

TAKING CARE OF BANNERS



People's History Museum
Left Bank
Spinningfields
Manchester M3 3ER
www.phm.org.uk



Picture: National Union of Agricultural Labourers and Rural Workers, Mulbarton and District

INTRODUCTION

Banners are made for a range of organisations as diverse as trade unions, women's guilds, Sunday schools, friendly societies, peace campaigners and sporting groups.

They are produced both professionally and at home using a wide range of materials (textiles, metal, paper, pigments) and techniques (painting, embroidery, appliqué, patchwork).

Their construction and the fact that many were designed to be used infrequently brings a challenge in their care and display.

This booklet is designed to outline some general guidelines relating to the care of banners to help enhance their long-term survival and enable them to be safely handled. It also includes a detailed description of how to roll a banner.

Like all textiles, banners are susceptible to damage and deterioration from dirt, over-exposure to light, incorrect environmental conditions, attack by pests and inappropriate handling and storage conditions.

However, these factors can be controlled and their damaging effects minimised by following these guidelines.

CONTENTS

- 1 Environmental conditions
- 2 Handling
- 3 Display
- 4 Storage
- 5 How to roll a banner
- 6 Conservation

Picture:
The Textile Conservation Studio at the People's History Museum

1 ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS

RELATIVE HUMIDITY AND TEMPERATURE

Banners should be stored in stable conditions, i.e. stable relative humidity (*RH*) and temperature. Fluctuations in RH and temperature cause repeated contraction and expansion of the fibres which increases the risk of damage, particularly for mixed media objects such as painted banners. The level of RH and temperature is also important. The environment should neither be damp (*high RH*) or too dry (*low RH*).

High levels of RH (e.g. *above 65%*) could promote or encourage:

- *mould growth which could lead to staining and damage to the textile fibres*
- *bloom on painted surfaces*
- *corrosion of metal*
- *pests to flourish*
- *dyes to fade more rapidly*



Low RH leads to embrittlement of fibres and cracking of paint.

The optimum RH is 50–55% and temperature is 18–20°C.



Top: bloom on painted surface before conservation

Bottom: bloom removed after conservation

LIGHT

Light is damaging to textiles and this damage is cumulative and non-reversible. Light levels and exposure should be controlled.

As a guide, it is recommended that light-sensitive objects such as textiles should not be exposed to light levels above 50 lux. However, they can be exposed at higher light levels for limited periods, compensated by longer periods with lower light levels or darkness. This can be calculated on the TOTAL LIGHT DOSAGE measured in lux hours (*lux hours = amount of light in lux multiplied by time in hours*). For example, in one year, a museum open for 8 hours a day can safely display a textile at 50 lux (i.e. $8 \text{ hours} \times 7 \text{ days} \times 52 \text{ weeks} \times 50 \text{ lux} = 145,600 \text{ lux hours}$) which is equivalent to displaying it at 100 lux for 26 weeks (i.e. $8 \text{ hrs} \times 7 \text{ days} \times 26 \text{ weeks} \times 100 \text{ lux} = 145,600 \text{ lux hours}$).

Ultra-violet (UV) radiation is the most damaging part of the light spectrum and it is important to screen out UV. This can be done using UV screening or filters on lights and windows. The recommended maximum level of UV radiation is 75 $\mu\text{W/lumen}$.

In storage all light should be excluded except when an object is being viewed.

DIRT AND ATMOSPHERIC POLLUTION

It is important that the storage/display area is kept clean. Dust contains many different particles that could be acidic (which would weaken fibres), sharp (which could cut fibres), or a food source for pests.

KEY POINTS

The optimum RH is between 50 and 55%, and temperature is 18–20°C. As a guide textiles should not be exposed to light levels above 50 lux. For textiles the recommended maximum level of UV radiation is 75 $\mu\text{W/lumen}$. Keep storage/display area clean.

2 HANDLING

Often because of a banner's large size it may require two people to handle it safely. It should be handled wearing clean cotton gloves or with clean hands. Jewellery or anything that could catch or snag the textile should be removed.

When examining a banner or preparing it for storage, a large clean flat surface should be prepared to enable the banner to be laid out flat. If possible, the surface should be covered with acid-free tissue or clean cloths.

It is important to support the banner evenly. It should not be dragged by its corners as this would put strain on it and could lead to tears or splits.

Large banners should be rolled to turn them over. This enables the banner to be adequately supported. Sandwich the banner between acid free tissue, roll it up (*following guidelines in 'How to roll a banner'*), and then unroll it from underneath. It may be necessary to have extra help when turning a banner.

