

Book Reviews

WILLIAM BUTTS

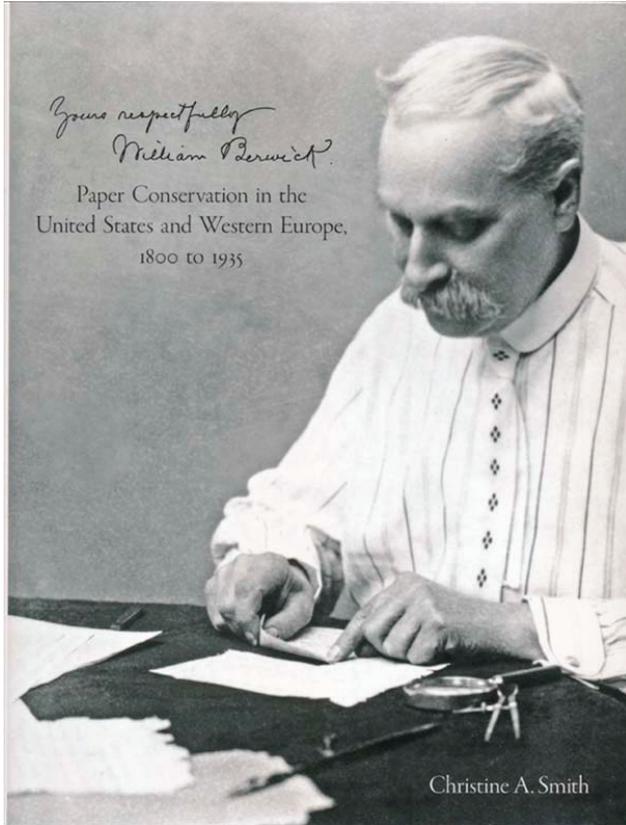
SMITH, Christine A. *Yours Respectfully, William Berwick: Paper Conservation in the United States and Western Europe, 1800 to 1935*. Ann Arbor: The Legacy Press, 2016. 4to. Hardbound, dust jacket. 664pp. Illustrations. **\$90.00.**

RENDELL, Kenneth W., and HEYWOOD, Samantha. *The Power of Anti-Semitism: The March to the Holocaust 1919-1939 – An exhibition by The Museum of World War II Boston*. Boston: The Museum of World War II, 2016. Small 4to. Softbound. 79pp. Illustrations. **\$14.95.**

KAGAN, Neil, and HYSLOP, Stephen G. *The Secret History of World War II: Spies, Codes & Covert Operations*. Washington, DC: National Geographic, 2016. 4to. Hardbound, dust jacket. 352pp. Illustrations. **\$40.00.**

If you're one of those who give the stink eye to large books, don't let *Yours Respectfully, William Berwick's* lap-crunching five-plus pounds, its three-inch thickness, its quarto size and abundance of technical lingo intimidate you. Like any book, you only read one page at a time.

Christine Smith's new opus puts the onus on many of us, dealers and collectors especially, to become more knowledgeable about the history of document repair and conservation. Most of us dealers have scant interaction with paper conservators – but we also have



extensive experience in handling documents repaired a century or more ago. We know firsthand the sandpapery feel of documents that have been “silked,” of documents so shiny they appear to have been varnished, of documents so puckered and wrinkly you’d swear they’d been laminated, of documents fogged and hazy by overlays gone bad, of tears mended with once-transparent papers now brown and brittle, of other work so poorly aged it’s difficult to tell what procedure was undertaken. Call reading *Yours Respectfully* continuing education, call it due diligence – just don’t call it dull and don’t call it homework, for Smith makes what could be a lackluster topic in another’s hands lively and entertaining.

The fact that she is a seasoned conservator with broad experience shines through these pages and informs her approach to the many technical matters that arise.

