

# A Year of Book Conservation at West Dean College, United Kingdom

**Bronwen Glover**

**An International Specialised Skills Fellowship**

The George Alexander Foundation



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# i. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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From September 2015 to July 2016 Bronwen Glover, with the assistance of the International Specialised Skills Institute, had the opportunity to attend the Conservation of Books and Library Materials Graduate Diploma Program at West Dean College in the United Kingdom. The aim of attending this program was for the Fellow to gain an internationally recognised qualification in cultural heritage conservation, specifically relating to books and bound materials, to further her career in the field. Prior to departing for this endeavour, Bronwen had been part of the Collection Care team at the State Library of New South Wales (SLNSW) in Sydney since 2011. The Fellow's previous qualifications include a Diploma in Collections Conservation and Management from Sir Sandford Fleming College in Peterborough, Canada, and experience working in cultural heritage conservation in various institutions in Canada.

While there are two institutions in Australia which offer training various aspects of the conservation of cultural materials, there are none that are specifically focused on the conservation of books and library materials. Therefore, it is essential to seek this training at overseas institutions. Australian institutions, including the SLNSW, hold some very rare and valuable bound collections and their conservation and preservation by trained professionals is essential for their continued value and use both to academic researchers and the public who learn from and enjoy this special material.

West Dean College is an internationally recognised institution and its graduates are appreciated the world over. The Fellow found that their reputation is well deserved and felt that she gained valuable skills and knowledge during her time studying there. This report will cover many of the aspects of hands on and theoretical conservation that the Fellow experienced throughout the program, as well as interesting points about the scientific and ethical knowledge gained. The program also included valuable field outings during which cultural material conservation could be witnessed in action.

The Fellow would recommend pursuing this program to anyone interested in a career in the conservation of books and library materials, although this choice should be carefully considered as this valuable field can be fairly narrow. However, the Fellow is confident that Australia's bound cultural heritage is well appreciated within the country and continued support for its conservation will be given by the government and institutions concerned. Upon her return to Australia, the Fellow will resume her post at the SLNSW where she looks forward to sharing her newly gained knowledge and experience with her colleagues in the Collections Care branch as well as colleagues state and nation-wide, and continuing to learn from them as well, continuing the preservation of these valuable assets.

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## ii. ABBREVIATIONS/ACRONYMS

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<b>SLNSW:</b>	State Library of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia
<b>AICCM:</b>	Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material – The professional body for conservators of cultural heritage in Australia
<b>ICON:</b>	The Institute of Conservation – The professional body for conservators of cultural heritage in the UK
<b>UK:</b>	United Kingdom

## iii. DEFINITIONS

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### **EVA**

Ethyl Vinyl Acetate – A conservation grade adhesive

### **XRF**

X-ray Fluorescence – A piece of analytical equipment used to examine material on an elemental level

### **FTIR**

Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy – A piece of analytical equipment used to obtain information about material on a molecular level

# 1. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Bronwen Glover thanks the following individuals and organisations that have generously given of their time and expertise to assist, advise and guide her through this Fellowship program.

## **Awarding Body – International Specialised Skills Institute (ISS Institute)**

The International Specialised Skills Institute (ISS Institute) is an independent, national organisation. In 2015 it is celebrating twenty-five (25) years working with Australian governments, industry education institutions and individuals to enable them to gain enhanced skills, knowledge and experience in traditional trades, professions and leading edge technologies.

At the heart of the ISS Institute are our individual Fellows. Under the Overseas Applied Research Fellowship Program the Fellows travel overseas. Upon their return, they are required to pass on what they have learnt by:

- Preparing a detailed report for distribution to government departments, industry and educational institutions
- Recommending improvements to accredited educational courses
- Delivering training activities including workshops, conferences and forums.

Over 300 Australians have received Fellowships, across many industry sectors. In addition, recognised experts from overseas conduct training activities and events. To date, 25 leaders in their field have shared their expertise in Australia.

According to Skills Australia's 'Australian Workforce Futures: A National Workforce Development Strategy 2010'.

*Australia requires a highly skilled population to maintain and improve our economic position in the face of increasing global competition, and to have the skills to adapt to the introduction of new technology and rapid change. International and Australian research indicates we need a deeper level of skills than currently exists in the Australian labour market to lift productivity. We need a workforce in which more people have skills and knowledge, but also multiple and higher level skills and qualifications. Deepening skills and knowledge across all occupations is crucial to achieving long-term productivity growth. It also reflects the recent trend for jobs to become more complex and the consequent increased demand for higher-level skills. This trend is projected to continue regardless of whether we experience strong or weak economic growth in the future. Future environmental challenges will also create demand for more sustainability related skills and knowledge across a range of industries and occupations.*

In this context, the ISS Institute works with our Fellows, industry and government to identify specific skills and knowledge in Australia that require enhancing, where accredited courses are not available through Australian higher education institutions or other Registered Training Organisations. The Fellows' overseas experience sees them broadening and deepening their own professional knowledge, which they then share with their peers, industry and government upon their return. This is the focus of the ISS Institute's work.

For further information on our Fellows and our work see <http://www.issinstitute.org.au>.

The Fellow also warmly thanks the CEO (Lou Ellum) and staff (Ken Greenhill, Paul Sumner, Danielle Cull and Fiona Waugh) of ISS Institute for their assistance in the planning and development of the Fellowship and completion of this report.

## 1. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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### **Governance and Management:**

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### **Fellowship Sponsor**

Bronwen Glover sincerely thanks The George Alexander Foundation for providing funding support for the ISS Institute and for this Fellowship.

In 1972, George Alexander AM (1910 - 2008) set up an independent philanthropic Foundation as a way of sharing his wealth and giving back to the community. Today, the main focus of The George Alexander Foundation is access to education for promising young people, particularly students with financial need and those from rural and remote areas.

