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The Walberswick Scroll
John Doman Turner
1931-32

Assessment of the scroll for
in-situ conservation (and options for
future storage, display and care)

25.08.2022

The Walberswick Scroll, Walberswick, Suffolk

Brief history

The Walberswick Scroll is one of 4 similar drawings on paper completed by John Doman Turner (1871-1938). Turner was born in Lambeth, south London, where he lived and worked as a stockbroker's clerk. He was associated with the Camden Town Group, gaining artistic training during a 5-year correspondence with the artist Spencer Gore, attended Walter Sickert's evening classes at Westminster School of Art and exhibited on occasion with the group. Turner married a woman from Norwich and spent time on the Suffolk coast, including Walberswick and Southwold (two of the other scrolls depict scenes in Southwold). He also painted locally in south London, in particular the annual fair on Mitcham Common. He died in Streatham in 1938.



Sections of the Walberswick Scroll as viewed in August 2022

The Walberswick Scroll (titled ***Walberswick: A Diaramic Pictorial Record of a Suffolk Village***) was sketched over two summers (1931 and 1932 – the wettest and coldest for 100 years!) and records the buildings along each side of the road running through the village. It is an unique snapshot of the period as it includes the names of individual buildings, details of shops and tradesmen, and particulars about daily life, such as the river Blyth ferry timetables, the programme of events in the village hall and even notice of an exhibition of watercolours. The main focus is of the buildings, although some figures do appear (many simply outlines) and they may have been recognisable members of the community at the date the drawing was made.

The drawing is executed in pencil, ink and watercolour (with notes and annotations) on sheets of thin wove paper of varying dimensions. The paper sheets have been joined to form a continuous length which measures 123 ft (l) x 2 ft (w) (3700cm x 600cm).

The other scrolls include:

- **Trinity Fair Scroll**, 1933 (depicting a travelling circus) previously shown in long lengths in a reception room at the Swan Hotel, Southwold; this has now been cut down and framed in smaller sections and displayed on two upper corridors in the hotel.
- **Ferry Road Scroll**, 1930 (detailing the buildings along Ferry Road, Southwold) and now stored at the Southwold Museum. The scroll is in poor condition and not easily accessible.
- **Fairground Frieze**, 1934 (depicting circuses and fairground attractions in Southwold). The scroll is part of the Theatre and Performance collection at the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (S.579-1983). It is currently unavailable to view as it is part of the decant of collections from Blythe House to the new storage facility at V&A East.

Each of the other scrolls are considerably shorter in length (the V&A scroll measures only 743cm).

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Care and usage of the Walberswick Scroll

The scroll is a much-loved treasure in Walberswick and has been frequently shown to the local community and visitors alike. In the 1950s it was openly displayed on a table-top in the Gannon Rooms and rolled between two wooden spindles. When not on display it was stored on a high shelf in the Village Hall in a shallow glazed box (this was fortunate in that it avoided damage and probable loss during a flood in 1953). The scroll moved to the new Village Hall in 1968/9 and then more recently to the Heritage Hut.

The Heritage Hut is a secure building with lockable doors and windows. The windows have blinds which can be used to reduce daylight, while overhead spot lights on tracking can be adjusted for viewing purposes. A heating system is used to control temperature and relative humidity, with conditions recorded and monitored.

In the 1980s, damage typical of frequent handling, and rolling and unrolling for display, meant it was becoming increasingly fragile, with losses, splits and tears, some of which had been repaired with pressure sensitive adhesive tape (such as Sellotape). With money raised through subscription, the scroll was sent to Cambridge for conservation treatments (name of conservator unknown) and a local resident, Tony Whittenbury, converted a football table in which to store and display it.



The Southwold, Ferry Road Scroll exhibiting the type of damage, with tears, losses and staining from tape repairs – this is the state the Walberswick Scroll is likely to have been in prior to conservation in the 1980s.



Repair to looses at upper edge of paper and staining from Sellotape reduced during conservation in the 1980s.

It is understood that the scroll is legally owned by Walberswick Parish Council (they cover the insurance of the scroll) – however, at various times it has been in the hands of Southwold Museum, Ipswich Record Office and exhibited at Christchurch Mansion, Ipswich. Viewing now takes place 2-3 times per year, facilitated by members of the Walberswick Scroll Advisory Group (a group of local residents, with knowledge of and an interest in the history, care and access to the scroll).

