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# A Review of Conservation Public Engagement Events: The Development of the Communicative Textile Conservator

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A dissertation submitted part of requirements for the MPhil Textile Conservation degree at the  
University of Glasgow

## Abstract

This study explores the variable contexts of socio-economic impact upon the evolving role of the conservator. Government policies and funding organisations have affirmed the significance of public value within heritage interpretation and its contribution to an enhanced society. This has led to a recent emergence of conservation projects involving communities and public outreach, and the development of a more established visitor/conservator relationship. Textile conservation is still a relatively unknown profession to the general public considering the major role it plays in the preservation and exhibition of cultural heritage. This paper argues the need for textile conservation to take a more active role in public engagement events in order to maintain its place within the heritage sector.

The review covers current practice regarding textile conservation public relations and socio-economic impact. It examines the challenges faced by the heritage sector which have given textile conservation practice the impetus to evolve and uses sources to verify the need for more in-situ textile conservation public events. It critically examines technical practice and management skills taken into consideration when creating and undertaking remedial and preventive conservation public engagement events; evaluating various case studies of conservation public engagement events from differing heritage environments that focus on the visitor/conservator interactive relationship.

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# Introduction

Textile conservation is still a relatively new profession within the heritage sector and is comparatively unknown to the general public considering the major role it plays in the preservation and exhibition of cultural heritage.<sup>1</sup> This study reviews current practice regarding textile conservation public relations and socio-economic impact. It critically examines technical practice and management skills taken into consideration when creating and undertaking remedial and preventive conservation public engagement events; evaluating various case studies of conservation public engagement events from differing heritage environments that focus on the visitor/conservator interactive relationship.

This study examines the challenges faced by the heritage sector which have given textile conservation practice the impetus to evolve. Socio-economic pressures on the profession have encouraged change within conservation practice, and a new trend for large public engagement projects has been adopted in large organisations. Opportunities have arisen from requirements set by funding organisations with the aim of bringing an enhanced knowledge of conservation to wider audiences and have begun to bring the conservation profession from behind the scenes, to the forefront of heritage environments.<sup>2</sup> The benefits of this development in the role of the conservator is questioned and rationalised throughout the study.

The increase of public engagement projects within conservation is evident within published works; there are recurrent themes of public value, community involvement and interpretation debates.<sup>3</sup> Many published successful public engagement projects in conservation focus on method planning and treatments and are deficient in exploring socio-economic impact on the projects. Areas that have been previously assessed include architectural and objects conservation particularly regarding local community rights, ethical challenges and community involvement in restoration. Such examples as were discussed at the International Council of Museums – Conservation Committee (ICOM-CC) 13<sup>th</sup> Triennial Meeting in Rio de Janeiro 2002 which ‘manifested a further shift of emphasis, moving from

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<sup>1</sup> E. Pye and S. Dean, ‘Evolving Challenges, Developing Skills’ in *The Conservator, Volume 30, 2007*, Irit Narkiss ed., (London, 2007) 19-33.

<sup>2</sup> The Heritage Lottery Fund, ‘Broadening the Horizons of Heritage- The Heritage Lottery Fund Strategic Plan 2002-2007’, (London, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Jones, S. and Holden, J., ‘It’s a Material World: Caring for the Public Realm’, (London, 2008).

collections to community'.<sup>4,5</sup> Museums have taken lead way in increasing public access to conservation by developing exhibitions on conservation and adapting the surroundings to allow public view but the work remains relatively behind the scenes, and therefore is absent of engagement *per se*.<sup>6</sup> Such examples include the British Museum's exhibition 'Conservation in Focus' and the viewing area of the conservation studio at Manchester's People's History Museum.<sup>7,8</sup> There is a lack of published articles specifically for in-situ textile conservation events and this paper aims to highlight this area for improvements in order to benefit the discipline. This posed a challenge in developing the research in order to evaluate the level of public engagement within textile conservation. The case studies presented in this paper vary in their level of focus on textile conservation and an attempt has been made to specialise. Research was limited to examples from the United Kingdom from due to personal experience and interest in the subject.

The following institutions and projects from the United Kingdom were chosen for case studies:

- National Museums of Scotland: Behind the Scenes with Fascinating Mummies
- Glasgow Museums: The Burrell Tapestries Research Project
- The National Trust: Attingham Re-discovered
- Historic Royal Palaces: The Queen's Mattresses Event at Hampton Court Palace

Research into the social sciences, including public value and interpretation impact, has been used to measure the performance of the conservation public engagement event case studies, with the aim of building information to use as recommendations for textile conservators when considering public engagement projects. The research does not intend to deliver exact instructions but to highlight and recommend areas for consideration having been derived from the successful elements observed in each of the case studies. An attempt to relate the benefits in the wider context of political and social theories has been correlated in order to provide evidential support towards the aim of arguing for

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<sup>4</sup> D. Eastop, 'Conservation Decision-making: From Object Collection to Community and Back Again' in *Conserving Textiles: Studies in Honour of Agnes Tímár-Balázs*, B. Judil et al eds., (Rome, 2009) 39-42.

<sup>5</sup> R. Vontabel ed., *ICOM-CC 13<sup>th</sup> Triennial Meeting, Rio de Janeiro, 22-27 September 2002, Preprints Volume 1* (London, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> H. Shenton, Helen, 'Public Engagement with Conservation at the British Library' in *IIC Conservation and Access: Contributions to the London Congress, 15-19 September 2008*, David Saunders, Joyce H. Townsend and Sally woodcock eds., (London, 2008) 130-135.

<sup>7</sup> British Museum, 'Conservation in Focus', 2008, ([http://www.britishmuseum.org/whats\\_on/past\\_exhibitions/2008/archive\\_conservation.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/whats_on/past_exhibitions/2008/archive_conservation.aspx)).

<sup>8</sup> People's History Museum, 'Textile Conservation Studio' (<http://www.phm.org.uk/our-collection/textile-conservation-studio/>).

the textile conservation profession to take more opportunity in public engagement. It is hoped that this paper provides inspiration for textile conservators to actively contribute to the promotion of the profession consequently maintaining its place within society to benefit its future.

## Aims and Objectives

The aim of the research is to ultimately argue for the textile conservation profession to take a more dominant role within the heritage sector amongst other conservation fields to determine its sustainability in an uncertain economic future. Personal interest in the subject of in-situ conservation events forms the basis of personal aims in gaining management skills within conservation public relations and pursuing a career in this area.

### Aims

- Promote and henceforth maintain the role of textile conservation within the heritage sector.
- To verify whether textile conservation needs to play a more dominant and public role within the heritage sector.
- Provide evidential research in arguing for more textile conservation in-situ conservation, public engagement programmes and events.
- To inspire textile conservators to take a more active role in public relations.
- To review current public engagement conservation practice and its relevance in contributing to political socio-economic goals.
- Highlight challenges and risks in promoting textile conservation through public engagement.
- Analyse how effective public engagement projects are in promoting textile conservation and benefiting the heritage sector.
- To create a series of recommendations derived from successful conservation public engagement events to put forward to textile conservators to use in promoting the profession.

### Personal Aims

- To gain a personal understanding of the management of conservation public engagement programmes.

- Develop textile conservation theory and communicative skills.
- Develop professional networks.

## **Objectives**

- Gather information on socio-economic impact on the heritage sector and reviewing public value in regards to conservation.
- To review current governmental policies and funding requirements which have influenced the developing role of the communicative, textile conservator.
- Research how conservation messages are interpreted and communicated by conservators to promote textile conservation.
- To research current public engagement practice within textile conservation.
- Determine how intrinsic material culture is interpreted to increase public engagement.
- Recognise the importance of institutional goals and the effects of instrumental values on the success of public engagement events.
- Evaluate conservation public engagement event case studies to determine the most successful aspects to put forward as recommendations for other organisations to use in promoting textile conservation.
- To measure the success of the case study events through use of statistics and/or feedback and conversation with primary sources.

## **Conservation Public Engagement Review**

### *1.Introduction*

#### **1.1 Textile Conservation and Public Outreach**

The textile conservation discipline is still in the early stages of developing its professional identity within society and its role amongst its conservation partners within the heritage sector. The last century has seen the role of conservation evolve and adapt with changes in social attitudes and culture trends which have shaped the relevance of historical material culture and it continues to do

so.<sup>9</sup> 'Conservation is therefore rooted in social action, and refers to the management of change in objects that have fluctuating value in the society in which they exist'<sup>10</sup>

Although the last twenty years have seen a vast development in textile conservation theory and technical practice and the profession has proved its validity as a standalone specialism, recent economic crises have challenged its future.<sup>11</sup> The closure of the textile conservation course at the University of Southampton in 2009 signified a threat to the future of the profession.<sup>12</sup> Alternative funding and a new home was fortunately found for Textile Conservation Centre (TCC) at the University of Glasgow, where the new Centre for Textile Conservation and Technical Art History opened to host the new MPhil Textile Conservation course.<sup>13</sup> The United Kingdom economic crisis of the 2000's, which continues today, saw reduced sources of funding across organisations; it also saw the closure of other conservation education courses including archaeology in Durham and the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) MA conservation course at the Royal College of Art (RCA).<sup>14</sup> Such economic pressures have given conservation the impetus to proactively respond and take promotion opportunities to further enhance access and support of the work and the profession.<sup>15</sup> The course in Glasgow now includes active and learning communication skills, in order for student textile conservators to effectively explain and promote their work (figs. 1 and 2). Advances in technology and social media networks in recent years have aided this change in conservation social viability and have developed and enhanced access.

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<sup>9</sup> Cited in E. Pye and S. Dean 2007, 19.

<sup>10</sup> S. Jones and J. Holden, 'Conservation and Its Values' in *It's a Material World: Caring for the Public Realm*, S. Jones and J. Holden eds., (London, 2008) 27

<sup>11</sup> L. Hillyer, 'Foreward' in *Textile Conservation; Advances in Practice*, F. Lennard and P. Ewer eds., (Oxford, 2010) ix.

<sup>12</sup> S. Jones and J. Holden, 'Conservation Under Threat' in *It's a Material World: Caring for the Public Realm*, S. Jones and J. Holden eds., (London, 2008) 41.

<sup>13</sup> The Textile Conservation Centre, 'Welcome' 2011, (<http://www.textileconservationcentre.co.uk/>), accessed 18<sup>th</sup> August 2012.

<sup>14</sup> Cited in S. Jones and J. Holden 2008, 41.

<sup>15</sup> Cited in S. Jones J. Holden, 2008.

## 1.2 Institutional Developments

An increased acknowledgement for public and community value during the 2000's set the way for a socially advanced role of the conservator. The ICOM-CC 2002 Triennial Meeting in Rio de Janeiro emphasised the new outlook involving participation and theoretical involvement with local communities to improve conservation treatments to better include society.<sup>16,17</sup> It also saw the establishment of a 'Task Force on Public Awareness and Involvement in Conservation within ICOM-CC'.<sup>18</sup>

In museums heritage sites across the UK there has been widespread in promoting conservation awareness. For example, conservation studios visible to the public such as at Manchester's People's History Museum increase access to behind the scenes work.<sup>19</sup> National Museums Scotland devised an exhibition specifically on conservation called 'Please Touch!', similar to York Museum Castle Museum's 'Stop the Rot!' in 1990, created to help the public understand the importance of preventive conservation and why conservation restrictions are in place at museums.<sup>20,21</sup> In 2007 the new centre for conservation at the British Library opened comprising 'state-of-the-art book conservation studios and sound preservation facilities, inextricably intertwined with an ambitious training and public outreach programme'.<sup>22</sup> The British Museum has seen ten years of its public outreach and educational hands-on desk, and exhibitions such as 'Conservation in Focus'.<sup>23,24</sup> Historic

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<sup>16</sup> Cited in R. Vontabel, Roy, 2002.

<sup>17</sup> Cited in D. Eastop 2009, 39-42.

<sup>18</sup> Cited in D. Eastop 2009, 39-42.

<sup>19</sup> People's History Museum, 'Textile Conservation Studio' *The People's History Museum, Manchester* (<http://www.phm.org.uk/our-collection/textile-conservation-studio/>).

<sup>20</sup> A. Chester and J. Tate, 'Please Touch! Taking the Stick Out of Fingers...' in *SSCR Journal*, Vol.11, No. 2, May 2000 (Edinburgh, 2002), 10-12.

<sup>21</sup> S. L. McNett, 'Communicating Textile Conservation: What Are the Positive Outcomes of Promoting Public and Financial Support?' *MA Dissertation, Textile Conservation*, University of Southampton, 2005.

<sup>22</sup> Cited in H. Senton 2008, 130-135.

<sup>23</sup> British Museum, 'Conservation in Focus' 2008, ([http://www.britishmuseum.org/whats\\_on/past\\_exhibitions/2008/archive\\_conservation.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/whats_on/past_exhibitions/2008/archive_conservation.aspx)).

<sup>24</sup> S. Frost, 'In Touch with the Past: Hands On at the British Museum' in *Social History in Museums, Journal of the Social History Curators Group*, M. Day ed., (London, 2011) 25-34.



Royal palaces initiated their conservation front-of-house public outreach programme 'Ask the Conservator' in 2005.<sup>25</sup> The last ten years have also seen the conservation work at the National Trust developed into a front-of-house practice.<sup>26</sup>

The upcoming year of 2013 will see The Institute of Conservation's (ICON) second triennial conference at the University of Glasgow, 'Positive Futures in an Uncertain World', where papers will be presented on the theme of developing conservation practice in response to the current economics and 'uncertain times'.<sup>27</sup> ICON has established the Conservation Awards and Conservation accreditation system which has, for the past few years, further established the profession within the heritage sector and introduced enhanced funding prospects.<sup>28</sup>

Examples of institutional conservation outreach developments are positive responses to the current economic crisis, however further development and outreach strategies need to be enforced to ensure the survival of conservation. The lack of textile conservation specific examples, prove the need for the profession to take a more confident, publicised approach to public outreach.

## 2. Public value

### 2.1 Governmental Policies

In the wider context of conservation values, the awareness of public influence upon treatments and projects has become increasingly prevalent as is evident by the increased public engagement programmes listed above. Society's value of heritage has a variable impact on the requirements of the services of heritage organisations. 'Value is socially determined: an object, artefact or building

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<sup>25</sup> K. Frame, 'Communicating Conservation at the Historic Royal Palaces' in J. Bridgland ed., *Preprints ICOM Committee for Conservation, 15<sup>th</sup> Triennial Conference, New Delhi 22- 26 September 2008, Volume II* (New Delhi, 2008) 1150.

<sup>26</sup> C. Hughes and S. Kay, 'The Power of Conservation in Action – A Virtuous Circle', Presentation, *AIC Annual Meeting: Conservation Outreach & Advocacy, May 2012, Albuquerque, New Mexico* (paper received via email in communication with Sarah Kay).

<sup>27</sup> ICON, 'Call for Papers: Icon Conference 2013: Positive Futures in an Uncertain World, In partnership with the University of Glasgow', 2012, ([http://www.icon.org.uk/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1861:icon-conference-2013-positive-futures-in-an-uncertain-world-in-partnership-with-the-university-of-glasgow&catid=30:calls-for-papers&Itemid=130](http://www.icon.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1861:icon-conference-2013-positive-futures-in-an-uncertain-world-in-partnership-with-the-university-of-glasgow&catid=30:calls-for-papers&Itemid=130)), accessed 21<sup>st</sup> August 2012.

<sup>28</sup> ICON, 'The Conservation Awards 2010', 2010, (<http://www.conservationawards.org.uk/>), accessed 21<sup>st</sup> August 2012.

can only have value insofar as people give it value.’<sup>29</sup> Therefore heritage professionals are needed to encourage interest.

Public value is the measurement of social involvement which focuses on issues such as equity, ethos and accountability within organisations, and the delivery of such.<sup>30</sup> The government uses the idea of public value within the heritage sector to drive improvements to the socio-economic climate. The government has previously expressed recognition for public value within the heritage sector. Tessa Jowell stated that understanding public value through communication and consultation is beneficial in interpretation decision making, and, consequently having a direct impact on what should be protected and preserved.<sup>31</sup>

‘The historic environment and wider heritage contributes to a wide range of Government ambitions to cut crime, promote inclusion, improve educational achievement, but is worth supporting in itself, for the way it can encourage people better to understand and engage with their history and their community, and help slay that poverty of aspiration which holds so many people back from fulfilling their potential’<sup>32</sup> - Tessa Jowell.

Since the more recent cuts to the heritage sector under the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), museums across the UK will expect about eighty percent cuts in their income by 2015, the concept of public value should be fully exploited in order to convince society and the DCMS that our heritage contributes to our quality of life.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Cited in S. Jones and J. Holden 2008, 27.

<sup>30</sup> K. Clark, ‘Should We Fund It? Can We Change It? An Introduction to Heritage and Impact’ in *Heritage Impact 2005: Proceedings of the First International Symposium on the Socio-economic Impact of Cultural Heritage*, J. Mcloughlin, J. Kaminski and B. Sodagar eds., (Budapest, 2006), 125.

<sup>31</sup> G. Harrison and J. Rowe, ‘Policy and Practice: Challenges for Interpretation in the Heritage Sector’ 2006, (<http://www.plbltd.com/UserFiles/File/downloads/AHI%20policy%20article.pdf>), accessed 18<sup>th</sup> April 2012.

