Special collections in Oxford college libraries

The libraries of the 44 colleges and halls of the University of Oxford contain a wealth of special collections, including printed books, manuscripts, and archives. Some of the more significant are listed in this guide, with further information often available on college websites.

College librarians will be happy to advise on your research. Please contact the library in advance of any visit, by email or telephone, as most college libraries lack the resources to accommodate visitors who arrive without an appointment.

Contact details for all college libraries, including those without fuller entries below, are available at http://libguides.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/colleges. The Oxford Archivists’ Consortium has compiled information on college archives at http://www.oxfordarchives.org.uk/.

In addition to the present guide, a detailed, if inevitably dated, overview of colleges’ special collections is Paul Morgan, Oxford libraries outside the Bodleian: a guide, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 1980). It is out of print, regrettably, but should be available in libraries.

A substantial number of early printed books in colleges, but by no means all, are catalogued on SOLO, Oxford’s library catalogue: http://solo.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/. In addition to SOLO, it will often be necessary to refer to bibliographical tools such as ESTC (http://estc.bl.uk/) and its printed predecessors, STC and ‘Wing’.

Several colleges have commissioned catalogues of their manuscripts in recent years. The clearest directory, with references to Coxe’s 19th-century catalogue of college manuscripts, is provided by the Bodleian Libraries at http://libguides.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/medieval-sc.

If you have a general question about special collections for Oxford’s college librarians, please email the Chair of the Committee of College Librarians, currently Owen McKnight of Jesus College, at owen.mcknight@jesus.ox.ac.uk.

Committee of College Librarians, October 2011
All Souls College
The Codrington Library has over 50,000 books printed before 1800. The majority have been catalogued on SOLO, but the work is still ongoing.

The Library holds 115 manuscripts pre-1550: the main strengths in this collection are psalters, Bibles, law, and medicine. The post-1550 manuscripts consist mainly of the manuscripts belonging to the Luttrell/Wynne family and relate to parliamentary affairs.

The Library also houses the papers of Charles Richard Vaughan (1774–1849), traveller and diplomat at Madrid and America. The archives of the college are extensive: the catalogue of the archives can be seen in the Codrington and in the Special Collections Reading Room at the Bodleian Library.

Balliol College
The special collections include over 400 medieval manuscripts, important nineteenth- and twentieth-century historical and literary manuscripts, about 10,000 early (pre-1800) books, and nearly 100,000 post-1800 books. The nearly 200 medieval manuscripts donated to the Fellows’ Library by William Gray, a 15th-century Bishop of Ely, form ‘by far the finest, as well as the largest, private collection to survive in England from the Middle Ages’. Balliol’s modern papers include significant literary and personal collections of Robert Browning, Matthew Arnold, Arthur Hugh Clough, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and more than eighty other individuals and families with Balliol connections.

Balliol’s archives and manuscripts are now open by appointment at their new premises in St Cross Church, Holywell. Information about the collections and access to St Cross can be found at [http://archives.balliol.ox.ac.uk/](http://archives.balliol.ox.ac.uk/). The early printed books are still housed in the Library, and students wishing to consult them should contact the Librarian.

Christ Church
The library has grown largely by gift. The many special collections include:

Wake bequest
William Wake, Archbishop of Canterbury (1657–1737), left to Christ Church his printed book collection (some 5,500 volumes), his Greek manuscripts, his official and personal papers in 31 volumes, and his collection of coins (now on deposit in the Ashmolean).

Orrery bequest
Charles Boyle, 4th Earl of Orrery (1676–1731), left to Christ Church his printed books and also his scientific instruments, including the original orrery which bears his name (now on deposit in the Museum of the History of Science).

Allestree Library
Richard Allestree, author of The whole duty of man, left his library in 1681 to his successors in the post of Regius Professor of Divinity. In 1946, Christ Church took over the administration of this library, which is still housed over the South Cloister, just as Allestree left it.

Morris bequest
In 1648 John Morris, Regius Professor of Hebrew, left his books to his successor, with in addition an annuity of £5 for the purchase of further works in Hebrew.

Robert Burton’s library
Burton, author of The anatomy of melancholy, bequeathed the residue of his library (c. 500 volumes) to Christ Church after the Bodleian had had first choice.
Aldrich bequest
Henry Aldrich (1648–1710), Dean of Christ Church, left to the college his collection of prints and drawings (now part of the collections in the Picture Gallery), some 3,000 books and pamphlets, including many Quaker, Civil War and Commonwealth tracts bought from Francis Bugg, and his fine collection of early printed and manuscript music.