The George Alexander Foundation (GAF) Scholarship and Fellowship Programs form the core of the foundation's work, operating in partnership with major tertiary institutions, while our Fellowships and other Education grants provide a variety of other unique and challenging educational experiences. George Alexander believed in the notion of 'planting seeds and hoping they grow into pretty big trees'. The programs supported by the Foundation endeavour to support this ideal and as GAF students graduate and go on to contribute to the community, George's legacy and spirit lives on through their achievements. George Alexander came to Australia as a child migrant, and went on to become a mechanic, an entrepreneur and a businessman and later, a generous philanthropist, who held that you do not own the possessions you have, 'you're just minding them'. This philosophy guided him to give during his lifetime and to hope that through his example, he might inspire others to do the same.

### Fellowship Supporters

#### **Employer Support:**

Bronwen would like to acknowledge the support of the State Library of NSW in encouraging her to apply for and attend this program of study and allowing her the time off to dedicate to the program.

#### **Supporters:**

Bronwen would like to thank the following individuals and organisations for providing assistance throughout her Fellowship:

- Louise Anemaat, Manager Collection Care, State Library NSW
- Anna Brooks, Senior Conservator, State Library NSW
- Nichola Parshall, Senior Conservator, State Library NSW
- Dr. Alex Byrne, former NSW State Librarian and Chief Executive, State Library NSW
- Guy Caron, Book Conservator, State Library NSW
- Steve Bell, Book Conservator, State Library NSW, the Collection Care Branch, State Library NSW
- Patricia Neden, Chief Executive Officer, Innovation & Business Skills Australia
- Sheldon Teare, President, Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Materials – NSW
- David Dorning, Program Leader, Conservation of Books and Library Materials, West Dean College – UK
- Sonja Schwoil, Associate Tutor, Conservation of Books and Library Materials, West Dean College – UK
- Abigail Bainbridge, Associate Tutor, Conservation of Books and Library Materias, West Dean College – UK
- Lara Meredith, Graduate Teaching Assistant, Conservation of Books and Library Materials, West Dean College – UK
- Steve Bell, Book Conservator, State Library NSW
- The Collection Care Branch, State Library NSW

## 2. ABOUT THE FELLOW

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**Name:** Bronwen Glover

**Qualifications:**

- B.A. Hons Classics, Religion and Humanities from Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada. Completed April 2006
- Diploma Collections Conservation and Management from Sir Sandford Fleming College, Peterborough, Canada. Completed December 2008
- Graduate Diploma Conservation of Books and Library Materials from West Dean College, United Kingdom. Completed July 2016
- Ongoing – Post Graduate Diploma and M.A. in Conservation Studies to be completed September 2017

**Current Position:**

- Assistant Conservator – Collection Care Branch, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney

Bronwen Glover is an Assistant Conservator at the State Library of New South Wales in Sydney. Since January 2011, Bronwen has been a part of the Collection Care team. Most recently she has earned a temporary position as a Conservator level 1, working on higher level projects. In her role at the Library she has had the opportunity to work on many interesting aspects of their internationally significant collection including conservation work on a set of John Gould's *The Mammals of Australia* dating from 1845-63. Bronwen has also had the chance to work closely with more experienced conservators in the team and was involved in the treatment of a set of Joan Blaeu's *Atlas Maior*, published between 1662-1672.

Bronwen completed the Collections Conservation and Management program at Fleming College in Peterborough, Canada in 2008. As part of this diploma, Bronwen interned in the book conservation lab at Library and Archives Canada. Subsequently Bronwen worked in various conservation labs including those of Parks Canada, the Archives of Ontario and at the Canadian Museum of Civilization.

During her time in Sydney, Bronwen has been an active committee member of the NSW branch of the Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material (AICCM), helping to co-ordinate events and meetings that bring together the heritage conservation community in New South Wales.

Upon her return to Australia, Bronwen is looking forward to resuming her position at the SLNSW where she can share her newly acquired skills and knowledge with her colleagues as well as continuing to learn from their expertise. Through her AICCM network she will be able to further disseminate her expanded knowledge on book conservation theory and methods.

### 3. AIM OF THE FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

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The aim of this Fellowship was to attend and participate in the Conservation of Books and Library Materials program at West Dean College, in West Sussex, United Kingdom. This is a two-year program, with the graduate ultimately earning a Masters in Conservation Studies. This Fellowship helped to enable the Fellow to complete the first year of the program which is a full time course of 36 weeks, resulting in a level 6 Graduate Diploma in the Conservation of Books and Library Materials.

This report covers the outcomes of the first year of the program. The program at West Dean College is accredited by the University of Sussex. The course was heavily focused on developing practical skills with the majority of the student's time spent in the workshop practicing various book conservation techniques. Students also undertook bookbinding projects to better understand the structure of the historic books they would be working on. Other aspects of the program included lectures on Materials Science and Contextual Studies as well as interesting site visits and visiting guest lecturers and tutors. The Fellow was also able to undertake site visits and professional gatherings on their own time outside of the program. The program ran from September 2015 to July 2016. Before the Fellow began the program, six main aims were set out to be achieved throughout the year.

1. To gain a Graduate Diploma, with a view of completing a full Masters Degree in Book Conservation at West Dean College in the United Kingdom.
2. To learn and perfect high level book conservation treatments and hand skills.
3. To establish an international network of conservation professionals to call upon and share knowledge with in the future.
4. To gain an understanding of current theories on ethical best practice in book conservation.
5. To learn cutting edge techniques for materials analysis in book conservation.
6. To learn about historical production methods for books and library materials.

# 4. THE AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT

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Worldwide, heritage conservation is a small profession made up of highly trained individuals with specialised skill sets; this statement holds true for Australia. Currently in Australia there are two universities that offer professional qualifications in heritage conservation, and nowhere that offers a specialisation in the conservation of books and bound materials. It is for this reason that such a qualification must be sought at an institution overseas.

