Textile Conservation

Advances in Practice

Edited by

Frances Lennard and Patricia Ewer

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Textile Conservation: Advances in Practice

Butterworth-Heinemann Series in Conservation and Museology

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the future of textile conservation education.

FOREWORD

Textile conservation is a complex, challenging and multi-faceted discipline. Textile conservators work not only with some of the most vulnerable objects in our cultural heritage, but also with a large variety of related materials which may form part of a textile artefact. In the last 20 years there have been significant changes and developments in the profession. This book, written by leading conservators in the UK, North America and Europe, illustrates not only the technical advances in treatment options that have been achieved but also the different world in which the textile conservator now operates. The interaction of these two factors has shaped the profession and broadened the textile conservator's role into one of far greater diversity. Technical skills are only part of the textile conservator's work. In order to apply those skills in an appropriate context, the modern conservator needs to understand the multiplicity of meanings and values that an object can present and the role of that object in a collection. In an increasingly project-led culture the conservator also needs the ability to assess and manage risk. Management and negotiating skills as well as financial acumen are needed by conservators in both museum and private practice.

Many factors have contributed to the advances in techniques and the wider range of materials which are part of the modern textile conservation studio. There is now a substantial body of practical experience among textile conservators about the validity of a whole range of treatment options and the reasons for the failure of earlier applications. These observations are backed by a body of scientific research into the effects of treatments on historic textiles and have resulted in a more complete understanding of condition. The profession has grown in confidence over the past 20 years. Most training for textile conservators is now at MA level. Codes of ethics developed by professional conservation bodies have defined and promoted the field. Systems of accreditation have been established. There is open exchange of information between different schools of textile conservation and access to online discussion groups and online journals. Multi-disciplinary meetings and conferences have also played a significant part in contributing to technical advances. The basic methodology of textile conservation remains the same but there is greater finesse in application techniques, a wider and more informed choice of materials and an increased understanding of the effect of those materials and techniques on the object. Conservators view treatments differently. The concept of reversibility, a basic principle of conservation for so many years, has been replaced by that of re-treatability and minimum intervention. Solvent-activated adhesives, cold-lining techniques and pressure mounts are an alternative to the use of thermoplastic adhesives; ingenious non-invasive treatments have been devised for upholstery conservation projects. New materials for mounts and more sophisticated designs have resulted in the recognition that a well-constructed mount can play a greater and often crucial role in minimizing the amount of interventive treatment needed to stabilize a damaged object. Digital images enable conservators to illustrate the possible outcomes of treatment proposals and document the condition of an object with more clarity.

These new tools have given textile conservators more flexibility, an essential factor in dealing with the often rapid changes that have faced them over the past two decades. Pressures on conservators are

greater today than they have ever been. The focus on access in the museum world has led to a constant demand for objects on display in exhibitions and on loans, some of them at a succession of venues. Many conservators have the added responsibility of acting as couriers of these objects to loan venues or with touring exhibitions. Cuts in funding and greater demands mean that levels of conservation treatment have to be balanced against available resources of time and money. There are fewer opportunities to treat objects in storage. Consequently there is a greater need for preventive conservation and strategies for whole collections are not uncommon. Extensive conservation treatments for museum objects are often contracted out to private conservators. Conservators in both private and museum practice consult not only their colleagues but every stakeholder involved with the future of the object. There is widespread recognition that the view of an object by a client or curator may change over time and that minimal intervention gives more freedom to re-interpret the object and its role in the future. Perhaps one of the most positive results of the economic constraints on modern textile conservation is that conservators have developed a more reflective practice and think in a creative and flexible way of how to balance the key issues of access and preservation in their work.

The diversity of the textile conservator's work makes it a very rewarding profession. Textiles have infinite variety and interest and they are often objects of great beauty. The conservator is in a privileged position and needs to understand the significance of every aspect of the evidence that a textile might present. Conservators can add to a greater technical understanding of the production and construction of a textile object and, by doing so, contribute to its historical context. These insights also add to the enjoyment of the object by its audience. The publication of this book, however, comes at a difficult time in the history of conservation. Funding cuts have led to a reduction in the number of permanent jobs available in textile conservation and a contract culture exists in many museums. MA training in textile conservation is no longer available in the UK. Opportunities for research at university level have been curtailed. The technical advances of the last two decades and the ability of conservators to make sound decisions about the objects in their care have never been needed more. The examples in this book illustrate the great range and competence of the modern textile conservator and the crucial role they play in preserving a vital part of our cultural heritage.

Lynda Hillyer

EDITORS' PREFACE

The last comprehensive manual on textile conservation in the UK, Landi's *The Textile Conservator's Manual*, was published by Butterworth-Heinemann in 1985, over 20 years ago. This and other pioneering texts, such as Leene's *Textile Conservation* (1972) and Finch's *Caring for Textiles* (1977), focused primarily on textile conservation techniques, reflecting the needs of the time. This book is intended to demonstrate the development in the role and practice of the textile conservator since these first textile conservation manuals were published, hence the sub title *Advances in Practice*, and to capture the current diversity of textile conservators' work. The book focuses on four factors which have influenced the development: the changing context, an evolution in the way conservators think about objects, the greater involvement of stakeholders and technical developments. These four factors are interconnected and are all integral to effective conservation decision making. The core text in each chapter is written by the editors, and it is illustrated with case studies by leading practitioners in museums and in private practice. The book is written primarily from the perspective of conservators in the UK and USA.

