

MUSEUM OF ST HELENA

# VISITOR CENTRE

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IMPROVED ACCESS AND STORAGE PROPOSAL

# CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
<b><i>Museum's Visitor Centre: The Concept</i></b>	
1. Background	2
2. Advantages of the Proposed Development	4
3. Benefits to St Helena	5
<b><i>Museum's Visitor Centre</i></b>	
1. The Storage of Museum Collections	6
2. Aim of the Visitor centre	7
3. Storage Standards	8
4. Storage Provision and Related Facilities	10
5. Storage Environment	12
6. Security and Safety	12
7. Storage Equipment	14
<b><i>Estimated Development Cost</i></b>	16
<b><i>Conclusion</i></b>	18
<b><i>References</i></b>	19

## MUSEUM'S VISITOR CENTRE: THE CONCEPT

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### BACKGROUND

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The Museum of St Helena offers a valuable service to the island in terms of providing a dynamic experience to visitors from the island and overseas, to school children as they explore their heritage and to researchers as they delve into the island's rich history. Visitors often comment on the high standard of the Museum and we wish to develop so that we can enhance the visitor experience and attract many to come back time and time again.

Given the emphasis being placed upon developing tourism, the Museum needs to move towards meeting the expected increasing visitor numbers and, as such we would expect support under the funding of infrastructural development leading towards the introduction of improved access.

The Heritage Society therefore proposes the development of a purpose-built Visitor Centre. The Visitor Centre would be the ideal space to exhibit/store larger objects such as the printing press acquisition from the former SHG Printing Office and a Governor's car not on display due to space limitation in the current museum and as so beyond public viewing. The centre's central design would be based on accommodating the viewing/handling and/or research of most objects of the museum's collections both on display and stored. The museum's currently study facilities are limited and the current store is a poor working environment for the staff undertaking research and conservation work and at present much of the museum's larger object collection is stored off site in unsuitable and inappropriate, yet available space. The planned Centre will provide better working conditions and a safer area for handling the museum's collections, preparation of objects for exhibit, and the general study of artifacts by both visitors and Museum staff.

The Centre would however have an obligation to care for the museum's collection, which it would house and so therefore will need to be equipped with a laboratory for treating objects and various archival material.

The Centre's main goal is to provide and promote access to the museum's reserve collections. To further assist in the achievement of this goal and to encourage people to explore collections for inspiration, learning and enjoyment the centre will be equipped with an IT suite; it is hoped that the digital copies of the current and new archival material will be accessible from these terminals.

Funding assistance from SHG would enable the development of the Museum in the above way to meet the existing and expected demands of increased tourism with improved access to the island. We would also expect to seek sponsorship from overseas, but feel that, given our essential service to education, leisure and tourism the lead should come from the government.

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**ADVANTAGES OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT**

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Improved study facilities for both Museum staff and visitors. Local school children will be able to undertake activities involving the use of paints and other media which hitherto have been restricted due to the unsuitability of such materials within the main building.

The ability to combine work surfaces into a large unit will make the preparation of exhibits and temporary exhibition materials easier and enable us to achieve a higher standard.

## **BENEFITS TO ST HELENA**

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The proposed Visitor Centre will be an added attraction to visitors in what SHG has designated a key tourist area in Lower Jamestown. Already the Museum attracts many visitors. Approximately 16000 people have visited since opening. Improvements can only be beneficial to the overall tourism strategy being promoted by SHG.

It will also benefit the schools on the island with a purpose built and designed study area for heritage within the heart of town which will be used by school groups as a study base when in town doing work on local history topics.

