Digitalisation and Paper Conservation

PM, by Lisa Swedberg (2022-12-13), from digital meeting (2022-12-0)1.

The meeting was organized by Liv Friis, Paper Conservator, Department of Conservation, University of Gothenburg; Victoria Skalleberg and Mariateresa Pullano, both Paper Conservators at Gothenburg Museum of Art, and Lisa Swedberg, Paper Conservator, The Kiruna Center for Conservation of Cultural Property.

Since 8th of October Paper Conservation Network is a part of the IIC Nordic group (NKF). NKF Paper Conservation network is open to all paper conservators in the Nordic countries. Use paperconservationnet@gmail.com if you want to reach any of us or engage in any activity or help in arranging the next meeting.

Introduction

Since more and more digitalisation projects are starting, NKF Paper Conservation Network believe that paper conservators would benefit by finding a common voice to influence the development of its direction; and the role of the paper conservator working in them. Therefore, in the Nordic countries from different sectors had been invited to share their experiences.

Sarah Noble, National Archives (UK) - The Role of the Conservator in Mass Digitisation Projects at The National Archives UK. Sarah.Noble@nationalarchives.gov.uk

The life cycle of a digitalisation project at the National Archives includes: (1) A collection has been identified as to be digitised (the conservator Is not commonly involved in this stage). (2) **Understanding the condition of the collection. This step involves the conservator**. It often starts with a spot check (sometimes followed by a full survey or a sample survey) to understand the condition of the collection. Condition categories can give an indication of the condition of the collection and estimation of time for preparation measures, which is helpful when planning the project. (3) **Preparing the collection for imaging. This step involves the conservator** and often involves flattening of creases. Decision making is a big part of the role of the conservator and involves decisions on how to prepare books with tight bindings (where text is lost in the gutter), sealed items, or hazardous materials (historical mould, iron Gaul ink, or arsenic). Decision-making can also involve how to stabilize paper enough to be handled for digitalisation. How the collection is to be stored afterwards the conservator needs to have in mind. (4) **Imaging the collection.** In this step, the conservator is involved in advice on safe imaging and handling. If the document has pigments nothing is put on top in digitalisation, or they secure the pigments. (5) Storage of the digital image and access, the conservator is not commonly involved in this stage.

To summarize, the role of the conservator at TNA is in project planning, decreasing the risk of surprises and ensures efficiency, as well as avoiding damage to collections. To have conservators looking at the collection before digitalisation helps deciding what kind of imaging equipment and guidance for handling, as well as making sure the document is legible and stable. *How do you handle tight bindings?* Around 1/3 of the collection has access issues due to text- loss (in the gutter). Common measures is to start by releasing the boards and look at releasing the binding. Cutting the sewing and returning to single sheets, foliated so that they are in the right order. The boards are kept in a box with the object to make sure (in future) that it is clear it was a binding and that is now is loose sheet. *Does TNA ever say no to digitisation?* It happens, but not very often. There was one collection that was damaged due to fire and mould. It did not make any sense to image the collection since the amount of time preserving it, so that you could handle it, did not way out the benefits.

Fanny Stenback, SCRIPTUM papperskonservator (SE) - SweLiMus: a digitalisation project of the Swedish Liturgical Music Sources from 1520-1820. fannystenback@hotmail.se

In the project SweLiMus, a collection of handwritten manuscripts of Swedish liturgical music between 1520-1820 was digitised. A challenge with the project was that the digitalisation had to be done in the churches, with portable camera equipment. This is because the Swedish law say that ecclesiastical collections cannot

be brought outside of the church. The role of the conservator in this project was to find the objects to digitalize, handle them on site, digitalize and collect and register metadata that described the materials of the paper and boards, binding techniques, watermarks, as well as original parts and later additions.

Anne-Grethe Slettemoen, Adam Larsson, Yolanda Bustamente, Nationalmuseum (SE) - The illuminated manuscript project at the Nationalmuseum: Preservation, creating access and adding knowledge to a rare collection. Anne-Grethe.Slettemoen@nationalmuseum.se
The Illuminated Manuscript Project included research, conservation, and digitalization, which all happened simultaneously and within one team. Firstly, conservation involved understanding of the collection by assessing the conservation needs and spot manuscripts requiring treatment. To understand the collection (and later n to digitalize the collection) many objects was rehoused. Preparation (and conservation) measures involved stabilization of gold and pigments. The conservator was in constant dialogue with the photographer to ensure safe handling and digitalization. Fragments was stabilized and mounted and digitalized; a future work is to join these fragments together at the Fragmentarium website.

Victoria Skalleberg, Gothenburg Museum of Art (SE) - 13 000 missing images - the digitalization of Konrad Peter Lundblad's portrait collection at the Gothenburg Museum of Art Conrad Peter Lundblads collection. victoria.skalleberg@kultur.goteborg.se
Since the Konrad Peter Lundblad portrait collection (graphic portraits from 16th to 19th Century). would be stored outside the museum building a decision was made to have it rehoused, digitalised, and registered in the museum database (Museum Plus). Victoria (paper conservator) worked in the storage area, rehousing and digitizing (around 100 images per hour in high resolution) the collection using a Bookeye 5 V2 overhead book scanner Image Access. Having Victoria (the conservator) in the project enabled the museum to find new information about the collection. For example, an interesting graphic technique from late 17th century was identified. Having a Pedagogue in the working group can help educate and communicate the findings.

Istvan Kecskemeti, The National Archives of Finland (FI) - Conservation in Digitalisation at The National Archives of Finland **istvan.kecskemeti@arkisto.fi**
At The National Archives of Finland, a team of three conservators and ten other staff works with preparing collections for digitization. Other staff can do simpler preparation work, while the conservator is the one giving instructions, and preparing very damaged or cultural historically valuable parts of collections. Regarding digitization of volumes with tight bindings (where text is lost in the gutter) the preparation works includes removal of bindings on volumes which has not historically been bound.

Conclusions

The roles of the paper conservator in digitalisation projects, identified in this meeting, where:

1. To handle collections, especially if digitalized at site, for example in a church or in storage (when the digitalization must come to the object and not the other way around).
2. Increased efficiency in digitalisation projects. By including the conservator in the planning stage in a (understanding and preparing the collection) can curb surprises and avoid bottle neck situations.
3. To make decisions regarding preparation treatments required for accessibility (tight bindings, flattening, repairing, how to handle seals etc.).
4. To ensure a good capture in the digitalisation through the conservator's preparation (readability).
5. To ensure safety for the collection during digitalisation (stability).
6. To ensures safety to the personal handling the collection in digitalisation, the conservator can spot (and perform treatments) if there is mould in collections or hazard/toxic materials.
7. To find information about the collection that otherwise would have been lost. For example, the case at Gothenburg Museum of Art where an interesting graphic technique was identified.
8. Help in decision-making on what collection to prioritized for digitalisation (by understanding the condition of the collection).
9. Collect information about the objects (for example to describe the materials of the paper and boards, binding techniques, as well as original parts and later additions) for metadata.