

OSLER LIBRARY NEWSLETTER

McGill University, Montreal, Canada

No. 55 – June 1987

THE PROVENANCE OF SOME OF THE INCUNABLES IN THE OSLER LIBRARY



IN 1911 IN AN ADDRESS TO the annual dinner of the International Association of Antiquarian Booksellers in London, William Osler, then Regius Professor of Medicine at the University of Oxford, amusingly described the symptoms of his bibliographical interests:

You see here before you a mental, moral, almost, I may say, a physical wreck — and all of your own making.

Until I became mixed up with you I was really a respectable, God-fearing, industrious, earnest, ardent, enthusiastic, energetic student. Now what am I? A mental wreck, devoted to nothing but your literature. 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 a better man than I.¹

Osler was an enthusiastic book collector and as Charles G. Roland has observed “although Osler had been collecting books for decades, it was at Oxford that he had both the opportunity and the income to add substantially to his library”.² And “the opportunity was great” as Osler himself noted in “The Collecting of A Library”. Osler explained that: “a Curator of the Bodleian [Library] (as *ex officio* I am) and Delegate of the [Oxford University] Press is forced into the most bookish circles of the University”.³ In addition to these “bookish circles of the University” Osler soon made other bibliographical contacts. Less than a year after his arrival in England, Osler was elected a member of the Bibliographical Society (London). He was elected to its Council in 1910; a year later he was elected Vice-President, and in 1913, President.

During Osler's active days of collecting in Oxford one of the great libraries of the day was offered for sale. From February 1913 to November 1917 Sotheby's offered for sale the library of George Dunn of Woolley Hall near Maidenhead. Dunn was a bachelor who died without heir. He was called to the bar, but never practised; he devoted himself to his collection and to his bibliographical pursuits, particularly to the study of incunables. Dunn's library was described in his obituary in *The Times*:

The incunabula of which he formed so splendid a collection were for the most part scarce volumes, little known or without the printer's names. He cared far less for the books already prized and described and understood by collectors, as these present few of the problems which it was his delight to solve, often at the expense of whole nights as well as days passed in his study. There was a time when he used to take the books that baffled his researches to Robert Proctor, of the British Museum, whose erudition usually enabled him to clear up any difficulty. After Proctor's untimely death in 1903, Mr.

Dunn was compelled to pursue his investigations unaided, with the result that he became the best authority on the subject in England, and was appealed to for information by the officials of the British Museum and other great libraries.⁴

Dunn's nocturnal habits are witnessed in a book from his collection now in the Osler Library. Tipped into the copy of Vincent of Beauvais' *Speculum morale* (B.O. 7502) is a letter from Sidney Cockerell to Dunn and Dunn's reply which ends "...Home only last evening and still at work — 6 A.M. Yours sleepily, G.D."⁵

In addition to the *Speculum morale* there are over twenty-five other books and manuscripts from Dunn's collection now in the Osler Library. A number of these were acquired by Sir William at the third and final portion of the sale in November 1917. Tipped into the back of Osler's bound and annotated set of the Dunn Sale catalogues (B.O. 7017) are four letters from the firm of Bernard Quaritch who acted as Osler's agents. These are daily reports for November 26, 27, 28 and 29 of their purchases on his behalf. Tipped into the front of this same volume is a list of the lots on which Osler wished to bid and his limits. See Plate 1.

Rec'd copy 1937 p. has title of the Bodleian who has found it then in a former copy of the 3rd part of the Dunn sale. W.O.S (2 Madam?) bid, I've added the 3.0. in + minus 1/2 to be obtained. of # 7017. 14. 35. 2 m.

# 494	£23	
{ 1503	£ 20 - 25	15 m. including the 2nd
# 7417	£15.10.0	
{ 1565	10 - 15	
# 574	25	
3178	£ 50	
# 7439	35.0.	
3185	£ 6	
3301	£ 20	15 m. including { 1503
# 632	5	
3445	5 or 6	
# 7483	8.10	
3650	£ 5	
# 8552	3	
3673	£ 10	
3703(3022)	5	£3.50
375-3(7499)	15	£19.10. = 7499, 45, 46, 75, 99. +
3886	10	15 m. including not in O.L.

