

Hidden treasures abound inside some of the University's oldest libraries

Shelf life

IN COLLEGIATE Cambridge's old libraries – the ones that house the ancient manuscripts and books donated by scholars over hundreds of years ago – it's easy to overlook the modern world beyond the library doors.

Inside, you'll most likely find a librarian or archivist whose knowledge and passion for the books held within the library is broad and deep, even as it is contained within the frame of a soft-spoken and measured person. Look around, and you can't fail to be left with the sense that books are objects to be treasured, housed in carved

bookcases under chapel-like ceilings, commemorated in stained glass and sometimes even chained and locked by key for their safekeeping.

We recently paid visits to the old libraries at Trinity Hall, Jesus College and Corpus Christi College. Cambridge is a university rich with libraries: there are more than 100 housed in the departments, faculties and colleges, not to mention the Cambridge University Library, which is one of only six legal deposit libraries in the UK and Ireland. Our libraries provide employment to several hundred staff and resources for thousands more.



TRINITY HALL'S OLD LIBRARY

TRINITY HALL'S Old Library was built around 1590 and was one of the earliest purpose-built college library in Cambridge. "What is unique is it's virtually unchanged since it was built," says Dominique Ruhlmann, Director of Library Services. "All of the original bookcases and benches are still in place."

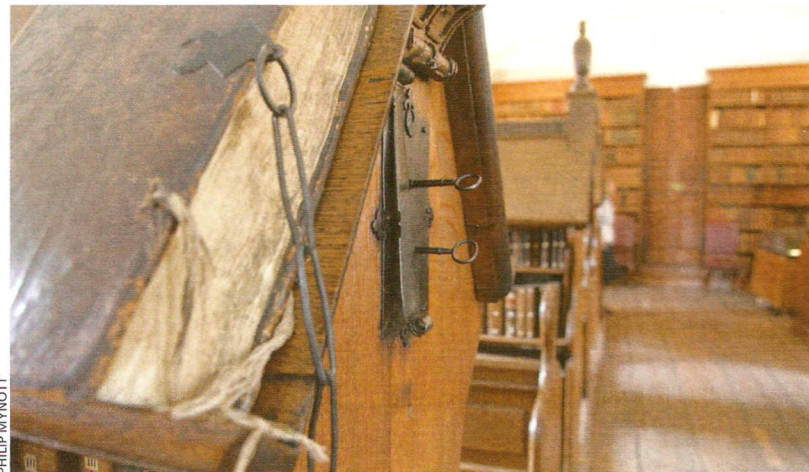
Austere white walls and a gently curved white ceiling contrast sharply with the dark wood of the wide floor

planks and the six pairs of lecterns and benches, arranged along a central aisle. An obsession with security is evident: Each bookcase was equipped with a metal rod that ran its length so the books could be chained. As an added insurance policy, two keys are needed to unlock the handles that remove the rods.

The library's collections date back to the original bequest by Bishop

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Bateman of Norwich, who founded the college in 1350. The collection has grown through the years and now includes everything from a 14th-century manuscript refuting John Wycliffe to an advice-filled letter written by Charles Dickens to his son, who was a Trinity Hall student. One prized manuscript is from the early 1400s and is a history of St Augustine's Abbey, founded in 597 and destroyed in the 1530s.



Although the library was designed to keep all its books chained, Trinity Hall's Director of Library Services, Dominique Ruhlmann, now has only two chained books to look after: Erasmus' *Adagia* (1522), a collection of sayings by philosophers, and Faber's *Paraphrases in Aristotelis philosophiam naturalem* (1512), a student textbook.



