

## Durham Research Online

---

### Deposited in DRO:

15 June 2017

### Version of attached file:

Accepted Version

### Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

### Citation for published item:

Scarre, Geoffrey (2017) 'The compages, the bonds and rivets of the race' : W. E. Gladstone on the keeping of books.', *Library and information history*, 33 (3). pp. 182-194.

### Further information on publisher's website:

<https://doi.org/10.1080/17583489.2017.1334860>

### Publisher's copyright statement:

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor Francis in *Library and information history* on 19/07/2017, available online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/17583489.2017.1334860>.

### Additional information:

## Use policy

---

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a [link](#) is made to the metadata record in DRO
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Please consult the [full DRO policy](#) for further details.

**‘The compages, the bonds and rivets of the race’: W.E. Gladstone on the keeping of books.**

In a retrospect published in 1906, Mary Drew (*née* Gladstone) observed of the late Liberal Prime Minister that ‘[s]o human and personal did any book seem to Mr Gladstone that it gave him real pain to see it carelessly used or ill-treated’.<sup>1</sup> For William Ewart Gladstone, writing in *The Nineteenth Century* in June 1890, a book – any book – ‘consists, like man from whom it draws its lineage, of a body and a soul’.<sup>2</sup> This might at first seem no more than a flowery way of saying that a book can be thought of as informational content embodied in some physical form, which in his day for the most part meant printed paper. But this would be too reductive a reading of Gladstone’s meaning. In the article from which I have quoted Gladstone proceeds to say that ‘books are the voices of the dead. They are a main instrument of communication with the vast human procession of the other world. They are the allies of the thought of man.’<sup>3</sup> As such, they are things – beings, rather – worthy of our love, representatives of the dead (or of the living, in the case of current authors). Like human beings, books present an outward appearance: a volume’s binding or cover is ‘the dress, with which it walks out into the world’.<sup>4</sup> Books teach and instruct, entertain and comfort us, and are ‘second to none, as friends to the individual’; in their company, no one can feel lonely.<sup>5</sup>

This is an undeniably romantic and anthropomorphised view of books and it may be thought that Gladstone comes close to eliding the distinction between a book and its author. A book may be an attractive and sometimes a valuable physical object but, unless it is one of the shrieking books in the Restricted Section of the Library at Hogwarts School in the Harry Potter stories, it does not literally talk to us or have a voice. It is authors who speak to us through their books, and books are simply the medium through which meaning is conveyed. In describing books as instruments of communication with the dead, Gladstone duly acknowledges this middle-man role but in referring to them as our ‘dear old friends’ he seems to merge the medium with the author.<sup>6</sup> Is the book itself so very special and worthy of our love? Is it not rather the *author* who deserves our affection, respect, admiration or gratitude? Yet the fact is that for those of us who read and – yes – *love* books, it is impossible to look on them as mere functional

objects akin to chairs and tables or knives and forks. For unlike those other artefacts, books are vehicles of thought, conveyers of ideas and opinions, passions, hopes, fears, enthusiasms and the fruits of experience. As such they are uniquely stand-ins for their authors and sharers in their humanity. Gladstone saw that books' status as proxies for authors entitles them to be regarded with an affection and respect not normally entertained for non-living things. (Even where we dislike a book, we may still value it as extending our intellectual horizons.) And because proxies should be worthy of their role, books should be sent out into the world correctly dressed, a shoddily-produced *Iliad* or Shakespeare being an insult to the memory of its illustrious author. Too many modern printed books, Gladstone thought, were poorly produced when the taking of a little more care would have produced a better item at minimal extra cost. 'Noble works ought not to be printed in mean and worthless forms,' he wrote, 'and cheapness ought to be limited by an instinctive sense and law of fitness.'<sup>7</sup> We may imagine what Gladstone would have made of those modern inventions, the Kindle and the e-book. Many readers today still prefer a hard-copy version of a book, perhaps in part because it shares the physicality of the author. Probably Gladstone would have felt the same, though his pragmatic mind would readily have granted the convenience of those electronic miracles.

It generally happens that people who love books also, like Gladstone, love libraries – or at any rate those libraries that are not merely bland and spiritless receptacles of books, coldly-lit spaces where scholars and students listlessly scan the lengths of characterless metal shelving like Galahads who have lost all interest in the Grail. Books are not gods and do not deserve temples; but they do demand homes in which they will be well looked after. 'A library of wisdom,' wrote the fourteenth-century Richard of Bury in his *Philobiblon*, 'is more precious than all wealth, and all things that are desirable cannot be compared with it.'<sup>8</sup> M.R James begins one of his ghost stories with the reflection that those of a scholarly disposition need no further entertainment from their host if they find themselves in an unfamiliar library: 'The putting of dispersed sets of volumes together, or the turning right way up of the those which the dusting housemaid has left in an apoplectic condition, appeals to them as one of the lesser Works of Mercy.'<sup>9</sup> Books, Gladstone admitted, make 'exacting demands' of their owners yet no book-lover will resent these: 'for him the question is how best to keep his books'.<sup>10</sup>

