



Problems with a menagerie

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The Conservation Awards

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Issue 32

2010 was a memorable year in Icon's (admittedly rather short) life, bracketed as it was by the splendid CF10 Conference in Cardiff in March and closing in December with a flurry of events: the traditional Plenderleith lecture, our 6th AGM and the return of the Conservation Awards, which lived up to their heading Valuing Excellence.

Of especial note is that such splendid events can be – indeed were – run on a modest budget for Icon, thanks to the generosity of our sponsors and partners and in no small measure to the indefatigable efforts of Icon members themselves who volunteered their help. Perhaps more of us might ponder what we can contribute as we head into 2011, the European Year of Volunteering?

We follow up last issue's article in which three school children explored the relevance of conservation to their curriculum with an interesting project at the National Maritime Museum which takes a structured approach to providing opportunities for children to learn about conservation. In our next issue we shall pursue the theme with a look at the Ashmolean's secondary schools project.

Do please make a note of Icon's new address and phone numbers following the move just before Christmas. Full details about the new premises can be found on page 12

Last but not least, a Happy New Year to you all!

Lynette Gill, Editor



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Cover photo: Zebra, Hyena and Lion
figures undergoing repair to
damaged limbs, each measuring
approximately 30 mm to 50 mm in
height. The figures are from a 19th
century multimedia toy menagerie
currently on display at Tunbridge
Wells Museum and Gallery.
Photograph © Wiltshire Council.

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around & about

The Plenderleith lecture



Icon's Scotland Group was delighted to be host for the Annual Plenderleith Lecture on 19 November last year and to welcome Professor May Cassar as the 13th speaker in the series.

Held in Edinburgh's elegant National Gallery complex in the heart of the city, the lecture attracted just over a hundred people from Scotland and beyond. Particularly welcome were Frances Lennard and all seven of her first intake of students from the new Textile Conservation MPhil course in Glasgow.

May's subject 'Science and Heritage: Strategies for surviving turbulent times' was an inspired and highly relevant choice, focussing on the opportunities arising from the current economic situation and her ideas for how Icon and its members could make strategic use of the Heritage Science Strategy to meet our own and the government's agendas.

It was a concise and punchy lecture, delivering a volley of practical ideas and solid encouragement. No slides were used, yet by the end there was a feeling of energy and enthusiasm in the audience, carried over into a lively questions session. Chair Linda Ramsay's thanks were echoed by all and the debates and networking continued over a welcome glass of wine.

The AGM

More elegant surroundings, this time for the AGM followed by the Awards, which were held on 1 December at the Royal Institution of Great Britain, a most fitting venue with its Grade 1 listed building, historic collections and aura of scientific discovery. It was a perishing cold evening and Icon members battled the elements to get to London from far and wide to hear about Icon's activities and finances for the year and to question the Board on issues of interest to them.

Outgoing Chair Diane Gwilt noted the highlights of the year: the Cardiff Conference, successful fundraising to provide more internships; increased applications for accreditation and

developmental work on the Conservation Register and on the National Strategy for Conservation Education and Skills. She also reported that membership numbers are holding up and expressed gratitude for this support at a time of economic hardship. Diane was thanked for her service, as was outgoing trustee Russel Turner, whilst the incoming Chair Amber Xavier-Rowe was made welcome and trustees Kate Frame and Louise Lawson were re-appointed for a further term of office.

Participants then dispersed to admire the surroundings or talk amongst themselves – never difficult when two or more conservators gather together – whilst the auditorium was set up for the Awards and the finalists, guests, speakers and prize presenters arrived. The hum of anticipation rivalled that of the experiments which take place in the RI's labs!

The Conservation awards



In her last task for Icon, outgoing Chair Diane Gwilt took on the role of MC



Ranjit Mathrani, High Sheriff of Greater London, gave the opening remarks. As the oldest civil role in the country, his office could be described as a prime example of conservation: having adapted, modified and survived for over a thousand years.

Keynote speaker Roy Clare, Chief Executive of Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. 'Conservation rocks!' he said but we need to invest in ourselves, we need to shout about ourselves and we need to be flexible. Despite the current gloom we are a lot stronger than in the past and, taking the long view, we need to be ready to seize the future.





Robert Turner of Eura Conservation Ltd and Dr Bronwyn Ormsby of Tate collect their awards from Francis Plowden.

Anna Plowden Trust Award for research and innovation in conservation

The judges decided on joint winners, one representing the best in research and the other in innovation. The Tate Axa Art Modern Paints Project (TAAMP) evaluated the effects of surface cleaning treatments on acrylic-emulsion-based works of art. The research has been widely disseminated and has broad application to many art collections, along with implications for conservation practice and training. Eura Conservation Ltd devised a novel but practical technique for the controlled removal of Edwardian ceramic tiled panels from their substrate using a diamond wire saw. The method virtually eliminates breakages and was put into practice in the working environment of a hospital.

The Award for Care of Collections

The Primrose Project was developed by the Royal Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter, with funding from Renaissance South-West, to help museums cope with their extensive photographic collections. The judges was impressed with the project's strong message about training, sharing and enthusing keen volunteers, and its broad positive impact using minimal public funding.

Photographic conservator Sarah Allen with presenter of the award Dame Liz Forgan



Herbert Van De Sompel collects the award for the MEMENTO project: Time Travel for the Web on behalf of Old Dominion University & Los Alamos National Laboratory, USA.

Digital Preservation Award

Richard Ovendon, Associate Director and Keeper of Special Collections at the Bodleian Library, presented the award on behalf of the Digital Preservation Coalition of which he is Chair. He commended the impressive quality of the entries from an international field, which underlined a growing confidence about the future for digital preservation. The winning project, selected from a short list of five, allows the user to request a web page from a specific time then retrieves the closest match from whatever archived source might hold it.

The Student Conservator of the Year Award

Simon Lambert's project at Cardiff University, as part of his Masters in Care of Collections, was judged to be an innovative piece of work with wide benefits beyond the conservation community. His study The Carbon Footprint of Museum Loans provides a methodology that encourages conservators, registrars and others to continue delivering the social benefits of loans without downsizing activities.

Laura Hinde and The Courtauld Institute of Art were also commended for her Investigation into the Nature and Causes of Surface Whitening in Twentieth Century Paintings at Dudmaston Hall.

Jane Henderson, Professional Tutor, and Simon Lambert, MSc Cardiff University, receive the Award from Maev Kennedy, Arts Correspondent for The Guardian Newspaper.



Thanks go to all of the speakers and presenters; the sponsors Sir Paul McCartney and The Pilgrim Trust and Icon's partners The Digital Preservation Coalition and The Anna Plowden Trust.

A great deal of volunteer effort also went on behind the scenes to make it alright on the night, not least those who submitted their projects for consideration, the members of the screening panels and the judges. In addition, thanks are due to Katherine St Paul, Heather Ravenberg, Louise Lawson, Clare Finn, Chris Woods, Carole Milner and Susan Hughes, Charlotte Cowin, Carol Jackson and Brian Holden.

All the Award photographs : Matt Wreford
www.mattwreford.net



Richard Lithgow of the Perry-Lithgow Partnership receives his Award from Lady Jay of Ewelme, Chair of the Pilgrim Trust

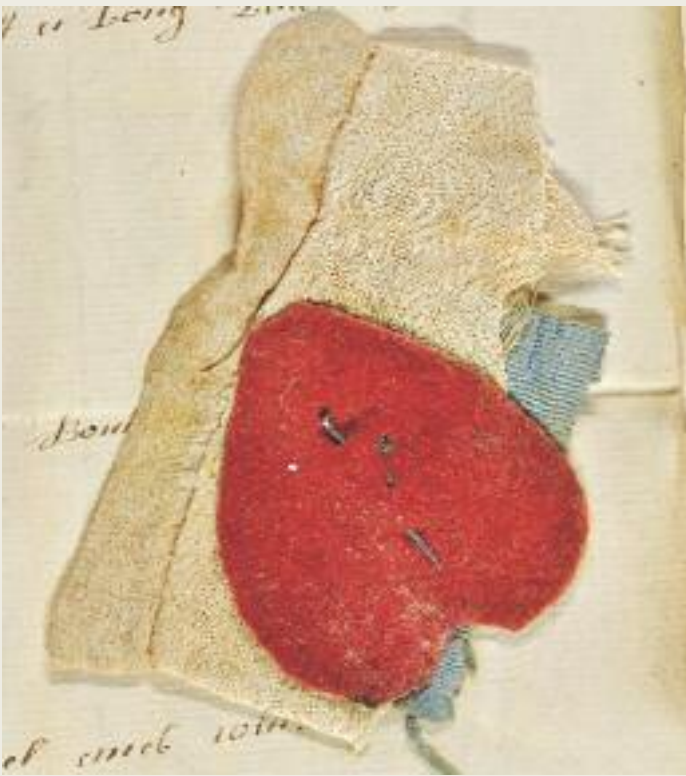
The Pilgrim Trust Award for Conservation

In a four-phase project over ten years the Perry Lithgow Partnership transformed the poor condition of the 18thc staircase wall paintings at the National Trust's Hanbury Hall and added to the understanding of English Baroque wall painting techniques in the process. The bold approach to access in the last phase, letting the public view the painting up close via scaffolding, was particularly well-handled.

The judges also gave a special commendation to the British Library's Codex Sinaiticus Project as a model of international collaboration to re-unite the 1600-year-old manuscript in digital form and make it accessible to the world for the first time.

The party afterwards





© Coram

Example of a fabric swatch attached to a registration form: A heart cut from red woolen cloth, a ribbon of blue paduasoy silk, and a piece of linen diaper

Threads of Feeling

This is the title of the most poignant exhibition of the past year, to be found at the Foundling Museum in London and continuing until 6 March. It shows a selection of fabric swatches which illustrate the moment of parting as mothers left their babies at the original Foundling Hospital, which continues today as the children's charity Coram.

In the cases of more than 4,000 babies left between 1741 and 1760, a small object or token, usually a piece of fabric, was kept as an identifying record because the process of giving over a baby to the hospital was anonymous. The mother's name was not recorded and the child's previous identity was effaced. The fabric was either provided by the mother or cut from the child's clothing by the hospital's nurses and could be the means of identifying the child if the mother ever came to reclaim him or her.

Some of them beautiful and all of them touching, attached to registration forms and bound up into ledgers, these pieces of fabric form the largest collection of everyday textiles surviving in Britain from the 18th century and tell us about the clothes of working women at the time. The exhibition has been beautifully mounted with the help of conservators from the London Metropolitan Archives, where the ledgers are normally stored. Inevitably only a fraction of the material can be displayed and one can't help wishing that the total archive be more accessible.... a good project, digitisation perhaps, for a generous sponsor?

Talking of generous sponsors..

Bankers may not be top of any 'most loved' list these days but an exception must be made for Bank of America Merrill Lynch which launched an Art Conservation Programme last November with the announcement of funding for the restoration of national treasures in Europe, the Middle East



Portrait of Richard II Enthroned in Coronation Robes, paint on wooden panels, ca. 1398 (Elaborate frame is from 1872) 2.3 x 1.2 metres

and Africa. The programme also aims to raise awareness of the essential but invisible role of conservation in preserving works of art for future generations.

Pieces selected for a grant include *The Winged Victory of Samothrace* at the Louvre in Paris, photographs from the Arab Image Foundation's collection in Beirut, Daniel Maclise's 1854 painting *The Marriage of Strongbow and Aoife* at the National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin, and a group of *iziphephetu* (beaded aprons) at Wits Art Museum in Johannesburg. Other institutions receiving funding are in Madrid (for a Picasso), Nice (a Bronzino painting), St Petersburg (three portraits by Vigilius Eriksen), Budapest, Frankfurt, Milan and Florence.

The Courtauld Gallery in London receives help to restore its important Rubens painting *Cain Slaying Abel*, whilst Westminster Abbey benefits from grants to conserve coronation materials, medieval objects, manuscripts, books and documents, including its famous over-life-size portrait of Richard II. Painted in a linseed oil medium, it probably dates from the 1390s and is the earliest known contemporary painted portrait of a sovereign. First documented in 1611, it was heavily restored in 1732 and 1866, when it was given its decorated frame by Sir Gilbert Scott.

This initiative is a great shot in the arm for conservation at a difficult time. You can see the full list of projects at <http://museums.bankofamerica.com/arts> where information about the 2011 grant applications will also be announced.

Researchers at the North West Film Archive at Manchester Metropolitan University have exposed a potential threat to the archive of British life on film. Fungal mould can cultivate and eventually consume home cine film, videos, TV and film archive if not stored correctly.

The British Library have stored their valuable film archive in Vindon's 5°C 35%RH heritage suite, increasing the P.I. of film from 63 years to 488 years whilst reducing the natural age rate from moderate to very slow.

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professional update

FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

In terms of media profile, the last few months have proved that conservation in all of its various aspects is a story that has enduring public appeal. *'The second fall of Pompeii'* – the recent collapse of Pompeii's House of Gladiators – was branded a 'world scandal' (The Guardian 12 November) and is a case in point of what happens when adequate attention is not given to preventive measures and maintenance – things fall apart. The phenomenon was echoed in another Guardian headline *'Heritage sites crumble in the face of slashed budgets'*. (4 December). An article in the Financial Times on 13 November *'The Bronzino code: What lies beneath an Italian painter's elusive allegories? A new conservation programme reveals all'* highlights how conservation and technical art history reveal the meaning of works of art. *'British art restorer uncovers a lost Giotto masterpiece: The Ognissanti Crucifix was a neglected Italian treasure which a team of experts have now repaired and identified'* appeared in The Guardian on 24 October. This story was unusual in that it focussed the limelight not on the Crucifix itself, but on the conservator, Anna-Marie Hilling, a British woman who had trained in Florence, and had worked for seven years as part of the team that revealed the crucifix to be by Giotto himself. She described her feelings about her experience: *"It is a very emotional time for me,"* said Hilling this weekend. *"At the moment the cross is still in the laboratory, but it is now upright and seeing that gave me such satisfaction."* These stories make me think that there is huge scope for generating public interest in conservation through the press. Our challenge is to make them appealing.

The annual Harold Plenderleith Lecture, organised by the Scotland Group, is another excellent example of raising the public profile of conservation. This year's lecture was delivered by Professor May Cassar, Director of the AHRC/EPSRC Science and Heritage Programme. In her provocative paper *'Science and Heritage: Strategies for surviving turbulent times'*, she challenged Icon to develop strategies for building the resilience of heritage science and conservation, which included putting together an all-party parliamentary group (APPG) on heritage science and conservation to lobby government; setting up a skills bank for sharing expertise; setting up an 'emeritus' programme to capture and pass on knowledge of retiring senior conservators and conservation scientists; and celebrating outstanding examples of volunteering in conservation.

Icon is one of the eighty seven organisational members of the Heritage Alliance and I attended the HA's Heritage Day held at the Banqueting House in Whitehall. This umbrella group has refocussed its mission to advocacy for cultural heritage in all of its many manifestations, from historic houses to railways, from places of worship to local archaeology. With member bodies ranging in size from The National Trust to local preservation societies it is a powerful voice for conservation, lobbying government and responding to government consultations. In break-out groups we shared experience of the impact of cuts and generated ideas of how we could support each other better. Jeremy Hunt, Minister of State for

Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport, was there to remind us that heritage had not done so badly out of the comprehensive spending review if you took into consideration the reallocation of the Lottery to its original good causes, making it only a 2.5% cut across the whole sector(!). In line with Big Society policy, he warned against expecting much from central government and recommended instead making direct contact with local authorities and groups.

On a happier note, the Conservation Awards were presented to the winners at the Royal Institution on a night to remember. It was snowing and bitterly cold all over the country, with transport grinding to a halt, but around two hundred people managed to get there, making it a really special evening. I would like to congratulate all the winners and runners up for making it such an exciting and competitive field, and thank everyone who contributed to the process.

By the time you read this, Icon will have moved to its new office at The Leathermarket, just seven minutes walk from London Bridge. We will have lots more room and we look forward to welcoming you there in the New Year!

