I always look forward to my visits to this beautiful campus, and especially to meeting old friends and colleagues. But today is unlike any of my previous visits, because of the untimely death of the Principal [Colin Bell], and the grievous blow which this has inflicted on the University, as well as on all his many friends.

I have two good reasons for feeling sure that Colin would not have wanted us to postpone this meeting: firstly, it was he who suggested that a series of talks should be given about the special collections in the Library to draw them to wider public attention. Secondly, he had a personal interest in my own collection, since he was himself a collector of Penguin Specials - and even gave some from his own collection to fill gaps in mine. I accordingly feel very privileged to have been invited to give the first presentation in the series.

Despite Colin's warm approval of the subject, I come here today with some trepidation. I am not quite sure how the academic community will react to the arrival of a collection of elderly paperbacks, some of them rather the worse for wear. Is the Librarian, or the Chairman of the University Collections Committee, going to be hauled before the Academic Council and accused of debasing the currency by accepting my offer? If so, I shall be happy to speak as a witness in his defence.

My own mental image of a Special Collection in a University Library is admittedly based on very limited experience, but it would include such valuable items as manuscripts of Victorian authors, or the correspondence of retired politicians anxious to redeem their reputations. I could not possibly claim that my Penguins have as much scholarly gravitas, for example, as your collection of the papers of James Hogg, or of my old friend Alastair Hetherington. And I very much hope that before long the University will be able to arrange for another exhibition on the Hetherington collection, especially since he and I served together in the same armoured division from Normandy to Denmark.

While some of my Penguins could only be described as low-brow and forgettable, I shall try to convince you that the collection as a whole has a scholarly potential which would merit a place in any university. Unless you have qualified for your bus-pass, some of you may not be fully aware of the revolution in British publishing which was triggered off by the arrival of the first ten Penguins in 1935 - when I was myself still a schoolboy.

They were not of course the first paperbacks (these Penny Popular Novels came out in the

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1 Reworked by Alec Spencer from original digital file of Angus Mitchell, and with new photographs/images (images at www.penguinfirsteditions.com)
reign of Queen Victoria, and many serious paperbacks were published in Leipzig by Tauchnitz). They were however the first attempt to bring good literature to a wider public at the modest price of only 6d. - the price at that time of a packet of 10 Woodbines. They were accordingly viewed with deep suspicion and contempt by most traditional British publishers who feared that these upstart parvenues would undercut their market in expensive hardbacks.

How wrong they were! This new venture was so successful that nearly all the early Penguins had to be reprinted several times over. It was not long before other publishers jumped on the bandwagon by producing sixpenny paperbacks - like this example from Hutchison's Pocket Library. In the next 4 years before war broke out in 1939, over 200 books were published by Penguin in its main series, colour-coded for instant recognition by the purchaser (eg deep blue for biography, yellow for crosswords). The new firm sold over 28 million books worldwide in those 4 years, which placed them in a very strong position to face up to the stringent rationing of paper during the Second World War.

However, this was very far from being a one-off venture in successful marketing of fiction reprints. It was only the beginning of a remarkable experiment in adult education over a wide field of knowledge, once described as "The Poor Man's University". Over 4000 books were published by Penguins between 1935 and 1960, and so my collection could almost serve as a synoptic survey of the gradual changes in British reading tastes at that time.

Many of you will remember the brave decision by Penguins in 1960 to publish the unexpurgated edition of DH Lawrence's "Lady Chatterley's Lover", despite a clear warning that the publisher and printer would be prosecuted for obscenity. The huge publicity given to the court case reflected a major change in public attitudes towards sex in literature, and possibly resulted in further relaxations in censorship in many other countries.

When I began collecting Penguins systematically about 20 years ago, I did not realise how many colourful birds I was going to find in this extraordinary aviary. Everybody knows what a Penguin or a Pelican looks like, but I would like to show you just a few illustrations of the wide range covered in this collection; these are taken mainly from the earlier series, which have been discontinued, so that you may be less familiar with some of them.

1. ALLEN LANE was the progenitor and driving force behind Penguins from their inception in 1935 until his death in 1970. He had no formal education after leaving school, but had a remarkable talent for finding new niches in the book market, and then for finding talented men and women (such as Krishna Menon and Bill Williams, the first Director of the Arts Council) to serve as editors in the firm. He once described himself as "a cross between a missionary and a mercenary" - not a bad epitaph for any publisher. He certainly deserved the knighthood which he was awarded in 1952, and he was made a Companion of Honour a year before he died.
2. ARIEL was the biography of Andre Maurois, and has the proud distinction of being Penguin number 1, although it was in fact published in July 1935 on the same day as 9 others in the main series. I saw one copy advertised recently for £60, as it had the printer's error of missing out the acute accent on the name "Andre".

3. POET’S PUB was published on the same day as Ariel, and both still bear the imprint of The Bodley Head, the rather old-fashioned firm of publishers in which Allen Lane and his two brothers were employed; that connection ended a few months later when the Lane brothers broke away and set up Penguin Books as a separate company. I picked this out partly because it is the earliest Penguin by a Scottish author, and also in the hope that his son Magnus might be able to join us today - but political journalists may have better things to do on the eve of the election!

