As the Bodleian Library prepares for the opening of the £80m Weston Library in the autumn, Linora Lawrence begins an access-all-areas tour around this ancient and celebrated institution which is embracing change.

An A-Z of the Bodleian

This A-Z of the Bodleian Libraries does not claim to be comprehensive; it aims to give an overview, looking at some things old and some things new.

Hopefully readers will emerge feeling better informed as to what happens in the various libraries in the group that come under the central administration located in the Clarendon Building on Broad Street.

The Bodleian Libraries are a department of the University of Oxford. They abide by its rules, pay scales, terms and conditions, and so on, unlike the colleges and their individual libraries, which are autonomous.

There are some 27 physical libraries within the group. But it is a bit like trying to count the Rollestone Stones — everyone comes up with a different number.

is for Admissions Office

This is your first port of call if you want to become a reader in any of the libraries in the Bodleian group. All members and staff of the university are entitled to be readers and new students are automatically enrolled.

The reader’s card also acts as a university ID card. Others, with suitable academic references, can apply for a reader’s card.

It is interesting to note that in June 2013 there were 23,243 holders of Bodleian Library cards who were not members of the university.

is also for Archives.

If you were JRR Tolkien or C S Lewis or Philip Pullman you would probably want them to be stored in an old tower in the historic heart of the city — well, they are! The archives are based in the Bodleian Library in the Tower of the Five Orders — it could be straight out of The Lord of the Rings.

The earliest document in the archives concerns a murder in 1209. The document, dated 1214, settled a dispute between the university and the town in connection with the hanging of two clerks for the alleged murder of a woman.

Simon Bailey tells the story that the student who actually committed the murder fled the city, but the townspeople were so incensed they seized the other two who lodged in the same house insisting that they must have been complicit.

The consequence of this was that after the hangings most of the scholars abandoned Oxford and returned to their homes wherever they were. Some scholars went to Cambridge (because it was their place of origin) and never returned to Oxford, and their continuing presence in Cambridge, led, within 20 years or so, to the establishment of a university there.

The award, the first of many similar adjudications which almost invariably settled...
local differences in the university's favour, commanded the town to feast 100 poor scholars annually and provided for the appointment of a Chancellor, this being the first preference to such an officer.

Before the Bodleian Library was built the archives were held at St Frideswide's Priory, where they were stored in chests each of which had more than one key and key holder—one chest at least had four keys and four key holders and is in the safe-keeping of the Ashmolean.

In 1320, when the old Congregation House was built onto the side of the University Church of St Mary's they were moved there for safekeeping and there they remained until 1634 when the post of Keeper of the Archives was created and the Tower of the Five Orders was designated as their residence.

The records have remained there to this day, though much modern material has been housed in the basement of the Examination Schools in the High Street since 1973. This will move to the Weston Library when the refurbishment is completed.

**B**

**is for Bodleian**

Sir Thomas Bodley (1545-1613), a scholar and a diplomat, was the founder of the Bodleian Library. The original library of the University of Oxford which, by Bodley's time had fallen into sad disarray, started life around 1320 in an upper room in the University Church of St Mary with the bequest of the private collection of books of Thomas Cobham, Bishop of Winchester.

These books would have been kept in locked chests and were added to between 1439 and 1447 by the scholarly and well-educated Duke Humphrey (younger brother of Henry V) to the tune of some 276 manuscripts. It was in 1444 that the university decided that the library should move to a larger, purpose-built room to be constructed over the Divinity School.

From the day of its opening the library failed to prosper. Manuscripts were, by now, old technology, printing had come to Oxford some ten years earlier and the university consisted of a collection of academics with no central system of administration. Like many other libraries in the reformation period it basically broke up. By the time Thomas Bodley came to the rescue only 13 of the Bishop's original volumes remained.

Bodley was born in 1545 in Exeter into a staunchly Protestant family. When Mary Tudor came to the throne, along with many other Protestant families the Bodleys took refuge on the continent, staying for a while in Wesel, then Frankfurt before following John Knox to Geneva where they were to become part of an English community in exile.

Nicholas Hilliard (the famous miniaturist), then aged about nine, was of the party having been placed in the care of John Bodley by his father, a goldsmith of Exeter.

