Research Report 2012

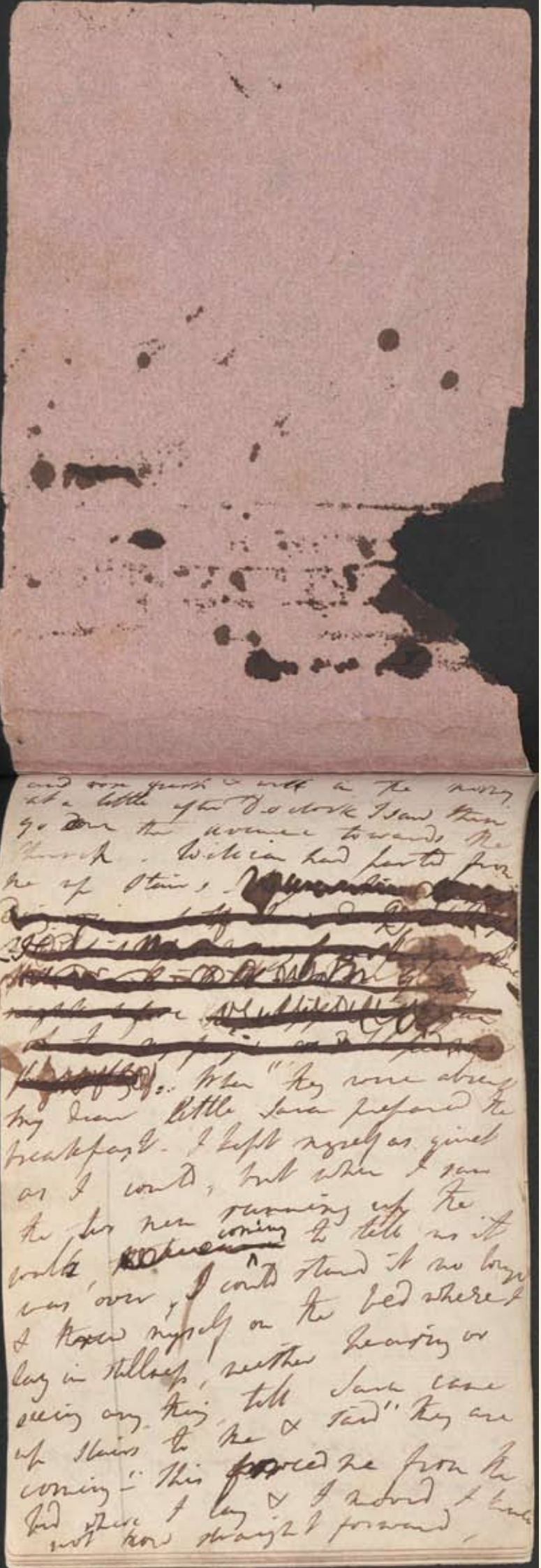
Beyond Words:

Understanding & Sharing the Meanings of Manuscripts

WORDSWORTH TRUST

This report was written by Jane Davies, Jael Edwards, Jeff Cowton, Jane Connolly, Helena Sinclair and Eleanor Black.

We would like to thank all staff, interns and volunteers who participated in the evaluation and documentation of this project and all visitors, in particular our focus group participants who shared their thoughts and ideas.



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1

INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

by the Curator of the Wordsworth Trust
Jeff Cowton

When we view a manuscript in an exhibition, how often do we read but fail to look? And by failing to look, how much do we miss? If we replaced the manuscript with a transcription of its words, what visual clues to its creation and history would be denied to the visitor? Occasionally, the words on a manuscript can be less important than it's history; a closed exhibit to be looked at but not read. Most often, however, it is a combination of the text and the artefact that creates a powerful and engaging exhibit: the representation of words, images and ideas in a form that itself has history and meaning.

The Wordsworth Trust looks after Dove Cottage in Grasmere, where Wordsworth wrote much of what is now regarded as his best work. It also holds the world's greatest single collection of Wordsworth's manuscripts, alongside a significant collection of manuscripts by his family and papers by other writers and leading figures of the day. The Wordsworth Museum, which opened in 1981, hosts an exhibition on Wordsworth's life displaying over 50 notebooks and letters.

Interpreting manuscripts successfully in an exhibition can be difficult. Those of well known authors, works or moments in history will resonate with visitors already familiar with their significance. For some people, being in the presence of a draft of a favourite poem can be a dream fulfilled, and the end of a journey. For others, the wonder of such a manuscript will be lost. Manuscripts in our collection, for example, are not brightly coloured, and cases filled with several, similar looking pages of handwriting do not have the visual power of other types of artefacts, and can even appear quite daunting to the uninitiated.

How do we stimulate a visitor's interest in manuscripts without adding more words to an exhibition that already requires the act of reading – more words added to words? How do we create a learning experience that makes the most of the visitor being in the presence of the manuscript, and one that goes beyond regarding the manuscript only as a two dimensional holder of text? How do we encourage visitors to notice clues in the physicality of the object; to look closely at handwriting styles (different pens and hands, or the same hand instructed from different states of the same mind?); to notice the way the page is laid out; to investigate how the text changes over time through the visible evidence of drafts, revisions and additions; to get a sense of the manuscript's creation and history over several generations; to imagine what this physical object, perhaps with words of comfort or love, meant emotionally to its creator and subsequent owners?

In essence, how do we enable a visitor to start to see what at first glance appears like an old piece of paper in a typical museum display, as a thing with a prior life that witnessed the lives of people every bit as real as ourselves, and which describe feelings and thoughts that are as common to us now as they were to the authors from the past. The text and the artefact: a powerful combination with great learning potential.

We began our investigations into these questions some years ago, with support from the Designation Development Fund, part of the Renaissance programme previously administered by the Museums, Libraries & Archives Council and now managed by Arts Council England.

A first round of funding enabled us to carry out an extensive programme of research into the learning potential of manuscript collections and to commission Piotr Bienkowski to produce the report 'Putting Manuscripts at the Heart of the Experience' completed in 2011. Further funding enabled us to implement many of Piotr's recommendations. Firstly, to identify the meanings that can be found in manuscripts, we held a conference of academics, learning specialists and artists in Grasmere in April 2012. The conference (one of several that we have held as part of this project) provided evidence to suggest that there were seven main areas of 'meaning'. It also suggested different methods of interpreting these 'meanings'.

Several of these were then incorporated into the Wordsworth Museum as gallery interventions, and their effectiveness was evaluated during the summer of 2012. Although, as the authors of this report note, these were experiments added to the existing layout of the gallery, making the testing conditions less than ideal, the conclusions and recommendations arising from these interventions are invaluable, and will be central to our thinking as we redevelop our existing exhibition.

Our research has also led to commissions of new artworks and new displays, and activities involving people of different age groups and backgrounds, at the Wordsworth Trust and in community settings across Cumbria. The project as a whole, along with Piotr's report, has transformed our ideas for interpreting manuscripts. We now have a checklist of meanings against which we can establish the learning potential of proposed manuscript exhibits, and a second checklist of tried and tested methods with which to interpret them.

We hope, of course, that the report and its findings will be of great benefit to the wider community of manuscript-holding institutions.

A word of thanks

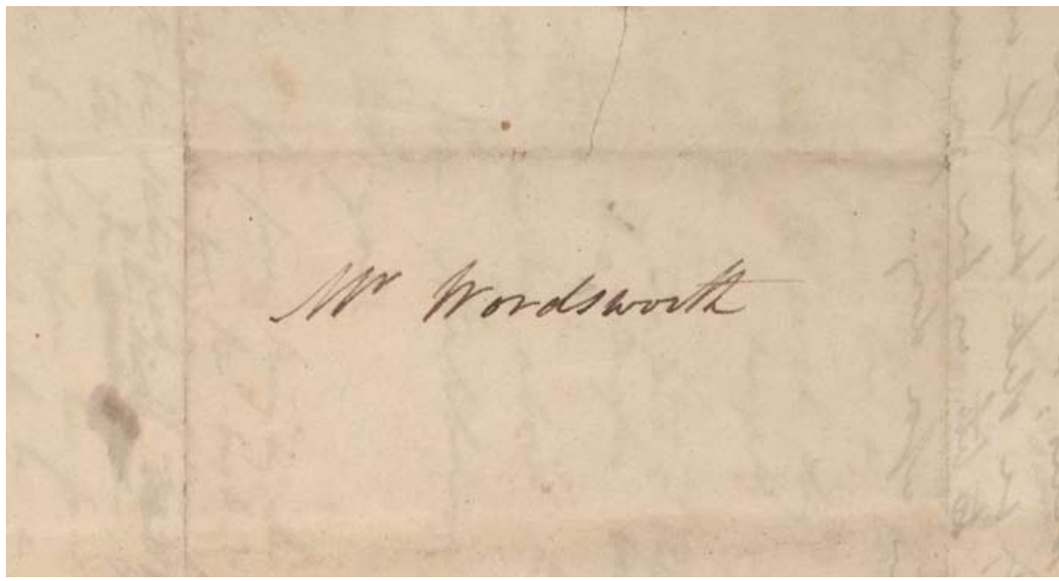
Limited space prevents me from thanking by name all those who have contributed to the success of this project. We are extremely grateful that such generous support has been made available through the Designation Development Fund. We are grateful too to Paula Brikci and Sarah Waldron at Arts Council England for their interest and encouragement throughout. Nick Winterbotham inspired and steered us through a lively and, for one memorable moment in particular, moving conference, and Adam Mathew Digital Ltd kindly helped us with some of the conference's core costs. Jane Davies and Jael Edwards, authors of this report, supported and guided us at every stage: their contribution has been immense, going beyond the evaluation and the compiling of this report. Without the many contributors to the conference we would still be searching for meanings and be the poorer in ideas for interpretation. Thank you to all who gave presentations, and to all who contributed ideas.

To all who prepared gallery interventions: it was a great pleasure discussing ideas and working with you – thank you for believing in the concept of what we were trying to do. The Wordsworth Trust's interns have made a very significant contribution: Eleanor Black and Helena Sinclair turned the ideas from the conference into the summary contained in this report; Eleanor, Jennifer Mullholland, Melissa Mitchell and Suzannah Brown took leading roles in the weeks of interviewing and tracking visitors. Catherine Kay, Education Officer, led the interns in creating and evaluating the loan boxes for schools. Mark Bains, Development Manager, raised the funds and reported on the project.

Finally – and my apologies to anyone who I've missed – my very grateful thanks to my colleague Jane Connolly, an indefatigable driving force behind all that has been achieved.

Jeff Cowton
Curator, the Wordsworth Trust
September 2012

Below: Dorothy Wordsworth to William Wordsworth, 4th June 1812 (The Wordsworth Trust)



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Wordsworth Trust received funding from Arts Council England through the Designation Development Fund (DDF) in spring 2012 to further develop its research into the learning potential of manuscripts and effective public engagement with manuscripts. The project builds on a number of research projects which culminated in Piotr Bienkowski's report 'Putting Manuscripts at the Heart of the Experience', March 2011.

The DDF funding allowed the Wordsworth Trust to carry out the following initiatives in 2012:

An international conference for manuscript experts and learning specialists held at the Wordsworth Trust, Words on the Page and the Meanings Beyond: The Innovative Interpretation of Manuscripts.

The development of a series of prototype exhibits to test out interpretative ideas and concepts developed by previous research and the conference.

A schools programme of workshops held at the museum and in schools.

An evaluation of the project, managed by external evaluators and involving staff and interns of the Wordsworth Trust.

The conference established seven 'meanings' of manuscripts. These 'meanings' are an articulation of the knowledge and understanding that can be gained from an examination of the physical qualities of the manuscript that a transcript of the text alone could not convey.

1. The Magical Qualities of a Manuscript
2. The Creative Process of the Writer
3. State of mind of the Writer
4. Evolving Relationships
5. Manuscripts as Social Objects
6. The Emotional Values of a Manuscript
7. Manuscripts as Historical Evidence

The prototype exhibits and the schools programme tested out techniques to engage visitors and school children directly with manuscripts. The Wordsworth Trust wished to draw attention to the physical qualities of the manuscript and better communicate what these physical qualities were evidence of, i.e. the 'meanings' developed at the conference.
The Wordsworth Trust also wished to use better interpretation to improve the visitor experience by providing experiences that inspired visitors and were attractive to different learning styles and tastes, including more hands on/interactive activities. They wished to develop more social activity within the gallery and provide opportunities for a stronger emotional connection.

Evaluation of the prototype exhibits and the schools programme revealed the following key findings:

The interpretative techniques developed by the Wordsworth Trust were able to engage the visitor more directly with the manuscript itself, with the use of film, artist responses, redisplay and repositioning being the most effective tools in this instance.

The effectiveness of the interpretative tool to encourage the visitor to have direct contact with the manuscript is increased where: the themes and messages within the exhibit are focused on the manuscript's physicality; the manuscript is central to the exhibit and given high status within the exhibit area; a manuscript with strong physical qualities is displayed; a small number of manuscripts are displayed in an exhibit area; the theme of the exhibit is of relevance to the visitor.

Interactive and hands-on activities were the most popular types of exhibit even for those visitors with an existing interest in Wordsworth.

The interpretative techniques motivated some visitors to examine the physicality of the manuscript and look for evidence such as handwriting and marks on the page. However, very few visitors were then able to translate this into understanding the 'meanings' when looking directly at the manuscript themselves.

The use of films of experts was the most effective tool at helping the visitor understand and appreciate the 'meanings' related to the manuscript's physicality.

New interpretative approaches such as the use of artists' responses, hands on activity and technology displays were very effective at encouraging social interaction in the museum, which aided the visitor's learning experience but also provided a more informal atmosphere.

Artistic responses engendered a sense of inspiration and curiosity which in some cases was transferred to the associated manuscripts. Visitors were able to make an emotional connection but this was mainly through exhibits with strong emotional content, such as the letters about Wordsworth's daughter's death.

Visitors valued the opportunity to see the real manuscript and felt it was an important part of their visit. For many it was significant just to 'see the real thing'. Positioning and displaying the manuscript as an object of significance as well as allowing the visitor to get up close to it, helped emphasise its magical qualities.

Recommendations:

Interpretation needs to be focussed on the physicality of the manuscript and draw attention to these aspects.

Best practice suggests that the themes and stories being told should relate to the visitor, i.e. 'meanings' that resonate most should be emphasised. Visitors should also be provided with clarification of that 'meaning'. It is not enough just to say 'look at the folds in the letter', one must also ask 'what is their significance and why would the visitor care about them'. The human story that the manuscript tells is likely to be of most interest.

The manuscript's physicality should tell a story and be a supporting part of an overarching interpretative theme or message. The various interpretative elements should reinforce the significance of the manuscript's physicality as a thread that runs through an exhibit.

Small numbers of manuscripts should be used to draw attention to them and be displayed as significant parts of the exhibition. Manuscripts which have strong physical attributes should be used to tell the story of the exhibit through their physicality.

A variety of interpretative tools should be used to appeal to different learning styles and tastes with an emphasis on interactive and hands-on activities. Where hands-on activities are used, the connection between the activity and the manuscript should be clear, allowing the visitor to reflect back and forth.

Artists' responses should be used to draw attention to the physicality of a manuscript, but also to propagate feelings of curiosity and wonder.

Exhibits should promote social interaction amongst visitors in order to enhance the learning experience and reflect the social nature of the manuscript itself.

Below: Visitor at the Wordsworth Trust
Far Left: The Wordsworth Museum main gallery

3

CONFERENCE REPORT

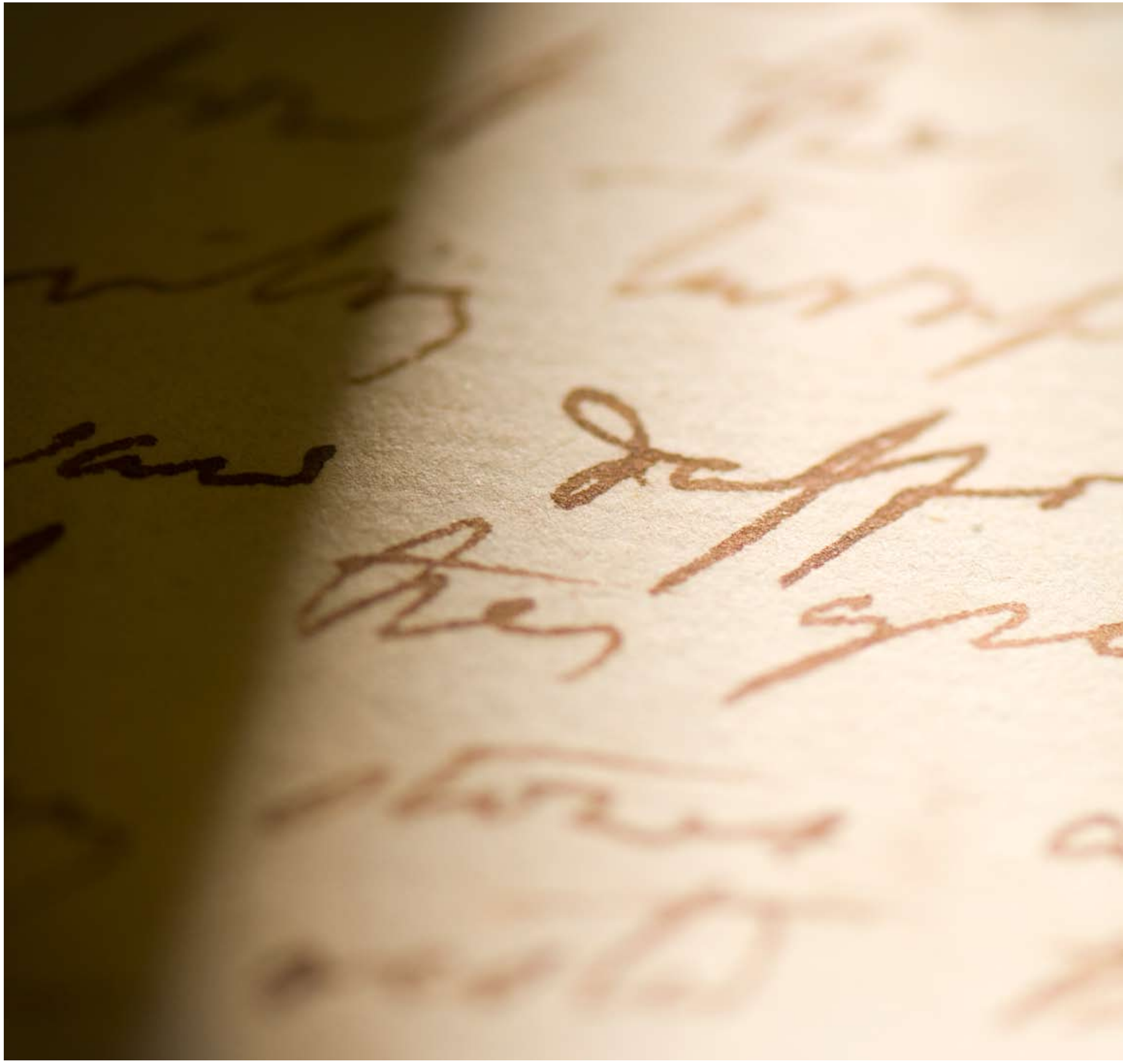
WORDS ON THE PAGE AND THE MEANINGS BEYOND

by Helena Sinclair and Eleanor Black

Words on the Page and the Meanings Beyond: The Innovative Interpretation of Manuscripts was a conference held on the 26th and 27th April 2012 at the Wordsworth Trust. The conference followed a similar event held in March 2011, where the opportunities and challenges presented by manuscript collections were discussed. Words on the Page and the Meanings Beyond was generously funded by Arts Council England, through the Renaissance Designation Development Fund. Additional support was kindly provided by the Adam Matthew Group.

The conference programme was divided thematically over two days. Day one consisted of speakers focusing on the multifaceted 'meanings' which can be inferred using original manuscripts. The following day, speakers were invited to share their experiences of interpreting manuscripts in the gallery and beyond the museum walls.

The conference concluded with an opportunity for delegates to form small focus groups where they expressed their opinions on the themes and interpretative tools discussed during the conference.



Right: Dorothy Wordsworth's journal 15th April 1802 (The Wordsworth Trust)

3.1

THE ‘MEANINGS’ OF MANUSCRIPTS

Delegates and speakers at the Words on the Page and the Meanings Beyond conference were asked to focus on the physical qualities of manuscripts, rather than their textual content. The following are some of the ‘meanings’ of manuscripts, established during the conference:

‘Meanings’ from manuscripts:

A manuscript, like any artefact from the past, can take us to a moment in history. We as people can never go back in time to 1800, but by being with Dorothy Wordsworth’s Grasmere journal we are in the presence of something which has lived at that time. It is a tangible link with the past.

