

THE MAGAZINE OF THE INSTITUTE OF CONSERVATION • MAY 2013 • ISSUE 46



A conservation centre blooms in the desert

Also in this issue

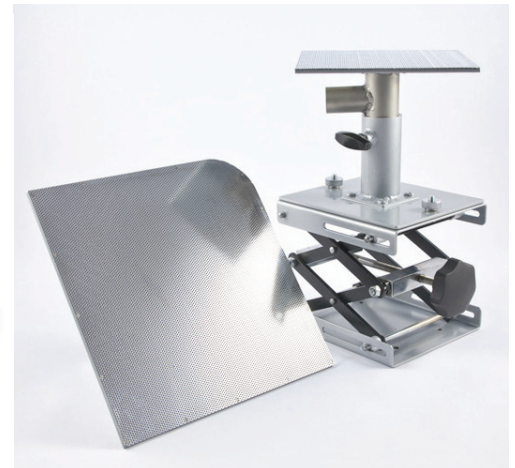
Report on Icon's PF13 Conference

Conservation workforce research

The new PACR Pathway scheme

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MAY 2013

Issue 46



From the Editor

First, a huge thank you to everyone who put so much effort into organising and running the PF13 Conference. I learned lots of interesting things and enjoyed it thoroughly. I hope that is true for all of you who attended and that even more of you can make the next one. True, there were one or

two quibbles and we're airing an interesting one in this issue's Intervention column. Overall though, we had a good conversation about who we are and where we should be heading.

That conversation continues this month with the publication of our research into the conservation workforce, a piece of work which feeds directly into questions about the profession's future. It is the subject of our CEO's column and do read the full report on the website. More immediately, don't fall at the first hurdle of job hunting by making thoughtless mistakes with your application. Our article about how not to do it may be written with a light touch but it makes a really serious point in these uncertain and difficult times.

Lynette Gill



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Institute of Conservation
1.5, Lafone House,
The Leathermarket,
Weston Street
London SE1 3ER
T +44(0)20 3142 6799

admin@icon.org.uk
membership@icon.org.uk
www.icon.org.uk

Chief Executive
Alison Richmond
arichmond@icon.org.uk

Conservation Register
conservationregister@icon.org.uk
www.conservationregister.com

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Icon News

Editor
Lynette Gill
news@icon.org.uk

Production designer
Malcolm Gillespie
icon@ls-printing.com

Printers
L&S Printing Company Limited
www.ls-printing.com

Design
Rufus Leonard
enquiries@rufusleonard.com

For recruitment and all other
advertising
Rebecca Hendry
020 3142 6788
admin@icon.org.uk

Cover photo:

In the new Deir al-Surian Library: an illuminated page from a 10th century Syriac manuscript (f.3v from Ms, Deir al-Surian, Syriac 25) on parchment. It comes from the Book of the Holy Hierotheos and depicts (full standing figures) Hierotheos, the alleged author of the book, on the right, and Patriarch Cyriacus, who wears a solemn priestly dress on the left. The role of the persons depicted in the upper half named as Zakkay and Mattay have not been identified. © Elizabeth Sobczynski

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THE RESULTS IN MORE DETAIL

Dr Kenneth Aitchison, Icon's Skills Strategy Manager, puts some flesh on the bones of the research

The employers of conservators across the United Kingdom were approached to provide information about employment and training issues via an online survey in late 2012.

- 'An atomised workforce' of micro-businesses: 71% of workplaces are in the private sector, 46% have only one person working there and 38% have between two and five workers.

Is this effective, efficient, sustainable? How can we support these workplaces, or should we be encouraging more collaboration, between

private practitioners, between private and public?

- Geographical imbalance: conservators are over-represented in London and South-West England, and under-represented everywhere else in comparison with the distribution of the total UK workforce.

To care for the heritage effectively do we require more employment opportunities to grow elsewhere in the UK? Or does the friction of distance mean that it is actually more cost-effective for conservators to be working close together

- A shrinking or static sector: employers have reported that the conservation workforce has been decreasing over the last five years, although, surprisingly, more respondents anticipate that they will grow in numbers in the future than expect to contract further. The low levels of competition reported by most specialist providers, combined with the low numbers of providers, suggest that the lack of competition actually reflects a lack of market, rather than an uncompetitive environment, and that the small number of providers reflects the limited amount of work available. Most salaries have either fallen in absolute terms in the previous year or had remained unchanged (and had thus fallen in real terms, as they had not kept pace with inflation).

How can we respond strategically to these downward trends? These have clearly been influenced by the global economic situation of the last five years; we have to ensure that the sector is best able to cope with this so that these trends are temporary and not fatal.

- Low pay: the median salary for full-time conservators is slightly less than the national median for all occupations,

and considerably less than the comparable figures for professional and associate professional occupations.

Now that we have reliable figures, Icon will actively campaign to be appropriately rewarded as a well educated and skilled sector.

- Volunteers: now one-sixth of the conservation workforce, volunteers are here to stay. They have skills to offer and want to learn new skills.

How will we provide the training that conservators need to understand and manage volunteers' particular requirements?

- Critical skills gaps and skills shortages*: these exist in areas that are likely to grow as priorities in the future: modern and contemporary materials, time-based media and digital assets. These will require more collaboration with professional colleagues, such as collections managers and curators, and joint training initiatives may be appropriate. Others are so niche that they are at risk of neglect: natural history and biological specimens; clocks, watches and scientific instruments; stained glass. In such cases, a highly focussed, specifically targeted and located skills transfer is required.
- Weaknesses in the provision of training: in spite of a general awareness of skills gaps, and employers' stated support for continuous professional development, most organisations do not have a training plan, or a training budget. Only a minority record how much time is spent in training or evaluate the impact of training on individuals, and even fewer evaluate the impact of training upon the organisation. At the same time, there is intense demand for future training in the skills and knowledge needed to deliver training; in nearly every specialist area, significant numbers of providers want to improve their skills in the future. A strategic approach is critical to use scarce resources effectively.
- Gaps in professional transferable skills: as more than 25% of respondents identified needs in *business skills, information technology, leadership* and *project management*, these could all be considered to be areas of serious skills gaps in existing staff. For new entrants, there can be considered to be serious skills gaps in *project management, leadership, people management* and *business skills*.

*A skills 'gap' occurs in an area where existing workforce members have lower skill levels than are necessary to meet the business' or industry's objectives, or where new entrants lack some of the skills they need; the sector is underskilled, so this identifies training priorities. A skills 'shortage' is where there are not enough suitably skilled individuals in the workplace; rather than an under-provision of skills, this is where there is an absence of skills, which can often only be addressed by bringing in external specialists.

from the chief executive

THE RESULTS ARE IN!

Alison Richmond ACR FIIC comments on the outcome of our workforce research:



Photo: Matt Wrieford

One of the big gaps in our knowledge that was highlighted in our consultation on Icon's National Conservation Education & Skills Strategy was accurate and up-to-date information about the conservation workforce.

If we were to fulfil our strategic aim of mapping a framework of sustainable career paths then we had to have a sound understanding of what skills and knowledge we had in the workforce now and what employers' needs would be in the future. While

there has been previous research undertaken, notably by the Museums and Galleries Commission (MGC) and UKIC (the United Kingdom Institute of Conservation), this is now at least a decade out of date. Other research by Creative and Cultural Skills, *Cultural Heritage Blueprint* document, published in 2008, is more recent but does not give us the level of detail specific to the conservation profession that we need.

Moreover, our domain spreads across three sectors and it was a very important objective of the research to capture all three:

- 1 publicly funded organisations, such as the national museums;
- 2 private practices, such as Plowden & Smith; and
- 3 civic society organisations (also called third sector or charities), such as The National Trust for Scotland.

One of the central objectives of our project was to obtain data on training needs, provision and priorities, providing information that could be used by employers, training providers and individual conservators to plan for their future corporate or professional development.

We were able to interest Arts Council England, English Heritage and the Heritage Lottery Fund in supporting us to carry out this research, the latter making it possible for us to cover the whole of the UK, not only England.

There are limitations to any sociological research, but Icon was very fortunate in having on staff Dr Kenneth Aitchison, who had previously led a series of similar projects for the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA). With Kenneth involved we were confident that the research methodology would be rigorous and the outcomes robust. Moreover, as a similar method was used for the IfA, we are in a position to compare our results with those of a 'sister' organisation, thus setting conservation in the context of other heritage professions.

The research results are now publicly available on our website. It will take some time for us to grasp all of the ramifications for our sector. However, there are clear challenges that, as Kenneth explains opposite, the conservation profession, employers, education providers, funders and the wider heritage sector will wish to grapple with.

These research results set a benchmark against which subsequent changes in the workforce can be measured. For Icon, it will provide a basis for assessing the success of the Strategy, in due course, and for planning and advocacy.

Now that the research methodology has been established, we plan to seek funding to repeat the research at the end of the five-year Strategy in 2016. We have an established Stakeholder Group that will meet in June to consider the implications of the data and recommend actions. The NCESS is a strategy for the sector as a whole and we are encouraging others to participate in its delivery. Anyone who is interested in helping should contact Kenneth Aitchison or me. Icon is also putting together a press campaign to get the messages out to key decision makers and government agencies. Everyone can help with spreading the word.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- It is estimated that 3,175 people worked as professional conservators in 2012–13, supported by 1,125 support staff, 700 volunteer conservators and 175 voluntary support staff, meaning that the total conservation workforce in 2012–13 was 5,125 people.
- The workforce was not diverse; it was drawn from a relatively narrow segment of society.
- The median salary for a professional conservator was £26,000 (50% earned more than this, 50% less). The national median for all occupations was £26,500, but the median for professional occupations was £36,359.
- Conservators were very highly qualified, with 78% being graduates.
- Conservation workplaces were typically very small; 84% of all conservation workplaces have five or fewer conservators working in them.
- Conservation employment was relatively evenly distributed between the public, private and civil society (charity / NGO) sectors.
- Skills gaps and shortages were identified in many areas of specialist conservation skills, and also identified widely in areas of transferable professional skills.

Recommendations are also made.

The report can be found on Icon's website on the National Skills Strategy page.

scenes from the conference

Over four hundred of us congregated in Glasgow for last month's PF13 Positive Futures Conference. No one perspective on the event can hope to convey the experience in full so here are a few moments captured in pictures and words to give a flavour

Pre-conference day (Wednesday 10 April)

The Icon members of Glasgow and Edinburgh are to be congratulated and thanked for organising a great array of trips and tours during the day, setting a tone of warm welcome for the enjoyable and informative conference to come.

In the evening many of us assembled in the splendid Hunterian Museum for a reception.



Margot Clark, Councillor, (above) welcomed us on behalf of Glasgow, which 'as a City of culture, science and architecture knows the value of conservation'. She apologised for intruding on our obvious pleasure in meeting each other!



All images except where otherwise credited: University of Glasgow Photo Unit



'If Cardiff set the benchmark high, Glasgow will try to do it even higher' so said Sir Kenneth Calman (left), Chancellor of the University. Speaking about the University and

the Museum he noted that 'things don't remain the same, though conservation is about who we are and where we come from. Education, renewal and the power to transform – these are just what Icon is also about'

Professor David Gaimster, host of the evening as Director of the Hunterian Museum, told us about Scotland's oldest public museum and its enlightenment mission, connecting the arts, humanities and sciences. With its extraordinary mix of objects reflecting one man's

collecting passions, it felt like a metaphor for Icon itself, covering as we do everything from stuffed birds to bassoons.

Rob Lewis (right), International Marketing Manager of Tru Vue the sponsors of the reception, confided that he was a rubbish salesman but fortunately, his job entailed, supporting conservation all over the world and he was

'especially glad to support his own professional body – Icon'.



only sigh with envy at the manifest enthusiasm for culture and conservation. The amount going on in the heritage sector in Scotland was eye-opening and refreshing. 'We need to get smarter about shouting about ourselves' she told us, 'if you can bottle the vision, passion and ambition in this room, our cultural heritage is in safe hands'.

Sir Kenneth Calman once again took to the rostrum. With his strong links to the British Library and the National Trust for Scotland, he spoke knowledgeably about our sphere, focussing on how to respond to uncertain times. Icon needs to see the big picture, he said and urged us to take inspiration from Star

Day One (Thursday 11 April)

A morning of plenary sessions, which our Chair, Juergen Vervoorst (below), opens with a promise that this is now a triennial event and a sign of confidence in the future



The opening address is given by Member of the Scottish Parliament, Fiona Hyslop (top right), who is Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs. English Icon members could



An attentive audience





Trek by following Captain Jean-Luc Picard's commands: 'Engage!' and 'Make it so!'

There followed seven talks, variously scintillating, thought-provoking, uncomfortable even, touching and instructive. Here are one or two highlights. Icon Trustee Siobhan Stevenson (top left) gave an account of making a video with 9-year olds to show what can and can't be climbed on in the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum. The result is wonderful: do look it up on the Museum's website under Visiting Information or on You Tube under *National Museums Northern Ireland Enjoy your trip to the Ulster Folk & Transport Museum safely*.

