



Archives & Records  
Association  
UK & Ireland

December 2012

No: 280

ISSN: 1745-2120

# ARcmagazine

archives • records management • conservation

[www.archives.org.uk](http://www.archives.org.uk)



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We're working hard to improve the website and make it the one-stop-shop for everything you need to know about your Association and the archive and record-keeping world.

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WELCOME **ARC**



## EDITORIAL

**W**elcome to the December issue of *ARC*.

This month focuses on Preservation and Conservation. Unfortunately, we can't tell you a great deal about how to preserve your sanity and conserve your waistlines over the Christmas period, but we are able to bring you some interesting articles about what has been happening in the world of archive conservation.

Stuart Welch reports on the Montefiascone Book Conservation Summer School, and Louise Vaile gives us an outline of the Adhesives training course held in June. Karen Vidler explains some of the potential problems with the use of leather dressings, Mark Allen takes us through the re-backing of case bound cloth books and we also have Kate Bailey on her research into a collection of Chinese watercolours at the RHS.

But perhaps one of the most inspiring articles this month is Shirley Jones' account of West Yorkshire Archives' rescue of flooded textile pattern books. As Shirley rightly points out, the salvage of the books shows "how resilient archives can be", but it also shows how resilient, tenacious and resourceful conservators can be.

In other features, we're bringing you news on Manchester Library and Archives, centenary celebrations at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, a newly catalogued collection at the National Monuments Record of Wales, and we take a look at heritage education in Northamptonshire.

Many thanks to all our contributors for taking the time to write for us; we hope Santa rewards you well. A very Happy Christmas to you all!

**Ceri Forster, Sarah Norman, Richard Wragg, Rose Roberto and Gary Collins**

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Preservation and Conservation Special Issue cover images:

Main: Chinese Drawings of Plants' vol.3:Page 73. Courtesy of the Royal Horticultural Society.

Top: Monitoring the relative humidity. Shirley Jones, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

Middle: Pittenween, Scotland - The Giles: coloured line copy (FHA04/11/02). © RCAHMS.

Bottom:Scholarship winner 2012 Shaun Thompson. Photograph by Stuart Welch.

**ARC Magazine is the monthly publication that is published by the Archives & Records Association (UK and Ireland)**

Prioryfield House  
20 Canon Street  
Taunton  
Somerset  
TA1 1SW  
Tel: 01823 327030

Registered Company No: 2969472

Registered Charity No: 1041063

Registered Charity in Scotland No: SC041674

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### DISCLAIMER

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# Opening Lines



Julian Thomas was awarded the MBE for services to Conservation Science and Bookbinding in the 2012 New Year Honours List. This came after more than 41 years service to the National Library of Wales' Conservation Department and in May this year Julian was elected to Life Membership of the ARA in recognition of his career and services to Archive Conservation and the Society's Archive Conservation Training Scheme.

Here he reflects on the changing face of conservation.

After leaving school at 17 I knew I wanted to work with my hands and my careers master suggested a choice of three different career paths; signwriting, becoming an apprentice saddler; or working in the bindery at the National Library of Wales. So it was back in 1969 that I first walked through the doors of the Bindery to begin a four-year apprenticeship as a bookbinder. On my first morning I was given a guided tour of the building and in the afternoon I was shown how to mix paste and spent the afternoon pasting pieces of paper together just to get familiar with the brush and how damp paper reacted. The binders also undertook paper and parchment conservation in addition to rebinding. At that time, emphasis was not always put on preserving original bindings, as is the case today, and over the years many cheap 19th century bindings and wrappers were discarded and everything was bound in a standard split board library style binding. We would make 1000 endpapers at a time and split boards in different sizes, it was a repetitive job that at times could be very laborious.

During the late 1970s the Welsh Office evaluated the binders' posts at the National Library of Wales that resulted in the

binders being upgrading from Technician to Conservation Officer grading. Similar job inspections were occurring elsewhere within the profession and with this came a re-examination of conservation practices and an awareness of the need to extend one's knowledge as a conservator. New trainee conservators replaced retiring binders and the Society of Archivists Annual Conferences played an important role in educating conservators from regional as well as national archives.

In the early 1980s I became an instructor for the Society of Archivists Training Scheme for Conservators and trained 51 trainees through the scheme that continues to play a pivotal role in educating conservators. Reduced funding and the availability of online archive databases have led to job losses and a situation where there are fewer training opportunities for conservators. I therefore hope that the ARA's Training Scheme for Conservators survives into the future, continuing the crucial function of training conservators.

Conservation is constantly evolving and as such the philosophy behind its principles and practice are changing alongside. Although I am aware that large scale

digitisation is beyond the resources of regional archive offices, as an experienced conservator I am also aware that even the most sensitive treatment of an item will invariably change its character and appearance. I do think that digitisation in many cases is a better approach to preserving the original and is the way forward, provided that the original can be stabilized and stored appropriately. However, although preserving and accessing the intellectual content of an item is important, the physical can hold an enormous amount of important information that can't be gleaned from just the intellectual content. This is why there will always be a need for the conservator and the wealth of knowledge and traditional craft skills they possess.

# Collecting Matters

You may already know that The National Archives supports and advises on grants for acquisition and cataloguing, but were you aware of funding available for conservation too?

The National Manuscripts Conservation Trust (NMCT) offers grants for the conservation and preservation of manuscripts and archives. The NMCT has more funds available than ever before, thanks to grants from The Pilgrim Trust, The J. Paul Getty Jr. Trust, The Dulverton Trust and The Garfield Weston Foundation - so now is a good time to apply.

The next deadline for the submission of applications is 1 April 2013.

Grants can cover conservation, binding and other preservation measures. This includes digitisation, provided it is part of a wider conservation project. Serious consideration will be given to the significance of the collection detailed in the application, and the conservation treatment proposed. The National Archives will also offer its expert opinion to help inform the Trustees' decision-making. For applications from Wales, CyMAL provides similar expert opinion and match funding too.

Applications are submitted on a form which you can download at [www.nmct.co.uk](http://www.nmct.co.uk). If, having consulted the website, you have any queries about whether your project is eligible, please do contact the Trust Manager, Mrs. Nell Hoare, either directly through the NMCT website or at [nmct@thetrustpartnership.com](mailto:nmct@thetrustpartnership.com).

With more funds available and an increased chance of your being successful, surely it's an opportunity not to be missed?

.....  
**James Travers**

Casework Manager, The National Archives  
.....

[asd@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:asd@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk)

[www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/information-management/policies/collection-strategies.htm](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/information-management/policies/collection-strategies.htm)

# Registration Scheme News

## New Enrolments

We welcome the following new candidates to the Registration Scheme and wish them good luck with their progress:

**Kiara King,**

Assistant Archivist, Ballast Trust, University of Glasgow

**Katy Iliffe,**

Archivist, Sedbergh School

**Leanne Jobling,**

Online Resource Archivist, National Records of Scotland

**Sophie Stewart,**

Archivist, National Co-operative Archive, Manchester

**Fiona Cormack,**

Project Archivist, National Jazz Archive, London

**Amy Proctor,**

Senior Information Officer, London Metropolitan Archives

## Contacts

**General Registration Scheme Enquiries:**

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**Registration Scheme Admin and Bursaries:**

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**Registration Scheme Communications Officer:**

[<regschemecomms@archives.org.uk>](mailto:regschemecomms@archives.org.uk)

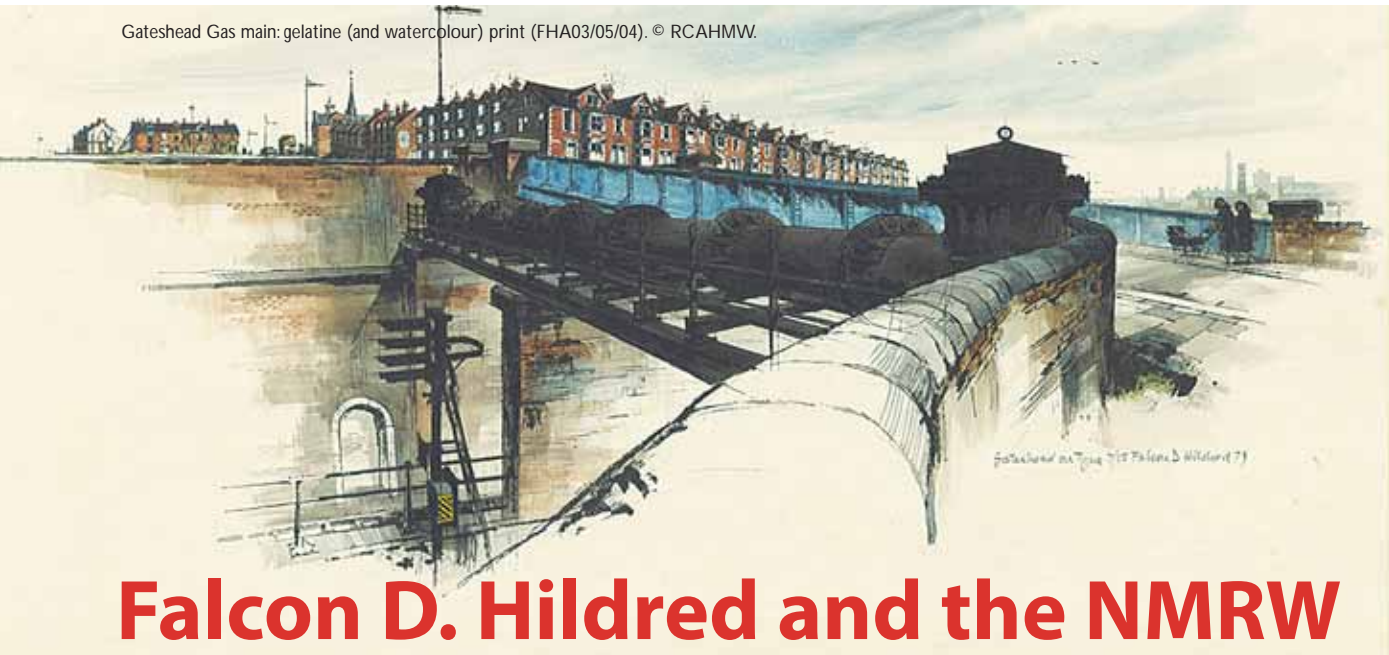
**Registration Scheme Mentor Queries and Advice:**

