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Library History (ISSN 0024-2306)

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Citation Details

Citation for the version of the work held in 'OpenAIR@RGU':

REID, PETER H., 2002. Proto-bibliophiles amongst the English aristocracy, 1500-1700. Available from <i>OpenAIR@RGU</i>. [online]. Available from: http://openair.rgu.ac.uk
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Citation for the publisher's version:

REID, PETER H., 2002. Proto-bibliophiles amongst the English aristocracy, 1500-1700. <i>Library History</i>, 18 (1), pp. 25-38.
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PROTO-BIBLIOPHILES AMONGST THE ENGLISH ARISTOCRACY, 1500-1700

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The idea of aristocratic book collecting in Great Britain tends to conjure up images of great bibliophiles like Sunderland, Roxburghe and Spencer or of the benign neglect of country house libraries. Yet the origins of aristocratic bibliophilia - which in time gave rise to country house libraries - lie much further back in history with a handful of important English collectors who led the way the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This article presents an overview of some of these early collectors, their position in the society of the time and the influences which made them purchase books.

The architectural historian, the late Gervase Jackson-Stops, suggested that the Restoration in 1660 can be pinpointed as the moment when the English gentry and nobility took up reading as a serious pursuit. To a certain extent this can be said to be the case. Indeed, it was shortly after the Restoration that the first surviving country house library - in the sense of a room rather than a collection - was created. The Duke of Lauderdale's library closet at Ham House in Surrey was fitted up with proper shelving and a built-in cabinet and writing desk. However, Lauderdale's closet was by no means the first, it is simply the earliest surviving example and there were, prior to him, a large number of important bibliophiles or rather proto-bibliophiles amongst the English aristocracy.¹ Yet, in spite of this, the idea of collecting books and gathering them into a library took a remarkably long time to emerge as a suitable pursuit for noblemen.

In the Middle Ages, much of the aristocracy was made up of people who were in some way related, either by blood or by marriage, to the Royal house. Consequently, the handful of great magnates who actively collected books and manuscripts in that period were connected with the Court. Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester (1390-1447), the brother of King Henry V, was described as a scholar and a patron of scholars. His collection formed the nucleus of Oxford University Library but were subsequently lost, while the other significant collector of the time, Thomas Percy, Earl of Worcester, was the Lord Steward of the Household. Another Earl of Worcester, John Tiptoft, was noted for collecting a library of manuscripts while he resided in Padua. Yet as Lawrence Stone remarks, "two swallows like John Tiptoft, Earl of Worcester, and Humphrey Duke of Gloucester do not make a summer."²

As far as the majority of the aristocracy was concerned, learning was an extension of the province of the church. The Lords Spiritual, although frequently from humble origins, eclipsed the Lords

Temporal in educational terms. For this reason, the ecclesiastics tended to be propelled into high administrative posts right up until the time of Cardinal Wolsey. Books were of course a central part of this. The *Testamenta Eboracensia*, drawn on by Mark Girouard in his ground-breaking social history *Life in the English Country House*, highlights that as early as 1423 the residence of Henry Bowet, Archbishop of York possessed a room called the *liberaria*.³ Until the Reformation, however, relatively few sons of noble houses were sent to Oxford or Cambridge and, on the whole, bravery in the field was a talent prized more highly than intellectual gifts and scholarship. Indeed, Gervase Jackson-Stops has pointed to a social stigma being attached to intellectual pursuits, with one squire remarking in 1480 that he would “rather his son should hang than study letters, a pursuit which should be left to the sons of rustics”.⁴ Thomas Starkey noted “gentlemen study more to bring up good hounds than wise heirs”,⁵ while Edmund Dudley thought that the English nobility were “the worst brought up for the most parte of any realme of christendom”.⁶

Hard evidence on the education of the aristocracy at this time is patchy. It is impossible to make sweeping generalisations on education, scholarship and culture amongst the titled nobility, let alone the landed gentry. Certainly, as Stone points out, Sir John Fortescue's claim in *De Laudibus Legum Angliae* that the gentry were crowding the Inns of Courts in the late fifteenth century was an exaggeration.⁷ Yet significant collections of books and manuscripts in private hands did exist. The collections which Thomas Percy, Earl of Worcester had assembled survived for several generations. He housed them in his two principal residences, Leconfield Manor and Wressel Castle, both in Yorkshire. By the beginning of the sixteenth century the collection at Leconfield was the property of a Percy descendant, the 5th Earl of Northumberland. The *Northumberland Household Book* refers to 'my Lord's Library' and 'my Lady's Library' in 1512.⁸ Indeed Petworth in Sussex (once a Percy house) still has a Chaucer MS which was owned by the Percy family in the fifteenth century.