When carrying a rolled textile, try to hold the roller at each end of the tube. Avoid holding the banner in the middle and squeezing it as this could lead to damage by crushing.

KEY POINTS

Prepare a clean workspace and handle banners with clean hands/gloves.

Ask for help when handling a large banner.

3 DISPLAY

If in doubt consult a textile conservator.

Examine the banner to ensure it is safe for display. A fabric may appear to be sound, but may be fragile. Look for any splits or tears. Painted textiles in particular should be closely examined at the junction between the painted area and textile, as this area is very vulnerable.

In display, banners should be hung using a pole sleeve or mounted on a board. Tacks or pins should not be used. Generally, free-hanging banners should only be on display for short periods of time (e.g. 6–12 months) and this should also be determined by their condition. Heavy decoration such as embroidery or paint would stretch and deform a banner if it is on display for a long period of time.

Ideally banners should be displayed in a case which would help to provide a buffered environment and protect against dirt. If a banner is to be on open display, the area should be environmentally controlled, monitored and clean. (*Refer to Environmental Conditions section for further information on display conditions.*)

KEY POINTS

Display free-hanging banners for only short periods of time.

If you are not sure if a banner is safe for display, consult a trained conservator.

4 STORAGE

Use acid-free or pH neutral materials for storage. These materials should be replaced periodically because they lose their acid-free qualities over time.



Before a banner is stored it should be checked to ensure that there are no signs of insect activity. It should be dry with no dampness present, otherwise mould growth could develop.

Left and right:
The effects of poor storage

A banner should ideally be stored flat or rolled (*for details on how to roll a banner see 'How to roll a banner'*). It is best to avoid folding a banner, whenever possible. However, if it has to be folded due to space constraints or if it has multi-layers which could make it difficult to roll, it should be folded loosely and any folds should be padded out with thick rolls of acid-free tissue. Avoid folding a textile in two directions (*i.e. do not fold in quarters*). The aim is not to allow any sharp creases to form which would lead to damage. Avoid placing any heavy item or number of items on top of a folded textile.

Do not fold a painted textile. The paint is not flexible enough to enable it to be folded safely and this could lead to cracks in the paint or splits along the junction of the paint and textile.



Often because of their large size it is most convenient to store banners rolled. If a banner is to be rolled ensure it is sufficiently flexible to do this. If a banner has been folded for a long time and has sharp creases or if the fabric is brittle it may require a textile conservator to prepare it for storage.

Left: banner storage at the People's History Museum

A rolled banner should be stored suspended on a racking system so that the weight is evenly distributed and the banner is not crushed under its own weight and that of the tube. Alternatively the banner could be stored on a shelf with the ends of the tube raised on wedges of card, wood or bubble wrap.

KEY POINTS

*Use acid free/pH neutral materials for storage.
A banner should ideally be stored flat or rolled.
It is best to avoid folding a banner.
Do not fold painted textiles.*

5 HOW TO ROLL A BANNER

You may require two people to roll the banner (*see section on handling*).

1 Prepare a clean flat surface and cover with a layer of acid-free tissue.

2 The banner should be rolled on a wide diameter tube. The size of the tube is important. The diameter of the tube required depends on the flexibility of the banner, i.e. the less flexible the banner, the wider the tube required. As a guide, painted banners should be rolled on a tube of 20cm/8" or wider to reduce the curvature of the paint. If a painted banner is rolled on too narrow a tube or around its pole this could cause the paint to crack. If it is not possible to obtain a wide diameter tube, the diameter of a small tube can be increased by wrapping it in polyester wadding and covering with a layer of acid-free tissue.

The tube should be at least 20cm longer than the banner to allow a handling edge when carrying the rolled banner.

3 Prepare the tube for rolling the banner. The tube should preferably be made from acid-free cardboard wrapped in a layer of acid-free tissue.

If it is not possible to obtain an acid-free cardboard tube, an ordinary cardboard tube may have to be used. The banner should be protected from the acids in the cardboard by wrapping it with an isolating material and then a layer of acid-free tissue. The isolating layer acts as a barrier to acids or other volatile substances in the cardboard. Such isolating materials include *Melinex*TM or *Mylar*TM (*polyester films*) or *Moistop*TM (*an aluminium barrier foil*).

Alternatively, a short-term solution is to wrap the tube in several layers of acid-free tissue. However, the tissue would need to be replaced regularly as it soon absorbs the acids from the cardboard and loses its acid-free qualities.

4 Remove the pole from the banner. This may not be possible if the pole loops are too tight or if they have been nailed to the pole. If this is the case it may be safer for the banner if the pole is left in place.