[<regscheme Mentors@archives.org.uk>](mailto:regscheme Mentors@archives.org.uk)

.....  
**Richard Wragg**

Communications Officer, Registration Sub-committee  
.....

Gateshead Gas main: gelatine (and watercolour) print (FHA03/05/04). © RCAHMW.



## Falcon D. Hildred and the NMRW

### Falcon Hildred

The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales (RCAHMW), working in partnership with the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust, and with support from the Heritage Lottery Fund, have acquired a unique collection of original drawings of industrial buildings and landscapes by the Wales-based artist Falcon Hildred. Within the remit of 'The Falcon Hildred Access and Learning Project' (a collaborative-working partnership between the RCAHMW and the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust) the collection has been conserved and catalogued as part of the National

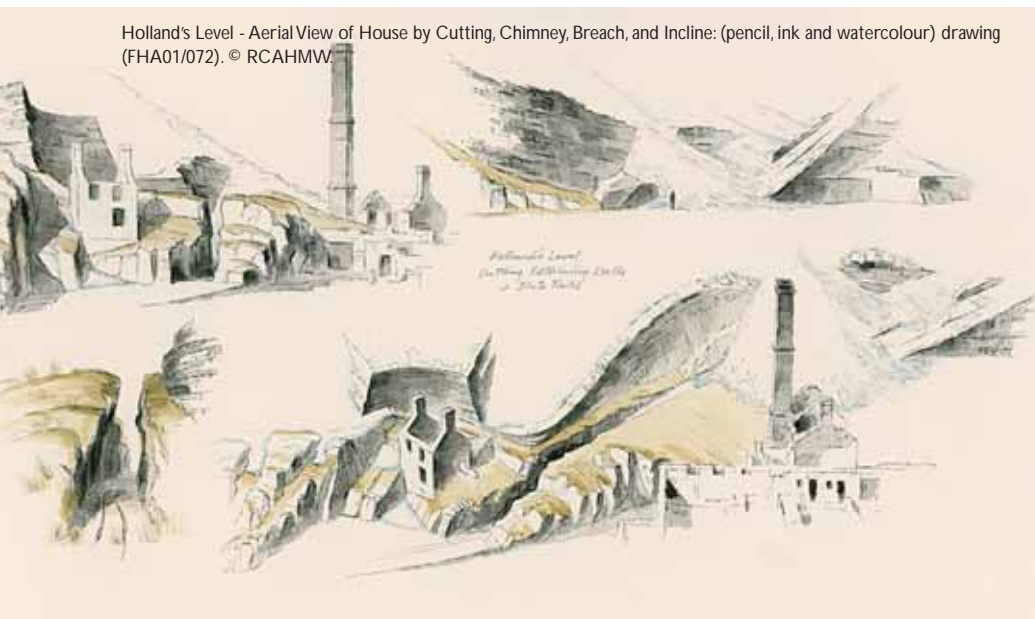
Monument Record of Wales. This forms the first stage of a co-ordinated plan for enhancing access to the material through a programme of digitisation, exhibition and education across Wales and England.

Falcon David Hildred has dedicated his working life to recording 19th and 20th century industrial buildings and landscapes, producing works of high aesthetic, historic and social value. His work records, in accurate detail, technological and engineering advancements made over that time. He trained at the Royal College of Art, where he obtained a medal

of distinction in 1960, and was subsequently elected an honorary member of the Society of Architects in Wales. Commissioned works are held by Cadw and various museums including the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust, the National Museum of Wales, and Newport Museum and Art Gallery.

The collection spans the period 1956-2012 and comprises over 600 original drawings and prints, mainly in pencil, ink, and watercolour. They record the industrial landscape of Blaenau Ffestiniog (Hildred's home since 1969), and industrial towns in Wales and England (Cardiff, Overton-on-Dee, Grimsby, London, Coventry, and many more). The collection also includes drawings of transport and engineering related features (machinery, garages, etc), along with rural life and industry, houses, churches and chapels, Hildred's student and early work, design commissions, Scottish landscapes, and scenes from holidays. The drawings are accompanied by Hildred's research files relating to Blaenau Ffestiniog, slides pertaining to exhibitions, his working scrapbooks, index cards pertaining to each drawing, and a compiled list of work. The images provide a wonderfully evocative and immensely fascinating insight into

Holland's Level - Aerial View of House by Cutting, Chimney, Breach, and Incline: (pencil, ink and watercolour) drawing (FHA01/072). © RCAHMW.





Pittenween, Scotland - The Giles: coloured line copy (FHA04/11/02). © RCAHMW.



Moelwyn Mill, Blaenau Ffestiniog: (pencil and watercolour) design, showing part-conversion to flat (FHA02/40/01). © RCAHMW.



a rapidly disappearing world, and serve to enhance existing written and photographic records through the provision of a personal-vision inspired perspective.

The collection is available online via the NMRW catalogue at [www.coflein.gov.uk](http://www.coflein.gov.uk), and for personal consultation at the NMRW's reading room in Aberystwyth. Digitised copies are also held at the Ironbridge Gorge Museum ([www.ironbridge.org.uk](http://www.ironbridge.org.uk)). Selected images are available via the People's Collection Wales website [www.peoplescollection.co.uk](http://www.peoplescollection.co.uk).

A recently published book entitled *Worktown: The drawings of Falcon Hildred* highlights images from the collection, and details the artist's working practices and philosophy. The collection, and research relating to it, will form the basis of an exhibition at the Ironbridge Gorge Museum from 11 October 2012 to 31 March 2013. Further exhibitions will be shown at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, and the North Wales Slate Museum, Llanberis.

Further details are available from the NMRW/ RCAHMW at [www.rcahmw.gov.uk](http://www.rcahmw.gov.uk), email [nmr@rcahmw.gov.uk](mailto:nmr@rcahmw.gov.uk).

### The NMRW

The National Monuments Record of Wales (NMRW) is the archive of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Wales (RCAHMW). It holds the national collection of information relating to the historic environment of Wales, dating from the earliest times to the present day.

The collection comprises site files (the main record files series of the RCAHMW), photographic material (c.2 million images, including vertical and oblique aerials), maps (including c.30,000 O.S. maps), drawings (c.12,000), special collections, and a rapidly expanding digital archive. The NMRW also maintains a specialist library which aims to provide published sources to complement the information available in the archive.

A considerable part of the specialist collections relate to archaeological sites and investigations undertaken in Wales, although many other types of sites and properties are also represented. The digital archive is, as one would expect, the fastest growing of the collections. Comprising digital photographs, texts, and surveys produced by the Royal Commission and/or external sources,

“The images provide a wonderfully evocative and immensely fascinating insight into a rapidly disappearing world”

these are made available for download, wherever possible, directly from the NMRW online catalogue, Coflein: [www.coflein.gov.uk](http://www.coflein.gov.uk).

The website [www.rcahmw.gov.uk](http://www.rcahmw.gov.uk) also provides access to online teaching and learning materials, and links to selected websites, via the Learning Resources section.

.....  
**Lynne Moore**

RCAHMW, Aberystwyth  
.....

# Highlighting Heritage

Lynn Scarsbrook writes on another successful year at Northamptonshire Record Office's Heritage Education Service.

The last 15 months were busy for the Heritage Education Service at Northamptonshire Record Office. The numbers are rising rapidly with over 3000 people using our service between July and September 2011 alone. There are a number of reasons for our success, for example, it is becoming more common to work with a whole school and spend more time in schools. Another aspect of our success has been joint partnership events to highlight aspects of our county's heritage.

A case study of Chester Farm, a 34 hectare heritage site covering more than 2000 years of Northamptonshire's history, illustrates many different aspects of working in partnership with colleagues to enhance the offer we make to schools and the general public. The site contains the remains of an Iron Age settlement, a walled Roman town and its suburbs, ancient fields and parkland, a deserted medieval village and areas of more recent ironstone extraction. At its centre is an important complex of farm buildings dating back to the 17th century or earlier, an orchard, and a former kitchen garden. Northamptonshire County Council is making detailed plans for the future. We want to develop the site and make it a place that, through education, learning and enjoyment, adds value to people's lives, and helps them to appreciate Northamptonshire's outstanding heritage.

