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Despite this difficult year, the Friends have continued to support the Library to secure new items, undertake vital conservation work, and digitise more of our fantastic collections, making them accessible worldwide. On behalf of all at Cambridge University Libraries, thank you.

I joined Cambridge University Libraries as the new Membership Manager in November 2020. As I’m sure you can imagine, it’s been a challenging time to start a role without being able to settle into a new office, meet colleagues in the tea room, or orientate myself within the labyrinth of corridors and stairwells. But the last couple of months have also shown me what a privilege it is to work at an institution as remarkable as the Library. It has been particularly heartening to see the huge effort made collectively by staff, who have responded quickly and frequently as Covid-19 restrictions have changed over the year. The Library is continuing to provide outstanding remote access to millions of the resources in our collections, and developing new ways of providing support to students and researchers. This work is made possible by the continued generosity of the Friends.

Last year, our Friends programme ranged from tours of the historical print room, exhibition centre and conservation studios to our first virtual event: a lecture from Mark Purcell at our summer celebration. This year, we are continuing with our new digital programme so our Friends around the world can keep up with the Library’s exhibitions, events and ongoing projects from home. I am particularly excited to see our new digital exhibition, Ghost Words: Reading the Past – you may recall that the Friends supported the purchase of the Codex Zacynthius in 2014, featured in the exhibition, and contributed funds for multi-spectral imaging of the Library’s collection of palimpsests.

In our Friends Bulletin, you’ll find a spotlight on the work of the Polonsky Foundation Greek Manuscripts Conservation team and a behind-the-scenes look at the Women at Cambridge portraits exhibition, as well as information on acquisitions supported by the Friends and a lockdown update from the Map department. We enclose our Annual Report alongside the Friends Bulletin, and I hope you enjoy reading about some of the fantastic projects taking place at the Library.

Despite ongoing uncertainty around the pandemic, I am confident that the Friends will grow and adapt, and I look forward to an enjoyable year ahead at the Library. We want to be able to welcome you back as soon as it is safe to do so and I hope to meet many of you in-person in the future, but until then, you can reach me at friends@lib.cam.ac.uk

HEATHER BOOTON, MEMBERSHIP MANAGER

Writers, readers, researchers, scholars, book-lovers, students past and present: the Friends of Cambridge University Libraries are a warm and vibrant community.
FACING THE WORLD

Take a look behind-the-scenes at the making of the Women at Cambridge portraits exhibition, which ran alongside The Rising Tide: Women at Cambridge.

In October 2019, The Rising Tide: Women at Cambridge opened at the University Library: a programme of exhibitions and events focused on women’s roles in the history of the University of Cambridge, from foundation to the present day. A major exhibition, curated by Dr Lucy Delap and Dr Ben Griffin, was held in the University Library’s Milstein Exhibition Centre and visited by over 50,000 people. The displays focused on the lived experiences of women at the University, the ongoing fight for equal educational rights, recognition, and inclusion in university activities, and the careers of some of the women who shaped the institution.

Alongside the exhibition, the Library installed a series of portraits of women from Cambridge’s illustrious past, co-curated by University Librarian Dr Jessica Gardner and Public Programming Assistant Holly Pines. The project took almost two years from conception to completion and required vast amounts of research in the University and College archives.

The project began with a list of significant women since the University’s founding in 1209, using the University archives and portrait databases. Some of the first women of significance were the founders or benefactors of colleges, such as Lady Margaret Beaufort, Dame Joyce Frankland and Lady Elizabeth de Clare. As Holly moved through the years towards the establishment of Girton College in 1869, more women became prominent. These included women like Emily Davies, Joan Pernel Strachey and Marion Kennedy, who were involved in the creation of the new women’s colleges, and often had already created a name for themselves within the sphere of the women’s rights movement. Amazing stories of women coming first in their year groups, women who formed the Girton Fire Brigade and women who had to do their exams separately in the houses of academics made the research process particularly rewarding.

