

**Research Resources in Medical History: Preserving Twentieth-Century
Case Notes of the Royal Edinburgh Hospital**

Final Report: January 2007

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1. Summary

The Research Resources in Medical History project, *Preserving Twentieth-Century Case Notes of the Royal Edinburgh Hospital* was successfully completed on time and on budget. This project utilised the methodology developed by Honeybone and Barfoot¹ for the preservation of folder-based clinical case notes.

2. Introduction

This project aimed to facilitate the long term preservation of, and improved access to, case notes of the Royal Edinburgh Hospital for Mental and Nervous Disorders (REH). The records were prioritised for treatment on the basis of their intellectual importance, actual and potential usage and condition. It was an 18-month project involving the re-housing of approximately 25,500 case notes dating from 1907 to 1965.

The final report includes:

- a description of the work
- an evaluation of the project
- a statement of expenditure
- a note on the dissemination of information relating to the project
- an assessment of the project within the context of the Archive as a whole and LHSA's commitment to ongoing preservation of its collections
- appendices on the relocation of the Archive due to the refurbishment of Edinburgh University Main Library, environmental conditions in storage areas and an article submitted for publication in *ARC*, the monthly newsletter of the Society of Archivists.

3. Description of work

Condition prior to treatment

Each of the c25,500 case notes consists of sheets of paper-based material ranging from a single sheet to upwards of 150 sheets enclosed within a folder. The material typically includes patient histories, charts, forms and correspondence including letters, drawings and patient accounts. A small number of photographic prints and x-radiographs have also been found.

Prior to treatment the case notes exhibited surface dirt, tears, creasing and losses. Rusty metal paper clips, staples and other fasteners were also present and had caused mechanical and chemical degradation to the case notes. The enclosures were of poor quality materials and also exhibited surface dirt and physical and chemical degradation. A small number of case notes and their enclosures had also been subject to water damage, which led to, now dormant, mould growth and increased rust damage.

Treatment

The case notes were stored in three types of non-archival enclosures as follows:

1. c1,000 single crease folders with papers secured with a metal fastener. The folders measured 265 x 360mm.

¹ Honeybone, R and Barfoot, M (2003) *Research Resources in Medical History: Preserving Twentieth Century Hospital Case Notes of University of Edinburgh Clinical Professors: Edwin Bramwell and Norman Dott, Final Report: June 2003*, Lothian Health Services Archive.

2. c2,000 single crease folders in which papers were not secured. The folders measured 250 x 295mm.
3. c22,500 card envelopes in which the papers were not secured. The envelopes measured 240 x 360mm.

All of the c25,500 case notes have now been treated.

Treatment common to all three types of enclosure

The three types of folder varied slightly in the degree of different types of damage found (see below). However, the overall pattern of treatment was common to them all and consisted of the following:

- removal of all paperclips and staples, realignment of creases and removal of surface dirt with the aid of a chemical sponge
- removal of mould using a soft brush followed by further cleaning using a chemical sponge. To prevent inhalation of the potentially hazardous mould, this work has been carried out within a fume cupboard.
- re-housing of each case note in a single or double crease paper folder constructed of premier grade archival paper and labelled with its contents
- placing of photographic prints found within the case notes in individual folders of photographic storage paper and returned to the appropriate folder
- removal of x-rays to be stored separately in conservation grade materials before being either put into cold storage in the case of good condition cellulose acetate x-rays or – in the case of x-rays on a cellulose nitrate base – digitised and then destroyed, with cross-referencing to preserve the link between case note and x-ray
- removal of oversize and awkwardly shaped objects to be stored separately, with appropriate cross-referencing (only a very small number of such objects were found)
- removal of the parts of the original folders that provided informational content (e.g. name, case number, diagnosis) for storage with the appropriate case note
- retention of examples of each style of folder to be used for reference purposes
- vertical storage of the new folders in labelled, custom-made, die-cut, drop-spine boxes.

See Interim Report (January 2006) and Second Interim Report (July 2006) for further information and a photographic record of treatments undertaken and Figure 1, page 4 in this report, for images before and after treatment.

During the course of this project, the Main Library Redevelopment Project commenced. This meant that the LHSA collections, including the REH case notes, and project work area were relocated (see Appendix A for more details).

