Change and Decay: 
a history of damage and conservation in Balliol’s medieval manuscripts

curated by Anna Sander
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**Introduction**

I have produced numerous small displays of medieval manuscripts for teaching and college events since I became responsible for the collection in 2010 and moved it to the new premises in 2011, but this is the first major exhibition of Balliol’s western medieval manuscripts in the Historic Collections Centre at St Cross Church.

While avoiding a miscellaneous ‘Treasures of…’ approach, I have tried to include manuscripts from the whole medieval period covered by Balliol’s collection (C11-16), and to represent a range of provenances, decoration and handwriting styles, contents, sizes, formats, physical condition, and conservation issues. Exceptions prove the rule; not everything in the exhibition is medieval, western or a codex (book-shaped) – or even manuscript (handwritten). Two manuscripts are shown closed; one is displayed upside down. Some mss are well known to scholarship and have been exhibited before; others are relatively unknown. All are catalogued (1-450 by RAB Mynors, 1963), but to widely varying degrees of detail. Visitors may be surprised by the variation in the amount of documentation about not only conservation work but provenance and donation.

Not every manuscript shown has been conserved – or at least not to modern standards - yet. The exhibition features a number of fine examples of the work of the Oxford Conservation Consortium and previous conservators known and unknown, but it marks a milestone rather than an endpoint. The OCC has been providing conservation services to Oxford’s special collections since 1990. Balliol joined it in 2006 at the instigation of Dr Penelope Bulloch, then Fellow Librarian, and with support from John Phillips and the Balliol Society. The OCC became an independent charity in 2014, and Balliol’s Archivist and Finance Bursar sit on its management committee. The OCC now cares for the historic collections of 17 colleges. They also maintain the Chantry Library of conservation-related sources, which is available to everyone.

One great advantage of OCC membership is the ability to plan not only a full year’s work but strategies and priorities for years to come. We have been able to move from a reactive programme of occasional work on individual manuscripts to proactive long-term planning that includes detailed conservation of key individual items but emphasises improving the condition and care of the collection as a whole.

Curatorial initiatives for the medieval manuscripts comprise a network of related projects:

**Completed:** 2014 condition survey, boxing of all manuscripts (nearly 100) previously without boxes, 2017 exhibition. More details and illustrations are available on the blog.

**Ongoing:**

- Conservation treatment/repairs
- Improving descriptions and updating bibliography
- Digitisation for documentation & research
- Supporting teaching and research in person
- Documenting manuscript fragments in early printed books
- Workshops on correct handling of special collections material for students preparing for research using archives and manuscripts
The aim of all of these activities, and others as yet in the planning stages, is to improve preservation and access for all the manuscripts. **Preservation** means ensuring the continued survival, and improved physical condition, care and handling of, all manuscripts. **Access** is not only hands-on consultation of original material, but also improved access to better information about the manuscripts; images are an important source of information. It also includes improving understanding of the manuscripts as texts, physical objects and cultural products. **Conservation** means specialist professional treatment and repair of individual manuscripts, with the aim of ensuring that future careful handling/consultation/display does not actively cause further damage.

Each of the manuscripts displayed is augmented by a number of prints from digital photographs. While no facsimile edition or digital image can replace direct encounters with original manuscripts, they can support and augment research. An exhibition can only show one opening of a codex, or one side of a document, at a time, in a single geographical place, to a limited number of people, for a limited period of time. Digital images can help to provide more access to information about, and contained within, the manuscripts, to more people in more places over a longer period.

Digital photography of the manuscripts is carried out as part of my work as archivist, prioritised by researchers’ enquiries. Images are sent to individual enquirers and also posted to Flickr at full resolution. Neither the original requester nor online users are charged for access to the images; widening access in practicable ways to collections that cannot be made generally available in person is part of the College’s obligations as a Charity, and of its aims as a higher education institution responsible for these historic collections.

The supplementary images in each display case provide a window into other parts of the book and a magnified view of tiny details that can be hard to appreciate with the naked eye. If you are inspired by the original manuscripts on display to explore the wider world of manuscript studies, links to more images of these and many more of Balliol’s medieval manuscripts, and a starter list of ‘Further Reading’ sources, are provided at the end of this guide and at balliolarchivist.wordpress.com.

I would like to thank Jane Eagan and her team of dedicated professional conservators at the Oxford Conservation Consortium for a decade of not only repairs to the archives and manuscripts, and latterly to some of the early printed books as well, but also for their expert advice and support on all aspects of the material wellbeing of the historic collections, including environmental monitoring and amelioration, pest monitoring and treatment, local and international loans and exhibitions, project grant applications and planning.

I thank also Annaliese Griffiss for proof reading – all remaining errors are mine – and invaluable help preparing the exhibition.

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Photographs in this catalogue and its online additions are by Anna Sander for Balliol College except where otherwise indicated.

This catalogue is available in full online at balliolarchivist.wordpress.com, both as a PDF of this document and augmented with further detail in a series of blog posts tagged #mss2017.
We begin not with a codex but with a single sheet of parchment with a pendent seal, the usual format for individual medieval legal and administrative records. This is the first formal document laying out the constitution, governance and way of life of the scholars of Balliol College; it is issued in the name of Dervorguilla of Galloway, Lady de Balliol, and is dated at Botel (Buittle Castle, seat of the lords of Galloway, near the town of Dalbeattie in Dumfries & Galloway), on the octave of the Assumption of the glorious Virgin Mary (i.e. 22 August), in the year of grace 1282.

The Statutes have required remarkably little repair over their 735 years and are still in extremely good condition: as the College’s key founding document they have always been carefully preserved, and as they were legally superseded by Sir Philip Somervyle’s statutes in 1340 they were not current for long enough to suffer much wear from actual use. Parchment, usually made from the prepared skin of sheep or young calves, can last longer than a millennium if kept away from heat, damp, direct sunlight and pests; iron gall ink if made correctly and similarly preserved lasts as well. The fate of wax seals is often less happy, as in addition to the vulnerabilities already mentioned, they are naturally highly brittle and fragile even under the best storage conditions.

This document will have been folded around its seal for much of its existence; this has helped to preserve both the text and the seal. It and many of the medieval title deeds were flattened, and a modern label affixed, in the late 19th century. The original fold lines are still readily visible.

The Statutes were mounted in an acid-free buffered housing inside a Perspex box frame by Judy Segall of the Bodleian Library’s Conservation Department in 1986, at the instance of Dr JH Jones, then Dean and Fellow Archivist of Balliol This treatment protected the flattened document and its seal, and made it safe to produce for either research or College events.