Landi commented 'Wide exchange of information must rely on publication but a good bibliography on the practical side of textile conservation is not easy to compile, as I know to my cost when making the attempt for my own book, published case histories covering new ground being very hard to find' (1988: 32). Fortunately, this is not the case today; although relatively few books have been published, specialist texts and articles in professional journals and conference proceedings discuss treatment case studies and broader issues. In fact the body of textile conservation literature is now so large – today it includes online journals and resources – that it is impossible to provide a comprehensive bibliography in this book. However, one of the aims of the book is to highlight some of the published sources; these are given in the lists of references at the end of each chapter and case study, and in the select bibliography at the end. Please see the bibliography for a list of abbreviations used in the references.

The editors hope this book will be used by a diverse audience including textile conservators, students and prospective students and other museum professionals. Within the economic climate in which it was written (2009–2010), the impact on conservators in museums, private conservation laboratories and studios was great. How do we react to these new developments, respond to protect the objects that are entrusted to our care and protect our jobs? Textile conservators have proved, as you will see in this text, to be extremely flexible and resilient.

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Finally we would like to thank Hannah Shakespeare, our editor at Elsevier, for her encouragement and advice, Susan Li, Project Manager and all the Elsevier team for their work in producing this book.

PICTURE CREDITS

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CONTRIBUTORS

Katherine Barker
Katherine Barker, Field Services Director and Conservator, holds a BA in Chemistry from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. Her particular interests include research into cleaning techniques, specifically pertaining to historic iron gall components.

Cathy Batt
Dr Cathy Batt is Senior Lecturer in Archaeological Sciences at the University of Bradford. She has BSc and PhD degrees from the University of Durham. Her research focuses on scientific analysis of archaeological materials, particularly on dating, and she recently co-authored *Analytical Chemistry in Archaeology*, published by Cambridge University Press.

Julia M. Brennan
Julia M. Brennan has worked in textile conservation for over 25 years. She lectures to historical societies and collector groups on the care and display of textiles and is passionately committed to conservation outreach. From 2000 to 2008, she led four textile training workshops in Bhutan and helped establish their Textile Museum, conducted a conservation seminar and mounted a national exhibit of historic nineteenth-century textiles in Madagascar and taught the first textile conservation workshop at the National Bardo Museum in Algiers. Julia is a Professional Associate of the AIC and Director of the Washington Conservation Guild. Her company, Textile Conservation Services, founded in 1996, is based in Washington, DC. www.caringfortextiles.com

Mary Westerman Bulgarella
Mary Westerman Bulgarella obtained a Bachelor degree in Art History and a Master's degree in the Conservation of Artistic Works, and subsequently trained in textile and costume conservation. Her professional work focuses not only on interventions and their documentation but also on problems pertaining to the research of materials and methods of storage and display. She has collaborated with an array of museums and institutions in Italy and abroad and has published many articles on conservation-related subjects. At present she is a freelance consultant on conservation projects as well as organizing conferences on significant textile and costume themes.

Karen Clark
Karen Clark, Senior Conservator, holds an MA from the State University College Buffalo, formerly Cooperstown. She has supervised treatments at the Workshop since its inception, and is a Fellow of the AIC.

Jim Devenport
Jim Devenport. Freelance Paintings Conservator. Formerly Senior Lecturer, Easel Paintings, MA Conservation of Fine Arts, University of Northumbria, retiring in 2002.

Dinah Eastop

Dinah Eastop, PhD MA, FIIC, ACR, FHEA. Senior Lecturer, Textile Conservation Centre, University of Southampton (1998–2009); Honorary Lecturer, Institute of Archaeology, UCL; Founding Director of the AHRC Research Centre for Textile Conservation and Textile Studies (2002–2007), a research collaboration between three UK universities. Co-authored *Chemical Principles of Textile Conservation* (with Ágnes Timár-Balázsy, 1998); co-edited *Upholstery Conservation: Principles and Practice* (with Kathryn Gill, 2001) and the GCI *Readings in Textile Conservation* (with Mary M. Brooks, submitted for 2010). Member of the CollAsia2010 programme and contributor to ICCROM's *Sharing Conservation Decisions* courses. Member of the research team investigating deformation in hanging tapestries. Leads the Deliberately Concealed Garments Project: www.concealedgarments.org

Linda Eaton

Linda Eaton is currently the director of collections and senior curator of textiles at Winterthur Museum and teaches in the Winterthur Program in Early American Culture and the Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation. She did her graduate work on the programme run by the Textile Conservation Centre in conjunction with the Courtauld Institute of Art. She has worked as a conservator for the Scottish Museums Council, the National Museums of Scotland and Winterthur Museum. She has curated a number of exhibitions including *Deceit, Deception & Discovery; This Work in Hand: Philadelphia Needlework from the 18th Century*; *Needles & Haystacks: Pastoral Imagery in American Needlework*; and *Quilts in a Material World: Selections from the Winterthur Collection*, also the title of her book. Together with recent WPAMC graduates, Alison Buchbinder and Samantha Dorsey, she has co-curated the exhibition *Who's Your Daddy? Families in Early American Needlework.*

Norman Emery

Norman Emery. Resident Archaeologist, Durham Cathedral. Chairman of the Esh Winning Colliery Banner Group. Author of *Banners of the Durham Coalfield.*

Patricia Ewer

Patricia Ewer is the principal of Textile Objects Conservation. She is a conservation professional with over 27 years of experience in treating textiles, managing, developing and staffing conservation projects. She has held conservation positions at Historic Royal Palaces (UK), Midwest Art Conservation Center (Minneapolis, Minnesota), Biltmore House (Asheville, North Carolina), Textile Conservation Laboratory at the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine (New York, New York) and The Textile Conservation Workshop (South Salem, New York). She has been a Professional Associate of the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works since 1989.

