As the Bodleian Library prepares for the opening of the £80m Weston Library, Linora Lawrence continues her access-all-areas tour around this ancient and celebrated institution.

O is for Oriental Collections - which encompasses South and Inner Asia, China, Japan, Korea, the Middle East and Hebraic and Judaic holdings.

When one thinks of China one tends to think of the very old and venerable or cutting edge. Well, think cutting-edge when it comes to the new home for the KB Chen China Centre Library (formally known as the Bodleian Chinese Studies Library) was officially opened by Prince William on September 8 in its stunning new home in the Dickson Poon University of Oxford China Centre within the grounds of St Hugh's College.

The library’s new name is in recognition of a generous gift from Hong Kong businessman, Mr Henry Chen, towards St Hugh’s College. The building is named after his late father, Mr K B Chen.

Approximately 200 students undertake Chinese studies in any given year. Given the facilities, the elegance and the tranquility of the library’s new premises in the basement could be a reason for choosing the subject just for the pleasure of working in this library whose reading rooms look out onto an inner courtyard planted with bamboos and palm trees and a carved stone plaque with the citation from the Chinese Book of Rites.

Under the direction of the Chinese Studies Librarian, Mirth Chung and subject specialist, Joshua Seuffert, the small but dedicated library team look after their readers’ needs. The space will seat up to 60 readers at any one time between the tables, desks and well-equipped carrels (private study spaces), half of them lockable (so that study can be picked up again, uninterrupted, the next day), plus a seminar room with all the latest IT facilities.

The centre has state-of-the-art teaching and meeting rooms of various sizes with common rooms for both students and staff. Every inch of the building is put to good use – a visit to the rooftop shows solar panels on the north wing over student accommodation which looks out onto St Hugh’s gardens.

Once word gets about it will be no surprise if staff from other Bodleian libraries start asking if they can book a room at the library for a meeting.

Joshua explained: “The old and beautiful collections will be kept in the new Weston Library under the guardianship of David Hellwell. They include 6,500 wood block printed books, one of the biggest collections in Europe. This is a library for teaching and study.” He foresees the library working closely with the China Centre upstairs.

“The print and online output from China is

Continued on page 20
The Shuinjo — a document, issued in 1613, stating the terms of an agreement to trade between Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu and Captain Saris of the English East India Company.

From page 19

roughly equal to all of Europe put together. We anticipate working closely with the academics in order to select the material precisely relevant to what they are teaching.

A Korean Studies Library opened in June 2013 within the Oriental Institute Library in Pusey Lane. The project, entitled Window on Korea, is a collaboration between the University of Oxford and the National Library of Korea.

It is the first space dedicated to Korean Studies in the UK, possibly in Europe. Prior to its opening, material was cared for by the Oriental Institute Library along with other relatively small collections.

Dr James Lewis, lecturer in Korean History, said: "The Window on Korea project brings together books on Korea from disparate parts of the Library system and augments these with substantial numbers of recent publications given by the National Library of Korea."

"This new gift boosts Oxford's Korean holdings into primary position in the United Kingdom and also puts it in the forefront of European collections."

Minh Chung has worked tirelessly towards this Korean library becoming a reality. The Bodleian, in its wisdom, was collecting Korean material from before the university started teaching Korean Studies.

The Korean National Library has given some 3,000 volumes (with more to follow over the next five years) increasing the Bodleian's collection to 33,000 volumes in the Korean language, plus many more about Korea written in other languages.

Minh Chung's own book, Korean Treasures, published in 2011, is a feast for the eyes and is packed full of information, truly a worthy addition to what is now the largest single collection of Korean written materials in the UK.

The Bodleian Japanese Library is situated in the Nissan Institute of Japanese Studies in Winchester Road.

To the right of the entrance grows bamboo to set the tone for visitors. An extremely calm and well-ordered atmosphere presides in these modern premises operating on two floors.

The librarian in charge, Mrs Izumi Tyler, explains that the collections are among the finest in Europe.

