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CONTENTS:

Coordinator's Message	p. 1
Textile conservation in New Zealand	p. 2 - 5
Textile treasures rescued from old synagogues in Turkey	p. 5 - 6
Exhibitions	p. 6 - 7
Museum News	p. 7
New member	p. 7

Message from the Coordinator

Dear Textile Working Group members,
Here it is, already mid-November as we send you this latest Newsletter! While our faithful editor, Rebecca Rushfield has had most of this issue ready to send for over a month, I owe you all an apology for the delay. As you'll see below my "signature," I have new contact information. In August, I retired from my position as Textile and Upholstery Conservator for New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation's Peebles Island. I have not, however, retired from the field. Besides continuing to serve as your working group coordinator, and as a

member of the AIC Board, I am continuing to do conservation work. My business is Trupin Conservation Services, LLC, with the motto, "Have Project? Will Travel!" I will be teaching, advising small museums on conservation issues and planning, and working with other textile conservators on short term projects. All of the changes associated with leaving my position have taken a lot of my time!

In this issue, you will find a terrific report on the history of textile conservation in New Zealand, by Rangi Te Kanawa and Rachael Collinge. The article shows just how far we have all come from the state of textile conservation in the 1960s. Brava to our New Zealand colleagues!

This issue also has a very interesting report on the conservation of textiles from former synagogues in Izmir, Turkey that our colleague, Anna Häkäri (Metropolia University, Finland) is working on with her students. Of course, this issue includes a list of textile exhibits of interest to our members.

During the last six months, we have been pleased to welcome six new members to our working group. One of them, Margunn Veseth, Conservator at the Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo, Norway, responded to my invitation to introduce herself. You can read about Margunn and her work in these pages. Our other new members are: Namita Jaspal, Linda Lin, Naomi Luxford, Yuliana Nikolaeva, and Asta Vasiliaukaite. Perhaps we will "meet" them in the next newsletter.

As 2015 is drawing to a close, I will close by wishing you all a good end of year and all things good for 2016.

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Textile Conservation in New Zealand

By Rangi Te Kanawa and
Rachael Collinge

A 1967 letter held in the Te Papa archives written from a lecturer at the University of Otago recommends restoring a wedding veil by stewing it in 2 parts milk to 1 part water with a little lux flakes or liquid detergent following careful rinsing with Dylon Super White before a final dip in a solution of gum Arabic and ironing between waxed paper. (1)

This letter provides some insight into the approach taken in the care of textiles in the early years of the field in New Zealand. The first people involved in the care, display and restoration of textiles were often teachers of home science courses or textile practitioners such as embroiders and weavers, or individuals actively involved in the production of textiles. There was a general familiarity with textiles due in part to their role in our domestic life and the kiwi culture of do-it-yourself.

In the 1960s the Dominion Museum's textile collection was in the care of the Botany Technician, Nancy Adams. Nancy had experience with natural fibres and a personal interest in textiles as a keen embroiderer. It was Nancy who made an attempt to loosely organise the museum's textile collection unpacking 'brown paper bags and boxes' (2), cataloguing the costume collection, and making the collection accessible for the first time.

Michael Fitzgerald recalls that in the late 1960s- 1970s there was a nostalgia and developing interest in New Zealand's colonial history. In 1964, Nancy Adams presented a fashion show featuring the Museum's costume collection modelled by Museum staff.

This fashion parade was held at two venues-- the Dominion Museum and a small theatre in Lower Hutt, Wellington.

The show was extremely popular and, while it is not current practice to wear collection items, this fashion extravaganza highlighted the potential of costume and dress.

It was Nancy who first approached the Wellington Embroiders Guild requesting that its members with practical skills help with prepare some of the Museum's embroideries for an exhibition. One of those volunteers was Valerie Carson. It was Valerie who went on to become the first textile conservator employed by the National Museum. Valerie began her professional career as a dental nurse. When, after having a family she couldn't find employment in that field, she then pursued her strong interest in textiles. She began textile classes at Wellington High School and joined the Wellington Embroidery Guild, and eventually taught adult classes in embroidery.