Ann French

Ann French trained in textile conservation at the Victoria and Albert Museum from 1984 to 1988, and worked for Glasgow Museums, the Area Museums Council for the South West and The National Trust, before joining the Whitworth Art Gallery in 2002. She has served on the committee of the Textiles Group of Icon, including as Chair from 1998 to 2001 and as textiles representative on Icon's Accreditation Committee. Her primary interests are enabling achievable collection care whatever the institutional circumstances and communicating conservation beyond the professional sector.

Sarah Gates

Sarah Gates has been affiliated with the FAMSF since 1980 and was named head of the Textile Conservation Department in 1992. She received a BA from Mills College in 1981, interned in the Organics Divisions

of the British Museum in 1985 and received a 3-year diploma in The Conservation of Textile from the University of London, Textile Conservation Centre, Hampton Court, in 1987.

Nicola Gentle

Nicola Gentle trained as a painter at Winchester School of Art. In 1978 she joined the staff of the Conservation Department (Textiles Section) of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, and as Senior Conservator (1988–1994) was in charge of the Osterley Textile Studio. Since 1994, she has worked as a freelance Conservation Consultant in Devon and Cornwall. She is an Accredited Member (ACR) of the UK Institute of Conservation.

Kathryn (Kate) Gill

Kathryn (Kate) Gill, FIIC, ACR, FHEA. Following her training in the conservation of textiles and upholstery at the Textile Conservation Centre (TCC), England, Kate moved to the USA to set up upholstery conservation at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In 1992, after 7 years as Senior Conservator, she took up a post at the TCC, University of Southampton. Kate was Senior Conservator and Lecturer until the TCC's closure in 2009. During this period and since then, Kate has combined practical conservation (textile and upholstery treatments) with teaching and research. She has taught on a number of conservation programmes and courses for professional conservators in practice. Kate has published widely on textile and upholstery conservation.

Sara Gillies

Sara Gillies has completed an MSc in Archaeology at the University of Bradford, for which the scientific analysis of a seventh- to eighth-century Egyptian tunic in the collections of the V&A formed the basis of her dissertation. Previously she received an HBA in history from Lakehead University, looking at the establishment of the textile industry in New France, and an MA in the history of medicine from University College London, on the redefinition and regulation of English midwifery at the turn of the twentieth century.

Christine Giuntini

Christine Giuntini is the textile and organic artefact conservator for the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MMA) in New York City, where she has worked since 1981. She attended the Conservation Program at the Institute of Fine Arts and studied textile conservation under Nobuko Kajitani at the MMA. Her particular areas of interest are three-dimensional fibre artefacts, archaeological textiles and feather work, and the development of mounting and exhibition techniques for these types of complex artefacts.

Claire Golbourn

Claire Golbourn, BSc, completed her degree in Restoration and Conservation in 1999 at the former London Guildhall University. She worked as preventive conservator for Historic Royal Palaces at Hampton Court before joining the National Trust in 2000. Claire has been senior conservator at the Textile Conservation Studio since 2006. She has managed a number of large studio-based conservation projects, besides participating in on-site teams.

Elizabeth-Anne Haldane

Elizabeth-Anne Haldane is a Senior Textile Conservator at the Victoria and Albert Museum. She graduated with an MA in Conservation from the RCA/V&A Conservation Course in 1999. Following this she completed a one-year Historic Scotland/Scottish Conservation Bureau internship based at Glasgow Museums.

Over the next 2 years she worked as a contract conservator for the National Museums of Scotland and the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco before taking up a permanent post at the V&A in late 2002.

Susan Heald

Susan Heald joined NMAI's conservation staff in 1994, becoming Senior Textile Conservator in 2001. She served as textile conservator at the Minnesota Historical Society from 1991 to 1994, and was awarded a Conservation Analytical Lab postgraduate fellowship in 1990. She holds an MS in Art Conservation with textile major/objects minor from the University of Delaware/Winterthur Museum and a BA in Chemistry and Anthropology from the George Washington University. She served as chair and vice-chair for the AIC Textile Specialty Group in 1997–1998, and is currently on the board for the North American Textile Conservation Conference.

Lynda Hillyer

Lynda Hillyer, ACR, FIIC, began her career in the British Museum designing and making perspex mounts. In 1975 she joined the Department of Oriental Antiquities as an assistant conservator working on a wide variety of materials and objects. She later transferred to the Organics Conservation section where she worked on ethnographic and archaeological material, specializing in fibres. She joined the textile conservation studio at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1981 and was Head of Textile Conservation from 1989 to 2005. She has published widely on many aspects of textile conservation.

Sarah Howard

Sarah Howard is Principal Conservator for Hampshire County Council Museums and Archives Service. She completed a postgraduate diploma in textile conservation from the Textile Conservation Centre in 1992 and subsequently worked for a number of freelance conservation studios and museums. She joined HCCMAS in 1996 as textile conservator where she has been responsible for the care and conservation of their Dress and Textiles collection. Sarah is an accredited member of the Institute of Conservation and has been Secretary and Chair for their Textile Group. She is currently co-ordinating a touring exhibition in Hampshire promoting conservation to school and family audiences.

