Early Printed Books (EPB) at Christ Church

Beginning in March of this year, I resumed work on the Christ Church College early collections where Will Hale left off more than 2 years ago. The Early Printed Books Project works in colleges around Oxford, creating descriptive catalogue records on OLIS for books printed before 1851. The Project currently has cataloguers working in Merton, All Souls, and Queen's Colleges. Records we create or edit go beyond the cataloguing standards for modern books in order to provide researchers and students with detailed information about the text as well as the book as an historical object in its own right. This includes transcriptions of any provenance notes in the book together with an authoritative version of the name and dates of previous owners if they can be identified, as well as identification of any imperfections in the text, and a description of the binding of the book. Starting at the beginning of the Wake collection, I’m working my way along the shelves towards the central doors, with a running total of about 230 books done to date. It’s a slow business, but if you’re looking for early printed books at Christ Church, keep checking the system for new additions.

Elizabeth Mathew,
Early Printed Books Project, Oxford.

Early printed books project (EPB) Background & brief history

This is a prestigious, but not as widely advertised project as one might expect. It has been going on for a while and the majority of Oxford College Libraries have taken part in it. As a couple of months ago (due to a generous donation) Christ Church Library could resume cataloguing its rich collections of early printed books, we take the opportunity now to give you a little background information about the project. The details below are provided by the EPB team.

The need for the riches of the College libraries to be more widely known was first stated almost 350 years ago. There have been a number of attempts to rectify this deficiency, but it was not until 1929 that there began the initiative that provided the foundations for the current project. At a meeting of the Oxford Bibliographical Society, it was proposed that a union catalogue of pre-1641 books in Oxford College libraries should be created. This was compiled by means of each relevant catalogue, or a copy thereof, being deposited at the Bodleian and copies of entries for these books were typed onto cards and interfiled. Work continued through the 1930s and there were several reports which stated that the Inter-Collegiate Catalogue (ICC) was almost ready for printing. However, the file remained on cards until the 1950s when the records for British imprints and English books printed abroad were removed for inclusion in Pollard and Redgrave's Short Title Catalogue (STC). In the 1970s the records for the foreign books were converted into machine-readable form. In the following decade some entries in the file were checked against the books themselves, but on the whole the file remained as a copy of early catalogue records, which were often of limited value for identifying the work in hand, being inaccurate or incomplete. A few print-outs of the file were made, but their existence has been largely unknown.

HEADLINES THIS ISSUE

Early printed books (EPB) at Christ Church
EPB Project - Background and brief history
Archbishop Wake's bequest to the Library
News - The Trevor Roper Papers
Library news
Noticeboard
What's on – Exhibitions
Endgame : Charles I and the English Civil War

continued on page 2

The Eikon Basilike, engraving by William Marshall
Early printed books project (EPB)  
Background & brief history

With the advent of the Follett Report and the offer of HEFCE Non-Formula Funding for Special Collections, the University of Oxford put forward the ICC file as a project for funding. A grant was made by HEFCE to fund the project initially for one year, and then for a subsequent 15 months.

The Early Printed Books Project began with a team of six cataloguers who started work in June 1995, and used the original ICC file as a management database and initial finding tool for the project. Funding for the Early Printed Books Project from HEFCE came to an end in September 1997 and for two years the project was solely reliant upon the goodwill of the University and Colleges. In August 1999 the project was awarded funding for three years from the Research Support Libraries Programme (RSLP) specifically to catalogue foreign books printed between 1641 and 1800. This project, entitled Charting the European Printed Heritage 1641-1800, aimed to catalogue a further 19000 post-1641 foreign titles, in 18 Oxford libraries. Additional funding in May 2000 allowed work to begin on cataloguing a further 6800 pre-1641 foreign items unique in Oxford.