Valerie Carson with Princess Anne

Valerie recalls the Guild members working on the textile collection using a 1972 book called *Textile Conservation* edited by J.E. Leene as their principal guide. This book was published in conjunction with a 1964 conference on textile conservation organized by the International Institute for Conservation of Artistic and Historic Works and held in Delft, the Netherlands. The book was very informative. It outlined treatment processes but also emphasised the importance of assessment and documentation. It discussed different approaches to textile conservation such as remedial treatment, invisible repairs using natural materials, and repairs carried out in a manner in which they could be easily distinguished from the authentic article.

Twenty leading textile authorities from Europe and America contributed to the book, including Garry Thompson and Karen Finch. Karen Finch went on to found the Textile Conservation Centre at Hampton Court. Valerie first became aware of the Centre's course when she was asked to review Karen's book *Caring for Textiles* for the National Library, in Wellington. Valerie describes this as a defining moment making her realize that further study and specialised conservation training was required. It was a huge personal commitment requiring her to leave her family including her three children in New Zealand to study abroad for a year.

As the cultural climate in New Zealand changed with a growing awareness of conservation practice and museum professionalism, the development of textile conservation arose. In 1979, Dr. John Yuldwyn, Director of the Museum was advocating for change. Jack Fry was appointed to the new position of Conservation Officer. Jack, who had a background in materials science, had come to New Zealand from the United Kingdom to

work for Building Research NZ. This new position was created when the museum's carver retired. 'He was quite a good carver and did the repairs on the carvings'. (3) It is important to note that money was provided to establish and furnish a conservation laboratory. Further grants were made so that Jack could attend a three month training course in conservation in Canberra, Australia.

Storage and display conditions were very poor at the Museum. Taonga (carvings) were stored in open cages in a basement with an earth floor. Textiles were stored in brown paper bags or stacked in boxes. Textile conservation practice at the time was described as 'mothball in boxes'. (4) Jack's first priority was improving the environmental conditions. He developed a five year plan which included environmental monitoring and improvement of the poor display and storage conditions.

When Valerie returned to New Zealand, a work space was provided for her with Jack Fry. The position of textile conservator was unfunded, so while she had a space to work she had no salary. She approached Allan Highet at the Ministry of Internal Affairs and expressed the need for a Textile Conservator position at the National Museum. Her proposal was also made known at the first AGMANZ (Art Galleries and Museums Association of New Zealand) conference.

The Ministry acknowledged the need for such a position and provided partial funding for a textile conservator at the National Museum for a three year period. In that position Valerie was required to travel around both the North and South Islands providing advice on the care and display of textiles in museum collections. She developed hands-on collection care workshops that gave volunteers and museum staff the tools with which to improve storage

and display conditions for their textile collections.

Conservators who were working at the time describe a pioneer mentality while the field moved towards a more professional and specialized framework. New Zealand was geographically isolated and conservation materials and equipment were expensive and difficult to obtain. It would take several months for basic supplies to arrive in the country by ship. To ameliorate this situation, the newly established conservation unit set up a conservation materials business, importing conservation products and selling them at wholesale prices to other cultural heritage institutions.

Conservation equipment like suction tables, humidification chambers and a large wash table for textiles was designed by staff. The wash table in which a car jack is used to tilt the table is still in use. Members of the public donated threads, button and trims which were used out of necessity.

Of great concern was the stability of the Museum's Maori textile collection. Most of the Maori textiles that were made of the black Phormium fibre, *Muka*, were dyed with an iron-tannate dye, which is very acidic and results in the disintegration of the fibres, causing structural collapse and many losses. Numerous international enquiries were directed to both Valerie and Jack from those seeking best care practices and a means of stabilizing Maori textiles.

Jack consulted with Maori weaver Emily Shuster in his research to identify the processes of dyeing with *Paru* (mud rich in iron and tannin solutions sourced from various barks). This black dyeing method was also demonstrated to Dr Peter Barber of the Textile Department at Otago University. It became apparent that the problem of disintegrating black fibres in Maori textiles would be a complex and long-term research project. Today this is the main focus of textile conservator Rangi Te Kanawa, working

in collaboration with Otago University and the Auckland Museum.

Along with Emily Shuster, Rangi's mother and grandmother were founding members of the Moananui a Kiwa Weavers. In the mid-1980s the weavers were approached by the CCAC- Cultural Conservation Advisory Council of the Internal Affairs Department which was looking for Maori to study conservation.

