13 Responsibilities

13.1 Colleagues

As perception is based on pattern matching past images against the current image (see Chapter 1), each individual will view the same object in an entirely different way. Perception is as unique to an individual as fingerprints. When the cave paintings of Altimera were viewed by the influential archaeologist Abbe Breuil who had studied palaeolithic cave painting extensively, he described them as depicting 'active animals' such as the 'bellowing bison' and the 'trotting boar'. Consequently these animal images were interpreted as being drawn by hunters depicting animals they hoped to kill and capture in forthcoming hunts and the cave site was regarded as a ritual or religious place where hopes and aspirations were lodged (Abercromby 1960). When the images were re-examined by the artist, Learson, he noted that the animals had a slumped posture, the feet did not appear to either touch the ground or bear the weight of the animals and the tongues of the animals were often depicted hanging out. All these features, he argued, corresponded to the images of dead animals thrown on the floor of the cave. This would suggest that the cave would have been used as an area for storage or processing of animal carcasses (Abercromby 1960). Regardless of the rights and wrongs of either interpretation, the alternative interpretation caused existing evidence from the cave to be carefully studied for further facts to support either interpretation and for additional evidence to be sought. The sensitization to different interpretations and the acquisition of different forms of evidence informs and develops the debate, bringing truth closer – the aim of the conservation, as well as the archaeological, process.

Alternative interpretations about an object can be regarded as alternative patterns or schemata (see Chapter 1). Such alternatives reduce the temptation to:

- Push all the facts to a single interpretation.
- Overlook the absence of evidence which should be present.
- Overlook contradictory evidence which is present but which does not fit the existing pattern or schemata.

It is desirable that the conservator has as much information as possible so that proposed conservation work does not obscure or alter important aspects (the truth) of the work. It is, therefore, beneficial for a conservator to have colleagues who can suggest alternative interpretations about an object under examination and alternatives to the proposed conservation treatment. At the extreme alternative interpretations can be seen as leading to

academic conflict (see Case study 12A: The Bush Barrow Gold). Though distracted by the rhetoric and heat of the debate, considerably more thought and effort has gone into the investigation and interpretation of the object than is normal. There is a responsibility on every conservator to seek a variety of ideas about an object before determining the final interpretation and the appropriate form of conservation. There is also a responsibility to be a good observer and interpreter of objects for others.

It is important that conservators are people who can change their minds. As shown in Chapter 1, having made a judgement it is a natural reaction to defend it, even when new information makes it appear a poor judgement. In modern Western societies changing one's mind appears to be associated with a loss of status (i.e. being wrong and someone else being right). This often leads to an unwillingness to communicate, in case information is proffered which makes earlier judgements appear inaccurate and require a change of mind. Such human frailties of ego must be overcome in order to achieve the best decisions about artefacts and provide the most appropriate conservation.

To achieve the care of historic and artistic artefacts most effectively within large organizations, it is necessary for conservators both to manage and to be managed. The purpose of management is to use finite resources most efficiently and effectively. Professional conservators are usually responsible for managing their own work and selecting the most efficient and effective methods for achieving the conservation aims. Where conservators have some element of responsibility for collections they routinely employ management techniques such as collection surveys, disaster planning and risk analysis to prioritize actions and expenditure (Keene 1996). Where a group of conservators work together, on a project or in a department, one individual is often responsible for leading or managing the group. Those individuals who have a capacity for 'seeing the big picture', being aware of conservation's role within the organization and have leadership and organizational skills, should be those in managerial positions. Often conservators work as part of a team managed by a curator or museum director who should have similar qualities. Where teams of different specialists working towards a goal can be developed, the input of the different experts can create a very powerful holistic effect as seen in the case of the research team investigating Lindow Man (see Case study 8A).

Numerous other individuals (e.g. museum directors, designers, councillors and trustees, scholars, teachers, archaeologists, researchers and curators) work alongside conservators. All have their own areas of responsibility and their own agendas which they seek to implement. Curators, art historians and archaeologists will frequently share the conservator's goal to investigate; teachers, curators and exhibition designers will share the conservator's goal to reveal objects to the public. Though all will wish to preserve the objects of the past, no group, other than conservators, has preservation as its primary responsibility.

Since other heritage professionals have different priorities to conservators, there is a risk of conflict. If conservators are to work effectively with these individuals, it is essential to understand fully other agendas and what they are trying to achieve. This will minimize conflict situations. Such conflict rarely results in either side achieving their aims. If conservators do not contribute to the overall process, they will become ignored and their advice is not sought (Barclay 1990). Conservation can end up as an expensive nuisance in the eyes of those trying to create exhibitions, run excavations, open museums, etc. The conservator can become typecast as 'an interfering nuisance with a negative attitude' (Ward 1986), or worse:

> The former, often curators, consider that the latter, often conservators, tend towards the same kind of inconvenient zealotry as Fire Prevention Officers, and lack understanding

> of the underlying issues, while the latter accuse the former of recklessness and lack of professionalism.
>
> (*Apollo* 1987: 390)

Stereotypes: Images of conservators are often stereotypes which, though they derive largely from hearsay, often contain a grain of truth. Such stereotypes can make it difficult for a conservator to function effectively and frequently the initial task facing a conservator when working in a museum or on excavation is to create a positive image. Examples of the stereotypes of the conservator, derived from a variety of professional colleagues, include:

