

## ST. DEINIOL'S RESIDENTIAL LIBRARY: A HAVEN OF PEACE IN NORTH WALES, UNITED KINGDOM

William Ewart Gladstone, the founder of St. Deiniol's Residential Library, has been aptly described as a Victorian colossus. A man of indefatigable energy with a zest and concern for all aspects of human life, Gladstone strode across the 19th century world of state and church affairs with a passionate interest in social and political reform. Four times Prime Minister, with a career of almost 60 years in parliament, he combined these duties with a great appetite for the reading and collecting of books.

For Gladstone, a day without reading was the exception rather than the rule. By 1860 his propensity for books led to the creation of a new wing at Hawarden Castle, his home in North Wales, and there reading was elevated to almost religious proportions of devotion and attention in his 'Temple of Peace,' the name he gave his new study. Here he would retreat from the pressures of state and family life to enjoy the peace and quietness that were essential conditions for reading, studying and thinking amid the company of his beloved books. 'Ever since I began to pass out of boyhood,' he wrote, 'I have been feeling my way, owing little to living teachers, but enormously to four dead ones, over and above the Four Gospels.' It was a quartet made up of Aristotle, Augustine, Dante and Joseph Butler, and they show how vast the range of his reading was. His diaries record that range from Pusey's 'The Improvement of Farming' through Buchanan's 'Memoirs of Painting' in two volumes, pausing for the poetry of Milton or a novel of Sir Walter Scott, to Edwards's 'Libraries and Founders of Libraries'.

'Books' he wrote 'are the voices of the dead, but voices that live on in the pages to inspire and guide. They are a main instrument of communion with the vast human procession of the other world. . . . In a room well filled with them, no one has felt or can feel solitary.'

Eager that others should experience those truths, Gladstone welcomed family and guests into his 'Temple of Peace'. But conversation was strictly prohibited. The purpose of being there was for study and reading. As he immersed himself in his books, a vision formed in Gladstone's mind of a larger temple which would welcome not just family and guests, but anyone who was interested in the pursuit of 'Divine Learning'. To Gladstone, this phrase meant the sum total of all human knowledge revealed by God. Through his enthusiasm and commitment, that vision became a reality towards the end of his life, when in 1896 he set up a Trust. To this Trust he donated some 30,000 of his own books and built a temporary corrugated 'iron library' to house them, close to the church of St. Deiniol where he regularly worshipped.

On his death in 1898 an appeal was launched to provide a more fitting home for this library, which would also be a permanent memorial to a great Victorian statesman and churchman. The £9,000 raised by this appeal went into the building of a new library which was formally opened in 1902. Gladstone's own family provided the funds to build the residential accommodation which opened five years later. In 1908, King Edward VII visited the newly founded Residential Library, and since those days the Library has welcomed readers of all nationalities, ages, disciplines, cultures and religions.

The reader who today enters the driveway of the Library is confronted by an imposing façade in the warm sandstone of Runcorn and green slate which blends together Gothic and Elizabethan features. It is the creation of the famous architect of the Victorian and Edwardian periods, John Douglas, and represents the crown-

ing achievement of his professional career. Statues of Gladstone's four literary heroes welcome the reader into the stately galleried library with its octagonal oak columns and delicate swirling tracery that is now the home for a collection of over 200,000 printed items. As early as 1925 an annexe had to be built adjoining the Library, such was the growth in the number of books acquired.

The collection reflects not only Gladstone's passion for reading books, but also his concern for their efficient arrangement and care. As a British statesman, he was possibly unique in his interest in libraries. In his later years he visited many libraries and promoted the cause of libraries in rural areas and for the leisured society of his day. The library at Hawarden embodies three basic principles of economy, good arrangement and accessibility. The bookcases move in and out from the walls at right-angles, an idea of Gladstone's which provides alcoves with shallow cases at the ends ensuring the maximum use of the storage area; while in the annexe books are stored on mobile shelves.

