



Postgraduate Diploma in Conservation of Books & Library Materials

Student report for *The Stationers' Foundation* – October 2015

Rachael Seculer-Faber

My second year of studies at West Dean has consisted of a busy and exciting programme of conservation work, academic work, experience of making techniques and visits, which have combined to provide me with a thorough consolidation and extension of the skills and knowledge gained in my Graduate Diploma year.

The five-week work placement was a particularly useful aspect of the programme for gaining experience of conservation 'in the real world'. Based at The Hive in Worcester, my placement within Worcestershire Archive & Archaeology Service involved the conservation of several Local History-related items from the Library's own collection. I found it fascinating to work in such an innovative institution as The Hive, which houses a joint public and university library (the first in Europe) alongside an archive & archaeology service, café and various council services. This approach attracts users from all walks of life, some coming to read, others attending events with their children and babies, and others taking advantage of the Playstations, internet access or simply the fact that the library is a welcoming space in which to spend an evening. Working at The Hive caused me to consider what the role of libraries is, and presented interesting ideas for a way forward at a time when many libraries are struggling to survive.

The college study tour to Paris provided valuable insight into book and paper conservation practices within a number of different organisations, with visits to both private conservation studios and national institutions. In addition, a visit to the INPF conservation school provided an interesting glimpse into the life of our conservation-student peers across the Channel.

Throughout the year, essays, presentations and science assignments enabled me to undertake independent research and extend my knowledge of a range of topics. These included: the effects of excess moisture on library collections, exhibition lighting and the risks associated with excessive light exposure, research methodology, presentations covering my work placement (see above) and historical book model project (see below), science assignments on the topics of entropy, gels and polymers, and a practical analytical assignment involving the use of X-ray Fluorescence (XRF) Spectrometry for pigment analysis.

In my final term at West Dean, I decided to revisit this analytical method as the basis for my Postgraduate Research Project. I conducted XRF pigment analysis on the marbled endpapers of a



selection of volumes from the House's Old Library, presenting my findings in a presentation to tutors and a 4,000 word written report, including background research on marbling patterns and the history of marbled paper. This project was fascinating as my analysis both confirmed the presence of pigments known to have been used for marbling (such as yellow ochre and vermilion) and found evidence for the use of a white pigment (zinc white), not mentioned in any of the literature.



As far as my conservation projects are concerned, I worked on six books during the academic year, the first being the completion of a 1706 Holy Bible on which I had commenced work in my Graduate Diploma year. I then carried out two new projects, both commenced under the guidance of Book Conservator Karen Vidler, during a three-day course focussing on the conservation of leather bindings. Both items belong to the Admiralty Library in Portsmouth, the first being an 1835 volume of *Hardy's Register of Ships & Supplement* in a decorative binding with pink silk doublures, originally presented to the Royal Naval Staff College as a royal gift. The detached boards of this volume provided an opportunity to practise a quick and robust board-reattachment method, with seven aerocotton sutures being adhered to the spine of the textblock and into slits in the boards which had been cut with a scalpel.



Before treatment

Front opening.
Note the purple-brown inner hinge of Japanese repair paper, tinted with acrylics to closely match the shade of the leather.



After treatment



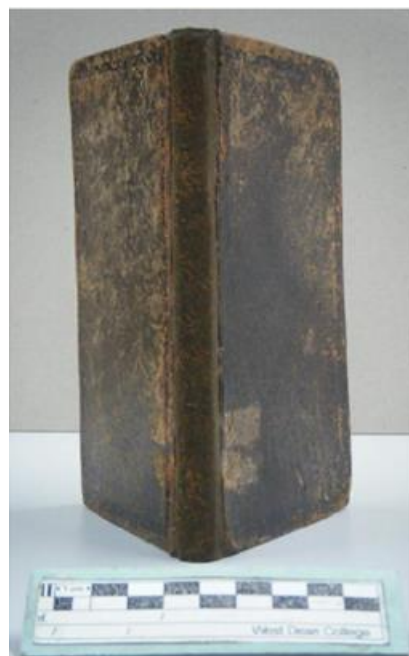
The second volume was a handwritten and hand-coloured signal book dated 1794, showing the flags used by various naval vessels:



The damaged spine-covering of this volume provided an opportunity to practise a more complex book conservation treatment known as a leather re-back, in which a piece of archival-quality leather was dyed to match the original leather, pared at the edges, and then adhered to the spine and boards, having lifted a few centimetres of the original leather at the edge of each board to allow for its insertion.



