

Your voice

The Cotton Cataloguing System

I don't know what cataloguing system was in use at the great library of Alexandria but possibly the second-oldest system was that used by the seventeenth-century English book collector Sir Robert Cotton in his grand Westminster library. His system is described in the recently-published book, *The year 1000*, by Robert Lacy and Danny Danziger, Little, Brown and Company, London, 1999.

In Sir Robert's library, each bookcase was decorated with the bust of a Roman emperor — Tiberias, Augustus, Diocletian, Nero, Vespasian, Julius — and these resonant imperial names became the basis of the Cotton Cataloguing System. Tiberias D.III indicated a book that was stacked on the shelf marked 'D', third volume along, below the bust of Tiberias.

Perhaps there is a case for adopting Cotton's system at our institutes of learning — to be true to a liberal arts tradition that seems to have disappeared. It would bridge the gap between the two cultures (CP Snow) and inculcate our students (and librarians) with some ancient history. Busts of the great philosophers, composers, and conquerors could also be used. Just a thought!

Lana Wall, University of Tasmania

Your voice

Your letters on any issue of relevance to the library and information sector are welcomed.

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