



## Events for your diary

2 June:  
Guided tour of the  
**Museum of Archaeology  
and Anthropology**

18 June:  
An amazing double act:  
the **Whipple Museum**  
and the **Botanic Garden**,  
all in one day!

(See p.4 for more details)

15 July:  
Our annual *Garden Party*  
- this year at Christ's  
College

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## 2008 Christmas Party



Our 2008 Christmas Party was kindly hosted by Wai Kirkpatrick at King's College. After a wide range of seasonal snacks and nibbles we were entertained by performers from local dramatic writing group WriteON! with a lively rehearsed reading of M.R. James's 'Casting the Runes'. The Keynes Hall was the perfect setting for Michelle Golder's specially written adaptation, by turns spine-chilling and comic.

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Photographs by Wai Kirkpatrick

## Archives and Official Publications of the Royal Commonwealth Society Library

The prevention of the breaking up of the Royal Commonwealth Society Collection by its purchase in 1993 for £3m and transfer to Cambridge University Library must rank as one of the twentieth century's greatest achievements in preserving library materials for research. The history, scope and use of the Collection were described at the meeting by Dr. Sarah Preston and Dr. John Cardwell, who respectively work on its books and archives.

There is a helpful description of the Collection on [www.lib.cam.ac.uk/deptserv/rcs/](http://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/deptserv/rcs/). The Collection springs from the Society's original aims for a library 'in which recent and authentic intelligence upon colonial subjects may be constantly available' and for 'a museum for the collection and exhibition of Colonial and Indian productions'. As well as the Commonwealth, the Collection extends to works about other nations' empires and, for example, to uncolonised Siam. Bombing in the Second World War destroyed 40,000 items and a flood in 1980 damaged some holdings, but the Collection comprises 300,000 printed items, 800 collections of photographs totalling 100,000 images, and 700 collections of manuscript diaries, correspondence, and papers, as well as paintings and historical artefacts. The 500 drawers of the card index attest to its size, and yet, founded in 1868, the Society had only 300 books by 1873.

Work on the books has concentrated on cataloguing and preserving the official publications, an important part of the Collection and comprising Colonial Blue Books, government reports, directories and yearbooks, and civil and military lists - occupying 2,500 metres of shelving. This prioritisation reflects projects underway at other institutions, as well as the availability of similar holdings elsewhere (e.g. on India). 24,000 volumes have so far been classified and catalogued on Newton, and when necessary boxed and cleaned. Almost every facet of colonial life seems to have been the subject of a report at some point, including prisons, hospitals, smuggling, transport, and even the furnishings of a Governor's residence. The Colonial Blue Books, first hand-written, then printed, provide an extraordinarily detailed record, and reflect the preoccupations of their times, for example, the extent of squatting for an Empire anxious about land-holding. The civil and military lists record postings, salary, examinations passed, and leave taken.

Apart from official publications, the Collection also has materials not often retained because considered ephemeral, such as an oil company's introductory pamphlet for employees posted to south-east Asia in the mid-twentieth century. The card index subject cards reveal an often detailed level of analysis of individual books and articles. The archives and photographs cover an equally wide range of countries. One of the earliest manuscript collections dates from the 1630s and the holdings include some of the first accounts of explorers, such as the 1794-5 journal of fur trader McGillivray in north-west Canada. The photograph collections cover a wide range of subjects, and as an introduction to these there are 700 digital images on the RCS website, together with a biographical index of photographers. The Queen Mary Collection alone comprises 3,800 photographs from her two state visits to India. In addition to conservation, on-line cataloguing to improve access to the archival collections has been the priority, using Janus, the University's archives portal. These improvements to accessibility have led to a high and increasing number of enquiries for information contained in both books and archives from scholars and the general public.

During a career in commerce I would occasionally have time for tantalisingly short visits to the Collection in London in the 1980s. The talk gave a lively impression of the Collection's richness, and now as a student here undertaking research into commerce in Joseph Conrad's Asian fiction, I am able fully to benefit from its richness, from Directories of Siam and a book on its taxation regime to photographs of the colony of Labuan off Borneo.

*Andrew Francis*

## Carry on Illuminating: the second calligraphy workshop with Penny Price



The silence was palpable as thirteen CLG members bent over their work in intense concentration. Flowers and foliage, animals, figures, mythical beasts and intricate patterns, all came to life as they were traced, outlined, painted, and spectacularly gilded with gold leaf. It was Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> January, and Penny Price, Scribe to the University, was leading the second CLG calligraphy workshop in the Bennett Room at Clare College.



Several participants brought back pictures to finish that they had started at the first workshop, others were completely new to the craft, and some who had attended the first workshop knew what fun it was and just wanted to carry on illuminating. At intervals Penny would explain about the methods and tools used by medieval scribes, like the best way to fashion a quill pen so that it had a reservoir, and how acorn cups and walnut shells were used as dolls-house size containers for the precious pigments. Mineral or organic names of the colours and materials that we were using, such as verdigris, cinnabar, lampblack and gall, either took you straight to the Middle Ages or to a Farrow and Ball paint chart, or perhaps both! Penny patiently demonstrated techniques, such as layering paint to shade an area or to build up an intensity of colour, and we could then attempt them ourselves. Every now and then riotous laughter broke the silence as the gum ammoniac, applied and left to dry as a base for the gold leaf, was reactivated by the warmth of heavy breathing. The paper-backed gold leaf was then transferred to the picture by rolling a fingertip over it, and hey presto, the image came to life!

By the end of the day everyone had an illumination to take home which surpassed their own expectations. What better way to spend a dark and cold January Saturday? At least I think it was dark and cold, but in all honesty I was too busy to notice!