For many years, up until his death in 2020, Richard Scott was the 'keeper' of the scroll (a recording exists of him describing a viewing).

Further information about John Doman Turner and his art, including the 4 scrolls, can be found on the following website: www.johndomanturner.com

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Description and condition of the housing and turning mechanism

The converted football table has a hinged upper section which opens up to reveal two inner spools which hold the scroll in tension and a chain mechanism with two turning handles which serves to wind the scroll between the two spools. When closed the upper section has a glass viewing pane through which the scroll can be seen as it is turned through its length. There is an additional protective, and well fitting, wooden lid which covers the scroll, protecting it from light when it is not on display. The legs of the table have lockable casters; it can be moved around the room of the Heritage Hut for viewing. The lid and legs also protect the scroll from any water ingress.

Dimensions of the housing:

Overall 1339mm (l) x 790mm (w) x c.740mm (h)
The spools: 603mm (l) (LHS) and 599mm (l) (RHS)
The spools are centred 847mm apart



The converted football table with viewing pane; the upper section lifted off to show the spools, and the chain and handle turning mechanism.

The housing is sturdy, secure (with a lock to hold the upper section in place at one end) and generally in excellent condition. However, the wood, metal, glass and plastic components are not conservation grade materials, and will be contributing cumulatively to the deterioration of the paper. The paper also runs across a plate glass bed with hard edges – this provides a pressure point that will cause stress to the paper and may also catch where joins are separating (see below left).

In addition, despite the housing having been refurbished in 2019 and the mechanism overhauled in order to re-align the paper on the spools correctly, the upper and lower paper edges are no longer parallel and the spool turning system has caused damage to the upper and lower edges of the scroll in places in the past and continues to do so.



Paper runs across edge of glass plate; paper veers across the spools along the length of the scroll; buckram taped to wooden spool

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The paper ends of the scroll are reinforced with vertical strips of paper, stitched to sheets of green buckram which is in turn taped to the wooden spools with self-adhesive brown tape (although there is evidence that in the past the buckram was pinned in place); the tape is loose and could easily become detached as the adhesive dries out and fails (see above right). It may also not be aligned correctly and thus also contribute to the paper veering across the spools as it is turned.

Buckram at joining edge is: 565mm (h)

Buckram at taped end is: 558mm (h)

Buckram length is: c.560mm

Description and condition of the paper scroll

The primary support is a thin, wove paper, more like a paper used for plans or architectural drawings, and less like paper usually used by watercolour artists for finished works. It is difficult to visualise how the artist would have undertaken the sketching outdoors on such large sheets of thin paper – they may have been pinned to a drawing board, or firstly dampened and then taped out to create a taught drawing surface. The sheets appear to have been executed one at a time, and butted up to each other (rather than with an overlapping join) – the joins may always have been secured from the verso with tape or additional pasted strips of paper, although the extra layer of paper would have caused some distortions of the paper surface from the start.



Overall, the drawing is mostly executed in pencil and watercolour with pencil and brown ink inscriptions, titles and annotations. In some places the original ink appears to have faded or be washed out, and the letters have been overwritten in black ink at a later date (1932?).

Abutted joins, and later ink annotations.

(It would be useful to look at the Ferry Road Scroll in Southwold Museum, as the original materials and construction may still exist and be similar to that of the Walberswick Scroll).

It is assumed that it was during treatment in the 1980s, that the primary support paper was lined onto secondary support papers made from a European, cream, laid paper. The sheets may vary in dimension (although this was difficult to determine while the scroll was attached to the spools), are further supported in places with additional strips of linen tape (also of varying dimensions), and then lined with a longer length of linen towards the end of the scroll. All the changes in lining materials will be causing different stresses and contributing to the embedded creases, and planar distortions throughout the length of the scroll.

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While the lining paper serves to fill any small losses and support tears and creases, it has been inexpertly applied (probably not using a light box to aid the alignment of tears), and may not have been the most suitable choice of material – a finer, but stronger Japanese paper would have been a better choice of lining material and remained more flexible as a roll.

