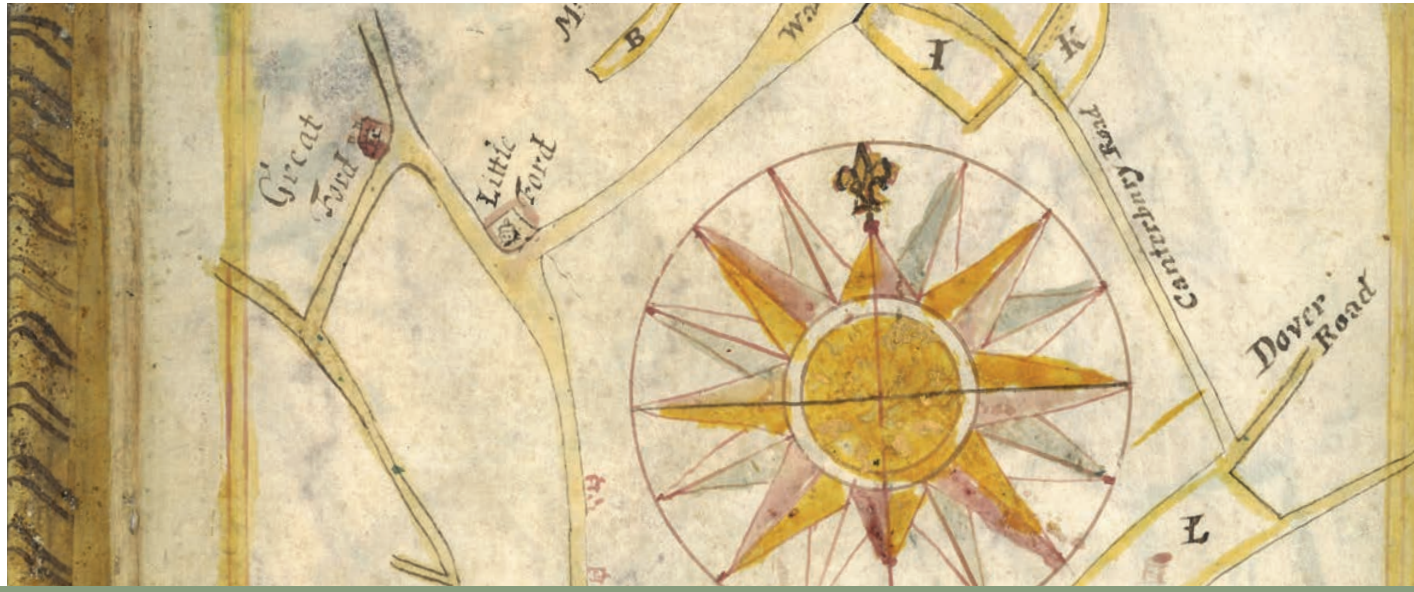

NMCT

National Manuscripts Conservation Trust

Annual Report and Accounts 2025

Cover imagery (front and back). Courtesy of Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre.

The Survey of this Estate
Was begun the 13th day of April
1698, And Finished on Friday
the 17th day of March 169 8/9
And the Large Mapps were
delivered on the 5th day of
May 1699: And afterwards
Reduced into Small Mapps &
Drawn in this Book & Finished
the 15th day of December 1699
All Faithfully Performed by me
Abraham Walter of
Larkfield in Kent

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NMCT National Manuscripts Conservation Trust

Registered Charity: 802796

Annual Report and Accounts for the year to 31 December 2025

Reference and Administrative Information

www.nmct.co.uk | info@nmct.co.uk | @TheNMCT.bsky.social | @TheNMCT

Registered Charity: 802796

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The Rt Hon. Lord Waldegrave of North Hill

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Professor David McKitterick FBA FSA, Chair
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Victoria Stevens ACR FIIC

Administrator to the Trustees
Mrs Nell Hoare MBE FSA FIIC
P.O. Box 4291, Reading, Berkshire RG8 9JA

Independent Examiner
Galloways Accounting
Ridgeland House, 15 Carfax, Horsham, West Sussex RH12 1DY

Solicitor
Anderson Rowntree
Wisteria House, Market Square, Petworth, West Sussex GU28 0AJ

Fund Manager
Cazenove Capital Management Ltd
1 London Wall Place, London EC2Y 5AU

Bankers
CAF Bank Limited
25 King's Hill Avenue, West Malling, Kent ME19 4JQ

Chair's Introduction and Review of the Year

The NMCT was established in 1990. For the past 25 years, our treasurer has been Charles Sebag-Montefiore. He has seen us through international financial crises, the Covid pandemic and much more. It need not be repeated that without a well-organised income we could not pursue our work. Always well informed and thoughtful, he has been a constant source of humane and wise guidance in ensuring that our funds have been prudently managed so as to match our expenditure. We and all to whom we have given grants owe him profound thanks for a quarter-century of care. He has now retired, and in his place we have been delighted to welcome Philip Tansey, who brings his own financial knowledge and interest in our activities to this most central of tasks.

As always, we have paid especial attention to the needs and possibilities of training, the importance of experience to those entering manuscript conservation professions, and the importance of passing on skills to future generations. We were therefore very glad to enter into a partnership with other like-minded bodies to fund internships for people embarking on their careers. A brief account of intern Megan Whiteley's experience in the Senate House Library in London is printed later in this report.

Every year brings variety, as we work with organisations large and small and consider materials of all kinds. There are always surprises, such as the minute fragments of glass incorporated into the maps of part of Kent so as to make the sea appear to glisten. All too often, well-meaning measures for preservation taken in the past have not stood the test of time well. In the Rylands, parchment fragments of the Odyssey are to be rehoused, taken out of their unsuitable glass frames. In other, more recent, collections conservators cope with rusting staples, damage caused by ring binders, self-adhesive tape, animal glue and a host of other methods that once seemed good. Scrap books, whatever their scale, present especial challenges thanks to the mixed nature of their contents, anything from old parchment to modern newsprint. The immense volume containing all kinds of ephemera relating to the history of magic is a key part of the unique collection on the subject formed by Harry Price, now in the Senate House Library. It should be much easier – and safer – to consult in the future.

As usual, some awards have been made to large archives. We continued to support the work of West Sussex Record Office on the Chichester Consistory Court papers, which shed light on the early modern period in sometimes extraordinary detail. In Hampshire, work continued on the long series of medieval rolls from St Swithun's monastery from Winchester Cathedral, likewise making possible more detailed investigations of the past. In the British Jesuit Archives, attention was paid to the last of a group of documents at a critical period. In the 19th century, it was a particular pleasure to see work nearing completion on the papers of William Burges in the Glamorgan archives. In Cornwall, a start has been made on the architectural plans of a prominent local 19th-century architect, Sylvanus Trevail.

Others concerned more recent events. The plans providing all too immediate detail of the Senghenydd mining disaster of 1913 can now be more fully studied. Another part of Wales's industrial heritage is recorded in the considerable archive of the giant Ebbw Vale Steelworks. A third Welsh project casts light on how local tensions could arise in the First World War.

To our funders, and those who have shared their knowledge in considering sometimes complicated applications, we remain profoundly grateful. Our work, and the benefits it brings, would be impossible without them.

Professor David McKitterick
Chair

Work underway removing card backing stuck onto plan drawing of panel from Cardiff Castle. Courtesy of Glamorgan Archives.

The Bury Psalter f. 28r (detail), Psalm 38. David pointing to his mouth. Image by Henry Wolff and © Edward Cheese.

The Trustees are indebted to these partners and funders for their support of NMCT's work in 2025.

Pilgrim Trust

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

THE DULVERTON TRUST

T. S. ELIOT FOUNDATION

BRYAN GUINNESS
Charitable Trust

CAREWPOLE
CHARITABLE TRUST

THE GOLSONCOTT FOUNDATION

Thriplow Charitable Trust

TRINITY COLLEGE
CAMBRIDGE

And a number of generous individual donors.

NMCT's current level of grant-giving is possible thanks to our ongoing fundraising efforts. In 2010 we were able to give total grants of under £70,000.

Since then over £1.6m has been raised from many generous funders which has transformed our ability to support manuscript conservation projects.

Awards by the National Manuscripts Conservation Trust 2025

ABER VALLEY HERITAGE MUSEUM, SENGHENYDD
Conservation of inquest maps and drawings and preservation of memorial napkins
Project cost: £3,653
Grant award: £3,653

Andrea Davies, Trustee, writes: This project will conserve two profoundly significant collections relating to the 1913 Senghenydd mining disaster, the worst in British coal mining history. Central to the project is a rare and irreplaceable set of original surveyors' drawings produced immediately after the explosion. These meticulously executed plans document the underground layout of the Universal Colliery and record, with exacting precision, the locations where combustible material was identified and where the bodies of miners and pit ponies were found.

Created as key evidence for the official inquest, the drawings provide a uniquely direct and uncompromising insight into the conditions encountered by rescue teams on 14 October, 1913. Their historical, social, and industrial value is considerable, offering researchers primary evidence of both mining practices and the human cost of early 20th-century coal production. The surveyors' drawings will also be digitised so that they can be made as accessible as possible; facsimiles will be made for display in the museum.

In addition to these technical records, commemorative paper napkins printed with a memorial poem that were distributed within the Aber Valley community in the aftermath of the disaster will also be conserved. The napkins will be housed in a bespoke box made from archival materials.

Together, this small collection provides complementary perspectives, official and personal, on a defining moment in Welsh industrial history. Their conservation will ensure continued access for researchers, educators, and the community for generations to come. Thank you NMCT for making this project possible and to Glamorgan Archives for their help with the conservation and preservation work.

The memorial napkin. Courtesy of Aber Valley Heritage Museum.

BATH UNIVERSITY, ARCHIVES AND RESEARCH COLLECTIONS

Sir Isaac Pitman's Letter Book (1833-1838)

Project cost: £2,600

Grant award: £2,000

Lizzie Richmond, University Archivist, writes: Sir Isaac Pitman's (1813-1897) letter book (1833-1838) covers the period in which, while working full-time as a teacher, he designed and published stenographic sound hand, the phonetic shorthand system that made him famous (and rich). It documents the ideas behind his invention and early attempts to encourage its adoption.

