

# The Condition Report

Issue 4

October - December 2014

ISSN: 2203-1758

Aus: \$15.00



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## Front and Back Cover -

**Merran Esson** Pot Shot, 2009, Stoneware clay and copper glaze, H 64 x W 44 x D 43 cm Photographer: Greg Piper

Published by The Condition Report

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Issue 4 - October - December 2014  
ISSN - 2203-1758 (Print)

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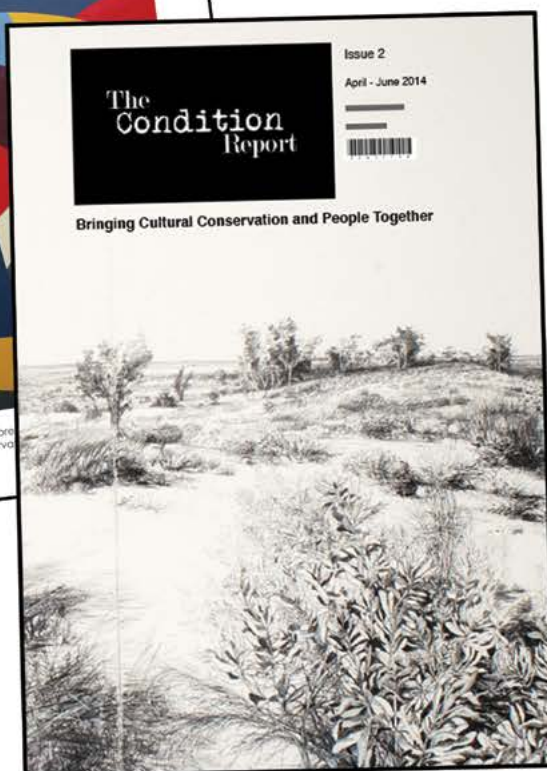
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# Editor's Letter

Issue 4 is a milestone for this magazine, it marks the end of our first year of publication. What an enormous achievement for all those involved. Special congratulations go to those who form the core team of writers and editors, without whom, this magazine would not exist.

Have we achieved what we had hoped in one year? In many ways, the answer is yes. We have created an accessible medium for sharing the work conservators do with those outside the profession, we have created a platform that introduces emerging conservators to industry professionals worldwide and we have developed the style and content of the magazine into something we are proud to stand beside.

Issue 4 is packed with articles from conservators in Australia and abroad. We hear from a masters student who has transitioned into a PhD candidate, we delve into the world of linen and canvas and we hear from the UK conservators who established the private practice, W H Conservation.

In one of our artist interviews we gain an insight into the materials and techniques of the Australian artist Merran Esson, whose striking work is featured on our cover.

Happy Reading!

Shellie Cleaver

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**Above:** *Tintaldra Tank*, 2005, Stoneware clay and copper glaze, H 27 x W 37 x D 30 cm Photographer: Greg Piper

## Artist Interview: Merran Esson

Interviewed by Shellie Cleaver

*Merran Esson has been making works of art using clay for over 30 years. She was awarded the Port Hacking Award in 2000, Nava Marketing Grant in 2006, the Gold Coast Ceramic Award in 2005 and Poyntzpass Pioneer Ceramic Award in 2008. She was a resident in the National Art School studio at the Cite Internationale des Arts in Paris in 2006 and has been a visiting artist in China, Korea, Scotland, Sweden, Taiwan and Pakistan. Esson has exhibited in The National Gallery of Australia, The Art Galleries of South Australia and Western Australia, The Victoria and Albert Museum London, Galerie Rosenhauer in Germany, Gaffer Gallery in Hong Kong, also Korea, Taiwan, Sweden, Pakistan and numerous galleries in Australia. She is currently the Head of Ceramics, at The National Art School in Sydney.*

### Could you tell us how you came to be an artist?

I didn't plan to become an artist; I didn't really plan out my life, but I knew I wanted to make things. My childhood was spent in the foothills of the Snowy Mountains near Tumbarumba and I can see now that my early experiences growing up on a farm have led me to this point. I always thought I would return to the land and when I discovered ceramics I imagined a studio behind a wool shed somewhere. The women in my family have all been artists, my mother and her Sydney cousins were painters, and when they came to stay we would spend time drawing and painting farm machinery and grand landscapes of the mountains. I am a practical girl, and watched my father and grandfather fix things as farmers do; it was not always beautiful, but over time a patina builds up and something once practical takes on its own beauty. My father was a glider pilot and I flew over the farm and mountains with him, learning to

navigate and understanding the aerial view of the land. I am still fascinated by the markings of both man and nature on the earth below. My grandfather used to fire up an old forge and hammer out plough shears and horseshoes, I became quite fascinated in how metal changes under heat. It never occurred to me that all these experiences would lead me to where I am now. I rejected the grand landscape and became fascinated by the minutia of rural detail. Drawing it and later creating aspects of it in clay. In the 1970's I studied Ceramics at Caulfield Institute of Technology in Melbourne (now Monash University), and on completion I moved to London. This was to really open my eyes to the breadth of contemporary ceramics. I was introduced to a much broader art world. My studio practice is now an urban practice, it includes teaching, exhibiting, writing, curating and making. There is still a yearning for a farm studio, recent works although rural in origin have an industrial scale.

### Which core ideas inform your work?

The British writer Peter Dormer wrote in 1994 'Function is the subject matter, not the purpose; the purpose is art.' This quote has informed my work over my whole career. The core of my practice has always had its roots in function as first understood as a potter, and in rural and industrial objects as memory. Combining these two influences to create an artistic practice has always been the challenge. It still underpins my work and gives me endless subject matter. The rise of China as a producer of many things that we need, especially ceramics, has reinforced my need to make work that does not compete in the domestic marketplace.

### How important are the materials you work with and how particular are you about these aspects?

Clay is such a willing material, I can leave my imprint on any clay and it will stay there forever. I like my clay made by someone else and delivered on my doorstep wrapped in plastic and ready to use. I have found a couple of clays that I like and tend to stick with them. In ceramics one takes time to develop an understanding of what a particular clay body will do under firing conditions. Perhaps my practical background also means that I am less fussy about a specific material.

### What materials do you use?

My main clay is a fine hand building clay made by Clayworks in Melbourne. It's strong and easy to manipulate. I do cover it with a very fine white engobe, which is a type of slip and gives the appearance of a much smoother clay body. It covers and hides the structural body beneath. I have been working with a green glaze, which gives my work a soft matt surface. Developed over a number of years from a base recipe, I use a range of glaze ingredients including copper and lithium carbonate to achieve the surface.

### When choosing materials to use do price, brand, quality and range affect your selection?

Not really. Clay is fairly cheap and abundant. The translucent porcelains are expensive, quite hard to work with but give some beautiful results, so one has to just go for them. Most artists using clay are constantly testing materials to understand and recognise changes. Of course some glaze materials are expensive. I always go with what is needed to give the best result.

### Do you consider the longevity of your artworks when creating them and making choices about materials and techniques?

One of the reasons that I work with clay is that it lasts a very long time. So in some ways I do consider longevity. Clay is part of geology and rocks are the basis of ceramic glazes. Clay is derived from weathered rocks, so technically by combining the two (clay and glaze), ceramic artworks should last forever. Of course they don't because human beings don't always look after them. I do have some pieces that I gave to my mother as my career was developing; a teapot with a cracked handle and a coffee mug with a crack in it. My mother never used any of my work, so I surmised that the flaws in my work would never be discovered. When she passed away I collected all the work and was reminded that longevity can be a problem when the work is not made very well. It's a reminder of one's own flaws. I have since destroyed them. I contemplate casting in bronze one day. However, I do keep returning to clay and I think I just know intuitively that it is the right material for me. I have not always made sturdy work, but as my experience has grown I realise that clay is strong when it is fired to high temperatures. Clay is heavy, so it needs to balance on a sturdy base.



**Above:** *Collision*, 2012, Stoneware clay and copper glaze, H 18 x W 45 x D 18 cm    Photographer: Greg Piper



**Above:** *Pod Stack*, 2014, Stoneware clay and copper glaze, H 66 x W 40 x D 20 cm Photographer: Greg Piper

**In your practice do you work on one piece at a time or several?**

I prefer to work on several pieces. I work in series and like to follow a particular subject matter. It's good to have different pieces in the studio, it helps me to see the links between different works and it refreshes my decisions, particularly in how to complete the forms. If I get stuck, I just wrap work in plastic and return to it later. Clay needs to stiffen for ease of modelling and construction, so there are often works in different stages of construction waiting to be worked on.

**Do you revisit old works and make changes?**

Yes. Of course it's impossible to add new clay to objects after firing, but I love to refire works that are unsuccessful. Sometimes I will refire years later when I have discovered a 'rescue' glaze. If a glaze hasn't worked but the form is good then it's worth persevering. I like to live with work for a while, some pieces are ahead of their time and need to sit and wait on shelves until the time is right to show them.





**Above:** *Jagungal Series*, 2007, Stoneware clay and copper glaze,  
Sizes variable Photographer: Greg Piper



**Above:** *Pot Shot*, 2009, Stoneware clay and copper glaze,  
H 64 x W 44 x D 43 cm Photographer: Greg Piper

#### **How do you document your art practice and body of work?**

I use a very good photographer who knows how to capture a three dimensional object into a two dimensional image. Images are so important now with social media and online opportunities. Keeping files organised and up-to-date is always a challenge. I have a stack of CD's from my photographer. I just need to file them properly.

#### **If one of your artworks of yours was damaged, would you want to repair it yourself or would you prefer/be happy for a trained conservator to make the needed repairs?**

I like to repair my own work, and I think I am quite good at it. Most of the objects that I make are large and take a few days to make, so if a crack appears I have all sorts of experience at repairing works that are unfired. I have repaired my own completed work when something has been damaged. It takes time and patience but I don't mind doing it. When a piece of ceramics breaks, the glue or filler takes up space so the pieces never set back together exactly as they were. Thankfully I haven't had to repair much at all.

#### **Do you know much about the work conservators do?**

I am fascinated by the work conservators do. I remember watching a program on the conservators in Florence after the Arno River flooded and damaged so much artwork. I thought in my next life I would quite like a job like that. It would be exciting to work on a great old master. On a trip to X'ian in China I visited the area where the terracotta warriors were being restored. Of course the Chinese are dab hands at repair and camouflage.

#### **Do you think the knowledge conservators have about materials and techniques could be useful for practising artists?**

Yes, definitely. I think that if one is going to repair work it must be done well. In ceramics I have spoken to Penny Byrne, a Melbourne artist, who trained as a ceramist and then a conservator. She has very specialised skills and I know that there are many products that have been invented in the dental industry that make invisible repairs on fine china. These materials and skills are important when repairing works of great value. I am often asked by galleries and collectors about where to get damaged work repaired, so I believe that a greater awareness of correct and successful conservation practices would be very useful for practising artists.

#### **How do you think the relationship between artists and conservators could be improved?**

The really sensible answer would be to watch and learn from each other, but to be honest, I never think about my work being damaged. I make art because I need to, because I take great pleasure in making and when it's gone from the studio I return to the table to make another one that is better. I have on a few occasions repaired work by other artists. It's lovely to handle someone else's work and try to match up colour and surface. It's a slow job and requires fillers, glues and paint. The Japanese have a tradition of repairing pots with gold called "kintsukuroi". The Japanese have always accepted imperfection in pots and so repairing a broken pot adds beauty and does not seek to hide flaws.

