

# The Baillieu Library Conservation Project

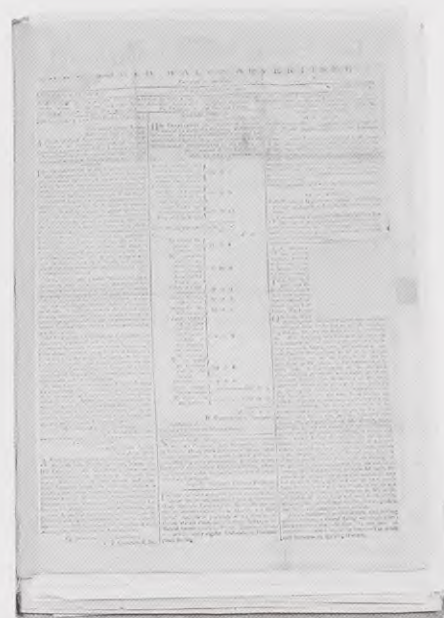
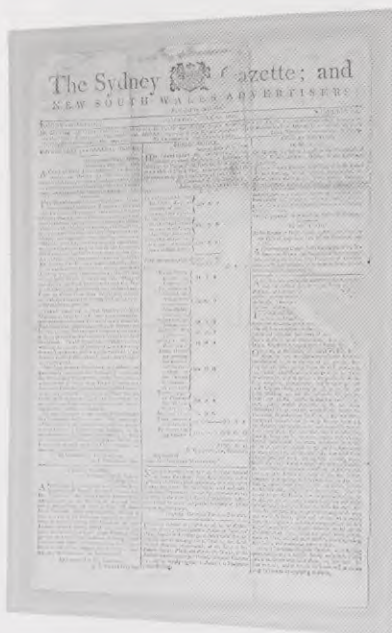
BY PIP MORRISON AND LOUISE WILSON

A project is under way to conserve selected material from the Baillieu Library's Special Collections. Previous assessments have highlighted some conservation requirements of the collections. More recently, a conservation survey of these valuable and significant collections has identified more than eight million dollars worth of immediate conservation treatment needs. Significance assessments of items and collections were carried out. These identified which objects and collections should receive first priority for treatment. This process was also informed by the recent valuations of the Special Collections.

The Baillieu Library Conservation Project, running from 2002 to 2003, is being undertaken by staff from the University Library and the University of Melbourne Conservation Service. In particular the project focuses on the Australiana Collection, the Morgan Collection of Children's Books, the Grimwade Collection, the Rare Books Collection and the Middle Eastern Manuscript Collection.

## Australiana Collection

In 2002, a major item of significance from the Australiana Collection was treated using funds donated by the Friends of the Baillieu Library. The item sponsored by the Friends is a volume consisting of pages from 19th century Sydney and Tasmanian newspapers, and single sheet documents such as Tasmanian convict forms, police warrants and handwritten correspondence by George McArthur.<sup>1</sup> The individual items in the volume were either tipped into the binding or pasted down to pages of a scrapbook of late



These photographs show a 19th century newspaper, *The Sydney Gazette*, before and after repairs were made with Japanese tissue. (Australiana, Special Collections.)

19th or early 20th century manufacture. The items nearly all had gummed paper tape repairs, showed signs of insect damage and were acidic. The proposed treatment involved removing old tape repairs, washing the paper items to remove acidic products and repairing tears with Japanese tissue and wheat starch paste.

To perform these treatment steps, it was necessary to remove the individual items from the binding and treat them separately. Removal of the items resulted in a change in the form of the object, and the ethical implications of this needed to be considered. Further research determined that the items housed within the volume were donated to the Library in single sheet form in 1903, and that the Library bound them in 1908. The scrapbook format is significant to the items in that it shows

how the Library treated materials at that time, but it is not the original form in which the items were donated to the Library. On consultation with the Curator of Special Collections, Ian Morrison, it was decided that the items would be removed from the binding, treated individually and encapsulated. To preserve the historical context and integrity of the item as a whole, a box was custom made to house the empty scrapbook and the individual objects in the order in which they were bound.

