Paintings Conservation in Australia from the Nineteenth Century to the Present: CONNECTING THE PAST TO THE FUTURE

Essays, Recollections and Historical Research on Paintings Conservation and Conservators, from the Nineteenth Century to the Present.

Contributions to the Eleventh AICCM Paintings Group Symposium, held at the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne, October 9th & 10th, 2008.

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National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne 2008
EDITED BY CARL VILLIS AND ALEXANDRA ELLEM
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On 30 September 2005 the National Gallery of Victoria farewelled Tom Dixon, its long-serving and admired Head of Conservation. This was a significant milestone in the recent history of our gallery because Tom is the person who had overseen the reinvention of the department he had inherited some twenty-one years earlier. Under his dedicated stewardship the NGV Conservation Department had grown beyond recognition from a bare-bones service facility of about 6 people to the large, multi-faceted division it now is.

Tom’s departure was also significant because it gave all of us a moment to reflect on how much change had occurred over that time, not just in our own Conservation Department but across the conservation and art museum professions generally. In 1984 the academic era of conservation in Australia was in its infancy, and art museums around the country were only just beginning to witness the demand for ambitious exhibitions and collections display that are now universally felt. Clearly, much had changed in the intervening years. It is in this reflective and questioning spirit that the theme of the Looking both ways: Connecting the past to the future symposium, and this accompanying book, was formed.

Initially this symposium was planned along the lines of previous AICCM Paintings Group symposiums, which are held every two years at different venues across the country. However, as the potential for rich historical and theoretical investigations into the past, present and future of the profession began to be tapped, it became evident that this could be an event to resonate beyond the immediate confines of paintings conservators. In many ways the story of the development of paintings conservation in Australia mirrors the same struggles and successes of individuals working in the art- and art-museum worlds of this country over the past century. The NGV was therefore delighted to lend its support and assistance to this landmark event, wanting to draw attention to opportunities and possibilities in developing the conservation profession in Australia. Our Deputy Director Frances Lindsay has been involved in the planning of the symposium since its inception, providing vital ongoing support and encouraging the organisers to promote the event to the broader public.

I hope that the reader will take time to absorb these interesting essays on the development of paintings conservation in Australia.

This is the right moment to reflect on how far we have come, and on what the future holds. We need collectively to get it right, and the AICCM has an increasingly important role to play.

Gerard Vaughan, National Gallery of Victoria
At the entrance of the great neo-classical National Archives building in Washington, D.C. is an imposing sculpture of a seated female figure symbolising the future. Carved onto the stone plinth directly below her are the words, “What is past is prologue”. Deriving from Shakespeare’s The Tempest, this sober message stares down over all people who enter or pass by America’s repository of historical records. The declaration serves as a reminder of how our future is inextricably linked with what has gone on before, and at the same time acts as an entreaty for all to respect, understand and preserve our knowledge of the past so that we enter the future with an understanding borne of experience and consideration. This is very much the premise which underlies the theme Connecting the past to the future for the eleventh Paintings Group Symposium of the AICCM, held at the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne on October 9th and the 10th, 2008.

Two years ago, at the previous paintings conservation symposium held in Brisbane, it was noted that a generational change appeared to be taking place, that the circle of contributors who were prominent in the first two decades of these gatherings was slowly being replaced by a core of more recently-trained paintings conservators. While generational change is a permanent cycle, this particular shift was noteworthy because the earlier group were among the very first conservators to come through the system of academic training for paintings conservators in Australia. In fact, some of these conservators had worked on both sides of that pivotal moment when Australia’s first materials conservation training course was established in 1978. They included members of a generation who had initially trained under an old apprenticeship system and subsequently found themselves as the first students in a fledgling university training programme. For these conservators and the students who followed in the first years of the course, the newly-devised materials conservation training programme must have been a substantially different experience from that of their counterparts some thirty years later. Not only was the academic training of conservators a new and largely unwritten field; conservation departments in the nation’s art museums were wholly unrecognisable in role and appearance from the ones which we see in place today. Therefore, within a single generation, the paintings conservation profession in Australia saw the most profound and dramatic shift in its history: surely this was a story worth telling, and one whose time had come.
The initial plan for this symposium was thus centred around the idea of a historical survey about the development of our profession over these past thirty years. Frankly, it was felt that there would not be much to know or tell about the history of paintings conservation in Australia prior to that time. It did not take long at all to learn how mistaken this assumption was. Though the field of historical research into the conservation of paintings in Australia is still in its early days, we already know that there were active and dedicated practitioners at work since the nineteenth century. Even more remarkable is the discovery that since those days some surprisingly informed debates were taking place relating to the preservation of paintings in our national institutions. This symposium is intended to mark the first point of coordinated historical examination of our past from anecdotal records to verifiable records, with the hope that it will act as a starting point for further research.

Given that much work needs to be done even to complete an overall survey of the history of paintings conservation on these shores, we can nevertheless alert the reader to certain key moments, some of which are discussed at length in the papers, and others which are referred to in passing.

From a museums perspective, the debates surrounding the deteriorating condition of certain paintings at the National Gallery of Victoria and Art Gallery of New South Wales in the late nineteenth century marks the awakening of a consciousness about conservation issues in Australia. As we learn from the detailed examination given to this moment, in papers by Alexandra Ellem and Michael Varcoe-Cocks, and in another co-authored by Paula Dredge and Alan Lloyd, we learn how conservation issues preoccupied Directors and trustees of both galleries. With successive papers we learn what impact their responses had on conservation staffing and in particular, cleaning policies. The construction of both galleries. With successive papers we learn what impact their responses had on conservation staffing and in particular, cleaning policies. The construction of both galleries demonstrated a more cautious approach, with the presence of a single conservator until well into the second half of the twentieth century, as was the case in Adelaide with the Art Gallery of South Australia and other State collections. As the twentieth century progressed, the conservative approach to collection care and maintenance would catch up with most of these institutions. By 1975, the Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections laid out some critical findings:

1. “In Australia there are numerous priceless collections, national, state and privately owned which are rapidly deteriorating due to lack of adequate controlled storage and conservation facilities.”

2. There are very few conservators available in Australia to combat this problem.

3. There are only a handful of conservation laboratories scattered throughout Australia and these are inadequately staffed and equipped.”

In response, Australia’s first materials conservation training course was established at the Canberra College of Advanced Education (later renamed the University of Canberra) in 1978, ushering in the era of the academically-trained conservator in Australia. The implications of this event have been profound, with virtually every museum conservation department - and many private firms - staffed with graduates from this programme. Though the baton of training was unofficially handed from Canberra to Melbourne with the demise of the University of Canberra course and the establishment of the Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation at the University of Melbourne in 2004, the culture of conservation training has continued to be nurtured with the same essential aims.

These are the key events upon which much of the history of paintings conservation in this country hinges. However, as the reader proceeds through these essays, recollections and historical research findings, he or she will notice that within these large gulfs of time there are plenty of events, careers and treatments that are important to lay out for historical record.

One needs to acknowledge at the same time - bearing in mind the essence of Shakespeare’s words – that the mere recounting of history is worthless if it is done just for its own sake. Accordingly, as the planning for the symposium began to crystallize it became evident that we would also need to consider our present and future in light of what can be learned from the past. For this reason we encouraged contributors to reflect on what has come out of their experiences, what things are worth remembering, what mistakes we might avoid and what we might aim for in the future.

This publication has been structured essentially by chronological sequence. However, as the papers draw closer to the present, other branches of themes relating to paintings conservation begin to assert themselves. The cross-references and common flows of themes across this collection of essays are abundant and can be drawn in many ways. They are explicit in the case of the three chapters mentioned earlier relating to the deterioration of paintings in the National Gallery of Victoria and the Art Gallery of New South Wales in the late nineteenth century. In these chapters names and events intersect as very different stories are told.
Similarly, in the section entitled *Years of Transition*, the careers, the struggles and successes of several key figures cross paths as they lay the foundations of conservation departments, firms and training courses across the country.

Less explicit but equally illuminating are the links which can be drawn in the *In Focus* component of this publication. In the essays by Deborah Lau, Catherine Earley and Holly McGowan-Jackson we learn of the precarious establishment of streams of the profession which are intimately connected with modern paintings conservation: Conservation science, exhibitions conservation and frames conservation. We are reminded of the growing importance of these streams within the ever-broadening and deepening of our centuries-old profession, and how our future standards of professional excellence will, in many ways, depend on our making greater provision for these correlated fields. It is up to the Directors and Conservation managers of Australia’s art institutions to show leadership and foresight by planning ahead to accommodate these current and future needs. A bell of recognition will ring out as one reads the common response to this issue cited by Catherine Earley: “No, we haven’t got a dedicated exhibitions position. We’d love one. There’s no money.” Though the recurring theme of tight budgets and small collections is always presented as an argument against the expansion of conservation departments and the investment in dedicated specialists in those areas, we must remember that our art institutions are demanding ever more sophisticated museological standards. Even more importantly, a vision for the advancement of our profession cannot occur without a plan and a blueprint, and this is where we need to focus our efforts so that the justification for such advancements can be understood by people who will ultimately make these decisions.

This point is one forcefully made as one reads the keynote lecture given by Sarah Fisher, Head of Painting Conservation at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. Sarah has dedicated her lecture to Ross Merrill, the long-serving Chief of Conservation at the NGA in recognition of his efforts and vision in building a conservation department. In a story which has a surprising number of parallels to our own experiences in this country, we learn of the difficulties faced by conservators there in trying to establish a dedicated conservation department after many decades in which the care of the collection was left in the hands of one or two private conservators trusted by former Directors and Trustees. The struggle to modernize was a painful one, and it has taken the breadth of vision on Merrill’s part—well as the NGAs considerable resources—to create a conservation department (complete with exhibitions conservators, conservation scientists and frame conservators) which so ably meets the needs of such an ambitious gallery while at the same time maintaining the highest professional standards for its conservators. We are reminded that good outcomes are the work of vision, planning and commitment.

Here at the National Gallery of Victoria, we have been fortunate to witness a similar process at work, albeit on a smaller scale. From the despair which filters through in Jacqueline Macnaughtan’s account of the NGV conservation department during David Lawrence’s years here, we can see that enormous advances have taken place. This is due in no small part to Tom Dixon’s stewardship of our department over many years. Tom made a number of key decisions over two decades which have resulted in this department’s expansion along similar lines to that seen in Washington. This part of NGV history is too recent to be covered in detail in this volume, but Tom nevertheless deserves recognition for his achievements.

The distinctly Australian experience of working in relative isolation from the traditional centres of conservation practice and art museums has had a major impact on our development as conservators. In this volume we can identify a special affinity for structural repair work, scientific research and technical innovation as the areas where Australians have played leading roles. These are fields in which our smaller base of collections and traditional restorers has not proved to be such a handicap. There are, however, two papers in this volume, one by John Payne, and the other by John Hook, which speak of themes that are universal to conservators everywhere: they relate to the fundamental yet often-overlooked notions of seeing, thinking and understanding as the primary guides and drivers for the work we carry out in this profession. Both call for a fundamental intelligence and maturity to be applied to the work we do, whether at the easel, or in meetings about planning for the future.

*Connecting the past to the future* is also what we do as working conservators: we preserve, repair and interpret paintings made in the past so that people can appreciate and enjoy them in the future. It is hoped that this volume of papers will enlighten readers on how this has been done in Australia over the past century and a half.

Carl Villis

1 The sculpture and its pendant figure representing the past were made by the American sculptor Robert Ingersoll Aitken in 1939.

A Note to the Reader

This volume of essays, recollections and historical research contains most of the content to be delivered at the Eleventh AICCM Paintings Group Symposium. However, as the contributors began to develop their ideas for their presentations, it became clear that there was far too much material that could be contained in the time-restrictive format of a symposium. For that reason we have allowed the writers to expand their papers to their natural length for this publication. Two writers, Alan Lloyd and Jacqueline Macnaughtan, have opted to submit additional papers which could not be fitted into their original accounts. In addition, Holly McGowan-Jackson has written an account of the development of frames conservation in Australia, providing an important companion piece to those written by Deborah Lau and Catherine Earley.
Acknowledgments

The organization of this symposium and its publication could not have taken place without the encouragement, assistance and hard work of many people. Firstly, the contributors: Catherine Nunn, Alex Ellem, Paula Dredge, Alan Lloyd, Michael Varcoe-Cocks, Jacqueline Macnaughtan, Allan Byrne, Chris Payne, Sarah Fisher, Robyn Sloggett, John Hook, Deborah Lau, Gillian Osmond, Catherine Earley, Holly McGowan-Jackson, Kate Eccles-Smith, Anne Carter and John Payne. All of these people have set aside many hours of their valuable work time to write their well-researched and thoughtful papers.

We would like to recognise the vital support and advice offered by NGV Director Dr. Gerard Vaughan, our Head of Conservation David Thurrowgood, and the Senior Paintings Conservator John Payne.

We would not have been able to invite Sarah Fisher to Melbourne to be the keynote speaker without the generous funding provided by the Elizabeth Summons Fellowship, In Memory of Nicholas Draffin.

We would like to express our gratitude to NGV Deputy Director Frances Lindsay. Frances has shown nothing but total support for this symposium since we first discussed it over a year ago, and has demonstrated her commitment by bringing the skills and resources of the Gallery into the organizational process of the symposium. In the Conservation department of the NGV we pride ourselves on always delivering a quality product. Frances’ assistance has enabled us to keep true to our aim.

So many people at the National Gallery of Victoria have provided a tremendous amount of advice and help. In particular, Caitlin Malcolm of Public Programmes has been involved in the planning for this symposium for over a year, and we are very grateful for her knowledge and skills in helping us negotiate the surprisingly complex issues relating to catering, ticketing and promotion. Other colleagues in Public Programmes who have helped us along the way are Gina Panebianco, Ben Divall, Emma Cox and Sumeena Keshow. For promotion of the symposium we thank Kristen Eckhardt, Carolyn Harris, and Sue Coffey and her team in Media and Public Affairs. Julia Cassar, Nanne Mitchelson, Nicole Monteiro assisted us in arranging for Sarah Fisher to come across from the United States to be the Keynote speaker. With the publication of this book, we have received important assistance from Philip Jago, Judy Shelverton, Jennie Moloney, Anne-Marie De
Boni, Jessica Gommers, Elizabeth Carey Smith and Jackie Robinson. Jean-Pierre Chabrol and Jean-Philippe Larue have assisted us with multimedia arrangements. Hugh D.T. Williamson Foundation Fellows in Paintings Conservation Raye Collins and Melanie Carlisle have co-ordinated the poster session associated with this event.

We have been helped throughout the process by several contacts at the AICCM: Gillian Osmond, Jenny Dickens, Maria Kubik, Alice Cannon, Marika Kocsis, and Robert Franzke. MaryJo Lelyveld has been a constant support and the Victorian Division Committee have also provided constructive counsel. At the University of Melbourne, Jaynie Anderson and Alison Inglis provided helpful advice during the planning stages, and Robyn Sloggett has been an important support.

Part I:

Stories of the Early Years
Many European paintings were brought from Britain to Australia during the colonial period with migrating settlers bringing family heirlooms from home. Access to restorers in Australia during this period was understandably limited. Consequently, many paintings in private Australian collections remain untreated and provide rare examples of original materials unaltered by traditional European restoration practices, of which lining was a common feature. This “benign neglect” has meant that many such paintings have escaped what is known as the “lining cycle”. This paper discusses the phenomenon of un-treated European paintings in Australian collections in the context of the treatment of an eighteenth century British portrait brought to Australia in 1852. The portrait belongs to a group of British eighteenth-century paintings in an Australian private collection, all of which are un-treated.

Early conservation in Australia
Prior to the introduction of formal conservation training in Australia in the 1970s, painting conservation was carried out by artist-restorers or picture framers. An example of an early professional restorer in Australia is Alexander Fletcher, a picture dealer and restorer who operated in the 1870s at premises on Collins Street under the business name "Fletcher's of Collins St". The Australian history of conservation mirrors that of Europe and the United States where early restoration was undertaken by artist-restorers who had apprenticed to a master or were self-taught. However, not being formally colonised by the British until 1788, Australia's history of artist-restorers was established significantly later than elsewhere. It was not until towns had been built and cities furnished with artworks that the need for picture conservation arose.

European paintings in Australia
State and regional galleries in Australia were furnished with European pictures purchased in the nineteenth and twentieth century “to raise or improve public taste”. The Felton Bequest of the early twentieth century is well known for enabling the National Gallery of Victoria to become one of the most formidable buyers in the international art market in the mid-twentieth century. However, the nineteenth century also saw the importation of European artworks to Australia through private hands. Free-settlement began in what is now Victoria in 1839 and from this time many middle class migrants traveled to Australia, bringing with them all of their possessions which sometimes included family portraits.
High-quality European paintings also arrived in Australian private collections in unusual ways during the colonial period. One example is a Dutch panel painting that was left as “a grub stake”, in other words, collateral in return for mining supplies, by a Scottish miner on the gold mining fields of Australia in the 1850s.7

The picture at the focus of this paper is an eighteenth-century portrait that has spent its life as part of a family collection and had never been restored. It is a double portrait of Mrs Anne Bradford and her young son Samuel, painted in London, in around 1752, by an unknown British portrait painter. The picture format conforms to the standard “half-size” portrait known as the Kit-cat, named after the London club, a half-length portrait usually featuring the head and shoulders, measuring 36 by 28 inches.9

Mrs Bradford’s husband, William Bradford, a bricklayer from Old London Bridge, died in 1791, soon after the birth of his son Samuel. On his death, Mrs Bradford’s uncle, Willem de Santhuns, who had no children of his own, adopted Samuel as an heir. William de Santhuns was a prosperous silk dresser in East London and it was he who commissioned three family portraits in 1752, one of which is the double portrait discussed in this paper.

Portrait painting was a flourishing trade in London in the eighteenth century, with many artists working on commissions. Some artists specialised in the painting of drapery, such as the beautiful silk dress that can be seen in this painting.9 Inexpensive portraiture was available to the public from all ranks of society in London during the eighteenth century. The artist (and sometime picture restorer) Sir Joshua Reynolds, estimated towards the end of the century there were eight hundred painters working in London, most of whom were portrait painters.10

By 1788, Samuel Bradford was working in the trade of his great uncle, naming his profession as “silk and satin dresser”.11 He was married with two daughters, one of whom had a son named Samuel Bradford Vaughan. Samuel Bradford Vaughan was a solicitor and it was he who emigrated to Australia in 1852, sailing aboard the Medway, finding work within his profession after arriving in 1853.12 He had left nothing to chance, bringing with him all his family possessions, including an entire prefabricated wooden house that was re-erected on the shores of Port Phillip Bay at Queenscliff.13 The family portraits would have travelled in this shipment with Samuel and his family in the 1850s. The paintings have remained in Australia since this time and have been passed on to the current owner who is the great-great-grandson of Samuel Bradford Vaughan.

Mrs Bradford and Samuel: condition and conservation requirements

Despite surviving the perilous journey aboard a ship from England and escaping restoration intervention for almost three centuries, a domestic accident interrupted this painting’s charmed existence. A fall from a wall caused two severe tears in the portrait. This incident brought the picture to the attention of conservators at The Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation at The University of Melbourne. This was the first time the picture would undergo structural intervention by a conservator. The painting was found to have never been removed from its strainer, nor to have been lined. In this case, conservators had the privilege of being the first to open the door to the private world of this painting and discover a previously unaddressed aspect of Australian conservation history.

Comparative levels of conservation intervention in Australia and Britain

Experience working as a painting conservator both in Australia and Britain enabled the author to compare and observe that levels of conservation in Australia on eighteenth-century paintings in private collections were far less extensive than those in Britain. In particular, some British paintings in Australian collections appear to have escaped the lining cycle.

Lining is a term used to describe the adhering of a painting onto another fabric, which is performed to support a degrading original canvas, to consolidate cracked paint and often to stabilise tears and address planar deformations. In the past, lining has been an almost automatic treatment for canvas paintings and it was routine for restorers to carry out linings almost indiscriminately, perhaps often unnecessarily.14 Lining techniques used in the past were also very aggressive, using high levels of heat, moisture and pressure. Adhesives based on animal glue, often in a flour paste mixture were used, and from the mid-nineteenth century wax and resin adhesives were introduced.15 The heat and pressure involved in this process often leads to flattening of the paint, destroying areas of impasto and subtle brushwork. Additionally, the impregnation of the whole structure of a painting with adhesive can significantly alter the tonal values within a painting. The lining process is, at best, only a temporary solution as all linings inevitably deteriorate and need to be re-applied over the centuries, hence Percival-Prescott’s term “the lining cycle”.16

As the double portrait has spent the majority of its life in Australia, it has escaped interventive treatments so commonly applied to paintings of the same age in Britain. The scarcity of unlined eighteenth-century paintings can be illustrated by the fact that in 1986, of approximately seven hundred canvas paintings in the National Gallery, London Collection, which pre-date the year 1820, only four...
paintings remained unlined. As well as never having been lined, this painting has also retained its original hand-made strainer and original stretching, complete with original tacks and corner folds, making it a rare find indeed. While paintings from the eighteenth century may have escaped lining, original strainers are often missing. Only five stretchers of works of the British eighteenth-century artist Joseph Wright of Derby have been identified in the literature as being original to the paintings to which they are attached. The rarity of an “intact” painting such as the portrait of Mrs Bradford and Samuel tacked in its original stretching to the original stretcher presented real motivation to undertake a treatment that would not disturb these original features.

Treatment of Mrs Bradford and Samuel: Modern treatment, philosophy and approach

Bomford writes that the philosophy of modern conservation is one of minimum possible intervention in the structure of an artwork. That is to say an artwork is a three-dimensional object and all of its parts contribute to provide information about the maker and method of its making. Therefore, a painting is given fundamental character not only by the paint film, which is the most important part, but also by the sum of its parts. It has a back as well as a front. It follows that for modern painting conservators, it is imperative to preserve the originality of all components of an artwork – this being the canvas, stretcher and frame – not exclusively the paint layer. Consequently, preservation of the original stretching and un-lined state of this canvas was a priority.

The decision not to line a picture presents an ethical approach to the work of art as a whole, a resolve to preserve as much as is possible of the unique original structure. However, the extreme and complex nature of the tears in this canvas made this a challenge. A picture with such a compromised condition would, in the past, have been lined without question. Even in modern conservation ethics, a painting in this condition could be justifiably lined. The use of a high-stiffness lining fabric, or layers of interleaves, is more effective at holding large tears in plane than tear repair alone. The development of a treatment approach that sufficiently repaired and stabilized these tears while preserving the rarity of the original stretching was therefore a challenge.

Prior to undertaking structural treatment, the painting underwent standard cosmetic conservation procedures. The picture was surface cleaned and the varnish removed. Analysis of the paint layers through cross-sections, pigment dispersions and portable X-ray fluorescence revealed a typical English double grey ground technique and the use of smalt in the blue silk dress, which was well preserved.

The canvas appeared to be primed while on the strainer and the painting executed on the strainer, as paint ran around the edges and priming drip marks were consistent with the tension in the canvas whilst stretched.

Mechanical age craquelure had led to severe cupping of the paint across the image. Lining would have addressed this issue also, however to avoid this an alternative approach was taken. It was not possible to consolidate and flatten these cupped areas on the hot-table, as would have been carried out had the painting been un-stretched, as described by Bomford in his treatment of an unlined sixteenth-century painting. Consequently, cupped paint was consolidated with Beva 371® gel in xylene brushed over the painting. Hand-ironing with small thermostatically-controlled spatulas heat-set the cupped paint back into plane.

A structural treatment method was devised that repaired the tears without removal of the painting from the strainer. Fortunately, the extensive tears did not run under the strainer bars, so it was possible to repair these tears from the reverse with a version of the thread-by-thread technique as described by Professor Winfried Heiber. Polyamide welding powder was used for this process, rather than wheat-starch/Sturgeon glue mixture. The increased strength and filling capacity of polyamide, as well as speed of application justified this approach. Butt-joining the tears proved difficult in some areas as the tears had been in their pre-treatment damaged state for several years, and gaped up to two millimetres. In order to achieve a butt-join of the edges of the torn canvas, a Heiber “trecker” was used to ease the canvas edges together. The tears were further reinforced with polyester fibre sutures applied with Beva 371® gel adhesive across the reverse of the joins.

Following the tear repair, losses were filled and retouching was undertaken with whole egg-tempera and dry pigments, and varnishing was carried out with MS2A resin. After treatment, some planar undulations remain in the canvas and paint layers, and the complex tear through the face of Mrs Bradford sits slightly proud of the surface plane. However, these imperfections were considered acceptable in light of the historical information to be gained through the preservation of the original components made possible by avoiding lining. The painting is now in a stable condition and can be fully appreciated for the depth of the colours, the shimmer of the silk fabric, and the sensitivity of the brushwork in the rendering of the hands and features of the sitters. The treatment has enabled as much of the original structure of the artwork to be maintained as possible. Choosing not to line this painting meant that the physical rarity of an un-lined eighteenth century painting has been successfully preserved.
Conclusion
In the colonial years of Australia’s history, access to picture restoration was limited. However, during this period European paintings were arriving by way of British migrants building new lives in the colonies and bringing with them their family heirlooms. It has been found that today these paintings are sometimes in more original condition than their counterparts in Europe. The lack of access to conservation has preserved rarely seen levels of originality in paintings in Australian collections. This unlined painting is perhaps one of many as yet undiscovered paintings in private collections in Australia that have escaped conservation intervention. The stories of such paintings remain hidden until the sale or need for conservation of these works brings their existence to light.

As modern professionals we approach artworks with an appreciation and respect for the unique history of all components of a painting and seek to preserve as much original material as possible. In the case of this painting, contemporary developments in treatment philosophy and techniques enabled it to be conserved with a less interventive approach, allowing the integrity of the canvas and original stretching to be retained. Ironically, “benign neglect” has led to increased levels of preservation of paintings in Australia compared with those in Europe. It is now the responsibility of conservators, through a sensitive modern approach, to preserve this quirk of Australian conservation history.

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About the author
Catherine Nunn is a Senior Painting Conservator and lecturer at The Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation for their assistance.

Abstract
During the colonial period, many European paintings were brought from Britain to Australia, where access to restorers was limited. Today, some of these paintings remain untreated and provide rare examples of original materials that were often altered by traditional restoration practices in Europe. This “benign neglect” has meant that many such paintings escaped the “lining cycle” and are sometimes in a more original condition than those in European collections. The rarity of unlined eighteenth-century paintings in London today makes extraordinary the finding of any unlined paintings from this period. An example of an unlined eighteenth-century British painting in an Australian private collection is described here in the example of the double portrait of Mrs. Bradford and her son Samuel. Painting conservators were challenged to repair two severe tears in the painting while preserving the integrity of the original stretching and un-lined canvas. Modern conservation philosophy and techniques enabled the tears to be successfully repaired with a version of the Heiber thread-by-thread tear mending technique. Fortuitously, this so-called “benign neglect” has led to levels of preservation rarely seen outside Britain and Europe and hints that Australian private collections may contain further examples of such paintings in original condition, and hence a new resource for future research.

4 “The National Gallery of Victoria” (editorial), The Burlington Magazine 93, May 1951, p.149.
6 Once in Australia, these works were often housed in homesteads in remote rural communities. The vagaries of drought and other financial burdens could have rendered conservation intervention for these artworks unjustifiable. This historically limited access to restorers, both geographical and economic, has led to European artworks in private Australian collections to have sometimes escaped conservation intervention altogether.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
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12 Vaughan's journal of his voyage on 'The Medway' from England is housed in the La Trobe Library, Melbourne.
15 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
24 Bomford D., op.cit.at note xiv above, p. 39.
25 Consolidation of the paint with sturgeon glue prior to cleaning proved to be insufficient.
2. “Danger and Decay”: A restoration drama concerning the National Gallery of Victoria, 1899
Alexandra Ellem

In February 1899, in Melbourne’s Argus newspaper a controversy was sparked off by an anonymous contributor proclaiming, “The pictures in our National Gallery are perishing for want of the skilled restorer”. Unlike the better known cleaning controversies of the mid-nineteenth century at the National Gallery, London, in which passionate cries of public outrage were expressed at the “mutilation” of the nation’s pictures by picture cleaners, here it was proclaimed that the paintings in the collection of the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) were badly neglected and the self-titled correspondent, One of the Owners of Our National Gallery, implored Gallery Trustees to hire a restorer to “remedy the evil”. Where the London controversies launched government enquiries into the principles of picture cleaning and museum management and had direct impact on restoration at the gallery and the gallery’s overall administration, the Melbourne controversy involved protracted debate in the press involving strong criticism of the Gallery’s collection management, attacks based on narrow interpretations of frank confessions made by Director Bernard Hall, and a further lofty attack underscored by the opinions of several “English Authorities”. The Gallery took a rational approach, openly examining the collection and the preventive procedures in place, requesting informed professional advice, and querying the efficacy of restoration with a scientific desire for proven methods. Ultimately it maintained its considered emphasis on preservation over restoration.

On February 25th, 1899 the unidentified contributor argued, in an article titled “Our National Gallery: Decay and Danger”, that in the National Gallery of Victoria a restorer should be “always at work on the first incipient decay discovered” and that the Gallery install a Keeper to engage in “incessant and conscientious watching of canvases” for any sign of deterioration. He expressed grave concern that the paintings belonging to the nation were not being cleaned and were rapidly deteriorating, thereby diminishing the value of costly, beloved pictures. A litany of complaints was aired. The contributor conjectured that the public favourite Watergate Bay by John Mogford no longer “hung on the line where its beauties were constantly studied”, since it was encrusted with dirt, and because “successive generations of buzzers” had made the painting “their annual picnic ground” it had been skied, that is, hung high on the wall to reduce embarrassment. Continued failure to clean the work, he rightly opined, would result in paint...
losses where any “solid Korrumburra splotch” took root. Wrinkling paint and gaping cracks threatened the early demise of Andrew Gow’s No Surrender. Several paintings were victims of chill, observed as a cloudy discouloration of the surface and considered a result of varnishing in a room that was insufficiently warm and exposed to moisture. Leslie Carlyle’s studies confirm that softer varnishes such as mastic were considered more susceptible to chill at the time.6 Other problems were enumerated, including the excessively early application of cheap mastic varnish, the cracking and disintegration of varnish and media, the use of bitumen, also known as asphaltum or mineral pitch, made worse by exposure to extremes of temperature causing it to boil and trickle down the paint surface, exposure to direct sunlight, and the reckless employment of artists to restore paintings.

The contributor developed on his criticisms with treatment proposals. He proposed that old or cheap mastic varnishes and faulty pigments such as asphaltum and discoloured lead pigments be removed. Cracks could be rescued with the relining of the picture and gentle ironing from the back to expand the extant patches of paint before the fine network of cracks was to be stopped and filled. Rather than painting over a varnish as he suspected Louis Buvelot had done to Nicholas Chevalier’s Buffalo Ranges when repainting clouds and snow; a restorer, he claimed would remove the varnish and oil the underpainting first.

In a long-winded rant, the mystery correspondent implied the Trustees were ignorant fools, unaware of the decay occurring before their eyes and of the well-recognised methods of caring for their collection. He blasted them as “faith-healers” trusting in “Providence” for allowing valuable paintings to perish when they could call in a skilled restorer, “specially trained and educated to his own work, so deft of touch and exquisite of manipulation” that no-one “would attempt to rival his trade or fathom his ‘mystery’”.7 Invoking the mantle of office, the gallery critic called upon the Trustees as “the legal custodians of the nation’s property” to “discharge their duty” ensuring the pictures were properly cared for.

In his history of the NGV, Leonard Cox makes brief mention of the controversy. His three sentences identify a “critical letter” in the Argus, which

"occasioned a good deal of discussion between the director and the trustees as to the preservation and cleaning of pictures in the collection. Hall’s views seemed rather to be against cleaning and restoration; but the matter being referred to the National Gallery London, a balanced account was given of the practice there, and the views held on the cleaning and washing of pictures in its collection. The effects of light, and the changes of temperature as a cause of deterioration of pictures, were also made known, so that the practice of cleaning and restoration was accepted in Melbourne".8

The suggestion that the information received from the National Gallery in London had a transfiguring influence on those at the NGV, explaining the problems the paintings faced and winning them over to cleaning and restoration, overlooks the fact that preventive measures had been in place since Von Guérard’s directorship of the Gallery and fails to see Hall’s critical understanding of significant issues involved in deciding whether to have paintings restored.

Indeed records reveal a broad awareness at the NGV of the various environmental hazards that could damage paintings and that numerous measures had been taken to avoid them from 1870.9 When agitating for a purpose built gallery in 1870, the Trustees called for an edifice that was fireproof, that would prevent dust and extremes of temperature, and whose design would incorporate the conditions necessary for appropriate display with respect to natural and artificial lighting and ventilation.10 Within a week of the initial attack, Bernard Hall, Director of the NGV, responded twice in the paper frankly acknowledging that many pictures in the collection were “wearing badly”.11 Some were cracked and “one or two of the pictures ... show about a dozen flymarks between them”.12 He attributed much of the decay to artists using “improper methods” and materials with inherent vices, whose deterioration “may be assisted or developed by the climate”.13 Artists had loved bitumen, which had been in vogue up until the mid-1870s, for its colour and effect.14 Hall indicated its instability had destroyed many paintings by David Wilkie and Sir Joshua Reynolds among others, and often faulty pigments or materials caused unavoidable cracking or damage.15 He echoed criticism of the methods of the Gallery’s previous Director, the painter George Folingsby. Cracking and surface disruption caused by bitumen is still detectable in the shadows of Folingsby’s Bunyan in Prison.16 Defending the Gallery’s management, Hall explained that temperatures were measured three times a day, with the most exposed room never dropping below 47° or rising above 83° Fahrenheit.17 He declared there was “no direct solar incidence on any picture in the National Gallery”.18 Stawell Gallery seemed brighter because the skylight had been recently cleaned, and direct light and associated heat were not at issue.19

After establishing that Gallery’s environment was essentially safe, Hall voiced his concerns about employing a restorer. He argued, “The idea of washing pictures...
professional picture-restorer, but as an artist I am afraid
Understandably this was a concern for Hall who confessed, “I know nothing
about the methods of the professional picture-restorer, but as an artist I am afraid
of him”.31 Hall was concerned too that the restorer’s ideal state for a picture was “a
clean bran -new appearance, and surface glassy with varnish”.32 His anxiety about
varnishing was not unfounded.

Leslie Carlyle’s extensive research on nineteenth-century oil painting instruction manuals reveals that although most suggested the application of just one or two thin layers of varnish, William Jabez Muckley’s painting manual published in 1882 declares, “The application of a thick coat of varnish to an oil-picture as usually practised is a mistake”.33 Furthermore, Isaac Whitehead, the son of Melbourne’s well-known frame maker, artist and restorer of the same name, weighed into the debate in The Argus, reporting that in the mid-1870s restoration involved flooding paintings with varnish until they had a glassy appearance, then leaving them horizontal for weeks until the varnish had set.34 Although named by Fraser as the “original contributor to the Argus”35, an interesting suggestion considering his experience as a local restorer, Whitehead’s explicit statement that he did not “endorse” the contributor’s treatment proposal for No Surrender and The Widow indicates the contrary.36

Whitehead recorded that James Webb’s Rotterdam at sunset and Chevalier’s Buffalo Ranges received this treatment despite Director Eugène Von Guérard’s objection to unnecessary treatment for new pictures.37 Whitehead’s father restored the resulting damage to Buffalo Ranges and an embargo was placed on restoration. Between the directorship of Von Guérard and Folingsby, some restoration had been conducted, but Folingsby quickly stepped in and halted further restoration. His first annual report as Director pronounced restoration “a very dangerous
process and in most cases unnecessary”,38 a position maintained by Hall on assuming the Directorship.

In the balance Hall appears to have understood many factors concerning the preservation of paintings. He arranged lectures for painting students on the chemistry of pigments as early as 1896, reflecting an awareness of problematic materials.39 Following a discussion of the damaging inherent vices of artists’ techniques and materials, Hall insisted, “I would sooner… see the pictures in a state of natural decay, if paint and varnish are inclined that way, than incur the risk of having them restored and all that that process implies, removing paint and varnish, washing, relining, and gentle ironing”.40 He knew that, despite his limited knowledge of the restorers’ secret methods, without a deeper understanding it would be impossible to make educated decisions on restoration treatments. Faulty methods and materials that dogged the art world in the nineteenth century were major factors in deterioration but there were few solutions. Condescendingly, the anonymous critic suggested a trip to the Public Library to read up on the matter in the art department to convert Hall from obstinate negligence to seeing the need for saving pictures “by careful restoration…which is a preservative rather than a renovating process”.41

Hall conceded that if the Keeper of the National Gallery in London were to advise the necessity of restoration he was prepared to suggest pooling resources with the Adelaide and Sydney galleries to “obtain…the services of the best man for this work” from England.42 The contributor superciliously concurred the Gallery’s restorer must have the best qualifications.43 Hall’s desire for a well-recommended restorer who was in constant practice was reasonable but difficult to satisfy in Melbourne as opposed to the thriving art world of London.

Faced with a collection packed by inherent vices, Hall was unwilling to spend scarce funds on “remedies that are neither effective nor permanent”.44 In 1893, a year after Hall became Director, his salary and gallery purchases were cut due to the depression, with his former salary and a few acquisitions being resumed in 1898, lending him a keen understanding of precious resources.45 In March 1899, a site visit by the Premier and the Chief Secretary of the colony prompted a request to hire a restorer in conjunction with the Sydney Gallery as they inspected the condition of the pictures. The Premier noted that New South Wales had greater land revenue to spend but the issue would receive “the fullest consideration”.46 In practical terms, employing a restorer seemed an unlikely solution.

In May, a report Hall had made for the National Gallery Committee on the
condition of the collection and the “character” of the galleries along with photographs of the worst-cracked pictures was sent to Edward Poynter, Director of London’s National Gallery and Hall’s former art teacher, for informed advice on whether the Gallery’s conditions were satisfactory and if so, whether the service of “a really experienced operator” could put the collection in order. If problems were due to injudicious methods, Hall wished to know whether and how they might be treated.

At roughly the same time, the anonymous contributor was also seeking professional advice from “Home”. After little activity in the press, a torpedo, loaded with the ammunition of the “weighty” opinions of English artists and authorities, was launched at the Gallery in July. Luminaries of the English art world including Charles Eastlake, Keeper and Secretary of the London National Gallery from 1878 to 1898 and an important advisor to the NGV on acquisitions; Frank Walton, President of the Society of Oil Painters; and Sir James D. Linton, the President of the Royal Institute of Painters in Watercolours, and Sir Philip Burne-Jones, the artist son of Edward Burne-Jones, concurred with the ideas promoted by this anonymous critic, advocating careful watching of canvases, addressing dirt and deterioration at first sight, and the employment of a competent restorer. Several authorities added that glazing pictures provided further protection. Rubbing salt into the wounds, the contributor associated accelerating decay of the collections in Sydney and Melbourne with the deaths of the former Directors, Montefiore and Folingsby respectively, noting how incessantly they watched the collections with the “anxiety of a private collector and connoisseur”, sending for help “when decay threatened”.

Under the cover of his determined perseverance Hall volleyed shots back, announcing that examination of photographs taken in 1893 compared with the cracked paintings showed not “a single crack has been added since that time”, with the exception of four paintings and in the case of another the cracks had widened. Perhaps this is the first documented use of photographs to assess changes in collection condition. Vindicated that deterioration was not “generally increasing”, Hall added fuel to the fire recording that Folingsby prevented further restoration because he felt the pictures had been “spoil’d”, and he queried how Montefiore’s devoted attention did not “arrest the decay of colour and paint” in a list of Sydney’s paintings which were probably prone to inherent deterioration. The response was feeble, “I do not believe the evidence of Hall’s camera. The apparatus, perhaps cannot lie, but, like all its fellows, it is incapable of telling the truth”.