The creative process; the mind of a man in motion. Regardless of the appearance of the words, manuscripts provide evidence towards the thought processes of their creators. One word replaces another, and paragraphs are added or removed

The appearance of the manuscript and words provides evidence of the state of mind of the creator during the creative process. The pen strokes ‘mimic the texture of thought’. The style of writing, emphasis or deletions, positioning and layout of words or paragraphs can all help us understand better the creator’s intellectual and emotional state.

All manuscript texts have a specific purpose and audience, even if this is just the creator themselves. This may change over time. This affects the handwriting and layout, and may provide evidence of the state of relationships between those involved.

Manuscripts can contain texts with several creators and purposes, written at different times and in different places. Entries can be by one or more creators working together, and be sequential or layered on top of existing entries, perhaps over hundreds of years.

Manuscripts are not emotionally neutral. The creator invests emotionally and intellectually, the result perhaps being of financial, as well as artistic and emotional value. The subsequent holder of a manuscript will place a different set of values on it.

Manuscripts give evidence of life at the time and the general circumstances under which they were written. For example, they provide evidence of communication systems, cost and use of materials and the social setting.

Right: A student studying an original manuscript at the Wordsworth Trust

3.2

DEFINING THE ‘MEANINGS’

3.2.1
The Magical Qualities of a Manuscript

A manuscript, like any artefact from the past, can take us to a moment in history. We as people can never go back in time to 1800, but by being withDorothy Wordsworth’s Grasmere journal we are in the presence of something which lived at that time. It is a tangible link with the past.

‘All literary manuscripts have two kinds of value: what might be called the magical value and the meaningful value. The magical value is the older and the more universal: this is the paper that he wrote on, these are words as he wrote them, emerging for the first time in this particular miraculous combination. The meaningful value is of much more recent origin, and is the degree to which the manuscript helps to enlarge our knowledge and understanding of a writer’s life and work.’ (Philip Larkin, 1979).

Manuscripts represent the unique moment of creative impulse and, as Larkin observes, this renders these objects with a particular ‘magical value’. Speakers and delegates at the Words on the Page and the Meanings Beyond conference agreed that manuscripts have an extraordinary potential to connect the contemporary viewer with a historical time period or figure. The ‘magical value’ of a manuscript can be extremely difficult to define, however it is undeniable.

The Wordsworth Trust holds approximately 90% of William Wordsworth’s surviving literary manuscripts and every year thousands of visitors and researchers travel to see these objects at first hand.

Andrew Lacey is undertaking a PhD at the University of Newcastle and spoke to conference delegates about the ‘undeniable thrill’ of working with DCMS 15, an original notebook used by both William and Dorothy Wordsworth and often referred to as The Christabel Notebook. Although Lacey’s aim was to study the content of this manuscript, it was the physicality of the original object which created an irreplaceable emotional connection for this researcher. For Lacey, handling an object which had once been part of Wordsworth’s daily domestic life, but is now far removed from its original owner, was a profound experience.

Similarly, Ali Desovska, a freelance bibliotherapist and community arts worker, found the experience of viewing Mary Shelley’s original Frankenstein; The Modern Prometheus manuscript, in the Shelley’s Ghost exhibition of 2011, magical and inspiring. Museums, galleries and archives displaying manuscripts are able to offer their visitors an irreplaceable glimpse into an author’s life and the genesis of a beloved text.
For Desovska, her emotional reaction to encountering Shelley’s manuscript led her to further develop the bibliotherapy outreach programme, Get Into Reading. Her outreach programme grew exponentially and Desovska’s initial enthusiasm inspired other group members to engage with literary collections and pursue their own creative projects.

Many cultural institutions are attempting to navigate the difficulties of providing physical access to rare and fragile collection material. There are many innovative solutions which make physical access possible and this report will investigate some of the interpretative tools discussed at the conference. However, it could be argued that only through encountering the original manuscript can the visitor have a truly authentic, and perhaps magical, experience.

3.2.2
The Creative Process: The Mind of a Man in Motion

Regardless of the appearance of the words, manuscripts provide evidence of the thought processes of their creators. One word replaces another, and paragraphs are added or removed.

A printed edition of a text can be a clear, portable and immediate resource but often reveals very little about the author’s creative process. One of the key values of a manuscript is its potential to offer an insight into the creative process. A notebook or original draft often contains revisions, additions, deletions and even unnoticed mistakes which can now provide an invaluable insight into the text’s development and the author’s mind. Without access to a manuscript containing draft material it would be impossible to comprehensively understand the evolution of a text. Furthermore, manuscripts containing draft material can allow for a discussion of the fallibility of the author and the importance of the editorial processes.

Dr Luca Crispi of University College, Dublin shared his research into the unique value of James Joyce’s commonplace books which he described as ‘a storehouse’ for ideas, words and blocks of text. Dr Crispi curated the exhibition James Joyce and Ulysses at the National Library of Ireland which displayed the author’s commonplace books, Ulysses drafts and fair copies alongside published texts. Exhibiting the drafting process allowed visitors a rare insight into the author’s personal and artistic development. In particular, viewing Joyce’s complex colour coding system, employed in his commonplace books, enabled visitors to better understand how the author visually structured his own thoughts.

John Ruskin was one of Britain’s most influential polymaths. Similar to Joyce’s commonplace books, Ruskin’s notebooks provide a fascinating glimpse into his inner thoughts and working processes. Professor Stephen Wildman of Lancaster University spoke about his work with Ruskin’s manuscripts. Ruskin kept 29 notebooks from 1835 onwards and these manuscripts reveal his wide ranging interests, personal experiences and also contain many unpublished sketches. These notebooks were revisited by Ruskin and additions and revisions would often be made many years after the original entry. Professor Wildman describes Ruskin as an ‘inveterate tearer-out’ who would often cut and paste early detailed sketches onto a relevant later entry in his notebooks.

Without Ruskin’s notebooks or Joyce’s commonplace books a great insight into the creative processes of these men would be lost. Original manuscript material not only visualises the evolution of a text but also reveals a more personal portrait of a writer who is compelled to draft and redraft their work before it becomes publishable material. Based on the work of Professor Wildman, Dr Crispi and other speakers, delegates concluded that manuscripts are an essential part of any investigation into what Dr Crispi terms the ‘dynamics of creativity’.

Right: Details from John Ruskin’s notebook page with fragments stuck down with homemade tape (Ruskin Library, Lancaster University)

3.2.3
The Appearance of a Manuscript: Mimicking the Texture of Thought

The style of writing, emphasis of deletions, positioning and layout of words or paragraphs can all help us understand better the creator's intellectual and emotional state.

Within the first few seconds of encountering a manuscript we can gather a wealth of meanings before even attempting to decipher the text. The physical qualities of the paper, size of a notebook, condition and handwriting style are among some of the visual signifiers which, at first glance, allow the viewer to form an immediate understanding of a manuscript. A key challenge for those working with manuscript collections is emphasising the value of this first impression. In an exhibition the viewer quickly undergoes the transition to the status of reader as they begin to focus on the content of the text. Professor Melanie Hall of Boston University observes that:

Braille is one of the few writing systems where tactile perception is used, as opposed to visual perception. But, with manuscripts it's not eye versus fingertips, it's fingertips supplementing the eye. The manuscript displays not only words for reading but other signs of expression for feeling or emotion.

(Professor Melanie Hall, Boston University)

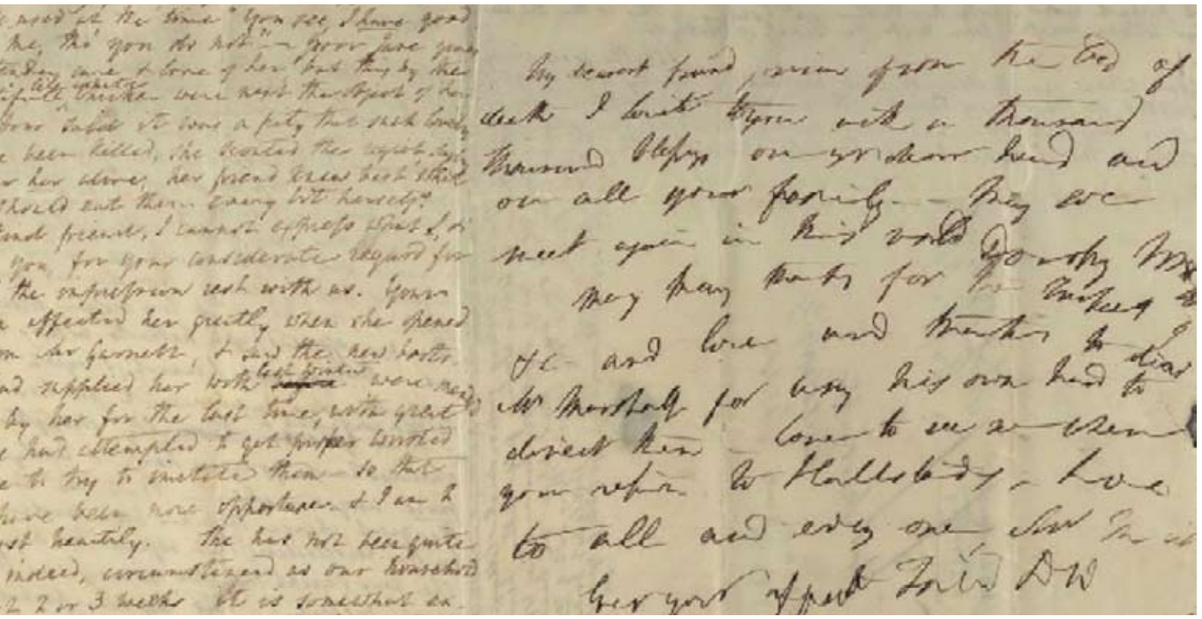
Handwriting

Each manuscript is unique and factors as subtle as the flick of a pen stroke can offer an insight into the creator's mind. The analysis of handwriting was a particularly rewarding topic at the Words on the Page and the Meanings Beyond conference. A number of speakers commented on the importance of evaluating handwriting to a biographical study of the author.

Handwriting can reveal valuable clues as to the state of mind of the creator. Jeff Cowton, Curator at The Wordsworth Trust, described handwriting as a visual form which can 'mimic the texture of thought' and this is particularly apt when interpreting Dorothy Wordsworth's handwriting in later life. Dorothy Wordsworth suffered from dementia and in a letter written with Mary Wordsworth Dorothy's handwriting indicates her disturbed mental state. Her untidy handwriting is in stark contrast to her sister in law's neat and considered hand. From the content of the letter it is clear that Dorothy was under duress when writing her short passage, which begins: "My dearest friend, risen from the bed of death I write".

Structure

Another aesthetic quality of a manuscript which can form part of the viewer's aesthetic impression is the structure of the text. Without any previous knowledge of the text's content, analysing the writing's structure on the page can provide insight into its meaning. The 'Goslar Letter' sent by William and Dorothy Wordsworth to Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1798 contains early material for 'The Prelude', 'Nutting' and the 'Lucy poems'.

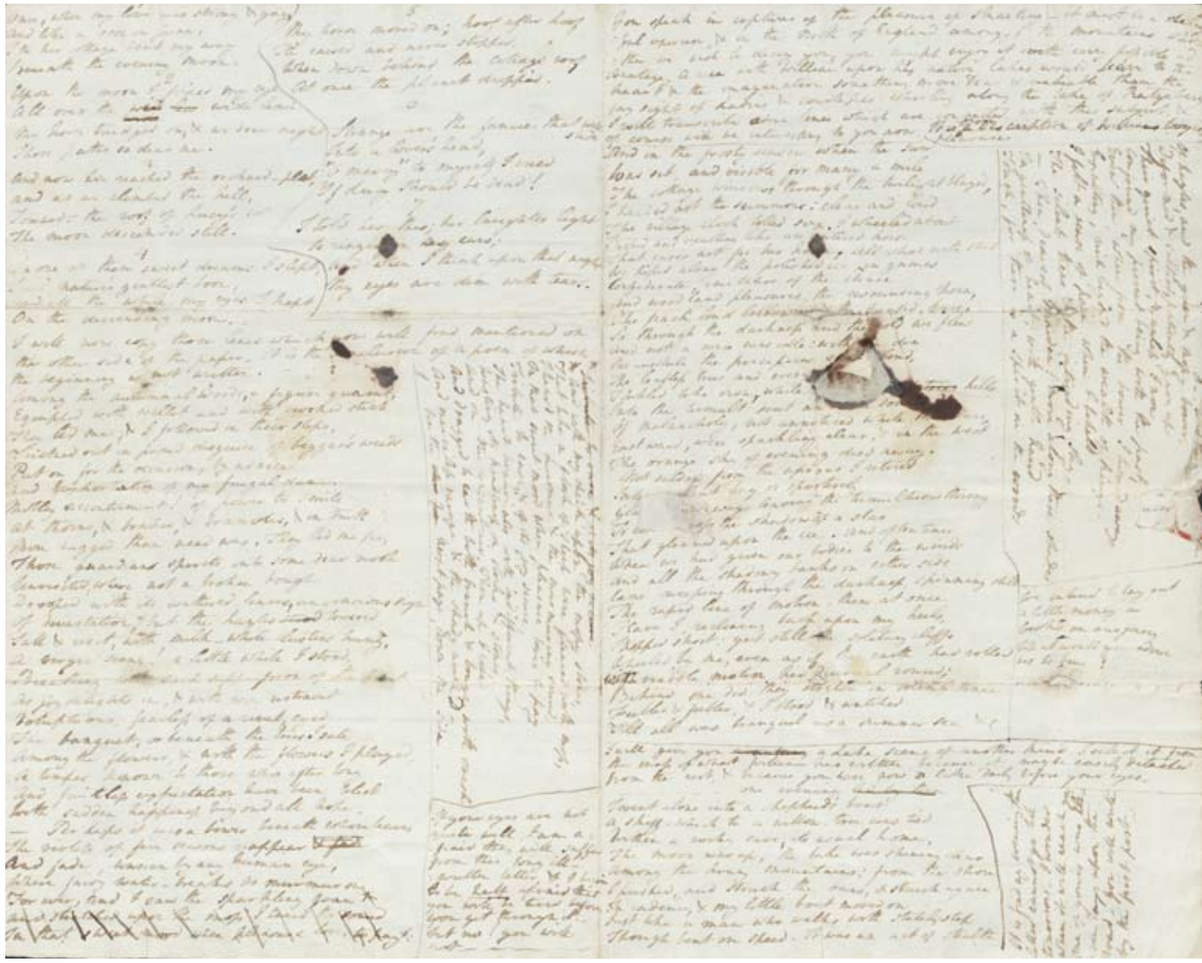


Made up of one large folded piece of paper, the 'Goslar Letter' presents its readers with blocks of text, sometimes a carefully transcribed poem or instructions for the recipient to reply soon. This manuscript is aesthetically attractive and as Catherine Kay, Education Officer at The Wordsworth Trust, observes, it invites its viewer to engage in the act of imaginative reconstruction.

The appearance of a manuscript can help us to better understand the creator's intellectual and emotional state and the historical context surrounding the text. An analysis of the physical qualities of a manuscript, such as its size, texture and condition, can reveal a variety of meanings which would not be derived without viewing the original object. Similarly, viewing the original structure of the text in the creator's handwriting can enable researchers to form a more detailed biographical understanding of a writer. As Andrew Lacey commented, without access to archive material he would not have been able to interpret the meanings of the unwritten texts which he defines as:

"non-linguistic signs which speak as something which can be read but which aren't set down in words".

Below: The 'Goslar Letter', sent from William and Dorothy Wordsworth to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 14th or 21st December 1798 (The Wordsworth Trust)
Far Left: Mary and Dorothy Wordsworth to Jane Marshall, December 1835. Mary's handwriting is seen on the left, and Dorothy's on the right



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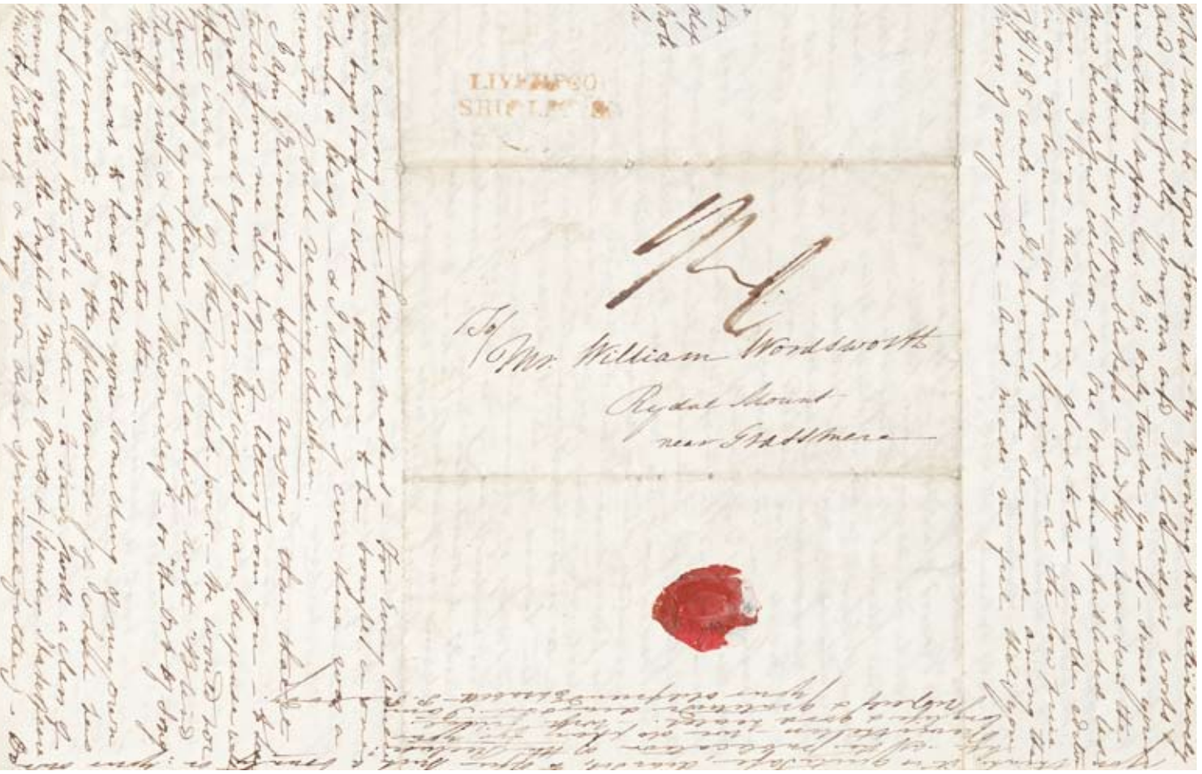
Evolving Relationships



Above: Elizabeth Peabody to William Wordsworth, Feburary 1838 (The Wordsworth Trust)
Far Right: Thomas De Quincey to Johnny Wordsworth, 1809 (The Wordsworth Trust)

All manuscript texts have a specific purpose and audience, even if this is just the creator themselves. This affects the handwriting and layout, and may provide evidence of the state of relationships between those involved. Whether they are a neat copy of a poetic verse intended to be read aloud, a love letter written for only one recipient or a private diary. Manuscripts can tell us a lot about the relationship between a writer and reader. By deciphering the 'unwritten texts' of a manuscript's appearance, discussed in the previous section, the viewer is able to gather information about the manuscript's purpose and the relationships it represents. Changes in the paper quality, condition and handwriting of a letter are just some of the visual signifiers from which the evolution of a relationship can be tracked using a manuscript.

One conference speaker who successfully demonstrated the importance of the aesthetic qualities of a manuscript to tracking relationships between writers and recipients was Professor Louise Swiniarski of Salem State University. Professor Swiniarski shared her research into the letters sent between the writer and publisher Elizabeth Peabody and William Wordsworth. Although the writers never met, their correspondence reveals a relationship which altered with Peabody's changing status. Peabody's early letters were those of an admiring fan, as evident from their content and Peabody's neat and considered handwriting and structure.

The earliest letter Peabody sent to Wordsworth was written in 1825 but from the postmark we can see that it was not sent until 1827. It could be inferred that Peabody did not initially feel confident in contacting Wordsworth, who was at this time a well known and perhaps intimidating figure. Professor Swiniarski noted the evolution of Peabody's handwriting in her letters to Wordsworth as the American writer's hand became more confident, and less careful, as she became familiar with her correspondent.