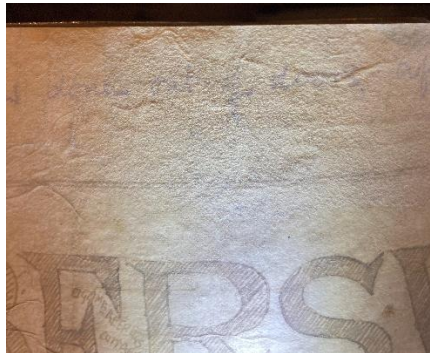
In addition to the lining which was applied to the verso of the scroll, large areas of loss, particularly to the edges have been patched with a European paper – while carefully executed, they may also be contributing to the distortions. The patches are further supported in places with a thin, white tissue (maybe lens tissue or Spider tissue) on the recto – this tissue is also used to support vertical joins to the original paper of the scroll as well as some tears, obscuring the watercolour in these areas. As with the lining paper, a stronger, long fibred Japanese tissue, such as Tengujo tissue would have been a better and more sympathetic choice of material.

The **first section of the scroll is a map of Walberswick** with detailed inscriptions and the names of houses clearly articulated. The map section measures: LHS: 563mm, RHS: 547mm, Top edge: 362mm and Lower edge: 368mm. The map has numerous creases in the paper surface, old tears and losses. These have been repairs as part of the lining process and there is additional thin tissue extending across the upper and lower edges – this slightly obscures the annotations.

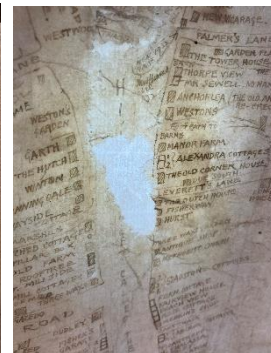
At the beginning of the scroll the primary support is lined onto a cream, laid paper measuring c.445mm that overlaps the join of the map and the second sheet of original paper of the first watercolour drawing. The upper edge has been trimmed leaving a loss to the original and a jagged edge; neither the dimensions nor the alignment of the design fit those of the adjacent watercolour (see images below).



Creases, tears and losses repaired as part of the 1980s relining process



Thin tissue overlay obscuring text



Losses patched with laid paper

The **first watercolour** appears to overlap the front leading edge of the map, probably as part of the relining process during the 1980s conservation – it feels like even if the scroll had originally been joined, that during re-lining the sections were taken apart and joined again.

Is it possible that the map had originally been a separate entity? (How does this tally with other similar works by the same artist? It would be interesting to see how the initial design of the other scrolls are introduced). There is loss to the whole upper edge and some loss to the lower one; the lower one has been trimmed (see below far left).

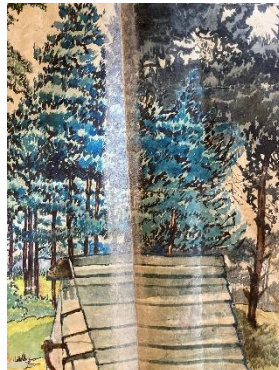
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Misaligned map and first
Watercolour



Numerous creases



Tissue across the recto



Linen support on the verso

Otherwise, damage to the first watercolour is in the form of creases formed during the relining process. At the join with the second watercolour there is a strip of thin white tissue vertically along the whole recto obscuring the pigments (see above centre right) and a fabric (cotton or linen) strip c. 72mm wide adhered vertically along the verso join (see above far right).

Watercolour 1 measures 349mm along the upper edge and 338mm along the lower edge.
Watercolour 2 measures 983mm along the upper edge and 973mm along the lower edge.
Further along the scroll at the paper join prior to *Rosemary* the paper measures 550mm (h) while at *Thorpe V* it is 547mm (h).

These irregular measurements, both vertically and horizontally, appear to be typical throughout the length of the scroll and are clearly contributing to the veering of movement along the length of the scroll.

Given that there was limited time to examine the full extent of the scroll, general observations have been made in relation to the condition of the scroll and listed and illustrated as follows (note that the majority of the images are with a raking light which highlights surface deformations):



(Left) The slight incorrect joining of watercolour brush strokes indicate that the sheets were joined after being executed, either by the artist or misaligned during the lining process.

(Right) Planar distortion



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(Left) There are several marks associated with old tape repairs (probably Sellotape) both vertically and horizontally at the verso of the original paper – these do not appear to correspond to areas of damage so their value is unknown.

(Right) Staining from Sellotape along the lower edge.



(Left) Edges trimmed in some places extremely close to annotations.

