

Introduction

PETER FOX

In November 1995 the Sunday newspaper, the *Observer*, described Cambridge University Library as ‘the nearest thing to Paradise that this world has to offer . . . the most accessible collection of literary treasure on this side of the Atlantic’. The following month a columnist in the *Sunday Telegraph* said that the Library was ‘one of the most wonderful places I know, not for what it looks like but for what it contains . . . Walking around its mile on mile of . . . corridors, you know you are walking around the world mind.’

This book is a celebration of some of the collections that arouse such praise and enthusiasm the world over. It seeks to give a flavour of those collections, not just as artistic, literary or scientific treasures in their own right but as sources for the research and teaching which are central to the University’s purpose. It makes no attempt to survey the collections in anything like a comprehensive way, nor to be a history of the Library – that has already been written, at least for the period up to the end of the nineteenth century.

In selecting topics for inclusion, the editorial committee have attempted to provide an impression of the range of the Library’s collections: in terms of period, from the fifth-century Codex Bezae to the archive of the living writer Stefan Heym, which is still being created; in terms of geographical spread, from the British Isles, through continental Europe to the Middle East and on to Japan, with the Royal Commonwealth Society adding the global perspective of the Empire ‘on which the sun never set’; in terms of subject matter, with history and theology represented in several chapters, but also studies of the worlds of literature, politics, sociology, art history, biology, agriculture, mathematics and astronomy. Aware that a comprehensive survey was impossible, even for those parts of the Library’s holdings selected for inclusion, the editorial committee invited scholars with a deep knowledge of their subjects to adopt an approach which was not simply descriptive but would seek to demonstrate how the material in question serves as the raw material for research.

The illustrations have been carefully selected both to support the text of the chapters and also to provide an indication of a wider range of material in the Library than could be considered in detail.

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It was clear that any book of this scope can do little more than scratch the surface of what is housed on the 160 kilometres or so of shelves in the University Library. The editorial committee have tried to maintain a balance in their selection of chapters but have done so acutely aware that almost every reader, on picking up the book for the first time, will ask why a chapter on... was not included. A different editorial committee might well have selected a very different range of topics, and produced a book which is just as representative as the present one. This dilemma, however, illustrates the wide-ranging nature of the University Library's collections and the reason why it is so central to research in so many fields not just in Cambridge but on a national, indeed international, level.

What is it about the University Library that causes it to have such a powerful positive influence on its users? Obviously, much rests upon the size and range of the collections which, as David McKitterick indicates in his chapter on the history of the Library, have been built up by donation and purchase over a period of over 600 years, augmented in the last 300 by the legal deposit privilege. In terms of size, the collections do not match those of the British Library or the Bodleian in Oxford. What marks out the Cambridge library is the large proportion of material on open access, and thus immediately accessible to users, and the privilege of borrowing, which is extended to a wide range of readers. This lends the University Library a 'user-friendliness' unusual among major national libraries.

The Library's fundamental philosophy is that its collections are there to be used. But that use brings its own problems. Given that its readers are not just those of today but those of decades, even centuries hence, preservation plays a major role in the overall activities of the Library. Preservation activities range from the binding and repair of modern books and journals to the painstaking conservation of medieval manuscripts. In this way, the treasures illustrated in this book are being kept in a condition that ensures that they will be usable for centuries to come [1].

In many ways, though, manuscripts written on vellum, or books printed before about 1850 on rag paper, are remarkably resilient, provided they are kept in suitable storage conditions. It is the preservation of books and journals printed on wood-pulp paper since the middle of the nineteenth century which is causing librarians across the world the greatest concern. This paper is acidic and contains within itself the seeds of its own destruction. Good storage and low exposure to light and heat will slow down the process of decay, but inevitably books, journals, music—anything—printed



on this type of paper are at risk from what is known as the ‘brittle-paper’ syndrome. The quantity of material is so great, and the artefactual value of many of the items relatively low, that the normal preservation process is to microfilm, and thus preserve, the content, whilst accepting that the original might eventually disintegrate. Microfilm is generally disliked by readers, and so more and more now it is combined with digitization, so that the microfilm acts as the preservation medium and the digital image the version made available to users. Though much cheaper than hands-on conservation, this is, nevertheless, an expensive process, and the University Library is collaborating closely with other major research libraries in the British Isles, continental Europe and in north America, to ensure that the most cost-effective methods are used and that duplication of effort is reduced to a minimum.