Helen M. Hughes

Textiles conservator, Glasgow Museums, Culture and Sport Glasgow. Helen Murdina Hughes BSc, dip Cons (tex), ACR, trained in textile conservation at the Textile Conservation Centre, Hampton Court Palace, then worked in textile conservation at the Rocky Mountain Regional Conservation Centre, Denver, Colorado, USA. Helen joined Glasgow Museums in 1990 and has worked on numerous exhibitions and major projects such as the redisplay of Kelvingrove, Glasgow's main Museum and Art Gallery, and has also supervised Historic Scotland Textile Conservation interns. She is currently working on a tapestry catalogue project in Glasgow's Burrell Collection.

Rebecca Johnson-Dibb

Rebecca Johnson-Dibb, Conservator, holds an MS in Historic Textiles and Conservation from the University of Rhode Island. Her specialties include woven textiles and historic dyes.

Maria Jordan

After taking a degree in Politics (BA Hons) at Durham University (1980–1983), Maria Jordan gained a postgraduate diploma in Textile Conservation from the Textile Conservation Centre, Courtauld Institute of Art (1997–2000). In 2000, she joined Historic Royal Palaces to work for the Conservation and Collection Care

department. For the past 4 years she has been the Treatment Conservation Supervisor for the Furnishings team. Maria was accreditated in 2007.

Mary Kaldany

Mary Kaldany, Senior Conservator, holds an MA in Paintings Conservation from the State University College at Buffalo. Her special interests include all aspects of conservation for painted textiles, including conservation adhesives and the use of the textiles suction table.

Masumi Kataoka

After being awarded a BA in Dyeing and Weaving from the Kyoto City University of Arts, Japan in March 2006, Masumi Kataoka studied textile conservation on the MA programme at the Textile Conservation Centre, University of Southampton, UK. She spent a 3-month internship at the Tapestry Conservation Project Committee, Japan in spring 2006, and an 8-week internship at the Detroit Institute of Arts, USA in summer 2007. In October 2008 Masumi joined the Textile Conservation Laboratory at the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, USA, as a fellow funded by the Sherman Fairchild Foundation.

Marion Kite

Marion Kite. FIIC, ACR, FRSA, is Head of Furniture, Textiles and Fashion Conservation at the Victoria and Albert Museum. A 'bench conservator' for 30 years she specialized in treating textiles, organic materials and animal products associated with textiles. She has published widely and lectured internationally; she co-edited *The Conservation of Leather and Related Materials* with Roy Thomson (Elsevier, 2006), now in second impression. She was Chairman of the Leather Conservation Centre, Northampton, for over 10 years and is a Trustee of the Museum of Leathercraft and the Gloves Collections Trust. She has served on the Directory Board of ICOM-CC and also the Council of IIC.

Barbara Lehrecke

Barbara Lehrecke worked as a costumier before completing a master apprenticeship at the Textile Conservation Workshop. She specializes in textile-related objects with three-dimensional properties.

Frances Lennard

Frances Lennard, ACR, FIIC, FHEA, gained the Postgraduate Diploma in Textile Conservation from the Textile Conservation Centre in 1985. She worked as a textile conservator at the TCC and for 12 years in partnership with Fiona Hutton in the southwest of England. She was a Lecturer/Senior Lecturer and Programme Leader of the MA Textile Conservation at the TCC between 2001 and 2009. She has taught on the MA Conservation programme in Malta. She has published widely on conservation treatments and is the joint editor with Maria Hayward of *Tapestry Conservation: Principles and Practice* (Elsevier, 2006). She is an Assessor for the PACR Accreditation scheme and is on the Editorial Advisory Board for the IIC publication *Reviews in Conservation*.

Ksynia Marko

Ksynia Marko, ACR, trained at the Victoria and Albert Museum. She joined the National Trust in 1991 as manager of the Blickling Textile Conservation Studio in Norfolk, having previously run her own freelance conservation studio in London for several years. Ksynia has been the Trust's Textile Conservation Adviser since 1995. Her experience of project planning and management has grown through necessity and practice, from running a business, designing studio premises and working with many different groups of people on a variety of projects.

Catherine C. McLean
Catherine McLean is the head of the costume and textile conservation laboratory at LACMA. She came to the museum in 1980 after completing her MS in Art Conservation from the University of Delaware-Winterthur Museum Art Conservation Program. A Michigan native, preparations for her conservation career included a BA in Art History with a minor in Chemistry from the University of Michigan.

Bernice Morris
Bernice Morris received an MA Textile Conservation from the TCC, University of Southampton (2005), and a BA History of Art and Italian from Birmingham University, UK (2002). She came to the Philadelphia Museum of Art as the Andrew W. Mellon Fellow in Costume and Textiles Conservation in 2005, and has stayed on to work as the Assistant Conservator of Costume and Textiles. Bernice has a particular interest in the conservation of textiles used in religious practice and conservation ethics.

Sonia O'Connor
Dr Sonia O'Connor, FIIC, ACR, Archaeological Sciences, University of Bradford, has worked in archaeological conservation for over 30 years. She specializes in the radiography of cultural material and is co-author, with Mary M. Brooks, of the book *X-Radiography of Textiles, Dress and Related Objects*, published in 2007 by Elsevier.

Patsy Orlofsky
Patsy Orlofsky, Executive Director, received a Bachelor of Science degree from Skidmore College and her graduate work was in the Master's Degree programme for Preservation Administration in Columbia University's School of Library Service Conservation Education Programs. Her special interests include American textiles and Judaic objects.

