

Taking Liberties: 31 October 2008 – 1 March 2009

by Vicki Humphrey, previous Head of Conservation at the British Library

Conservators are actively involved in the preparation and installation of exhibitions - this can include treatment, checking condition of items to determine their suitability for exhibition and in the case of loans, to monitor their condition before and after travel and display. After exhibition the condition of the items has to be checked and work has to be done to return items to the collections or to their owners.

Several conservators were involved in preparing British Library items for this exhibition.

In addition, conservators assisted the Loans Registrar in checking items loaned from other institutions, and in some cases assisted the Exhibition department in the display of these loaned items.



Above: Cotton Charter XVIII.40

The final effect for the exhibition, with the objects positioned inside the cases, was powerful and a surprise to both the conservators who were involved in the installation and the Exhibition team as most items displayed are neither visually 'exciting' or colourful in a 'traditional' way.

In 1291 the court of Edward I of England assembled at Norham Castle to judge rival claims to the throne of Scotland. The document above is the agreement of each claimant to abide by Edwards decision. It is flush mounted on a typical 2200 micron thick Museum board with polyethylene tapes holding the four corners of the parchment. The whole document including the pendant seals are placed on a Perspex sheet with Perspex rods supporting and aligning the seals and cords. Alongside the charter is a monitoring device that records the temperature and the relative humidity of the case providing a permanent record of the conditions during the period the charter is displayed.