In 2017, Dervorguilla’s Statutes have been lightly cleaned and rehoused in a new acid-free mount by Katerina Powell of OCC, with an outer box made by Bridget Mitchell of Arca Preservation.
The seal attached to the 1282 Statutes is not the College seal but the personal seal of Dervorguilla herself. In her right hand she holds an escutcheon (shield) bearing the orle (shield outline shape) of the Balliol family; on the left, the lion of Galloway. The other two shields represent Dervorguilla’s powerful English family connections: on the left, three garbs for the Earl of Chester; and on the right, two piles meeting toward the base for the Earl of Huntingdon. The motto on the obverse (front) reads, clockwise from the top: ‘+ S’[GILLUM] + DEVORGLLE DE BALLIOL FILIE ALANI DE GALEWAD’.’ [Seal of Dervorguilla de Balliol, daughter of Alan of Galloway.’] That on the reverse gives her titles in reverse: ‘Dervorguilla of Galloway, Lady de Balliol.’

The College's shield, used in its official logo today and visible in various forms throughout the College site in Broad Street, is taken directly from that shown on the reverse of Dervorguilla's seal, above: the arms of Balliol and Galloway impaled, with, unusually, those of the wife rather than the husband on the dominant dexter side - the right as held, though the left as viewed.

Further reading:
- F de Paravicini, Early History of Balliol College. 1891. (includes full text of Statutes)
- National Library of Wales, Seals in medieval Wales http://seliau.llgc.org.uk/
There is no record of College Meetings – the regular termtime business meetings of the Governing Body, formed of the Master and Fellows of the College – before 1514, except one isolated mention in College Archives B22.38, a decree by the Visitor regarding a dispute about debt. For much of the 16th century the Register records chiefly elections of Fellows, leases of College houses, leaves of absence etc. The volume was added to regularly and with increasing frequency for more than 150 years, and shows signs of wear and 18th century repairs to the outer edges of pages throughout and the binding, which has been replaced and then rebacked again.

Open at pp.91-92, entries for 1561-1564, in the early years of the reign of Elizabeth I and of regular records in the Register. The opening shows a number of different hands making entries, and others making indexing notes in the margin – the hand of C17 Fellow Nicholas Crouch, ubiquitous in the archives and early printed books, appears in the top left margin of the right-hand page. The lower half of the right hand page is in English while the rest is in Latin: ‘certayn customes to be observed’.

The other images displayed with the Register come from the back of the volume. The main text on the final page is a sequence of lists of Church feasts and saints’ days, probably to be observed in the Chapel. The page also shows a number of different hands from different decades, writing
dates and making pen trials including the initial A and name ‘Anthony’. There are again losses and paper repairs on the outer edge. Ink corrosion damage is evident in the middle third of the page, with a ghostly impression of the words on the other side of the page showing through in outline. Red ink offset probably shows the position of a flyleaf, perhaps reused liturgical manuscript, in a previous binding – it does not correspond to the position of red ink on the page facing it now.

Flyleaf – recycled liturgical manuscript with decorated initials, rubrics and musical notation, bound in upside down, showing marks where former cover was pasted down.
We have begun with two examples of administrative documents created in the course of College business. MS 349 perhaps conforms more closely to the expected type of a medieval manuscript: a 15th century copy on parchment, in several different English bookhands, of nine texts related to the office of priesthood.

This manuscript is, unusually, displayed closed in order to show the only surviving medieval binding in Balliol’s collection. Images are displayed to show a typical opening, some of the alum tawed supports showing through in places, and an illuminated initial using gold and colour.

MS 349 was bequeathed to Balliol by Dr George Coningesby (1692/3-1768, Balliol 1739) in 1768, and by then would have been an antiquarian gift rather than a contribution to the active contemporary College Library. Coningesby’s donations were just late enough to escape the wholesale rebinding of the medieval library in 1724-7, for which one Ned Doe was paid nearly £50. Most of the manuscripts are still bound in this 18th century half-calf (similar to suede); the bindings tend to be heavily glued and many have cracked and split, while the fuzzy covers are thin, and tear easily. Coningesby is the largest single donor of manuscripts (17 or 18) to the College after William Gray, a 15th century Bishop of Ely. He also left a large number of printed books to Balliol.

Losses to the cover of 349 reveal a bevelled edge of the wooden board; there is also (old and inactive) woodworm damage, and the smooth pigskin cover has faded from its medieval red nearly back to the original pale brown, though an inner corner shows some remaining dye. While in many cases medieval sewing structures may survive within later rebindings, they are difficult to observe; full medieval bindings are rarer survivals and provide useful research opportunities.
At some time there has been a modern repair of ff.121-122, a bifolium that had become detached from the textblock. Although there is some heavy cockling to folios at either end, and tears to spine folds in places, the book opens well and can be handled, carefully.

^^ MS 349 – turnin showing something of the cover’s original bright red
MS 350 contains three texts, connected by the subject, medieval English law, though not by age: a 12th century copy in Latin of the Herefordshire section of Domesday; an early C13 copy of Glanvill, also in Latin; and an early 14th century copy of another law treatise known as Britton, in Anglo-Norman French. From the Herefordshire connection, Mynors thinks it likely to have been another Coningesby gift, but there is no provenance documentation.

MS 350 is displayed open to ff. 11v-12r, part of the Herefordshire Domesday, with entries for the Wormelow and Elsdon hundreds. This opening shows surface dirt, particularly in channels from the head edge, liquid staining at the edges, and ink oxidation of the red initials – most have darkened from bright orange-red to silvery purple. Some of the red and green ink, though not blue, has come through from the verso. The manuscript was rebound, or at least recovered in white vellum (calf skin) in 1892, but this rebinding may have reused medieval wooden boards – it is impossible to tell from the outside. The manuscript is in generally good condition, and only needs some surface cleaning and repairs to the split parchment cover.
MS 350 – lively marginal penwork drawings in the second text, an early C13 copy of ‘Glanvill’, the earliest treatise on English law. Its full title is Tractatus de legibus et consuetudinibus regni Anglie (Treatise on the Laws and Customs of the Kingdom of England).
MS 263 is a late 14th or 15th century copy of a dozen texts of varying lengths on the subject of poetic and rhetorical composition, with a total of 181 folios. The text, in Latin, appears to be in one English hand throughout, with minimal decoration also in an English style. It is not known when or how the book came to Balliol.

This is certainly the most obviously damaged MS displayed. In addition to the ‘standard’ surface dirt, losses, and small tears, major liquid damage has caused not only loss and staining of parts of all of the first 100 folios but also brittleness, mould damage (no longer active), text loss in the first 90 folios, and blocking (pages stuck together). The parchment in the rest of the volume is badly buckled owing to the distortion when the damaged section became wet. Although the text block in the latter part of the volume is in fairly good condition, handling of this manuscript is further complicated by split joints and several broken and weak supports on the lower board – that is, the back cover is coming off.