*Merran is represented by Stella Downer Fine Art in Sydney, and Gaffer Gallery in Hong Kong - gaffer.com.hk  
merranesson.com  
stelladownerfineart.com.au*



## Brittany Webster

**Year Graduated?** 2012

**Current Residence:** Montreal, Quebec, Canada

**Title of conservation course:** Painting conservation, Art Conservation Program, Queen's University

**What was your previous background?** Engineering and architecture at the University of Manitoba. I graduated with a Bachelor of Environmental Design in 2008. After this, I took a gap year to work on my French, teaching English classes and organizing activities with elementary students in Amqui, Quebec. Returning to Winnipeg, I worked as an interior designer for a year. I later began volunteering at the Winnipeg Art Gallery's conservation lab about once a week to learn more about art conservation.

**What attracted you to conservation?** Initially, conservation felt like a backstage pass into the world of art. I loved the idea of seeing and working with a piece of art from a vantage point that no one else gets to have, ordinarily. Also, there is a lot of specialized knowledge needed and research that goes into treating an artwork: were there previous treatments, understanding the work technically, knowledge about the artist and his or her working methods, etc. The more questions I asked about art conservation, the more I realized just how integral conservation is to the art world.

**What skills have you developed from your course?**

Through coursework, internships and post-graduate work I have developed a wide range of craft skills, including: knowledge of sealants and mortars, using a chisel, how to heat and patinate bronze sculptures, and the incredible amount of sanding needed to create a smooth surface for gilding. I have developed a love of climbing scaffolding and understand the importance of communicating well with clients, engineers, contractors etc.

**What are your goals post-graduation?** My personal goals include learning how to run a successful private practice business, becoming fully bilingual and working on heritage and

architectural conservation projects. In general, I would like to attend more conferences and workshop sessions, author an article in one of the conservation journals and pursue specialized training abroad.

**Where do you see yourself in five years?** In five years I can see myself doing contract work and collaborating with a range of professionals and different conservation disciplines. My work would overlap with the domains of design, engineering, architecture, the heritage sector etc. and projects would be approached by an interdisciplinary team of individuals sharing input and problem-solving skills. Hopefully by this time I am also pursuing professional accreditation in conservation, having gained more experience in the field.

**If you could work anywhere in the world where would it be, and why?** I would absolutely love to work in Barcelona, Spain on one of Antonio Gaudi's buildings. He is the reason I pursued architectural studies in the first place and even seeing his work in person would be amazing! Also, the culture and way of life appeals to me. I love the idea of collaborating on large-scale projects and if I were living in Spain, I would be speaking Spanish as well, so I should add that to my list of languages.

**Advice for other student/graduate conservators?**

Conservation was very foreign to me when I first heard about it and my first point of advice would be to do your homework: Make sure to investigate the different programs available, further training options and job options. Talk to conservators in the field, at institutions, researchers. Realize that conservation is very different depending on what discipline you're dealing with, whether you're working in an institution and depending on its size and location, if you work for the government, or if you work with a private studio, or want to start your own. Know you have options and be willing to travel.

We are trained and perhaps specialize in a certain type of conservation, but its important to be able to adapt and keep learning. Know your strengths and be confident enough to take on projects that will challenge you, but always be able to ask for help.



## Laura Dellapiana

**Year Graduating?** 2014

**Current Residence:** Italy

**Title of conservation**

**course:** Master of Art in Conservation and Restoration of Cultural Heritage, Academy of Fine Arts of Turin, Italy. Specialisation: books and paper.

**What was your previous**

**background?** My background includes an interest in bookbinding, paper marbling, miniature, painting, origami, European and Asian/African books and paper based artefacts.

**What attracted you to conservation?**

I have a passion for cultural heritage and art history. It developed when I was a child after visiting several wonderful cities in Italy

and France. After my high school diploma in fine art, I was fortunate to obtain a fixed term contract with a frescoes conservation company, which further developed my interest in conservation.

**What skills have you developed from your course?**

I have developed technical skills in conservation, especially in graphic documents, rare books, archive collections and photographic materials. The logical skills I have developed were helpful at the Vatican Museums, where for my masters degree, I worked on several conservation projects at the same time.

**What are your goals post-graduation?**

Complete a 6-12 month internship and secure my first contract in an important conservation institution in the UK or Ireland. Through this I hope to develop

my professional skills and improve my knowledge of the English language so I can develop my career and working relationships at an international level.

**Where do you see yourself in five years?**

I see myself in a senior position in the conservation laboratory of a public conservation institution, such as an archive, library or museum.

**If you could work anywhere in the world where would it be, and why?**

In the United Kingdom or Ireland, as these countries offer opportunities to grow that I can't find in Italy.

**Advice for other student/graduate conservators?**

You must have a genuine passion, be curious and study hard. Continuously researching through books, articles, videos and seminars is important to improve your knowledge



about conservation, materials and techniques. I would advise students to save money to travel to the most important conservation centres and museums. Try to obtain internships and volunteer positions and finally, try to practise your skills on less valuable objects. For example, a student in book and paper conservation can find damaged books at home to work on.

## Aimee Sims

**Year Graduating?** 2014

**Current Residence:** Kingston, Canada

**Title of conservation course:** Queen's University Master of Art Conservation – Artefacts Stream.

**What was your previous**

**background?** BFA, major Art History, Concordia University, Canada. Pre-program experience at the McCord Museum, Montreal. During my time at Queen's I held a two year work-study position of collections assistant and conservation advisor at the Museum of Healthcare at Kingston.

**What attracted you to conservation?**

I always loved art, and had many projects on the go in a variety of media. Add to that, an obsession with museums...as a child I dreamt of owning a museum! For my bachelor's degree, I chose art history as it had always held my interest, but after completion, I felt the only path being recommended was studying to become a teacher. The lack of options inspired my search for a more hands on profession within the art world, which could offer me a chance to use my artistic skills as well as my analytical thinking.



**What skills have you developed from your course?**

The most important skills that I developed were observation skills and creative thinking. Conservation teaches you to look at the physical, chemical and aesthetic aspects of objects, and each of these factors need to be fully considered when devising a treatment plan. Creative thinking requires you to take traditional theories and apply them in a non-traditional manner. Most of the time, objects conservation is like a puzzle you need to approach from all directions to find a satisfactory solution. A secondary skill developed throughout my course was collaboration. Most of the time, students are working on individual projects but through the introduction of a group treatment, we developed communication between the paper and paintings streams. Everyone brings different backgrounds and ideas to the

table but to be able to convey ideas properly and listen to others is an often-underestimated skill.

**What are your goals post-graduation?**

My primary goal post graduation is to continue my education through fellowships and contract work. I hope to gain experience in numerous areas of conservation and in various types of institutions to be better able to narrow down my focus in a few years.

**Where do you see yourself in five years?**

I hope to be working full time in an institution and have narrowed down my interests to be able to specialize in a single area of conservation. More importantly I hope to be on my way to becoming an accredited conservator and making a name for myself in the conservation community through research and publication.

**If you could work anywhere in the world where would it be, and why?**

Currently I would love to work in England; there is so much heritage and history there and therefore projects that would be phenomenal to be a part of. I'm not very picky about the country I see myself working

in. I have always loved to travel and would think it a great adventure to work somewhere that I had never been before. One of my passions in life is exploring new cultures and learning different languages so it's exciting to think that conservation can combine these interests.

**Advice for other student/graduate conservators?**

The most valuable advice I can give to other students is to try everything and speak to everyone. You may know from the outset where your interests lie, but trying new techniques, materials and specialisations will benefit your overall knowledge and more often than not, you may be surprised to find that you have talents that were just waiting to be revealed. Finally, communication is key. Art conservation is a small community, so establishing good relationships with more experienced conservators, curators and technicians is essential in building a solid launching pad for your career. I have often been surprised at how friendly and willing to share information other conservators are, which sets a great example for the new generation of conservators entering the field.





**Above:** *Dislocation (Detail)*, 2014, Sandstone

## Artist Interview:

# Paul Smith: Stone Sculptor and Stonemason

Interviewed by Katie Dunning

*Paul Smith is an Australian stone sculptor and restorer who works in his studio in Kallista, in the picturesque Dandenong Ranges.*

### How did you come to be an artist?

I think in some ways you are born with the raw materials for being an artist. Often you don't discover this aspect of yourself till much later in life.

### What drew you to stone?

It's a basic building block of the earth we tread. It's a very powerful medium visually and I enjoy working with the bones of the earth. I really enjoy the thought of the process that's gone on to make the stone that sits before me. I started into stone when I was about 21. Running behind a garbage truck wasn't going to get me anywhere and I wanted to get into the alternative fields of endeavour. Mud brick I thought! Going past a stone house being built in Lower Plenty one day I went in and asked for a job and started working on weekends for the two stone masons as a labourer. It didn't take long for me to become addicted to the stuff, drawn to it like a magnet. The slow unfurling of the artist started (not without a few failures along the way).

### Which core ideas inform your work?

Many and they are varied, because it's a very rich tapestry out there. They are ideas about nature and the natural world around me. People and the way we are constructed. I'm doing a torso in limestone at the moment, and it's all just rattled out of my head, I'm not using a model per-se. I've got a clay model I made out of my head, so I'm replicating that and following the form. I get inspired by the way we are constructed, even us dudes that are in our fifties! We all have our own beauty. There's also social justice and pushing a boundary or two, if there's a boundary to be pushed. I think if it has grabbed my imagination, then I'll push it.

### How important are the materials you work with and how particular are you about them?

They're pretty important, because you need a particular visual look. You need to be able to assess whether the visual styling is going to work or if it's going to fall apart on you. Will it fracture? Will it weather? Does it lend itself to what you're doing visually and/or texturally? We perceive stone as a dead thing, but it's sort of alive, not in an esoteric sense, but it's a natural product, so it has a life force of its own. I don't have a standout favourite type of stone to work with. The limestone that I'm currently



**Above:** *Seed 2*, 2014, Sandstone

using is good because you get a long way quickly. Marble is good, especially Statuario because it resists you and you have to tease it, just caress it into submission. Other marbles such as Bordonaro, or Carrara for instance are difficult types of stone; it's like being in a bad relationship.

**When choosing materials to use do price, brand, quality and range affect your selection?**

To a point. Carara statuary grade is something like \$8 - \$12,000 AUD per cubic metre. It's nice, but the statuary grade Carerra, the Vietnamese statuary grade, which I'm starting to use, is \$3,000 AUD per cubic metre, much better. So price does dictate, as does availability. The limestone I use is only \$1,000 AUD, to have shipped from New Zealand. So yes, it does affect choice.

**Do you consider the longevity of your artworks when making choices about materials and techniques?**

Yes I do. It's not much good if all your hard work ends up eroding away in a couple of decades!

**Do you work on one piece at a time or several?**

In an ideal world I'd like to work on one at a time, but this is not an ideal world, so I have three on the go at the moment.

**Do you revisit old works and make changes?**

No. Once they're done, they're done.

**How do you document your work?**

Sometimes I photograph works, and other times I don't, it depends on what it is.

