

Assessing Roles in Cleaning Historic Interiors

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Focus groups were used to investigate the roles of different groups in setting cleaning cycles and standards in historic interiors. The views of curators, conservators, conservation assistants, house stewards, room stewards, conservation advisers and property managers were collected in nine groups. Broad themes of perceptions, consequences and control debated in each group. Whether dust was seen as damaging, or contributing the 'spirit of place' depended on the role of the group. Thus, conservation assistants engaged in the routine removal of dust focussed on its destructive potential, while property managers and curators were interested on how dust could be managed to influence visitor experience. Individual views about dust addressed areas of historic house management beyond those normally anticipated to be within the control of conservation staff. The work revealed the need for standards, yet difficulties of applying universals to specific places or objects. It exposed how perceptions were filtered as information is passed between different staff groupings, and raises issues of how communication is best fostered within historic house teams. We will explore ways in which this research leads to a range of management options for historic interiors.

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