Sharing Conservation Insights in *Textile History*MARY M. BROOKS

This article reviews the presence and representation of textile conservation in Textile History over the last fifty years. It looks at both articles and reviews and maps changing concepts and practice as textile conservation has become accepted as a means of contributing to 'making meaning' with textiles.

Introduction

Textile History has always 'displayed a catholic interest in all areas and related subjects' and textile conservation is one of these areas. Its presence in Textile History demonstrates the changing interests and activities of the Pasold Research Fund which first published the journal in 1968, four years after Eric Pasold OBE established the Fund. Negley Harte, the Fund's Director between 1984-1997, astutely observed that textile history is 'not a single field of study, much less an academic discipline' and this is naturally reflected in the changing scope of the journal. The fifty years of Textile History have also seen the establishment and evolution of the modern profession of textile conservation in the UK. Textile conservation has, inevitably and appropriately, changed in both thinking and practice during this period and these changes are reflected in the journal.

TEXTILE CONSERVATION IN TEXTILE HISTORY

Surveying both the presence and the representation of textile conservation in *Textile History* proved to be a fascinating and revealing process. An admittedly subjective and somewhat arbitrary categorisation of articles by key topics in *Textile History*'s forty-nine volumes showed both the wide range of subjects covered by the journal and concentration on specific areas.³ Whilst acknowledging that a single paper might easily be categorised in more than one way or fall into more than one category, this process also raised the question of boundaries. For example, should the technical analysis of fibres and threads, often key processes in planning a conservation intervention, be included in the 'conservation' category?⁴ In the end, somewhat reluctantly, such papers were not categorised as conservation papers on the grounds that such important analysis was not usually presented here as part of a conservation process or discussion. Unsurprisingly, the resulting word cloud showed the predominance of articles categorised as business, textile machinery, clothing and the clothing trade (Fig. 1). Nevertheless, textile conservation makes a decent showing with nineteen papers. This is just behind knitting with twenty-one papers, reflecting Eric Pasold's keen interest in this subject (Table 1).⁵

[Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 here – one above the other on one page]

[Table 1 here]

However, when reviews of textile conservation books are included in the conservation category something very interesting happens to the word cloud. The presence of textile conservation suddenly increases as a result of fourteen such reviews, starting in 1973 [Fig. 2].

Although coverage was not comprehensive or consistent, *Textile History* editors clearly believed that textile conservation was a subject which would be interest their readership. Editors asked conservators, curators and dress and textile historians to write these early reviews, resulting in useful multi-disciplinary perspectives and some perceptive critiques. Authors and reviewers included key figures in textile conservation in England such as Karen Finch, founder of the Textile Conservation Centre, and Sheila Landi, Head of Textile Conservation at the Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A) (Table 2).

[Table 2 here]

Landi's reminder of the paucity of literature in the field of textile conservation in the early 1970s is salutary. She welcomed Jentina Leene's edited volume *Textile Conservation*, as 'something of a pioneer in the field of conservation' because it was 'the only book on textile conservation at present in existence'. Landi considered it would be 'as useful to curatorial staff of museums as to active conservators'. Linda Parry, also then at the V&A, similarly recognised the need for such publications, describing Caring for Textiles by Karen Finch and Greta Putnam as coming 'at just the right time ... a manual of information on the care and protection of these objects'. By the time dress historian Jacqueline Herald reviewed La Conservation des Textiles Anciens in 1996, she was able to note that it provided 'a survey of 25 years of textile conservation at the Institut Royal du Patrimoine Artistique'. 8 The concept of a 'philosophy underlying conservation' techniques had also emerged. ⁹ Cross-disciplinary communication was, however, a concern. Herald critiqued the lack of inter-connections in La Conservation des Textiles Anciens: '...like many events and publications devoted to conservation...it does not consider the wider application and context of conservation. To the textile historian, many of these papers will appear too scientific and insular'. ¹⁰ This gap seems to have been resolved. Reviewing Tapestry Conservation: Principles and Practice in 2007. Patricia Ewer noted that '... Lennard describes a goal of the book as [the] promotion of discussion among tapestry conservators, restorers, historians and curators. This goal is ably met. Every textile conservator and tapestry historian will learn something from *Tapestry* Conservation ...'.11

