

PRESS RELEASE

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RARE AND ANTIQUARIAN BOOKS TO REMAIN IN WALES

A collection of 14,000 rare and antiquarian library books, some dating from the late 15th century, are being saved for future generations to enjoy. A joint initiative between Cardiff Council, Cardiff University, the Welsh Assembly Government, and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) has secured the books' future at Cardiff University.

The collection will be held at Cardiff University's Arts and Social Studies Library on Colum Drive, within Cardiff University's Special Collections and Archives (SCOLAR).

Once conservation work has been carried out on the collection, members of the public will be able to access it by asking for a visitor pass from the entrance to the Library. In time they will also be able to view digitised versions of some of the most interesting works on the internet.

The collection is of enormous historical and academic value, including examples of some of the earliest printed books from around 1500, through to special press books produced in the early 20th century.

The collection includes 175 incunabula (early printed books before 1500), around 500 rare Bibles, Restoration and Quarto drama volumes, including a rare collection of early Shakespeare volumes, and a large quantity of high quality, limited edition British 19th and 20th century private presses.

Some items in the collection are almost certainly not held in any other library collection in the world, and further books are only held in one other library. But the real value lies in the groupings of works.

A major set of 17th century editions of Shakespeare, for example, is extremely rare, and the coverage of the restoration drama collection appears to be unique.

The books were due to be sold through public auction in London but after leading academics and members of the public raised concerns about the collection leaving the city, Cardiff Council decided to work together with Cardiff University and the Welsh Assembly Government to see if an alternative solution could be reached.

Cardiff University, the Welsh Assembly Government, and HEFCW are contributing financial support totalling £1.2 million to facilitate the transfer of the collection to Cardiff University, for the benefit of the people of Cardiff and Wales. The University is contributing £500,000 to the cost of the transfer, the Welsh Assembly Government £450,000, and the remaining £250,000 is being provided by HEFCW.

The matter was agreed today (4 March) at the Council's Executive Business Meeting.

Heritage Minister, Alun Ffred Jones said of the announcement: "I am very pleased to support the co-operation between Cardiff Council and Cardiff University to ensure that the important collection of rare books will remain in Cardiff and be made available by the University to the people of Wales and Cardiff.

"I am also delighted by the University's plans to raise the profile of the collection by digitising and making books from the collection available online. This will ensure that even more people from Wales and the rest of the world are able to access free of charge information from one of Wales' important cultural assets."

Executive member for Sport Leisure and Culture, Nigel Howells said: "I'm delighted that all parties have come to this agreement. While the money offered for the book transfer is less than their commercial value this is the best solution for the city as the books will remain in Cardiff and will be accessible by the public if required.

"This also means that the books will be transferred to appropriate storage conditions and will safeguard their long term condition. This has been an excellent example of the Council, the Welsh Assembly Government, Cardiff University and HEFCW working together for the good of the city, and Wales, to come up with a suitable way forward and good relationships have been established for the future as a result of these negotiations."

Cardiff University's Pro Vice-Chancellor for Education and Students, Professor Jonathan Osmond said: "Cardiff University has made a substantial financial investment in partnership with the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales and the Welsh Assembly Government to help secure a significant rare book collection for the University, the city of Cardiff and for Wales.

"Developed over the last two centuries as part of Cardiff's heritage, these books reflect all of the major stages in book production from the earliest printed works to modern fine bindings, and touch upon many of the cultural and literary trends in Europe from the sixteenth century onwards.

"The acquisition of a collection of this size, depth and quality will enable Cardiff University to move into the senior league of humanities research collections and to create opportunities for collaborative research across Wales, the UK and internationally.

"This investment not only secures the collection for Wales but it will benefit existing humanities researchers and help to increase the number of humanities and international students coming to Cardiff. It will also help attract high quality academic staff in specialist areas to the University, and with the additional financial support from charities and individuals we are aiming to raise over the coming year, the books will be catalogued, restored and digitised to be available for the general public to view.

"Finding a permanent home for this collection will help enrich the cultural life of Wales and Cardiff. Cardiff University is delighted to have helped secure its future."