

CILIP Rare Books and Special Collections Newsletter

Issue 118
April 2022



*Opening of Inferno. Dante, La Commedia (Comm. Christophorus Landinus)
(Florence: Nicolaus Laurentii, Alamanus, 30 Aug. 1481). 17280
Image courtesy of The John Rylands Research Institute and Library*

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Editors' notes

Welcome to the April 2022 edition of CILIP's Rare Books and Special Collections Group Newsletter. We are very excited to bring you the first update from our new Chair, Lucy Evans, as well as features relating to offensive language in catalogues and an insight into the new Lambeth Palace Library.

We are also running our first book giveaway! You can win a copy of the new 3rd edition of Alison Cullingford's *The Special Collections Handbook* by tweeting something interesting (picture or text) about a collection you work with, tagging @CILIPRareBooks and #SpecCollsHandbook, by 15 June 2022 to be in with a chance.

Please get in touch with any questions, comments, or ideas for future articles. We happily take any notifications of exhibitions and events and look forward to hearing from you.

Jane, Karen, and Katherine (co-editors)

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News from the Committee

RBSCG Conference 2022

The Rare Books and Special Collections Group conference will be held at St. Hilda's College, Oxford, from 7-9th September 2022. The working title is "Are You Sitting Comfortably?" and the conference aims to arm delegates with the tools to tell new stories with existing collections, collecting to tell untold stories, and to meet uncomfortable stories head on.

The conference is normally attended by rare books and special collections librarians, archivists, conservators, museum professionals and rare book sellers, but is open to all and we are particularly interested in attracting students and new professionals to the conference.

Confirmed speakers include [JC Niala](#),¹ Helen Williamson from the [Library of Mistakes](#),² Maddy Smith from The British Library, Mara Gold from St. Hilda's College, Sian Prosser of the Royal Astronomical Society, [Kate Bernstein](#)³ and Erin Farley of Dundee Libraries. There will also be an exciting opportunity to attend a workshop run by [Uncomfortable Oxford](#).⁴ PLUS the usual line up of visits and an opportunity to network with colleagues.

The conference will be advertised via our website, newsletter, and social media in May. We will also be advertising bursary places at the same time.

New members of the Committee

We have a number of new Committee members following our call for volunteers in December 2021. Please meet Alex and Katherine!

Alex Kither, Honorary Secretary

I am a cataloguer in the printed heritage collections at the British Library. I work with a wide variety of printed materials, from early printed bibles to Georgian scraps of ephemera. My interest in special collections started while I was a history student with a part-time job in an archive. I then gained library experience at the Institute of Historical Research before moving over to my current role. I have a personal passion for late Victorian private press books and the development of print technology over the nineteenth century. I was delighted to be invited to take on the role of honorary secretary of the RBSCG and I look forward to meeting new colleagues, working on projects and poking my nose in other people's collections.

Katherine Krick-Pridgeon, Newsletter Co-Editor

Greetings from the Welsh/English borderlands! I am the Library Manager of Bristol Central Library. I grew up helping my mom track down information about New Jersey's Carnegie Libraries on microfilm. But special collections have been a part of my academic and library careers since I started at the University of Iowa. After years examining Books of Hours, other Use of Sarum service books, and the Church of England's Book of Common Prayer, I achieved my doctorate at Durham University. My library career began during my doctorate at Durham, then migrated first to Christ's College, Cambridge and now to Bristol Central Library. I am looking forward to bringing some more public library perspective to the group.

¹ www.jcniala.com/

² www.libraryofmistakes.com/

³ www.katebernsteinbookartist.co.uk/

⁴ www.uncomfortableoxford.co.uk/

Feedback on DCRMR

Co-editors of DCRMR, Jessica Grzegorski and Elizabeth Hobart, with the RBMS RDA Editorial Group, are pleased to announce the publication of [Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Materials \(RDA Edition\)](#).⁵ DCRMR is a revision of [Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Materials](#) aligned to the RDA element set.⁶ This first iteration is a minimum viable product containing book instructions only. In the future, other rare materials formats will be added to the standard, beginning with graphics.

Although DCRMR is approved for cataloging, the Library of Congress and PCC have not yet implemented the new RDA Toolkit. As a result, at this time, catalogers are not able to code records for both DCRMR and PCC. Guidance on creating PCC-compliant DCRMR records will be forthcoming sometime after PCC's adoption, which is currently slated for October.

In the coming weeks, we will update guidance at the [DCRM and RDA page](#) to reflect publication of DCRMR.⁷

The editorial group warmly thanks everyone who contributed to the development of this standard, including the RBMS Bibliographic Standards Committee, the RBMS Executive Committee, and everyone who participated in public reviews or hearings. We deeply appreciate everyone's time and considered feedback.

Iris O'Brien
Chair of the Bibliographic Standards Committee

CILIP 'Big Conversation' event

On 30th November, CILIP's Nick Poole and Jo Cornish joined the RBSCG community to discuss the comprehensively revised and update Professional Knowledge and Skills Base online tool, its benefits for CILIP members, and the next 5-year plan for CILIP.

The 'Big Conversation' was a programme of informal, semi-structured meetings, conversations, get-togethers, and activities which took place across the nations and regions in late 2021 and early 2022. The live session was recorded, and is now available on the [RBSCG YouTube channel](#).⁸

⁵ <https://bsc.rbms.info/DCRMR/>

⁶ <https://rbms.info/dcrm/>

⁷ <https://rbms.info/dcrm/rda/>

⁸ www.youtube.com/watch?v=Omn2nKwHbWM

Chair's update

I am delighted to introduce myself as the new Chair of the RBSCG. I joined the RBSCG in 2010 as the Reviews Editor, strong-armed by Amanda Saville, past Chair of the RBSCG. In the last 12 years I have worked on day events, as Secretary and Vice-Chair, and as the Conference Co-ordinator. I have met many of our members over the years at conferences in Oxford, Cambridge, Sussex, Cardiff, London, Canterbury, and Liverpool.

