

British Library Conservation

A Balance of Preservation & Access

Dr Cordelia Rogerson

Head of Conservation

British Library – St Pancras



Brand-new St Pancras Station and the British Library

St.Pancras - Opened 1997

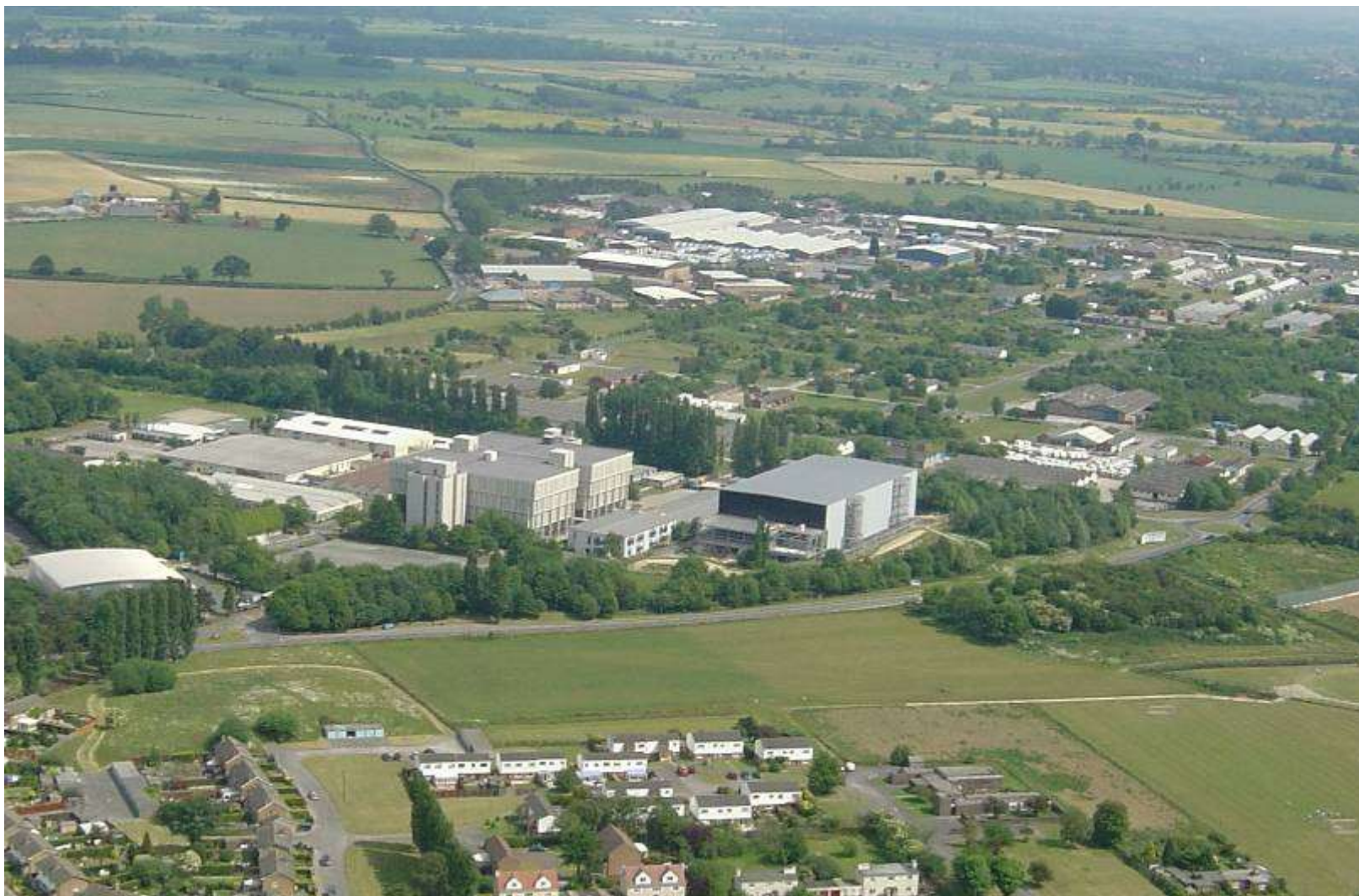
BL is one of 6 legal deposit libraries in the UK