Armed with Poynter’s pointers concerning the adequacy of the Gallery, the problems of inherent vice and of climate, which included severe cold, Hall made recommendations for change, which also borrowed from Professor Church, Chemist to the Royal Academy. He proposed blinds be installed to control light and a system of heating to maintain an equable temperature. He also urged that the moisture of the Gallery’s atmosphere be measured and that the air be moistened in the dry season. His concerns about artists’ materials and methods were heightened by the climate’s possible acceleration of decay.

Poynter indicated that regarding restoration “each case must be judged by itself”. Dirt should not accumulate and careful washing of pictures was sound but there were risks when cracks existed. Varnish removal is “not objectionable” but must be done by a knowledgeable restorer. Privately, despite the prejudice against artist’s repairs, Hall possibly repaired his own paintings. An undated bust portrait of a Dutch woman of his experienced severe drying cracks, exposing a bright crimson undercoat. Tinted fills were carefully applied to hide more extreme areas of cracking. The picture remains within the family collection. Such actions would have improved knowledge of his materials and their wear. Institutionally, a purge for restoration never arrived and Hall maintained his policy of not hiring restorers, although it seems there were occasions when restorers were brought in.

A further development arose when Hall identified the Argus contributor. In September, the Argus “Art Notes” outlined features in the latest number of London’s The Studio, indicating a summary of the Melbourne articles had concluded thus, “It is a happy thing to find a watchful press, though so removed from the centres of art, yet keenly alive to the interests of art in our distant colonies”. Perusal of The Studio, “a periodical of some influence” to Hall, revealed the article was a thinly-veiled attack on the Director and Trustees for their lack of expertise and failure to call upon a local restorer. The Melbourne correspondent to The Studio signed off as “J.L.”, the same initials of the Editor of “Art Notes”, Joshua Lake.

On this discovery Hall immediately wrote to the Trustees, Editors of The Studio and The Age, and to Poynter to inform them of Lake’s abuse of his connections with The Studio to amplify views he had aired in the Argus internationally, and then as Editor of “Art Notes” to further authorize his views in Melbourne. Poynter was informed probably because his letter advising the NGV had been prefaced with the statement, “I have already received a letter enclosing copies of correspondence and numerous newspaper cuttings on the subject of the condition of the pictures in the National Gallery, Melbourne to which I returned a brief answer”. The article citing English art experts’ opinions was introduced
noting that the authorities had been sent material concerning the Melbourne debate. In October The Age published an article, “Artistic Opinion: How it is Manufactured”, anonymously written by Hall, explaining the lengths to which Lake had extended himself to make himself heard and including a copy of the letter he had sent to one of the English authorities. 17

In that letter preceding the request for an opinion on the care of the Gallery’s collection, Lake referred to doing “a fair business for you” five or six years ago and suggests that now that times are better he hopes to “renew our acquaintance”. 18

Hall noted that Frank Walton, President of the Society of Oil-Painters and whose opinion was cited, had sold a painting to the NGV for £300 through Lake, a few days before Hall had assumed his post as Director in 1892. Hall queried how Walton had come to have “valuable pictures in the public galleries of Melbourne, Adelaide and Ballarat” as detailed in that article. In fact, Lake was an adviser to all three galleries. 19

This leads to the question of Lake’s purpose. Hall mentioned in March that three days before the drama had erupted in the papers an application to treat pictures in the Gallery had been received. 20 No name has yet come to light as to the author’s identity. Perhaps it was a restorer who had earlier worked for the NGV 21 or perhaps Lake himself was aiming for a position. When mentioning Montefiore’s devotion to and care of the collection, he mentions that the contributor had “many times accompanied him and assisted him in his work”, possibly suggesting a readiness to take on the task. 22

Throughout his Australian career Lake was employed in various enterprises in the arts and as a writer. He had served as General Superintendent of Fine Arts for Melbourne’s Centennial International Exhibition of 1888-89 and edited the Official Guide. He had continuing influence with local and British artists as he managed other exhibitions through which pictures were offered for sale, 23 and he was involved in ventures such as the compilation of Melburnian art and literary works for a souvenir book to raise funds for the Children’s Hospital. 24 Yet it is in his hastily composed notes appraising the George McArthur bequest as a collection and of its needs for storage and care performed during a short stint as a librarian at the University of Melbourne that his strengths are revealed as a connoisseur and custodian, 25 which might have made an arguing point for his appointment as Keeper at the National Gallery.

Early in his career in Australia, having emigrated from Britain in 1875 for his health, Lake commenced work as the Art Master at the Melbourne Church of England Grammar School and became the first editor of its newsletter The Melburnian in 1876. It is interesting to note that in 1877 when discussions of establishing an annual Old Boys’ dinner made no progress, a letter of complaint published in the Argus was reprinted in The Melburnian accompanied by an editorial note encouraging action, and a dinner was soon arranged by Headmaster Morris. 26 It appears Lake may have had some experience in manufacturing opinion to stimulate action.

This paper highlights some of the issues associated with questions concerning restoration as an effective treatment, felt all the more intensely in a remote colony with limited options. The drama over restoration also demonstrates the degree to which opinion and self-interest can dominate discussions concerning national collections and their management. While parties on both sides of the “discussion” had the best interest of the collection behind them, it is evident that because of the complicating factor of inherent vice in the materials of the paintings there were no simple answers. The Gallery’s decision to review and consider the matter carefully was wise, yet the advice encouraging regular maintenance was equally important. The vain attempts to influence the Gallery to employ a restorer did, however, improve the preventive care of the nation’s collection.

Furthermore, in 1900, Hall reported to the Trustees that “a spot of dirt and cut or damage to the canvas of Turner’s Dunstanborough Castle” had been brought to his attention by a Gallery attendant with the dirt being “at once removed”. 27 The alacrity of the response suggests Hall may have altered his views on accumulations of dirt. Moreover, notes carefully taken during Hall’s travels to Europe illustrate an almost scientific interest in the modes of preservation implemented by the galleries he visited. The drama had obviously wrought some influence on this Director’s views. 28

Regardless of the reasoning behind the criticism that initiated the discussion, this drama highlights for conservators today the importance of having well-trained and experienced practitioners, implementing sound preventive measures and increasing their knowledge of the methods and materials of artists and their chemical and physical properties.

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The author would like to thank Dr. Paul Paffen for directing my attention to this controversy. Thanks also to Michael Hall and Gwen Rankin for their support and input.
Abstract
In 1899, an anonymous correspondent publicly attacked the National Gallery of Victoria for its perceived failure to preserve its paintings in the Argus newspaper. It was argued that the gallery should follow the model of the National Gallery in London by having someone keeping constant watch of the paintings and their condition and hiring a restorer to treat the first sign of decay. The ensuing drama involved barbed criticisms and raised a series of questions about how to best preserve paintings. The skills and methods of restorers came into question alongside issues of the inherent vice of artists’ materials and methods, particularly of nineteenth-century artworks, and environmental controls that could be put in place to reduce danger and decay.

Doubts raised led Bernard Hall, the Director of the NGV, and Gallery Trustees to thoroughly examine the pictures and Gallery practice concerning their care and maintenance. Advice from British authorities was sought on both sides. Hall’s use of photographs may be one of the first documented examples of their being used to assess condition over time. During the year criticisms continued to flow far and wide, yet the Gallery stood firm in taking a conservative approach for fear of causing more harm than good. Issues related to inherent vice and effective treatments were a major sticking point. The controversy highlights matters conservators continually juggle: balancing costs, dealing with the unknown concerning artists’ materials and methods, maintenance and prevention and the need for restoration.

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41 Hall, B., March 21st, 1899, Letter to the Chairman of the National Gallery Committee, May 31st, 1899, Bernard Hall Papers, Box 2, no 441.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
46 This claim was documented by the restorer defending himself against Folingsby’s claims. Ibid.
48 Poynter, E., Letter to Edward Langton, July 8th, 1899, Public Library, Museums, and National Gallery of Victoria, Pamphlet, Hall Papers, NGV Collection, 2BH 441, 3-4; Hall, B. Letter to the Chairman of the National Gallery Committee, August 30th, 1899, Public Library, Museums, and National Gallery of Victoria, Pamphlet, Hall Papers, NGV Collection, 2BH 441, pp.5-8; Church, Sir A. H., Chemistry of Paints and Painting, Seeley and Co. Ltd., London, 1902.
49 Hall, B., Letter to the Chairman of the National Gallery Committee, August 30th, 1899, Bernard Hall Papers, Box 2, no 441, NGV Collection.

50 Poynter, E., op.cit. at note xlviii above, p. 4.
51 Ibid.
52 For further detail on restoration in Melbourne, see the paper in this volume, Yuace-Cocks, M. “An overview of the first century of restoration in Victoria.”
54 Hall, B., Letter to the Editor of the Age, October 3rd, 1899, Hall Papers, NGV Collection, 3BH 98.
56 The letter to The Age was signed “Watchful Press”. Hall, B., Letter to the Editor of the Age, October 3rd, 1899, Hall Papers, NGV Collection, 3BH 98.
57 Anonymous (Hall, B.), “Artistic Opinion: How it is Manufactured”, The Age, October 18th, 1899, p.11.
58 Poynter, E., op.cit. at note xlviii above, p.4.
60 Hall, B., Op.cit. at note xi above.
61 Anonymously Lake referred to a restorer having expertly treated six or seven pictures nearly twenty years earlier under Folingsby. “In three of them the keenest connoisseur can hardly detect them.” One of the Owners, op.cit. at note xxi above.
62 Anonymous, op.cit. at note xlii above.
63 Lake managed and catalogued the Exhibitions of the British Art Gallery by the Royal Anglo-Australian Society of Artists in Melbourne in 1892 and in 1908 in Brisbane, the latter opening shortly after his death that year. Lake, J., Exhibition of the British art gallery by the Royal Anglo-Australian Society of Artists, with which is associated the German art gallery and a selection of pictures by Australian artists 1892, Exhibition Building, Melbourne: illustrated catalogue; 2nd ed., Edgerton and Moore, 1902; Lake, J., Exhibition of the British Art Gallery in conjunction with the Royal British Colonial Society of Artists, London: First season, 1908 / illustrated catalogue, Melbourne: Atlas Press, 1908.
66 “We sincerely hope something may be done in the direction indicated by the correspondent of the Argus, but unless some permanent Committee or other organization be instituted, the dinner will suffer, the same fate as the old boys’ cricket match, and the old Boys’ football match. Each took place once, and then perished because, ‘What is everybody’s business is nobody’s business.’ Wilmot, RWE (Hon Sec of the Old Melburnians), Liber Melburniensis 1838-1914: A History of the Church of England Grammar School Melbourne, Melbourne: Arbuckle, Waddell & Fawckner Printers, 20-22 McKillop St., 1914, pp. 381-82.
67 Hall, B., Letter to the Trustees, May 17, 1902, Hall Papers, NGV Collection, 3BH 282.
68 Hall, ‘List of a Number of European Museums and Notes on their Structure, Management and Collections’, Notebook, Hall Papers, NGV Collection, 1903 trip to Europe and Britain.
Prior to 1899 the National Art Gallery of NSW (now the Art Gallery of NSW) had assigned conservation work to a commercial picture framemaker and restorer, Henry Callan. Callan was an exceptional framemaker used by many of the Australian Impressionists to craft English-style gilded frames for their paintings. His work as a restorer is less well known, but it appeared he was required to varnish paintings and “double back” - loose-line - canvases for the Gallery.

After Eliezer Montefiore’s death in 1894, a replacement Director of the National Art Gallery of NSW was not appointed and the Trustees, in particular the President Eccleston Du Faur, took care of all administrative matters. In response to the 1899 public debate about the condition of paintings in the NSW collection, a Sub-committee of Trustees was formed on May 19th, 1899 to investigate the “Restoration of Cracked Pictures”. The appointed committee members were Du Faur, Josiah Mullins & the artist Julian Ashton. At the Sub-committee’s first meeting they selected a number of paintings to send to Callan “to fill up cracks” and others for varnishing only. They also examined the correspondence between the National Gallery of Victoria and the National Gallery, London.

It was a letter presented to the Sub-committee in August 1899 that caused a new direction on the issue of cracked paintings. The author was Alfred Coad Murch who claimed to be “a trained (in London) Picture Restorer, and an expert in the chemistry of paints, oils, varnishes &c.” The blame for most of the cracking of the contemporary paintings Murch argued; lay with the artists themselves by either forcing work forward for exhibition or sale, or from lack of knowledge of materials.

“The elements of destruction often lie in the pictures themselves, and from the day of their completion, deterioration commences.”

Although the suggestion that cracking in nineteenth-century paintings was caused principally by problematic materials and techniques, is a familiar idea to us today, this was a departure from the wisdom being received from the English experts; artists, restorers and Gallery directors, solicited by the Australian galleries for their opinions in 1899. Suggestions from Sir Edward Poynter, artist and Director...
of the National Gallery London, that it was the harsh antipodean environment which was to blame, did not make sense to du Faur who noted that paintings contemporary to each other and hung side by side for many years were in quite different condition, one cracked while another remained perfect. Du Faur also noted that localized cracking was occurring in a painting by Sir Edward John Poynter owned by the Art Gallery of New South Wales, The visit of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon, which had been painted in 1890 (Fig 1):

“...the main part of the work is evidently of 'first intention'- painted off at once and shows no deterioration- while the Queen to whose figure the artist may be assumed to have naturally devoted the most attention, and probably touched over and over again, as shown by its solidity, is gone all to pieces- and the immediate foreground, peacock and, also likely to have received the same special attention, is badly cracked (Fig 2) and I claimed that such results could only be ascribed to such extra manipulation, or to special pigments or media used on those special parts, and not to general conditions affecting all parts alike.”

The most compelling evidence for inherent vice put forward by Murch was a test panel he submitted with his report which demonstrated a number of painting techniques and materials showing signs of cracking including; the use of lead driers, bituminous glazes, varnish as medium, antagonistic pigments and vehicles, unnecessary varnishing, and injudicious use of water for cleaning. Unfortunately Murch's test panel was lost after it was sent to the London Selection Committee for comment and photographs taken of it before it was sent are also missing. While the demonstration panel cemented Murch's authority with du Faur, it must have been the subject of some debate by the Sub-committee as Murch felt compelled to back up his submission with a note that the panel was legitimate and "not tricked up" and that he was willing to paint a sample picture in front of anyone to prove its truth.15

The problem of Murch's unknown background and his inability to furnish references was however a stumbling block to his appointment by the Sub-committee, and these concerns do seem justified in the light of investigations of his public record. Alfred Murch was born on February 5th, 1862 in Plymouth, England16. His father, James Murch was a journeyman tailor. No record of Murch's arrival in Australia has been found, but it appears likely that the Queensland Police Service file of Alfred Code Murch 1883-1885, is his.17 Soon after his resignation from the Queensland Police he married, and on his certificate he recorded that his father was a surgeon and that his own occupation was a sailor.18 Murch's first daughter was born in Sydney in 1886, and her birth certificate says that her father was an artist. He was also recorded in the Sydney Sand's Directory as an artist in 1888.19 He must have moved back to Brisbane in 1888 where he and his wife are recorded as having another four children between 1888 and 1893. In the second half of the 1890s A.C. Murch had several paintings exhibited in Brisbane.20

It remains a mystery as to how this "sailor" became the artist and then restorer "trained in London" some time between 1885 and 1899. It seems unlikely that Murch could have spent anytime in London during these years, and it is unknown what his training may have been, but it appears this could only have occurred in Sydney or Brisbane. Given Murch's own elevation of his father's occupation from tailor to surgeon on his marriage certificate, it may be that Murch was rather adroit at manufacturing his background. Nonetheless, his understanding of the materials of oil painting and the causes of deterioration were insightful and knowledgeable. His treatment strategy was however more problematic. Much of Murch's treatment for paint craquelure appeared to lie with the application of a small amount of drying oil. This, he said, replaced the volatile components of varnishes and mediums, the loss of which was the cause of some cracking. He called this "toughening" the paint film.

On August 28th, 1899 Murch was assigned several paintings to restore under the supervision of Julian Ashton. These treatments appear to have satisfied the Trustees and more paintings were given to his care for oiling. However, by November some disquiet about Murch's methods was being expressed, in particular by Ashton. The debate appears to have come to a head over the treatment of the Lord Frederic Leighton painting Wedded of 1882 (Fig. 3). In a note to the Trustees, Murch described the cracking on the Leighton painting as "thin glazes that have cracked and split into small patches" (Fig. 4).21 He stated that the cause of the problem was the use of varnish as a medium and recommended that the painting be treated with oil. Murch may have had some undeclared inside information to support his assessment of the materials used in this particular painting as it was noted in a conservation report by William Boustead in 1957 that there was a hand written note on the back of the loose lining canvas of the painting (which he removed and discarded in order to stick the painting to a solid masonite support) which said:

“Vehicle, amber varnish and oil of spike. Canvas single primed white rubbed in brown and white. Pale blue wash on flesh”.22

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A report on "Restoration" written by Du Faur on the 6th of November 1899, describes some of the contrary opinions about Wedded. "Murch" he writes, "says major cause of cracking is use of varnish as medium." But that; "Mr Ashton is not aware of the fact that varnish is used as a vehicle". It seems this debate became heated. Ashton wrote to Bernard Hall, the Director of the National Gallery of Victoria:

"My dear Hall, We are in somewhat the same difficulty at our national gallery here as you have just gone through in Melb. There is a so called restorer (Murch by name) who unfortunately has got the ear of our President and is swamping our pictures with paint and linseed oil. I have protested and protested but with no great result, and I was very glad to get the pamphlet which was forwarded to us containing your reports and that of Sir E. Poynter. This disastrous person (Murch) Has been limbering up our works for the last three or four months and today was a board meeting at which I turned on all my eloquence and your reports upon my co trustees to stop this business at last- they agreed to ask you over to confer with them upon the matter they are paying expenses. Get ... as soon as you can as I am sure that your trustees will give you a few days leave of absence upon a matter as vitally important not only to our two galleries but to all collections of pictures this side of the line...".

Hall was no great supporter of restorers, quoting in an article for the Argus newspaper Walter Armstrong, Director National Gallery of Ireland that "the Russian authorities follow the excellent rule that no picture is to be cleaned until from the artist:

"The more I work on it the more I see that the shocking state it is in is entirely the result of the varnishing it has had and has nothing whatever to do with my painting."
The earlier return to Sydney of The visit of the Queen of Sheba in April had produced similar disappointments for the Trustees. It was generally felt that the painting had lost brilliancy. Murch’s comments on the restorer Buttery’s ability were blistering. He wrote that Buttery was lacking in “chemical training and applied practice”. Applying mastic varnish directly after repairs caused further problems he said and it looked as if it had “been smeared with wax or soap”. He says of Buttery’s suggestion that the enormous painting be put behind glass, that glazing served little benefit unless the air is “loaded with impurities”. For paintings done with good materials and good materials, free air he said helped to harden it and keep it safe from damage:

“If a picture cannot lay claim to these conditions, then the placing of it under glass, will not prevent its deterioration, as witness the fact that the picture "Queen of Sheba" arrived here under glass, namely:-secure from atmospheric changes in an airtight zinc case- in as shabby a condition as if it had lain in a lumber room neglected for twenty years”.

The poor outcome of the London experiment sealed Murch’s long-term employment as the National Art Gallery of NSW’s restorer. He continued to work at an incredible pace on the collection of cracked paintings treating one hundred and forty-eight paintings in the period 1899-1906. He continued the photographic catalogue of treatments tabbing into the conservation book photographs of each painting after treatment as well as writing numerous reports on his restorations. These records have yet to be fully collated and documented, but they would appear to be one of the most unique early collections of conservation treatment documentation.

In 1902 a follow-up newspaper article appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald, paying tribute to Murch’s work at arresting the decay of the State collection of paintings:

“….the skill and experience of Mr S. E. Murch [sic] being called in as picture-restorer, the source of the deterioration was traced in nearly every instance to the employment of inferior varnish. The removal of the varnish, together with the dust and dirt mixing in with it, added to the use of a little secretly prepared oil, is now putting quite a new face upon old friends”.

This article riled one old ally of the gallery, the previously commissioned and now no longer used restorer Callan, who quickly responded by writing to the Gallery:

“Obtain the best London or Continental expert opinion as to the advisability of allowing oil even “secretly prepared” to remain on the surface of valuable paintings. I ask the Artists on your Board is it not a fact well known to Artists and restorers that oils discoulour more than varnish and whilst the varnish I put on the paintings (inferior or otherwise) can be easily removed, the solvent necessary by and by to remove the ‘secretly prepared’ or any oil from the surface will remove the paint with it. I have always charged the gallery for Best Mastic varnish, if you believe and can prove it was inferior …and the valuable property in your charge was thereby ‘so cracked and tarnished that absolute disintegration threatened’ (fortunately ‘secretly prepared’ oil was at hand) though the rapidly increasing list of invalids once declining… are now restored to robust health” it will prove me a Scoundrel and you should deal with me”. Callan’s excellent letter elicited only a short reply from the gallery saying they were very respectful of his work on frames.

Despite Murch’s extensive work for the National Art Gallery of NSW from 1899 to 1929, it was clear that he was not well throughout this time. As early as January 1900 he noted he was home ill “unable to see”. These reports of illness continued until 1909 when a note written in a very shaky hand to the secretary of the gallery stated:

“Dr Sir! You must excuse my inability [sic] to write my report. My hands find it difficult to do my pen justice. This doesn’t affect my brush in any way”.

Murch died on March 20th, 1910 of “paralysis of the insane”, the consequence of tertiary syphilis. It is remarkable that through this period of 10 years of suffering very bad effects of his illness, including damage to his eyes and legs which caused him to spend large amounts of time in bed, was a period of such productive work on so many paintings at the Art Gallery of NSW.

The oiling of paintings so strongly advocated by Murch, is a problematic idea to most conservators, as it is thought that it forms an intractable layer which darkens over time. Clearly this was also the opinion of many at the time, like Ashton and Callan. Whether this has actually occurred on those paintings that underwent Murch’s oil treatments is less known. A number of paintings treated by Murch with oil have undergone varnish removal at the Art Gallery of New South Wales.
in the last 10 years. No report on these treatments has ever noted the presence of a discoloured oil layer on the surface of the painting. As the science of identifying organic layer structures in paintings becomes increasingly commonplace perhaps more will be discovered about the value of Murch’s treatment strategy.

There is no doubt from the extensive correspondence and minutes that Murch was an eloquent advocate of his own practice, and not reluctant to shower strong criticism on the work of others with evident authority and experience. However Murch’s identification of the cause of the cracking affecting so many contemporary English, French and even Australian paintings, as inherent vice set in place by the artists themselves, is in retrospect perhaps a more accurate assessment than those furnished by the “English authorities” of the day.

Abstract

In 1899 the debate on the condition of paintings at the National Gallery of Victoria began to impact in Sydney.1 The National Art Gallery of NSW admitted that it was also suffering from paintings developing contraction cracks. As a consequence the Trustees of the NSW Gallery, established the “Cracking & Restoration Sub-committee” to examine the cause and to find a remedy for the affliction.

The principal outcome from the Sub-committee’s investigations was the appointment of the first art restorer to a public collection in Australia; Alfred Coad Murch. Murch’s background and training was an enigma at the time of his appointment, but recent research has brought to light some of his story. His meticulous record keeping, photographic records and correspondence outlining the rationale for treatments is an extraordinary example of early documentation of conservation treatments.

About the authors

Paula Dredge holds a Bachelor of Applied Science in Conservation of Cultural Materials and a Bachelor of Arts in Art History. She has been a Paintings Conservator at the Art Gallery of New South Wales since 1995, and was the Advanced Conservation Intern at the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco in 1999.

For Alan Lloyd, see “The Boustead Years 1946 – 1977”, published in this volume.
30 Death Certificate, NSW Births, Deaths & Marriages, 1910/00575.
31 For background on the 1899 controversy see the contribution in this volume by Alex Ellem, ‘Danger and Decay’: A Restoration Drama concerning the NGV, 1899.
Fig. 3. Lord Frederic Leighton, *Wedded*, 1882, oil on canvas (later mounted on hardboard), 84.4 x 81.3cm, Purchased 1882, Collection: Art Gallery of New South Wales.

Fig. 4. Lord Frederick Leighton, *Wedded*, 1882, detail photographed December 1899 before treatment.

Fig. 5. Stanhope Forbes, *Their ever-shifting home*, 1887, oil on canvas, 179.2 x 115.6cm, Purchased 1890, Collection: Art Gallery of New South Wales.

Fig. 6. Stanhope Forbes, *Their ever-shifting home*, 1887, detail photographed December 1899 before treatment.

Fig. 7. Stanhope Forbes, *Their ever-shifting home*, 1887, detail photographed July 1901 after restoration by the artist.
Introduction

The private and public collections that grew from Victoria's gold-generated wealth also created a new demand for a local industry of restoration. Without specialist practitioners, those with artistic know-how including artists, photographers and art dealers possessed acceptable credentials to secure the confidence of custodians in both the public and commercial domain. The artist/photographer Benjamin Saunders - who exhibited at the inaugural Victorian Society of Fine Arts exhibition of 1857 - was typical of those who diversified their income by applying knowledge derived from limited experience and an increasing amount of misleading literature. However, a more prominent painter-photographer has emerged as the first documented restorer to work on what would become the National Gallery of Victoria collection. From 1867, two years after his arrival in the colony, Louis Buvelot (frequently claimed as the father of Australian landscape painting) submitted quotes to the then Librarian of the Melbourne Public Library, Augustus Tulk, for treatments involving the cleaning and structural repair of works of canvas. An autobiographical summary forwarded by Buvelot during this period made no mention of his qualifications or previous practice as a restorer. It is likely that the trust placed in him, and others who followed, was based on perceived artistic abilities rather than previous endorsement of restoration work.

The first art dealers also began to advertise restoration as a service: Fenwick and Macfarlan in Bourke Street offering "Pictures Cleaned, Re-lined & c", while Mr George H Powis "[begged] to state that he has devoted much study and attention to the cleaning and restoration of pictures and respectfully offers his services to connoisseurs and collectors".

The year 1868 marked the arrival of the colony’s first professional restorer. Hiram W. Paterson immediately wrote to Redmond Barry - the senior Trustee of the Public Library and Chair of its Fine Arts Commission that was established to report on the formation of a National Gallery - to offer his services as a "skilled restorer of pictures" with nearly twenty years' experience. Arriving from England and listing the Canadian Government as a client, Paterson was an opportunist drawn to the buoyant cultural market. He immediately secured work restoring several paintings in possession of the Public Library while also being made the Superintendent in charge of the installation and hanging of the important Art...
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Treasures loan exhibition of 1869.\(^6\) After commencing his treatments a nervous custodian requested that Paterson report on their status. His dismissive reply gave simplified descriptions of the work being undertaken while mentioning in passing that he had cleaned one painting “without authority” and varnished another as they were close at hand. Immediately Redmond Barry directed that no further work was to be undertaken.\(^7\)

Paterson’s relationship with the public institution was further strained when he entered into a dispute with the Melbourne Catholic Bishop Rev. James Alipius Goold concerning payment for work he performed while preparing their pictures for exhibition. The Bishop claimed this work was also unauthorised and suggested the Trustees of the Public Library should settle the payment as, in his opinion, Paterson had acted as their servant.\(^8\)

Two years later, the troubled restorer was required to defend his reputation further when pictures that he had treated began to show marked cracking. It was claimed that the cracks were a result of his liberal use of strong mastic varnish while his own defence laid blame on the harsh Australian environment.\(^9\) The pictures were part of the newly-formed National Gallery of Victoria and subsequently restored by the appointed Master of Painting and Curator Eugène Von Guérard as well as local framer-maker Isaac Whitehead.

Later in the same year Paterson, perhaps mindful of diminishing professional opportunities, made a proposition to the Port Phillip council to grant him land on the St Kilda beach reserve for the purpose of building an impressively ambitious aquarium house which, although never built, was considered.\(^10\)

Unfortunately what might have amounted to a breach of trust by one individual resulted in the institution’s loss of faith in the restoration process and cemented a widely-held belief that restoration inflicted more damage than it benefited.

The noted cracking of pictures and detrimental conditions of the Australian environment was understandably a continual point of public discussion in the nineteenth century. One of the collection’s largest and most problematic works, John Herbert’s Moses bringing down the Tables of the Law, measuring over six metres in length, became known as the “The Barometer” because when the weather was wet it became “a mass of waving undulations”.\(^11\) Naturally the Trustees took their custodianship very seriously, and in 1869 several thermometers were installed for attendants whose job it was to “to read the thermometer three times a day and make return of same monthly.” The building was also continually modified. Hessian was used to filter air ducts, blinds were installed and glass painted out to limit direct sunlight, while routine cleaning of the gallery (including dusting and “washing” of paintings) attempted to retard decay.\(^12\) One of the catalysts for a new purpose-built picture gallery was the concern raised by smoke entering the galleries from the neighbouring Melbourne Hospital. The focus on preventive measures was more palatable and less confronting than the proactive treatment of works of art.\(^13\) The Gallery went to great lengths and periodically sought international advice regarding the appropriate display and housing of works of art.

Under the pressure of public scrutiny, Redmond Barry sought greater control over the restoration of pictures. He urged that only the most competent man be procured, that they be required to submit in writing any proposed work while keeping a diary and noting thermometer readings during their treatments so that, “Should anything go wrong they [the Trustees] may have the fullest evidence for their satisfaction in case of enquiry at a future time”.\(^14\)

He also noted that, “Oil gums, resin varnishes, pigments made wholesale for restoration are frequently impure & adulterated” and suggested that the materials to be used be analysed first by the analytical chemist connected with the Industrial Museum. This is one of the few expressed interests in the chemical definition of locally sourced materials both for the manufacture and repair of works of art.\(^15\)

The years under von Guérard’s curatorship saw a tentative treatment program undertaken by him, Isaac Whitehead, the picture dealer Alexander Fletcher and Fletcher’s subcontracted restorer George Peacock. Von Guérard had a strong understanding of technical matters and a sympathetic approach that was understanding of the need for reversibility in retouching.\(^16\)

Following von Guérard’s resignation, George Folingsby was instated as director in 1882. This was the first of a series of changes in administration that brought a corresponding change in restoration policy that promoted the opinion of the individual rather than the direct needs of the collection. An almost immediate command to cease the cleaning of pictures reflected Folingsby’s non-interventionist ideology that also suited his own aesthetic sensitivity of subdued tonal ranges.\(^17\)

The restorer George Peacock, claiming that “some very false and injurious statements” had been made in the press regarding his work, demanded that he
be allowed to continue – a demand which was not met. The following decade saw little proactive maintenance of the collection and with it came a lack of awareness of aesthetic change and lasting impact on the confidence of the administration.\textsuperscript{18} The sudden death of Folingsby left the new Director, Bernard Hall, with a trusteeship that limited his freedom in acquisitions and control over the management of the collection. After several years, the hindered program of treatment erupted into accusations of neglect of the public collection in the 1899 “controversy”, addressed in detail by Alex Ellem in a separate paper in this publication.

This paradoxical cleaning controversy involved protagonists from the restoration profession seeking to initiate a program of treatment. The campaign was typical of the alarmist culture of the last decades of the nineteenth century when the press was frequently a forum for opinions attesting to an aesthetic authority. Perhaps the most influential article was written by Sir Charles Robinson, who was Her Majesty’s Surveyor of Pictures. This article, entitled “Picture Conservation”, appeared in the widely-read British journal The Nineteenth Century.\textsuperscript{19} This sixteen-page review of conservation practice outlined the chemistry of deterioration and concepts of reversibility and artistic intent in a concise and intelligent manner. Its overriding sentiment was caution – noting that London’s unscrupulous picture cleaners were colloquially referred to as “members of the Skinners Company” - while maintaining that conservation was a necessary evil. Bernard Hall not only read this article but also transcribed passages of it into his notebook.\textsuperscript{20}

Fortuitously the Felton Bequest soon followed and with it came a renewed acquisition program that brought authenticity and the condition of pictures to the forefront of the minds of the public and Gallery administration. It also provided opportunities to establish links with international conservators who could restore new acquisitions in a more expedient and less confrontational manner, out of the local public eye.

This preference for international expertise was reiterated in 1912 with the visit from the English restorer Louis Fairfax Muckley, who was undertaking a world tour. Fairfax was from a distinguished family of British artists and was himself a noted illustrator.\textsuperscript{21} His Uncle William J Muckley had published a technical handbook for artists that included information on permanence and comments on the treatment of pictures.\textsuperscript{22} Bernard Hall’s diaries show that he met with Muckley on several occasions presumably to converse on the approach and extent of restoration. Muckley’s treatment of the pictures was intentionally allowed to pass without notice by the local press.\textsuperscript{23}

In 1913, a former Melbourne student of Hall’s named Clewin Harcourt returned from a period of study in London and Antwerp where he had gained a variety of skills including the manufacture of musical instruments and, apparently, restoration. Harcourt periodically undertook work for Hall which was not sufficient to prevent renewed accusations of neglect appearing in the press in the late 1920s. Particular concern was placed on the “unseen paintings” sent to storage to enable space for the Felton pictures.\textsuperscript{24} Despite Hall’s faith in Harcourt he was quick to secure the services of another itinerant English restorer named F.W. Colley who restored ten oil paintings during 1929.\textsuperscript{25}

The 1930s marked the beginning of significant change in the approach to restoration. At the start of the decade seventeen paintings loaned to the Western Australia Art Gallery were returned in a compromised state. In preparation for their return trip, the crated paintings were left outdoors and became saturated in an unanticipated rain shower. Surprisingly, the crates were not opened until they reached Melbourne, where it was found that the only watercolour was destroyed and all but one of the remaining oil paintings were covered in large passages of opaque deposits. Bernard Hall began to restore the paintings himself, but after a frustrating six months sought the help of the Commonwealth Analyst in an attempt to qualify the compromised surfaces. A newspaper article titled “Stains Defy Analysis” detailed the confusion and frustration of both scientist and Director.\textsuperscript{26} In what seems to be an act of desperation, the paintings were placed in the care of two chemists from the Victorian Railway Department who undertook the restoration in their spare time. A more optimistic headline, “Restoring Paintings: Virtues and Vices of Chemistry”, glorified their achievements and scientific approach.\textsuperscript{27}

Hall’s newfound positivist faith in chemical knowledge signalled a modern approach to the treatment of pictures. In this situation scientific knowledge advised the removal of additional layers while the artistic hand of Bernard Hall compensated damage. The treatments are not recorded but technical examination reveals a process of cleaning and regeneration of the surface followed by a liberal application of varnish to conceal the damages and subsequent repairs.

This proactive stance continued with the change of directorship to J.S. MacDonald in 1936. Whereas Julian Ashton had cautioned Hall about the restoration program undertaken in NSW, MacDonald was optimistic from his previous four years as Director there. He immediately declined the services of Clewin Harcourt, providing new opportunities for others who were then working in the field.\textsuperscript{28}
These included Stephanie Taylor (artist and critic), Swinton Diston (artist) and the young Harley Griffiths (artist), who eventually won favour to begin a long association with the Gallery.

One of Griffith's first assignments was to enact the new Director's approved "experiment" of applying a wax varnish to pictures. This, along with a program of marouflaging canvas to hardboard in preference to lining was a programme enforced by MacDonald and most probably encouraged by Trustee Max Meldrum.

Over the following years Griffiths developed a continuing relationship with the NGV; his workmanship secured the confidence and respect of the then-current and future administrations and curatorial staff. When Sir Kenneth Clark visited Melbourne in January 1949 he was suitably impressed by Griffiths' work and recommended a twelve-month trip overseas to continue his development at international institutions. To what extent this experience influenced Griffiths is unclear, but it did symbolise a commitment by the Gallery to what would be the genesis of the Conservation department. The full career of Harley Griffiths and his subsequent colleague David Lawrance merits further study.

Conclusion
Understanding our past is always relevant to the present. The process of restoration is accumulative with previous interventions continually introducing new variables and influencing the integrity of an object's future; undoing one action requires another action.

Many of the pictures restored by those mentioned above have since been revisited by members of the current Paintings Conservation section. The professionalism and care of our predecessors, working in considerably less favourable conditions, is understood if not previously recorded.

Paintings that entered the NGV collection soon after their manufacture have generally fared better than those which were acquired after longer periods of time spent in private hands. This is a testament to the management of the collection as well as to the individual restorers trusted with its care. If any lessons should be taken from past experience, it is the importance of relationships beyond the work of art and the role of the conservator in imparting their knowledge.

Abstract
Little has been recorded about those who worked in the field of restoration during the first decade of Victoria's cultural history, and mostly their contributions have been forgotten. Without formal documentation any attempt to reconstruct this past relies on archival research that can itself be misleading. This paper will present the key events and individuals who made significant contributions to the collections of the National Gallery of Victoria from the middle of the nineteenth century until the 1950s when Harley Griffiths was promoted as consultant conservator and set the framework for the future of the NGV conservation department. With no technical staff of its own the NGV had drawn on available expertise in the colony. The collection's history documents the ideological development of the conservation profession in the colony.

Acknowledgments
I would like to acknowledge the early work done by Liana Fraser into the conservation history of the National Gallery of Victoria. I would also like to thank those people who have allowed access to their personal histories, particularly relevant to the current paper is the generosity of John Perry.

About the author
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1 See Public Record Office Victoria (PROV) Victorian Public Record Series Number (VPRS) 5863 Unit 2: Registered Outward Letters “letter no. 358 from the Secretary of the NG Committee, Marcus Clarke, to the Master of the School of painting Mr von Guérard”.

2 PROV VPRS 5839 Correspondence Inward 1864-1872. Unit 1: Inward Letters of correspondence Letters 16, 53, 55 and 106.

3 PROV VPRS 5839 Correspondence Inward 1864-1872. Unit 1: Inward Letters of correspondence Letters 138.


5 PROV VPRS 5839 Correspondence Inward 1864-1872. Unit 2: Inward Letters of correspondence Letter 81.


7 PROV VPRS 5839 Correspondence Inward 1864-1872. Unit 2: Inward Letters of correspondence Letter 102.

8 PROV VPRS 5839 Correspondence Inward 1864-1872. Unit 2: Inward Letters of correspondence Letters 128, 159 and 160.

9 PROV VPRS 5839 Correspondence Inward 1864-1872. Unit 2: Inward Letters of correspondence Letters 157 (Eugène von Guérard) 158 (Hiram Patterson).

10 See letters in Port Phillip Shire Archive, Hiram Paterson to The Mayor. June 3rd, 1872 and February 3rd, 1873, Hiram W Paterson.

11 “Our National Gallery” The Leader September 26th, 1892. This painting arrived in a compromised state and was also subjected to problematic restorations. It is currently too fragile to be displayed.

12 For the purchase of thermometer see PROV VPRS 804 Unit 2 Correspondence Inward from Trustees, original quote dated 18/1/1869 J.B. Grimboli. For role of attendants see “Regulations for the Staff of the National Gallery” 1872.

13 See Report of the Trustees of the Public Library, Museums, and National Gallery of Victoria 1871.

14 PROV VPRS 4636 Unit 1 Inward Correspondence – Unregistered. Letter from Redmond Barry October 16th, 1872.

15 Ibid.


17 PROV VPRS 4636 - Inward Correspondence – Unregistered George Verdon August 16th, 1883/1882.

18 PROV VPRS 4636 - Inward Correspondence – Unregistered. Letter dated December 19th, 1883 from George Peacock. It was said that no restorer was called to the Gallery during Folingsby’s period as Director.


