
DWL Conservation Newsletter



Comitatus Namurcensis cum Finitimis Regionibus : [c.1710]

CONSERVATION AND FUND RAISING

The DWL Adopt scheme

The DWL Adopt scheme was relaunched by the conservator in a voluntary capacity in December 2013 and in consequence a number of trustees, friends and supporters have adopted a range of documents and works of art, including some eighteenth and nineteenth century manuscript notebooks. The first Friends' special event updated trustees, friends and adoptees with the scheme's progress. Three twenty minute talks were given, two by adopters of manuscripts and one by the conservator on decorated and plain papers used as binding materials. The aim, when relaunching the scheme, was to examine our collections at risk and to prioritize those items that need preservation solutions as well as serious conservation attention in order to arrest their deterioration, an eventuality which is by no means assured. Starting, therefore, with documents that are particularly vulnerable has led the conservator to address firstly items made of paper, as these often do not survive in collections, and our paper items may have a rarity value. Such items usually require between £20 and £40 to conserve and box.

Both our speakers, Prof Isabel Rivers and Meg Kirk (trustee of DWL), chose simple paper covered notebooks. Isabel's paper included the study of a letter of Archbishop Tillotson and a poem by Matthew Prior, both much reprinted, and, to her and everyone else's great surprise, two otherwise unknown poems by Anne Wharton (1659–1685).

Meg Kirk told us of her discoveries about the Rix family; other items in this collection have since been adopted. My own short talk addressed the need always to consider the material element of books and manuscripts in academic study as they always reveal extra information, as was seen from both Isabel's and Meg's papers.

The conservator's colleague, Rachael Smither, showed visitors around the conservation studio while Alan Argent and the conservator took them on a tour around

the strongrooms and introduced them to an exhibition of adopted items. The event ended with tea and a good deal of conversation.

Growing out of this attempt to care for the collections is the desire, on the part of the adopters, to select manuscripts, printed books or portraits with which they feel particularly strong connections. Through the Adopt Scheme Jane Giscombe hopes to bring some of the manuscripts and works of art to a wider audience. Further events will promote this work. The next Friends' special event will take place in the winter of this year and more sponsors have been invited to talk about their chosen subjects.

If you are interested in the DWL Adopt scheme and would like to receive information please contact Jane Giscombe: jane.giscombe@dwlib.co.uk.

The Baxter Treatises Project

In 2012 The conservator applied for a grant in order to carry out vital conservation work on the Baxter Treatises. The grant body was The National Manuscripts Conservation Trust and the application was successful because the board of the NMCT was happy with the storage areas for the manuscript collections and the treatment proposal, and made particular mention of the fact that DWL was putting together a comprehensive calendar of the collection which would eventually be made available to the public. The need for such a calendar cannot be overstated.

With a grant in place, work began on the actual manuscripts, seven volumes of randomly drawn together items, of different sizes, and different subjects. After a condition report had been carried out, it was obvious that the papers were in a particularly poor condition. It has since been shown that several manuscripts could only be improved to a limited extent. The collection was damaged by poor environmental conditions, dirt and dust, light damage, inappropriate bindings which had directly damaged the manuscripts with the excessive use of animal glue, folding and the oversewing of original manuscripts. Early paper repairs with heavy paper had further damaged the treatises. Five conservators have worked on the collection over the last year and a half: two in-house and three freelance accredited conservators. Manuscripts have been carefully separated, cleaned, repaired and strengthened where necessary. Over the next few months the calendar will be launched, as will a website dedicated to the study of The Baxter Treatises which will be particularly concerned with the history of seventeenth century paper.

Jane Giscombe
Conservator May 2014