Other esteemed collections are held at Cambridge University Library and the School of Oriental and African Studies (University of London).

The Bodleian's earliest Japanese accession was three volumes of Sago-bon presented to the Library in 1629 by Robert Viney, Rector of Barnack (interestingly, Barnack, a village near Stamford, Lincolnshire is famous for its ancient burial barrows dating back to between 2,330-2,130 BC).

Perhaps this historic background combined with the fact that Viney had studied at Oxford honed his interest in rare objects. Sago-bon are luxury editions of Japanese literary works printed by the Hon'ami Koetsu's Press at Soga, Kyoto between 1608-15.

The next oldest acquisition is similarly unique and significant in the history of Japanese printing.

Kiri-shitai-ban are various kinds of missionary literature produced by the Jesuit Mission Press in Japan between 1590 and 1614, year of the expulsion of the missionaries from Japan.

What many think of as the 'jewel in the crown' in the library's collection is the Shuinjo — a document, issued in 1613, stating the terms of an agreement to trade between Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu and Captain Saris of the English East India Company's Eighth Voyage.

This impressive document is framed for the purposes of preservation and is locked securely away, coming out only for symposiums and exhibitions.

Exquisite Japanese lettering (read from left to right and vertically) on thick creped Japanese paper, staked with the kind used for formal documents, is completed by the shogun's personal vermilion, square-shaped seal.

A mention must also be given to Will Adams (1564-1620) an Englishman who joined a Dutch voyage as a pilot in 1598. In 1600 his ship was stranded on the Bungo shore in Kyushu.

Adams was granted an audience with Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu and this eventually led to him acting as an advisor to Tokugawa, becoming known in Japan as Miura Anjin and being granted privileges and estates.

Adams' log book records four voyages which he made between 1614 and 1619, made its way to the Bodleian Library as part of a gift from Sir Henry Savile, a close personal friend of Sir Thomas Bodley.

Adams has been the inspiration for various characters in historical novels, including Shogun by James Clavell.

The Bodleian's Middle Eastern and Islamic collections are tremendously important on at least three counts—the first is their sheer size, secondly many of the items are quite literally unique, and thirdly, many are exquisitely beautiful.

Alasdair Watson, Bahari Curator of Persian Collection vaxes lyrical when he talks about them. "When the Bodleian Library opened in 1602 there was already a manuscript copy of the Arabic Qur'an among its collections, and in the same year a number of Persian books were added. So we can honestly say that our Oriental collections date from the 17th century."

Alasdair explained that, over the next 250 years, the Islamic collections of the Library increased through purchases, as well as donations and bequests from many distinguished and discerning scholars and collectors.

Currently, the collections stand at more than 15,000 works, not only in the three main Islamic languages of Arabic, Persian and Turkish, but also a variety of other languages including Chagatay, Kashmiri, Malay, Pashto, and Urdu.

"In the 17th century there was a great flowering of scholarly interest in the 'Arabic
learning' and Oxford scholars such as Archbishop William Laud and Professor Edward Pococke were two of its main proponents," Alsdair explained.

"They both collected large numbers of manuscripts which eventually came to the library. Laud was also instrumental in setting up a chair of Arabic at Oxford in 1636, and the first holder of the Laudian Professorship, as it is still known today, was the very same Professor Pococke, the finest Arabist of his time."

Pococke was also to hold the Professorship of Hebrew at Oxford in conjunction with the Arabic.

The Bodleian's Islamic and Middle Eastern collections cover all classical disciplines both religious and secular including grammar, Arabic and Persian poetry, medicine, Qur'anic sciences, law, history, astronomy, and even magic.

Early collectors of manuscripts were primarily interested in the texts they contained and interest in the illustrations and miniatures, which are of such a delight to art historians and connoisseurs today, was somewhat secondary.

A prime example of this is a copy dated to 1070 CE of an Arabic translation of the book of

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Conic Sections by Apollonius of Perga, a Greek mathematician of the third century.