Before treatment

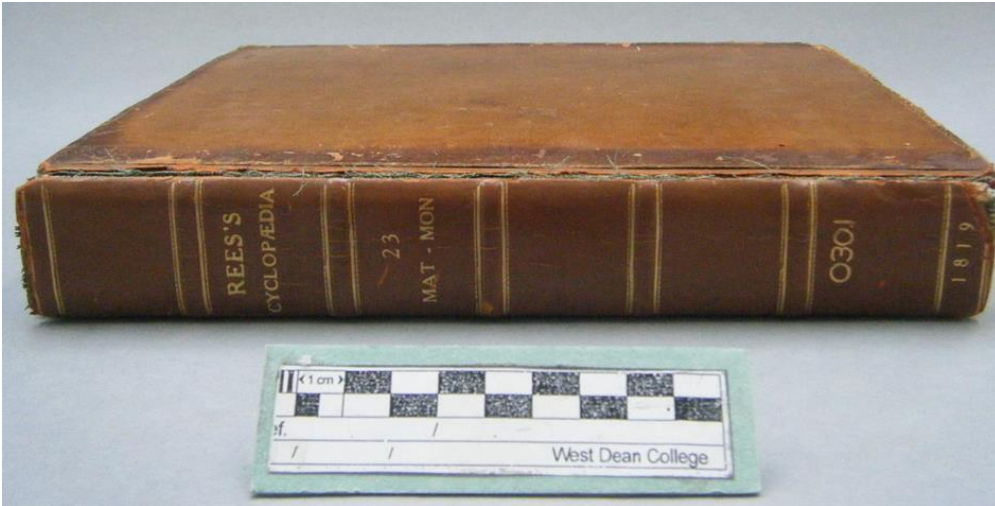


After treatment



The next project was a group effort, with each member of the class completing one volume of a set of Rees's *Cyclopaedia* belonging to the Royal College of Physicians. Completing a group project such as this required me to ensure that my materials and techniques were co-ordinated with others' so that the volumes of the set were repaired in a consistent and aesthetically-harmonious manner.

Before treatment

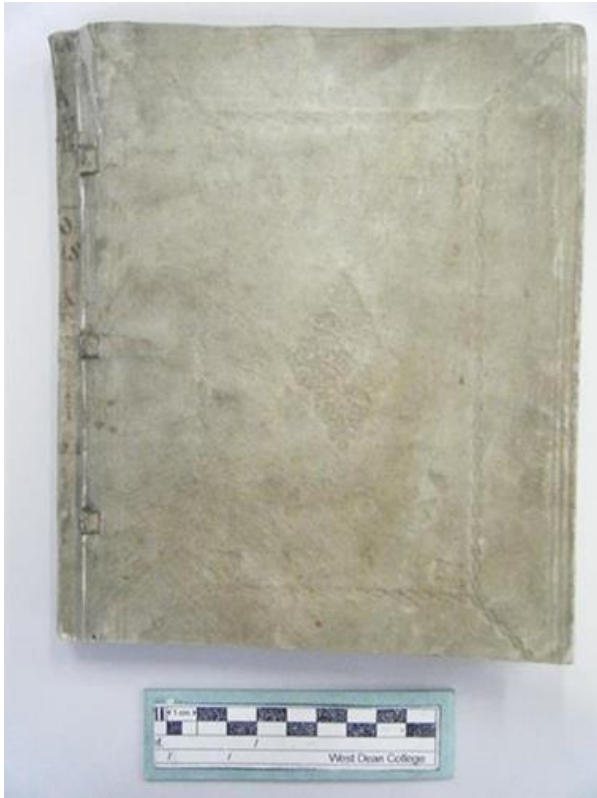


After treatment – cleaning, paper repairs, leather consolidation, corner repairs, removal of previous re-back leather, board reattachment, new leather re-back and label, repair of inner hinges.



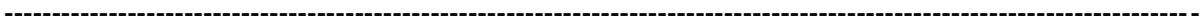
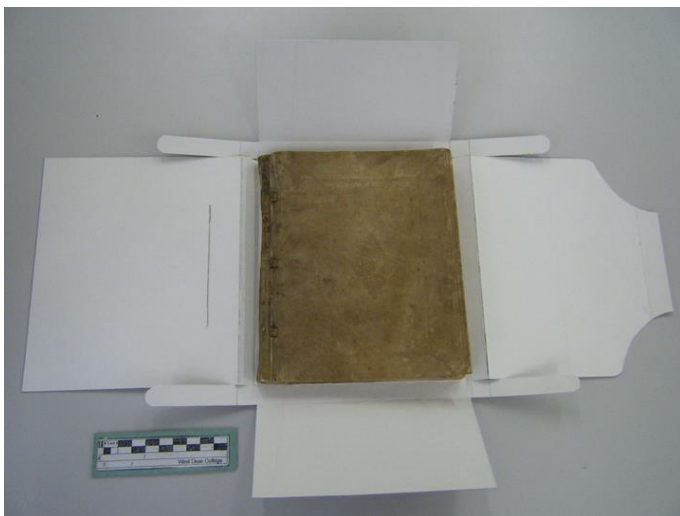


An important part of the practical book conservation work during the Postgraduate Diploma at West Dean is the treatment of parchment bindings, as parchment is a material that requires special care due to its susceptibility to damage. I gained experience of working with hot gelatine and gelatine mousse as adhesives (favoured as they bring less moisture into contact with the parchment than wheat starch paste), and of reshaping warped parchment covers and turn-ins with the use of very gentle humidification and gradual pressure.



