

# The Textile Conservation Centre

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## LIBRARY & REFERENCE COLLECTION

A knowledge of materials used in Textile objects and their history is the basis of sound conservation and is essential to Textile Historians and Conservators alike.

This knowledge may be gained in part from tutors and colleagues but in the main the study of books and the examination of a wide range of objects provides the answer to this fundamental need.

The Centre has, of course, many knowledgeable people who are keen to pass on all they know. It also has a Library and a Reference Collection of Textile objects.

It is no accident that the Library and the Reference Collection are placed side-by-side in the Centre, because their educational functions are complementary. Together they are designed to form a foundation for our academic and practical work. We are determined to reinforce these valuable assets to serve the needs of students and textile conservation generally in a more effective way. We wish to expand and, as far as possible, interlink these two facilities. In this way we will meet the increasing demand for our educational activities in an environment where technology, science and general knowledge of Textile conservation is expanding rapidly.

### LIBRARY

The nucleus of the Centre's Library consists of books, articles and conference papers collected over many years by Karen Finch.

These concentrate on the history of textile techniques and technology and on the development of textiles for dress and furnishings. Around this nucleus the library has grown and expanded, and now contains additional sections on history, iconography, pictorial representations of textiles, documentation processes, conservation science and conservation records of the work done at the Centre since being formed in 1975.



## FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE LIBRARY

The re-organisation of the library in its new location is virtually complete. We must keep pace with changes and the results of research. More books are needed to fill "gaps" in the information we need. The matter of cross-referencing our books and records to the objects we have is dealt with in the section of this paper concerning the Reference Collection which follows:

### REFERENCE COLLECTION

From the beginning the Centre has made use of a reference collection of objects to illustrate lectures on textile history and for the study of textiles generally. It is essentially a working collection that is meant to be handled. It is from the collection that first year students get their introduction to practical conservation, including the handling and storage of historic textiles in a museum environment. From the collection they learn the varying methods of conservation demanded by each piece and since earlier methods of conservation and repair can be examined, a life times experience may be condensed into the few terms of the Diploma Course. The collection also supplies the necessary material for research into the processes of decay and the recognition of fibres, dyestuffs and finishing treatments which are the common denominators of most textiles.

### ORIGIN AND CONTENT OF COLLECTION

The reference collection consisted initially of:

1. Samplers to illustrate techniques of textile construction made by Karen Finch during her training in embroidery at Salling Ungdomsskole in Jebjerg and in weaving and design at Kunsthaandverkerskolen in Copenhagen. These were complemented with older pieces acquired for the purpose of teaching students about historic textiles in her workrooms at Ealing.
- 11 Looms and other textile equipment acquired to introduce students to the techniques of spinning, weaving, lacemaking, embroidery, dyeing, printing and textile conservation.

In the course of time the collection came to include early repair patches from the back of objects removed prior to conservation and then donated by the owners. These patches make a history of their own and generate interest in both students and donors leading to gifts and bequests from many sources including collections that were specialising in one type of object only and therefore wished to part with other material.



Other collectors have given us textiles to make way for more representative pieces of the same type - nearly every piece has come from people interested in preserving information concerning the original use and production of historic textiles and those who made them.

The reference collection now contains a few archaeological textiles from Egypt and Peru and some ethnographic textiles but in the main consists of 18th, 19th and 20th century European textiles including many pieces of dress and furnishings. It takes in most types of weaving, embroidery and lacemaking ranging over 17th century silk embroidered slips to the Diploma work by 2 sisters who completed their training at the Royal School of Needlework in 1917, and right up to the present time.

The criteria for inclusion are that an object should be representative of its age and place in the development of textile technology and cultural history. Valuable pieces that we may acquire which are too precious to handle or to use for reference, are offered to the Victoria and Albert Museum.

#### FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE COLLECTION.

The collection has reached a considerable size and has outgrown the original facilities for its use. It is now in the process of being catalogued and re-organised within purpose built cabinets. Once catalogued the objects will be re-arranged in chronological order to give an overview of each fashion cycle and to demonstrate how colour and design are related to the materials and technology available in different ages and cultures.

At present the collection is deficient in early textiles so more samplers are to be added to the technique samplers and diagrams made by former students or provided by colleagues at the Danish History and Archaeology Research Centre at Lejre near Roskilde.

Depending on being able to raise the necessary funding the collection will be cross-referenced with the relevant matter in the library including the Centres conservation records and be available for individual study by students, graduates of the Centre and interns from other courses and by the Friends of the Textile Conservation Centre.

#### EXTENSION OF THE CENTRE'S ACTIVITIES

With the enlarged and improved facilities we now have and the re-organisation we plan for the Reference Collection and Library it is envisaged that we should extend our activities to include



Special courses during vacations. Given initial funding it is envisaged that special courses may be prepared for archaeologists, conservators, ethnographers, textile historians and others with an interest in textiles as historic documents.

#### COURSES IN BASIC TEXTILE TECHNIQUES

Courses are planned to provide students with practical experience in the construction and recognition of early techniques, including separate courses in spinning, sprang, detached stitching or knotless-netting, tablet and rigid heddle weaving and brocaded weaving.

#### COURSES IN ANALYSIS OF FIBRES - DYESTUFFS - WEAVES

Specialist courses in these subjects will teach recognition and analysis of fibres, dyestuffs and weaves and the use of the necessary facilities such as microscopy and special photography.

All courses will provide opportunities for the students to relate their work to the historic pieces of the collection.

#### EXPECTATIONS

The textile technology and design study activities of the Textile Conservation Centre aim to form a bridge between the practical and the academic study of textile objects in their cultural as well as their technical context. As a by-product of our cross-referencing and categorising work we should attain a common vocabulary to make it easier for textile artists and craftsmen to work with scientists and historians in unravelling the long history of the development of the textile arts.

#### FUNDING

Grants and donations for equipping the Library and Reference Collection have been gratefully accepted from The Chase Charity - The Clothworkers Foundation - The Goldsmiths Company, The Pilgrim Trust and several anonymous donors.

We are now looking for funding to make them work.