2022 has seen a great deal of change on the RBSCG committee. Sarah Mahurter, Melanie Wood, and Helen Vincent have left the committee with many years of serving the Group under the belts! We are extremely grateful to them for the many roles they have fulfilled on the committee, particularly as Chair, Secretary, and Rare Books in Scotland Liaison.

Within the committee some members have moved into different roles. Tanya Kirk has moved into the CILIP Liaison role (formerly Member Network Forum representative), Bob MacLean has taken on the Rare Books in Scotland Liaison role, and Erika Delbeque has become the Equality and Diversity Champion.

We are also pleased to welcome new committee members. Sarah Cusk, of Lincoln College, University of Oxford as Vice-Chair, Alex Kither, of the British Library as Secretary, Katherine Krick-Pridgeon, of Bristol Central Library joins the Newsletter team, and Jacqueline Spencer takes on the Historic Libraries Forum Liaison role. We are also recruiting for a new Social Media Champion.

2022 is looking like a packed year for the RBSCG, with a return to in-person events including a visit to the new Lambeth Palace Library. We will also maintain a programme of online-only events to reach as many of our members as possible. We are delighted to be holding our annual study conference at St. Hilda's College, University of Oxford, 7-9th September. The working title is *Are you sitting comfortably?* The aim will be to arm delegates with tools to tell new stories with existing collections, collecting to tell untold stories, and to meet uncomfortable stories head on. Keep an eye on the website and social media for a launch date in May.

Please do get in touch if you have anything you would like to discuss, or anything you feel the RBSCG could support you and your institution with. The email bulletin is also returning, so make sure your email preferences are up to date on the CILIP website so you can receive the most up to date news.

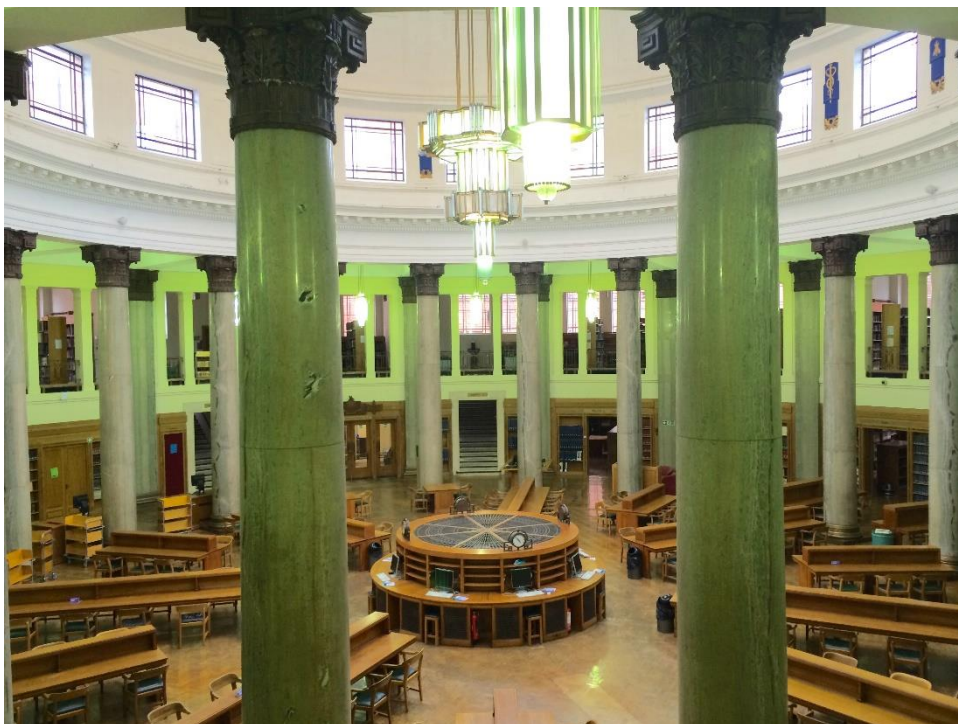
Lucy Evans

RBSCG Chair

Chair.RBSCG@CILIP.org.uk

Identifying offensive language and bias in legacy catalogues descriptions: TNA TestBed and University of Leeds Special Collections.

Between June and September 2021, research was conducted as a part of a National Archives funded testbed project to develop computational methods detecting offensive language and bias in legacy catalogue descriptions. Anecdotes about problematic language in the catalogues of certain collections formulated the basis of the exercise, and due to the highly offensive nature of some descriptions, the primary aim of the project was to devise methods to detect all offensive terms. A secondary aim was to develop ways to detect bias within legacy descriptions. This short piece will provide a brief overview of the work that we conducted during this three-month project, beginning by assessing the theoretical issues surrounding legacy descriptions, moving on to describe the methods we developed, and finishing with some tentative conclusions and suggestions for further avenues of research. We have also included a link in the reference to the resources we developed during this project: these will allow those interested in adopting these procedures to do so.



Brotherton Library main reading room, courtesy of Cavie78 via Wikimedia Commons (CC BY SA 4.0)
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Brotherton_Library_reading_room,_University_of_Leeds,_27th_June_2014.jpg

Offensive Language and Bias in Archive Descriptions

During the early phases of the research, we held discussions with archivists at other institutions to gather accounts of problematic archive metadata. The resources to find these terms proved a key obstacle to tackling this problem. Given the often huge volumes of legacy descriptions, they have often not been reviewed yet are still visible to users of public-facing catalogues. We also chose to conduct a survey of GLAM sector professionals, circulated through email and social networks, to further understand attitudes from the sector for implementation during the planning phase. When

we asked, 'has either bias or offensive language in legacy descriptions associated with your professional duties had an impact upon your wellbeing?' within British archival contexts, responses made repeated references to discomfort and distress for people of colour, or recognising that there may be distress caused to others, if not them personally.

