POSTERS

Automation from Scratch
How to Turn a Room Full of Books into a Monastic Library

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ABSTRACT Fifty thousand volumes and no bibliographic control: Such was the state of affairs in the library of St. Michael's Abbey in southern California when, in 2012, the abbey acquired the sizable personal library of the late historian Henry Chadwick. The abbey community had long desired to improve the organization of its library anyway, so the Chadwick Collection finally supplied the impetus to hire a librarian. Here follows the tale of how that lone arranger is introducing automation and formal policies in an institution that for sixty years has had neither.

THE ABBEY

The Norbertine order, officially called the Order of Canons Regular of Prémontré, is a Roman Catholic religious order founded in 1120 by St. Norbert of Xanten at Prémontré, France. As a species of Augustinian canons, they lead a life that combines the structure of a monastic community with flexibility for active ministry.

St. Michael's Abbey is a rapidly growing Norbertine community in Orange County, California, currently home to over eighty canons, including fifty priests and over thirty seminarians. It was founded

in 1961 by seven priests from Csorna, Hungary who fled Communist persecution in 1950. Today, the canons of St. Michael's operate an on-site high school, administer two nearby parishes, provide chaplains for various ministries, and generally go wherever they are needed.

Each of the thirty-three seminarians currently preparing to become Norbertine priests at St. Michael's will undergo nearly ten years of formation. Most of that time will be spent at the abbey itself, except for four years of theological studies in Toronto and Rome. Seminarian life is filled with liturgy, manual labor, pastoral work, and classes in philosophy, theology, Latin, Gregorian chant, and Norbertine spirituality. While some academic courses for seminarians are held on site, the abbey is not a degree-granting institution.

THE LIBRARY

The library's holdings consist of roughly 50,000 print volumes, including 14,000 which comprise the Henry Chadwick Collection (detailed below). When the abbey hired me in 2016, none of the holdings had ever been cataloged or even inventoried. Items were shelved according to a simple, homegrown scheme, which was loosely based on LCC and inconsistently applied. The Chadwick Collection initially had no order at all. There had never before been an integrated library system (ILS) in use. Circulation operated (and for the moment still operates) on a variation of the honor system: The borrower writes his name and the item's title on a placeholder slip and sticks the slip into the gap on the shelf where the item was.

The library has a user base of about 150, including the Norbertines themselves, and approximately sixty high school boys. In the future, once the holdings are organized, the library will be available to outside researchers as well. The staff consists of one full-time librarian/archivist, plus one or two seminarians who shelve books one afternoon per week. The abbey has an institutional IT staff of less than one FTE.

In 2012, the abbey increased its library holdings by nearly 40% all at once by acquiring the personal library of Sir Henry Chadwick KBE DD FBA (1920-2008), one of the great church historians of our time. Chadwick was a priest of the Church of England, an avid participant in ecumenical dialogues, and a patristics specialist who served as Regius Professor of Divinity at both Oxford and Cambridge. He was also head of a constituent college at each of those universities—the

first such "double head" in over 400 years. With approximately 14,000 print volumes and over 30 linear feet of personal papers, his library is a trove of resources in early church history, general theology, philosophy, classical literature, and more.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goals

1. To help the canons at the abbey live their communal rule more perfectly.
   The Rule of St. Augustine, brief though it be, takes pains to address the orderly administration of the library, for it says: "Books should be requested at a fixed hour each day. Those who demand them outside this hour may not receive them."

2. To organize the library for public use.
   The Chadwick acquisition came with the expectation, from both the Chadwick family and the abbey's benefactors, that the collection would be accessible to the public.

Objectives

1. Deploy an ILS
2. Establish a workflow
3. Reform circulation

OBJECTIVE 1: DEPLOY AN ILS

Product research led me to choose an open-source, vendor-hosted ILS called OPALS (OPen-source Automated Library System). Open source was attractive because of scale and cost: Most proprietary systems, even those intended for "small" libraries, are feature-rich beyond all necessity for the simple needs of St. Michael's, and those features are built into the price whether they are used or not. A vendor-hosted model was preferable to self-hosting mainly because of our limited in-house IT expertise. Moreover, hosting options exist for open-source systems that are often magnitudes cheaper than their proprietary counterparts.