- Technician: where others decide (curators, archaeologists, museum directors) and the conservator simply implements the decision. The view of the conservator as a technician was fostered by the authors of the period 1950–80 who frequently used the term. Coremans (1969) and Chamberlin (1979) refer to a conservator as 'a highly trained technician'. Though such a role may be appropriate for some who have only a basic-level training (Watkinson 1996b), for fully trained and qualified conservators this stereotype continues to deny the professional expertise, training and qualification level of the conservator.
- Scientist (mad). Speaking a language which others do not understand, doing things with chemicals (smells), living in a laboratory into which others do not go and doing things that nobody understands.
- Parent/mother/nurse. Anything which is broken, damaged, or just looks 'unhappy' is brought to the conservator for care. They will mend it. They will make it better. 'Whilst the curator adopts the role of pseudo ownership, the conservator adopts that of parent or carer' (Keene 1996).
- No, No, No! In attempts to safeguard the objects the conservator is seen as constantly turning down ideas for using or displaying objects. Appearing fussy, difficult, unrealistic, uncooperative, conservators are perceived as marching to the beat of their own (ethical) drum. Colleagues soon stop asking the conservator's opinion because they know what the answer will be. 'The conservator stereotype – being considered a pedantic nay-sayer by other museum professionals, especially exhibition designers, education officers, curators and management, – is a familiar one' (Frost 1994).
- Frustrated curator. An experienced conservator can often end up knowing more about the subject, particularly in specialist areas such as textiles, paper, paintings, archaeology, than the inexperienced curator or museum director. With such expertise in the material culture, the conservator ends up producing displays, planning research, answering enquiries and fulfilling a curatorial role.
- Artist/craftsman/restorer. Does lovely work but takes for ever. Lost in the 'art of conservation', all other things become secondary.
- Luxury. Too expensive, requiring costly equipment, a spacious laboratory and never appear to get anything done. An idle aristocrat who plays with their toys whilst the workers are short of the tools to get on with the job.

The general public often has an even less clear idea what a conservator does, invariably confusing the role with people who 'save trees and whales'.

Conservators need to be aware of these stereotype images that colleagues can hold and should seek to modify them. It is, therefore, essential to develop conservation as a positive experience for all curators, museum directors, archaeologists, painting historians, connoisseurs and owners of objects. This is most effectively achieved through creating an image of competence which derives from running successful conservation, storage, recording or exhibition projects. For inexperienced conservators running a series of smaller successful projects will give them experience and confidence and subsequently give them access to the resources necessary for larger projects. A positive attitude can be generated through:

- Successful completion of the project.
- The project estimates of time and funding being proved to be accurate (i.e. it is brought in on time and on budget), ensuring that the conservator is seen as someone who is responsible and can manage a budget.
- Awareness of colleagues' requirements, ensuring that their goals are achieved as well as the conservator's requirements. This creates the perception of the conservator as a broad-minded problem solver and dispels the myth of someone who always says 'no'.
- Colleagues seeing the conservator in a professional and managerial role, successfully organizing and running a project, dealing with fellow professionals on equal terms.
- Making difficult or awkward things happen. This creates the positive image of the conservator as an enabler. People who 'get things done' are always valued in any organization.
- Demonstrating skill at your craft, knowledge of your subject and mature well-considered judgement.
- Receiving a positive response from the public, or one's colleagues to the work which has been done. This may require publicising the successful project work.

13.2 Objects, conservators and owners

Conservators and owners: In the case of private ownership, the conservator is usually dealing with a single individual. In the case of public ownership, they are normally dealing with a representative of a public organization (e.g. the curator or archaeologist who, though a public servant, acts as the owner). Though responsible through a museum director and a board of trustees or councillors to the general public, in reality many curators adopt a highly proprietorial view of 'their' collections.

Drysdale (1988) has suggested that conservation can be seen by some owners as a 'distressed purchase', such as a TV licence or going to the dentist. We are fearful of the potential damage or loss if we do not get it 'fixed'. Large areas of personal and state spending are undertaken on this basis (e.g. pensions, mortgages, house repairs, etc.). Such purchases invariably focus on the trouble-free future and some aspects of preventive conservation, such as lining, backing, framing or storage, clearly fall into this category. However, other purchases like those to do with the car, garden and decorating the house focus on a dream, a beautiful vision of the future. Restoration work – readhering ceramics, repairing broken antique furniture, cleaning paintings, etc. – are undertaken in order to create such visions of beauty. When discussing conservation with the owner or curator of an object, the conservator is discussing their fears or their dreams. Such matters are frequently very personal and decisions are made, in part at least, on an emotional rather than a purely logical basis.

There are many potential areas of misunderstanding between the owner or curator of an object and the conservator, particularly when undertaking private contract work. It is important that owners or curators recognize that it is part of the conservator's duty to advise over the care and conservation of their object. Owners should be prepared to provide basic information about the object which may include some proof of ownership. It is often advisable that, prior to discussing conservation measures, conservators and owners/curators discuss the nature and importance of the object. This ensures that both parties have a common frame of reference. Following discussion of all the relevant conservation options and a decision over what work is to be done has been formulated, it is desirable that a formal written contract between the parties for the conservation work should be drawn up (UKIC 1998; MGC 1995b). This is particularly important when the work involves restoration up to a particular point. If a conservator is asked to undertake work which they consider inappropriate or unethical they can always decline to undertake such work and should do so before any contract is signed. They should always advise the owner/curator of why such actions are unethical and seek to persuade them to a more appropriate and ethical course of action.

