



**April 2004**

**INFLUENTIAL BOOK AND MANUSCRIPT CONSERVATOR**

**AWARDED PLOWDEN MEDAL**

Book and manuscript conservator Christopher Clarkson has been awarded the Royal Warrant Holders Association 2004 Plowden Medal. The award has been made in recognition of his outstanding contribution in the field where he has worked tirelessly to raise standards and develop new techniques and treatments. He was presented with the Medal by Viscount Linley at the Royal Warrant Holders Association lunch in London on 8 June.

The Gold Medal, inaugurated in 1999, is awarded by the Royal Warrant Holders Association in memory of the late Hon. Anna Plowden CBE, the leading conservator who was Vice-President of the Association at the time of her death in 1997. The Medal is awarded annually to the individual who has made the most significant recent contribution to the advancement of the conservation profession. It can also be awarded to recognise a lifetime of commitment and achievement.

For over 30 years Christopher Clarkson (65) has dedicated himself to studying the preservation and conservation of books and manuscripts. His teaching and innovation have profoundly influenced understanding of the subject and have been highly influential in improving standards in libraries and museums throughout the world.

Clarkson graduated in 1964 from the Royal College of Art - 'Book Design & Fine Binding' - after which he taught graphic design, wood engraving and fine bookbinding to diploma level at leading London art colleges. He worked for S. M. Cockerell and later with Roger Powell. He was sent to Florence after the flood in 1966 with the English team, and worked and taught in Italy and England until

1971. He was then invited to design and run the first Special Collections Conservation workshop at The Library of Congress, Washington DC (1972-77). During this period he also acted as a consultant to the Smithsonian Institute and The National Gallery of Art. In 1977 Mr. Clarkson moved to The Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, as the first conservator for their manuscript collection and worked on codicological and binding descriptions for their new manuscript catalogue. Returning to England he took a position as the first Conservation Officer at the Bodleian Library, Oxford (1979-87).

Mr Clarkson developed major programmes of preventative conservation for library and archive collections, which led to new thinking on conservation issues. He pioneered protective boxing programmes, established training in handling bound materials, and developed innovative storage systems for archive materials. His design for book supports, which aim to reduce damage to bound materials, now figure prominently in reading rooms worldwide. He also developed book cradles to support bound material on display and his guidelines for exhibiting book and manuscript materials are accepted internationally as a minimum standard.

Throughout his career Mr Clarkson has endeavoured to source conservation quality materials for the book conservation profession and establish standards for paper, board and book cloth. Many materials have been developed in partnership with suppliers, resulting in the highest quality materials being available for use in the profession.

He is one of the most accomplished and trusted conservators of medieval manuscripts in the world, combining superlative craftsmanship, innovative development of techniques and painstaking documentation. His seminal study of medieval limp vellum bindings is recognised as the classic text in the field.

In 1987 he established a book conservation training course at West Dean College, Chichester, where his non-traditional teaching methods helped students develop a sense of curiosity and imaginative problem solving. He now lectures and leads practical workshops in the UK and abroad, sharing his knowledge and

remaining dedicated to the education and training of young conservators. He has published 26 major articles on book conservation for members of the profession.

Clarkson returned to Oxford in 1998, setting up in private practice and continuing to work on the conservation of manuscripts and early printed books. He has recently reported on the early 5th century Ms. Syriac 30 and on the newly discovered fragments from the Codex Sinaiticus, both at the Monastery of Saint Catherine, Sinai.

He is a conservation consultant to the Bodleian Library, The Wordsworth Trust and to Hereford Cathedral Library. At Hereford he advises on the preservation and display of the Chained Library and 'Mappa Mundi'. His technical examinations of the map have presented new evidence of its making and meaning and prompted some re-evaluation of long held scholarly assumptions.

Comments Ann Rossiter, President of the Royal Warrant Holders Association, "Christopher Clarkson's major contribution to book and manuscript conservation makes him a truly worthy recipient of the Plowden Medal. His pioneering and inventive work in the field and his dedication to education have helped secure important and irreplaceable works for future generations to study and enjoy."

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