

# Harwell Case Study: Special Collections Cleaning for Queen's University Belfast.

**Keeping bound volumes and archival collections free from dust contamination is a crucial part of any preservation strategy. Not only can such dust present a danger to health by triggering allergies or sensitising staff and users, but if conditions are suitable, accumulated dust can allow the germination and growth of mould spores on the substrate, and attract insect pests.**

Surface debris commonly found on books can include particles such as pollens, mould spores, skin, degraded leather as well as external contaminants entering through windows and doors, including pollutants from traffic. A regular program of cleaning of collections for accumulated dust, together with robust quarantining procedures for new acquisitions should be a key requirement in a special collections library to remove problematic deteriorogens and maintain a pest-free environment.

The Special Collections service at Queen's University Belfast provides access to the Library's rare and early printed book, map, and manuscripts collections, as well as to more modern material relating to Ireland and Ulster in particular. All items held in Special Collection are considered to be of lasting research value and include examples of the earliest printed works, and books and pamphlets published between the 16th and early 19th centuries.



A collections survey highlighted that approximately 19,000 volumes on roughly 900 shelves within one storage area would benefit from specialist cleaning. The majority of the volumes affected were leather bound, including the library's most important collections, and the 19th and 20th Century book collection, as well as all volumes printed before 1701.

The McClay Library has been a Harwell Priority User for a number of years and made contact so that a quotation for the works could be provided. A site visit and survey was conducted by one of Harwell's project managers, where the levels of contamination were examined, and the logistics of the project were considered so that a project cost could be calculated. Other considerations included that the library specified that the cleaning project should be conducted in the long summer vacation to minimise disruption to library users, and that the works should be conducted onsite in Belfast to ensure continued access to the collection for researchers. Harwell proposed to conduct the works over a period of five weeks, with a team of people led by our External Project Manager, Stuart Simmons.

A combination of methodologies was utilised on this project, including adjustable suction HEPA vacuums with specialist tools, along with conservation brushes and sponges to achieve a successful outcome. Given the age of much of the material, sensitive and careful handling was essential throughout.

The project was completed within the time frame required, during Freshers' Week, to the original budget, and to a standard that the library was delighted with. Deirdre Wildy, Special Collections Librarian and Archivist at Queen's University Belfast, comments:

*"We are very happy with the work carried out by the Harwell team here at Queen's. The team fitted seamlessly into our environment, were unfailingly helpful and extremely pleasant to work with. Stuart is a real asset to your company - efficient, confident and thorough. I would have no hesitation in recommending Harwell. Thank you so much for your assistance during the past months, it has been extremely helpful."*