



## Library & Information History Group

### **News from the Chair**

Welcome to the winter newsletter 2025 from the Library & Information History Group.

I am happy to report two items in this issue that have sprung from very successful events. The first is the article on the Warburg Library classification and its architectural manifestations, by Dr Dimitrios Latsis. Dr Latsis, an associate professor at the University of Alabama's School of Library and Information Studies, was this year's recipient of the James Ollé award for his ongoing research on library architecture. As part of his award, we asked Dr Latsis to be a guest speaker at our 2025 Annual General Meeting, which took place in November. His paper was exceptional; wide-ranging, erudite, and, full of energy. We are very grateful to him for his time.

By the by, you can find out more about the James Ollé award on page ten of this newsletter. If you think you have a research proposal that fits our library history criteria, please do apply. We are keen to support new research and new voices in the field of library and information history.

The other item of particular note is Al MacAodha's report from LIHG's annual conference, which took place a few weeks ago at the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh on the theme of 'Freedom of Information/Information as Freedom'. A responsive group of delegates heard amazing papers from a range of early career scholars and established voices, including a keynote from Bodley's Librarian, Richard Ovenden, which took a step

back to explore the concepts of freedom and democracy of access to knowledge. My thanks to Al MacAodha from our sibling group, CILIP LGBTQ+ Network, for the excellent report.

Finally, I want to mention that this is my final newsletter introduction as chair, as I will be stepping down in the next few weeks. I am immensely grateful to my esteemed colleagues on the LIHG committee, who have supported and guided me through the last few years. I have enjoyed my time as chair immensely, and found it very rewarding. The vacancy for chair, as well as vacancies for web editor, and marketing officer, are on page thirteen. If you are a librarian with an interest in library and information history, or this is your area of academic research, we would love to hear from you. We are also keen to hear from students and those earlier in their careers. New voices and new ideas are an important and welcome part of our work.

I hope you enjoy the winter break, and we look forward to promoting new research and events in 2026.

Kathryn Peak  
Chair, CILIP Library & Information History Group

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# The Warburg Library Classification and its architectural manifestations

Dimitrios Latsis, Associate Professor in Digital and Audiovisual Preservation at the University of Alabama and recipient of the James Ollé Award, discusses his research into the Warburg Institute's Archives and architectural drawings.

**M**y ongoing research concerns the relationship between library classification systems and the architecture and design of research libraries from the late eighteenth to early twentieth centuries. My project argues that classification is not only an intellectual tool but also a spatial practice. It takes physical form in the arrangement of books, the design of reading rooms, the circulation of users, and even the symbolic language of buildings. The library is both a container of knowledge and an argument about how knowledge should be ordered, accessed, and used. This investigation situates the Warburg Library of Cultural History - first in Hamburg and later in London - as a central case study for understanding how architecture and classification crystallise intellectual history.

This research builds upon my longstanding

interest in intellectual history, media, architecture, and library science. The current phase focuses on Aby Warburg's library and its 1926 building, designed by Gerhard Langmaack. Warburg arranged his collection according to four conceptual categories: Image, Word, Orientation, and Action. These themes correspond not only to the intellectual structure of the collection but also to the vertical organization of the library building in Hamburg, where each floor embodied a stage in the movement from perception to thought to belief to social life. This alignment of architecture and classification - what Gertrud Bing (Warburg's assistant and later Director of the Institute) called "the law of good neighbourliness" - ensured that books were shelved to encourage serendipitous discovery. A reader in search of a specific volume might instead be drawn into a new line of inquiry by the proximity of unexpected neighbours.

My research draws on archival evidence, including floorplans, shelving diagrams, accession registers, correspondence, and photographs from the Warburg Institute archives and the Hamburg Staatsarchiv. The materials reveal how Warburg's librarians translated his conceptual categories into physical space. Each book was assigned a call number composed of a capital letter for the main division, a lowercase letter for the subfield, followed by a numerical sequence. Colour-coded stripes, applied to the spines of volumes, indicated subject, period, or geographic region. This system supported both retrieval and intellectual inquiry.

The focus was never to fix a single location for a book forever, but to allow for continual rearrangement as Warburg's questions evolved. The Warburg Library was a "problem library" - a collection assembled not to reflect universal knowledge but to produce new questions about the survival of antiquity in modern culture.

