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Poster: *Conserving the Wentworth Family Papers – Developing a practical treatment process*

Lang Ngo, Cecilia Harvey and Kate Hughes

ABSTRACT

The State Library of New South Wales holds three collections of the Wentworth family papers, including the correspondence of D’Arcy Wentworth, William Charles Wentworth and Sarah Wentworth. The most significant collection consists of 17 volumes of various size and thickness. In 2013 a condition survey was conducted of these volumes and the collection was recommended for priority treatment by the Collection Care branch.

The collection consists of mainly letters and correspondence written in iron gall ink which have been guarded into volumes using poor quality paper. In some cases, brittle and fragile manuscripts have been lined or ‘encapsulated’ with silk or paper. These items have deteriorated extensively and are now extremely discoloured. Since 2013 the Collection Care branch has been treating these volumes, removing folios from guards and old repairs and linings from the supports, and treating the iron gall ink media to prevent further degradation.

This poster looks at how over the past few years we have developed a conservation tree to inform our treatment of iron gall ink media. How our treatment approach has changed as we have incorporated the use of readily available commercial equipment (Sodastream©) to assist our production of a de-acidification wash. The inclusion of new knowledge from other staff members in the use of rigid and viscose gels and how we have used the excellent resource of the Iron Gall Ink website to produce our solutions and treatment resources.

The treatment approach we use for the Wentworth family papers will now also guide other treatments of iron gall ink media in terms of project planning and resourcing. Measuring the changes in dimension, pH and conductivity of the letters before during and after treatment has allowed us to support upcoming treatment proposals with evidence that demonstrates the efficacy of the washing procedure.

BIOGRAPHIES

Lang Ngo graduated from the University of Canberra in 1999 with a Bachelor of Applied Science in the Conservation of Cultural Materials. Lang has previously worked at the State Library of Victoria, and the Adelaide City Archives and is currently a Conservator at the State Library of New South Wales.

Cecilia Harvey is a paper and photographs conservator at the State Library of New South Wales. In 2002 she graduated from the University of Canberra with a Bachelor of Applied Science in the Conservation of Cultural Materials.

Kate Hughes is a paper and photographs conservator at the State Library of New South Wales. She completed a Churchill Fellowship on the materials of First Fleet natural history watercolours in 2016. She completed a Master of Cultural Material Conservation at the University of Melbourne in 2010.