

Towards a History of the Phi Collection, 1882-1945

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Conceived in 1882 as a literary ‘Siberia’ in which ‘improper books’ could be kept out of the hands of impressionable undergraduates, in the first decades of the twentieth-century the Bodleian’s ‘Φ’ (Phi) collection served as an ark within which avant-garde writing could weather the storms of obscenity prosecutions and Customs seizures. Despite having held in its time approximately 2,100 obscene and libellous works, the Phi collection has never been the subject of sustained critical scrutiny, nor does it feature in any of the major published histories of the Bodleian. The present article is intended to offer a detailed, though by no means definitive, account of the origins, contents, and development of the Bodleian’s restricted collection from its establishment in the late-nineteenth-century to the completion of its most substantial restructuring in the middle of the twentieth. While necessarily provisional, this account of the collection’s origins and development is intended not only to offer a snapshot of a hitherto undocumented facet of the Bodleian’s institutional life, but to indicate the extensive opportunities that the Phi collection affords for future research into the transmission and reception of a wide range of literary and non-literary texts. In doing so it offers the possibility not only to chart the mechanisms through which obscene works were acquired and made available to readers by the Bodleian, but to analyse the conditions under which the category of obscenity itself was being constructed and contested in Britain in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-centuries.

Towards a History of the Phi Collection, 1882-1945

Late in his tenure as Bodley's Librarian, E.W.B. Nicholson received a somewhat unusual letter from Arthur Lionel Smith, a History fellow at Balliol College, Oxford.¹ Smith explained that he had been asked to enquire on behalf of a 'Cambridge don' whether there existed 'any Siberia attached to [the] Bodleian Library to which books are banished' when deemed unsuitable for the general reader.² Nicholson knew that just such a literary Gulag did exist, for he had personally overseen its creation. It had been dubbed the 'Φ' (Phi) collection, punningly titled to register a 'Fie!' of disapproval to those who sought to peruse its contents. Despite having held in its time approximately 2,100 obscene and libellous works, the Phi collection has never been the subject of sustained critical scrutiny, nor does it feature in any of the major published histories of the Bodleian.³ The present article is intended to offer a detailed, though by no means definitive, account of the origins, contents, and development of the Bodleian's restricted collection from its establishment in the late-nineteenth-century to the completion of its most substantial restructuring in the middle of the twentieth.

The earliest evidence of the Phi collection resides in the minutes of a meeting of the Curators of the Bodleian dated 29 April 1882.⁴ Item 2.(6) on the printed Agenda, under the heading 'Applications from the Librarian', asks for 'leave to submit [the] proposed form of [a] statute respecting [the] issue of improper books'. A manuscript notation indicates that authority

I would like to acknowledge the patience, generosity, and diligence of the staff of the Bodleian Library, Weston Library, and the Bodleian Library Records Department, especially Oliver House and Theodora Boorman. I am also indebted to Patrick Kearney for access to his as yet unpublished bibliography of the Phi, and to Liam Sims, who provided valuable information on Cambridge University Library's *Arcana* collection. My particular thanks go to Chris Fletcher for drawing the existence of the Phi collection to my attention.

¹ R.L. Patterson, 'Smith, Arthur Lionel (1850-1924)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Online Edition, ed. Lawrence Goldman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36129>, accessed 29 June 2015.

² A.L. Smith to E.W.B. Nicholson, 16 June [c.1910-12], Bodleian Library, 590/1: Φ 1910-1943.

³ The most prominent discussions of the Bodleian's history and collections are:

W.D. Macray, *Annals of the Bodleian Library Oxford*, Second Edition (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 1984).

Edmund Craster, *History of the Bodleian, 1845-1945* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 1981).

Gregory Walker, Mary Clapinson, and Lesley Forbes, eds. *The Bodleian Library: A Subject Guide to the Collections* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2004).

Mary Clapinson, *A Brief History of the Bodleian Library* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2015).

By contrast, the British Library's 'private case' has been the subject of detailed study by commentators both within and without the institution. See:

Peter Fryer, *Private Case – Public Scandal* (London: Seckler and Warburg, 1966).

P.J. Kearney, *The Private Case: An Annotated Bibliography of the Private Case Erotica Collection in the British (Museum) Library* (London: Jay Landesman, 1981).

Paul James Cross, 'The Private Case: A History', in *The Library of the British Museum: Retrospective Essays on the Department of Printed Books*, ed. P.R. Harris (London: The British Library, 1991), 201-240.

R.F. Harris, *A History of the British Museum Library, 1753-1973* (London: The British Library, 1998).

⁴ 'Curators' Acta – Saturday, April 29, 1882', *Minutes of Curators' Meetings, Nov. 8 1876 – Dec. 5 1887*, Bodleian Library, Library Records d.15.

was duly granted to Nicholson, who proposed that ‘the Librarian be authorised to refuse any book at his discretion to persons who are not M.A.s, unless they have special permission of the Curators’. Two manuscript notes in the earlier of the two Library Records files concerning the collection - one on Bodleian letter-head dated 4 January 1913, the other undated - quote this statute directly, indicating that it continued to serve as the basis for regulating access to Phi materials until the collection was rationalised in 1939.⁵ In 1882 Nicholson, who had been appointed to the post only two months earlier, initiated a wholesale expansion of the Bodleian’s classification system.⁶ He introduced a scheme of around 7,000 sections, carefully differentiated by academic discipline, subject matter, and volume size, one of which appears to have been the ‘Φ’ shelfmark. This supposition is borne out by the first Phi handlist, which is dated ‘Jan. 30 1892’ in Nicholson’s hand, and which was to remain in use until 1927.⁷ Nicholson records at the foot of the handlist’s title page that any work marked with an asterisk ‘is not entered in the General Catalogue’ and that a ‘slip catalogue of those excluded books’ is to be kept ‘at the end of Φ.c’. On this basis, it may logically be inferred that the majority of Phi titles were listed in the library’s General Catalogues, a theory confirmed by the Bodleian’s *Pre-1920 Catalogue of Printed Books*.⁸ The works listed in this ‘slip catalogue’ comprised the ‘Res.’ shelfmark, the Bodleian’s most heavily restricted collection, reserved for works to which readers could not legally be permitted access on grounds of libel, sedition, or because the publisher had withdrawn the book from circulation.⁹