In 1986 Rangi attended a three week introductory course in the conservation of basketry at what was then Canberra College of Advanced Education (it became Canberra University in 1989). It is there that Rangi met Valerie. Rangi spent a year training with Valerie before returning to Canberra to carry out a three year Bachelor of Science degree in the Conservation of Cultural Materials.

The CCAC supported the training of five Maori conservators who specialized in textiles, objects, and paper at the University of Canberra-- the only center for training in Conservation in the southern hemisphere at the time.

The successful exhibition *Te Maori* that toured United States in 1984 and received large numbers of visitors influenced the training of Maori to work in New Zealand museums. Today there is a unique bi-cultural working structure at the National Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa.

Current situation

Te Papa has a conservation unit with eight full time, professionally trained conservators, four specialized object support preparators, a conservation technician, and a conservation manager.

There are three textile conservators who fill two full time positions: Anne Peranteau, Rachael Collinge, and Rangi Te Kanawa. Anne is a graduate from the Winterthur/ University of Delaware program. Rachael graduated from the Textile Conservation Centre. Rangi Te Kanawa graduated from Canberra and Wellington

University. There are real benefits in having three textile conservators, each of whom brings a different range of conservation skills and knowledge.

Having retired from Te Papa, Valerie is working in the private sector, but there are no other textile conservators working privately in the cultural heritage sector. Tracey Wedge, another TCC graduate is currently working in Southland as a collection manager and the museum will benefit from her specialist skills.

Due to New Zealand's geographical isolation, small population, and the costs associated with conservation training, the reality is that in many cultural institutions display and remedial treatments are still undertaken by volunteers or by individuals with an alternative training in textiles. However, through the work of outreach programs and publications of the Museums National Services and the NZCCM there is now an awareness of conservation principals and many institutions have worked towards improving their standards of display and storage.

The conservation revolution of the 1980s was led by a team of conservation evangelicals who travelled the country and spread the word through their workshops, disaster training exercises, and Wellington Cultural Conservation Group. We would like to acknowledge the work and commitment of Valerie and the many volunteers who worked on the textile collections not just at Te Papa but throughout the country. Their work and passion for textiles has elevated the position of textiles within museum collections.

Valerie is an enthusiastic, passionate and energetic individual at the forefront of textile conservation who raised the profile of textile conservation in New Zealand. She continues to promote textile conservation through her public talks and the guided textile studies tours she has conducted in recent

years. She has been a mentor to many of us, supportive of our studies, and approachable and generous with her time and knowledge.

1. University of Otago, Letter to Mrs Wells September 1967
2. Miachael Fitzgerald. Interview 8 July 2015
3. Jack Fry. Interview 9 July 2015
4. Michael Fitzgerald. Interview 8 July 2015

Textile treasures rescued from old synagogues in Turkey

by Anna Håkäri

In a three-year project, textile conservation students from the Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Science are rescuing textiles from old synagogues in Izmir, Turkey, a city which once had a flourishing Jewish culture, and saving vanishing cultural heritage for future generations.

The students' most recent trip to Izmir was their third together with their lecturer and supervisor, Textile Conservator Anna Håkäri. English textile conservator Tarja Bennett joined the project as the work load increased. She is now in Izmir for the second time, working as a supervisor.

Even though there is a rich textile heritage in Turkey, there is no formal education in textile conservation there. When Anna Håkäri learned of the Izmir project while attending an IIC Congress in Istanbul in 2010, she thought it would be a great opportunity for her students to learn through practice varied conservation methods that they would otherwise have learned in the classroom.

During the first year, the students inventoried and documented over a hundred textiles, some of which had been rescued from the ruins of collapsed synagogues. The textiles included Torah mantles, Ark curtains and Torah binders

with elaborate Ottoman-style, metal-thread embroidery. The documentation covered the condition of textiles and their conservation needs. Careful surface cleaning, photography and packing followed the inventory. During the second visit the students further investigated the textiles and their origins and were more involved in practical conservation. They wet-cleaned the textiles when necessary and supported weak areas. Using condition and historical importance, a Judaica expert based in Jerusalem decided which textiles were to undergo conservation treatment. It is hoped that the textiles will be exhibited in the near future.

During the third and final year of the project, the students are continuing practical conservation work and thinking about the future exhibit. Through their work with the textiles, the students have gained invaluable practical conservation experience and learned to combine previously learned conservation theory and methods with creative problem solving.

