



BRASENOSE COLLEGE

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD



Library and Archives Report 2011

Liz Kay, College Librarian

The library has been extremely popular for many years now and the sustained pressure on reader spaces has been troubling for a long time because it so obviously affects daily life in the library. While we wait patiently for the library expansion project to get under way, which will happen on completion of Project Q, we have come up with ways in which we can improve the existing library environment. I am happy to report that the box scheme implemented in October 2010 proved a great success throughout the academic year. The scheme allows work to be left in the library yet does not generate piles of work that take up valuable space on desks. Boxes are rented on termly basis and additional boxes were made available at the beginning of Michaelmas 2011 in order to meet demand.

Another success relating to working conditions in the library, and also on the aesthetic front, was the replacement of the completely worn out library seating that was unable to survive another term. Splendid new library chairs were installed at the start of Michaelmas 2010 just in time for the arrival of new students. The chairs, crafted in sustainable oak, were made by a company expert in making furniture for historic buildings. Not only do they look splendid with the beautiful embossed Brazen Nose on the back rest, they are robust, comfortable and will last for decades. The original idea was that the chairs be sponsored/named and that on each chair would be a plaque bearing the name of the sponsoring alumnus. While this did not happen as quickly as anticipated because of other pressing college fundraising initiatives, I am delighted that at the time of writing a brochure for the chair naming has been produced by Lizzie Hardingham of the Development Office team and will have reached you before publication of the next volume of the Brazen Nose. I sincerely hope that many people will delight in the opportunity to have their name in perpetuity on one of these fabulous chairs.

During the Christmas vacation we carried out a stock check. This is always a time consuming activity but it is a necessary one. This year we were disappointed to discover that more books than usual or expected had gone missing since the previous stock check which took place during the summer of 2009. Whether this is due to pressure on books across the University because of budgetary restraints within the Bodleian and Departmental libraries, or whether it is simply laziness or forgetfulness (or something more sinister) on the part of the current cohort of

students, it is impossible to know. However, the net effect is that we have had to spend money replacing books that could otherwise have been spent on new books to improve our collection.

Speaking of the library book stock, last summer and again this summer we were fortunate to be able use money from the Reynolds Fund to replace a selection of the volumes in the Loeb collection. Some of these heavily used little volumes have seen better days and we are very happy that at least some of those in poorest condition have been replaced. There are still many books in the library that have become tatty through regular use but we are happy that the Loeb collection at least has been somewhat reinvigorated. In January last year, wishing to find good homes of some unwanted books (old editions, unwanted personal copies etc) rather than throw them away, we had a small book sale. Although the sum raised was not huge, we were pleased, and somewhat amazed, that people were willing to pay 50p for the replaced Loeb volumes that were in a sorry state of disrepair; they were all snapped up very quickly by keen classicists. Collections in other subjects do require some updating and refreshing but sadly in the current financial climate we are not able to embark on any major initiatives such as replacing all old editions in law, science and medicine. Instead we restrict ourselves to adding new titles as they are called for and replacing a proportion of old editions. In the future I would like to see sponsorship of collections as a method of revitalizing them, allowing us to buy more than the bare essentials. (This already happens at some colleges, where for example, an alumnus supports the purchase of medical texts on a regular basis.) Our own library users, contrary to what some may believe, are keen readers of books and work with these traditional resources alongside those available electronically. Certainly the experience here is that there has not been a drop in demand for hard copy material. As for periodicals, we have reduced the number of periodical subscriptions as some are extremely costly and many are now available online, although in some subjects hard copy appears still to be preferred.

The cataloguing of our older books, carried out by Sophie Floate, has been facilitated as in previous years by generous funding from alumnus Paul Lloyd. Following on the completion of cataloguing the Yarborough collection of books Sophie is working on others, mainly 17th and 18th century, from what was the old Stamford House collection plus the occasional item from the pre-1640 collection in the Latham Room. We anticipate that over the coming years it will be possible to increase the number of hours available to Sophie for cataloguing and thus progress the cataloguing project more quickly. We plan to feature some of the interesting volumes that Sophie uncovers as she progresses through the older books at BNC in the new Library and Archives Blog and also on the library Webpages.

The Brasenose Library Facebook page has now been going for a year and postings are made on a regular basis by Library Assistant Lianne Smith. Lianne's postings feature important library information plus library/book related stories and images. Recently a link has been added to the Library and Archives Blog. The first post, made by graduate Andrew Sillett who is studying for DPhil in Classical Languages, is a book review of a new library acquisition. This review of "*A Most Dangerous Book: Tacitus's Germania from the Roman Empire to the Third Reich*" by Christopher B. Krebs is also available on the library Webpages. Throughout the year we intend to feature reviews written by BNC members of College library books. In addition to book reviews there will be contributions from Archives Assistant Georgie Edwards and, as mentioned earlier, Antiquarian Cataloguer Sophie Floate as they make discoveries during the course of their work. Through this we hope to share interesting pieces of information relating to the College and its treasures with current and old members alike.

