

Roundtable discussion

Panellists: Dr Fenella France, Dr Henk Porck, Dr Matija Strlič, Velson Horie, Dr Barry Knight and Helen Shenton

Introduction

Helen Shenton summarised the key points of the conference in the context of the British Library and Heritage Science. The strategy for Conservation Research at the British Library has proved sound, validated by the conclusions of the Science and Technology Sub-Committee of the House of Lords and the timeliness and success of its first grant-funded projects: the Identical Books Project and the Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) in Books Project.

Next steps were outlined below:

- Embed collaboration by engaging UK and international libraries i.e. British Library, Library of Congress, Royal Library, Trinity College Dublin, National Library of Scotland, National Library of Wales, Oxford University Library Services, Cambridge University Library, National Archives, etc. and confirm commitments from conference audience
- Support VOCs as non-destructive characterisation of books, including development of the “nose” by applying to AHRC / EPSRC grants or setting up studentships
- Explore what can be learned from all characterised collections i.e. Barrow, SurveNIR, IDB and ASTM 100 year survey by metadata analysis, sharing of research data using the Library of Congress tool and long-term commitment by holding institutions.

Discussion points

- There is a growing need and expectation of collaboration within the conservation research sector.
- Collaboration works on issues. What does the conservation research sector want from collaboration? What type of projects can only be done by sharing?
- Institutions need to be sure of the benefits of collaborations. It is important to address the what, how and why. It is important to be retrospective and forward looking.
- Reputational risks to sharing information was considered and the importance of knowledge emphasised.
- Large amounts of data are generated on a daily basis; an agreement on standards for how to share data is needed. Standards need to be applicable to a wide variety of material. The audience was encouraged to engage with the process of standardisation.
- Tracking data of moving collections was debated.
- The Time-Weighted Preservation Index (TWPI) appears to be a valuable tool but needs to be further developed.

- The sustainability of project outputs must be addressed and the value communicated to funding bodies.
- Data is needed in order to ask valuable questions. The Identical Books Project is a prime example of data informing a question that could not have been thought of prior, e.g. why is there a difference in colour in the books tested?
- There was considerable audience enthusiasm for developing further collaboration. A number of members from major institutions pledged their support in sharing information and developing new strands of conservation research, e.g. on the environment in collecting institutions.