Gladstone was himself a famous creator and patron of libraries. He was a member of the founding committee of the London Library in 1840 and found time from his busy political schedule to act as a trustee of the British Museum and an adviser to the Bodleian. 11 Gladstone numbered among his closest friends and associates Antonio (later, Sir Anthony) Panizzi, Keeper of Printed Books at the British Museum from 1837 and Principal Librarian there from 1856 to 1866. The two men first met in 1842, when Panizzi, who had come to England in 1823 as a political refugee from Italy (he remained under sentence of death in the Duchy of Modena) held a junior position in the Museum. Panizzi's struggles against entrenched interests and conservative attitudes at the Museum, his insistence on the need for an adequate catalogue of the books, and his championship of the idea of a great national library to rival the Bibliothèque Nationale and similar institutions abroad, make him a towering figure in the history of libraries in the nineteenth century. 12 Panizzi was a regular visitor to Gladstone's London home in Carlton House Terrace and the two men corresponded frequently and at length. 13 Gladstone found Panizzi a valuable advisor on Italian politics and something of a soul-mate, as both men possessed a reforming temperament and a commitment to turning words into actions. Their views on the role of libraries also had much in common and while it might be surmised that Panizzi, the professional librarian, influenced Gladstone's thinking more than Gladstone influenced Panizzi's on matters of detail, there was undoubtedly much cross-fertilisation between their ideas, Gladstone having his own very definite views on the purpose and use of books. Gladstone gave his unstinting support to Panizzi's struggles to modernise and develop the British Museum as a national library and in 1859 he advised on the construction of the famous round reading room. 14 It was also at Gladstone's instance that the long-reluctant Panizzi finally accepted the offer of a knighthood in 1869.

Gladstone's personal study-library (the 'Temple of Peace') at Hawarden Castle in Flintshire, North Wales, has been frozen in time, preserved exactly as it was at the time of his death in 1898. It is patently the den of a scholarly gentleman and contains, besides books, some of Gladstone's favourite walking-sticks and axes (felling trees on his estate being one of his more idiosyncratic pastimes). However, the majority of Gladstone's books were moved from Hawarden Castle during his lifetime to his new foundation of St Deiniol's (now renamed Gladstone's Library), many of them being wheel-barrowed half a mile (uphill!) to the new site by the octogenarian Gladstone himself. The idea for a residential library in Hawarden village

dates to the early 1880s and may have been inspired by the creation of the Pusey Memorial Library in Oxford. In 1886 Gladstone's son Stephen, then Rector of Hawarden, told a correspondent that 'He plans to leave his library to the Church of England as a legacy – together with a sufficient endowment to let it become a centre of study and learning.' 15 Two years later Gladstone set out his intentions in a letter to his son-in-law Harry Drew: 'I have a large scheme in prospect, a building meant to be the nucleus of an institution for religion and learning, but under the care of the family; such is the blessing of being able to trust my children.' 16 Gladstone invited Stephen to become its first Warden but, perhaps because he anticipated too much interference from his father, the rector declined. On Stephen's refusal, Harry Drew stepped into the breach and ran St Deiniol's from 1893 until 1896, when a more permanent Warden from outside the family, the Reverend Gilbert Joyce, was appointed. 17 The Gladstone family, however, continued to take a keen interest in St Deiniol's and paid for the erection of the new hostel building in 1904.

The Foundation Deed of 1895 states that the Library at St Deiniol's should be 'for the promotion of Divine learning in connection with the Church of England as an historical branch of the Catholic Church'. 18 To set the new foundation on a firm footing, Gladstone provided an initial endowment of £40,000, a sum equivalent to several million pounds in today's money. Even for the wealthy Gladstone, this was a substantial drain on his financial resources. Yet without the endowment, it is doubtful whether his dream for St Deiniol's could have been realised. Establishing a major research library in such an out-of-the-way place would otherwise have risked failure, although its setting in a small village on the Welsh-English border was admirably suited to its secondary role as an Anglican retreat centre. Roy Jenkins shrewdly remarks in his biography of Gladstone that 'Such [financial] underpinning has been one reason why a remotely situated and strongly theological library has more than maintained its utility over the changes of a century which have been not wholly helpful to such an institution.' 19

