

Sarah Knighton's thoughts on:

'What is your view on the purpose of, and best practice for conservation records, and how have your systems developed?'

I started working on conservation records when a health problem meant I couldn't do site work for a period of time. This made me the logical candidate to do the records once the glass had left the workshop. Previously they had been written by whoever had managed the project.

I am not academic but more practical and visual. I read and dissected all of the available records we had on file to find consistency and develop a method. I quickly noticed how different they could be, not just from person to person but between projects.

I found:

- **Overly flowery language.** Addition of lots of adjectives that were unnecessary such as carefully, gently etc
- **Confusion in description** and ambiguous language.
- **Lack of context.** Without a floorplan or picture of the church to get started it can be a challenge to check everybody is talking about the same locations.
- **Confusing presentation.** E.g. certain fonts can be off-putting to the reader
- **Assumptions.** Certain terminology or processes are not widely understood.
- **Overly long** documents. Being given a paper brick is intimidating.
- **Repetition.** Often projects had a summary in the introduction. Described in the record and then sometimes even summarised again at the end.

These were the initial things that I strove to avoid and a basic template grew from what was left over this comprises of:

- **Introduction** with all necessary contextual information such as dates locations floor plans and photographs. All on the first page to allow easy identification in future. A description and diagrams are both used to firmly set some terminology in place. The glass itself is described enough to allow identification and highlight interesting features but not to repeat the condition survey.
- **Before condition.** Photos and description of the before condition as part of recording and to allow comparison (often new things crop up that are not included in the condition survey).
- **Conservation record.** Description of works, before and after photos, conservation diagrams.
- **After conservation condition** to record the state the glass was left in so accurate monitoring can occur.
- **Details of historic, Artistic or Technological importance.** Anything learned during the project that adds to, or helps clarify, the history of the window and associated fabric.
- **Materials list.** Currently I include a full materials list (as much as possible). However, I am currently in two minds about how much is actually necessary.
- **Recommended future works.** Generally environmental monitoring or something the client wants to put off until later.

I quickly had a knock-on effect with presenting the conservation diagrams. Legibility of diagrams on the page is a very important factor, I started introducing colours and creating separate diagrams for details of historic, Artistic or Technological importance so as not to make them too complicated. And stitching some diagrams together to give whole window context. Another effect was the

photographic record. It was important to have a camera good enough to give sharp and colour-true images on a page.

I often work with the national trust who use a box type lay out and tick charts, so these were incorporated initially. I found it easier to lay out certain types of information in this way. However recently I asked a junior colleague to summarise what it meant and found they had trouble pulling out the right information, because to them the tick boxes were confusing. Therefore, I have reduced the amount I use them and changed the presentation style.

Different types of project also require slightly different approaches. E.g. a cathedral dean asked for a more personal approach. So, time was spent creating a studio profile and photographing team members working on each stage. Another example is working for an art dealer and not knowing if the glass will end up in a museum archive, private collection or someone's front room. In this case details about handling, storage, display and ongoing care are included to help the future owner.

This is probably an oversimplification but I currently think of the conservation record like any other tool except I will be giving it to someone else to use. If I were to source a new lead knife or cutting wheel, I would evaluate it in terms of:

- **Function.** Will it perform its intended job?
- **Longevity.** Will it last a decent amount of time?
- **Cost.** Is it value for money?
- **Ergonomic.** Is it comfortable to use?
- **Form.** It should be pleasingly presented but not to the detriment of use.
- **Appropriate materials.** It should be made from the right stuff. Interestingly I want my tools to be made of traditional materials, I would hate a plastic handled lead knife. Perhaps this is why I always think of the record in terms of how it looks on a page or how others will react to it in solid form.