

FROM ICON, THE INSTITUTE OF CONSERVATION

Iconnect

MAGAZINE

Autumn 2025 Issue 12

Land of the Thunder Dragon

Relocating a natural history
gallery in Bhutan

PLUS:

Conserving murals from a Mortuary Chapel

SS Great Britain conservation update

International standards get green light

Icon | **20**
THE INSTITUTE OF CONSERVATION YEARS

WELCOME



Whether something is made from brick, metal, paint, paper, thread or another material; is tangible or intangible; static, dynamic or time-based; historic or contemporary; there is one constant at the heart of every heritage project – people. It is the creators, curators, conservators, researchers and communities, among so many others, who breathe life into objects and buildings, tell their stories and give them meaning and relevance. And I think the articles in this issue of *Iconnect Magazine* truly reflect that.

In our lead feature (page 12), Kamal Pokwal and Dr Ayesha Fuentes describe the logistics of relocating and conserving the National Museum of Bhutan's natural history collection. This project involved a wide team of professionals who helped to revitalise and re-imagine the artefacts' presentation, not just for the security and well-being of the collection, but to enhance the overall visitor experience and make the gallery more engaging and accessible to both local and international audiences.

In *Icon in Conversation*, Sara Wajid MBE, Co-CEO of Birmingham Museums Trust, talks to Emma Jhita about the visceral response she has witnessed in those visiting the Ozzy Osbourne exhibition since his death in July, and creating a Citizens' Jury to ensure the museum's work is representative and relevant to the people of Birmingham. She even highlights the power of creating an online team of volunteers to help the Trust digitally transcribe records from their paper accession registers and take a giant leap forward in developing an accessible collections database (see page 20).

Wall Paintings Conservator Karen Dundas ACR reflects on some of the key considerations when conserving murals commissioned for grieving parents visiting a mortuary chapel in Scotland's first hospital for sick children, which the artist created, repaired and expanded two decades apart following the murals' relocation, using different materials and techniques (page 24).

We also hear from two emerging professionals who completed career-defining internships, made possible by the generous bequest of the late Clare Hampson (see page 30), plus the vital role that Icon Group Treasurers play in supporting their fellow committee members and peers (page 34).

This is most definitely an issue that celebrates people, conservation and compassion. Enjoy!

Karen

Karen Young, Editor

Iconnect – a portmanteau

Icon – noun;
Icon, the Institute of Conservation – a charitable company working to safeguard cultural heritage and the professional membership body for the conservation profession

Connect – verb;
to join, link or fasten together; unite or bind – to bring together or into contact so that a real or notional link is established

Iconnect – noun;
to provide a direct link between you, cultural heritage conservation and the full spectrum of conservation professionals across the world

WHY JOIN ICON?

Icon is for everyone: a charity working to safeguard cultural heritage, and the professional membership body for the conservation profession.

Through the development of skilled conservation professionals, the promotion of cross-sector collaboration and meaningful public engagement, Icon champions excellence in conservation.

From students to accredited conservator-restorers, Icon supports its members by promoting high standards and developing new skills, ensuring they stay informed and connected within the conservation community.

As a member, you'll enjoy access to:

- 28 specialist Icon Groups: from Textiles to Books and Paper, Sustainability to Stained Glass, there is a Group for you. Engage with like-minded individuals, share expertise and expand your professional network
- Quarterly *Iconnect Magazine*, a must-read for those who love cultural heritage and its conservation
- Three issues a year of the *Journal of the Institute of Conservation* and online access to everything that has ever been published in this or its antecedent titles. That puts thousands of articles at your fingertips
- Exclusive discounts on Icon events. Gain insights from leading experts and stay at the forefront of the profession
- Monthly email newsletters bringing you the latest sector news, events and initiatives straight to your inbox
- Weekly job bulletins. Your go-to source for conservation vacancies across the UK and internationally
- Exclusive opportunity to gain peer-reviewed recognition via Icon Accreditation to showcase your expertise and dedication to the conservation profession.



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CELEBRATE AND CONNECT AT ICON EVENTS

As autumn arrives and the days grow shorter, I'm delighted to welcome you to the October issue of *Iconnect Magazine*. In this issue, we highlight the remarkable work being done across the conservation profession – from an innovative Tru Vue funded project in Bhutan to the sensitive conservation of mortuary murals and a reminder of the relevance and value of standards. I also share my inspiring interview with Sara Wajid MBE, Co-CEO of Birmingham Museums

Icon26 is themed around 'impact' and promises to be a dynamic gathering

Trust in Icon in Conversation.

Looking forward, I'm delighted to announce that early bird tickets for Icon26, our flagship conference taking place in Edinburgh from 24-25 June, are now available. Icon26 is themed around 'impact' and promises to be a dynamic gathering. Do take advantage of the early bird rate and I very much look forward to seeing you there.

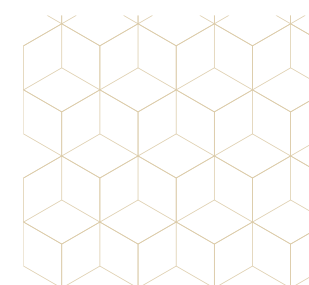
We're also preparing for our first ever Winter Reception, a chance to come together in person, celebrate shared successes and strengthen the connections that make our community so special. Along with the winners of the Conservation Awards and Photography Prize being announced on the evening by Carole Milner MBE, I'm delighted to share with you that the Annual Lecture will be delivered by Jane Henderson FIIC ACR. Bringing together voices from conservation to celebrate and reflect on 20 years of Icon, Jane will deliver a call to action for the next 20. I want to express my sincere thanks to all of our event and award sponsors – especially our headline sponsor, Tru Vue – and encourage you to vote on the Royal Charter proposal which will be announced at our AGM. You can read more on page 37 and I hope to see many of you on 6 November.

Finally, we are really pleased to introduce you to Icon's newest co-opted Trustees, Amber Law and Louise Hayward, and the latest addition to the Icon Team – Annie Whiteson, our new Membership Officer.

As always, thank you for your continued dedication and passion. Whether you're just starting out or have decades of experience, your work is vital to the future of conservation.

Emma Jhita

Emma Jhita, Chief Executive Officer



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Scan the QR code for more information about the role and responsibilities of Icon's Board of Trustees

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THE INSTITUTE OF CONSERVATION

The Institute of Conservation
Studio 32, FBC Clerkenwell, 40 Bowling Green Lane,
London EC1R 0NE
T: +44(0)20 3142 6799
office@icon.org.uk
membership@icon.org.uk
www.icon.org.uk

Chief Executive Officer Emma Jhita
emma.jhita@icon.org.uk

Find a Conservator
membership@icon.org.uk
<https://www.icon.org.uk/conservation-hub/find-a-conservator.html>

Iconnect Magazine

Editor Karen Young
iconeditor@cplone.co.uk
Strategy Director Stewart Dymock
Senior Designer Daniel Swainsbury
Sub-editor Denise Burrows

For advertising opportunities contact
Paul Heitzman
T: 01727 739 196 E. paul.heitzman@cplone.co.uk

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Alban Row, 27-31 Verulam Road, St Albans,
Hertfordshire AL3 4DG
W: www.cabbells.co.uk
T: 01727 893 894
E: info@cabbells.co.uk

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With thanks to this issue's key contributors...



Kamal Pokwal



Ayesha Fuentes



Sara Wajid MBE



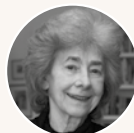
Karen Dundas
ACR



Nicola
Grahamslaw



Melinda Hey



Kate Colleran
ACR (Emeritus)



Jordan Megyery



Anna Gallwey



Chris Sebestik



Meagen Smith
ACR



Jane Henderson
ACR



Isobel Griffin
ACR



Lorraine Finch
ACR



EMMA JHITA

PRIZES CELEBRATE CERAMIC AND GLASS CONSERVATION EXCELLENCE

Congratulations to the winners of this year's Nigel Williams Prize – Rieveley Ceramics (Michael Rieveley, Alex Haycock and Eadan Cunningham), Nicole Sayre and Tamsin Ferguson – who were presented with their awards at a special event held at the National Trust's Fenton House in Hampstead this September. The biennial award is the result of a

collaboration between Nigel Williams' family and the Icon Ceramics & Glass Group (CGG). It was created to serve as both a memorial to Nigel's work as a renowned expert in the conservation of ceramic and glass objects, and to encourage continuing high standards at all levels within the profession. At the awards presentation, the winners

Left and below: Those attending the Nigel Williams Prize presentation also enjoyed a tour of the venue - the National Trust's Fenton House



gave engaging presentations about their winning submissions, providing insights into the ceramic interiors and mosaic flooring at Morecambe Winter Gardens, the material challenges and innovations in ceramic figurine repair, and techniques and choices made in reconstructing a roman glass archaeological find.

PAINTING CONSERVATOR RECEIVES 2025 PLOWDEN MEDAL

Painting Conservator Professor Aviva Burnstock (right) has been awarded the 2025 Plowden Medal for Conservation, recognising her exceptional contribution to the field through her work as an educator, where her teaching is underpinned by her research into both artists' materials and techniques, and conservation practice. Professor Burnstock, Head

of the Department of Art Conservation & Technology at the Courtauld Institute, said: "I am delighted to be the recipient of the 2025 Plowden Medal – it's wonderful to be recognised for my contribution to the conservation profession." She will receive her award at a special event at the end of October. **Source:** The Royal Warrant Holders Association



THE FULL STORY: ARTICLES NOW ON ICON'S WEBSITE

As well as sharing unabridged articles published in *Iconnect Magazine* and features from our *Icon News* archives, we regularly publish original content on our website that hasn't appeared in print. Here are two articles that we have recently shared online...

Textile conservation at The Palestinian Museum

By Baha Jubeih, Collections & Conservation Manager, The Palestinian Museum, and Katy Smith ACR, Senior Organics Conservator, British Museum

In this article, Baha and Katy provide an introduction to The Palestinian Museum, a Swiss-registered NGO (non-governmental organisation) that opened in Birzeit in the occupied West Bank in 2016. Among other things, the article outlines some of the museum's critically acclaimed exhibitions (at home and abroad); training and other collaborative work carried out with museums in the UK; the foundation and development of its conservation studio; and more recent exhibitions, projects and initiatives, including conservator-led workshops with the local community.

The authors also provide an insight into the traditional craft of Palestinian embroidery before moving on to the more poignant subject of salvaging objects from museums, archives, libraries, and historic and archaeologically important sites that have been destroyed since the Israeli assault on Gaza began in October 2023.

Among these objects are three war-torn dresses recovered from the ruins of the Rafah Museum which were smuggled to safety in the suitcase of a foreign doctor who had been volunteering at a hospital. One of the dresses is currently on display in the exhibition Thread Memory at V&A Dundee, however discussions about how to conserve these garments are ongoing, with the conversation being led by Palestinian curators, conservators, and community members.



Scan the QR code to read the full article by Baha and Katy



©THE PALESTINIAN MUSEUM

Above: The inauguration of the textile conservation studio in July 2023, showcasing the work on the museum's collections to the local community

Death of an artwork

By Dr Clare Finn ACR, Painting Restorer and Conservator

Since 2023, the Sainsbury Centre for the Visual Arts has been making waves in the museum world. Its director, Jago Cooper, was appointed in 2021 and relaunched the museum as the first in the world to recognise art as being 'alive'.

The museum's model changed from seeing its collection as property that must be preserved, protected and communicated to one that instead understood its collections as living entities. Thus the Sainsbury Centre now do things differently; through music, film, and taking exhibits into environments beyond the museum walls. You can even hug a Henry Moore.

The museum's audience has increased and become broader but if the collection is indeed alive and "great artists, makers and creators transfer their life force and physically materialise it in their art", some commentators have proposed that rather than preserve it at great expense, should we not let art die? But what do you think?



Scan the QR code to learn Dr Clare Finn ACR's views on this topic



Above: Dr Clare Finn ACR

NATIONAL TRUST INITIATIVE HOPES TO PROMOTE MENTAL HEALTH BENEFITS OF ART AND HERITAGE

The National Trust is inviting visitors to slow down and reconnect – with themselves and with art – through a year-long national tour of one of its most celebrated paintings: *Self-portrait Wearing a Feathered Bonnet*, by Rembrandt van Rijn.

With the average museum or gallery visitor said to spend just eight seconds looking at each artwork, the Trust hopes that by offering seating and audio guides with meditative prompts, viewers will spend more time with Rembrandt's masterpiece and discover the mental health benefits of 'slow looking' at art.

"Slow looking is about more than just taking your time," said Amy Orrock, National Trust curator. "It's a way of being present, of noticing the details and the emotions they generate that might otherwise pass us by. You're not just seeing – you're feeling, thinking, connecting."

"This self-portrait is the perfect companion for a slow looking experience."

It invites you to look closer, to wonder what Rembrandt was contemplating, and maybe to reflect on your own state of mind."

As part of the tour, the portrait will be visiting Kingston Lacy in Dorset, Dunham Massey in Cheshire and Upton House in Warwickshire, before returning to its home, Buckland Abbey in Devon.

Source: National Trust



For more information, scan the QR code



Above: The National Trust's Kingston Lacy house in Dorset



©NATIONAL TRUST IMAGES, JAMES DOBSON

Above: A self-portrait by Rembrandt van Rijn is touring National Trust houses to inspire visitors to slow down and reconnect

RICHES EXPANDS ACCESS TO HERITAGE SCIENCE

The UK's Research Infrastructure for Conservation and Heritage Science (RICHES), which is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), is entering an exciting new chapter. October marks one year since the programme launched and the milestone is being celebrated with a suite of new opportunities designed to transform access to research resources and strengthen collaboration across the heritage science community.

On 1 October, the Heritage Science Data Service (HSDS) unveiled its brand-new Catalogue of Services and Data Catalogue. This marks a significant step forward in opening up access to both research facilities and datasets across the UK, supporting innovation in how we study, conserve and share cultural heritage. Alongside this, the HSDS has also introduced the HSDS Service Small Grants Programme, offering funding to



RICHES

RESEARCH
INFRASTRUCTURE FOR
CONSERVATION AND
HERITAGE SCIENCE

projects to enhance access to heritage resources or develop virtual research environments. Applications are open until 28 November 2025.

The HSDS Catalogue of Services is designed as an accessible gateway to RICHES, helping researchers, practitioners and organisations navigate what facilities and services are available. This new tool is central to the RICHES Access Fund, an initiative that is designed to foster and strengthen collaborative research and tackles one of the biggest challenges: cost.

The first call of expressions of interest to the RICHES Access Fund is now live, with full applications opening in early 2026. The Access Fund welcomes applications

from a broad range of individuals and organisations including galleries, libraries, museums and archives. To be eligible the material under study must be in the public domain or have a clear route to public accessibility and applications must demonstrate a clear impact.

If you are keen to get involved, there are two upcoming events:

- 21 October – RICHES Access Fund webinar
- 4 November – RICHES regional workshop in Cardiff

Source: RICHES



To learn more and register visit www.riches.ukri.org or scan the QR code

ICON26 EDINBURGH, 24-25 JUNE 2026

The countdown is officially on for the Icon Conference 2026 (Icon26), which is set to take place on the 24–25 June at the magnificent Assembly Rooms in Edinburgh

Over two inspiring days, Icon26 will bring together conservators and heritage professionals to delve into the impact of the conservation profession – on its own practices, the wider heritage sector and society as a whole.