The initial list of potential portraits of women to include in the exhibition ran to thirty-two pages. This document was whittled down to roughly forty women, with Jess, Holly and Dr Chris Burgess meeting regularly to hone the selection. The final exhibition consisted of twenty-six portraits, borrowed from a plethora of colleges and departments. The University Library has also purchased an artwork by Leonora Saunders of Dorothy Garrod, the first female Oxbridge Professor, which remains on display in the building.
Three portraits were also commissioned specifically for the project: two photographs, and one painting. The photographs featured the Gonville and Caius Joyce Frankland Feminist Society, which hangs next to the portrait of Joyce Frankland, and the CUSU Women’s Officer Kate Litman. The third commission, a painting by contemporary artist Caroline Walker, depicts female scientists working on lung stem cell research at the Wellcome Trust/ Cancer Research UK Gurdon Institute and is part of Walker’s ongoing series of paintings of women at work.

Throughout, Jess and Holly wanted to ensure a balance between household names and portraits of lesser-known women. More prominent women include Rosalind Franklin (whose work on crystallography was central to the understanding of the molecular structures of DNA), Jocelyn Bell Burnell (the astrophysicist who discovered radio pulsars in 1967) and Dorothy Hodgkin (who won the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 1964, and is the only British female scientist to have been awarded it). Lesser-known trailblazers included Lettice Ramsey, a photographer who ran a successful studio in the 1930s and photographed the Bloomsbury Group, and Caroline Mary Ridding, who was a Sanskrit and Pali scholar and the second woman to be employed by Cambridge University Library.

Having these portraits hang in the corridor of the University Library provides a visual representation of how women have been and continue to be at the centre of Cambridge’s evolution.

HOLLY PINES
Public Programmes Assistant

HAVING THESE PORTRAITS HANG IN THE CORRIDOR OF THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY PROVIDES A VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF HOW WOMEN HAVE BEEN AND CONTINUE TO BE AT THE CENTRE OF CAMBRIDGE’S EVOLUTION.”

HOLLY PINES
Public Programmes Assistant
THE CONSERVATORS’ CHALLENGE

Our Polonsky Greek Manuscript Conservators have conserved hundreds of medieval and early-modern Greek and Eastern Mediterranean manuscripts this year. This is no simple task; they are each estimated to require over two hundred hours of complex conservation treatment.

Cambridge University Libraries have launched a two-year collaborative project with the University of Heidelberg. The Polonsky Foundation Greek Manuscripts Project aims to preserve, conserve, digitise and catalogue all the Greek manuscripts in Cambridge, Heidelberg and the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana in Rome. Housed in fourteen institutions across Cambridge, the books we are looking at range from Medieval Christian manuscripts in early Mediterranean bindings to eighteenth-century treatises in nineteenth-century bindings, covering a wide variety of subjects from religion to science. Our goal is to stabilise these manuscripts for digitisation and make them available for readers once more.

Let’s take a closer look at the work on one of these manuscripts. MS Dd.4.39 is an eleventh-century psalter in a Northern European binding, covered in brown reversed tanned skin, and consisting of 364 parchment folios. Various elements of the original text are missing, though some have been replaced with folios from a later manuscript. No sewing structure remained, other than helical sewn spine-fold repairs. There was evidence of past sewing preparations; both V-shaped and pierced sewing holes can be seen along the spine-folds. The presence of two separate techniques suggests the book had been rebound several times. The parchment book block also suffered heavily from cockling, abrasion, tears and losses. Wax deposits can also be found.

Parchment after drying under a light weight following humidification
throughout the book, most likely from a dripping candle. This left a lot of work for the conservators to do to stabilise the manuscript.

As the textblock was completely detached, the binding was simply removed, which meant cleaning and repair of the parchment textblock could start immediately. The first stage involved cleaning the leaves with a soft brush and smoke sponge. The second stage involved removing the hard and brittle animal glue and leather remnants from the spine-folds. In the current structure, the animal glue formed the attachment to the binding along with the endleaves. The glue was removed either mechanically or by using a wheat starch paste poultice which softened the glue so that it could be removed carefully using a spatula.