Of the eight books which make up this work the last is lost and books five to seven are only preserved in the Arabic translations.

When Edmond Halley (of comet fame) made his edition of the Conics in 1710 he used the Bodleian copy having already learned Arabic in order to study mathematical and astronomical texts.

Amazingly he also reconstructed the lost eighth book.

One early and fascinating example of where miniature paintings were indeed appreciated in their own right is the Laud Ragamala, a Muraqqa' or album of miniatures depicting classical Indian musical modes juxtaposed with panels of Arabic and Persian calligraphy.

The Laud Ragamala was the first Islamic Indian manuscript to come into the library and again was given by Archbishop Laud in 1640, only 30 or so years after the album had been first commissioned by Abd al-Rahim Khan-i-Khanan, commander-in-chief of Mughal Emperor Akbar's armies, a great patron of art and literature.

Following on from the recent Love and Devotion in Persian Literature exhibition, Alasdair revealed that it is hoped that the Laud Ragamala will provide the inspiration for a new exhibition to be held at the Bodleian Library's

Weston Library exhibition space in the winter of 2018 in which the themes of Persian and Indian poetry and music as represented in the album and others like it will be explored.

This will provide a window to view aspects of the elite courtly and literary culture of 17th-century Mughal India.

Rather than these manuscripts simply remaining curiosities, it is a testament to the importance and breadth of the collections and to the knowledge, discernment and generosity of the collectors and donors of manuscripts to the library that modern-day researchers and scholars continue to use the Islamic collections for their editions of the texts, their monographs, and their discussions of art history and the history of the book.

In the past few years, scholars have come to the Bodleian from all over the world to study works such as Firdawsi's Shahnamah or Book of Persian Kings, al-Suli's Book of Constellations, the medical works of Al-Razi and Ibn Nafis, and the Algebra of al-Khwarizmi, and with the recent endowment of the post of Bahar Curator of the collections and the imminent opening of the David Oriental Reading Room in the new Weston Library, this long tradition is set to continue with renewed vigour.

The Bodleian holds the largest known collection of Sanskrit manuscripts outside the Indian sub-continent. It also has some Gujarati and Hindi manuscripts as well as Telugu, Prakrit, Marathi and Pali, and some Jain manuscripts.

Its collection has been judged to be surpassed only by that of the British Library's India Office Collection which incorporates the East India Company's Collection.

Continued on page 23

October 2014 Oxfordshire Limited Edition 21
is for Publishing: Not content with possessing 12 million books and counting, the Bodleian Library adds to its collections by publishing in its own right — this year it is producing 30 new books. The Bodleian published its first item in 1605 — that was its first catalogue and, naturally, catalogues have been published at regular intervals ever since. From the turn of the last century they started publishing books relating to the collections themselves as well as books to accompany exhibitions they were mounting. With the technology available at the time books were only produced in black and white and were sold primarily in the gift shop on site. Samuel Fanous, head of publishing, joined the Bodleian in 2005. He said: “The first thing I did was to visit my opposite numbers at the national metropolitan institutions such as the British Library, the British Museum, the National Portrait Gallery, the Victoria and Albert Museum, The Tate Gallery and the Royal Collections. They all had one thing in common — flourishing publishing programmes.”

Samuel, knowing as he did that the Bodleian, by its very nature, would never have as many visitors as a London museum or art gallery, could see that it was vital to start selling through bookshops and online and to obtain worldwide distribution. Today the Bodleian’s publishing arm reaches out to readers globally which, of course, the exhibitions, gallery talks and lectures do locally. “The books are the Bodleian’s ambassadors, taking its name and contents around the world,” said Samuel.

They also generate valuable publicity for the Bodleian, as well as much-needed income. Soon after Samuel joined the Bodleian the librarian then in charge of the Iffley House Library drew his attention to a pamphlet written by the American State Department for US forces serving in Britain in 1942. It was black and white and stapled down the middle. Samuel was fascinated by it and, seeing its potential, decided to reproduce it, but not in its pamphlet state. “The original did not look sufficiently original,” laughed Samuel. “I wanted it to look like something you might have found in your grandparents’ attic.”

