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## Access to Large Collections Stores at The Science Museum

Hazel Newey, Head of Conservation, Science Museum, Exhibition Road, London, SW7 2DD.

The Science Museum has approximately 350k objects in its collections relating to the history of science, industry, technology and medicine. At present, there are about 3,000 on display in the museum galleries at South Kensington and the remainder are located either at the storage facility in Hammersmith, West London or at the Large Object Store at Wroughton Airfield, outside Swindon. This article will cover basic access to large numbers of objects as well as large-scale objects.

The West London Store is the old Post Office Savings Bank in Olympia, a large Edwardian building shared with the Victoria and Albert Museum and the British Museum. When the building was acquired, The Science Museum decided to make its smaller objects as accessible as possible by putting them out on open shelves or racks, unless security or safety dictated otherwise. In order to ensure that the environment remained stable and dust-free, the windows were sealed on the inside with heat-reflecting board to exclude daylight and the heating pipes insulated so the temperature was stabilised. A pest management programme was instituted so insect infestation could be dealt with immediately.

Currently, apart from museum staff, the collections at West London are used mainly by individual visiting researchers. There are a number of group visits over the year from special interest societies and groups, usually led by one or more curators and often as part of a meeting or seminar. There are also a number of corporate evenings for our sponsors, during which they are given a tour of the store accompanied by one or more curators, conservators or stores staff. There are also plans to open the store to the public on certain days. The arrangements for this have not been decided and due to our current exhibition programme this has been put on hold.


The larger objects that are not on display (c16k), for example from the transport, civil and mechanical engineering collections as well as medical and analytical items are stored at Wroughton. The site is a World War II maintenance airfield and the objects are housed in six hangars and a new purpose-built, environmentally controlled store. During the summer months, the museum organises a series of events or open days, usually at weekends. Several of the hangars are laid out in display configuration, for example road transport, agriculture and aviation. The staff or members of the local support group act as guides or the visitors are free to wander around the designated walkways. The main objects have labels with some textual information. The aviation hangar is also used for corporate hire space. The aircraft are arranged around an open space in the middle, which can be used for trade stands, or corporate dining. Although it seems removed from the main purpose of the collections it stimulates interest and promotes visits from people who may never have considered going to the site before. There are other hangars, which are more densely packed with objects, and these are occasionally opened for behind-the-scenes tours or specialist visitors.

The museum is in the process of acquiring additional land and building at one end of the site. The whole site will become the National Collections Centre and the intention is to increase public access and increase the interpretation and education aspects. Space will be leased to other museums, whose collections relate to the Science Museum's, both for access and some storage.

With collections relating to science and industry, Health and Safety issues always have to be considered. Many of the objects are large and seemingly robust but are not safe to handle or climb on. These are separated from the public by barriers but the staff have to be constantly aware as some visitors disregard these in order to get a closer look (or even get inside the planes). Likewise, some of the objects have intrinsic hazards in the materials from which they are made, for example asbestos, mercury, and other chemicals. It is essential when allowing the public to access the collections that the full extent of possible hazards are known and understood. This indicates the need for the correct information to be entered onto the collections inventory or database, the object marked with a visible hazard label and, if necessary, moved to a separate area. The Science Mu-

seum tries to identify hazards before an object is accepted for acquisition or loan, asking the owner or lender to remove the problematic component. In addition to looking for hazardous materials, we use a Geiger counter to identify objects that may have radioactive components, and check for insect pests on arrival.

Providing access to collections that are not normally on public display has considerable resource implications. It is not just opening the doors to the stores and letting everyone in. There is still a need for interpretation; security and the human factor to ensure the visitors get the most out of the experience. Access should be seen as an opportunity to show the public other aspects of the work of museums in the preservation of the heritage.



## The WWW

### Re:source

The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries is a new UK strategic organisation replacing MGC.

<http://www.resource.gov.uk/>

### Journal Abbreviations and Full Titles (BIOSIS Format)

For those of us involved with cataloguing collections, this WWW is very helpful, with a searchable database of abbreviations of journal titles.

[http://csssrrv.entnem.ufl.edu/~pmc/journals/j\\_titles.htm](http://csssrrv.entnem.ufl.edu/~pmc/journals/j_titles.htm)

### The "Deutsches Entomologisches Institut" Bibliography of World Entomologists

A useful list of obituaries of entomologists

<http://www.dei-eberswalde.de/>

## Best Value

A One Day Seminar  
The Potteries Museum and Art Gallery, Stoke on Trent  
28<sup>th</sup> September 2000

### Best Value for Collections Care

Jo Sage, Technical and Specialist Services Officer, McManus Galleries,  
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#### Introduction

In 1996, Dundee's Art Galleries and Museums joined with a range of arts-based services to form the Arts and Heritage Department. This process brought together an assortment of 10 technical staff to form Technical and Specialist Services, a distinct group providing support services across the Department.

During 1998/99, the Technical and Specialist Services team (TASS) underwent a Best Value Review, which sought to determine the most cost-effective way of delivering technical services for the ensuing five years.

This paper attempts to explain, simply, what Best Value is and how to prepare for it. The information presented draws heavily on personal experience as well as published information.

As with any new concept or management tool, *Best Value* comes complete with its own set of jargon and "newspeak". Whilst some of this may appear self-explanatory, much of it requires some definition.

#### What is Best Value?

Best Value is the Labour Government's strategy to ensure Council services:

- reflect the needs of local communities
- are accountable to those communities
- are the best available in terms of efficiency, effectiveness and economy