<sup>32</sup> T. Jowell, ‘Better Places to Live: Government Identity and the Value of the Historic and Built Environment’, ([http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.culture.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/586CB2C9-D8FA-4DCB-AD50-6D6705F2FECE/0/better\\_places\\_live.pdf](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.culture.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/586CB2C9-D8FA-4DCB-AD50-6D6705F2FECE/0/better_places_live.pdf)), accessed 18<sup>th</sup> April 2012.

<sup>33</sup> The Guardian, ‘Local museums face crisis after DCMS announces end to financial support’, 2012, (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2010/nov/17/local-museums-funding-cuts-dcms>), accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2012.

## 2.2 Funding

Changes in the funding landscape and the recent threat of DCMS cuts have encouraged the change in textile conservation practice as is evident by the new public engagement skills offered at educational level training.<sup>34</sup> It is evident also from the case studies evaluated in this study, that conservation is adapting its practice and developing engagement strategies to fulfil requirements of funding organisations to compete for financial support.

Heritage funders specify that projects should communicate knowledge and understanding of the values of conservation through identifying the stimulant of its marketed audiences. Funding organisations such as the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) support projects that encourage public involvement; teaching audiences about the practices involved in caring for their heritage and inspiring appreciation. In ensuring that a wide and diverse audience are involved within heritage projects there is 'scope for reducing economic and social deprivation'<sup>35</sup>. Within the decade prior to 2005, HLF has sponsored numerous heritage projects, giving over £3 billion to more than 15,000 projects in the United Kingdom.<sup>36</sup>

Interpretation of heritage sites and objects is an important factor in achieving this. HLF recognises that the heritage sector must adapt with the changing ways in which an evolving society values the past<sup>37</sup> and public engagement with professionals, evoking understanding through demonstrations and debates. The accountability of textile conservation could be improved significantly if it were to promote itself further by taking more opportunity to increase innovative projects such as public engagement events.

## 2.3 The Cultural Value Triangle

The HLF uses public value theory to measure heritage impact using the model 'The Cultural Triangle' by John Holden.<sup>38</sup> It is used internally within the organisation to inform funding strategies by

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<sup>34</sup> R. Peters and D. Romanek, 'Approaches to Access: Factors and Variables' in *IIC Conservation and Access: Contributions to the London Congress, 15-19 September 2008*, David Saunders, Joyce H. Townsend and Sally Woodcock eds., (London, 2008), 1.

<sup>35</sup> The Heritage Lottery Fund 2002, 18.

<sup>36</sup> Cited in K. Clark 2006, 125.

<sup>37</sup> Cited in The Heritage Lottery Fund 2008, 1.

<sup>38</sup> Cited in K. Clark 2006, 130.

determining three different types of value and to 'assemble evidence' on the accomplishments of the company.<sup>39</sup>

The model can be adapted to evaluating individual heritage projects by looking at the significant areas of heritage impact. The three areas public values are:

- 'Intrinsic Values  
What is important about heritage? Why is it important? To whom it is important?
- Instrumental Values  
The economic, social and environmental benefits of intervention.
- Institutional Values  
The ethos behaviour of heritage organisations.'<sup>40</sup>

### *3. Conservation Interpretation*

#### **3.1 Misinterpretation of conservation**

It has been argued previously that there is a lack of understanding by the public of the role of the conservator. Mary Brooks, a well established textile conservation and Museum Consultant describes a lack of accurate media coverage regarding the conservation profession; for example, an article in the Guardian contained a picture of a conservator's hand working on an object, and she identifies this with the association of the stereotypical behind-the-scenes conservator.<sup>41</sup> This portrays a lack of understanding of the theories and challenges and diversity of the work that conservators do. This can cause misunderstandings between conservation and other departments in the heritage sector, as well as the public. Lack of understanding is problematic in gaining support and an appreciation for the profession.

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<sup>39</sup> Cited in K. Clark 2006, 131.

<sup>40</sup> Cited in K. Clark 2006, 130.

<sup>41</sup> M. M. Brooks, 'Talking to Others: Why do Conservators Find it So Hard to Convince Others of the Significance of Conservation' in J. Bridgland ed., *Preprints ICOM Committee for Conservation, 15<sup>th</sup> Triennial Conference, New Delhi 22- 26 September 2008, Volume II* (New Dehli, 2008) 1135- 1140.

### 3.2 Slow Conservation

The concept of slow conservation has been brought about by Sarah Staniforth at the National Trust. Particularly within historic houses, slow conservation looks at the locality, the environment and the contents as a whole.<sup>42</sup> It is an interpretive technique that allows increased accessibility to conservation by prolonging projects and everyday practice to incorporate public engagement of various forms.

The concept has been adapted from the marketing idea for 'slow food' which aims to re-establish within society, particularly local communities, those traditions and cultures that are being lost by fast globalisation and by large corporate businesses.<sup>43</sup> The HLF also recognises that there is a shortage of professionals with craft skills.<sup>44</sup> This poses the risk that these skills may one day be lost forever; however, it also makes them unique and interesting areas for public focus. Slow conservation is a holistic approach that initiates participative project work, supporting community activity within building conservation sustaining the specialist skills that conserve the majority of our heritage. The approach can be applied to textile conservation treatments by tackling projects with the 'little and often' approach, using projects as opportunities to raise the conservation profile, through expressing its importance and relevance within society.

Slow and sustainable conservation integrates long term accessibility and outreach to initiate interest and appreciation from a wider audience; increasing public understanding of the role of the conservator. Through textile conservation public engagement projects this can be achieved. Conservation can be amalgamated into a 'front of house/transparent activity' in order to enhance access and educate.<sup>45</sup> In-situ treatments which also incorporate working with other departments thus benefit textile conservation, broadening communication with the public to subsequently promote and sustain the profession.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> S. Staniforth, 'Conservation Heating to Slow: A Tale of the Appropriate Rather Than the Ideal', [http://www.getty.edu/conservation/our\\_projects/science/climate/paper\\_staniforth.pdf](http://www.getty.edu/conservation/our_projects/science/climate/paper_staniforth.pdf), accessed 10<sup>th</sup> April 2012.

<sup>43</sup> Slow Food ® UK, 'A Better Way to Eat', Slow Food 2012, (<http://www.slowfood.org.uk>), accessed 11<sup>th</sup> April 2012.

<sup>44</sup> Cited in The Heritage Lottery Fund 2008, 128.

<sup>45</sup> Cited in R. Peters and D. Romanek 2008, 2.

<sup>46</sup> G. H. Kirke, 'The Practicalities of Working Together' in *Conservation Plans in Action, Proceedings of the Oxford Conference* (London, 1999) 109.

### 3.3 Interpretation Techniques

Pro-active interpretation is often more successful than simple signs and posters to communicate conservation within displays. Conservation language is generally very formal and relatively scientific and this can be quite intimidating, or boring, for public audiences.<sup>47</sup> HLF particularly 'want to help break down the barriers which currently exist in order that people can take advantage of the wealth of opportunities available'.<sup>48</sup>

'Because of the role conservation plays in these decisions (within the nexus of the tensions and variables within museums) and the growing interest in access in museums, conservation has taken on a more active and visible role related to public outreach.'<sup>49</sup>

Conservation in action and behind the scenes events are becoming increasingly popular; 'watching conservation being carried out can be a very rewarding experience for visitors and therefore, a very useful interpretive tool'<sup>50</sup>. The heritage environment setting, such as the historic house, is advantageous in setting objects in context and provides an exclusive aesthetic ambience in the physical context.<sup>51</sup>

Surveys undertaken by Sophie Sarkodie, paper conservator at the British Library, as part of her MA dissertation on conservator's opinions on public engagements provide anecdotal and quantitative data to support the argument for increasing public outreach within the profession. Responses to the international survey reckoned 'ninety six percent of conservators feel it is part of their job to make conservation accessible to the public and one hundred percent think the public need to know more about the profession'.<sup>52</sup> The overall consensus derived from this information is that promoting the

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<sup>47</sup> N. Ingram, 'Interpreting Conservation' in *The National Trust Manual of Housekeeping* (Oxford, 2006), 745.

<sup>48</sup> Cited in The Heritage Lottery Fund 2008, 21.

<sup>49</sup> Cited in R. Peters and D. Romanek 2008, 1.

<sup>50</sup> Cited in The Heritage Lottery Fund 2008, 21.

<sup>51</sup> L. D. Dierking, 'Interpretation as a Social Experience' in *Contemporary Issues in Heritage and Environmental Interpretation: Problems and Prospects*, David Uzzell and Roy Ballantyne eds., (London, 1998) 57.

<sup>52</sup> S. Sarkodie, 'Conservators' Opinions on Going Public' in *ICON News, Issue 28, May 2010* (London, 2010), 19.

profession is an important aspect of the role of the conservator. The review concluded that 'activities such as exhibitions, lectures/seminars and tours are accepted as the best choices, with exhibitions being most popular.'<sup>53</sup> There were some negative responses regarding observation rooms stating that 'unless there is other written information and explanation present, these prove difficult for the public to see work being carried out and to understand what is happening'; which suggests that in-situ treatments in front of the public enable more meaning and understanding; but highlight the importance of accompanying information and graphics or warders to help explain the work.<sup>54</sup>

'There were also positive comments within the survey about conservation learning from the public activities, showing that respect for the public and two-way learning can be rewarding.'<sup>55</sup>

The research indicates that communicative interactions between conservator and audience to most efficient in promoting conservation to the general public. This verifies the plausibility to undertake more public engagement events.

#### *4 Visitor Dynamics*

##### **4.1 The Communicative Transaction**

The interactivity and accessibility that slow conservation encompasses, signifies communication is a key role to public outreach in promoting the profession. Demonstrations and debates increase understanding and allows for audiences to ask the conservators questions regarding their own understanding of conservation, creating an inclusivity that cannot be gained through 2D graphics alone.

A model of communication by Sless (1981) discussed by Paulette M. McManus demonstrates the communicative transaction between the museum professional 'author' and the recipient 'audience' to deliver a successful message<sup>56</sup>. It looks at the process of human interaction and communication and explains that both the heritage professional and visitor need to 'participate and work actively in

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<sup>53</sup> Cited in S. Sarkodie 2010, 19.

<sup>54</sup> Cited in S. Sarkodie 2010, 20.

<sup>55</sup> Cited in S. Sarkodie 2010, 20.

<sup>56</sup> P. M. McManus, 'Making Sense of Exhibits' in *Museum Languages: Objects and Texts*, G. Kavanagh ed., (Leister, 1991), 43.

the same direction' to achieve a satisfactory understanding, relaying an accurate message.<sup>57</sup> In discussing exhibition text, 'the nature of the visitors' engagement with the words in labels is conversational in style and in a psychological sense'.<sup>58</sup> This, from a socio-linguistic point of view highlights the significance of conversation and hence, the effectiveness of human personal contact in the visitor experience.

Increasing communication from conservation professionals is effective in promoting conservation and encouraging people to build relationships and increasing social inclusion. It is evident that 'social inclusion is currently a major concern for heritage organisations'<sup>59</sup> as it plays a considerable role in gaining public support and fulfilling heritage institutional goals and funding and governmental aims towards an enhanced society.

#### **4.2 The Visitor Experience**

To begin to understand the dynamics of visitor behaviour, observing the variables of the context of public engagement projects is essential. Lord Gilmore Hankey Kirke argues that the interpretation of conservation projects and the messages communicated 'should be better supported by the social sciences and by cultural anthropology' in order to understand the impact of human value within the heritage sector.<sup>60</sup>

The visitor experience is difficult to monitor using quantitative data due to many heritage sites, particularly museums, which do not impose admission fees.<sup>61</sup> Through observing the interactions in the personal, physical and the social context of the experience as a whole, visitor patterns can be established to help obtain understanding of visitor engagement, in order to produce qualitative data for evaluation.<sup>62</sup> The social context is particularly relevant when planning events and projects in order to gain a wider audience. Previous 'research suggests that personal interaction with staff increases the likelihood that a museum experience will be memorable',<sup>63</sup> which supports the

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<sup>57</sup> Cited in P. M. McManus 1991, 44.

<sup>58</sup> Cited in P. M. McManus 1991, 40.

<sup>59</sup> Cited in N. Ingram 2006, 746.

<sup>60</sup> Cited in G. H. Kirke 1999, 109.

<sup>61</sup> Cited in R. J. Loomis 1987, 36-38.

<sup>62</sup> Cited in L. D. Dierking, 1998, 57.

<sup>63</sup> Cited in L. D. Dierking, 1998, 61.



importance of in-situ conservation projects whereby visitors can ask conservators questions and feel a part of the experience promoting social inclusion within conservation and institutions and the in the wider context of society.

### 4.3 Public Engagement Projects

There are many variables that directly affect the viability of public engagement projects such as, available funding, time and resources. Issues regarding access are ‘inherently complex and couldn’t be approached without considering larger and variable contexts.’<sup>64</sup> However, textile treatments can be particularly flexible in that there is a huge variety of diverse textile objects within heritage environments and especially in historic houses, some already in-situ and some manageable for transportation, that makes the conversion of behind-the-scenes to in-situ treatments particularly convenient and so, successful.

Access and safety and security within the heritage environment is a matter of concern when holding events such as undertaking in-situ remedial conservation work, and the planning of such can be very time-consuming.<sup>65</sup> The time, location and scale of a project should be initially assessed in relation to feasibility and the message that is to be communicated through the event.<sup>66</sup> Such elements contribute to personal, physical, and social contexts of the visitor experience which can increase social inclusion and promote conservation to the public across organisations and more widely, within society.<sup>67</sup>

## Conclusion

The emerging trend of visible conservation will eventually overturn the perception of the stereotypical behind-the-scenes conservator. From reviewing conservation practice over the past decade it is evident that a realisation of the importance of public awareness of the profession is developing the role of the conservator into a more communicative and inclusive one within

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<sup>64</sup> Cited in R. Peters and D. Romanek 2008, 5.

<sup>65</sup> Cited in N. Ingram 2006, 751.

<sup>66</sup> C. MacCarthy et al, ‘Events: Planning and Protection’ in *The National Trust Manual of Housekeeping* (Oxford, 2006) 723.

<sup>67</sup> Cited in L. D. Dierking, 1998, 57.

organisations and externally. It is evident from published papers that public engagement projects work well to attract and inform wider audiences, and the non-visitor about conservation practice and the important role it plays in the preservation of our heritage. The lack of published specific textile conservation projects is of concern and as a relatively new specialism would benefit from such projects in order to maintain its place within the heritage sector.

It is clear from funding requirements and strategic plans, that public engagement events within conservation benefit the sustainability of heritage organisations and play an important role in benefiting society. Socio-economic impact on heritage sites has been meticulously studied and frameworks have been produced in order to understand the variable effects of the success of heritage organisations and heritage impact. Public value is an increasingly significant aspect in the promotion of conservation within the heritage sector and enables a more effective evaluation of the benefits that heritage environments contribute to social culture and economics.

In recognising the importance of promoting textile conservation through public outreach, strategies towards producing more successful public engagement projects and programmes can be produced. This study provides information on interpretation techniques in aiding audience understanding of conservation. It can be concluded from social studies and the facts presented in this study that engagement on a personal and comprehensive level to the visitor is most effective in relaying a message and providing the public with an increased understanding of conservation work. Communication and conversational interaction between the expert and the audience enables social inclusion and enhances the visitor experience. Supported by popular conservator opinion, such techniques as in-situ conservation, talks, presentations and tours are most effective methods of engagement. Slow conservation is a concept to which exploits daily practice to the public by integrating interpretive methods in order to promote conservation as a craft, and a valuable specialism.

Although conservation public engagement events can be costly on resources, they are overall beneficial to institution goals, heritage sector aims in establishing itself within society, and in contributing to social developments across the country. When organised sufficiently well to exploit their potential, engagement events can be worthwhile and profitable. Textile conservation should take every opportunity to publicise the profession and develop relationships to ensure a certain future.



Fig. 1 The opening of the Centre for Technical Art and Textile Conservation allowed students at the University of Glasgow to publicly engage through talking about their conservation work.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Copyright of University of Glasgow Photography.



Fig.2 The second year on the MPhil Textile Conservation course at the University of Glasgow saw students present to local community groups.

# Case Studies

## Introduction to case studies

To evaluate the benefits of undertaking textile conservation public engagement events, four case studies are presented using primary and secondary sources. Assessment of each study questioned how and why the public engagement projects were organised and undertaken, focusing on the strategic practices involved in textile conservation public engagement planning in the chosen institutions.

To gain a greater understanding of the running and organisation of public engagement events in heritage sites in the United Kingdom, case studies of various organisations were chosen from heritage environments which have focused on textile conservation, to compare the success of engagement activities.

The following institutions and projects from the United Kingdom were chosen:

- National Museums of Scotland: Behind the Scenes with Fascinating Mummies
- Glasgow Museums: The Burrell Tapestries Research Project
- The National Trust: Attingham Re-discovered
- Historic Royal Palaces: The Queen's Mattresses Event at Hampton Court Palace

In studying and comparing the heritage impact of each event using the model by John Holden, The Cultural Triangle which combines intrinsic, instrumental and institutional values to evaluate the success of each event and determine which aspects contributed most to the success of that event.<sup>69</sup>

Research on socio-economic impact on the heritage sector was used to identify activity trends and to examine the 'new' role of the conservator within a wider context of public value, governmental policies and the United Kingdom's current economic climate.