The EPB Project aims to catalogue to the highest standards, in order to facilitate accurate identification of specific items. Authority files are used to ensure that names are drawn together, however many variants are apparent on title pages and in colophons. Names are entered not only for the main author of a work, but also for editors, translators, illustrators, engravers, printers and publishers (where these are known). Library of Congress subject headings are included. Places of printing are included both in the form that appears on the title page or in the colophon, as well as in a standardised hierarchical place name, so that items printed in any given location can be drawn together in a single search. Cataloguing is done directly onto OLIS (Oxford Libraries Information System) and the records are therefore immediately available. In addition to this, all the records are exported to COPAC, the online public access catalogue of CURL (the Consortium of University and Research Libraries) and the Hand Press Book Database maintained by CERL (Consortium of European Research Libraries). These records are available both to researchers, and to other cataloguers for downloading.

Christ Church is one of several Oxford college libraries to have contributed to the University of Oxford Early Printed Book Project. Between 1995 and 1998 descriptions of around 4500 Christ Church books printed abroad before 1641 and listed in the Inter-Collegiate Catalogue were added to OLIS. Most of these items were extremely rare, many being the sole copy held in an Oxford college library. They were thus being made known to the wider world for the first time.

Between 1998 and 1999 attention turned to the college’s holdings of early science books, and inter alia most of those once belonging to the library of the former Anatomy School were catalogued. In 1999 work began on the three year RSLP-funded project Charting the European Printed Heritage, in the course of which records for over 6000 books printed abroad between 1641 and 1800 were added. With the completion of that project in October 2002 the emphasis shifted from cataloguing books of particular types to cataloguing integral collections, the former approach (necessitated up to that point by the terms of funding agreements) having resulted in large sections of the Library remaining uncatalogued.

We are now watching with delight (and gratitude to our donor) how the priceless books of the Wake collection are progressively made available on OLIS.

ARCHBISHOP WAKE’S BEQUEST TO THE LIBRARY

By deed of appointment of 17 April 1728, Archbishop William Wake bequeathed to the Dean of Christ Church, and the Regius Professors of Divinity and Hebrew, and to their successors in office, all his books (except where otherwise provided), manuscripts, and his collection of rare Greek and Roman coins.

The books and manuscripts were to be “placed in Christ Church Library for the benefit of the members of the House for ever”. He provided further that a library-keeper should be appointed to care of the bequest. In his will (dated 12 February 1731) Wake left specific instructions that his collection should be conveyed to the college “by land carriage only and not by water, to the end to avoid any damage which might happen [...]”. Wake also left thirty-one volumes in folio and quarto of letters and original papers.

The trustees were urged to be “very cautious whom they admit to use [the documents] for some years to come, considering that many of those papers may respect persons either still living or but lately dead, and many regard the present times and therefore ought not to be perused without good care and circumspection”.

About twenty years after the death of Wake and the establishment of his bequest at Christ Church, Archbishop Thomas Secker asked Dr Edward Bentham, Canon of the first stall in Christ Church (and afterwards, as Regius Professor of Divinity, one of the trustees of Wake’s benefaction) to look through these papers and make a report on their contents.

After six months of carefully studying the collection, Bentham was confirmed in his opinion of the value of the manuscripts for the historian. In his report to the Archbishop, Bentham stated that Wake might possibly have had it “in his view to furnish some future genius with materials for writing his life, so far as his public character was concerned.” Bentham concluded that it is not “improper that other people besides the inhabitants
of Lambeth Palace should have an authentic proof what a severe tax is constantly paid by the archbishopal dignity in impertinences to be endured as well as in real business to be performed".

Page of a manuscript (dated 1718) from the William Wake collection

Sic olim suos discipulos admonuit Salvator
Hominum, D[ominus] Jesus Christus.
Sic spectatissimum virum Fr[anciscum] P[ajar] Papaj,
ad suos rediturum.
Contra Veritatis Evangeliae Hostes
Hortatur, consolatur,
Illique Omnia prospera atque felicia apprecatur

Guillelmus providentiam divina Cantuar[iensis] Archiepiscopus et
Idibus Januari A. D. 1718. Sisto Anglic[o]

Translations

Greek text (Mt 10:28)
And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Latin text
Thus had exhort'd once his disciples the Saviour of mankind, the Lord Jesus Christ. And thus do I exhort and console the illustrious Ferenc Pápi Páriz who is returning to his beloved ones; and I wish him success and good fortune in everything in spite of the enemies of the evangelical truth. William, by God's grace Archbishop of Canterbury. On the Idus of January of 1718, by the English calendar.

