



## Library & Information History Group

### **News from the Chair**

Welcome to the Summer 2026 issue of the LIHG Newsletter! At our most recent meeting, we said a warm farewell to Kathryn Peak, who has done such wonderful work as Chair since taking up the role in 2023.

My name is Emma Sibbald, and I am delighted to be taking on the role of Chair. I work part-time as Rare Books Curator at Queens' College, Cambridge, alongside my DPhil in English at the University of Oxford, and my research explores women's unofficial use of university libraries before they were formally admitted as students. It has been a real pleasure to get to know the committee over the past few months, and I am very much looking forward to LIHG's programme of events and activities. There is much to be excited about in the year ahead.

One of those exciting developments took place on 2 June, when LIHG's Conference Coordinator, Eve Lacey, hosted our first Early Career Conference. The event brought together a wonderful range of speakers and attendees, with excellent papers from Jacqueline Imrie on libraries and social identity in early nineteenth-century Scotland, Rachel Daley on women's reading practices and elite identity at Tatton Park Library, and Ashley Parry on conceptualising catalogues in medieval monasteries.

The conference was created to support those at the beginning of their careers in library history, including students, graduate trainees, early-career professionals, and researchers from a variety of disciplines. We were delighted by the enthusiasm and engagement of everyone involved, and we hope to run similar events in the future.

Papers arising from the conference will be published in future newsletters, so do keep an eye out for those. Thank you so much to Eve for organising this.

We are also looking ahead to our next conference, *Disaster in Libraries*, which will take place at Newnham College, Cambridge, on 8th December, 2026. The call for papers is now open, and further details can be found on page 24 of this issue. Within stories of loss and damage in historic libraries, it is possible to explore narratives of resilience, recovery, and renewal, and we hope to welcome a wide range of speakers and perspectives.

This issue is also a bit of a bumper edition, featuring three fascinating articles. Andrew K. Shenton takes us into the world of science fiction, early television, and information management in *Information in Avengerland: a 1960s perspective on record repositories and the people who manage them*. Julia Chandler traces the development of the historic iterations of what is now the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office Library, in *Library services for international development: a brief history*; and Fawn Todd explores the history of a unique eighteenth-century travelling collection now held in Canterbury Cathedral, in *Library in White: The Travelling Bray Library of Preston-next-Wingham*.

Finally, I am pleased to highlight two opportunities that are currently open for entries: the James Ollé Award and the Library History Essay Award 2026. Please do take a look at the details on page 22 and consider sharing them with colleagues, students, and anyone else who may be interested.

I hope you enjoy this issue of the newsletter, and thank you for your continued support of LIHG.

Emma Sibbald  
Chair, CILIP Library & Information History Group

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## 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 currently looking to appoint a **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 the LIHG Secretary, Emma Laws, [emma.laws@exeter-cathedral.org.uk](mailto:emma.laws@exeter-cathedral.org.uk).

## Information in Avengerland

A 1960s perspective on record repositories, libraries and the people who manage them

*Science Fiction: The Illustrated Encyclopedia* describes *The Avengers* as “perhaps the archetypal 1960s TV series”.<sup>[1]</sup> It ran for virtually the whole decade, initially in black and white, then in colour, and featured seemingly ever more surreal and fantastic cases investigated by two government agents, the nature of whose masters is never unequivocally disclosed. In most of the stories and certainly those within the best remembered seasons of the show, the duo consisted of a man and a woman. Here the male operative was invariably John Steed, his partner being – successively – Cathy Gale, Emma Peel and, finally, Tara King. Although the stories were fictitious and we may even call many outlandish, what we see in *The Avengers* provides some fascinating incidental insights into the England of sixty years ago.

### Records

Information-providing repositories, departments and organisations appear in several episodes and sometimes they – or

their contents – play significant roles in the plot. In *The Grave-Diggers*, for example, it is the reaction of Mrs. Peel's contact to the information contained in the personnel file she is consulting that helps her to establish the involvement of a man whose technical expertise is integral to the plot she is attempting to uncover. The scene reminds us that it is when connections are made between the information we access and personal knowledge that true learning and key discoveries take place.



Image by Public Domain Pictures from Pixabay.

Elsewhere, the removal or destruction of certain information from records repositories convinces Steed and Mrs. Peel that skulduggery is afoot. In *The*

*See-Through Man*, a file on a research submission is found to be missing from a Ministry of Defence records office, having apparently been taken by an invisible intruder, and in *The Positive Negative Man*, exploration of a dusty archive reveals that papers on another pioneering project have been reduced to ashes. In both instances, it is the absence of information that is telling and causes suspicions to be raised; in the earlier instalment, *Warlock*, the situation is different. Here, as the website, *The Avengers Forever* reports, when an expert on rocket fuel disappears in mysterious circumstances, the books in his library suggest that he has a strong interest in the occult<sup>[2]</sup> or, in the words of the script, “psychic research and spiritualism”,<sup>[3]</sup> much of the subsequent plot sees our investigators concerned with black magic.

The files referred to in *The Grave-Diggers*, *The See-Through Man* and *The Positive Negative Man* portray records very much as a tool of officialdom and, especially, government. It is, no doubt, the repository scenes that lead Paul Cornell, Martin Day and Keith Topping to their opinion in relation to the second story that the MoD is “drowning in paper and bureaucracy”.<sup>[4]</sup> The later episode, *Pandora*, which belongs to *The Avengers*’ final season, adds to this impression. Still,

the effectiveness of the tools employed by the records clerk, Carter, in a government “file room” is admirable – he is able to use a bound name index to find, within moments, documentation dating back to 1915. Nevertheless, information is again concealed from Steed by a villain intent on preventing him from discovering the plot that is being perpetrated.



Image by Pexels from Pixabay.

The need for rigorous organisation in order to render information readily retrievable is a notable theme in *A Sense of History*. Here Mrs. Peel spends much of her time combing a haphazardly arranged university archive so as to learn the identity of the author of a thesis that would seem pivotal to a murder she and Steed are investigating. The latter dismisses the archive as “a shambles” and Mrs. Peel says there is “absolutely no system whatsoever”. Some of the episode’s most dramatic sequences happen in the room, with several attacks

and fights taking place within its confines and there is another killing when a student who is attempting to help Steed is crushed beneath a set of shelves.

