

National Conservation Centre, Liverpool

Friday morning, 25 July

The Conservation Centre in Liverpool city centre is housed in a spacious converted former railway warehouse. Four groups were organised so delegates could see close-up details of work being undertaken in different studios.

Graham Usher (furniture conservator) discussed three items in the studio. An Egyptian polychromed coffin sat beside two chairs, which provoked much discussion into museum collecting policies, as well as conservation treatments. The first chair, described as 'ecologically sensitive' and influenced by the 'vernacular tradition' was by the maker Guy Martin, and had come to the NMGGM collections as new; while in contrast, William Roscoe's voyeur's chair displayed the signs of use and age which we associate with objects of such historical importance.

Gemma Knowles (organics conservator) discussed preparation of two coffins from the Egyptian collection destined for the Liverpool World Museum, using smoke sponges for dry cleaning. One body-shaped box, perhaps of cedar, with traces of cochineal pigment, had pegged construction and remains of linen and gesso surviving from c.600BC between the joints of the timber strips forming the box sides, rather as a timber ship's joints are caulked. An earlier rectangular box, 3-4,000 years old, had a plain exterior but a profusely decorated interior, including illustrations of items for the afterlife.

Vivian Chapman (head of organics conservation) discussed a mid-to-late 17th century stumpwork mirror from the Lady Lever Art Gallery. By using a large lens and images relayed to a monitor, details of the exquisite stitchwork and knots creating the patterns and textures could be more fully appreciated. The piece's chequered past was also highlighted: the oldest stitched panels had been rearranged, not entirely corresponding with the glass size, and later infills with parchment backgrounds had been added.

Other groups in the party visited the framing department and Lutyens' impressive model of the proposed Roman Catholic cathedral, both of which gave food for later discussion.

Tim Phelps and Andrew Cox Whittaker