

## **SPECIAL COLLECTIONS AND ARCHIVES (SCOLAR), CARDIFF UNIVERSITY**

*We spoke with Peter Keelan, Head of Cardiff University's Special Collections and Archives (SCOLAR). Keelan has held this position since SCOLAR's inception in 2005.*

### **General Description**

#### **Over 120 Years in the Making**

Founded in 1883, Cardiff University (initially named the University College of South Wales and Monmouthshire) now stands as the largest research university in Wales, and in less than 150 years it has established itself also as one of Britain's leading teaching and research universities. While rare book collecting at Cardiff has been a practice nearly since the university's foundation, it was not until 2005 that it all came together in one place: with the merging of Cardiff University and the University of Wales College of Medicine the year before, the rich history of rare book collecting at Cardiff had become apparent to newly-named Cardiff Librarian Steve Pritchard (previously with the College of Medicine), and so Special Collections and Archives (SCOLAR) was swiftly established, with Keelan appointed as SCOLAR's first (and, since then, only) Head.

Keelan estimates the collections that came together under SCOLAR had been scattered across a dozen different libraries. "We've integrated most of them here into SCOLAR," he says of the collections, which were previously managed by individual subject librarians. Now housed on the ground floor of the Arts and Social Studies Library (the university's main library)—where it has been since its foundation—SCOLAR boasts up to 100,000 volumes of pre-20th century materials, as well as an additional 70,000 volumes of 21st century materials, plus a wide range of 18th to 20th century archives. The university's first collection was acquired in 1886, "and we've been adding to that collection ever since."

## **The Salisbury Collection**

That founding collection was the Salisbury Library collection, acquired by the university in 1886 from Flintshire businessman and bibliophile Enoch Robert Gibbon Salisbury. Salisbury's personal library included rare books and albums of maps and prints of Welsh and Border Counties focus, with some of these materials dating as far back as the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Since that initial acquisition, the already strong collection has continued to thrive, growing into one of the major collections of its kind about Wales and wider Celtic studies, a collection now of international significance.

## **The Cardiff Rare Books Collection**

More recent strengths have risen from the university's 2010 acquisition of the Cardiff Central Library's rare book collection. Acquired from the Cardiff City Council for £1.2 million, the acquisition was an instant boon to SCOLAR. "As a public library, [Cardiff Central Library] was catering more for popular reading not using rare books as much," explains Keelan, and so the collection was acquired by SCOLAR, where it retained its original name, the Cardiff Rare Books Collection. Bringing together over 14,000 books from the 15th century onward, the collection covers British and European studies, but has highlights in three distinctive collection areas of both national and international import. The first is an extraordinary set of British private press books, the most famous of which is William Morris's Kelmscott Press. "It's one of the two largest collections in Britain, and the world," says Keelan. Another strength is a world-class collection of English Restoration dramas from the late 17th century, "including almost everything by [John] Dryden," as well as various Shakespearean second and third editions. The third highlight is the incunabula collection, which gathers about 180 works published between 1470 and 1500, including some of the earliest printed books in Europe from the Gutenberg era, the start of modern printing in Europe. "There are only three incunabula collections in Wales," says Keelan, "and this is one of them."

## **Human and Medical Genetics Historical Library**

Outside of the humanities rare books collection, SCOLAR also lays claim to very strong collections in medicine, one of the most notable of which is the Human and Medical Genetics Historical Library. Established in 2003 by Professor Peter Harper, this special collection chronicles the development of human genetics, and with roughly 4,000 volumes of 20th century books and monographs, the collection stands as the only one of its kind, and yet another collection of international significance.

## **Other Collections of National Significance**

Keelan is keen to point out a handful of other collections at SCOLAR that are particularly noteworthy from a Welsh and U.K. perspective. One such strength is a collection of 19th century children's literature, featuring English and Welsh children's books, journals, and comics, as well as a wide variety of rare illustrated books, booklets, and almanacs. The personal archive and book collection of World War I poet Edward Thomas is another collection of great importance, brining together the poet's papers, poems, and correspondences, the largest collection of its kind in the world. Keelan also mentions an historical travel writing collection of about 3,000 volumes, including topography and travel collections dating back to the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, with Baedeker guides, and various 20th century tourist writings. "It's a developing research field," Keelan says of the travel writing collection. "We find it's being dipped into a lot at the moment."

## **Acquisitions and Development**

### **Diversifying the Funding Base**

SCOLAR does not benefit from the luxury of an acquisitions budget, and so Keelan estimates that 90 percent of the library's acquisitions come from donations (with the £1.2 million acquisition of the rare books collection being the big exception).