'Uncomfortable', 'emotional', 'distress' are an accepted part of working with historical records: the preservation of difficult and challenging histories are an impetus for continuing this archival work. This study was devised based on institutional staff's anecdotal experiences of finding racial, ethnic, and homophobic slurs within our own collections, and the discomfort that brought to staff and to users. As Alicia Chilcott has stated, 'traditional archival practice,' due to the roots of archives as record-keepers of colonial institutions, 'with its focus on the supposed neutrality of archivists, is inextricably linked with Eurocentric colonial ideologies' (Chilcott 2019, 360).

Descriptions of records that contain racist, homophobic, transphobic, antisemitic, and potentially misogynistic biases may range from outright use of slurs in quoting from records, through to the naming of white male figures and anonymisation of people of colour and marginalised genders involved in the donation, curation, or creation of such records. This not only obscures discoverability of important information in the records, but can cause offence and harm to the communities affected, including both users of archives, as well as staff working with them. Examining the literature of the field, Chilcott notes that 'there has been little acknowledgement of these issues [of bureaucratic violence and erasure] within the UK, although issues of marginalisation and erasure from official records are implicit in much UK literature concerning community archives (Flinn 2011; Ajamu et al. 2009, pp. 283–284; Bastian and Alexander 2009; Flinn et al. 2009)' compared with the USA and Australia, where horrific acts of violence on indigenous peoples by white European settlers literally comprise their national and community archives. One expects to find outdated language in historical records; but use of offensive and outdated language to describe marginalised communities in the descriptions of such records by professionals in the modern era is more surprising, and, as we discovered, troubling to users and staff of archival collections. Even just from the perspective of institutions looking to improve their diversity and outreach, this is an issue.

'racist materials should be collected as they serve as evidence of the activities of the institution, community, or individual they originated from. These records should not be censored to remove offensive elements'
(Nelson 2020)

Maintaining records of challenging histories - at best, erasure of voices from records, at worst, slurs and graphic violence - is part of the responsibility of archives. We hold onto materials in order to learn from the past, to hold our communities accountable. Melissa J. Nelson, drawing on the American Archive Association's Code of Ethics, states that 'racist materials should be collected as they serve as evidence of the activities of the institution, community, or individual they originated from. These records should not be censored to remove offensive elements' (Nelson 2020, n/p). However, when considering the variety of audiences who may be consulting archive catalogues, from undergraduate students to veteran scholars to amateur family historians to community groups; there is not necessarily a need to mimic the offensive content of records in the descriptions without

context. It is the archivist's responsibility to guide users to what they are looking for, but not to insult or assault them. Content warnings can be helpful in mitigating harm to users and staff before they reach problematic language, without removing the historical record. Archives come in all shapes and sizes. One example of this from the Brotherton Special Collections is the Liddle collection of WW1 and WW2 materials: Peter Liddle was a military historian at the university, and collected these items personally, before leaving them to the University. Liddle chose to keep these items for a reason, believing them to be of particular significance based on his ideas and expertise. He was a man of his time, and labelled the items as such - maintaining these records of the creation and curation of such items is part of the archive itself, and it is important to understand the context of record and collection creation. This is also where problematic language in the archive catalogue comes into play.

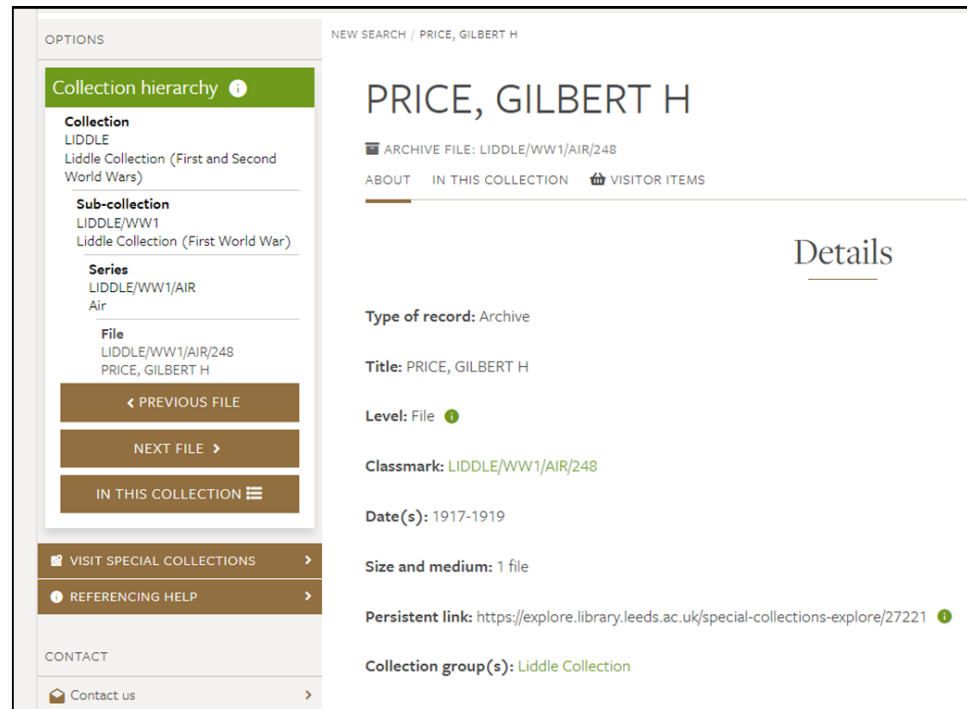
Methodology

This section will provide a basic outline of the processes we developed to identify offensive language in legacy descriptions (detailed information can be found in the process documents included in the project's Github repository: [<https://github.com/OffensiveLanguageLegacyDescriptions/Workshop-Materials-September-2021/commits?author=OffensiveLanguageLegacyDescriptions>])).

