

<b>Committee:</b>	<b>Date:</b>
Gresham (City Side) Committee Joint Grand Gresham Committee	26 February 2021 26 February 2021
<b>Subject:</b> Gresham Music Collection Conservation: Update on Restoration Activity	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Town Clerk	<b>For Information</b>
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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 in particularly urgent need of repair or restoration work. 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. Subsequently 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 originally expected to be completed in June 2020; however, due to the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on delivery timescales, completion of the project was delayed. However, the project is now complete. This report updates Members on the completion of the project and on the intended course of action in respect of the restoration of the remainder of the Collection and ongoing maintenance.

## Recommendation

That the completion of the project to restore the Music Collection, and the update on further restoration activity, 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 18<sup>th</sup> 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 setting out a breakdown including costs of what was immediately necessary, 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. To save those works which needed most immediate attention to prevent irretrievable loss, approval was therefore sought and obtained for funding to allow the works to proceed.

#### **Update on Restoration Work**

6. Following the appointment of an experienced Book Conservator, 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.
7. However, in March 2020, in response to the emerging COVID-19 pandemic, Her Majesty's Government took the decision to encourage (and subsequently enforce) social distancing and lockdown restrictions. 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.
8. Since the easing of lockdown restrictions, some further works were able to be progressed. A revised completion date of Christmas 2020 was anticipated for this initial stage of the project, subject to any further movement restrictions.
9. The Gresham Music Collection project is now complete and subsequently the conservator, Rachael Smither, has left in order to take up a new post at Cambridge University. Shortly before her departure, both she and the Head Conservator, Caroline De Stefani, took part in an online talk about the conservation work on the collection, which was attended by members of the public and by conservation professionals across the country.

#### **Future Works**

10. 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 were complete.
11. Whilst around a third of the Collection are music pieces, there are also more than 700 (719) 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, which may indicate that they were separately housed at the College before they came to Guildhall Library in 1958.

12. At the last meeting of the Joint Grand Gresham Committee in October 2020, Members reiterated their commitment to a survey to assess the amount of work required to restore other parts of the Collection. Further to this, the Principal Librarian estimated that the amount of work required would be less than that required for the restoration of the Music Collection.
13. It was further advised that the survey would constitute part of the existing agreement with the London Metropolitan Archive and could therefore be undertaken at no cost to Gresham College, although there may be small ongoing costs plus that for any work to be undertaken.
14. Following the completion of the restoration of the Music Collection, focus turned to undertaking this survey. However, due to the current lockdown restrictions, the survey is unfortunately on hold, as no staff are currently based at Guildhall Library. As it is currently not clear when these restrictions will be lifted to the extent that staff are back on site, it is not yet clear when the survey can be resumed.
15. The Principal Librarian has confirmed that the survey will be carried out by the Head Conservator, at no cost to the College or the Gresham Committees as the cost can be covered as part of our service level agreement with the conservation team at the London Metropolitan Archives. As soon as is practicable, an estimate will be provided of the number of hours required to carry out the work, and the Gresham survey will be prioritised as staff return to the building.

### **Ongoing Maintenance**

16. 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.
17. 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**

18. 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.
19. Further to this, the Principal Librarian has kindly offered to host a visit to the Library for the Members of the Joint Grand Gresham Committee once it is practicable, so that Members can view the collection.
20. Although restoration activity in respect of the Gresham Music Collection has been completed, the ongoing restrictions in respect of COVID-19 continue to restrict activity in respect of the collections, although Members are invited to consider the options for such a time when they can be advanced.

### **Conclusion**

21. Members are asked to note the completion of the project 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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