For Gladstone, 'Divine learning' meant much more than the study of theology and Bible history, since a robust and sustainable Christianity needed to secure its place among the intellectual currents of the age. Hence St Deiniol's Library should 'be associated with the various branches of human knowledge, especially ... History and Philosophy.' 20 Gladstone scorned the idea of a Church that cocooned itself from the modern world and resisted the spirit of

the times. This, he thought, was the error of the Roman Catholic Church under Pope Pius IX, which sought to keep alive a version of Christianity more fitted to the sixteenth century than the nineteenth. 21 In stark contrast to the anti-intellectualism of Pius's Vatican, the liberal St Deiniol's would foster broad learning and welcome new thinking. While the training of Anglican clergy and the provision of a place of retreat and study for those already in Anglican orders was the primary occupation of St Deiniol's for a hundred years until the 1990s, the Library has always been an inclusive rather than exclusive centre of scholarship. In the words of the historian of St Deiniol's, 'From the very beginning, in the spirit of the founder's love of liberty, toleration and intellectual integrity, all students have been welcomed of any creed or none and of every class from all over the world.' 22

The first students and residents of St Deiniol's had to make do with temporary buildings 'that were little more than converted cottages.' 23 But a major boost to the fortunes of St Deiniol's occurred when the National Memorial Committee appointed by Parliament to consider how best to commemorate the greatest Victorian statesman decided to erect the fine neo-Gothic building which, with later additions, now houses the Library and the residential facilities. This was constructed between 1899 and 1906, with additional finance being provided by the Gladstone family. The official opening of the National Memorial took place in October 1902, and St Deiniol's received the favour of a royal visit by King Edward VII in 1908.

Around 30,000 of Gladstone's own books and manuscripts (chiefly in the areas of theology, history, philosophy and classical literature) form the nucleus of the collection; today the Library possesses over 200,000 printed items, acquired through donation or purchase. Its unusual character in being a residential library, offering study-bedrooms, a refectory, common-room and other visitor facilities, has enabled Gladstone's Library to become a popular venue for academic conferences and literary meetings as well as a research centre for visiting scholars. One thing the Library is *not* is a shrine to Gladstone, something that the Grand Old Man would certainly not have wanted. Jenkins compares it favourably in this respect with American presidential libraries, noting that the National Memorial is not 'a shell for Gladstone memorabilia but a serious theological and historical research library'. 24 As a site of scholarship rather than hero-worship, the Library pays Gladstone a much more subtle and discreet tribute than any more ostentatious memorial could have done.

What sort of book-collector was Gladstone? A letter that he wrote to the London bookseller Bernard Quaritch in 1896 casts a revealing light on his book-buying. 25 Since his youth, he estimated, he had bought ‘about 35,000 volumes’ – an astonishing number in any age, although Gladstone does not note anything remarkable about it. Book-collectors ideally should possess six particular qualifications, namely ‘appetite, leisure, wealth, knowledge, discrimination, and perseverance’; of these, Gladstone claimed to have only the first and the last. The absence of the third qualification, wealth, from the list of self-attributed qualities may surprise us in view of the huge number of books that he bought and the generous endowment he made to St Deiniol’s. But Gladstone probably was probably comparing himself not with the ordinary book-buyer but with the very (in some cases fabulously) rich book collectors and bibliomanes of his day: men such as the Americans Henry Huntington and John Pierpont Morgan, or the English collectors Sir John Hayford Thorold, the 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> Earls of Crawford or the eccentric Sir Thomas Phillipps. In further describing his library as a ‘beggarly collection’, Gladstone was referring to the relative absence from his library of volumes of the highest rarity or value. In his diary for 14 August 1865 he recorded a visit to Hawarden Castle by Panizzi: ‘P. examined my old books &c. which are but very insignificant.’ 26 Gladstone valued books much more as avenues to communication with their authors than as precious objects to be admired for their beauty, scarcity or antiquity – although he was far from indifferent to such features. While other collectors competed to add the most notable medieval manuscripts and incunabula to their libraries, Gladstone was content to pursue less ambitious aims, among them the collection of numerous editions of the *Book of Common Prayer*. 27

In perhaps the most intriguing sentence of his letter, Gladstone remarked that ‘Book-collecting may have its quirks and eccentricities, but, on the whole, it is a vitalizing element in a society honey-combed by several sources of corruption.’ 28 These words were not merely a well-turned compliment to a book-seller or the truism that books need to be acquired before they can be read. There is passion behind Gladstone’s claim that the buying of books and the assembling of libraries is a valuable counterpoise to the competition, greed and egoism of a commercial society that has become obsessed with money and power. Book-collecting reminds us that there are other and finer objects in life than the relentless search for profit, status and personal aggrandizement. The book collector (and the book-lover generally) values scholarship and learning, cultivates imagination, has a sense of history and respects the past and its ways,

appreciates beautiful objects and possesses, in the company of authors, a far richer social circle than someone whose reading matter consists primarily of ledgers and account books. To love books and to wish to acquire them is to soar above the petty concerns that keep so many people earthbound. Book-collecting reminds society that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in a purely commercial philosophy.

