

IIC-ITCC 2017
'TEXTILE CONSERVATION' COURSE: CONCEPT AND CONTENT
13-23 November 2017

Introduction: The five-day component of the 2017 IIC-ITCC course looked at key principles and themes in the practice of textile conservation. What constitutes 'conservation' is wide-ranging and was analysed in conversation between the course team and the participants with the aim of enabling each participant to develop an understanding of conservation in terms of his or her national and institutional remit/s. The course combined presentations, hands-on activities, discussion and visits within the Palace Museum. The course took place in the excellent facilities provided by the newly built *Hospital for Conservation* with its purpose-built, state-of-the-art laboratories.



Left: participants walking to the *Hospital for Conservation*

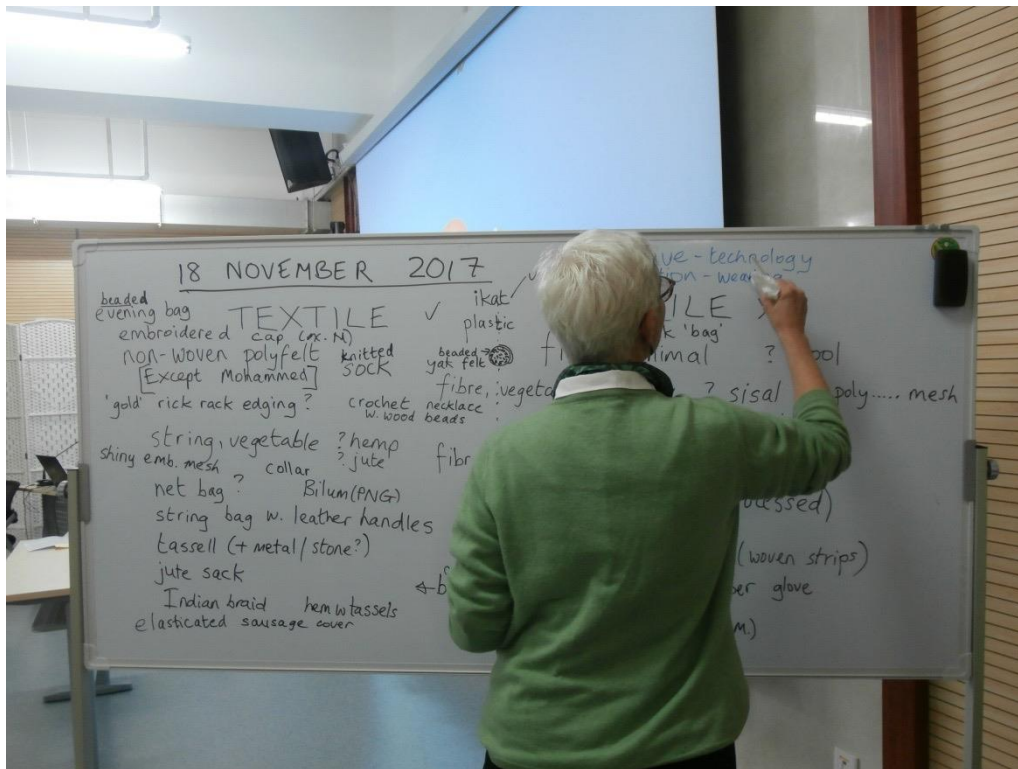
Right: participants in a lab tour to view textile collections of the Palace Museum

'Textile' as a Category: Understanding materials (fibres, dyes and finishes), and techniques of production, is fundamental to conservation practice. Museum collections are no longer restricted to natural materials (such as silk, wool, cotton and linen); the collections, and/or the materials used to store and display them, will include natural, man-made and synthetic materials. Commonly found components include gelatine sequins, polyurethane foam padding, metal fastenings and baleen ('whalebone'). The Latin root of the word textile (meaning 'to weave') would appear to restrict textiles to woven structures and therefore exclude non-woven fibrous constructions, such as felt, and single thread techniques such as knitting. The term 'cloth' is useful in encompassing non-woven techniques, such as felting, plaiting, knitting, sprang, tatting, bobbin-lace and net-making techniques. The characteristic (defining) properties of textiles were explored; they are often mixed media. planar, pliable and drape;

many are fibre/filament-based, and often formed from long threads made from spinning (and then plying) fibres/filaments.

Reference:

Collingwood, P. 1987. *The Maker's Hand. A Close Look at Textile Structures*. Ashford: Bellew.



