

The City and Guild Library

(*Shaun Hately*)

The City and Guild Library (commonly referred to as 'The C and G' by its patrons) is a cross-shaped building dominating the prosperous Gracefields ward of the city of Ongus, capital of Albion. Built of (or at least faced in) white marble, it is an impressive sight, and many who see it for the first time assume it is a church or even a cathedral. Plain glass windows are set high on the walls, and entry is by double doors at the south, guarded by two members of the city watch of Ongus. Before approaching these front doors, most visitors will pass three pillories and a gallows just outside the library – under city law, the Guild of Sages and Scholars has the right to mete out punishment to those who seriously violate this great library – this power is very rarely exercised but all are warned.

The library is one of the largest in the known world, containing thousands of volumes. In theory, any free citizen of Ongus is allowed to use the library, and visitors to the city are allowed to do so if a prominent citizen vouches for them. In practice, the librarians find excuses to bar those who they do not consider suitable. A person may be required to bathe before entry (public bathhouses are nearby) and may also be required to sit an examination in Bacchile, Ancient Emphidian, or any modern language to prove their literacy before being allowed entry. Licences to enter can be purchased from the Guild of Sages and Scholars at a price determined on an individual basis for those who wish to be guaranteed entry despite the objections of the resident librarians.

On entering the library, the visitor will find themselves facing the duty librarian at a desk. Other librarians wait on pews at each side of this entry area. The duty librarian will determine whether a person is allowed entry and will assign another librarian to escort them if necessary. Wheeled handcarts can be taken from here deeper into the library. These are necessary as many books are heavy and all on the main floor of the building are chained to their shelves – the carts can serve as desks and supports for those reading. Most of the library's collection is found on this main floor divided up into a wide range of subject areas. Buckets of sand are dispersed around the floor to deal with the threat of fire, no flame is allowed on this floor, and people must rely on the natural light from the windows above. At the northern end of the building is a large room where scribes toil at copying books. Tables are provided, and parchment and ink are sold within to those who wish to do their own copying (a librarian will unchain a book and bring it here and return it later if it is to be copied) but one of the resident scribes can be hired to copy for a visitor. The chief scribe oversees the operation of this room.