Conservators, as a result of their training and natural inclination, hold objects in high regard. Consequently they see part of the role of the conservator as protecting objects. Where an owner or curator damages or neglects an object, a conservator will frequently feel it their duty to protect the object against the owner (see Figure 13.1), developing emotional involvement with the object, and experiencing moral indignation, even direct conflict, with the owner (private or state). This often results in censuring owners for not taking good and proper care of their objects. Aggressive, angry, censorious reactions are usually unhelpful, as they simply dissuade the owner/curator from taking conservation advice in future. The conservator needs to develop the emotional detachment of medical staff, to keep working to improve the condition of objects and see the 'big' picture of collections and future objects rather than focusing on any one individual object. This means seeking to slowly improve the standing of the object in the owner's eyes, usually through developing understanding of what is important to the owner (their agenda) and showing how the object has facets which make it valuable in such terms (i.e. advocacy, see Section 13.8). Making the owner treasure the object is the only long-term solution. The reaction to mend or do immediate conservation action is only a short-term solution which merely delays the inevitable decay of the object.

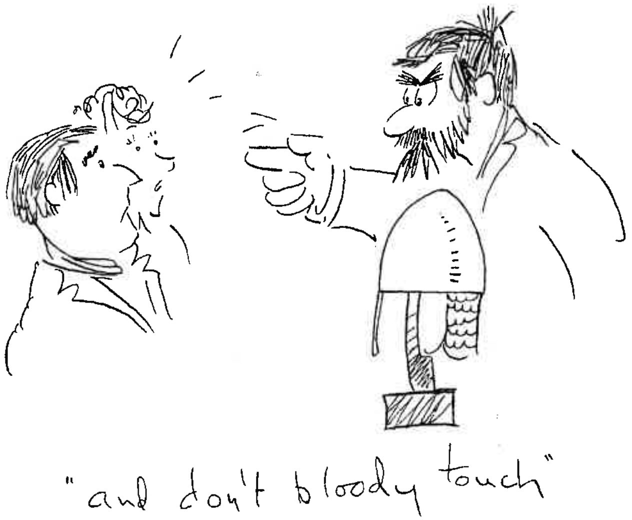

Figure 13.1 Preventive conservation: The conservator's responsibility to the object? (Cartoon drawn by Richard Stansfield.)

Conservators and objects: Conservators spend almost all their time working with objects. Drysdale (1988) noted, in psychoanalytical terms, that conservators can develop an object cathexis (an idea or fixation). This is a prop compensating for the failure to establish the proper balance between internal psychic reality and the real world. This is, perhaps, a relatively frequent occurrence. From the much cherished and highly polished car to a tightly gripped childhood teddy bear, all of us have sought certainty in the form of an object, an anchor of certainty that acts as comforter in a world of uncertainty to which we will, literally, cling. Few conservators will go as far as to identify with Ruskin who in a letter to his father wrote 'whatever feelings of attachment I have, are to material things' (Drysdale 1987). The vast majority of conservators recognize that excessive attachment to an object is not healthy since it distorts an accurate appreciation of reality. It is where objects have become symbols, particularly religious icons such as the relics of saints which exemplify the extent of the distortion of reality. Rycroft offers a slightly less perturbing definition of an object in psychoanalytical terms as 'that towards which an action or desire is directed: that which the subject requires in order to achieve instinctual satisfaction' (Drysdale 1988). This can be seen in any form of artefact, tool or machine with which the individual has frequent contact. Musicians certainly achieve instinctual satisfaction playing an instrument and many who use a machine or drive a car regularly enjoy the operation or action involved. A degree of attachment frequently forms with an instrument or machine which is regularly used, they often acquire a 'personality' and even a name in the user's mind.

Conservators often examine objects in greater detail than anyone else, other than their creator. For many objects, especially works of art, this gives rise to a deep insight into, and attachment to, the object. Many conservators talk to their objects and even dream about them. Conservators frequently spend hundreds even thousands of hours with an object, and since they value themselves and their time, this value must also apply to the object. This gives the object a value to the conservator far beyond its monetary value, its museum value and its value to others. This can lead to problems of perspective since the conservator sees the object as far more valuable than the curator or museum director, who has many other objects and concerns, and this can lead to conflict. Clearly it is beneficial, if investing a lot of time with a single object, to ensure that curators, directors and others also spend time dealing with this object so that they will also consider it valuable.

If the conservator's desire to be with objects can be seen as a normal, understandable (if slightly insecure) part of the human condition, what of the desire to conserve? Most potential conservators first approach the subject without the rational 'academic' approach which has been detailed in this book up to the present. In truth, more basic instincts probably apply: the desire to clean, make perfect, correct, make whole, make work again, make beautiful, investigate. These may stem from childhood notions of right and wrong and Victorian attitudes of cleanliness (next to godliness, see Section 7.2). Over the last few years it has become increasingly important for the conservator to temper their basic instinct to mend and clean, with a high level of intellectual control.

- The importance of objects as historic documents has grown and there is a need to preserve the traces of use: the dust, dirt and scratches that accompany every object.
- The importance of collections as a whole has become appreciated and thus the need for collection surveys and prioritizing and managing scarce time.
- The importance of building surveys, materials testing, storage and packaging and environmental monitoring and control, in order to ensure that the object's long-term condition is not jeopardized, has been understood.
- The importance of training staff in handling objects and all advocacy activities (see Section 13.8) has become better appreciated.
- The importance of recording and research has been realized.