The Visitor Centre will contribute to and in part fulfil the following island Strategic Objectives:

- Improve the standard of education for the people of St. Helena
- Development of a sustainable and vibrant economy to the benefit of St. Helena
- Promote and Develop a Sustainable Workforce
- Continue to develop and establish the democratic and human rights and self-determination of the people of St. Helena
- Protect and conserve the environment
- Care of the elderly
- Protect and cherish the culture on St Helena

## MUSEUM'S VISITOR CENTRE

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### 1. THE STORAGE OF MUSEUM OF ST HELENA'S COLLECTIONS

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The Museum of St Helena is located in a one of the oldest buildings in the island's capital. An old warehouse and one time power house, the building is typical of those of the early, 1800s, as it exhibits the classic two foot thick exterior walls of stone lime mortar and lacks internal walls. The building was registered as grade 2 listed building in 1974, so modifications made to house the current museum's collection in 2002 were limited (Crallan 1974). During the 'making' of the Museum of St Helena it was decided that the purpose of the collections was the education of visitors, however difficulties in planning for the foreseeable future has meant that the museum's store now limits the quantity and size of objects that can be accessioned to the collection and in addition has not provided the level of care needed to prevent object deterioration.

The current store of the Museum of St Helena is ill equipped to meet the needs of the collections that it houses, its thick insulated walls where levels of temperature (21°C) and relative humidity (65%) remain reasonably constant with annual fluctuations of 5°C and 15% respectively is home to 30% of the museum's total collection. These conditions are unsuitable for the storage and stabilisation of individual objects of the museum's dynamic collections. Although the Museum of St Helena differs from many museums in the respect that it has more of its collection on display than in store, this does not give adequate reason for a poor storage system and with time the Museum of St Helena's reserve or stored collection will become increasingly at risk of deterioration. This poor storage environment has limited or restricted the acquisition of many objects and object types, for the museum's collection.

Even though the environment of the store is relatively constant, a 'formal review of the existing storage facilities and an audit of the condition of the collection have provided hard evidence of inadequacies in the existing facilities', the store houses a mixed collection of objects that require very different storage conditions which can not be catered for in such a small space (6m x 4m), which even if compartmentalised would reduce accessibility and increase operation costs (Martin 1996).

## 2. AIM OF VISITOR CENTRE

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The fundamental reason for improving of the storage facilities for the collections of the St Helena Museum is to “provide suitable physical and environmental conditions for the care and preservation and protection of collections” and improved access both for members of staff and more so than before, visitors to the institution (Martin 1996).

By improving the storage facilities the museum can expect the following benefits:

- improve knowledge of the collections
- demonstrate the use and value of the reserve collection
- develop ways of using objects in displays and other areas of work such as education and outreach.
- a reduction of the need for future remedial conservation work
- improved facilities for handling and studying collections
- a reduction in the risk of damage to collections or injury to staff through better facilities and equipment for storage and handling.
- the improved development of strategies of mechanical, cultural and biological (and possibly chemical) control,
- the implementation the various control measures as an integrated program, and monitoring to evaluate the enacted control measures.

(Source: Martin 1996)

The central theme of improved storage is that no single strategy is likely to achieve adequate results by itself. Control can only be achieved by integrating a variety of approaches. This means combining strategies to achieve adequate protection for objects and collections, while ensuring accessibility.

### 3. STORAGE STANDARDS

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Corfield (1991) stated that “standards for the storage of collections will only work if their effectiveness is monitored”, the storage of mixed collections is somewhat difficult as the degree of care required by an object is determined by its composite material and current condition, ideally it would be better if the store could be compartmentalised, with an individual store catering for a particular type of material, however due to limitations of space (for current and future collections) and finance this can not be made possible (Hiberry and Weinberg (1994). This proposed storage facility will provide an environment universal to its objects and so will promote physical and chemical stability for objects and collections with a special storage unit for particularly sensitive objects. With in any storage environment the following standards in museum care would need to be adhered to:

- Standard for curation and conservation
- Standard for access
- Standard for museum research
- Standard for protecting from theft
- Standard for protecting from Fire
- Standard for protecting from Flood
- Standard for protection from Physical and chemical damage
- Standard for protection against damage due to poor construction or maintenance of buildings and of their furnishing and fittings
- Standard for protection from buildings and environment
- Standard for protection against damage through poor internal environmental conditions
- Standard for protecting from dust, dirt, pollutants and pests
- Standard for protecting people from specimens, photographic material and others.
- Standard for planning response to disasters

(Source: Museums and Galleries Commission 1992, 1996 and 1998)

In addition to a various policies such the museums collections policy, management plan, integrated pest management plan, other methods by which this standard can achieved are shown in Table 4. Table 4 details how the physical environment, store management and people should be considered during planning and management of this proposed storage facility.