The rapid growth of electronic publishing is bringing with it exciting new opportunities for access to information and is undoubtedly opening up new avenues for research. For a library which has to plan in terms of decades or centuries, the new media are bringing their own problems. One can put a book onto a shelf and be fairly confident that, in a hundred years’ time, one’s great-grandchild will be able to remove it and read it. Do the same with a CD-ROM and the chances are that your great-grandchildren will probably not even recognize what it is. Even if they do, the chances of their being able to read it are quite remote. Libraries are investing heavily in providing access to electronic information, and in the same way that it is the role of the great research libraries to preserve and share information in traditional printed form long after its original publisher has lost interest in it, so it will be their role in the future to ensure the preservation of, and access to, information originally published in electronic form. The difficulty and cost of achieving this, however, are such that no library can act independently, and Cambridge University Library is working closely with its partners in the Consortium of University Research Libraries and the North American Research Libraries Group to establish standards and procedures to ensure that important work in electronic form is preserved for the use of future generations.

During the 1980s there was much speculation about the death not only of the book, but of libraries. It seems clearer to us now that, for many years to come, the future of information and other library provision will be a hybrid one, with electronic information resources augmenting or replacing print in some subjects and for some purposes. This is likely to be par-

1. Conservation work in the University Library on a manuscript catalogue of the Vatican and other Italian libraries, dating from the mid sixteenth century. A number of leaves had been damaged due to the acidic nature of the iron-gall ink, and the original binding had deteriorated. The manuscript has now been stabilized and rebound; the original binding has been preserved and boxed with the conserved manuscript.

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ticularly so for journals in rapidly developing fields such as many of the sciences, for publications which need to be regularly updated such as reference tools, and for providing means of access and searching which are simply impossible with print. On the other hand, the human mind has not yet developed the capacity to work through a concentrated argument or to read comfortably a lengthy work of literature on a screen.

For many purposes the codex is, and will remain, the most effective information medium. It can also be a very beautiful object in itself, as can be seen from many of the illustrations in this book. The sense of tactile pleasure gained from opening a book, whether it be a brand new one, a well-loved copy, or one that has been sitting on the Library's shelves waiting patiently for its time to come, is something which will never be achieved by turning on a computer.

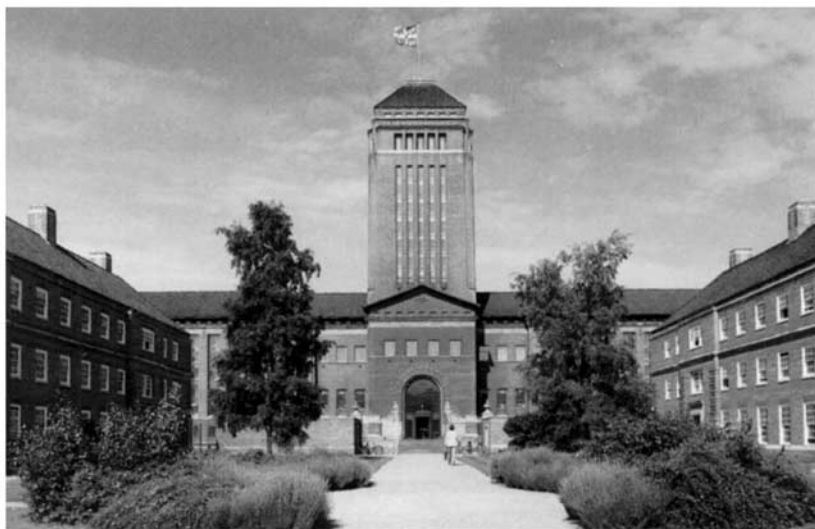
The publication of this book coincides with the opening of a new exhibition centre, in which, for the first time in its 600-year history, the University Library will be able to show to the general public some of its treasures in a way which displays them to their best advantage whilst at the same time providing appropriate environmental conditions.

The editor acknowledges with gratitude the assistance of many people in preparing this book, both inside the Library and outside: the contributors, for the time and effort they have put into writing their chapters, selecting illustrations and dealing with editorial queries; colleagues in the Special Collections Division of the Library, particularly Brian Jenkins and Patrick Zutshi, who have worked through the chapters and organized the photography; staff of the Library's Photographic Department, especially Mark Scudder, the magnificent results of whose work can be seen on almost every page; other Library colleagues who have selected illustrations or made helpful suggestions – Richard Andrewes, Charles Aylmer, Terry Barringer, Jill Butterworth, Roger Fairclough, David Hall, Steve Hills, Craig Jamieson, Alan Jesson, Stephen Lees, Mark Nicholls, Adam Perkins, Nicola Thwaite, Jonathan Topham, Roy Welbourn, John Wells; Sally-Anne Buckle for countless hours of editorial support; members of the Library Syndicate, especially its Chairman, Anthony Edwards, for advice and assistance and for permission to reproduce the illustrations; and finally, our colleagues at Cambridge University Press, especially Andrew Brown.