How fitting that the father of our country should unite a modern paper conservator with her counterpart of a century previous. When in 1998 Christine Smith was asked to conserve George Washington's famed last will and testament, she recognized in the conservation work of four score ago a master craftsman – London born William Berwick (1848-1920) about whom little was known and whose pioneering contributions to paper conservation and restoration had gone unheralded. After moving to Canada as a young man to find more steady work as a bookbinder, Berwick by 1880 lands in Lansing, Michigan, dipping his toe in paper restoration working on plat maps for the Office of the State Printers, and by the late 1890s moves to Washington, D.C. to work at the Government Printing Office.

Talk about the right person in the right place at the right time: This wannabe document restorer gained employment at the capitol at the very time that the State Department library and the Library of Congress realized their manuscript treasures had lain neglected and abused too long. In 1897 the Library of Congress moved into its grand new building and a new Department of Manuscripts was created in which all those repositories were gathered. On February 28, 1899, Berwick was assigned to supervise all manuscript restoration.

I like Smith's all-inclusive approach to filling in Berwick's early years and training about which so little is known. Berwick himself made the task of piecing together his life story more difficult, since he "exaggerated or dissembled" about his background on occasion – shaving a couple years off his life at one point, changing his job title from "Chief of the Repair Section" to "Restorer of Ancient Documents" to journalists. Smith is able to fill in some of the background of this hazy portrait by, for example, an interesting and lengthy discussion of what the professional literature on

conservation was like during his early years against how it had evolved by his later years. She even charts his wages between 1898 and 1920, computing his yearly earnings based on his official hours, with another column showing “Approximate Equivalent Purchasing Power in 2013 – which, if accurate (and these conversions tend to be dodgy), prove that conservation work was not a highly lucrative field a century ago. So poorly was Berwick paid, in fact, that he took on much outside work to supplement the family income. For the American Philosophical Society of Philadelphia he did a large volume of work. “He worked on the Society’s manuscripts on evenings, weekends, holidays, and vacations,” writes Smith. “He worked on the 4th of July, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year’s Day; and most of his vacations seem to have been given to work as well.”

Berwick was a fastidious craftsman as a conservator, taking every pain in his work and upset with himself when the finished product didn’t live up to his demanding standards. Ever the perfectionist, he once wrote that “Although I have been engaged on this work so long I am convinced that the art of restoring Mss. Is never thoroughly learned, as there is always something turning up requiring different treatment to those previously done, + just when you least expect it you run against a snag. . . .”

Since *Yours Respectfully* is a history of a trade as well as a biography, Berwick’s career creates a jumping off point for Smith to explore the larger paper conservation scene. Berwick “went to Europe twice searching for supplies and information about treatment methods used by other restorers and institutions,” thus Smith covers the first international conference on manuscript conservation and the effects of iron gall ink, held in St. Gallen, Switzerland in 1898. Eighteen delegates from across Europe attended and numerous pressing problems and possible solutions were debated. “Participants recounted the symptoms and progressive autodegradation of iron-gall ink, correctly ascribing the cause to acidity, although they were uncertain whether the acid

originated in the inks themselves or in reagents used to intensify faded passages.” Should conservators be “sandwiching manuscripts between sheets of glass,” as many had been, or single gelatin sheets of this new material celluloid? Should tears be mended using gelatin with formol instead of alum? And what of this controversial notion of “adhering silk gauze over one or both sides by means of corn flour/cornstarch”? Many future research projects were identified and resolutions made. It’s fascinating to observe the genesis of the conservation conference cottage industry, and Smith also addresses the German Archivists Conference (Dresden, 1899), the International Congress of Librarians (Paris, 1900), the International Congress of Archivists and Librarians (Brussels, 1910) and others.

