

THE MAGAZINE OF THE INSTITUTE OF CONSERVATION • JULY 2013 • ISSUE 47



Saved for a rainy day

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WE'VE GOT IT COVERED!

Alex Walker, Collection Care Icon Intern 2012-2013, describes recent changes to the storage of umbrellas and parasols at the Museum of London

BACKGROUND

A new method for the rehousing of the Museum of London's umbrella and parasol collection is being introduced to the Museum's costume and textiles store. The costume store was renovated in 2008-9. Some areas of the store did not receive the desired refurbishment and this included the wooden plan chests containing the umbrella and parasol collection.

CURRENT SYSTEM – DRAWBACKS

The current storage allows for the umbrellas to move or roll when the drawers are opened; they are covered with sheets of acid-free tissue but this does not offer suitable protection as

Empty Tyvek™ bag with label and image attached.



© Museum of London

the canopies of the umbrellas could catch on the shallow roof of the drawer. The chests will eventually be replaced with a more stable alternative, as the threat of off-gassing from the wood persists.

NEW SYSTEM IMPROVEMENTS

The innovative method for hanging the umbrellas from horizontal rails was originally developed by conservators at Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums in 2004. The system was designed to use space efficiently, but also offer support to the objects. Roughly twenty Tyvek™ cone shaped bags were custom-made to fit the umbrellas. The bags have a cotton tape draw-string at the top and a secured hanging tie. The shape of the bag offers support to the length of the canopy whilst it is hung from the rail.

The method was then updated for the Museum of London by adding a second cotton tape tie at the bottom of the cone and a small loop to attach a label. Labels were updated from the previous paper tags to larger Tyvek™ labels with a photograph of each umbrella attached. The Museum of London has a collection of over two hundred umbrellas and parasols. This meant that production of the Tyvek cones in three different sizes was outsourced.

PROJECT PROGRESS

The first stage of the project was to assess the condition and fragility of the collection. Each umbrella was photographed and evaluated. Fragile umbrellas with broken armature, handles with delicate hinges or a canopy which had friable or torn areas were given a highly visible 'fragile' label and were considered too delicate to hang. These umbrellas will remain in the plan chests and await further storage solutions.

The final stage was then to carefully place the remaining umbrellas into the appropriate sized bag and tie securely to the rail. Documentation was paramount due to the movement of collections, so each label was made visible and the

Tyvek™ bag containing umbrella and tied at base and at the top drawstring



Assessing the condition of umbrellas in current storage conditions and applying fragile labels when necessary – Alex Walker (left) and Christine Supianek

database updated regularly.

The umbrellas and parasols can be seen in their new storage system on the front cover of this issue of Icon News.

This has been a fantastic opportunity to work with a stunning collection and utilise an interesting storage method.

With thanks to: – Mark Baker at CCA Products, Beatrice Behlen, Hilary Davidson, Adrian Doyle, Libby Finney, Caroline Rendell, Sharon Robinson, Beryl Robinson, Christine Supianek, Rachael Thomas