It has been a wonderful year for the Cultural Collections Projects Program with many students and volunteers achieving great results on projects across the University’s collections. Ably supported by collections staff and academics, they have had the opportunity to work closely with these rich collections, be introduced to issues involved in their management and develop their vocational skills. As well as their individual project placements, volunteers have participated in professional development opportunities through attendance at training sessions and seminars. Beyond the obvious benefits of skills acquisition, the at times transformative nature of these projects should also be recognized. Several times this year I have had conversations with students who have revealed that as a result of their placement with a collection, they have decided to refocus their area of study or pursue a new interest about which they previously had little knowledge. This is an inspiring result.

Through this Program, I am often struck by how generous students and volunteers are with their time – most have jam-packed schedules between study, work and other commitments, and yet they still manage to find the time to commit wholeheartedly to a project. I think that enthusiasm stands both as a testimony to their drive and determination and to the enduring appeal of the University’s cultural collections which are an ongoing source of inspiration and discovery.

A closer look at the students volunteers and projects...

This year 46 students and volunteers have worked on projects with the cultural collections: they have catalogued, researched, phase-boxed, brush vacuumed, curated, interpreted, developed outreach activities, sorted, stabilised, listed, inventoried, documented, significance assessed, surveyed, installed, measured, rehoused and photographed a great number of collection items. Project placements have been across the University with the Physics Museum, Harry Brookes Allen Museum of Anatomy and Pathology, Henry Forman Atkinson Dental Museum, Medical History Museum, Special Collections, Baillieu Library Print Collection, University of Melbourne Archives, Louise Hanson Dyer Music Library, East Asian Collection, Rare and Historic Map Collection, Creswick Campus Historical Collection, Ian Potter Museum of Art, Grainger Museum, Herbarium and the Classics and Archaeology Collection. That’s quite a rollcall! While it is not possible to go into their individual achievements in detail, what follows is an introduction to the students and volunteers who have worked so enthusiastically on projects throughout the year.

The Medical History Museum hosted several volunteers this year on a variety of interesting projects. Masters of Art Curatorship student Sarah Barrow enjoyed her project cataloguing, photographing and allocating to storage objects in the collection. Erin Mathews, also studying Art Curatorship and Jennifer McFarland studying for her Bachelor of Arts (History/Ancient World Studies) worked as curatorial assistants on the exhibition Strength of Mind: 125 Years of Women in Medicine which was received with much acclaim. Masters of Cultural Materials Conservation student Meredith Freeman applied her skills to a rehousing and relocation project with the recently acquired Psychology Collection. Meredith reported that she found the time she spent working with the intriguing objects in the collection to be a challenging and satisfying experience.

Meanwhile at the Henry Forman Atkinson Dental Museum, Kerrie Farnsworth studying Museum Studies (Deakin), has been working on a cataloguing project with a teaching collection of large, colour coded models of Australian marsupial molars. Created in the Dental School in the 1920s-1930s, the models are made of gypsum, paint and wood and once catalogued will be accessible through the Museum’s database.

The Baillieu Library Print Collection hosted four volunteers to work with its impressive collection this year. Masters of Art Curatorship students Ellen Bradley, Marguerite Brown and Gloria Folino explored different aspects of the collection in their projects. Ellen recently commenced as a catalogue assistant, Marguerite worked as a research assistant and investigated an old master drawing in the collection about which little was known, while Gloria focused on the compilation of exhibition narratives. For his project, Bachelor of Arts (Art History) student Anatol Pitt wrote narratives for the upcoming print exhibition catalogue. All have relished the opportunity to work with this splendid collection and to add to the existing body of knowledge.

The Physics Museum had two volunteers working on their ongoing cataloguing project. Danielle Woodward studying for her Masters in Cultural Materials Conservation joined graduate conservator Stephanie Smith to assist in the cataloguing, photographing and researching of the collection. Over the past couple of months they have worked their way through galvanometers, optical instruments...
and many more curious objects in an effort to ensure that this fascinating collection is more accessible to students, academics and the general public.

This year Special Collections hosted four students on a range of projects. Jessica Finlay a Masters of Information Management (RMIT) student undertook a cataloguing placement. For her project, she worked with the English Room collection updating the catalogue and helping in the organisation of the texts housed there. Kylie King studying for her Bachelor of Arts (Honours, Art History) assisted in the early stages of the exhibition *Libri! Six centuries of Italian Books* held during the middle of the year. Anna Bagshaw a Masters of Information Management student (Charles Sturt University) completed extensive research on the Medical Rare Books Collection which will be used to inform an upcoming significance assessment. Lastly, Masters of Cultural Materials Conservation student Kate Hodgetts has recently commenced her project with the Artists’ Books Collection which will see her rehousing and listing these beautiful books and their associated archives.