By 1912 the access procedures outlined in Nicholson’s statute had evolved into a semi-formal system whereby undergraduate students were required to secure written authorisation from a tutor in order to access Phi materials. Readers who were not members of the University were likewise required to provide academic *bona fides*, typically in the form of a letter of introduction from a present or former member of University staff. The earliest evidence of this system in action comes in the form of a printed library request slip dated 24 May 1912, from which may be inferred the transactions necessary for undergraduate and unmatriculated readers

⁵ Documentary evidence of the administration of the Phi collection is largely confined to two uncatalogued Library Records files, ‘590/1: Φ 1910-1943’ and ‘590/2: Φ 1937-1949’, which contain correspondence, reports, and press-clippings relating to the collection and its contents.

⁶ For a discussion of Nicholson’s period as Librarian, see Craster (1981: 152-245). For details of Nicholson’s reform of the library’s classification system, see:

G.W. Wheeler, ‘Bodleian Press-Marks in Relation to Classification (Concluded)’, *Bodleian Quarterly Record*, 1.11 (3rd Quarter, 1916), 311-322. pp. 313-15

⁷ *Handlist of Φ*, Bodleian Library, Library Records d. 786.

⁸ Bodleian Library, *The Bodleian Library Pre-1920 Catalogue of Printed Books (Windows)* [CD-ROM] (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 1997).

⁹ The British Museum’s equivalent was the ‘Suppressed Safe’ (S.S.), which came into being in the early twentieth-century (Cross, 1991: 210).

to view a volume from the Phi collection at this time.¹⁰ The slip has been completed in pencil by a student named 'D. Matthews' who requests 'Φ.f.31', a 1731 edition of *The Works of the Earls of Rochester, Roscommon, and Dorset*.¹¹ Matthews's request slip was returned to him on the same day with a pencil notation from Bodley's Librarian, Falconer Madan, informing him that it was 'not a book ordinarily to be given out'. Undeterred, Matthews sought the support of R.J.E. Tiddy, fellow of Trinity College and recently appointed lecturer in the nascent Honours School of English, who noted in black ink on the reverse of the slip on 28 May 1912 that, in his opinion, 'Mr. Matthews should most certainly be allowed the book'.¹² The requested volume would have been presented to Matthews and subsequently retrieved from him by a Senior Assistant, as 'boys' (adolescent apprentices employed by the Bodleian) were not permitted to handle Phi materials.¹³ The twenty-nine request slips and letters of support contained in '590/1: Φ 1910-1943' offer a valuable microcosmic image of the development of a range of academic disciplines in Oxford in the first decades of the twentieth century.¹⁴ These requests provide particularly clear insights into the growth of the Honours Schools of English Literature and Experimental Psychology, whose students contribute eighteen of the twenty-six requests for Phi materials made by Oxford undergraduates between 1910 and 1943.¹⁵

Tellingly, only four of these letters of support concern female students, whose requests often result in lengthy discussions between tutors and librarians over the suitability of the materials in question for women. One such exchange from late September 1917 concerns a request by a student of medieval literature, 'Miss Robinson', to view a volume of 'Folk-lore slave de le [*sic*] vallée Résee' from the *Κροπτάδια* (1883-1911).¹⁶ Upon examining the work in question, Falconer Madan did 'not feel justified in giving it out unless she brought some testimony that her

¹⁰ This slip and twenty-eight similar requests, notes, and letters of recommendation from tutors are contained in 590/1: Φ 1910-1943.

¹¹ J.W. Rochester, *The Works of the Earls of Rochester, Roscommon, and Dorset; the Dukes of Devonshire, Buckinghamshire, &c. with memoirs of their lives. In two volumes. Adorned with Cuts* (London: 1731).

[Current shelfmark: Radcl.f.238.]

¹² Michael Heaney, 'Tiddy, Reginald John Elliott (1880–1916)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Online Edition, ed. Lawrence Goldman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/57228>, accessed 1 March 2015.

D.J. Palmer, 'English', in *The History of the University of Oxford*, Vol. VII, eds. M.G. Brock and M.C. Curthoys (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 397-411. p. 411

¹³ *Staff Manual, 1923* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 1923). p. 40.

[Hereafter cited as '(*Staff Manual, 1923*)'.]

¹⁴ See Tables 1 and 2.

¹⁵ The most regularly requested items in the Phi collection in this period were the works of Rochester - requested by four students - and volumes of Havelock Ellis's *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1897-1910), which were requested by five.