Since 2010 we have worked in partnership with colleagues in country parks, archaeology and heritage to deliver Heritage Open Day activities for families to highlight the hidden heritage of Chester Farm. Children and adults alike enjoyed seeing copies of original documents, writing with a quill pen and using watercolour pencils to recreate the Victorian landscape of Chester Farm based on original sketches by George Clark of Scaldwell.



Top: Detail from Map 605 showing Chester Farm estate in 1756. © Northamptonshire County Council Record Office.

Bottom: Young visitors using water colours to recreate the Victorian landscape of Chester Farm based on original pencil sketches by George Clark of Scaldwell, September 2011 © Northamptonshire County Council Record Office.

The next step in exploring archives to create a wider appeal for the site was to create a teachers' resource, entitled 'Farming through the centuries'. The resource, although not specific to Chester Farm, used a variety



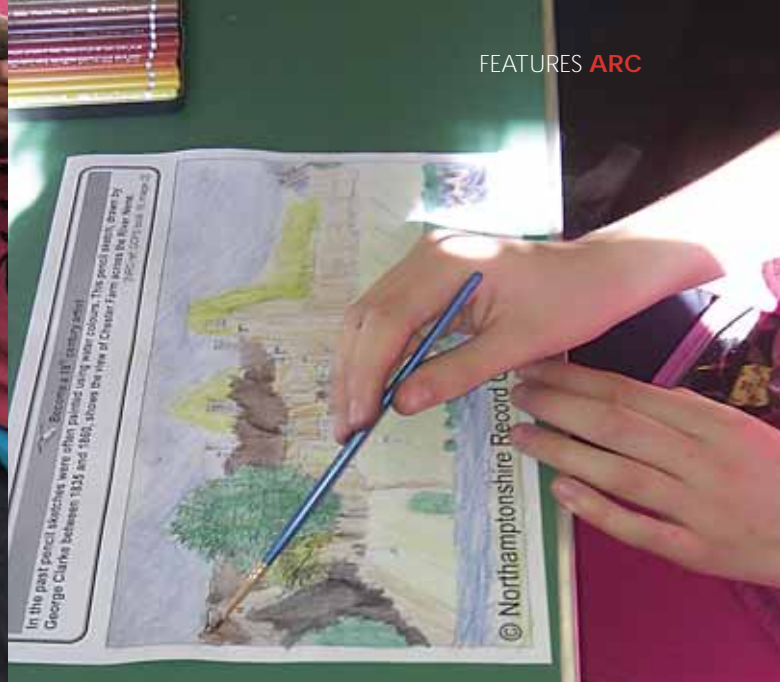


School children investigating Roman finds on site at Chester Farm, October 2012 © Northamptonshire County Council.

of records from our collections to show how farming has changed from medieval times to the 20th century. The idea was to spark people's imagination about how farming (and society) has changed over the centuries, which can be followed by an educational visit to the heritage site once it is open to the public.

In January 2012 we piloted educational sessions specifically related to Chester Farm in a local primary school. Working with 100 children, the day began with an assembly introducing them to the importance of the heritage site at Chester Farm, recent developments and plans for the future. This was followed by sessions with individual classes.

The idea behind the lessons was to use a technique called 'Talk for Writing' to plan a multi-sensory piece of creative writing to bring the past to life. Children used large copies of a 1756 map of the estate as a stimulus for writing. The map shows Chester House at the centre of a small landscaped park with formal walled and terraced gardens, an avenue of trees and even a garden temple set on top of the Roman defences. Children discussed what they could see and its context, for example thinking about what might have been grown in a kitchen garden. We discussed the journeys people may have taken over the year, for example visiting the osier bed by the river to collect materials to make the basket that was used to collect fruit from the walled fruit garden, and using items from the kitchen garden to make soaps to wash clothes that got mucky collecting fruit. To develop their writing, children were encouraged to think about sounds, scents and feelings that might be associated with what it would have been like for someone living or working at Chester Farm in the 18th century, recording their ideas and beginning



Young visitors using water colours to recreate the Victorian landscape of Chester Farm based on original pencil sketches by George Clark of Scaldwell, September 2011 © Northamptonshire County Council Record Office.

“  
if we can inspire and enthuse  
creativity and imagination in the  
children we meet and teach, then  
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their learning.”

to generate sentences. Exploring the stories within an original document helped the children develop an enriched vocabulary and enhanced meaning to produce some fantastic writing samples. The day was very successful and feedback said “Brilliant, every child enjoyed the initial talk and class tasks ... Thanks - [we] will use again!”

In October 2012 I had the opportunity to work with the children again as part of a project related to an archaeological excavation for children and young people at Chester Farm (but that's a story for another article!). Nine months later they recalled the earlier session and were able to revisit the 1756 map in context adding yet another dimension to partnership working and their learning.

When working with schools it is not just what we do during the time we are there that is important; it is also about the legacy we leave. Things do not change dramatically in an hour but if we can inspire and enthuse creativity and imagination in the children we meet and teach, then we can have a positive impact on their learning.

.....  
**Lynn Scarsbrook**

Northamptonshire Record Office  
.....

# The Cardigan Continuum

A reading group? A support group? An underground movement?

Sarah Demb and Nicole Convery explain all...

## Who are we and what do we 'do'?

The Cardigan Continuum was born out of a desire to discuss professional literature, trends and concepts with like-minded people in a relaxed environment. It is seen as a 'self-help group' for those souls who cannot help but agonise about archival context or the records continuum. The group aims to bring people together in a non-institutional context to get a discussion going and to network with others. The wide mix of people from archival, records management, museum and other backgrounds who attend meetings, contributes to an exchange of different views, opinions and experiences.

We meet on the first Monday of the month in a London pub to discuss a previously agreed text over a leisurely drink. Suggestions for the next text often emerge from a previous discussion, or come from participants either at the meeting or through comments on the Cardigan Continuum blog at [www.thecardigancontinuum.wordpress.com](http://www.thecardigancontinuum.wordpress.com). We are open to and actively try to include 'text' in all its various guises and have discussed newspaper articles, blog posts and podcasts amongst others. The group aims to read and discuss a mixture of academic and other professional writing and does not shy away from the unusual or eccentric, if it addresses a professional interest.

In order to open up the debate and engage with those not able to attend meetings in London, we also discuss the chosen texts on Twitter on the last Monday of every month. Discussions start at 8 pm and can be followed by anyone with a Twitter account, via the hashtag #cardcont. We crowdsource 5 questions every month and discuss them online with a wide range of participants who are attracted by the topic.

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The group aims to read and discuss a mixture of academic and other professional writing and does not shy away from the unusual or eccentric, if it addresses a professional interest.

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## Who is it for?

The group is open to everyone with an interest in archives or records management related topics. It does not matter whether you are new to the profession, not in the profession at all or an 'old hand' who has seen it all before. We like a good mix of people to share views and experiences, and to learn from and with each other. The group is, apart from a hardy few, relatively fluid and new people come along every month. You should come along too, if you:

- are looking for some like-minded company
- need a little incentive to get reading professional literature
- have a burning issue that you would like to discuss with others
- just like to read, talk and make new friends in the archives and records management world.

## What have we read and discussed so far?

The inaugural meeting of The Cardigan Continuum took place on 24 June 2011 to discuss 'the right to be forgotten'. The feeling amongst the participants was that what was really at issue in the discussion was the re-negotiation of personal/professional boundaries within individuals' online identities. Subsequent meetings have discussed, amongst other things:

- the archives and records management blogosphere
- David Bearman's article *Moments of Risk: Identifying Threats to Electronic Records* - on which opinion was mixed, although there was some consensus that what was particularly valuable was Bearman's retrospective summary of early research activity into electronic records in the 1990s
- Caroline Williams' *Studying Reality: The Application of Theory in an Aspect of UK Practice*. This sparked off a lively debate, including the raising of that old question 'what is theory?' as well as others, such as 'are archivists of a more theoretical bent than records managers?'
- *MoReq2010* and its vision to make every business system a records management system

- *More Product, Less Process* by Mark Greene and Dennis Meissner and the evils of the paperclip
- a review of the Archives Accreditation Scheme 'destruction document', which led to a debate about how an 'archive' should be defined, something which was felt to be missing, and also about where the boundaries of eligibility would lie.

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a few debates and use them as  
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At other sessions, we have attempted a verdict as to whether or not FOI has met its stated objectives (based solely on anecdotal evidence) and considered the ARA Code of Conduct, noting that it is heavily based on the ICA Code of Ethics and discussing the purpose and audience for each. Most recently we passionately discussed the future of the profession based on recent North American and British blog posts.

#### What will be next?

We are hoping to attract more regular members to our monthly discussions and to keep the discussion of professional issues going. We are working on a competition to find a suitable logo for the Cardigan Continuum through our blog in the next few months, and are hoping for creative contributions from archives and records management professionals.