Also an Icon Trustee and Head of Conservation and Collection Care at Historic Royal Palaces, Kate Frame detailed a decade of coming out from the shadows and putting conservation at the heart of HRP's decisions. She must be doing something right with a team of thirty eight conservators.



With her talk about recent changes in approach to conservation priorities and approach at the British Library, its Head of Conservation, Cordelia Rogerson (above), showed formidable talent as a management guru.

Christina Rozeik (top right) asked if we should care about conservation's public image and proceeded to make us laugh and squirm in turns by demonstrating why indeed we should, judging by our nerdy, introverted image according to Google and the howlers whenever we make an appearance in fiction. She also noted the need for a better understanding of the effectiveness of outreach efforts.

The afternoon was devoted to group sessions and with lots of interdisciplinary talks and interesting topics dotted across the schedule the choice was agonising.



Photo: Matt Wreford

In the evening the Conference Dinner and Ceilidh were well attended, albeit perhaps beyond the purses of the younger members. Probably as well, since they would have seen senior and respected members of the profession in another light altogether and not entirely at one with Christina Rozeik's images: appalling footwork, inability to understand and follow orders and a chronic tendency to collapse in hysterical laughter. Funnily (or fortunately) enough, there were no official pictures of the event (but plenty of blackmail potential from many phone camera shots).



Studying the posters



All images except where otherwise credited: University of Glasgow Photo Unit



Day Two (Friday 12 April)

Group sessions again in the morning and then all back together for the afternoon, when we heard interesting talks about e-learning tools (at the Museum of London); actually making good use of all the data you collect to persuasive effect (at The National Archives) and fund-raising difficulties in the current climate (for Cambridge University Museums).

At the coffee break the student poster prizes were awarded. Charlotte Anstis of Camberwell College of Arts was the runner-up for her poster (below) about the conservation of a



composite model of a church in Brighton. The winner Francis Lukezic of Cardiff University (below) was present to receive her prize from our Chair for her poster about the repair of an Alaskan Inupiaq seal skin mat.



Back to business and a rousing call to the barricades from keynote speaker Clare Cooper (above), of *Mission Models Money*, whose mission is to help arts and culture build creative resilience in a world of finite resources. She spoke of getting us out of our isolated, professional silos, strengthening our values to guide us through turbulent times ahead and moving away from reactive problem-solving to actively creating the future we want. 'Our practice of care and craft is a paradigm for a better world and social renovation', she concluded.

Then it was into the final straight with a look at past, present and future. Clare Meredith gave a succinct history of the conservation profession from 1882 to the present. Icon Trustee Jane Henderson summarised the conference themes and messages, although her notion that we are all Radio 2 listeners was challenged at question time by an advocate of Radio 3. But she spoke for us all in noting with pleasure the



number of students taking part. Alison Richmond, our CEO (above in the magisterial Bute Hall), then took us on a tour of the horizon, drawing on the recent workforce research data and its implications for our role, the future of conservation education and our part in the bigger cultural picture. 'We are responsible for making our future a positive one' she concluded.

And that was it, apart from Ylva Dahnsjö's tribute to Clare Meredith – see People on page 16 – and her reminder that it isn't a bad profession after all. With a parting gift of Scottish wildflower seeds to us all, she urged us to go in for guerrilla sowing, find one beautiful thing a day and practise 'mystical science' *

* A reference to Grayson Perry's description of conservation as 'a weirdly mystical science' when he spoke at Historic Royal Palaces' centenary celebration of conservation – see p.27.

professional update

ANNOUNCING THE PACR PATHWAY

Looking ahead? Planning to apply for accreditation? Icon's new initiative could be for you.

What is it?

PACR Pathway is a new Icon initiative approved by the Icon Board at its January meeting this year. Its aim is to encourage you to prepare for accreditation whilst you are developing professionally. Accreditation is for the individual member, not an organisation or business, so you can begin to think about and prepare for it as early in your career as you want. Indeed, it is never too soon to start working towards it!

PACR Pathway offers you help along the way and it is available to you whether you are employed, between posts or unemployed, a recent conservation graduate, or someone with conservation work experience. The scheme is relevant to you if you are looking at applying for accreditation within the next five years.

What does it cost?

You will need to be a Full member of Icon, though the concessionary rate for the low-waged still applies if you are eligible for it. Notices about the scheme have been going out with subscription renewals. All you need to do if you want to join is tick the box when you renew your Icon membership. Payment of your membership fees by direct debit is preferable but there are no additional costs to setting out on the Pathway.

How will it help?

Joining PACR Pathway will be useful to you because it will help you:

- With **planning** for accreditation - by identifying your learning needs to address the Professional Standards at the 'proficient' level required for PACR accreditation.
- By offering you **support**: you will work with a mentor/s, who can support you as you prepare an accreditation portfolio and help you identify suitable projects for your application
- To **record**: keeping quality records of your work in your personal files that address the PACR Professional Standards; this is really important to do particularly when moving from one post to another.

What other advantages are there?

PACR pathway members will benefit from:

- Formal recognition by Icon of your commitment to become accredited (you must sign up annually at membership renewal)
- A PACR trained mentor (this is mandatory)
- An annual meeting of PACR pathway participants and opportunities to network

Interested? Just sign up at renewal.

STANDARDS

As work proceeds apace on the development of standards for conservation both within the UK British Standards Institution and through the European standards organisation, CEN, one

reader has been in touch to say:

'You might be interested to know that PD 5454:2012 is available free of charge to library card holders at all the libraries in Norfolk. You can print up to 15% of the Standard, which is very useful. The library staff were very helpful and I am now trying to find the time to visit again and view the other relevant British Standards. These, too, are all available to access free of charge in Norfolk Libraries. Again, you can print out 15%.'

In case you need reminding, PD5454:2012 *Guide to the Storage and Exhibition of Archival Materials* is the revised and updated version of the old archival British Standard BS5454:2000 amalgamated with the old PD0024:2001.

CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Don't forget the help available for those conference, workshop and other training opportunities.

The remaining deadlines this year for application to the Anna Plowden Trust are June 18, followed by September 17. Visit the Trust's website for the forms: www.annaplowdentrust.org.uk

The Clothworkers' Foundation makes CPD awards to conservators on a rolling basis, so there are no application deadlines as such but you need to apply at least eight weeks before the event. Look for the relevant information on their website (foundation.clothworkers.co.uk); from the Open Grant Programmes page click on the Conservation link, followed by the CPD Bursaries link.

MOULIN DU VERGER MASTERCLASS

For the 7th consecutive year, conservation equipment and supplies specialists, Conservation By Design Limited, have pledged their support to the annual Moulin Du Verger workshop and research masterclass on the principles and practice of handmade papermaking and limp paper covered bookbinding.

Taking place from 16 to 20 September 2013, Jacques Brejoux (papermaker) and Christopher Clarkson (bookbinder), two of the leading scholars and craftsmen in their fields, will host a five day residential workshop for just eight delegates at the 16th century Moulin Du Verger Paper Mill at Puymoyen near Angoulême, located in the Charente (Cognac) region of France.

Previous reports in Icon News from participants at this event suggest that a good time is had by all, along with some serious learning, of course. More details from the Icon website.

COMMONSITES

CommonSites is an international initiative providing a unique web-based platform for the heritage sector. It is designed to connect funders, partners and communities around the world. CommonSites allows you to find and share knowledge, raise funds and simplify reporting back to donors. Experts and students can donate time to help projects they are interested

in. Funders can follow projects on-line and search for novel support opportunities.

Visit the website at www.commonsites.net. Twenty three projects from across the globe are registered on the site. They include Heritage without Borders in Turkmenistan, whose work was featured in Icon News no.41.

HONOURS

As part of making ourselves more visible – a key theme of the Glasgow Conference – we should be more active in getting recognition for outstanding members of the conservation profession by putting them forward for the New Year's Honours list or the Queen's Birthday Honours. If we don't do it, no-one else is likely to and, not surprisingly perhaps, nominations from our sector have been low in the past. Yet the qualities of dedication and commitment which make for an exceptional contribution to the heritage world are, after all, prime characteristics of conservators!

There is no real deadline but it takes twelve to eighteen months to process a nomination. More details and a nomination form can be found on:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/honours-nomination-form-department-for-culture-media-and-sport-sectors

NEW MA AT DURHAM

It is always good to report on a new course in the heritage sector and this autumn sees the start-up of a new Masters in International Cultural Heritage Management in the Department of Archaeology at the University of Durham. It is a one-year full-time course (or two years part-time) and the Course Director is Mary Brooks, who will be known to many conservators from her time at the Textile Conservation Centre as Programme Leader for the MA Museums & Galleries, not to mention her many other curatorial, research and educational achievements.

CARING FOR....LEAFLETS

Four more leaflets are now available in the Caring for...series. They are:

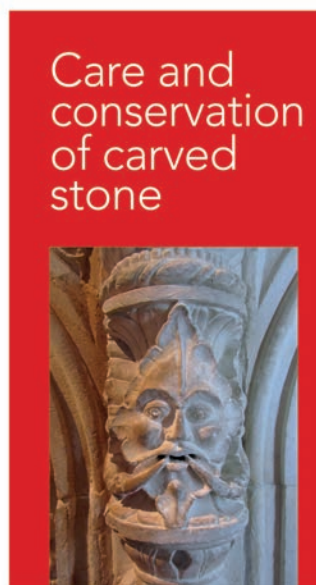
- Care and conservation of carved stone
- Care and conservation of botanical specimens
- Care and conservation of geological specimens
- Care and conservation of zoological specimens

The last three in the list have been produced jointly by Icon and NatSCA, the Natural Sciences Collections Association.

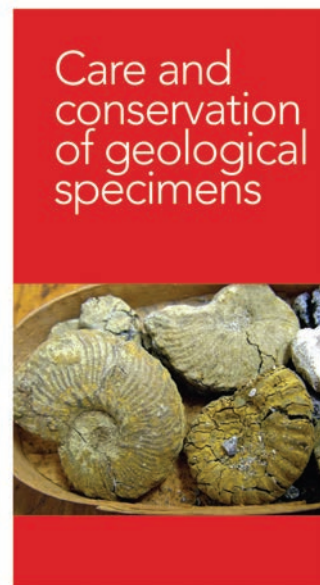
If you need copies to hand out at events, then get in touch with our Membership Manager, Wiebke Morgan on wmorgan@icon.org.uk.

As well in being in a folded leaflet format, the same material is also available on the Icon website as pdfs, which can be downloaded and used as needed.

Older leaflets are being updated as and when funds become available. Don't hesitate to get in touch if you know someone



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or some organisation who might be interested in helping to sponsor the updates.

THE CO-OPERATIVE TRAINING REGISTER

The outgoing Chair of the CTR Committee, a subcommittee of the Book and Paper Group, brings you an update on this pioneering, structured training initiative.

The year 2012–2013 has seen the CTR committee successfully consolidating and refining the scheme as a membership benefit for Icon and specifically the Book and Paper Group. As well as providing an affordable and diverse programme of training events, presented by speakers with a high profile in their subjects and held in locations across the UK, we have also looked to the future of the scheme, with changes in committee personnel to take forward the equally varied agenda we have for the coming year.

The committee's enthusiasm for working with our Icon partner Groups and the positive results of such cross-disciplinary co-operation demonstrate one of the several benefits of our Icon mutuality very well. Additionally, we have continued to co-operate and forge links with related institutions and organisations outside Icon for our mutual benefit.

The content of all our activities has been in response to members' proposals and requests via the CTR online forms or through direct contact with the committee. Our courses attract members from across the UK as well from Europe and they represent an excellent cross-section of both institutional and private practice as well as people at different stages of their conservation career. This coming together of members from all areas and sub-disciplines in our group is one of the main purposes and functions of the CTR and it was gratifying to see it continue to work in practice.

Workshop training

Five workshop-based training courses have been held in 2012/13:

- *The Adhesives: Properties, Preparation and Characteristics and Adhesives: Aerosol Applications* courses, held in Liverpool and Oxford respectively in June 2012.

- *Environment for Objects*: this one day course, organised in conjunction with the Science Group, was held over two days in October in order to meet the overwhelming demand for places.
- *The Information Skills for Conservators* presented by Chantry Librarian Ros Buck at Camberwell College of Arts in November 2012. The two half-day courses were available to all members but designed to allow the maximum number of students from Camberwell to attend free of charge.
- *Stationery Bindings*: this one-day seminar session and workshop was held at Staffordshire Record Office in February 2013 in collaboration with our conservation colleagues in the Archives and Records Association. (It is reviewed on page 31.)
- *An Identification of Prints* course, arranged in conjunction with the renowned Department of Typography at the University of Reading, was held over two days in mid-April.

The PF13 Conference

The conclusion of all our efforts for this reporting year was the excellent and varied programme developed for the two half day group sessions at last month's Conference. Working on a theme of *Current Solutions for Mutual Issues*, the benefits of our Icon mutuality were again highlighted by the willingness of other groups to contribute to a cross-disciplinary joint adhesives session on day two. Presentations on adhesive use by members of the Book and Paper, Ethnography, Photographic Science and Textile Groups allowed delegates to access and understand techniques and knowledge with common applications across the groups.