Record keepers are represented in a variety of ways. In *The Positive Negative Man*, the intermediary who seeks to make the requested information available to Steed is a secretary with a range of duties and those relating to records form only part of her remit. The records clerk to whom we are introduced in the opening scene of *The See-Through Man* and the more senior counterpart in the "Special Section" we meet immediately afterwards never appear again in the instalment, so the viewer is given no opportunity to get to know them as people.

*A Sense of History* plays with the viewer's expectations. Here D.B. Grindley, a university archivist who had seemed no more than an absent-minded eccentric and whom the viewer had been led to believe was dead, is ultimately revealed to be the episode's criminal mastermind. We realise that the chaos of the archive has been deliberate, so as to hide the truth. Grindley acknowledges that whilst an archivist may be considered no more than "a sort of glorified librarian", he has had the opportunity to learn much from being surrounded for his entire life by

"thoughts committed to paper, ideas, wisdom". Grindley's duplicity is matched in *Pandora*, when one of the villains is revealed to be the controller of the file room and Carter's superior.

### **The Public Library**

It is perhaps surprising that in a series set in contemporary Britain and which includes many scenes taking place in institutions of the day, libraries are rarely in evidence. Although the publishing industry is fundamental to *Love All*, where subliminal messages projected by "microdots" found on the pages of works provided by the firm, Casanova Ink, change the behaviour of their readers, all the books are delivered to and circulated among individuals; no libraries are involved.

The stand-out "library episode" is *Murdersville*. Here a stereotypical, albeit small, public library and reading room appears at three different points in the story. The village alluded to in the title, Little Storpington-in-the-Swuff, offers an unusual service – for a substantial fee, an individual can lure an enemy to the place and kill them with no questions asked by the locals. One such murder happens in the village's library. In a scene that has been praised by commentators for its humour,<sup>[4,5]</sup> one business rival shoots another, having first equipped his gun with a silencer after being reminded by

the librarian of the room's rules on quietness. All the patrons ignore the event. There is a clear irony in the perpetrator dutifully abiding by the library's requirement for silence but having no qualms about breaking the most important of the Ten Commandments. The library's rules, we may infer, are sacrosanct. We may smile, too, at how the crime is overseen by a friend of Mrs. Peel after he has gone to the library in search of normality having himself received a sample of the village's oddness.



Photo by Nick Fewings on Unsplash.

Terence Feely defines surrealism as the juxtaposition of two entirely disparate objects or concepts that are not normally found together.<sup>[6]</sup> In *Murdersville*, the surrealism of the killing that we witness in the library is heightened by the ordinariness of the environment itself. We see books, newspapers, shelves with classification numbers marked at

intervals, tables and various users. It is a typical English scene and entirely in keeping with the aim of the series co-producer, Brian Clemens, to present a romanticised version of our country – in Clemens' own words, a land “of bowlers and brollies, of charm and muffins for tea, a Britain long since gone – if it ever really existed!”<sup>[7]</sup> The killing in the library is startling, even though already in the episode we have twice seen or heard murders taking place in broad daylight in the village.

The librarian is unnamed in the dialogue but identified in the closing credits as “Miss Avril”, played by Marika Mann. Formally dressed and bespectacled, with a serious demeanour, she personifies the prim manner and appearance which, no doubt, the programme makers felt viewers would expect to see in a member of library staff. Commentators' opinions of her are mixed. Rodney Marshall describes her merely as “strict”,<sup>[8]</sup> whilst *Avengers* expert Dave Rogers considers her “attractive”.<sup>[9]</sup> After the murder scene, the library appears twice more in *Murdersville*. It is the venue for an emergency meeting of the villagers, when Mrs. Peel's suspicions about the events in Little Storpington are gathering momentum. Miss Avril is again in attendance. A climactic fight sequence, in which Steed and Mrs. Peel confront the

villains, also takes place in the library. Here books are used as weapons, with Steed at one point sweeping a row of volumes on to the head of his adversary and he delivers the final blow by throwing a weighty tome to knock out a villager who is about to take a shot at Mrs. Peel. Again, contrasts are at work. A library may be popularly associated with studious scholarship and learning but the custard pie-style fight we witness in it is derived from the best traditions of comedy slapstick.

Any viewer wishing to make a real-life visit to the library we see in *Murdersville* will be sadly disappointed. Chris Bentley reports that the exterior was actually the Memorial Hall, in Aldbury, and the inside shots are of a set on a soundstage at ABP Elstree Studios.<sup>[10]</sup>

### Closing Thoughts

Much is often made of the timelessness of *The Avengers* and indeed Clemens highlights this himself in his foreword to a major book on the series.<sup>5</sup> To us today, however, the facilities and methods used for providing information are typical of the period when the show was made. We see, for example, filing cabinets, paper folders, box files, traditional bound volumes and a library environment with not a computer in evidence. Despite its

fictional orientation, as a document that reflects the information world which was prevalent in the 1960s, the series has considerable historical value, as well as highlighting the dramatic potential offered by information scenarios of a range of kinds.

### References

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- [5] Speirs, J. Murdersville. In: Marshall, R. (ed) *Mrs. Peel, We're Needed: The Technicolor World of Emma Peel – The Avengers on Film, Volume 2*, 2014, pp. 264-80.
- [6] *The Prisoner In-depth Tape 6*. VHS video cassette. TR7 Productions, 1994.
- [7] Clemens, B. Foreword. In: Rogers, D. *The Complete Avengers*. Bantam, 1989, p. 9.
- [8] Marshall, R. *Subversive Champagne: Beyond Genre in The Avengers*. 2014.
- [9] Rogers, D. *The Avengers*. ITV Books/Michael Joseph, 1983.
- [10] Bentley, C. *The Avengers on Location*. Reynolds and Hearn, 2007.

Andrew K. Shenton

# Library services for international development: a brief history



**Figure 1:** New Library at 94 Victoria Street. © The Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office, reproduced with permission.

