The foundation of the Universitie of Cambridge

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The foundation of the Universitie of Cambridge, 1662, manuscript, 32.5 x 21.0 cm. Cambridge Collection, Special Collections, Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne.

Below right: title page showing tears, detachment, staining and mould damage before treatment.

Below left: paste-downs after removal and reattachment.

This unique heraldic manuscript depicts the arms of the Earls of Cambridge, and of the chancellors and colleges of Cambridge University, plus lists of founders, benefactors, masters, fellows, other officials and current students. Compiled for Edward Montague, the second Earl of Manchester (1602–1671) and Chancellor of the University, and containing a bookplate of his son Robert, the third Earl (1634–1683), the manuscript consists of 34 leaves, written on both sides, with one large full-page coat of arms and 61 smaller coats of arms, all with contemporary hand colouring. It is bound in contemporary red morocco English panelled binding, gilt decorated, with remnants of green silk ties.

The manuscript is dated 1662. The volume celebrates '[T]he foundation of the Universitie of Cambridge with the names, and arms of all such noble persons, as have been Earles of Cambridge; and Chancelors of the Universitie, for 100 yeares last paste'. The volume also contains the names of the masters and fellows of each college and the names of 'magestrates, governors, and officers, there-unto belonginge: and the number of students now therin residinge.' The pages that contain the entries for the masters and fellow of each college have been pasted over with a sheet of paper containing a single name. This may have been an updating of the volume when it was collected by W.S. Sanderson.

The volume was in poor condition. A number of pages were creased, detached and torn, and there was extensive bookworm damage. The first page was detached from the text block and had been sitting proud of the case for some time. As a result it had sustained considerable mechanical damage. The volume was disfigured by extensive surface dirt, water staining and mould damage. As noted a number of pages had paper sheets pasted over original text.

The pages were dry surface cleaned, mould mycelium was removed mechanically, and the affected area was deactivated with ethanol/deionised water. Losses, mould-weakened areas and bookworm damage were repaired using medium-weight Japanese tissue and wheat starch paste. Tears were repaired and losses were filled with Japanese tissue and wheat starch paste.

On pages where paper sheets had been pasted over original text there was tearing indicating previous attempts to lift pages in order to read the obscured text. In order to reveal this original text, damp blotters and a heated spatula were used to create steam to soften old adhesive. The paper sheet overlays were carefully removed, and then washed in buffered deionised water and pressed. Once dry and flat, the pages were hinged back into their original positions with small Japanese tissue hinges and wheat starch paste, providing access to all the information in the volume while retaining the historic integrity of the manuscript.