As we move further into the 21st century there is an understandable tendency to regard shorthand writing as outmoded and irrelevant. This underestimates its value as a product and driver of Victorian innovation and entrepreneurship, evidencing a vital stage in the ongoing evolution of data and communication technology. Pitman's belief in the power of knowledge – that it should be available to as many people as possible at the least cost – underpinned his commercial activities and helped pave the way to the information age. His pioneering approach to capturing and transmitting language fuelled a worldwide business enterprise and helped to shape our appreciation of information as an asset. Recording the thinking behind this story of self-made success, the letter book is a fascinating artefact in its own right.

Thanks to the generosity of the National Manuscripts Conservation Trust, we are now able to conserve the fragile letter book and secure its place in the unfolding narrative of information technology. Restoring the physical integrity of this unique object is a fitting way to celebrate one of Bath's most interesting citizens while safeguarding his legacy.

Top: Photographic portrait of Sir Isaac Pitman (1813-1897), c 1880s
Right: Sir Isaac Pitman's letter book (1833-1838) cover.
Courtesy of the University of Bath.

BRITISH JESUIT ARCHIVES

Completing the restoration of *Anglia* for future generations: conservation of volumes III, V-VII

Project cost: £8,026
Grant award: £6,689

Rebecca Somerset, Province Archivist, writes: Thanks to the generous financial support of the NMCT, essential conservation work on the remaining four volumes of the seven-volume *Anglia* series is now underway.

The *Anglia* series is among the most treasured holdings of the collection. It contains manuscripts of exceptional importance for the early history of the Jesuit mission in England, as well as for Catholic history in 16th- and 17th-century Britain. In particular, Volume III – one of the largest in the series – comprises more than 100 individual documents dating from 1600 to 1613. It is of profound significance not only for Jesuit history but also for the wider narrative of British history, as it covers the aftermath of the failed Gunpowder Plot of 1605, in which several Jesuits, including Father Henry Garnet SJ, were accused of involvement, though they denied any direct participation.

These volumes are frequently requested by researchers. However, their fragile condition has made direct access impossible, and currently only low-quality photocopies produced from 1990s microfilm are available, significantly limiting usability. Completing the conservation of the remaining four volumes will not only secure their long-term preservation but also greatly improve access to the entire series. The volumes will also be digitised, which will substantially enhance access for both researchers and the wider public.

Above: Jolanta flattening folds and creases with heated spatula, through a silicone coated paper. Overleaf: Detail showing iron gall ink damage.
Courtesy of the National Conservation Service.

‘My colleague and I are working with cold gelatine mousse for the first time to repair areas affected by iron gall ink damage. We have found it surprisingly easy to use as an adhesive, which has been both encouraging and exciting.’

Conservator Jolanta Tursa, above.

which haue made me thinke out England
those wch you may reade in Sr Anthonie s
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all she could dispose of at her death,
sooner to giue me all she could spare
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that I was his onely sonne. I doubt
her death and she is neare 80 to haue aboute 1000 t to b
best for the good of the mission. Beside
hauing dedicated her verginitie and
allmightie God made a will at the exa
disposed for the good of the mission a

BROMLEY HISTORIC COLLECTIONS

The conservation of 18th- and 19th-century Overseers' Rate Books

Project Cost: £16,209
Grant Award: £6,696

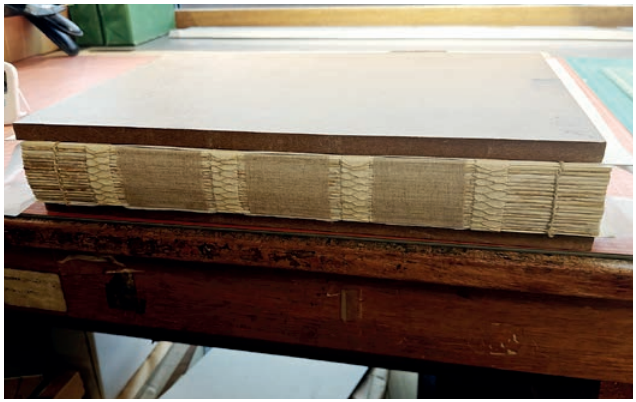
Gabriella Bush, Senior Archivist, writes: Bromley Historic Collections, operated by GLL on behalf of the London Borough of Bromley, is the combined archive, museum and local studies service, it is both a Place of Deposit and a Diocesan Record Office for Rochester. Our Church records hold significant value to both parish and family historians in and outside the borough.

These five Overseers' Rate Books, belonging to the parish of All Saints, Orpington, date from 1780 to 1836 and were sadly in poor condition. Front covers were worn or missing, many of the pages were tatty around the edges, paper was thinning, binding had come loose and they showed evidence of historic mould, damp and pest damage.

Treatment included surface cleaning of all volumes, pages were paginated and an alphabet letter added in pencil to indicate the beginning of a new signature. In one case, the textblock was reordered to fix its continuity. Areas with sizing loss, were locally resized and areas of thinning in the paper were consolidated. New endpapers were created and textblock was sewn in the original style with archival or flax linen thread. A limp paper cover was made for all the volumes and each is now housed in its own box. Original covers/end papers were retained and packed with the associated volume.

We are due to publish a book about the Poor Laws in Bromley which will help to better contextualise these, and other records.

We are grateful that the generous grant from the NMCT enabled us to make these volumes accessible again.



Top: Example of separated text blocks. Above: During treatment – the textblocks being rebound. Courtesy of National Conservation Service.

ST EDMUNDSBURY CATHEDRAL, BURY ST EDMUNDS

The Bury Psalter, c.1405-1410: conserving and displaying a town's manuscript heritage

Project Cost: £7,627

Grant Award: £1,890

Suzanne Reynolds and Stephen Dart, Voluntary Librarians, write: This large, richly illuminated Psalter was made c.1405-1410 in Bury St Edmunds for use at the Benedictine Abbey there, home to one of the largest libraries in medieval Britain (some 3,000 volumes) which was ruthlessly dispersed at the Dissolution in 1539. The Psalter remained in the local area and was gifted to the King Edward VI Grammar School in Bury St Edmunds in 1706, where the school's Foundation Governors took responsibility for it for the next 300 years. In 2025, in an act of remarkable civic generosity, the governors transferred ownership of the Psalter to the Cathedral Library.

The aims of this gift were to secure the Psalter's long-term preservation, safeguard its future in the town for which it was made, and place it on public display in the Cathedral Treasury.

The manuscript is in a robust post-1895 binding which was showing signs of wear and tear at the joints and corners. Its 190 folios had areas of ink corrosion where the parchment support had split and needed stabilisation. Small splits and tears in the edges of the leaves needed repair to prevent them becoming worse, and suction pleats required humidification and flattening to prevent them from developing further and causing damage to inks and pigments.

We are most grateful to the NMCT for their grant. This has enabled us to commission the necessary conservation work from Edward Cheese ACR, and, in addition, has funded bespoke supports for the book so that it can be displayed at a range of different openings. The manuscript was formally received by the Cathedral at Choral Evensong in March 2026, after which it was put on display.

Left: The Bury Psalter on the day of the Choral Evensong where it was formally received. Above: On display in the Cathedral.

Courtesy of St Edmundsbury Cathedral.

CANNON HALL MUSEUM, BARNSLEY MUSEUMS

The conservation of a Special Pardon from King Charles II

Project cost: £705

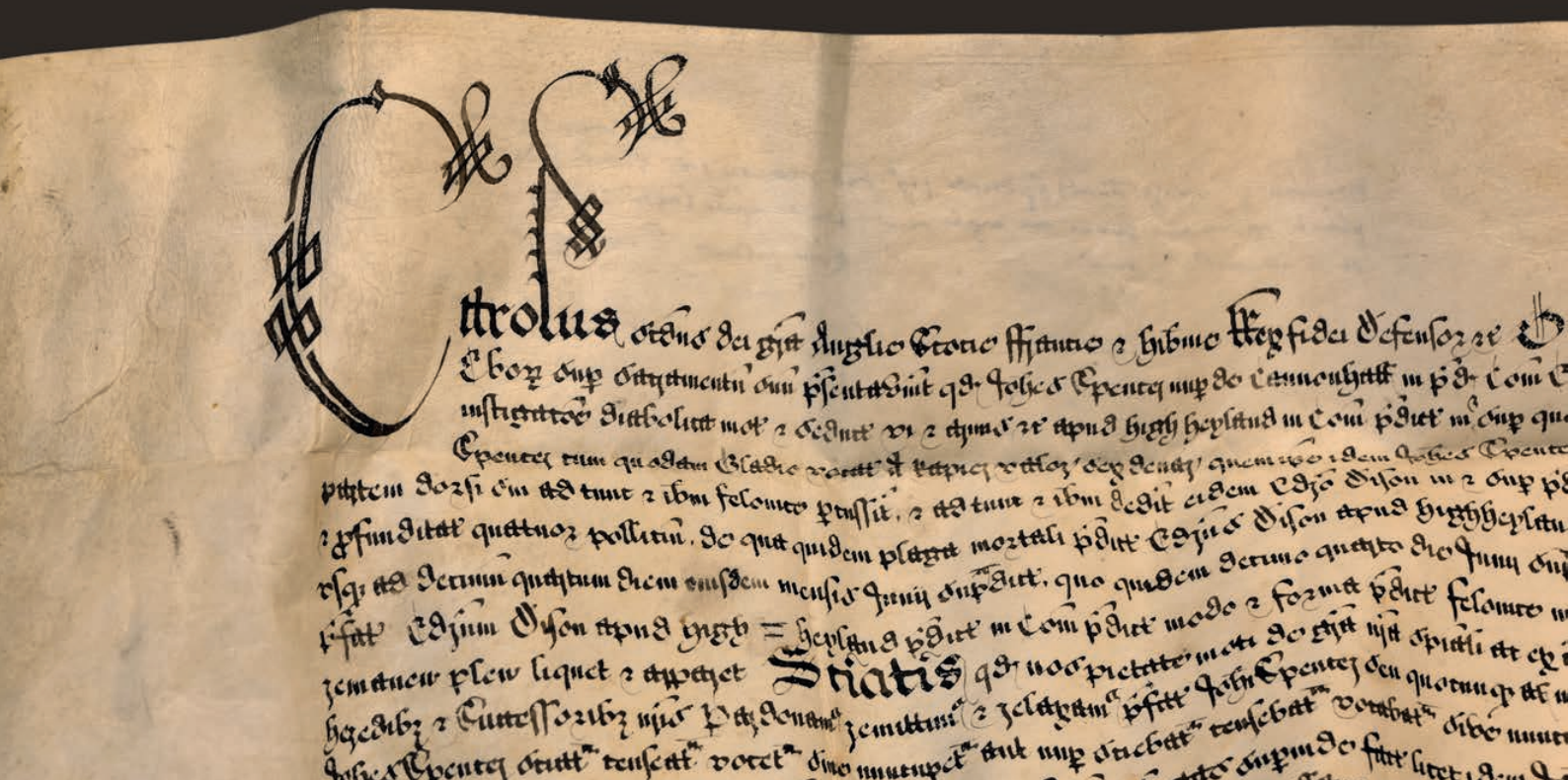
Grant award: £550

Melissa Gallimore, Freelance Curator, writes: The grant from NMCT will enable the conservation of an important document relating to the Spencer Stanhope family, owners of Cannon Hall near Barnsley from the mid-17th century to 1951. Dating from the 1660s this document is a special pardon for John Spencer with the royal seal of King Charles II. In 1661 John Spencer killed Edward Dison, a local man fishing close to the estate. It is uncertain whether the man was poaching but it is reputed by the Spencer Stanhope family that John Spencer had a quick temper and a cruel disposition. John Spencer made his successful plea at the assizes at York Castle.