Dr Dinah Eastop leading a class exercise to characterise 'textiles', in order to highlight the huge diversity in materials and techniques.



Using microscopy to examine a cloth with metallic threads

Object Biography: We can learn a lot about an object (and the person telling us about the object) by adopting the 'biographical' model proposed by Kopytoff; he argued that "biographies of things can make salient [obvious] what might otherwise remain obscure" (1986:67). "In doing the biography of a thing, one would ask the questions similar to those one asks about people" (Kopytoff 1986:66), e.g. asking about recognised stages in its 'life', its origins, its names. Object biographies are of two types: biographies of actual objects or biographies of a type of object. Curatorial and conservation decisions tend to privilege certain stages in an object's biography over other stages. The case studies included: a toy 'panda bear'; the Chippendale bed cornice preserved at Temple Newsam House, UK; the 'Morton 'cope' (a reconfigured medieval vestment).

“Biographies of things can make salient what might otherwise remain obscure.”

(Kopytoff 1986: 67)

Conclusion - Object 'biographies'

are useful because they

- help us to **understand** what stage in an object's life we are studying, recording, representing and conserving
- help us to **think** about:
 - * how things are made (materials and technique)
 - * where they were made and used
 - * why they are in poor or good condition
 - * how their significance varies

References:

Kopytoff, I. 1986. The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process. In: A. Appadurai (ed) *The Social Life of Things. Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. Cambridge University Press, 64-91.

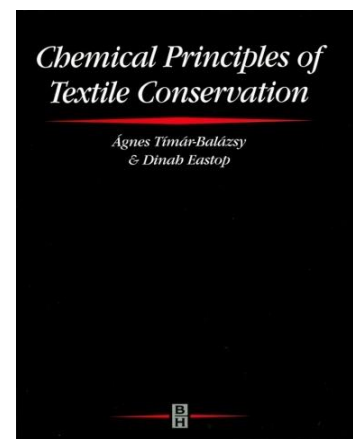
Eastop, D. and Brooks, M.M. 1996. To clean or not to clean: the value of soils and creases. In: Bridgland, J. ed. *Preprints of the 11th Triennial Meeting of ICOM's Committee for Conservation, Edinburgh*. London: James and James, 2: 687-691.

Eastop, D. and Morris, B. 2010. Fit for a princess? Material culture and the conservation of Grace Kelly's wedding dress. In: F. Lennard and P. Ewer (eds) *Textile Conservation: Recent Advances*. Oxford: Elsevier, 76-84.

Improving storage: Secure, well-organised, well-managed and accessible storage is the basis of effective preventive conservation and collection care. This session looked at some of the underlying principles and explored different practices for different types of textiles and dress. Underlying principles and standards were discussed together with appropriate materials and techniques as well as approaches to accessible storage. This was followed by a hands-on session planning storage approaches for a range of flat and three-dimensional historical textiles and dress elements, some in a severely degraded and fragile condition.

Reference:

Tímár-Balázs, Á. and D. Eastop. 1998 (reprinted 1999, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2007, 2011). 'Storage and display materials' (Chapter 20) and the following case studies (Chapter 21). In: Á. Tímár-Balázs and D. Eastop, *Chemical Principles of Textile Conservation*, Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 332-378.



A small group exercise with participants discussing ways to store vulnerable textiles and dress

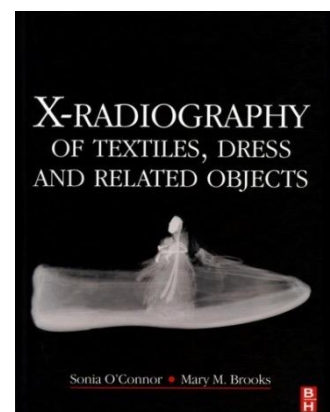


Preventive conservation at The Palace Museum: padded door covers being fitted to external doors of an exhibition building.

X-radiography of textiles: X-radiography has long been used to examine non-textile elements in historic dress and mixed media artefacts such as metal threads on embroideries. In the late 20th century, systematic study was undertaken into the production of useful radiographic images of textile threads and structures themselves. This session explored the history of using radiography to examine textiles and outlined procedures for producing effective textile radiographs. Case studies included English quilts and 17th century embroideries as well as archaeological textiles and internal features such as 'bones' (baleen) in European women's dress and fillings including cotton, wool and feathers.

