

**The Arts Society Sussex
End of Year Report, 2020 – Hollie Drinkwater**

Tutor Report

Hollie has successfully completed all the practical, contextual, and science units and she is now working on her final thesis to be submitted in September.

This year, Hollie has worked really hard, developing her practical skills and always with a professional attitude. She is a team player and has collaborated successfully with students from other disciplines. Hollie always reflected how things are going what could she adjust/change/ do differently before or after in similar situations, and how can move forward which is a great quality to have in conservation. Her documentation is very thorough and with good useful diagrams. She also worked on her E-Portfolio producing a really attractive portfolio with a clear layout and good annotated images. She has the potential of becoming a great conservator and we will be supporting her on her applications for jobs during these challenging times.

Mariluz Beltran de Guevara, Books Subject Leader

Student Report

It has been almost a year since I began my MA at West Dean College and I cannot quite believe how quickly the time has flown by. It has been a year full of adventures, and challenges. The pandemic resulted in me spending the final six months of the course studying from home; despite missing out on some practical experience, excellent support from our tutors has allowed us to make the most of our lecture time, expanding our interests into a broad range of conservation related topics, including: collections care, risk assessments, undertaking condition surveys, dealing with mould, working with volunteers, and of course continuing to develop our thesis topic.



Figure 1. Detail of a Greek-on-two-cores endband on a binding at the National Library of Greece



Figure 2. A picture of me in my makeshift workshop (my parent's garage!)

My thesis topic is focused on the decision-making associated with repairs undertaken to the sewing structure on genuine Greek-style bindings. The methodology for my thesis topic has been adapted in order to compensate for travel restrictions as a result of the coronavirus outbreak. I was originally intending to return to Greece to complete the condition assessment of a binding sample at the National Library, where I undertook my placement back in February – March. Despite not being able to return to the library, I managed to partially complete the assessment remotely, based on photographs and documentation collected during my placement, and have expanded my thesis objectives in order to address decision-making and conservation rationale behind the choices made when it comes to undertaking binding repairs. I am specifically interested in the role of the endband, a mechanical and aesthetic feature of the binding that sits at the head and tail of the textblock (pages of the book), and which is crucial to stabilising the opening of the book, the movement of the textblock and attachment of the wooden boards (Fig. 1). The endband forms an important functional component of the sewing structure, but its mechanical role is often overlooked in relation to this style of binding, which has consequences for conservation treatment. If the role of the endband is not acknowledged by conservators, then treatments to stabilise the sewing structure may not be undertaken in the most efficacious way. A questionnaire has been designed and sent out to book conservators who are currently responsible for treating collections of genuine Greek-style bindings, in order to gauge contemporary perception of the endband and its role within the binding structure.

I have been making binding models in order to help me understand the mechanics of the binding and support the hypotheses within my thesis (Fig. 2). The pictures presented here demonstrate the consequences of damage to the endbands upon the stability of the binding structure (Figs. 3-6). The significant role that the endband plays in securing and consolidating the head and tail of the textblock when looking at the collapsed spine at the head of this model is immediately evident. The gatherings that are no longer secured by the endband tiedowns at the head are pulled towards the tail, setting up tension across the spine at the point at which the loopstitches (sewing thread) join each gathering of pages together. The transferred stress to the loopstitch then leaves this component vulnerable to



Figure 3. View of opening from tail



Figure 4. View of opening from head



Figure 5. Gatherings at textblock centre pulled towards tail of the binding



Figure 6. Gatherings at textblock centre pulling away from head of the binding

breakage overtime. By isolating damage to the endbands, the integral role that the endband plays in the overall sewing structure is clearly observed.

My final term at West Dean College has also been instrumental in helping me to prepare to enter the field as a professional book conservator and to consider working towards accreditation. One of our assignments involved reflecting upon our experience to date in the field in order to gather evidence of how we can meet the standards for the PACR accreditation pathway. Indeed, this experience of gathering examples of my work to meet different criteria was incredibly useful in helping me to pre-prepare scenarios that I could then also use during interviews for employment.

I am currently applying for jobs and internships as they come up, alongside writing-up my thesis, which is due in September. It has been a very unusual year to undertake a practical course, but I feel that the students and college have made the best out of a difficult situation in order to continue to stimulate an engaging and educative study environment. I have great appreciation for the time and effort that my tutors have put into redesigning the course under very unprecedented circumstances. I have great hope that the skills and expertise that I have developed at West Dean will be recognised and will lead to me securing an official position as a book conservator.

I would not have been able to progress my academic learning in this manner if it were not for the funding I have received from the Arts Society Sussex. I have great support for the work that the Arts Society undertakes, having myself worked with volunteers from this charity when training in books conservation at a private studio in Cornwall (2017-2018). I have great enthusiasm for outreach and engagement with members of the public and I hope that outreach in this form takes-on a key role in my future employment.

My deepest thanks go to the Arts Society Sussex for investing in my career. I am committed to making a success of my career as a book conservator and cannot wait to see where the next step in this journey takes me.