

# Conservation best practice

If you haven't visited the Society website lately, check out the Conservation section where a new page has been added ([www.bsmgp.org.uk/stained-glass/conservation/conservation-best-practice/](http://www.bsmgp.org.uk/stained-glass/conservation/conservation-best-practice/)) to bring you the very latest ideas and debate around the best practice in stained glass conservation.

The first topic for discussion deals with conservation records. We begin by asking the Conservation Working Group for their thoughts on conservation documentation and archives. Our panel of experts each responds to the question 'What is your view on the purpose of, and best practice for, Conservation Records and how have your systems for recording developed?'

Working group chairman Steve Clare begins the dialogue:

'I guess that with the benefit of hindsight, looking back over our archive which is now extensive, spanning nearly 40 years, my view of my old reports and conservation records is fairly critical. Earlier reports now appear to be verbose, opinionated and lacking in clarity. They are also rather amateurishly presented.

I have over the years refined the systems that we use in Wells, and in that process, my long-term role as National Adviser on stained glass to the National Trust has been pivotal. In my time in post, I have seen, and have been part of, a move towards a system based on short concise reports which serve to identify specific key areas of condition, and to give prioritised advice on necessary conservation work. Importantly, advice to do nothing is equally valuable, supported by recommendations for structured monitoring where necessary. In National Trust conservation proposals and records, enough information is given, reports are thorough, but avoid overcomplication. They inform house custodians, conservators and curators to allow them to deal with immediate conservation needs, and to integrate stained glass in the wider conservation plan for the building. Well designed and presented, they offer a thoroughly good model.'

Next, Martin Crampin reflects on researching archives:

'Researching stained glass in Wales has often necessitated archival work and helped me appreciate what records can tell us about the stories behind stained glass windows. These visits to the archives have sometimes been to find more about windows that I have

discovered and recorded, including the basic information that is not always immediately apparent, such as their date and maker. But research has also revealed stories relevant to the choice of subject matter or studio, or in fact the controversies behind certain commissions. In some cases, often while looking for something else, I have discovered information in archives that has encouraged me to visit and record particular windows.

The archives I have used fall into two main categories: those of stained glass artists or studios, and those relevant to dioceses or individual parishes, and in these cases the information found with the faculty correspondence is most



useful. Diocesan archives afford the possibility of finding information on a large number of churches in one repository, whereas parish archives are often more spread out and cannot always be located. Some are at local record offices, but many are not. In some cases parish archives are still kept at the relevant places of worship, and can be hard to track down.'

Sarah Knighton then shares her reflections on conservation reports: 'I began 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 whomever had managed the project.

I am not an academic but I am practical and visual. I read and dissected all of the available records we had on file to look for consistency and develop a method. I quickly noticed how varied reports could be, not just from person to person but between projects as well.'

Sarah Jarron answers the question: 'What is your view on the purpose of, and best practice for, Conservation Records and how have your systems for recording developed?':

'The subject of conservation documentation is vast, with much having been debated and written on the subject. What are we recording and why? What is the purpose or aim? Who is it for? And how do we balance the time and cost of producing documentation with the often limited resources of a conservation project? I believe that accurately recording our projects and creating conservation records is a mandatory and important part a conservator's job. This conviction is corroborated in section 2 of the CVMA Guidelines (Corpus Vitrearum Medii Aevi), which is the internationally agreed code of best practice for conserving stained glass ([www.cvma.ac.uk/conserv/guidelines.html](http://www.cvma.ac.uk/conserv/guidelines.html)). It is also a stipulated requirement by many funding bodies such as the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).'

And finally, Fernando Cortés Pizano shares a Master Plan for the conservation of the stained glass windows in Santa María Cathedral in Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain. (The report is in Spanish but includes lots of beautiful photos, illustrations and plans.): 'The Master Plan took Mikel Delika González de Viñaspre and myself a year to compile in 2008. is a very valuable work tool for art historians, stained glass conservators and architects. Its main objectives are to expand and deepen the information that we had so far on the stained glass windows of the cathedral and to provide useful and up to date information to be able to tackle a comprehensive intervention. This work had the support of the Santa María Cathedral Trust, a non-profit organization created in 1999 to manage and develop the Master Plan for the Restoration of the most emblematic church in Vitoria-Gasteiz.'

You can read more about and download pdfs of these topics on the webpage.

Do contact Helen Bower via the website if you would like to contribute to the page.

**Conservation Working Group**