Figure 1 Shelved case notes: (i-ii) examples of shelved case notes prior to treatment; (iii) complete run of treated and re-housed case notes in their new location on mobile racking



4. Evaluation of the project

The work carried out over the eighteen-month period July 2005 – January 2007 has successfully re-housed c25,500 case notes ensuring their long-term preservation and facilitate their safe and easy access. This has been achieved using the accepted methods of minimal intervention and re-housing as set out in the initial RRMH award application to the Wellcome Trust. It has also reduced the space required to house this collection, saving around 10 linear metres of shelf space.

Progress was monitored by shelves completed against time. The schedule allowed for two shelves (approximately 400 case notes) to be treated by the Project Conservator and Conservation Assistant per five-day week. Treatment was completed just ahead of schedule, allowing slightly more time for associated tasks including report writing, photographic documentation and the production of an article for publication.

The case notes have been referred to by a number of researchers since the project began. LHS Archivists have noted that the newly re-housed case notes

are far easier to access and the treatment undertaken has made it possible to process such requests much more efficiently.

Additionally, any discrepancies between the database containing the names and basic details of the patients and information in the case notes themselves were eliminated. These include information on case notes missing from the database, case notes that are on the database but appear to be missing, and other errors such as misspelled names. This work to update the database has improved its accuracy and its effectiveness as a finding aid.

5. Statement of expenditure

Salaries:	£56,386.84
Materials and equipment:	£23,130.64
TOTAL:	£79,517.48
 GRANT AWARDED:	 £80,550.00

6. Publicity and dissemination

An article was submitted to *ARC* – the monthly newsletter of the Society of Archivists – for publication in early 2007. This gives an overview of the completed project and the text and images compiled for publication are found in Appendix B.

The LHSA website carries detailed information regarding the project, including a number of illustrative images before and after treatment. The relevant page can be found at <http://www.lhsa.lib.ed.ac.uk/projects/rrmh3/rrmhreh.html>.

In addition, the LHSA Paper Conservator has presented a paper at two conferences – ‘Exploring Medical History: What’s happening in libraries and archives’, 17 October 2005, and ‘Exploiting Medical History: A practical approach’, 23 and 24 October 2006 - in which the methodology for this and previous LHSA RRMH projects to re-house case notes has been described. The Powerpoint presentations were edited for online publication via the Royal Society of Medicine website.

7. Assessment of the project within the context of LHSA as a whole and its commitment to ongoing preservation

LHSA’s third RRMH project has further enhanced the well-established treatment programme devised for the first project. The REH case notes treated constitute c125 linear metres out of a total of c1000 metres of twentieth-century folder-based case notes held by LHSA. Combining the three RRMH projects undertaken, approximately one third of the total holdings of folder-based case note material have been treated to date.

LHSA is committed to the long-term preservation of its case notes; environmental monitoring of all Archive storage areas is undertaken (see Appendix C), and guidelines for safe handling have been produced. Furthermore, core funds from the annual budget have been allocated to treat case note material wherever possible and work to date has included re-binding of REH case books, digitisation

of microfilms and X-rays, and re-housing of small case note series and associated correspondence.

A further application for funding for a fourth RRMH project was made to the Wellcome Trust while this project was nearing its completion. Funding has now been secured and work to conserve c.74,000 folder-based case notes, 1930-1994, relating to reproductive and sexual health in Edinburgh is due to commence in early 2007.

8. Conclusion

The Research Resources in Medical History project, *Preserving Twentieth-Century Case Notes of the Royal Edinburgh Hospital* has been completed on time and on budget and has facilitated the long-term preservation of, and improved access to, the case note collection of probably the most important single institution for the care of the mentally ill in Scotland.

At around 1000 linear metres, LHSA probably has the largest and most important collection of twentieth-century folder-based case notes in the UK, with around 30 specialties and over 50 physicians and surgeons represented throughout it. LHSA has recently supported four University of Edinburgh PhDs that used case notes as their chief primary sources. However attention has focused in the main upon bound case notes. Apart from the fact that fewer history of medicine students appear to work in the 20th century, this is also due to the fact that folder-based notes are unwieldy and often in a poor condition, all of which hampers safe access.