The Warburg case does not stand alone. My project examines other major research libraries whose architecture and classification reveal competing visions of knowledge. These include the Newberry Library in Chicago, the Morgan Library in New York, the Huntington Library in California, the Frick Art Reference Library, the Gennadius Library in Athens, and the Library of Congress. Figures such as William Frederick Poole, librarian at the Newberry and Herbert Putnam at the Library of Congress developed alternative classification systems based on readers' needs, thematic reading rooms, and browsing. In contrast, large institutions like the Library of Congress embraced steel stack systems developed by companies like the Snead Company, which allowed for expansion, compact storage, and controlled access. These choices shaped how scholars encountered books and how libraries imagined their public.

The Warburg Library stands apart in its fusion of symbolic architecture and



The Reading Room of the Kulturwissenschaftliche Bibliothek Warburg © The Warburg Institute Archive, London

intellectual order. The oval reading room on the ground floor - often compared to a Hopi kiva or the Wolfenbüttel library designed under Leibniz - was conceived as a cosmological space. It represented the ellipse of human inquiry oscillating between rational analysis and mythic imagination. Above it, the stack tower embodied a vertical ascent through the disciplines: ancient art on the first floor (Image), philology and literature on the second (Word), philosophy and religion on the third (Orientation), and politics, law, and social life on the fourth (Action). This was less a

neutral library than a three-dimensional diagram of Warburg's mind. As Ranganathan famously wrote, "The librarian classifies in order to uncover himself" - an aphorism that seems especially apt here.

My research has taken me to library collections in London, Hamburg, Paris, Florence, Athens, Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and Washington, D.C. I analyze how librarians collaborated with architects and donors, how private collections were transformed into public

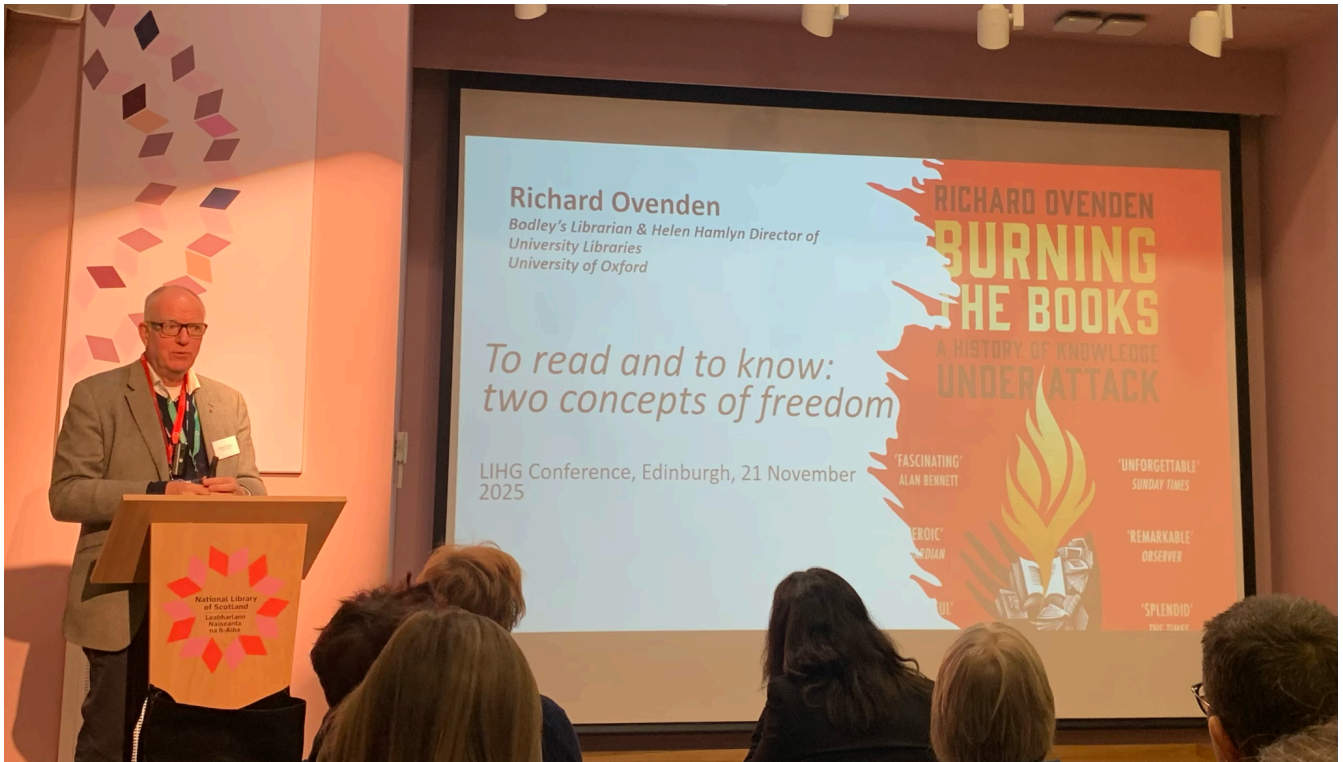
institutions, and how shelving systems mediated between intellectual ideals and practical constraints. This research also traces the influence of earlier models such as the Bibliotheca Augusta at Wolfenbüttel, the Prunksaal of the Austrian National Library, and the seminar libraries at the University of Strasbourg, where Warburg first experienced the integration of space, scholarship, and community.

