

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07341-7 - Repertorium Bibliographicum: Or, some Account of the Most Celebrated British Libraries

William Clarke

Excerpt

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LONDON.



THE

BRITISH MUSEUM.

THIS magnificent collection of manuscripts and printed books may justly claim precedence of all the public libraries in the kingdom: it has been formed chiefly by the munificent grants of Parliament for the purchase of great collections, of royal donations, and numerous valuable bequests of private individuals. His late majesty contributed the whole of the important library of printed books and manuscripts which had been collected by the preceding sovereigns from Henry VII. to William III. The present king, in 1762, presented to the Museum a most valuable collection of pamphlets and periodical papers, in about 2000 volumes, relating to the civil wars, and which had originally been the property of King Charles I. The Museum contains also the libraries of Archbishop Cranmer, Henry Fitzalan Earl of Arundel, and his son-in-law Richard

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Lord Lumley, the learned Isaac Casaubon, and Major Arthur Edwards; the Cottonian, Harleian, and Lansdowne collection of manuscripts; and the manuscripts and printed books of Sir Hans Sloane, purchased by Parliament in 1753, on the foundation of the establishment.

It has also been enriched from the libraries of Dr. Thomas Birch, Mr. Thomas Hollis, the Rev. Dean Milles, Mr. Tyrwhitt, Mr. Halhed, Sir William Musgrave, Sir William Burrell, Rev. William Cole, and Rev. C. M. Cracherode, whose fine collection of early printed books forms a most valuable acquisition to the Museum.

COTTONIAN MANUSCRIPTS,

Collected by Sir Robert Cotton,^a in the times of Queen Elizabeth and James I., consist of authentic documents relating to the history, antiquities, laws and constitution of the kingdom; of many ancient biblical and liturgic volumes, chronicles and political tracts. This library was removed from Cotton House,^b Westminster, in the year

^a It is greatly to be lamented that a life so meritorious as that of Sir Robert Cotton, should, towards its close, have been embittered by base calumny and arbitrary proceedings. See Preface to the Catalogue of the Cottonian manuscripts: also an extract from Sir Symonds D'Ewes's Life (preserved among the Harleian MSS.) in Chalmers's Biographical Dictionary, 1813, 8vo. vol. x. p. 326.

^b Cotton House was situated behind the House of Commons; the residence of the chief clerk is built on the site.

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1712, to Essex House in the Strand ; but in 1730 it was conveyed back to Westminster, and placed in Ashburnham House;^c where, shortly after, a fire broke out, and destroyed several of the manuscripts. After this unfortunate accident, the remaining part of the collection was removed into the dormitory of Westminster school, and remained there until the year 1753; when, by order of parliament, it was finally deposited in the British Museum.

This library, originally consisting of 958 volumes, was by the above-mentioned fire reduced to 861, of which 105 were considerably damaged. Fifty-one out of that number have by great care been restored, and are bound up in forty-four volumes.

Of the Royal Library of Manuscripts there is a catalogue compiled by Mr. David Casley, and printed in 1734, in quarto; and of the Cottonian Library there are three extant: the first by Dr. Thomas Smith in 1696, folio; the second in 1777, octavo; and the third, considerably enlarged, by Joseph Planta, Esq. principal librarian, in 1802, folio.

^c Ashburnham House, formerly so called, in Little Dean's Yard, was the residence of the late Dr. Bell, prebendary of Westminster.

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HARLEIAN MANUSCRIPTS,

Collected by Robert and Edward Earls of Oxford, consist of about 7600 volumes. They may be divided into the following classes.

1. BIBLES and biblical books, upwards of three hundred copies in the Hebrew, Chaldee, Greek, Arabic and Latin; many of them of great antiquity.

2. CABBALAS, Talmuds, Targums, Glosses, and Commentaries on the Pentateuch, and other books of the Old Testament, in Hebrew, Chaldee, &c.

3. Near 200 volumes of the writings of the Fathers of the Church.

4. LITURGIES and books of devotion.

5. MISSALS, BREVIARIES, and HOURS of the Virgin, according to the Roman, English, and Gallican Churches, many of them curiously illuminated and richly adorned with historical paintings.