## Chronology and origins

Just as the government department itself went through many iterations, so did its library services. The Ministry of Overseas Development was set up as a separate Ministry in 1964, then in 1970 the Ministry was dissolved and overseas aid and policy functions were carried out by the Overseas Development Administration (ODA), as the overseas aid arm of the Foreign and

Commonwealth Office (FCO). In 1974 it was again made a separate Ministry, then in 1979 it reverted to ODA. In 1997 it became the Department for International Development (DFID) and then in 2021 it merged with FCO to become the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

Library services were run jointly, serving the needs of staff from both organisations, with collections held across a number of locations. In a nutshell, the Foreign and Commonwealth

Office collected material on the political and historical aspects of countries, diplomacy and international relations, while Overseas Development Administration collected mainly in the fields of economic and social development, development planning, health, population, education, science and technology and anything relevant to the development process. ODA also housed the statistics library, which contained material relevant across both organisations.

### **North and South**

The main ODA library started in Eland House, London (home of ODA since the 1960s – and note that I refer to the original Eland House, not the building currently standing on that site, which was opened in 1995). The statistics library was housed in a separate room – described in a library note of 1984 as “a small, pleasant room on the second floor [with] space for two or three visitors to work comfortably”. This floor also housed the journals library, an office for the senior librarian, and a paperkeepers' room.

In 1991, the bulk of the collection was moved from London to Abercrombie House, on the outskirts of East Kilbride which had, at that point, been open for 10 years. The new library opened on 25 March 1981.

Shortly after, ODA staff in London also left Eland House and relocated to 94 Victoria Street, where they were served by a small reference and information service which opened on 6 May 1981. This shifted location within the building; starting in what later

became Sir David Nabarro's office, and in October 1996 moving to a larger space which provided study desks and more open access terminals – reflecting the growing shift from paper to electronic resources (see Figure 1).

### **Specialist collections**

To support specialist work, ODA had three scientific units: the Tropical Products Institute (TPI), the Centre for Overseas Pest Research (COPR) and the Land Resources Development Centre (LRDC). Each unit had an extensive library, with staff and collections housed at a number of different locations.

In 1983, TPI and COPR merged to form the Tropical Development and Research Institute (TDRI) and the libraries merged too. Then in 1987, TDRI and LRDC merged to form the Overseas Development Natural Resources Institute (ODNRI). Once again, libraries and staff merged - although for a time, materials remained at their separate locations.

In 1990, ODNRI became an Executive Agency and the name was further abbreviated to Natural Resources Institute (NRI). Relocation happened in stages from 1988-1990, but eventually NRI consolidated eight sites into one, at the former naval barracks in Chatham, Kent. The new library opened in August 1989, then closed briefly as asbestos dust was discovered in one of the old sites, from which stock had been distributed throughout the new collection. One good thing to come out of that hiccup

was that when the library reopened, all of the stock had been cleaned!

Along with the staff of NRI, this library served many of the specialist officers who had previously used the ODA library, plus ODA's natural resources advisers. This was especially the case after 1991 when – following the stock edit programme in preparation for the move to Abercrombie House – material on agricultural or scientific research from the ODA library was offered to NRI.

### **Library collection: from Aid policy to Zoonotic diseases**

As mentioned, the ODA library collection was centred around topics of interest to the organisation, and this changed over time as aid priorities shifted. In the 1990s, there was a growing interest in women, and social development advisers helped improve the areas of the collection which gave a gender perspective to development work.

There was also increasing focus on assessing the environmental impact of programming, so the collection grew to include forest development, energy efficiency, and sustainable development. The library was fortunate in that, as an international organisation, we could make use of contacts in embassies and High Commissions and obtain publications locally. It also received a large amount of 'grey literature', including research reports, working papers, conference proceedings and reports produced by government departments.

The library also contained a range of journals and reference material. The journals covered a broad spectrum - some niche, some of general interest including *New Statesman*, *The Economist* and *New Scientist*. It also took the main broadsheet newspapers. Reference material included maps, gazetteers, dictionaries, and many directories. The collection also contained a complete set of UK telephone directories and yellow pages (of course, pre-internet!)

The collection was catalogued according to the Library of Congress classification system, with around 50% of stock being in the "H" section: economics and social sciences.

The Statistics collection consisted mainly of primary statistical material and compilations by the UN, World Bank, OECD and other international bodies. Under a Commonwealth exchange programme, copies of 'Statistics on International Development' were sent to other organisations, and ODA received their equivalent reports in return. The collection was also increased by ODA statisticians who deposited publications received through their contacts in statistical offices in other countries. The collection was classified according to a different scheme to the main library, with separate country and subject sequences (see Figure 2).

### **People and memories**

Over its 40 year existence, many people worked for the ODA library services, often making the internal transfer from FCO to ODA

ASS B - INTERNATIONAL TRADE

General statistics only, total trade, direction of trade, collective commodity trade, imports, exports.

N.B. Publications showing trade and production of individual commodities are classed at C.

ASS C - PRODUCTION - INDUSTRIAL CENSUSES

Surveys of production. Indexes of production. Includes production, stocks, consumption and prices of individual commodities.

ASS D - PRICES

General prices and prices indexes. Market and wholesale prices and price indexes. Retail prices and price indexes (including cost of living and consumer prices).

ASS E - NATIONAL INCOME, FINANCE

National income and expenditure, estimates, finance, taxation, gold and assets, credit, money, banking, shares and company finance, gross domestic product, gross national product, balance of payments.

**Figure 2:** Extract from Statistics Classification Scheme. © The Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office, reproduced with permission.

and back. Of the many names we've traced from memories, photos and documents, at least 7 people still work in FCDO, although only 2 in a library related post. The original library in London had a staff of 14 (including 3 assistant librarians and 2 paperkeepers.)

Once the library split, a staff of 3 remained in London, and there were 9 members of the new team in Abercrombie House.

The earliest librarian traced to date is Peter Griffiths. He moved to the FCO main library to lead the library automation project, and Anne Monks became senior librarian. Anne moved back to FCO and Elizabeth Povey (now Courtney) took over until Richard Lewis

arrived. He led the service when the new library opened in Abercrombie House. He was succeeded briefly by John Lehane, then Anne Fraser, who was the last to oversee the full service with its 2 libraries.