Bachelor of Arts and Diploma of Languages (Honours) student Hannah Gould’s placement on a preventative conservation project last year with the East Asian Collection has inspired a special curatorial project. Hannah is currently developing an exhibition entitled *Reverberations* which will utilise the Great Kanto Earthquake materials and other collection items from the rare materials in the East Asian Collection. *Reverberations* is scheduled for the second half of 2014 and will feature in the redeveloped Leigh Scott Gallery exhibition space.

This year the interesting projects offered at the Harry Brookes Allen Museum of Anatomy and Pathology captured the imagination of four students, all of whom were keen to apply their excellent research skills to the collections. Masters of Art Curatorship student Dominique van de Klundert has been exploring the theme of ‘Phrenology and the University’ using the Museum’s death mask collection as a starting point. She has found the interdisciplinary approach of the project so rewarding that it has influenced her future work and study directions! Continuing on the research theme, and also completing her Masters of Art Curatorship Anneliese Milk, has been investigating the history of the ‘Flute boy’ skeleton held in the Museum. She has generated some very interesting findings which have enabled the history and context of this unique artefact to be more fully understood. Similar to Dominique, Anneliese has found her project work at the HBA Museum to have been influential in future career options. Master of Information Management (RMIT) student Patrick Splawa-Neyman has been researching the collection of late 19th and early 20th century His-Steger anatomical models held in the Museum, while Fine Arts graduate Meagan Down has commenced a significance assessment project on a recently identified life-size Auzoux papier-mâché anatomical anatomical models. Once completed, her report will provide a wider context for viewing the model and understanding of its place within the history of the University.

The University of Melbourne Archives hosted 11 volunteers and students from varied backgrounds on projects over the year. Three students, Charmaine Ching (Master of Arts and Cultural Management), Alice Mathieu (Master of Art Curatorship) and Jeremy McEachern (Master of Cultural Heritage, Deakin) worked together on an exhibition at the George Paton Gallery entitled *Creativity & Correspondence: The George Paton Gallery Archive 1971-1990*. The exhibition explored key relationships between artists, directors and the creative process. For their project Charmaine, Alice and Jeremy immersed themselves in the collections at Archives selecting correspondence, photographs, slides, catalogues, early video art, posters and annual reports to feature in the exhibition. They also assisted in the installation of this material in the gallery space achieving a visually striking result. Hannah Gwyther, a Masters of Art Curatorship student (Melbourne), continued her project work with the Fine Arts Department Collection, appraising, listing and documenting the records of Joseph Burke. Participating in a more ‘traditional’ archival project, Moyra McAllister continued her project work identifying details that relate to the acquisition, ownership and access conditions of early UMA files from the business collections. Meanwhile, Barbary Clarke, Jean Taylor and Ardy Tibby have continued processing the items in the Victorian Women’s Liberation and Lesbian Feminist Archives. Stuart Moffat, studying for a Masters of Information Management (RMIT), undertook a ‘General Work experience’ placement where he has been listing, auditing and rehousing the UoM Jubilee material and Shell Pty Ltd Collections. Masters of Cultural Heritage (Deakin) student Shane Talia has been working on an archival documentation project with the AMP Collection. Lastly, Bob Appleyard continued with his archival documentation project where he has been applying his in depth knowledge of the mining sector to related collections.

Volunteers have also worked with the Grainger Museum’s extensive collections this year. Bachelor of Arts student Naomi Beck commenced a preventative conservation project with the John Harry Grainger scrapbooks which contain architectural prints, engravings and articles compiled by this important architect. The scrapbooks were in a fragile state and through her project, Naomi conservation cleaned and rehoused them to help ensure that the important historical information they contain was preserved.
Melinda Barrie studying for her Masters of Cultural Heritage (Deakin) has been working as a catalogue assistant with the fascinating collection of Ella Grainger correspondence held within the museum.

