

# Parchment

## Conservation analysis and preservation treatment of parchment documents

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### Introduction

The work placement in the Glasgow University Archives and Special Collections was devoted to the analysis of two collections of parchment documents: 497 documents from *Blackhouse Charters Collection* (1304-1717) and 119 documents from *Boyd family of Trochrig Collection* (1485-1759). Both collections record the history of the university through royal grants, acts of transfer of land, and donations. This project was divided into two stages: analysis of the parchment documents and basic preservation and conservation treatment.

### Object



Parchment BL423

Following is the discussion of the work with the focus on one of the parchments from the Blackhouse Charters Collection. This parchment is a letter, written on behalf of King James VI on 17 June 1581, confirming the transfer of lands to the Archbishop James Boyd of Trochrig, chancellor of Glasgow University. Attached is a privy seal of James VI.

The document was examined with a digital microscope, description of the parchment was recorded in the Condition Report and with the photographs taken in normal conditions, and with magnification by a digital microscope (x90).

### Condition assessment

Several types of damages to the document were identified:

- Damage to the surface of the parchment, including several folds and wrinkles which appeared because parchment was stored folded and no protection was provided for the corners of the documents; build-up of dirt and dust, especially around the edges of the parchment, and gelatinization which leads to the parchment becoming transparent, stiff and brittle
- Damage to the text: fading and sometimes the complete disappearance of the text, particularly in the folding lines and on the margins due to the handling of the document.
- Damage to the seal: wax seals are considered to be very stable material, suffering mostly from mechanical damages, embrittlement, flattening of the relief, due to insufficient support and protection during storage.



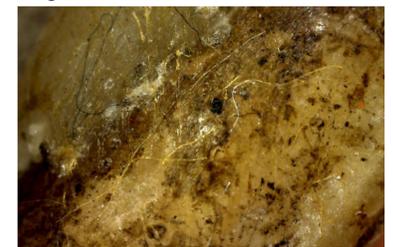
BL423, detail of the text



BL423, detail of the text in the area of gelatinization



BL423, dust and dirt on the edge of the parchment



BL423, impurities and fibres on the surface of wax seal

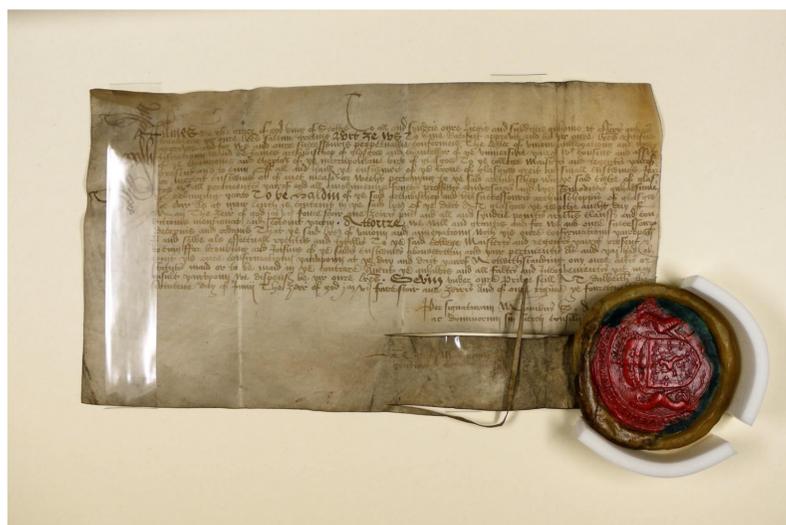
### Repacking

A detailed assessment of the parchment's condition led to the development of the treatment proposal, which involved the repacking of the document.

- The parchment was placed on a separate acid-free museum board recto side upwards and fixed to the board with the polyethylene strips. The individual mount supports the parchment during long-term storage and, additionally, can serve as a short-term exhibition backing. Margins around the edges of the document allow viewing without direct handling.
- The wax seal was protected from the physical damage and stabilised with the Plastazote foam forms. Moreover, the seal was separated from the surface of the parchment with a paper "pillow".
- The Japanese Kozo tissue paper was attached to the board to cover the parchment and protect it from dirt and dust build-up. The last step was devoted to the creation of the folder from acid-free storage board. Foam forms were attached to the folder's covers to avoid any contact between the surface of the box and the parchment.

### Conclusion

Repacking of the parchments not only improves the aesthetic appearance of the documents and provides safe access to the collections, but creates new storage conditions which minimise or eliminate undesired damages, and answer to required British Standards for Heritage and Conservation.



BL423, during repacking, with polyethylene strips and foam forms attached



"Pillow" protection between the seal and the parchment



BL423 with Japanese Kozo tissue paper attached



BL423 in the final storage folder

### References

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