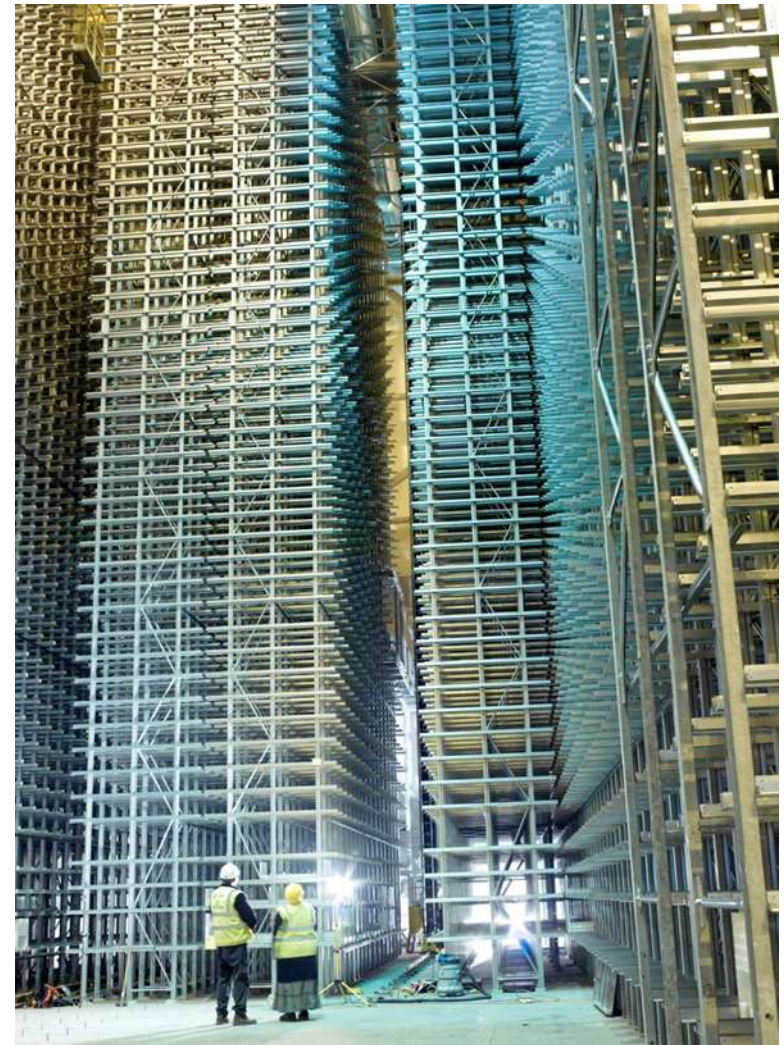
Shelving in basements



Boston Spa, Yorkshire - north England



Storage Building, Boston Spa



Types of collection items

The library has many different types and ages of collection items in different formats, sizes and condition



Physical collection – 150 million items

Over 625 km of shelves, and grows by 12 km every year
- 3m items

Space for over 1,200 readers

Over 16,000 people
use the collections
each day (on site and online)





