

# **PITSTONE GREEN MUSEUM**

## **Plan for the Care and Conservation of the Collections**

**Issue 1 12<sup>th</sup> July 2012**

### **1. Introduction**

Our collection is diverse. For our own convenience we sub-divide the collection into three types of artefact; viz. tangible solid artefacts, paper artefacts (eg papers, books, letters, documents, posters, pamphlets, etc), and recorded images (eg photographs, negatives, transparencies, CD's & DVD's, film, magnetic tapes etc).

The vast majority of items in the third category have been digitised and are stored as computer files which are regularly backed-up in accordance with procedures detailed in the Office Manual. Virtually all of the originals are kept in a fireproof safe, individually enclosed in appropriate plastic wraps/bags, containers etc.

Only a small portion of the paper artefacts are on display to the public behind glass in rooms with only artificial lighting when the museum is open. The remaining bulk of the collection is stored in a chest of drawers designed specifically for document storage.

At least 80% of the tangible artefacts are on display to the public in a variety of locations ranging from glass fronted cabinets within an artificially lit room to completely exposed to the weather outdoors.

Virtually the whole of the museum exists in an environment which closely follows outdoor temperature and relative humidity, and the museum has no means of controlling these.

### **2. Monitoring & inspection**

Around the time of our original (successful) application for accreditation, and on the advice of our then Curatorial Adviser, we monitored the temperature and relative humidity over a periods of 6 months plus in each of 4 specimen locations in the museum. These locations were:-

- a) a windowless adapted loose box, brick built, single storey, concrete floor, draughty, arranged as a simulated Victorian Kitchen
- b) our artefact store converted from a brick and timber hayloft
- c) our "office" where we have computers, printers, filing cabinets, and a fire proof safe: this is a windowless stud-work enclosure with 3 desks with virtually no air change, but fitted with a low power thermostatically controlled electric heater designed to prevent the ambient temperature ever moving below 0°C. It is adjacent to the artefact store b).
- d) a windowless adapted milking parlour where the cows were once taken to be milked.

The results of this monitoring were as we expected. Locations a) and d) closely followed the outdoor ambient. Locations b) and c) showed some summer temperatures exceeding the outdoor ambient on sunny days, and location c) never fell below 0°C in winter.

In an ideal world every one of our artefacts would receive a detailed examination at least once every year for signs of damage or deterioration. In practice only parts of the collection come under regular scrutiny, this being due to shortage of human resources available to carry out such a mundane task. The museum is staffed entirely by volunteers and there are never sufficient people available for the more obvious priority tasks which if left undone could prevent the museum successfully opening to the general public some nine days each year.

### **3. Remedial measures**

The three main problem areas at Pitstone Green Museum are (a) metal corrosion, (b) woodworm, and (c) damp storage conditions. A potential problem could be (d) ultra-violet light entering through windows.

(a) Metal corrosion is widespread. This mainly manifests itself on ferrous metals and, after the initial onset on unprotected bright surfaces, progress is usually slow. Newly acquisitioned artefacts with unprotected ferrous metal are routinely given a thin brush coat of preservative treatment provided such treatment is appropriate. Other items which have been in our ownership over a longer period are awaiting treatment by various methods to remove the corrosion and prevent or retard its return. This is a long slow process and no timetable exists for its eventual completion. There is a rolling programme of

corrosion alleviation when effort is available, and a watch is kept for items for which such treatment is becoming more urgent.

(b) A programme of treatment of artefacts containing wood to prevent infestation by woodworm was started some years ago. This is proceeding on a location by location basis and there is much still to be done. Again no programme exists for its eventual completion. Newly acquisitioned items containing wood are treated routinely provided such treatment is appropriate.

(c) Damp storage does not appear to be causing us a major problem at present. Admittedly there are a few old books in our collection which show obvious signs of deterioration caused by damp storage, but these have been with us since before computer records started in the mid 1990's and their condition on acquisition is not recorded anywhere. Ongoing monitoring of susceptible items will reveal the need for measures to be taken to halt any deterioration noticed.

(d) The museum has a policy of continuous improvement of buildings used for artefact display. Some buildings have been demolished and rebuilt and it is policy to rebuild without windows if the intention is to use it for artefact display. The listed buildings on the site could not have windows removed without gaining planning consent from the local authority, and this would be unlikely to be granted even if we wanted to do so. For this reason artefacts likely to be degraded by ultra-violet light are not displayed in the listed buildings with windows.

This Plan was adopted by the Executive Committee of Pitstone & Ivinghoe Museum Society on 12<sup>th</sup> July 2012.

Signed ..... Chairman