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# **Interpretive Displays: Investigating aspects of Conservation and Access of Furnishing Textiles within Historic Interiors**

**Alice Young**

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## **Abstract**

As the requirements of access within historic properties continue to develop, the implications of changes in display are at present unclear, especially in relation to the long term stability of furnishing textiles. This research attempts to highlight the attitudes and methods used within interactive displays and examine the growing use of replicas within conservation. This study has shown that two

defined arguments for and against the use of replica and sacrificial textiles are prevalent. Conservation concerns regarding damage being done to objects as well as a misrepresentation of the past is discussed. Primary and secondary resources are combined and an in-depth case study of National Trust property Upton House is examined. Conclusions advocate that, instead of regarding increased access as a negative and potentially damaging aspect of display, conservators should focus on the progressive outcomes associated with interpretive displays. Opening up historic interiors to new audiences is a positive step towards communicating the message of conservation to a wider audience.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Furnishing textiles encompass a broad range of objects from carpets and upholstery to curtains. The following research project refers to the textile elements that make up historic interiors with a particular focus on the issues associated with the re-display and use of non-accessioned, sacrificial and replica textiles within historic house settings.

In recent years the move towards widening access within historic houses has seen the emergence of a new type of interpretive display, where a visitor can experience the cosy chairs, real fires and

homely touches of a historic country house.<sup>1</sup> In a current promotional publication on behalf of the National Trust these displays are heralded as a:

*“Sensory experience where everything visitors experience is absolutely consistent with the period and the life of the inhabitants of the house. Nothing is out of place, nothing is irrelevant.”<sup>2</sup>*

By studying the role of replica and sacrificial textiles it is hoped that this development of the visitor experience and the current methods adopted by curators and house managers to create an authentic environment will be assessed. Throughout this research the term open access relates to the level of access members of the public have when visiting a historic house. As the term access is very much context dependant it is referred to in relation to the extent of physical contact a member of the public has with an object, such as sitting on a chair and touching objects on display.

### **1.1: Research aims and objectives**

There are three principle aims of this research project, each has been developed with the specific purpose of assessing the extent and current attitudes towards open access displays. The aims are:

- To examine the extent of the use of sacrificial textile furnishings.
- To critically assess the positive and negative aspects of open access within a historic house setting.
- To reflect upon the future of open access and consider how display methods may change.

Each aim has been designed with the specific purpose of assessing the extent of the current trend in the recreation of atmospheric experiences where visitors can interact with a historic house interior through the use of props, sound and interactive videos<sup>3</sup>. Overall, this research project intends to assess the extent of their use and to establish if and how such objects are treated by conservators.

### **1.2: Research methodology**

Within the following chapters it is hoped that an accurate picture of the attitudes and methods adopted towards the use of replica and sacrificial textiles within the conservation profession will be established. The possible effect of such open access is also considered along with an in-depth

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<sup>1</sup> “Upton House,” National Trust, <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/upton-house> (accessed April 26, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> “Visitor Experience,” Motivation, <http://www.motivation81.co.uk/experiences.html> (accessed April 14, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> “Visitor Experience,” Motivation, <http://www.motivation81.co.uk/experiences.html> (accessed April 14, 2014).



examination of visitor's attitudes towards touching objects on display. The overarching purpose of this research is to establish if:

- Open access can be controlled?
- Will the role of the conservator change as open access increases?

Following on from these overarching aims, secondary research includes a literature review. This review places emphasis on the degree of information available and covers case studies in conservation journals to institution specific guidelines for display strategies. Architectural focused papers of period room installations within museums also feature within available sources as do papers that examine the heritage industry more broadly. The inclusion of this review compliments the primary research that takes the form of interviews with collections managers, house stewards, volunteer room guides and textile conservators. Finally, the inclusion of specific case studies illustrates the current methods of display used in some historic properties. These studies act not only as examples of the types of methods adopted to increase visitors access to historic interiors, but also provide indicators of the kinds of institutions that are using such methods of display to increase visitor numbers.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1: Aim of review**

The principle objective of this literature review is to compile together, examine and consolidate pertinent information that relates to the interpretation of historic room interiors. It is also intended to establish an understanding of attitudes both past and present towards the use of replica and sacrificial textiles within conservation literature. This chapter gives context and an understanding of how this dissertation's research builds on the current literature and body of knowledge available. It should be emphasized that this review does not attempt to address the display of every type of furnishing textile, as this is a far reaching subject matter. It does however include examples of specific textile based studies and places emphasis on the differences in approach to display and treatment.

While compiling this review it has become clear that at present, there is a lack of literature that relates solely to the functional use of furnishing textiles to aid the interpretation of historic interiors.

Recent developments within historic properties have seen methods of display becoming increasingly focused on authentic visitor experiences where visitors feel more like guests to a property<sup>4</sup>. As this level of open access is a relatively new development, it has become clear that there is little written that evaluates the conservation challenges of such display strategies. It is hoped that the following chapter will provide not only a useful indication of publications that are relevant in addressing the research aims of this project, but also clarify areas for future consideration and highlight contrasting attitudes.

## **2:2: Conforming to the context of display**

To form an initial starting point, a range of literature that related to the conservation and display of furnishing textiles was assessed. Within this literature, there is a clear difference between the aim of conservation and in some cases the treatment methods adopted in relation to the display context of each textile. One defining factor emphasized within the sources examined is the differences between furnishing textiles on display in a museum opposed to a historic house interiors. This difference in approach to treatment strategies is emphasized well in two case studies that focus on the contrasting approach to the stabilization of two carpets, one retaining its original function within a historic interior and one mounted on a wall within a museum<sup>5</sup>. Tetley states that conservation treatments for carpets in historic houses have been developed to meet ethical as well as practical needs and conservation treatments for textiles and other objects in use create special challenges for conservators<sup>6</sup>. Unlike most valued historic objects, carpets in historic houses will usually continue to be used and exposed to wear after conservation and the problem of conserving carpets in historic houses, which have different needs from those in museum collections, has driven the development of a range of treatments. Such treatments are based around predominantly ensuring that the object can continue to carry out the original function that it was designed to do without further loss of original materials. Providing a contrast to this approach is a 2009 study<sup>7</sup> where the use of digital infill's to visually complete a 16<sup>th</sup> century Spanish carpet for display is discussed. These two sources alone highlight the impact that different contexts have on conservation decisions particularly within

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<sup>4</sup> "The restoration of furniture at Dumfries House," Dumfries House, <http://www.dumfries-house.org/about/blog/article/the-restoration-of-furniture-at-dumfries-house/> (accessed June 15, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> Frances Hartog, "Digital in-fills for a carpet," *V&A Conservation Journal online* 58, (2009): <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/journals/conservation-journal/autumn-2009-issue-58/digital-in-fills-for-a-carpet/html>.

<sup>6</sup> "18<sup>th</sup> Century British Floor Coverings," Building Conservation, <http://www.buildingconservation.com/articles/floor-coverings/floor-coverings.htm> (accessed July 11, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Frances Hartog, "Digital in-fills for a carpet," *V&A Conservation Journal online* 58, (2009): <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/journals/conservation-journal/autumn-2009-issue-58/digital-in-fills-for-a-carpet/html>.

the scope of objects where functional use is still desired to fulfil both practical and interpretative requirements. Although the continued functional use of original furnishing textiles is not a common practice in most historic properties with the exception of carpets, a general consensus in the available literature does define the key aspects to consider when displaying original furnishing textiles within historic properties.

A paper written in 2008 introduces three overarching aims adopted within National Trust properties open to the public. These state that above all: safe access should be ensured, visitors should be engaged during their visit and that conservation and environmental performance within properties should be continually improved.<sup>8</sup> Such literature although relevant to this body of research focuses more on preventive conservation measures adopted in order to ensure increased access and does not include specific object based case studies nor considerations of interpretive display strategies. The most clearly defined paper written in 1995 by Helen Lloyd eloquently emphasizes the challenges faced in presenting the original contents of a house where it was originally intended and finding safe ways of doing so in order to preserve the original appearance of rooms<sup>9</sup>. This study includes aspects relating to the open access demands of historic properties. It acknowledges the well-developed belief that preservation may always permit access, while, at the same time, without preservation access becomes forever impossible<sup>10</sup>.

### **2.3: Is access achieved at a cost?**

Control measures that are adopted within historic properties that promote access while at the same time ensure the preservation of contents is a particular area of the literature available that openly acknowledges that despite the best intentions period room settings can place collections at risk. Trupin states in her 1993 publication that no matter how much care is taken, a degree of deterioration occurs through the use of artefacts as furnishings.<sup>11</sup> Despite the best efforts of

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<sup>8</sup> Katy, Lithgow, Sarah Staniforth and Paul Etheridge. "Prioritizing access in the conservation of National Trust collections," in *Conservation and Access Proceedings of the IIC Contributions to the London Congress, London, 178-185 September 2008, Preprints*, edited by David Saunders, Joyce H Townsend and Sally Woodcock. 1-6. London: The International Institute for the Conservation of historic and artistic works, 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Helen Lloyd, "The role of housekeeping and preventive conservation in the care of textiles in historic houses (1995)," in *Textiles in Trust: Proceedings of the symposium 'Textiles in Trust' held at Blickling Hall, Norfolk, September 1995*, ed. Ksynia Marko, 40-53 (London: Archetype Publications in association with the National Trust, 1997).

<sup>10</sup> Katy Lithgow, Helen Lloyd and Sarah Staniforth. *The National Trust Manual of Housekeeping: The care of collections of historic houses open to the public* (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann an imprint of Elsevier, 2006), 672.

<sup>11</sup> Deborah Lee Trupin and David Bayne. "The dilemma of interpreting and conserving the past at New York State's historic sites," *JAIC online*, 33, no 2 (1993): 211-220. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3179429>.

conservator's, house stewards and room guides, historic carpeting is walked on and historic drapery hangs in windows and is exposed to varying light levels, dust and gravity. Trupin's paper does not of course take into account the level of access required of furnishing textiles examined in the following case studies but it does highlight how the use of replicas and sacrificial textile furnishings is an unavoidable aspect of the current trend to create such open access displays.

A small number of sources that develop Trupin's view point further examine feasible options for the display of furnishing textiles through the use of non-accessioned and replica objects. Although these sources are neither extensive nor exhaustive, accounts of this display method provide a valuable insight into the methods used in a variety of different institutions. This literature however does not focus on historic houses in particular and tends to concentrate more on open museums.

