

## Handling and moving museum objects

Handling museum objects can, if inappropriately done, result in damage both to museum objects as well as to staff and visitors. However the risk of damage can be minimised with careful handling. Before handling or moving items consider the following points:

### **Why move objects ? Is it necessary ?**

#### **What is the object(s) like ?**

- ! Size - large or small
- ! Weight - heavy or light
- ! Strength - robust or fragile
- ! Shape - simple or complex
- ! Stability - top heavy or stable
- ! Protection - packed or unpacked

- ! Are there any fragile surfaces which need protecting e.g. flaking paint
- ! Is there any damage such as cracks or chips, which may weaken the structure ?
- ! Are there any repairs (these may be well concealed) which may fail ?
- ! Are there any strong points by which the object can be handled, or weak points which should not be used to handle it ?

#### **How can I safely move it ?**

There are different ways in which items can be moved. To choose an appropriate one consider the following:

- ! People - how many are needed ? Be realistic about this and don't underestimate whether you need help and if so how much. Where more than one person is involved, good teamwork is necessary. Larger projects should have a designated supervisor.
- ! Protection - will the object(s) need to be wrapped or packed and if so what materials are suitable for this?
- ! Contact - is it to be carried in the hands or in a container ?
- ! Equipment - is mechanical equipment (e.g. a pallet truck) or manual equipment (e.g. picture slings) required ? Have we got this equipment or will I need to buy / borrow / hire it ?
- ! Transport - is powered (eg van) or manually propelled (eg trolley) transport necessary ? Make sure any transport is large enough for the objects.
- ! Route - Is this a clear route or will special modifications be needed eg taking doors off hinges, building a ramp over steps ? Plan the route, if necessary walk it through, make necessary arrangements like gallery closures and work with any other people involved to keep them informed of what's happening.

### **How can I reduce risks to objects during handling ?**

Wear gloves to protect the object from the oils and sweat on your skin as this can damage them. Gloves can also help to protect you from sharp edges or contaminants such as mercury or pesticide treatments. Gloves are available in many materials so choose one to suit the nature of the job and the type of items being handled. Ensure gloves are clean and change them when they get dirty.

Pack items to prevent them from moving around in boxes or containers when being moved. Larger items may need protective covers.

Lifting objects on your own, you should place one hand underneath it and one around it to support it. You can cradle it against your body but beware dirty clothes, jewellery and buttons on clothes which may scratch or catch on it. Never lift something by handles or knobs as these are often the weakest point. If two or more people are lifting an item together, nominate a lead person who gives instructions, clearly explain what the plan is before you all start and think about choosing people matched in height and strength if possible. Where using equipment read instructions and familiarise yourself with it before using.

### **How can I reduce risks to people during handling ?**

- ! Involve all effected staff .
- ! Close galleries or public areas to keep visitors out of the area if necessary or move things during museum closing hours.
- ! Ensure correct safety gear eg safety boots, and equipment is used where necessary.
- ! Keep equipment maintained and checked and ensure staff are trained how to use it correctly.
- ! Allow enough time so you aren't rushing to get something done.
- ! Keep access routes clear of hazards.
- ! Ensure you can safely see where you are going when carrying something

If an object is damaged or dropped during handling, move people away from the immediate area and carefully brush up all pieces into a polythene bag, or envelope (preferably acid free). Larger pieces can be wrapped in acid free tissue. Label the bag with the accession number and description of the object, from which the pieces came. If it is a large or complex item, identify the area from which the pieces(s) became detached. Try to keep this package with the damaged object. Once broken pieces become separated from the parent object, they are more likely to be lost. If necessary, call in a conservator to repair the item. Document the damage and any subsequent action taken and keep this with the object's history file.

## Handling do's and don'ts

### **Do:**

- ! Keep handling to a minimum.
- ! Check objects for signs of damage or previous repair before handling them.
- ! Think before you handle an object and be realistic about what you can manage.
- ! Wear appropriate gloves whenever possible.
- ! Separate loose pieces of objects such as cups from saucers and lids from teapots, before carrying them separately.
- ! Cradle objects in both (gloved) hands.
- ! Use boxes or trays for carrying multiple objects, or items where gloves may not be appropriate, for example, items with fragile surfaces etc. Line the boxes with a thick layer of tissue or some Plastazote
- ! Remove watches, jewellery and sharp objects such as keys, from your person and tie back long hair. Be aware that buttons and zips on clothing can also scratch objects or be impressed into their surface.
- ! Ask for help if you are unhappy about moving an object on your own.
- ! Plan ahead, be patient and don't rush.
- ! Keep access routes and stores clear and tidy.
- ! Collect all pieces of objects, which become detached when handling and place in a clearly labelled bag or box to be kept with the parent object.

### **Don't:**

- ! Pick up objects by handles, knobs or rims.
- ! Reach over one object to pick up another.
- ! Carry too many objects at once.
- ! Leave objects near the edges of desks or shelves.
- ! Strain to reach objects on high shelves or lift those, which are too large or heavy.
- ! Assume that because an object looks robust, it is.
- ! Rush.