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Historic Libraries Forum Bulletin Autumn 2021

HLF Chair's report 2021

In 2021, the Covid-19 pandemic continued to have an impact on how we work as an organisation. Our aim remains to bring together people from across the sector who work in or with historic and special libraries and to offer learning, mentoring and networking opportunities, as well as support for libraries at risk. Membership of the HLF remains free of charge.

We currently have 13 committee members, some of whom are representatives of groups with an interest in historic libraries, namely the CILIP RBSCG; CILIP LIHG; ILA; CALCA; and APLM. Our website has a list with names, affiliations, and roles on the committee.

There have been a few committee changes in the last year with new people joining, and others changing committee roles, or leaving after many years.

- Thomas Gordon stepped down as our long-standing Membership Secretary at the end of 2020. His role was taken on by Julie Davis, who was already on the committee. Julie also maintains the mailing list and bulletin
- Lucy Gwynn was our Social Media Officer from the beginning of 2021 to the start of her maternity leave. Our social media presence is temporarily handled by Emma Laws (Facebook) and Sian Prosser (Twitter)
- Our Events Officer Katie Flanagan has also temporarily stepped down to concentrate on her new role at the Science Museum Group and relocation to York. Jill Dye will be managing events in the next few months
- Jill Dye stood down as chair at the end of 2020. I now have the difficult task of following in her footsteps
- At present, because Emma Laws has changed roles, we are looking for a representative of the Independent Libraries Association to sit on the committee

A huge thank you to those who have stepped down for their dedication to the HLF and the positive contributions they have made. My thanks also go to the current members of the committee for keeping things ticking over so brilliantly during the pandemic whilst also dealing with heavier workloads and complex arrangements in the workplace.

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Several high-profile libraries at risk prompted us to consider our role as advocates. The result is a policy document drafted by a sub-committee and agreed by the full committee, which sets out what support we can provide for historic libraries. An online version of that policy document will be published on our website soon. Our committee meetings are currently held online and we will review these arrangements in the run-up to summer 2022.

We decided to postpone our AGM until this year, but a financial report for 2020 can be found in the first HLF bulletin of 2021. All our member activities – although fewer in number – continued to be online. We now have our own Zoom account to enable us to organise events such as the “HLF hosts...” meetings, which we started early in 2021. We suffered a temporary setback in losing access to our paid-for email account in spring 2021 and we have had to revert to using our old email address.

Our mentoring scheme is doing well and has led to very positive outcomes for some mentees. If you are interested in either being a mentor or a mentee, do get in touch with us.

I hope that 2022 will bring some reprieve from the challenges of the previous two years. We may not have seen the end of historic libraries being put at risk but I think we can take some comfort from knowing what an amazingly resourceful and forward-thinking bunch of library workers we are.

Danielle Westerhof
Chair Historic Libraries Forum

Presenting historic libraries in the digital world: Historic Libraries Forum Conference and AGM

Join the Historic Libraries Forum for a fascinating trio of case studies exploring the various ways historic libraries have sought to engage their users and stakeholders online. The event will start with a short AGM and finish with a round table featuring librarians from a variety of historic/special libraries discussing their experiences under Covid-19.

Wednesday 1 December, 2-5pm, online

Tickets £5 via [Eventbrite](#)



Historic Libraries in Focus

Moving the libraries at RHS Garden Wisley

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The first designated library space at Wisley was a room in the Laboratory at RHS Garden Wisley, which opened in 1917. The library was located next door to the Herbarium where the Journal of the RHS records that the library had an “immediate purpose of research, scientific periodicals and so forth and not such as more properly find their place in the Lindley Library at Vincent Square”.

The collection, focused on scientific and practical horticulture, continued to grow over the decades, with the first librarian appointed in 1994. A separate Members’ lending library followed in 2004, and for the next 16 years Wisley had two libraries – a general lending library open to all, and a staff reference library open to researchers by appointment only.



The Garden Library (2003) Photography: Joanne Noyes / RHS Lindley Collections



The Research Library (2018) Photography: RHS/Adrian Green

A key investment programme of redevelopment work began at Wisley in 2016. This meant that the old lending library moved into temporary accommodation to make way for a new entrance building. A new library was planned as part of a new building at Hilltop within the garden - Hilltop: The Home of Gardening Science.

