Antiquarian cataloguing & the Early Printed Books Project

A unique antiquarian library

Christ Church Library has been a member of the Early Printed Books Project since 1995, and cataloguing work has continued on its vast antiquarian collection for much of the last decade. The Library holds at least 37,000 pre-1800 imprints, making it the second largest antiquarian library in Oxford, after the Bodleian. Its holdings are of international importance and are particularly rich in music, theology, classics, travel books, numismatics, early science, medicine and Hebrew studies. “But it is invidious to emphasize subjects, for it would be unwise for anyone seeking scarce material from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries to neglect this library”. *

The EPB project

The Early Printed Books Project was established in 1995 using external funding to provide the University of Oxford with a specialist antiquarian cataloguing resource to enhance access to pre-1800 imprints held in libraries across the whole University. While the Bodleian Library has long been regarded as one of the world’s foremost research libraries, other departmental, faculty, institutional and college libraries of the University contain early printed collections of international importance, and between them hold upwards of 300,000 pre-1800 printed books.

Sarah Wheale, EPB Project Manager
(continued on page 2)

Exhibitions in the Upper Library

Since the beginnings of humankind people have gazed at the heavens. For centuries astronomers concentrated on learning about the motions of heavenly bodies. The Orrery collection contains some priceless volumes related to the history of astronomy.

This is the topic of Looking at the Heavens, this term’s exhibition in the Upper Library. Keep an eye on the posters and introductory leaflets on display in the reading rooms and entrance hall. Opening hours: 9am - 12pm; 2pm - 5pm. We look forward to your visits.

Cristina Neagu

Personal scanning in the Bodleian

From Michaelmas Term 2005, Oxford University readers may use their own personal scanning equipment and digital cameras in designated areas within OULS libraries. This is in response to a number of enquiries from readers in the past months who have requested this facility. Certain restrictions apply. As with photocopying, pre-nineteenth-century material cannot be scanned and scanning is not permitted in reading rooms designated for special collections. There are also be restrictions on the type of equipment permitted. For example, for conservation reasons, flatbed scanners cannot be used, nor can flash photography. For details, please see the information posted in reading rooms or on the OULS web site (under Services and Facilities, Copying services), or ask a member of library staff. The pilot scheme runs initially for six months.

The heavens according to the Copernican system: Celestial map of 1661 by Andreas Cellarius.
Antiquarian cataloguing

Many of these items were not electronically (or in some cases, even manually) available to the wider research community and the Project was created specifically to address this shortfall.

While the team has expanded and contracted over the years to take advantage of various funding strands, the work itself has continued in the same consistent manner throughout. Cataloguing is done directly onto OLIS (Oxford Libraries Information System) and the records are available to all via the internet (http://library.ox.ac.uk).

Each record provides multiple points of access, not just via the author or title. Using the Library of Congress Names Authority file, names are drawn together, however many variants are apparent on title pages or in colophons. Access can be via the main author of a work, editors, translators, illustrators, engravers, printers or publishers (where these are known).

Library of Congress subject headings are included. Places of printing are included in both the form that appears on the title page and as a standardized hierarchical place name, so that items printed in any given location can be drawn together in a single search.

A full physical description is provided, standard citation reference numbers are added and explanatory notes given. Copy specific notes are added which attempt to fully describe the unique journey the item has taken since leaving the press.

Provenance names, previous shelfmarks, manuscript additions, binding descriptions, etc. can give a unique insight into the readership, usage and transmission of texts not available from the bibliographic record alone.

Administratively, the Project is based within the Bodleian Library's Rare Books Section, part of the Department of Special Collections and Western Manuscripts, but our services are contracted out to all the antiquarian libraries in Oxford, regardless of size or affiliation. This, along with adherence to strict international cataloguing rules and continuity of well trained staff, has resulted in the greater harmonization of much of the antiquarian cataloguing work now done across the many independent libraries which make up the University’s library sector. When work got underway in 1995, it was often the case that researchers would need to approach each individual library separately to search locally held card catalogues, handlists and bibliographies to locate items of interest.

Today about 50% of the total non-Bodleian pre-1800 printed holdings, and over 90% of the Bodleian’s pre-1800 holdings can be found easily via OLIS in the comfort of the researcher’s own home (assuming they have access to the internet, of course). Work is continuing to make the remainder available, and each year somewhere in the region of another 5,000-8,000 bibliographic items are added to OLIS by members of the EPB from our various active locations.

Antiquarian cataloguers at Christ Church

In the years between 1996 and 2003, work concentrated largely on pre-1800 foreign imprints as part of several externally funded projects involving many of the college libraries. Today, Christ Church has a team of two cataloguers, Elizabeth Mathew and Dr. Francesca Galligan, who are working their way methodically through the entire contents of the Upper Library, beginning with Archbishop WAKE'S collection.

Items previously not known to be in the library or not listed in the standard bibliographies are regularly coming to light, and the addition of full copy specific information for each volume is beginning to open up new areas for research for scholars. Once the online catalogue is completed is it hoped that it will be more than a simple list of books held by the library, but a scholarly resource that will answer more than the question “Have you got …?”