6. LIVES and Canonizations of British, Saxon, and English Saints.

7. Many ancient copies of the Greek and Latin Classics and Historians, particularly a fragment of Virgil's *Æneid* written in the ninth century; his *Bucolics*, *Georgics*, and part of the *Æneid* of the twelfth century; two copies of Livy of the tenth and thirteenth centuries; Ovid's *Metamorphoses* of the tenth century; Quintilian of

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the ninth century; Lucan of the eleventh century.

8. **LEXICONS, Glossaries, and Dictionaries**, in various languages; particularly a beautiful copy in Greek and Latin, in capital letters, of the seventh century.

9. **CHOROGRAPHIES, Antiquities, Histories, Chronicles, &c. of France and other countries.**

10. **CHRONICLES, Topography, Antiquities, and Ecclesiastical History of Great Britain and Ireland.**

11. **HERALDICAL and Armorial Books, Ceremonials, Poms, and Solemnities.**

12. **BOOKS of ARCHITECTURE, Geometry, Gunnery, Fortification, Ship-building, and Military Affairs.**

13. **NATURAL HISTORY, Agriculture, Voyages, Travels, &c.**

14. Many rare mss. in Astronomy, Cosmography, and Geography.

15. **POEMS, Essays, Ditties, Ancient Ballads, Plays, &c. in almost every modern language; many of them hitherto unpublished.**

16. A great variety of Alchymical, Chymical, and Medical Tracts.

17. Original Letters written by eminent and learned men; a numerous collection.

18. A great variety of mss. highly valuable on account of the many beautiful illuminations with which they are embellished.

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A catalogue of the Harleian mss. was printed in 1759, two vols. folio, but the latter part of it being found defective, an improved edition became necessary; this was completed in four vols. folio, 1808—1812.

SIR HANS SLOANE'S COLLECTIONS

Are supposed to consist of about 50,000 volumes of printed books and mss. including books of prints and drawings. A catalogue of the mss., including other collections, was published by the Rev. S. Ayscough in 1782, two vols. quarto.

JOHN BAGFORD'S

Collections, made in the early part of the eighteenth century, were designed as materials towards writing a general history of printing. H. MS. 5891 to 5988 excepting (5955).

DR. THOMAS BIRCH,

In the year 1766, left his library and manuscripts to the Museum; the latter contain several historical documents, correspondence of eminent men, and copies of State Papers.

THOMAS HOLLIS, ESQ.*

Appears to have been a liberal benefactor, having been unremitted in his contributions of rare

* Mr. Hollis's contributions also to foreign libraries were very extensive; Switzerland, Venice, Leyden, Sweden, &c. liberally shared

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books, prints, &c. from the year 1756 to his death in 1774.

his favours. The library at Harvard College in New England, being destroyed by fire in 1766, was by his benevolent assistance materially restored: it originally contained rich treasures in oriental, theological, and classical literature; and had been replenished from the stores of Dr. Lightfoot, Dr. Mead, Bishop Berkeley, &c. Mr. Hollis seems to have imbibed an ardent love of liberty; he published elegant editions of Algernon Sydney, Ludlow, &c. and employed Mr. Pingo to cut a number of emblematical devices, such as the caduceus of Mercury, the wand of Esculapius, the owl, the cap of liberty, &c. &c. to adorn the backs, and sometimes the sides of his books. When patriotism animated a work, instead of unmeaning ornaments on the binding, he adorned it with caps of liberty! When wisdom filled the page, the owl's majestic gravity bespoke the contents! The caduceus pointed out the works of eloquence! and the wand of Esculapius was a signal of good medicines, &c. &c. His volumes in these exterior garbs were frequently distributed among his intimate friends.

