



Located at the entrance of the Bodleian Library, the Tower of the Five Orders depicts the five orders of classical architecture: Doric, Tuscan, Ionic, Corinthian and Composite.

AALL Members Celebrate 400th Anniversary of Bodleian Library

Historic Issues Still Relevant Today

by Hazel Lord

Five AALL members joined more than 200 librarians, archivists and scholars from around the world to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the Bodleian Library Sept. 18–20 at the University of Oxford in England.

Association members Joyce McCray Pearson, Robert Mead, Hazel Lord, Sandra Wilkins and Billie Jo Kaufman attended the international conference to mark the anniversary of one of the world's

greatest research libraries. Established by diplomat and scholar Sir Thomas Bodley in 1602, the Bodleian Library is a scholarly collection of about 6,872,000 volumes. It includes 185,150 manuscripts and approximately 6,500 incunabula, which serve not only the University of Oxford community but also scholars throughout the world.

Up Close and Personal

In this ancient seat of learning, attendees soaked up the history and culture of Oxford. The conference kicked off the celebration in the Sheldonian Theatre, erected by Sir Christopher Wren in 1664–1668. From the banquet at the medieval-style Keble Hall to the tours of the constituent college libraries, the scholarly atmosphere reminded attendees about why they became librarians.

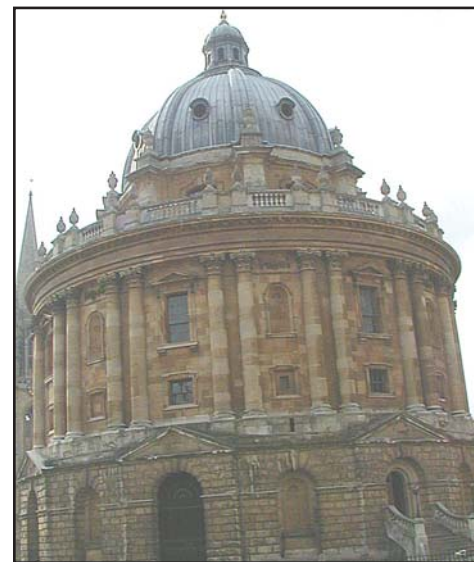
“Going to the conference returned me to my ‘library roots,’” said Joyce McCray Pearson, director of the University of Kansas School of Law Library in Lawrence, Kan. “So often in a law school library and law school setting, where I am busy teaching and being an administrator, I forget that first and foremost I am a librarian. The conference brought home many of the reasons I purposefully chose to be a librarian.”

Past and Present Collide

The conference featured international scholars who not only commemorated the Bodleian Library's historic past but also examined the present-day challenges libraries face.

In his opening address, David Vaisey, librarian emeritus at the Bodleian Library, described the legacy, vision and character of Sir Thomas Bodley, who appears to have been the classic micromanager. Bodley assailed his first appointed librarian, Thomas James, with almost daily letters from London, passing down edicts on every aspect of the library. He directed James on such details as what items to add to the collection (“no idle books and riffe raffe,” Bodley wrote), the nature and quality of the chains that were attached to the more precious manuscripts, and the accuracy and penmanship of his catalogers. Bodley even gave James reasons why he should not marry but devote his life to the library. James' responses to these letters have not survived.

In contrast, Michael Gorman, dean of library services at California State University in Fresno, Calif., discussed the core values of librarianship today. He raised such pressing issues as the costs of maintaining digital collections, the quality of training for new librarians, and the preservation crisis in 21st-century libraries. With the rise in electronic text, libraries have reverted to pre-printing press days



Britain's first circular library, the Radcliffe Camera is a reading room of the Bodleian Library and is not open to the public.

and are in danger of losing the archival virtues of print, Gorman said. He pointed out the close correlation between manuscripts and Web sites — both are individualized, easily changed, and not standardized or authenticated. Whereas

very few printed books have totally vanished, many manuscripts and electronic archives have disappeared without a trace.