**Not just rooms of printed material:  
Services**

The Dobis/Libis Library Management System was installed in 1989 and the catalogue included books, reports and journals. This could be searched by staff in all library locations.

Alongside providing a collection of material that colleagues could either borrow or consult, library staff also created 'Development Index'. In the 1980-90s, the library subscribed to around 850 journal titles, and these were indexed onto a Cardbox based system. This produced around 250 new references each month, which were printed out and sent to recipients in the UK and offices around the world. Copies of articles were provided on request. By 1992 this database contained over 23,000 articles and there were moves to make this unique resource available as a commercial product, but this initiative was never fulfilled.

Another large part of the work of library staff was responding to enquiries: from the population of Sudan, the impact of AIDS on the health service in Southern Africa, to specific articles by a leading environmentalist. If the team could not provide an answer from the collection, they had access to a network of libraries and institutions they could call on, plus a growing number of databases and electronic resources. The library bought compact discs, including IntIEc, which held references from the joint World Bank/IMF library in Washington, and the IDRC (Canada) database of projects and development activity, to which the ODA and other donor organisations contributed.

### **From paper to online**

This change in how people accessed information was the sign of the biggest shift in library services. Before the emergence of the

internet, and the move towards self-service, with a computer on every desk (and indeed, in everyone's pocket) library staff had an important role to play in responding to enquiries. In 1995, computer terminals with internet access were installed in libraries in Victoria Street and Abercrombie House. A report from November 1995 records "low interest in the internet terminals, which were mainly used by library staff". This may well reflect that access was via complicated code instructions rather than a user-friendly browser, and there was no guarantee that material found one day would be available the next.

Library staff were well placed to explore the opportunities offered by this new way of storing and accessing information, and in January 1996 Julia Chandler visited the fledgling organisation OneWorld Online to discuss ODA's presence on the internet. This visit led to the creation of one of the earliest government websites.

It was not until early 1998 that plans were announced for 'selected' staff in DFID to be given internet access at their desk. Access and web development grew rapidly after that, with library staff involved in creating online content, using online sources to provide information for staff, and training colleagues in how to use these new tools themselves. Library staff also developed the organisation's first intranet – a pilot in February 1997, followed by the launch of inSight in 2001, until a new team was created in internal communications.

## **Public Enquiry Point**

In 1998, when the library team had been responding to steadily increasing external enquiries, there was a push for government departments to have an advertised public point of contact. The Public Enquiry Point (PEP) was created in the library and took on that role. Besides direct enquiries via an 0845 number, and email via the new public website, the team were also passed enquiries that had been sent to the department which required a standard response. Development awareness was a priority during that time, so the contact information appeared on all official publications, and was mentioned in speeches, and the service quickly became very popular and heavily used.

The customer base grew over time to include members of the public, civil society, businesses looking for contracts, students and teacher from primary, secondary and higher education, job hunters and those wanting to comment on, or volunteer to support, humanitarian disasters (especially the 2000 Mozambique floods, and 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and Boxing Day tsunami). Later the PEP was merged with the FOI Unit and Data protection into an Open Government Unit.

## **Further evolution**

The biggest transformation in information handling was from paper to online. Many library staff were ideally placed to move into the digital space (having been active in the teams which created the intranet, website

and a wide range of digital content), however there were still information needs within the organisation to be met. Library staff continued to develop services based on user needs. Between 1997-2000 there was a series of visits to DFID offices (including New Delhi, Harare, Pretoria, Nairobi, Kampala and Dar es Salaam) to discover how colleagues' information needs were changing, what material they needed access to, and what new skills they needed.

In 2007 a further review looked at the balance between existing printed book and journal collections and DFID's eLibrary service provision. After consultation with staff in the UK and overseas it was concluded that DFID's library services should move to purely electronic delivery. Under this new service DFID staff continued to have access to a professionally managed library and information service on a virtual basis, with printed books supplied via inter-library loan from the British Library or specialist development libraries. Selected items from DFID's printed collection were distributed among various DFID departments as well as donated to Oxfam and the University of Strathclyde.

After 2010 the responsibility for the eLibrary moved to Research and Evidence Division (RED) and its services focused on the delivery of online peer reviewed journals (both subscription and open access) to support evidence-based decision making within DFID. By then, DFID staff had access to over 8,500 titles – a dramatic illustration of how online services had increased access over printed resources.

After the formation of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office in September 2020 subscription services merged completely. RED worked with colleagues in the FCO (now FCDO) Library to develop a road map to open up subscriptions and services to all FCDO staff.

### **Further reading**

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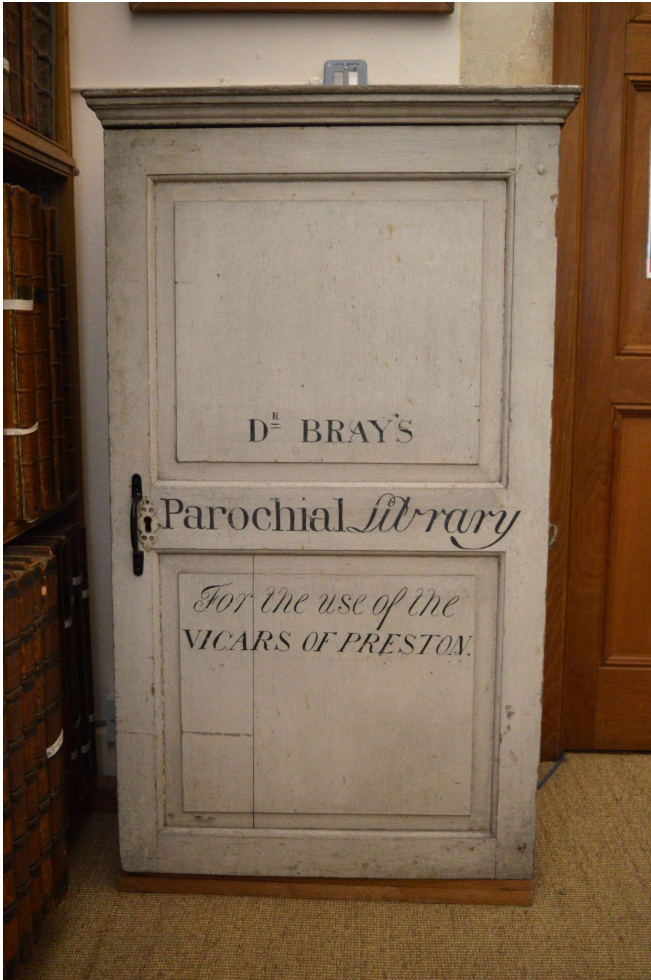
*Taking hold of new technology: how the FCO libraries plan to expand their services*. *Foreign Services*, Summer 1986

