Relative Humidities above 65%RH in storage or display areas. This is to prevent accelerated decay and mould growth. In addition, the environment within galleries and stores will not fall below 30%RH to reduce the risk of accelerated physical damage to organic collections. More specific microclimates for more vulnerable objects will be created as conservation staff consider appropriate.
- 4.8** The environment within the Museum's stores will be monitored and controlled to prevent sudden extreme changes in RH that occur at a rate considered to cause unacceptable irreversible physical change in collections. Gradual seasonal changes in RH and Temperature are acceptable.
- 4.9** The upper limit for temperature in the Museum buildings will aim to be 25°C, whilst the lower limit for store temperatures will be 5°C. This is to prevent accelerated deterioration of the collection and risks associated with freezing and subsequent flood damage respectively.
- 4.10** It is recognised that light within a collection space can cause extensive and irreversible damage to collection materials. Where it can not be eliminated, collections exposure to Ultra Violet Light (UV) light shall not exceed 75 μ W/lumen. Light levels for collections on display will be determined by conservation staff that enable expected collection lifetimes to be achieved. This will be based on an understanding of individual items sensitivity to light, UV radiation and IR radiation. It is recognised that when setting parameters for light levels the need for staff and any visitors to see the collection should be considered. The collections' exposure to light will be routinely monitored.
- 4.11** MonLife Heritage Museums will remain abreast of developments in lighting technology taking measures to optimize energy efficiency of light systems and identify lower energy light sources.
- 4.12** The potential damage internally generated pollutants can cause to collections is recognised. Sensitivity of collections to pollutants in enclosed storage and display cases will be determined. The potential of materials used in enclosed storage and display cases to emit pollutant will be evaluated. This knowledge will be used to ensure materials are selected that do not emit gaseous pollutants to an extent that would be expected to cause unacceptable irreversible change to the contents of the enclosure. Monitoring enclosures for pollutants may be undertaken if there is a considered high risk.

- 4.13 Objects selected for open storage and display will be evaluated to determine their sensitivity to outdoor generated pollutants and dusts. Steps will be taken to reduce their exposure to this based on an understanding of pollutants within the surrounding environment and material sensitivity of each individual object.
- 4.14 MonLife Heritage Museums recognises the role which cleaning, housekeeping and pest management plays in preserving collections.
- 4.15 Integrated Pest Management schemes are used to monitor insect pest activity and standards such as Benchmarks in Collections Care will be utilised to ensure best practice is achieved in this area.

5. Remedial Conservation

- 5.1 When objects require remedial conservation work due to their condition or display requirements, only those with appropriate conservation expertise and cultural, historical and technical knowledge to carry out the conservation measures required will be appointed to conduct this work.
- 5.2 When remedial conservation work is contracted to external specialists, conservators accredited by the Institute of Conservation (ICON) will normally be selected.
- 5.3 Volunteers or interns may be tasked with employed to conducting basic object conservation and care only at the discretion and supervision of MonLife Heritage Museums collection staff. Involvement of volunteers or interns in conservation activities will be conducted in agreement with MCC's Volunteer Policy.
- 5.4 Any remedial conservation work undertaken will be in agreement with ICON's Professional Guidelines and accompanied by full documentation to current national standards.
- 5.5 Materials utilised in conservation treatments will be selected with a consideration of their environmental impact and in accordance with COSHH regulations.
- 5.6 MonLife Heritage Museums will ensure that appropriate Personal Protective Equipment is available and always worn when required.

6. Collections & Handling

- 6.1 All staff and volunteers required to handle collections will be appropriately trained in accordance with national standards.

- 6.2** Specialist trained staff or contractors will be enlisted to handle or transport large, heavy, complex or fragile items.
- 6.3** A risk assessment approach will be utilised to select appropriate levels of object access and to guide selection of objects for short or long term displays and for handling by the general public. This will be based on an understanding of the sensitivity of individual objects.
- 6.4** MonLife Heritage Museums will routinely assess the condition of collections within its care.
- 6.5** Before making new acquisitions, staff will consider the storage and cost implications of providing long term conservation and care for the prospective item.
- 6.6** Condition of new acquisitions will be assessed and those considered to present a risk to the rest of the collection will immediately be quarantined and monitored until the threat is no longer identified.
- 6.7** Should MonLife Heritage Museums conclude that it is unable to provide appropriate care or accommodation for an object or better access and/or care can be provided by other organisations collection rationalisation will be considered. Process outlined in our Collection Development Policy and the Museums Association's Disposal Toolkit will be followed to maintain best practice.

7. Loans

- 7.1** MonLife Heritage Museums will ensure that the lender's conservation requirements can be met before agreeing to borrow objects.
- 7.2** Before agreeing to loan an item from its institution to another organisation, collections staff will conduct a risk assessment of all factors involved and assess resources available. A thorough condition assessment will be made an item is lent from its collection.
- 7.3** Objects borrowed and loaned will be condition checked on arrival and departure.

8 Emergency Plan

MonLife Heritage Museums holds an emergency plan for each of its museums and recognises the need to immediately consult collections staff when collections are at risk.

9 Training

- 9.1** When considered appropriate collections staff will provide training in conservation and collections care for the museums' staff, interns and volunteers, using external providers if necessary.
- 9.2** It is recognised that the continued professional development of staff is imperative to ensure the long term preservation of its collections. MonLife Heritage Museums will share its collections care and conservation expertise and knowledge as widely as possible.

10 Review of Care and Conservation Policy

This policy and all efforts to improve the care and conservation of MonLife Heritage Collections will be reviewed annually by collections staff.