*Anne Hughes*

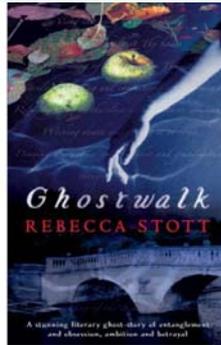
*Illuminated letters by Dominique Ruhlmann*

## 'The ghost in the archive': the historical fiction of Rebecca Stott



Rebecca Stott is no stranger to Cambridge libraries. Although she teaches at the University of East Anglia, she does most of her research here, where she lives. The high turnout for her talk at the English Faculty in April demonstrated not only her popularity, but also the warm affection that many Cambridge librarians feel for her. She has a favourite seat in the West Room, where she writes most of her books. She thinks this odd, many in the audience thought it quite normal (I also confess to this abnormality).

Rebecca is the kind of library user who makes working in a library interesting. A novelist and academic, a historian of science and a teacher of creative writing, her interests are wide and her projects diverse. Giving us an insight into the research *Ghostwalk* so eerily convincing, she spoke carrying out historical research in libraries Newton dabbling in alchemy and involved depiction, against the smokey plague-Cambridge, is no mere flight of fancy. It is research, which Rebecca described in some



which made her debut novel about the palpable excitement of and archives. *Ghostwalk* features Isaac as a suspect in a series of murders. This sanctuary of seventeenth-century the result of painstaking and fascinating detail.

Writing the novel made her an expert in and the footpaths, staircases and rooms of the resources available in the Cambridge Rebecca's distractions and digressions in libraries – her discovery of the route taken by Newton's famous prism from the glassworks of Murano to his Trinity rooms, and her uncovering of Newton's terrifying experiments on his own eyes (which temporarily blinded him) – may sound like familiar evasion strategies. But serendipity is central to her work, and to her popularity. Her next novel, much anticipated by the audience, should be out later this year.

Colin Higgins

### Summer visits: sign up now!

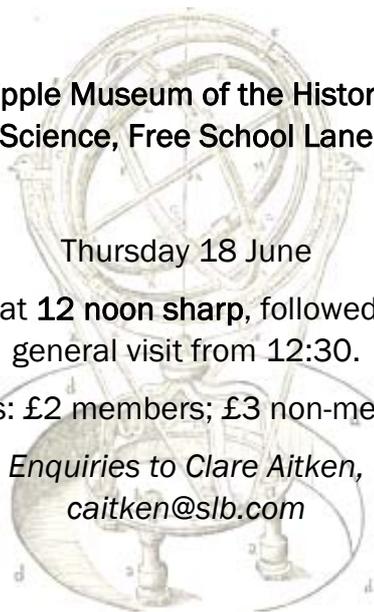
#### Whipple Museum of the History of Science, Free School Lane

Thursday 18 June

Tour at **12 noon sharp**, followed by a general visit from 12:30.

Tickets: £2 members; £3 non-members

Enquiries to Clare Aitken,  
caitken@slb.com



#### Botanic Garden

1 Brookside

Thursday 18 June

Tour at **5:30**, followed by a glass of wine by the lake

Tickets: £2 members; £3 non-members

Enquiries to Chris Barker,  
cmb81@cam.ac.uk





## 'Rat-catching for schools': Vanessa Lacey and the UL Tower Project

Myths abound in Cambridge about the contents of the UL's tower. Does it house old librarians? Dirty (in either sense) books? Students who got lost in the stacks? Read on to discover the truth ...

The Tower in fact contains a huge collection of 19<sup>th</sup>-century British publications, about 170,000 items in total - not just books but also pamphlets, timetables, calendars, jigsaws, games and other 'unacademic' material of the most absorbing kind. Considered at the time of receipt to be of secondary value, these items were not deemed worthy of inclusion in the main UL catalogue (the 'Greensleeves' volumes that can still be seen in the main Catalogue Hall, which were succeeded by Newton), and until very recently the only way to gain access to the collection was by consulting the 'Supplementary' sheaf and card catalogues in the South Reading Room corridor. Now the collection is being catalogued online, thanks to a Mellon grant received in 2006, and Project manager Vanessa Lacey gave the CLG a fascinating look into some aspects of this motley collection.

### *"Misconduct often ends in ruin"*

The collection contains many school books reflecting the teaching strategies of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Original thought was not encouraged; instead a great deal of copying was done, much of it from 'improving' reading supplied by religious organisations. For a complete education, one textbook recommended that the art of ratcatching should be taught alongside Greek and Latin.

Children's lives were bound round with heavily moral messages. Fiction books too conveyed Awful Warnings like the cautionary tale of Harry Beckwith (see below), who couldn't say no to a drink and (naturally) ended up leading a life of dipsomania and dissipation.

### *Penny dreadfuls and shilling shockers*

Another target for moral messages was the poor, who were assailed with well-meaning pamphlets about the evils of idleness and 'how to wash the baby'. Perhaps in protest, there was also a great market for escapist fiction like westerns and detective stories, some of which contained enterprising female sleuths ever-ready to pull out their pistols.

The joy of the Tower Project is that you never know what you'll find next: original advertisements tucked between the pages of books; pamphlets of opposing views cheek-by-jowl on the shelves. But with the Project cataloguing team working at a rate of a thousand books a week, the Tower collection won't stay hidden for much longer—and the undergraduates will have to come up with some new myths!

Emma Coonan

Images from [www.lib.cam.ac.uk/deptserv/towerproject](http://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/deptserv/towerproject)

