1546–1600

CHAPTER 1

COLLEGE LIBRARIES IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

The history of Trinity College Library from the foundation of the College in 1546 to the installation of the books in the newly finished Wren Library in 1695 falls into two distinct periods dividing in about 1600. Although the development of the Library from 1600 on can be followed in some detail from surviving documents, the first half-century of its history is scarcely documented at all. Nevertheless there is some light in the darkness, for it is possible to make a list of the books that were in the collection in 1600. From this it appears that more than two-thirds of the books that were in the Library then are still in it today, so that the actual books can be examined for evidence of how the collection developed in the early days. Even this evidence, however, is so scanty that it has to be interpreted in the light of what is known about the other college libraries of Oxford and Cambridge; and I begin with a brief account of these libraries in the sixteenth century.[1]

In 1500 there were at Oxford ten colleges with libraries: University College (founded 1249), Merton (1264), Balliol (1293), Exeter (1314), Oriel (1326), Queen's (1340), New College (1379), Lincoln (1427), All Souls (1438), and Magdalen (1458); while at Cambridge there were eleven: Peterhouse (1284), Michaelhouse (1324), Clare (1326), the King's Hall

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[1] This section relies heavily on N. R. Ker's admirable Sandars lectures of 1955, published as 'Oxford college libraries in the sixteenth century', *Bodleian Library record*, vi, 1959, pp. 459–515; see also his Bodleian Library exhibition catalogue, *Oxford college libraries in 1556*, Oxford 1956, and his 'Oxford college libraries before 1500', *The universities in the late middle ages*, ed. Ijsewija, J., and Paquet, J., Leuven 1978, pp. 293–311. There is no comparable survey of the Cambridge college libraries in the sixteenth century, but a good deal of scattered evidence indicates that they were essentially similar to those at Oxford; see inter alia Willis and Clark; the introductions to M. R. James's catalogues of the western manuscripts in the Cambridge college libraries; Streeter, B. H., *The chained library*, London 1931; and McKitterick, D., 'Two sixteenth-century catalogues of St John's College library', *Trans. Camb. Bib. Soc.*, vii, 1978, pp. 135–55. References to the printed inventories of Cambridge college libraries prior to 1500 are given in the notes to pp. 246–58 of Cobban, A. B., *The King's Hall*, Cambridge 1969.

(1337), Pembroke (1347), Gonville Hall (1347), Trinity Hall (1350), Corpus (1352), King's (1441), Queens' (1448), and St Catharine's (1473).[1] Just as the colleges at both universities had generally similar constitutions, so their libraries contained the same sort of books organised in the same sort of way. The heart of the college library was already the reference collection of books chained for the use of the Fellows in the Library apartment, but in 1500 the colleges still loaned library books to the Fellows, the older colleges having special loan collections of books that were distributed at annual meetings called *electiones*, at which each Fellow might choose a book or books for the year.

Very few library books were bought by the colleges, nearly all of them being acquired as a result of gifts or bequests. By 1500 the library apartments were mostly full – their capacity was limited by the type of library furniture in use – so that new books displaced old ones, those that were displaced going to the loan collections along with any new books that were more suitable for loan than for reference. The reference collections then numbered from about 100 to about 500 folio volumes, mostly manuscripts still, but including an increasing minority of printed books. The loan collections were now smaller than the reference collections, but might include as many as 375 volumes (as at Merton in 1500), nearly all of them manuscripts.

Coverage was uneven. Not only had the older colleges had time to build up better libraries than the younger ones, but a college might not happen to be given the books it needed. Nevertheless most of the colleges had good basic reference collections in divinity and law by 1500, and often in philosophy and medicine as well. This really mattered to the Fellows, since the academic books that they needed were not yet available in cheap printed editions that they could afford to own in any numbers, and they were obliged to rely chiefly on their college libraries for access to the central texts of the late medieval curriculum.