20 State Library of Victoria, Bernard Hall Papers MS20549. Untitled notebook with numerous quotations and notes on the preservation of pictures.

21 Most notably the 1897 Dent edition of The Faerie Queene by Edmund Spenser. Muckley’s paintings closely followed the Pre-Raphaelite tradition. He arrived with his wife on the Levuka in January 1912.

22 Muckley, W. J., A handbook for painters and art students on the characters, nature, and use of colours: their permanent, or fugitive qualities, and the vehicles proper to employ, with an appendix giving permanent hues and tints : also short remarks on the practice of painting in oil and water colours. London. Bailliére, Tindall and Cox, 1893.


24 For example see “Our Buried Treasure at the Art Gallery” The Herald October 29th, 1927.

25 F.W. Colley is said to have first made contact with the NGV in 1925. He moved regularly between New Zealand, Australia, North America, England, Bermuda and Hawaii until his unexpected death in 1930. He was known to have carried a letter of recommendation from Director of National Gallery of Canada Ottawa dated November 15 1924. “Mr Colley has, for the past two years been employed by the National Gallery of Canada in restoring and renovating its collection of both old and modern pictures.” Correspondence from Hilary Soper, Devon Kingbridge to National Gallery of Victoria dated 14th April 1933.


28 PROV VPRS 4636 Unit 3. Inward Correspondence – Unregistered J.S. MacDonald to Mr Pitt, August 31st, 1937.
4. The Boustead Years 1946 - 1977
Alan Lloyd

Introduction

The Art Gallery of NSW (AGNSW) has had Restorer-Conservators continually on staff since 1899, and in 1933 the AGNSW constructed Australia's first purpose-built conservation department facility. The following time-line puts Bill Boustead into context.

1899 - 1908 Alfred C. Murch (with assistant Thomas Hall as an assistant).
1908 - 1926 Thomas Hall (with assistant William (Billy) Hall, his son).
1927 - 1948 Billy Hall (with assistant A.E. Willoughby 1937–1940).
1946: Bill Boustead appointed as assistant to Billy Hall.

The Boustead Years 1946 - 1977

William Morris Boustead (1912-1999), known as Bill Boustead or just Boustead, was a man with a background of diverse skills. After leaving school, he worked in a metallurgical and analytical laboratory and studied in this area at college for two years. During the Second World War in the years immediately prior to starting work at the AGNSW, Boustead was in the Army Engineers where he obtained many varied practical skills. Subsequent to leaving the army he enrolled at Sydney Art School, where he studied sculpture with Lyndon Dadswell.

Boustead started employment at the AGNSW in June 1946 as a workshop assistant to the then Conservator, Billy Hall. His duties included making picture frames and stretcher frames; stretching canvases, cutting mounts and glass; assisting with the hand lining of paintings and other related tasks. If history had repeated itself, as suggested by those preceding him in the time-line above, Boustead would have learned everything possible from Billy Hall and inherited his job when Hall retired. However, it did not happen this way. During Boustead's early years, Billy Hall had experienced personal tragedies in his life with the loss of both his mother and wife. The consequence of this was that he became an alcoholic. In 1948, the Trustees of the Gallery offered him early retirement with a reduced pension (or alternatively to be dismissed!). After Hall left the Gallery they had the problem of finding a replacement Conservator.

In 1949, around the same time that Harley Griffiths from the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne was sent off London to study at London's National Gallery, The Trustees of the AGNSW enlisted the help of overseas contacts in the United...
Kingdom, such as Sir Kenneth Clark, to find a conservator since no one was available locally.\(^3\)

On December 16\(^{th}\), 1949 Anthony Blunt - who was then at the Courtauld Institute - recommended Stephen Slabcynzki, stating he would require a salary of £1,500. Only three weeks earlier, a Mr. A. L. Dwyer from the United Kingdom had enquired if there was a vacant position for a Conservator.\(^3\) He requested a salary between £900-£1000. The Public Service requested that the qualifications of Mr Dwyer be investigated and there was no further mention of Mr. Slabcynzki who was obviously too expensive. Slabcynzki went on to become head of Conservation at the Tate Gallery. The Public Service dithered around for 1½ years and finally agreed to offer Dwyer a salary of £950. On April 27\(^{th}\), 1951 he wrote back declining the position, saying that in the meantime, the situation in the UK had much improved and he would not come!

Previously on September 22\(^{nd}\), 1950 Boustead was appointed Assistant Conservator and while these deliberations were going on Boustead was unofficially the Acting Conservator. On October 16\(^{th}\), 1950 the Gallery appointed Jack McGeorge as a “handyman” in Boustead’s old position, to assist Boustead in his new role. The Public Service board enquired whether the position of Conservator be removed due to the fact it had not been filled, meaning of course, “You seem to be able to function without it!” The Trustees finally managed in 1952 to get an “Acting Conservator’s allowance” for Boustead. He had also been reclassified as Permanent Staff.

During this period, Boustead had been troubled by the heavy-handed method he had been taught concerning the hand wax-lining of paintings. He thought it potentially very dangerous to the condition of the painting, particularly the flattening of impasto. This is where his previous practical training and experience clicked in. In 1952 he invented and built the world’s first vacuum hot table. A flattening of impasto. This is where his previous practical training and experience clicked in. In 1952 he invented and built the world’s first vacuum hot table. It potentially very dangerous to the condition of the painting, particularly the flattening of impasto. This is where his previous practical training and experience clicked in. In 1952 he invented and built the world’s first vacuum hot table.

Meanwhile, the Gallery Trustees had decided that the best course of action to get a Conservator was to send Boustead to London to study. One of the Trustees, Sir James McGregor, personally guaranteed that he would pay Boustead’s return boat fare to London. Once a list of expenses was submitted to the Public Service board, they finally agreed to pay for his living expenses and land travel while there.

Boustead left by ship from Melbourne on April 8\(^{th}\), 1953 for London, taking seven weeks to get there! He commenced study with Stephen Rees Jones, snr. at the Courtauld Institute in London, and later visited the Louvre conservation studios in Paris. While there, he became very ill and was hospitalised. Sir James McGregor happened to be in Paris at the time and immediately had him transferred to a London hospital. After Boustead recovered from his operation he was granted an extension of study time. He left London by ship on January 7\(^{th}\) 1954, arriving back in Sydney on February 25\(^{th}\).

Returning to the Art Gallery of NSW with his new-found expertise, Boustead was presented with the task of solving a major long-term conservation problem. The collection storage was in a dark, non air-conditioned area in the basement with bad rising damp in its walls. Everything was infested with varying degrees of mould. Boustead obtained some thermo-hygrographs, which he placed in the worst affected areas, while others were placed throughout the building to collect comparative data. Added to this, he regularly obtained outside temperature and humidity readings from the Bureau of Meteorology. With this data he was able to produce convincing evidence that highlighted the adverse conditions in the storage area. The Trustees and the Director used this information in submissions to the State Government for funding to rectify the problem.

After a period of time it became obvious that the Government was not going to immediately take positive action. In response, the Trustees formed a Conservation Sub-Committee consisting of the Director, the Conservator and representatives from the Trustees, as well as some outside consultants.\(^4\) This sub-committee recommended that the Conservation Department be re-fitted with the necessary equipment to examine, record, and treat the affected parts of the collection. It was also recommended that further staff be appointed.

A small proprietary de-humidifier was installed in an isolated room of 16,000 cubic feet to act as a test area. The humidity was effectively lowered and the fungal infestation had practically been eliminated. The Public Works Department Technical Officers in consultation with Boustead drew up plans for mobile de-humidifying units equipped with bacteria and fungus filters. Also to be incorporated in these units were ultraviolet rays. These units were designed to cope with 62,000 cubic metres of storage space. The walls were damp-proofed and coated with four coats of anti-fungal white paint, containing zinc white and 2% santophen fungicide followed by a final coat of high gloss bound with stand oil.

Despite these successes, Director Hal Missingham’s continued frustration with problems affecting the collection’s condition is evident in his statement, “For many years, and with increasing frequency since 1952, I have reported...”
the increasing disintegration of the collection”. References occur in the annual reports of 1952 and 1953 - when a special report on Conservation was sent to the Minister by the Board – and every successive year up to 1957. In 1957 funding was finally made available for the complete refurbishment of the Gallery’s Conservation Department.

During this period the Art Gallery came under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. A consequence of this change in governance was that the Gallery was expected to mount a display for Education Week. In 1956 a small conservation-related display had been shown and for 1957 a full-scale exhibition was mounted. It covered, through display and demonstration, the detailed work carried out in the Gallery Workshop in caring for and maintaining art works. Photographic enlargements, colour transparencies and demonstrations by the Conservator and Assistant Conservator using technical equipment were seen daily by an average audience of 200 visitors. In conjunction with this, the Director, Conservator and Assistant Conservator using technical equipment were seen daily. A consequence of this change in governance was that the Conservation Department.

Having gained funding approval in 1958, the Conservation Department was completely re-modelled and furnished with the necessary equipment for examination, treatment, testing and research. This new facility was deemed significant enough to be reported in Studies in Conservation. In 1959, George Baker, Artisan, from the Art Gallery of South Australia did two weeks training at the AGNSW with Boustead. Baker had started at AGSA as an attendant in 1948. He showed interest in becoming a conservator so it was decided to have him trained. He qualified as Conservator in 1965.

In 1960, Boustead was made a Fellow of IIC. By then, he had taken on his first intern, Anan Singh Bisht, from the National Museum in New Delhi, India. Bisht had been awarded a six-month Colombo Plan Scholarship for overseas study. That same year, Herbert (Bert) Farris was appointed as Framemaker/ Mountcutter at the Gallery. Originally from the United Kingdom, Farris had worked in the antique furniture trade.

On June 30th, 1961, Boustead’s long-serving assistant Jack McGeorge died, just two days before Boustead departed by ship for a six-month work research trip. That September, Boustead attended the inaugural IIC conference in Rome, where he delivered a paper entitled, The conservation of works of art in tropical and sub-tropical climates, and he attended the ICOM conference in Lisbon. Following the IIC conference he was made a member of a special working group concerning the care of works of art in tropical and sub-tropical climates. While in Europe, many of his IIC colleagues invited him to visit their conservation studios, thereby enabling him to get a very broad understanding of how conservation departments were set up in the United Kingdom, France, Holland, Belgium, Germany, Portugal, Spain and Italy.

In August of that same year, a Czech-trained conservator, Dimitri Setelek, was appointed to the position of Restorer, with the intention of his covering Boustead’s position while the latter was overseas. He was also made responsible for the conservation of paintings from the NSW State Library. The State Government finally recognised the need for further conservation staff at the Gallery, so they created two positions of Cadet Restorer. The intention was that these new employees would be trained by Boustead. The first Cadet Restorer, Royston Harpur, was appointed in September of 1961. For this initiative, Boustead formulated a “course” for the Cadet Restorers based on a combination of his own training at the Courtauld Institute, his fifteen years practical experience, plus visits to many overseas conservation studios, and his involvement with international conferences and publications.

Boustead returned to Sydney on January 23rd, 1962, and Setelik was transferred to the State Library where he became their first Conservator, leaving vacant the position of Restorer at the Gallery. This position was advertised twice, and although there were eight applicants, none were considered suitable. Mr Harold White, Chief Commonwealth Librarian in Canberra, encountered the same problem. The position of Assistant Conservator was then considered for reclassification to that of Restorer.

In 1962, Boustead made a request to the Trustees to be reclassified into the Professional Division from the General (meaning not professional) Division he was then classified under. The Trustees were advised that the Public Service Board was “looking into it”, however this never eventuated until long after Boustead retired. In 1963, the framemaker and mountcutter Bert Farris was promoted to Restorer Grade 2 and was trained by Boustead to become a paper conservator. Around this time the first Cadet Royston Harpur resigned (to go to Spain and become an artist). That same year a second Cadet Restorer, Peter Martin, had been appointed,
though he too would leave in December of the following year to become an artist. Following these departures, Alan Lloyd was appointed on July 29th, 1963 for the Cadet Restorer position, and in October, Bill Lamont was appointed as the new framemaker and mountcutter.

During this time, the Trustees tried to get Cadet Restorers indentured to the Gallery to prevent them from leaving, but they were told that it could not be done because conservation work was not a recognised trade!

In 1965, at the request of Harold White from the National Library of Australia, the Gallery agreed to train a Cadet Restorer for the Library. Ian Cook commenced in this role on March 1st, 1965. On July 15th of that year, another momentous event in the history of conservation in this country occurred with the appointment of Prudence Smith, the first female conservator to work in an Australian art museum.

In 1966, Bert Farris resigned as the Gallery’s paper restorer. In August of that year Alan Lloyd qualified from his Cadet Restorer training and was appointed as Restorer. On November 4th, over the other side of the world, the devastating Florence flood occurred. An international appeal for help from conservators was made. In Australia, the Department of Foreign Affairs asked the Gallery to release Boustead so that he could be sent to Florence to represent the Australian Government.

On May 10th, 1967 Boustead went to Florence for six months. Because of his experience with mould damage to paper he established a paper conservation laboratory at the Biblioteca Nazionale. Funding from the Australian Government paid for the fit-out and equipment. Boustead trained Biblioteca assistants to be paper conservators so that they could carry on with the conservation work when he left. While Boustead was in Florence, Alan Lloyd was made Acting Head of Conservation until Boustead resumed duty on December 4th, 1967.

In 1968, two new Cadet Restorers were appointed: Allan Byrne, and Chris Payne, who was in training for the National Gallery in Canberra. Les Byron, a Cadet Restorer from the State Library, Sydney, also studied there one day per week to get experience using Conservation equipment, which they did not have at the Library. He also listened to Boustead’s chemistry lecture tapes.

After many years of constant submissions to the NSW Government, the Gallery received funding to build a new extension that included air-conditioned display space and storage, plus a new conservation facility.

In early 1969, Ian Cook qualified as conservator and started as the first conservator for the National Library of Australia in Canberra. September of that year saw the resignation of Prue Smith.25

In 1969 six cannons and an anchor from Captain Cook’s Endeavour were found by American marine archaeologists on the Barrier Reef at Cooktown. Boustead was asked by the Commonwealth Government if he could or would restore them. He told them that special facilities were required, which he did not have. Instead he referred them to the Maritime Museum in Fremantle, Western Australia. There they were conserving assorted artefacts recovered from Dutch shipwrecks found off the coast of WA. Dr Colin Pearson, who was the Head of Material Conservation and Restoration at the Museum was employed to carry out the task.

In September 1970, Roy Graf was appointed as paper conservator.26 Graf had trained and worked at The British Museum in London as a specialist Paper Conservator. He had also worked in “Boustead’s” paper conservation laboratory at the Biblioteca Nazionale 1969-70. Alan Lloyd worked with him while there and it was on his recommendation that Graf was employed. Graf was really the first specialist Conservator employed at the AGNSW. Prior to that all conservators had to be multi-skilled and able to work on all types of media.

In 1970 the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon gave the Conservation Department a special grant to purchase equipment for the new department. One of the pieces of equipment was an infrared Videcon unit. Images could be located and viewed through this prior to taking infrared photographs.

In 1971 Allan Byrne and Chris Payne qualified as conservators. New Cadets to start were Murray Millar from the Dunedin Public Library in New Zealand, on a six-month Churchill Scholar internship, and Gordon Hudson from the Art Gallery of Western Australia, who also did a six month internship. In October of that year the new conservation laboratory of the AGNSW was opened. In 1970 a special grant to purchase equipment for the new Department was received. This was the result of many years of lobbying by Prue Smith.
November, Susan Walston, who had trained in Conservation at the British Museum, started at the Australian Museum in Sydney. There had not been a position of conservator when she started work there. It is possible she would have been classified as a Preparator. In March 1972 she was reclassified as Technical Officer and it was suggested she was a “likely candidate if a Conservation section was ever established in the Museum”. In September 1973 she was approved as Officer in Charge of the Materials and Preservation section.

In October 1972 Allan Byrne resigned his position to accept a new position as Assistant Conservator at the National Library in Canberra. Boustead attended the fifth IIC conference in Lisbon and the ICOM conference in Madrid. He also visited Conservation training centres in London, Rome and Stuttgart.

1973 was the year of the inaugural conference for the AIICC – then known as the IICM; it was held at the National Maritime Museum in Fremantle, Western Australia. At the AGNSW, a steady stream of learning conservators continued to visit Boustead’s laboratory, including several from overseas: George Packwood from the National Gallery in Wellington, New Zealand; Francis Bafmatuk and Michael Tymchuk from the National Museum in Port Moresby, Papua-New Guinea; and Raewyn Cooper from the Auckland Art Gallery. Paper Conservator Roy Graf resigned to take up a new appointment at the Canadian Conservation Institute in Ottawa, Canada.

In 1974, Geoffrey Major was appointed as Cadet Restorer in February. It was intended to train him as Paper Conservator as a replacement for Roy Graf. In the same year Rosemary Miller (later Peel) and Ian Cook from the National Library in Canberra visited for one week to observe recent paper conservation techniques introduced by Boustead. Alan Lloyd attended the Greenwich Lining Conference in UK. A conservator from the Commonwealth Archives spent time learning about equipment and its use and also conservation department design, prior to establishing the Archives’ own paper conservation department.

In August of 1975 Geoff Major was promoted to Paper Conservator. International internships continued with Renato Perdon from the National Museum, Manila, the Philippines carrying out a three-month internship. In 1977 Geoffrey Major was awarded a six-month Art Galleries Association Travel grant for overseas study. He visited the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Italy and France. In the same year Peter Gill was appointed Cadet Restorer, and Mark McIntyre from the Commonwealth Archives did a three-month internship in paper conservation.

Bill Boustead retired on February 28th, 1977. Alan Lloyd succeeded him as Head of Conservation. In this position, Lloyd supplied technical assistance to architects building the new National Gallery in Canberra, as well as the Art Gallery of Western Australia and the Queensland Art Gallery. He later attended a special meeting at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra concerning the establishment of a National Conservation Training Course at the ANU Canberra in 1978.

Conclusion
In retrospect, it is hard for present-day conservators to perceive how much Boustead actually achieved in the extreme remoteness where he was working. The only other colleague he had in the rest of Australia was Harley Griffiths at the NGV. Access to the rest of the world was by post or through a manually connected telephone. If he attended international conferences it meant a seven-week ship voyage both ways, plus the time for the conference, meaning an absence for a minimum of four months! His main point of reference beyond 1961 relied on the IIC and ICOM publications. Luckily Boustead was a very resourceful person, a lateral thinker and very practical…and very good at adapting things. He relied very much on accessing experts from other fields, for example, consulting a paint chemist at a commercial paint manufacturer for information about oils, resins, and binders. His solo pioneering efforts have directly and indirectly affected all our careers today as conservators. His stock “mantra” was “prevention is better than cure”, a lay person’s explanation for the need for conservation. His solo efforts created a national awareness for the preservation of our cultural heritage. The training of what has become known as “Bousted’s Boys” led to the establishment of many other conservation departments in Australia and Australasia, beyond the two which existed when he started. When he retired the “next generation” picked up where he left off, and that is why conservation and conservators in this country have achieved so much. Having been one of “Bousted’s Boys” and in the profession for forty-five years, I can see the fruits of his labour (and ours collectively). A unique situation has evolved. I suppose the easy Aussie way to explain it is “mateship”. This is the secret to our success! Keep up the good work.

About the author
Alan Lloyd trained at Art School between 1962 and 1963. He commenced employment at the Art Gallery of NSW in 1963 as a Cadet Restorer. After three years’ training with Bill Boustead he qualified as a Restorer in 1966. He carried out a six-month internship at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London in 1969, followed by a two-month internship at the Biblioteca Nazionale in Florence, Italy in 1970. He was appointed Head of Conservation/ Exhibitions Conservator at the AGNSW in 1977, where he still holds that position.
1 A.E. Willoughby worked from September 22nd, 1937 through to his retirement on December 2nd, 1942.

2 Harley Griffiths set off for London on September 8th, 1949.

3 Correspondence, November 25th, 1949.

4 Mr H. Justelius (Senior Microbiologist, NSW Department of Health); Mr Ralph Symonds (Director, Ralph Symonds Ltd – a wood technology company); Miss Rachel Salmon (Micro Chemist, Australian Paper Manufacturers - paper technology); Mr Arthur Langham (Head Chemist, Max Factor Ltd - industrial chemistry); Mr S. Woodward-Smith (Photographic Officer in Charge, University of Sydney).

5 AGNSW Director Hal Missingham, in his Director’s report to the Trustees on Conservation; February 1959.


7 The author has tried – without success - to locate this programme.


9 Allan Byrne was appointed in May 1968.

10 Prudence Smith resigned on September 5th, 1969.

11 Roy Graf was appointed on September 28th, 1970.

12 Australian Museum Human Resource Files.

13 Peter Gill was appointed on October 31st, 1977.

Fig. 1. The original AGNSW Conservation department building, constructed in 1932.

Fig. 2. Bill Boustead with the Gallery’s first infrared viewer in 1972. At left is Boustead’s tape recorder used for his lectures. Photographer: Max Dupain.

Fig. 3. The Retouching room of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1972. Seated in the centre is Alan Lloyd; standing at right is Allan Byrne. Photographer: Max Dupain.
In Bill Boustead’s lifetime he was never formally recognised as the inventor of the vacuum hot table used for lining canvas paintings. In 1975, Hazel de Berg of the National Library of Australia did an oral history interview with Boustead. In the transcript Boustead tells his story about how he invented the vacuum hot table; unfortunately he does not mention the year. In my research I have been able to find a definite reference to it in 1952, but it could have been earlier. This is the year before Boustead went to London to study conservation at the Courtauld Institute.

It has been noted that in the late 1940s Helmut Ruhemann told Steven Rees Jones at the Courtauld Institute of his idea of making a hot table for lining paintings. Rees Jones made a prototype in 1948, and details of it were published in *Studies in Conservation* in June 1953, the year after Boustead’s first vacuum hot table. In the opening sentence of his paper, Ruhemann states: ”the drawbacks of lining paintings has been long realised, and several reliners are reported to be using hotpresses much like those employed in veneer work”. Boustead had arrived at the Courtauld Institute just before this paper was published. Boustead would have most probably told them about his vacuum hot press invention and how it was based on a vacuum method used to mould plywood in the construction of aeroplanes. I assume this is what Ruhemann is referring to!

Obviously Rees Jones and Ruhemann should be given full recognition for inventing the first hot table. The interesting fact is that Boustead appears to have independently thought of the same thing, but with vacuum as well. The chances of Boustead knowing about Rees Jones’ hot table are very remote when one considers that Australia at that period was very isolated from the rest of the world. Communication was limited to telephone or mail. There is a remote chance he might have heard about it from Harley Griffiths (Restorer at the National Gallery of Victoria) if the latter had seen it in London while there, however there is no evidence to suggest that Griffiths either knew about it or built a table himself.

The International Institute of Conservation (IIC) was incorporated in 1950, but the first issue of *Studies in Conservation* was not published until October 1952. Until his trip to the United Kingdom in April 1953, there is a strong likelihood that Boustead would not have known of the existence of the IIC and its members unless Harley Griffiths of the NGV had told him about them after his return.
to Melbourne in February 1951. It is a fair assumption that Boustead would have joined the IIC while studying at the Courtauld Institute in 1953. While there, Boustead is believed to have told his tutors of his invention, as will be discussed below.

Related Abstracts

In an IIC Newsletter in 1956 it notes that “The National Gallery of Sydney, N.S.W. employs a vacuum pressing hot table for lining and reports that its performance over a period of four years of usage has been most satisfactory”. This confirms the existence of Boustead’s table in 1952.

In an article in the Sydney Morning Herald in April 1953 entitled, “The Art Gallery to share secrets of restoration”, it notes:

“Boustead recently developed a process which is likely to be accepted throughout the world. The process involves bonding the canvas to waterproof plywood by creating a vacuum between the two by suction. The amount of adhesion, Mr Boustead said, “is much smoother and more secure than that obtained otherwise”. The important aspect is that pressure is applied evenly to both hollows and ridges in the paint film. In the ordinary process there is always the risk that raised impasto or brush strokes may be flattened by pressure”.

In October of 1960 Boustead published an article in Studies in Conservation entitled “The Conservation Department of the Art Gallery of NSW”. In it he states:

“In the centre of the laboratory is the vacuum hot table. This handles about 65% of our lining and cupping problems and will accept canvases up to 6 feet by 4 feet. It has given good service for over eight years” - thus again confirming it had been built by 1952.

In an abstract from Hazel de Berg’s oral history of Bill Bousted in 1975 he states:

“When I came into my present job I had a certain background in science, training in art, and some technical expertise which allowed me to work out electrical circuits, design mechanical appliances and knock up apparatus that we could not afford, nor could obtain. After I had been there for a couple of years I was rather appalled by the way they lined canvases. They had an old slab down there, a huge marble slab (4 x 2.5 metres) in the old building at the back, (The Conservation Workshop they called it in those days). It originally came from the old Sydney Morgue. We used to line paintings on it. It was so huge that they had to build the building around it. We used to line paintings on that. We would put this mixture on and put the canvas on the back and we used to iron with huge billboard irons...big huge things! You would heat it up over a gas ring and hold it to your face to test the warmth. You can just imagine how the painting would suffer. It didn’t come into direct contact, mark you, it had a lot of paper under it, but if you had impasto or raised paint, it would flatten that. I thought, “Oh my God...this is brutal!” I will have to do something about this.

I suddenly thought how they made Mosquito (aeroplane) fuselages during the war. They used vacuum for pressing, and it meant that you got pressure in the valleys as well as the ridges. I thought, “Oh my God, that’s the answer!”; when paint is flaking, the only way that you can get adhesive onto the back of the paint is through the back of the canvas. One of the barriers from getting the adhesive through is air...you get air bubbles. You get the adhesive in so far and no further, so you could not get complete impregnation. I thought, “Well, vacuum would get the air out”. One thing led to another, and in the end I ended up designing the vacuum hot table. Everyone thought I was mad, but it only cost the Government thirty pounds! That was for the temperature regulator control. I was not allowed to do that because I did not have an electrician’s licence. Anyway, I made up this vacuum press and it worked like a charm! This was the first one...over twenty years ago...the first of its kind...a principle which had never been used before. On the strength of that I was awarded a Government scholarship to study abroad.

I studied at London University (the Courtauld Institute), The National Gallery, The Louvre and various places in Europe...I came back with quite a lot of know-how; more sophisticated techniques, etc. I explained my technique of the vacuum press over there. Unfortunately I became ill, had had to have post-operative treatment. I’d explained it to the Courtauld Institute and showed them examples...and then I came back - they didn’t think I would come back! Luckily I did, because I was more seriously ill than I thought. I came good and went back (to the Courtauld) and here are two blokes working on this “project”. I was not consulted on it at all. They could not get a perfect vacuum...I could have told them in five minutes, but I thought, “No, they never consulted me, so I am not going to tell them!”

A couple of years later in the technical journal of the IIC - lo and behold - there is an article by these two people, with no reference to me at all. They had finally discovered the secret of it and obtained a perfect vacuum! Now it has been patented by a German...it is now used all over the world. At last I am getting some recognition because at a few international conferences I have been to recently, people have said to me,”Oh, I remember you, you showed us the vacuum...
corresponding “female” clip with the ring was attached to the side of the table. This enabled the frame to be securely clamped to the table.

Originally Boustead used a sheet of latex rubber as his pressing membrane so that it would stretch over any impasto in the painting being lined. This was secured to the table with the clamping frame. However, he found that after two or three uses the latex deteriorated quite badly and had to be replaced, making it quite expensive. He tried a thicker black rubber sheet, but this was too rigid for his liking and made the operation below invisible. His solution was to use a thick polyethylene sheet that was sealed around the edges using masking tape. This was a success because it was in a roll, transparent, easily obtained and inexpensive. Additionally it was disposable, and therefore did not require clean up for reuse. Most importantly, it was flexible enough to accommodate impasto.

Operation
The table took quite some time to heat up so it was turned on first while other preparation for lining was carried out. The wax lining mixture was heated in a double boiler saucepan on a hotplate. The support and the back of the painting was brush-coated with the lining mixture on the table and allowed to impregnate and then placed together with the painting face-up on the hot table.

Strips of fibreglass flyscreen mesh were placed around the perimeter of the painting and two or three extra patches of it were placed over the vacuum exhaust holes. This was used so that air could escape through the weave of the flyscreen mesh while the pressure was on. The polyethylene was secured as previously described. After this the vacuum pump was turned on and the pressure increased slowly to the desired level. Any excess lining mixture was gently rolled out from the centre (in a Union Jack pattern) with a rubber photographic roller. It was imperative that not too much excess wax lining mixture was applied; otherwise it flowed down the table vacuum holes and clogged up the exhaust pipes. Unfortunately Boustead did this on numerous occasions, and it was the job for us Cadet Restorers to clean them out...so we learned the hard way!

After lining was complete, the heat was turned off and pressure left on until such time the table cooled and the lining mixture was cured - this took quite some time.

About the author
7. High Hopes, Difficult Times
Jacqueline Macnaughtan

The years directly preceding the establishment of an Australian training course were not easy for any aspirant practitioners. David W.J. Lawrance was employed at the NGV for nearly 20 years in both curatorial and conservation positions. The author, a volunteer trainee with David in the conservation studio of the National Gallery of Victoria before David’s departure, recalls some of the times and circumstances, in a tribute to his dedication and persistence in this transitional and difficult period.

David Lawrance’s abiding passion has always been painting and paintings. Following active war service in World War II, David resumed his interrupted training as a painter at East Sydney Technical College, under Douglas Dundas and James Cook - another accomplished painter and later a curator at the Art Gallery of Western Australia between 1949 and 1952. Following westwards, Lawrance was appointed as Assistant Director at the Art Gallery of Western Australia from 1953 to 1956, under Director Laurie Thomas. Both Thomas and Lawrance were to resign in response to “unprofessional administrative interference”.

After having joined the National Gallery of Victoria staff in 1957, by 1958, David Lawrance was listed as Professional Assistant to the Art Museum (The Decorative Arts collection was called the Art Museum at the time, exclusive of the Paintings collection). Harley Griffiths was designated as Conservator, in what was a small staff body. By 1959, Lawrance’s title was listed as “Curator, Art Museum”.

A visionary Director, Eric Westbrook sent Lawrance abroad for further experience in 1962-63. Overseas, he undertook various purchases on behalf of the NGV, including negotiations with the Rodin Museum for the acquisition of a cast of Rodin’s *Balzac*.

Lawrance had already met Norman Brommelle, Keeper of Conservation at the Victoria and Albert Museum, when he was in Australia. On this visit overseas, they renewed this acquaintance sharing mutual enthusiasms. He also attended the internationally significant Art Conservation Symposium held in Brussels in 1963, where he met the inspirational Paul Coremans, Director of the Royal Institute for the Study and Conservation of Belgium’s Artistic Heritage (IRPA).

By a combination of inclination and luck, Lawrance thus found himself at the epicenter generating a new consciousness, and given additional impetus from the
recent devastation of the Florence floods, which was to bring about significant
changes in museums, including the need for trained conservators.

On his return to his position as Curator of Decorative Arts at the NGV he filed a
detailed report on the museological “state of the art”, attempting to introduce and
implement these findings. Unfortunately not all the Trustees wished to hear about
current best practice; he was “warned-off” being involved in the details of the new
building at St Kilda Road, still on the drawing board in 1966-67. Nevertheless,
he continued to advocate for sufficient space being allocated to the Decorative
Arts collection during 1966 to early 1967. In April 1967 he resigned from his
full-time curatorial role, finding the continual administrative requirements
counterproductive and depleting. However, his observations and information
absorbed in conservation studios in his time away, combined with his personal
friendship with the Conservator at the NGV convinced him that he could offer
another specialized skill. Harley Griffiths and David Lawrance are both listed
as Conservators in 1967, Lawrance having subsequently agreed to practise as a
conservator, working for the NGV three days a week. The NGV continued the
common nineteenth-century European practice whereby restorers were granted
the right of private practice part time, using the studio and equipment as “in kind”
compensation for low rates of remuneration; this offer was extended to Lawrance.

The move from what is now solely the State Library in Swanston Street was
imminent, and the collection was safely packed and transported down to the new
building at St Kilda Road. The new Gallery finally opened in August 1968.

State-of-the-art thermohygrographs continued the NGV’s longstanding practice
of monitoring the environment. However, the new building was not without its
problems. After the galleries were hung, it was discovered that the building had
pollution problems. A film of oil from the car park exhaust fumes was noted on
the surface of quite a number of the significant pictures, and glazing needed to
be inserted into the framing system of all paintings in these affected areas. At
that time there were “no reliable restorers” available for the treatment of works;
significant paintings from private collectors and regional galleries were treated in
the two days weekly allocated for private practice.  

According to the 1971/72 Annual Report, “Conservation” by this time included
photography and frame making, with Lawrance nominally in charge of a much
larger section – although still no more conservators. Lawrance was by then Chief
Conservator, reflecting his overall responsibility for the collection, whilst Griffiths
is listed as a Consultant.

Both Lawrance and Griffiths undertook conservation and restoration on a
number of important paintings around this time. The augmented curatorial staff
particularly remember several varnish removals as a “revelation”. Such highly
visible procedures, inevitably accompanied with much publicity predictably
acted as a flagbearer for Conservation generally. Nevertheless, Lawrance always
proceeded with circumspection and regard for the underlying fragility of the paint
layer, constantly referring to all the literature then available. He was extremely
thoughtful and never undertook any treatment without consultation with the
curator concerned.

There were always a number of paintings being treated in the Studio at any time,
selected from the stack of largely unloved, often large and still unfashionable
to display Victorian acquisitions, stacked in storage tills outside the paintings
conservation studio – an area nicknamed “the Graveyard”.

By this time Harley Griffiths was enjoying some success with his own painting
and decided to leave in 1974 to concentrate on his art. This left David responsible
for managing, in principle, the entire collection – tens of thousands of works - in
addition to restoring paintings and responding to exhibition needs, still working
just three days a week.

By 1977 he agreed to take on the additional commitment of training a volunteer
(the author) who had been recommended to the Director as someone who might
have the required training and temperament. One of my initial tasks was to
monitor and maintain the thermohygrographs throughout the gallery, this being
seen by David as a valuable introduction to the collection and the problem areas of
the gallery.

My notebook kept from that time, lists many of the works, the treatments, and
comments, both practical and theoretical. Linings were undertaken on the hot
table only when absolutely essential; all the materials were standard for that time
and used with circumspection. He impressed on me that there was more than one
way to approach problems, and I would become acquainted with others; the safest
and best results would only be obtained by the way in which any material was
understood and handled. I believe some of the works conserved at this time would
certainly not have survived had they not had this intervention.

After a number of months of this induction, David finally applied for some
remuneration for his trainee. Unfortunately for Conservation, by this time a
new Director had arrived, with different priorities. David’s request for modest
funding for this position was refused. This must have been a particularly disheartening response, considering that the Art Gallery of NSW already had four conservator/restorers at various levels by 1971. The responsibility for simultaneously managing and conserving this enormous and important collection, by one conservator working three days a week, was a Sisyphean task; it became apparent that this situation was no longer sustainable...

In late 1978 David Lawrance finally resigned in protest at this clear evidence of the lack of support for Conservation. Ironically, conservation was soon to become a strong priority for successive Directors. The next to take up the lone conservation position was the Viennese-trained Renate Schneider. Her time at the Gallery saw the introduction of a direction and commitment to take in trainees from the Canberra training course, still, initially an uneasy path.

The Canberra course commenced in 1978. Although I was initially extremely reluctant to leave Melbourne and the Gallery, both David and Lenton Parr strongly encouraged me to undertake it, accurately forecasting that a professional qualification would become mandatory for future employment in art museums. Lenton, as an informed Trustee, was most conscious of the parlous state of overall Conservation in the Gallery, setting up a subcommittee which included the Senior Curator Sonia Dean, and establishing two trainee positions for Canberra course graduates. Lenton was determined that there be positive results from this commitment, commenting to me that "nothing succeeds like success".

The first two incumbents were John Hook and Eric Archer in 1981, who accompanied the NGV's sixteenth-century Flemish altarpiece to the IRPA, the Brussels institution which had so inspired David many years earlier. David Lawrance continued to practise as a private conservator. From time to time in my work I was able to consult him about the materials used by particular artists. He remained generous in sharing his knowledge, also lecturing about painting techniques and preventive practice to students in Melbourne's art schools.

Several of his colleagues who enjoyed David’s inclusive approach have recently paid tribute to his contribution: “he achieved so much, under such terrible circumstances”.

My own recollections of David’s general approach, overview and advice are of a quietly knowledgeable and greatly skilled conservator who undertook any interventional procedure only after perusal of the available literature. His generous and insightful teaching, understanding of paintings and outstanding connoisseurship has never been surpassed in my personal experience.

About the author
See Jacqueline Macnaughtan’s "A Few Tesserae", published in this volume.

2. The changing designations are taken from the NGV Annual Bulletins, 1959 onwards.
3. Lawrance met Norman Brommelle when Brommelle was visiting Australia as a guest of his colleague William Boustead, in Sydney. (information from Alan Lloyd, AGNSW).
5. For a description of the earlier Library, Gallery and Museum complex, see Macnaughtan, J., From Life Victorian College of the Arts affiliated with the University of Melbourne, 2004, p2.
7. “Attention, Your Collection Is Rotting" This exhibition, mounted by Ron Radford at the Ballarat Regional Gallery in 1977, highlighted the need for a Conservation Centre for Regional Galleries. I succeeded in the subsequent opening of a Regional Centre in Ballarat, whereby such collections were to be subsidised to receive conservation time and attention. The first conservator, Matthew Moss, was followed by Aman Siddique, before a later move as the VCCCM to Laverton. The growth of professionally trained conservators practising privately contributed to the unsustainability and demise of this centre in the 1990s.
8. He was relieved after this resignation - which he correctly said would be recorded as a retirement - and commented to me, later, that he regretted not having taken this action earlier.
9. Lenton Parr (1924-2003) sculptor, educator, inaugural Head of the Victorian College of the Arts, had been my lecturer at RMIT, subsequently inviting me to join his team at the art school of the Prahran Technical College, where I taught drawing, painting and printmaking in 1968-69. His belief “nothing succeeds like success” was greatly responsible for the undertaking to conserve the Flemish altarpiece.
10. One of my tasks in 1977 was to unwrap and dust this marvellous altarpiece. I was immediately enchanted, and asked David why it could not be at least readied and surface cleaned for display in the new building, even although it required extensive conservation. At the time, the understanding appeared to be that it had little curatorial priority- an opinion overturned relatively swiftly, with great success!
11. Sonia Dean, in conversation with the author, August 2108.
In 2006 I was about to work on a small painting by Joseph Fowles (1810-1878) at the State Library of New South Wales. The painting, a small oil on canvas, was required for exhibition or loan (the two driving forces for conservation treatments in our time) so was listed for my attention as a contract conservator. As I removed the backboard I was suddenly wrapped in an aromatic veil of beeswax-dammar resin lining adhesive. Instantly 38 years disappeared and I was transported back to May 29th, 1968, the day I walked into the Art Gallery of New South Wales conservation department as a cadet restorer. How did I get there? Was it the end result of years of work at college or university, of studies in art technique and a keen desire to preserve Australia’s artistic and cultural heritage? No, my being there, at the door of the old concrete bunker conservation and workshop building behind the then modest Art Gallery of New South Wales was due to pure chance - an accident of fate.

I left Tumut High School with a less than adequate HSC and after a short period stacking green timber at a local sawmill I took the train to Sydney with the idea of finding some sort of job in the visual arts. I was unsuccessful until I saw an advertisement for the position of cadet restorer at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. I had no idea what a restorer did (unlike today where we all expect and benefit from boundless amounts of information on any topic) but it sounded interesting so I submitted an application. I was offered an interview and duly attended with a portfolio of drawings under my arm. In a letter dated May 15th, 1968 (I amazingly still have the letter) I was informed that my application had been successful and instructed that I call on “Mr Brown” to make arrangements for commencement of duties.

