Exhibitions in the Upper Library

“Facets of the Upper Library” is a series of exhibitions aiming to introduce some of the treasures in our collections of early printed books and manuscripts. We plan to cover a wide range of subjects, thus reflecting the huge variety of fields, each particularly well-represented here. Last term we started with a topical display on the history of astronomy, *Looking at the Heavens*.

This term, with *Astraea: Elizabeth I & the Imperial Theme*, we shall document two visits paid by Elizabeth I to Christ Church. The Queen was in Oxford for almost a week in 1566 and 1592. She attended lectures and disputations. Genuinely interested in academic life, she met as many fellows and students as she could. In the evenings plays were staged for her in Hall. These proved to be a great success. Her enthusiasm is expressed in the orations which she delivered. Her subjects’ exaltation on the other hand is equally visible. Contemporary accounts and representations of Queen Elizabeth hail her in hyperbolic fashion. She was compared to virtually every female deity of classical and biblical mythology. Ever so often both words and images of her time describe her as a celestial object of worship and from the very beginning of her reign the ‘Virgo-Astraea’ symbol was perhaps the most poignant and appropriate means to encapsulate her carefully constructed public persona. Striking images of a Queen empowered (by virtue of her supremacy over both Church and State) to rule the universe abound in Elizabethan art and literature. We shall follow a few as they surface in some of the books in our early printed collections.

*Christina Neagu*


Knowledge of the problems present in the interior of Christ Church Library was acquired by me haphazardly. I first saw the exterior as a schoolboy trudging from a college in the Turl to Christ Church Hall, where Scholarship examination papers were written, passing on the way this blackened façade. From 1950 Christ Church was my base: the first five postwar years were over, and the work of the Oxford historic Buildings Fund Appeal was awaited. As the junior member of the House Library Committee I attended the meetings which led in the mid-1950s to the redecoration of the Library’s Entrance Hall and Staircase, all in a strong orange; for this we had the presence and advice of our consultant, Mr. J.B. Fowler from Odiham. Between April 1960 and late September 1962 the exterior of the north front and of the east and west ends of the Library were fully repaired and all appeared ready for the redecoration of the remainder of the interior.

I assumed office as Librarian on 1 October 1962. The rest of the ground floor presented no problems, and within a few months the East and West Libraries had been painted an unadventurous white. It was time to recall John Fowler and expose ourselves to his views on the Upper Library.

The plasterer or ‘stucco-man’ was the notable Thomas Roberts of Oxford (d.1771) who, in 1753 was paid £662-11-3d. Roberts did similar work at five other locations in Oxford (St John’s, Queen’s, All Souls, Bodleian Library and Radcliffe Camera) and three local country houses (Kirtlington Park, Rousham and Heythrop).

*Cristina Neagu*

continued on page 2

---

**THIS ISSUE**

Redecoration of the Upper Library in 1964-5

News from the Archive

Sorting out Letters in the “Alice collection”

A Book from John Dee’s Library

Introducing VTLS Virtua

What’s on – Exhibitions

*Astraea* : Queen Elizabeth I at Christ Church

---

According to an anonymous essay on the life of David Gregory (Canon-Treasurer of Christ Church and, from 1765 to 1776, Dean) it was Gregory who oversaw early work in the Library. Mr Fowler carried out a ‘scrape’ in the Upper Library to discover the original colour of the walls. This showed, unhappily, that the colour might have been off-white.

After four long consultations with Mr Fowler, I produced a memo for my colleagues on 3 March 1964 seeking to explain the situation we had reached. I would have found this more difficult had I known that Mr Fowler’s utilizations of ‘scrapes’ would later be criticised (The Georgian issue 2/2005 p.18-19).

Apart from the difficulty that we could not tell exactly what colour Roberts had used in 1752-3, there was the further problem that the passage of time had effected so much change in the appearance of the other main element in the décor, the bookcases of 18th century Norwegian oak, that one could not know what the initial appearance of Roberts’s scheme had been. It was clear that we had to start afresh. We soon concluded that Roberts’s extensive enrichments in white plaster must now be gilded, and that the low ceilings at the east and west ends should be painted in three shades of off-white and that the walls and high central ceiling must be painted in one dominant colour (definitely darker on the walls than on the ceiling).

All (sic) that we had to do would be to find the single dominant colour. To assist the Governing Body in this crucial task, Mr Fowler had three large areas of the room’s north wall, west of the bookcases containing the library donated by Dr John Morris (d.1658) painted in three colours which he thought would be possible to repeat throughout the room: pink, white, and (I think) yellow. As the days passed, two parties grew up, the ‘pinks’ and the ‘whites’. I was convinced that my opponents’ scheme involved too much white and that the shade of pink being advocated would be bold enough. It was at this stage that I had an unforgettable exchange with Mr Fowler: I was commissioned to request him to produce a bolder pink and he replied, with careful stress on one particular word, “Dr Mason, if Christ Church wants a scheme in lingerie pink, it must find another consultant.”