The volume is displayed upside down for two reasons: to display the damaged area near the head edge as close to the viewer as possible, and to enable the use of lead weights (‘snakes’) at the display angle without their coming into contact with the damaged friable areas. The inversion has no impact on the spine or fragile supports. It is perhaps appropriate that displaying e.g. a flag upside down is an international distress signal.
This manuscript has been the subject of five unrelated research requests in the last five years, and this active research interest combined with its ‘unusable’ status has put it at the top of the conservation priority list. Once it is safe to handle, it will be both photographed in full, with images posted online, and made available for research in person in the usual way. It will remain fragile, but with careful handling, it will be possible to consult it without actively causing further damage.
MS 238E is the fifth in a set of five volumes containing Domenico Bandini (d. 1418), *Fons memorabilium uniuersi*, a medieval encyclopaedia in Latin. This copy was made c. 1444-8 for William Gray (d. 1478), later Bishop of Ely, during his travels in Germany and Italy, and bequeathed with his library to Balliol College. The scribes and illuminators of the five volumes, perhaps working largely at Cologne, display an international range of influences: Dutch, Italian, English, even Spanish. Illuminated initials and borders sometimes include Gray’s coat of arms. 238E contains Part V Bks. ii-v of the encyclopedia, with more than 100 marginal drawings apparently by its scribe, Laurentius Dyamas, who states in a final colophon that he was working for Gray. Although the same scribe appears to have written (at least) 238C as well, 238E is the only one to feature these marginal drawings. MS 238E was expertly repaired and rebound in the 1990s, prior to its digitization in 1997 for the Early Images at Oxford project, probably by Christopher Clarkson.
Book modification, or, Vandalism: Lost initials, lost text

Sian Witherden (Balliol 2011): Balliol College Library has one copy of the *Rudimentum Novitiorum* ('Handbook for Novices'), an encyclopaedia of world history whose author remains anonymous, shelfmark ARCH C.1.9. This book was printed on paper in Lübeck by Lucas Brandis on the 5th of August 1475. The volume is quite large at 380 x 290 mm, and it is still in the original stamped leather binding. Other copies from the same print run are held in libraries across the globe, including Berlin, Copenhagen, Moscow, Paris, Prague, Princeton, Vienna, and Zürich. Each of these copies has its own unique history, but what is perhaps most remarkable about the Balliol copy is the way it has been dismembered by a later reader (or perhaps readers). Many of the woodcut prints in this volume have been cut out, though there seems to be no obvious reason why certain images were selected for excision and not others. Perhaps the reader wanted to keep these particular ones for a scrapbook or put them to use in another volume. Unfortunately, leaves are also missing from both the front and back of the book.

Another reader was evidently so dismayed by the extent of the losses that he felt impelled to make a comment in the margins: “Is it not a great shame to the scholars of Balliol College to suffer such a choice book as this is to be thus defaced?” There is of course a distinct irony to this, as the annotator takes issue with the defacement of the volume while simultaneously adding his own blemishes to the same book. Abbreviations have been silently expanded and orthography has been modernized. For further reading on this book, see Dennis E. Rhodes, *A Catalogue of Incunabula in all the Libraries of Oxford University outside the Bodleian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 296–7.

Anna Sander: Unfortunately, the phenomenon of cut-out initials is similarly widespread, anonymous and often inexplicable in Balliol’s manuscripts, and those of many other collections. Sometimes a single inch-square initial will be taken and a full floral border left around it, or much larger and fancier initials elsewhere in the volume left intact. All but one may be taken, or only one or two initials not obviously different from the rest taken among a hundred. Sometimes there was no hard surface put under the cut page, and the cuts go through the next 4-5 ff as well. Of course, an initial excised from one side of a page usually means a significant loss of text on the other side.

*With thanks to James Howarth (Balliol Library) for pointing out the MS annotation, Sian Witherden (Material Evidence in Incunabula project (CERL)) for sending it to me and writing it up, and Luca del Panta for confirming my hunch that the final repeated word was Greek in Latin letters, and identifying it.*
Case 6: MS 148

MS 148, ff.44-45

MS 148 is a later 13th century copy, in a very small hand that Mynors takes to be French, of ‘Bernardi opuscula’ – a collection of short texts by St Bernard, Abbot of Clairvaux, the 12th century Cistercian theologian and reformer. This MS is one of many given to Balliol by William Gray, Bishop of Ely, in the mid-15th century; although it would have been a 200 year old copy of 300 year old texts by then, Bernard remained an important theological authority. The book’s continuing relevance for study is indicated by a table of contents and marginal comments added in a 15th-century hand.

MS 148 is displayed open at ff.44-45, showing a loss to the lower margin and some pleating. On the whole it does not appear particularly damaged apart from the torn area, but this MS was assessed in 2014 as in poor condition, suitable only for minimal very careful handling. In addition to the ubiquitous surface dirt, it has sustained numerous small losses including initials deliberately cut out, more tears to the very thin parchment, stains, cockling, pleating, smudging and some rodent damage. It has had some text block repair, particularly to tears near or directly affecting parts of the text, but some of these old repairs were losing adhesion and coming apart. Further recent repairs have improved its condition considerably, but extra care is still needed when handling such thin parchment, as it tears easily. It is not known when or by whom the small initials on ff 23 and 24 were removed.
MS 148 – details of decorated initials, showing oxidation and loss
MS 253 is a 13th century copy of a number of texts by Aristotle including the ‘Logica vetus’. Its exact provenance is not known, but a late medieval ownership inscription shows that it would have come to Balliol while still part of the University curriculum. The layout is that of a book intended for active study use: main text in the centre, with clear headings and section divisions, generous space on all sides and defined columns for generations of reader comments. There are copious marginal comments and annotations throughout – but they are not necessarily marks of individual study. Many sets of commentary circulated as texts in their own right and were designed to be copied into – sometimes with – the main text. In addition to the practical layout, MS 253 is decorated throughout; each section is headed with an illuminated initial, many appropriately inhabited by tutors lecturing to students.

MS253 was assessed in 2014 with a number of serious conservation issues: creasing/pleating on many folios, edge tears extending into the text, abrasion and oxidation of illuminated initials. These text block problems have been repaired in 2017, but the binding has suffered from wear as well: the cover (a particularly cheap and nasty piece of Ned Doe’s half-calf leather) is very worn, with multiple tears & losses particularly to the corners & head cap. The boards are warped, sewing supports are weak and all joints are split. In short, the C18 binding has reached the end of its useful life, and this is an excellent candidate for full rebinding.
Before and after: repair of a severe vertical crease that was distorting the page and obscuring text. Repair photos on this page by Celia Withycombe of OCC, 2017.

Initial, showing oxidation of some pigments.
MS 12 is not a manuscript at all: it is the one printed book given to Balliol by William Gray in the mid-15th century, and the only known printed book in Gray’s library. The text is Josephus’ *Antiquitates Judaicae (a history of the Jewish people)*, in the edition printed by Lukas Brandis of Lübeck before 1475.