Reference:

O'Connor, S. A. and Brooks, M. M. 2007. *X-radiography of Textiles, Dress and Related Objects*. Oxford: Elsevier, 336pp.



Online delivery for enhanced conservation and access: In the UK, the archive sector has led the way in enhancing public access to collections via online access, while promoting long-term preservation of collections. This presentation introduced a huge set of design records: the Board of Trade Representations and Registers of Designs, 1839-1991, held at The National Archives [of the UK government]. They contain records of 3 million designs, registered by proprietors worldwide (mostly UK and mainland Europe). This registration scheme encouraged investment in design by enabling copyright control over both ornamental and useful designs, for a wide range of materials and products. Many textile designs are represented by samples of cloth or artefacts (gloves, kerchiefs, bonnets). Online access to the text records was enhanced when more than 600,000 text records were made available, free-of-charge, via the archive's website. Polynomial texture maps (PTM) were used to enable user-friendly study of textiles and other textured surfaces.



Dr Dinah Eastop introducing online delivery as a way to enhance both conservation and access.

References:

<http://blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk/blog/new-light-on-old-seals/>

Eastop, D., Buelow, A.E. and Brokerhof, A.W. 2012. Design, Digitisation, Discovery: Enhancing Collection Quality. *Studies in Conservation* 57:96-102. [IIC Vienna Congress 2012: The Decorative: Conservation and the Applied Arts.]

Eastop, D. 2016. New ways of engagement: interactive images online. *Textile History* 47(1):83-92.

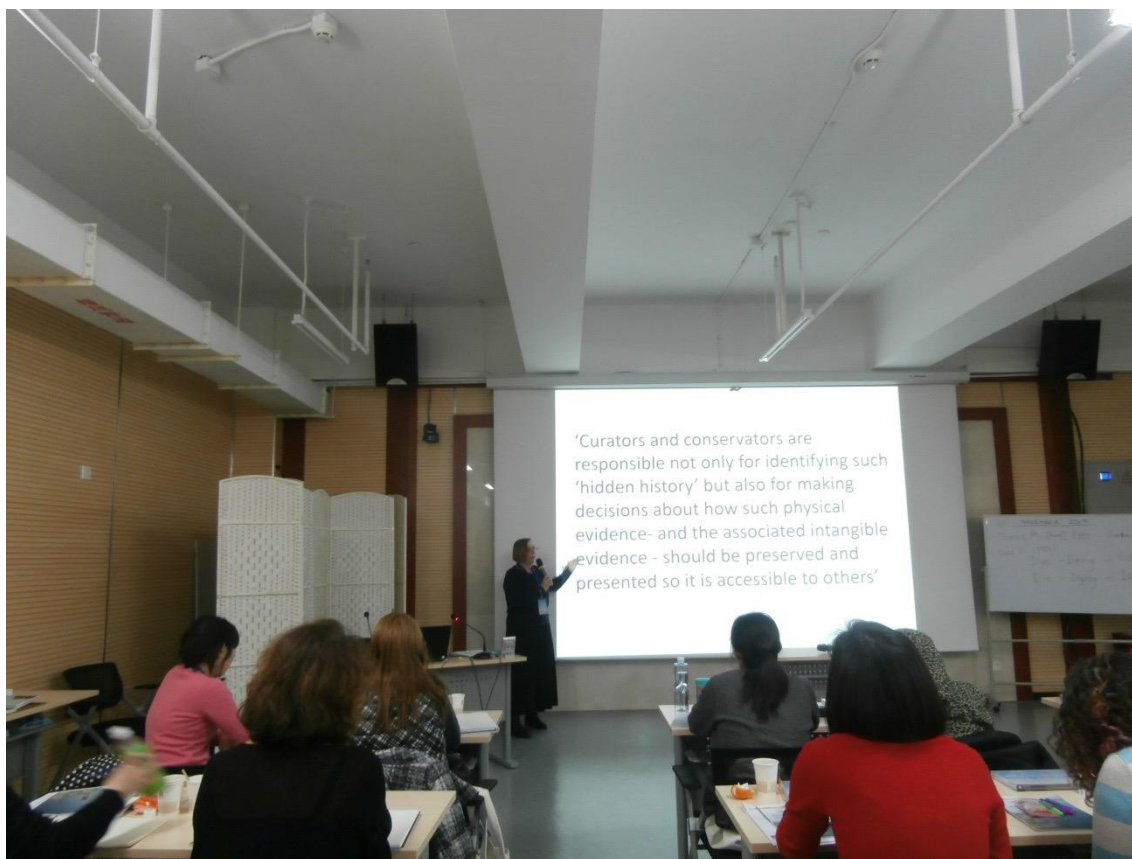
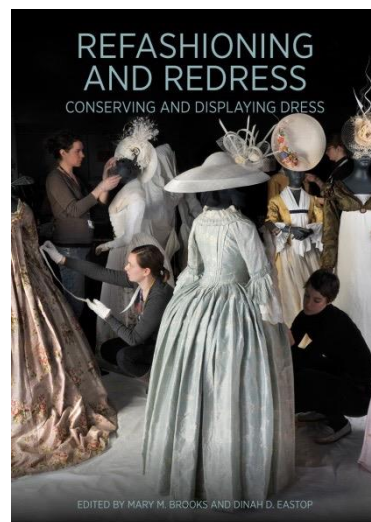
Conservation and display as refashioning: Conservation influences the presentation of collections, including how dress is displayed and perceived by visitors. The physical realisation of exhibition narratives often arises from 'behind-the-scenes' processes and so the role of conservation in creating these stories and interpretations is seldom recognised. This session discussed the explicit and implicit implication of displaying garments in museums and the role of conservation is this complex intellectual and physical process. It focused particularly on the conservation and exhibition of garments worn by known individuals and how evidence of the altered state of a garment is highlighted or suppressed in an exhibition's chosen narrative.