The summer vacation 2011 brought with it major challenges for Library and Archives. The aged and failing University library management system that is responsible for OLIS and all of its back room functions was replaced, which is of course good news. However it did mean training

sessions for the library staff followed by a steep learning curve when the system went live in July. The transition was relatively painless due to the fact that all members of the library staff were around during the summer months to exchange discoveries and work through problems together. The users will see many benefits and we are glad that we no longer have to work with and rely upon an ailing system. On the Archives front the removal, cleaning and temporary storage of at risk archive material took priority although decisions as to the final resting place of the material have yet to be made.

Library induction in 2010 saw the showing of the library film noir parody and it was worthy of another airing in 2011 such was its success. Lianne was the camerawoman for the short film that was filmed in a matter of hours back in June 2010 while Harry Ford (Classics & English) was our writer and leading man. (The film can be viewed on You Tube)

Library and Archives staffing improved this year not only because Sophie was able to spend a significant number of days cataloguing over the summer, but because an Archives Assistant was appointed to provide the College Archivist with the long awaited assistance she required. Georgina Edwards joined us at the end of April and is already making a valuable contribution, not least because Archives staffing now covers four days a week. The electronic cataloguing of the archives on to Adlib (a specialist system used by museums and archives) has been able to commence due to the appointment of Georgie which is brilliant news. Georgie has also been able to take on answering many of the general enquires leaving the Archivist free to concentrate on strategic matters and more complex requests, especially those of the College Land Agent.

Georgie's team spirit was perhaps tested sooner than she would have anticipated when in July the entire Library and Archives team had the rare opportunity to get together. Elizabeth Boardman, the College Archivist and also Archivist at St Hilda's, kindly arranged for us to make use of two St Hilda's punts for our picnic and punting afternoon while the library staff provided the picnic. Georgie found herself with Lianne in the same punt as enigmatic Fellow Librarian Dr Simon Palfrey and his two daughters while former Fellow Librarian Dr Ed Bispham punted effortlessly away from the riverbank with the Archivist, Librarian and Antiquarian Cataloguer seated comfortably in his punt. It transpired that Simon had no punting experience and after some minutes the Bispham Punt turned back to rescue Lianne and Georgie who were perched precariously on a slimy concrete slab at the side of the river on which the punt was firmly lodged. A farcical scene ensued and thanks to Ed's cool head in a crisis nobody fell in and no punts capsized, although it was touch and go for a while. Once the stranded punt was released both punts were able to progress towards the picnic spot, this time with Elizabeth charge of the Palfrey Punt while the Fellow Librarian reclined in the sunshine instantly looking for more at ease. While certain members of the party were clearly happier enjoying the picnic on dry land than gliding (or not) across the water, inevitably the time came to return the punts to St. Hilda's. Elizabeth joined Ed in his punt for the return leg while Simon's punt was steered away from the riverbank by his plucky young daughters with Lianne on board as back-up. All was well until Simon took over again and demonstrated emphatically that being an expert on Shakespeare does not necessarily make one an expert punter! Much hilarity, scrambling about and one slightly wet Fellow Librarian was the cue for Lianne to order her boss to "move" in order to take over and bring the punt home. Exhausted by her efforts as she approached the mooring spot, Lianne had no energy for the final push and so was assisted right at the end by Ed who stepped gallantly across several waterlogged punts to ensure the punt reached its mooring. If it was intended to be a team building exercise it certainly was that but mostly it will be remembered as a fun afternoon, even if it was terrifying for some! Photographic evidence reveals some of the joys and terrors of the day and we were all relieved that Georgie was still happy to work at BNC after her ordeal.

Clearly we have a happy team who work well together and last year we extended our reach by appointing student library representatives. Feedback is very important to us and we appreciate having named contacts to actively promote the library as well as act as a conduit between us and their peers. This year we wish to further develop this relationship and increase the number of subject representatives. We foresee a fruitful relationship with the new Senior Tutor and this should be beneficial as we strive towards our goal of providing the best and appropriate library facilities for BNC students that we possibly can. It is also likely that the library will be involved in outreach activities organised by the Schools Officer over the next few months; it will be tremendous to use some of the College treasures to help inspire young people who could be the BNC students of the future.

Outside the confines of the College I have entered another three year term of office as Secretary to the Committee of College Librarians (CCL). The committee meets four times a year to discuss matters of shared interest and between meetings members communicate via the CCL mailing list. Being part of the CCL is important for many reasons not least because it facilitates the exchange of ideas between libraries and colleagues can offer each other advice and assistance; keeping up in this way ensures that our students are as well served as those at other colleges. Although each college library is unique there are areas of common ground and most other colleges readily offer help and support. I am delighted to announce that Sally Jones, who as an undergraduate here assisted with a major library project back in 2004, has recently been appointed Librarian of Mansfield College. Sally previously job-shared at St Catz but now has the opportunity to run her own library and do so in the knowledge that she has the support of colleagues at other colleges.

Here at Brasenose 2012 should be the year in which the eagerly awaited library expansion project gets underway and I very much look forward to covering this in this in the next volume of the Brazen Nose. I sincerely hope I have much to report