At least 356 Tb, representing ca. 19m items

Currently growing at between 50-80 Tb per year

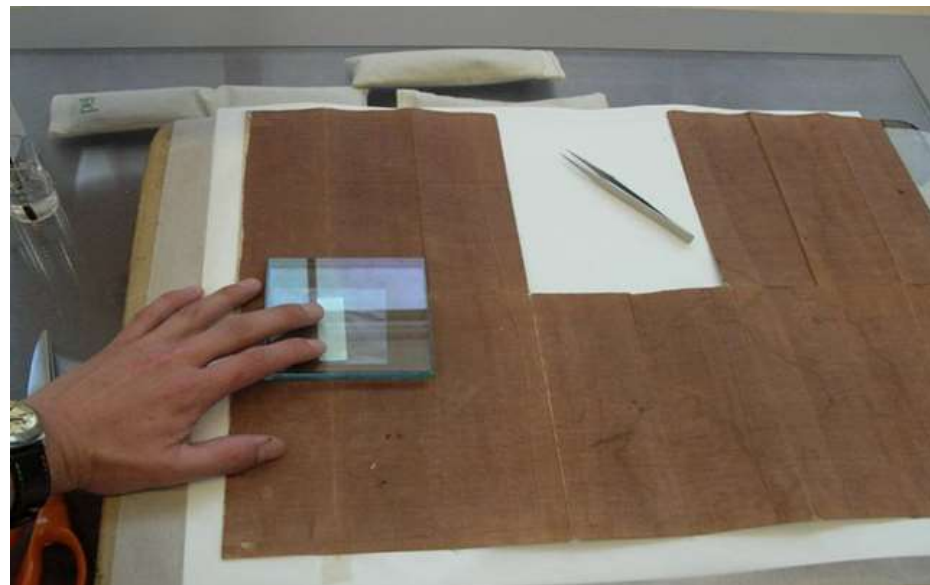
UK domain crawl

Items: 9,435,182

Annual domain crawl, collecting at least 30 Tb per year (but likely to grow)

What to conserve? Library priorities?

1. Guarantee future access
2. Allow access to readers
3. Support Research
4. Enrich culture for the nation
5. Grow knowledge





British Library Centre for Conservation



Conservation Studio



