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Services in
Biosciences &
Environmental
Sciences
ISBES

100 Years of Forestry Information from Oxford

1: 1905-1923

In 2005 Oxford University Library Services celebrates the centenary of what is now known as the Oxford Forest Information Service (OFIS)

Over the past century, the name of Oxford has become synonymous with forestry information throughout the world, and from the beginning has served the profession globally as well as locally.

The Coopers Hill school moved to Oxford in 1905, with its director, Sir William Schlich, and its library, largely his personal collection.

It included a complete set of the earliest forestry periodical *Kritische Blätter für Forst- und Jagdwissenschaft* (1822-1879).



Schlich with his grandson, the composer Humphrey Searle

Schlich was a noted German forester who had served as Britain's Inspector-General of Forests in India and later became a British citizen.

International collaboration was fostered by the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO) which originated in 1892 in Germany. By 1906 it had formed an International Committee on Forest Bibliography, agreed that it should use the 'bibliographical system of Melvil Dewey', and that a permanent secretariat of forest bibliography should be established in Switzerland.

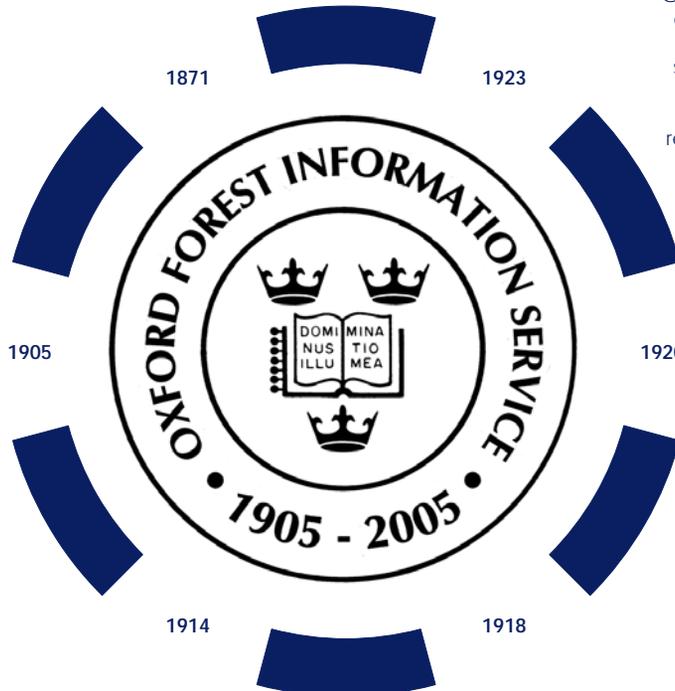
Literature from 1750 to 1900 was to be recorded in a published book, and that from 1900 on in a card catalogue, with additions published in a 'quarterly magazine'. Subscriptions were taken to fund the work, which was about to begin when the First World War intervened.

Discussions did not resume until 1922, by which time inflation had put paid to the original funds.



Where it all began

The story of forestry in Oxford begins with the Royal Indian Engineering College at Coopers Hill, Windsor, a training college for the Indian civil service, which established a school of forestry in 1871



Oxford students frequently went on to serve in the tropical forests of the Empire, largely and in the 1920's the Government decided to set up an Imperial Forestry Institute (IFI) specifically to train them.

FORESTRY AT OXFORD.
AN EMPIRE INSTITUTION.
The report was issued yesterday (Cmd. 1102, para. 24) of the Interdepartmental Committee which was asked to prepare a scheme for giving effect to the resolutions of the British Empire Forestry Conference with regard to a central institution for training forest officers.
The Committee recommends that such an institution should be placed at Oxford and incorporated with the University. It should be governed by a Board, appointed one-half by the Departments or Governments concerned, and the other half by the University. The Board should have general charge of the higher course of training of officers, and of administration. The director of the institution, who should be the Professor of Forestry, and the staff should be appointed by the University with the approval of the Board. Pending the erection of buildings, arrangements can be made with the University for temporary accommodation. The Committee says that the annual cost of the permanent staff should not at the beginning exceed £4,000 per annum. There will be a further liability on every Department concerned for the University fee and subsistence, estimated at £200 a year for each probationer. Students should be selected by the Departments for admission to the central institution from those who have taken a forestry degree at any university whose standard of education is approved by the Board.

