

Archivist and Librarian

Over the last year we have been continuing to make improvements to the cataloguing and preservation of the library and archive collections and also to make them more accessible. One key priority is to improve the archive catalogue and to find ways of sharing the information about what is actually in the archive more widely. The catalogue is key for several reasons the most important of which is to record in detail exactly what the many thousands of documents are, their date, what they say and who is mentioned in them. Fortunately to assist with this mammoth task I have been joined on a part-time basis by a fellow archivist, Helen Sumping. Helen has a classics degree and so is particularly well qualified to catalogue the medieval documents. Already over 3000 documents have been re-catalogued from the 12th to 21st centuries – details of many of these are available on the

archive page of the Cathedral's website. The other key purpose of the catalogue is for us to record information to allow us to organise and look after the documents. For example which box documents are stored in, their language, whether seals are attached, what medium the information is recorded on eg paper, parchment, digital, video, photographs but also crucially their conservation condition and priority requirement for repair. The condition for every document when it is catalogued is identified as one of the following: *unfit*, *poor*, *fair* or *good*. For example a document rated as *poor* would be generally fragile and might have major structural damage such as heavy tearing, broken spine, areas missing or heavy staining. A document rated *fair* would only contain surface dirt and minor creasing or folds. *Unfit* would mean insect infestation or active mould growth – in these cases we would take immediate remedial action so there shouldn't actually be any items catalogued as *unfit*!

To prevent future damage ongoing monitoring of the main archive store in the Chapter Office is essential. To monitor pest damage we use sticky blunder insect traps which emit an irresistible (to insects!) pheromone. These enable potential insect pests to be detected at very early stages of infestation and greatly improve the chances of preventing damage. Unavoidably some friendly creatures are also trapped – particularly spiders which don't damage the documents themselves but eat the insects which do. Twice a year the traps are collected and sent off for analysis. Although there has been evidence of booklouse detected from traps positioned on the floor there



Fading from binding



Paul Arden

is no evidence of any insects in traps within the archive boxes. It is nearly impossible in an old historic building to keep out completely insects such as booklouse and silverfish but by controlling the humidity to prevent damp, booklice are unlikely to thrive and breed. Booklice will eat the surface of damp books and paper so we will clean and dry out if necessary any newly accessioned items suspected of being damp.

Another specific preservation threat affected the library book collection - the effect of direct sunlight on the books. Over time many of the bindings have faded and dried out causing cracking and other structural damage. Commonly historic buildings with this problem cover the windows with blinds. However we felt that in the Cathedral library blinds would be an unacceptable eyesore and in themselves would cause damage to the masonry when installed. Instead every individual pane of glass from the ten leaded windows

has had UV film individually applied by Paul Arden of Arden Window Films, recommended to us by the librarian at Hereford Cathedral. This film not only filters out 99 % of harmful UV light but also reduces the amount of visible light and solar heat. This was a fiddly and time consuming job but well worth it to protect the books without affecting the aesthetics of the 15th century windows.

Improving the catalogue and storage conditions of items already in the archive and library is vitally important but also important is ensuring that key documents created in more recent times are identified and transferred to the archive. In the last year documents originating from Cathedral offices and transferred to the archive have included: marriage registers from the vestry, past art exhibition catalogues, and minutes of Chapter and other committee. Discovered in a top cupboard in the vestry were 46 copies of *The Sarum Almanack and Diocesan Kalender* 1865-1967 - these include brief diary notes entered by the vergers including a record of when the large iron stoves were lit during the winter period! There was also a poignant volume from the 1940s of prayer requests for their loved ones serving in the armed forces. Another important transfer to the archive has been 90 files and associated photographs of stained glass window repairs by the glazing department in churches around the diocese in the last 30 years. Rather more unusual was the donation of a collection of peregrine feathers!

I am still very much familiarising myself with the thousands of books in the library. One particular volume has caught our attention recently with particularly interesting features. It is a copy of Balbus' *Catholicon*, a thirteenth-century dictionary of the Bible, printed at Venice in 1497 and therefore referred to as an incunabula (from

adum conspirauerat in sui ipsius dif-
famacionem pro perpetuo diuulgata
confisit

I In a Cronyng as thou shalt wyte
A grete ensample I fynd wyte
Whiche I shal telle wyth this thyng
Of the kynge of Macedonye the kyng
Two sones had he by his wyf
Whos fame is yet in grece ryf
Demetrius the fyrst broder
Was hote & Perseus that other
Demetrius they sayden tho
The better knyght was of tho
To whome the lond was attendanut
As he whiche hys was appaunt
To regne after his faoure day
But that thyng whiche no water may
Quenche in this world but euer breu-
neth. In to his broder heert renneth
The proud enuy of that he syght
His broder shold clyme on hyght
And he to hym than made okepe
That may he suffer by no weye
With strength durst he no thyng sece

Section of leaf printed by William
Caxton in 1483

the Latin cradle) a term only used to describe very early printed books i.e. those printed before 1500. Our library copy was bound, probably in London, in finely-stamped leather, using as part of the binding some unwanted papers from William Caxton's edition of *Gower's Confession* of 1483 – the Library's only known example of Caxton's printing. In addition on the fly leaf someone has recorded in their own handwriting the steps for 20 French basse dances, a rare survival of evidence for the courtly dances of the late-medieval period.

I am very fortunate to have a really supportive and enthusiastic group of volunteers assisting with caring for and bringing the collections to a wider audience. Much of what has been achieved over the last couple of years would not have been possible without their help.

One great achievement which has been almost completely achieved by

volunteers is the creation of the Library's modern reference collection. It is a work in progress but already numbers over 900 items. It comprises of books, articles and pamphlets - really anything published on the history of the Cathedral, the Close and the people associated with it. In addition we have specific sections on Sarum Liturgy and Magna Carta. These have been singlehandedly catalogued by two volunteers Helen Clarkson and Elaine Wood both retired school librarians. Alongside the cataloguing another group of volunteers have been covering the books in UV film, inserting articles and small pamphlets in film sleeves and labelling the books. To finish off another volunteer has created some discreet but very smart calligraphy shelf labels.

Other library and archive volunteers have been writing blog posts and helping with library tours and visits. I particularly want to mention Peter Hoare whose expertise and knowledge of rare books and historic libraries has been invaluable. The next edition of *Sarum Chronicle* published in the autumn will contain a highly informative history of the Cathedral library written by Peter.

As I write we are in the middle of a project in partnership with the Salisbury International Arts Festival to bring the collections to community groups who would not normally have an opportunity to see and enjoy them. Another, research based project, is underway with a number of volunteers to find out more about Cathedral life during the two world wars and also to re-discover the history of our iconic Spire over the last 70 years. Do come along to a special day on 5th August in the Cathedral when we shall be sharing our research on the Spire's history.

Emily Naish