

The Librarian writes...



2019 marked the 40th anniversary of women students at New College and the 400th anniversary of the Savilian Professorships in geometry and astronomy. The library made a fuller contribution this year to milestones in the history of the college, thanks to the installation of two specialist high-quality exhibition cases in its upper reading room, kindly funded by donors to the library. An exhibition on ‘New College Women Writers: A 40th Anniversary Celebration’ was followed by ‘Geometry and Astronomy: 400 Years of the Savilian Professorships’, both accompanied by displays of related library items elsewhere in college. Both have also occasioned purchases and donations of important printings. These include those relating to

New College alumna, Alice Oswald—in 2019 appointed Oxford Professor of Poetry, the 46th poet to take up post, and the first woman ever to do so—as well as early printed books in astronomy and geometry. In 1619, the scholar and diplomat Sir Henry Savile (1549–1622) founded two university chairs bearing his name. They have long been associated with New College, and since the late nineteenth century statutorily linked to professorial fellowships here, as they remain today. With much support from the Fellow Librarian, Dr Will Poole, the library published a book to celebrate the Savilian anniversary, *Geometry and Astronomy in New College, Oxford: On the Quatercentenary of the Savilian Professorships 1619-2019*, the inaugural publication in a New College Library & Archives Publications series. It is beautifully colour illustrated with images from our rich collections; a form to purchase copies is included at the end of this issue of the *Record*. Also during 2019, two further issues appeared of *New College Notes*, the college’s e-journal, which is edited and produced by the library, and is now more extensively illustrated and published more frequently.

This year has seen a significant increase in purchases of early printed books and items by and relating to college alumni, aided indeed by the generosity of our own alumni, and notably an important legacy from the Barratt family. These books include a fine vellum-bound 1563 Venetian printing of a biography of the last Roman Catholic archbishop of Canterbury, Reginald Pole (1500–1558), whose own manuscripts the library holds by bequest, and books by or from the library of the novelist John Fowles (1926–2005). Sixty Old Members and friends of the library have donated books, or made financial donations which enable crucial physical conservation and digital preservation of our special collections to continue. I am most grateful indeed for their kind generosity. Our manuscript collections are especially renowned—more manuscripts survive from the medieval library of New College than from that of any other Oxford or Cambridge college—and so our responsibilities to college and the worldwide scholarly community are considerable. Some of our manuscript treasures featured in a display the library was asked to stage for Stephen A. Schwarzman and other visitors in advance of the university’s announcement of the transformational philanthropy of Mr Schwarzman, which is funding a new Centre for the Humanities at Oxford with the largest single donation to the university since the Renaissance.

Other displays have included a further treasures display for the Wykeham Society, 1379 Circle and Founders Society, those on music and on English literature for symposia organised by New College School, and ‘show and tell’ displays in the library and chapel for students, Oxford schoolchildren, a Hong Kong summer school contingent, and to precede an Oxford Bach Soloists concert. The new books display we introduced in the library entrance hall last year is proving popular, and we have also used that space this year to theme displays for LGBT History Month, UK Disability History Month, Mental Health Awareness Week, on women and film, and on leisure reading. We contributed to an important widening access initiative,



Peter Apian, Astronomicum Cæsareum [Ingolstadt, 1540], B III recto. New College Library, Oxford, BT1.70.2

© Courtesy of the Warden and Scholars of New College, Oxford.

this year promoting our library collections and services to Oxfordshire state schools and to pupils we assisted, as part of the University’s OxLibris endeavour. The social media channels we established in 2018 are successfully extending our outreach. By the close of 2019 we had 350 followers on Twitter (@NewCollegeLib) and had received 1,866 ‘likes’ and 609 retweets. Our most popular tweet of 2019 was a video of the volvelles (spinning disks) in action from our copy of the extraordinary 1540 printed book, *Astronomicum Cæsareum*, which has now been viewed over 19,000 times. Our website (www.new.ox.ac.uk/library-and-archives) we have further developed, and in 2019 we initiated monthly web listings of new acquisitions to our collections to ensure readers can be readily informed of new bookstock.

Central to our service provision is indeed the range of new books we acquire for students and other readers, which rose in number by 4½% this academic year to 2,057 items, with considerably more books purchased directly in response to student requests.



Opening of the manuscript book, depicted in Paula Wilson's portrait, which Ruth Mazo Karras is shown holding in the portrait.

'The New College Apocalypse' (1300–1310), New College Library, Oxford, MS 65, f. 78v

© Courtesy of the Warden and Scholars of New College, Oxford. Photograph by Liz Fleetwood.

Usage of our special collections and books by external readers also rose by 7½%, from 243 items consulted last year to 261 in 2019. Increasing usage of a physical library can in no way be taken for granted, at a time when libraries compete with other platforms and services for provision of information and access to knowledge. I am grateful to a dedicated Library and Archives team, which seeks to innovate and aims to provide excellent reader services. Their hard work has helped ensure we serviced a large increase (approaching 13%) in physical visits to the library over the course of 2019, with 67,779 visits (2018: 60,104, 2017: 57,405). Our busiest week saw 2,772 visits. Such heavy use of the library is an indicator of the library's growing popularity and the value to our students of our service offering. It is most

important we respond to and predict user needs. With this in mind, and to identify where we can best improve, we carried out a library survey in 2019 which attracted an overall response rate of 33% of New College students. We have already implemented a number of improvements as a result of the survey, which we have communicated back via a 'You Said, We Did . . .' promotion. These include: better seating in the upper reading room, some improvement to cool air circulation on the lower floor, an extension and earlier start to library opening hours, and increased purchase of additional copies of in-demand books.

We have implemented significant improvements to the library space and to our core services over 2019, chiefly, refurbishment and a new automated book circulation and security system. We updated our classification and shelf-marking to provide a required new 'Q' section in the library for books on gender and sexuality, which are increasingly in demand; introduced the provision of literary review journals in the entrance hall, and extended our provision of disability and assistive equipment. Towards the end of 2019 we set up a document binding service, available to both students and college staff; early indications are that it is well-received.



Author Kate Mosse signing her book at the 40th Anniversary of Women at New College Library Exhibition.

Further improvements to book borrowing services will be introduced at the beginning of 2020. Other planning includes the provision of additional shelving, more storage space in college for growing modern records, library, and archives collections, expanded provision for the management of modern records, further titles for our new publications series, and developing our exhibitions offering. In the future we shall also need to expand our library by building a sizeable extension. I have greatly enjoyed my first full year in college, and I look forward to the new challenges which developing our Library and Archives service will bring. I leave the final word to one of the anonymous respondents to our library survey: ‘Really appreciate the work of the librarians—all the changes made in the last year have been really positive’.

Christopher Skelton-Foord – Librarian

Back cover illustration:

Galileo, *Systema cosmicum* (1641)

New College Library, Oxford, BT3.181.7

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Photograph by Colin Dunn

GALILÆI
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LYNCEI, ACADEMIÆ
PISANÆ MATHEMATICI,

SEREN^{MI}. MAGNI-DUCIS HETRVRIAE

Philosophi & Mathematici Primarij

SYSTEMA COSMICVM:

IN QVO

Dialogis IV. de duobus maximis Mundi Systematibus,

PTOLEMAICO & COPERNICANO,

Rationibus vtrinque propositis indefinitè differitur.

Accessit locorum S. Scriptura cum Terra mobilitate conciliatio.



LUGDVNI,

Sumptibus IOAN. ANTONII HVGRETAN,
viâ Mercatoriâ, ad insigne Spharæ.

M. DC. XLI.