Institutions in Australia hold internationally significant collections and their preservation for future generations is dependent on the work of qualified book conservators. Book conservation demands a unique skill set with a deep understanding of the complex and varied structures of bindings and materials. Conservation is also a constantly evolving field both in terms of treatment approaches and the thinking behind them. For this reason, it is important to stay current in the field and be up to date with thoughts on current best practice.

West Dean College is an internationally renowned institution whose graduates are well respected in the field. Without the opportunity to study overseas and obtain specialised skill sets, valuable knowledge fades away and the ability to preserve Australia's unique bound heritage collections is greatly diminished.

## SWOT Analysis (Attending book conservation training overseas)

### Strengths:

- High level of skills and knowledge acquired
- Internationally recognized training
- Access to world renowned institutions and conservation specialists
- Well established institutions

### Weakness:

- Prohibitive costs of living and attending school overseas for two years
- Heavily focused on UK and European standards, climate and facilities

### Opportunity:

- Bringing new ideas and enthusiasm back to Australia
- Meeting a wide range of professionals from many countries
- High level of skill developed – focused training

### Threats:

- Relatively few job opportunities in Australia

### **Conclusion**

Attending formal training for the conservation of books and library materials at West Dean College in the UK has been an extremely worthwhile experience. The thorough training and experience that the Fellow will return to Australia with will be invaluable to her work at the State Library of NSW and could not be achieved anywhere in Australia.

While the training in some areas of the program, such as the effects of environmental controls and light damage, as well as ethical considerations, are geared more specifically to students who will make their careers in institutions in the UK and Europe, the knowledge is easily transferrable to the Australian climate and institutions. The course also provides the basic knowledge of these factors and therefore the means with which to continue research into these issues with a more specifically Australian slant.

The school's population is very diverse and international and the Fellow has been able to make connections with current and future colleagues from around the world who will continue to innovate and make advancements in the field of book conservation which can be shared throughout the community. While it is true that such a specialised skill can result in relatively few job opportunities, it is still a valuable and recognised asset within the conservation community.

As the Fellow has been able to hold a position at the SLNSW, taking the time and money that has been required to attend this program was a well calculated opportunity that will benefit the Fellow's career in the long term and allow her to bring back new skills and information to her institution and the greater conservation community in Australia.

# 5. IDENTIFYING THE SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE ENHANCEMENTS REQUIRED

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There are examples of areas in Australian industries where there are weaknesses in innovation, skills, knowledge, experience, policies and/or formal organisational structures to support the ongoing successful development and recognition of individuals and the particular sector.

The focus of all ISS Institute Fellowships is on applied research and investigation overseas by Australians. The main objective is to enable enhancement and improvement in skills and practice not currently available or implemented in Australia, and the subsequent dissemination and sharing of those skills and recommendations throughout the relevant Australian industry, education, government bodies and the community.

Specific skill enhancement areas addressed through this Fellowship were as follows:

## **Skill Enhancement Area 1**

**Formal education leading to an internationally recognised qualification in the conservation of books and library materials.**

- Hands on practical work in the studio, book conservation and book binding.
- Conservation science theory and practice, introduction to scientific analysis, materials science.
- Contextual Studies, discussion and lectures about ethical considerations and professional best practice surrounding conservation.

## **Skill Enhancement Area 2**

**Writing condition reports and treatment proposals for bound materials. The ability to assess bound materials requiring treatment for preservation and recommend an appropriate course of action.**

- Learning specialised terminology relating to book structures and materials.
- Understanding decision making for treatments involving minimal intervention and ideas around re-treatability.
- Understanding the range of treatment options available for various materials and book structures.

## **Skill Enhancement Area 3**

**The ability to identify and understand the style and construction of bound materials and their components.**

- Attending lectures on historical book structures.
- Creating bookbinding models to better understand common book structures.
- Reading and research into various book structures and typical constructions throughout history as well as the manufacturing of components: paper, leather, parchment.

## 6. THE INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

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The Fellow travelled to West Dean College in West Sussex, UK to undertake a 36-week Graduate Diploma in the Conservation of Books and Library Materials. The school has an internationally respected reputation for producing graduates who are highly skilled in their chosen field, and part of this is due to the high tutor to student ratio.

This year there were ten Graduate students in the conservation of books program, one of the largest groups in some time, however, the facilities and the available time with tutors was certainly sufficient and this is not an unusually sized group in comparison with many comparable programs around the world.

### Practical Work

A large component of the program, and a draw for many students to this specific program at West Dean College, is the strong focus on practical work. The equivalent of four working days a week is spent in the studio undertaking hands-on work or receiving book conservation theory lectures. Students are given a damaged book to work on and an informal lecture is given about the possible repair methods for the type of damage present on that volume. Three key conservation treatments were introduced throughout the year and adapted by students to suit the specific requirements of the books they were working on.

The first style of repair that was undertaken is commonly called the Etherington Repair, or Japanese Paper Hinge Repair.<sup>1</sup> The repair was devised by Don Etherington, of Don Etherington Fine Binding and Design in North Carolina in the USA. The repair is used to strengthen or re-attach detached covers on smaller sized leather bound books. It is an inexpensive and efficient repair when compared with more traditional repairs which involve replacing leather, which can be time consuming and expensive. The Etherington Repair is also in keeping with modern conservation ethics surrounding the issues of re-treatability<sup>2</sup> and minimal intervention,<sup>3</sup> ideas which will be discussed later in the report. Japanese paper, which is used to re-attach the covers using either wheat starch paste or a mix of wheat starch paste and ethyl vinyl acetate (EVA), is a strong and flexible paper made up of long plant fibres. The paper is toned to match the leather of the boards using acrylic paints, and once dried it is coated with SC6000 wax which gives the paper a look and texture similar to leather. The book that the Fellow worked on was entitled *Extrait Du Journal D'un Officier De La Marine De L'Escadre De M. Le Comte D'estaing* by Charles Henri Comte D'Estaing dating from 1782. The book belongs to the Admiralty Library in Portsmouth, UK. It had one fully detached cover and one loose cover and was successfully repaired by the Fellow using this method.