Plate 1

Of particular interest is the note against three of the lot numbers; the note reads “B[ritish] M[useum] bidding, do not”. The annotations by W.W. Francis, first Osler Librarian, suggest that Osler had consulted with Falconer Madan, Bodley's Librarian, in order not to bid against the British Museum which they must have felt

The initial letter on this page is from a late 19th century revival of Florentine Renaissance initials published in the *Schriften Atlas*, Stuttgart, 1889 and reproduced here from Alexander Nesbitt (ed.), *Decorative alphabets and initials*, Dover Publications Inc., 1959.

should have first choice. In his notes for the copy of Averroes *Colliget* (B.O. 494), the first lot on the list and one of the three marked "BM bidding, do not", Osler explained that "at the Dunn sale 1917 the B[ritish] M[useum] withdrew their bid which enabled me to get this".⁶

Sir William did not acquire all the lots he wanted at the sale. In fact, the Dunn copy of Vincent of Beauvais' *Speculum morale* was purchased only after the sale from the booksellers Dulau on 5 May 1919 (Catalogue no. 75, lot 113). Similarly among his remarks for Nicolaus of Cusa's *De visione Dei* and *De docta ignorantia* (B.O. 7465 and 7466) Osler wrote this happy note. "I bid on this and missed it at the Dunn sale and afterwards picked it up at Davis & Orioli's".⁷

Seymour de Ricci reports that Dunn's library realized 32,390 pounds at the auction.⁸ Dunn's collection of incunables was important enough that Francis Jenkinson published a list of its contents and the present location of the volumes then dispersed (*A List of the Incunabula Collected by George Dunn Arranged to Illustrate the History of Printing* [Oxford: Oxford Bibliographical Society, 1923]). Dunn's books are easily identified by the distinctive bookplate which is reproduced here as Plate 2.

FROM THE LIBRARY OF GEORGE DUNN OF WOOLLEY HALL NEAR MAIDENHEAD

Plate 2

George Dunn was a good friend of Robert Proctor and on Proctor's death at 35 in 1903 Dunn took over the anonymous editorship of the Type Facsimile Society portfolios, a society founded by Proctor for fifty select members.⁹ Dunn had been publishing since 1899 a limited edition of what are now known as the Woolley photographs, full-size photographs of leaves in his collection. Dunn published fifty sets of these photographs of type faces "designed to supplement published examples [that is, those of the Type Facsimile Society] with references to Proctor's Index of Books in the British Museum and Bodleian Library". A complete set consists of 500 photographs.¹⁰ In 1905, now editor of both series, Dunn wound up the Woolley photographs and published a final list of contents.

Robert Proctor was the author of *An Index to the Early Printed Books in the British Museum: From the Invention of Printing to the Year MD, with Notes of those in the Bodleian Library* and despite his young age was an important expert on fifteenth-century printing. As the passage from Dunn's obituary quoted above indicates, Proctor was responsible for the attribution of place and printer for a number of volumes. Dunn recorded this information on the flyleaves of his incunables in his very characteristic hand. For example, on the front flyleaf of the Averroes mentioned above (B.O. 494) Dunn has written "Proctor, who has not seen the book, assigns it to Venice, Press lxij, created ad hoc. Doubtless he will transfer it to Ferrara. Cp. Bellfortis, Type 5".¹¹ Proctor's attributions and his explanation of the spread of printing throughout Europe are beginning to be reexamined and Dunn's records of Proctor's observations will prove to be very useful. It is interesting to note a similar phenomenon in the library of William Morris where Sydney Cockerell also added Proctor's attributions of printer in a number of early printed books.¹²

At the conclusion of the Dunn sale Osler wrote to his friend George Dock. "I made a good haul at the Dunn sale a few weeks ago — ten Incunabula, among them the Ed[itio] prin[ceps] of Averroes, which is excessively rare".¹³ Just how good a haul it was we are only now beginning to appreciate.