During the research we developed a corpus to be used to automatically detect offensive language in legacy descriptions. This list of offensive terms was arrived at by merging glossaries from a number of different sources: firstly, OFCOM's list of offensive terms used for broadcast media standards and regulation; secondly, an online list of offensive words used to detect offensive posts on social media; and thirdly, we drew upon our own research expertise in cultural and social history. This list of offensive terms can be cross-referenced with catalogue descriptions once they have been extracted from the collections management system in a format suitable for text mining processes (i.e., a plain text format such as .txt or .csv). Some degree of corruption in the data is expected; if it requires a great deal of cleaning after it has been extracted from the catalogue management system in a plain text format, consider using OpenRefine. Due to the short time frame of the project, we opted to use AntConc to conduct searches, but these processes are also compatible with alternative corpus analysis software or with Python or R. The main advantage of using Antconc to develop these processes is its relatively user-friendly interface, allowing it to be used with little additional training. Searches ran with Antconc on catalogue description dataframes with hundreds of thousands of entries returned results in the hundreds of entries with possible offensive terms: for the Liddle collection, over 12,000 catalogue entries, containing 16,874 different word types, we narrowed down just 134 potentially offensive terms. Antconc allowed the context to be reviewed to make sure the usage of the term was in fact offensive, or a false positive.

The number of 'true hits' - where manual reading of the results generated by the search identified these as actually problematic in context - was significantly lower. However, it was a much faster and less intensive process than searching manually for them. The types of problematic language we identified by individual collection also highlighted significant trends and challenged our assumptions: our concerns around Feminist Archive North were around language derogatory to transgender

people, but was instead identified as largely ableist. Likewise, the Liddle collection was likely to show colonial and nationalist bias - as perhaps might be expected from descriptions of materials collected in the aftermath of the two World Wars. There were also instances of former colonial place names in use, which for



Screenshot of the online catalogue for LIDDLE/WW1/AIR

potential visitors to the archives who are unfamiliar with these, may be confusing if users wanted to search the catalogues for modern-day place names. Additionally, references to female creators in the descriptions are more likely to use titles, such as 'Mrs.' or 'Miss', or descriptors of 'wife' and 'daughter' to place them in relation to men, and less likely to include their names, compared with male record creators. For example, one description recounts 'Typescript account of L Riddell's First World War experience, written by **his daughter** [significant record creator] and drawn from his letters and diaries, photocopies of which are included (Feb 1986). [LIDDLE/WW1/AIR/248]'.

Conclusions

The methods we developed for detecting this kind of language in archive legacy descriptions - those which are public-facing - are not perfect. Our priority was to, at least in the first instance, find the most egregious terms for library staff to contextualise or add content warnings to. As we saw, it also sometimes picked up false positives, which can be a drain on staff time - though we would still argue this is better in the long run than not picking these terms up at all. The use of the corpus with AntConc needs further development to find nuances in more subtle biased language that can still cause offence and harm to users. It was through more in-depth qualitative analysis of the Liddle collection, which we used as a sample, that we identified the gender bias.

Given this, the methods for finding problematic language in the first instance have wide applicability. At the end of the project, we presented these methods in a workshop that was attended by around fifty people from the GLAM sector, and received positive feedback from this. Most prominently, we have a list of English language offensive terms that can be used by anyone and is open-source so can be expanded by others - and the emotional labour of compiling this has at least been started, so won't all fall on already overburdened workers. We also have a resource-light method to detect offensive language in legacy descriptions which can be used by archive professionals, and indeed,

heritage and history professionals more broadly, in the future. We look forward to seeing future research, allowing more nuanced detection as this field grows.

Resources

Project Github repository: <https://github.com/OffensiveLanguageLegacyDescriptions/Workshop-Materials-September-2021>

Biographies

Dr. Vic Clarke is Lecturer in Modern British History at the University of York, where she researches popular politics and the periodical press in Victorian Yorkshire, and teaches on Empire and Victorian Britain.

Dr. Kevin Matthew Jones is a Research Fellow at the National Archives, where he is developing methods to digitally represent nationwide archive statistics c.2007 - 2020.

They conducted this research at the Brotherton Special Collections in the Summer of 2021, when they were both Postdoctoral Research Fellows at the Leeds Arts and Humanities Research Institute, University of Leeds.

Dr. Vic Clarke, University of York

Dr. Kevin Matthew Jones, The National Archives

Locating offensive terms in the archive catalogue: a case study from Leeds University Library

“Have you seen this? That sort of language shouldn’t be in our catalogue.” Or even worse – “Have you seen this that a researcher’s just found? That sort of language shouldn’t be in our catalogue.” Conversations with team members that will be familiar to an awful lot of archivists, research librarians, and curators, especially those whose catalogues and collections management systems contain large amounts of imported legacy data. They’ll be particularly familiar to anyone who’s got imported catalogue data that deals with marginalised communities and groups. The researcher stumbling upon offensive descriptions and language in the catalogue potentially puts the repository in a very poor light – “who cares how old it is? It’s there!”. Far worse, it’s a painful, belittling experience for the researcher who might well be looking for something of themselves or their community, only to find nothing but the negative.



Sheep dipping: Redmire (LAVC/PHO/P1811) © University of Leeds. Interviews with the rural population made by the Survey of English Dialect in the 1950s and 1960s sometimes contain historically offensive terms for various communities.

