

# From Bodley's Librarian

Summer 2011



Bodleian Libraries  
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

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## Dear Friend

Katherine Hepburn, plunging down the rapids in the riverboat the *African Queen*, remarks with understated astonishment: "I never dreamed any mere physical experience could be so stimulating". In the Bodleian, our equivalent might be the satisfaction that comes from barcoding our collections. Mundane, mechanical, and utilitarian as it might seem to be adding these zebra stripes to the cover of every item held by the Bodleian, the initiative to apply inventory control is a critical element in successful service.

As part of the extraordinary transformation of the Bodleian that is taking place, the centrepiece being the renovation of the New Bodleian Library (to be renamed the Weston Library when it emerges from its cocoon in 2015), we are barcoding over 6 million items. The purpose is to automate our tracking of the movement of items in order to increase the reliability of the information and the speed of handling, particularly as we relocate 3.5 million volumes from the New Bodleian to our gleaming storage facility in Swindon.

Such a simple thing as putting a sticker on a book has challenged us to confront all manner of issues. We've looked at the placement of the barcode for efficiency (front left upper corner) and balanced that against aesthetics and the integrity of the artefact (rare books and other valuable materials have their barcodes put on a separate piece of paper or on the box that holds them). To meet our tight deadlines, we have hired small armies of temporary employees who work two shifts and sometimes Saturdays.

In order to barcode the book, there must be a record in the online catalogue for the volume in hand. As you might imagine, out of the millions of volumes being inventoried, more than a few lack a proper bibliographic record. These problem books are 'escalated' to staff trained to resolve them swiftly and accurately.

## Decanting...

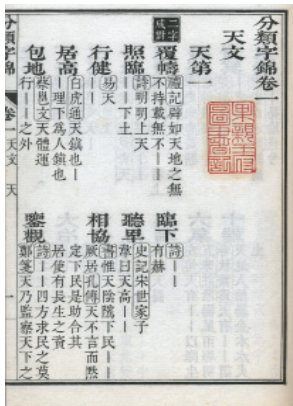
Hard on the heels of the barcoders are the bookmovers, who pack up items for removal to the storage facility, swaddling rare and fragile materials in bubble wrap, and leaving row after row of empty dull-coloured metal shelves in the New Bodleian.

Collections and card catalogues from the New Bodleian have been dispersed, with the voluminous John Johnson printed ephemera the last to vacate the premises. Duke Humfrey's Library is temporarily given over to music and maps, with the consequence that oak catalogue files and globes now encroach on the aisle to the readers' seats in Selden End.



Colin Wakefield and Alasdair Watson looking at cards that will be converted

An ultimatum was issued that these paper catalogue cards needed to be converted to online form before 2015, because no space had been allocated to them in the metamorphosed Weston Library. The curators paled at the impossibility of the task, but fortunately, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation has come to our rescue, providing funds for us to scan the card images and mark them up so for the first time, the majority of our superb (and often unique) holdings in maps and music will be searchable online, making these resources discoverable internationally. Progress is also being made in opening up access to our Chinese and Islamic Collections.



*Fenlei zijin (an encyclopaedia produced in the imperial palace in 1721)*

The Tan Chin Tuan Foundation is funding the cataloguing of almost 5,000 pre-modern titles, some dating back to the 16th century, while records for 10,000 Islamic manuscripts held at Cambridge and Oxford are being made available electronically through funding from JISC, the Joint Information Systems Committee.

No other library in the world has taken on so many complex and challenging initiatives simultaneously. The Bodleian is transferring the equivalent of 6.5 million volumes to the book storage facility in Swindon. In addition, it has managed many smaller moves in the space of the past 18 months, relocating Official Papers from the Underground Bookstore to sparkling renovated space in the Law Library; emptying the Plant Sciences Library and consolidating its collection into the Radcliffe Science Library and transferring the remainder to Swindon; and shifting high-use modern English language monographs to the space vacated in the Underground Bookstore under Radcliffe Square. It's a dizzying array of carefully choreographed movements, a Rubik's cube of planning.

Another project underway is the implementation of a new integrated library system, Ex Libris, which will modernise the infrastructure used to support electronic access and management of our collections.

To co-ordinate the various streams of activity, the Libraries have created the BodSquad, a team of project leaders and executive stakeholders who meet weekly to ensure that internal and external communication is strong, that problems are anticipated and resolved before becoming crises, that budgets don't overrun, and that targets and milestones are met. Throughout this year of immense change, we have striven to minimise disruption to our readers. Books in transition are taken out of circulation for as short a period as possible, and if a reader requests an item that is unavailable, we seek to find it from an alternative source. College librarians have helped us by making available texts from their collections, and we have increased our use of interlibrary loan and electronic document delivery. What is particularly gratifying is the way in which hundreds of staff throughout the libraries have hustled in order to ensure that readers receive exemplary service, even under the most challenging of conditions.