John Spencer was the first member of his family to own Cannon Hall, starting a lineage of ownership that lasted almost 300 years. The document, written in Latin, was gifted back to the Hall in 2023 by James Fraser, grandson of the last owner. We would like to thank Christopher Whittick for his support in translating and researching the content.

The document has been folded for a considerable time and conservation will allow it to be gently flattened and surface-cleaned. The damaged seal will also be carefully supported to prevent further damage and loss. After conservation it will go on display at Cannon Hall Museum from May to September 2026 as part of the exhibition about the Hall and its owners. The manuscript has given us important new information about the first owner of the Hall and will enrich our interpretation and discussion about his life and times.

Detail of the special pardon. Courtesy of Barnsley Museums (Cannon Hall Museum).



The seal of the special pardon before conservation. Courtesy of Barnsley Museums (Cannon Hall Museum).

CONWY ARCHIVES SERVICE

Conserving the Llanrwst petition

Project Cost: £1,270

Grant award: £1,270

Kate Hallett, Archives Manager, writes: David Evans (1883–1921), born into a farming family in Betws-y-Coed, became a veterinary surgeon whose practice was vital to local farming, mining, and forestry communities, all reliant on horse power. In 1917, during the World War I and compulsory conscription for fighting age men, Evans was called up for military service. He appealed for exemption, arguing his work was essential on the home front, but his appeal was refused, even at county level.

This led to the creation of a petition in 1917, comprising 46 pages of names, addresses, and supporting letters from the Llanrwst community pleading for their only vet to remain. These names offer a rare snapshot of rural Welsh society between the 1911 and 1921 censuses, revealing a community that valued local needs over compulsory military service.

The NMCT's kind support has enabled conservation of this manuscript, which has suffered damage through frequent public consultation at Llanrwst Library. Without conservation, access would have had to be restricted. The conserved manuscript is now stored securely in Conwy Archives and available for supervised research. Digitisation is allowing wider access and a display is also planned at Llanrwst Library. The digital copy will also contribute to the Crowd Cymru digital volunteering project, enabling transcription by Welsh speakers and enriching our online catalogue with detailed, name-rich records of great interest to local researchers.

Above: Llanwrst petition after conservation. Right: Conserved items in their original packaging. Courtesy of Conwy Archives Service.

EAST LONDON MOSQUE ARCHIVES

Conserving a unique record of British Muslim history

Project cost: £7,800
Grant award: £7,800

Jamil Sherif, Member of the East London Mosque Archives Working Committee, writes: Thanks to this NMCT grant a unique document that had fallen into poor condition due to wear and tear can now be conserved and preserved for future generations. This is the personal memory book of Abdullah Yusuf Ali (1872–1953), renowned for his translation and commentary of the Qur'an, and a figure closely associated with the East London Mosque in various roles from the 1920s to the 1940s.

Sufia Alam, Head of the East London Mosque Archives, said: 'NMCT first supported us in 2013 with the preservation of the London Mosque Fund Minutes Book. We are once again grateful for their support, which will help ensure that young Muslims in particular have access to a primary source documenting the life and work of one of our pioneering elders.'

The conservation work will be carried out by book and paper conservator Abigail Bainbridge ACR. The conserved original will be available for researchers to consult; a facsimile will be created to reduce pressure on the original and a digital copy will be made to enable wide access.

The scrapbook is of national significance as evidence of Muslim presence and participation in British public life during the inter-war years. It contains newspaper cuttings documenting Yusuf Ali's activities, transcripts of 'Eid khutbahs and speeches, letters and poems, and material relating to his work for the Ministry of Information during the Second World War.

The scrapbook was recovered from debris around 1973 when a mosque in London was demolished for redevelopment. It remained in private hands until its recent donation to the East London Mosque Archives.

Below, left: Abigail Bainbridge examining the scrapbook before disbinding.
Below right: The volume before conservation.

Courtesy of the East London Mosque Trust and Abigail Bainbridge ACR.

EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY HERITAGE COLLECTIONS
Preserving the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland Director's letters
Project cost: £26,552
Grant award: £9,000

Antonia Clark, Senior Philanthropy Officer, writes:
The archive of the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland (RZSS) was recently transferred to the University of Edinburgh. The RZSS was founded by Thomas Gillespie in 1909, and Edinburgh Zoo opened soon after in 1913. Gillespie was Director from 1913 to 1950. As a broadcasting contributor to the BBC radio programme 'Children's Hour', he became known as 'The Zoo Man'.

Gillespie's letters as RZSS Director expand our understanding of the working practices and attitudes of the Society in the early 20th century, as well as giving us a picture of his own personal and professional interests. Topics include the animal trade, the effects of colonialism, veterinary practice and attitudes to animal welfare.

The letters are currently unsuitable for handling and therefore inaccessible to researchers. Tightly packed in their original acidic ring-binders, they are on fragile copy paper which tears easily against the metal fastenings, and there is surface dirt and mould. Treatment includes removal from the current ring-binders, surface cleaning, foliation and collation, repairs using Japanese paper, guarding and folding, sewing the leaves into protective smaller booklets, and housing the booklets in custom-made covers and boxes.

We are grateful for this NMCT grant, which is funding a paper conservator to carry out essential work to stabilise these documents and protect them from further deterioration, through cleaning, repair and rehousing.

Paper Conservator pasting Japanese paper guards to edges of documents ready for folding and binding.

Letters ready for binding, after pasting with Japanese paper guards. Images courtesy of the University of Edinburgh.

GLAMIS CASTLE ARCHIVES

The conservation of five volumes from the Strathmore Papers Collection, 1666 to 20th century

Project cost: £5,050

Grant award: £4,550

Ingrid Thomson, Glamis Castle Archivist, writes: The five volumes in urgent need of repair represent the history of Glamis in eclectic ways. Lady Helen Middleton's Recipe Book dating from 1666, contains both culinary and medicinal recipes; whilst the harrowing narrative of Mary Eleanor Bowes, Countess of Strathmore and Kinghorne, of her second marriage to the scheming, psychopathic Andrew Robinson Stoney Bowes, written in 1795, is one of the earliest detailed accounts of domestic abuse. The 13th Earl of Strathmore and Kinghorne's Game Book, 1878-1888, not only records game shot on the estate but also includes many unique artistic illustrations of historic events and wildlife at Glamis, as well as family photographs.

The Factor's Account Book, 1888-1894, records rentals and accounts, which tells us much about developments at the castle and estate. Finally, a 20th-century Visitors' Book contains the signatures of WWI convalescent soldiers, family, friends and royalty. It has the first of several signatures of 'Lilibet' (Queen Elizabeth II), aged five in 1931, and informal family photographs taken at the golden wedding celebrations of her maternal grandparents, the 14th Earl and Countess of Strathmore and Kinghorne that year.

Thanks to this generous grant from the NMCT, we are delighted that conservator Emma Fraser ACR of The Book and Paper Studio, Dundee, will now be able to clean and repair the damaged bindings and joints, and secure the loose pages in these five significant volumes, ensuring their continuing accessibility and longevity.

Lady Helen Middleton's Recipe Book, 1666 (Vol.243). Images courtesy of Strathmore Estates (Holding) Ltd.

GLAMORGAN ARCHIVES

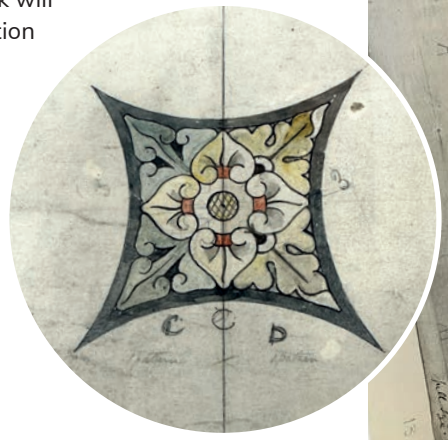
Preserving the Cardiff Castle collection, Phase 3

Project cost: £25,064

Grant award: £20,000

Laura Cotton, Glamorgan Archivist, writes: The Cardiff Castle collection comprises c.2,000 drawings and paintings compiled by William Burges, the respected architect and designer who worked in the Gothic Revival style. The majority of the items relate to his redevelopment of Cardiff Castle (on behalf of the 3rd Marquis of Bute) from 1868 until his death in 1881, although there are also drawings for his reconstruction of Castell Coch, 1872-1881, and other buildings with which he was involved around the same date.

Following two successful phases of work from 2023-2025, which conserved large rolled drawings and tracings, we are delighted to have received a further grant to enable us to complete conservation work on this significant collection. This final phase will concentrate on paper plans that have been stuck onto blotting paper or mount board, large badly damaged plans and the small or medium-sized plans or drawings that are badly damaged. Work will be undertaken by a conservation intern under supervision from our conservation staff, with assistance from a specialist works-of-art on paper conservator.



Once conservation work has consolidated the whole of this large collection, cataloguing and digitisation will be undertaken to make the material more widely accessible, enabling broader research and exhibitions to take place within Cardiff Castle and beyond. The work of William Burges is relatively under-researched and it is hoped that, by widening research access to the collection, more people will discover these wonderful drawings and paintings.

Work underway to separate Cardiff Castle plan from old heat-set tissue. Plan shows inlay from back of seat in the Library (see detail, left). Courtesy of Glamorgan Archives.