Based on a previous discussion about the lack of articles written by new professionals or practitioners in general, we would like to try and formalise a few debates and use them as a springboard for publication in peer-reviewed journals. This could happen through break-out collaborations between participants particularly interested in a certain topic following on from our monthly discussions.

As an open group, however, future direction will be decided by what the group members want it to be, because as it says on the blog: "A reading group or an underground movement bent on changing the world. You decide!"

#### Sarah Demb and Nicole Convery

The Cardigan Continuum Reading Group

All references to texts discussed can be found on the blog at [www.thecardigancontinuum.wordpress.com](http://www.thecardigancontinuum.wordpress.com)

# Archives+

The redevelopment of Manchester Central Library and Archives forges ahead, thanks to a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The Heritage Lottery Fund has awarded £1.55million to Manchester City Council to create a state-of-the-art archive centre at Manchester Central Library.

Manchester City Council is investing £48 million in extensively refurbishing the Grade II listed Central Library. The additional £1.55m from HLF for the Archives+ project will transform public access to archive and family history collections held by Manchester City Council and complementary partners, so that people from across the community will be inspired to learn about and explore the wealth of history captured in the collection.

Archives+ will bring Manchester's history alive, with interactive interpretation areas on the ground floor and exhibition showcases for rare books in the majestic domed Reading Room on the first floor. This will include viewing stations for film archives, and exhibitions telling the story of different aspects of Manchester's history. A new community exhibition space will be created in the lower ground floor.

“  
Our redesign of Central Library to  
transform it into a world-class centre is a  
step closer  
”





As part of the project, events will be offered through the archives and library, with hands-on activities and performances for families, young people and schools. New volunteer opportunities will also be created so that local people can get directly involved in the archives and the treasures.

Sara Hilton, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund North West, said: "We are delighted to support the groundbreaking Archives+ project at Manchester Central Library. Every aspect of Manchester's development as the world's first industrial city is captured here in these collections and thanks to this project, visitors from near and far will be able to explore and learn about the city's fascinating history."

Councillor Rosa Battle, Executive Member for Culture and Leisure said: "Our redesign of Central Library to transform it into a world-class centre is a step closer, with the award of this additional funding from Heritage Lottery Fund to create a centre of excellence for our unique archive collection."

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It will bring together the largest and most important archives from different Manchester venues  
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"Archives+ will give Mancunians and our visitors from around the world the chance to develop a fuller and richer understanding of the phenomenon that is Manchester and the people who have helped to shape its destiny over the centuries."

"It will bring together the largest and most important archives from different Manchester venues and it will give new audiences, including young people and schools, the opportunity to engage with and be inspired by the archives and treasures at Manchester Central Library."

The Archives+ collection has a wide variety of materials dating from the 12th century, including rare books, special collections, parchment, paper, leather-bound volumes, photographs, glass negatives and film.

Much of the collection relates to the industrial heritage of Manchester and family history. There are also important documents recording the city's social heritage, including the arrival of people of different nationalities, Manchester's role in the free trade movement, the country's first public library and the establishment of the Manchester Ship Canal.

Manchester was the first local authority to open a library supported by public rates and the Archives+ partnership promises to again break new ground in how the public can access archive and special collections, to learn about the story of the city and region.

.....  
**David Govier**

Manchester Libraries, Information and Archives  
.....

# 100 Up At The REP

Gary Collins tells us of plans to digitise archives from the Birmingham Repertory Theatre and explains the significance of the collections.

A project to help celebrate the 100th anniversary of one of the most important regional theatre companies in the UK has just started. One of the many aims of The REP 100 project is to digitise a selection of material from the Birmingham Repertory Theatre collections held at Birmingham Archives & Heritage and to make it available online. The items will come from The REP's archive and that of its founder Sir Barry Jackson.

Over 3000 records from The REP's historic productions - including photographs, letters, programmes, scripts, licenses, press cuttings, and plans - will be available on The REP 100 website ([www.rep100.org](http://www.rep100.org)) to coincide with the theatre's centenary in February 2013, and the move back to its refurbished location, which will be part of the new Library of Birmingham building due to open in September 2013. The website will be supported by exhibitions and performances based on archival material, and a programme of lectures, talks, walks, and a guided tour. Oral history and memories will be collected and collated by local people, and resource materials will be created for teachers, students, the general public, writers groups and local historians. There will also be games and quizzes and an opportunity for volunteers to get involved in all aspects of the project.

Highlights will include photographs of many famous actors who began their careers at The REP or appeared in plays there. These include Sir Laurence Olivier (who made his stage debut in Birmingham), Sir Derek Jacobi, Albert Finney, Julie Christie, Ralph Richardson, and Richard Chamberlain.



'First Impressions', the first Birmingham Repertory Theatre production in its new theatre at Broad Street, Birmingham. This was a musical adapted from a dramatisation of Jane Austen's 'Pride And Prejudice' and opened on 14 October 1971. The cast included Patricia Routledge and Gemma Craven. Photo by Willoughby Gullachsen, © Birmingham Libraries.

Built and founded by Sir Barry Jackson (1871-1961), The REP was the first purpose built repertory theatre in the UK and has a history of ground-breaking productions with significant playwrights and actors. Jackson was influential in the foundation of many arts organisations across Birmingham and the West Midlands, and in the development of the repertory theatre movement in the UK. REP 100 will show how Jackson and The REP broke new ground in many areas such as: providing opportunities for women (actors, writers and production staff); performing Shakespeare in modern dress (a performance of 'Cymbeline' in 1923 was the first Shakespeare production to be performed in modern dress, and this was followed two years later by the first modern dress performance of 'Hamlet'); performing new work (53 pieces of new writing were staged in the first decade at The REP); pioneering a series of live radio broadcasts in the 1930s; and offering directing opportunities (Sir Barry Jackson gave a young Peter Brook the chance to direct 'Measure For Measure' starring John Gielgud at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in Stratford in 1950).

There are four main themes for the project:

- 'Drama Queens' will explore The REP's long and positive history of encouraging and championing women working in theatre including playwrights, performers, administrative staff and directors.
- 'The Detail's in the Design' will show how design plays a critical role in theatre - from looking at original architectural plans for The REP's first building in Station Street, Birmingham, to the ideas behind the current building on Broad Street; and the design of programme covers, and costume and set designs created by theatre designers.
- 'Station Street to Stratford Via Malvern' will look at the journey from Jackson's background and involvement with the Pilgrim Players in 1909 to the Old Rep theatre on Station Street in 1913, and then Jackson's work at the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford, via the Malvern Festival, to the new Repertory Theatre on Broad Street in 1971 and up to the present day.



Sir Derek Jacobi in the Birmingham Repertory Theatre 1972 production of 'King Oedipus'. Photo by Willoughby Gullachsen, © Birmingham Libraries.

- 'Hidden Histories' will tell the story of The REP through different perspectives and use a wide range of archive material - in particular production photography, prompt scripts and publicity - to give audiences an alternative insight into the workings of a producing regional repertory theatre.

The REP 100 project has been made possible by a grant of £175,300 from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Trina Jones, General Manager of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre says that the project will not just be a celebration of The REP, but of the city and its place in British theatre history: "REP 100 will illustrate unique aspects of The REP's history. Our archives are of local, national and international importance and so the new online digital archive will allow people across the globe to learn about theatre history, Birmingham and British culture."

Reyahn King, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund in the West Midlands explains the importance of the award: "Birmingham Repertory Theatre holds a special place in many people's hearts and is an important part of the city's cultural history. Now, with this grant REP 100 will enable people of all ages to get involved and explore its remarkable stories of the stage so that they can be preserved for everyone's enjoyment for many years to come."

**Gary Collins**

REP 100 Archivist

# Welcome to the Preservation and Conservation issue

Welcome to this special Conservation and Preservation issue of ARC. Another exciting year has flown by, with many new developments in the profession. The ARA Section for Preservation and Conservation is leading the way with exceptional value training days, which have all been oversubscribed this year with conservators clamouring for places. The conservation stream at the conference was very successful and is continuing to provide high quality debate and wonderful networking opportunities.

As usual, a variety of relevant subjects have been covered in marvellous detail in this edition. The tale of how three conservation heroines rescued mould ravaged documents in danger is fascinating and an inspiration.

The structure and properties of cellulose ether-based adhesives Methyl cellulose, Hydroxy propyl cellulose and Carboxy methyl cellulose are all examined at a training day on adhesives. Beautiful Chinese botanical drawings are examined and researched in the Reeves collection illustrating the wide range of material that can be held in archives. The controversial subject of leather dressing is discussed and there is the latest news from the National Preservation Advisory Centre. Thank you so much to all the authors for their contributions, I hope you enjoy reading the articles as much as I have.

**Mark Allen**

Section for Preservation and Conservation Committee





Monitoring the relative humidity. Shirley Jones, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

# Trouble at Mill

Shirley Jones describes the salvage, freezing, drying and repackaging of flooded textile pattern books in West Yorkshire.

The winter of 2010-11 was certainly bleak. At West Yorkshire Archive Service, we thought we had survived the worst of the winter weather without major incident. Then in June, Conservation received a call from a local textile mill. They had just discovered that their collection of textile pattern books, dating back to the 19th century and held in a secure strong room had been flooded. Unbeknownst to them, water had secretly travelled from a burst pipe which had frozen back in December. The leak had caused other damage in the building, but had then tracked horizontally via the ceiling joists into the strong room. By the time it was discovered in late spring, a mould and insect infestation was well established.

