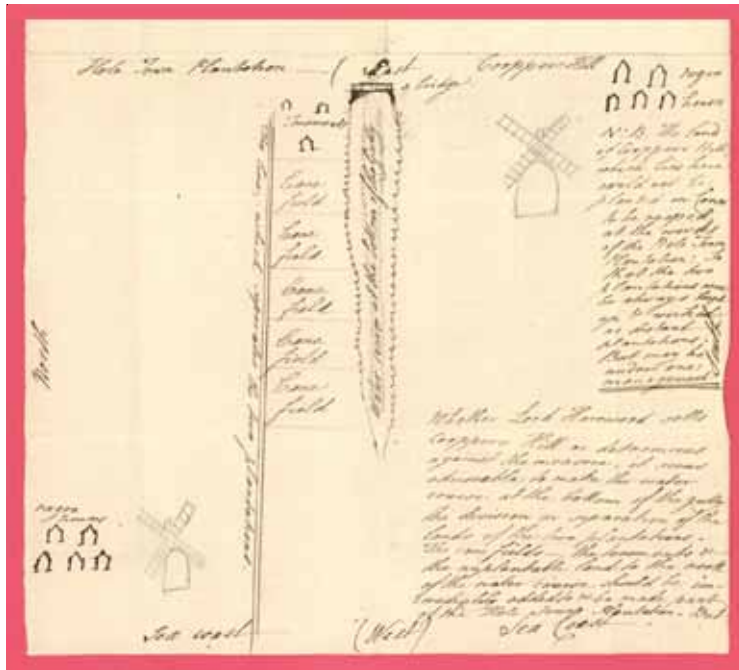


CONSERVING AND MAKING AVAILABLE THE RECORDS OF SLAVERY: HAREWOOD HOUSE

This HLF funded project, in partnership with the Harewood House Trust, will conserve, preserve and make available through the Borthwick's searchrooms and the internet a startling discovery of manuscripts detailing the Lascelles family's involvement with slavery and the slave trade from the first half of the 18th to the middle of the 19th centuries. It's common knowledge that the family's fortune was based on its estates in the West Indies – indeed, their last plantation was not sold until 1975 – but it had been thought that the bulk of the evidence for the acquisition of the family's wealth had been lost: large quantities of material that told the story of the Lascelles family's dealings in the Caribbean were housed in the London offices of the family's agents, Wilkinson and Gaviller. Almost all these records were destroyed in a bombing raid during the blitz of 1940; virtually the only survivors were some transcripts made by the historian Richard Pares.

Recently, however, during an inventory of Harewood House, several deed boxes, cabinets and cupboards were found to contain West India papers, including details of several plantations. This project deals with this new discovery of papers.



This plan, discovered in the course of making the inventory, shows Hole Town Plantation and Cooper's Hill on Barbados, acquired in 1779 and 1784 respectively. The Negro houses, fields and windmills are clearly delineated in the standard pattern of Caribbean plantation settlements, with the houses and windmills for processing the sugar cane set apart from the fields where the cane was grown.

This series of discoveries, coupled with general social changes, led Harewood House Trust to adopt a policy of openness about Harewood's past links with slavery, and the Trust is now very active in investigating its slave-owning past.

It is not quite clear when these documents, most of them written in the Caribbean, on materials manufactured in the Caribbean, came to England. What is clear, however, is that the storage conditions in Harewood House were poor. Many documents were kept in a cupboard next to a coke boiler. This cupboard was not opened for many years, but the coke boiler was very much in use. The documents were therefore subjected to extremes of heat in a very dry atmosphere, and the consequence of that poor storage is very visible.

This observation goes to the heart of the Borthwick Institute's role, in partnership with Harewood House Trust, in making these documents publicly available, so that the primary sources for the history of slave-owning by the Lascelles family can be scrutinised by anyone. The Trust transferred the slavery archive to the Borthwick, and it became immediately obvious that it was simply not possible to make them available to the public without carrying out considerable remedial conservation work on almost all the several thousand documents in the archive. Some of the documents are in good condition, of

course, but many bear the marks of their storage in a poor environment and of the poor materials used in their construction. Most of the documents were made in the Caribbean – interestingly, documents that would in England have been written on parchment, such as title deeds, were written on paper in the Caribbean. But even documents written on and with high quality materials have suffered.

