

Title: Documentation and the Decorative Arts at the Houses of Parliament

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### Short Paper

The Historic Furniture and Decorative Arts team are now in their third year of professionally caring for 11,000 items of historic furniture, silver, clocks and ceramics. The collection had been treated as a basic asset with only skeleton information being recorded, especially in the last 20 years. In recent decades conservation of this working collection had been carried out on an ad-hoc basis driven by the need to return items to use quickly.

This paper will discuss one of the team's main aims; to build up reliable object documentation and information. Legacy data from two old databases was integrated into a new Spectrum compliant Collection Management System. This pointed the way to other supporting documentation including archival records. The Parliamentary Archives, The National Archives and local archives have provided material showing collection items as they were originally designed. This has informed accurate, standardised, materials and techniques being used in conservation. Archival records illustrating where items were originally placed around the Palace of Westminster are leading to more harmonious, accurate interiors. This information will dovetail into the Restoration and Renewal of the Palace beginning in 2025. The challenge of integrating this information into the Collection Management System is on-going with a number of different processes being trialled.

Work has begun using this newly revealed information to assist in interpretation, access and outreach in Westminster and further afield. The documentation relating to the origins of items; sketches, technical drawings and photographs, is often used in talks to deepen understanding and increase engagement.