



Changing Institutional Amnesia:

How Special Collections can Foster Collaboration, Increase Engagement, and Spearhead Research

By Angus Harker

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Food for Thought:

How many people here have tried to change their culture at work?

Examples could range from:

- Small changes like getting people to put the right stuff into the right bins.
- Large, institutional changes, like getting employees to incorporate something new and unfamiliar into their workloads.



What is Institutional Amnesia?

- **The Storage Bin Metaphor**
 - Individuals as Storage Bins
 - Structural Storage Bins
 - External Storage Bins
- ‘...formal-institutional amnesia is registered through the loss or damage of collective memory that is held in formal (and observable) organisational storage bins’ (p. 27).
- **The Cause and Effect of ‘Emptying the Bins’**
 - Restructure -> Impermanence -> Memory Loss



From Institutional to Cultural Amnesia

- **Cultural Amnesia** – an absence of the social remembering that takes place through storytelling (p. 102).
- ‘...an organization in which a culture of silence was dominant would be paralysed to the extent that it would no longer perform collective actions or functions in the world’ (p. 108).



The Special Collections Project

- Selection of 10 or more printed books from special collections (e.g. rare books, donated collections). Final number selected: 17.
- Review of existing bibliographic records in Library Management System (LMS).
- Provenance research using internal records, external databases, and physical inspection.
- Metadata enhancement using MARC21, DCRM(B), and Linked Data principles.



What These Records Looked Like Before

Author	Machiavelli, Niccolò, 1469-1527.			
Uniform Title	Istorie fiorentine			
Title	Historie di Niccolo Machiaueilli cittadino, et secretario Fiorentino : Al santissimo et beatissimo padre Signore Nostro Clemente VII pont. mass. ; Il principe di Niccolò Machiavelli...			
Publication	[Geneva?] : [s.n.], [1620?]			
Location	Classmark	Barcode	Loan Type	Status
Special Collections	DG 737.A2 for vol.	75190184	USE IN LIBRARY	LIBRARY USE ONLY
Description	2 v. in 1 (441, [6], 140p) ; 22cm.			
Note	The first half of an edition of Machiavelli's complete works. Date on title page given as M D L (1550). Title vignettes: port. of Machiavelli. Separate title pages.			
Contents	Two volumes bound together; vol. 2 (Il principe) also contains: La vita di Castruccio Castracani da Lucca - Descrizione del modo tenuto dal Duca Valentino nello Ammazzare Vitellozzo Vitelli - Ritratti delle cose della Francia - Ritratti delle cose della Alamagna.			
Note	committed to retain aa 20250909 permanent UKPBC spa UK-CovUW Heritage 2025 UK-CovUW			
Subject	Florence (Italy) -- History -- Early works to 1800. Italy -- Politics and government -- 1268-1559 -- Early works to 1800.			
Added Author	Machiavelli, Niccolò, 1469-1527. Principe.			
OCLC #	m0020712uw			

- No signatures included.
- No copy-specific notes.
- No accession notes.



What We Did

- Conducted in-depth cataloguing alongside DCRM(B) guidelines.
 - Notation of pages and signatures
 - Investigation into the history of each book, including referencing scholarship that illuminates the copy.
 - Accession registers investigation – **recovering institutional memory.**
 - Copy-specific notes, including notes on condition and past ownership, were added.

Laudatur infidiosus. III.

*Candidius nihil est te, Cæciliæ, notavi :
Si quando ex nostris disticha pauca legis,
Protinus aut Marsi recitas, aut scripta Catulli,
Hæc mihi das, tanquam deteriora legas ;
Ut collata magis placeant mea. Credimus illud,
Malò tamen recites, Cæciliæ, tua.*

a Ironice : alij leg. callidus : non placet.
b Poëte, qui multà cum laude scripserunt epigrammata.
c Mibi gratificari velle videris, præ te ferens mea te cum illis Marsi & Catulli recitare ut mea cum illis collata appareant esse æquè boni aut melioris ingenij atque artificij, cum reverà hoc facis ut mea præ illis fordescant, quasi majori lumine offuscata.
d Ironice.
e Tui certè collata mea facile appa-
reant melliora.

