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| Committee: | Date: |
| Gresham (City Side) Committee | 25 February 2022 |
| Joint Grand Gresham Committee | 25 February 2022 |
| Subject: Gresham Collection Conservation: Update on Restoration Activity | Public |
| Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly? | 7, 10 |
| Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending? | No (not at this stage) |
| If so, how much? | N/A |
| What is the source of Funding? | N/A |
| Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department? | N/A |
| Report of: Town Clerk | For Decision |
| Report authors: Peter Ross – Principal Librarian, Guildhall Library | |

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. 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 restoration and repair works.

The restoration works on the Music Collection have now been completed, as reported to your Committee in February 2021. At that meeting, Members expressed a desire to understand the likely costs and level of activity required to undertake similar restoration activity for the remainder of the Collection (more than 700 volumes of history, travel, biography and other items, dating from the sixteenth century onwards).

The Principal Librarian subsequently undertook a thorough survey to verify the condition of the items within the Collection and their suitability for display and consultation, as well as an estimate of costs associated with any repair and restoration activities. This was reported to your Committee in October 2021, where Members suggested that greater information was required and asked that a report be brought back to its February 2022 meeting. This report subsequently discharges this duty and responds to queries raised, while also proposing a way forward through discussion with the College to consider more holistically its views and assessment of the Collection, so as to inform next steps.

Recommendation

That Gresham College be approached with a view to establishing a small Working Group, supported by the Principal Librarian, to identify its views on the status of the collection and inform next steps.

Main Report

Background

1. The Gresham 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. Around one-third of the items in the Collection are music pieces and were for the most part collected together by Edward Taylor, who was appointed Gresham Professor of Music in 1837. This portion of the Collection (known as the Gresham Music Collection) contains the most historically significant and rare items. The remaining two-thirds (some 719 pieces) comprise various history, travel, biography, and other works.
3. In 1959, the City Corporation, in conjunction with The Worshipful Company of Mercers, formally agreed to be the custodian of the Collection, with any costs as deemed necessary to be executed by the Gresham Committee. The Collection is insured under the City Corporation's general insurance for library items (see: *report to Gresham (City Side) Committee, October 2015*).
4. Elements within the Music Collection were identified as in urgent need of restoration and repair and, as a consequence, 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. 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.
6. An experienced Book Conservator was appointed to repair and house the manuscripts from the Gresham Music Collection, with work commencing 17 September 2018 and completing Christmas 2020 (completion having been delayed due to COVID-19 related issues).
7. The completion was reported in February 2021, when Members expressed a desire to understand the likely costs and level of activity required to get the totality of the wider Collection into acceptable condition.
8. The Principal Librarian subsequently undertook a survey of the remainder of this Collection, which was presented for Members' review in October 2021. It is re-attached at Appendix 1 for the sake of completeness.

9. It was advised that, from the entire remaining Collection (of 719), 105 books had been identified as unfit for consultation / use, as this would cause further damage to the binding and the text-block. For the most part, damage was to the covers, spines, joints, and cap ends of the affected books.
10. To repair the identified 105 volumes would, it was estimated, require 16 months, employing a full-time conservator on a fixed-term contract (the 16 months including annual leave and potential sick leave of up to 10 days). The salary (including on-costs) for a suitably qualified Grade D conservator currently stood at £68,767. Cost for materials was estimated as £2,285 plus VAT, resulting in an overall estimated cost of £71,509.
11. At the October 2021 meeting, Members expressed a desire for further information on various matters and asked that the report come back to its next meeting, to provide the opportunity to probe the matter further with the Principal Librarian in attendance. Further information from the Principal Librarian is set out below in response to the queries raised, and he will also be present at the meeting to respond to other questions of detail.

Issues Raised and Further Information

12. At the October 2021 meeting, Members raised a number of queries, including the following points in particular:-
 - Noting there were 105 books which were unfit for consultation, Members expressed a desire to understand how important or rare they were, and what the demand for consultation might be (so as to understand the impact of delaying any restoration works).
 - A Member gave the example of Scott's Bible, which was one of the pictures in the report, observing it was neither an original binding nor a particularly rare book, so would cost more to repair than its value. It was asked if it would be possible to get an item-by-item breakdown of the 105 books, ideally with valuations attached and an indication of their importance or interest from a consultation standpoint, so as to allow for the prioritisation of activity if available funds were insufficient to fund the totality of restoration works.
 - Members also commented that there might be merit in exploring the disposal of some books in order to pay for the restoration of the rest, or perhaps donating some works away to other bodies who could then pay for the repairs. However, it was noted that the collection was only in the care of the JGGC and was actually owned by the College, so any determination of that nature would be a matter for them.
13. The Principal Librarian has since provided further information in relation to these queries as below:-

Unlike the Gresham music volumes none of these printed items are unique, nor even particularly rare. Their 'importance' is much more difficult to quantify. Most of these texts could be found in other major research libraries – The British Library for instance. But these are not public libraries. Guildhall Library is almost unique in being a local authority public library with material of this nature freely

available. That said, the demand for their consultation is likely to be low and the impact of delaying any restoration from this point of view would be minimal.