More than just a conference, Icon26 will provide the opportunity to connect with colleagues, collaborate with thought leaders and celebrate the work of the conservation community. It is a chance to reflect on how conservation shapes our understanding of cultural heritage and to consider how the profession continues to evolve in response to new challenges and opportunities.

From insightful talks to dynamic discussions, the programme will provide space to share knowledge, build networks and inspire new ideas. Speakers, exhibitors and sponsors will come together to explore the full spectrum of conservation's impact, from small but meaningful improvements in practice to significant shifts that redefine how conservation is understood and valued.

There will be representation from all areas of practice, ensuring a broad and inclusive perspective throughout the event.



The Assembly Rooms

For more than 200 years, the Assembly Rooms have been at the centre of Edinburgh's cultural and civic life. Located on George Street in the elegant New Town, this category A-listed Georgian building offers timeless elegance and beauty. With enormous crystal chandeliers, gleaming gold leaf and giant gilt mirrors reflecting the history and tradition of the building, the Assembly Rooms provide the perfect backdrop to celebrate a profession grounded in care, stewardship and cultural significance.

Accessibility and inclusion

Icon26 is committed to accessibility and inclusion, with both in-person and online ticket options available ensuring everyone can be part of the experience. We look forward to



welcoming delegates to Edinburgh for what promises to be an insightful and engaging event, full of meaningful dialogue, sector-wide collaboration and forward-looking discussion on the most pressing issues in conservation today.



To book your place and learn more, scan the QR code or visit www.icon.org.uk/events/icon-conference-2026.html

A MOUNTAINOUS TASK

Kamal Pokwal, Senior Conservator at the National Museum of Bhutan, and Objects Conservator Ayesha Fuentes reflect on relocating a natural history gallery in the Land of the Thunder Dragon

The history of the museum

The National Museum of Bhutan was built in 1649 by the first Paro Penlop (Governor of Paro), La-ngo pa Tenzin Drukdra. Locally referred to as Ta Dzong, this impressive seven-story structure stands on the eastern spur of the Paro valley. It was originally built as a watchtower, designed to safeguard Rinpung Dzong against potential invaders. With walls approximately 2.5 metres thick and made almost entirely of stone and mortar, the building's shape is believed to have been emulated from a conch shell, an object considered to be both auspicious and sacred.

Three centuries later, and many decades after Ta Dzong ceased to function as a military defence post, the late His Majesty Druk Gyalpo Jigme Dorji Wangchuck (1952–72) directed the Ministry of Development to convert the historic building into a national museum, to preserve and promote the country's rich and unique cultural heritage. After several years of renovation, the National Museum of Bhutan was officially opened to the public in 1968, along with a newly constructed road to provide access for motor vehicles.

A visionary monarch, His Majesty Druk Gyalpo Jigme Dorji Wangchuck recognised the vital importance of safeguarding and showcasing the nation's rich flora and fauna, alongside other objects of historical significance. A Natural History Gallery was therefore included on the second floor of the museum, to provide a dedicated space for displaying and interpreting Bhutan's ecological wealth. Although the gallery initially featured just a handful of specimens, the collection steadily grew over the years thanks to an enrichment programme.

In 2011, a powerful earthquake struck Bhutan and the museum building sustained considerable damage, with the upper section of the stone wall on the main tower collapsing and stress cracks appearing throughout the lower sections. Fortunately, only a few artefacts were lost as a consequence. The remainder was moved into storage or displayed in temporary exhibitions in a separate administration building while careful renovation work was carried out on the museum. One of these temporary exhibitions included the museum's natural history collection.

Returning the natural history collection to the museum

After 14 years, moving the natural history collection from the administrative building back into the museum had become a high priority. The collection had continued to increase in size and so a larger space with a much better environmental control system was needed, alongside essential conservation work. Relocating

Above: The National Museum of Bhutan (top right) was once a military watchtower and stands on the eastern spur of the Paro valley

the collection to the third floor of the Ta Dzong would ensure that delicate specimens could be preserved in line with international museum standards, protecting them from deterioration caused by temperature, light, relative humidity, dust, pests and overcrowding.

It would also provide an opportunity to revitalise the exhibits through creative presentation techniques, enhancing the overall visitor experience and making the gallery more engaging and accessible to both local and international audiences. By conserving and repositioning this invaluable collection, the museum would also show its ongoing commitment to protecting Bhutan's natural heritage while encouraging deeper appreciation, more research and better education for future generations.

Planning and preparation

With thanks to support from the Tru Vue Conservation and Exhibition Grant Scheme, Icon, and Objects Conservator, Dr Ayesha Fuentes, the relocation of the museum's natural history collection was able to take place between January and June 2025.

Before proceeding, a well-developed and comprehensive activity plan was submitted to the Chief of the Museum

In addition to cleaning and pest mitigation, restorative efforts were undertaken on specimens with missing or damaged elements

Below: Senior Conservator, Kamal Pokwal, carefully cleans a crocodile skin at the Conservation Laboratory, before it is relocated to the main museum



Division to ensure all the work would be carried out efficiently and in alignment with the project's objectives. Following approval, the collection was carefully removed from its temporary exhibition area and transported to an off-site conservation laboratory.

To ensure the safe handling of the artefacts, a specialised team comprising six experienced museum assistants and a senior conservator (Kamal Pokwal) was assigned to carry out the deinstallation and transportation. Stringent safety measures were implemented throughout the process

and custom-designed transport crates were fabricated and used to minimise potential damage during handling and transit.

Condition assessment, conservation and restoration

Once the collection had arrived safely at the conservation laboratory, each specimen was carefully examined, assessed and documented, both before and after conservation treatment.

The conservation process included dry and wet cleaning techniques using fine, soft brushes and appropriate solvents such as distilled water and ethanol to gently remove accumulated dust and dirt. For specimens exhibiting signs of active deterioration, particularly those



Top right and above: The Natural History Gallery at the National Museum of Bhutan, after relocation and conservation work



Above: Optimum Museum Acrylic sheets were used to create protective display cases for rare and endangered specimens ensuring both visibility and long-term conservation



Above: New lighting systems were installed during the relocation project

Objects Conservator Dr Ayesha Fuentes reflects on her work with colleagues in Bhutan and supporting the National Museum's relocation project

When I first saw the stone watchtower of the National Museum of Bhutan, it was closed to visitors and had a large crack running down its east side, a result of recent earthquake damage. It was 2012 and I had joined the Conservation Section at the Department of Culture in Bhutan as a work placement through the University of California, Los Angeles/ Getty Conservation Training Program.

Over the next decade, as both my conservation practice and professional relationship with this country evolved, I followed the restoration of the building. Then in 2023, the central government's newly-formed Museum Division that administers the National Museum in Paro – as well the Textile Museum in the capital Thimphu and Royal Heritage Museum in Trongsa, central Bhutan – invited me to work with local conservators and collections managers to build capacity in preventive care, risk management and safe storage.



Over the next two years and supported as a Research Associate in Conservation at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Cambridge, I made multiple trips to work alongside my Bhutanese colleagues for weeks at a time. Together we faced monkeys, snakes, leaking roofs, wildfires and high-altitude sunlight that can measure over 200,000 lux on a cloudy day. The result thus far has been improved policies for collections management, safer storage and display, and increased staff confidence across institutions, and for myself, a more nuanced and practical understanding of conservation-based knowledge exchange.

To support this on-going collaboration, I obtained funding for impact-led research in the humanities through the University of Cambridge, making it possible to volunteer my time and purchase small amounts of supplies. I quickly found that testing and risk managing locally known and available materials often produced a more sustainable change in practice, so I often made these purchases on site, in consultation with Bhutanese colleagues. Managing resources is a constant challenge in this small, mountainous country with a limited market for conservation-specific products; the nearest supplier of archival boxboard, for example, is several hundred kilometers away in Delhi.

Supporting the relocation of the Natural History Gallery

In 2024, following a workshop on cleaning and treating pest infestations in natural history specimens, the National Museum came to me with a proposal and budget for relocating their Natural History Gallery.

The aim was to move the artefacts from their temporary display in the administration building to their pre-earthquake position in the Ta Dzong, among the rest of the museum's collection of painted scrolls, crafts and metal statues. Having previously worked with the museum's team, I knew how essential this redisplay was – not just for the security and well-being of the collections, but because the institution is frequently the first stop on guided visits for Bhutan's international tourists and a valuable learning resource for local students.

When Icon circulated details about the Tru Vue Conservation and Exhibition Grant Scheme that year, I asked colleagues at the National Museum if I should try to put together an application. With the help of their existing proposal and Senior Conservator Kamal Pokwal's expertise on the ground, our bid was successful.

Planning the move had unique challenges. Most importantly, the Ta Dzong is a protected heritage site that limits the ways in which its stone walls can be altered for museum practice. In addition, the sheet of donated Tru Vue Optimum Museum Acrylic would need to be cut to maximise the volume, with only wood

at our disposal as a supplementary case-construction material. Fortunately, the National Museum was able to repurpose two hand-painted tables, consistent with the historic interior of the building, to use as a base for their new UV-resistant displays.

In preparation for the move, on a visit in early 2025, Mr Pokwal and I ran from shop to shop looking for suitable hardware to hang the large animal heads mounted on baseboards from the gallery's wooden beams, some of which weighed more than 10kg each.

The lighting also needed some improvement and I very much enjoyed my trips haggling with shopkeepers over the price of steel cable or a box of LED bulbs with Mr Pokwal and Yonten, the museum electrician. Apart from the Tru Vue acrylic sheets – which we had shipped across from Wessex Pictures in the UK and pre-cut to size – all the supplies for this relocation project were sourced locally, with most being fabricated in India.

After I returned to the UK, and despite challenges (each met with patience and persistence by all involved), the move was completed during the 2025 rainy season. One local staff member said they were especially happy to see the specimens back in the galleries as they remembered from childhood visits to the museum.

As a conservator and colleague, I learned a great deal about international collaboration from this project, and I am proud to have connected resources like these to hard-working heritage professionals and museum workers in Bhutan, and to the communities they serve.

actively infested by insects, a deep-freezing treatment was administered for a minimum of 21 days to interrupt the insect lifecycle and prevent further damage.

In addition to cleaning and pest mitigation, restorative efforts were undertaken on specimens with missing or damaged elements. These were skillfully reconstructed to restore their original form and ensure a coherent and informative display. The conservation team ensured that all specimens destined for exhibition were thoroughly treated to maintain long-term stability within their display environments, minimising the need for frequent intervention.

Deinstallation of artefacts from the Exhibition Gallery

To accommodate the natural history collection in the Exhibition Gallery on the third floor of the National Museum, it was first necessary to deinstall an exhibition dedicated to the Bhutanese monarchy.

All deinstalled artefacts were condition assessed and then safely relocated to the designated storage room. Comprehensive preventive measures were employed throughout the process to ensure the artefacts' long-term preservation. The museum team ensured that all objects were stable and adequately prepared for storage, maintaining the integrity of the monarchy collection for future use.

Installation of natural history specimens

Artefacts suitable for enclosed exhibition were securely mounted within protective showcases, while larger specimens that could not be accommodated within cases were artistically installed on the gallery's structural pillars using durable mounting materials including hooks, black mounting mats, cable strings and gypsum screws.

To enhance the visual appeal and visitor experience, new track lighting

Below: The museum building's shape is believed to emulate a conch shell, an object considered to be both auspicious and sacred



systems were installed, strategically illuminating the exhibits. Notably, Tru Vue Optimum Museum Acrylic sheets were used to custom-fabricate protective display cases for rare and endangered specimens such as the Chinese pangolin and a crocodile, ensuring both visibility and long-term conservation.

The gallery was thoughtfully divided into two thematic sections: an animal section and a bird section. For the avian displays, the team employed the diorama technique, a three-dimensional model that recreates lifelike natural habitats to provide an immersive and educational experience. To achieve this, the museum engaged a team of skilled artists with expertise in diorama creation, ensuring the highest standard of aesthetic and interpretive quality.

Post-relocation

Following the successful relocation and re-display of the natural history collection, a series of preventive conservation measures were implemented to ensure optimal environmental conditions for the long-term preservation of the artefacts. To regulate the gallery's micro-environment, digital data loggers were installed inside each display case to monitor and record temperature and relative humidity levels.

Where necessary, silica gel packets were placed to stabilise humidity within the showcases. Additionally, a proper air circulation system was maintained throughout the gallery to ensure consistent airflow and mitigate environmental fluctuation. Regular monitoring and inspection routines were established to uphold the integrity of both the collection and the display environment.

Plans for the future

As the National Museum of Bhutan advances towards maintaining international museum standards, the primary focus going forward will be on preventive conservation. An essential component of this is to have improved storage facilities. While the museum has made improvements in this area, progress has been limited due to the high costs involved, which exceed the museum's financial capacity.

As a result, the artefacts in the museum's storage facilities are currently at risk of decay. By installing more modern amenities including climate and light monitoring/control systems, smart lockers for artefacts, storage cabinets for natural history specimens, and painting and artwork storage racks, all the museum's collections will be appropriately protected from agents of decay and sustainability and accessibility will be ensured.

Below: Collections care staff at the museum prepare a taxidermied example of a local wild cat species for freezing to control pest activity

Left inset: Specimens that could not be accommodated within cases were artistically installed on the gallery's structural pillars



AYESHA FUENTES

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS



Mr Kamal Pokwal is Senior Conservator at the National Museum of Bhutan. With a Bachelor's

degree from Royal Thimphu College and more than two decades of successful experience in cultural heritage conservation and exhibition designing, he has contributed his tireless and seamless assistance in conserving museum artefacts and establishing new museums in Bhutan. He plans to take Bhutanese conservation methods to another height by discovering and adopting environmentally sustainable conservation practices and materials. www.nationalmuseum.gov.bt



Mr Ayesha Fuentes is an Objects Conservator originally from Washington State, USA. She has an MA

from the University of California Los Angeles/Getty Training Program in the Conservation of Archaeological and Ethnographic Materials and completed her PhD at the SOAS University of London in 2021. She is currently a Research Affiliate in Conservation at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge. More about her work, publications and experience can be found at www.ayeshafuentes.com



Patrick White, Policy and Programmes Director, talks about Icon leading a collaborative effort to develop market intelligence to help tackle the risks posed by declining conservation skills

ADDRESSING A DECLINE IN SKILLS THROUGH COLLABORATION AND ENGAGEMENT

There is growing concern that vital skills across the heritage sector are at risk, threatening the capacity and ability to protect and preserve the nation's cultural heritage. Many specialist skills are already on a knife edge with few practitioners meaning that even minor workforce losses could have major impacts.

This is made worse by a lack of sustained training to pass on critical knowledge and a limited understanding of what future skills will be needed as the sector evolves. Without investment in both traditional and emerging skills, the sector risks becoming severely under-resourced.

Focusing on conservation-restoration skills

While good work has been done to assess craft skills at risk, no such approach exists for conservation-restoration skills.