¹⁶ Henniger Frères, eds. *Κροπτάδια, recueil de documents pour servir à l'étude des traditions populaires*, 12 vols. (Heilbronn: 1883-1911). [Φ.f.7 (1-12)].

studies in folklore are serious'.¹⁷ However, even when presented with a letter of support from the Dean of Balliol, Francis Fortescue Urquhart, identifying her as 'a very serious student', Madan remained intransigent.¹⁸ The matter was only settled when Urquhart, in an evident fit of pique, declared that Miss Robinson 'is quite an elderly lady' whose 'morals won't suffer!'¹⁹ In April 1926, Christine M.S. Burrows, Principal of the Society of Oxford Home-Students (which was to become the St. Anne's Society in 1942 and St. Anne's College a decade later), addressed a letter to Arthur Cowley, Bodley's Librarian, to reassure him that - though listed as an undergraduate - Miss K.J.K. Jamieson was in fact 'an Advanced Student' of 'mature age' reading for a DPhil in 'Medieval & Modern Languages'.²⁰ While the paternalism with which Madan and Cowley treat these requests is undoubtedly a by-product of ingrained patriarchal constructions of femininity as a state of naïve innocence, it owes a particular debt to contemporary British obscenity legislation. Censorship in Britain in the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-centuries was governed by the 1857 Obscene Publications Act (popularly known as 'Lord Campbell's Act' after its author) and the precedent set by Lord Chief Justice Cockburn's interpretation of this Act in the 1868 decision of *Regina v. Hicklin* (the so-called 'Hicklin' Ruling).²¹ Though Campbell's Act neglected to offer a legal definition of obscenity, its author argued that the Act 'was intended to apply exclusively to works written for the single purpose of corrupting the morals of youth, and of a nature calculated to shock the common feelings of decency in any well regulated mind.'²² Cockburn's 1868 decision substituted for this rather nebulous mandate his famous, if no less subjective, 'test of obscenity', which required legal officials to determine 'whether the tendency of the matter charged as obscenity is to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences, and into whose hands a publication of this sort may fall'.²³ Both Celia Marshik and Rachel Potter gloss 'those whose minds are open to such immoral influences' as denoting 'the young, the working-class, and women' (though Hicklin considered his definition to include 'persons of all classes, young and old').²⁴ Read in this light, Madan and Cowley's reluctance to offer female readers access to Phi materials is borne of their awareness of the librarian's role - and, by extension, legal liability - in regulating into whose hands obscene publications may fall. A similar awareness inscribes itself in the tutors' insistence that their female

¹⁷ F. Madan to Miss S. Robinson, 21 September 1917, Bodleian Library, 590/1: Φ 1910-1943.

¹⁸ F.F. Urquhart to F. Madan, 24 September 1917, Bodleian Library, 590/1: Φ 1910-1943.

¹⁹ F.F. Urquhart to F. Madan, 26 September 1917, Bodleian Library, 590/1: Φ 1910-1943.

²⁰ C.M.S. Burrows to A.E. Cowley, 9 April 1926, Bodleian Library, 590/1: Φ 1910-1943.

²¹ Rachel Potter, *Obscene Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). pp. 16-18.

²² Hansard HL vol. 146 col. 329, 25 June 1857 (Millybank Systems, 2005), <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1857/jun/25/second-reading>, accessed 05 December 2014.

²³ Court of the Queen's Bench, *Regina v. Hicklin* 1868, (Wikisource), http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Regina_v._Hicklin, accessed 05 December 2014.

²⁴ See Potter (2013: 17) and Celia Marshik, *British Modernism and Censorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). p.23

students are ‘mature’, academic, and morally robust women, whose minds are, therefore, closed ‘to such immoral influences’ as the Phi might exert.

The Phi collection grew in large part through the Bodleian’s legal deposit accessions, including such controversial works as James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922), the Egoist Press second impression of which arrived at the library on 19 December 1922.²⁵ However, the correspondence contained in ‘590/1: Φ 1910-1943’ offers evidence of a range of means by which the collection was assembled. One group of letters deals with the transfer of the residua of the British Museum’s ‘Ashbee bequest’ to the Bodleian in 1914. On his death in July 1900, Henry Spencer Ashbee bequeathed the contents of his library (8,764 works in 15,299 volumes) to the British Museum.²⁶ Of these, around ‘1,000 books in 1,600 volumes’ were deemed by the Keeper of Printed Books, G.K. Fortescue, to be of ‘an erotic or obscene character’ necessitating their placement in the private case.²⁷ In the process of cataloguing this extensive bequest it became apparent that many of the volumes were duplicates of those already held by the Museum, and, in line with Ashbee’s will, these were offered to the Bodleian on 5 March 1914 by Fortescue’s successor, William Barclay Squire.²⁸ Craster selected a range of works from a list compiled by Squire, and their transfer was approved by the Trustees of the British Museum on 14 March.²⁹ The chosen books arrived at the Bodleian on 23 March in a case marked ‘Private and Personal’ and were duly shelved in the Phi collection.³⁰ The Bodleian’s willing acceptance of these works demonstrates the library’s commitment to acquiring, conserving, and making available to its readers as many texts possible, irrespective of their perceived obscenity.

A 1925 letter addressed to Arthur Cowley by a British Customs official named H.R. Reade indicates the ways in which the Bodleian actively sought to claim works which had been impounded by H.M. Customs and Excise under Section 42 of the 1872 Customs Consolidation Act.³¹ In the letter, Reade responds to a request by Cowley to claim copies of Edward Fuchs’s *Geschichte der erotischen Kunst* (1908) and *Illustrierte Sittengeschichte, vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*

²⁵ *Invoices of Books and Pamphlets Acquired Under the Copyright Act of 1911: 1922-1925*, Bodleian Library, Library Records, b.176.

James Joyce, *Ulysses* (London: Egoist Press, 1922).

This copy was initially shelved at Φ.d.127 and currently resides at Arch.AA.d.198.

Prominent studies of legal deposit in the United Kingdom include:

R.C. Barrington Partridge, *The History of the Legal Deposit of Books Throughout the British Empire: A thesis approved for the Honours Diploma of The Library Association* (London: The Library Association, 1938).