5 Lay the banner face down, so that it is rolled with its face outermost. This is important to reduce the curvature and stresses on the face of the banner and therefore minimise any possible damage.

6 Ensure the banner is flat and there are no folds or creases in it.

7 Cover with a layer of acid-free tissue to act as a buffer between successive layers and help protect each layer.

8. Soften and cushion any raised decoration by covering with a layer, or layers, of polyester wadding between acid-free tissue to obtain as flat a surface as possible. Any bumps would cause distortion over time.

9 Align the prepared tube with the banner. If the pole has been removed start to roll the banner from this end. However if it is not possible to remove the pole safely, start to roll the banner from the bottom edge and soften the bulk of the fringe by covering with a layer, or layers, of polyester wadding between acid-free tissue. It is important that the banner be rolled in the direction of the warp or weft threads.

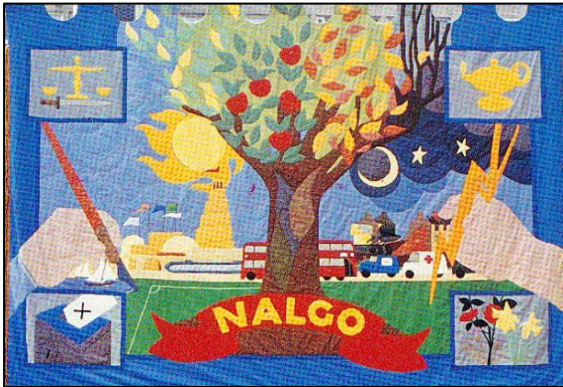
10 Pick up the three layers (*tissue, banner and tissue*). Roll the banner, ensuring it is rolled smoothly with an even tension to avoid creases.

11 Once the banner is rolled, if the pole is still attached, lash it to the tube to prevent it slipping; any slippage could lead to creases.

12 Protect the rolled banner from dust and light, wrap it in *Tyvek*TM (*spun-bonded non-woven polyester fabric*) or in washed, undyed calico. Do not wrap a banner (*or any textile*) in polythene for storage (*polythene may be used for transportation only*). Polythene attracts static electricity and dust and traps in moisture which could lead to mould growth. Secure the cover with wide cotton tapes tied loosely and attach a label to the banner.

KEY POINTS

- 1 Prepare a clean flat surface and cover with layer of acid-free tissue.
- 2 The banner should be rolled on a wide diameter tube.
- 3 Prepare the tube for rolling the banner.
- 4 If possible, remove the pole from the banner.
- 5 Lay the banner face down.
- 6 Ensure the banner is flat and there are no folds or creases in it.
- 7 Cover with a layer of acid-free tissue.
- 8 Soften and cushion any raised decoration by covering with polyester wadding and acid-free tissue.
- 9 Align the prepared tube with the banner.
- 10 Pick up the three layers (tissue, banner and tissue). Roll the banner, ensuring it is rolled smoothly, with an even tension to avoid creases.
- 11 Once the banner is rolled, if the pole is still attached to the banner, lash it to the tube to prevent it slipping.
- 12 Protect the rolled banner from dust and light, wrap it in Tyvek™ or in a washed, undyed calico. Do not wrap a banner (or any textile) in polythene for storage.



Left:
NALGO
national
banner

6 CONSERVATION

Do not attempt to carry out any repairs as these can often cause more damage and may be more costly to deal with. Consult a textile conservator. Do not use self-adhesive tape on banners.



Above: before and after conservation

Conservation is time consuming and expensive. Good practice in housekeeping, care and handling will enhance the long-term preservation of a banner, and thereby help reduce its future care cost. Improving the storage of a banner collection will go a long way to helping to preserve it.

KEY POINTS

- Do not attempt to carry out any quick repairs.
REMEMBER, IF IN DOUBT, CONSULT A TEXTILE CONSERVATOR.*

This leaflet arose out of the National Banner Survey, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund in 1999. The survey set out to document all banners held in museums across Britain, assess the storage and conservation facilities for these banners and establish a database with a comprehensive image bank. Many of these images are now available online at www.phm.org.uk. The survey identified the need for advice on caring for banners and as a result this leaflet was produced for those who care for banners, funded by the Museums and Galleries Commission. Both the National Banner Survey and this leaflet have been updated and made available online with support from the Designation Challenge Fund.

The People's History Museum is the national centre for the collection, conservation, interpretation and study of material relating to the history of working people in Britain. It is a leading authority on the conservation and study of banners. A selection of banners from the museum's extensive collection is always on display in its main galleries.



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Free admission to all
Open every day, 10.00am – 5.00pm



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