Leeds University Libraries’ Special Collections & Galleries are no exception. We have several large collections which contain quite a lot of historically offensive terminology that reflect social and historical prejudices of the time in which they were written. These often exist in legacy scope and content descriptions imported en masse from earlier systems, digitised hard copy finding aids, or in more formal data elements such as titles. A good example of this are our [Gypsy, Traveller and Roma collections](https://library.leeds.ac.uk/special-collections/collection/702/gypsy-traveller-and-roma-collections)⁹. They include large collections of newspaper cuttings illustrating prejudice and abuse, so

⁹ <https://library.leeds.ac.uk/special-collections/collection/702/gypsy-traveller-and-roma-collections>

the article titles themselves contain offensive terms. [The Liddle Collection](#)¹⁰ of World War I and World War II material contains vast numbers of letters and diaries from soldiers across all the theatres of the war, so it contains some instances of outmoded or outright racist language about soldiers from Asia and Africa, as well as insults towards the nations being fought against. Some of this language was included in index summaries of the correspondence, which were turned into Word documents, which were in turn ingested en masse into the predecessor system to our current EMu collections management system. Central to the [Leeds Archive of Vernacular Culture](#)¹¹ are the interviews carried out across rural England in the 1950s and early 1960s to record disappearing dialect and local speech as part of the Survey of English Dialect. Some of those interviews, which exist in both audio recording and transcript, contain racist language and outdated terms for certain communities. And adjacent to the offensive and outdated is the potentially unpleasant or graphic – for example historic medical terms, particularly for mental health conditions, in our medical collections, or photographs of war wounds and dead bodies in the Liddle Collection. In amongst the 1.5 million or so records in the system, the instances of outright offensive material are proportionally few (and therein lies one of the problems – actually identifying them). But they are there.



Index entry from the online catalogue of the Liddle WW1 and WW2 collection, originally from an index card.

As will be familiar again to many, knowledge of where such instances lay was with the staff, in people's heads or in replies to particular enquiries or searches. We ran an exercise at one of our departmental away days to harvest that knowledge and build up a picture of particularly problematic areas within collections. That away day for example demonstrated that most of the offensive language in the Liddle Collection was not in the ISAD(G) catalogue records, but in the linked index records which had been created from the old hard copy summary cards. And it was important to demonstrate to the staff firstly that we weren't alone in facing this problem, and that a lot of work was being done across the sectors to tackle it. Over the last few years much of that work has become familiar to librarians, archivists, and curators as toolkits and methods for dealing with offensive language have developed. We have made particular reference to the Museum Association's report 'Power and Privilege in the 21st Century Museum'¹² which has plenty of advice that's equally applicable to archives and research libraries, and Alicia Chilcott's extremely practical article 'Towards protocols for describing racially offensive language in UK public archives.'¹³ We were

¹⁰ https://library.leeds.ac.uk/special-collections/collection/723/liddle_collection

¹¹ https://library.leeds.ac.uk/special-collections/collection/2571/leeds_archive_of_vernacular_culture

¹² The report can be downloaded here -

<https://www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/workforce/inclusion/power-and-privilege-in-the-21st-century-museum/#> Accessed 3 Mar. 2022.

¹³ Chilcott, A. Towards protocols for describing racially offensive language in UK public archives. *Arch Sci* **19**, 359–376 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-019-09314-y>

able to adapt the strategies described in these and other works to develop tools that are becoming familiar, trying to make as informed a decision as possible on a case-by-case basis to deploy sensitivity statements and context statements, and/or editing or removing descriptions as appropriate. The team working on the Leeds Archive of Vernacular Culture as part of a wider National Heritage Memorial Fund project were able to apply these solutions to the archive.¹⁴

This led us to think further about how we can actually find the offensive terms amidst the millions of catalogue records in the EMu system, and if there was a way of employing programmatic / technological methods. The away day had gathered curatorial knowledge, and the work across the sector gave useful guidance on building term lists – a good starting point for many is OfCom’s list of offensive terms¹⁵ and a valid and manageable way to identifying offensive terms is to use such a list for searching (not a pleasant task and one which focuses the mind on how offensive such terms could be to a researcher happening upon them). But the question of scale, time spent searching, historic terms, variant spelling and the like made us continue thinking about applying some kind of automated process. The Project Archivist on the LAVC project, Caroline Bolton, was awarded one of the 2019-2020 RLUK / TNA Professional Fellowships, to consider questions of catalogues as data. This brought her into contact with ‘Legacies of Catalogue Descriptions and Curatorial Voice’, the digital humanities collaboration between the Sussex Humanities Lab, the British Library, and Yale University, led by James Baker.¹⁶ Caroline was struck by the project’s application of corpus linguistic software to the British Library’s catalogue of personal and political satires, and she and then Collections Assistant Holly Smith looked at how it might be applied to the LAVC catalogue. This led to an application to The National Archives’ Testbed fund, which Special Collections & Galleries submitted in partnership with the Leeds Arts & Humanities Research Institute (LAHRI). LAHRI played a vital role in bringing an academic voice to the project, and in putting out the opportunity on their networks, ensuring we got a strong field of applicants with a blend of linguistic, data and historical research skills. As with so many projects, it’s the collaboration that’s got it this far and we’re extremely grateful to TNA, LAHRI, all the staff who contributed, and to Kevin Jones and Victoria Clarke for the amazing in-depth work they did in a very short space of time. And of course, the work doesn’t stop with a proof of concept. Next comes actual application.

Tim Procter, Collections & Engagement Manager (Archives & Manuscripts)

Caroline Bolton, Archivist

Special Collections and Galleries, Leeds University Library

¹⁴ See this blog post by the then Collections Assistant Holly Smith

<https://leedsunilibrary.wordpress.com/2021/05/26/sensitive-language-in-archive-description/>

¹⁵ See Ipsos Mori research for Ofcom, Public Attitudes to towards offensive language on TV and radio: Quick reference guide, Sep. 2021, available at

https://www.ofcom.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0020/225335/offensive-language-quick-reference-guide.pdf Accessed 4 Mar. 2022.

¹⁶ See <https://cataloguelegacies.github.io/>

The New Lambeth Palace Library

Lambeth Palace Library is the historic library and record office of the Archbishops of Canterbury and the national library and archive of the Church of England. Its collections have been freely available for research from 1610 when it was founded under the will of Archbishop Richard Bancroft. Yet, despite being over four hundred years old, Lambeth Palace Library has never had a purpose-built building to house it until now. Originally it was accommodated in the Archbishop's study above the cloister in Lambeth Palace, but in 1829 when Archbishop Howley had the Palace extensively modified, it was moved to the Great Hall. As the collection grew, the library began to expand into other areas of the Palace eventually occupying thirteen separate spaces within the grounds, including the 15th Century Morton's Tower. Many of the storage areas lacked fire suppression systems and were difficult to control environmentally. Leaks and mould outbreaks were a constant worry and pests were a problem. Lambeth Palace Library's sister repository, the Church of England Record Centre (CERC), which was housed in a warehouse in Bermondsey, had similar problems in safely storing its collections. A solution was urgently needed.



