

11.00 The various visual records of the partbooks (10)

5 minutes = 850 words OR 170 w.p.m.

10 minutes = 1700

When we embarked on our work on the Sadler partbooks, we thought we knew what we were getting into. We were so wrong, in so many ways. Not only were the books in far worse condition than we had anticipated, but we found that pretty much everything we thought we knew about them was wrong.

We thought we would be looking at another Baldwin or Dow. What we found was another animal altogether.

It has been difficult to establish exactly when Mus. e. 1–5 were withdrawn from public access. Warwick Edwards asked to see them as an undergraduate in the late 1960s, and was refused access, but as far as we can tell they were not officially withdrawn until the conservation work in the 1970s, when the books were disbound and the decision was taken not to rebind them, but to keep them stored in wallets. Certainly from that point access has been very much on a 'need to know' basis, so I think in reality they have been hidden from view for more than half a century, although James Burke was able to examine them for his dissertation work a few years ago, when he photographed them with a hand-held camera.



There are now two partial and two complete photographic surrogates of the books. Possibly the most important of those was the first, a set of negative monochrome Photostats that were made for the editors of Tudor Church Music in the early 1920s (known as the TCM Photostats), and stored in boxes in the library of Senate House in London.

The leaves were microfilmed, again in monochrome, after the 1970s conservation.

In 2014 a new set of high-resolution colour images were made by the Bodleian reprographics studio for the Tudor Partbooks project, and it is this set of images that allowed us to undertake the digital reconstruction work during the Tudor Partbooks project, and which is still ongoing as we tweak and tidy the images prior to print publication. A final limited set of images was made in 2017 using infra-red imaging, but because of the state of the MSS this was limited to just 30 images.

The 1920s images represent one of the earliest uses of Photostat technology, with the equipment set up at the British Library in 1920 and handled by a specially trained operator – the records of that installation allow us to date the Photostats with reasonable certainty to around 1922.¹

<Photostat>

The outputs look to all intents and purposes like black and white photographs, printed on similar stiff card and with grayscale variations in tone that make them considerably more useful than a photocopy. This set of photostats was not complete, covering only those works that were required for TCM editions, but the majority of the leaves were copied.

<table of which pages were shot>

we are very grateful to the librarian at Senate House in London, James Harrowell, for allowing us to visit with a flatbed scanner and scan of all of them for the Tudor Partbooks project, and for permission to put those scans on DIAMM.

Like many old photographs, the images are yellowing, the edges are disintegrating and the leaves are cockling and becoming brittle, but overall they are in excellent condition.

These images are important in allowing us to get a sense of the rate of the deterioration of the books and also because they show evidence of earlier, undocumented conservation work

<gauze>

in which areas of leaves that were beginning to disintegrate were stabilised with gauze.

<gauze impression>

The gauze was lifted presumably in the 1970s, but the pattern of the fabric is still visible on a number of leaves.

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Most important, of course, is that they show the leaves in a significantly better state than they are now,

< better state1 >

¹ Burke

so some areas that are unreadable CLICK – or even missing – on the current images are readable on the Photostats. CLICK. Despite being grayscale they also show variations in ink tone that are no longer visible in the manuscript if the page has been stabilized with tissue overlay.

<microfilm title>

The next photographic record was the black-and-white microfilm made after the conservation in the 1970s,

<microfilm title>

and were published in the Harvester microfilm collection in 1984 that became such a mainstay of manuscript study.

<microfilm 1 -- run images>

It is sometimes difficult to see the point of this record, since the grayscale separation is so limited that many areas that might have been readable with more levels of gray appear simply as black blobs – much as a photocopy might look.

However, it was the most efficient record available at the time, since colour photography would have been prohibitively expensive for so many leaves. This set of images was useless for the purposes of the digital reconstruction because of the quality of the images, and because the manuscript had not deteriorated between this photographic record and the modern colour images.

I think it was similarly useless for researchers, because so many of the images were so off-putting that nobody wanted to look at them.

<microfilm 2 (better ones) run images>

They probably contributed considerably to the scholarly neglect of these manuscripts. Nevertheless, there are aspects of the books that are visible on these images which might have encouraged a reappraisal of some of the assumptions about the content that have persisted for over 200 years: some pages are clearly readable, particularly the less damaged ones.

From these two sets of grayscale surrogates it was difficult to estimate the condition and readability of the books as they might emerge in a new set of colour digital images because, although the disparity in quality between the two, suggested quite a rapid and extreme rate of decay, the quality of the microfilm imaging was too poor for a realistic evaluation.

<RGB title slide>

The master set of images was the RGB digital images, supplied by Bodley reprographics.

<colour images -- run series>

These are beautiful images: with good colour depth, plenty of resolution and, because the books were disbound, each page was as flat as a pancake, so we didn't have to worry about curvature distortion. And OH! they were straight! Because of the way modern imaging is done, a strip of the facing page is always visible, so we were able in some cases to see the join with the conjunct page and, because the pages were almost completely flat we had ideal images for eventual print reproduction.

They were both depressing and encouraging, as anyone who has looked at these images on DIAMM will know. The extent of damage extreme enough to prevent a reading was greater than we had anticipated, and it became clear just how much work would be involved in recovering the texts,

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the images were of a quality that colour separation and magnification allowed us to read much of the text (albeit with difficulty) that was completely illegible on the microfilm. The sharpness and clarity allowed us to use the colour separation to great effect in the first stages of digital recovery, although the pages overlaid with tissue lost out because the colour response was flattened, and there's nothing you can do about that at the imaging stage, and precious little after it either.

<four images>

Even without any intervention from an editor, the images are of a quality that it is possible to read much of the music with some effort, but we had now three versions of most of the pages, any much that wasn't visible on the new images could be recovered from the Photostats.

<IR title page>

The final set of surrogates was of a very limited selection of pages. When we were well on with the editing work and had done at least a first pass over all of the images (so nearly three years into the work) we were in a position to identify a number of pages where neither the photostat nor the master could provide us with sufficient information to recover some areas, and we felt it would be worthwhile to undertake some infra-red imaging. At the time IR imaging was not offered by Bodley, and we

were given permission to take the DIAMM rig into the library, where Martin Holmes kindly handled the leaves so that I could take a maximum of 30 infra-red images.

<IRs>

These were stunning – showing far more than we could have hoped and, looking at them, we realised that a complete set of IR images would be a fantastic asset to the record of these books. For now though, we have to be satisfied with these few and the edited digital images. This one in particular shows so clearly the darker overwriting on many of the notes.

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The Photostat set of images, [CLICK](#) the 30 IRs [CLICK](#) and the digitally reconstructed version of the Sadler partbooks

<three images>

which we will be referring to almost exclusively for the rest of today, are in the process of being brought online in the online DIAMM virtual library, with many thanks to Andrew Hankinson, who is putting in all-nighters on the web interface. Seeing all three sets side-by-side is something that couldn't even have been imagined when the Photostats were made.

What follows is a tip-of-the iceberg look at what these images have revealed about a lost set of partbooks, partbooks that we hope will now get the close attention they deserve.