



Cambridge Library Group

Events for your diary

- 1 September, **New membership year begins!** Subscriptions to Sue Williamson please.
- 8 September, Tessa Webber, 'Beg, borrow or steal: the provision of books in late medieval Cambridge', Gonville & Caius College, **5.30 for 6.00pm**
- 14 October, **AGM** and talk by Elin Strangeland, Schlumberger Research Centre, Maddingley Road, **5.30 for 6.00pm**
- 11 November, Cherith Durrant, 'Books behind bars', Graham Storey Room, Trinity Hall, **5.30 for 6.00pm**

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Cambridge past

Alison Dickens: Archaeology on the Grand Scale



A shadow of its former self. Robert Sayle remembered on www.flickr.com

GRAND ARCHAEOLOGY – AN UPDATE

You may remember Alison Dickens' talk, reported by Stephen Hills in *CLG Reflections* 1 a couple of years ago, about Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) and the Grand Arcade. The demolition work, to make way for the Grand Arcade, afforded one huge and unique opportunity for an investigation of Cambridge's past.

The Grand Arcade is now a gleaming mall. On 4 June, Alison gave Cambridge Library Group an update on CAU's research. The archaeologists have done the digging and are analysing what they found – having produced a 1000 page interim report at the end of 2007

Grand Archaeology, Alison calls it. Grand in all ways, in the size of the site and in the comprehensiveness of what the archaeologists could do with it. They examined old maps in detail, they made detailed records of the buildings that were to come down, they dug the ground that became empty when the buildings had gone.

New since 2006 is the computer modelling of those buildings, and an examination of the importance of the King's Ditch.

The site straddled this medieval city boundary. The ditch in its heyday was some 10m across and 2m deep. Alison's audiences are sorry to hear that it never seems to have had boats on it. But it represents two kinds of split: in space, between the city and what lay outside; and in time, because organised use of the land effectively began when the ditch was dug in the 11th century. And the ditch has yielded up organic material – dead dogs, shoes – to the CAU in a wonderful state of preservation.

The definitive report should be with the publisher by November 2009; a more popular book is expected to be with the publisher by the end of this year, and CAU is preparing a companion volume on other Cambridge sites. Meanwhile, see 'Cambridge: historic city centre revealed' in *Current Archaeology* 208, March/April 2007, pp. 22-31.

Aidan Baker
Haddon Library



St Tibb's Row in 1971 [www.flickr.com]

REMINDER

Subscriptions due!

The CLG subscription year ends on 31 August.

Annual membership costs just £7 and provides free entry to meetings and complimentary refreshments.

Please send renewal forms (available from <http://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/maps/clhg.htm>)

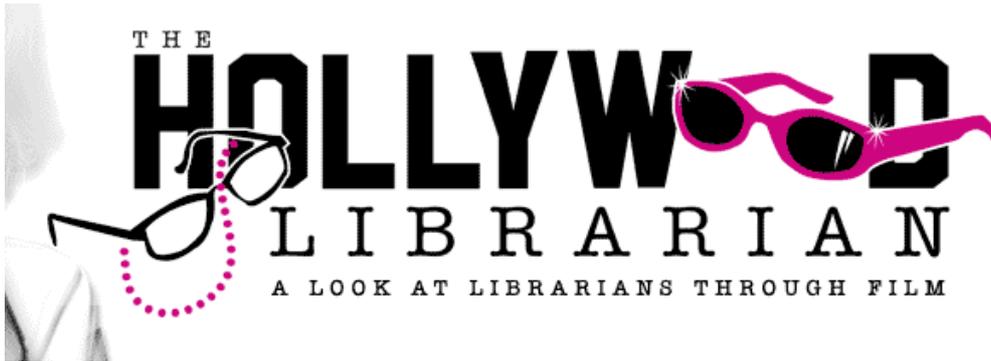
and cheques payable to 'The Cambridge Library Group' to

Sue Williamson, Cambridgeshire Library Service, Roger Ascham Site, Roger Ascham Road, Cambridge CB4 2BD

We look forward to hearing from you!



The Grand arcade site today



The Librarian in 2008? [Image from Flickr.com]

On 17 June the CLG staged the first screening in Cambridge of *The Hollywood Librarian*, a film about librarians made by librarians. Over 50 Cambridge librarians and their friends gathered in the Wolfson Hall at Churchill to see how the profession fairs on the silver screen. We asked two, one librarian and one not, to share their impressions.