I was entering an occupation that was at the time involved in dramatic change. The conservation field was leaving its craft-trade based foundations behind and developing a professional edifice based on technology, scientific research and the dissemination of information. The modern conservation machine had started to tick and its springs and cogs were gathering momentum, though its tempo was unknown to me on the morning of May 29th, 1968. As I stood, somewhat unattended at the doorway of the conservation department (some crisis was in progress), I was lured to the gallery library by Ian Cook and shown the location of the conservation reference books. While perusing the titles I was discovered by the Gallery Conservator and my new boss, Bill Boustead, and chastised with
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the opinion that he would inform me when he thought I would be able to read such texts. The episode earned me the title of "young upstart", a label I carried for the duration of my cadetship. Boustead escorted me back to the conservation department where any idea of a noble restorer future was dashed by me being taken downstairs to the workshop and placed in the care of the Leading Hand, Bob Ford.3 As I entered the semi-subterranean workshop Rossini’s William Tell Overture was playing on the radio, “Oh” I said, “the Lone Ranger” to which Bob turned to the mount cutter, Bill Lamont and remarked, “Ah Bill, we have a classical music buff in our midst”.4 I had started my accidental career in conservation and my education of classical music.

The Art Gallery of New South Wales cadetship was of three years duration with the cadet expected to complete a yearly examination and present a final “thesis”. My detailed duty statement was as follows:

1. Undertakes instructions in frame making, mount cutting, use of various adhesives, procedures in mounting prints, drawings and watercolours.

2. Studies the various types of painting supports from early to present day, materials and methods of preparation, safety procedures with toxic materials.

3. General training in manual dexterity, identification of media, unfavourable phenomena (mould etc.) simple cleaning methods with the use of moderate solvents.

4. Familiarises himself with scientific apparatus and use of scientific instruments.

5. Has to present himself for a yearly examination, and if successful at the end of the third year may be classified as a restorer.

As one can see from the duty statement cadets were expected to be familiar with all aspects associated with works of art. Under the guidance of the workshop tradesmen I was put to work on frames, stretchers and mounting works of art on paper. I can honestly say that the skills obtained during this initial period of training have benefited me throughout my working life. It is not so much that I needed to make frames or stretchers on anything like a regular basis but the ability to communicate from a position of knowledge with those who do has been invaluable.

After a suitable time downstairs or when the need arose I was elevated to the upper level and placed in the paper conservation area. At the time the paper conservator was Prue Smith who may have been the first female institutionally employed in conservation in Australia. Eventually I was moved to the painting conservation area occupied the bulk of the upper floor of the conservation-workshop bunker. The area boasted several benches, a large slab of marble from the Sydney morgue and a modest vacuum hot table. At the back of the area was a dark room with sink, an equipment room for such things as ultraviolet examination and a small chemical store. The windows overlooked the sloping edge of the Domain and Woolloomooloo, a similar but less grand view enjoyed by conservators in the present laboratories.

I enjoyed the work. Initially I was given simple treatments and then more complex tasks as time went on. In 1971 I completed the requirements of the cadetship and sought to be classified as a restorer but there was one impediment in my path, my age. Public Service regulations at the time specified that one had to attain the age of 23 before being classified as a restorer but at the conclusion of my cadetship I was a few years short being 21. In 1972 I left the Art Gallery of New South Wales for the position of Assistant Conservator at the National Library of Australia in Canberra.

In 1978, ten years after I commenced my cadetship at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, I entered the Masters Degree program in Materials Conservation offered by the School of Applied Science at the Canberra College of Advanced Education (now the University of Canberra). My desire to enter the course was at the time a commitment to the future of conservation in Australia. I saw the train of change coming and decided to hop on board. The Canberra course was a response to the dearth of trained conservators in Australia and the lack of training facilities identified in the Pigott Report of 1975. There was also the belief amongst those few in the field that it was time to lift the conservation trade out of its workshop foundations and polish it up as a profession. Parity was sought with other cultural institution professionals, such as curators and to achieve this required a university-standard training program.

In line with recognised overseas training programs, the course developed at the Canberra College of Advanced Education was firmly anchored in science, technology and historical context. This was the common ground for all students. The emphasis was not only how to correct a form of deterioration but to understand the chemical and physical actions that lead to the deteriorated state. Students therefore took basic chemistry and the like in an effort to understand...
the molecular world affecting cultural objects. Students were also required to take introductory units in a range of conservation fields. The thinking behind this was twofold. Firstly, students could get an overview of the conservation field before deciding on their area of specialization. Secondly, it was postulated that due to the lack of trained conservators in Australia, students may be required to work in isolation, for example, in a small rural-based museum, and have some knowledge on the treatment of a range of objects.

After the introductory year students selected a major specialization and spent increasingly longer periods of time devoted to their selected field. Even with more time to devote to the practical application of conservation skills many thought this inadequate to produce suitably qualified conservation practitioners. This limitation was always accepted by the Principal Lecturer, Colin Pearson, who regularly stated to students commencing the course that they could by no means consider themselves qualified conservators until the completion of several years of practical experience following their academic studies.

The first intake of students, of which I was one, arrived in the desolate surrounds of the Canberra College of Advanced Education in 1978 to a course still in its infancy. No paintings conservation lecturer had been appointed so Rosamond Harley had been engaged for the interim. I expect that my experience as a student was different to my colleagues and therefore my comments about the program cannot be taken as being characteristic. I found the course to be a welcome change to the previous 10 years employment, I was blessed with a collection of conservation reference texts accumulated over the years that facilitated assignments and my specialization was by that time well established. The latter meant that I could argue with the Principal Lecturer about the irrelevance of doing anything other than painting conservation units. In 1981, after an internship period spent in London I was awarded the first Masters Degree in Applied Science (Materials Conservation) issued in Australia.

To give the Canberra course due credit we must see it in perspective and judge its success on the broader scale rather than the level of skill provided to individual students, though the latter was undoubtedly important. At the time the Canberra course was established there were few options for those wishing to enter the conservation field. The Art Gallery of New South Wales cadetship scheme had wound up by the mid 1970s leaving overseas training programs essentially the only option to achieve a recognised level of training. The lack of expertise in any country to look after its own cultural heritage is a shameful state and it was this situation that the Canberra course sought to address. It was a sad day in 2004 when the University of Canberra conservation course ceased to exist, though one could argue that the program had, to a large extent, achieved its goals.

The conservation environment that was the impetus for establishing such a training program no longer exists and perhaps it is time for the profession to look at new models.

In retrospect how would I compare the two training courses I have experienced, the gallery cadetship and the university program? Both methods of training had their benefits and limitations. One had ample scope for practical application and exposure to the museum ethos but lacked academic recognition, the other provided an academic (professional) standard but limited practical exposure to the ins and outs of the museum environment. If we can forget the matter of time, what both training programs needed was an intimate relationship with each other. Conservation training courses that are able to combine both cultural institution and university working closely, ideally within the same physical environment, has the potential to provide a well balanced and comprehensive learning environment. Such courses already exist but what does Australia need now? It certainly doesn't need a replica of the University of Canberra course, and the burden of accepting students in "on the job" programs would be too burdensome on most institution staff already over worked preparing exhibitions and loans.

The nature of the painting conservation profession in Australia dictates that training programs that produce 3-4 graduates per year are uneconomic on the one hand and over abundant on the other. How many paintings conservators does Australia need in the next ten years, given that it appears unlikely there will be an increase in painting conservation positions from the current level. Now may be the time to think outside the square and introduce a coordinated national cadetship (for want of a better word) scheme where 2-3 paintings conservation students with pre-existing academic qualifications are mentored by qualified practicing conservators. Such a scheme could be jointly funded by cultural organisations that already employ painting conservators with the thought of ensuring the availability of future conservation expertise. Such a scheme could be administered by the AICCM (to give this organisation a true professional role) or some other appropriate cultural council.

Whatever the future holds for students entering the noble arena of paintings conservation one thing is certain, the days of the accidental conservator are over. The time of the well informed conservation traveler is firmly established. The problem in Australia at the moment is deciding which vehicle to ride.
Abstract
In 1968 I accidentally became a cadet paintings conservator. How this happened characterizes the method practitioners entered the conservation field in Australia forty years ago. In fact the manner of entering the conservation field in Sydney in the 1960s was one step up from the traditional method of learning the trade (now called profession). Though cadets took such subjects as Use of Scientific instruments and Simple research projects the cadetship was firmly grounded in solid workshop practices.

In 1978 I was among the first intake of students undertaking the Conservation of Cultural Materials Masters Degree at the Canberra College of Advanced Education (now University of Canberra). Arrival at the gates of this program was less an accident and more a conscious choice aided by university entrance levels (though some exceptions were made). Though the course provided a solid foundation of science, history and technology, the amount of time for practical experience was limited.

The question when contemplating the training of painting conservators is what type of conservator is required. Is a student trained in a workshop system less or more effective than one in a tertiary education program? Perhaps there is a suitable compromise.

About the author
Allan Byrne commenced training as a cadet restorer at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1968. Since then he has worked in a number of art and cultural institutions in Australia. He was Senior Lecturer, Paintings Conservation at the Canberra College of Advanced Education from 1984 to 1992. He currently works part-time on conservation projects.

2 Ian Cook was employed by the National Library of Australia, Canberra to undertake the Art Gallery of New South Wales cadetship. He had completed his course and was due to leave for Canberra the day following my arrival.
3 The old conservation department and workshop was located at the rear of the Art Gallery of New South Wales in a separate two storey concrete bunker style building. The conservation studios were located on the upper level with the workshop and mount-cutting area on the lower level. The lower level was partly below ground level.
4 ABC classical music was the station of choice in the Gallery workshop.
5 Museums in Australia 1975: Report of the Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections including the report of the Planning Committee on the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia. The report is known as the Pigott report after the chair of the committee Peter Pigott.
“Thinking in painting is thinking as paint. Painting is the art of metamorphosis... Chemistry can only go so far, and then intuition, creation, skill, genius, imagination, luck, or some other intangible has to take over...” (James Elkins)

My earlier training at RMIT as a painter, in that crossover period spanning the introduction of acrylic paints, included the subject “Materials and Techniques”, accompanied by the classic texts. Although discarded by fashionable de-skilling, I believe this focus remains an important component of any painter concerned with their craft, and anyone professing to be a connoisseur of paintings.

In 1977, as a teacher of painting and drawing in Melbourne art schools, it was recommended to the Director of the National Gallery of Victoria that I be accepted as a volunteer trainee with the conservator David Lawrance. In retrospect, a happy time of intensive learning clarified my understanding of the role of the conservator within an art museum, and laid sound foundations for later experiences.

Encouraged by David, and Lenton Parr – at the time a Trustee of the NGV - I commenced the Canberra training course in the second year’s intake in 1979. Parr and Sonia Dean, Senior Curator, formed a conservation subcommittee at the NGV and took an active interest in the course. Lenton subsequently ensured the establishment of two conservation internships at the Gallery.

Early years at the Canberra Course

In the first several years, the Canberra conservation training course – which started in 1978 when the institution now known as the University of Canberra was called the Canberra College of Advanced Education, was still a “work in progress,” with contradictory internal requirements. I was certainly not the only “art” person to note that there was sometimes tension between those whose professed interest was fine art, and those preferring other disciplines – reflecting the uneasy relationships and accompanying debates over several centuries concerning the relative merits and status of fine and applied art, artists and artisans, distinctions often ignored by the practitioners but maintained in European museological nomenclature.

Undertaking this course at a Masters’ level - the only option for paintings conservators - had not been my preference, only too aware of time restrictions with a young child, and not aspiring to be the head of a conservation studio - the
AGNSW was an exemplary and inspirational mentor. Nicholas’ second home was The late Nicholas Draffin, the first Curator of Prints and Drawings at the grant.

years depended on the Supporting Parents Benefit, augmented in the third year by and Library Services studio. Precarious financial survival throughout these earlier offered two days a week of supervised practical work in their Conservation Art conservator must apprehend. Nevertheless, the course was a courageous start to redress an intolerable situation in Australia’s museum holdings, an introduction m useology and to many individuals who have remained valued colleagues and friends.

The Canberra Master’s course required a year’s internship. Where could this be undertaken and supervised in Australia? Applications overseas were discouraging. The Australian course had not yet received the recognition it gained later. The internship’s aim was unresolved, apparent when clarification was sought. One directive instructed that the purpose of this (non-funded) year was “to undertake new research” – something for which there would have been no one qualified to be a supervisor; another, “to join in the daily life of a conservation department” – opposing and irreconcilable aims.

I arranged with Alan Lloyd, Head of Conservation, to undertake this year at the Art Gallery of NSW, the first intern of many to follow. Alan and Anne Gaulton – just returned from the Gateshead Course in the United Kingdom – were generous in including me in ethical solutions to practical problems in a larger museum.

Not being a staff member of the AGNSW, I was not permitted to undertake any practical work on the collection. Rose Peel and Tony Chadwick generously offered two days a week of supervised practical work in their Conservation Art and Library Services studio. Precarious financial survival throughout these earlier years depended on the Supporting Parents Benefit, augmented in the third year by a Federal training grant.

The late Nicholas Draffin, the first Curator of Prints and Drawings at the AGNSW was an exemplary and inspirational mentor. Nicholas’ second home was the conservation department, where he was often to be found studying an artwork through the microscope. I have since found the same infectious enthusiasm in the very finest curators and art historians I have met.

That year, John Brealey, the English paintings conservator who was then Head of Paintings Conservation at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York visited the AGNSW. In a seminar about the cleaning of paintings he unexpectedly suggested he should clean the discoloured picture The Release of St Peter by Bernardo Strozzi. Confidently wielding chopsticks with large cotton swabs, he undertook a particularly dramatic varnish removal to an audience of curators and conservators.

Early 1982 saw my return to Canberra, having successfully applied for a position at the Australian National Gallery (as it was then known), initially under Ilse King. Allan Byrne’s appointment as the conservator for post-1940s art followed, with Nathan Stolow being appointed as Director of Conservation, in the inspirational lead-up to the opening. As a member of ICOM and the (then) Art Museums of Australia, I learned of a scheme for exchange partnerships between museum personnel and submitted a proposal for consideration. A time of observation and practical experience at the Courtauld Institute and the Tate Gallery were surprisingly brokered for me by Dr Stolow and Allan Byrne, and approved by the Director. The Courtauld term was reassuring in the depth and spirit of enquiry and thinking and practical solutions, fostered by knowledgeable and sensitive students and lecturers; significantly, they placed equal importance on the teaching of art history as well as scientific and technical skills. The Australia Council had approved some modest funding. A British Council grant enabled visits to a number of art museums and conservation studios across the United Kingdom, where I enquired about opportunities for internships for future graduates of the Australian course. Reporting back to the Australia Council on my return, and citing a number of institutions willing to admit self-funded interns, this information was unfortunately received during an inter regnum, and shelved.

Some of my particular interests cited for these grants may now seem presumptive and obviously have since been given in-depth attention. However, they included:

- Contemporary cold-lining practices, including a week with Bent Hacke’s team at the Kunstmuseernes Falleskonserving, Århus, Denmark.
- Various approaches, including legalities, to managing so-called “ephemeral” and “New” art, particularly at the Tate.
The relationship of the private versus the institutional conservator, including regional centres, with interviews in England, Scotland and at Aarhus, Denmark, about their regional centers, in relation to the recent establishment of Australian regional conservation centers.

The relationship of earlier nineteenth-century British landscape painting techniques to Colonial Australian paintings.

Correspondences and differences in techniques between the “Australian Impressionists” and their European counterparts.

My short time at the Tate was a turning point in invaluable experience on every level. Returning to the ANG, I had attended both IIC and ICOM conferences, met and watched many of the leading practitioners of the time, looked at a great number of paintings, and gained an invaluable overview and understanding of benchmark museological and conservation practices, hopefully shared and made manifest over the years which followed.

Following the 1987 Sydney ICOM conference, I made the suggestion that it could be timely to form a Paintings Special Interest Group of the AICCM – the first SIG in Australia. In 1989, at the Albury meeting, this group supported my suggestion to instigate a conference showcasing Australian collaborative contributions by conservators and art historians to art history and connoisseurship.

Ten years in Canberra therefore culminated in a successful conference in 1992: The Articulate Surface, and its subsequent publication.

Returning to Melbourne, I realized that a paintings conservation position was unlikely to appear. Other rewarding directions emerged, and I have since enjoyed a mélange of working with art historians and conservators at the University of Melbourne, interspersed with time at the NGV, three years at the Queensland Art Gallery (QAG), extensive private work, and writing, curating and public lecturing in many venues. Very different from the relatively safe haven of working permanently within an institution. One project undertaken whilst at the QAG exemplified my belief that well-endowed larger institutions should be able to extend partnerships to smaller museums, and in the process bring together a new audience. This was the exhibition A Long Life: The See Poy Paintings, which took place after the restoration of two early twentieth-century group portraits of an important Chinese family that migrated to Innisfail in Queensland in the late nineteenth century. The exhibition was, in the words of one of the opening night audience “better than a wedding or a funeral”.

The contemporary discipline and practice of paintings conservation is embedded in the context of institutional art collections across the world. Significant works in private ownership will gravitate towards and be finally drawn into public custodianship, although this journey may be protracted over several generations. Awareness of mortality may transform owners into custodians: similarly, valuable artworks become inherited assets. Over this time, responsibility will remain with private conservators. Institutional conservators and private conservators should possess interchangeable skills; maybe in the future there could be a system of exchanges, for the continued enlightenment of all practitioners.

Keeper, curator, conservator: interchangeable earlier designations reflect the true common purpose of this role of keeping and caring, necessarily divided only as collections grew and the complexities of knowledge and practical management burgeoned. The best curators possess to a greater or lesser degree that particular relationship to history and time, an intense and passionate focus common to all collectors, whilst those conservators who do not envisage themselves as solely technicians - conversing only within their own discipline - but who are passionate about paintings, their making and meaning and care, will make every opportunity to converse with circles of collectors, curators, art historians and the interested public. Such conservators, working as technical art historians construct a particularly accessible entrée to paintings. The validation of technical art history preempts any need to exclusively “own” a painting or a body of knowledge by any temporary custodian, and generous curatorial acknowledgment of these separate but complementary insights will doubtless be common practice in the future.

“Scholarship is the heart of a museum.” Conservators, therefore, contribute to the scholarship and intellectual property of the employing institution. It is essential that this precept be formalised by inclusion in a written constitution; no other measure can ensure a sanctioned allocation of time to research and writing. The role of visionary directors, in recognizing and encouraging conservation - and equating the remuneration of conservators and curators - is also crucial.

Working in a museum, one has the great privilege of daily acquaintance with this historical companionship of makers throughout the ages. In return for repetitive managerial and housekeeping tasks, for the tensions inherent in respecting and balancing different temperaments, resources and priorities, this is indeed a valuable and generous compensation.

For myself, paintings conservation has given me the experience of wonderful
paintings, viewed intimately; unexpected and rich experiences, and finally, valued and enduring collegial and personal friendships from all my many places of work.11

Abstract
For most of the twentieth century, conservators in institutions with few resources continued to look after deteriorating collections with great dedication; their efforts underpinned later developments in training and professional practice. The author developed her particular interest in technical art history working alongside such a practitioner. Other valued mentors including curators and visionary directors, in this transitional period coincidental with the growth of museums and museology in the later 1970s, are mentioned, in a contribution of a “few more tesserae” to the larger mosaic.

About the author
Jacqueline Macnaughtan completed the University of Canberra materials conservation training course in 1982, subsequently working at the National Gallery of Australia for 10 years, before returning to Melbourne and engaging in lecturing, contracted institutional work and private practice. She has a particular interest in the contribution of technical art history to the multiple readings of paintings.

2 See Macnaughtan, J., “High hopes, difficult times” (a tribute to David Lawrence), in this publication.
3 Other outstanding curators with whom I have worked and from whom I have learnt so much include Daniel Thomas (OAM), Mary Eagle, and art historian Dr Alison Inglis.
4 The varnish removal on this painting was completed by Alan Lloyd.
5 See Byrne, A. “In the skinners company: The evolution of conservation at the NGA” Artneweek, Summer 2002-2003, pp.41-42.
10 Little can ultimately be achieved without the interest of such Directors as Eric Westbrook, NGV, James Mollison, (OAM) NGA and Doug Hall and Michael Brand, both formerly at the QAG. Support at this level remains essential for any progress in conservation concerns.
11 Particular personal acknowledgements to two distinguished paintings conservators, Allan Byrne, and John Hook, for their professional support at crucial times.
Introduction

It would appear that the Art Gallery of South Australia (formerly National Gallery of South Australia) has never had any one designated “restorer” on its staff. To date, it has been found that people providing this service were designated Assistant (presumably to the Director), Attendant, Senior Attendant, Artisan, Senior Artisan, Conservator or Curator of Conservation. This confusion of title and function has made identifying individuals difficult. This paper concludes when the Gallery staff moved to the State Conservation Centre. Restorers working privately have been even more difficult to trace and little has been found.

Non-institutional Restorers

Records so far found have consisted of back labels on framed paintings or advertisements in Almanacs and Directories. The earliest found is in the South Australian Almanac, 1851, where picture framers Calvert and Waddy advertised “Drawings Prints and Pictures etc Cleaned Revived and Mounted”. However “Pictures etc” may not imply oil paintings, rather images on paper.

In a small place like nineteenth-century Adelaide, picture framers had to offer comprehensive services. In 1872, D.Cully, Carver and Gilder was advertising, “Looking Glasses and Picture Frames repaired and regilt”. By 1876 he was also offering, “Paintings Lined, Cleaned, Repaired and Varnished”. Had he taken on a new employee or had he been teaching himself new skills? These advertisements appeared in the Adelaide Almanac and Directory for South Australia until 1879, when he then appeared in Boothby’s South Australian Directory until 1882.

He appears to have formed a partnership with someone called Warming, as an advertisement for Culley and Warming appears in 1884 in Sands and McDougall’s South Australian Directory.

Perhaps a son took over in 1885 as “Geo. D. Culley” advertised from the same address. His last entry was from a new address in 1888. Interestingly, references to painting restoration were dropped from the advertisements on the formation of Culley and Warming.

The only other commercial enterprise found involved in restoration was Augustus Molton, “Old pictures cleaned, lined or restored” (Fig. 1). We think we have found an early example of a treatment by Augustus Molton in the State Library of South Australia.
Part II | Years of Transition

Australia. It is a painting of John Chinner by J. Cheney. John Chinner’s daughter came to South Australia in 1855 bringing the painting with him (Fig. 2). The painting has had an early eighteenth century panel frame fitted to it. The painting did not quite fit so it was reduced in size by taking it off the stretcher, making the stretcher smaller (evidenced by two different types of stretcher joints) and restretched. The painting was then put in a slip made to fit inside the old frame. Extensive drying cracks were retouched. The frame was regilt to match the slip. Why was this old frame available for reuse (Fig. 3)?

A. Molton + Son (est. 1867) advertised in Sands and McDougall’s South Australian Directory (1885–1886), “Oil paintings, Cleaned, Lined and Restored, Regilding in all its branches.”

The earlier years of the twentieth century have yielded little information. We hear of a Bert Adlam, a picture restorer in the mid-1930s being a friend of the artist John Goodchild. We know some of the Gallery staff did work privately. George Baker worked directly for clients and also did some of the work for the picture framers Dimonds. Dimonds are third generation picture framers who have been in business for 116 years and have provided a restoration service for most of that time. Then for a long period through the 1960s and 1970s, Mrs J. Rampling was also established on Cross Road, Clarence Park.

Following years spent training and working in Sydney and Canberra, I returned to South Australia to set up “The Art Conservation Studios” in 1976. The aim behind this move was to offer a comprehensive service to public, corporate or individual collectors, working with clients directly or through picture framers and dealers who, in some cases, advised of this service in their literature.

I began a long association with the Gallery almost immediately, taking on individual jobs, and a little later short contracts such as exhibition preparation of a number of paintings for the groundbreaking Mood and Moment exhibition of Australian landscape paintings sent to China in 1983. With the formation of the State Conservation Centre I took continuous part-time contracts while still working privately. The only change was in the mid-1990s when I accepted a permanent part-time position at Artlab.

Institutional Staff

A common experience of galleries in the nineteenth century was that the purchase of contemporary art could be a risky business. The National Gallery of South Australia was not excepted. Established in 1881, it began buying modern English paintings through its agents in London. One purchase was J.W. Waterhouse's painting The Favourites of the Emperor Honarias painted in 1883 and purchased from its first airing at Burlington House. Sixteen years later Harry P. Gill, the curator at Adelaide, sent the artist photographs showing extensive cracking which had begun to appear as early as 1884. Waterhouse suspected that “ thinly–painted transparent shadows have cracked over some more solid paint underneath”. They are traction cracks – he had not let the more solid paint dry properly before glazing over the top. Was it Gill who followed Waterhouse's advice, “(A) little watercolour might be used to hide them, and it certainly could do no harm.”?

The Gallery started modestly, sharing a Board of Governors with the Museum and Public Library with a staff of honorary curator and attendants. The aforementioned Harry P. Gill was the most prominent honorary curator from 1890 through to 1929. He was also an artist and an art teacher who advised the Board on purchases through the Elder Bequest and oversaw design of the Elder Wing - the nucleus of today’s building. I am sure such a multifaceted man would not have been fazed by the odd restoration problem.

After returning from active service abroad following World War I, J.E. Dunmore was appointed to the Gallery in January 1919. In 1924 or 1925, he was appointed Assistant and Attendant, and then around 1929-30 was appointed Assistant and Senior Attendant. Assistant seems to be all encompassing but includes assisting the Director with restoration work.

Two Curator/Directors coming after him were Leslie Wilkie (related to the artist David Wilkie) and Louis McCubbin (son of Frederick). Both men were also artists. The position of Director was created in 1934 and filled by Louis McCubbin until 1949, during which time restoration was seen as part of his duties. In 1940 the Gallery was separated from the Library and Museum and was given its own Board who were required to issue an annual report from which most of this information is taken.

The first year of operation was busy. Louis McCubbin (assisted by J. Dunmore) carried out work on a list of eight paintings. This list was the first definite record of treatment at the Gallery. In addition, “A number of frames...have been either repaired or treated to harmonize more effectively with the paintings”, by Mr. Dunmore with the help of Mr. G.E. Fathers (classified as Attendant). In recognition of his increasing workshop duties Mr. Dunmore was relieved of his position as Senior Attendant to become Gallery Assistant, a position he held until he retired in 1948.
spent three months in London in the conservation laboratory of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

On his return he was reclassified as a conservator and renamed the workshop the Conservation Laboratory. There would be no more patronizing newspaper articles like, “Took Gamble over Cleaning a Picture”, a part of which says, “Mr. Campbell (Director) could either send the painting to London for expert treatment or hand it to his self-taught staff member, Mr Baker….He made a complete success of the job”. The picture was Gainsborough’s portrait of Madame Le Brun (Fig. 4). Baker also started the process of bringing conservation to public attention as is seen by the number of newspaper clippings still held by his family.

His energies were not solely directed to his work. With a young family and post-war shortages, he built an extension onto his house and as a founding member of the trotting track at Globe Derby, volunteered countless hours towards its establishment. The “trots” were his great passion, owning horses, following form, even successfully lobbying the Public Service Board to enable him to take annual leave one day at a time. This meant that he could spend most Tuesdays at the track where he would breezily “bump into” department heads who had not made similar arrangements (Fig. 5). He was also a self-confessed “rock hound”, spending his holidays travelling around Australia fossicking and his spare time was taken up with lapidary.

While I have not come across any early treatment references, newspaper clippings and staff memories give some clues. Paintings were almost routinely stuck to board, usually masonite with a wax resin mixture. Interestingly, Baker used xanthorea resin in his mixture. This was available to the food and pharmaceutical industries and was harvested on Kangaroo Island. I have no information on why its addition was thought desirable. In an article of about 1964, George explained the idea of reversibility but curiously mentioned dammar as a new varnish. But this may be nothing more than a confused journalist.

Retouching was not as disciplined then as it is now, as you may expect when restorers were so often also artists. There are still a few paintings in the collection sporting extra clouds hiding some type of blemish. But it is rarely a major problem to remove.

George designed and had built an early vacuum hot table but it heated unevenly and was notoriously temperamental. There is one story of a piece of facing paper disappearing into the surface of a painting.
While no shrinking violet, George was aware of his limitations. In about 1969, he was asked to treat a large painting on canvas by Skipper (an early South Australian artist). It had an oiled, badly cupped, leathery paint surface. Deciding he would not be able to flatten it successfully, it was agreed to send it to the Art Gallery of New South Wales. It came back flat but weighing a ton, having been stuck to a large chunk of chipboard. George’s response was, “Well, bloody hell, I could’ve done that!”

It should always be remembered that our predecessors were expected to achieve a great deal with very small resources of time, materials and available information. We have seen little evidence of damage from previous treatments and a number have been successfully and completely undone, proving their long term success.

**Artlab**

On Baker’s retirement in June 1975, his position was filled by Ron Webster in an acting capacity. Ron was primarily the mount cutter and framer but had learnt a good deal helping George with treatments. In 1977, Allan Byrne from the Australian War Memorial accepted the position of Conservator for about eighteen months before returning to Canberra. Ron Webster once again held the position in an acting capacity. Allan instituted detailed conservation records and spent some time designing the new Conservation Centre laboratories which initially were to go into the old lying-in ward for destitute mothers. Fortunately, although not before a lot of wasted time, it was recognized as too small and another building was sought.

Initial impetus for a conservation facility upgrade had come from the Edwards Report of 1979, commissioned by the Bannon Government as a major review of facilities of the state’s cultural institutions. It was further driven by David Tilbrooke, Conservation Scientist at the South Australian Museum, who, fresh from the dynamic Fremantle Maritime Museum, had been shocked by the institutional apathy toward conservation issues. From 1982, he and Robert Wilmot - who had arrived in 1981 - devoted substantial energies in company with others on the design of the new laboratories. David was able to corner the Premier at a Christmas party and present his idea of combined conservation laboratories for all North Terrace institutions, which included the Museum, Gallery, Library and Migration Museum.

A steering committee was formed and, by 1982, a final report was presented with several options on location, the Gallery holding out for a building on the site of the old workshop. Eventually they were persuaded to agree to a site about 50 metres away in the old Trade School which was adapted and enlarged to accommodate the State Conservation Centre, later to become Artlab Australia. The ambitious North Terrace precinct redevelopment became part of the celebrations for the State’s sesquicentenary in 1986.

Ron Webster retired after Robert Wilmot’s arrival. On leaving the old workshop there must have been a sense of, “Pinch me I must be dreaming”. The carpenter Bob Tremlett went into a spacious newly-equipped basement workshop, Fred Francisco to a palatial paper laboratory and Robert to the paintings laboratory of his dreams. The old workshop was quickly and unceremoniously pulled down; the site was eventually covered by the Gallery extension.

**Abstract**

This paper is the outcome of research attempting to provide a review of the development of restoration and conservation services available in Adelaide during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The search was not restricted only to those working with state collections.

**Acknowledgments**

In no particular order, I am indebted to the following people for their recollections: Mrs. Ida Baker (George’s widow), Georgina Price (his daughter), Fred Francisco, David Tillbrooke, Allan Byrne, Jane Hylton and Ian Maidment. I would like to thank Gillian Leahy, Jin Whittington and Zandria Farrell for their help in research and preparation of this paper.

**About the author**

Chris Payne commenced training forty years ago in October, 1968 at the Art Gallery of New South Wales under Bill Boustead. On completion of training he worked in Fyshwick, A.C.T., on the National Gallery of Australia’s collection. In 1974 he won a Visual Arts Board scholarship to study in Rome. He set up the Art Conservation Studios in Adelaide in 1976 and has for many years balanced private and institutional work. Always a generalist he defines his work area simply as “cultural heritage conservation focusing on painted surfaces”.

**Part II** Years of Transition

Payne
A panel frame is a frame which has decoration carved into the surface of the moulding at the corners and centres, leaving sections or panels of the moulding plain.

Other people on the scene are Marek Pacyna who came to Adelaide from Sydney in 1990 and while working privately works permanent part-time at Artlab. Other people currently working in restoration include Michael Piper in the Eastern Suburbs and Ron Adams at Victor Harbour. More have come and gone. Like the chap “trained in Italy” who specialized in tinted two-pack lacquers to hide his repaints.

Fig. 1. Frame label for the Adelaide framer, gilder and restorer Augustus Molton, undated.

Fig. 2. Portrait of John Chinner by J. Cheney, State Library of South Australia (Accn. No. B72510)

Fig. 3. Detail of repainted frame for above work.
Part III:

Keynote Lecture

Sarah Fisher has been able to attend this symposium thanks to the generous assistance of the Elizabeth Summons Fellowship, In memory of Nicholas Draffin.
Introduction
This will be a talk about the history of painting conservation at the National Gallery of Art in Washington DC, where I have been a painting conservator since 1981. I shall focus on painting conservation but will include the other conservation specialties when they have some impact on our area.

I am dedicating this talk to my boss, Ross Merrill. Ross has been Chief of Conservation at the Gallery since 1983 and had arrived as Head of Painting Conservation just two months before I did, in the spring of 1981, so we have both been at the Gallery for 27 years. Over the years under his direction, the conservation division has grown from 9 or 10 people when we first arrived to over 67 people at present. The division is known for the breadth of its research and its innovations in the field, as well as the quality of its conservation work. Much of this is due to Ross’s amazing vision, energy, ambition, creativity, toughness, good political sense and resourcefulness. From his childhood in West Texas, through work in the Texas oil fields, through art school in Philadelphia and conservation training at Oberlin, Ohio Ross has made an amazing journey and is a fascinating person to work with.

The Conservation Division within the National Gallery
The National Gallery opened to the public in 1941 in a beautiful new building designed by architect John Russell Pope, and was the result of the dream, the high standards and the financing of one man, Pittsburgh financier and art collector Andrew Mellon. Recognizing that allowing the new gallery to be named after himself would discourage many donors, Mellon wisely insisted that the new museum be called The National Gallery. A core of donors formed the mainstay of the collection in the early 1940s; consisting of, besides Mellon, Samuel H. Kress and his great Italian Renaissance paintings, Joseph E. Widener and his collection of grand European old masters, Chester Dale with his donation of great American and Impressionist Paintings, and Lessing Rosenwald, with his comprehensive collection of prints and drawings. Over the years many new donors continued the tradition of donations and a new building was completed in 1978 to accommodate the expanded collection. The East Building, designed by architect I.M. Pei, along with a sculpture garden which opened 20 years later, completes the complex I work in today.
The following is a brief introduction to the Conservation Division as a whole, with its present structure and organization. The 67 people in the Conservation Division include staff, interns, fellows and long-term contractors. Of these, 56 people are US government employees; only a few of the highest positions as well as the fellows are funded by private endowments. Seven departments make up the Conservation Division, four of which specialize in the treatment of the art: Paintings Conservation, Paper Conservation, Objects Conservation (covering sculpture of all materials, and some decorative arts) and Textile Conservation. There is also a section devoted to the conservation of frames, but this is housed under the Loans and Exhibitions department, and includes the matting and framing of works of art on paper. The three other departments, the non-treatment departments, are the Scientific Research Department, the aforementioned Loans and Exhibitions Department, and the Administration Department. All of these seven departments are unified under the Chief of Conservation and because of this have great impact and power within the Gallery structure when it comes to achieving goals important to conservation.

Painting Conservation consists of eight mostly full-time staff members, one of whom is a conservator specialized in modern painting. One is a technician who does our x-raying and infrared work and deals with the day-to-day managing of the upkeep of the laboratory. There are also technicians in the Objects and Paper Conservation laboratories. These technician jobs are one of the few paid conservation jobs available to pre-program students interested in getting experience prior to applying for a conservation training program.

We also have a one-year internship program for students in their third year of conservation school or just out of a program, and a three-year fellowship program for more advanced students. Similar fellowship programs exist in the other departments. We also have a full-time and part-time contract position, the full-time one for a conservator who focuses on research on our paintings for whichever of our systematic catalogs is being written at the time. As do many museums, the Gallery has a program, in our case now 30 years old, to study and publish all of its collection with individual art historical and technical entries on each work of art. The other treatment departments have variations of what I've outlined above.

The non-treatment departments are a vital part of our work and benefit painting conservation greatly. The scientific research department under René de la Rie consists of 8 permanent staff scientists, one research conservator, and three fellows, and does independent research as well as providing analytical services for us. We also work closely with the Loans and Exhibitions department, under Merv Richard, which deals with the conservation-related demands of the huge numbers of exhibitions that the Gallery became involved in the 1980s and 90s, also with matting and framing of works on paper and frame conservation. Merv and his staff carry out independent research on packing, shipping and environmental issues in museums. The administrative department, headed by Michael Skalka, not only administers the division but also manages several programs developed by Ross. The Modern Materials Program is creating a reference collection of artists' materials of the present, although it occasionally collects nineteenth-century materials. Michael manages a group of part-time fellows who categorize, create draw downs of and photograph samples of all materials donated to the collection. He has also put together exhibitions on historic artists' materials and has organized lectures featuring speakers on historic and present day artists' materials.

The First Thirty Years of the Painting Conservation Department
That gives you a quick review of the Division as it is today, the result of Ross's own vision and the ability to hire people with vision. Let us now examine the historical development of the Painting Conservation Department within this large entity. How has it evolved into its present form, what broader conservation movements helped form it, what controversies has it weathered and how has it grown because of them? The oral history interviews from the National Gallery's Archives department's Oral History Project have been an invaluable source of this information for me, as well as "common knowledge" among the staff.

In a 1941 plan of Andrew Mellon's magnificent new building you can find at the northwest corner a suite of 6 small rooms set aside specifically for conservation, with the purpose of each room clearly indicated. But in 1941 the Gallery actually had no full-time permanent staff painting conservators. It was not until over 30 years later, in 1972, that the first permanent professional conservation staff was hired. This, however, did not mean that during these first 30 years conservators were not attending to the collection. Conservation's earliest history at the Gallery is inextricably linked with one man, Stephen Pichetto, conservator for the Samuel H. Kress Collection and Foundation. From about 1929 through 1949, Pichetto was closely involved with almost every aspect of conservation planning and activity for the developing museum. His importance to the Gallery in those years later, in 1972, that the first permanent professional conservation staff was hired. This, however, did not mean that during these first 30 years conservators were not attending to the collection. Conservation's earliest history at the Gallery is inextricably linked with one man, Stephen Pichetto, conservator for the Samuel H. Kress Collection and Foundation. From about 1929 through 1949, Pichetto was closely involved with almost every aspect of conservation planning and activity for the developing museum. His importance to the Gallery in those years later, in 1972, that the first permanent professional conservation staff was hired. This, however, did not mean that during these first 30 years conservators were not attending to the collection. Conservation's earliest history at the Gallery is inextricably linked with one man, Stephen Pichetto, conservator for the Samuel H. Kress Collection and Foundation. From about 1929 through 1949, Pichetto was closely involved with almost every aspect of conservation planning and activity for the developing museum. His importance to the Gallery in those years later, in 1972, that the first permanent professional conservation staff was hired. This, however, did not mean that during these first 30 years conservators were not attending to the collection. Conservation's earliest history at the Gallery is inextricably linked with one man, Stephen Pichetto, conservator for the Samuel H. Kress Collection and Foundation. From about 1929 through 1949, Pichetto was closely involved with almost every aspect of conservation planning and activity for the developing museum. His importance to the Gallery in those years later, in 1972, that the first permanent professional conservation staff was hired. This, however, did not mean that during these first 30 years conservators were not attending to the collection. Conservation's earliest history at the Gallery is inextricably linked with one man, Stephen Pichetto, conservator for the Samuel H. Kress Collection and Foundation. From about 1929 through 1949, Pichetto was closely involved with almost every aspect of conservation planning and activity for the developing museum. His importance to the Gallery in those years later, in 1972, that the first permanent professional conservation staff was hired. This, however, did not mean that during these first 30 years conservators were not attending to the collection. Conservation's earliest history at the Gallery is inextricably linked with one man, Stephen Pichetto, conservator for the Samuel H. Kress Collection and Foundation. From about 1929 through 1949, Pichetto was closely involved with almost every aspect of conservation planning and activity for the developing museum. His importance to the Gallery in those
formative years has only recently been appreciated through the research by my colleague, Ann Hoenigswald. Up until her findings for her 2006 article published in Publishing and Conserving Paintings; Occasional Papers on the Samuel H. Kress Collection, we knew Pichetto only as the person behind the cradling of almost all of our Italian Renaissance panel paintings and as the applier of the now whitened retouching we found on so many of our Kress paintings and which we had always called “Pichetto whitening”. In her article about Pichetto, Ann reveals how close he was to collector Samuel H. Kress, how much mutual respect existed between the two of them, and how, as a result, Pichetto strongly influenced Kress in his attitudes towards conservation. He left a major legacy of emphasis on the care and conservation of all the Kress paintings and through that influenced the way all the paintings in the Gallery’s collection were cared for.

