

The Rex Wailes Collection

Damage, Repair and Conservation

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When we inspected the Rex Wailes Collection in the Science Museum's offsite store, it was clear that the 30 years since his death had not been kind to his life's work. Many drawings were damaged, often with fragile edges torn, missing or held together by decaying sticky tape. Others had been damp, dried out and were covered in mould.

Although we had the knowledge and ability needed to ensure further damage would not happen, we did not have the specialist skills need to carry out conservation to the standard and extent required for such a nationally important collection. So, we called in a specialist paper conservator. We also obtained a grant from the National Manuscripts Conservation Trust to handle those that were badly in need of attention before we could catalogue and store them.

The conservator's advice on how to deal with various problems will help us with future collections. Her report covered mould, water staining, inappropriate use of adhesives and just plain dirt as well as handling fading and friable media. She indicated what we could learn to do ourselves and the kit we would need (including a very specialised vacuum cleaner).

She agreed to run a training workshop for key staff and we invited our more experienced volunteers to attend. I found it a fascinating experience. We learned how to deal with torn or damaged photographs, how to clean documents and remove old tape.

Repairing small leather tears on the covers of books completed our days training. One of our volunteers videoed a short section which is very therapeutic to watch and is on our YouTube channel.

There are many more items that need attention before they are scanned and catalogued, but gradually conservation is now helping us to preserve the collection for the future.

Watch the video: [myMAG.info/e/868](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=myMAG.info/e/868)