(Right) First split at join in drawing at top edge.



Darker rectangular patches with repaired losses to the centre of each – the rectangles may be staining caused by adhesive from tissue patches between the primary support and a lining – if so these are very unsympathetic repairs.



(Left) First edge loss below outbuilding to *Thorpe V.*

(Right) Very deep crease in upper section above *Tod's Cottage.*



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(Left) large area of tissue on recto surface across upper left corner of *Thorpe V* building roof – extent of tissue is unnecessary to secure tear.



(Right) Bubbling surface and loss of adhesive between primary and secondary supports.



(Left) In numerous places there are vertical strips of paper from top to lower edge as supports – however, no damage is visible from the recto.



(Right) Long, slightly curved strip of Sellotape used as an old repair (now removed) but translucency from adhesive remains and paper is stained (to left of *Mafeking Cottages*).

(Below left) Edge tears at both top and lower edges around the area of the *Gannon Reading Room*.
(Below right) Edge tears, mostly upper edge above *Old Farm* and *Old Farm Garage*.



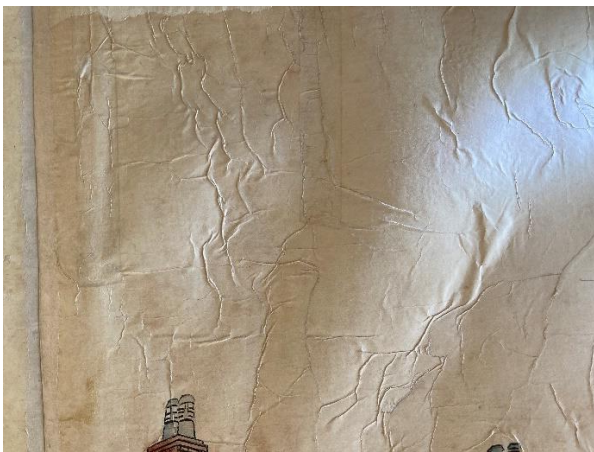
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(Left) At the join between *Winton* and *The Hutch*, there is an additional fabric (cotton/linen tertiary backing) – it has a further vertical strip of linen across the join on the verso. The linen continues to the end of the scroll.

(Below left) Extensive creasing above *The Hutch*.

(Below right) The longest split at a paper join is by *Concord Cottage*.



(Below left) Deep, embedded creases caused during the turning process.

(Below right) Staining from old Sellotape repairs and planar distortion caused by paper joins, support strips and unsympathetic repairs.



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(Below left) Detail of edge tears caused when the paper is caught on the wooden spools.
(Below right) Detail showing poor alignment of damaged area of primary support with creases, wrinkled paper and overlapping edges.



Conclusions

It appears the artist deliberately chose a lightweight paper on which to execute the watercolour drawing and while joined, maybe with some similarly lightweight supporting strips of paper behind the paper joins, the scroll was able to withstand repeated rolling and movement (across a table top on wooden spindles) for a good period of time.

However, with handling, the scroll inevitably became more fragile, suffering creases, tears and losses. In the extract from the *Walberswick Story* by Allan Jobson, published in 1953, reference is made to the scroll having been restored – this maybe when pressure sensitive tapes (such as Sellotape) were applied to the verso of the primary support. This was a typical amateur repair method in the past and would have appeared sound for a period of time. However, over time, the adhesive layer on such tapes deteriorates, firstly becoming tacky and seeping into the paper fibres, and eventually drying out and causing the plastic carrier to fall off, but leaving dark staining to the paper.

The subsequent remedial treatments, carried out in the 1980s have been described above, and in some places illustrated. It seems that there is no record of where the scroll was sent for treatment or the materials used (although there may be some information in Parish Council minutes or in the Suffolk RO archives).

My view is that while sound in concept (ie to repair and reline the scroll), and many of the repairs, especially to the edges are well executed, the main lining technique is poor, and materials used are unsympathetic and applied in such a way as to obscure the design in places, set up stresses in the paper, and an uneven distribution of weight along the length of the scroll. In addition, the edges of the scroll have been trimmed and there is consequent loss to some written information.

