

Dana Research Centre and Library visit 23 March 2017

On our arrival at the Dana Research Centre and Library, we were welcomed by Nick Wyatt, Head of Library and Archives for the Science Museum Library. He drew our attention to an imposing painting hanging above the reception desk titled “Launch of the Fuji at Blackwall”. It was the first battleship of the Japanese navy and was built in London. On its launch, a red and white paper balloon hanging from a spar on the bow split open to release a flock of pigeons and thousands of pieces of paper. It was painted by Gerald Maurice Burn in 1896 and is part of the Science Museum Library collection.



The first part of our visit consisted of a presentation by Nick about the history and collections of the Library. It was founded in 1883 as the “Science Library of the South Kensington Museum” and was located on the site of what is now the Victoria and Albert Museum. In 1908 the Library moved to the Royal College of Science building.

In 1899, Samuel Clement Bradford joined the staff of the Science Museum and from 1901 until 1938 he worked in the Library. During his tenure, he turned the Science Museum Library into the National Science Library which housed the largest collection of scientific literature in Europe. He supported the adoption of the Universal Decimal Classification (UDC) and establishment of abstracts for scientific literature. He also developed “Bradford’s law” or the law of scattering regarding differences in demand for scientific journals.

The Library building in the Royal College of Science was demolished in 1969 and the Science Museum Library then moved into Imperial College. In the 1990s it was linked to and managed by Imperial College’s Central Library. In front of the Central Library stands Queen’s Tower which was saved from demolition by Sir John Betjeman in the 1960s.

In 2005–2006 the Science Museum Library was reviewed and the collections were split to release space for the Imperial College Library collections. It was decided that the history and biology of science, technology and medicine collections should remain in London and the science, technology and medicine archives would be moved to Wroughton, an old RAF airfield now owned by the Science Museum Group. The Science Museum’s Library and Archive comprises world-class collections of over half a million items that are stored at Wroughton. Researchers may consult the collections stored there by prior appointment on Fridays only, from 10.00 to 17.00. Small quantities of material can also be ordered for consultation in London at the Dana Research Centre and Library.

In 2014 the Library staff were given two months' notice to clear all the Science Museum Library's holdings from the Imperial College Central Library and move them to Wroughton. No space was immediately available in London but it was eventually decided that a small part of the Library's holdings could be located in the Dana Centre on Queen's Gate, which was built in 2003. Previously an events space and café, the building was refurbished and re-opened in 2015 as the Dana Library and Research Centre bringing together the Science Museum's research and Public History department and access to its library and archive collections.

The second part of our visit was a tour of the new Library. It is a very calm and reflective study space with large windows along one side, partially covered at the top half with a screen modelled on punch cards and the Jacquard loom which is exhibited in the Science Museum. The screen gives a dappled effect within the Library representing the tree from which Sir Isaac Newton's apple fell.



The Library is open to the general public and registration is needed to order and consult books and journals over 100 years old. There are 18 reader study tables and seats and four desks for PCs to access the Library and Archive catalogues and the Library's electronic resources.

Until 2015, the Library shared a catalogue with Imperial College but from November 2015 a new catalogue was installed using Koha. Visitors can consult around 6000 books and journals covering museum studies, the history and biography of science technology and medicine and the philosophical and social aspects of these subjects.

The online collection gives users fast access to over 150,000 objects and archives from the Science Museum, Museum of Science and Industry, National Media Museum and the National Railway Museum. You can access the collection at <http://collection.sciencemuseum.org.uk>. Library and archive material from the Wroughton stores can be ordered in advance.

Highlights of the collection include:

- Drawings and sketchbooks of Charles Babbage (1791-1871), mathematician and computer pioneer.
- Letters from Sir Humphrey Davy (1778-1871), chemist and inventor
- Apollo 11 flight plan signed by Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin
- Archive of Sir Patrick Moore (1923-2012), astronomer, writer and TV presenter

Other items in the collection include works by William Harvey, Albert Einstein and Florence Nightingale.