As I investigated the available open-source systems, two alternatives stuck out: Koha hosted by ByWater and OPALS hosted by MediaFlex. Both are well-established systems, with over fifteen years of existence and more than 700 current deployments, and both are

consistently well-reviewed in Marshall Breeding's annual "Perceptions" reports. Koha is in almost every way the more sophisticated of the two, but that means it is also more complex and accordingly more difficult to learn, at least on the back end. OPALS is the picture of simplicity, and the hosting is much cheaper, but it has a somewhat outdated appearance and few options for customization. Both hosting companies have strong reputations for customer support, although ByWater offers more services, such as designing custom functionality. In the end, price and ease of learning weighed more heavily than rich features and aesthetics, giving OPALS the edge. Tables 1 and 2 provide more information about each product and a more detailed pro/con comparison.

TABLE 1 Basic product information for the final two ILS choices.

System	KOHA	OPALS
	• First released in 2000 • Info, demo, & free download at: koha-community.org	• First released in 2001 • Info, demo, & free download at: help.opalsinfo.net
Support Company	**BYWATER**	**MEDIA FLEX**
	• Founded in 2009 • bywatersolutions.com • Leading Koha supporter in U.S.[1] • Serves 745 libraries listed on libraries.org—60% public, 16% academic[2]	• Founded in 1985 • mediaflex.net • Original developer of OPALS • Serves 873 libraries listed on libraries.org—74% school, 4% academic[3]

TABLE 2 Pro/con analysis for the final two ILS choices.

Pro	KOHA VIA bywater	OPALS VIA media flex
	• More features: acquisitions module, infinitely customizable reports, rich features for search and navigation, authority control, API access • More stylish appearance	• Easy to learn and to use: teach yourself or attend webinars by Media Flex staff (no charge) • Lower costs, both to deploy and to maintain
Con	• More complex, requiring extensive training • Higher costs, especially for initial setup and training • Extra features are not high priorities, given our simple needs	• Fewer features: no acquisitions module or authority control, limited reports, fewer search options (e.g. no federated search), no APIs • Visually dated • Inconsistent sorting in shelflist

OBJECTIVE 2: ESTABLISH A WORKFLOW

Step 1: Choose a Cataloging Utility

I considered three options for obtaining catalog copy: OCLC Connexion, SkyRiver, and direct import via Z39.50 protocol. The main considerations driving the choice were cost and the desire to minimize original cataloging. The ideal choice would therefore have been an enormous database at a low price, but naturally some compromise was unavoidable.

A utility offering a large number of records was desirable because of the relative obscurity of Henry Chadwick's books: Most of them predate ISBNs, come from European imprints, and are narrowly specialized; many are also not in English. All these factors give the obvious edge to OCLC, which boasts nearly ten times the record count of SkyRiver. Z39.50 is also at a disadvantage here: Obscure manifestations make for more laborious queries.

The decision practically made itself, then, when the bid from OCLC turned out to be surprisingly affordable. For the abbey's situation, it was clear that the time-saving benefits of OCLC's enormous database (i.e., WorldCat) outweighed the relatively modest cost savings of the other options. This calculus, however, may change in the future because of impending alterations to the pricing structure for OCLC's Cataloging and Metadata Subscription. Within the next three years, the abbey will need to weigh the greatly increased minimum subscription price against the benefits of access to—and visibility in—the WorldCat community. Table 3 summarizes the advantages and disadvantages of each option.

TABLE 3 Pro/con analysis of the three cataloging utility options.