**If one of your artworks was damaged, would you want to repair it yourself or would you prefer a trained conservator to make the needed repairs?**

Me - every time. There are conservators who are quite capable, that I would trust, but I'd be my preference. I'd make it as close a match as I possibly could. Up to a point. It would be identical up to a close distance. Once it was more obvious than that, you might as well use a different material. You can always find a match for the grain texture if you work at it, or you can get it pretty close.



**Above:** *Rose Study*, 2014, Sandstone

**Do you know much about conservators and the work they do?**

Yes I do. I know a fair bit about conservators and the work they do. They've got a place, just as much as I've got a place. Some times their lack of understanding on how stone behaves is evident. For example, trying to conserve delaminating Barrabool sandstone steps, I know that stone cannot withstand the expansion and contraction of the clay that runs right through it, so you may get 15 years out of a treatment but it would just start delaminating again. But museum pieces and highly historical pieces, yeah, conserve away! If you can get 15 years out of it, go for it! Photograph it, because conserving never stops the decay in its tracks. It slows it down on the limestone, and sandstone and marble. It never stops it, and often, it makes it quicker.

**Do you think the knowledge conservators have about materials and techniques could be useful for artists?**

All knowledge can be useful as an artist. As a stone sculptor I would be going straight to a stonemason to chat about a particular stones durability. I'd look at existing works to see how they have performed. In short I would talk to everybody about it, including a conservator. But their word would not be the definitive answer to the question of 'do I use this stone or not?' Conservators have done a fantastic job on Michelangelo's David, but they have also done some terrible work on other projects.

**How could the relationship between artists and conservators be improved?**

Simply by realising that there is always knowledge to be gained by listening to the other point of view.

**Would you recommend anyone wanting to go into sculpture to learn about conservation?**

Only on the side. There is so much to learn about sculpture; just stone sculpture alone is a lifetime learning saga. If you want to be a sculptor then that's what you do. If you want to be a conservator then that's what you should do.

[forestedgestone.com.au](http://forestedgestone.com.au)



## Cool Things

I learnt during my internship

By Cash Brown

*I recently completed my internship at the Rabo Art Collection in the Netherlands. I also spent time travelling around looking at galleries, museums, art fairs, the odd castle and a couple of ateliers. It is with great pleasure that I share a few things I picked up along the way.*

### 1 Reducing Deformations in Canvases

Bulges and deformations in canvases can be reduced or eliminated using a system of local humidification, with blotters, Goretex® sandwiches, combined with magnets, more blotters, mount-board and time. The acrylic painting I worked on had many bulges, which were systematically removed by using this system.

### 2 Edge Protectors for Paintings

The blue object you can see on the top of the painting is a PE Foam Edge Protector. It is 'C' resilient blue polyethylene foam, in profiles that slip on and stay on the edge of the frame without rubbing the finish. At the corners, you can notch the PE with a knife and fold it around. Cling-wrap can be used to hold it in place, or corner pieces are available for purchase. It comes in different thicknesses and is a great product.

Visit: [componentforce.com/category/289/foam-edge-protector](http://componentforce.com/category/289/foam-edge-protector)



### 3 Securing Stretcher Bar Keys

Rather than using gummed tape, pressure sensitive tape, or screws to secure stretcher bar keys, try drilling holes in them, tying with string, then tape the ends to the stretcher bar. This is a great technique for preventing key losses.

### 4 Corner Device for Tensioning Canvases

I don't know what these are called, but I do know deffner-johann.de sell them. These nifty thingamajigs are designed so you can attach them to the corners of stretchers with screws and slowly wind out the nut over time, ensuring an even stretch with no sudden shocks to the paint film. They are preferable to bashing in keys.

In fact, Deffner – Johann have everything you could possibly need as a conservator or artist, from pigments to UV lamps, microscopes and... just get them to send you a catalogue!





## 5 Breathable, Comfortable Gloves

Nitras® gloves are fantastic breathable gloves like a cross between nitrile and cotton gloves, excellent for handling things. They are comfortable, seamless, knitted gloves, bleached, palm and fingertips with a PU coating that has a high cut resistance. I gLOVE these!



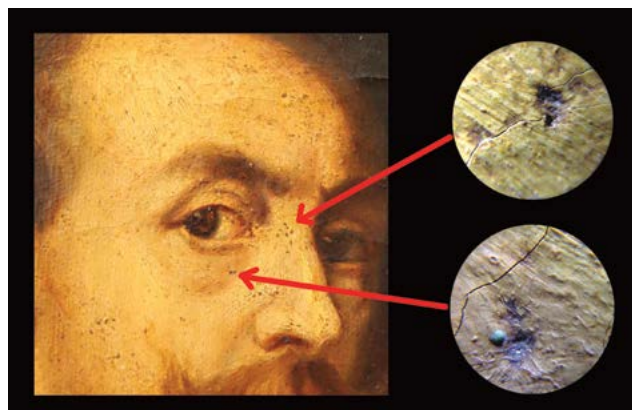
You do need to edit the images to crop out the background, but the quality is very good. It is excellent for condition reporting on the go, and also makes a superb present for the inquisitive mind.

Check Ebay® under iPhone® or Samsung® microscopes. The units themselves are all the same; it's just the sleeve adaptors that are different. If you don't have an iPhone® or Samsung Galaxy®, try making your own sleeve using thermoplastic! I have trialed a couple of other similar devices but they are clumsier, more expensive and the light emitted is too blue to be really useful. Buy a few at the same time, as the plastic protective piece over the lens tends to fall off. They are about \$2 each when purchased alone. Here is an image I made using this wonderful device for condition reporting.

## 6 Replicas for Informing Conservation Solutions

Making replicas of artworks is a great way to understand their structure and behaviour. Information gathered can assist curators and historians in understanding materials and methods. Replicas make excellent stunt doubles for testing things like anti-theft devices, display options and packaging. Troubleshooting conservation issues, especially with contemporary art, can be assisted greatly by creating replicas. It is a process that reveals how ready we often are to make assumptions. It also can hone your eye to look for details and clues like a masterful detective. I made replicas of these three small Jan Schoonhoven works from 1964. All they need now is the patina of age! See photo below.

For the full story, visit: [issuu.com/cashbrown/docs/cash\\_brown\\_replicating\\_schoonhoven](http://issuu.com/cashbrown/docs/cash_brown_replicating_schoonhoven)



## 8 Trekking With Bulldog Clips

Trekking with bulldog clips is not just for small works, I have seen it in action at SRAL\* for massive canvases to great effect. You just need massive tables, hundreds of clips and patience.

## 9 Discussion and Collaboration

Perhaps the most important thing I learnt is that by discussing conservation materials and techniques with other conservators, you can discover a wealth of information on a multitude of approaches available to the same problem. While this may seem obvious, the array of choices, treatment justifications, suppliers and innovations are not always published, and certainly

not always in English. This is where networking; conferences, professional memberships and an open, inquisitive mind can become the best tools you can have.

\* Stitching Restauratie Atelier Limburg – or SRAL for short - is a leading institute specialising in the conservation and restoration of paintings, sculptures, modern and contemporary artworks and historic interiors. The interdisciplinary collaboration between our various restoration specialists and researchers provide an integrated approach to conservation issues. Research, consultancy and education courses are also part of SRAL's domain. SRAL is located in the former Wiebengahal on Avenue Ceramique, Maastricht. The public-viewing studio, where you get a clear view of SRAL's work, is located in the Bonnefontenmuseum, Maastricht. For more information on SRAL, visit: [sral.nl/en](http://sral.nl/en)

## 7 Portable Microscope For Your Phone

Not everyone in the world knows about the best five dollars a conservator can spend... A microscope for your iPhone® or Samsung Galaxy® phone, with 60x magnification.

Two LEDs are used to illuminate your specimen and one is UV. It comes with a carry case and the lens mounts with a sleeve that slides over the top of your phone. It uses 3 little lithium batteries as a power source.

# Linen Versus Canvas

By Bronwyn Dunn

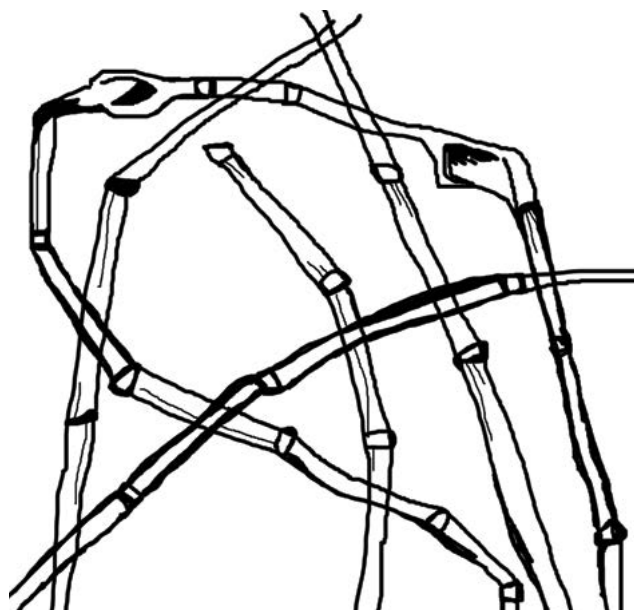
Throughout history, works of art have been rendered on many different surfaces; cave walls, ceilings, wood, metal, ceramics and the list goes on. However when thinking of paintings, the word canvas comes to mind.

Artists may consider their 'canvas' as any surface they choose to paint on. Others may understand the word 'canvas' as some form of woven textile specifically used for painting. Whatever the interpretation, 'canvas' tends to be a general term for the surface used in painting and can cause confusion as it can indicate either cotton canvas or linen.

Linen is usually the preferred choice for painting supports due to its physical structure and resulting attributes.

## The Flax Fibre

Linen is a fibre made from the flax or linseed plant (*Linum usitatissimum*). The fibres grow between the outer bark and the central woody portion of the stem and are rotted, retted, then cleaned and bleached. Flax is considered a 'bast' fibre because it comes from the stem of the flax plant. Linen is approximately 70% to 80% cellulose. These fibres do not twist or bend with soft curves like cotton fibres, instead they feature more straight lines and characteristic nodules as seen under the microscope. Linen fibres can be between 6mm to 60mm long and between 5µm and 40µm wide.



**Above:** Illustration of linen fibres as seen under an electron scanning microscope displaying the characteristic nodules.



## 10 Facts About Linen

1. Linen is very tough and durable, considered the strongest of the natural fibres. When wet, the flax fibre increases its strength by about 10%.
2. The warp and weft threads are of equal weight and strength. This makes them less prone to expansion or contraction with changes in moisture levels.
3. Linen can easily absorb up to 20% of its weight in moisture before it begins to feel damp.
4. Linen can easily be dyed a variety of colours, which is advantageous for the textile industry. Linen can be successfully bleached.
5. Many artists prefer linen to paint on, due to its responsive, robust, smooth finish. It is often chosen for its durability and it is thought to impart a sense of depth to paintings. Linen canvas is available in a variety of weights and textures to suit artists' needs and is often preferred for larger paintings as it is less likely to stretch in response to the moisture of the paint or the humidity in the air.
6. Linen was favoured by the Egyptians for burial shrouds in the mummification process and has been found in prehistoric remains from as early as 3000 BCE.
7. The regularity of the linen weave is due to the round shape of the fibres.
8. Linen fibres contain natural linseed oil which gives them flexibility and strength. This helps a stretched linen canvas keep its shape, thereby preventing sagging.
9. The tensile strength of linen is twice that of cotton.
10. The main producers of flax are Poland, Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, and the British Isles. Belgium is thought to produce the best quality flax fibre in the world.

