

HISTORIC LIBRARIES FORUM

BULLETIN NO. 12

October 2008

Since the last *Bulletin*, news has surfaced of the proposed sale of a spectacular collection of early printed books, plate books and rarities from Cardiff Public Library. A full report on the proposals can be found on page five - the Forum has voiced its opposition in the strongest terms and would encourage individual members to follow suit. The written response received from Councillor Nigel Howells makes for depressing, if unsurprising, reading. It is the view of the Forum that the arguments put forward for this dispersal are short-sighted and somewhat fallacious, and that it would be catastrophic, not just for the Public Library, but for the future intellectual and cultural life of Cardiff if these books are lost to the City. Rare book collections in public libraries have been neglected for decades, frequent victims of the old-fashioned and ignorant opinion that they are of no interest or significance to the man or woman in the street, appealing only to a rarefied elite. The implicit and somewhat demeaning view of the intellectual abilities and interests of the general public library user aside, one wonders at Cardiff how this public opinion has been gauged as the majority of the collections have never been catalogued or made available. To use a lack of public interest as an argument for dispersal when the books in question are currently invisible, unknown and inaccessible to that public seems somewhat specious. Likewise, the argument that the cost of conservation exceeds the value of the items held seems hard to take seriously when the first proposed sale contains sets of John Gould's ornithological works on the Trochilidae and Toucan, the birds of Europe, Great Britain, and the Himalayas. A very conservative estimate might value these items alone at £150,000.

At a time when other public libraries are actively engaging with the Historic Libraries Forum and the wider library community to examine ways to reinterpret and reinvigorate their special collections, Cardiff's actions are particularly unwelcome. The real tragedy lies in their decision, whatever their protestations, to view these historic and cultural assets solely in terms of their financial value. If they had consulted they would have found that there is a huge public appetite for historic books and the stories they can tell, as evidenced in historic libraries across the country. Rather than selling these treasures to fund their redevelopment of the library they should be using them as the cornerstone of its reinterpretation and reinvigoration.

Reports some weeks ago in the national press of the possible dispersal of the Harry Price Library, currently under the auspices of Senate House Library, seem thankfully to have been exaggerated. SHL has recently suffered sweeping cuts as a result of the HEFCE Review of Special Funding for Research Libraries. The special funding scheme for the Library has been cut from £1103k to just £397k, representing a 16% cut in their current operational expenditure. As a consequence their current balance of income and expenditure is untenable and an external review of the role of Senate House is underway. The remit of this review is broad, hence the sudden panic about possible sales, but the Forum has been reassured that the break-up of the library is something everyone associated with the Library wishes to avoid at all costs.

Ed Potten, Chair

Historic Libraries Forum Annual Conference, 20th November 2008

Poverty is no excuse – Disaster Preparedness for the Small Library

A reminder that the Forum's annual conference and AGM will take place at the Wellcome Institute, Euston Road, London on 20th November. Thanks to generous sponsorship by the IMC Group the cost has been held at £45, which will include tea and coffee and a buffet lunch. Please use the Booking Form at the end of this Bulletin or on the website (<http://www.historiclibrariesforum.org.uk/events>).

Our key speakers are Alison Walker, Head of the National Preservation Office, and Prof. Graham Matthews of Loughborough University. In the afternoon Jennifer Holland, Interim Deputy Director of Cultural Services, Norfolk, will show slides of the infamous Norwich Library fire and talk about lessons learnt. There will be two further case studies by Alison Cullingford and Kathy Adamson and an optional tour of the Library. As usual there will be plenty of opportunities for networking with colleagues.

HLF events 2009

After another successful day-long workshop in Manchester on identifying, describing and caring for historic bindings (full report in the next *Bulletin*) the Forum is proposing three further workshops over 2009, in addition to our annual conference. In the spring we plan to offer a redesigned version of our popular workshop on cataloguing rare and special material, formerly run in conjunction with the Rare Book and Special Collections Group of CILIP. In the summer The John Rylands Library will again play host to a new workshop on surveying historic collections. A further workshop is planned for the autumn on provenance.