To summarize some of Ann’s findings on Pichetto: this man, born in New York City in 1889, whose training is totally unknown, became a highly successful restorer in New York. By the late 1920s he was consultant conservator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, worked for dealer Joseph Duveen and was associated with many of the greatest American collectors of the day, and most importantly, with Samuel H. Kress. For Kress, Pichetto made sure that all the paintings acquired in Kress’ massive collecting project, involving the purchase and distribution between 1929 and 1961 of over 3,000 works of art, 1,800 of which came to the National Gallery, were in the best possible condition. Pichetto was far more than a restorer to Kress, he was also a “confidant and connoisseur” and the person through whom all decisions related to how the Kress paintings donated to the new Gallery would be cared for, framed and displayed were passed. In 1939, two years before the building opened, Pichetto was named consultant conservator at the Gallery. John Walker, the Gallery’s first chief curator and later director said he had no choice politically but to accept the Kress directive at the time, that Pichetto be hired for the position. Walker seems to have had an ambivalent relationship with Pichetto, uncertain of his loyalties and ambitions, calling him in a well known quote, “a large, well-fed bullfrog, perfectly tranquil but ready to snap at any insect which might fly by”. Walker eventually came to realize that Pichetto and he shared similar goals for the well being of the new National Gallery.

But Pichetto never became full-time staff conservator at the Gallery; he continued to run a big private studio in New York City, and juggled his work for the Kress and the Gallery with that for other major collectors and museums. In January of 1942, with the fear of enemy attack during World War II rife along the East Coast, Pichetto managed the wartime evacuation of the Gallery’s greatest paintings to Biltmore House, the Vanderbilt mansion in Asheville, North Carolina, well away from the coast. He established the packing and transit guidelines for the transfer and prepared the storage facility there with particular attention to environmental conditions. Hoenigswald is certain that his advice to Samuel Kress often appeared, unattributed, in Kress’s long letters of recommendations to the NGA staff, on such diverse topics as: the special care required for paintings on wood, the importance of stable temperature and relative humidity for the works of art, and the significance of x-radiographs (then called shadowgraphs) for the study of the collection, which were included in the Kress donation. It was certainly his advice to Kress which had brought about the Kress Foundation’s funding of the x-raying by Alan Burroughs of all the Kress Collection paintings. These x-radiographs of our early Italian paintings are held by both us and the Fogg Museum at Harvard and create an invaluable early record of the past states of our Kress Collection paintings.

Pichetto has left us a complex legacy both beneficial and detrimental to the works in his care. According to our present standards, his team’s structural work on both wooden panels and canvases was excessive and often tragic, considering how many original reverses have been lost. His record keeping was poor. His inpainting and varnishing were heavy handed. When we clean Pichetto-treated paintings, we are often amazed at how much original paint he covered when retouching. However, his team’s apparently unnecessary cradling of panels did reflect his era and the worries about the reactions of the old European supports to the very different conditions in centrally heated, dry, interior American environments. Hoenigswald has also found that the restorers working on his team actually kept extensive “day books”, diaries with precise details of what treatments they carried out and what materials they used. Nevertheless, it was Pichetto’s overriding emphasis on preventative caring for the paintings that influenced Samuel Kress and his successor, brother Rush Kress, and through them established a strong policy of care for the National Gallery’s collection. It certainly formed the Kress Foundation’s conservation policies as they continue today and is the origin of their steady, financial support of the conservation field over the years.

The unexpected sudden death of Pichetto in January, 1949 brought panic to the Gallery and the Kress Foundation. Nearly instant communications from John Walker and Rush Kress to their advisors in Italy, Bernard Berenson and Florentine dealer and collector Count Contini-Bonacossi, requested immediate recommendations for a replacement conservator. Both advisors thought of Mario Modestini, a highly respected Italian conservator with a studio in Rome, and he arrived in New York a few months later to take over the reins of conservation.
at the Kress Foundation. Mario, who died just two years ago at age 98, provides a link between these early years and the present, as he was still visiting the lab occasionally after I arrived in the 1980s. I remember him as a gracious and elegant old-world gentleman who generously passed on to us his stories and knowledge of the Kress paintings he had treated. But his views on other conservators’ work that he didn’t like could certainly be strong and were very influential.

On his arrival in New York in 1949, his position as curator/conservator to the Kress foundation was formalized; he found new studio space, established his own team of conservators, taking on three of Pichetto’s team and eventually brought over from Italy some of his former staff. As did Pichetto, he balanced Kress and National Gallery work within his large private practice, continuing as consultant to the National Gallery but not in as all-encompassing a role as Pichetto. He would come to do minor treatments until the Gallery had a more permanent conservation staff. The Kress collection kept him extremely busy in the 1950s as it ratcheted up its collecting and began a program of distributing those paintings the Gallery didn’t want to regional museums which had the luck of being in a town or city where Kress had one of his “five and dime” stores. Most interestingly, in 1950, Rush Kress decided to solve the problem of the lack of adequate space in New York City for the collection by having a large conservation and storage facility built for the Foundation on a remote property he owned in the Pocono Mountains in eastern Pennsylvania called Huckleberry Hill. A contributing factor was also that this was the era of the Korean War, and there was a general fear of an atomic attack on New York City. The custom-designed building was completed in 1951 and was equipped with all the latest tools and analytical equipment, and has been well described elsewhere. The Gallery curators of the next few years remember visiting this isolated spot to look at paintings, and stories of the winter weather and problems getting there abound. The Kress conservation staff worked there for at least seven years until they rebelled against the remoteness, and much of the restoration operation was sent back to New York City.

Meanwhile, the Gallery’s lack of interest in establishing a larger in-house conservation presence, certainly lies in the philosophy of John Walker, chief curator under director David Finley from 1938 through 1955 and then director from 1956 through 1969. John Walker’s philosophy has been described as follows, “I want the pictures good when they come in, and just hang them on the wall and leave them alone”. A later deputy director, Charles Parkhurst, said that John Walker was “simply scared to death of conservation” and that he probably passed that sentiment on to Paul Mellon, Andrew’s son. Paul inherited the role of great collector and of National Gallery patron from his father and was a major donor to the Gallery throughout his life time. He was president of the Gallery’s Board of Trustees for years, beginning first in 1938. Some of the aforementioned nervousness about conservation certainly also rubbed off on later director J. Carter Brown who started work at the Gallery under John Walker in 1961 and was still director when I arrived. We have to remember that the curators and directors of these eras were strong Anglophiles, spent holidays in the United Kingdom and were close to art historical colleagues there. The intense cleaning controversies at the National Gallery in London which were heating up again in the late 40s and early 50s must have been well known to them and heightened any nervousness about the dangers of conservation.

So during the next 20 years, the only in-house conservation presence was Francis Sullivan, known as Frank. He had been one of Pichetto’s team in New York and apparently was recommended to the Gallery by Mrs. Pichetto, who was trying to keep her husband’s business alive in New York after his death. Sullivan was hired by the Gallery as assistant restorer in December, 1949 and continued in that role until the big staff changes in 1972. He worked part time at the Gallery, doing mainly structural and minor treatment work and carried on an active private practice. Regrettably again, his records are minimal and in our files, if present at all, consist of typed cards with one or two words next to a date, with a rare mention of relining or another more complex treatment. Visitors interviewed at later dates reported that he was an old fashioned craftsman, disinclined to try new materials, and preferring to keep to himself.

Modestini would visit occasionally, sometimes with Rush Kress and his entourage, with Kress inspecting the collection and “obsessed” with the details of the displays. In 1961 Modestini’s position as curator/conservator to the Kress collection was officially closed when the Kress Foundation made its final disbursal of the art and got out of the collecting business. At that time it made the final deeds of gift of the distributed paintings to the NGA and the regional museums, closing an incredible era of art collecting and patronage. But Modestini found that he had more than enough work to continue his private studio practice in New York, and remained there, available as a consultant to the Kress Foundation and the National Gallery for the rest of his active life. There are wonderful stories in the Gallery’s oral histories about his more glamorous activities for the Gallery. For example, he played an important role in the 1963 purchase by the Gallery of Leonardo da Vinci’s Ginevra de’ Benci from the Prince of Liechtenstein, the only painting by Leonardo in the western hemisphere. He accompanied the future director, young J. Carter Brown, to Liechtenstein first to check the painting’s condition prior to the Gallery’s decision to purchase it, then went back when the...
purchase had been financed, to pick the painting up. The painting traveled in a seat next to him on the airplane in a special valise as “Mrs. Modestini”, and they were met in New York by the FBI, transferred to Mellon’s private plane, and whisked to Washington without going through Customs.

Our Early Scientist
In spite of Walker’s worries about conservation that kept an in-house conservation staff presence minimal, he showed amazing foresight in developing the Gallery’s first strong relationship with a conservation scientist, an action which would have very positive effects, not only on the Gallery but even more on the broader conservation world. In 1950 the Gallery established a Fellowship at the Mellon Institute for Industrial Research (now the Carnegie-Mellon Institute) in Pittsburgh at his instigation. Walker had discussed the idea with Paul Mellon that a conservation scientist was needed to do research for the Gallery and eventually, as a result, the Institute hired young chemist Robert Feller for the position. The Mellon Institute had been established by Andrew Mellon in his home town of Pittsburgh to provide facilities in which the application of scientific research to the solution of industrial problems could be carried out. It was because of this connection with the Mellons that John Walker thought of the Institute as a potential home for the scientific research he was interested in. Feller relates later that he assumed that John Walker wanted to have “his own chemist” because he didn’t want outside scientists telling the Gallery what to do. The question of synthetic varnishes was being discussed in conservation and museum circles, notably in England and continental Europe, and that’s probably what made Walker interested in the Gallery’s having access to its own in-house advisor. After hiring him, the Mellon Institute gave him little direction, and Bob Feller’s description in the NGA oral interviews of his first months at work is quite amusing. It took him some time to decide what he was supposed to be doing. He had no clear direction and had to structure his goals and his research himself, an ideal situation for a creative scientist. Interestingly, John Walker never told him what to do or suggested what research direction he should follow. He started reading up on the National Gallery in London’s scientific work, and on the influential work at the Fogg Art Museum laboratory at Harvard University where Edward Forbes, George Stout and John Gettens were working. He had known nothing about the Fogg lab, the pre-World War II originator of conservation science study in America, so traveled there and was met with huge hospitality, help and encouragement from the Fogg team. He met with John Walker often and Walker read his weekly, then monthly reports, although Feller recognized he understood little science. Eventually Feller settled on the idea of researching the use of synthetic varnishes in art and finding ones that would be useful in conservation treatments. And from these beginnings came all of Bob Feller’s future work on varnishes and synthetic resin based varnishes, most influential on the painting conservation field and conservation in general. Over time he moved into many different areas of fruitful research, often in response to requests from the museum staff or from other conservators. These are all well documented in his publications, and include: the effects of light on museum objects, light-induced color changes in pigments, pigment volume concentration and chalking, the color wheel, polymers, paper degradation, paper darkening and bleaching. His beneficial effect on the conservation field has been enormous, and it is interesting in light of our story today to see it as part of the Gallery’s early development.

Between 1950 and 1976, Bob Feller was always available for advice and analysis of any questions Gallery staff might have. As he continued investigating synthetic varnishes, he chose to try to create some which would be appropriate for conservators. Eventually his assistant created the later somewhat notorious 27H, a copolymer of butyl methacrylate and amyl methacrylate which seemed to have all the characteristics conservators desired from a varnish. It was very lucky that Feller was as cautious as he was; he had sent test bottles of the new varnish around to all his colleagues nationally and abroad but had warned people not to use it other than for testing. Whereas Frank Sullivan wasn’t at all interested in trying the new varnish, Mario Modestini, with characteristic vision, was; in the characteristic simple, picturesque language of his oral history, Bob says Mario “just gobbled the stuff up”, probably used at least 15 gallons of it, much of it on Kress and thereby National Gallery paintings, and was delighted with it. Anyway, Bob and his assistant discovered at the last moment that the varnish cross-linked and published that fact one month before Gary Thomson in London nearly beat him to the draw and also published that it was a dangerous material. The Gallery went in to emergency mode, calling a meeting with all concerned, including Modestini, to discuss the problem of possibly dangerous materials being applied to the Gallery’s masterpieces. Then the whole situation for the NGA was diffused by Modestini’s saying that, yes, he had used it on many paintings but he had always used it over dammar, so the new varnish was never directly on the original paint. The Gallery sent out statements to practically everyone in the field explaining the problem and warning people about it.

The effect of this problem on conservation at the NGA was, interestingly enough, relatively minimal, and the Gallery, luckily for us all, continued to support its distant scientist. It made Bob Feller even more cautious than he already was about recommending materials but at the same time had the beneficial effect of bringing to the forefront the whole interesting issue of cross-linking, which had not been
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Previously known about in conservation circles. Many years later in my early days at the Gallery, conservation chemist Suzanne Lomax and I ran a new testing program at Ross’s instigation and carried out solvent tests on the paintings in the collection recorded as having been varnished with 27H and with Lucite/Elvacite. We discovered and published that, first, many paintings said to be coated with 27H, actually no longer had it on them, and, second, that any 27H present had not cross-linked and was very easy to remove. It was clear that with true scientific thoroughness, Bob Feller’s cross-linking results were due to baking the samples in conditions that would never be experienced in the stable museum environment like the NGA.

In 1976 a new centre for scientific research on artists’ and conservators’ material was founded at the Carnegie Mellon Institute with Bob as the head, administered independently from the National Gallery, ending their formal relationship. The following year, 1977, the first full-time staff conservation scientist, Barbara Miller was hired, the beginning of the present in-house science department. Bob continued as special advisor to the conservation division, and Ross and all of us have kept the communication channels with Bob open.

The 1970s and the Cleaning Controversy

But we return to our chronology. In 1969 a new director came on board at the Gallery, replacing John Walker. J. Carter Brown was young, highly energetic, intense and knowledgeable and knew the Gallery well, having been assistant to the director for the eight previous years. In 1971 he hired a new deputy director, Charles Parkhurst, who at that time had been director of the Baltimore Museum of Art for ten years and prior to that, director at the Allen Art Museum in Oberlin, the home of Richard Buck’s Internuseum Laboratory and the first official regional conservation center funded by the Mellon Foundation. In hindsight I recognize that it was Parkhurst, with Carter Brown’s strong backing, who had the most significant effect on the future of conservation at the Gallery up to the present. It was Charles Parkhurst, who reorganized the curatorial departments of the Gallery to reflect more modern developments in the museum world. He developed the library, he started the photo archives department with a major purchase of archival photos on the market in his early years at the Gallery, and he later initiated the Systematic Catalogue project, all reflecting a scholarly seriousness for which the Gallery had not been known up to that time but which Carter Brown and Parkhurst were determined to introduce.

Parkhurst formed the new Conservation Division by bringing in three conservators, a painting, a paper and an object conservator. And who were these three? He actually stole away the three conservators he had hired ten years earlier at the Baltimore Museum: Victor Covey, objects and paintings conservator and head of the division, Kay Silberfeld, painting conservator, and John Krill, paper conservator. The three conservators moved into Frank Sullivan’s space at the northwest end of the building and Sullivan quietly departed. The new direction at the Gallery was determined to update conservation and Sullivan, with his traditional ways, did not fit into the picture. Staying as part of Parkhurst’s team were frame conservator Eleanor Labaree, later known as Nori Baker, and textile conservator Joseph Columbus working on contract at the Gallery since 1969. The early and mid seventies were a fascinating time for the new team. Vic and Kay worked well together, with Vic working on both paintings and objects, a mainly self-taught great practical conservator with “the most incredible (skilled) hands I’d ever seen”, according to Chuck Parkhurst, and Kay, apprenticeship-trained by Richard Buck at Oberlin, a very sensitive painting conservator, an excellent organizer, and eager to make the conservators an essential part of the Gallery’s curatorial research efforts. Kay set up and organized procedures: she systematised the inspections of the collections, the documentation of treatments through report writing and, in general, initiated excellent record keeping. Vic solved practical treatment problems and understood materials and equipment well. Between the two of them, they brought new energy into a studio that had had a passive role in the museum for years. Interesting to note here is that Charles Parkhurst requested no advice on these hirings from the Kress Foundation, the body which had had so much influence over conservation at the Gallery over the years. Chuck brought in conservators with whom he was familiar and whose approach he liked. They represented what could be called the American or the Keck/Fogg school of conservation training, which Joyce Hill Stoner of the Winterthur/University of Delaware conservation training program, has described as wanting to honestly and safely clean the painting, and to revere the resulting original in its present cleaned state without subjective later introductions to try to knit it together. One element of American conservation had reacted against the mysteries and mystique of the old craft traditions of restoration by believing that science held the answer to all questions about a painting’s final appearance. The practical effect of this philosophy was to discourage interpretive varnish removal and inpainting, aiming for pure objectivity.

When the new team came to the Gallery, they had the old studios renovated with new floors and new paint; they bought a new microscope, ultraviolet equipment and in 1975 installed a new x-ray system. The conservators’ relationships with the curators improved as Kay worked closely with the newly hired young curators of the early 70s and the curators began to respect and depend on conservation’s...
teaching findings for their research. Also during these years Carter Brown was developing his interests in the “blockbuster exhibition”, often competing with Thomas Hoving of the Metropolitan Museum in New York, and the conservators participated actively in all the exhibition procedures which are so familiar to us now but were so new then. They travelled to distant places, made international friends of their professional colleagues and had fascinating experiences. In 1975 Kay flew to Russia with director J. Carter Brown and donor/collector/organizer Armand Hammer to inspect the condition of paintings for an upcoming exhibition called “Master Paintings from the Hermitage and the Pushkin Museum” and tells amusing stories about Armand Hammer’s showmanship as she toured around Leningrad and Moscow with his entourage. The conservation techniques of the new painting conservation staff were typical for American conservation of the era: extensive use of Paraloid B72 and B67 for varnishes, inpainting with PVA pre-ground with dry pigments, and the use of wax resin or non-penetrating PVA resins for linings. Meanwhile, the staff expanded through the mid 1970s in preparation for a move into a much larger space when the East Building was built. William Leisher, Oberlin trained, was hired in 1974 and Ann Hoenigswald, also Oberlin trained, started as an intern in 1977 and was hired in 1978. In 1977 the staff moved to their greatly expanded quarters in the northeast corner of the old building where the cafeteria had been, tripling the painting conservation space, and in June of 1978, the formal opening of the magnificent new East Building took place.

It was in the second half of the 1970s that some problems began to develop for the department, culminating in its major cleaning controversy in 1977-78. One could say that the controversies milling around in the international conservation world for the last century caught up with the Gallery’s newly energized and activist conservation staff. With its great collection, the Gallery’s staff could clearly not long avoid the public airing of any critical scrutiny of its work by colleagues and the public, a situation with which, for example, the National Gallery in London was already very familiar. The Gallery’s cleaning controversy revolved around the classic issues of all the historic cleaning controversies we’ve known and studied, with local variations due to the personalities and history involved.

The main controversy was initiated by the cleaning of Rembrandt’s much loved landscape, The Mill, beginning in 1977. The cleaning was part of a program by Northern Baroque curator Arthur Wheelock and the conservators to study and treat the Gallery’s Rembrandts, and two in the collection had already been treated. The Mill was hidden by an extremely yellowed varnish, and had many attribution questions, so it was the perfect subject for the study and treatment by the staff and its outside advisors. Unfortunately, the Gallery’s director and Paul Mellon, head of the Board of Trustees, hadn’t been informed about the treatment of The Mill, and it later became clear that there had been no system in place to keep the Director informed about coming conservation treatments. The painting in its pre-treatment darkened and mysterious state had been a favorite of former director John Walker and had been the subject of much romantic writing over the last two hundred years. Also unfortunately, for the Gallery conservators that is, not necessarily for conservation in the US in general, John Brealey, London conservator, had been hired by the Met in 1975 and was in the full swing of his campaign to improve American conservation practices. He found the appearance of American-conserved paintings deplorable and never hesitated to publicly and privately state that. In 1977 he had been appointed advisor on conservation to the Mellon Foundation, confirming his strong influence on Paul Mellon whose British painting collection he had been looking after. In the resulting sequence of events, Mellon was informed by Brealey that the conservators at the Gallery were damaging The Mill; Mellon then brought in a group of three outside experts he knew personally to judge the conservation work in general and The Mill specifically. Because of their negative report, Mr. Mellon instituted a moratorium on all conservation treatment in the labs until he could inform himself better as to what was going on. The matter inadvertently became publicized through press contacts the staff had had prior to the cleaning of The Mill and dragged the Gallery into much unwanted publicity. Eventually, Charles Parkhurst was able to persuade the director that the staff had been judged unfairly. It was arranged that the Mellon Foundation appoint a second review committee, chosen from a broader range of the American art historical, academic and conservation world. This group inspected various treatments of the conservation staff and their documentation, approved what they saw, and the staff was exonerated of blame. After four months the moratorium was lifted and the conservators could get back to their practical work.

The staff, especially Kay Silberfeld, was deeply affected by this controversy and never quite returned to the confidence of the pre-controversy days. In hindsight we see the classic elements of all cleaning controversies, with such subjective statements as: “The painting has lost its mystery”, “It just doesn’t feel right any more”, “It is no longer Rembrandt”, unable to be countered by the logic and scientific evidence of the staff. Around this time, curator Arthur Wheelock spent extended periods in New York at Mario Modestini’s studio regularly checking in on Mario’s treatment of the Gallery’s large Rubens, The Gerbier Family, which had been sent to Mario to be treated as a result of a disagreement over its appearance following an American treatment after it had been newly acquired. Wheelock remembers that it was very hard for a scholarly mind such as his to...
accept that a conservator could state that he knew exactly what the artist's intent was and could therefore subjectively interpret that in his restoration, even with no evidence left on the painting to support his interpretation. Nevertheless, in her oral history, Silberfeld says she hated being categorized as representing only the so-called scientific, American approach. She said her goal was always to make the painting look the best possible; science was always a tool for her and not an end in itself. As we well know, any such controversy can crush nuances and polarize opinions, and the Gallery’s was typical that way.

It would have helped the beleaguered staff greatly in the 1970s to have been able to see the attacks on their work with the hindsight we have from our thirty years of familiarity with the historical and philosophical writing on cleaning choices that has appeared since then. Already during a precursor of the cleaning controversy, in 1976, Vic Covey had retired from painting conservation, unhappy with the pressure, and from then on he had focused on objects conservation and administration, leaving Bill Leisher as head of the painting department. Bill Leisher left in 1980 to become Chief Conservator at the LA County Museum. Kay became ill in late 1980, survived the illness, but was convinced that the stress of the controversy had caused it and decided to step down from the head position. It was she who recommended Ross Merrill, at that time Head of Conservation at the Cleveland Museum of Art, to the Gallery as the next head of the department. Meanwhile, Carol Christensen was hired as assistant conservator in 1980 and I was asked to be Senior Painting Conservator in 1981. That set in place the framework for the staff as we know it today. But there were other important policy changes as a result of the controversy.

The most significant one was that the Director and Board of Trustees were never again left uninformed about coming painting conservation treatments. Since that time, treatment proposals have always been signed off for approval by all levels of the Gallery hierarchy involved, starting with the conservator who proposes it, the head of the conservation department, the Chief of Conservation, the curator responsible, the Deputy Director, the Director, and a representative from the Board of Trustees: six signatures! The same policy is followed in the Objects Conservation Department but not by the paper conservators whose large numbers of small treatments would make such a signature requirement unwieldy. The Board of Trustees meets three times a year, so we plan writing our examination reports and treatment proposals accordingly, saving them up for submission. It means that treatments must be carefully planned in advance, which is always good, and if there are any last minute urgent requests between meetings, the director can get the board’s verbal approval. There was no other specific policy change as concrete

as that one but the department became much more aware of the need to consider the political ramifications of each treatment, not only the purely academic and practical results. In a sense, the department became more politically sophisticated about conservation treatments as a result of the controversy.

Painting Conservation since 1981
My objectivity about the history of the department in its last 27 years is probably non-existent, as I have been so closely involved with the department’s development during that time. The Gallery has given the department and the division remarkable support, as they have expanded under Ross’s guidance to meet the demands of the growing collection. To clarify the early chronology of these years: Ross was appointed Chief of Conservation in 1983 on Vic Covey’s retirement. In 1985 Ross was lucky enough to be able to persuade David Bull, the renowned British painting conservator who had long been working on the American West Coast, to be the head of the painting conservation department. David may be one of the last of the grand, movie-star breed of conservators, such as John Brealey and Mario Modestini. The beautiful results of his aesthetic treatments, his knowledge of the art market and his elegant style have made him a favorite with Gallery curators, patrons and audiences. He has had a profound influence on our inpainting and varnishing approaches, as the staff has tried to emulate his aesthetic results. He introduced the use of MS2A ketone resin varnish to us, and its silky look and ease of use made it an immediate favorite. It has dominated our varnish use since then. His treatment of our great Feast of the Gods by Bellini and Titian and the publication in 1990 of that treatment and of the analysis of the painting written by him with scientist Joyce Plesters of the National Gallery in London was probably the highpoint of his time with us. He and I existed as co-heads of the laboratory for years until his departure in 2000 for the establishment of a private conservation practice in New York. He still works on contract for us and comes down around 3 days a month to work his wonders on our masterpieces. Some of the most famous paintings he has treated over the years include Leonardo’s Ginevra de’ Benci and several of our greatest Rembrandts and Turners.

Meanwhile, in 1984 Ross hired Merv Richard as Conservator of Exhibitions and Loans, and hired Michael Skalka as his program assistant, both positions which expanded in the future to full-time heads of the separate departments, as I have previously mentioned. The massive undertaking which was the great Treasure Houses of Britain exhibition which the Gallery organized for 1985 through 1986 required a huge focus of not only Painting Conservation’s time but that of many of the other departments and clearly justified the existence of Merv’s new department. Probably Ross’s greatest success was persuading the Gallery that
the development of a major scientific research department was essential to the well being of the collection and for the support of the division. Over the years we have often grumbled about the funds required to acquire and keep up to date its plethora of scientific instruments but the benefit to us is the close collaboration resulting in a wealth of important findings and publications for us all. Ross early on was very interested in the developments of conservation science at the National Gallery in London and used their model as a goal for his ambitions for the Gallery’s conservation science department. Following Barbara Miller’s departure, Ross hired first Gary Carriveau as Department Head for the science laboratory, then at his departure, in 1988 hired René de la Rie, who has been the head of the department ever since. He has expanded the staff and greatly increased the number and types of analyses available. For a while Ross was able to get support for a Gallery conservation publication, called Conservation Research, inspired by the National Gallery of London’s Technical Bulletin, which reported on the results of the conservators’ and scientists’ work. However, lack of institutional support finally put an end to that effort after only three volumes had appeared. We still talk of trying to revive the publication.

The Gallery’s movement into acquiring modern art and dropping its policy of not collecting art by living artists has resulted in an active acquisition of modern and contemporary works. In 1990 the painting conservation department was able to hire a conservator to specialize in the treatment of modern paintings, Jay Krueger, and later Ross established a fellowship in modern paintings conservation to work with that conservator. In 1984 Ross had already established three fellowships in the three treatment labs and that brought to our department Michael Swicklik, who we were later able to hire as a staff conservator. The needs of research for the conservation portion of the Systematic Catalogue project gave Ross more hooks on which to hang the justification for new hires, resulting in the final permanent staff increases in the Painting Conservation Department in the mid to late 1980s with the addition of Catherine Metzger and Elizabeth Walmsley.

Because of the great collection and institutional support the Gallery provides, the conservation staff tends not to leave, and all the present painting conservators on staff have been there over 15 years. The conservation treatments carried out over the many years are too numerous to list and cover all periods and techniques. It is interesting that the staff has been able to specialize somewhat in the periods they like best, a luxury no smaller staff is able to indulge in. The treatments we carry out are mainly aesthetic, surface work, cleaning and inpainting, removing the many old discolored retouchings of the last century and replacing them with more stable and, one hopes, better interpreted results. The Gallery’s environment is so steady that structural work is generally not necessary on paintings that were solidly lined in the 1920s, 30s and 40s in preparation for their purchase by American collectors and that have been kept in a protected environment since then. We continue to generally use MS2A, with the addition of Tinuvin, as our varnish for its ease of handling and appearance, although Regalrez and the varnishes developed through René de la Rie’s work have often been experimented with and occasionally used. Our cleaning approaches vary, depending on the painting and we seem to have avoided further controversies. We no longer hesitate to do some subjective interpretation in our cleaning and inpainting if it is well documented and deemed necessary after consultation with all concerned. The Gallery has an endowment fund which generously supports educational travel if a curator or conservator needs to become familiar with originals by a master he/she is working on, a great benefit for us.

Our research is probably what we shall be most remembered for and has usually been strongly supported by Ross. We try to keep a balance in the laboratory between treatments and research, as other day-to-day Gallery demands allow. An incomplete list of our work includes Cathy Metzger’s and Elizabeth Walmsley’s work with colleagues Colin Fletcher and John Delaney on new infrared technologies, Carol Christensen’s work on Raphael’s and also later Siennese Renaissance painters’ techniques, Michael Swicklik’s work on the impressionists’ use of varnishes, Ann Hoenigswald’s work on Van Gogh’s and Picasso’s techniques and recently on the use of matte paints in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Catherine Metzger’s work on northern Renaissance techniques, Elizabeth Walmsley’s work on Venetian Renaissance techniques, and my work on Claude, most made possible by the support of colleagues in the Scientific Research Department.

Conclusion

The permanence of the painting conservation department’s staff is an indication of the rewards of working in the department and of working with the great collection at the National Gallery. This history has attempted to trace the evolution of the staff within the context of the National Gallery’s history, how our present ways of caring for the collection came about and how we arrived where we are today with our materials, techniques and philosophies. The quality of the output of the department, and of the conservation division overall, must make Ross proud and is a fitting legacy to him.
Acknowledgments
I would like to thank the Painting Conservation Department for its support and patience, and the National Gallery Archives staff, especially Anne Ritchie, for all the help they’ve provided.

Abstract
The paper covers the 67-year-long history of painting conservation at the National Gallery in Washington, DC and places it within the development of the conservation division as a whole and within the expansion of the Gallery around it. The evolution from 30 years with no permanent full-time staff to the present staff of over 55 people is chronicled, and the importance of some of the individual conservators who were responsible for collection is described. The paper notes the surprising development of a conservation science component during these early years and its interaction with the conservators. An effort is made to trace the evolution of the conservation materials and techniques of each period. As new staff arrives in the early 1970s, a cleaning controversy develops, and its ramifications and effect on the staff and Gallery are considered. Finishing with the expansion of the staff under Ross Merrill beginning in 1981 and developments of the past 27 years, the review helps the reader to understand the techniques and philosophies of today’s painting conservation department in context.

About the author
Sarah Fisher has been Head of Painting Conservation at the National Gallery in Washington since 1990 and has worked as painting conservator there since 1981. Her BA degree was from Wellesley College in 1967. She was apprenticeship trained in Florence, Stuttgart and Zurich at the Swiss Institute for Art Research and completed her training with a Fulbright Fellowship for a year at the SIK/IRPA in Brussels. Upon her return from Europe in 1975, she worked for two years at the Intermuseum Laboratory in Oberlin, Ohio and for three and a half years at the Balboa Art Conservation Center in San Diego, California prior to starting at the National Gallery. She has been active in the American Institute for Conservation, and has published and lectured on the materials and techniques of Watteau, Dosso Dossi, and Claude Lorrain.

Part IV:
Reflections on Training
Introduction
The history of paintings conservation intersects with other histories; that of the conservation profession and the development of professional identity; of the art market and the development of an economic base; of public institutions and the development of an institutional framework; of art history and the development of scholarship and intellectual models; of materials analysis and the development of analytical capacity and scientific investigation; and the history of materials development, and research led practice. Any one of these could serve as the point of departure for a discussion of the history of paintings conservation.

History is meaning made after the event. Usually this means history is assessed through primary sources (letters, gallery minutes, interviews, and first-hand accounts) and secondary sources, as will be done in this symposium. However, the fact that most of us here have a direct link to the people and history we are discussing provides the opportunity to engage in conversations about the history of ideas that frame paintings conservation, and thereby lay the ground for the future development of the profession.

Examining a history of ideas also helps determine the distinction between professional development, and disciplinary development; a subtle but important distinction. A profession has agreed practices, standards, conduct, and activities. It involves specialized training and education, but is defined by its practice. A discipline is defined by the knowledge it generates. This involves a community of question makers as well as answer seekers. It is clear paintings conservation is both, with links between disciplinary enquiry and our professional activities becoming increasingly close.

As Barbara Hofer discusses, there are various ways by which knowledge is built within and across disciplines. Davies and Devlin provide a clear articulation of how a community of practitioners moves from professional service provision to an inquiring discipline. It is this shift that is the basis of this paper.

Communication and publication
An effective communication network is one of the most important tools for
disciplinary development. For Australian paintings conservators, publications have been critical. The outcomes of meetings, symposiums, conferences, research and even lifelong practice remain relatively inaccessible unless there is a publishing regime that supports the development of a contestable history of ideas. It is worth considering that the availability of conservation knowledge in Australia through publications predates any formal training or any professionally based fora.

Paintings conservation in Australia has been heavily influenced by international publications. Over the past two decades the National Gallery of London’s National Gallery Technical Bulletin and Art in the Making series have been particularly influential. Professional journals such as the Journal of American Institute for Conservation, Studies in Conservation, and Restaurator warrant mention. More recently the two volumes Historical and Philosophical Issues in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage and Issues in the Conservation of Paintings have mapped the history of ideas that supports painting conservation.

Perhaps the most important source of knowledge for Australian conservators has been the proceedings of international conferences and symposia. These include Lining Paintings: Papers from the Greenwich Conference on Comparative Lining Techniques, Appearance, Opinion, Change: Evaluating the Look of Paintings and Art in Transit: Studies in the Transport of Paintings.

There are also key texts, found in conservation laboratories across the country, which include Artists’ Pigments c. 1600-1835 or The conservation of antiquities and works of art. In this category we can also include the writings of influential conservators such as Gerry Hedley’s writings in Measured Opinions: Collected Papers on the Conservation of Paintings. It would be interesting to have some research focus on the reading material that influenced our early paintings conservators.

Generally in Australia conservators have not embraced opportunities to publish. There are, however, individual pieces of writing, papers and books that shine in this rather barren landscape. And while I am reluctant to single out any contributors in particular (because in reality anyone publishing in conservation in Australia is making an important contribution to our profession) I will mention a few of the publications that illustrate some of the keystone activity in this area.

Publications that educate the public act provide important incursions into other territories, as for example, Allan Byrne’s Conserving Paintings: Basic Technical Information for Contemporary Artists. Texts that share knowledge that has been collected over a professional lifetime such as John Payne’s Framing the Nineteenth Century: Picture Frames 1837-1933 also operate to enhance the reputation of the profession as a whole.

Edited volumes are critical in enabling an open and debateable account of past and current thinking and practice, and assist in identifying new areas for research and development. In this respect Jacqueline Macnaughtan’s editorship of The Articulate Surface conference is a benchmark publication.

Then of course there are individual papers that serve as important ambassadors linking our discipline to others and informing allied disciplines of our expertise. Here I am thinking here of Carl Villis’ paper with Jaynie Anderson published in The Burlington Magazine. There are papers that inform our practice, assess conservation materials and techniques and extend our scholarship. In this respect professionally refereed journals, the AICCM Bulletin and The Melbourne Journal of Technical Studies in Art, are critical.

Other publications posit our professional identity by contributing as equals to institutional publications such Paula Dredge’s work on John Peter Russell published in the Art Gallery of New South Wales’ exhibition catalogue Belle-Île: Monet, Russell & Matisse in Brittany.

Then, and increasingly important in the shift from service provision to profession to discipline, are research higher degree theses, such as Maria Kubik’s dissertation, The use of non-sampling spectroscopic techniques in conservation.

Finally we know conservation is important when we become the subject of choice for other disciplines. Liana Fraser’s 1994 “Research into the History of Conservation at the National Gallery of Victoria” is a good example.

Legitimacy through advocacy; a community of thinkers

A cohort of professionals with disciplinary interests that inform the development of a body of knowledge is critical to the success of that profession. Working more or less in professional isolation Australia’s conservation pioneers were reliant on documented knowledge rather than mentoring or on any practice based learning that was characterized by intergenerational knowledge transfer. They were, however, heavily influenced by allied professions; artists, curators, even framers and packers and handlers. John Thallon for example, best known as a framer, furniture maker, artist and restorer, repaired and restored paintings for both private clients and public institutions. His influence on the history of
ideas in conservation is not visible. We do know that a generation later Bernard Hall, suspicious of Australian expertise, employed visiting experts such as two Englishmen, Mr Muckley and Mr Colley who cleaned and restored at least sixty paintings in the National Gallery of Victoria.14 The battle for professional legitimacy continued even after tertiary training of conservators commenced in Canberra. The tension between Tom Dixon as head of the paintings program and Fred Williams as Trustee of the National Gallery of Australia over the conservation of the Tom Robert’s *The Opening of the Houses of Parliament* in the early days of the Canberra program is probably remembered by many of those attending this symposium.15

While turf wars still occur, we are in a stronger position today because of these earlier skirmishes and the advocacy done by individuals on our behalf. In an early ICCM Newsletter Maxwell Hall mentions that he gave talks and presentations on conservation in Victoria from the mid 1970s.16 The same kind of activity was undertaken in other states. Public advocacy showcased conservation theory and practice and enabled an assessment of expertise and knowledge by practitioners and scholars in other disciplines. The emergence of an identifiable community of professionals in turn supported the success of individual conservators. The emergence of a community of paintings conservators dates, in a practical sense, from 1988 with the first meeting of the AICCM Painting Conservation Group Symposium at the Ballarat Conservation Centre. Charting the content, and shifts in content of each Paintings Group Symposium presents another interesting research project.

With an identifiable community of professionals it was possible to identify a common knowledge base and provide opportunities for the enhancement of professional practice and the development of disciplinary knowledge. In Australia the workshops given by overseas visitors are an indication of this coming of age. With Richard Wolbers’ “New Methods in the Cleaning of Paintings Workshop” in 1992 a prime example, workshops continue to be the major way in which new knowledge is generated within the profession.