In this picture you can clearly see *through the paper on which the verse was written* to the red backing paper on which the document was placed when it was scanned. That doesn't normally happen with a standard paper of this date that has been kept in something approaching the normal environment in a house for 200 years; and this particular document was written in England, during the run up to the parliamentary election in May 1807. In the wake of the Abolition Act receiving royal assent on 25 March, Henry Lascelles was again a candidate for Yorkshire in the first contested election which had occurred for sixty-six years, standing against William Wilberforce and Lord Milton. The campaign was bitter, and difficult. Not surprisingly, campaigners brought to the fore Lascelles slave-owning interests, as this satirical verse by an anonymous opponent shows:

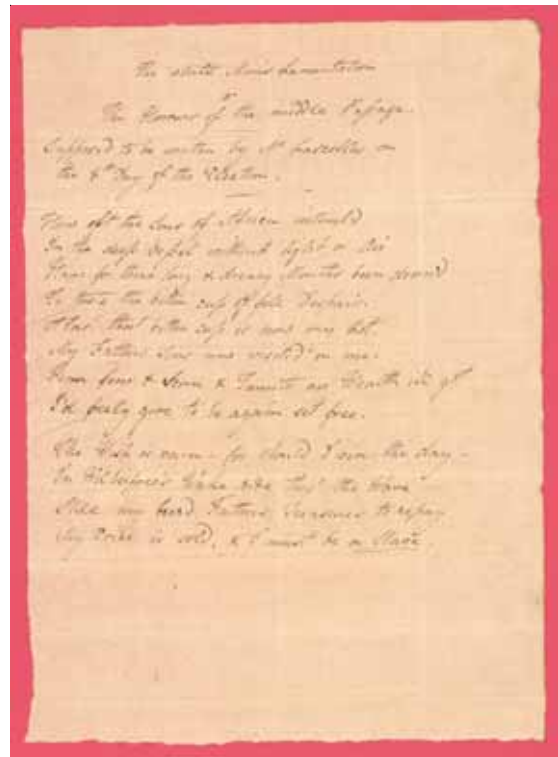
***The white Man's Lamentation or
The Horrors of the Middle Passage***

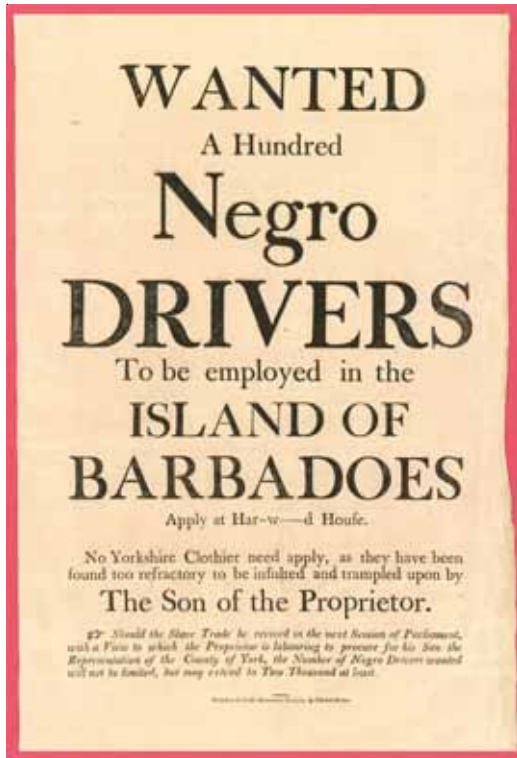
Supposed to be written by Mr Lascelles on the 8th day of the election

*How oft the sons of Africa intomb'd
In the deep vessel without light or Air
Have for three long and dreary months been doom'd
To taste the bitter cup of fell despair.*

*Alas! that bitter cup is now my lot
My fathers sins now visited on me:
From Fear and scorn and taunts our wealth ill got
I'd freely give to be again set free*

*The wish is vain – for should I win the day –
In Wilberforce's wake ride thro' the wave –
Still my hard Father's Treasures to repay
My voice is sold, and I must be a slave.*





And the election posters were similarly pointed.