As well as being impressively international, the number of reviews of Butterworth-Heinemann conservation publications is significant. Butterworth-Heinemann became publishers of *Textile History* in the early 1980s which had important consequences for the inclusion of conservation articles in the journal (Fig. 3). The subtitle 'The journal of textile and costume history and conservation' was adopted. ¹² In 1982, editors Stanley Chapman and Donald King announced '... the first of a series of articles which will attempt to describe the overall textile conservation scene. These three essays cover the position in America and we shall follow with further series covering both the UK and Europe'. ¹³ The development of these papers was facilitated by Landi and Nobuko Kajitani, Conservator-in-Charge, Textile Conservation, Metropolitan Museum. Sadly, these overview issues never materialised. The 1985 editorial reported that Butterworth Scientific was reducing its journal list so *Textile History* was to be published by Maneys, for so long its printer. In consequence, Chapman and King noted that 'Our interest in conservation, which was initiated as part of the understanding with Butterworths, will ... be maintained, but we shall no longer feel obliged to include an article on this subject in every issue'. ¹⁴

Volume 13 in 1982 thus remains something of a highwater in terms of the concentrated presence of textile conservation in *Textile History*. It includes Rosalind Hall's paper *Garments in the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology* integrating evidence from conservation, and three overview papers on textile conservation in the USA. Dennis Piechota, a private conservator, wrote on conservatism in American textile conservation. Phyllis Dillon, who worked at the Metropolitan Museum, the Museum of the American Indian and the Textile Conservation Workshop, South Salem, compared British and American conservation services while Jane Hutchins, then conservator at Merrimack Valley Textile Museum, reviewed textile conservation in the United States.

[Fig. 3 here]

CHANGING TEXTILE CONSERVATION CONCEPTS AND PRACTICES

Having looked at the number and frequency of textile conservation papers and reviews in *Textile History*, this paper will now explore the changing perspectives in articles and reviews discussing and describing conservation concepts and practices. The 2008 International Council of Museums (ICOM) Conservation Committee's definition highlights the role of conservation in 'safeguarding tangible cultural heritage while ensuring its accessibility to present and future generations' through 'preventive conservation, remedial conservation and restoration' while respecting 'the significance and the physical properties of the cultural heritage item'. ¹⁵ This definition encompasses the shift in the concept and practice of conservation as 'not just as a means of "fixing things" vital though that is, but as a means of creating cultural meaning'. ¹⁶ The social role of conservation has become as important as its analytical and technical functions. ¹⁷ This evolution is reflected in papers in *Textile History* and is encapsulated in Sarah Levitt's 1999 review of the conference *Fabric of an Exhibition*:

The profession has come a long way since the days when some textile conservators did not see it as their job to know about the historical context of the thing they were stitching together, and exhibition staff championing wildly imaginative displays confronted dragon-like conservators in battles over light levels and unbleached calico. Today, a better understanding of team working has produced a more interdisciplinary approach. Moreover, a better understanding of our accountability to the public has shown that museums are there to give people access to their heritage and culture through their collections, which we care for on their behalf, rather than collecting and preserving objects for their own sake.¹⁸

Three papers will serve as examples of articles discussing treatment approaches. Rosalind Hall and Jennifer Barnett wrote a collaborative article as curator and student conservator describing the objectives of the interventive treatment of a rare Egyptian dress in the Petrie Museum which aimed 'to support and improve the appearance of the garment for display purposes' while ensuring 'vital historical evidence of materials used in Fifth Dynasty burials was preserved'. The stages of analysis, stabilisation and reconstruction are described in thoughtful detail, outlining the thinking behind the decisions. A similar progression from analysis to intervention with the goal of enabling improved public understanding of the Jesse cope in the V&A is evident in Marion Kite's paper. Kite comments that '...solutions arrived at were based on information and evidence taken from the object and from academic study. These were balanced by an aesthetic interpretation with the aim of presenting the design of the vestment more clearly than in previous reconstructions'. The interventions in the dress

and the cope were critical in preserving fragile fabrics and re-establishing form to enhance understanding. In contrast, the joint conservation and curatorial team of Anna Javér, Dinah Eastop and Rosalind Janssen (née Hall) determined that a minimal approach was appropriate to maximise understanding of a sprang cap, uniquely preserved on a human head.²¹

In other contexts, restoration techniques may be appropriate. Lesley Melville Smith explained why the relatively unusual method of reweaving to replace an intrusive blue patch was appropriate to re-establishing visual integrity in the depiction of Penelope in a medieval Franco-Flemish tapestry.²² P. H. Rem detailed the curatorial policy at Het Loo, The Netherlands, to explain why an historic bed was completely rehung with replica silks.²³