Unusually, it is printed on parchment. The intention was to make the new printed books look as much like high-status manuscript books as possible: the layout, font and decoration all follow their manuscript heritage closely. Indeed, Mynors’ catalogue entry shows that Gerard Langbaine Sr, cataloguing college libraries in the C17, mistook it for a manuscript. And some of the work is done by hand: it was more efficient (and doubtless less expensive) to have a person hand-colour the headings, rubrics, capitals, woodcut illustrations, and even the red accents throughout the text.

This book has suffered numerous losses; more than one full leaf has been removed, and all the woodcuts have been cut out except one – presumably left accidentally. Aside from the losses, the text block is in good condition, but its weight had caused the binding to need repair and partial replacement more than once before the most recent rebinding work by OCC conservators in 2010-11 to remove and correct some heavy-handed previous repairs, and reattach both boards – see separate detailed conservation report.
MS 12 – the one remaining woodcut, colours and gold leaf applied by hand

A hazard of printing on parchment – while a scribe can anticipate, adjust for and write around a production tear/‘scar’ that leaves an area of uneven or missing writing surface, a mechanical press... makes a mess.
We now turn from the largest volume in the exhibition to the one of the smallest, oldest, and most recently acquired. MS 367 is an 11th century Antidotarium or collection of medical recipes and remedies, perhaps produced in Italy. The text is evidently a copy of a longer work, as one section heading begins ‘Liber quintus’, ‘the fifth book’ (chapter/section), but it has not been definitely identified. The MS is incomplete at both ends, one leaf is missing and two are bound in the wrong place. The binding is Victorian. From an inscription we see that Sir John Ponsonby Conroy, 1st Bt (Fellow of Balliol 1890) acquired this manuscript in Rome in 1895, and it was probably part of his bequest to the College in 1900.

The opening displayed shows old but relatively modern (probably Victorian) repairs, reinforcing the spine fold of f.7-8 and filling in losses to the upper fore edges – most folios show similar edge loss and repair. In several cases marginal text and illustrations have been lost, as here, and in several places text in the margin has been cut off, probably when the manuscript was rebound and the pages were trimmed to match. The parchment shows some staining and minor cockling throughout, but on the whole is in good condition for a much-used object the best part of 1000 years old, and does not need further intervention.
MS 367 marginal illustrations relating to medicinal remedies – a bearded man with two small phials, and one man treating the arm of another with salve against canker (ulcer/sore/infection)

At the foot of f.10r, a Latin pangram or holoalphabetic phrase, including all the letters of the alphabet and used as a pen-trial: ‘Exurgens kaurum duc zephyre flatibus equor’
MS 348, open at f.414-5, showing decorated initials and trimmed headings

MS 348 is a C13 Vulgate Bible, certainly in the ‘pocket Bible’ category at 3x4 ½”. The text is the complete Vulgate and occupies 550 ff., though a few small sections are missing. There are numerous tiny painted and penwork initials throughout, though no gold. Its provenance is unknown.

Conservation work on this tiny book is among the best documented in the collection: Chantal Karli, a Swiss conservator, undertook repairs funded by the Edward James Foundation in 1992, and has left a comprehensive report. The Foundation is a charitable trust which also runs West Dean College near Chichester, the main training college for conservation in the UK.

Karli notes that ‘the book has probably been kept in a fluctuating environment, which has caused the vellum to cockle in the margins of the 3 edges, particularly in the first half of the book.’ At some point in its history, numerous small cuts were made from the edges, sometimes into the text, in order to relieve the tension caused by this distortion in the parchment, and to allow the pages to lie flatter. However, with tension cuts in such thin parchment there is a risk that they will tear further when the page is turned, and this has happened in several places. Karli was also aware that the inflexibility of other old repairs may even have made the problem worse over the years.
The manuscript has been rebound, probably several times but most recently in the 1720s Balliol binding campaign by Ned Doe. As if the book were not small enough, successive binders have trimmed the edges of many pages to fit, to the point of losing text and decoration.
Case 9c: MS 451

MS 451, open at pp. 350-351, showing a full decorated page marking the beginning of the Commemoration of St Catherine of Alexandria

MS 451 is a Book of Hours, Use of Rome, probably made in the 1480s in Ghent or Bruges, in Latin with occasional notes in French, on parchment. Given to Balliol by the Rev. EF Synge.

Sian Witherden writes: ‘In late medieval Europe, this small format was a popular choice for prayer books, especially Books of Hours. These devotional texts were mostly written in Latin and typically include a calendar of church feast days, the seven penitential psalms, an Office for the dead, along with various other prayers. Books of hours were highly personal objects which were often passed down through the generations, and they were especially popular among women. While many books of hours have minimal decoration, this example contains numerous full-page illuminations.

‘Books this small allowed for an intimate reading experience while also having the advantage of being highly portable. Nevertheless, this mode of use presents its own set of conservation issues. For example, it would have been unavoidable for users to put their fingers on certain illuminations in order to read a book like MS 451 because it measures just 103 x 73 mm. Unfortunately, the edges of some beautiful pages are worn as a result.’

Although this tiny book shows signs of considerable use – surface dirt, some wear and abrasion especially to the miniatures, and minor staining, particularly the marks of fingers near the lower outer edge – it is in generally good condition. The 19th century binding by C. Kalthoeber of London is somewhat stiff, but robust, allowing us to use it for workshops on safe handling of special collections materials. Students are usually somewhat taken aback to be told to hold it in their hands (over a desk) rather than using standard foam wedge supports!
Above: the Crucifixion, facing the Hours of the Cross; figure of Death from a lower margin; trompe l’oeil border including blue flowers, strawberries and a bird; St Nicholas’ miracle of the three pickled boys.
MS 378 is an undated volume of prayers to the Virgin Mary in Ethiopic, or Ge’ez, the liturgical language of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. This is Balliol’s smallest manuscript book at only 2 ½ x 3 ½”, or 62 x 83mm. It is so tiny that its custom-made box is about four times the size of the book, with a recessed mount to hold it securely. One benefit of this rather larger box is that it’s easy to find on the shelf and to keep track of during production and consultation – a box as small as the book might easily be hidden behind a larger one.

This manuscript is displayed closed in order to show its Ethiopic sewing, often known as Coptic style and distinct from later western binding techniques. The Copts, early Egyptian Christians, were the first to use the codex format, and their sewing method is still unsurpassed in simplicity and flexibility: a new Coptic binding can be opened a full 360 degrees.

The MS is in fairly good condition; there is evidence of fairly recent repair to the attachment of the front board – what looks like a large stitch on the lower front cover – but other than some surface dirt it does not require further intervention. The paper label glued to the front cover, which MS 378 has in common with many of the others, is in the hand of EV Quinn, who began at Balliol as Assistant Librarian in 1940 and became Fellow Librarian in 1963, a post he held until 1982.