The process of silking was another burning issue among archivists in the late-nineteenth century, and Smith devotes a chapter to “Silking and Its Antecedents” and later to “The Decline of Silking, the Rise of Acetate Lamination.” Varying special papers (even ultra-thin cloths and goldbeater’s skin, “an extremely thin transparent sheet made from the outer membrane surrounding the large intestine of cattle”) with varying coatings (often wax, oil or varnish) were experimented with and debated. Many yellowed or darkened with age, others wrinkled and turned brittle. The Vatican Library took a lead role in these and other conservation issues, developing one of the favored silking techniques. Smith nicely sums up the intricacies of the debate:

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, collection caretakers compared paper and silk facings. The “cardinal objection” to paper was that it obscured writing more than silk. However, besides the significantly lower cost, paper overlays required less manual skill, allowed for notations on the covering layer, and despite observations of mold growing beneath them, were sometimes advocated for shielding objects from the air...

Additional chapters cover emerging issues that include “Experiments with Synthetic Coatings” and “Environmental Concerns.” Passages are admittedly technical in nature occasionally, but the effort is well worth it even for those of us lacking background in chemistry.

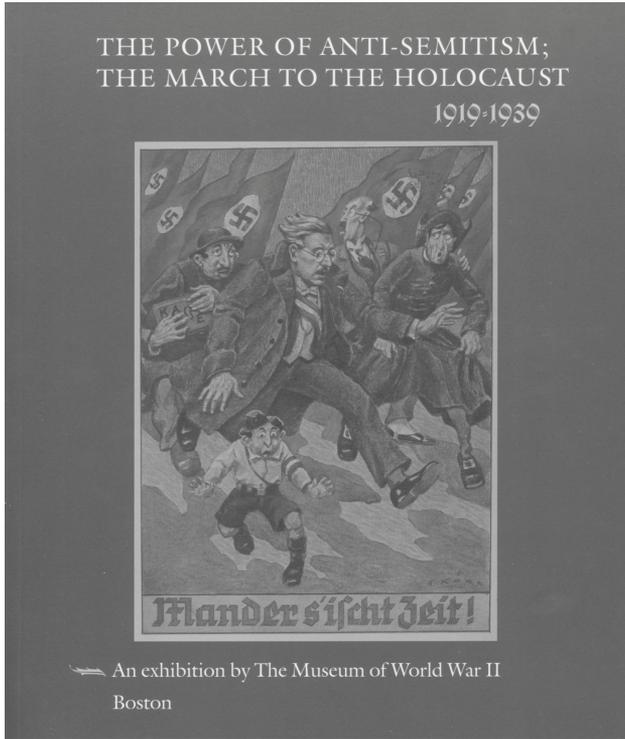
Yours Respectfully’s most intriguing chapter by far is “Working Methods,” which at 150 pages is practically a book unto itself. Smith here enters the trenches and delves into the nitty-gritty, day-to-day procedures that Berwick would have faced – an impressive compendium of information based on Smith’s exhaustive study of his methods and of standard operating procedures of the day. Page after page addresses such topics as “Tools,” “Marking and Collation of Objects,” “Opening Folded Sheets, Disassembling Bound Volumes, Removing Mounts,” “Removing Dust and Dirt,” “Removing Mold Deposits and Stains,” “Removing Foxing Stains,” “Removing Water Stains,” “Removing Wax, Oil, Grease,” “Removing Finger Marks,” “Removing Ink Stains,” “Removing Rust,” “Acidity,” “Fixing Media,” “Water Baths,” “Boiling,” “Humidification,” “Steaming,” “Poultice Washing,” “Bleaching” – all these and others only within the first fifty pages! If you’ve ever wondered what daily life may have been for a turn-of-the-century paper conservator, this is it.

Yours Respectfully is nicely illustrated with both color and black and white images. So thorough is Smith in her approach that fully 300 pages at the close consist of really useful appendices such as “Miscellaneous Interesting Recipes” and the 1924 “Library of Congress Paper Conservation Bibliography.” Her endnotes are thorough beyond compare, her bibliography sizeable and worth studying, her index lengthy and what you would want from a tome of this size. All of these help make *Yours Respectfully*, *William Berwick* indispensable in understanding how our conservation methods have evolved since the nineteenth century – and it’s always gratifying to see the achievements of an unsung hero such as Berwick brought to light. In Christine Smith’s capable hands, she accomplishes both tasks admirably.