CONSERVATION REGISTER UPDATES

The Register is changing!

With the generous support of English Heritage, Icon has been working over the past year and half with a group of volunteers and consultants to develop the Conservation Register and is well on the way to deliver the following major changes by April 2011.

1. The Members Database has been restructured to be an internet based platform that gives the member direct control over business and personal information enabling changes to be available to the public in real time.
2. The Conservation Register Website has been redesigned in a new Icon format and will now include more sophisticated search facilities through four categories:
 - Individuals with specific objects,
 - Public institutions,
 - Owners / Managers of Historic Houses and Places of Worship; and
 - Private Collections and Galleries.
3. The Website will, therefore, generate vital statistics for each Member and the Conservation Register in total to monitor usage for each category of user, thus enhancing the possibility of target marketing initiatives.
4. The Website will continue to provide the existing complex mechanism for controlling display of each Member's business to provide the fairest possible showing.
5. The new Website will incorporate both new and updated guidance materials on working with a conservator-restorer, best practices of a professional conservator-restorer, tendering guidance, accreditation information and marketing of the Conservation Register.

If you have any questions about the changes to come in the Conservation Register, please contact Dubravka Vukcevic: dvukcevic@icon.org.uk.

In addition to this valuable development work, Icon continues to **promote the register** actively as evidenced by the attendance of staff and Icon members at the following events:

- Who do you think you are? – Olympia, February 2010
- The Listed Property Show – Olympia, February 2010
- Museums and Heritage Show – Earls Court, May 2010
- Family Weekend at Imperial War Museum – June 2010
- Collect: the Collections Management Exhibition – Kingsway Hall Hotel, June 2010
- Festival of History - Kelmash Hall, Northamptonshire, English Heritage, July 2010
- Antiques Roadshow – British Museum, September 2010
- Museums Associations Conference – Manchester, October 2010
- Antique Fair – Esher Hall, Sandown Park, October 2010
- Family History Weekend – Imperial War Museum, November 2010; and lastly ...

On 16 November Icon exhibited at a small Stand at the Historic Buildings Parks & Gardens Event held at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Hall in London. This is a prestigious event catering directly for Historic Home owners, Stakeholders and private Stately Homes. It particularly offered us the opportunity to explain Icon as an organisation and publicise the Conservation Register to those who are most likely to use it.

The event is popular and the day was well attended by many Historic Houses Association members and invited guests. Baroness Andrews OBE, Chair of English Heritage, was the Guest Speaker and mentioned the Conservation Register in her speech. After lunch the Marquess of Cholmondeley gave the Historic Houses Association/Smiths Gore Lecture on the extensive and impressive programme of work he has carried out at Houghton Hall, Norfolk.

With many of the Exhibitors displaying services in architecture, surveying, building and design, Insurance, carpets, textiles, metalwork and mosaics, it was important for the visitors to learn of the work of Icon and the importance of the Conservation Register as the first point of reference when seeking a specialist Conservator in any field of work. Our Stand was busy with a great 'take up' of leaflets and such interest and support for our service that we'll have to make a quick return to the Printers and certainly consider a bigger Stand next year!

Many thanks go to Francis Downing, Paintings Group Chair, for running the Stand.

The Register is on YouTube! Jane Henderson, Icon trustee and mastermind behind the Cardiff Conference, can be seen expounding the purpose and benefits of the Register at www.youtube.com/watch?v=YbA1KSWR9Hs. Jane would give the panellists of Radio 4's *Just a Minute* a run for their money as she holds forth fluently on the subject without hesitation, repetition or deviation for over five minutes!

HEALTH & SAFETY FOR CONSERVATORS

Icon training event

Here is an opportunity to update your H&S knowledge at one of three venues – London, Dundee and Cardiff – this spring. Perhaps you are planning on getting a CSCS card and need a refresher. This event is suitable for all levels of experience.

The main features of the programme include an introduction to legal requirements and the process of risk assessment, plus hazards and how to deal with them, which will be an interactive session throughout the afternoon with the opportunity for some specific H&S problems to be discussed.

The trainer, Martin Adlem, is a Health and Safety Consultant with over twenty years' experience and has worked for such diverse organisations as Poole Harbour Commissioners and the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra. He has worked in colleges, schools, laboratories, factories, warehouses, shops, ports and theatres and first presented courses for conservators in 2004.

Dates and venues are noted in Listings. More details can be found on the Icon website 'Events' page.

TRAINING NEWS

Welcome to 2010 Interns!

Year five of the Icon internship scheme is now well and truly under way, with record numbers appointed. By June 2011 there will be twenty seven Icon interns working in parallel across the UK, forming a diverse and busy network of new conservators. Current Heritage Lottery Fund interns to welcome to our fifth intake are:

Ellie Baumber (National Museums Liverpool – Objects and Public Engagement)

Aimee Dunn (Eura conservation – Metals)

Rob Gambell (Canterbury Cathedral – Stone)

Alison Gilchrist (Stained Glass conservation, in Keith Barley's York studio)

Tonya Outtram (Leather Conservation Centre, Northampton)

Carol Peacock (British Museum – Eastern Pictorial Art)

Claire Solman (with Plowden & Smith – Decorative Surfaces)

Anne Marie Taberdo (British Museum – Facsimiles)

Andy Thackray (Furniture conservation at the V&A)

Rachel Weatherall (Fitzwilliam Museum – Preventive conservation with coins and medals)

Kristi Westberg (Books and Archives, Derry and Raphoe project, Derry)

Creating a legacy for the HLF scheme...

Icon is also delighted to be working with other funders and employer-partners in four new externally-funded internships from October 2010. The Clothworkers Foundation has generously continued to support Historic Royal Palaces, the Museum of London and Guildhall Art Gallery with Icon internships, as has the Whitby Literary and Philosophical



Claire Solman

Society and the Pilgrim Trust. New interns for 2010 are:

Jennifer Halling (North Yorkshire Archives, working on the Whitby muster rolls project), **Louise Joynson** (Historic Royal Palaces, Textiles), **Maria Yanez-Lopez** (Museum of London, Collections Care) and **Yukiko Yoshii** (Guildhall Art Gallery, Frames)

Future plans?

A new intern – **Monika Stokowiec** – was appointed in December 2010 to be the first 18-month placement of a series of four working on the conservation of Books and Binding Materials in Elizabeth Neville's studio in Penzance. Part of HLF's *Skills for the Future* programme, the remaining three opportunities will be advertised over the next three years.

Icon also hopes to offer more internships in the coming year, funded through Clothworkers Foundation and other partner employers. Watch our website for news!

Interns Bulletin

Look out also for the first edition of Icon Interns News – a new e-bulletin coming into Icon Members' in-boxes this month. The bulletin carries up-to-date stories and news of what our interns are getting up to across the UK; we hope you enjoy reading it and that you will help promote its circulation beyond Icon.

ANNA PLOWDEN TRUST ALUMNI !

The Anna Plowden Trust would very much like to hear from anyone who has received one of our grants to learn about what they are doing now and how they have benefited from their training. We have been in existence for more than ten years and helped over 150 people – students and working conservators – to obtain training in conservation skills.

We want to celebrate our achievements with you and learn lessons from you, which will inform our future activities. We would like to hear from as many of our alumni as possible. If you have been a bursary or grant recipient, please contact Penelope Plowden on the Anna Plowden Trust website for more information. We will then get in touch with you. The website address is annaplowdentrust.org.uk

CPD HELP FOR 2011

The Clothworkers' Foundation

The Conservation Bursary Scheme offered by the Clothworkers' Foundation helps qualified conservators attend

conferences, seminars and events which will benefit their current work and future careers. The scheme started in 2009 when fourteen bursaries were awarded. 2010 saw the total close to forty at the last count and the Foundation is keen that 2011 proves just as successful.



Applications are welcome for bursaries of up to £1,000 towards travel, registration and fees, and reasonable accommodation and subsistence costs. Applicants' employers, or applicants themselves (if self-employed), must contribute at least 50% of the cost. For further details including eligibility criteria and guidance on completing the application, and to download the application form, visit the website at www.clothworkers.co.uk.

The Anna Plowden Trust

The Anna Plowden Trust is seeking applications from established conservators for grants towards the cost of attending either a short specialist course or a major conference during 2011. In both cases the Trust will consider funding up to 50% of the cost.



The Trust has been awarding grants since 1999 and normally between ten and twelve are given each year. The courses have covered a wide range of subjects, varying from pest management and plant fibre identification to the use of adhesives for textile conservation, the examination of paint layers, new methods of cleaning painted surfaces and Japanese conservation techniques as well as collection care issues. The Trust also funds attendance at conferences, both in the UK and abroad, often helping to finance participants who are giving a paper.

The Trust particularly welcomes applications from those teaching conservation and from conservators working in the private sector. Preference will also be given to applicants who work in a team, either public or private, where the skills they acquire with the help of an Anna Plowden Trust grant can be passed on to others.

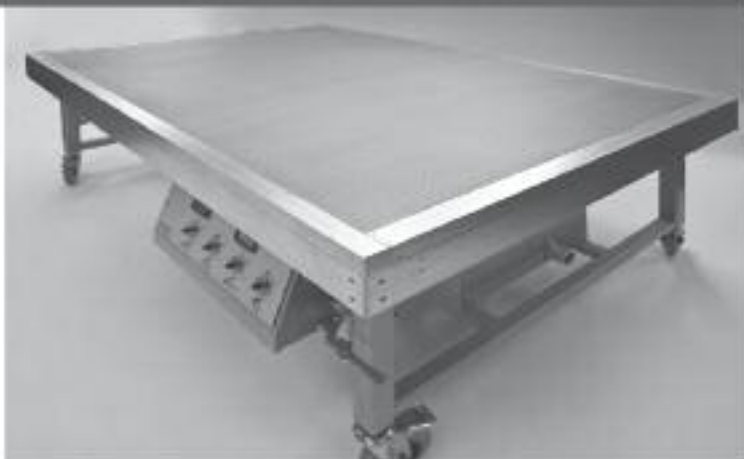
Those applying should have more than five years' experience since completing their training. The closing dates for 2011 applications are March 14, June 13 and September 12. Application forms can be obtained from the Trust's website, which is annaplowdentrust.org.uk or applicants can e-mail Penelope Plowden at penelopecplowden@btinternet.com.

The Zibby Garnet Travelling Fellowship

ZGTF is an educational charity set up to fund study trips for conservation students who are training in the United Kingdom and wish to widen their practical skills overseas. Since ZGTF was set up in 2000 it has enabled over sixty students to visit

WILLARD CONSERVATION EQUIPMENT

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nearly thirty countries. Many students have gone on to secure positions in conservation both in Britain and around the world.

Grant applications are considered once every year with a deadline of 31 March. To learn more and get the application form go to ZGTF's new website at www.zibbygarnett.org

NEWS FROM THE LIBRARY

A Happy New Year to everyone from the Chantry Library! I'm just starting to draft out my workplans for the next few months, and thought I would look back on 2010, picking up on some of the more productive threads from last year, and pulling them into 2011 to develop further.

The tail end of 2010 saw a flurry of activity for the Chantry Library, including a trial workshop at West Dean College in early November (Practical Information Skills for Conservators), compiling Iconnect, developing the Online Bibliographies Project, attending the AGM and Conservation Awards and organising an 'Explore Session' at the library for a group of Oxford University Librarians.

The Information Skills Workshop and Online Bibliographies Project are two of the pieces of work I am keen to further expand in 2011, and both are areas which will benefit from online exposure and a revitalization of the library webpages. Plenty to do then! If you would like to find out more about either of these two pieces of work, please email me at chantrylibrary@icon.org.uk or call 01865 251303

A quick reminder that we supply photocopies of journal articles, chapters from books, and conference papers, which are held in the Chantry Library collection. Icon members are entitled to claim **ten free** articles each year, so please quote your membership number with your requests. Articles can be provided either as scanned pages, or in hard copy.

For details of all new resources and a full listing of all journal articles received over the last two months, check out the library blog 'Library News' at <http://chantrylibrary.wordpress.com>.

You can also subscribe to our RSS feed, and track new books and journals at the Library in real time! More details on how to do this at <http://chantrylibrary.wordpress.co./feed/>

Ros Buck (Librarian, Chantry Library)

ICON HAS MOVED!

As you know, 1 London Bridge is being decanted and refurbished in preparation for letting to a single corporate tenant. Icon has therefore had to find a new office and with the assistance of Simon Green, life member of Icon and former Chair of IPC, we have succeeded in finding what we think is very suitable accommodation at a price we can afford.

We are now busy settling in at our new offices in The Leathermarket. The Leathermarket is a group of listed buildings in Bermondsey, about seven minutes walk from London Bridge. As the name implies, it was once the main

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The deadline for applications is Friday 4th March 2011.

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London wholesale market for hides and wool. Our office is in Lafone House which has full disabled access and a good café. We share the building with Creative and Cultural Skills (our Sector Skills Council) as well as many creative companies and charities. There are meeting rooms available in Lafone House that can be booked through the Icon office. These are being refurbished in January and should be available from 1 February. The cost of a meeting room for up to eight people is £15 per hour. Meeting rooms for up to 15 people is £25/hr and for up to 30 £40/hr. Icon has its own self-contained office with five desks (an extra one for member volunteers or visiting Trustees). We are building a meeting room within the office that will accommodate a maximum of ten people. This should be ready in early March and should meet the requirements of most Icon committees as well as staff. If you would like to book a room from 1 February please email: admin@icon.org.uk We look forward to welcoming you at Icon's new HQ!

**Unit 1.5 Lafone House
The Leathermarket
11/13 Weston Street
Bermondsey
London SE1 3ER**

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Charlotte Cowin – Membership and Groups – 0203 142 6785

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Rebecca Hendry – Finance – 0203 142 6788

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Icon's new address is:

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people

IN APPRECIATION

Merryl Huxtable 1955–2010

Merryl Judith Baker was born in Kampala, Uganda on 27 October 1955. Following training in conservation at Lincoln College and Gateshead Technical College, Merryl worked as a freelance paper conservator for public and private collections in Hampshire, Sussex and London. Merryl joined the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1981 – making her our most experienced and long serving paper conservator.

Merryl was instrumental in the re-design of the Paper and Books Conservation studios in 1996. Over the years her experience and knowledge helped raise standards and awareness of conservation across the Museum but particularly with our colleagues in the Word and Image Department and the Theatre Collections. Merryl was equally generous in passing on her knowledge to fellow conservators as well as to students.

Merryl had an avid interest in historic wallpapers, which grew from having worked in situ at houses such as Nostell Priory and Penryn Castle. Established as a specialist in wallpaper conservation, she was a founding member of the Wallpaper History Society in 1986. In 1989, along with her friend and colleague Pauline Webber, she helped to set up the first ever MA in historic wallpaper conservation for the fledgling RCA/VA Conservation programme in conjunction with the National Trust.

Merryl was also internationally recognised as an expert in the conservation of vellum objects. Two of the V&A's largest and most problematic vellum objects – *Ulm Cathedral* and *The Sackville Pedigree* were both conserved by her. These are currently on display in the Medieval and Renaissance Galleries and in the British Galleries respectively.

Merryl's other great passion, apart from her job, was sailing. A full member of the Ocean Cruising Club, Merryl's sailing included her epic voyage of over 4,000 miles with John Gore-Grimes way inside the Arctic Circle. Here she spent a week locked in the ice with polar bears in close proximity. But it was with her great friends Graham and Margaret Morfey, that she did her most treasured sailing trips. Her 'big adventure' was to be taking their boat *Flight of Time* around the globe during her annual leave and a precious year's sabbatical from work. Merryl sailed to 78 degrees North inside the Arctic Circle and 35 degrees South in New Zealand. Few could claim to have equalled this feat.