Leo semper est leo. IV.

*Verbera securi solitus leo ferre magistri,
Infertamque pati blandus in ora manum :
Dedidit pacem, subito feritate reversi,
Quanta nec in Libycis debuit esse jugis.
Nam duo de tenerâ puerilia corpora turbâ,
Sanguineam rastris quæ renovabat humum,
Sævus & infelix furiali dente peremit :
Martia non vidit majus arena nefas.
Exclamare libet ; crudelis, perfide, prædo,
A nostrâ pueris parcere disce lupâ.*

a Montibus Africae leonum nutritis.
b Duos pueros ministros theatralis, qui amphitheatro arenam, ferarum gladiatorumque sanguine indant verberando.
c Marti sacrâ Romani.
d Apostrophe ad leonem.
e Namque illa Romulo & Remo infantibus peperit, immitis ubera præbuit.

Disticha longa. V.

*Osceni, qui longa putas epigrammata nostra :
Utilis ungendis axibus esse potes.*

a Qui in epigrammate non tam argutum quam brevitate exigit, probas te aptiorem fore auribus servum qui in Circo axes ad celeritatem ungat, quàm lectorum diligentem. Ramiresius Cosconium hebetem & stolidum a Poëta dici putat.

D 5

Hæc

Example of
Signature.



Enhancing the Bibliographic Record

- All records were hand-crafted onto Sierra and enhanced (where lacking) with RDA elements and subject headings, following MARC formatting.
- Enhanced discoverability, authenticity, supporting increased research of the books.
- DCRM(B) utilises the 500 MARC fields.



What the Selected Records Look Like Now (Classic Catalogue)