Caroline Rendell
Caroline Rendell, ACR. Trained at the Textile Conservation Centre, she was awarded a diploma in Textile Conservation. After working for Leeds City Museums she joined the National Trust in 1986. She combines her role as National Trust Conservator with responsibilities for her portfolio properties with her work as a freelance textile conservator.

Zoe Roberts
In 1997 Zoe gained a degree in Modern History from Oxford University. She then undertook an MA in Textile Conservation at the Textile Conservation Centre, University of Southampton, between 1999 and 2001, followed by a one-year Historic Scotland internship at Glasgow Museums. From 2002 she has worked for Historic Royal Palaces, first as a textile conservator and, since 2007, as the Commissioned Treatment Conservation Supervisor. She has always had a strong interest in presenting conservation to the public and has sat on the committee of the Institute of Conservation's Care of Collections Group for the past 3 years.

Susan R. Schmalz
Susan Schmalz, Associate Textile Conservator, has worked at LACMA since 1997. Originally from Vancouver, Canada, she received her graduate degree in conservation from the State University College at Buffalo in 1996 and also holds an MFA in Studio Arts from Virginia Commonwealth University. Her past work experience in conservation includes working for a private painting conservator in Richmond, VA, and interning at the National Park Service, Division of Conservation in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia.

Chris Scott

Chris Scott. Keeper of Industry, Beamish Museum, County Durham. He joined the staff of Beamish Museum in 2004 after completing a Master's in Heritage Education and Interpretation. His first degree was in Archaeology.

Patricia Silence

Patricia Silence, Conservator of Museum Exhibitions and Historic Interiors, has been at the Colonial Willamsburg Foundation since 1999, where she manages the preventive conservation programme. Patricia is an apprentice-trained conservator with a background in fibre arts and civil engineering. She began her conservation career in 1984, becoming an objects conservation assistant at the Nelson Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, Missouri, USA in 1991. In 1994 she moved to the current American Textile History Museum in Lowell, Massachusetts, to focus exclusively on textile conservation. Patricia is a Professional Associate of the American Institute for Conservation.

Ben Stern

Dr Ben Stern is Lecturer in Archaeological Sciences at the University of Bradford. He has a BSc in Chemistry (1992, Bristol) and a PhD *Biomineral Lipids in Living Fossil Molluscs* (1996, Newcastle). His research falls at the interface between analytical chemistry and archaeology and he is interested in the identification of the 'archaeologically invisible' by the correct application of analytical techniques.

Louise Squire

Having gained a postgraduate diploma in Textile Conservation from the Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, Louise Squire worked at the Textile Conservation Centre, Hampton Court Palace for 3 years, before setting up in private practice in London. From her studio she has undertaken conservation work for many London and international museums and for private clients both in the UK and abroad. She has undertaken short-term contracts for museum exhibitions and installations. She has recently assisted in establishing the textile conservation section in the newly opened Museum of Islamic Art, Qatar.

Beth Szuhay

Beth Szuhay has been with the Fine Arts Museums as a textile conservator since 2001. She received her BA in International Studies from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio in 1990 and her MS from the Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation in 2001.

Mika Takami

Mika Takami is Senior Textile Conservator at Historic Royal Palaces. After gaining a BA in Arabic language and literature at Osaka University of Foreign Studies, she worked as an assistant registrar and conservator at the National Museum of Ethnology in Japan. She completed a three-year postgraduate diploma in textile conservation at the Textile Conservation Centre, Courtauld Institute of Art in 2000, followed by two one-year Andrew W. Mellon Fellowships at Metropolitan Museum of Art (2000–2001) and National Museum of the American Indian/Smithsonian Institution (2001–2002), before joining HRP in 2002.

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Part one
The changing context

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1

Textile conservation in the heritage sector

Frances Lennard, Patricia Ewer

Conservators have worked within a changing world since the pioneers in textile conservation established the profession. In both the UK and the USA political and cultural shifts have an impact on the way the 'heritage sector' operates, and this in turn affects the working environment of the conservator.

Developments in the sector and pressures on funding

In both countries the cultural sector is directly affected by the political swings inherent in an electoral system dominated by two main political parties, although cultural heritage is often low on the agenda. A separate ministry for arts and heritage, later renamed the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), was created in the UK in 1992, although the then Conservative government was criticized for its lack of a strategic vision for museums (*Museums Journal*, Dec. 1991: 7). The USA does not have a designated cultural department within the President's cabinet (although the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities (PCAH), created in 1982, administers the *Save America's Treasures* Program), but many cultural institutions rely on government funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities and The Institute of Museum and Library Services. But, as in the UK, in the 1980s and 1990s the funds for these organizations were severely cut under the influence of a coalition within the Republican Party who felt the arts were eroding the moral fabric of the nation (Koch, 1998).

Pressures on central and local government spending have a direct impact on the heritage sector and on conservation jobs. In the UK, with a new emphasis on sponsorship and commercial enterprise to fund museum activities, reduced government spending during the 1980s, and particularly in the recessionary environment of the early 1990s, meant reduced funding for conservation in both national and local authority museums. In the USA, reduced government funding had a similar impact, although US cultural institutions are less reliant on the Federal government and have more avenues to explore such as regional, state and local government funding as well as money from independent foundations, corporate and individual giving. After the crisis of the late 1980s institutions broadened their sources of funding, developing endowments (Farrell & Marshall, 1999) and expanding marketing and retail services. Even large government conservation projects such as the conservation of the Star-Spangled Banner were made possible by a combination of federal and corporate funding (Thomassen-Krauss, 2001).