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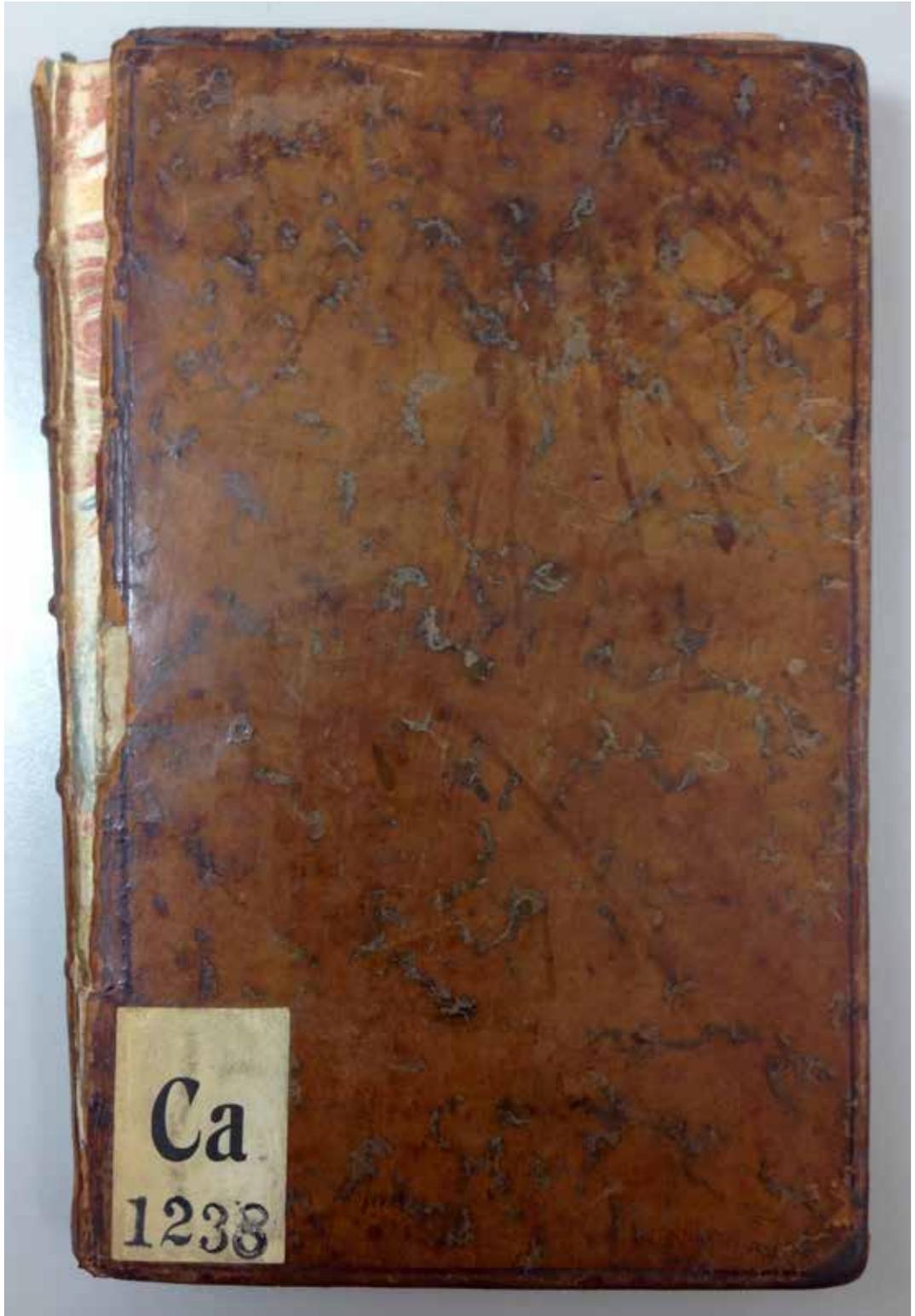
1 Japanese Paper Hinge Repair for Loose Boards on Leather Books, 1995, *Abbey Newsletter*, 19/3.

2 Muñoz Viñas, S., 2002, 'Contemporary Theory of Conservation', *Reviews in Conservation*, 3: 25-34.

3 Code of Ethics and Code of Practice, 2016, *Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material*, <<https://aiccm.org.au/sites/default/files/docs/AICCMBusinessDocs/CODE%20OF%20ETHICS%20AND%20CODE%20OF%20PRACTICE%20Australian%20Institute%20for%20Conservation%20of%20Cultural%20Material.pdf>>, retrieved 5 August 2016.

## 6. THE INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

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*Before Treatment*

## 6. THE INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

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*During Treatment - loss is leather filled and Japanese tissue prepared to re-attach cover*