A key text by textile conservator Clare Stoughton-Harris engagingly presents the considerations and display ethos of open air museums. She outlines the importance for visitors to feel that the interiors that they are seeing are real and describes how few restrictions are placed on the visitor and that the friendly welcome that they traditionally receive is a strong feature of the museums attraction<sup>12</sup>. Harris details how such open display is only achievable through a pragmatic approach where continuous assessment of monitoring of environment and condition is vital. By dividing the museum's collection into accessioned, non-accessioned and reserve accessioned objects the display of realistic interiors was achieved but only after careful consideration of the individual historical significance of each item was taken into account. The paper details how only items with no provenance, that duplicated what was already in the reserve collection and was not in such good condition were deemed appropriate to be collected for use. More historically significant and vulnerable textiles were placed in safe storage with other objects from the National Museums and Galleries of Wales collection. The key message communicated in such papers places emphasis on the need for vigilance in assessing condition and rotating displays. Both of these aspects are significant considerations within any display setting and particularly relevant to furnishing textiles due to damage being caused by environmental fluctuations and pollutants as well as overzealous handling. Stoughton-Harris highlights issues of visitor's expectations, experiences and the atmosphere of room settings. The paper succinctly outlines the reactionary measures put in place within the museum to safeguard original furnishings and defines the importance of individual assessments of vulnerable and historically important objects. Another useful aspect of this paper in

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<sup>12</sup>Clare Stoughton-Harris, "How open can you get and sustain it?," in *Opening up open display Joint Forum of UKIC Textile and Historic interiors section 2008 Preprints*, ed. Albertina Cogram and Maria Jordan, 12- 18 (London: UKIC, 2008).

terms of this research project is that it is written specifically from the view point of a textile conservator. As a result of this, the methods adopted to increase access while at the same time ensure realistic control measures, are especially relevant to inform future display developments both within an historic house or museum setting. The grading of textile objects into defined categories and therefore safeguarding more vulnerable objects in the collection is expressed positively, as items from the national collections are not being put at risk by displaying them in less than ideal environmental conditions and in areas of real open access.<sup>13</sup>

This awareness of 'at risk objects' and developing a strategy to protect against further deterioration is also discussed within a number of other available literature sources. A compromise between retaining the original visual continuity and authentic feel is undoubtedly a significant aspect of such strategic methods. As well as environmental monitoring and preventive measures the selection of certain objects to stand in for others is a common practice reflected within the literature. In the case of room settings and the display of furnishing textiles, Lloyd discusses the practice of exhibiting a set of chairs with original needlework upholstery. This upholstery is then protected with reproductions of the original case covers, and only one or two chairs in each set are displayed to the public each year in rotation. Such a display decision is based around the belief expressed in several sources that it is better to preserve one chair in a set in pristine condition.<sup>14</sup>

Moving away from preventive conservation measures, the redisplay of historic interiors within museum and gallery settings has also formed a point of discussion within more recent architectural history publications. An article written in 2012 regarding period room architecture in American art museums<sup>15</sup> provides a succinct overview of the development of historic room installations by tracking trends in taste and scholarship over the past century. Such a paper may not be immediately obvious as to its value in informing this research topic especially due to its architectural and curatorial focus; however Barquist's account of the ethical debates regarding the removal of historical architectural elements from their original settings is a relevant conservation concern. He

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<sup>13</sup> Clare Stoughton-Harris, "How open can you get and sustain it?," in *Opening up open display Joint Forum of UKIC Textile and Historic interiors section 2008 Preprints*, ed. Albertina Cogram and Maria Jordan, 12- 18 (London: UKIC, 2008).

<sup>14</sup> Helen Lloyd, "The role of housekeeping and preventive conservation in the care of textiles in historic houses (1995)," in *Textiles in Trust: Proceedings of the symposium 'Textiles in Trust' held at Blickling Hall, Norfolk, September 1995*, ed. Ksynia Marko, 40-53 (London: Archetype Publications in association with the National Trust, 1997).

<sup>15</sup> David L Barquist, "Period room architecture in American Art museums," *JSTOR online* 46, no. 2/3 (2012): 113-116, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/668643.html>.

goes further by highlighting issues relating to authenticity, an especially pertinent aspect of this research. The paper also documents the shift in cultural perceptions during the 1960's that saw the end of the isolated historic room and the development of the now strongly acknowledged belief that the cannibalizing of older homes for choice bits and pieces was no longer permissible.<sup>16</sup>

Although these studies are certainly relevant to inform historical understanding of architectural design and interpretation they do not focus on the rooms furnishings in an attempt to redress the imbalance of interest between these two aspects of period rooms. To counterbalance this argument there is also literature that expresses a focus on furnishings rather than architecture and expresses the opinion that the period room presents the decorative arts in a lively and interesting manner and provides an opportunity to assemble objects related by style, date, or place of manufacture<sup>17</sup>. While assessing interior recreation based literature it became clear that emphasis was placed on the difficulty in curating such period room settings within museums and issues associated with determining the validity of the relationship between objects.

This concept of the relationship between objects and how furnishing textiles were once used within historic room settings is clearly described within a case study focusing on the textile collection of the Winterthur Museum in Delaware.<sup>18</sup> This source is a useful reference for several reasons. The most significant being that it provides a valuable indication of the need to actively assess textiles as indicators of past attitudes especially with regards to the use and display of furnishing textiles even within a museum collection. Eaton states that the interiors created within Winterthur were used as an artistic medium and as such, they were constantly being altered as new scholarship about historic interiors progressed. This adjustment of furnishing textiles to conform to other aspects of display appears to have been a common practice and certainly presents a great deal of scope for future research. The connoisseurship of objects that Eaton enthusiastically promotes within the source places emphasis on the need to have an awareness of past manufacture and use of furnishing textiles in order to inform future study.

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<sup>16</sup> James Marston Fitch, *Historic Preservation: Curatorial Management of the Built World* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1982), 43-44.

<sup>17</sup> David L Barquist, "Period room architecture in American Art museums," *JSTOR online* 46, no. 2/3 (2012): 113-116, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/668643.html>.

<sup>18</sup> Linda Eaton, "Conservation and Connoisseurship (2010)," in *Textile Conservation Advances in Practice*, ed. Frances Lennard and Patricia Ewer, 69-75 (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann series in conservation and museology, 2010).

Despite the variety of objects, case studies and attitudes expressed within these literature sources they are linked with one overarching message. Each emphasizes the need for having an awareness of the context of historic interiors and the changing role of the objects within interior schemes.

## **2.6: Conclusions provided by the literature**

It is hoped that this review has provided an insight into the types of influential sources available to inform this research project, and it has certainly highlighted gaps in the current literature available on the subject of furnishing textiles in use. From the sources, it appears that one of the overarching challenges faced in presenting the original contents of a house in a way that it was originally intended, is to find safe ways of doing so in order to preserve the original appearance of each room and thereby the spirit of the place<sup>19</sup>.

Narrowing down the literature to inform a review such as this was especially problematic particularly within the confines of the specific research question. The majority of the most pertinent sources referenced were written not only by textile and object based conservators but also curators as well as historic property professionals from organizations such as the National Trust and English Heritage. It is this aspect of the literature alone that shows how problematic it is to pin-point who at present has the greatest degree of understanding relating to the use of sacrificial and replica textiles. Leaving the question to consider: Are the use of such textiles under the remit of curatorial or conservation professionals or both? The following chapters and case studies will attempt to answer such a query.

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<sup>19</sup> Helen Lloyd, "The role of housekeeping and preventive conservation in the care of textiles in historic houses (1995)," in *Textiles in Trust: Proceedings of the symposium 'Textiles in Trust' held at Blickling Hall, Norfolk, September 1995*, ed. Ksynia Marko, 40-53 (London: Archetype Publications in association with the National Trust, 1997).

## Chapter 3: Historic House Settings and Widening Access

This chapter examines the motivation for members of the public to visit historic properties and why they continue to endure as places of interest and intrigue. Background information is included to provide an understanding of the development of heritage organizations and how the need to entice visitors to properties has altered the display of interiors.

### 3.1: Attracting visitors in a competitive age

*'Let us live again in the past and surround ourselves with the treasures of past ages'*<sup>20</sup>.

For many, the country house symbolizes the grandeur and wealth of a past age with added modern enticements. Visitors can take a guided tour, stroll through landscaped gardens and leafy avenues while at the same time fulfilling a desire to get out of modernity without leaving it all together<sup>21</sup>. Through the passage of time the motivation to visit places changes. This change is especially true in the case of historic properties where the expectations of visitors have significantly shifted over time. Since the start of the twentieth century the purpose of many historic properties has altered with the once private family homes of the British landed gentry being turned into venues for a day trip excursion, where visitors can enjoy a staged snapshot of the past, often complete with a cafe, gift shop and adventure playground.

While historic properties in the care of the National Trust, English Heritage and private ownership are invaluable in conserving cultural heritage, they are also businesses and as such rely on attracting visitors. Enticing visitors to such properties requires a delicate balancing act between respecting historical integrity and conservation requirements while at the same time guarding against a decline in financial income. It is estimated that 200,000<sup>22</sup> people visited National Trust properties last year, an impressive figure considering that the heritage and leisure sectors are expanding and becoming more competitive as the weather continues to drive people abroad<sup>23</sup>. This high rate of visitor numbers certainly indicates that the interest in historic properties is greater than ever and also that the trust is aware of the need to adapt to changing visitor expectations and to think differently and

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<sup>20</sup> David Lowenthal, *The past is a foreign country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 9.

<sup>21</sup> David Lowenthal, *The past is a foreign country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 7.

<sup>22</sup> Alice Philipson, "National Trust 'asking too much' of ageing volunteers," *The Telegraph*, June 3, 2014, Online edition, main section.

<sup>23</sup> "National Trust Annual Report," National Trust, <http://www.nationaltrustannualreport.org.uk/> (accessed June 6, 2014).



present differently.<sup>24</sup> Initially attracting visitors to historic properties is one thing, gaining repeat custom is quite another. Statistics show that although gardens and parkland owned by the trust entice repeated visits especially during the summer months, the properties themselves are less likely to be re-visited. In order to improve these figures, seasonal interpretive displays and methods of utilising new technology have been adopted in the hope of increasing visitor numbers.

It could be argued that these methods of display are side effects of the recent economic downturn; however this seemingly new type of open access is certainly not a new concept. As Eilean Hooper-Greenhill<sup>25</sup> argued in 1994 that visitors have been content to stroll through displays and rarely sought more than a tangential visual experience of objects. Now, there is a clear and consistent demand for a close and active encounter with objects and exhibits. A physical experience using all the senses is called for<sup>26</sup>. As such, the combination of this need to provide a sensory experience and to meet financial net gain targets<sup>27</sup> has resulted in the re-display of several historic house interiors. Such interiors encourage visitors to touch; sit and rummage with the use of non-accessioned and replica textiles forming integral aspects of the displays.

### **3.2: The development of heritage trusts**

During the latter part of the twentieth century the changing social and economic climate of post war Britain provided the backdrop for the widely acknowledged demise of the English country house. A period where the ravages of time and ever increasing taxation<sup>28</sup> heralded the destruction of many grand private residences. In general, these houses were built between 1600 and the Reform Bill of 1867<sup>29</sup>, a period covering roughly two centuries where England was ruled by the nonurban, landowning classes. It is though that as many as 10,000 country houses of all shapes and sizes were built during this time<sup>30</sup>. For the ruling classes, a country house exemplified the social standing of its owners. As David Littlejohn states in *The Fate of the English Country House*, expensive furnishings

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<sup>24</sup> J. Freedom Du Lac, "Struggling to attract visitors, historic houses may face day of reckoning," *The Washington Post*, December 22, 2012, Online edition, main section.

<sup>25</sup> Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and their visitors* (London: Routledge, 1994), 6.

<sup>26</sup> Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and their visitors* (London: Routledge, 1994), 6.

<sup>27</sup> "National Trust Annual Report," National Trust, <http://www.nationaltrustannualreport.org.uk/> (accessed June 6, 2014).

<sup>28</sup> Mark Girouard, "Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History," *JSTOR* online 12, no.3 (1979): 400-403, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2738516>.

<sup>29</sup> The Reform Act of 1867 was a piece of British legislation that enfranchised part of the urban male working class in England and Wales for the first time.

