

Committee:	Date:
Gresham (City Side) Committee	1 November 2019
Joint Grand Gresham Committee	1 November 2019
Subject: Gresham Music Collection Conservation: Update on Restoration Activity	Public
Report of: Town Clerk	For Information
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Summary

At the February 2018 meetings of the Gresham (City Side) and Joint Grand Gresham Committees, discussion took place in relation to the Gresham Music Collection, elements of which were considered to be in urgent need of repair or restoration work. This Collection is housed in the Guildhall Library, where it has been held on deposit since 1958.

Given the legal liability on the City Corporation and Worshipful Company of Mercers to maintain the Collection, a feasibility study was undertaken to ascertain the activities and costs associated with restoring and preserving the items within it. Subsequent to the completion of the feasibility study, approval was obtained in May 2018 for funds to undertake the priority works and restore those items in need of urgent attention.

This report provides Members with an update on restoration works to date and sets out the intended course of action in respect of the restoration of the remainder of the Collection and ongoing maintenance.

Recommendation

That the progress made in restoring the Collection be noted.

Main Report

Background

1. Originally put together by Edward Taylor, who was appointed Gresham Professor of Music in 1837, the Gresham Music Collection belongs to Gresham College but has been on deposit at Guildhall Library since 1958. The most important single items within the Collection are probably the very early copy of Thomas Tallis's *Spem in Alium*, which is regarded as one of the most important copies of Tallis's work in existence, and the Purcell Autograph manuscript, which is an anthology of 48 songs, all but the last three in Purcell's hand.
2. Much of the rest of the collection remains undiscovered, despite it having many significant manuscripts – these make up the majority of those which the Principal Librarian has assessed as needing very urgent attention. They include autograph manuscripts by John Blow (1649–1708), choirmaster at St Paul's Cathedral, and an annotated copy of Handel's *Messiah* from which the famous 18th Century soprano Gertrude Mara sang. This volume also has autograph notes by Dr Samuel Arnold (1740 – 1802), who was both a composer and the publisher of the collected works of Handel.

3. In 1959, the City Corporation, in conjunction with The Worshipful Company of Mercers, formally agreed to be the custodian of the Gresham Music Collection, with any costs as deemed necessary to be executed by the Gresham Committee.
4. The Collection is insured under the City Corporation's general insurance for library items (*see: report to Gresham (City Side) Committee, October 2015*). However, elements within the collection were identified as in urgent need of restoration and repair and, to honour this responsibility, it was agreed that a feasibility study should be produced by the Principal Librarian, clearly setting out a breakdown including costs of what was immediately necessary (i.e. to save those works/items that required immediate attention to stop them deteriorating beyond repair), and what was desirable (i.e. to return the totality of the Collection into acceptable condition).
5. At the May 2018 Gresham (City Side) and Joint Grand Gresham Committee (JGGC) meetings, the Principal Librarian presented an assessment of the prioritisation of works and a breakdown of costs.
6. To save those works which needed immediate attention (i.e. the priority works), it was calculated that the equivalent of nine months' work for a mid-scale Grade D conservator (calculated to include annual leave, sick leave and other contingencies) would be required, at a cost of £36,954. Approval was therefore sought and obtained for these monies, to allow the works to proceed.

Update on Restoration Work

7. Following approval of the funds, a Book Conservator was appointed to repair and house the manuscripts from the Gresham Music Collection.
8. Following the appointment of an experienced individual, work commenced on the project on 17 September 2018 and it is anticipated that it will be completed by July 2020. Pictures of some of the items worked on to date are appended to the report in case of interest.
9. Using the findings of a survey of the collection undertaken in 2015 (from the point of view of creating a detailed catalogue to international music manuscript cataloguing standards [RISM]), the Conservator first identified and selected those items that presented similar problems and could therefore be treated at the same time. Working on multiple items simultaneously allows the Conservator to fill the time when they cannot work on one item because it needs to dry or rest by starting to work on another volume. This method is the most efficient way to use all the time available.
10. At the time of the last update (November 2018), the Conservator was in the process of undertaking restoration work on three sets of pamphlets which suffered from damage on either the paper cover or the sewing structure (or both).
11. Losses and missing areas were infilled and repaired using Japanese paper that was toned with acrylic colours to very closely match the colour of the original paper. Japanese paper, often made from mulberry, is a preferred material for paper conservation as it has particularly long fibres which makes it strong even when very thin. It can be used to make almost invisible repairs where text needs to be read through the repairs, but thicker papers might be used, for instance, for