Our workshops have proved very popular and we are keen to continue and expand the current programme. If there are workshop topics you would like to see covered please contact us and let us know.

Next autumn's annual conference theme seems likely to be security - again, if there are particular aspects of this topic you would like to see discussed please do get in touch and let us know.

HLF joins Facebook

Committee member Katie Lord has created a Facebook group for the HLF.

<http://www.new.facebook.com/group.php?gid=28562679022>

Katie writes, 'I'm the only person on it at the moment, so please come and join me if you use Facebook.'

Seminar on the History of Libraries

A series of research seminars, which are freely open for anyone to attend, has been organized at the Institute of English Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London.

Venue: Senate House, Malet St., London WC1E 7HU.

Meetings will take place on Tuesdays at 5.30 p.m. in Room NG 16, located off the main ground floor corridor of Senate House North Block.

Seminar convenors: Giles Mandelbrote (Early Printed Collections, The British Library, London); Dr. Keith A. Manley (Institute of Historical Research, University of London).

AUTUMN TERM 2008

October 7 Dr. John Screen (University College, London): From Helsinki to Irkutsk: Finnish military libraries from 1812 to 1918.

November 4 Professor Alistair Black (Leeds Metropolitan University) and Professor Simon Pepper (University of Liverpool): Buildings, books, and social engineering: the architecture of early public buildings in Britain.

November 25 Dr. Keith A. Manley (Institute of Historical Research): Love, blood, and teddy bears: twopenny libraries, parliament, and the law of retail trade in the 1930s. NB No teddy bears will be harmed during the course of this lecture.

SPRING TERM 2009

February 3 Alison Walker (British Library): Re-creating Sir Hans Sloane's library.

March 10 Prof. David McKitterick (Trinity College, Cambridge): Waste management or selling the family silver?: libraries and the second-hand book trade since the 16th century.

March 31 Peter Hoare (formerly of University of Nottingham Library): Library practices and policies in the British Zone of Occupation in Germany, 1945-50.

SUMMER TERM 2009

May 5 Graham Jefcoate (Radboud University Library, Nijmegen): 'A difficult modernity': the library of the Catholic University of Nijmegen.

June 2 Prof. Richard Sharpe (Wadham College, Oxford): John Bagford's account of London libraries (1707).

Further information concerning the Institute of English Studies may be found on its website, or email ies@sas.ac.uk.

Three events related to disaster and conservation may be of interest to members:

➤ **National Preservation Office Training Day**

Managing the library and archive environment.

Wednesday 26 November 2008 British Library Centre for Conservation, 96 Euston Road, London NW1 2D

This one-day course will help librarians and archivists to understand the effect that a poor environment has on collections, and demonstrate how to monitor and control their storage environment. It is led by Jane Henderson, a well-known expert and trainer from Cardiff University's Department of History and Archaeology, with demonstrations of equipment by Chris Michael, Meaco.

➤ **ICON Pest Management in practice (conference)**

10 December 2008, Kelvingrove Museum and Art Gallery, Glasgow, UK

One of the most important tasks of this workshop will be to enable people to share and discuss their problems and successes and then to formulate a set of guidelines and priorities for future work and research to make IPM even more effective.

➤ **HDRS Salvage and Practical Disaster Recovery Course**

Harwell Document Restoration Services. February date to be confirmed.

Salvage and Practical Disaster Recovery is a new event which focuses on procedures for successful implementation of an emergency plan.

Two new NPO preservation guidance leaflets have been published:

- *Understanding and caring for bookbindings*
- *Managing the library and archive environment*

A further title, *Specifying library and archive storage*, will appear shortly. The leaflets can be downloaded free of charge from the NPO website: <http://www.bl.uk/services/npo/publicationsleaf.html>.

MORPETH LIBRARY FLOODED

Heavy rain in the North of England in September caused severe flooding in Morpeth. The Public Library was swamped and an estimated 25,000 items (60% of the stock) have been damaged. Most of the archives were housed upstairs and have hopefully been preserved. Treasures at Morpeth Chantry and the Bagpipe Museum were salvaged thanks to volunteers. A report on the Morpeth flood and the response to it in a future *Bulletin*.