At the Warburg Institute Archive in London, I examined unpublished correspondence between Warburg, Bing, Saxl, and architect Gerhard Langmaack, as well as construction drawings, furniture specifications, and colour charts used for the library's call number system. I was particularly interested in how the library's classification changed after its move from Hamburg to London in 1933 and how it responded to new spatial constraints in Woburn Square. By studying these transformations, I hope to show how the physical life of a library can illuminate broader histories of intellectual exchange, exile, and reconstruction.

Dr Latsis is a historian and digital humanist working at the intersection of archiving and visual culture. He is Associate Professor in Digital and Audiovisual Preservation at the University of Alabama's School of Library and Information Studies.

Ultimately, this research argues that libraries are not passive repositories but active theories of knowledge. To build a library is to imagine a world. The Warburg Library imagined a world in which images, words, beliefs, and actions are linked across time. Its architecture makes visible the movement of thought from perception to philosophy to social life. In tracing how this vision was constructed, shelved, and inhabited, I hope to contribute to the history of ideas, architecture, and librarianship.

I expect the first outputs of this research to include an article-length study of the Warburg Library's architectural symbolism and a comparative chapter on American research libraries of the 1890-1930 period. The long-term goal is a monograph combining intellectual history, architectural analysis, and library science. I am grateful to the Library and Information History Group for supporting this research and look forward to sharing further findings.



Richard Ovenden presented the keynote speech at the Library & Information History Group Conference, entitled 'To read and to know: two concepts of freedom'.

## When Small Actions Matter: Intellectual Freedom at the LIHG Conference 2025

Al MacAodha

This year's Library & Information History Conference was on the theme 'Freedom of Information/ Information as Freedom', and held at the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh.

I wanted to attend this year's conference to learn more about the history behind control of information, to better understand what's happening today and how libraries can combat the suppression of information.

A key idea that has stuck with me is that when the entire system feels too big to change, small or local actions can make a difference. With state authorities contributing to the suppression of intellectual freedom, independent changes at community level have the most potential for tangible impact.

The history that has led us to this point is critical. While the specifics might be new, the

underlying desire to control access to information is not. In what can feel like a divided world, it is vital to access a wide range of perspectives different to our own. If we understand one another, we can work with open minds and draw on each other's experiences to preserve intellectual freedom, the right to knowledge, and enable a broader understanding of the world.

We opened with a welcome from Jill Dye, and it was great to hear that the microphones for audience questions were integrated into hearing aid loops. This attention to accessibility set a fitting tone for the day.

From there, Emma Sibbald shared fascinating reflections on women users of academic Oxbridge libraries, 1600-1850. Her stories highlighted the silent interactions, showing a need to reconsider who user groups were.

Gabriella Reyes then analysed how classification systems form part of the colonial legacies we still live with. Highlighting that knowledge systems are not neutral, she asked how classification systems shape what we consider worth knowing.