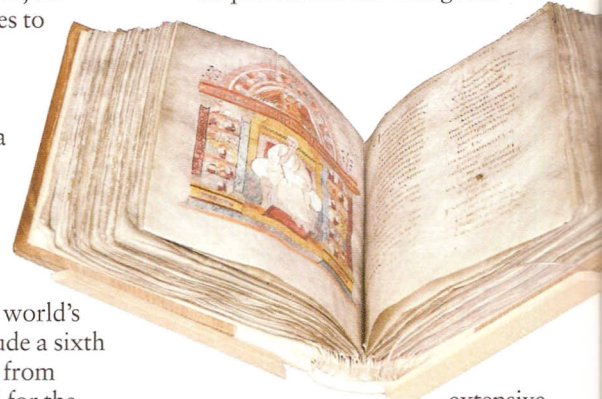
CORPUS CHRISTI'S PARKER LIBRARY

AS THE PARKER Library's sub-librarian, Gill Cannell must wear many hats to keep the library running smoothly. "I find myself doing everything from changing light bulbs to responding to quite complicated enquiries," says Ms Cannell, who loves her job.

Everyday, she comes to work in the elegant surroundings of the library, built in the 1820s and featuring a panelled ceiling and massive windows. Even more stunning are the Parker Library's collections, which are among the world's finest. Treasures include a sixth century Gospel book from Canterbury, still used for the enthronement of each new Archbishop of Canterbury, and a rare surviving manuscript of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, a source for Britain's early history. In fact, nearly a quarter of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts still in existence today

are in the library's collection.

The Library is named for Matthew Parker, Corpus' master from 1544 to 1553. He was a key player in the English Reformation, serving as Archbishop of Canterbury under Queen Elizabeth. In 1574, he bequeathed to the college his



extensive collection of nearly 480 medieval and Renaissance manuscripts and 1,000 printed books, many of which informed his leadership of the Church of England during a pivotal time in its history. His own notes are still visible on many of the texts.

The Parker Library is home to the oldest illustrated Latin Gospel book now in existence, above.

JESUS COLLEGE'S OLD LIBRARY

THE OLD LIBRARY of Jesus College was purpose-built early in the college's history, shortly after Bishop Alcock founded the college in 1496 on the site of a dissolved priory. Fourteen stained glass windows – half original, half 1926 replacements – still depict his rebus: a rooster standing on a globe. Scrolls above each rooster indicate, in Latin, the subject matter of the texts that sit in that aisle.

Stately oak bookcases, added in

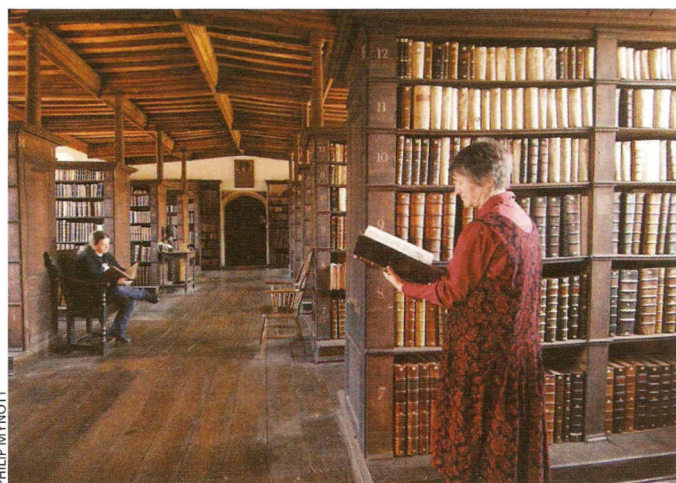
Stately oak bookcases, added in 1662 ... house approximately 9,000 books

1662, are linked to the timber ceiling by decorative posts and house approximately 9,000 books. "It really would have been more of a reading room in the earliest stages," says College Archivist Frances Willmoth. As an example, she shows a logic textbook published in 1483, with student notes in the margins. "It's also a classic student textbook," Dr Willmoth says. "You get halfway through and the notes disappear."

The library also has 78 medieval manuscripts, primarily from northern English cathedrals and religious houses, and an original copy of Jesus alumnus John Eliot's Algonquin translation of the Bible, the first Bible published in America. Dr Willmoth appreciates the opportunity to manage a library which contains such precious books. "Of course," she says. "Who could resist it? I wouldn't get the chance to work with such splendid historic collections anywhere else."



Dr Frances Willmoth, standing, manages Jesus College's 16th-century Old Library. The library's original features include windows, above, depicting the rebus of Bishop Alcock.



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