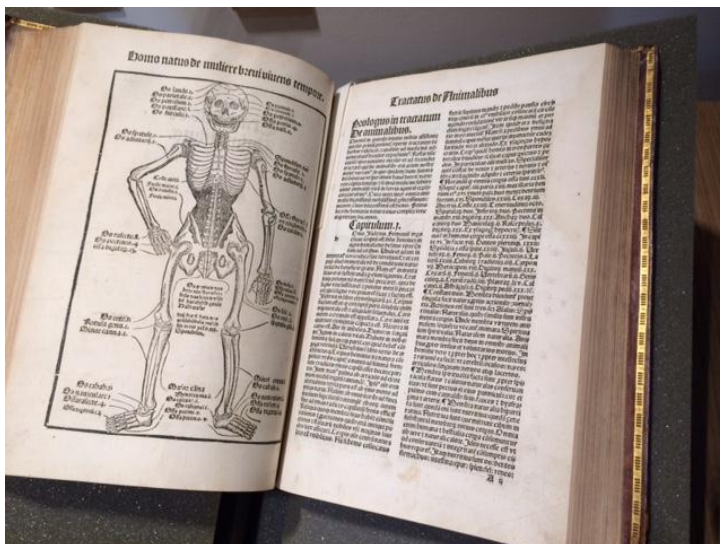
One of the novelties in the Library are the shelf labels which are all produced using a 3D printer.

After looking around the Library, Nick showed us a small display which the Library staff had set up for us which included the following:

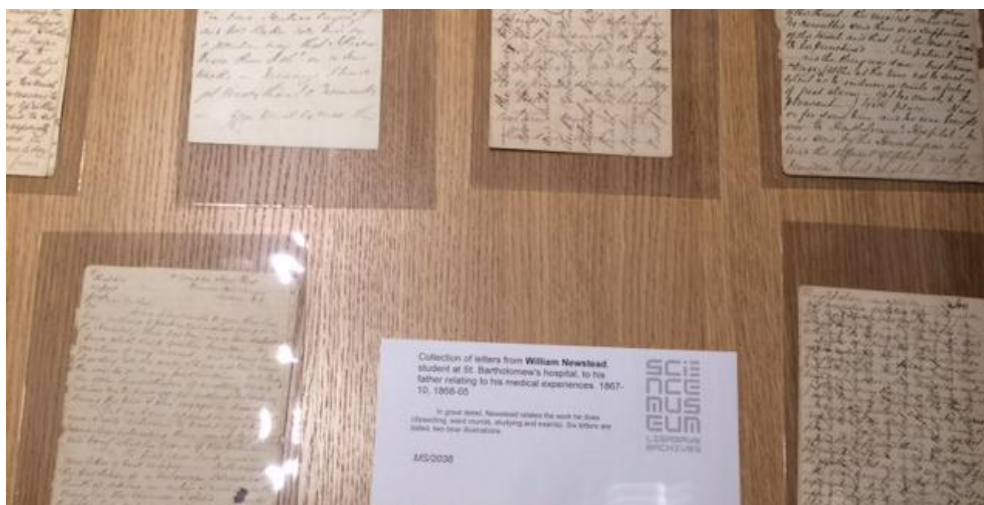
Notes on nursing by Florence Nightingale.



Ortis sanitatis (Garden of Health), Johann Pruss, 1497 woodcut.



Collection of letters from William Newstead, student at St Bartholomew's hospital, to his father relating to his medical experiences.



The final part of the tour took us outside and across a small courtyard into the back entrance of the Science Museum. When we entered the Science Museum, the first display that we were confronted with was the Soyuz spacecraft that Tim Peake returned to Earth in after his time at the International Space Station. It is incredibly small and hard to believe that it transported three people back from space.



Nick showed us a few more exhibits, before returning to the Library and leaving us to wander in around the Museum ourselves.

I would like to thank Nick Wyatt for taking us on a very interesting and informative tour of the Science Museum Library.

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