Fresh on the heels of the exceptional *World War II: Saving the Reality-- A Collector's Vault* (see my Fall 2009 review) and *Politics, War, and Personality: Fifty Iconic World War II Documents That Changed the World* (see my Summer 2014 review), Kenneth Rendell follows up with *The Power of Anti-Semitism: The March to the Holocaust 1919-1939*, an accompaniment to an exhibit held at the New-York Historical Society from April 12 through July 31 of 2016. This collection of largely paper anti-Semitic printed propaganda expands upon the examples depicted in these earlier books.

Rendell introduces this gathering of roughly fifty mostly-paper artifacts: leaflets, posters, handbills, documents, postcards, books, a few objects. He places Hitler's anti-Semitism into the context of early twentieth-century Germany and the punishing effects of the Versailles Treaty, showing that "His manic and obsessive anti-Semitism was personal, and while using it to bring crowds to a frenzy with his oratorical skills, he was also very clever in introducing it in propaganda very incrementally so that the majority of Germans who were not rapidly anti-Semitic acquiesced and accepted each level." Rendell also introduces each of the catalogue's five chronological sections.

Each object is illustrated in full glorious color, with accompanying expert commentary varying from a single paragraph to more than one full page. Autograph items are fairly few in number, although extraordinary examples both open and close the show: First comes a mundane broadside on tan stock printed with that heavy Gothic script we associate with Nazidom and *Hogan's Heroes* and displaying some illegible scribbles at lower right. But rather than announcing some petty bureaucratic measure this poster heralds the signing of the Versailles Treaty and "was discovered in Hitler's papers from his Munich apartment. His handwritten comments may be his earliest known recorded anti-Semitic statement," which are then translated and close with a chillingly bald "The Jews must therefore leave Germany."



And if that's not attention-grabbing enough, the six pages of Hitler's manuscript notes for a speech given twenty years later is staggeringly effective in showing the evolution of his single-minded obsession. "The speech was not the first time that Hitler or the Nazi leadership had used the word 'Vernichtung' (annihilation) when referring to Jews but its coupling of these plans with the threat of a new world war signaled a change in emphasis. The threat against the Jews was now being expressed within a more violent context.... Hitler's fanatical anti-Semitism was as central to his dystopian vision of the perfect future in 1939 as it had been twenty years earlier."

In between these two bookends are artifacts that chronicle Germany's increasing anti-Semitism, increasingly blatant and

distasteful. Printed broadsides, announcements and tickets soon include, for instance, a picture postcard of a well-known hotel with a sign noting “Jewish visitors prohibited” on a column in the lobby and Reichsmark banknotes overprinted with anti-Semitic slogans and caricatures. Soon there are more offensive caricatures featured on book dust jackets and cast onto objects such as ceramic and metal ashtrays. Perhaps most disturbing of all are children’s books, one of which “described Germans as being tall, blond, handsome, racially pure and therefore healthy. . . . In contrast, [it] portrayed Jews as the opposite; short, dark, with exaggerated and disfigured facial features.” Another featured “brightly illustrated stories. . . . to inculcate its young readers with the falsehoods and stereotypes about Jews that the Nazi regime needed to sustain.”

Thoughtfully compiled, superbly illustrated and attractively presented, *The Power of Anti-Semitism* is a compelling example of how documents and artifacts may help better understand history and shine the harsh light of truth on the past – especially timely in this Trump era.

As if this provocative exhibition catalogue and Rendell’s earlier books weren’t enough, Ken’s unsurpassed World War II collection may also be studied further in Neil Kagan and Stephen G. Hyslop’s *The Secret History of World War II: Spies, Codes & Covert Operations*, for it provides hundreds of this volume’s extensive illustrations. Like many National Geographic publications, the topic is covered thoroughly and in-depth but in a journalistic, enjoyable style. Like all National Geographic publications, the illustrations are—well, beyond extensive, so much so that one wonders whether the illustrations illustrate the text or vice versa. The many full and close-up color images of items provided by Rendell are accompanied by scores of well-chosen period images.