Peabody's presentation altered again in 1839 as she writes to Wordsworth in a more formal guise as an advisor on publishing in America, she now uses a clear and legible script. Using these letters Professor Swiniarski stated that she was able to "reveal an inner portrait of the correspondents" using the text in conjunction with an analysis of the appearance of these manuscripts.

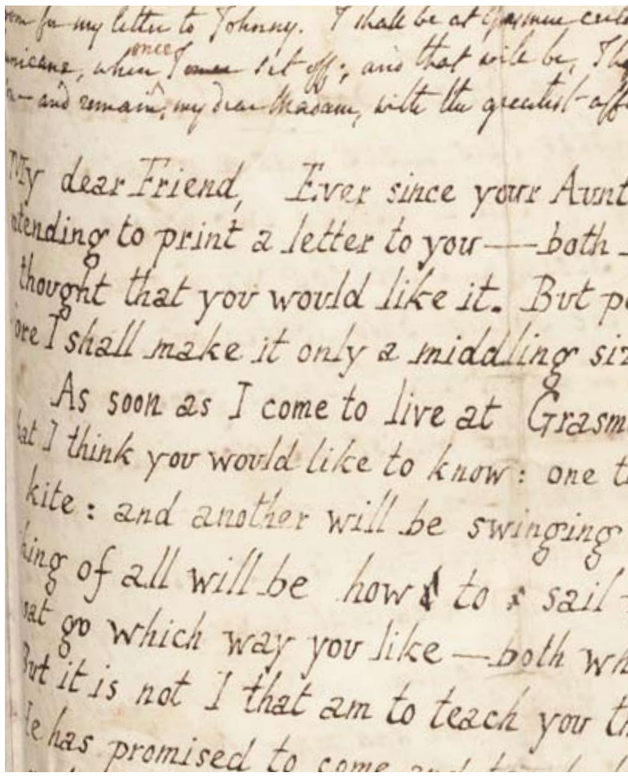
Dr Ruth Abbot of Worcester College, Oxford presented her work on the notebooks of George Eliot also observing the author's neat and considered handwriting. Abbot posited that Eliot's handwriting was evidence that the author may have intended these notebooks for limited public access, although not general publication. George Eliot's notebooks contain a wealth of research into versification, in addition to notes on her many other varied academic interests. Abbot theorises that by presenting these ideas in a legible hand Eliot may have intended to use her notebooks as a tool for supporting her poetic works and other published material.

Professor Philip Martin of Sheffield Hallam University also sees the physical appearance of manuscripts as an important tool in deciphering meaning, and in particular the relationships being represented. In his session Professor Martin spoke about the insight which a study of manuscript form can offer into the interaction between adults and children throughout history. The appearance of the early handwritten manuscripts of Lewis Carroll's Alice Through the Looking Glass reveal the author's intention to communicate directly with the young reader. The print is clearly legible and the paragraphs and page structure make the text easy to follow. In addition, the integrated illustrations make the content accessible to even young children. Professor Martin sees these manuscripts as a unique insight into Carroll's creative processes and into his relationship with the Liddell children, for whom he intended the tales to be immediately accessible.

Another clear example of the value of viewing a text in its original manuscript is Thomas De Quincey's letter to Johnny Wordsworth, the poet's son. In a letter to the Wordsworth family, De Quincey breaks off to address a passage directly to the young Johnny Wordsworth and this is signalled by a change in the handwriting and spacing of the text. De Quincey's writing becomes clear and evenly printed as he intended it to be read by the child. Although the passage addressed to Johnny is clearly accessible to adult readers it does appear to symbolise a private 'pact' between the adult and child, excluding other readers, as De Quincey has chosen to modify his script in order to communicate with only Johnny, writing:

"Ever since your Aunt Dorothy told me you could read, I have been intending to print a letter to you- both because I promised that I would- and also I thought that you would like it. But perhaps you will not like a very long one, and therefore I will make it a very middling sized one". (Thomas De Quincey)

Manuscripts can provide invaluable biographical evidence about the writer and reader. In many cases this evidence is very rare and can open entirely new dialogues surrounding a text or historical figure. For example, very few Elizabeth Peabody letters remain therefore her correspondence with William Wordsworth is of particular value to academics and institutions hoping to learn more about her creative processes and self representation. For both Professor Swiniarski and Professor Martin interpreting the 'unwritten texts' of manuscripts has allowed them to explore themes and relationships which may never have come to light without access to the original documents.



3.2.5 Manuscripts as Social Objects

Manuscripts can contain texts with several creators and purposes, written at different times and in different places. Entries can be by one or more creators working together, and be sequential or layered on top of existing entries, perhaps over hundreds of years.

Dr Martin described manuscripts as “transitional artefacts” with meanings which alter over time and with the subjective understanding of the individual viewer. The term transitional seems particularly apt when discussing manuscripts which contain entries by one or more creators working together, writing either sequentially or layering on top of existing entries, perhaps over hundreds of years. As previously discussed, manuscripts provide a valuable visualisation of a writer’s editorial processes and, similarly, they can be used to track the social interaction between multiple creators.

The Words on the Page and the Meanings Beyond conference organisers encouraged attendees to share their ideas using post-it note boards and Twitter and perhaps both of these outlets could be viewed as manuscripts with many creators.

The Wellcome Library’s collection of seventeenth century recipe books exemplifies the value of manuscripts to an understanding of the social and intellectual interaction between creators. Helen Wakely of the Wellcome Library presented a number of manuscripts at the conference which showed evidence that many handwritten recipes and remedies had been altered by various contributors over a number of years: a volume created for Ann Fanshawe in approximately 1651 was added to over the next 50 year period. Recipe books often have a variety of users and owners and the communal nature of these objects is evident from a study of the handwriting and aesthetics of the pages. Wakely also discussed the importance of illustrations and doodles in the collection as they allow the viewer to imagine a multifaceted personality of the creator, and particularly a more playful and jovial persona. One engaging object in the collection is a late seventeenth century recipe book which has a page containing a child’s drawing of a woman who appears to be cooking. The child’s sketch, which was drawn over a hundred years after the manuscripts original use, reveals that the book remained in a domestic environment and was understood as an object detailing culinary history.

Andrew Lacey also spoke about the value of manuscripts to an understanding of the social interaction between multiple authors. The focus of his presentation was the manuscript DCMS 15 which is a notebook containing material from William Wordsworth and his sister, Dorothy. The handwriting and structure visually represents the creative dynamic between the siblings as Wordsworth’s rough drafts of ‘The Cumberland Beggar’ follow Dorothy’s fair copy of ‘A Night Piece’.

Manuscripts with multiple authors can offer extremely valuable insights into relationships and the evolution of texts over an extended time period.

Right: Child’s sketch found in late seventeenth century recipe book (The Wellcome Library)
Below: A scribble in one of the Wordsworths’ notebooks, possibly by a child (The Wordsworth Trust)

3.2.6
Manuscripts are Not Emotionally Neutral

The creator invests emotionally and intellectually, the result perhaps being of financial, as well as artistic and emotional value. The subsequent holder of a manuscript will place a different set of values on it.

Manuscripts are not emotionally neutral. For the original author a notebook may symbolise a moment of inspiration, a particular event or even a relationship. A key example of the emotional resonance of a manuscript is the symbolic nature of a consolation letter which can become the embodiment of grief, standing for the lost relationship rather than as a simple written document. However, the emotional potency of a manuscript extends far beyond the understanding of its creator and new emotional layers are added over time. Academic studies and manuscript exhibitions now reveal meanings and aspects of manuscripts which would never have occurred to the original author, but are of great importance to subsequent holders of the object.

Dorothy Wordsworth's poem 'Floating Island' was originally composed as a religious allegory and the manuscript material for this work would have signified the poet's religious views and her creative processes. However, as Rachel Feder of the University of Michigan discussed during the conference, in contemporary eco literary criticism 'Floating Island' is often positioned as representative of environmentalism hence a manuscript is endowed with meanings which is unlikely to have been recognised at its creation.

Similarly DCMS 15 may have represented a number of complex meanings for its original creators. The document may have stood as a reminder of their domestic life in Alfoxden, where Wordsworth and Dorothy were living, or perhaps a particularly significant moment in the creation of the poems it contains, such as 'The Ruined Cottage'. Yet for researchers in the twenty-first century DCMS 15 is representative of the physicality of the poet as they study "the dried ink or pencil, the work of a hand which was once warm and capable". With each new research project or exhibition a new layer of meaning is added to DCMS 15 and viewers place different sets of values upon it.

All the manuscripts discussed at the conference are in a constant state of flux as their meanings are added to and re evaluated. Although these layered meanings can pose a challenge when designing exhibitions, it can be worthwhile communicating to the visitor the idea that manuscripts are neither emotionally neutral nor static.

3.2.7
Manuscripts as Historical Evidence

Manuscripts give evidence of life at the time and the general circumstances under which they were written. For example, they provide evidence of communication systems, cost and use of materials and the social setting.

The 'unwritten texts' of a manuscript can reveal information about the circumstances under which it was written and the general history of the time period. A study of the structure, materials and other physical qualities of a manuscript can provoke new questions about the lives and creative practices of the creator and the society in which they lived. Andrew Lacey observed during the conference that a manuscript can "without words speak of eighteenth-century paper production methods, its unique storage history and the inherent fragility of the manuscript form".

An investigation of the materials used can provide a wealth of contextual knowledge. For example, Dr Ruth Abbot was able to date George Eliot's notebooks exactly by identifying a particular type of purple ink which was only used by the author after a specific time. Similarly, researchers are able to formulate theories about the circumstances under which Wordsworth was writing as he often used ink when working indoors and pencil when outdoors. The weight and quality of paper can also reveal historical detail about the prosperity of the author and provide an insight into the paper making industry of the period.

Letters are a common manuscript form that can tell the history of not only the writer and recipient but also of the postal service. Speaking about letters between William Wordsworth and Elizabeth Peabody, Professor Swiniarski discussed her interpretation of the ways in which Peabody had simply addressed her letters to 'Rydal Mount, Westmoreland' and how the letters may have reached Liverpool via packet boat from America. The cost of receiving a letter in the nineteenth century could be relatively high as it was based on the distance over which it had travelled and the number of sheets used. The affluence of both the sender and receiver can be understood from the way in which they present a letter. For example, wealthy senders, such as Lord Byron, would write in relatively large handwriting on many sheets of paper, perhaps to indicate their wealth, while others may use small or crossed script in order to reduce postage costs. Manuscripts are not only invaluable to a biographical study of a literary figure but they can also offer invaluable insight into a historical period.

The physical condition of manuscripts is a preoccupation for institutions attempting to preserve their unique, and often extremely valuable, collections. However the condition of a manuscript can in itself be an invaluable symbol for visitors engaging with these objects. Helen Wakely from the Wellcome Library spoke to conference attendees about her extensive work, and hope or further public engagement, with seventeenth century recipe manuscripts. One of the fascinating aspects of the Wellcome Library's manuscript collection is the physical evidence of their past uses, such as burn marks, stains and spills.

No conclusive solution will ever be found as to the origin of the damage to the manuscripts in the Wellcome Library's collection. However, it is the multitude of questions and potential answers that are provoked by the mystery of these mistakes, accidents and alterations which are of real value to a museum or archive visitor.

Below: Burn marks on a seventeenth century recipe book (The Wellcome Library)

3.3

METHODS OF INTERPRETATION

What linked the wide range of manuscript interpretation techniques highlighted at the Wordsworth Trust's Words on the Page and the Meanings Beyond conference was clearly summed up by Dr. Luca Crispi, lecturer in the School of English, Drama and Film at University College Dublin, when he stated:

'It is our obligation to communicate our passion about this material and the insights that we have gained from years of research [...] therefore we have to find more innovative and creative ways to reach this wider audience.' – Dr. Luca Crispi

The methods of manuscript interpretation illustrated at the conference fell into two fundamental categories; digital interpretation and physical interpretation. Furthermore, the different methods encompassed by each of these categories could be grouped by their contexts, into experiences that are located in a museum or archive setting, and those that can be accessed away from their typical surroundings, and undertaken independently. Using examples discussed by the artists, academics and members of the cultural heritage community who spoke at the conference, the following sections will explore these methods of interpretation. Within each sub section, three areas will be explored:

a. What the method can offer us, and why it is successful.

b. The setting and audience to which the method is best suited.

c. Which of the 'meanings' the method can interpret specifically.

Right: Visitors at the letter writing exhibit

3.3.1. In-gallery digital interpretation

This encompasses audio-visual displays as well as more interactive technology like The British Library's Turning the Pages application.

a. What in-gallery digital interpretation can offer us

Digital interpretation techniques offer an opportunity to experience the physicality of manuscripts without any impact on the conservation of the items. For most users, this is the closest they can possibly come to handling the manuscript for themselves. Though many of the aspects discussed by Andrew Lacey at the conference, in his paper entitled 'The Fallings From and Vanishings of Manuscript Reproduction', such as experiences of a more profound, emotional nature, cannot be reproduced, the quality of the technology can give a genuine sense of the scale and feel of a book or leaf of paper. For instance, the Turning the Pages application allows images of single sheets and books to be viewed in 3D, and aims to replicate the sensory elements of handling manuscripts, like the weight of the thick pages as they are turned, and the sound of the paper.

b. The setting and audience

Technology that is of a high enough quality to come close to replicating a real manuscript often comes at great expense, so these methods are limited to being used in galleries, libraries and museums. The benefit of this is that technology allowing users to interact with a manuscript can be situated alongside a display of the original artefact, creating an experience with both physical and visual elements, whilst bringing together both the old and the new. Dr Luca Crispi spoke of the success of this method of exhibiting within his James Joyce and Ulysses exhibition at The National Library of Ireland, which he felt provided the visitors with privileges typically granted only to conservators. The audience to whom these digital methods appeal is wide-ranging, as their visual quality is eye catching and consequently engaging, and the interactive, tactile, touch-screen technology being used is simple and effective enough to appeal even to those who are more comfortable with physical engagement.

c. The 'meanings' from manuscripts

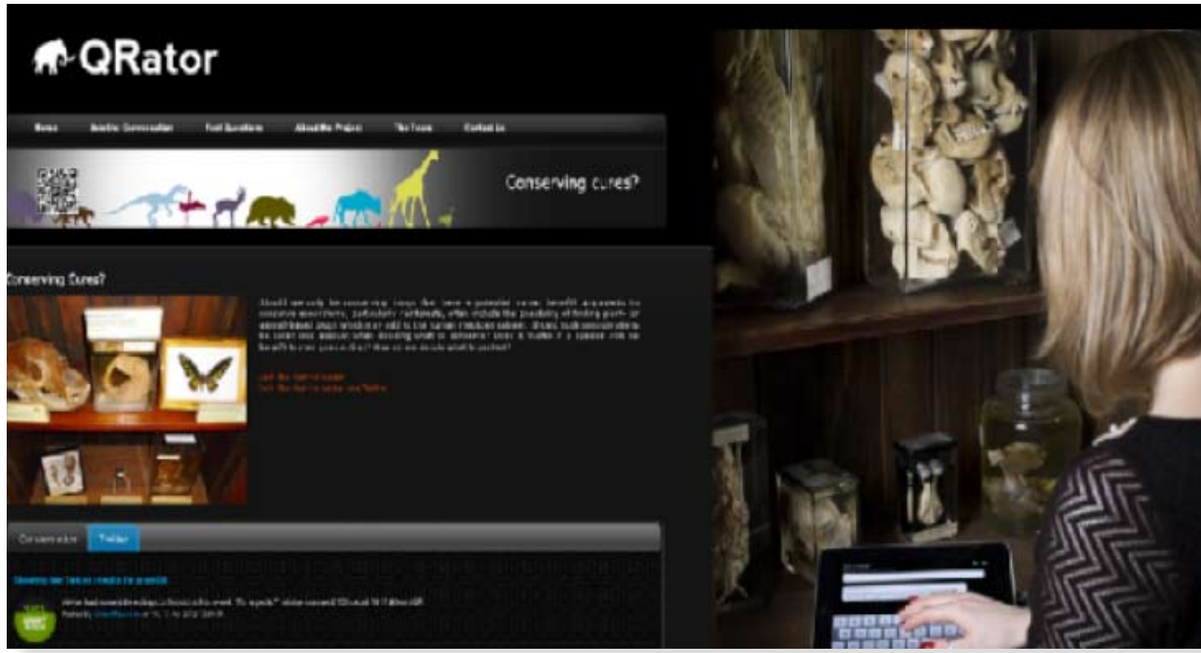
These digital, visual methods appear to be particularly useful in interpreting the author's creative process, demonstrating how they mimic the texture of thought as they write. Dr Luca Crispi discussed this in relation to the James Joyce and Ulysses exhibition, highlighting how he was able to illustrate Joyce's unusual methods through digitally adding and removing crossings-out and different paragraphs.

3.3.2 Independently-accessible digital interpretation

This includes applications for smart phones and online material designed to be accessed through computers or tablets.

a. What independently-accessible digital interpretation can offer us

Independently-accessible digital interpretation methods offer a way to facilitate a range of different levels of user engagement, and are very inclusive. Smart phone applications can be used both in-gallery, to respond immediately to a manuscript, and elsewhere, to further the experience beyond the typical constraints of having to be in a fixed place. These applications, as well as other online material, encourage users to respond and interact with manuscripts whilst aiding their understanding, and by using formats visitors are already familiar with, for instance, based on existing social networking platforms, people can feel more at-ease with the material. Dr Wim Van Mierlo, Lecturer in Textual Scholarship and English Literature at the University of London, discussed the scope of these digital interpretational ideas at length in his presentation at the Words on the Page and the Meanings Beyond conference. He speculated about how a manuscript's Facebook profile would appear, using timeline technology to chart its history of composition with both text and photographs, and, at the higher-end of intellectual engagement, he discussed the conception of digital workspaces, where users could create and share content, contributing to an expanding web of information about manuscripts. Dr Van Mierlo emphasised the collaborative, engaging and cost-effective nature of applications, citing QRator, a collaborative project between the UCL Centre for Digital Humanities and UCL museums and collections, as an example. As explained at www.qrator.org, QRator enables



Above: A tablet application QRator as seen at the Words on the Page and the Meanings Beyond Conference

members of the public to type in their thoughts and interpretation of museum objects and click 'send'. Their interpretation becomes part of the object's history and ultimately the display itself, via the interactive label system to allow the display of comments and information directly next to the artefacts.

At the conference, Dr Van Mierlo discussed the fact that the responses collected by QRator were not sophisticated, and that was exactly the point; they create a record which can then, in turn, become a subject of analysis.

b. The setting and audience

The key feature of these independently-accessible methods is that they can be used anywhere, as long as the user is in possession of the necessary technology. This offers people a means of taking manuscript material out of galleries in a manner that was previously not possible. The number of smartphone users is constantly increasing (approximately 44% of mobile phone users now own smart phones, according to data presented at the conference), and their capabilities can be harnessed. Alyson Webb, a partner at Frankly, Green & Webb, a consultancy providing mobile experiences to the cultural sector, pointed out that since most people use their smart phones to while away time, apps provide a means of getting people to engage culturally, in a setting of their choosing, through a familiar, playful medium. For instance, Tracy Wilkinson, Assistant Archivist at King's College, Cambridge, created a guidebook-style app using text and images from manuscripts held in the Alan Turing archive at King's College, utilising the fact that visitors were already using their smart phones in the area, to take photographs of the college itself. An important factor, however, is to ensure that those without the necessary technology to access these programs do not feel alienated: these methods are particularly relevant to young, technologically fluent visitors, bringing them into contact with material they may not have otherwise sought out, but this can be to the detriment of people unable to use these digital devices.

c. The 'meanings' from manuscripts

Many of the independently-accessible digital interpretation methods discussed at the conference seemed to concern the idea of place. Dr Ian Gregory, Lecturer in Digital Humanities at Lancaster University, spoke about his work with Geographical Information Systems (GIS), creating maps of tours of the Lake District taken by Gray and Coleridge, which show not only their route, but their emotional responses, and create a visual comparison of written material. Also, by putting material online, manuscripts that could not otherwise be viewed together due to their location can be amassed, allowing new comparisons to be made.