Several papers explored the impact of preventive conservation. Maria Hayward examined the practices used by staff in Henry VIII's wardrobes of the robes and beds: 'Many of their working practices can find parallels with the regimes of modem curators and conservators'. Margaret Ponsonby looked at the ways in which conservation practices influence visitors' perception of textiles in historic house interiors. She noted how conservation practices differ in different cultural contexts: 'Conservators and visitors are more likely to expect to see textiles in a pristine condition in American historic houses, whereas a less than perfect condition seems to be more acceptable in England'.²⁵

CHANGING CONTEXTS: THE 'MATERIAL TURN'

Any one of these papers could be used to demonstrate how textile conservation contributes to enhanced understanding and knowledge. Hall reflected that 'modern scientific techniques of conservation, analysis, and absolute dating have often ... forced the Petrie Museum to make a complete re-evaluation of...original identification and dating ...'.²⁶ This recognition of the creation of meaning through conservation can be linked to the 'material turn' in cultural studies whereby objects which are perceived as having agency in the making of meaning.²⁷ Textiles are particularly responsive records of the people who created, utilised, altered and discarded them and conservation engagement provides deeper understanding of these processes of making, re-use, degradation and disposal.

Leanne Tonkins demonstrates how insights gained through the documentation and conservation treatment of an Opus Anglicanum altar frontal revealed 'glimpse[s] into the workshop practice of artists/designers and embroiderers'. Sensitive treatment interventions can highlight subtle distinctions while retaining evidence and enhancing meaning. Anna Harrison and Kathryn Gill described complexities inherent in the conservation approach they adopted for the treatment of a pocket and cap found concealed in a building: 'As related objects it was also important that the pocket and cap's appearance on display complimented one another, suggesting their shared history, one not appearing 'cleaner' than the other ...'. 29

CONCLUSIONS

Generating and communicating new evidence and understanding has become integral part of textile conservation approaches. In her review of *Textile Conservation: Advances in Practice* Alison Carter notes the expanding role of conservators and their contribution:

Conservators of textiles have in the past seemed naturally deferential to curators ...but this book exposes the reality. Conservators often come to know much more about specific items than their colleagues, and it is to the credit of museum and heritage

professionals that many now recognise this and allow their conservators' knowledge to be shared more widely with their public ... A new generation of what we might call 'conservator educators' is rising to the challenge of sharing, very openly, what they have preserved and uncovered.³⁰

The contribution of the Pasold Research Fund to textile conservation in other contexts should also be noted. In addition to funding conservation activities through grants, the 2002 Pasold conference 'Textile Matters' engaged directly with the contribution of conservation to textile history and research. This recognition of conservation as a means of generating meaning as well as preserving and presenting textiles has been a crucial development. Thanks are due to past and present editors of *Textile History* who have embraced the evolving depth and breadth of textile conservation as well to the Pasold Research Fund for support, guidance and – crucially – funding, which should provide the foundation for further rich explorations and publications.³¹

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With thanks to Dinah Eastop for suggesting the idea of creating a word cloud.

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³ *Textile History* appeared as a single annual volume from 1968 to 1981. Since 1982, each volume has had two issues.

⁴ Examples include: M. L. Ryder and T. Gabra-Sanders, 'The Application of Microscopy to Textile History', *Textile History*, 16, no. 2 (1985), pp. 123-140; N. Indictor, R. J. Koestler, C. Blair and A. E. Wardwell, 'The Evaluation of Metal Wrappings from Medieval Textiles using Scanning Electron Microscopy-Energy Dispersive X-Ray Spectrometry', *Textile History*, 19, no. 1 (1988), pp. 3-22.

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⁹ S. Landi, Review of 'Faui Come Nuovi'. Restauri di Oggetti d'arte Applicata el Museo Poldi Pezzoli by A. M. Molfino, *Textile History*, 17, no. 2 (1986), pp. 216.