References

1. Harvey Cushing, *The Life of Sir William Osler* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929) II, 260.
2. Charles G. Roland, "'Dry, Dusty, Tedious, Accursed, Hateful Bibliography': Osler and British Bibliography", *Books, Manuscripts, and the History of Medicine: Essays on the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Osler Library*, ed. Philip M. Teigen (New York: Science History Publications, 1982) 21. On Osler as a collector, see also Ellen Wells, "Books for the Bibliotheca: A Study of Sir William Osler's Book Bills", *Osler Library Newsletter* 2 (October 1977).
3. William Osler, "The Collecting of a Library", *Bibliotheca Osleriana: A Catalogue of Books Illustrating the History of Medicine and Science* (1929; Montreal and London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1969) xxx.
4. *The Times*, 11 March 1912: 11.
5. *Bibliotheca Osleriana: A Catalogue of Books Illustrating the History of Medicine and Science* (1929; Montreal and London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1969) 661.
6. *Bibliotheca Osleriana: A Catalogue of Books Illustrating the History of Medicine and Science* (1929; Montreal and London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1969) 49.
7. *Bibliotheca Osleriana: A Catalogue of Books Illustrating the History of Medicine and Science* (1929; Montreal and London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1969) 649.
8. Seymour de Ricci, *English Collectors of Books & Manuscripts (1530-1930) and Their Marks of Ownership* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930) 183.
9. Proctor disappeared while hiking alone in the Alps; Dunn was one of the last people in England to see Proctor alive. Their last meeting at the British Museum was recorded in Proctor's diary. See Barry C. Johnson, *Lost in the Alps: A Portrait of Robert Proctor the "Great Bibliographer" and of his Career in the British Museum* (London: n.p., 1985) 39.
10. One of the complete sets of the Woolley photographs is in the Rare Books and Special Collections Division of the McGill University Library.
11. *Bibliotheca Osleriana: A Catalogue of Books Illustrating the History of Medicine and Science* (1929; Montreal and London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1969) 49.
12. Paul Needham, *William Morris and the Art of the Book* (New York and London: Pierpont Morgan Library and Oxford University Press, 1976) 39 and 99.
13. Harvey Cushing, *The Life of Sir William Osler* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929) II, 586. The original letter is not among other letters from Osler to Dock now in the Osler Papers; there is a typescript copy of the letter among the Cushing Papers dated incorrectly "17 Nov 1917". The sale took place 22 — 29 November and the letter was obviously written after the sale.

William P. Stoneman

The author of the leading article in this issue, Dr. William P. Stoneman, was an Osler Library Fellow in the summer of 1986. His project was recording and analysing the features specific to the Osler Library copies of incunabula (*Osler Library Newsletter*, p.2, no. 52, June 1986). He is presently with the Department of English at the University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario N9B 3P4.

THREE OSLER LIBRARY FELLOWS FOR 1987

Osler Library Fellowships for 1987 have been awarded to two medical students and a scholar in the field of medical history. The students - the first recipients of this new type of fellowship - will come to the Osler Library for one month to conduct a reading programme in an area of medical history of their choice. Mr. Cary Alberstone, a first year student at Albany Medical College, Albany, New York will be studying the relationship of humanism to Renaissance medicine and medical education. Mr. Alberstone holds a master's degree in music history, specializing in the Renaissance and early modern periods, so his proposed reading programme will link his past studies to his present medical training. Our second student Fellow, Mr. Giuseppe Del Priore, is a final year medical student at SUNY Brooklyn, and intends to specialize in obstetrics and gynaecology. His reading programme focusses on the history of contraception and abortion in 19th century America, a topic for which his undergraduate training in philosophy provided some valuable background. The response to our new student Fellowship programme, and the quality of the successful candidates, are extremely encouraging for the future. Finally, it was our great pleasure to award a scholar's Fellowship to Dr. Albert Z. Iskandar, retired Fellow of the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine in London and specialist in Arabic medical manuscripts. Dr. Iskandar's catalogues of manuscripts at the Wellcome Institute and at UCLA, as well as his editions of the medieval Arabic versions of Galen's work, are well known to scholars in the field. It is his intention to survey the Osler Library's Arabic manuscripts with a view to a potential catalogue.

MARION GERTRUDE WRIGHT (1896-1987)

The number of those living who knew Sir William and Lady Osler and their son Revere has become few indeed. With the death of Marion Gertrude Wright in Montreal last March, we have lost a member of that small and select company. We have also lost a staunch friend of the Osler Library.

Miss Wright owed her close association with the Oslers to the fact that her father, Dr. Henry P. Wright, shared rooms with William Osler when they were medical students at McGill University. This led to an enduring friendship between the Wrights and the Oslers. After Dr. Wright's sudden death in 1899, the Oslers continued their friendship with his widow and her children.

When Mrs. Wright moved to Oxford in 1915, Marion accompanied her mother and they lived only a short distance from 13 Norham Gardens, the Osler home. The bonds between the Wrights and the Oslers were further strengthened by the friendship between Marion and Revere, who were the same age; Marion was born January 31st, 1896 and Revere's date of birth was December 28th, 1895.