Yet Gladstone's estimation of the beneficial effects of book collecting was not unqualified: it was only 'on the whole' that its effect was 'vitalizing'. Book-collecting was not invariably a virtuous, high-minded activity, and collectors sometimes displayed not merely 'quirks and eccentricities' but showed themselves quite as grasping, envious and competitive as the most cut-throat bankers or industrialists. *Cupiditas habendi* – the keen desire for possession – is a common trait of collectors in any field. If kept within bounds it need be no bad thing – and it may indeed be considered the essential stimulus to any serious collecting. But when it becomes excessive it becomes vicious, damaging to the self and others. While many committed collectors would never stoop to unethical or illegal methods for acquiring new treasures, even the most 'moral' collector can suffer from a poor sense of priorities. Gladstone was too well-balanced a man and too diverse in his interests to fall into that trap; he was a keen book collector but never an obsessive one, a bibliophile rather than a bibliomane. The buying of books and the foundation of St Deiniol's were only two amongst the many strands in his complex and busy life. If Gladstone loved books, he also loved his family, his country, the Church of England, and the rough and tumble of politics.

Whether it was Gladstone's self-discipline or his involvement in so many other activities that chiefly saved him from the perils of 'bibliomania' we can only speculate. The nineteenth century exhibits many examples of men (and a few women) for whom acquiring the rarest and choicest volumes became a grand passion. Alexander William Lindsay, the 25<sup>th</sup> Earl of Crawford, whose Bibliotheca Lindesiana at Haigh Hall near Wigan was a relatively near neighbour to St Deiniol's, records that he became as 'bibliomaniac' while at Eton in the 1820s, after reading the writings of Dr Dibdin.<sup>29</sup> Like Gladstone a customer of Quaritch in the mid-century, the Earl focused on purchasing incunabula and rare editions of the classics; a copy of the 1460 *Catholicon*, printed on vellum, bought for him in Paris by Quaritch in 1860, caused him particular joy. The Earl's son, James Ludovic Lindsay, who became the 26<sup>th</sup> Earl in 1880,



inherited his father's collecting interests and enriched the Library still further. Unfortunately, however, the family's increasing financial difficulties from the mid-1880s onwards enforced a number of sales of the choicest items. During the glory days of the Bibliotheca Lindesiana, in 1864, the 25<sup>th</sup> Earl declared his ambition that the collection should contain 'the best that has been known and thought in the world'. 30 This noble ambition was served by 'a policy of careful advance planning' of purchases which both Alexander and James Ludovic followed in consultation with Quaritch. 31

If the Earls of Crawford, like Gladstone, were responsible and discriminating collectors, the same cannot be said of another famous collector whose passion for adding to his library was a true monomania. Sir Thomas Phillipps (1792-1872) is believed to have amassed the largest collection of books and manuscripts of his age, and possibly of any age. Phillipps' self-declared aim was to possess 'ONE COPY OF EVERY BOOK'. 32). This barely sane dream was patently impossible of fulfilment, as Phillipps in his cooler moments must have realised; nevertheless his relentless pursuit of written material of every kind turned his homes of Middle Hill and Thirlestaine House into book stores crammed from floor to ceiling with printed paper and manuscripts. 'Books fill not only the rooms, but also the staircases and the passages,' commented one amazed visitor to Middle Hill. 33 Although possessed of a large private income, Sir Thomas spent much more on books than he could afford and he gained a sad reputation amongst booksellers as an unreliable client and a dilatory settler of debts. In Phillipps's strange psychology, bibliomania appears wholly to have supplanted morality. Miserly and egoistic (he might today be diagnosed as autistic), the twice-married baronet grudged his servants their wages and kept his family forever short of money. Quaritch, who bought frequently, if reluctantly, for Phillipps described him to the 25<sup>th</sup> Earl of Crawford as 'a wildly selfish old man' who leaves 'unlimited or mad commissions' on books coming up for auction. 34 Yet it is doubtful whether Phillipps's collecting made him really happy. His passion was a devouring hunger that could never be sufficiently assuaged. No matter how many books he bought (or cajoled out of dealers), the thought of those he did not yet own gnawed perennially at him. Unsurprisingly both his family and his fellow-collectors found him generally to be out of temper, quarrelsome and cantankerous. After his first wife, Henrietta, died at the age of 37 in 1832, the unsentimental baronet confided to an acquaintance that he was seeking a new wife, adding that any lady would

do provided that she could bring him £50,000 to fund his book-buying. 35 When ‘the dreadful old man’, as Alan G. Thomas has called him, died in 1872, no one seems to have been sorry. 36

Phillipps’s ideas about books and collecting were plainly profoundly different from Gladstone’s. It would be stretching the meaning of the term to describe the former as a creator of *libraries*; Phillipps’s vast accumulations of books, manuscripts and nondescript printed paper were held in locations that could more aptly be compared with warehouses. Never adequately catalogued and heaped together in spaces that impeded access, items in the collection other than the outstanding rarities could be impossible to locate; but for Sir Thomas the pleasure was in the collection rather than in the reading of his books. Nevertheless, his magpie mode of collecting did preserve many unique manuscripts and documents that would otherwise have perished, and for that reason later generations have reason to be grateful to, if not to admire, him.

