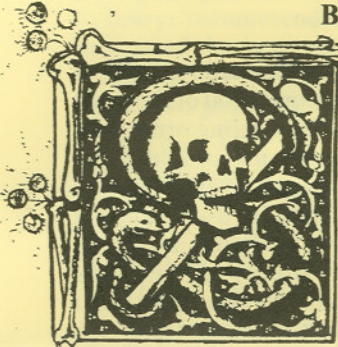


OSLER LIBRARY NEWSLETTER

McGILL UNIVERSITY, MONTREAL, CANADA

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BOOKS FOR THE BIBLIOTHECA: A STUDY OF SIR WILLIAM OSLER'S BOOK BILLS



OMETIME IN JUNE OF 1912, writing to Casey Wood, Osler penned words that echo through the decades in the memories of countless McGill graduates, book lovers and admirers of the man himself:

"I am adding treasures to my collection every few months, and it will finally be housed in Montreal".¹

Through the study of the surviving invoices now housed in the Osler Library, and additional data from other sources, one can envision the way in which Osler built his collection. Further, the excitement and intelligence which he brought to bear on the building process clearly come through.

Manuscript Collection Accession No. 326 in the Osler Library is a series of bundles, roughly by year, of 1,047 invoices from 1907 - 1918. Most of these are for books and manuscripts. There are also invoices for binding, repairs, and other restorative procedures (1,045 titles were to a greater or lesser extent prepared for further use and survival in this way). Many other books were bound when purchased, arranged through the dealer, and could be added to this total if time permitted such an exercise.

Other invoices in the bundles are from secretarial and typing services, a clipping bureau, publication costs (printing, photography and reprint orders), professional memberships, and a few oddities such as flowers, shirt collars and a silver tankard.²

W. W. Francis, the first Osler Librarian, was interested in the invoices. Many of the 1915 bundle are annotated in his hand with reference numbers to items in the *Bibliotheca Osleriana* (hereafter referred to as *Bibl. Osl.*) and have occasional dated comments from 1941 - 1944. The bills are often cryptic, listing books by catalogue and item number only, or merely by number of books. Most of these will never be identified fully.

The invoices record purchases for Osler's own collection, and purchases for friends and relations. A few are subscriptions to periodicals and annuals, such as *Book Auction Records*. The invoices represent purchases from dealers and auction houses in England, France, Germany, Austria, Holland, Denmark, Italy and the United States.

Techniques other than purchase were utilized by Osler. Some of the earliest entrants into the collection as we know it today were gifts. Perhaps the earliest gift extant is *Bibl. Osl.* 3588, Hallan's *Introduction to the Literature*

Once again our lead-article is by Miss Ellen B. Wells, the former (and founding) Editor of the *Osler Library Newsletter*. Her last contribution, "Books for horsemen in the *Bibliotheca Osleriana*," appeared in the October 1974 issue.

of Europe, 1864, an award to young William Osler at Trinity College School in 1866.

When an item was selected from a catalogue, it was telephoned, telegraphed or written for. When the books arrived, the invoice was returned to the dealer with payment. The dealer then accepted the invoice and returned it to the purchaser, often with fulsome thanks (by today's standards of courtesy). This was an opportunity for both buyer and seller to exchange greetings and messages on the invoice.

In 1910, when the bill preceded the arrival of volume 6 of Charles Evans' *American Bibliography* (*Bibl. Osl.* 7030), Osler wrote on it, "Congratulations! It has not come yet but I am sure the vol will be as good & even more interesting than the others. W.O." To which Evans replied, "Thank you for your kind expressions and always prompt courtesy."

Osler was a sophisticated and canny buyer. He was lucky to have an ever-widening association with dealers and friends who were on the watch for him. Books often came to 13 Norham Gardens without being specifically ordered, but on approval, with an invoice. Rejected titles were crossed off, the invoice and the balance paid. On an invoice to Davis & Orioli of July 1915, he justified one such rejection, "... as I have one edition. 'Tis a deuce of a price too, for a 4th class book." Alas, the title of this gem is covered by the dealer's receipt stamp!

As recounted in the notes for *Bibl. Osl.* 1357, the 1846 - 47 volume of the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*, a cornerstone in his anesthesia collection, Osler acquired it shortly before his death, and had it inscribed, "All things come to him who waits - but it was a pretty close shave this time!" His eagerness to get it is clear in a note to Goodspeed's of Boston on a 1917 invoice: "Do not forget the *Bost. Med. & Surg. Journal*, 1846 - 47. W.O."