Although the wet pattern books were still deteriorating, much of the damage had already been done. The mill was already making efforts with ventilation and a dehumidifier to begin the drying out process by the time we were invited to the premises. In our initial assessment, we counted the affected volumes and made on-site risk assessments relating to mould, manual handling and checks for asbestos. Taking photographs at this stage also proved useful when making estimates for materials and manpower.

The entire salvage operation had to be detailed, costed and agreed before we could begin any work. Planning, communication and organisation were definitely key

to its success. Fortunately we had the materials and resources required, and needed only to out-source the freezer facility. Essential to the salvage were:

- a van and driver
- quantities of cheap newsprint
- large transparent plastic sacks
- crates
- PPE (including gloves, masks, polypropylene suits)
- labels, masking tape, tying tape, scissors and pencils.

Due to the number of wet and damp volumes (60) and the infestation present, we advised freezing, both to buy time and kill the insects. We booked Doncaster Museum's facility which was able to accommodate the required number of crates.

Drying damaged sample books. Shirley Jones, West Yorkshire Archive Service





Mould inside a book. Shirley Jones, West Yorkshire Archive Service.



Defrosting textile sample books. Shirley Jones, West Yorkshire Archive Service.

Live mould on a sample book. Shirley Jones, West Yorkshire Archive Service.



Conservators are usually familiar with the ravages mould can effect on archives, but we do not often see it in full growth. Textile pattern books are characteristically bulky. The volumes nearest the ceiling were swollen, jammed and rusted onto the shelves. Insects were wide-spread, enjoying the glue in the bindings. With compensation guards allowing for the thickness of the adhered small cloth samples, the pages were more open to the ingress of water. Green mould was still growing on the sodden and warped boards, the volumes being also very heavy due to their saturated state.

The mission of our three-woman salvage team was to package and transport the 60 volumes to Doncaster in one day. Wearing our PPE, we first labelled all the volumes to be taken using prepared strips, the number being allocated according to bay, shelf etc. One person then prised each volume away from its neighbour and shelf before wrapping in plain newsprint and masking tape to contain mould and insects. We intended to dry out the books closed, so a permeable wrapper was essential, labelled with a unique number. The wrapping team then double-bagged each volume in transparent plastic bags, excluding as much air as possible, then put it into a numbered crate. The crates quickly became very heavy and needed two people to lift them, luckily the mill workers pitched in for this bit.

We found working in a confined space with heavy items hard work, especially wearing masks and suits. It took longer than we thought, but we still managed to successfully deliver the collection to Doncaster by the end of the day, before taking a welcome break to plan the next stage.

At Wakefield, we fortunately had a cool, dark project room available, with

“  
Insects were wide-spread, enjoying the glue in the bindings.  
”

shelving capacity for the volumes. They required drying en masse, it being impractical to defrost, dry, and clean them one-by-one. The frozen packages were defrosted in their bags over a couple of days before removal of the plastic wrapping.

Each paper-wrapped volume was tied up between boards to prevent warping (tightened later as they dried and became less swollen) and placed on top of empty egg-shell trays to help ventilation. A dehumidifier and fans were run all day, every day for over two weeks, and the collected water monitored and recorded. A similar, dry, 'control' volume was kept in the room and used to compare relative humidity readings from inside the damaged text blocks.

The procedure was a success and the books are now in the process of being individually cleaned on the Bassaire using brushes and sponges. Most of the insides of the volumes have survived surprisingly intact, the covers acting as sponges and bearing most of the damage. Possibly due to the open nature of the pattern book text block, the pages drained better than in a more solid book. The cleaned books are being given a simple archival paper jacket and a tie for support.

The project was a challenge both logistically and practically, but it has also been professionally affirming to see how resilient archives can be.

.....  
**Shirley Jones**

West Yorkshire Archives  
.....

# Learning from the Ancients

Stuart Welch talks to Shaun Thompson, this year's recipient of the Nicholas Hadgraft Memorial Scholarship, about his experiences at the Montefiascone Book Conservation Summer School.

When books were slow to make, they were always bound with the finest of materials available in such a way as to make them comfortable to read and at the same time giving protection to the text block. There has always been a scholarly interest in the text but in recent years book conservators and scholars have developed a growing appreciation of the three dimensional book structure, i.e. the book's binding. Many ancient books suffered from rebinding in later centuries. This was usually done to show ownership and to fit the fashion of the day. Consequently the original bindings were cast aside. The original bindings which survived, through 'benign neglect' as Professor Nicholas Pickwoad once said, are now objects of historical and practical study. These early bindings demonstrate remarkable engineering, craft and knowledge of materials and were very successful vehicles for preserving the text and illuminations.

“The location for the Book Conservation Summer School is chosen specifically to offer a tranquil and inspiring atmosphere where students can go back to basics whilst learning.”

The Montefiascone summer school started by Cheryl Porter gives students the chance to make an in depth study

of a particular historic binding by reproducing it under the supervision of a master book conservator-scholar.

Situated in a medieval hill town next to Lake Bolsena and close to the beautiful Etruscan City of Orvieto, the world renowned Book Conservation Summer School in Montefiascone, Italy, is one place that students, skilled conservators and book binders can still go to learn about historic pigments and the intricacies of ancient bookbinding techniques. Held annually throughout the month of August, each week of the summer school features a different specialised course and tutor. However, with such a niche curriculum, places on the courses often come at a premium, and are keenly contested by those wanting to hone their skills base.

The location for the Book Conservation Summer School is chosen specifically to offer a tranquil and inspiring atmosphere where students can go back to basics whilst learning. The restored monastery setting perfectly mirrors the level of conservation skill and excellence that the course strives to achieve, with more than 40 delegates in attendance year on year.

Back in 2004, the Nicholas Hadgraft Memorial Scholarship was launched in order to help fund ongoing access to the important teaching work at the Montefiascone project. It is offered in memory of Dr Nicholas Hadgraft, a much applauded conservator, lecturer, and scholar of note who died suddenly in 2004 aged just 49 years old. The scholarship aims to fund the



Scholarship winner 2012 Shaun Thompson.  
Photograph by Stuart Welch.

cost of summer school tuition for one deserving applicant each year. In 2012, Shaun Thompson, a bookbinder at Cambridge University Library, was chosen as the lucky recipient of the Nicholas Hadgraft Memorial Scholarship. He states:

“I had applied for the Nicholas Hadgraft Scholarship on four previous occasions without success and had initially decided not to enter this year. However, colleagues and friends encouraged me to try again and I am so glad that I did. My experience at the summer school was one of great joy and enlightenment, and I would rate the courses there as some of the best I have ever taken.”





Nicholas Barker, Former Head of Conservation & Deputy Keeper at the British Library, presents Shaun Thompson with his certificate alongside course tutor Ana Beny. Photograph by Stuart Welch.



Shaun Thompson. Photograph by Stuart Welch.

Shaun attended two courses at the summer school. The first addressed Glazier Codex, a 5th and 6th century Coptic binding system, under the tuition of bench-trained conservator, Julia Miller, who shared her vast knowledge and experience in the subject through engaging practical workshops. The second explored the history of Spanish gothic wooden binding structures in the 'Mudejah' style. Led by freelance conservator and consultant, Ana Beny, the course covered areas of cross-cultural influence on Mudejah bindings, discussing the importance of such influences.

"These courses provided a hands-on approach which introduced the students to all the relevant steps involved in successful binding," added Shaun. "The training and skills I gained whilst undertaking the scholarship was outstanding. The guidance of the experienced and knowledgeable tutors, both in and out of class, gave the opportunity to engage in lively debate, creating a challenging and interesting environment for everyone.

"The Montefiascone summer school is unique as it offers the chance to interact with people from across the globe on a level playing field, and you know that they are all there for one purpose - to share their knowledge and gain experience. Such a diverse group of people from such different disciplines created a very dynamic environment in which to learn about what is going on around the world not just in one's own professional surroundings.

"In such great company, I was able to hone my skills, increase my knowledge, evaluate myself and be inspired by my colleagues. The exchange of ideas and creativity in such an environment, away from job demands,

daily stress, routine and the pressures of time can only increase one's confidence and I think this should be encouraged.

“places on the courses often come at a premium, and are keenly contested by those wanting to hone their skills base.”

"The wealth of information and experience I obtained is remarkable. From the basic understanding which I came to the course with, I have gained a real insight into the profession through theoretical and practical training. It has given me a far deeper grounding than with just study alone. By aiding my current learning and development, winning the scholarship has provided me with a sound foundation to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to progress towards professional accreditation, as I embark on my conservation career.

"Knowing other individuals who have previously undertaken courses at the Montefiascone Summer School, I was already aware that it is a well-supported, practical and efficient scheme. But only now that I have finally been lucky enough to take part in them myself, do I have a real understanding of the positive impact to me personally and to the conservation profession as a whole."

For further information on the Nicholas Hadgraft Memorial Scholarship, contact Conservation By Design at [www.conservation-by-design.co.uk](http://www.conservation-by-design.co.uk).

