

# Bodleian Archives & Manuscripts

## FAQs



Bodleian Libraries  
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

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### Introduction

The Bodleian Libraries release an updated version of our online catalogue for archives and manuscripts on 30 September 2019. The new platform – known as [Bodleian Archives & Manuscripts](#) – replaces the [Online Catalogue for Archives and Manuscripts](#), which has been serving our users since 1997. The new platform makes significant enhancements to the accessibility of the Libraries' unique archive and manuscript collections, and provides a sustainable environment for the future management of important collections metadata. <https://archives.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/>

### What will I find in Bodleian Archives & Manuscripts?

At launch, Bodleian Archives & Manuscripts will include descriptions for approximately 100,000 boxes of archival material collected by the Bodleian Libraries, dating from c. 1500 to the 21st century. Material described is predominantly in manuscript form, but the collections also contain large amounts of photographic material, audio-visual items, and born-digital content. The service will describe:

- Manuscripts acquired singly, such as Jane Austen's Volume the First, or individual manuscript diaries
- Small collections, such as George Brownlee's laboratory notebooks (haemophilia research), Christina Rossetti's notebooks, and the archive of the Oxford University Exploration Club
- Large manuscript collections important for the early-modern period, such as the Tanner and Rawlinson manuscripts
- Personal archives, such as those of:
  - Poets and writers (e.g. Alan Bennett, Robert Bridges, Maria Edgeworth, Louis MacNeice and Stephen Spender)
  - Politicians (e.g. Clement Attlee, Barbara Castle, Edmund Dell, Benjamin Disraeli, Roy Jenkins, Harold Macmillan, and Harold Wilson)
  - Intellectuals (e.g. Isaiah Berlin, R.G. Collingwood, and Gilbert Murray)
  - Scientists (e.g. Walter Bodmer, Dorothy Hodgkin, Louise Johnson, Gwyn Macfarlane and Rudolf Peierls).
- Family archives, such as those of the Clarendon, Harcourt and Lovelace-Byron families
- Large archives of organizations including those of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, Anti-Slavery Society, British Association for the Advancement of Science, Conservative Party, Marconi, Oxfam GB, Oxford Group, etc.

### Does Bodleian Archives & Manuscripts provide a comprehensive catalogue of the Bodleian Libraries' post-1500 archive and manuscript holdings?

No, not yet. Bodleian Archives & Manuscripts contains descriptions of the Bodleian Libraries' archive and manuscript post-1500 holdings only where these descriptions exist in digital format. Descriptions in Bodleian Archives & Manuscripts currently include:

- Full descriptions for all holdings catalogued after 2001.
- Full descriptions for some holdings catalogued prior to 2001, following the conversion of descriptions from typescript to digital form.
- Collection-level descriptions of most of the collections described in our published hardcopy catalogues. These descriptions provide a high-level summary of the collection only, and will usually contain a reference to a hardcopy catalogue, which the user will need to consult in order to view information about the boxes and volumes contained in the collection.

We are working towards the conversion of all of our legacy hardcopy finding aids into digital form for inclusion in Bodleian Archives & Manuscripts. Our main legacy findings aids are the Summary and New Summary Catalogues. Digitised scans of these findings aids are available via SOLO and you will find links to them from relevant collection level descriptions in Bodleian Archives & Manuscripts:

- The [Old Summary Catalogue](#) describes western archives and manuscripts acquired up to 1915.
- The [New Summary Catalogue](#) describes post-medieval western archives and manuscripts acquired 1916-1975.

Descriptions of the University of Oxford's own archives are not yet held within Bodleian Archives & Manuscripts. Please see our website for [further details](#).

## What won't I find in Bodleian Archives & Manuscripts?

Descriptions of the Libraries' western medieval manuscripts are available on the [Medieval Manuscripts in Oxford Libraries](#) website. Some medieval items also appear in Bodleian Archives & Manuscripts where they form part of an archive also containing post 1500 materials, but you will always find our best description of a medieval manuscript at [Medieval Manuscripts in Oxford Libraries](#).

Descriptions of manuscripts in Oriental languages may be found in a range of specialist catalogues. Please see the [LibGuide for Oriental Manuscripts](#) for further details.

## How can I access training for Bodleian Archives & Manuscripts?

Training for the new system will be available to students, academics, library and other staff through the Bodleian Libraries' iSkills programme. Training will also be embedded in the Special Collections induction sessions offered by the Libraries.

## What is the technology underpinning Bodleian Archives & Manuscripts?

Bodleian Archives & Manuscripts is built on an open source system known as ArchivesSpace. Based on Encoded Archival Description, a globally recognised data standards for archival description, ArchivesSpace is an archives information management application for managing and providing web access to archives, manuscripts and digital objects. The user community of over 400 subscribing members is strongest in North America, but there is a growing user community in Europe, as well as a number of users in Africa, Asia, South America, and Australasia. Users similar to the Bodleian Libraries include Harvard and Yale in the United States. UK users include the University of Edinburgh, with the University of Cambridge currently in the process of implementing ArchivesSpace.