GWENT ARCHIVES

Saving Steeltown: Conserving the records of the Ebbw Vale Steelworks

Project cost: £30,467

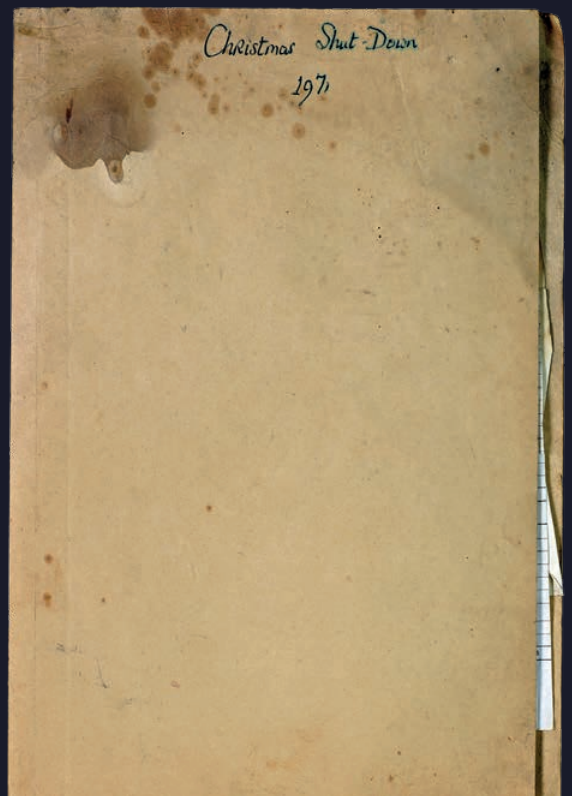
Grant award: £22,608

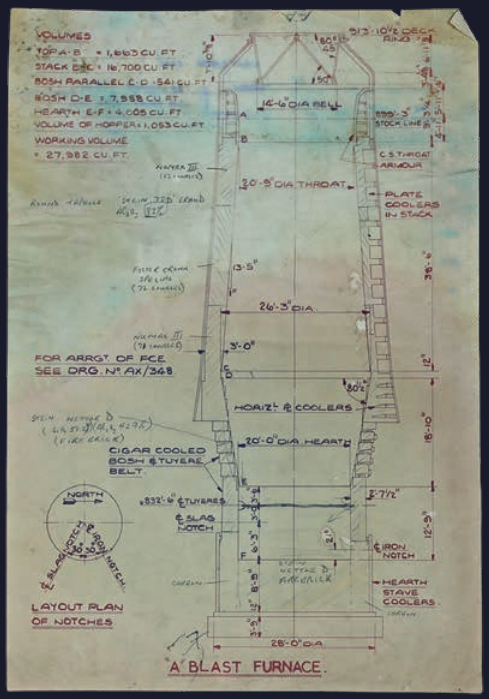
Lisa Snook, County Archivist, and Rhiannon Griffiths, Conservator, write: The Steelworks was an imposing feature of the landscape in Ebbw Vale and part of the everyday work, social and educational life of the inhabitants of the town and environs. It had a huge reach: the site was several miles long and employed 14,000 workers at its height.

This collection is the only intact steelworks archive in the UK. It represents over 200 years of iron and steelmaking in Ebbw Vale, from the beginning of the ironworks in 1789-1790, the rolling of the world's first steel rail in 1857, through successive changes in ownership – including British Steel and Corus – and fluctuating fortunes to its eventual closure in 2002 and subsequent demolition.

After its closure the records were rescued by volunteers and moved to a storage unit, but it had poor environmental conditions. The collection suffered some water damage, resulting in stiff and brittle parchment and damaged ink. The collection also has ingrained and surface dirt and mould in small sections, and parts are housed in acidic or plastic packaging with metal fastenings.

This generous grant from the NMCT will allow the conservator and a fixed-term Preservation Assistant to humidify older deeds to relax the parchment and flatten them for safe use; 'fix' loose or powdery ink to prevent loss of information and to clean and repackage documents into archival packaging. Once preserved, the collection will be catalogued and made available for research and engagement activities.





Blast furnace documents in poor condition. Courtesy of Gwent Archives.

HAMPSHIRE ARCHIVES

Winchester Cathedral medieval rolls conservation project

Project cost: £25,377
Grant award: £20,700

Sarah Lewin, Information and Archives Manager, writes:
The medieval parchment rolls that will be conserved and digitised through this project come from the extensive Winchester Cathedral Archive and date from the late 13th century onwards. They are nationally significant because St. Swithun's Priory at Winchester Cathedral was a major institution and landholder, and seat of the bishops of Winchester many of whom were pre-eminent in state and church.

About 1,300 medieval Cathedral rolls survive. When they were surveyed in the 1990s, about 880 were found to require conservation, many being too fragile to be handled. Over 60 were conserved in 2011-2012 supported by a generous grant from NMCT, but most remain untreated. In the current project we aim to conserve a further 40 rolls to make them stable enough to allow more detailed cataloguing, research and digitisation. They include some of the earliest and most badly damaged rolls, currently completely inaccessible to researchers.

All the rolls will be cleaned and, where necessary, humidified to allow them to be flattened. Tears and weak areas will be supported and infilled. The rolls will then be rehoused to provide ongoing protection, some stored flat and encapsulated in archival polyester, others rolled around an archival core to prevent further damage.

A part-time post of Assistant Conservator has been created to assist our in-house conservator, Frances Lunn ACR, enabling her to spend time focussing on this project. It will not only conserve and make accessible some highly important medieval archives, but also to develop our conservation team's knowledge and skill in parchment conservation.

Hordarian's account roll during conservation. Courtesy of Hampshire Archives.

Hordarian's account roll during conservation. Courtesy of Hampshire Archives.

HAWKSHEAD GRAMMAR SCHOOL MUSEUM

The conservation of the school's Letter Patent from 1585

Project cost: £3,620
Grant award: £3,620

Hollie Barker, Assistant Manager, writes: When Hawkshead Grammar School was founded by Archbishop Edwin Sandys in 1585, he obtained a Letters Patent from Queen Elizabeth I granting the right to establish the school. The school remained open until 1909 and taught many schoolboys including William Wordsworth and his brothers.

The Letters Patent reflects not only the story of the school's origin, but also that of contemporary Elizabethan grammar schools nationally. Education was important in the Elizabethan era, as Elizabeth I encouraged the establishment of grammar schools across the country, primarily to further the adoption of Protestantism following the dissolution of the monasteries.

Until the 1980s this document was stored folded in the original muniments chest owned by the school and the vellum is heavily creased as a result. In the 1980s the document was framed for museum display. However, the frame is not properly secure, leaving the manuscript open to environmental stressors. The vellum manuscript is discoloured and the delicately drawn illustrations, including an image of Elizabeth I, are faded and cracking.

Thanks to this generous grant from the NMCT, conservator Richard Hawkes ACR will clean and stabilise the manuscript to prevent further deterioration. It will also be digitised and a facsimile will be created. This work will allow us to display the facsimile of the Letters Patent whilst preserving the original and making it available for research, engagement and education opportunities.

Top: Facsimile and replica seals. Bottom, detail: Illustration of Elizabeth I. Courtesy of Hawkshead Grammar School Museum.

KRESEN KERNOW
Mr Trevail's Landmarks
Project cost: £2,750
Grant award: £2,750

Deborah Tritton, Archive Services Manager, writes: This pilot project will appraise, stabilise, and repackage a small selection of the thousands of plans in the Silvanus Trevail collection held at Kresen Kernow. Silvanus Trevail (1851-1903) was a prominent 19th-century Cornish architect, he was elected President of the Society of Architects in 1901. Over the course of his career, he worked on more than 300 commissions and the plans selected for the pilot will illustrate the amazing breadth of buildings he designed, including churches, houses, commercial and public buildings.

The drawings are on wove and laid Western paper, tracing papers, and linens, and the media is comprised of pencil, inks, watercolours, blueprints and diazotypes. Currently they are rolled in hundreds of bundles, and this project will put in place processes to enable handling and use, as well as digitisation of a selection of the plans to make available online to promote the project and the collection. As well as the generous grant from the NMCT, we are grateful to the Carew-Pole Charitable Trust and the former Silvanus Trevail Society for their funding to support this pilot project.

Above: Borrower lobby details, pen and wash on tracing paper, Bodmin Library, 1896-97. Right: Signed plans and elevations, pen and ink, Boscastle School, 1878. Courtesy of Kresen Kernow.

JOHN RYLANDS RESEARCH INSTITUTE AND LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

Conservation treatment and re-housing of the 'Papyrus' Rylands Greek 53: *The Odyssey*

Project cost: £22,730

Grant award: £9,100

Elisabeth Carr ACR, Collection Care Manager, writes: Despite the confusing catalogue name, this is in fact a large third–fourth century CE parchment codex of Homer's *Odyssey*. Originally comprising the entire epic, the surviving remains include substantial portions of Books 12-15 and 18-24. The manuscript comprises 22 fragmentary folios preserved in 13 glazed frames, plus uncatalogued fragments. Mid-20th-century glass mounts, devised for papyrus rather than parchment, have caused distortion and cracking, salt bloom on the glass, adhesive ingress, mislabelling and exposed edges, obscuring the text and creating handling risks.

The project begins with documentation and imaging of the glazings, including high-resolution photography, multi-spectral and photometric stereoscopic imaging. Conservators will open the frames, detach the fragments, and reduce historic tapes and residues using poultices and micro-tools. Tears and weak edges will be stabilised with Japanese paper tabs adhered with wheat starch paste, the Research Curator will then assist with the realignment of the fragments to restore coherence across the codex.

Crucially, the NMCT grant provides dedicated time for bench trials and consultation allowing us to research, test and refine a suitable, low-intervention and innovative mounting system tailored to parchment, enabling safe viewing of both sides and meeting requirements for handling, imaging and display. Treatment is paired with codicological investigation and scientific analysis, including Fibre Optic Reflectance Spectroscopy to characterise inks and proteomic species identification to support biocodicological research. The findings will inform rehousing in archival enclosures, deliver updated catalogue data and a new digital facsimile, strengthening teaching and research internationally in the long term.

Conservator with an unglazed leaf. Courtesy of the University of Manchester.

Top: Self-adhesive tape on an unglazed leaf. Above: Detail af several overlapped gazed leaves. Courtesy of the University of Manchester.

