



# Zoe Finlay Paper Conservation

Newsletter #6, January 2013

## WELCOME!

**Hello** and welcome to the quarterly newsletter from **Zoe Finlay Paper Conservation**, the first of 2013.

This issue reveals some of the bizarre materials used in the history of papermaking as well as highlighting a more unpleasant side of books: book burning. These incidents have often influenced history around the world; it's difficult to imagine that books easily available in shops today once fanned the flames of censorship, political and religious tensions.

Working in my studio, I am already aware of the lengthening daylight hours. However, with the potentially hazardous winter combination of damp and central heating, don't forget to check your paper items for mould and pests.

If you've any concerns or suspicions, don't hesitate to contact me for free advice.

Enjoy reading!

*Zoe*

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## FROM THE STUDIO

Wasps' nests and moss, potatoes and asbestos.

Since antiquity and long before the invention of paper, there have been a wide variety of materials used for writing on: baked clay, papyrus, bamboo and bark to name but a few. And then there was paper. In fact, the experimentation did not end there. Indeed, the history of papers development includes a vast amount of experimentation with materials, the availability of which was often dictated by politics, geography, war and the economy.

The diverse materials listed in this article title were all once investigated or used as a source of papermaking with varying degrees of success.

During the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, linen and cotton rags imported from Europe were the most commonly used materials for paper production. However, import taxes were eventually raised in an attempt to cover the cost of the European wars and an international rag shortage ensued. This period coincided with cheaper advances in printing and an increase in demand for paper.

Without enough cotton or linen,

cheaper, reliable local sources were urgently sought with experimentation employing a vast array of materials including sails, fishing nets and local vegetation.

During both World Wars, the demand for news was insatiable and straw and wood were used to produce newspapers, propaganda items and documents. The poster, 'Comic Cuts', (pictured below) is currently undergoing treatment and while it is remarkably intact, it demonstrates the typical discolouration and fragility of a straw or wood-based paper.

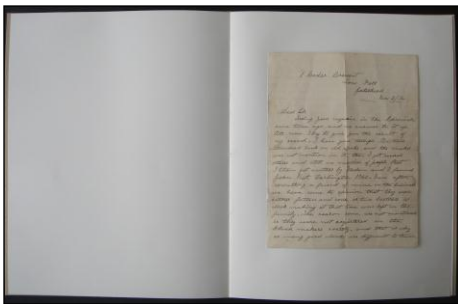


**Advertisement poster for 'Comic Cuts', (early 20<sup>th</sup> C.)** (Image reproduced with clients' permission).

Such paper items which survive today do so in a discoloured, weak and brittle condition, making them difficult to handle and easy to tear.

Whilst there is no cure for these brittle papers, there are certainly effective methods of storing, handling and displaying them that can significantly slow deterioration.

A typical method is to use a fascicule, an archival quality folder in which items such as letters can be housed. The design allows for handling of the object, viewing both sides yet never having to touch the paper again. Framing using conservation grade materials is another simple yet effective approach.



**A custom-made archival fascicule** with family letters preserved inside.

In many ways, we may not have moved far from those early years of experimentation. Despite our digital age, the demand for paper still continues amidst dwindling natural resources. New materials for paper are sought as well as improved methods of reprocessing our old paper.

If you would like advice on any letters or items of personal value which you feel too afraid to touch due to their condition, please contact me for a free estimate on how your papers can best be preserved.

## Lindisfarne Gospels

As the eagerly anticipated arrival of the **Lindisfarne Gospels at Durham** draws near, (1<sup>st</sup> July-30<sup>th</sup> September 2013), organisers are urging people to buy advance tickets to avoid the queues. Whilst these aren't available yet, people can sign up to be notified online.

Don't miss an opportunity to see this amazing manuscript, briefly back home in the north. For details go to: [www.lindisfarnegospels.com](http://www.lindisfarnegospels.com)

## BURNING ISSUES

### *Book Burning throughout History*

During a recent visit to Newcastle Central library, I happened to pass a book with the rather arresting title, 'Books on Fire'. Thoughts of my time at the Bodleian Library came flooding back, when I handled a single copy of one of Milton's works which had narrowly survived a burning edict issued by Charles II in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. Hidden in the library by sympathetic staff who opposed this attempt at censorship, I visualised men in shadowy cloisters, passing the volume from one to another while the fire raged nearby in the quadrangle.

So it was that I borrowed 'Books on Fire', through which I discovered the astonishing extent of book burning throughout history.

For centuries, book burnings have been carried out in attempts to

control the populace, diverting religious, social and political beliefs. One of the earliest examples of book burning dates back to the year 213 AD, when the Emperor of China, in a demonstration of his power ordered Taoist books, apart from treatises on medicine and agriculture, to be burnt. People hid what books they could however anyone found to be in defiance of the order was tattooed on the face and sent to work on the construction of the Great Wall of China.