The aim of the study evaluation is to make recommendations for smaller and independent organisations, so that they may take them into consideration when planning their own engagement projects. The analysis will also allow other organisations to understand the benefits of undertaking such projects in both micro and macro contexts.

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<sup>69</sup> Cited in K. Clark 2006, 130.

## **Aims**

- Observe how the intrinsic values of the exhibition themes are interpreted to the public within the various environments.
- How institutional values are utilised in the organisation of the event and how these values are expressed to the public.
- Understand how institutional goals are achieved through promoting public value and holding events.
- Recognise the semiotics employed by the conservators, and determine which are most successful in informing the public and improving the overall visitor experience.
- Determine the most successful aspects from each event to put forward as recommendations for other organisations to use in promoting textile conservation.
- To verify whether textile conservation needs to play a more dominant and public role within the heritage sector.

## **Objectives**

- To ascertain the role of the heritage and artefacts featured in the event.
- Understand what message the institution wanted to communicate to the public and observe whether this was achieved or not.
- Observe how the message was interpreted and communicated by the conservators.
- Determine what aspects of textile conservation were promoted.
- To research which departments within the institutions were involved in the events organisation.
- Gain an understanding of the how much time and work was required.
- Find out how the event was marketed and if it was funded.
- To measure the success of the each event through use of statistics and/or feedback and conversation with primary sources.

# Museums

## 1. The Museum Environment

Museums have always had a social function, a place for leisure and cultural education.<sup>70</sup> Access has always been significant to its sustainability within society. Exhibition themes and trends have developed and public access improved with a growing awareness of the benefits of public value and recent incentives from government and funding organisations to promote cultural value.<sup>71</sup> The ease of access that is offered by the museum environment has made engagement projects more feasible to undertake, in comparison with historic houses. Literature reveals that many experimental engagement projects have been undertaken within museums; organisations such as The British Museum and National Museums Scotland have been able to use their space to create exhibitions on conservation to engage the public and educate them in the importance of conservation and the work involved, behind the scenes at museums.<sup>72,73</sup>

Museums make for interesting public engagement projects because they can range from exhibitions, to audio interactions and professional talks in a variety of spaces, and the involvement of multiple museum departments. I have taken two case studies from museums to study and compare in order to distinguish key successful, transferrable aspects of access and engagement.

## 2. National Museums Scotland: Behind the Scenes with Fascinating Mummies

### 2.1 Introduction to Case Study

The author was invited to participate, as part of this dissertation research, in a public engagement event at National Museums Scotland (NMS) 'Behind the Scenes with Fascinating Mummies' where the different conservation departments displayed and talked to the public about the work involved in the Fascinating Mummies exhibition at the museum in Edinburgh.

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<sup>70</sup> S. Frost, 'In Touch with the Past: Hands On at the British Museum' in *Social History in Museums, Journal of the Social History Curators Group*, M. Day ed., (London, 2011) 25.

<sup>71</sup> H. Monger, 'Lottery Funding Challenges Museums to Innovate- Was An Opportunity Missed?' in *Social History in Museums, Journal of the Social History Curators Group, Volume 29, 2004*, Rebecca Fardell ed., (London, 2005), 23.

<sup>72</sup> British Museum, 'Conservation in Focus' 2008, ([http://www.britishmuseum.org/whats\\_on/past\\_exhibitions/2008/archive\\_conservation.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/whats_on/past_exhibitions/2008/archive_conservation.aspx)).

<sup>73</sup> Cited in A. Chester and J. Tate 2002, 10-12.

This was a great opportunity to see a 'conservation in action' event at a museum and to witness the preparation involved, work undertaken, and skills required to hold such events. The participation was important, fulfilling personal aims of gaining a greater understanding the management work involved.

The aim of evaluating this case study was to learn how cultural value is interpreted within the modern museum environment and how successful the event was in promoting textile conservation. The objectives in evaluating the event are to learn more about the semiotics involved and the role of the conservator within a museum public engagement event.

## 2.2 National Museum of Scotland

NMS care for a large collection of Scottish and worldwide cultures, preserving and making Scotland's heritage accessible and engaging for all, across five individual museums and the Collection Care Centre. Their mission statement, to 'preserve, interpret and make accessible for all, the past and present of Scotland, other nations and cultures, and the natural world... inspiring people, connecting Scotland to the world and the world to Scotland'<sup>74</sup>.

NMS is a large organisation run by a corporate management team and trustees and is fortunate to have a variety of valuable departments including, C&AR, Learning and Programmes, Marketing, Digital Media, Support Services and Visitor Operations. All work together to strive to achieve the museum vision, contributing to public value.

'NMS Strategic Plans:

- **Collections:** developing the potential of our collections, making them more relevant to today's audiences
- **Audiences:** engaging people with our collections, at and beyond our Museums
- **Connections:** building more strategic relationships, nationally and internationally

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<sup>74</sup> National Museums Scotland, 'About Us', 2012, ([http://www.nms.ac.uk/about\\_us-1/about\\_us/corporate\\_information.aspx](http://www.nms.ac.uk/about_us-1/about_us/corporate_information.aspx)), accessed 8<sup>th</sup> April 2012.



- **People & Resources:** engaging and developing our people, enhancing our estate and increasing income.<sup>75</sup>

### 2.3 The Exhibition Event

Behind the Scenes with Fascinating Mummies was an event held at NMS that accompanied the Fascinating Mummies temporary exhibition at the museum, which showcased a stunning array of Egyptology objects from the National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden and National Museums Scotland, Ancient Egypt collections.<sup>76</sup> The exhibition ran from the 11<sup>th</sup> February to the 27<sup>th</sup> May 2012. The event, a Saturday showcasing of the conservation work and scientific research that went into the development of the exhibition, was held on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012. The event was part of both the Edinburgh International Science Festival (EISF) and the NMS adult events programme for the Fascinating Mummies exhibition.

Modern scientific techniques have allowed us to push the boundaries of our understanding of the extraordinary culture of the Ancient Egyptians. The themes of life, death and the afterlife make the Ancient Egyptians a fascinating subject to research and exhibit, often inspiring great interest within the public, historians and researchers alike. Mummification over 2,000 years ago has provided not only visible evidence of the preservation of ancient peoples and objects, but the preservation of the stories of the lives behind them.

The exclusivity of the subject matter forms the basis of the overall intrinsic value of the exhibition and accompanying public engagement event. This intrinsic value of the heritage revealed, on display in the exhibition directly impacted the success of the public event held. This is evident from the marketing strategies used through web sources, which highlighted the significance of the collections, using words such as ‘treasures’ and ‘secrets’ to describe the objects. The success of the marketing strategies can be evident by the tickets sold; priced at £10 each, all 40 tickets were sold out in advance.

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<sup>75</sup> Cited in National Museums Scotland 2012, accessed 8<sup>th</sup> April 2012.

<sup>76</sup> National Museums Scotland, ‘Past Exhibitions’, 2012, ([http://www.nms.ac.uk/our\\_museums/national\\_museum/past\\_exhibitions/fascinating\\_mummies/about\\_the\\_exhibition.aspx](http://www.nms.ac.uk/our_museums/national_museum/past_exhibitions/fascinating_mummies/about_the_exhibition.aspx)), accessed 8<sup>th</sup> April 2012.

## **2.4 Planning and Organisation**

The initial ideas for the event were created by the exhibition team which included the Conservation, and Learning and Programmes departments. Claire Allan, Learning Officer (Adults) at NMS has been developing the 'Saturday Showcase' events programme which the Fascinating Mummies event perfectly suited. Generally, planning at NMS begins 6-9 month before event deadlines. Planning for the event was initiated in the autumn of 2011, in order to meet marketing deadlines both internally at NMS and for the EISF programme, and, to allow the C&AR time to prepare for conservation work and interpretation preparation, to organise time and staff. The last 5-6 weeks saw the finalising of planning and detailing. The event was marketed online and in the NMS 'What's On?' leaflet, as well as the EISF brochure and website; ticket sales were split between both organisations.<sup>77</sup>

## **2.5 The Event Programme: Talks**

During the first half of the event, a range of talks were given on various aspects of the behind the scenes planning, organisation and preparation of the Fascinating Mummies exhibition. The talks were undertaken in a lecture room which had a state of the art projection screen for presentations.

Artefacts conservator, Ticca Ogilvie introduced the series of talks and began with her own PowerPoint presentation on the diverse skills involved in preparing and staging an exhibition at NMS. Photographs were shown of conservation staff enjoying out-of-the-studio activities including handling, packaging, transporting and cleaning displays to emphasise the huge effort and dedication, and variety of skills that are involved within conservation. The talk had a professional manner and a good balance of informal and formal education, on a level that the audience could comprehend.

Subsequent talks were conducted by artefacts and textile conservators who worked on objects in the exhibition. Conservation techniques and decision making was explained, with emphasis on how scientific evidence adds to the value of the object and the way it is conserved and subsequently interpreted.

These talks were based on the research and conservation undertaken on the outer coffin of Amenhotepiin, dating to the Late 25<sup>th</sup> Dynasty c. 700BC. Scientific analysis using X-Ray Fluorescence Spectrometry (XRF) to detect the inorganic elemental composition of materials helped the conservation team to distinguish between the original and restored areas of paint on the coffin, from which they could make informed decisions on which materials to use in conservation and if any non-

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<sup>77</sup> Appendix i, personal communication with Claire Allan.

original areas should be removed. The importance of careful visual examination and analysis to determine the materials, damage was highlighted as being fundamental in gaining a deep understanding of an artefact and discovering the stories behind the objects; thus portraying the unique and important role conservator's play within the museum complex. This explanation formed the base understanding of the expertise involved in the stabilisation and interpretation of the objects for display, and the amount of hard work involved in producing the exhibition; knowledge of which the audience took into the demonstrations room after the talks.

Proceeding talks by Dr Jim Tate, Head of C&AR at NMS and forensic anthropology scientists from the University of Edinburgh delved into the stories discovered having undertaken scientific analysis and scanning of the mummies featured in the exhibition. The forensic aspect of the talks added to the quality of the information and increased some excitement within the audience, which proves how effective partnerships can be in creating further interest and encouraging understanding of the collaborative nature of the heritage sector, and effectiveness of all departments.

The talks offered an informative introductory to the conservation sector at NMS and the specific work undertaken in creating the exhibition. The strategy of the talks was to communicate key information, a background into why and how conservation is undertaken to express its worth and value to the public. The semiotics utilised, which included presentations and imagery, were key aspects to increase understanding. The audience, inspired, then asked further questions during the demonstrations and gained a greater level of understanding and appreciation.

## **2.6 The Event Programme: Demonstrations**

The demonstrations took place in a neighbouring room, which had been effectively laid out to welcome the audience and influence circulation around the room.<sup>78</sup> The main feature, an anthropoid mummy board of an unidentified woman, dated to the early 22<sup>nd</sup> Dynasty (late 10<sup>th</sup> Century BC), made from wood, plastered, painted and varnished was laid out on secure tables, centred in the room (Fig.?).<sup>79</sup> There were various tables at which the experts introduced artefacts, the techniques described in the talks and made conversation with the audience. Although questions were encouraged during the talks, this was the best time for the audience to delve into discussion with the team and learn more through one to one communication. Tables in the room were themed by areas

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<sup>78</sup> R. J. Loomis, *Visitor Evaluation* (Tennessee, 1987) 215.

<sup>79</sup> Appendix ii, personal communication with Lizzie Millar.

of the Conservation and Analytical Research departments as in the talk; these included artefacts conservation with the mummy board, textile conservation, science analysis, and forensic science.

It was planned to group the audience prior to entry into the demonstration room to control circulation of the room, so that there weren't too many people crowded around one table at a time, this wasn't enforced and people naturally circulated at will. The central artefacts conservation table, with the poster 'Conservation in Practice' and the mummy-board were most popular, along with the forensic table where human bones were laid out (fig. 3, 4 and 5). Both tables had three experts on them and were constantly busy with in depth discussion.

The conservators generated discussion by asking questions such as, 'what material do you think this is?' and 'do you think this technique is better than this technique?' for example. Using props, the conservators explained the thought processes of their conservation work. For example, the artefacts conservators described infill patch techniques that are used on damaged areas of the mummy coffins. Demonstrating the various paint techniques using samples of painted designs on paper (rather than on anything valuable), the conservators would hold the paper over areas of the mummy-board to ask the audience what they thought of each, and through 'show and tell' and discussion, explained how ethical, time worthy, and most accurate each technique is. This was a successful technique to explain conservation interpretation which stimulated audience engagement; promoting social inclusion and generating interest and further understanding of the work done by the profession.<sup>80</sup> Through discussion and questions back and forth between conservator and audience, 'the communicative transaction' as discussed by Paulette M. McManus was reached whereby an understanding of the interpreted message is achieved.<sup>81</sup>

Much interest was generated during the demonstrations; an extraordinary amount of passion from individuals towards the conservators and objects and materials on show was perceived. One young girl spoke about her love for the Ancient Egyptians hence the reason for her visit; she had previously not been aware of textile conservation and the event proved beneficial to her in gaining knowledge of the profession. The objects and props were really beneficial in initiating conversation and the conservators relied on their use to make their explanations visual and more understandable.

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<sup>80</sup> Cited in P. M. McManus 1991, 43.

<sup>81</sup> Cited in P. M. McManus 1991, 43.

## 2.7 Evaluation

Direct observations from the participation were helpful in obtaining an understanding of the work required in organising public engagement events. Although it was not in-situ within the museum, but in allocated lecture rooms, much time was spent arranging the layout of show case tables and organising the equipment and transporting the artefacts from the museum store.

The talks enabled outreach and set the scene for a basic understanding and the demonstrations allowed for a more effective engagement where by the audience could understand the institutions infrastructure. One audience participant stated:

“I really enjoyed the event – really interesting talks and the chance to wander round and ask detailed questions was fantastic. Really good to see artefacts, equipment etc up close and in a really approachable but not kid-filled space”.<sup>82</sup>

In conclusion, the demonstrations were most effective in relaying information across to the audience. The talks were beneficial in setting a professional scene, and giving the audience a clear, educational background of information about the C&AR team at NMS. The discussions helped the audience gauge an understanding of the importance of the role of the conservator and the hard work involved. In observing the semiotics of the interpreted message through conversational interactions, a comprehensive language was exercised by the conservators; questions were asked in regards to how the audience felt about the artefacts and equipment on the tables on show, which enabled a communicative transaction and satisfactory message relationship between conservator and audience.<sup>83</sup> No barriers were enforced within the demonstration room and conservators did not wear gloves, creating a very socially inclusive atmosphere, in which the audience appeared sufficiently comfortable to engage in discussions with the experts.

Textile conservation was promoted in its own right, having an involvement, presentation and demonstration table of its own. However, the absence of the textile conservator affected the potential for engagement in this specialist area.

The event was monitored by L&P staff, with feedback being collected through the use of small questionnaire cards. One person’s feedback quoted “Fascinating! I found everyone very knowledgeable and interesting. Things were explained in an engaging approach.” Another person

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<sup>82</sup> Appendix i, personal communication with Claire Allan.

<sup>83</sup> Cited in P. M. McManus 1991, 43.

said “I would have liked a bit more time for questions and the hands-on bit” which confirms that the demonstrations were a more engaging and educational aspect of the event.

The event fulfilled the institutional goals to engage and inspire an audience. The selected adult audience was strategic in striving to build stronger visitor relationships to promote repeat visits and attract wider audiences through word of mouth. Claire Allan explained that the purpose of the event:

‘was to offer adult visitors a broader perspective on the scientific analysis and research that goes on in the museum, and to give them an opportunity to engage more directly with those involved – more than just a series of presentations, the direct interaction is a key feature of this type of event, and is well received by visitors. We hope it will encourage those who attended to look out for more adult events and exhibitions in the future.’<sup>84</sup>

In holding such events which encourage audience involvement and offer insight into the unseen work behind the scenes at the museum, a wider appreciation can be gained and henceforth more support for the museum can be established. Visitor comments from the event included “Excellent – interesting talks and great hands-on experience. Enjoyed it all – coffee and cookies excellent too”, “Very enjoyable and informative. Nice to get access to the experts behind the scenes” indicating the visitors experience of the museum was enhanced.<sup>85</sup> Creating memorable experiences will increase the prospect of revisits and support. NMS does not charge admission and so public support is increasingly important for the survival of the museum; in order to gain funding and support.

In analysing the intrinsic value, the wealth of Egyptian heritage displayed in the exhibition and which was featured for the event was the major driving force behind the success of ticket sales. Both the conservation work and the scientific research undertaken prior to the exhibition installed created an extra dimension of educational information and interest. The Egyptians as a theme was successful due to the interest it generates. It also fulfilled institutional values, increasing corporate connections internationally; some of the objects from the exhibition were on loan from the National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden.

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<sup>84</sup> Appendix i, personal communication with Claire Allan.

<sup>85</sup> Appendix i, personal communication with Claire Allan.

The instrumental values including the current economic state in the UK means that the role of the museum plays an important part in socio-economic development.<sup>86</sup> This increases the importance of public engagement events and helps the development of heritage public relations, and has seen the emergence of developing public engagement events, as has been evident at NMS.