## Milestones

Amidst this whirlwind of activity, there are other important milestones. In May, Council approved the New Bodleian renovation in full, enabling us to tender the demolition and construction work that will see us hand over the building to contractors on 1 August for three years. Historic Giles Gilbert Scott furniture and fittings will be removed for safety and refurbishing, and our contractors will carefully prepare the library for the deconstruction of the 11 stack floors and their columns and shelving. The perimeter spaces, including the PPE reading room, which will become the main special collections reading room, will remain intact.



*The PPE reading room as it was, prior to its closure for renovation*

The initiative to transform the New Bodleian into the Weston Library and to make it a showcase for the exhibition of collections and the study of some of Oxford's most significant documents is topping £80 million in estimated costs. Benefactions have streamed in, a mark of the enthusiasm for the project.

In addition to the signature gifts from the Garfield Weston Foundation and Julian Blackwell, plus funding from Oxford University Press, the Bodleian has received commitments this past year from the Headley and Tedworth Trusts for the staff and readers' café, to be named the Headley Café; from Mr Antonio Bonchristiano, Emerson (through the service of Sir Robert Horton), and Dr Joseph Sassoon to name seminar rooms; and from Dr Lee Seng Tee to name one of the exhibition galleries.

Information about the aims of the project and opportunities to honour benefactions is available online at [www.campaign.ox.ac.uk/priorities/find\\_your\\_priority/libraries.html](http://www.campaign.ox.ac.uk/priorities/find_your_priority/libraries.html) and from the Head of Development for Libraries, Amy Trotter: [development@bodleian.ox.ac.uk](mailto:development@bodleian.ox.ac.uk).

## Outreach

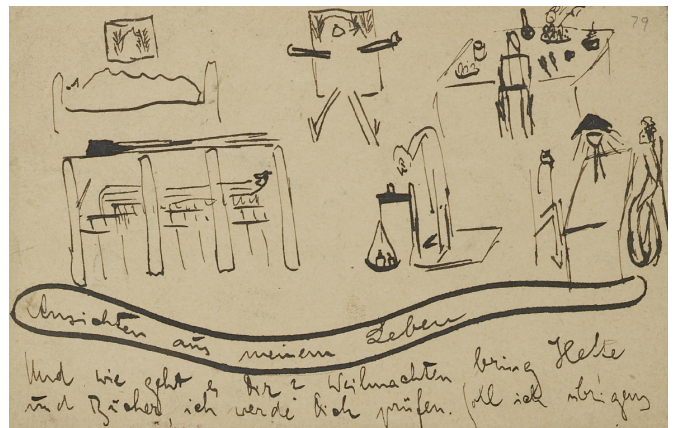
With our physical infrastructure on the path to excellence, we are increasingly turning our attention to the digital world and outreach activities. Many of you will have noticed that our exhibitions, visited annually by more than 100,000 people, now have a parallel online version. This allows visitors to our current shows to prepare for their encounter with the original artefact or to consult what they have seen online after their foray to Oxford. Dr Leonard Polonsky has supported this through a generous digitisation grant.

Additionally, those unable to travel to the Bodleian benefit from the intellectual rigour with which an exhibition on Shelley or the King James Bible is assembled with the collaboration of scholars and curatorial staff. We are very much on a mission to expand our outreach. This spring, a 'Magna Carta West Coast Tour', supported by Irwin and Joan Jacobs, Qualcomm, and John Wiley and Sons, brought a 1217 Magna Carta to San Diego, Los Angeles and San Francisco, where, in conjunction with Brit Week, it was displayed at the LA County Museum of Art and the Legion of Honor. Thousands of people had the chance to see this document, so fundamental in the democratic world.

## Collaboration

The Bodleian continues to collaborate with other cultural institutions in order to share its superlative collections. Beginning in July and running until 30 October, *Shelley's Ghost* will take the Bodleian to the Lake District as part of an exhibition at the Wordsworth Trust; in February 2011, a portion of the Shelley materials will join others from the Pforzheimer collection at the New York Public Library for a display. Exquisite Mughal painting, Persian miniatures, and Ottoman Turkish manuscripts will voyage to the State Library of Victoria to be shown from March to June 2012. Entitled *Love and Devotion*, it will be the first major display of Persian manuscripts in Australia.

An even more pioneering collaboration has been forged with the Deutsches Literaturarchiv in Marbach, Germany. Our joint acquisition of Franz Kafka's letters to his youngest sister Ottla made headlines in April as a creative solution for institutions to steward resources and share holdings. Instead of competing to purchase this poignant and significant correspondence, and perhaps driving up the price by bidding against one another at auction, we agreed to share ownership with Marbach, something which, in the digital age, is feasible, since surrogates can support research during the period the original artefacts are not in residence. Plans are underway to develop a Kafka website drawing on primary sources from each repository.

