

A Condition Assessment and Proposal for Conservation of the 18th century map of the Manor of Claines by John Doharty Junior.

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Introduction

In January 2008, the Worcestershire Young Archaeologists' Club was awarded a grant of up to £49,950 by the Heritage Lottery Fund, for the Northwick Manor Community Heritage Project, an initiative designed to engage and inspire local people of all ages through the historic and natural environment of Northwick and Bevere. One of the key resources for historic research within this area of north Worcester is a large parchment map produced between 1751 and 1753 by John Doharty Junior, of the lands forming the Manor of Claines belonging to the Dean and Chapter of Worcester. The map is the earliest detailed depiction of lands within this area of Worcester and is accompanied by a terrier book (both stored at Worcestershire Record Office) which provides a key to the numbered fields, plots and buildings depicted on the map, and gives details of tenants, field names, land use and acreage.

One of the aims of the project is to ensure the future preservation of this map and to make the information it contains more widely available. It is hoped that digitisation of the map (funded by the project) will reduce the need for physical handling of this resource, however, the condition of the original document is deteriorating. Permission has been obtained from the Church Commissioners who are the owners of the map for conservation work to be undertaken and the Worcestershire Young Archaeologists' Club has commissioned Moira Buick, Paper Conservator to make the initial assessment. The aim of this report is therefore to provide an assessment of the current condition of the document and to propose steps for stabilising this condition to ensure its future preservation.

Assessment by Worcestershire Record Office against Preservation Policy

When approached about this project the Record Office assessed it against its Preservation Policy. Our normal priorities are preservation, that is to say, storage at British Standard levels, appropriate packaging and controlled handling procedures. This seeks minimum intervention to ensure an item suffers no avoidable further deterioration whilst in the care of the Record Office. As part of this policy a digital preservation copy had already been made to deal with most requests for use of this map.

However, the Office also has criteria to assess when more detailed conservation work might be justified, taking into account such factors as historical importance at a local or national level and potential future use. Often the Office's ability to carry out the more detailed intervention such a conservation decision entails is almost totally dependent on the availability of grant aid. In this case the Claines plan is a striking example of a production of the famous Dougharty family of estate surveyors and map makers, and despite the digital preservation copy it was felt the original merited further work to stabilise it, again in line with the policy that states 'conservation will be the minimum necessary treatment to stabilise, prolong the life and render fit for use in accordance with BS 4971.' The Worcestershire Record Office was delighted to be able to work in partnership with the Northwick Project to achieve this goal.

Condition Assessment

The large 18th century parchment map by John Doharty Junior of the Manor of Claines is landscape and approximately 64" + 13" wide and 52 ½" high (163 + 33cm wide and 133cm high). It is dated 1751-1753 and is hand-drawn and coloured. It is important to understand that parchment/ vellum is an animal skin and reacts very differently to the way paper performs. Parchment can be very long lasting, but has to be stored correctly or it will easily distort and degrade. Parchment, unlike paper, can have the writing and colouring mediums 'sitting on top' rather than within the base medium. The 'attachment' of the ink and colours have been affected on this map and there are areas of 'loss by abrasion'. It is a vulnerable object.

From a conservation view point the whole map gives cause for concern, especially since it is rolled and unrolled. The parchments of this map have distorted over the 256 years, since it was made. It is made up of four large skins and two 'half-size' skins. The main body (four whole skins) were probably sewn together before the map was drawn. The actual 'sewing' construction requires further study. The smaller section (in two parts) to the right, is sewn onto the main and may be a slightly later addition. Though the green colouring of the map extends onto this smaller section, its style is different, with the black intensity of the black roads and buildings.

It is this smaller part that has been most affected by handling. Damage has been caused by surface dirt, wear, loss, tears, weakness (as it is a thinner skin) and its overall fragile condition. One corner shows old water-damage and subsequent hardening of the skin. Rather urgent conservation work is necessary, its condition is deteriorating noticeably and fragments are being collected within its cotton housing. The sewing of the two halves of this smaller section is broken and there is a noticeable sharp 'ridge' at the line of sewing between the main body and the two 'half-skins'.

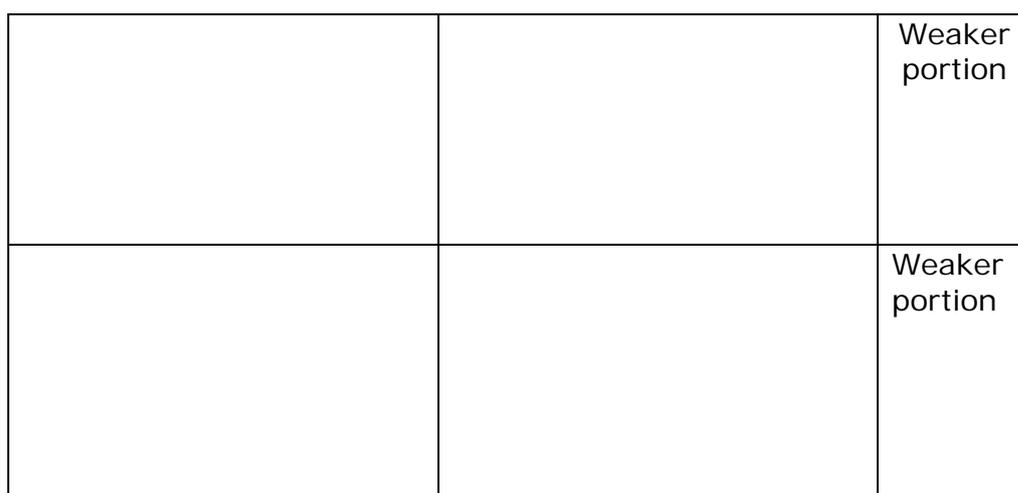


Diagram to give an approximation of the construction of the map. Each rectangle represents a separate skin or half skin.

Recommendations for Conservation

The most effective solution to protect this important object is to Conservation-mount the whole map onto an inert, light-weight construction and store in the environmentally-controlled Record Office strongroom. This is not currently a practical option however, due to issues of space for storage of an object of this size.

An alternative option concerns the smaller section which is most in need of treatment. It is proposed that this section is separated from the main, conserved and mounted. It can then be digitally scanned within the Record Office and an improved image made available.

This would give a minimum panel size (with 2" or 5cm borders of aero-cotton fabric) of approximately portrait 17" x 56 ½" (43 x 144cm). Applying aero-cotton borders will ensure the parchment is held out under slight tension. Any work on the parchment is best undertaken with colder, wetter weather or in a suitable air-conditioned environment as they do not respond well with rapid changes of temperature and humidity and there are often more problems on what work can be undertaken with parchment, than on paper. The separation would allow relaxation by humidifying, some repair with collagen and new parchment repairs and conservation mounting to reduce movement and subsequent damage. A separate archival 'lid' can then go on top to avoid possible abrasion.





Overall views of map



View of join between main body and the smaller (possibly later) section



Close up showing deterioration of stitching. Also shows damage caused by earlier folding of map



View showing extent of damage to smaller end section, including water damage to top corner



Further views of damaged end section