Many years have passed since William Wake's rich collection of books and manuscripts have passed into the possession of Christ Church. Apart from the thirty-one volumes of correspondence, the manuscript section also includes several collections of diocesan visitation articles, note-books and extracts from the records of convocation.

Several original documents of Wake's correspondence with foreign prelates have survived in public and private possession abroad, particularly in Switzerland.

Selected Bibliography

Portraits
T. Gibson, oils, 1715–1720, Christ Church; copy, St James's Church, Piccadilly · T. Hill, oils, 1720–1725, National Portrait Gallery · oils, c.1730 National Portrait Gallery · J. Ellis, oils, 1732 · I. Wood, oils, 1736, Lambeth Palace · J. Dassies, silver and copper medal, British Museum · J. Faber junior, mezzotint (after J. Ellis), British Museum · National Portrait Gallery · M. Vandercook, line engraving (after unknown artist), National Portrait Gallery · G. White, mezzotint (after T. Gibson), British Museum.

News from the Archive – The Trevor-Roper Papers

On a rather soggy day in March, an inconspicuous white van drew up at the gates to Christ Church. One distinguished Oxford historian, one archivist, one librarian, and 5 Meadow men rushed to unload the contents and transport them as fast as possible, before the rain did too much damage, into the confines of Blue Boar 4. This understated but purposeful activity, marked the arrival of one of the largest and most important collections of papers to be deposited in the archive; those of Hugh Trevor-Roper, Lord Dacre.

Four hundred and thirty one boxes and files, including business and private correspondence, lecture notes, offprints, financial papers, newspaper articles, research notes, travel books and maps, tapes and videos, photographs, card indices, and one revolver represent the scholarly life of one of the country's foremost historians. We are privileged to have been asked to take the collection which will, in the future, be of interest to researchers in many fields and biographers of many famous people, particularly Oxford scholars of the later 20th century. At the moment, the collection is on deposit courtesy of Lord Dacre’s executors and the Dacre Trust, and access is limited, but cataloguing onto the new software just installed in the archive has already begun and it is hoped that in the future the papers will be more generally available.


Hugh Trevor-Roper, the son of a doctor, was born in Northumberland on 15th January, 1914. Educated at Charterhouse and Christ Church, he became a research Fellow of Merton College in 1937. During the Second World War Trevor-Roper served in the Radio Security Service. Later he worked for the Secret Intelligence Service where he was involved on the project to penetrate the German Secret Service. In 1945 he was sent to Germany to find out if the claims being made by Joseph Stalin that Adolf Hitler was still alive were true. This involved his interviewing all the survivors of Hitler’s staff. This material became the main source for his book, The Last Days of Hitler (1947). He also produced Hitler's Table Talk (1953). In 1957 Trevor-Roper became Professor of Modern History at Oxford University, a post he was to hold for twenty-three years. A supporter of the Conservative Party, in 1959 Trevor-Roper led the campaign to get Harold Macmillan elected as Chancellor of Oxford University. Other books by Trevor-Roper include Historical Essays (1957), Hitler's War Directives (1964), Religion, The Rise of Christian Europe (1965), The Reformation and Social Change (1967), The Philby Affair (1968) and edited The Goebbels Diaries (1978). In 1980 Trevor-Roper became Master of Peterhouse College. He was also Director of Times Newspapers (1974–1988). In retirement he published Renaissance Essays (1985), Catholics, Anglicans and Puritans (1987), From Counter-Reformation to Glorious Revolution (1992).

Library News

Diary of events
14 March
Elizabeth Mathew resumed work on the Early Printed Books project.

8-9 April
Special Interest Weekend 2006. Staff welcomes visitors to the Upper Library and mounts an exhibition. On display are documents from the Library and Archive on King Charles I and the English Civil War.

