Specialist libraries at the University of Birmingham transcript

The University of Birmingham holds one of the largest academic libraries in the country and boasts an outstanding research collection, incorporating an astonishing 2.7 million books and scholarly periodicals -- as well as 3 million manuscripts -- across 10 sites, along with more than 16,000 electronic resources.

Title: **Specialist libraries at the University of Birmingham (http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=C7iJmd8VBNk)**
Duration: 6.23 mins

Professor Michael Dobson (Director of the Shakespeare Institute): There's all the difference in the world between receiving knowledge at second hand that's been summarised for you and passed on by others, and actually being able to look at the real primary evidence for yourself. And one of the great things about working at the University of Birmingham is that we have so many specialist libraries. For me, the most important is the one here in Stratford at the Shakespeare Institute, but in total the university has three million manuscripts and an extraordinary collection of books dating back to 1471.

Jacque MacDonald (PhD Student): We have a library here that has resources that are not only varied but if you're interested in Renaissance drama, it's all here under one roof. At the moment I'm doing an MPhil on the Jacobean [Masks - 0:09:37], specifically looking at the distinctive qualities of the supernumeraries that performed in these [Masks] and this means that I need not only 35 texts, some of them are very very rare and hard to find and it's amazing because I have found all 35 texts in the Shakespeare Institute Library alone. Sometimes I need some very specific material such as I needed the white block papers from Longleat and the Institute was able to get me some microfilms that I could see diagrams of some of the choreography of musicians that were on and that's been not only vital to my Masters degree, it was vital to my MPhil and inspired me to go on for a PhD next year.

Margaret Roper (PhD Student): My area of research is Shakespearean graphic novels, so I'm looking at things like the text, I'm looking at visual images of Shakespeare, I'm looking at performance. The Shakespeare Institute library collection covers a vast range of contemporary culture. It has a wonderful collection of newspaper and magazine articles that extends over 50 years and so you can see what was happening with Shakespeare in contemporary culture. It also has materials on popular culture, youth culture and even includes some graphic novels.

Karin Brown (Shakespeare Institute Librarian): My role in the Shakespeare Institute library as Manager is to maintain and develop the collections at this particular site and we do that in close collaboration with the academic staff and with the students in order to ensure that they've got all the resources that they need for their particular area of research. A major aspect of our work concerns guiding and navigating the students round the vast amount of resources we hold at the university, from the printed collections which we hold here and at the main library on other sites, to the growing amount of electronic resources that are becoming available. So part of our job is just guiding the students through those resources.

Erin Sullivan (Lecturer and Fellow): Here at the Shakespeare Institute we have MA distance learning students from all over the globe, lots that are in the UK, but also lots that are in continental Europe, in parts of Asia, the Middle East and the United States, so they need to be able to access the kinds of research materials that you use when you're a postgraduate student and they need to be able to do it online. We're also thinking about ways in which we can take the unique resources, the archival resources we have here, and make those available to students through new initiatives like the virtual manuscript room which takes original documents that you won't be able to find at any other library in the world, things like Kenneth Brannagh's shooting script for his Henry V, or Zapharelli's shooting script for his Hamlet, also theatre notebooks; how we can get some of those online so that students can use those to do original primary source research. We're thinking very much about how to make sure that the things we want our students to read and study are available easily to distance learners so we're working with the library to digitise select chapters of certain books so that students are able to log into web-CT which is our virtual learning environment and there they can read pdfs of certain articles online or certain book chapters and that can really be used as a jumping off point to the research that they complete as they continue on in the course.

Matthew Rampley (Chair of Art History): I've been here just over a year at the Barber and what we've got here in the reading room is actually just a tiny proportion of the total collections that the Barber has got. My own particular research interest is to do with the art criticism and the emergence of art history as a discipline in the late 19th Century and the library really has quite extraordinary collections in that regard. It has really very unusual and important and quite rare historic monographs from the mid-19th Century onwards which have been very useful for my research, and it also has really quite rare collections of periodicals. Outside of London and possibly Oxford and Cambridge I think it's one of the most important resources that we have in Britain.

Professor Michael Dobson: The University of Birmingham has so many extraordinary collections in its libraries, not just the collection here at the Institute but in the music department there's the Barber Music Library, there's the Barber Fine Art Library, the Harding Law Library, the Barnes Collection in Medicine and the Orchard Learning Resource Centre. All these enable students and faculty at Birmingham to actually get among the evidence and make their own knowledge for themselves.

End of recording

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