For Gladstone, as we have seen, books were valuable above all because they connect us with a vast array of authors, living and dead, collapsing the temporal and spatial barriers that separate us. In order to serve this purpose, books had to be housed in secure, clean, dry, insect-free, light and accessible places. But more than this, a library had to provide a supportive setting for scholarship. It must therefore be effectively organised and efficiently run while remaining a pleasant grove of Academe in which readers could pursue their dialogues with the writers of the past and present. Typically interweaving high ideals with pragmatism, Gladstone the book-lover sought to identify specific solutions to the problems of storing large collections of books that would not turn a library into a warehouse.

As Frederick Ratcliffe remarked in his St Deiniol’s Founder’s Day Lecture in 1976, ‘Among the numerous traits in [Gladstone’s] complex personality was unmistakably that of the librarian, not simply of the book collector or book lover, but of the lover of order among his considerable collection of books.’ 37 Gladstone’s 1890 article ‘On books and the housing of them’ is essentially a short treatise on library design, its opening paean to books as friends being the overture to several pages of practical recommendations on the shape and size of libraries, the classification of books, the binding of volumes, the construction and placing of bookcases and shelving, and the best means of saving space while preserving ready access. A floor-plan illustrates the ideal lay-out for a library housed in a room measuring approximately forty feet in length and twenty in breadth (a library capable, in Gladstone’s estimation, of housing easily

20,000 volumes. 38 The contemporary reader might smile at Gladstone's claim that 'a room of quite ordinary size' could house 10,000 volumes, 'all within easy reach'. If we allow, following Gladstone's estimate, an average of one inch of width of shelf-space per volume, this would require 278 yards of shelving, or approximately one-sixth of a mile; plainly, what Gladstone meant by an 'ordinary room' was something rather more capacious than might be understood by that term today.

One of Gladstone's more notable recommendations for saving space in libraries of constricted size was the use of mobile shelving (i.e. wheeled bookcases), a common-enough feature of libraries nowadays but a considerable novelty in the late nineteenth century. As Ratcliffe notes, the arrangement and lay-out of the present Library 'conforms in all essentials ... to most of the precepts of Gladstone's article', 39 the extension added in 1925 to cope with the ever-expanding collection making use of the mobile shelving he advised. The general conformity of the lay-out of the Library with Gladstone's suggestions should not be seen as a mere expression of pious respect for his memory; rather, it reflects the fact that his suggestions *work*, their adoption facilitating the accommodation of a very large number of books without any sacrifice of comfort or convenience.

Regarding books as he did as friends, Gladstone believed that their company should be enjoyed in a congenial setting: the sort of surroundings in which one would wish to meet one's boon companions. Richard of Bury described the libraries of medieval Paris as 'luxuriant parks of all manner of volumes; there are Academic meads shaken by the tramp of scholars; there are lounges of Athens; walks of the Peripatetics; peaks of Parnassus; and porches of the Stoics'. 40 Not dissimilar words might have been applied by Richard, or by Gladstone himself, to Gladstone's Library, with its multiform riches of learning, its scholarly nooks and crannies, and its atmosphere of lively research. Yet for Gladstone in 1890, all was not well in the world of libraries. The major problem was that new books were appearing so fast that even the largest libraries (including national collections such as those of the British Museum or the Bibliothèque Nationale) were liable soon to be overwhelmed. One of Panizzi's continuing struggles at the British Museum, as Gladstone knew well, was to raise the funds to pay for new buildings to house fresh acquisitions. Gladstone never complained that too many books were being published, although he must have sniffed at the literary and intellectual quality of some of those

being produced at the lower end of the market. But he saw that something had to be done to ensure that libraries could keep up with the growing number of worthy books. This called not only for extensions to be built on to libraries where the location allowed for this but also for libraries to use their existing space more effectively.

Gladstone sensibly acknowledged (and here we may detect the influence of Panizzi) that the old and cherished 'idea of the society of books' would now require compromise. 41 Inevitably libraries, both public and private, would have to become *in some part* (though certainly not predominantly) book-warehouses, housing at least a portion of their stock in high-density storage areas. The introduction of mobile shelving was one effective method of shelving more books in a given space and, according to Gladstone's calculations, were this and other space-saving measures to be adopted (e.g. the reduction to a bare minimum of access passageways), 'nearly two-thirds, or say three-fifths, of the whole cubic contents of a properly constructed compartment may be made a solid mass of books'. 42 However, the cost of adopting such means for packing the largest number of books into the smallest amount of space was that one could no longer enjoy the society of every book. That loss could best be borne, thought Gladstone, when the books relegated to the mass-storage areas belonged to the less sociable genres. A 'wall of *Hansards*,' long runs of reviews and volumes of 'pamphlets innumerable' were most fitted for such 'interment' (though never for destruction). Even so, the burying of 'the best beloved among inanimate objects' in 'catacombs, or like the wine-bottles in bins' was a 'repulsive' process, a dereliction of the normal duties of friendship. 43 Gladstone might well have been willing to replace some hard-copy texts by digitised versions, if that option had been available in his day; but it is a fair guess that he would have found little sociability in computer disks and USB keys.