As yet, many of Balliol’s non-western manuscripts are still ‘closed books’: not yet accurately dated and without full descriptions of their contents, they have not been studied and their research value has yet to be assessed. We hope that through recently established Balliol and Oxford
contacts, and with good digital images emerging as useful tools, scholars in the relevant fields will soon be able to tell the College more about this part of the collection.

**Tiny Books**

Sian Witherden has been working on tiny books as part of her Balliol DPhil research. She writes: ‘In this exhibition, four small Balliol manuscripts have been placed together in one display case. These books are not related to each other in any way besides their common size—they contain different texts, they are written in a variety of languages, and they hail from across the globe. However, the creators of all these books faced the same challenge: how do you produce a readable text on such a small scale? Each of these books is smaller than an adult’s hand, and this demands an impressive level of craftsmanship. In MS 348, for example, the scribe has managed to write letters that are just a millimetre or two in height. Creating ornamental initials and illuminations on this scale is an equally arduous task, and close-up photographs of these decorations reveals an astonishing level of detail and precision.’

Anna Sander: On the one hand, small books are easy to move, hide or pack away if necessary; not obviously useful for recycling as binding waste, as big sheets of parchment are, when no longer e.g. liturgically relevant; and often much-loved, beautiful, and highly personal items handed down through generations. On the other, they are easily misplaced, lost or stolen owing to their small size; highly attractive on the market, reluctant though an owner might be to sell; and rather chunky to handle because of their high proportion of height and width to thickness. Mechanically, their own weight will not help to ‘persuade’ a stiff binding to open further, and in this exhibition, it’s only the tiny books that need to be strapped in place in order to keep them open.
Case 10: MS 396

Guard-book (hardbound fascicule volume) containing five leaves of an early 14th century noted Sarum Breviary, written in two columns of 28 lines with large red and blue flourished capitals. These leaves were found and removed from the binding of an ‘old dilapidated’ College account book in 1898, by George Parker of the Bodleian Library, who was checking College records on behalf of a Mr Richardson.

In addition to the obvious holes in the parchment, the unknown Victorian conservator observed that the material was damaged and fragile throughout, and applied a then popular method known as silking: a fine silk gauze was glued to both sides of the parchment. This was considered less invasive than the other method available at the time, which covered the damaged area with translucent paper.

Silking certainly reinforced the parchment while leaving the text and music largely visible from both sides, but it is hard to tell now how much of the brown discoloration may have been caused by the adhesives used in the silking process. The glue still gives off a distinct smell, but it would cause more damage to the leaves now to remove the silking than to leave it in place. The leaves are reasonably safe to consult as they are, so no further intervention will be made for now.

A breviary is one of the liturgical books used for the Office, the cycle of daily church services other than the Mass. It includes the text and musical notation, shown here in square black notes, known as neumes, on a red four-line stave. A direct descendant of this system, which indicates mode, pitch and relative note length, is still used for traditional Gregorian chant. Are these manuscript fragments related to any of the other pieces of liturgical manuscript recycled as binding waste in Balliol’s administrative records and early printed books? A question for future research...
Manuscript Fragments in Early Printed Books

Balliol’s archivist and librarians are working together with researchers to collect information about manuscript fragments reused in the bindings of the college’s early printed books. This information has not been compiled at Balliol before, and while some manuscript fragments are well known in secondary literature, the college’s catalogue entries do not always include copy-specific details describing them – or even indicating their presence.

Fragments are usually located just inside the front and/or back covers of books, may consist of paper or parchment, and can occur as spine linings, stubs, pastedowns and flyleaves. All kinds of texts are reused; so far we have already noted full or nearly full pages of text, decorated, decorated initials, sections of medieval and early modern music notation, and parts of administrative documents and personal letters.

More about research in manuscript fragments
- Images and descriptions from the ongoing Balliol project [https://www.flickr.com/photos/balliolarchivist/albums/72157683085214934](https://www.flickr.com/photos/balliolarchivist/albums/72157683085214934)
- Princeton University Library online exhibition about historic bookbindings, including a section on manuscript binding waste [http://libweb5.princeton.edu/visual_materials/hb/cases/bindingwaste/index.html](http://libweb5.princeton.edu/visual_materials/hb/cases/bindingwaste/index.html)
- Digital Image Archive of Medieval Music (DIAMM) [https://www.diamm.ac.uk/](https://www.diamm.ac.uk/)
- Harry Ransom Center, UTexas - Fragment identification crowdsourcing project [http://blog.hrc.utexas.edu/2012/07/26/manuscript-waste/](http://blog.hrc.utexas.edu/2012/07/26/manuscript-waste/)
The Formal Archives files E.1-3 contain several hundred charters, documents from the 14th century into the late 20th, pertaining to property at Long Benton near Newcastle, given to Balliol College by Sir Philip Somervyle (he of the revised Statutes) in 1340. The Long Benton deeds displayed are the earliest in the series, and represent over a thousand medieval title deeds in the archives. Before the advent of the Land Register, it was essential for landowners to retain the full documentary history of a property, in order to be able to prove their ‘title’ as rightful current owner – with the right to sell.

All but one of the documents displayed is written on a single parchment membrane, often on a piece only large enough for a few lines of text. Most have parchment tags, either made by cutting narrow strips from most of the width of the deed’s lower edge, or attached separately, carrying one or more pendent seals made of green, red, brown or natural white beeswax. Others have seals attached by plaited cords made from silk, linen or wool.

The content of title deeds is highly formulaic and deals with the transfer of property and rights. Their contents have received scholarly and antiquarian attention over the years, but as physical objects they have been both interfered with and neglected. At some point, some were flattened while others were left folded. They were bundled in brown paper packages; some of the labels from those bundles are displayed. In most cases the parchment of these deeds is in good condition, and the folded documents can be carefully flattened for reading. Their seals, however, are in a parlous state, and are not well protected for handling or storage.
Medieval seal impressions were not generally used for closing a document, but for authenticating it. Personal and institutional seals were used for centuries before personal signatures, and continued in tandem with them. Seals are an important part of medieval documents, carrying highly symbolic text and images; even their colour and shape can have meaning. They are also small, fragile, brittle and heavy for their size, and hanging from their charters, they move easily and are vulnerable to breaking.

I have been considering, with the OCC conservators, the best approach for long term preservation of these deeds, with particular concern for their seals. The questions we ask are specific to this type of document, but they follow a pattern similar for all archives and manuscripts. The chests, boxes and presses (cupboards) in which they would once have been stored do not survive. Should they all be flattened, or all folded? How can the seals best be protected? How do we balance the ideal treatment and the material requirements of the documents with the realities of time and resources available? How can the deeds be made safer to handle for research, teaching and photography? Will new packaging or housing occupy more shelf space in the repository? Are there other similar collections that offer a useful model? There are, and we hope to implement a good working solution for these charters within the next five years.
Case 12: MS 116

MS 116, open to ff. 125-6, showing illuminated initials, some ink corrosion from 125r, natural skin edges at lower right

MS 116 is a later 13th century copy of a commentary by Eustratius, an early 12th century bishop of Nicea, on Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. Its earlier provenance and Balliol donor are unknown, but an inventory mark places at Balliol by the late 14th century. Its current binding dates from the 1720s.

