

British Museum Blog July 26, 2012 • 1:50 pm

## The tale of a tapestry



Maggie Wood, Keeper of Social History,  
Warwickshire Museum Service

The Sheldon Tapestry Map of Warwickshire was woven in the 1590s, and was one of a set of four tapestry maps made to hang in Ralph Sheldon's house in south Warwickshire.

It's a rare and wonderful pictorial representation of Elizabethan Warwickshire – a bird's eye view of Shakespeare's landscape.

Before arrival at the British Museum for the exhibition [Shakespeare: staging the world](#), the tapestry has spent over a year undergoing conservation. This work has enabled us to get close to the tapestry, and make exciting discoveries!

Removing the old lining revealed the vibrant original colour – it was very green! Light has faded the yellow colour from the green wool, so that the tapestry front now looks blue instead of green.



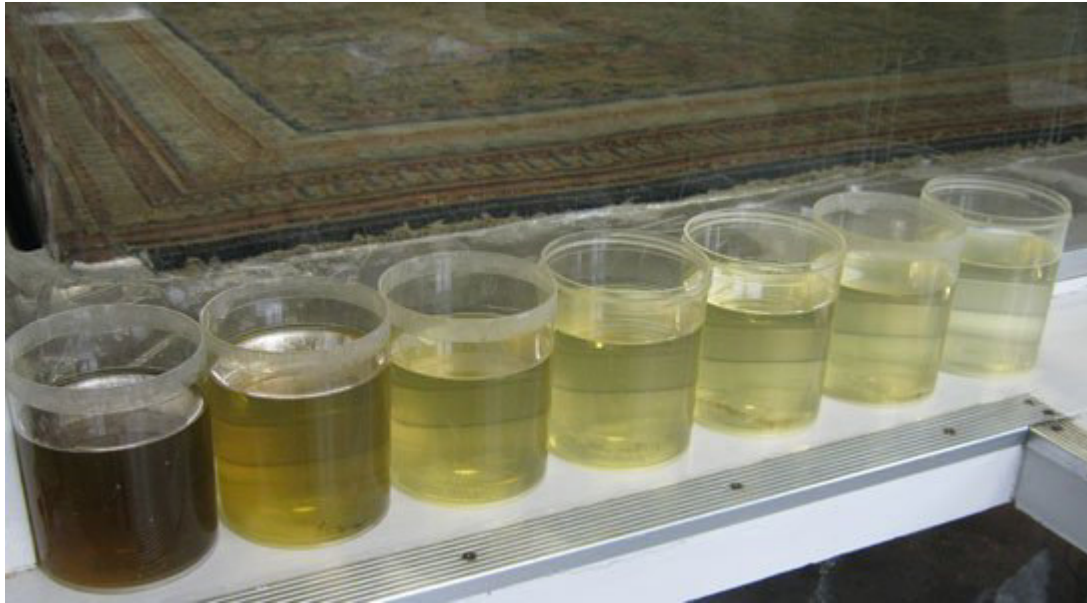
*Original green and yellow on reverse of tapestry, contrasted with faded colour on the front*

The tapestry's border was replaced in the 17th century. Removing the lining revealed fragments of the original Elizabethan border – much more lively and colourful than the later replacement.



*Original tapestry border*

In April 2011, the tapestry went to Belgium to be wet-cleaned. De Wit is a famous tapestry workshop which has developed a safe and fast method of wet-cleaning large textiles. The Sheldon Tapestry was washed, rinsed and dried in one day!



*Water samples taken during the wet-cleaning, with dirtiest on left!*



*Gently sponging the tapestry during wet-cleaning*

Wet-cleaning didn't restore the original bright colour, lost through light damage, but it did make tiny details easier to see.

The Rollright Stones, a Neolithic monument built at a similar time to Stonehenge, appear on the tapestry in the lower right corner. They are very hard to spot!

This is probably the first known visual depiction of this ancient site.



*Rollright Stones – just below the windmill*

We've now noticed that this bear's claws are blue and that there are many tiny cottages hidden in the Forest of Arden.



*Left: Bear with blue claws Right: Cottage in the Forest of Arden*

We have made many new and fascinating discoveries during the last year, which has helped to build our knowledge of this wonderful object and its history.



*Raising the tapestry into place with pulleys*