<sup>30</sup> David Littlejohn, *The fate of the English country house* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 19.

and gardens, were a matter more for display than function.<sup>31</sup> It was a way of demonstrating to the surrounding population the extent of ones' wealth, power and connections. Despite enduring for generations, the onslaught of the agricultural depression signalled the end. Beginning in the early 1900's it is estimated that more than 1, 200<sup>32</sup> country houses were demolished. The result was an architectural and cultural tragedy<sup>33</sup> which saw vast collections being broken up and sold in auction houses across Britain. The reasons for such devastation varied from the growth in urban development to fire damage. Many properties simply became unaffordable as agricultural or mining incomes fell and well established fortunes depleted due to heavy inheritance tax demands. The contents of such houses and the surrounding estates which had been passed down for many years were lost within a single generation.

For the properties that remained, instead of the houses existing as a means to support the ends of their owners, their owners now were forced to support the survival of their houses<sup>34</sup>. As a result, these once private residences of the privileged few became less of a family home and more of a tourist attraction where visitors could flock. Within a short time period, hundreds of country houses were open two or three days a week to a public eager to see the rooms which a few years earlier their ancestors had cleaned<sup>35</sup>.

Opening up your country home to paying members of the public was by no means a new development, since the early nineteenth century it was common for visitors to gain entrance into houses in exchange for a charitable donation to the poor of the estate. However, the access offered by private owners in the twentieth century soon became essential in bringing in a financial income. Such visitors played a significant role in the survival of the house, its contents and its inhabitants.

In 1934 the Liberal politician Lord Lothian warned that most country houses were under a death sentence. He proposed that endangered houses should be given to the treasury in lieu of tax and handed over to the National Trust in order to make them places of hospitality and converse<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> David Littlejohn, *The fate of the English country house* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 19.

<sup>32</sup> Giles Worsley, "Country houses: the lost legacy," *The Telegraph*, June 15, 2002, English edition, main section.

<sup>33</sup> Giles Worsley, "Country houses: the lost legacy," *The Telegraph*, June 15, 2002, English edition, main section.

<sup>34</sup> Mark Girouard, "Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History," *JSTOR* online 12, no.3 (1979): 400-403, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2738516>.

<sup>35</sup> John Martin Robinson, *Felling the ancient oaks: how England lost its great country estates* (London: Aurum Press LTD, 2011), 42.

<sup>36</sup> David Littlejohn, *The fate of the English country house* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 58.

Despite this developing interest, the properties that had survived the initial wave of demolition were teetering on the edge of survival and certainly faced an uncertain future. It was not until the Town and Country planning act of 1947<sup>37</sup> that historic buildings were acknowledged as being culturally and historically significant and therefore deserving of protective legislation. Such legislation was in reality difficult to effectively enforce as determining historical significance was often down to personal interpretation and political influence. Another twenty years would elapse before rigorous new planning procedures were laid down in the Planning Act of 1968. This act explicitly outlined full statutory obligations of care and conservation<sup>38</sup> for historic properties, as a result, some semblance of adhering to preservation legislation was observed.

It was during this period of social upheaval that the country house acquisition programme initiated by the National Trust for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty gained momentum. During the 1960's alone, historic properties and gardens owned by the trust increased from 130 to 200 and members from 90,000 to over 177,000.<sup>39</sup> This rise in visitor numbers provided a much needed boost for the trust which, as a charitable organization is financially dependent on membership subscriptions.

The need to conserve the places and objects of the past has been an integral aspect of the trusts purpose since its conception in 1895, with its principle remit being to preserve places of natural beauty and historic significance as living rooms for the poor.<sup>40</sup> A Welsh hillside known as Dinas Oleu formed the first property placed into the trusts care. The trusts benefactor a Mrs. Talbot gave the land to "*place it in the custody of some society that will never vulgarise it, or prevent wild nature from having its own way*"<sup>41</sup>. In the following year, the first historic building; Alfriston Clergy House in Sussex was acquired by the trust. This growth has continued and as of 2014 it is now estimated that

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<sup>37</sup>The Town and Country planning Act of 1947 initiated the system of listing buildings and structures of special historical, architectural or cultural importance.

<sup>38</sup> "Preserving historic sites and buildings," Parliament UK, <http://www.parliament.uk/about/livingheritage/transformingsociety/towncountry/landscape/overview/historicsites> (accessed May 13, 2014).

<sup>39</sup> Henry Benson, "The Benson Report and the National Trust," *JSTOR* online 112, no.804 (1970): 131, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/876248>.

<sup>40</sup>Katy, Lithgow, Sarah Staniforth and Paul Etheridge. "*Prioritizing access in the conservation of National Trust collections.*" In *Conservation and Access Proceedings of the IIC Contributions to the London Congress, London, 178-185 September 2008, Preprints*, edited by David Saunders, Joyce H Townsend and Sally Woodcock. 1-6. London: The International Institute for the Conservation of historic and artistic works, 2008.

<sup>41</sup> Merlin Waterson, *The National Trust the first hundred years* (London: BBC books and National Trust (Enterprises) LTD, 1994), 38.

there is in excess of 300 properties and heritage sites owned by the trust.<sup>42</sup> Appendix one of this research includes a timeline of significant dates in relation to the development of the trust.

### **3.3: The textile collection of the National Trust**

As well as the ownership of the houses the contents of each property is also passed to the trust. These textile collections can be extensive and at the last estimate, the collection is thought to include approximately 50,000 textile objects ranging from elaborate state beds, humble samplers, household linen and almost five hundred hand-woven tapestries.<sup>43</sup> Such a vast collection of textiles falls under the care of a large team starting with collections care assistants, house stewards and volunteers and culminating in the textile conservation workshop in Blickling Hall Norfolk. For the most part the furnishing textiles selected for conservation are of particular importance, being of historical significance as indicators of past wealth and status. Most objects are conserved after a change in condition has been reported, a testament to the vigilance of volunteers and room guides in properties, but not all objects can be treated. Financial restraints and the lengthy timescale of treatments are taken into account before any conservation is undertaken. It could therefore be argued that for the most part, the majority of furnishing textiles on display within historic properties that have undergone conservation are the select few.

For the textiles that could be considered to be the more mundane objects within the trusts collection, the changing display methods utilized in a number of properties are now placing them in center stage. This re-evaluation of the more commonplace examples of textiles has, in the case studies discussed within the following pages seen objects being reinstated back into their original functional use within room settings. In most instances, chairs that have been kept in long term storage and are deemed to have no particular historical significance and are structurally stable have been recovered with loosely fitting slip covers. As well as this, carpets, curtains and other items of upholstery are now being selected to augment these schemes, while the addition of reproduction furnishings fabrics and newly acquired non-accessioned objects are also adding to room displays.

In the vast majority of cases, the properties examined during this research project have developed displays based on the individual histories and the lives of past inhabitants. Such displays are constructed around a set time period, most commonly the early to mid-twentieth century. It is this

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<sup>42</sup> "Houses and Buildings", National Trust, <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/what-we-do/what-we-protect/houses-and-buildings/>. (accessed June 4, 2014).

<sup>43</sup> Martin Drury, "A crumbling inheritance: Textiles and the National Trust (1995), in *Textiles in Trust: Proceedings of the symposium 'Textiles in Trust' held at Blickling Hall, Norfolk, September 1995*, ed. Ksynia Marko, 1-7 (London: Archetype Publications in association with the National Trust, 1997).

period of time especially between the interwar years that have been most commonly recreated. It could be surmised that this era is chosen for a variety of reasons. The two principle considerations are to provide an interesting backstory of a not too distant past and to make the practical display of accessioned textiles feasible.

The selection of objects is required to conform to the needs of the display on a variety of levels. Domestic objects such as table cloths and upholstery fabrics from the 1920's -30 are readily available and arguably more familiar to modern visitors than their nineteenth or eighteenth century counterparts.<sup>44</sup> As well as the selection of objects that are more familiar to visitors, furnishing textiles from these time periods are readily available and as a result, similar textiles can be used on a rotational basis and replaced like with like.<sup>45</sup> This concept of creating an environment where the past is both familiar and inviting to visitors is based around a careful and well developed understanding of the collection of individual houses, as well as a realization that the past can be recreated in both an engaging and ethically sound way while still conforming to the conservation requirements of the textile collection. This research has also found that a great deal of emphasis is placed on the display of furnishing textiles in terms of the representation of specific time periods, and that this redisplay requires an awareness of the intangible allure of atmosphere within historic properties.

## **Chapter 4: The Atmosphere of Interiors and Changing Context**

The following chapter examines the importance of atmosphere, context and authenticity within properties open to the public. The attraction of visiting houses for specific personal reasons is also explored in relation to how a famous individual or time period is selectively interpreted. The conclusions from this chapter attempt to highlight how the use of replica objects can influence how the past is perceived and attempts to define the negative and positive outcomes of such display methods.

### **4.1: How a selected period of the past is presented**

*"There are few features of an historic house that leave a more powerful and lingering impression than atmosphere. Over hundreds of years embracing births, marriages and deaths, it is hardly surprising that such emotions as happiness or sorrow, love or hatred should leave their marks, perhaps in metaphysical terms such as colour schemes in décor, the*

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<sup>44</sup> Michele Leake. Collections and Engagement Manager at Upton House. Conversation with the author, July 15<sup>th</sup> 2014.

<sup>45</sup> Michele Leake. Collections and Engagement Manager at Upton House. Conversation with the author, July 15<sup>th</sup> 2014.

*style of paintings and furniture collected, but more usually in a cocktail of abstract sensations that can only be summarized by the word 'atmosphere'.*<sup>46</sup>

Atmosphere is in itself difficult to fully define especially within the framework of this research; however the word is used a great deal in the context of historic interiors especially in terms of atmospheric experiences that relate to a house or room setting. Atmosphere is defined as: A dominant intellectual or emotional environment or an aesthetic quality or effect, especially a distinctive and pleasing one, associated with a particular place<sup>47</sup>.

The significance of place is especially relevant within historic properties. The tangible atmosphere of once private homes is still undoubtedly a draw to thousands of visitors each year. Seeing at first-hand how individuals and social classes once lived provides a brief snapshot into specific periods of history without the need for a time machine. As well as providing the public with a sense of the past, there are a number of properties both within Britain and abroad where arguably the main attraction is not the historical splendour of their architectural design or collections of rarefied and culturally significant objects but simply for their association with a famous resident.

Within the UK, a £424,000<sup>48</sup> grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund has aided in the development of poet John Keats Hampstead home which has been restored in the style of the early 19th century when Keats lived there not far from his fellow poets Byron, Shelley and Coleridge<sup>49</sup>.

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<sup>46</sup>Gareth, Fitzpatrick, Charles Lister and Mark Adams. *Boughton the English Versailles* (Derby: Heritage House Group, 2006), 4-6.

<sup>47</sup> "Atmosphere," Cambridge Dictionaries Online, [http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/atmosphere\\_2](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/atmosphere_2) (accessed August 14, 2014).

<sup>48</sup> Louise Jury. "Keats House will be restored to original 19th-century condition," *The Independent*, December 14, 2006, Online edition, main section.

<sup>49</sup> Louise Jury. "Keats House will be restored to original 19th-century condition," *The Independent*, December 14, 2006, Online edition, main section.

Fig 1: Keats House Hampstead. Image © Keats House City of London 2014.