Looking ahead

The programme for the coming year is being developed by the committee, with members suggesting new venues, locations and subject areas for training via the online forms. Under consideration and development are workshops and courses on *lining and flattening*, *mounting*, *setting up a small business*, *Islamic binding* and a repeat of the very popular *Medieval Palette* course, our first course originally held in 2011.

In the medium term, our main focus is to hold a *Book and Paper Group Conference*, with a working date of the second half of 2014. The subject area will be *Eastern Print and Paper* and we hope to have more news on this in due course.

In response to a member's request, we have also built into the budget for 2013/14 the capacity to hold *four evening lectures* a year. In the past we have aimed to offer a free evening lecture connected to the major courses, allowing all members to benefit from the excellent speakers. This was a popular initiative and we want to formalise it into a quarterly programme. The aim is to offer these lectures free of charge to all members and on a regional basis wherever possible.

In an important financial initiative, The Clare Hampson Scholarship Fund Committee has kindly awarded £3,500 per annum for the next three years towards CTR activities. It is hoped that this contribution will allow us to run more

financially demanding courses and in particular support the planned 2014 conference. A key part of this initiative will be the introduction of an annual lecture, *The Clare Hampson Memorial Lecture*, based on a significant science research project in recognition of the scheme's founder. Our thanks go to the Clare Hampson Scholarship Fund Committee for their generous support.

Consultation and communication has always been a key tenet of the scheme and the committee is keen to hear members' views and ideas. I hope that the reports in Icon News on all our courses and activities will encourage you to suggest areas, either in terms of subject or location, where you would like to have training, and contribute to the vitality of the scheme. In the coming year there are changes to the CTR committee with several members, including me, stepping back from an active role and new members coming on board. I hope you will offer your full support to them. My thanks go to all those members and Icon staff who have provided encouragement and support to the outgoing committee in our work to found and develop the CTR.

Victoria Stevens ACR
Outgoing CTR Committee Chair

NEWS FROM THE GROUPS

Archaeology Group

We will be holding our AGM at Leeds Royal Armouries on June 7 this year. At last year's AGM in Scotland, we announced the results of our well-received membership survey and we are pleased now to be able to respond to various requests for a theme of 'new materials'. See the box below for more information about the event.

It has been a busy time for the Archaeology Group since the last AGM. In the pipeline is a collection of papers from our meeting on *Imaging Techniques*, held at the Rutherford Appleton Laboratories in November 2011. Speakers will receive a copy of this publication free of charge, delegates will be eligible for a discount copy – so keep your eyes peeled for the publication announcement!

We are sad to report that Karla Graham has stepped down as chair – we would all like to thank her very much for steering us so well over the last couple of years. Arrangements for selecting a new chair are currently in progress and we hope to confirm these at the AGM by the usual process. We have also very recently waved off our webmaster Rob Lewis – thanks very much Rob for everything.

Looking to the future, our events team leader Beth Werrett has been working to arrange for us a guided visit of the Mary Rose in Portsmouth, which is due to re-open in the Autumn. Further details will be available in due course. Beth works extremely hard arranging events for us so a big thank you and congratulations on becoming accredited!

We are currently welcoming applications from those who wish to be part of our small and friendly committee, particularly anybody who would like to work on the events team, who might like to learn the ropes of being treasurer, or who would

like to help keep the Group pages on the Icon website up to date. Please contact myself or Mags Felter for further information – contact details can be found on our group webpages.

We are delighted to announce that work on the new edition of 'First Aid for Finds' is again underway in the hands of Jim Spriggs and David Watkinson. At this time any thoughts and ideas of modifications and improvements are welcomed; please do get in touch with Mags Felter (Secretary, AG) with your input.

Claire Woodhead
Group Vice Chair

The Archaeology Group AGM and talks on *Innovation and Invention: Developments in Conservation Materials and Techniques* will be held at The Royal Armouries, Armouries Drive, Leeds, LS10 1LT on Friday 7 June 2013. It will cost Icon members £20, students £15 and non-members £30. Along with the talks and the AGM there will also be an opportunity to explore the stores and collections of the Royal Armouries with tours led by the conservation staff. Lunch and refreshments will be included. The AGM will be held at 1pm.

Further information and booking details are on the Group web pages. Places are limited so to avoid disappointment please reserve places by sending booking forms and enquiries to beth.werrett@wiltshire.gov.uk. **The deadline for bookings is Friday 31 May 2013.**

Book and Paper Group

I would like to thank those of you who attended the General Meeting on 3 April 2013, which was a great success. I would especially like to thank Birthe Christensen and Lizelle de Jager and the rest of our conservation colleagues at the National Maritime Museum for their generosity and for hosting the exciting programme and events for the day, as well as the General Meeting itself.

This year, the GM was shaped into a very special and stimulating event for us all by our outgoing CTR Chair, Victoria Stevens. I would like to thank Victoria for all the work she put into the day, alongside all the other CTR events throughout the year that she has planned and organised with her CTR committee. Victoria's enthusiasm, energy and total dedication to her CTR work in the last two years has been inspirational. The B&P Group committee hopes that the other Icon Groups will want to explore this area too. This venture has made such an impact that we want to expand the CTR work, and we have therefore introduced five new positions (all recently advertised and filled) into the CTR subcommittee, as it is our duty to support and offer CPD to as many members as possible.

A big thank you, Victoria, for your stamina and your hard work. You have set an example to us all, and we are very lucky to have you still on the committee for another year.

I would also like to thank the rest of our committee members, and say how fortunate I am to be able to work with such a bunch of committed people, who are also enthusiastic, creative, sensible and full of energy. This makes us a very active group

and this is fantastic, considering that we are all volunteers.

In order for us to keep putting our energies in the right place, we need your help: we already have many ideas for projects and challenges for our Special Project Leaders, but we also need your suggestions. Please tell us what you would really like us to tackle. We are organising a brainstorming meeting, around the end of June, for about ten ordinary B&P members to help us put together a small survey which will be sent to the whole B&P membership. Once completed, each member will be able to contribute ideas and suggestions as to what we should concentrate on. To give you an idea of what these special projects might be, we have been considering, for instance, recycling conservation material; putting together a treatment 'recipe book' for common treatment materials and comparing digitisation projects between institutions, etc. If you are interested in being part of this project, please email me at s.signorello@wellcome.ac.uk. The meeting in June 2013 will be informal and, I am sure, very stimulating.

The following is an update on the committee members:

- Chair: **Stefania Signorello**, stepping down at the end of December 2013 (position to be advertised in August/September)
- Deputy Chair: **Victoria Stevens**
- CTR Chair: **Amelia Rampton**
- Treasurer: **Ian Watson**
- Secretary: **Anna Johnson**
- Journal Task & Finish Group: **Isabelle Egan** and **Heather Ravenberg** are staying on the committee until December 2013 to complete the Task & Finish Group work. After this date, they will be leaving the committee to focus on developing The Gathering.
- Special Projects Leaders: **Mark Furness** and **Catt Baum**

Stefania Signorello, Group Chair

Ceramics and Glass Group

It's been a quiet few months within the Ceramics and Glass Group as we prepared for our Group's session during PF13 – I hope that many of you attended! However, we have not been too idle and have managed to organise a fabulous tour of the De Morgan Centre to coincide with this year's AGM to be held on Saturday 8 June.

De Morgan began his illustrious career working alongside artistic contemporaries such as William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones, before opening his own potter's studio in Chelsea. His work is heavily inspired by the brilliant colours of Islamic pottery, especially the bright turquoise he first admired on Iznik work of the 16th century. This wonderful collection was formed by Evelyn De Morgan's sister, Mrs Wilhelmina Stirling who died aged ninety nine in 1965. She bequeathed her substantial art collection to be looked after in Trust and the De Morgan Foundation Charity was formally created in 1967.

The day will include a tour of this collection, refreshments, lunch and a well-deserved trip to the pub afterwards – hope to see a few of you there. We will also be welcoming two new members to our committee at the AGM – Helen Warren and Rebecca Sanderson.

We will also be holding another 'Silicone Mould Making Workshop' at the Ashmolean Museum in early September and are now planning our next big conference due to take place in the beautiful historic city of York in spring 2014. Watch this space, our Group's Icon pages and Facebook page for further information and call for papers.

Kathleen Swales CGG Chair

Textile Group

Now that the Glasgow conference is over the Committee has planned a packed events programme for the rest of the year. All details including costs and contact information can be found on the Textile Group web pages, along with information about other related textile events in which members may be interested.

As there is no Forum this year please note that the Textile Group Annual General Meeting will be held during the visit to Hampton Court Palace on Friday 21 June. New committee members will be announced at the AGM, and thanks go to all who voted using the on-line system this year. The AGM will fit into the programme for the day, which includes a tour of the textile conservation studio and visit to the new state bed exhibition 'Secrets of the Royal Bed Chamber'.

This will be followed by the Back to Basics Workshop 'Wet Cleaning, the Appliance of Science' on Thursday 27 June. The one day CPD refresher course will be led by Dr Anita Quye (Lecturer in Conservation Science, Centre for Textile Conservation and Technical Art History, University of Glasgow) and held at the British Museum Orsman Road site.

September 20 sees us joining forces with the Historic Interiors Group for a visit to Ham House, London to hear about a recently completed project on the wall coverings there.

Later in the year, on Friday 11 October, there is a visit to the Leather Conservation Centre, Northampton. It will include a tour of the facility and a short handling/identification session.

Finally we have received a number of expressions of interest in the proposed visit to the textile division of Toye, Kenning and Spencer (www.toye.com) in Bedworth. Toye specialises in narrow fabric weaving, manufacturing ribbons, braids and laces and has particular expertise in hand and machine embroidery, and making crafted hats and caps for the military, home security, sports and show business markets. The firm of Benton & Johnson was bought by the Company in 1990 and makes metal threads to order. The company holds a Royal Warrant for gold and silver laces, insignia and embroidery to HM The Queen. The date will be announced on the Group's web pages.

Deborah Phipps Group Chair

LIBRARY NEWS

Photocopies

We supply photocopies of journal articles, chapters from books, and conference papers, which are held in the Chantry Library collection. Icon members can claim **ten free articles**

each year, provided either as scanned pages or in hard copy. Email Ros Buck, Librarian at chantrylibrary@icon.org.uk with your requests, quoting your membership number, or complete and send the copyright form available on the Chantry Library webpages www.chantrylibrary.org.uk (Library Services).

Recently received publications

Art and Authenticity edited by Megan Aldrich and Jos Hackworth-Jones, Lund Humphries (Farnham) in association with Sotheby's Institute of Art (London), 2012, 208pp. ISBN: 978-1-84822-098-0

Blue Pigments: 5000 Years of Art and Industry by François Delamare, Archetype Publications, London, 2013, 442pp. ISBN: 978-1-904982-37-1

Suave Mechanicals: Essays on the History of Bookbinding (Volume 1) edited by Julia Miller, The Legacy Press, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 2013, 522pp plus DVD. ISBN: 978-0-9797974-5-3

Lasers in the Conservation of Artworks IX edited by David Saunders. Matija Strlic, Capucine Korenberg, Naomi Luxford and Karen Birkhölzer, Archetype Publications Ltd., London, 2013, 259pp. ISBN: 9781904982876.

The papers in this volume were presented as papers or posters at the ninth meeting dedicated to the use of lasers in the conservation of artworks (LACONA), hosted by the British Museum and University College, London.

A Companion to British Art: 1600 to the Present Day edited by Dana Arnold & David Peter Corbett, Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, 588pp. ISBN: 978-1-4051-3629-7

The British Museum Technical Bulletin, Volume 6, 2012
Volume 6 will be available online in Autumn 2013
Volumes 1-5 of the BMTM available online at:
www.britishmuseum.org/research/publications/online_journals/technical_research_bulletin.aspx

Recently received journals

The Ephemerist, No.160, Spring 2013
Ephemera Item of the Month: www.ephemera-society.org.uk/items/2013/apr13.html

JAIC (Journal of the American Institute for Conservation), Vol.52, No.1, February 2013
JAIC Online (Volumes 16-44, 1977-2005):
<http://cool.conservation-us.org/jaic/tocvol.html#vol44>
Contents and articles online.

AIC Painting Speciality Group Postprints, Vol.22, 2009 CDRom

Waac Newsletter, Vol.35, No.1, January 2013
Online access to Waac back issues (up to January 2010):
<http://cool.conservation-us.org/waac/wn/>

Find out more

There are several ways of keeping up to date via the Chantry Library:

- Check out the library blog 'Library News' <http://chantrylibrary.wordpress.com/> for further details of new resources and a full listing of all journal articles received over the past few months.
- Or you can have the news come to you by subscribing to the RSS feed and track new books and journals at the Library in real time. More details on how to do this are also at <http://chantrylibrary.wordpress.com/feed/>
- Details about new library resources can also be found in the quarterly Chantry Library Resources Updates, on the website here: www.icon.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1827&Itemid=175

'KNOWING THE NEED'

Caroline Peach of the British Library Preservation Advisory Centre is co-author of a thought-provoking report about the state of preservation management of physical library and archive collections in the UK and Republic of Ireland. Here she discusses some of the findings of concern and her thoughts about how to address them

'Know what you've got, know where it is and know how it is.' These wise words are the mantra of a colleague of mine. 'Simple enough' you might think, 'obvious', but apparently not often the case. On 1 March this year the British Library Preservation Advisory Centre held a conference to launch its five-years-in-the-making report 'Knowing the Need'.