OCLC Connexion	PRO	CON
	• Access to over 415 million WorldCat records[4]	• Reputedly higher cost than alternatives[5]
SkyRiver	• Reputedly cheaper than OCLC[6] • Still a big database: 43 million records[7]	• May require a higher rate of original cataloging[8]
Z39.50 Import	• FREE! • An inborn feature of the ILS	• MARC editor in OPALS is less flexible than alternatives are

Step 2: Set Priorities for Cataloging and Processing

To the extent possible, my priorities are guided by MPLP: More Product, Less Process. This concept, which has fostered much animated discussion in the archival community, may offer a few lessons to librarians. First expounded in a 2005 article by archivists Mark Greene and Dennis Meissner, the thesis behind MPLP is simple: With a view to reducing the backlogs of unprocessed (and thus inaccessible) collections that saddle many archives, archivists ought to consider, and prudently apply, substantially less laborious processing practices. "The goal should be to maximize the accessibility of collection materials to users. ... What is the least we can do to get the job done in a way that is adequate to user needs, now and in the future?"[9]

MPLP principles are useful in the library of St. Michael's Abbey because:

- The entire collection is, in effect, a giant backlog
- With a staff of one, time for book processing and repair is limited
- Circulation rates are low, so there are fewer hazards to minimally protected materials

  Some of my MPLP-inspired library practices:

- In copy cataloging, extraneous data fields are retained in the record, unless retaining them would confuse users (e.g., non-English subject headings)
- Pamphlets are cataloged at an aggregate level instead of individually
- Book reinforcements and repairs are limited and minimally invasive (e.g. reinforcing tape is used only on already damaged items)

MPLP is scalable: It does not mean arbitrarily skipping all the details all the time. I still perform tasks that could conceivably be passed over, such as entering ISBD punctuation, applying label protectors to all (non-rare) volumes, and using dust jacket protectors. Such niceties are intended in part to serve as visible evidence to the Chadwick family and the abbey's benefactors that the abbey will be a professional and responsible steward of Sir Henry's legacy.

Step 3: Devise Shelving Logistics

With no separate storage space for the backlog, cataloged and uncataloged items must occupy the same shelf space within the library for

the duration of the project. The Chadwick books were already in the stacks when I arrived—in no order whatsoever. Except for one wall of shelves in my office, there is no place where uncataloged books can be kept apart. I have therefore needed to develop a workflow that allows cataloged and uncataloged items to coexist in the same shelving ranges without mixing and while minimizing shifting. I considered two approaches.

Option A: The "From the Top" Approach

1. Start in first bay of first range.
   - Uncataloged items are drawn from the beginning of the whole collection.
2. Proceed linearly to end of collection.
   - Cataloged items displace uncataloged items by snaking from one end of the stacks to the other.
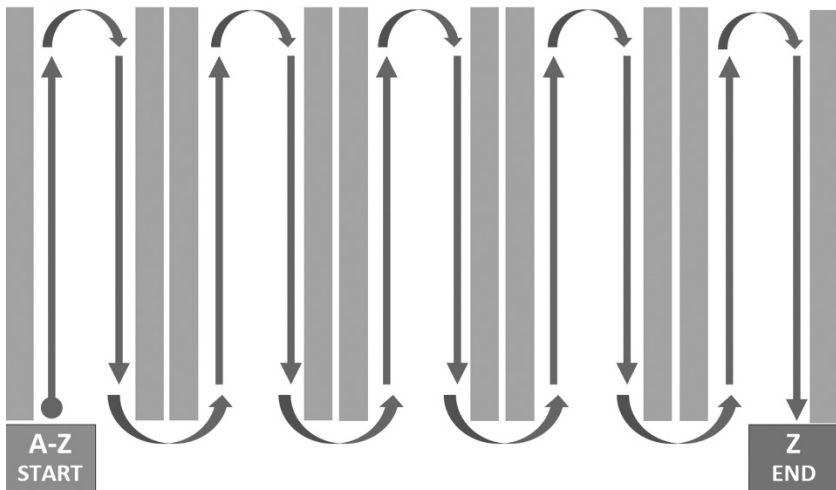

FIGURE 1 The "from the top" approach.

Option B: The Pre-Segmented Approach

1. Assign each shelving range a span of classification numbers.
   - Based on a sample—say, 200 random items.
2. Start in first bay of each range.
   - Uncataloged items from each "first bay" are vacated to the cataloging room.

