

The generous award I received from the Stationers' Foundation has permitted me to complete the MA Conservation Studies in Books and Library Materials at West Dean College. The MA year was a crucial step in my trajectory towards becoming an accredited benchwork conservator: It has exposed me to more complex treatments and projects to nuance my decision making, as well as undertaking a work placement and completing a research project for my MA thesis.


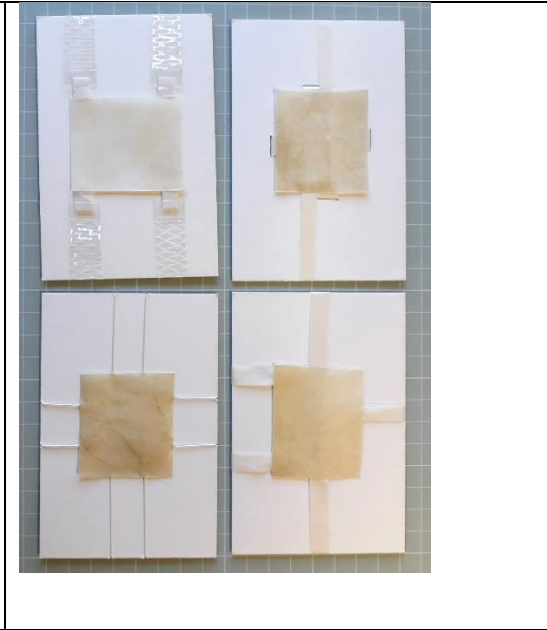
## Conservation projects and historic bookbinding

### *Conservation*

The Masters year advanced my knowledge and experience of conservation projects through taught sessions and experience at the workbench.

Among the important topics covered was the interaction between paper and water: From the more interventive option of immersing paper in water, to humidifying an object, to considering the effects of relative humidity in the atmosphere – this interaction is prevalent in a conservator's work. We established suitability for each technique, reinforcing that all conservation measures should be carried out because they are suitable rather than simply following something which has been taught.

Learnings from these sessions were underpinned by workshops with visiting tutors: We were fortunate to spend time learning the fundamentals of East Asian lining techniques, tools and materials with Susan Catcher (V&A). We also participated in a workshop with Ruth Stevens (Sussex Conservation Consortium), covering all stages of the calcium phytate treatment process - an interventive measure but useful for understanding the science behind the degradation of iron gall ink. Historic and contemporary conservation of parchment was covered with Lara Artemis and Mariluz Beltran de Guevara.

	
<p><i>Fig 1. My wallpaper sample with Japanese-style lining mounted on a drying board</i></p>	<p><i>Fig 2. Experimenting with parchment mounting techniques using melinex hinges,</i></p>

<i>parchment strips, twisted thread and Japanese tissue strips</i>
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### *Historic bookbinding*

Workshops covering historic bookbinding structures were also a key part of the year. Making models of historic structures is an excellent practice for understanding how these structures function and how materials were used by the binders. This knowledge then feeds into more robust conservation decision making.

Historic structures explored with visiting tutors included Coptic and Ethiopian structures with John Mumford, and Gothic and Limp Vellum for Conservation with Shaun Thompson (Cambridge University Library). I was inspired by the adaptation of the historic limp vellum structure for use in conservation, due to its non-adhesive, non-invasive qualities. This led me to experiment with the “K-118” binding championed by Bruce Levy, as another example of a historic structure which can be adapted for use in conservation and I look forward to implementing these learnings in my future career.



*Fig 3. My model Coptic binding complete with bookmarks and toggle fastenings*



*Fig 4. My limp vellum for conservation binding, a non-adhesive structure which can be easily disbound again*

### *Client work*

A significant project undertaken this year was the conservation of a large album binding belonging to the Admiralty Library. This allowed me to interact with a real client and propose a treatment to meet their needs. This project had more complex facets than some of the objects I had worked on previously. The binding exhibited signs of mould, necessitating appropriate risk assessment paperwork and use of PPE. As the album weighed 10kg, it was essential to propose appropriate treatments and materials which could withstand the weight of the object, as well as handling

considerations during treatment. The large dimensions and real-life implications of working on the binding gave me the opportunity to nuance my approach to conservation and conservation measures.

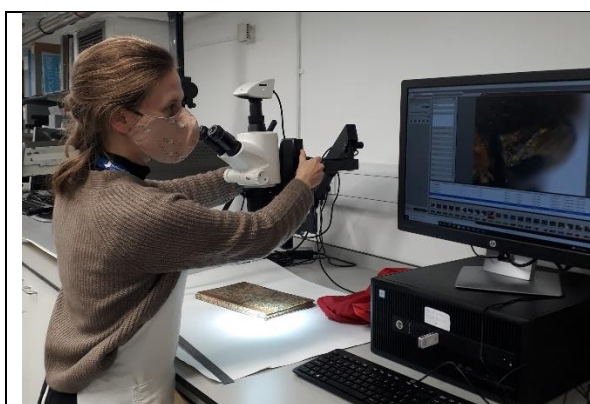
### Work placement

As part of the MA course, in February and March this year, I was privileged to complete a work placement in the conservation studio at the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh.

The first project I undertook was surveying and rehousing the MacKinnon photographic materials collection, depicting Scottish life between the 1840s and the 1940s. While the photographs and albums were being digitised for greater accessibility, conservation was involved to box them for safe storage at the library. I was delighted to participate in a project which brought together my interests in both historic books and photographs, and gave me practical exposure to early photographic techniques such as Daguerreotypes, ambrotypes and autochromes which I previously had only theoretical knowledge of. It confirmed my conviction that I will continue to pursue photograph conservation in my career alongside my book skills.

My work placement overlapped with the preparation and opening of the 'Treasures' exhibition, a fortunate coincidence allowing me to see and understand the hard work that goes into such an endeavour – not to mention the excitement of seeing a Gutenberg bible come through the conservation studio! I also had the opportunity to have my own conservation work on display by repairing and mounting a poster for the 'Words of Refuge' exhibition case outside the Library's reading rooms.

My time at the National Library of Scotland was rich and varied: From spending time with the preventive conservator, to seeing how sustainability goals are influencing innovation in book housing, the placement provided vital professional development after the impact of Covid-19 on studio visits during my studies.



*Fig 5. Examining the tail endband of a volume under the microscope in order to replicate the endband with archival materials at the head*



*Fig 6. Repairing a translucent paper document using isinglass adhesive*

**MA research project**

Following on from an interest in book board reattachment techniques from my Graduate Diploma year at West Dean College, I am pursuing research into a novel reattachment technique which has not yet been tested in book conservation literature. My aim is to contribute a beneficial piece of research to the known body of tested techniques a book conservator can employ: Providing evidence of the technique's performance, allowing conservators to make a more informed decision. While I cannot yet discuss the results, the technique shows signs of acceptable durability for use in conservation and meets some definitions of minimal intervention.

**Conclusion**

I would like to give my sincerest thanks to the Stationers' Foundation for enabling my MA year at West Dean College. The experience gained on the course has been vital for my future career and I have received an offer of permanent employment in a Conservator role following completion of my research project.

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