Discovering the Whitefriars Collection, a project to conserve, digitize, and make accessible a large collection of stained glass cartoons, is in its second full year at the Juliette K. and Leonard S. Rakow Research Library of The Corning Museum of Glass. The project revolves around the Library’s collection of James Powell & Sons (Whitefriars) stained glass cartoons (or working drawings), which includes 1,800 rolls of an estimated 10,000 to 15,000 works on paper. Our goal is to conserve and digitize a study collection of these cartoons and make them available online for artists, researchers, and stained glass enthusiasts.

The Rakow Library has collaborated with several organizations on this project, including the Museum of London and West Lake Conservators. The Museum of London, who gifted us the Whitefriars cartoons in 2008, has presentation drawings for the company’s stained glass commissions. Alex Werner, Head of History Collections at the Museum of London, helped us select which rolls to conserve and provided us with digitized images of several presentation drawings. On a recent trip to England, Rakow Chief Librarian Jim Galbraith met Werner at the Museum of London to examine their collection and to discuss future steps of the project. The Museum will play a key role in the Whitefriars project website, which will unite their presentation drawings, the Rakow Library’s cartoons, and crowdsourced photos of the stained glass windows, along with supplementary information about the installation sites.

As part of the project, the Library has established a summer internship program for paper and photo conservators. We partnered with West Lake Conservators, located in Skaneateles, NY, to design the internship, and conservators Moya Dumville and Luisa Casella advised the interns on treatment techniques. West Lake also conserved several rolls that needed treatment beyond the processes we are able to provide at the Library. Through the efforts of Dumville, Casella, and our
first four interns, we established a set of procedures for treating the cartoons, which are on a variety of media and can be up to 20 feet long.

Outreach is a key component of the Whitefriars project. We visited a number of institutions that have Whitefriars installations, including St. Thomas in New York City; Calvary Episcopal Church in Summit, New Jersey; Headstone Manor in Harrow, London; and our local Park Church in Elmira, New York. These visits not only provide us with insight into the process of making a Whitefriars window, they also allow us to meet with representatives of the organizations. In a recent visit to New York City’s Temple Emanu-El, Warren Klein, Curator at the Herbert & Eileen Bernard Museum of Judaica, gave project team members a tour of the building and the Whitefriars stained glass windows there. We also had a chance to visit their archives, where we examined the original contracts for the Whitefriars installations. The team hopes to partner with institutions like Temple Emanu-El to digitize primary documents like the contracts and unite them with other digitized collections on our future project website.

Collaboration with our partners was essential to our success throughout the first two years of Discovering the Whitefriars Collection. As the project continues, we look forward to building on these partnerships in order to tell the complete story of Whitefriars stained glass.

To learn more about our project and to see photos and videos of our progress, please visit https://storify.com/corningmuseum/whitefriars2016. You can also find our #WhitefriarsWednesday posts on social media.

Rebecca Hopman is the Outreach Librarian at The Juliette K. and Leonard S. Rakow Research Library of The Corning Museum of Glass.