Various editions of *North and South*

And with thanks to the many staff who reviewed personal archives and shared their memories

Julia Chandler, BLib Joint Hons and Sharon Skelton, MCLIP  
Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office, formerly ODA and DFID library service

## Library in White: The Travelling Bray Library of Preston-next-Wingham



**Figure 1:** Preston-next-Wingham's Bray Library © Canterbury Cathedral Archives & Library

Amongst the many treasures in the library of Canterbury Cathedral, in the corner of the Howley-Harrison Library sits a rather unassuming white cupboard with simple black painted lettering on the door. This cupboard, the property of the parish of

Preston-next-Wingham in Kent and deposited with the Cathedral in 1983, has a much more colourful history than its white exterior might suggest (see Figure 1). It is a rare surviving example of an eighteenth-century travelling Bray bookcase, with around 60% of its original volumes still extant within its small enclosure.

To understand why these cupboards were created, we need to look back to the world of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, and the experiences and beliefs of the Reverend Dr Thomas Bray (1658-1730).

### **The Reverend Dr. Thomas Bray and the spiritual concerns of poverty and isolation**

Thomas Bray was born to a poor farming couple in Marton, a small village in Shropshire, and was baptised in 1658.<sup>[1]</sup> He was ordained deacon and priest in 1682. The early years of his priesthood were undertaken against the backdrop of the Glorious Revolution of 1688, which saw the deposition of the Catholic King James II and the ascension of Protestant William III and Mary II in joint rule.

Despite the restoration of Protestant monarchs to the throne, the challenges to its authority within the country from nonconformists and Roman Catholics had unsettled the Church of England. Within this religious and political

landscape, Bray's *Catechetical Lectures* was published in 1696. Written as a guide for clergymen in explaining the principles of Christian religion to a congregation, it quickly drew approval from many in the Church, including Henry Compton, the Bishop of London.

During these years, the issue of protecting the spiritual health of Anglicans overseas was also a rising concern. As the numbers of British colonial settlers in America began to rise, the Church of England found the remote parishioners in need of ministers to tend to their religious requirements.

These did not tend to be lucrative or attractive postings for clergymen: the salary was small, the parishioners were rarely wealthy, the climate was often vastly different to what they were used to, food scarcity and disease was not uncommon, and many newer postings were in places which had not yet been fully established and which were often painfully isolated. Those who were able to gain positions in parishes in England were rarely willing to give up even the poorer posts to emigrate across the Atlantic Ocean.

As a result, those willing to take the posts overseas were almost exclusively from poor backgrounds with little to no connections who could be called upon for help or support.<sup>[2]</sup> These were not men

who could afford to bring or purchase the theological and religious texts that they would require in drafting their sermons, and which would help ensure that they did not inadvertently stray from orthodox Anglican belief. In their vulnerable and isolated parishes, the Church of England was very aware of the influence which nonconformist texts and beliefs could wield.

### **Bray and the push for parochial libraries**

Bray was well aware of these concerns, and loudly encouraged support for the provision of libraries for such remote parishes. In December 1695, Bray released a printed appeal entitled *Proposals for Encouraging Learning and Religion in the Foreign Plantations*, garnering public support for his proposal including royal backing from Princess Anne (the future queen), who granted him the sum of £44.<sup>[3]</sup>

In 1696, William III granted permission to the Bishop of London to appoint a commissary to manage colonial ecclesiastical affairs: the well-respected Rev. Thomas Bray, an expert in helping clergy ensure their flock adhered to the established teachings of the Church and who had already demonstrated his dedication to the welfare of foreign parishes, was chosen. He accepted the role – on the condition that parochial

libraries would be provided for the clergymen sent to the colonies; Bray went on to found 39 libraries in North America alone.<sup>[4]</sup>

For parishes closer to home, Bray outlined his plans further in 1697 with *An Essay Towards Promoting all Necessary and Useful Knowledge, both Divine and Human, in all the Parts of His Majesty's Dominions, Both at Home and Abroad*. He estimated that £30 would allow for 'a compleat Sett of all necessary Books' for a parish library, and suggested that the clergy foot part of the costs, with gentry covering the remainder. Once the volumes were received, they were to be

*...made up in such Boxes, or Book-Presses, with Shelves in them, and Locks and Doors to 'em, as will serve both to preserve 'em in the Carriage down, and in the Place where they shall be deposited for the Publick Benefit.*<sup>[5]</sup>

Once at their new home, the books within these transportable presses were to be marked with the deanery or parish to which they belonged, and their preservation became the duty of the minister of the parish.

In 1699, Bray helped to found the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK) with the express aim of spreading Christian learning both abroad and at home in England and Wales through the support of libraries and charity schools.<sup>[6]</sup>

Six years later, the Trustees for Erecting Parochial Libraries and Promoting other Charitable Designs was founded.<sup>[7]</sup> Around 56 parochial libraries had been established throughout England by 1729, and a further 10 in Wales.