Scholarship and education depended as much on one's location as one's social status. As late as the 1560s members of the landed gentry in remote Northumberland were not particularly advanced; only 92 of the leading 146 gentry could sign their own name. Even although the titled nobility have always been a more identifiable group than the gentry, both are difficult to analyse at this period. Of course, there were exceptions, even amongst the gentry. The Paston family, who were extraordinarily literate, took books very seriously. However, they neither prove nor disprove any hypothesis but simply show that we know about them because of their papers and letter happened to have miraculously survived.⁹

As the Renaissance began to make itself felt a greater importance was attached to learning. As the sixteenth century progressed one of the most significant developments was this thirst for learning. According to Lawrence Stone the increased attachment to education and learning enabled the landed classes to

fit themselves to rule in the new conditions of the modern state, and they turned the intelligentsia from a branch of the clergy into a branch of the propertied laity.¹⁰

Essentially, there were three reasons for this. Firstly, the influences of the Italian humanists which were permeating Northern European society; secondly, the nobility and the gentry were increasingly concerned about their ability to maintain a grip of key political, legal and court positions and the third reason, tied very directly to the last point, was the impact of the Reformation which led to the final demise of the Prelate-statesmen. The aristocracy had concerns that the posts freed-up by the removal of the likes of Wolsey might slip from their grasp to characters like Thomas Cromwell.

It was not only the social structure of the landed interest which changed with the Dissolution of the Monasteries, but also the political structure. The clergy was replaced in political and administrative duties by "talented laymen from the lesser gentry".¹¹ This not only worried the old aristocracy, but it prompted them to attempt to reclaim their place in the councils of the realm. This period marked the most drastic upheavals in landed society (effectively a euphemism for the governing class) since the Conquest and the old aristocracy's reaction to this change was inevitable. As the structures of the landed interest evolved, the desire to maintain the social hierarchy also increased. Part of this prompted some aristocrats to become more scholarly and many were actively encouraged to acquire books. However, in this the old Aristocracy was not entirely successful; as late as the early part of the reign of Elizabeth I there was at least one Privy Councillor, the Earl of Pembroke, who could not read or write. Meanwhile the new and talented bureaucrats had become successful and gradually became the new ruling class. Men like Sir William Cavendish, who had risen on the back of the Dissolution, established a dynasty which would, in a few generations, reach the lofty heights of the Dukedoms of Devonshire and Newcastle. Another example of a 'talented layman' was Sir Nicholas Bacon, who was Keeper of the Great Seal on Elizabeth I's accession. Within a generation the Bacon family established themselves as pillars of the gentry. Sir Nicholas's eldest son (another Nicholas) acquired several manors in Norfolk and Suffolk, his second son, Sir Nathaniel, became Lord of the Manor of Stiffkey, while his youngest son was the renowned Sir Francis Bacon (Viscount St Albans).

It was for these reasons that the initial flowering of scholarship took place and these were early

but crucial factors in the development of the libraries of nobles. However, widespread acceptance of the idea of a library being an essential feature of the nobleman's home remained some way off. This acceptance of scholarship and reading was largely for practical reasons and the emphasis on instruction and education rather than entertainment was to continue for decades to come. Yet this initial phase of literary pursuits had some interesting aspects, not least because it embraced, temporarily, the daughters of noble houses. The daughters of the More, Howard and Grey families were educated to a level which seems astonishing in comparison to the later shameful neglect of women. Much of this scholarship was for the sake of learning alone. Stone has gone as far to say that

in this first, heroic, phase...peers and gentry possessed an enthusiasm for scholarship that far outran the practical needs of an administrative élite.¹²

It is important to stress, however, that the Mores, Howards and Greys would have all seen themselves - at different times - as part of that administrative elite and so were, perhaps, untypical.