Stuart Welch

Conservation by Design

## News from the Preservation Advisory Centre

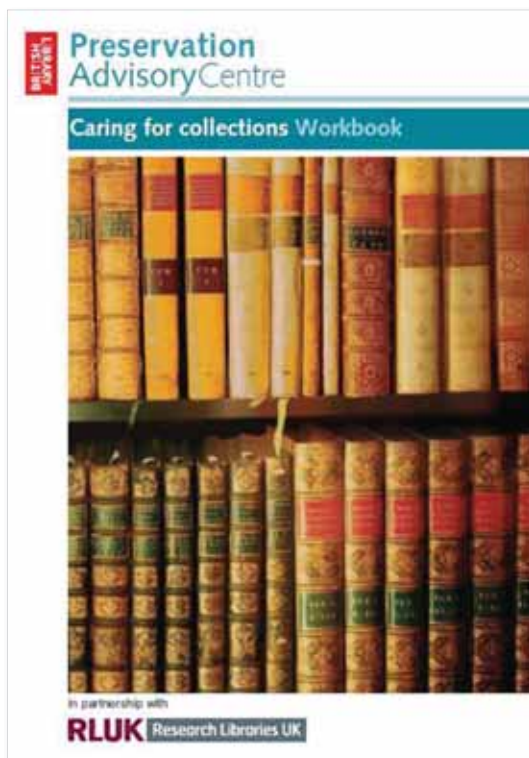
The Preservation Advisory Centre can now share the collection care design icons that have been created and used by the British Library to support handling and use guidelines. There are 14 icons illustrating things like 'clean hands', 'no pens or highlighters' or 'use book supports'. The images are available for re-use under a Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 England and Wales licence. The full range is available at [www.bl.uk/blpac/icons.html](http://www.bl.uk/blpac/icons.html). Choose which icons you would like to use, email the Preservation Advisory Centre and we will send you the image files.

Also available, is our free on-line induction resource. The 'Caring for collections' resource was developed in partnership with Research Libraries UK, and whilst it focuses on the care of books and library materials I hope there is much in it of value to people working and volunteering in archives. The 11 sections cover the importance of collection care, how things deteriorate, and how different preservation practices can slow down deterioration and minimise wear and tear. The online tool is accompanied by a downloadable pdf workbook, both available at [www.bl.uk/blpac/induction.html](http://www.bl.uk/blpac/induction.html). This is our first online learning resource and I would be most interested to hear what you think of it as we hope to develop further resources over the next year.

**Caroline Peach**

Head of Preservation Advisory Centre

[caroline.peach@bl.uk](mailto:caroline.peach@bl.uk)



Screenshot from the 'Caring for Collections' workbook.  
Copyright © The British Library Board



Collections care design icon  
'No food'. Copyright ©The  
British Library Board



Collections care design  
icon 'Use book supports'.  
Copyright ©The British  
Library Board

## Re-Backing a Case-Bound Cloth Book

From time to time at Flintshire Record Office, cloth bound books will arrive for conservation. Figure 1 shows two volumes of the *US Naval Astronomical Expedition to the Southern Hemisphere* 1849-52 by Lieutenant J M Giliss printed in Washington and signed by the author. Both books were in a poor state with the spines detached and the paper linings exposed and damaged. They are a typical example of case-bound books of this date, sewn on recessed cords that have not been laced through the boards. There is a lining of mull which extends either side of the spine and this has been pasted down under the endpapers when casing in. The covering book cloth has been embossed with a morocco grain and has decorative squares with ornate corners that have been pressed into the boards with a 'Marshall' type heated press. There is a gold-blocked cartouche to the centre of each front board. The cloth and cane stuck-on headbands are a cheap addition and help to create the illusion of a better quality binding.

Figure 1. Before conservation work. Photograph by Mark Allen.



Figure 2. Spine cleaned. Photograph by Mark Allen.





Figure 3. Loose section. Photograph by Mark Allen.



Figure 4. Damaged corner. Photograph by Mark Allen.



Figure 5. New cloth and spine piece. Photograph by Mark Allen.



Figure 6. Inner corner endpaper lifted. Photograph by Mark Allen.



Figure 7. Removing original hollow. Photograph by Mark Allen.



The first thing to do is to remove the old paper spine linings and mull by using wheat starch paste to soften the animal glue adhesive, leaving the headbands in place. When dry, the shoulder joints can then be sharpened up by rounding and backing (see figure 2). There is an option to create an adhesive barrier at this stage by applying a Japanese paper lining directly to the back of the sections using methyl cellulose. This will prevent the future ingress of damaging acids from the reversible PVA which will be used to adhere the new acid-free Kraft paper spine linings and a lining of Irish linen.

One of the books shown in figure 3 has a section with a lithographic plate which has come loose from the rest of the sewing. This has been re-attached using a curved needle to sew linen thread around the original cords. The boards are repaired and consolidated with wheat starch paste where necessary with small pieces of new book cloth of a matching colour and texture inserted to fill missing areas (see figure 4).

A new piece of cloth is selected and inserted under the old cloth of the front board and a new manila hollow is cut to size. It is important that the new cloth does not show as a line underneath the original (see figure 5). The required gap is measured between the boards and the new spine piece and the board papers are lifted to accept the new cloth (see figure 6).

The original paper hollow is removed from the spine using wheat starch to soften the adhesive (see figure 7) and the titled spine is adhered to the new spine formed by the new cloth (see figure 8). Japanese paper joints are then applied underneath each inner board paper so that the strength of the re-case is not only reliant on the Irish linen. In the early years of conservation the strength of the board attachment was considered paramount to withstand handling. For this type of cased binding the attachment was never very strong, even when first constructed, and it would be unsympathetic to introduce non-original structural changes.

**Mark Allen**

Flintshire Record Office

Figure 8. Spine replaced and finished article. Photograph by Mark Allen.





Course delegates.



# Adhesives: Properties, Preparation and Characteristics

Louise Vaile reports on the ICON Book and Paper Group Co-Operative Training Register course, held at the Conservation Centre, National Museums Liverpool, 11- 12 June 2012.

**T**welve conservators, the majority from private practice, attended this course, given by Dr. Andrea Pataki-Hundt of the State Academy of Art and Design, Stuttgart. Dr. Pataki-Hundt teaches in the field of conservation adhesives and has written extensively on this subject.

The first session of this two-day course looked at proteinaceous adhesives: sturgeon glue, gelatine (Type A and B) and parchment glue. We were given a PowerPoint presentation covering the variety and origin of these glues, their viscosity/Bloomgrade (in relation to gelatine) and their preparation and usage. In the second session we examined the structure and properties (viscosity and Degree of polymerisation) of cellulose ether-based adhesives: Methyl cellulose, Hydroxy propyl cellulose and Carboxy methyl cellulose. The final session of the day covered polysaccharides: wheat starch, rice starch, modified starch and Funori/JunFunori (polysaccharide/protein).

Having completed the theory, we then headed up to the large and splendidly equipped Paper Studio, where we prepared all the adhesives mentioned above, using recipes provided by Dr Pataki-Hundt. It was a very useful exercise in that we all got to prepare a wide range of adhesives, using different methods, a number of which we were unfamiliar with.

Day two of the course dealt with the theory of why adhesives stick, their characteristics and ageing properties. Andrea showed slides of various case studies from her work at the State Academy, including the preparation of goldbeaters skin, the use of sturgeon glue to repair tears, the use of gelatine as a consolidant and the use of Tylose MH 300 (Methyl Hydroxy methyl cellulose) in the repair of parchment.

In the final session we split into small groups and were given three case studies to discuss amongst ourselves and to present to the group. Each case study involved a problematic object, for which we had to select the appropriate adhesive(s) for its treatment. The day concluded with a second visit to the studio, where we prepared remoistenable tissues with the adhesives made the previous day.

The course content, location, facilities and administration were all very good and made for an enjoyable two days. I am only sorry that I was unable to attend the second training session, held in Oxford on 14 June 2012.

**Louise Vaile**

Ogilvie Vaile Conservation (Works of art on paper)



Figure 1 'Chinese Drawings of Plants' vol.1. Page 23. Courtesy of the Royal Horticultural Society.

# The RHS Reeves Collection of Chinese Botanical Drawings

Private conservator Kate Bailey details her research into a series of 19th century Chinese watercolours.

In the Royal Horticultural Society's Lindley Library at Vincent Square, London, there is a notable collection of Chinese botanical watercolours, called 'The Reeves Collection'. This comprises nearly 800 pages of paintings of Chinese plants on large western papers, predominantly Whatman, (Figure 1) and small Chinese papers (Figure 2). They were commissioned and collected by an East India Company tea inspector, John Reeves, between 1817 and 1831 for the Horticultural Society of London.

The collection has had a chequered career. In 1859 the Society's library was auctioned off due to financial difficulties, but the eight albums were reacquired by the Society in two batches, in 1935 and 1953 respectively. During the period of private ownership, five volumes suffered water damage. However, despite tidemarks and mould damage to the heavily sized western papers (Figure 3), most of the pictures remain bright and exhibit features from Chinese and western painting traditions.