Finding great comfort in her work and sailing, they provided shelter from the storm on a few occasions throughout her life and never more so than when she was diagnosed with cancer in 2009. Testament to Merryl's steely determination, she boarded the *Flight of Time* in South Brittany for the final



stage of the voyage with Graham and Margaret in August this year. The three of them sailed into Plymouth on 25 August, fourteen years and 50,000 miles after leaving England in 1996. Merryl met her illness with the same determination she did most challenges. Helped by her parents and brothers, her friends and colleagues visited her at Trinity Hospice in their droves. Greeting them with the same aplomb as she would if at a party, Merryl introduced people who had never met before, explaining where or why they featured in the fifty four years of her life.

Merryl's encyclopaedic knowledge of her profession was without parallel and enlivened and enriched our lives. She was a key member of the Paper Conservation studio and was recognised internationally for her expertise in the field. She will be greatly missed not only by the Museum but by colleagues and friends from all over the world.

Staff of V&A Paper, Books and Paintings Conservation

PROFILE

Location

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Exhibition

Picasso in The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Time

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Pablo Picasso, *At the Expin Agile*, 1905, The Walter H. and Leonore Annenberg Collection, Gift of Walter H. and Leonore Annenberg, 1992, (Bequest of Walter H. Annenberg, 2002 (1992-2001); *The Actor*, 1904-05, Gift of Thelma Chrysler Foy, 1950 (50.1793); *Sallimbarque in Profile*, 1905, Bequest of Scofield Thayer, 1982 (1984.433.269). All works from The Metropolitan Museum of Art. © 2010 Estate of Pablo Picasso / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo: Don Pellard.

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A 19th Century Toy Menagerie

Beth Werrett, a Project Conservator with Wiltshire Council, describes the conservation problems raised by a charming old toy

INTRODUCTION

Wiltshire Conservation Service recently conserved a number of toys for display at Tunbridge Wells Museum and Art Gallery. The project included a nineteenth century toy menagerie. It proved to be quite a complex object. The deterioration of the varied materials of its construction and the impact of previous rudimentary repairs raised a number of issues. In addition the high proportion of paper based materials present in the menagerie proved problematic. Limited experience working with such materials meant that consultation with paper conservation specialists was deemed essential to ensure that the most appropriate materials and techniques were chosen.

The menagerie was constructed from a wooden frame with cardboard doors decorated with coloured paper and etched panels. The illusion of bars was created with taut threads strung vertically at regular intervals along the front face of the case. The interior of the case was divided into numerous small compartments each housing a model animal. Two types of animal models were present: smaller figures that were moulded from a composite material and painted; and a number of larger pieces with a wooden armature and additional layers of a gesso-like material, paint and flock (fine, shredded fibres which have been applied to the surface to imitate fur).

CONDITION AND ISSUES

The menagerie had suffered a moderate amount of damage during its lifetime and endured a number of amateur repairs.

The wooden frame of the case was in excellent condition; however, the paper covering and cardboard doors were yellowing and desiccated. In many areas the paper was lifting from the frame of the menagerie, splitting and laminating. The damage to the interior paper lining of the menagerie was concentrated around the intersections between the dividing slats, the doors and the main body of the case. The rich blue pigmentation of the lining paper provided an additional complication as it was only loosely adhered to the surface, resulting in transfer to other surfaces and the risk of bleeding during repair. The hinges of both the front and rear doors were badly deteriorated with significant tears, so that the doors did not hang evenly. Previous attempts to reinforce the deteriorated paper and areas of card which had detached had been carried out with adhesive tape and self adhesive plastic film. An excess of the self adhesive plastic was present around many edges and had lifted collecting deposits of dust and debris. The majority of the self adhesive plastic and adhesive tape was firmly adhered to the surface.

Perhaps the most obvious conservation issue was that each of the animal figures was held in place with large amounts of Plasticine. This is a modelling clay formed from calcium salts, petroleum jelly and aliphatic acids. The plasticine had hardened in areas adhering quite firmly both to the interior of the case and to the surface of the animal. This was causing additional damage as oily deposits stained the paper lining in some areas once the plasticine had been removed. There was also a risk that the delicate painted and flock surface of the animal models could be damaged during the removal of the plasticine.

Two images of the menagerie before conservation





The conservator at work

The animal figures had suffered a great deal of damage. Most of the smaller models had chips or larger areas of surface loss resulting in the loss of detail and the exposure of the friable interior. The larger animals had lost a number of limbs and ears. The flocked and painted surface was delicate and a large number of cracks were present over the surface, in particular around the intersection between limbs and the animal body. A number of models had old repairs, which were misaligned and the adhesive, which was present in excess, had discoloured.

COLLABORATION

Wiltshire Conservation Service is in part of a building housing the Wiltshire and Swindon archives and has two paper conservators on the staff. So it was an easy matter to seek advice about the most suitable adhesives for securing the paper elements of the menagerie. Many useful discussions also took place regarding the problems of the sellotape and the self adhesive plastic.

CONSERVATION

Before any other treatments could be considered the animal models first had to be removed from the menagerie and the plasticine removed from both the surface of the animals and

Paper damage and sticky back plastic



the menagerie itself. Small tests revealed that in many cases the plasticine was still flexible underneath its hard crust and with gentle leverage could be eased away from the surface of the menagerie without disrupting the paper lining. More persistent dried on deposits and the oily stains were reduced by gentle mechanical cleaning and rolling a barely damp cotton swab of white spirit over the surface. This technique was successfully applied to the removal of plasticine from both the animal figures and the interior of the menagerie. All cleaning was carried out under magnification to ensure that damage did not occur.

Spot tests revealed that the blue pigment of the interior lining paper was soluble in most solvents. Following consultation with paper conservator colleagues it was decided that wheat starch paste was the most suitable adhesive for the repairs to the paper elements of the menagerie. As this was mixed with water it was necessary to reduce the risk of staining and of migration of the pigment. It was decided that an acceptable compromise was to consolidate the pigment to reduce the risk of movement, as long as the consolidation did not dramatically alter its appearance. Tests revealed a 2% solution of Klucel G (hydroxypropyl cellulose) in propanol successfully fixed the pigment with virtually no darkening. This was applied to the blue surface with a sponge to prevent disruption of the pigment layer.

The dividing slats that had detached from the frame of the case were secured with Lascaux PVA to provide additional support and the lifted paper lining secured around them with wheat starch paste. The exterior paper coverings and the interior decorative etched panels had deposits of dust and dirt, the surface of these areas was cleaned very gently with smoke sponge to remove the heaviest deposits, repairs were then carried out on these areas. The wheat starch paste repairs proved to be extremely strong, so strong that after initial repairs the hinges were found to no longer require reinforcement.

After Conservation





The Zebra at various stages of its conservation

After experimentation with various mechanical and solvent based techniques it became clear that the self adhesive plastic film and sellotape could not easily be removed from the surface of the menagerie. It was felt that as the plastic was so firmly adhered and the paper so vulnerable, the risk of surface loss was greater than the desire to improve the aesthetic appearance of the piece. Therefore it was decided to leave the plastic films in place until the adhesive failed. Although this solution was far from ideal, as it presented the risk of staining developing as the adhesive deteriorated, it was felt to be an adequate compromise compared to the risk of significant surface damage. The excess of film and areas that had lifted were trimmed to provide a more cohesive appearance.

It was decided that the damage to the animal figures should be stabilised and the models returned to a state where they could be safely displayed. Therefore only large areas of loss that affected the structural stability of the model would be replaced. Small areas of surface loss and the numerous cracks were consolidated with an 8% solution of Paraloid B72 (ethyl methacrylate copolymer) in 50:50 IMS (industrial methylated spirits) and acetone, chosen as it provided the best adhesion with the least glossy appearance. Loose limbs were secured with a 10% solution of Paraloid B72 in 50:50 IMS and acetone. Replacement limbs were created for two of the animal figures to allow them to stand independently. A mould was taken of an existing limb. An armature was formed from fine wire and Holytex nylon gossamer, this was placed into the mould and plaster cast around it. The combination of the armature and plaster was felt to match the weight and texture of the original limbs. The cast limb was adhered in place with Paraloid B72, premixed by HMG, and carefully shaped with scalpels and micromesh abrasive paper to mirror the appearance of adjacent limbs. Acrylic paints were used to tint in the replacement limbs.

In the case of old repairs, if the joints were well aligned they were left in place and the excess adhesive removed, where possible, with gentle mechanical cleaning. Old repairs which were misaligned were taken down. Spot tests identified the adhesive present as an animal glue which could be softened with hot water and removed with careful mechanical cleaning.



The fragments were re-adhered with Paraloid B72, premixed by HMG. Voids were filled with 10% mix of Paraloid B72 in 50:50 IMS and acetone with glass micro-balloons to provide additional strength, and tinted with acrylic paints.

CONCLUSION

Although it was disappointing that a more satisfactory conclusion could not be reached with regard to the removal of the sticky back plastic, the overall result was successful. The menagerie was conserved to a standard suitable for display. Whilst the individual components are structurally stable and the general appearance of the piece improved, the additions and losses that are part of the object have been maintained preserving the history of the life of the menagerie. The project provided an opportunity to collaborate with archive colleagues, allowing new skills to be learnt, and knowledge and information to be shared. It is hoped that the objects and archive conservation teams will be able to collaborate on future projects.

All photographs © Wiltshire Council

The Preservation Box

Metals conservation student Sia Marshall, inspired by the Demos Report and encouraged by Birthe Christensen, the Head of Conservation and Preservation at the National Maritime Museum, has developed a conservation awareness tool for visiting school children

INTRODUCTION

The Preservation Box is an innovative project at the National Maritime Museum (NMM), Greenwich; it was stimulated by the 2008 Demos report* and conceived as a way of extending awareness of the field of conservation to school groups. Findings from a pilot study were presented at the Royal College of Art/Victoria and Albert Student Symposium in May 2009.

Children from diverse backgrounds visit the Museum for activities organized by the Learning and Interpretation department, so incorporating some conservation content into the existing programme should be an effective way of educating a broad audience. Crucially, the new conservation content would be delivered by members of the Learning and Interpretation team. The aim was to develop a sustainable group of resources which would introduce the factors (e.g. light, temperature, humidity, handling and chemical composition) that influence the life expectancy of materials, for use alongside current education activities. The NMM Learning and Interpretation department already uses a series of 'Journey Boxes' containing various museum objects and paper items, and a Preservation Box introducing some conservation content was thought likely to sit well alongside the existing set of education resources.

INCEPTION

Good cross-departmental working practices already exist at the Museum. Both the Conservation and Learning and Interpretation departments were enthusiastic about the project and soon established shared objectives:

1. To raise public awareness of conservation and preservation in line with the Museum's Corporate Strategic Plan 2009–14.
2. To achieve specific learning outcomes initially for KS2 (Key Stage 2) students, including the identification of different materials and appreciation of how different agents of deterioration can change them.
3. To strengthen existing links between the two NMM teams.

The preservation of paper was chosen as the first topic to trial. Children are already familiar with examples of damaged paper (e.g. comics spoiled by handling) and paper-based items such as letters, prints and books are shown to them in most of the existing school sessions. There may also be many more opportunities to utilize a paper-based initiative with the 2011 opening of the Museum's Sammy Ofer Wing, which includes a new reading room supported by purpose-built stores for the majority of the Museum's large holdings of manuscripts and reference books.

The first trial of the Preservation Box occurred as part of a Key Stage 2 education session called 'There be Pirates' but was designed in such a way that it could be used alongside any paper archive activity.

Other requirements were that:

- the new materials were stored in a smart container in keeping with those used for archival storage
- new content would add no more than ten minutes to session time
- education staff were given adequate training and supporting notes about paper preservation
- handling demonstrations utilized only new materials, no museum items
- the emphasis was placed on preservation, not conservation practice
- there were no adverse health and safety implications.

RESOURCES

A further necessity was that the Preservation Box involved little in the way of resources to make, deliver and maintain. The content devised comprised three demonstrations, each highlighting a different agent of damage. One, two or all of these can be included in the session depending on time available:

1. Blue litmus indicator paper (acid damage)
A small piece of blue litmus paper is handed out to each child and the colour change after a few minutes demonstrates that hands are slightly acidic. Discussion follows about acids causing damage.
2. Two paperbacks (handling damage)

Handling blue litmus indicator paper





Explaining the use of melinex

Two identical pirate-story paperbacks were bought in 2009. One is being kept pristine while the other is handed around the group and the children are encouraged to look through it. Even after a handful of sessions there was a clear contrast in the condition of the two books. The differences are discussed and ways to avoid careless handling are brainstormed.

3. Sailor print (light and handling damage)
A recently purchased (non-accessioned) second-hand print of a sailor is shown to the group. The paper has already started to turn yellow and the group discover that this is because of light exposure. The children suggest how to prevent any further damage to this print, having already seen some items protected by Melinex in the session.

Once the content had been decided, supporting documents were produced in collaboration with specialist paper conservators. These sheets describe and explain the three demonstrations, along with teaching suggestions and background information regarding science and conservation. Regular meetings were organized for the Learning and Interpretation staff delivering the content, so that they felt prepared and confident about the subject matter.

Extracts from the supporting documents are shown here.

CONCLUSION

The Preservation Box has been successfully incorporated into the 'There be Pirates' education activity and has received favourable feedback both from the education staff delivering it and from several of the visitors attending the sessions. As well as being wholly satisfied with the material provided, the facilitators reported that 'by introducing the idea of conservation into manuscript sessions we are actually achieving several learning outcomes. Pupils understand clearly the reasons why they are not allowed to handle the documents and this adds emphasis to both the importance and age of the documents'. The objectives agreed by the two NMM departments involved have been achieved, and the resource also has the potential to be used throughout the Key Stages 2 to 5.

The NMM wishes to develop this scheme further and both teams would like to expand the project to cover other materials such as metal, textiles, painted surfaces and so on. Most importantly this project has proved itself to be a low-cost, sustainable and wide-reaching initiative.

* Samuel Jones and John Holden, 'It's a Material World – Caring for the Public realm' Demos 2008

'Preservation Box' for 'There Be Pirates' Education

Question	Key facts
What is Litmus paper and why does it change colour?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Litmus paper is available in two versions and is an indicator for acids which turn it from red to blue (or alkalis which turn it from red to blue). • All acids contain Hydrogen Ions which cause the colour change. • Water must be present, e.g. from the sweat on the skin, for the acid to be able to cause the colour change.
Why is acid damaging to paper?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper is made up of cellulose fibres and the breakdown of these fibres. This causes the colour from white to yellow and to become brittle.
Why is light damaging to paper?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Light also hastens the breakdown of cellulose, causing paper to turn yellow and become brittle. • Light can also fade the writing, drawing or printing on paper.
Give examples of careless handling.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper is very delicate and is easily damaged. • It can become worn, tear, crease, discoloured or stained. • Paper can have various 'media' (eg pencil, ink, watercolour) and these too can be damaged by careless handling.

'Preservation Box' for 'There Be Pirates' Education

Object	Description/Age	Teaching Suggestions
Blue Litmus Indicator Paper	Supplied by Whatman chemicals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Hand out a small piece of paper. Suggest they fold it in half between fingers for a few minutes whilst the session goes on. ➢ Not all pieces will show a change but a change in colour (where skin in contact) will be visible. ➢ This introduces a bit of 'science' into the activity. 'What is the most acidic hands? (most pink) ➢ Need to tell students to keep the paper at end.
Two 'Pirates' paperbacks: untouched & handled	New March 2009 (from NMM shop)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Involve the children in the 'Test'. ➢ Every group who visit should have a 'flick through' it. ➢ Show the untouched book and the handled book. ➢ Ask question: How many think the handled copy is better? (Keep a record somewhere discrete at the end of the session)
Sailor print	From 'Pollocks Toy Museum'. Yet to find out actual age but probably c.1980.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Ask children how best to protect it for the future – they suggest of minimizing handling. ➢ If time, introduce the concept of deterioration e.g. light, air, pests, fire

Supplementary Information (above) and Teaching Notes (below)

Anyone who would like a copy of these documents should apply to Birthe Christensen, Head of Conservation, National Maritime Museum, London SE10 9NF or bchristensen@nmm.ac.uk

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Ruth Boley and Carrie Roder, members of the NMM Learning and Interpretation team, and Elisabeth Carr and Virginia Lladó-Buisán for their specialist guidance regarding paper conservation.

news from the groups

ETHNOGRAPHY GROUP

Welcome to 2011! We are busy planning another exciting year full of events. But first, a quick recap of what we saw in 2010.