The college library apartments of 1500, most of which had been built in the first half of the fifteenth century, were typically first-floor rooms measuring from about 35ft × 15ft to about 60ft × 20ft inside. Windows were set at regular intervals of from 5ft to 7ft 6in in the two long walls, with a two-sided lectern projecting into the room between each pair of windows, and four single-sided lecterns set at the ends of the rows against

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[1] God's House (1439, refounded as Christ's, 1506) is not known to have had a library; and the library of Jesus (1496) was established after 1500.

the end walls.[1] The lecterns had benches fixed between each pair, and each
row occupied one third of the width of the room, the other third being a
central passage. The lecterns had sloping desks on each side, originally
perhaps only one desk but by 1500 either two desks one above the other or
one desk and a flat shelf on each side (figs. 1, 5). The books were laid flat on
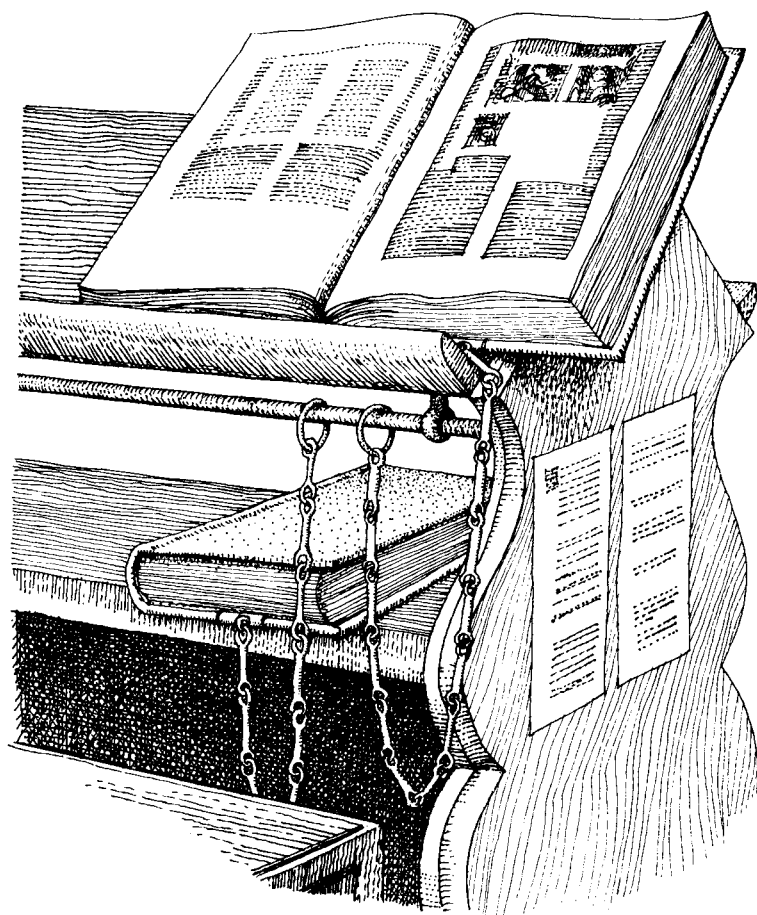
1 A conjectural drawing of a lectern of the sort that is likely to have been taken over
by Trinity from Michaelhouse and the King's Hall, and used in the Old Library
until c.1604. It can be seen why the chains were attached to the tail-edges of the
covers, and why the titles were written on the bottom edges of the books.
Shelf-lists were probably pasted on the lectern ends.

[1] Neil Ker has demonstrated that, contrary to the views of J. W. Clark and B. H. Streeter, no
Oxford college library changed from lecterns to book-cases before 1589 (*Bodleian Library*

the desks or shelves, chained by their bottom (or less commonly their top) edges, and each folio volume occupied a space about one foot wide. The average number of volumes kept on a two-sided, two-decker lectern was therefore four times its length in feet. Since there was the equivalent of one such lectern to each of the windows in the long walls, and the length of each lectern was one third the width of the room, the approximate capacity of the whole apartment can be obtained by multiplying the width of the room in feet by $\frac{4}{3}$ (to get the average number of books per lectern), and then multiplying the result by the total number of windows. Thus a room measuring 35ft × 15ft, with a total of 10 windows, could accommodate about 200 volumes; and a room measuring 60ft × 20ft with 16 windows could take about 425 volumes.[1] In practice the limit for a large college library before the 1590s was about 500 volumes.