Goodson bequest
Richard Goodson (c. 1655–1718) and his son, also Richard (1688–1741), were both successively Professors of Music, and each left a substantial collection of music, to add to Aldrich’s volumes.

Pamphlets
In 1722, Lewis Atterbury, brother of Francis (Dean, 1711–1713), gave to Christ Church almost 4,000 pamphlets.

Icelandic collection
Frederick York Powell (1850–1904) bequeathed about 800 volumes of Scandinavian and Icelandic literature, almost all of which are currently on deposit in the English Faculty Library.

Thai collection
84 volumes, mostly in the Thai language, presented by Rama VI (1881–1925), King of Siam and a commoner of Christ Church 1900–1901, were deposited in the Bodleian in 1967.

Gibbs collection
This good collection of liturgical texts, especially English Books of Common Prayer, was formed by Kenneth Gibbs (1856–1935), sometime Archdeacon of St Albans, and presented by his widow in 1946.

Brady collection
Francis Bridgford Brady presented in 1977 his collection of English theatrical ephemera, including much on juvenile theatre.

Driberg papers
Tom Driberg, Labour MP, gave to Christ Church his papers, which fill 5 filing cabinets.

Portal papers
Papers of Viscount Portal of Hungerford, Chief of the Air Staff during the Second World War.

Phillimore papers
Letters and other papers relating to the Phillimore family, chiefly Sir Robert Phillimore, ecclesiastical lawyer and friend of Gladstone (on deposit at Christ Church).

Greek resistance newspapers
A small collection of newspapers published ‘underground’ in Greece, 1943–1944, given by Eric Grey.

Carroll collection
Manuscripts, books, pamphlets and ephemera relating to Lewis Carroll and Alice Liddell.

Corpus Christi College
The Library’s collection of early printed books and manuscripts was largely assembled in the first 170 years after the foundation of the College in 1517.

Through the generosity of the Founder and other donors, Corpus Library has up to 20,000 volumes printed before 1830. These include a fine collection of early editions of the classics, early works on science, a large collection of early Italian works from the bequest of Baron
Coleraine, a large number of 16th-, 17th-, and 18th-century political, historical, and theological tracts, and a good collection of works on medieval Latin, from the library of Sir Roger Mynors. Over 8,000 items are listed on SOLO. Other items are listed in online databases such as ESTC and ISTC, as well as in printed bibliographies such as STC, Rhodes, and Wing.

The manuscript collection has been built up since the foundation of the College through donations, mostly by members of the College. Consequently, it covers a wide range of texts, bindings, artwork, and provenances. Descriptive catalogues of the Greek, Hebrew, and Western medieval manuscripts will be published in 2011 and 2012. Digital versions of some Corpus manuscripts are available on the Early Manuscripts at Oxford University website (http://image.ox.ac.uk/). The manuscript collection is not strong in collections of personal papers, but holds important collections of antiquarian manuscripts relating to both local and national history, especially the extensive collection of the seventeenth century historian William Fulman.

**Harris Manchester College**
The general antiquarian printed holdings are extensive, reflecting the college’s growth out of the dissenting academies in the north of England. One of the cornerstones of the library is the enormous tract collection which consists of many thousands of pamphlets printed in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. The contents are strongly Unitarian and include some extremely rare items not to be found elsewhere. The collection has generally been bound up in chronological order which gives the reader an excellent idea of the ebb and flow of Nonconformist thought over several centuries as the discussions change, grow, and fade over time. An extremely interesting feature of the tract collection which has yet to be documented in any comprehensive fashion is previous ownership, which should prove invaluable to scholars working in the field of textual transmission. This collection is in the process of being catalogued and has revealed some very rare items.

The catalogue of our archives is available online and may provide some interesting items for a research project: http://www.hmc.ox.ac.uk/userFiles/File/PDF/Porter_Catalogue.pdf

**Jesus College**
The college’s traditional association with Wales is reflected in the Celtic Library, a research collection of 8,500 books, many from the library of the medieval historian Charles Plummer (1851–1927). As well as the college’s administrative documents, the Archives hold private papers such as those of the popular historian J.R. Green (1837–1883).

The 12,000 early printed books in the Fellows’ Library (mostly on SOLO) include noteworthy scientific and medical books from the 1648 bequest of Lord Herbert of Cherbury. Jesus’s best-known old member is T.E. Lawrence ‘of Arabia’ (1888–1935) whose thesis on Crusader castles is kept in the Library.

