



THE UNIVERSITY OF
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Ballarat Mechanics Institute Heritage Library

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reveals her true colours

Von Mueller's books –
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Progress on conservation and environmental monitoring projects



Image 1: Bonneted Girl with Dog – detail mid-way through varnish removal

The BMI acknowledges the Wadawurrung people as the first inhabitants and traditional custodians of the land on which the BMI building stands.

GCS acknowledge that we are on the lands of the Wurundjeri people who have been custodians of this land for thousands of years and acknowledge and pay our respects to their Elders past and present.



The Ballarat Mechanics Institute Heritage Library Conservation project is supported by the Victorian Government through the Living Heritage Grants Program.

In March 2022, Ballarat Mechanics Institute Heritage Collection items were transferred to Grimwade Conservation Services in North Melbourne so in-depth conservation treatment could commence. Progress immediately started on the nineteenth-century untitled oil painting known as *Bonneted Girl with Dog*. Documentation of the first group of rare books was completed, and the first report was generated from the environmental data to reveal the conditions in which the collection items will be housed in the future.

Bonneted Girl with Dog.

The conservation treatment of *Bonneted Girl with Dog* commenced in earnest in March. Principal Paintings Conservator Caroline Fry removed dirt and discoloured varnish by swabbing with solvents to expose the vibrant colours of the original oil paint. This revealed concealed details along with lightness and delicacy in the fabric and skin tones, and the gentle expressions of the girl and her dog. Stiff patches and bulky adhesive were removed from the back, tears were repaired, and holes filled to allow the brittle canvas to be lined onto new fabric. Dull bronze paint was removed from the frame revealing traces of original gilding in schlag leaf – a fine metal film with a bright appearance like gold.

In April, the painting will be lined onto new linen and final treatment to the surface will be completed, before the painstaking process of retouching of the lost image is commenced.

Damages to the frame will be infilled and in-gilded to match the original finish, and the painting and its fresh gold frame can be reunited.



(Top to bottom)

Image 4: Conservator Caroline Fry removes degraded varnish using solvents and cotton wool.

Image 3: Frames Conservator Jordi Casasayas removes dull bronze paint to reveal traces of bright schlag gilding

Image 2: Caroline removes bulky patches from the back of the canvas

Conservation of Ferdinand von Mueller Collection

Photography and condition assessment of the books from Ferdinand von Mueller Collection was completed, and cleaning in preparation for conservation was commenced.



Image 5: Book Conservator Peter Mitchelson and Conservation Assistant Tina Kaliakmanis documenting books from the von Mueller Collection prior to conservation treatment.

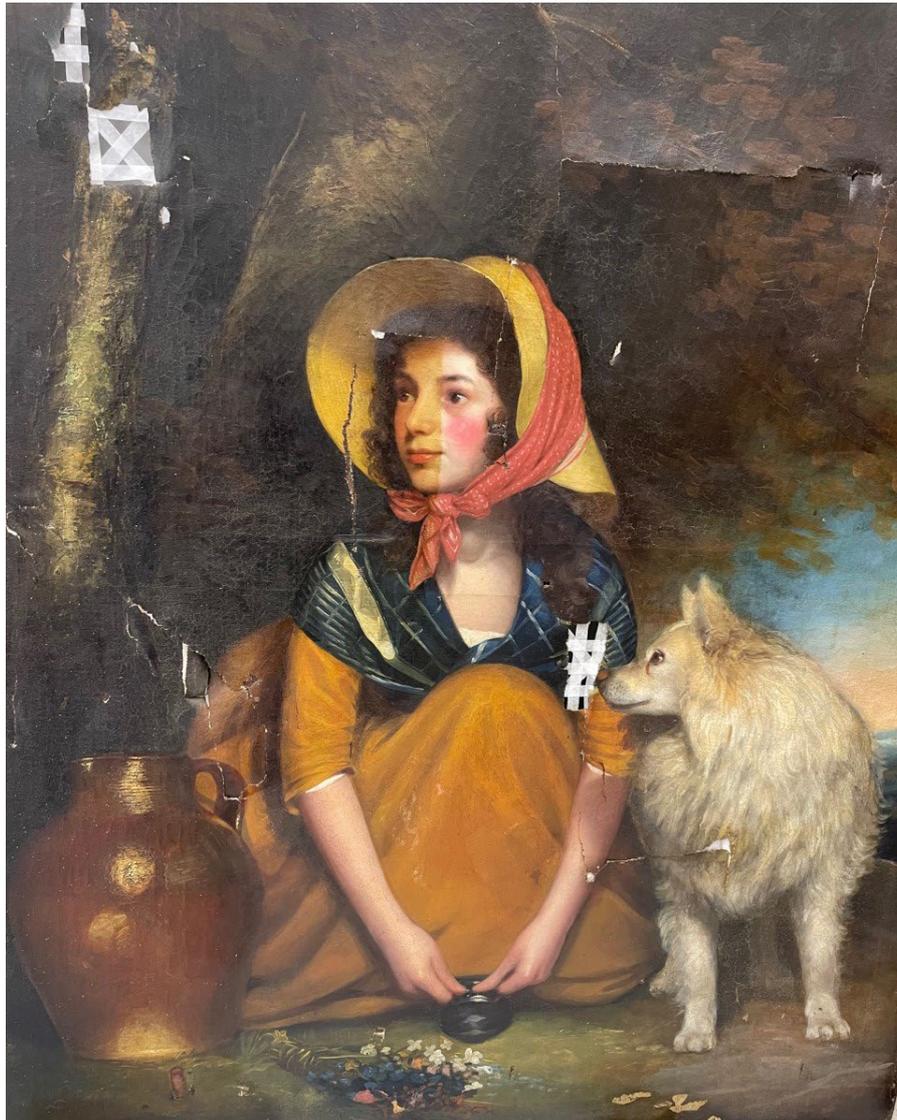
Environmental Monitoring

At the start of March, the first clear set of data was able to be downloaded from the dataloggers installed in various spaces in the Mechanics Institute building. The data revealed the types of fluctuations you would expect to find in a large heritage building. Interestingly, some of the lesser used spaces appear to offer potentially stable conditions for the storage of more vulnerable parts of the collection. This will become clearer over the coming months as we collect more data.

What next?

In April:

- The von Mueller books will move onto the next stage as documentation is completed, and cleaning and minor conservation treatment commences.
- The oil painting, Bonneted Girl with dog will be lined onto new linen and returned to a stretcher.
- Documentation and anoxic pest treatment of the von Mueller herbaria will commence.



Get in touch



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