### *3. Glasgow Museums: The Burrell Tapestry Project*

#### **3.1 Introduction to Case study**

The Tapestries Research Project was a textile conservation project that was purposefully undertaken within the temporary exhibition space in front of visitors at the Burrell Collection at Glasgow Museums. The project ran for three years from 2009 to 2012 and aimed 'to prepare a scholarly catalogue of over 200 tapestries in the Burrell Collection'.<sup>87</sup> The project involved the photography and conservation examination of the entire tapestry collection at the Burrell to produce documentation for a detailed archive of tapestries for the use of the organisation and to improve public access to museum information.<sup>88</sup>

The research into the case study aims to understand why the museum chose to exhibit the conservation work in progress, within the building as an exhibition itself and how it was managed. It is an example of a project that combines various departments of the museum operations of which employs a hierarchy of sectors. Establishing the input of the textile conservator will determine the role and significance of the specialism at Glasgow Museums.

#### **3.2 Glasgow Museums**

Culture and Sport Glasgow (CSG) is a charitable company operating under the branded name Glasgow Life<sup>TM</sup> which incorporates various sectors including the museums, arts, events, libraries,

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<sup>86</sup> Cited in T. Jowell, 'Better Places to Live: Government Identity and the Value of the Historic and Built Environment', accessed 18<sup>th</sup> April 2012.

<sup>87</sup> Glasgow Museums, 'Burrell Tapestries Research Project', Glasgow Life<sup>TM</sup> 2010, (<http://www.glasgowlife.org.uk/museums/projects/burrell-tapestries/Pages/home.aspx>), accessed 6<sup>th</sup> August 2012.

<sup>88</sup> Glasgow Museums, 'The Burrell Tapestries Collection Project', Blog at Word Press, (<http://burrelltapestriesproject.wordpress.com/2009/12/24/so-what-it-is-the-burrell-collection-tapestries-project/>), accessed 6<sup>th</sup> August 2012.

music sport and young Glasgow.<sup>89</sup> Whose mission statement is 'to inspire Glasgow's citizens and visitors to lead richer and more active lives through culture, sport and learning.'<sup>90</sup> Glasgow Museums care for a large collection across 9 different centres including: The Burrell Collection, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Riverside Museum, Open Museum, People's Palace, St. Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art, Scotland Street School Museum and Glasgow Museums Resource Centre.

Glasgow Life<sup>TM</sup> strategic objectives encourage economic growth for local communities through culture, leisure and sport activities. Increasing accessibility and instigating interest within public domains. Glasgow Museums work towards these strategies by involving communities in its work and making its heritage accessible to all.

'We will encourage participation, involvement and engagement in culture and sport for all:

- to enhance the health and wellbeing of people who live, work and visit the City
- to create an environment where enterprise, work and skills development are encouraged
- to provide opportunities for making positive life choices in a safe, attractive and sustainable environment
- to create a culture of learning and creativity that lets people flourish in their personal, family, community and working lives
- to enhance and promote the City's local, national and international image, identity and infrastructure
- to demonstrate the ongoing improvement in the quality, performance and impact of the services and opportunities we provide.'<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Glasgow Life, 'About Us', Glasgow Life<sup>TM</sup> 2010, (<http://www.glasgowlife.org.uk/about-us/Pages/home.aspx> ), accessed 6<sup>th</sup> August 2012.

<sup>90</sup> Cited in Glasgow Life, 'About Us' 2010, accessed 6<sup>th</sup> August 2012.

<sup>91</sup> Cited in Glasgow Life, 'About Us' 2010, accessed 6<sup>th</sup> August 2012.



### 3.3 The Exhibition Event

The Burrell Tapestries Research Project aimed to analyse and record all 200+ tapestries in the collection to enable further access, learning and conservation monitoring. It also produced detailed curatorial reports of each of the tapestries which fulfilled institutional scholarly aims.

Although the Burrell has a conservation studio space and textile stores, the tapestries of varying large sizes needed a large space in order for their full examination to be carried out. The only space large enough and available was that of the temporary exhibition gallery within the building of the Burrell museum. This open gallery was perfect for conservation in action being off of the busier visitor routes and the space large enough to be turned into a workshop where tapestries could be hung, desks could be utilised and a photography area set up.

A series of events within the project were planned, a video was made, and there were talks and presentations from curators, conservators and external experts from the Dovecot Studios on the theme of tapestries. Other tapestry related workshops and exhibitions ran alongside the project.<sup>92</sup> 'Tapestries: A New Interpretation' display accompanied the research project 16<sup>th</sup> April until the 11<sup>th</sup> July 2010 and was funded by the research project. It commissioned and exhibited modern works inspired by the tapestry collection at the Burrell; Glasgow School of Art students produced re-interpreted works on the tapestries in accordance with the 'Present, Past & Future' theme of the 2010 Glasgow Life Festival.<sup>93</sup> The project shows the importance of working together and developing relationships for the cause of the organisation and local communities; the display supports local communities, local institutions and young people. The research project and accompanying activities inspired by the conservation of the tapestries, provide evidence of the contributions Glasgow Life<sup>TM</sup> can offer to society.

Posters and leaflets and a video about tapestries offered visitors background information on tapestries, for example the history of, terminologies and the collection at the Burrell. It was found that this background information and illustrative form was helpful for the conservators at work in explaining what they were doing and in answering questions from visitors.<sup>94</sup>

Updates and findings and related informative pieces were shared via blogs on the Glasgow Museums website to increase public inclusivity and wider interest. Textile conservator Sarah Foscett wrote

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<sup>92</sup> Glasgow Museums, 'Burrell Tapestries Research Project', 2010, accessed 6<sup>th</sup> August 2012.

<sup>93</sup> Appendix v, personal communication with Louise Treble.

<sup>94</sup> Personal interview with Helen Hughes.

about a Glasgow Museums staff trip to Stirling castle to see the recreation of 7 medieval tapestries from the Hunt of the Unicorn series, promoting textile conservation, Scottish heritage and traditional skills.<sup>95</sup> Even if people did not visit the project at the museum, they could learn about it through other means.

With free entry to the museum and access to the project re-visits were popular to witness various stages and progress of the project; Head Conservator Helen Hughes who worked on the project throughout, often recognised faces.<sup>96</sup> There were also many passers-by who had come to see the permanent collections who encountered the project.

### **3.4 Planning and Organisation**

The textile conservation department had a dominant role in the planning and ideas for the project, along with curatorial staff and in combination with the Learning and Access team whom worked on interpretation and public access. The project was marketed internally and with the use of social media including the online website.

Once the project was planned, Glasgow Museums was then able to apply for a grant to obtain funding to allow the project to go ahead. Institutional values and the public engagement focus of the project fulfilled funder's requirements in arguing the socio-economic cause; fulfilling scholarly aims and increasing social inclusion within the heritage environment successfully gained the project external funding.<sup>97</sup>

### **3.5 Textile Conservation at Glasgow Museums: Communication with Helen Hughes**

Textile conservator Helen M. Hughes worked with the organisation of the Tapestries Research project and worked on the conservation documentation in front of the public for the three years.

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<sup>95</sup> Glasgow Museums, 'Tapestry Project visit to Stirling Castle to see the Stirling Palace TapestriesProject', Blog at Word Press, (<http://burrelltapestriesproject.wordpress.com/>), accessed 6<sup>th</sup> August 2012.

<sup>96</sup> Personal interview with Helen Hughes.

<sup>97</sup> J. Mccloughlin, Jim, B. Sodagar and J. Kaminski, 'Dynamic Socio-economic Impact: a Holistic Analytical Framework for Cultural Heritage Sites' in *Heritage Impact 2005: Proceedings of the First International Symposium on the Socio-economic Impact of Cultural Heritage*, J. Mccloughlin, J. Kaminski and B. Sodagar eds., (Budapest, 2006), 43.

Hughes worked with another conservator on the projects examining the tapestries to produce a catalogue of the entire collection. The work she described could be trying at times due to visitor interruptions (some people would shout for the attention of working conservators) but was, overall, enjoyable. The social aspect of allowing access is hugely rewarding, and Hughes met some interesting people, and that it was good to see re-visits. The access and communication of the project to the public “added to the experience... there is often too little personal contact” within conservation work.<sup>98</sup>

On the judgement of the conservators at work, visitors were sometimes allowed beyond the barriers for a closer look. The temporary gallery is relatively remote from the public, being off the main visitor route, so it was safe to allow some visitors a closer look, or to stop work to hold conversations. Hughes commented on how tapestries were quite difficult to explain in reference to terminology, what they are and their production. The use of a tapestry frame was useful in helping visitors to understand more about tapestries through using a 3d visual source to explain the manufacturing of a tapestry.<sup>99</sup> The use of the illustrative posters were informative and the lecture theatre opposite the gallery where the video and talks were held, was beneficial in increasing understanding being hugely relevant to the conservation work in the gallery. The use of language and accompanying semiotics is fundamental to visitor understanding.

There were some problem areas of organisation that were not anticipated, such as barriers which allowed young children to run under. A double barrier system was introduced to solve the problem. From this, Hughes recognised that more time spent planning might have foreseen this possibility. Hughes particularly came away with a greater appreciation for front of house staff who manage visitor activity in the museum, daily.<sup>100</sup> The departments had to be diplomatic and work together as a team to organise the event.

### **3.6 Evaluation**

The event was successful in enhancing visitor experience and in gaining re-visits. The textile conservators generally felt that adapting the conservation work to allow public access was worthwhile at the expense of extra time and resources having to be used. Hughes particularly

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<sup>98</sup> Personal interview with Helen Hughes.

<sup>99</sup> Personal interview with Helen Hughes.

<sup>100</sup> Personal interview with Helen Hughes.

enjoyed the one to one engagement with visitors, and found it fascinating to learn from some of the visitors herself. A visitor with knowledge in calligraphy was able to distinguish some of the lettering design on one of the tapestries being worked on, which added meaning to the words revealing more about the factual history of the piece.<sup>101</sup> Increasing access allows for wider audiences to get involved and thus increases shared knowledge and intellectual growth. 'Throughout the collections generally, textiles/objects are being looked at by a wider range of people who are aware of many different aspects.'<sup>102</sup> Hughes observed that there were lots of mothers and children in particular who were casually visiting the museum and found themselves at the temporary gallery to view the conservation.<sup>103</sup> The introduction of conservation to children could promote the industry in the long term and could potentially mean that museum visitor numbers would likely increase in the future if children were introduced an early age.

'Research projects help us learn more about our collections, and about the time and place the objects in the collections came from. We often collaborate with a wide range of people and organisations. These include museums and academic institutions around the world. This helps raise Glasgow's cultural profile internationally.'<sup>104</sup>

The current practice of Glasgow Museums underpins increasing public access to contribute to the corporate aim, to enrich the lives of residents and visitors. The Burrell Tapestries Research Project has influenced other events and the general desire to do more conservation in public areas.<sup>105</sup> Conservation practice is changing from being a behind the scenes activity where only maintenance was undertaken in front of the public, to becoming an exhibition of itself. Conservation is becoming more publicised internally within the company as it is a key asset to increasing access.<sup>106</sup> The planning and organisational team work makes for successful projects across the institutions,

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<sup>101</sup> Personal interview with Helen Hughes.

<sup>102</sup> H. Hughes, 'How Greater Knowledge of an Object Can Affect an Assessment of the Reversibility of Previous Treatment' in *Reversibility; Does it Exist?*, A. Oddy and S. Carroll eds., (London, 1999), 173.

<sup>103</sup> Personal interview with Helen Hughes.

<sup>104</sup> Glasgow Museums, 'Projects', 2010, (<http://www.glasgowlife.org.uk/museums/projects/Pages/home.aspx>), accessed 6<sup>th</sup> August 2012.

<sup>105</sup> Personal interview with Helen Hughes.

<sup>106</sup> Personal interview with Helen Hughes.

promoting conservation and other behind the scenes departments to the rest of the heritage sector, and to the public.

The socio-economic aspect of the project which argued to fulfil institutional goals and benefit instrumental social and environmental values was crucial in attaining funding. Entry to the museum is free and The Burrell Collection, like all Glasgow Museums relies on external support. Integrating public engagement into everyday practice is increasingly prevalent in the sustainability of such museums. In-situ conservation exhibiting is an efficient way of combining practice and engagement. Timed talks enhance visitor experience and allow a balanced focus on achieving work as well as public engagement.



Fig.3 Public engagement at the National Museums Scotland event, 'Behind the Scenes for Fascinating Mummies'.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Photograph author's own with acknowledgement of National Museums Scotland.



Fig.4 The textiles table at 'Behind the Scenes for Fascinating Mummies'.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Photograph author's own with acknowledgement of National Museums Scotland.



Fig. 5 The forensic science table at the 'Behind the Scenes for Fascinating Mummies'.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Photograph author's own with acknowledgement of National Museums Scotland.



# Historic Houses

## 4. The Historic House Environment

The twentieth century saw the conversion of a considerable number of stately family homes into historic houses open to the public, henceforth becoming dominant tourist attractions across Britain. The impact of continuous large numbers of visitors into these old historic buildings has encouraged the need to preserve and prevent damage to these culturally important and priceless sites; it has seen the development of conservation, which has become a major and important profession within the heritage sector. The role of the conservator has become more significant since a greater understanding of caring for historic houses and their collections has been realised.

Unlike museums, most historic houses do not have conservation studios on site. In past years conservation was undertaken during the closed hours and the winter season. Circa 10 years ago, rooms in historic houses of the NT were presented perfectly and still. Sarah Kay, curator for the NT explained;

‘...there was no transparency in terms of the conservation processes, priorities, skills involved or the costs. Visitors would arrive in the new season not necessarily knowing that conservation work to objects and interiors had happened in the interim. They were passive admirers.’<sup>110</sup>

Historic houses offer elite and engaging surroundings in which to conduct exclusive and inclusive engagement events. The buildings themselves are of great value and historic significance, as are the objects within them. It is an environment where objects are in context with their settings, where preventive and remedial conservation often has to be undertaken in-situ. Conserving objects in their related environment can encourage greater understanding of the value of objects, and demonstrate the challenges faced within historic buildings that make conservation within them so special.

In 2001, The NT embarked upon a new public outreach strategy in order to achieve corporate aims to increase revenue. Instrumental values led to the decision to open houses for longer, meaning conservation work during the closed 6 month period would be compromised. However Sarah Kay

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<sup>110</sup> Cited in C. Hughes and S. Kay, 2012.

described 'this apparent negative challenge to conservation turned out to be a positive catalyst as it has resulted in creativity in how conservation work is now achieved'.<sup>111</sup>

The context of the historic house makes for interesting in-situ conservation projects that can be promoted to increase public engagement within organisations in order to increase footfall and/or to increase funding opportunities. Unlike museums, space for engagement can be limited and factors such as safety of the house, collections and visitors have to be taken into consideration. I have taken two case studies from museums to study and compare in order to distinguish key successful, transferrable aspects of access and engagement.

## *5. The National Trust: Attingham Re-discovered*

### **5.1 Introduction to Case Study**

The National Trust (NT) has been at the forefront of modern conservation practice within historic houses and so it is particularly important to my research to determine how and why conservation is undertaken in historic houses across the UK. I have researched the NT project of 'Attingham Re-discovered' which focuses on promoting conservation through public outreach, in-situ at Attingham Manor, to gain an understanding of the NT's modern outreach techniques in fulfilling its institutional goals and values. My research looks at the role of textile conservation and its involvement within the project.

Recognising public value and its need to increase revenue, the trust was the first to see conservation, traditionally undertaken when the houses were closed, become an in front of house practice.<sup>112</sup> The trust now exploits conservation, prolonging projects to increase public appreciation; audiences can now regularly witness, enjoy and understand the processes involved and the decisions that are made. Slow conservation is put into practice, allowing social inclusivity and access and the development of a sustainable visitor/conservator relationship, for the good of the people and their heritage. The NT has developed its practice based on slow conservation, dedicating heritage preservation to the local communities. Conservation projects aim to drive community involvement

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<sup>111</sup> Cited in C. Hughes and S. Kay, 2012.

<sup>112</sup> Cited in C. Hughes and S. Kay, 2012.

by exhibiting craft skills and in-situ conservation, including treatments and preventive cleaning schemes.<sup>113</sup>

## 5.2 The National Trust

The NT is a UK conservation charity that cares for heritage sites, monuments and parks across the UK, including, over 300 historic houses.<sup>114</sup> The trust was founded in 1895, with the aim of protecting historic public sites and spaces for future preservation and public use. The founder of the NT, Octavia Hill described why the work of the NT is so important; the trust preserves the land and heritage ‘for the everlasting delight of the people’.<sup>115</sup>

An independent charity, the trust relies on membership, visitors, partners and funders to maintain finances in order to continue the conservation of the many heritage sites in its care. Public value is of key importance to the charity’s mission and in context in gaining support and funding.

The charity strives to revive and develop the properties and land it owns so that they can be enjoyed by all, for future generations. The trust works to improve public access, social inclusion and education through the renovation and conservation of places of historical and social value. To do this, the trust is ‘developing new ways to bring places to life’;

‘Developing...

- a wider range of activities at properties, from nature walks and bike riding to surfing
- open dialogues with local communities about new uses for our properties
- new opportunities for public access to our land for food production

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<sup>113</sup> S. Kay and C. Hughes, ‘Engaging the Public in Their Cultural Heritage: The Attingham Re-discovered Project’ in *ICOM-CC 16th Triennial Conference, Lisbon, 19-23 September 2011* (Lisbon, 2011), 2.

<sup>114</sup> National Trust, ‘About us’, (<http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/about-us/>), accessed 20<sup>th</sup> July 2012.

