

Heritage Open Days 2020: Conservation in the Cathedral Ancient Library.



Dr Nicholas Hadgraft wrote in 2000 that the Cathedral Ancient Library ‘is a collection rich in the history of the book and should be considered as a national asset.’

The earliest books in the library were printed in 1482-3 and most of the nearly 600 volumes date from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Cathedral Library has a controlled environment to protect the books by keeping them at the correct temperature and relative humidity. When funds allow individual volumes are conserved to ensure that future generations will be able to use them.

In the last two years donations from visitors on open days, individual donations and a grant from the Friends of the Cathedral have allowed us to conserve two volumes:

- Robert Catchpole’s *A choice collection of church music* (Bury St Edmunds, 1761)
- Euclid’s *Elementa geometriae* (Vicenza, 1491)

The first was chosen because it was printed here in Bury St Edmunds and lists many local people as subscribers and the second because it is one of our earliest books which, although printed in Italy, was bound in Cambridge by the ‘demon binder’ in the 1490s. He gained this name because of the stamps he used to decorate the leather binding. It is also our only book on mathematics and is bound with the *Historias* of Justinus and Florus (Venice, 1487).

Both volumes had detached boards and damage to pages. The aim has been to return them to a stable condition whilst at the same time preserving as much as possible of the original materials and aesthetics of the volumes, including signs of use over time. Vicky West, the conservator, has provided the following ‘before’ and ‘after’ pictures.

Robert Catchpole's *A choice collection of church music*

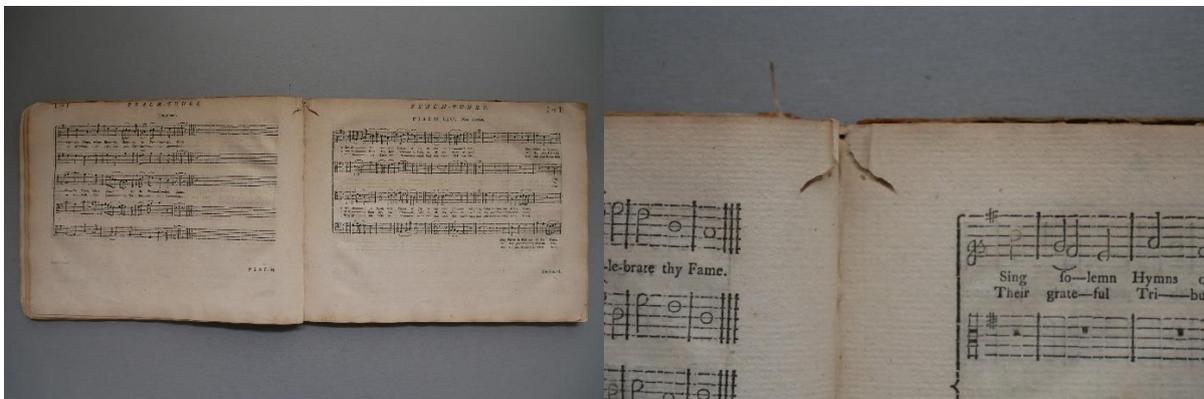
The left board and the first section were detached from the binding and the leather on the spine was very thin and degraded.



The boards were very worn with ingrained dirt and stains and the board corners were worn down.



There was insect damage in the first third of the book.



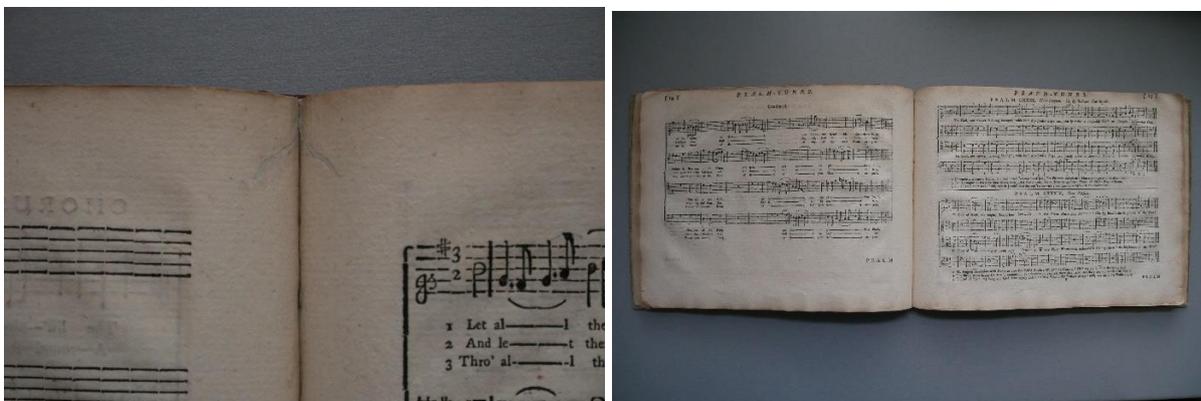
The first section was re sewn and the left board was reattached with a calfskin spine in a colour that matched the original.



The worn down board corners were rebuilt and toned with watercolour to blend with the original.

