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DISASTER SALVAGE TEAM

Working Towards Saving Cultural Collections

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NEWS LETTER

Assessing Conservation Concerns

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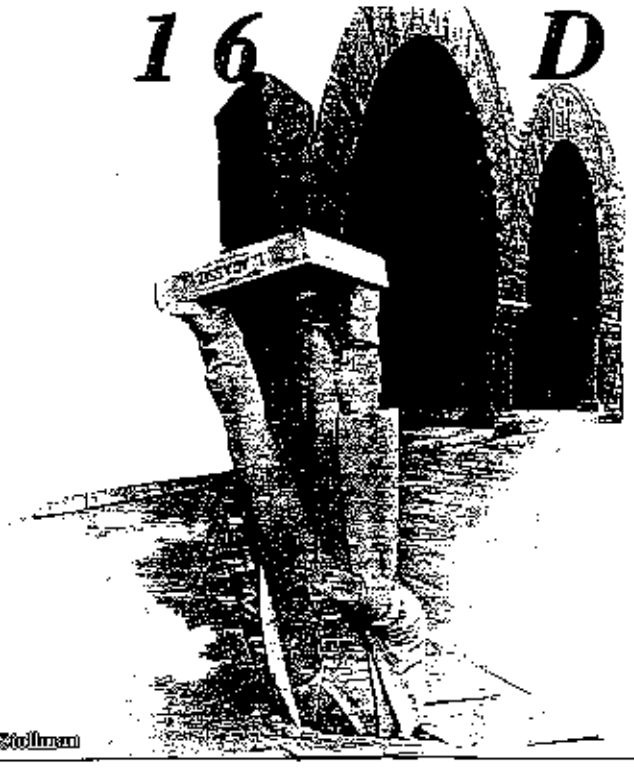

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Editor: Sasha Stollman

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ASSESSING CONSERVATION CONCERNS

Preserving collections is one of the key missions for all museums, art galleries and other heritage institutions. Methods of preservation fall into two distinct categories: preventive conservation and remedial conservation treatment.

Preventive conservation encompasses methods of preserving collections by controlling their environment and thereby minimising destructive elements. Primary target areas to address are: light levels, temperature and relative humidity, pests, natural disasters, dust and pollutants, handling techniques and frequency, packing systems, storage provisions and display materials and methods. For further information on a variety of preventive conservation topics, a series of videos produced by the Canadian Conservation Institute are available on loan to any heritage institution from the Canterbury Museum Conservation Lab. (See list of titles below. Please call in advance to request videos.)

Remedial conservation treatment encompasses methods of preservation involving direct contact with the surface or structure of individual collection items. Forms of remedial treatment are extremely wide ranging and include: removal of accumulated surface dust and dirt, analysis to determine original composition and cause(s) of decay, surface and structural stabilisation, structural repairs, removal of previous unstable and/or inappropriate restoration and the application of new, conservationally sound restoration. Remedial conservation treatment should not be attempted by untrained staff or volunteers, unless the work is supervised by a qualified conservator.

When in doubt regarding the needs of your collections, consult a conservator! In the near future, the New Zealand Professional Conservators Group will be providing copies of our 1997-98 New Zealand Directory of Conservators of Cultural Property to all heritage institutions. These will be distributed by the NZPCG regional representatives. The Directory will assist you in locating the appropriate conservation specialist (i.e. archaeological objects, architecture/buildings, books, ceramics, conservation management, firearms, furniture and wooden objects, glass, objects, paintings, paper, photographs, preventive conservation, sound recordings, textiles). As you know, conservators are too few and far between, particularly in the South Island, so please try to spread your enquiries around.

When approaching a large, new project, such as a building renovation, an

addition for storage or display or the preparation of a collection for display, please plan ahead. Include the cost of a conservation consultant in your applications for funding. Please note that all applications to the Lottery Board Environment and Heritage Committee require recommendations from a qualified conservation consultant. In order to provide valuable feedback to you and the Lottery Board, the conservator will need to spend time examining your facility and proposal. A condition survey of your collections may also be necessary.