Continuing the music theme, the Louise Hanson Dyer Music Library hosted two volunteers on projects this year. Bachelor of Arts (Art History) student Cathleen Rosier and Anna O’Regan enrolled in a Master of Cultural Heritage (Deakin) both had a strong interest in music and worked together on a preventative conservation project involving two fragile orchestral manuscripts from the Rare Materials Collection. After training in object handling and conservation cleaning, Cathleen and Anna applied these newly developed skills to Meyerbeer’s Les Huguenots and L’Africaine ensuring the historical information that they contained was preserved and accessible to future users.

Bachelor of Arts students Imogen Dixon-Smith and Matthew Ducza continued with a preventative conservation project for the atlases in the Rare and Historic Maps Collection. The phase boxes they custom-made for the atlases will see the collection better protected from environmental variations and thus contribute to their long term preservation.

Emily Keppel, Master of Cultural Materials Conservation student and recipient of the 2013 Museums and Collections Award, has been honing her conservation skills on a preventative conservation project at the Herbarium. The project involves rehousing the Breidahl Moss Collection, a collection of approximately 500 historic moss specimens. Also studying for her Masters in Materials Conservation, Meg Ellis rehoused the drawings in the Harry J. Swart Collection which relate to leaf-inhabiting fungi. Once she had rehoused the specimens to archival standards, Meg created a basic catalogue spreadsheet to aid in the ongoing management of the collection.

Anne Faithfull, studying for her Masters in Museums Studies (Macquarie University) recently completed a significance assessment on the Cresswick Campus Historical Collection. Through the project which commenced late last year, Anne became well acquainted with this unique collection of photographs, herbarium specimens, teaching aids, wood specimens and archival documents. Her completed assessment has enabled the collection to be officially endorsed by the Executive Committee as one of the University’s cultural collections – an excellent result.

The Ian Potter Museum of Art hosted three students on two projects this year. The first project saw Master of Cultural Materials Conservation student Sarah Boundy work on a photographic and inventory project with the Edith Alsop Collection. Meanwhile Colleen Chen a Master of Arts and Cultural Management student and Elizabeth Kulas studying for her Bachelor of Arts (Honours, Art History), very much enjoyed their assignment with the Gerard Herbst Poster Collection which involved cataloguing and researching this important collection of international graphic art.

Three volunteers have recently commenced a placement on a project with the Classics and Archaeology Collection. Mem Capp (Graduate Diploma Museum and Heritage Studies, Deakin), Rebecca Clifton (Bachelor of Arts, Ancient World Studies and Linguistics) and Amy Walsh (Bachelor of Arts, Ancient World Studies and Art History) have joined forces to work on an upcoming exhibition entitled 100 Objects which will showcase artefacts from the Classics and Archaeology collections. Working closely with Classics and Archaeology curator Andrew Jamieson, Mem, Rebecca and Amy will use the selected objects to highlight stories from the collection. All are very much looking forward to apply their love of history to this exciting exhibition project which will be on show at the Potter in the second half of 2014.

Museums and Collections Award 2013

In August of this year the Cultural Collections Unit had the pleasure in welcoming University of Birmingham student Chloë Lund as the UK recipient of the 2013 Museums and Collections Award. Having just completed her Bachelor of Arts (Art History), the Award provided Chloë with an opportunity to develop her collection management skills in an international context through working with Melbourne’s cultural collections and museums. During her time here, Chloë was exposed to many aspects of collections work. Through specially designed projects across several of the collections, she achieved great outcomes which will have many ongoing benefits for Chloë and the collections. Below Chloë reflects on her month-long placement at Melbourne and what the experience meant to her.

The award encouraged me to explore and develop my existing skills and interests in museums and collections work. I was thrilled, upon being informed of the main projects to see that my experiences and interests had clearly been taken into consideration. My project with the Baillieu Library Print Collection, for example, was to research and write the narratives for three prints that are to be included in a touring exhibition next year. This presented me with the opportunity to utilise the analytical skills that I acquired through my art history degree in a professional environment.

My interest in cultural engagement and communication was incorporated through my project with the Cultural Collections Projects Unit (CCPU). Here, I was asked to devise an activity that would introduce students to the University’s collections. I began by producing a report that combined primary and secondary research with my own experiences of student engagement in museums and collections, in both...
the UK and Melbourne. Coming up with a proposal for the activity, I was given a level of creative freedom, which was a real boost to my confidence; whilst discussing my progress with my supervisors provided me with valuable feedback and support.