Author	Machiavelli, Niccolò, 1469-1527,			
Uniform Title	Historie fiorentine			
Title	Historie di Niccolò Machiavelli cittadino, et segretario Fiorentino : Al santissimo et beatissimo padre Signore Nostro Clemente VII pont. mass. ; Il principe di Niccolò Machiavelli...			
Publication	[place of publication not identified] : [publisher not identified], [1610-1620?].			
Location	Classmark	Barcode	Loan Type	Status
Special Collections	DG 737.A2	75190184	USE IN LIBRARY	LIBRARY USE ONLY
Description	2 v. in 1 (441, [6], 140 pages) ; 22cm.			
Note	Signatures: 4 ^o : p1 ^o 1a-3h ⁴ , 1 ^a 2a ⁴ -r ⁴ 2s ² [53 signed (-1 ^a 4, -1 ² p3 ⁴ , -1 ² z2 ⁴), mis-signing z3 as '2z3'], paged [4], (1 ¹)3-441, [1]; [8] (1 ²)1-140. M. D. L. 1550, false date [between 1610-1620] The first half of the first edition of Machiavelli's complete works, illegally printed in Europe. Noted as Gamba's 5th variant of Machiavelli's Tutte le opere, or Gerber's A variant (i.e. first edition). Known as the 'Testina' editions, because of the prevalence of Machiavelli's portrait on each volume. Date on title page given as M. D. L. is incorrect (please see Gerber Vol. 1 in citations). Title vignettes: Portrait of Machiavelli. Contains two volumes bound together: Historie de Florence; Il Principe (also includes La vita di Castruccio Castracani da Lucca - Descrizione del modo tenuto dal Duca Valentino nello Ammazzare Vitellozzo Vitelli - Ritratti delle cose della Alamagna). Pp. 244-245 repeated twice. Pp. 330-339 missing. Initials 'T. E. M.' in small font at bottom of bookplate, possibly indicating name of bookbinder, with 1866 to the right of it.			
Indexed In:	USTC 452367 Adolph Gerber, 'The Mutual Relations of the Five Prints of the Testina and the Terminus Post Quem of the Original Print [Part One]', Modern Language Notes, 21.6-7, 2 vols. (1906), pp. 171-175 and 193-197. Gerber, 'All of the Five Fictitious Italian Editions of Writings of Machiavelli and Three of those of Pietro Aretino Printed by John Wolfe of London (1584-1589) [Part Three]', Modern Language Notes, 22.7 (1907), pp. 201-206. Alessandro Campi, 'A (false) portrait of Machiavelli and the origins of iconographic anti-Machiavellism: genesis, fortunes, and propagation of "La Testina"', History of European Ideas, 45.4 (2019) pp. 509-535. Bartolommeo Gamba, 'Opere divise in cinque parti', Senza luogo nome di stampatore, 1550, in 4 ^o - raro, Serie Dei Testi Di Lingua e ni Altre Opere Importanti Nella Italiana Letteratura Scritte Dal Secolo XIV al XIX, Quarta Edizione (Co' tipi del Gondoliere, 1839), pp. 193-195. Bonnant, Georges, Les impressions genevoises au XVII ^e e siècle de l'édition dite de la Testina des oeuvres de Machiavel, (University of Rome, 1965), pp. 83-89. Harold Maurice Abrahams and John Bruce-Kerr, Oxford versus Cambridge: a record of inter-university contests from 1827-1930, (Faber and Faber, 1931), pp. 1-619 [316]. Sergio Bertelli and Piero Innocenti, 'Introduction', Bibliografia Machiavelliana (Edizioni Valdovena, 1979), p. LXIII. Niccolò Machiavelli (born May 3, 1469, Florence [Italy]—died June 21, 1527, Florence) was an Italian Renaissance political philosopher and statesman, secretary of the Florentine republic. Italiano. Acquired from the library of Edward Hutton in 1969. Accessioned on February 25th 1970. Previously owned by Walter Henry James, 2nd Baron Northbourne, from as early as 1866 (evidenced by bookplate on recto of front book board). James was in Oxford University in at least 1868 as he won the Doubles tournament, presumably winning a Blue. Therefore, this copy was likely owned by his father Walter Charles James, rebound in 1866, and given to his son when he went to Oxford University. Missing overall title page, instead has title pages of each individual volume. Should be: TVTTE LE OPERE DI NICCOLÒ MACHIAVELLI CITTADINO ET SEGREARIO FIORENTINO, DIVISE IN V. PARTI, ET DI NOVOO CON SOMMA ACCVRATEZZA RISTAMPATE [port.] M. D. L. There is water damage at the bottom of this copy but not in the 'Discorsi' half that James owned. It was likely split in half before it was rebound in 1866. Only faint pencil scribbles in the margins for the first book of the Historie de Florence, then absent thereafter. Editions 2-5 of the Testina editions, according to cited authors, were definitely printed in Geneva, however the place of publication of this first edition is hitherto unknown. committed to retain aa 20250909 permanent UKPBC spa UK-CovUW Heritage 2025 UK-CovUW This bibliographic record is available under the Creative Commons CC0 "No Rights Reserved" license. The University of Warwick, as creator of this bibliographic record, has waived all rights to it worldwide under copyright law, including all related and neighbouring rights, to the extent allowed by law.			
Historical note				
Language				
Provenance				
Note				
Subject	Florence (Italy) -- History -- Early works to 1800. Italy -- Politics and government -- 1268-1559 -- Early works to 1800. Machiavelli, Niccolò, 1469-1527. Principe.			
Added Author	Edward Hutton Collection.			
Spine Title				
Collection Title				
OCLC #	warb47287780			

Issues with Classic Catalogue/Summon

Difference in metadata layout

Extensive references to help reader.

View in Summon

- Citations added
- Copy-specific notes
- Title history
- Past ownership
- Biographical notes etc.

The screenshot displays a library catalog record for the work "Historie di Niccolò Machiavelli cittadino, et segretario Fiorentino: Al santissimo et beatissimo padre Signore Nostro Clemente VII pont. mass. ; Il principe di Niccolò Machiavelli" by Machiavelli, Niccolò. The record is shown in a "Quick Look" view, indicating it is the first of three results. The item is a book, specifically a "LIBRARY USE ONLY, DG 737.A2, Special Collections" item. The record includes a "Full Details Page" link, a "Library Notes" section with an "Action Note" stating the library is committed to retain it until 2025, and a "Citation/References Note" listing various scholarly references. A "General Note" provides detailed information about the manuscript's physical characteristics, including its date (1550), format (4°), and the fact that it is a false date. The "Subjects" section lists "Florence (Italy) -- History -- Early works to 1800" and "Italy -- Politics and government -- 1268-1559 -- Early works to 1800". The "Record Details" section specifies the language as Italian, the publisher as unidentified, the date as 1610, and the page count as 2 volumes in 1 (441, [6], 140 pages).