John Feather, ‘The Legal Deposit of Books’, in *Publishing, Piracy and Politics: An Historical Study of Copyright in Britain* (London: Mansell, 1994), 97-121.

²⁶ Cross, *The Private Case*, p. 206.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ W.B. Squire to H.H.E. Craster, 5 March 1914, Bodleian Library, 590/1: Φ 1910-1943.

²⁹ W.B. Squire to H.H.E. Craster, 17 March 1914, Bodleian Library, 590/1: Φ 1910-1943.

³⁰ W.B. Squire to H.H.E. Craster, 23 March 1914, Bodleian Library, 590/1: Φ 1910-1943.

³¹ H.R. Reade to A.E. Cowley, 22 January 1925, Bodleian Library, 590/1: Φ 1910-1943.

(1909-1912).³² Reade concedes that it seems to him ‘a pity to have [these volumes] destroyed’ and assures Cowley that they will be despatched to the Bodleian ‘with the approval of [his] board’. Despite this bibliographic pang of conscience, Reade is keen to ensure that any evidence of his department’s complicity in the Bodleian’s acquisition of Fuchs’ obscene works does not appear ‘in any list issued or pasted up for public information’. That the Bodleian was not alone in its efforts to liberate obscene works from the British authorities is reflected in a letter addressed by Alwyn Faber Scholfield, Cambridge University Librarian, to Arthur Cowley in February 1929. Scholfield informs Cowley that he has ‘written to New Scotland Yard in the hope of obtaining two copies of [Norah C.] James: *Sleeveless Errand*’ - one for the Bodleian, the other for Cambridge - and states that William Kirk Dickson has requested a copy for the National Library of Scotland.³³ Scholfield believes it ‘unlikely that the Police will yield to the request’ and asks Cowley to ‘add [Oxford’s] voice’ to those of Cambridge and Edinburgh in demanding a copy. James’s freshly published novel had been seized by plain-clothes officers across Britain in a co-ordinated sting only a week before and would be found guilty of obscene libel the following month.³⁴ This swift and co-ordinated effort by several of the U.K.’s copyright libraries to claim copies of an obscene text while it remained in a state of legal limbo further emphasises the seriousness of their commitment to their responsibilities as legal deposit collections. More significantly, it suggests the ways in which they exploited this legal duty as a means by which to protect contentious works from destruction. This desire to operate as independent mediators between the institutional mechanisms of *avant garde* publishing and the British legal establishment is an as yet under-explored reflection of and contributing factor in the growing professionalisation of librarianship in Britain.³⁵ Unfortunately, in spite of this rapid response,

³² Edward Fuchs, *Geschichte der erotischen Kunst. Erweiterung des Werkes ‘Das erotische Element in der Karikatur’, mit Einschluss der ersten Kunst* (Berlin: 1908) [Φ.d.137]. Edmund Fuchs, *Illustrierte Sittengeschichte, vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*, 3 vols. (Munich: Ergänzungsbd, 1909-12) [Φ.d.138/1-3].

³³ A.F. Scholfield to A.E. Cowley, 28 February 1929, Bodleian Library, 590/1: Φ 1910-1943.

Alan Bell, ‘Dickson, William Kirk (1860–1949)’, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Online Edition, ed. Lawrence Goldman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/72368>, accessed 29 June 2015.

³⁴ Celia Marshik, ‘History’s “Abrupt Revenges”’: Censoring War’s Perversions in *The Well of Loneliness* and *Sleeveless Errand*, *Journal of Modern Literature*, 26.2 (Winter 2003), 145-59. p. 145

³⁵ Ian Cornelius identifies the years between 1920 and 1970 as ‘a period of professional establishment’ for British librarianship. See:

Ian Cornelius, ‘The Interpretation of Professional Development in Librarianship Since 1850’, in Alistair Black and Peter Hoare, eds. *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland, Volume 3: 1850-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 525-33, p. 525.

For discussions of the emergence of librarianship as a recognised profession in Britain see:

Gerald Bramley, *Apprentice to Graduate: A History of Library Education in the United Kingdom* (London: Clive Bingley, 1981).

Thomas Kelly, *History of Public Libraries in Great Britain, 1845-1975* (London: Library Association, 1977).

Alistair Black, *A New History of the English Public Library: Social and Intellectual Contexts, 1850-1914* (London: Leicester University Press, 1996).

Alistair Black, *The Public Library in Britain, 1914-2000* (London: The British Library, 2000).

Cowley's request to secure a copy of James's novel – communicated to the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police in a letter of 2 March – was itself a sleeveless errand.³⁶ The Bodleian only succeeded in acquiring James's novel in 1960, when a copy of the first Paris edition, inscribed with the author's compliments, was shelved at '25612 e.13325.'³⁷ Nevertheless, Cowley's efforts demonstrate that, if it had once constituted a bibliographic 'Siberia', by the first decades of the twentieth-century the Phi had also come to offer an ark within which avant-garde writing could weather the storms of obscenity prosecutions and Customs seizures.³⁸

Further evidence of covert cooperation between the Bodleian and the British government in the Library's acquisition of Phi materials is offered in a 1929 letter from the British Institute in Florence. In it, the Secretary of the Institute responds to a request from Cowley for a copy of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928) which had been forwarded to the Institute by a 'Mr Gazelee [*sic*] of the Foreign Office'.³⁹ The Secretary offers Cowley a 'copy of the 1st edition, signed for £10-10-0 less 10%' or the 'Paris edition,' printed from 'a photographic reproduction, for 13/- or 14/-.' Cowley appears to have purchased both copies, which were brought from Florence to the Bodleian in the diplomatic bag by Stephen Gaselee, Librarian and Keeper of the Papers of the Foreign Office, on 14 November.⁴⁰ As these examples indicate, the holdings of the Phi collection represent a significant record of the British government's ambivalent attitude towards its own censorship mechanisms in the first decades of the twentieth century. The history of the Phi collection thus complicates traditional narratives of British modernism in which authors and publishers grapple heroically with a reactionary censor, presenting a more nuanced image in which government officials and library staff co-operated to mitigate the worst excesses of contemporary obscenity legislation.

