

Whipple Library

The Whipple Library was founded on Robert Whipple's gift of 1200 rare scientific books to the University in 1944. It is now the largest specialist library in the history and philosophy of science in the United Kingdom, and supports the teaching and research work of the Department of HPS in which it is embedded.

Robert Stewart Whipple (1871-1953)

At the core of the Library's Special Collections are the rare books donated by Robert Whipple. The managing director of the Cambridge Scientific Instrument Company from 1905 to 1935, Whipple started to collect antique scientific instruments and rare books of science in the 1910s. In the 1940s he was involved in the foundation of the British Society



for the History of Science. With the donation of his instruments to the University of Cambridge in 1944, he intended to promote the establishment of a science museum, while the books were to become the first nucleus of its reference library. In addition to the main donation in 1944, he continued to present rare books until his death in 1953. Over the next forty years the history of science as an academic discipline in Cambridge was built around his collections. The Whipple Library and the Whipple Museum are now sited in adjacent rooms; this allows visitors easily to combine essential sources for research in the history of science.

The Whipple Collection

The most distinctive feature of Whipple's collecting was the integration of scientific instruments and of books illustrating their construction and use. The collection amounts to about 1300 volumes and includes publications on scientific instruments ranging from medieval instruments for astronomical observations to early twentieth-century industrial technology. Whipple's interests led him to appreciate and collect the works of less-known scientific practitioners in addition to more canonical landmarks of science. Three major fields are particularly well represented:



- Renaissance books of astronomy and practical mathematics, including surveying and navigation
- 17th- and 18th-century books on the new philosophical and optical instruments
- books on 19th- and early 20th-century instruments

Whipple also assembled a collection of about 140 editions of the works of Robert Boyle, including some extremely rare editions. The original bequest included three incunables: Johannes Angelus, *Astrolabium* (Augsburg, 1488), Hyginus, *Poeticon astronomicon* (Venetiae, 1482) and Sacro Bosco, *Sphaera mundi* (Venetiae, 1478). Since then the collection of rare books has grown to nearly 3,000 volumes. Three incunables have been added: Firmicus Maternus, *De nativitatibus*, (Venetiae, 1499), Sacro Bosco, *Sphaera mundi*, (Venetiae, 1482) and Solinus, *Polyhistor, sive De mirabilibus mundi*, (Venetiae, 1498).

Other items of note include a substantial collection of trade ephemera belonging to the Cambridge Scientific Instrument Company, and an album of autographs of nineteenth-century scientists, including Darwin and De Morgan, one of the few manuscripts in the collection.

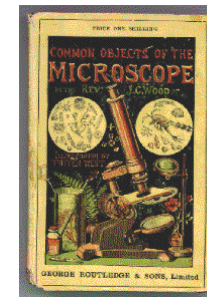
Provenance

Some of the books in the collection have extremely interesting provenance. Among these are Ben Jonson's and Montesquieu's copies of Gilbert's *De magnete*; Borelli's copy of Gilbert's *De mundo nostro sublunari*; Newton's copies of Boyle's *Tracts consisting of observations about the saltness of the sea* and of Wallis' *Opera mathematica*; Hooke's copy of Fermat's *Varia opera mathematica*; Boyle's copy of Huygens's *Horologium oscillatorium*; and Flamsteed's copy of Wing's *Astronomia britannica*. Among the books that formerly belonged to more recent collectors are Augustus De Morgan's copy of Guericke's *Experimenta nova*, and several books from Pierre Duhem's library. These names, in addition to those of less-known owners, who appear in more than one book, confirm the potential of the Whipple Collection

as a source for documenting the history of the collecting and dissemination of science books

Nineteenth-Century Collections

The Whipple Library has an important collection of nineteenth-century material, a total of around 2,000 volumes, acquired since the original bequest by Robert Whipple. This includes books donated by George Parker Bidder on biological sciences, the Sleeman and Steward collections on chemistry and physics, and some of the books originally presented to the Cavendish Laboratory by James Clerk Maxwell. Other strengths include books on natural history, medicine, scientific instruments, and popular science. This collection was catalogued in 2002 as part of the Research Support Libraries Programme, *HOST (The History of Science and Technology 1801-1914: a collaborative retrospective conversion and conservation programme)*.

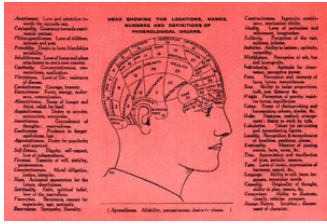


During the process of retrospective cataloguing, it was discovered that the Whipple Library holds many of the works of the Rev. John George Wood (1827-1899), a popular and prolific writer of the 19th century. The inclusion of material such as this in the collections indicates the strength and breadth of the Library's holdings. Not only are those works of pure academic value retained, but also those representative of the publishing of more popular scientific material of the time.