The college’s medieval manuscripts are housed in the Bodleian. The Celtic manuscripts have been digitised at http://image.ox.ac.uk/, including the Red Book of Hergest, source of the tales of the Mabinogion.

**Keble College**
The historic collections include the personal library, correspondence and papers of John Keble, one of the early leaders of the Oxford Movement, and bequests of early printed books and manuscripts from Victorian benefactors who were influenced by High Church idealism or associated with the College. Consequently the collections are significant for research into the history and literature of the Oxford Movement and for early printed liturgical and devotional books and manuscripts.
Lady Margaret Hall
LMH has a small but distinctive collection of rare books, nearly all received by donation. There is a strong component of books and pamphlets relating to the English Civil War, an excellent collection of antiquarian French works including a set of the first edition of the Diderot *Encyclopédie*, and a good collection of early 20th century fine presses.

Lincoln College
The Senior Library collection comprises c. 10,000 volumes, reflecting the interests of Fellows of the College over generations. Thomas Marshall, Rector of Lincoln, bequeathed a collection of Civil War pamphlets to the Library. There is also a small collection of Hebrew books and some incunabula amongst the early printed books.

Magdalen College
Magdalen’s special collections include around 20,000 volumes, most of them printed before 1800. There are many more titles than that since many volumes contain multiple tracts, pamphlets, or small books. Most have been catalogued on SOLO, but not all; the uncatalogued material is mostly pre-1700 English, so it is always worth checking directly for items in that category. There are about 250 manuscript books.

Highlights include the Goodyer Collection of early botanical books, Nicholas Gibbard’s medical books, much of Bishop John Jewel’s library, Arthur Throckmorton’s gift of continental imprints, and a representative collection of books written by Magdalen authors.

Mansfield College
From its theological foundation, there is an inheritance of research material for the study of English and Welsh Nonconformity, a collection of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century books, and a small but significant antiquarian collection. In addition the College Archive is also held in the Library and reflects the history of the College through minute books; reports and magazines; architectural plans and drawings; photographs and staff ephemera.

Merton College
In addition to c. 9500 early printed books (on SOLO), 326 medieval manuscript books, and the historic archive comprising thousands of documents recording the administration of the college and college estates, there are:

**Beerbohm Collection**
Drawings, correspondence, and books from the library of the artist and critic Max Beerbohm (1872–1956)

**Merton Blackwell Collection**
Family and business papers of the Oxford booksellers and publishers, c19 to mid-c20.

**Brenchley Collection**
Publications by T.S. Eliot (strong on works that appeared in periodicals and journals).

**Sandy Irvine Collection**
Personal papers and documentation of the 1924 Everest expedition on which George Mallory and Andrew (Sandy) Irvine lost their lives.

New College
New College holds 30,000 pre-1850 volumes, including 335 incunabula. Cataloguing on SOLO is now 95% complete; the outstanding items are mainly 17th century, so at present it is still advisable to check ‘Wing’ and/or ESTC. There are also c. 360 medieval manuscripts, most of which are listed in Coxe’s *Catalogus codicum MSS. qui in collegiis aulisque Oxoniensibus*
It should be noted that manuscripts cannot be listed on SOLO but the production of a new comprehensive catalogue is now underway.

Since its foundation in 1379, New College has built up a considerable archive of historical material relating to the foundation of the college as well as the running of the college and its estates up to the present day. The archive also houses a number of special collections, including personal papers donated to the College by the families of former fellows and alumni.

**Nuffield College**
The G.D.H. Cole Collection forms the main core of the Nuffield collection and is an extensive early modern collection in all things ‘political’, including labour history. It includes significant collections on William Cobbett, Daniel Defoe, and William Morris, plus extensive trade union and political party material.

Archives and ‘modern political’ papers include the collections of Frederick Lindemann (Lord Cherwell), William Cobbett and Lord Nuffield, amongst others. Please see the Library website for a full searchable list.

**Oriel College**
Oriel’s historic archive includes an early benefaction book and correspondence with the leaders of the nineteenth-century Oxford Movement; some early printed books; some medieval manuscripts, and a substantial eighteenth-century collection bequeathed by Edward, fifth Baron Leigh (1742–1786).

**Pembroke College**
Two noteworthy collections at Pembroke are the H.W. Chandler collection of antiquarian books on Aristotle, especially his *Nicomachean ethics* (including early editions of Aristotle and other philosophers, many in interesting bindings) and a Samuel Johnson collection of both antiquarian and modern books and periodicals by and about Samuel Johnson, including several copies of the first edition of the *Dictionary*.