As librarians, guests and the just plain curious took their seats on the evening of June 17th at Churchill College, the excitement was palpable. Whispered snatches of conversation confirmed the obvious anticipation; librarians eager to see how they would be presented, and non-librarians eager to catch a glimpse of the realities of the library profession. The lights went down, the chatter dispersed, and the film began.

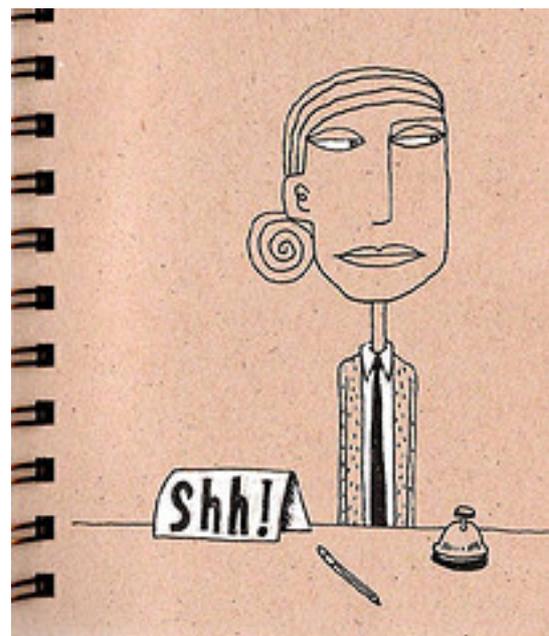
Ann Seidl's *The Hollywood Librarian* is an at times extremely humorous, and at times incredibly poignant, look at the work of librarians and how librarians are portrayed on the silver screen. The juxtaposition of Hollywood's bun-sporting finger-shussing twinset-wearing spinster librarian with the real-life counterpart often highlights the disparity between the two. However, it would have been more inspiring to see a greater age range of genuine information workers, perhaps moving away from the female American demographic.

The film begins by exploring the importance of reading as a tool for social inclusion. Books allow people to read the thoughts of others across the centuries. Librarians young and old are attracted to the profession, we are told, because it is their calling. Discovering new databases, teaching information literacy skills, uniting books and readers and helping people to discover their true information needs; for all these reasons and more, men and women meander into librarianship. However, the image of the librarian as portrayed in these film clips is anything but a wonderful life. You would have a challenge on your hands persuading the librarians of *Desk Set* or *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* to run database training sessions or create a library brand through the world wide web. Although shussing is high on the agenda, quite why readers continued to visit these libraries with no new acquisitions and inappropriate musical numbers in not made particularly clear. It is suggested that perhaps the librarian's negative image on the silver screen stems from an inherent mid-twentieth century distrust of any predominantly female profession. However, even in ancient Egypt, the librarian, in reverence or ridicule, has continually captured the collective imagination of humanity.

Librarians are portrayed as intelligent, thoughtful people who protect and uphold access to information, who work daily with knowledge, indulging in the practices of cataloguing and classification, and helping readers to ask the right research questions.

As a young professional embarking on a career in librarianship, I can empathise with the librarians in this film who said that they could not imagine doing anything else. Every day, I learn something new. We straddle the gap between being keepers of information and teachers of new ways of searching. Unfortunately, the immense impact of new technologies on libraries is ignored throughout Seidl's film. I would like to have heard more from the library school student on what attracted her to the profession, and the reasons behind the middle-aged woman changing career and becoming a librarian only fifteen short months ago. It is slightly disappointing that this film did not take the opportunity to dispel the stereotypes created by Hollywood; instead, by focusing on such a small professional demographic, it may have unwittingly reinforced them. Despite these limitations, *The Hollywood Librarian* presents an amusing and also serious picture of the professional librarian.

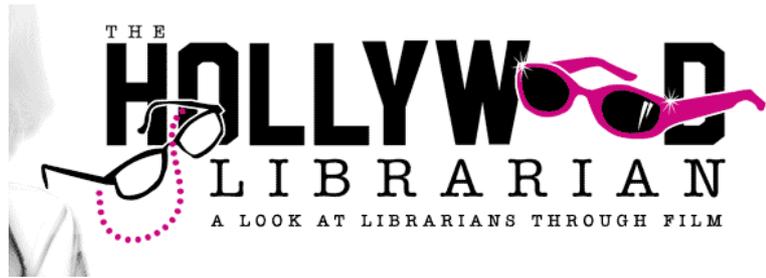
Charlotte Smith
Newnham College Library



Do you recognise this lady? [Image from Flickr.com]



A view from the other side of the counter...



