

“We Have the Books Already” — Why That Is the Case

For the Scan

What the Owen Cipher Wheel's canvas holds that no library on earth does · Walter H. Wilkinson ·
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The books are the only thing on the canvas we *don't* need. Every source work Dr. Owen used is perfectly preserved in libraries and in searchable digital form — nothing on the canvas can teach us a word of Shakespeare we lack. What cannot be found anywhere else is everything Owen **added to** the books. The canvas is not a copy of books: **it is Dr. Owen's manuscript, written in book-fragments** — and it was never published.

Four things that exist only on the canvas

- 1. The arrangement — the gluing sequence.** The physical order of fragments along the ~1,000 feet. Modern computational experiments (2026) show that the *ordering* of Owen's decoded texts cannot be recovered from the printed books — many equally coherent orders exist, and no analysis converges on his. Yet the 1895 eyewitness test (J. B. Millett, *Baconiana*) records that a novice operator reproduced Owen's ordered result. Both facts can be true only if the ordering information resides in the *apparatus itself* — the arrangement of fragments on the canvas. No description of Owen's gluing order survives in any publication. The canvas is the sole record of the system's one missing mechanism.
- 2. The selection.** The books say which *works* Owen drew on; only the canvas records which *passages* he actually cut — his chosen subset of some 2.4 million words.
- 3. The six-colour pencil markup.** Owen's colour-coded markings are the method's actual working record — which colour meant which guide, key, or thread. They have never been transcribed and exist in exactly one place.
- 4. The editions and marginalia.** Which physical printings he cut up (with their textual variants), and any notes in his own hand.

The conservation point — stated in the contractor's own terms

Precisely because “we have the books already,” nothing at risk on the canvas is replaceable. The glue is failing (Groenewegen, *Baconiana*, 2017). When a fragment detaches and falls, the world loses no Shakespeare — the books are immortal. What is lost, permanently, is that fragment's *position*: the only class of data the artifact uniquely holds, and the very datum the whole open question turns on. The books cannot restore it; no future technology can restore it; only a scan made before it happens can preserve it. **The arrangement is dying while the books are safe** — which is the exact opposite of a reason not to scan.

And what the scan makes possible

With the canvas order in hand, two pre-registered tests become runnable at once: the *wheel-order hypothesis* (does the physical arrangement encode the published sequence?) and a full modern replication of Millett's 1895 experiment (blind operators, quantitative scoring — protocol enclosed). Every outcome is decisive, and no other object on earth can answer these questions.

Companion documents: the Bespoke Image Scanner design package (non-contact, single careful unwinding, conservation-first); the Millett Replication Protocol; the first-edition reference corpus (29 works). New Gorhambury · gorhambury.org · Research by Walter H. Wilkinson.