Such activities, though often less personally satisfying, also place preservation and investigation of objects at the centre of the conservator's role, rather than the personal gratification of cleaning and restoration craft skills (revelation). The balanced approach which a present-day conservator needs to have towards any object being described through the RIP triangle (see Section 3.4).

13.3 World heritage

Some monuments and objects are important to several nations with complex aspects of legal and moral ownership. Thus the Elgin Marbles are claimed as part of the heritage of the peoples of both Greece and Britain and the slave forts of West Coast Africa are important to the history of the people of Ghana and the other countries of West Africa and the black community of the USA. Images and ideas from ancient cultures from all over the world have directly affected all modern-day societies. Consequently those societies have an interest, and arguably some right, to preserve that which has shaped their culture.

The 1954 Hague Convention asserts 'cultural property belonging to any people' is also 'the cultural heritage of all mankind'. This suggests that although cultural-heritage resources are located in individual countries and belong to the people of that country, the cultural heritage is the inheritance of all the peoples of the world and each country is responsible to the global community for the cultural property in its care.

Such concepts were undreamed of in the nineteenth century when national power was dominant. However, the interlinking of the global economy in the late twentieth century, emphasized by two world wars, as well as transnational pollution, transport, media and the development of international events and organizations, has resulted in concepts such as world heritage. Most countries in the world have joined the World Heritage Convention, created in 1973, which requires national governments to 'ensure the identification, protection, presentation and transmission to the future generations of its natural and cultural heritage' (Young 1998). World heritage has been manifest in physical form through:

- The creation of international agencies such as ICOM and ICCROM which have an international role in preserving both movable cultural treasures and ancient monuments and buildings of cultural and historic importance. These agencies have an important role to play in the case of threats to heritage sites and objects of world importance when large sums of money are required to achieve the necessary conservation, such as the saving of the temple at Abu Simbel (see Section 11.6).
- The creation by UNESCO and its World Heritage Committee of 506 'World Heritage Sites' in 107 countries (1998) (Young 1998). This is designed to highlight the importance to world culture of these sites and to aid their preservation.

A significant factor in developing the concept of world heritage is heritage tourism and the economic power it represents. For many countries, such as Egypt and Great Britain, heritage is a significant factor in tourism which is one of a country's largest industries and which brings significant economic benefits to it. The economic power provided by these tourists affects the nature and extent of the heritage on display (see Section 2.6).

The involvement of one country with another's national past has always been a delicate area. Nineteenth-century ethnographic collecting and archaeological expeditions and the purchase of one country's art by another, invariably favoured the economically powerful European countries. During the later half of the twentieth century America and Japan have become powerful importers of the material culture of South America, Africa and Asia. Resentment at the loss of their material culture has led to the banning of exports of ancient cultural heritage by countries such as Greece, Italy, Turkey, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Syria and other countries of North Africa, the Middle, Near and Far East as well as South America.

Modern expeditions from the developed world to the developing world are now increasingly collaborative affairs often focusing on efforts to research and preserve the heritage of the host country. Organizations, such as the Getty Conservation Institute, have worked with host countries, such as China at the Yungang and Mogao Grottoes (Agnew 1995), Egypt at the tomb of Nefertari (Corzo and Afshar 1993) and Tanzania at the site of the Laetoli footprints (see Case study 11A), to preserve the sites and their content, establish long-term management solutions for the sites and train local personnel in the relevant conservation skills.

The concept of world heritage aims to ensure that objects and monuments are preserved for the peoples of the world and not merely for the interests of the host nation of the antiquity. Through grants, training and public support the world community encourages a long-term approach preserving the material culture of the past for posterity. They encourage both techniques and materials which have been internationally proven and solutions which are locally based and can be effectively run with the resources and personnel available. Management plans are encouraged for all important ancient sites and are required for World Heritage Site designation. The world community discourages short-term 'cosmetic' conservation using techniques where there is limited local knowledge and unproven materials.

13.4 Objects of belief

Native peoples: As discussed in Section 10.1, the concept that the importance of an object derives principally from the physical form of the object comes largely, though not exclusively, from modern Western civilization. In societies which have different cultural roots, such as the native people of the Americas or Asia, the Maori of New Zealand or the Aborigines of Australia, objects are often considered to possess the spirit of their creator or owner. This makes them essentially living things and endows the object with feelings, life processes and rights. In collections such as those of the Museum of the American Indian, the objects are considered as they would be by the native peoples who originally created and owned them and the feelings, life processes and rights of the object are respected. In such a museum environment it is not regarded as appropriate to treat an insect-infested object by fumigation or freezing since this would 'kill' the object (Drumheller and Kaminitz 1994). Therefore, approaches such as isolating the object and using natural insect-repellent plant secretions which would not harm a human being are used. There are also considerable limitations on who can touch the objects (with restriction on groups such as menstruating women), what objects may be stored together and which way they face (Drumheller and Kaminitz 1994; Clavir 1994). These 'human' attributes have been vested in objects to support social beliefs and customs (see Section 6.3). As such they formed an important element in the belief system and social structure of the culture which created them and a device to remind and reinforce that belief system (Peters 1981; Barton and Weik 1984; Labi 1993; Mellar 1992). The continued supporting of these attributes and traditions within the museum can be seen as 'preserving the true nature of the object'.

Whilst a conservator is encouraged to respect the beliefs associated with any object, in the AIC and other conservation ethical codes, how far the conservator should go in enacting these beliefs is a matter of careful judgement (Clavir 1996). Museum policies on such matters are highly variable depending on the nature of the institution and the local community they serve.