36 conservators – Book, paper, photographic, parchment, plastics

Work streams in Conservation

Activity	% of time	Hours
Overall capacity	100%	31,128
General collection items	66%	20,544
Running Repairs	10%	3114
Exhibition / loans	7%	2179
Project work	8%	2490
Digital preparation	1%	311
Training	6.5%	2023
Public programmes	1.5%	467

1 full time conservator = 1300 hours conservation work per year

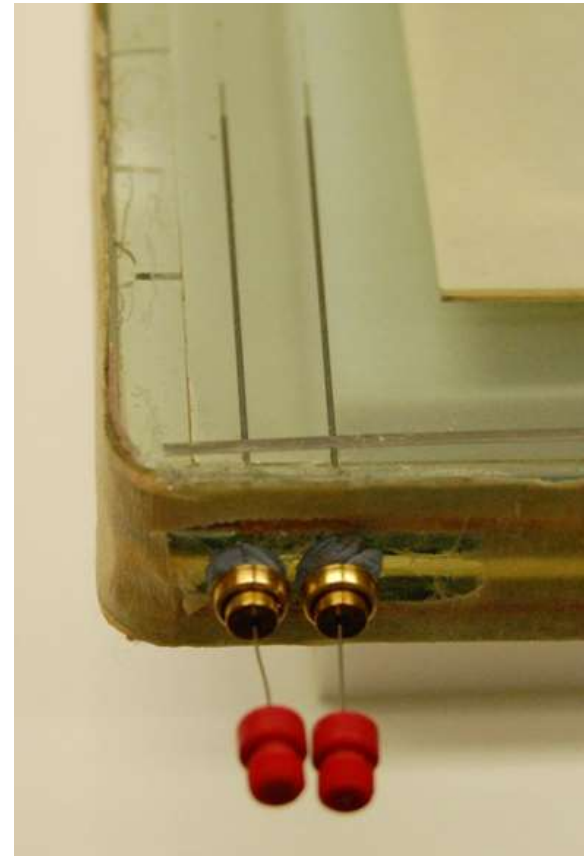
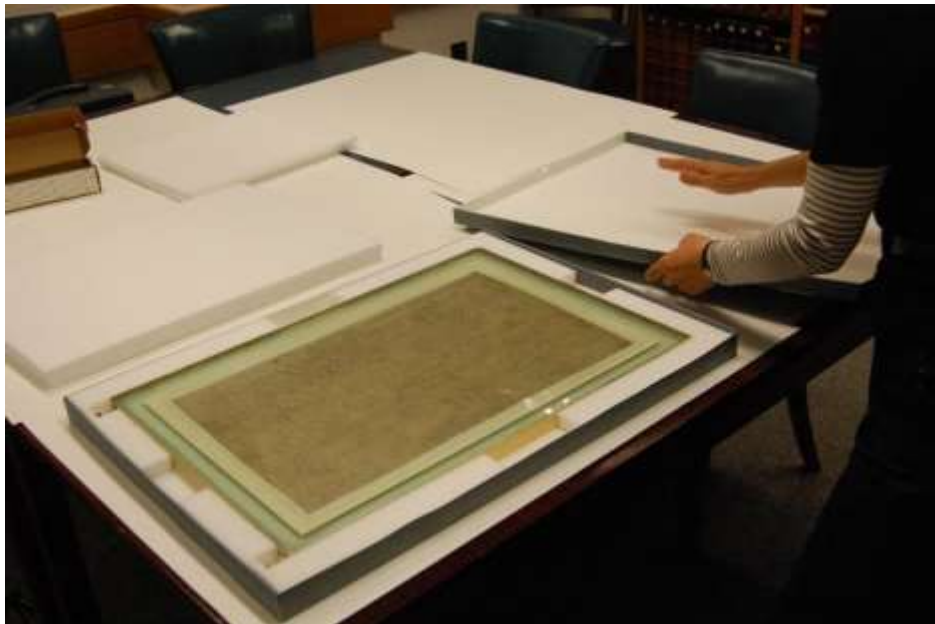
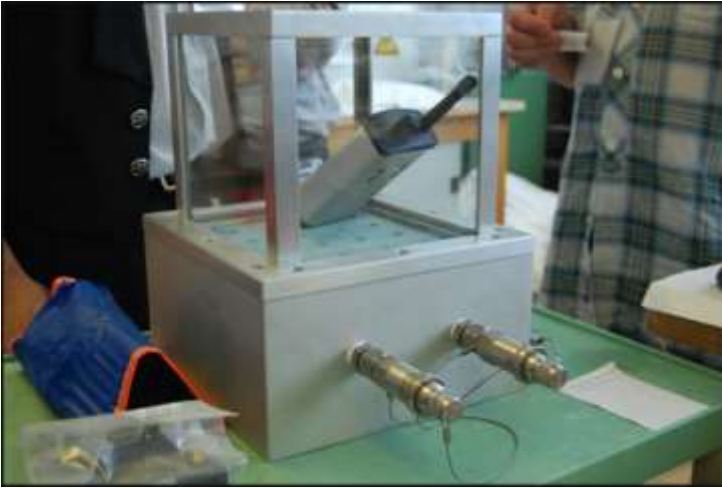