The books themselves reflect Gladstone's absorbing interests in a wide range of subjects, theology and 19th century history being major themes that interested this outstanding Churchman and life-long student. The present collection has gradually grown over the years through careful buying and donations into a comprehensive arts/humanities library. The Library Association *Record* of 1899 remarked of 'the St. Deiniol's Library Scheme' that 'a cursory inspection of the collection bears witness to the wonderful catholicity of Mr Gladstone's taste in literature and the amazing scope of his studies and knowledge.' That catholicity is even more evident today.

There are many volumes of antiquarian interest: an early edition of Dante's *Convivio*, a rare copy of a translation of *Erasmus on St John's Gospel* by the Tudor Princess Mary and dedicated to her mother, Katherine of Aragon, and a 16th century Armenian *Book of the Gospels* presented to Gladstone by the Caucasus Armenians. The addition of the Bishop Moorman Franciscan Library has brought more treasures, including a 15th century missal, a tiny handwritten breviary ideally suited to the itinerant medieval friar because of its small weight, and various incunabula. Many volumes contain Gladstone's annotations and occasional glimpses of his humour, as in a copy of the *Colloquies* of Erasmus of 1664 which is inscribed 'Samuel Powell Purser bought this book on the 11th day of July, being Saturday in the year of grace 1840'. Gladstone has written underneath 'And sold it very soon after.' Readers now come from all parts of the world to consult his comments and marginalia.

In such a wide-ranging library, a student can find something to further his or her studies, be it an item from the wealth of source material for the 19th century, a volume of the Early English Text Society, or a pamphlet from the 50,000 pamphlets that date from the late 17th century. Unexpected treasures, rare items and new discoveries are regularly commented upon by residents who represent very varied academic interests. Serendipity always lies in store for the reader eager to wander along the shelves and alcoves.

Among serial holdings, are the *Rolls Series*, numerous volumes of the *Historical Manuscripts Commission* and the *Surtees Society*, and a large number of H.M.S.O. publications, such as *Calendars of State Papers*, and *Calendars of Close Rolls* and *Patent Rolls* from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century. The Library has a complete run of *Camden Society* volumes and subscribes to publications of the *British Record Society* and the *Catholic Record Society*, and to the *Victorian County Histories* series. The wide range of current journals taken include *The English Historical Review*, *The Historian*, *The Historical Journal*, *History*, *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, *Teaching History*, and *The Welsh History Review*. Many other publications and works of reference in a range of subject areas provide invaluable sources of information for the researcher, as well as the general reader.

The Library, in addition to the extensive book collection, has rich collections of manuscripts which may be consulted in the Clwyd Record Office nearby. (The County Archivist acts as honorary archivist to the Library.) The largest collection in size is the Glynne-Gladstone MSS, comprising family and estate correspondence, mostly of the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> Although W. E. Gladstone's political correspondence and papers were given to the British Library in 1930, there remain at St. Deiniol's over 5,000 letters from him to members of his family, together with his personal account books and an extensive collection of press-cuttings. Also in the Glynne-Gladstone MSS is correspondence of other members of the family, amounting to 70,000 letters, and papers of his wife, Catherine, and his father, Sir John Gladstone. The collection includes extensive records of the Hawarden estate and a wealth of material for the study of Liverpool, in which Sir John Gladstone made his fortune. There are also papers relating to Sir John's slave plantations in the West Indies, his Indian business interests, and the Oak Farm Co., a complex of collieries and ironworks in Staffordshire.