I still study my canvass list with interest. The debate itself, in Michaelmas Term 1964, was distinguished by courtesy and relevance, and a powerful intervention by the future Lord Blake which I like to think was decisive because we pre-arranged it. Pink won the day by a good margin (21-9) and I spent much of the next Christmas Vacation deciding on small points in the gilding.

An enjoyable inaugural party was held in the room in April 1965. The room was found ideal for some musical occasions, and among those I still recall with particular pleasure were the recitals by George Malcolm, and Sir Yehudi Menuhin, and the performance on two pianos by Sir Henry Chadwick and Dr Sydney Watson. Unfortunately in recent years public performances in the room have been forbidden by the City Fire Officer on safety grounds.

Happily the great achievement of Dean Conybeare, his Treasurer David Gregory, and Thomas Roberts in the 1750s, and its careful re-examination and enhancement in the 1960s remain accessible to the members of the House.

J.F.A. Mason, Librarian 1962-1987
Come Summer 2007, when the refurbishment of Blue Boar Quad is scheduled to begin, the archives will have to vacate their home of 40 years in the basement of staircase 4. It sounds easy to move a few books and boxes of papers to a new location but, in reality, it is quite a logistical exercise. There are over 400 linear metres of boxes, manuscripts, photographs, maps, plans, and artefacts, all of different sizes and shapes, and weighing a tremendous amount. Any of the Clerk of Works’ team who have shifted just small portions of the collection will confirm how heavy everything is!

While the refurbishment is underway, and before a new archive repository has been found and fitted out, the material all has to be stored, perhaps for as long as a year. The option which sounds the easiest is to distribute the collection into spare rooms around Christ Church. Except there aren’t any spare rooms; every clean and dry room is occupied by an office or a student or a tutor, and the cellars and attics are just too dirty, too damp, or too dangerous. And every space is just too small.

And so we have had to look at other options; the first, suggested by Lord Salisbury, was to use shipping containers. The marquis rented a container to store furniture from one wing of Hatfield House while re-wiring was taking place. In order to store the archive, we would need at least two 40 foot shipping containers, more if the archive were to be made accessible during the storage period, which would have to placed outside the Library in Peck, or in the ‘orchard’, the grassed area between Peck and Oriel Square. As you can imagine, the shipping containers are less than beautiful, and would be terribly noisy with their integral environmental conditioning system. They are expensive, too. To hire two for a year would cost in excess of £40,000, and then there are all sorts of extra costs like the electricity, the shelving that would be needed, the crane that would have to be hired to bring the containers in… And so the second option, storage offsite, looks the best. In Cheshire, salt mines which have been exhausted are turned into repositories for archives and libraries. Amazingly, the mines offer stable environmental conditions and security to a standard far in excess of what the archive has been used to in Blue Boar (not that that would be difficult!). The store is used by the Bodleian Library and the National Archives which is a credential second to none.

These preparations may seem very premature; after all, work is not scheduled to begin for another 16 months. Yes, but the archive needs to be packaged and prepared for long-term storage, which takes time, and we need to book our space in the storage facility. Researchers need to be forewarned as all the material in the archive will be completely unavailable during the refurbishment programme. And, of course, if there is anything that tutors or the offices in Christ Church will need to use or would prefer to stay on-site, then the archivist will need to know soon, before papers are packed away, and the pre-removal shelf-check completed. The Dacre papers, which are on deposit with us, will be kept at Christ Church, squashed into the little available space in the library’s basement, and so will continue to be available to all those researchers currently using them. The three medieval cartularies will also be kept in the Manuscript Room or in the archivist’s office. But everything else will go to Cheshire.

And just in case everyone thinks that the archivist will be sitting back and taking it easy for a year while the archive is away, nothing could be further from the truth. The cataloguing of the Dacre papers will continue, as will the retrospective re-cataloguing of the whole archive into the electronic package, AdLib. There are also archival collections in the library which need attention, the Treasury’s ‘overflow’ store in Meadows Building to be cleaned and repackaged, and enquiries will still keep coming in. In addition, of course, there will be a new archival repository to be prepared for the collections when they return to Christ Church. The final site for this has still not been settled, but it is hoped that it will somewhere that will maintain the archive for many years to come, in better conditions than they have ever had before.

Judith Curthoys

Sorting out Letters in the “Alice collection”

The library has several collections of papers connected with the Liddell family, who lived in the Deanery from 1855 to 1891 and for whom Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (Lewis Carroll) wrote ‘Alice in Wonderland’. Amongst the most interesting of these collections are the letters of Lady Pleasance Smith, Alice Liddell’s great aunt, to Alice’s mother, Lorina. We have over two hundred letters to Lorina written by Lady Smith over thirty years. These are currently being collated and catalogued in order to make them more accessible to scholars.