- The adoption of special practices is perhaps not done for the physical benefit of the object, but for the benefit of modern-day adherents of the belief system from which the object is believed to derive.
- How effective are the procedures if there is no personal belief on the part of the conservator? Can only conservators who are adherents of the belief system treat the object?
- The folkways and belief systems, the non-material traditions, are an essential element of the past and it can be argued are every bit as important as the physical form of material possessions (see Section 10.1). They have fundamentally shaped the world in which we live. Consequently every effort should be made to preserve these folkways and belief systems as much as the physical world.
- The concept of the native peoples of the world as 'First Nations' is often inaccurate, many are invaders who drove out earlier native predecessors. Most of these tribes of native peoples, whilst respecting their own traditions and those of their allies, did not respect those of other tribes especially those whom they had conquered or with whom they were at war. In some cases they deliberately denied the existence of the other tribes and sought to remove or eliminate the material culture of other tribes (Drumheller and Kaminitz 1994).

- Modern Western society has been formed from many groups, each of which had traditions and ideas about their objects which do not correspond with present museum practice. Nineteenth-century housekeepers would be horrified at the ideas of preserving evidence such as stains on textiles, and regimental standing orders would require that metalwork was regularly polished regardless of need. Are such belief systems 'cleanliness next to godliness' and 'the beneficial nature of hard work' any more or less important than those of nineteenth-century native peoples?
- How does one reconcile two different belief systems which venerate the same object in different ways? Should a conservator treat the venerated 'lucky rabbit's foot' in a different way to all other rabbits' feet?
- It is important to understand the tradition fully in order to avoid removing its significance such as the 'lucky' attribute of the rabbit's foot. Conservators will deal with such a large number of objects from many different cultures. Even with the guidance of experts, there is often too much information for an individual conservator to learn (Odegaard 1995). Consequently there remains a considerable risk of unintentionally damaging the non-visible belief or 'living' aspect of an object.
- The limits of time and money.
- There may be much inherent wisdom contained within the belief systems of those who created the artefacts. Though undoubtedly geared to the native use of the objects rather than the object use in a modern museum, there may yet be much to be learnt about object care from other societies who have successfully cared for their objects for many decades.

Religious objects: The question of religious and sacred objects is the extreme example of objects having meaning and symbolism well beyond their physical form. Objects such as a cross were intended to be primarily representational, though they have frequently been manifest as physical forms which have become venerated in their own right. Sacred objects are often over-represented in collections since they tend to be venerated, cared for and have consequently been preserved.

The world's religions have taken different attitudes to conservation and in particular to investigation of religious objects. Christianity has experienced the questioning and doubting of science for many centuries. This has led to some perception of the separate nature of religious belief from the physical form of the object. This was demonstrated by the Catholic Church granting permission to radiocarbon date a thread from the Turin shroud. Christian relics can consequently be cleaned and preserved through the ministrations of conservators. In the 1980s the cowl and chasuble of St Anthony housed in the Basilica del Santo at Padua were cleaned and supported by a textile conservator (Brooks *et al.* 1996). Other religions maintain an investment of religious meaning in physical objects. Thus Tibetan religious leaders condemn as desecration the opening of Tibetan bronze statues to remove and examine the textile or birch-bark scrolls of religious writings which they frequently contain (Brooks *et al.* 1996; Reedy 1992).

Many religious objects remain primarily symbols of belief, objects in active use to the present day (see Figure 5.1). Regardless of age those objects still need to meet the needs of present-day believers (Weersma 1987; Greene 1992). The conservators treating a series of medieval polychrome crucifixes and religious statues in northern France adopted a minimal conservation approach removing surface dirt and consolidating the fragile painted surface. This was seen as inappropriate by some of the priests and congregations who owned the objects and who wanted clear symbols for veneration. They expected restoration to mean a new coat of brightly coloured paint and in a number of instances following minimal conservation the objects were overpainted by the local community (Molina and Pincemin 1994).

Objects of veneration can be very modern symbols such as regimental regalia, miners' trade-union banners, even mementoes of sporting or other events. The colour, orientation and numerous other small features of presentation of these objects are regarded as extremely important by the believers, and consequently need to be respected and preserved. All these cases highlight the need for consultation when dealing with religious or devotional objects. It is desirable for views of those who venerate the object as well as those who own the object, often separate entities for religious objects in museums, to be known and consulted prior to commencing conservation treatment.

Human remains: There is a fascination with human bodies. Staring at mummified or preserved bodies one comes literally face to face with the past, and Egyptian mummies or bog bodies have always been popular exhibits in museums (Berger 1992). Human remains are always a sensitive subject and remains, such as the shrunken heads of Indonesian and Amazonian tribes, have often been removed from display in deference to the sensitivity which such objects have acquired in the late twentieth century. Modern sensitivities, particularly those of native peoples such as native American Indians, Maori, Aborigine and Inuit, to the treatment of the bones and bodies of their ancestors have led to repatriation and reburial of much skeletal material (MacGowan and LaRoche 1996).

Human remains were principally collected by museums in the nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries when all museums considered themselves centres for serious research and learning. As many museums have evolved in the late twentieth century from centres of learning and scholarship to foci for entertainment and leisure time as well as education, sensitivity to late twentieth-century public opinion and visitor numbers have led to the removal from display of all but the most ancient human remains. A similar sensitivity was also observed in the display of 'stuffed animals'. The animal and human remains in museums' collections are, with the loss of animals in the wild and the advent of DNA studies, being recognized as a valuable scientific resource, which should be respected and preserved.