### The Bray Library of Preston-next-Wingham



**Figure 2:** Preston-next-Wingham's Bray library, opened to show the surviving volumes and the locations on the inner door where the 1708 Act and the shelflist were once pasted. © Canterbury Cathedral Archives & Library

In 1710, the Trustees for Erecting Parochial Libraries sent out a compact library to the parish of Preston-next-Wingham. Sitting a few miles south-east of Canterbury, the small village is surrounded by rural farmland. St Mildred, its historic parish church, has stood for around 900 years. Despite, however, the village's dignified

age and the community's relative prosperity, the living of Preston was said to be worth only around £40 a year in 1711.<sup>[8]</sup>

Although the travelling bookcases sent out by the Bray Trustees were normally unpainted, after arriving at the parish of Preston-next-Wingham, this case was painted white. That once vivid white paint has now faded to a light grey as a result of the lead content of the original pigment. The words 'Dr Bray's Parochial Library for the use of the vicars of Preston' were proudly painted in black lettering across the front of the door. The sturdy oak case stands 117 cm high, 70 cm wide and 30 cm deep, and is fitted with three shelves, allowing the base to form the fourth (see Figure 2). Handles were affixed on each side, and a lock on the door ensured the safety of the contents.

A copy of the 1708 Parochial Libraries Act, which established the rules for the protection of parish libraries, was originally pasted onto the inside of the door along with a handwritten shelf list. Both have since been removed to allow for conservation, but are kept with the case. The Act set out that newly appointed incumbents should audit the library and make a new catalogue of the contents within six months of taking up their position. No book could be disposed of without the permission of the Ordinary who oversaw the clergy and parishes,

and then only when it was a duplicate copy.<sup>[9]</sup>



**Figure 3:** The Bray Library bookplate pasted into William Reeve's *The apologies of Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and Minutius Felix* (1709) © Canterbury Cathedral Archives & Library

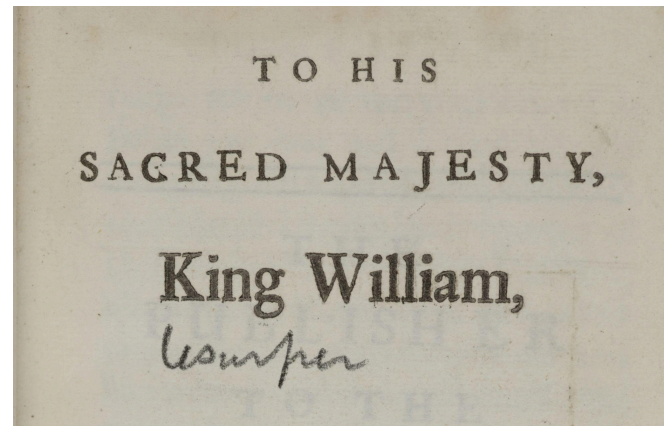
Preston's book press originally contained a standard set of 67 volumes, all recommended by Bray, of which only 41 survive.<sup>[10]</sup> Each book retains its specially designed bookplate (see Figure 3) featuring a kneeling clergyman in front of a bookcase with a ray of light shining down from the heavens with the words

'Tolle Lege', translating to 'Take up and read'; the divine message which prompted Saint Augustine of Hippo's conversion. Printed text underneath announces the parish the volume belongs to, leaving space for the parish name and county to be added by hand. These have been dutifully completed in the Preston volumes, although we do see the parish misspelled as 'Perston' in one.<sup>[11]</sup> Larger volumes in the library bear the second design of Bray bookplates, which feature St John receiving a book from an angel along with the words 'Accipe librum et devora illum', translating to 'Take the book and devour it'.

The surviving contents include guidance on appropriate texts, theology, sermons and discourses by Tillotson, works on Christian obedience, biblical commentaries by Symon Lord Bishop of Ely, Eusebius Pamphilus' history of the church, and of course two volumes by Bray himself: his *Catechetical Lectures* (1703, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.)<sup>[12]</sup> and *Bibliotheca Parochialis* (1707, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), a lengthy work designed to help guide clergy in their choice of texts.<sup>[13]</sup>

Although the surviving volumes are in large part free of annotation or marginalia, we do see one former reader's strong feelings break through on the early pages of John Tillotson's *Of Sincerity and Constancy in the Faith and*

*Profession of the True Religion* (1704, 4th ed.).<sup>[14]</sup> Where the work is dedicated to 'King William', someone has commented 'Usurper' underneath his name! (See Figure 4). It seems not all the readers have been unwavering supporters of the Glorious Revolution.



**Figure 4:** The manuscript addition of 'Usurper' under the name of William III, in John Tillotson's *Of Sincerity and Constancy in the Faith and Profession of the True Religion* (1704, 4th ed. © Canterbury Cathedral Archives & Library

Preston's Library was reported as 'withdrawn' in 1878, but was discovered again in 1971 in the home of the vicar's warden. It was deposited with Canterbury Cathedral's Library in 1983, where it has since remained. Although, as Bray and his colleagues intended, it still belongs to the Vicar and church wardens of Preston-next-Wingham, today its contents are now catalogued and accessible to all.

Fawn Todd, Librarian  
Canterbury Cathedral Archives and  
Library.

## Further reading

Lee, Brian North. *Some Church of England parochial library and cathedral ex-libris* (Bookplate Society, 2004)

Perkin, Michael. *A directory of the parochial libraries of the Church of England and the Church in Wales* (The Bibliographical Society, 2004)

Shaw, David. 'Parochial libraries in Kent', *Library & Information History*, 27, no. 4 (December 2011) pp. 239–245.

## References

[1] Cowie, Leonard W. "Bray, Thomas (bap. 1658, d. 1730), Church of England clergyman." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. October 04, 2012. Oxford University Press. Accessed 16 May 2026, <<https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-3296>>

[2] Houlette, William D. "Parish Libraries and the Work of the Reverend Thomas Bray." *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy*, vol. 4, no. 4, 1934, pp. 588–609. p.588. Accessed 16 May 2026, <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/4302124>>

[3] Cowie, "Bray, Thomas (bap. 1658, d. 1730), Church of England clergyman". This equates to around £8,042 as of March 2026 (Bank of England Inflation Calculator. Accessed 16 May 2026, <<https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator>>)

[4] Houlette, pp.591-592

[5] Bray, Thomas. *An Essay Towards Promoting all Necessary and Useful Knowledge, Both Divine and Human, in all the Parts of His Majesty's Dominions, Both at Home and Abroad*. (London: Printed by E. Holt for Robert Clavel, at the Peacock in St. Paul's Church-Yard, 1697). pp. 2-3. Accessed 16 May 2026, <<https://archive.org/details/essaytowardsprom00bray/page/2/mode/2up>>

[6] Cowie, "Bray, Thomas (bap. 1658, d. 1730), Church of England clergyman".

