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Million Dollar Moths

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ABSTRACT

In 2013 Textile Conservation staff were devastated to discover a large infestation of clothes moths in the primary textiles store of the Australian War Memorial (the Memorial), at our off-site storage facility in Mitchell, ACT. The clothes moth infestation in 2013 was the first of its type since 1984, when the Memorial became one of the first cultural institutions to implement freezing for pest management.

This paper will discuss the range of factors that contributed to the infestation, our holistic response to this very significant threat to the Memorial's national collection, including a review of our preventive conservation practices, the new standards we set; and the building, cultural, procedural and pest treatment changes that were implemented.

In responding to this problem, collaboration with many different stakeholders within the Memorial was critical, and extensive consultation with other professionals outside the Memorial was required. These collaborations provided invaluable information to implement a whole of Memorial response. Clear and concise communication within the Memorial was found to be challenging but essential to bring about the required cultural and technical changes. Conveying the potential scale of the infestation to non-conservators was one of the biggest obstacles to getting the project off the ground. The effective response has only been possible with the development of supportive culture and understanding by the entire institution.

Our pest management strategies were reviewed, upgraded and implemented. Standard operating procedures for new freezers and anoxic equipment were developed. New integrated pest management procedures were initiated and staff encouraged to foster a caring and thorough attitude to pest management and collection care.

The whole process has taken over three years at a cost of over \$1 million, to reach a point where we are satisfied that best practices have been implemented. We now have a very clear understanding

that we must never rest on our laurels, and must continually review our processes. With vigilance this puts us in good stead to care for the collection for the future.

BIOGRAPHIES

Sarah Clayton is the Senior Conservator, Textiles at the Australian War Memorial, where she has worked for 17 years. Sarah is responsible for conservation and preservation of all the Memorial's textile collection. Sarah has over 26 years of textile conservation experience. Along with her extensive work at the Memorial, Sarah has worked at the National Gallery of Australia and has spent numerous seasons in Antarctica with the Antarctic Heritage Trust conserving heritage material from the Shackleton and Scott expeditions.

Eliza McKenna is the Preventive Conservation Officer at the Australian War Memorial where she has worked for four years after completing a Masters in Cultural Material Conservation at The University of Melbourne. Eliza is responsible for the preventive conservation requirements of the wide range of collection material at the Memorial.