The human body has been an important form of expression of human beliefs from present-day body piercing, through tattooing, scarring, castration and mutilation to ritual sacrifice and mummification. Human remains from the past also contain indirect information on diet, disease, poisoning, ancient medical practices, execution, race, genetics and human parasites. In all these cases the bodies are the only form of information and it is only through examination of bodies and body tissues that these aspects of the human past can be understood (see Case study 8A: Lindow Man). Consequently it is essential both to preserve and investigate human remains. There is a fine balancing act to be achieved between reconciling the requirements of those who claim ancestry from those whose bones or bodies are retained in the museum collections and the rights of the wider public and scientific community who through the law, conquest or purchase have acquired these objects. The conservator has the same responsibility of care to human remains in museum collections as any other object. Many countries now have clear guidelines related to the collection, storage and display of human remains, which should always be treated with respect (Museum Ethnographers Group 1991).

13.5 Artist/creator of the object

Both the American (AIC) and Australian (AICCM) conservation codes make special reference to the 'need to respect cultural property and the people who created it'. This refers both to living artists and those who created culture in the past, such as the native peoples (Brooks *et al.* 1996). The rights of living artists have been enshrined in the Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works (1971) (Fry 1997). This asserts:

- Copyright exists for every artistic work without the need for registration or formality.
- The rights are first given to the author or artist.
- The protection period continues to be active until at least 50 years after the death of the artist.

The convention has now been signed by ninety countries including the USA, UK and all major European states. It is being slowly incorporated into national legislation, in the case of the UK into the Copyright Designs and Patents Act of 1988, in Canada in the Copyright Act of 1988 (Curnoe 1990) and in the USA in the Visual Artists Rights Act (VARA) (Garfinkle *et al.* 1997). Of particular relevance to conservators is the statement in the Berne Convention that 'the author shall have the right to claim authorship of the work and to object to, any distortion, mutilation or other modification of, or derogatory action in relation to, the said work, which would be prejudicial to his honour or reputation'. In practice this has meant that any work by a conservator on a work of art by a living artist is normally only done with the artist's permission. Some artists, particularly those working in unstable materials, have requested that the objects are not conserved and are allowed to degrade naturally, such as Joseph Beuys *Fat Battery* and Dieter Roth's *Chocolate Bust*. Other artists feel the form of their work is important and will allow varying degrees of action to preserve them, such as Claes Oldenburg's *Earthquake* a chocolate, enamel paint and polyurethane resin sculpture which was frozen and then sprayed with methyl bromide to stop insect activity (Heuman 1995). Some artists are involved actively in the conservation process; for example, the architect Lubetkin who worked with John Allan of Avanti Architects in the 1987 restoration of his 1934 masterpiece of Early Modern architecture, the Penguin Pool at London Zoo (Pearce 1989). There is, however, a demonstrable risk that artists will not have the restraint merely to restore and will seek to recreate the work (Barclay 1990; Smith 1990). Conservators are invariably the most appropriately skilled people to intervene with objects provided the intervention would not be considered prejudicial to the honour and reputation of the artist. However, with works of conceptual art or works of unstable materials it may be argued that conservation was directly altering the artist's intent and fundamentally changing the nature of the work of art. Thus it is a difficult area and consultation with the artist is always to be encouraged.

13.6 Stolen or looted objects

Despite attempts to limit the rise in the trade in stolen or looted objects through the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property and the 1995 UNIDROIT Convention on the International Return of Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects (see Section 11.5), the rising price of antiquities has led to large numbers of illegally exported (looted) or stolen items on the antiquities market. This has led to many conservators being faced with the prospect of being asked to treat objects which they suspect are stolen or looted (Tubb 1995; Tubb and Sease 1996). There are two responses:

- Conservators may choose to work on 'objects of dubious provenance' since this ensures that the object is at least fully and properly recorded (see Section 6.2). This may be the only opportunity to ensure that information about this object enters the public domain. The aim of such actions by the conservator is to preserve the object for future generations. Even if the conservation work benefits the private owner now, it will also ensure that the object can survive and could eventually become public property.

- Conservators may choose not to work on 'objects of dubious provenance' since this denies the object any respectability and denies the perpetrators or collaborators in the crime the financial gain which a well conserved and thus seemingly respectable object would attract. Reducing the financial gain means that there is little benefit to be gained from looting sites or stealing objects and this would eventually suppress the trade in illegal objects and the damage to sites.

Both arguments can be seen as naive and idealistic. It is difficult to turn away a beautiful damaged object in need of care, particularly as it provides the conservator with much needed employment. However, such actions will help support and maintain the stealing of objects and the looting of sites. Equally refusal to treat one object will do little to suppress the trade in stolen or looted art and antiquities which, it is claimed, is the second most profitable criminal activity after drug trafficking (Palmer 1995).

Though the AIC (1994) and UKIC (1996) ethical codes do not forbid working on stolen or looted objects, they do emphasize the importance of working within the law. The public statements of conservators (Tubb 1995; Tubb and Sease 1996), however, clearly urge conservators to refuse to work on such objects. Such a stance indicates that the conservator's responsibilities lie primarily with the majority of objects even the, as yet, unexcavated ones rather than to the immediate well-being of any one looted or stolen, damaged object. Other bodies such as ICOM and the UK Museums Association prohibit their members from purchasing stolen or looted objects, thus clarifying their priorities (Boylan 1995). Refusing to treat objects which are stolen, looted and are thus devoid of their archaeological or artistic context, emphasizes the importance of objects as historical documents.