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- ¹⁹ R. Hall and J. Barnett, 'A Fifth Dynasty Funerary Dress in the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology: its Discovery and Conservation', *Textile History*, 16, no. 1 (1985), p. 6.
 - ²⁰ M. Kite, 'The Conservation of the Jesse Cope', *Textile History*, 20, no. 2 (1989), p. 235.
- ²¹ A. Javér, D. Eastop and R. Janssen. 'A Sprang Cap Preserved on a Naturally Dried Egyptian Head', *Textile History*, 30, no. 2 (1999), p. 151.
- ²² L. Melville Smith, 'The Exception to the Rule: Conservation of a Tapestry Fragment', *Textile History*, 15, no. 2 (1984), pp. 209-218.
- ²³ P. H. Rem, 'Restoration of the State Bed acquired by Het Loo Palace and intended for the Bedchamber of King Stadholder William III', *Textile History*, 31, no. 2 (2000), pp. 150-162.
- ²⁴ M. Hayward, 'Repositories of Splendour: Henry VIII's Wardrobes of the Robes and Beds', *Textile History*, 29, no. 2 (1998), p.152.
- ²⁵ M. Ponsonby, 'Textiles and Time: Reactions to Aged and Conserved Textiles in Historic Houses open to the Public in England and the USA', *Textile History*, 42, no. 2 (2011), p. 214.
- ²⁶ R. Hall, 'Garments in the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology', *Textile History*, 13, no.1 (1982), pp. 39-40.
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- ²⁹ A. Harrison and K. Gill, 'An Eighteenth-Century Detachable Pocket and Baby's Cap found concealed in a Wall Cavity: Conservation and Research', *Textile History*, 33, no. 2 (2001) p. 184.
- ³⁰ A. Carter, Review of Textile Conservation: Advances in Practice by F. Lennard and P. Ewer, *Textile History*, 42, no. 1 (2011), p. 133.
- ³¹ In chronological order, the following, not including book, conference and exhibition review editors and editors for special issues, have served as editors of *Textile History*: Ken Ponting; Donald King; Stanley Chapman; Santina Levey; Lesley Miller; Beverly Lemire; Katrina Honeyman; Mary M. Brooks; Pat Hudson; Laura Ugolini; Kaori O'Connor; Marina Moskowitz and Vivienne Richmond.

Sharing Conservation Insights in Textile History

Mary M. Brooks

Biography

MARY M. BROOKS trained as a textile conservator at the Textile Conservation Centre when it was still at Hampton Court Palace after having worked in the book world and management consultancy. Following an internship at the Abegg-Stiftung, Berne, Switzerland, she worked at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco and York Castle Museum where she jointly curated 'Stop the Rot' which won the first International Institute of Conservation (IIC) Keck Award for promoting public awareness of conservation. Mary is an Accredited Conservator/Restorer and was elected a Fellow of IIC in 1994. She is a Governor of the Pasold Research Fund and was joint editor of *Textile History* from 2009-2015 and is now a member of the Editorial Board. She currently works at Durham University.

TABLES

Table 1 Articles engaging with conservation in *Textile History*

Date	Textile History	Author/s	Article
1982	Volume/ issue Volume 13, Issue 2 Textile Conservation in	Rosalind Hall	Garments in the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology
	America	Dennis V. Piechota	Conservatism in American Textile Conservation
		J. K. Hutchins	Rags to Research: Textile Conservation in the United States
		Phyllis Dillon	A Comparison of British and American Conservation Services
1983	Volume 14, Issue 1	Karen Finch	A Medieval Hat Rediscovered
1984	Volume 15, Issue 1	Mary Westerman- Bulgarella	Rediscovery, History and Conservation of a K'o-ssu Set from the Grand-Ducal Collection, Florence
	Volume 15, Issue 2	Leslie Melville Smith	The Exception to the Rule: Conservation of a Tapestry Fragment
1985	Volume 16, Issue 1	Rosalind Hall & Jennifer Barnett	A Fifth Dynasty Funerary Dress in the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology: its Discovery and Conservation
1989	Volume 20, Issue 2	Marion Kite	The Conservation of the Jesse Cope
	·	Mechthild Flury- Lemberg	Reconstruction of a Persian Silk from Antinoë
1998	Volume 29, Issue 2	Maria Hayward	Repositories of Splendour: Henry VIII's Wardrobes of the Robes and Beds
1999	Volume 30, Issue 2	Anna Javér, Dinah Eastop & Rosalind Janssen	A Sprang Cap Preserved on a Naturally Dried Egyptian Head
2000	Volume 31, Issue 2	P. H. Rem	Restoration of the State Bed acquired by Het Loo Palace and intended for the Bedchamber of King Stadholder William III
2002	Volume 33, Issue 2	Anna Harrison & Kathryn Gill	An Eighteenth-Century Detachable Pocket and Baby's Cap, found concealed in a Wall Cavity: Conservation and Research
2006	Volume 37, Issue 2	Ana Cabrera	'Textile Conservation in Brazil: Museums and Collections', Museu Paulista, Universidade de São Paulo, 8–13 May 2006
2011	Volume 42, Issue 2	Margaret Ponsonby	Textiles and Time: Reactions to Aged and Conserved Textiles in Historic Houses open to the Public in England and the USA
2012	Volume 43, Issue 1	Hilary L. Turner	Working Arras and Arras Workers: Conservation in the Great Wardrobe under Elizabeth I
	Volume 43, Issue 2	Charlotte Eng & Maria Fusco	Fish Scales and Faux Pearls: A Brief Exploration into the History of Manufacturing Faux Pearls
2016	Volume 47, Issue 1	Mary M. Brooks	'Mouldering Chairs and Faded Tapestry Unworthy of the Observation of a Common Person': Considering Textiles in Historic Interiors

