

# CELEBRATING CANADA'S FATHER OF CONSERVATION

In Tribute to  
Philip R. Ward,  
Conservator  
(1926-2019)

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Philip Ward, Canada's father of conservation, championed his profession in museums and on behalf of the protection of cultural heritage nationwide. His title, (bestowed on him by Dennis Alford, former Curator of Collections for Ethnology at the Canadian Museum of Civilization which is now the Canadian Museum of History) acknowledges his four decades of advocacy, expertise, research and educational achievements. Ward is especially remembered in BC for his conservation of Indigenous monumental art, notably totem poles, and his holistic, practical understanding of the field.

Ward's museum career began in the Department of Oriental Antiquities at the British Museum (BM) in 1955. There, he had the opportunity to work under the tutelage of Harold Plenderleith, Keeper of the Research Laboratory, and his colleague and successor, chemist Dr. Tony Werner, in what was a new and scientific approach to preservation. Ward, an artist himself, was able to integrate art and science into his work at the BM. He did this through treating artefacts or illustrating collections, as exemplified in his ink drawings for the 1963 BM *Handbook to the Collection of Early Chinese Antiquities*.

In 1966, Ward made his trans-Atlantic transition to the British Columbia Provincial Museum (now Royal BC Museum), where he founded the Conservation Division, which included the first conservation laboratory west of Toronto. He worked tirelessly to learn about his new home province and country. Ward, along with curators and Indigenous colleagues, conducted early field surveys of Pacific Northwest monumental art in order to better understand their environmental and preservation issues. He stressed the vital importance of collaboration, advocating for carving programs that engaged Indigenous artists and respected cultural traditions.

To meet the growing demand for conservation services, Ward expanded his staff; first recruiting Chris Russell, former colleague from the BM, and later training volunteers and interns who were among them the first Canadian-trained professionals in the field. From the outset, he emphasized the role of conservation as an essential element to museum collections care, and a key component in museum culture. Ward integrated conservation staff into field expeditions, and curatorial research as well as exhibition planning, design, and installation.

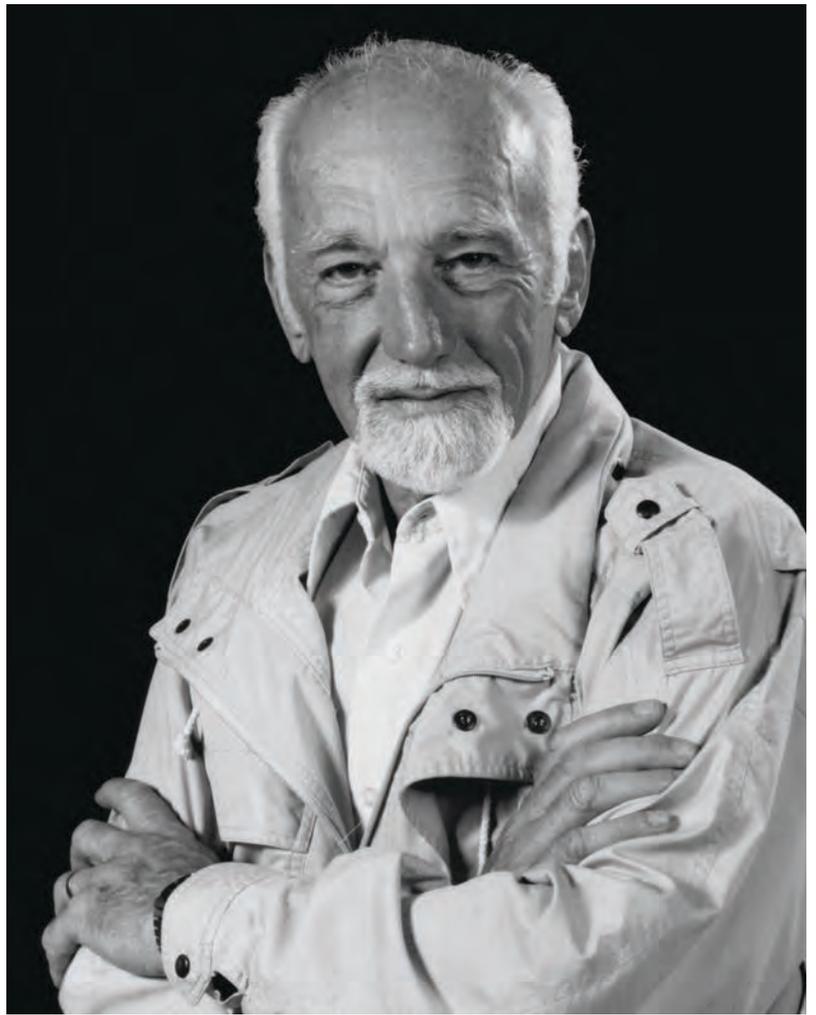
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As part of his provincial mandate, Ward regularly visited and consulted with small community museums. His personal dedication to the BCMA was demonstrated in his regular attendance at annual conferences and his development of educational resources and seminars for members. His practical manuals addressed important and relevant topics, including insect control and the support of collections in storage and display. In the early 1970s, he went on to design and teach the first *Conservation of Antiquities* course at the University of Victoria.

In 1977, Ward took on a leadership role at the Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI) within the Canadian Department of Heritage. He held positions as Director, Conservation Services (1977-1980); Senior Conservation Advisor (1980-1988); and Director, Information and Extension Services (1988-1990). He played a prominent role in the development of CCI's Mobile Laboratory Program. By bringing centrally based conservators and conservation scientists to clients across the country, this innovative approach ensured that CCI's recommendations for the care of collections were sensitive to, and appropriate for, a diversity of local conditions. As a result, this approach facilitated their acceptance and practice. Trust and confidence grew between conservators and the communities served, with resulting collaborations laying the groundwork for outreach publications, such as the *CCI Notes*, which Ward enthusiastically supported.



Throughout his career, Ward actively promoted policies to ensure that conservators would be recognized in positions parallel to those of curators and scientists in related fields. His efforts helped to advance the professionalism of the field and to strengthen the role of conservation within museums, galleries, and archives in Canada and abroad.

Philip Ward succeeded in all his endeavours as a conservator, scholar and educator, simply by being himself: committed, learned and humble. His efforts have established conservation as a recognized profession in the preservation of Canada's tangible and intangible heritage. All of us in the museum field share in the privilege of perpetuating this work, no matter our roles. Together, let us remember our champion and perpetuate his legacy.