Thomas was remarkably well provided with his brothers, to receive an excellent classical education in Geneva. His curriculum included Latin, Hebrew, Greek and Divinity.

Following Mary Tudor's death and the Accession of the Protestant Elizabeth to the throne the family returned to England and Thomas went up to Magdalen College, Oxford, the following year, graduating as a Bachelor of Arts in 1563 and becoming a fellow of Merton College in 1564.

He was appointed as Merton's first lecturer in Greek. However, he developed a deeper interest in the Hebrew he had studied in Geneva and was soon to become known for his expertise in the subject.

Wishing to widen his horizons Thomas obtained leave of absence in 1576 to travel on the continent, writing that I waxed desirous to travel beyond the Sea, for attaining to the knowledge of some speciall modern strange tongues, and for the increase of my experience in the managing of affaires.'

He became proficient in Italian, French and Spanish, all of which became invaluable assets when he found himself developing a political career. He was 'subcontracted' by ambassadors because of his knowledge of languages and sent to negotiate on behalf of the Queen—some say he acted as a spy.

Between various missions he married Ann, the widow of Nicholas Ball, a wealthy fish

continent, the Library at the University of Leiden being an example.

In 1602 another letter from Bodley to the vice-chancellor declared the building work complete and reported that he was busy himself with 'gathering in Bookes'.

Thomas James was appointed Bodley's Librarian, a title still used today; the other of the two original posts in the Library is that of Janitor. Bodley's correspondence with James, which continued until his death, effectively formed a manual of library management for its time. His grasp of successful fundraising would not be out of place today.

It is gratifying to know that his work was recognized by James I who knighted Bodley in 1604, followed by a visit to the Library in 1605. Sir Thomas Bodley's last great achievement (1610) was to persuade the Stationers' Company to enter into an agreement to supply a free copy of every book registered at Stationers' Hall (this was the foundation of legal deposit), a legacy lasting until today and into the future.

Bodley did worry that this arrangement might introduce into the library 'idle books, and rife raffes', and was anxious about 'the harm that the scandal will bring unto the Librarie when it shall be given out, that we stuffe it full of baggage books'.

Sir Thomas Bodley was buried in Merton College chapel on March 29, 1613.

**C**

**is for Cairns**

The Cairns Library can be found in the John Radcliffe Hospital—where was the site of some very early Below the Library's Staff and rife raffes', and was anxious about ‘the harm that the scandal will bring unto the Librarie when it shall be given out, that we stuffe it full of baggage books'.

Sir Thomas Bodley was buried in Merton College chapel on March 29, 1613.

Unsurprisingly Cairns was appointed its first Newfield Professor of Surgery in 1937. Following the Munich agreement in September 1938, Cairns ordered in large supplies of neurosurgical instruments that he knew the army would need in the event of war and went on to establish a hospital for head injuries, which was run under the auspices of the War Office, in St Hugh’s College.

At the beginning of the Second World War they had 50 beds—half the time of the Normandy landings they had 430.

Cairns, who was knighted in 1946, was closely involved in post-war planning. Through his association with Howard Florey (a fellow Australian who went on to win the 1945 Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine together with Ernst Chain and Alexander Fleming) he became interested in the treatment of infections of the central nervous system, particularly tuberculous meningitis.

Another field of interest was the physiology of consciousness and the surgery of mental illness.

In another brush with history, in 1935...
Cairns attended T.E. Lawrence after the motorcycle accident that caused his death. This experience and his observations about the loss of life in general through motorcycling head injuries, resulted in the introduction of crash helmets for army motorcyclists in the early years of the Second World War and later, for civilian riders.

A lymphosarcoma of the caecum caused Cairns’ untimely death in the old Radcliffe Infirmary at the age of only 56.

It seems only fitting that a man who championed the teaching of medicine should have a library named after him and wouldn’t have welcomed the current exhibition on at the Bodleian – Great Medical Discoveries: 800 years of Oxford innovation.

Conrad Keating, writer-in-residence at The Wellcome Unit for the History of Medicine, is the curator of this fascinating exhibition which runs until May 18.