Full Text: Copyright 1921, The Times

Oxford won, and agreement was reached in 1923 to set up the Imperial Forestry Institute as a central training school with direct Government funding. It was however entirely synonymous with the School of Forestry, with the same director, staff, library and premises (adjacent to the Department of Agriculture in Parks Road), but now with formal responsibility for the 'external' work it had in fact been doing informally since 1905.



Oxford and Cambridge fought bitterly to house the new Institute; their vitriolic debates, begun in 1905, make entertaining reading today, but reflect the importance of forestry to the British economy at that time.



COOPERS HILL AND OXFORD.
TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES.
Sir.—In the debate on the transfer of the Coopers Hill School of Forestry to Oxford, which took place in the House of Lords on the 7th inst., Lord Lansdowne must have spoken from incorrect information. He was mistaken in supposing that any proposal had been put before the University of Cambridge by the Secretary of State. It was "details" of a proposed mode to Oxford. The authorities at Cambridge never admitted that they possessed no particular facilities for encouraging the study of forestry. On the contrary, the provisions for teaching all the sciences necessary for the complete forester are more advanced at Cambridge than at the sister University. There is a large school of science, and a vigorous school of agriculture, with their well-equipped laboratories and courses of instruction. In face of antagonism to Oxford in this matter, it is rather peculiar of Lord Lansdowne to speak of the matter as a "kind of private war" between the University, and of Lord Gossett to call the controversy a "quarrel." The protest made by Cambridge against the scheme of the India Office is based, as appears throughout Lord Lytton's speech, on the higher grounds. No monopoly should be given to any University in supplying servants of the Crown either in India or elsewhere. The field much in the interests of the various Universities as in that of India itself. The scheme of the India Office is a retrograde step, contrary to modern usage and injurious to the efficiency of the public service, and I trust it will only be a temporary one.
Yours truly,
GEO. E. GOSSET.
Oxford Club, S.W., March 13.

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Poster prepared by Roger Mills
(Oxford University Library Services, UK)

Frontiers in Forest Information
A centenary conference

St Anne's College, Oxford
5-7 December 2005

100 Years of Forestry Information from Oxford

2: 1924-1938



Schlich had retired by 1924 and his successor, Prof. R.S. Troup, was another highly literate man with a great interest in information.

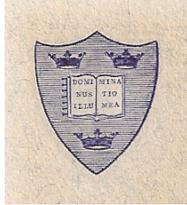
Under his direction the library, now a depository for the forest reports being generated across the Empire, mostly by former Oxford students, began a programme of cataloguing and indexing, very advanced for its time.



Troup invented his own classification, used in a card catalogue of books, reports and reprints and also for shelf arrangement. The catalogue suffered from idiosyncratic abbreviations and a curious policy of omitting author's initials in headings, but nevertheless remains a treasure trove of early forestry materials much used by forest historians; it has found its way on microfilm to many corners of the globe.

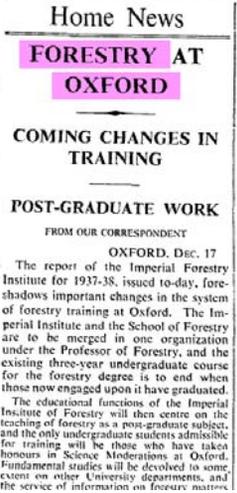
Troup recognised that what was really needed was a record of the contents of the mass of journals and reports the library was acquiring, and some means of relaying this information back to the forest officers in the field. So in 1934 the library began producing the Current monthly record of forestry literature, a detailed analytical index of articles including everything the library acquired, distributed throughout the Empire.