Phrenology Collection

The Library holds around 350 items on the subject of phrenology. The core of the collection was donated in the 1970s by Miss Frances Hedderly, former President of the British Phrenological Society, following the disbanding of the Society in 1967. Many of the items contain the bookplate of the British Phrenological Society Library, outlining the Library rules and recording dates of issue. The collection includes rare editions of the works of George Combe (1788-1858), the most influential British phrenologist and founder of the Edinburgh Phrenological Society (1820), the first of many societies devoted to the subject of phrenology. A number of the items were owned by the Brighton phrenologist Joseph Millott Severn (b. 1860), a former

President of the British Phrenological Society, and include his



notes on their provenance and bibliographical history. Also amongst the collection is a presentation copy of J.G. Spurzheim's *The anatomy of the brain* (1826): a key work in the popularization of phrenology in Britain,

Spurzheim gave this copy to Andrew Combe, the Edinburgh phrenologist, and brother of George Combe.

Foster Pamphlet Collection

This collection of around 5,100 pamphlets was originally assembled by Sir Michael Foster (1836-1907), founder of the Cambridge School of Physiology, founding editor of the *Journal of physiology*, and a leading figure in the professionalization of physiology in Victorian England. It is a valuable resource not only because of its coverage of all aspects of physiology at the time of its collection, but also because of its provenance. The collection was donated to the Library in 1997 by the Department of Physiology. It was catalogued as part of the Research Support Libraries Programme, *19th Century Pamphlets (A CURL project to provide enhanced access to nineteenth century pamphlet collections (1801-1914))*.

Catalogues

All the Whipple Library's Special Collections are fully catalogued online as part of the University of Cambridge's online catalogue, available at: <http://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/>

Publications

Silvia De Renzi, *Instruments in print: books from the Whipple Collection* (Cambridge: Whipple Museum of the History of Science, 2000), x, 107p. £8.00 + p&p (to order a copy, please contact the Library).

Other printed catalogues documenting some of Whipple's books are Jim Bennett and Domenico Bertoloni Meli, *Sphaera mundi: astronomy books in the Whipple Museum 1478-1600* (Cambridge, 1994); S.A. Johnston, F.H. Willmoth, and J.A. Bennett, *The grounds of artes: mathematical books of 16th-century England* (Cambridge, 1985); Stella Butler, R.H. Nuttall, and Olivia Brown, *The social history of the microscope* (Cambridge, 1986).

Exhibitions

The Library has a small exhibition space on Level 1 that is used for topical displays from the collections curated by members of staff and students from the Department. Individual items are also featured in occasional posts to the Whipple Library Books Blog.

Access

Anyone with a genuine research interest may use the Library for reading purposes and request books from the Special Collections, which are held in the Library Store. Visiting readers should supply a form of photo ID, showing name and permanent address, as well as a letter of introduction from an academic institution. Booking in advance is essential. Please see library website for further details.

Opening Hours

Mon-Fri 9.15am-7.00pm Full Term
Mon-Fri 9.15am-5.00pm Vacation

The Library is usually closed over the Christmas period, on Good Friday and Easter Monday, and on the August Bank Holiday.

Contact Information

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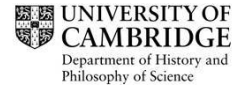
Web: <http://www.hps.cam.ac.uk/>

Illustrations

Cover: Half-hours with a naturalist: rambles near the shore / J.G. Wood (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1899). Page 1: Photo of Robert Stewart Whipple from his article "Some recent improvements in pyrometers" (1911), one of the pamphlets in the Foster Collection. Page 2: Woodcut of Ptolemy observing the stars with a quadrant, guided by Astronomy. From an edition of Gregor Reisch's *Margarita philosophica* (Argentine: Joannes Gruninger, 1512). Page 3: Common objects of the microscope / by J.G. Wood (London, George Routledge & Sons, [189-?]). Page 4: From a flier advertising "The Brighton Phrenological Institution, Professor and Mrs. J. Millott Severn, advisers in careers, professions, businesses, trades, marriage".

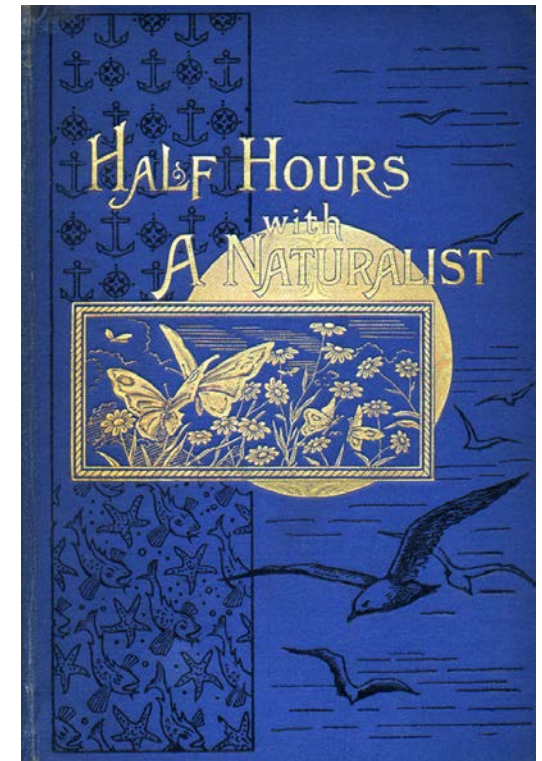


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