

From Poison Books to “Bibliotoxicology”



WINTERTHUR



Highlighting Hazards in Paper-Based Library Collections

Rosie Grayburn^{1,2} and Melissa Tedone²

¹Department of Conservation, Winterthur Museum and ²Department of Art Conservation, University of Delaware

The Poison Book Project

The Poison Book Project is an ongoing investigation of **arsenic** and other heavy metals in **19th-century Euro-American bookbindings**.

We have defined multiple methods of identification for arsenic in bookbindings and created a website to **share findings** and health and safety recommendations publicly.



Our emerald green color swatch bookmark has proven to be a successful outreach tool and has facilitated gathering crowd-sourced data.

Scan QR code to visit the **Poison Book Wiki** and the **Arsenical Books Database**.

The database lists 19th-century imprints bound with confirmed arsenical components such as emerald green bookcloth, bookbinding paper, decorative onlays, spine labels, and colored textblock edges.



The Bibliotoxicology Working Group

These public outreach efforts brought us into contact with **conservation colleagues**, **allied professionals**, and **health & safety specialists** working with library and archives collections such as bespoke bookbindings, scrapbooks, maps, and historical wallpapers.

biblio = relating to books

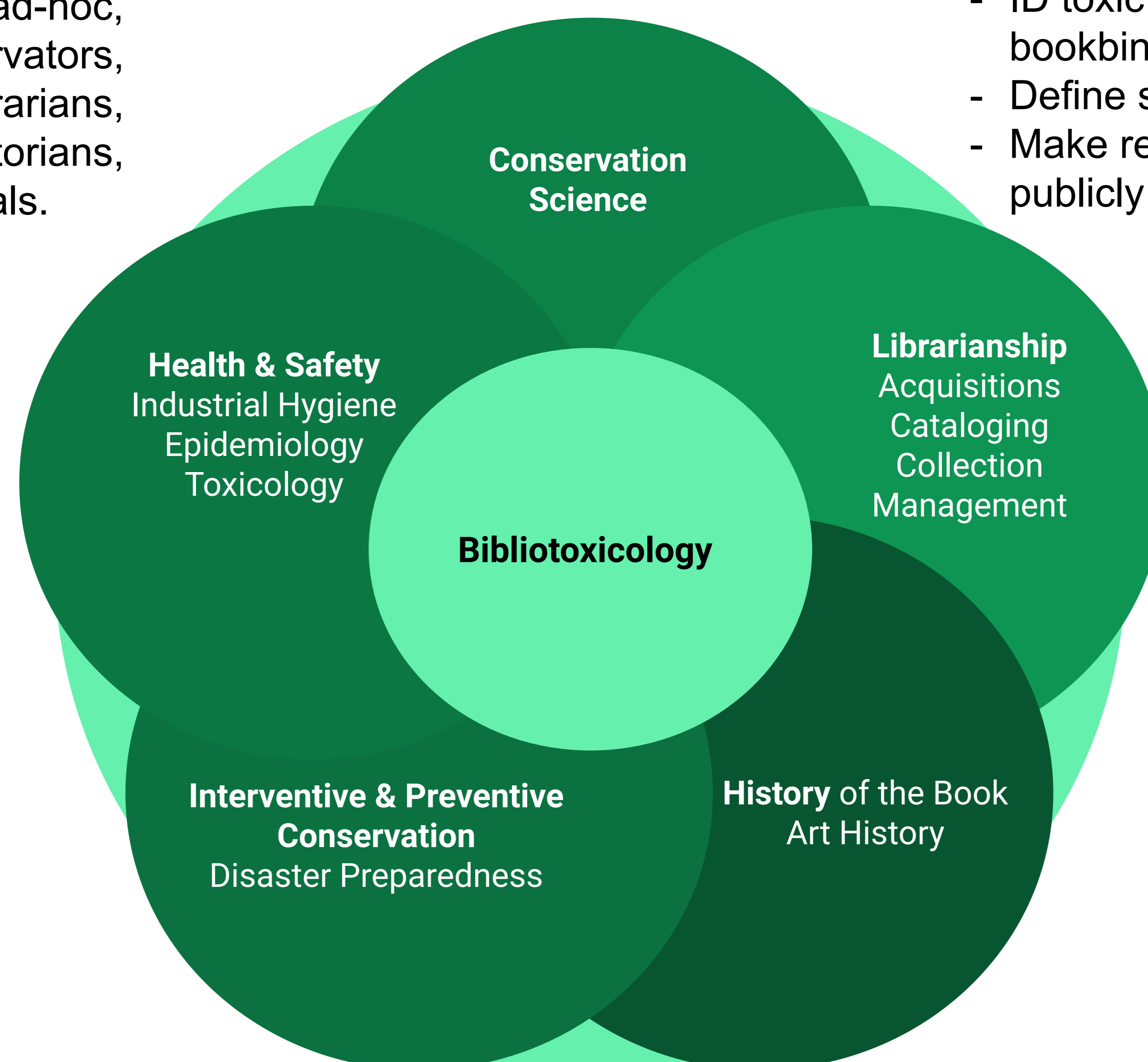
toxicology = the study of poisons

Heavy metals and pesticides are being found in a wide range of paper-based library collections, **creating the need for an intentional working group** to share challenges and brainstorm solutions within the library and archives context.

The **Bibliotoxicology Working Group** was thus **formed in 2022** as an ad-hoc, international cohort of conservators, cultural heritage scientists, librarians, collection managers, book historians, and health and safety professionals.

We are:

- **40+** members
- From **25 institutions**
- Representing **7 countries**



Our goals are to:

- ID toxic substances in historical bookbindings and archives materials
- Define safer management strategies
- Make reliable information broadly and publicly accessible

How do we do this?

- Creation of **open access resources** soon to be available on the AIC Wiki through the AIC Health & Safety Network:
 - ID Methods for Arsenic & Heavy Metals in Bookbinding Materials
 - Pesticides in Library/Archives Collections
 - Communicating About Bibliotoxicology with a Range of Audiences
 - Safer Handling & Storage for Books & Archival Materials Containing Heavy Metals
- **Recorded lectures** from our first (closed) bibliotoxicology symposium
 - Search “Bibtox symposium playlist” on YouTube

Join us!

If you are interested in getting involved with our working group, please send an email to Rosie and Melissa:

rgrayburn@winterthur.org
mtedone@udel.edu

Members can **access** group resources, including published papers and working documents about dealing with toxic substances in library collections.

Members are **currently**:

- Working on open access resources with the American Institute for Conservation (AIC);
- Publishing and sharing research with the group;
- Exploring next steps for a public facing symposium.

We look forward to hearing from you!