A re-evaluation of museum activities led to the restructuring of staff positions and an increased use of outside consultants (Zusy, 1998; Bryk, 2001). The trend towards enhanced collections care became more economically viable than remedial conservation treatments which could be outsourced to freelance conservators. Museums sought to attract more visitors as a way of increasing income. *Museum News*, the journal

Figure 1.1 *Hampshire's Treasures – Celebrating the County's Collections.* A Hampshire County Council Museums and Archives Service exhibition which was shown at two venues.

of the American Association of Museums (AAM), has regularly discussed marketing, visitor surveys, serving the public, creative partnerships and other topics intended to help museums increase visitor numbers (Kotler, 1999) (Figure 1.1).

In the UK a major change at the beginning of the twenty-first century brought museums, libraries and archives together under the strategic leadership of one body. Regional Museums, Libraries and Archives Councils replaced the former Area Museum Councils, which had employed conservators to provide conservation treatments and advice for smaller local museums. This caused the loss of several textile conservator posts, although some conservators have gone on to provide similar services on a freelance basis. The regional councils now have a more strategic and a less functional role, leaving small museums, many run by volunteers, with less access to conservation services. Although increased funding for regional museums from the government was welcomed following the 2001 report *Renaissance in the Regions*, it was felt that collections management and conservation were not given a high enough priority.

Effect on textile conservation posts

Although there were no major losses of conservation posts in the principal US institutions during the 1980s and 1990s, conservators' roles and responsibilities changed. In the UK the economic situation has led to a widening freelance culture. The last two decades have seen the growth of the 'project culture' where there are fewer permanent positions in museums (Ashley-Smith, 1999). Instead museums rely on short-term contract posts to service particular projects and place greater reliance on the private sector, while freelance textile conservators now spend a greater part of their time working for museums, both national and local, as demonstrated in **Squire's case study**. In the local authority sector conservation has been seen as a service which can be 'contracted out'. There was widespread concern at the loss of 35 jobs in Glasgow's museums service in 1996, with the loss of core curatorial and conservation posts. Hughes' case study in Chapter 2 demonstrates how institutional changes impacted on the conservation department.

This situation has led to an increasing degree of specialization. Freelance textile conservators usually spend the majority of their time carrying out treatments, including often lengthy remedial treatments for museums. Conservators working in small museums are often more concerned with overall care of the collection and with preparing objects for display, as illustrated in **French's case study**. Conservation departments in large museums tend to be occupied primarily with preparing large numbers of objects for exhibition. Volunteers have often been used as a way of increasing the amount of work that can be achieved by a limited number of staff. The **case study by Gates and Szuhay**, and French's also, demonstrate how this can be an effective strategy as a way of providing additional resources, although not as a substitute for professional staff.

There has been a big increase in 'blockbuster' exhibitions at institutions like the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) in London and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, as museums have sought to attract visitors. These major exhibitions gather together large collections of objects, usually for short periods, and require sophisticated display mounting techniques (Reiter et al., 2005). They often go on to tour other venues around the world, with conservators called upon to courier exhibitions and take responsibility for objects' safety in transit and during mounting. Innovative techniques have been developed to allow the safe transport of costumes (Haldane et al., 2007). **Kite's case study** details the pressures on a busy textile conservation department and illustrates the employer's perspective on the project culture.

The growth in the number of conservators, including textile conservators, working privately in the UK has been significant and has encouraged a more businesslike environment (Figure 1.2). In 1993 Leigh, Head of the Conservation Unit of the Museums and Galleries Commission, urged textile conservators to cost their work more realistically: 'Most conservators do not charge nearly enough to properly cover overheads, or properly to reflect their true level of training and expertise' (1993: 20). This is also true in the USA, but in a sense it is related to competition; in both countries many deliberately keep their costs low to outbid their competitors. The Foundation of the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (FAIC) has introduced on-line courses on basic business topics such as establishing a

Figure 1.2 Work in a freelance textile conservation studio: re-assembling an eighteenth-century Mughal tent panel following conservation.

conservation practice, marketing and estimating through its Professional Development initiative. Members of the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (AIC) and Specialty Group Conservators in Private Practice (CIPP) have for years discussed business issues such as competition, certification and qualifications. **Ewer's case study** demonstrates how the development of business skills is an important part of conservation practice.

The type of work undertaken by textile conservators has undoubtedly changed in response to budget constraints. Cussell (1998) suggested that conservators need to be more inventive when proposing treatments for private clients, where limited budgets do not permit lengthy treatments, but it is by no means the case that museum budgets allow unlimited time for major treatments either. Conservators have had to develop a range of management skills; **Marko and Golbourn's case study** outlines the project management protocols which many textile conservators employ in their daily work.

At the same time conservators have been operating in a more businesslike environment with the growth of competitive tendering practices. In 1993 Leigh reported that 'the tentacles of competition have reached the cultural heritage' (1993: 15). The United Kingdom Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (UKIC) produced *Guidelines for the Commissioning and Undertaking of Conservation Work* in 1998 to help conservators and clients manage this development. The tendering or bidding process for projects with US government agencies has become more uniformly structured.

Increasing access to collections

Conservation has always tried to balance the aims of preservation and access, but in the UK the balance has shifted in recent years from the preservation of collections towards their use. The *National Action Plan for Museums in England*, published by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council in 2009, did not mention conservation.