Mobile Trolleys – Running repairs – 10 hours or less

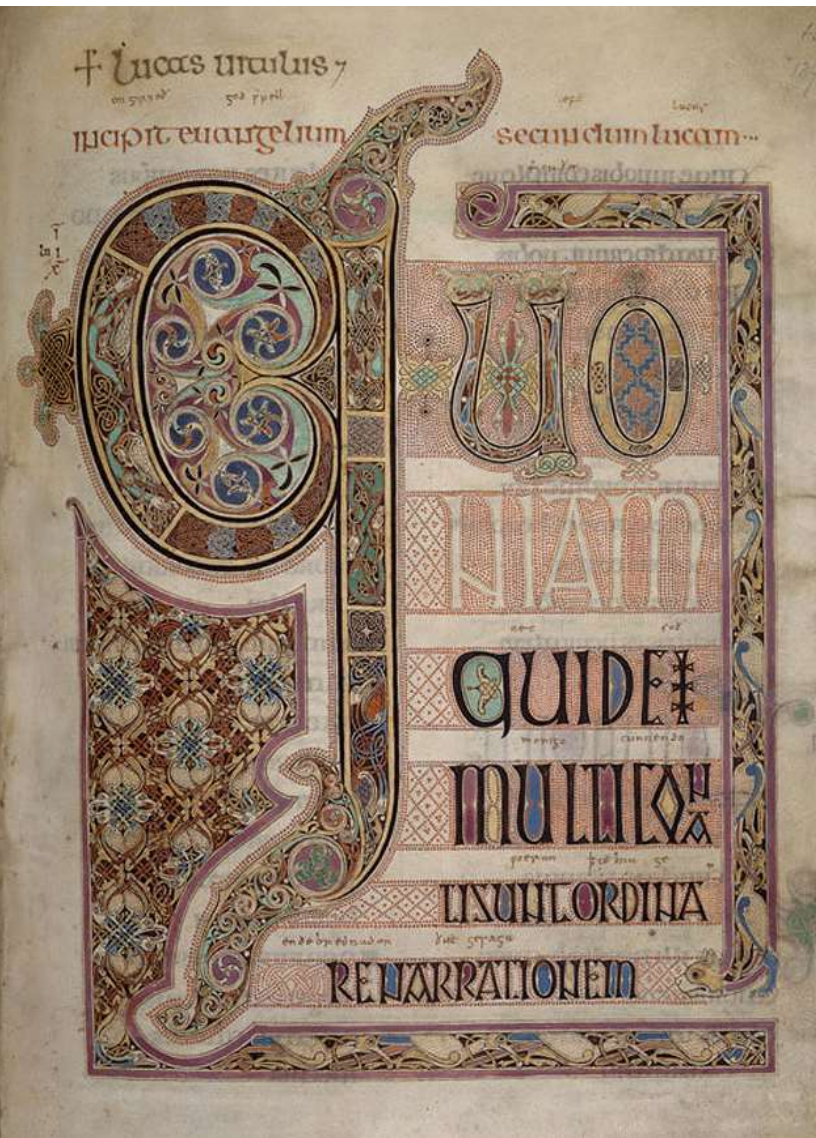


Project work

Magna Carta – research



Project work – imaging - Lindisfarne gospels, early 700s



Public tours



Priorities for Conservation treatment

Question			score
A digital copy exist?	Yes	No	0-10
Is it boxed?	Yes	No	0-10
What condition?	Good	Poor	0-30
How much use?	Low	High	0-30
Is it unique?	No	Yes	0-20
TOTAL SCORE			0 - 100

A high score is a **high priority** for Conservation treatment

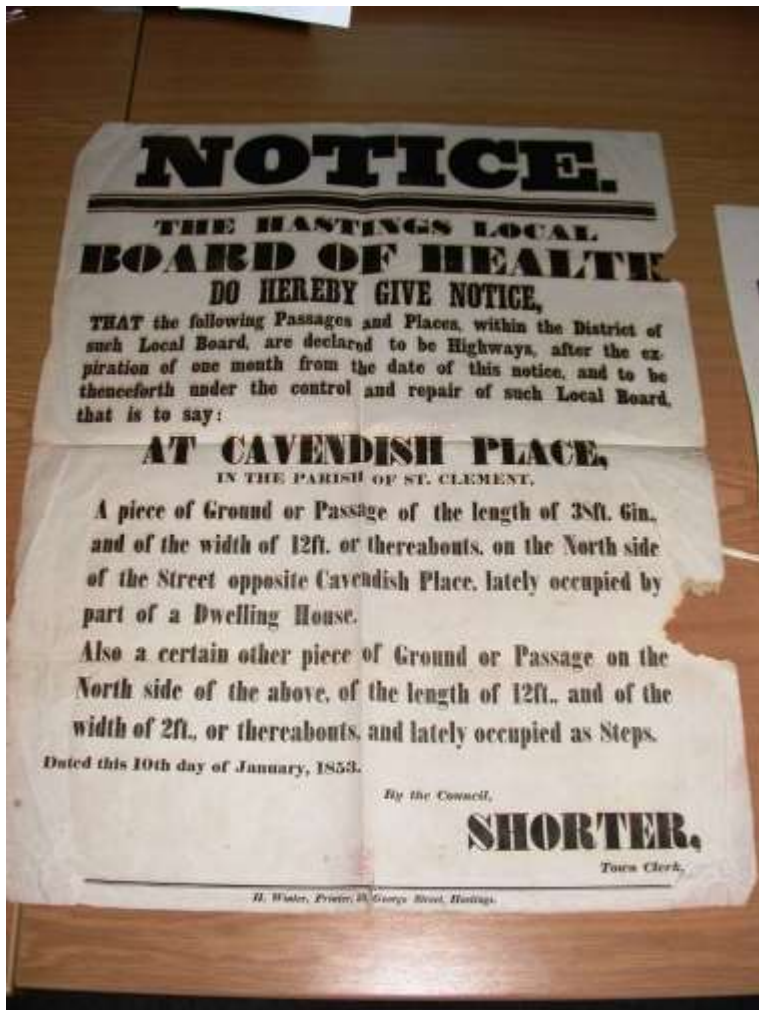
FIT FOR PURPOSE – approach to conservation treatment