Richard Ovenden's keynote explored Isaiah Berlin's 1959 concepts of freedom as positive and negative liberties. The freedom to access information is positive - citizens being able to

access their laws, for example. A negative freedom is the freedom to read - to not be stopped from reading. Richard used these to speak about the diversity of knowledge essential to democracy, and the control of information by contemporary governments.



Behind the scenes tour at the National Library of Scotland.

Lunch included behind the scenes tours of the National Library of Scotland, after which Fiona Mossman spoke about access to legal information in Scotland. Who had it, who benefited from it? Who didn't? She explored how even men of privilege sometimes struggled to access legal information, as well as discussing women and the role of newspapers in making legal readings more widespread.

Alana Farrell discussed the intersection between law, libraries and healthcare. The focus was the impact of over a century of abortion information censorship in Ireland, the covert networks that worked to share that information with the women who needed it, and the legacy of this history today.

Finally, David McMenemy and Steven Buchanan reflected on how libraries preserve access to information and intellectual freedom, as well as instances of librarians participating in censorship. In this age of 'big tech' and the spread of disinformation, it is more important than ever that libraries stand as a counteraction to this.

Kathryn Peak, Chair of the Library and Information History Group, closed the

conference by reflecting that the quiet accumulation of daily tasks within any library builds to form the community that affects users and their access to information. What we do, no matter how small, matters.

I'm very grateful to CILIP's Library & Information History Group for helping me to attend the day. I found each paper thought-provoking and have come away full of ideas and reflections!

Al MacAodha was the recipient of an LIHG conference bursary and currently works in museum fundraising for HMS Unicorn, one of the oldest ships in the world. Al is also the Secretary of the CILIP LGBTQ+ network.



Exterior of the National Library of Scotland, the venue for this year's Library & Information History Group Conference. All photographs courtesy of Rachel Daley.

## James Ollé Awards

James G. Ollé (1916-2001) was an active teacher and distinguished writer in the field of library history; the Library and Information History Group has offered awards in his memory since 2002 with the intention of encouraging a high level of activity in library and information history. Individuals may apply for an award of up to £500 each year for expenses relating to a library history project.

**Please note that the award is not intended to support conference attendance.**

James Ollé Award recipients will be asked to write a report (maximum 1000 words) of the work undertaken for inclusion in the LIHG's Newsletter, and may be invited to present a short paper at an LIHG conference or meeting, such as the AGM.

To apply for the award, please send a short CV, statement of plans and draft budget to the LIHG's Awards Manager. Applications may be made throughout the year.

Dr Dorothy Clayton, Awards Manager, LIHG  
Tel: 0161 826 3883; or 07769658649; Email:  
[dorothy.clayton@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:dorothy.clayton@manchester.ac.uk)

## Library History Essay Award 2026

The Library History Essay Award is an annual prize for the best article or chapter on library history published in, or pertaining to, the British Isles, within the previous calendar year (i.e., 2025). Introduced in 1996, the award is organized and sponsored by the LIHG and aims to support the publication of research into library history in the British Isles. The prize is **£350**.

Submissions should contain original historical research and be based on original source materials if possible. Evidence of methodological and historiographical innovation is particularly welcome.

Authors may put themselves forward for the prize but may make only one submission per year. Any member of CILIP may also nominate a published essay for consideration.

The entries will be identified and judged by a panel of three:

- Chair of the LIHG
- Awards Manager of the LIHG
- Additional assessor at the invitation of the LIHG Committee

Nominations and any queries should be sent to Dorothy Clayton, the Group's Awards Manager (see details to the left).

Deadline for submissions for Library History Essay Award 2026 is 30 September 2026.

**Please Note:** The article/book chapter must have been published in 2025.

## Events

### **A body of knowledge: discover 500 years of book collecting at the Royal College of Physicians**

Free exhibition - runs until 23 July 2026

The Royal College of Physician's (RCP) new exhibition reveals the fruits of 500 years of book collecting at the college. The library is testament to numerous donors and benefactors who contributed to a unique collection reflecting physicians' changing interests and priorities, as well as the ongoing work of librarians who have protected and documented it over time.

The exhibition is accompanied by a new site-specific art installation, 'Making Visible', by artist and researcher Catherine James, which reveals the contribution of women to the RCP's library. Visit the exhibition in person in London, or explore its content online on the RCP museum website.

