
The Donald Mason Library, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine



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Libraries have changed over the years and the library at the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (LSTM) is no exception. In 1920, the library was housed in what is now a recently refurbished lecture theatre and was subsequently relocated to a larger area. In the 1960s it was enlarged following the building of a new wing and more space was made available for periodicals.¹ LSTM was founded in 1898, the first of its kind in the world. Sir Ronald Ross, professor of tropical medicine at LSTM, became the first British winner of a Nobel prize for medicine when, in 1902, he was recognised for his discovery that malaria is carried by mosquitoes. Until the recent construction of a new, highly specialised centre for tropical and infectious diseases (CTID) building, the LSTM premises were mainly a pre-first-world-war building with additions built in 1966 and 1978. The LSTM library emerged from Ronald Ross's own collection of books and a purpose-built library was included in the pre-first-world-war building. Physical expansion took place in the 1960s and a library committee was established in 1972. The library was eponymously renamed the 'Donald Mason Library' in 1997 after a late LSTM chairman who had a particular interest in the library. For many years now, the DML has worked very closely with the University of Liverpool library and is included in the University's Millennium

library management system. Support is also given by the University of Liverpool library via journal provision and management, an inter-library loan scheme, the considerably greater opening hours and computer facilities available at the major libraries on campus and professional liaison with colleagues there. However, there has always been a commitment to an independent library and IT facility stemming from the notion that 'the School, as a whole, represent[ing] a model for the developing world rendered the maintenance of the library a necessity'.²

The challenges faced by the Donald Mason Library have been various but they probably mirror those of academic libraries everywhere: space management; adequate resourcing; responding to the challenges posed by new technologies and to internal organizational change. Within the last decade LSTM has entered one of the most significant periods of development and expansion in its history. During the 1980s and 1990s there were times when funding was severely constrained, but a period of change was heralded by the appointment of a new Director, Professor Janet Hemingway, in 2001, and subsequently some significant grants have been awarded, such as the \$50.7 million given to establish the Innovative Vector Control Consortium for research on malaria and dengue by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in 2005.

The new grants have brought new project teams to LSTM and there has been a significant growth in estate, notably with the creation of the new CTID building, which opened in 2008. Users demand more access to electronic resources and services like laptop loans, while also requiring a space that is less regimented and that allows for some group interaction. This has been a challenge in such a small space, and one that is ongoing. In 2004 the DML underwent a major refurbishment as part of a larger improvement of learning and teaching spaces funded by the Wolfson Foundation. By 2008, though, there were new demands leading to another rethink. The library archives and special collections had been surveyed following a grant from the Wellcome Trust in 2007 and this led to a reconsideration of the space needed to accommodate them and additionally to an important deposit from the Maegraith family, descendants of a past LSTM dean, Professor Brian Maegraith. It is envisaged that the part of the archives currently in the custodianship of the University of Liverpool will return to the management of LSTM, and funding is currently being sought to enable this, along with cataloguing of

the newly acquired Maegraith collection. The acquisition of Professor Maegraith's archives is another example of library co-operation since the Liverpool Medical Institution very kindly housed them until we were able to find a space to place them with LSTM. As a result, consideration is being given to the creation a new entrance to the library, following the relocation of the adjacent travel clinic, and to re-positioning of the library counter. However, this is contingent on funding. It should open up the space in the main body of the library and allow for an area to be converted to become the archive room. It will also bring the computing team closer to the library team and help cement the relationship between the two.

The student experience is another factor that has a great impact on the service. LSTM students are from as many as 90 countries and often have varied levels of IT experience and information skills. They may be on short three-month courses or on longer taught Masters, or with us for the duration of their PhDs. They may be demanding, but there is often tremendous appreciation shown to the small team of library staff for the assistance they have been given during their stay in Liverpool.

The assistance the library has been able to give extends far afield beyond Liverpool. In 2007 and 2008, two members of staff went to Saudi Arabia and Syria to advise on the setting up of libraries at King Saud bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences / National Guard Health Affairs and the Faculty of Public Health and Health Informatics, Riyadh, and at the Centre for Strategic Health Studies, Damascus, respectively. There were certainly challenges in this; the positioning of the library in a consultancy role was a new departure, as was understanding the cultural differences in these locations and the impact on the service in Liverpool when the consultant in question (Martin Chapman) formed part of the operational team back in Liverpool.

Sarah Lewis-Newton was appointed library manager towards the end of 2006 and has brought in other changes, such as merchandise sales and a book exchange scheme as well as the very well used 'Tsetse files' blog, acting as a current awareness service, as a link for students to other library blogs and useful websites and as a training tool. There have been changes to the internal furniture with more varieties of seating, some to encourage group working or socialising near to the popular book exchange scheme.

THE FUTURE?

Plans for the future involve the library staff as integral to a project to establish 'Eprints' as an institutional repository showcasing the LSTM's research output. This project is underway and it is hoped that the repository will go live later this year. The role of the library has so far been in recommending authority files, advising on bibliographic citation styles and liaising with other support staff such as those from the research office who will also be helping to monitor the repository contents. LSTM is small enough to allow for a cross-section of people to work together, as has happened on the 'Eprints' project. We have many of the elements of a much larger higher education institution, but in microcosm, and working with senior academics, support staff and computing experts is one of the ways we change our colleagues' attitudes to what the library can do for them.

There are other exciting challenges for the Donald Mason Library. We are looking forward to developing stronger links with local, national and international organisations, such as the Liverpool Medical Institution and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, through project work and collaboration, particularly in respect of our archive and historical collection, which we expect to be a wonderful opportunity to showcase the unique resources in historical tropical medicine that are invaluable to researchers internationally.

Space is a major consideration for the Donald Mason Library, just as with all library services, and despite the planned expansion, with an ever-increasing stock of journals and the geographic placement of our staff, students and alumni, a move to electronic-only provision is not only inevitable but sensible. The increase of electronic resources and the encouragement and support of the library staff and service has led to a demand for an alumni service to help support students once they return to their home countries, many without the wealth of resources they encountered whilst studying. Negotiation with providers of resources such as Global Health has begun in order to provide this valuable support.

A recently completed survey circulated around LSTM students not only indicates their respect and regard for the library and its staff – with 91.7% of respondents reporting having used the Donald Mason Library and 68.2% regarding the library staff's helpfulness as very good – but

also points the way to future developments to be considered, including longer opening hours (with 55% of respondents wanting later opening). The survey also indicated how valuable our links are with the University of Liverpool library service, with 54.2% and 20.8% of the surveyed students having used the Harold Cohen and Sydney Jones libraries, respectively.

One hundred and eleven years on from when it first opened, the library at LSTM may be unrecognisable from the one created from the collection donated by Ronald Ross, but it is still here, renewing itself and growing with the institution, spreading its influence internationally just as the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine has done.

REFERENCES

- 1 H.J. Power, *Tropical medicine in the twentieth century: a history of the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, 1898–1990*, London: Kegan Paul, 1999
- 2 *Ibid.*, p 163