It is quite a thought that even as you are visiting the Exhibition Room in the Bodleian Library, perhaps learning the history of penicillin or getting interested in the Oxford Knee, there are people working at the cutting-edge of the next medical discoveries less than half-a-mile away from you in the science departments of the university.

is for Digitisation

This project began in the Bodleian Libraries during the 1990s. Initially, copying even one page was very expensive, as is always the way with any new technology.

At the beginning of 2000, the Oxford Digital Library Project was launched, the first systematic initiative in this area. It very soon became clear that the Bodleian could not bear the costs of digitisation on its own and that project partners needed to be sought.

One major partner was Google and the collaboration known as the Google Book Project took five years between 2004 and 2009. Some 350 classics (220 million pages) are now available online thanks to that initiative.

It was, however, becoming clear that a whole new department needed to be created and dedicated to this work with someone to head it up who could develop a strategic plan to create the Bodleian in regard to all digital projects which would go beyond the task of digitisation.

In 2012, Dr Wolfram Horstmann (picture above) joined the Bodleian Libraries as Associate Director for Digital Library Programmes and Information Technologies.

“There is no plan to digitise all the collections in the libraries,” Dr Horstmann explained, “Given the size of the Bodleian group of libraries this would take decades. The choices are driven by demand from scholars and academics. The current policy is to digitise the unique, rare and ancient.”

He gives an example from a current project namely a collaboration with the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (BAV) which is digitising and making available, on one dedicated website, some of the world’s most unique and important Bibles and biblical texts from their joint collections. The first tranche went live online at the end of 2013 and, in the first 24-hour period, the website received 40,000 hits from 174 countries.

“The traffic exceeded all expectations,” Dr Horstmann said, “Digitisation is not a competitor to the printed book, but it can complement and extend the mission of the Bodleian Libraries. In many cases the fragile nature of some items does not allow it to be accessed by even the most careful scholar. Once digitised it is available for all to study. Already many items have come to the attention of experts who did not realise they were there in the Bodleian.”

A staff of 50 staff – curators, imaging specialists, conservators and digital engineers – are working on projects at any one time. Every item recommended for digitisation goes for a review with a conservator to determine how it can be handled and photographed. In the case of an especially sensitive item a conservator goes with the book to the imaging studio. The work does not end with an image being taken. Some information, such as the date, is generated automatically but an important part of the work is creating the context information for the object and then placing it in the relevant website. This is far more time consuming than the moment of imaging.

Some collaborations take place with other institutions such as the Shelley-Godwin Archive project with the New York Public Library and the Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities, plus contributions from the Bodleian and some other British libraries.

This provides the digitised manuscripts of Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, William Godwin, and Mary Wollstonecraft, bringing together online for the first time ever the widely dispersed handwritten legacy of this uniquely gifted, and iconic family of writers.

More frequently these days digitisation is financed by either individual philanthropists or philanthropic foundations such as the Polonsky Foundation which is supporting the Vatican project and also has enabled the Bodleian Libraries to offer to digitise a number of old, non-digital Oxford D.Phil. theses to the great joy of the alumni who have written them some decades ago.

How does the Bodleian handle new works being published in digital form only?

“We are looking at this now,” said

One of the ancient texts published online by the Vatican and Bodleian Libraries

Dr Horstmann. “A digital library is not the same thing as digitisation. There are several additional components. The library of the future will not deal with books alone, or even primarily. Academic journals whether they be medical, historical or about astronomy, have become the source of specialist information.

“Many of these journals are produced only digitally. In any case the Bodleian Libraries subscribe to electronic form only and academics access them. To give an example of how popular they are, every second we have one request (one hit) for electronic information.”

It should not be forgotten that managing the libraries depends on a digital service. Readers request books using the library search engine, SOLO, whether they are calling up a physical or a digital item.

Behind the scenes there is extensive digital infrastructure running things, whether it be directing a van to the storage facility in Swindon to collect books or enabling someone to access an article of faith such as the Shikshapatri manuscript which is a treasure of the British Hindu cultural heritage.

is also for Divinity School

This was the University’s first central meeting space. It was built as a lecture and examination hall for the Faculty of Theology – the ultimate subject one could study at that time.

It was completed in 1488 having taken over 60 years to finish owing to construction money periodically running out, but the final result is a building, in the magnificent late English Gothic style known as Perpendicular, which surely is the true heart of the University of Oxford.

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