This poster in the Harewood archive is just one of a very large number of posters surviving from the 1807 campaign – there are also original art works created by the campaigners, which present their own particular conservation problems. The bulk of the work, however, relates to the manuscripts.

This picture shows a title deed (on paper) half open.

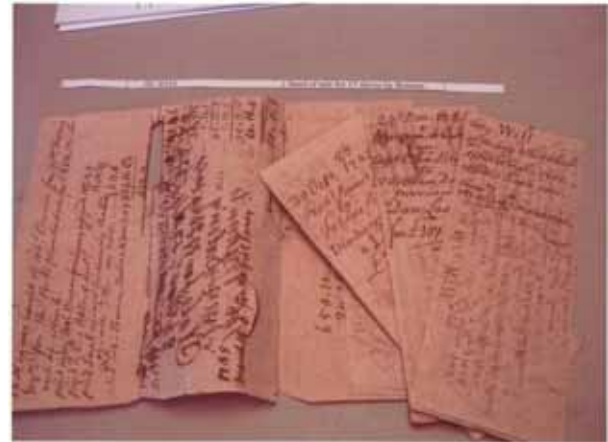


You can see that a great part of one of the pages is missing, and if you look at the fold at the bottom of the slide you can see that the paper has become detached along a large part of that fold. What the slide can't really show is how dry the document is, and how it is very difficult to open it any further than the conservator has done without severe danger of damaging the document further.

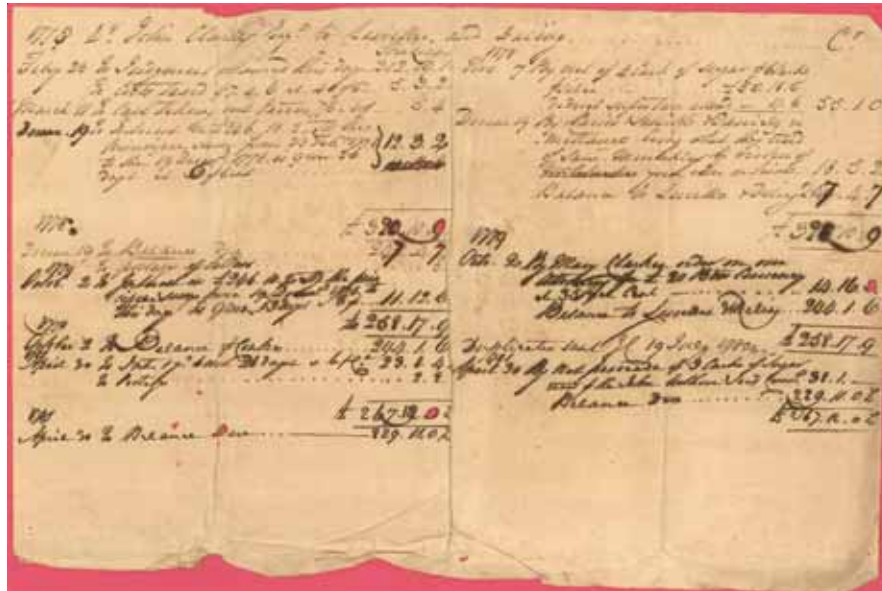


This picture, showing a different document, shows how it is not always possible to tell from the outside what state a document is in on the inside. This missing section is entirely invisible when the document is in its normal folded state.

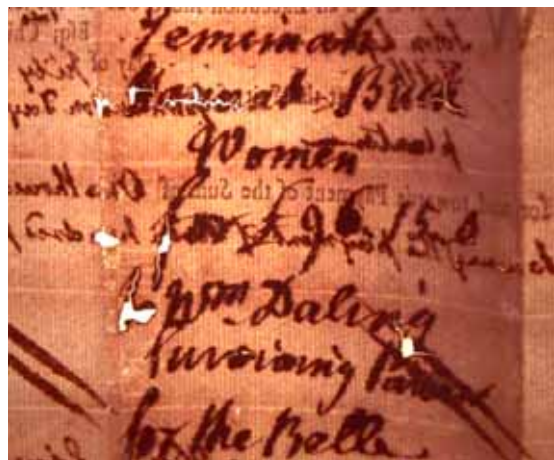
This group of documents shows exactly how a document can look fine on the outside – look at the paper marked Copy Will to the right of the screen – but contain hidden horrors on the inside. The paper on the left has suffered from drop-out. That is to say, the ink, the paper and the environment have reacted together in such a way that the letters of individual words fall out of the document.