*After Treatment*

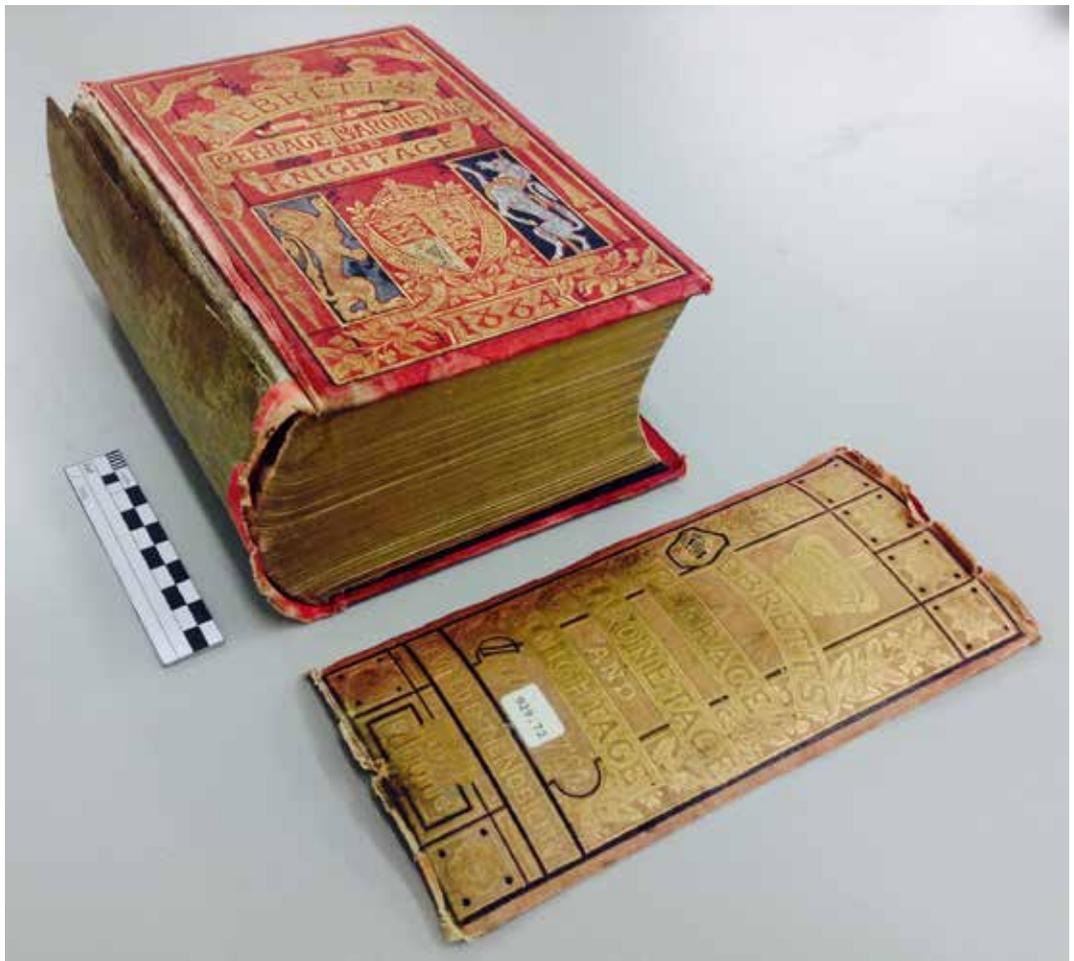
This repair method is sturdy and efficient. It is something that would be advantageous both in terms of time spent on the repair and also the cost of materials. The Fellow has observed this repair method in use in institutions in Canada and has also been aware of short courses teaching this method in Australia, although she is unaware of whether or not it is commonly practiced among book conservators in the country.

The second major repair style that the students undertook was a cloth re-back. The book that the Fellow worked on was a large volume of Debrett's Peerage dating from 1884. This book belongs to the Surrey History Centre. The conservation issues with this volume included loose covers and broken inner hinges, as well as the cloth of the spine being completely detached. This repair method involves splitting the edges of the boards of the front and back covers in order to insert new cloth that is attached to the spine which will form a new hinge and hold the boards in place securely. One

## 6. THE INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

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advantage of this method is that it can be done without disturbing any decoration on the covers and is therefore useful for many styles of binding, including leather bound books with fragile gold decoration on the leather covers.<sup>4</sup> This method of repair can be considered much stronger than the Etherington repair and is appropriate for heavier volumes or perhaps books from a lending library which will undergo frequent handling and use. Although this method of repair can be slightly more time consuming than the previous, it also provides a longer lasting repair which would be necessary for some books and with practice, a book conservator would become quite adept at executing this repair quickly.



*Before Treatment*

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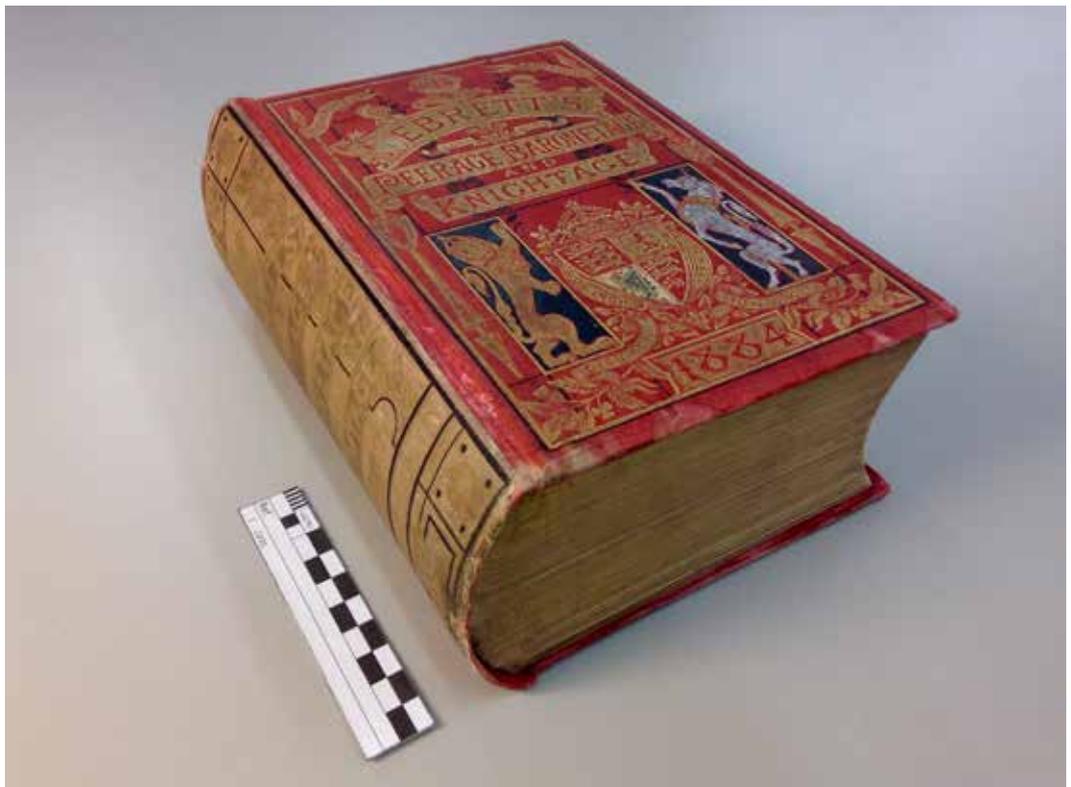
<sup>4</sup> Clarkson, C., 1992, 'Board Slotting—A New Technique for Re-attaching Bookboards', *IPC—Manchester Conference Postprints*, 158-164.