Table 1: Standard considerations for planning and management of a museum store. (Modified: Martin 1999)

<b>Physical Environment</b>	<b>Store Management</b>	<b>People</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Users of the new storage facility would need to be considered – how will staff retrieve objects, adequate space for the use of handling equipment?</li>   <li>• Re-evaluation of procedures to ensure, for example that the way storage systems are used does not overload floors or obstruct fire exits, fire detectors and fire-fighting equipment</li>   <li>• The load capacity of storage systems should be suitable and strong enough for the material that they are intended to support, and are correctly assembled to manufacturers’ specifications by competent installers</li>   <li>• Shelving and racking should be marked with their load-bearing capacity; scales should be provided in the store to weigh objects before they are stored</li>   <li>• The use of pallets should be considered to enable staff to better handle heavy objects them with pallet trucks or other lifting equipment</li>   <li>• Heavy objects should be stored on lower shelves, preferably at the average waist-height of about 900mm above the floor. Only lightweight, stable objects should be stored above head-height.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Store should be kept clean and tidy to reduce risk of fire and avoid obstruction of access ways</li>   <li>• Warning labels should be fixed to dangerous objects such as those containing hazardous materials</li>   <li>• Warning labels should also be fixed to particularly heavy objects or archive boxes</li>   <li>• Staff should be provided with a means of communication and of summoning help in an emergency</li>   <li>• Suitable ladders in a range of sizes should be provided and checked annually</li>   <li>• Specific areas should be allocated for such equipment as ladders, trolleys and returned to this location once used</li>   <li>• Clear surfaces at waist-height must be provided within the store to give users the chance to put down things they are carrying and rest their arms or adjust their grip</li>   <li>• Warning signs should be posted where pesticides have been used and staff should be provided with copies of safety data sheets provided by the manufacturer.</li>   <li>• All storage equipment should be suitable for its purpose and regularly checked and maintained by competent persons.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•To ensure the safety of the collection the identity of visitors should be checked before they are allowed into the store</li>   <li>• Training should be provided in the use of the storage system and handling equipment for all those persons using the store</li>   <li>• All staff should be aware of emergency procedures.</li> </ul>

#### 4. STORAGE PROVISION AND RELATED FACILITIES

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The new storage facility for museum collections will provide the following:

1. Means of access (for small objects, staff, visitors, people with disabilities)
2. Means of access and storage of large objects and vehicles; loading bays.
3. Reception and receiving area
4. Quarantine room for loans, acquisitions and returned items
5. Registration and holdings area (space for administration, documentation, photography)
6. Fumigation or specimen washing area.
7. Conservation laboratory and workshop
8. Packing and unpacking area
9. Compartmentalization of storage areas (sensitive objects)
10. Compartmentalization of storage areas (stable objects)
11. Compartmentalization of storage areas (large objects)
12. Space for research, study, object handling (by staff, researchers and visitors) and databases access, this space could also be used for staff and visitor training and education work

Figure 1 shows the storage floor plan, the ceilings of this storage facility will be high to allow the movement of plant equipment, for example a forklift to aid heavier objects relocation. This provides the added benefit of extra space for shelving and drawer systems extending above eye level (Johnson and Horgan 1979). Unfortunately as the store will be located between two listed building a second floor is not a consideration, the store can only be contained within an existing structure.