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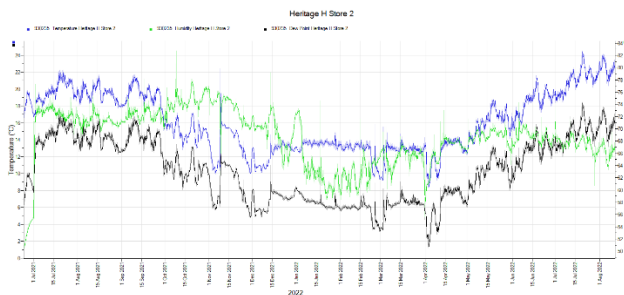
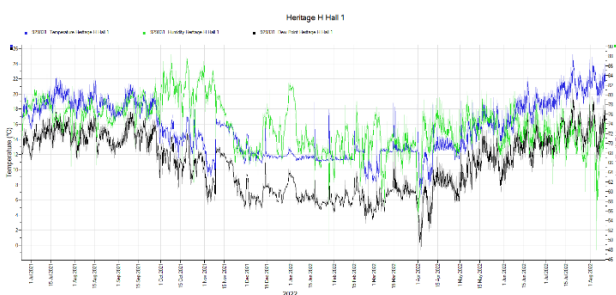
Since the 1980s interventions, in some places there is now a loss of adhesion where the primary support was joined or where subsequent supporting strips of paper were applied, resulting in vertical splits. There is now edge damage caused by the spools – local creasing and small tears.

Finally, as the paper has continued to deteriorate over time, it is likely to have embrittled and is more fragile overall; the deep creases and planar distortion are exacerbated by the rolling.

Key observations:

- The irregular shape of the joined sheets mean the sides of the scroll are not parallel and as it rolls onto the spools, deep creases are being set up.
- The lining process, materials used and additional supporting strips on the verso are all contributing to the tensions causing planar distortions.
- Inevitably, the scroll will alter between being either tighter or looser on the spools depending on where it is held on the spools along its 123ft length.

Environmental conditions:



The readings above represent a year from July 2021 to August 2022 for both the main room in the Heritage Hut (left) and the Store (right). In general, there are quite wide fluctuations which is not ideal, probably due to the heating being adjusted to accommodate people comfort for events, and turned down when the building is not being used.

However, as described below, the football is providing some buffering from the environment in the room.

The housing:

- The bespoke housing of the converted football table has provided security, protection from light when the scroll is not being viewed, a mechanism by which the scroll can be turned, and protection from dust, dirt and additional handling (including grease from hands).
- The casing will also be providing a degree of buffering from any fluctuations in environmental conditions (temperature and relative humidity - see above).
- However, some of the materials used in the housing, such as the wood and the plastics will have been, or continue to off-gas and are not suitable in close/confined proximity to the paper. There is for example little in the way of isolating material between the wooden spools and the paper (apart from the buckram). The paper also moves across the glass plate bed with quite a sharp square edge touching the paper causing a pressure point and catching on any paper splits or tears.

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- It has been reported that the turning mechanism worked well in the past, although many of the edge tears to the paper are not new and damage has inadvertently been caused over a period of some years.
- More recently, the turning mechanism has been overhauled, but it appears it no longer turns as easily as it has done and hence concerns being raised about continuing to allow access to the whole length of the scroll.

Recommendations

In situ-conservation treatments (immediate treatments to edge damage and splits):

- Surface cleaning of selected areas as required.
- Repair of all edge tears along the upper and lower edges along the whole length of the scroll.
- Patch repairs to any areas of loss to the edges.
- Re-adhering splits in joins to the primary support and additional adhesive applied to previous supporting strips on the verso.
- Support from the verso to any lifting or jagged edges that might catch on the spools of the glass plate.

All materials would be conservation grade and mostly applied to the verso side of the scroll.

Work would take place in-situ in the Heritage Hut. The scroll would need to be removed from its current housing and accessible in such a way as to be able to work on it from both sides (this might necessitate a temporary turning / support mechanism such as large cardboard tubes).

Work to take place over a period of 3 days:

- Day 1 Travel, visit to Southwold to examine the scrolls in the Museum and the Swan Hotel / set up and start treatments
- Day 2 Treatments
- Day 3 Complete treatments, return scroll to new housing or temporary storage, travel.

Cost: £1,280 (labour @ £360 per day + report writing @ £200)

Repair materials @ **£20**

I believe it is necessary to support the paper against another layer of material, for example polyester wadding, in order to take up some of the dimensional variations and prevent further deep creases and planar distortion. This would then require temporary packing and storage @ **c.£250** preparation and materials.