Buchſen Meifterein ('Mastery of Rifles') after treatment, showing loss infill at top left corner (prepared from a laminate of two layers of 8gsm kozo paper and Evacon-R adhesive, tinted with acrylics. Adhered with gelatine mousse.)

Phase-box constructed to protect the book:



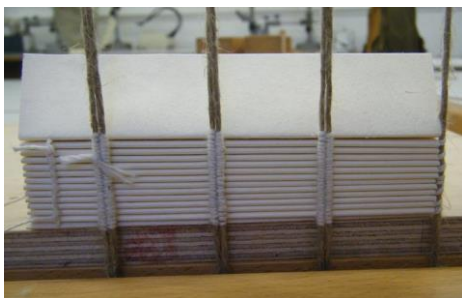


In addition to book conservation treatments, the Postgraduate Diploma also included the continuation of bookbinding practice, as commenced in the Graduate Diploma year. Springback bindings and mediaeval binding structures were both studied, with the view that making a book structure oneself allows a better understanding of its specific conservation requirements.



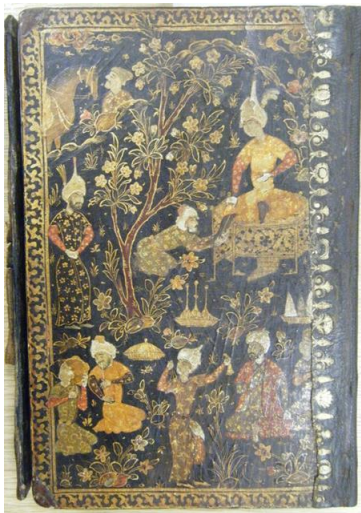
Springback bindings produced under the guidance of visiting lecturer Richard Nichols. Mine is far right.

Images from mediaeval bookbinding workshop taught by Juergen Vervoorst, for which we joined the second year Book Conservation students at Camberwell College of Arts, to create cutaway models of Carolingian and Gothic style bindings.



Finally, perhaps the most exciting part of the Postgraduate Diploma for me was the historical book model project, for which we were required to “make an accurate model of a chosen historical book structure” and to give a presentation to the rest of the department involving “critical evaluation and discussion” of the chosen structure.

I decided to use this project to explore my passion for Islamic bookbinding by recreating a 15th-16th century Persian lacquer binding. Although held in high regard by both art historians and non-experts for their beautiful decoration, these books and their making are rarely considered in structural terms, nor do any attempts seem to have previously been made by modern bookbinders or conservators to recreate one. This project was therefore an exciting and challenging opportunity for me to ‘try something new’ and to develop a rare understanding of the actual structure and making processes of lacquer bindings. I carried out several visits to the library of the Royal Asiatic Society in London to examine bindings from their collection, and ultimately based my model on the binding of MS. CODRINGTON/READE NO 278. BOX 107, a binding with polychrome figural decoration in the early Safavid style.



The original book, my model, and (below) detail of the Islamic-style woven endbands



Following on from my attendance at the *TIMA Introduction to Islamic Codicology* short course in 2013 (with the help of a Francis Mathew Stationers’ Company Scholarship), I have furthered my special interest in the books and manuscripts of the Islamic world by completing the Persian lacquer binding project discussed above and by obtaining a Distinction in the Islamic Art module of the *Postgraduate Diploma in Asian Art* at SOAS, University of London. I am currently enrolled on a Farsi language evening class at Oxford, and hope to find opportunities to continue learning about and working with Islamic books and manuscripts in my future career.

I am currently employed as a Library Assistant at several academic and public libraries in Oxfordshire, and hope to enrol on a part-time MA in Library & Information Studies once I have gained the required work experience in the sector. My eventual aim is to combine this experience of customer-facing library work with the conservation, preservation and book-history knowledge gained from my studies at West Dean, by going into Rare Books & Special Collections Librarianship.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Stationers’ Foundation for the generous assistance which has enabled me to attend this course. I have learnt a huge amount about the conservation of books – in terms of developing both subject knowledge and practical skill – and feel that I could not have gained so much knowledge and experience within a year at anywhere other than West Dean.