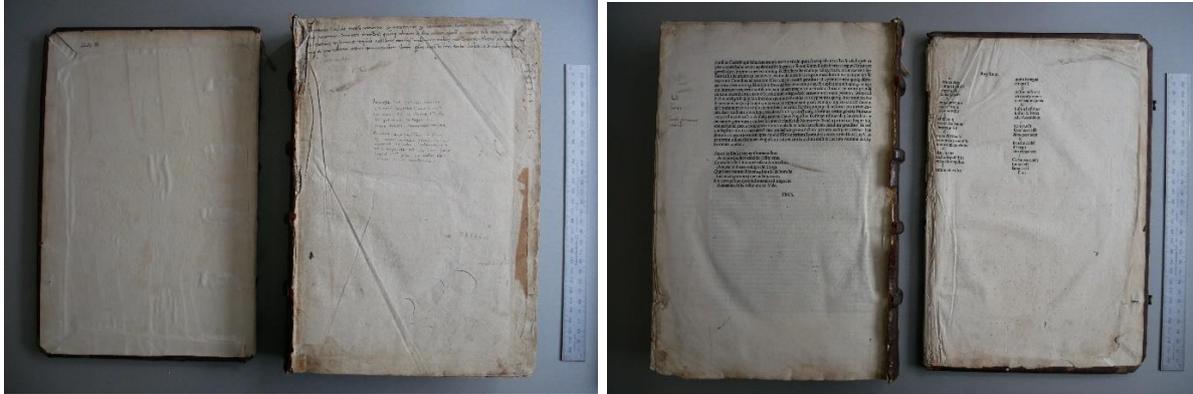


The insect damage was repaired and work was done to strengthen the fragile edges of other pages. It was decided to leave some of the corners folded over to preserve the character of the volume.



Euclid's *Elementa geometriæ*

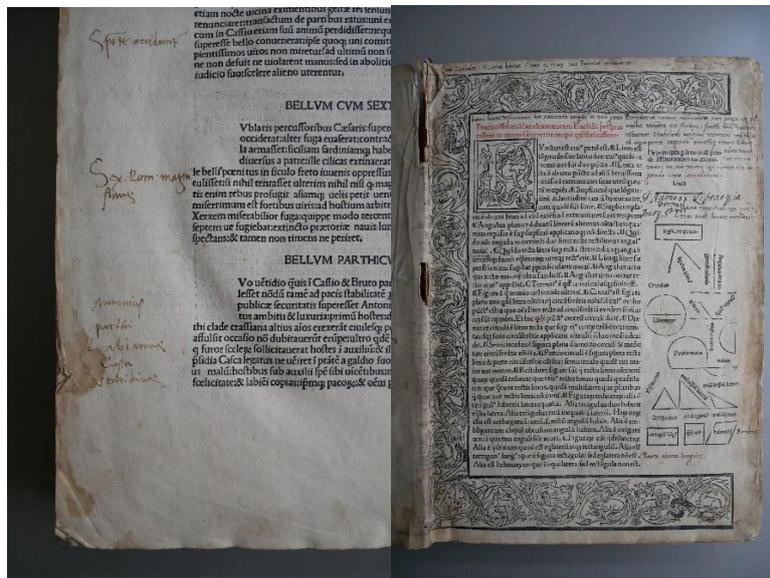
Both boards were detached and the last page was still attached to the right board.



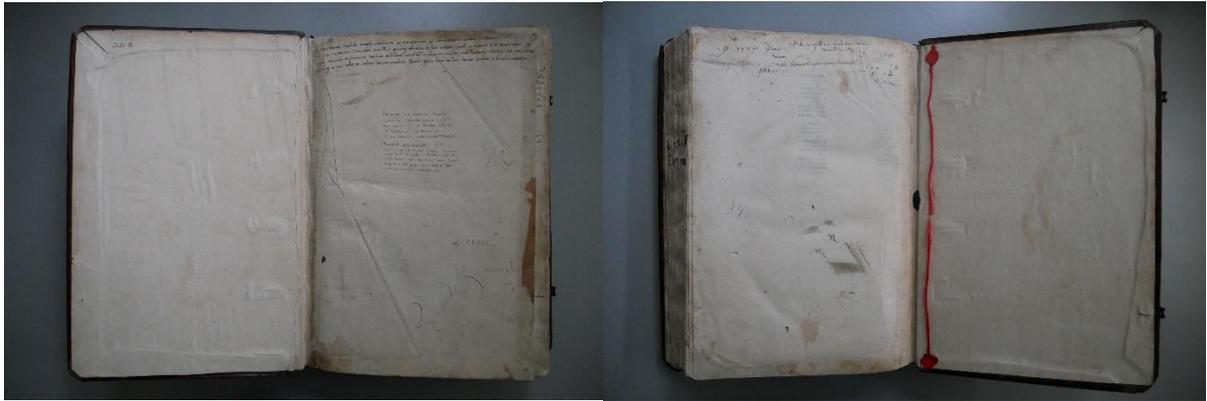
The leather had been worn away exposing the wooden board beneath and there was evidence of fire damage to the spine.



There were tears, loss of corners and water damage. Creases obscured some manuscript text.



The boards were reattached whilst leaving the original material untouched. The red silk thread between the wax seals was probably used to hold an additional manuscript in place.



The leather covering was consolidated and the original spine retained, along with the burn hole, which is part of the history of the book.



The text block was given a very light surface clean, edges and corners infilled and trimmed and creases opened to enable the manuscript text to be fully visible.