repairs along a fold. It also has the advantage that its edges can be teased out rather than cut straight, which again can make for a very strong but less visible repair. In some cases, as in the pamphlet repairs, the paper repair is tinted to almost match the original. The 'almost' is significant as, whilst it is not desirable for the repair to be obvious, it is nonetheless important for it to remain detectable for any future work that might be necessary.

12. Wheat starch paste was used as adhesive as it has very good ageing properties and is easily removable after years of its application. The pamphlets with a broken sewing structure were re sewn using the same style and sewing stations (i.e. the holes where the thread passes through a gathering of paper). Using the original sewing stations means that, having dismantled a pamphlet, it is re-stitched using the original holes rather than making new holes – thereby avoiding the risk of further weakening the paper where it is folded.
13. Since the last update, repair works on the pamphlets have been completed successfully and the Conservator has commenced work on volumes where the spine cover is either detached or missing from the book and the corners of the boards are torn and worn out.
14. Restoration of 36 volumes has been completed so far (of a total of 55). For the most part, the volumes tend to have leather on the spines and corners of the boards, with marbled paper covering the main part of the boards. The leather along the joints has usually degraded and split, meaning the board attachment is no longer secure. In some instances, repair work has been simply a case of replacing the leather around the spine with new; however, some volumes have had problems with the sewing and so have required complete removal of the binding, re sewing, reattaching the boards and applying new leather around the spine.
15. One particular aspect of the project that Members may find of interest is the process of toning leather, when the spine and/or corner leather is being replaced. A number of photographs of the process are appended to this report by way of explanation and information. Essentially, undyed leather is used, with special leather dyes to colour it to the same as the original leather. The book identified in the pictures is G.MUS.435, where the spine leather was replaced with new and new patches added to the corners, as they were extremely worn.
16. At the time of writing, there remain 19 further volumes to restore, with a total time estimate of 372 hours (roughly 37 weeks) further work, meaning that work should be completed by the end of June 2020 (i.e. the project remains well on track).

Future Works

17. Members were also previously keen to understand the likely costs and level of activity required to get the totality of the collection into acceptable condition, once the priority works have been completed.
18. Whilst around a third of the Collection are music pieces, there are also more than 700 volumes of history, travel, biography and more from the sixteenth century onwards that formed part of the original Gresham College deposit and which make up the rest of the Collection. On the whole, these have been assessed as

being less historically important than the music volumes and, for the most part, in a better condition.

19. The Principal Librarian has advised that the survey of the remainder of this collection will require some time to undertake and he is anxious not to delay the more urgent part of the project whilst this is completed; this activity will therefore be undertaken on a more gradual basis and reported back on as the priority works are completed. A separate funding bid can then be made for this activity as appropriate.

Ongoing Maintenance

20. Members also previously asked that an assessment of what would be required to maintain the Collection on an ongoing basis be produced. Whilst it will not be fully possible to calculate a realistic figure in respect of ongoing costs until such time as the various stages of the restoration project have been completed, the Principal Librarian is confident that, having completed the necessary work on all the material, the annual costs would be quite low. Once stabilised, stored and consulted in a controlled environment (such as Guildhall Library), there should only be a limited necessity for further significant intervention.
21. It is believed that the serious problems of the Gresham Music Collection were sustained before the collections were deposited at the Library: Guildhall Library has many collections of a similar age and level of use, yet their condition has remained stable with none of the problems across the board that one finds in the Gresham Music Collection.