## 6. THE INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

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*During Treatment – Splitting the boards to insert cloth hinges*



*After Treatment*

## 6. THE INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

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The third treatment undertaken by the students was a full leather re-back. This is a traditional method of repairing leather bound volumes with broken or missing leather spines. The treatment typically involves toning and pairing a new piece of leather to match any original leather that is left on the volume. The new leather is then adhered to the spine using wheat starch paste and is inserted under the original leather on each cover, thus restoring the book's functionality and aesthetic. The book that the Fellow worked on in this instance was Volume 1 of *The Book of the Delight of Days*, which was a Hebrew volume dating from 1762. It is owned by private client Isaac Levy, who purchased the book for its relevance to his family history and was not concerned with its poor condition. The volume had been heavily damaged by rodents and insects, with the entire spine having been eaten away and many insect holes evident throughout the volume. There was some debate over the best method to treat this volume, as the extensive damage required conservation attention on every page. The first of two possible methods proposed was to use leaf casting to repair the damaged text block. Leaf casting involves submerging the damaged pages one at a time into a machine where a bath of water mixed with a paper pulp suspension is present. This water is then released and drains through the damaged page, depositing the pulp into the areas of loss and thus repairing the sheet of paper in a relatively seamless manner. This equipment is not available at West Dean College, however, the students were able to visit the conservation labs at the University of Southampton to spend a day learning about the technique and to gain firsthand experience. This method was also deemed inappropriate because the text block's edges were coloured yellow and this decoration would have been lost if submerged in water. The second option, which was ultimately undertaken, was to guard each individual bifolio. This involved adhering a thin strip of Japanese paper with wheat starch paste to the damaged fold in each page so that the volume could then be re-sewn. The text block was then sewn, lined and rounded. The original boards were repaired, with areas of loss filled using frayed cord and wheat starch paste. Areas of loss to the original covering material were replaced with new, conservation grade materials, to both consolidate the original material and ensure that no large areas of damage were distracting to the overall look of the finished piece. Finally, a new piece of leather was toned, using leather dyes, to match the remaining leather on the covers, and inserted under the original leather.



*Before Treatment- Spine completely lost and pages damaged at spine*



Evidence of insect damage

## 6. THE INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

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*During Treatment – repairing each page with Japanese tissue guards and wheat starch paste*



*After Treatment – New leather on spine*

This treatment is fairly traditional and not always practiced by contemporary conservators as leather is sometimes considered not to be a long lasting material and the treatment is quite interventive. However, it is important to understand all of the possible options for each treatment so that one can weigh the pros and cons, and in some cases, this treatment is the appropriate choice. This treatment was advanced and complex providing experience that there is rarely time to gain on the job and is not readily available as training in Australia. The discussions surrounding the appropriate treatment

## 6. THE INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

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methodology were also highly beneficial experience regarding choosing the appropriate treatment for a conservation issue.

Students also had the opportunity to undertake bookbinding as well as conservation. This was an important part of the program as students must understand how a book is put together, when diagnosing problems and deciding on the best method of treatment. Three major styles of binding were undertaken, following some of the most common styles of bookbinding that the students will encounter in their careers.

The first style was a basic pamphlet binding, involving a single folded section of pages, sewn and bound into hard boards covered with cloth. The second style was a case binding, consisting of 15 folded sections, sewn on tapes. This book was then rounded and backed to produce the shoulders typical of this style, which the boards sit in once the case, or covers, are attached. The third style of binding was a tight back three quarter leather binding. This style included 15 folded sections sewn on cords, to provide the raised bands on the spine that are typical of books from that period. This book was also rounded and backed and the boards laced onto the cords. The spine and corners were then covered with leather, hence the three quarter leather, and the boards covered with paper. The Fellow has undertaken some similar styles of binding in short courses elsewhere, but never with such traditional equipment or such time available. Therefore, these bookbinding models can be said to be much more traditional and thorough than any that the Fellow has undertaken before and therefore a much more complete understanding of the styles was achieved.

The students also learned about conservation quality enclosures that are typically used in institutions and by private conservators. A three-day intensive workshop was undertaken with professional book conservator Bridget Mitchell. She taught the students how to make five walled, double walled clamshell boxes, which are very sturdy and protective. Some of the boxes produced in this workshop were used to house material from the Edward James Archive which was being loaned to the National Gallery in Edinburgh for their exhibition *Surreal Encounters: Collecting the Marvellous*.

The year concluded with an exhibition of all of the students' work throughout the year to which industry professionals were invited.

## 6. THE INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

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*End of year exhibition*

## 6. THE INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

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### Science

Weekly science lectures were held during which the students learned about the chemical make-up of heritage materials and why they deteriorate. Lectures also covered topics such as colour theory, the effects of light and relative humidity on materials and the use of solvents in cleaning. Students also had access to a well-equipped analytical laboratory.