Gladstone took for granted that space for the new must always be found and that books, once acquired, will not normally be discarded. He explicitly compared his Malthusian worries about the increasing number of books to fears about the ever-growing human population. With striking prescience, he predicted that the population of England could one day reach a total of seventy million souls. Yet it was the growing number of books, rather than that of people, that more immediately concerned him: 'I entertain more proximate apprehension of pressure upon available space from the book population than from the numbers of mankind.' 44 This is not the

absurd contention that the increasing number of books posed a greater problem for the world than the increasing number of people. Gladstone was a man who used words precisely. In saying that his 'more *proximate* apprehension' concerned books rather than people, he meant that the book-problem would come to a head before the people-problem did. It therefore required an attention that would brook no delay. Otherwise, said Gladstone with wry humour, the words of the evangelist St John would be fulfilled and 'even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written'. 45

Gladstone expected particular pressure to arise from the increase in book-production in the United Kingdom and the USA, countries which were now 'masters of the world' and whose presses would shortly spread the English tongue across the globe. Then 'let floors beware lest they crack, and walls lest they bulge and burst, from the weight of all the books they will have to carry and confine'. 46 At one level this is certainly Gladstone the practical librarian speaking. But it may not be too fanciful to discern another theme sounding in the background. If the ever-growing number of books posed a problem for libraries and librarians, it also presented a challenge to those scholars who, like himself, had prided themselves on their wide and varied learning. When Gladstone wrote that 'A vast, even a bewildering prospect is before us,' the pronoun 'us' may refer as much to the community of scholars as it does to that of librarians and library designers. 47 Recognising that in the future specialism would 'more and more abound,' Gladstone sadly tolled the death-knell on the age of 'encyclopaedic learning', observing that its sun had set with Leibniz. 48

Gladstone's concern with the problem of book storage thus suggests the sublimation of a deeper and more personal worry: that of the storage of knowledge in the human head. It was not just how librarians would cope with the growing number of books that concerned him but how those who wanted to *know*, and whose heroes were Aristotle, Dante and the old polymaths, would cope in an age of mushrooming science and scholarship. In this respect, libraries were actually better-off than people, for while libraries could be extended indefinitely, this was not true of the knowledge-storage facilities of the human being. Life was not long enough nor one brain sufficient for anyone to keep abreast of every new development in the arts and sciences. No wonder that Gladstone used the term 'bewildering' to characterise the contemporary scholar's situation. If hardly in the tragic condition of the hapless individual lost in the infinite

library that forms the entire universe in Borges' story 'The Library of Babel', Gladstone nevertheless conveyed the anxiety of the literary gentleman who fears losing his bearings and who painfully acknowledges his limits.

Putting a library in good order is one practical method of easing the scholar's predicament, facilitating quick and ready access to the springs of knowledge. What cannot be found room for in one's head can be accommodated in one's library. Yet even the keenest reader can feel overwhelmed by the amount of literature 'out there', most of which there is no possibility of mastering. Libraries may therefore be seen and valued as symbolic proxies for all the knowledge that one would like to possess but never will. *Ars longa, vita brevis*. By maintaining a well-stocked library, one can retain some of one's self-respect as a scholar, or at least the happy illusion of learning.

This is, perhaps, rather a cynical view of the function of libraries. But I do not mean to suggest that libraries are primarily to be valued as psychological props to disappointed would-be polymaths who feel that the next-best thing to having knowledge in their heads is having it on their bookshelves. For one thing, it really *is* the next-best thing! And for another, libraries can be far more than repositories of volumes: they can also be meeting-places where scholars enjoy the society of other scholars as well as that of books. Gladstone thought that libraries should be focal points of research, discussion and the sharing of ideas. According to Mary Drew, St. Deiniol's was her father's gift 'to the students of Great Britain,' a centre, as Gladstone himself explained, prepared to offer hospitality to persons beyond the Anglican Church and even the Christian religion provided they were prepared to 'respect in spirit as well as in letter the rules and usages of the place'.<sup>49</sup> Although Gladstone did not live to see St Deiniol's in its completed form, its Gothic design and furnishings and its scholarly atmosphere, a little solemn perhaps (like the great man himself) but at the same time affable and welcoming, would most surely have pleased him. Books might be stand-ins for the dead, but Gladstone thought that no library should be an uninviting or ugly place. Yet his curious and enigmatic remark that books 'are in a certain sense at enmity with the world'<sup>50</sup> may convey his sense that libraries are places significantly apart from the hurly-burly of the everyday world. Whereas *that* world is interested chiefly in the material concerns of the present and the immediate future, libraries with their collections of

books are sites of quasi-spiritualistic contact with the world of the dead who still have something to say to the living.