Certainly it was the case that, away from the centres of power, there were many houses of noblemen which contained no books at all. The relatively small number of books which were to be found in the majority of Elizabethan houses cannot be entirely explained by their high cost and difficulty in obtaining them. Even the most perfect of all Elizabethan houses, Hardwick Hall in Derbyshire, had only six works listed in the 1601 inventory. Yet Bess of Hardwick (or the Countess Dowager of Shrewsbury to give her her formal title) was, after Queen Elizabeth, the richest and most powerful woman in England. All of the books at Hardwick were kept in Bess's own bedchamber. Of the six one was a work by Calvin, another was *Saloman's Proverbs* while another was *A Booke of Meditations*. As Gervase Jackson Stops points out "these were works for instruction and edification rather than pure enjoyment".¹³ They were almost certainly not for status or show either. Had Bess been interested in making a show of her collection of books she would have undoubtedly purchased far more, given her almost limitless resources. She had no qualms about purchasing for either of these motives and much of Hardwick was calculated in these terms. For example, the fact that she chose to hang portraits on top of the exquisite tapestries in the Long Gallery was a demonstration of wealth and status. All of which suggests that these books were indeed for practical instruction. Hardwick, therefore, appears relatively typical of the Elizabethan country house in general. Similarly, at Glapthorn, near Oundle in Northamptonshire, the manor house of the Johnsons (a minor Gentry family) there was also only a single shelf for books (a bible, a handful of devotional works and a Froissart).¹⁴

Yet in spite of this, literacy and scholarship did have its champions amongst the Aristocracy and to a certain extent academic and bibliographic study was becoming more organised. As early as 1531, Sir Thomas Elyot wrote a manual entitled *The Booke Named the Governour*, a work discussing the education of the ruling class. Forty years later, Sir Humphrey Gilbert (half-brother to Sir Walter Raleigh) proposed an academy for noble wards and listed Latin and Greek, law, philosophy, rhetoric, diplomacy, political theory and divinity as areas of study. Barely a century earlier, in the time of King Edward IV, riding, tilting, courtesy, manners and dancing were viewed with the awe later attached to academic disciplines. By the time of Gilbert's proposed academy Cicero and Erasmus, Aristotle and Plato were more crucial to young nobles than the joust and the tilting yard. Lord Burghley, arguably one of the most important men in the whole story of private book-collecting in England, recommended Cicero to Sir John Harington¹⁵ not only for his philosophies but also for the style of his Latin. William Cecil, 1st Lord Burghley was the most powerful man in Elizabethan England; as Lord High Treasurer he had an unrivalled position in the political affairs of the nation, but as Chancellor of Cambridge he also had immense influence in the intellectual life of the state. He also played a significant part in the foundation of the love affair which the British aristocracy carried on with Rome for upwards of two centuries.

It was partly through Burghley's admiration for him Cicero became one of the cornerstone of the English sense of noblesse oblige, emphasising as he did the requirements of aristocracy: duty to the state, loyalty to oneself and one's class. However, Burghley's influence spread far and wide in his own lifetime. This devotion to Cicero and Rome was, perhaps, sublimated two centuries later with the creation of the magnificent suite of rooms at Syon House in Middlesex which were intended to project the glory of Rome onto the English Aristocracy. However, Burghley sowed the seeds; writing in 1589 to Roger Manners, Earl of Rutland, Burghley noted:

Your lerning do not deminish...for lerning will increass if it be cherished, and cannot be lost but by negligence, and besyde that, lerning will serve you in all ages, and in all places and fortunes. But I must add to you that this lerning wherof I wryte must be governed allweiss with the knolledg and feare of God, for otherwise it will prove but for a vanyty and leade you to folly.¹⁶

It could indeed be said to represent the credo of the proto-bibliophiles amongst the educated aristocracy.

The scions of the nobility and gentry started to frequent the universities and increasingly tutors formed a necessary part of the nobleman's household. Noblemen also became men of letters. The Herberts at Wilton and the Sydneys at Penshurst were responsible for the development of

Arcadian and pastoral poetry; Lord Buckhurst wrote tragedies; Lord Oxford wrote comedies. Literature was more and more part of the printers' remit. However, the majority of works coming from the presses were not the products of the literary imagination. The presses concerned themselves with history, law, philosophy, science and, of course, divinity. Theology found a ready market during these days of religious dogma amongst men such as Lord Stourton, who wrote two treatises on religion or the Earl of Bedford who wrote ten folio volumes of theological reflections.

