



# A Vision for the Future of Cambridge University Libraries

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UNIVERSITY OF  
CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Libraries

## Foreword: A City of Books

Dr Jessica Gardner, University Librarian



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Cambridge University Libraries sit at the heart of the University. We are proud to be one of the world's greatest libraries, caretakers of incredible collections that transform our understanding of the world around us.

Our collections, like the knowledge they contain, are vast. Housing millions of physical and digital books, maps, manuscripts, photographs and other objects, we are home to 4,000 years of the written word in more than 2,000 languages. We operate from a growing network of 25 libraries across the University, including iconic Giles Gilbert Scott research library, the largest building in the University.

We continue to grow, with hundreds of books arriving every week through our legal deposit status, which means we receive a print or electronic copy of every publication in UK and Ireland. To name but a few, it is our privilege to care for Newton and Darwin's handwritten papers, a beautiful copy of the Gutenberg Bible, and 4,572 copies of works of Shakespeare, from the historic 1623 First Folio to a 2019 textbook edition of Romeo and Juliet.

We are a city of books. And as Shakespeare wrote, "What is the city but the people?"

On any given day our libraries are home to thousands of students, researchers and visitors (physical and digital) – all with their own unique experience of our expertise, spaces and collections.

In the magnificent University Library alone, on any one day you might encounter in the Tea Room: an author writing a children's book on dinosaurs; a visiting academic bringing a medieval manuscript to prominence on social media; a biographer using 20th century newspapers in her upcoming book about a female detective agency; an archivist co-authoring an academic paper about Jewish-Christian interaction in 13<sup>th</sup> England.

This city of books is a constantly evolving factory of ideas across every discipline imaginable.

We are (as Darwin would be thrilled to hear) in evolution mode. The world in which we deliver our mission is moving fast, as is Cambridge. We are refreshing our strategy to allow us to focus our time and energy on the changing needs of our academics, students and visitors. scholarship, digital advances and the changing needs of students learning in the 21st century.

Today, while we owe continuing responsibility and care to our great collections and spaces, we are also looking to accelerate support for digital education and research, and the needs of our digital collections. Our new vision sets out a future that is ours to shape together, for our own generation and for those follow us.

## A Vision for the Future of the University Libraries

**Founded in 1416 as the common library for the scholars, today, Cambridge University Libraries provide expertise, partnership, services and collections that underpin the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.**

From their beginning to support a small community of scholars, the Libraries' mission has expanded to reach new audiences across the world, and our collections and expert staff aid research throughout global academia.

Within the University, the Libraries are a bed-rock for the best in learning and scholarship. The University's mission to deliver excellence in education and research would not be possible without the support of the Libraries, and our highly skilled staff. The main University Library is also home to the University's own archive – the very history of Cambridge itself. In this way, the Libraries' provides a vital link between our past and our present, reminding us that we are old because we are excellent and because we continue to innovate.

In an increasingly digital age, the University Libraries are called upon to act as drivers of innovation, providing vital skills and resources to catalyse new research and learning. The advances in the way ideas are stimulated and how knowledge is captured and shared have transformed how we collect, preserve and make information accessible to the world. Libraries are at the heart of this change.

Our vision for the future of the University Libraries is to harness the power and potential of the digital age to transform the cultivation and sharing of knowledge. Our vision for the University Libraries identifies a set of top priorities to help us achieve this future, from delivering an unrivalled education and student experience to becoming a partner in research and sharing collections and knowledge openly with the world. Central to this vision is continuing to ensure our approach is informed by deep subject knowledge and a commitment to provide services and spaces that are tailored and integrated closely into the teaching, learning and research of faculties and departments.

All the strands of our vision are designed to help us achieve these aims. With a philosophy of openness and a generous spirit of collaboration, we strive to deliver a flexible and inclusive working environment for the benefit of our students, scholars, staff - and the world.



## An unrivalled education and student experience

**The University Libraries play a crucial role in supporting excellence in teaching, learning and the student experience at Cambridge.**

We are dedicated to helping students gain the skills to fulfil their potential both within Cambridge and beyond, and strive to provide flexible services to help students navigate the University. Our subject-specialist staff work in close collaboration with academics and college libraries to support students from all backgrounds with their access and transition to the University, and to build an inclusive, accessible learning environment underpinned by an understanding of the different requirements of different academic disciplines. We aim to empower students at all levels to own their intellectual journeys and discoveries, and to equip them with transferable skills in information and data management to aid their transition from University to the workplace.

However, as the way people learn and access information is revolutionised by the advent of increasingly sophisticated digital technologies, so too are the needs of our library users adapting and evolving. Changes in social infrastructure, too, are increasingly impacting our work – the demise of libraries, both public and school, means it is increasingly common for students to arrive at University without the necessary skills to navigate a large library. Even where this is not the case, most new undergraduates, whilst equipped with a wide range of digital skills, are unfamiliar with using original digital resources. The University Libraries play a crucial role in plugging these skill gaps and enabling students to unlock the full wealth of resources available to them.