The refurbishment reflects the original decoration of the property, creating a living space that Keats would have recognised and providing an authentic example of Regency style.<sup>50</sup> The public interest in visiting properties associated with a famous individual is a burgeoning market made more popular by the addition of interactive tours, family activity days and longer opening times. The Keats House is one such example where the allure of his romanticised life and early death influenced the selective display of the house and its contents. Within the parameters of this research project, the restoration of the house provides a valuable example of a property where the decision to use replica textiles in order to enhance the interior being of particular interest.

Keats's death nearly two hundred years ago makes the display of his possessions and depiction of his life subject to what may arguably be described as 'creative license'. Historical records of the time will of course provide some indication of the decorative scheme of the house but it is impossible to accurately recreate an interior once the content has been disbanded. It is in these instances that replica objects are introduced to fill in the gaps in display. Within the Keats House, replica curtains carpeting and seat furniture have been used. As within many historic properties where access is required, the decision to include replica furnishings is often based purely out of necessity, when

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<sup>50</sup> "Keats House re-opens after restoration," International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works of Art .<https://www.iiconservation.org/node/2423> (accessed June 23, 2014).

original material is no longer extant, has deteriorated to a point where it can no longer be used as intended or would be put at risk by further use.<sup>51</sup>

Fig.2: Replica dress and bonnet. Image © Keats House City of London 2014.

The selection of reproduction objects to augment a decorative scheme certainly conforms to ethical concerns regarding the preservation of historically significant furnishings textiles, but is the use of reproductions misleading and in what instances are they needed? It could be argued that visitors to the Keats House are not expecting to see objects that are absolutely consistent and original with Keats life. There are of course a variety of personal effects associated with the poet displayed in cases around the property that provide as one visitor enthusiastically exclaimed "*a real link to the man himself*."<sup>52</sup> These authenticated objects displayed behind glass in environmentally monitored cases are the real draw to the house and as such require a backdrop for their display. The furnishings used within the house are just that; a backdrop and consist of a collection of objects that have been selected for their appearance rather than any direct link with the poet.

Reproduction curtains are draped at windows to accentuate both the view from the house of the garden and act as a method of framing the windows to entice visitors to experience the same view

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<sup>51</sup> Deborah Lee Trupin and David Bayne. "The Dilemma of Interpreting and conserving the past at New York State's Historic Sites," *JAI C online*, 33, no 2 (1993): 211-220. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3179429>.

<sup>52</sup> One visitor's reaction to the display of personal possessions owned by poet John Keats and on display in the Keats House, Hampstead London. July 9th 2014.



as Keats. Such display methods certainly contribute to the notion that the poet would spend many hours staring out of the window and that the view influenced some of his most celebrated literary works. The replica carpeting and druggets are less of an attempt at accentuating the romanticised vision and are purely functional in their use in protecting the wooden floorboards and structural fabric of the Georgian property from heavy footfall.

Fig.3: Interior of Keats House. Image © Keats House City of London 2014.

When examining properties such as the Keats House, it is important to consider what visitors expect and hope to gain from the experience. Historical accuracy is undoubtedly a vital concern in the recreation of historic interiors but as long as there is an acknowledgment that the use of original objects would be impossible is acknowledged, is it fair to assume that the use of replicas is misleading? In such a case, complete authenticity of the rooms could never be achieved due to the extensive alterations made within the Hampstead property during the mid-part of the nineteenth century. The use of original furnishings that conform to the desired Regency style would be potentially damaging to historic furnishings and even if suitable alternatives could be sourced they could not practically withstand the demands of the display within the house, nor provide an accurate picture of the condition and appearance of the furnishing textiles in place in the house while Keats would have been in residence.

Taking into account these considerations, it could be argued that the display of original furnishings may not be as important as initially thought, especially when the individual demands of display are

considered. Having an understanding of the purpose of displays is undoubtedly vital but in this case, the emphasis is placed on personal possessions and the overall atmosphere of the house in general. Taking this aspect into account it may be surmised that the use of selective replicas both enhances atmosphere and fulfils practical display requirements without detracting away from the real points of interest. It should also be acknowledged that each visitor will undoubtedly bring different readings and interpretations of the exhibits.<sup>53</sup> Although this theory may be supported by the interpretive nature of the Keats House, art historian David Phillips argues that the intention to use historic houses as appropriate display backgrounds to the objects placed in them persuade visitors to understand whole interiors as 'authentic'. He goes on to assert that opening up properties to the public as expressions of a period makes them forgeries.<sup>54</sup>

The use of the term forgery is certainly strong especially within this context. It is undoubtedly true that both curators and conservators have a duty to preserve the past and display it without misleading but the use of replica objects in this instance could not be considered a falsification of original when the original is not intact. To further question Phillip's view, the Keats house is a valuable indication that the use of replicas fulfils the need to show visitors what un-faded textiles can look like, while preserving both damaged and pristine objects.<sup>55</sup> Within the context of this research, the replica textiles included in the property provide an indication of just one area of display when replicas are of greatest use.

Outside of the UK the demand to gain an insight into the homes of the famous is high, especially when the home has associations with a figure whose life and death is still remembered in living memory. Since opening its door to the public in 1982 the much visited Tennessee mansion Graceland; the home and resting place of Elvis Presley has seen approximately 600,000<sup>56</sup> visitors flock through its doors each year. The house itself as a colonial revival style mansion built in 1939 provides an enduring physical reminder of Elvis to the legions of fans and inquisitive tourists. Visitors can take an audio tour of the ground floor and gardens. As well as the 'jungle room' which has been

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<sup>53</sup> David, Uzzell, "Interpreting our heritage: A theoretical interpretation." Academia.edu.  
[http://www.academia.edu/301486/Interpreting\\_our\\_heritage\\_a\\_theoretical\\_interpretation](http://www.academia.edu/301486/Interpreting_our_heritage_a_theoretical_interpretation). (accessed May, 11 2014).

<sup>54</sup> David, Phillips, *Exhibiting Authenticity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 128-129.

<sup>55</sup> Santina M. Levey, "The embroidery exhibition at Hardwick Hall (1995), in *Textiles in Trust: Proceedings of the symposium 'Textiles in Trust' held at Blickling Hall, Norfolk, September 1995*, ed. Ksynia Marko, 25-32 (London: Archetype Publications in association with the National Trust, 1997).

<sup>56</sup> Karal-Ann, Marling, *Graceland: Going Home with Elvis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 137-138.

described by some as; “*a record of bad taste carried to spectacular heights with crimson carpeting, scarlet satin chairs with rhinestone seat cushions and paintings on velvet panelling.*”<sup>57</sup> Elvis’s home provides an interesting case study when considering the atmosphere of a place that has been frozen in time since his death in 1977. In many ways Graceland is like many other historic properties where visitors stay to a set cordoned off route unable to deviate away from the carefully laid druggets that protect the original shag pile carpets. Importantly the overtly colourful and kitsch surroundings provide an indication of the interior tastes of the super wealthy in 1970’s America while its undeniable attractions are varied and encompass both the extravagant decorative schemes<sup>58</sup> and the atmospheric allure of the house. People come to the property to walk on the same floors, see the same sights and immerse themselves utterly in the intimate environment of the music icons family home. The connection visitors feel when visiting the house has been well documented with one fan stating in 1986 that:

*“My first tour of the mansions interior was overwhelming..... too much of an emotional experience to take pictures.... I felt like he’s back.”*<sup>59</sup>

This intense response is based solely on an individual’s reaction to surroundings and the strong belief that what is seen is authenticated by the association of personal possessions and original interiors.

But what happens when the original can no longer withstand the demands placed on it? Despite the best efforts of tour guides and house managers originals furnishings will deteriorate through environmental and biological degradation. It could be argued that the demands placed on the property are at odds with its original function, at no point was the house built to withstand large numbers of visitors nor were the furnishings intended for prolonged display. In such a case would the best course of action be a removal of the original into an environmentally stable storage facility and the replacement with replica objects? If the motivation of visitors is to take a nostalgic trip into their idols past, does it matter if what they see is 100% original? The sentiments expressed by the visitor in 1986 focus on the nostalgic vision of Graceland and its atmospheric allure. When

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<sup>57</sup> Karal-Ann, Marling, “Elvis Presley’s Graceland, or the Aesthetic of Rock ‘n’ Roll Heaven,” *JSTOR online* 7, no.4 (1993): 72-105, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3109154.html>.

<sup>58</sup> Karal-Ann, Marling, “Elvis Presley’s Graceland, or the Aesthetic of Rock ‘n’ Roll Heaven,” *JSTOR online* 7, no.4 (1993): 72-105, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3109154.html>.

<sup>59</sup> James, W, Davidson, “Graceland: More than a Hit Song—A Twentieth Century Mecca,” *JSTOR online* 10, no.1 (1987): 51-63, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23412925.html>.

visitors go to such properties with such strong associations do they want to see original objects weakened from the detrimental effects of time? Perhaps not, but then can the removal of the original be justified simply to conform to what the public wants? In such a case as this can reality ever match up with expectations?

In many ways providing the public with what they want to see is of paramount importance, especially when commercial revenue is dependent on ticket sales. Kevin Walsh states in his 1992 publication, as sites of spectacle and consumption, many tourists-spaces can be considered as successful especially if a crude marketing criterion is applied.<sup>60</sup> This success is certainly based on providing access in both a physical sense and access to nostalgic memories of a remembered past or be introduced to a selected “best bits” recreation of an unfamiliar yesteryear.

This exploration of nostalgia is not necessarily a bad thing; people’s emotional attachment to that which they remember is of paramount importance<sup>61</sup> and will always undoubtedly shape perceptions of history. The static nature of display within properties such as Graceland relates to this nostalgic re-imaging, objects are kept in place to ensure the interior is displayed just as it was when Elvis was in residence. The display does not of course take in account that the curtains, carpets and upholstery would have been renewed just as the walls would have been repainted if Elvis death had not occurred. It is this aspect of a property frozen in time that forms the principle point of contrast with properties such as the Keats House. Elvis will be forever associated with Graceland and the extravagant interior that was his own design whereas the representation of John Keats is subject to individual interpretation and ultimately a less personal depiction of his own tastes.

It is this selective depiction of the past that arouses unease about the authenticity of historic properties and especially relates to the concern that once a period of history has been portrayed in a set way it is difficult to alter perceptions. As such, it could be argued that the display of Graceland and other such similar interiors firmly fixed in time with selective displays and sanitised roped off areas are responsible for inciting within the public a reactionary, superficial and romantic view of the past. A past where the promotion of heritage has more often than not been little more than a

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<sup>60</sup> Kevin Walsh, *The Representation of the past: Museums and heritage in the post-modern world* (London: Routledge, 1992). 96-98.

<sup>61</sup> Kevin Walsh, *The Representation of the past: Museums and heritage in the post-modern world* (London: Routledge, 1992). 96-98.

cynical attempt to exploit and satisfy the public's appetite for reconstructing, fabricating and comforting nostalgic images and myths.<sup>62</sup>

This viewpoint considers nostalgic recreations of the past as misleading but it could be argued that depictions of set periods of history promote a deeper understanding of history and that recreating nostalgic and fabricated imaginings with replica objects promotes the conservation of cultural heritage. By becoming bogged down with the focus on absolute authenticity, is there a danger that depictions of the past that do not utilise replica objects will alienate the public further? To guard against this there is now a burgeoning demand and expectance of being able to interact with objects in collections. This belief has been expressed by a number of individuals during the course of this research and is supported by a key point communicated by Merlin Waterson, the former director of historic properties at the National Trust who states that:

*The question 'how are tapestries-or carpets, or damask, or "mohair"- actually made? does concern and excite our visitors. Providing a clear and convincing answer will win us friends and supporters. For that I believe we must be ready to use models, reconstructions, replicas and, where appropriate modern technology.'*<sup>63</sup>

This expectance of the need to adapt to changing expectations is a vital consideration and one that has become linked with the development of attitudes regarding the use of replicas in a wider context.