The Imperial Forestry Institute (IFI) was set up in 1924 as a central training resource alongside the Oxford School of Forestry. The Library served both

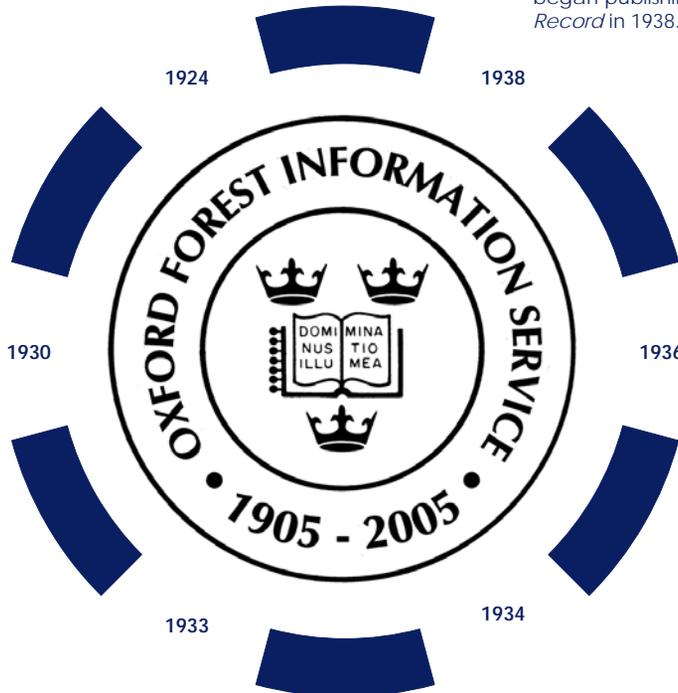


Eventually, in 1938, the School and Institute were merged as the Department of Forestry

The university, with IUFRO's support, decided to invite the abstracting organisation Imperial Agricultural Bureaux (IAB) to set up a Forestry Bureau in Oxford, taking over the *Current monthly record* and developing it into an abstracting journal. This was agreed and the Imperial Forestry Bureau (IFB) was duly set up, initially located in the Bodleian Library, and began publishing the *Record* in 1938.



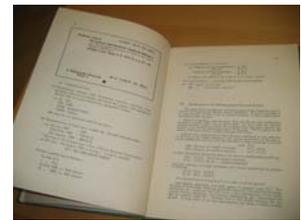
Copyright 1938, The Times



The new classification became known all over the forestry world as the 'Flury System' and authors began to publish Flury numbers as 'keywords' on articles. At Oxford the system was immediately adopted for the *Current monthly record* and the card catalogue. The *Record* was very well received but it soon became apparent that it was unsustainable with the library's one-and-a-half staff.



The International Committee on Bibliography was reformed under the chairmanship of Troup and began work on developing an extended version of Dewey for the proposed catalogue.



Every entry was also added to the library card catalogue. Troup's classification proved too broad for this level of indexing, and at this point the Institute's European heritage came to its rescue, in the form of the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO).



This was prepared by Dr Phillip Flury in Switzerland and published in German in 1933, translated into French and English and published as *Forest bibliography with the index number 634.9F: an international decimal classification on the basis of Melvil Dewey's system* in 1936.



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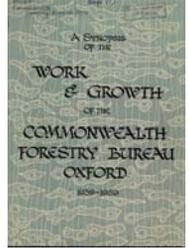
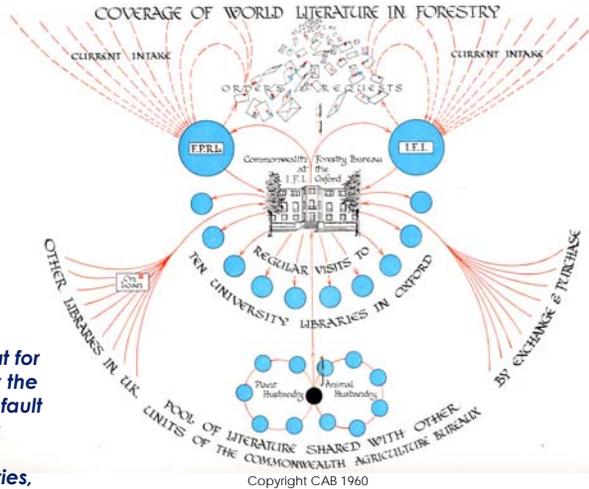
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100 Years of Forestry Information from Oxford

3: 1939-1963

The newly-formed Imperial Forestry Bureau (now CAB International), which began publishing *Forestry Abstracts* as successor to the *Current Monthly Record* in 1939. It still continues today.