[7] Potten, Ed. Chair's introduction to *Historic Libraries Forum, Bulletin No.13*, April 2009. P.1. Accessed 16 May 2026, <<https://historiclibrariesforum.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/0904.pdf>>

[8] Rignall, John. *St Mildred's Church, Preston: A brief history* (c.1990).

To put this into better context, David Albert Jones states that at the end of the seventeenth century £80 was just enough to allow someone to 'maintain minimal trappings of gentility' in the poorer counties of England. Preston's annual living of £40 would have put the incumbent at a roughly equivalent economic level to a shopkeeper or trader. That said, Jones also astutely points out that many likely purposefully underestimated their benefice income in the early eighteenth century in order to gain additional endowment from Queen Anne's Bounty, or avoid the associated tax. See Albert Jones, David, 'The Incomes of the Clergy', *The Clerical Profession in the Long Eighteenth Century, 1680-1840* (Oxford University Press, 2007). pp. 115 and 117.

[9] Parochial Libraries Act 1708. Accessed 18 May 2026, <<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/apgb/Ann/7/14/1991-02-01>>

[10] Gray, Sarah and Baggs, Chris. 'The English Parish Library: A Celebration of Diversity', *Libraries & Culture*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (Summer, 2000), pp. 414–433. p.421

[11] Library reference: CCL Preston-2-1

[12] Library reference: CCL Preston-4-6(1)

[13] Library reference: CCL Preston-3-4

[14] Library reference: CCL Preston-2-1

## 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 2025 is 30 September 2026.

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

## Publications

### Discover a cross-journal special feature from *Library & Information History* and *Archives of Natural History*

Following a successful Library and Information History conference hosted by the Linnean Society in 2024, a cross-journal special feature from *Library & Information History* and *Archives of Nature History* is now available. Papers in this virtual issue cover themes such as library collections and scholarly networks, how books and archives challenge existing narratives, evidence in the afterlives of books and preservation of knowledge in the past and present.

This journal is available on the Edinburgh University Press website:

<https://www.euppublishing.com/cjsf/anh-lih>

### **'A History of the British Museum Library, 1753-1973', now digitised**

The British Library is delighted to announce the digitisation of an important work for the study of the history of librarianship: P. R. Harris, 'A History of the British Museum Library, 1753-1973' (London: The British Library, 1998).

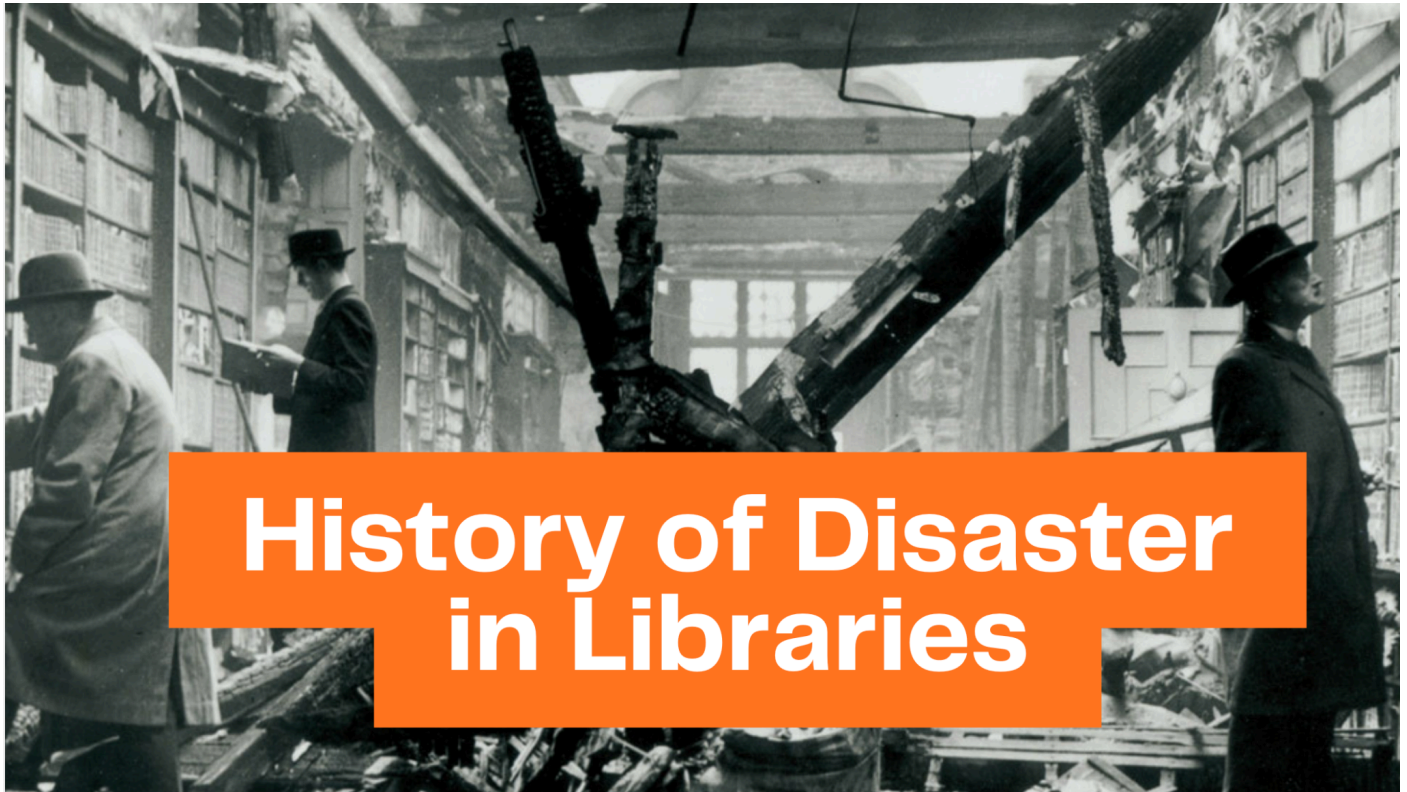
This work is extensive, at 883 pages, as well as comprehensive – with six appendices listing senior staff, staff structures, some holders of readers' tickets 1759-1939, glossary, approximate value of the pound 1750-1995 and a note on statistics. There are ten plans and 111 illustrations (one redacted for copyright reasons), a bibliography and source notes.