<sup>115</sup> National Trust ‘Going Local, Fresh Tracks Down Old Roads: Our Strategy Plan for the Next decade’ 2010 (<http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/servlet/file/store5/item365051/version1/w-strategy-next-decade-17-march.pdf>), 2.

- a more welcoming atmosphere for visitors, reducing signage and rules
- collaboration with tenants and neighbors to reduce our energy use and to use resources more sparingly and efficiently
- relationships with academic bodies to further enhance our commitment to scholarship, knowledge and conservation expertise
- the instinct to say 'yes' more often than 'no'.<sup>116</sup>

### 5.3 The project

Attingham Re-discovered is a conservation project, at the NT's regency mansion, Attingham Park in Shropshire. The project celebrates conservation in historic houses by undertaking treatments in-situ whenever it is possible.<sup>117</sup> The project aims to promote conservation practice by making it more accessible and inclusive to the public, to further increase public interest in The NT as an organisation as well as the property.

It is a long term project that utilises the slow conservation theory; it aims to demonstrate conservation at a local level, communicating the value of conservation and provoking audiences to think for themselves about the sustainability of their own heritage.<sup>118</sup> What began as a 6 year project, starting in 2006, Attingham Re-discovered has become indefinite due to its success in engaging its audiences.<sup>119</sup> It aims to gain support from local communities through building relationships 'emotionally, spiritually and intellectually'.<sup>120</sup> Membership is vital to the funding of the

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<sup>116</sup> Cited in National Trust 'Going Local, Fresh Tracks Down Old Roads: Our Strategy Plan for the Next decade' 2010, 7.

<sup>117</sup> Cited in S. Kay and C. Hughes 2011, 2.

<sup>118</sup> Cited in S. Kay and C. Hughes 2011, 1

<sup>119</sup> Cited in S. Kay and C. Hughes 2011, 2.

<sup>120</sup> Cited in S. Kay and C. Hughes 2011, 1.

work undertaken at The NT and so it is important to encourage repeat visits by reinforcing people's appreciation for their heritage.<sup>121</sup>

Conservation projects within the project as a whole have included the cleaning of the Boudoir walls and ceiling, which unveiled 18<sup>th</sup> century gilded decoration, undertaken by a paintings conservator in front of visitors for 18 months. From visitor surveys and monitoring, it was evident the work was a success in engaging public interest; visitors returned at intervals to witness the progress.<sup>122</sup> During such projects, conservators have open discussions with their audiences; through explaining what conservation involves, the implications and challenges faced on a day to day basis and the long term sustainability of conservation, the NT has broadened the boundaries of the visitor/conservator relationship.<sup>123</sup>

## **5.4 Planning and Organisation**

Curator Sarah Kay works closely alongside Catriona Hughes, Project Conservator who choreographs the project. General Manager at Attingham Park, Mark Agnew oversees the commercial side of the project and conservation requirements; balancing creativity and authenticity with realistic goals. The project is marketed through a range of social media: radio, local press, membership newsletters, leaflets and flyers around the property and in local community places and online, including YouTube, Twitter and Facebook.

Helen Royal, Head of Conservation and Engagement, manages preventive conservation around the house and tackles the overall conservation interpretation and semiotics such as the conservation panels and visitor trails and tours. The Conservation and Engagement role itself shows how important public understanding and appreciation is to the daily running of the house.

External specialist conservators are contracted in to do the remedial conservation work in the Attingham Re-discovered project. Built into contracts is the requirement to be able to work in front of the public and be able to present and talk to the public on numerous occasions. Extra time is allocated for this. The NT is increasingly practicing the 'slow conservation' concept, whereby projects are prolonged, consciously exploiting the work being done to achieve maximum engagement

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<sup>121</sup> Cited in S. Kay and C. Hughes 2011, 5.

<sup>122</sup> Cited in S. Kay and C. Hughes 2011, 2.

<sup>123</sup> Cited in S. Kay and C. Hughes 2011, 3.

benefits, to increase public interest in the values of the house and the NT organisation as a whole.<sup>124</sup> Attingham Re-discovered does just this; the projects are drawn out so that talks and demonstrations can be integrated and projects are delayed so that they can be done in front of visitors, to increase conservation exposure.<sup>125</sup>

## 5.5 Outreach online

The internet is also used for outreach; such projects that cannot be carried out in front of visitors are made into short films so that audiences can continue to access the work being carried out at the house. The official website for Attingham Park has links to YouTube, to videos of conservation work at the house narrated by curator Sarah Kay, the Engagement and Conservation team and specialist conservators working on the projects. The experts describe what is being done, explaining how and why conservation and restoration is being carried out.

The online videos include a 6 minute programme 'An emotional day in Attingham Park's history...' about the removal of the c.1812 silk damask curtains in the Sultana Room.<sup>126</sup> The curtains are of huge value and historical significance having been commissioned for the Sultana Room, and continually altered and preserved by members of the family who lived at the manor. Curator Sarah Kay explains in the video, that, at the time they were the only historic curtains to survive in the house still hanging up. Their removal was discussed 5 years ago, thus expressing to the audience that was a difficult decision, but one that was well thought through. Kay explains that textile conservators had advised 5 years ago that the curtains should be removed to prevent further degradation because they were already in poor condition and near to falling to pieces. Their in-situ location on a main visitor route was harmful to the condition of the curtains; being at high risk of damage from dust and general wear and tear. Damage to the curtains was shown close up so that the audience can understand exactly why their removal to storage was essential; so that the curtains can be preserved for longer. Kay further expressed that decisions will be made to continue 'to provide access to the curtains even though in the store and out of context', explaining that the curtains are historically significant and can educate people about textiles, cut and construction from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Engagement

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<sup>124</sup> Cited in S. Staniforth, accessed 10<sup>th</sup> April 2012.

<sup>125</sup> Personal interview with Sarah Kay.

<sup>126</sup> Attingham Park TV, 'Attingham Rediscovered', YouTube, (<http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLBEE1FBB8E7425982>), accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2012.

and Conservation team manager Helen Royall, explicated that the curtains have been examined for damage and prepared and cleaned before they are further cared for in storage when the damage will be recorded and monitored on a yearly basis. The video showed some of the team cleaning the curtains and she described the process, skills and the equipment involved, in a language clear and informative for any audience that may be watching. Care was even taken to explain the decision to keep the hooks attached to the curtains; sewn to the curtains by the 8<sup>th</sup> Lady Berwick, the hooks are significant in their own right and so their selvedge is also important. The decision to wrap the hooks individually with acid free tissue paper was justified by their historical significance and to prevent the hooks from reacting to a change in relative humidity and temperature, and causing damage as well to the silk curtains whilst in storage.<sup>127</sup> This detail of description makes for a good insight for the public, visitors and members into the behind the scenes work, the decisions involved and care taken to preserve the history of the house. Thus generating public interest and encouraging visits and re-visits to see and keep up to date with the work being done.

### **5.6 Engagement skills: Communication with Curator Sarah Kay**

The NT is increasingly trying to carry out conservation in action in-situ for visitors to see and be a part of. Curator Sarah Kay explains that the public find behind the scenes work fascinating, leaving a deep and lasting impression; making their experience more memorable, invariably building visitor support.

Hands-on demonstrations in which visitors can interact with the staff and try things for themselves are new engagement approaches. For example, as part of Attingham Re-discovered, it is planned that volunteers will help recreate the curtains in the Sultana Room. Small components of the curtains will be reconstructed and hand made in front of visitors so that they can witness how intricate and time consuming the work is. This also raises awareness of the traditional skills used by conservators and highlights the importance of their use. These are traditions and skills that otherwise might one day have been lost, which also emphasises the importance of the construction of the historical objects and the building. The use of volunteers keeps costs to a minimum and allows for slow conservation to be put into practice.

Making projects relevant to visitors and local communities is considerably important in gaining their involvement and appreciation. Textiles and household objects, such as favourite chairs make for good engagement conservation projects as people have an understanding and emotional connection

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<sup>127</sup> Attingham Park TV, 'An Emotional Day in Attingham Park's History...', YouTube, (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KOoesYpHylE>), accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2012.

to these objects. Kay explains that learning to care for historic items in historic houses is both fascinating and inspiring; a transferrable skill that people can take home with them.

Engagement events don't have to cost an extortionate amount, spending on graphics for example, is not needed when the real objects and work are available; talking is far more successful in communicating a message.

“Don't underestimate the power of talking to people” –Sarah Kay

Discussion between specialist and visitor is a valuable tool when educating or interpreting a message. Through being 'transparent', generating thought and debate encourages people to care, especially when it is their heritage that is involved. In understanding conservation, psychologically people realise caring for their heritage is a good thing and so become actively supportive, and are likely to visit again.<sup>128</sup> Transparency does however allow criticism, but people's opinions are often valid, and it's beneficial for conservators to understand other points of view in relation to the ethics involved in the decisions they make regarding the peoples heritage.<sup>129</sup>

### **5.7 Textile Conservation at the National Trust: Communication with Kate Gill**

There are few textile conservation examples and this does highlight my argument for more textile conservators to take on the slow conservation approach, and for more textile projects to include more public access. Kate Gill, a contracted textile conservator specialising in upholstery, has worked for the NT on occasion, with years of in-situ public engagement experience.

“In my experience of public engagement, explaining your work and expressing your own passion is always popular and beneficial to the conservation profession as far as maintaining our profile is concerned” - Kate Gill.<sup>130</sup>

In August 2011, Gill undertook phase one of a project for the NT's Knole House in Kent, working on the conservation documentation of some upholstered 18<sup>th</sup> century furniture in the Reynolds Room whilst open to the public. The project was in the interest of Knole who wanted to increase visitor

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<sup>128</sup> Personal interview with Sarah Kay.

<sup>129</sup> Cited in S. Kay and C. Hughes 2011, 3.

<sup>130</sup> Appendix iii, personal communication with Kate Gill.



interest. Examination of the furniture began in the morning when the house was closed and in the afternoons when the house opened Gill remained in the room to discuss the work and findings with visitors and to answer questions. 'Questions were quite broad based, some specifically relating to the project, other about conservation, restoration, presentation and preservation, textile production and upholstery' which proves how much thought and care about the heritage can be encouraged through providing public engagement opportunities.<sup>131</sup>

Gill also prepared material information to be shown alongside her on display to educate visitors on her findings.<sup>132</sup> When working on intricate and layered objects, the use of imagery documentation is valuable in helping explanation and communication to a variety of audiences.<sup>133</sup> The second phase of the project, which consisted of non-interventive examination, investigation and documentation, was undertaken when the house was closed to the public; a convenient time, as it would not have been possible to devote the amount of concentration demanded of the project *and* engage with the public at the same time. It is important to note that engagement can affect concentration and quality of work:

'Any project involving direct public interaction reduces the amount of practical work you can achieve- in reality, it is impossible to carry out work and engage with the public at the same time.' - Kate Gill<sup>134</sup>

The NT projects of Attingham and Knole, allocate time for talks, and tours which is marketed to the public and any fine or difficult work requiring concentration is done during closed hours or taken to a studio so that quality and progress is maintained. This organisation is essential so that work can be done, yet it can also be exhibited. Historic houses also pose potential health and safety issues regarding visitor damage; consideration into where the work can be undertaken and the layout is necessary due to lack of barriers.

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<sup>131</sup> Appendix iii, personal communication with Kate Gill.

<sup>132</sup> Appendix iii, personal communication with Kate Gill.

<sup>133</sup> Appendix iii, personal communication with Kate Gill.

<sup>134</sup> Appendix iii, personal communication with Kate Gill.

## 5.8 Evaluation

Researching the NT has developed my understanding of public engagement practice within historic houses and what can be achieved from it. There are many long term benefits for undertaking conservation engagement projects including, increasing footfall subsequently increasing revenue and gaining community support and promoting conservation awareness, fulfilling institutional goals and funding requirements. Projects such as Attingham Re-discovered at the NT help fulfil institutional goals and add to instrumental values by offering a service to the public by ‘helping people enjoy life’.<sup>135</sup>

Attingham Re-discovered generated a lot of public interest and performance statistics show visitor numbers doubled during projects.<sup>136</sup> Visitor feedback which is collected on a daily basis helps determine popular opinion, what audiences felt about their overall experience and which areas of engagement were most successful; this also verifying visitor patterns.<sup>137</sup>

‘Numerous visitors talked about being astonished by the level of detail and time involved in the conservation and restoration work, which was a complete ‘eye-opener’ to many and several commented on being fascinated by the philosophical dilemmas which the Trust are grappling with’.<sup>138</sup>

After speaking with Attingham’s Re-discovered curator Sarah Kay, it was apparent that projects do not need to be costly to be successful; conservation work that needs to be done is done in-situ during visitor hours with allocated times for presentations and talks. Projects are prolonged and there may be extra costs towards extended external contractors, however the benefits prove worthwhile. ‘There is no rush; indeed, it is crucial *not* to rush the decisions and the work involved’ and it is important to relay this to audiences during engagement.<sup>139</sup> Communication is key and in terms of semiotics conversational interactions are most successful in engaging audiences by interpreting a message through the physical, personal and social experience by advocating access

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<sup>135</sup> National Trust ‘Going Local, Fresh Tracks Down Old Roads: Our Strategy Plan for the Next decade’ 2010, 6.

<sup>136</sup> Personal interview with Sarah Kay.

<sup>137</sup> Cited in L. D. Dierking, 1998, 57.

<sup>138</sup> Cited in S. Kay and C. Hughes 2011, 7.

<sup>139</sup> Cited in S. Kay and C. Hughes 2011, 2.

and inclusivity.<sup>140</sup> Visitor interaction allows the communicative message transaction.<sup>141</sup> In regards to the visitor experience, conservation 'explanations add value to a visit and give more reason to return'<sup>142</sup>. Discussions and debate provoke deep thought on heritage impact and the future of historic houses.

'Explaining conservation adds a further dimension to the interpretation of the property as a whole, it needs to be incorporated as one strand of an integrated interpretation and educational plan, or, as it is increasingly being called, a 'property learning strategy''.<sup>143</sup>

The intrinsic value of the heritage of an historic property is rich and diverse and significant to its surroundings and local communities. It is important to keep the conservation message relevant by integrating objects and stories that people can relate to, such as everyday items.<sup>144</sup> Textiles fit this role perfectly; a state bed, an old loved armchair, children's toys. Hence textile conservation has the opportunity to involve itself more within the new role of the engaging conservator. Kate Gill at Knole has proved how textile conservation can be transferrable for public engagement, recommending supporting visuals such as photography and graphics to enhance audience understanding. Visuals can be helpful in relaying background information about objects such as textiles which can be layered and complex, and can clearly illustrate the processes of conservation through the use of before and in progress photography in communicating the past and future journeys of the objects.

Attingham as an inter-site has a beneficial impact on the sustainability of the local town and communities and can add a huge value to the local environment.<sup>145</sup> In the context of historic houses, there is a vast and indefinite amount of intrinsic value which benefits the success of the heritage organisation and its socio-economic impact. Giving people memorable experiences and including them within the conservation of their heritage allows the institution to 'argue the socio-economic case for investment'.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Cited in L. D. Dierking, 1998, 57.

<sup>141</sup> Cited in P. M. McManus 1991, 43.

<sup>142</sup> Cited in N. Ingram 2006, 745.

<sup>143</sup> Cited in N. Ingram 2006, 745.

<sup>144</sup> Personal interview with Sarah Kay.

<sup>145</sup> Cited in J. Mcloughlin 2006, 54.

<sup>146</sup> Cited in J. Mcloughlin 2006, 43.

## *6. Historic Royal Palaces: Ask the Conservator, Conservation of Mattresses Project*

### **6.1 Introduction to Case Study**

Historic Royal Palaces (HRP) has long been acknowledged for its specialism in textile conservation since the Textile Conservation Studio (TCS) was established by William Morris one hundred years ago at Hampton Court Palace (the centenary was celebrated this year). State of the art textile conservation studios are located in the grace and favour apartments at the palace, where conservation of a diverse range of textile objects is undertaken by highly acclaimed conservators. In the midst of an open-house palace, the conservation team is experienced in public communication, which is integrated into their role at the palace to fulfil institutional charitable goals.<sup>147</sup> Programmes such as 'Ask the Conservator' are continually practiced to engage and inform the public of the responsibilities of the conservation team at the palace.

The integration of programmes such as 'Ask the Conservator' within conservation projects make for valuable case studies in order to identify successful organisational elements and communication techniques used in public engagement. My research aims to understand the role of the textile conservator within HRP public engagement events.

A particularly inspirational public engagement project was the in-situ conservation of three Queen Anne, eighteenth century mattresses at Hampton Court Palace. The project was devised purposely to publicise the textile conservation department at HRP. Bringing the interventive conservation work out of the studios, to the visitor route of the Queen's State Apartments, allowed for visitors to 'stumble' on the conservators at work.

### **6.2 Historic Royal Palaces**

HRP is responsible for the care and management of five British historic palaces including Hampton Court, Kensington Palace, Tower of London, Kew Palace and the Banqueting House. HRP is an independent charity, established in 1989 as an Executive Agency of Government, now within the

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<sup>147</sup>M. Day, 'Foreward' in *It's a Material World: Caring for the Public Realm*, S. Jones and J. Holden eds., (London, 2008), 10.