Removing cultural history has often been seen to strike at the very heart of a people. In 1949, Chairman Mao Tse Tung ordered the repression of Tibetans. Believing that an educated people can't be governed, about six thousand monasteries were burnt, most of which contained libraries. Again in 1950, in an effort to remove all books that were felt to be reactionary, Mao ordered the burning of many more books in China.

It was political motivation at work in 1812 when war broke out between Britain and America. The US had underestimated the strength of the British army and in August 1814, British troops marched into Washington D.C and burned the American Library of Congress, destroying all its contents with only a fortunately-timed rainfall preserving its walls.

Of course, it is not just in our distant

history that such events have occurred. In 1988, copies of Salman Rushdie's 'The Satanic Verses' were burned in several English cities.

Whatever the motivation, it is a testament to the written word that so much passion, anger and devotion have surrounded books throughout the ages.

## PUTTING PEN TO PAPER...

By the time you read this, **National Handwriting Day**, (23<sup>rd</sup> January) will have happened in the USA. The event was begun in 1977 as a marketing ploy by a stationery manufacturer who chose the date in recognition of the birthday of John Hancock, the first person to sign the Declaration of Independence in 1776.

The initiative remained popular and nowadays the event is used to entice people to put pen to paper once again, recalling the simplicity and personal touch of writing poetry or a letter to someone instead of sending a text or an email.

Our relationship with paper has been influenced by political and economic factors throughout its fascinating history. Shortages of raw materials, (see the article on page 1), have often seen paper become an expensive luxury and as a result, letters were sometimes written in several directions. Although the pictured letter, (see right) looks indecipherable to us, the method would have reduced paper and

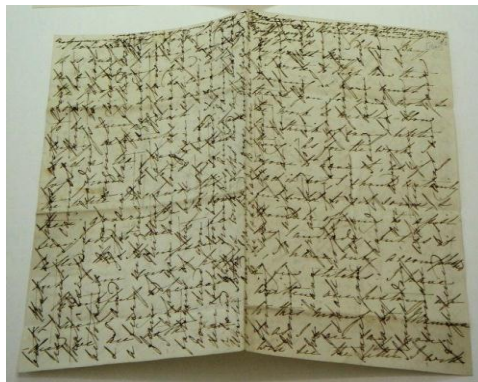
postage costs for the sender

Apparently, amidst our booming digital age many of us are missing the personal touch and are lately returning to pen and paper. It is perhaps in response to this that 2012 saw an influx of books published on these subjects. So, below are some handpicked titles for you who still yearn for the scratch of a fountain pen nib on a sheet of Basildon Bond:

**Kind Regards: The Lost Art of Letter-Writing**, Liz Williams, (Michael O'Mara, 2012)

**The Missing Ink: The Lost Art of Handwriting**, Philip Hensher, (Faber & Faber, 2012)

**Paper: An Elegy**, Ian Sansom, (Fourth Estate, 2012)



**Every inch is precious:** On this early 20th century letter, the writing is in three directions to exploit all of the paper. The result is difficult to decipher.

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

PREVIOUS NEWSLETTERS CAN BE FOUND ON MY WEBSITE.

## LOCAL EVENTS:

- **EXHIBITION: Richard Hobson: A Northern Realist** Beautiful, atmospheric watercolours of the North East Region. Shipley Art Gallery, 19<sup>th</sup> January – 2nd March 2013. [www.twmuseums.org.uk/shipley-art-gallery](http://www.twmuseums.org.uk/shipley-art-gallery)
- **TALK:** Hassan Ebied, a PhD student from Egypt talks about his current doctoral research in manuscripts conservation. 13<sup>th</sup> June @ 6.30pm, Lit & Phil Library, Newcastle. (Society of Bookbinders event) £2 entry [www.litandphil.org.uk/events](http://www.litandphil.org.uk/events)
- **ONLINE: Beowulf**, The British Library gives a fascinating account of this magnificent manuscript. Explore the detailed information and watch the video. [www.bl.uk/onlinegallery](http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery)

## ... AND FURTHER AFIELD:

- **EXHIBITION: Schwitters in Britain**, Tate Britain. Celebrating Kurt Schwitters's contribution to European modernism. January 20<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> May 2013 [www.tate.org.uk](http://www.tate.org.uk)

## Dates for your diary

The New Year heralds a new round of our much-loved local book events. Listed below are some dates for your diary:

**Tynemouth Second Hand and Antiquarian Book Market:** (Sundays) April 28<sup>th</sup>, June 23<sup>rd</sup>, August 11<sup>th</sup>, October 20<sup>th</sup>. 20 year anniversary celebrations are scheduled for the August event.

**Alnwick PBFA Book fair:** This year this takes place on the slightly later date of Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> August.