ArchivesSpace's initial development was funded through an Andrew W. Mellon Foundation grant, with the first major release in 2013. The latest release is v. 2.6.0 (May 2019).

## How will Bodleian Archives & Manuscripts benefit our users?

Bodleian Archives & Manuscripts provides a clean and modern interface, which is typical of what users of archives and manuscript collections will experience when working with similar collections at

other repositories. The catalogue provides a number of functional improvements over our current platform:

- Enhanced search and browse features, providing users with intuitive ways of searching our holdings, and making links between collections
- Ability to derive links to share search results, or sets of collections related to specific subjects (e.g. all collections indexed as 'Colonial administrators')
- Improved metadata management capabilities
- Greater standardization of metadata improving potential for data sharing with services such as the Archives Hub, The National Archives Discovery, and Archives Portal Europe
- Large and strong user community to share the costs of development
- Support for digital object metadata

By adopting a widely used open source platform the Bodleian Libraries can share the responsibility for ongoing development with a number of research organisations, ensuring we are well placed to continue to deliver improvements to our users' experience.

## How do I access materials described in Bodleian Archives & Manuscripts?

Users can access materials described in Bodleian Archives & Manuscripts in the Weston Library, the Bodleian Libraries' dedicated special collections library. Orders for archive and manuscript materials are made using a manual green slip, or via email to [specialcollections.bookings@bodleian.ox.ac.uk](mailto:specialcollections.bookings@bodleian.ox.ac.uk). There are plans to introduce online ordering of this material in future. Further details of how to place requests for material are available at <https://archives.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/help#order>.

## Does Bodleian Archives & Manuscripts contain any digitised or born-digital collection material?

No. Bodleian Archives & Manuscripts provides [descriptions](#) of archives and manuscripts only. In some cases there may be links to Digital.Bodleian where users can access digital surrogates of some of our holdings.

## How can I give you feedback on Bodleian Archives & Manuscripts?

We have included access to a feedback form on the site itself. We would love to hear what you think!

## What else is the Bodleian Libraries doing to improve access the Bodleian's Archives and Manuscripts?

The release of Bodleian Archives & Manuscripts will transform the discoverability of our archives and manuscript holdings, but we are not stopping there. Other strategic priorities in this area include:

- Expanding the range of content included in Bodleian Archives & Manuscripts – we are engaged in multiple initiatives to convert legacy manual catalogue metadata to digital form for inclusion in Bodleian Archives & Manuscripts
- Tackling our cataloguing backlog – we continue to secure external support from a wide range of sponsors to maintain a strong cataloguing programme, designed to release as much new material for research and teaching as possible.
- Working towards a discovery layer for all archives and manuscripts in Oxford - developing a proposal for the introduction of a discovery layer to facilitate access to archives and manuscripts across the collegiate University
- Planning for the introduction of online ordering for archives and manuscripts

## Which areas of the Bodleian Libraries Strategy 2018-2022 does Bodleian Archives & Manuscripts address?

In the *Bodleian Libraries Strategy 2018-2022*<sup>1</sup> the organization set the target of opening up the Libraries' collections:

- We will increase access to our unique archive and manuscript holdings, unlocking their potential for research, learning and teaching
- We will make inaccessible collections available through cataloguing and prioritizing the conversion of legacy hardcopy catalogues into digital forms, incorporating catalogue descriptions into easily searchable digital records

And of making efficiencies:

- We will prioritize key areas across the Bodleian Libraries in which efficiencies can be made in order to control costs, and with the aim of increasing the effectiveness of the organization, and lowering dependency on University funding

## What can you tell me about the platform being replaced?

The Bodleian Libraries were pioneers in the use of international encoding standards for archive catalogues and the publication of archive catalogues on the web. Our first catalogues went online in 1997, transforming the experience of users at that time. The bespoke system built then has been in use ever since, with only small enhancements over the years. It has served us well.

The current site attracts approximately 60,000 unique users per year. Around 50% of users are based in the UK, 17% in the USA, 3% in Australia, 3% in Canada, while France, Germany, India, Ireland, Italy and South Africa each generate 1-2% of our users. Referral sources are Google, Direct link, Bing, UK National Archives, Wikipedia, and Bodleian Libraries blogs. Devices used to access the Online Catalogue are as follows: Desktop (71%), Mobile (21%), Tablet (8%).

With the launch of Bodleian Archives & Manuscripts the Bodleian Libraries is back at the cutting edge of access and discovery tools for archive and manuscript collections.

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/about/strategy>