



# Zoe Finlay Paper Conservation

Newsletter #2, January 2012

## WELCOME!

**Hello** and welcome to the second edition of the quarterly newsletter from **Zoe Finlay Paper Conservation**.

In this edition, 'From the Studio' highlights one of the main, yet often unseen, dangers posed to paper objects. Beware! Action now can save damage and money. It's amazing what chemical changes continually take place in natural materials without us being aware of them.

While 'Local Events' presents a selection of things to see and do this quarter, the Society of Bookbinders also have some very interesting forthcoming talks and workshops relating to bindings and paper at the Lit and Phil library, Newcastle. If you fancy marbling paper or trying your hand at book bindings, further information is on their website: [http://www.societyofbookbinders.com/regions/north\\_east](http://www.societyofbookbinders.com/regions/north_east).

Finally, I would like to wish everyone all the best for 2012!

Enjoy reading.

*Zoe*

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## FROM THE STUDIO

### Be Wary of Wood

Recently, a framed watercolour painting by local artist George Edward Horton, (1859-1950), arrived in my studio.

The client, who has given permission to show the picture here, had noticed that a mysterious browning had occurred across almost the entire surface yet the effect was puzzling. There remained just a few undamaged areas where the paper and pigments appeared unaltered. It wasn't until the painting was unframed and the

back could be viewed that a cause was found. During the last decade or so, the painting had been reframed. Unfortunately, the framer had failed to insert a barrier layer between the wooden backing board and the back of the painting.

Moreover, fragments of the original dark brown backing paper, (see photo *ii*), had not been removed possibly because it proved to be stuck quite firmly.

The areas created where these fragments remained attached correlated perfectly with the unaffected areas of the painting that had separated (continued...)



**(i) Front view:** George Edward Horton (1859-1950,) Coastal scene, 19<sup>th</sup> century, (532mm x 1016mm), watercolour and graphite pencil on paper. The unaffected areas are indicated with arrows.



**(ii) Reverse view:** showing the fragments of the original backing paper still attached. The shapes perfectly matched the areas of discolouration on the front.

from the wooden backing board.

The cause of the discolouration rests in the fact that wood 'off gasses', emitting a surprising concoction of acids with formic acid, acetic acid and formaldehyde heading a very lengthy list.

While a barrier layer won't prevent this, it can be extremely effective at minimising the movement and absorption of the gases and the resulting discolouration into the paper beyond. In this case, even though the original backing paper was typically of poor quality and is likely to have contained some wood pulp itself, it was still preferential to it being completely absent.



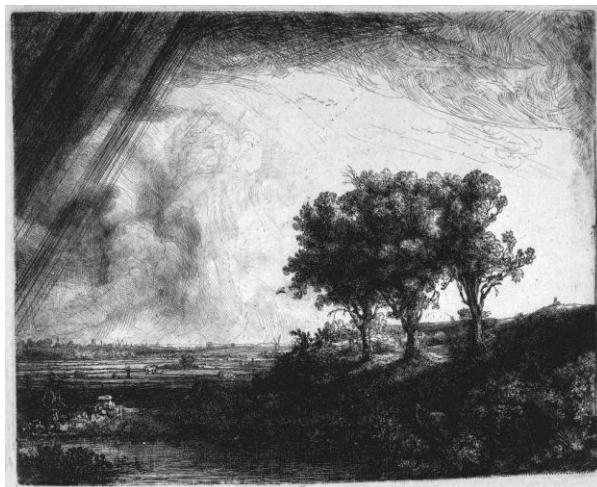
**(iii) Detail:** lower right corner showing the extent of the browning.

If you have any object which exhibits browning, one of the causes may be its wooden backing board. Left untreated, the paper will increase in acidity eventually becoming brittle whilst certain pigments can alter irreversibly with a change in pH.

The insertion of a conservation-grade barrier material is a cost efficient, instant and effective way to help to protect your paper objects; contact me for more information and a free quote.

## PICTURE OF THE QUARTER

Rembrandt van Rijn,  
'The Three Trees', (1643)



**(iv) Rembrandt van Rijn**, (1606-1669), 'The Three Trees', Netherlands dated AD 1643. Etching on paper, (213mm x 279mm) © Trustees of the British Museum

This print is widely regarded as one of Rembrandt's finest landscape etchings with its contrast between the dark, velvety richness of the trees and the bright, clear burst of sunlight in the sky.

Although the image appears dominated by the trees being shaken by gusts of wind, there is a surprising amount of detail present with animals, a fisherman, lovers and a sketching artist, each of whom appears overshadowed by the power of nature.