Despite minor issues such as surface dirt, some pleating and tearing on the last folio, pleats to the flyleaves and former pastedown, and some ink corrosion and offset, MS 116 is in good condition and does not need conservation treatment. This book seems to have been in the College Library since a time when it could reasonably have been expected to be in regular use for study, but it has suffered very little from the tooth of time, the teeth of creatures or the marauding knife of the initial-collector. Its well-executed illuminated initials are all still present and correct. MS 116 appears in the old catalogues, so it has not been lost – and yet it does not show much use either. An example perhaps of the benefits of benign neglect, thermally passive and minimally heated stone buildings, and good drainage...
MS 277 is a late 13th century copy, in Latin on parchment, of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* and *Meteorology*, translated by William of Moerbeke, and his *Ethics*, translated by Robert Grosseteste. This volume may have been at Balliol in the 14th century, alienated and returned in the 15th; given by Mr Robert Rok (Rook). It was rebound with the rest in the 1720s. There are illuminated initials of very good quality at the beginning of each book in the *Metaphysics*.

The manuscript’s main vulnerability was a detached bifolium (ff.140-141). This has been repaired and reattached by Celia Withycombe of OCC. Celia comments: ‘Previous parchment spine repairs to the centre of the gathering were readhered where they had become detached, and further reinforcement of the spinefold was adhered using whaet starch paste. It was not possible to fully re-insert the bifolium into its ‘original position’ [in line with the rest of the folia]. It is now secure but only held in place with very light touch of wheat starch paste at head and tail.’ The bifolium has not been sewn back into place, but this would have been a highly interventive job affecting a much larger part of the manuscript, and the present treatment meets the immediate requirement of ensuring that the bifolium will not fall out or be damaged during consultation.

This manuscript has other conservation issues: losses, patches and old parchment repairs, old stitching repairs, pleating and cockling. However, none of them is actively worsening or causing difficulty for consultation, so they have simply been recorded for now.
Opening showing detached bifolium before repair.

Figures surmounting elaborate illuminated initials: a rabbit plays the cymbals, and a hooded drollery.

MS 277 ff.140-1, detached bifolium with split and loss to the upper edge of the spine fold. Appropriately, the top line of the first column on the right hand page includes the word ‘frangibile’ (breakable, fragile).

Creased and partly detached upper corners.
Case 14: MS 384

MS 384 is a 15th century Book of Hours according to the Use of Sarum, made in the Low Countries for the English market. I am sometimes asked about the pre-Reformation liturgical books lost from the College chapel. Books of Hours would not have been among them – they were designed for the private devotions of secular individuals at home.

It is not known who gave the book to the College, or when, but from a note inside it, it was not at Balliol before the 18th century. It bears marks of having been a much-used family devotional book, and has a remarkable history (or at least legend) of preservation against the odds; the anonymous donor writes: ‘The Book was found in the thatch of an old house... now my guess is that at the beginning of the Reformation, this Book was committed to Atkins of Weston to be secured ‘till a turn might happen... Pray Sir my humble service to Mr Harris and all friends at Colledge.’

MS 384 does corroborate this story in several ways: there is rather heavy, ingrained dirt across all surfaces, which would fit with its having been stored in the inevitably smoky thatch of a house. Burns marks on its lower edge might indicate a thatch fire – perhaps this is how it was rediscovered. It shows a few signs of contact with water, and of damp conditions. Otherwise, it is in remarkably good condition – it was rebound, probably in the 18th century, but does not show...
much evidence of earlier intervention in the text block. The only essential repair needed in 2017 was to secure a long tear across the lower part of f.70. unusually, this tear did not start at the edge of a page; rather, it looks as though a guideline ruled with a dry point may have (after several centuries) weakened an already thin and fragile area of parchment.

The other type of damage evident in this manuscript affects two miniatures, with similar partial removal of the faces of the central figures. Such damage has often been assumed to be deliberate ‘de-face-ment’ by anti-Catholic reformers – but Kathryn Rudy and others have more recently asserted, with excellent evidence, that many such instances may in fact be the result of devotional kissing. Both Thomas à Becket and John the Baptist have suffered loss of paint here, but not of drawing or parchment surface – the painting has not been scratched or scraped, and the faces are still clear despite the smudging. Both also look as though the damaged areas have been somewhat damp. Viewers may draw their own conclusions!

*MS 384 – detail of miniature damaged by devotional kissing, water damage from head edge*

*Celia Withycombe of OCC: fine bridges of Japanese paper connect the edges of an irregular tear, 2017.*
Case 15: MS 210

MS 210 is an early (1st half) 13th century copy on parchment of several texts in Latin by C12-13 University theologians, including Prepositinus (Prévostin) of Cremona (d.1210), Simon of Tournai (d.1201) and several Anons, with a later addition of a 14th century theological treatise by Gilles van der Hoye or Oye, dean of Courtrai. The volume was given to the College by Roger Whelpdale, sometime Fellow of Balliol and Bishop of Carlisle in 1419-20 (d. 1423). Rebound in the 1720s.

Mynors’ collation (description of the binding order of quires or gatherings of bifolia, single leaves and flyleaves if any) show that parts of the book have been misbound, a common mistake, especially during rebinding. Page numbering or foliation was not common, but medieval scribes and binders often used a system of quire numbers and catchwords to ensure that their texts were complete and in the correct order for binding. In addition to the misbinding, one of the texts is incomplete. It is difficult to tell whether the individual texts had previous lives of their own, or in other combinations, and at what point they were gathered into one volume. The third text, an anonymous treatise ‘de quinque luminibus’ (on the five lights) was unknown to Mynors in any other copy, and may be a unique survival.

It is usual to come across occasional production repairs of parchment in medieval books, but MS 210 has an unusual number of them on a single opening. There are numerous pages with multiple stitched tears each, and in most cases the stitches have been left in, leaving long, bumpy dents in
the facing page. While tears and their repairs were accepted as a normal feature of parchment, they were considered blemishes, and are less often seen in high-status manuscripts. As this manuscript is fairly large 12x9”, the use of scarred parchment probably lowered the price, and was not considered of aesthetic importance for what was probably a study text. This is not a beautiful book, but neither is it cheap – the text is small but there is plenty of space in the margins, some of which has been used, as intended, to add commentary.