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<sup>62</sup> David, Uzzell, "Interpreting our heritage: A theoretical interpretation." Academia.edu. [http://www.academia.edu/301486/Interpreting\\_our\\_heritage\\_a\\_theoretical\\_interpretation](http://www.academia.edu/301486/Interpreting_our_heritage_a_theoretical_interpretation). (accessed May, 11 2014).

<sup>63</sup> Merlin Waterson, "Forward (1995)," in *Textiles in Trust: Proceedings of the symposium 'Textiles in Trust' held at Blickling Hall, Norfolk, September 1995*, ed. Ksynia Marko, 11-13 (London: Archetype Publications in association with the National Trust, 1997).

## Chapter 5: The Value of the Replica: A Conservation Perspective

The subsequent pages attempt to define the meaning and use of replicas within the conservation field. Examples of the variety of replicas currently used within the heritage industry are discussed, with particular focus on replicas used to enhance display and replicas designed to tackle conservation concerns on a larger scale.

### 5.1: Definition of a replica

The Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI) states that institutions should consider displaying replicas of particularly valuable objects where normal environmental conditions in the display may accelerate the deterioration of the object.<sup>64</sup> This guideline acknowledges the practical use of replicas only if the original object is deemed at risk and significant enough to warrant a copy. The vulnerability of the original object is of course of paramount importance in the decision to create a replica copy, however within these particular guidelines the CCI does not acknowledge the other factors that may influence the decision to replicate the original; most importantly the interpretive and educational benefits association with such replication.

The term replica derives from the Latin *replicāre* or to reply and is defined as: a close or exact copy or reproduction of a work of art.<sup>65</sup> Within the field of cultural heritage and conservation in particular, replicas fulfil a variety of functions and are therefore developing in popularity. In defining the purpose or use of a replica in terms of this research project the most significant aspect to consider is the capacity that replica objects have in enhancing the cultural and historical understanding of an object while safeguarding the original. If careful examination and analysis of the original methods of construction is undertaken in the production of a replica an enhanced understanding of the original is achieved. Such methods of replication support the ethical stance that textile conservators are not only concerned with preserving, or prolonging the life of objects but are also involved in gathering information from objects and helping audiences to understand what they see.<sup>66</sup> This need to

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<sup>64</sup> "Care of Objects made from Rubber and Plastic," Canadian Conservation Institute, [https://www.cci-icc.gc.ca/resources-ressources/ccinotesicc/15-1\\_e.pdf](https://www.cci-icc.gc.ca/resources-ressources/ccinotesicc/15-1_e.pdf) (accessed July 17, 2014).

<sup>65</sup> "Replica," Cambridge Dictionaries Online, <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/replica?q=replica> (accessed August 9, 2014).

<sup>66</sup> Frances Lennard and Patricia Ewer, "Treatment options - what are we conserving? (2010) in *Textile Conservation Advance in Practice*, ed. Frances Lennard and Patricia Ewer, 53-62. (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann series in conservation and museology, 2010).

communicate the historical journey of objects while at the same time stabilising condition and retaining evidential signs of usage and alterations is the cornerstone of conservation theory. Replica textiles have the capacity to not only recreate original construction methods but can also fulfil the requirements of modern day display in an engaging and meaningful way. This is well shown in the example of a man's early seventeenth-century linen doublet known as the Reigate doublet<sup>67</sup> treated by textile conservator Susan Stanton.<sup>68</sup> The doublets found condition recorded the practice of deliberate concealment and therefore was deemed unsuitable for interventive conservation apart from minimal surface cleaning. In such a case the creation of an exact replica reveals hidden aspects of cut and construction that would otherwise have remained obscured.

Fig.4: Replica and original linen Reigate doublet. Image © Textile Conservation Advances in Practice Edited by Frances Lennard and Patricia Ewer.

Such a replica aids the interpretation of the 17th century original and makes the minimally interventive treatment more acceptable to those who look at the display.<sup>69</sup> The success of projects such as this also indicates the value of decision making and the judgements needed in developing a suitable treatment choice. Equally, knowing when a replica textile is and is not needed is of equal importance. If the original textile is stable enough to conform to the requirements of display it could be surmised that the addition of a replica would be both an unnecessary expense and may send a conflicting message to the audience it is attempting to engage with. The use of replica textiles within historic properties has certainly increased in popularity as a result of this growing trend with

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<sup>67</sup> "The Reigate Doublet," Deliberately Concealed Garments Project, <http://www.concealedgarments.org/2002/08/the-reigate-cache/> (accessed August 1, 2014).

<sup>68</sup> Frances Lennard and Patricia Ewer, "Treatment options - what are we conserving? (2010) in *Textile Conservation Advance in Practice*, ed. Frances Lennard and Patricia Ewer, 53-62. (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann series in conservation and museology, 2010).

<sup>69</sup> Dinah Eastop., "Decision making in conservation ." in *International Perspectives in Textile Conservation* Papers from the ICOM-CC Textiles working group meetings, Amsterdam 13-14 October 1994 and Budapest 11-15 September 1995 Preprints, ed Ágnes Timár-Balázsy and Dinah Eastop, 45-46 (London: Archetype Publications, 2008).

purpose made displays of domestic interiors prevailing in a number of historic properties. But what impact does a replica have in promoting the conservation of objects and what criticisms are the use of replica objects subject to?

Despite Merlin Waterson's assessment into the positive and necessary outcomes of replicas in historic properties, within museums the use of replicas remains a controversial subject.<sup>70</sup> Aspects of presenting an authentic portrayal of history certainly have an impact on this controversy, but despite these concerns, it should be acknowledged that museum period rooms and house museums utilise replicas as a necessary tool to interpret the larger story.<sup>71</sup> In order to understand the wider implications of the use of replicas in historical institutions an overview of the current practices adopted when using replicas for display is needed.

## **5.2: The purpose and meaning of a replica**

When considering the most widespread use of reproduction textiles to aid display within both historic houses and museums, there is a high probability that most visitors will have been provided with the opportunity to interact with a replica textile in the form of costume. In most cases a visitor can try on outfits and have their picture taken. Such costumes certainly provide an interactive experience for visitors and are especially popular with children. However, it should be acknowledged, that this type of replica is based less on creating an exact historically correct copy of an original costume and more on providing a break from the display of objects behind glass display cases and ropes. Undoubtedly, the use of costumes provides an interactive and often educational element, even with the modern additions of Velcro® and easily washable synthetic fabrics. The inclusion of these modern materials in many of the costumes are of course a product of necessity as each costume needs to withstand the rigours of being worn and be easily taken on and off to survive the demands placed upon it during busy periods. In essence, these costumes are replicas in the loosest of terms but they still merit consideration in their own right as valuable tools of learning. Their addition in displays certainly aids in visitors desire to seek experiences that connect them with the past and conform to the viewpoint that institutions interested in education will be better served by replicas that can be touched, moved, examined and photographed.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Robin Neely, "Making Museum Replicas: Expanding project goals may help in decision making," *News in Conservation*, no. 28 (2012): 6.

<sup>71</sup> Robin Neely, "Making Museum Replicas: Expanding project goals may help in decision making," *News in Conservation*, no. 28 (2012): 6.

<sup>72</sup> Constantine, Sandis. "An honest display of fakery, Replicas and the role of museums." Academia.edu. [http://www.academia.edu/6504654/An\\_Honest\\_Display\\_of\\_Fakery\\_Replicas\\_and\\_the\\_Role\\_of\\_Museums](http://www.academia.edu/6504654/An_Honest_Display_of_Fakery_Replicas_and_the_Role_of_Museums). (accessed August, 14 2014).



By taking this belief into account and considering the function of replicas within the context of displays within historic interiors, it could be argued that a replica costume or furnishing textile provides the visitor with a deeper understanding of the historical context of the house and the objects within it. This enhancement of visitor experience should acknowledge that, in the case of most costumes provided for visitors to wear historical inaccuracy goes hand in hand with reality and that providing the public with accurate garments in terms of materiality or construction would be problematic. One recurring aspect that contradicts the educational values of such replicas relates to problems of authenticity especially with regards to how the selective depiction of the past can alter perceptions. If a replica is not 100% consistent with the original is there a danger that misrepresentation of history will occur? This concern is most often associated with the use of replicas by costumed room guides who utilise historic costume and props to stage a performance style depiction of a selected time period of life within historic properties. Researcher Ceri Jones states the opinion that these attempts to emulate the past in the pursuit of authenticity claim authority for their simulations of the past and thereby have negative implications for the historical understanding of audiences.<sup>73</sup> This aspect of the use of replicas does not of course take into account the level of awareness the audience has that replica objects are being used to aid the interpretation. However it can should be emphasised that within the case studies included within this research project, replica objects have been defined as such and therefore could not be accused of misinforming historical understanding. Indeed, through the course of compiling together this study, it has been observed that costumed room guides promote a deeper understanding of conservation issues especially with regards to textiles. Audiences are more likely to ask questions regarding the attire of the guides and unavoidable queries relating to the material authenticity of the costumes are inevitably a source of interest.

Despite these positive effects of using replica textiles it should undoubtedly be acknowledged that the use of replicas in period rooms and house museums should be approached with caution and will perhaps always be controversial. As much as replicas fulfil a larger interpretive vision their use to promote conservation and educational understanding should be made on a room by room, object by object basis.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Ceri Jones, "Binging the past to life? Exploring the role of authenticity in developing young people's historical understanding (2012)," in *Authenticity and replication: The 'real thing' in art and conservation*, ed. Rebecca Gordon, Erma Hermens and Frances Lennard, 131-139 (London: Archetype Publications LTD, 2014).

<sup>74</sup> Robin Neely, "Making Museum Replicas: Expanding project goals may help in decision making," *News in Conservation*, no. 28 (2012): 6.

### 5.3: Large scale replication

In contrast to the replication of individual costumes, historical replications are now not confined to specific objects. Entire sites of historical significance are now being reproduced with the aim of allowing greater visitor access and enabling the original to be protected from the detrimental effects of high visitor numbers. This large-scale replication project is well documented in a four year project to create an exact facsimile which is part of a coherent approach to preservation and dissemination of cultural heritage.<sup>75</sup> Recent developments in the push for visitor access to historic sites has seen not only an increase in interactive displays with historic properties but also a drive to recreate whole rooms or in this particular case whole tombs.

Fig.5: The facsimile image of Tutankhamun. Image© Ferdinand Saumarez Smith. Factum Foundation.

A project costing £420,000 is due to open in the coming months in Luxor, Egypt.<sup>76</sup> The replica encompasses an exact recreation of the four chambers of the Tutankhamen tomb and is located near the original burial chamber.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> "Facsimile of the tomb of Tutankhamun." Factum Foundation.  
<http://www.factumfoundation.org/ind/40/Facsimile-of-the-Tomb-of-Tutankhamun> (accessed July 18, 2014).