In other parts of the heritage sector, the challenges may be different – maintaining traditional heritage craft skills such as thatching in Scotland, or keeping pace with future workforce requirements such as the retrofit agenda and net zero targets in built heritage – but the same problem exists: a small workforce that struggles to meet demand.

We have written about these challenges many times in the past however, we're delighted to now share the progress that has been made and outline how we plan to develop the vital labour market intelligence needed to underpin efforts to reduce the risks that a declining skills base poses to collections and buildings across the UK.

A collaborative approach

Icon has led a partnership of representative bodies across the



NIGEL SPENDER

Above: Volunteers Alan and Bert working on the Bursledon Windmill under the supervision of Industrial Heritage Conservator, Nigel Spender

UK including Historic Environment Scotland, the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, the Construction Industry Training Board, Historic England, and Communities Northern Ireland, to develop our understanding of the very real challenges across the heritage sector.

The result has been a methodology to understand the skills across the sector and assess demand for those skills. This work is vital if we are to effectively advocate for the needs of all parts of the profession.

Getting an accurate picture

We will be starting the long process of rolling out this research over the coming months. Given the huge range of specialist skills in the conservation sector (Icon represents members working across more than 150 different areas of practice) we will be dividing this research into ten blocks of work to enable us to really get into the detail of each area of practice. Each of these areas will be

overseen by a specialist Steering Group, including practitioners, employers, and commissioners, to ensure that we are genuinely getting an accurate picture of skills across the sector.

How you can support us

This work is vitally important to Icon's efforts to advocate for the conservation profession, to ensure that we continue to have the highly skilled workforce needed to care for our buildings and collections and meet the future needs of the sector.

This is why we are putting out a heartfelt plea to encourage as many members as possible to complete and share surveys and join discussion groups, so that we can produce robust and reliable research that can be used as an effective tool to underpin activities that support the development of training, document skills and techniques, and promote knowledge transfer to ensure that these skills can be preserved.

Expect to hear more from us very soon.



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ICON IN CONVERSATION

With Sara Wajid MBE,
Co-CEO of Birmingham
Museums Trust



Icon's CEO, Emma Jhita, speaks to Sara about reaching new audiences and making the Trust's collections more relevant to the people of Birmingham



Above: Emma and Sara discuss Benjamin Zephaniah's typewriter and its importance to the museum collection

Emma: Hello Sara. My first question is one that's been intriguing me – when you and Zak Mensah were announced as Co-CEOs of Birmingham Museums Trust (BMT) five years ago, it was a first in the museum sector. Can I ask how this came about?

Sara: When we applied for the role, I had not seen myself as a CEO candidate. I was 47 and felt I was probably not as senior as I ought to be, given what I hoped to achieve. However, for a myriad of reasons – including that the role was with Birmingham Museums, the fact that I'm Pakistani myself and 20% of the population in Birmingham is – this particular post looked a good fit.

I can't remember how the idea of job sharing came to me, but Zak was the most obvious choice – first and foremost for his skills, but also because he's a black working-class man. At the time, as ever, there were very few global majority leaders in the sector, but I always thought of Birmingham Museums as one of the most likely large museums to appoint non-white leaders because it had done so in the past. And if we split the role, an additional benefit was that the sector would get two new leaders rather than one.

Emma: Had you and Zak worked together previously?

Sara: No, not at all. We met once, briefly, at the Museums Association conference in Belfast the previous year, but I'd read Zak's blogs over the years and basically there are so very few global majority leaders in sector roles across the country. Through Museum Detox, you build up an awareness of all of them.



Above: Sara with Zak Mensah, her Co-CEO at Birmingham Museums Trust, at a Citizens' Jury meeting

traditional Victorian collection.

Emma: Can I move onto the introduction of a Citizens' Jury for Birmingham Museums. Was this idea already in train, or has it been part of yours and Zak's response?

Sara: When I was Head of Engagement at the Museum of London, my job was to involve the people of London in re-imagining the new museum. It was there that my colleague Mark O'Neill, former Director of Kelvingrove, suggested the idea of the Citizens' Jury model. I immediately recognised it as a way of scaling up in-depth community group conversations, to make them meaningful and representative of an entire city. If that could work for London, with a population of more than nine million, it could work for Birmingham.

Mark has been working closely with Zak and I these last five years to realise this vision for a more democratic, representative, exciting 21st-century museum. To achieve that, you have to do what you can, as boldly as you can, with the space, curators, teams and community engagement that you have.

So, when we reopened after Covid, we did it bit by bit, in a very atypical way. It has to come from your ability and commitment to reach new audiences with exhibitions such as Ozzy Osbourne: Working Class Hero. To reach non-visitors, we have to set out our stable clearly and bear the complaints from visitors waiting for the Pre-Raphaelites, Ancient Egyptian galleries and the Staffordshire Hoard to return, which they will. But you only get the opportunity to re-open once.

Emma: That makes a lot of sense.

Following on, in the current climate where the culture and heritage sector is facing huge financial challenges – and Birmingham City Council has recently been declared bankrupt – what do you see as the role for the museum and the difference it can make?

Sara: My background before museums was in journalism. I've always seen culture as the fourth estate which, like journalism, speaks truth to power and provides that space where democratic conversations need to happen. We often think about politics in terms of what happens in parliament, but politics is just a texture of our everyday lives – who we



Above: Sara standing in the Ozzy Osbourne: Working Class Hero exhibition which has helped to attract new visitors

Emma: That makes so much sense, especially in Birmingham, as a diverse city with a rich history of immigration. Since you've both been in post, you've led the museum and art gallery through a dynamic transformation. It would be really interesting to hear about the inspiration behind this.

Sara: I knew the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery quite well as I'd curated a show here in 2017, but I couldn't understand the connection between the museum's collections and the West Midlands. What would the people who I saw walking around outside this building make of the historical European fine art collections on the inside, hung in a quite traditional way?

The previous Director set me a challenge, saying: "Well, you're here for a year – bring me something that makes the Pre-Raphaelites relevant to this audience." In the end, the scope of the project was too wide, and I ended up focusing on one gallery and collections relating more directly to empire and decolonisation. But I had started the initial research, thinking about the fine art collection and the challenge of making it relevant and representative, so that had always been the enticement to come back.

There are a million other things to do, but the core of this collection needs to speak to the people of Birmingham and that requires a really big jump. Birmingham has the youngest, most ethnically diverse population of any city in Europe and the museum has a

It has to come from
your ability and
commitment to reach
new audiences with
exhibitions such
as Ozzy Osbourne:
Working Class Hero

love, how much we earn, what food we eat, whether we have health, security and space to imagine. I see those all as part of the same thing – the culture that is part of the public sector, funded by our taxes. It's an incredible thing to be proud of in our society. Growing up here, I had access to London's museums and a local library that was tiny but brilliant, and so that's part of my citizenship.

When you come to England as an immigrant, where everybody else is different to your family and there's racial inequality all around you, those things are how you balance that out, stay sane and thrive. Culture really is books, television, museums and all the stuff that connects us to each other.

So, back to your point about museums in these polarised times, that's why I feel so committed to our work in Birmingham. It goes right to the centre of asking what kind of Britain do we want to be, and what kind of story do we tell?

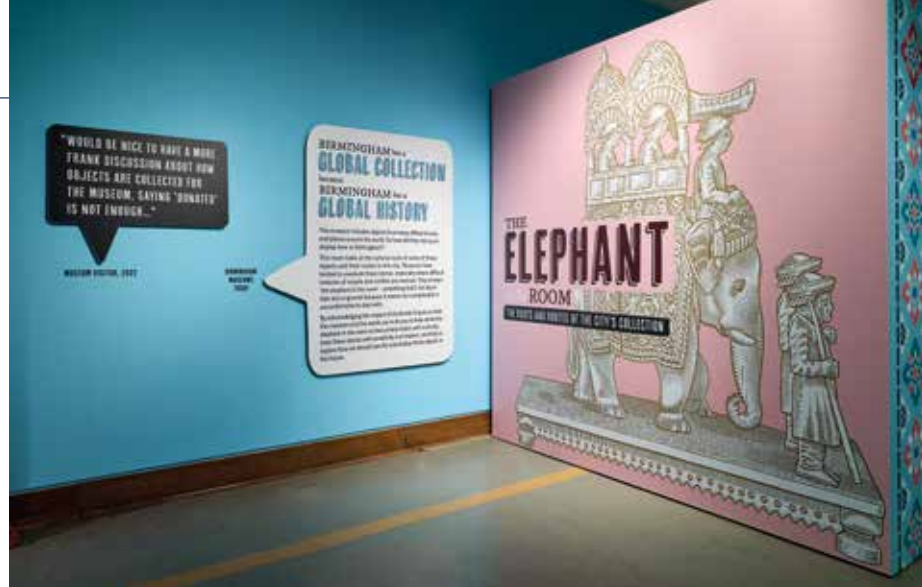
Emma: And through initiatives such as the Citizens' Jury, your work with local schools and community groups, you're putting the museum in the hands of local people – I'm really interested in how that will take shape and where The Elephant in the Room fits in?

Sara: We opened this exhibition a couple of months ago. It focuses on objects from our existing collections but in a new way as the gallery team was largely comprised of people with a background in community engagement and visitor experience. They wanted to tell a more honest story about how these objects came to the museum.

Visitors keep asking us, where does this come from? Is it looted? Should it be here? So rather than the story starting from a traditional, curatorial, scholarly understanding of the collection, it started from a very audience-centered point of view, drawing on curatorial knowledge. We don't want to disappear these collections, but some perhaps do need to be restituted and others reframed in a different way.

Emma: I love the title and I think the exhibition is refreshingly honest, both in terms of the narrative and installation, with the use of wooden transport crates. I imagine it has connected with new and different audiences.

Sara: It has, along with the Ozzy



Above and left: The Elephant in the Room exhibition highlights to visitors some of the difficult questions raised by certain objects in the museum's collections

Osbourne exhibition, which is next to The Elephant in the Room. I never get tired of walking between the two, watching visitors' reactions and the incredibly visceral responses that people have to Ozzy, especially since he died. I regularly see burly 50-year-old men welling up in the museum, just standing in front of those exhibits and people literally stopping me in the street saying, "thank you so much for honouring Ozzy properly. He means so much to us!"

And having this in the museum does seem to have helped people with the mourning process and especially those who feel like outsiders, because I think Ozzy really represents that. He was speaking to and for people who were living in deep-seated poverty in a part of the country that was almost considered a lost cause.

And so, at this time, when the City Council is bankrupt and we are in the headlines for uncollected rubbish, tensions between communities and frankly on the receiving end of a lot of Islamophobia – with all of that, to see people feeling proud of their city, proud of Ozzy, and connecting that with the museum, which might be considered

quite posh and elite, that's what it means to do civic repair. That's what it means to be part of enriching a social fabric. It's not rocket science or particularly innovative. It's just good solid cultural practice.

Emma: Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery is a logical home for the Ozzy Osbourne exhibition and hosting a book of condolence really gave people an opportunity to be part of that collective mourning process. Returning to our earlier conversation and Museum Detox, which was founded to support people of colour in the heritage sector. What progress has been achieved through this network and what are the ongoing challenges?

Sara: Museum Detox has been one of the great joys of my working life in this sector, because it's a self-sustaining network of solidarity that's resulted in some incredible collaborations, research and exhibitions, and also supported career progression. Since it was launched, it has grown from a London-based group of about 15 people to a UK-wide network of around 700 people.

However, from a leadership perspective, in the five years since I've been part of the National Museum

Directors' Council, no new people of colour have joined. In the English Civic Museums network, the picture is a bit better, but there hasn't been very much shift. If anything, I suspect things have gone a bit backwards. You would always hope a network like Museum Detox shouldn't be needed in the long term but, 10 years on, it feels like it's needed more than ever.

What I'm currently looking for is a way to speak to government agencies and others to say that we really need to act now, in terms of this bottom-up energy. We need to see some movement and investment to create positive change across the sector, because when I look around the table at the National Museum Directors' Council and there's not a single other global majority person among us, it's not good enough. It's not the country that we are anymore.

Emma: Absolutely. You champion the value of Museum Detox as a network which is fundamentally what's needed in terms of career development – having access to networks and genuine support to grow and achieve.

Sara: Yes. I was recently talking to someone at a Detox social meet-up who's not currently working in a conservation role but is trained as a conservator in another country and wants to move in that direction. Because the network is non-hierarchical, she was sitting alongside some of the most powerful people in our sector. We just shouted around the table: "This person needs a mentor in conservation, can anybody help?" and someone said, "Yes, I know somebody."

Emma: Amazing! To move onto a collections question, at BMT you talk about 'unlocking thousands of stories

from an international city'. It would be great to hear more about this.

Sara: It's about finding new ways to engage, open up and share the collections. One of our most interesting innovations has been an online volunteering project we started during lockdown called Documentation Detectives, where we invited people to digitally transcribe object records from our paper accession registers, using a platform called Zooniverse.

At the time, we didn't know if anyone would be interested, but we've just hit 3,000 instances of participation, which is brilliant. Suddenly, there's this massive engagement and support to help jump us forward in building an accessible collections database.

Emma: That really is exciting work and a great way of engaging people not just on a local level, but globally. One final question from me – what's next for BMT?

Sara: How to boil that down... I mean it really is an existential battle at the moment for civic museums! It's about looking at how we can deliver cultural value and develop a way of being financially sustainable when we have a bigger asset responsibility than we have the public funds to support. There's only so much you can do to offset that by innovations, commercial enterprise, philanthropy and fundraising.

At the core of what we do is public value, like the NHS and schools. It's not designed to make money because we are trying to create value for people who shouldn't be charged for that value. There's an irreducible core which will always have to be publicly financed.

The only option is to have the boldest and most ambitious vision for the museum since its inception in 1885, at a time when we are facing the most severe financial challenges. How we square that circle is what I spend 95% of my time thinking about and that comes down to making the argument to the decision makers, alongside trying to be smarter, more enterprising, efficient and streamlined. Everything else has to follow from that.

Emma: A huge challenge but powerful ambition. Thank you for spending time with me today, it's been incredibly insightful and inspirational.

Sara: Thank you very much for having us in *Iconnect Magazine*.



Above: Exhibitions at Birmingham Museums aim to engage, open up and share the collections in new and innovative ways

Right: The Citizens' Jury initiative involves local residents to help shape the future of Birmingham's museums



CONSERVATION WITH COMPASSION

Wall Paintings Conservator **Karen Dundas ACR** provides an insight into conservation work carried out on murals in a Mortuary Chapel at Scotland's first hospital for sick children

In May 2024, Scottish Wall Paintings Conservators undertook a unique murals conservation project in a highly-sensitive space – the 'Category A' listed Mortuary Chapel in the grounds of Edinburgh's Royal Hospital for Sick Children (RHSC).

History of the murals

The Mortuary Chapel had functioned in its intended use from the 1890s, when the RHSC was first built, until the hospital relocated to more modern premises in June 2021. Developers immediately took ownership of the old hospital complex and the future of the Mortuary Chapel murals fell under threat. With the hospital context gone, the paintings had lost their *raison d'être*: to sustain and comfort bereaved parents. Future use of the mortuary building remains undecided.

