



Libraries contain the evidence of our past in the form of large collections of diverse materials. Unfortunately, over time, parts of collections can be forgotten, ignored, or neglected as priorities and interests change. The environment in which collections are kept, and the way they are used, has enormous influence on their condition. Light, temperature, humidity, pollution, pests, and the actions of people impact on the physical state of objects.

Careful handling and good housekeeping will ensure the survival of collections.

The Preservation & Conservation Department at Trinity College Library provides management and advice on the storage, handling, and treatment of the Library's collection of over 6 million items. Preservation activities, such as environmental monitoring and the management of risks such as flood and fire, ensure overall care of the whole or large parts of the collection. Conservation treatments aim to stabilize and repair individual items. Both approaches require expert knowledge and practical skills.

HOW DO YOU DO THAT?

Conservation training is provided in specialist courses throughout the world, and is usually supplemented with internships and supervised work experience in a conservation department. Our department has hosted students from across the globe for over 35 years, enabling them to develop their skills under the tutelage of experienced staff. Since 2008 the Heritage Council of Ireland has supported this programme through a jointly-funded internship scheme which is available annually to a conservation graduate.

Many preservation activities are based on good house-keeping principles. By storing collections in a pest-free and dust-free environment, away from high light levels and extremes of temperature and moisture, collections will age more slowly. By careful handling, or using digital copies of the items, physical damage will be minimised. This approach can be followed by anyone wishing to preserve their own collection for future generations.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

The work of the Preservation & Conservation Department is supported by the Library budget, by Trinity College Dublin alumni, and through grant funding and private donation.

To help us continue to Save the Treasures of this great Library please make your donation via: <http://www.tcd.ie/Library/Preservation/> or the donations box in the Long Room.



PRESERVATION & CONSERVATION

what's that?



The Long Room, Trinity College Library, Dublin
May – September 2013

PRESERVE OR CONSERVE?

This exhibition invites you into the world of the Conservators at Trinity College Library, and offers an introduction to the range of activities carried out by staff in the department.

Our display explores the treatment and care of a range of different materials, from Greek and Roman papyri to parchment scrolls from Ethiopia; from manuscripts to printed books; and from glass-plate negatives to twentieth-century travel diaries.

The eclectic nature of the collection requires an equally broad spectrum of approach. For many items, preservation solutions such as good documentation, minimal treatment, and safe housing, are the best options. Others need a more extensive conservation treatment in order to remedy severe damage, and to slow aggressive degradation processes.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THAT BOOK?

Over a quarter of the bindings in the Old Library have structural damage, such as detached boards or split text blocks. As the full treatment of all items is not possible, most are cleaned, stabilized, and secured with cotton tying-tape. Our Save the Treasures of the Long Room project, which is supported by Trinity College alumni, has resulted in the preservation treatment of over 90,000 bindings. The success of this can be seen on the shelves throughout the Long Room.

The conservation treatment of prioritized printed books can include: surface cleaning, de-acidifying, and repair to remedy tears and losses to the pages; re-sewing, board reattachment, re-backing, and the stabilization of original spine elements and covers.

Most medieval manuscripts were written on parchment which, while providing a robust support for the text and image, is very sensitive to moisture changes in the environment. This can be seen in the distortion of the parchment due to shrinkage, and tears and losses due to embrittlement.

Unfortunately the majority of our early manuscripts have lost their original bindings. When a contemporary or near-contemporary binding survives, it is retained, and the treatment is focused on enabling the item to be used without further damage. Many medieval bookbinding techniques are also incorporated into new conservation bindings, to produce sympathetically-treated and functioning books.

Untreated early printed books, with detached boards, and missing headcaps and endbands.

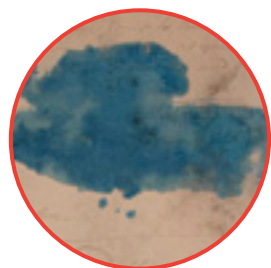


WHAT DO WE WANT TO KNOW?

In recent years we have increased our research output to include in-depth investigations into the significance of book structures, the analysis of pigments in manuscripts, and the study of Old Library dust. The results inform our treatment decisions, and also enable us to understand more fully the physical properties of collections and the impact the environment has on their aging. Conservation science is a developing field and much of our research is carried out in collaboration with students and colleagues at Trinity College, and institutions such as the Victoria & Albert Museum, the British Library, University College London, and the University of Perugia.



Detail from an Ethiopic scroll; pigment and ink on parchment.



Detail of faded iron gall ink on paper, obscured by a blue pigment.