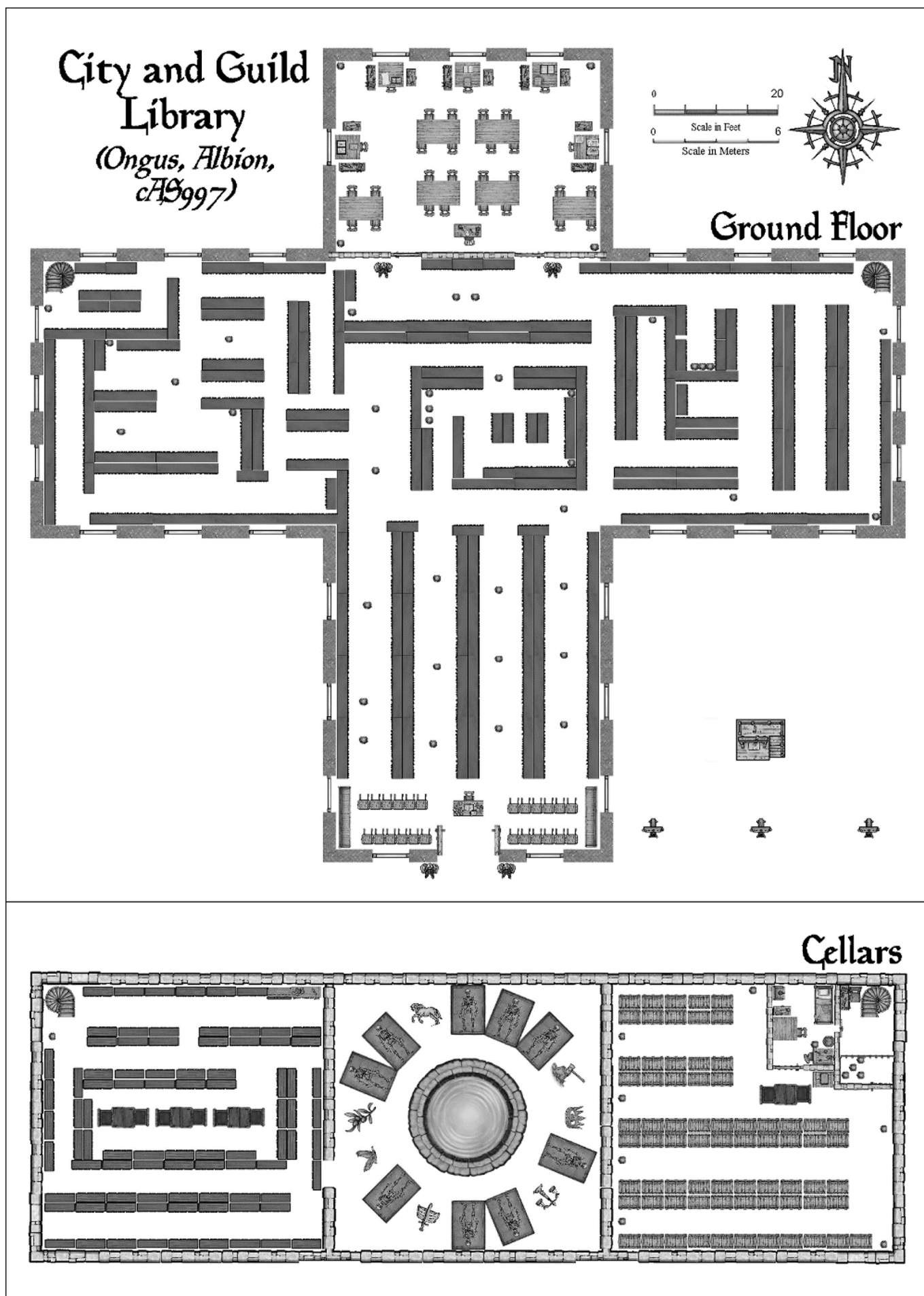
There are two cellars beneath the library. One, which is guarded by a city watchman and a priest (who determines if somebody is allowed to enter), contains books that the church has chosen to restrict from the general public but which bona fide researchers of sound reputation may be allowed to access. Books in this area are stored in locked chests. A cell is provided for a scribe from the scriptorium above to be locked inside when any of these books are to be copied. It is rare for this to be allowed except for requests from high nobility, high church officials, or the leading lights of the city. Out of necessity, the use of lantern light is allowed in this area.

The second cellar is devoted to works associated with the 'magical' arts and similar areas of interest. Magic is tolerated in Ongus by the local church authorities – provided those who study it do not show signs of heresy or worse, the church does not interfere. This smaller library is reputed to be haunted and dangerous to anybody who is not magically inclined and this is enough to keep most visitors from entering. Those who do will find a room that is suffused with a light of unknown origin and shelves of books that are not chained and can be freely accessed by those with the wit and knowledge to study

them. A number of desks are made available for this purpose. People in this room must do their own copying. At least one sheet is available in the back of each book for people to leave notes for those who may read it in the future – it is common to use aliases for this purpose and new sheets may be added as needed. Ink and parchment are available to those who need it, paid for by donation into a sealed money box – those who can afford it are expected to pay more to help those who cannot pay.

The City and Guild Library was built about fifty years ago on the site of a ruined temple and market site dating back hundreds of years to the days when the Selentine Empire occupied Albion. The land (enclosed by a street known as Bloodylease Turn) had an evil reputation that meant few entered it. It was cleared under the direction of Poul Smallfellow, a priestly scholar of great renown who died shortly after the clearing was completed and who many expect to eventually be canonised as a Saint by the church. Some land was left as open land for the recreation of the community, but some was built upon, the City and Guild Library being the largest part of that construction.

Unknown to most people, some subterranean ruins within the area were kept intact and one of these lies under the City and Guild Library between the religious library and the magical one. It can be accessed by a sliding bookcase in the magical library. Inside can be found a pool surrounded by nine stone slabs each with a skeleton atop it – space exists for five more slabs, with carvings on the floor that may represent those who were expected to one day lie there. Nobody is sure who this communal tomb was intended for, but many have theories. One prominent one is this was intended as a tomb for the great King Vallandar and his closest knights – one of the carvings on the floor that waits to be covered by a slab is a crown which lends some credence to the idea that a King was to be buried here, but whether it was Vallandar or some other, it seems that King was never brought here.



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