Ideas of creating a permanent secretariat for forest bibliography were finally ended by the Second World War and the role fell by default to the IFI/IFB who, working with the Forest Products Research Laboratory at Princes Risborough and with other Oxford libraries, performed the role of clearing house and cataloguing centre originally envisaged for the secretariat.

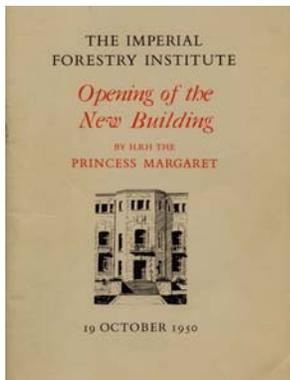
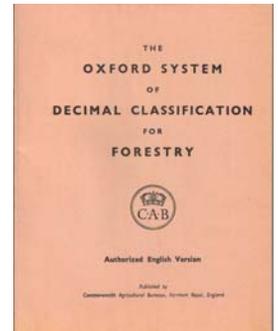
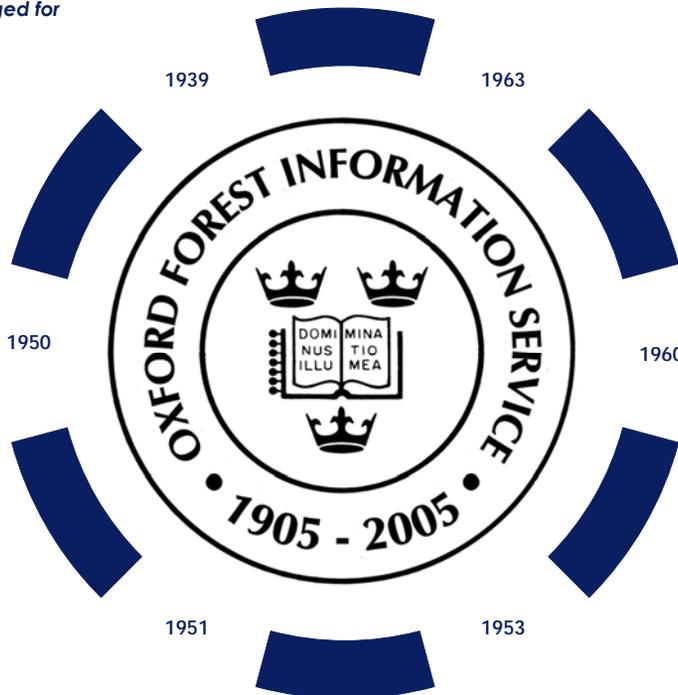
From the start all material received by the library was passed to the Bureau for abstracting, and all material received directly by the Bureau was donated to the library after abstracting. Consequently every item held by the library was included in *Forestry Abstracts*, a unique one-to-one relationship which continues today.

The arrangement was formalised by IUFRO which adopted a recommendation that 'authors should generally send a copy of their work to Oxford for abstracting', and although this has no legal force it was, and still is, widely recognised.

'Imperial' changed to 'Commonwealth', giving us 'CFI', 'CFB' and 'CAB', in the 1950's, and the library continued to grow until by 1964 it was completely full.

ODC was used as a shelf arrangement and in the catalogues at Oxford, and like its predecessor, the Flury system, was also used by authors on their articles. This practice still continues, incidentally, in Eastern Europe and some other parts of the world.