Students were introduced to the use of a portable x-ray fluorescence spectrometer (XRF). This device is useful in the analysis of inorganic compounds and can indicate which elements and their approximate quantities are present in materials such as pigments or gold tooling.

The Fellow was also introduced to the Fourier transform infrared spectrometer (FTIR) which analyses infra-red absorption and emission spectra in order to determine more about a material on a molecular level allowing organic materials to be analysed. Spectra can be compared against thousands of samples in a database to determine what a material is or what other materials it is like. One major advantage of this technology is the extremely small sample size required, causing no noticeable damage to original materials.

Both of these analytical tools are available and widely used in Australia in the conservation field but are not currently as regularly used in the analysis of books as they are in other specialisations. They take specialised training and theoretical knowledge to operate and to analyse any data retrieved from them. This course has helped the Fellow to better understand their use and operation and this will be a useful tool that she can bring back to the SLNSW with her.

Scientific analysis and a firm understanding of materials is key to making informed decisions in conservation treatments and the choice of materials. Such thorough scientific training is becoming more and more relevant in contemporary conservation with an increased importance being placed on evidence based conservation treatments which require the understanding of what is happening to our cultural heritage on a chemical level.

### Contextual Studies

During the contextual studies lectures, students were introduced to the theory of conservation ethics, among other topics. Ethical considerations play a major role in modern conservation practice. Many countries' professional conservation bodies have published a code of ethics and code of practice. Much of the discussion at West Dean College revolved around the UK's Institute of Conservation (ICON) Code of Conduct and Professional Standards.<sup>5</sup> The Fellow is aware of and has been an active member of the AICCM for some years and their Code of Ethics and Code of Practice contains very similar standards and goals.<sup>6</sup>

One of the main ethical considerations in book conservation is that of minimal intervention. With this ideal in mind, conservators aim to treat a book as little as possible to maintain the integrity of the original materials. It is not always possible to maintain all original materials when the goal of book conservation is often to return the book to a useful state, however, conservators should always be conscious of this goal when considering what interventions are truly necessary striking a balance between the priorities. Often original materials or components that must be removed to restore functionality can be retained and incorporated into an enclosure or file that is linked to the book, and preserve valuable information about the history of the object.

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<sup>5</sup> The Institute of Conservation's Code Of Conduct, 2014, ICON- The Institute of Conservation, <[http://icon.org.uk/system/files/documents/icon\\_code\\_of\\_conduct.pdf](http://icon.org.uk/system/files/documents/icon_code_of_conduct.pdf)>, retrieved 10 August 2016

<sup>6</sup> Code of Ethics and Code of Practice, 2016, Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material, <<https://aiccm.org.au/sites/default/files/docs/AICCMBusinessDocs/CODE%20OF%20ETHICS%20AND%20CODE%20OF%20PRACTICE%20Australian%20Institute%20for%20Conservation%20of%20Cultural%20Material.pdf>>, retrieved 5 August 2016.

## 6. THE INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

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The Fellow was able to attend the ICON Annual General Meeting at which well respected Spanish paper conservator Salvador Muños Viñas gave a lecture Paper Conservation: Selective Blindness. In his lecture he spoke about the interest in “reversibility” in conservation practice, in which conservators aim to perform treatments on objects that can be undone if deemed necessary in the future. He suggested in his lecture that perhaps “retreatability” was a more appropriate term and aim, as no treatment is ever truly reversible, especially when considering porous materials such as books and paper.<sup>7</sup> The idea of retreatability allows for the constantly changing and improving nature of conservation. If in the future a treatment is deemed unsuitable or an improved method has arisen, objects should be in a state in which it is possible to instate such changes. This information is in keeping with conservation practices that the Fellow has encountered throughout the world, and certainly at the SLNSW.

### Site Visits

Another component of the Fellowship program was scheduled visits to institutions. Visits were made to:

#### **The Weald & Downland Open Air Museum – West Sussex (UK)**

This museum is a collection of historic buildings brought to the site from across England. Here the students were able to see an outdoor museum in action and hear about education programming.

#### **Royal Pavillion Museum – Brighton (UK)**

Here the students toured the museum and heard about the challenges of running a conservation department and environmental monitoring with a small budget.

#### **Chichester Cathedral and Library – Chichester (UK)**

The students were given a tour of the cathedral and the library, with books dating to 1197. Students were able to have a close look at some interesting historic bindings.

#### **CASS Sculpture Foundation – West Sussex (UK)**

A non-profit organisation that allows well known and up and coming artists to create large, outdoor pieces. As well as the sculptures in the park, students viewed the small archive containing maquettes and hanging works.

#### **Society of Antiquaries – London (UK)**

Students visited this relatively small organisation and library, founded in 1707. Their museum professionals spoke to the students about their environmental monitoring system and challenges and some of the unique pieces that they hold. Students also received a tour of the library and viewed the Society's copy of Magna Carta.

#### **Wallace Collection – London (UK)**

A National Museum and historic town house in London, this collection holds mainly paintings and arms and armoury. Students were able to go behind the scenes into the conservation labs and had brief overviews of some of the treatments performed by their metals and furniture conservators as well as an introduction to the supports made specially for their objects in house.

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<sup>7</sup> Muños Viñas, Paper Conservation: Selective Blindness, Lecture.

## 6. THE INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

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### **Amberley Museum & Heritage Centre – Amberley, West Sussex (UK)**

Students visited the historic printing workshop and were introduced to historic printing practices and machines throughout British history.

### **The National Archives – London (UK)**

Students were given lectures on their extensive environmental monitoring and control system as well as their innovations in mould remediation. Students were given a tour of the facility as well as the conservation labs and were introduced to the high complexity treatments being performed there.