Quick Look 2 of 3 results

Historie di Niccolò Machiavelli cittadino, et segretario Fiorentino: Al santissimo et beatissimo padre Signore Nostro Clemente VII pont. mass. ; Il principe di Niccolò Machiavelli

by Machiavelli, Niccolò

Book LIBRARY USE ONLY, DG 737.A2, Special Collections

[Full Details Page >](#)

Library Notes

Action Note
committed to retain aa 20250909 permanent UKPBC
Heritage 2025

Citation/References Note
USTC 452367.
Adolph Gerber, 'The Mutual Relations of the Five Prints of the Testina and the Terminus Post Quem of the Original Print [Part One]', *Modern Language Notes*, 21.6-7, 2 vols. (1906), pp. 171-175 and 193-197.
Gerber, 'All of the Five Fictitious Italian Editions of Writings of Machiavelli and Three of those of Pietro Aretino Printed by John Wolfe of London (1584-1589) [Part Three]', *Modern Language Notes*, 22.7 (1907), pp. 201-206.
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Bonnant, Georges, *Les impressions genevoises au XVII e siècle de l'édition dite de la Testina des oeuvres de Machiavel*, (University of Rome, 1965), pp. 83-89.
Harold Maurice Abrahams and John Bruce-Kerr, *Oxford versus Cambridge: a record of inter-university contests from 1827-1930*, (Faber and Faber, 1931), pp. 1-619 [316].
Sergio Bertelli and Piero Innocenti, 'Introduction', *Bibliografia Machiavelliana* (Edizioni Valdonega, 1979), p. LXIII.

General Note
Signatures: 4°: pi² 1a-3h¹, ** 3a¹, 1a² [S3 signed (-¹4¹4, -¹2p3¹4, -¹22²4), mis-signing z3 as '2z3'], paged [4], (*¹1)3-441, [1]; [8] (*²1)1-140.
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Initials 'T. E. M.' in small font

Subjects

Florence (Italy) -- History -- Early works to 1800.
Italy -- Politics and government -- 1268-1559 -- Early works to 1800.

Record Details

Language
Italian

Publisher
publisher not identified

Date
1610

Pages
2 volumes in 1 (441, [6], 140 pages)

Fostering Collaboration, Increasing Engagement

- Immediate Impact.
 - Used in 'Tricky Texts' Exhibition.
 - Used in 'Set the Pace' Showcase.
 - Special Collections Guide created.
- Student Outreach – Introductions to Special Collections.
- Embedding into modules



Gary Brannan, 'Can Special Collections Get a Rebrand',
Katina Magazine, 05/06/2026



Spearheading Research

- Multiple collaboration opportunities with existing departments, alongside new Humanities ventures (e.g., Centre for Material Humanities).
- Digital Humanities Direction of Travel: more data, more visualisation.
 - University of Southampton: Discovering Collection as Data.



Spearheading Research (Cont.)

- The use of AI in helping to understand this new data, to help chart our collections with an eye on the future.
 - CDH Workshop - From Letters to Data: Digitizing 19th-Century Student Travelogues (with a guest talk by Jörg Wettlaufer) | Events | University of Groningen
 - Inside of Herculaneum scroll seen for the first time in almost 2,000 years | Oxford University



To Conclude: How to Change Institutional Amnesia With Special Collections

- Key stakeholder engagement.
 - Directors, Academics, Librarians, Staff, Students
 - Cross-departmental, interdisciplinary engagement.
 - Embed into modules.
 - Locate your Special Collections in the future.
- Culture of Storytelling.
 - Social Media.
 - Informal Talks.
 - Presentations and Seminars.



Thank You!



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