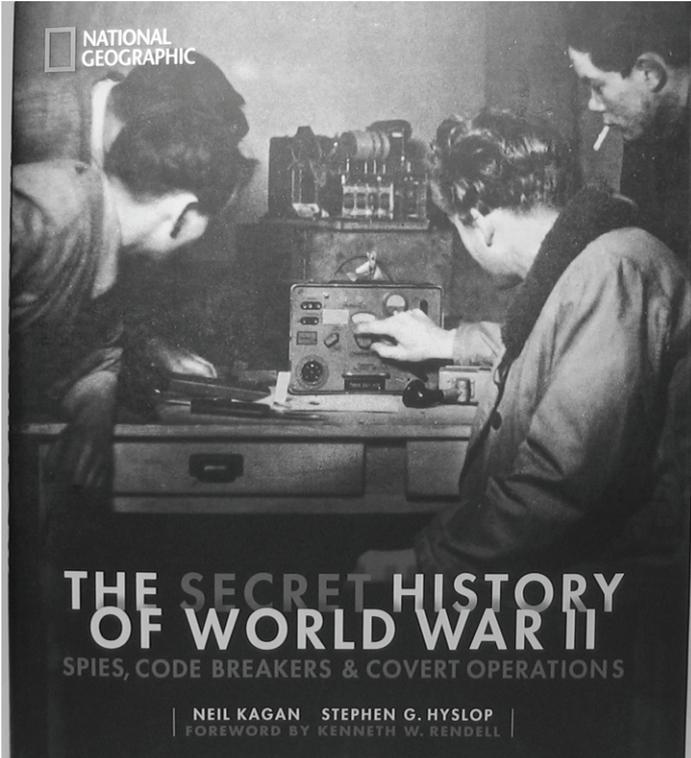
In a foreword as entertaining as it is informative, Rendell notes that:

Uncovering the secret history of World War II has long been an important part of my work as founder and executive director of the Museum of World War II, Boston, which has the world's largest and most comprehensive collection of World War II artifacts, including 7,500 on exhibit and over 500,000 artifacts and documents in its archives.... Many of them appear in this book, which features more than 240 secret weapons, documents, and devices from the museum's collection....

Absolutely fascinating to this dealer is Rendell's account of some of the more imaginative, unorthodox means he employed over the decades in his zeal to build up his collection:

Meeting veterans at reunions led me to acquire many important artifacts for the museum. Those vets hadn't thought of selling their valuable mementos, nor had they thought of donating them. I found that I had to offer something unexpected, something that would make a difference in their lives. A new car could make that difference – over the years, the offer ranged from a Porsche sports car to a Subaru station wagon. One of the most important uniforms in the museum's collection was acquired by paying off the veteran's mortgage. Flea markets in farmers' fields in Britain and France were good early sources for European artifacts and also great challenges. Everything had to be paid for in cash, and I became adept at figuring out how to move and ship impossibly large items in the days before services like FedEx were widely available.

The range of material from Rendell's collection of course varies far more here than in *The Power of Anti-Semitism*, ranging from a baby carriage that conceals sabotage stuff beneath the infant (as well as snapshots of another baby carriage concealing a *rocket*



launcher beneath a sleeping child), a Navajo code talker's portable radio, a hollowed-out firewood log used by Norwegian resistance to smuggle underground newspapers, special blackout light bulbs, and of course the Holy Grail of World War II spy stuff, an Enigma machine. Paper artifacts are predominant, so autograph folk will never feel out of their element: Documents, maps, newspapers, posters, forged Nazi postage stamps, forged English pound notes... the variety of paper is staggering and I merely scratch the surface here.

Ken tells me that "This is the 1st of 3 books being done by National Geographic based on artifacts in the Museum." I for one along with all lovers of autograph material and World War II aficionados look forward eagerly to the next two....