

Having benefited from the generosity of the Stationers foundation, my gratitude in being able to pursue my desired craft permeated all aspects of my remaining time at Camberwell College of Arts; having received the Major award in late 2016, one of the first ways I utilised the grant was by funding a 4-week Summer placement at Canterbury Cathedral Library and Archives.

Though my pathway specialism was in the Conservation of Books and Archival materials, this placement provided excellent grounding in project management of both preventive and interventive treatments, with an emphasis of appreciating the holistic context of the object within the collection. Having solely worked with books and their associated storage until this juncture, this opportunity provided the chance to work with new materials and formats including parchment charters some of which dated back until the 15th century.

Working in the studio and archives, based in the old Monks dormitory, a profound sense of connection to the past was never far from the mind. The project I oversaw was the conservation of a 16th century legal text, an edition from the printer and publisher T.Read. He was based in Whitechapel and I discovered he was recorded as 'a well-affected jobbing printer' in the 1922 volume *'A Dictionary Of The Printers And Booksellers Who Were At Work In England, Scotland And Ireland From 1668 To 1725'* by Henry R. Plomer. The work itself was a donation to the archive from a member of the public, and though I later found the text was still in widespread circulation, it was a pleasure to dedicate time to restoring the functionality of the binding.

The process itself had numerous stages, with each impacting on the following and contributing to the final finish of the binding. Some of the most gratifying elements of the project included the consolidation of the original boards and the attachment of the new leather spine; these elements would ensure that the boards could withstand further handling, and prevent acid hydrolysis from within the red rotten original leather surface layer from flaking and placing the volume at further risk.



New leather attached and shaped around endcaps and supports

With the Summer placement comprising the final aspect of first year, the second year syllabus swiftly commenced. The Camberwell program is designed in such a way that students benefit from a balance of practical and theoretical elements, which are assessed over the course of the year. Principally these assessments took the form of written submission, but other methods of assessment were also employed.

In order to prepare student conservators for the workplace, it was imperative that we spent as much time cultivating our skills across a diverse range of treatments as was possible, and evidence of this venture was recorded for future reference in our own personal development journals, which comprised workshop notes and records of treatment progress.

During the second year we had the opportunity to develop skills collectively within our pathway specialisms with the support of visiting lecturers. These workshops were invaluable to building our portfolio of experiences and learning techniques from our peers. A small selection of the workshops undertaken over the course of the year included; preparation of solvent set tissue, leather toning, the manufacture of gels, treatment of parchment and vellum documents, calcium phytate treatment, and identification of photographic processes and their conservation.

As a prior graduate of a postgraduate diploma in Conservation of Historic objects, one of my personal interests was how treatment methodology differs between materials; a particularly enjoyable articulation of this flexible approach was necessary when covering the treatment of vellum and parchment; due to their unique method of manufacture, these materials are very hard wearing and under the right conditions can remain in excellent condition for centuries. However, though the material is robust, it is also extremely vulnerable to damp, humid conditions and biological attack.

In order to treat such vulnerable materials, which can easily warp, discolour, and in extreme cases cause the collagen to gelatinise, alternatives to aqueous methods are necessary. In the case of the documents myself and fellow student Joey Shuker, we utilised controlled exposure to humidity Gore-tex humidification packs, which permits only harmless water vapour to pass through the layers. The attached wax seals were protected with polyester barrier pouches, and after monitored humidification, the relaxed documents were removed and allowed to tension dry using both the magnet board and pin and board methods of tension drying. We also had the opportunity to trial a variety of suitable adhesives including gelatin, gelatin mousse and isinglass as well as materials for parchment repair including parchment, toned Japanese tissue and goldbeaters skin.



1822 'Probate of the will of Philip Gram' 477mm x 650mm, parchment; utilising the pin and board method of tension drying post- controlled humidification using a sandwich of Gore-tex and capillary matting

To complement the range of conservation techniques developed over the course of the year, it was imperative that we gain an intrinsic appreciation for the styles of binding which we may be required to work on. This was highlighted through instruction in a variety of styles, including Gothic and Carolingian binding styles led by Jurgen Vorvoorst, Conservator at the National Archives.