BRITISH LIBRARY ROUND READING ROOM – The Forum’s Actions.

In July the British Library’s application to extend the term of the Reading Room’s use as an exhibition space went before Camden Planning Committee. Permission was granted for a further four years, with a stipulation that it cannot be extended further.

The Forum Committee campaigned to have the application rejected, supported in their objections by CILIP and the Library and Information History Group. Our submission stated that “It is the view of the Committee that approval would render one of the UK’s most important and iconic libraries and library interiors inaccessible to both library users and the visiting public for an unacceptable length of time ... It is our view that this is an inappropriate use for such a key part of our national cultural heritage.”

In reality, however, the chances of a rejection were slim. The British Museum recognised the unsuitability of the Reading Room as an exhibition space, but emphasised that, prior to approval being granted for the development of their now exhibition galleries, they have no alternative if they wish to continue to host major exhibitions. They acknowledged that the space presents particular problems: it was designed as a Library and is inflexible for anything else; it is Grade 1 listed; it is one of the most important library interiors in the UK and should be available for public access and it is difficult to combine access for tourists with its function as a working library. Under sustained pressure they have committed in writing to an open debate and public consultation on the future of the Reading Room over the coming two years. The Forum intends to take an active role in this consultation process.

Under the circumstances the Committee are cautiously pleased with the outcome - the four year extension was based on a clear undertaking given by representatives of the British Museum to the Planning Committee that no further applications for an extension would be submitted.

LIBRARIES UNDER THREAT

UPDATE ON THE HURD LIBRARY AT HARTLEBURY CASTLE

The future of Hartlebury Castle is still under discussion. Worcestershire County Council remains anxious to purchase it but for political and financial reasons the news on public acquisition is uncertain. The Friends have been very active, both in supplying material to form part of the Council's business plan and in advising on various ways in which to reduce the cost to the public purse. The Wychavon Council is also very supportive. The Friends are now looking into the possibility of forming a BPT (Building Preservation Trust), which would have great advantages in terms of grant funding. We all feel that ownership of the Castle by a charitable trust is the best way forward and a meeting has been fixed for 30 September with representatives of the Friends and the CC where a presentation on setting up BPTs and the advantages of doing so will be made and discussed.

The Hurd Library cannot be sold, as it was left to the Bishops of Worcester in perpetuity and is held in trust by the Church Commissioners for them. The new

Bishop, Dr John Inge, is very supportive and extremely anxious that the library remains at Hartlebury in the beautiful room built for it in the 18th century by Bishop Hurd. The Church Commissioners recently agreed that the Friends could take care of it; it has been closed and neglected for over a year. We have drawn up a simple care plan which involves a shelf-check and basic survey of condition. We have an excellent and enthusiastic group of volunteers who will take it in turns to work on Wednesdays, starting in October, under the supervision of two qualified librarians. This is all we intend at present, while the situation is unclear, but eventually we shall hope to introduce plans to admit readers and visitors, under strict supervision.

The County Museum continues to occupy part of the Castle, on a lease which has another 18 years to run. The staff there have been most co-operative in allowing access to the Friends and making us feel welcome.

Christine Penney

CARDIFF PUBLIC LIBRARY

The Forum was disturbed to learn of Cardiff City Council's decision to sell off a substantial part of the City Library's special collections including incunabula, civil war tracts, early bibles and atlases, and private press material. Objections are set out below in a letter from E.Wyn James to members of the Welsh Assembly.

Destruction of an Important Part of Cardiff and the Nation's Heritage

I am writing to you in my capacity as Secretary of the Cardiff Welsh Bibliographical Society. It has come to our attention that Cardiff City Council intends to sell many of the rare books in Cardiff Public Library, in order to make short-term improvements in the public library service in Cardiff. We understand that Bonhams of London are at present preparing lists of the Library's books for sale by auction.