Each of the eleven chronological chapters is subdivided into: reading rooms, trustees and staff, catalogues and publications, collections, accommodation and, where appropriate, royal commissions.

The downloadable PDF is fully searchable, complementing the extensive indexes of the book. You can access the volume via the British Library Research Repository: <https://doi.org/10.23636/t2sw-0b06>.

## Call for Papers!

CILIP Library & Information History Group Annual Conference 2026  
Newnham College, Cambridge | Tuesday 8 December



# History of Disaster in Libraries

Libraries have historically been destroyed, rebuilt, and recovered from disaster. Whether from flood, fire, theft, war, or individual bad actors, salvage has always formed a part of heritage and conservation, and libraries have regularly adapted to new sites and tasks in disastrous conditions. This conference will explore the history of catastrophic events and the libraries that survived them.

The Library & Information History Group invites potential speakers to submit an abstract (500 words or less) and short biography (100 words or less) by the closing date of Friday 31 July.

Suggested topics are:

- Case studies of historic disasters affecting libraries
- Historical accounts of disaster recovery and salvage operations
- Historical accounts of theft, forgery, or other malpractice
- Analyses of libraries operating in adverse circumstances
- Alternative uses of library spaces in historic disasters

Papers should be no longer than 20 minutes in length, and we ask potential speakers to be mindful of the historical angle of the conference. Therefore, we will not consider any paper for which the primary focus is later than the turn of the twenty-first century. This is an in-person conference and will not be recorded, though a summary will follow in the Library & Information Group newsletter. Please submit all abstracts and any queries to Eve Lacey at [eve.lacey@newn.cam.ac.uk](mailto:eve.lacey@newn.cam.ac.uk).

## PhD and Postdoctoral Networking Group

# SCHOLARS & BORROWERS

## Library and Information History

### PhD and Postdoctoral Networking Group



Are you working on a PhD or postdoctoral project on libraries and the history of information? Join our friendly, collaborative, and supportive group of like-minded scholars! We meet online regularly to discuss our work, share ideas and resources, exchange feedback on research in progress, and build connections across institutions and disciplines. Whether you're just beginning a project or preparing publications and job applications, you'll find a welcoming space for conversation, collaboration, and mutual support. Email Emma Sibbald at [emma.sibbald@trinity.ox.ac.uk](mailto:emma.sibbald@trinity.ox.ac.uk) for more information.

## Events



### **Everything and Nothing: what makes a 220-year-old library?**

Until 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2026

The Portico Library is going through rapid change. This exhibition explores the idea of the Portico as a box holding memories; a place to look back in time at 220 years and a place to imagine what a library could be like in 10, 50 and a 100 years' time. Come and explore the adventures, the mystery, the fun and sad stories the Portico has witnessed.

There is also a chance for you to take part in the Time Capsule project, writing a memory of the Portico on a postcard which will be stored in the Portico archive to be opened in the year 2076.

Entry is free. Opening times can be found online at:  
<https://www.theportico.org.uk/visit>

## The Forgotten Library: Enriqueta Rylands and her books

The John Rylands Library, 20 May - 31 October 2026

The Forgotten Library exhibition explores the personal book collection of Enriqueta Rylands (1843-1908), founder of The John Rylands Library. Kept at her home Longford Hall, south Manchester, this remarkable collection reveals her life as a passionate reader and collector.

Enriqueta Rylands filled her home with books of all shapes and sizes: old and new, beautiful and plain, luxurious and useful. In her will Rylands left all the books, manuscripts and engravings at Longford Hall to The John Rylands Library. Although Longford Hall no longer stands, traces of this forgotten library run through the shelves at the Rylands today, where her treasured possessions sit alongside books she bought for the people of Manchester.

Through ledgers, lists and letters, discover which books Enriqueta Rylands treasured at home, and which she sent to The John Rylands Library. Uncover her book collecting passion for first editions and autographs of beloved authors, from Charlotte Brontë to William Makepeace Thackeray. Explore the books Enriqueta Rylands enjoyed reading and understand why she cherished even ordinary-looking books. Through intricately decorated medieval manuscripts and modern fine bindings, experience the beauty of this forgotten library.

## A History of the Middle Temple Library

Online: <https://www.juncture-digital.org/middletemplelibrary/history-of-the-library>

The Library of Middle Temple has enjoyed a long history in the legal heartland of London. This exhibition traces that history, from its Tudor inception to its modern-day establishment.

An anonymous account from 1540 recorded in one of the Cotton manuscripts (Cotton MS. Vit. C. IX. 35) and printed in a book on display by William Dugdale (*Origines juridiciales*, 1680) is the first mention of a Library at Middle Temple, explaining that all the books in the Library had been stolen.

The Library wasn't officially founded until long-standing Inn member Robert Ashley in 1641 bequeathed his collection of 6,000 books, including volumes on history, science, astrology, demonology, and more. Since the first purpose-built Library in 1650, the Library has moved all over the Temple premises. Arguably the most impressive Library, the Neo-Gothic structure built in 1861 could house up to 60,000 books. Sadly, after immense damage suffered during WW2, that Library had to be demolished.

A new permanent Library was built in 1958 and has housed the Library's collections ever since.

This exhibition explores the Library throughout the centuries. Items available in the online exhibition include Robert Ashley's will, one of the first printed catalogues, early donations to the Library, and photos, petitions, quotes and letters.



The Old Middle Temple Library  
(MT19/PHO/5/2/9) © Middle Temple Library

## 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:

30 October 2026 (Winter 2026)

29 May 2027 (Summer 2027)

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

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