However, the mural paintings have a rich, complex history, and this is not their first abandonment. In fact, their story begins in the 1860s, when the very first children's hospital in Scotland was established at nearby Meadowside House.

In 1885, Arts and Crafts artist Phoebe Anna Traquair (1852-1936) received her first professional commission – decoration of a tiny former coalhouse on Meadowside House grounds, to create a suitable space where 'bodies can be left reverently and lovingly for the parents before the burials' (National Library of Scotland, 1898). This modest



'chapel of rest' provided an independent mortuary, improving upon what had existed until then – a corner of the autopsy room, in a building known as 'The Dead House'.

The commission was arranged by the philanthropic Edinburgh Social Union, as part of a larger initiative to revitalise Edinburgh through art and social reform. While Traquair's paintings reflect a Christian response to bereavement typical of her era,

their dense symbolism is ripe with her unique artistic creativity. As a mother of three children herself, the murals were specifically intended to comfort grieving parents, rather than simply art for art's sake. This was the first of Traquair's three Edinburgh mural schemes and as such, is of great artistic and historic importance both in Scotland and the wider Arts and Crafts context.

But a mere decade after the murals were painted, a grand new Royal Hospital for Sick Children was built, designed by Scottish architect George Washington Browne (1853-1939). While the old hospital building was repurposed, the tiny coalhouse chapel was abandoned and marked for demolition. Traquair was incensed and led a determined campaign to preserve her beloved murals. She eventually succeeded and oversaw cutting the wall paintings from the building, with the transfer of 'surviving' sections to a purpose-built mortuary building on the new RHSC grounds. Between 1896-98 she restored and extended her 1880s painted scheme to fit this slightly larger chapel space.

Initial assessment

The sensitive use of the chapel meant that there had been very few assessments of the murals' condition while the hospital was in use. Despite apparent access restrictions, several structural alterations had been made to the mortuary building including the addition of an upper floor in 1931 and an extension attached to the chapel's west wall, circa 1960s.

Over the decades, structural changes made within the chapel itself had directly affected the wall paintings: furnishings attached to one of the 1880s panels had further broken its plaster substrate; a doorway had been cut through a wall, resulting in decorative losses and crude

Below: Conservator Shannon Miller filling plaster cracks

Top left: Phoebe Anna Traquair

Bottom left: An incomplete restoration by Traquair – an overpainted bird wing at a join between panels



overpainting of damaged edges; and a hatch opening in the same wall had been infilled with a metal plate, thinly-plastered and painted 'in the manner of' Traquair. Again, oil paint had been brushed out to 'blend' with adjacent original decoration.

Despite historic structural damage and some mobility along the edges of the plaster panels, the paintings had fared well for over a century. Nevertheless, there was a little flaking paint, the usual surface soiling (particularly near the window) and significant darkening of coatings commensurate with the age of the scheme.

Conservation considerations

One of our primary concerns was how to balance the level of clean when faced with different eras of decoration: 1880s paintings; 1890s paintings; the artist's 1890s restoration of her 1880s paintings; and a late 20th-century reproduction panel and overpaints.

Crucially, the murals span two distinct eras of Traquair's artistic career, thus highlighting the evolution of her distinctive painting technique and style. Traquair had developed a simplified version of the 'spirit fresco' technique, made famous by Thomas Gambier Parry and Frederic Lord Leighton, and this had been well documented prior to the Mortuary Chapel project.

Murals in the Mansfield Traquair Centre (Edinburgh), which she began in the 1890s, were painted using 'spirit fresco' – oil paints mixed with beeswax dissolved in turpentine. Reputedly, Traquair then applied two coats of copal resin carriage varnish, followed by 'a wash of wax and turpentine, polished with a cloth to a dull eggshell finish' (Allardyce, 2007).

By contrast, beneath waxy varnish coatings applied over the unified murals' scheme in the late 1890s, the 1880s paintings showed no evidence of 'spirit fresco'. Samples sent to Lincoln Conservation's laboratory for analysis confirmed that the artist had used straightforward oil-based paints for her earlier wall paintings. There had evidently been some effort to remove sooty black dirt and darkened varnish from the 1880s wall paintings before the decoration was extended.



Top: Conservator Cristina Beretta inpainting losses to a dado mural on the west wall of the Mortuary Chapel

Above: Supervising removal of protective boarding after nearby demolition works

One of our primary concerns was how to balance the level of clean when faced with different eras of decoration

During treatment, we discovered some historic abrasion of the paint layer, and residual black grime and aged varnish ingrained in the paint texture. Laboratory analysis found these varnish remains to strongly resemble copal.

Unfortunately, Traquair's 1890s restoration work had been matched to the patchy, partially-cleaned 1880s murals. Similarly, the 20th-century reproduction panel had been painted to match adjacent darkened wax-resin coatings, and oil-based overpaints 'disguising' structural damage had been brushed onto original decoration.

Our approach towards consolidating loose, vulnerable plaster for the merged scheme was shaped by consideration for the varied constituents of the murals themselves, as well as those of the building structure. The chapel is located at the west end of the red sandstone and brick mortuary building. Most of the 1880s murals are on a lath and plaster support, however one particularly fragile and vulnerable painting is on plaster directly over a brick substrate – this is the only painting at dado height and it is situated beneath the window. The 1890s

murals, which extend from edges of the relocated paintings, are on lath and plaster.

Moreover, Traquair had expressed a desire for 'ease of removal' of the early mural fragments should this become necessary in the future. Our research at the National Library of Scotland's Special Collections Archive revealed that the 1880s mural sections were 'framed in wood' when cut from the walls. In their new setting, the framing timbers had been fixed in position and the walls plastered out from their edges. According to the artist, the murals were inset in such a way that they 'could be removed, if at any time a fate should overtake the new mortuary similar to that which destroyed the old one' (National Library of Scotland, 1898). (It is interesting to note that Traquair did not consider any need for 'ease of removal' of her 1890s murals.)

The highly risky 'stacco a massello' [solid cut] procedure resulted in significant losses of the 1880s scheme. In addition, most of the surviving panels were found to be too deep to fit into the new building structure. According to



Top: A conservator consolidating plaster

Middle: The cleaning process reveals 1890s restoration of earlier panel fragment with plaster fill, ingrained dirt and varnish remains

Bottom: North wall detail after cleaning and removal of proud fill

Traquair, the dado mural on a plastered brick substrate had been 'sawn through parallel to the paint surface to reduce the thickness of the brick [...] then framed in wood like the rest.' Once inserted, the 1880s panels 'were so cracked and injured by the necessary handling [...] that they had to be [...] restored' (National Library of Scotland, 1898).

Archival information had forced a rethink of our original plan to secure all joins merging the two schemes. Instead, we focused on consolidation where mechanical damage existed within a painted panel. Joins between panels were treated more superficially, for aesthetic reasons, to respect the artist's desire for her earlier 'framed' murals to be (in theory, at least) 'removable'. We were also aware that firmly securing discrepant panels together would risk future tensions between organic timber frames and inert plaster, stone and brick.

Careful treatment...

When the hospital complex was first handed over to developers in 2021, demolition works were undertaken to remove the 1960s extension and protective measures put in place to ensure safety of the wall paintings. Three years later, the murals' conservation treatment finally got underway. Phase 1 was carried out between May and June 2024, to facilitate construction works on the nearby hospital complex, while Phase 2 of the project was delayed until August and ran until completion in November 2024.

We re-adhered paint flakes using rabbit skin glue and lightly consolidated the edges of narrow cracks at joins between 1880s and 1890s mural sections using lime-based Ledan TB-1® injections. Our aim was simply to stabilise weakened plaster edges, not to fill voids. Cracks at joins were then superficially filled using gypsum-based filler to provide a base for aesthetic reintegration of the scheme. Over time, we anticipate that cracks between panels may reopen, given their structural and material differences (although this risk should be minimised by environmental control).

A distinctly different approach was

taken for badly damaged plaster within the 1880s dado panel. Now that the 1960s extension had been removed from the west wall of the Mortuary Chapel, there was heightened risk of moisture ingress and mobilisation of soluble salts within the wall. We sourced an injectable mortar designed to address the specific needs of the west wall dado panel – Calchera San Giorio's Boiaccia Iniezione 50 Plus®.

Consolidation was carried out extremely gradually (over a period of four months), to allow curing between applications. We were cognisant of creating structural tensions within the wall and aimed to introduce the minimum consolidant necessary for stabilisation. Discreetly drilled injection holes were left unfilled for ease of access, in case further consolidation becomes necessary in future.

Cleaning processes

During cleaning of Traquair's extensive murals' scheme in the Mansfield Traquair Centre in 2003 to 2005, conservators had opted to leave a thin layer of early coatings on the murals, thus retaining a slightly yellowed film. The rationale was to respect the blurred boundary between materials used for the 'spirit fresco' paint layer and overlying wax-resin coatings that are an integral part of the murals' scheme. Previous analysis of the 1890s murals in the Mortuary Chapel had shown that they too were 'spirit fresco'; therefore, we decided to adopt a similar approach towards cleaning these areas.

The cleaning process for the Mortuary Chapel murals sought to achieve as balanced a result as possible. Our first step was to remove surface soiling from the entire scheme using a chelator (2.5% tri-ammonium citrate solution). Details picked out in gold and aluminium leaf, and the late 20th-century reproduction oil-painted panel, were all cleaned in the same way, then thoroughly cleared with water.

We gradually reduced discoloured surface coatings applied during the 1890s, using denatured alcohol and a mild surfactant. However, as the discoloured 1890s coatings were reduced, darkened remains of underlying dirt and aged varnish on



Above right: Reintegrating paint losses on a west wall dado mural

Above top: North wall of the Mortuary Chapel before treatment

Above bottom: North wall of the Mortuary Chapel after treatment

1880s painted surfaces became more visually distracting. We decided to fully remove later coatings from the earlier paintings to access and remove the residues. Although this additional cleaning step meant that the earlier paintings might appear slightly brighter than the 'spirit fresco' murals, we felt that allowing full appreciation of their exquisite details and jewel-like 'illuminated manuscript' qualities far outweighed any minor imbalance in the appearance of the overall scheme.

Reducing the 1890s coatings revealed intriguing changes to the iconography, and also some lovely pentimenti,

where 1880s panel edges adjoined the extended scheme. However, the cleaning process also revealed that Traquair had struggled to retain and reintegrate more severely damaged areas during the 1890s restoration. Plaster fills, overpaints and layers of tinted glazes had been applied to try to disguise abrasions, cracks and losses. Depending on their condition, we reduced, removed or replaced the artist's misaligned and broken fills.

Following trials, some of the mismatched oil-based overpaints from the 1890s restoration were softened and removed with the help of Apolar Coating microemulsion - a Nanorestore Cleaning® product from the Research Centre for Colloids and Nanoscience (CSGI). Microemulsion was rolled over the surface on a cotton swab, then softened overpaint was reduced or removed mechanically. Oil-based overpaints from the latter half of the 20th century were also reduced in this manner.

During trials, we found CSGI's Polar Coating G microemulsion effective in softening aged varnish, allowing it to be

rolled from the mural surface; however, overpaints could only be softened very slightly, whether using microemulsions on a swabstick or contained in a hydrogel poultice.

We reintegrated small plaster fills using conservation-grade heavy body acrylic paints. Crudely applied, oil-based overpaints, that could not be safely removed without damage to original paintwork, were touched-in to better match surrounding decoration. Plaster fills on the badly damaged and abraded dado panel were given a base

tint prior to revarnishing using gouache paints. We then manually applied a single coat of matte Dammar varnish to the entire murals' scheme, using a lint-free cloth. Once revarnished, we used thin tinted glazes of powdered pigments in dammar varnish to complete chromatic reintegration of losses.

The future of the murals

It has been a privilege for my conservator colleagues, Cristina Beretta and Shannon Miller, and myself to work on this uniquely moving project and to

collaborate with Lincoln Conservation, City of Edinburgh Council's planning department and archaeology officer, and architects and developers to protect Traquair's Mortuary Chapel wall paintings.

Next steps will include finding an appropriate future use for the mortuary building and ensuring controlled public access to the murals.

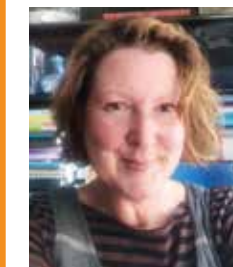
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Karen Dundas ACR is an independent Wall Paintings Conservator based in Scotland. She trained on a post-graduate

paintings conservation programme at CEROA (Madrid, Spain), before returning to Scotland in 2003 as a Structural Paintings Intern with Historic Scotland's Conservation Centre (now HES) and the National Trust for Scotland. Since 2005, when Scottish Wall Paintings Conservators was formed, Karen has gained considerable experience working on historic decorative surfaces but has developed a 'soft spot' for Scottish Renaissance painted decoration. Karen is an Expert Member of ICOMOS International Wood Committee (IIWC) and Icon Specialist Advisor for accreditation assessments.



Above: Detail of west wall dado mural prior to treatment



Above: Detail of west wall dado mural after cleaning, with broken 1890s plaster fills

The Clare Hampson Fund was established in memory of the late paper conservator, Clare Hampson (1951–2002). Clare's incredible generosity supported five emerging professionals through scholarships and internships. Opening doors and creating opportunity within our cultural institutions, her gift helped to engage and inspire the next generation of conservators, ensuring our heritage is in safe hands for generations to come.

In this article Kate Collieran ACR (Emeritus), who helped to set up the Fund, offers insight into Clare's decision to support and champion newly qualified conservators by leaving a gift in her Will. We also share updates from two of the conservators who have benefitted from the internships Clare made possible.

A tribute to Clare Hampson

Kate Collieran ACR (Emeritus) was Chair of the Institute of Paper Conservation (IPC) from 1999 to 2006 and worked alongside Clare, who was Secretary of the same organisation.

"One of life's enhancers, Clare was a founding member as well as Secretary of the IPC. She was passionate about conservation and her contribution to the development of paper conservation was considerable," Kate recalls.

"Clare studied at Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts (as it was then known) and worked as a paper conservator before she became Secretary of the IPC. She was keenly aware of the importance of that crucial period between leaving formal education or training and being a fully trained conservator.

"When she died at an early age in 2002, she left a significant bequest of £150,000 'to be used to set up and provide for an annual scholarship for the study of paper conservation.' Over the many years since, several conservators have benefitted from the bequest to carry out research, prepare manuscripts for publication or attend workshops abroad.

"In the past few years, as Icon developed a more structured internship programme, we were delighted to be able to fund the internships for Jordan Megyery, Lindsay McPherson,



Above: Jordan cleaning an album of dockyard photographs at The National Archives

TRANSFORMING CAREERS

Reflections on the legacy of Clare Hampson, whose generous bequest funded five career-defining internships

Samantha Herd and Anna Gallwey together with the host institutions.

"I am confident that Clare would be cheering them along their professional ways."

Jordan Megyery – From London to Los Angeles

In 2018 I embarked on a one-year Icon internship in Photograph Conservation and Audience Engagement, generously funded by the Clare Hampson bequest. I was lucky enough to split my internship across both The National Archives and Tate, under my internship supervisor Jacqueline Moon ACR.