We began with the very first Icon-wide general conference, CF10 in Cardiff. Within this we ran a very successful joint session together with the Textile Group entitled – *From top to tail: Accessories from around the world*. Following this, we had another intriguing Ethno Crawl which entailed a visit to Dennis Severs House and 19 Princelet Street in the Brick Lane area of London. The year was rounded out with the highly successful basketry conservation workshop, run by Sherry Doyal and Barbara Wills, and a very informative and well attended one-day conference on basketry conservation. Both events were held at Kew Gardens. (See review on page 29.)

Finally, as a conclusion to year 2010, we welcome three new members to our committee. It now includes:

Chair:	Arianna Bernucci
Treasurer:	Emma Schmuecker
Secretary:	Kate Jackson
Events Organizers	Emilia Ralston, Pieta Greaves
Website coordinator:	Pieta Greaves
Ordinary Member:	Monika Harter
and our new members:	
Icon News & publicity officer:	Charlotte Ridley (Horniman Museum)
Student liaison:	Ian Langston (University of Lincoln)
Student liaison:	Gemma Aboe (Cardiff University)

We have many events in the pipeline for 2011 including a joint New Year's party with the Archaeology Group. We're also planning an ethno crawl in Edinburgh (when the weather gets warmer) as well as special tours of the Kew Gardens Economic Botany Collections during the summer months. In the meantime, keep your eyes peeled for our next call for papers as we are actively working on the next conference!

SCOTLAND GROUP

The Icon Scotland Group Committee would like to thank May Cassar for delivering a fascinating and thought-provoking Plenderleith Lecture in November last year. We hope you'll take the opportunity to read the review in this edition written by one of the students on the new textile conservation course in Glasgow.

We are now looking to future events including a pest day in Glasgow and an iron gall ink day in Dundee, both scheduled for early 2011. Details will be posted once finalised.

We also have a glass plate negative day arranged for 11 February 2011 – an excellent CPD opportunity that combines theory and practice – hosted by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland. Please see the Listing section and the website for details.

We're delighted that the Icon training event, Health and Safety for Conservators, will be coming to Scotland (Dundee

University Library, 7 April 2011). Please see the Icon website for details and booking: <<http://ctt-news.org/6S6-AV0P-NALOU-4B9O8-1/c.aspx>>

STONE AND WALL PAINTINGS GROUP

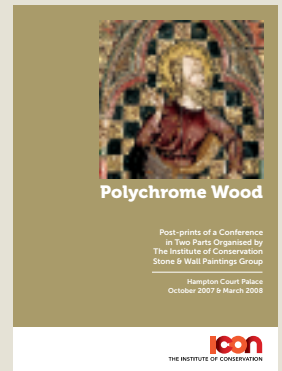
The first day of our Going beneath the Surface conference series was held on 5 November. This was well attended and received. You can read a review of this on page 27. The second conference will take place on Friday, 25 March at Stratford Old Town Hall, London E14 4BQ (see Listings on page 35). As with Day 1 the presentations will focus on the practical application of a variety of methods for identifying and removing unwanted deposits on decorative surfaces. If you would like to present a paper at this conference, please contact Peter Martindale on petermartindale@btinternet.com. We aim to publish the conference proceedings in due course.

The Stone & Wall painting group is delighted to announce the long-awaited publication of the proceedings of our two-day Polychrome Wood conference, which took place at Hampton Court in October 2007 and February 2008. This significant collection of papers bridges the specialist fields of panel painting, architectural wood and wall painting conservation. The contributors discuss a diverse range of important historic painted wooden surfaces, the materials involved, their composition and techniques of execution, the agents of deterioration, preventive measures, methods of treatment, and aspects of presentation and display. Contributors include Jim Coulson, Ian Tyers, Spike Bucklow, Eddie Sinclair, Lucy Wrapson & Marie Louise Sauerberg, Pauline Plummer, Lee Prosser, Christine Sitwell, Tobit Curteis, Hugh Harrison, Al Brewer, Madeleine Katkov, Ailsa Murray, Chantal-Helen Thuer and Ruth McNeilage. Bibliographic details: ISBN: 978-0-9553364-5-4 • 228 pp • Full colour. You can order the book from the Icon website.

We would encourage Group members to submit interesting case studies, reviews of courses attended and anything else that may be of interest to colleagues for inclusion in future editions of Icon News. Please contact our News Web Editor: clara.willett@english-heritage.org.uk

The Stone and Wall Paintings Group Committee

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TEXTILE GROUP

The conference 'Fashion, Ritual, Furniture and Textiles: the Phenomenon of the State Bed' was held at Hopetoun House, South Queensferry, by the Hopetoun House Preservation Trust on 14 & 15 October 2010. It was the first conference in what is hoped will be a series, exploring different aspects of the house, collections, family and estate to be held in fulfillment of the Trust's objective to facilitate and encourage access to the study and appreciation of the house and its contents. The conference was held in the recently refurbished ballroom of the house, which is hung with Flemish tapestries. There were about a hundred delegates, made to feel very welcome by excellent hospitality that included a drinks reception in the state apartments on the first evening. There were many interesting papers on a mixture of history and conservation subjects, five given by textile conservators. Tuula Pardoe ACR (The Scottish Conservation Studio) spoke about the Hopetoun State Bed. She is currently assessing the condition and considering the possible treatments for the bed's textiles which will contribute to the development of a conservation programme. Maria Jordon ACR (Historic Royal Places) gave a talk on the conservation work on Queen Anne's and Queen Charlotte's beds, two of the state beds at Hampton Court

Palace. Ksynia Marko ACR (National Trust, Blickling Hall Estate, Norfolk) began her talk on the conservation of King James II bed at Knole with a vivid description of her impression of the upholstered furniture on her first visit to the house in 1981. Kateřina Cichrová (Central Commission for Conservation of Moveable Heritage, Prague) gave an overview of the range of textiles, including furnishing textiles that come to her studio. Sheila Landi FIIC (The Landi Company, Burghley House, Lincolnshire) spoke about some of the excitement and frustration of working in private practice in relation to a bed she has been consulted about. There was also an opportunity for delegates to view and discuss the Hopetoun State Bed with Tuula Pardoe.

Harriet Woolmore, Preventive Conservator, Glasgow Museums.

The annual Textile Group Forum '**Incompatible Partners? Challenges of composite objects**' will be held on Monday 4 April 2011. The forum will explore the conservation of mixed material objects, the challenges faced in storing and displaying them as well as ethical issues, such as prioritising the different materials, collaborative research, working with other specialists and the sequencing of the treatment of the different materials. Please see the Icon website for further details.

Graduate Voice

The 2010 winner of the Denise Lyall Prize Jasmina Vuckovic writes about her MA research project whilst studying at West Dean College

'An initial investigation into appropriate water based adhesives for bonding meerschaum tobacco pipes'

After practising as a ceramic artist in Belgrade for ten years, I felt compelled to widen my horizons, make a deeper commitment to my craft and its historic precedents. Consequently in 2008, I enrolled in a programme of Conservation of Ceramics and Related Materials at West Dean College where I have spent the last two years.

Winning the Denise Lyall Prize in my final, postgraduate year was the pinnacle of a very stimulating and challenging year. During this time I successfully completed seventeen projects at the college and spent six weeks on a work placement at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Although most of my work was on ceramics objects, I happily grasped opportunities to treat other materials including stone, glass and ivory. Of all the projects I worked on over the last twelve months, the most exciting included reconstructing a Roman flagon broken into hundreds of sherds, matching a lustre pattern on a Hispano/Moresque lustre vase, and consolidating a soft organic coating on an earthenware japanned vase. However, the most fascinating and challenging object I came across was a meerschaum cigarette holder, which led me to my MA research project.

Meerschaum is a soft, whitish mineral, also identified as sepiolite, which, in powdered form, is known in conservation practice as a poulticing material. The highest quality meerschaum is only found in Turkey's Eskişehir Province from where, in the 18th and 19th centuries it was exported to West Europe and America for carving tobacco pipes and cigarette

Testing the strength of adhesives on a Tensometer for the MA project





The cigarette holder. A small section on the back of the holder where the cigarette would be inserted is missing.

holders. On seeing a meerschaum cigarette holder for the first time, I was convinced that it was made from ivory in view of its highly polished (wax-coated) surface which is regarded as a distinctive feature particularly if it is further coloured by smoke absorption.

The object I worked on was in a bad state of repair. One of the bonds had failed and others were misaligned with excess yellow adhesive. Attempts to dismantle these bonds were not successful – the adhesive swelled slightly in Nitromors/Dichloromethane but this solvent was too aggressive for the surface wax coating which had to be preserved. Moreover, it appeared that the solvent would penetrate into the meerschaum substrate at a rapid rate, without allowing enough time to break down the adhesive. Removing the previous restoration was therefore practically impossible without extensive damage to the object. Through this experience, which served as a case study for my MA project, several problems were identified: the meerschaum body was extremely soft, porous and brittle and the way the objects were made (mixed media, sensitive wax coating) made any attempt at treatment even more complicated.

Meerschaum as a material and subject within conservation is under-reported. A significant part of my project was therefore concentrated on identifying the material itself and its properties. Despite my intensive research, I found precious little: obscure literature, no records of previous conservation treatments, no thoughts from other professionals in the field, limited access to these objects on public display, and great difficulties in obtaining the raw material for testing as the Turkish government had banned the export of meerschaum since the 1970s, apparently in order to protect and stimulate the local carving industry. However, I was not discouraged and after numerous letters the mineral was obtained from a chemical engineer in Turkey doing a project about meerschaum and its possible uses. This enabled me to create valid samples and to carry out tests on the primary source material.

While the main focus for my MA project was to find an adhesive which would be reversible without extensive damage to the substrate, the process of research forced me to step back and assess issues of compatibility with the substrate, tack and strength. Therefore, instead of delving deeply into one aspect of the conservation treatment, my research covered a much broader area in order to determine which adhesive(s) would be strong enough to enable safe handling of the object (while not exceeding the strength of meerschaum itself) and ideally be reversible as well.

As water is the most popular solvent and the least harmful to

wax coating my tests were limited to water-based adhesives. Potential water damage to the substrate was not an issue as these pipes are traditionally soaked in water for ease of carving during the manufacturing process. Most water-based adhesives are typically used in books and textile conservation and I was concerned that they might not be sufficiently strong to bond a solid object. However, meerschaum is very light (specific gravity <1) and fortunately, this proved not to be an issue. Many adhesives were discarded along the way until I was left with those which appeared compatible with, and gave a good tack when applied on meerschaum. These final five adhesives were: wheat starch, isinglass, gelatine, Aquazol® 500 and Evacon-R™.

Strength tests were carried out in two stages: a subjective-handling method and an objective method carried out on a Tensometer type "W" by recording the force needed to break these bonds and comparing it with the force needed to break the meerschaum. Being very soft, it was not possible to insert the meerschaum samples into standard grips provided with the Tensometer without causing damage to the substrate, thus a new testing rig had to be designed and adapted for this purpose. All of the tested adhesives proved weaker than the cohesive strength of meerschaum itself. Apart from starch, which proved too weak to resist handling and was therefore discarded, the four other adhesives were used further in dismantling tests.

Aquazol® 500 performed well in all tests and appeared to be the most suitable adhesive for bonding meerschaum both from a strength and reversibility point of view while Isinglass proved the most difficult to reverse and had the least consistent results. However, further research is still necessary prior to any definitive conclusions being reached. These tests should be repeated and ideally carried out on aged adhesives.

In conclusion, conducting this research provided an invaluable experience for me during which I have learned a great deal. The practical component allowed me to use analytical instruments such as the XRF and the FT-IR for identification of materials for testing, and I was forced to meet the challenge of designing the new testing rig for the Tensometer. From a professional viewpoint, my research also involved a valuable expansion of my network to include many more curators, mineralogists, chemists and other professionals worldwide. Finally, I hope that my initial investigation of meerschaum and possible adhesives for its bonding, will generate and refresh interest in this unusual material and be of practical use in the conservation of such objects in the future.

reviews

BOOKS

WILLEM DE KOONING: THE ARTIST'S MATERIALS

Susan F. Lake

Getty Publications 2010

ISBN: 978 1 60606 021 6 112 pages £29.99

Dr Susan Lake is Director of Collection Management/Chief Conservator, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden. A glance at her repertoire shows her to be synonymously linked to technical studies on American 'gestural' Abstract Expressionist painter Willem De Kooning. Lake's well established and widely recognised commitment to exposing De Kooning's idiosyncratic working practices is now embodied in this publication.



Willem De Kooning. The Artist's Materials is a scholarly and comprehensive appraisal of the technique of an artist who punishingly pushed to the limits the qualities of commercial and non-commercial artists' materials. He knew how to paint, exploiting both a classic art school education and his experience as a commercial painter to make some of the most intriguing paintings of his generation. The book works chronologically through each decade showing how De Kooning's technique alters in response to what he wants to paint and how he wants to paint it. Each chapter is rich in new information. The technical information in this book is extensive and at times repetitive; Lake feels a need to re-emphasise points made in previous chapters to link innovations. The objectivity of her analytical observations challenges us to re-interpret the subjective art history. Lake uses her findings to suggest alternative interpretations of the artist's working practices. On occasion she disproves memoirs from reliable sources such as De Kooning's wife Elaine and his studio assistant John McMahon. However, this exemplifies a balanced study where science and myth are equally valued.

Lake fuses art history, anecdote and rigorous scientific analysis to track the evolution of De Kooning's practice, a task facilitated by her custodial responsibility for the Hirshhorn's seventy strong collection of works by the artist. Her study begins with work produced in the late 1940s when De Kooning was an impoverished New York-based painter using the more affordable oleoresin-based commercial house paints and charcoal to create abstracted images of his surrounding urban landscape. These house paints were then modified with material such as plaster of Paris, glass and wax giving them the desired corporeality. Lake suggests that what may

drive the evolution of De Kooning's technique is his interrogation of the rheology of paint. He modifies it with both orthodox and unorthodox additives in order to create textured and reflective surfaces.

Lake is at her descriptive best (all the more appreciated due to the somewhat spare use of images in the introductory chapter) when discussing the most famous of De Kooning's works, the 'women' paintings of the late 1940s and 1950s. She writes of *Woman 1953* 'Her wide staring eyes and mouth are comically duplicated below as a second set of large cross-eyed nipples and a toothy red-lipped pubis'. Her compositional and aesthetic inferences balance the large number of scientific ones.

Later in her book Lake examines work produced in the 1960s. At this time De Kooning relocated to Long Island; the move from city to sea heralding a bolder and more simplified abstraction. Through gesture and material he sought to sublimate the water and light surrounding him and so there are fewer references to the recognisable, the act of painting taking precedent. This section includes vivid descriptions and technical observations illuminating an artist manipulating his materials to create sophisticated surface variation and atmosphere. Having reduced compositional references, De Kooning takes material experimentation to another stage, painting on doors, adding whipped up water and oil to his paint in order to create specific features. The pits and wrinkles that characterise his surfaces of this period then lead him to repudiate his signature smooth glossy surfaces and work with a thicker more impasted surface.

Lake's research undoubtedly enables us to contextualise De Kooning's working practices within the regenerative era of post war America. Whilst the 'gestural' Abstract Expressionists are obviously shared painting processes, any common approach to their choice and modification of materials is less obvious. Lake correctly maintains that the efficacy of her research is dependent on a wider exploration of their techniques, yet to be carried out.

