

Oxford Circle Visit the Bodleian Library.

A group of Brothers and wives of Oxford Circle took a tour of the Bodleian Library in Oxford.

“The Bod,” as it is known to Oxford scholars, is the main research Library of the University of Oxford and is one of the oldest libraries in Europe. With over 12 million items it is the second largest in Britain, after the British Library. The library features strongly in the SKY television program “A Discovery of Witches” currently showing on the TV.

The party learnt that, whilst the Bodleian Library, in its current incarnation, has a continuous history dating back to 1602, its roots date back even further. The first purpose-built library known to have existed in Oxford was founded in the fourteenth century under the will of Thomas Cobham, Bishop of Worcester but when Humphrey Duke of Gloucester (brother of Henry V of England) donated a great collection of manuscripts between 1435 and 1437, the space was deemed insufficient and a larger building was required. A suitable room was finally built above the Divinity School and completed in 1488.

The late sixteenth century saw the library go through a period of decline: the library's furniture was sold, and only three of the original books belonging to Duke Humphrey remained in the collection. During the reign of Edward VI, there was a purge of "superstitious" (Catholic-related) manuscripts. It was not until 1598 that the library began to thrive once more when Thomas Bodley wrote to the Vice Chancellor of the University offering to support the development of the library.

The Brothers and wives were conducted through the Divinity School, through to the Convocation room, where they heard that the room was used by Charles 1st as the site of his Parliament, and through to the very austere Court Room, where cases were heard up to 18th Century.

From here the party were taken to the 1st floor library where they heard of the ingenious way books were safeguarded from removal by being chained to their shelves. A practice that was ended when the library paid the princely sum of £3 to have them removed.

The tour ended in the Quadrangle reviewing the various grandeur of the architecture which has graced the City for so many years. Being good Catenians, the party retired to a local pub for lunch.

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