
Gladstone's Library

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Gladstone's Library, St Deiniol's

Gladstone's Library is a unique resource for librarians and scholars, and one which I think has slipped below the radar of many people in the sector. This short article provides some background information about the library and identifies what it has to offer to SCONUL members and the communities we serve. My own involvement with the library began only in 2009 and I have since been delighted to become a trustee. However, information for this piece has come largely from the article by Annette Lewis, Development Officer at the Gladstone Library, which you may have seen in *CILIP update* in August 2012 and on the library's own website, <http://www.gladstoneslibrary.org/>

The library is based in Hawarden, a small town about six miles outside Chester and 15 minutes by car from the M56. Anyone wishing to contact or visit the library should visit the website or call 01244 532350.

BACKGROUND

The name 'Gladstone's Library' refers to a Victorian building which not only contains an imposing library (pictured above) but also offers residential accommodation, meeting rooms, a chapel and a restaurant. William Gladstone founded the library in 1894 by donating his

private collection of books, with the intention of supporting ‘the pursuit of divine learning’. He had attended the funeral of Edward Pusey in 1882, where the idea of founding a library based around Pusey’s books was discussed. After the funeral Gladstone returned home to Hawarden and came to the conclusion that, as he had a larger and more widely ranging collection than Pusey, his books could also form the basis of a library. Friends and colleagues suggested that he donate his collection to the Bodleian Library – he had been a student at Oxford and Member of Parliament for Oxford University – or to the London Library, where he was an active trustee. However, he was keen that the library should go somewhere that was not already well served or well known as a centre of learning and therefore chose his home village of Hawarden, which was within easy reach by rail of Manchester and Liverpool, both rapidly growing new cities. The books that formed the original library were wheeled in a barrow from his home in Hawarden Castle to a corrugated iron building known as the Tin Tabernacle and were arranged using his own cataloguing system – still in use today. Following his death in 1898 the present library was built as the National Memorial to Gladstone, so forming the only prime-ministerial library in Britain.

COLLECTIONS AND LIBRARY SERVICES



Gladstone Library reading areas

The core of the library is the approximately 32 000 items from Gladstone’s own collection. Many of these books contain Gladstone’s annotations, giving a unique and valuable insight into his reading of the books. The library also houses most of Gladstone’s non-political correspondence, speeches and papers. In addition to this initial collection the library now contains over 250 000 items, specialising in theology and Victorian studies, but also including a wide-ranging collection of material on history, politics and culture and a growing collection of books on Islamic studies. Among the manuscripts held by the library

are Sir Stephen Glynne’s Church Notes and the Glynne-Gladstone Manuscripts, which are administered by the Flintshire Record Office. The latter collection consists of over 250 000 items of family letters and estate, household and business papers relating to the Gladstone and Glynne families and forms a complementary collection to the Gladstone political papers held by the British Library. At the heart of the library’s mission is its commitment to maintaining Gladstone’s legacy of engagement with social, moral and spiritual questions. The books and other materials are seen as central to informing this mission.

For many years Gladstone’s own books have been dispersed throughout the larger collections. However, a new project has been established to re-assemble the original collection in the History Room of the library, thus creating what has been called the Gladstone Foundation Collection. The project provides the library with the opportunity to showcase Gladstone’s collection and afford scholars an insight into the mind of one of the great Victorian polymaths, enabling them to see the connections he made between topics such as Homer and the New Testament, as well as his insights into the situations in Afghanistan, Ireland and the Balkans. The room will provide a focal point for many visitors and will also contain items of Gladstone memorabilia that are preserved by the library. Gladstone’s own library is available via a dedicated catalogue, known as GladCat, also available online. As Annette Lewis said in her CILIP article, the catalogue is valuable both to Gladstone scholars and to students of nineteenth-century literature and culture.

RESIDENTIAL AND MEETING SPACE

The oak-panelled rooms occupied by the library manage to combine a scholarly and relaxing library environment with a range of up-to-date services, including free wi-fi and social seating areas. The permanent staff posts are supplemented by volunteers and interns who provide help and advice to library users. The library has appointed Dr Louisa Yates to the new post of Director of Collections and Research, with specific responsibility for promotion and strategic leadership of library services and for further enhancing the library’s role and reputation as a pro-active centre of research for theology and the liberal arts.



Residential accommodation



The Gladstone Room

Although the collections are at the heart of the library, this is much more than a library, as it offers residential and meeting facilities, with a café/restaurant called 'Food for thought'. In addition to the very beautiful oak-panelled library there is a range of comfortable rooms which can be booked at individual or residential group rates, and the library has meeting rooms that can accommodate medium-sized and smaller groups, including a meeting room with internet access that accommodates about 24, a smaller meeting room for about 16 and a couple of rooms for small meetings and training seminars that can accommodate half a dozen people. In addition, the chapel can be made available for lectures, retreats and services and accommodates about 40 people.

CONCLUSION

I hope this short article has given readers some idea of the riches housed in this unique library. I believe that SCONUL members would benefit from getting to know the library, both for its rich collections and for the residential and meeting spaces available. The library is not set up to manage large conferences or groups, but it does offer a peaceful environment for smaller residential meetings or for individual scholarly work.