

## Salvage planning for the Henry VIII exhibition

By Sarah Hamlyn, Senior Preservation Coordinator at the British Library



*Above: Head of Exhibitions, Alan Sterenberg, installing a roll of fire-retardant fabric above a 16th century Belgian tapestry*

The British Library has long-established disaster preparedness procedures designed to prevent incidents from occurring whilst ensuring that there is an appropriate response in the event of an emergency. These procedures apply whether collection items are housed in storage, in transit, in use, or on display.

A good example of salvage planning relates to the current Henry VIII: Man and Monarch exhibition. The exhibition, which runs from 23 April to 6 September 2009, brings together rarely displayed British Library collection items with 128 additional objects that have been borrowed from other institutions. These items range from armour, altarpiece fragments and globes

through to panel paintings, manuscripts, and a very large tapestry.

Close liaison between the Exhibitions department, the Loans Registrar's team, Exhibition Liaison conservator and the Salvage Planning Team ensured that there was a good understanding of the design of the exhibition, the types of objects on display, and any special environmental conditions that they required and the risks that any object may face because of its shape, condition or size.

In this exhibition the risks are minimised because all objects, except the tapestry, are enclosed in some way, either in exhibition cases, custom built enclosures or in frames.

The 16<sup>th</sup> century Belgian tapestry, The Triumph of Chastity over Love, on loan from the Victoria & Albert Museum was too large and heavy to be enclosed – it is four metres high by nearly nine metres wide and weighs an impressive 71 kg.



*Above: Conservators, Martyn Jones and Gary Kelly, unrolling the fire-retardant fabric*

Given the size and shape of the tapestry, in an emergency situation the safest course of action would be to protect it insitu until it could be removed by specialist art handlers. In order to ensure that there was adequate protection in place while it was on display, the team decided to secure rolls of fire retardant fabric on top of

the supporting wall. This material is light and can also protect the tapestry against water ingress. The white colour of the material also blends with the visual appearance of the tapestry. In an emergency the rolls can be released to provide protection to the whole object.

Prior to the exhibition opening, the Salvage Team were led on a familiarization tour by the Head of Exhibitions and Assistant Loans Registrar so that they could see the layout and exhibits. Team members were asked to complete a short exercise to ensure that they could easily locate emergency equipment, access routes and vulnerable items. This exercise provides beneficial refresher training and is a process that we undertake every time there is a new exhibition.



*Above: Head of Exhibitions, Alan Sterenberg, leading the Salvage Team on a familiarisation tour*