A project at the Ian Potter Museum of Art included accessioning, handling and producing condition reports for a recent gift of ten large photographic prints and paintings, as well as a newly commissioned sculpture on campus. I also sat in on exhibition planning meetings, and learnt about a number of the museum policies and procedures implemented at the Potter. As well as building on my existing experiences and interests, the programme was designed to introduce me to a number of less familiar areas. On a visit to the University’s Herbarium, I learnt about the specific issues and practices needed to manage botanical collections…. At the University of Melbourne Archives, I gained an understanding of their organisational systems: I saw how on a large scale, organisation must be consistent and rigorous to make items accessible, whilst within smaller collections, other considerations such as preserving ‘original order’, may take priority. As a result, I found myself reflecting on the storage and organisational systems of material at the University of Birmingham’s Research and Cultural Collections (RCC) and the RBSA Gallery.

The work I did at the Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation (CCMC) was the aspect of the award that I was least experienced in, and accordingly, the area of my understanding that underwent the greatest transformation. Prior to the exchange, my experience of conservation came from working in museum and gallery collections, where the idea of minimal contact with the objects had become ingrained in me. At CCMC, I gained hands-on experience of a number of active conservation techniques – most incredibly (and initially, terrifyingly), applying spots of bleach onto a stain left on a print by an acidic mount. The team of experienced conservators at CCMC taught me a lot about the science and art of object conservation, as well as demonstrating the importance of initiative when it comes to object handling. My interest in this work prompted me to attend a research seminar hosted by the University’s conservation department, where I was fascinated to see examples of scientific analysis informing art history, criticism and curatorship.

The award also offered me the freedom to pursue my own interests independently, imbuing me with an all-important sense that I was responsible for shaping my own experience. Thursdays were set aside as a free day, on which I was able to make appointments to visit other people or places in the University or the city that I was particularly interested in. These self-led excursions and meetings provided positive experiences of networking - something that I had previously viewed with fear. In my free time, I also enjoyed the rich culture of the city of Melbourne, still armed with a critical eye and a notepad! I received an education in Australian art; was blown away by my first experiences of Aboriginal art, (as well as intrigued to consider its presentation in the context of social, political and historic attitudes); and was captivated by the unique curatorial style of the Ian Potter Museum and MONA, Tasmania. It probably goes without saying that as well as being one of the most intensive periods of learning that I have ever experienced, my visit to Australia was also one of the most enjoyable.

Returning to the UK, I have felt the advantages of the award almost as acutely as I did whilst I was in Melbourne. The placement developed my understanding, skills and confidence in a number of areas of collections work, which have proved to be beneficial to my work....I was amazed by the extent to which my expectations of the Award and its benefits have been realised, and indeed exceeded. I hope this report demonstrates my enthusiastic support for the partnership between the University of Birmingham and the University of Melbourne, as well as my gratitude to both for granting me this opportunity.

More details on Chloë’s stay at Melbourne can be found on her blog at http://melbirm-exchange2013.blogspot.com.au/

Following on from Chloë’s visit, Emily Keppel the Melbourne recipient of the Museums and Collections Award, will be venturing off to the UK in January to immerse herself in the collections, museums and culture of the University of Birmingham. Emily is looking forward to acquainting herself with the Birmingham campus and exploring the many cultural offerings of the city. While there Emily is planning to catch up with past UK recipients of the Award Katy Wade (Award recipient 2010) and Emily Millward (Award recipient 2012). Katy is currently working at SAMPAD a dynamic development agency for South Asian Arts based in Birmingham. In her role as project coordinator she works with local community groups collecting oral histories, objects and researching the local area. Emily is in the final stages of her PhD in Egyptology and is working at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust where she is involved with the day to day management of the museum’s collections. Of course Emily will also be welcomed to Birmingham by Chloë, so she will have some excellent insider knowledge on what to see and do in the city! We wish Emily a wonderful safe trip, and a blog of her stay will be available on our website in coming months so stay tuned....

With so much activity during the year it is easy to get caught up in day to day activities. However, from time to time it is useful to step back from this flurry of activity and think more broadly about the students, the volunteers and the collections themselves. The cultural collections around the campus are a testimony to the history of the University and the people who have studied, taught and worked here. Each participant in this Program who invests their time, energy and enthusiasm with a collection becomes part of this shared history. Through this meeting a charmed exchange often takes place where hopefully a little bit of this magic will linger with each volunteer long after they have moved on to other ventures. Thank you to all who participated in and supported this ‘magic’ throughout the year, I wish you a Merry Christmas and all the best for the New Year.

Helen Arnoldi
Cultural Collections Projects Coordinator
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