

Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery

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PLYMOUTH CITY MUSEUMS AND ART GALLERY

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This report arises from a survey of archival material in museums in Devon and Cornwall undertaken on behalf of the Museums and Galleries Commission, with support from the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, January - April 1995. (*Museums and Archives*, a Museums and Galleries Commission Report, researched by Clare Conybeare and Anita Travers.)

Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery was founded in 1897 and has been a local authority institution since its foundation. The museum service is responsible for four other sites: Merchant's House Museum, Elizabethan House, Smeaton's Tower and the Plymouth Dome. Of these, the Merchant's House has some archival material such as posters on display, but it was not possible on the occasion of this survey to inspect it. Some original Drake and Raleigh documents are displayed at Buckland Abbey: others are deposited on loan at West Devon Record Office.

Archive material is held in three departments of the main museum: Human History, Art, and Natural Sciences.

The Museum's own archives are vulnerable to a policy of the accounts administration department of the City Council of destroying correspondence after 5 years. It has accession cards for all the collections since 1897, and index cards for donors, vendors, prints (artists & engravers), lenders, topography, ceramics, metal, glass, textiles etc. Curatorial correspondence with much valuable information occupies 2 filing cabinets but remains unsorted for want of staff time. The Museum does not seem to have an archive set of its own printed guides and catalogues but now acquires them as it can.

Department of Human History

1. Manuscripts

'Paper Archive' in a large double fronted wooden cabinet with two tiers of shallow wooden drawers, divided into pre-20th cent and 20th cent, and arranged by subject, such as printed parliamentary acts and speeches, 18th - 19th cent, school books, school reports, local education authority forms, receipts, hotel bills, maps, playbills and posters, Captain Scott letters(2) c1900.

City Engineer's plans and drawings incl architectural plans for rebuilding after WW II

Theatre programme collection 1867-1963 (purchased): 54 items, listed

Posters, in bound volume (posing conservation problem)

Address to William IV 1830 printed on silk (framed)

Soldier's scroll, medal and photograph, WW I, (framed)

Collectors' notebooks, archaeology, ethnography, British and foreign, incl Francis Brent, eg 1875 catalogue of stone implements and flakes (in box file in office)

Olive Munday of Blackheath: transcripts (1 vol), of Egyptian hieroglyphs

Civil War tracts (1 vol, printed)

Newscuttings, unsorted, loose in a filing cabinet drawer

Plymouth Archaeological Resource Centre (set up by Keith Rowe the City Archaeologist), including OS maps, copy of the Devon Sites and Monuments Register for Plymouth, and plans and drawings, eg Tamerton drainage sections

2. Photographs

General series of photographs, mounted on card, arranged alphabetically by location, in filing cabinet drawers. A number are mounted in swing frames since the dismantling of the former Old Plymouth gallery

James Barber (late curator) photographs of Plymouth 1972-93, in both black and white and colour, a cupboard full, mostly in developers' packets, being catalogued by a volunteer, Joyce Searle.

City Engineer: photographic record of the aftermath of the Blitz, (mounted as contact sheets), with a negatives collection numbered 1-20377, and index; also prints (2 vols) of rebuilding in progress, lacking negatives

Nancy Astor MP photographic archive, mainly of election campaigns (7 vols and some loose leaves, also some council minutes and details of wartime court cases concerning, for example, the blackout)

Linnaeus Tripe (probably the Captain L Tripe who published *Stenographs of Madura*, 1858, and *Stenographs of Trichinopoly*, 1858): paper negatives (1850s) showing ships, ammunition store etc, with various attempts at prints from them; also carbon prints

H Rugg Monk: glass negatives. Prints should be included in the general alphabetical sequence mentioned above

James Joseph Judge (1869-1954), newspaper editor, social worker, friend of Lady Astor, and archaeologist, bequest: prints and negatives, photographs as war correspondent on Italian campaign, letters about archaeological sites, and a few TE Lawrence and G Bernard Shaw letters

Albums of local views printed and sold by stationers (the source of most scenes is Valentine rather than Frith)

Aerofilms: blown-up aerial views mounted for display

Note: throughout the photograph collection generally there is no proper concordance between negatives and prints, or record whether a print is original or a copy. A photographic expert would be required to make a proper catalogue.

Department of Art

1. The Cottonian Collection

given to Plymouth by William Cotton FSA of Ivybridge, in 1853 and 1862. See the Museum's own leaflet (appended) about its origins and fortunes. It is administered by a Board of Representatives, six in number, three from the family, three from the Proprietary Library. It includes 300 watercolours, 6,500 - 7000 prints, paintings, 2000 books, ceramics (c20), bronzes (10 or 12), plasters (c10 or 15), two 15th cent Books of Hours, and 13th cent sermons (1 vol).