3. Proceed bay-by-bay down each range.
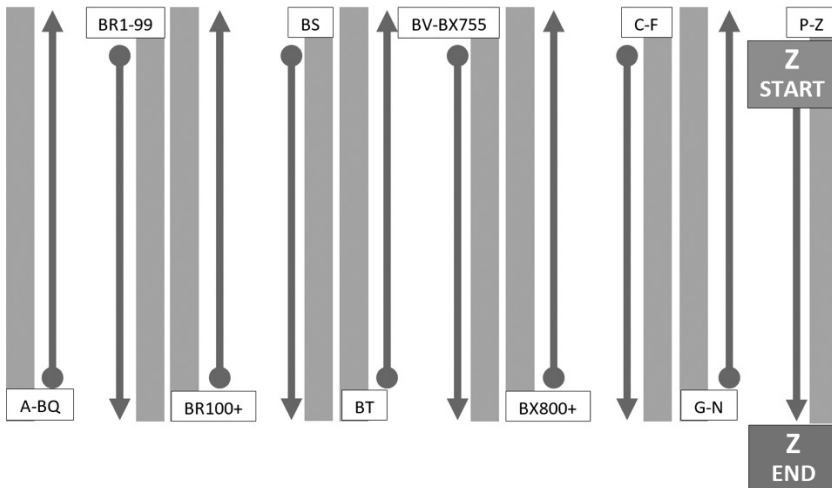   - Empty the next uncataloged bay to the right when space is needed in a given range.

FIGURE 2 The pre-segmented approach.

With option A, the entire collection must shift every time newly cataloged items are shelved; shifting becomes a weekly preoccupation. With option B, shifting occurs within each range as needed; some ranges can go months without a shift. Moreover, no item under option B needs to shift further than the length of one range—give or take, depending on how closely the initial call number segmentation corresponds to the final distribution. Option A, by contrast, requires that items near the end (i.e. class Z) traverse the entire room over the course of the project. I have found that Option B is effective at dividing the task of shifting into small, manageable segments.

OBJECTIVE 3: REFORM CIRCULATION

The canons of St. Michael's have had sixty years to develop superlatively casual and open-ended borrowing habits. Regularizing the circulation process will be necessary as the library's holdings become formally organized, but this need must be balanced against the need to respect the internal life of the community. I see opportunities to honor the existing culture while also safeguarding the integrity of the collection.

First, self-checkout must be the norm, since the library is available to the canons around the clock. A dedicated self-check station will be installed.

Second, lending periods will be generous. The canons are accustomed to borrowing books almost indefinitely, or until someone else wants the item, whichever comes first. While it would be difficult—and not especially desirable—to accommodate this custom within the limits of our ILS, the new policy can achieve something similar by means of lengthy periods for loans and renewals as well as the use of hold requests.

Finally, change will be introduced gradually. Since the Chadwick Collection is off-limits until fully organized, there is time to manage expectations prior to rolling out the circulation system. When the day for rollout arrives, the library will at last be fully capable of assisting the abbey in living up to its motto: to be "prepared for every good work"—with every good book.

ENDNOTES

1 "Library Systems Report 2018," *American Libraries*, May 1, 2018, accessed May 4, 2018, https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2018/05/01/library-systems-report-2018.

2 "Library Automation Companies," Library Technology Guides, accessed April 17, 2018, https://librarytechnology.org/vendors.

3 Ibid.

4 "Inside WorldCat," OCLC, accessed April 9, 2018, https://www.oclc.org/en/worldcat/inside-worldcat.html.

5 Tony Siciliano and Aaron Skog, "OCLC & SkyRiver: Whitepaper for the SWAN Membership" (SWAN Libraries, 2011), 12, accessed April 9, 2018, https://support.swanlibraries.net/system/files/Public/SWAN_Bibliographic_Utilities_Whitepaper.pdf.

6 Siciliano and Skog, "OCLC & SkyRiver," 12.

7 "Features and Benefits," SkyRiver, accessed April 9, 2018, https://theskyriver.com/features-and-benefits.

8 Siciliano and Skog, "OCLC & SkyRiver," 9.

9 Mark A. Greene and Dennis Meissner, "More Product, Less Process: Revamping Traditional Archival Processing," *American Archivist* 68 (2005): 240.