

## The Identical Books Project at the National Library of Scotland

**Abstract:** The Identical Books Project involves the six Legal Deposit Libraries of the United Kingdom and aims to produce a unique record of the condition of a large, broadly based selection of identical items. Identifying the final 380 Identical Books has been a long and challenging process since many differences in the format of the copies were encountered. The National Library of Scotland has been heavily involved at the early stage of the preparation of the Identical Books. Here is described my personal experience of the collection of the 380 Identical Books and the finalization of a practical method of sampling. The paper also describes the wonderful opportunity I had assisting with the training to the other institutions and first hand experience of the benefits of collaboration with other institutions both local and National.

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation awarded a grant in December 2005 to study the deterioration of paper and books in libraries: The Mellon Conservation research Project (MCRP). It ran from October 2006 to March 2009 and is headed by the British Library. My involvement in the project arose because the National Library of Scotland (NLS) is one of the partners. I have taken part in two sections of the project: the Identical Books Project (IBP) and the Volatile Organic Compounds survey (VOCs) but my work concentrated mostly on the IBP.

The **IBP** involves the six legal deposit libraries of UK and Ireland and aims to record and compare the condition of a large broadly based selection of 20<sup>th</sup> century items. It is based on four different methods of assessment: Photographs, Preservation assessment survey, colour measurement by Konica CM-2600 and micro sampling of 1mm of diameter for pH and molecular weight (MW).

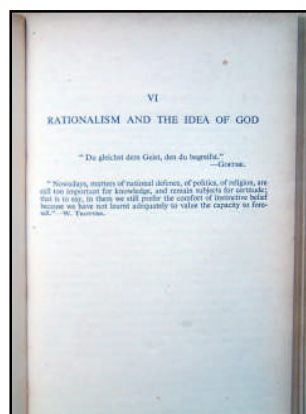


Konica CM-2600

The National Library of Scotland was heavily involved at the early stage of the preparation of the Identical Books. The identification of the 380 identical items

has been a long and challenging process since many differences in the format of the copies were encountered. The meaning of “Identical Books” has evolved since I have started their collection at the NLS. I learned that even if the books were produced at the same time in the same place they would probably look very different from each other now. Firstly they have been rebound in many different ways in each library and, secondly, their conditions can vary depending on how and where they have been stored or how they have been used.

During this period I worked with Velson Horie (Project Manager, BL) to develop a simple and inexpensive methodology to ensure that the samples would be taken in identical positions in each collection. A polyester template, marking the page text, indicated the exact position for the samples. I familiarized myself with the equipment and set what I thought was the best procedure for the testing to be able to provide training for the other partners. The NLS collection was tested between December 2007 and January 2008.



samples taken with hypodermic needle

The final result of the IBP is a database that records, for the first time in Europe, a wide range of information on the conditions of the Identical Books in the different libraries. This sets a standard for a monitoring project that will develop in the years to come. Working on the IBP also raised awareness of the new technologies used in conservation research and gave to the conservators the opportunity to learn how to use the new equipment. The secondary, not less important, benefit of the IBP has been the interaction and collaboration developed between the institutions, both local and national. The periodical meetings and the travelling to the various partners gave me the opportunity to meet their conservators,

visit their workshops and learn about new conservation projects.



For further information:

[www.nls.uk](http://www.nls.uk)

[www.bl.uk](http://www.bl.uk)

<http://www.science4heritage.org/survenir/>

[www.bl.uk/npo](http://www.bl.uk/npo)

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