Department for Culture, Media and Sport. It receives no funding from the government or the crown, even though the palaces are all owned by the Queen, on behalf of the nation.<sup>148</sup>

The aim of HRP is to preserve the palaces in their splendour, to present and educate in an exciting fashion, the stories and memories of the past that the buildings and their contents represent. As Michael Day, Chief Executive explains, 'in a world more uncertain than ever, people are searching for roots, foundations and anchors. They want to understand how the past shaped the present, and they want to protect the things they value. In this respect, I believe that we at Historic Royal Palaces have a unique role to play'.<sup>149</sup> The Conservation and Collection Care (CCC) team at HRP are responsible for the care of a richly diverse object collection. 'Most of the contents of the Palaces form part of the Royal Collection and are owned by The Queen in right of the Crown'<sup>150</sup>, and so the CCC team have a responsible and unique role to play at HRP. The team of expert conservators aim to preserve, guard and show these priceless objects.

'We exist for tomorrow, not just for yesterday. Our job is to give these palaces a future as valuable as their past. We know how precious they and their contents are, and we aim to conserve them to the standard they deserve: the best.'<sup>151</sup>

### 6.3 The Project

The mattresses project was part of a three year programme of events branded 'Ask the Conservator', which was initiated in 2004 to develop a conservator/visitor relationship. The programme initiated by Head of Conservation, aims to explain conservation to a wider public audience through a series of showcases which ran for three years. 'Ask the Conservator' is now part of HRP established operations across the five palaces.<sup>152</sup>

Planning for the mattresses conservation began in 2006, when condition surveying and documenting began behind the scenes. The mattresses were chosen specifically for the project because they were

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<sup>148</sup> Historic Royal Palaces, 'About Us', 2004-2012, (<http://www.hrp.org.uk/aboutus/contactus/>), accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2012.

<sup>150</sup> Historic Royal Palaces, 'Conserving History', Historic Royal Palaces 2004-2012, (<http://www.hrp.org.uk/aboutus/aboutuswhatwedoconservation>), accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2011.

<sup>151</sup> Historic Royal Palaces, 'About Us', 2004-2012, (<http://www.hrp.org.uk/aboutus/contactus/>), accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2012.

<sup>152</sup> Appendix iv, personal communication with Kate Frame.

in need of conservation and they were large enough for display, and manageable for transportation, yet stable enough for stand-alone display, justifying their use for a 'conservation in action' exhibition event. Assessment of the mattresses was undertaken by curator and conservators to establish conservation needs and exhibition requirements so that treatments could be proposed with display in mind. The State Apartments at Hampton Court were chosen for location of the event, being relevant to the theme, and the only space large enough. The Queen's apartments are spacious and less busy than the popular Tudor Apartments and so allowed adequate access and safety for both conservators and visitors. The rooms were pre booked for three weeks after discussions with the events team and in front of house staff of their availability, because the rooms are often used for other out of hours functions.<sup>153</sup>

Initial conservation inspection of the mattresses, documentation of condition and measurements allowed for the exhibition design to incorporate treatment areas and displays and scale drawings were made with the planned layout and visitor route. Textile conservator at HRP, Maria Jordan emphasised in her paper on the project, 'devising and preparing the treatment space was paramount in order to ensure work was carried out safely and successfully'.<sup>154</sup> Barriers were designed enabling visitor access, yet allowed sufficient shielding for conservators to work.<sup>155</sup> Barriers were also a health and safety requirement, to prevent harm from the conservation equipment being used.<sup>156</sup> The 1m high barriers made from wood and Perspex were 1.5m away from the treatment areas which 'allowed visitor to see conservators at work but sufficiently far away that they would not be able to touch the objects'.<sup>157</sup>

Treatment was planned and estimated, with timed talks integrated to enable efficient completion of conservation work. 'The three weeks in the State Apartments represented almost one third of the treatment allocated' on the conservation of the mattresses.<sup>158</sup> Treatment began approximately 9am so that work could be started before the palace was opened, giving the conservators a few hours of

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<sup>153</sup> M. Jordan, 'Negotiation and Flexibility: New Challenges influencing the Management of Large, Complex Textile Conservation Projects Working in the Public View' in *Textile Conservation; Advances in Practice*, F. Lennard and P. Ewer eds., (Oxford, 2010) 132.

<sup>154</sup> Cited in M. Jordan 2010, 134.

<sup>155</sup> Appendix iv, personal communication with Maria Jordan.

<sup>156</sup> Appendix iv, personal communication with Kate Frame.

<sup>157</sup> Appendix iv, personal communication with Maria Jordan.

<sup>158</sup> Cited in M. Jordan 2010, 135.

uninterrupted time before visitors reached the Queens Apartments.<sup>159</sup> Kate Frame also explained that conservation time in-situ the State Apartments was preferable in that there were no interruptions from telephone queries, etc which can be time consuming when in the studios.<sup>160</sup> One or two in people were at hand by the barriers to assist the public and answer questions so that conservation work could be continued uninterrupted. Approximately half an hour talks from conservators were timed from noon throughout the day. However Jordan explains in her article, 'conservators had to be flexible in how they worked, being prepared to answer questions and finding ways of explaining their work not only in an accessible way but also succinctly'.<sup>161</sup>

Conservators were trained in semiotics by other HRP departments in interpretation and learning specifically for the programme. Areas of communication development included: story telling techniques, body language, presentation, voice projection, how to conduct tours and how to produce effective interpretation graphics.<sup>162</sup> Such public engagement skills enhance personal skills and professional practice and contribute to the overall aims of the organisation 'to educate and inform' the public about their heritage and the role of HRP.<sup>163</sup>

Visitor questionnaires collected regarding the programme were positive; a public interest in conservation was recognised. Although as Kate Frame explains, 'it is relatively difficult to gauge how much more the public understood about conservation' feedback confirmed that engagement towards the subject was generated.<sup>164</sup> Kate Frame highlights the key responses:

'the public responded with surprise at how interested they were in the conservation techniques and ideas. Main responses were: very privileged (and surprised) to be able to meet those who carry out the work (the experts directly), to see the objects close up (and noted the great skills required to make the objects, and now to conserve them), were surprised that conservation was an established profession (and that palaces have people in

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<sup>159</sup> Appendix iv, personal communication with Kate Frame.

<sup>160</sup> Appendix iv, personal communication with Kate Frame.

<sup>161</sup> Cited in M. Jordan 2010, 136.

<sup>162</sup> K, Frame, 2008, 1150.

<sup>163</sup> Cited in K. Frame 2008, 1147.

<sup>164</sup> Appendix iv, personal communication with Kate Frame.

their employ who do conservation on a five day week basis, and get paid for it).<sup>165</sup>

It is interesting to note exactly which aspects were found most fascinating by the visitors; they confirm that traditional techniques and skills, which have been disregarded and forgotten by the general public, those which are historically significant and important for a diverse cultural future are at the forefront of public interest, such as that slow conservation conceives to inspire. The feedback proves that conservation in action events are successful in communicating the relevance of heritage, the importance of caring for the environment and promoting the industry to audiences unaware of the specialist profession.

#### **6.4 Planning and Organisation**

The project was exhibited; the theme and interpretive display were carefully conceived with time, space and whom the project was to be marketed to, in mind. HRP is lucky to have a dedicated team of professionals; CCC, curators, Access and Learning and in front of house teams work together to produce such projects. This has enabled the public communications programme 'Ask the Conservator' to continue its success in promoting conservation to the wider audiences. Funding towards the programme is allocated within the Annual Operating Plan budget for a minimum of seven events a year.

'The programme is now delivered as part of our established operations, in that conservators are to have a visitor communication element to explain what they are doing whenever carrying out work on site that has them in one place for more than one day.'<sup>166</sup>

The textile conservation department at HRP takes an active role in context of the organisation itself contributing to the overall aims 'of being visitor-centred, learning-based, engaging and inclusive' and is innovative in its involvement within exhibitions and public involvement at the palaces.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Appendix iv, personal communication with Kate Frame.

<sup>166</sup> Appendix iv, personal communication with Kate Frame.

<sup>167</sup> Cited in K. Frame 2008, 1147.



The mattresses project was marketed internally within the organisation under the programme. Media including posters, the palace staff magazine, meetings and presentations were used to promote the programme and is also branded in many publications and online.<sup>168, 169</sup> Footfall in the Queens Apartment's increased due to these promotions of the event, however ticket sales for the palace were not increased, proving that visitors were interested to extend their time to view the conservation in action.<sup>170</sup>

## 6.5 Evaluation

The event, which was one of many conservation public engagement events at HRP, highlights how efficient and successful textile conservation work can be achieved in front of the public. The 'Ask the Conservator' programme has many more upcoming projects including, tapestry audits, 'Bugs', National Archaeology Day and the annual book clean.

The aim of the programme 'to enhance the quality of the visitor experience by showing the behind-the-scenes work, and meeting conservation specialists, as an additional and then-unique offer to HRP's many other on site programmes' aims to 'raise awareness of conservation and show the public, visitors, directly where their ticket money is being spent' improving institutional value.<sup>171</sup> The practice of events unites the various departments within the organisation; the mattresses event established the then-new, communicative role of the conservator within infrastructure of HRP.<sup>172</sup> Approximately ten percent of conservation time is now assigned to communicating conservation.<sup>173</sup>

'Conservators have begun to build a role of wider value in society... This is certainly true at Historic Royal Palaces, where public communication has been integrated into every conservator's job... We support the national strategy for

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<sup>168</sup> Frame, K., 'The Show Must Go On! Your Guide to Safe, Successful and Conservation-Friendly Events', (Surrey, Historic Royal Palaces, 2010).

<sup>169</sup> Historic Royal Palaces, 'Conserving History', 2004-2012, (<http://www.hrp.org.uk/aboutus/aboutuswhatwedococonservation>), accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2011.

<sup>170</sup> Appendix iv, personal communication with Maria Jordan.

<sup>171</sup> Appendix iv, personal communication with Maria Jordan.

<sup>172</sup> Appendix iv, personal communication with Maria Jordan.

<sup>173</sup> Appendix iv, personal communication with Kate Frame.

change and we support broadening the professional role of the conservator’-  
Michael Day, HRP Chief Executive.<sup>174</sup>

The mattresses event aimed to educate and excite audiences about history, whilst demonstrating the importance of the conservation work that is undertaken at HRP. To stimulate communication and understanding of the meaning of the project, visitors were encouraged to ask questions and have discussions with the conservators.<sup>175</sup> Interpretation was well planned prior and devised during exhibition design. Training from other HRP departments increased conservator’s confidence and abilities to manage public communications and to be able to successfully engage and educate visitors through tone of voice and language training. Warding staff also supervised the rooms and answered questions. Clear, understandable and informative language backed with clear and illustrative display information allowed the communicative transaction achievable and manageable during in-situ work. Instead of technical conservation language, conservators were ‘encouraged to use words like battered, crumbled and broken’.<sup>176</sup> The interpretive material and the message were pitched at a level which could be understood by a wide audience.<sup>177</sup>

The event had vast institutional value through developing ‘the communication skills of our conservators to make them confident to explain and promote their work to generalist audiences (non conservators including visitors as well as their colleagues from commercial teams to our Directors and Trustees; and in so doing influence to get support for their work).’<sup>178</sup>

Feedback and conservator opinion attest that interaction and hands-on event formats are most successful in engaging public interest in conservation. The samples of materials, watching the detailed conservation stitch work and being able to discuss with staff the work being carried out and the purpose of it, were the most successful aspects of the event.<sup>179</sup> The context of the historic house environment indefinitely increased relevance and visitor understanding even in exhibition form. The

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<sup>174</sup> Cited in M. Day 2008), 10.

<sup>175</sup> Cited in K. Frame 2008, 1150.

<sup>176</sup> Cited in K. Frame 2008, 1150.

<sup>177</sup> Uzzell, David, ‘Strategic Considerations and Practical Approaches to the Evaluation of Heritage and Environment Interpretation’ in *Contemporary Issues on Heritage and Environmental Interpretation: Problems and Prospects*, David Uzzell and Roy Ballantyne eds. (London, 1998), 189.

<sup>178</sup> Appendix iv, personal communication with Kate Frame.

<sup>179</sup> Appendix iv, personal communication with Maria Jordan.

subject matter of the mattresses and the story telling surrounding the intrinsic value enhances enjoyment and attracts a younger audience, to which the event was particularly marketed at. The event interplayed the personal, physical and social contexts of visitor interaction which invariably enhances the visitor experience, and emotionally connects them to the organisation and environment.<sup>180</sup> Thus encouraging the promotion of the textile conservation witnessed during the experience. The comments of fascination regarding the role of the conservator at HRP informs us that the average museum visitor does not know the existence of conservation, let alone the important role it plays in allowing public access to such heritage sites.<sup>181</sup> Public events such as these that bring conservators out of the studio are invaluable to the overall practice of conservation, particularly the specialism of textile conservation in gaining acknowledgement and support.

The increase of footfall in the Queens Apartment's was a positive response to the marketing of the event within the palace, evidently attracting visitors that would not usually have visited that route. This infers widespread interest in conservation in action. The event did not increase palace ticket sales and this may have been due to lack of promotion of the event outside of the palace.

From the textile conservators point of view it was felt overall that the event was worthwhile, however 'two weeks was long enough'.<sup>182</sup> A lack of good lighting to do intensive work due to minimal sockets within the Queens Apartments, persistent visitors trying to attract attention and having to work alone at stages, affected efficiency in achieving work at some points.<sup>183</sup> However, work was achieved on time as planned.<sup>184</sup>

The event contributed to the overall success and development of the conservation sector at HRP. The event and the programme as a whole is evidence of the success of enabling public engagement into general organisation operations. Although a considerable time and team effort was required for the mattresses project, in the long run it will gain an increase in support and interest, benefitting the sustainability of textile conservation at HRP. Areas of substantial importance have been highlighted during the creation of these events, indicating a need to continue to hold them.

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<sup>180</sup> Cited in L. D. Dierking, 1998, 57.

<sup>181</sup> Appendix iv, personal communication with Kate Frame.

<sup>182</sup> Appendix iv, personal communication with Maria Jordan.

<sup>183</sup> Appendix iv, personal communication with Maria Jordan.

<sup>184</sup> Appendix iv, personal communication with Kate Frame.

## Evaluation of Case Studies

It is evident from the case studies that audiences enjoy witnessing conservation in action; the interaction between conservator, object and visitor creates a sense of inclusivity and unity. Increased visitor flow can only be monitored over an extensive period of time; when analysing these figures, variables such as time and season must be considered.<sup>185</sup> However, measuring the effects that conservation events play in benefiting society is difficult to measure as often the effect is not immediate.<sup>186</sup> Obtaining data for evaluation is beneficial in adapting programmes in response to the evidence that can be obtained. Quantitative data can be difficult to collect if admissions are not charged, however methods including attendance counts, simple observation and visitor registers, such as guest books and memberships can be advantageous in gathering relative data.<sup>187</sup> Summative information such as surveys and visitor questionnaires can inform management and staff of particular aspects for improvement and which aspects were most successful.<sup>188</sup> The case studies show evidence through ticket sales, re-visits and increased footfall that the conservation public engagement events generated further interest in each of the heritage environments and were beneficial in contributing to the overall aims and missions of the organisations.

From my communications with Attingham Re-discovered curator, Sarah Kay and textile conservator at the Burrell Collection, Helen Hughes it was obvious that textile conservation does need to take a more assertive role within the heritage sector. There are few published works specific to textile conservation public engagement projects; the lack of which supports this assertion. This reinforces my argument for the textile conservation profession to develop public relations and specifically take more opportunities in undertaking in-situ public engagement projects. In observing the case studies to determine how successful such projects can be and deciphering their efficiency in organisation and achievement, I have endeavoured to determine the most significant aspects which should be considered when creating conservation engagement projects.

In evaluating the intrinsic, institutional and instrumental values of each case study I gained an increased understanding how interpreted themes and organisational goals within different heritage environments, contribute to the overall success of engagement events. In summary, the most successful aspects to put forward as recommendations for other organisations to use in promoting

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<sup>185</sup> Cited in R. J. Loomis 1987, 35.

<sup>186</sup> Cited in S. Kay and C. Hughes 2011, 1-8.

<sup>187</sup> Cited in R. J. Loomis 1987, 36-38.

<sup>188</sup> Cited in R. J. Loomis 1987, 8.

textile conservation are: utilising institutional goals, developing the intrinsic theme, building communication skills and adapting semiotics, using the concept of slow conservation in everyday practice, undertaking in-situ events wherever possible, spending time on planning and health and safety, utilising volunteers and working together with other organisational departments.

## Recommendations

### *7. Recommendations for Textile Conservators*

#### **7.1 Institutional Goals**

Conservation plays a significant role in the preservation, interpretation and access of the heritage and so hugely contributes to the institutional vision and strategic goals of heritage environments of both museums and historic houses. Clear institutional goals help to deliver more meaning to conservation projects in that their contributions can deliver successful benefits to the organisation, such as public support, professional allies and potential funding. Institutional demands can influence the development of conservation professionalism, building on transferrable skills and maintaining its place within the heritage sector.

#### **7.2 Intrinsic Theme**

The comprehensive level of understanding by the public, of the role of textile conservation relies on the interpretation of heritage and the message relayed by the conservator. Themes that are of popular wide interest that have a scientific research element, such as the Egyptians, can increase potential storytelling and so are potentially successful outreach subjects. Day to day conservation practice can be made more relevant to the public, because it can be associated and understood more at a local level. For example, Attingham Re-discovered includes the conservation of more sentimental house hold items that are made relevant by provoking thought about the preservation of items that can be found in their own homes. Through expressing the significance of the people's heritage and gaining public understanding of the importance of preserving it, encourages the public to play an active role in supporting it.