A revision of ODC as the *Global Decimal Classification* is now in progress



The International Bibliographical Committee was revived after the war as the Joint FAO/IUFRO Committee on Forest Bibliography, demonstrating the importance both IUFRO and the newly-formed Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations attached to forestry information. It undertook further work on classification and after 'prolonged and earnest deliberations' finalised the new *Oxford system of decimal classification for forestry* (ODC) officially adopted by IUFRO and FAO in 1953 and published by IAB.

A new building for the IFI and IFB in South Parks Road, planned before the outbreak of war but constructed after it, was opened in 1950 by Princess Margaret. Commonwealth countries donated timber for furniture, floors and panelling throughout the building; species and donors are identified by wall plaques, making the whole building including the library a kind of museum of wood, and a very attractive (if inflexible!) space.

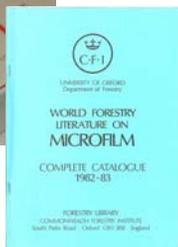


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4: 1964-1999



After expiration of the original grant, microfilming continued on a self-funding basis through sale of films to other libraries; this was particularly useful to newly-independent colonies, which were able to re-stock their own forestry publications which had been lost over the years or in post-independence unrest.

1964 saw the creation of an in-house **microfilm unit**, funded by the Ford Foundation. Between 1964-67 about one third of the collection was microfilmed. Originals were offered to other libraries or disposed of.

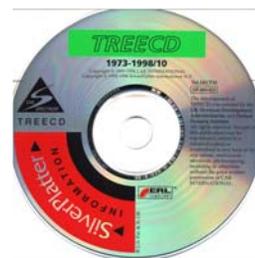
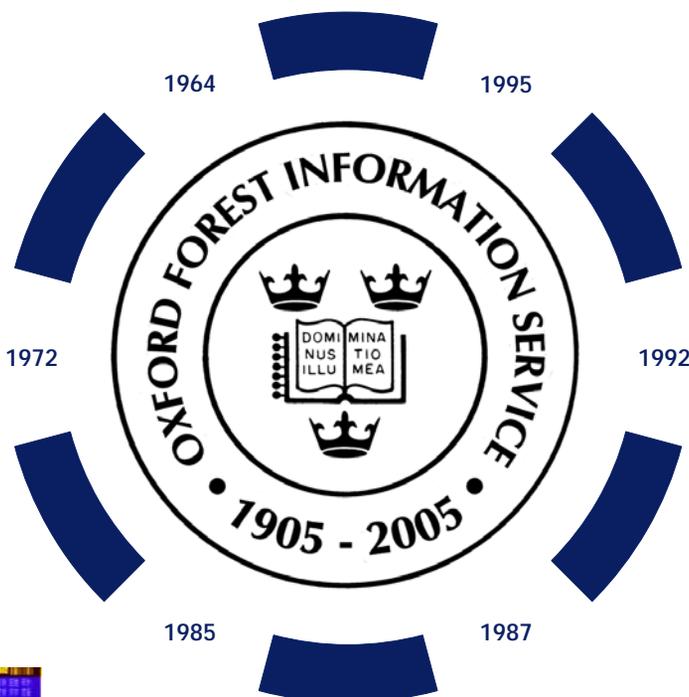
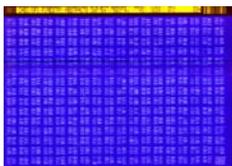
The programme ran for over 30 years and produced 4000 reels of 35mm microfilm of library stock. These are available for purchase, and can be read, purchased or digitised in the Library.

Restructuring in 1995 provided the Library with a staff of 8, three of whom were externally funded by a contract with the newly established Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) in Indonesia, which, initially having no library of its own, bought all its services from Oxford. However, by the end of the contract in 1998 CIFOR had become self-sufficient; the loss of those funds combined with other financial pressures placed the future of the library in doubt.



In 1972 all CAB's abstract journals became available for searching on Dialog as CAB Abstracts. The library was the first in Oxford to offer Dialog searching, using the Bureau's equipment and expertise, it can thus claim to have had the first computer catalogue in Oxford, as all its holdings from 1972 were included in the new abstracts database.