Books should always be treated with respect, not only to prolong their physical existence but also from a sense of deference towards their authors. Libraries require custodians, although not gatekeepers. That books are often carelessly handled is an ancient complaint. Richard of Bury railed against the headstrong students who bedewed precious books with the drippings from their noses, used straw and flowers as book-marks and soiled white vellum pages with wet fingers.<sup>51</sup> Librarians must protect the books in their care and ensure that their readers treat them well. But it is not their role to restrict the access to books by those who can benefit from them. There should be no prohibited books or prohibited readers. How different Gladstone's Library is from another theological library, the medieval monastic library portrayed by Umberto Eco in his novel *The Name of the Rose*. Whereas the Gladstone Library welcomes visitors, the library in Eco's nameless monastery keeps them at bay, locking up its rare and beautiful manuscripts in a maze of rooms to which the entrance is known only to the guardian. Should some ingenious person nevertheless find his way inside, he is immediately lost in a labyrinth. As he wanders through the many rooms, desperately seeking escape, he encounters with frightening carved images, distorting mirrors and thuribles that poison the air with hallucinogenic fumes.<sup>52</sup> This is a library which baffles, not eases, the communication with the dead. It has been suggested that *The Name of the Rose* can be read as 'a parable for the situation of the modern researcher and library user'.<sup>53</sup> But it can be no library's business to repel or disorientate its readers. While large modern libraries can seem labyrinthine on first encounter, there should always be an Ariadne's thread provided in the form of good cataloguing and clear signposting.

And yet, for all their patent differences of design and intention, both Gladstone's Library and Eco's library are alike in acknowledging the power of books – or, to speak more precisely, the power of the ideas conveyed by books. This is why books can be loved or loathed, or seen as allies or as enemies. Gladstone observed that books are 'the *compages* [i.e. the supportive framework], the bonds and rivets of the race,' the term 'race' here not implying any xenophobic or imperialistic idea but rather referring to the cultural continuities that help to fix the identities of particular nations or communities and which books are essential to sustaining.<sup>54</sup> Heinrich Heine's famous remark that those who begin by burning books may go on to burn people

graphically recognises the significance of this role of the printed word. Destroying books or preventing people from reading them are the most effective ways, short of genocide, of destroying or undermining cultural traditions. Ignorance is impotence, and controlling the flow of knowledge is a classic method by which elites preserve their power and privileges.

Locking up libraries or housing books in labyrinths are forms of thought-control that no liberal conscience could accept. Gladstone believed in the democratisation of knowledge and the expansion of the literate public through the widening of educational opportunities. There was therefore nothing to be regretted in the unprecedented cascade of new works from the printing-press. The effects of this were ‘for good, unless it be our own fault, far more than for evil’.<sup>55</sup> Libraries would have to find space for all the new books and also (though, surprisingly, Gladstone never mentioned the fact in his article) the financial resources to pay for them. Yet these problems reflected an embarrassment of riches. Admittedly, it was a matter for regret that the era of the self-sufficient solitary scholar was reaching its end, to be replaced by that of academic specialisation; but even this development had the saving grace that researchers would now be compelled to be more sociable and cooperative than in former days, more prepared to pool their individual efforts in a collective enterprise of knowledge-seeking. Not the least of Gladstone’s insights was that such sociability needed to be fostered by the provision of friendly and welcoming surroundings in which scholars and researchers could meet to exchange views and ideas. Providing a setting of this kind is precisely what his foundation has now been doing with great success for over a century. If Gladstone could revisit Hawarden today, he would surely be delighted, though not at all surprised, that his Library continues to attract visitors from all over the world who value books, learning and academic good-fellowship.

## Notes

1. Mary Drew, ‘Mr. Gladstone’s Library at “St. Deiniol’s Hawarden,”’ *The Nineteenth Century* 60 (1906), 944-54 (p.947).
2. William Ewart Gladstone, ‘On Books and the Housing of Them’, *The Nineteenth Century* 27 (1890), 384-96 (p.384).
3. *Ibid.*, p.386.
4. *Ibid.*, p.385.
5. *Ibid.*, p.386.