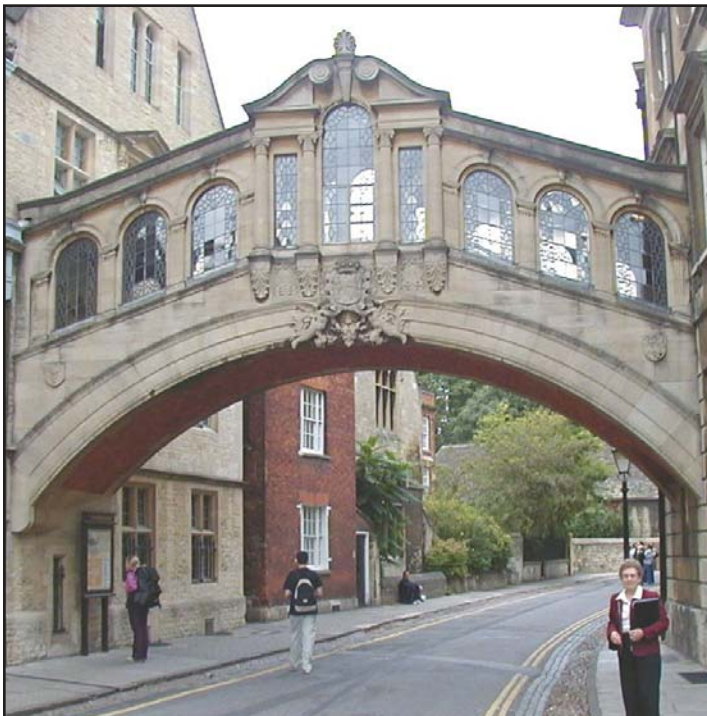
Lynne Brindley, chief executive of the British Library, examined the importance of national libraries in the 21st century, which offers a plethora of electronic publishing. Brindley emphasized the continuing need for deep and broad collecting if national libraries are to fulfill their role as keepers of the national archive and provide perpetual access to their nations' memory.

Speakers constantly returned to the historic role of librarians and archivists as the guardians of human knowledge. In his address on "Humanistic Scholarship and the European Printed Archive," Bernard Fabian, professor emeritus at the University of Münster in Germany, described the significance of past scholarship and preservation issues. Fabian stressed the importance of maintaining national archives, such as the British National Library and the Library of Congress. Michael Keller, university librarian and director of academic information resources at Stanford University in Stanford, Calif., raised more contemporary issues of preservation and digitization in his address on "The Future of Great Research Libraries." His rallying cry of LOCKSS — Lots of Copies Keeps Stuff Safe — described some of the current negotiations with publishers to ensure that multiple copies of digital archives are maintained.

Common Bonds

Despite the differences inherent among different library types, AALL members were struck by the universality of library concerns not only throughout the present-day world but also down through the centuries. For example, the initial tour of the Bodleian Library confirmed the similarities of modern academic law libraries.

"[Librarians] are dealing with similar issues regardless of location," said Sandra



AALL member Hazel Lord (bottom right) got a chance to see Oxford's sights, including the Bridge of Sighs, which was built in 1913.

Wilkins, law librarian and acting assistant university librarian for public services at the University of British Columbia Law Library in Canada. "Issues such as shelving and storage space for books, buildings that weren't designed for today's connectivity requirements, and meeting budget requirements for electronic resources needed by today's technologically advanced students."

The efforts of Sir Thomas Bodley in the early 17th century struck a common chord with today's information professionals: finding donors for his fledgling library; securing a fitting building to house it; safeguarding the precious books, which he had chained to the shelves; and providing accurate cataloging records. His concerns were part of a tradition that dated back even further as attendees discovered during a visit to Oxford's Merton College Library, one of the oldest libraries in England. Founded in the 13th century, Merton College Library's books were originally stored in chests equipped with triple locks. The keys were entrusted to three

dignitaries of the college, who opened the chests at rare intervals for special ceremonies. These same conservation concerns continue today: The librarian at Oxford's Queen's College has every item in that library's rare book collection individually "shrink-wrapped" against the vagaries of its underground storage facility.

Keepers of the Archive

In the historical setting of Oxford, the conference's celebration of the Bodleian Library resurrected the achievements and insights of past scholars while raising the challenges librarians and archivists face today and in the future as "keepers of the archive." For Billie Jo Kaufman, director of the law library and technology center and associate professor at Nova Southeastern

University in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., the conference enhanced her dedication to the profession: "Attending the 400th anniversary celebration of the Bodleian was one of the highlights of my professional career."

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The Divinity School, which was part of the original Bodleian Library, features an elaborate fan-vaulted ceiling.