3.3.3
Interpretation through contemporary art

This encompasses painting, sculpture and text-based artwork that is rooted in manuscripts, and aims to widen their accessibility.

a. What interpretation through contemporary art can offer us

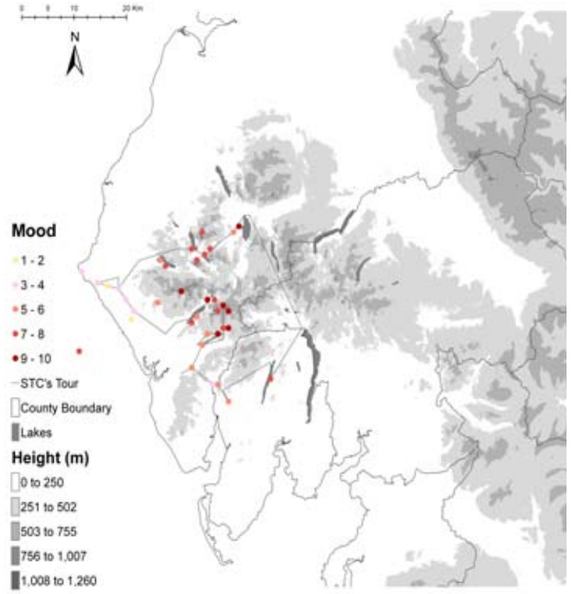
Contemporary artwork that interprets manuscripts can offer new ways of seeing and understanding the manuscript material. The methods highlighted at the Words on the Page and the Meanings Beyond conference were wide ranging, with some artists taking a text-based approach, and others exploring the meanings of manuscripts through a physical medium. By creating artwork designed to be touched, boundaries are broken down, and the manuscript material can be experienced in a physical manner.

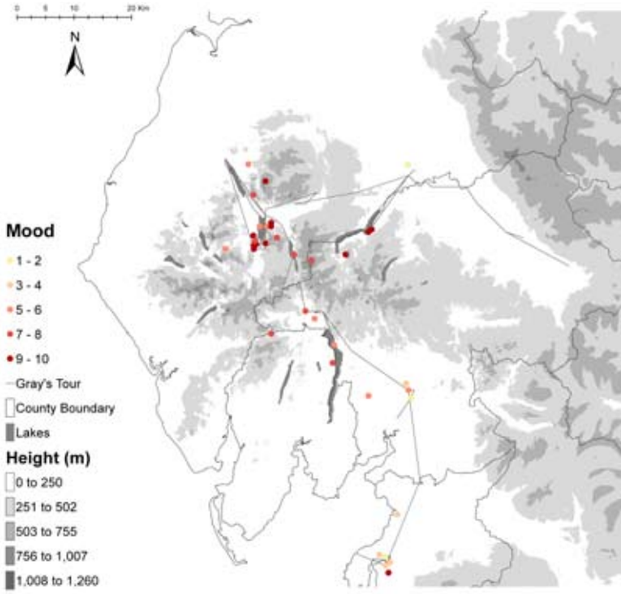
b. The setting and audience

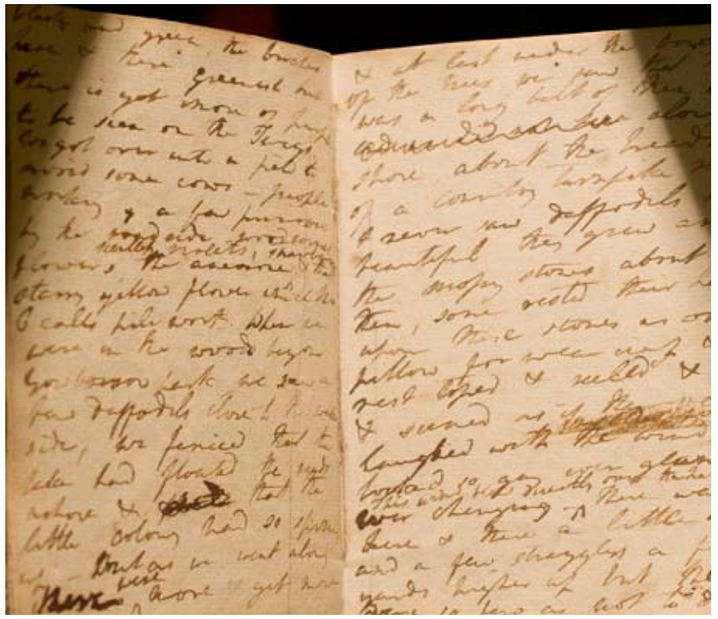
These art-based methods include and engage people who can feel alienated in galleries, such as those with mental or physical impairments. At the conference, Heather Bowring, an artist who paints with plaster to create three-dimensional pieces, discussed how she aims to create a tactile, visual means of understanding a manuscript which will be displayed alongside the original, its transcription and an audio-recording, ensuring accessibility on several different levels. On a very fundamental level, a manuscript-based artwork placed in an art gallery instead of an archive, works to widen the appeal of literary material to visitors who would not choose to visit the location of the manuscript itself. When he showed his work at the conference, Dr Mike Collier, Programme Leader for Foundation Studies in Art and Design at the University of Sunderland, demonstrated how he lifted characters from the manuscripts of Dorothy Wordsworth's journals to provide a new way of experiencing the language, beyond the page.

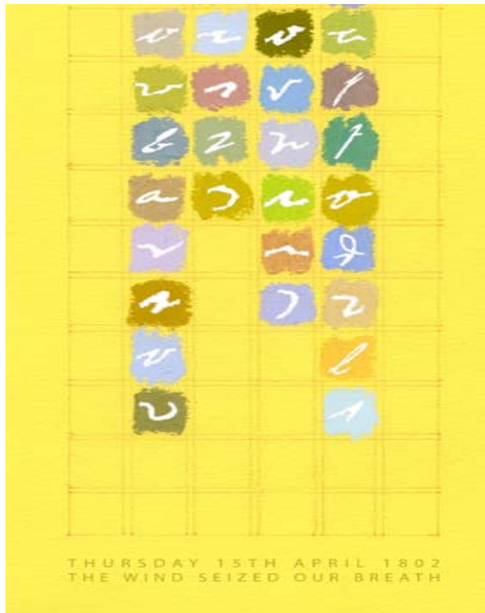
c. The 'meanings' from manuscripts

In his presentation at the Words on the Page and the Meanings Beyond conference, Professor Brian Thompson, Associate Dean for Research, Resources and External Engagement at the University of Sunderland, spoke about the way in which he uses the sculptural line as a metaphor for walks, and layers manuscript material with the line of rivers and land, mirroring the building up of the manuscript text. While the manuscript's involvement in his work may not be immediately obvious to an audience, his sculptures provide a type of visual engagement with manuscripts that differs greatly from looking at a simple reproduction. Thompson's work makes the labour of creation very tangible: processes are displayed physically, giving a sense of the scale of endeavour that goes into the making of manuscripts – 'the mind of a man in motion' (Jeff Cowton).









Right Top: Dr Ian Gregory's GIS technology, mapping Gray and Coleridge's emotional responses to their tour
Right Centre: Dr Mike Collier's work based on Dorothy Wordsworth's journals (left)
Right Bottom: Professor Brian Thompson's sculptural process illustrating the creation of manuscripts

3.3.4
Facsimiles of manuscripts

This encompasses high quality reproductions of book and single-sheet manuscripts that aim to replicate the sensory and emotional experience of handling the actual artefact.

a. What facsimiles of manuscripts can offer us

By making facsimiles of manuscripts, the material can be used by a far wider audience, beyond researchers and conservators. For the vast majority of this audience, being able to hold and interact with a facsimile is the closest they will be able to get to the feel of the original manuscript.

While facsimiles are very useful for studying the meaning of what the writer actually wrote, as they replicate the original written document, they can also trigger an emotional response: the intellectual and emotional investment the manuscript's creator originally created encourages and stimulates creativity in those that use the facsimile of the manuscript.

b. The setting and audience

Facsimiles can be used in galleries, to provide a more hands-on, sensory experience, but they have also proven to be well suited to outreach work, away from a museum setting, and have been used successfully with children, the elderly and unengaged groups, to name a few examples.

Facsimiles of manuscripts are currently being used by The Wordsworth Trust for a project alongside Age UK, which Val Dugdale, Target Wellbeing Coordinator at Age UK Carlisle and Eden, spoke about at the Words on the Page and the Meanings Beyond conference. By looking at facsimiles of particularly emotionally stimulating letters from the Wordsworth Trust's collection, the members of the elderly groups involved, many of whom are suffering from dementia, are encouraged and stimulated to write down their own reminiscences. These facsimile letters have also been used by a Get Into Reading group, led by bibliotherapist Ali Desovska, who were inspired to start a written correspondence among their own members after the experience.

The members of this group, mostly recovering addicts, had felt alienated from cultural institutions in the past, but were able to feel comfortable and inspired through the emotional connections they could make with the manuscript material.

c. The 'meanings' from manuscripts

As high quality facsimiles recreate the appearance and physicality of manuscripts, they are able to provide an effective means of deducing meaning from manuscripts, which can be brought to a much wider audience. As the original author's writing is reproduced as he or she wrote it, the human aspect of the writer and their emotional state can be perceived through studying their deletions, emphases, handwriting and layout. Facsimiles can provoke what Catherine Kay, Education Officer at the Wordsworth Trust, called 'imaginative reconstruction'; studying not only the written material but every aspect of a physical document. A study such as this allows the user to draw conclusions about where and how it was written, communication systems and its intended audience, which in turn encourages the study of social history.

Below: Val Dugdale's work with Age UK and manuscript facsimilies

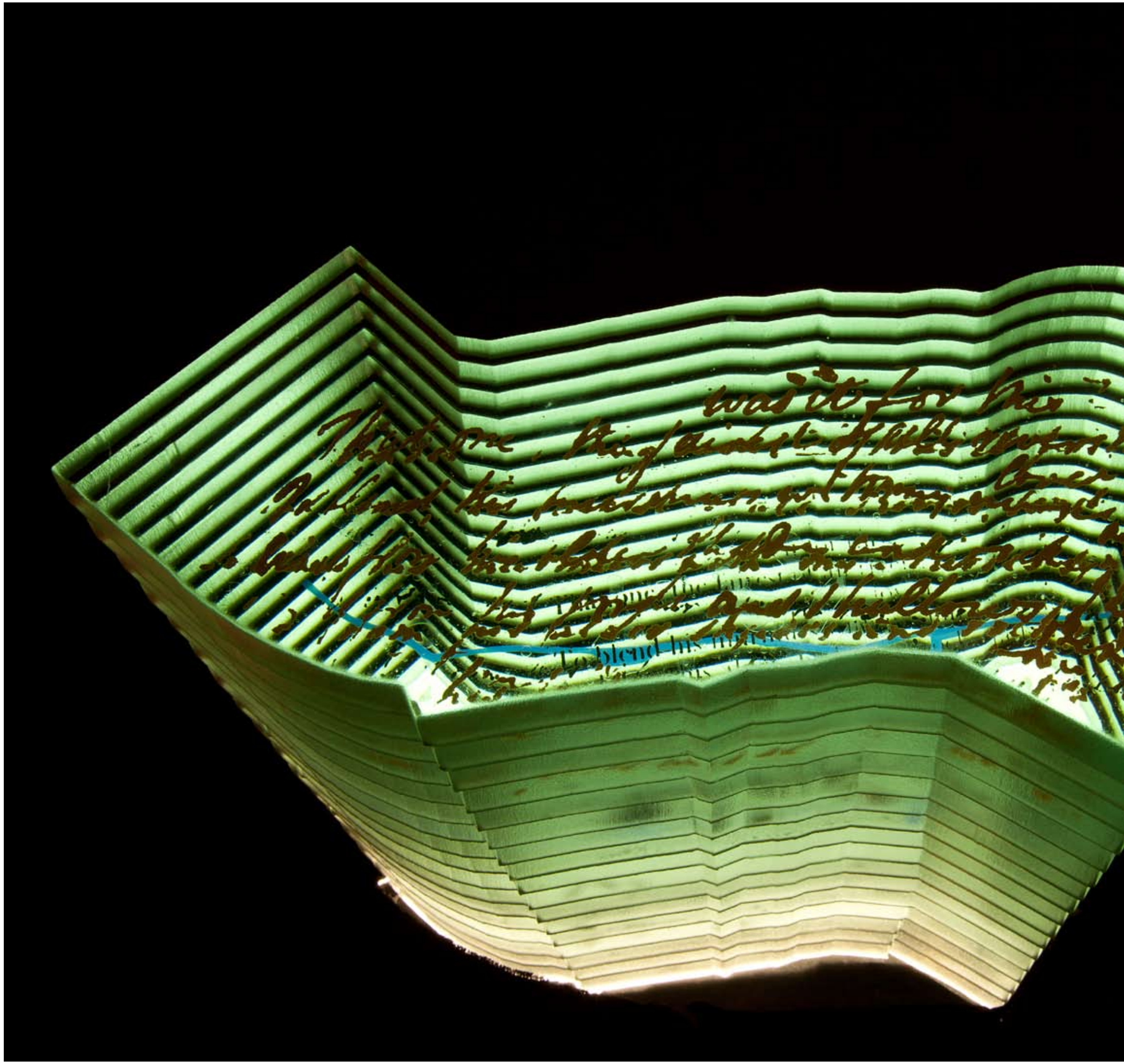
4

TESTING INTERPRETATIVE TECHNIQUES

by Jael Edwards and Jane Davies

The Wordsworth Trust developed a number of prototype exhibits to test out the impact of new approaches in interpreting manucripts to the visitor. The prototype exhibits were displayed inside the existing museum exhibition from June 2012. Evaluation of the prototypes took place from the 16th of June until the 20th of August. .

As stated in the introduction, the Wordsworth Trust developed the prototype exhibits to test out some of the ideas and recommendations developed through the Words on the Page and the Meanings Beyond conference and also to build upon a number of research projects which were analysed in Bienkowski's report (2011).



Right: Professor Brian Thompson's sculpture *Frozen River*

4.1

BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

The principal focus of the evaluation was to examine how effective the interpretative tools were at engaging the visitor directly with manuscripts and the 'meanings' derived from their physicality, and the subsequent results of this engagement. A version of the Generic Learning Outcomes Framework* (GLOs) , was used to plan the exhibits and also to capture evaluation evidence. The GLOs framework was implemented because the Wordsworth Trust wished to capture outcomes for visitors which did not solely focus on intellectual outcomes but also emotional, social and behavioural outcomes.

These outcomes are important for the Wordsworth Trust in developing more social spaces and a greater mix of learning environments within the museum to enhance the visitor experience and also to reflect the social production and use of the manuscript material itself. Previous research by Morris Hargreaves McIntyre (2010) and Piotr Bienkowski highlighted the need for more social activity within the museum, not only to aid visitors' enjoyment but also to support a more effective learning experience i.e.

"learning through co-participation rather than the individual mind". (Bienkowski, 2011).

The Wordsworth Trust is also interested in exploring how exhibits and manuscripts can elicit emotional responses. Such responses can provide the visitor with a deeper and more connected experience, as well as helping make the visitor more receptive to learning. As Bienkowski stated in his report,

"Emotional engagement plays a major part in bringing the visitor's mind into a receptive state."(Bienkowski, 2011).

As well as the benefits of emotional engagement described here, the Wordsworth Trust also wished to emphasise the emotional 'meanings' of some the manuscripts themselves.

The main research questions that the Wordsworth Trust wanted to explore were:

1. Which interpretative tools help engage the visitor in a direct physical examination of the manuscript?

2. Which interpretative tools can help the visitor understand that a close physical examination of manuscripts can lead to a greater understanding of them? In particular, which tools are effective in helping the visitor understand the 'meanings' of manuscripts:
   - The Magical Qualities of the Manuscript
   - The Creative Process of the Writer
   - State of Mind of the Writer
   - Evolving Relationships
   - Manuscripts as Social Objects
   - The Emotional Values of the Manuscript
   - Manuscripts as Historical Evidence

3. Which tools were effective in enhancing the visitors' experience, in particular:
   - Which exhibits did the visitors enjoy?
   - Which exhibits led to social interaction amongst visitors?
   - Which exhibits led to emotional outcomes for visitors?

4. Which interpretative tools are effective at helping the visitor understand the significance of the manuscript and appreciate its beauty?

The evaluation involved gathering data from a number of different sources to ensure that findings could be triangulated and also that the perspectives of a range of visitors of differing profile (age, gender, group dynamics etc.) would be gathered.

The Wordsworth Trust Interns took part in two evaluation training sessions in order to gain the skills, knowledge and understanding to take ownership of and carry out visitor interviews and tracking. Data gathering techniques included:

- Interviews with 98 visitors. An interview questionnaire was developed for each exhibit area with between 10 and 16 interviews conducted for each exhibit.

- Visitor Tracking. 94 visitors were tracked with 20 tracked using the whole gallery and approximately 10 detailed tracks of visitors using each exhibit.

- A focus group of 14 people recruited from Cumbria and Lancashire.

- A graffiti wall of visitor comments on the exhibition.

- An area for visitors to vote for their favourite exhibit.

- Individual staff reflective diaries. Interns and staff were asked to keep diaries to record observations, analysis and reflection not covered by the evaluation tools

- A collaborative and reflective meeting with the Interns and other members of staff to review the exhibition and analyse the evaluation data.

*www.insipringlearningforall.gov.uk

The approach to the evaluation was to gather qualitative information in order to get a deeper understanding of visitors' responses to the exhibits.

It is important to note that the prototype exhibits were tested within the existing museum exhibition area, which has been in situ for 30 years. The new exhibits were only developed to a prototype stage with no graphic or 3D professional design input. Visitor experience was therefore affected by the surrounding exhibition cases, lighting and layout restrictions of the existing gallery.

The visual impact of the exhibits was also inhibited and there was no overall exhibition theme in which the visitor could be immersed. Evaluation tools were therefore in the main developed to capture the visitor's experience of individual exhibit areas rather than their overall experience in the gallery. It was expected from the outset that the exhibits would have a lesser impact on the visitor than in a fully designed new gallery.

The evaluation focussed on the testing of the main concepts and ideas being tried out rather than a detailed critique of each exhibit. However, reference has been made to some of the restrictions brought about by the circumstances in which the exhibits were tested as these had such a big impact on their effectiveness.

This chapter of the report explores each type of interpretative intervention in turn, looking at the rationale behind the prototype development, the research questions and drawing conclusions and recommendations.

The main types of interpretation being tested were:

- The use of visual art
- Redisplay and repositioning of manuscripts
- The use of digital technology
- The use of sound and film, integrating the voice of experts and enthusiasts
- The use of hands-on activities including high quality facsimiles

Below: Visitor viewing the Malta exhibit and manuscript

4.2

CONTEMPORARY VISUAL ART

4.2.1 The prototype exhibits

The Wordsworth Trust commissioned three artists, Dr Mike Collier, Professor Brian Thompson and Heather Bowring, to develop visual responses to the collections as part of the DDF project.

Dr Mike Collier produced 4 pieces of visual art using handwritten characters taken from the manuscripts of Dorothy Wordsworth's journals. Professor Brian Thompson pioneered a new technique to produce a glass sculpture Frozen River, which used the sculptural line as a metaphor for the River Derwent and layers inscribed with text mirroring the evolution of manuscript text. Heather Bowring created two tactile pieces of art which were representations of two lines from correspondence between William Wordsworth and John Wilson about the poem 'The Idiot Boy'.

4.2.2 The rationale

The Wordsworth Trust commissioned art works as an alternative medium to connect the visitor with the manuscripts. The artist's interpretation of the manuscript was used as a tool for the museum to experiment with one of the new core principles of "involving different voices" (Bienkowski, 2011) to enrich the visitor's experience and encourage reciprocal learning between the museum and the visitor.

It was hoped that the artist's interpretation of the manuscript would not only offer new ways of seeing and understanding the manuscript material but allow a different route in for visitors, appealing to different visitor tastes and learning styles. It was felt that a visual artistic response, by its very nature, is an aesthetic physical medium that would draw attention to the physicality of the manuscript.

4.2.3 Encouraging direct contact with the manuscript

Evaluation showed that the art works did encourage some visitors to have direct contact with the associated manuscripts, especially where the subject matter was most direct and the art work used an explicit representation of a physical aspect of the manuscript.

The pieces by Dr Mike Collier, which replicated some of the handwritten letters and ink splodges of Dorothy's journals, mirrored the physicality of the associated manuscript. The work encouraged 50% of visitors surveyed and tracked to visit the original journal after viewing the art work (the greatest percentage across all three artists) even though the journal was not situated immediately next to the art work.