The early printed collections at Christ Church

Overview of the project 1996-2006

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Note:
Old College plans & drawings return to Archive

After the excitement of the arrival of the papers of Hugh Trevor-Roper, Lord Dacre, last Spring, we weren’t expecting another large acquisition for the archive for some time. But, this is just what has happened. Early in January, the archivist went to the Map Room in the Bodleian at the suggestion of David Sturdy, an old member of Christ Church who is interested in the history of our buildings. A substantial collection of plans and drawings, mainly from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, had been re-discovered in an attempt to find additional space in the Bodleian’s stores.

The Bodleian Library holds much archival material that originally belonged to the colleges, but that has been kept there for many years for all sorts of reasons. Some of Christ Church’s earliest accounts were ‘borrowed’ by Anthony Wood in the seventeenth century, and ended up with others of his papers in the Bodleian, rather than finding their way back to their real home. The medieval deeds relating to the property with which Christ Church was endowed in 1546 were deposited, for safe-keeping, in 1927. More recently, though, in 1952, the Bodleian acquired this miscellaneous collection of plans and designs for architectural alterations to various buildings in Christ Church, including the cathedral, Tom Tower, the Senior Common Room, the kitchen, and the library. How these ended up in the Library, forgotten and neglected until a few months ago, is a bit of a mystery. It seems likely that J.N.L. Myres, who was Bodley’s Librarian and a Student of Christ Church, rescued them from potential destruction by the then Treasurer and the Archivist of the time.

The Bodleian van drew up outside the library, almost unannounced, to deposit the plans back where they belong. They are in a rather tatty condition, and some definitely need some professional conservation. If the archival budget can stretch to it, we hope that the worst can be cleaned, flattened and repaired, and that all of the drawings will soon be stored in new map chests for the use and interest of anyone who would like to study them.

Judith Curthoys

Embosed bindings in the Wake Collection

Two very pretty and unusual bindings have just come to light in the course of cataloguing the Wake collection. They instantly caught my eye, having just read Mirjam M. Foot’s forthcoming book, Bookbinders at Work (London, 2006) which includes a picture of a similar binding (p. 111).

It appears that the intention was for the pattern to be picked out in various colours which were applied by hand, with the gilt background applied later to cover the haphazardness of the hand-worked sections. In the current state the binding usefully reveals the methods used to produce the binding.

The second book (WL.7.7) was printed in Tubingen in 1722. It looks rather like it has been covered in wall-paper, with an embossed floral pattern in white with a gilt background.

Again, this binding has degraded with age, resulting in the loss or discolouration of most of the gilt. Despite this, it is still possible to appreciate the prettiness of the binding.
Bindings like these, using embossed paper, are to be found in relatively small numbers in Oxford college libraries, usually in the bindings of small publications or pamphlets.

Mirjam Foot, in her book, includes the illustration as an example of the embossed paper that could be bought by book-binders in Germany in the 18th century for a little less than half a crown for a book (consisting of a number of sheets). It is possible that these bindings survive in such small numbers in Oxford due to the fact that many owners had their books rebound after purchase, either to suit their own taste, for reasons of permanence, or to match the volumes already in their libraries.

Elizabeth Mathew

Google at Oxford

The Bodleian is the first European library to participate in Google’s initiative to digitally scan books from their collections so that users worldwide can search and read them online. Because of copyright restrictions and intellectual property issues, the agreement between Google and Oxford covers only ‘public domain’ materials (i.e. printed books for which the copyright has expired - principally, books published before 1920), and it will involve the establishment in Oxford, by Google, of a digital scanning and processing unit which, when fully operational, should be capable of producing as many as 10,000 electronic books per week.

The vast collections of unique, or rare research materials in Oxford (manuscripts, archives, maps, and early printed books) are not included within the scope of the agreement with Google. These are within the remit of the Oxford Digital Library initiative, a programme the aim of which is to digitise the University’s more ‘high-value’ library materials. Google will start scanning the Bodleian’s collection of 19th century printed material (around one million items in total). This includes works by Charles Darwin, Edgar Allan Poe and Christina Rossetti. In addition there are numerous books and journals on subjects such as art, history, theology, politics and travel, with some of the more unusual titles including An account of the pirates executed at St Christopher’s, in the West Indies, in 1828 by Enoch Wood (1830), and On the Economy of Machinery and Manufactures by Charles Babbage (1832).

Finding books with Google Book Search

This is as easy as finding websites with ordinary Google search. Just enter the keyword or phrase you are looking for into the Google Book Search box. Click on a book title and you will see the Snippet View which, like a card catalogue, shows information about the book plus a few excerpts (a few sentences of your search term in context). You may also see the Sample Pages View if the publisher or author has given us permission, or the Full Book View if the book is out of copyright. You can then do new searches within the book using “Search within this book,” or click on any of the “Buy this Book” links to go straight to an online bookstore where you can buy it. If the book was scanned from a library, you can also click “Find it in a Library” to find a local library where you can borrow it.

Cristina Neagu

Library news

In view of a smooth migration of the Library’s modern collections from Heritage onto OLIS, we have been joined by Anna Dunton (Cataloguer at the Bodleian Library). She has started upgrading our bibliographic records, a complex and highly skilled process.

Library Opening Hours (term time)

Sunday: 11am-11pm
Monday – Thursday: 9am - 12 midnight
Friday: 9am - 6pm
Saturday: 10.30am - 6pm

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For queries and suggestions regarding the Newsletter, please contact Cristina Neagu (01865 276 265)