When such a prize did come, he could be very generous in his thanks, such as when Gilbert Knowles' *Materia medica*, 1723 (*Bibl. Osl.* 5030) arrived late in November 1917 from John Grant of Edinburgh, billed at 3/7d.,³ Osler wrote happily, "Thanks for such a nice copy of a book I have been looking for these five years." When

The decorated letter on this page is from Cornelius Celsus, *De medicina* (Florence: Nicolaus Laurentii, 1478; *Bibl. Osl.* 287).

Editorial Committee for the *Newsletter*: E.H. Bensley, Editor; Philip Teigen, Librarian; Patricia Birks and Karin Waterhouse, Editorial Assistants.

several boxes of books were delivered by messenger by an Oxford bookbinder, he sent the lad back with money and invoice, with the latter annotated to take the change after the bill was paid and give it to the lad.

Osler was not above bargaining, especially when unsolicited offers came in, sometimes effecting a reduction in price. One was an offer from Luigi Lubrano of Naples of an early 16th century manuscript of medical texts of the Paduan school, *Bibl. Osl.* 7600. The price in Lubrano's letter of 4 May 1917 was £10/-/-. On 14 May, Lubrano accepted a counter offer of £6/-/- for the item and shipped it.

Also, in 1917, a dealer apparently went after an item for Osler and succeeded in getting the price reduced for him. The dealer still considered it high but the price was paid. Someone at Davis & Orioli wrote on the £10/-/- invoice for *Bibl. Osl.* 7441, "You will note the large reduction on the Guainerius. Very high price for so poor a bit of early typography! I would not buy at £5 at auction!" This 1487 edition of Guainerius' *De peste* is represented even now by only three copies in North America.

When competing with others in the general antiquarian book market, Osler paid high for herbals, incunabula and books with fine illustrations, but otherwise he was able to amass working groups in areas of interest without exorbitant expenditure. At any rate, we now see such prices as follow as low: Auenbrugger's *Inventum novum* (*Bibl. Osl.* 1863), Dutch florins 3.50 in 1916; Fludd's *Philosophia Moysaica* (*Bibl. Osl.* 2629), £1/16/- in 1915; Huxham's *A Dissertation on the Malignant, Ulcerous Sore-Throat* (*Bibl. Osl.* 3040), 5 shillings in 1914; and an edition of Sanctorius' *De Medicina statica* with Baglivi's commentary (*Bibl. Osl.* 3913) at 5 lira in 1909.

To begin at the beginning one would have to trace Osler's earliest surviving acquisitions, and some do indeed turn up in the *Bibliotheca*, primarily as gifts from people such as James Bovell. The 1862 edition of *Religio medici* (*Bibl. Osl.* 4446) is mentioned in the introduction to the *Bibliotheca* as the second book he bought.

There are few survivors of his student days in Europe, although he had started an account at Dawson's by 1874. An early purchase Osler recalled was Virchow's *Gesammelte Abhandlung zur wissenschaftlichen Medicin*, 1856 (*Bibl. Osl.* 1629). This was by his account "... knocked down to me at £6 at a sale in Liverpool ... of the books of an old German physician" in 1878. His first auction?

Auctions, he felt, were often a good place to buy. Remarking on Olschki's fine stock in his Rome shop, and the high prices, he wrote "... but really auction sale is the only economical way to get old books ..."⁴ And even though many of Osler's treasures were purchased at auction, the majority of books were purchased from antiquarian dealers, through their catalogues and as a result of his incessant personal visits to shops.

Osler customarily made the rounds of bookshops and libraries on trips. A notably successful foray was a trip to Britain and Holland in the summer of 1899. That summer he paid 7 guineas for the first "authorized" edition of Sir Thomas Browne's *Religio medici*, 1643 (*Bibl. Osl.* 4420), perhaps one of his earlier expensive purchases. By the end of 1900, he had almost completed his Browne collection, perhaps a reason to pay so much for one of the last and surely one of the most important items for such a collection.

In the summer of 1901, Osler attended a sale by Burgersdijk and Niermans of the effects of a great granddaughter of Hermann Boerhaave. Although the invoice did not survive, Osler's connection with the great Leyden auction house flourished. In 1909, on a receipted invoice for the 1725 *Opera omnia* of Vesalius (*Bibl. Osl.* 579), Osler was told, "We have not manuscripts in stock just now." In 1914, he received advance sheets from them for upcoming sales of medical materials.