Travel @ **c.£60** and accommodation/subsistence @ **c.£150 x 2**)

(NB – While I was on site, I would also be willing to prepare and deliver an evening talk to the village community to include information on caring for paper @ **£150**)

Total estimate: @ c. £1,910 - £2,060

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New housing:

While I fully appreciate the care taken to provide a housing for the scroll, the current system is contributing in a number of ways to its on-going deterioration and recent damage. During my visit on 9 August 2022 there was some discussion around adapting the current mechanism, for example installing barrel shaped spools or adjusting the length of the spools – although the latter is limited by the internal dimensions of the converted football table.

I have been thinking about this further, and having looked at the various measurements taken along the length of the scroll, observing the extent of the veering of the paper off-centre, and recalling the number of times I had to adjust the scroll on the spools, I am increasingly concerned about the damage that will continue to be caused by its current turning/spool mechanism.

In addition, the housing is not made of appropriate materials and the scroll would benefit from being stored and displayed in more suitable conditions. The converted table is a means of presentation, and not the original artwork, and no longer fit for purpose.

If in-situ conservation is carried out as per the quotation above, and returned to the current housing (even with some adaptation), damage will continue to be caused.

A new housing, using conservation grade, inert materials, with wider diameter tubes on which to wind the scroll and longer spindles to allow the scroll to turn without touching the edges of the spools is essential. The idea of barrel shaped spindles may well be incorporated. Thought should be given to a new turning mechanism that is carefully balanced on both sides of the spools.

Otherwise, the housing should be enclosed (dust proof and provide environmental buffering), secure (lockable), enable good viewing (with a non-reflective glass viewing pane), and with the ability to prevent light falling on the scroll when not in use (cover, doors etc).

A new housing and turning system will require design by an engineer / designer with an understanding of conservation storage and display requirements. There are several conservation suppliers who may be able to support this, for example Conservation-by-Design, or Willard Conservation Equipment Engineers. Several UK Museums may also be able to advise – I am in touch with technical staff at the Victoria & Albert Museum and have also contacted Bridget Mitchell of Arca Preservation, who creates mounts for paper artefacts.

Costs unknown at present.

I appreciate this is a more costly investment, and will take longer to design, and implement satisfactorily, but it would contribute greatly to the long-term preservation of the scroll.

In the meantime, there has already been investment in high quality images which could be used to make a facsimile of the whole scroll. This could be printed on a continuous roll of paper, without joins, which would ensure it moves across the spool mechanism evenly. The digital copy could then be made available on an almost permanent basis for viewing inside the current converted football table or up until a new housing is constructed to show the original artwork.

Note - it is becoming common practice in many museums to use of combination of display and access techniques in order to balance the needs of visitors and the preservation of original material.

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Full conservation treatment:

I have described the remedial treatments undertaken in the 1980s and believe these are contributing to the problems the scroll is now subjected to and the damage caused.

The scroll would ultimately benefit from full conservation treatment. This could include:

- Surface cleaning
- Testing pigments and inks to sensitivity to moisture
- Humidification and removal of old repairs, linen and paper supporting strips, and the old relining paper
- Repair and relining using suitable weight and flexible materials (Japanese papers) and wheatstarch paste (to include careful realignment of tears)
- Lining paper to extend beyond the edges of the scroll to accommodate the uneven dimensions of the original paper.
- Preparation for installation onto new turning mechanism

Full conservation would be a serious intervention and take considerable time. It would have to be undertaken by a qualified and accredited paper conservator with a studio able to accommodate the scroll.

The following is a ballpark estimate supplied by **Museum Conservation Services Limited**, Duxford, Cambridge. NB. If you are interested in pursuing this option, Nicholas Burnett, ACR should be asked to independently assess the scroll and provide a full costed treatment proposal.

See: <https://www.conservationregister.com/acr-profile-page/1408/>

Cost: c.£30,000

Environmental monitoring:

It would be interesting and useful to compare the environmental conditions inside the current housing with those of the room. This could be done with a small button environmental logger, with data downloaded via blue-tooth technology on an app.

See: <https://bluemaestro.com/products/tempo-disc-bluetooth-temperature-humidity-sensor-beacon-logger>

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