## Morgan Collection of Children's Books

The Morgan Collection is one of Australia's most significant collections of children's books and contains a number of volumes not identified in any other collections in the world. It consists

of about 4000 volumes of children's books, mostly published in England in the 18th and 19th centuries. A conservation survey carried out by the University of Melbourne Conservation Service in 1995 and 1996 estimated that approximately 600 to 800 of the children's books required archival packaging. The boxing of selected books from the collection commenced in 2002. Items of significance within the collection are being identified as part of this process and highlighted for future conservation work. With the assistance of several volunteers, the boxing program is ongoing.

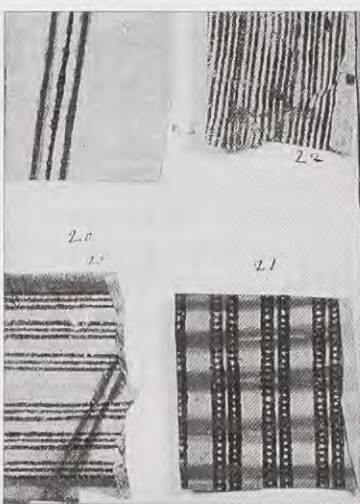
## Grimwade Collection

Alexander Shaw's *A Catalogue of the Different Specimens of Cloth Collected in the Three Voyages of Captain Cook, to the Southern Hemisphere*, 1787, is an irreplaceable volume from the Grimwade Collection. The volume contains 43 samples of tapa cloth, typed accounts of their manufacture and some anecdotes of the voyages. The volume is in good condition and only required minor treatment, which was undertaken in 2002.

Research into the origins of the tapa specimens commenced in 2002. The importance of items collected on Cook's voyages often lies in the fact that his expeditions were the first to make extensive contact with the local inhabitants, and as a result, the objects collected on the voyages are relatively free from European influence. The Shaw volume in the Grimwade Collection is highly significant because the tapa samples it contains represent an archaeological cut-off point in terms of tapa manufacture in the Pacific region. Fabrics traded by Cook and his men influenced decorative elements used on tapa and methods of manufacture were influenced by the introduction of European tools, technology and ideas.<sup>2</sup> The level of change between voyages would have been noticeable, so as part of the research currently being undertaken, attempts are being made to



Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotlande and Irelande*, 1577, being disbound before major conservation treatment can commence. (Rare Books, Special Collections.)



Examples of tapa cloth which appear in Alexander Shaw's *A Catalogue of the Different Specimens of Cloth Collected in the Three Voyages of Captain Cook, to the Southern Hemisphere*, 1787. (Grimwade Collection, Special Collections.)

determine on which voyage the specimens were collected, as well as their islands of origin.

Research to date has involved looking at other copies of the Shaw volume held by the State Library of Victoria, the National Library of Australia, the National Gallery of Australia and the Mitchell Library in Sydney. While these copies have the same introduction and list of specimens as the Grimwade Collection copy, the tapa samples are quite different from volume to volume. Initially, analysis of fibres and plant-based dyes was considered the most suitable method of

determining the origin of the samples. However, with the discovery that most of the plants used would have been widespread due to the spread of seeds by ocean currents, determining origin on stylistic grounds appears to be the most promising approach.

Tapa and plant specialists from a range of institutions including the Amy B.H. Greenwell Ethnobotanical Garden at Bishop Museum in Hawaii, the Economic Museum at Kew Gardens in London, the Auckland Museum, the Melbourne Museum, the Royal Botanic Gardens in Melbourne and the Smithsonian Institution in Washington have provided information which has led to the identification of approximately 20 of the samples to date.