³⁶ A printed acknowledgement of receipt on New Scotland Yard letter-head signed by H.M. Howgrave-Graham, Secretary of the Metropolitan Police, confirms that Cowley addressed a letter to the Commissioner on 2 March. Though the letter's contents are unknown, the fact that it was sent within two days of Scholfield's request for assistance suggests that it must have concerned James's novel:

H.M. Howgrave-Graham to A.E. Cowley, 4 March 1929, Bodleian Library, 590/1: Φ 1910-1943.

³⁷ Norah C. James, *Sleeveless Errand: A Novel* (Paris: H. Babou and J. Kahane, 1929).

An undated black ink manuscript inscription on the flyleaf, initialled by the publisher, Henry Babou, presents the volume '[w]ith the author's compliments'. The reverse of its fly-title bears its '4 July 1960' accession stamp.

³⁸ I explore the ways in which modernist authors and British librarians exploited the legal deposit mechanisms of the 1911 Imperial Copyright Act to circumvent British obscenity legislation in greater detail in:

Lloyd Houston, '(Il)legal Deposits: *Ulysses* and the Copyright Libraries', *The Library* (forthcoming).

³⁹ Secretary (British Institute of Florence) to A.E. Cowley, 10 October 1929, Bodleian Library, 590/1: Φ 1910-1943.

⁴⁰ D.H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (Florence: Tipografia Giuntina, 1928).

[Current shelfmark: Arch. H d.48.]

D.H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (Paris: Privately Printed, 1928).

[Current shelfmark: Arch. D d.47.]

S. Gaselee to M. Needham, 14 November 1929, Bodleian Library, 590/1: Φ 1910-1943.

Ronald Storrs, 'Gaselee, Sir Stephen (1882–1943)', rev. David McKitterick, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33347>, accessed 8 Aug 2015].

The Library Records files also reveal the Bodleian to have been extremely conscious of the potential impact that press coverage of the Phi and its contents might have had on the library's public image. This is reflected by the presence in '590/1: Φ 1910-1943' of a copy of 'The Taboos of the British Museum Library' by E.S.P. Haynes, which had featured in the December 1913 issue of the *English Review*.⁴¹ Haynes' polemic, the first article publically to address the existence of a restricted collection in a prominent U.K. library, denounced the private case as an apparatus of censorship and excoriated the British Museum for its perceived moral timidity in deferring to an 'ecclesiastical' belief that 'intellectual curiosity is sinful in itself'.⁴² The file also contains seven newspaper articles pertaining to the Phi collection and its most prominent British analogues, gathered for the Bodleian by 'Durrant's Press Cuttings' between 1928 and 1937.⁴³ One is a 'Letter to the Editor' taken from the June 1937 issue of Oxford's weekly student magazine, *Isis*. In it, 'S. Dell', an undergraduate at Queen's College, expresses his outrage at having been asked to secure the permission of his tutor before viewing the Bodleian's copy of 'Volume V of "The Psychology of Sex" by Havelock Ellis' (Dell, 1937: 12).⁴⁴ For Dell, this 'ridiculous example of narrow-mindedness' and 'fantastic antiquarianism' betrays an 'attitude to sex' which serves only to 'make it an object of unholy curiosity' (*Ibid*). Ironically, Dell demurely neglects to give the volume in question its full title, *Erotic Symbolism, The Mechanism of Detumescence, The Psychic State in Pregnancy* (1906), though the editors of the *Isis* playfully offer their correspondent use of 'the office copy for a trifling fee'.⁴⁵ This outburst of undergraduate ire was seized upon two days later by *The Daily Mirror*, who printed quotations from the *Isis* article under the headline 'VARSITY LACKS SEX SENSE' (11 June 1937). Dell's letter, and the tabloid interest it garnered, reflect the ways in which the Phi and comparable restricted collections were associated in the contemporary popular imagination with an increasingly outmoded form of prudishness. This position had already been expressed in articles in *The Times of India* and *The Irish Times*, the latter of which emphasises the futility and apparent ridiculousness of the Bodleian's

⁴¹ E.S.P. Haynes, 'The Taboos of the British Museum Library', *The English Review*, (December 1913), 123-34.

⁴² Haynes, 'Taboos', p. 133.

⁴³ The articles collected are:

'Banning Tolstoy', *The Times of India*, 2 November 1928.

'An Author's Complaint', *The Irish Times*, 24 November 1928.

'The Acquisitive Museum', *The Times of India*, 8 December 1928.

'The Bloomsbury Raid'. *The Eastern Daily Press*, 22 February 1929.

Bertrand Russell, 'Havelock Ellis on Sex', *New Statesman and Nation*, 18 March 1933.

S. Dell, 'Innocence = Ignorance?', *Isis*, 971 (9 June 1937), 12.

Daily Mirror, 11 June 1937.

[Hereafter cited parenthetically by date].

⁴⁴ Dell, 'Innocence', p. 12.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*.

Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex, v. 5: Erotic Symbolism. The Mechanism of Detumescence. The Psychic State in Pregnancy* (Philadelphia: F.A. Davis, 1927) [Φ.e.0227, current shelfmark: 189129 e.68/5].

restrictions on access to Rochester's works by rhetorically demanding to know '[w]hat English reader has not seen a banned copy of James Joyce's *Ulysses*?' (24 November 1928).

These journalistic laments over the apparent 'narrow-mindedness' of the Bodleian were paralleled by academic attempts to catalogue and historicise the Phi and its contents so as to render them legitimate objects of critical scrutiny. Evidence of these efforts can be found in the successful applications for access made by Alfred Rose, a bibliographer of erotica, in 1933 and Alexander George (Alec) Craig, a literary historian and free-speech advocate, in 1942. Rose, whose application was endorsed in a letter by Charles Grant Robertson, a fellow of All Souls College and then Vice-Chancellor of the University of Birmingham, was conducting research for his monumental *Registrum librorum eroticorum* (1936). The *Registrum* drew on a range of existing bibliographies to present an (occasionally inaccurate) index of over 5,000 erotic works in English, French, Italian, and German, with their corresponding shelfmarks in the Bodleian, the British Museum, and a range of major European libraries.⁴⁶ Although Rose died before the work could be properly proof-read, it was published in 1936 in a limited edition of 200 copies under the pseudonym 'Rolf S. Reade'. Craster not only approved Rose's application, but subscribed for a copy of the *Registrum*, which joined the ranks of the Phi Collection on 2 July 1936.⁴⁷ Craig's scholarly credentials were vouchsafed by W.A. Marsden, Keeper of Printed Books at the British Museum Library, who introduced him to Craster as a 'serious student' and the author of a recent polemical study of the *Banned Books of England* (1937).⁴⁸ By March 1942 Craig was engaged in the final stages of research for a second broadside, *Above All Liberties*, which he published later that year. Although violently opposed to censorship in all its guises – particularly what he characterised as the British Museum Library's insidious policy of suppressing private case works by omitting them from its General Catalogue – Craig was in fact largely sympathetic to the Bodleian's more measured handling of obscene material, wryly commending its 'witty' choice of admonitory symbol.⁴⁹ This willingness to facilitate both a bibliographical catalogue and an

⁴⁶ G.A. Shakespear, 'Obituaries: Sir Charles Grant Robertson, C.V.O.', *Nature*, 161 (3 April 1948), 510. p. 510.

⁴⁷ Rolf S. Reade (Alfred Rose), *Registrum librorum eroticorum vel (sub hac specie) dubiorum: opus bibliographicum et praecipue bibliothecariis destinatum*, 2 vols. (London: 'Privately Printed for Subscribers', 1936).

The Bodleian's copy is numbered '[o]ut of series', with its accession date stamped on the flyleaf of the first volume. It was shelved at Φ .d. 214 and now resides at 2586995 d. 8/1. That the Bodleian had subscribed for its copy is confirmed in a letter to Craster from Joseph Hanna, the Assistant Librarian of Trinity College, Dublin:

J. Hanna to H.H.E. Craster, 8 May 1936, Bodleian Library, 590/1: Φ 1910-1943.

Peter Fox, 'The Librarians of Trinity College', in *Essays on the History of Trinity College Library Dublin*, eds. Vincent Kinane and Anne Walsh (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), 11-24, p.13

⁴⁸ W.A. Marsden to H.H.E. Craster, 30 March 1942, Bodleian Library, 590/1: Φ 1910-1943.

⁴⁹ Alec Craig, *Above All Liberties* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1942), p. 166.

Craig reiterates this qualified endorsement of the Bodleian's Phi policies in:

Alec Craig, *The Banned Books of England and Other Countries: A Study of the Conception of Literary Obscenity* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1962), pp. 206-7.

ideological critique of the Bodleian's restricted collection reflects an impulse towards greater transparency and accessibility on Caster's part that was to be given tangible expression in a range of reforms undertaken between 1937 and 1945.

The resulting restructuring of the Phi was principally the brain-child of Stephen G. Wright, Assistant Secretary to Bodley's Librarian, who by the late 1930s had come to regard the collection as overcrowded and out of step with contemporary social mores. On 3 December 1937 he wrote to W.A. Marsden at the British Museum Library and H.C. Stanford, Secretary of Cambridge University Library, to discuss best practice in the operation of restricted collections. Wright offered both officials a revealing outline of the Phi's contents, which he described as 'a rather heterogeneous collection' roughly divisible into three categories:

1. Works on sexual pathology and physiology whose outspokenness or illustrations make it undesirable for them to be generally accessible.
2. Obscene literature in general, ranging from certain translations of Petronius and the Arabian Nights [*sic*] to Ulysses [*sic*] and Lady Chatterley's Lover [*sic*].
3. Drawings and photographs of nudes and similar subjects, application for which would be inspired by pornographic (or very occasionally artistic) interest.

Wright explained that he wished to ascertain how these materials were handled at the 'other principal libraries' as the Bodleian was considering a 'reclassification' with implications for the 'degree of accessibility' of Phi works.⁵⁰ The following day Stanford replied, informing him that Cambridge handled the contents of its 'Arc' (*Arvana*) collection in a virtually identical manner, with a requirement that all 'undergraduates' and 'dubious applicants' provide a letter of support for their requests.⁵¹ Successful applicants were able to view Arc materials in the 'Anderson Room', a rare books and MSS reading room, with borrowing rights extended only to 'serious graduate students' who requested sexological works. Stanford emphasised that 'nude' drawings and photographs were entirely restricted to the library, as when borrowed by students they had previously tended to be returned 'adorned' with what he euphemistically dubbed 'phallic additions'.⁵²

Marsden was unwilling to 'put anything down in writing' concerning the private case, and instead invited Wright to visit the British Museum and witness its operation for himself.⁵³ Wright

⁵⁰ S.G. Wright to W.A. Marsden and H.C. Stanford, 3 December 1937, Bodleian Library, 590/2: Φ 1937-1949.

