



# Zoe Finlay Paper Conservation

Newsletter #3, April 2012

## WELCOME!

**Hello** and welcome to the third edition of my quarterly newsletter.

I'm delighted to be able to say **Zoe Finlay Paper Conservation** recently had its first birthday. It's been quite a year; reflecting upon the objects I've conserved and the people I've met really brings home how interesting, fun and, ultimately, rewarding this work can be. A very big 'thank you' to all of my customers.

In this edition, I take a look at the problem of foxing – something that may interest many of this newsletter's readers, especially the book lovers – and offer some advice for controlling it.

I'll also attempt to throw some light on the almost-forgotten art of silhouettes. Having recently come across some fine examples, I felt there was an interesting history to be explored there.

Finally, I hope I have something for everyone in the events listing on page three.

Enjoy reading.

Zoe

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## A DATE FOR YOUR DIARY...

Sunday the 22<sup>nd</sup> April sees the first of this year's **Secondhand and Antiquarian Book Fairs** at Tynemouth Metro station and, once again, I'll be there.

Call by my stall at any time between 10am and 4pm with photos of your own items for a bit of free advice... or just to say hello!

## FROM THE STUDIO

### Frustrating Foxing

Many of you are likely to have come across foxing at some point and may recognise it as the brown, reddish or orange coloured spots on paper which is particularly common in books.

The generic term, 'foxing' was first coined in 1848 supposedly because it likens the colour of the red-brown spots to that of foxes. The spots contain metal particles and mould and although these are mostly found together in foxing, this is not always the case. In fact, foxing has been the cause of much speculation and despite decades of research of this common

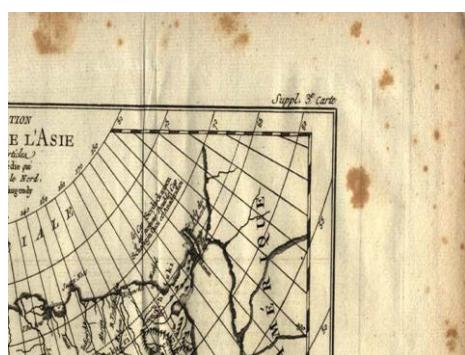
phenomenon, a direct correlation between the presence of iron, mould and the brown stains has yet to be found.

### Causes of foxing

The problem is that we still don't know which comes first – the metal or the mould – or why some types of paper are more affected than others.

Metal particles and mould spores can be introduced into paper through many avenues, from the papermaking process to the pigments applied to the paper. The mould and metal appear to form an ideal partnership. Supporting one another as a nutrient source, they turn the paper acidic and brown in the areas where they appear.

Another unsolved mystery of foxing is why the spots commonly



**(Above)** An example of foxing on a book leaf. **(Photo on page two)** Detail of the corner of a foxed print.

appear heaviest around the edges of the paper at first before gradually working their way towards the centre.

If the main cause of the stains is the metal particles then surely an even spread throughout the sheet could be expected. This has led many to assume that the stains begin as a result of the metals which have degraded in the presence of moisture. The metal then provides an ideal acidic environment in which mould can thrive after settling on the outer edges of paper or a closed book.



Mould is extremely resilient and digests paper to create holes where it can take hold. In fact it is so persistent that if it has exhausted all other nutrients in the paper, it will survive on the acids it produced during its own growing stages. As the majority of moulds are single-celled organisms, many do not even require light to survive and continue to grow in the dark.

As fungi holds firm by using roots and hooks, torn objects are often more susceptible as they provide shelter.

As for metals, they too degrade paper and cause it to turn brown and acidic. They do not stay motionless within paper but migrate very slowly through it, entering surrounding paper and spreading damage as they go.

#### Conservation approaches

Removing or reducing foxing stains is possible, depending on the object. There is no reliable method of killing mould on paper or of preventing foxing except for certain housing and storage measures that can be taken to minimise the risks and stabilise the object.

If you have a foxed paper item, isolate it from the rest of your collection and keep it in a dry and cool area. Do not attempt to brush off any mould as this can pose a health risk.

If you have concerns about an object and would like it evaluated, contact me for a free quote.



## PICTURE OF THE QUARTER

### Profiling the Silhouette

I recently visited Graham Smith Antiques in Jesmond, Newcastle, and found myself next to several fine examples of silhouettes (pictured). Looking at them, it struck me how the uniform blackness and simplicity of this art form belies a very colourful past.