vulnerable damage vs stable damage



Fit for Purpose

Minimum work is undertaken



2014-15 Conservation Programme

Conservation Estimate and Documentation



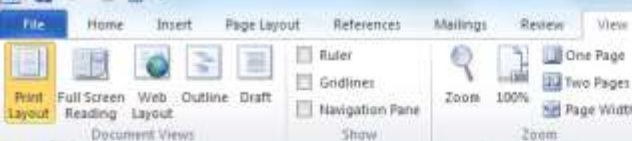
Treatment Proposal Options with estimated times for treatment

Conservation treatment is proposed using a **Fit for Purpose** approach, meaning the minimum work will be undertaken to enable the item to function in its future role.

Accuracy of estimate – level of risk that the chosen estimate will be exceeded

- ☐ low risk estimate is exceeded ☐ medium risk estimate is exceeded
- ☐ high risk estimate is exceeded (rescoping possible once project has commenced)

	Treatment step	Option 1: Fit for purpose	Option 2: Possible further work	Materials
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				



Description of Item

Artifact type e.g. printed monograph, manuscript, photograph

Principal substrate e.g. paper, parchment, papyrus

Type of media e.g. iron gall ink, printing ink, pencil

Binding description, where appropriate, of binding style, lettering, furniture, decoration, endbands, spine description, endleaves, sewing, board details

Text block description i.e. collation/foliation, inclusion of plates etc

Evidence of previous repair or format change. Describe

Secondary support or housing

Additional Information if required

Future role of item / reason for treatment

- ☐ Digitisation
- ☐ High profile item
- ☐ Storage/ available to readers on request
- ☐ Occasional handling by curators/ readers
- ☐ Frequently requested & used by readers/ planned for display

Key Performance Indicators

1. Accuracy of estimates – aim for estimates to be within 10% accuracy
2. Running repairs – aim for treatment within 10 hours
3. Exhibitions & Loans – aim for all deadlines to be met



Results

1. Accuracy of estimates

12-13 programme	90%	1937 items treated	
13-14 programme	92%	2178 items treated	(ranging 10 hrs to 200 hrs)

2. Running repairs

11-12 programme	165	
12-13 programme	850	6 hours average time (500% increase)
13-14 programme	869	6.6 hours average time

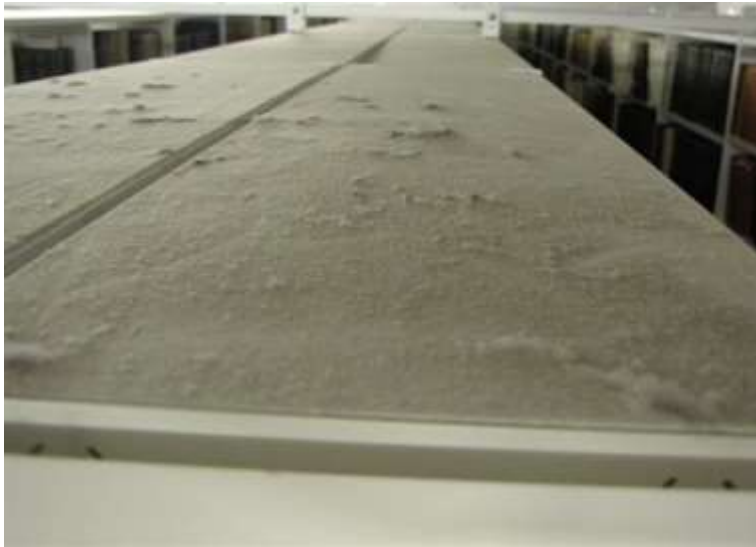
3. Exhibitions / loans - 100% deadlines met