THE ROYAL SOCIETY

The conservation of the Patent granted to Robert Rigg FRS, organic chemist, by George IV, in 1827

Project cost: £5,810
Grant award: £3,200

Vida Milovanovic, Assistant Archivist, writes: Having kept a library since its foundation in 1660, The Royal Society holds one of the most important heritage collections in the world in documenting the development and influence of science in the modern age.

The Society recently accepted the donation, from the descendants of organic chemist Robert Rigg FRS, of this patent for apparatus employed in the distillation of vinegar. Rigg, an exemplar of industry and ingenuity during the industrial revolution, was part of a generation of professionalising scientists, rather than gentleman enthusiasts, who did not earn their keep through science. Rigg founded a brewery with his brother and moved into vinegar production, leading to the grant of the patent.

The material object is an illuminated manuscript on parchment, with its original great seal attached. It has a bespoke 19th-century storage box lined, intriguingly, with printed sheets from an 18th-century publication on Captain Cook's voyages.

The generous grant from the NMCT will enable the conservation of the patent and the improvement of its housing; the original box and seal enclosure will be retained as part of the object's history. The conservator will also create a bespoke mount to accommodate the delicate wax seal and support the ingrained folds of the vellum; it will then be digitised. The manuscript will be incorporated into an exhibition on patents and inventions, placing the object in context with other inventions of Fellows of the Royal Society, and charting the formal documentation and registration of those inventions.

Robert Rigg patent with seal. Courtesy of the Royal Society.

SENATE HOUSE LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

The conservation of the 'Wonderful Magical' scrapbook, 1450-1850

Project cost: £20,677

Grant award: £9,000

Lucy Evans, Head of Collections, writes: The 'Wonderful Magical' scrapbook, 1450-1850, contains 1,100 manuscript and archival items on magic, spiritualism and the paranormal; it forms part of the Harry Price Archive, one of Senate House Library's most consulted and significant collections.

Harry Price (1881-1948), British psychic researcher, amateur conjurer and ghost hunter, assembled an extraordinary archive of books, manuscripts, prints and ephemera; he bequeathed the collection to the University of London in 1948. The archive is a significant national resource for the study of psychical research and spiritualism; in 2024-2025 alone 10% of all consultation requests across the Library were for items from the archive.

Described by Price as 'the most extraordinary collection of magical scraps ever bound together', 'Wonderful Magical' offers unique insight into centuries of magical and occult traditions. Its fascinating contents – letters, notes, drawings, cuttings and ephemera – document astrology, cartomancy, performance magic and more, revealing the people, practices and networks that shaped these fields.

The scrapbook is in very poor condition and has been 'not fit for production' since 2013, preventing physical access for detailed cataloguing and for research. Conservation work will involve full disbinding, repairs, digitisation, resewing and rebinding. Adapted covers and a bespoke clamshell box will ensure safe handling, significantly improving access for researchers and the public.

Senate House Library is deeply grateful to the NMCT for its generous help in preserving this important collection.

Above: Cover damage. Left: An example of the extraordinary array of most diverse scraps and their extensive damage.

Courtesy of Senate House Library.

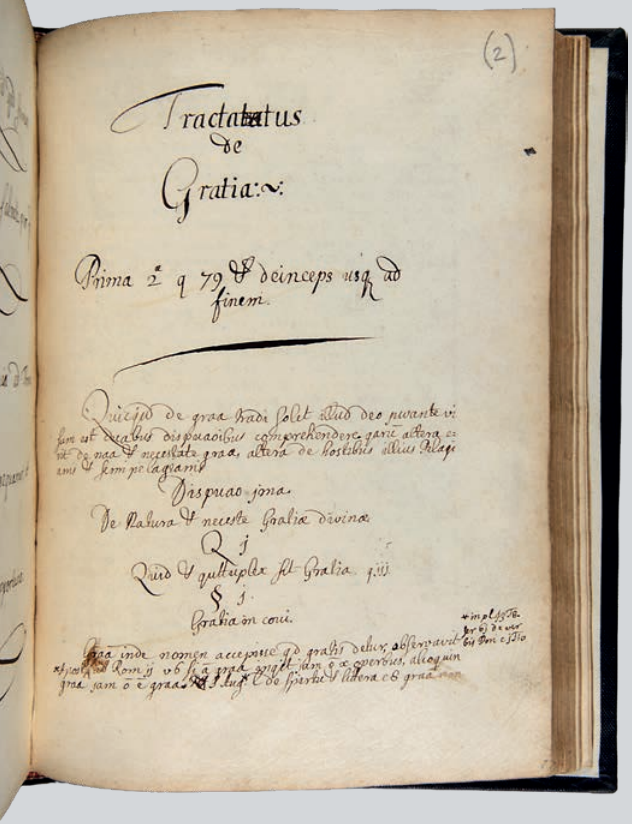
USHAW HISTORIC HOUSE, CHAPELS AND GARDENS, DURHAM

Ushaw Library Manuscripts (1500-1890): conservation and access

Project cost: £6,874

Grant award: £5,810

Dr Claire Marsland, Curator, writes: From 1808, Ushaw College served as the main English Catholic seminary for the northern districts, educating boys from 11 to 25 years old. Its library reflects its university level of teaching, as Catholics were not able to attend Oxford or Cambridge until 1871. It comprises over 60,000 books, including over 100 incunabula, pamphlet material and printed ephemera from the 15th-21st century, and 50 medieval manuscripts.



The focus of this project is 149 bound volumes of manuscripts dating from 1500-1890, which include rare and nationally significant items. Most importantly, there are 58 Douai Dictates, handwritten lecture notes by students at Ushaw's predecessor, the English College, Douai (1568-1793), dating between the 1630s and 1790s. The European practice of writing dictates meant that each student had, in his own hand, a reliable summary of his courses in philosophy and theology to guide him through his work as a missionary priest serving in England. These texts now provide vital information about teaching practices in an English exile community.

The generous grant from the NMCT is enabling the treatment of these manuscripts by conservator Gloria Conti ACR. They will be cleaned, assessed for stabilisation and housing needs and inspected for iron gall ink degradation. This is important work as Ushaw's library has faced challenging environmental conditions over the past few years, which the team is now working hard to mitigate.

Above: Ushaw historic library, c.1894. Left: Douai Dictate by Peter Tunstall, 1679. Courtesy of Ushaw Historic House, Chapels and Gardens.

WEST SUSSEX RECORD OFFICE

Ordinary Voices Revealed: conserving the working papers of the Consistory Court of the Archdeaconry of Chichester, 1554-1851

Project cost: £19,014
Grant award: £13,543

Jennifer Mason, Collections Manager, and Carina Rosas, Senior Conservator, write: The archive of the Diocese of Chichester contains an extensive series of records, including the working papers of the Consistory Court for the Archdeaconry of Chichester, described as 'Miscellaneous Court Papers', dating from 1554 to 1851. This is an extremely significant series of records, not only shedding light on the administration and operation of the Consistory Court but also providing insight into the lives and activities of ordinary people. They represent a point of connection between residents of the Diocese today and those living over 400 years ago, as well as being an untapped source for researchers from a range of disciplines.

The vast majority of documents in the series were found to be in poor condition, and were largely inaccessible due to their fragility. After a successful Phase I of this project in 2024 that was generously funded by NMCT, we have recently begun Phase II, which aims to conserve 65 folders of documents in four months. The grant funding has been used to employ a recent graduate for this period, providing an exciting career opportunity that encompasses both practical conservation work and project management experience.

The conservation treatment focuses predominantly on stabilisation of the documents. Treatment follows the principle of minimum intervention and takes a fit-for-purpose approach, aiming for sufficient physical integrity to enable safe use and handling of the documents.

We are very grateful to the NMCT for making this project possible.

Above: Yearly bundle (1710) before treatment (Ep I/15/1/188).

Daniella Shuhman, Assistant Conservator, treating Consistory Court records.
Images courtesy of West Sussex Record Office.

WILTSHIRE & SWINDON HISTORY CENTRE IN COLLABORATION WITH NEW FOLKESTONE SOCIETY

Conservation and digitisation of Abraham Walter's Book of Maps of East Kent 1699

Project Cost: £2,250

Grant Award: £2,250

Patricia Cocks, New Folkestone Society, writes: This generous NMCT grant has enabled us to conserve Abraham Walter's Book of Maps that is held at the Wiltshire & Swindon History Centre (WSHC) in the collection of the Earls of Radnor.

The survey, begun in 1698, covers the Folkestone estates of Jacob Desbouvery. Large versions of the maps were reduced in scale for this book, which was finished 15 December 1699 and used as a portable record by the bailiff. The indexes detail ownership, acreage, and use of land in the 17th century. Many of the maps are illustrated with bold colours and gold detail.

Metal furniture remained intact on the covers, but the binding itself had failed. During consultation with the conservator it was agreed, due to its fragile condition, not to re-stitch the text block but to preserve the covers separately and keep the text block separate so that the volume can be handled without damaging the pages.

The text block was surface cleaned, avoiding areas of delicate ink. Brittle animal glue and leather remnants were removed, parchment pages repaired, and edges reinforced. Interestingly, glitter on the areas of sea was identified as glass by conservators at WSHC.

The leather boards were surface-cleaned, and edges consolidated. The document has been housed in a bespoke archive box.

Before treatment – the inside cover with clasps. Courtesy of Lux & Livre.

New Folkestone Society is indebted to WSHC's Collections Manager, Ian Hicks, for his collaboration, enabling us to have this document conserved and digitised for future generations.

WILTSHIRE & SWINDON HISTORY CENTRE
A View Across Time: Conserving the Arundell Manorial Court Rolls, 1331-1799
Project cost: £31,625
Grant award: £15,000

Sophie Coles, Archive Conservator, and Naomi Oakley, Archivist, write: A notable land-owning family, the Arundells were granted the Wardour estates by Henry VIII, with the Manor of Tisbury awarded to Sir Thomas Arundell in 1540. The Arundells were a great landowning family reaching their greatest extent in the late 18th century, followed by bankruptcy.

The Arundell Court Rolls are parchment manuscripts containing valuable legal information about property ownership and rights, and insights into the day-to-day lives of the manorial tenants from 1331 to 1799. A rich source of social and economic history during this period, they also provide information of national historical significance, such as evidence of the impact of the Black Death on labour and social structure for the Manor of Tisbury.