Also:

Robert Townson's catalogue of books 1641-1705

Sir Joshua Reynolds: sitters book 1755, letters (c12)

Artists' letters (2 vols) (is this same as Charles Rogers 2 vols to artists, collectors, agents?) and card index

William Cotton III's own research and related notes

Travel maps of Europe (printed), early 19th cent

Exhibition and sale catalogues, annotated

A large quantity of loose miscellaneous documents, in a filing cabinet, eg family papers and wills, rough archival notes, accounts, bills and jottings about constructing the original bookcases for the collection, partial listings etc. These had been sorted over 15 years voluntarily by Miss FM Stanbury, (who died recently) and placed in envelopes (not acid-free) with an identification, but an arbitrary arrangement. Classifying was to be a later stage. Miss Stanbury had been asked to write a family history of the Cottons and her own working papers were handed to the museum on her death and remain unsorted in a series of cartons and bags.

Correspondence returned from Cotton family connections in Australia (TS and photocopies)

2. Other

James Northcote (1746-1831): letters (c50), mounted on card, in a box file, acquired 1935, with TS transcripts, listings, related correspondence

Sir Charles Lock Eastlake (1793-1865): letters (23) c1819, writing from Rome to various correspondents, with TS transcripts. (Copies also at Paul Mellon Center (check full title))

Samuel Prout (1783-1852): compilation of MSS, TSS and printed notes and articles, with at least one original sketch, mostly mounted in an album of amateur binding, posing conservation problems. Used by Richard Lockett in *Samuel Prout 1783-1852*, London 1985, describing the group as partial transcripts of letters, partial transcript of a tour journal 1814 (Leeds to Edinburgh), and a note of a passport 1824-25. Its origin may possibly have had to do with the exhibition of his work held in Plymouth 1951.

Lockett refers to:

note of purchase of painting Milan Cathedral at Old Water Colour Society by Lord Surrey 1826

letter 1829 to Arthur Glennie of Dulwich (tutor's son)

letter to Prout from AB Johns 7 Dec 1830

letter from Thomas Roscoe, author of text of *Landscape Annuals*, 1830

letter from David Roberts 1833

a letter of SC Hall (*Art Journal*) asking for a portrait of Prout, c1849

J Carpenter sketch book incl bills and notes 1827-28

Notebook of an unnamed picture restorer 1880s, with varnish recipes etc

William Cookworthy marriage document 1736 (framed)

Naval flags, on silk (framed)

Bernard Moore pottery bill

Broadsheets, pamphlets, sale notices etc; a few topographical sketchbooks but with scarcely any text

Department of Natural Sciences

1. The Herbarium

This is a collection of c10,000 pressed plant specimens mounted on paper and housed in a floor to ceiling double cupboard in shallow metal trays (to be replaced with acid-free storage boxes). It originated as several separate collections now merged into an acceptable botanical sequence. Many are 19th century. The earliest are 18th century, collected by Sir John St Aubyn, Bt, MP (1758-1839), of Clowance, in Cornwall. Many of the sheets throughout the collection are annotated with information about the plants, and St Aubyn's own notes are particularly full and provide a summary of what was known of a plant at that time. The sheets also provide evidence of collecting practice in the 19th century, through the Botanical Exchange Club of London.

2. Other

Isaiah Waterloo Nicholas Keys (1818-1890), botanist and bookseller: notebooks of coleoptera 1880s-1900

George Carter Bignell (1826-1910), entomologist: notebooks of hymenoptera (bees and wasps), c1880-1900
(the two collections comprising 6 notebooks)

Miscellaneous collectors' notes and odd letters stored in office as information on collections

Scrap books kept by curators

Some old guides and catalogues (printed) to collection

Site documentation by botanical and geological recorders initiated by the Museum since the 1960s

William Cotton III moved to Ivybridge in 1839. He began to consider the future of the collection, and first offered it to the Borough of Plympton as a memorial to Sir Joshua Reynolds, who was born in Plympton St. Maurice. The Borough was however unable to raise the funds to meet the special needs of the collection, and it was instead accepted by the Plymouth Proprietary Library, a private subscription library in 1850. The collection was first opened in June 1853 in the Library's premises in Cornwall Street, in a purpose-built room decorated with a frieze copied from the Elgin Marbles. When William Cotton died in Plymouth in 1863 the final portion of the collection which he had retained, was added to the main collection.

In 1916 the collection came into the care of Plymouth Corporation and was housed in the Museum and Art Gallery where it has remained ever since. The conditions of the original gift required amongst other things that the collection should be kept together. This and the other provisions to protect the special interest of the collection were incorporated in the Plymouth Act of 1915. Statutory protection for both the collection and the right of public access to it was re-defined under the the Plymouth City Council Act 1987.

The Cottonian Gallery

The bookcases date to the second half of the eighteenth century and were acquired by Charles Rogers especially for his library.

The red tortoise shell inlaid cabinet is Italian, seventeenth century.

The 'Canterbury' cupboard (on the right of the gallery) with carved doors is seventeenth century, also part of Rogers' collection.

The vases are seventeenth century Chinese.

