

## **Advances in Paper Conservation Research**

**23 and 24 March 2009**

In 2005 the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation awarded the British Library the largest grant ever for library and archive conservation research in the UK. The \$695,000 grant has been used to establish the Identical Books Project, a study into the deterioration of paper and books in the six UK legal deposit libraries and two UK national archives.

The Advances in Paper Conservation Research Conference marked the end of this three year project. The conference brought together the project collaborators including expert researchers from around the world, 16 speakers and over 100 attendees. The break times had a vibrant buzz, with many contacts and new ideas emerging.

The first day reviewed the context of research in libraries, archives and the wider scientific movements. Helen Shenton, Stephen Bury and Dr Barry Knight outlined the status of cultural heritage research in the UK and the British Library. Dr Jana Kolar and Dr Henk Porck gave similar insights into the European research environment. Dr Fenella France initiated discussion on environmental standards for the care of books and other cultural materials, which led onto contributions by Velson Horie, Dr Jana Kolar and Dr Matjia Strlič on the data collected on the condition of the Identical Books and their storage environments.

The second day looked primarily at the development of methods for evaluating paper, books and their environments. Dr Lorraine Gibson, Dr James Lewicki and Dr Steve Hobaica explored the measurement of volatile organic compounds emitted from books and paper and their potential for non-destructive monitoring of condition. Dr Robbie Goodhue examined many different ways of monitoring the storage environment and what this means to collections. Dr Dirk Lichtblau and Dr Matjia Strlič described a newly developed tool, SurveNIR, which uses near infra-red spectra to estimate important paper properties non-destructively. Giordana Santoro described

how the staff in the legal deposit libraries came together to gather the Identical Books data while Velson Horie outlined results and conclusions drawn from the data. Dr Masazumi Seki described the properties of matching copies of Identical Books and methods of strengthening paper.

The conference concluded with a round table evaluation of the achievements and ways forward for conservation research. Three lessons of the project stood out:

- Collaboration between collections institutions, researchers, and innovative companies had created synergies and new opportunities. A number of significant players represented in the audience supported a call for a new wave of joint work.
- Volatile organic compounds will be further investigated for non-destructive characterisation of books, including development of the “nose”. This will build on the tested partnerships to develop research proposals and attract funds.
- Collections that have been well characterised will be used for investigation of long term studies of change and the response to their environment. There is already commitment from holding institutions in the UK and North America to share in the data gathering tool being provided by the Library of Congress.

A reception was held at the British Library Centre for Conservation for all conference attendees. Special guests included Baroness Margaret Sharp and leading professionals in the field of conservation. Guests enjoyed the Centre for Conservation permanent exhibition ‘Conservation Uncovered’ which highlights the methods behind book and sound conservation at the Library.

Thank you to all who participated in the conference and helped to make it a stimulating and thought-provoking event.