By 1905, he could refer in a letter to Howard A. Kelly of his intention "... to start my collection of 100 of the great medical works."⁵ In 1908, he set up a standing order with Karslake for *Book Auction Records*, and completed his set of previously published volumes, another indication of his systematic approach to his task. He used standard historical and bibliographical tools available, including Sir Michael Foster's *Lectures on the History of Physiology* (*Bibl. Osl.* 5877), and Ludwig Choulant's *Geschichte und Bibliographie der anatomischen Abbildung* (*Bibl. Osl.* 6975), to establish identities of texts appropriate to his goals.

In remarks at the 4th Annual Dinner of the International Association of Antiquarian Booksellers, Osler described the symptoms of his bookcollector's mania: "Instead of attending to my duties and attending to my work, in comes every day by the post, and by every post, all this seductive literature with which you have, as you know perfectly well, gradually undermined the mental virility of many and many a better man than I."⁶ He noted with some satisfaction that his revenge was soon to descend upon them, having seen a catalogue listing his own *Principles and Practice of Medicine*, a title which now fetches from \$175-250 in the antiquarian marketplace.

As every anxious collector has discovered, other collectors are also after the same books. Osler did not get all the items he tried for, either from antiquarian catalogues or in the auction house. He missed Bayle's *Recherches sur la phthisie*, 1810, from a Welter list in 1909 (a copy is now in the Osler Library). Many invoices in the collection have such sad messages as "Galen sold," "Champier sold" (but he got a 1497 Celsus with that same message), "I regret the others sold," and "Sorry Lamarck has not come to hand yet, but will send it directly it arrives" (it evidently never did).

However, he was not only persevering, but definitely lucky to be able to recognize and act upon good opportunities. By his own account, five copies of the 1543 Vesalius passed through his hands, and he was often able to help friends acquire books. In 1912, he bought all of his editions of Claude Bernard's works (*Bibl. Osl.* 1507-1518) from Loescher of Paris for 48 francs. In 1916, he paid Maggs £2/9/6 for eleven first editions of Robert Boyle. These latter are unspecified on the invoice, but *Bibl. Osl.* 950, *Medicina hydrostatica*, 1690, had come from Commin in 1911, at 3/6d. Another coup was the purchase in 1916 of 12 editions of the works of John Ray, in *Bibl. Osl.* 967-981, from Whelden for 10 guineas.

During the years of the First World War, when shipping was disturbed and Britain was in a state of war with Germany, the book trade suffered. Osler's invoices show a cessation of German trading, but maintenance of trade, albeit sporadic, with France and Holland. In later stages, some shipments from France were held until after the Armistice.

Special quests for materials such as Indian and Persian texts involved help from experts. Osler had purchased Wise's *Commentary on the Hindu System of Medicine* (*Bibl. Osl.* 112) in 1915, and in 1916, asked A.A. Macdonnel, the Boden Professor of Sanskrit at Oxford, for advice on how to acquire Sanskrit manuscripts. Professor Macdonnel, who had been very successful in 1907-1908 in acquiring Sanskrit manuscripts in India for the Bodleian Library, recommended two colleagues in Benares, and suggested he acquire texts of Charaka, Susruta and Vagbhata. In 1919, Sir Leonard Rogers, a tropical disease specialist, gave Osler 10 Sanskrit items (*Bibl. Osl.* 93, 94, 97-104).

A great admirer of Osler, and devotee of his writings, was Dr. M. Sa'eed, of Hamadan, Iran. They apparently met in Oxford in 1913, although corresponding earlier. It was through Sa'eed that many of Osler's Arabic manuscripts of Rhazes and Avicenna were purchased, all at prices under £15. Delivery was sometimes delayed for years due to wartime conditions. Through Sa'eed the Dioscorides manuscript (*Bibl. Osl.* 346) and the al-Ghafiki manuscript (*Bibl. Osl.* 7508) were purchased in 1912.

On the evidence of the invoices, the highest price Osler paid for a single item was £40 to Leo Olschki of Florence for the extremely rare edition of Rhazes' *Liber nonus ad Almansorem*, 1476 (*Bibl. Osl.* 451) which was sent to the British Museum. Another expensive incunable was Brunschwig's *Buch der Chirurgia*, 1497? (*Bibl. Osl.* 7423) purchased from Schwartz of Vienna for kr.600, about £12. One of the heaviest tomes in Osler's collection, the *Speculum naturale* of Vincent of Beauvais (*Bibl. Osl.* 7503) cost him £22, from Davis & Orioli.

