

LIBRARY REPORT

For the period September to December 2016

Thomas Manning Archive

The Librarian and Archivist delivered a joint lecture on the Manning Archive at a conference at the Courtauld Institute on 12 November, “The Inexplicable and the Unfathomable: China and Britain, 1600-1900”. The lecture was well received and has led to further research interest in the collection.

RAS Archives

In the last few months the Archivist has sorted and listed all the material pertaining to the RAS major anniversaries – the centenary, sesquicentenary, and the 160th and 175th celebrations. This will facilitate planning for the forthcoming 200th Anniversary as the material on previous celebrations is now organized and accessible. The Archivist has also commenced work on the Papers of Brian Houghton Hodgson, preparing them for cataloguing to Archives Hub. This work will continue in 2017. Further progress has been made in planning towards sorting the current and historic records of the RAS with the Archivist currently working out a schema for their appraisal and listing.

It has been a season for training, The Archivist and one volunteer attended free training for the new Archives Hub catalogue, ensuring that they were up-to-date with the changes in its functionality. The new system is now active and both the Archivist and volunteer have started to use it.

The Archivist also attended a one-day training session at the British Library on Archival Management of Oral History Collections. This gave insight into proper handling and care of oral histories once produced, alongside practical instruction on such things as audio formats, copyright, and recording agreements. The Archivist has since created a draft Oral History Recording Agreement Form and Explanatory Leaflet, in readiness for future oral history projects.

The third training day which the Archivist attended was “Making progress with digital preservation,” run by the Digital Preservation Coalition. [...] Since attending the training, the Archivist has begun work on a Digital Preservation Policy.

Explore Your Archives week ran in the middle of November. Once again we held a creative writing workshop run by Dr Emma Filtness, Lecturer in Creative Writing at Brunel University. This year the theme was “Writ in Water”, and participants were encouraged to respond to some of the water-themed material in our collections. We had a total of 13 participants, only 2 of whom had visited the RAS before. Among the participants we welcomed students from Brunel University, SOAS, and the American University in

Richmond, academics from Brighton and Cambridge Universities, a Serbian translator and her daughter, and some RAS Fellows.

Our social media presence continues to grow. We now have almost 3250 followers on Twitter. As mentioned previously, this is an active and engaged audience able to respond to requests for help and provide helpful and informative detail about some of our Collection material. The blog following also continues to grow. At present we have approximately 230 people subscribed to receive our new blog posts.

Donations

In September we received a donation of set of Chinese ‘playing cards’, dated 1863 and a Chinese almanac from Eddie Staunton, a distant relative of George Thomas Staunton.

Users and enquiries

The library was extremely busy in the last months of 2016, with 95 research visits between September and December alone (2015: 52). In total, the library received 233 research visits in 2016 (2015: 164; 2014: 154; 2013: 90).

Library staff also responded to 85 remote enquiries between September and December (2015: 75; 2014: 65). The total number of remote enquiries answered in 2016 was 267 (2015: 212).

The collections most consulted in the last months of the year were Persian manuscripts, the RAS Archive, Manning and Staunton Collections, and our Indian art collections.

Cataloguing

Between September and December we added 976 records to the library online catalogue. This included 469 books and 447 pamphlets. This is slightly down on the same period for 2015 (1236 records). Overall, in 2016 we added 3699 records to the library catalogue, down from 4307 in 2015. The decline can be attributed to the high levels of use of the library service, meaning less staff time for cataloguing; combined with the extra focus on cataloguing the pamphlet collection, as cataloguing this material is generally more time-consuming than cataloguing books.

We continue to make steady progress towards cataloguing the standard-format book sequence, most of which is now completed, and are approaching the halfway point in the pamphlet collection.

Volunteers

We continue to benefit from the help of volunteers. Ian Scholey has divided his time between cleaning Minute Books and organizing our slide collection. The Quaritch Wales and Freya Stark slide collections are now listed and repackaged in photographic quality housing. Ali Syed has continued work on the William Pettigrew Papers which will be online in the next few weeks. Our Twitter followers helped to identify several items in a variety of scripts, which led to the discovery that the Pettigrew papers were mixed up with some of Frederic John Goldsmid, a British Indian Army officer and linguist, and an active member of RAS Council. Therefore it was exciting to discover that we have some material related to him.

