

# The Percival Library from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> century



*A photograph of the South Quad about 1870*

Originally Clifton College library was housed in Big School. The first Headmaster soon decided that this arrangement did not engender a scholarly approach to reading and research that required a silent study environment. The Percival Library was originally built as a library at the expense of this first Headmaster, Rev. John Percival, and later Bishop of Hereford. A plaque still exists in the newly restored window bay area recording his “generous gift”. Initially the building extended only part of the way along the north side of the South Quadrangle. The Cliftonian of 1867 records that the library now has “781 volumes, showing an increase of nearly 300 books this term”. All early books were acquired by donation. An early donation to the Percival Library recorded in the Cliftonian, now found in the Stone Library, was Darwin’s *Origin of Species*. It appears that there was a list of books needed by the library and every boy upon leaving was requested to “add a brick to the building” in the form of a book for the new Percival Library. What a pleasing tradition and how lovely it would be to revive it!

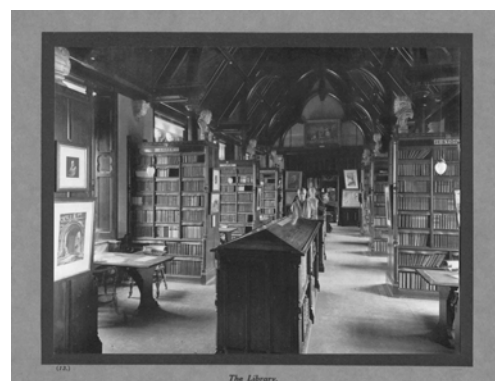
In 1870 the Cliftonian stated that the first phase “the new building in which it is intended to place the library and museum is now rapidly approaching completion”. Charles Hansom, brother of Joseph Hansom (designer of the original Hansom cab), designed the first phase of building at Clifton College. The brothers had already collaborated on the design of a library for Ushaw College near Durham in 1851.

The Council report of 1875 saluted “a voluntary movement” by masters, pupils and a few friends of the Headmaster to add a museum, with classrooms underneath and to “create a cloister to the buildings thus extended”. This fund had been opened in 1874 to complete the north range, a similar idea to the current foundation appeal for development funding.

*Percival Buildings 1870s*



*Percival Library 1887*





*The Percival library about 1887 before the addition of the Wilson Tower, a photograph from the Jubilee Album issued in 1912.*

The following century saw little alteration to the library although the East Wing was completed to the staircase in 1880 and the Wilson Tower with Council Room, also designed by Hansom was added between 1888 and 1890. Wilson, the second Headmaster also contributed generously to the building works from his salary of £2000 *per annum*.

During the 1939 – 1945 war the Percival library was taken over by clerks typing loading bills for the D-Day invasion. Corps and Division commanders used the Council Room for their planning of the D-Day landings; drawing pin holes from this time are still just visible in the oak panelling.

The Council Room did not become part of the Percival library until after the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. A plaque in memory of Headmaster Dr J. E. King was added above the fireplace in the Council Room, and officially unveiled by Sir Frank Tribe on June 23 1950. In 1954 - 1955 bookshelves for the Council Room and new furniture for the Percival Library were purchased in memory of Cecil Francis Taylor, Librarian and Second Master during the 1930s. Sixth formers were now allowed to use the Council Room for study, a tradition only ended in the late 1990s.

Stanley Steadman O.C. “the most scholarly man in the place” according to Martin Scott was appointed librarian in 1947 and remained so until 1962. Both Taylor and Steadman bequeathed substantial legacies to the Percival Library; their contributions still form part of the collection today. In 1963 David S. Reed was appointed to the school as cataloguer and Assistant Librarian when Rodney Gee was Librarian, becoming Librarian in 1968. He was the first professional librarian and undertook the first major recataloguing of the collection. I have benefited greatly from his advice in my own recataloguing of the collection.

Since Steadman’s time the library has been the domain of a number of schoolmaster librarians on half a timetable, reverting to the former practice. First Geoffrey Hardyman and then Robin Barton carried on the model of good practice set by Reed, cataloguing to Dewey Decimal Standards and adding scholarly items to stock. In 1998 a part-time information scientist, Anne Mossman, was appointed as Librarian. A beginning was made on the computerisation of the catalogue and plans were started for the refurbishment of the library.

The character of the Percival Library and departmental libraries became indistinct over a period of time. The custom had been that multiple copies; exam texts and staff resources were purchased by and housed in departments; whereas single, more scholarly or Clifton related texts were purchased by and housed in the Percival Library. It is expected that the former convention will again prevail and that the distinctions will become the custom again.

The new century sees the advent of a new College Librarian, no longer in charge solely of the Percival Library but with overall responsibility for all libraries within Clifton College. The College has decided to integrate the older technology of the printed word with the newer information technology in the newly revamped Percival Library. This places reading and all forms of research back into the centre of life at the school.

Planning for the refurbishment of the Percival library began about eighteen months before the contractors moved in. The Library Committee under the chairmanship of Tim Meunier began the process of deciding what was needed to update the library for the needs of the twenty-first century student. Architects were sent a brief and invited to present designs in competition. The winner of this competition, by a unanimous decision of the Library Committee and most of the Council members was Mark Webber O.C. of Nicolls Brown Webber, Henley-on-Thames. Mark produced a design that admirably fulfils the original brief to create a learning resources centre at the heart of the school. The NBW website admirably states Mark's objectives:



*"We have recently completed the refurbishment of the Percival Library, a magnificent grade II listed gothic building dating from the 1870's. The project involved linking the Library to adjacent computer suites where a new mezzanine floor was inserted. The aim of the project was to form a dedicated Learning Resource Centre. Modern services including new heating, power, data and security were installed. Subtle lighting helped to enhance the impressive hammer beam roof of the Percival Library. The project was completed on time and on budget."*

*Mark Webber planning colour schemes in front of a display of his plans for the new library.*

The Percival Library is the first phase of a Development Plan that aims to improve the facilities of the school. This will be achieved both by improving the environment as in the Percival Library and School House projects and by enriching the support offered to the curricular and leisure needs of those that live and study at Clifton College. Part of the funding for this project has been generously donated by Old Cliftonians, whose £50,00 has been used to purchase the new solid oak desks in the Grade Two listed Percival Library. The new Foundation has also received several magnanimous donations. It is hoped that the Foundation will continue to assist with the funding of such projects.

Open since October 2002 the library is already showing a far greater volume of use than any of its previous incarnations. Students actually like using a library that is bright, cheerful, better stocked for the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century students and above all welcoming. Issues have gone up and the students now actually seem to enjoy using the library to study especially the Sixth form during evening prep times. The Percival Library now incorporates both the best of our Clifton traditions and the latest in modern facilities. This integration of information technology with more traditional book based resources will help to produce the scholarly enquiring minds of the future.

*Anne Allan, College Librarian*