The Labour government, which came to power in 1997, promised more funding for museums, but in reassessing the purpose of museums it increased demands on the sector. The key priority for the new government was access (Ashley-Smith, 1999); funding was allocated specifically to help museums tackle social problems, 'recognising their potential for enhancing education, combating social exclusion and promoting urban regeneration' (*Museums Journal*, Sept. 1998: 25) through involving broader sections of the community. Anti-discrimination legislation also encouraged museums to become more accessible to the disabled. A new emphasis on performance management meant that funding was often linked to targets such as increased visitor numbers. The increased emphasis on access has had an impact on the work of the conservator and made the balancing act more complex.

In the USA the AAM recently initiated the Center for the Future of Museums, 'a think-tank and research design lab for fostering creativity and helping museums transcend traditional boundaries to serve society in new ways.' *Museums & Society 2034: Trends and Potential Futures* alerts museums to the implications of potential societal changes by the year 2034. Issues discussed include the effects on access of the ageing population and the increasing cost of preservation and storage compared with the decreasing cost of digitizing museum objects (Chung, Johnstone & Wilkening, 2008).

The access agenda has not just been taken up by museums. In the UK the National Trust, which opens its historic houses to the public, is also aiming to widen access to its properties beyond its traditional market, commonly perceived to be middle-aged and middle-class (Greenacre, 2005).

There is a continued tension between access and preservation. In December 2005, Heritage Preservation of Washington, D.C., released the results of its Heritage Health Index, the first comprehensive survey of the condition and preservation needs of US collections held in the public trust in archives, libraries, historical societies and museums. 'Museums … devote more money to conservation but also

have greater needs when it comes to conservation treatment…. They do significantly more to promote conservation awareness to their donors, trustees and the general public. Museums do less well than respondents as a whole, including libraries and archives, in cataloguing their collections and making them intellectually accessible' (Merritt, 2006). Thomas Campbell, Director of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, explained why it is important to increase access: 'engaging visitors who don't feel comfortable is one of the primary challenges… [One of the] key experiences of visiting a museum is that moment of standing in front of an object…Suddenly you're responding to something physical, real, that changes your own perspective. And great museums will always do that, as long we get people through the doors' (Cembalest, 2009).

Making collections accessible

Financial and political pressures on museums have impacted on the work of textile conservators in different ways. Museums are under pressure to make better use of their collections (Keene, 2005). Nightingale (2005-6) explicitly cited the desire to make more of the collection accessible as a factor in the development of a very large costume display at the Museum of London. Innovative methods of display, such as visible storage and the use of handling collections, also aim to make better use of museum objects; the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York introduced visible storage of objects in its Egyptian Galleries in the 1980s. These methods can increase the objects' exposure to risks from light or handling, but conservators' expertise can help to manage this tension through good documentation, appropriate packing, training in handling and good display design and mounting techniques.

Montague (2005) explained how digital photography of the collections of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and the publication of the images on the museum's website, provided greater intellectual access to curators, scholars and the general public, while limiting direct handling of the objects. In another example, Spicer et al. displayed replicas of flags from the State of Maine's collection in the Hall of Flags in the State House, where conditions were not optimal for fragile textiles but the traditional method of display was considered important. This successful solution allowed a rotating display of the conserved originals in a museum environment. In fact 'Rotation, interpretation and an on-line photo gallery dramatically increased public access to the collection' (2003: 79) (Figure 1.3).

Museums have exploited the development of the Internet in many ways. As well as promoting access to collections, a website has become an essential marketing and information tool. This has led to an exponential rise in visitor enquiries in the last 20 years; the Museum of London reported a rise in enquiries via its website from 100,000 in 1998, to 1.4 million in 2004 and to 6.4 million in 2007.[1] If only a small proportion of these enquiries are requests to look at objects, this still represents a huge increase in access to collections, with implications for the treatment of objects and conservators' workloads. In 1996 Sykas (1996: 14) noted that, as a curator of a textile collection spending up to 20% of his time answering visitor enquiries, he was facing an increasing demand from students at all levels to access primary source materials, such as objects and documents.

The professional status of conservators

Conservation has expanded and developed as a profession since the 1980s. It now conforms more closely to the definition of a profession: it has formalized training routes with career-entry qualifications; it has professional membership organizations which subscribe to ethical codes and can levy sanctions against

[1] *Answering Enquiries*, Museums Association seminar at Manchester Museum of Science and Industry, February 26, 2009.