The parchment documents, some with multiple pages, are rolled. In many cases the information contained is unavailable to researchers as the moderate to severe deterioration of the edges means they cannot be unrolled without causing damage. The generous funding from the NMCT has enabled the archive conservator to buy time from her income generation requirements to focus on this project, providing a valuable opportunity for her to develop her skills in parchment conservation. Prior to the start of the conservation work, Sophie benefitted from a period at the Bodleian Library's conservation department learning from colleagues there and practising the techniques.

The 20 most damaged documents will be surface-cleaned, repaired and rehoused. There will also be a volunteer programme to clean and rehouse the remaining rolls that are in better condition. This project will make the rolls accessible for the first time since they were deposited and will protect them for the future.

Shaping an infill using Japanese paper, with the aid of a lightbox. Courtesy of Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre.

The Lasting Benefit of NMCT Grants

The NMCT has helped institutions to conserve important manuscripts and collections for thirty years. In this section we give some examples of projects that would not have been possible without NMCT's support.

NORFOLK MUSEUMS SERVICE
The conservation of a 15th-century Processional and a 16th-century Commonplace book
Project cost: £32,350
Grant award: £20,350 in 2020

Debbie Harris ACR, Senior Conservator, writes:
A remarkable survival, the Castle Acre Processional is a rare 15th-century English manuscript, probably written in the Cluniac priory of Castle Acre, Norfolk. Its pages hold chants for the mass and office hours of feast days, including notation for other ceremonies not held in earlier processionals. The extensive content positions it as an English exemplar of an elaborate and comprehensive processional of the period.

The Commonplace book of Henry Appleyard of Dunston, 1560, was progressively added to by the family over 40 years. Entries include the deeds of Roman emperors, lists of mayors and sheriffs of Norwich, and almanacs. Illustrated throughout, with a particular density of entries examining science and astronomy, it includes a fold-out map with a biblical gloss. The contents reflect the intellectual appetites and the changing world view of Tudor England.

These two manuscripts are essential in understanding Norfolk's past, both religious and secular. They were highlighted during an initial conservation assessment, as future exhibits for the Gallery of Medieval Life: A British Museum Partnership. Both required extensive treatment to maximise their potential accessibility and to make it possible to display them. Both were digitised so they could be made widely and freely accessible. The digitised processional has been used in an informative gallery interactive. Transcriptions of selected processional chants with an East Anglian interest were made by Professor John Harper of Birmingham University and recorded by volunteers from Norwich Cathedral's choir under their Master of Music, Ashley Grote. Visitors will be able to hear these monastic chants for the first time since the dissolution of the monasteries.

Castle Acre Processional before conservation.
Images on pages 32 to 35 are courtesy of Norfolk Museums Service.

Commonplace Book (Fol 8v) Listings and personifications of some of the major power-breakers of the ancient world – the proclaimed enemies of the Kingdom of Israel. The names include Darius the Great and Cyrus the Great, Kings of Persia, Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, and Alexander the Great, King of Macedon.

Commonplace Book: Fold out map of the world with a biblical gloss.

Above: A family enjoying the Commonplace Book on display. Below: The projections in The Great Hall at Norwich Castle Keep tell the story of life in the medieval period. © Norfolk Museums Service.

In August 2025, one of the most spectacular of palaces in medieval Europe fully reopened its doors, turning back the clock 900 years to the heyday of Norman England following a multi-million-pound redevelopment. It is now one of the most accessible historic buildings of its age in Europe and The Gallery of Medieval Life: A British Museum Partnership is an integral part of Norwich Castle's transformation. This project has been a wonderful collaboration with external manuscript conservators Bridget Warrington ACR, Victoria Stevens ACR (who has since been elected as a NMCT Trustee) and photographer, Colin Dunn of Scriptura.

The NMCT has been pivotal in ensuring the accessibility of these two significant manuscripts for generations to come.

STAFFORDSHIRE AND STOKE-ON-TRENT ARCHIVES

Conservation of the Minton Archive, Phase 1
Project cost: £33,000
Grant award: £24,000 in 2015

Jess Hyslop ACR writes: For one year in 2016-2017 I worked as Project Conservator on the Minton project. I had recently graduated from the two-year MA Conservation: Books & Library Materials at West Dean College and this was my first job in the profession.

Among the challenging conservation projects that I worked on were large springback volumes, small tightback books, tattered lever arch files full of single-sheet designs, and many loose single-sheet artworks. The items were often severely damaged and inaccessible to readers in their current state, and it was necessary in many cases entirely to resew the textblocks and either reback or even rebind the volumes with new archival-quality leather. It is relatively unusual to carry out such interventive treatments – as the ethical circumstances do not always call for it – and this opportunity so early in my career was invaluable in reinforcing and building upon my Master's training.

I also gained valuable experience of making independent treatment decisions. Though I had a wonderful line manager whose advice I could seek, for three days a week I was the sole conservator based at Stoke-on-Trent Central Library and so needed to be able to make decisions alone – something I became increasingly confident in doing as the year progressed.

The wealth of experience I gained through this NMCT-funded project was, I believe, directly responsible for me getting the job of Conservator at the Oxford Conservation Consortium (OCC).

Here, we work for 17 of the Oxford colleges, conserving a huge variety of library and archival material, from medieval manuscripts to 20th-century machine-sewn volumes. I have now worked at the OCC for 8 years and have recently achieved professional Accreditation and have been promoted to Senior Conservator.

It is also very satisfying recently to have supervised a conservation student who is at the start of her own career. Her one-month placement, funded by the NMCT, focussed on the conservation of John Keble's sermons.

Jean Brooks (L) supervised by Jess Hyslop (R).

I remain extremely grateful for my NMCT-funded role based at Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Archives, which kick-started my conservation career and enabled me to find the role at OCC in which I have flourished.

Jess Hyslop working on Jesus College MS 11. Images courtesy of the Oxford Conservation Consortium.

The Value of Collaboration:
1. Collaborative Conservation Internships

In 2025, we reported that NMCT was collaborating with a number of other grant givers jointly to fund up to three one-year internships for early career conservators, the first of which was to be in the conservation of manuscripts.

Our collaboration has proved to be so successful, with other grant givers joining our group, that five internships are now underway or in development and a further two or three are being considered.

The Collaborative Conservation Internships scheme's partners are:

ANNA PLOWDEN TRUST

Idlewild Trust

JULIA RAUSING TRUST

NMCT National Manuscripts Conservation Trust

Pilgrim Trust

THE RADCLIFFE TRUST

SWIRE CHARITABLE TRUST

In addition, the Association for Industrial Heritage have made a donation towards the industrial heritage internship.

The internships currently underway are:

Specialism	Host Institution
Manuscripts	Senate House Library, University of London
Horology & scientific instruments	Royal Museums Greenwich
Musical instruments	University of Edinburgh
Industrial heritage	Manchester Museum of Science and Industry
Modern materials	Tate

The specialisms for further internships are being discussed.

The internship in manuscript conservation features overleaf. Above: James Taylor, the intern in musical instrument conservation.
Courtesy of The University of Edinburgh Library, Heritage Collections.

Internship in Manuscript Conservation

MEGAN WHITELEY, INTERN
Manuscript Conservation at Senate House Library

My internship is giving me an incredible opportunity to develop my skills and gain experience of the day-to-day running of a conservation studio in a busy working library, under the wonderful support and supervision of an experienced book and paper conservator, Salvador Alcántara Peláez. Undoubtedly, the highlight of the internship to date has been my work on MS278, a 15th-century manuscript of Robert of Gloucester's Chronicle.

Named for its supposed author, Robert of Gloucester's Chronicle is a Middle English verse chronicle of the history of England to the 1270s. While the earlier history is taken mostly from Geoffrey of Monmouth, William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon, the Chronicle is an eyewitness account to some of the events of the Second Barons' Rebellion led by Simon de Montfort during the 1260s. MS278 is one of the Library's most-used manuscripts for teaching, particularly for palaeography and codicology but also for Middle English literature.

Within two weeks of starting my internship, I had begun to consider different treatment options for MS278. In its current early 19th-century vellum binding, the manuscript was unfit for production. The too-tight sewing, rounding and backing had caused the sewing to fail in three places and the left board was detached. After extensive discussion, the decision was made to rebind the manuscript sympathetically in wooden boards and alum-tawed goatskin.

One of the incredible opportunities of this internship has been the chance to consult with experts in their fields. After I carried out parchment repairs to the spine folds, Edward Cheese, former Conservator of Manuscripts and Printed Books at the Fitzwilliam Museum, visited the Library to provide support on the rebinding process. Thanks to his expert advice, the parchment gatherings have now been resewn and await lacing-in. Bernard Allen, a designer-craftsman with decades of experience creating wooden boards for manuscript rebindings, generously hosted the conservation team at his workshop in February for a masterclass on shaping the new oak boards. It is a huge privilege and responsibility to be working on a medieval manuscript, and I am so grateful for all the support I have had on this project. I am very much looking forward to bringing everything together in the rebinding!

In addition to working on MS278, I have carried out a condition survey and proposed a rehousing scheme for the Fuller Collection of charters dating from the 12th to 19th centuries.

To gain experience of the general work of the conservation studio, I have helped to prepare material for loans and exhibitions, do condition assessments and to invigilate university classes using special collections material. In addition, thanks to a generous grant from the Convocation Trust, I have also been able to attend several conferences.

It was my love for medieval manuscripts that first inspired me to become a conservator so it is quite incredible to be working on a medieval manuscript straight out of college. It is a huge honour and privilege, and I have already learned so much.

I am thrilled to report that I have accepted permanent post at the Oxford Conservation Consortium (see page 36) and will start there immediately after my internship finishes.

Megan (left) discussing her work on the Robert of Gloucester Chronicle with the internship funders and colleagues from Icon. Courtesy of Senate House Library, University of London.

The skills and experiences I have developed through the internship played a huge role in getting me the job and I am so grateful to the NMCT and the rest of the funders for helping me to start my career in conservation.

2. Collaboration in Wales

Reflections on a decades-long partnership between CyMAL and the NMCT that has greatly benefitted archival collections in Wales.

MARY ELLIS, RECENTLY RETIRED HEAD OF STANDARDS AND TRAINING
The Museums Archives and Libraries Department (MALD/CyMAL) of the Welsh Government.

In 2008, the NMCT and the Welsh Government via CyMAL (now the Culture Division) created a partnership scheme to encourage more archive services in Wales to apply for NMCT grants. A restricted fund was established, to which both CyMAL and NMCT contributed, to support projects in Wales. Prior to this date, only a handful of projects from Wales had requested NMCT support. This was partly due to the difficulty services faced in securing the required partnership funding, but also a lack of local support for applicants to develop projects, and a misplaced view that records of 'local' interest were unlikely to receive support. The partnership sought to address each of these issues.