The digital revolution means that students now have access to more information than ever before, but many lack the skills to manage it. They struggle to shape research questions, to critically appraise sources in an age of fake news, and to navigate original source material. This means that not only are the needs of our users changing, the level of support they require is also increasing.

**Our strategic commitments towards this goal are to:**



**Collaborate** across the collegiate University to support educational excellence and help pioneer innovation in learning and teaching.



**Ensure the development and delivery** of a comprehensive and integrated set of services for all students; services which are user-focused, inclusive and increasingly digitally enhanced and which are informed by evidence of the changing needs of learning and teaching and an understanding of the needs of different academic disciplines.



**Support** students in their access and transition to University, and to help students from all backgrounds gain skills that will help them fulfil their potential within Cambridge's world-leading research-rich educational environment and beyond.

## A partner in research

**Cambridge University Libraries also form part of a national and global research infrastructure.**

As a Legal Deposit Library, we hold a copy of every UK and Ireland publication, keeping the intellectual record of the nation and ensuring it is preserved for future generations. The main University Library has one of the largest open collections in Europe – more than two million volumes available to browse on open shelves, giving our readers the benefit of serendipitous discovery as well as direct access to the books they need – and our electronic library is available 24 hours a day from anywhere in the world.

We believe that the findings of publicly funded research should be free and easy to access, and our subject-specific staff are adept at supporting researchers to not only access the information that is relevant to them, but to share their own research with the world. We will lead on embedding the principles and practices of Open Research into the core of the University, and support and advocate for advances in digital and data-driven scholarship.

Our collections inspire new research opportunities and strategic partnerships both within Cambridge and beyond. This extends to unexpected collections with great research value – in 2018, a Margaret Thatcher puppet and scripts, tapes and the unbroadcast script and video tape for the pilot episode of Spitting Image took their place alongside the works of Newton and Darwin. Our ambition is now to build on and amplify this existing work to make the Libraries partners in, as well as supporters of, research.

**Our strategic commitments towards this goal are to:**



**Work in collaboration** across the University to provide services and training to support research excellence and innovation. This includes leadership to help embed the principles and practice of Open Research, and support advances in digital and data-driven scholarship.



**Continue to acquire** and make discoverable and accessible world-class information resources that enable the generation of new knowledge.



**Maximise opportunities** for research collaboration, research income and research impact arising from our expertise, influence and the convening power of our outstanding collections.

## Sharing our collections and knowledge openly with the world

In addition to our work within Cambridge, there is tremendous energy and appetite at the University Libraries to foster links with the wider community, and to broaden access to our unique collections.

Our social and cultural responsibilities as custodians of world heritage are at the heart of our mission to make the University Libraries open and accessible to all, and we strive to be innovative, creative and inclusive in endeavouring to achieve this. Central to this vision is maximizing free online access to our collections, and as we work to be innovative pioneers of digital curation, we hope that more and more will be available online, thus widening access to the global academic community. The Cambridge Digital Library plays a key role in helping us to achieve this vision. Since its launch in 2011 it has received more than 18 million visits. It has revolutionised access to some of our most treasured and important collections, including the papers of Sir Isaac Newton and Charles Darwin, with some notable successes: Stephen Hawking's PhD thesis was downloaded more than 60,000 times in the first 12 hours after it was uploaded to the Library.

Opening and sharing our collections with the world is also part of our ongoing mission to widen participation in the Library's activities, locally and globally, and to make it an inclusive and welcoming institution. Recent exhibitions, for example, Black Cantabs: History Makers and Queering the UL, have used the Library's collections to reflect upon the changing social landscape of the University, and to spark discussion and debate around topical issues. Further afield, we are working to build links with communities about whom our collections contain material.

Our strategic commitments towards this goal are to:



**Be an exemplar** for openness and inclusion in our engagement with staff, students and society through an ambitious public engagement programme and partnership with colleges and the University museums.



**Make a leading contribution** to the University's mission to society through maximising free online access to collections and opening up the historic University Library building to a wider public.



**Work in partnership** across the collegiate University to lead and steer the University Libraries' social and cultural responsibilities as custodians of collections of world heritage.

## An integrated digital and physical environment

**Accessible, inspiring and enabling working spaces, both digital and physical, underpin all our work to support education and research at the University Libraries.**

Even as we enter an increasingly digital age, the importance of the Libraries as physical spaces for learning, research and collaboration is continuously reinforced by our users. So, too, is continued investment in physical resources – particularly books and journals – and the development of inspiring spaces in which to use them. At the same time, as technological advances have changed forever how we work, learn and study, we are committed to delivering the best of both digital and physical resources to our users, with an integrated approach balancing the mutual benefits of both.

Our strategic commitments towards this goal are to:

- **Increase investment** in digital initiatives (e.g. infrastructure, services, resources and skills) to support the University's agenda for digital enhancement of teaching and learning and the changing needs of research.
- **Provide** inspiring and enabling working environments for library users and library staff, online and in our physical spaces.
- **Expand** our preservation capability to include digital assets and to fulfil our responsibilities as a Legal Deposit and national research library through the effective management and preservation of collections (print and non-print).