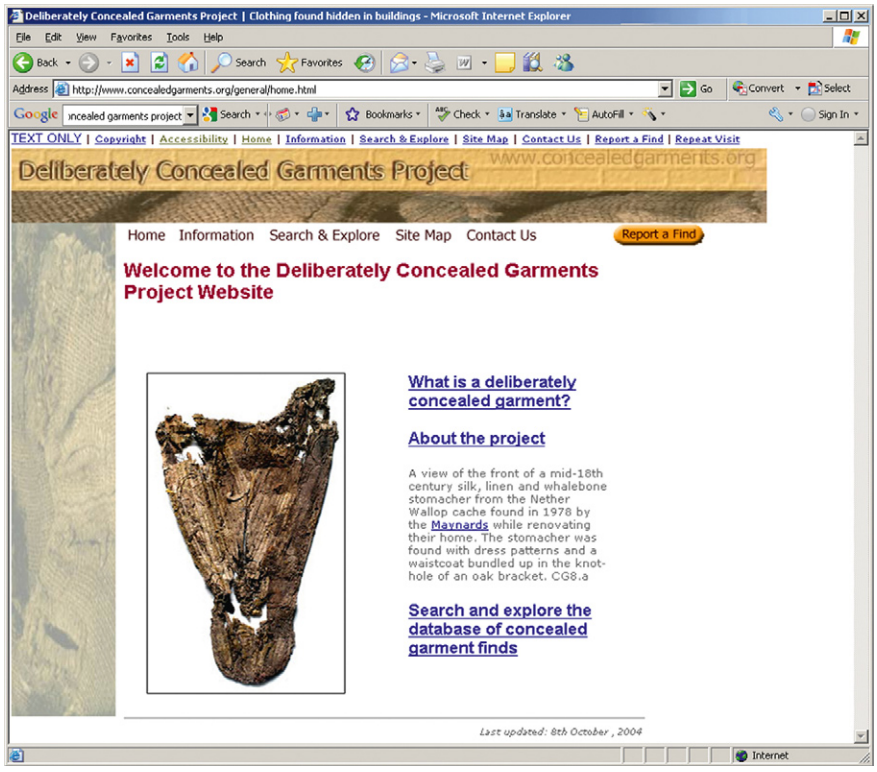

Figure 1.3 The *Deliberately Concealed Garments Project* website acts as a virtual collection.

members who fail to meet required standards; it has a body of literature and a requirement for continuous professional development. Although there are competing pressures, textile conservators manage to successfully tread the fine line between being business competitors and professional colleagues; textile conservation is demonstrably a profession – there is no question but that information should be shared, and the results of research disseminated.

More conservators today enter the profession with a master's degree, although other routes still exist. Indeed this has become true to such an extent that there have recently been calls for entry levels to be broadened.[2] Certainly there is a lack of social and racial diversity in the profession; increasingly there is a larger proportion of women in the conservation workforce, in common with personnel in museums more generally, perhaps in response to the low levels of pay in the sector. This is overwhelmingly the case within textile conservation. Although conservation has become a profession, the lack of funding in the sector means that conservators do not receive financial rewards commensurate with their levels of training and expertise.

There have been developments designed to monitor the conservation profession, although it is unlikely ever to be regulated by law in the UK or the USA. The AIC Conservators in Private Practice (CIPP) group developed the 'Find a Conservator' service in 1987 while the UK Conservation Register was established in 1988 to provide the public with a means of selecting a reputable conservator. Both require practitioners to meet certain criteria for inclusion. The Professional Accreditation of Conservator-Restorers (PACR)

[2] By speakers at the meeting *2020 Vision – The Conservation Workforce of the Future*, organized by Icon, at the Tate Modern, January 9, 2008.

was introduced in the UK in 1999 (www.pacr.org), aiming to safeguard the public while also raising the status of the profession. The accreditation system does not require conservators to have undergone a particular training, but tests their ability to meet a set of professional standards following some years of post-training experience. While the topic of professional accreditation comes up repeatedly within the AIC, the membership voted against certification in 2008. Professionalism is a major concern amongst US conservators but a model for assessing it could not be agreed upon; the country and the discipline in the USA are just too vast.

In 2005 a number of conservation organizations in the UK, including UKIC, merged to form the Institute for Conservation (Icon); this has helped conservators in the UK to be seen as speaking with one voice. The gains have been immediately apparent; for example in 2005–06, Icon was asked to give evidence to the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee on Science and Heritage. Despite this merger the sector remains rather fragmentary with a number of other conservation organizations still in existence. In the USA by contrast, the AIC is the major professional body and represents almost 3000 conservators (interestingly Icon has a similar number of members despite the UK population being about 20% of that in the USA). AIC's efforts to speak for the conservation field are growing, especially in the political arena.

The conservator's image

In any discussion of the character traits of the 'typical' conservator, it is said that conservators prefer working with objects; they don't look up from the bench. The range of case studies in this book demonstrates the variety of roles textile conservators now occupy, and this range and diversity makes textile conservation a rewarding career. The relatively small proportion of textile conservation graduates who leave the profession demonstrates this. However, it is true that not many have gone on to management roles where they could influence policy at a higher level, perhaps partly because the overwhelmingly female bias of textile conservation has meant that many practitioners work part-time while raising their families, although many take on volunteer roles for the professional bodies.

Conservators used to be regarded as unhelpful and obstructive by other museum staff. In 1987 Carter, a museum designer, recommended closer liaison between conservators and designers: 'In my experience designers very often see conservators as having a wholly negative effect on their activities. They are seen as for ever hampering one's work with increasingly stringent constraints' (1987: 14). The situation has changed slowly, and it appears that on the whole the relationship between conservators and curators has become more productive. In 2000 Wills commented: 'It is also interesting to reflect on the observable change in status in the conservator/curator relationship in the British Museum over the last decade or so. The contemporary, qualified and articulate conservator often (though not always) has a greater degree of input into decisions about objects… than was the case in the past' (2000: 87). The joint teaching of students on textile conservation and museum studies programmes at the Textile Conservation Centre aimed to give students who would be future conservators and curators a common foundation in the heritage sector, and an understanding of and respect for each others' roles (Lennard & Brooks, 2008).

Despite this and other initiatives there is a degree of separation between the conservation profession and the rest of the museum world in both the UK and the USA. Attempts to engage curators in professional conservation meetings have not proved fruitful. The North American Textile Conservation Conference (NATCC) aimed to attract curators as well as conservators, but with limited budgets for travel this has not happened. The journals of the professional bodies, *Museums Journal* (of the UK Museums Association) and UKIC's *Conservation News* (replaced by *Icon News* in 2005), reflect different concerns; conservation is very rarely mentioned in the pages of *Museums Journal*. Only one article addressing