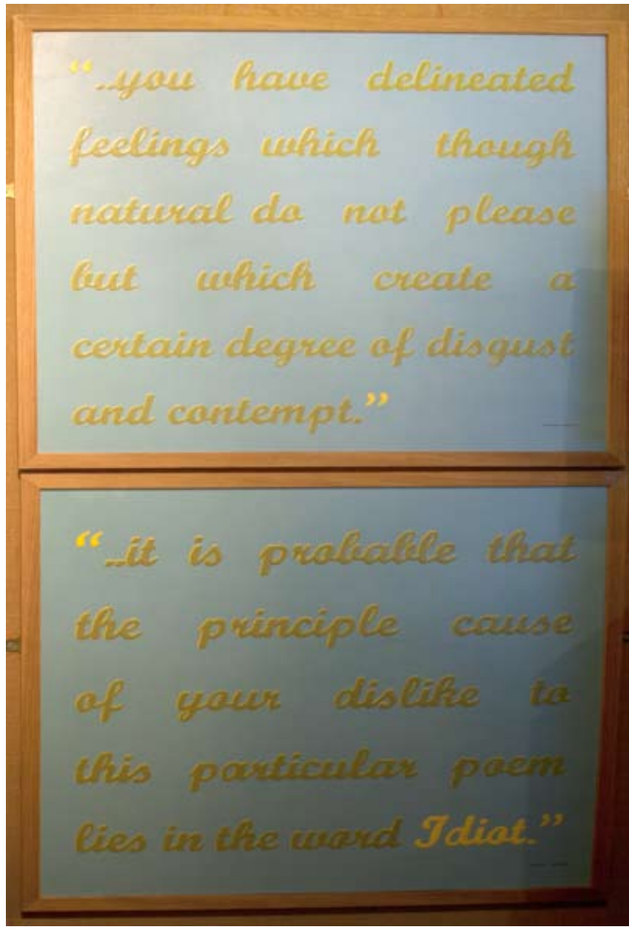
The Frozen River glass sculpture was the least effective at connecting the visitor to the manuscript with a very limited number of visitors visiting the associated text after viewing the sculpture. In this case, many visitors were distracted by other exhibits in close proximity such as the 3D map of the Lake District. The visual connection between the Frozen River glass sculpture and the physicality of the associated manuscript was weaker in comparison to the works by the other two artists. Only a small number of visitors noticed the layers of text within the sculpture although not all were able to decipher them.

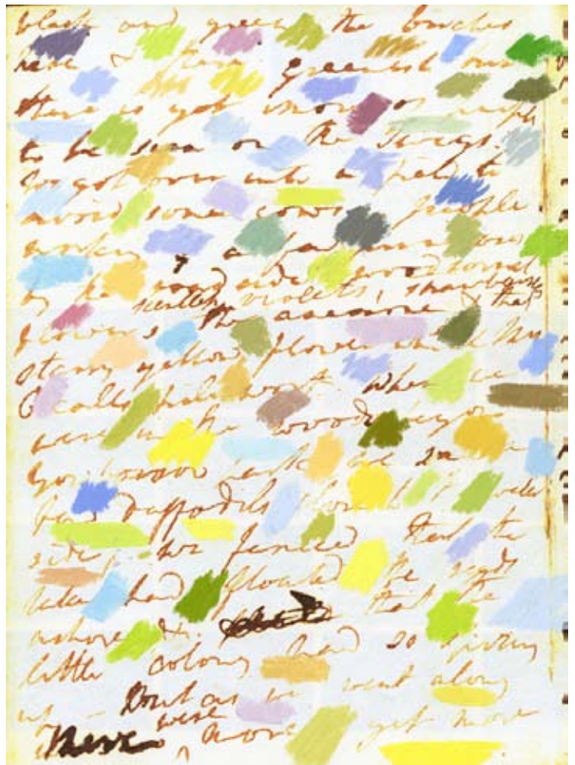
The use of direct quotes from the two manuscripts was the focus of The Idiot Boy art work by Heather Bowring. These pieces were effective at drawing attention to the quotes and encouraging some visitors to look for quotes within the manuscript which was displayed in close proximity. Approximately 50% of visitors surveyed saw a direct connection between The Idiot Boy art work by Heather Bowring and the manuscript:

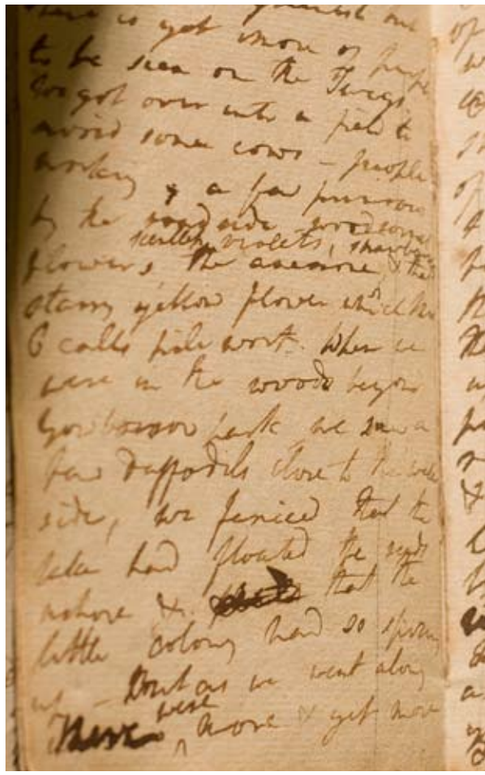
"The panels stood out and we wanted to read the quotes in the letters".

Staff and interns at the Wordsworth Trust commented that if The Idiot Boy piece had mimicked the handwriting more directly the connection to the physicality of the manuscript would have been stronger, and in turn this would have deepened the visitors' understanding.

Top Left: Professor Brian Thompson pioneered a new technique to produce a glass sculpture *Frozen River'*
Top Right: The use of direct quotes from the two manuscripts in Heather Bowring's piece
Below Left: The piece by Dr Mike Collier based on Dorothy Wordsworth's journals (right)







4.2.4 Helping the visitor understand the 'meanings'

The Wordsworth Trust did not intend for the art works to give the visitor a deep intellectual understanding of the manuscripts, but rather to highlight and draw attention to some of their 'meanings', context and subject matter. It was anticipated that the personal artistic interpretation would make the manuscript a more accessible and interpretable object by the visitor.

The art works were able to highlight some of the 'meanings' and other concepts for some visitors, although not all visitors made a connection. Evaluation showed that only Dr Collier's letters art works were successful in highlighting the physical qualities of the manuscript which in turn gave visitors an understanding of what these physical properties meant.

During interview, a number of visitors made comments that showed that Dr Collier's letters art works had helped them see Dorothy's journals as a piece of evidence and also helped them directly understand some of the seven 'meanings' captured during the Words on the Page and the Meanings Beyond conference. In particular visitors alluded to the art works aiding their understanding of the creative thought process of the writer, the character of the writer and the process of writing:

"Captures imperfections of the writer"; "Writing is a painstaking task"; "Wondered why they were crossed out"; "I thought about the colour splodges as similar to ink blots on the page"; "Puzzled over them - liked piecing together the journal".

Evaluation showed that the two other art works gave visitors more of an understanding of the subject matter or context in which the manuscripts were written as opposed to their physicality. The prominence of the word 'idiot' in one of Heather Bowring's pieces did provoke some of the visitors to engage with the manuscript. This was related more to the subject matter of the manuscripts rather than their physicality:

"I enjoyed the panels as it made me think about the word 'Idiot'".

The Glass Sculpture Frozen River did draw attention to the content of the associated manuscript (DCMS 15) for some visitors, where they noticed the subject matter of rivers, however this was weaker than the other two pieces and without prior knowledge visitors would not be able to make a connection unaided. No visitors recognised that the layers of text in Frozen River represented different versions of the same text without having this signposted by a member of staff.

Explanatory labels were provided for the art works to explain the connection with the manuscripts. Focus group participants felt that these were a necessary part of the exhibit and should be used in the future. Signposting between the manuscript and the art was also seen as important.

The evaluation highlights the potential of art as a vehicle for drawing attention to the physicality of the manuscript and communicating some of the seven 'meanings' related to that physicality, as well as conveying messages about subject matter, particularly when this is controversial. The more direct the connection, the greater the likelihood that the visitor will visit the manuscript. Staff and interns at the Wordsworth Trust and Focus group members felt the art pieces were an opportunity for the Wordsworth Trust to be more provocative and take risks in highlighting controversial issues.

The clear provocation alluding to the word 'idiot' in Heather Bowring's piece had helped draw some visitors into a debate, a technique which could be further exploited in other commissions.

Focus group participants and staff commented that they felt the prototype exhibits had aided the visitors' connection and understanding of the manuscripts but future commissions should be bolder and provide a stronger 'hook' from the art into the subject of the poem and letters in order for the visitor to make the connection and be enthused by the manuscripts.

This concurs with the evaluation data which showed that although some visitors had made a connection, not all had and stronger pieces could have reached more.

Below: Professor Brian Thompson's *Frozen River*
Far Left: Dr Mike Collier's artwork based on Dorothy Wordsworths journals

4.2.5 Enhancing enjoyment and experience

The art pieces were popular amongst visitors with the majority of visitors surveyed expressing that they had enjoyed them, even where they had not made a direct connection with the manuscript. Visitors who enjoyed the art works noted most often that this was because they offered something different in the museum - their colour, shape and brightness offered a contrast to the other exhibits and helped punctuate their visit.

4.2.6 Eliciting emotional outcomes

The art pieecs were an effective tool at engendering an atmosphere of curiosity, wonder and positivity. When asked about their emotional response to the art works many visitors commented about being inspired and intrigued:

"Inspired feelings of chaos- seeing the order of the words", "Generally interesting- curious to work it out"; "It was bright, energising and intriguing".

Evaluation showed very little evidence of deep emotional engagement connected to the emotional 'meanings' of the associated manuscripts and focus group participants felt that the art pieces were not designed with this focus in mind.

The commissioned pieces did highlight the potential of art in a manuscript museum to particularly trigger emotions of inspiration and curiosity and future commissions could be developed with a greater focus on the emotional connection with the manuscript.

4.2.7 Making the museum a more social space

The art works were very effective at making the museum a more social space. The majority of visitors who viewed the art works as a couple or group engaged socially, mainly in conversation as a result of interaction with the piece:

"Talked to wife about sculpture pointing out the river on the inside of the glass"; "I talked to my niece about the sculpture, she agreed she thought it was really good"; "We tried to read it together".

This social interaction is likely to have aided the visitors learning experience, as noted by Bienkowski (2011) but also provided a more informal relaxed atmosphere within the museum.

4.2.8 Making the museum a more sensory space

The two Idiot Boy pieces were designed for the visitor to have a physical sensory experience. The letters on the art work were slightly raised and visitors were encouraged to touch them to feel their shape and texture. This particular artist was commissioned to create a more multi-sensory experience for visitors and to provide experiences for visitors who may have visual impairment. Heather Bowring specialises in three dimensional art which has been used successfully in other galleries to widen access.

Evaluation showed that the sensory experience from the Idiot Boy pieces had a limited impact on visitors. Many did not touch the exhibit or were confused by the experience. Only two visitors commented that the sensory experience was positive:

"Idea of touching words connects you to poetry and the idea of writing",

With a greater percentage of visitors either not touching the art work or commenting that it had very little impact:

"I expected something to happen when I touched it to link it to the manuscript in some way".

Although these particular pieces were less effective in providing a multi-sensory experience, staff at the Wordsworth Trust felt that adaptations such as larger and more exact copies of letters from the manuscript would make the piece more successful.

4.2.9 Barriers to engagement with art

Although the art works were generally popular amongst visitors they were not to everyone's taste. Some visitors and focus group members noted a dislike for particular pieces. Some visitors noted that they were confused or disconnected by the art works saying that they were "too abstract" or "out of context". It was also felt that the temporary or prototype nature of the pieces and their display undervalued their significance and distracted attention from them. Not all of the art works were displayed in direct proximity with the associated manuscript and it was felt that the art would work better:

"if it were on the same visual plane as the manuscript..."

4.2.10 Conclusions

Artistic responses can motivate the visitor to have direct contact with the manuscript and increase awareness of its physical properties and the associated 'meanings' of these physical properties but only when there is a very direct relationship.

Artworks can create a different ambience in a gallery, one that encourages curiosity, reflection and conversation.

Art works are useful tools in creating social spaces within a literary museum, which in the past have tended to be more solitary intellectual environments.

Art is a good tool to provoke thinking and can draw attention to controversial issues that are of contemporary relevance.

Artistic responses can help draw attention to the subject matter and context of the manuscript. Again, where the relationship is more obvious, the art is more likely to aid the visitor's understanding.

The contrast of the bright, colourful, three dimensional art works can help punctuate a visit to a literary museum whose collections tend to be in muted colours.

4.2.11 Recommendations

The potential for art to instil wonder, curiosity, intrigue, reflection and social interaction should be nurtured as a means for exploring and interpreting manuscripts.

Art forms of different types should be used to elicit different responses to both the content and physicality of the manuscript.

Explanatory labels helping draw attention to the connection with the manuscript may be needed in the context of a museum.

'Meanings' of manuscripts should be highlighted more clearly in the art works and visitor understanding supported through clear connections to the themes in an exhibition.

Art works should be provocative to highlight controversial issues of human interest.

Develop partnerships with key arts organisations in commissioning and displaying work to ensure professional standards and quality visitor experiences.

4.3

CONVEYING SIMPLE MESSAGES

4.3.1 The prototype exhibit

The Wordsworth Trust incorporated a technique of displaying manuscripts in a way that created a striking visual presence and communicated a simple message as part of the prototype testing. A visual exhibit was created to represent the 60 letters written and sent by Dorothy Wordsworth in March and April 1802.

60 facsimile letters were inserted into a wooden chest, two of the letters coloured red to represent the two letters that have survived today. The display illustrated the fact that such a large quantity of letters were written over a short period of time and also the fact that only two have survived.

4.3.2 The rationale

By displaying Dorothy Wordsworth's letters in this way the Wordsworth Trust wished to test out the technique of using stronger visual elements within an exhibition to communicate messages. Although on this occasion the Wordsworth Trust did not use original manuscripts, it is interested in developing this technique for future exhibits.

During the Words on the Page and the Meanings Beyond conference Tony Trehy, Director of Bury Museum and Art Gallery, discussed how the Bury Text Festival (2011) had used visual representation to communicate information about writers' creative thought processes and methods of working. The Text Festival exhibition, exploring the writer Bob Cobbins, was packed full of examples of his work to illustrate the volume and speed of production of his writing. In another exhibition, the Text Festival displayed a bookcase that held all the books that had led to the curator's understanding of the subject matter.

Bottom left: Facsimile letters diplayed in wooden chest
Top and Bottom Right: Bury Text Festival, Bury Art Gallery

4.3.3 The effectiveness

The display of large quantities of Dorothy Wordsworth's letters did have an immediate impact on visitors and communicated the intended message without the need for detailed explanation. The majority of people surveyed (four out of five interviewed and focus group participants) understood clearly the two messages that were being made. The strong visual representation of the exhibit and the simple label text led to the messages being communicated effectively.

The exhibit was created from paper folded to look like letters and placed in an original trunk. The exhibit did have a "homemade" feel to it which some visitors commented on and this may well have influenced visitors' enjoyment of the exhibit with only half of those surveyed saying they enjoyed the exhibit.

Visitors also commented that they would have preferred to have been able to open facsimile letters that were more like the originals. Many visitors did open the letters in the trunk, even though this was not the desired intention, and were frustrated by their lack of text:

"Shame you couldn't pick them up and open them like the other letters".

4.3.4 Encouraging visitors to draw their own conclusions

The chest exhibit was one of the few prototype exhibits where visitors were asked to think for themselves. In Piotr Bienkowski's (2011) report he recommended "challenging visitors to come to their own conclusions". A few visitors commented that they liked the fact that this exhibit encouraged them to think about what had happened to the lost letters:

"Liked that the lost letters were a mystery":

"I enjoyed the question mark about them"

Focus group participants also suggested that this technique should be used in other areas of the exhibition.

4.3.5 Conclusions

Visual representation is an effective mechanism for communicating simple messages.

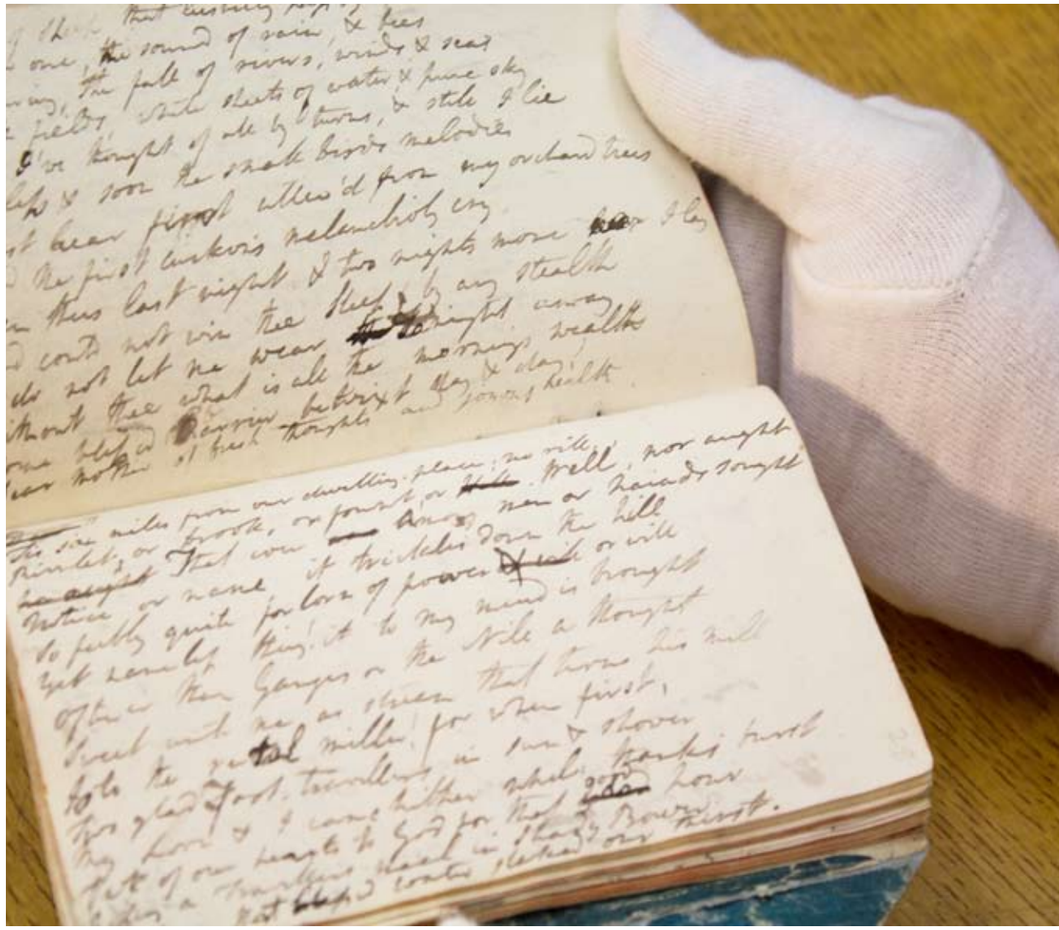
A display of original manuscripts or more authentic reproductions would have been valued by the visitor, however the prototype was still effective in communicating the messages required.

Visitors responded positively to being challenged to think for themselves.

4.3.6 Recommendations

Use visual representation in future exhibits to communicate messages to the visitor but where possible use original manuscripts or facsimiles.

Use visual representation to provoke thought and to challenge the visitor.



Top Right: The Malta manuscript (The Wordsworth Trust)
Bottom Right: 'To Sleep', William Wordsworth (The Wordsworth Trust)

4.4

REDISPLAY AND REPOSITIONING

4.4.1 The prototype exhibits

The Wordsworth Trust repositioned and redisplayed four manuscripts in the prototype exhibition. The ‘Goslar Letter’ was displayed vertically, as a single item in a double sided display. The Malta Manuscript (DCMS 44) was displayed horizontally in a single case next to an associated film and sound exhibit. A letter from William Wordsworth was displayed vertically about ‘The Idiot Boy’ poem and a letter from John Wilson about the same poem was displayed in an individual case horizontally.

4.4.2 The rationale

The Wordsworth Trust experimented with the redisplay of some of the manuscripts to try out some of the recommendations and core principles developed by Piotr Bienkowski (2011).