Normal opening hours are Monday to Friday, 9am - 5pm, however please check the website in advance of a visit for occasional closure dates.

For the full programme of events throughout the run please visit:

<https://history.rcp.ac.uk/exhibitions/body-knowledge>

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### **The Aberystwyth Bibliographical Group lectures**

The Aberystwyth Bibliographical Group is running a programme of lectures into 2026 including talks on 'The Libraries of the National Trust' (online) and 'Accounting Treasures of the Library of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales, Chinese Archives and National Library of Wales' (in -person).

For further details and the full programme of events, please visit:

<https://www.hugofox.com/community/aberystwyth-bibliographical-group-19783/current-programme/>

## Middle Temple Library Heritage Tours



Image of Middle Temple Library © 2025 Zbigniew Tomasz Kotkiewicz. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

For the first time ever, Middle Temple Library is opening its doors to the public. Join exclusive heritage tours led by members of the Library team, offering a rare glimpse into centuries of legal history.

The first library at Middle Temple existed before 1540. However, left unlocked, eventually all its books were stolen. The Library was refounded in 1641, when Robert Ashley bequeathed 6,000 of his own books and funds for a Library Keeper. The collection grew rapidly and today holds over 250,000 volumes, making it one of the UK's leading legal libraries.

While the focus is on law, you'll still find works on philosophy, literature, theology, and more reflecting the broader education of earlier barristers. From 1852, when formal legal training and exams were introduced however, the Library narrowed its scope to law, just as legal publishing boomed.

Over the centuries, the Library has had several homes. Its current building, designed by Sir Edward Maufe (of Guildford Cathedral fame), opened in 1958 after WWII bombing destroyed the previous site. The old entrance steps of the nineteenth century building still remain and can be seen from the windows of the current library.

To book your place on a tour visit:

<https://www.middletemple.org.uk/library/library-heritage-tours>

## LIHG Committee Vacancies

The LIHG committee is proactive and enthusiastic in promoting the history of libraries and information and aims to organise visits, talks and events that attract a wide and diverse audience. The Group is made up of volunteers who meet 3-4 times per year (latterly, with at least two of these meetings online).

The CILIP LIHG is looking to appoint three roles to the committee:

### **Chair**

The Chair is responsible for providing a strategic lead and direction for the Group, ensuring its activities advance the study, understanding and promotion of library and information history. The Chair acts as the principal representative of the Group within CILIP and the wider professional community. The Chair is supported by the Committee and works closely with the Secretary and Treasurer.

Please note, this vacancy closes on 30th January 2026. For this role, candidates must be a member of CILIP or willing to join.

### **Web Editor**

The Web Editor is responsible for the design and presentation of the Group's website, including sourcing new content, reporting and statistics and maintenance of digital files.

### **Marketing and Social Media Officer**

The Marketing and Social Media Officer is responsible for promoting the work of the group, working closely with the Newsletter Editor and Website Editor.

More details are available on the [LIHG website](#). To apply, please send a one-page CV and short paragraph outlining your interest in the role to Emma Laws (Secretary) at [emma.laws@exeter-cathedral.org.uk](mailto:emma.laws@exeter-cathedral.org.uk).

## Back Matter

The LIHG newsletter is produced twice a year. It contains short articles, news items, exhibition and conference announcements, notices of awards and bursaries, and reports on conferences, exhibitions, and site visits. We also highlight a selection of new publications. We are always looking for feature articles in the field of library and information history; descriptions of little-known historic libraries; information about projects with a significant historical component; new resources (print and digital); news items; and calls for papers.

We also welcome reports on conferences on any subject in library and information history and reviews of exhibitions. Recent graduates are invited to submit brief descriptions of their research projects. Please contact the editor, Rachel Daley, if you would like to have news, events, exhibitions or calls for papers included in the newsletter: [lihgnewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:lihgnewsletter@gmail.com)

Proposals for feature articles (length of article max. 2000 words) and descriptions of graduate research projects (max. length 750 words) should be accompanied by a short CV. Deadlines for contributions:

15 May 2026 (Summer 2026)  
30 October 2026 (Winter 2026)

Information about events, conferences and bursaries is also disseminated via the [CILIP website](#).

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