## Linen Fibre Production

Cultivated in temperate climates of between 10° and 39° Celsius, the growing season of a flax plant is very short. There are only 100 days between sowing and reaping and unlike other crops, the entire plant is removed from the ground. The harvested flax is then stacked into mounds and allowed to dry before going through the retting stage. Retting involves exposing the flax to moisture to encourage the breakdown of a substance called pectin which binds the plant fibres together. This process is the controlled bacterial decomposition of the stems. It was once done in rivers but today the flax is laid out in the fields to be exposed to the elements. The fibres are then stripped (known as scutching) with a scutching machine that detaches the fibres from the woody core and removes any bark. The fibres are then combed or hackled, which separates the short fibres from the longer fibres and removes any straw (shives) from the fibres. The longer fibres (line) are used to make linen. The shorter fibres (tow) are used to make coarser yarns. The fibres are then carded or drawn out into sinuous ribbons, which are then plied together on spinning looms to various thicknesses. Fine yarn is generally spun wet, which gives it a smoother finish.

Cotton is an alternative textile for painting canvases and can be a popular choice as it is less expensive, but it has very different characteristics.



**Above:** Unprimed linen canvas

## Canvas Made of Cotton

Cotton is a very different fibre to linen. Referred to as a 'seed' fibre, cotton fibres are hollow growths attached to individual seeds. When the fruit of the cotton plant ripens, the seedpods burst open to reveal a 'boll' of cotton fibres. The seeds are then picked and the cotton fibres are collected. This process was once completed by hand and is now carried out by machinery. After the cotton has been picked, it is combed or carded which helps to remove any short or unusable fibres. Cotton comes from the *Gossypium* plant and different varieties are found around the world. Cotton picked at the right maturity, produces fibres that have a corkscrew twist that makes spinning easier. The twisting, ribbon-like appearance of the fibre is a diagnostic feature of cotton and is why cotton is flexible and able to stretch easily.

Cotton has been cultivated and used by many cultures from around 4500 BCE. Picked, spun and woven by hand, cotton was converted into fabric with many uses. With the development of machines for spinning and weaving and steam power in the 18th century, the production of cotton grew rapidly, especially in The United States of America.



**Above:** Unprimed cotton canvas



**Above -** Primed cotton canvas

## Comparing Linen and Cotton

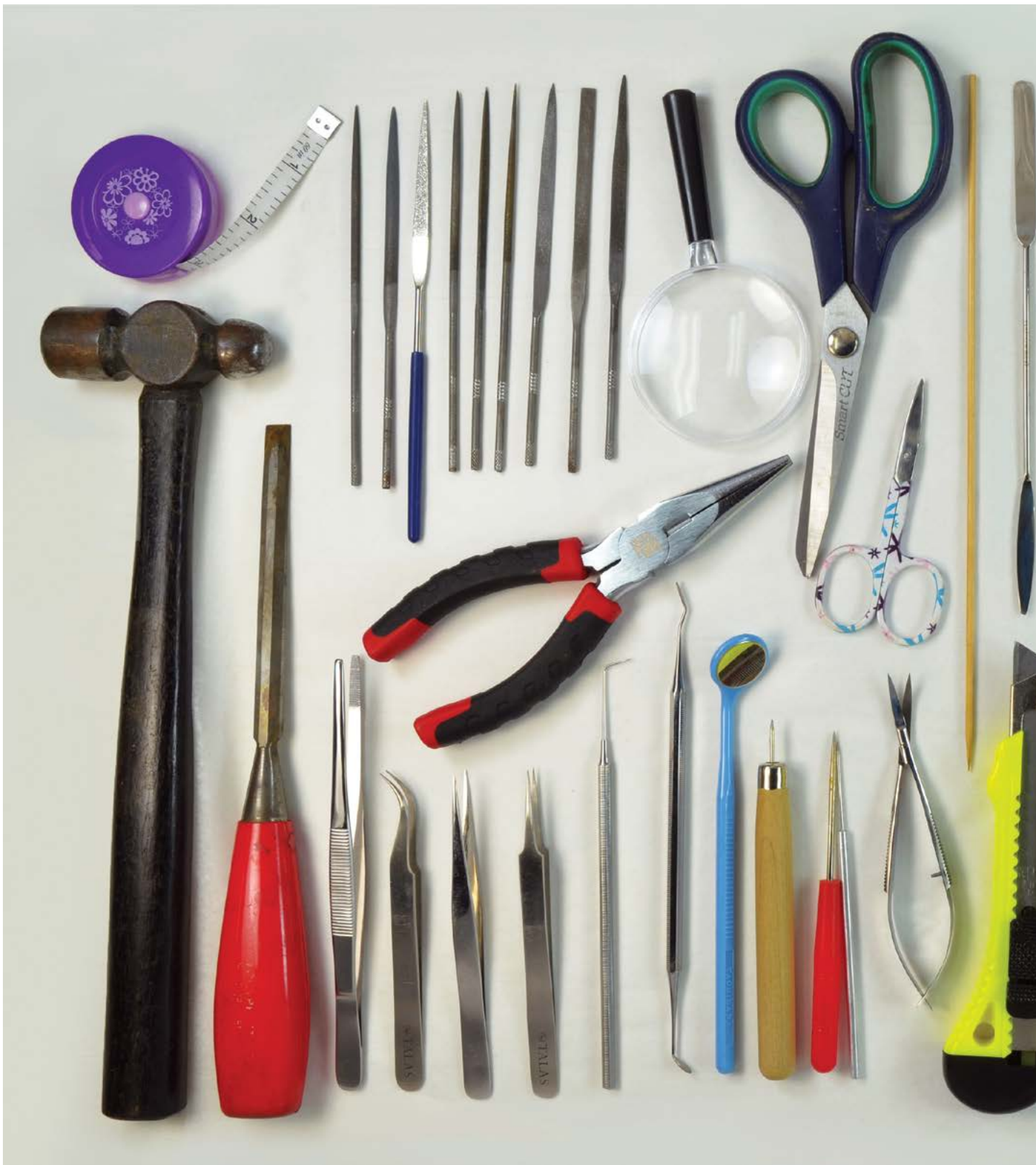
Both linen and cotton canvases are considered to hold acrylic and oil paints well. If an artist is thinking of stretching their own canvas, cotton is less rigid and more forgiving than linen, however linen, being less flexible than cotton, will not continue to stretch or warp. Finally, part of the attraction of cotton is that it is cheaper to purchase than linen.

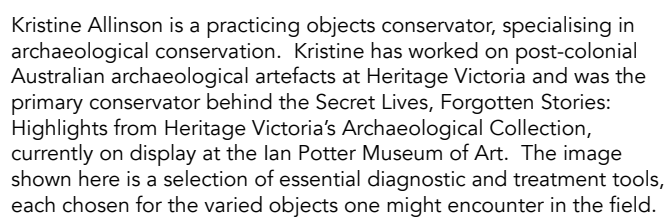
## Constructing an Artist's Stretched Canvas

Fabric is placed over a wooden frame called a stretcher. On the reverse side, the stretcher has wooden keys inserted into the corners which can be hammered in, forcing the stretcher frame to expand therefore stretching or re-tensioning the canvas. When a canvas has been stretched, whether of cotton or linen, the surface is usually sized, traditionally rabbit skin glue was used but a modern alternative is a poly vinyl acetate (PVA) size. The canvas should then be primed with a gesso, most often an acrylic gesso is used. This is to create a smooth surface for painting and a barrier between the fabric and the paint. This layer stops the paint soaking into the chosen support fabric, which aids the artist's work and prevents deterioration from the paint and medium interacting directly with the canvas fibres. Ideally when choosing a fabric for making a canvas, the weave should be as close and tight as possible with consistent thread sizes.

Choosing the type of canvas for a painting is a personal decision. There are pros and cons for each fabric type. Whatever the fabric used, it is important to understand its working qualities and how these features affect the artist's experience of painting on it, the finished artwork and its longevity.







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**Above:** Assessing the condition of tapestries at Doddington Hall

## Focus on Private Practice: **W H Conservation**

Interviewed by Emily Harris

*I met Leah Warriner-Wood as a supervising conservator on the Doddington Hall 'Yellow Room' Tapestry removal project during June 2014, along with her business partner Terri Dewhurst. Warriner-Wood and Dewhurst form W H Conservation, based in the Cathedral city of Lincoln, Lincolnshire. The company services the East Midlands area of England. In this interview I ask them both about W H Conservation and their conservation interests.*

### **What is W H Conservation's focus and how do you achieve these aims?**

**Leah:** When we set up the company we were clear that we wanted to do conservation, but we wanted to do it in a way that made it approachable and achievable by the types of groups and organisations which we felt were being alienated from conserving their heritage assets. Terri and I have both worked in small scale museums and with the general public, so we've seen first hand how conservation is quite often a luxury commodity, and even something of an exotic mystery. But, we've also seen that there is drive, passion and a genuine interest out there in what we do, which is what we really wanted to latch onto. The company's focus was really a natural extension of this; to preserve the tangible past by promoting proactive skills development among heritage workers, and by demystifying and preserving the at-risk skills of the conservator via educational outreach. We achieve this through a combination of hands-on work ourselves, bench work, preventive systems, site work and so on. It is by taking conservation outside of the confines of the lab, to where people can see it, interact with it, and begin to understand and appreciate it as something accessible and relevant to them. This means offering training to museum staff and volunteers, and also

running workshops and outreach events with the general public. We get a real kick out of sharing what we do, so our approach is very hands-on and inclusive, which people really seem to like.

**Terri:** As Leah has described, WHC's main aim is to promote conservation to the general public, to highlight the work we do and its great importance to 'everyone's history'. Raising awareness of what conservators do is crucial to us, as we ourselves found prior to joining this area of work; conservation in the heritage sense (and not the saving rainforests and pandas sense!) is still a relatively unknown industry and area of work. Already in 2014 WHC has attended three public events where we have demonstrated our conservation work and skills. We had a great public response when we positioned ourselves outside of a busy shopping centre in Lincoln as part of Lincoln's first Colonia Roman Day. Extremely enthusiastic passersby were involved with cleaning archaeological finds, mending pots and examining/condition checking objects. We aim to inspire the next generation of conservators through organising and attending such public events as well as running courses to interested parties.

### **What are your academic backgrounds and where did you complete your conservation training?**

**Leah:** I came to conservation as a second career. I'd worked in office management for a number of years. After getting my undergraduate degree in a humanities subject, and when fate delivered me an opportunity to study at postgraduate level: I chose conservation as something that would combine my obsession with heritage, and the hands-on craft skills I enjoyed as a hobby. I took a one-year graduate diploma as an intensive



introduction to bring me 'up to speed' before I began my Masters degree in the Conservation of Historic Objects. All of my academic studies, at undergraduate and postgraduate level, were done at the University of Lincoln.