Collecting the evidence

Those of you with good memories will remember that this title was also used in 2006 by the National Preservation Office to describe its report on the state of preservation of the UK's library and archive collections (www.bl.uk/blpac/pdf/knowning.pdf). In 2013 we are fortunate to have five more years' information on the way that library and archive collections are catalogued, used, and looked after; on what physical condition they are in and how they are valued by their holding organisation.

This body of evidence has all been collected using the Preservation Assessment Survey (www.bl.uk/blpac/paslib.html) so it is consistent and comparable. The latest report uses the results of surveys from eighty six collections representing an estimated fifty million collection items. It shows where there are common strengths and weaknesses in the way that library and archive collections are looked after, and it shows what has changed (or hasn't changed) in the space of five years.

Major Findings

What did we find? The headline preservation findings are that improvements in collection storage are required (41% 'inadequate'); improvements in environmental management are required (62% 'inadequate') and improvements in emergency control planning are required (38% 'inadequate'). Why is practice 'inadequate' in these areas? Commonly, there is a lack of regular housekeeping (particularly cleaning of storage areas), organisations struggled to meet the environmental parameters in BS5454:2000 (though there has

been a welcome increase in the number of organisations monitoring the environment), and although emergency control plans are now more widespread, staff/volunteers are frequently not trained in their implementation (compromising the effectiveness of the plan). Unsurprisingly, though perhaps disappointingly, these were also found to be the areas of greatest weakness in the 2006 report.

The way forward

This set me thinking, and raised the question 'what do we need to do to make sure that we don't report the same findings in another five years' time?'. It is common knowledge that the resources for managing collections are hard-pressed. We need to be certain that the way that we allocate preservation effort brings maximum benefit. We need to optimise our preservation activity.

This could be done by prioritising action for items that are in greatest demand, or those that are currently most vulnerable. 'Common sense' you may well say, but not commonly done I say. The statistics in the 2013 'Knowing the Need' report appear to show that there is very little discrimination in the way that actions have been targeted to item demand or vulnerability. I refer you to the full report for the detail www.bl.uk/blpac/pdf/ktn.pdf but the positive 'take away' from this is that there is something that we can do to improve the status quo, even in times when money is tight.

The conference in March probed the report's statistics, drew on wider research into the way library and archive collections are valued, and questioned both what we need to know about our collections and how we collect it in order to make good decisions about their long-term care (presentations online: www.bl.uk/blpac/ktnconference.html).

So how do we begin to 'optimise' our preservation activity? Here are some of my thoughts. First, the relatively recently published PAS 198: 2012 'Specification for managing environmental conditions for cultural collections' and PD 5454: 2012 'Guide for the storage and exhibition of archival materials' provide the opportunity to re-examine our approach to managing the environment and targeting conditions appropriate to the collections.

Secondly, we need to recycle and reuse: there is good information and good practice available on emergency control planning and training, but it often exists in pockets. Let's share, and share regardless of whether the information originated in a library, archive, museum, historic house....

Finally, as my wise colleague said, let's know what we've got, know where it is, and know how it is – and use that information to tailor what we do to the areas of greatest need.

Icon Trustee Kate Frame writes about your Icon from her perspective on the Board

Photo: Matt Wrieford



For the last five years it has been my pleasure to be a trustee for Icon. My belief in Icon's important role as the 'voice of conservation' led me to become an active member. With over 2500-strong membership Icon sets the standards for quality assured conservation in the UK. With my experience at the Historic Royal Palaces (HRP) I felt I could contribute to the work of Icon. As a charity it is dependent on the support and work of all of us in the profession. The more people and organisations that join Icon,

the stronger it will become, and in turn the stronger our profession will be.

Unlike many Boards ours is a working board that not only sets strategy but works directly with members and others to develop and implement our work. For some of my time at Icon, I have been head of the Communication Committee whose members are currently David Leigh, Frankie Halahan, Alison Richmond, Jane Thompson-Webb, Lynette Gill, and Wiebke Morgan.

We first recognised that Icon needed an overall communications strategy that could harness the many communications tools used to promote Icon (i.e. our website, Iconnect, Icon News, triennial conference, leaflets, and the Conservation Register) and increase the overall effectiveness of our programs and forums by tying it into a planned strategic framework. With help from a marketing specialist from HRP, we developed a 'communication framework' in which we identified and prioritised main communication objectives and audiences, developed messages and media for each, and potential long term campaigns that support Icon and its goals (e.g. promoting the Conservation Register)

One of our priorities has been to raise the profile and understanding of Icon and its value by existing and

potential members and supporters. As a way forward, HRP's marketing specialist recommended making Icon's existing communication tools work harder. As a result we subtly revamped the widely read 'Icon News' magazine to make it more clearly direct, for example with pieces on finances and membership. We created a *From the chief executive* page giving our CEO a forum to discuss Icon's major initiatives, and her position on sector trends and challenges and this *From the Trustee* segment that informs members on the status of different programmes and goals directly from the Trustee in charge. We have a few Icon communication 'champions', Icon members who gather news about members changing jobs, starting their first job or retiring, winning awards, achieving ACR or other for the *People* section (they also run Icon's Facebook site).

We revised our brochure 'Why join Icon?' to clearly demonstrate to members and potential members that Icon is the natural home for them. We articulate Icon's many benefits of belonging, influencing, and valuing, and the recognition and representation that comes from being a member.

We are currently finalising an inspirational short descriptive statement for Icon that clearly states its role and position to allow us to communicate its value in a fast-paced world where we may have but a few seconds to introduce ourselves and make a pitch for support from others to assist us.

Going forward, Icon has many communication ambitions, including redevelopment of our website to make it attractive to those outside our profession to inspire them to become involved in Icon, while retaining its wealth of information that is a resource for conservators. Our communication activities and campaigns continue and we welcome others enthusiastic about conservation communications to become involved, to become an Icon communications 'champion'.

Kate is a graduate of the Institute of Archaeology. She has worked at Historic Royal Palaces since 1999, becoming the first Head of Conservation and Collection Care in 2004.

PF13: What do people make of us?

Allyson Rae, a Freelance Organic Artefacts Conservator, raised a cheer at the Conference when she criticised the conference bag. Here she develops her thoughts further.

Q: *What is durable, elegant, re-usable, understated, beige, rather obscure, difficult to get things in and out of, has scratchy corners which rub people up the wrong way and which gets put aside because it's too much trouble?*

A: *The Icon PF13 conference bag with its carefully designed logo – or is it the image of the conservation profession?*

I am being provocative and perhaps rather unkind. I know hard work and good intentions went into producing the conference bag, by people who are very busy and some of whom gave their time for free. But I am going to put those considerations to one side. The question I asked at the very successful and stimulating Icon PF13 conference was a serious one: *'What does the conference bag tell the people of Glasgow about us?'* If we are satisfied with the answer 'nothing' a beige bag with an elegant logo is fine. If we would like it to tell them anything else we need something different next time. It seems to me that this bag embodies so many of the things we complain of and have striven to overcome – we don't get noticed, valued or appreciated enough. For all the progress we have made, which was eloquently demonstrated by many of the papers, the walk we walk is still elegant, beige obscurity where four hundred people carrying identical bags through Glasgow for two days passes unnoticed.

What do people make of us? Jane Henderson in her entertaining summary of the conference drew our attention again to Grayson Perry's reflections on conservation quoted by one speaker – an interesting perspective. Cristina Rozeik, in her amusing and thought-provoking paper *'Should we care about conservation's public image?'*, looked at the way conservators are perceived and presented in the media and literature. Interestingly she also acknowledged that we have never really asked people what they think of conservators and conservation. Do the things we do to raise our profile actually work? Now there's an interesting piece of research for a conservation student. And while we are waiting for that research what about a regular feature in Icon News asking an individual what they think of us, rather as The National Trust did in its magazine? We could start with Grayson Perry and move onto the Minister of Culture, a ten-year old, a curator, a disadvantaged young adult...endless possibilities and what an insight we would gain.

So what about the conference bag? Does it matter – it's just a bag. Well, I would argue that it does matter. If its only purpose is to contain the conference papers we don't need it at all and could use the money spent on designing and producing it in better ways. The excellent conference booklet slipped easily into most people's ordinary bags. How often does the profession produce advertising that is carried around the streets by four hundred people, not just in the conference city, but hopefully once they get home? People should want to buy an Icon bag when Icon is at trade fairs, not consign it to the recycling bin. All of us making a living in conservation know that coasting is not an option and in my view this is what the conference bag is doing. It is not



University of Glasgow Photo Unit



Allyson Rae

working hard enough for us. Am I alone in feeling angry that we have paid a rather smug marketing organization (Icon News January 2013 6–7) to come up with this? Icon – us, its members – need to think about how we present ourselves in the world, the boring, everyday world of carrying papers, picking up shopping, mingling with ordinary men and women for whom 'PF13' and an esoteric logo may suggest a rather obscure private club which is not looking for any new members.

For my part I would have liked the people of Glasgow to know that we are vibrant, inclusive, relevant, intriguing, skilful. Can we get that across on a bag? Yes we can. Alison Richmond, in sharing the early results from Icon's excellent workplace research, told us that 38% of conservation jobs are in the private sector. What a pool of marketing experience. And for the rest working in museums or charitable organizations, think of all those 'branding' and 'promoting' activities we get involved in. We are a very creative and inventive group of people. So how about a competition to design a bag for the next triennial conference – something that really expresses our essence and reaches out to people? What about advertising that 'conservation is in town' by choosing a venue with a high profile conservation project which could be presented to the public and media to complement the conference? Birmingham and the Staffordshire hoard springs to mind.

I am not a good self-publicist or an inspiring public speaker; I feel the introspective pull of a complex conservation treatment, but advocacy demands we put ourselves out there in whatever ways best suit our skills. Two of the motivating phrases used by one speaker at the conference, borrowed from the bridge of the Starship Enterprise, were 'Make it so' and 'Engage'. We will struggle to do either if we present ourselves as understated and obscure. Grayson Perry didn't get where he is today by being beige and elegant – he wears his passions on his sleeve and walks the walk. We need to do the same, conference bags carried with pride.

Clare Meredith 'by her team'



Clare receiving her bouquet at the Glasgow Conference

Clare, who has decided it is time to move on from her post of Head of Collections Conservation Services at the National Trust for Scotland, will be remembered by her team for just that – standing by her team.

Clare brought to the Trust, as a maternity cover and then as Department Head, all those characteristics which she is so highly regarded for in the conservation sector: integrity, respect for others, advocacy for the profession, a passion for her subject and a joy in working with colleagues. We have experienced this at first hand as Clare has led us over the past six and a half years. She has pushed each and every one of us to achieve more than we thought we could, supported us when the going got tough, wanted the best for us and been a source of sound sensible advice.

Clare's passion for helping new professionals has become one of her lasting legacies within the Trust where Icon internships have become embedded. It is due to Clare's commitment that we have not one but

two interns this year and a member of the team going forward with the CTQ. That sums Clare up, pushing, pushing, pushing for the best for people and for the profession.

Clare has raised the profile of collections conservation internally within the Trust, guiding our small team out of a difficult restructure in 2007 and ensuring that we are now seen as a distinct and valuable conservation discipline within the Trust. Through her, collections conservation has a very strong and diplomatic voice at that table. Who better to have as our advocate at this level?

Clare has been instrumental in helping the Trust to raise and embed best practice standards of conservation and collections care across the organisation. Her leadership of our annual Collections Care Workshops has been testament to that – these are now sell-out events on the Trust training calendar and have helped us to train staff involved in hands-on work with collections, as well as being a vehicle for advocacy of what we do at the highest level.

Her external advocacy for the Trust, and for the profession of conservation as a whole, has been remarkable. The most recent of a long list of external public speaking engagements highlights this perfectly when she travelled to Los Angeles to speak at the Getty about the evolution of conservation approaches taken at three very different Trust properties. Clare also gave a great summary of the profession's convergence at Icon PF13 and we hope she can be persuaded to help capture this in writing for posterity.

Clare's small Collections Conservation team will be all the smaller without her. However, this is the start of a new and exciting chapter in Clare's life and we wish her luck with her ambition of having a quiet life. It's hard to believe that for someone with such huge reserves of energy and joie de vivre that life could ever be quiet!

It should also be mentioned that Clare Meredith served as the Chair of the PACR Accreditation Committee for six years and, although she chaired her last meeting in Spring 2011, she continues to be involved in the PACR process as an Assessor.

Her important role in the UK-wide conservation profession and the affection in which our community holds her was recognised at the recent PF13 Conference, when an accolade and a bouquet of flowers was sprung on her during the closing session. She clearly wasn't expecting the ambush!