4. THE MISSING MONEYLENDER is here, not for its dubious contribution to the quality of English literature, but to illustrate the extent to which Penguins aimed to cater for low-brow as well as high-brow readers. Some collectors even specialise in the green crime Penguins, which are sometimes rarer than the orange fiction.
5. THE SURGEON’S LOG has the maroon cover reserved for books of travel and adventure; it was first published in 1911 and went through 20 editions before Penguin bought the rights in 1936. These pre-war Penguins had paper dust-wrappers with a small photo and potted biography of the author, which have all too often fallen to pieces or been lost by later owners. Most of the pre-war books in my collection have their original dust-wrappers, but I am still searching for others that are missing.

6. POLAND was one of the earliest Penguin Specials, the series collected by Colin Bell. This was a new venture in its combination of book publishing with journalistic reporting on current political issues. This one was especially well timed, as it was brought out in July 1939, only a few weeks before the German invasion. In the exhibition you will see another early Special, “Spain”, written in the heat of the Spanish Civil War by the Duchess of Atholl MP, whose biographer Sheila Hetherington has happily been able to join us today.

7. PUFFIN PICTURE BOOKS started in 1940, and were designed as educational books for small children. They were much admired artistically, and very popular with godparents seeking birthday presents; but they were much less popular with booksellers because of their awkward shape, and were unfortunately discontinued in 1965. I have over 100 of them in my collection, but am still searching for another 15 which are hard to find.
8. PUFFIN STORY BOOKS will be known to most of you since childhood - or at least since parenthood. They were first published in 1941 and have continued as a highly popular series for children up to the present day. Worzel Gummidge was the first in the series, and has unusually moved with the times with 4 different pictures on its front cover.

9. PENGUIN PARADE was published as a quarterly periodical from 1937 to 1948, and included a number of poems and short stories by authors who were not then well known, but later became famous - like John Pudney and Stella Gibbons.

10. PENGUIN CLASSICS were launched in 1946, against strong commercial advice, and over 300 have been published so far. Classic no 1 - which has sold over 2 million copies worldwide - was the translation of Homer's Odyssey by E V Rieu, who was also the editor of the series for the next 18 years. More translations came from about 25 foreign languages, including Icelandic; this copy of Nyal's Saga was translated by the late Herman Palsson and Magnus Magnusson, and I recommend it strongly as a good preparation for any visit to Iceland.

I am sorry that I cannot show you a slide of one of the AMERICAN PENGUINS, but you will find one in the Exhibition. This was started as a separate series in 1942, and this example with its gaudy cover illustrates the very different format preferred by the American market - in which the average brow level was at least 3 centimetres below the British series. Allen Lane had an old-fashioned aversion to pictorial covers which he unkindly described as
“all bosoms and bottoms”; so it is hardly surprising that he soon fell out with the New York branch - which then declared independence from the parent company. These US Penguins are not often found in Britain, and I have only 20 in my collection so far.

This is only a small selection from my collection, and I have not shown you any pictures of some other series such as Phoenix, Ptarmigans, King Penguins, Peregrines and Porpoises. Some of these are however shown in the Exhibition which Helen Beardsley has very ably put together, and which I hope you will have time to look at shortly. I am most grateful to her and her colleagues for the trouble they have taken in arranging the exhibition - and I am even more grateful to them for taking the future care of the collection off my own shoulders.

There are now over 400 members of the Penguin Collectors’ Society from Australia to California. We were once described in the Sunday Times as “a club for the nicest kind of nutter”. It may well be true that most collectors are slightly mad, and that some of us are serious addicts; but we have now become more respectable, since the Charities Commission in England last year approved the Society as a charity because of our educational purpose. The Society publishes a learned journal twice a year, as well as several other useful publications, all of which are in my collection. Here is a booklet by the Society, for example, about the various Penguins brought out specially for the armed services in World War II.

When I began collecting Penguins about 20 years ago, I thought at first that I would try to collect the first 500 in the main series, going up to 1945. However, when I found that they were often available for only 5 or 10p I was unable to resist the temptation to look for other series like Pelicans, Specials and Shakespeare up until 1960, when my shelf space could not cope with any more. If I had a larger house it would have been more logical to go on until 1970, when Allen Lane died of cancer and the firm was taken over by Pearson. I hope that the University will consider the possibility of extending the collection up to that date, to complete a chapter in the fascinating story of British publishing in the last century.

My collection now includes around 4000 Penguins, including a few hardbacks such as the Pelican History of Art. But there are still a few gaps among the rarer species; I still hope to find some of these, and I have hopefully given the Library a list of those still missing. If anybody in the audience happens to have at home the rare Puffin edition of "The Hobbit" by Tolkien, for example, please speak to me after the meeting; I have brought my chequebook with me.

"Presentation" is an ambiguous word, and some of you may have come here expecting me to present a large box of books to the Librarian; that is not the game plan, however. Over the last 10 years I have gradually transferred to the Library about 1400 books in over 20 diverse series such as Pelicans, Editions Pinguin, Russian Review and New Biology. I have made sure in my will that you will get the rest in due course - but there are still a lot which I have not yet had time to read. I expect that I shall hang on to the Penguin Reference series as long as I feel able to tackle the Times Crossword.

As a token of intent and good will, however, I am happy to hand over today this copy of "Claes Oldenburg", which will complete the attractive series of 24 Penguin Modern Painters. I found it only last month over the Internet in a bookshop in Dublin. There are plenty more to come, and I would like to record my gratitude to the University for accepting responsibility for their care.