**Terri:** Being interested in all things art based throughout my school years, combined with my love of textiles and fashion, I made the decision to study Fashion Design for my undergraduate degree at Nottingham Trent University. This course gave me skills in pattern cutting, tailoring, sewing, and design. During this time my love of historical costume developed. I'd spend hours in heritage sites and museums taking inspiration for projects not only from past fashions but from an array of historical movements, figures in history, right down to decorative objects that lined the cases and walls of many museums and stately homes. After graduating I realised that I didn't want to create new fashions but I had a great desire to preserve the ones of the past. When I began to explore the possibilities of working within the heritage industry I stumbled across conservation... and as they say, the rest is history! I signed up for the Post Graduate Diploma in Conservation Studies at The University of Lincoln, starting in the same year as Leah. I completed both this course and the masters part time, enabling me to fund the course (whilst working part time) and built up a good bank of voluntary experience in the process.

**Do you think your training gave you enough confidence to form your private practice? If not, did either of you complete any other training, such as a small business course?**

**Leah:** I think that leaving the safety net of university and heading out into the world of work is always daunting, no matter how confident you are or what field you work in. I think that I definitely benefited from the experience of running an office that I'd had before my conservation training though, which I'd like to think gave me quite a pragmatic 'can do' attitude to setting up in private practice. As University of Lincoln alumni we were also eligible for a scheme offering guidance and financial support to new start-ups, so we did receive some training in business-related subjects to give us a bit of a head start.



**Above:** Helping a young visitor to clean some 'Roman' finds at an outreach event in Lincoln, May 2014



**Above:** Leah completing a condition survey at True's Yard Museum, King's Lynn

**Terri:** Leah and I are unanimous in our positive views of the conservation courses at The University of Lincoln. Our training and experiences whilst studying armed us with a great broad bank of knowledge and skills covering the conservation of many material types, from textiles to metal, gilding to ceramics. We received great lectures on many topics related to conservation, to name a few: the management of conservation, ethics involved with conservation work, conservation science and a great run through of the history of decorative and architectural styles. During our studies Leah and I utilised our spare days off to undertake voluntary placements with heritage organisations. This gave us the chance to apply the skills we were learning at university to real life heritage situations. Leah worked for The National Trust within Belton House as a conservation assistant and myself, I worked for Leicestershire County Council's Museum Service, looking after their vast collection of objects and preparing items for exhibition. I also undertook a placement with textile conservator Sheila Landi. All of this 'training' in and outside of university, coupled with the excellent business advice and training we received, gave both of us the necessary confidence to enter the conservation industry as a private practice quite promptly after graduation.

**W H Conservation is a relatively new venture for you both, what made you make the leap and go in to private practice rather than align yourself with an organisation or institution?**

**Leah:** I could answer this one of two ways. The simplest answer is the pragmatic version; Lincolnshire is a sprawling, rural county (with a fantastically rich heritage!) which is far beyond the reach of the big players in the heritage world, but due to personal commitments I just didn't have the option of relocating for work. My option was to make a niche for myself here. The other reasons are more closely linked with the company's vision. Having gained experience in various museums and so on in our neck of the woods, Terri and I were struck by the big aspirations on small budgets that we were seeing. We really wanted to be able to do something that might help these little places with big ideas, to harness their enthusiasm for their collections in an achievable way, and that meant moving into private practice, where we'd have the opportunity to be truly creative in our approach.



**Above:** Terri wet cleaning a mid-twentieth century wedding dress

**Terri:** I think Leah describes the answer to this question beautifully. The only thing that I would add is that private practice means that we can be the masters of our own destiny. We can pursue the things that we are most passionate about and do these things the way we'd like to.

**What are some of the challenges you face in running a private conservation business? What are some of the highlights?**

**Leah:** The highlight of our work for me is definitely being able to indulge my 'hobby' on a professional basis. I've always been so mad on history and heritage that often it doesn't feel like I'm working at all! Projects where we can work collaboratively with other conservators, students or heritage professionals are also highlights, as are the times we spend sharing our work with the public generally. There are challenges though, of course, and it'll come as no surprise when I mention money. The economic climate is very challenging in the UK generally, and in such difficult times, culture and the arts definitely feel the pinch, as does new business enterprise. Conservation is also a fairly under-represented discipline in comparison to, say, archaeology or curatorship and so we face challenges in 'selling' what we do. But in a way that's also precisely why we set up the company: to demystify and promote conservation skills, and to do so in a way that would have sustainability at its heart. So I suppose we're taking our challenges and finding a way to work with them, rather than beating our head against them.

**Terri:** The highlights of running a conservation business are getting the chance to work on historically important objects, such as the Doddington Hall tapestries. Sometimes I have to pinch myself and I often daydream about the people who made these objects many years ago, and wonder what life might have been like then! Of course modern objects and those that may not appear as grand or exciting as the breathtaking Doddington tapestries are quite often just as fascinating to work on. Every object comes with its own interesting story and physical make up.

When thinking about the challenges we face in running our own business I would say that as it is early days, both Leah and I are juggling running the business with other part time jobs, this can sometimes be difficult. We are both looking forward to the work growing to such a level that we can run the business full time.

**What are some of the types of objects you work on?**

**Leah:** If people ask me what discipline I work in, I like to say that I'm a 'Social History Conservator'. The everyday objects that people have lived with, used, worn or worked with are the things that I get a bit giddy over, and also the things that make up the mainstay of our work. Having said that, 'Social History' covers a multitude of sins, and we've worked on everything from wedding dresses to cardboard boxes, and natural history specimens to silver coins. Part of the joy of doing objects conservation in private practice is never knowing what your next object might be.

**Terri:** As previously mentioned, our training gave us the skills to work on a great number of material types. Right from the word go, when forming the business Leah and I decided that we would not pigeon hole ourselves to working with 'just textiles' or 'just ceramics' etc. We love being able to work with many differing objects and being able to give advice on anything from how to look after family documents and photographs to cleaning and stabilising archaeological finds.



**Above:** Explaining textile conservation techniques to visitors at Lincoln's '1000 Years of Traditional Crafts' event, June 2014

**Leah, in addition to the educational outreach workshops you run through WHC, you also lecture at the University of Lincoln. Do you find the teaching styles are quite different between the two or do they feed into each other?**

**Leah:** My students might write in to your magazine to disagree with me here, but I like to think that I take a fairly relaxed style to my teaching. I like to include lots of case studies, as that was what made me sit up and pay attention as a student, and I like to use hands-on examples and activities wherever possible. Why just talk about Chris Caple's 'Decision-Making Model for Conservators' when you can bring objects along and make it real? In that way I suppose the teaching styles are quite similar, simply because we learn best when all of our senses - not just our eyes and ears - are engaged. In other ways though the styles have to be different by necessity. My students at the University of Lincoln have three years to add to their knowledge, drop by drop. For outreach learners the learning environment is much shorter, and perhaps more intensive, but also the expectations are quite different. At university there is an expectation that students are learning to be a professional and an academic, whereas in a public workshop environment the student wants simply to learn a new skill for its own sake, quite possibly in isolation (to a degree) of any others.

**What advice you would give to people about caring for their own treasured objects?**

**Leah:** It's all too easy to chant the old mantra, "seek professional advice", but that's not really what we're about. Of course we encourage people to seek advice when necessary, but we're





**Above:** Stabilising a weak document with Japanese tissue paper

more about giving people the knowledge and skills to manage their own objects than taking the object off them and doing something secret behind closed doors. I suppose if I were to offer one nugget of wisdom to people about caring for their heirlooms, I would say, 'be aware of what you have'. That means know your object, or collection, but also don't assume that the know-how to care for it is beyond your means or skill. Of course we don't expect to train everyone to be professional practitioners in a few short days, but we often find that people are pleasantly surprised and excited at knowing that they are able to play a part in preserving their own objects, especially if they have special significance as family treasures.

**Terri:** Along the same lines as Leah, I too would say don't be scared of what you have, however I do believe it's important to be slightly cautious before doing anything. Don't just jump in headfirst. Conservation to me has always been about taking well-considered and measured steps before carrying out any remedial work. Do your research in regards to an object, find out what it is made from, how it was made (how might this impact on the way it is cared for?), how stable is it (does it even require any treatment?). Once you know your object there are relatively simple things you can do to care for treasured objects. For example, wrapping an object in acid free tissue can prolong its longevity as opposed to that plastic carrier bag it might currently be housed in. We believe in making conservation techniques approachable and understandable to everyone, so that you can care for your treasured items with confidence.

**What do you see as some of the particular challenges in the East Midlands region for the cultural heritage sector at the moment?**

**Terri:** In one of my other jobs I work for the museum service in Leicestershire, this has given me a great insight and understanding of the heritage sector and how it has been developing and changing over the past few years. There is a general feeling of uncertainty. Due to the local government having to make quite large financial savings I have witnessed many job cuts and there are talks at present of museum closures in this area. You would think that this would have an impact on the conservation work that we are trying to gain, as conservation is often seen as a luxury that gets pushed down the list of priorities when budgets are tight. However, it is not all as doom

and gloom as I make it sound! There are many museums and heritage organisations who are actively seeking advice on how to care for their objects. Within the East Midlands this year we have been approached and carried out work on many projects for numerous clients, public and private. We hope that as long as there are historic objects there will be work out there for us.

**Finally, in closing, what is your favourite part/s of being a materials conservator?**

**Leah:** Of course, meeting people who are every bit as barmy about cultural heritage as I am is a real joy, but my favourite part of our work with objects is definitely the privilege of being brought as close as you can get to past lives. To me every object we work on is equally special, because however lowly it is, it has a real human being's life story wound up in it. We literally wouldn't be here if it weren't for all the people living their humdrum lives who came before us, and to be able to give a bit of a nod to that by making sure those people are remembered through their similarly humdrum belongings gives me a real buzz, and a sense of continuity through time.

**Terri:** Like Leah, I'd have to say that it has a lot to do with the objects. That's partly why we do the job we do, because it's so thrilling finding out about an object's previous life and helping preserve it for its future one. Personally, I love being able to quench my desire to be inspired by an object, research its past, but also combine my intellectual skills with artistic ones. Conservation at times can be very hands-on, it allows me to use those practical skills I love to utilise.

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Twitter: [twitter.com/WHConservation/](https://twitter.com/WHConservation/)  
Facebook: [facebook.com/WHConservation](https://facebook.com/WHConservation)

Find out more about the Doddington Hall Tapestries Conservation Project: [doddingtonhall.com/tapestries.php](http://doddingtonhall.com/tapestries.php)

Interviewer Emily Harris acknowledges the 2014 UK ADFAS Patricia Robertson Scholarship for giving her the wonderful opportunity to be involved in the Doddington Hall Tapestry Conservation Project.



**Above:** Meredith on the south wall of Lincoln Castle, overlooking the site, purpose-built to house the Magna Carta.

## The Accidental Doctoral Student

By Meredith Freeman

Mid-life transitions - no longer termed crises - are under utilised as opportunities for growth. I had become impatient with my office-based professional life and while a number of my peers opted for early retirement, overseas trips, fast cars and other diversions, I decided to indulge a long-held dream to become a conservator. I still recall toying with the idea of following my first degree, pharmacy, with the only conservation course offered in Australia at that time, in Canberra. But to me, a Sydney-sider, Canberra was a distant and strange city, and the thought of another three years of impoverished student status resolved me to build on my new degree. I did that for a couple of years and then travelled overseas, backpacking around Europe for six months then working in a country pub in Kent for a year, and a ski resort in France for a season.