History of the Library

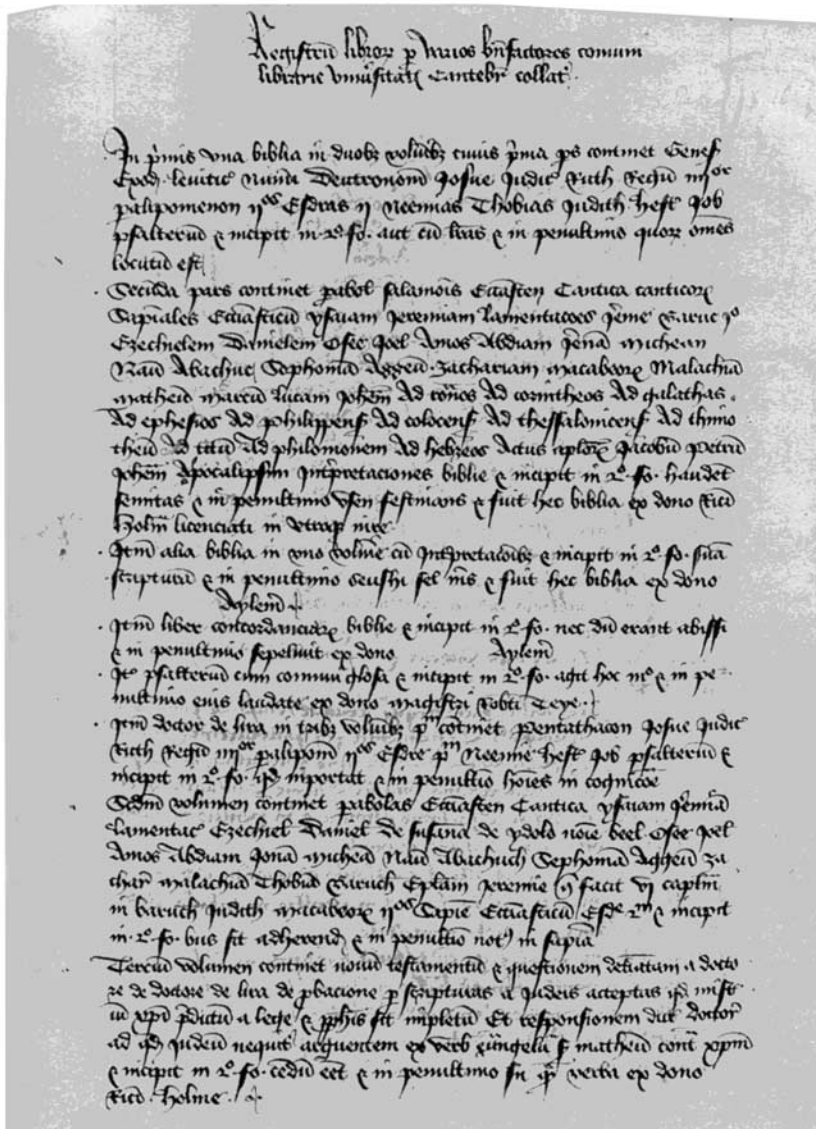
DAVID MCKITTERICK

THERE IS ONE simple lesson to be learned from studying library history. Those administering, and those using, libraries have almost invariably faced a growth of knowledge, reflected in increasing numbers of books, that threatens to engulf each succeeding generation. In 1627, Gabriel Naudé was only one among many librarians and others across Europe in the early seventeenth century who expressed their concern at the multitudes of publications falling from the press. The efforts to order knowledge made then and subsequently, as well as by earlier generations, are the direct fore-runners of our present concerns with how best to exploit computing resources to avoid losing what we already have. In the last hundred years, Cambridge University Library has become known world-wide as one of the most efficient to use, most effectively run, and best-stocked libraries in the world. That reputation has held good for readers of modern books, of rare books, of manuscripts or of other special collections. Some understanding of the history of the collections and their organization, why there are particular strengths and particular weaknesses, helps enormously in using the Library as a reader today.



2. The University Library seen from Memorial Court, Clare College, before building of the new college library began in 1984.