The facade of the new Lambeth Palace Library © Wright & Wright

It was not a given that the solution was to build a new library in the Palace grounds. Other solutions were explored, including collaboration with other institutions, and moving the collections outside London. Eventually it was decided that to maintain the integrity of the collection and to preserve its historic link to the Palace a new building on site was the preferred solution. The Church Commissioners generously agreed to fund the building and after a competition Wright & Wright Architects were appointed to design it. Building work started in April 2018 and was completed by July 2020. The move of the collections from the old library to the new building was hampered due to COVID19 and lockdown but the transfer of the collections was completed by May 2021 and the building eventually opened to readers in August 2021.

The new Lambeth Palace Library is a sensitive addition to the site of the Grade I listed Palace and is the first new building on the site for 185 years. The façade is designed in homage to the Tudor gate tower of

the Palace and blends into the red brick perimeter wall of the gardens. Lying amongst mature trees at the north end of the garden, the new building preserves the collection's historic link to the Palace while increasing public access, as well as providing a host of other benefits for readers, the public, staff, the environment, and, of course, the collection.

Facilities and accessibility

The library was difficult to access when in the grounds of the Palace owing to the configuration of the historic buildings and security concerns. Access for those with mobility difficulties was problematic with no direct access to the reading room from the street because of steps and uneven surfaces. Wheelchair users had to go through staff offices to reach the reading room. Furthermore, there were no disabled toilet facilities with readers having to leave the library to use facilities elsewhere in the grounds. The new building has been designed with accessibility in mind; there are no steps to manoeuvre, passageways are wider and there are disabled toilets in all public areas and lifts to all floors.

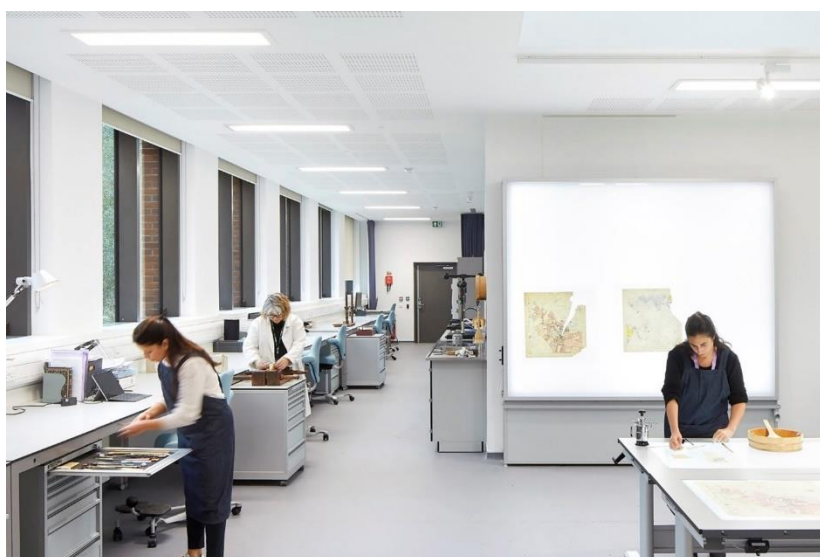
The main advantage of the new library for readers is that it brings together the complementary collections of Lambeth Palace Library and CERC, facilitating research. There is a spacious new reading room and group working areas and seminar rooms for teaching. There are also more basic improvements for readers. Previously, those using the reading room had to eat their lunch in the same room that housed the library's box making machine but now there is a dedicated readers' lounge with kitchen facilities and a seating area on the first-floor mezzanine where readers can eat or take a break.

For the first time the library has a door opening on to the street. The public can come in and learn about the library and its collections from the interactive displays on the ground floor and see items from the collections in the display cases in the entrance hall mezzanine. In addition to these display cases, a dedicated exhibition space leading off the mezzanine is currently being equipped, which will enable the library to put on more substantial public exhibitions.

There is better accommodation for staff too, with enough office space to accommodate thirty members of staff. The furniture was designed in collaboration with the staff who were keen that there be enough space to catalogue comfortably, including enough room for foam supports/cushions and layout space. There is also a large break room where staff can take their meals.

Collections Care

Care for the internationally important collections was at the heart of the design of the new building. In contrast to the difficult environmental conditions that plagued the storage in the Palace and at Bermondsey, all stores in the new building are temperature and humidity controlled, have fire suppression systems, and are PD 5454 compliant. As the library is on one of London's flood plains, the archive repositories are located above any potential flood risk. The building frame is designed so that the archive stores are as airtight as possible, and all air is filtered to prevent