## Characteristics of the Paintings

Typically, each page holds a drawing of one plant centrally placed on the page in the manner of western scientific illustration. Graphite pencil under-drawing is visible to the naked eye, and under an infrared light source. The Chinese name appears in black carbon ink (Figure 1) known as mo. The Linnean name, where added, is in iron gall ink. (Figure 3). Pigments identified using polarized light microscopy include azurite, smalt, vermilion, organic reds possibly carmine or lac, malachite, gamboge, orpiment, lead white, red lead and the



Figure 2 'Chinese Drawings of Plants' vol.1 Page 1. Courtesy of the Royal Horticultural Society.



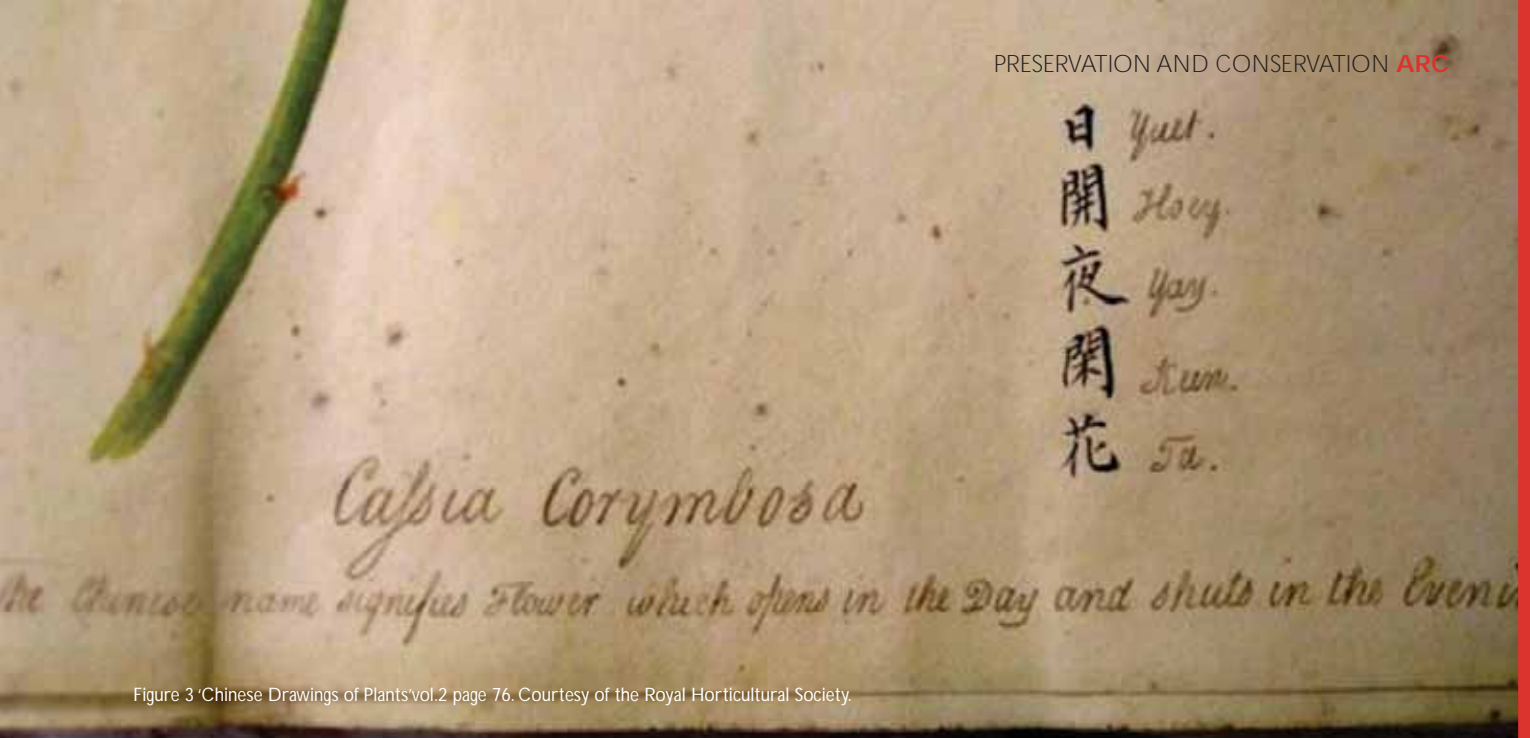


Figure 3 'Chinese Drawings of Plants' vol. 2 page 76. Courtesy of the Royal Horticultural Society.

earth pigments umbers, ochres and siennas. Prussian blue has been detected by chemical means in the debris in the gutter of one album.

In some pictures, plant parts were separately painted in rows to show the number and size of petals, sepals etc (Figure 4). Similarly, the outer casings of fruits were sometimes painted cut transversely to reveal the seeds within. This method of portraying plant material has its origins in Linnean taxonomy.

From Chinese painting tradition came the painting of a grey wash around white petals to ensure that they stood out from the page. Although a useful convention for delineating white flowers on fine white Chinese paper such as Xuan, it was not strictly necessary on cream western papers. Similarly, on many drawings the main stems and fruits were under-painted with a base layer of lead white. This follows a tradition of painting white on the reverse side of the paper or silk to make the image stand out from the surrounding page. Much of the lead white on these pictures has darkened and will be treated with hydrogen peroxide solution.

Another feature of Chinese painting is the artists' penchant for faithfully reproducing plant blemishes, including withered leaves and areas of insect damage. This may be due to the early influence of Taoist and Buddhist philosophies with their emphasis on faithfully reproducing on paper what nature had produced from the earth (Figure 5).

Chinese painters used gradations of pigment coarseness to create light and dark shades. For example, the stone pigment malachite was produced by repeated levigation (washing and sieving). The finer the pigment particles, the paler the paint, due to an increase in the number of crystal surfaces from which light is refracted. To achieve a high degree of realism, the

painter used this phenomenon to his advantage, particularly in the painting of leaves. The upper leaf surfaces were painted with the coarsely ground paint, which could be darkened further by the addition of ink or a top coat of glue, while the undersides, which were commonly shown, were painted in the paler version of the same pigment (Figure 6). However, the technique could not be universally applied because some pigments, such as the plant-based resinous yellow gamboge, produced a uniform colour.

“Chinese painters used gradations of pigment coarseness to create light and dark shades.”

Figure 5 'Chinese Drawings of Plants' vol. 3 Page 73. Courtesy of the Royal Horticultural Society.







Figure 4 'Chinese Drawings of Plants' vol.5, page 24. Courtesy of the Royal Horticultural Society.

“

The collection represents a dated record of pigments, binders, sizes and papers in use in Canton in the early part of the 19th century.

”

#### Conclusions

The collection was effectively a plant catalogue. As far as is known, the pictures were not exhibited, but were bound into albums from which the Society requested live plants to be sent back by Reeves. This means that the colours have not faded. The collection represents a dated record of pigments, binders, sizes and papers in use in Canton in the early part of the 19th century. Since the patron was an Englishman and the painters were Chinese, it is a unique product of east - west collaboration, amply demonstrating features from both traditions. The pictures are also a record of plants in cultivation in China at that time and have recently served to identify varieties of camellia that have since been lost. Although requiring conservation, including lead white reversal and consolidation of the flaking copper green pigments, this remarkable collection continues to inform and delight.

I would like to place on record my thanks to the RHS for sponsoring my research into this collection.

.....  
**Kate Bailey**  
.....



## Unlock the true potential of your collections

Adlib Archive is the professional solution for the management of archival collections. Adlib Archive supports multi-level archival descriptions with on-screen hierarchical display, and includes comprehensive indexing capability to build a solid base for successful data retrieval. Multimedia and document files link easily to catalogue records, meaning Adlib Archive is equally at home in digital archives.



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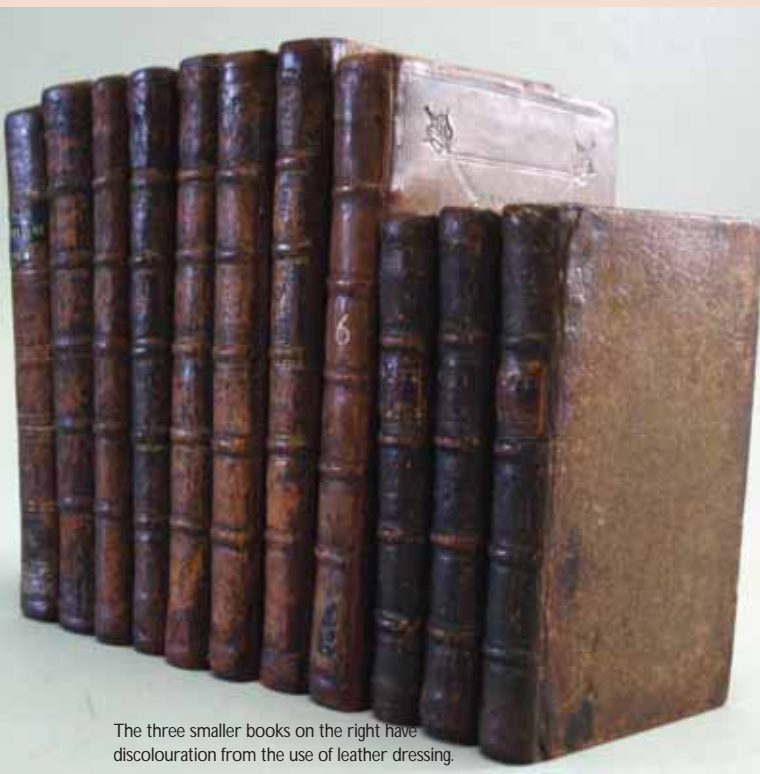


# The Use of Leather Dressings in Archives Conservation

Karen Vidler considers the potential damage to our collections through the use of leather dressing products.