This book provides a comprehensive technical art historical study. Lake's resources are extensive and she has made the best use of them. With so many works by De Kooning in the Hirshhorn's collection to study (and access to many more in private and other public institutions) we are left in little doubt that her findings represent the techniques and materials used across De Kooning's lengthy career. By containing the details of her analytical methods to an extended appendix towards the end of the book she will not deter readership within the wider art and museum communities as well as students and scholars looking for very detailed technical information on this important artist.

Rachel Barker Painting Conservator Tate

CONSERVING HISTORIC VESSELS: Understanding Historic Vessels Vol.3. National Historic Ships 2010.

ISBN 978 0 9566554 0 0 200 pages £30

This is the third publication in the series of practical guidelines *Understanding Historic Vessels* produced by National Historic Ships. It is intended to provide practical guidelines for those involved in preserving our historic ships and boats.

Ship and boat conservation is a field which is fraught with problems – not only in the practical work but in the approach and ethics. It is an expensive process so it is important that people carrying out this work have a clear idea of what they are achieving, and it is an area which is awash with 'experts' – some more informed than others. *Conserving Historic Vessels* is an important step forward in informing the debates around the conservation/restoration of historic boats and ships without being too didactic. The authors are trying to present a practical working tool for the important decision making necessary in vessel conservation.

The book begins with chapters outlining the history of conservation; conservation principles and sources of funding. Indeed, one of the practical aspects of this book is advice on where to get relevant information and the importance of clarity and objective thought for any proposed maritime conservation project based on good background knowledge. The chapters lead the reader through the process of the evaluation of the vessel asking the basic question of whether the vessel should be acquired in the first place, ensuring that reasons for acquisition are sound and valid. Whatever route is taken in the long run there will be financial and resource consequences, even later disposal may not be cheap.

Once acquired there are issues of stabilisation whilst the plans and process for conservation, preservation or restoration are developed including an understanding of the vessel and assessing the significance (although this should be part of the decision making before acquisition). In subsequent sections the authors discuss the issues around the different approaches to preservation of an historic vessel such as straight forward conservation, restoration, adaptation if it is to be sailed with or without public access, and the construction of a replica. Again the text is not didactic but informs the decision making process and suggests approaches.

The last section considers the important and often forgotten subject of maintenance which can have considerable financial consequences. A vessel on the water will obviously need to undergo regular maintenance inspection; but a maintenance regime is also important for vessels stored, housed or displayed out of the water.

The book includes a flow chart to help guide the decision making for those embarking on the preservation of historic vessels, case studies (although at times these seemed a little perfunctory - I found myself wanting more details), an extensive bibliography and copious photographs, though with these I felt the captioning could have been better arranged (and some do not appear to have captions at all).

However, these little niggles aside *Conserving Historic Vessels* is a useful contribution to the more reasoned development of boat and ship conservation. Inevitably it will not be the last word on this subject but it brings together the essential elements of the debate, it is clearly written and well structured and a good practical guide to inform the essential decision-making.

George Monger ACR

TALKS

FAKES AND FORGERIES IN ARCHIVES & LIBRARIES

Icon Book & Paper Group
28 September 2010 London

Dr. **Brian Davies** is a deservedly popular speaker and the Icon office was packed at this our last lecture in the current premises. Brian is a retired senior lecturer in biochemistry from Aberystwyth University, where he was responsible for teaching to postgraduate archive administration students scientific background to archival materials and their conservation.

The lecture dealt with the various methods that have been used over centuries both to create forgeries and to detect them. Until the mid-19thC, forgeries were often revealed by critical comment forcing an eventual and detailed confession. Nowadays, increasingly sophisticated scientific analysis, coupled with an understanding of how the technology of writing and printing has changed, is able to detect inconsistencies with alleged provenance.

Before the advent of printing in the late 15thC, the only way of duplicating a document was to copy it by hand. The various manuscript copies that still exist of important works such as Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* are just copies; they are neither fakes nor forgeries. But fake documents were made in medieval times – charters and papal bulls – to support historical belief with written authority or to provide false evidence of ownership or privilege. Such fakes can be regarded as forgeries because they were prepared with the intention to deceive or defraud.

It is that intention to defraud which distinguishes the forgery from the fake. In more modern times, from the late 19thC,



When iron-gall ink is freshly made, it is very pale, but darkens and thickens as it oxidises. Although quill pens worked well with the black oxidised ink, the new steel pens of the 1820s required the freshly made and free-flowing ink, too pale to be seen easily as it was being used. In 1832 Henry Stephens added indigo to such ink, making it blue and visible. It quickly darkened to black as it oxidised on the paper, and was known as 'Stephens' Blue Black Writing Fluid'

suspicious documents have been submitted to chemical analysis, using techniques of ever-increasing sophistication. But all scientific analysis can do, whether of the paper or of the ink, is to determine whether or not the materials used in a document are consistent with its alleged provenance; comparisons have to be made against a detailed knowledge of the way paper, ink, paint or binding technology had developed by the alleged date. If the materials are consistent, the document may be genuine; if they are not, then the document is a fake or a forgery. But even modern chemistry cannot detect fraudulent intent.

Documents which challenged the origins and belief of the Mormon Church were 'discovered' by Mark Hofmann in the 1980s. Chemical analyses of ink and paper showed they were Hofmann's own forgeries. Medical student Hofmann 'found' and sold to the Mormon Church scores of documents including *The Anthon Transcript* and *The Salamander Letter*. The text of the latter contradicted the founder of the Church, Joseph Smith. *The Oath of a Freeman* was allegedly a 1638/9 imprint by Stephen Daye; such an oath was known to have been used but this was the only copy ever 'found', which Hofmann tried to sell to the Library of Congress. Much of Hofmann's trial in 1987 was taken up with forensic evidence, some of which showed that Hofmann had been artificially ageing his paper and iron-gall ink.

Results from a variety of modern techniques used, over a period of forty years, in attempts unequivocally to determine the authenticity of the *Vinland Map*, have been interpreted in different ways; the balance of opinion is that it is a forgery. Palaeographic studies were inconclusive and cartographers were suspicious since early maps showed

Greenland attached to Europe while the *Vinland Map* depicted it – and rather too accurately – as an island. The scientific argument was mostly about the presence of anatase, a form of titanium dioxide (manufactured since 1921) which, although known to occur naturally, was present in quantity in the yellow ink underlying the black carbon ink. The balance of this evidence suggests a forgery. Carbon dating merely confirms that parchment of a suitable age was used for the map – it does not prove the map is genuine.

The sale of 'Hitler's Diaries' in the 1980s was suspended pending the forensic (mainly chemical) analyses which showed them to be forgeries. Their bindings contained polyamide 6 fibres and mixed polyester and viscose fibres which were not in use in the 1940s. The paper contained the optical brightener Blankophor R, known in 1945 but not used until the mid-1950s. The ink was proved by thin-layer chromatography to be a mixture of Pelikan Blue and Pelikan Black.

Forgeries have been produced for a variety of reasons, to try to alter a belief or a view of history, to provide provenance for ownership or for the authenticity of works of art, or simply for financial gain. The danger of theft of valuable manuscripts, books or maps from archives and libraries necessitates that collections and readers are subjected to security measures. Nowadays, such security measures have to guard against the possibility of false material being introduced as well as genuine and valuable works being removed.

Later I asked Dr. Davies what he would do first if faced with a suspicious document. He said that the important rule is to check the materials first before doing any handwriting comparisons, palaeography etc. Those Londoners lucky enough to see this summer's exhibition *Close Examination: Fakes, Mistakes and Discoveries* at the National Gallery would have read in the accompanying booklet *A Closer Look: Deceptions and Discoveries* that 'scientific examination does not replace traditional connoisseurship and art historical research, but it is an extraordinarily powerful tool when used in concert with them'. Paper conservators have a wealth of knowledge and are well equipped to be part of the debate.

Joanna Payne ACR Independent conservator of works of art on paper

HOW TO PHOTOGRAPH WORKS OF ART: An insight into photography, painting and two-dimensional artwork
Icon Paintings Group
5 October 2010 London

Continuing Icon's occasional series of talks, **Andrew Smart** of Mayfair Photographic firm AC Cooper shared with us his professional knowledge and practical tips to facilitate the photography of paintings and two-dimensional artwork. The aim of his talk was



to help the amateur conservator-photographer by

resolving some common studio problems. Whilst he acknowledged the merits of film photography, Smart chose to focus on digital capture, given the direction in which he feels photography is progressing: convenience and flexibility, coupled with the rising price of film as supply diminishes, favour the digital method.

Smart opened with a short history of AC Cooper. The firm was set up in 1918 to photograph the works of art of independent collectors, galleries and museums, and has been awarded three Royal warrants since its inception. Seven years ago Smart bought the family company and has aimed to uphold the standards and values its founders held dear. The firm houses a substantial archive of 45,000 negatives which is in the process of being digitized and catalogued.

In order to highlight the problems he has observed, and that have been communicated to him by conservators, Smart provided for discussion a series of photographs taken of the same female portrait. Each demonstrated a common photographic error. These included the unnecessary use of flash, incorrectly set white balance, wrongly positioned lights and misalignment of picture and camera. Each problem was addressed and tips were given to improve image quality in each case.

Smart emphasized that to achieve a standard of image capable of producing archival quality print reproductions, one does not need to buy very expensive equipment. A suitable 6 megapixel camera with a zoom lens should be available for around two hundred pounds, and associated equipment is widely available second hand. For the best results, he advised buying a DSLR camera of 10mp or more, with interchangeable lenses of between 50 to 105mm. Fixed focus lenses will always produce images of better quality than zoom lenses, achieving heightened sharpness and avoiding distortion. Smart also stressed the benefits of investing in a good quality tripod, to enable longer exposures and ensure a well-aligned image.

Lighting, contrast and exposure were all discussed, with clear instructions and practical advice given on how employ each best in various situations for optimal results. Taking questions from the group, Smart explored the difficulties inherent in and best approaches to the photography of warped panels and glazed paintings, and the use of tungsten, incandescent light and polarizing filters.

In conclusion, Smart emphasized that preparation is the key to good results. Time spent in setting up the space correctly is invaluable, as is giving proper consideration

to the particular nature of a picture: its size, shape, topography etc. Whilst he was confident that one would notice an instant difference if the steps he outlined were followed, he also stressed the importance of taking professional advice should a significant problem arise.

Angelina Barros D'Sa
Paintings Group

SCIENCE AND HERITAGE: Strategies for surviving turbulent times
The 13th Annual Harold Plenderleith Memorial Lecture
Edinburgh 19 November 2010

The latest Plenderleith lecture was delivered by **May Cassar**, Professor of Sustainable Heritage at University College London and Director of the AHRC/EPSRC Science and Heritage Programme. The setting for the event was in the heart of Edinburgh, at the National Galleries of Scotland Weston Link.

At the core of the lecture was the very current theme of the economy and how this is affecting, and will continue to affect, the science and heritage sector. This sombre topic was approached constructively and with foresight, looking at long-term choices and action that can be taken now to minimise future risks. May Cassar began by celebrating both the international reputation of the UK's achievements in science and heritage and the vast resource available within the UK in the form of museums, historic houses, archives, libraries and archaeology and historic settlements. She advised that this reputation and resource be fully exploited in order to promote the UK's role internationally as a key hub for the exchange of knowledge. The UK should use its expertise to lead in the field of science and heritage, whilst working with other countries for a collective influence. She also detailed the vast tourism revenue brought into the UK through its heritage; this acknowledged gain should be exploited for the benefit of the sector.

Speaking of the changing structure of the workplace and the risk this poses to employees, Professor Cassar specifically warned of the loss of skilled researchers who are retiring early, suggesting that preparations for the future be made to ensure the preservation of expertise, via 're-engagement'. She also promoted the collaboration of cultural and academic institutions, which should work together as 'two halves of the same picture'. Improvements, she said, are necessary in existing areas of the heritage sector in order to gain benefits. We need to make clear what resource ambitions we have and use the UK's 'cultural assets as instruments of prosperity'.

Technology was identified as an important

factor in sharing information and increasing connections within the science and heritage sector, which should be used to extend our values and build global links. An example was given of the EU heritage portal the Net-Heritage Observatory, created by the UK as part of a European Commission project and cited as a current case of how technology can enable countries to share knowledge. May Cassar also noted that the UK's growing digital databases should be protected in order to contribute to the 'world knowledge economy'. The EU's concept of Joint programming was highlighted as an opportunity to gather resources among European Ministries of Culture and of Research that would enable common research agendas to be developed in the future.

The second half of the lecture began with the idea of establishing a 'survival kit' – a strategy to help inform policy-making and encourage funders. May Cassar went on to say that influence should be exerted to ensure that the science and heritage field is appropriately recognised and suggested that one way of achieving this aim would be to nominate an Icon Government Relations Officer. She also suggested that the science and heritage sector should utilise the Coalition Government's 'Big Society' focus on 'localism' through community engagement projects, such as those that have been carried out by the conservation profession. In her position as the Director of the Science and Heritage Programme, she is looking to identify interested partners with whom to commission research on the future of science and heritage in the UK.

Professor Cassar concluded her lecture by reiterating the importance for the science and heritage sector of developing new ways of thinking: improving current practice, making it more efficient and ready for the unprecedented future it faces. She asked that the problems holding the sector back should be 'divested' and turned into opportunities, 'recognising we have no option but to collaborate internationally'. She closed by advising attendees to remain adaptable and not to accept a pared down future, but instead to optimise the science and heritage industries, to ensure change happens that benefits and assures the future progression of the whole sector.

Following the lecture was a reception of wine and nibbles and a chance to meet with professionals in the field. Speaking personally, and on behalf of my fellow students, the evening provided an excellent opportunity to engage with the Icon Scotland Group, and also a good chance to visit Edinburgh!

Charlotte Gamper MPhil Textile Conservation student, University of Glasgow

CONFERENCES

GOING BENEATH THE SURFACE

Icon Stone and Wall Paintings Group
5 November, London

Issues associated with removing unwanted deposits from decorative surfaces was the focus for this well attended and very well received day conference. With a range of papers which took on a European perspective; it was the first of two day conferences covering this topic: the second will be held on 25 March 2011 in London.

'The Cultural Background to Cleaning Techniques' was discussed by **Spike Bucklow** (Hamilton Kerr Institute). This paper, well delivered and spiced with humour, considered cleaning from the angle of craft, or nuance, as opposed to a 'determinist' scientific view. He suggested that if such a view were adopted by conservators the contributions made by conservation science might be more effectively employed. Spike feels that the science of conservation is better compared to ecology rather than chemistry, a view shared by others.

Prof. **Adrian Heritage** and Dr **Alison Sawdy** (both from the Cologne Institute of Conservation, Cologne Institute of Applied Sciences) delivered separate but linked papers which considered poulticing to remove soluble salts from porous materials (like plaster and stone). Prof. Heritage's paper described the findings of an EU project which gathered information both online and through interviews on current poulticing methods and materials employed. Information was predominately from France and Germany – with some from Italy, the UK and the US – with results showing that views and approaches varied considerably. Dr Sawdy explained two ways in which soluble salts might be extracted with aqueous poultices – diffusion and advection. In the former the poultice is kept wet, it is replaced, and contact time is considerable. In the latter, advection, the poultice is allowed to dry and the process repeated – usually once or twice more. A key component of advection is the relationship in pore size between the object and the poultice, which may explain why sometimes things 'work' and at other times 'don't work'.

Optical Coherence Tomography (OCT) is a tool which enables one to see below the surface – both of paintings and stone. This non invasive technique, originally designed to look at the human eye, was described by Dr **Haida Liang** (School of Science and Technology, Nottingham Trent University). With OCT it is possible to see through varnish to the paint layers below and some under drawing. By assembling a number of images which were taken next to each other into an animation, we were effectively taken

on a journey through the surface of a painting – quite an experience.

The second half of the day had a more practical feel; **Ann Ballantyne** (conservator in private practice) described her removal of unwanted deposits from three artefacts; the Brougham Reredos (V&A Museum), and the wall paintings in All Saints Church, Sutton Bingham and in Bradwell Abbey. In the 1970s overpaint was removed from the Brougham Reredos using 'Nitromors'. At Sutton Bingham oil overpaint was removed with steam, whilst at Bradwell Abbey a poultice of acetone and cellosolve was used to remove Paraloid B72 (which had been ill advisably applied).