With the completion of this project, and thanks to the RRMH programme, LHSA now has five re-housed 'demonstrator' collections, which will assist in further promoting the use of folder-based case notes as unique primary sources in understanding the history of twentieth-century medicine.

Appendix A: Relocation of the case notes within the library.

Work began on the complete refurbishment of Edinburgh University's Main Library in the summer of 2006. To allow work to be carried out on the fifth floor during the first phase of the refurbishment, LHSA has had to move its collection to two new locations. The case notes relevant to this report have been moved onto mobile racking in a storage space on the lower ground floor of the main library building (see Figure 2). From the point of view of this project this was seen as a good solution for two main reasons. Firstly, it allowed the Project Conservator and Conservation Assistant to continue their work in the Library's Conservation Studio, which is also situated on the lower ground floor, thus ensuring easy access to the case notes. Secondly, the shelving system in the new store is superior to that on the fifth floor.

The details of future phases of the library's refurbishment and how they will affect LHSA have yet to be established in full. However, LHSA's commitment to the ongoing preservation of the case notes will ensure that their environmental conditions are as good as, or better than those in their current location. For information on environmental conditions in both storage areas see Appendix C.



Figure 2 Mobile racking within the new storage space on the lower ground floor

Appendix B: Article for publication

Text and images to be published in ARC magazine in early 2007.

Case Note Conservation at Lothian Health Services Archive

Toby Gough

Project Conservator, Lothian Health Services Archive

Lothian Health Services Archive (LHSA) is core funded by the National Health Service and aims to locate, collect, preserve and list all historically important NHS and related records, and to promote and use them to increase awareness of the local history and traditions of health care in Edinburgh, the Lothian area and Scotland. Non-NHS institutional records and personal papers concerning the local history of health care and the history of Scottish medicine are also collected. LHSA holdings are housed on University of Edinburgh curtilage and include over 3,000 linear metres of material ranging from the late-seventeenth century to the present day. The collection includes official publications and grey literature, bound volumes, plans, photographs, objects and a small number of works of art. In addition, LHSA has around 1,000 linear metres of twentieth-century folder-based case notes, probably the largest and most important collection of such material in the UK.

LHSA has recently conserved and re-housed approximately 25,500 folder-based case notes of the Royal Edinburgh Hospital for Mental and Nervous Disorders dating from 1907 to 1965. Funding for the work was provided by the Wellcome Trust's Research Resources in Medical History (RRMH) programme. This was the third project of its kind carried out by LHSA, the case notes of University of Edinburgh Clinical Professors Norman Dott, Edwin Bramwell, James Learmonth and Derrick Dunlop having previously been treated.

In spite of the vast numbers of medical case notes generated in the twentieth century, comparatively few survive in long runs available for research. This is in large part due to current destruction policies and the failure to use available sampling techniques. This highlights the need to preserve the case note collection of the Royal Edinburgh Hospital, probably the most important historical institution for the development of the care for the mentally ill in Scotland. The project aimed to facilitate the long-term preservation of the case notes and, at the same time, improve access to them in line with national legislation and existing guidelines.

Each of the c.25,500 case notes consists of paper-based material ranging in quantity from a single page to upwards of 150 sheets enclosed within various types of folder. The material typically includes patient histories, charts, forms and correspondence, although personal items belonging to the patient, for example paintings and poems, are occasionally found.

Project Conservator, Toby Gough, and Conservation Assistant, Sue Turnbull, began work in July 2005 and treated around 200 case notes each per week over an eighteen-month period. The treatment programme was devised by LHSA's Paper Conservator, Ruth Honeybone, and Archivist, Mike Barfoot, and had been used for the Archive's two prior RRMH-funded projects. It included the removal of all metal fasteners, realignment of creases and removal of surface dirt with the aid of a chemical sponge. Approximately seventy different types of original folder were removed and boxed together as reference samples, while being cross referenced to the case notes they had contained. The rest of the original folders were cut down so that the written information they carried could be retained and re-housed along with their contents in new archival paper folders. The folders

were then placed in high specification, labelled, custom-made, drop-spine boxes for vertical storage.

As each case note was treated, the accuracy of the database accompanying the series was checked and any discrepancies were noted. In addition, approximately twenty case notes had sustained damage that could not be repaired within the time constraints of the project. These were listed separately for further, more complex, treatment in the future.