With this background, it was natural that when Marion Wright returned to Canada to live in Montreal, she took a keen interest in the Osler Library. In the early 1950s, she offered her services to the Library as a part-time volunteer; her offer was gratefully accepted. She dusted books and did other cleaning jobs when no person was employed for this work. When the Osler Librarian, Dr. W.W. Francis, was absent, she conducted tours for visitors; her intimate knowledge of the Oslers and their Oxford home made her a superb guide. One who knew her well remarked that her arrival as a volunteer was "as manna from heaven." Marion took a special interest in the books which Osler had owned and bequeathed to McGill University. During the 1960s, in cooperation with Mr. Philip Osler, representative of the Osler family on the Library's Board of Curators, she raised funds from the Osler family for the rebinding and restoration of many of Osler's books. In the Minutes of the Board of Curators it is recorded that, thanks to Marion

Wright's interest, Osler's rare books were now in excellent condition.

Marion Wright was a loyal and enthusiastic supporter of the Osler tradition and the Osler Library. We are greatly in her debt.

Edward H. Bensley
Honorary Osler Librarian

HENRY VINING OGDEN

H.V.O.: The Life and Letters of Dr. Henry Vining Ogden, 1857-1931 by Leonard Weistrop has been issued by the Milwaukee Academy of Medicine to celebrate its recent centennial (1986). Ogden was a founding member of the Academy and its first Librarian. The author, Leonard Weistrop, is its present Librarian. The book can be obtained from the Milwaukee Academy of Medicine, 8701 Watertown Plank Road, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53226.

Ogden received his medical degree from McGill University in 1882 and was thus a student at McGill when William Osler was Professor of the Institutes of Medicine there. It is clear from our McGill records that Ogden was a good student. He was granted "honorable mention" in the Primary Examination at Convocation in 1880 and, when he graduated in 1882, he was awarded the prize for the best Final Examination. It is also clear from the letters in Weistrop's book that Osler thought highly of Ogden. They kept in touch with one another throughout Osler's life in spite of the fact that Ogden left Montreal on graduation to devote his medical career to practice in Milwaukee. Also through his friendship with Osler, Ogden developed close relationships with the Francis family and Harvey Cushing; there are many letters demonstrating this. It is of interest that in the course of writing his famous biography of Osler, Cushing repeatedly sought help from Ogden.

Since this note is intended for the *Osler Library Newsletter* it is appropriate to mention that some of the letters reproduced by Weistrop came from the Osler Library. They were deposited there by Ogden's widow, Frances Winkler Ogden, at the request of the Osler Librarian, W.W. Francis. In acknowledgment, the author has been kind enough to send us a complimentary copy of his book.

A WELCOME MEMENTO

Mrs. Alfred White Franklin has presented to the Osler Library a copy of Oliver Goldsmith, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, Frank H. Dodd, 506 Broadway, New York, 1865. This volume originally belonged to Lady Osler and is inscribed by her "G.R. Osler". According to Mrs. Franklin, it was given to her late husband, Dr. Alfred White Franklin, by Lady Osler's sister, Mrs. H.B. Chapin, about 1935. It came to us as a welcome memento of Dr. Franklin, a friend of the Osler Library from its very beginnings (*Osler Library Newsletter*, no. 47, October 1984 and *British Medical Journal* 1984; 289:1703).

OSLER DAY - 1987

Osler Day this year falls on Wednesday, November 4th. The Osler Lecturer is to be Dr. Robert Gale, Associate Professor of Medicine, UCLA School of Medicine, Center for Health Science, Los Angeles, California. The title of his lecture will be "The medical consequences of nuclear energy: the lessons from Chernobyl". Readers will recall that it was Dr. Gale who was called to Moscow to perform bone transplants on Chernobyl victims.

As is customary, the Osler Banquet will be held on the evening of Osler Day. Dr. Gale will be the honoured guest at the banquet and will respond to questions from the floor about his Osler Lecture delivered that afternoon.

FRIENDS OF THE OSLER LIBRARY

The appeal to the Friends for the 1986-87 academic year concluded at the end of May and the Library is grateful to have received about \$15,100 contributed by 325 Friends. Most of the contributions have come from Friends in Canada and the United States of America. However, very welcome contributions have come also from Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Denmark, England, Japan, Switzerland, South Africa and West Germany. The Library acknowledges with thanks the support of all its Friends. The following have been added to the list since the publication of the February *Newsletter*.

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The appeal for the 1987-88 academic year will be made in the October *Newsletter*.