Remedial conservation treatment needs are more difficult for the smaller heritage institutions to address. Certain basic, minimal intervention, such as surface cleaning, can be undertaken in-house following the advice of a conservator. The conservator will need to examine the collection items in question before any work is begun. If the conservation project is suitable for supervised untrained staff or volunteers, specific treatment recommendations will be provided. These recommendations should be included in applications to funding bodies. Your proposal must specify that the condition of the item is documented by detailed photographs and written records before and after treatment (and in some instances, during the treatment). As the consulting conservator will point out, treatment methods and materials must not alter the original surface or structure and must remain reversible over time. If an item is treated without documentation and/or using inappropriate methods or materials, the value of that item is greatly reduced. The conservator should be kept informed of progress during the treatment process.

For more elaborate treatment requiring trained conservators, the best way to channel available funds is to request a treatment proposal with cost estimate for a particular item or group of items from an appropriate conservator. This proposal can then be submitted to the Lottery Board Environment and Heritage Committee or to another interested funding body. (The conservator may be willing to provide the proposal free of charge or for reimbursement of expenses, with the understanding that the time spent will be charged if and when the proposal is funded.) If funds are not currently available, your collection item(s) will be best served by utilising preventive conservation methods only. Postpone treatment until it can be done correctly!

The demise of the Liaison Office has exacerbated the overall lack of appropriate conservation consultants for heritage institutions. This situation will soon place an unworkable burden on specialists with existing institutional responsibilities. As the Museum of New Zealand National Service's stated mission is to assist New Zealand's heritage sector, it is critical that the museum community advocate clearly for the establishment of an affordable, available body of qualified conservation consultants representing all specialities. One of National Service's current projects is an investigation into international museum standards. This should provide an ideal opportunity to voice our concerns.

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Sasha Stollman
Conservator, Canterbury Museum
NZPCG Canterbury Representative

CANADIAN CONSERVATION INSTITUTE
PREVENTIVE CONSERVATION VIDEOS

Video Titles:	Length in Minutes:
1. Introduction to Preventive Conservation	10
2. Light and Lighting	13
3. Relative Humidity and Temperature	19
4. Pollutants	16
5. Integrated Pest Management	20
6. Packing & Transportation of Museum Objects	20
7. Storage	10
8. Protecting Objects on Exhibition	22
9. Emergency Contingency Planning	27
10. Closing a Seasonal museum	16
11. The Condition Report	10
12. Handling Museum Objects	10
13. The Care of Paintings	24
14. The Care of Works on Paper	25
15. The Care of Sculptures	22
16. The Care of Metal Objects	19
17. The Care of Furniture	21
18. The Care of Textiles	19
19. The Care of Museum Objects	28
20. Videos # 1-12 (back to back on one tape)	193
21. Videos # 13-19 (back to back on one tape)	158

SOME USEFUL E MAIL ADDRESSES
From Rosemary O'Neill Canterbury Public Library

www. mord.govt.nz/whowcare/mocd act.html

akcity.govt.nz/council/civildefence/book1/evaluate.htm

a city.govt.nz/council/civildefence/book3/evaluate.htm

www.mocd.govt.nz/whatwedo/**recovery**.html

www.computerworld.co.nz/nzweb/6d52.html

www.cit.ac.nz/smac/os100/msdos25.htm

ftp.csc.cit.ac.nz/smac/os100/msdos25.htm

www.auchmeddan.co.nz/

akcity.govt.nz/council/civildefence/cd plan/index.htm

www.advantage.co.nz/news0041.htm

www.cuddon.co.nz/cuddon4.html

www.infotech.co.nz/spreports/asabak.html

akcity.govt.nz/council/civildefence/cd plan/list.htm