Conservation of a wide range of exhibits within the re-opened Medieval and Renaissance galleries at the Victoria and Albert Museum was described in a joint paper by Dr **Lisa Wagner** and **Sofia Marques**. They explained how each artefact was first evaluated for treatment, and then described the results of the treatments employed. Sometimes the intervention was very minor – dusting; whilst in other cases a laser was used, sometimes in combination with poulticing. The programme of conservation had to tie in with the overall scheduling for the re-opening of the galleries.

Meredith Pesti, a conservator with Nicholas Boyes Stone Conservation (Edinburgh), focussed on the use of the laser in stone conservation. She explained how developments in laser technology have made it easier to use this tool over time – although it has its limitations. Of the cases described, one was from Rosslyn Chapel where uneven soiling on the internal walls of the chapel is being treated.

The use of Laponite RD water gel was described by **Frank Toohey** (Plowden and Smith) for the cleaning of the façade of the Garrick Club in London and the cleaning of a fire damaged Atlante marble surround. In the case of the Garrick Club, Laponite RD water gel was used on an unusually large scale; which involved scaling up methods of mixing, application and removal. The gel poultice was applied and removed three times. A steam lance was used to pre-treat surfaces and aid clearance.

As this conference was so well received, the Stone and Wall Paintings Group aim to publish these papers and those from the forthcoming conference in March 2011. Further details are on the Icon website.

Peter Martindale ACR

RESTORING JOINTS, CONSERVING STRUCTURES

10th International Symposium on Wood and Furniture Conservation
Amsterdam, Netherlands 8 & 9 October 2010

There are few opportunities for wood and furniture conservators to meet and discuss



From Hubert Baija's talk: 3D digital image of the exploded view of a joint

new developments, techniques and materials and current best practice in the profession. This Symposium, organized by Stichting Ebienist, was one not to be missed. It was held in De Rode Hoed, a cultural centre occupying three splendid 17thC canal houses; the three-storey main auditorium, the Great Hall, is the largest and oldest remaining hidden church in the Netherlands. The symposium covered a number of aspects of joint restoration and structural conservation: historical investigation into techniques, style and construction and the use of visual investigative conservation techniques and practical conservation were the main themes.

The opening presentation by **Clive Edwards** (Loughborough University, UK) provided an in-depth stroll through the history and use of the dovetail joint. This was claimed to be a key defining moment in the evolution from the joiners' trade in making furniture to cabinetmaking in the early 17thC but had of course, existed in wooden objects in Ancient Egypt some three thousand years earlier. The chronology of its use through history and its variants were discussed giving an insight into what has always been considered a complex, attractive and strong joint.

Jürgen Huber (Wallace Collection, London UK) continued in this vein discussing the use of foxtail wedging used by the Berlin based cabinetmaker Fielder to enhance the strength of dovetails and revealed during conservation of an 18thC commode. Huber went on to discuss his further investigation into the use of this sophisticated adaptation to the dovetail elsewhere in Germany.

Marijke Kuper (Art Historian, Netherlands) with her presentation 'No Progress without Experiment (Gerrit Rietveld 1950) Joints in the work of Rietveld' transported us into the 20thC where Rietveld, one of the most important furniture designers and architect in the Bauhaus school, used simple dowelled butt and basic lap joints in the making of the iconic Armchair Red Blue. These rudimentary joints were chosen in order not to 'break the plane of the wood' as was the effect with other more commonly used wood joints in the making of furniture e.g. mortise and tenon. The selection of the joint was purely aesthetic, but offered a new perspective for the furniture makers who followed.

Bodil Stauning (Copenhagen, Denmark) introduced many of us to the wonderful, eccentric and very talented character of the 20thC cabinetmaker Peder Moss and the

fine furniture he designed and made.

Hubert Baija (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam) discussed the recent results of research and digital cataloguing of paintings and frames at the Rijksmuseum. His use of 3D computer simulation to record joint and layer construction of frames was the envy of many of the presenters and the audience.

Claire Daly (Belgrave Conservation and Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, UK) began the second session of the day with her presentation entitled 'Restoring the Joints of Picture Frames; Maintaining Function at the Expense of Aesthetics' which tackled the unenviable subject of the complexity of frame conservation and the difficulties and compromises that are demanded when structural integrity is balanced with the fragility of the decorative layers and how this influences treatment choices. **Daniela Coelho** (Portuguese Science and Technology Foundation, Portuguese Catholic University, Research Centre for Science and Technology in Art, Portugal) delivered a talk on her recent study of four pieces of furniture carried out to aid the conservation treatment. **Andrea Coerd** (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam) spoke on the application and potential of 3D stereo radiography to reveal information on the construction methods of furniture to help conservation treatment decisions. The presentation sparked lively discussion of the success to date and further use and potential of this method of analysis. To everyone's amusement the talk also provided an opportunity to observe the audience wearing 3D spectacles.

Alistair Fox (Canadian Conservation Institute, Ottawa, Canada) talked about the complexity of restoring a collection of historically important chairs of the Judges of the Supreme Court of Canada, designed by Ernest Cormier in the Art Deco style in 1946. Fox was faced with the challenge of reversing a later modification, when the chairs were converted into swivel chairs, and incorporating new structural elements to provide integrity to them. The chairs had an inherent design flaw that contributed to their failure in use but there was a requirement to make them functional, working objects. His presentation outlined the complexity of the task and included a description of the scientific experimentation into the strength and suitability of materials and the restoration techniques employed.

Isander Breebaart (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam) opened the second day's proceedings with a presentation about two late 17thC cabinets-on-stand, which provided us with a detailed study of their construction and the subsequent methods of conserving their doors. **Adrian Smith** and **Nigel Goldsmith** (Royal Household Department, London) gave an insight into the on-going conservation of functional

chairs in the Household, no mean task at 1200 chairs. The physical demands placed on these pieces of furniture should not be underestimated. The conservators have, over time and through experience, developed methods of repair that impart a new lease of life to structurally compromised furniture through the innovative use of modern materials and techniques.

Carla Enrica Spantigati (Centro Conservazione e Restauro, Turin) presented a collaborative project by an art historian, a conservator and scientists on the work of an 18thC cabinetmaker, Pietro Pefetti. This multi-faceted approach into the investigation of these important pieces of furniture revealed a wealth of knowledge through the historical, technical and scientific analysis. The final paper delivered by **F Carey Howlett** (Private Conservator, Callao, USA) was on the dimensional changes experienced by architectural objects in uncontrolled environments. His case study was the conservation of large, panelled external doors, subject to very different conditions on the inner and outer faces. The extremely complex treatment of correcting warped panels and reversing 'plastic deformation' (considered by many to be irreversible) was very well presented.

Every year the organizers of the symposium provide an excellent choice of excursions, this year was no exception with three options on offer:

- the conservation studios of the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam accompanied by conservation staff.
- the Bratavia shipyard, Lelstad, providing a unique opportunity to view the ongoing reconstruction of 17thC Dutch ships.
- the Horrix and Mutters exhibition; two leading Dutch furniture manufacturers of the 19thC and early 20thC.

There was enthusiastic uptake for all the trips (with many injured in the rush) and inevitably some were disappointed when places on their choice of excursion were oversubscribed.

The theme of the symposium was a good choice and the conference was well organized and well attended in wonderful surroundings. The conservation of wooden structures employing wooden joints that are inherently weak or which have failed completely over time is a recurring problem. The solutions require an understanding of the structure and the function it is expected to perform, the historical significance of the object and the context in which it is used or displayed. It is a topic that will be returned to as materials and new techniques develop. The papers delivered were of a high quality but I would have liked to have heard more papers addressing practical matters; the problem solving and ethical considerations; materials and techniques for repairs,

replacement, consolidation and support of damaged wood joints. That said, I am still a fan of this symposium which brings together many who are interested in the conservation of wood and furniture.

Philip Kevin British Museum

METAL 2010: ICOM-CC metal working group triennial conference

11-15 October 2010 Charleston USA

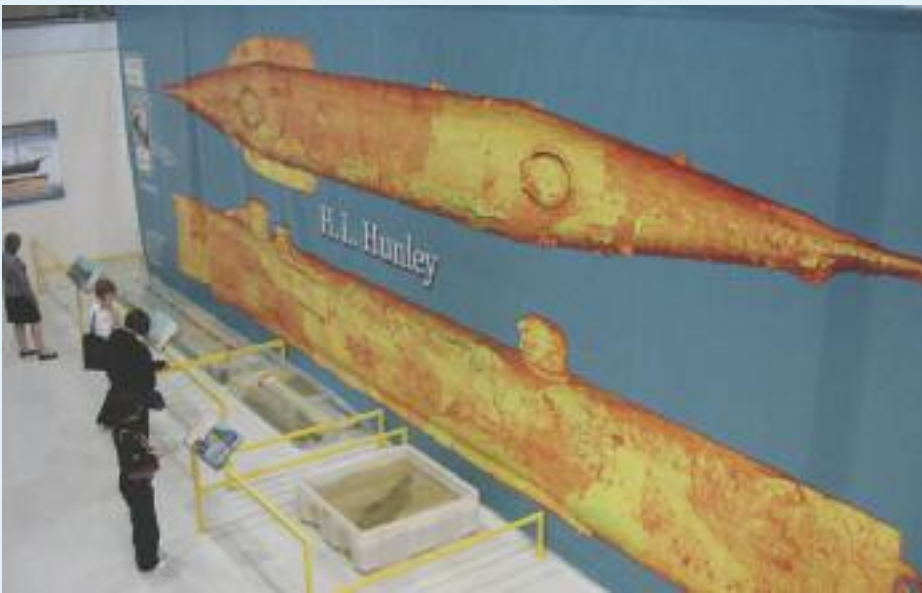
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The ICOM-CC Metal conferences are held every three years and are an excellent forum for presenting the latest research by leaders in the field. On this occasion, the conference sessions were grouped into broad themes including archaeological and marine metals, analytical work, coatings and corrosion studies, object case studies, outdoor heritage, preventive conservation and engineering and 3D technology. Over 150 delegates attended.

This was the first time this conference has been held in the United States; it was hosted by the team at the Clemson Conservation Center, where the HL Hunley submarine is being treated and displayed. The Hunley, one of the world's earliest submarines, sank in 1864 during the American Civil War and was recovered in 2000. The first evening reception was held at the Center, where we could see the excellent facilities and equipment being used to analyse and conserve the iron submarine and associated objects. The team is experimenting with sub-critical fluids for treating marine iron and showed very promising results. Thick iron ballast blocks free of chlorides within ten days of treatment filled many of us with envy!

Of the nearly sixty papers and posters presented, a number stood out and some common themes developed. One of these was the importance of working to agreed standards when carrying out testing. Many papers described experimental research on coatings and corrosion inhibitors but it is proving difficult to compare results. There was a call for identifying industrial standards that would be applicable to conservation research. Along this line, one paper presented by the Getty Museum showed a remarkable collaboration between sixteen participating museums to evaluate XRF results of the same group of objects by different institutions. There was a discrepancy in results, attributed to the quality of calibration, so again an adherence to closer application of standards was emphasised.

Case studies ranged from the conservation of miniature cameras for carrier pigeons (designed in the 1930s for the Swiss Army) to the challenges of dealing with huge objects such as Saturn rockets and battleships. There were several papers on the potential of new



Delegates viewing displays at the Clemson Conservation Center including a life size digital scan of the Hunley submarine

techniques such as dry ice blasting used in industry for removal of graffiti and organic coatings. Papers on outdoor sculpture (noted as 'extreme conservation') included gilding a statue 100 metres off the ground and maintaining unstable painted zinc sculpture, commonly used in the 19th century to imitate bronze.

Several papers showed the application of computer scanning and x-ray computed tomography (XCT). Historic Scotland presented two papers on laser scanning to aid documentation and treatment of large metal structures. XCT was used by conservators in southwest Germany to reveal material within excavated soil blocks showing the power of this technology to provide high resolution images of complex archaeological assemblages. A highlight of the conference was a paper describing work on a badly damaged Rodin sculpture by a team led by Tonny Beentjes in Amsterdam. The conservators used laser scanning of a maquette of the statue to create the infills needed for the large and disfiguring gaps. It was an excellent example of the combination of computer technology and the skill of the conservator.

The full programme is listed on the ICOM-CC metal group website. The conference organisers deserve praise for the variety and quality of the papers and for giving a new generation of conservators the opportunity to present their work; a number of papers were recent Masters and PhD research projects. Posters were on display throughout the conference and the breaks and receptions gave plenty of time for networking. The panel discussions after each session were recorded to include in the publication which will be available in early 2011 (see the website). For anyone involved in metals conservation, I would highly recommend attending the next conference to be held in Edinburgh or Arles in 2013.

I am grateful to the Anna Plowden Trust, the Museum of London and the conference organisers who found donors to support the conference by providing travel assistance for presenters.

Helen Ganiaris Museum of London

WORKSHOP

BASKETRY CONSERVATION

Icon Ethnography Group
Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, London
15-17 September 2010

There have been few recent workshops on the Conservation of Basketry, perhaps because specialists felt that the subject had been fully covered in the comprehensive GCI course *The Conservation of Artifacts Made from Plant Materials* (1984). Participants in the Ethnography Group workshop held at Kew Gardens therefore felt fortunate to be given the chance to focus on the subject for a full three days, updating their knowledge and practice under the excellent tutelage of conservators **Sherry Doyal** and **Barbara Wills** of the British Museum. Sherry's training and experience as a basket maker, and Barbara's passion for ancient basketry and sustainable conservation practice, made for a stimulating, lively programme. Participants also had the benefit of teaching assistance from ethnobotanist **Mark Nesbitt** and basket-maker and volunteer **Ruth Stungo**, both from the Economic Botany Collection, Kew. All four specialists worked very much as a team, with Sherry and Barbara giving brief lectures alternating with practical sessions, while Mark and Ruth conducted tours of the Economic Botany Collection, and of relevant plants growing in the adjacent gardens.

The opening session of the workshop focused on the classification of plant materials, with participants being given a grab-bag of specimens and instructions to sort them into their respective families. This exercise proved more difficult than expected, and Sherry cautioned against hasty identification based on familiarity, warning that processing and dyeing of plant fibres can confuse the evidence, as can the weaving technique used, where poor quality materials may be masked by more valuable weft-faced elements.

Participants were encouraged to create their own permanent reference sections using known specimens, particularly those verified

by basket makers. Sherry demonstrated the use of the Trekker microscope – one of the many cheap and cheerful tools she has used when working in the field. It comes in a range of magnifications and is equipped with a magnetic specimen holder, making identification of cross-sections relatively fast and easy.

Barbara demonstrated the humidification and reshaping of baskets, using a distorted Melanesian sack bag. A large tear was strengthened prior to humidification by threading through strips of Japanese tissue, with the tip of the temporary strips reinforced with adhesive (Sellotape, a Melinex needle attached using a Paraloid B72 dot, or unreinforced Tyvek strips could also be used). Barbara then used partially split Plastazote strips as temporary springs to slowly and gently extend the dimensions of the basket – 'to enhance the pressure', as participant Bruno Pouliot dryly put it.

Several cleaning techniques were demonstrated, including the use of Groomstick and Lascaux 360 swabs. The latter was a new technique for many participants, who were keen to experiment with different sized tips made from differing quantities of adhesive – the swabs remained sticky after drying and were used to gently lift the dirt from the plant fibre surface. Other new materials for many conservators were the latex-free polyurethane sponges recommended as a cheaper alternative to smoke sponges. These are more commonly found in the toolkit of professional make-up artists, and can be purchased from Qosmedix in the US, and from laboratory suppliers and chemists in the UK.

