

Committee:	Date:
Gresham (City Side) Committee Joint Grand Gresham Committee	30 October 2020 30 October 2020
Subject:	
Gresham Music Collection Conservation: Update on Restoration Activity	Public
Report of: Town Clerk	
Report authors: Greg Moore – Town Clerk's Department Peter Ross – Principal Librarian, Guildhall Library	For Information

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 particularly 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 most urgent works and restore those items in need of most immediate attention.

The restoration works were expected to be completed in June 2020; however, the COVID-19 pandemic has, unfortunately, had a negative impact on delivery timescales. Completion is now expected by Christmas 2020. 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, following the completion of outstanding work.

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 most immediate attention to prevent irretrievable loss, 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 was anticipated that these activities would be completed by the end of June 2020.
9. However, in March 2020, in response to the emerging COVID-19 pandemic, Her Majesty's Government took the decision to encourage (and subsequently enforce) restrictions on travel and association in relation to individuals not identified as "key workers" playing a role in the immediate response to the crisis. This necessarily impacted on the ability of the conservator from being able to gain access to the relevant books and to complete the project within the timescales originally envisaged.
10. Since the easing of lockdown restrictions, some further works have been able to be progressed. A revised completion date of Christmas 2020 is now anticipated for this initial stage of the project.
11. However, it should be noted that the introduction of any additional movement restrictions in the coming period, as part of continued efforts to counter the pandemic, may have a further impact on delivery date.

12. Members will recall from the update reports in November 2018 and 2019 that restoration work on the various pamphlets has been completed and that restoration of 55 leather-bound volumes was underway. 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, resewing, reattaching the boards and applying new leather around the spine.
13. At the time of writing, there remain 11 further volumes to restore. Of these, work on 2 volumes is virtually finished, work on 3 further volumes is in progress, and work is yet to commence on a final 6.

Future Works

14. 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.
15. 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.
16. The Principal Librarian has advised that the survey of the remainder of this collection will require some time to undertake and this activity will be undertaken on a more gradual basis and reported back on following the completion of the first tranche of works. A separate funding bid can then be made for this activity as appropriate.

Ongoing Maintenance

17. 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.
18. 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

19. 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.
20. These will be addressed in future reports, once the restoration activity has been completed.

Conclusion

21. 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.

Contacts:

Greg Moore
Principal Members' Services & Committee Manager
E: gregory.moore@cityoflondon.gov.uk

Peter Ross
Principal Librarian, Guildhall Library
E: peter.ross@cityoflondon.gov.uk