From the end of the nineteenth century until the Second World War, an enlightened Cardiff City Council created in the City Library a research collection of national and international status – a collection befitting a capital city. The City Library holds one of the most important collections of Welsh books and manuscripts outside of the National Library of Wales at Aberystwyth; but it also has many thousands of rare books from the 15th to the 19th centuries, together with manuscripts from the Middle Ages, which are not 'Welsh' as such, although many of them have strong Welsh connections.

These truly remarkable collections include a notable collection of rare atlases; a good cross-section of 'incunabula' (i.e. early books printed in Europe pre-1501); an important collection of early printed Bibles; key English and European texts from the Protestant Reformation; a substantial collection of scarce political tracts from the Civil War; rare books on natural history, geography, and so on, and so on.

In other words, Cardiff City Library has a rich research collection of international prestige and importance.

It is probable that Cardiff is the only capital city in Europe without either a National Library or a National Archives. But at least it had the magnificent collection of the Cardiff City Library. That collection is now in danger of being damaged irreparably as a result of a little-publicised decision by the Council made in 2007.

The decision to sell many of the Library's rare books was made following the recommendations in a document entitled 'Disposal of Surplus [sic] Library Stock' (11/01/2007). The document contains such statements as: 'they [the rare books] are unsuitable for use by anyone other than academics and specialists' – as if Cardiff did not have a substantial academic community and aspirations to be an international city of learning!

As the document admits, most of these valuable books – especially since the Library was moved from its old building in the Hayes in 1988 – have been lying in stores, uncatalogued, and their existence almost unknown to all but a few specialists. Who knows but that Cardiff would have been the cultural capital of Europe in 2008, if these rare books had been treated and promoted as they deserve!

But rather than ensuring that these valuable collections be catalogued, and exploiting these assets in a way that would substantially enhance Cardiff's prestige as a city of culture and learning, the Council has decided to sell them, thereby losing the substantial long-term benefit – both cultural, academic and cultural – that would come to the city through their presence there.

It is true that many of the approx. 18,000 rare books the Council intends to sell are not 'Welsh' as such; but as a collection they are a significant part of the cultural history of Wales. And of course, all libraries which aspire to 'national' status include a good cross-section of books from outside their country, in order to place their culture in an international context. Indeed, selling the rare English and Continental books in Cardiff City Library would be a cultural disaster to Cardiff and Wales comparable to the National Museum selling 'La Parisienne' and the rest of its French Impressionist art collection!

Many of the items to be sold were gifts, donated to the City Library by benefactors for the long-term welfare of Cardiff, its citizens and the nation. Although the Council may (perhaps) have the legal right to sell these treasures, it certainly does not have the moral right.

We urge you, therefore, to do all in your power to overturn this shameful decision to sell an important part of the heritage of Cardiff and Wales, an act which will damage irreparably Cardiff's standing in the world of culture and learning, both nationally and internationally.

Cardiff Heritage Friends are seeking help to stop the sale. The email address for Councillor Nigel Howells, the Council Executive Member responsible for libraries, is NHowells@cardiff.gov.uk. The Heritage Minister in the Welsh Assembly

Government is Alun Ffred Jones: AlunFfred.jones@wales.gov.uk. Although the Assembly cannot prevent the sale as such, they have some influence which can be brought to bear.

BROMHAM LIBRARY

We are pleased to report that Bromham parochial library has found a home with the National Trust property Canons Ashby – full details in the next *Bulletin*.

COPAC ADDS SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

New libraries have been loaded on the Copac Academic, Special & National Library Catalogue, (copac.ac.uk), most of them thanks to the Copac Challenge Fund. This is an initiative jointly funded by the Research Libraries UK (RLUK), the Research Information Network (RIN) and the British Library. The additions greatly enhance the already rich and diverse collections recorded on Copac and will be of enormous benefit to the research community:

- **Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.** The Library and Archives at Kew hold one of the largest collections in the world of printed and original material relating to botany. The Library is the national collection for botanical literature and is international in its coverage.
- **St. Andrews University Library** has over one million volumes. The catalogue includes special collections covering areas such as theology, classics, history, English and Scottish literature, philosophy, science and medicine.
- **The City of London, Guildhall Library** has the most comprehensive collection of printed works on London history and outstanding resources on diverse subjects such as food and wine, gardening, law reports, English parliamentary papers, local history, marine history, clock and watch-making and archery
- **York Minster Library** is the largest cathedral library in the UK. It holds over 130,000 books with collections covering topics such as Theology, Art History, Stained Glass, History, Literature and Religious texts.

