Rare Books Collection, University Library

Student/Volunteer Position Guide

Position Title: Collection Management – Preservation and Rehousing, Rare Book Collection

Supervisor: Susan Millard, Senior Curator, Cultural Collections
Helen Arnoldi, Cultural Collections Projects Coordinator

Position Goal: The primary goal of this position will be to contribute to a ‘stabilising’ preservation program of items in the Rare Books Collection through preventative conservation methods. There will also be the opportunity to complete research on a particular aspect of the collection of interest to the student/volunteer. This project will contribute to the longevity of this significant collection.

Background: The Rare Books collection consists of International and Australian items. Because of their age, beauty, rarity or other factors, they are not suitable for placing on the open shelves. The International collection consists of early printed books, periodicals and pamphlets. The collections also include manuscripts, high quality facsimiles, modern limited editions, examples of fine binding and printing and notable private press collections, including Doves and Kelmscott Press. Although the cut-off date for inclusion is generally 1880, there are also many later books in the collections. The Australiana Collections comprise books and some serials, newspapers and pamphlets published in Australia or on Australian subjects or by an Australian author. The cut-off date for inclusion in Special Collections is a publication date before 1900; however, there is a considerable amount of material that was published after that date, particularly in the McLaren collection. The Book Arts Collection holds around 350 artists’ books, the majority of which are Australia made with many created by Melbourne artists.

Responsibilities: This project will require the student/volunteer to contribute to the ‘stabilising’ preservation program of the Rare Books Collection through the jacketing, rehousing into acid free card/plastic pockets and boxing of vulnerable items in the collection. This work may involve the rehousing of items within the collection into phase boxes for those with detachable covers and giant folio volume; custom making of Mylar enclosures to protect books with decorative illustrations on the covers and the use of acid free bags for all fragile pamphlet material to ensure they meet current conservation standards.

To complement this practical preventative conservation project, the student/volunteer will also have the opportunity to complete research into an aspect of the collection that is of particular interest to them. Or, if they have an appropriate background, as part of this rehousing project, the student may like to prepare a conservation survey report on the collection within Rare Books on which they are working. The survey could identify the items that require future conservation treatment such as binding repairs. The report could include suggested
recommendations for future conservation treatment priorities and the storage of this collection.

**Qualifications:**

The student will ideally have a basic understanding of collection management and conservation principles specific to rare book collections (progress towards the completion of a degree in Cultural Materials Conservation, Art Curatorship or Librarianship would be ideal).

A knowledge of the correct procedures for the safe handling of books is required as this position requires the handling and close inspection of these vulnerable volumes.

An interest in and working knowledge of conservation methods and practices.

A methodical, prudent approach with a keen eye for detail is required.

Ability to work independently and as part of a small team.

**Training and Supervision:**

On-the-job training specific to the task will be co-ordinated by the Curator.

Occasional meetings with the Cultural Collections Projects Coordinator to review how the project is progressing and discuss any ideas or problems encountered.

**Benefits:**

The opportunity for professional development through experience gained in collection management procedures and practice.

Satisfaction in focusing on a specific collection within Rare Books Collection in the Baillieu Library and seeing it rehoused to meet conservation standards. Through the project, you will be contributing to the long term preservation of the University’s cultural collections. The application of collection management principles to the University’s cultural collections is necessary to enhance our long term understanding, management and appreciation of the collections.

For more information on this position please contact:
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