Future library – all collections physical & digital - one strategy



Future library – multi skilled teams

Preventive Conservation & Conservation Treatment



New skills in Conservation

- Ceramic, metal conservation
- Textile Conservation

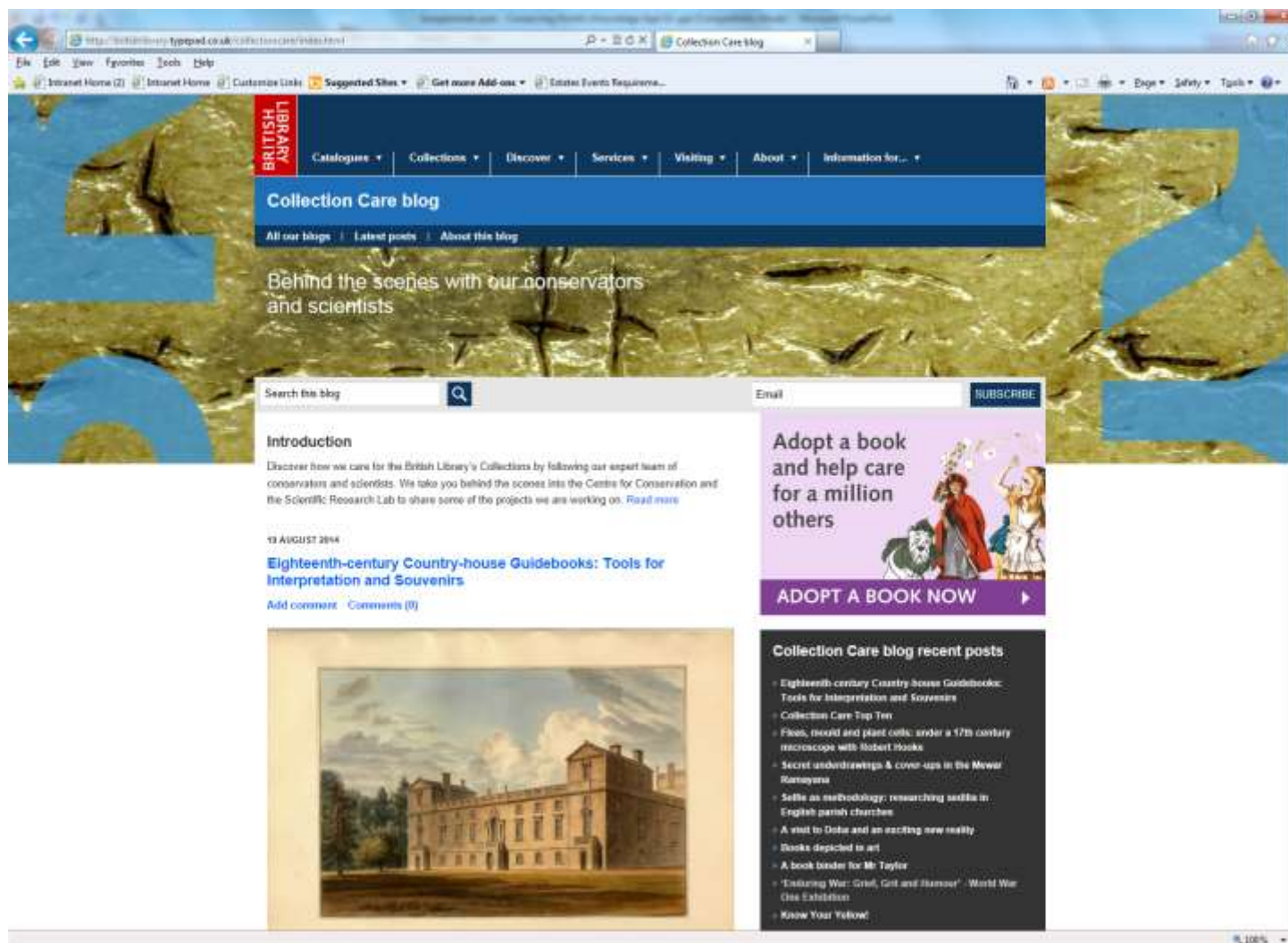


Royal MS 7 D. X. After Treatment



Collection Care blog

<http://www.bl.uk/blogs/>



Thank you