<sup>76</sup> A. R Williams, "Replica of King Tut's tomb to open in Egypt," *National Geographic*, October 23, 2013. Online edition, main section.

<sup>77</sup> A. R Williams, "Replica of King Tut's tomb to open in Egypt," *National Geographic*, October 23, 2013. Online edition, main section.

Fig 6: The interior of the facsimile of the Tomb. Image© Ferdinand Saumarez Smith. Factum Foundation.

Such a project certainly arouses a number of considerations especially when the concepts of authenticity are considered. However the conservation concerns regarding the long term stability of the original tomb and the detrimental effects of the number of visitors certainly provides the central aspect of the decision to replicate the original. The development of such a replica provides an indication of a situation when the requirements placed on the original are no longer achievable if historical integrity is to be conserved. If visitors are happy to visit a replica that is both historically accurate and environmentally stable is there anything wrong with more replicas being used in future? If the message presented in such a case is one of increasing public awareness as to conservation and the replica is clearly defined as a modern reproduction it could be surmised that it conforms to the best of both worlds and produces a positive outcome for all concerned, especially Tutankhamen.

#### **5.4: Conclusions relating to the use of replicas**

Replicas are undoubtedly a valuable tool to utilise within conservation. The above case studies emphasise the most pertinent aspects of their usage and examines current attitudes regarding their value in promoting conservation.

The most critical aspect of their use is almost certainly the danger of misrepresenting the past. It could be argued that this concern, is not as relevant as it may first seem especially when the context of the displays discussed are taken into account. In all cases assessed during the course of this research, visitors have been clearly informed as to the use of replicas within the displays. At no point have the objects or sites been portrayed as “the real thing” with educational labelling, posters and informative room guides informing the public as to the use of replicas. In most cases the visual

dissimilarities between the real thing and the replica are also evident, in the case of costumes that the public can try on, no one considers that the items are genuine and it is made clear as to their educational purpose. The emphasis is placed very much on what objects can show and how interaction with them can lead to a deeper understanding. Concerns regarding authenticity should of course be taken into account but within the scope of this project accurate depictions of authenticity are not the principle focus. The most significant concern however expressed by a number of individuals interviewed relate to how the use of replicas may alter the public's attitudes towards the original objects on display and that the extent of interactive experience may cause damage to the very objects the replicas are trying to protect.

## Chapter 6: Conservation Issues of Furnishing

### Textiles on Open Display

The following chapter outlines the principle conservation concerns associated with furnishing textiles on open display and a brief assessment of the role of preventive conservation is discussed. Examples of furnishing textiles that have been conserved over prolonged periods of time are also included with primary research into past conservation treatments forming a point of assessment.

#### 6.1: Sacrificial textiles and prolonged usage

The term sacrificial textile is most associated with carpets especially within the historic house industry. The phrase itself is certainly alarming and arouses visions of wilful destruction; however it simply means that there is an acknowledgement that carpets receive the most wear and tear through use and therefore the selection of carpets with no particular historical value are selected for use. Often, such carpets are placed in the busiest parts of a property that receive the most footfall such as corridors and entrance spaces.<sup>78</sup> The use of sacrificial carpeting within historic properties guards against damage being caused to original pieces, however the wide variety of furnishing textiles encompass many different objects which pose a number of conservation concerns when open access is desirable. Pamela Clabburn states in her 1987 publication that:

*“Upholstery is the sum of all textile furnishings of a house; this includes most wall coverings, carpets and rugs, curtains and bed hangings, as well as seat furniture and all the myriad odds and ends made from fabrics which turn a house into a home. Plaster-work, carving, graining, panelling, along with sculpture and paintings, can all be admired as works of art, but a house with all this beauty and no textiles would be a most depressing place in which to live.”*<sup>79</sup>

This quote eloquently sums up not just the variety of furnishing textiles but also their relevance in many historic properties. They are indicators of the taste, social status and lifestyles of past residents and contribute a sense of, ease, richness, softness and variation providing a soft and

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<sup>78</sup> Michele Leake. Collections and Engagement Manager at Upton House. Conversation with the author, July 15<sup>th</sup> 2014.

<sup>79</sup> Pamela, Clabburn, *The National Trust book of furnishing textiles* (London: Viking in association with the National Trust, 1998), 1-2.

harmonious background to great works of art and fine furniture.<sup>80</sup> Arguably the significance of furnishing textiles makes their conservation even more critical and their importance within historic properties is certainly a key feature of interiors. The conservation of furnishing textiles has to take into account not only the condition of the object but also its function that it has to perform. The requirements of continuous usage represents special challenges for a conservator and as such, the needs of the object are taken into account at all points. Revisiting old treatments is also an aspect of the conservation of such objects especially when furnishings have been passed down for generations and still remain in private ownership. This aspect of conservation was examined at first hand by the author in the case of a set of crimson curtains from Stanford Hall<sup>81</sup>. The curtains had been treated in the 1970's<sup>82</sup> with a net covering and full replacement lining. In the subsequent years their use had faded the original vibrant crimson to a dusky pink. The use of tie backs had also caused damage where abrasion and creasing had developed and the leading edge had become discoloured and abraded through handling. These curtains provided the author with an accurate indication of the detrimental effects of open display and how past conservation treatments stand up to such display.

It could be surmised that furnishing textiles are most vulnerable to the detrimental effects of physical damage compared to many other types of textile. The overriding reason for this vulnerability is that as functional objects, within historic properties open to the public such textiles continue to be exposed to environmental fluctuations and are often placed on open display long after their intended period of usage. To examine this point further, the condition of historic carpets is especially evident of this prolonged usage. Walked upon by large numbers of people; the pile becomes crushed and weakened, retaining little more an indication through fragmentary fibres of original appearance. Despite this, original carpets are still in use in the rooms that they were made for and as such require regular monitoring of condition and in many cases the addition of protective druggets.<sup>83</sup> A chenille carpet from the National Trust property Craggside<sup>84</sup> in Northumberland is just one such example where continued usage has resulted in the need for conservation to be undertaken.<sup>85</sup> In a similar way to the Stanford Hall curtains, this carpet provides an interesting

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<sup>80</sup> Martin Drury, "A crumbling inheritance: Textiles and the National Trust (1995), in *Textiles in Trust: Proceedings of the symposium 'Textiles in Trust' held at Blickling Hall, Norfolk, September 1995*, ed. Ksynia Marko, 1 - 7 (London: Archetype Publications in association with the National Trust, 1997).

<sup>81</sup> "The Hall", Stanford Hall, <http://stanfordhall.co.uk/the-hall.php> (accessed August 4, 2014).

<sup>82</sup> Sheila Landi. Textile Conservator. Conversation with the author, April 4 2014.

<sup>83</sup> "Blickling Estate", National Trust, <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/blickling-estate/history/> (accessed June 6, 2014).

<sup>84</sup> "Where it all began", National Trust, <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/craggside/history/> (accessed July 18, 2014).

<sup>85</sup> "Blickling Estate", National Trust, <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/blickling-estate/history/> (accessed June 6, 2014).

example of a furnishing textile where protective measures in the form of barriers and overlays have been put in place but damage has still occurred. Surprisingly, in the case of the Cragside carpet such damage occurred due to the presence of a room guide. The area under the guides feet had receive the most wear and tear, with a defined section where the ground had become exposed and the silk chenille had become most fragmentary. When the condition of a carpet has deteriorated to the point where its use is no longer a possibility, reproduction carpets are used but they are costly.<sup>86</sup> The sheer size of rooms within historic properties makes the decision to replace the original with a reproduction expensive and often requires several years of grant proposals and fundraising.<sup>87</sup> For this reason, remedial conservation treatments that prolong further use of the original are often undertaken.

This long term conservation strategy can be examined in the case of the Louis XIV style Elizabeth Saloon carpet at Belvoir Castle in Leicestershire which is privately owned by the Duke of Rutland. The carpet has undergone a number of separate conservation treatments carried out by the same conservator over the course of thirty years.<sup>88</sup> Despite change in ownership during this period, the continuation of the carpets use has seen past conservation treatments become unstable. As a result of this, the conservator is now faced with the dilemma of carrying out further treatments. In such cases as this, the question when to stop using a furnishing textile within its original setting comes into question.

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<sup>86</sup> Michele Leake. Collections and Engagement Manager at Upton House. Conversation with the author, July 15<sup>th</sup> 2014.

<sup>87</sup> Michele Leake. Collections and Engagement Manager at Upton House. Conversation with the author, July 15<sup>th</sup> 2014.

<sup>88</sup> Sheila Landi. Textile Conservator. Conversation with the author, April 4 2014.

Fig.6: Louis XIV style Elizabeth Saloon at Belvoir Castle. Image© Belvoir Castle.

When the pressures of guarding against damage being done to furnishing textiles through continued functional use are varied, the current trend for enhanced open access and allow the public to touch selected objects could be criticised. Is the drive to entice more visitors in to historic properties deviating away from the core values of preservation and conservation within National Trust properties and is the addition of replica and sacrificial textiles putting original objects at stake?

The message communicated by both collections care officers and conservators appears mixed. While there is certainly an acknowledgement that new methods of display need to be explored in order “*to breathe new life into the property*”<sup>89</sup>, conservation concerns are still evident. One of the biggest issues appears to be based around the use of replica and sacrificial objects and how to differentiate between objects that are structurally stable enough to be touched and objects that are particularly vulnerable to damage. These vulnerable objects emphasise the need for constant monitoring and the value of preventive conservation where furnishing textile are concerned.

## **6.2: Preventive measures**

The current preventive conservation measures in place to guard against damage to furnishing textiles are far reaching and an integral concern for any historic property open to the public. Apart from disasters, most damage to textiles is caused by photochemical and thermochemical degradation, acid environments, biological deterioration, physical and mechanical stress, improper

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<sup>89</sup> Volunteer room guide in conversation with the author at National Trust property Chirk Castle. July 14<sup>th</sup> 2014.



previous treatment, and inherently unstable material.<sup>90</sup> Implementing control measures to try and alleviate these risks while at the same time allowing access into historic interiors is a balancing act that requires consistent monitoring of condition and environmental fluctuations.

Within the scope of this research and as previously mentioned, the damage caused by handling and the continued functional use of furnishing textiles is the main focus. During use and general handling the following types of dirt may be deposited on textiles: soiling originating from wear, food or cosmetics, fats, cooking or mineral oils, blood, body fluid, skin particles, various corrosion products, water marks, dye transfer accidents, dust, soot, smoke, paints, inks, adhesives, mildew and fungi.<sup>91</sup> As well as discolouration occurring through soiling as a result of handling, loss of fibre structure also occurs. Known as the cumulative effect textiles that are exposed to prolonged periods of touch become weakened to the point where fibres are completely worn away. Educating members of the public as to the detrimental effects of touching textiles is now widely communicated especially within National Trust properties. Figure 7 shows an example of how this message is communicated. *“People just can’t believe the damaging effect touching textiles has, the use of these types of visual aids really emphasises why protective barriers are put in place”.*<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Lucy Commoner, “Warning Signs: When textiles need conservation (1992)”, in *Conservation Concerns a guide for Collectors and Curators*, ed. Konstanze Bachmann, 157-160 (New York: Smithsonian Institution Press in association with Cooper-Hewitt, 1992).