Pleasance Smith (née Reeve) was born in Lowestoft in 1773, and lived to be 104. She was intimately connected with many of the most notable figures of her period, initially through her husband, Sir James Smith, who was a founding member of the Linnean Society, and a distinguished botanist and natural historian. Through the Liddells she became acquainted with academics like Benjamin Jowett, and illustrious churchmen like Arthur Stanley, the Dean of Westminster. She made the most of these connections and was a prolific letter writer, and although she never left England, her network spread throughout English high society and the British Empire, and grew larger as she gained celebrity on account of her advanced age.
The letters at Christ Church cover the period from Lorina Reeve’s engagement to Henry George Liddell in 1845 to Lady Smith’s death. Lady Smith’s enthusiasm for letter-writing and for the Liddell family leaps off the page – praises are heaped upon the Liddell children, particularly the eldest boy, ‘dearest Harry’. She has a boundless curiosity in their activities, and offers a delightful and occasionally poignant insight into the experiences of Victorian family life. In one touching note following the death of the Liddell’s infant son, Arthur, she describes herself staring across her breakfast table at the black-bordered envelope on the mantelpiece, fully aware of the dreadful news it must contain and yet reluctant to open it. She was sympathetic to the Liddells’ position in debates over university reform and the rise of Puseyite Anglo-Catholicism, and supported their academic friends whose work she appreciated. As an avid reader of The Times and all the recent periodicals and magazines, Lady Smith could hold a well-informed discourse on Cabinet reshuffles and the progress of the Crimean war as thoroughly as she could agonise about the choice of a new dinner service or the wisdom of a recent society engagement. Her love of letter-writing was such that she persevered despite her failing eyesight, producing sheets with only a handful of heavily scrawled words. The collection provides a fascinating view into the life of an elderly woman at the end of the nineteenth century, with exceptionally broad interests and many things to say.

Lucy Gwynn

Early Printed Books Cataloguing

Case studies

A Book from John Dee's Library

A 1517 edition of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s Historia Regum Britanniae (History of the Kings of Britain) is one of three books in the library of Archbishop William Wake formerly owned by John Dee. Dee (1527-1608/9), primarily a mathematician, is remembered largely for his later associations with alchemy and his purported conversations with angels. But he was a serious scholar in his earlier years, with a voracious appetite for reading and collecting books. He stressed the necessity for a national library to preserve Britain’s heritage after the destruction of monastic libraries, and in the meantime amassed his own collection of books and manuscripts, creating one of the finest libraries of his time.

His copy of Geoffrey’s Historia (Wb.5.12) was printed by Josse Badius in Paris in 1517 under the title Britanniae utriusque regum et principum origo et gesta insignia, and contains two woodcut illustrations. The first, on the title page, depicts a printing shop with its various activities [Figure 1].

The second, a woodcut armorial device, accompanies an address to the reader from the editor, Ivo Cavellatus, who attests to the truth of Geoffrey’s account, saying that there is nothing more true in the world. [Figure 2].

Geoffrey’s text, finished around 1136, describes the origins of the British race from a supposed Trojan ancestor Brutus (a descendant of Aeneas) to the time of Cadwallader, who died in the 7th century AD. The text exerted enormous influence on medieval literature, not least because of its extended treatment of figures such as King Arthur and Merlin, and was popular from the 12th-century onwards. Around 200 manuscripts of the text still survive to this day, testifying to its popularity over the centuries. The book fits Dee’s antiquarian interests well. We know from other books in his library that he collected material on the early history of Britain, seeing it no doubt as a valuable example of ‘ancient’ writing and heritage that was to be carefully preserved. The other two volumes in the Wake collection that were owned by him are also concerned with British history (John Bale’s Scriptorum illustrium Maioris Brytanniae (Wb.4.8, printed 1557-1559), and a collection of works by the famous antiquary, John Leland (Wb.5.13)).

But he seems to have been particularly fond of Geoffrey of Monmouth, as he had at least three manuscripts of the text in addition to this printed edition. One of these manuscripts, Roberts and Watson suggest, is annotated in Dee’s hand “perhaps, indeed, more than any other of his manuscripts”.

The extensive notes in the Wake copy bear witness to Dee's engagement with Geoffrey, showing that he was actively comparing copies and editions: for example [Figure 3] shows the marginal note “Some copyes have here for Lergecia, Leros”.

---

Dee’s ownership of the Historia is verified both by the presence of his distinctive italicised signature on the title page [Figure 1], and the fact that the book is listed in the manuscript catalogue of his books compiled in 1583. While the commonest form of his name, according to Roberts and Watson, was “Joannes Deeus”, the Historia bears the inscription “Joannes Dee Londinensis”.