The main ideas tested were:
• Displaying a small number of manuscripts to draw attention to them and signify their individual importance. “Quality not quantity - it’s better to have a few carefully chosen manuscripts than to overwhelm the visitor in a gallery full of them.” (Bienkowski 2011)
• Displaying manuscripts vertically and in a prominent position so the visitor can get up close to them.
• Displaying an individual manuscript vertically in a transparent frame or case so that visitors can see both sides and appreciate its three dimensional qualities.
• Using a frame around the manuscript to signify its status and draw attention to the aesthetic beauty of the object and as a piece of art in its own right.

It was anticipated from the outset that the redisplay of the manuscripts would have less impact on the visitor than in a newly installed exhibition because they were being displayed in the original museum spaces which contained other manuscripts and were subject to the existing lighting conditions and design of a 30 year old museum.

4.4.3 Displaying a small number of manuscripts

The use of a small number of manuscripts in a prominent position in an exhibit area did lead to visitor contact with them, especially where the relationship between the interpretative tool, e.g. the film or art work, and the manuscript was most direct.

The Malta exhibit displayed the manuscript immediately in front of and slightly below the film screen. The simplicity of the display, without distraction from other objects, and the very direct physical relationship between the manuscript and the screen, contributed to the fact that all visitors engaged with the manuscript. (The content of the film also contributed, see section 4.5).

Two manuscripts, John Wilson’s and William Wordsworth’s letters, were displayed proximately and centrally within the Idiot Boy exhibit. Their prominence and style of display is likely to be a contributing factor that the majority of visitors (over 70% of those interviewed and tracked) looked at the manuscripts when using the exhibit.

The ‘Goslar Letter’, which was displayed as an individual manuscript within the letter writing exhibit, attracted much less attention from visitors, with only a small number of visitors (18% surveyed) actually looking at the original manuscript. There were a number of reasons for this: the manuscript was not the central theme of the letter writing exhibit as was the case in the other two displays, with the main focus of the display being about letter writing rather than the ‘Goslar Letter’; its positioning was in what is considered a corridor or transition space within the gallery; its aspect was not directly facing the visitor as they moved down the gallery corridor and there was a lack of direct connection between it and other interpretative tools in the area. In other words the visitor did not necessarily associate the manuscript with the exhibit area.

Below: The Malta manuscript exhibit
Far Left: Prototype exhibits in the museum

4.4.4
Positioning of the manuscript

Two of the manuscripts were displayed vertically, Wordsworth's letter to John Wilson and the 'Goslar Letter' which was displayed so visitors could read both sides. Displaying the manuscript vertically allowed visitors to get up close to it at eye level and some visitors and focus group participants said that they liked this feeling of close contact, which helped in most cases reading the text more easily:

"Prefer cases where you can get really close and almost touch"; "The cabinet with John Wilson's letter in [displayed horizontally] is a waste of space as you can't really read it".

It should be noted that a number of visitors expressed a preference for being able to look down on the manuscript. Visitor tracking showed that although in a minority, some visitors still chose to only look at the horizontally displayed manuscript in the Idiot Boy exhibit. The evaluation suggests that visitors appreciate being able to have close contact with the manuscript but there is a need to have a variety of options that appeal to different preferences and also to allow for variety in physical stature:

"It was well presented with sufficient light, and good that they are at different heights".

4.4.5
Framing manuscripts

The 'Goslar Letter' and the letter by William Wordsworth about 'The Idiot Boy' were presented in picture frames. The 'Goslar Letter' in particular was chosen because it is a manuscript with interesting physical qualities, i.e. text written in different directions, use of every possible space available to write, ink splodges and blots, folds and creases. It was thought that by displaying it as an individual item within a frame, visitors would be drawn to it and feel a greater appreciation of its beauty, status and value. Only a limited number of visitors did look at the original letter (due to the positioning problems described above) but, of those who did many made comments that showed an appreciation of it:

"Amazing that a letter could survive"; "It was more moving to see the original - their handwriting is not too dissimilar to our own."; "Intrigued by the handwriting - wanted to try and read it", "Yes - it's interesting to see the original marks and how they used to write letters".

Only a small number of visitors expressed that they were able to gain a deeper intellectual understanding directly from the framed manuscripts. One of these comments relating to the 'Goslar Letter' does show that the visitor could potentially understand the creative thought process of the writer (one of the 'meanings' as discussed at the Words on the Page and the Meaning Beyond conference):

"I felt like I could follow his train of thought".

Another visitor also commented:

"I learnt how they used every bit of space to write on (the 'Goslar Letter') and also looked at how the letters had been folded from looking directly at the manuscript".

4.4.6
Factors affecting the redisplay of the manuscripts

Only a few visitors examined the framed 'Goslar Letter' for any length of time. The majority of visitors spent more time using the exhibits in the letter writing area next to the 'Goslar Letter'. There were a number of factors which influenced the reaction to this redisplay which could be addressed in a more permanent exhibition: a more expensive, quality picture frame would have given the object a greater value; removing the letter from a visitor corridor; turning the letter 90 degrees so it faces

the visitor as they enter the gallery; a more central position within the letter writing activity area; and more cross referencing between the exhibits in the letter area and the 'Goslar Letter' with direct instructions to view the letter.

4.4.7
Conclusions

Using a small number of manuscripts exhibited individually or in small groups is an effective way of encouraging visitors to engage with them and gain an appreciation of their value.

Displaying manuscripts so that visitors can examine them at close quarters encourages interaction.

The aspect and positioning of manuscripts displayed vertically, in terms of proximity to other exhibits and visibility to visitors entering and moving through a gallery space, is critical in determining interaction.

Other exhibits or activities in close proximity to the manuscript on display can be distracting unless signage is very clear.

Redisplay of manuscripts alongside other new forms of interpretation such as film and sound prove particularly effective at engaging visitors with the content, context and 'meanings' of manuscripts.

4.4.8
Recommendations

The manuscript needs to be positioned centrally within an exhibit area with activities and interpretation making direct reference to it.

The manuscript should be visually obvious as a visitor enters the gallery space.

Where the museum wishes to communicate that an item is high status, the quality of materials e.g. frame, lighting and setting should be appropriate for this.

For greatest impact, redisplay should be combined with another type of interpretative tool such as film, audio or more simplistically magnifying glasses.

Top Far Left: 'Idiot Boy' manuscripts displayed vertically and horizontally
Top Left: Existing museum display
Top Right: Framed Goslar letter

4.5

FILM AND SOUND

4.5.1 The prototype exhibits

The Wordsworth Trust created and installed three films, two of which had associated Sound Showers and four of which had listening stations with headphones. A Sound Shower was also used with the Spots of Time installation which is discussed in more detail in section 4.6. Film and sound were incorporated into the new exhibits as follows:

- A new introductory film narrated by the Wordsworth Trust Curator, Jeff Cowton, was merged with an existing film by Robert and Pamela Woof. Sound was provided through speakers in the introductory area housed on the floor below the main gallery.

- A film explaining the context for and subject matter of the two letters on display at the Idiot Boy exhibit, sent and received by Wordsworth and John Wilson, and relating to the controversial nature of Wordsworth's poem . The sound was transmitted through a Sound Shower.

- A listening station with headphones with a reading from the associated 'Goslar Letter'

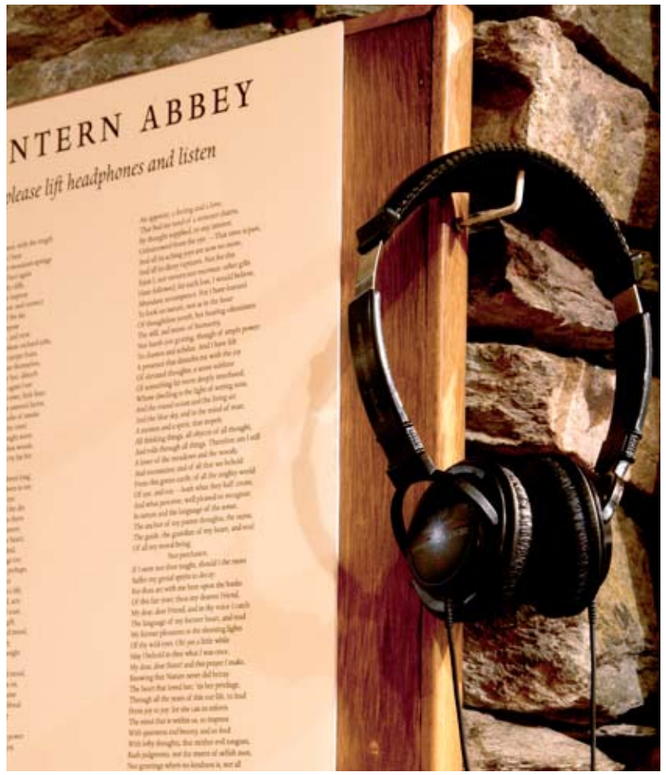
- A film about the Malta manuscript and Wordsworth's relationship with Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The sound was transmitted through a Sound Shower.

- Two listening stations at the Letter Writing exhibit with headphones with the sound of two members of staff at the Wordsworth Trust discussing the letters about the Wordsworths' daughter's death. These letters were available for visitors to open and read as facsimiles.

- A touch screen 3D exhibit Spots of Time with a Sound Shower.

The Sound Showers used a parametric sound system (www.parametricsound.com) which funnels sound into a specific area, a bit like projecting the light beam from a torch. Only the visitor standing underneath the Sound Shower is able to hear the sound.

Below: Heaphones used as interpretive device
Far Right: Visitors viewing the 'Idiot Boy' film



4.5.2 The rationale

Film and sound was used as an alternative medium to written labels for conveying information. In literary museums such as the Wordsworth Trust, whose display items are text based, there is a need for mechanisms other than text for labelling exhibits as noted in Bienkowski's (2011) report:

"Text is not a good interpretative tool for text".

The use of sound in the prototype exhibits was used to enable the visitor to focus on the manuscript whilst listening to a reading or information, thus freeing up the visual senses and also providing a multi-sensory approach.

The films were also created to capture the interest of visitors, and to motivate visitors to explore particular aspects of the manuscripts that they might find most interesting. The prototype films were narrated by the Curator of the museum, to convey the enthusiasm and passion of the expert, to motivate the visitor and instil a sense of awe and wonder around the manuscripts. They were also used to communicate a depth of contextual information about the manuscripts and their physical properties, with the Curator illustrating particular points whilst holding the manuscript itself in the film.

4.5.3 Encouraging direct contact with the manuscript

Evaluation showed that film and sound led the majority of visitors surveyed and tracked to have direct contact with the original manuscript, especially when the manuscript was displayed in close proximity to the film or sound intervention. The Malta film was the most successful in encouraging direct contact with 91% visitors surveyed stating that the Malta film had encouraged them to look at the Malta manuscript and visitor tracking confirming this. This significant figure was most likely due to the immediate proximity of the manuscript to the film, the directional nature of the content of the film and the fact that no other interpretative devices or exhibits were nearby.

Where the proximity of the film to the manuscripts was less direct, the films were less successful in leading to direct contact with the manuscript, although they still were fairly effective. The Idiot Boy film was viewed at the side of the exhibit area with two art pieces separating the film and the associated manuscripts. The introductory film was displayed downstairs in a separate room to the main exhibition area containing the associated manuscripts. 63% of visitors interviewed who had watched the Idiot Boy film also looked at the manuscripts, and 40% of visitors interviewed about the introductory film said that they were motivated to look at the manuscripts:

"When I went to look at the manuscripts upstairs I did try to look for the things the curator talked about like the handwriting and speed of writing."

It should also be noted that the focus of the films contributed to their effectiveness as a tool to encourage direct contact with the manuscript. The Malta film, the most successful at encouraging direct contact, focussed much of its content on the physicality of the manuscript. The Idiot Boy and introductory films provided a greater emphasis on contextual information.

Evaluation revealed that visitors did spend more time watching a film than looking at the associated manuscript itself. However, during collaborative analysis, staff felt that the films were not a distraction from the manuscript and the relative time spent on each was not a concern. Bienkowski discusses the danger of interpretative tools distracting the visitor from the manuscript in his report (2011). Staff and focus group members consulted suggested that greater emphasis within the films to instruct the visitor to look at the manuscript's physicality and also interpretative devices, to reinforce points made, positioned throughout the exhibition, could have increased the dwell time at the actual manuscript itself.

The evaluation was inconclusive in the assessment of the listening stations with headphones as very few visitors involved in the interviewing or tracking process actually used them. This may partly be due to the small sample size examined for each exhibit. However their low usage may be indicative of their failure as an interpretative tool in this particular setting and is also likely due to their lack of prominence within the exhibit area. Staff commented that they felt the listening stations were a minor attraction and often lost within some of the displays, especially the letter writing area where they were one of six activities. In the letter writing area there was no instructional text or design elements to draw attention to the listening stations and confusion in relation to which facsimile letter each listening post related to.

4.5.4 Supporting the visitor's understanding

Evaluation showed the films were effective in increasing the visitor's intellectual understanding of the manuscripts. A majority of visitors stated that they found the films informative with 85% of people saying that the Malta film had helped them understand the subject matter of the manuscript and 80% of people surveyed feeling that they had learnt something from the introductory film.

a. Manuscripts as evidence

The films encouraged some people to understand the manuscript as a piece of physical evidence. Approximately half the visitors surveyed at the introductory film were able to talk explicitly about manuscripts as evidence:

"I am going to look more closely at Dorothy's handwriting".

b. Understanding the 'meanings'

A smaller proportion of visitors showed a deeper understanding of how the evidence contained in the physical qualities of the manuscript could reveal information about the writer or the context of the manuscript's production i.e. the 'meanings' as described at the Words on the Page and the Meanings Beyond conference. 27% of comments were in relation to handwriting as evidence of the state of mind of the writer and the co-creation of the journals between Dorothy and William. And although 64% of visitors surveyed about the Malta exhibit said that the film had helped them understand the manuscript only 36% of people made explicit comments, which showed an understanding of manuscripts as evidence and what this might mean.

These visitors were able to transfer the knowledge and skills gained from the interpretative exhibit to the manuscript more successfully where the film content was focussed on describing the physicality of the manuscript and what this 'means', and where the manuscript was displayed in close proximity to the film. The Malta film was more successful than any exhibit tested at transferring visitor knowledge to the manuscript as stated above. When asked to explain what they had learnt from the manuscript there were a range of comments:

"Made me think about individual pieces, and the survival of manuscripts": "Thought about the manuscript's age, its survival after travelling and the sense of history".

c. Communicating general contextual and factual information

The films were effective in giving the visitor contextual information about the manuscripts and/or the Wordsworths. All the films were able to communicate some of their intended learning objectives to visitors and focus group participants. Evaluation of the Idiot Boy film only elicited comments about the subject content of the manuscripts, with visitors expressing what they had learnt about the controversial subject matter rather than any deeper understanding derived from the physical qualities of the manuscript:

"[I] learnt more about Wordsworth and John Wilson's relationship and the debate about learning difficulties."; "It was interesting to know that ideas like that were under consideration even then."

The introductory film was effective in supporting visitor understanding of the context for Wordsworth's writing, in particular the effect of the landscape and the people where he lived. Visitors expressed understanding of the Malta manuscripts' context, in particular the relationship between the two writers, with more visitors (64%) expressing an understanding of contextual information as opposed to the physicality of the manuscript.

4.5.5 Transferring personal enthusiasm and passion

Evaluation showed that the passion and the enthusiasm of the Curator was effective in drawing attention to the manuscript and helping visitors appreciate its value. In the majority of cases visitors interviewed liked the enthusiasm and expertise of the Curator. 64% of interviewees mentioned the Curator specifically in positive comments about the Malta film and several participants in the focus group valued the knowledge, enthusiasm and personal insights of Robert and Pamela Woof in the introductory film. It is likely that the personal enthusiasm of the Curator resulted in many visitors expressing that they appreciated the manuscript's value and were touched by seeing the real manuscript:

"Felt aware of its importance and historical value"; "Trying to go back in time- envisage

the trials and tribulations of Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge".

As described above the Curator was able to bring a human element to the interpretation by successfully communicating his personal passion. This took forward Bienkowski's (2011) recommendation for the museum to take a more personalised approach to interpretation such as that of the National Museum of the American Indian which used:

"quotes from real people (Curators and Native Americans). The personalisation of the text humanised the experience and also established that it was articulating a point of view".

Discussions with staff and focus group participants concluded that the museum could have made an even stronger connection with the general visitors if the films had also included the voice of the non specialist:

"Engaging with and involving different voices", Core principle 5, (Bienkowski, 2011).

The power of the non specialist was communicated most clearly at the Words on the Page and the Meanings Beyond conference when delegates were shown films of participants in the Age UK project and the Get Into Reading group discussing the personal impact of the Wordsworth manuscripts they had encountered.

Right: Curator in film about the Malta manuscript

4.5.6
Challenging the visitor

The vast majority of visitors surveyed enjoyed the films and felt they were very informative (93% of visitors surveyed said they enjoyed the introductory film, 82% said they enjoyed the Malta film, 47% surveyed said that they particularly enjoyed the Idiot Boy film). However focus group members felt the films could have been more challenging for the viewer, encouraging them to think more for themselves.

Because of the nature of a manuscript as a handwritten document, often difficult to decipher, it would be easy to fall into the process of transcribing every aspect of it in order to convey messages about it. Staff at the Wordsworth Trust recommended that films in the future should incorporate opportunities to encourage the visitor to think for themselves, drawing from their own experiences to make sense of an exhibit. This concurs with Bienkowski's recommendations to:

"Provide visitors with sufficient context, derived from current scholarship, but do not overload them; we do not have to tell them everything we know about what is on display" and to *"stimulate and challenge visitors to come to their own conclusions"* (Core principles 6 and 9, Bienkowski, 2011).

4.5.7
The impact on social outcomes

Listening to sound posts and watching films tended to be a solitary experience unless in a space with multiple chairs as was the case with the introductory video. The use of either a Sound Shower or headphones was intended to provide the visitor with an intimate and individual experience. However this meant that couples or small groups, such as families, could not experience the exhibit effectively. Where social interaction was more prevalent at exhibits such as the Spots of Time Display and/or where the content of the manuscript was controversial, e.g. the Idiot Boy exhibit, the Sound Showers limited the social experience even giving the impression that the sound was not working properly.

It was concluded that specific sound technology should be appropriate to the intended social outcomes of the exhibit i.e. where an intimate experience is required a Sound Shower would be appropriate and where social interaction is intended multiple listening points or 'open' listening should be used.

4.5.8
The impact on emotional outcomes

Evaluation of the prototype exhibits showed that the films generally did not generally elicit emotional responses because of their nature and content. In a limited number of individual cases (three comments relating to the Malta film and three comments from the focus group about the introductory film) visitors noted more of an emotional impact, which does show the potential of film to elicit emotions. The Malta manuscript in particular instilled feelings of inspiration or being touched by the exhibit:

"Inspired by the curator's enthusiasm, touched."; "It spoke to me - I would watch it again".

4.5.9
Quality of Sound

Focus group participants were divided in their enjoyment of film and sound, generally supporting the concept of using sound and film but citing poor sound quality as as a drawback. Some visitors were unable to hear the sound on either film or listening posts and as a result were unable or unwilling to engage with the exhibit as a whole. Sound was particularly an issue for those with hearing difficulties and for groups of individuals trying to listen at the same time:

"Vocal was clear but could be a bit louder as I was distracted by people in the area talking".

Comments about the quality of sound are partly due to the fact that sound could only be heard when one visitor stood in the correct location. The prototype exhibits did not include instructions or locational markers to indicate where the visitor needed to stand, which could easily be remedied with a simple symbol on the floor in future exhibitions.

4.5.10
Conclusions

The use of film and sound generally proved effective at encouraging direct contact with manuscripts, most successfully when in immediate proximity to the associated manuscript and when there was no other interpretative tool.

Film and sound provided helpful contextual information about the life of Wordsworth.

The films helped visitors understand manuscripts as evidence and some of the seven 'meanings'.

Films were a useful tool for motivating visitors to look for evidence but messages were not always reiterated around the gallery spaces.

Film and sound had little social impact on visitors often being a solitary experience for practical reasons.

Film and sound was least effective at eliciting an emotional response.

The enthusiasm and expertise of the presenter in the film/audio provided motivation and inspiration for the majority of visitors.

4.5.11
Recommendations

Use the model created for the Malta film as a best practice example.

Create a more personalised and layered approach to exploring the gallery through the use of audio guides.

Use Cumbrian accents for readings on film or audio.

Where film and sound refer to particular aspects of a manuscript provide easy access tools to highlight these aspects, for example, magnifying glasses.