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We are sad to announce the death of Ian Constantinides who lost his battle against cancer on 15 April 2013. He was a founder of St Blaise and a charismatic figurehead in the world of architectural conservation. An appreciation of Ian will follow in the next issue.

Wooden grave markers

Pieta Greaves ACR describes the conservation of some rare Victorian memorials

INTRODUCTION

Twenty Victorian wooden grave markers were recently conserved at AOC Archaeology, Edinburgh. These grave markers are rare survivals of their type. Found during archaeological excavations at St John's Church of England Primary School, Bethnal Green, London, in the fill of a waterlogged vault, the grave markers were no longer in-situ and had been discarded overlying and adjacent to two lead coffins. This environment had preserved the markers as they became waterlogged.

The markers were predominantly round-topped with square-cut bases although examples with rounded bases were identified and indicate mechanised, probable mass production of the markers, although one was of a higher quality with detailed carved relief and lettering.

The overall decoration and evocation of sacred dedications towards the deceased identified on the gravemarkers clearly demonstrate that their intended function was as monuments for the dead in the same manner as gravestones. It is likely that the decision to purchase and erect a wooden monument rather than a stone memorial was one strongly dictated by cost and socio-economic status. Four of the individuals

Gravemarker 4 showing the lettering before treatment and iron staining



commemorated were adults compared to six juveniles. Four different timber species were present; larch, pine, oak and elm.

CONDITION

The condition of the markers varied, all were covered in clay and iron staining deposits which were removed prior to consolidation. The site conditions of London clay with some gravel and the construction of deep graveshafts meant that areas of the ground were waterlogged. This led to residual traces of oily and greasy decomposition fluids that had mixed with rain water and affected the wooden gravemarkers. No specific health risks were found to be associated with the

Gravemarker 4 after conservation. The iron staining has been reduced





Lettering in high quality relief

excavation and subsequent conservation of the wooden gravemarkers but extra care was employed in handling the markers by avoiding prolonged skin contact or inhalation of the fluids.

There is evidence that the grave markers were used. The wood was weathering; the result of the action of cyclic wetting and drying and exposure to ultraviolet (UV) light and erosion of the wood through wind-blown debris. Several of the bases have decayed from moisture penetration from the ground.

The wood also appeared to have a dark staining applied on the surface which is most evident along breaks where lighter original wood in the interior can be seen, this perhaps could be a treatment to preserve the wood once erected in the graveyard.

Prior to conservation, all the visible lettering was documented. The lettering appears to be a black pigment. Although no testing could be conducted it is likely that this was a permanent ink; much of the original lettering was no longer visible. Further lettering could be seen if a raking light was applied to the surface.

CONSERVATION

To remove the excess and any disfiguring iron staining a pre-treatment with 5% of EDTA (ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid) was used. The markers were individually immersed in the solution for five hours, successfully removing larger areas of staining.

As the waterlogged gravemarkers were to be stored for archive and possible future display it was necessary to dry them. Since simple air drying would lead to cell collapse of the wood structure it was decided to use polyethylene glycol



A standard gravemarker

(PEG) and the PEGcon program to calculate the required solutions. All four different wood species were calculated separately but due to the nature of the waterlogging and the size of the markers it was decided to use the same PEG concentrations for all species.

Two solutions of PEG were used, PEG 400 was used to control the shrinkage of cell walls and waxy solid PEG 3350 to support the wood. The markers were immersed in large baths of the solutions over one year to ensure that the PEG achieved the desired level of penetration.

Following this the wood was frozen for one week and then placed in the freeze-drier so any remaining water could be removed by sublimation. To monitor the process the wood was weighed regularly to indicate how much water was being removed; once the readings had equalised the process was complete. Each gravemarker took three to five weeks to freeze-dry.

In conclusion the process has been very successful; the rare markers can now be archived and studied safely.

At the time of writing Pieta Grieves worked for AOC Archaeology. She has recently taken up the post of Staffordshire Hoard Conservation Manager – see Icon News 45



The high quality relief lettering seen in close-up

Lettering seen in raking light



The new Deir al-Surian Library and Conservation Centre

Elizabeth Sobczynski ACR, Chief Executive of the Levantine Foundation, and Mother Antonia of the Deir al-Surian Monastery celebrate the opening of a splendid new facility for looking after a priceless collection of manuscripts

HOW THE LIBRARY CAME ABOUT

More than one thousand years ago, deep in the remote desert of the northwestern Nile Delta in Egypt – commonly known at that time to locals and strangers alike as ‘Scetis’ – in the quiet of a secluded Coptic Christian monastic community, two hooded figures started something very special indeed.

Matthew and Abraham, as they were called, were Syrian monks of the famous Monastery of the Mother of God, later renamed the Monastery of the Syrians (Deir al-Surian) – one of the many early Christian monastic communities of Scetis. It is to these two simple monks that modern scholarship owes an enormous debt of gratitude, for it was they who were responsible for establishing the monastery’s first library of ancient Christian texts. Little did they know that the library which they were starting would eventually become one of the oldest and most important surviving collections of ancient

Christian manuscripts in the world.

The beginning of the Deir al-Surian Library has been traced back to the 9th century when Matthew and Abraham laid its foundations, and from that period onward, the accessions of ancient Syriac texts became increasingly frequent, with numerous contributions received from the vast region of Syria and Mesopotamia. These manuscripts included Gospels, biblical texts, theological and philosophical writings, homilies, and historiographies of the desert fathers.

THE SILVER LINING TO A TAX CRISIS

In 922, the Christian monasteries in Egypt were faced with a dire crisis: a new Vizier from Caliph al-Muktadir demanded that monks, who had previously been exempt from the poll tax, should now pay. The only way to appeal against this new

October 2008: the site allocated for the new Library



Building work starts





The conservation team outside the Library



Work in progress

tax was to go to Baghdad to see the Caliph himself, and it was the abbot of Deir al-Surian who was chosen to undertake this delicate, and as it turned out, extremely lengthy task. Abbot Mushe of Nisbis set out for Baghdad in 927 and returned five years later in 932, having successfully completed his mission. Mushe, however, had not wasted time whilst waiting for the decision about the tax, instead he went about acquiring Syriac manuscripts, as we learn from a note in a manuscript now in the British Library:

To the honour and glory and magnificence of this Syrian Orthodox monastery of the Mother of God in the Desert of Scetis, Mushe, known as "of Nisbis", an insignificant sinner and abbot strove to acquire this book...together with 250 others, when he went to Baghdad on behalf of this holy desert and monks dwelling in it.

Following an imprecation threatening some terrible punishment for anyone who would erase the commemorative note or remove the book from the monastery, it continues:

These books arrived with the abovementioned Abbot Mushe in the year 1243 of the Greeks [= AD 932]

Mushe's gift to the monastery was enormous and it placed the Deir al-Surian Library firmly on the list of the most important Christian manuscript collections in the world. After his death, the date of which is uncertain, the monastery's library continued to increase, but never again was there such a bulk acquisition of ancient manuscripts as he made. Throughout the following centuries, Coptic and Christian Arabic codices were added to the collection, and Ethiopic manuscripts were brought to the monastery by Ethiopian monks, who lived there until the 19th century.

THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES

Although much of the monastery's original collection is today in Rome and London, having been acquired by the Vatican Library in the 18th century, and by the British Museum in the 19th, a respectable quantity of approximately one thousand bound manuscripts and some fifteen hundred fragmentary manuscripts in Coptic, Syriac, Ethiopic, and Arabic still remain housed in the Deir al-Surian Library. These include the oldest dated Christian literary manuscript in any language (AD 411), the oldest dated biblical manuscript in any language (Isaiah, AD 459/60), and the oldest dated Gospel manuscript in any language (AD 510).

For centuries, the collection was stored in the monastery's 9th century keep in one of its chambers, adjacent to the main oil store, where in 1837 Lord Curzon discovered the Coptic and Syriac manuscripts. Collectively, these formed one of the chief treasures of the British Museum, and more recently the British Library.

In the early 1970s, a new tower and new monastic cells were built and the collection was moved from the keep to a newly-built cell, and later transferred to the top floor of the tower.

BUILDING THE NEW PREMISES

In the autumn of 2006, mindful of the real need to ensure the permanent survival of the precious collection of manuscripts, The Levantine Foundation and the Deir al-Surian Monastic Council launched a joint initiative to construct a new library building within the ancient walls of the 6th century monastery.

In January 2007, the site of the new library was allocated by His Grace Bishop Mattaos, Abbot of Deir al-Surian, where a



The East side of the building completed in 2012

dilapidated 1960s' building would be demolished to make space for it. There followed the approval of the planning application by the Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquities and, after fundraising, planning, and completion of the design, building began in early 2009.

The firm of Morad Bebawy & Meleka Farah had been appointed by the Monastic Council to oversee the

The East side of the building in 2010



Librarian Father Bigoul outside the entrance of the new building

architecture which was designed to be in harmony with the original monastic buildings and within its tenth century walls. The new building would consist of two storeys above ground, with a basement library and archive area underground. By the end of the year the first stage – a skeleton shell – was complete. In the summer of 2012, the second stage – the internal fittings and services – was finished and the start of 2013 saw the completion of the final stage: fitting-out and installing metal shelving and cabinets, tables and workbenches and conservation equipment.

The purpose-built Deir al-Surian Library now provides world class storage for the monastery's collection, as well as facilities for all aspects of book conservation, such as education and training to enable unrivalled state-of-the-art care for the library's priceless collection. The building is equipped with an advanced temperature and humidity control system for long term preservation, a conservation laboratory, public access areas such as reading rooms for scholars and an exhibition facility featuring a rotating display of the library's treasures. Biannual conservation field campaigns organised by The Levantine Foundation will give British, European, and Egyptian conservators unique professional development opportunities to acquire broader capability and 'extended professionalism' characterised by independent judgment, involvement in a community of practice, and the demonstration of practical or intellectual leadership.

READY TO OPEN!

The Deir al-Surian Library has come a long way from its humble beginnings in the 9th century. In mid-May, distinguished guests will be present when the new facility

opens under the patronage of His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of Saint Mark; His Grace Bishop Mattaios, Abbot of Deir al-Surian; and The Levantine Foundation, which has partially funded the building. Elizabeth Sobczynski, the Foundation's CEO, is thrilled:

'This is the most exciting moment since the organisation's founding in 2002. For the past ten years it has been my dream to house this unique collection safely, to ensure its survival for future generations and, with modern technology, make it accessible to the world of scholarship. I look forward to working with the collection and training Egyptian conservators on how best to preserve their cultural heritage for the future'.

Visit The Levantine Foundation website for further information: www.thelevantinefoundation.org

Illustrating the rich contents of the Library, this illuminated page shows the four Evangelists from a 13th century Coptic manuscript of the Four Gospels. This codex is written on beautifully polished Islamic paper in a mixture of carbon and iron-gall ink. It was written by the scribe Simon Ibn Peter in 1220 A.D. in the Deir al-Surian scriptorium where it has remained for the last eight hundred years. It is written in Boharic, the ancient Coptic dialect used in Lower Egypt from the 3rd until the 13th century when Arabic began gradually to replace it



The underground storage area in February this year



around and about

Zoom in and smell the coffee!

On a miserable sleety Saturday at the end of March, British Museum scientists and conservators entertained the crowds in the Great Court with a behind-the-scenes look at how science unlocks the secrets of the Museum's collections. They must have talked themselves hoarse as there was a never-ending stream of interested visitors keen to view the displays, try out the experiments and learn. Even the head of the Conservation and Scientific Research Department was spotted taking his



A turquoise mosaic skull from Mexico thought to be early 16th century

Gold model chariot from the Oxus treasure.

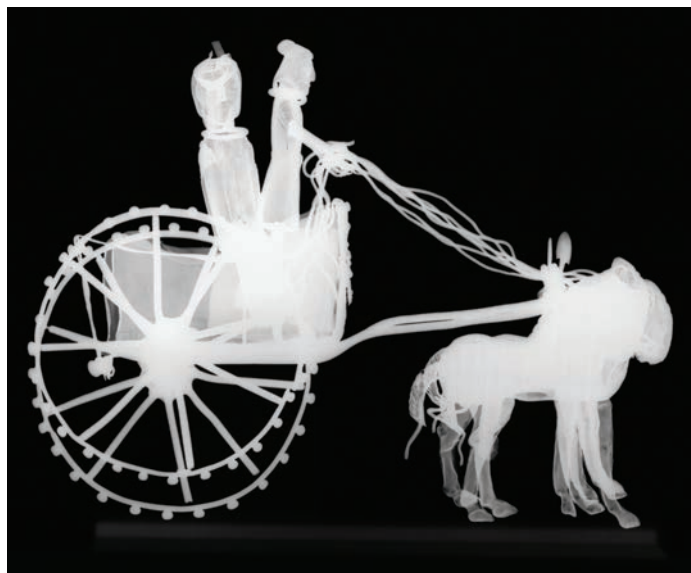


Detail of wall painting from the 18th dynasty tomb of Nebamun showing desert hares

turn at a stand, earnestly explaining the secrets of the Portland Vase.

