The Corpus Papers 11

LOOKING AFTER THE LIBRARY'S HORTICULTURAL COLLECTIONS

Dr Carolyn Boulter, Master Clothworker 2017/2018

In September 2019, my husband Hugh Boulter (CCC 1959, History) and I visited the Conservation Studio to see the work being carried out on four important books from the Corpus Library – it was hugely impressive. We have a mutual love of books and during fifty-one years of marriage, our collections have increased enormously and now we have a huge library. For my part, I studied Biological Sciences at the University of Birmingham and have maintained my interest in science, recently researching and writing about Charles Darwin, and in particular the classification of barnacles to which he devoted eight years of study prior to the publication of *The Origin of Species*.

The previous year I was elected the First Lady Master of a City of London Livery Company, the Clothworkers. In the lead up to the year I sat on the Clothworkers Conservation Committee and was an active trustee. During my year as Master we attended functions connected to the craft of finishing cloth as well as supporting many charities. We also arranged a visit for the Clothworkers Court and a lunch at Corpus for which thanks must go to Head of Alumni Relations, Sarah Salter.

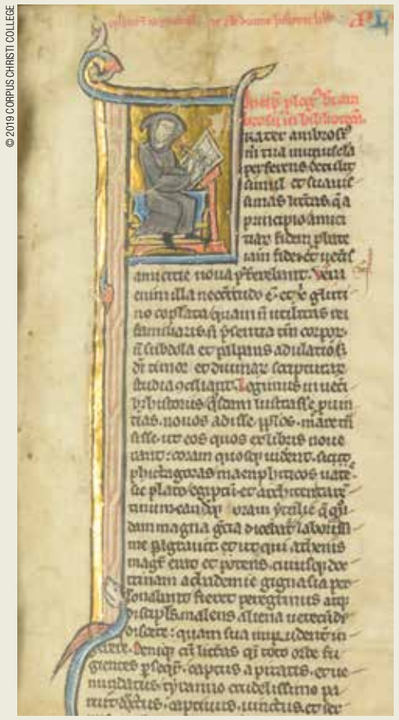
In July 2018 at the end of my year in office, Hugh and I were invited to choose a charity to which a modest Clothworkers donation could be made. With our love of books in mind, my interest in botany and classification, and Hugh's in history and theology, in which he decided in 1997 to study for a PhD at Bristol, we contacted Joanna Snelling, the Corpus Librarian, to identify a conservation project in the Library. She had the perfect suggestion: a project to conserve two early printed herbals, an Italian history volume with botanical specimens, and a 13th Century Vulgate Bible.

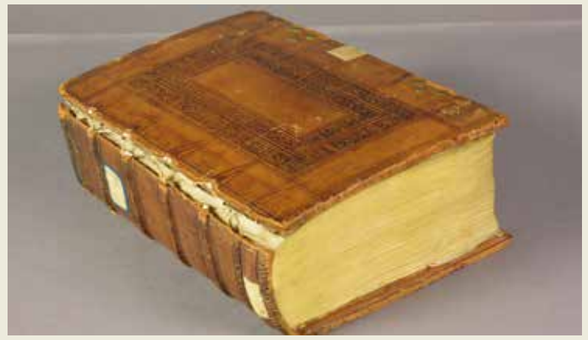
Corpus is a founder member of the Oxford Conservation Consortium to which seventeen other Oxford colleges also belong, with Jane Eagan at its head. Maria Kalligerou, one of the eight conservators, was chosen to undertake the painstaking work on the conservation of these significant books from the Corpus Library.

The 13th Century Bible has a 16/17th Century leather binding which had become almost completely detached. This meant that it could not be safely opened; in such a condition, the wonderful work of the scribes' handwritten text in Latin on vellum, with marginal illustrations, had become inaccessible. The Bible's cover has staple marks providing evidence that it was once chained in the college library, as well as the remains of catches that once kept the volume closed. With the use of paper hinges and conservation quality cloth, the detached binding was carefully reattached to the spine while preserving the original sewing thread. It is now safe for the work to be consulted.

Two of the three other texts are botanical and contain pressed flowers or leaves; these pages required special conservation treatment to allow users to access them without the risk of damage.

The most widely used botanical reference work for a hundred years before Linnaeus introduced the binomial classification system using morphology was the work of Rembert Dodoens (1517 to 1585). He published his first herbal in 1554, and throughout his life edited and extended it through thirteen editions in several languages. The Corpus copy was published in Latin in 1616 and was presented to the College by William Clayton in 1667. With each successive edition, Dodoens had refined the ordering of the plants





THIS PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: The illuminated initial of Jerome writing (CCC MS 3 fol.1r)

The binding of CCC MS 3 before treatment

Two botanical specimens in the Corpus copy of Dodoens' work (N.7.2), one loose and now protected, the other secured in its page tabs

OPPOSITE PAGE, LEFT: Maria Kalligerou, OCC Conservator, working with a loose botanical specimen

OPPOSITE PAGE, RIGHT: Painstaking work repairing the binding of CCC MS 3

so that by the time of the Latin translation of 1583 he had ordered his subjects into twenty-six groups, illustrated by 1,309 woodcuts on 900 pages. Dodoens' work is forward-looking and interesting because it shows the gradual evolution of the classification of leaves and flowers from the alphabetical listing of names to categories based on structure and form.

The Corpus copy of this significant reference work has fine hand-painted woodcuts and, unusually, thirty-five botanical specimens inserted within its pages. Most of these were attached on the text-leaves with paper tabs, and many are annotated. A few rather large specimens were loosely inserted in between text-leaves. In other places, fragments were to be found in the gutter between pages where specimens had become detached from their tabs, or become brittle over the centuries. As part of the conservation treatment, Maria secured and stabilised the specimens which were still attached using new paper tabs where necessary. The loose specimens and fragments were either fixed on archival quality paper sheet and/or protected by handmade pockets of archival tissue paper, each according to the size and shape of the specimen. The loose specimens remain in their original location while a detailed documentation sheet now provides guidelines for safe consultation of the volume with its plant insertions. All thirty-five of the leaves containing botanical specimens were then digitised, to provide further assistance for future users.

Readers consult many of the over one hundred medical texts William Creed left to the Corpus Library in 1711. Amongst them is a catalogue of the trees and plants of the Oxford physic garden at the time – what an absolutely wonderful trove it is. The volume has an original early 18th Century binding and contains handwritten notes, presumed to be Creed's own, referring to the structure of the plants listed, and the fly leaf lists no fewer than thirteen hundred specimens he collected. The single botanical specimen in this book, of the Campion family, has been beautifully preserved.

Part of a large bequest from Henry Hare, Baron Coleraine, who died on 1749, is a history of Milan written in Italian. This volume had a large number of flower petals pressed between its pages which had caused staining and the petals themselves had become very fragile. Conservation of the pages and fixing of the petals will now enable scholars to consult the book.

Bespoke boxes of acid-free card have been made for extra storage protection and the books, their boxes and invaluable history will all sit in the air-conditioned College strong rooms.

Both Hugh and I have found it a privilege and a joy to participate in this project.