I wasn't sure what, if anything, a film about libraries would have to say to me. Apart from a long-ago summer fetching books for readers in the beautiful Wren, I haven't worked in a library. But I was soon absorbed into Ann Seidl's gently earnest celebration of the library. Her film is a patchwork of conversations with library workers, snippets of history, politics and film clips featuring libraries and librarians. The film clips are often extremely comical; humorous in the same way the vintage housewife ads shown before the film were funny for offering such an outmoded vision of women's roles. Interspersing these clips with the testimonies of present-day library workers further highlights the redundancy of the old stereotypes of prim librarians shushing readers. The diversity of skills held by those interviewed was apparent, but what really came across was an often moving dedication both to their work and to the part their libraries played in the community, from offering reading groups for tots to literacy programmes.

Although this is an American film about the American library, the theme of the library as hub of the community is not exclusively American. It made me freshly miss our own Central Library in Cambridge, once a lunchtime haven and currently closed for many months for refurbishment. The film looked at the increasing cuts to funding suffered by many libraries, and the threats of limited opening or closure which many face, including libraries in the town of Salinas, birthplace of John Steinbeck. It perhaps overplayed the emotional impact here (a friend was irritated by the 'violin-string' quality of the background music), but the starkness of the prospect of national closures, an all-too familiar threat on this side of the Atlantic too, was sobering, especially when juxtaposed with the massive expenditure on the Iraq war.



A blast from the past...?

More than the funny film clips and heartfelt testimonies, though, I liked the sprinklings of quotations from various authors, variously acknowledging their personal links and debts to libraries. These spoke to the book-lover in me and took me back to my teenage years, foraging for fiction in our local suburban branch. I took home with me a quote from one of my favourite writers, Barbara Kingsolver, who said, "I'm of a fearsome mind to throw my arms around every living librarian who crosses my path, on behalf of the souls they never knew they saved!"

*Hayley Stephen
Tutorial Office, Christ's College*



The iconic Round Reading Room at the British Museum, courtesy of Flickr.com.

Milton Road Primary School Library



On 7 May the CLG visited the awarding winning Michael Rosen Library at Milton Road Primary School. The evening began with a talk from Head teacher Mrs S Romero and Foundation Stage leader Miss J Morrison. The school moved to the purpose-built site on Ascham Road on 6 June 2006 and in 2007 it gained 'Ofsted Outstanding' status. The library is located in what could be effectively described as a wide corridor. The result is what must be some of the most effect use of corridor space in a school ever.



The school decided to take its time planning the library space, initially using the books from the old school site on trolleys. The school consulted the local authority schools library advisor and IT advisor when designing the library. It also worked with the company *Opening the Book*, who use a 'reader-centred approach' applying marketing and retail knowledge to library design. Apparently, people are much more likely to buy a book they pick up and they are more prone touch and pick up books which are presented face up. Thus in this library there is combination of forward facing and come-and-browse type units, with the books arranged in combination alphabetised and face up. In addition there are a number of units such as the picture book tunnel shelving unit and the picture book spinner which are designed to get younger readers touching, interacting and experiencing books. These units are a world away from the unsuitable plastic boxes that picture books are often jammed into in schools.



The shelves are clearly labelled and the school has broken away from the Dewey Decimal system to allow for a mix of fiction and non-fiction under themed headings. As well as this feature there is also a 'horrid' section in which can be found the *Horrid Henry* series, *Horrid Histories* and *Horrible Science* series. For the use of Years 5 and 6 there is a 'Restricted section' as can be found in the library at Hogwarts. The returns section allows the children to browse what other users have been borrowing. Taking into consideration how the children will use libraries in the future, ICT is fully integrated with the library but not overemphasised. The junior librarian system allows the children to self issue their books and for the school to monitor the children's borrowing. The children are also given a say in what is purchased for the library.



The school wanted a library which was aesthetically pleasing and this has been achieved. The library is a colourful and light space, decorated with strong vibrant panels of colours taken from the school's classroom areas. This feature adds to the sense that this is 'everyone's library'. The walls in the library are kept free of posters and displays, so the children's eyes are drawn only to the books. The evening concluded with a tour round the school from Mrs Romero, followed by drinks and refreshments back in the library with the chance to explore for ourselves the book tunnels, book spinners and sneak a look at the restricted section. Our thanks once again to Mrs Romero and her staff for hosting this event.

