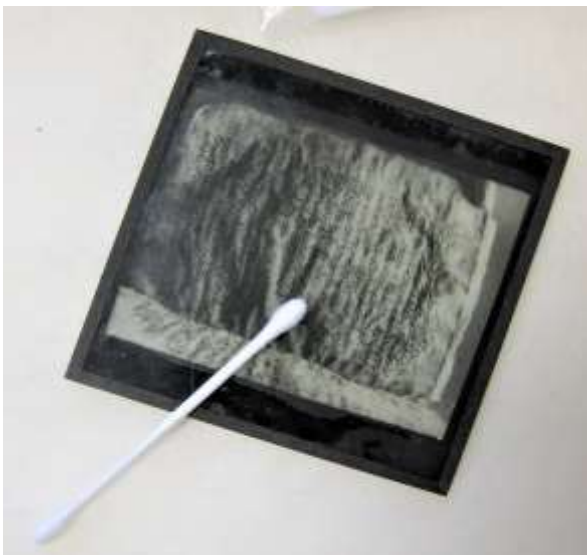




Archives Conservation Project : cleaning glass lantern slides



100 lantern slides in their original box...



...and one ready for cleaning.



Archives volunteer Imogen Blackburne cleaning one of the slides

Some of the glass lantern slides in the archives collections are in need of a clean! After training with a specialist photographic conservator, work has begun on a project to clean them up.

The [Sisters of Sinai](#), our indefatigable benefactors, took many photographs on their travels to Egypt at the turn of the nineteenth century. When they returned home, they had some of their photographs made into lantern slides – an early version of 35mm projector slides – which they could use when giving talks and lectures. (You can see some of the sisters' slides [online here](#).)

The slides are constructed like a three-inch-square glass sandwich: the image is put onto the bottom piece of glass ('support glass'); then a paper mount is laid round the edges to frame the image, giving a small space between the two layers; and then the top glass layer ('cover glass') protects the image. Finally, the layers are sealed together with a paper strip round the edges.

We have nearly 800 lantern slides here in the archives, and most are 120 years old. We asked specialist photograph conservator [Àngels Arribas of Lumen Photographic Conservation](#) to come and have a look at our collections.

After a theory session with Àngels on lantern slides - discussing their structure, the key handling issues during examination, and their main deterioration patterns - we learned about assessing their condition, identifying conservation priorities using a condition report, and we explored storage ideas.

Àngels told us that although most of the slides she examined are in good condition, they are very dirty and have occasional mould spores on the outside of the glass. These aren't doing the images harm – but they need removing.

So we've begun a long-term assessment and cleaning programme. Firstly, we examine each slide carefully, and we note any damaged or unusual slides so they can be taken for specialist conservation with Àngels. But if our slides are just dirty, that's where we can get to work ourselves!

Àngels has taught us the methodology of in-house training, including how to gently clean the external glass with a solution of water and denatured alcohol, applied sparingly with a cotton bud; and she also suggested we work over a padded white paper mat covered with acid-free or pHoton paper – the contrast helps to show the image more clearly. The slides are both heavy and fragile, so we try to handle with care! However, it's not necessary to wear gloves, as – unlike many photographic collections – there is no danger of touching the actual image, which is safe under glass.



Before cleaning...



...and after!

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And here's the result! These images are of one page of the [Sinaitic Syriac Palimpsest](#), which Mrs Lewis and Mrs Gibson discovered at [St Catherine's Monastery in Sinai](#). The sisters used these photographs to show other scholars, and to illustrate their transcriptions of the manuscript – which is still at St Catherine's today.

Now cleaned, the image is much clearer, and the slide will hopefully survive for another hundred years.

Helen Weller, Archivist
(With many thanks to Àngels and Imogen!)
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