Dee’s copious marginal notes are at times simple, repeating a word (usually a name) in the text as a means of quick reference. These sorts of notes are often written in his clear italic hand. He also used a more cursive script, and the two can be compared in [Figure 4].

Dee provides aids to his own reading, [Figure 5], as his translation of the Latin date into Arabic numerals illustrates.

So how did the Historia, and the two other Dee books, come to be in Wake’s collection? Roberts and Watson illustrate the loss of books from Dee’s library during his years in Poland after 1583. They suggest that many were stolen, and a number given to or taken by a man named Nicholas Saunder, who made a point of erasing Dee’s name from the books, and replacing it with his own. This suggests rather strongly that they were stolen from Dee.

The John Bale text in Wake’s collection has only the name “Nich: Saunder” in it, though the text is clearly annotated in Dee’s hand. It is probable, then, that all three books were taken by Saunder. After Saunder’s death in 1649, again according to Roberts and Watson, they passed to Henry Pierrepont, Marquess of Dorchester, where they appear in a 1664 catalogue of Dorchester Library books. Wake then acquired them, perhaps after Pierrepont’s death in 1680. Wake presumably acquired Dee’s books for their content rather than their provenance, but it is interesting to note that at least one book by Dee, his A true and faithful relation of what passed for many yeers between Dr John Dee (a mathematician of great fame in Q. Eliz. and King James their reignes) and some spirits (London, 1659; Wh.3.3) also appears in his collection.

All three Dee books have now been catalogued as part of the ongoing Early Printed Books Project, and can be accessed via OLIS. Dee’s copy of Geoffrey’s Historia provides a marvellous testament to a man with magical interests who was keen to preserve books and British heritage, and to the enduring appeal of a text that has continued since the 12th century to enchant readers with its tales of Merlin, magic and early Britain.

Francesca Galligan, Early Printed Books Project
Introducing VTLS Virtua or ... the new “OLIS”

Oxford University Library Service (OULS) is very close to launching a new library management system (LMS). The present library system (OLIS) is based on the GEAC Advance integrated library management system, installed in 1996.

After a complex procurement process, VTLS Inc. was chosen as the supplier. The contract was signed on 1 October 2005. At the moment a team of specialists work hard to implement the new system, customizing it to the specific needs of our unique academic environment.

The new system will maintain high functionality in day-to-day operations (especially in local developments such as the closed stack request capability), but which will also have the ability to integrate closely with the University’s new administrative systems, the Virtual Learning Environment and a broad electronic information environment.

The current Oxford University library management system provides functionality to the online catalogue accessible to readers around the world via the internet. It also provides services such as stack requests, library loans, inter-library loan and access to electronic resources.

Features that are planned for the new system include a new streamlined search interface allowing readers to conduct one search across many library collections, alerting services providing email updates on new resources in your area, and improved access to the status of your interlibrary loans, stack requests and borrowing.

At present specialists work on the migration of data from GEAC to VTLS for configuration over the coming months. Librarians have started testing the online public access catalogue (OPAC). Training for library staff will take place during June to August 2006. The “Go Live” date for the new system is August 2006.

The VTLS implementation team is keen to involve readers and staff in the design of the new interface. At this stage we can really help improving functionality, pinpointing shortcomings and suggesting new features.

To give you some idea of how the system works and which other libraries world-wide use VTLS you could check some of the places on the list below.

**Other VTLS Virtua Libraries**

- Bibliothèque cantonale et universitaire, Fribourg
  http://www.fr.ch/bcuf/
- National Library of Switzerland, Bern
  http://www.snl.admin.ch/
- Göteborg University Library
  http://www.ub.gu.se/
- Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York University
  http://library.nyu.edu/

More information about the new system can be found on the LMS website at http://www.ouls.ox.ac.uk/lms. and on VTLS at http://www.vtls.com. Do let us know what you think and we will make sure to pass on your comments.

*Cristina Neagu*

---

**Extended Library opening hours during Trinity (term time)**

Please note extended opening hours on Friday evening from 3rd week on.

- **1st-2nd week**
  - Sunday : 11am - 11pm
  - Monday – Thursday : 9am - 12 midnight
  - Friday : 9am - 6pm
  - Saturday : 9am - 6pm

- **3rd-8th week**
  - Sunday : 11am -11pm
  - Monday – Thursday : 9am - 12 midnight
  - Friday : 9am - 10pm
  - Saturday : 9am - 6pm

**Contacting us**

Postal address: The Library, Christ Church
OXFORD OX1 1DP
Telephone: 01865 276169

Email library:
library@chch.ox.ac.uk
janet.mcmullin@chch.ox.ac.uk
cristina.neagu@chch.ox.ac.uk
lucy.gwynn@chch.ox.ac.uk

Email archive:
archives@chch.ox.ac.uk
judith.curthoys@chch.ox.ac.uk

**Newsletter**

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