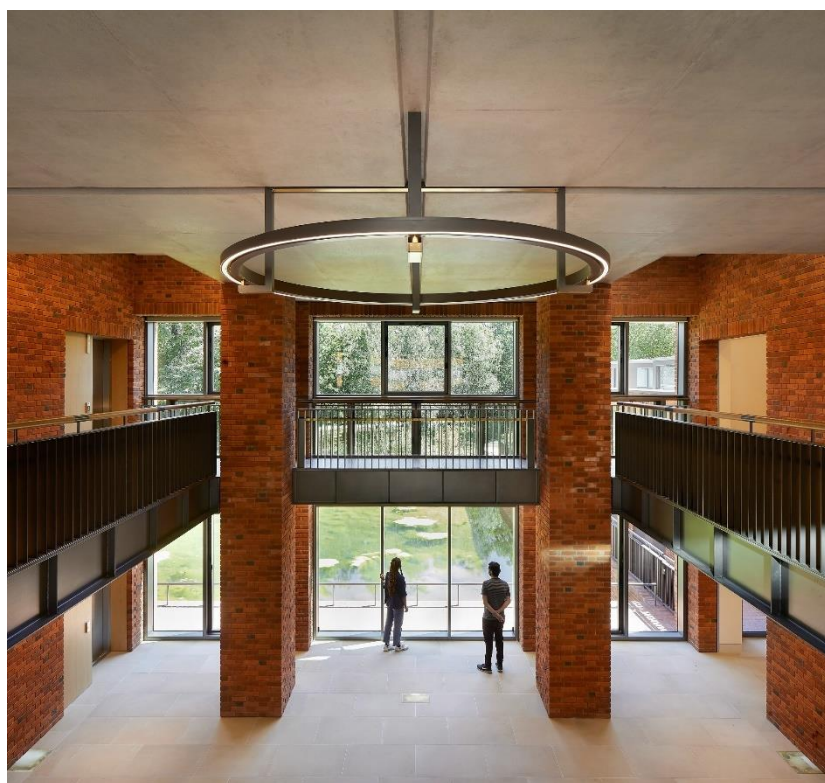
The new conservation studio © Wright & Wright

pollution damaging the books and archives. As the collections are continually growing, significant growth space has been included - the building has over 20,000 linear metres of shelving.

A new purpose-built conservation studio has been created. Designed in conjunction with the collections care team, the new studio enables more complex conservation treatments to be undertaken. The new studio is much more spacious than the old one and has room for eight full-time conservators. It also has a dedicated quarantine room and separate rooms for specific treatments. The environmental conditions in the stores can also be monitored remotely via the building management system.

Environment and Sustainability

Lambeth Palace gardens are listed and are the oldest continuously cultivated gardens in London, dating from the twelfth century. The library is designed to minimise the building's impact on the grounds and to enhance the local ecology of the gardens. The new building takes up less than 3% of the area of the site and acts as a bulwark between the garden and Lambeth Palace Road, significantly reducing noise and air pollution in the garden. There is a new and enlarged pond and wetland glade and the area around the library has been designed by award-winning landscape architect Dan Pearson Studio. All public spaces and the reading room benefit from carefully attuned natural light and have views across the enhanced gardens.



The entrance hall, looking towards the garden © Wright & Wright

Care has been taken to make the building as sustainable as possible and it has achieved a BREEAM (Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method) rating of 'Excellent.' BREEAM is the world's longest-established method of assessing, rating, and certifying the sustainability of buildings.

The building is highly insulated and designed to minimise the energy needed to keep the internal environment stable. Furthermore, on-site renewable energy provided by photovoltaic panels makes up almost half of the electricity that the building uses. The building has also been designed to reduce

water use by at least 25%, by using water efficient toilets and hand basins. The pond harvests the run-off water from the rooftops and acts to attenuate and filter water through planting within the pond before it enters the public drainage system at a slower rate. The library is close to public transport links, is designed to support walking and cycling, and will add no new parking (except blue badge parking).

Prizes and plaudits

Wright & Wright's building has received several architectural and building industry awards. Even before building started, the design had won the Architectural Review MIPIM Future Projects Awards in the Old & New category in 2017. In the same year, it was shortlisted in the Culture category at World Architecture Festival Awards. In 2021, Wright & Wright won the Schüco Excellence Awards in the Cultural Building category. Appropriately for a building which is faced in brick to echo the early modern brickwork in Lambeth Palace, Wright & Wright won in the Public Building category at the 2021 BDA Brick Awards and went on to win the overall prize for their use of brick in Lambeth Palace Library.

The building has also been well reviewed in the architectural press. For example, in The RIBA Journal, Hugh Pearman called the new library:



The new reading room © Wright & Wright

... a subtle, rewarding building and landscape, acknowledging its workaday function while enriching it as a place of study and of huge cultural and historical value.

Conclusion

The new building marks a new chapter in the life of Lambeth Palace Library. It has already proven itself to be better for staff, readers, and the public. It provides many new opportunities to bring the wonderful collections at Lambeth to a wider audience and ensures that the cultural and religious heritage of the Church of England is safeguarded for the future and can be explored and enjoyed by all.

Facts and Figures

- 300,000 handmade bricks
- 3,800 cubic metres of concrete
- Over 20,000 linear metres of shelving
- 5,400 square metres of floor space
- Cost: £23.5m + VAT + fees

**Hugh Cahill, Senior Librarian
Lambeth Palace Library**

Exhibitions

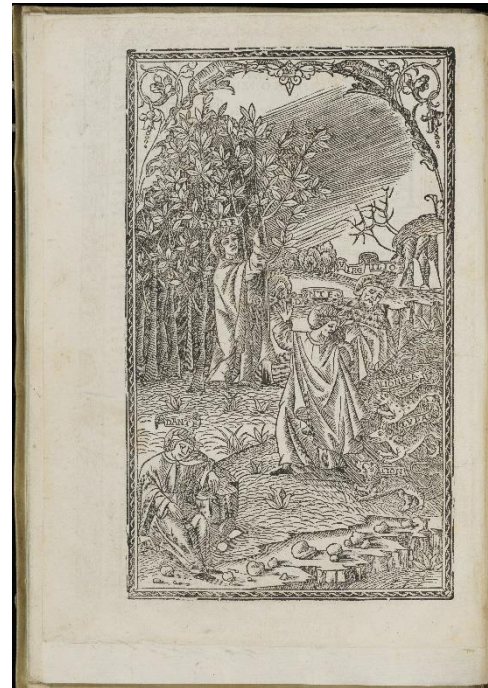
Manchester: Designing Dante

The Italian medieval author Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) is known for his fantastical reimagining of the worlds of the Christian afterlife, the *Commedia* (*Divine Comedy*). The poem is a fictional eyewitness account of his journey through Inferno, Purgatory, and Paradise, an evocative and multi-sensory account of the torment of the damned and rapture of the blessed.