**A tradition of inquiry**

There is no doubt that paintings conservation is firmly fixed within a European framework of the Western history of ideas. For Australian paintings conservators this is a double-edged sword, posing challenges for the development of new knowledge while raising a constant threat of our knowledge base being derivative and at distance. To deal with this we have tended to engage in the universal language of scientific enquiry which, as Caple identifies has:

> “...required the ability to analyse materials, characterize them in terms of elemental composition and microstructural form, and to develop some understanding of the use of physical evidence to interpret the past... all of which also occurred throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century.”

This activity supports one consideration of the development of a discipline; a mode of inquiry that defines how data is collected and interpreted.18 In Australia one of the earliest documented cases of science informing paintings conservation was the work undertaken in Victoria following damage to paintings lent to the Art Gallery of Western Australia. Chemistry was the discipline of choice for the NGV Trustees. Liana Fraser noted that “For the first time the artworks were restored by ‘experts’ with a scientific training; two chemists from the Railways Testing Laboratories were employed as ‘picture restorers’. An article in the *Argus* entitled, ‘The Virtues and Vices of Chemistry’, was the first public report on the scientific aspect of restoration in Melbourne. It was noted, for example, that the chemical composition of “copal, shellac and mastic” varnishes was analysed along with a prescribed method of removing these materials (*The Argus*, August 27th, 1932).19

In Australia, science and paintings conservation have continued a strong partnership. An assessment of the NGV paintings in light of the documentary evidence available about their condition, research undertaken prior to treatment, and the treatments themselves would be an interesting investigation of the earliest example of a relationship, which today we see as essential.

Paintings conservation is also closely tied to the art market where it is one skill base within a network of professional and trade support. This economic paradigm is a consideration that paintings conservators, particularly those in private practice, have had to build into their practice. That national art galleries/museums are not deals at some length with issues of dealing, gifting and collecting.20 The history of building protective ethical frameworks warrants a paper in its own right.

**Educating who to do what?**

Finally we come to the real issue in this romp through “conservation – the history of ideas”. The issue is this. Do we now have the ability to define requirements for what constitutes new knowledge for paintings conservation? What kind of
knowledge within our very cross-disciplinary discipline can be defined as ours? Caple identifies this position historically:

“It has been suggested by Coremans (1969) that conservation could not exist as a discipline until it had grasped the ethical concepts, articulated by Morris and SPAB in 1877, of the importance of original evidence of the past, and the need to preserve it for future generations. Equally it could not exist until there was a widespread acceptance of the need to explain decay in terms of the chemical reactions between the object and the surrounding environment, work which emerged in the late nineteenth century through the effort of Rathgen and others.”

Each of these two concepts, ethics as a definer of our discipline and the role of the physical as evidence could quite separately engage us in a two day symposium. I want therefore to finish with a comment about the future.

This has not been a paper about the history of paintings conservation in Australia; rather it is about the paths we travel as members of a professional body and an emerging discipline. Some of these paths were choices made for us in Europe several centuries ago and stem from art practice and the art market. Others relate to the emergence of strong paradigms about knowledge and knowledge acquisition that had their roots in the Enlightenment, but were developed by conservators for professional purposes towards the end of the nineteenth century. This symposium is wonderful in concept, and in execution. But at this point we are still mapping our history; collecting, disgorging and organizing our files, our facts and for many of us, our memories.

For conservators, as with other professions, the difference between professional leadership and service provision is the discipline. As such we need not only to respond to questions raised by our employees, or within allied professions and disciplines, or by the market; we need also to understand how to define our own questions. And while there are certainly many questions to be posed and answered that relate to scientific examination of artwork or ethical considerations such as artistic intent or levels of intervention, these continue existing paradigms and do, to a large extent, position us within fields of enquiry that are driven by knowledge development in other disciplines.

The project that will engage us in the coming decades will be to define what it means to be an Australian paintings conservator working in a post-colonial, Indigenous-informed country in the middle of the Asia-Pacific. While our history and our ideas have a direct genealogical route from Europe, and more recently North America, the next generation of paintings conservators will be informed by a body of knowledge that has been made robust through symposia, publications and professional and disciplinary engagement. It will be their challenge, and perhaps great pleasure, to contest this knowledge base. It is our challenge to give them both the tools and the support to do this.

Abstract

There is no defining moment in the history of paintings conservation in Australia. Rather the conservation profession and that section of the profession defined as paintings conservation has developed by incremental creep towards a heterogeneous and identifiable group of practitioners who used the word “professional” to define their activities.

The availability of skilled practitioners to oversee and undertake proper care for paintings was one of the earliest concerns of Australia’s colonial galleries. The lack of training opportunities for those interested in gaining appropriate knowledge about conservation theory and practice created problems for practitioners in Australia. The development of a community of professionals supported the credibility and status of individual practitioners. Into the future it is the strength of the disciplinary base that will provide important ballast to our professional reputation.

An overview of conservation research and literature produced in Australia provides insights into the issues facing paintings conservation in this country. This also helps identify the history of ideas that has informed developments in research, training and education, and which will provide the basis of future directions.

About the author

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16. ICCM Newsletter (No. 8 undated), Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Materials, Canberra, p. 5.


As John Brealey has written,

“After a student has mastered theory, ethics and history of past and present conservation practice and is one-on-one with a painting on the easel, it is - in the end - the quality of the individual’s judgement that matters. Every teacher knows that although he or she can present an argument no one can provide understanding. The heart of the matter lies in the quality of the understanding which springs from a natural intuitive response, the right exposure and informed guidance”.¹

This paper will look at how we might best develop the cognitive and practical skills required to “weigh up, with appropriate balance, a wide range of diverse operational factors in order to make value judgements” which lead to refined and sound conservation treatments. Much of this paper is a result of conversations with Alan Phenix, Scientist, Museum Research Laboratory at the Getty Conservation Institute in Los Angeles, whose words I have just quoted.²

The early years of a paintings conservator’s career, after formal training, is a period where much of the theory learnt is integrated with studio practice. It is where the recently-graduated conservator develops experience and understanding in a wider context, making connections with their values and commitments. The contested premise offered by Elliot W Eisner, that “we cannot interpret or analyse unless we experience” applies to our field.³ The early years in treating paintings mark the beginning of experiential learning which is the foundation of judgement and professional competence. This is the time when post-graduate students are coming to be conservators, bringing theory, practice and ethics together, and forming judgements. John Brealey spoke of the quality of the individual’s judgement as if it is an innate ability. However he was speaking with the benefit of thirty years hindsight – thirty years of training, knowledge and practice – that assisted his intuition. I will return to this point later.

Today’s students come from a very different background than was the case in Brealey’s time. In Australia, the trend has been towards tertiary training which emphasises theory and ethics and, in general, results in a less practice based experience. When I was in training, the scientific aspects of conservation were...
elevated, and craft-oriented processes were somewhat devalued. In 1979 and 1982, the Canberra College of Advanced Education, where I trained, had established a Masters Degree of Applied Science – the conservation course. The raison d’être for establishing the course was to position the conservator as a professional rather than a technician or artisan. The first groups of professional graduates entering the field in Australia at this time could either be considered “trail blazers” or ‘sacrificial lambs’, depending on your point of view. Certainly, we intruded on territory that had been dominated by practitioners trained in a scheme akin to an apprenticeship – people who worked within a long-standing and revered tradition, based on the handing down of skills and techniques. This system offered positive and negative aspects. In many ways it was a closed system, where scrutiny of methods was discouraged. But in a positive way, the craft of conservation was revered.

As a result of formal training, both past and present, some students could complete a course in conservation without ever having experienced traditional cleaning or lining methods, or having dealt with other aspects of the history of practical conservation. In my opinion, at some stage students or new graduates undertaking internships should do wax-resin linings, glue linings, nap bond linings, clean sections of paintings with acetone and turpentine or ethanol and castor oil; in other words try as many traditional methods as possible and evaluate them, compare them with more modern treatments, make up traditional recipes for fillers and try them. In essence I believe they should flesh out the history of past and present conservation practice and interpret and analyse what they have experienced, forming not only preferences, but a comparative framework as a platform to take them forward. One needs to know why a painting looks the way it does and the earmarks of previous restorations can best be appreciated after these practices have been experienced first hand. Teachers and mentors need to allow space for this. Without this background and in the wake of all of the possible theory, treatment options and approaches at hand, it is understandable that students and young professionals could become reliant on sets of processes and recipes rather that developing the necessary frameworks that can assist in their own decision making. It takes time of course, and the pressures and time constraints inherent in both the education system and professional life tend to mitigate against reflective time and the nurturing of this type of approach. However, slavishly following certain processes and recipes is not the way to make value judgements which lead to the most refined treatment outcomes.

In the absence of practical experience in tertiary training there is a plethora of information. An abundance of research now exists through papers available on the internet, publications and databases. The subject has become more complex, and the weighing up of these complexities often confounds the approach to the treatment at hand. When do you have enough information with which to make a decision? Usually, information is gathered, options are evaluated and then decisions are made. However, an internet search today often provides so much information that more questions need to be considered. The overriding emphasis is on gathering as much information as possible and the internet is often more available than a one-on-one exchange with a suitable mentor. Anxious conservators resist commencing work on a painting until they are convinced that all vital information has been sourced. But what is often missing in this assessment period is time to reflect – to actually look at the work and be with it, to actually consider that part of the solution can be found within the work itself. One of my objectives, first and foremost, is to be informed by the painting that is in front of me.

Conservators are initially trained to analyse and examine the detail within a painting, focussing on individual elements, condition reporting being a case in point. However the repetition of such procedures may work against developing a meaningful and complete understanding of the painting. One has to guard against looking at paintings in a formulaic way or just focusing on the problems, especially when undertaking a major treatment such as varnish removal. The component parts should not be considered in isolation but as interconnected elements of the whole. To use an analogy from music; it is like listening to the melody as distinct from the notes that comprise it. In the same way that a period in history can be studied from any number of perspectives, economic, social, political, etc. but a complete picture only emerges when these threads are drawn together and understood in relation to each other. When you add to all this the commentary put forward by Gerry Hedley in “Long Lost Relations and New Found Relativities”, it amounts to a very complex scenario. Nevertheless, one must consider the whole and how your intervention might affect the meaning of the painting.

Let me give you an example of something that I routinely do before undertaking a varnish removal. Having already looked at paint cross-sections and if condition permits, I always surface clean the painting first. This serves many purposes apart from its obvious aim. Since the varnish is protecting the paint, I try to do this in a very relaxed frame of mind. As the paint is temporarily saturated, I’m seeing how the colours might saturate, looking at areas that will I predict will be more resistant and stable and areas that might be problematic, seeing areas where craquelure is making absorption a consideration – trying to identify individual
issues simply using logical, analytical thinking. But another part of my mind is considering the whole. I may have surfaced cleaned from top left to bottom right but I would rarely remove a varnish in that manner. One side of my mind is coming to terms with the best logistical way of approaching the cleaning. It has also, without me really thinking about it, determined the swab size that I will use and is looking forward to which type of varnishing system might be best. Even after the surface cleaning is completed, I have realised that my mind continues to process information. Hopefully, the process makes it possible for me to achieve, in my mind’s eye, how I want the painting to ultimately look. I know conservators who prefer to sit at their easel and look and consider the painting for some time before they progress with treatments. I find that going through a process like surface cleaning— a sort of “dry run” if you like, quiets my mind and allows space for me to start considering the whole and the meaning.

Quieting the mind or engaging the right side of the brain is not always easy to achieve in a busy work environment. I have been interested in the advent of conservators listening to music using ipods. John Sutton suggested as early as 1981 that “music is the best tonic for colour matching there is. It gets the right conservators listening to music using ipods. John Sutton suggested as early as 1981 that “music is the best tonic for colour matching there is. It gets the right side of my mind working”.

Using ipods goes beyond that; it also seems to be about providing personal space of your own choosing; about exercising a method of control over your environment where you can interact with the painting one-on-one, free from the distractions, duties and deadlines of the workplace. In that sense, it quiets the mind, and at the end of the process you may not even recall what music was playing. In my own case, I can use this method whilst inpainting or during the “dry run” surface cleaning described, however, I could never consider listening to music whilst undertaking a varnish removal. This implies that, for me, different forms of cognition may be required for different functions.

In the early years of my career, I found it very necessary to acknowledge my limitations and to work within them. It was not until I had gained five or six years of experience that I remember having my first discussions with Alan Phenix (in London) about the role of intuition in conservation. In our recent email correspondence we concur that intuition is a much-underrated skill in the field. Alan suggests that “not only do I think intuition is a fundamental skill of paintings conservation, I do actually think there is something scientific to the process of cultivating it. It goes back to all that eighteenth-century Enlightenment, empiricism, stuff of observation, cause and effect … which is still valid in our kind of field. Do something, observe (carefully, sensitively and informedly) and draw a conclusion (carefully, sensitively and informedly).” Whatever you do decide, you also have to consider the most refined method of application.

It doesn’t matter how much you read, sooner or later you need to confront the work itself and deal with the craft of conservation. It involves control of delivery, diminishing risk and optimising results, and is often more easily demonstrated than talked about. Using the subject of varnish removal as an example and returning to Alan,

“As David Myers suggests, “knowledge cannot just be a verbal construct”. Any lack of articulating experiences in a verbal or written way does not result in the loss of that knowledge. In my case as time went by, I certainly felt that part of my decision-making about treatments seemed to be intuitive. To return to Brealey’s point, I would make the distinction that intuitive knowledge or an “intuitive response” from a paintings conservator cannot occur without a considerable degree of practical experience. Alan suggests that “not only do I think intuition is a fundamental skill of paintings conservation, I do actually think there is something scientific to the process of cultivating it. It goes back to all that eighteenth-century Enlightenment, empiricism, stuff of observation, cause and effect … which is still valid in our kind of field. Do something, observe (carefully, sensitively and informedly) and draw a conclusion (carefully, sensitively and informedly).” Whatever you do decide, you also have to consider the most refined method of application.

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“Through experience we gain practical intuition – subtle, complex, ineffable knowledge that aids with our problem solving.” In reality it relates to experiential learning where analytic thinking and intuition are interdependent and, if nurtured concurrently, form a key to developing sound judgement and professional competence. This comes about slowly as one works on more and more paintings. Each painting you work on, each observation you make, all of these individual experiences could be considered as a series of dots points. Without realizing it, your implicit memory is making interconnections; joining the dots, if you like; making correlations which result in a steadily growing and specific body of intuitive knowledge about paintings and conservation.

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“Through experience we gain practical intuition – subtle, complex, ineffable knowledge that aids with our problem solving.” In reality it
As for my own practice and continuing the theme of varnish removal, there is an optimum way for me to approach the cleaning of paintings. I pay attention to the way I roll the swabs (overlapping two pieces of cotton wool and rolling it tightly on a damp swab stick; ensuring tapered swabs of the same size), the way the swabs are dipped into the solvent mixture (two-thirds immersion and watch the solvent wick to the end will ensure a not too wet and not too dry swab) and so on. These examples of operational measures may seem minor and possibly pedantic, but what I am trying to emphasise is an attention to detail required for controlling the variables, that is, known surface areas and volumes so that you can judge the feel and the comparative resistance of the swabs as the varnish swells. These are aspects of the approach which emphasise the element of craft in the removal of varnish.

Finally I wish to emphasise the importance of accepting responsibility for some measure of controlled risk in conservation. Safety is about events that are always imminent, but if safety precautions are successful they never materialise. Safety is about a future that is frustrated, about unrealised potential. Risk, on the other hand, has as its basis, action, decisions and taking responsibility. Of course I am not suggesting any actions that are reckless; it’s more about tinkering with processes and materials, pushing the boundaries slightly, changing the variables to some extent in order to optimise the overall performance and outcomes - then, of course, allowing time to reflect on the results. This means deviating from the general to being more specific in your aims and in doing so, embracing change and risk as part of that process.

For my colleague Alan,

“the process of learning how to make good judgements comes from taking risks, of trying things out (under as controlled circumstances as possible); finding what works and what doesn’t.”

We both agree that what is involved in “intuition” comes from taking risks and weighing things up, in ways which are almost conscious and which explore potential positive benefits whilst keeping negative risks to a minimum. Risk-taking has become problematic for many people in conservation. There are many senior people who think that practical conservation should only be performed “risk-free”. This is debatable. As the field of conservation has become more complex, many practitioners have become less confident, or willing, to weigh up the many factors involved and slip into a kind of stasis. The principle of “minimal intervention” is an easy crutch to use to camouflage inability to make any decision. Problems of both structural and aesthetic natures still need to be addressed. There are many other interesting and legitimate pursuits that can occupy a conservator’s time: technical art history, scientific research, museum climatology and so on. However if these activities take precedence over undertaking actual conservation, then this could be seen as symptomatic of a reluctance to take responsibility for the decision-making involved in treatments.

In conclusion, primary training and education in conservation establishes the rules and methods of its practice. Becoming a professional is learning how – legitimately – to bend or adapt the rules and methods to achieve the best and most appropriate solution to any given problem. The importance of factors such as the craft of conservation, nurturing one’s intuitive responses (and its associated link to implicit memory), and having the courage, maturity and responsibility to manage risk, cannot be underestimated. The foundation of good judgement is being able to weigh up, with appropriate balance, a wide range of diverse operational factors – to make value judgements about respective significance.

Acknowledgments
Alan Phenix and Robin Daw.

Abstract
“Life is lived forward but understood backwards” (Soren Kierkegaard, Journals, 1850). It is not until we experience conservation practice that we can begin integrating all of the necessary, complex modes of cognition which facilitate our decision making and sound, professional practice. This paper looks at some of the less heralded issues that run parallel to mainstream thinking.

About the author
John Hook studied Art History and Pure Mathematics at La Trobe University in Melbourne before commencing his Masters Degree in Materials Conservation in Canberra in 1979. After internships at the National Gallery of Victoria and I.R.P.A, Brussels, he has worked mostly as Paintings Conservator and Senior Conservator at The Queensland Art Gallery and is currently in private practice.
Part IV | Reflections on Training


2 All quotes from Alan Phenix are taken from email correspondence between the author and Alan Phenix, 2008.


4 Brealey trained under an apprenticeship scheme, first with Johannes Hell, at Dulwich Picture Gallery and for a short period at the Courtauld Institute with Stephen Rees Jones, Head of the Technology Department.


9 Ibid.

10 See note ii above.

Part V: In Focus
Conservation science is science or engineering which supports the activities of conservators. Activities and examples include the vast field of materials analyses to support technical studies or treatments, research into degradation processes, developing materials for use in conservation, developing cleaning methodologies, and measuring or monitoring air chemistry and environmental parameters.

Conservation science activities are generally considered by conservators as critical to the functioning of the conservation profession, and although many of the activities can be achieved by conservators themselves, or through liaising with the scientific community, specific scientific expertise is brought to bear by a conservation scientist. Some conservators have formal undergraduate or postgraduate studies in science while others have come from an arts background so the amount of science underpinning conservation is variable.

A conservation scientist or department often works across, and contributes to all the conservation disciplines, including broader issues, for example preventative or environmental measures, storage, display, treatment, materials, structural studies and degradation.

The following discussion is a personal perspective of the profession in Australia based on my involvement over the last eighteen years, and some options for how to achieve the provision of ongoing scientific support for conservators in the Australian conservation community.

Personal History
After finishing a degree in Applied Biology in 1990 at RMIT University, it was very much by chance that I saw an advertisement for an Art Foundation of Victoria (AFV) three-year internship in Conservation Science at the National Gallery of Victoria. I was captivated by the idea of applying science in an area I understood, previously, to be non-scientific and was immediately drawn to the idea of it, although I had no previous knowledge of what this would entail exactly. It became apparent that the role was quite flexible, and rather ill-defined, and operated quite simplistically as a response to problems and questions as they arose; what is this unidentifiable material, what is this accretion, what is the transmission spectrum of this Perspex, identify these insects, monitor the
Part V | In Focus

air quality, temperature, humidity, lighting...I was in the company of four other
AFV conservation interns in the area of paintings, paper, objects and we were all
learning together. As a consequence of the arrangement of space and desks in the
department and the availability of senior staff, most of my time was spent in the
paintings conservation studio and an immeasurable debt of gratitude is owed to
John Payne who provided a conservation perspective that is unparalleled.

There were some simple materials identification and characterisation problems
and some more challenging ones. At that time, there were no standard or generally
accepted methodologies within the gallery or the country. Across the world,
although the profession was relatively new, significant in-roads had been made in
applying traditional scientific analyses to conservation questions – for example,
the work by Mills and White in the National Gallery, London, the Institute of
Atomic and Molecular Physics (AMOLF), Netherlands and the Infra-red Users
group in the area of organic analysis. Since the range of materials and questions
relating to them is extensive, the range of approaches was evaluated by reading as
much literature as possible and locating the appropriate equipment in universities
or research organisations such as CSIRO. I eagerly scoured every new edition of
Studies in Conservation as it was published for new developments. It was largely a
matter of learning through trial and error, with good advice and equipment where
and when it could be accessed.

Overlapping the last eighteen months of my time as an AFV intern and for a
while afterward, I completed a Masters in Analytical chemistry. The NGV AFV
science position was not renewed and I undertook some contract work with state
conservation labs, what was then the Ian Potter Conservation Centre (now the
University of Melbourne’s CCMC) and any other galleries or museums as needed.
I then began a very long-standing doctorate developing the technique of Raman
analysis for artists’ materials.

Eventually a position at CSIRO became available as a materials scientist and it
was an attractive proposition to work in an environment filled with scientists and
interesting scientific questions. The group I joined had also done some work in the
area of museum environment and microclimate measurement and modelling. A
wonderful opportunity seemed to be revealing itself, where all the scientific needs
of conservators could be met by the wealth of scientific resources available in the
national science organization; spectrometers, electron microscopes, computational
modellers, non-destructive and non-invasive techniques, all manner of measuring
devices, equipment, highly skilled people and resources to answer so many
questions that had been posed.

At this point, a Memorandum of Understanding was prepared as a formal
agreement between the NGV and CSIRO to facilitate the exchange of scientific
research for non-monetary benefits. It started slowly, and then the opportunity
ended almost as quickly as it started because it was not possible to continue with
the arrangement on a non-monetary basis. CSIRO, because it is accountable to the
Australian public and National research priorities, cannot support unpaid research
activities.

Conservation departments in Australia constantly bemoan the lack of funding for
staff and operating costs, let alone the additional financial burden that research
imposes. It became an untenable situation, and so it stands at this point in time.

Local and distant
The Smithsonian, the National Gallery, London, The Getty, The National
Gallery, Washington, the Louvre and many other major international collecting
institutions have conservation science departments and scientists because they
have the financial resources, also, but more fundamentally, because they are
considered a priority for conservation. The two separate and independent issues
here are funding (resources) and priority (imperative).

Realistically, there is little value in drawing comparison between major
international departments and the larger conservation departments and practices
in Australia as we simply do not operate on the same scale. Perhaps it is more
meaningful to compare smaller scale institutions. They perform scientific work on
a similar basis to us – accessing larger equipment as needed through Universities
and research organizations, and liaising with specialist scientists as specific
projects require expertise.

What works abroad may not be the ideal approach for Australia. The current
international model is of a large conservation department which houses
compartmentalised disciplines such as paper, paintings, metals etc. and
partitions conservation science off as another separate laboratory – that physical
separation may or may not be needed. Perhaps the science department could be
geographically distant? Whatever the approach, either with large-scale funding
or on a smaller basis, an important observation is the collective recognition by
international institutions that conservation science is a priority and provision is
made for scientific work to occur alongside other conservation practices.

The conservation profession in this country is uniquely deficient in scientific
support in comparison with equivalent countries abroad. Within the profession,
the need is constantly expressed but cannot be addressed with satisfaction with an ongoing and permanent foundation. An examination of the inertia in this regard may offer some suggestions for a solution. The limiting factor to the advancement of the profession is clearly the funding and resources barrier. This barrier will continue to exist unless responsibility is acknowledged by those who maintain the barrier and the recognition that they are responsible for removing it.

In the foreseeable future, no conservation department in Australia will have the financial resources to install a fully equipped scientific lab and a team of scientists, but there is an ongoing, recognised need by the profession for access to expertise and equipment – so what are some of the options?

a) Small scale, single issue solutions for projects can and have been funded through grant applications. A disadvantage is the significant amount of work involved in preparing the application, the uncertainty of the outcome, specific requirements for applicants such as the Australian Research Council requiring an educational institution. It is an unsuitable approach for creating an environment where small questions can be answered on an ad-hoc basis without significant lead-up time. Medium to large-scale projects can be addressed this way, e.g. Modern Paints (CCMC). Although not a comprehensive solution for the provision of scientific support, grants can offer individual project support.

b) Conservation projects can be an attractively different prospect for science students. Student projects are short (one to three years) but offer another opportunity to address some conservation research questions, even if it is impermanent. The supervisors of final year, honours and postgraduate science students in chemistry or forensic science are generally keen to collaborate and this is an untapped resource.

c) One of the main aims of many conservation departments is the acquisition of key pieces of analytical instruments or equipment for technical examination. The rationale for purchasing specialised scientific equipment such as a Fourier-transform infrared spectrometer (FTIR), an X-ray fluorescence spectrometer (XRF) or even a scanning electron microscope (SEM) is that it is they are versatile instruments that can be used for numerous applications, and having them on hand means more work can be performed quickly and easily.

The benefits of departments housing equipment, which include ease of access and immediacy of results, should be considered against the disadvantages, such as potential difficulties with data analysis, instrument maintenance and technical know-how. Equipment can often require additional maintenance or service costs over a 10 - 12 year maximum lifespan and by itself, a piece of equipment is not a permanent solution to scientific support in a conservation department.

In a similar cost-comparison exercise, the value of one-off projects/science students/instruments versus the costs and benefits of taking on in-house scientists should be used to inform whether an ad-hoc or long-term solution is more cost-effective overall. Beyond the purely economic rationale, opportunities to enhance the reputation or improve professional recognition are also important components of any organisational decision making.

National solutions for equipment - options
In scientific communities, research networks and co-operative research centres that do not require the constant use of large, expensive pieces of equipment share the use amongst the group. This economic rationalisation could equally be applied within the conservation community. Realistically, however, in conservation communities there is a reluctance to do so. When this was discussed as an option for departments and private conservators as a way to purchase laser cleaning and p-XRF equipment during the respective workshops in recent years, the difficulty of managing the arrangement quickly dampened enthusiasm for that solution.

There is very little large or small scale scientific equipment that cannot be hired, rented or accessed on an as-needs basis. Forward planning is necessary to make financial provision for that need as it arises throughout the year but adequate planning could ensure that needs are met as they arise.

National solutions for a skills base - options
For a conservation profession the size of that in Australia, a distributed network of scientists, who specialise in a particular technique or area and are familiar with conservation research questions, could be centrally co-ordinated and managed. The arrangement of a distributed network would allow for the geographical spread of conservation departments. Skilled professionals could be sourced and trained as the facility developed. The primary issue of funding still remains, and perhaps more importantly the driving force to establish something substantial of that scale. Discussions with many conservators have identified this as an ideal situation, but it is hard to imagine that there would ever be a national conservation science centre without an individual driver. Activities such as this require a fully committed person to champion the cause.
An option on an intermediate scale is to create increased opportunity for scientific research within major institutions. If the current financial pressures on conservation budgets do not allow for expansion of departments to include significant scientific activity, then the self-evident outcome is that it is not valued sufficiently to warrant its inclusion. If science is a priority for conservators, in the same resource category as equipment, training and consumables, then it must be communicated effectively from conservators to conservation managers to senior management who apportion the institutional funding.

So in summary,

1. Acknowledgement of the fundamental importance of science to conservation exists on a range of levels. International institutions all include science in their programs as much as possible and individual conservators rely on it whenever they can – whether undertaking research or analysis themselves or in collaboration with scientists.

2. For the development of conservation science as a profession to support the recognised need by conservators, there needs to be a transition from the current situation where access to scientific support is difficult and hampered by a lack of resources to facilitate the engagement of scientists.

3. Whatever the scale of the solution – on an as needs basis or a national facility to provide scientific support for conservation – the solution requires the input of financial resources and personal engagement. The long-term challenge is for individuals at all levels to personally take the responsibility for driving the structure towards a new direction for the ongoing benefit of conservation and the preservation of material heritage.

About the author
Deborah Lau received a Bachelor of Applied Science (Applied Biology) and Masters in Analytical Chemistry from RMIT, Melbourne. She was a Conservation Scientist at the NGV from 1991 to 1993 and currently works at CSIRO Division of Materials Science and Engineering, Clayton, as the leader of the Cultural Heritage Project and leader of the Surface Coating and Characterisation Group. Her key interests involve non-destructive and micro/nano-analytical methodologies using a wide variety of x-ray and spectroscopic characterisation approaches. She is actively engaged in implementing strategies to improve the efficiency of examining large data sets. Her PhD thesis on the Raman Spectroscopy of artists’ materials is in its final stages of completion. She is the convenor of the AICCM Conservation Science Special Interest Group and has an ongoing interest in developing the field of conservation science in Australia.

15. The Impact of Richard Wolbers
Gillian Osmond

Introduction
Richard Wolbers came to prominence in the paintings conservation scene in the late 1980s, generating huge interest around the world with an innovative approach to cleaning painted surfaces. Applying skills and knowledge from his background in biochemistry, Wolbers exploited the potential of water and used a range of chemicals adapted from other fields to construct cleaning systems tailored to specific surface and soil conditions.

Assisted by generous Getty sponsorship, a series of international workshops was held in Los Angeles to facilitate dissemination of Wolbers’ work. In 1990, conservators from Australia and New Zealand were given an opportunity to learn first-hand from Wolbers at a locally organised workshop, also sponsored by the Getty and supported by the National Gallery of Victoria. This was due to the efforts of John Payne, who had attended one of the original programs and became committed to enabling others in Australia to share the experience. Participants, of which I was fortunate to be one, spent a memorable and inspiring two weeks with Wolbers in Melbourne, where we were introduced to his new methods in the cleaning of paintings.

The early years
The year following the Melbourne workshop witnessed a flurry of activity as conservators attempted to apply and analyse the information covered. Most of us would test various cleaning formulations for varnish removal, enjoy the sensation of working with gelled materials, and experience some success with removing previously difficult materials such as oil based overpaint. There was heightened interest in microscopic examination of paint cross-sections and experimentation/frustration with using reactive fluorescent stains for characterising layers within a sample. However even with relatively limited success, the very act of focusing on cross-sections and trying to make sense of the information they contain added to our understanding of painting structures and encouraged us to consider the unique and complex nature of each painting. Coinciding with the burgeoning interest and research into nineteenth-century painting techniques and technical art history more generally, cross-sections and ultraviolet fluorescence microscopy as tools to assist in interpretation became widely used.
Wolbers’ Australian workshop inspired many contributions to the 1991 AICCM Paintings Group Symposium, collectively published in the AICCM Bulletin of that year.² This document serves as a record both of the hope invested in the potential benefits of the new methods, but also in the inevitable difficulties and frustrations which emerge when applying any new technology – where practice is rarely as straightforward as theory.

Wolbers’ approach to cleaning is logical but also complex, and assumes a reasonable comprehension of the underlying chemistry. His intention has only ever been for conservators to intelligently apply his methodology to the specific circumstances presented in a given cleaning project – and not to proceed where an approach is clearly inappropriate. This is so different from how we would assess the suitability of any other conservation intervention. What is different, however, is the large variety of unfamiliar chemicals which he has introduced to the profession to achieve particular properties in a cleaning formulation – with attendant uncertainty about their interactions with original materials. There is also relatively little published by Wolbers himself to serve as a comprehensive reference; even following the release of his own book,³ the primary sources of information are a few published case studies, workshop handouts and the notes of participants attempting to interpret content. In these circumstances it is unsurprising that people have attempted to condense Wolbers’ work into a series of recipes, with scope for confusion and ill-informed application.

Wolbers’ work has sparked substantial controversy within the profession. Along with genuine and valid concerns for potential risks associated with his techniques there has been a fair dose of drama heightened by studies of inappropriate applications. The conservation of collections will always rely on the practitioner having the necessary knowledge, skills and judgement to not act irresponsibly. To those of us fortunate enough to have participated in one of Wolbers’ workshops, it sometimes seemed that critics were so focused on potential risks that advantages offered by the new cleaning methods were overlooked. Wolbers’ matter-of-fact approach to cleaning may also have been perceived as a challenge to the prevailing methods for varnish removal widely practised among the profession. These typically relied on increasing polarity within a limited series of solvent mixtures to tackle intractable surface coatings. There is no question that such methods also have the potential to damage underlying surfaces and are not sufficiently selective in activity to take advantage of the specific conditions which may be present within individual paintings.

Doubt and even hostility towards Wolbers was apparent by the 1990 IIC Congress in Brussels. While successful applications of Wolbers’ methods were detailed,⁴ the dominant tone of debate witnessed by those attending was negative.⁵ This seemed unfortunate given the hopes expressed specifically for the Brussels meeting and the broader potential of Wolbers’ cleaning innovations by Gerry Hedley the previous year. Applicants to the 1989 Wolbers’ workshop in London had identified a lack of control in cleaning as one of the primary limitations of “conventional” cleaning methods. In his opening address to the workshop Hedley stated that “This willingness to admit to a lack of control is not widespread in our field. One would search high and low through the official publications to find explicit reference to such a difficulty in the controversy ridden field of cleaning. Yet all practitioners know it to be true…”⁶ Hedley recognised that Wolbers’ work opened the way for greater understanding and control of cleaning processes,⁷ Possibly the most encouraging feature of these new cleaning formulations is the interest they have raised among conservation scientists. The processes of cleaning are at long last exciting the kind of study which they so desperately need”⁸

Hedley was under no illusion about the complexity and uncertainties surrounding Wolbers’ techniques, and the need for “a great deal of fundamental work”⁹ to take place. However, he concluded that “for the first time since I entered painting conservation I feel that there is reason to be optimistic about the future of the science of cleaning and, consequently, optimistic too about the maturity with which the profession can address the cleaning controversy”⁸

One can only imagine how differently the debate surrounding Wolbers’ cleaning innovations might have taken shape if Gerry Hedley had not so suddenly and prematurely died just weeks prior to the Brussels Congress in a mountain climbing accident. Coincidentally his death occurred during the Wolbers’ workshop in Melbourne, making the event seem all the more shocking and poignant for those of us present.

The Australian experience
The impact of Wolbers’ work in Australia following his Melbourne workshop includes a personal highlight in my own professional development. With encouragement from Wolbers, I approached the Tate Gallery in London with a research proposal to evaluate the reliability and sensitivity of two fluorochromes advocated for use in the examination of paint cross sections.⁸ Although the research ultimately detoured from its intended path, I attribute this experience and the benefit I gained to the high level of interest in Wolbers’ work at the time.⁹
Also in Australia Bruce Ford & Allan Byrne published a paper detailing the results of their research: “The Lipid Stripping Potential of Resin Soap Gels Used for Cleaning Oil Paintings”, joining the ranks of conservators and scientists internationally attempting to clarify some of the implications of applying Wolbers’ cleaning methods. Increasingly, this research focused on the potential for non-volatile residues to remain following cleaning with gelled formulations. Extensive literature reviews on this subject have been undertaken by others, so will not be repeated here. The Getty Conservation Institute has also published a book which addresses the “residue question” as part of their Research in Conservation series. Needless to say, uncertainty and the risk of residues have deterred many from wider application of Wolbers’ cleaning methods. This has been confirmed locally by a recent survey completed by members of the AICCM Paintings Special Interest Group, circulated in preparation for this paper. Other reasons given by respondents for not using Wolbers’ cleaning methods include difficulty in obtaining materials, uncertainties arising from the complexity of formulations and sensitivities of original surfaces.

However, others in Australia have found applications for Wolbers’ methods. Not long after the 1990 workshop, Jo Shea, then a Foundation Conservator at the National Gallery of Victoria, successfully used a solvent gel to remove an insoluble polyurethane varnish from an early Arthur Streeton painting. The painting was unexhibitable prior to cleaning: “nobody knew what the picture actually looked like under all the coating and overpaint”. Treatment was painstaking, undertaken entirely under magnification, and the application of the gel carefully timed and monitored. The gel was “only left on long enough for the top layers to soften and wrinkle enough that it could then be “pushed” away mechanically. The rest could be cleared by solvent”. Shea spent a week cleaning the painting in public with a TV camera set up so that visitors could watch what she was doing on a screen. She recalls how previously no reference to removal of polyurethane coatings from paintings could be found in published literature. “It is amazing that because of his work we are able to remove virtually insoluble varnish from a more delicate/ more soluble paint surface; without the Wolbers technology this painting would definitely not have been able to be resurrected”.

This treatment led the way for others at the NGV and elsewhere in Australia where paintings had unfortunately been varnished with polyurethane or similarly cross-linked polymer coatings. Solvent gels and water based formulations have also been used to tackle different cleaning challenges when other more “conventional” methods have failed. Circumstances listed by survey respondents include removal of otherwise insoluble overpaint or coatings, intractable dirt or disfiguring materials remaining following conventional varnish removal, and water-sensitive or physically vulnerable surfaces where gelled cleaning methods were considered to be more gentle. Textured surfaces, discrete accretions requiring highly controlled application of cleaning reagent, and the quest for the lowest possible toxicity in cleaning formulations were other instances where Wolbers’ methods have proved advantageous. Removing overpaint from gilded frames has been another area of application.

A number of survey respondents described the philosophy or approach advocated by Wolbers as having had the most significant influence on their work, rather than the new materials per se. Giving us “tools” to characterise the layers and surface conditions involved, and then logically designing a cleaning system appropriate to those conditions has enabled a shift away from more standardised approaches. Our awareness of the potential impact of conservation treatments on original surfaces also continues to increase.

The future

Wolbers has continued to innovate throughout his career, and those of us fortunate enough to attend his most recent workshops in Brisbane in 2008 were introduced to ever more interesting methods for tailoring and controlling cleaning. “Solid” state gels promise even greater capacity for containing the application of a cleaning reagent – whether solvent or water based. And the preparation of emulsions for cleaning has become more feasible with the development of polymers which replace the role of surfactants in previous formulations and thereby substantially reduce the risk of residues. All treatments aim to recover a surface which is not just aesthetically pleasing but which is in the most chemically stable condition possible.

Another key difference in the workshops of 1990 and 2008 was the different tools demonstrated for characterising surface conditions. The 1990 workshop was held over two weeks and included a large component of fluorescence microscopy. This aspect of the workshop was subsequently discontinued following feedback from workshop participants who did not have routine access to a microscope. Current workshops make use of initial surface conductivity and pH measurements to guide the preparation of appropriate surface cleaning options.

The high profile focus on potential residues arising from gelled cleaning methods has led Wolbers to better define the conditions which contribute to their deposition, enabling formulations to be refined to minimise risk. There are now also more fully developed and logical guidelines for clearance.
Conclusion
There is no doubt that Wolbers’ new cleaning methods are complex in comparison with the limited range of conventional solvent mixes. Workshop participants benefit from Wolbers’ comprehensive knowledge, thoughtful and logical approach and his ability to give clear explanations of complex chemistry. We also benefit from his rare capacity for combining the theoretical with extensive practical experience – indeed all of his innovations have arisen from the need to solve a specific cleaning challenge – his is a world where anything seems possible. However, as expressed in the Getty’s research publication, in the hands of most of us “…the infinite flexibility of the gel cleaning systems can be rather intimidating.” The authors advocated for “…a methodology or decision making tool that would simplify the process of developing an efficient cleaning strategy for a given cleaning problem and reduce the number of tests needed to arrive at an optimum gel formulation”.17 Responding to this need, The Modular Cleaning Program (MCP) was developed by Chris Stavroudis, a paintings conservator in private practice in Los Angeles, with the cooperation and support of Wolbers. The MCP is a computerised database which coordinates the mixing and testing of stock preparations based on physical constants. It aims to assist the conservator to efficiently test a large range of mixtures and thereby facilitate “more delicate and sensitive cleanings”.18 Stavroudis makes the MCP freely available to professional conservators with the understanding that its use assumes familiarity with Wolbers’ work and his theoretical concepts.