However, out of thousands of purchases, few reached over £4. The high prices were for some manuscripts, incunabula, and the Prima items (of which many are incunabula). One Vesalian item was expensive because it could attract bidders as the earliest known English book with engraved illustrations. Thomas Geminus' *Compendiosa totius Anatomie delineatio*, 1545 (*Bibl. Osl.* 574) cost Osler £25 at Sotheby's in 1917.

In April 1911, Osler received from Muller the catalogue for the upcoming van den Corput sale (*Bibl. Osl.* 6989). Bernard Edouard Henri Joseph van den Corput (1821-1908), a Belgian physician, had published works on plague, papermaking and technical education. His collection was a fine opportunity for Osler to add basic texts, and he leaped at it.

One truly exciting item was listed, a certificate written by Vesalius. He wrote to Harvey Cushing to ask, "Shall you bid on it? If so I will not. Or if you like I will bid, and we will toss who will keep it . . . I wish you would let me know anything special that you are bidding on so I will not bid against you."⁷

Time passed and correspondence across the Atlantic was slow. Osler decided to bid for the Vesalius item and to take pot luck on other items for Cushing. As it turned out, the manuscript was withdrawn by the van den Corput family from the sale. However, he did get some nice things for Cushing, which are now in the Yale Medical Library, among them: Paré's *Oeuvres*, 1579, at fl.30 (about \$15); C. Estienne's *De dissectione*, 1545, at fl.30; and Blankaart's *Anatomia*, 1695 and Vesling's *Syntagma*, 1666, in a single lot with six others at fl.15.

For himself, Osler bought at least 120 titles, for a total of fl.681.25, about \$340. "At least" because many lots had more titles than were listed in the sale catalogue, which may or may not have been retained by Osler. Among his prizes were a number of Laennec letters (*Bibl. Osl.* 1329), a first edition of Mondino's *Anatomia*, 1492 (*Bibl. Osl.* 7463), and a Leyden diploma (*Bibl. Osl.* 7539). One lot of five, knocked down at about \$5, included Laennec's *De l'auscultation médiate*, 1819 (*Bibl. Osl.* 1318). Most of his editions of Glauber were bought as lot 336, for fl.20. Most of the van den Corput purchases were to end up as substantial additions to what became the Secunda section of the *Bibliotheca*.

The sale of George Dunn's superlative collection of manuscripts, incunabula, Shakespeare folios, etc., took place in four sessions at Sotheby's from 1913-1917. "I made a good haul at the Dunn sale a few weeks ago," Osler wrote.⁸ He did indeed, at a price. Among these were the Averroes first edition, 1482 (*Bibl. Osl.* 494) at £23; Thomas Geminus *Compendiosa* (*Bibl. Osl.* 574) at £25 (he asked Quaritch to go to £50 for this if necessary); and an important Avicenna manuscript (*Bibl. Osl.* 480) at 6 guineas.

Osler participated in at least nine auctions at Burgersdijk and Niermans between 1909-1917, often with Muller as his agent, resulting in an influx of about 120 titles. These were, like the van den Corput sale, mainly basic bread and butter books for the Secunda section, and supporting materials for the stars in the Prima section. Two sales netted him 96 titles alone, in 1914-1915.

Many of his purchases in these sales, as elsewhere, exemplified a principle promulgated by Osler and endorsed by Fielding H. Garrison. To avoid the "prohibitive prices" put on "rare first editions and quaint folios" by major antiquarian dealers, one must go to the ". . . occasional auction sale or in out-of-the-way places in Italy."⁹ Thus in one of the Amsterdam auctions, Osler brought the Waite translation of Paracelsus' *Hermetic and Alchemical Writing* (*Bibl. Osl.* 529) for fl.4. Another good buy at the 15-24 March 1915 sale was Gilles Basset's *Phisica Data* (*Bibl. Osl.* 7518) a two-volume illustrated manuscript, purchased at fl.16.

How much did Osler spend on books? The invoices, converted as necessary into pounds sterling at contemporary exchange rates, provide figures for those purchases for which records have survived (see Table 1).

In 1914 and 1915, Osler's brother Sir Edmund Boyd gave him a total of £950, which he evidently spent on additions to his library.¹⁰ If these figures, incomplete as they are, are compared with the total known amounts of income published by George T. Harrell,¹¹ it will be seen that there were years when Osler spent a significant amount of his known income on what became the Osler Library.