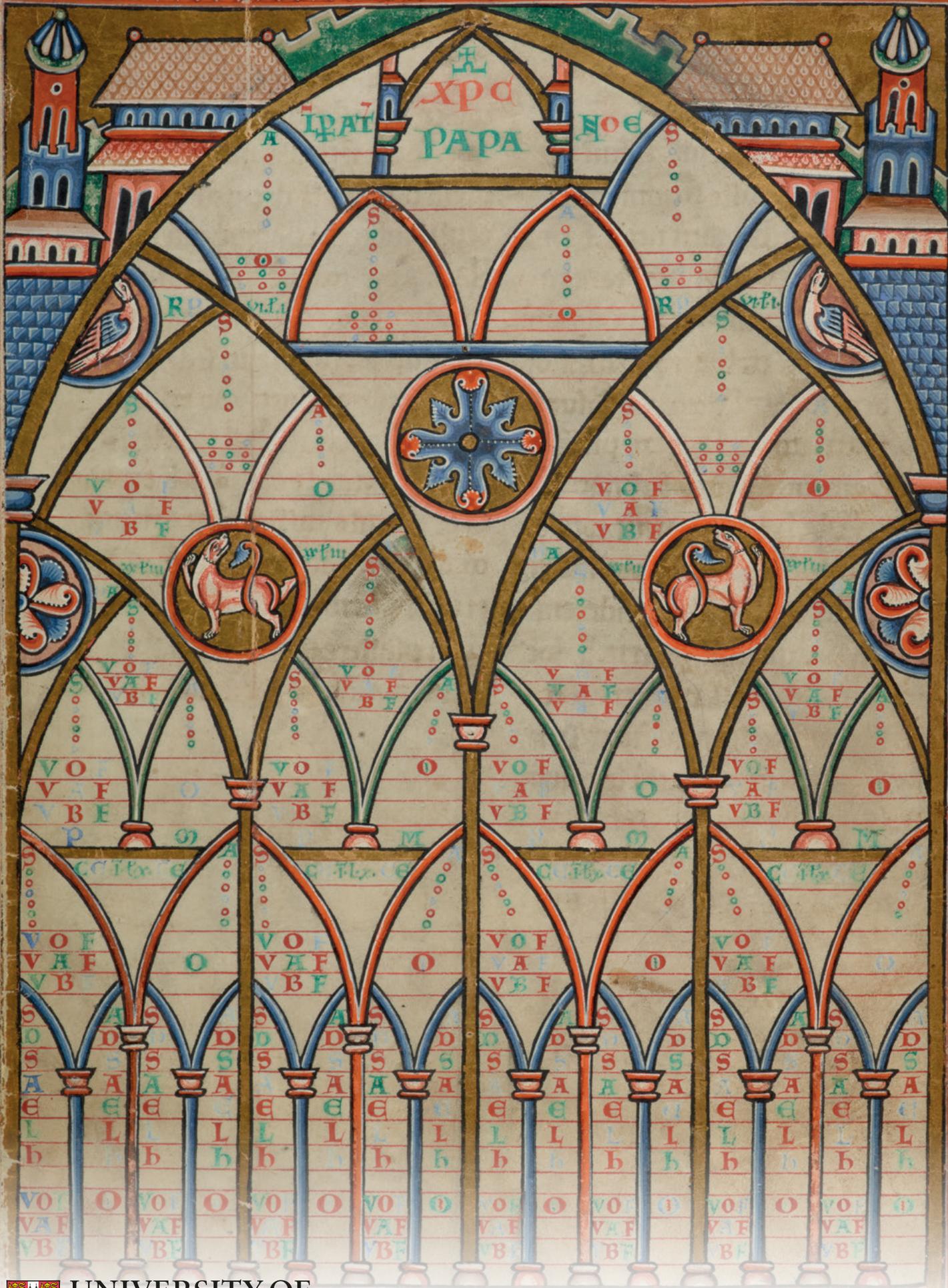
## Strong foundations for the future

**We will provide a network of libraries across Cambridge which are able respond to the localised needs of their students, researchers and visitors, while benefitting from the resilience and expertise which come from a professional community of more than 400 expert staff.**

Cambridge University Libraries must invest in long-term stewardship: we must cherish what has been inherited, look after it, and then pass it on to the next generation in the best shape possible. In doing so, we ensure not only that our existing collections are maintained and used, but also that people are encouraged to place their collections and archives with us, to be studied and researched for generations to come.

Our strategic commitments towards this goal are to:

- **Strengthen** common purpose and community across the network of University Libraries and work in close partnership with the college libraries towards shared goals for education, teaching and learning.
- **Demonstrate** our ability to prioritise effectively in alignment with the University's academic vision and achieve financial transparency and long-term financial sustainability.
- **Work towards** a more flexible, diverse and inclusive working environment and foster a research and learning culture that looks outward, compares and shares ideas and encourages innovation to achieve our aims.



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MS. Ff.1.27, p. 238: 'The Image of the Church': probably the earliest Gothic illumination in English art, made in Durham round 1190. Given to the University Library by Archbishop Matthew Parker in 1574.