<sup>91</sup> Ágnes Timár-Balázsy and Dinah Eastop, *Chemical Principles of Textile Conservation* (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann series in conservation and museology an imprint of Elsevier LTD, 1998), 157.

<sup>92</sup> Michele Leake. Collections and Engagement Manager at Upton House. Conversation with the author, July 15<sup>th</sup> 2014.

Fig. 7. An example of the cumulative effect of touch on a piece of silk on display since March 2009. Image © National trust.

This decision to emphasise the detrimental effects of handling is certainly a positive step, however it could be argued that these methods of highlighting the need to protect textiles to guard against loss in close proximity to rooms where touching of objects is actively encouraged may be sending mixed messages.

## Chapter 7: Case Study: Upton House

*Historic houses are not museums but living organisms.*<sup>93</sup>

This chapter focuses on a property where display methods have developed to allow increased visitor access. The addition of primary research informs and adds relevance to this study.

### 7.1: Why Upton House?

The selection of a National Trust property to focus on was based several aspects. The first being that the property had to include the type of interpretative display relevant to this research and the second being that the collection of the property needed to include a range of textile furnishings that were both original and reproduction. Overall, a property owned by the National Trust was deemed to be particularly necessary, as the organisation has been at the forefront of promoting the use of replicas and sensory experiences within recent years.

Upton House near Banbury in Warwickshire has been in the care of the National Trust since 1948.<sup>94</sup> The original property was built on the Upton Estate by Sir Rushout Cullen and dates back to 1695. Structural and internal alterations continued in the house up until 1927 when the house and surrounding estate was purchased by Lord Walter Samuel Bearsted as a hunting lodge to use at weekends for house parties.<sup>95</sup> Bearsted was a leading philanthropist and social figure of the 1920's having inherited a substantial fortune from his father, a co-founder of the Shell Transport and Trading Company.<sup>96</sup> In the twenty or so years of Lord and Lady Bearsted's occupation of the house, a large collection of porcelain, furniture and art works were amassed as well as seven 16<sup>th</sup> century Flemish hunting tapestries depicting the hunt of Maximillian.<sup>97</sup> Although Upton is predominantly known for its art collection that includes works by Thomas Gainsborough and Joshua Reynolds it is the glamorous haze of the inter war years that the trust is most keen to recreate.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Robert Hewison, *The heritage industry: Britain in a climate of decline* (London: A Methuen paperback, 1987), 53-54.

<sup>94</sup> "House party at Upton," National Trust, <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/upton-house/history/> (accessed May 6, 2014).

<sup>95</sup> Unpublished documentation regarding the tapestry collection at Upton House.

<sup>96</sup> Stephen Howarth, *A century in oil: The "Shell" transport and trading company 1897-1997* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1997), 15-24.

<sup>97</sup> Unpublished documentation regarding the tapestry collection at Upton House.

<sup>98</sup> Michele Leake. Collections and Engagement Manager at Upton House. Conversation with the author, July 15<sup>th</sup> 2014.

Since 2009 it has spent approximately £200,000<sup>99</sup> on the development on the Millionaires weekend house party experience.

Fig.8: Millionaires weekend house party promotional leaflet. Image © National Trust.

Two main aims of the re-display of the interior were developed, the first being that visitors should be able to go into the house and touch things and that the house felt and looked as if it was being lived in. In response to this brief visitors are now greeted by a video produced in the style of a 1930's home cine recording. Interaction with the house and its collection is actively encouraged in the form of mounted leaflets on furniture and walls enticing visitors to touch objects. The experience goes even further in to the realms of recreating real events as members of the public are given the chance to enjoy a game of billiards and play the great halls grand piano. On leaflets, audio descriptive guides and posters the message is communicated of the:

*Sounds, smells and cosy chairs to rest in while you're here make Upton feel lived in and welcoming. Music and voices in the background add to the atmosphere to take you back to Upton's heyday. Look*

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<sup>99</sup> Michele Leake. Collections and Engagement Manager at Upton House. Conversation with the author, July 15<sup>th</sup> 2014.

*out for those homely touches such as the family's photos and suitcases just brought in by the chauffeur. Look out for the cosy chairs and rest your feet.*<sup>100</sup>

Fig.9: The grand piano at Upton House. Image © National Trust.

Diaries can be touched and read, photo albums can be looked through and the contents of drawers can be inspected.

Fig. 10: Diaries, albums and newspapers on display at Upton House. Image © National Trust.

Although the current style of display has been in place since 2009, adjustments are still being made to the presentation of the rooms. Next Year sees the removal of the original furnishings within the main bedroom into store so that reproduction textiles including carpeting, curtain and bed hangings

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<sup>100</sup> "House party at Upton," National Trust, <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/upton-house/history/> (accessed May 6, 2014).

can allow complete access to Lady Bearsted's bedroom.<sup>101</sup> Although this removal of original furnishings from rooms, may at first appear to be an alarming step certainly in terms of the authenticity of the interior of the property. Such a decision was taken in order to conform to the original bequest of Lord Berstead when the property was left to the trust. A key aspect of this bequest included the desire that no barriers or ropes should be used within the property to inhibit the display of its contents. This aspect of the display of the house certainly conforms to the more widespread ethos of the trust to avoid using 'do not touch signs' so as not to intrude into the atmosphere of a home<sup>102</sup> but is the desire to encourage such a homely atmosphere a step too far when the conservation of the interior is taken into account? In order to fully address this concern, a more detailed understanding of the selection process and justifications for such a display scheme was needed.

## **7.2: The selection of objects for use within displays**

Bringing new objects into an existing collection always demands careful judgement but in the case of Upton House, this was a requirement if the atmospheric recreation of the Berstead's family home was to come to fruition. Where no alternative was found, objects from antique shops were purchased to infill gaps in display such as items of costume and household cleaning props to dress the kitchen area.

Fig. 11. The broom cupboard in the kitchen. Image © National Trust

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<sup>101</sup> Michele Leake. Collections and Engagement Manager at Upton House. Conversation with the author, July 15<sup>th</sup> 2014.

<sup>102</sup> Helen Lloyd, "The role of housekeeping and preventive conservation in the care of textiles in historic houses (1995)," in *Textiles in Trust: Proceedings of the symposium 'Textiles in Trust' held at Blickling Hall, Norfolk, September 1995*, ed. Ksynia Marko, 40-53 (London: Archetype Publications in association with the National Trust, 1997).

For the most part however, this research has found that where possible objects already in existence within the collection of the house have been used for the vast majority of the displays. Appendix two includes a transcript of the interview conducted with Collections and engagement manager Michelle Leake who states that: the decision making process at the point of selecting objects is vital and ultimately down to personal judgement, based on the difficult and often subjective task of defining the value of the individual object.<sup>103</sup>

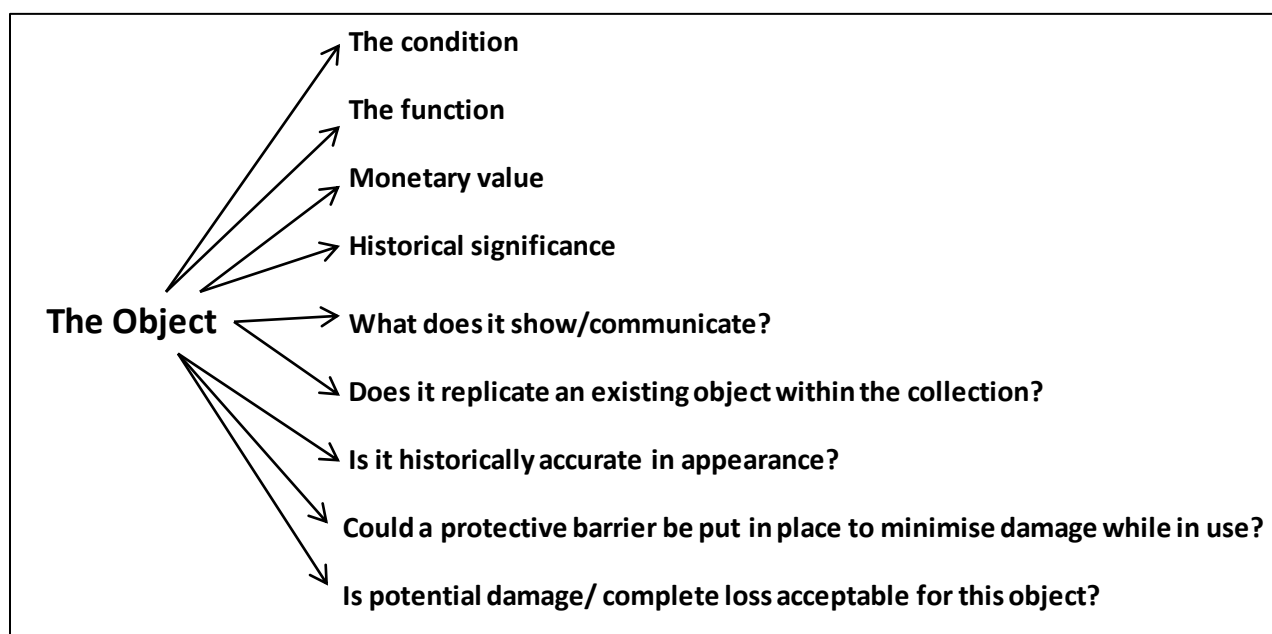


Fig. 12: Nine vital considerations that are taken into account before a textile is selected for use within an interactive display

Figure 12 illustrates the nine main considerations that need to be taken into account before an object within an historic house collection can be selected for use within an interactive room setting. Perhaps one the most problematic areas is defining the historical significance, and ultimately deciding whether deterioration in condition as well the possibility of total loss of an object through theft or vandalism is acceptable. In such a case, a clear understanding of the collection is an integral aspect, only when an assessment has been made of individual objects can their use in the display be justified.

Historical accounts of contents inventories aid in this selection process. However in the case of Upton, it should be emphasised that the textiles selected for open display have in many instances, been in long term storage since the trust took ownership and all date from the last 50-85 years. As a result, most do not feature on inventories and objects from the post-war years were most prevalent

<sup>103</sup> Michele Leake. Collections and Engagement Manager at Upton House. Conversation with the author, July 15<sup>th</sup> 2014.

in the displays. It could be argued that the conservation of such objects is not at present a concern as in most instances the textiles were mass manufactured and consumable items such as linen tablecloths and commercial upholstery fabrics.

### **7.3: The purpose of the object**

Another integral aspect to consider is the purpose and usefulness of the object especially in relation to: Could the display function in the way that it is intended without the addition of extra objects? Being clear as to the message each object communicates about the time period undoubtedly aids interpretation and avoids unnecessary damage being done to an object just for the sake of including it within the room setting.

Considering the possible threats to the rest of the collection with this type of display have to be taken into account. This is where the addition of barrier layers to reduce damage being done to upholstery is of particular use. In the case of chairs such measures can be easily implemented, arm chairs can be selected from excising ones in the collection and close fitting cover slips can be made using reproduction fabrics. The places on the chair that receive the most wear through use are protected with a layer of wadding which is then placed under the cover slip.

Fig. 13 & 14: Original 1930's armchairs with loose slip cover. Image © National Trust.



According to both Leake and room guides, these protective measures have minimised the levels of damage done to objects on display since 2009. When asked if damage had occurred to the objects in the rest of the collection which is not part of the interactive display it appears that the control methods in place within Upton are effective.