The Friends of the Osler Library kindly provided micro-films on loan of the invoices. The staffs of the Osler Library and the McGill Department of the History of Medicine have been generous in their help and suggestions. I owe a special debt to Miss Marilyn Fransiszyn.

Acknowledgement is also due to the Center for Research Libraries, Chicago, for the loan of micro-films of Sotheby sales catalogues from 1907-1917. And finally, thanks are due for the loan of six Burgersdijk and Niermans auction catalogues by the Bibliotheek van de Vereeniging ter Bevoerding van de Belangen des Boekhandels of Amsterdam.

TABLE I

Osler's expenditures on books as calculated from extant invoices.

Year	Book Purchases			Binding		
	Pounds	Shillings	Pence	Pounds	Shillings	Pence
1907	28	14	0			
1908	136	15	0			
1909	544	11	3	6	1	0
1910	111	18	10	5	12	6
1911	174	8	0	20	8	0
1912	224	15	3	15	4	6
1913	38	18	0			
1914	462	18	9	23	0	3
1915	243	5	1	55	14	8
1916	132	4	0	22	18	11
1917	451	10	7	32	6	10
1918	29	8	1	35	19	11
Totals	2,579	6	10	217	6	7

NOTES

¹Harvey Cushing, *The Life of Sir William Osler*, 2 vols. (London, Oxford University Press, 1925), vol.2, p.318.

²The silver tankard, with "Presented to the Fellows' Club of the Royal College of Physicians by Sir William Osler, Bart, M.D., July 1912" engraved on it, was purchased from D. & J. Weillby Ltd. of Garrick Street, London.

³Prices given in this article are not converted to today's values, but are expressed in contemporary currencies.

⁴Cushing, *Life*, vol.2, p.167.

⁵Willard E. Goodwin, "William Osler and Howard A. Kelly . . . as revealed by nineteen letters from Osler to Kelly," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* (1946), XX, 611-652, p.625.

⁶Sir William Osler, quoted in a report of the dinner in *The Bookseller* (1911), XVI, old series, 144-145.

⁷Osler to Cushing, 19 April 1911, typescript copy of letter in Cushing Papers, Osler Library manuscript collection.

⁸Cushing, *Life*, vol.2, p.586.

⁹Fielding H. Garrison and Felix Neumann, "How to Collect Old Medical Books in Europe: Where to go and What to look for," reprinted, with additions, from the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (1911), LVII, 895-898, p.895.

¹⁰Sir William Osler, "Autobiographical Notes," edited, annotated and introduced by Edward H. Bensley and Donald G. Bates, *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* (1976), L, 596-618, p.615.

¹¹George T. Harrell, "Osler's Practice," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* (1973), XLVII, 545-568, p.567.

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KARL HOLECZEK

After a long illness borne with extraordinary courage, Mr. Holeczek of McGill's Department of Physiology died August 23rd last. Readers of the *Newsletter* who make a practice of examining fine print will recognize him as the member of our Editorial Committee responsible for photography. His elegant work has adorned almost every issue since the *Newsletter* was founded in 1969. Most of his photographs have been the reproductions of decorated letters but he has contributed a number of other attractive illustrations as well.

Over the years Mr. Holeczek had become a valued friend and colleague within the McGill community. When illness finally forced him to retire last June, he was given a silver tray and a "McGill chair". The presentation was made by Dr. Robert E. Bell, Principal and Vice-Chancellor of McGill University, acting on behalf of the Department of Physiology, the Osler Library, and the many other areas of the University served so ably and so willingly by Mr. Holeczek.

E.H. Bensley

FRIENDS OF THE OSLER LIBRARY

At this time each year, the Osler Library appeals for funds from those wishing to support its aims and activities. Friends who wish to contribute are asked to fill in the enclosed golden-rod coloured form and to return it with their cheques to the designated address.

During the past year contributions from the Friends have supported the publishing of the *Newsletter* and permitted the purchase of the manuscript account book of a nineteenth-century Quebec doctor, Josiah Brigham, and several out-of-print books relating to public health. Typical of the latter were, *Raccolta dei Principali Provvedimenti dati dalla Commissione Sanitaria di Torino . . . in Occasione del Cholera Asiatico* (1835?), F. Asti, *Costituzione delle Malattie Regnate nella Cita Mantova* (1782), and T. Fasano, *Della Febre Epidemica Sofferta in Napoli* (1783).