Some more facts and figures about the project are...

- c.18,900 cubic centimetres of chemical sponge were used to surface clean the documents
- c.60 sacks of low quality folder material with no written information were removed and sent for recycling
- 680 new drop-spine archival boxes were put together and filled
- 10 linear metres of shelf space were saved
- 2 microspatulas were worn out by each conservator
- 27 kg of paper clips and staples were removed.

The work has been completed on time and on budget. It has achieved its original aims and the project has increased knowledge of this part of LHSA's collection. Approximately one third of LHSA's twentieth-century folder-based case notes have now been treated by Wellcome Trust RRMH-funded projects. A further grant has been secured for a fourth RRMH project to conserve c.74,000 folder-based case notes relating to reproductive and sexual health and work began in early 2007. The support of the Wellcome Trust is gratefully acknowledged.

For further information please contact Ruth Honeybone, Lothian Health Services Archive, Edinburgh University Library, George Square, Edinburgh, EH8 9LJ, Tel: 0131 6503418, Email: ruth.honeybone@ed.ac.uk, or see <http://www.lhsa.lib.ed.ac.uk/projects/rrmh3/rrmhreh.html>.

(i) shelved case notes prior to treatment; (ii) complete run of shelved case notes after treatment



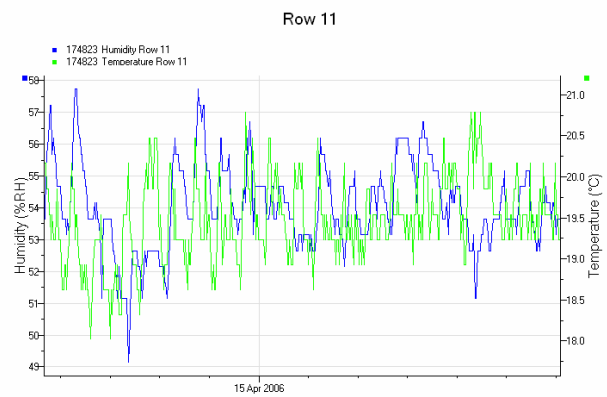
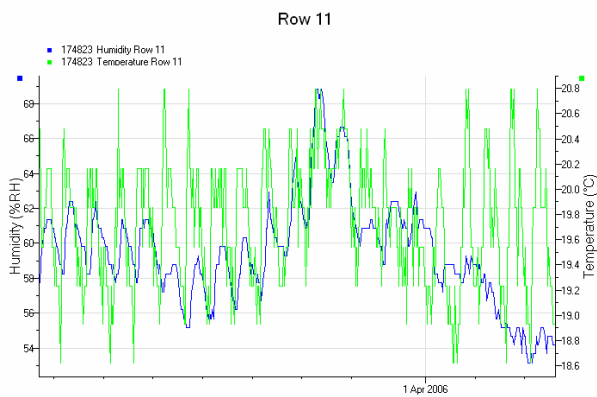
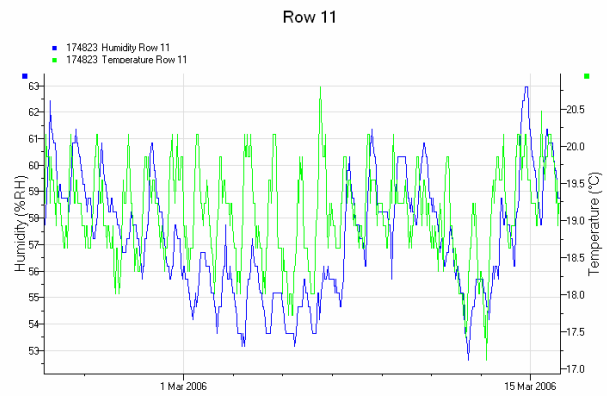
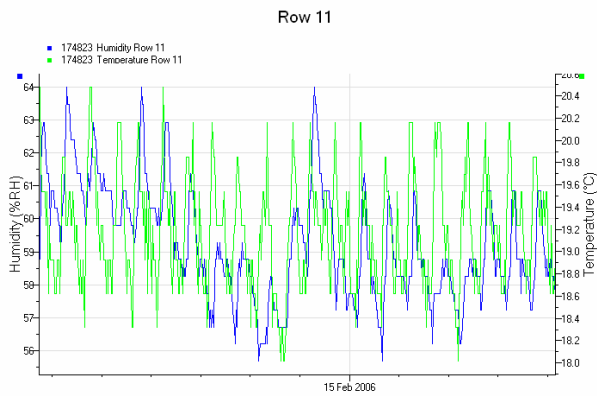
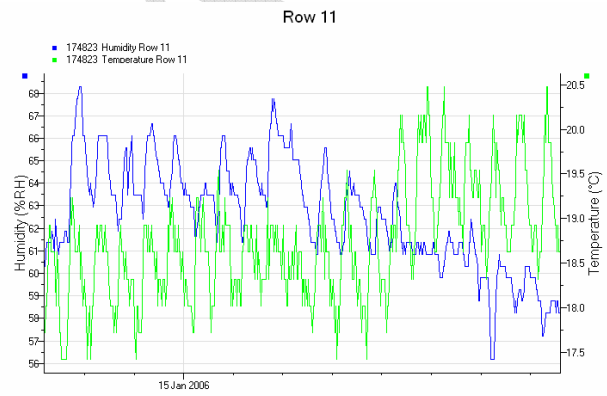
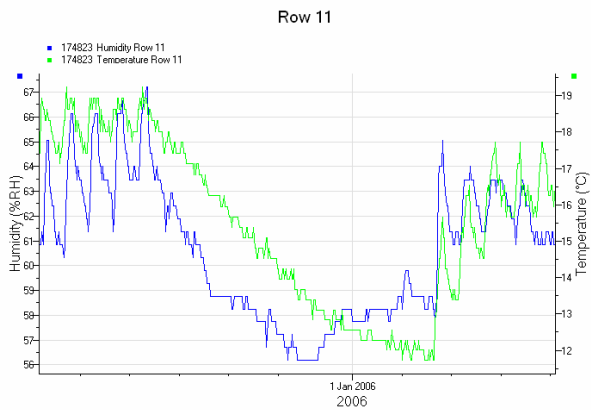
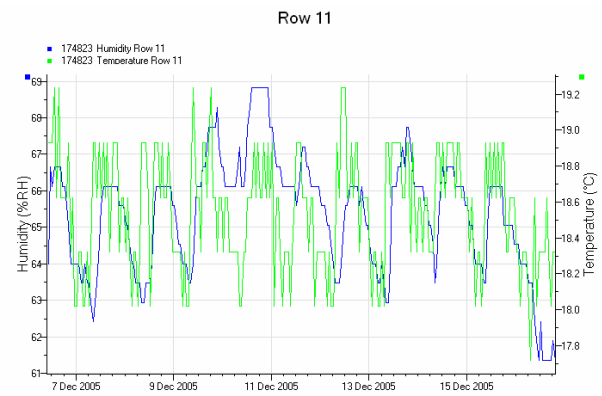
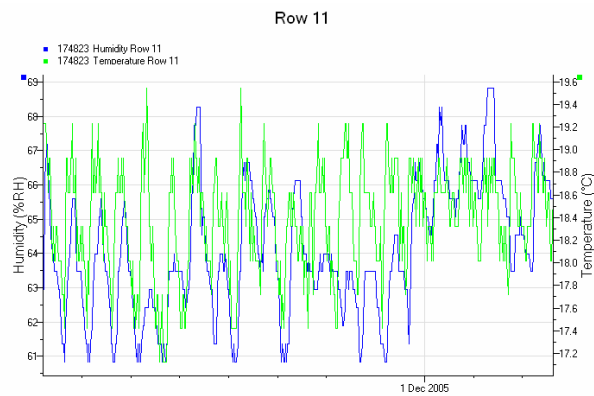
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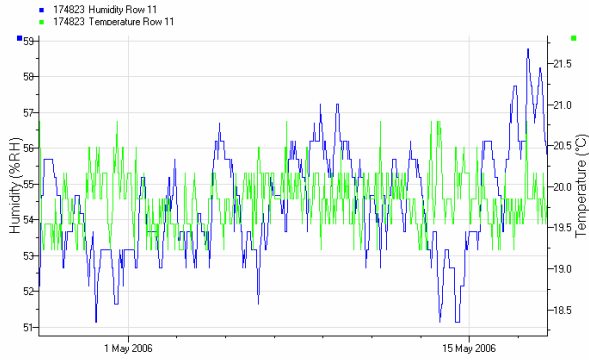
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Appendix C: Environmental conditions