It was something of a leap of faith for both organisations. Neither had experience of this type of collaborative working and, even with the offer of financial support from the Welsh Government to support the partnership with funding and a commitment to provide practical support to prepare applications, it was hard to gauge the level of potential interest in the scheme.

It was a misplaced concern. Today, the scheme is well embedded in the sector in Wales and enormously valued as the only consistent source of grant funding available for conservation work. All local authority archive services have benefitted from funding, along with university collections and Accredited Museums holding eligible archive collections. Between 2011 and 2025 the NMCT and Welsh Government together invested over £433,000 in conservation projects in Wales – far more than would have been possible without this collaboration.

In the early years of the partnership, we worked closely with the NMCT and applicants to identify eligible projects. This would often include a trip to view a collection and assess the proposed conservation work and supporting applicants to submit a full application. We have always relied on the generosity of our colleagues at the National Library of Wales for expert assessment of the proposed treatments.

Workers at the Neath Abbey Ironworks, undated. Courtesy of West Glamorgan Archives Service.

Above: A map from the Penrhyn Estate collection before conservation. Courtesy of Bangor University. Right: Florrie Hamer (left) picnicking with a friend. Courtesy of Ceredigion Archives.

This approach worked well and, although as time progressed, the more experienced began to require less support; the offer of assistance has remained in place for those less familiar with the scheme or fundraising in general. This has enabled small, volunteer-run organisations to apply for support for conservation work that would otherwise be outside of their scope.

Each round of applications produced a fascinating and often surprising crop of proposals ranging from items of national, UK and international importance, to items of significance to a local community. The projects supported range from the conservation of the Neath Abbey Ironworks plans that are inscribed on the UK UNESCO Memory of the World, to the internationally significant papers of the Jamaica estates in the Penrhyn Castle collection, and to a small grant of just over £500 to the volunteer run Holyhead Maritime Museum to conserve documents relating to the loss of HMS Thetis.

As well as conserving and making documents accessible, the scheme has also brought unanticipated benefits. Many projects have provided opportunities for volunteer participation, but even more important have been the opportunities for conservation and collections care students to gain valuable work experience under the supervision of experienced conservators. The funding from NMCT projects has also supported local archive services to meet all-important income generation targets and to increase the resilience of the network of archive conservation studios in Wales.

Trustees' Report

The Trustees of the National Manuscripts Conservation Trust present their Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31st December 2025.

Structure, Governance and Management

Constitution
The National Manuscripts Conservation Trust (NMCT) was established on 9th January 1990 by a declaration of trust executed by three Trustees: John Ehrman, representing the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts (HMC); Henry Heaney, representing the British Library board (BL) and Lewis Golden, representing the private benefactors. Since 1 April 2003, the HMC has formed part of The National Archives (TNA), whose Chief Executive is the sole Historical Manuscripts Commissioner.

Trustees
Both the HMC (as a constituent body within TNA) and the BL each appoint one Trustee, and the two Trustees so appointed are empowered to appoint up to four further Trustees, none of whom shall be a member or an officer of, or employed by, either the HMC or the BL.

The Trustees as at 31st December 2025 are listed at the front of this report. Five served throughout the year, namely Professor David McKitterick (Chair), Philip Tansey FCA (an experienced chartered accountant), Dr Norman James (who has specialised knowledge of the library and archive sector in the UK) and Gabriel Sewell (College Librarian at Christ Church, Oxford), Victoria Stevens ACR (an experienced library and archive conservator who is Subject Leader for Books and Library Materials at West Dean College). Charles Sebag-Montefiore CBE retired in June 2025 (see page 3) and Philip Tansey succeeded him as Treasurer. (see page 3).

New Trustees are provided with a detailed induction to the charity and to their responsibilities as Trustees, in line with charity best practice.

Administration
The administration of the NMCT is provided by Mrs Nell Hoare, whose address, together with other administrative information, is given on page 2.

Risk Management
The Trustees have identified the principal risks that might affect the NMCT and believe that appropriate action has been taken to manage them. The Trustees continue to review the adequacy of the procedures in place.

Objectives and Activities

The chief objective of the NMCT is to advance the education of the public by the provision of financial assistance towards the cost of conserving manuscripts, which, in the opinion of the Trustees, are of historic or educational value.

Applications for grants can be accepted from all county record offices, non-national libraries and museums and other similar publicly funded institutions including local authority, university and specialist record repositories throughout the United Kingdom, and from owners of manuscript material exempt from capital taxation or owned by a charitable trust. National libraries and institutions that are directly funded by the government are not normally eligible for grants from the NMCT. In deciding whether an application merits a grant, the Trustees assess the significance of the manuscript or archive, the suitability of the storage conditions, the applicant's commitment to continuing good preservation practice, and the requirement for reasonable public access.

The NMCT's website **www.nmct.co.uk** provides full information for applicants on how to apply for a conservation grant, as well as case studies on supported projects; a full list of recent grants, together with information about the Charity and its Trustees.

Since 1990 the NMCT has awarded grants of over £4m towards projects with a total value of over £7.5m, which have helped to preserve important historical, literary, scientific and other documents. Many of the manuscripts conserved with our help were fragile and completely inaccessible before treatment, as a result of the NMCT's grants, these documents have been preserved and can now be made accessible to researchers and the public.

The Trustees have had regard to Charity Commission guidance on public benefit. The Trust's core objective is to support the conservation of manuscripts by archives, libraries, universities, museums and specialist collecting institutions. The public benefits that flow from this are:

i. Prolonging the life of locally, nationally and internationally significant manuscript material for the nation;

ii. Making it possible for the public and researchers to access manuscripts that would otherwise be inaccessible or lost to the public domain;

iii. Supporting the nation's libraries and archives, and enabling them to conserve their collections, which would be beyond their resources without our support.

In addition, many of the conservation projects that NMCT supports provide a training benefit.

The Trustees believe this financial support greatly benefits the recipient institutions, researchers and others who access and engage with their collections, and also the public realm. These benefits are clearly demonstrated by the short case studies in this Annual Report.

Achievements and Performance

Grants

Grants are normally awarded in June and November each year. In 2025 the Trustees considered 24 applications (2024: 20). They awarded 22 new conservation grants (2024: 17) giving to university libraries, local record offices and other eligible applicants the aggregate sum of £174,067 before adjusting for overprovisions in earlier years (2024: £142,545).

Full details of grants awarded in 2024 are given in the Review of the Year (pages 6 to 31).

Our partnership with the Culture Division of the Welsh Government to support conservation projects in Wales continues to flourish. Librarians in four libraries and archive services submitted applications, which we were delighted to support to a gross value of £47,531 (2024: £22,183). We are grateful to Mary Ellis and her colleagues for their work in raising awareness to these grant opportunities, offering free advisory visits to applicants where necessary and arranging for expert advice to be given on every application from Wales.

In recent years, NMCT and the Scottish Council on Archives (SCA) have worked increasingly closely to raise awareness of NMCT grants in Scotland and to increase the funding available for Scottish conservation projects. In addition, SCA arranges for expert advice to be given on all applications from Scotland.

Meanwhile, colleagues at The National Archives generously contribute their expertise and advice on all grants from England and Northern Ireland. Their contribution and that of colleagues in Wales and Scotland ensures that the Trustees can make very well-informed decisions on all grant applications. We are also grateful to each of our partners for offering advisory visits to applicants where necessary.

Financial Review
In 2025 the Charity's aggregate income reached £228,355 (2024: £175,980). Twenty-two grants for conservation were approved in 2025, amounting to the aggregate sum of £174,067 (2024: £142,545). The 2025 sum includes the grant of £7,500 towards the Collaborative Conservation Internship scheme. All these grants are set out in more detail on pages 6 to 31.

The Charity enjoys two streams of income: investment income, which at £107,934 was very similar to the £110,080 received in 2024; and donations, which amounted to £120,421 (2024: £65,900), of which £44,271 was restricted.

Aggregate operating expenses rose from £25,688 to £30,928. The cost of administration increased in 2025 to further develop the internship scheme and enhance our fundraising efforts. Other costs include the investment manager's charges (£6,113), fundraising for the Trust (£4,160), producing the annual report (£3,088) and the independent examination fee (£1,680).

The balance sheet at 31 December 2025 recorded total net assets of £2,835,010 (2024: £2,634,811). The increase is explained by the significant unrealised investment gains. Further details of the investment portfolio are given in note 9.

Current assets amounted to £264,743, represented mainly by cash. Current liabilities, mostly grant commitments, amounted to £153,307 giving net current assets at the end of 2025 of £111,436 (2024: £83,477).

Investments and Reserves
The Trustees have adopted a total return investment policy, intended to maximise total returns whilst accepting a medium degree of risk. To this end the NMCT's portfolio is invested in the Cazenove Sustainable Multi-Asset Fund. This is a long-term investment fund with a diversified strategy investing in equities, bonds, property and alternative assets. The Fund aims to provide income and capital growth in excess of the Consumer Price Index + 4% per annum (net of fees) over rolling ten-year periods.

Other than the Unrestricted Fund and the Restricted Fund, all the Trust's reserves are regarded as endowment funds, which are normally represented by investments in order to produce a reasonably predictable and regular level of income. The Trustees regard this as necessary to maintain and support the Charity's operation.

Any annual deficit on the Unrestricted Fund is made good by a transfer from unrestricted funds brought forward. Grants awarded from the Restricted Fund are limited to donations received by the Charity and their defined, restricted purpose.

Reserves Policy and Plans for Future Periods
The Trust's objectives for 2026 are to continue to seek to maximise investment income and grants receivable and to award conservation grants of around £150,000 unless incoming resources turn out to be significantly greater than in 2025.

Statement of Trustees' Responsibilities
The Trustees are responsible for preparing the Trustees' Annual Report and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and Charities SORP (FRS 102) 'Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland' and with regulations made under the Charities Act 2011.

The law applicable to charities in England and Wales requires the Trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year, which give a true and fair view of the charity's financial activities during the year. In preparing financial statements, the Trustees are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and apply them consistently;
- observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP;
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- state whether applicable accounting standards and statements of recommended practice have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements;
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charity will continue in operation.