Zoom in: a closer look at science assembled a wealth of material revealing hidden information about artefacts from

X-radiography analysis shows that the men and horses are hollow





X-radiography of an Egyptian mummy of a hare

across the Museum's range: basketry, the technology of jade carving, the manufacture of Iron Age torcs, the craftsmanship of Mexican turquoise mosaics, the role of Oddy tests, the internal structure of the Oxus chariot (a tiny gold model of wonderful Persian craftsmanship from the 4th/5th century BC) and others.

One section of the displays was focussed on the latest findings from the 'Heritage Smells!' project – a major collaborative piece of research between the BM, University College London, the University of Strathclyde and the National Archives of Scotland. This study is looking at questions such as whether the understanding of an object's smell will cast light on its past, what it is made of and how it has been looked after. The instrumentation used to 'sniff' old books, plastics, ethnographic objects and other artefacts was demonstrated and lots of fun tests related to the sense of smell could be tried. It is extraordinarily hard to identify a substance, even one as pungent as roast coffee, when you can't see what is in the container you are sniffing! .

And was this demonstration of the techniques and technology of heritage science appreciated? Well, judge from this. One item which created a lot of interest amongst children at the stands was the x-ray of a mummified hare, which a member of BM staff was explaining and bringing to life in a vivid and entertaining way. As they left the stand, one of two young men accompanied by a boy turned to his companions and said:

'People's lives are amazing. All the years that these ladies are studying. The things that they do. And you can come to a place like this and they open their mouths and just tell us all they know.'

The PF13 Trade Fair

One important feature of IconPF13 was the Trade Fair which was situated in Hunter Halls, where all the breaks took place. During these breaks the stands were busy and there was a real buzz in the air – though perhaps slightly longer breaks would be appreciated both by exhibitors and delegates at future conferences, as there was so much to see and do.

Delegates could see equipment in action at Willard Conservation and Meaco Measurement and Control's stand or admire the vast selection of papers and storage materials at

John Purcell Papers, Conservation by Design and Schempp. Click Netherfield presented a selection of museum showcases and Mapping Solutions' partner NEO introduced Hyperspectral technology. Harwell Document Restoration Services, a specialist provider in recovery and reinstatement of documents, books, and photographs, were on hand with leaflets and advice.



Rebecca Hendry

Exhibitors not only staffed their stands but also attended conference sessions. Dave Gough, Business Development Manager, Hanwell Systems (IMC Group) commented: 'On both a personal level and on behalf of Hanwell I would like to say that IconPF13 was a great show. It gave me a chance to catch up with existing contacts in the conservation world as well as meeting new people within our trade. I felt that all the speakers gave informative presentations and our stand gathered a lot of interest from everyone. Congratulations to Suzanne Press who won our prize draw for the bottle of champagne and glasses.'

Conference sponsors Tru Vue, Historic Scotland and Taylor & Francis were, of course, present and Icon is truly grateful for their support.

Preservation Equipment, sadly, were unable to attend at the last minute and were greatly missed.

The National Heritage Science Forum had information for those who wanted to know more or had missed Sarah Staniforth's talks on Thursday either at the Plenary or Icon Science Group's sessions.

Schempp – from Germany – was a first time exhibitor with Icon and asked: 'When is the next one?'.

Rebecca Hendry
Icon's Finance Officer

At the trade fair





The Connoisseur, Reginald Barratt (1861–1917), RWS, oil on canvas attributed to Collier, John, 1850–1934

a specific expertise on a particular painting. This grant was one of eighty seven awards made by ACE through its Renaissance strategic support fund announced at the end of March.

Thanks to PCF's efforts, we now know that 80% of the 210,000 oil paintings in the national collection are in store and that 30,000 have no artist's name attached to them. Few museums and organisations these days are able to afford in-house art experts or conservators to examine the mystery orphans, so let us hope that they make use of the OPEN scheme and that this leads to some exciting discoveries and attributions to be made.

A PCF postscript

You might have expected the organisers of the Public Catalogue Foundation to sit back and congratulate themselves on getting all the nation's oil paintings photographed and put on line (see Icon News 45). But they are not resting on their laurels.

They have persuaded Arts Council England (ACE) to fund the creation and initial running cost of OPEN, (Oil Painting Expert Network), a scheme to set up a network of specialist art historians whom regional museums can contact if they require

Celebrating a centenary of conservation

This year Historic Royal Palaces celebrates over one hundred years of conservation at the Palaces. To mark the occasion we held a spectacular reception in the Banqueting House, Whitehall Palace on 25 February, to put the spotlight on the role of all the conservators, craftspeople, artists, historians and champions of heritage who have helped to develop the legacy of conservation work at the five HRP-managed palaces.

Figures in a Sculpture Gallery, oil on board by an unknown artist





Conservator Kaori Motaung in front of one of HRP's 17th-century tapestries. Conservators and scientists share some of their memorable moments on the Conservation100 blog: www.hrp.org.uk/conservation100

Over four hundred guests attended. They included our special guest Grayson Perry - one of our most exciting contemporary artists, champion of craftsmanship, social commentator and creator of modern tapestry – who spoke provocatively on his perspective on making objects, saving them and enjoying them.

Our CEO, Michael Day, gave a welcome speech and outlined the centenary events this year: our launching of a blog where conservators and scientists share some memorable moments and surprising stories about conservation; a series of thought provoking talks about how we care for some of the most precious objects in the world, this autumn across the HRP palaces; and the sharing of our expertise with the wider world through a free download for everyone of hundreds of expert tips on how to look after the treasures in your own home, from silver jewellery to vintage leather handbags.

He closed his speech with a thank you to all present who have helped to support the conservation work we do and maintain the standards of guardianship we are so proud of today. He said, 'from the people who preserved these places one hundred years ago, to conservators present and future, let us make a toast to your legacy'.

Kate Frame, Icon Trustee

Head of Conservation & Collection Care HRP



Grayson Perry speaking at the Banqueting House Whitehall at the February celebration

HRP Conservators Karen Ayres and Kate Orfeur with Grayson Perry



The Stoven ceiling project

Following an article in issue 41 (July 2012) about the proposed conservation and installation of a salvaged 17th century Suffolk plaster ceiling, we write to update you on the successful completion of the project.

After its rescue from North Green Farmhouse prior to its demolition in 1978, the embellished plaster ceiling (which was cut into twelve door-sized panels to facilitate removal) spent twenty six years in a council garage until 2004 when they were taken to Lowestoft Heritage Centre to be conserved and restored. Funding was secured through the Heritage Lottery Fund and a number of other local sponsors and the project started in earnest in June 2012. The project timeline ran for a period of sixteen weeks from initial unveiling of the panels (to assess the unknown condition) – through to final decoration.

Under the direction of Spencer Hall ACR of Cliveden Conservation and in conjunction with Stefan Ganther (Heritage Consultant and the project's 'designer'), the project was developed and a methodology defined for the careful consolidation and stabilisation.

The restoration itself played an important but small part within the overall project scope, as a large focus was the development of 'hands-on' heritage construction skills within the region. Bursaries for two temporary staff working closely under the supervision of Cliveden Conservation formed a central part of the works. Adverts were placed locally looking for interested parties, attracting a huge response from applicants as far afield as Spain. Interviews were carried out and Daniel Chapman and Katie Langridge (local to the area) were selected to join the team working under the day to day guidance of Fiona Kelsey (a senior conservator with



The trainees under direction as the ceiling is reinstated



Unveiling the panels



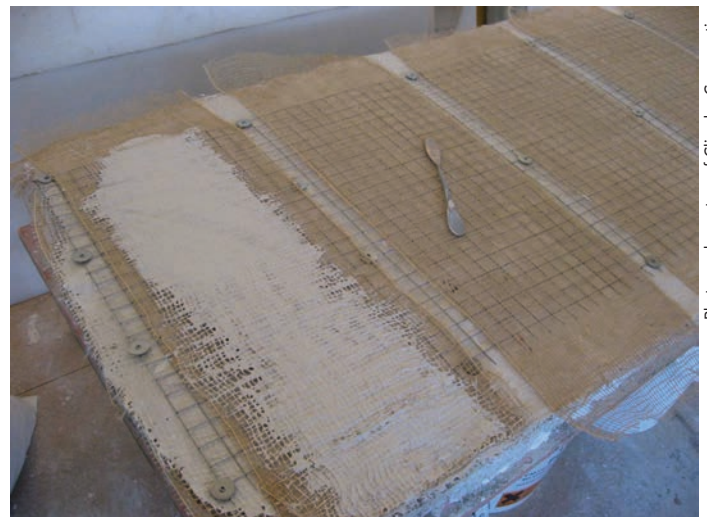
The farmhouse from which the ceiling was rescued in 1977



Laying out the jigsaw of pieces after stabilisation



1977: before the removal from the farmhouse



Stabilising the reverse of the ceiling

considerable experience).

Throughout the restoration process, a series of 'lime days' were put on to spread the word on traditional building materials. Each session gave interested parties from around the region (including architects and surveyors) the opportunity to learn more about lime, how it has been used in the past and its benefits in the current repair of historic fabric.

A series of evening seminars were also initiated throughout the project timeline to relay detail of the venture as it developed and to allow the trainees the opportunity to reflect and share their experiences of the work.

Twelve students from Lowestoft College Painting & Decorating Department were also invited to get involved with the scheme; learning about the benefits of limewash as a traditional paint finish and assisting in the application of the final coats.

A detailed and fully illustrated step by step description of the restoration process itself is available to those who are interested via The Lowestoft Civic Society website: <http://tinyurl.com/d5vgrsn>

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CONFERENCE

CONSERVATION MATTERS IN WALES
Cynon Valley Museum & Art Gallery, Wales
20 December 2012

I am often upset at the demise of the polymath: inspirational people who absorb and share knowledge from those with different backgrounds and experiences bringing those ideas to their own research. Therefore it was with great pleasure that I attended this one day conference organised by Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales (AC-NMW), The Federation of Museums and Art Galleries of Wales and Cardiff University. The focus for the conference was 'Best in Show – conservation and exhibitions' and the speakers' enthusiastic accounts of their involvement in various diverse projects were well received, providing much food for thought amongst the delegates.

The topics ranged from the conservation of objects to exhibiting large collections. Cardiff University Masters student **Francis Lukezic** provided a fascinating insight into the conservation of the feather cockade from a bicorn hat belonging to Cardiff Castle Museum of the Welsh Soldier. Francis shared her experiences of cleaning the cockade, illustrating the effectiveness of using electrostatic methods to remove surface dirt. She stressed that the methods used to reattach broken feathers were intended to be both sympathetic to the object's original technology, and detectable to future conservators via UV examination.*

Julian Carter, Senior Conservator of Natural History at AC-NMW provided an interesting account of project managing the installation of large exhibitions. He expressed a view of exhibitions as an 'opportunity to link the museum's collections to the outside world' often utilising research specimens not originally intended for display. The presentation highlighted difficulties associated with preparing exhibitions, such as displaying complex ideas; challenging time scales; limited staff numbers; and persuading the public that small stuff is interesting! He also stated that, as a conservator, project managing exhibition installation requires compromise but gives a wider understanding of conservation.

Another fascinating presentation was given by **Rebecca Ellison**, an Oil Painting Conservator also from AC-NMW, who has undertaken research on paintings by artist David Cox. Cox, although born in Birmingham, often used Welsh landscapes as the subjects for his paintings. Paintings Conservation is a specialised field, yet

* You can see a picture of Francis Lukezic on page 7 of this issue of Icon News. She was runner up in the Student Poster competition at Glasgow PF13



Julian Carter, Senior Conservator of Natural History at Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales

Rebecca gave a very accessible and informative demonstration of how multiple analytical techniques can be used to answer specific research questions and 'reconcile contemporary accounts of technique with analytical evidence'.

Many of the presentations contained common themes as well as contrasts. **Alison Lister** from Textile Conservation Studio in Bristol spoke on the conservation of two banners, whose replicas were marched through the streets as the culmination of the Maerdy Banners Project. Alison's comprehensive account included elements of social history, conservation and ethics and highlighted the 'problems related to

function' of these 'portable messages'.

Problems related to function were also highlighted by **Sam Gatley**, a textile conservator from the Victoria and Albert Museum, who discussed preparations for the museum's 'Hollywood Costume' exhibition. The exhibition featured a hundred and thirty loaned costumes which, though beautifully constructed, were not made to last, posing significant challenges for their display. The focus of the exhibition was 'not about the clothes but the character inhabited by each of them', necessitating a balance between preservation and creating a sense of movement and life in the displays. Sam's absorbing presentation provided insight into

Nerys Rudder, Conservation Masters student at Cardiff University



the range of challenges encountered when implementing this type of exhibition: from ethical discussions to practical costume mounting.

Deborah Magnoler, conservator for Birmingham Museums Trust, gave an excellent presentation about the loan of objects from the Staffordshire Hoard to the National Geographic Museum in Washington D.C. She highlighted the importance of documentation and communication when arranging a loan of this significance and also stressed the importance of including conservators at all stages of the loan process. The conservators involved with this project proved invaluable in terms of the experience they could provide, and recognition of their role was such that an entire section of the gallery was dedicated to conservation.