The card catalogue was still maintained, however, with cards printed from the database: by 1984 these were running at over 1000 entries a month, a major filing task for library staff, mercifully relieved that year by transfer to computer-output microfiche.



With the help of funding from the Overseas Development Administration work was undertaken to digitise the whole Forestry Abstracts pre-1972 backfile to 1939; published on CD-ROM as TREECD (Figure 4) in 1992, this was the first such archival project in CABI. Like the card and microfiche catalogues it replaced, it includes the library shelfmarks.

During the 1980's major organisational changes occurred at Oxford as the original undergraduate degree in Forestry gave way to new degrees first in Agricultural and Forest Science (1980) and then Pure and Applied Biology (1985), and finally Biological Sciences in 1993. The Departments of Agricultural Science, Botany and Forestry were merged in 1985 to create the Department of Plant Sciences, with the Oxford Forestry Institute (OFI) as a semi-autonomous unit within it, running a successful MSc course.



In 1987 abstracting operations moved from Oxford to CAB International's new HQ at Wallingford, Oxon. New IT links and a formal Agreement with Oxford University ensured continuity

The libraries of the three departments of forestry, botany and agricultural science were merged over a period of ten years, eventually emerging as the Plant Sciences Library in refurbished accommodation in 1995.



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5: 2000-2005

In 2000, following a full review, the university agreed to continue to support forestry information and preserve the collections, transferring management to the newly-formed Oxford University Library Services (OULS). This ensures long-term security and continuing development, with central services for preservation, digitization and archival storage.



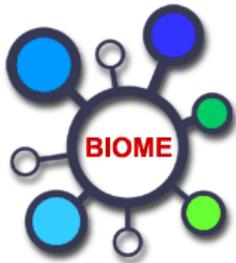
Today the library receives around 2000 current serials, about 1900 of which are donated. It collects in all languages, and abstracted material is retained permanently. The total collection is now around 200,000 items.

The name *Oxford Forest Information Service (OFIS)* was adopted for the forestry activities of the Plant Sciences Library, and in 2001 a new 5-year MoU with CAB International was signed, to continue existing activities and develop new areas of collaboration.

In 2005, the Plant Sciences, Zoology and Geography & the Environment libraries became part of a new grouping, Information Services in Bio- and Environmental Sciences. This includes Oxford's special collections in ornithology, taxonomy and forestry. The Oxford Forest Information Service continues to provide a specialist 'view' of these collections, which have much in common.

Also in 2000 OFIS began indexing forest related web sites for the AgriFor (Agriculture, Forestry and Food) section of the BIOME gateway of the UK Resource Discovery Network.

Oxford Digital Library for Forestry launches Winter 2005 www.odl.ox.ac.uk



By Oct 2005, AgriFor was serving some 13,500 successful requests daily.

A tutorial for Agriculture, Forestry and Food for the Resource Discovery Network's *Virtual Training Suite* was prepared by CABI in 2002



CABI and OFIS work together in the developing *Global Forest Information Service (GFIS)*, a United Nations initiative originally stemming from the 1992 Rio Conference on Environment and Development.



OULS has signed an MoU with GFIS as an information provider, and it is intended to develop OFIS in full coordination with GFIS.

A IUFRO Task Force set up in 1998 developed a prototype GFIS (www.gfis.net), essentially a tool to facilitate cross-searching of participating institutions' databases, which was launched at the World Forestry Congress in Quebec in September 2003 and is now being taken forward into a production phase under the aegis of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (an interagency partnership supporting the work of the United Nations Forum on Forests).



Many complex issues surround interoperability and cross-searching of bibliographic databases, let alone the 'hard' datasets to which GFIS also hopes to provide access. These were explored in a conference *Information Interoperability and Organization for National and Global Forest Information Systems* organized by IUFRO at the World Forestry Congress 2003, and addressed in the EU-funded project Network for a European Forest Information Service (NEFIS); OFIS and CABI have contributed to both, and the topic is likely to dominate agendas for some years.



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