One of the most useful sections of the workshop was the lively discussion concerning the selection of adhesives for basketry repair. Participants shared accounts of the different ways adhesives could be prepared to suit the texture, strength, and shape of damage to a basket – what worked and what didn't. Paraloid B72 and microballoons were used as a fill material for industrial basketry, for example, while a more flexible PVA and paper pulp mixture was used for twined baskets, with fills sculpted to match the surrounding weave. Where lengths of adhesive were required for long splits, conservators were keen to try Gabrielle Tieu's method of creating Paraloid B72 'strings', formed by pulling out resin beads with tweezers over a spirit flame. These strings can be more easily manipulated into position across a split or tear, and reactivated using solvent.

Practical sessions were crammed with more useful tips, some of which seemed obvious once described, but resulted from clever lateral thinking about tools that are used in other professions or trades. A technique for threading through an unravelling section of fragile cordage, for example, using a temporary wrapping of split paper straw, was



Ruth Stungo and Heike Winkelbauer discuss construction of a basketry water bottle carrier

one that was blindingly simple yet effective, and uses cheap and readily accessible materials.

The combination of conservation expertise, basket making skills and ethnobotanical knowledge resulted in a hugely varied and instructive workshop. Participants left with a clear understanding of the complex interrelationship of plant fibre anatomy, cultivation and processing; weaving techniques; and the form, function and condition of the finished basket.

Several participants commented that they would have liked more time to practise some of the treatment techniques on their delegated basket, but this was unrealistic given the time available. While a five-day course would be preferable, the additional preparation and leave required for teachers and participants, seem likely to make this impracticable.

Thanks to the enthusiastic presenters, Sherry and Barbara, and to the Icon Ethnography Committee for organising such a stimulating workshop. It is hoped that the event will be repeated, so that more conservators on the lengthy waiting list can benefit from such a concentrated pool of basketry expertise.

Symposium

The three day workshop was followed by a one day symposium on 18 September 2010 and many participants took the opportunity to present case studies of basketry conservation projects. The first of these was a presentation by **Marion Kaminitz** and **Deborah McConnell**, representing a larger team from the National Museum of the American Indian, Washington. The speakers described the ongoing collaboration between the Museum and basket weavers in the Northern Californian region, with Deborah representing the Hupa people. The project involves a two-way exchange, with staff and interns from the NMAI visiting the Hoopa tribal landscape, to discover more about traditional cultivation and harvesting methods. They are introduced to the ways in which these methods are incorporated into partnerships between local tribes and the regional government bodies responsible for resource management, with simple exercises like clearing undergrowth to reduce fire damage being part of the annual maintenance cycle. The second part of the exchange involves weavers visiting the NMAI to examine baskets and to compare indigenous and professional conservation approaches to the care and repair of woven items.

Simple, accurate identification of baskets can be a side benefit of such exchange – when



Flexible Plastazote rings are used to gradually expand a Solomon Islands bag during humidification

viewing Hupa baskets in the collection of the Horniman Museum, Deborah identified a group of basketry 'bowls' as actually being 'caps', a confusion which had more serious connotations for interpretation than simple orientation. As Deborah explained further, the pattern in the central section represents God, and descending patterns towards the rim represent increasingly lower positions in the hierarchy – it is therefore critical that the artefact be viewed the correct way up. It was encouraging to see such a vital example of the way in which collaborations between conservators and members of communities who make, use and care for objects can actually work. While many institutions now acknowledge the need for closer, more active partnerships like these, progress is often stymied by lack of focus or available resources. This programme is obviously successful in increasing specialist knowledge on both sides, and establishes an ongoing relationship which has long-term benefits in areas other than conservation.

A cluster of papers featured the treatment of basketry items, covering groups such as fancy baskets, leather covered Bavarian baskets and bark clothing. What was most interesting was the preliminary acquisition, socio-cultural and analytical research carried out to determine provenance, and to formulate an appropriate treatment. The presence of basketry specialists in the audience was valuable, as they suggested alternative origins for the fancy baskets analysed and treated by Bruno Pouliot, Samantha Springer, Jennifer Mass and colleagues at Winterthur Museum.

Peter McElhinney and **Verena Kotonski** described treatments carried out on a heavily folded cedar bark Nuu-chah-nulth garment and a group of leather-covered Bavarian baskets. These formed a strong contrast, with Peter deciding to humidify and relax the garment, to regain its intended shape, and Verena deciding not to relax the leather lid as its distortion gave valuable evidence of use.

The most in-depth account of basketry technology was given by **Marianne Davy-Ball** who gave a comprehensive summary of her PhD fieldwork (Durham University) amongst the Orang Ulu of Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo. In the absence of published ethnographies, research like Marianne's is invaluable in providing up-to-date information on changes to technology as a result of development. This contrasted strongly with **Mark Nesbitt** and **Ruth Stungo's** paper on basketry in the Economic

Botany Collection at Kew, which described the enormous breadth of cultural contexts represented in the collection, and the challenges of identifying and describing sometimes unfamiliar materials and techniques. **Barbara Wills** took a similarly general overview of colour in baskets, with a fascinating account of defining missing areas of black dyed design on a Beni Hasan basket, through collaboration with a specialist curator.

The final presentation of the day was the most thought-provoking, and encouraged conservators to think far more critically about the effects of their treatments on structural information held within basketry fibres.

Sherry Doyal and **Julie Eklund** detailed the research they have carried out on the influence of historic basketry conservation treatments on future DNA extraction and identification. Sherry's role was to compile information from basket makers and conservators on the historic and contemporary treatments carried out on basketry items. Examples given included the use of coconut oil for processing rattan, paraffin oil for surface coating baskets and mats, and pesticides.

One brave audience member asked what the point of DNA analysis was but was quickly given a list of benefits, starting with the use of results to gain new information on global issues such as plant disease and climate change. Pinpointing connections between plants would also increase knowledge on plant distribution and cultural trade.

The long list of treatments and a grading of the extent of damage they cause plant DNA will be an extremely useful reference for conservators, allowing them to select the least inhibiting, contaminating and DNA damaging treatments, where possible (a plea echoed by Mark Nesbitt of the Economic Botany Collection, Kew). They were also urged to make past treatments available to researchers and encourage sampling of less treated specimens where appropriate.

The full day's programme was packed with inspiring examples of collaboration between conservators and other specialists, and gave those in the audience an invaluable list of resources to consult when investigating and treating basketry items from a wide range of cultures.

Members of The Basketmakers' Association attended the conference and manned a bookstall publicising their work. It would have been interesting to have heard presentations from makers, particularly those keen to talk about the general decline in traditional basket making in the UK, and the recent rise to prominence of the Eastern European market.

Julia Gresson Deputy Head Collections Conservation & Care, Horniman Museum

in practice

THE CONSERVATION OF 'MONS GRAUPIUS' BY GILLIAN AYRES

by Gillian Walker ACR, Wilma Day ACR and Helen Davis
(private conservators, Sheffield)

'Mons Graupius' is a large abstract oil painting by Gillian Ayres, owned by Touchstones, Rochdale Art Gallery. The paint layers contained areas of soft, tacky impasto which had not dried since completion in 1980. Due to its size (H 257.0 cm x W 273.8 cm), the painting had been taken off its stretcher, covered in a layer of polythene, and rolled around a cardboard tube for storage. When the painting was unrolled, the polythene cover had stuck to the impasto causing a change in texture. The paint layers also contained several vertical splits and areas of flaking. The support had deteriorated along the front edges, and part of the original stretcher had been lost. The following article discusses the treatment of the painting in the studio and on site and some of the problems encountered with its transportation.

Condition Problems

The painting was transported to the studio covered in the polythene layer and rolled around a cardboard tube. It was unrolled face-up on a large table (Figure 1). A full examination took place, and the main condition problems are summarised as follows:

1. The areas of red, ochre and purple impasto were soft and tacky. The polythene sheet had stuck to these colours, resulting in a change in surface texture (Figure 2). Excess paint media had contributed to this problem, and had stained the surrounding canvas.
2. Other areas of paint had dried and split in long vertical lines probably as a result of rolling.
3. Areas containing white paint had dried to form a brittle film, and the impasto had fractured away in places. Some thinly applied grey paint was poorly adhered to the layers

Figure 1: 'Mons Graupius', unrolled on the studio table, with the polythene sheet still attached



beneath and was flaking.

4. The paint layers were covered in a light deposit of surface dirt and dust.
5. The loosely woven cotton support was not strong enough to carry the heavy paint layers, and had split around the front edges.
6. The stretcher was incomplete, and needed to be replaced.

Removing The Polythene Sheet

The polythene sheet was strongly adhered to the paint layer and could not be removed with solvents or by mechanical action. The soft paint tended to pull away from itself rather than separate cleanly from the polythene. It was decided to test cooling the surface to increase the rigidity of the paint layer and make the bonds of adhesion between the oil and polythene more brittle.* A flexible cooling source was essential, as it needed to conform to the uneven profile of the impasto. Some commercial ice packs, intended to treat sports injuries, were bought from a local retailer. These consisted of an aqueous gel in a rectangular polythene sleeve, which remained flexible after storage in a domestic freezer. The ice packs were cooled for several hours, by which time their temperature had fallen to approximately minus 3°C. An ice pack was then placed on an adhered area of polythene, and gently pressed onto the impasto. The polythene sheet was tested every minute to see if it could be separated from the paint layer, and to check for signs of condensation.

After 6–10 minutes the area had cooled sufficiently for the polythene to be pulled away at a shallow angle (Figure 3). Separation was initiated with a scalpel in some places. The detached polythene was stained with paint medium and small flecks of paint were also removed in areas. However, the system was felt to be an effective, time-efficient solution, and the rest of the sheet was removed using this method.

Figure 2: Detail of red paint showing the change in surface texture caused by the polythene.





Figure 3: The ice pack used to remove the polythene sheet.

Texturing The Paint Surface

The areas of paint attached to the polythene sheet had adopted a shiny, distracting texture. Tests were conducted with various tools (including a frayed swab-stick, steel brush, and impressions made with non-woven synthetic materials such as Reemay) to see if the glossy texture could be reduced. Unfortunately it was very difficult to impose any texture on the paint layer due to the excess of media. It may be possible to deal with these areas in the future, when they have dried completely. A matting agent (such as microcrystalline wax or fumed silica) could be applied to the surface to suppress its appearance.

Consolidating The Paint Layer

Two different methods were used to consolidate the paint. In areas where thin paint was flaking from the ground, Lascaux Medium for Consolidation was favoured as it flowed easily beneath the edges of the flakes. The consolidant was applied with a paint brush, and any excess was removed immediately with a swab; it was then left to air-dry. In areas where the paint had split, an adhesive with more body was required. It was also important that the adhesive did not require heat activation. A dispersion of Mowilith in water (in the ratio 2:1) was injected with a syringe into the split, and the two sides were held in contact with finger pressure. Any residues were removed immediately from the surface with a cotton swab.

Removal Of Surface Dirt

Many areas of paint were sensitive to water and it was only possible to clean the non-tacky areas (namely, the white and pale areas), and the exposed areas of grey ground. These were cleaned with demineralised water. A soft brush was used to remove dirt from around the impasto.

Strip-Lining

The support consisted of a piece of loosely woven cotton duck. The weight of the paint layers had caused puckering around points of attachment to the stretcher and there were numerous splits along the front edges. It was necessary to reinforce the edges by strip-lining, and to provide a loose-lining to confer extra stiffness to the support and to protect the reverse. The painting was turned face-down onto sheets of release paper, and the reverse was cleaned with a vacuum cleaner and soft brush. The strip-lining consisted of pieces of polyester Permawear fabric, coated with six layers of Beva 371 adhesive dispersed in stoddard solvent (in the ratio 1:1). Permawear was chosen as it had a similar flexibility to the loosely woven original support.



Figure 4: During strip-lining. The strips of polyester Permawear fabric were heat sealed into place with lining irons. The new stretcher is in the background



Figure 5: During preparation of the loose-lining, showing the application of acrylic gesso to the linen canvas

The pieces of strip-lining were 15.0cm wide, and overlapped onto the back of the image by 2.5 cm. The forward edges were 'pinked'. The strips were heat-sealed into position with lining irons set to 80°C, and the paint layer was checked frequently for changes in surface texture (Figure 4). Two pieces of strip-lining were abutted at the midway point along each side, due to the painting's considerable size.**

Figure 6: The transportation structure (note that the cardboard tube is missing from the image; it was threaded around the central steel pole before the painting was draped across)





Figure 7: The painting stored face-up on the transportation structure, covered with sheets of release paper

Preparing The New Stretcher With A Loose-Lining

A sheet of Melinex (25 microns thickness) was attached to the assembled stretcher to protect the surface during the preparation of a loose-lining. A medium-grain linen canvas was attached above the Melinex and secured with staples. The linen was cleaned with a brush and vacuum cleaner and de-crimped by saturating it with water, and allowing it to air-dry. The linen was then sized with a single coat of Mowilith dispersed in water (in the ratio 1:1), and applied with a roller. Once dry, the surface was sanded, and any slubs and inconsistencies were removed with a scalpel. Two coats of acrylic gesso primer were then applied to the surface, again with a roller (Figure 5).

The loose-lining was then rolled around a separate cardboard tube and covered with Melinex for travel. The stretcher was disassembled, and each part was cleaned and sanded. The front edges were lightly rounded with a plane and the wood was polished with beeswax and carnauba polish. The stretcher was then packed for transport to Rochdale.

The Transportation Support

As the painting was too large to fit through the internal doors of the gallery, it needed to be re-stretched on site. It had been hoped that the painting could be transported without needing to re-roll it. A joiner was asked to produce a transportation structure consisting of a hinged wooden A-frame, which supported a metal pole inserted through a cardboard tube (with a diameter of 22.0 cm) (Figure 6). The painting could then be draped across the cardboard tube. It

Figure 9: The painting is attached onto the stretcher with copper tacks



Figure 8: In the gallery: the unrolled painting on top of the loose lined stretcher

was felt that the paint layers were flexible enough to cope with this pressure for short periods of time.

The central metal pole enabled the cardboard tube to be lifted on and off easily. The sides of the A-frame were kept an equal distance apart by wooden bars at the base. Softwood battens and pieces of plywood were attached to each side of the A-frame to support the sides of the painting. Casters were also attached to the bottom to allow the structure to be moved easily around the studio. Once the painting had been draped across the A-frame, a sheet of release paper was placed over the top to protect the paint layers (Figure 7).

However, after discussions with the staff at Touchstones, Rochdale Art Gallery, it became clear that the A-frame would not fit inside the gallery's service lift. It was also too heavy and unwieldy to be carried up the main stairs which contained a number of turns. While rolling the painting again was undesirable, it was the only realistic solution to the problem. The painting was rolled around the cardboard tube in the studio, with an interleaf of release paper separating the paint layers. The transportation structure still played an important function as it enabled the painting to be suspended off the floor of the transit vehicle, and prevented it from moving during the journey.

Attaching The Painting To The Stretcher On Site

The polished stretcher was unpacked and reassembled in the gallery, and placed onto trestle tables. The loose-lining was unrolled across the stretcher, stretched with canvas pliers, and attached with steel staples. The painting was then unrolled on top of the loose-lined stretcher (Figure 8). The front fold edges were aligned with the edges of the stretcher, and the painting was folded around the tacking margins with finger pressure. A hair dryer was used to warm the strip-lined edges to produce a crisp fold.

The painting was stretched with canvas pliers and secured with copper tacks (Figure 10). Two conservators worked opposite each other to maintain an even tension. Six tacks were placed at 3.5–4.0 cm intervals at a time before moving onto a different side.*** Excess strip-lining material was removed at the corners so that a neat, flat fold could be created.

The painting was then lifted off the tables and placed face-in against a gallery wall so that the back could be reached. The turn over fabric was secured to the back of the stretcher with steel staples. The painting was keyed-out, and the keys were tied to the stretcher with nylon line, brass screws and screw cups.