It is also important to understand that Wolbers’ ideas are constantly evolving, and his formulations being refined to take advantage of ongoing research and technological developments in fields beyond our own. Communication remains one of the major challenges for the conservation community; information is currently only reliably sourced through workshop participation, making it difficult for even the most committed practitioner to keep up. However, Wolbers is a gifted teacher. Through his workshops and university lecturing he continues to inspire and contribute generously to the conservation profession. Just as previous decades witnessed profound changes in approach to structural interventions, Wolbers’ work has led to new ways of defining and solving the challenges of cleaning paintings.

Acknowledgments
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Abstract
Richard Wolbers emerged on the paintings conservation scene in the late 1980s with an innovative approach to defining and solving the challenges of cleaning painted surfaces. The impact on Australian conservators following a 1990 workshop with Wolbers is examined. Research projects inspired by his visit, cleaning case studies made possible by his innovations, and the widespread controversy and concern over the clearance of cleaning residues are discussed. Responses to a survey on the subject distributed among members of the AICCM Paintings Group are also reported. Reference is made to Wolbers’ ongoing contribution to the field of conservation and his ever-evolving approaches to cleaning painted surfaces.

About the author
Gillian Osmond is Conservator, Paintings at the Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art. She is fortunate to have attended 3 workshops on the topic of Wolbers’ cleaning methods, at the Courtauld Institute, London 1989, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne 1990 and Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane 2008.
6. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.

Fig. 1. Attendees of the 1990 Wolbers workshop, held at the National Gallery of Victoria. Standing, from left to right: John Harper, Bruce Ford, Therese Mulford, Merv Hutchinson, Allan Byrne, Tim Dixon, Stewart Laidler, James Martin, John Hook, Chris Adams, John Payne. Seated, from left to right: David Murchison, Linda Waters, Erica Burgess, Gillian Osmond, Richard Wolbers.

Fig. 2. Attendees of the 2008 Wolbers workshop, held at the Queensland Art Gallery, August 2008. Standing, from left to right: Anne Carter, Sharon Alcock, Lisa Nolan, Melanie Carlyle, Ingrid Ford, Michelle Wassell, Paula Drudge, Helen Gill, Michael Varcoe-Cocks, David Wise. Seated, from left to right: Adam Godjin, Alex Ellen, Gillian Osmond, Rays Collins, Julia Sharp, Maria Kubik, Richard Wolbers.
Introduction
The work programme of an exhibitions conservator is focused solely on exhibition-related tasks and involves working across all media groups. While considering this definition, I recently rang colleagues in other State art galleries around the country and in New Zealand to ascertain how many conservators might be working in this speciality. I knew of the existence of one and a half exhibitions conservation positions – Alan Lloyd combines the position with Head of Conservation duties at the Art Gallery of NSW, and the National Gallery of Australia has had a contract position since about 2000. It is probably not coincidental that these two institutions come closest to the National Gallery of Victoria in the number of exhibitions staged per year. Beyond these positions and those at the NGV, I could find no others. In both cases though, much of the work is still shared with the other specialist sections. Everywhere else I got the same response, “No, we haven’t got a dedicated exhibitions position. We’d love one. There’s no money.”

Getting Started
In 1993, the Conservation Department at the NGV consisted of the Head of Conservation, specialist conservators caring for the paper, painting and object collections, and a framer and two technical assistants. Planning and preparation of artworks for exhibition or loan was shared between the conservators depending on material type. Paintings were prepared or received by the paintings conservation section, the works on paper by the paper conservator and so on.

As is common within the profession world-wide, a large proportion of the Department’s work was dictated by the exhibition and loan schedules. For a lot of conservators, this was felt to be at the expense of engagement with artworks in the permanent collections. Time for collection management activities such as condition surveys and preventive maintenance, complex treatments and research into materials and techniques was reduced to fit around the servicing of exhibitions and loans. In particular, receiving and dispatching exhibitions of non-NGV owned artwork took time away from working on collection material. Preparation of in-house exhibitions or outward loans at least meant that collection items were being worked on, although the selection of collection items was prioritised by loan request. Each exhibition could impact on the workload of one...
Exhibitions Conservation: A Proposal

My argument, as I neared the end of a three year painting conservation internship, was that a conservator dedicated to exhibition work would release the other conservators for more collection based activities. The position could be defined by function rather than material speciality. The conservator would work as a generalist across all media groups in a mixed fine art collection and as a specialist in exhibition management. Focus would be on travelling exhibitions and those containing non-NGV owned artworks. In-house exhibitions and outward loans from the collections would be left in the care of the relevant material specialist conservator. As a paintings conservator, transition to exhibitions conservator would be made easier due to the trend in the early 1990s for painting-based travelling shows.

Generic procedures relating to exhibitions and loans would be streamlined under one position regardless of material type. This would include management activities such as forward planning timetables and budgets for conservation input into all the exhibitions, attending project meetings, liaising with individual curators over exhibition content and with lenders over environmental conditions. It would also involve preparation of artworks for exhibition, assessing condition and treatment needs, undertaking minor treatments or out-sourcing as necessary, organising photography, backing boards or display stands, condition reporting, advising on display materials and techniques, packing and so forth.

The year before (1992) I had made a start, developing a “ready reckoner”. This was a system for calculating the materials, time and costs required for various levels of preparation of paintings and works on paper for exhibition. It was designed during preparation for a Hugh Ramsay exhibition and presented at the 1995 AICCM Paintings Special Interest Group Symposium, held at Lorne as "a method of costing the conservation component of a painting exhibition”. Its success was demonstrated in its use by curators calculating time and costs when developing exhibitions for some years afterwards.

Exhibitions Conservation

The exhibitions conservation position was duly created, financed not by the Gallery’s salary budget, but by a combination of exhibition gate receipts and a small fund administered by the Trustees. It became what is now one of six specialist sections within the Department, and the only one defined by function rather than material speciality. While a valued position, it took ten one-year contracts before I was made a permanent, payroll enrolled staff member. In addition, a small annual operating budget of $12,000 - $15,000 was established for materials and contract staff as required. This budget was subsumed into the general Conservation materials budget in 1999 at the time the Gallery closed for renovation, and individual exhibition budgets have been made available through the Exhibition Management Department for costs specific to each project.

In 2003 a second staff member was employed, doubling the size of the section. This reflected the changing nature of the exhibition programme which in ten years had, on average, tripled both in number of artworks per exhibition and frequency of exhibitions per year.

In 2007 the section expanded temporarily to three staff when a short-term, full-time contract position commenced which will run until January 2010. This contract position is funded through the Gallery’s Strategic Projects in the 2006-2009 Business Plan, linked to Travelling Exhibitions and the Melbourne Winter Masterpiece projects.

So, fifteen years on, has the Exhibitions section allowed the Painting, Frames and Furniture, Textiles, Objects, Paper and Photographic sections to be less driven by the exhibition programmes? Well, yes, but with emphasis on “less driven, not “We’ve completely freed them up to do other stuff”. Doing much more would require re-examining the structure of the Department and the roles of the specialist sections, but more on that in a moment.

Inward Loans and Exhibitions

Taking over the management of non-NGV owned artwork was straightforward. Today this includes one-off or small groups of loans, brought in to augment collection-based shows or permanent displays, and approximately thirty five exhibitions a year. The three staff manage an average of twelve exhibitions each at any one time, in varying stages of planning. They also assist each other particularly during heavy hands-on installation and de-installation periods. This is a considerable workload to divert away from the rest of the department. It also removes any work done in relation to non-NGV artwork from the work programmes of the other conservators. As a result, other sections only undertake exhibition-related tasks on collection items.

Administratively, non-NGV owned artworks are straightforward to manage. They arrive with loan agreements, get moved about by the Registration Department and
are uniquely identified in the system. As non-collection items, they are assigned to non-collection based conservators. They even come with a catchy mantra, “If we don’t own it, it goes to Exhibitions Conservation.”

Project Management
It is a common misconception that exhibitions work equates to condition reporting. In fact it is project management. The exhibitions conservator brings conservation expertise to individual exhibition project teams made up of colleagues from departments across the Gallery and external “stakeholders” such as institutional and private lenders and artists. Where other sections focus on the collections, this is an outward-facing section with a highly developed sense of the roles played by different departments within exhibition projects. Work practises are adjusted to anticipate and facilitate others’ tasks.

From the first, I developed a strong relationship with the Registration Department. As they administer the loan paperwork, this department compiles the confirmed exhibition contents list. As well as the main exhibition project teams, I joined smaller project teams with Registration, Exhibition Design, Lighting and Building Services (carpenters), the other departments that physically receive, display and dispatch the artwork. Here we liaised over timetabling tasks and I instigated procedures in relation to conservation involvement. For example, the Registrar would have privately-owned artworks brought in early and at a convenient time in my schedule. Unlike loans from institutions, they would not necessarily have been prepared for display, might require some treatment, and would also require a condition report. Sadly as storage space has become less available, and insurance expensive, Registration no longer brings in artwork in advance, except for specific requests. Ways in which I reciprocated included prioritising condition reporting in packing order or by finishing preparation in good time for an artwork to be photographed for catalogue deadlines. During this period I also assisted in developing the generic timeline of procedures for the Gallery’s exhibition project template.

Additional Benefits - the one-stop shop
Apart from alleviating workloads within the Department (remember the thirty-five exhibitions a year) other significant benefits have been achieved by gathering common tasks into one section. Experience and expertise in exhibition-related administration such as working with project budgets, contracts, facilities reports and loan agreements and in anticipating and dealing with issues relating to other members of each project team are pooled in one area. General trends become clear, enabling formation of supporting policy and procedure. Fifteen years of reading loan contracts from lenders all over the world has resulted in a useful overall view of “international standards” in requested lux and UV levels, relative humidity and temperature parameters, wet/dry sprinkler systems, use of vitrines and so on. Fifteen years has also refined the contents of my tools and equipment trolley so that it is rare not to have what is needed at hand.

For loaned material, the Exhibitions section has become a one-stop-shop for external departments, providing a single contact point. This centralisation of certain functions results in those working outside the Department hearing a consistent voice.

However, we have yet to achieve consistency of process in relation to all loans and exhibitions at the NGV. While Exhibitions conservation has streamlined and prescribed procedures in relation to loaned artworks, NGV-owned artworks are still administered across five material specialist sections. Inevitably each section, focused on their specialist collections, request slight variations in procedural detail.

Bringing administration of all loan and exhibition procedures under one section, with different policies and procedures depending on whether loaned or owned, is possible and worth pursuing. Within the Department, this would result in the most effective time management, freeing up maximum time for non-exhibition driven programming. Externally it would result in the reduction of mixed messages and unnecessary variation of procedures.

The Future – Loaned and Owned
Exhibition conservation’s involvement with the institution’s own collections, managing the outward loans and assisting in the preparation of in-house or collection-sourced exhibitions is less straightforward. These collections require more negotiation than borrowed artworks as they sit within the Gallery’s collections and are thus already under the care of the specialist conservators who may have a strong sense of ownership over artworks and related decision making.

The following questions and issues are ones that should be considered and dealt with. Can core collection procedures and functions, such as stabilisation of an artwork or display or packing decisions, be handled by those outside the specialist section? Ambivalence arises as every activity means an engagement with the collection – does sharing these activities result in the specialist section being distanced from the artwork? And how awkward is it to be making decisions across collections under another’s care? The exhibitions conservation section has
been involved with NGV outward loans in the past. Examining this experience, it becomes clear that there are ways to make co-management possible.

Outward Loans
For the first ten years, outward painting loans from the NGV collections were also administered by this section, as the incumbent's area of training was in paintings. At the time this represented the bulk of all loans going out, due to the popularity of the paintings collection and to the large "Loans to Government Departments" programme which involves lending paintings to government offices and Government House. As the annual number of loan exhibitions doubled, then tripled however, the workload grew too great for one, and later two exhibitions conservators, leading to administration of the paintings loans being returned to the paintings section.

This early attempt to take on part of the NGV collection-care raised an interesting dilemma. Rather than a feeling of usurped ownership on the part of the paintings section, they were only too delighted to devolve the work. It was the exhibitions conservator who experienced a sense of unease about treading on someone else's turf. When do you mention, or not mention, to someone that you have made a tricky packing or treatment decision about an artwork in their care? This illustrated the necessity of anticipating and working out some of the finer detail in advance.

In the meantime, the NGV entered a redevelopment phase closing in 2000 to reopen in 2003, after evolving from one building into two display buildings and one off-site store. As work loads grew for everyone, devolving loans to the Exhibitions section started to look appealing. Not every section wanted to relinquish these tasks however. The "almost but not quite" complete transfer of these functions to one section would have resulted in less rather than more clarity for installation and registration administration, and I decided to leave the work divided as it was.

The unease on my part and reluctance on another's would have been alleviated by accompanying the changes with clearer ownership and support of the new procedures. Conservators who undertake the conservation of artworks in a particular media, with all their infinite variations, feel custodial towards the specific collections in their care. If functions such as preparation of loans and exhibitions are prescribed in detail, then the activity is less about giving someone else decision making powers over "your" artworks, and more about delegating agreed upon procedural tasks. I was worrying unnecessarily that the Paintings section might lose the "overall view" of their collections, while in fact, they were comfortable with my involvement. Reliability and predictability allay anxiety, and coupled with the assurance that unusual or specific requirements will be communicated or caught, we are on the way to achieving the desired transfer of workload, consistent voice and that one-stop shop.

In-house exhibitions
The processes and procedures for exhibition management are now well established at the NGV. Adaptation of these for "in-house" use should not be problematic. Similar tasks are required. Exhibition lists could be co-ordinated and condition surveys of the artworks undertaken by exhibitions staff. Project meetings, installation, design and registration issues managed. As with outward loans, the material specialist conservators would be called on to provide input when necessary in assessing the need for more complex treatments and the possibility of these fitting into their workflows. They remain a valuable source of information and technical skills in relation to specific artworks.

It is worth highlighting a significant "treatment" issue here. It is difficult for exhibition conservators to maintain hands-on skills when treatments are sporadic. These are usually of a "field-hospital" type undertaken on loaned artworks, often with a courier watching on anxiously. Due to the number of artworks in an average exhibition, if the treatment time is estimated to be over two or three hours, the work is generally outsourced to the other sections if possible, or contracted outside. It is easy to prioritise conferences and workshops and the like for "bench" conservators but equally critical that the exhibition conservators remain current in their work practices.

Resourcing
With adequate resourcing, it should be possible to add administration of NGV outward loans and in-house exhibitions to the exhibitions conservation oeuvre. Staff ceilings are fixed - if we are lucky and cuts are avoided. More and more reliance on short-term contracts rather than ongoing positions makes any restructuring of tasks difficult. Core departmental programming needs to be serviced by permanent staff to ensure predictable ongoing resourcing of those programmes. With current staffing levels, the outward loans programme could be serviced by the exhibition section. We haven't taken this step as we cannot assume that our third contract position will be renewed after the January 2010 expiry date. Accepting then returning this workload back to the other sections as a result of that contract ending would disrupt their new work programmes and cause real confusion to other departments. Adding in-house related workloads...
would definitely require more staff. Despite the streamlining made possible by consolidating “like” functions – the exhibition programmes are just too large.

**A New Structure**

With gains in time achieved by consolidating procedures, we can transfer more of the exhibition-related workload to the exhibition section without hiring more staff, but it has become clear that what we will achieve is a reduction rather than a complete removal of these functions from the other sections. It is managing these across sections that becomes interesting.

The exhibitions section could undertake the administration of all loans and exhibitions and co-ordinate a reduced level of involvement by conservators in the other sections. In doing this it is important to avoid “cherry picking” the interesting tasks. If management activities such as time-tabling, resourcing, networking etc, are removed, there is the danger that non-exhibition conservation staff are left with what they may feel is the “boring condition-reporting” and tasks are boring if disconnected and repetitive and all decision making has been removed. This gives condition-reporting a bad name when it can be a fascinating study of materials and techniques. The challenge is to offer involvement in the exhibition project as a whole, and avoiding dissatisfaction due to distraction from preferred research and treatment. Acceptance of a more manageable (but not boring) level of involvement in the exhibitions programmes could mitigate this problem.

Materials specialist conservators should view participation in exhibition and loans related activities more positively. Rather than resented because it detracts from in-depth treatments, this focus can be considered as part of the holistic approach to the artwork and its reason for being in the collection. Conservators conserve and restore artwork in an attempt to preserve it for future generations to enjoy – on display! It is applied conservation. Practically, it is a chance to gain project-management skills. If working on an exhibition containing material outside your area of specialisation, it is an opportunity to broaden skill bases and competencies, and this helps to develop a mature and multi skilled conservator. It is value adding.

**Conclusion**

Initially the creation of the exhibitions position achieved what it set out to do. By taking over management of the busy schedule of exhibitions containing non-NGV owned artwork, the work loads of the other conservators were freed up for other tasks. In addition to benefiting the Department, there were also benefits for the Gallery as a whole with the conservation input into exhibition management becoming structured, streamlined and easy to interact with. Having spent fifteen years working on NGV, regional, interstate and international exhibitions, it has become clear to me that this is also a complex conservation specialisation in its own right.

Gradually, however, the number of in-house exhibitions and permanent-collection changeovers has grown. The opening of a second display building did not coincide with an increase in staffing levels, and the work programmes of the material specialist conservators have again become dominated by exhibition related work.

Ironically, as I am speaking to the Paintings Special Interest Group, it is the painting section that is least run by the exhibition imperative, although loans remain significant. At the NGV it is the sections containing light-sensitive artworks such as textiles, paper, photography, as well as some furniture and objects that would most benefit from expanded involvement with the exhibitions section. With limited exposure times, they are caught in a cycle of surveying and preparation of work for rotating exhibitions and change-overs.

These exhibitions and changeovers are our next focus. Most of the procedures developed for loan exhibitions would apply. The limiting factor is staffing. The challenge is developing procedures for utilising existing departmental staff effectively. In a modest way we are about to trial job-sharing across the Photographic/Exhibitions and Exhibitions/Textile sections using staff that have had experience working as Exhibitions conservators. Hopefully in future there will be an opportunity to report back on further developments.

**Abstract**

In 1993 I left the Paintings Conservation section of the National Gallery of Victoria to establish a specialist exhibitions conservation position within the Conservation Department. After fifteen years it is useful to look back critically at the development of this position. Over this period Exhibition Conservation has evolved into a specialist section within the Department and a conservation specialisation in its own right. This paper outlines the history and context of this development. It discusses issues that have been raised and resolved, further developments that could be made in Exhibitions Conservation and why they should be considered.
About the author
Catherine Earley completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts at the Caulfield Institute of Technology and a Bachelor of Applied Science (Conservation of Cultural Materials) at the University of Canberra. She joined the Conservation Department of the National Gallery of Victoria as an Art Foundation of Victoria Conservator for Paintings from 1991 to 1993. In 1993 she formed what is now the Exhibition Conservation section which she continues to head as Senior Conservator for Exhibitions.

17. Unique Australian Conservation Inventions Associated with Touring Exhibitions
Alan Lloyd

In addition to being Head of Conservation at the Art Gallery of NSW, I have also been the Exhibitions Conservator. As a consequence, I have been responsible for the conservation aspects of exhibitions mounted in-house, as well as those sourced nationally and internationally, for more than forty years. Because of this, I have most probably experienced all of the possible variants associated with travelling exhibitions. From this experience I have identified some distinctly Australian inventions, which should be recorded as part of our conservation history.

Standard frames for works of art on paper
I worked with specialist Paper Conservator, Roy Graf, who had previously been at the British Museum, at the Biblioteca Nazionale in Florence in early 1970. When Graf’s contract finished in Florence later that year, he joined the staff of the AGNSW as specialist Paper Conservator. Roy Graf introduced the British Museum’s system of using six standard mount sizes for mounting art on paper for the AGNSW collection. Standard frames were built to be used in conjunction with them and the collection was also stored in standard-size Solander boxes. This in turn led to using standard-size packing crates which could be reused. The merits of this system were soon realised by other art institutions throughout Australia, and to the best of my knowledge was adopted nationally. This has even developed further to the point where in many cases we all use the same standard frame supplier. Consequently, there is uniformity in appearance due to the fact that the same wood is used for the frames, so an exhibition sourced from a number of Galleries is uniform in appearance and easy to pack. This uniform practice is unique to Australia.

T.E.D packing crates
Over the years I have found it an invaluable experience to be a courier as you get to observe every possible scenario associated with moving art in transit. You see the good and bad aspects of packing crate design and the resulting effects of their transport. Herein lies a story.

Being the Exhibitions Conservator, I was required to fly to Tokyo in February 1986 to courier an exhibition from the Guggenheim Museum which had been on display there and was then going to the AGNSW. It was snowing at the
airport. The packing crates were to be shipped in standard metal units instead of on pallets. When they arrived, water had to be tipped out before loading! The Guggenheim packing crates were the standard type of crate which had flat plywood sides with a raised external frame on all sides. They were unpainted. On arrival in Sydney, the top recess of each crate was full of water - the result of condensation on the internal metal skin of the airline container; in addition there was water again in the base of the container.

The AGNSW used a company originally called Touring Exhibition and Design, now known as T.E.D, to make packing crates. As Exhibitions Conservator, I regularly worked with Edward Parfenovics of T.E.D. I told him about the condensation problem and asked that in the future he might fill the top recesses of crates with polystyrene and put an external skin of plywood on top. This would prevent water from collecting and also provide insulation to the crates, based on the principle of the "Esky" portable drinks cooler. Edward's reply to that was, "What a good idea, but why not take it further and fill all sides?" - which he did. He said that doing this would add the following advantages but not add much additional weight:

1. It would be much stronger and give better protection against puncturing of the panels.
2. The polystyrene and extra plywood would give much better thermal insulation. This is a very important factor considering that sometimes artworks were trans-shipped for up to three days across the world. The artwork would be sealed in accepted museum environment when packed. If there were any environmental change outside the crate the foam would act as a buffer, thereby providing further protection for the artwork.
3. The crates would be painted and this would seal the timber and make it waterproof.
4. The painted smooth crate would distinguish it from normal packing crates in a bulk-handling situation, such as in an airport freight terminal.

The fact that the crate looked "special" would psychologically create more respect from the crate handlers due to its superior appearance to other crates. He chose the distinctive yellow colour because he said that the crates would be easily identified in a mass crate situation during transit. Later, as a courier, I have observed that both of these aspects have proven to be an advantage. This has particularly become more necessary since September 11th, 2001, as couriers are no longer allowed on airport tarmacs so have to observe the movement of their crates at a distance from the terminal.

The next innovation by Edward was the use of flush sprung-recessed case handle, which were adapted from those used on musicians' metal-lined road-crates. The previously used protruding handles tended to catch when other crates were slid next to them in the back of trucks and containers. A further innovation by Edward was his recessed-lid closure plates. These were flush and were fitted with a bolt with an "Allen slot" which gave added security, because a specific size Allen key or electric drill-bit was required to open them. Previously a hexagonal head bolt with a protruding head was used, which was a potential security risk due to being able to be removed with a universal shifting-spanner. Bolts were often difficult to remove due to packers previously using ill fitting shifting-spanners that eventually damaged the heads.

Edward then favoured end-loading crates fitted with travelling frames because the paintings were always kept in a vertical position which then reduced the amount of handling required to load or unload paintings from crates.

Ozclips

Ozclips were invented by Cathy Lillico-Thompson. They did in fact evolve from another of her inventions. Cathy studied conservation at the Courtauld Institute and her major project there was the development of a reusable, conservation-packing crate.

When she returned to Australia she met Neil Wilson who started Australia's first specialist art transport company – Austart Services. Neil later merged his company with Grace Bros and became Grace Fine Art Services. Cathy worked with him and developed two packing crates, named FABWELL. The crates were completely moulded from fibreglass and were insulated between the internal and external skin with polystyrene. They also were fitted with rubber seals on the lids. Their conservation properties were excellent. The unfortunate thing was the cost, and perhaps they were too innovative for some. They did not take off. The thing which did evolve in about 1985 was the invention of Ozclips as a means of securing paintings into the Fabwell crates. Originally there were two sizes: The small ones finally went out of production but the big Ozclips have survived and are now extensively used internationally.

Doovers

Edward Parfenovics originally worked for Grace Fine Art Services but then left and established his own rival company, T.E.D. He realised the efficiency of Ozclips but out of principle found it hard to purchase them from his business rival. After carefully studying the properties of Ozclips, he then developed his
own variation, the Doover. The principal advantage the Doover had over the Ozclip was the price, being manufactured from High Density Polyethylene rather than brass. Doovers are still extensively used throughout Australia but to the best of my knowledge have not been marketed overseas.

**Standard travelling condition reports**

By the early 1980s, the number of national and international travelling exhibitions had increased markedly. Related to this were outward loan requests from all art galleries. It became evident that the style and content of individual condition reports varied immensely. One of the major problems was that some were too long-winded and very labour-intensive, particularly when a conservator had to condition-check an exhibition containing, for example, eighty works in two or three days from the moment of unpacking to the exhibition opening.

In 1986, there was an AICCM Annual Conference in Adelaide. Prior to that a Special Interest Group meeting was held in Mintaro, north of Adelaide, to specifically talk about touring exhibitions and the role that conservation played in them. At that seminar it was decided that we would collectively design a standard touring condition report. From memory, Andrew Durham suggested we employ the one used by the Tate Gallery and that we modify it to suit our purposes. After some group discussion, Andrew was given the task of coming up with the final version. What we have today is a version that has evolved from that. Personally, I have used it over the years and have found it to be very efficient and labour saving. Over the years, individuals have developed variants according to how it is used. It would be useful at some stage if all involved with its regular use got together and reviewed it and once more standardised its method of notation.

**About the author**

See Alan Lloyd’s “The Boustead Years 1946-1977”, published in this volume.
1980s, numerous articles and publications on the history of picture frames have been produced, a number of which have had accompanying gallery exhibitions of frames. Naturally, the field of picture frame conservation has developed with this increased focus and interest, and indeed the work undertaken by conservators in the technical examination, documentation and treatment of frames has informed many of the major historical publications on the subject, internationally and in Australia.

**Frame making and conservation**

Frame conservation has its roots in the traditional crafts of frame making and repair, shaped by modern conservation ethics and methodology. Frame conservation is part of the broader conservation field of gilded, polychrome and wooden objects conservation, and has close links to furniture conservation.

Over-riding the field of picture frame conservation is the challenge of conserving objects that still have an active function, providing both protective encasements and visual borders for pictures. In this respect, picture frame conservation is necessarily at the more “interventive end” of the treatment spectrum as far as objects conservation is concerned, as both physical stability and visual integrity are key treatment goals. Consequently, in addition to knowledge of traditional materials and methods of construction, frame conservators benefit from the attainment of a certain level of technical proficiency in traditional frame crafts, to enable the recreation of missing ornament and surfaces. As outlined below, traditional techniques may be adapted for use with synthetic materials to meet reversibility/re-treatability criteria.

A major aspect of work for frame conservation departments involves the manufacture of reproduction frames. With the prevalence of reframing in the past, there are many pictures in gallery collections housed in frames that are now considered inappropriate, both historically and aesthetically. At the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV), much effort goes into reinstating the original presentation of pictures, through the manufacture of historically accurate frames. This is a cooperative process between conservator, frame maker and curator. We have found that the best results are achieved when an appropriate prototype frame is identified that can be copied in its entirety, or otherwise several prototypes that each provide details for different aspects of the frame, such as ornament or surface finish. The conservator brings to the process the skills of technical examination and documentation, as well as an exacting eye to the accuracy of form and finish. Ornate, gilded frames require a very high level of frame making skill to produce a convincing reproduction, and frame making or gilding specialists are often engaged for the major part of this work. To develop and maintain their skills, NGV conservators are encouraged to carry out aspects of frame manufacture, including ornamentation and gilding, and most commonly the final toning and distressing of the newly gilded surfaces, with reference to the actual picture.

**Steps in the development of frames conservation in Australia**

For many years, a number of the state art galleries employed framers, whose role often focussed on the manufacture of frames, in addition to frame repair and the re-housing of paintings. The role of framer continues to be a key position in several institutions. In the late 1980s and 1990s, the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW) and the NGV established specialist frame conservation studios with (eventually) two or more frame conservator positions, plus additional resources for frame making. This change in emphasis from making to conserving demonstrated a growing appreciation of the significance of frames as objects to be valued in their own right. These developments were followed by the first workshop in Australia on the application of modern conservation principles to the treatment of picture frames, and the formation of the Gilded Objects Conservation Special Interest Group (GOCSIG) of the AICCM, both of which occurred in 1996.

The workshop, *The Technology and Conservation of Picture Frames* was presented by Professor Jonathan Thornton of Buffalo State University, USA, and hosted by the AGNSW. The approach and methodology advocated by Professor Thornton, who presented a second workshop in the region, in Wellington, New Zealand, in 2001, has very much shaped the profession here. Thornton has published widely on both traditional craft methods and the use of modern materials in frame conservation. A feature of his approach is the use of synthetic resins, applied in other fields of conservation, for such purposes as barrier layers and as in-gilding media, to allow the removal of restoration additions without further damage to original surfaces.

During the workshop, Malgorzata Sawicki, Head of Frames Conservation at the AGNSW, proposed the formation of an AICCM Special Interest Group (SIG) for gilded objects. After four inspiring days of learning and interaction the workshop participants readily agreed, and Malgorzata was elected first GOCSIG coordinator. Obviously, the coverage of GOCSIG extends beyond picture frames to the wider field of gilded and polychrome objects conservation. In brief, the purpose of GOCSIG is to encourage communication amongst people working in the area, to promote research in the field, and to encourage the highest standards of examination, documentation and treatment of these types of objects. At its inception, picture frame conservation was specified as an area of particular interest for GOCSIG, with one of the aims to...
encourage authenticity in the manufacture of reproduction frames.9

**GOCSIG 1996-2008**

Since 1996, GOCSIG has provided a focus of energy for the development of gilded objects conservation and specifically frames conservation in Australia. In this period, three people have served in the position of GOCSIG co-ordinator, Malgorzata Sawicki from 1996 to 2001, Holly McGowan-Jackson from 2001 until 2007, and most recently, MaryJo Lelyveld, NGV Frames and Furniture Conservator. In the past dozen years there have been seven meetings and symposia with speakers, and two workshops. Topics have included conservation treatment techniques and case studies, documentation methods, research on frame makers, research on historical materials and methods for frames, and other gilded objects, reproduction frame making techniques, and the conservation of furniture finishes. In addition, eight editions of the group’s newsletter, *GOCSIG News*, were produced from 1997-2001 (for a list of titles and authors see Appendix).

The first three meetings, in 1996, 1998 and 1999, were SIG sessions of AICCM National Conferences. One of the most well-attended GOCSIG events to date was the 2000 seminar Compensation of Losses in Gilded Surfaces: In-gilding and In-painting Using Traditional and Modern Materials and Methods, held the day preceding the 50th IIC Congress in Melbourne. The seminar attracted almost 50 participants, including 10 from overseas. In 2002, a stand-alone GOCSIG symposium was held, consisting of a day of presentations, and two half-day workshops on *The Chemical Patination of Schlag Metal on Picture Frames*, with around 30 participants.10 The past three GOCSIG events have been held in conjunction with other SIG groups; in 2004 as part of the Paintings SIG symposium, in 2006 the workshop *Cleaning and Preserving Finishes on Furniture* was held in partnership with the Objects SIG, and of course this year, 2008, the symposium *Frames: past, present and future* precedes the Paintings SIG symposium.9

This is a fine record of activities, especially considering the group’s relatively small size; in 1999 there were approximately 45 members, with this number growing to 65 members in 2006, at which time it had the third smallest membership of AICCM SIGs. As with other small SIGs, there are fewer people to spread the workload of organising and contributing to events and publications, and indeed to attend events, and for this reason there has been a move towards working in conjunction with other SIG groups. One of great strengths of GOCSIG is the way it has encouraged connection, bringing together a diverse group of specialists, from both public and private sectors, including conservators from various fields, framers and frame makers, art historians, artists and students. GOCSIG has encouraged the sharing of knowledge, and provided essential professional development opportunities. Additionally, GOCSIG has raised the profile of gilded objects conservation in the Australian conservation community, and in the wider museum and arts sector.

**Work in the field, research and publications**

Over the last decade or so, conservators and framers have undertaken major work programmes in the conservation and reframing of collections. The on-going work of specialists in the area has contributed to the development of the field, in terms of the development of skills and knowledge, the improvement of work methods and practices, and the education of colleagues and the wider public about frames conservation.

Research and publication in the area include conservation, reframing and frame history topics. Around twenty articles and reports were published in *GOCSIG News*, including the written versions of ten presentations from the first four GOCSIG meetings (see Appendix for listing of titles and authors). *GOCSIG News* helped to keep members in touch and provided a forum for getting specialist information in print. However, it was found that the considerable time required to produce the newsletter could not be sustained given work pressures. In addition, the AICCM National Council requested that SIG information to be published more widely, to a greater AICCM readership. Subsequently, Suzanna Shaw’s paper from the 2002 GOCSIG symposium, on the manufacture and use of gold leaf in Asia, was published in *AICCM National Newsletter* as the lead article.11

Malgorzata Sawicki has been a leading contributor to the field of gilded objects conservation with on-going research and publication, as well as teaching.11 Over the last several years, she has undertaken extensive testing of non-traditional in-gilding techniques, particularly for the compensation of losses in matte water gilding. These studies form the subject of Malgorzata’s PhD research with the University of Western Sydney-Nepean. In 1999, Malgorzata was named AICCM Conservator of the Year in recognition for her contribution to the field. Other papers in recent years include an article co-authored by Holly McGowan-Jackson on the reframing of a nineteenth-century crystoleum, and a paper by Barbara Dabrowa, Conservator-Frames, Art Gallery of NSW, outlining three frame treatment case studies at the Victoria and Albert Museum.12

Frame history studies are vital references for day-to-day frame conservation and reframing work. Publications providing technical data on individual frames, including materials and methods of construction and profile drawings, are
particularly useful. The research and publications to date form a valuable body of knowledge about the history of Australian frames and frames in Australian collections. Paintings and frames conservators have made important contributions in this field, and it is on their work that this paper will focus. In 1997, a significant step forward was the publication of the first book in Australia devoted strictly to frames by Therese Mulford, formerly Paintings Conservator at the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery.13 This was followed in 1999 with release of the first volume of the Melbourne Journal of Technical Studies, dedicated to the topic of frames.14 The journal contains a collection of important articles from leading researchers of the time, including listings of historic frame makers in Sydney, Melbourne and Tasmania. In 2003, the AGNSW conservators Paula Dredge and Malgorzata Sawicki were among the authors of S. A. Parker Framing Works,15 a useful survey of frames by the company S. A. Parker.16 Most recently, in 2007, John Payne, Senior Conservator of Paintings at the NGV, produced the major work Framing the Nineteenth Century: Picture Frames 1837-1935, consisting of 288 pages, lavishly illustrated with colour photographs and line drawings.17 This book has set a new benchmark for frame publications.

There remain many opportunities for conservators to contribute to the area as frames offer a relatively new area of enquiry. Research topics in frames conservation include research into frame materials and methods of construction; factors of deterioration for frames; and materials and techniques used in frames conservation. In terms of frame history studies, further investigations into the work of specific frame makers would be most useful.

Key issues for the future

The provision of training in both frames conservation and traditional frame making crafts is a major issue for the profession. There are no specific training courses in Australia for frames conservation, or for the related areas of gilded and polychrome objects conservation, and furniture conservation. Consequently, there is often a scarcity of appropriately qualified candidates to fill conservator positions. Current personnel working in the area have either received specialized training overseas and/or on-the-job training in addition to qualifications in paintings or objects conservation. A positive step has been the introduction of the subject of frames and furniture conservation to second year objects conservation students in the masters program at the University of Melbourne, consisting of a two-hour laboratory visit and tutorial at the NGV, since 2006. For staff working in the field, professional development opportunities occur infrequently through GOCSIG activities and other specialist courses, or require substantial funds to attend training programs in Europe or the USA.

Of equal concern is that there are only a small number of specialists highly trained in traditional methods of frame construction, ornamentation and finishing, and due to the relatively small commercial demand, this number is becoming fewer and fewer as the years go by. These skills are highly specialised and vital to the continued creation of exquisite, historically accurate reproduction frames with which to enhance pictures in collections throughout the nation.

In putting together this paper, the importance of publication for the development of the profession was highlighted. Obviously, finding time in our busy lives to prepare papers is often a challenge. However, without publication, the progress of the profession is limited. The knowledge and experiences held in the minds of working professionals is incredibly valuable, but this value is increased many-fold when put into print, to be read and considered for years to come. There is still much education to be done in the arts and museum sector, and in the community at large, about the value of picture frames, particularly frames that are original to pictures, and those with original surfaces. Once again, publication can be an effective way of spreading this message.

Conclusion

Over the last dozen years there has been significant developments in the field of frames conservation in Australia. GOCSIG has provided a focus for developments, predominantly in terms of bringing people together for meetings and symposia. Specialists working in the field and related areas have contributed to the growth of the profession in their on-going work, and through presentations and publications on conservation, reframing and/or frame history topics. Ensuring the availability of skilled specialists in frames conservation and frame making in Australia into the future, and developing means of encouraging and facilitating research and publication in the field, remain key issues for GOCSIG and the profession as a whole.

Acknowledgments

Many thanks go to John Payne and MaryJo Lelyveld of the NGV for their helpful comments. Also, I am most appreciative to Malgorzata Sawicki and Barbara Dabrowa of the AGNSW; Malgorzata for reading through the paper, and Barbara for assisting with last minute details. I would like to acknowledge all the people who have contributed and participated in activities that have forwarded the fields of frame conservation, frame making and historical frame studies, even though it was not possible to mention them all by name in this paper. Most of all I would like to thank my family for supporting me to write this article.
About the author
Holly McGowan-Jackson graduated with a Bachelor's degree, specializing in Objects Conservation, from University of Canberra in 1991. She studied cabinet making at night school and in 1994 moved to New York to undertake an Andrew W. Mellon fellowship in the furniture section of the Objects Conservation Department at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Since 1996, Holly has worked in Frames and Furniture Conservation at the National Gallery of Victoria. She recently returned to work after a year of maternity leave.

Abstract
In recent decades, picture frames have been increasingly recognized as works of value that should be conserved to the same standards as other cultural material. This has inspired the development of the field of frames conservation, and in 1996 the establishment of the Gilded Objects Conservation Special Interest Group of the AICCM. The field has advanced through the ongoing work of specialists in the area, and numerous activities such as workshops, meetings, research and publications. Frame making is a closely aligned area and the provision of training in both frame conservation and traditional frame making crafts is an issue of major importance.

1 For example, at the NGV in the late 1930s and 1940s there was a program of modernisation of the Australian galleries that included the reframing of a considerable number of key works. The original nineteenth-century frames were removed and replaced with standard “Whistlerian” style frames. John Payne (Op. cit at note xvi, p.9) cites a report on the process from the Melbourne Herald, June 21st 1941, that gives an insight into contemporary attitudes of style and its influence on framing decisions: “…the director (Mr J.S. MacDonald)…is putting dull gold frames around pictures in the eastern bay…Already, eight paintings demonstrate the new system. All of them gain surprisingly from the change. The beach scene by Rupert Bunny and the landscape by Frederick McCubbin, which hang on the end wall, look twice the pictures they did…The mouldings are actually copied from the frame of Augustus John’s ‘Canadian Soldier’ in the National Gallery of N.S.W. The lines are straight and simple, and there is none of the teaming ornament which makes some other frames in the Gallery so disturbing”.