No college had yet appointed a Librarian, although the annual *electiones* were administered by Fellows who may also have cared for the reference collections. In any case the libraries were unsupervised, a library key being issued to each Fellow; hence the chains. Several shelf-inventories of college libraries have survived from around 1500, but no alphabetical catalogues. Users of these libraries appear to have made do with shelf-lists posted on the lectern ends, which were sufficient when the collections were such small ones, and were arranged in a traditional order.[2]

The older college libraries of Oxford and Cambridge remained in this general condition for the first three decades of the sixteenth century, there being if anything a reduction of activity as donations fell off, and as the organised distribution of the loan collections was given up in most colleges by about 1520.[3] Then, from the 1530s to the 1550s, the richer Oxford colleges began to buy library books in a conscious effort to catch up with the new learning, replacing their manuscripts with such things as the splendid new editions of the Greek and Latin Fathers from the scholar-printers of Basle. Similar purchases may have been made by the Cambridge colleges, but the evidence is lacking.

record, vi, 1959, pp. 470–2); and I know of no evidence that any Cambridge college library changed to book-cases before the end of the sixteenth century.
[1] It hardly needs to be said that these figures are the merest approximations. On the one hand a lectern desk might not be filled right up, while on the other the average space taken up by a volume might be reduced by piling the books up on a flat shelf; and there might be unsuspected variations in the library furniture.
[2] On classification, see pp. 109, 112 below.
[3] Though Neil Ker shows that *electiones* continued at Lincoln College, Oxford, until the 1590s. At Cambridge the last recorded *electio* appears to be one that took place at Corpus in 1517 (Fletcher, J. M., and McConica, J. K., 'A sixteenth century inventory of the Library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge', *Trans. Camb. Bib. Soc.*, iii, 1959–63, p. 188).

There had always been some turnover of the stock of college libraries, but from the 1530s until about 1560 the pace of change rapidly increased. Its chief agents were, first, the replacement of old, outdated texts by new ones; secondly, wholesale disposal of the books belonging to the loan collections, which were not replaced; thirdly, the purging of library books on doctrinal grounds by the successive visitations of the Reformation and Counter-reformation; and fourthly, the loss of library books as a result of maladministration and neglect. The extent to which individual college libraries were affected by these factors varied enormously, being generally less at Oxford than it was at Cambridge. At Oxford the libraries of Merton, Balliol, Oriel, New College, Lincoln, All Souls, and Magdalen retained substantial numbers of their medieval manuscripts, whereas at Cambridge only Peterhouse, Pembroke, and Gonville and Caius kept many manuscripts, and then in smaller proportions than the Oxford colleges. At the other end of the scale University College and Queen's alone amongst the older Oxford colleges kept none (or very few) of their medieval manuscripts through the sixteenth century, while at Cambridge the libraries of Clare, Michaelhouse and the King's Hall (as Trinity), Trinity Hall, Corpus, King's, Queens', and St Catharine's had few or none of their old manuscripts in 1600.[1]

It appears that two of these Cambridge colleges, moreover, actually lost large numbers of their library books altogether. The Fellows of Clare, dismayed by the proposal of the Visitors of 1549 to unite their College with Trinity Hall, distributed all their worth-while library books amongst themselves. Less dramatically the Library of King's College was reduced by the combined effects of religious purges and of administrative neglect from perhaps 500 books in 1528 to 113 by 1557, and to a negligible rump by the late 1560s.[2] The two university libraries were also despoiled;[3] but in most colleges the old library books were exchanged rather than lost. In any case mid-century losses are unlikely to have undermined the intellectual

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[1] See the sources referred to in p. 3 n. 1 and p. 6 n. 3; and Hunt, R. W., 'Medieval inventories of Clare College Library', *Trans. Camb. Bib. Soc.*, i, 1949–53, pp. 105–25; Cargill Thompson, W. D. J., 'Notes on King's College Library 1500–1570, in particular for the period of the Reformation', *Trans. Camb. Bib. Soc.*, ii, 1954–8, pp. 38–54; and James, T., *Ecloga Oxonio-Cantabrigiensis*, London 1600.

[2] For the distribution at Clare see Mullinger, ii, pp. 134–5; and on King's, Cargill Thompson, W. D. J., loc. cit.

[3] Oxford University Library lost *all* its books, and the library furniture was sold in 1556 (Wormald and Wright, pp. 168–9). At Cambridge the University Library survived the Reformation, but with its 1528 stock of 500–600 volumes reduced to 175 volumes by 1557 (Oates, J. C. T., and Pink, H. L., 'Three sixteenth-century catalogues of the University Library', *Trans. Camb. Bib. Soc.*, i, 1949–53, pp. 310–40).

life of the universities as much as similar losses would have done in 1500, since by this time many dons owned private libraries of academic books that were large enough to supply their prime needs.[1]

Five new college libraries were established in each of the universities during the sixteenth century: at Oxford those of Brasenose (founded 1509), Corpus (1517), Christ Church (1546), Trinity (1555), and St John's (1555); and at Cambridge those of Jesus (1496), Christ's (1506), St John's (1511), Magdalene (1542), and Emmanuel (1584).[2] These new collections, though dominated at first by their foundation gifts, came to resemble the older college libraries, and they were kept in the same sort of library apartments, chained to the same sort of desks.

