

Background and Context

In the afternoon of 15 June, half an hour of torrential rain and hail fell, blocking gutters. Water poured down the slopes towards the house, a baroque mansion, built from 1701 to 1704. The water flowed under the front door, moved through the house, and damaged part of the ground floor. Part of the roof acted as a swimming pool and water was not able to drain away quickly enough. Water cascaded down one of the staircases and dripped off light fittings. Water had poured in through the roof, down one corner of Lady Crewe's Sitting Room on the top floor, then down into the Boudoir and the back of the shelves in the Library. Carpets in both these rooms were wet in various areas. Water also collected in an under floor duct in the Entrance Hall and was pumped out a few days afterwards.

How the Topic was Handled

- The property staff acted very quickly activating the Emergency Plan.
- The electricity was turned off, water was swept away from the ground floor, and collections at risk were removed to unaffected areas within the house.
- 20-30 people were on site in a very short space of time, including members of the Emergency Salvage Team. Those National Trust staff who attended included the Property Manager, House Staff, Gardeners, Wardens, Building Manager, Conservators, Area Manager, Regional Director, Curator, and Visitor Services Manager.
- Rooms in unaffected areas were used as safe areas for damaged contents and those at risk. Polythene was laid on the floor for books and textiles.
- Some staff remained on site until around 9.30pm the first evening.
- Floor boards were lifted to assist drying and air movement, and days later, wet rubble was removed from under floorboards; fans were hired along with dehumidifiers. Fans and dehumidifiers were in use for in excess of four weeks.
- Contents: Textiles, such as carpets were blotted with absorbent materials and raised on milk crates to increase the air circulation and aid drying. Furniture was raised on polythene covered blocks and, when the house opened to the public, was placed on Melinex (polyurethane protective sheeting) to protect from the still damp floor. Books were separated out, and a team of volunteers set up to change blotting paper as it became wet. This continued for several weeks afterwards. Wet books were bagged and placed in a freezer to be treated later.
- Were able to turn the electricity on the next day, after it was deemed safe after inspection by an electrician.
- The Fire Service did attend and offered to help, but the situation was under control.
- The Territory Conservator arranged visits from Conservation Advisers. The Head Conservator and Conservation Advisers were on

site within a day to assess the damage to contents. Advice was also given by the Preventive Conservation Adviser, Environment.

- Gave the Media a press release the next day and invited the regional television company to the site a week later.
- Non historic textiles, including druggets (protective covering for floors), were sent to a commercial company for cleaning and were returned 3 weeks later.
- Opened to the public about one month later.
- Have introduced A3 panels in many of the rooms giving the public information about the events at the time, and subsequently.
- Three months later, the moisture content of the structure is still being monitored as the building dries.

Lessons Identified

- Essential to have an analogue phone in the Emergency Equipment Store, as a backup when digital systems fail with the loss of electricity supply.
- The Emergency Plan must be flexible.
- Access to the site was easy only for those with a 4 wheel drive, and would have been impossible for those with small cars.
- Take photographs all the time: during, a few days afterwards, and a few weeks afterwards.
- Mould can occur weeks afterwards, and surfaces have to be monitored carefully in order to detect early signs of mould growth.
- The benefits of having a well stocked Emergency Store and a National Trust Emergency trailer located on site – around £1,000 worth of materials were used in the salvage operation.
- The benefits of managing the media well.
- Have purchased a supply of sandbags.
- Archaeologists have identified the course of an earlier drainage system in the area in front of the house, and may re-instate to reduce the effects of future downpours.

Contacts for Further Information

Preventive Conservation Adviser (Technical)

Tel: 01793 817771

Website: [National Trust](#) [External website]