Rembrandt was known for using contrast to dramatic effect in all his work. One of the ways he managed to achieve this with his etchings was by using a paper known as 'Japan paper', a soft, thin, smooth-surfaced, golden-toned paper made from bamboo. It possessed similar characteristics to 'China paper' also rather confusingly called 'India paper'.

Despite the multiple and misleading names, India paper originated in China and earned its misnomer from its role as packaging material wrapped around goods imported by the East India Company.

The paper had remarkable qualities. Starch added to the paper reduced its absorbency, allowing it to hold printing ink on its

surface and imparting a dense, crisp line to prints. Thin and soft, it was particularly good for engravings as the paper could mould itself into the engraved lines of the printing plate. This gave a sharpness and richness of tone like no other paper.

The paper quickly became a favourite with artists who in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries didn't have access to the artists' paper available today, using instead any suitable paper that came their way.

In addition, the new transport links which enabled missionaries to travel abroad during the early 1800's meant that new bibles were required that would be light and transportable, strong yet cheap. This paper would be ideal, only one small problem remained. English papermakers didn't know how to make it.

As demand increased, a premium was offered for the best account of the production of India paper. The papermaker who found a solution would gain



an exclusive contract with Oxford and Cambridge universities to produce bibles yet despite much experimentation it wasn't until 1870 that English papermaker, Thomas Brittain & Son, discovered how to emulate the original paper.

Brittains became the sole supplier of paper to Oxford, and Oxford the sole consumer with exclusive rights between the two forging a monopoly for many years.

If you should you happen to find yourself near Cambridge, I can

recommend a stop in the Fitzwilliam Museum where some of Rembrandt's beautiful etchings on Japan paper can be viewed in glass display cases. Rolling back the covers that protect them from the light is a real treat, with the treasures unveiled below appearing as fresh as if printed yesterday.

## Hidden Gems - The British Library's Virtual Books

It's possible that you are already aware of the virtual books available online from the British Library website, but I never tire of seeing these beautiful items.

Ok, it may not be quite the same as seeing the real thing but nevertheless it's a wonderful free resource which allows so many to view an object in great detail without causing it damage.

The treasures, which include amongst them Scott of the Antarctic's diary (a personal favourite) and the sketchbooks of Leonardo da Vinci, can be viewed online at:

<http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/virtualbooks>.

DON'T FORGET TO CHECK MY WEBSITE FOR LINKS TO LOCAL AUCTIONEERS, FRAMERS, ANTIQUE SHOPS AND BOOKSELLERS, AS WELL AS FOR MY REGULAR BLOGS.

## LOCAL EVENTS:

- **BOOK FAIR: Durham PBFA,** Durham County Hall, Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> February, [www.pbfa.org](http://www.pbfa.org)
- **EXHIBITION: Cullercoats, An Artists' Colony by the Sea,** Segedunum Roman Fort, 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2011 – 15<sup>th</sup> April 2012, [www.twmuseums.org.uk](http://www.twmuseums.org.uk)
- **EXHIBITION: Dutch Landscapes: Paintings from the Royal Collection,** The Bowes Museum, 12<sup>th</sup> November 2011 – 11<sup>th</sup> March 2012, , 11am -4pm [www.bowesmuseum.org.uk/exhibition](http://www.bowesmuseum.org.uk/exhibition)
- **EXHIBITION: Society of Bookbinders: Designer Bookbinders** Newcastle City Library, (6<sup>th</sup> floor) 20<sup>th</sup> January – 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2012
- **EXHIBITION/TALKS: What's Your Story? Discovering Family History,** Discovery Museum 11<sup>th</sup> February – 27<sup>th</sup> May 2012. Exhibition with free city walks and talks. [www.twmuseums.org.uk/discovery](http://www.twmuseums.org.uk/discovery)
- **TALK: Can you judge a book by its cover?** Chris Calver, (Bookbinder) Great North Museum, 09<sup>th</sup> March 2012 [www.twmuseums.org.uk/greatnorthmuseum](http://www.twmuseums.org.uk/greatnorthmuseum)

## ... AND FURTHER AFIELD:

- **EXHIBITION: The Art Books of Henri Matisse,** Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, 17<sup>th</sup> January – 15<sup>th</sup> April 2012. First public showing in the UK. [www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk](http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk)
- **EXHIBITION: Royal Manuscripts, The Genius of Illumination,** British Library, London, 11<sup>th</sup> November –13<sup>th</sup> March 2012, <http://www.bl.uk/whatson/exhibitions/royalman>