

## Visit to the Guildhall Library 27 Feb 2017.

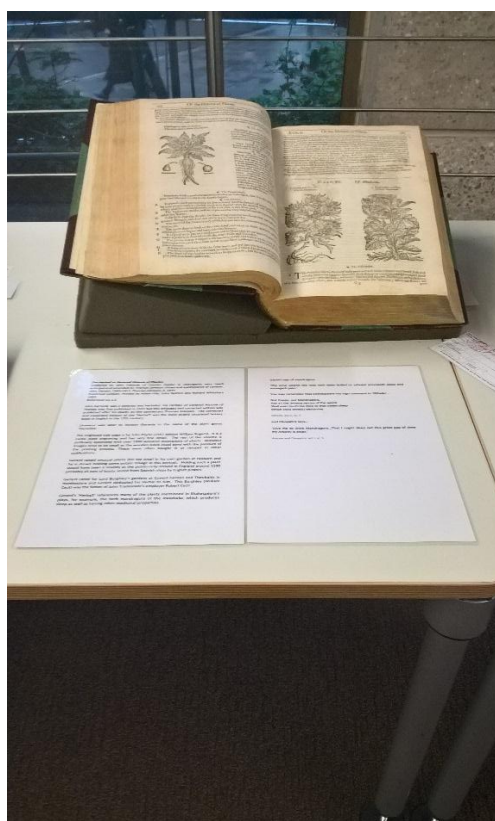
Guildhall Library, administered by the Corporation of London, is a public reference library specialising in the history of London. The founding of the library can be traced to 1425, and the printed books collection comprises over 200,000 titles dating from the 15th to the 21st centuries. The Library aims to cover all aspects of life in London, past and present.

The library also holds significant collections in maritime history, business history, clocks and clockmakers, wine and food, as well as historic English law reports. The special collections include, but are not limited to, materials related to Samuel Pepys, John Wilkes and Thomas More, plus the libraries of the Gardeners' and Fletchers' Companies and Gresham College.

The visit was in two parts. Firstly Jeanie Smith, Assistant Librarian, introduced us to some of the 'treasures' of the collections – some of the older, rarer and more unusual books. Of particular interest to health library staff were John Gerarde's *Herball, or Generall Historie of Plantes*, and a book tabulating the cause of death of Londoners, including the Great Plague. The latter forms part of the collection of London related material and notes causes of death from problems with lites (the lungs), and the stone - kidney stones. Kidney stones were very common in the seventeenth century and the means to remove them were known, but many of those who were operated on died (due to infection). Samuel Pepys famously survived having a kidney stone removed and had it as a keepsake. Gerarde's work was the most widely circulated book on botany in the seventeenth century, Gerarde being both the supervisor of the gardens of Elizabeth I's chief advisor William Cecil (Lord Burghley), and the curator of the physic garden of the College of Physicians. Also, as the collection includes the library of the Worshipful Company of Gardeners, there is a particularly rich selection of books about plants, often with their medicinal attributes. Gerarde's *Herball* also includes plants which were mentioned in Shakespeare's work.



The treasures



Gerarde's Herbal

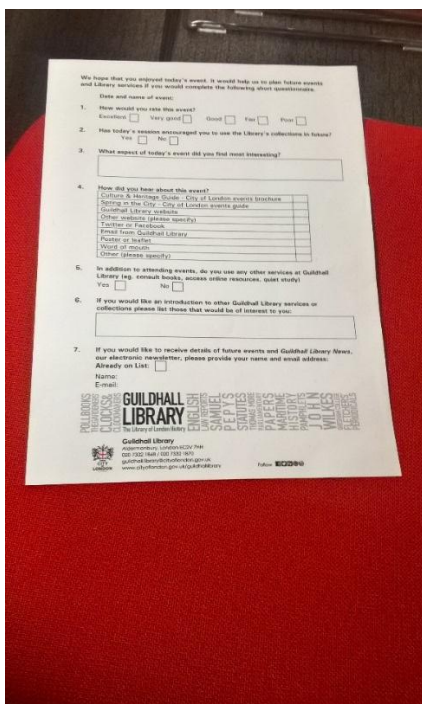
Talking of the Bard, the library also holds a rare edition of Shakespeare's works which includes plays which are now known not to be his work. Many copies of this particular edition were lost in the Great Fire of London in 1666, so this edition is very sought after. Although Guildhall Library has an impressive collection of materials from earlier centuries, it has also had its losses. During the Second World War 200,000 books which had been placed in the crypt of the Guildhall for safekeeping were destroyed by enemy bombing. Somewhat ironically the library itself was not bombed. So if the books had not been moved perhaps they would have survived.

After viewing and discussing the treasures, Jeanie took us for a tour of the public space and also the bookstore. The public space includes an exhibition/ seminar room, a reading room, and outside of the library itself but in the same building, the City of London Police Museum and the City Business Library. There is a core collection of material on the open shelves including books about family history, which are very popular, and there is also extensive selection of its London titles, which range from architecture to shopping to theatre. Readers may order up items, using slips provided by the help desk staff, from the store which are produced without delay in most cases.

There is generally no need for readers to order items in advance of their visit. The vast majority of materials are kept on site. Having used the library as a researcher myself I can vouch for the easy of ordering of, and access to, store materials.

The store itself has in the region of eight kilometers of shelving. We were able to peruse some of the special collections, which include books, marine records, periodicals, and broadsides. We spent quite a bit of time enjoying the food and recipe books that were bequeathed to the library by Elizabeth David, the renowned British cookery writer who inspired a resurgence of interest in the art of home cooking in the twentieth century. Otherwise, I particularly liked the collections of the Illustrated London News. We also saw how the requests for store materials are retrieved and dispatched. As well as the bookstore, the library has a large manuscript store.

I was especially interested in how the library deals with tours from the public. It offers tours of the library and its treasures once a month on a Tuesday for individual members of the public, free of charge, bookable on Eventbrite. Tours can also be [booked by groups](#) at a charge of £5 per person. The tours last 1.5 hours and an evaluation form is given to attendees.



Evaluation form

This was an excellent visit and it was a good opportunity to experience a tour of the library, whereas usually I am organising or giving tours of our own RCN library, exhibition and historic building, and to reflect of the similarities and differences in our offer. Of course it was also great to meet Jeanie and understand more about a library and its collections which I have had the pleasure of using as a researcher. I also enjoyed considering it as a library of London history and comparing it to the London history collection of Bishopsgate Institute, and how these different collections evolved and reflect collection development ideas and practices. In short, I would highly recommend a visit to the Guildhall Library to all LIS professionals.

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