There are other smaller collections of manuscripts, but of particular interest to the local historian are the church notes of Sir Stephen Glynne, 9th Bt., in 107 volumes, dating between 1824 and 1874. Sir Stephen, who was W. E. Gladstone's brother-in-law, devoted several months of the year to visiting and describing churches in all parts of Britain. His notebooks give an architectural description of each church, its monuments, etc., and are particularly valuable where the church has been altered by later restoration. Record societies have printed the notes for twelve English counties, and the whole of Wales, but the majority remain unpublished.<sup>2</sup>

**Ecclesiastical Law.** St. Deiniol's has over 200 books, pamphlets and articles relating to ecclesiastical law, with sections on ecclesiastical law generally, but also specific to the Church of England. The collection includes books about the work of Parliamentary Commissions, the Convocations and the General Synod, and covers a wide time scale, the earliest book dating from 1536 and the newest from the last few years. There is a substantial collection of books from before 1800. There are books relating to the work of English ecclesiastical courts, and institutions, and also books comprising lectures on canon law. There is material relating to proceedings and controversies such as Tractarianism, images and ritual. There is also a large collection of 16th century religious tracts. Other subjects covered are visitations, ecclesiastical revenue and tithes. There are sections relating to church law in Scotland, other denominations, and also in foreign countries. Material in several languages other than English is included.

The foundation deed of the Library of 1895 lays down that the purpose of the Library is 'the promotion of Divine Learning,' and in an earlier document of that year Gladstone elaborated: 'Divine Learning, in order to reach its fullest efficiency, had been and ought to be associated with the various branches of human knowledge, especially with history, and philosophy; and it is upon the widest basis that the Library is being formed.' And it is upon that widest basis that the Library has grown in size and use, so that through the decades this 'Temple of Peace' has acted as a haven to many from over 40 nations of the world.

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<sup>1</sup> For a list of the collection, see C. J. Williams, *Handlist of the Glynne-Gladstone MSS in St. Deiniol's Library, Hawarden*. (List & Index Society Special Series, vol. 24, 1990). The collection has been used extensively by S. G. Checkland in his history of the Gladstone family, *The Gladstones. A Family Biography 1764-1851* (1971), and by Dr H. C. G. Matthew in his edition of the Gladstone Diaries, now published up to the end of 1886, and more recently by Dr Peter J. Jagger in *Gladstone: The Making of a Christian Politician. The Personal Religious Life and Development of William Ewart Gladstone 1809-1832*, Pickwick Publications, 4137 Timberlane Drive, Allison Park, Pennsylvania, 15101-2932, U.S.A. (1991).

<sup>2</sup> A. G. Veysey, 'Sir Stephen Glynne, 1807-74', *Flintshire Historical Society Journal*, 30 (1981-82), 151-70. An index to the church notes, arranged by counties, was prepared by the Clwyd Record Office in 1977.

As the only residential library of its kind in the world the amenities, in addition to the Library, include accommodation for 48 people in modern, single, twin and double-bedded rooms all with study facilities; a large common room, lounge, lecture and seminar rooms, television lounge and waitress-service dining room with excellent and varied meals and also a chapel, and all this under one roof. The building is centrally heated and double-glazed throughout.

As you work in the Library, eat in the dining room, or enjoy a coffee in the common room, you will find yourself rubbing shoulders with other guests, who represent a variety of disciplines and professions. Here they find an excellent, indeed a unique, book collection, comfortable and modern residential amenities, conditions of peace away from the pressures of life, and the stimulating company of a wide family of guests, but above all the opportunity for refreshment and renewal of mind and spirit.

For the researcher, the student, the librarian, the general reader and the browser, a visit to this unique residential library with its extensive book collection, a treasure-store for research and study, will provide a fascinating and memorable experience.

St Deiniol's is only six miles from the city of Chester, which boasts fine Roman and medieval remains and lies across the border in north-west England. The beautiful countryside of North Wales, including Snowdonia and the Ffestiniog railway is within 70 miles, and Caernarfon and Conwy Castles are only about an hour away by car.

Manchester Airport is less than an hour away, and there are excellent train services from London to Chester, a journey of just under three hours. In terms of access and in terms of what the Library can offer, St Deiniol's is an excellent centre for anyone contemplating a brief stay away from everyday duties or a longer period in which to pursue a particular subject.

If you would like further information, please write to:

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