

Finally there is an ecumenical calendar and lectionary and a listing of the major celebrations of other faiths. The whole work is well-indexed. All this augurs well for an increasingly useful annual.

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THE BODLEIAN LIBRARY OXFORD

Lynn Pryor

Can you imagine a basement covering perhaps three acres, crammed full of books stored in movable stacks? Can you picture a library with millions of items, most of which have been catalogued in large ledgers by author entry only? Sound archaic? Can you conceive of a staff of 35 cataloguers to handle the 97,500 book and pamphlet accessions per year, not to mention the 224,500 periodical accessions? These are just some of the mind-boggling facts I discovered on the occasion of my visit to the Bodleian Library in Oxford.

As a visiting overseas librarian I had enquired about the possibility of seeing more of the library than the average tourist who paid for a guided tour. The result was a personal conducted tour, lasting two hours, in the company of the Assistant Secretary of the Library, Mr W.H. Crenell, who, I was to discover, has been employed at the Bodleian since 1957. What better guide could I have anticipated? On the day appointed this gentleman proceeded to introduce me, at a casual and quiet pace as if nothing else was scheduled for the day, to the fascinating history and the day-to-day operations of the library, which is the hub of this world-famous centre of learning.

The Bodleian Library is one of the oldest libraries in Europe, and in England is second in size only to the British Library. The natural place to

begin the tour and pause for my first history lesson was the old Divinity School. Early in the fourteenth century, with funds provided by Thomas Cobham, Bishop of Worcester, a Congregation House was built with a library room over it, on the north side of the chancel of the University church. It was not until early in the 15th century that the library room was properly furnished, at which time other benefactors helped to increase the collection of books, benefactors who included Henry IV, Prince Henry the future Henry V, and his brothers, Thomas, John and Humfrey, Duke of Gloucester.

From 1435 until 1447, the year of his death, Humfrey, Duke of Gloucester gave to the University a great collection of manuscripts, including many classical texts scarcely known in England at that time. By now the collection had outgrown the old room beside the church. The university was then building a new Divinity School, so it was decided to build over it a library room fit to house these new and splendid benefactions. The manuscripts were moved into this room upon its completion in 1488. The room still survives as one of the glories of the Bodleian Library, and is still known as the Duke Humfrey's Library. Unfortunately the Duke's books were scattered, and only three have found their way back to the Bodleian.

The sixteenth century saw the dispersal of this early library of the University. Between 1530 and 1550 political and religious upheavals would have contributed, yet a more direct cause may have been the poverty of the University. Some of the colleges were better able to purchase printed texts now available, with the result that the college libraries became more efficient while the University library, being inadequately endowed, could not keep up-to-date with the better texts.

For about fifty years the university was without a library, but in 1598 Sir Thomas Bodley, who had abandoned a distinguished academic career for diplomacy, decided to retire from public life and devote himself to the restoration of the old university library. When the refitting of the room was finished, Bodley began the work of restocking the collection, partly by his own gifts, partly by donations of books or money from various sources. Thomas James was appointed the first librarian; the library was formally opened on 8th November 1602.

By 1612 extensions were required, resulting in Arts End, built on to the Duke Humfrey's Library. Then when the Schools Quadrangle was built in 1613-1619, adjacent to the existing building, the top floor was reserved for book storage. In almost four centuries since then, various stages of development have been necessary to cope with the evergrowing collections of manuscripts and printed texts. Huge benefactions of books and manuscripts, as well as purchases, resulted in pressing space problems by the end of the eighteenth century. In 1789 two storeys of the Schools Quadrangle were absorbed by the Library. In 1860 the adjacent Radcliffe Camera was taken over, providing space both for Bodleian book storage, and a new reading room.

The building of the New Bodleian Library was completed in 1939. It contains the bookstacks, administration rooms, and some reading rooms; it is separated from the Old Library by a road and a quadrangle. An extensive basement running under the roadway links old and new. An endless conveyor belt facilitates the movement of materials between stacks and readers. Much of this basement houses hundreds of thousands of books stored in movable stacks.

The Bodleian is a national legal deposit library and therefore accommodates a wide range of materials and readers. Each week the Acquisitions department processes several large boxes of materials deposited under copyright. In the Cataloguing room, some 35 persons are employed to handle the enormous task of processing such a volume of material.

In October 1989 an automated library management system was installed, so cataloguing nowadays is no doubt much more streamlined. It is fascinating to visit the area where readers consult the catalogue: three systems are in operation. The original catalogue consists of a series of large ledgers, in which each item is listed under an Author entry. There are no Subject or Title entries. More recently a card catalogue has been introduced, and now the automated system provides a number of OPAC terminals for reader consultation. Presumably the

automated system will render significant changes providing greater accessibility to information on library holdings.

The task of retrospective cataloguing, in order to have the whole collection on the automated system, seems overwhelming and will probably take many years. It is anticipated that most of the departmental and college libraries, as well as other relevant libraries in Oxford, will eventually participate in the system - already about 35 of these libraries have begun to enter their data into the system - a great asset to the many students who seek ready access to materials daily.

Three rooms visited were especially interesting: (i) the Map Room which houses over 1,013,000 maps; (ii) the room which accommodates the John Johnson Collection of Printed Ephemera. This is a collection of any non-book printed materials, eg. paper or plastic bags with business/organisation advertising, sweet/knick-knack tins with printed designs/pictures, college ties etc. Most fascinating and seemingly impossible to catalogue! And (iii) the Binding Room. The library has its own binding and conservation department, where folders, boxes, etc. are custom designed for individual items.

The library is primarily a reference library and therefore has no borrowing facilities. Material required by undergraduates is on open shelves. However much material is housed in the bookstack and must be ordered from the stack for use in the reading room. Often a reader waits half a day, or even more, to obtain the required materials from the stacks.

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