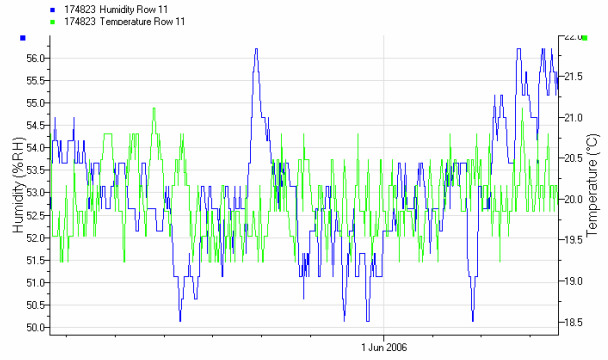
Fifth floor archive conditions prior to the relocation of case notes covering a period from 1 December 2005 to 1 September 2006.



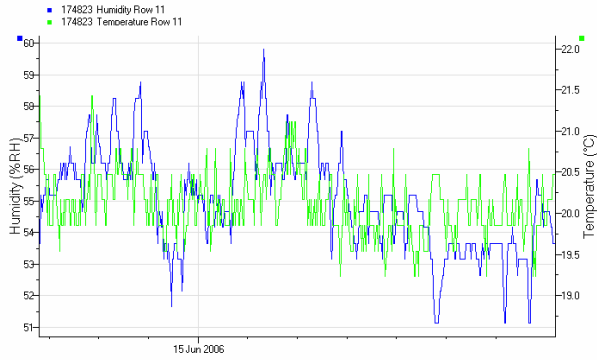
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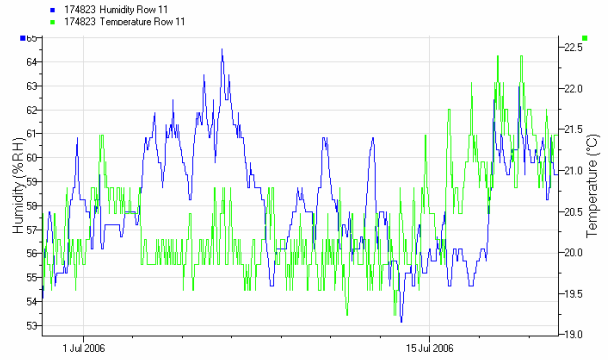
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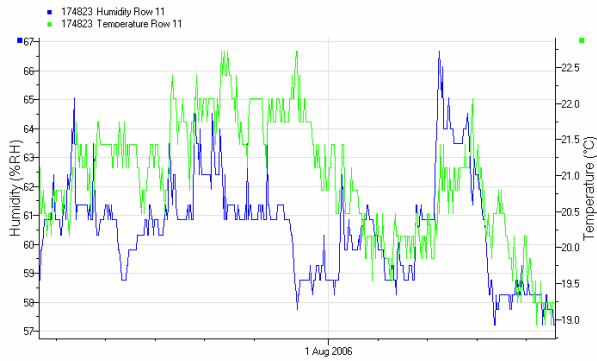
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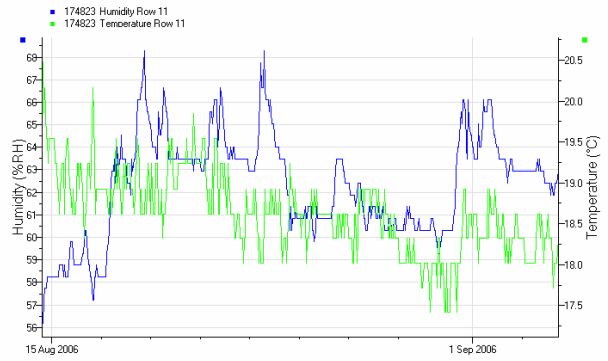
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Row 11



Lower ground floor conditions following the relocation of case notes covering a period from 15 August 2006 to 1 December 2006

