

<b>Committee(s):</b>	<b>Date(s):</b>
The Honourable The Irish Society Culture, Heritage & Libraries	12 July 22 October
<b>Subject:</b> Restoration of the Great Parchment Book, 1639, progress report	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Director of Culture, Heritage & Libraries	<b>For Information</b>

### Summary

This report describes progress with the project for the restoration of the Great Parchment Book, an iconic item in the archive of The Honourable The Irish Society lodged at London Metropolitan Archives (LMA). There are three key elements to the project: the physical conservation of the item; a digital imaging process, to attempt to recreate the manuscript in digital form; and transcription and text encoding, to allow interpretation and exploitation of the text itself. If successful, the project would allow for the display of the Book (and its digital recreation) in 2013, the 400th anniversary of the charter of Londonderry and of the building of the City walls.

In previous reports to the Irish Society on the subject, we reported that LMA had reached agreement with University College London to create digital images of the text and made progress with the conservation element of the project with assistance of a grant of £9000 from the National Manuscripts Conservation Trust towards conservation work, matched by funding from Derry City Council.

#### **Recommendations**

- The award of a grant of £3000 from the Marc Fitch Fund towards the transcription and encoding work, and of £5000 from the Irish Society towards online publication, should be noted.

### Main Report

#### **Background**

1. History of the Great Parchment Book
2. In 1639, after prolonged proceedings in Star Chamber, Charles I claimed as forfeit the Irish estates of the Irish Society and the City companies in Northern Ireland. A Commission under the Great Seal was instituted to survey the forfeited estates, consolidating all contracts and particulars of the affected rental lands and enrolling their details into one volume. The resulting book, which is lodged with the Society's archives at London Metropolitan Archives, therefore includes invaluable information about the County of Londonderry in the early 17th century. The book was apparently

passed to the Irish Society when it was reconstituted by Charles II in 1662. (Archive reference CLA/049/EM/02/018).

3. However, a fire at Guildhall in 1786 caused extensive damage to the historical collections of the Irish Society, destroying a large proportion of the 17th century material entirely, and causing dramatic 'shrivelling' and fire damage to the vellum pages of the Great Parchment Book (See appendix A for an image of the damage). This hugely important document has therefore been unavailable to historians since this date.

### **Current condition of the Book**

4. The surviving 165 folios of the volume are now stored in 16 boxes, loosely tied into bundles equating as far as can be determined to the passages dealing with the particular lands of the different Companies and of the Society. They are all classified as 'unfit' and cannot be consulted by members of the public.
5. All the folios are fire damaged with severe overall cockling and, on most, shrinkage of at least one edge. Where the shrinking has occurred, the parchment is very stiff and slightly transparent and the text has shrunk too. On some folios, the cockling is so severe that the parchment has folded in on itself, meaning that substantial areas of text are not visible.

### **Project**

6. The Irish Society agreed at its meeting on 11 December 2009 to approve the project to restore the Great Parchment Book subject to external project funding being obtained for (a) the physical conservation of the Great Parchment Book, (b) the creation of a surrogate version of the book and (c) its display in 2013. It is envisaged that the project will lead to the recovery of as much of the text of the Great Parchment book as conservation science can allow, through both the physical conservation of the folios, and digital surrogacy and interpretation. It is hoped that the project will form the centrepiece of our contribution to the process of commemoration of the Plantation of Ulster. If the results (or at least partial results) could be available by 2013, the 400th anniversary of the charter of Londonderry, the volume and accompanying digital resource could take centre stage in the planned exhibitions in Northern Ireland.

### **Action taken so far**

7. In the last report to the Irish Society in September 2011, we reported that LMA had been awarded a grant of £9000 by the National Manuscripts Conservation Trust (NMCT) for a 6 month project to conserve the Great Parchment Book with match-funding from Derry City Council. The project is to thoroughly document the format and condition of the Great Parchment Book; investigate the treatment options for the project; carry out tests and develop workable methods to open out the parchment sufficiently to facilitate digital imaging; to carry out and fully document the treatment;

train other conservators at LMA; publish the results of the conservation project; and contribute to the dissemination of the wider project as a whole. A conservator, Rachael Smither, was recruited and started work, under the supervision of the LMA conservation Studio Manager Dr Caroline De Stefani, at the beginning of April 2012. Good progress has been made with the documentation and research; treatment will commence shortly. The conservation work is being publicised through the Great Parchment Book Blog at <http://greatparchmentbook.wordpress.com/> which has attracted interest from around the world. We are grateful to postgraduate student Alberto Campagnolo, a visiting researcher at the Centre for Computing in the Humanities (CCH), King's College London and experienced conservator, who helped us set up the Blog and continues to administer it for us.

8. It has previously been reported to the Irish Society that, to get the digital imaging underway, LMA had entered into an agreement with UCL Centre for Digital Humanities, University College London to sponsor one research engineer on the Engineering Doctorate in Virtual Environments, Imaging and Visualisation programme for four years. The engineering doctoral student, Kazim Pal, began work in September 2010 at the start of the 2010/11 academic year. Most of his first year was spent completing the taught element of his course, but since September last year he has been carrying out research including work on discarded used parchment supplied by LMA.
9. The third element of the project is the transcription and encoding of the text using standard-based methodologies to capture information which will enable sophisticated online presentation and searching of the document contents. We are pleased to announce that LMA has been awarded a grant of £3000 from the Marc Fitch Fund towards the transcription and we are in the process of recruiting a palaeographer for 6 months who will both transcribe and encode the text. We are also in discussion with CCH about providing training in encoding to the palaeographer. In the meantime, with the support of the Irish Society, we have written to the Great Twelve livery companies whose estates are recorded in the Great Parchment Book, to ask them if they would each be willing to make a small donation towards this element of the project.
10. The encoding of the text will enable comprehensive searching of the document once it is available online and LMA is very grateful to the Irish Society which has given £5000 towards the Great Parchment Book website. The design and development of the website has been awarded to Headscape and work on this will start shortly with the intention that it should go live in the latter part of 2012.

11. The final strand of the project involves the use of the Great Parchment Book in schools programmes and community work by LMA and Derry Museum and Archive Service.

### **Financial implications**

12. The Great Parchment Book project, with such specific and varied requirements, is broken down into a number of project elements, each of which is a major piece of work in its own right. Different funders are therefore being approached for each of the elements of the project. The Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council has already provided funding for the Eng.D doctorate with LMA also contributing an annual sum of £8,000 over four years as an Industrial Partner. This will cover the digital imaging part of the project. The NMCT has awarded LMA a grant of £9000 towards the conservation work with match-funding provided by Derry City Council. The Marc Fitch Fund has awarded LMA £3000 towards transcription and encoding work; and LMA is seeking donations towards the transcription from the Great Twelve livery companies. The Irish Society has given £5000 towards the online publication of the book. Other funding streams are being sought for this and the remaining elements of the project.

### **Conclusion**

13. The scheme represents a major partnership of international significance. Such a potentially ground breaking piece of work should enhance the City's reputation both nationally and internationally, and form a flagship project whose results would be of benefit to a number of other manuscripts in the collections of LMA and other institutions worldwide. The digital imaging and transcription will provide a lasting resource for historians researching the history of Northern Ireland in local, national and international contexts.

### **Appendices**

Appendix A – example of damage

### **Contact:**

*Emma Stewart | emma.stewart@cityoflondon.gov.uk | 020 7332 3827*