

The Librarian writes...

It has been a privilege and a pleasure for me to take up the role of Librarian in April 2018, working with the talented Library and Archives team at New College. I have joined the college from Durham University, but I am not new to Oxford, having previously worked as History Librarian in the Bodleian, prior to which I held posts at the British Library in London. As the library of one of the largest and highest-achieving colleges in Oxford, New College Library serves a vital role in the life and work of its student body and Fellowship, with significant and extensive rare book, manuscript and archival collections attracting researchers from the scholarly community worldwide. It is wonderful to have returned to Oxford. My professional background includes bibliographical and publishing history research, and, as a keen musician, I am very pleased to have joined a truly outstanding academic community with a world-famous choir and rich musical life. My predecessor, Naomi van Loo headed up our library and archives service for 17 years, passing on to my care one of the undisputed jewels in the crown of library and archives collections in Oxford – one of the University’s great collections. That the Library is so well-regarded both within and beyond Oxford owes very much to her dedication and skilful management over many years. Therefore, it was extremely fitting when a beautifully produced colour booklet, *New College Library Through Time*, was published at the beginning of 2018, marking her librarianship of New College (a form to purchase copies can be found at the end of this issue of the *Record*). Illustrated with photographs of unique and distinctive items from our rich and varied Library and Archives collections, it provides a fascinating account of the Library, from the first donation of books in 1377 by the college’s Founder up to the present day.

The Library is enormously grateful to those Old Members and friends who have made financial donations to the Library over the course of 2018. Throughout its history, New College Library has benefited from the generosity of its donors, both in the form of regular gifts and one-off sums of money received. Many of the great treasures of the Library’s manuscripts and early printed books holdings, too, are now part of our collections thanks to the munificence and foresight of our donors. I am grateful to more than forty donors who have each kindly given books to the Library this year, often quite a number of volumes. Financial donations this year, also, have helped fund the acquisition of important modern antiquarian items, contributed to the Library’s conservation and preservation activities, which only increase as time goes by, and helped fund our ongoing digitisation programme.

Stewardship of assets of enduring significance is an essential part of our responsibilities in the Library, as we seek to fulfil our commitments both to the wider scholarly community and also to our Old Members themselves whose Library this will always be. Two sizeable donations, in particular, are funding the purchase of two state-of-the-art exhibition cases, which will become available during 2019. These will enable the Library and Archives to better showcase some of our wonderful collections via a proper exhibitions programme to take place within the Library. In addition to ‘show and tell’ displays for the boys of New College School and for Dr Will Poole’s bibliography class, exhibition displays throughout 2018 have included: two Library Treasures displays for the Oxford Bibliophiles (spring and winter), another for the JCR and MCR, a Library, Archives and Chattels display for the boys of New College School, an LGBTQ+-themed display to accompany the launch of the New College Society LGBTQ+ Old Members Group, an illuminated manuscripts display for the Oxford Preservation Trust, a centenary display for the Wykeham and 1379 Societies of



The Library Benefaction Book (1617), p. 10 [detail]
New College Library, Oxford

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Photograph by Colin Dunn

World War One materials, with Archives, commemorating the anniversary of the Armistice, and a Modern Languages-themed display of rare and unique materials in the SCR. The latter is the first in a series of subject displays intended in time to cover all subjects taught in New College and for which online exhibitions will also be created.

During 2018 the Library increased publication of its e-journal, *New College Notes* www.new.ox.ac.uk/new-college-notes to two issues per year, publishing issues 9 and 10 and assigning an ISSN to the journal to ensure its wider dissemination via Oxford and worldwide library catalogues. The journal was the inspiration of the Fellow Librarian, Dr Poole, back in 2012 and it has been carefully nurtured by him since. September saw the launch of two new social media channels for the Library: Twitter ([@NewCollegeLib](https://twitter.com/NewCollegeLib)) and Facebook [Facebook.com/NewCollegeLib/](https://www.facebook.com/NewCollegeLib/). These new channels provide students, academics, alumni and friends of the Library and Archives with information updates and serve a welcome opportunity to promote the visual beauty, quality and international significance of our outstanding special collections. It is early days, but within less than four months of 2018, our tweets had attracted more than 750 ‘likes’ and been retweeted over 250 times. Issue 10 of *New College Notes*, published late December, saw the inclusion of the journal’s first video link from one of its articles, published via the new Twitter account. This led to its being picked up by the outreach Twitter account of the Folger Shakespeare Library, home to the largest number of Shakespeare first folios in existence and to the world’s largest collection of materials relating to Shakespeare and his works. Within just five days, our little video, which revealed sparkling handwritten corrections (with pin-dust or ‘Calais sand’) in one of our seventeenth-century books, had been viewed over 7,500 times.

There are ever-growing expectations in a highly competitive, student-fees HE environment of what the library will provide, with students demanding that the library come to them as well as they to the library. We have developed our website www.new.ox.ac.uk/library-and-archives over the course of the year to promote and facilitate usage of various collections, including our Biography, Film, Student Welfare and Study Skills, and Colleges of St Mary Winton collections. But our web and social media presence will be increasingly important not only for our students and academics, but for our alumni too, who make up an important part of the New College family. Our special collections have been consulted more frequently this year than in previous years, with 112 appointments made by external readers to consult almost 250 items from our manuscript, early printed and other library collections. Students continue to use the Library heavily, with 11,725 items (more than 15% of the borrowable collection) loaned during the course of 2018. Ensuring the Library is well-stocked with up-to-date, required books is a cornerstone of our service offering, and we acquired 1,969 books over the 2017/18 academic year. Extensive use of a physical library might seem counterintuitive in the ‘digital age’, but the number of reader visits to the Library has continued to rise. Termly reader visits topped 20,000, probably for the first time ever, during Trinity 2018. There were 60,104 visits over 2018 (2017: 57,405, 2016: 53,577), with our busiest week recording 2,727 visits (4th week of Trinity). This is the first full year we have run our extended term-time opening hours of 8.30am till 2am and the Library’s physical spaces are being used more intensively than ever. Students require a welcoming space – a flexible, academic and social learning area – suitable for both quiet, independent work and small-group collaborative learning, where students can interact with information

sources and each other and researchers, beyond and quite separate from their living and departmental accommodation. The library as place seems more important to students than it has ever been. Improvements to the physical library and our reader services in 2018 also included establishing on the Lower Floor a Group Study Room with an online booking facility, fully re-signing the Library and its public areas to provide improved guidance to the building and the location of our collections, and implementing an eye-catching new books display in the entrance hall. We have thereby brought a fresh, consistent appearance and branding for all our signage, notices and communications. We finalised plans to refurbish most of the reader spaces on the Lower Floor, commissioning beautiful, bespoke wooden tables and leather chairs, in keeping with the ambience of the Library, for the Classics, Law, and Group Study rooms. This refurbishment will be fully operational at the beginning of 2019 and it will increase significantly the overall number of IT-enabled study spaces in the Library, providing students with more seating and study options, reducing pressure on reading spaces especially during Trinity Term and the Library's busiest periods, going some way to improving WiFi coverage in the Library, and thereby addressing constructively issues students have been raising both through the JCR and MCR. We also initiated what will be long-term planning to improve the Library for readers with disabilities, and we developed plans for the implementation of a new circulation management system, to take effect during the course of 2019. Next year promises to be a busy and exciting one.

Christopher Skelton-Foord – Librarian

Back cover illustration:

Volvelle with the zodiac (coloured woodcut illustration) from:
Peter Apian, *Astronomicum Cæsareum* [Ingolstadt, 1540], F III.

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