As a keen bookbinder I relished the opportunity to attempt these structures, but one of the most gratifying experiences for me was being instructed in how stationary bindings were constructed; having been privy to the contents of the archives at Stationer's Hall, I was particularly excited to attempt a structure which epitomises the dual importance of design and functionality so well.

One of the most beneficial aspects of the course was the ongoing relationship between students and institutions across London; over the two year period, we had the opportunity to visit varied collections ranging from the botanical samples of the Linnean Society to the large scale conservation programmes of institutions such as the National Archives, and many more. During the second year, students on the Books and Archival materials pathway were fortunate enough to continue our long term placement at the Book Conservation department of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

As a preface to provide context to our final module, we also had the opportunity to experience a masterclass led by instructors relative to our specialism, which lasted the duration of two weeks. For those who specialised in conservation of historic books this entailed a workshop led by Professor Nicholas Pickwoad on the history and development of codex styles within the western European and how styles changed in response to the influence of the printing press. This was hosted at Lambeth Palace who permitted access to the collection to cross-examine features, and allowed us to develop in depth knowledge about the extent to which the book trade drove stylistic changes, and how features of a binding may indicate the school to which the original binder belonged.

For the final project itself, which made up much of our grade, I was given the opportunity to treat a 16th century gothic style codex which contained several of the works of eminent theologian Jean Calvin generously allocated from the Sion College collection of Lambeth Palace. Over the six weeks allotted for treatment, I was provided the opportunity to study the unique features of the volume; bound in wooden boards with early examples of stuck on endbands which utilised parchment manuscript waste, treatment of this volume was an excellent opportunity to put the skills gained over the course of the degree to the test, and challenged me to devise appropriate treatment solutions to address paper repair, structural weakness, loss of original leather and ethical considerations surrounding the removal of surface salts, and whether or not to infill areas of original damage.

My approach to the treatment was to adopt an attitude of 'minimal intervention in context', by which I addressed each individual concern with a holistic view of what would enable the long term stability of the volume. To that end, the most time consuming and ultimately rewarding element of treatment was undoubtedly the toning and preparation of new leather for the process of rebacking. As there was substantial leather loss, the treatment entailed the removal of the original spinepiece and the reinsertion of the new leather to which the original spine piece was to be remounted.



Codex before treatment



Codex after treatment

Due to the financial support with which the Major Award provided me, I was able to make the most of the opportunities afforded to me by living in London. This included providing assistance on behalf of Shepherds

Bookbinders at the 2016 Shine Media Awards where I led a bookbinding workshop; at four week placement which I organised myself at Rooks Books, a bookbinding and craft studio which specialised in the production of bespoke Leather goods; enabled attendance to numerous workshops hosted by independent bodies and professionals such as the Independent Paper Conservators Group, and attendance at the 2017 Ligatus Conference.

One of the opportunities I am proudest of is becoming the Postgraduate Student Ambassador for Camberwell College, where I was able to curate content in the form of blog posts and newsletters addressed to the wider postgraduate community. As a Conservation student, many of the pieces I produced were aimed at raising awareness of conservation concerns for an art student audience, and giving advice about selection of materials. I also worked with the Camberwell College student community and produced an article which gained the notice of the ICRI and was shared publicly on their social media accounts.

This role also allowed me to produce interdisciplinary events including visits to the British Library and Tate archives, with an aim to encourage cross-disciplinary networking and educational support for professionals within the wider arts and crafts community. It also provided a platform for students to disseminate knowledge; a paper marbling workshop was led by my classmate Solange Masher, which I photographed and wrote up as an instructional article so Camberwell and the wider community could attempt this traditional craft skill.



Examples of student attempts at paper marbling

Having studied at Camberwell has meant that I have been extremely fortunate to gain a diverse range of skills, whilst having the opportunity to network within the wider professional community, and supplement my knowledge with practical experiences in adjacent environments such as binderies, archives and craft businesses. In addition to this it has meant that during my studies I have been able to make use of the extensive resources of renowned institutions such as the British Library, Lambeth Palace and the London Library to support the growth of my abilities and foster a more complete understanding of the discipline.