In addition, the catalogues of the following libraries will be made available on Copac in the future.

- **Chetham's Library** in Manchester was founded in 1653 and is the oldest public library in the English-speaking world. Amongst other collections it "holds more than 100,000 volumes of printed books, of which 60,000 were published before 1851.
- **The French Institute** is the official French government centre of language and culture in the UK.

- **The Henry Moore Institute Library** is a specialist resource for the study of sculpture. The collection includes a significant collection of exhibition catalogues and rare materials, including limited editions, artists' books, ephemera and influential journals.
- **Reading University Library.** Copac currently contains records related to the 19th Century Pamphlet Collection. Further records will be loaded for their Special Collections which are particularly strong in the history of medicine and science, publishing and printing history, theology, philosophy, classics and literature and early agriculture and horticulture.
- **The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow** is the only royal medical college for physicians, surgeons and dentists in the United Kingdom. The library holds modern and historical items.
- **Royal College of Surgeons of England.** Copac currently contains records for the Tracts Collection and will be adding the complete catalogue in future. The College holds an "an outstanding library of surgical and medically related literature that ranges in scope from the late 15th century onwards".

The Copac Challenge Fund is looking into adding more libraries to Copac, and would especially welcome expressions of interest from specialist libraries. For more details, or to express your interest, please contact Bethan Ruddock at copac@manchester.ac.uk. More details about the Challenge Fund can be found at <http://www.rluk.ac.uk/node/59>, including a link to the original application document.

Mimas are also keen to promote The Archives Hub (www.archiveshub.ac.uk), which provides access to descriptions of unique and unpublished primary source material held in more than 160 UK universities, colleges and research institutes, Cambridge and Oxford Universities, John Rylands at the University of Manchester and Lambeth Palace Library to name but a few. The archives cover a rich and diverse subject matter from the Scottish Brewing Archives to Anglo-Saxons, from British politicians to pressure groups such as CND, from Antarctic expeditions to volcanoes. The site also includes information about the Archives Hub and its' contributors, and provides professional information for archivists and other information professionals.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

ALLAN, David. *A Nation of readers: the lending library in Georgian England* (British Library, 2008; £45.00)
ISBN 9780712349673 (0712349677) Hardback

Peter Hoare writes, 'Many of our members' libraries are featured in this very detailed survey of subscription and circulating libraries in the 18th and early 19th centuries. It forms an interesting complement to William St Clair's "The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period" (CUP, 2004).'

CHAMBERS, David. *A modest collection: Private Libraries Association 1956-2006.* (Private Libraries Association, 2007; £30)
ISBN 9780900002670 (0900002670) Hardback .

An interesting historical record of the PLA since its foundation, with contributions from 83 members, introduced by Lynne Brindley.

NPO e-Journal

The latest issue, March 2008, has two articles of particular interest:

K. Begg

Beyond the book: Preserving the fabric and content of a 15th-century library.

S. Bioletti

Collection preservation at Trinity College Dublin.

Both can be accessed at: <http://www.bl.uk/services/npo/journal/5/content.html>

BOOKING FORM

**Historic Libraries Forum annual conference: Poverty is no Excuse
November 20th, 2008, The Wellcome Institute, Euston Road**

I would like to book places to attend the annual conference on November 20th, at the Wellcome Institute, @£45.00 per place.

I enclose a cheque for

Cheques should be made payable to **The Historic Libraries Forum** and should be sent to Miss C.L. Penney, Treasurer, 58 Selly Wick Drive, Birmingham B29 7JH.

If an invoice or a receipt is required, please enclose a stamped addressed envelope, or ask for them to be sent electronically.

Please note that the closing date for booking is 7th November.

Name(s) of attendee(s):

Name(s) of institution(s):

Telephone no. / Email