

ing—and using—this crucial tool.—*Gene Hyde, Radford University.*

The Bodleian Library: A Subject Guide to the Collections. Eds. G. P. M. Walker, Mary Clapinson, and Lesley Forbes. Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2004. 240p. \$37.50 (ISBN 1851240799).

This is the first comprehensive overview of the subject collections of the Bodleian Library at Oxford, the oldest and largest academic library in Great Britain. Each chapter relates the history of manuscript and print collecting in a specific subject area and concludes with a list of more detailed bibliographies and catalogs of specialized collections. Chapters are devoted to Classical Studies, British History and Politics, English Literature and Language, Children's Books, Theology, Philosophy, Social Sciences, Law, Geography and Maps, Music, Science and Technology, German Studies, French Studies, Italian Studies, Hispanic Studies, Russia and Eastern Europe, Near and Middle East, South and South East Asia, East Asia, North America, Australia and New Zealand, Sub-Saharan Africa, Printed Ephemera, Pictorial Resources, Bindings, and the History of the Book. Because the narrative format makes it difficult to find specific bits of information in the guide, an index of names and subjects is provided. Forty-eight color plates illustrate the range of materials in the collections, from a third-century papyrus to an anti-Apartheid poster. Also included are a guide to the arcane Bodleian shelf marks and an alphabetical list of principal-named collections, such as the papers of J. R. R. Tolkien and the Opie collection of 20,000 works for children.

Among the Bodleian's incomparable holdings are the collection of primary and secondary materials on the English Civil War and Interregnum and the vast collection of maps, from early charts to electronic tools. The library also has impressive, if uneven, foreign-language collections, including German scientific dissertations, Italian bank books, Japa-

nese local histories, Russian works on indigenous languages, Hebrew manuscripts, early Yiddish books, and papers of Mendelssohn, Kafka, and Wittgenstein. The collections were amassed through a combination of personal interest, donations by private collectors, purchase, and foreign exchange. As a depository library, the Bodleian has always been entitled to copies of British publications, although not all are accepted or catalogued.

The Bodleian has had a complicated relationship with departmental and college libraries at Oxford, suffered periods of neglect and underfunding, and nowadays struggles to support everything from scientific periodicals to foreign law reports to digitization projects. Its shelf marks are like geologic strata recording the vicissitudes of the library through the centuries, just as its international collections reflect the history of the British Empire. Patterns of rifts and irrationalities are clearly visible in collection management over the centuries, reflecting the interests of individual faculty, a changing university curriculum, and shifting priorities of library administration.

The proud tone of the guide is laced with touches of sardonic humor, for example, an allusion to "an uncatalogued collection of materials on coconuts, deposited by Reginald Child, author of a standard work on that subject." Another amusing anecdote is the story of the origins of collecting in Hispanic Studies: Thomas Bodley and his librarian, Thomas James ("a fiercely Puritan polemicist"), were eager to get an index of works condemned by the Spanish Inquisition to use as a desiderata list.

The guide lacks any serious critical analysis, perhaps inevitable in a work that pays tribute to donors and patrons. It is a rather uncomfortable hybrid of reference and coffee-table book. A museum-like interest in the book as object is not entirely successfully combined with a praiseworthy attempt to profile collections for educational and research use. Digital collections such as the Wittgenstein archive

are mentioned in passing, but not given special prominence. I also would have welcomed a broader comparative context for the collections. Occasional references are made to other Oxford libraries as well as Cambridge and the British Library, but collections outside the UK are seldom mentioned.

Only the editors themselves, distinguished staff associated with the Bodleian, could explain exactly why a print guide has been published at this particular time, when the Bodleian's Web pages can and do provide much of the same information for researchers. I suspect that most potential scholarly users are al-

ready familiar with the Bodleian's general strengths in their areas and would likely seek more detailed guides, inventories, and catalogs for research purposes. As for general readers, it strikes me that they are not particularly interested in reading about library collections, although Cambridge recently came out with a book celebrating its own treasures (*Cambridge University Library: The Great Collections*. Cambridge: CUP, 1998). Most academic libraries in North America probably will want a copy of the Bodleian guide for the record, even though its practical utility remains to be seen.—*Jean Alexander, Carnegie Mellon University.*