The period from about 1560 to the mid-1580s saw a general improvement in the college libraries' holdings of Protestant theology, but otherwise there was little progress. Around 1580 a college's collection began typically with various Bibles, probably including a large one in several volumes with Lyra's glosses, and a concordance (few colleges yet owned the Complutensian polyglot). Next in the traditional order came the Greek Fathers – Josephus, Irenaeus, Eusebius, Epiphanius – commonly in the fine Basle editions of Froben and Episcopius; and after them the Latin Fathers, led by Augustine in nine or ten volumes, but also including Tertullian, Hilary, Jerome, and Gregory the Great; again it was the Basle editions that were most often chosen. The rest of the divinity books that were placed after the Fathers were strongest in biblical commentaries – especially the Protestant commentators such as Zwingli, Oecolampadius, Musculus, and Bucer – and in the history of the Church. Medieval theology was for the moment out of favour, and many scholastic texts had been thrown out; but few collections yet included much of Luther or of Calvin, or of the English controversialists. Altogether the divinity books were likely to make up about two-thirds of the whole library.

The classes which followed divinity varied more between the colleges. There would be dictionaries, but few classics, and those few probably in Greek rather than in Latin; they would not have included Virgil or Horace. Aristotle would be there, and probably Plato, both in Greek. Some of the libraries had small medical and scientific sections; and there might, finally, be a considerable section of law books, devoted equally to canon and to Roman civil law.

[1] See Chapter 8.
[2] The library of Trinity, Cambridge (1546), was not a new one; while Jesus, Oxford (1571), and Sidney Sussex, Cambridge (1596), did not have libraries in the sixteenth century.

Nearly all the printed books were folios imported from abroad and – apart from some Fathers, classics, and dictionaries in Greek – nearly all were in Latin. There were no recreational works, and none of the octavo text-books that were used by this time in both universities for teaching the junior courses.
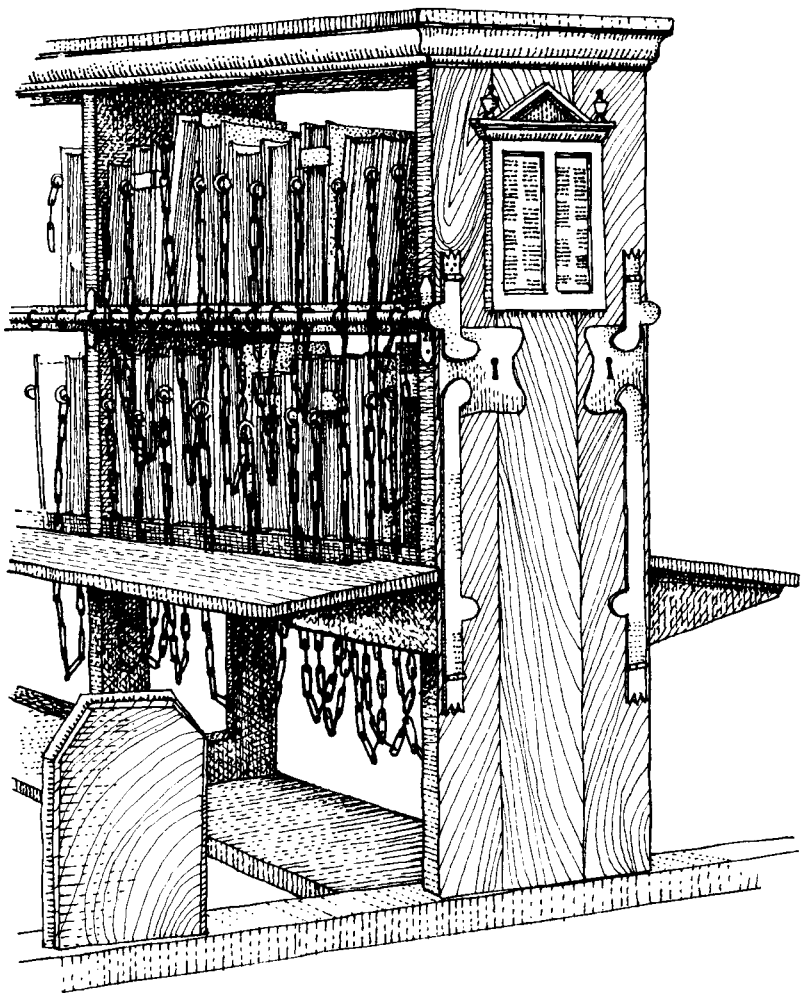
2 A conjectural drawing of a four-shelf book-case with chained books of the sort that was introduced at Oxford at the end of the sixteenth century. The chains were attached to the fore-edges of the covers.