After cleaning, the conservators could humidify and relax the stiff and cockled parchment. Introducing moisture to the parchment in the form of vapour allowed the parchment to relax and the cockling in the parchment could be reduced by drying the leaves under light weights. This resulted in a less brittle, softer parchment with fewer undulations, allowing the conservators to repair the parchment more effectively.

The repairs were carried out using toned Japanese paper adhered with wheat starch paste. This method was chosen due to the amount of repair that was required. Japanese paper can be very fine and very strong; using strong thin paper allowed the conservators to reduce the ‘bulk’ that may appear if many repairs were conducted in the same area of the textblock. Excessive bulk would affect the mechanics of the book once bound. Other benefits of using Japanese paper for repair is that it can be easily toned to match the parchment’s tone and repairs are quick to do!

Many repairs to the textblock of the psalter were conducted along the spine-folds and the fore-edge bottom corner of the leaves. The repaired manuscript has now been fully conserved and rebound, and will be made available to readers once more.

This project is taking place thanks to the generous funding of the Polonsky Foundation.

SAMUEL FOLEY
Project Conservator

If you’d like to know more about the projects and the important work taking place, email friends@lib.cam.ac.uk
WITH YOUR SUPPORT

Friends of Cambridge University Libraries continue to make important purchases of rare books, manuscripts, and items of historical significance for the Library.

Sister E. B. Taylor’s WWI Album amicorum

While we have paid tribute to NHS staff and other key workers in the current pandemic by bashing pans, drawing rainbows and painting thanks on the road, the final acquisition to arrive at the Library before we left the building offers a personal tribute to a nurse of a previous era. Purchased with the support of the Friends, this quarto-sized album belonged to a nurse during World War I, Sister E. B. Taylor. Sister Taylor kept this album with her during her service and asked her patients to contribute to it. Its pages are covered with notes, poems and sketches by over 100 wounded soldiers from across the Commonwealth, and from a number of different regiments including the Black Watch, Rifle Brigade, the Suffolks, Gordon Highlanders, Sherwood Foresters, Highland Light Infantry, Northumberland Fusiliers, Australian Imperial Forces, and Canadian Field Artillery.

A century on, this unassuming book offers a vivid and evocative first-hand insight into the military and medical experience of the First World War and a precious souvenir of the pre-history of the UL building. We hope to be able to share it more widely with Friends in the future.

We are grateful to the bookseller Deborah Coltham for her permission to use her description as the basis for this account and for the accompanying images.
The Scott family’s architectural drawings

Thanks to the generosity of the Friends, the Library has acquired a group of over three hundred plans, elevations and other architectural drawings. The collection was assembled by the late architectural historian Gavin Stamp and includes drawings by George Gilbert Scott Junior (1863) and his son, Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, the architect of the University Library. This new acquisition allows us to place our material relating directly to the Library building in a broader context.

The collection has been described as representing a ‘fragment of an office’, and the variety of the types of drawing – design, presentation, contract and working – which it comprises throw valuable light on the Scotts’ professional practice. A significant proportion of the collection consists of details of interior decoration, some drawn at full-size, and including designs for the letter-forms to be used in inscriptions. The George Gilbert Scott Jnr drawings were created in the course of projects pursued during the 1870s and 1880s, and those with local or regional connections include work on St Andrew’s church in Cherry Hinton, the Catholic church of St John the Baptist (now the cathedral) in Norwich, Garboldisham Manor in Norfolk, and St Peter’s church, Ipswich (a charming presentation drawing for the West gate in pen and coloured washes, c. 1883). The Giles Gilbert Scott drawings date chiefly from the early decades of the twentieth century, and relate principally to church buildings, many of them in London, although the range extends from an elevation drawing and plan of the Aswan hydro-electric station in Egypt, and a survey drawing of Victoria Tower in the Palace of Westminster, to designs for a Post Office pillar box and traffic signs.