Having just completed an MA in the conservation of works of art on paper at Northumbria University, this internship provided an amazing opportunity to pursue my dream of specialising in photograph conservation. There are currently no MA programmes in the UK that support a specialisation in photographic materials, so internships like this are pivotal in training the new generation of photograph conservators.

Splitting my time between two institutions gave me a well-rounded learning experience. At The National Archives, I helped set up a volunteer-led survey of the photographic film



Above: Anna working on a series of 18th-century 'buttery' material as a conservator of the OCC, 2025

collection, prepared photographs for exhibition, treated and rehoused photographs for safe handling in the study room, and learnt to use analytical techniques such as FTIR and multi-spectral imaging.

At Tate, I was able to hone my practical conservation skills by treating a variety of different photographic materials in preparation for exhibition, as well as assisting during exhibition installs, and learning about the acquisitions process. I was encouraged to share my work with a variety of different audiences, the most significant being a paper I presented at the 2019 Icon Triennial Conference in Belfast about the film project at The National Archives.

This internship was fundamental in giving me the experience necessary to pursue a career in photograph

conservation. Soon after the internship I was hired as an assistant conservator at Tate where I continued to specialise through various workshops, trainings, and on-the-job experiences, finally becoming a permanent photograph conservator there in 2022. In 2024, I was hired as Associate Conservator of Photographs at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles where I currently am today.

My future career ambitions include further research into the deterioration of inkjet materials and continuing to advocate for the profession through outreach and dissemination. I continue to support the photograph conservation field in the UK through volunteering as a committee member for Icon's Photographic Materials Group.

I am forever grateful for this internship

opportunity and the many amazing colleagues in the conservation field that have mentored me throughout my career and allowed me to be where I am today.

Anna Gallwey – Full circle at Oxford Conservation Consortium

In 2022 I was awarded an Icon internship funded by the Clare Hampson bequest. The internship was six months, with my time split between the Bodleian Libraries and the Oxford Conservation Consortium (OCC). During this time, I worked closely with my supervisors Robert Minte ACR, Senior Conservator at the Bodleian Libraries, Celia Bockmuehl ACR, Head of Conservation at OCC, and Helen Lindsay ACR, my Icon advisor. During this time, I worked on a wide range of materials, spanning from Ming Dynasty Chinese bindings to 17th-century account books.

The internship helped me to hone my practical and professional skills while gaining invaluable experience in two diverse conservation workplaces. As this internship was my first professional experience after completing my MA at West Dean College, it put me in a perfect position to jump start my conservation career.

Since completing the internship, I went on to do another internship, this time with the Heritage Council at The National Library of Ireland. I worked with my supervisor Louise O'Connor on a variety of Irish heritage items, namely a collection of 18th-century early Irish newspapers. In 2024, things came full circle and I returned to Oxford to work at the OCC as a full-time conservator. Here, I work on a wide range of items from the member colleges' library and archive collections. I am currently working on an early photographic album and some 18th-century buttery documents.

Leaving a gift in your Will

If you have been inspired by the stories shared in this article and would like to learn more about leaving a gift in your Will, please visit Icon's website



or speak to a member of the Icon team. Scan the QR code for more information.

This internship was fundamental in giving me the experience necessary to pursue a career in photograph conservation

SCIENCE BITE 4

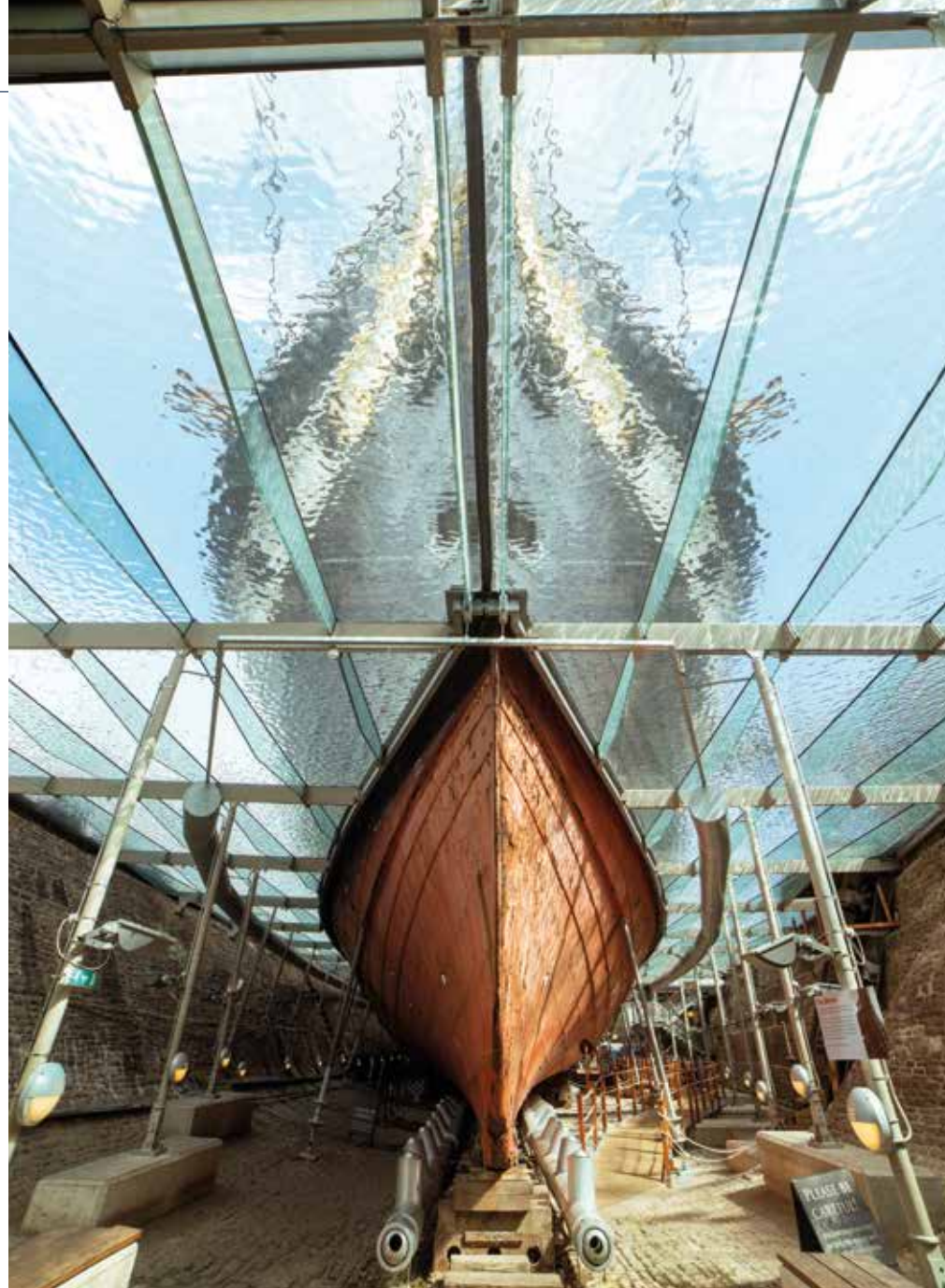
SSGB UPDATE

In November 2005, the conservation of SS Great Britain featured in the very first issue of *Icon News*. Twenty years on, Ship's Conservation Engineer **Nicola Grahamslaw** provides an update

Launched in 1843, Brunel's SS Great Britain combined two firsts: screw propulsion and a wrought iron hull. After 32 trips around the globe as a passenger ship, troop carrier, cargo vessel and floating warehouse, the ship was abandoned in Sparrow Cove before its epic 1970 rescue and return from the Falkland Islands to Bristol.

In 2005 another first was unveiled: the ship's original dry dock converted into a climate-controlled environment, a glass plate at waterline level sealing the dock and protecting the ship from Bristol's oceanic climate. This allows the chloride-contaminated lower external hull and ship's interior to be kept at a corrosion-arresting 20% relative humidity (RH) using two bespoke desiccant dehumidifiers. A thin layer of water on the plate provides insulation and creates the appearance from above that the ship is ready to set sail.

Around 15 years later, the Ship's Conservation Engineer role was created, tasked with the challenge of making conservation more sustainable.



Above: The lower hull of the SS Great Britain in its climate-controlled dry dock, under the 'glass sea'

Reducing energy consumption

Our data showed that the environment around the ship had been held broadly stable but by digging deeper, we have developed more insight, identifying where we can make improvements. By getting to grips with the previously under-utilised capability of our building management system and analysing real operating data to observe how the different components communicate and interact, we discovered that settings fine-tuned in the original design had drifted with time, leading to inefficiency.

We started by targeting specific parts of the system where higher-spec

sensors would make the most difference and making tweaks to the control algorithms. Working more proactively with our maintenance contractors also allows us to tap into their expertise, making sure we understand the way the system is set up and getting the best out of it. Combined with retro-fitted fan and heat recovery upgrades, this work reduced our energy consumption by about 25%, winning Sustainable Project of the Year at the 2023 Museums + Heritage Awards.

In the longer term, our challenge is to adapt the conservation system to run without fossil fuels. Twenty years ago, much of the UK's electricity came from

Below: Dried air delivery ducts at the stern of the ship

Bottom inset: Improved controls and instrumentation has resulted in new insight and energy savings



coal power stations, so installing gas burners directly in the dehumidifiers was more environmentally friendly than a system using electricity generated from coal. Recent growth of renewables means that electricity is now a greener option, but it is much more expensive than gas.

Finding a way to incorporate heat pumps may be the way around this problem. A heat pump could take heat from the ship, dry dock and outside, and use it to create the hot conditions needed for our desiccant to reactivate. Better still, a heat pump can move three to five times as much heat as the electricity needed to power it, making it cheaper to run and more energy-efficient than an electric heater.

Since the ship is a confined space with complex ventilation, for this switch to be feasible the dehumidification needs to be optimised so the smallest possible components can be used. Working with the University of Bristol, we are studying the flow of air around the dry dock in detail to identify ways to reduce load on the desiccation plant.

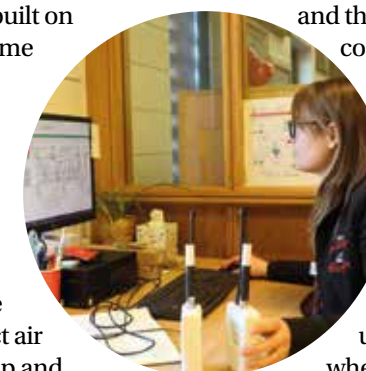
Tackling water ingress

Under the 'glass sea' the Grade II* listed 1839 dry dock is built on soft, wet ground and some water ingress from the surrounding harbour through the dock walls is unavoidable. To overcome this, the conservation system creates a dried air curtain over the surface of the hull. Nozzles eject air along the keel of the ship and

ducts positioned just below the ceiling collect it to be recirculated through the dehumidifiers. By minimising moisture entrainment from the dock floors and walls, only the air immediately surrounding the ship's hull needs to be dried and the efficiency of conservation is improved compared with drying the whole space.

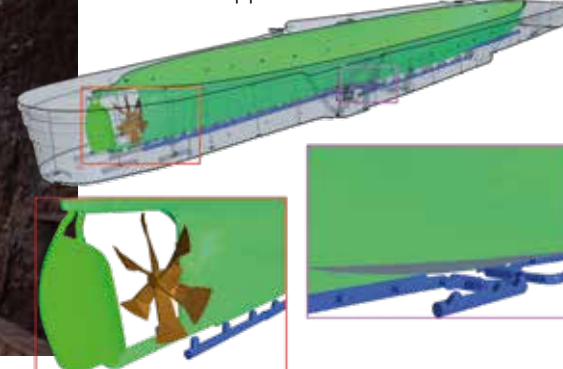
The 'air curtain' dry dock desiccation system was designed before modern computer modelling techniques became available, and past assessment of the system's performance has relied on sensor readings which can only be collected in a limited number of locations simultaneously.

The effectiveness of this configuration is now being assessed using Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD), a numerical modelling technique used to simulate and predict the behaviour of liquids and gases as they flow within or around a space. For the flow to be modelled by a computer, the space is divided into a 3D grid with millions of small 'cells.' The flow is estimated in each cell and discrepancies between neighbouring cells used to refine the estimates, repeating iteratively until the discrepancies become very small and the solution is said to be converged.



By comparing data from sensors around the dry dock against the model's predictions, we can identify areas where the flow is behaving as we expect and work towards improving our understanding in areas where the measurements and

Below: Computational domain for the CFD model with details of the rudder, propeller, and air delivery system, generated using laser scanning and a surface wrapper tool



model do not align. Insights gained from this study can be used to inform potential adjustments to improve the desiccation system's performance and reduce energy consumption, for example modifying the shape or position of the air vents or adjusting other parameters such as air flow rates.

As well as reducing energy consumption in the short term, improving moisture management in the dry dock is a vital piece of our decarbonisation puzzle, reducing overall load on the desiccation plant and underpinning the future feasibility of lower-carbon methods.



To read two papers about SSGB's voyage to being carbon neutral, scan the QR code and visit

doi.org/10.1016/j.buildenv.2023.110640

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Nicola Grahamslaw is a Chartered Engineer specialising in heat and energy. Following an early career

analysing cooling systems in nuclear reactors, she was appointed Ship's Conservation Engineer at the SS Great Britain, where she has developed expertise in museum climate control. Nicola is passionate about making technical topics accessible to non-specialist audiences. She has worked in STEM education and has held a range of voluntary roles across engineering, heritage and education institutions.



Below: Adelheid working on a stained glass window during her Icon internship at Barley Studio

MONEY MATTERS

As part of our regular series of articles about Icon's volunteers, in this issue we shine a light on the Treasurers who support Icon's Groups

Icon has 28 specialist interest Groups, offering members the opportunity to expand their knowledge, develop new skills and connect with like-minded conservation and heritage professionals through an annual programme of online and in-person events. They are a fundamental part of Icon's organisational structure, helping the organisation to deliver its strategic aims including the continual drive to support high standards in conservation practice.

The success of Icon's Groups is largely thanks to a small number of volunteers who make up each Group's Committee – ranging from Chairs, Co-Chairs and Secretaries to Events Coordinators, Communications and Social Media Officers, Student Representatives, and more.

While each Committee member has an important role to play, in this article we will be focusing on the Group Treasurer.

About Icon's Group Treasurers

As the title clearly suggests, the Treasurer's role is to oversee the Group's finances. This includes an annual allocation from Icon central for the running of the Group and any other grant funds received by the Committee. The Treasurer's key responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

- Arranging for invoices and expenses to be paid on time
- Maintaining up-to-date, accurate records of all transactions
- Producing an annual budget for the forthcoming year, showing the Group's projected income and expenditure
- Advising the Committee on financial matters
- Preparing the Group's annual report and accounts for circulation before the Group's AGM
- Checking Group transaction reports from Icon's accountants on a quarterly basis.

Each Icon Group must appoint a Treasurer, who is often someone identified by the Committee and then formally elected to the Committee at the Group's AGM. They are supported in their role by other members of the Group's Committee, Icon staff members and through a range of resources

available on Icon's website including a *Treasurers' Guide*.

While there are no formal prerequisites for becoming a Group Treasurer (other than being a member of Icon), there are certain skills and traits that are desirable for anyone taking on the role.