References:

Bayer, A. 2016. Preserving and displaying archaeological garments via pressure-mounting. In: Brooks, M.M. and Eastop, D.D. (eds) *Refashioning and Redress: Conserving and Displaying Dress*. Los Angeles: GCI, 79-92.

Brooks, M.M. and Eastop, D. D. (eds) 2016. *Refashioning and Redress. Conserving and Displaying Dress*. Los Angeles: GCI.

Brooks, M. M. 2016. Reflecting absence and presence: displaying dress of known individuals. In: M.M. Brooks and D.D. Easton (eds). *Refashioning and Redress: Conserving and Displaying Dress*. Los Angeles: GCI, 19-32.



Dr Mary Brooks giving a lecture on conservation and display as refashioning

Conservation as redress: Conservation responds to change and preserves what is considered important. Interventions will vary with time and context. This session explored how conservation influences both the appearance and the use of collections. The renewal of making and wearing practices, as well as the preservation of artefacts, was examined. Contact with historic artefacts inspired a revival in the making and wearing of possum-skin cloaks in southern Australia. Recent work in New Zealand has demonstrated that museums and conservation practices can be used to articulate and to embody alternatives to colonial histories, and to restore customary knowledge with their communities of origin

References:

Atkinson, H. L., Couzens, V., Darroch, L., Grieves, G., Hamilton, S., Jones-Amin, H., Nicholson, M. and Reynolds, A. 2016. "Wrapped in Country". Conserving and representing possum-skin cloaks as in/tangible heritage. In: M. M. Brooks and D.D. Eastop (eds) *Refashioning and Redress. Conserving and Displaying Dress*. Los Angeles: GCI, 49-64.

Brooks, M.M. and Eastop, D.D. (eds) 2011. *Changing Views of Textile Conservation*. Los Angeles: GCI. 658pp.

Te Kanawa, R., Tamarapa, A. and Peranteau, A. 2016. *Kahu Ora. Living Cloaks, Living Culture*. In: M.M. Brooks and D. D. Eastop (eds) *Refashioning and Redress. Conserving and Displaying Dress*. Los Angeles: GCI, 65-78.



Participants discussing a small-group assignment.

Case studies in conserving Chinese and Southeast Asian textiles: The recent rise in popularity of Chinese and Southeast Asian textiles has fuelled by landmark exhibitions and learned publications. Challenges include the maintenance and display of private collections and more recently, the identification of facsimiles, which makes it even more important for conservators to be familiar with technologies behind the creation of valued textiles. Preparing textiles for display is amongst the most time-consuming tasks any conservator undertakes. The importance of preserving the conservators is also important and ways to reduce risks and to minimise discomfort were introduced. [Details of this lecture are given in a separate pdf document]



Diana Collins presenting case studies in mounting and display of textiles and dress.