⁵¹ For a discussion of the origins and contents of the 'Arc' see Liam Sims, "'Scandalous and Libellous Books': The Arc Collection at Cambridge University Library", *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, XV.4 (2015), 625-46.

⁵² H.C. Stanford to S.G. Wright, 4 December 1937, Bodleian Library, 590/2: Φ 1937-1949.

⁵³ W.A. Marsden to S.G. Wright, 8 December 1937, Bodleian Library, 590/2: Φ 1937-1949.

undertook this fact-finding mission on 4 January 1938, summarising its outcomes in a typed report composed four days later. Wright's report highlights the 'vagueness and inconsistency' that govern the classification and accessibility of works in the private case, the handling of which appears 'more lax' than the practices of either the Bodleian or Cambridge. It notes that 'moral considerations are not taken into account as a rule' and that the 'preservation of the book rather than of readers' morals is the guiding factor' of private case accessions. Thus, while the refusal to list private case holdings in the General Catalogue was intended to discourage frivolous applications, Wright emphasises that the British Museum otherwise tried its best to facilitate public access to 'national property'. Marsden explained to Wright that this policy was possible because the British Museum was not obliged 'to keep any class of book from any particular type of reader', the majority of whom were 'at least twenty-one years old'.⁵⁴ In contrast, Wright implies, the Bodleian has a duty of care over its undergraduate readers which must inform its access policies.

On the basis of this visit Wright proposed a wholesale reclassification and reshelving of Phi materials, intended to reduce the collection to its 'quintessence' and maximise readers' access to all but the most obscene, fragile, or legally dubious works.⁵⁵ He outlined his proposals in two sets of typed recommendations which he circulated on 17 January and 21 February 1938. Perhaps in deference to the consistent journalistic outrage at the restriction of works by Havelock Ellis, Wright suggested that 'scientific texts on the physiology and psychology of sex, including birth-control and nudism' be reshelved in the Radcliffe Science Library. Unillustrated literary works were to be transferred to the relevant fiction sections, where they could be issued to readers at the Librarian's discretion.⁵⁶ 'Valuable limited editions' whose text 'may or may not be to some extent obscene' or whose illustrations 'have hitherto been regarded as improper' were to be reshelved in 'Arch.Bodl.D', a shelfmark already employed for 'fine editions, not generally required for consultation'. All but the most 'gross' nude studies were likewise to return to 'their ordinary sections', though collections of drawings 'obscene in subject or treatment' would remain in the Phi.⁵⁷ The equivocal tone of Wright's heavily qualified remarks ('may or may not', 'to some extent', 'hitherto') offers some indication of the progressive impulse governing the proposed reclassification, even as it attests to the inherent instability of the category of obscenity.

⁵⁴ S.G. Wright, 'SUMMARY OF CONVERSATION WITH THE KEEPER OF PRINTED BOOKS, THE SUPERINTENDENT OF THE READING ROOM AND OTHER [sic] OFFICIALS AT THE BRITISH MUSEUM ON TUESDAY, 4 JANUARY 1938', 8 January 1938, Bodleian Library, 590/2: Φ 1937-1949.

⁵⁵ S.G. Wright, 'Φ (7)', 19 March 1942, Bodleian Library, 590/2: Φ 1937-1949.

⁵⁶ All requests for fiction by students 'below the degree of M.A.' had to be 'initialled by the Librarian or Sub-librarian in charge' (*Staff Manual*, 1923: 44).

⁵⁷ S.G. Wright, 'Φ Collection', 17 January 1938, Bodleian Library, 590/2: Φ 1937-1949.

Wright's 'Supplementary Recommendations', dated 21 February, deal with the practical implications of this reclassification for the Bodleian. They note that the use of Arch.Bodl.D to house the majority of the Phi's contemporary contents may necessitate the relocation of the section. Likewise, Wright states that '[s]tricter control' of access to Arch.Bodl.D will entail a revision of the Bodleian's *Staff Manual* to ensure that works in Arch.Bodl.D, E, and F are 'fetched only by a Senior Assistant who must be satisfied as to the reader's qualifications for using them'. The contents of the 'Reserved' section were to be reduced only to works which had been 'specifically withdrawn by the publisher' or 'confiscated as obscene or libellous' by the authorities. Those works which retained their 'Φ' shelfmark were only to be issued 'with the written approval of the Librarian'. Wright also proposed that books in the reconstituted Phi and Reserved collections 'should not be entered in the general catalogue', though in an autograph pencil notation Wright records that he is 'doubtful on second thoughts of the wisdom of this' policy.⁵⁸ This anxiety was to persist until 1942, when a manuscript pencil note from Wright to an unnamed recipient indicates that it 'was ultimately decided that Φ (but not Res.) should go into the Catalogue', though Wright cannot locate the written authorisation for this decision.⁵⁹ In order to avoid the necessity of a future large-scale reclassification, Wright proposes that the contents of the Reserved and Phi sections be reviewed 'not less often than every five years' and redistributed 'where possible'. Wright's first set of recommendations appears to have received the assent of Edmund Craster, Bodley's Librarian, on 31 August 1939. A red ink manuscript notation to Wright's recommendations in Craster's hand expresses his general approval of the proposals, though he reminds the Secretary that the expansion of Arch.Bodl.D will have to await its transfer to the stacks of the recently completed New Bodleian (now the Weston Library and the present home of what remains of the Phi).⁶⁰

Craster's desire to ensure that the new access procedures governing Arch.Bodl.D were followed is reflected in a pair of typed memoranda dated 14 June 1940. The first calls the attention of the staff to the revised sections of the 1938 *Staff Manual* concerning the shelfmark.⁶¹ The second outlines the new responsibilities of a Senior Assistant when dealing with Arch.Bodl.D requests. Assistants were now required to verify that the reader's needs could not be met by 'another copy or edition' of the work from a non-restricted section, to ensure that the

⁵⁸ S.G. Wright, 'Φ Collection Supplementary Recommendations', 21 February 1938, Bodleian Library, 590/2: Φ 1937-1949.