Sophie Fisher

References

www.openingthebook.com

www.miltonroadschool.org.uk

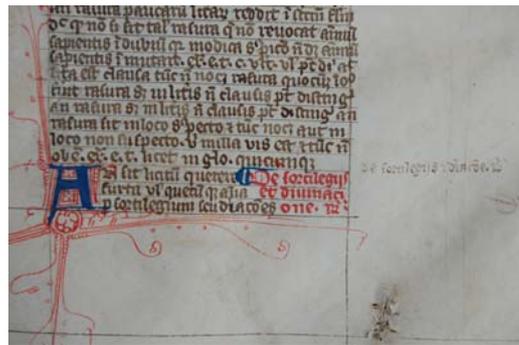


Magic in Medieval Priests' Manuals



On 9 April members gathered at Christ's College to hear former Research Fellow, Dr Catherine Rider, speak about her work on magic in medieval priests' manuals, illustrated by examples from a Christ's manuscript.

Alan Stevens of the Department of Engineering Library writes:



Dr Rider's illustrated talk provided a glimpse into a specialised and intriguing area of study. There was a strong local link in the form of a fourteenth century manual in Christ's College Library:

Decretales Novae, or Summa Summarum, attributed to William of Pagula
(Christ's College MS 2)

Connections were also made with Catherine's previous study on beliefs relating to the influence of magic on impotence.

Dr Rider showed how the content of the manuals could provide an insight into the beliefs of a priest's congregation. At the same time she cautioned that since entire manuals might have been copied out word for word as new priests were appointed, the beliefs might not have been contemporary with a particular manual.

Parts of the manuals used exceptionally colourful language. This included the recommendation that the priest search out the details of a sin as if delivering a twisting snake with a midwife's hand - a memorable and alarming image to say the least.

An informed audience made for a good session of questions and answers to round off an outstanding talk.



Visit to HMP Littlehey

It was with a little trepidation that I set out on the visit to HMP Littlehey on Midsummer's Day. Apart from the worry about finding it (easier than I'd expected, as it turned out), a prison library was the one type of library I found very hard to envisage. Going into the prison was surreal, reinforced by the absence of prisoners on our route because of a staff training day.

The party visited in three small groups to make for easier access, but this increased the workload for Cherith Durrant, the prison librarian, who gave separate tours to each spread throughout the day. Despite this extra effort, Cherith 'wowed' us with her enthusiastic commitment to her post (not one I would envy), from the enthusiasm for her library orderlies (prison helpers) to ensuring the prisoners' needs are met.

In many ways the library was similar to a small public library, but with added restrictions (books with spiral bindings are banned, for instance, and any map or atlas has to have the page showing the location of Littlehey torn out!). There are also 'unusual' books in the collection, such as the ARGOS catalogue in the Reference section, and it is probably a larger legal section than would be expected in a general library of comparable size. Other problems seemed more familiar, such as a range of reading abilities, and the diversity of cultural backgrounds.

The importance of security impacts on the work of the library in a number of ways, not least in terms of recruitment. Extensive checking means that it can take six months from interview to appointment of staff. Orderlies can be removed from post without warning (on one occasion Cherith lost all her helpers at the same time), and cannot spend more than 18 months in post so that 'familiarity' does not become an issue. Equally, donations cannot be accepted from outside, and there is no internet access in the prison, so Cherith has to go to St Neots library to check emails and order books, etc.

Cherith was very enthusiastic about the work of her 'helpers', showing our groups some of the publicity material produced. She also stressed the importance of a library in a situation where people have so much time to fill when in their cells. All too soon the visit was over, and we came away very reflective on the marvellous work Cherith does, and looking forward to her talk to the CLG at Trinity Hall in November 11th: 'Books behind bars'.

Chris Barker, Jesus College

HIGHLIGHTS FOR 2009

The full programme for 2008-9, to include dates and venues, will be available at the AGM on 14 October, but meanwhile, here is a taster of what's in store from January.

January 2009

- Twelfth Night Party, CUP bookshop
- Calligraphy workshop with Penny Price, Clare College (tbc)
- John Cardwell & Sarah Preston: 'Archives and Official Publications of the Royal Commonwealth Society Library', University Library

February 2009

- Local biographer, Sally Cline, will talk about her new book, *Lillian Hellman and Dashiell Hammett: Memories and Myths* (publication due January 2009), the American dramatist and mystery writer

March 2009

- Vanessa Lacey: 'Rat-catching for schools: viewing the Victorians from the University Library tower', University Library

April 2009

- Rebecca Stott, Professor of English Literature and Creative Writing at UEA, and author of, *Ghostwalk*, a mystery novel set in Cambridge, will talk about her writing, English Faculty

May 2009

- Professor Janet Todd, to speak on the *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen*, of which she is Editor

June 2009

- Anita Herle: An introduction the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Downing Street

July 2009

- Garden Party in the Darwin Garden at Christ's College