

Sharing its resources

Located in central London by Charing Cross station, the College of Optometrists building contains a valuable resource for optical professionals – the College Library. With ongoing improvements aiming to offer a more modern and effective service, the Library has come a long way in its 108 years.

Historical perspective

The Library dates back to 1901, when the first ever catalogue contained a mere seven books. Founded by the British Optical Association (BOA), the Library was wholly dependent on donations of books or money from its members for over a decade but was significantly bolstered during this period by the private collections of Dr RS Clay, AW Oxbrow and JH Sutcliffe.

Growing steadily over the years, a major step forward was made in 1968 when Neville Chappell, a past president and council member of the BOA, donated £12,000. This facilitated a multi-level library with ample study desks and storage space.

The Library was transferred to the College when the BOA was disbanded in 1980, but officially remains the British Optical Association Library in honour of its founding body.

New catalogue

So what is new at the Library?

An updated Library catalogue is being introduced this winter. The aim behind this is to make it more user-friendly than the current system and will include many new features including interactive elements.

‘The main thing is the new catalogue,’ says Carrie Sherlock, information specialist at the Library (pictured). ‘The current one serves the basic purpose of allowing users to find a book they need, but is not particularly friendly in layout or in accessing the supplemental features we offer. The new system will be similar in layout to the Amazon website and will feature a link to online booksellers together with a picture of the book. For some books there will also be a link to Google Books, which will allow users to preview several pages before making a decision about loaning or buying the book.’

Additionally with the new system users will be able to post reviews of books they have read and read other



Optician reviews the new services on offer at the College of Optometrists' Library

members' reviews to see if a book is appropriate for their needs.

The Library's collection policy is based on members' needs and is reviewed every few years to ensure it is still valid. ‘Our target groups with the books are pre-reg students and members taking up higher qualifications, so we aim to support their education and research needs,’ comments Sherlock. ‘We are trying to collect some more items on research methodology because the Library has recently expanded its research department and we administer a small grant scheme. We want to make sure that optometrists in practice, who are engaging in research, are supported by the Library because they often do not have access to an academic library besides us. Also, pre-reg students who have left university but have not fully qualified need the facilities – it is very expensive to buy all the textbooks!’

Other services are being improved too. The current awareness programme which notifies people of developments in specific areas of interest is being expanded. ‘I've got a few members to whom I send weekly updates in the form of any journal articles or abstracts that have come out on, any interesting books or things like reports by the Department of Health. We are looking to expand this service to include e-mail alerts for various areas of research.’

Looking ahead to the next stage of development, Sherlock feels the increasing use of technology in publishing will enable the Library to reach a wider audience.

COLLECTIONS AT THE LIBRARY

- 5,000 optical books, pamphlets and audiovisual titles including a first edition of *Newton's Optics* and the latest textbooks on optometry
- Over 100 journal titles including 38 current journals, many of which are available electronically
- British Standards online: College members have electronic access to over 3,000 British Standards
- Historical collections including works dating from the 15th century
- The Library also houses reference-only collections belonging to the British Contact Lens Association and the Ophthalmic Antiques International Collectors Club

‘There are some e-books relevant to optometry and within about two years we will probably use these. This works by subscribing to various e-books but this is very new and many of the publishers have concerns, so the change will not be immediate. Ultimately this should be a good thing as we aim not to have a bias against people who do not live in London, so further development of electronic resources, as well as our postal loans, is a priority. People access information completely differently today and we have to reflect this.’ ●

● To make a request, or to find out more, contact Carrie Sherlock at the Library on 020 7766 4352 or e-mail: library@college-optometrists.org