Over the course of the textile conservation project, the number of textiles involved increased to nearly three hundred as people brought out textiles from safekeeping. Although the conservation work is now in its final stage, there is still a lot to do.

Further details about this project, contact Anna Häkari, Senior Lecturer at anna.hakari@metropolia.fi

Exhibits of Interest

“The Red that Colored the World”
Bowers Museum, Santa Ana CA
October 31, 2015- March 20, 2016

Few people know about the most prolific and enduring source of the color red: American Cochineal, a tiny scaled insect that produces carminic acid. Fewer still know the story behind its explosive global spread after its first

encounter by Spain in 16th century Mexico. Cochineal was a commonly used colorant in painting, sculpture, furniture and textiles from the mid 16th through the mid-19th century, when synthetic pigments were invented. “The Red that Colored the World” highlights 100 objects--textiles, sculpture, paintings, manuscripts, decorative arts, and clothing -- to explore the history of cochineal and the seductive visual nature of red. The exhibit integrates a variety of interactive, visitor friendly features and didactic materials which invite visitors to look through the centuries to consider the central role of color in art, history and culture- as well as in their own lives.

“Furor floralis”

Textilmuseum St. Gallen (Vadianstrasse 2, CH-9000 St. Gallen, Switzerland)
August 26, 2015 – March 1, 2016

Flower mania! Whether a flamboyant sea of flowers, a wild mass of tendrils or tenderly scattered blossoms; whether arranged as decorative posies or as stylised geometric ornaments: floral motifs have dominated textile designs from the Middle Ages to the present. With its garden of glorious flower patterned textiles, the “furor floralis” exhibition reveals the intriguing parallels between textile design and horticulture. The lavish arrangement from the museum’s own collection is complemented by selected costumes and textiles from a private collection as well as garden plans from the landscape architecture archives in Rapperswil.

“The Fabric of India: About the Exhibition”

Victoria & Albert Museum, London
October 3, 2015 - January 10, 2016

The first major exhibition to explore the dynamic and multifaceted world of handmade textiles from India, spanning from the 3rd century to the present day. Showcasing the best of the V&A’s world-renowned collection together with

masterpieces from international partners and leading designers, the exhibition will feature over 200 objects, many on display for the first time.

“Fashion and Virtue: Textile Patterns and the Print Revolution, 1520–1620”
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City

October 20, 2015–January 10, 2016

An exhibition drawn largely from the Metropolitan Museum’s own collections, it will combine printed pattern books, drawings, textile samples, costumes, paintings, and various other works of art to evoke the colorful world in which Renaissance textile pattern books first emerged and functioned. The exhibition will be accompanied by a Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin entitled Fashion and Virtue: Textile Patterns and the Print Revolution, 1520-1620 written by Femke Spielberg. It will be on sale in the Museum’s book shop.

Museum News

Archives of Fritz Rau & Co to be digitised

The archives of the firm Fritz Rau & Co which were donated to the Textile Museum St. Gallen in 1988 are being digitized and will soon be available to the public. They document the production of one of the most significant manufacturers in eastern Switzerland over the period 1900-1947. Fritz Rau & Co, founded shortly after 1900 produced embroideries for haute couture in Rome, Paris and New York and then reoriented to produce white embroidery for lingerie. The archives contain 7,200 sheets with 20,000 samples of exceptional quality machine embroidery. This project is made possible through the support of Dr. Fred Styer Foundation Herisau, the USB Foundation and the Kulturförderung of the Canton of St. Gallen.

MEET A NEW WORKING GROUP MEMBER

Margunn Veseth

Conservator, Department of Collection Management

Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo



I was trained as a conservator at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden and specialized in textile conservation. I graduated in 2004. Since 2006, I have worked at the Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo, Norway as a conservator. I have worked on the pieces in the Ethnographic Collection and undertaken a rehousing project. Recently, I have been working with architects and engineers planning the reconstruction of our storage facility and new conservation labs.

I am about to look into our collection of archaeological textiles. I have not decided yet whether I will focus on the conservation history or on reconstruction work. The results of my work may be a part of an exhibitions in a new museum-to-be.

For the next Newsletter

Please send any news to Rebecca Rushfield, our newsletter editor, at wittert@juno.com. Have you been to a conference? Send us a short review. Have you just opened a new exhibit, or are you working on one? Perhaps you have published or are doing research on topics of interest to the group? Do send Rebecca information!