The making of black reliefs of people in profile has long existed, from the mummy cases and tombs of Egypt to coinage since the Roman era. Silhouettes as we recognise them today initially began as an analytical aide to the science of physiognomy. Produced in their thousands, it was thought that a person's character could be read by studying their profile.

During the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, shadow portraiture, as it was then known, grew in popularity with French royalty, who enjoyed cutting outlines of their courtiers from paper, after casting their shadow on a wall using a candle as a source of light.

Gradually, the art began to appear outside the royal court, at circuses and fairs. Paper cutters would roam from town to town armed with a stash of papers, scissors and varying amounts of

**(left)** A typical 19<sup>th</sup> century Victorian silhouette. (335mm x 290mm). (Currently for sale, image courtesy of Graham Smith Antiques, Jesmond, Newcastle).

skill, cutting portraits freehand within minutes. However, it took many years before the true silhouette artists could throw off the former associations with science.

The term 'silhouette' itself was coined as a reference to Etienne de Silhouette, a French finance minister and patron of the arts. The more skilled artists of the time looked with disdain on many of the profile portraits being produced and, seeing Silhouette as a man of little effort and cheapness, gave them his name; and this despite the art-form first appearing some 60 years before his birth.



Encouraged by the widespread availability of economical papers, silhouette cutting – outside France referred to as 'shadowgraphy' and in England, 'black-shades' – moved through Europe. It was a popular hobby of all classes of mid-18<sup>th</sup> century Britain, even becoming part of the curriculum in ladies' schools.

Save for a few true artists, it was becoming more of a handicraft

than an art form. Unskilled cutters proliferated, plying their trade at fairs, in booths and tunnels and on street corners and piers.

Silhouettes began to wane during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century with the advent of photography. In an effort to compete, artists began adding detail to their profile cuts, using gold paint to bring them to life, or by placing the silhouette on a background decorated with watercolours or inks. Sadly, it was to no avail. The art of silhouette cutting all but died out, although the travelling silhouette artists continued to work at state fairs in America into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## Local Talks on Paper Conservation

I've recently given presentations to local interest groups that have been very well received. As well as giving an interesting introduction to paper conservation, I offer advice on how to store and display paper items in the home to prevent or minimise damage.

If you are a member of a local group who may be interested in booking a talk, I'd love to hear from you.

DON'T FORGET TO VISIT MY WEBSITE FOR LINKS TO LOCAL AUCTIONEERS, FRAMERS, ANTIQUE SHOPS AND BOOKSELLERS AS WELL AS FOR MY REGULAR BLOGS.  
<http://tinyurl.com/zoefinlay>

## LOCAL EVENTS:

- **EVENT: Live printing demonstrations of Thomas Bewick's processes** using original hand presses, Cherryburn, Stocksfield, 13 dates between 01<sup>st</sup> April and 24<sup>th</sup> June 2012.  
[www.nationaltrust.org.uk/cherryburn/](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/cherryburn/)
- **EVENT: The Late Shows**, free culture crawl around Newcastle. Now in its 6<sup>th</sup> year and bigger and better than ever. 18<sup>th</sup> May – 19<sup>th</sup> May 2012.  
[www.thelateshows.org.uk/home](http://www.thelateshows.org.uk/home)
- **EXHIBITION: Red Chalk; Raphael to Ramsay**, Scottish National Galleries, Edinburgh, 18<sup>th</sup> February 2012 – 10<sup>th</sup> June 2012, **Edvard Munch: Graphic Works**, 07<sup>th</sup> April -23<sup>rd</sup> September 2012  
<http://www.nationalgalleries.org/whatson/exhibitions/red-chalk/>
- **EXHIBITION: Beyond the Great Wave**, Hokusai, book illustration and the origins of manga. Oriental Museum, Durham, 09<sup>th</sup> December 2011 – 27<sup>th</sup> May 2012,  
<http://www.dur.ac.uk/oriental.museum/exhibitions/current/>
- **TALK: Robert Browning Bicentenary Event** Readings of his works, Lit & Phil Library, Newcastle, 09<sup>th</sup> May 2012, 7pm, [www.litandphil.org.uk](http://www.litandphil.org.uk)

## ... AND FURTHER AFIELD:

- **EXHIBITION: Writing Britain: Wastelands to Wonderlands** Treasures from the British Library's English literature collection, British Library, London, 11<sup>th</sup> May - 25<sup>th</sup> September 2012,  
<http://www.bl.uk/whatson/exhibitions/writingbritain>