

# **Professional conservators in practice: an introduction to the conservation of air and land transport collections.**

**Chris Knapp**  
West Dean College

***Abstract:** All too often the original surface and materials that make up aviation and transport collection objects are being lost due to over restoration and inappropriate replacement. In addition there is such disparity in aims of treatment and the level of conservation/restoration of objects that there is no common approach that can be used as a basis for management, treatment methods, documentation, or for the consideration of ethics. Another concern is the lack of provision of conservation training in industrial museums. It is not possible for a conservator to learn the required engineering skills in a short timescale and so the staff in transport museums and collections tend to be engineers first and become conservators/restorers second. However there are relatively few opportunities for them to develop a more ethical conservation approach. The Imperial War Museum is working in partnership with West Dean College, who is acting as a training provider to establish opportunities in all aspects of the conservation of transport collections.*

Most museums with industrial or transport collections employ engineers to care for the collection. From a safety aspect this is a sound practice but sadly lacking as far as conservation issues go. In 1997 the Imperial War Museum started looking for a suitable course to encourage the aircraft and vehicle engineers of the museum conservation department to approach their work as conservators rather than as engineers. No such course could be found in the UK or Europe.

In 1998 delegates from leading UK aviation museums met with representatives of West Dean College to discuss the possibility of putting together a suitable package. It was agreed that there was a need for such training and that it covered more than just the aviation heritage sector. The general consensus of the group was that few museums would be able to release most of their staff for more than a week at a time and that cost would play a major part in the uptake. The outcome of that initial meeting was that the Imperial War Museum decided to work in partnership with West Dean College to provide suitable training.

As time is limited and there is much to pack in it was decided early in the planning stage that the training would be residential and include evening lectures. In fact the students arrive around 5pm Sunday. They have a short time to settle in to their accommodation and have dinner. At 8pm the first session, "What is a museum", explores the various aims and roles of the modern museum.

As the week progresses there are discussions on the historical integrity of objects, the conservation issues involved, the importance of proper documentation and regular condition checking. There are case studies from museum professionals, both industrial and fine art. Basic chemistry is explained to help the students understand the different chemical reactions they can expect when choosing treatments.

The term “training course” can be misleading, as the intention is to encourage the students to look at their work from a new perspective and the course involves a great deal of student interaction. “Discussion week” is probably more accurate. It is aimed at individuals who are already skilled in their own field and there is no intention to teach new practical skills at this stage. (Plans are in hand to progress to Part Two where practical conservation skills will be demonstrated.)

Attached is the draft timetable for the next course to be run in February 2005. There will be some changes but the basic course will be the same.

<p><b>Professional Conservators in Practice</b>  <b>An introduction to the conservation of transport collections</b></p>
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TIME	EVENT	TUTOR	FORMAT	VENUE
16.00-18.45	Registration			College Office
	<b>Coffee</b>			Dining Room
18.45	Welcome to the college	College Facilitator	Talk	Oak Hall
19.00	<b>Dinner</b>			Dining Room
20.00	What is a museum, why do they exist?	Chris Knapp	Talk	Kings room

TIME	EVENT	TUTOR	FORMAT	VENUE
08.00	<b>Breakfast</b>			Dining Room
09.00	Introduction to day	Chris Knapp		
	Introduction to conservation: principles and aims.	Hazel Newey	Talk	Kings room
10.30	<b>Coffee</b>			
10.30	Ethical guidelines for conservators.	Hazel Newey	Talk	Kings room
11.30				
12.30	<b>Lunch</b>			Dining Room
14.00	Project management conservation planning and maintenance schedules	Bruce James	Talk	Kings room
15.30	<b>Tea</b>			
16.00	Object management, recording and documentation.	Bruce James	Talk	Kings room
19.00	<b>Dinner</b>			Dining Room
20.00	Student survey project	Chris Knapp Suzanne Kitto	Practical	Old Dining Room

TIME	EVENT	TUTOR	FORMAT	VENUE
08.00	<b>Breakfast</b>			Dining Room
09.00	Introduction to day	Chris Knapp		
	Material Science: Understanding of the structure of inorganic materials	David Dorning	Lecture	Kings room

10.30	<b>Coffee</b>			Dining room
11.00	Materials Science: Understanding the deterioration of inorganic materials	David Dorning	Examination and handling session	Old Library
12.30	<b>Lunch</b>			Dining Room
14.00	Approches to conservation- case histories	Suzanne Kitto	Lecture	Kings room
15.30	<b>Tea</b>			
16.00	Case histories cont.	Suzanne Kitto	Lecture	Kings room
19.00	<b>Dinner</b>			Dining Room
20.00	Students survey project	Chris Knapp Suzanne Kitto	Practical	Old library

TIME	EVENT	TUTOR	FORMAT	VENUE
08.00	<b>Breakfast</b>			Dining Room
09.00	Introduction to day	Chris Knapp		
	Materials Science: Understanding the structure of organic materials	David Dorning	Lecture	Kings room
10.30	<b>Coffee</b>			Dining room
11.30	Materials Science: Understanding decay and corrosion of organic materials.	David Dorning	Examination and handling session	Old library
12.30	<b>Lunch</b>			Dining Room
14.00	Approaches to mixed media – Case histories	Mark Holloway	Lecture	Kings room
15.30	<b>Tea</b>			Dining room
16.00	Approaches to mixed media.	Mark Holloway	Object handling session	Old library
18.00	Break			
19.00	Dinner			Dining room
20.00	Students survey presentations	Chris Knapp Mark Holloway	Practical	Old library

TIME	EVENT	TUTOR	FORMAT	VENUE
08.00	<b>Breakfast</b>			Dining Room
09.00	Introduction to day	Chris Knapp		
	Understanding degradation and environmental control	David Dorning	Lecture	Kings room
10.30	<b>Coffee</b>			Dining room
11.00	Object risk assessment and disaster planning	David Willey	Lecture	Kings room
12.30	<b>Lunch</b>			Dining Room
14.00	Object risk assessment and disaster planning cont.	David Willey	Lecture	Kings room
15.30	<b>Tea</b>			Dining room
16.00	Storage and display	Moirra Gittos	Lecture	Kings room

19.00	<b>Dinner</b>			Dining Room
20.00	Students survey presentation	Chris Knapp David Willey Moira Gittos		Old library

TIME	EVENT	TUTOR	FORMAT	VENUE
08.00	<b>Breakfast</b>			Dining Room
09.00	Introduction to day	Chris Knapp		
	How to access conservation information from printed literature	Adrian Tribe	Practical session	College library
10.30	<b>Coffee</b>			Dining room
11.00	How to access conservation information from the internet.	Adrian Tribe	Lecture	Kings room
12.30	<b>Lunch</b>			Dining Room
14.00	Discussion and questions	Chris Knapp		Kings room
	Course evaluation and certificates	Chris Knapp Isabel Thurston		
15.30	<b>Tea</b>			
15.40	Transport to station			