It is, frequently, not a simple matter to know that an object is stolen or looted, and often the conservator's suspicions may only be aroused during the conservation process. It is always legitimate to raise concerns and enquire about the ownership of an object with the relevant authorities.

13.7 Competence

The most strongly imprinted images or memories are those events and activities which are personally experienced (see Sections 1.3 and 1.5). Consequently, personal experience is one of the strongest factors in making a judgement. The wider the conservator's experience, the potentially better their judgement. The most powerful experiences are those involving all the senses, thus practical work is a far more powerful learning tool than anything read or heard. This makes practical work essential in training conservators, hence the emphasis on practical work, placements and internships on conservation courses. It is essential that inexperienced conservators are conscious of the need to continue learning and developing their conservation skills throughout the rest of their working life. This consciousness is aided by the encouragement for practising conservators to become involved in 'continuing professional development' (CPD) (e.g. through attending seminars, conferences, visits and workshops). The benefit derived from a practical experience can be enhanced by debriefing whether through discussion or writing a report since it draws out the key points and makes the individual aware of what has been learnt from the experience.

Child (1994) has noted the present emphasis on preventive conservation encourages a 'hands off' attitude to conservation. This unfortunately reinforces an inexperienced conservator's natural lack of confidence in using vigorous interventive methods with important historic and archaeological objects. It is, therefore, important for conservation students to take opportunities, especially during their student years or early professional experience, to become familiar with undertaking substantive intervention conservation work, such as extensive cleaning or restoration. This reduces the risk that their future judgements will be clouded by caution because of their own lack of confidence or experience and decisions to pursue preventive conservation methods are made purely on the grounds of appropriateness.

Though the AIC and UKIC codes both refer to conservators not working in areas beyond their competence, it is difficult for the conservator to judge when they have reached the edge of their competence and an object is imperilled. All conservation processes carry risks, and although the conservator always tries to minimize that risk, since no two objects ever react exactly the same, there is always some element of risk. Practitioners in all professions only learn through working at the edge of their competence. This is made safer by:

- The presence and advice of a senior colleague who can act as a guide and safety net in such situations.

- Qualified conservators should, through their training courses, further reading and experience, be well aware of the many other areas of specialist conservation expertise which exist. In such areas consultation with a fellow conservator in the field is essential. As a result of such discussions it will become clear who has the appropriate level of competence to undertake the conservation work required.

- Trying procedures, where possible, on fragments, samples or 'less valuable' objects is a process often used by conservators of all levels of experience to build up their confidence and expertise to a level where they can successfully tackle new or difficult treatments on 'valuable' or difficult objects.

13.8 Advocacy

A conservator's work is limited by the fact that 'they only have one pair of hands'. Greater volumes of conservation work will be achieved if others are persuaded to do conservation work as well. This persuasion or advocacy can take many forms: publication in conservation journals and conferences, publication in the journals of the numerous related fields, public speaking (whether to the local Women's Institute or international conferences), exhibitions and appearances in the media. All such communication emphasizing the values and basic principles of conservation will encourage people to take good care of their own objects and it will inform a wide range of people about conservation (MGC 1993c, 1997). It may also encourage financial and political support for larger conservation projects. The people who receive this communication represent an enormous group of potential preservers of, and carers for, objects. They can do infinitely more good for more objects than any single conservator could achieve.

Advocacy can be a powerful tool; however, there are risks in describing conservation work, as unqualified individuals may attempt to copy some of the things mentioned and through lack of skill and understanding damage objects. Consequently conservators should provide minimal details of materials and practices for widespread public consumption. Conservators should also be aware that radio, television, magazines and particularly newspapers are in the business of making a profit, thus they will amend (edit) the information provided by the conservator in order to make a more dramatic or controversial story (see Case study 7A). Where conservators control the delivery of the message – as in the case of exhibitions such as 'Stop the Rot' at York Castle Museum and 'Preserving the Past' by the Getty Conservation Institute (Podany and Lansing Maish 1993) – it can be delivered with clarity and subtlety.

13A Case study: Cartoon – Leonardo da Vinci – *The Virgin and Child with St Anne and St John the Baptist* (Harding and Oddy 1992)

The cartoon *The Virgin and Child with St Anne and St John the Baptist* was drawn by Leonardo da Vinci in 1507–8 using chalk and charcoal on paper. It was purchased by The National Gallery in 1962–3 from the Royal Academy. On 17 July 1987 a man entered the National Gallery and fired a shotgun at the picture. He was subsequently detained in Broadmoor high-security hospital. The picture, which had been protected behind laminated glass, sustained an approximate 100-mm circle of extensive damage. The National Gallery employs some of the world's finest conservators of oil paintings amongst their conservation staff. However, they have less expertise in dealing with works of art on paper and, after seeking advice from a number of experts, seconded Eric Harding, Chief Conservator of Western Pictorial Art at the British Museum (and previously a member of staff at the National Gallery) to conserve the damaged picture.