6. Ibid., p.395,
7. Ibid., p.385.
8. Richard of Bury. (2015), *The Philobiblon*, tr. E.C. Thomas (p.10). Available at <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/626/626-h/626-h.htm>. Accessed 27 November 2016.
9. James, M.R., ‘A Neighbour’s Landmark,’ in *Collected Ghost Stories*, 514-32 (p.514). (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1992).
10. W.E. Gladstone, ‘On Books and the Housing of Them’, 389.
11. Pritchard, T.W., *A History of St Deiniol’s Library* (Hawarden: Monad Press, 1999), 17.
12. For a fuller account of Panizzi’s work at the British Museum, see Edward Miller, ‘Antonio Panizzi and the British Museum’, *The British Library Journal* 5 no 1(1979), 1-17.
13. M.R.D. Foot, ‘Gladstone and Panizzi’, *The British Library Journal* 5 no 1 (1979), 48-56, (p.48).
14. Eric Glasgow, ‘Sir Anthony Panizzi’, *Library Review* 50 no 5 (2001), 251- 54 (p.251).
15. Quoted in Pritchard, *A History of St Deiniol’s Library*, 9.
16. Richard Shannon, *Gladstone: Heroic Minister:1865-1898* (London: Allen Wood, 1999), 476.
17. Peter J. Jagger, ‘Gladstone and his Library’, in Peter J. Jagger (ed.), *Gladstone* (London and Rio Grande: The Hambledon Press, 1998), 235-53 (p.243).
18. Pritchard, *A History of St Deiniol’s Library*, 10.
19. Roy Jenkins, *Gladstone* (London: Macmillan, 1995), 625-26.
20. Pritchard, *A History of St Deiniol’s Library*, 10.
21. Even before the Vatican Council of 1870 (which approved the notorious dogma of papal infallibility), the *Syllabus of Errors* published in 1864 had already condemned, alongside many other targets, the view ‘that the Roman Pontiff ought to come to terms with progress, liberalism, and modern civilization’ (quoted by Gladstone in his 1874 pamphlet, ‘The Vatican Decrees in their Bearing on Civil Allegiance: A Political Expostulation’ [London: John Murray], at p.18). The absurdity and ultimate futility of Pius IX’s attempt to stop the clock of civilisation were forcefully brought out in Gladstone’s anti-papal diatribe. (For further discussion of Gladstone’s reaction to the Vatican decrees, see my

- ‘Fallible infallibility? Gladstone’s anti-Vatican pamphlets in the light of Mill’s *On Liberty*’, *Victorian Literature and Culture* 44 no.2 (2016), 223-37.
22. Pritchard, *A History of St Deiniol’s Library*, 12.
  23. Eric Glasgow, ‘St Deiniol’s Library, Hawarden’, *Library Review* 46 no.2 (1997), 113-21 (p.119)
  24. Jenkins, *Gladstone*, 565.
  25. The original source of Gladstone’s letter to Quaritch is D. Williamson, *Gladstone the Man* (London: James Bowden, 1898). I am indebted to Glasgow, ‘St Deiniol’s Library, Hawarden’, which reprints portions of the letter.
  26. W.E. Gladstone, *The Gladstone Diaries*, ed. H.C.G. Matthew (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), vol.VI, p.378.
  27. Glasgow, ‘St Deiniol’s Library, Hawarden’, 115.
  28. Ibid.
  29. Nicholas Barker, *Bibliotheca Lindesiana: the Lives and Collections of Alexander William, 35<sup>th</sup> Earl of Crawford and 8<sup>th</sup> Earl of Balcarres, and James Ludovic, 26<sup>th</sup> Earl of Crawford and 9<sup>th</sup> Earl of Balcarres* (London: Bernard Quaritch, for the Roxburghe Club, 1977), 38.
  30. [Anon], ‘The “Bibliotheca Lindesiana”’, *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 30 no 1 (1946), 185-94 (p.190).
  31. Barker, *Bibliotheca Lindesiana*, 283.
  32. Quoted in Werner Muensterberger, *Collecting: An Unruly Passion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 74; the capitals are Phillipps’s own.
  33. Ibid., 94.
  34. Barker, *Bibliotheca Lindesiana*, 239.
  35. Muensterberger, *Collecting: An Unruly Passion*, 91.
  36. Alan G. Thomas, *Great Books and Book Collectors* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1975), 264.
  37. Frederick W. Ratcliffe, ‘Mr Gladstone, the Librarian, and St Deiniol’s Library. Hawarden,’ in Peter J. Jagger (ed.), *Gladstone, Politics and Religion: A Collection of Founder’s Day Lectures Delivered at St Deiniol’s Library, Hawarden, 1967-83* (London: Macmillan, 1985), 49.

38. Gladstone, 'On Books and the Housing of Them', 394.
39. Ratcliffe, Mr Gladstone, the Librarian, and St Deiniol's Library', 59-60.
40. Richard of Bury, *Philobiblon*, 20.
41. Gladstone, 'On Books and the Housing of Them', p.395.
42. Ibid., 396.
43. Ibid., 395.
44. Ibid., 384.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid., 385-86.
47. Ibid., 386.
48. Ibid.
49. Drew, 'Mr Gladstone's Library', 944-45.
50. Gladstone, 'On Books and the Housing of Them', 386.
51. Richard of Bury, *Philobiblon*, Ch.17.
52. Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*, tr. by William Weaver (London: Picador, 1984), Chapter 'Night'.
53. Jeffrey Garrett, 'Missing Eco: On Reading *The Name of the Rose* as Library Criticism', *The Library Quarterly* 61 no 4, 373-88 (p.376).
54. Gladstone, 'On Books and the Housing of Them', p.386.
55. Ibid.