



June 2000

V & A's HEAD OF CONSERVATION AWARDED PLOWDEN MEDAL

Dr Jonathan Ashley-Smith, Head of Conservation at the Victoria and Albert Museum, has been awarded this year's Plowden Medal by The Royal Warrant Holders Association in recognition of his significant contribution to the advancement of the conservation profession. Dr Ashley-Smith will be presented with the Medal by The Rt Hon The Lord Weatherill at The Royal Warrant Holders luncheon in London on 6 June.

The gold medal, inaugurated last year, is awarded by The Royal Warrant Holders Association in memory of the late Hon. Anna Plowden, CBE, the leading conservator who was President Elect of the Association at the time of her death in 1997. The medal is awarded annually to recognise the individual who has made the most significant recent contribution to the advancement of the conservation profession. It can also be awarded to recognise a lifetime of commitment and achievement within the profession.

Dr Ashley-Smith (53) is recognised as the outstanding conservation thinker of his generation. Throughout his career he has always been willing to question the status quo while remaining dedicated to developing conservation as a core activity of museums and heritage bodies. Through his publications and presentations he has demonstrated that conservation is both a service and a fascinating way of learning more about objects and the changes they undergo.

As Head of Conservation at the V & A he actively encourages his staff to carry out research, to publish, and develop partnerships and training programmes. His

leadership has resulted in the Museum's Conservation Department being recognised as an international centre of excellence with new conservation laboratories which are arguably the best in the world. A staunch defender of museum conservation, Dr Ashley-Smith has nevertheless endeavoured to break down the barriers between public sector and private conservation work.

Dr Ashley-Smith's published work includes the ground breaking 'Risk Assessment for Object Conservation', published last year. Widely read by the conservation profession, it is regarded as essential reading for anyone involved with finance in the arts. As well as this global contribution to conservation Dr Ashley-Smith continues to manage his large department through the heavy workload imposed by the size and complexities of the V & A's British Galleries Project.

Comments Michael Skinner, President of The Royal Warrant Holders Association, "Awarding the Plowden Medal to Dr Ashley-Smith is particularly appropriate as he was a close friend of Anna Plowden, sat with her on the Crafts Council Conservation Committee and was chairman of UKIC when Anna was Vice Chairman. The Conservation Register, the work of the Conservation Unit at the Museums and Galleries Commission and the professional accreditation of conservators owe much to their visionary and controversial mutual work in the 1980s."

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Note to Editors:

Anna Plowden was a founding partner of Plowden & Smith Ltd, one of the world's largest commercial conservation enterprises. Granted a Royal Warrant of Appointment to HM The Queen in 1982 and to HM Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother ten years later, Anna was elected to the Council of the Royal Warrant Holders Association in 1990.

Jonathan Ashley-Smith, BScHons, PhD, Cchem

After graduating in chemistry from Bristol University Dr Ashley-Smith undertook two years research at Cambridge University before joining the Victoria and Albert Museum's Conservation Department in 1973 as conservator/scientist. In 1977 he was appointed to his present post as Head of Conservation. The Department has 50 permanent staff and 20 post graduate students. Its main functions are assessing the condition of objects, practical conservation and restoration, scientific research and routine analysis, monitoring the Museum's environment, post-graduate conservation training and research, and providing conservation information and advice.

Throughout his career Dr Ashley-Smith has sat on numerous technical, grant awarding, professional and academic bodies. He was Chairman of UKIC 1983-4, and Chairman of its Professionalism Committee which prepared the document 'Standards of Conduct in Conservation'. He was on the Museums and Galleries Commission Conservation Panel 1984-5 and the MGC's Conservation Unit Research Policy Working Group 1990-93. He was on the committee that prepared the pre-prints for the 1999 ICOM Conservation Committee conference meeting in Lyon, and is currently a Board Member of the Cultural Heritage National Training Organisation.

The V & A/RCA Conservation course, which Dr Ashley-Smith launched 12 years ago saw the graduation of its first PhD student last year.

His many publications include 'Let's be Honest', 'Response and Responsibility' and 'Photographic conservation – is there a problem?', all questioning the status quo and challenging dogma. Dr Ashley-Smith was also responsible for founding the V & A Conservation Journal for which he continues to provide editorial.

He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Chemistry, the Museums Association and the International Institute for Conservation and an Honorary Fellow of the Royal College of Art. Married with one son and a daughter, his home is in Cambridge.