

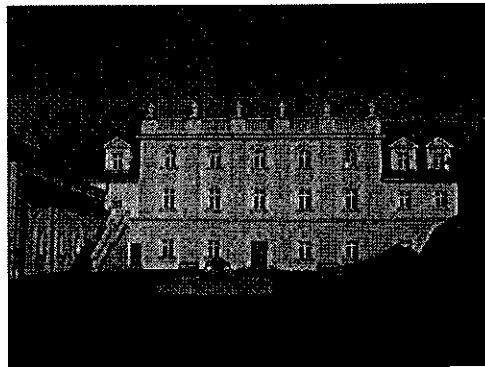
Highlights from Prague

Lesley Utting

Lesley Utting of Ayson Clifford Library, Carey Baptist College, Auckland, New Zealand attended the Golden Jubilee Conference of ABTAPL, the Association of British Theological and Philosophical Libraries. The Conference was held from 6-10 April 2006 at IBTS, the International Baptist Theological Seminary, Prague, Czech Republic. Here is Lesley's report.

The Location

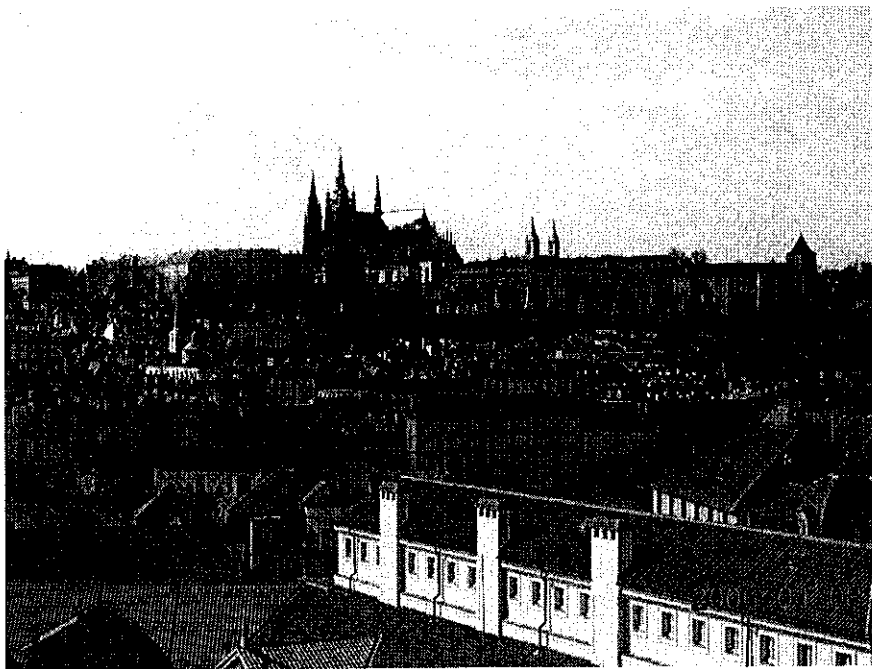
IBTS sits in the village of Jeneralka, about 30 minutes from the centre of Prague. The Jeneralka area is a wonderful setting and location for a Seminary! The IBTS buildings were formerly Jeneralka Castle. During World War II the buildings had been used by the German SS as the SS were based in the area.



The Welcome

We received a warm welcome from our ABTAPL and BETH (Bibliothèques Europeennes de Theologie) colleagues and from Dr Keith Jones, the Rector at IBTS. This set the stage for a great time of networking, exchanging ideas and talking about projects that are underway. Having breakfast, lunch and dinner together is an excellent way to build relationships and make lifelong professional connections.

Lesley Utting works at the Ayson Clifford Library, Carey Baptist College, Auckland, New Zealand.



The People

It was wonderful to meet people from theological libraries throughout the United Kingdom, the USA, Eastern and Western Europe. My husband Ray and I had travelled a long way from New Zealand, but not as far as Victor Kuhleshov who had travelled from Ukraine via train and bus for at least 34 hours. Wherever librarians gather we have much to talk about, comparing notes and exchanging ideas! A talkfest!

The Programme

As an introduction to IBTS we were given a brief snapshot of its history by a staff member. Prior to our visiting the historic city of Prague, Tim Noble from IBTS gave us an address titled "Putting Prague in context: an overview of the city's history and culture". This was a bonus. On Friday evening Wim Francois from the Catholic University in Leuven spoke about The Biblia Sacra project www.bibliasacra.com, Bibles printed in the Netherlands and Belgium. Chris Beldan from Lancaster Theological Seminary spoke about his success with a digitisation project. "The frugal digitiser:

setting up and using a \$500 digitisation workstation". The Golden Jubilee dinner was a highlight as we dined and watched the spotlights lighting up the beautiful city of Prague. The AGM was brief and to the point, which is always popular with the participants.

The Visits

The Czech National Library is housed in the historic Klementinum building which is in the Old Town district of Prague. We were taken on a tour of the beautiful Baroque galleries and were shown some unique items from the Library's collections.

We saw the Nostiz Library. The Nostiz family were a prominent noble dynasty of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Although the collection is not explicitly theological or philosophical in character it is a comparatively rare example of an intact European aristocratic library. The collection is now in the care of the Library of the Czech National Museum. The curator was thrilled to be able to show the collection to a group of librarians and we were equally thrilled to see this private collection, along with the security guard!



The Strahov Monastery was founded in the 12th century and the present buildings date from the 17th - 18th century. We were shown into the theological and philosophical libraries by the librarian. Once again we had a librarian who was delighted to be able to show his treasures and his kingdom to a group of colleagues. The libraries are housed in beautiful Baroque galleries with furniture and furnishings to match. The spectacular Baroque chapel within the monastery complex, was also a sight to feast your eyes upon.

At Charles University we found the Protestant Theological faculty library. Charles University is the oldest university in continental Europe north of the Alps.

The study of theology was prohibited during the Communist era and somehow the theological collections in the university managed to survive intact. The collection therefore reflects acquisitions from the previous era and now more recent acquisitions.

The location, the programme, the visits and the people made this conference a highlight for me. Ray and I had planned a trip to Europe for 2006 and were fortunate that our dates could mesh with those of the conference. Next year's conference for ABTAPL is to be held in Edinburgh. Why don't you think about attending? Put it in your budget for next year! It will be well worth it!