Table 2 Conservation book reviews in *Textile History*

Date	Textile History	Author and title	Reviewer	
1973	Volume 4	Jentina E. Leene, ed.	Sheila Landi	
		Textile Conservation	[Victoria & Albert	
		(Smithsonian Institute)	Museum]	
1979	Volume 10	Karen Finch & Greta Putnam	Linda Parry	
		Caring for Textiles	[Victoria & Albert	
		(Barrie & Jenkins)	Museum]	
1985	Volume 16, Issue 2	O. P. Agrawal	John Wagstaff	
		Conservation of Manuscripts and Paintings		
		of South-east Asia		
		(Butterworths & Co.)		
		Rosalie Rosso King	Lois V Singer	
1700	7 0141110 17, 15540 2	Textile Identification, Conservation and		
		Preservation		
		(Noves Publications)		
1986	Volume 17, Issue 2	Alessandra Mottola Molfino, et al.	Sheila Landi	
1700	Voidine 17, 188de 2	'Faui Come Nuovi'. Restauri di Oggetti	[Victoria & Albert	
		d'arte Applicata el Museo Poldi Pezzoli	Museum]	
		[publisher not given]	Widscam	
1992	Volume 23, Issue 1	Rosalia Bonito Fanelli, ed.	Jacqueline Herald	
1//2	Volume 25, issue i	II Piviale Duecentesco di Ascoli Piceno:	Jacquemic Heraid	
		Storia e Restauro		
		(Cassa di Risparmia di Ascoli Piceno)		
1996	Volume 27, Issue 2	SFIIC (Section Française, International	Jacqueline Herald	
1990	volume 27, issue 2	Institute for Conservation)	Jacqueille Heraid	
		La Conservation des Textiles Anciens:		
		Journées d'Etudes de la SFIIC, Angers, 20-		
		22 October, 1994		
		(SFIIC)		
1000	Volumo 20. Iceno 1	E. von Baeyer, L. Leclerc & S. Georgiev,	Sarah Levitt	
1999 Volume 30, Issue 1		eds. Fabric of an Exhibition: an	Saran Levill	
		Interdisciplinary Approach. Preprints.		
		1		
2002	Volume 33, Issue 1	(Canadian Conservation Institute) J. M. Cardamone & M. T. Baker, eds.	Danalana Walton	
2002	Volume 55, issue i	•	Penelope Walton	
		Historic Textiles, Papers and Polymers in Museums. ACS Symposium series 779.	Rogers	
		• •		
2007	Volume 38, Issue 1	(American Chemical Society)	Patricia Ewer	
2007	Volume 38, issue i	Frances Lennard & Maria Hayward, eds.		
		Tapestry Conservation: Principles and	Historic Royal Palaces	
		Practice.		
2010	Valuma 41 Iaana 1	(Butterworth-Heinemann Elsevier)	Fuences Heater	
2010	Volume 41, Issue 1	Anita Quye, Kathryn Hallett & Concha Herrero Carretero	Frances Hartog	
			Victoria & Albert	
		'Wroughte in gold and silk' Preserving the	Museum	
		Art of Historic Tapestries.		
2011	X7 1 40 7 4	(NMS Enterprises)	A1' C :	
2011	Volume 42, Issue 1	Frances Lennard & Patricia Ewer, eds.	Alison Carter	
		Textile Conservation: Advances in Practice.	Hampshire Museum	
2012	X 1 40 X 4	(Butterworth-Heinemann)	Service	
2012	Volume 43, Issue 1	Mary M. Brooks & Dinah D. Eastop, eds.	Joanne Hackett	
		Changing Views of Textile Conservation.	Victoria & Albert	
		(Getty Conservation Institute)	Museum	

FIGURES

Fig. 1	Word cloud showing articles in <i>Textile History</i> which engage with textile conservation.	CLOTHING:
Fig. 2	Word cloud showing articles and book reviews in <i>Textile History</i> which engage with textile conservation.	E HISTORIAN ENTING ENTRE ENTINE ENTINE ENTRE ENTINE ENTRE ENTRE ENTINE ENTRE ENT
Fig. 3	Chronological distribution of articles and book reviews in <i>Textile History</i> which engage with textile conservation.	Totals Mesons Construction willies to review