Their importance, however, is greatly increased by the fact that the volumes have, for more than 200 years, been part of a collection created for Gresham College. The collection reflects the research interests of former Gresham Professors, collectors and donors. Books will have evidence of ownership, provenance, binding styles and annotations that will be unique to these copies. They should be preserved as part of that collection; individual rarity, monetary value, current demand for consultation are mostly irrelevant. It is my professional opinion that it would be wrong to break the collection up by disposal and to make unnecessary value judgments that in the future might prove to have been misguided.

It is difficult to look at a book in isolation when it forms part of an historic collection. Scott's Bible may indeed cost more to conserve than its value on the open market. But this view ignores the fact it has historic value simply by being part of the Gresham Collection and should therefore be most highly valued by Gresham College itself.

It would be possible to create an item-by-item breakdown of market value, cost of conservation, interest from a consultation standpoint, and so on. However, the Gresham Collection in its entirety represents less than half of one percent of Guildhall Library's holdings. The amount of time that we can spend on assessing a collection that does not actually belong to the library is very limited. Indeed, over the last few years we have devoted more staff time to this collection than to any other deposited collection – for instance to the Clockmakers' Company Collection, the Gardener's Company Collection, the Fletchers' Company Collection, the Parish Clerks' Library, the Lloyds Marine Collection, Computer Audit Library, the Shorthand Collection, the Antiquarian Horological Society Collection, and the Institute of Masters of Wine Collection. In combination with all the collections we do own and the core London History Collection we care for more than 500,000 items. Unfortunately, there simply isn't the staff time to provide the information requested, particularly as we will shortly be 30% down on our pre-COVID staffing levels. I have, however, an alternative proposal to make.

An alternative proposal:

14. *Ultimately, the collection remains the property of Gresham College, administered by the Gresham College Council. Guildhall Library are the custodians of the collection and have been since 1958. I would like to propose that we call a halt to any further consideration of which items to conserve or not and instead begin to discuss the status of the collection. What fundamentally is the Gresham Library Collection? Is it an historic collection that reflects the College in the early 19th century or is at a living, growing collection and if so, what is its purpose? Perhaps the College should set up a small group to address these questions and, if it were considered useful, I would be happy to provide my assistance as a professional librarian.*
15. *In response to the Principal Librarian's comments, the College has provided the following input to the submission on the Gresham Collection: "the College Council and Executive would be interested in hearing JGGC's views on the*

proposals of the Head Librarian as the Committee and Council consider the longer-term future of the collection..."

Corporate & Strategic Implications

- **Financial Implications** – should the Principal Librarian's proposal be supported, there would be no direct financial implications at this stage. However, should Members wish to pursue the restoration of the full collection at a later date then, assuming the usual 50/50 allocation of costs between the Corporation and Mercers, this would equate to a minimum of £35,754.50 each (although this is likely to increase in line with inflationary pressures and so on as time progresses).
- **Resource Implications** – should the Principal Librarian's proposal be supported, the only direct resourcing implication for the City Corporation at this stage would be the Principal Librarian's time in supporting the College's Working Group.
- **Equalities Implications** – none.
- **Climate Implications** – none.
- **Risk Implications** – it is unlikely that any decision to not proceed with the restoration would cause the books to deteriorate further, although this would only be the case if the volumes are not produced for consultation or used in exhibitions (thereby limiting their utility from a research or educational perspective). There is, however, a risk that any delay in undertaking the works will lead to increased salary costs to complete the work in future, given inflationary pressures and the upwards trends of salaries in general.
- **Legal Implications** – none.

Conclusion

16. Having concluded restoration works to the Music portion of the Gresham Collection, the condition of the remainder of the Collection has now been assessed. Members, having noted the outcomes of the Principal Librarian's survey thereof, together with the estimated costs and activity required to undertake repair works, requested further information. This is now presented for Members' review, together with a proposal to ask the College to consider its own position in relation to the collection with a view to informing further steps.

Appendices

- **Appendix 1** – Gresham Collection Condition Report (Principal Librarian's Survey)

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