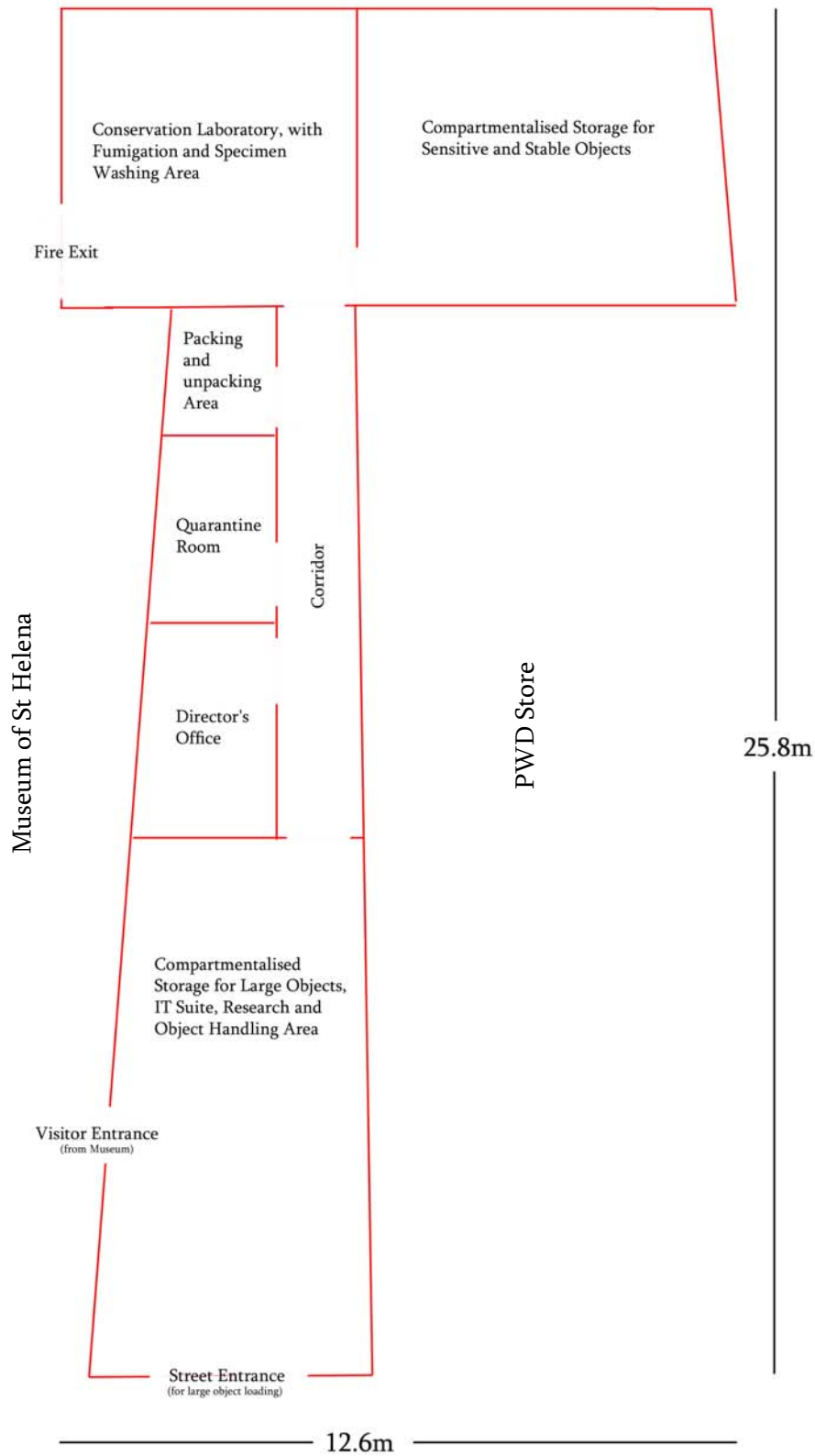


Figure 1: A floor plan of the proposed Visitor Centre of the Museum of St Helena.

## 5. STORAGE ENVIRONMENT

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Bradley (1992) stated that one of the primary functions of a high quality of storage facility is to preserve the collection. The main environmental requirements for the storage and display of a museum collections, as suggested by Bradley (1992) are; “areas should be free of dust, insects and other biological pests and pollutant gases and should be capable of sustaining appropriate levels of relative humidity, temperature and light”, and that it is important to consider the occupants comfort as they have to work in this environment. Methods of environmental control, such as air conditioning, will be monitored closely through data loggers and routine inspection of random objects within the collection. All the factors outlined as causing object deterioration will be consider within the confines of the storage environment; as this store will cater for a mixed collection, with a compartment for particularly sensitive objects and so will concentrate on maintaining the stability of the collection.