#### **7.4: Control method one: creating defined zones**

The first control method discussed by staff was the method of clearly defining the zones where visitors can touch objects. In the case of Upton in particular, these zones take the form of entire rooms or part of a larger space such as the great hall. Even though barriers have not been used, a change in flooring type and wall colour indicates the area where interaction with the space is permissible. Although such measures to define spaces are subtle, through observation of visitors and discussion with volunteers, it does appear as if these methods are effective and that the areas where touching of objects is allowed is made clear.

#### **7.5: Control method two: presence of volunteers and room guides**

In any historic property the presence of room guides is an integral aspect of opening up a property to visitors with the number of volunteers working for the trust hitting a record 70,000 individuals last year.<sup>104</sup> In Upton House room guides perform a variety of different functions. Arguably the most important aspect of their role is the need to inform visitors about the interactive displays and the historical background of the property. Within each room, the presence of volunteers allows visitors to ask questions and also guards against the risk of damage being done to the collection where handling is not permitted.

#### **7.6: Control method three: labels & voice recordings**

The combination of timed and motion sensor voice recordings are also a useful method used to define space. Small speakers set into wooden panelling plays 1930's music and a recorded message plays intermittently.

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<sup>104</sup> Alice Philipson, "National Trust 'asking too much' of ageing volunteers," *The Telegraph*, June 3, 2014, Online edition, main section.

Fig. 15: Radio with 1930's music and voice recordings. Image © National Trust.

Such a recording adds another layer of information to the display and also adds a more practical outcome in terms of how visitors react to the space. Leake states that visitors are more likely to sit down in the arm chairs and listen to the recordings, therefore focussing their attention on the atmospheric experience and increasing their engagement with the concept of a 1930's house party.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Michele Leake. Collections and Engagement Manager at Upton House. Conversation with the author, July 15<sup>th</sup> 2014.

## Chapter 8: Looking to the Future of Display

The addition of sound recordings to a display is just one aspect that further develops the concept of creating a vision of the past. The question whether these new developments in technology might one day remove the need to use objects in interactive displays at all is considered within the following chapter.

### 8.1: Advances in technology

As well as the sound recordings, Upton and other National Trust properties such as Chirk Castle<sup>106</sup> in Wrexham and Belton House<sup>107</sup> in Lincolnshire are now utilising other areas of technology. Quick Response Codes or QR codes are used alongside displays of objects. These codes have been designed to communicate information relating to the individual histories of the objects on display, and as the trust explain: *“Allows for enhanced visitor access to layers of information”*.<sup>108</sup>

Fig. 16. National Trust QR code. Image © Motivation on behalf of the National Trust.

It is argued that one of the main aspects of using this type of technology is that QR codes allow a deeper understanding of objects to be reached without the need to display objects at all. This idea is based upon the concept that QR codes act as a replacement for objects where there is either no room to display them or they are unsuitable for the demands of display due to their condition.

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<sup>106</sup> “Chirk Castle,” National Trust, <http://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/search/highlights/Chirk-Castle,-Wrexham.html> (accessed May 9, 2014).

<sup>107</sup> “Belton House,” National Trust, <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/belton-house/>. (accessed May 8, 2014).

<sup>108</sup> “Visitor Experience”: Motivation. <http://www.motivation81.co.uk/experiences.html> (accessed April 14 2014).

This aspect of using QR codes to stand in for actual objects is an interesting theory especially from a conservation view point. Such developments certainly raise the question of whether this is the future for interpretive displays. In such a future is it possible that objects may be replaced with digital replicas?

Further research undertaken by the Arts and Humanities Research Council/Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council Science & Heritage Programme<sup>109</sup> is also contributing to new ways to add touch to the visitor experience. In this case, 3D printing is being used to produce accurate replicas of museum objects. Some replicas are coloured like the original but the researchers have also experimented with replicas that use neutral tones so that the visitor is given a facsimile sense of the textural details, without the visual sensory distraction of colour.<sup>110</sup> The programme leaders argue that the replica better represents what the artefact would have felt like when originally made rather than how it might feel now after years of wear and decay. These methods of displaying objects and fulfilling visitors' desire to interact with objects, although in their infancy show an acknowledgement of the reevaluation of the old museum taboo of "*Do not touch*"<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> "Touching the past: Adding touch to the visitor experience of ancient artefacts," The heritage portal, <http://www.heritageportal.eu/News-Events/Latest-News/Touching-the-past-Adding-touch-to-the-visitor-experience-of-ancient-artefacts.html>. (accessed August 5, 2014).

<sup>110</sup> "Touching the past: Adding touch to the visitor experience of ancient artefacts," The heritage portal, <http://www.heritageportal.eu/News-Events/Latest-News/Touching-the-past-Adding-touch-to-the-visitor-experience-of-ancient-artefacts.html>. (accessed August 5, 2014).

<sup>111</sup> Elizabeth Pye. *The Power of Touch: Handling Objects in Museum and Heritage Context*. (London: Left Coast Press, 2008), 18-19.

## Chapter 9: Conclusions

As the requirements of access within historic properties continue to develop, the implications of these changes in display are at present unclear, especially in relation to the long term stability of furnishing textiles. This research has attempted to highlight the attitudes and methods used within interactive displays and the growing use of replicas within conservation. Despite the fact that this topic covers a variety of objects as well as properties it is hoped that this research has provided the reader with an indication of the current usage of textile furnishings within historic properties.

### 9.1: Main points found in this research

What has become most evident during the course of this project is that there appears to be two defined arguments for and against the use of replica and sacrificial textiles. On the one hand research has shown that the selection and use of textiles within displays may be placing objects in danger of becoming damaged, therefore creating a conservation concern. It could be argued that by allowing members of the public to touch and sit on objects within a historic property is placing both the property and the objects at risk. Such fears also relate to how this type of access can be controlled in an organization that relies on volunteer room guides. Feeding into this conservation focused anxieties is the worry expressed by many art historians and museum professionals that such types of display promote an inaccurate and misleading image of the past.<sup>112</sup>

Taking these viewpoints into consideration, the author of this research project advocates that, instead of regarding increased access as a negative and potentially damaging aspect of display, conservators should focus on the positive outcomes associated with interpretive display. From the primary research gathered during this study, it has become clear that in allowing people greater access to objects within their 'original' settings, and combining these displays with atmospheric recreations, an increased public appreciation of objects has developed. Arguably such an outcome can only be seen as a positive step towards communicating the message of conservation to a wider audience.

Although there have been highly encouraging reactions towards the interactive displays within Upton House, the author does not advocate that visitors to historic properties should be subjected to no boundaries. Standards of collections care and preventive measures to control environmental fluctuations should be stringently observed, even in areas where touching and sitting on objects is

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<sup>112</sup> David, Uzzell, "Interpreting our heritage: A theoretical interpretation." Academia.edu. [http://www.academia.edu/301486/Interpreting\\_our\\_heritage\\_a\\_theoretical\\_interpretation](http://www.academia.edu/301486/Interpreting_our_heritage_a_theoretical_interpretation). (accessed May, 11 2014).

encouraged. It should also be emphasized that this research has highlighted the need for well-informed object selection and a developed understanding of individual objects within collections is a vital aspect of this type of display. It is hoped that the control measures outlined within chapter eight place emphasis on how the displays within the property are laid out in a zoning method and monitored to minimize the threat of damage being done to objects where touching is not permitted.

## **9.2: Limitations of the research project**

As previously outlined, the sheer number of National Trust properties makes gaining an accurate picture of current display practices and attitudes within properties problematic. By visiting a number of houses in the care of the trust it became clear that there are different viewpoints and focuses across the organization. One particularly significant aspect of these differences was the individual collections within each property and how some houses suited to the type of interpretive displays seen at Upton. Houses that had remained in the same family for generations were less suitable for playing host to open access. Such houses arguably had a larger collection of original objects and therefore lacked the space to enable such a display.

## **9.3: Principle conclusion**

In conclusion, the current social and economic environment dictates that, in order for historic properties to survive increased visitor numbers are needed. The displays outlined in the previous chapters provide enjoyment to visitors and above all increase educational awareness of historic properties. The use of sacrificial and replica textiles to aid in increasing an understanding of the past should be viewed as a progressive and necessary step towards keeping the preservation of historic properties relevant. Concerns regarding the stability and possible loss of historically and culturally significant textiles will always be an aspect within properties open to the public. As long as standards are observed to safeguard the collection, interpretive displays add an educational and above all enjoyable aspect to visiting historic properties. It is hoped that this research project has introduced a number of thought-provoking areas for future research.

As advancements in display and technology develop in the coming years a reevaluation of the attitudes and trends into this particular aspect of developing conservation strategy will in no doubt be necessary.

## **Appendix 1: Timeline of the National Trust's Development**

- 1884:** Octavia Hill develops the idea of setting up a preservation trust to guard against the destruction of places and properties of historic significance.
- 1895:** The National Trust for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty is founded.
- 1896:** Alfriston Clergy House is bought by the trust for £10.00.
- 1899:** The first nature reserve is purchased by the trust.
- 1907:** Sir Robert Hunter drafts the 1907 Act of the National Trust which saw the act incorporate and confer powers upon the National Trust for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty.
- 1912:** Blakeney Point in Norfolk is acquired by the trust.
- 1923:** A peak in Derbyshire called the Great Gable is gifted to the trust.
- 1925:** Beginning of favourable coverage in the press after funds were appealed for in The Times to acquire Ashbridge, a property in Hertfordshire.
- 1927:** The farmland around Stonehenge is bought for preservation.
- 1931:** The National Trust for Scotland is established
- 1934:** An entire village called West Wycombe comes under the protection of the trust.
- 1945:** The trusts 50<sup>th</sup> birthday.
- 1946:** The National Land Fund is established as a memorial to those killed in the Second World War.
- 1965:** A campaign to acquire unspoilt coastline is initiated known as project Neptune.
- 1968:** The Benson Report is produced.
- 1970:** The 75<sup>th</sup> birthday of the trust.
- 1975:** 500,000 members are reached.
- 1981:** 1 million members are reached.
- 1990:** 2 million members are reached.
- 1995:** 100<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration.
- 2002:** The Victorian country house Tyntesfield is acquired after a grant of £17.5 million from the National Heritage Memorial Fund is gifted.
- 2007:** Membership reaches 3.5 million.
- 2008:** Volunteer numbers reach 50,000.
- 2011:** Membership reaches 4 million.

## **Appendix 2: Transcript of interview with Collections and Engagement manager**

### **Michele Leake**

The interview took place on July 15<sup>th</sup> 2014 at Upton House in Warwickshire. After a tour of the house and an introduction to both the collection and volunteers within the property a discussion took place regarding the interpretive displays in place .

**A.Y:** The method of display of objects and the theme of the Millionaires house party weekend is unique to Upton, when was this project initiated and for what reasons?

**M.L:**

**A.Y:** Have you seen an increase in visitor numbers since the displays have been put in place?

**M.L:**

**A.Y:** How is the House party organised?

**M.L:**

**A.Y:** How are groups monitored while they are in the house?



**M.L:**

**A.Y:** Have you found that these methods are successful?

**M.L:**

**A.Y:** In terms of conservation issues, could you talk me through the selection of objects to use for the house party weekend? Are they a combination of new and reproduction pieces or part of the collection?

**M.L:**

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**A.Y:** Could you tell me a little bit about where you see the future of the displays at Upton?

**M.L:** I



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