

# From Bodley's Librarian

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Bodleian Library  
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*Dear Friend*

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I am writing to let all those with an interest in the life of the Bodleian know how the Library is faring, and of our plans for the future.

## Creating space for our collections

Leaning against the bookcase in my office is a gleaming silver-coloured spade with a sturdy oak handle. Streaks of dirt could be traced to a plot of earth in Swindon, where a groundbreaking



ceremony was held on September 17 for the new Bodleian book storage facility (*pictured, above*) which will provide essential space and better protection for our collections.

The shovel came in handy again in early January when a major snowstorm blanketed Oxford with several inches of snow. In an effort to dispel the notion that administrators don't do any useful work, Richard Ovenden, Keeper of Special Collections; David Howell, Head of Conservation and Collection Care, and I cleared the Clarendon steps and a path to the Bodleian (*pictured, right*).

The shift of so many volumes from Oxford's libraries, destined to occur in 2010-11, will make history. More than six million volumes collected by the libraries over 400 years will flow into the vast warehouse currently rising 12 metres high in Swindon – from the emptying shelves of the soon-to-be-redeveloped New Bodleian Library, from the remote stores of Nuneham Courtney, and from the depths of salt mines in Cheshire, where the overflow from collections has been stacked in caverns, and from where they have to be transported many miles when requested by readers.

The libraries' collections have long outgrown the storage space available within the New Bodleian. And with 170,000 new volumes arriving each and every year, we are in urgent need of space for what we already have, and to allow for future growth. The new facility in Swindon, 28 miles from Oxford, will provide storage for up to eight million of our lower-use volumes, with daily



deliveries to Oxford to ensure readers' requests are met.

Just as importantly, it will enable us to transform the New Bodleian over the next five years into a library dedicated to our special collections, with new destination reading rooms for the benefit of researchers within the University and beyond, and expanded exhibition space to welcome the hundreds of thousands of visitors who are drawn to the Bodleian to admire its contribution to preserving the written record of the world's civilization.

### **Maintaining services to our readers**

The transfer of over 300,000 linear metres – enough to line a path from Oxford to Lizard Point in Cornwall – to Swindon is a logistical challenge of high order. We are planning our operations very carefully to assure that all items are transferred securely and efficiently. Unlike some other distinguished libraries undergoing renovation, which close for the duration, the Bodleian Libraries are attempting this unprecedented feat whilst maintaining virtually unbroken service.

Meanwhile, pending the New Bodleian's re-development, we have begun to serve a selection of our Special Collections in the Lankester

Room (*inset*) of the Radcliffe Science Library (*pictured*). In November we began to move into a converted storage area, replete with a state-of-the-art fire suppression system, following its renovation to the high standards commensurate with the quality of the books and manuscripts that will be kept there for the next five years – such as Mendelssohn's Hebrides overture, Princess Elizabeth's New Year's gift for

Katherine Parr embroidered in her own hand, Magna Carta, the Gutenberg Bible and the Audubon Elephant folios.

In December, the Special Collections Reading Room in the New Bodleian Library closed, and a new chapter in Bodleian history opened. How will readers respond when they venture down Parks Road to the 'Starship Enterprise' world of the Lankester Room, forsaking, no doubt ruefully, the dimly-lit timbered hall of Duke Humfrey or the shabby quarters of the neo-modern New Bodleian? There are some positive signs. On the first day of opening, two researchers requested over 300 items. In what must have been a record, they received them in the Lankester Room in 15 minutes!

Perhaps – in addition to the convenient access to Special Collections – the bright lights, extended hours (instead of closing at 7pm, the Lankester



Room will stay open until 10pm), and the lure of coffee whilst sitting snugly in the Abbot's Kitchen of the Radcliffe Science Library, will provide some compensation for the disruption.

### **Acquiring the Gehenna Press**

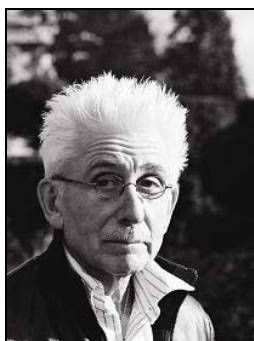
It's a good thing that the Bodleian is expanding its storage capacity because, on October 15, seven sturdy crates arrived at our Broad Street

loading dock and were muscled down into the bowels of the New Bodleian by our strong and able porters. Encased in one of the crates was an Albion Press that had made its second transatlantic journey, returning to England after 30 years in Leeds, Massachusetts.

The Press, a gift of book and photography collector Lisa Baskin to her husband, artist and sculptor Leonard Baskin, was accompanied by many crates of material from the Gehenna Press archives. The most important private press of the later half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Gehenna (Hebrew for 'black as hell') has come to the Bodleian on deposit as we enlist the help of friends and foundations to make the Bodleian its permanent home. I am pleased to report that a major gift of £75,000 by the Art Fund was awarded to us in December towards this goal.

Baskin, whose *Oresteia* represented the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the Bodleian's quatercentenary exhibition '*Wonderful things: Four Centuries of Collecting*', had a lifelong collaboration with Ted Hughes. Rich with probing, pithy and witty correspondence between Baskin and Hughes over decades, and replete with multiple proofs and drafts of Baskin's distinctive drawings and printmaking, the Gehenna Press archive will be a superlative resource for researchers in literature, art history and the study of the book. When the New Bodleian re-opens its doors as the Weston Library following its transformation into a special collections library, we expect the Albion Press will inspire new generations to learn about printing.

### Sir Roy Strong donates his archives



A very different archive, a cultural record of England from the 1970s to the present, has been promised to the Bodleian. Sir Roy Strong, the celebrated director of the Victoria and Albert Museum from 1972 – and with his wife Julia Trevelyan Oman the creator of the most

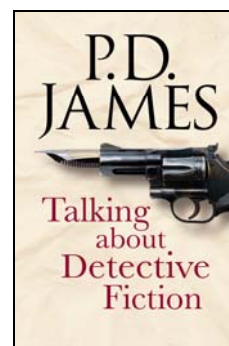
ambitious garden of the last quarter-century, the Laskett – will donate his exquisitely well-organized scrapbooks documenting the evolution

of the 23-room house and garden, photographs of the couple interacting with cultural connoisseurs, correspondence with the Queen Mother, Sir Roy's school teacher and a host of others, and extensive records of the films, radio programmes and books featuring the irrepressible Strong's observations on art, national treasures and the nature of Englishness (the subject of his forthcoming book).

The Gehenna and Strong archives are extraordinary acquisitions that extend the scope of the Bodleian. We continue to push boundaries and to expand our horizons.

### Opening up the Bodleian Library to all

On October 2, for example, we hosted a series of talks by crime and detective fiction writers in the Divinity School occasioned by the publication of PD James's non-fiction – *Talking about Detective Fiction* – published under the Bodleian imprint and with Baroness James generously donating royalties to the benefit of the Bodleian Libraries.



Oxford alumna Kate Summerscale (St John's, 1984) was interviewed about her prize-winning book based on a famous Victorian child murder; Val McDermid (St Hilda's, 1972) gave a riveting tour of crime fiction; and PD James and Ruth Rendell captivated 200 fans in a friendly discussion of their writing. On display in the

Proscholium was a tantalizing sampler of related materials from our collections.

The libraries are alive with lectures, master-classes, concerts and exhibitions. *Crossing*