The preservation program for leather bound books held in archives often includes the use of leather dressing. After cleaning, an application of leather dressing is applied with a soft cloth to improve the appearance and longevity of the vegetable tanned covering leather. Leather dressing products can be purchased as a liquid or cream, usually containing a mixture of lipids (fats, oils and waxes) in a solvent.

Throughout the 20th century, leather dressing had been used with the intention of improving the 'condition' of vegetable tanned leathers when they appeared to be dry and losing flexibility. The use of a water-insoluble, lipid-based product comes from the belief that an application could replace the loss of the lubricant added during the leather making process. Lubricants such as neatsfoot oil and lanolin are worked into the tanned leather during the fatliquoring process, preventing the fibres from sticking together as the leather dries and to allow the fibres to slide over each other during flexing. During the finishing process, additional lipids are added to enhance the final physical properties of softness and suppleness required for use as bookbinding leather.



The three smaller books on the right have discolouration from the use of leather dressing.

“leather dressing does not penetrate and fixate within the leather fibres to replace the lubricant lost as the leather ages.”

Unfortunately leather dressing does not penetrate and fixate within the leather fibres to replace the lubricant lost as the leather ages. Instead, it sits on and just below the surface of the leather acting more like a coating. Leather dressings are part of a group of substances known as surface coatings which are used in the conservation and restoration of leathers. Surface coatings are substances applied to materials to alter the surface properties such as the colour, gloss and resistance to physical abrasion or chemical attack or permeability to moisture loss. Such coatings include materials such as paints, varnishes, oils, fats and waxes.

In recent months, there has been a lively discussion on the use of leather dressing/treatments for bound materials on a Conservation-Restoration group on LinkedIn<sup>1</sup>. From the comments posted with this group, there is strong evidence of the conflicting opinions regarding the use of leather dressing on aged bookbinding leather. Some conservators prefer to use traditional leather dressings that include neatsfoot oil, lanolin and beeswax, while others, such as the conservation staff of the Royal Library, The Hague, have discontinued the use of leather dressing as part of the conservation of leather covered books.

There are some fundamental problems for the conservator when choosing to use leather dressing include:

- Visual examination is a limited way to determine the 'condition' of any vegetable tanned leather. The 'dry' appearance and apparent loss of flexibility could be due to factors such as the loss of the bound water in the fibres structure, the ageing of the fats and oils worked into the leather during manufacture, or from the degradation of a recent application of dressing or another chemical change in the leather<sup>2</sup>. An accurate assessment of the leather must be determined to ensure the cause of the drying of the leather fibres before using leather dressing.<sup>3</sup>

- Application of leather dressing will not penetrate efficiently into the vegetable tanned leather's fibre network. The addition of lubricants into new leather is undertaken with mechanical action, forcing the large lipid molecules into the fibre structure from both sides of the leather. The careful application of leather dressing with a soft cloth to the often fragile outer surface of leather will not force the penetration required for the dressing to be an effective lubricant.
- Published evidence on the long-term degradation caused by the use of leather dressing is available in the literature<sup>4&5</sup>. Pushing more fats and oils into the leather fibre structure will fill voids in the leather and replace sites of bound water - both of which are needed for the leather fibres to slide over each other during flexing. Leather dressing will make the leather less flexible, cause hardening, eventual cracking and discolouration of the leather over time.

Conservators are asked to improve the 'condition' of leather covered bookbindings. The intention to improve the visual appearance and flexibility of aged leathers can be to meet the expectations of curatorial staff as well as the conservator. As leather dressing is a surface coating and not a lubricant for leather, we need to consider whether by applying leather dressing we are actively reducing the longevity of leather bindings for short-term, superficial gain. The decision to use leather dressing on slightly or highly degraded bookbinding leathers should be based on a rigorous technical examination undertaken by the conservator.

1. See following link for relevant LinkedIn postings: [www.linkedin.com/groupItem?view=&qid=3872542&type=member&item=120539434&qid=5e855887-7b67-4841-891d-c9cd741c1f28&trk=group\\_items\\_see\\_more-0-b-ttl](http://www.linkedin.com/groupItem?view=&qid=3872542&type=member&item=120539434&qid=5e855887-7b67-4841-891d-c9cd741c1f28&trk=group_items_see_more-0-b-ttl)

2. R. Thomson, *Leather In Conservation Science: Heritage Materials*. (London, 2006), pp.92-120.

3. K. Vidler, "The Leather Checklist", In preparation (2012).

4. A.W. Landmann, *Lubricants In Leather: Its Composition and Changes with Time*. (Northampton, 1991), pp. 29-33.

5. K. Blaschke, "Lubricants on Vegetable Tanned Leather: Effects and Chemical Changes", *Restaurator*, Vol.33 (2012), pp.76-99.

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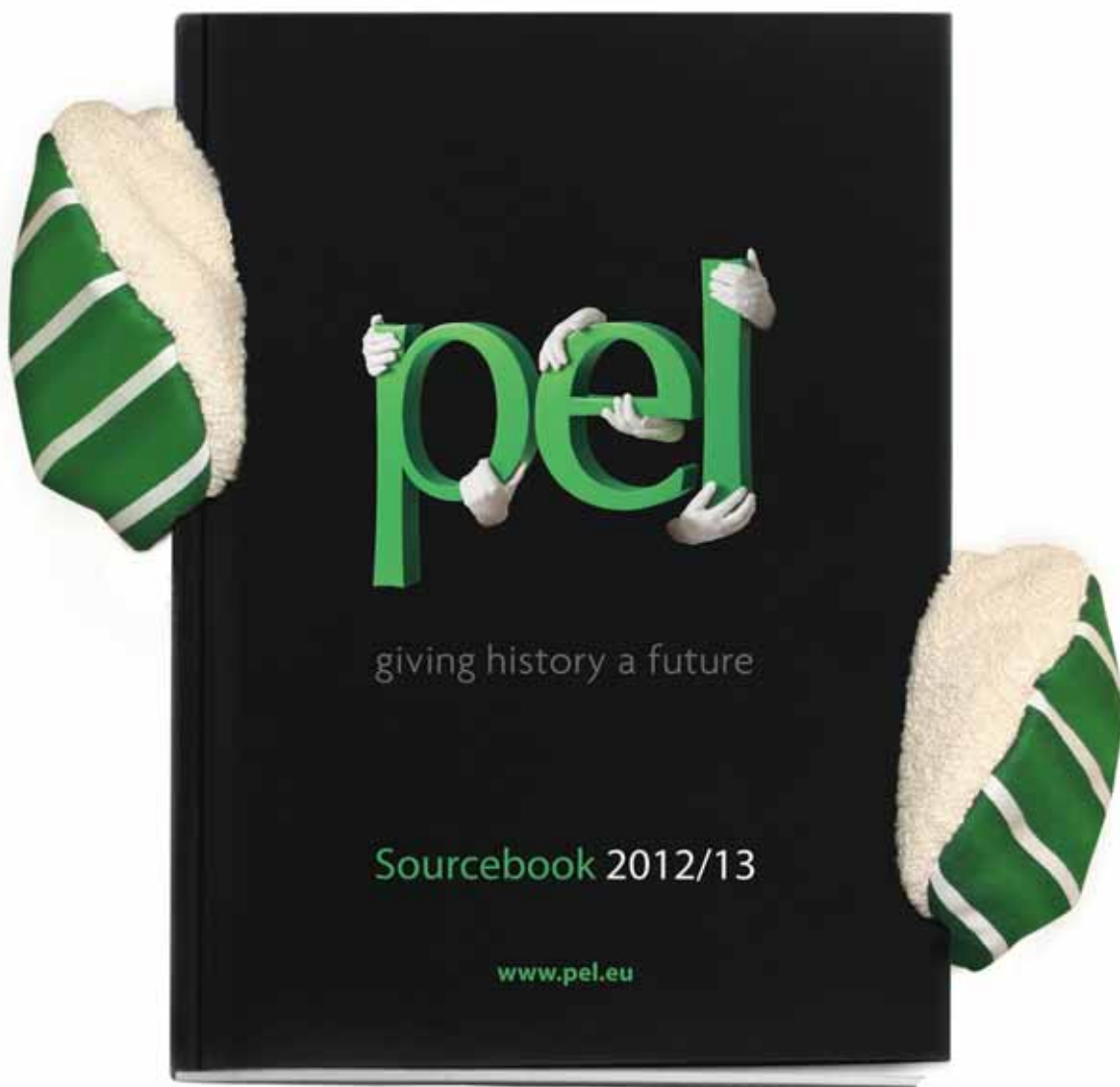
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