Coming events
17-24 July
Summer Schools
1 August
OLIS scheduled to go live

Noticeboard

OULS : Briefing on possible changes ahead
There is a strong (and in many ways controversial) wind of change initiated by the management of Oxford University Library Services (OULS). Because it has created quite a stir and the proposals (aptly qualified as ‘sweeping and universal’ and aimed at the very structure of both central and departmental libraries), if put into practice, will ultimately affect us all one way or another, we thought it might be a good idea to briefly inform you about the talks that took place at the second Acting Director’s Forum held on 14 April in the Examination Schools.

Beginning with the Sciences, the proposals under discussion were the amalgamation of the Radcliffe Science and Hooke Libraries and the merger of smaller science libraries, for example the Geography Library, into the Radcliffe Science Library, as well as the envisioned amalgamation of four medical libraries into two.

Moving on to the Humanities, it is envisioned that the Upper and Lower Reading Rooms of the Bodleian Library would continue to be the principal reading rooms for modern printed texts. Duke Humphrey would also remain as a reading room.

The lack of a modern delivery system and the need to handle books 150 yards and up a flight of 65 steps were cited as practical obstacles in the way of maintaining the Radcliffe Camera as an undergraduate Humanities library. Moreover (it was said) the Camera holds fewer than 50,000 books. Under current proposals, the Camera stock would be moved to the new Radcliffe Infirmary site library, which is to be developed in the coming years. The Camera would then be used by the University for ‘scholarly purposes’.

In the area of book storage, the underground stacks beneath the New Bodleian would be decommissioned—works being stored instead in a purpose-built, state-of-the-art book depository in Osney Mead. This would also accept stock currently held in the repository at Nuneham Courtenay, which would also be decommissioned as a library store.

The New Bodleian Library would be redeveloped as a centre of excellence for research in the Humanities, with the focus on Special Collections. These collections would be housed in the New Bodleian above-ground stack and consulted in the current Philosophy and Slavonic and other reading rooms. The New Bodleian might also house the Library Admissions Office, as well as a permanent exhibition space, a digital creation centre, seminar rooms and conference-related facilities.

The Radcliffe Infirmary site would be the location for a Humanities and Area Studies Library larger than had been initially proposed, providing undergraduate and first level (taught) research facilities.

After a period of consultation within the University, the proposals will be voted upon by Congregation.

Cleaning Glass Plate Is No “Negative” Thing
This issue of Christ Church library news focuses largely on the importance of the Wake collection as a central pillar of our special collections, and rightly so. However, if we look past the manuscripts and early printed books, the library contains a surprisingly varied set of holdings.

One area that is little known is the collection of glass plate negatives, the products of early photographic methods. There are essentially two types of glass plate negatives. The “wet collodion negative” was first introduced in the 1850s, and made use of liquid collodion as a binding agent for light sensitive chemicals which were applied to the glass plate by the photographer immediately prior to exposure. This complex preparation procedure led to the development of a second type of negative in the 1880s, namely the “gelatin dry glass plate negative”, which was pre-coated and pre-sensitized on production thus making photography a much easier process. Although this method was largely obsolete by the 1920s, the technique was still used for specialist purposes until the 1970s.

The Christ Church collection contains mainly “gelatin dry” negatives and their subjects are almost exclusively college “assets” (e.g. individual pages of a manuscript, paintings and art). Dating them accurately is almost impossible, but they are certainly 20th century negatives (more than likely from the ‘40s or ’50s), and this would seem consistent with the theory that they were taken for the purpose of creating high quality reproductions in books and other publications. Like any special collection, the glass plate negatives need special attention to prevent deterioration. I am currently engaged in a project to clean and catalogue them, followed by improving their storage conditions using a combination of acid free “four-flap” wrappers and vertical storage units. This endeavour will both extend the lifespan of the negatives and provide easier access to a little known resource. JPA

Library Opening Hours (term time)

Sunday : 11am-11pm
Monday – Thursday : 9am - 12 midnight
Friday : 9am - 10pm
Saturday : 9am - 6pm

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