A Well Travelled Camera Case.
MHS Inventory No. 21126

Fig. 1 Object on receipt: view of the front.

Fig. 2 Object on receipt: view of the back.

This particular camera and kit belonged to T.E. Lawrence and was used while on his archaeological excavations. The camera was made by J.H Dallmeyer c. 1910 and is of a shallow box-form, front focusing, mahogany quarter plate hand held camera, with a rise and swing front lens panel. The bellows and front lens plate contract neatly into the main body of the camera; and, when the lens has been removed, the bellows extension and the focus runner fold up to close the camera neatly away. The metal plates, screws and fixtures and fittings are made from lacquered brass, and there is a leather strap on the left side of the camera. Surmounting the camera is a spirit level and at the front left hand corner of the bellows extension/focus plate, there a small folding viewfinder. The camera could also be attached to a tripod base. Alongside the camera there are a number of lenses in their small Morocco leather covered cases, a dark cloth and six dark plates; all of which are kept in the leather carrying case. This case is divided into two compartments, lined with green velvet and has brass lock and hinges. When the lid is opened, Lawrence's address can be seen, inked onto the front of the leather.

Fig. 3 Showing the inked inscription.

The camera, lenses and dark plates are all in pretty good condition, however, it appears that the leather case has served its purpose well and has taken the brunt of the damage. The exterior is very worn, scuffed and abraded from use, and much of the stitching has failed particularly at the corners and along the carrying handle (Fig. 4). There are a variety of marks on the surface of the leather including watermarks, spots of white paint and remnants of adhesive labels. The majority of the damage is along the hinged lid area along

the top back edge of the case where the leather has split to approximately half the length of the hinge, and subsequently the interior textile. This lining is worn and has been considerably faded through light damage, particularly on inside of the lid. Sections of textile have become detached from the substrate and it has been torn along the length of the hinge (Figs. 5 and 6).

Fig. 4 Showing stitch failure along the seams.

Fig. 5 Showing split in textile lining.

Fig. 6 Showing split in the leather along the hinge.

The one remaining, textile covered dividing board (forming the compartments inside the case) has come adrift from it's attachment to the back of the case. This is due to a combination of stitch failing and the textile fibres tearing (Fig. 7). There may have been two further covered compartmentalising boards, but these have been removed at some point throughout its use. Evidence to support this are holes in the leather, with some thread fibres remaining in the holes. There is a lot of lint and particulate dirt attached to the nap of the textile, especially to the base.

The front proper left corner of the lid is damaged and dermis fibres are being lost (Fig. 8). The metal stud feel are a little corroded, particularly around the circumference of the base of the stud (that which is in contact with the leather) and the brass fittings are somewhat tarnished.

Fig. 7 Showing loose debris inside the case and damage to the dividing board.

Fig. 8 Showing damage to the leather on the lid.

To begin with the interior of the case was vacuumed using a museum vacuum with miniature attachments and the hard to reach corners with a microvacuum pump. Areas of lifting textile were then re-adhered back into position using wheat starch paste, and for the larger, curled up areas of textile; gentle humidification was undertaken to make this process much easier. This localised humidification was achieved using small pieces of Gore-Tex™. The Gore-Tex™ was wetted thoroughly with de-ionised water, excess moisture squeezed out and the permeable membrane dried off with absorbent tissue. This was then placed over the area to be humidified, membrane side to the textile, and then covered with Clingfilm to prevent the Gore-Tex™ from drying out too quickly. This was left for an initial period of half an hour before checking on the flexibility of the textile. This period of time was found to be sufficient, so the Gore-Tex™ was removed and the textile adhered into place using wheat starch paste. Bags of lead shot were used to weigh down these areas until the glue had dried.

Due to the damage around the stitch holes on the leather handle, it was decided to adhere the two pieces of leather together using wheat starch paste instead of passing new stitch threads through the existing holes, as this could possibly cause more damage to the already vulnerable leather. This area was then held together using silicon release paper and strained paper clips, until the adhesive had cured.

Attention was then given to other areas where the stitching had failed. Although these areas are quite numerous it was decided to only re-stitch the two areas where further damage could be prevented. These areas were as follows:
The section of stitching that had failed, on the upper right corner of the back of the case (viewing the case from the back) was secured using "J. Wenzel linen thread for leatherwork" in natural, in the upper four holes (Fig. 9). And the compartmentalising board was secured into position using Gutermann 100% cotton thread colour 9623. A small number of securing stitches were applied at the top corner of the board (Fig.10).

Fig. 9 Showing new stitches to the top section of the seam.

Fig. 10 Showing the re-attached dividing board.

After these repairs had been carried out satisfactorily, attention was then given to the long split along the hinge to the lid. It was decided to implement this repair using a Japanese Mulberry tissue. First the interlining board in the lid, which is lifting along this tear in the hinge, was adhered back into place using High Tack Fish glue, a cold set adhesive. Small bags of lead shot were used to weigh the areas being adhered down until the adhesive had thoroughly dried. A length of Urushi Koshi 5.7g tissue was then inserted behind the lifting textile lining and the inner side of the leather or board interlining, and adhered into place using the wheat starch paste. Sections were weighted with a small bag of lead shot until the wheat starch paste had dried (Figs. 11 -13).

Fig. 11 Bags of lead shot used as weights during adhesion.

Fig. 12 Tissue repair to split in leather prior to pigmentation.

Fig. 13 Tissue repair to the split inserted behind the textile.

This initial tissue paper repair was further strengthened along the last 5½cm of the split by inserting another section of tissue with wheat starch paste. When dry, the tissue was pigmented to match the leather using Winsor &Newton designer gouache pigments in yellow ochre, raw sienna, burnt sienna, burnt umber and lamp black (Figs. 14 and 15).

Fig. 14 Tissue repair pigmented to tone down to blend in with the leather.

Fig. 15 Tissue repair pigmented to tone down to blend in with the leather.

Finally, the fragmentary corner of the lid was adhered down using wheat starch paste and clamped into place using a small piece of silicon release paper and a strained paper clip (Figs.16 and 17).

Fig. 16 Method of clamping the damaged leather on the lid during adhesion.

Fig. 17 Area after strained paperclips and silicon release paper had been removed.