Returning to Australia I married, had two daughters, divorced, and focused on raising my children and progressing my career. I revisited the option of retraining as a conservator; however, finances, family commitments, and the Canberra degree closing in 2002 meant it wasn't feasible. In 2011, with one daughter having finished her university degree and the other half way through her tertiary studies, as well as an established Masters Degree available at the University of Melbourne, I once again seriously considered conservation as a career. The support and encouragement of my family was amazing and instrumental in my final decision to enrol in the Masters of Cultural Material Conservation in 2012.

The two-year Masters degree is hard work, and while I loved the content, the workload is unrelenting. The course is intended to

provide training in conserving all cultural materials; the reality is you will need to choose between paintings, paper and objects for the practical component. With no built heritage or textile specialism on offer, 'objects' became my default. Keeping my conservation skills broad proved fortunate as it enabled me to secure an internship at ArtLab Australia, which combined work experience in the textiles and objects laboratories. For my second year minor thesis I investigated the paint and render layers of an historic building in Melbourne, working with a heritage architect and Heritage Victoria who are the State Government authority. I revelled in the blend of science, archival research, historiography, social context, conservation principles and practices and the functional aspects of the project.

I wasn't looking to continue my studies, however two Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) projects advertised in my final year piqued my interest. Serendipitously the University of Lincoln, United Kingdom, invited applications for a PhD Scholarship with the focus being architectural paint research. Reading the scholarship briefing document I felt it was written with my recent Masters thesis in mind, as it would enable me to build on my minor thesis work. My concerns were that I did not have an architectural or historian background and wasn't sure how to pitch my proposal. An email to the contact person confirmed that the proposal criteria were intentionally broad and non-specific to encourage the greatest variety of proposals. Expanding on the findings and issues raised from my minor thesis I put together a one-page proposal and submitted it.





**Above:** Castle Square with market stalls, and in the distance is top of Lincoln Cathedral behind the Exchequers Gate.

You know how you feel when you read the first line of an email that says: "We had a huge response to our request for applications ...?". Your heart drops because you are anticipating the following phrase: "... unfortunately on this occasion your application was not successful." Well I didn't have that line, instead I read, "You have been shortlisted for interview". Panic soon overtook excitement at the thought of putting together a 10-minute PowerPoint presentation of my one-page proposal within a week, to be presented via Skype™ at an interview with a panel located on the other side of the world.

The Skype™ interview with three academics from the University of Lincoln was so interesting and informative that I came away thinking if I didn't get the scholarship the effort and experience had been worthwhile - I had the best time. As you have probably guessed, I was successful and in April 2014 I arrived in Lincoln to commence my PhD in architectural paint research over the next three years.

The PhD is unique as it incorporates the usual research doctorate with hands-on work experience. One day a week I work with the conservators at Crick Smith Conservation, which is the commercial arm of the University of Lincoln and co-located in purpose-built facilities within the Conservation-Restoration Department.

I have been welcomed so warmly in Lincoln that it has been easy to settle into my new routine. I have study space in dedicated postgraduate facilities within the Art and Design School, close to the Conservation-Restoration Department. I can also access working space in the Crick Smith laboratories when I am doing work for them and this provides flexibility to collaborate with the appropriate group of people depending on what stage my study/work is at.

For this article I wanted to share my journey to this stage of my career and provide some links to resources that I found useful in considering whether to undertake a PhD. I can't stress enough the importance of finding and building a rapport with a supportive lecturer or supervisor. I was given very good advice and guidance from my thesis supervisor in the things to consider and incorporate in my PhD proposal and presentation. If I have a gripe it would have to be the lack of support and funding provided to Australians wishing to study overseas.

Of course, I now have to deliver on the PhD, but it is a fabulous opportunity and so far I love it!

There are a number of things to consider even before you apply for a PhD and here are links to some sites I found useful:

- Help sheet on Completing a PhD - Teaching and Learning Unit, University of Melbourne, 2010, available at: [fbe.unimelb.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0007/647593/Completing\\_a\\_PhD.pdf](http://fbe.unimelb.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/647593/Completing_a_PhD.pdf)
- Finding a topic or field of study and preparing a proposal - Teaching and Learning Unit, University of Melbourne, 2010, available at: [sydney.edu.au/business/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0014/90410/Research\\_proposal.pdf](http://sydney.edu.au/business/_data/assets/pdf_file/0014/90410/Research_proposal.pdf)
- Funding - is there funding associated with the PhD, or is funding possible from the university or philanthropic organisations? If no funding is likely, can you afford it? JASON: Postgraduate Scholarship Database for Australia, available at: [jason.edu.au/](http://jason.edu.au/)
- If you are thinking of studying overseas, check out your entitlement to live and study in the country. Universities in the UK must meet UK Border Agency requirements to ensure students have appropriate student status.

# English Silver Hallmarks

By Katie Dunning

The United Kingdom and Ireland's system of hallmarking is the most extensive in the world. They were first introduced to England in 1300 AD to discourage the melting of alloyed silver coins to make items and vice versa. Dishonest manufacturers would add more base metals to the mix, lessening the silver content, and then if the owner decided to return the item to coin, it would be less valuable than legal.

Used hallmarks include stamps indicating the purity of the silver, the mark of the manufacturer, date of manufacture and other information. A created item would be taken to an assayers office for measuring the silver content. If it were acceptable it would be marked to indicate it contained the correct amount of silver. This mark is the Lion Passant in England and a harped crown in Ireland. Applied with a punch and hammer, the hallmarking process creates sharp edges so is usually done before the piece is finally polished.

## Facts About Hallmarks:

- A date mark indicated the year of production. This depends upon the font, capitalisation or otherwise, and the shape surrounding the letter. This is particular to each assaying office.

- A small simple image like a crown or anchor refers to the city the object was assayed in.

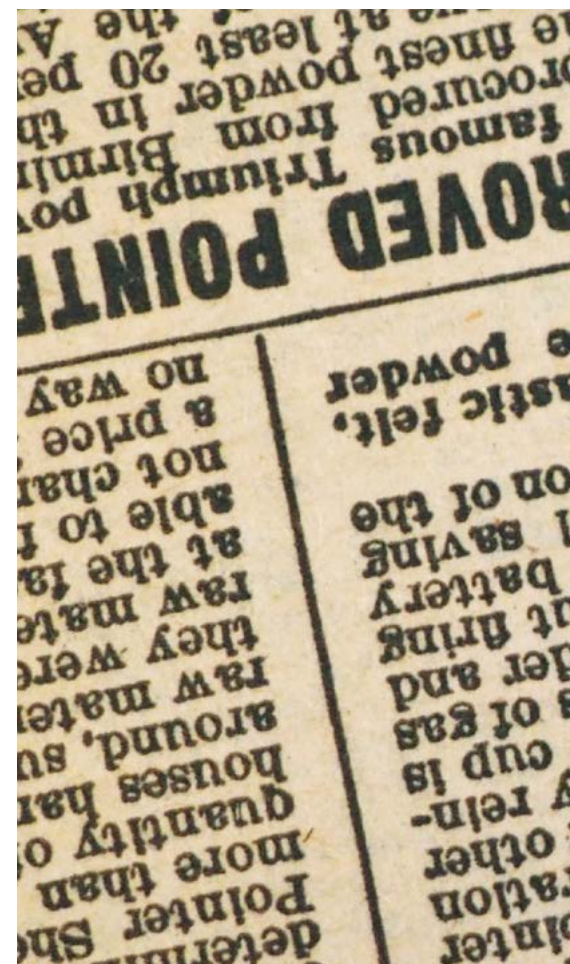
- A unique maker's mark is a set of initials inside a shield.

- Between 1784 and 1890 a duty mark was included to show the required tax had been paid to the Crown. The mark was the profile of the reigning monarch.

Between 1697 and 1720, the Britannia standard was mandatory as an attempt to prevent people melting down British sterling silver coins to make silver plate. This symbol is now only occasionally used with the hallmark "958".

Irish silver after 1730 also bears the stamp of Hibernia. Interestingly, hallmarks are not recorded if the item is silver-plated. Other countries utilising their own hallmark system include France, the United States and Hungary. In the US, stamps are comparable to logos or signatures, immediately associated with a brand.

Do you have a hallmark you can't identify or an unusual stamp from around the world? Send them to us at [info@theconditionreport.com.au](mailto:info@theconditionreport.com.au)







# Yellow

By Anna Murphy

*'I made a circle with a smile for a mouth on yellow paper, because it was sunshiny and bright.'*

Harvey Ball- designer of the "smiley face"

Unlike blues, purples and greens, yellow pigments have been in use since the invention of painting itself. They have been used to represent warmth, the sun, and the earth, and are made from dirt, waste, metals, and poison. Yellow is the colour of Helios the sun god, and it is associated with luck and eternity and in English with caution and cowardice.

**Yellow ochre:** The Greeks were the first to list yellow as a primary colour. Along with the other colours of the classical palette: red, white and black, yellow ochre is sourced from naturally occurring minerals. Yellow ochre is an iron deposit and is found all over the world and was used by early humans. Examples of early ochre use have been found in rock paintings all over the world.

**Indian yellow:** Legend has it that this luminous yellow is made from the 'gold' in 'golden showers'. Indian yellow was banned in England in the nineteenth century after an investigation uncovered that the pigment was made from the urine of cows fed exclusively on mango leaves. However this attribution has been questioned in recent years. It may be a dye produced from a shrub, though it is said to smell of cow's urine. Indian yellow was much prized for its bright luminescent colour, though it did not demonstrate good light fastness. The modern equivalent, Indian yellow hue is a synthetic blend of Hansa yellow, quinacridone, burnt orange and nickel azo.

**Orpiment aka King's Yellow:** A rich lemon colour with good covering power, orpiment is the product of arsenic and sulphide. It is mentioned by Pliny and Vitruvius and found in Egyptian and Persian works and across Asia. Orpiment requires care in its use as it is highly poisonous, it reacts with lead and copper pigments, darkening to form lead sulphide.

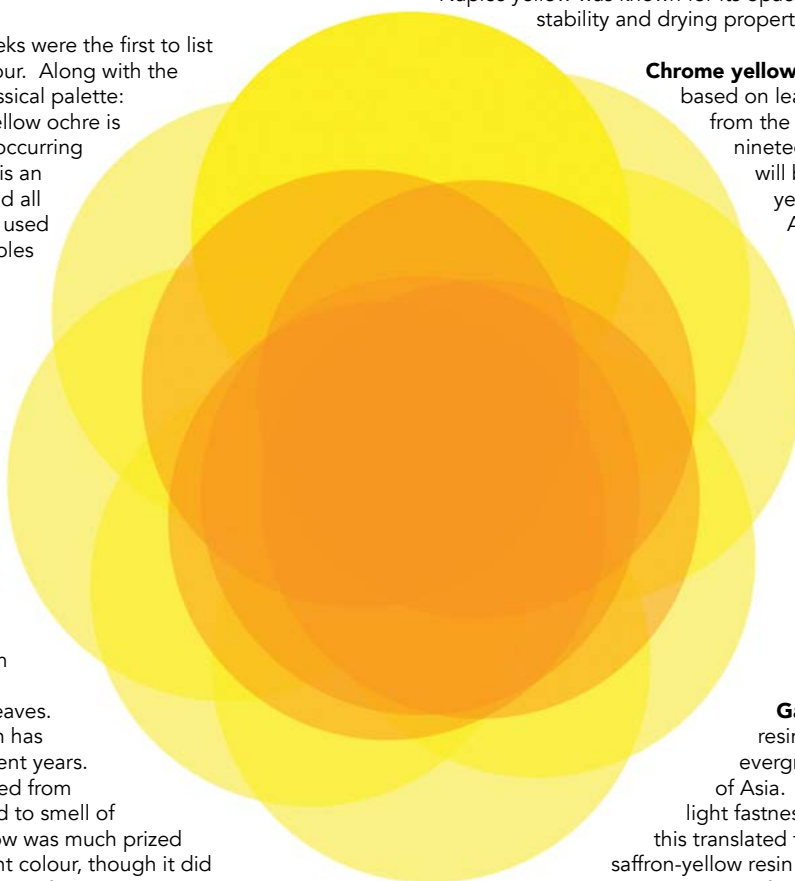
**Naples yellow:** This is one of the oldest synthetic pigments and has been produced since the 1620s. Also called 'antimony yellow', this pigment can range from a somewhat muted reddish yellow pigment to a bright light yellow. Its chemical compound is

lead (II) antimonite. This pigment was in use extensively starting from at least 2500 years ago. There is evidence of its use in glazes on bricks and ceramics from Persia and Babylon, though its use as a paint pigment only dates from the renaissance. In the modern era its use was phased out due to its lead content. Naples yellow was known for its opacity, tinting strength, chemical stability and drying properties.