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## 6. SECURITY AND SAFETY

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This visitor centre will provide the necessary security and safety for the objects stored and occupants within, through the following key areas:

### *Security Systems for Buildings and Site*

The visitor centre will be located in the building adjacent to the museum and so will be connected to the museum’s alarm and proposed CCTV system, with a direct link to the island’s Police Headquarters. Secure locks will be used though out the building and as with the museum itself keys will only be issued to ‘named members of staff and will not be taken from the museum property’ (Bradley 1992).

### *Demarcation of Public and Private Areas*

Visitors and researchers will have limited access to this facility. The facility can be opened twice a year to the public, so they can gain a behind the scenes perspective into the conservation and preservation of museum objects, however during the rest of the year they will only be allowed to visit the store by appointment and viewing of all objects will be confined to the store’s study room.

### *Specification of Storage, Access and Handling Equipment*

The storage system, access and handling equipment should be specific to the task for which they were intended. The Curator will be the only member of staff with the authority to move objects in and out of storage, the curator will also have the task of accepting objects for possible acquisition. As this is so the environment of this particular storage system will have to be monitored by the curator. Other staff members within the storage will need to be supervised closely to eliminate the possibility of object theft.

### *Fire/ Flood/Disaster Protection*

Johnson and Horgan (1979) suggested that protecting the collection from fire is a 'critical part of any collection conservation program as such a threat can permanently eliminate objects from a museum collection'. Fire protection can be increased by the installation of a fire detection and extinguishment system and by ensuring that all electrical equipment has been installed to the manufacturers' specifications and checked regularly for faults. As this area is at risk of flood, the museum store compartments will have sloped floors with moisture sensitive drainage ducts and lower level shelved objects will be located at least 6 inches from the ground. Fire/Flood/Disaster would have been considered in the museum's disaster management plan, which can be adapted to the museum's proposed visitor centre.

### *Pest Control*

An integrated pest control management plan will be adopted, which involves periodic monitoring and inspection of museum objects and remedial action if an infestation is detected, it should also promote or encourage a preventative solution though 'good housekeeping practices'. To help in this area the proposed museum store will be designed to limited areas of dead space and dark areas to prevent the cycle of insect infestation.

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## 7. STORAGE EQUIPMENT

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The objects and collection of the museum will be stored in a combination open-shelving system with drawers, as the “flexibility of this system allows for the storage of many different kinds of artefacts in the same area”, with costume hanging storage and compartmentalized storage for framed prints, drawings or paintings (Johnson and Horgan 1979). The capacity for adaptability means that the storage system can be changed to suit the object, so if the first of a type of object enters the collection the storage system can be changed to accommodate its physical storage requirements. Johnson and Horgan (1979) described the open-shelving system as economic, it is one which could be constructed on island and avoids the expense of importing custom made equipment. Figure 4, provides an idea of how objects can be stored in an open-shelving system, from the illustration it can be seen that larger objects will be stored on the lower level shelving, however aisles spacing will be determined by the size of the largest object and the space required to safely remove it and replace it on to its shelf, this may “compromise the efficient use of storage space” (Johnson and Horgan 1979). All materials used to construct the shelving, in this instance wood, will be sealed to prevent the release of harmful gases, or corrosion if made from metal, which might contribute to the slow deterioration of the collection. If necessary material can be treated with insecticide to prevent infestation and to eliminate deterioration cause by particulates such as dust, clear plastic curtains will be hung in front of the shelves.