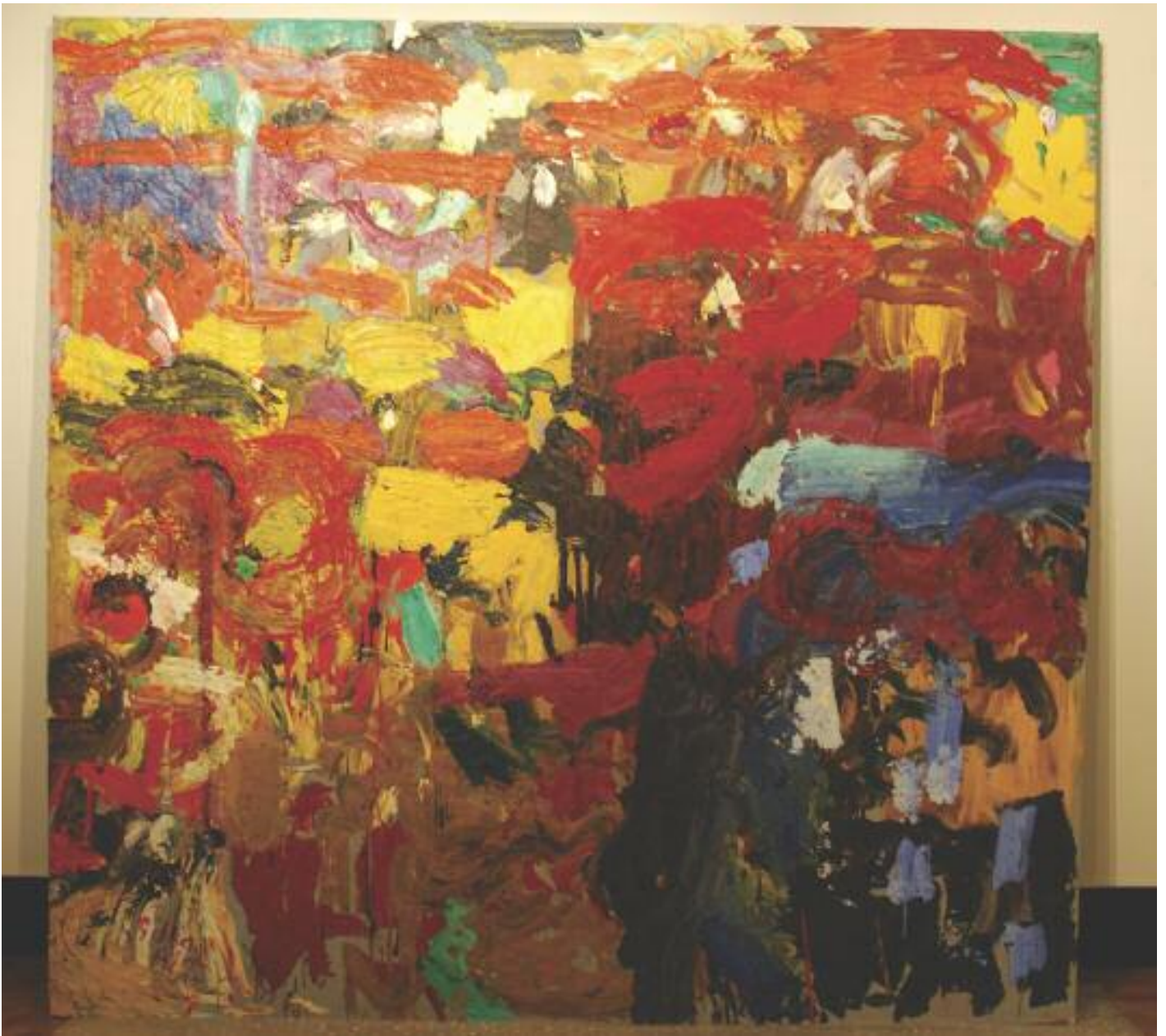


Figure 10: 'Mons Graupius' after treatment

Storage Considerations

As the painting is too large to fit through the gallery's internal doors, it will be stored behind a false internal wall inside the exhibition space. It has been suggested that a box frame is created, which incorporates a Melinex cover to be kept at least six inches off the surface. The environmental conditions will need to be monitored carefully, and the box frame regularly inspected for signs of condensation.

Materials and suppliers

Beva 371 (Lascaux 375) (Ketone/wax/EVA mixture) A. P. Fitzpatrick
 Polyester Permawear, Carrington Fabrics, Lancs. (Polyester Permawear is no longer available. A similar fabric called 'Restretching Fabric' [200gm polyester] is available from A. P. Fitzpatrick.)
 Mowilith DP 5458, Cons. Resources UK
 Medium for Consolidation (Lascaux 4176) A. P. Fitzpatrick
 Medium grain linen canvas (305gsm) Russell and Chapple
 Beeswax and carnauba polish John Lewis plc
 Acrylic gesso primer Daler-Rowney
 Hot/cold Gel Packs Aptonia (supplied by Decathlon sports shop)
 Stretcher with 9 openings Barry Willson, Milton Keynes
 Transportation structure Jack Richardson, Heartwood Carpentry, Sheffield

Acknowledgements

Thanks go to Yvonne Hardman (Curator) and the staff at Touchstones, Rochdale Art Gallery; Jack Richardson, Peter Day, Claire Finn and Joanna Russell

Notes

* This method has been used in the past to separate paint from glass. See, for example:

Bubb, R., Letter to the Editor, *The Picture Restorer*, No. 23, Spring 2003, p.37;
 Moison, R., Letter to the Editor, *The Picture Restorer*, No. 20, Autumn 2001, p.26;
 Flanagan, D., Shorter Notice: *Freeing an Oil Painting on Canvas Affixed to Plate Glass*, *The Picture Restorer*, No. 19, Spring 2001, p.15

** The pieces of strip-lining were abutted only in the area of 2.5cm overlap on the back of the image. The ends of the pieces of strip-lining were cut at 45° and adhered to each other in the area of the tacking margin.

*** Ideally the painting should have been attached on the reverse of the stretcher due to the presence of paint in the tacking margins. However, it was not feasible to place the painting face-down due to the tacky, flexible paint layers and weight of the loose lined stretcher. Furthermore, the original front fold edges had been preserved. It is likely that Gillian Ayres painted the image off the stretcher, attaching it once it had been completed with staples through the present tacking margin. Re-attaching through the sides of the stretcher was arguably in keeping with the artist's original intention. As the painting is exhibited without a frame, it has been suggested that the copper tacks are painted with acrylic paint. Unfortunately, the tight schedule precluded this when the painting was re-stretched, but it is a consideration for the future.

listings

Full details of all the events listed here can be found on the Icon website www.icon.org.uk

Icon Offices: Please note that from 1 February events and meetings can be held at the Icon Offices at Unit 1.5, Lafone House, The Leathermarket, 11/13 Weston Street Bermondsey, London SE1 3ER. The Icon website provides comprehensive directions on how to find the offices – from the home page, go to 'About Icon' and then to the 'Find us' page.

26 January

British Library

Preservation Basics Training

Venue: British Library Centre for Conservation, London

The day will explore what is meant by preservation; highlight the risks to collections and show how to minimise those risks with simple, cost-effective actions.

27 January

Icon Historic Interiors Group Burns Night

Venue: Geffrye Museum, London.

Aside from a Piper, Haggis, canapés and a prize for the most flamboyant Scottish costume, there will be an after hours presentation on the history and future developments of this innovative museum. Cost: £17 (£20 non-members)

9–11 February

The Swedish Energy Agency and Gotland University Energy Efficiency in Historic Buildings

Venue: Visby, Sweden

Details via the Icon website

11 February

Preservation of Glass Plate Negatives

Venue: RCAHMS, John Sinclair House, Edinburgh

Conservators and photographers from RCAHMS will discuss their work with glass plates, and Jenny Hodgson, conservator from National Monuments Record English Heritage will present her talk entitled Conservation of Glass Plate Negatives – Creating a Stable Future (recently presented at the CF10 conference in Cardiff). There will be an opportunity for participants to share their knowledge and experiences of glass plate negative preservation.

Cost: £70 (£90 non members, £50 students)

Contact: Tizzy Hepher on email: Elizabeth.Hepher@rcahms.gov.uk or t. 0131 668 6850.

4 March

Icon Book and Paper Group Conservation Paper Binding Workshop

Venue: V&A Museum, London SW7 2RL;

Tutor: Tracey Rowledge

Looking at approaches to making paper bindings for books in need of rebinding. Discussing the rationale behind various book structures devised by Tracey and instruction on how to make one of her non-adhesive book structures, through demonstration and one-to-one tuition.

Cost: £75 (£100 non-members) + £5 on the day for materials.

Contact: register in advance with Jane Rutherford, Head Book Conservator on e: jrutherford@vam.ac.uk

6–18 March

Papermaking and Printmaking Tour in Japan Providing an opportunity to understand Japanese papermaking and printmaking and experience of Japanese culture and life style.

Contact: Megumi Mizumura on e: megumimizumura@aol.com

10 March

Lighting Seminar Don't leave it up to lux!: Lighting Museums and Galleries

Venue: Murray Edwards College, Cambridge

Participants will understand the basic principles of light, see how different lighting affects perception of objects, learn how to implement and maintain effective lighting plans, explore the quality and efficiency of lighting options. Contact: either Rosy Aindow or Sarah Norcross-Robinson at Conservation Coordinator, Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service, Shirehall, Market Avenue Norwich NR1 3JQ or t: 01603 223387

16 March

PACR Clinic

Venue: London

Clinics are aimed at potential PACR candidates who are working towards a PACR application deadline. This event will support candidates with their PACR application, address any queries and provide a useful insight to the accreditation process.

Please book via the Icon website

17 March, 6pm

Icon Book and Paper Group The Conservation of Lord Byron's Screen

Venue: The Wellcome Institute Conference Centre, 183 Euston Rd, London

Speaker: Graeme Storey

In an illustrated talk on the conservation of a four panel decoupage screen built by Lord Byron in the early nineteenth century, the speaker will describe the practical conservation and then focus on a consideration of the ethics of preserving the bonds between maker and object.

Cost: £10 (£15 non-members, £6 students)

Contact: register in advance with Joanna Payne on e: jw@joannapayne.com

17 March

PACR Clinic

Venue: Manchester

Clinics are aimed at potential PACR candidates who are working towards a PACR application deadline. This event will support candidates with their PACR application, address any queries and provide a useful insight to the accreditation process.

Please book via the Icon website

19 March

Heritage Crafts Association Spring Conference

Venue: V&A Museum, London

A number of heritage crafts may be in danger of decline, but this is a day to celebrate the ways in which craft workers contribute to the rich tapestry of British heritage, and are a significant part of tourism and the economy.

Cost: £30 (£25 – HCA Friends)

25 March

Icon Stone and Wall Paintings Group Going Beneath the Surface – Day 2

Venue: The Council Chamber, Stratford Old Town Hall, London.

Second instalment of the conference looking at the removal of unwanted deposits from decorative surfaces, focussing on laser cleaning, latex removal methods, poulticing, and removal of overpaint, mould growth and staining.

Cost: £45 (£60 non-members, £25 students)

Contact: register via Icon website – S&WP Group events page or e: swpconference@gmail.com

29 March

Icon Event

Health and Safety for Conservators

Venue: Museum of London

Features: Responsibilities, Risk Assessment, Hazards and how to deal with them.

Cost: £90 (£120 non members, £85 ACRs and Rols)

4 April

Icon Textile Group Annual Forum

Incompatible Partners? Challenges of composite objects

Venue: V&A Museum, London

Papers will explore the conservation of mixed material objects, including innovative or challenging conservation projects of textiles with other materials such as wood, plastics, metals, feathers, precious stones, glass and leather, as well as the challenges faced in storing and displaying them.

Papers will highlight ethical issues such as prioritising the different materials, collaborative research, working with other specialists and the sequencing of the treatment of the different materials.

7 April

Icon Event

Health and Safety for Conservators

Venue: Dundee University Library

Features: Responsibilities, Risk Assessment, Hazards and how to deal with them.

Cost: £90 (£120 non members)

13 April

PACR Clinic

Venue: Lincoln

Clinics are aimed at potential PACR candidates who are working towards a PACR application deadline. This event will support candidates with their PACR application, address any queries and provide a useful insight to the accreditation process.

Please book via the Icon website

13–15 April

Care and Conservation of Manuscripts

Venue: University of Copenhagen, Denmark

Details via the Icon website

15 April

Icon Historic Interiors Group

Historic Interiors in Secular Buildings 1600–1700 (Elizabethan to Georgian)

Venue: Corpus Christi College, Cambridge
Focussing on the radical transformation of the interior which occurred during this turbulent period in British history in terms of structure, decoration, lighting, heating, decoration, furnishing and function – and relationship to the exterior, in grand and vernacular houses.

Plus a tour of seventeenth-century buildings in Cambridge.

Cost: £75.00 (£95.00 non-members)

Contact: Mette de Hamel on e: mdehamel@btinternet.com or t: 0207 6221620.

Please book early as places are limited.

28 April, 7.15p.m.

Icon Book and Paper Group

Keeping Fit for Conservation – Part 2

Venue: St. Michael's and All Angels Church Hall, Bath Road, Chiswick, London W4.

A physiotherapist who teaches Pilates and a trainer will work with the group to advise and show them stretches and other exercises which can be developed into a simple daily routine to relieve stiffness in the back, neck, arms and hands caused by poor working positions. Please bring mats and wear loose clothing.

Cost : £30

Contact: register in advance with Joanna Payne on e: jw@joannapayne.com

5 May

Icon Event

Health and Safety for Conservators

Venue: Cardiff University

Features: Responsibilities, Risk Assessment, Hazards and how to deal with them.

Cost: £90 (£120 non members)

6 May

Icon Paintings Group Conference

Venue: National Portrait Gallery London

Adhesives and Consolidants used in paintings conservation: case studies, materials testing, experience with new materials

Contact: icon.paintingsgroup@gmail.com

14 May

Icon Ceramics and Glass Group

Losing Your Lustre?

Venue: Hochhauser Auditorium, V&A, London.

The conservation and restoration of lusted ceramic and glass surfaces presents a unique problem which arises with a variety of objects, whether in response to conservation based priorities or when working with approaches suited to the private collector and the commercial market.

Contact: Nancy Sharpe on highfired@fsmail.net or Rachel Swift on rswiftccg@hotmail.com

16–19 May

West Dean College

Conservation for Horologists

An Icon-approved course for professional horologists aspiring to achieve PACR qualification.

Contact: Liz Campbell on t: 01243-818219 or e: cpd@westdean.org.uk

26 May

Introduction to PACR

Venue: London

Aimed at those who would like to find out about PACR – the programme includes everything you need to know about the PACR Accreditation – what is it, how does it work, the professional standards and the application process, the assessment process, the assessment visit and Continuing Professional Development. Please book via the Icon website

26th May, 7.15pm

Icon Book and Paper Group

Keeping Fit for Conservation – Part 2

Venue: St. Michael's and All Angels Church Hall, Bath Road, Chiswick, London W4.

Many conservators are afflicted by stiffness in their backs, necks, arms and hands caused by poor working positions. A physiotherapist who teaches Pilates and a trainer will work with the group to advise and show them stretches and other exercises which can be developed into a simple daily routine. *Please note change of date owing to Royal Wedding holiday.

Cost: £30

Contact: register in advance with Joanna Payne on e: jw@joannapayne.com

19–23 September

ICOM-CC 16th Triennial Conference

Venue: Lisbon, Portugal

Details via the Icon website

26–28 October

A Pest Odyssey 2011: Ten Years Later

Venue: The British Museum, London
Focussing on developments that have been made in the last ten years, highlighting international priorities and how these have changed. To include new understanding about pest species and the risk they pose to both collections and buildings and practical control strategies that work in the heritage context.

Contact: Dee Lauder on e: dee.lauder@english-heritage.org.uk

- Visit www.icon.org.uk for more events and full details of all the entries listed here. There is also lots of information about short training and CPD courses available from a variety of providers. On the website Home page choose Events and Careers & Training and follow the links.
- More PACR information and booking forms are in the Accreditation/CPD section.



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