The statue busts are eighteenth century copies of ancient Greek and Roman pieces; except for those of Saints and the Buddha.

The Cottonian Collection

The Cottonian Collection was given to Plymouth by William Cotton F.S.A. of Ivybridge, in 1853 and 1862. The collection includes paintings, prints, old masters drawings, books, manuscripts, furniture and other objects of art. It is principally, however, the residue of the extensive collection made by the art collector Charles Rogers F.R.S., F.S.A., (1711-1784) who was Head of the Certificate Office of the Customs House in London. A proportion of Rogers' collection had been inherited from his close friend William Townson (1682-1740) who in turn had inherited material from his forebears. Charles Rogers' left his collection upon his death in 1784 to his nephew William Cotton I, whose son, William Cotton II, sold two thirds of it. The remaining collection passed to the latter's son William Cotton III of Ivybridge who supplemented items according to his own interests and gave the collection to Plymouth. Despite past losses, the collection contains a wealth of artistic and literary treasures.

Origins of the Collection

The beginnings of the collection can be traced back to the Townson family, who had roots in Skerton, near Lancaster. One of the family, Robert Townson (1599-1699), moved to London about 1640 where he established himself as a successful merchant, and lived at No. 3 Laurence Pountney Lane. His brother-in-law Sir John Shaw was influential in obtaining for Townson's son (another Robert) a post in the Customs House in London, and this younger Robert Townson (1640-1707) accumulated a collection of pictures and a sizeable library. Robert's son William Townson (1682-1740) inherited in 1707, his father's London home, his collection, and the post of Chief Clerk of the Certificates Inwards in the Customs House.

The Townsons had made close friends with the Rogers family of Soho in London, and by 1725 the young Charles Rogers (aged 14) and his sister were living with William Townson and his two spinster sisters. The Townsons took a great liking to Rogers and his sisters and William Townson and Charles Rogers found a common interest in their love of art and literature. Townson retired from the Customs House in 1738 and died in 1740 leaving Rogers his collections, and his sisters his remaining estate on the understanding that it would ultimately pass on to Charles Rogers.

Charles Rogers was largely self-taught, but his intelligence, charm, personality and enthusiasm for art brought him into close contact and lasting friendship with many leading artistic and literary figures of the 18th century. William Townson had found Rogers a junior post in the Customs House in 1731, later leading in 1747, to his promotion as head of the Certificate Office, a post he was to hold until a short time before his death. This post became the avenue to a great number of useful contacts and friendships, some like the artist-collector Arthur Pond who worked in the Customs House, and others such as Horace Walpole, Charles Townley, Sir Robert Strange, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Richard Gough, Paul Sandby and Angelica Kauffmann.

Many of Rogers' friends were artists and collectors through whom he enhanced his own collection, and although he never travelled abroad, he employed the services of agents and friends to acquire material on the Continent.

Rogers' connoisseurship and developing antiquarian interests led to his election as a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries in 1752 and the Royal Society in 1757, further broadening his contacts and friendships.

The emphasis of his collecting was upon drawings by, and engravings after, works by such masters as Leonardo, Durer, Raphael, Michaelangelo, Rubens and Rembrandt, and Rogers' chief literary work 'A Collection of Prints in Imitation of Drawings', published in 1778, reflects this interest and made available for students and scholars facsimiles of old master drawings from important private collections.

Rogers died unmarried in 1784 and his collection and estate passed to William Cotton who had married Rogers' sister Charlotte in 1755.

Reductions and Additions to the Collection

William Cotton I inherited from his brother-in-law, Charles Rogers, a collection of about two thousand old master drawings, nineteen thousand prints, over four thousand books, and other works of art, plus the rest of his estate, including his London and Richmond properties.

The collection soon passed however to his son William Cotton II (1759-1816) upon his father's death in 1791. William Cotton II lived at Balham Hill House, Clapham, and had obtained the post of Chief Clerk at the Customs House after Charles Rogers' retirement. He married in 1792 Catherine Savery, daughter of the Rev. William Savery of South Devon, and in 1796 with an expanding family, decided to sell most of his inherited London properties (including No. 3 Laurence Pountney Lane) and took up permanent residence in Balham Hill House. To accommodate the collection, William decided to sell a large proportion of material, and in 1799 over a period of 30 days 12,000 prints and 1,800 old master drawings were sold in the salerooms, and in 1801 3,000 books were also auctioned. Although the collection was reduced by two thirds, it was still of sufficient size and quality for William to have a special room built for it at Balham Hill. William died in 1816 leaving his property and collections to his son William Cotton III (1784-1863).

William Cotton III maintained Balham Hill House until his marriage in 1823 to Mary Ann Collins, when he purchased 'The Priory' at Leatherhead and had a room built specially for the collection. The Priory remained their home from 1824-1839, after which they moved to Highland House, Ivybridge in Devon. During these years William added to the collection, and developed a special interest in Sir Joshua Reynolds, adding many important Reynolds items to the collection, and later publishing two major books on his life and work.