### 7.3 Communication Skills

The role of the conservator is quickly becoming more publicly evolved and many institutions are initiating communication training alongside the traditional in-studio practical work. Historic Royal Palaces, have initiated such training to prepare the textile conservation team for their developing role in explaining and promoting their work to wider audiences including visitors, colleagues, Directors and Trustees.<sup>189</sup> The ability to talk to a generalist audience is important in obtaining inclusivity and exclusivity, and achieving public understanding of conservation.

One to one communication between visitor and conservator enhances the visitors experience and forms a more memorable and lasting impression. In initiating discussion and debate, 'interpreters have a way as to encourage visitors to think about and consider different futures'<sup>190</sup> and in so, offer an understanding of the value of heritage and the preservation of it. Illustrative and informative texts are useful as backup sources and for audiences to gain a base knowledge of projects from which they can then ask more in-depth questions.

### 7.4 In-situ Events

Undertaking textile conservation in-situ to its local and relevant environment is a simple way of providing access to conservation work and increasing interest in the work and the organisation as a whole. It allows public access to conservation skills and techniques and the history of the intrinsic heritage being shown. It is clear that the public find behind-the-scenes work fascinating because it exposes more of the history and meaning of heritage and so increases public sentiment and interest. The ambience of heritage environment, particularly historic houses, impacts the visitor experience in the physical context adding value and purpose to the meaning of conservation. It also allows visitors unaware of the conservation profession to stumble across the work and take notice.

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<sup>189</sup> Appendix iv, personal communication with Kate Frame.

<sup>190</sup> R. Ballantine, 'Problems and Prospects for Heritage and Environmental Interpretation in the New Millennium: An Introduction' in *Contemporary Issues om Heritage and Environmental Interpretation: Problems and Prospects*, David Uzzell and Roy Ballantyne eds. (London, 1998) 3.

## **7.5 Slow Conservation**

The concept of slow conservation initiated by Sarah Staniforth at the National Trust is recommended when adapting a textile conservation project for public engagement.<sup>191</sup> Prolonging conservation projects to incorporate public engagement and undertaking both preventive and remedial work in-situ is effective in gaining re-visits and visitor support and promoting the profession to audiences that might not be aware of the existence of conservation. There is emphasis on promoting the meaning of conservation and the significant role it plays in preserving history; explaining and demonstrating historical skills and stories that can be revealed from everyday objects. The concept aims to educate the public on those traditions and cultures that are being lost by fast globalisation, by large corporate businesses and mass manufacture. Textile conservation can play an important role within this because it incorporates numerous traditional hand skills and historical technical analysis; a diverse range of skills that non-conservators are usually unaware of.

## **7.6 Hands-On Activities**

Where possible, hands on activities are effective in demonstrating the time and hard work that goes into conserving and restoring history. The public can gain an understanding of the work and where exactly the money is being spent. It also enhances the visitor experience through the physical and social contexts.

## **7.7 Organisation**

The efficiency of a conservation public engagement project relies on the planning and organisation of the work prior to commencement. Conservation work should be estimated and yet be flexible to allow for public distraction. Allocated times for talks are essential to allow for work to be achieved, and this sets boundaries that the public should be able to appreciate. The National Trust and Historic Royal Palaces (HRP) work with front of house staff so that warders can also help with the engagement and answer questions. At Glasgow Museums and HRP two conservators worked together at a time to share responsibility. At National Museums Scotland the learning and access team were at hand to manage and oversee the project. Working together and using staff to their full potential benefits the efficiency of the running of a project and enhances visitor experience. Layout

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<sup>191</sup> Cited in Staniforth, Sarah, 'Conservation Heating to Slow: A Tale of the Appropriate Rather Than the Ideal' 2007, accessed 10<sup>th</sup> April 2012.

of the floor and exhibition displays should be planned in full, to plan a visitor route and maintain health and safety of visitors, staff and objects.

Working across the organisation also promotes conservation to other departments. At HRP ‘the studio conservators became better known by site staff’ and their role better understood by palace operations.<sup>192</sup> And vice versa, Helen Hughes at the Burrell Collection was more appreciative of the role of the front of house staff. Volunteers are also a huge asset being able to undertake conservation engagement events, and their skill and dedication should not be underestimated;<sup>193</sup> at the National Trust volunteers helped with hands-on activities.<sup>194</sup>

## **7.8 Health and Safety**

Time spent planning and organising public engagement events should include focus on health and safety risks and issues prior to work beginning. This includes the flexibility of conservation staff, the safety of conservation equipment, maintaining a clean and tidy working environment and integrating barriers or shields into display layout.

## **7.8 Marketing**

Working with other departments of an organisation can improve marketing strategies in order to promote events. It is worth promoting the event internally as well as locally to other local institutions and organisations. Making most of the social media including websites and social sites and blogs, local newspapers and film contribute to the promotion of the event, the conservation department and organisation and increase access and potentially generate greater understanding of the heritage sector.

## **7.9 Integration with Other Programmes and Events**

To gain further outreach, events that can be integrated with other programmes and organisational strategies address the needs of wider audiences and increase the support for the work of the textile

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<sup>192</sup> Appendix iv, personal communication with Kate Frame.

<sup>193</sup> H. Lloyd, ‘Staffing Historic Houses’ in *The National Trust Manual of Housekeeping* (Oxford, 2006), 692.

<sup>194</sup> Appendix iii, personal communication with Kate Gill.



conservator.<sup>195</sup> For example, National Museums Scotland, Fascinating Mummies event was derive from the adult learning programme initiated by the Learning and Access team and ran alongside the Edinburgh International Science Festival. The Historic Royal Palaces mattresses project was part of the 'Ask the Conservator' programme which extended the support of the education team, and the Burrell Tapestries Research Project produced numerous accompanying activities and exhibitions such as 'Tapestries: A New Interpretation'.

## Conclusion

It can be concluded from the case studies, that conservation public engagement events actively contribute to the long term political vision of more educated and enriched society. The positive responses and interest gained from the members of the public who experienced such events proves that the time and organisation that goes into creating such events is well worthwhile. Many responses told of fascination for the subject matter and the heritage involved and in regards to this relatively unknown profession, surprise at how much work and skill is involved in conservation.

Textile conservation among the other more known and dominant areas of conservation have shown to have a relatively quiet existence in comparison. In my research of the subject of textile conservation public engagement case studies, there are relatively few stand-alone published works. In my argument to promote the specialism of textile conservation, any opportunities to increase public inclusivity within projects are recommended to be considered. This means interpreting conservation work to show its relevance to society. Textiles have huge intrinsic value relevant to society and so have great potential for successful outreach projects. Using the concept of slow conservation within daily practice is an effective strategy in gaining the benefits of public outreach and using available resources. The case studies prove that with good organisation and planning, projects can be adapted to increase access and interest and so forth support and increase revenue.

The case studies provide evidence that conservation events generate greater interest; sold out tickets, increased footfall and re-visits. It is however difficult to measure the long term effects of public events upon the success of institutions across the United Kingdom and the beneficial impact they have upon society. Measuring the success of public engagement projects is difficult as there is often not an immediate effect upon the overall aim of undertaking such events.<sup>196</sup> The case studies however, offer some optimism and can influence the possibility of a respectful and cultured society.

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<sup>195</sup> Appendix iv, personal communication with Kate Frame.

<sup>196</sup> Cited in S. Kay and C. Hughes 2011,1-8 .

They are evidence that the heritage sector can develop and grow in such a struggling economic era and play an influential and sustained role within society.

The role conservation has within the existence of the heritage environment and the significance of what can be learnt from it and how it can affect society is an important responsibility. The knowledge and skill of the conservator therefore is essential within institutional public relations. Conservation events therefore can achieve institutional goals and contribute to the strategic objectives of the heritage sector and political policies.

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## Appendix i

### Claire Allan email sent with following attachment to author

17/5/2012 10:40

1. Why was the event held? Who initiated the ideas? This event was part of 2 different programmes – Edinburgh International Science Festival and our own adult events programme for the Fascinating Mummies exhibition. The initial ideas came from brainstorming sessions between the exhibition team (which included Conservation colleagues) and Learning & Programmes staff. The format and timing of the event, as a ‘Saturday Showcase’ event fitted one of our new programme strands I have been developing since we reopened last summer.

2. Why were the ancient Egyptians chosen for the theme of the event? Because it was part of our wider events programme to accompany the special exhibition (and because our C&AR team had a lot of knowledge and experience in this area both during the exhibition project and previously as part of earlier research and display projects.

3. What was the purpose of the event and how will it serve the museum in the long run? The purpose was to offer adult visitors a broader perspective on the scientific analysis and research that goes on in the museum, and to give them an opportunity to engage more directly with those involved – more than just a series of presentations, the direct interaction is a key feature of this type of event, and is well received by visitors. We hope it will encourage those who attended to look out for more adult events and exhibitions in the future.

4. How much organisation was involved? When did planning start? The initial discussions took place in Autumn 2011 as we have to plan 6-9 months ahead in terms of our marketing deadlines (both internally and for the EISF programme), booking spaces, ensuring relevant staff and resources are available etc. I’m sure ideas will have been developed and discussed within C&AR at various points since the basics were agreed, and then the final detailed planning took place in the 5-6 weeks running up to the event.

5. What departments were involved in the planning? How many man hours did it involve? Was the project expensive? The main input came from C&AR staff and Learning & Programmes staff (although it also involved input from Marketing, Digital Media and Visitor Operations in terms of the event marketing, selling tickets etc , the Design department who created the banners and Support Services who helped set up the spaces before the event). In terms of actual costs, L&P had to pay for the

catering for participants and staff – I don't know if there were direct costs from C&AR perspective, for example for transporting the materials to and from the Collections Centre. Most other elements were staff time costs, as we were able to produce the banners in-house. In terms of staff time, there were a lot of people involved. It probably took 3-4 days of L&P time overall, you'd have to ask Ticca for a better estimate of C&AR time. We were also lucky that the external people involved from the University gave their time for no cost.

6. How was the event marketed? It was marketed in our own What's On leaflet and website, and also through the Science Festival brochure and website. The ticket sales were split half and half between the two organisations, and EISF take a cut of the ticket sales that go through them.

7. How was it funded? The catering costs were covered by the L&P adult events budget, and the staff time was covered by relevant departments.

8. Forty people were expected, how many came? We were fully subscribed, and also had an extra person turn up on the day, who luckily was able to take the place of someone no longer able to come along. There were also a number of extra guests invited by C&AR, so overall we had about 45 visitors.

9. What was the overall feedback? There was some constructive but negative feedback about technical issues with the space and audibility of speakers (some of which could have been avoided if we'd taken more time to brief the speakers about using the space and equipment – a definite lesson for future events), but overall the feedback was excellent. Here are some example quotes:

"I really enjoyed the event today – really interesting talks and the chance to wander round and ask detailed questions was fantastic. Really good to see artefacts, equipment etc up close and in a really approachable but not kid-filled space. The tea, coffee and biccies were delicious too!"

"Very enjoyable and informative. Nice to get access to the experts behind the scenes"

"Fascinating! I found everyone very knowledgeable and interesting. Things were explained in an engaging approach."

"Excellent – interesting talks and great hands-on experience. Enjoyed it all – coffee and cookies excellent too"

"I would have liked a bit more time for questions and the hands-on bit"

Claire

## Appendix ii

Lizzie Millar email sent with following attachment to author

12/6/2012 16:53

The object we had out on the table to show the public was the mummy-board of an unidentified woman. It is an anthropoid mummy board of typical early Third Intermediate Period type. Exact provenance is unknown but typologically from Thebes. Dates to Early 22<sup>nd</sup> Dynasty (late 10<sup>th</sup> century BC). Materials: wood, plastered and painted including varnish (info from Manley, B and Dodson, A. 2010. *Life Everlasting*. Edinburgh: NMS Enterprises Ltd.

We based our talk and demonstration tables on the conservation treatment of the outer coffin of Amenhotepiin which was featured in the Fascinating Mummies exhibition. It dates to Late 25<sup>th</sup> dynasty, c.700 BC.

## Appendix iii

### Kate Gill Email sent to author 5/7/2012 09:58

1. Was the 'event' held as part of The National Trusts Conservation in Action programme? NO, I DON'T BELIEVE SO, I BELIEVE THE - MEET THE PUBLIC ASPECT- WAS A ONE OFF PROJECT INITIATED BY KNOLE

Were project ideas developed initially by The National Trust or/and yourself?

YES - BOTH OF US -I was involved in a pilot documentation project of upholstered furniture, specifically for for Knole about 15 yrs ago. This most recent project undertaken was basically the next phase. The first part of the project was planned to co-inside and take place in one of the rooms at Knole - a room which was undergoing a completely separate project concerning the environment ('Google 'Reynolds Room Conservation experiment' and a summary of that project should be listed somewhere there. As far as I know that project has now been complete). 'My' project - the first part was undertaken in the Reynolds room when the house was open to the public (August 2011). Knole wanted to increase visitor interest by having me on display rather than work as I normally do in a studio or room in a historic house when it is closed to the public. I WAS HAPPY TO OBLIGE AND UPON MY SUGGESTION PREPARED MATERIAL FROM WEEK ONE CONCERNING INITIAL FINDINGS, TO BE SHOWN ON A SCREEN ALONG SIDE ME WORKING DURING WEEK 2. THE second part was undertaken when the house was closed to the public

2. Was the event marketed? TO AN EXTENT - KNOLE HAVE A BLOG - SEE

[www.edp24.co.uk/news/knole\\_furniture\\_to\\_be\\_forensically\\_examined\\_to\\_discover\\_its\\_hidden\\_secrets\\_1\\_934593](http://www.edp24.co.uk/news/knole_furniture_to_be_forensically_examined_to_discover_its_hidden_secrets_1_934593)

Probably best to contact Emily Watts at Knole for further info (warning - Although I would encourage you to contact Emily, I would imagine she is also very busy, so she may not have time to reply)

3. Was any feedback from the public collected? How did HRP (I GUESS YOU MEAN Knole/NT here?) evaluate the success of the project? -was it foot fall or visitor comments book/questionnaires etc? I HAVE NO IDEA

I could contact Knoles directly for this perhaps? PROBABLY BEST

Do you feel there is an increased sense of understanding by the public regarding the work done? YES

4. What were the most successful aspects that you felt best educated the audience? Obviously from your paper, imagery is of key importance, but do you feel explaining your work and expressing your own passion for it is beneficial? YES - IN MY EXPERIENCE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT explaining your work and expressing your own passion IS ALWAYS POPULAR AND BENEFICIAL TO THE CONSERVATION PROFESSION AS FAR AS MAINTAINING OUR PROFILE IS CONCERNED

5. Were any problems encountered during the process of event organisation? NO

6. Did you learn anything from the process yourself? NOTHING NEW - I HAVE BEEN DOING THIS KIND OF THING FOR YEARS

7. Did you enjoy the public interaction? YES Do you think it was successful and/or worth the extra time and effort? YES - BUT I WAS BEING PAID TO DO IT SO YOU MAY WISH TO POSE THE SAME QUESTION TO KNOLES. ANY PROJECT INVOLVING DIRECT PUBLIC INTERACTION REDUCES THE AMOUNT OF PRACTICAL WORK YOU CAN ACHIEVE - IN REALITY, IMPOSSIBLE TO CARRY OUT WORK AND ENGAGE WITH THE PUBLIC AT THE SAME TIME

I hope this has been helpful. Good luck in completing your dissertation.

Kind regards

Kate

## Appendix iv

### Maria Jordan and Kate Frame, email sent with following attachment to author 6/7/2012

I think I have consulted with everyone now - I wanted to wait for Kate Frame's return and you will see on the enclosed that she has added many useful comments.

Maria

Maria Jordan ACR  
Treatment Conservation Supervisor,  
Tapestry Conservation  
Conservation and Collection Care,  
Apartment 37,  
Hampton Court Palace,  
KT8 9AU

### Attachment follows:

#### **Raising the Profile of Conservation – Public Engagement for Hayley Rimington, Glasgow University**

*Response by M. Jordan with comments from K Frame on the programme in which the textile ask event was delivered as one of many conservation visitor engagement such events.*

#### **1. What was the purpose of the event and how will it serve the Historic Royal Palaces in the long run?**

KFrame comment –we deliver a programmes of events, none is a stand alone as it is all part of communicating on a continuous basis in some form under the umbrella brand 'ASK the Conservator'.

Purpose – 1) To raise awareness of conservation and show the public, our visitors, directly where their ticket money is being spent (ie on conserving the royal collection items and buildings). 2) To enhance the quality of the visitor experience by showing the behind-the-scenes work, and meeting our conservation specialists, as an additional and then-unique offer to HRP's many other on site

programmes. *KF additional comments* are: 3) The other purpose was to develop the communication skills of our conservators to make them confident to explain and promote their work to generalist audiences (non conservators including visitors as well as their colleagues from commercial teams to our Directors and Trustees; and in so doing influence to get support for their work). 4) The purpose was to raise the profile of conservation work (and conservators) within HRP (normally an unseen activity) and show that the conservation story is worth telling along with those about historical events and individuals. 5) To establish our then-new organisational structure that made 'explaining' (communicating) a part of every conservators' job description.

