



Heritage Smells!

A newly launched research project, funded by the AHRC/EPSRC Science and Heritage Programme and led by Dr Lorraine T. Gibson of the University of Strathclyde, brings together leading scientists in the fields of chemistry, physics, statistics, heritage science and sensor technology to develop new diagnostic tools that will 'sniff' objects. The aim is to evaluate collections in museums, archives, libraries or other heritage organisations to evaluate their environment, conservation history, composition, condition or stability – without touching the object.

Dr Gibson explains: 'a good example is a library or archive; we all know that when we walk into a library, there is a very distinct musty smell. But we want to know what *causes* the smell – what does it tell us about the books stored inside? The best way to find this out is by understanding the science behind the smell'.

The new technology will be non-invasive, non-contact, portable and simple to use providing real-time data; making it particularly well suited to address questions about cultural heritage collections. Rapid examination and assessment of materials will allow informed decisions to be made promptly aiding safe storage, conservation, display and long-term preservation of collections important to our cultural heritage.

Crucially this project brings together academic partners at the University of Strathclyde and University College London with heritage organisations such as the British Library, the British Museum, the National Museums of Scotland, the National Archives of Scotland and English Heritage. An SME partnership with Owlstone Ltd. will facilitate sensor technology development for use in heritage applications.

Speaking of the research councils' support for heritage science research in the UK Professor Rick Rylance, AHRC Chief Executive, said "This is great news for the development of heritage science in Britain. We have a unique heritage, and expertise in its development. It is crucial we maintain skills and tackle important projects such as these. It is also excellent to see experts in humanities and technology working so closely and successfully together."

George MacKenzie, head of the National Archives of Scotland agreed. "Using science to understand the condition of stored documents, and doing it in a non-invasive way, will be of great help in preserving our heritage for future generations."