I can attest to the fact that these experiences will support me through my further career as even in my first year at Camberwell, I was fortunate enough to have been able to complete a short contract post with the National Conservation Service. Similarly, the internships both arranged for me and those I had negotiated myself have been hugely influential in the expansion of my professional portfolio; the skills I have gained

facilitated by the Stationers Foundation have well-equipped me for my first professional contract as a conservator.

I am happy to say that as of July 17th, I have been working full-time for the Berkshire Record Office as a Project Conservator for the Coleshill estate. This contract is 9-months in duration, with the possibility of work leading to further projects; guided by my manager, Sue Hourigan, I have continued to learn and develop my skills – this contract has provided an ideal environment in which to learn as the majority of the collection consists of maps and plans, which vary in material from paper, parchment to tracing paper.

The associated treatments I have used and been taught to apply have built on the foundation laid by the experiences I gained on the course; particularly the use of cyclododecane, which I am in the process of developing an alternate method of application, the use of gels, and the utilisation of remoistenable tissues which were the core element on which we were tested during the practical component of the interview process.

Having benefited from the resources available at Camberwell College, I selected the adhesive poly(2-ethyl-2-oxazoline), known by the trade name Aquazol, for a preparatory repair for tracing paper as I recognised that the faster evaporation rate facilitated by the volatile alcohol component of the material would aid adhesion to the repair area; my decision was influenced by the knowledge that tracing papers are somewhat hydrophobic and the desire to minimise exposure to moisture whilst creating a repair which was not visually distracting, a challenging task given that we only had 15 minutes.

Subsequently, I have learned I was the only candidate for the position to make this material selection; I am thrilled to be working in an environment which challenges me to develop my material knowledge, and continues to support me to develop my skills as a conservator. The range of materials is ideal for a new graduate and I feel extremely fortunate that I am now able to develop my skills both treating flat works in addition to books and archival materials. The remit of the project is such that I also have the opportunity to conduct my own supported research, learn from colleagues, and manage staff and a team of volunteers.

To conclude, the ability to learn at Camberwell has outfitted me with a body of experience which provided the foundation for entry into a career in Conservation. With the support of the Stationers Foundation, I have endeavoured to develop my craft and utilise experiences which ensure that these skills have been continually honed. Each opportunity which I have had the privilege to experience has fuelled my desire to develop further, and encouraged me to work harder. Without the input of the Foundation, I do not think that it would have been possible for me to experience such rapid progression, and I think the chances of my completing the course were highly unlikely due to my financial background.

I cannot thank the Foundation and the Company enough for believing in me and supporting me through my development; it is a gesture which I will never forget and has made everything I am now experiencing possible. I am immeasurably grateful for the support and look forward to furthering my association with the Company after I am made Free in the November ceremony.

Many thanks,

Aimée Crickmore

Recipient of the Major Award

Recent Camberwell MA Conservation: Books and Archival Materials Graduate

Archives Conservator at Berkshire Record Office

Links to events and articles

'Maps and the 20th Century: Drawing the Line': <http://blogs.arts.ac.uk/pgcommunity/2017/02/02/visit-to-the-maps-in-the-british-library-20th-century-exhibition-pg-community-tour/>

'MA Conservation's 5 things to consider before you display your art':
<http://blogs.arts.ac.uk/pgcommunity/2017/04/24/ma-conservations-5-things-to-consider-before-you-display-your-art/>

Tate Print and Drawing Rooms Visit: <http://blogs.arts.ac.uk/pgcommunity/2017/07/06/reporting-back-on-a-pg-community-visit-to-tate-archives/>

Paper marbling workshop: <http://blogs.arts.ac.uk/pgcommunity/2017/03/15/marbling-paper-a-how-to-guide/>

'Do No Harm' article (Conservation ethics and similarities to the Hippocratic Oath):
<http://blogs.arts.ac.uk/camberwell/2017/06/07/camberwell-cameo-do-no-harm-aimee-crickmore-explains/>