Reiterate messages given in films about 'meanings' or things to look for in the gallery spaces through the use of questions or provocations.

Provide discussion spaces where controversial or sensitive issues can be discussed in a social group.

Ensure that films are visually stimulating, include images of manuscripts and use high quality sound.

Below: The Goslar letter exhibit

4.6

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

4.6.1 The rationale

Digital technology has been introduced into museums and archives to increase access and provide visitors with an opportunity to experience the physicality of the collections without any impact on the conservation or security of items. The Turning the Pages application developed by the British Library and Armadillo New Media Communication, gives the visitor a greater sensory experience simulating interaction via a touchscreen to turning the pages of a book, explore the three dimensional aspects of a manuscript e.g the binding or front cover or use a virtual magnifying glass to zoom in on the text.

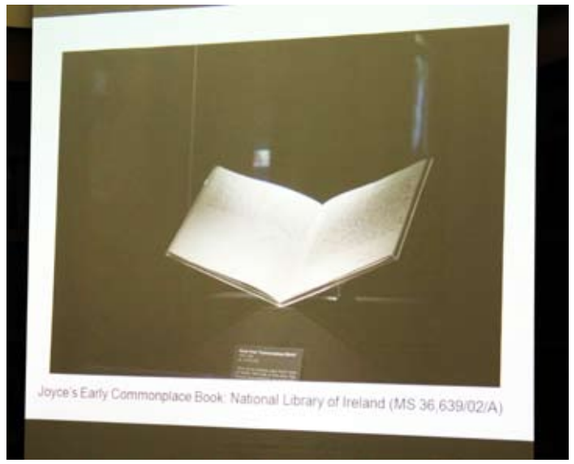
The benefit of this type of technology is clear in that it allows visitors to interact with the manuscript at a number of levels. It can successfully reveal processes in the development of the manuscript such as editing and its interactive nature appeals to a wide range of visitors.

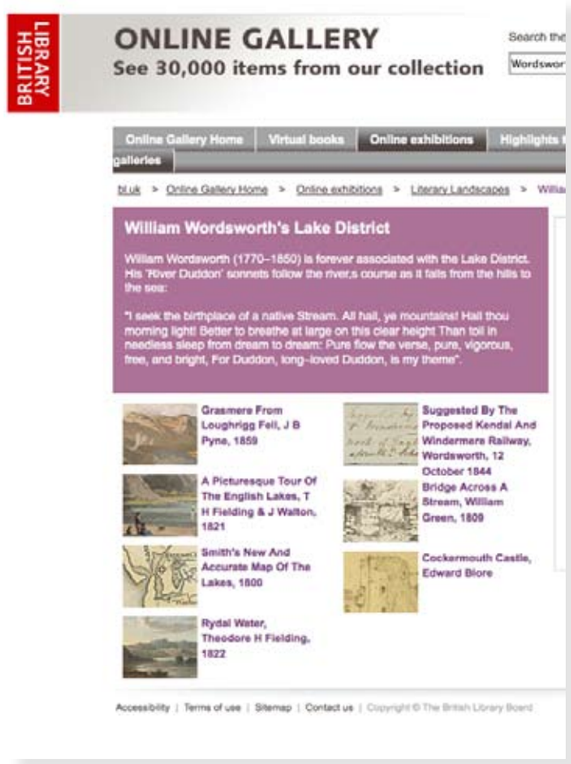
The disadvantages are that technology that is of high enough quality to come close to replicating the real manuscript often comes at great expense. Although the technology allows the visitor to interact in a way that is not normally possible in an exhibition setting, it still fails to give the visitor a more profound, emotional experience with only a limited number of sensory qualities adequately replicated in the technology. As Dr Andrew Lacey said, at the Words on the Page and the Meanings Beyond conference, technology can become outdated very quickly and adequate resources need to be in place to update and maintain it.

There is a potential danger that the technology could dominate exhibitions and actually distract from the manuscripts themselves, as Bienkowski (2011) pointed out in his report:

"technology should bring you closer to the manuscripts, not duplicate them in another format: we do not have to use the newest and cleverest technology at every opportunity".

Top: Turning the Pages used to explore James Joyce's working methods, National Library of Ireland
Below: http://www.turningthepages.com/. Turning the Pages™ 2.0 is an application that allows libraries and museums to put entire collections of books and single sheet items in a compelling 3D environment, with a suite of useful tools to aid understanding
Top Right: Spots of Time exhibit





It has been shown however, that where used correctly, such as at the James Joyce exhibition, technology can draw attention to the manuscript as an object of interest and compliment the display of the original.

4.6.2 Testing the use of digital technology

The Wordsworth Trust worked in partnership with the University of Nottingham to create an exhibit called Spots of Time using three manuscripts relating to William Wordsworth's poems: the 'Ice Skating' passage from 'The Prelude'; seeing Grasmere when a boy as described in ' Home at Grasmere'; and the 'Boat Stealing' passage from 'The Prelude'. The exhibit used a 3D map showing the location of three of Wordsworth's childhood moments, loosely termed 'Spots of Time' which influenced the development of the growing boy. Touch screen technology highlighted the geographical area on the map and provided associated interpretative content. Information about the manuscript was provided on a screen and through a Sound Shower. This included: an image of the manuscript with highlighted text relating to an audio reading of the poem; images of the landscape related to the poems; and graphic cartoons of the events.

The exhibit aimed to give visitors a greater awareness and understanding of the significance of the geography, landscape and childhood memories on Wordsworth and ultimately to motivate visitors to look directly at the associated manuscript as a result. Audio narration of later versions of the poems to those highlighted on the film were used to demonstrate the process of refinement of texts over time.

4.6.3 Encouraging direct contact with the manuscript

Approximately half the visitors said that the exhibit had motivated them to want to look at the original manuscript, with slightly less (40%) visitors observed in tracking actually looking at the manuscript as a result of using the exhibit. When interviewed only 25% of people said that the exhibit did not make them want to look at the manuscript. The exhibit was very explicit in describing the location of the manuscript and showed a map of where the manuscript was situated within the gallery. This sort of directional information, alongside the interest generated by the content of the exhibit, is likely to have been a contributory factor in motivating visitors to look at the original. At the same time the

distance between the exhibit and the manuscripts in the gallery meant that there was not the immediacy of transfer of knowledge and understanding.

Where the exhibit did focus on the physicality of the manuscript it displayed images of the manuscript with text highlighted as the poem was read out. This visual representation is similar (although more simplistic) to the Turning the Pages application described earlier in this report. When focus group participants discussed the manuscript text they were very positive about the experience, particularly hearing the sound of the poetry at the same time as reading the lines highlighted in the electronic version of the manuscript:

"I liked reading the manuscript itself, and the combination of hearing the poetry and reading".

It must be noted, however, that only a few people mentioned this feature compared to the other features of the exhibit.

The use of different versions of poems in the readings to those highlighted on the film was not picked up by visitors possibly because these differences were quite subtle and did not stand out as the main message from the exhibit. A number of visitors who had not used the exhibit when asked to make recommendations for the Wordsworth Trust suggested using the Turning the Page technology in the museum.

4.6.4 Supporting the visitor's understanding

A minority of visitors (31%) said that the exhibit had helped them understand the manuscript with the majority saying that it had only provided contextual information:

"Yes [when reading the manuscript] I was able to visualise what the words were saying and picture the places, like Google maps for Wordsworth poems". "Didn't find anything out (from the manuscript), but we did learn a lot from the map".

A few visitors commented that they found out that Wordsworth had stolen a boat in connection with the poem. One person commented that the exhibit had made them aware of the influence of childhood memories on the writer. This is likely due to the focus on contextual influences on the poet rather than physical aspects of the manuscript in the exhibit.

4.6.5 The combined use of visual and auditory technology

The exhibit made a strong visual and auditory connection between the poems and landscape. Visitors were able to hear the poem being read, see the location of the poem's inspiration highlighted on a 3D map as well as seeing visuals relating to the landscape on a screen reinforcing visitors' understanding of the influence of geography and landscape on the poetry. 50% of the visitors specifically commented that they had learnt about the geography and the connection to the manuscript.

4.6.6 The landscape as a hook for non-specialist visitors

The connection with the landscape was one of the reasons visitors cited for enjoying the exhibit. Some visitors and focus group members said that their existing interest in the geography and landscape had attracted them to using the exhibit and this then led to further enjoyment and understanding of the poetry. This concurs with the Words on the Page and the Meanings Beyond conference recommendations which included the use of themes and activities focusing on geography and landscape as a hook that would start from the visitor's own interest leading to an interest in poetry or manuscripts. At the conference Dr Ian Gregory, Lecturer in Digital Humanities at the University of Lancaster, spoke about his work with Geographical Information Systems (GIS), creating maps of Lake District tours taken by Gray and Coleridge, which not only show their route, but their emotional responses at different points and visual comparisons of written material. Conference delegates noted that Dr Gregory's technique had offered an unusual and interesting look at the writers and would be most likely of interest to walkers and tourists visiting the Lake District who did not have an existing strong interest in poetry.

4.6.7 Visitors' enjoyment of digital technology

The exhibit was popular with visitors and was shown in tracking surveys to have a higher dwell time in comparison to other prototype exhibits and the original displays. 88% of visitors surveyed said that they enjoyed the exhibit and it was also popular with the focus group. Visitors liked the fact that it was very different from the other exhibits and brought a modern feel to the gallery. They valued the multi-sensory approach including hearing the poetry together with the 3D landscape and geographical context. Several participants in the focus group mentioned the way that the cartoon graphics had consolidated their learning very simplistically.

4.6.8 Eliciting emotional responses

The exhibit did lead to emotional responses from some visitors and it is likely that the sophisticated visuals combined with sound helped elicit this response:

"The combination of poetry and the map and geography reminded me of my own visits to the Lake District, and I really found it quite moving".

There was no recorded emotional response from the manuscripts related to the exhibit. Several focus group participants noted an intention to restudy or read 'The Prelude' and one visitor noted:

"I will go away and read some Wordsworth" [as a result of this exhibit.]

4.6.9 Eliciting social outcomes

The exhibit led to social interaction amongst the visitors using it with 67% of people who looked at it as a couple or group saying that they had interacted socially. This is particularly significant given the fact that only one visitor could effectively listen to sound at a time. The shape of the exhibit, being accessible from three sides, the strong visual pull of the 3D map and the subject of geography being a common interest amongst visitors, is likely to have resulted in it being a more social exhibit.

4.6.10 Conclusions

Exhibition themes relating to geography and landscape can be attractive to visitors who have an interest in this area and provide a hook into the poems, literature and manuscripts. This is particularly significant for an organisation such as the Wordsworth Trust located in the Lake District with many non-specialist visitors.

Visitors enjoy multi-sensory experiences and these can support learning and elicit social and emotional responses.

The technology enabled the museum to present layers of information and different visual approaches including multiple images to reinforce exhibit themes. This led to greater understanding of the intended learning outcomes.

The exhibit was more focussed on the contextual information surrounding the inspiration for and development of manuscripts and communicated these successfully.

More subtle messages, e.g. about the development and refinement of text over time, were missed by visitors.

Although the direct connection with the physicality of the manuscript was a minor part of the exhibit, it still motivated visitors to want to see the manuscripts. This was due to the directional instruction given as well as the interest generated by the exhibit.

The exhibit was very successful in leading to interaction amongst visitors due to its shape and subject matter. If the exhibit had used a sound technology that a group of visitors could use, it may have had an even greater social impact and possibly could have encouraged separate groups of visitors who were in different groups to interact.

4.6.11 Recommendations

Incorporate more multi-sensory socially engaging exhibits within the gallery.

Use simple graphics e.g. cartoons to illustrate or consolidate particular points.

Limit the number of messages within an exhibit to make it simpler and clearer for the visitor to understand.

Make clear distinctions between conveying messages about context, subject matter and physicality or 'meanings' at the planning stages.

Exhibits that convey the former can also support an understanding of the physicality and 'meanings' of manuscripts but only if that connection is explicitly made.

Right: Visitor viewing the Spots of Time exhibit

4.7

HANDS-ON ACTIVITIES INCLUDING FACSIMILES

4.7.1 The prototype exhibits

The Wordsworth Trust introduced four hands-on activities into the museum which were positioned within a prototype exhibit area about letter writing.

Activity 1: Facsimile Letters

Two high quality facsimile letters: A Letter from Mary Wordsworth to William Wordsworth, 1st-3rd August 1810 and a letter from Dorothy Wordsworth to William Wordsworth, 4th June 1812.

The letters related to the death of the Wordsworths' daughter Catherine. The letters were reproduced on a colour photocopier. Visitors were able to handle the letters and they were folded in Regency style so that visitors could open and close them. Visitors were also able to listen to a sound recording of two members of staff discussing the letters. The exhibit was positioned to encourage the visitor to touch the letter and listen to the sound recording at the same time.

Activity 2: Folding Regency Letters

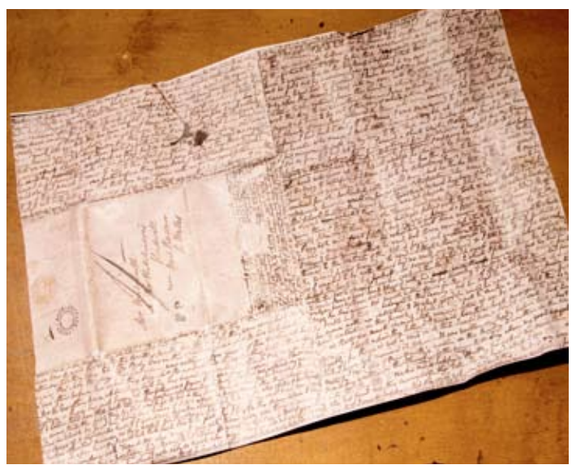
Instructions and blank paper were provided for visitors to fold their own letters in a Regency style. Some background information about Regency letters and postal systems was incorporated into the activity.

Activity 3: Quill Pens and Ink

A set of quill pens and ink was provided on the table with cartridge paper for visitors to write their own letters. They were invited to present their written and folded letters to museum staff so that they could be posted to the stated address.

Activity 4: Visitor Experience Book

A comments book was included in the letter-writing area with instructions that invited visitors to write about their own experiences of letter writing.



Far Left Top: Facsimile letter folded in the Regency style
Far Left Bottom: Facsimile letter opened
Below: Visitor experience book
Right: Quill pen and ink
Bottom Right: The letter writing activity exhibit

4.7.2 The rationale

The Wordsworth Trust wished to build on pilot activities tested in workshop scenarios and take forward recommendations from Bienkowski's (2011) report by incorporating more multi sensory activities for visitors which appealed to different learning styles and tastes. They wanted to use activities which would draw attention to the physical qualities of the manuscript, for example, the touch and weight of the paper and the smell of the ink, and to replicate the sensory experience of the creator or user of the original manuscript such as the opening of a letter and the drafting of a sentence.

Very close contact and handling experiences, particularly for high status manuscripts, is normally restricted to researchers and conservators. The Wordsworth Trust used facsimiles to increase access and give visitors an experience that would replicate the sensory and emotional experience of handling the real thing.

The activities were designed to reinforce an emotional connection with the writer and receiver of the manuscripts. This was intended to give the visitor a much deeper and more meaningful experience, as Bienkowski (2011) states in his report:

"Emotional Engagement plays a major part in bringing the visitor's mind into a receptive state. Once a person is emotionally engaged, then the intellect can follow: connections are made through prior knowledge, building on existing experience".

The introduction of the visitor experience book was intended to give the visitor an opportunity to contribute their own ideas and share experiences, taking forward Bienkowski's suggestion of involving different voices in a reciprocal process.

It was hoped that all these activities would help the visitor step back in time, have a greater emotional connection with the writer but also draw attention to the physical qualities of the manuscript and motivate the visitor to engage with the real thing.

4.7.3 Popularity of activities

The letter writing area was the most popular exhibit area of those tested. The quill activity in particular was very popular with visitors of all ages, background and experience of Wordsworth. Tracking showed that visitors spent more time in this area and 50% of visitors (160/315) voted for this activity as their favourite. The activity area was very popular with families and many said that it was the only place where there was something for their children to do in the museum.

4.7.4 Encouraging direct contact with the manuscripts

Evaluation showed that the hands-on activities in the letter writing prototype exhibit led to very little contact with the original manuscripts. Only 25% of visitors interviewed about this exhibit viewed the manuscripts associated with the activity and 30% of visitors tracked using the exhibit looked at the 'Goslar Letter'. The activities were very absorbing for visitors and tracking showed that visitors spent more time with the quill activity than any other exhibit in the museum. It could therefore be argued that the activities were distracting from the manuscript. However the letter writing exhibit area did have a number of design faults discussed already in section 4.4 Redisplay and Repositioning: the position of the 'Goslar Letter' in a corridor area; the feeling that it was separate from the activities; the fact that the original letters about Catherine's death were in a display case that was part of the old exhibition.

Several participants of the focus group mentioned that they would have liked to see the original manuscripts relating to the letters in the exhibit area. In addition, the information provided to visitors about the activities did not strongly make a connection with the manuscript e.g. the folding of Regency letters did not reference the letter folds of the 'Goslar Letter', nor did information at the manuscript make a connection with the activities.

4.7.5 Supporting an understanding of manuscripts

The letter writing activities and in particular the facsimiles and letter folding instructions helped visitors learn about the significance of letter writing at the time. Focus group participants said that they had reflected on the fact that letter writing had been the main form of communication and had understood better the practicalities, including costs of paper, Regency folding and mailing, of writing and sending a letter in the 1800s. Although these intellectual outcomes relate to the 'meaning' that manuscripts give evidence of life at the time and the general circumstances under which they are written, it is important to note that the understanding of this 'meaning' came more from the activities associated with the exhibit than the manuscript itself.
Only one visitor who was interviewed showed an understanding of the processes of communication of the time from the manuscript directly.

Above and Right: Visitors at the letter writing exhibit

The quill and ink activity gave visitors an understanding of the technicalities of writing:

"Thought how long they must have taken to write and how much ink they'd have needed"; "It gave me a 'palpable sense of them [the Wordsworths] writing"; "I empathised with Dorothy and Mary writing with a quill".

Visitors interviewed said that the quill and ink activity had helped them understand the original manuscript more than any other activity in the letter writing area (7/16 visitors), although we can only presume that they were referencing manuscripts generally as some visitors who made this comment did not actually view the associated manuscripts in the exhibit area.

"How frustrating to have to write with ink and quill. When your thoughts and ideas are at a greater pace than your ability to capture them on the page at hand, me xx"; *"The sound is off putting, scratchy and the beauty of the hand lost by the inability to manage the ink!"* (Comment from letters written by visitors using quill and ink)

Although nine of the sixteen visitors expressed when interviewed that the activities had helped them understand the manuscript, there was little evidence from their responses to later interview questions to show that the knowledge gained from the activities had been utilised when looking at the manuscripts directly associated with the exhibit area. As stated above the evaluation suggests that the activities supported an understanding around writing at that time rather than the specific manuscripts on display.

4.7.6 Eliciting emotional outcomes

Evaluation showed that the hands on activities were very successful in eliciting emotional responses from visitors. Each individual activity was shown to lead to emotional outcomes, with a number of reinforcing activities combined with the emotive subject matter of the letters relating to the death of a daughter, having a powerful effect on some visitors, as was highlighted in the visitor's responses book:

"Letters mean more to me than any email or instant message. Handwriting things today is even an effort compared to typing. How much it must have meant back then. The effort must have been invaluable".

Focus group participants enjoyed using the facsimile letters. They particularly liked the fact that it was a hands-on activity. They commented that they liked the experience of opening and reading the letter. For some, this helped them make a more personal connection with the manuscript where they were able to imagine what it might have been like to receive or send the letter. This feeling of going back in time reveals how facsimiles can help elicit some of the magical qualities of manuscripts, one of the seven 'meanings' discussed at the Words on the Page and the Meanings Beyond conference. A manuscript is a tangible link to the past and can help take us to a moment in history. The physical process of opening the letter also helped the visitor connect the experience of people in the past to their own memories of letters they had sent and recieved.

The quill and ink activity, which on the surface seemed a very simple exhibit did have an emotional impact on a number of visitors, who were able to make a connection between their own experiences and the Wordsworths:

"I thought about my own past and thought about the Wordsworths sitting in the dark very carefully writing their letters"; "The action of writing took me back in time to learning to write".

One visitor who was surveyed said she was a poet herself and said she had a strong emotional connection to her own writing materials. Using the quill pen made her think about Wordsworth's connection to his pens, chair etc.