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3. Registrum librorum per varios benefactores communi librerie universitatis Cantebriensis collatorum. The Library's first catalogue, 1424–c. 1440. (University Archives)

All new members of the University of Cambridge quickly learn one fact about its libraries: that they are divided into three kinds. Largest, and most obvious on the skyline, is the University Library, its seventeen-floor tower visible from many miles away [2]. In addition to this, there are faculty and departmental libraries run by the University, mostly identified according to their subjects, varying very greatly in size. Some incorporate important historical or other research collections, and others are much smaller,

servicing the everyday needs of departments with fewer people. Then, to complete the trio, there are the college libraries, again varying profoundly in their character and holding many a surprising treasure for the unwary. Altogether there are over a hundred libraries in the University.

Of all these, the libraries with the longest documented history are those of the colleges. The oldest departmental library, that for botany, was established in 1765; most date from the twentieth century. But of the colleges, Peterhouse is known to have possessed a library within a few years of its foundation in 1284. The library of Trinity College, now the largest of the college libraries, and second only to the University Library in its holdings of manuscripts and early printed books, includes several volumes that belonged to two of the smaller houses from which the college was cast by Henry VIII in 1534: King's Hall and Michaelhouse.

The date of the foundation of the University Library is not known. It is probable that it began, like so many other libraries, almost by accident, when books were deposited as securities against loans. However, it is clear that by the second half of the fourteenth century there were enough books in the possession of the University for it to be reasonable for it to be bequeathed further ones; the Library's first catalogue, begun in 1424 and continued to about 1440, lists 122 volumes [3]. The names of many of the early benefactors are known; but only a handful of their gifts have survived and most of them are noticeably plain to look at. They include, however, a finely decorated copy of Chaucer's translation of Boethius, *De consolatione philosophiae*, given by John Croucher of Gonville Hall [48]. Other volumes have fallen victim to theft, religious intolerance, educational reform and, perhaps most damaging of all in a library, sheer neglect – especially, but by no means exclusively, in the upheavals of the sixteenth century.

By 1473, the date of the Library's second catalogue, the space occupied by the old library (on the site now known as the Old Schools) was inadequate; and, in the figure of Thomas Rotherham, then Chancellor of the University and from 1480 Archbishop of York, the Library found a benefactor of imagination as well as wealth. He not only gave books (no contemporary list survives, but they numbered probably over ninety), but also provided for a new room to be built as the upper room of the east range of the Schools. This new room, to which access seems to have been restricted, was designated the *nova bibliotheca*, so as to distinguish it from the old.

The first printed books to enter the Library were present by the mid-1480s, though the celebrated copy of Cicero, *De officiis*, printed at Mainz in

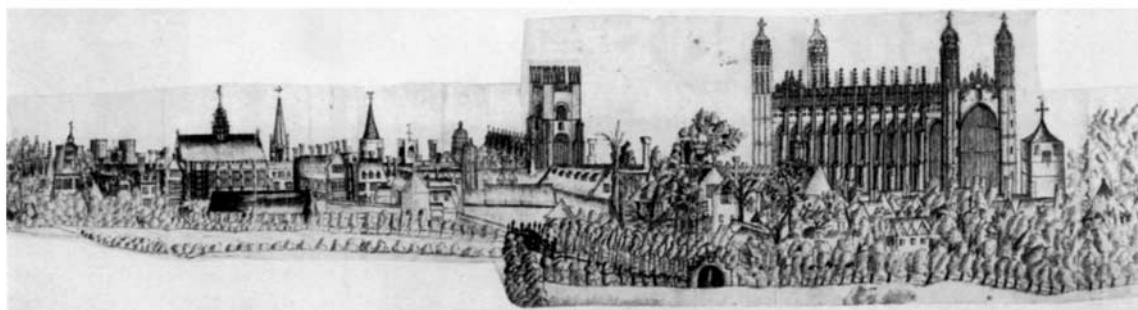
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1466, referred to by Dennis Rhodes on page 65, arrived only in 1715, with the books of John Moore. Rhodes also alludes to the Greek books presented by Cuthbert Tunstall, Bishop of Durham, in 1529, which lent a new air of modernity to the Library as a whole.