∆ Construction of the University Library tower in July 1933 (Cam.a.934.2)
Throughout lockdown, Ian Pittock, Assistant Librarian in the Map department, has catalogued his way through the boxes of postcards in the Library.

“Today’s journey with the Map Department’s postcard collection…” or words to this effect have been a welcome companion as I’ve logged my progress on Twitter through several boxes of old uncatalogued postcards from the Map Department’s collections. It started as a bit of a novelty, but over the last year it has become a daily comfort to pick out cards of interest and compile them together as a fun travelogue for those of us at home.

The Map Department collections include thousands of postcards. Most of the postcards are topographic views but some show the interiors of buildings (stately homes, churches), and there is also a sub-collection of postcards with maps on them, usually maps specially drawn for this medium but also including some with reproductions of other maps (facsimiles).

Before leaving the Library building back in March, we each took with us a number of boxes to work on at home. Each box was full of postcards from across the world and often in no order at all, so it sometimes took a bit of investigation to work out where it is that we are looking at. The process, however, is rewarding and at times educational, and the current situation has given us a perfect opportunity to dig into the collection.

This view of Sullivan Square Elevated Terminal in Charlestown, Massachusetts is no exception and also gives us a glimpse into the postcard’s main purpose: conveying a message to those who are not with you. In times such as these, simple enduring themes, such as the need for human contact even over long distances become all the more powerful. During this period of isolation and restricted travel many of us will have been forced to give up our plans or have relatives and friends who are themselves shielding or staying at home. For me, these postcards offer a window into places both familiar and unknown and an opportunity to sightsee and explore from afar. It’s been therapeutic and rewarding to share these images and I’ve had some lovely comments from those who have followed me along the way.

We annotate the cards with country and place name, and on our return to work in the Library, they will be filed away in order of country and place within that country in filing cabinets. The collection is truly vast: a treasure trove waiting to be unlocked!

IAN PITTOCK
Assistant Librarian (Map Department)
LOOKING FORWARD

This year has been a year like no other and we are hugely grateful for the support of our Friends. There are plenty of opportunities to get involved with the Library and our community of Friends, so do have a look at the details below. We hope to see you soon.

Exhibitions
Our current exhibition, supported by the Friends, is available to view virtually. Ghost Words: Reading the Past explores the lost texts and hidden histories beneath the recycled manuscripts known as palimpsests. Medieval scribes reused old books by scraping the parchment clean and writing a fresh text over the top, and scholars have long sought to decipher the manuscripts. This exhibition examines the quest to retrieve these ghost words. View online at https://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/ghostwords

Events
This year, without physical events, the Friends have begun a new programme of online events and exhibitions. As we move forward, we are expanding our digital offering to provide a range of new content exclusively for the Friends. If you’d like to find out more about this, do sign up to our e-newsletter for all the latest information in the meantime. Friends are also warmly invited to all of our Library events, and you can check the diary on the What’s On page: www.lib.cam.ac.uk/whats-on. We are looking forward to welcoming you back to the Library in the future!

Contact us
We are always keen to hear from you, with your stories, feedback, and questions, or if you’d like to recommend a new Friend or an idea for an event, get in touch. Friends of Cambridge University Library can be reached at friends@lib.cam.ac.uk.

“THIS YEAR HAS BEEN A YEAR LIKE NO OTHER AND WE ARE HUGELY GRATEFUL FOR THE SUPPORT OF OUR FRIENDS.”
HEATHER BOOTON, Membership Manager

Become a Patron
Now is an exciting time to consider becoming a Patron of Cambridge University Libraries. Our Patrons provide vital support, and their generosity directly funds research, conservation, acquisitions, and exhibitions amongst other crucial aspects of the Library’s work. Patrons have a unique relationship with the Library, based on your own individual interests. Get in touch with Heather (friends@lib.cam.ac.uk) if you’d like to discuss more.

Friends of Cambridge University Library can be reached at friends@lib.cam.ac.uk.