>> detail of a mended production tear within the text –the scribe has continued to justify his text within the ruled frame while avoiding the tear

The parchment-making process involves a great deal of scraping and stretching under great tension, so tears in the skin are inevitable during production – they are usually stitched up while the skin is still wet. This stitching is very difficult, and the sewing as a result is often rather crude – in this manuscript, however, they are notably neat. The stitched area tends to be lumpy when dried, so the stitches themselves are often removed at a later stage to make the page lie flatter against its neighbours; if the area around the stitch holes is particularly lumpy, it may be scraped flat. This can leave either a slit edged on two sides by stitch holes, or a narrow rectangular hole if the torn area is trimmed as well. It is often clear that these cuts/repairs have been made before the book was written because the text is written around the hole – example below, leaving space around the ‘scarred’ area. In this case the stitches have been scraped rather than removed, but the surface is still not flat enough for writing on.

Detail of a cluster of neatly stitched tears – and evidence of rodent damage to the lower corner.
Case 16: MS 173A

MS 173A, open at ff.76-77, showing an apprentice scribe’s efforts at laying out a complex illustrated text.

MS 173A is made up of two books bound together, from the late 13th century (ff.1-73) and the early 12th (ff.74-119), both collections of short texts, 16 in all, of medieval music theory. Authors include Avicenna, Isidore of Seville, Odo of Cluny and others. This manuscript also includes the text, with diagrams, of Guido d’Arezzo’s famous treatise on music (De Musica) – though the well-known ‘Guidonian hand’ diagram does not feature in this particular copy. Open at ff.75v-76r, showing coloured illustrations of musical instruments in a letter attributed to St Jerome ‘de generibus musicorum’ (On the kinds of music) – the text explains the theological symbolism of musical instruments in the Bible. Apparently part of William Gray’s mid-C15 gift. MS 173A 12th and 13th century. Two collections of short texts bound together, on medieval music theory, in Latin, on parchment. Rebound 1720s. Given to Balliol by William Gray, Bishop of Ely (d. 1478).

This manuscript was extensively repaired by Katerina Powell of OCC in 2007. Most of the work required was in the binding, which was stiff and becoming distorted from the heavy application of glue during the 1720s rebinding. Most of the work is not visible from the outside – we can only appreciate the easier opening of the book, and that the leaves now lie flatter than they did, without buckling along the spine.
Conservation treatment

The reversed skin spine covering was lifted off the spine using a small spatula and the animal glue below was softened with a 5% solution of methyl cellulose and scraped off. This revealed the 17th century sewing. Although all the quires were sewn individually, not all stations were used every time and a system of looping round 3 or 4 cords alternatively was used. The sewing cord was quite fragile and the rigidity of animal glue on the spine caused it to break at the flexing points when opening the book. It was, therefore, decided to disbind the volume, carry out the necessary repairs to the text-block and re-sew the book to provide a strong sewing structure.

17th century sewing pattern:

Text-block

The sewing threads were cut, sewing supports and remains of end-bands removed and the quires were separated. Residues of animal glue at the spine folds were cleaned off after softening with methylcellulose, or swabbed off with a dampened cotton swab; the pages were cleaned using latex sponge (in the margins) and a soft brush. Tears in the pages and damage to the spine folds were repaired using Hasegawa Japanese tissue of varying weights and wheat starch paste.

Once repaired, the goatskin parchment leaves were humidified on a Gore-tex and capillary matting sandwich and dried open under tension to remove distortion. They were pressed folded between felts to retain the original spine folds. The calf skin parchment was very stiff and difficult to tension, and it was straightened by drying it folded, rather than opened up as in the case of the goatskin parchment leaves from the first book.
B.22.1, the oldest document in Balliol College’s archives, is an undated charter of ca. 1200, recording a grant of the Church of St. Lawrence-Jewry, London, with rents etc., from Robert, Abbot of St. Sauve, Montreuil, to John de St. Lawrence, with others.

The charter pre-dates the founding of Balliol College by several decades, and has nothing to do with it or the founders. The property’s history is traced through a sequence of 13th century documents; eventually it and associated rights were given to Balliol College by one Hugh de Vyenna (Vienne), a canon of the College of St Martin le Grand, London, in 1294 (Archives B.22.16). As with e.g. house title deeds, it was necessary to retain the whole documentary history in order to confirm legitimate current ownership.

The half-visible lettering down the right hand side of the document has not been lost through trimming. It reads ‘CYROGRAPHUM’ – a chirograph is a legal record written in multiple copies on the same piece of parchment and then cut up for the respective parties, with this form of authentication appearing in part on all the copies. This meant (at least in theory) that they could be verified later by matching up the pieces. Later chirographs added to the un-forgeability of these documents by separating the pieces with an irregular, wavy-edged cut – hence the term ‘indenture’.

B.22.1 was prepared for its new housing by Celia Bockmuehl of OCC in 2009. No interventive treatment was necessary, but the acid-free mount within the new box was custom made to support the heavy seals and provide an appropriate backing for the document to be strapped to using archival polyester tape. The historic folds and cockling from past exposure to damp/liquid have not been corrected as they are not causing active damage or obscuring the text, and they illustrate some of the document’s long history. The new box protects the charter during storage and exhibition, but can be dismantled if necessary, to examine the back of the document. Fortunately, the photographs clearly show the text on the reverse as well as the dorse (back) sides of the seals. Even the lid does double duty, holding the mounted caption during display.

Before 2009, B.22.1 had been kept in a cigar box, with the seals wrapped in cotton wool. While the materials used may not have been entirely to modern conservation standards, the arrangement certainly made the charter safe for storage and production.
Case 18: MS 354

MS 354 is an early 16th century commonplace book created and used by Richard Hill, a London grocer. Mynors calls the book’s tall, narrow ledger format ‘the upright shape of a tradesman’s account-book’ – the text block is paper and the wrapper, or cover, limp parchment.

Despite its workaday origins and unprepossessing appearance, this manuscript is one of Balliol’s best-known, most-studied, most-edited and still most frequently requested for consultation. Its main research interest to date has been the many texts of English medieval songs or carols (all without music), for which it is a key source, but the contents, in English, Latin and French, are diverse, including long literary extracts, poems, religious and spiritual texts, notes on the practicalities of farming and cross-Channel trade, culinary and medicinal recipes, proverbs, riddles, and the earliest known English instructions for a card trick.

The manuscript bears several ownership inscriptions but no clues about its route to Balliol. A mid-C19 editor of some of the texts noted that it had then ‘been recently found in the library of Balliol College, Oxford, where it had been accidentally concealed, behind a book-case, during a great number of years.’

MS 354 has been consulted frequently over the last 150 years, and has been repaired more than once. It is currently receiving treatment to reverse problematic earlier repairs and to strengthen the paper itself, much of which has become softened and very fragile. The damage has threatened text loss in some places, and the manuscript has been closed to researchers for the last several years. It has been well photographed and transcribed, but surrogates are often inadequate for research. When treatment is complete, Richard Hill’s book will be ‘open’ for research again.
Nikki Tomkins of OCC has been working on structural repairs to MS 354. She writes:

‘Historic repairs in a volume often cause more problems than they solve. In MS 354, previous repairs were causing a number of mechanical problems to the structure of the volume: new sewing threads were trapped under layers of glassine paper, putting stress on the sewing supports and causing the page edges to protrude. In order to resolve the problem and pull the section back into place, the old repairs needed to be removed.