   The next period of change in the college libraries began in the 1580s with a widespread increase in the rate at which the collections grew. This resulted both from more and larger donations of books, and from an increasing reluctance to turn out old but still useful books to make way for new ones. There was also a revival of interest in the works of the medieval Schoolmen and in Catholic theology, but for the most part the existing sections of library books were simply expanded.

   More library books meant that the colleges were obliged either to find more economical ways of keeping them – laying them out on lecterns was grossly extravagant of space – or to enlarge their library apartments, or to do both. Merton led the way in 1589 by replacing half its lecterns with book-cases[1] which had two flat shelves on each side on which the books stood upright, and were chained at their outward-facing fore-edges so that they could be pulled down and read on desks fixed below the shelves on each side of the case (fig. 2). This alteration increased the capacity of the library furniture by a factor of four or five, since the four shelves of such a book-case held 16–20 volumes to the foot, whereas the four desks of the lectern it replaced had accommodated only about 4 books to the foot; while more shelves could be added to the book-cases if they were needed. Most of the college libraries eventually changed over to book-cases in one form or another, Cambridge lagging behind Oxford.

   More books also required more administration. A few colleges appointed Fellow-librarians – the first being the 'custos' of the library of Magdalen, Oxford, appointed in 1550 – but most of them did no more in the sixteenth century than employ a college servant, or occasionally a junior member of the college, to clean the library apartment and to set up the books. Records of benefactions became more detailed, and the inventories used for checking the books were well kept, but there were scarcely any full library catalogues before the end of the century.

[1] The term 'stall' was used by J. W. Clark and B. H. Streeter to distinguish this type of book-case from lecterns. The usage can be misleading, however, since the terms 'stall', 'desk', and 'seat' were all used in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century college libraries both for lecterns and for shelved book-cases.

CHAPTER 2

THE LIBRARIES OF MICHAELHOUSE AND THE KING'S HALL

The ancient colleges of Michaelhouse and the King's Hall each had a library at the time of their amalgamation and refoundation as Trinity College in 1546. All that we know about the Michaelhouse collection is that the College was given three divinity books and two law books by the Founder in 1327;[1] many books by William de Gotham, Master in 1387;[2] works of Augustine and Hugh of St Victor by John Ottringham, Master, by 1454;[3] 200 books by John Yotton, Master in 1492–3;[4] seven books by four donors in the early sixteenth century;[5] and six printed divinity books by William Filey DD, perhaps c.1525, of which three are still in Trinity College Library.[6] At the time of its dissolution, moreover, Michaelhouse commemorated about 150 other benefactors, some of whom, perhaps, had also given books to the College.[7] All this – and especially John Yotton's enormous donation – suggests that Michaelhouse had a large library by the 1520s; and it is likely, in view of the clerical character of the society, that it was a collection chiefly of divinity books.

Where Michaelhouse kept its books, however, we do not know. We have no Michaelhouse buildings records, and the buildings themselves were all pulled down long ago. All that is left are Trinity's sixteenth-century demolition and building accounts, and three perspective views of Cambridge made in the later sixteenth century when about half of the old Michaelhouse buildings were still standing, but none of these documents so much as hint at where the Library was located. Since, as we shall see,

[1] [Stamp, A. E.], *Michaelhouse*, privately printed 1924, p. 14.
[2] *Memoriale*, p. 21.
[3] [Stamp, A. E.], op. cit., p. 49.   [4] *Memoriale*, p. 22.
[5] The bequests of Thomas Colier, Fellow (3 law books; CUA, VCC Wills, c.1506); John Proctor BCL (2 divinity books; CUA, VCC Wills, 1510); Richard Nelson, Fellow (a Bible with chain c.1512; [Stamp, A. E.], op. cit., p. 55); and Henry Crossley, Fellow (a Hebrew bible; CUA, VCC Wills, 1526).
[6] See below, pp. 27–8.   [7] [Stamp, A. E.], op. cit., pp. 51–6.