Detailed observation established that none of the shotgun pellets had penetrated the plastic laminate layer in the glass, although the force of the blast had pushed fragments of glass into the paper, fragmented the paper and caused pigment loss in the damaged area. Small fragments of the detached paper and pigment were analysed, as was the construction of the picture itself. The cartoon is drawn in white chalk and black charcoal, without any binder, on to a piece of paper composed of six smaller sheets stuck together. The surface of the paper had been coloured with a mixture of chalk, soot and iron oxide which had been rubbed into the surface to give a mid-red-tone background on to which the image of the picture was drawn. At a later date, possibly in the eighteenth century, the cartoon had been stuck on to canvas secured over a wooden stretcher. The paper had been poorly attached to the canvas with a number of tears and wrinkles clearly visible. Prior to the attachment to the canvas there had been a number of repairs and patches applied to support tears and cover missing areas of the cartoon; the picture had clearly received poor treatment earlier in life. Several of these repairs were of poor quality. It was desirable to remove the cartoon from its now distorted canvas backing, relax the paper so removing the creases and wrinkles, reback it on to a stable support, redo the earlier repairs and de-acidify the paper which had become brittle because of acidity, a condition which is considerably increased by the adhesive and canvas backing. However, it was felt that such remedial conservation action could not be undertaken since it would risk greater damage to the object:

- Any attempt to remove the paper from the canvas would risk weakening the adhesive holding the six sheets of paper together and thus offsetting part of the original image.
- Unbacked the paper would be difficult to handle and very weak thus there would be a considerable risk of exacerbating some of the existing tears.
- The moisture would differentially affect the pigments dislodging some, whilst binding others closer to the paper. There could consequently be considerable alteration to the visual effect of the image.
- Any dry backing would require working on the picture, face down, with consequent loss of surface pigments.
- Any non-aqueous de-acidification would again require the use of a solvent which would have some effect on the pigment particles and thus alter the visual effect of the image. The chalk highlights appeared particularly vulnerable to alteration through aqueous or solvent treatment.

In view of these factors it was decided that only very localized and limited conservation would be undertaken. After collecting all the shattered pieces of paper and removing all pieces of glass embedded in the paper, the distorted canvas was flattened through localized humidification, using an ultrasonic humidifier and modified suction tables. When flattened the canvas was removed from the wooden stretcher and backed on to another piece of paper and canvas using wheat-starch paste. All the pieces of shattered paper from the damaged area were readhered in place, eventually only leaving approximately 1 cm^2 empty. This was filled with a piece of new paper visually similar to the original which was cut to shape and inserted. There were many thin lines of pigment loss as well as the new piece of paper. Powdered chalk, charcoal and other pigments were used to tone down these areas to harmonize with the rest of the image. Applied dry to the surface this pigment

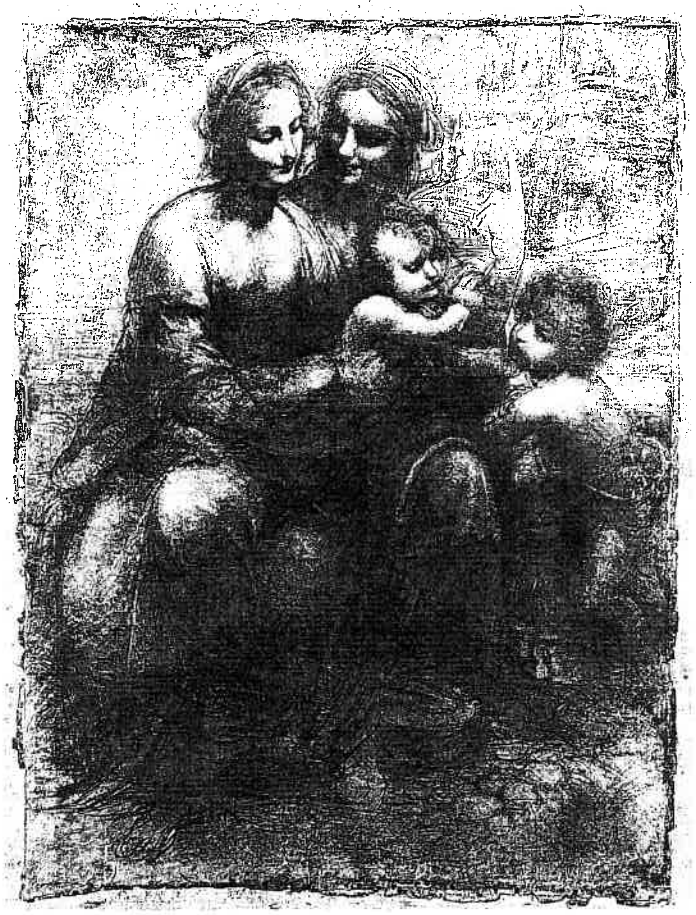

Figure 13.2 Leonardo da Vinci cartoon, *The Virgin and Child with St Anne and St John the Baptist*, after restoration (photograph courtesy of The National Gallery).

could readily be removed by future conservators if required. The cartoon, mounted in a new frame, again protected with laminated glass, was returned to display in May 1989. The damage is not visible to the casual observer, only detectable upon detailed inspection (see Figure 13.2).

This conservation work, whilst restoring the image, demonstrated the careful consideration which is needed by a conservator. There was clear recognition of the limitations of their own skills by the conservators of the National Gallery and the benefits of involving more specialized and experienced colleagues clearly paid dividends.

Examination gave clear information about the materials and techniques used to create this work of art, providing a clear indication of the sensitivity of the materials used. There was very careful judgement made in the extent of conservation, with the potential improvement to the stability and longevity of the cartoon balanced against the risk of further damage.