Kevin Smith, manager of the exhibitions team of Plowden Smith Ltd explained his company's work on mount-making, condition reporting and showcase testing for both small and very large projects. His thought-provoking presentation described the role of a mount maker as a 'position of trust and responsibility' which is always interesting and varied. He detailed how the company carries out projects and how the museum conservator fits into this process. The presentation showed the issues faced by external contractors coming into an exhibition and how conservators can support them as they carry out their role.

A ray of sunshine from the Caribbean was brought to the proceedings by **Nerys Rudder**, a Masters student in conservation from Cardiff University, who spoke about her time with the National Art Gallery project in her native Barbados. The project, initiated in 1998, sought to protect over 2000 pieces of art work that, in the absence of any conservation, had deteriorated significantly. The conservation team, mainly gathered from Puerto Rico, carried out conservation treatments, taught people object handling skills and passed on ideas for 'Macgyver conservation', using unconventional solutions to preserve cultural heritage.

Overall the proceedings were enlightening and sometimes inspiring but for me the most exciting aspects of the conference were the broad spectrum of topics, different viewpoints and experiences of the speakers. I like to think, in this respect, that the conference awoke a little of the polymath in all who attended.

Susan Sandford

Conservation student, Cardiff University

COURSE

STATIONERY BINDINGS: History, Development and Treatment

Icon Book and Paper Group Co-operative
Training Register and the Archives and
Records Association Preservation and
Conservation Section

Staffordshire Record Office, 4 February 2013

Stationery bookbinding in and outside Britain

Under the title 'Function not Finery: Stationery Bindings 1500–1799', **Pamela Birch** presented an illustrated summary of their historical development, based on her long experience as a conservator at the Bedfordshire & Luton Archives Service.

Although rolls were still produced in the 19th century, register books of parish records had existed since 1538. A 1597 ordinance established that they had to be made in parchment, which resulted in the rebinding of all record books from 1558 onwards. The extensive use of this material until the 20th century made 'vellum books' synonymous with stationery bindings.

The earliest examples show a somewhat rough covering. Manuscript material was used for covers, cut flush with the book block or with untrimmed turn-ins. Other features included the lack of pastedowns, oblong formats, overbands and decorative lacing.

Frederick Bearman's keynote lecture centred on the history of the laced overband. Laced overbands are elements widely identified with stationery bindings and on which Fred has focused his research

in recent years. They are usually strips of tanned leather that extend from cover to cover across the spine and are affixed to the sides with lacing of alum-tawed skin or parchment in a geometrical or decorative pattern. They are meant to provide a solid base for tacketing and an additional reinforcement of the joint area, as well as to help hold down the turn-ins on the inside of the cover.

The first surviving example of an account book with laced overbands known to Fred is a journal, now in The National Archives (E 101/127/10 Exchequer), which belonged to the Frescobaldi, an Italian family of internationally established merchant-bankers. Their books became the property of the English Crown following their arrest by Edward II in Bordeaux in 1311.

By then, the binding type was fully developed, its main specifications being: a non-adhesive limp parchment binding with cover made off the book, bypass-link stitch sewing on leather thongs with laced-in slits on the front cover and free back cover, secondary spine tackets, head and tailband tackets, saltire laced overbands, fore-edge flap, fastening strap and lug.

The Italian models of account books enjoyed a wide success. Outside the Italian sphere, local contributions included French limp hair vellum bindings in the pasted-in style, echoes of Islamic lacework decoration on Spanish covers, the 'portfolio' or 'Lyonese' bindings from 16th to 18th century France or the 18th century British laced-case vellum bindings, which were to be superseded by the spring-back in the following century.

Laced overbands started to be referred to as 'Russia bands' when the use of the same-

Composition of a Spring-back Ledger



Image courtesy of Arthur Green, Bodlian Libraries Oxford

name leather came into fashion. Even deprived of its structural function, they stayed as a leitmotiv of stationery bindings produced for accounting purposes well into the 20th century. The coming of computers in the nineteen sixties somehow put an end to the technical development of the genre.

Some outstanding books rebound

In 2010 **Victoria Stevens** and **Celia Withycombe** of the Oxford Conservation Consortium took charge of the conservation of four Buttery Books from the University College. These documents record the payments made by members of the college for food and drink, with entries dating back to 1639.

As heavily used working books their condition was very poor when received in the studio. They had lost their covers, the spines were distorted and many of the page edges were in a very fragile state. Incunabula fragments had been used for endleaves. Iron gall ink, extensive dirt and water damage, with associated mould evidence, completed the diagnosis.

Two very interesting findings stood out during the examination of the volumes: some remnants of tanned hairside leather on the spine of two of the volumes and a large amount of wood chips scattered in the gutters most likely to be whittlings from tally sticks.

Paper repair was required on virtually every page and was complicated by the metallic nature of the inks; a resizing solution of MHPC in IMS/water was applied to strengthen softened areas where the paper structure had broken down and this treatment had the dual function of also easing out creases in affected areas.

The sewing on alum-tawed supports had stood in a reasonably sound state in all cases, which allowed for the re-shape of the spine rather than pulling the book blocks apart. Linen braiding and aero cotton lining were added for extra support for the spine and board attachment. For the substitution of new covers, the decision was made to rebind the books in quarter leather with sized flax fibre paper for the sides.

Sonja Schwoil, independent ACR, presented her research and conservation treatment of the first minute book (1557–1606) of the Commission of Sewers of Surrey and Kent (London Metropolitan Archives, SKCS 018).

Due to the rebinding and extensive repair that it had undergone in the last two centuries, this oversized volume appeared seriously damaged and its access had been restricted, which made an historically important document unavailable to researchers. The corrosion caused by the iron gall inks used to write the minutes added to the poor condition of the object.

After examination, an extensive intervention which involved taking down and repairing the whole book block was deemed necessary. Old repairs, added guards and linings had to be removed, extensive paper treatment was undertaken only relieved by the possibility of resizing instead of repairing a number of weak leaf edges. Dyed Japanese papers and goldbeater's skin were used to mend the paper and parchment leaves respectively. The ink-corroded areas were supported with remoistenable tissue coated with methyl cellulose and wheat starch paste reactivated with an 80/20 ethanol/water solution.

Research into the technical specifications found in oversized, parchment covered, stationery bindings of the late 16th century and early 17th century produced in the London area provided the clues to devise a suitable 'in-style' binding for the volume. Its main characteristics are: text block sewn on three tapes made of three layers of vellum and one of alum-tawed skin (the latter providing the slits to be laced into the boards), spine lined with kozo paper, no endbands, paste boards, four vellum tackets for each sewing station threaded through the centrefold and a vellum stub guard, a spine card, cover and blocks made of dyed alum-tawed skin and lined with vellum, alum-tawed skin tackets close to the joints and alum-tawed fore-edge ties.

Hands on the spring-back

Arthur Green, book conservator at the Bodleian Libraries, shared his experience on spring-back making, which he decided to take up when faced with the fact that these bindings were a seriously endangered species. Working in Oxford has allowed him to conduct extensive research on the subject. During his talk, Arthur went through all the steps of the forwarding process, offering valuable tips on techniques and most suitable materials. He also gave out a printed breakdown of procedures and we could handle several specimens, which definitely helped clarify the structural principles behind this bookbinding method.

Richard Nichols' demonstration on the making and substitution of a spring-back hollow ended the day. Richard is senior book conservator at the Staffordshire Record Office. He pointed out two typical related problems that compromise the durability of a spring-back book: a lever that is too close to the spine and the spine detachment itself.

For the spine replacement exercise, Richard chose a piece of 650-micron archival folding boxboard as the core material, which he wrapped in one strip of kraft paper using a protein-based glue. He then rolled the piece in Tyvek around a cylindrical tube with a diameter matching the width of the book spine, before vigorously rubbing the spring with a bonefolder.

Once unwrapped, Richard bent with his fingers approximately a quarter inch on each side of the spring inwards to shape the edges that clamp over the joints. Once the desired form was achieved, the piece was left to dry between weighted boards. An aero linen flange is later glued to the inside of the spring to be inserted into the split boards and adhered onto the lever. To form the headcaps, the excess in the spring length is removed in a curved cut to leave some extra material to help form the caps. Richard completed the operation by back-cornering the spring.

From the point of view of someone with a limited previous knowledge of the subject, the course was extremely informative. The more experienced professionals might have found little new material in the programme, although the experience of the speakers and the quality of their presentations was without par. The course, wide in scope as it was, could not cover all possible aspects related to stationery bindings, a branch of the bookbinding trade that offers an inexhaustible wealth of possibilities for research and inspiration. On the whole, the impression was that all of us who attended the course found the travel to Stafford very worthwhile. It was a day of intense training run in one room that was just right for the requirements of the event and the number of attendants.

Salvador Alcántara Peláez

Icon/HLF Book conservation Intern
The Wellcome Library, London

Note: The Book and Paper Group aim to make available the transcripts of all the speakers' presentations for all members to access on The Gathering via the Book and Paper Group pages on the Icon website, www.icon.org.uk

CONSERVATION OF BROADMOOR HOSPITAL PATIENT RECORDS:2

by Rhonda Niven, Broadmoor Project Conservator at Berkshire Record Office from 2007–2012

BACKGROUND

This article is a follow-up to one which I wrote for Icon News (19) in November 2008. 'Conservation of Broadmoor Hospital Records' dealt with a project funded by The Wellcome Trust to conserve 19th century asylum records. This article deals exclusively with the treatment of around three hundred damaged personal files of male patients admitted to Broadmoor between 1875 and 1884. Most of the information was unique and likely to be both of high use and of high importance to researchers.

INTRODUCTION

On arrival at Berkshire Record Office these files were found to be in such a fragile condition due to water damage that any handling, however careful, resulted in further loss and

damage. An initial survey carried out with the Project Archivist estimated that each box of files contained three hundred and thirty two documents. Within each box, approximately one hundred documents were classified as being 'significantly damaged', where ideal treatment would involve infilling areas of significant loss. In total, this gave rise to a rather daunting estimate of 7000 documents, of which 2100 were significantly damaged.

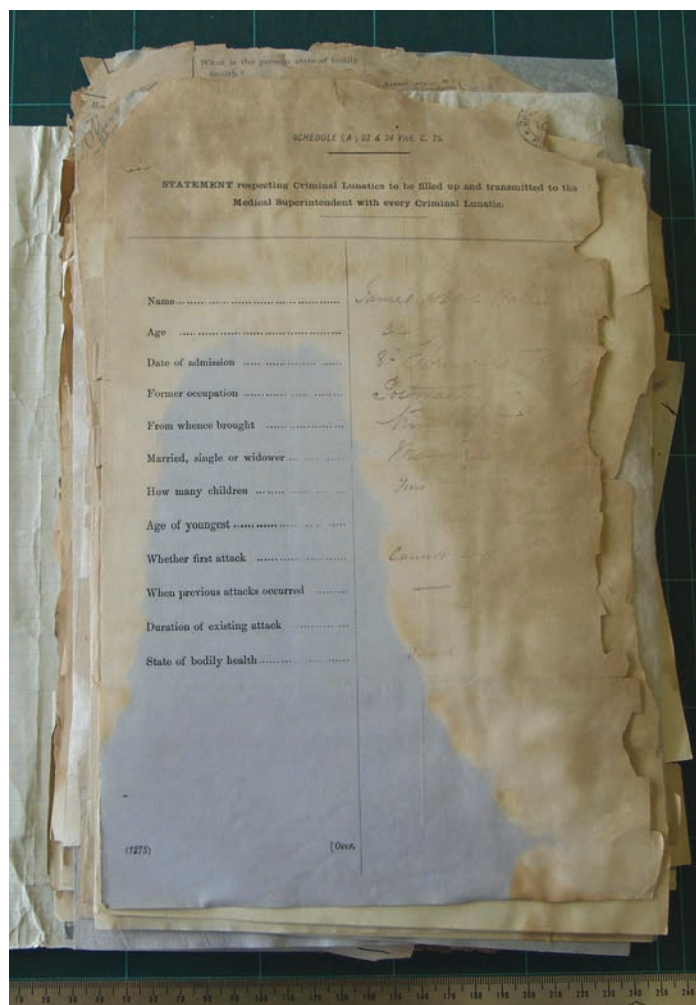
TREATMENT OPTIONS

Five treatment options were initially investigated to determine the most suitable outcomes and time estimates for the project. All documents were supported on 'Terylene' then washed in cold water for 30 minutes, warm water 30 minutes and then soaked for 30 minutes in a 1% solution of Calcium Hydroxide.