"Obviously having a good head for figures is important, but we don't expect our Group Treasurers to necessarily have a qualification in finance or previous experience," explains Patrick Whife, Icon's Policy and Programmes Manager. "Being well-organised, confident in using spreadsheets, and a good communicator and team player are all qualities that contribute to being a good Treasurer."

More than a numbers game

While the Treasurer's role very much centres around the Group's finances, many of those who take on the position do so because they want to get involved in the wider work of the Committee and to enjoy some of the many benefits this can bring.

Joanne Fulton joined the Emerging Professional Group's Committee as Treasurer before taking over the role of Chair from James Harvie in July. When asked what attracted her to the role of Treasurer, she told Icon: "It was the responsibility and experience I would gain as Treasurer of a national group. My role wasn't purely numbers

Benefits of being a Group Treasurer

As with all Committee roles, being Group Treasurer counts towards continued professional development (CPD). It can help to build on existing skills such as:

- Improved networking and links with conservators, heritage organisations and like-minded peers
- Improved knowledge about voluntary sector workings and governance procedures
- Improved knowledge of other specialisms through links with Group Treasurers
- Exposure to new ideas and working styles from colleagues
- Transferable skills as a Treasurer/budget holder for other charity/professional body organisations including budget forward planning and monitoring, financial reporting in line with agreed internal guidelines and national legislation, negotiation and communication skills, and understanding of (charity) financial business management
- Event planning experience.

Soft skills:

- Communication
- Time management, planning, adaptability, problem-solving
- Teamwork, collaboration, coordination, dependability
- Delegation, leadership, responsibility
- Stakeholder management.

The Treasurer role provides a well-defined set of tasks, making it ideal for someone who wants to get involved in the Committee with clear responsibilities to manage.

– I contributed ideas within the wider Committee and help other Committee members where needed. It was also a very exciting time to become a committee member of the EPG, during our shift from a Network to a Group. This meant being given a budget for the first time, which created the need for a Treasurer."

Kim Thüsing has been Treasurer of Icon Cymru since the Group's inception in May 2025, but she had previously been Treasurer of the Icon Textile Group (2015–21). For her, a key reason for taking on the role was to feel connected, while at the same time supporting the conversation community.

"I had been on an extended sabbatical of nearly five years, away from work, so I was keen to re-establish connection with my profession and colleagues," Kim told *Iconnect Magazine*. "Also, being based in Wales can be somewhat isolating and I liked the feeling of being in touch with textile and other conservators across the country and being at the hub of any news or new developments within the profession. It feels good to be involved in promoting our profession and enabling others to improve their skills and knowledge through training and CPD events."

Adelheid Hansen, Treasurer of Icon's Stained Glass Group (SGG), echoes Kim's sentiments: "I wanted to give something back to the conservation community because I was lucky enough to be an Icon Stained Glass intern for six months at Barley Studio in York. I also hoped to meet more people working in stained glass."

Time and dedication

In addition to managing the Group's finances, the Treasurer – like all Committee members – is expected to attend meetings and participate in Group events on a regular basis. This requires dedication and a willingness to carve out time from current personal and professional obligations.

Speaking about the amount of time she is likely to spend on her role as Treasurer of Icon Cymru, Kim says: "I'm not sure how different this will be now, but when I was Treasurer of the Textile Group, I probably spent most time around certain events – especially our Annual Forum and AGM – and, of course, at the end of the financial year, to submit the Annual Group Budget and Events Planner. Other than



Right: Joanne carrying out a book survey as a Conservator at Durham University

that, there was a steady trickle of work, usually relating to reimbursing travel claims from Committee members for attending quarterly meetings, which were largely in-person back then. It never felt like an overwhelming amount of work."

Joanne agrees that time dedicated to the role can certainly peak in the run-up to key events in the Group's calendar. "Most of the year I might have dedicated 30 minutes to an hour per fortnight on tasks, however this year required more of my time due to the EPG holding its first in-person conference," Joanne explains.

"The conference required a lot of planning, which I was heavily involved in, and in the month prior to the event, I was spending several hours each week contacting the venue, speakers and poster authors, creating resources for them, arranging printing and catering, and having regular update meetings with other members of the conference subgroup. This isn't expected of the Treasurer role, but it was something I was passionate about and being based in Durham, where the conference was held, made some things easier for me to do than others."

Similarly, Adelheid notes that her work peaks around the SGG's annual conference, bespoke workshops and monthly Zoom sessions, "And, of course, around the time of the annual budget. The Committee also holds online meetings at least once a month."

Reflections and advice

When asked why the role of Treasurer is so important to her Group, Joanne comments: "With the annual budget we are given, I believe it's very important to use these resources to put on good quality events that are as affordable as possible for members. The feedback from EPG's conference was very positive and we hope to bring emerging conservators together regularly through events like these, so that they feel supported and walk away feeling excited about their careers in conservation."

In terms of what she enjoyed most about the role, Joanne says: "My contribution to the Group and getting to work with like-minded emerging conservators. As cliché as it might sound, the friends I have made from being on the Committee is one of the main highlights."

For Adelheid, it's also the opportunity to learn from her peers: "I enjoy being a



KIM THÜSING

Top: The Emerging Professionals Conference 2025 being introduced by James Harvie, then Chair of the EP Group

Above: Kim Thüsing surface cleaning a sampler

member of such an active group. Each member brings their own skillset, so I learn a lot. I also enjoy being part of organising our annual conference. These are so important because stained glass is on the red list of endangered crafts. This year we are welcoming speakers and delegates from all over the world!"

Speaking as the former Treasurer of one of the newer Groups, Joanne concludes: "While this role seems like a lot of responsibility, which sometimes it can be, it's not as scary as it seems. You do need to carry out some serious tasks like managing the allocation of funds and coordinating payments, but that's infrequent and most of the time you are contributing ideas, being at the centre of planning group activities, and helping to support your team."

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTORS



Joanne Fulton has worked as a Conservator (Collections Care) at Durham University Library and

Collections since 2022. She graduated from the MA Conservation of Fine Art: Works of Art on Paper in 2021, then went on to an internship with the Centre for Research Collection at The University of Edinburgh. Prior to this, Joanne volunteered for several years at National Trust sites, Cherryburn and Lyme Hall, and Seven Stories: The National Centre for Children's Books.

Adelheid Hansen completed a



minor in Conservation and Restoration of Cultural Heritage at the University of Amsterdam

in 2015, followed by a Graduate Diploma and MA in Conservation of Ceramics and Related Materials at West Dean College, graduating in 2017. She was the Icon Stained Glass intern at Barley Studio, York, in 2022 and an intern in advanced glass conservation at the Corning Museum of Glass in 2018, for which she was awarded the Zibby Garnett Travel Fellowship.

Kim Thüsing is Senior Conservator,



Textiles at Amgueddfa Cymru, National Museum Wales – a position she has held since

2005. Originally from Hamburg in Germany, she graduated from the Textile Conservation Centre in 2000, after which she worked for the British Museum, the National Trust and the Clodna Devitt private textile conservation studio in Dublin, Ireland.

YOUR VOICE, YOUR VOTE

As voting on Icon's future petition for Royal Charter draws closer, we share contrasting views from two of our members

Alongside our celebrations and reflections on 20 years of championing conservation in 2025, we have used our milestone anniversary to explore the opportunity to petition for Royal Charter.

As we come to the close of our member consultation period, we wanted to thank those of you who have engaged in the conversation at one of our information sessions, roundtables, panel discussions or who have browsed our Chartership information page.

The ultimate decision lies with you. Members will be asked to vote on the topic ahead of our AGM in November, so please check your inbox for voting instructions. Those who are eligible to vote can do so online in advance of the AGM. Online voting closes at 17:00 GMT on Monday 3 November 2025.

Ahead of the vote, we invited two Icon members with contrasting perspectives to share their thoughts on the proposal. You can read a synopsis of their thoughts below and their full statements on our website via the QR code.



Simon Cane ACR

'Recognition' has been an issue for conservators in the UK, in the EU and across the world, and has been discussed and debated at meetings, in sector

publications and conferences throughout my (long) career.

I believe that Chartered status is a step towards achieving the level of recognition that we all so desperately want and need for our sector. Accreditation created the foundation of conservation in the UK as a 'profession' and along with improving all aspects of governance of the membership, has put Icon in a strong position to achieve Chartered status.

Governments favour 'self-regulation' for professional practice; there will never be legislation in the UK or the EU for the regulation of the sector, as some have previously hoped and indeed explored. Chartered status is one of the UK Government's primary routes to achieving recognition through 'self-regulation' and as such offers Icon members the opportunity to finally become recognised at a level that reflects their education, skills and the significance and value of their work with regard to the care and preservation of our national cultural heritage.

We are a small sector, but our impact is inversely proportional to our size. Chartered status offers us a route to further develop as a profession and would be a significant step in achieving the recognition that we deserve.



Athanasios Velios

This is a synopsis of a longer article published on Icon's website where I take a sceptical view of the perceived benefits to Icon as an organisation and its members from applying for Chartered status.

In my unabridged article, I consider the risks of losing agency when an external body, the Privy Council, is considered more appropriate for assessing the quality of Icon's work than Icon itself. I also consider some serious problems that conservators face at a professional level, such as low wages, lack of career progression and work intensification, and the fact that Chartered status will do nothing to resolve these problems. They are the result of failing policies from successive Governments, the members of which now comprise the Privy Council who are the main assessors of applications for Chartership.

I find being judged by those who have damaged the profession over the past 25 years highly problematic. The key question is: what will the actual benefit to conservators at work be? Is this a nice-sounding title without any substance? If members do not benefit from it, who does?



For more information and to read Simon's and Athanasios' articles in full, scan the QR code

Running a private practice can be hugely rewarding, offering conservators the chance to work flexibly and build an interesting portfolio of work. On the flipside, unlike conservators in institutions, private practitioners need to find, provide estimates for and carry out the work, alongside running a business.

The expansive list of required tasks and skills for this includes marketing, accounting, public engagement, studio maintenance, engaging and managing staff, ensuring a safe working environment, and necessary training and safety procedures – all while ensuring the company provides opportunities for growth and a culture of respect.

In a short series of articles from Icon's Private Practice Group (PPG), we aim to highlight some of the ways in which conservators in private practice spend their time, in addition to their conservation projects. This includes marketing, but how much time should conservators spend on this important task and what activities should they focus on?

The fundamentals

A website and online presence are now baseline requirements, giving conservators credibility and allowing potential clients to research their services. Social media platforms such as Instagram and LinkedIn encourage frequent posting – regular weekly



ARTWORKS CONSERVATION LTD

TIME WELL SPENT

Melinda Hey and members of Icon's Private Practice Group discuss the importance of making time for marketing

content is more likely to be seen and engaged with. Similarly, websites are most effective when regularly maintained and adding keywords and fresh content ensures a search engine places a site on the first page of a search. Tools such as Mailchimp can be used for targeted mail-outs, allowing conservators to stay connected with clients and collaborators. Marketing courses are also available, and Icon run Marketing Essentials sessions for conservators (keep an eye on their socials or visit www.icon.org.uk/events for upcoming dates).

For the tech savvy, all these things can be managed in-house. For those who don't have the skills or time, these tasks can be outsourced, although the cost and efficiency of hiring external support must be considered. While more accessible newsletters, blogs and other outreach techniques all take time away from benchwork, is the effort worthwhile?

Three conservators working in private practice share their views on the importance of finding work and marketing for their businesses.

The voice of experience

Brighton-based textile conservator Zenzie Tinker ACR, who has been running Zenzie Tinker Conservation for 23 years, certainly thinks the effort is worthwhile. She says: "The business is like a hungry beast needing to be fed – not just now but in the future. I am responding to new queries all the time, might be out doing site visits and estimates, and also negotiating on future projects." Zenzie is open about stepping back from doing hands-on conservation work to pursue enquiries and create new opportunities, seeing this as imperative for her business: "This dedicated time, while not being benchwork, is crucial for keeping the practice alive."

Richard Hawkes ACR, Director of Artworks Conservation Ltd, echoes Zenzie's sentiments: "Marketing a conservation business should not be ignored in times when the studio is busy, as it might be too late to act when a quiet spell comes along. We have tried many different methods of promoting the business and there is no magic formula. Devoting a bit of time each week to different strategies – networking, writing blogs, updating a website, making a short

Below: Object Conservator, Mandy Garratt, working on a parrot lamp base

Left: Paper Conservator, Felicity Conway, filming a project for the National Trust at Artworks Conservation, Harrogate



MANDY GARRATT

video, social media, planning an article or presentation – can bring rewarding and interesting projects."

Richard goes on to offer the following advice: "I would find ways to directly interact with those who might commission conservation work. Ultimately, nothing beats reputation and word of mouth."

For early-stage practices, enquiries may be sporadic, requiring proactive searching for work. For freelancers and those just starting out, the balance between conservation and marketing can be just as challenging as for more established studios.

Mandy Garratt, an object conservator who established her freelance business, Glaze Conservation Ltd, within the past year, emphasises the importance of knowing your audience: "Spending time thinking about who your target clients are, and how they are most likely to be reached, is really useful. What

works in one location won't always be effective everywhere, so it's well worth trying various methods and seeing what works."

Mandy has found most of her clients have come via more traditional methods such as business cards, local advertising and recommendations on local Facebook groups, proving that marketing needs to be tailored to suit the needs and size of a business.

Ultimately, sustaining a private conservation practice requires more than technical expertise – it requires a willingness to engage with clients, promote services and actively seek out new opportunities. While there is no one-size-fits-all approach, the experiences of Zenzie, Richard and Mandy highlight the importance of dedicating regular time to marketing.

In the end, time spent on building visibility, reputation and networks is time well spent.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS



Melinda Hey is a Textile Conservator and Director at The Landi Company at Burghley House in Stamford. She

completed the MA Conservation of Cultural Heritage at the University of Lincoln in 2019 and also holds a degree in Fine Art Embroidery from the Manchester Metropolitan University. She currently serves as Vice Chair of Icon's Private Practice Group (ppgicon@gmail.com)



Zenzie Tinker ACR spent many years as a museum-based conservator and left the V&A in 2003 to establish

her freelance business from home, soon moving to a dedicated studio. Zenzie Tinker Conservation has since grown into one of the largest privately run textile conservation practices in the UK, offering a wide range of conservation and display services.



Richard Hawkes ACR is Director of Artworks Conservation, based in Harrogate. He established the

business in 2004, specialising in the conservation of watercolours, prints and drawings. With over 20 years' experience working for museums, institutions, art dealers and private individuals, Richard is also an Accredited Conservator-Restorer (Icon).



Mandy Garratt is a Freelance Objects Conservator specialising in Ceramics at Glaze Conservation Ltd,

based in north Wiltshire. Mandy graduated from Cardiff University's MSc Conservation Practice in 2020 and worked in Historic England's Archive Conservation team for two years, before setting up her own private practice in April 2024.