This picture shows the consequences of drop-out even more vividly. It has been scanned against a red background so that the problem shows up clearly. Figures on both the left and right sides of the document have lost their centres: 0s and 9s are most susceptible in this document.



There is more drop-out here, in a close-up shot, to show how extensive and contaminating these lacunae can be. Often, as in the missing top section here, they concentrate along the site of a fold in the document. Documents are by their nature weak along fold-lines, which makes them vulnerable to this sort of attack. Where drop out on a fold occurs, it often spreads along the fold – as illustrated in this slide.

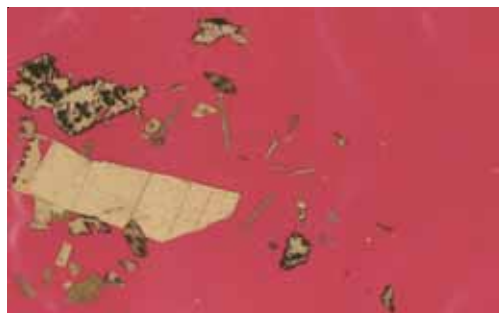


This slave inventory has been photographed on a light box. Here you can see drop out following a single letter shape, to the left of William Daling's name three lines up from the bottom – this letter is actually written on the reverse of the document. And immediately above it you can see the beginnings of drop-out in the letter F of the word 'for': part of the descender has gone, and you can see the ominous crack lines beginning to appear above and below the existing hole. The word Hannah, two lines above, is similarly affected. What this slide shows is that the process of decay hasn't stopped. Not only do the lacunae have to be repaired so that the document does not fall to pieces, but the process of

decay, the reaction of the materials, has to be arrested.

In some cases, when a document is opened, detached parts are still there, and can be saved. This picture shows some of the fragments that can't at this stage be identified with particular documents – although we've already had some success in matching orphaned portions of documents with their parents.

But it is not just the reaction of the materials and the



environment that has caused problems. Sometimes there is plain old mechanical damage to blame, as here, in this close up of one of the slave inventories. Here, the document, when folded, has been knocked and torn, resulting in a great hole in the centre when it's opened out.

So there are documents that are dry and brittle, and that are highly acidic (indicated by the strange

13 Matt a Cooper	40	9 Duffly	5000
14 Hannibal a Taylor	40	10 Girls	
15 Duannah	30	1 Mink	3200
16 Rob	30	2 Baby	2600
17 Jack	20	3 Baby	2700
18 Abough		4 Child	2100
19 Child	35	5 Bull	4500
20 John Tice	30	6 Galle	1800
21 Castle Tack	45	7 Child	4500
Women		8 Bull	1000
1 Quasidah	1000	9 Bull	2300
2 Jinc	4000	10 Bull	1200
3 Milkin	4000	11 Bull	1800
4 Hanna	4000	12 Galle	1800
5 Madida	2100	13 Little Boy	1800
6 Mary	2500	14 Bull	1800
7 Bull	3700	15 Chick	1800
8 Old Quasidah	2000		
9 Byrdon	2000		
10 Little one hand	1200		
		21 Man	
		22 Women	
		23 Bull	
		24 Little	

colour of many of them, tending towards the brown end of the colour chart – the title deed is a good example – rather than brown, it should be creamy, like the paper the verse is written on). In fact, nearly all the paper documents are so acidic that, left to themselves, they would quickly decay. Some documents are in such a poor condition that no-one can open them. Some documents have great holes in them that will widen if not attended to; some parchment documents have been attacked by mice, with great chunks nibbled from the edges (and, where this happens along an edge that is a fold, the nibbling then goes through the rest of the document, like cutting paper chains with your children); some parchment documents have been attacked by surface grazers, such as silverfish, so that the letters are missing and the parchment is transparent.

