

The Stuart and Cumberland papers digitisation project at Windsor Castle

Roberta Giubilini and Puneeta Sharma highlight a project providing greater access to two important collections of papers.

The Royal Archives at Windsor Castle, Berkshire, is home to an extensive collection of documents related to the Royal Family and the British Monarchy spanning over 250 years. There are two collections, which are the focal point of a current project: namely the papers of William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland, dating from 1721 to 1765, and the papers of the exiled Stuarts, dating from 1719 to 1766.¹ The project consists of the surveying, conservation and digitisation of these papers, which the Royal Archives are carrying out in collaboration with Gale, a part of Cengage Learning who have employed UK Archiving to undertake the scanning.²

Since the start of the project, a conservation survey of the collection has been carried out in order to verify the condition of each document. Essential preparatory works are carried out if a document is identified as having obscured text or suffering from any form of damage, which causes a loss of information prior to image capture. A large portion of the affected material is mounted, guarded and bound into volumes, and as a result some of the documents contain areas where the text has been obscured by the mount.

In order to rectify the issue of obscured text, a decision was made by the project partners to manually complete the missing text in pencil on the mount where at all possible. In order to assist with this, a light sheet is currently being used which allows the Archives Project Assistant to read the text through the mount. This has the added benefit of limiting the number of documents removed from the volumes. An additional issue is that a number of the documents are in French, Spanish, Italian and Latin.

The conservation aspect of this project ensures the completeness of the text of each document to be captured. In addition, it also minimises any potential damage that can occur as a result of handling during image capture. The items constitute handmade paper, and various inks including carbon ink, iron gall ink and printing ink. Occasionally, parchment and newsprint documents can be found within the collection as well. There are also some more unusual items, such as leather and cloth samples, possibly collected for military uniform designs, which are mounted and bound in the volumes.

The most common types of damage to the documents are areas of



Prince James Francis Edward Stuart



William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland

weakness or loss, where iron gall ink has caused corrosion to the paper structure. These areas are stabilised using remoistenable repair tissue, which has been coated with isinglass. Other conservation interventions are the humidification of distorted areas of a page and the removal of letters from their guards to allow any obscured text to be seen clearly. Post scanning conservation will include the re-integration of removed items back into the relevant volumes.

In addition, there are two further aspects to this project. Firstly, the typing and formatting of an early-twentieth-century handwritten manuscript of a section of the Calendar of the Stuart Papers, which forms part of the correspondence of Prince James Francis Edward Stuart (The Old Pretender). Secondly, the identification and creation of an inventory of a collection of wax seals, which were previously removed from some of the letters in the Stuart Papers. This will also require them to be re-housed in more suitable storage.

Once the project has been completed, the documents will be available for trial and purchase to institutions ranging from public libraries and academic institutions to museums and galleries as part of the State Papers Online programme published by Gale.³ They will also be made available onsite to visitors at The National Archives, Kew, UK and the Royal Archives, Windsor Castle.

The project to digitise the Stuart and Cumberland Papers in the Royal Archives is led by Laura Hobbs, Archivist (Digital) with Megan Gent, Senior Archives Conservator. The preparatory work is carried out by Roberta Giubilini (Project Assistant: Archives) and Puneeta Sharma (Project Assistant: Conservation).

Roberta Giubilini and Puneeta Sharma
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¹ For a better insight into the history of the Royal Archives and how these two collections came to be part of them, see Sheila De Bellaigue, 'The Royal Archives: Windsor Castle', *Archives et Bibliothèque de Belgique*, LXII, 3-4, Brussel 1991, pp. 395-422.

² The documents will be available through subscribing libraries or onsite at The National Archives, UK and the Royal Archives, Windsor Castle.

³ Any interest in purchasing the Stuart & Cumberland Papers should be sent to: emea.galereply@cengage.com.



Removing part of a guard to reveal obscured text



Showing how documents are mounted in Stuart volumes



A wax seal with paper protector in a Stuart volume