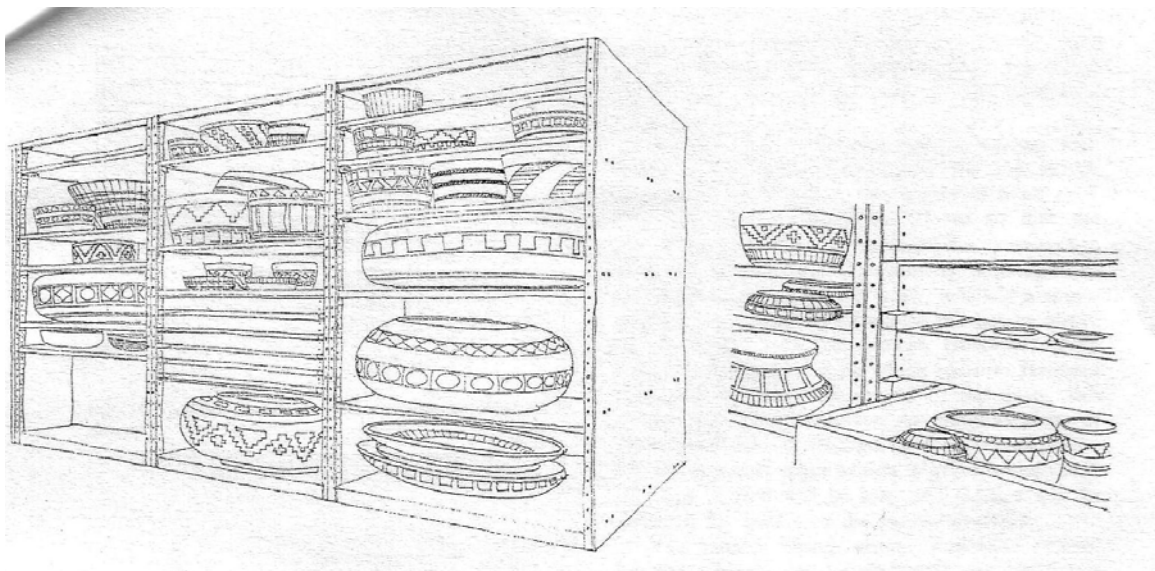


Figure 2: Combination open-shelving museum object storage system with drawers. (Source: Johnson and Horgan 1979)

It is hoped that the store will remain suitable, in terms of its density and capacity for at least ten years. Martin (1996) stated that it is the intention of most storage facilities to last at least ten years, however in most cases their capacity is reached much sooner, there should be no damage of this happening as object intake is slow so ten years is a fair estimate of the storage facilities usefulness.

## ESTIMATED DEVELOPMENT COSTS

### ***General Requirements - £30000***

Lighting  
Power Outlets  
Fire and Theft Security  
Floor Security  
Floor  
Roofing  
Sealed Room Partitions  
Plumbing  
Other General Building works

### ***Reception and receiving area - £2000***

Office Equipment  
Office Furniture

### ***Compartmentalization of storage area for large objects with IT Suite, research, study and object handling areas - £8000***

Heavy Loading Equipment  
Computers  
Digital Images of current and future archival material  
Office Furniture  
Carpets  
Display Boards

### ***Quarantine room for loans, acquisitions and returned items - £3000***

Packing and unpacking area  
Archival Quality Boxes  
Acid Free Tissue Paper  
Acid Free Packing  
Gloves  
Shelving

### ***Conservation laboratory with Fumigation or specimen washing area - £15000***

Fumigation Chamber

Sinks  
Chemical Store  
Benches  
Air-conditioning  
Refrigeration Units  
Freezers  
Vacuum Packing Equipment  
Shelving  
Other Equipment for Conservation and Restoration

***Compartmentalization of storage areas for stable and sensitive objects - £12000***

Racking  
Air-conditioning  
Object Handling Equipment  
Shelving

***Director's Office - £0***

***First Years Running Costs - £10000***

Additional Member of Staffing - £4000 or SHG Level 4

***Possible sources of funding for project:***

DFID  
St Helena Government  
SHDA  
Friends of St Helena  
St Helena Heritage Society  
RSPB  
WWF  
Some Boer Society  
St Helena Association  
Local Business and Local Individuals

## CONCLUSION

There are many general benefits to providing better storage facilities for museum objects and collections. To truly understand why a museum has to preserve and care for its own collection is reflected by its purpose. The purpose of the Museum of St Helena is to provide residents and the Island's visitors with an understanding of the Island's past, present and future, to inspire and promote an understanding of oneself and the world. This purpose is achieved through the museum's objects and collections.

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