2 The term “bronze” paint is misleading to the actual composition, which is infact, a copper-zinc alloy (brass) powder, combined with a binder. Although ‘bronze’ paint has a bright appearance when first applied, the surface darkens considerably over time with oxidation.

3 Reinstatement of the original presentation of pictures is the ideal; in practice we aim to achieve as close as possible replication of the first or an early framing of the picture, based on the evidence available.

4 Current gallery framers include Robert Zilli at the Queensland Art Gallery, Ray Prince at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Trevor Gillies at the Art Gallery of Western Australia, and David Butler at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. Until 2007, John Hay worked as framer at the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston, at which time the position was made redundant in a restructure of the organization (AICCM National Newsletter, No. 103, June 2007, p.2). The National Gallery of Victoria does not currently have a framer on staff. Former NGV framers include (in reverse chronological order) Robin Murdoch, Matthew Adams, Peter Chaloupka, and Leo Wimmer, who subsequently worked as framer at the National Gallery of Australia.

5 At the AGNSW, two frame conservator positions were created in 1987. At the NGV, an initial frame conservator position was established in 1996, followed by two additional frame conservator positions in 1999.


7 Sawicki, M., Gilded Objects Conservation
The workshop *The Chemical Patination of Schlag Metal on Picture Frames* were presented by Graham Reynolds, of the frame making company Graham Reynolds Pty Ltd, Brisbane.

The workshop *Cleaning and Preserving Finishes on Furniture* was presented by Arlen Heginbotham, Associate Conservator, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, U.S.A.


Malgorzata Sawicki has presented several short courses on picture frames conservation: at the Art Gallery of NSW in 1997, in Auckland, New Zealand, in 1998, and at the University of Canberra in 2003.


Appendix Listing of articles from GOCSIG News

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**Part VI: Looking Ahead**

Kate Eccles-Smith

Introduction
Can a paper conservation laboratory treat paintings at the same time? Can a conservator be a registrar and vice versa? When is a paper conservator a paintings conservator?

In 1978 I headed to Canberra to study conservation and have made many diversions along the way but I am currently well-immersed in the world of private conservation. Lo and behold, I am delivering my first paper at an AICCM symposium. What progression led me to this point?

In 1983 Art and Archival Paper Conservation started business with Kerry McInnis at the helm. Over the years, Art and Archival had operated at a couple of different sites. In 1990, Kerry built the purpose-designed studio at 28 John Bull Street, Queanbeyan, where Art & Archival (A&A) still resides and operates with Kim Morris as the Director, supported by a dedicated staff to assist in paper and paintings conservation with a very healthy consultancy in disaster-recovery training.

This paper follows my path through study and work and the ability to sit on both sides of the fence in terms of paper and paintings conservation and the ever-demanding world of exhibitions.

The Early Years
In 1979, I started the Conservation of Cultural Materials course at what was then the Canberra College of Advanced Education. At the time, the course was a two-year Associate Diploma, with the opportunity to specialise in either paintings, paper, ethnographic or textiles conservation. I was determined to become a paintings conservator; they were the sexy interesting people who hung about the Louvre and other such places. No one ever heard about paper conservators, and as for ethnographic or objects conservators as we now call them, they were quite frankly totally incomprehensible. Don’t forget we were just leaving the 70s and entering the 80s. The Fraser Liberal Government was in power. Top of the charts was *Knock on Wood* by Amii Stewart.
By 1983, I was qualified as both a paintings and paper conservator. After moving back to my beloved Melbourne, I worked in paper conservation at the National Archives as well as paintings conservation at the State Library of Victoria. Following a ten-year break I returned to work at the National Library of Australia (NLA) in the Preservation Services Branch. I still carried with me the strict regime of conservation as I was taught, very focussed on treatment based work, preservation and restricted public access. Several months later I moved into the Exhibitions branch, totally seduced by the sheer volume and variety of art I was exposed to. At this time the NLA was managing the fledgling National Portrait Gallery (NPG). NLA exhibitions also prepared early NPG exhibitions leading me to eventually join the NPG for ten years.

Life in Exhibitions
At first I was cutting mats and framing in the standard Fini frames. My first exhibition was *High Society* for the National Portrait Gallery, a collection of photos. I watched in amazement as the framed photos were loaded into a wooden container with wheels that later revealed itself to be a showcase base, inverted and converted, whisked away by staff to the waiting van to move them to Old Parliament House building, which then served as the site of the NPG.

National Portrait Gallery
In 1997 the NLA-NPG staff physically relocated to Old Parliament House. We were a small team doing big things and we worked hard. The main focus of the NPG was to restore the library space in the Gallery building to accommodate a permanent display whilst refitting the old Senate and House of Representatives galleries to accommodate temporary exhibition spaces. Andrew Sayers, the inaugural Director of the NPG was appointed in early 1998. We welcomed him with open arms as we had felt rudderless for too long.

NPG Registration had the jobs of organising exhibition spaces, installing temporary walls, arranging painters, hanging works of art, placing labels and installing the lighting. Occasional problems with interactive media, lasers and such made my job a constant learning experience. Since we had no conservator on staff we did our own condition reports and checked off against inward loans. The difference between the conservation I was taught and the conservation I practised as a Registrar/Exhibitions Manager was illuminating and invaluable. The difference between the conservation I was taught and the conservation I practised as a Registrar/Exhibitions Manager was illuminating and invaluable.

Public access is of course the main focus of a public gallery. What to do when the Board will be dining in the Gallery space with a three course catered meal and wine with Webber’s Portrait of Captain James Cook resting on an easel for them to view? Imagine my horror as a conservator - thinking of all the issues, but as the Registrar having to recall that two of these board members had paid millions to help the nation acquire this work. As the Director gently reminded me, they had every right to dine with their acquisition. On another occasion Barbara Blackman gifted the Charles Blackman work *The Family* with Judith Wright, Jack and Meredith McKinney as the subjects with Jack and Meredith McKinney on the event of Judith Wright’s 85th birthday. There was a birthday party and I nervously circled the guests whilst this valuable, unglazed work sat on an easel while the champagne and chocolate cake flowed. We never had lessons in College that prepared us for these events, I had to learn to be very flexible and approach our work in a very holistic manner. I have to say that, in both these cases, no harm was done but if it had it would have been the end of the world? Were the occasions and the spirit of these occasions more important than the minimal damage that may have occurred?

Any conservation treatment or matt-cutting was outsourced to save time. In 2004, exactly ten years after I joined the NPG, I decided to leave. I had been watching Kim Morris managing Art & Archival and could see that the potential for private conservation was becoming very interesting. Conservators were in short supply.

Paintings Conservation at Art & Archival
There are four main types of paintings conservation-related work undertaken at Art and Archival (A&A):

- Remedial treatment of paintings belonging to the public institutions.
- Exhibition preparation of paintings.
- Treatments for private clients.
- Treatment for insurance and disaster recovery companies.

Over many years various public institutions have entrusted paintings-related work such as condition reporting, reframing, servicing of travelling exhibitions, routine examinations and preservation work such as adding backing boards or exhibition preparation to A&A. This has particularly been the case where smaller institutions do not have conservators on staff. Institutions with an already overwhelming workload also take advantage of outsourcing work to our treatment laboratory to both save their own staff time and conserve their laboratory space.

An important feature of A&A is our ability to undertake projects with appropriate insurance coverage and secure storage facilities. We satisfy institutional insurance requirements by carrying and maintaining public liability insurance, workers’ compensation insurance, and the ubiquitous professional indemnity insurance.
In its original form as a dedicated paper conservation laboratory, A&A was comfortable with this type of basic consultancy and treatment. It meant that the core paper treatment programs were not greatly affected and there was no problem with sharing treatment space. The choice was to refer any in-depth treatment such as linings, repair and solvent related cleaning on to other specialists set up for such work.

However, as people moved on or changed focus, some of these specialists no longer provided comprehensive treatment services and there were few to refer on to. Remaining private conservators were swamped with work and had long waiting lists. Responding to the resulting demand for extended paintings conservation treatment, a decision was made to diversify A&A’s range of services to cover other disciplines, including paintings, utilising my own experience and bringing in expertise as required.

Since this change, in-depth treatment work at A&A has grown as trust has built up in the public institutions. While treatments are more in depth, most outsourced paintings treatment work is still at what could be termed a “medium level”, including cleaning, consolidation, repair, infilling, retouching, stretcher repair or replacement, stretching, frame servicing and repair.

This is linked to time and cost as extended treatment work that may take many hours is inherently expensive. Such work remains part of the institutional conservator’s territory where the value of treatments that may take months can be covered by an annual salary rather than an hourly rate. The pay off for the private conservator here is that we can take up their other treatment work that builds up as a result of their work on extended treatments.

Most of the smaller institutions with no conservators of their own do not have the financial resources to undertake extended treatment work. As a result, many paintings that may actually require full conservation are treated at the medium level with a recommendation that full treatment is recommended at a later date. In addition to our institutional work, we carry out treatment work for private clients. They usually have a limited budget, implying that in-depth or extended treatment work for private owners is a rare event.

Most private treatments could be called “quickies”, those that may take a few hours and therefore do not cost much. Simple cleaning, minor infilling and retouching and adding backing boards are examples of simple treatments. Medium treatments may extend to consolidation, strip lining, repairs, varnish removal, and lining. Satisfied clients will often request that we stretch their new acquisitions, as their level of trust in our work is stronger than for most framers.

An extension of one of our paper-based treatment services where we recover and treat damaged material from fire or flood affected private homes and businesses is the treatment of water, fire, smoke (and possum) damaged paintings. Recovery treatments include cleaning, repair, smoke smell reduction, frame restoration and cleaning, and replacement of all ancillary materials such as backings and hardware. The satisfaction of this work is that paintings thought lost can be recovered and returned to their grateful owners, often for less cost to the insurer than writing off the artwork.

Disciplines, work environment
The new co-disciplinary approach meant some modification of our laboratory work environment was required. While paper conservation traditionally is a “horizontal” discipline where treatments are carried out on benches, paintings treatments can also be a vertical discipline where treatments are carried out on easels. While many paper and painting treatments can be comfortably carried out side by side, notable differences in our approach with the addition of paintings treatments include:

• Storage - Whilst small works can be housed flat, many need to be housed vertically, posing storage and access problems, particularly where the work is large. One solution we use to overcome storage issues is to treat oversized works as soon as possible to reduce storage pressure and not impose significantly on our limited secure space.

• Work safety - In recent years, paper conservation has tended to steer away from solvent use except for some adhesive, stain and tape removal procedures. Paintings conservation often employs solvents for varnish removal and some cleaning procedures. The use of solvents at A&A has increased with the inception of paintings treatments, requiring a revision of our safety standards. Fortunately, we have a good fume-extraction system in our lower laboratory where solvent related work can be undertaken without affecting other people and treatments.

• Separation of treatment disciplines - Our facility was designed to split washing and solvent work away from “dry” treatment work. A&A’s lower laboratory has high ceilings and solvent extraction so work on large paintings can be accommodated. When assigning tasks for the day vertical or solvent treatment
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work can be located away from other horizontal dry treatments, but in the case of non-solvent based work there is no need to split up the work; both disciplines can cohabit easily.

Overall benefits include development and learning in both disciplines for all staff and a sense of pride in the growing nature of the business.

Conclusion
What have I learnt from this wonderful varied career? Work in the Exhibition/Registration areas certainly broadened my views and organisational skills. Working from the ground up does help to maintain perspective and provides a holistic view. Perhaps I would have reached this point if I had stayed in the world of conservation. I still like to think that my experience has added to my self-knowledge and my role as a paper and paintings conservator, business manager, project manager, registrar, collections manager, mother, wife, friend and colleague to many.

Abstract
This paper discusses both the current situation of paintings conservation in the ACT and how the author moved from conservation to exhibitions and back to conservation again. The situation of private paintings conservation will be told from the viewpoint of Art & Archival Pty Ltd, a private conservation facility that started life as a dedicated paper conservation practice. Why and how did Art & Archival’s business focus change? How did we adapt our working environment to accommodate both disciplines? What type of work is out there for a private paintings conservator? Most importantly, who does the work? The author’s career changed from paintings conservation to paper conservation to motherhood and back to paper conservation with a broad right turn to the world of Registration/Exhibitions, then on to the world of private conservation with its many vagaries and delights.

Acknowledgments
Thanks to all those people I have worked with over the years, in conservation Eric Archer, Debbie Breen, Sharon Towns, Jude Fraser, Kim Morris, Kerry Mc Innis, Rachel Spano and all the dedicated staff at Art & Archival. In NPG Exhibitions, David Andre, Andrew Sayers, Bruce Howlett, Ian Templeman.

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I
In 2006, the Queensland Art Gallery (QAG) opened its second site – the Queensland Gallery of Modern Art (GoMA). As one of four initiatives at GoMA, the Centre for Contemporary Art Conservation (CCAC) was launched. This paper discusses planning for the new GoMA conservation laboratory and its research capabilities and reflects on unique aspects of contemporary art conservation and the two-site model.

Planning
To reduce handling and transport of artworks in the new two-site model, it was determined that Conservation required a fully functional laboratory on both sites to service art stored and displayed on each site.

In terms of physical laboratory space, an assessment of the growing number of post-1970s acquisitions made clear that conservation space needs to be large, flexible and open plan. As a size benchmark, the art lift is six metres in length, two metres wide and four metres high. Other factors essential to a well-functioning conservation laboratory are good light, fume extraction (“elephant trunks” and a spray booth), storage space for conservation materials and artworks and access to collection storage.

The negotiations for space and equipment were seemingly endless, and, needless to say, there are some unresolved issues with the new laboratory in the GoMA building. These include that it has no ceiling, so dust is a big problem. There is not enough wall space to lean works against and the laboratory is divided by a large concrete column which hampers flow. The spray booth also became smaller during the construction phase. The view across the Brisbane River to the mountains beyond provides some compensation for these limitations.

Planning for the new laboratory also provided an opportunity to assess research needs and to invest in equipment and professional development. It was argued that understanding the chemical properties of new materials, and thus a material’s lifespan, degradation patterns and treatment options, through research and analysis is critical to the development of effective conservation plans for contemporary art works.
Thus the Centre for Contemporary Art Conservation (CCAC) was developed as one of the four initiatives of GoMA. It is managed by the Head of Conservation, who conducts activities in addition to day-to-day conservation duties. Its mission is to develop understanding of the conservation implications of contemporary art materials.

The other three initiatives at GoMA are the Children’s Art Centre, The Australian Centre for Asia Pacific Art and the Australian Cinématèque.

Besides scientific research programs (which are discussed later in this paper), the CCAC provides a professional workshop program (the 2008 Richard Wolbers workshops “New methods for cleaning surfaces”, being the seventh activity organised by the CCAC); internships and student support (for recent conservation graduates, current students, and international interns); and a conservation public program (primarily laboratory tours and public enquiries).

Conservation work practices
The move to a two-site model has had an inevitable and substantial impact on the function of the conservation department. The QAG collection has been divided, with the post-1970 works generally housed and exhibited at the new site. There are laboratory spaces on both sites for all conservation specialisations, and all conservators work across both sites as schedules demand.

To ensure both sites remain operational, paper, paintings, framing conservation and the conservation workshop are based at the original QAG building. Sculpture and analysis are based at the new GoMA building. All Directorate, Curatorial services and Heads of Sections were to remain based at QAG, however, recent office space changes have meant that the Head of Conservation (and some other sections heads) have moved to GoMA.

Conservators have chosen not to segregate into contemporary and historic roles, although this is the curatorial model and would be the neatest option. Conservators are interested in the challenges of working across the whole collection. Also, the majority of new acquisitions are post-1970 and a chronological division would weigh workloads unevenly. There has been no increase in staff allocation for the move to two sites. With - in theory - two conservators in each specialisation, paintings and sculpture conservators divide work requests by areas of interest and availability. Paper conservators divide work between Australian and International curatorial requests. Conservators are supported by a conservation framer, four part-time technicians, a part-time conservation administrator and a cabinetmaker/workshop co-ordinator.

During planning and implementation of the two-site model, it has been interesting to reflect on the evolution of paintings conservation, and what is unique about caring for contemporary paintings.

Conservation practice at QAG is prioritised by the exhibition schedule. It is dominated by display preparation and maintenance. The impact of changing art practice appears more dramatic for sculpture and paper conservation, where ethical issues of replacing or modifying parts (or the whole), and problem-solving outside the boundaries of traditional conservation practice are daily concerns.

Paintings conservation does not appear to be as complicated by ethical issues of impermanence and replacement possibly because the conceptual nature of paintings most often remains based on image. Interestingly, Coddington recently revisited a survey undertaken at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1989. He observed that none of the artists who replied to the survey questioned the permanence of their works or had any fear for the future condition of their paintings, indicating that transience or change was not a conceptual part of the work.

Unique to the conservation of contemporary paintings may be the scale of work, the fragility of the surfaces and the treatment complexities of new paint and mixed media. Possibly, not so unique in a contemporary Art Gallery, are the number of new acquisitions and the urgency for their preparation.

Preventive conservation and documentation of the tangible and intangible aspects of new acquisitions is now a large part of conservator’s duties. These activities often redirect resources from major restoration treatment. Perry summarises the unique role of preventive conservation in preserving contemporary works in a “condition as consistent with their original state as their inherent tendency to decay, and fortune, allows”.

Although considered one of the more mundane duties of a conservator, documentation is considered essential for enabling informed conservation decisions in the future. Documentation at QAG takes various forms including historical research, examination and photography, scientific analysis of materials, advice from industry and interviews with the artist.
Not only are new acquisitions documented, but much time is spent preparing and maintaining works for display and travel. Although conservators provide advice to curators prior to acquisition, it is the case that poor materials or craft will never be a reason to reject an acquisition. When reflecting on conservator’s and curator’s impetus to restore, Cayley notes:

“a great deal is made about discovering and preserving ‘the artist’s intention’, meaning almost exclusively image. Little or nothing is made of what the painter did, and there appears to be no place for accident or even failure on the part of the artist.”

Many paintings at the QAG are restretched upon acquisition due to poor or no stretchers and weak canvas support materials. Others require paint consolidation, retouching or cleaning prior to display. Critically, we are reminded that paintings will be “preserved by being seen”, and our work practices reflect this.

The unusual combination of fascinating conservation problems with laborious solutions was famously described by Margaret Watherston in 1971, then Conservator at the Whitney Museum of American Art, while treating colour field paintings:

“Probably most conservators would prefer to work on paintings of historic value that have a generally accepted place in the art world. However, if one is a conservator at a museum that also adds contemporary art to its permanent collection...one must be ready for the problems that are likely to occur with these acquisitions...Indeed while I feel that it is interesting to work out methods of treatment to meet the new problems posed by these paintings, the carrying out of the treatment, particularly on large paintings is repetitious manual labour and rather boring.”

In 1971, Watherston was not an advocate of minimal intervention. Perhaps one other current issue worth noting is the influence of the minimal-intervention approach. For example, historical conservation records at the Tate show that the decades between 1980 and 2000 were the most conservative decades for treatment of all paintings and this approach was reflected in conservation training of the time, my own training included. One impetus behind the minimal intervention approach may have been the 1974 Greenwich lining conference, which called for a moratorium on lining. Treatment of contemporary paintings also often involves discussions between conservators and artists, which began to be published in the 1980s. For very valid reasons, there was a perceptible ethical shift away from prioritising the “restoration of original surfaces toward conservation of the original material”. The “less is more” ethic has been successful for the Tate, with many contemporary paintings being stable and few requiring the reversal of conservation treatments, but there are increasing needs for intervention. Smithen notes that recent research has found that the average time for perceptible soiling of acrylic emulsions from surface dirt is 50 years. Thus we should be wrapping those acrylic paintings while in storage.

A significant issue facing the QAG’s contemporary paintings, like those in other contemporary collections, is the problematic intervention of cleaning. This is an issue that requires extensive research to satisfy the need for effective and appropriate treatment.

Contemporary paint media
The issue of cleaning is complicated when confronted with the development of synthetic paints in the twentieth century. How does a conservator of contemporary paintings know what they are looking at? How important is it to be able to distinguish between paint types? What gaps are there in current knowledge about contemporary painting materials?

Historical research into the introduction of paints in the twentieth century remains a fascinatingly vast and complex subject. Learner argues that “a reasonably good generalisation can be achieved by classifying the principle types of paints into two main groups: artist’s paints – predominantly acrylic and oil, and house paints - usually alkyd and polyvinyl acetate”. At QAG non-“oil” media is an important paint category with just over one third of post-1953 Australian paintings catalogued as “synthetic polymer” or “enamel” media.

Most published modern and contemporary paint conservation research relates to acrylic emulsion paints because it is by far the most common synthetic paint used by artists since the 1960s. However, even recommendations for the seemingly simple task of surface cleaning are not conclusive or straightforward. Clearly issues such as those raised below present the necessity of further research. Wet cleaning of acrylic emulsion paints (swab rolling with water for up to one minute) has been found to remove dirt as well as original material such as surfactant at the paint’s surface with negligible effect on the bulk properties of the film. Wet swabbing was found to affect occasional pigment removal, gloss and an increase in the surface area of some films. Golden Paints, a manufacturer of acrylic emulsions, recommend that artists “lightly wipe the dry paint surface with a damp lint free cloth to remove excess surfactant from the surface of acrylic paintings.”
Surfactant is seen to be the cause of the paint’s water sensitivity, its tack and dirt absorption. To mitigate potential loss of colour during future washes, Golden’s recommendation is to apply an isolation coating of a clear binder similar to that used in the painting. This recommendation also reminds us that it is critical for conservators to understand paint industry recommendations to artists.

We are reminded that research has not yet determined what is migrating to the surface in emulsion films because of the complexity and variation in products. The migration of materials is more than surfactant alone, and during his recent workshops in Brisbane, Richard Wolbers gave the example of the migration of silicone used as anti foaming agent. He continued that washing a fresh acrylic film with water will not improve the long term stability of the paint, and varnishing emulsion paint films may trap migrating materials and create their own surface effects over time. Wolbers also referred to new polymer technology which eliminates the need for surfactants to disperse the hydrophobic acrylic polymer. Thus the chemistry of emulsion paints will inevitably change. Despite this inevitable change, the works already in collections still require informed treatment, as will those to come.

Not only are we confronted with synthetic polymer artists’ paints and house paints over the last fifty years, but oil-based paints are still widely used. The range of contemporary artists’ oil paints has recently been studied by Schilling, Mazurek and Learner. Artists’ oil media has expanded beyond the traditional drying oils of linseed, walnut and poppy, including oils with different chemical structures and physical properties. Three contemporary classes have been identified: processed drying and semi-drying oils such as linseed, safflower, sunflower and castor oil; alkyds (three classes); and water miscible oils, which were introduced in the 1990s. While this significant study focused on analysis of media it did not cover conservation implications. Thus although we are now aware of new classes and distinctions of oil paints, we need to uncover more about their varied lifespans, degradation patterns and treatment options.

Additional research into the phenomena of water-sensitive oil paints in well-bound twentieth-century unvarnished paintings has recently been published. The authors found that hygroscopic pigments, including ultramarine and other blues, chrome and cadmium yellows, are affected most by water. They discuss the possibility that metal stearate soaps used in the formation of paints may degrade to form surfactant-like structures on the painting surface, contributing to their water sensitivity. An oil painting dated 1963 by Karel Appel has recently been aqueously cleaned at QAG requiring water sensitive yellows to be avoided, which is consistent with the observations of paintings by this artist in Burnstock’s study. Further research to corroborate these issues at the QAG is currently ongoing as outlined below.

There are many complexities within each of the categories of paint type introduced. As well, it is clear that there was experimentation by artists and to complicate matters, paint formulations changed as required by industry, thus providing a broad range of issues to explore.

Research Opportunities

During the planning of the new laboratory, it was argued that appropriate treatment and authentication of paintings of the past 50 years requires research and analysis that has little in common with traditional oil on canvas paintings. Priority was placed on developing organic analysis capacity. We now have a Fourier Transform Infrared (FTIR) spectrometer, fluorescence/polarising microscopy, industrial x-ray, and digital IR camera equipment. Investment has not yet extended to staffing, or an annual budget, but it is hoped that we will be able to attract students and interns in the first instance to use this equipment, and perhaps funds for a conservation scientist position in the future. Current research priorities developing QAG staff’s skills on new equipment.

Not only are these research tools made available to inform treatment decisions, but they may assist in meeting major challenges to promote the future of conservation at the QAG. Without the dramatic before- and after-treatment photographs, or images of underdrawings and x-rays that older paintings exhibit, anecdotes of unusual or new media and contemporary painting techniques may be one way to engage audiences. Without becoming more integrated into public programmes, it is unlikely that resourcing to conservation will increase.

Based on the QAG collection, research priorities have been identified for modern paintings and new paint media, fibre based works, wooden sculpture, audio visual media, colour photography and prints and large works on paper.

Current projects for paintings conservation include research for the exhibition...
“China!” opening in March 2009. Research is focussing on artists including Ah Xian, Gu Wenda and Zhang Xiaogang within the period between 1980 and 2000, with the aim to contribute to the exhibition catalogue. Currently Gillian Osmond is exploring the water solubility of (yellows) in an oil painting dated 1986 by Wang Youhen, as well as researching the materials used by Ah Xian for two early paintings that we have in the collection. Anne Carter is exploring unusual drying phenomenon on a painting dated 1985 by Gu Wenda, which appears to be related to a glue preparation layer under a contemporary oil paint.

QAG’s participation in The Twentieth century in paint Australian Research Council Linkage Grant, a three year collaborative project through the University of Melbourne, beginning in 2009, will also enable the study of post-1960 collections. The project details are yet to be determined.

Conclusions
At QAG we have had the opportunity to review collection and research priorities and design a new conservation laboratory specifically for the care of post-1970 artworks. Unique to the conservation of contemporary paintings is the scale of work and the complexities of understanding new paint and mixed media including their aqueous and solvent sensitivities. Paintings conservation does not appear to be as complicated by ethical issues of impermanence and replacement of parts (or the whole) as in sculpture and paper conservation.

The QAG aspires, through the Centre for Contemporary Art Conservation, to contribute to the understanding of conservation implications of new paint media. Research projects have been identified and scoped. Due to other commitments, conservators at the QAG currently spend less than the 2000 national average of 11.5% of time on research. However, we are hopeful of success in the future, and although many projects are as yet unrealised, they remain 100% potential.

Acknowledgments
The author would like to thank Amanda Pagliarino who has been acting Head of Conservation since May 2006, including during the transition to two sites. Also thanks to Gillian Osmond and John Hook for inspiration and to Helen Gill who cleaned Karel Appel (1963) Crying Head in August 2008.

Abstract
In 2006, the Queensland Art Gallery (QAG) opened its second site – the Queensland Gallery of Modern Art (GoMA). As one of four major initiatives at GoMA, the Centre for Contemporary Art Conservation (CCAC) was launched.

This paper reflects on the planning of the new laboratory, how the two-site model and increased exhibition and acquisition programs have impacted on conservation work practices, what appears to be unique about contemporary paintings conservation, and research capabilities and future directions of the CCAC.

About the author
Anne Carter is Acting Senior Paintings Conservator at the Queensland Art Gallery. She has a Bachelor of Applied Science in the Conservation of Cultural Materials, Paintings (University of Canberra, 1996), a Bachelor of Art, Art History (University of Queensland, 1988) and a Diploma of Art, Illustration (Queensland College of Art, 1985). Her interests include the painting materials of contemporary artists.

1 See Gillian Osmond’s paper entitled “The impact of Richard Wellness” in this volume.
I have amended the title of this talk with a quotation because I have always enjoyed quotations but equally because I have been absorbed by the paintings of Jean Siméon Chardin each time I have come across them, and in Diderot’s comment I found something to base some notes around. Tempting as it is to simply leave those words “we will still talk of La Tour, but we will see Chardin” sitting in the air for contemplation, I will instead offer some thoughts that spring from them – some personal reflections based around experience as a working conservator over the past 26 years.

Let’s start with a large and over-arching statement - seeing is at the heart of conservation. In the visual arts, few things are more basic than our ability to see and the complexity that surrounds the process of seeing. It is this field that conservation must engage with directly if it is to do a good job. In the end, how we preserve our material culture determines what we are able to see, now and in the future and, equally, how we preserve is determined by our ability to see. For the profession, the art and the craft of painting conservation, this needs to be the basis on which we work. We can talk about what we do. We can write papers about what we do. We can hold conferences and we can form policies but if we are not constantly reminding ourselves to look and in doing so attempt to see, we are failing the things we presume to be interested in. Chardin produced paintings that are often remarked upon by paintings conservators. It may be that his friend Diderot hit on something in his comment. Paintings that reflect the process of seeing, of direct observation re-imagined through the eyes of the artist reflect the process of enquiry, observation and interpretation that are the work of the painting conservator. How are these issues played out in the life of a big art gallery, the complex, organic world of push and pull that requires compromise and clear thinking to move forward?
Caring for collections
Within the broader scheme of art museums the platform on which the work of conservation sits is the shared responsibility of collection management: storing, displaying, moving, and all the housekeeping tasks that surround collections. This is perhaps the most difficult thing to get right in institutions. It is a thankless task, fraught with differences in ambition that rise up in directors, senior administrators, curators and conservators of art galleries. At the heart of this is the use of collections, why they exist and what purposes they serve. In the contemporary world of accountability, collections have a lot of work to do. The idea of custodianship, the notion that we don’t possess rather we simply hold in trust for those who come after us can often play second fiddle to that of marketable resource, a product to exploit for gain in our time. In this arena conservators can find themselves in difficult places, the sense that professional ethics are at odds with imprudent or rash use of material.

The underlying social and economic drive to consume has undoubtedly made its way into the minds of arts administrators and perhaps more critically into politicians and senior bureaucrats. If we study the history of art in terms of commerce this is probably not a new idea. The concept is nevertheless not an easy one to work with. The idea of sharing common goals of preservation and access to material should ideally underpin the decisions of the institution rather than the notion that the collection is at the centre of a play for power between apparently conflicting interests. For large and active collections this is most likely to be illustrated in the issue of loans from the collection, but we can imagine other examples. These are the issues that on occasion lead to conservators being thought of as undertakers, dour and no fun at all to play with. Curiously, these issues are seldom properly resolved in the arena in which they are most obvious – the process of acquisition.

New material is constantly brought into collections but the complex discussion of the future of the material is a difficult one to have. The idea that material can be acquired, exposed to deteriorative forces - used up as it were - then left in storage after its initial time in the limelight has passed, confounds some of the basic ideas about the role of collecting. There is no doubt that the material, which seems ephemeral at one point becomes the rare, sought after example over time. Of as much importance, its way into the minds of arts administrators and perhaps more critically into politicians and senior bureaucrats. If we study the history of art in terms of commerce this is probably not a new idea. The concept is nevertheless not an easy one to work with. The idea of sharing common goals of preservation and access to material should ideally underpin the decisions of the institution rather than the notion that the collection is at the centre of a play for power between apparently conflicting interests. For large and active collections this is most likely to be illustrated in the issue of loans from the collection, but we can imagine other examples. These are the issues that on occasion lead to conservators being thought of as undertakers, dour and no fun at all to play with. Curiously, these issues are seldom properly resolved in the arena in which they are most obvious – the process of acquisition.

How do we manage this? We invest time, energy, intelligence and money in storage that serves a preservative purpose. We work with registration departments to develop safe practices for transport and handling. We develop policies, ratified at the most senior levels of the gallery, to wrap preservation protocols around the actions of the institution. The idea of conservators as the police has its origins in this field. We provide advice at as many levels as possible, linking our professional aims with the collective mission of the institution. We maintain programs that we know work, against the fluctuating views of changing administrations: glazing and backing paintings, the use of handling frames. These are the things that mitigate the processes of irreversible change and the impact of accidental damage and neglect. These are the factors that lead to the notion of conservators as panel beaters: "we break it - you fix it". We build people to do the diverse range of tasks that influence how things are and how they will be in the future. In the end though, we are dependant on individuals to do their job and to do their job in a way that looks after the material. This sense of individual responsibility within the collected whole is the most difficult thing to get into practice. At the simplest level this boils down to a series of basic questions – such as how do we get people to turn off the lights when they leave a storage area?

Acting in the best interests of paintings
There is a tendency in conservation to see all things as objects. We even use the word in a generic sense in conversation and in written communications. The "objectification" of art limits our capacity to see art properly and deal with its preservation. We do art an injustice if we concentrate on the preservation of critical and more transforming. Colour that has faded cannot be retrieved, original material that is degraded to the point of illegibility leaves us with an artwork that is a challenge to our perception and our understanding of what we see. It is nevertheless important to remember that what we have from the past is only a small fraction of all things that all people have made.

Professionally we are at odds with some basic realities. It may be that despite all our best efforts some things will be lost regardless. Here we need to consider the big arc of change over time and the impending reality that all things will turn to dust, as Diderot noted. At best we are trying to flatten out this trajectory. At worst we invest a lot of resources in material that isn’t worth it – that is genuinely ephemeral. Expenditure of resources – money - compounds this problem. The powerful notion of investment in the material makes demands on the conservation profession that may be impossible to respond to - but who is to make that judgement? Who decides what to keep and why?

How do we invest time, energy, intelligence and money in material that is degraded to the point of illegibility leaves us with an artwork that is a challenge to our perception and our understanding of what we see. It is nevertheless important to remember that what we have from the past is only a small fraction of all things that all people have made.

Professionally we are at odds with some basic realities. It may be that despite all our best efforts some things will be lost regardless. Here we need to consider the big arc of change over time and the impending reality that all things will turn to dust, as Diderot noted. At best we are trying to flatten out this trajectory. At worst we invest a lot of resources in material that isn’t worth it – that is genuinely ephemeral. Expenditure of resources – money - compounds this problem. The powerful notion of investment in the material makes demands on the conservation profession that may be impossible to respond to - but who is to make that judgement? Who decides what to keep and why?
of substance only. The true complexity of conservation is in the preservation of meaning as well as substance. There are many branches to this tree, but at the heart is the matter of being able to see. It is not a concept limited by ideas of contextualization. It focuses more directly on being able to identify the language of the painting and the painter and to understand the place of the work in time. What has been lost? What has irrevocably changed? What can we do at this moment when the responsibility rests with us? What do we see and what will those who come after us see? Aged varnishes, aged restorations, expedient treatments that are overly broad in their approach can render the voice of the artist temporarily mute. These are the issues that revolve around restoration. We can preserve substance through “minimal interventions” and holding things together. We can concern ourselves with “patina”, the accumulation of age. These are worthy aims, aspirations and activities.

If we are truly concerned with the nature of art then we need to take another step and this is the one that is most difficult and most open to criticism. This step can be characterised as the answer to two simple questions. Is this the moment? And, am I the person? Can I do something worthwhile for this painting? Sitting behind these questions are the processes of professional development. What resources and skills do we have to look carefully and intelligently at the work in front of us? Here we expand our technical expertise, our processes of technical examination. Not just the ability to take a radiographic image but our ability to read it well. Not just the ability to make non-destructive analysis of pigment materials, but our ability to give meaning to the data. Not just our ability to develop infrared images of works but making sense of those images. And from this basis we need to take another step. Do we understand what we see, and do we have the skills to bring about change in what we see?

In some sense conservation is seen as a profession that is attempting to arrest change and this is undoubtedly part of the cause, the flattening out of the arc to extinction. On the other hand to understand the issues of preserving meaning almost inevitably is an engagement with bringing about change. The conservator as agent of change is not a well understood concept. This is the basis for “cleaning controversies” for the critique that damns the work of the restorer as vandalism and has caused the retreat to minimal intervention. This is an understandable response but not an adequate one. It is best seen as a challenge to be able to make sense of what we have and our place in the life of the artwork. When we experience the change brought about in the cleaning and restoration of paintings through thoroughly professional work there is little doubt that conservators are able to allow paintings to be seen for what they are, at the moment in time in which they are living. In some sense a pursuit of truth, in another sense the pursuit of meaning.

So the conservators we have and the ones we need to develop rely on the maintenance of the progression of technical expertise and the pursuit of the philosophical and ethical base on which to operate. The need to constantly expand the kit of practical abilities – new methods in cleaning, consolidation, lining, mending of tears, retouching, varnishing, the ability to carry out processes of examination, microscopy, radiography, the use of analytical equipment and processes (it’s a long and daunting list) remains the primary driver in professional development. How to make good use of the tools comes through building working environments that range in scope, age, experience, aptitude and attitude. Conservators cannot be all things to all people, but a department can be diverse and rich in its population. How we work together is as important as what we bring as individuals. The challenge will always be to balance the strength of the ego that drives our ambition with the need to suppress that ego in the work we do. We are always at or best when we disappear from the process – we should not be apparent in the end result of our labours.

There is a parallel body of intervention with paintings that occurs in art galleries and is somewhat beyond the scope of these notes, but it is important to flag. The conservator/restorer works directly with the painting – resolving the issues that the painting presents, that time has brought to the surface. Other significant factors that influence the way people perceive the work, such as issues of lighting and display, stand beyond the control of the conservator but nevertheless have enormous influence in the act of seeing the artwork. Paintings that have been carefully brought into balance through cleaning and restoration can be, and are, rendered “over-cleaned” or “stark” through exaggerated lighting strategies, or left to remain apparently “uncleaned” through similarly insensitive lighting. These, in themselves, may not necessarily be agents of deterioration but they are agents of change. They alter tonal values, colour relationships and depth in paintings. They influence what people see but they can be arbitrary in their origin rather than being based in complex readings of intention and the state of materials.

Is there a future?

There is directness in the engagement between the conservator and the painting that occurs in no other forum. It is, perhaps, an enviable relationship for those who have chosen other paths of intersection with art. It is the stuff of the old folklore about being in touch with the master, the restorer through whom the
artist lives again – magic. When one starts out in the profession these ideas are dismissed as old wives’ tales and notions that are superseded by scientific thinking. They are of course superseded by scientific thinking but they also carry some truths that are recognised by practitioners at points throughout their working lives. In the end, the conservator develops this relationship with treatments that call on complex levels of commitment to the artist and the artwork - this particularly unique working environment becomes a reality. It’s here that the future of the profession begins to emerge. For some this singular working activity is the end in itself, for others, and for institutions that wish to broaden their engagement with the communities they serve, there will be a role for conservators to articulate the significance of things through their particular eyes. For art to remain available and accessible the parallel worlds of preservation and interpretation need to by nurtured and maintained.

One final point comes to mind – the process of arriving at the end. We tend to want to define our activities as somehow finite: “I have done this, this and this, and now my work is done”. We are never done – but we do have to find a way to an end. This is one of the challenging contradictions in our profession – our work is always in progress but a treatment in particular has to come to a conclusion. How to find the end of the work on a painting at a particular time is an interesting process. Conservation undoubtedly attracts perfectionists and personalities that are attached to control. Having to let go is not so simple on many, many levels but let go we must. We have to develop a living relationship to the work, one in which there is no defining moment just a place to arrive at – a sense of satisfaction that what can be achieved at this time, in this place, with these hands - has been achieved and that the work must go back into the world at large and take its place again – and that we will disappear from the picture.

About the author
John Payne is Senior Conservator of Painting at the National Gallery of Victoria. He has worked with the Gallery since 1982. He carries responsibility for the preservation and restoration programs for the painting collections of the gallery and has restored numerous pictures in the collections, from the fifteenth century to the nineteenth century. In 2007 he published a reference book on picture frames called Framing the Nineteenth Century: Picture Frames 1837-1935.