

Preventive Conservation Monthly

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Preventive conservation enquiries

Much of my work involves enquiries from other museums or general public, I thought I would include a couple of these this month to illustrate the diversity of these enquiries.

Mouldy books



Because mould has developed on the surface of a number of scrap books removed from a store room one museum thought their environment needed urgent attention, possibly the need to install dehumidifiers and/or other forms of climate control.

Fortunately 3-4 years ago staff had monitored four different rooms in the museum including store rooms and exhibition spaces. Records more than a year old are not that useful because so much can change in four years, they did however show at the time of monitoring the environment was not extreme with only one or two occasions when humidity rose to 90% for a few hours. This is not unusual in an uncontrolled environment and similar to an average home.

A few days later I visited the museum, upon seeing the books the problem was immediately obvious; they were bound in starched linen book cloth, this material is usually pasted to the book cover using a starch based paste, a combination that will easily take up moisture and provide an ideal surface for mould to develop¹.

An **Aquaboy moisture meter** indicated high moisture content on the linen bound volumes,

high but slightly less moisture on the imitation leather bound materials.



Aquaboy moisture meter

Conclusion:

After removing mould I suggested the books remain in a well ventilated area.

Subject: UV pens

Email received from **Judith Taylor**, Museum Development Officer, National Services

“Does anyone have any info or comment about the use of UV pens on artefacts? Know of anyone using these?”

My reply is reproduced below; however I was wondering if anybody else had information regarding the use of these pens in museums?

My reply:-

UV pen inks are invisible under normal daylight but fluoresce under UV light making them a good security measure, but I believe the ink is non reversible. Using non reversible ink would conflict with the conservation code of ethics for cultural property that recommends all conservation treatment must be reversible.

If a barrier film (B72, B67) were painted onto an object before writing on the films surface with a UV pen this would be pointless because the barrier film could be removed together with the ink.

This raises another question why use invisible UV ink on a barrier film? The ink may be invisible but the barrier film will alert users to the presence of something written on the film - which can then be easily removed.

¹ A similar effect can be seen on vegetable tanned leather boots that easily become mouldy when wet; unlike modern fashion shoes made from chrome tanned leather that remain unaffected by mould.

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