The Trustees are responsible for keeping proper accounting records that disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charity and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Charities Act 2011, the Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations 2008, and the provisions of the trust deed. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

Independent Examiner
Scott Harrower of Galloways Accounting was reappointed as the Trust's Independent Examiner during the year.

Approved by the Trustees and signed on their behalf by:

Professor David McKitterick
Chair
29 May 2026

Independent Examiner's Report

To the Trustees of The National Manuscripts Conservation Trust

I report on the accounts of the trust for the year ended 31st December 2025, which are set out on pages 44 to 55.

Respective responsibilities of Trustees and Examiner
The charity's Trustees are responsible for the preparation of the accounts. The charity's Trustees consider that an audit is not required for this year (under Section 144 of the Charities Act 2011 (the 2011 Act)) and that an independent examination is needed.

It is my responsibility to:

- examine the accounts (under Section 145 the 2011 Act);
- to follow the procedures laid down in the General Directions given by the Charity Commissioners (under Section 145(5)(b) of the 2011 Act); and
- to state whether particular matters have come to my attention.

Basis of Independent Examiner's report
My examination was carried out in accordance with the General Directions given by the Charity Commissioners. An examination includes a review of the accounting records kept by the charity and a comparison of the accounts presented with those records. It also includes consideration of any unusual items or disclosures in the accounts, and seeking explanations from you as Trustees concerning any such matters. The procedures undertaken do not provide all the evidence that would be required in an audit, and consequently I do not express an audit opinion on the view given by the accounts.

Independent Examiner's statement
In connection with my examination, no matter has come to my attention:

(1) which gives me reasonable cause to believe that in any material respect the requirements

- to keep accounting records in accordance with Section 130 the 2011 Act; and
- to prepare accounts which accord with the accounting records and comply with the accounting requirements of the 2011 Act

have not been met; or

(2) to which, in my opinion, attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Scott Harrower, FCA
Chartered Accountant
Galloways Accounting
Ridgeland House, 15 Carfax,
Horsham, West Sussex RH12 1DY

1 June 2026

Statement of Financial Activities

for the year ended 31 December 2025

	Notes	*Endowment Fund 2025* £	*Unrestricted Fund 2025* £	*Restricted Funds 2025* £	*Total Funds 2025* £	*Total Funds 2024* £
Income from						
investment income	2	–	107,934	–	107,934	*110,080*
donations received	3	–	76,150	44,271	120,421	*65,900*
Total income		–	184,084	44,271	228,355	*175,980*
Expenditure						
charitable grants given	4	–	125,537	48,530	174,067	*132,798*
operating expenses	5/6	–	30,928	–	30,928	*25,688*
Total expenditure		–	156,465	48,530	204,995	*158,486*
Operating result		–	27,619	(4,259)	23,360	*17,494*
Gains/(losses) on investments						
Realised	9	–	–	–	–	*41*
Unrealised	9	176,839	–	–	176,839	*99,491*
Net income/(expenditure)						
Transfers between funds		(4,600)	1,340	3,260	–	–
Net movement in funds		172,239	28,959	(999)	200,199	*117,026*
Total Funds bought forward		2,321,781	312,032	999	2,634,811	*2,517,785*
Total Fund balances carried forward		2,494,020	340,990	–	2,835,010	*2,634,811*

Balance Sheet

As at 31 December 2025

	Notes	31st December 2025 £	31st December 2025 £	31st December 2024 £	31st December 2024 £
Listed investments	9		2,723,574		*2,551,334*
Current assets	4				
Debtors		34,271		–	
Cash at bank and deposits		230,472		*231,268*	
		264,743		*231,268*	
Creditors: falling due within 1 year	11				
Grants payable		(151,457)		*(146,471)*	
sundry creditors		(1,850)		*(1,320)*	
		(153,307)		*(147,791)*	
Net current assets			111,436		*83,477*
Net assets			2,835,010		*2,634,811*
Representing					
Endowment fund			2,494,020		*2,321,781*
Restricted fund			–		*999*
Operating fund			340,990		*312,031*
			2,835,010		*2,634,811*

Approved by the Trustees on 29 May 2026 and signed on their behalf by:

Professor David McKitterick
Chair

Notes to the Accounts

For the year ended 31 December 2025

1. Accounting policies

a. Basis of accounting
The accounts have been prepared in accordance with the Charities SORP (FRS 102) *Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland* and with regulations made under the Charities Act 2011. A summary of the more important accounting policies is below.

The Trustees consider that there are no material uncertainties about the Charity's ability to continue as a going concern nor any significant risk that that uncertainty over estimates made for the purpose of these financial statements may cause a material adjustment to the carrying value of assets and liabilities.

The Charity is a public benefit entity.

b. Fund accounting
Unrestricted funds are available for use at the discretion of the Trustees in furtherance of the general objectives of the Charity.

c. Income
Dividends are recognised in the period in which the dividend becomes payable.

Donations and legacies are recognised in the period in which they are received or when there is otherwise certainty of receipt. Other income is recognised in the period to which it relates.

d. Expenditure
Expenditure is allocated between charitable activities, raising funds and support costs.

Expenditure on charitable activities comprises grants made for the conservation of manuscripts that, in the opinion of the Trustees, are of historic or educational value. These costs are charged, as appropriate, to the unrestricted or restricted funds when they have been committed.

Expenditure on raising funds comprises chiefly the investment manager's charges and the fundraising element of the work of NMCT's Secretary.

Administration and support costs are those costs which are not attributable to a single activity but provide the necessary organisational support for all the Charity's activities. They include the administration element of the consultant's costs, the independent examiner's fee, the cost of printing the annual report, the expenses of the website and of holding trustee meetings.

e. Fixed assets
Investments held as fixed assets are re-valued at mid-market value at the balance sheet date and the gain or loss credited to or deducted from the Endowment Fund.

2. Investment income

	2025 £	2024 £
Dividends received from investments	104,072	104,732
Interest received on deposits	3,862	5,348
	107,934	110,080

3. Voluntary income

	2025 £	2024 £
Donations (unrestricted)	76,150	65,900
Donations (restricted)	44,271	–
	120,421	65,900

4. Direct charitable expenditure

	2025 £	2024 £
Grants from unrestricted funds	125,537	120,362
Grants from restricted funds	48,530	22,183
Grants approved in year	174,067	142,545
Under/(over)-provision in previous years	–	(9,747)
Net cost of grants	174,067	132,798

Total grants made, all to institutions, in the year of £174,067 (2024: £132,798) are explained in detail from pages 6 to 31.

In 2026, a restricted donation £34,271 was received. This donation was committed in connection with grant awards made in November 2025. This receipt has been recognised as income in accordance with the Accounting Policies (note 1(c) – Income) and as a debtor at the year-end.

5. Expenditure on raising funds

	2025 £	2024 £
Consultant's fees for fundraising	4,160	1,369
Investment management fees	6,113	5,950
Total fundraising costs	10,273	7,319
Administration and support costs (from note 6 below)	20,655	18,369
Total expenditure	30,928	25,688

6. Administration and support costs

Consultant's fees for administration	14,690	13,656
Annual report	3,088	2,625
Independent examination fee	1,680	1,440
Meeting costs	573	331
Website expenses	442	221
Bank charges and sundry costs	183	96
Total support costs	20,655	18,369

7. Transactions with Trustees

No Trustee received any remuneration (2024: £nil) or any reimbursement of the cost of travelling to meetings (2024: £nil).

8. Taxation

As a charity, the National Manuscripts Conservation Trust is exempt from tax on income and gains falling within Part 10 of the Taxes Act 2007 to the extent that these are applied to its charitable objects. No tax charges have arisen in the Charity.

9. Investments

The Trust's investment portfolio consists of a single holding in the Cazenove Sustainable Multi-Asset Fund, a long-term investment fund with a diversified strategy investing in equities, bonds, property and alternative assets. The Fund aims to provide income and capital growth in excess of the Consumer Price Index + 4% per annum (net of fees) over rolling ten-year periods. The portfolio as at 31 December 2025 is summarised in the following table:

	Cost	*Market value*	*Annual income (prospective)*	*Yield on market value*
	£	*£*	*£*	*%*
Sustainable Multi-Asset fund	2,639,136	2,723,574	104,072	3.8%

An additional analysis is given below:

	2025	*2024*
	£	*£*
Market value at 1 January	2,551,334	*2,457,742*
Proceeds of sale	(4,600)	*(5,940)*
Cost of purchases	–	*–*
Realised gains/(losses)	–	*41*
Unrealised gains/(losses)	176,840	*99,491*
Movement in year	172,240	*93,592*
Market value at 31 December	2,723,574	*2,551,334*

10. Creditors: Amounts falling due within one year

	2025	2024
	£	£
Grants payable	151,457	*146,471*
Sundry creditors	1,850	*1,320*
	153,307	*147,791*

11. Analysis of net assets between funds – 2025

	Endowment fund	*Unrestricted fund*	*Restricted fund*	*Total*
	£	£	£	£
Investments	2,723,574	–	–	2,723,574
Net current assets	(229,554)	340,990	–	111,436
Total assets	2,494,020	340,990	–	2,835,010

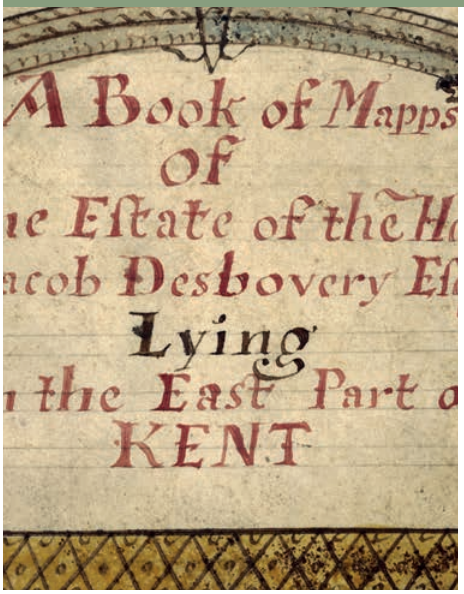
Analysis of net assets between funds – 2024

	Endowment fund	*Unrestricted fund*	*Restricted fund*	*Total*
	£	£	£	£
Investments	2,551,334	–	–	2,551,334
Net current assets	(229,553)	312,031	999	83,477
Total assets	2,321,781	312,031	999	2,634,811

NMCT National Manuscripts Conservation Trust

PO Box 4291, Reading, Berkshire RG8 9JA

www.nmct.co.uk e: info@nmct.co.uk



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