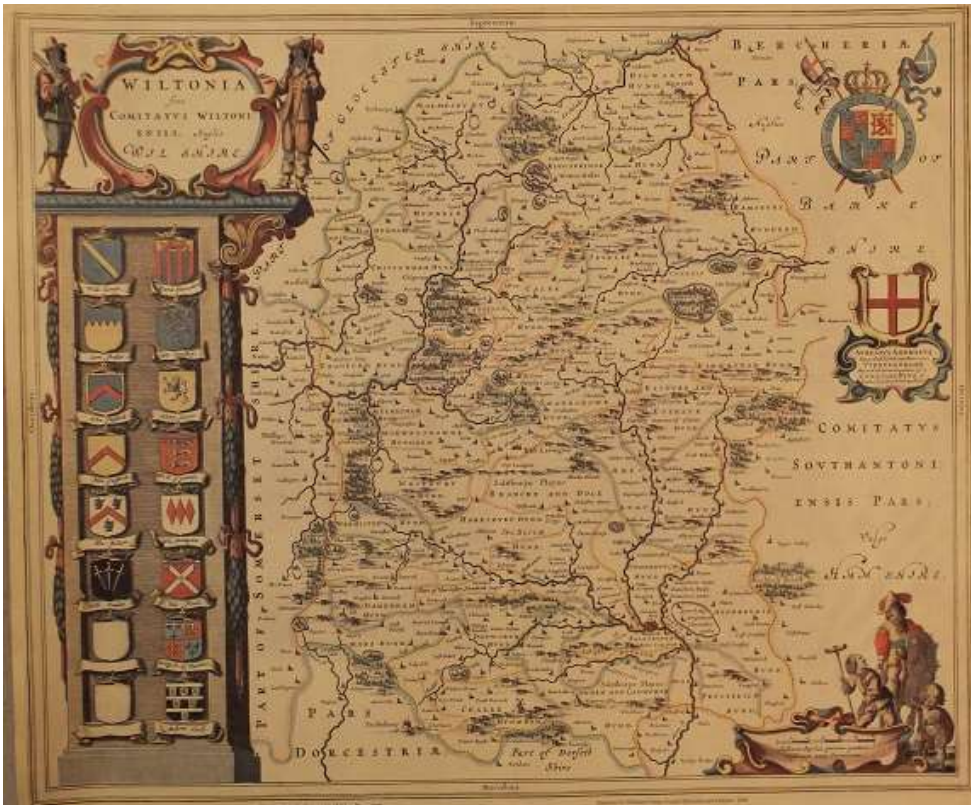
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Birmingham's Shakespeare Memorial Library possesses the oldest and largest Shakespeare collection in the world. It was founded in 1864 to mark Shakespeare's 300th birthday. Tragically much of the collection was lost to fire in 1879 but a new room was created for the surviving material in 1882. Today the collection totals over 100,000 items in ninety-three languages and is the focus of a [National Lottery Heritage Fund project](#) to unlock the contents of the collection for Birmingham communities.



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Exhibitions and Events

Exhibition: Travels of a Manuscript

Cambridge University's medieval Greek manuscripts hold a wealth of knowledge, not just in their texts but in the connections they have made through their life journeys. This virtual exhibition explores their travels.

The Polonsky Foundation Greek Manuscripts Project, Cambridge University Library and Heidelberg University Library virtual exhibition

<https://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/polonskygreek>

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The University of Reading houses one of the largest collections of bee-related material in the United Kingdom. The works contained within provide vital insights into historic social and political perceptions of the world's most important pollinators. This exhibition showcases some of the most significant apian-related works, held by the University and beyond, from the sixteenth to twentieth century which demonstrate how social and cultural perception of bees changes as British society evolved.

University of Reading Special Collections virtual exhibition

<https://collections.reading.ac.uk/special-collections/explore/online-exhibitions/bees-in-the-collections/>

Lecture: Panizzi Lecture 2: The Publishing Boom of Early Modern China and Late-Ming Book Culture

An exploration of both the high and the low ends of the lively book culture of the late Ming period. Commercial publishers published exquisitely illustrated novels, dramas, painting catalogues, and erotic albums.

At the same time, they eagerly sought out – and helped to create – a broader reading public by churning out a range of inexpensive popular texts including household encyclopedias, vernacular explanations of the Classics and cheaply-illustrated fiction designed to meet the needs and tastes of humbler readers.

British Library, 2 Dec 2021, 7.30-8.30pm. In person, free – online £5 donation

<https://www.bl.uk/events/panizzi-lecture-2-the-publishing-boom-of-early-modern-china-and-late-ming-book-culture>

Lecture: Textiles in Libraries: Context & Conservation series

Join conservators, curators and book artists to explore where textiles can be found in library collections, their conservation needs, and what they can reveal about historic and contemporary craft.

Bodleian Libraries, 9 December and 13, 22 January, 4pm-5pm, online, free event

<https://visit.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/event/textiles-in-libraries-series#/>

Course: Intermediate Renaissance Latin

4-day (15 hour) intensive course in Renaissance Latin, online via the zoom platform. It will focus on grammar and syntax in the mornings, and in the afternoon session on Latin texts from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century.

This course is designed for students at intermediate level and will run over four days, Tuesday to Friday, **4 - 7 January 2021**, from 11:00 to 13:00 and 14:00 to 15:45 (UK time / GMT).

The Warburg Institute, School of Advanced Study of London. Standard £140. Students £125

<https://warburg.sas.ac.uk/events/int-renaissance-latin>

Seminar: History of Libraries Series

'To open the Institution, well provided with all necessary s

Institute of Historical Research, School of Advances Study, University of London, 7 December 2021, 5.30pm-7.30-pm. In person event

<https://www.history.ac.uk/events/open-institution-well-provided-all-necessary-supplies-furniture-library-and-apparatus-0>

Seminar: The Moses Gaster Seminar

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once belonged to Moses Gaster, who, with modest resources, assembled one of the most remarkable collections of Hebrew manuscripts of the 20th century. To mark the occasion the John Rylands Research Institute and Library and the Manchester University Centre for Jewish Studies are hosting a series of seminars in autumn 2021 and spring 2022 which will explore aspects of the Rylands Gaster collection, and related collections. The seminars will focus on the nature of the collections and problems of cataloguing.

John Rylands Research Institute and library, University of Manchester, 7 December, 2.00– 3.30 pm, online, free event

<https://events.manchester.ac.uk/event/event:ilo-kudtmki3-3c0fzo>

Do you have any interesting news you'd like to share with HLF members? Why not drop us [a line...](#)



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