We have welcomed Ginte Serenaitė as a volunteer. Ginte recently completed an MA in South Asian Area Studies at SOAS, and has started working on the Papers of Daniel John Gogerly, Methodist missionary in Ceylon and scholar of Buddhism. Amy McCaffrey continues to volunteer with us when work commitments allow. She has been repackaging photographs, and over half of our photographic collections are now properly packaged and catalogued.

Roger Parsons and Ziyad Wanis continue to volunteer to catalogue the main sequence of books. Before Christmas, we also welcomed Sarah Burrell Wong to join our team of volunteers cataloguing library books. Sarah is a qualified librarian who recently re-located to London from Hong Kong.

We continue to be grateful for the services of our NADFAS volunteers who visit to repair and mend books one day per month.

We held a volunteer appreciation evening at the beginning of December as a thank you to present and past volunteers and placement students. Several volunteers shared a few words to the attendees about the work with which they have been involved and the experience they have gained. This was a very enjoyable occasion, well attended by volunteers, who enjoyed the opportunity to meet other volunteers as well as members of Council.

We are considering holding a “Show and Tell” evening in the next few months which would feature several short talks by Volunteers and RAS Council members or Fellows, focusing on items from our collections.

Conservation

Several students from the Camberwell College of Arts MA conservation programme visited with their lecturer to research potential objects to use in their final-year projects in 2017. Four students expressed serious interest in conserving objects from our collections, including:

- 4 Sino-Tibetan maps of holy mountains. There is no provenance or other information about these items other than a translation of their titles from the Chinese. The maps are all on Chinese paper which is very fragile and they have all suffered from tearing and folding.
- 2 C19th squeeze and ink impressions of Indian inscriptions. These are in bad condition with tearing, dirt, discoloration, losses, and folds.
- 2 Tibetan manuscripts. These suffer from frayed edges, discoloration, and tears.

- Elevation of Indian Temple from the Tod Collection (early C19th), which exhibits discoloration and tears.

Reprographic services

There were 1046 digital copies and 20 photocopies made from RAS collections between September and December, for which we charged £163. Of the digital copies produced, 361 were made by staff.

Visits and conferences

The Library hosted a number of visits towards the end of the year. We were delighted that Jim Mallinson included an afternoon at the RAS in the programme of a major workshop for scholars working on Sanskrit manuscripts, part of the European Research Council-funded Hatha Yoga Project. This was a wonderful occasion where we welcomed Sanskrit and Yoga scholars from all over the world.

In October, we welcomed a visit from several scholars working on Mongolian texts who were researching what is available in UK collections. In November, we welcomed several group visits of students from the Courtauld Institute to learn about our Persian manuscripts and Persian miniature painting. We were also grateful to Charles Allen for including a session at the Society as part of a Martin Randall cultural tour, when a group visited to see an exhibition of treasures from our Indian collections.

In September we were honored to welcome a visit from the Malaysian High Commission. We also welcomed Robert Hall, Director of Libraries at Kings College London, and Helena Zhang, Programme Manager at China Exchange, for visits to the Library during September.

The Library hosted special displays of material from the collections in conjunction with David Waterhouse's lecture on Brian Houghton Hodgson, and for the launch of Henry Noltie's biography of Hugh Cleghorn.

We also welcomed a group of conservation students from Camberwell who were researching items for their final project.

Loan from the Horniman Museum

The Horniman Museum loaned the Society a statue of the Daoist deity Zhenwu, and a display case, from 1 September until 6 December. The loan went smoothly and the lecture by Dr Rose Kerr, held in conjunction with the event, was very well-attended. Horniman staff expressed satisfaction with the loan and intimated they would like to do something similar again in future.

Basement

Temperature and humidity conditions have been within acceptable parameters.

Ed Weech
Librarian