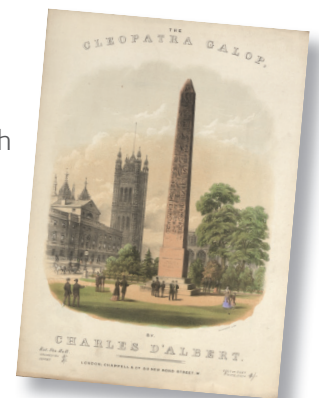


The postcard "Scenes from my life" (sent in December 1918) represents one of the finest examples of Kafka's drawings

I had the intense pleasure of attending the exhibition opening of the Kafka letters in Marbach on 1 June in the company of the German donors who made the acquisition possible. Over 30 years before, I had been a graduate student researching for my dissertation on author-publisher relations there, and it was a thrill to return as Bodley's Librarian to address a large audience (in rusty German). This autumn, Oxford will present the letters to the public and thank its generous supporters. The acquisition was an exciting cliff-hanger, as we initially despaired of raising the full purchase price, but then, with the concept of joint ownership lowering the threshold of funds required, our friends (and Friends) rallied round. With days to spare before the collection went to auction, perhaps to be hidden away in a private collection, or worse yet, to be resold as individual postcards and letters, we triumphed. Collaboration, not competition, will be the watchword for the future.

## Innovations

In the Bodleian's Google-sponsored project *What's the Score at the Bodleian?* ([www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/bodleian/library/specialcollections/projects/whats-the-score](http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/bodleian/library/specialcollections/projects/whats-the-score)), collaboration is taken to a new level, drawing on the power and knowledge of individuals. In this initiative, just being launched, the Bodleian is experimenting with crowdsourcing, a community-based approach to building information. Scores from the Bodleian's music collection which came to the library in the 19th century through legal deposit, and which were never catalogued, have been scanned and have had rudimentary description. These public domain works are now available for searching on the internet, and we are inviting people to complete a template that enhances our basic description.

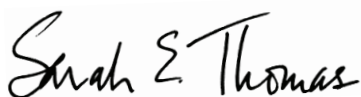


Produced for domestic consumption, this sheet music is graced by compelling graphics that would have been ignored in traditional music cataloguing. Sentimental and patriotic lyrics provide a view into the taste of the period. Not only do we wish to encourage broader access to these scores, but we hope new technologies and social networking sites will lead to new scholarly and popular uses. For example, a future possible application might be Music OCR (optical character recognition) in which a computer programme can recognise and play the notes. And, since the works being scanned are all in the public domain, music groups can perform them freely. It will be possible, should these performances be recorded and uploaded to YouTube, to link from the score to the performance. Composers, arrangers, lyricists, and artists whose works may have slumbered for over a century will awaken to be part of the 21st century. Who knows what hidden gems there might be or what light might be shed on our society as a result?

### **In conclusion...**

Every day at the Bodleian unfurls as an exciting development, full of the promise of discovery and the pride of being associated with a great institution. The stirring combination – of collections spanning millennia, awesome spaces, people who share and develop knowledge, and the application of emerging technologies to serve better our community, whether it be Oxford students and scholars, Bodley's Republic of the Learned, or new audiences around the world – offers enchantment and reward that are surely among the greatest experiences one could have. I hope you have savoured these experiences and that you will continue to partake of them, in our beautiful libraries, through our digital offerings, or through other Bodleian outreach initiatives. We thank you wholeheartedly for your past support and we hope you will remain part of our trusted and committed circle of friends and benefactors.

With very best wishes



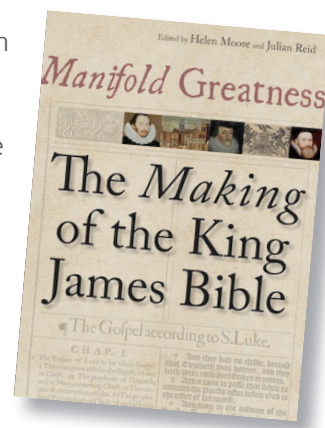
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Bodley's Librarian

### **What's on at the Bodleian**

#### ***Manifold Greatness: Oxford and the Making of the King James Bible, 1611***

(22 April – 4 September 2011)

The Bodleian Library Summer 2011 exhibition tells the story of the most frequently printed book in English language – the King James Bible. Exploring the political, religious and intellectual context of its time, the exhibition looks at the events and conditions that led to and shaped this world-changing translation enterprise.



#### ***Treasures of the Bodleian***

(30 September – 23 December 2011)

This exhibition looks towards the permanent gallery in the Weston Library. On display will be some of the Bodleian's rarest, most important and most evocative items, from ancient papyri through medieval oriental manuscripts to 20th-century books and ephemera. They are arranged into broad themes: classical heritage; mapping the world; the sacred word; the animal and plant kingdoms; works of the imagination; the sciences of observation and calculation; historical moments in time.

#### ***Korean Treasures: Rare Books, Manuscripts and Artefacts in the Bodleian Libraries***

(26 August – 26 September 2011)

The Bodleian Libraries are home to many historically significant and valuable manuscripts, rare books and artefacts related to Korean history and culture. Despite their importance, many of these items have been overlooked within the libraries' collections and largely neglected by scholars. *Korean Treasures* seeks to change this by highlighting the many noteworthy and unusual items in the collections.

For further information, please contact:

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