“I hit on the idea of making it look like a ration book. We used Eric Gill’s sans-serif typeface which was prevalent during the war years and printed it on recycled paper to echo the quality of paper in use during the war.”

The success of this book led to its companions being published — Instructions for American Servicemen in Australia, 1942, Instructions for British Servicemen in Germany, 1944 and Instructions for British Servicemen in France, 1944.

The publishing trade’s leading magazine The Bookseller wrote that these books marked the beginning of the avalanche of so-called ‘nostalgia publishing’. To date the Instructions series has sold more than 250,000 copies.

Samuel said: “Sometimes, I feel like the luckiest publisher in the world. We are sitting on a gold mine of publishing possibilities in the Bodleian. The work is so varied and we have a highly professional, dedicated team, all from the sharp end of publishing. They punch way above their weight and are hugely enthusiastic.”

The list is aimed firmly at a general, not a scholarly, audience and covers broadly the fields of history, literature, art history, botanical art and general interest. Samuel and his team have published six new titles to commemorate the First World War.

From Downing Street to the Trenches by Mike Webb accompanies the current Bodleian exhibition and recounts the events of the Great War through the letters, diaries and memories of those who lived through it. From Prime Minister Henry Asquith down to a local parish priest. It contains extracts from the previously unpublished diary of Earl Harcourt, who took notes of Cabinet meetings — something that was strictly forbidden.

“The Hare Have Got My Gramophone! explores the world of advertising in the First World War and the early use of propaganda disseminated through advertisements. The book has been widely reviewed and was featured in the Daily Mail.

Secrets in a Dead Fish by Melanie KIng recounts the extraordinary lengths to which spies went to communicate with one another during the conflict. These included hanging out the washing on a specified day (which served to communicate secret codes to military pilots) and stuffing messages in a dead fish, which would be picked up downstream by operatives.

Wilfred Owen, An Illustrated Life is a biography of the famous war poet, whose work is brought to life by Oxford’s Jane Potter. If England Were Invaded reprints a novel first published ten years before the outbreak of war. Journalist and novelist William Le Queux gripped the nation with a tale that sold over a million copies and was translated into 27 languages. The book recounts an imaginary invasion of Britain by German forces and the ensuing drama.

Ye Berlin Tapestrie reproduces John Hassall’s 1915 parody of the German invasion of Belgium in the same year, made in the style of the 11th-century Bayeux Tapestry, shining a light of wartime propaganda and the very British way of satirising the enemy.

is also for Printing Bibliography (Greek: literal meaning ‘book writing’) as a discipline, is the academic study of books. Descriptive bibliography studies books as physical objects and this is where printing comes in. The Bodleian has had a Bibliography Room since 1949, created to facilitate the study of hand press printing.

The room has moved locations round the library’s premises over the years, its most recent move having taken place in the autumn of 2011 when it relocated to the Story Museum in Pembroke Street, where it will remain until it moves into the Weston Library in 2015. While in Pembroke Street it is known as the Bodleian Hand Printing Workshop at the Story Museum.

The printing workshop expanded over the years with donations and bequests of presses, type, equipment and money. Two of the most important benefactors of the workshop were first of all, the Samson Press (a small press at Woodstock which gave its entire plant and archive, to the library around 1970, and secondly the University Press which at different times has presented type, a wooden ‘common’ press of the 18th-century, and three type-frames originally made for them by a local joiner, John Reinford, in 1669.

The Bodleian now owns five iron presses and two wooden presses, plus an impressive collection of related equipment, type and teaching specimens.

Over the past ten years the supervisor, Paul Nash, has been expanding the teaching to include more visiting groups from schools and universities, and members of the public, who are taught the joys of printing in classes and courses aimed at children and adults, beginners and more experienced printers.