

## Caring for your historic artefacts

Collections care encompasses a range of activities intended to safeguard historic artefacts. These can include cleaning, storage, handling, monitoring and controlling the environmental conditions they are kept in and ensuring that the care of the artefact is considered as part of its use and display.

This forms part of a suite of guidance information for the Management of Historic Artefact Collections and is informed by the Heritage Committee's Collections Management Policy and Standing Orders 212 (11) and 936.

Conservation can be remedial (techniques applied to an item to achieve physical stabilisation, eg specialist treatment to halt the affects of pest infestation in furniture) or preventive (managing the environment that it is kept in to achieve optimum conditions for the preservation of artefacts, eg reducing the light levels in an area where a painting is displayed so that it does not fade and deteriorate).

These are some simple guiding principles that can be applied to all historic artefacts held in Methodist church property to assist you with their long term care. They are:

- consider the **SECURITY** of historic artefacts. Make sure that they are stored, used or displayed in such a way that it is not easy for them to be stolen or lost, eg ensure that key access to storage areas is supervised. Ensure you have an **inventory**<sup>1</sup> of artefacts so you know if something has gone missing. Be aware of what your most valuable artefacts are and make sure that you have considered the risks to them and what steps you can take.
- careful **HANDLING** of historic artefacts. If you are moving large objects (eg furniture, or paintings) make sure you have enough people to do it, the object is protected (eg bubble wrapped) and plan your route so they do not get dropped or damaged. With smaller objects (eg ceramics), always use both hands to pick things up!
- careful **USE** of historic artefacts. The Church is keen to encourage the use of our historic artefacts in mission. It may be that you have historic artefacts in regular use, such as furniture, or communion plate, but do consider the risk of damage (eg if artefacts become fragile). It may be that you have some artefacts, such as delicate books, that should only be used/handled very carefully and under supervision. Consider the most appropriate approach for your artefacts.
- be **VIGILANT**. If you notice that the condition of one of your artefacts is deteriorating (eg fading, becoming fragile or damaged), remove it from any immediate danger (if possible) and seek advice from the Methodist Heritage Officer/Committee.

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<sup>1</sup> See guidance on creating an inventory overleaf.

- if in doubt **ASK FOR ADVICE**. In the first instance, from the Methodist Heritage Officer/Committee. This is essential if you think that an artefact requires conservation or restoration as a professionally qualified conservator will need to be consulted.

On a day to day basis there is a lot of very useful and practical advice available on the internet.

The **Institute of Conservation (ICON)** has a range of clear, practical fact sheet on the 'caring for' section of its website at:

<http://www.conservationregister.com/Plcon-CaringFor.asp>

The fact sheets cover a range of artefacts that you may have in your care including

- Books
- Ceramics and Glass
- Clocks
- Costume and textiles
- Furniture
- Oil Paintings
- Photographic materials
- Prints, drawings and watercolours
- Silver and plate

**ChurchCare** also has a range of guidance materials that you may find helpful, including brasses and church plate:

<http://www.churchcare.co.uk/churches/art-artefacts-conservation/caring-for-conservation-of-artworks-historic-furnishings>

It also has a useful guidance publication on security called *Protecting Church Treasures*. It is written from a Church of England perspective, but contains advice that will be relevant in Methodist Churches too:

[http://www.churchcare.co.uk/images/Treasures\\_SECURITY\\_guidance\\_note.pdf](http://www.churchcare.co.uk/images/Treasures_SECURITY_guidance_note.pdf)

### **Creating an inventory**

This can be one of the most useful things you can do to care for your historic artefacts, as it will allow you to:

- consider what to include in the inventory
- get a clear idea of what you have
- have information you can share with other colleagues when you need advice etc
- create a list you can check against in the future

Take these steps to create an inventory:

1. Create an inventory working group - it is much more efficient and enjoyable to carry out this work as part of a group, ideally in pairs.
2. Issue each artefact with a number, eg a running number 1, 2, 3 etc will suffice.
3. Label the artefact with its number using a tie on luggage tag/label or a soft pencil mark (do not disfigure the artefact by marking it in another way). If you can't tie a label on put a label in it or on its packaging.
4. Complete a table (if you prefer to work on paper) or spreadsheet with inventory information for each artefact that should include:
  - the inventory number that you have given the artefact
  - the name of the artefact, eg 'chair', 'book'
  - a short (physical) description of the artefact to help identify it
  - history - anything you know about the history of the artefact, such as who it came from, where and how it was used etc.
  - its location now
  - the date the record is being made
  - the name of the person making the record.
5. If you are dealing with large numbers of artefacts you can group things together, eg 36 identical cups and saucers or 300 photographs in an album, and assign one number to the sub-collection. (make sure you note that this covers 36 or 300 individual items in the description part of the record though.)
6. If possible, take a photograph of each artefact too. You should store copies of the photographs in a dedicated electronic folder, using their inventory numbers as/in the file names so they are easily matched up in the future.
7. Whether you have a paper or electronic copy of your inventory, make sure that:
  - it is kept in a secure place
  - there is at least one more 'back up' copy kept somewhere else
  - it is updated on an (ideally) annual basis or as part of your quinquennial review process.