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NSCG Newsletter

Title: Fire Procedures at national Museums and Galleries on Merseyside

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Source: Yates, S. A. (1997). Fire Procedures at national Museums and Galleries on Merseyside. *NSCG Newsletter, Issue 5, The Ten Agents of Deterioration, 1. Fire*, 7 - 9.

URL: <http://www.natsca.org/article/1096>

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Waller, R.R. 1987 An experimental ammonia gas treatment method for oxidizing pyritic mineral specimens. Pre-prints of 8th triennial meeting of ICOM Committee for Conservation, working group 13, Natural History Collections. Sydney, 1987. pp 625-630

A tale of effective smoke detectors

Kate Andrew, Ludlow Museum

Whilst carrying out a geology collection survey at Bolton Museum and Art Gallery, I experienced a minor fire at first hand. The fire alarm sounded at about 12 midday. The building, which includes an aquarium and public library as well as the museum and art gallery, was quickly and efficiently evacuated and staff and visitors gathered outside on the other side of the road.

The fire brigade arrived within a matter of minutes and entered the building, the fire detection system indicated the source of the alarm to be one of the public toilets. A fire in a toilet paper dispenser was rapidly put out, the building checked over and after about forty five minutes from the alarm sounding, the building was open to the public again.

As with the Eccles College fire, the cause was apparently arson, but an effective fire detection system and an automatic fire alarm brought a rapid response with only minor damage.

Fire at National Museum of Natural History, Paris

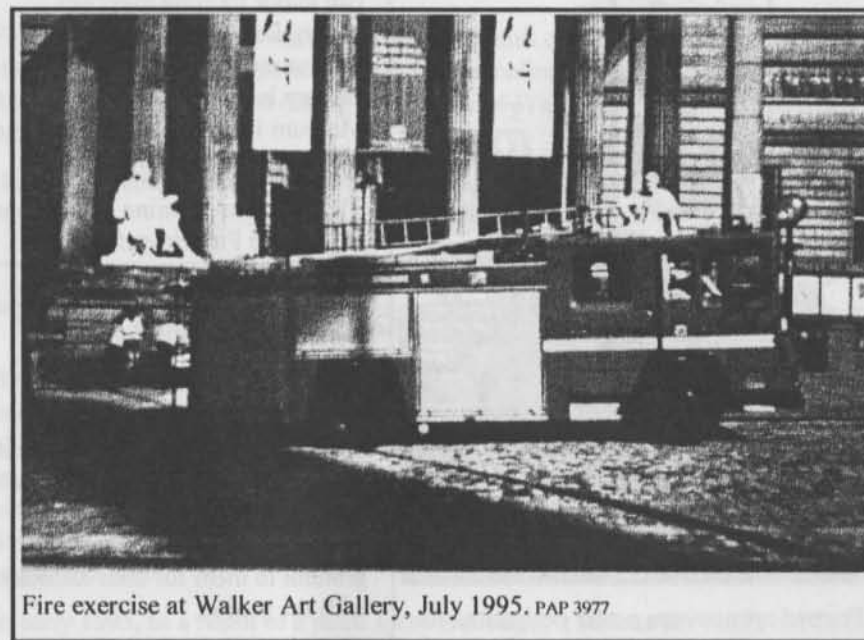
BCG nearly didn't see the star attraction of the 1996 trip to Paris. Declan Butler writing in *Nature* (30th January 1997, #378) reports that a serious fire at the National Museum of Natural History in Paris in August 1996 got within metres of the world's largest herbarium, some 8 million specimens. Decades of neglect have allowed the buildings to fall into a dangerous state of decay with many areas of the museum failing to meet minimum safety requirements, antiquated electrical systems, dangerous roofs and poorly stored chemicals. A major report by the CNE, an independent advisory committee to the French Government, has led to the government agreeing to carry out a detailed audit of museum improvement requirements before the summer of 1997.