But it is possible to do something about this. Most of the HLF grant will go towards employing a conservation assistant to work alongside the Borthwick's conservator to conserve the documents, and, not the least important outcome of the project, to learn a whole variety of skills in paper conservation,

including de-acidification, repair using tissue, and, where appropriate, traditional paper repair. As the documents are repaired, a portion of the grant will be used to scan them, and make them available via the Borthwick website, with appropriate supporting commentary. The following slides show the pilot work that the Borthwick conservator did in order to inform the grant application.

The first task is to wash the paper documents to remove the acidity and some of the staining. Here is a single sheet document in a bath, before washing. Where a document is more than one sheet, as with a title deed, it must be separated out, sheet by sheet, and each sheet treated separately. Single sheet documents can mostly (but not all) be opened without too much difficulty, and if sections of the document drop out they can be saved. Where a document is too dry to open safely, it needs to be relaxed, using a steam pencil – not unlike human beings in a sauna before a massage. The moisture content of the steam, and its temperature, need to be carefully controlled.



Once the document is in its bath, the water can be added. This picture shows a document at the end of the washing process; the colour of the water at the bottom of the bath is absolutely genuine, and illustrates just how much gunge can come out of a document. Some need washing more than once, and fragile documents (as with this one) may be sandwiched between layers of Reemay for added strength.¹

This document has been through the washing process, and has dried. The conservator has noted the point he's reached – washing and deacidification are complete. The next stage is re-sizing, where

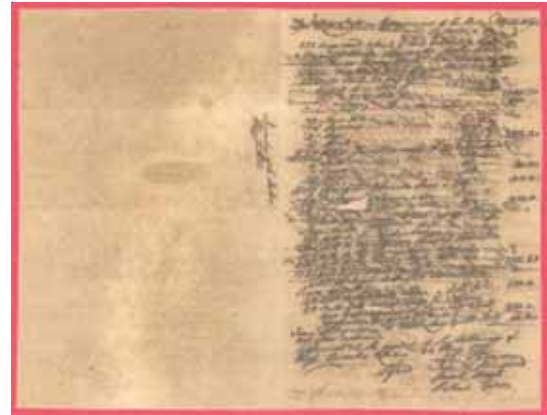


needed, to put the strength back in the document. Following that, is repair, of which there are many alternatives.

This document has been repaired by being sandwiched between layers of lens tissue. You can see the sandwich if you look carefully at the holes in the document, which in this case are mostly drop-outs, some along fold lines, and one example of mechanical damage, again on a fold. The red background here shows as pink, indicating the presence of a

double layer of tissue. The tissue is constructed from long fibres, so it will not tear easily along a

straight line, while being virtually transparent, so that the writing underneath is not obscured. The virtue here is that the method is relatively quick, and the tissue strengthens the whole of the document. The method can't be used for very large holes, however.



This is another example of tissue repair, this time to a document with only one hole, mechanically created.

This is an inventory of John Sober's plantation on Barbados, focussing on his slaves. Here, as with many of the documents, the writer, not unreasonably, has written on both sides of the

paper. That would normally pose little problem, but where a document has to be repaired the conservator has to be careful to ensure that he or she does not obscure the writing on either side. Here he's used a tissue sandwich to get round the problem. It's also worth noting that the writing from one side can be clearly seen from the other; that's an indication of the poor quality of the paper, the ink, and the storage conditions.



This picture shows an envelope that has been repaired using the traditional method. Traditional paper repair is used on some of the documents, where it's the most appropriate technique to use.



The point of all this conservation work (which will take about two years to complete) is to make the slavery documents available for public use. One way of doing this is to allow people to see them and research them in our public searchroom. But this is only useful for people who can visit the Borthwick, and the Harewood House Trust is particularly keen to ensure that its slavery archive receives as wide a public audience as possible. To that end a part of the grant will allow us to image the most significant documents, and make them available through the Internet on the Borthwick's website.

C.C. Webb, 2007

Notes

1 Reemay is acid free, random-spun bonded 100% polyester. It is a strong inert material for preservation and conservation methods, which retains its physical properties when wet and is dimensionally stable during humidity changes. Reemay is used in paper infill, as a drying support media, and for lining, interleaving and backing. It will withstand being laundered, and so can be used over and over again.