Below: Richard Hawkes ACR removing adhesive from the edges of a watercolour

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

As Icon celebrates Student Month this November, we hear from Icon Student Member **Chris Sebestik**, who recently completed an MSc at UCL Institute of Archaeology, and **Meagen Smith ACR**, who introduced students to condition reporting at Lambeth Palace Library

Chris Sebestik reflects on the projects he completed at UCL and his second year placement with Tate

Q. What first sparked your interest in conservation?

Growing up, I remember my grandparents taking me to the Science and Natural History Museums on a regular basis, so I have always found something comforting about those kinds of spaces. My grandfather was a hobbyist carpenter and I often used his workshop to make things. This led to an interest in art and eventually studying it for my Bachelor's. I came across collection care through working as a gallery invigilator and, after a lot of weighing up, I took the plunge.

Q. Tell us about your MSc...

I chose to study the Conservation for Archaeology and Museums MSc at the UCL Institute of Archaeology because of its generalist focus. I also wanted to develop knowledge and experience of archaeological and historical objects, of which I had no prior experience.

I worked on treatments for objects from the UCL collections and others. These included reconstructing an Iron Age Levantine bottle from UCL and a Victorian wax model of a germinating coconut from Kew, as well as cleaning and treating freshly excavated Anglo-Saxon iron objects.

Q. Where did you spend your student placement and what did you do?

I spent my second year within the Sculpture and Installation Conservation Department at Tate. I worked between Tate Modern, Tate Britain and the stores in south London. I also visited Tate Liverpool and St Ives.



Alongside routine cleaning and pest checks for artworks on display, I assisted with a variety of exhibitions and display changes, which are constant at Tate! Notably, the Electric Dreams exhibition at Tate Modern involved working with time-based media conservators and external stakeholders on kinetic artworks requiring maintenance for display.

Another display of a recently acquired installation work involved cleaning and joining glass components with silicone – one of many aspects that needed consultation with the artist.

I also got to carry out interventive treatments. Some of these included reconstructing a shattered ostrich egg, consolidating the paint layer of a wooden sculpture, and making a structural pin insert for an iron cast of a tree branch that had snapped in half.

I also cleaned several artworks, including a fluorescent-painted fibreglass sculpture dulled by a layer of dirt and, ironically, an artwork made of soap bars.

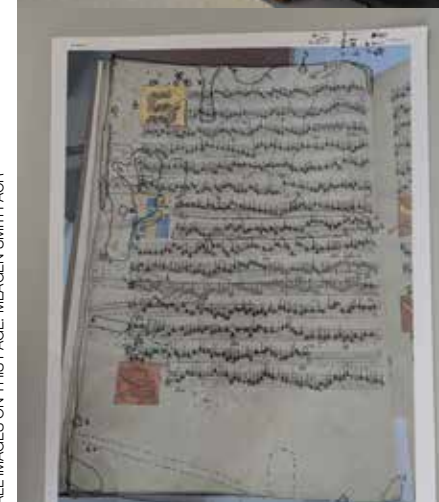
A highlight was visiting the Barbara Hepworth Museum in St Ives, to carry out routine maintenance on the outdoor sculptures and Hepworth's studio and tools.

Left, top to bottom:

Cleaning a glass element before it gets joined to its spout, as part of installing *Matanzas Sound Map* by María Magdalena Campos-Pons and Neil Leonard

Chris Sebestik, fourth from left, with Tate's Sculpture and Installation Conservation Team at the Barbara Hepworth Museum, St Ives

Rust removal from tools in the Barbara Hepworth studio, using Biox prior to hot-waxing



Above: The condition reporting workshop outcome included a practice diagram of MS1 f12v worked on by each workshop participant

Q. What did you gain most from your time at Tate?

I was entrusted with a great deal of autonomy and responsibility in planning and carrying out tasks, which was valuable in helping me determine my strengths and limits. I'm very grateful to the conservators and technicians in the Sculpture and Installation Team at Tate, who were so generous with their time and in sharing their expertise, tips and tricks.

Q. What are your ambitions for the future?

I'd like to gain some experience in private practice, to see the other side of things. I want to stay true to what I have loved about the interventive treatment work I've done so far. If I can find a way to keep doing that kind of work, I'll be happy!



Top: Each workshop participant rotated responsibilities to gain experience with describing, writing and annotating while they discussed key features of the manuscript with Meagen Smith ACR, third from left

Above: (L to R) Grace Howson, Quinn Mulligan and Nick Munn working through a condition report at Lambeth Palace Library

Meagen Smith ACR and colleagues introduce students to condition reporting, a core activity of exhibition preparation

Teams across Lambeth Palace Library host many students, interns and volunteers. The new exhibition at the Library, Sing Joyfully, offered the opportunity to include students in one of collection care's key exhibition preparation activities: condition reporting.

As Library and Archive Conservator, I led a condition report workshop to teach how to observe, describe and document one of the premier exhibition items, the *Arundel Choirbook*, MS 1, in preparation for the exhibition.

The aim of the workshop was to introduce the students to the purpose, method and effort involved in creating a

condition report. Many of the Lambeth Palace Library students on library, archive and history courses go on to roles that involve exhibition curation as part of their future jobs and we wanted to introduce them to an important, core activity of exhibition preparation.

With the assistance of Lambeth's two Collection Care Assistants, Grace Howson and Arianna Mangraviti, I described the purpose of creating exhibition condition reports in various formats, including written, photographic and diagrammatic. We then reviewed the basics of book structure, substrate material and media, including gold illumination, as well as vocabulary to describe evidence of use and damage – for example, parchment manufacturing flaws versus tears.

The large format of MS 1 (688mm high and 482mm wide) enabled each workshop participant to cycle through assigned roles of observing, recording and drawing. The workshop focused on documenting one folio of the display opening.

Nick Munn, a PhD history student at Queen Mary University of London, commented: "I have had the opportunity to work on manuscripts in Italian archives and observe many others in exhibitions as part of my PhD, but with little knowledge of the steps taken to ensure these items are kept in the best condition for public consumption. To be given the opportunity to see behind the curtain of the processes that allow these wonderful manuscripts to be placed in an exhibition was an invaluable experience."

Quinn Mulligan, a Medieval and Renaissance Studies MA student at UCL, added: "The process and care that each aspect of the page is given was fascinating. It has allowed me to better understand, and certainly appreciate, the lived history of various documents and manuscripts that I have worked on in my personal research. This exercise has taught me not only the conservation, but also the historical purpose of taking care to note the intricacies of a single page."

The *Arundel Choirbook* is on display at Lambeth Palace Library until 6 November 2025 (see www.lambethpalacelibrary.info/sing-joyfully for more information).

We're thrilled to share a major milestone in the world of conservation: the formation of a brand-new International Organization for Standardization (ISO) Technical Committee dedicated entirely to conservation. This is the first time that conservation, as a distinct concept, has been formally represented at the ISO level.

British and European standards committees for conservation have been in place for some time – namely B/560 for the British Standards Institution (BSI) and TC346 for the European Committee for Standardization (CEN) – and these committees have worked on areas such as standards for condition reporting and storage specifications.

However, on the international front, while existing ISO standards have occasionally covered important aspects of conservation, ISO TC-349 is the first committee solely focused on conservation practice. This is a significant step forwards in shaping global standards that reflect the needs and values of our field.

What is the BSI B/560 Committee?

B/560: Conservation of Tangible Heritage is the BSI's technical committee responsible for developing and maintaining standards related to the conservation of British cultural heritage including historic buildings, collections and materials.

Many of the standards are about conservation practices, such as condition reporting, environmental monitoring, storage and treatment methods. The B/560 Committee represents the UK in European (CEN/TC 346) and international (ISO) conservation standardisation efforts, reviewing and revising standards every three to five years to reflect evolving practices and technologies.

Some of the standards overseen by B/560 include:

- BS EN 16095 – Conservation of Cultural Property. Condition recording for movable cultural heritage
- BS EN 15757 – Conservation of Cultural

GREEN LIGHT FOR GLOBAL STANDARDS

Jane Henderson ACR, Isobel Griffin ACR and Lorraine Finch ACR provide an update on British, European and international conservation standards



Top to bottom: Jane Henderson ACR, Isobel Griffin ACR and Lorraine Finch ACR

Main image: On an international level, the ISO TC-349 is the first committee solely focused on conservation practice

Property. Specifications for temperature and relative humidity to limit climate-induced mechanical damage in organic hygroscopic materials

- BS EN 16853 – Conservation of Cultural Heritage. Conservation process. Decision-making, planning and implementation
- BS 7913 – Guide to the Conservation of Historic Buildings

Who currently contributes?

BSI Committee B/560 brings together a diverse group of UK-based professionals and organisations committed to shaping standards for the conservation of cultural heritage. It ensures that UK perspectives are reflected in European and international conservation standards. Representatives include conservators, historic building specialists and conservation scientists, who come from:

- Professional bodies, such as Icon;
- Government bodies and heritage agencies, such as the Culture Division

of the Welsh Government, Historic England, English Heritage and Historic Environment Scotland;

- Academic institutions, such as Cardiff University and UCL;
- Museums, galleries, libraries and archives; and
- Private practice.

B/560 creates some standards specifically for the UK and it acts as the UK mirror committee feeding into CEN/TC 346 – European Committee for Standardization on Cultural Heritage and ISO/TC 349 – International Technical Committee for Cultural Heritage Conservation. This means UK experts help shape standards at the European and global level, ensuring that local practices and innovations are part of the broader conversation.

How can you get involved?

In terms of international standards, this is very much a 'watch this space' moment, but if you are interested in seismic precautions, please contact Jane Henderson ACR direct (hendersonlj@cardiff.ac.uk). She'll connect you with Dina D'Ayala, UNESCO Chair in Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience Engineering at UCL, who is our lead on this topic. Other areas being explored include nomenclature for ancient ceramics and standards for wall

ISO committee details

- **Committee name:** ISO TC-349
- **Secretariat location:** China, hosted by the Palace Museum in Beijing
- **First plenary meeting:** September 2025

At the plenary meeting in September, New Work Items (NWIs) were proposed and, going forward, one of the first topics that will be discussed by the committee is protections for seismic activity. The UK, through the BSI, already has an expert lined up to contribute.

Other NWIs were proposed by participating countries and the UK is fully engaged. Jane Henderson ACR, Chair of the BSI's B/560 Committee, represented the UK at the first ISO TC-349 meeting, with other members of the British Standards Committee attending in person or online.

Jane commented: "While several proposals were considered at the meeting, the main theme was agreeing terminology that would work internationally. There is plenty to do and BSI will be looking for conservators to contribute."

paintings, though formal proposals are still in development.

In terms of British standards, you can also contribute by:

- Participating in public consultations and voting via the BSI website;
- Applying to join BSI's B/560 Committee to represent a relevant organisation; or
- Joining a BSI working group focused on a specific standard.

A quick note on commitment: if you join the B/560 Committee, you'll be responsible for the full scope of its work and not just your area of interest. So, consider your level of engagement carefully and choose a path that suits your capacity and expertise.

Alongside other ACRs, Isobel Griffin ACR (IGriffin@nationalgalleries.org) and Lorraine Finch ACR (lorraine@lfcpc.co.uk) are Icon representatives on the B/560 Committee, and are happy to be contacted for an informal discussion about what the work entails. If you wish to apply to join the B/560 Committee or a BSI working group, you can do this online by following the relevant links via this QR code.

Accessing BSI standards

BSI offers Icon members a 20% discount if they want to purchase the conservation standards; however, this is also a moment to celebrate the library. There are options to access BSI standards remotely though institutional affiliations – for example, if you are a university lecturer or student, or have library membership. Alternatively, ask your local or national public library if they offer remote access to members via British Standards Online. For more

information about getting hold of standards, consult Icon's website by scanning this QR code.

With thanks to...

Jane Henderson ACR, Professor of Conservation at Cardiff University, Chair of the B/560 Committee and UK Representative on the ISO/TC 349 Committee; Isobel Griffin ACR, Head of Conservation at National Galleries of Scotland and Icon Representative on the B/560 Committee; and Lorraine Finch ACR, Founding Director of LFCPC and Icon Representative on the B/560 Committee.

ICON'S PEOPLE

Welcome, new members

We would like to wish a warm welcome to all those who joined us in May, June and July this year. We look forward to seeing you at an Icon event soon!

Student

Serena Brooks	Mary-Anne Gooden
Jamie Chmara	Iona Hart
Alana Coates	Karen Haslewood
Josh Crowe	Karin Hignett
Susan Deutsch	Kirsten Hooton
Daisy Eaton	Emily Howe
Ruby Egger-Lipsett	John Labib
Ágnes Germán	Maria Lilleøre
Lucy Guthrie	Emily MacMillan
Kat Hicks	Fabio Mazzocchi
Anya Jun	Stefanie Mehrgardt
Özgür Kızıltaş	Meaghan
Veronica Madrigal	Monaghan
Julia Nijhoff	Alessandra
Jasmine Pike	Quadrelli
Robyn Rogers	Rhian Thoms
Adina Seitkazina	Nathan David Tutty
Abbie Smith	Eleanor Webster
Octavia Tam	
Elizabeth Taylor	Pathway
Andre Tham	Matthew Le Breton
Auriel Tiltman	Harriet Sharman
Jodie Vaughan	Connie Tang
Justin Venslovaitis	Luke Thurston
Melanie Wheeler	Emily Yates

Icon Intern

Miriam Parry
Megan Whiteley

Associate

Eve Andreski
Róisín Beirne
Paul Broomfield
Wing Yi Cheung

Supporter

Clare Lucy Blaxland
Thomas Boyle
Ellen Bradley
Rebecca Cox
Anya Goodwin
Ian Oxley
Lauren Phelan
Ella Sweasey

ICON WELCOMES TWO NEW BOARD MEMBERS

We are delighted to welcome two new Trustees who were co-opted onto Icon's Board in July this year.



Louise Hayward is an experienced Human Resources (HR) Director, having worked in a number of city firms across insurance, banking, asset management and strategic communications, as well as interim roles in higher education and publishing. Her experience includes leading on the people strategy for mergers and acquisition, scale-up, international expansion and initial public offerings. Other specialisms include leadership development, diversity, equality and inclusion, remuneration committees, regulatory change and complex employee relations. She holds a Masters in HR and is a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development (CIPD). She was previously a visiting lecturer in employment law for the CIPD's Employee Relations, Law & Practice course. With a keen interest in art history, Louise is currently studying art law.

Work status: Independent consultant

Location: Kent

Amber Law (ACA) is a Chartered Accountant and graduate of King's College London with experience of working across multiple public sector organisations. Following the completion of her accountancy training, she has led financial management and planning initiatives across a range of public sector programmes and services. Beyond her professional career, Amber has a keen interest in cultural heritage and supporting the conservation profession.

Work status: Employed

Location: London



CONGRATULATIONS, NEW ACRS



Congratulations to the following Icon members who were approved as Accredited Conservator-Restorers (ACRs) by Icon's Accreditation Committee in July 2025.

- Xsusha Flandro (Conservation Management – Architecture)
- Rowan Frame (Easel Paintings)
- Madeleine Marshall (Conservation Management - Archives)
- Miriam Orsini (Organic Objects)
- Kayleigh Spring (Objects)

FAREWELL TO BARBARA WILLS ACR - CELEBRATING 46 YEARS OF DEDICATION

In June, Barbara Wills ACR, Senior Organics Conservator, retired after an incredible 46 years of service at the British Museum.

