



## Art Conservation *and historical alchemy*

*In what must have been a very busy life, William Salmon (1644-1713), who called himself ‘Doctor’ though he had no formal medical training, sold his own medicinal mixtures and practiced alchemy. He also published numerous books on topics ranging from medicine to art to cooking. One of his most popular books, titled *Polygraphice*, offers advice on subjects such as drawing and painting the human figure, draperies, mixing pigments and preparing perfumes, and was reprinted eight times over 30 years.*

This fall, a well-worn 1678 edition of *Polygraphice* in the collection of the Winterthur Library became a treatment project for second-year Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation (WUDPAC) Fellow Cathie Magee. Cathie, a book conservation major with a deep affection for library and archival materials, was especially drawn to *Polygraphice* because of its hand tooled, sheepskin cover. Overall, however, the 336-year-old book had many treatment needs, including broken threads, loose sections of the text block, pages with tears and stains, and previous binding repairs that needed to be undone. A replacement leather spine and the front cover had become detached from the text block, and Cathie found that the cover of the book appeared to have been recycled from another book.

Cathie’s treatment goal was to put the book back together so that it could be handled by researchers, while at the same time being true to its historic origins and original appearance. She began by carefully removing the replacement spine with a scalpel, along with all the sewing from the loose sections of the book’s text block. She mended the loose pages with Japanese tissue and wheat starch paste,

and then sewed all the sections of text block back together in their original order on a sewing frame. This created a new support that she was able to use to help reattach the front cover to the text block with paste.

She next plans to create a new leather spine that more closely matches the leather of the original cover. She will attach it to the book by placing the new leather underneath the original leather on the covers and adhere them with paste. Once Cathie’s treatment is complete, the book will be returned to the Winterthur Library where it will be ready for use by any researcher interested in learning more about the wide-ranging advice 17th-century writer William Salmon offered in *Polygraphice*.



### ARTC Spotlight—December 2014

The University of Delaware’s Art Conservation Department educates and trains professional conservators who are well versed in the treatment, analysis, documentation, and preventive conservation of individual artifacts and entire collections. For more news about our students and other department activities visit our web site at [www.artcons.udel.edu](http://www.artcons.udel.edu).

Top and above: WUDPAC Fellow Cathie Magee using a sewing frame to attach the *Polygraphice* to original and new sewing supports; Right: Before treatment, the *Polygraphice* with a replacement spine and broken sewing; Far right: Cathie using a light table to reattach a torn piece in one of the illustrations. (Images taken by Chela Metzger, Pamela Johnson, and Cathie Magee.)

