

# Archivist and Librarian

Since my report in last year's Spire as usual a lot has happened for the archive and library collections. One of the most important is the start of the *Beyond the Library Door - Sharing Books and Bindings* project. Following an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund last spring we were delighted to discover that we had been successful! So, together with generous matched funding from the Pilgrim Trust, Sackler Trust as well as the Friends and other charitable trusts, we were able to get started in the autumn.

I cannot overestimate what a transformative effect *Beyond the Library Door* project will have on the care of, and access to, both the library and the archive. Until now all our catalogues have been in hardcopy form - starting with the earliest surviving library catalogue of manuscript books compiled by Patrick Young in 1622 to the excellent card catalogue compiled by my predecessor as librarian Suzanne Eward. Times, technology and expectations have moved on and our users (both the interested public and the

academic community) now need a catalogue they can easily access remotely and search rigorously i.e. an electronic catalogue in the form of a database. This is at the heart of our project - to create an online searchable catalogue database. Straightaway the funding enabled us to recruit an assistant librarian with extensive rare books cataloguing experience, Anne Dutton, and an assistant archivist, Hannah Tinkler. Anne and Hannah both started at the beginning of November. Anne's expertise is particularly important to ensure that the books are catalogued according to the professional standards (I'm an archivist - not a librarian - we do some things very differently!). The key cataloguing standard for books is Marc and for archives ISAD(G) - it is how the 'stuff' is catalogued that is the main difference between libraries and archives and also museums and traditionally archivists, librarians and museum curators don't cross paths much. This is a great shame as despite the different approaches to cataloguing we have much in common and indeed have much to learn from each other and experiences to share. To try to understand each other better, myself and other professional colleagues working in some of the different museums and libraries in the Close have started meeting informally, both to act as a support network for each other but also to discuss common ways of working and to share ideas.

*Beyond the Library Door* is a three year project at the end of which we expect to have both the library and archive catalogues available via the Cathedral's website. For the library books our new database will enable us not only to



Attaching tapes on a damaged book



### *Using the conversation mini vacuum*

catalogue the basic information about each book eg the title, author, date of publication, but also what is called ‘copy specific’ information i.e. what is it about the copies of books in our library that make them different from copies in other libraries. This means recording the binding style, bookplates, annotations by previous owners and also the condition of each book. The database will make the collection more accessible not only by having the information online but also because we will be learning and recording much more detail about each book that has been the case in the past. Recording this additional information is obviously time-consuming so although my colleague Anne will be cataloguing as much as she can, it is unlikely that she will be able to catalogue all 10,000 books in three years – so this is likely to be an ongoing task, but crucially we will have started the work, made good progress, and have a clear way forward to completion.

We also want to improve the condition and long term survival of each book, so with this in mind we have developed a volunteer book cleaning programme alongside the detailed cataloguing. We have recruited 17 keen men and women

as Library Preservation Volunteers. Following training from a conservator and binding expert they will be cleaning all the library’s printed books – a task that has probably not been done in a systematic fashion since the early 1980s. As well as cleaning the books the volunteers will be grading and recording the condition of each book - vital information which will enable us to develop a future book repair programme. Until we start in June we won’t know exactly how long the cleaning will take but I have warned the volunteers to prepare to get a bit dirty!

The project is also about making connections and building relationships with others and for this reason we are working with Sarum College Library and members of the parish St Mary’s Gillingham to clean and improve the cataloguing and condition of their own rare book collections. In addition over the next few years we will be running a series of talks, open afternoons and library and archive discovery days to show off the books and documents we have ‘rediscovered’ including opportunities to see the book cleaning in progress. Our first discovery day will be on Saturday 20th October - further information will be on the Cathedral’s website in due course.

Often the most interesting aspects of a book are the people who have owned and handled it in the past. Likewise it is the people whose lives are recorded in the archives which make the documents so fascinating to us today. This focus on people is not only what brings the collections and the past alive but is also essential in ensuring the relevance of the collections to the Cathedral today. I strongly believe that the collections should support the Cathedral in any way they can with current and ongoing needs: whether that is working with the





Cathedral's development team to raise awareness of the major repair programme, or thinking of imaginative ways in which the collections can be used by the Cathedral's schools and community outreach programmes. Last year I wrote about the project in partnership with the Salisbury International Arts Festival. For this we worked with a group of people with dementia and their carers spending a joyful afternoon in the Cathedral library perusing old scrapbooks of newspaper cuttings, invoices by seventeenth century ironmongers and photos showing how the city and close have changed as well as talking about parchment, and even having a go at calligraphy. The feedback following this session was so positive and shows how much our collections have to offer to everyone. One participant told us *that the afternoon took us right out of ourselves to something completely different and another participant that I've never known my husband to concentrate for so hard for so long as*

*the staff extracted plenty of memories, opinions and humour from the table of Alzheimer sufferers.* Other groups involved included art students from Wiltshire, who held an exhibition of their work inspired by the collections in the library, and a group of young carers – who knew that glass plate negatives from the 1920s could be such a source of inspiration for modern computer generated animation? Do visit [www.animatingthearchives.co.uk](http://www.animatingthearchives.co.uk) to find out more.

So for the next few years my colleagues and I will be very busy with Beyond the Library Door but we will be continuing with our regular series of library and archive spotlight talks as well as work with schools and library tours. Overall, use of the collections in so many ways - traditionally and non-traditionally - is increasing and will continue to do so as we learn more about what we have and share it via our online catalogue. As they say – watch this space!

**Emily Naish**