## **2. Why was the event held? Who initiated the project ideas?**

*(KF comment: See ICOM article for details)*

Kate Frame initiated the programme. After trial testing various event formats from walk and talk lectures, to fixed in situ-demonstration-style events, we decided on the latter and each of the seven project conservation teams were asked to create on site events from their work plan that could showcase conservation to visitors over a 2-3 day period (textile treatment, non textile treatment, and preventive conservators, scientists). This was a programme, as stated above – not a project – which ran for three years in a pre-programmed way and is now delivered as part of our established operations, in that conservators are to have a visitor communication element to explain what they are doing whenever carrying out work on site that has them in one place for more than one day. The programme is branded – 'ASK the Conservator'.

Some events extended to support the work of our other departments, like education, to gain further reach, address needs of more than one audience, and support their work (eg adult learning, summer school, primary, secondary and out-reach). We created a show about the work that we were doing.

## **3. How was the event marketed? How was it funded?**

The conservator/supervisor in charge of the specific event worked with Visitor services, front of house staff (warding), Education, Interpretation, HCP Volunteers, Operation and curators to

- i) get the message right (ie to whom were we pitching the event; adults, children/secondary/primary/UK/Overseas)
- ii) message in the daily programme/ screens in ticketing office
- iii) event info on the intranet and the HRP website

- iv) education to alert school groups of event
- v) trade sale team to alert tour companies of event
- vi) emails sent cross-organisationally to notify and invite to the event
- vii) education events in Clore Centre linked with the theme of the Ask event
- viii) *KFrame added:* through branding – logo ‘Ask the Conservator’ created, conservators were/are to wear these whenever working on site, it is identifier for other conservation communication materials we produce (ex HRP WEB items, posters, retail products, etc)

*K Frame comment:* The programme was otherwise marketed internally through various posters, in the palace staff magazine, at meetings and all staff presentations, through talks to our warders, publication in the palaces daily programme of events coming up etc.

Funding – an operations budget for explaining conservation was established in our Annual Operating Plan for a minimum of 7 events a year. Colleagues funded some events through their budgets – Tower of London commercial teams paid for production of a moveable ‘bugs’ ASK event show (props, theatre-style screen, etc) Additional requests were made for funds to produce items like posters, badges, barriers, as required There was no external funding required as ASK is part of our ongoing operations.

The Marketing/Press department were not involved in CCC events as they were/are short term and acknowledged to be an “add on” as I say in my conclusion and not the motivation for a visit and therefore do not warrant “marketing”

#### **4. Was any feedback from the public collected? What was the overall feedback? Was there an increased sense of understanding by the public regarding the work done by the CCC team?**

Feedback was collected on some of the ASK the Conservator events:

The mattress ASK event – from school groups – liked the samples and the handout

The counterpane ASK event – visitor feedback was collected in a form of a poll which was conducted on site to gauge the visitors’ view of our dilemma: to display original or replica. The fragile original velvet was exhibited along with the replica velvet. A total of 2523 replies and 1749 (69%) opted to see the original velvet.



Q Charlotte's state bed Ask event – written cards – this was more gauging public interest in state beds rather than in conservation alone; Favourable and enthusiastic responses.

Bugs ASK events (over half term) – hand out of furry bugs, response was anecdotal

K Frame: Visitor questionnaire – on level of understanding and interest in conservation

Difficult to gauge how much more the public understood about conservation but they certainly were pleased to see those caring for the objects.

*K Frame comment:* The public responded with surprise at how interested they were in the conservation techniques and ideas. Main responses were: very privileged (and surprised) to be able to meet those who carry out the work (the experts directly), to see the objects close up (and noted the great skills required to make the objects, and now to conserve them), were surprised that conservation was an established profession (and that palaces have people in their employ who do conservation on a five day week basis, and get paid for it).

**5. How did HRP evaluate the success of the project? -was it foot fall or visitor comments book/questionnaires etc?**

Foot fall and anecdotal feedback and number of hand outs taken e.g 150 taken by visitors during 2 weeks tapestry audit in February 2012; had to replenish hand outs regularly to keep up with demand!

**6. What were the most successful aspects? Which aspects/activity do you feel as a conservator best educated the audience?**

I think inter-active is the most successful whether it is a sample to touch or view, a talk where questions can be asked or a video loop  
e.g.

Bugs: looking through microscopes at bugs (bugs was most popular topics as visitors can relate to it and it works for adults and children)

Q Charlotte's tester dome of state dome – gilding samples and dismantling video

Q Anne's Bed mattresses – wool samples, silk samples and monofilament threads, watching us stitching, discussion of what we were doing

Book cleaning – done annually

Q Anne's counterpane – the scheduled 15-min talk by the conservators on the conservation work given three times a day followed by a 10-min Q&A session/ the scale model of the bed dressed with replica velvet and a set of replica mattresses (explained by the volunteers to the visitors), the visitor pole station of 'original v replica', hands-on activities such as weaving on the loom, a pop-up bed colouring sheet and jigsaw puzzles.

Tapestry audits – talking and explaining to the public about how tapestry woven and therefore what are potential weak areas (slit stitching weakening) and silk degradation

*KF comment:* Short text descriptions of the work being carried out – written in non-technical language (learnt from the interpretation teams). Visitor could read the few lines, see the work that they have just read about, then ask questions as conservators were in front of them.

Arms and armour – topic attracted enthusiasts and scholars as well as visitors

*K Frame comment:* Successful aspects were otherwise of benefit to HRP : efficient delivery as part of the work programme, spread the delivery across the whole team, re-cycled our explaining 'props' and written copy, kept schedule flexible so could deliver on the days that worked best to get the work done and for the palaces (ie could make last minute changes), team delivery of events meant that each on team could play to their communication strengths (some in writing, others speaking), developed conservator confidence and enthusiasm for speaking about their work, morale booster as direct and immediate feedback from visitors about how interesting the work is and how expert our skills are , studio conservators became better known by site staff and learnt how to operate in the public areas where our work needs to be designed in great detail to ensure it fits the needs of palace operations and the visiting public and after hour commercial events.

**7. Were any problems encountered during the process of event organisation?**

None we are aware of but it does take a considerable amount of planning and logistics and therefore time to set up a project to run smoothly once on site, whether this is the first event for a conservator or the 10<sup>th</sup>!

The questions of whether conservators should hold an ASK event on weekends? – we did for Q Anne’s counterpane. (Our policy for ASK the Conservator was that the ASK events would take place between Monday to Friday during our normal work hours. KF)

We try to host the event within our normal working hours. Set-up and clear up takes about a few hours to a half a day, allocated to the start and end of the event period. *K Frame comment:* For this reason each event was to be based on work that could be done on site (safely for the object, staff and public) that took 3 days or more (usually 3 days). We also fabricated our event props (including light weight portable barriers) and a range of explaining materials (a mobile conservation cart of our supplies and tools visitors could look through, etc) in the ASK pilot year so that they could be at hand to set up an ASK show very quickly, mix and matching the props to each team’s design of their show. As an example - Conservators Ask event based on cleaning leather required little more than the barrier, lights, a table, chairs and a few supplies like cotton swabs, a posters about ASK – the work was completed very efficiently over about a week in the public eye.

**8. Was footfall increased along the Queen’s Route? Was there an increase in tickets for the palace sold that day?**

Increased footfall in Queen’s Route but no increase in ticket sales.

**9. Will any similar events be held in the future?**

We have had many similar events to the mattress project (as listed below) and will continue to do so when and as suitable projects arise.

**10. Was the work done by the team on the mattresses affected badly by the event?**

I do not think so – I had estimated how much we would achieve and we did. By being in the state

apartments, telephone queries etc. do not happen so you can do non-interrupted work. We talked to the public at given times but had one or two people near the barriers to answer questions in between times. These conservators were preparing materials and therefore could stop and start their work without causing a problem.

*KF comment:* We allocate c10% of our time in our annual work plan to communicating conservation so time projections factor this in (this is because explaining conservation is part of our job descriptions, as mentioned above, and we need to resource it accordingly).

Visitors do not get to the Drawing Room until about 11.30 am (Palace opens at 10 am) and our first talk was about noon to 12.30 depending on number of visitors. Starting work in the Queens at 9 am meant that we had 2.30 hours of work before the public arrived.

**11. Were there any unsuccessful aspects of the event, i.e. level of help of the Warders, signs and posters, too many visitors?**

Barriers - Over keen visitors meant that we developed the barriers to keep the objects safe! We have rope barriers at HRP but we had to have Perspex barriers made to prevent our smaller visitors from ducking under the barrier to have a closer look! *KF comment:* this was also a requirement of our Health and Safety department to protect visitors from sharp tools and such).

Persistent visitors - Over keen visitors could shout to get your attention even when a notice explained that you would be giving a talk in x minutes! *KF comment:* the policy was to allocate one conservator to communicating with the public on a rotating basis, and this resource was built into the year's programme.

Working alone – when alone it is very easy for a visitor to interrupt and therefore we found that we were always two together. *KF comment:* ASK events are designed to be delivered by a team or else it would be a demonstration rather than an event, a show. As above: one was always assigned to engage with the public, to host the show if you will.

Not working at the week-ends – the warding staff very much wanted us to work week-ends as an unattended object makes the visitor feel they have missed out and there is the safety of the objects to consider especially if there are interactive activities for the visitor nearby. On the counterpane project, it was therefore decided to work over the week-end; 2 conservators covering each day

Signage - important as well as getting information into the ticket office and on the website– after a couple of events, we all were slicker at getting the information to the right place at the right time.

Lighting can be a problem – obviously to do the work good lightening is needed but there are not many power sockets in the state apartments. Once we had talked to the maintenance department, we were able to get that sorted.

**12. Did the team of conservators enjoy the work and did they think it was successful and/or worth the extra time and effort?**

Yes, I think everyone enjoyed it but 2 weeks is long enough!

**Some Examples of ASK events undertaken by HRP**

Q Charlotte's Tester dome (textile)	January 2006	HCP
Q Charlotte's tester dome (giltwood)	June 2006	HCP
Q Anne's State Bed Mattresses	January 2007	HCP
Q Anne's State Bed Counterpane	February 2010	HCP
Tapestry audits	2005 to date	HCP
Furniture work Conversation chair	2006	KP
17 <sup>th</sup> Century Embroideries	2010	KP
Padding up demonstration	2007	KP
Arms and Armour	2009/10	annually KP
Bywood Tower - wall painting	2011	Tower of London
Terracotta Roundels	2008	HCP hoarding interpretation
Annual Bed and Throne canopy clean & audit	2005 to date	HCP & KP

Bugs	2005 to date	HCP & KP
Annual Book Clean	2005 to date	HCP
Reigate Stone	2006	ToL
National Archaeology Day	2005 to date	ToL

## Appendix v

Louise Treble email sent with following attachment to author

5/7/2012 12:43

I hope this email reaches you as the last one I sent bounced back! So I apologise for not getting in touch sooner - technology is great when it works.

Attached are the documents I have that relate to the tapestry programme evaluation. I hope they are of some help to you. If you have any questions please let me know & I'll do my best to answer them.

Louise

Louise Treble (nee Brookes)

Learning Assistant

The Burrell Collection

Glasgow Museums

The attachments are as follows:

### **Tapestries: A new Interpretation**

16 April – 11 July 2010

**Tapestries: A new Interpretation**

16 April – 11 July 2010

The 2010 GI Festival theme of 'Past, Present & Future' was the initial inspiration to invite contemporary artists into the Burrell Collection to re-interpret the tapestries for future generations. The funding for the display was from the Burrell Tapestries Research Project, a major research and cataloguing project to produce a catalogue of Sir William Burrell's European tapestries.

Tapestries: A new Interpretation was a display of new work created by Glasgow School of Art students. Five Master of Fine Art students were asked to create their own work inspired by the tapestries in the collection. The results were represented in a range of media including watercolour, and even a comic brochure that gave the visitors a unique way to interact with the largest tapestry, *The Triumph of Divine Wisdom*.

At the initial meeting with the MFA students in November 2009 the aims and objectives of the project were set out: to re-interpret the tapestries in a new way and to show their work in an unconventional manner as small interventions throughout the museum.

**What the Burrell can offer you as a MFA student:**

- Inspiration
- Space (Temp Exhibition Space, Lecture Theatre, Outside, Courtyard)
- Materials
- Studio space
- Publicity
- Expertise (academic, technical)
- Library (research)

**What the students can offer us (The Burrell Collection):**

- New angle on tapestries
- New audiences
- New work for display
- New interpretation

**Constraints:**

- Money (budget £400: design, artist fees, materials, opening event. Space (stipulations re: main galleries only artworks/objects from Sir William Burrell's collection can go on display).

Students from both 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year of the MFA Course were invited to take part and to send concepts and ideas by end of November deadline. Initially 9 students registered interest in the project and a final 5 completed proposals were received by the deadline. There was much negotiation over the following months between the students, curators, conservation, museum managers and technicians. Some of the concepts and ideas had to change considerably to be viable whilst others, such as Shelton Walker's drawing on the windows, were accepted.

**Rosemary Scanlon**

Rosemary Scanlon was born in Montreal, Canada and obtained a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Studio Art and Art History from Concordia University in Montreal, Canada 2006. She was in the second year of



the Masters of Fine Arts programme at the Glasgow School of Art.

Rosemary's proposal was initially based around photography and large-scale wallpaper of images 'found' on the internet. An idea to cover a large wall space with images of flower and plants was put forward, however, the difficulty in producing and the cost implications meant that she had to change to an alternative idea. Rosemary was inspired by the composition in tapestries as well as the subject matter as in: *Peasants Hunting Rabbits with Ferrets*.



On Wednesday 21 April Rosemary took the Adult Art class related to the Curator's Favourite talk by Pat Collins on the Divine Wisdom tapestry. The class was titled Creative Collages and 12 people took part. She began with a talk on the background to her work and took participants through the process of using images from the internet to create a watercolour painting. It was interesting to find out about the artistic process and the different way in which an artist views a work of art, i.e. a tapestry.



### Shelton Walker

Shelton Walker's practice explores the histories and boundaries between communities through site-specific projects, sculptures and paintings. Shelton was born in Virginia, USA; received a BFA from Pratt Institute, New York; and was a first year student on the Master of Fine Arts at Glasgow School of Art.

Shelton provided two separate proposals the first being a large-scale sculptural installation based upon the fibres woven in a tapestry. The second, preferred proposal was installed onto the windows of the North Gallery:

*Three days five hundred years hence* was a 'performance drawing' based on the amount of time it took the weavers to create a tapestry, Shelton wanted to focus upon the time spent creating as opposed to the time it takes visitors to view the tapestries. She timed visitors and translated the times into binary code which also relates to weaving. 'The technological advancements of the loom led to the development of computers but also left many weavers without employment'.



On Sunday 11 July Shelton took participants on a guided walk of the tapestries while explaining her art installation on the windows, later she ran a session *Drawing as Leading* a 'drawing' walk outside in the park using lengths of wool in bright, contrasting colours. The workshop explored the ideas of drawing as a form of communication as you followed the lengths of yarn you explained what you saw and though was interesting, then shared this with the group .



### **Suzie Smith**

Suzie Smith is an interdisciplinary artist from Canada. She was in the first year of the Masters of Fine Arts programme at the Glasgow School of Art. Her work explores ideas of art and interaction and the relationship between fine art and craft.

A large percentage of Suzie's work is based upon interacting with the public in new ways. Taking her inspiration from the largest of the tapestries Suzie proposed a comic brochure that invited the public to interact with the tapestry and fill out speech and thought bubbles to interpret it for themselves.



On Saturday 10 July Suzie led the Burrell for Families workshop *Comic Art* where families worked together to create their own comic strips inspired by the tapestries on display.

### **Oliver Braid**

Oliver Braid was born in Birmingham in 1984. He studied at Falmouth College of Arts and was in the second year of the Masters of Fine Arts at the Glasgow School of Art.

*Similarly to many of the tapestries, in my work there is often an implied narrative – usually a very convoluted one. In this narrative there is usually a protagonist who is experiencing a joyful situation. To them, this joy comes from a pureness which they feel is essential to their being. It is this enjoyment which, from the perspective of others, becomes grating or annoying. The others see this joy as frivolous and its presence becomes a source of antagonism’*



### **Peter Schoeffer**

In 1999 Peter Schoeffer received his Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Vermont in the USA. He went on to pursue an interest in art for eight years living in New York and Massachusetts. He is was on the Masters of Fine Art course at Glasgow School of Art and graduated in June 2010.

*This work is a translation of a visual narrative from medieval times into the present context. By transferring this image onto a forgotten space in the museum, Schoeffer bridges the gap between past and future. His current artwork and research examines the places where the ever-evolving human presence meets with mainstream contemporary culture, and he is also interested in the subtleties of constructed spaces and how people gather information from them.*



### **Tapestries: A new Interpretation closing weekend:**

On Saturday 10 and Sunday 11 July Peter and Oliver ran demonstration workshops for the general public.

**Comments, compliments and complaints**

Visitors:

- It would be nice to keep the painting of the Rabbit Hunt under the stairs to the Learning Room – otherwise dead space.
- The binary numbers on the glass windows are not appropriate; I thought it was distracting from the well presented collection. It is clearly out of place. Otherwise I had a great visit.

Artists:

- It was a great experience. If you are ever looking for instructors/facilitators in the future please keep me in mind.
- I wanted to say thanks again for giving me the opportunity. I really enjoyed putting the concept together, and the whole project from start to finish there at the Burrell.

The Burrell Collection, Caroline Austin