4.7.7 Eliciting social outcomes

Evaluation showed the hands on activities led to social activities amongst visitors. 81% of visitors talked about social interaction they had had either discussing the letters, doing activities or writing each other letters. Visitor tracking confirmed that the activities encouraged social interaction and staff commented that the hands on activities made the museum a much more lively, relaxed and social space. Staff felt that this was very positive and had changed the overall ambience of the whole museum space.

"Yes - I gave the letter I wrote and folded to my husband"; "Used the quill and ink exhibit as a family".

4.7.8 Visitors sharing responses

Visitors were invited to write about their own personal experiences of letter writing in a visitor comments book. Although the majority of visitors used this as an opportunity to write comments about their visit to the Wordsworth Trust in general, there were a number of comments that showed that the exhibits had made a strong personal connection with them. Visitors were observed reading the comments but the activity did not generally elicit a written conversation amongst visitors. This type of activity, although a very limited intervention, was included to provide opportunities for the Wordsworth Trust to humanise the experience and consult, engage and involve different voices.

Although the visitor's responses book had a limited impact on visitors in terms of numbers of meaningful contributions, the comments do reveal a very deep personal, emotional and intellectual connection that some visitors made with the activities:

"Only a breath away: The words that have sustained me over the years after the death of my 30 year old son."; "My best friend and I always send letters to each other. It's really nice to get a letter in the mail. Just to know that someone put effort into a letter just for you gives you a sense of importance. I hope that my best friend and I will continue to write to each other."

Staff commented that the activity could have been developed if there was more space available for visitors to share thoughts or letters on a comments board, with the concept of sharing ideas being more strongly communicated.

A number of other visitors made similar comments about the power of letter writing in the responses book:

"When my gran was dying she gave me a biscuit tin. Containing all the letters I'd written to her before going off to university to the present day. Although it is one sided correspondence it provides a version of my early life. What struck me first of all was that she had censored some of my letters. I had a brief unhappy long distance relationship and she had chosen to destroy that record of my unhappiness. Secondly on reading some of the dreary letters, I didn't recognise the person that I was then. What would famous people make of the post-humus editing of their correspondence."

As part of the evaluation visitors were invited to stick comments on post-it notes onto a large board to reflect on their visit. They could also vote on which exhibits they liked best. The evaluation activity in itself was very popular with visitors, both participating and reading comments. This also highlights the level of interest and potential of this type of activity in the museum.

4.7.8 Conclusions

Visitors particularly enjoyed using facsimiles because they offered a hands-on experience that connected them to a moment in the past.

Facsimiles were successful in getting across one or two messages.

The facsimiles did not result in engagement with the actual manuscripts although some visitors expressed an interest in seeing those relating to the facsimiles available.

The hands-on activities supported social interaction within groups.

The facsimiles elicited an emotional response in several visitors.

Visitors wanted a more direct physical link between the facsimile and the manuscript.

4.7.9 Recommendations

Use facsimilies to elicit emtional responses to the physicality of the manuscript as well as its content.

Use facsimilies in large social spaces to support the social interaction they elicit.

Create a more direct link between facsimilies used and the orginal manuscripts.

Facsimiles should be of a high quality.

Below: Visitor at the letter writing exhibit

5

EDUCATION RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

5.1 The resources

As part of the wider DDF project a number of educational resources were developed for use by students at Key Stages 2 and 3 both on site and in school. The formal education part of the project had several phases of development: generating ideas for resources and activities; developing some prototype resources; testing out these ideas and prototypes with a group of teachers; refining materials based on conclusions from these tests; and producing a set of resources to evaluate with teachers and students. The decision was taken to focus on creating a loan box of material based around William and Dorothy Wordsworth's 'Goslar Letter' and developing resources for use by groups on site.

5.2 The rationale

The purpose of these materials was to provide engaging resources for teachers to use with students that would widen access to manuscripts, promote an interest in learning from them and start to convey messages about their importance in terms of content, context, physicality and value. Curriculum links were clearly made to ensure relevance for schools. It was hoped that some of the resources developed could be used for outreach with formal education groups and might generate enthusiasm and interest in subsequent visits to the museum by school groups and informal family groups. Other resources were developed for use with school groups on site.

Right: Young visitors using quill and ink

5.3
Developing ideas and prototype resources

The objectives of the Wordsworth Trust for developing the resources were based on the Wordsworth Trust's experiences of working with educators, knowledge of current educational trends locally and nationally as well as knowledge of what children and young people are most interested in:

- Creating an immediate WOW factor and interest by using manuscripts with a strong visual impact.
- Providing a sensory experience as close to the real manuscript as possible by using high quality facsimiles that convey the physicality of the manuscript as well as content.
- Ensuring relevance and connection to Key Stage 2 and 3 curricula through developing subject linked as well as cross-curricular materials.
- Deepening and sustaining learning and skills for students by creating resources that could be used across a half or full term.
- Devising a wrap-around package of resources that would support work in the classroom and as part of a visit to The Wordsworth Trust by providing high quality comprehensive and useful background materials.
- Supporting creativity through the inclusion of open ended and arts based activities enabling students to develop their enquiry into the manuscripts

Resources developed include:

- A loans box – for outreach to schools that includes a high quality facsimile of the 'Goslar Letter' and a transcription of this, a laminated jigsaw of the letter and detailed background information about Wordsworth and the context in which the manuscript was written, alongside planning materials and a number of suggested activities.
- Curator for the Day workshop – focusing on care, conservation of and access to manuscripts and using a high quality facsimile of one of Dorothy Wordsworth's note books with associated activities
- Facsimiles showing Wordsworth's three different drafts of the 'Boat Stealing' episode from 'The Prelude' with focused activities that encourage young people to explore the editing process.

5.4
Educational need

"Important that it feels like the real thing, and that it came folded up as it would have originally been received".

The objectives were developed through the initial consultation with two primary school teachers, two secondary school teachers and two education consultants with experience of working in Cumbrian schools. Also present were members of staff and interns from the Wordsworth Trust who had been involved in developing the resources under discussion. Consultation revealed that the three aspects of manuscripts that were most important for teachers and students were the same that had emerged from the evaluation of general visitors, i.e. the content, context and physicality of manuscripts and the fact that facsimiles of this quality could not be reproduced by the school. The main subject areas that could be addressed include English, Literacy, History and Art and Design.

5.5
Loan box

Educational practitioners were excited by the opportunity to handle the facsimile in the loans box and positive that curriculum links would be offered supporting their own planning processes in school. The connection with a moment in history and the writers themselves were valued and it was agreed that using the facsimile with students as young as at Key Stage 1 would be likely to generate curiosity and excitement around the magic of manuscripts.

Teachers liked the possibilities presented by the manuscript being used as a piece of evidence that their students would be able to explore and examine to find clues about the past, the author and reader of the letter. In this way students would be connecting to the seven 'meanings' of manuscripts mentioned in the previous sections of this report. Teachers also agreed that the loans box might be used to consider attitudes past and present in relation to, for example, communication techniques.

There is a large body of educational research that shows that child led learning like this has a deep and meaningful impact on students allowing them to research areas that they are particularly interested in and draw on their own experiences and knowledge.

Teachers were interested in having a wide range of resources including background information that would enable them to:

"integrate the loans box into the curriculum as a whole."

There was consensus that a loans box of this type might provide work across a longer school period and should include the evolution of a bank of creative responses from students who have used the box before.

Right: Visitor at the letter writing exhibit

5.6
Curator for the day

This workshop received a positive response from education practitioners who felt that it would convey the sense of the fragility and physicality of manuscripts and again enable students' detailed observation and exploration of these aspects. It provides a good cross-curricular activity with links to Science and History as well as supporting Literacy and English 'Writing for Purpose' at Key Stages 3 and 4. These subject areas are particularly supported through the Label Writing activity and the potential of peer reviewing each other's work. The transcribing task got very good feedback particularly because of the focus on handwriting, especially for younger children, although it was agreed that each task was easy to modify to suit the needs of different ages and abilities. Improving literacy is currently a key focus for schools at all levels and is explicitly stated as a focus area on new OfSTED inspection framework documents. Providing activities that support literacy developments are likely to be very popular with schools generally:

"Makes pupils realise how important it is to make your writing legible."

It was recommended that an element of dressing up and role playing would reinforce learning particularly if it related to a real life scenario.
This is similar to the use of 'Mantle of the Expert'* as a pedagogical tool in schools, which focuses on the use of drama to explore a challenge or enquiry. Teachers also felt that the workshop could lead to discussions about what should be preserved in the future and how this links to current social networking mechanisms, for example, manuscript notebooks as a more permanent version of Facebook.

5.7.
Drafting

This activity was again thought to explicitly support literacy work in schools enabling students to:

"realise that literature does not come perfectly formed from the sky – it takes work"

and to focus on punctuation revisions and evolution of a text, in this case the 'Boat Stealing' episode from 'The Prelude'. Encouraging students to select aspects of the text that they were most interested in (for visual or textual reasons) would give them ownership from which to develop their own creative responses, transfer learned knowledge and embed their understanding.

The active nature of the activity involving close examination of text to support building an argument is an important aspect, which will be a critical 'hook' for reluctant readers:

"Drafts can be used to highlight poetical, political and social issues".

5.8
Evaluating the impact of the Loans Box

Students from Captain Shaw's and St Bega's schools trialled the materials developed for the loans box. (Captain Shaw's had visited Dove Cottage, St Bega's had not).

*http://www.mantleoftheexpert.com/ - a dramatic enquiry approach to teaching and learning.

5.8.1 Developing knowledge and understanding

The resources provided a tangible link to life in the past for students giving them more of a historical context for wider topic and themed work. If used as an integrated part of topic or themed work over a period of time in school the resources and activities were able to reinforce existing knowledge about William and Dorothy Wordsworth and the importance and creation of letters in the past. Teachers valued the use of background information to support their work with students beyond engagement with the loans box itself.

5.8.2 Developing student skills

The loans-box resources provided opportunities for students to develop a number of transferable skills and this area of development was considered by teachers to be most successful. All students gained independent and group research and enquiry skills through close examination of manuscript facsimiles using magnifying glasses. Group work enabled students to practice and develop listening and questioning techniques as well as negotiating conclusions regarding the evidence that they were exploring. Through this activity students made connections between the physical evidence in the facsimiles such as ink splodges and sealing wax marks and the simplistic 'meanings' that this evidence conveyed. For example, sealing wax was used to ensure letters were only seen by the addressee. Students did not connect with the seven deeper 'meanings' of manuscripts but had started to understand some simplistic 'meanings' such as it being difficult to write with quill pens. Through the experience of folding Regency style and using quill pens, students developed their manual dexterity.

5.8.3 Enjoyment, creativity and learning

Students demonstrated engagement in their learning and in particular enjoyed the experience of opening letters, being able to handle them and examine them at close range using tools such as the magnifying glasses. They were inspired visually by the physicality of the manuscript and the subject content. They began to think of:

"old documents as visually interesting and as exciting puzzles to try and solve".

They clearly demonstrated pleasure at being able to work things out for themselves:

"those who had visited Dove Cottage worked out that the letter was written by Dorothy Wordsworth who they already knew something about".

The activities on offer supported student-led learning which is widely recognised as a pedagogical practice that supports enjoyment and engagement. This was further strengthened in giving students the opportunity to create their own piece of work e.g. letters.

5.8.4 Connecting with emotional aspects of manuscripts

In most cases students had started to be able to empathise with aspects of life in the past and the challenges that it presented in contrast to their own contemporary experiences. For example, on exploring facsimiles students were reminded about the conditions under which the letter was written i.e. in candlelight. Again this represents a surface level engagement with the emotional aspect of the texts. There was little evidence of students connecting with the emotional state of mind of the author and/or the reader of the text. This might be supported over longer-term engagement with the manuscripts. Some students initiated a discussion about the value of historical objects and the use of facsimiles as the closest the general public can get to the 'real thing'. This discussion developed students' appetite to see the real thing. This sort of values-based discussion could be integrated into teacher planning guidance as a tool to encourage a visit to the Wordsworth Museum.

5.8.5 Conclusions

Teachers valued the resources on offer and felt that they would be useful in several ways.

They were most interested in active experiences that enabled students to explore the content, context and physicality of the manuscripts.

The educational resources were most appropriate at supporting English, Literacy, History and Art curriculum areas.

Use of loans-box materials developed a surface level understanding of William and Mary Wordsworth. This was stronger if there was wider classroom based work on the same theme or topic.

Students did not appear to connect with the emotional state of mind of the author of the text but the potential for this to happen, through longer-term engagement, was apparent.

The activities in the loans box had most impact on developing student skills, in particular independent and group research and enquiry skills.

Students enjoyed using the facsimiles recognising their closeness to the real thing and being inspired by the content and physicality of the manuscript.

5.8.6 Recommendations

Develop the offer to include a range of background information available online including follow up activities focused on letter writing and poetry. In this way depth of knowledge, understanding, skills development and emotional engagement with the manuscript could be developed further.

Create access to examples of other letters to make comparisons and demonstrate different content and physical aspects such as crossed writing, more and less legible, less text and letters containing lots of information about life at the time.

Enhance the loans box activities to include guidance for making ink. This could be further developed with guidance on other science/craft based activities e.g. paper making.

To support sustained engagement in the topic or theme it was suggested that students or classes might like copies of facsimiles to keep as a longer term classroom resource.

The success of using active experiential activities for students could be enhanced by using dressing-up clothes for younger students and/or for example research scientist outfits/kits for older students.

Include opportunity for students to create work that would become incorporated into the loans box for use by subsequent schools.

Integrate guidance on supporting values-based discussion into resources on offer.

Build on opportunities to link activities back to real manuscripts on display at the museum to encourage independent visits.

Below: Manuscript and quill pen

6

KEY LEARNING AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Learning 1

New interpretation techniques can engage the visitor in closer examination of manuscripts and in some cases lead to a greater understanding of them. However this is only the case when there is a very close association between the content of the exhibit and the manuscript itself, i.e. the manuscript is positioned centrally to the exhibit, which makes explicit reference to the manuscript and in the same way the manuscript itself clearly reinforces the key messages conveyed in the wider exhibit.

Recommendation 1

Ensure that there is a greater emphasis on consistent and direct associations (physical and literal) between the exhibit and the focus manuscript to consolidate learning outcomes.

Learning 2

The interpretative techniques motivated some visitors to examine the physicality of the manuscript and look for evidence such as handwriting and marks on the page. However, very few visitors were then able to translate this into understanding the 'meanings' of the manuscript. The use of films of experts was the most effective tool in helping the visitor understand and appreciate the 'meanings' related to the manuscript's physicality.

Recommendation 2

The manuscript's physicality and associated 'meaning' should tell a story and be part of an overarching theme which the visitor can relate to. The 'meaning' and associated evidence from the manuscripts needs to be a central part of an exhibit with the various interpretative elements in an exhibition reinforcing this message.

Learning 3

Selection of the right manuscripts is key to conveying simple messages relating to the seven 'meanings'. Manuscripts which have strong physical attributes should be used to tell the story through their physicality. The reference to the manuscript's physicality and what this means should be reinforced by the associated interpretative devices. The 'Goslar Letter' is a good example of a manuscript that demonstrates a number of physical characteristics relating to the seven 'meanings'. However a more direct connection with the associated activities would have made the exhibit area more effective.

Recommendation 3

A small number of manuscripts should be selected based on the criteria of conveying an overarching theme and sub-themes. Interpretation should link associated activities directly to the manuscript.

Learning 4

The physicality of the manuscript can reveal seven 'meanings' to the visitor, but it is the human story of these meanings that generated the most enthusiasm from them. Focus group participants said that they were most interested in the 'human' emotional aspects of Wordsworth, the man and his life (personal and professional) rather than what they perceived as abstract 'meanings' of manuscripts.

Recommendation 4

The Wordsworth Trust could enhance the visitor experience focussing on the human story of the 'meaning,' using a manuscript that illuminates the 'meaning' and triggers further questions in the visitor's mind. For example there could be a more explicit message that Dorothy, Wordsworth and Coleridge contributed to each other's writing in a variety of different ways because of the closeness of their relationships and their intertwined lives. Alternatively, it could be that Dorothy wrote for William because he suffered physical discomfort when he held a pen and tried to write.

Learning 5

Hands on activities such as those provided on the letter writing table and interactive exhibits such as the Spots of Time exhibit were most enjoyed and successful at eliciting a range of learning outcomes for visitors. Evaluation showed that these activities provided the greatest interest and impact for all visitors even those who were familiar with Wordsworth at an intellectual level. Hands on activities at the letter writing table did not generally lead to contact with the associated manuscripts. However it is likely that visitors were able to transfer this knowledge within the wider exhibition.

Recommendation 5

Interactive opportunities should be provided for visitors which appeal to different learning styles and tastes but reference should be made between these activities and the associated manuscripts.

Learning 6

Visitors generally did not engage with full written transcripts or found them too difficult to navigate, therefore presenting a distraction from the manuscript itself. Short written or sound transcripts combined with visual interpretation were more effective. Transcripts were most effectively used when only the most relevant or interesting aspects were very clearly highlighted for the visitor e.g. with a lift-the-flap activity next to a facsimile extract. Transcripts used with Sound Showers and digital copy of the manuscript such as in the Spots of Time interactive, which highlighted the relevant text as the reading progressed, were enjoyed by visitors and elicited more emotional outcomes.

Recommendation 6

Visitors would welcome the use of highlighted or enlarged transcribed extracts from manuscripts e.g. short sections that illustrate a point. Sound transcript could be used through a Sound Shower or other appropriate device to elicit an emotional connection.

Learning 7

Despite the trialling of a number of different interpretative techniques visitors still found the manuscripts quite challenging. For some visitors they presented such a barrier visually that further engagement was not possible. The research recognises that whilst setting high expectations of the visitor is positive practice, setting outcomes that are too numerous, complex or intellectual can mean that the simple messages of an exhibit are lost amidst the attempt to present too much. Of all visitors surveyed only a very small number closely examined the manuscripts themselves and were able to find and understand the evidence of the seven 'meanings'.

Recommendation 7

A hierarchical layered approach to interpretation is required for all new exhibits. One key message per exhibit relating to the manuscript's physicality should be articulated clearly at the highest level with the opportunity to find out further information by reading, listening or viewing. Basic tools for giving greater access to the manuscripts themselves could be utilised at little cost. For example, the use of enlarged transcriptions of only the key aspects of the text and the provision of magnifying glasses for individual use.

Learning 8

Some of the exhibits helped elicit feelings of inspiration and wonder such as the artistic responses and the films of the curator which were particularly effective in this.

Recommendation 8

When developing future manuscript exhibitions the passion of the curator and ordinary people should be used to inspire visitors. The enthusiasm of experts and other voices should be used e.g. in sound and film to enthuse the visitor and support them in developing their own skills and understanding.

Learning 9

Artist responses to the manuscripts helped instil a sense of curiosity and wonder. The main themes and messages within the prototype exhibits were not focussed on providing the visitor with an emotional connection, apart from in the letter writing area. The exhibits therefore did not fully take forward the core principle recommendation of making a stronger emotional connection.

Recommendation 9

Interpretative tools which promote feelings of curiosity and wonder such as artistic responses should be propagated throughout the exhibition to enhance the experience and to engage the visitor in a more contributory and reflective learning experience. Greater emphasis on emotive themes within the exhibition and manuscripts whose physicality illustrates emotional themes will enhance the visitor's experience.

Learning 10

Exhibits which prompted debate and discussion led to social interaction amongst visitors which gave the museum a more positive energy. Artists' responses, multifaceted interactive exhibits such as the Spots of Time exhibit and hands-on activities encouraged social interaction amongst visitors.

Recommendation 10

Develop areas within the manuscript exhibition that allow for shared learning experiences.

Learning 11

The new interpretative techniques trialled during this research at the Wordsworth Museum were more effective at engaging visitors than the original main museum exhibition. Visitors spent more time in the gallery overall, felt a positive ambience to the gallery and were more engaged socially, emotionally and intellectually than previous gallery evaluations had revealed.

Recommendation 11

The Wordsworth Trust should refine some of their prototypes based on the learning and recommendations made in this report and continue to support wider access to and understanding of manuscripts. The installation of more visually stimulating, interactive, technically advanced, dynamic and hands-on activities will lead to better and sustained outcomes.

Wordsworth Trust
Dove Cottage
Grasmere
Cumbria
LA229SH

T: 015394 35544
F:015394 35748

enquiries@wordsworth.org.uk
www.wordsworth.org.uk

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