‘The glassine paper was adhered with a starch based water soluble adhesive. Applying too much moisture, however, would weaken the paper surface and compromise a clean removal, and often the paper had been placed over text. Gellan gum provided a suitable solution: water suspended in a gel allows for a controlled, minimal application of moisture that softens the adhesive without seeping into the paper surface below. Half an hour with a 2% gellan gum was sufficient. The gum was shaped precisely to the glassine paper, to ensure that moisture was applied to a controlled area. The repairs were removed with a small, thin spatula. The sewing guard was then lifted back into its correct place and the paper spine folds newly repaired using Japanese tissue and wheat starch paste.

‘Conservation often borrows ideas from other disciplines and practices - gellan gum, for example, is traditionally used as an alternative to agar gel for growing microbiological cultures. The treatment also demonstrates the importance of using repair materials that can be removed at a later stage: water soluble adhesives, and carriers that will not degrade with time. Finding solutions to bindings with compromised sewing means that the volume will be easier to handle by readers, and the pages will be once more protected by its binding.’
Case 19: MS 240

Open at f.136v, showing infill parchment repair, bookmark tab C12 initial, facing new blank parchment folio; detail of f.136r, showing reverse of repair

MS 240 12th and 14th centuries. Miscellany of religious texts, in Latin, on parchment. From the priory of Monks Kirby (Warwickshire). Unlike many collections of texts now in one volume, these seem related in both subject and annotations, and may well have been in use together at the 11th century foundation of Monks Kirby. Given to the College by Richard Bole, Archdeacon of Ely (d.1477).

This is one of the few Balliol mss to have been comprehensively repaired and rebound in recent times, by Andrew Honey of the Bodleian Library, in the 1990s or early 2000s.

Detail of f.138r: stabilisation of a historic tear through text by restitching, using the original needle holes – a way of rejoining the edges of the parchment without obscuring the text
Details from the different texts in the volume, showing variety of hands and decoration.

<< Detail of f. 136v: slits at the edge of the page which formerly held a bookmark tab.
Further Reading
A tiny sample from a vast field in print and online, examples mostly in English and within the UK

Balliol’s Medieval Manuscripts Online
- Digital photographs of more than 150 manuscripts (so far) on Flickr
  [www.flickr.com/photos/balliolarchivist/collections/72157625091983501/]
- RAB Mynors’ Catalogue of the Manuscripts of Balliol College Oxford (1963) with additions, corrections, new bibliography and links to images
  [http://archives.balliol.ox.ac.uk/Ancient%20MSS/ancientmsslist.asp]
- Previous displays, Special Collections in Focus features etc
  [https://balliolarchivist.wordpress.com/]

Medieval Manuscripts - Introduction
- Dianne Tillotson’s Medieval Writing site
  [http://medievalwriting.50megs.com/]
- Quill by Erik Kwakkel and Giulio Menna
  [http://www.bookandbyte.org/quill/]
- Medieval Manuscript Manual, Central European University
  [http://web.ceu.hu/medstud/manual/MMM/home.html]

Palaeography and Diplomatic – reading old handwriting and understanding old documents
- DigiPal – C11 English palaeography
  [www.digipal.eu/]
- Dave Postles’ medieval and early modern palaeography training
  [http://paleo.anglo-norman.org/]
- National Archives – Reading Old Documents resources
  [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/reading-old-documents/]
- Palaeography Training at Bangor University
  [http://palaeography-training.bangor.ac.uk/paleo.php]

Preservation and Conservation
- Bodleian Libraries Conservation Department
  [www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/our-work/conservation]
- British Library Collection Care (formerly Preservation Advisory Centre, National Preservation Office)
  [www.bl.uk/aboutus/stratpolprog/collectioncare/]
- Institute of Conservation
  [https://icon.org.uk/]
- Cornell University Library Conservation Blog
  [https://blogs.cornell.edu/culconservation/]
- The C Word – The Conservators’ Podcast
  [http://thecword.show/]

Old Manuscripts, New Science
- The Iron Gall Ink Website
  [https://irongallink.org/]
- MINIARE Project - Manuscript Illumination: Non-Invasive Analysis, Research & Expertise
  [http://www.miniare.org/]
- UChicago Libraries Preservation Dept, Under Covers: the Art & Science of Book Conservation
  [www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/webexhibits/scienceofconservation/index.html]
- Digital Editing of Medieval Manuscripts
  [www.digitalmanuscripts.eu/]

• eCodicology - Algorithms for the Automatic Tagging of Medieval Manuscripts
  www.ecodicology.org

Online research collections and exhibitions
• University of Pennsylvania
  http://dla.library.upenn.edu/dla/medren/index.html
• Koninklijk Bibliotheek van Nederland http://manuscripts.kb.nl/
• British Library https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/welcome.htm
• Digital Bodleian, Oxford http://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk (under construction 2017)
• Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge
  http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/collections/illuminatedmanuscripts

Medieval Manuscripts Blogs – Curators & Researchers
• British Library Medieval Manuscripts http://blogs.bl.uk/digitisedmanuscripts/
• Erik Kwakkel https://medievalbooks.nl/
• David Rundle: Bonae Litterae https://bonaelitterae.wordpress.com/

Printed Sources – Introduction to Medieval Manuscripts & Book History
• Christopher de Hamel, A History of Illuminated Manuscripts (1994)
• Jane Roberts, Guide to Scripts Used in English Writings Up to 1500 (2005)
• Raymond Clemens & Timothy Graham, Introduction to Manuscript Studies (2007)
• Ralph Hanna, Introducing English Medieval Book History: Manuscripts, Their Producers and Their Readers (2014)
• Alexandra Gillespie & Daniel Wakelin, eds. The Production of Books in England 1350-1500 (2014)

UK Academic & Professional Organisations
• Archives and Records Association (ARA), formerly Society of Archivists
  http://www.archives.org.uk/
• Association for Manuscripts & Archives in Research Collections
  http://www.amarc.org.uk/
• CILIP Rare Books & Special Collections Group (RBSCG)
  www.cilip.org.uk/about/special-interest-groups/rare-books-special-collections-group

Oxford seminars & events
• Centre for the Study of the Book http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/csb
• Seminar in Palaeography and Manuscript Studies
  events advertised termly on https://talks.ox.ac.uk
• Oxford Medieval Studies http://www.torch.ox.ac.uk/medievalstudies

If you use social media, #medievaltwitter is a lively and useful place to find all kinds of news and discussion of professional and academic issues for and by medievalists. Try #manuscriptmonday #mondaymonsters #fragmentfriday #flyleaffriday