## Rare Books Collection

The first volume of the *Chronicles of England, Scotlande and Irelande*, written by Raphael Holinshed and printed in 1577, is a highly significant item in the Rare Books Collection. The *Chronicles* are printed on handmade, antique-laid paper. The paper is made from predominantly linen fibres, probably sourced from rags, and a watermark of a gloved hand with a five-rayed star features on many of the pages. Similar watermarks have been identified in a number of historic texts including William Caxton's 1477 edition of Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. The text is printed in English Gothic type with woodcut illustrations of battles and other historic events and figures. The Baillieu Library copy is believed to be the only copy of this particular imprint in Australia. Shakespeare used this illustrated edition and the second edition as references for his historical plays such as *King Lear* and *Macbeth*.

The Holinshed is in extremely fragile condition and access has been restricted because handling will cause further damage. When the condition of the volume was first assessed, it was noted that the text block had separated from the case and the sewing had



Before and after conservation photographs of a children's primer: *Peter Piper's Practical Principles of Plain and Perfect Pronunciation: to which is added, a collection of moral and entertaining conundrums*, London, John Harris, c. 1820. (Morgan Collection, Special Collections.)

broken down. The volume appeared to have undergone at least two restoration campaigns and there was no evidence of original sewing thread. The edges of the pages were badly torn, and the paper was discoloured and brittle.

Treatment of the *Holinshed Chronicles* commenced in 2002 and is ongoing. To facilitate full treatment, the volume was disbound. Although no original sewing remained, sewing thread and paper guards added during previous restorations were thoroughly documented prior to removal and have been retained. During this process a wide variety of materials were found caught in the sewing, including small stones, plant material and feathers.

Since treatment commenced, all pages have been dry-cleaned to remove surface dirt, and accretions such as fly spots have been removed mechanically. The process of washing, resizing, repairing and flattening each page has commenced and will continue for months.

In addition to this epic treatment, a number of smaller treatments of significant items from the Rare Books Collection have been undertaken. As part of the 2002 treatment program, *Peter Piper's Practical Principles of Plain and Perfect Pronunciation*, which

was published in the 1820s, underwent full conservation treatment. Significant items included in the 2003 treatment program include a copy of the first English translation of the Koran direct from Arabic, which was printed in 1734, the Cambridge Manuscript, dated 1662 and *Hortus Sanitatis*, dated 1491.

## Middle Eastern Manuscript Collection

The Middle Eastern Manuscript Collection consists of 185 manuscripts dated from the 15th to the 19th centuries. The collection contains primarily Arabic and Persian texts, but also includes Ethiopic, Turkish, Syriac and Mongol manuscripts. This collection is of worldwide significance for its artistic, historical and scholarly value and because it contains some outstanding examples of original Islamic binding. The collection contains manuscripts that have been used for research over the centuries, with annotations by scholars, making the manuscripts irreplaceable examples of working documents.

The 2003 work program involves establishing protocols and procedures for the long term care and use of the manuscript collection, ensuring that all cultural sensitivities related to the

display, handling, storage and use are respected.

A workshop aimed at addressing the cross-cultural issues relating to the treatment and research of the Middle Eastern manuscript collections is being developed to ensure that this material is being handled appropriately in terms of access and conservation treatment. It will be an opportunity for staff involved with the Baillieu collection, as well as custodians of Middle Eastern manuscripts in other Australian cultural institutions to learn about these issues from experts in the field. This workshop will also serve to promote the variety and significance of the collections owned by the Library. ♦

Pip Morrison is a paper conservator at the University of Melbourne Conservation Service and was the Conservator Baillieu Project in 2002. Louise Wilson is a paper conservator at the University of Melbourne Conservation Service and is the current Conservator Baillieu Project.

## Notes

1. The University's first major bequest of rare books was by George McArthur and took place after his death in 1903.
2. Adrienne L. Kaepler, editor, *Cook Voyage Artifacts in Leningrad, Berne and Florence Museums*, Honolulu, Bishop Museum Press, 1978, p. vii.