**Queen’s College**
**Early printed books**
The Library’s historic book collections fall into two categories. First, there is a large collection of research material that the Library has accumulated over the last several hundred years. The collection is particularly strong in classics, philosophy, theology and church history, tracts and proclamations, ecclesiastical law, early medicine, and British regional history.

The second collection is formed from large benefactions of rare and antique books in many different subjects, including many rare items of bibliographical interest covering travel and topography, architecture, and natural history, among other subjects. 50% of our antiquarian monograph material has been catalogued onto SOLO. Other material appears in the printed bibliographies such as STC and ‘Wing’.

**Manuscripts**
The Library is rich in medieval and post-medieval manuscripts. Those acquired by the mid-19th century are described in Coxe, *Catalogus codicum MSS Collegii Reginensis* (Oxford, 1852), reprinted as *Catalogue of the manuscripts in the Oxford colleges* (1972). The collection is particularly strong in theology, heraldry, medieval bindings, post-medieval antiquarian collections, and the history of the College and University.

**Peet Library**
The Peet Library is a specialist collection of Egyptology material which is maintained and updated by the Queen’s College Library. It was donated by Sir Alan Gardiner in memory of Thomas Eric Peet (1882–1934).
**St Anne’s College**
The Handover bequest is a small collection (approx. 350 items) of books and journals on printing, book design, typography, publishing, and the book trade. Most items are 20th century and British. Miss Handover was a student at St Anne’s and worked with Stanley Morison at The Times.

**St Cross College**
No special collections.

**St Hilda’s College**
St Hilda’s has the Maconchy Archive: the papers of the Irish composer, Elizabeth Maconchy (1907–1994). This contains almost all the manuscripts of her compositions as well as some printed scores, programmes, press cuttings, and some correspondence. Many of the composer’s works have been published by Chesters, but we are the only source for some of the pieces.

**St John’s College**
The special collections at St John’s span manuscripts, printed books, and personal papers, as well as several interesting artefacts. The manuscript collections range from the Anglo-Saxon period to the 20th century, comprising c. 400 items, many of which are medieval, but also including Greek, Arabic, Hebrew, and Ethiopic items, as well as a Gujarati navigational chart.

The printed books in the special collections number some 20,000, with several incunabula, amongst which are a set of eleven Caxtons, the most notable of which is a contemporary hand-coloured second printing of Chaucer’s *Canterbury tales*. Other notable collections of printed books are the Bulwer-Thomas collection of works on the history of science, a collection of 20th century *livres d’artiste* (books as art works), and the classics library of A.E. Housman.

The Library also holds the working library and personal papers of the poet, critic, and author Robert Graves, and, by virtue of his friendship with Graves, the archive of Spike Milligan, including original typescripts of, and drawings from, his war memoirs. Artefacts include the 16th century founder’s chest, a cannonball, the walking stick Archbishop Laud used on his trip to the scaffold, and a micrographic portrait of Charles I.

**Somerville College**
Somerville’s special collections include:
- The library of John Stuart Mill
- The library, papers, and watercolours of the 19th-century novelist and Egyptologist Amelia Blandford Edwards
- Correspondence and papers of Percy Withers, Vernon Lee (Violet Paget), Margery Fry, Myra Verney, Muriel St Clare Byrne, Margaret Mann Phillips, and Margaret Kennedy
- A collection of Vera Brittain’s books, papers, and memorabilia bequeathed by her literary executor Paul Berry
- Books by and belonging to Robert Bridges bequeathed by Helen Darbishire, augmented by subsequent benefactions

**University College**
Univ’s special collections consist of around 7,000 early printed books and over 200 manuscripts. The collection includes the following:
- The Browne Library, a good example of an 18th-century gentleman’s general collection
- The Alport collection of mainly modern first editions
- The Robert Ross Memorial Collection (of material relating to Oscar Wilde and his circle)
- The papers of Clement Attlee
The College’s manuscripts, the Attlee Papers, and the Robert Ross Memorial Collection are deposited in the Bodleian Library. A proportion of the College’s scientific books are housed in the Museum of the History of Science Library.

**Wadham College**
Wadham has two main special collections. One comprises Persian material and Arabic manuscripts, and the other is a large collection of 16th- and early 17th-century theology, much of it polemic.

**Worcester College**
Worcester’s special collections include:
- Clarke collection of architectural drawings (by Inigo Jones and Nicholas Hawksmoor) and prints
- Eland collection of modern architectural books
- Over 1,000 early modern plays
- Civil War papers and pamphlets
- Pottinger collection of nineteenth-century pamphlets