Fire Procedures at National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside

Sally-Ann Yates, National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside

The Conservation Centre of the National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside was developed to support NMGM's seven venues in and around Liverpool. The rich and varied collections held by the Walker and Lady Lever Art Galleries, Sudley House, Liverpool Museum, Merseyside Maritime Museum incorporating HM Customs and Excise Museum and Museum of Liverpool Life draw an average of 1.3 million visits a year.

With so many buildings and collections to consider - everything from full-sized ships through to natural history collections - emergency preparedness is the top priority. Conservation staff operating from the new centre have concentrated on protection and salvage of objects from the new centre. The commonly used words 'emergency' and 'disaster' cover a wide range of events. From a small water leak to a major fire, physical damage or even total destruction may be the fate of any objects in the vicinity.



Fire exercise at Walker Art Gallery, July 1995. PAP 3977

Planning throughout NMGM has taken many forms, both practical and theoretical, examining many aspects of risk management. This is viewed as a long term activity with all plans and resources being regularly reviewed and updated.

For staff evacuation and organisation during an emergency, the Personnel Department has prepared a 'Major Incident Plan'. Further to this, examples of action taken by Conservation in order to care for the collections themselves include:

- ◆ Purchase of equipment, materials and protective clothing for emergency use only
- ◆ Formulation of basic training in emergency object handling for all staff
- ◆ Provision for key personnel to be contacted on a 24 hour basis
- ◆ Planning roles for key personnel during an emergency
- ◆ Sourcing back up resources, for instance transport and freezer companies
- ◆ Liaison with the Merseyside Fire Brigade



Framed art nouveau poster designated for moving by Fire Brigade. PAP 4029

Contact with the Merseyside Fire Brigade has been rewarding with two major training exercises undertaken to date, the first concentrating on the Walker Art Gallery in 1995, then the Liverpool Museum in 1996 and this year the Merseyside Fire Brigade.

The aim is to examine the response of both the Fire Brigade and our own staff if a fire, smoke or the means of extinguishing (i.e. water), were to endanger the collection material.

Although the Fire Brigade's primary objective is to save life and put out the fire, they also consider damage limitation as a high priority, and NMGM is very grateful to them for their assistance with the project.

The exercises follow a series of training sessions given by the NMGM staff for the Fire Brigade crews. These give basic information on the types of object held in the building and how they are stored and displayed. Information is also given on their vulnerability along with basic guidelines for protection and handling if the objects are thought to be in serious danger.

For the exercises themselves (held on Sunday mornings to avoid disturbance to the public) we decide where the fire(s) are to be and position pretend objects nearby. The alarm is raised and the Fire Brigade utilise their crews to find the fire, fight it and also protect or remove objects in immediate danger. Each exercise is followed by a debriefing.

We can thereby evaluate the effectiveness of our training and raise the awareness and knowledge of all involved as to what problems might be encountered in a real situation. It is also an important means of examining our own emergency planning procedures and identifying the gaps in such areas as communication and use of resources for salvage activities.

Fire and Wet Collections in Alcohol

Fire officers can get very worried at large volumes of alcohol. However, Velson Horie and Rob Waller reported seeing the wet collection at a museum in Dresden that had been fire bombed during the 2nd World War, some specimens were gently cooked but still wet.

Has anyone else anything to add to this topic?

Fire at Bewdley Museum Stores

Bewdley Museum store is referred to in Bordass (1996) as an example of an unheated store in a fairly new block of industrial units with an air-conditioned plaster board container kept at 16°C and de-humidified if necessary. Large scale industrial, agricultural, household and building items are housed in the main part of the store with sensitive items in the inner container which is made of insulated timber studwork and plasterboard. The door to this inner container is fitted with brush dust seals.

In early 1995, as a result of a paint spray explosion, a serious fire broke out in the adjacent unit that was being used at the time to make flock wallpaper. Within about thirty minutes, this unit was completely gutted and the metal roof girders