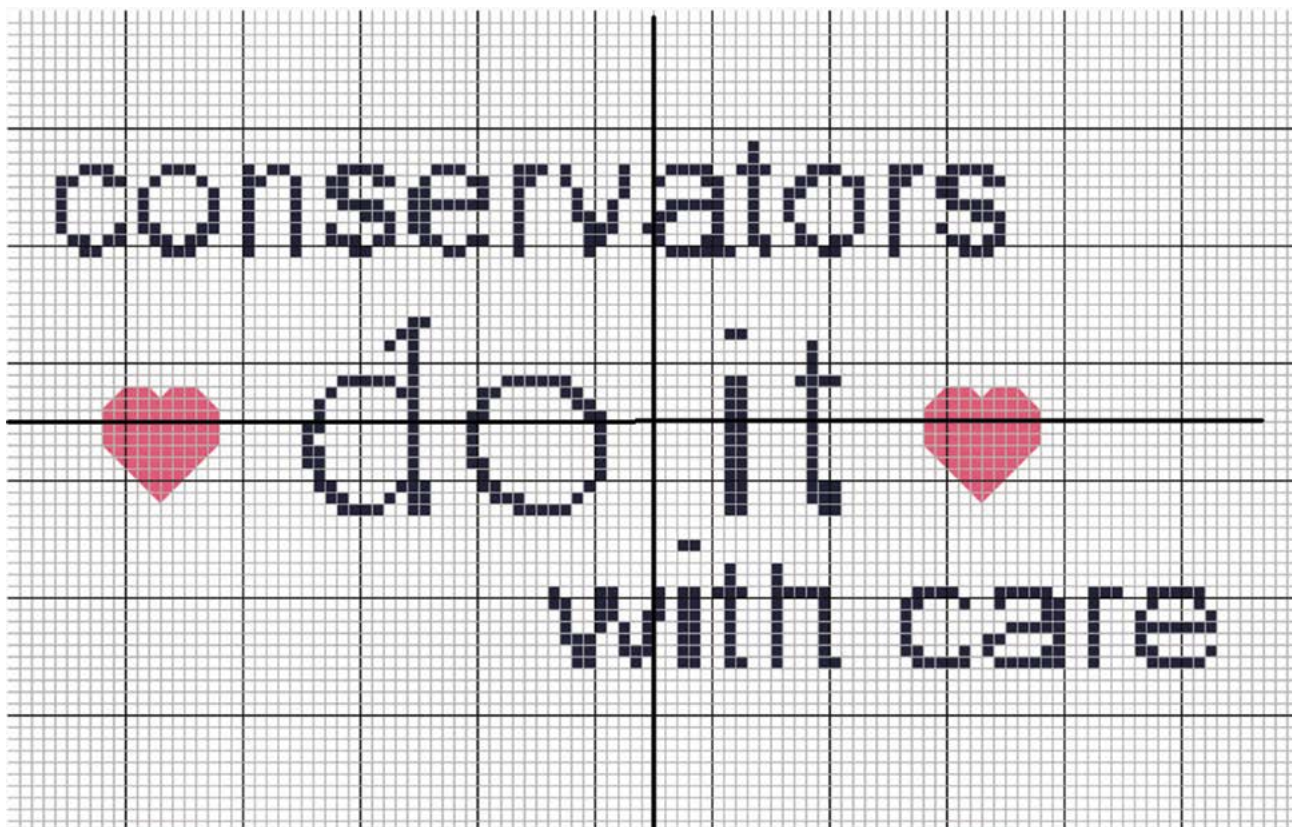
**Chrome yellow:** Is a synthetic pigment based on lead chromate. Its use dates from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. This yellow will be familiar to many as the yellow pigment used to paint American school buses. Mixing solutions of lead nitrate and potassium chromate, then filtering off the lead chromate precipitate produces the chrome yellow pigment. Due to its lead content and tendency to oxidise and darken over time when exposed to the air, chrome yellow is being replaced with cadmium yellow mixed with enough cadmium orange to approximate the chromate pigment.

**Gamboge:** Gamboge is a resin from various species of evergreen trees found in parts of Asia. The pigment had poor light fastness and covering power but this translated to a transparent glowing saffron-yellow resin that has been used as a pigment and as a dye for monk's robes. The process of collecting the sap takes years, which can attribute to the additional collection of flotsam from certain areas: shocking and sad reminders of war, such as bullets, have been found in sap collected from places including Cambodia.

**Cadmium yellow:** A modern synthetic pigment, Cadmium yellow is toxic. Poisoning is unlikely to occur through use of cadmium paints, however ingestion is not advised. The metal cadmium produces a vibrant and rich yellow colour that is now widely used in paints, plastics and ceramics. Aside from being toxic Cadmium has a tendency to fade in fresco or mural paintings but is otherwise quite stable and light fast.







# Conservation Cross-Stitch Project

By Anna Murphy

*Cross-stitch is a form of embroidery in which the image or design is made up of coloured stitches in the shape of 'x's. Cross-stitch is currently my favourite kind of needlework. It is a very old-fashioned technique that has a quite modern aesthetic reminiscent of pixels and early video games. It's also very neat and hard to get wrong.*

## You need:

**Aida cloth:** You can do cross-stitch on anything, but it looks best on Aida cloth which is specially made for the purpose. It is a stiff woven cloth with evenly spaced holes through which you pull your needle and thread. This can come in a variety of colours, try using a coloured Aida for instant pizzazz.

**Floss/ embroidery thread:** You'll find walls of this at a craft store or haberdasher. Each piece is made up of six threads, which you will separate out and only use 2 of at a time. For this pattern I recommend DMC 335 Rose for the hearts and DMC 939 Navy blue

**Needle:** The cross-stitch needle needs to fit through the holes in the Aida cloth and have a rounded, rather than sharp, tip.

**Scissors:** small embroidery scissors

**Pattern:** provided!

## Notes

- Make sure your stitches lie flat. If your thread becomes twisted while stitching, drop the needle and allow the needle to hang freely. The thread will untwist by itself.
- Make sure all your stitches are crossed in the same direction. For example all top left to bottom right, then top right to bottom left.

- One follows a cross-stitch pattern by counting the stitches from the centre of the gridded image. This point is marked on the pattern by thicker lines dividing the pattern grid into four large quarters. In order to follow a pattern you need to mark these lines, as reference points, on your cloth also. Fold your Aida in half to find the centre line. Run a thread down this line to mark it. Repeat this step crossways so that your piece of cloth is divided into 4 quadrants. Just loosely through every second hole is best, as it will be removed later.

## How to Start

Insert your needle into the Aida cloth at the start of the row you are about to stitch, say, five squares to the left of the centre line, pull the thread through but leave a tail that is the length or longer of the row you are about to stitch. As you stitch the first legs of the row of 5 x's to the left of the centre line, make sure to catch this tail in the loops at the back of the fabric and then when you've finished this row, snip off the extra thread.

## Stitching a Row

Start with the leftmost stitch and work your way, stitching one leg of each x, to the right. If there the pattern calls for one or two x's of a different colour in the same row, just skip over those squares—you can fill them in later. When you get to the end of the row, start going back the other way, stitching top right to bottom left in the other direction, right to left.

## When You're Done

When you are finished stitching a section, or when you're about to run out of thread, secure the tail end by weaving it under a few stitches on the backside of the fabric, then snipping off the excess.

Fin! You can frame your cross-stitch or turn it in to a cushion, or maybe sew it into a weight for use while working!



# Eclairs

By Stacey Cleaver

*Afternoon conservators! Now when I think of afternoon tea, the first thing that pops into my head are beautiful puffy cream filled eclairs. There is something decadent and delicious about eclairs, whether they are filled with coffee, chocolate or vanilla creme patisserie. But in order to make eclairs one has to tackle that very elusive choux pastry. Being a pastry chef I have had the opportunity to master this pastry whilst at work. I hadn't realised how much of a skill it is until my mother asked me to troubleshoot her failed attempt. So here we go.*

## Choux Pastry

180g butter  
375g cold water  
180 flour  
Pinch of salt  
4 eggs

Finely dice the butter and put it into a pan with the water. Place the saucepan on a medium heat, it is important that the butter melts before the water boils otherwise it will affect the end result. Bring it to the boil, meanwhile sift the flour and salt together. Catch the water just as it comes to the boil, then reduce the heat a little and throw in the flour. Work the flour in with a wooden spoon. Cook for about a minute moving it constantly, until it comes away into a ball. Now place the dough in a bowl with an electric whisk, and begin to whisk on a medium heat, steam should come pouring off the mix, continue to whisk until the steam subsides. Crack your eggs into a measuring jug and whisk lightly with a fork to combine. Begin to add the eggs a little at a time beating until they have fully combined, continue to add the



**Above:** Choux pastry ready to go into the oven



eggs until the correct consistency is achieved - you want a thick batter which holds its shape, the batter should also be glossy. When you have achieved this stop adding the eggs. Each batter is different, some will take more egg some less, just add as much as you think - 4 is generally an appropriate amount. Once you have achieved this consistency, keep beating it until completely cool. This can take up to 10 minutes. Put the choux into a piping bag and use a round nozzle if you have one - 18mm is a good size. If not, fill your bag, and cut yourself a hole, now pipe onto baking paper about 10cm long leaving about 5cm between them to allow for growing. Once you have piped the desired shapes, use a wet finger to tuck the tail in. Preheat your oven to 240 ° Celsius - you need it this hot so once you have opened the oven and put the choux inside the heat that has escaped will make the temperature perfect. Use a pastry brush and brush egg wash onto the choux. It is important to not open the oven once they have gone in - like a cake, and more likely with choux they will drop. Bake at 220 ° Celsius for 8 minutes, then, 180 ° Celsius for 12 minutes, then, 100 ° Celsius for 20 to dry out.

You can turn off the oven and leave them in there to dry out more if you aren't happy. It is okay to open the oven after the first 20 minutes - the choux has cooked into its shape so it won't affect it, but avoid it if you can!