Future Considerations

22. Members previously agreed that consideration should be given to a number of items once restoration work is completed. For the sake of completeness, these are set out below:
 - a) The general issue of displaying the Collection in due course, e.g. at the London Metropolitan Archives or the new Museum of London, to facilitate the greatest ease of access to the public who may wish to access the works.
 - b) Ascertaining resource requirements associated with ongoing conservation, to prevent the Collection falling into disrepair in future.
 - c) The potential to divide the Collection into two distinct parts with revised nomenclature, i.e. the music items be referred to as the Gresham Taylor Collection, with the non-music pieces separated out as a discrete Collection.
 - d) A performance, such as of *Spem in Alium*, to help showcase and celebrate the works once restoration is complete.
23. These will be addressed in future reports, once the restoration activity has been completed.

Conclusion

24. Members are asked to note the progress made to date in respect of the restoration of the Gresham Music Collection and note that further reports,

concerned with the restoration of the remainder of the Collection and arrangements for its future display and care, will be presented in due course.

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Appendix: Photos of Spine Leather and Corner Patch Replacement Process

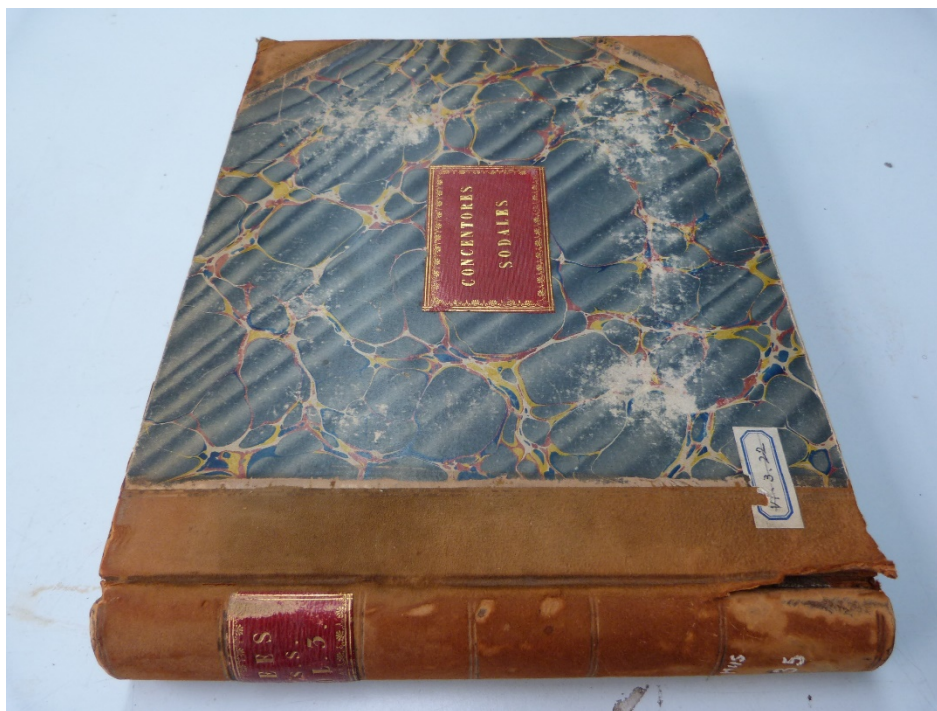


Figure 1 - Book with original spine leather



Figure 2 - Colour matching new leather to original

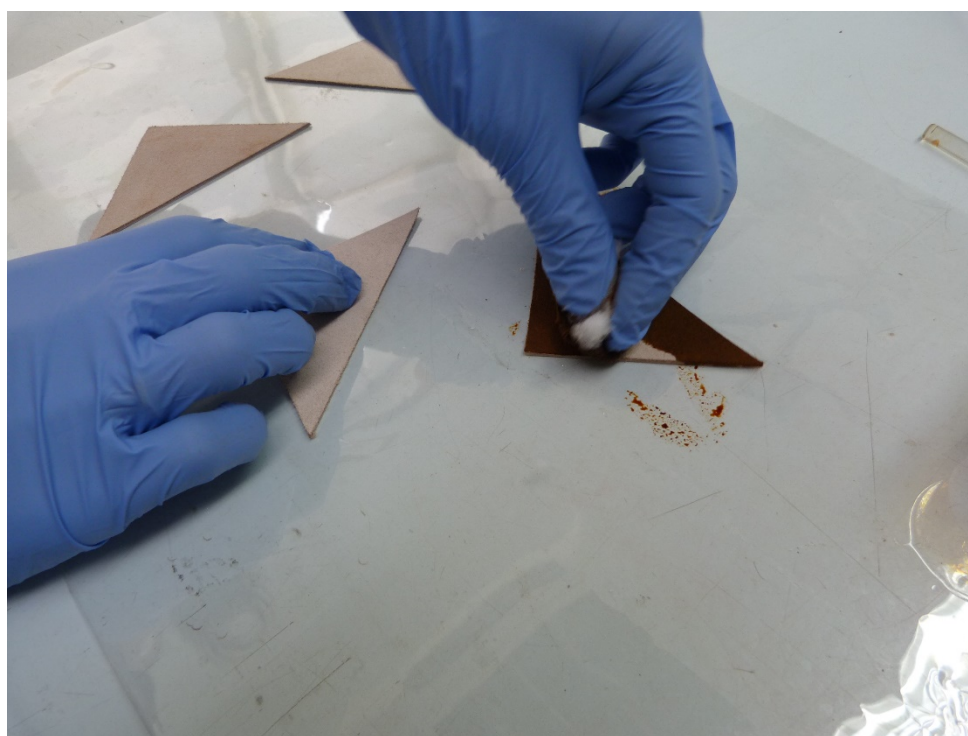


Figure 3 - Applying dye to new leather



Figure 4 - Part-way through leather spine removal

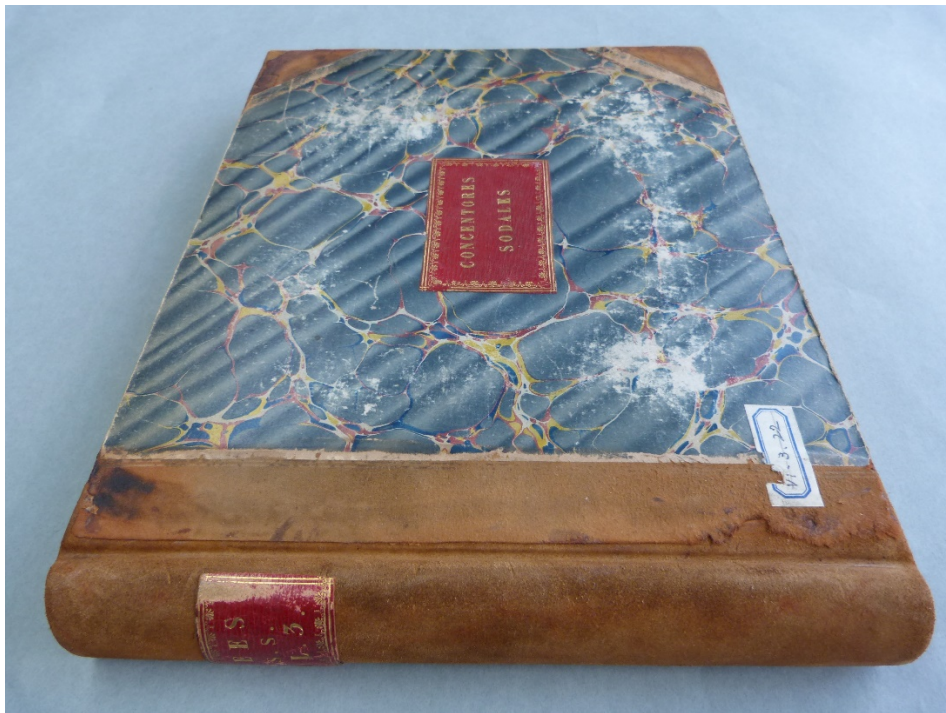


Figure 5 - Completed new leather cover