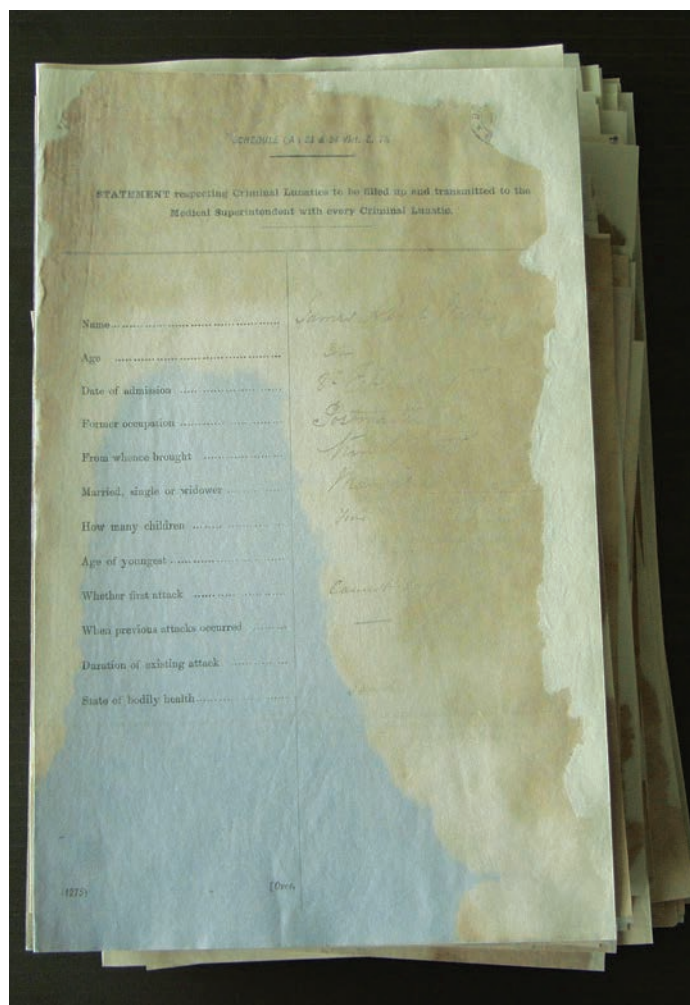
Option 1:

Repair of minor damage and tears by applying heat-set tissue to the reverse of the document. This improved document handling, but due to the extent of damage to many of the documents, further treatment was still

D/H14 D2/2/1/1134 Patient file prior to treatment



D/H14 D2/2/1/1134 Patient file following treatment



Photos reproduced with permission from the West London Mental Health Trust and Berkshire Record Office

needed for most of them.

Option 2:

Applying heat-set tissue to both sides of the entire document. This improved document handling but was not considered to be the best treatment for the collection due to reversibility issues arising from the use of heat-set tissue.

Option 3:

Applying RK-1 tissue to both sides of the document using tissue that had previously been prepared with PVA-methyl cellulose adhesive re-activated by spraying with de-ionised water. This offered a more reversible treatment but left the documents with a shine on the surface due to the PVA adhesive.

Option 4:

Infilling missing areas with RK-17 tissue and lining with RK-1 tissue on the reverse, using wheat starch paste. This resulted in a slight cockling around the areas of document-tissue overlap and took considerable time to infill each individual document.

Option 5:

Applying RK-1 tissue to both sides of the entire document and infilling with paper on areas of significant loss. This was found to produce the best results when the tissue was applied to a wet document and pasted through using a small decorating roller. Adhesive was prepared using 1 part Shofu Paste (2.5% w/v) in 2 parts Methyl Cellulose (2.5%w/v). Griffin Mill 'Unicorn' 60gsm was selected as the paper for infilling. Although there was originally wide variation in the type and colour of paper used for the documents, the damage they had undergone resulted in mottled beige colour leaching, and this was considered to blend well with the 'Unicorn' on repair. Documents were placed between blotters under weight to dry, and then the tissue was trimmed back to the size of the document.

On some documents the inks were found to be fugitive, making treatment by immersing in water unsuitable. These documents were treated by infilling as necessary and re-moistenable RK-1 tissue was then applied, which had previously been prepared by applying a thin layer of adhesive to the tissue and leaving it to dry.

OTHER DOCUMENTS

In the case of patients transferred to Broadmoor from the prison system, the files contained prison records which were printed on woven Calico. When immersed in water, starch was removed from the calico with the result that the documents became limp and text was lost from areas where damage had occurred. For these documents, it was found that capillary washing between sheets of blotting paper significantly improved the appearance of the document without loss of structural integrity and text. Following washing, a layer of the adhesive solution was applied to the front of the document and Abaca tissue applied to the back.

TREATMENT DECISIONS

On the basis of these investigations, it was considered that Option 5 above produced the best results for treating the collection. It was estimated that it would take an average of twenty minutes to repair each document, or three years to complete this phase of the project, well in excess of the original twelve month estimate to undertake all the conservation work when the initial funding application was made. As a result, a further funding grant was approved by The Wellcome Trust to enable this work to be undertaken.

Soon into the project it was found that the surface of the RK-1 tissue was 'fluffing' when removed from the terylene. This was avoided by using Abaca Hemp tissue. It was lightly sprayed with de-ionised water prior to being placed on the document to allow for a degree of expansion which took place when the tissue became wet.

THE OUTCOME

Three months ahead of schedule all the repairs were completed, with all 6061 documents treated, 2133 of which required infilling. It felt like quite an achievement to find that the time estimates, based on option 5, were correct and to know that the information within the documents can now be accessed, when previously to do so would have quickly led to their disintegration.

In a departure from our normal habit of publishing a piece here by a student, intern or other emerging professional, in this issue we have a salutary article about how not to set about getting a job. This takes the form of a fictionalised account of one recruiter's experience but is based on true events. It is followed by some straight-forward advice on writing a job application.

DESPATCHES FROM THE FRONTLINE – A RECRUITER SPEAKS

by A. Nonymous, Conservation Department, An Institution

Monday

Met with the rest of the recruitment team (there's three of us) to decide on the criteria for shortlisting the candidates. A real no-brainer – we decided to have six criteria so we simply took the essential personal specifications from the job description and chose the six most important ones. All the usual things: time management, team working, good communication etc.

Each of us will assess and score each application against the criteria and then each candidate gets an overall score based on this. These scores won't dictate who gets shortlisted but are a good indicator of who are the strongest candidates.

We'll meet again on Friday to decide the shortlist for interview. HR [Human Resources] want to contact people by the end of the week or first thing next week. Timescale is tight because we must fill this post a.s.a.p. so that the project can start as soon as the funding is released. So the pressure is on, but we're looking forward to bringing in some fresh talent to join the team.

Tuesday

Deadline for applications is midnight tonight. Email from our team leader – early signs are that we've had a record number of applicants! Good news, we should have an excellent crop of candidates. Also a bit daunting though. Have only got Wednesday and Thursday to assess the applications so it's going to be a hard slog to get through it all. Have blocked off both days in the diary but meetings have crept into Thursday so really need to break the back of it tomorrow.

Wednesday

8.15am: Over 80 applicants! Need to get through 50 applications today if I'm going to have a hope of assessing them all by Friday. Having an early start, but will still have to read up to 8 applications per hour. That's up to 8 minutes per application – there should be an application form and a supporting statement for each one. Hmm, it's going to be tough, but this is a fairly straightforward position for project work. We know what we're looking for and have recruited these posts plenty of times before. How hard can it be?

9.30am: A mixed start to the day. Candidate no. 1 is a history graduate with zero experience of conservation. Needless to say he didn't score very high, but at least it didn't take long to look at his application.

Still not quite managing 8 an hour though. No. 5 sent a CV as well as the application form and supporting statement. Had a quick look but CV doesn't seem to add anything. Just wasted a few minutes of my time – won't be making that mistake again.

Thought it would be quicker than this. Most of the statements are too wordy making it difficult to extract the info. I need. Am doing my best to read each statement carefully but am struggling to see how some of them meet the criteria. And too many have spelling mistakes.

10.30 am: Finally, an application that stands out. Statement by No. 14 is well structured and actually answers the person specification. And no spelling mistakes! They tick all the boxes – definitely one for the shortlist.

After over two hours in desperate need of a break. Have a quick cuppa with our team leader. She has even less time than me as she is in meetings all day and is planning to do the sift from home. She's going to have a late night!

11.45am: This has got to be a low point – a run of poor applications. No. 19 sent a CV but no statement. Very difficult to assess, which is a shame as they had previous experience of similar project work, but this doesn't tell me if they are good at managing their time or work well in a team. No. 22's statement is only two paragraphs telling me how much they want the job and how great they'd be. Can't see how they meet the criteria either!

No. 23 has sent a statement that's five pages – my heart sinks when I see it. And I still have trouble scoring them on the criteria. It's all in there somewhere but I have to wade through too much waffle and irrelevant info to find it. I don't need/want to read about details of conservation treatments.

11.53am: A new low – statement that is 10 pages with photos! I'm surprised the IT system didn't bounce this back as it's over 10MB. Nice pics, but actually not relevant to the job description and does not help their application at all. This person does not score high on 'effective communication'.

12.45pm: Done nearly 30 applications now. Fatigue is setting in but there's been a few promising candidates so the potential shortlist is taking shape. Should be able to squeeze a few more in before lunch.

2pm: Feeling relatively fresh after some greasy carbs, a strong cup of tea (two sugars) and a brisk walk round the block. Off to a bad start though. No. 32's statement is one page, but only because they have formatted it in 9 point font with minimal spacing and margins. I reformat it so as to avoid a migraine. Once it is legible I find it's not so bad and they score quite well.

Think I'm suffering from post-lunch slump. Had several applications open at the same time and got confused at one point because only one of them had written their name on their statement. Had to close them all down and reopen them one by one.

No. 35 is an interesting one. They describe voluntary work that's not conservation related but demonstrates a lot of the

criteria. They might not have as much bench experience as some of the others but I'd be interested to meet them.

3.30pm Definitely feeling jaded now. No. 37 must have been applying for the wrong job as the statement was all about cataloguing. Odd, but checked their application form and they had got the right job title. Maybe they just recycled a previous application without rewording the statement. Tsk!

No. 41 has used wacky fonts for titles and side headings. Hmm, certainly makes their application stand out, but unfortunately 'funky fonts' is not one of the criteria. At least they have used side headings.

Nearing the home stretch for today, but need another break to recalibrate my brain. Too many statements are impenetrable tracts of dense prose. Patience definitely wearing thin.

4.25pm: Starting to lose the will to live, but only a few more to go to reach the target 50 applications. Still reading too many rambling statements that list previous experience without stating how they meet the criteria. I really don't have the time or inclination to pick through this and second-guess the candidate's abilities. Just because a candidate worked on a particular project in the past does not mean they did a good job!

4.50pm: Ten mins left before I have to go catch my train. Reckon I have time for one more... No. 50. Let's have a look... oh no! Another four page statement!

Pulls the plug on the PC before slumping onto the floor under the desk

TIPS FOR WRITING JOB APPLICATIONS

by Jess Ahmon, Preventive Conservator, The National Archives

When applying for a job the purpose of the application is usually to secure an interview. The written application is probably the only contact that you will have with the recruiters at this stage so it is important to write an application with care, making it clear why you deserve to be shortlisted. Bear in mind that the recruiter may need to sift through dozens of applications and will probably have limited time so try to make their job easier by following these basic tips.

- 1 Read the job description. All the pointers for what to include in your application are in the job description. Pay particular attention to the person specification, you must show how you meet this specification in order to be shortlisted for interview.
- 2 Follow the instructions. Different employers have different procedures so make sure that you follow the instructions for the application. Provide all the documents that are requested – they have been requested for a reason. Bear in mind that if you submit anything additional that has not been requested this may be completely ignored by the recruiters. If you are asked to submit several documents then remember to put your name on each sheet, along with the position you are applying for.
- 3 If in doubt, ask. The job advert should include a contact, either in the Human Resources Department or one of the recruitment team, possibly the line manager of the post. If there is anything that you do not understand then a quick phone call or email may be enough to clarify things. Don't be shy about making contact, there is nothing suspicious or strange about asking questions and it can show that you are genuinely interested in applying.

- 4 Keep it short, keep it relevant. The instructions may ask for a supporting statement or may require you to answer questions or supply a covering letter. Unless the instructions state otherwise this should be in your own words, explaining why you are the right person for the job. Do not ramble on and try not to exceed two pages when writing a supporting statement or a CV. It is a good idea to use the points in the person specification as side headings to give structure and focus to your application. Be sure to tailor your application to the post you are applying for and be wary of cutting and pasting from a previous job application, which may have required a different set of skills.
- 5 When giving examples show how, not just what. It is not enough to simply state what you have done previously. Recruiters need to know how well you carried out previous work. Was it a success? What did you achieve? What did you learn? Think carefully about how each example demonstrates how you meet the criteria.
- 6 Read through carefully. A spell check will not pick up all errors so edit your application with care. If possible, give it to someone else to read as a fresh pair of eyes is more likely to spot mistakes. Make sure that titles are correct such as the name of an institution, a company or a department.

Lastly, if you are unsuccessful ask for feedback, try to view any criticism in a positive light and learn from your mistakes. There is also plenty of online advice on how to write a job application and how to write the perfect CV, including do's and don'ts, what to put in a supporting statement such as positive words and phrases to use, and tips on how to address problems such as periods of illness or unemployment. Make use of this advice and any feedback so that you can improve your future applications and land that all-important interview.



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