#### **Creme Pat:**

400g milk  
70g caster sugar  
5 egg yolks  
70g white sugar  
45g custard powder  
125g thickened cream, whipped  
1 vanilla pod

Place the milk, caster sugar and vanilla in a pan and bring to the boil. Whisk the egg yolks till thick, then add the white sugar, whisk again and finish by whisking in the custard powder. Now pour the boiling milk slowly onto the egg yolks whisking continuously, when all combined place back in the saucepan and cook over a medium heat whisking continuously. The mixture should begin to boil and thicken beautifully. When it has come to the boil and is nicely thick, pass through a sieve into a bowl. Then cover the top with cling film and leave to chill in the fridge. When cold, use a spatula to soften the mix then fold through the whipped cream. Place in a piping bag ready to use.

#### **Fondant Icing:**

375g sifted icing sugar  
60g water  
1 tbsp golden syrup

Place all the ingredients in a bowl over a bain marie, whisk till smooth and heat until 33 degrees. The consistency should be thin and smooth. Use while hot.

#### **To Assemble:**

On the underside of the choux use a small piping nozzle to create three holes, one in either end and one in the middle. Now pipe the creme patisserie into the holes ensuring the éclair is full up, turn the right way up. Now dip them in the warm fondant icing, holding them upside down and dipping the length into the icing, allow the excess to drain away then wipe the edge with your finger.

Place on a lined tray and leave to set.

Enjoy!



**Above:** Choux pastry eclairs with creme pat and fondant icing.

# Conservation Wordfind

## Sudoku

		4	9	7				
	5							8
1	2				6			4
	3	8						2
6			2	3	1			7
2						6	3	
7			3				8	6
5							4	
				9	8	7		

P	W	O	C	K	N	S	E	I	G	T	I	B	P	Q
A	W	A	T	H	C	L	T	A	N	N	S	I	C	D
P	E	C	W	H	A	T	S	I	Q	K	A	S	C	U
Y	M	C	T	I	Q	R	O	J	Y	A	N	J	M	I
R	S	U	B	O	L	P	O	N	R	X	G	D	P	G
U	F	M	H	O	R	L	O	C	E	Y	U	W	A	E
S	K	I	V	E	Z	R	O	J	A	D	I	I	P	S
I	O	I	V	E	X	C	G	W	U	L	N	L	Y	S
L	U	L	T	P	E	S	D	Y	Y	N	E	L	R	O
S	I	L	V	E	R	P	O	I	N	T	V	O	U	M
S	O	C	H	A	R	C	O	A	L	N	Y	W	S	L
H	Q	H	P	B	R	N	Q	S	H	E	L	L	A	C
H	P	T	U	F	I	X	A	T	I	V	E	F	I	G
E	S	M	W	A	S	H	I	N	G	A	S	T	S	T
L	J	B	S	H	E	L	L	A	C	S	X	C	Q	N

papyrus shellac willow fixative charcoal silverpoint  
gesso toned washing sanguine

## Conservation Speak

### Delamination –

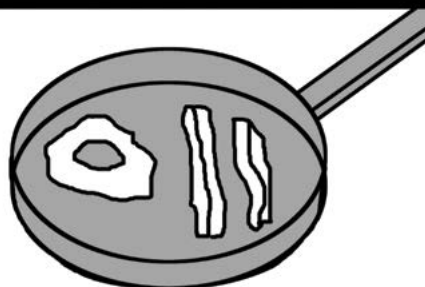
Is a mode of failure for composite materials when their layers begin to separate. Modes of failure are also known as 'failure mechanisms'. In laminated materials, repeated cyclic stresses and/or impact can cause layers to separate, forming a mica-like structure of separate layers, with significant loss mechanical toughness. While this term typically refers to layered composites, it is also used to refer to non-layered composites that break down in layers. Delamination is caused by a weakening of the bonds holding the layers together, often meaning that an adhesive begins to break down. Since this happens inside a material, the substance won't necessarily show any signs of wear, making its breakdown unexpected.

Classics  
From

The  
Conservator

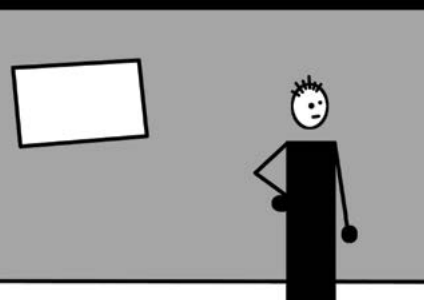
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The Conservator - versus life . . . . .



Before studying conservation,  
'friable material' had a completely  
different meaning!

The Conservator - versus life . . . . .

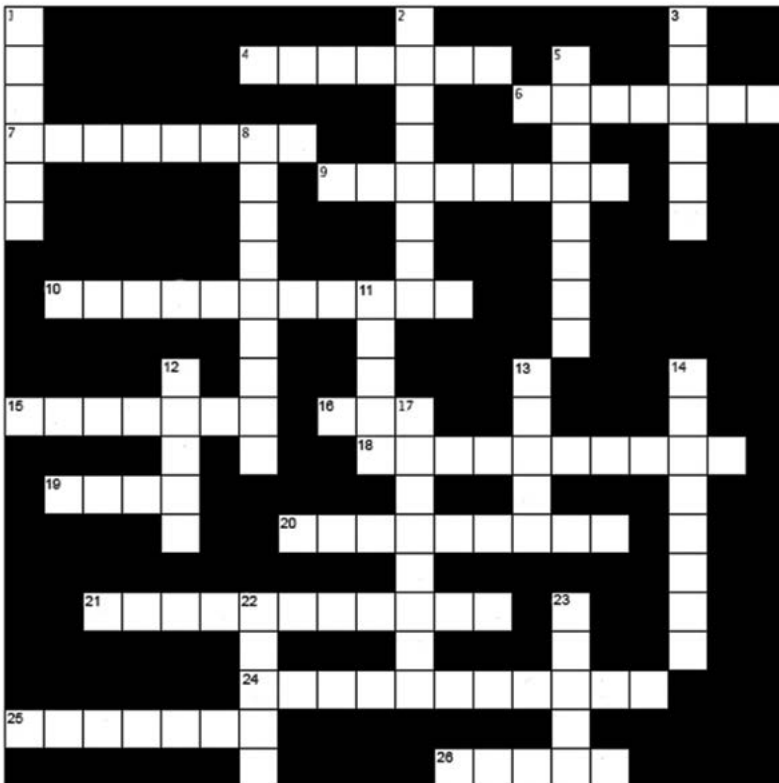


The crooked picture on the wall was  
definitely bothering him. It was a  
battle of wills he knew he would lose.



# Crossword

## Drawing Conservation



### Across

- 4.** A common conservation treatment used to draw the acid out of paper. (7)  
**6.** A binding agent commonly used in India ink to make it more durable once dried. (7)  
**7.** An artist material made with soot from pine or oil combined with animal glue. (3,5)  
**9.** A common, cheap, acidic paper used for throw away drawings by artists. (8)  
**10.** Another term used for kneadable eraser. (5,6)  
**15.** A picture made with lines on a surface, often with a pencil or pen, without the use of colour. (7)  
**16.** A type of cotton paper than can be made from old clothing. (3)  
**18.** These materials were combined to create the early form of this drawing material: pine wood smoke, lamp oil and gelatin from animal skins. (7,3)  
**19.** Most pencil cores are made of graphite mixed with this binder. (4)  
**20.** Basic India ink is composed of a variety of fine soot known as... (4,5)  
**21.** Due to its indelibility, this was the ink of choice for documentation from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century. (4,4,3)  
**24.** A drawing technique utilising a pencil of silver, usually on a specially prepared paper or parchment. (11)  
**25.** An early form of paper used for drawing, made from the pith of a plant. (7)  
**26.** Chalk drawings were commonly executed on paper that has been specially prepared in this way. (5)

### Down

- 1.** Pink erasers on the ends of pencils are made abrasive with the addition of a pulverised form of volcanic ash known as.... (6)  
**2.** A spray used to stabilise the loose particles on the surface of a charcoal or pencil drawing. (8)  
**3.** The type of wood most commonly used in the manufacture of artist charcoal. (8)  
**5.** A porous black solid used for drawing, a residue when wood is heated in the absence of air. (8)  
**8.** A basic quality type of acid free drawing paper. (9)  
**11.** This was used as an eraser prior to 1770. (5)  
**12.** Most erasers are now made with this material. (5)  
**13.** Drawing ink first appeared in this country in around 3,000BCE. (5)  
**14.** The name of a red variety of drawing chalk, derived from the French word for blood-red. (8)  
**17.** A grey crystalline allotropic form of carbon which occurs as a mineral in some rocks and can be made from coke. It is used in pencils among other things. (8)  
**22.** The ground used on silverpoint drawing. (5)  
**23.** The three colours of chalk traditionally used for drawing include red, black and... (5)

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## Just for Clicks

**The Conservation Research Laboratory at the Center for Maritime Archaeology and Conservation**

[nautarch.tamu.edu/CRL/](http://nautarch.tamu.edu/CRL/)

**Resources for Emerging Conservation Professionals**

[emergingconservators.blogspot.com.au/](http://emergingconservators.blogspot.com.au/)

**W H Conservation**

[whconservation.com](http://whconservation.com)  
[facebook.com/WHConservation](https://facebook.com/WHConservation)

**R H Conservation Engineering**

[RHConservationEng.com](http://RHConservationEng.com)

## Crossword Answers





# Calling Conservators, Museum Professionals and Artists!

## Deadlines 2014/2015 -

Issue 5 - 1st November 2014   Issue 6 - 1st February 2015   Issue 7 - 1st May 2015   Issue 8 - 1st August 2015

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Would you like to contribute to the next issue of The Condition Report?

The development of this magazine has been one of the most worthwhile projects our staff have worked on and we want to share this experience with you!

Are you a conservator, curator or other museum sector professional? We are looking for -

- \* Articles on conservation treatments - Before and After
- \* Article about old/controversial conservation techniques
- \* Arty photographs of a collection of tools you use to give non conservators a glimpse
- \* Articles about what you learned from..... anything really, a course, a conference
- \* Articles about why you became a conservator
- \* Articles about 'A day in the life of a conservator'
- \* Articles about particular materials and media
- \* Articles about digital preservation/art and the challenges that brings
- \* Articles about a scientific aspect of the work of conservation
- \* Articles about the ethics of conservation/authentication/education
- \* Articles about your area of specialisation
- \* Articles about your career, how you started out and advice for graduates
- \* Articles about an object with an interesting history or significance
- \* Articles about anything else you think is of interest

Live outside Australia? We at 'The Condition Report' are always looking for a new perspective, we would love to hear about projects and events in art and conservation around the world.

Are you a conservation student or graduate? Introduce yourself to the industry in our 'Student Showcase'!

Are you a collector? Send us some beautiful photographs and 150-500 words about why you collect, how you started, why and your favourite piece in your collection.

Do you have an object you don't know anything about? Send us an image and what you know about it and we may include it in a new feature 'What Is This?'

We would love to feature small museums and galleries! We at 'The Condition Report' admire what people are able to do on limited budgets and with niche collections. If you know somewhere we should interview, let us know!

Are you a cover star? Just because you're not an institution, you shouldn't miss out! We're looking for artists to contribute with an interview and images for our enticing cover!

Questions? Email us at [info@theconditionreport.com.au](mailto:info@theconditionreport.com.au)