### **University of Southampton – Southampton (UK)**

Students were given a tour of the conservation department and special collections exhibition. Students then spent the day practicing leaf casting techniques as well as lining damaged paper.

### **The British Library – London (UK)**

Students were given a tour of the conservation facilities, including the digitisation areas. Students were introduced to interesting ongoing conservation projects including the rehousing of Henry VIII's letters.

The site visits were an integral part of bringing the theory and practical elements of the Fellow's time at West Dean College together. The opportunity to view and experience conservation in action in a wide variety of facilities and environments was an excellent summary of all that had been learned in the class room. The opportunity to meet other professionals in the field and gain international contacts was also an invaluable experience.

Many of the larger institutions visited operate in a similar manor to those that the Fellow has visited or worked at in Australia. These visits gave a great insight into what best practice can look like in an institutional conservation lab environment. Some of the challenges and innovations brought about by smaller institutions were interesting to hear about.

Some techniques and materials learned about while overseas can certainly be brought back to Australia and shared and practiced by professionals in the field.

# 7. KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER, APPLICATION AND DISSEMINATION

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The Fellow will attend West Dean College for another year, from September 2016- September 2017. This will result in the completion of a Masters Degree in Conservation Studies. Therefore, the Fellow will not return to Australia until the program is completed.

The initial contribution by the ISS Institute towards the first year of the program has made it possible for the Fellow to begin this journey of learning and skills development. Without this encouragement and contribution towards this endeavour, it would not have been possible for the Fellow to continue on to the second year of the program and achieve the full Masters Degree.

The Fellow has already submitted an article to the NSW Guild of Craft Bookbinders, which was published in their newsletter Morocco Bound. The article was an overview of the Fellow's studies and time at West Dean College.

The Fellow also proposes to submit similar articles to the AICCM newsletter and the SLNSW newsletter before her return to Australia. Upon her return to Australia, the Fellow will disseminate her knowledge through internal workshops at SLNSW for her immediate colleagues, giving a general overview of her time at West Dean College and also demonstrating specific skills and techniques that they might find of use.

The Fellow will also re-establish her connection with the AICCM and provide a talk or demonstration as they see fit. Through her connection with the AICCM, the Fellow is happy to provide information or talks to interstate divisions if time and funding permit.

The Fellow's ongoing work in the conservation field will lead to on-the-job training for her colleagues and the potential presentation of future treatments at conferences and public lectures. As an SLNSW employee she is also engaged in providing public programs on preserving family history collections which her studies will contribute further to.

# 8. CONSIDERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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## **1. Formal education leading to an internationally recognised qualification in the conservation of books and library materials.**

- Hands on practical work in the studio, book conservation and making
- Science lectures, introduction to scientific analysis, materials science
- Contextual Studies, discussion and lectures about ethical considerations and professional best practice surrounding conservation

## **2. Writing condition reports and treatment proposals for bound materials. Ability to assess bound materials requiring treatment for preservation and recommend an appropriate course of action.**

- Learning specialized terminology relating to book structure and materials
- Understanding decision making for treatments involving minimal intervention and ideas around re-treatability
- Understanding range of treatment options available for various materials and book structures

To achieve points one and two, formal education at a recognised institution is required. In the current climate in heritage institutions, thorough on-the-job training is no longer a possibility as essential daily tasks have to take priority. The Fellow has had many wonderful opportunities to enhance her skills in the workplace, but to become a well-rounded book conservator with experience in routine and complex treatment approaches, formal education is currently a necessity.

Currently, formal education in book conservation can only be sought at institutions overseas. There are certainly both pros and cons to this. The cons, of course, come down to the prohibitive cost of attending an institution so far from Australia for an extended period of time. However, there is funding support available in many cases. Another con of attending an overseas institution is that much of the information provided is specific to the region in which the program is undertaken. However, much of the knowledge is transferrable and throughout the program, students acquire the skills required to obtain comparable knowledge relating to their own country. The students come away with a methodology and understanding that can be applied in a wide array of contexts. There are also pros to attending higher education overseas. The student gains international experience and broadens their horizons, obtaining knowledge that is unique to what many at home will already have and bring back new information and points of view that can be shared among the professional community. This enriches the knowledge base of the entire Australian book conservation community by introducing new thinking and reinvigorating discussion.

The conservation of books and library materials program at West Dean College has given the Fellow the skills, information and confidence required to return to Australia able to assume a post as a book conservator. The program covers a wide range of materials and treatment styles as well as scientific and ethical subjects that have provided a well rounded knowledge base.

While there is enough bound material in need of conservation in Australia to support the graduates of a book conservation program within the country, perhaps there is not enough funding within the heritage sector to provide enough jobs to do so. If the government were to invest more funding into heritage institutions in the country, perhaps this would translate into more positions being available to warrant this specialised program. The Fellow has been impressed by the workshops and activities offered by the Guild of Craft Bookbinders in Sydney. The continued activity and interest of the bookbinding guilds across Australia is very beneficial to bookbinders and conservators and their workshops are an excellent starting point for anyone interested in entering the field.

### **3. The ability to identify and understand the style and construction of bound materials and their components.**

- Attending lectures on historical book structures
- Creating bookbinding models to better understand common book structures
- Reading and research into various book structures and typical constructions throughout history as well as the manufacturing of components: paper, leather, parchment

Through her studies at West Dean College, the Fellow has gained an excellent base knowledge of binding structures and book components. Due to the intensive immersion in practical work over the nine-month period, the Fellow has encountered many styles of bound material and has carefully examined each. Such knowledge can only be built over time, through immersion in the material and thorough reading on the subject and will continue to grow. The Fellow will continue to attend workshops and read about binding structures, as well as to create historic and modern book models.

Continued training in bookbinding and book models is available through the various State bookbinding guilds. The Fellow would encourage the guilds to continue this program.

## 9. REFERENCES

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