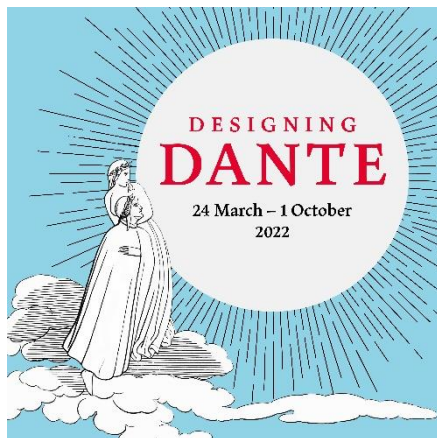
The exhibition explores both Dante's design of his afterlife and the ways the poem itself has been designed and presented in manuscript, print, visual media, and sound in the 700 years since his death. The Rylands holds one of the greatest collections of Dante books in the world, and many of the rarest and most significant editions will be on display in this landmark exhibition.

The exhibition is curated by Italian medieval specialist and book historian Dr Guyda Armstrong, Senior Lecturer in Italian Studies in the University of Manchester's School of Arts, Languages, and Cultures, in collaboration with the John Rylands Research Institute and Library.

There is also an events programme of Dante activities including online talks, curator tours, and close-up sessions with the books which will run throughout the exhibition. We will be highlighting creative responses to Dante's poem during the exhibition, with a film screening, sound art installations and an artists' books workshop.



Opere del diuino poeta Danthe (Venice, 1512).
Ref. R52854.



What's on display

- Explore Dante's vision of Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise through iconic illustrated rare books and manuscripts, including the first two editions to contain printed images from 1481 and 1487.
- Uncover how book design has evolved from handwritten manuscripts to digital editions.
- Compare the first three Italian editions of the *Commedia*, all printed in 1472, with the first Spanish (1515) and French printed translations (1595).

Designing Dante is open to the public at the John Rylands Research Institute and Library until October 2022 during public opening hours. For more information, visit www.library.manchester.ac.uk/rylands/visit/events/dante.

Explore more of the Dante Collections online, via [Manchester Digital Collections](http://www.digitalcollections.manchester.ac.uk/collections/dante).¹⁷

¹⁷ www.digitalcollections.manchester.ac.uk/collections/dante

Events

Lambeth Palace Library talks

Lambeth Palace Library, 15 Lambeth Palace Road, London SE1 7JT

Tuesday 3 May, 5.15pm

Professor Diarmaid MacCulloch: 'Right in front of our eyes: viewing the English Reformation afresh'.

Wednesday 18 May, 5.30pm

Dr Mary Wellesley: 'Hidden Hands: the human stories hidden in our oldest books'.

All are welcome, but those wishing to attend should book a free ticket. For further details and booking arrangements, please see [News & Events – Lambeth Palace Library](#).¹⁸

Please note that these events will take place in the Bancroft Room in the new building of Lambeth Palace Library (entrance on Lambeth Palace Road). Please arrive 10 minutes before the start time to allow time to take the lift to the top.

John Rylands Research Institute and Library online seminars

From February until May, the Rylands will be hosting a weekly series of a live, online lunchtime seminars in which University of Manchester researchers team up with experts from the Rylands to share current research activities.

The seminars will showcase rare and fascinating objects from the special collections, along with discoveries and new perspectives formed through their study. Attendees will be invited to participate with questions and thoughts during the live Q&A.

Attendance is online, free and can be booked via [Eventbrite](#).¹⁹

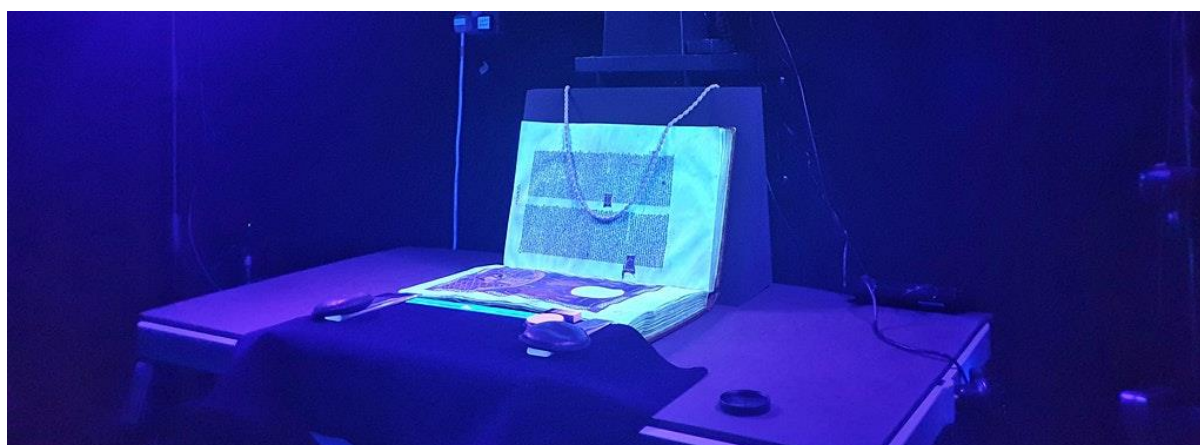


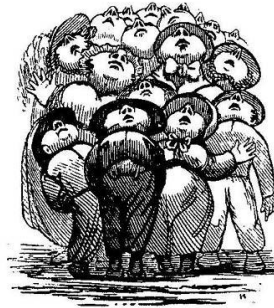
Image courtesy of The John Rylands Research Institute and Library

¹⁸ <https://lambethpalacelibrary.org/about-lambeth-palace-library/whats-on/news/>

¹⁹ www.eventbrite.co.uk/cc/the-rylands-lunchtime-seminar-series-109389

AM Adam Matthew
Primary sources for teaching and research

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