Though the political and religious upheavals of the mid-sixteenth century brought much to an end in Cambridge, a surprising amount survived from its libraries [49]. There still remain in their colleges' possession, for example, large portions of the medieval libraries of Gonville Hall (later Gonville and Caius College), Pembroke College and Peterhouse. The danger was neglect, or the more positive decision that, as some books were no longer of value, they could be recycled – either as waste paper or vellum or as materials for the bookbinder. By the 1570s the University was sufficiently settled for a major effort to restore and improve the Library [50]. Under the guidance of Andrew Perne, Master of Peterhouse, five times Vice-Chancellor, and by the time of his death in 1589 owner of easily the largest library in the University – not excluding the colleges or the University Library – a group of donors combined in 1574 to provide many of the core texts of Protestant theology, of history, of the sciences and of ancient literature. These men were Matthew Parker (Archbishop of Canterbury), Robert Horne (Bishop of Winchester), Sir Nicholas Bacon (Lord Keeper) and James Pilkington (Bishop of Durham) [51, 52]. Parker's gift included several Anglo-Saxon manuscripts from his own shelves, which thus did not figure in his bequest to Corpus Christi College a few months later. Eight years after this affirmation of faith in the Library's and the University's secure future, Théodore de Bèze entrusted the University with the fifth-century manuscript of the Gospels and Acts that bears his name (see chapter 2).

In the mid seventeenth century, when the Library was under the care of Abraham Whelock, learned alike in Anglo-Saxon and in oriental studies,

4. The central section of an early seventeenth-century panorama of Cambridge from the Backs. The panorama runs from Castle Hill to Queens' College.



the University Library gained and then lost an entire library. The Lambeth Palace Library was temporarily removed from London to Cambridge, and then back again [53]. During its sojourn in the University, it was meticulously catalogued; but any disappointment that may have been felt at its return on the Restoration of Charles II in 1660 was soon modified by a protracted lawsuit that resulted in the University's receiving the large and diverse library of Richard Holdsworth, Master of Emmanuel College, who had died in 1649 leaving his books to Emmanuel, or else to the University 'provided that it please God within five years to make a resettlement of the Church', and provided the University returned the Lambeth books to their home. He was far from alone in making such provision, for in the same year, 1649, Anne Sadleir, daughter of Sir Edward Coke, had expressed similar hopes in leaving to Trinity College her great thirteenth-century illuminated Apocalypse: 'God in his good time restore her [Cambridge] with her sister Oxford to there [*sic*] pristine happines, the Vulgar People to there former obedience, and God bless and restore Charles the Second'. It is thanks to Holdsworth that the University Library acquired not only its first books printed by Caxton but also, among several English medieval manuscripts, a volume (now MS Gg.4.27) dating from the second quarter of the fifteenth century, in which an early attempt was made to assemble all of Chaucer's major poetry [54].

The so-called Royal Library, gathered by John Moore, member of Clare College, and Bishop successively of Norwich and of Ely, is the subject of a separate chapter by Jayne Ringrose (see pages 78–89). In the eighteenth century, and thanks especially to Conyers Middleton, who in 1721 was appointed to care for Moore's books, increasing emphasis was placed on the care and study of the early printed books. Middleton owed his post more to those who wished to spite Richard Bentley, Master of Trinity (his own college), than to any latent bibliothecarial skills. But in 1735 he published a perceptive study of Caxton and other early English printing. In doing so he was to prove to be at the beginning of a tradition of Librarians among whom Henry Bradshaw, Librarian from 1867 until his death in 1886, has never been surpassed.

In the sixteenth century it was sufficient for the Library to have books in Latin, Greek and Hebrew; there were none in English or other foreign languages until the 1580s, save for some medieval manuscripts. By the nineteenth century, led by missionary and commercial interests (the two could seem indistinguishable), it was assumed that a major library would spread

Dialogue. A huit. Premier cœur.

Ola C
 exploré d

ge fatal: O de mande cruel- le,
 çoy moy en ta Barque. en ta Bar- que.

5. An initial from Orlande de Lassus, *Livre de chansons nouvelles* (Paris, 1571), one of an important set of partbooks of motets and madrigals bought in 1995 from the library of the Comtesse de Chambure.

its interests worldwide. In the first years of the century, manuscripts and printed books from India were given by Claudius Buchanan, a zealous advocate of Christianity there. As the century wore on, the Library took on much of its present shape. Serious efforts were made to buy in order to fill in gaps and extend the collections. In John Lodge, self-effacing but widely esteemed, the University had, between 1828 and 1845, a highly effective Librarian. Later on, the music and maps were at last organized as collections in their own right [5, 55]. The century also witnessed the arrival of a succession of collections of oriental manuscripts, some as gifts and others bought [56–9]. J.L. Burckhardt's Arabic manuscripts from north Africa and