

Lothian Health Services Archive

Fact Sheet 5: Objects



The LHSA Object Collection

One of the secondary roles of LHSA has been to advise on the care of historically important artefacts kept on LNHS property. Since the early 1980s, as a result of hospital and service reorganisations, LHSA has accessioned a range of items that were considered to be at risk. Although objects have never been a formal part of LHSA's collection policy as such, it now has a considerable collection of over 1,000 artefacts of various kinds. The majority of the objects are historical, surgical and scientific instruments but there is also a collection of bed plaques and donor boards as well as a number of other artefacts including clocks, silverware, textiles and a small number of works of art.

In response to the growing number of objects in the collection, a survey by the Scottish Museums Council was undertaken in March 2002 to assess the condition of the object collection and to provide recommendations for responsible long-term care. In summary, the survey report suggested that LHSA review its collection policy, provide proper documentation and storage systems and begin improving the condition of items with remedial conservation treatments as necessary. Following the survey, LHSA began committing funds from the core budget and staff time to address the recommendations of the survey report. The recommendations can be broken down into two main strands of activity: cataloguing and conservation.

Cataloguing of the object collection

Commencing in 2003, Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh (RIE)-related objects were given catalogue numbers and photographed. Valuations of a number of the more significant RIE objects in the collection were also commissioned. This information was entered into a database along with a brief description of each item. In January 2005 the database was developed with the addition of all non-RIE items.

Conservation of the object collection

Apart from the conservation of an important portrait in oils of Dr Charles Bell, treatment of the collection has been largely restricted to the provision of appropriate long-term storage, beginning in January 2004 with the small collection of particularly vulnerable textile items. These objects, ranging from an academic gown to a straight jacket, were individually wrapped in acid-free tissue and placed in custom-made, acid-free boxes. In November 2004, a three-month project to re-house the remaining objects in the collection began. The objects were ordered according to catalogue number, wrapped and padded where necessary with acid-free tissue and boxed. Clear labelling of the boxes and careful stacking has meant that the object collection is now easy to access and preserved for the long-term.

In early 2009 an in-depth condition assessment of all objects deemed of significant historical and or financial value was undertaken by an objects conservator.

Cultural engagement

In February 2009 'Narratives', a large installation in the RIE using historical bed plaques from the LHSA collection coupled with responses in bronze relief created by a contemporary artist, was unveiled. This collaborative work with Ginkgo Projects has resulted in a popular public display of part of the Archive's object collection for the benefit of patients, staff and visitors to the hospital.

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