Barbara always dreamt of becoming an artist and it was during her art studies at Bournemouth College that she was introduced to the world of conservation by one of her teachers. She went on to study conservation at a newly founded programme at Lincoln University. When she began her work in the organics conservation studio, the field was still in its infancy and Barbara often had to devise her own solutions. It was this blend of creativity, science and curatorial collaboration that sparked a lifelong passion.



©Trustees of the British Museum



Following a brief period at Plowden & Smith, Barbara joined the British Museum as an ethnographic conservator. Over the decades, she has worked on a remarkable range of projects, from a South American hammock to the intricate Ancient Egyptian crocodile armour which she treated not once, but twice. Her reflection on those experiences – how her approach to the same object evolved over time – underscored the depth of her thinking and her belief in the value of time and reflection in solving complex challenges.

Barbara will be sorely missed, not only by her colleagues in the Organics Conservation Team, but also across the wider conservation and collection care departments. And undoubtedly, by the countless objects she so lovingly and skilfully preserved.

We thank Barbara for her extraordinary dedication, innovation and the legacy she leaves behind. Wishing her all the best in her well-deserved retirement.

With thanks to Barbara's former colleagues at the Organics Conservation Studio, British Museum

Left top: Working on the Sherborne Cartonnage coffin (EA95851)

Left bottom: Early in her career at the conservation studios in Orsman Road

A TRIBUTE TO PAUL WILLARD (1958–2025)



Icon was saddened to hear that Paul Willard, Managing Director of Willard Conservation Ltd, passed away on 21 August 2025.

Paul joined the family business in the early 1980s and worked closely with his father, Jack Willard MBE, for more than 25 years. During his time at the company, Paul helped to develop a range of innovative tools and equipment that continue to play a vital role in the preservation of cultural heritage around the world.

Willard Conservation Ltd commented: "Paul took immense pride in the fact that the family-run business [based in Chichester, West Sussex] served not only local professionals but also leading institutions, museums and conservators internationally.

"He will be greatly missed, but his legacy will live on – both through the tools he helped create and the values he instilled in the company. We are proud to share that his daughter, Daisy, will be continuing the work of Willard Conservation, ensuring the company remains a trusted partner to the conservation community for years to come."

With thanks to Willard Conservation Ltd

NEW STAFF MEMBER JOINS ICON'S TEAM

We're delighted to introduce our members to Annie, who joined Icon's team in June as a Membership Officer.

She is working on events and supporting Icon's Groups, as well as handling day-to-day membership operations, and is a key point of contact for any membership enquiries via phone or email. She will also be running the



Find a Conservator service, ensuring the upkeep of the database.

"I've truly enjoyed my time at Icon so far and it's been wonderful connecting with so many of our members virtually," Annie commented. "I'm

looking forward to meeting even more members in person at the upcoming ACR conference and Winter

Reception. Further ahead, I'm excited to be involved in organising the Icon26 conference, which also promises to be an incredible event."

Since graduating from the University of Edinburgh with an MA (Hons) History of Art Degree, Annie has gained experience working in institutions such as the Design Museum, Ben Uri Gallery and Museum and, most recently, Tate, as the Membership Engagement and Loyalty Assistant.

NEWS FROM ICON'S GROUPS

DYNAMIC OBJECTS GROUP – 2025 EVENTS UPDATE



MICHAEL GOLDREI

The Dynamic Objects Group held its AGM in January at St Mary-at-Hill Church, London, as part of a one-day symposium. Committee members who had been temporarily appointed in 2024 were ratified at the meeting – Françoise Collanges (Chair), Matthew Read (Digital Officer) and Mostyn Gale (Secretary) – and a new treasurer, James Queay, was voted in, taking over the role from Dale Sarderson ACR.

'Automata: Now – Then – Future' was held in partnership with the Antiquarian Horological Society (AHS). Eight talks presented delegates with the conservation conundrum of keeping objects such as the Waddesdon Manor 18th-century elephant (Jonathan Betts) and Edward Ihnatowicz's 1970s robotic Senster (Marion Abt) both safe and partly or completely working.

Rachel Wicaksono and Matthew Read offered their thoughts on what an historical object such as the Bowes Museum 18th-century Silver Swan actually is, and how this question should inform its preservation as much as engage the conservators' responsibilities.

Two thought-provoking talks on



JONATHAN BETTS, NATIONAL TRUST

Top: A specially developed augmented reality escape game is demonstrated at The Vienna Clock Museum

Above: Jonathan Betts carries out conservation treatment of the Waddesdon elephant automaton, 2024

modern and contemporary art then led us to consider the relatively new field of time-based media conservation and the level of constraint that can weigh on a conservation project for a temporary exhibition, thanks to contributions from Christopher King (Tate), and Marie Ducimetière and Kristof Efferenn (Köln, Ludwig Museum).

The potential of new technologies was also highlighted by two projects: Raquel Racionero Núñez, Emanuel

Sterp Moga and Alicia Sánchez Ortiz from UCM's Faculty of Fine Arts outlined a project involving the 3-D scanning of a 19th-century automata painting, while Tabea Rude from the Vienna Clock Museum described how an escape game, with augmented reality for public engagement, proved challenging for the understanding and conservation of the clocks on display.

After chairing a panel discussion with the speakers, Jonathan Ashley Smith concluded the symposium by pointing out the large scale of what is or isn't accepted in terms of changing parts in conservation, depending on the professional field (historical objects or contemporary art, for example). He also highlighted the importance of people: how conservation is designed for people so they can engage with the artefact, and how this has a great impact on the treatment and preventive conservation of dynamic objects including the choices made about how and why it should run.

The day was followed by the AHS London lecture at the same venue and all the talks are available on Icon's YouTube channel, in the Dynamic Objects Group playlist.

On the 24 June, an online event was organised with the team of the Big Stuff Heritage conference. Big Stuff Heritage has been running since 2004, providing an international platform for discussing conservation of large industrial items which, for the main part, are also dynamic objects. Our group was delighted to discover more about the 2025 conference, held in parallel in Gand (Belgium) and Perth (Australia), and to take time to reflect on the conservation of dynamic industrial artefacts with the event organisers.

With thanks to Françoise Collanges

ICON TEXTILE GROUP: A REVIEW OF TCC@50



Delegates gather at the Kelvin Hall Centre in Glasgow for the TCC@50 Conference



Keynote presentation at TCC@50



TCC@50 took place in June at the Kelvin Centre for Conservation and Cultural Heritage Research, University of Glasgow. The conference marked the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Kelvin Centre's predecessor, the Textile Conservation Centre at Hampton Court Palace. Over two days, the conference sought to celebrate and challenge the diversity, maturity and creativity of our profession.

Here Megan Creamer, Textile Conservator at the Art Institute of Chicago and graduate of the MPhil Textile Conservation programme, shares a review of the conference:

"Listening and sharing experiences with textile conservators practicing, learning and teaching around the



Above: The TCC@50 Conference opens with a welcome address from Karen Thompson

world was a highlight of TCC@50 and echoed my experience at the Centre for Textile Conservation and Technical Art History (CTCTAH). The feeling of déjà vu while sitting in the row of Kelvin Hall's lecture theatre, surrounded by my 2018 cohort, was punctuated by reflections across time,

from the founding of the programme, to its future.

"Speakers were primarily from and working in the UK and North America, but Europe, Asia, Africa and South America were also present in the presentations and poster panels. Highlighting experiences that ranged from current students to some of the earliest graduates of the first era of the TCC felt very intentional, and the tone set by the moderators created an environment that felt both informal and personal, while also traditionally academic.

"Panels on history of practice and training were particularly impactful, working as a call-and-response across the two days of the conference, reflecting on how we learn and how we teach. Many conservators from the TCC-lineages of training reflected on programmatic influences – what worked and what didn't over many decades, with both humour and a critical eye, as they navigated their careers.

"Conservators from other training histories, and those working and researching in adjacent fields, pulled forward the foundational influence of Karen Finch with humour, poignance and deep dives into archival research to contextualise the history of textile conservation training and practice across the UK, Europe and North America. Practical tips for working with tricky materials, artists, interns, new technologies and each other were thoughtfully and enthusiastically shared.

"Conversations during breaks followed similar patterns, where discussions ranged from sharing DOI links and pictures of children and pets, to whether the last presentation was relevant to our practice or so fascinatingly unfamiliar that we hope to steer clear of it forever. There was great strength in having these intergenerational and intracommunity conversations to show the breadth and depth that can branch from the same roots, and where else we want to grow."

With thanks to Megan Creamer

CARE OF COLLECTIONS READING GROUP WELCOMES NEW MEMBERS



Launched in 2024, the Care of Collections Reading Group explores and discusses a range of articles with a remit covering preservation, collection care and collection-wide conservation, such as environmental monitoring, risk management, collection moves and more.

Led by Meagen Smith ACR, a committee member of Icon's Care of Collections Group (CCG) and Library and Archive Conservator at Lambeth Palace Library, the group provides an

accountability partner for reading new or established pieces of open access research as a method of keeping knowledge high and fresh. The reading group's discussions include applicability and suitability of described methods, relevance to our collections and ethical considerations.

Since December 2024, the group has met online five times (the first Tuesday of every other month) with an average of 20 UK and international participants, reading publications such as:

- Wickens, JDJ (2024). Preventive conservation: Continuously defining

itself at the crossroads of theory and practice. *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation*.

- Henderson, J and Lingle, A (2023). Touch decisions: For heritage objects. *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation*.
- Bastholm CJ, Andersen B, Frisvad JC, Oestergaard SK, Nielsen JL, Madsen AM, and Richter J (2024). A novel contaminant in museums? A cross-sectional study on xerophilic *Aspergillus* growth in climate-controlled repositories. *The Science of The Total Environment*.
- Pesme, C (2016). Presentation of tools helping to set a preservation

target for displaying light sensitive collection items. *Nuevo Mundo, Mundos Nuevos*.

All are welcome to attend, though if you haven't read the book, journal or article being discussed, you won't miss any spoilers: degradation, embrittlement and climate change!

The next meeting will be on 2 December at 16:00 BST. Attendance and voting is managed using the online Doodle website and is advertised through ConsDistList and LinkedIn. Further information requests can be addressed to iconcareofcollections@gmail.com

With thanks to Meagen Smith ACR



Gwenllian Thomas ACR



Rhian Thoms



Kim Thüsing



Sue Renault ACR



Susan Deutsch



Melangell Penrhys

SIWMAE, FROM ICON CYMRU! NEW GROUP EVENT COMING SOON



On May 22, Icon Cymru held its first open meeting, to hear directly from members about what they would like to see from this new national group. Subsequently, the committee has grown from two to six and the Group has received feedback about what events, locations, partnerships and support are important to its members.

Our first full meeting will be held soon to discuss suggestions put forward and we're excited to get started on planning our first event! Our aim is to provide advocacy, networking and development

opportunities for conservators and allied professionals working in and close to Wales and the Marches.

Below is a brief introduction to Icon Cymru's committee members:

Gwenllian Thomas ACR is the Group's Chair. She studied Care of Collections at Cardiff University and worked for the National Trust and the Science Museum in London for over 10 years before taking up a collections care conservator post in Edinburgh in 2017. Gwenllian was previously Secretary and later Chair of the Icon Scotland Group. In 2024,

she moved back home to South Wales to join Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales, where she is Senior Preventive Conservator.

Rhian Thoms, Icon Cymru's Secretary, is Administrator at Tiger Bay and the World heritage charity in Cardiff. She holds a BA in Ceramics from Cardiff School of Art and Design and an MSc in Care of Collections from Cardiff University. This is her first committee position and she is looking forward to networking with other conservators in Wales. Rhian is also a practicing artist, her latest work being in stained glass.

Kim Thüsing, Treasurer, has been Senior Conservator, Textiles at Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales since 2005. Originally from Hamburg in Germany, Kim studied at the Textile Conservation Centre, graduating in 2000. She has also worked at the National Trust Textile Conservation Studio, the Clíodna Devitt studio in Dublin and at the British Museum.

Sue Renault ACR is retired Chief Conservator, Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum Wales. As Icon Cymru's Social Media Officer, Sue is looking forward to raising the profile of the excellent conservation work happening in Wales by

sharing members' stories on Icon Cymru Wales sections of Instagram and LinkedIn.

Susan Deutsch is the Group's Student and Emerging Conservator Representative, currently in her second year at Cardiff University completing an MSc in Conservation Practice. Her academic background is in anthropology and she has previously worked in the publishing, literary and non-profit sectors before discovering her passion for conservation.

Melangell Penrhys is the Group's Events Assistant and started her conservation life as a textile conservator with an MA from the

Textile Conservation Centre. Melangell has had experience working as a conservator in museums, nationally and internationally, and is also freelance. She currently works as National Trust Regional Conservator in Wales and Project Conservator for Kedleston Hall Museum (South Asian Collection).

Find out more on the Icon website and follow us on Instagram (@icon_cymru_wales), LinkedIn (@Icon Cymru), or email us at iconcymruwales@gmail.com. We welcome your stories and photos to share via our socials, in English or Welsh.

With thanks to Gwenllian Thomas ACR



Above: Delegates at the NHSF conference enjoying the poster session

BRIDGING HERITAGE AND INNOVATION: A DAY OF INSIGHT, DIALOGUE AND COLLABORATION FOR HERITAGE SCIENCE GROUP



On 11 July, Icon's Heritage Science Group (HSG) supported the National Heritage Science Forum's first 'Trends in Heritage Science' conference, part of a series of events showcasing how heritage science research and innovation address key societal challenges.

The conference, held at UCL, opened with talks delving into the vital intersections between economic models and heritage science, laying the groundwork for a day rich in interdisciplinary exchange, highlighting how economic thinking can inform heritage science practice.

Attendees then joined discussions on sustainable retrofit trends and the growing role of digital technologies in heritage science. These sessions sparked thoughtful debate on how innovation can be harmonised with heritage science, ensuring that heritage remains resilient and relevant in a rapidly changing world.

The lunch poster session buzzed with energy as researchers presented cutting-edge projects and emerging methodologies, prompting conversations and connections among participants.

The afternoon featured three interactive workshops:

- A deep dive into the RICHeS resources and platform for heritage professionals.
- A session on damage function modelling, equipping attendees with techniques to assess and mitigate risks to cultural assets.
- A speed mentoring session tailored for emerging professionals, organised and led by HSG.

The mentoring session offered early career participants the opportunity to network with experienced heritage science professionals. Discussion topics included challenges in current projects; navigating careers in research and development, academia or entrepreneurship; and

securing grants and fellowships.

Between mentoring, attendees participated in networking, emotional mapping and reflection activities, designed to foster collaborative thinking and open, empathetic dialogue in a relaxed and informal atmosphere.

The day concluded with a forward-looking session on E-RIHS (European Research Infrastructure for Heritage Science). Speakers emphasised its crucial role in enabling cross-border collaboration and funding for shared challenges in the heritage science community.

As the sun set, a conference declaration was adopted, underscoring the central message of the day: collaboration must be at the heart of research. With spirits high and minds inspired, many attendees wrapped up the day with a well-earned pint, celebrating a successful and enriching event.

With thanks to Francesca Azolini and Nicola Grahamslaw

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