

American Library Student Explores British Libraries through Library Tour Program

By Nicole Powell

Last summer, I had the opportunity to take the British Studies course for Library and Information Science in London, England. The program is a six-week course in London, touring the operations of British libraries and museums. I traveled with 16 other library students from all over the U.S. Our professor was Dr. Teresa Welsh of The University of Southern Mississippi. She arranged some very exclusive tours and speakers.

This was a once in a lifetime opportunity that really expanded my global perspective. I was touched by visiting urban public libraries in the U.K. and realizing we share so many of the same struggles in libraries, such as reaching reluctant readers and dealing with budget cuts.

Highlights from the course include visiting the St. Paul's Cathedral, City of London libraries, the British Library, Museum of London, Shakespeare Centre Library, Greenwich National Maritime Museum, the British Museum, National Art Library, Oxford University, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh Central Library, National Archives of Scotland, Scottish Storytelling Centre and the Bibliotheek Amsterdam.

I took a special interest in researching the influence of magic on British youth literature, especially in series like Harry Potter and Lord of the Rings. I saw many Harry Potter film locations and places that inspired J.K. Rowling while writing the series. I visited the famous Platform 9 ¾ in London. I toured the school (George Heriot's school in Edinburgh) that was Rowling's inspiration for Hogwarts Academy of Witchcraft and Wizardry. I also spent some quality time at Elephant House, the cozy café where Rowling spent time writing

some of the Harry Potter books while overlooking Greyfriars Kirkyard and Edinburgh Castle.

My favorite experience was the Barbican Library, which serves as the downtown public library for the City of London. The library is on the second floor of the Barbican Centre, a cultural arts venue for film, art, music, theatre and dance. The site was a Roman ruins, but was bombed during the Second World War. The current arts centre and surrounding residential buildings opened in 1982 and the 'brutalism' architectural style of the Barbican is reminiscent of Roman times.

The Barbican Library offers free membership to anyone who lives, works or studies in the City of London. I was surprised to see Dewey as the classification system for this British library! I was also surprised to note the Bibliographic Records in the catalog were familiar, and the library even used Pharos to operate the public computers, the same system we use at Kansas City Public Library! For Outreach services, the City of London Libraries offer Home Delivery Ser-

vice to the elderly and disabled. Of special interest was the Children's Library, holding 25,000 items with books. In addition to regular storytimes and reading groups, the Children's Library hosts two different Outreach programs. The Bookstart program provides parents and their new babies with reading support. Bookstart is made possible by Booktrust, an independent charity. Reading is Fundamental is a national effort that provides funding for library outreach to all the playschools and nurseries in the community. The Barbican Children's Library partnered with Starbucks to reach children who don't often have the opportunity to visit the library. It was nice to see the Summer Reading Challenge in full swing!

I loved the libraries of London and I visited often, with my City of London library card. I felt right at home checking out books and using the Internet. To read all about my London experience, visit "Nicole's Nightly Nimbus Ride" at <http://nimbus-2009.blogspot.com/>.

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Nicole Powell takes a running start to the Hogwart's Platform.

Have you recently visited libraries overseas or hosted an overseas guest? If you have - please share your experiences with us! Send a description of your partnership or visit to intl.leads.irrt@gmail.com. Photos are always welcome!