⁵⁹ S.G. Wright, 'Φ (7)', 19 March 1942, Bodleian Library, 590/2: Φ 1937-1949.

⁶⁰ S.G. Wright, 'Φ Collection', 17 January 1938, Bodleian Library, 590/2: Φ 1937-1949.

⁶¹ H.H.E. Craster, 'Arch.Bodl.D (3)', 14 June 1940, Bodleian Library, 590/2: Φ 1937-1949. See: *Staff Manual, 1938*. Oxford: Bodleian Library, 1938. p. 44

work was required ‘for a serious purpose’, and to fetch and replace the book personally.⁶² Orders for works from the newly distilled Phi collection were to be handled by the Senior Sub-Librarian, whose responsibility it was to ‘enter them in a special register’.⁶³ As such, it may be inferred that by at least 1940 the Phi collection had been extensively pruned, and a ‘Secondary Φ’ (Arch.Bodl.D) established.⁶⁴ The access procedures for these collections had been formalised so as to resemble more closely those of the British Museum, with a written application required for all requests, irrespective of the reader’s academic status. However, unlike the British Museum, the majority of the Bodleian’s restricted holdings remained openly listed in the General Catalogue, ensuring a more consistent and transparent service than that offered by the national collection.

A typed memorandum circulated by Stephen Wright the following month offers a fuller account of the progress of the reclassification effort, noting that Arch.Bodl.D has been successfully relocated to ‘the grilled shelves in the New Library’.⁶⁵ While this new location affords the possibility of ‘further growth’, Wright nevertheless advocates renewed ‘pruning’. The reconstituted Phi and Reserved collections were ‘to be kept in Bodley’ (presumably the Old Library) ‘under Secretarial charge’, emphasising the extent to which oversight of the Phi had by this point become Wright’s personal province. The keys and handlists for these collections were to be kept in a locked drawer in the study of Wright’s superior, R.H. Hill, Secretary of the Bodleian, and made accessible only to ‘Library Officers and to the Under-Secretary’.⁶⁶ A manuscript memorandum composed in a new hand and dated 9 April 1943 indicates that after three years the reshelving process was nearing completion. The transfer of sexological works to the Radcliffe Science Library had been successfully completed, as had the transfer of limited editions and illustrated works of fiction to Arch.Bodl.D. The return of unillustrated mass-market editions to their relevant fiction sections had met with limited success, with only ‘three or four’ suitable works having been located in the Phi. Intriguingly, the author expresses concern regarding the impression given in Wright’s memoranda that the contents of the reconstituted Phi are, by definition, ‘wholly obscene’. The author notes that were a member of public to be informed that the works of a given publisher held in the Phi were ‘regarded as obscene’ by the Bodleian, a case could be brought by the publisher in which a ‘civil court might cast the Library in heavy damages for defamation’. These reflections are presented as an argument for greater

⁶² H.H.E. Craster, ‘Arch.Bodl.D (4)’, 14 June 1940, Bodleian Library, 590/2: Φ 1937-1949.

⁶³ S. Gibson, Untitled Typed Memorandum, 27 March 1940, Bodleian Library, 590/1: Φ 1910-1943.

⁶⁴ ‘Archives Books & Φ’, 9 April 1943, Bodleian Library, 590/2: Φ 1937-1949.

⁶⁵ S.G. Wright, ‘RESERVED SECTIONS (5)’, 17 July 1940, Bodleian Library, 590/2: Φ 1937-1949.

⁶⁶ Untitled Typed Memorandum, 11 March 1942, Bodleian Library, 590/2: Φ 1937-1949.
Untitled Typed Memorandum, 18 April 1942, Bodleian Library, 590/1: Φ 1910-1943.

consistency in the management of the Phi's contents and greater caution in their description, but they nevertheless raise prickly questions regarding what is legally at stake in the act of classification. The final item to feature chronologically in '590/2: Φ 1937-1949' is a manuscript note by the same author, dated 'July 1945' which states, perhaps fittingly, that, though 'Arch. A – D' have been 'reclassified and rehandlisted', the Phi collection has been 'left for further consideration'.⁶⁷

While necessarily provisional, this account of the collection's origins and development is intended not only to offer a snapshot of a hitherto undocumented facet of the Bodleian's institutional life, but to indicate the extensive opportunities that the Phi collection affords for future research into the transmission and reception of a wide range of literary and non-literary texts. In doing so it offers the possibility not only to chart the mechanisms through which obscene works were acquired and made available to readers by the Bodleian, but to analyse the conditions under which the category of obscenity itself was being constructed and contested in Britain in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-centuries. As in 1945, the Phi thus remains ripe for 'further consideration'.

⁶⁷ 'Scheme for reclassification of Φ and Archives', July 1945, Bodleian Library, 590/2: Φ 1937-1949.

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