An entertaining anecdote is related of Mr. Hollis, which shews the marked dislike he had to Popery:—Mathewman the bookbinder was strongly suspected by him of “being in link with popish priests and bad people,” and under popish influence had wilfully castrated one of the volumes of Prynne's Records entrusted to his care; or that some “Romish priest, or man of *vieu*,” had stolen out several leaves, containing the whole matter in dispute between the king and the pope in the affair of Thomas a Becket and other principal papal usurpations in the kingdom: it appearing however that the bookbinder was more negligent than criminal in the affair, on being remonstrated with, he was recommended to use more vigilance in future. Vid. *Memoirs of Thomas Hollis* (edited by Archdeacon Blackburne), 4to. 1780, p. 314.

Mr. Hollis in 1762 employed Elmsly the bookseller to procure every thing he could meet with written against the Jesuits: a considerable collection was made and presented to the public library of Zurich.

The Jesuits hearing of this collection sent to Zurich requesting that their answers, and other books written in their favour, might also be deposited in the same library, which was granted.

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REV. JEREMIAH MILLES,

DEAN OF EXETER.

A collection in forty-seven volumes relating to the history of Ireland.

THOMAS TYRWHITT, ESQ.^f

Bequeathed in 1786 a portion of his library, consisting of about 900 volumes, chiefly classical.

N. BRASSEY HALHED, ESQ.

In the year 1796, the trustees purchased for the sum of £550, the oriental library of Mr. Halhed: it consists of ninety-three volumes, fourteen of which are in the Shanskrit language, and the rest chiefly Persian: to these have been added twenty-six volumes purchased of the late Col. Hamilton, the translator of the Hedaya; and the four Vedas in the Shanskrit language presented by Col. Polier; besides thirty-two volumes which came with the trophies of our Egyptian expedition.

^f Mr. Tyrwhitt was thoroughly read in the old English writers, and his critical efforts have eminently contributed to restore the genuine text of Shakespeare. The admirers of Chaucer are also greatly indebted to him for elucidating the obscurities and illustrating the humour of that ancient bard.

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SIR W. MUSGRAVE, BART.[§]

In the year 1800, bequeathed to the Museum nearly 2000 volumes of printed books, among which are many biographical tracts of great rarity and curiosity: also forty-four volumes of manuscripts, consisting of an obituary kept by himself, autographs, original warrants, catalogues of portraits, &c.

DR. BENTLEY'S^h

Collection of ancient classics was added to the Museum in 1807; these volumes, eighty-four in number, are enriched with the manuscript notes of that eminent and learned critic; they were formerly in the possession of his grandson the late Richard Cumberland, who received for them the sum of £400.

[§] Sir William Musgrave's large collection of portraits, advertised for sale by public auction previous to his death (Jan. 3, 1800) was disposed of at Richardson's rooms in the months of February and March following; the produce amounted to nearly £5000.

^h Dr. Charles Burney in 1807 edited a magnificent quarto volume of Bentley's correspondence, under the title of "R. Bentleii et doctorum virorum Epistolæ, partim mutuæ, accedit Richardi Dawesii ad Joannem Taylorum epistola singularis:" Groevius is Dr. Bentley's principal correspondent in this interesting volume; which was not printed for sale.

ⁱ It may here be remarked, that the very learned papers in the fifth volume of the "Observer," on the Greek poets, published by Mr. Cumberland as his own, were chiefly taken from his grandfather's manuscripts.

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REV. WILLIAM COLE'S

Manuscripts, in upwards of 130 vols. folio, were bequeathed to the Museum with the condition that they should not be opened for twenty years after his death, which took place in 1782. He began these collections during his residence at college, about the year 1742, intending to compile a work, in imitation of Anthony Wood's *Athenæ Oxonienses*, containing the lives of the Cambridge scholars. He appears also to have had in view a *History of the University and County of Cambridge*. His topographical collections are illustrated by numerous drawings in rather a coarse style, but sufficiently illustrative of the subjects. Mr. Cole seems to have carefully registered every anecdote he could pick up in conversation, and to have freely characterized his contemporaries: his anecdotes are of that gossiping kind, on which a judicious biographer will not rely unless corroborated by other authority. His biographical researches display very extensive reading and great industry.

MR. SOLOMON DA COSTA

Presented to the Museum in 1759, 200 curious manuscript volumes in the Hebrew tongue, which were originally intended by the Jews as a present to King Charles II.