

Grants from the Foundation:

\$2,300,000 to the University of Oxford

THE NEW BODLEIAN LIBRARY BUILDING

Since 1602 the Bodleian Library of Oxford has been "a library of deposit," the recipient of numerous collections from a long line of benefactors beginning with Sir Thomas Bodley in the reign of Elizabeth. By 1930 it had over a million books and occupied several buildings, or parts of several buildings, and it was apparent that at the then rate of growth all available space would be filled within five years. The university appointed a commission to survey the situation. The commission visited libraries in Europe and the United States, and made its report a year later recommending that a new building be erected on an adjacent site with stacks to house 5,000,000 books, and that the old buildings be reconditioned as reading rooms.

Even before the appointment of its commission, the curators of Oxford approached the Foundation with a request for financial assistance for the Bodleian. Now, with the plan for a new building accepted, the application was made formal; and in December of 1931 the Foundation agreed to provide \$2,300,000 of the \$4,000,000 required for construction and maintenance. The grant was made conditional on the University's raising the remainder within four and a half years. In a year's time the \$1,700,000 had been raised.

The New Library was erected north of the Old Library, but separated from it by an open court and the width of a street. Building regulations and esthetic considerations ruled out a lofty tower. And yet the structure on this limited site must provide room for the next two hundred years of the Bodleian's growth, i.e., stack space for an estimated 5,000,000 books. These

requirements were met by the architect, Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, with a square building of massive steel, concrete, and stone construction, which has three stories of stacks underground, presents a solid frontage of three stories above ground on its four sides, and, following an adaptation of the set-back style of architecture, has a central section which rises to a height of eight stories. By these means a harmonious and beautiful result has been obtained, and at the same time the space requirements have been fully met. The central stack is surrounded with a series of rooms on each floor. These may be used as offices and cubicles for research workers and other readers; and are so constructed that as the demand for more book storage arises, the surrounding rooms can readily be converted into stacks.

When the war came the New Library was nearing completion and plans had been made for its opening in June of 1940. It was immediately pressed into emergency service, with the three underground stories crammed with precious rarities and other treasures transferred from the Old Library, while the Admiralty took over all the other floors and filled them with headquarters offices that had been bombed out of London. The nearby University Press was used to print the secret naval codes and other documents, and this section of Oxford became one of the nerve centers of the British Navy. The library's photographic laboratory, which had recently been fitted out for map work, was turned completely to naval service, and the war's end found it practically worn out. After V-J Day the Admiralty began evacuating the quarters, and the government set about providing repairs and replacements for what had been damaged or used up in its service. The university's desire for a formal opening in October of 1946 speeded up the renovation by about six months, and all was in readiness for the impressive ceremonies on the 24th of that month,

attended by the King and Queen and many notables. The recent ambassador to the United States, Lord Halifax, presided as chancellor of the University. Mr. David H. Stevens attended as representative of the Foundation, and his attention was called to an inscription cut in the stone wall of the entrance lobby in which acknowledgement was made to the Foundation for its gift. On a table underneath the inscription is a glass case containing the book of donors, and it was opened at the £1000-page on which were inscribed the names of the Marquis of Lothian, the Viscount Halifax, the Worshipful Company of Fishmongers, and many other £1000 donors, followed by an entry of £770 contributed from the receipts of a concert given by Arturo Toscanini.

"Repeatedly," says Mr. Stevens, "the word was passed about that if the building had not been mainly completed by 1939 it probably would never have been built, what with lack of materials now and higher construction costs for many years to come. If built at present prices, the costs would have been two and a half times what they were - \$10,000,000 instead of \$4,000,000. Such a sum could hardly be raised in Great Britain under the taxes now in force. In short, the help on the Bodleian in 1931 was given at a time strategic both for war and for peace - though of course no one foresaw it then."