Burghley, the personification of the Renaissance man, had one of the largest collections in England. In *Library Catalogues of the English Renaissance*¹⁷ his collection is listed as containing "very many" volumes rather than a specific amount. It remained intact for almost a century after the death of Burghley, not being sent to auction until 1687. One volume he owned which remains in the possession of his descendants is his much-annotated copy of *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* which included maps by the likes of John Dee, the Elizabethan geographer-cum-magician. However, it was Burghley's great bibliographic rival John Lord Lumley (1533-1609) who had the greatest collection. He was probably the first true bibliophile in British history. He possessed a library of 3,600 books and manuscripts, some inherited from his father-in-law, Henry Fitzalan, 12th Earl of Arundel (d. 1580), as can be seen from a copy of *Sancrosancti...Concilii Ephesini* (David Sartori, 1576) which has the autograph inscription of Lumley next to the inkstamp of Arundel. This collection included a significant amount of material from the collection of Archbishop Cranmer, although it must be said that this was predominantly made up of manuscripts. It was one of the earliest and most significant examples of an homogenous nobleman's library. King James VI & I later purchased parts of it and eventually it was presented to the British Museum.¹⁸ Lumley was a noted benefactor of University College, Cambridge, and bequeathed to it all the books in his collection which the library of the college did not contain. He wrote of his intention to the Vice-Chancellor on 24th August 1587:

My purpose is to confer the cataloge of your bookes with myne, and the Authors which I find duple and be wantynge in your Librarye, I promise shalbe yours.¹⁹

Similarly, Sir Edward Stanhope sometime Vicar-General to the Archbishop of Canterbury, was also a noted Cambridge benefactor, bequeathing books to his *alma mater*, Trinity College.

Throughout the Elizabethan period and beyond there were a number of other notable collections and collectors. As already mentioned, the 12th Earl of Arundel was a significant collector but others, members of the squirearchy, such as Sir Thomas Bodley and particularly Sir Robert Cotton cannot be ignored. A more obvious 'aristocratic' collector was Lord William Howard of

Naworth Castle, Cumberland. Howard's credentials were impeccable being the younger son of the 4th Duke of Norfolk. Howard was perhaps the exception who proved the rule that a remote location need no be a hindrance to scholarly activities. There is, however, evidence by the Elizabethan age that only a dozen nobles (in addition to Burghley and Lumley) owned collections of over one hundred volumes. Among them, Lord Stafford who was recorded, in 1556, as possessing 302 books. The Earl of Bedford had over 215 volumes and the Duchess of Suffolk is said to have had a chest in her lodgings full of books.²⁰ Mark Girouard has stated that research in this field is fairly superficial because of the lack of surviving documentation and that in reality probably around a hundred nobles possessed book collections of over one hundred volumes.

However, many collections were much more modest. The inventory of 1584 for the collection of Richard Grosvenor, (1583-1619) of Eaton Hall, Cheshire, enumerated thirty-eight titles. This included the religious works one would expect to find such as a "great bible" and works of contemporary importance such as tracts by William Fulke (the Puritan), John Howlet (the Jesuit) and John Calvin. The inventory demonstrates that Grosvenor had a particularly interest in literature and history. In the former the inventory noted Gower's *Confessio amantis* and a rare copy of *Arthur of Little Britain*. In the latter there were copies of *Plutarch's Lives*, Quintus Curtius Rufus on the *Wars of Alexander*, Appian of Alexandria on *The Roman Wars*.

By the time of Grosvenor's death in the early part of the seventeenth century, there were a number of very serious collectors. One of the most important was Sir Robert Cotton (1571-1631) who started collecting books and manuscripts around 1588. Cotton came from a well-established gentry family in Huntingdonshire; his mother was a member Shirley family of Staunton Harold, an ancient family renowned for its atavism and pride in ancestry. Cotton's library, best remembered for the peerless collection of manuscripts, is well-known and much research has been carried out into both the books and manuscripts.²¹ He acquired books from a number of aristocratic contemporaries such as Burghley, Lord William Howard and owned at least forty-six works which had been in the collection of Henry Savile of Banke (who died in 1617).²² Cotton like most other bibliophiles of the day was generous with his library and permitted well-trusted acquaintances to borrow from it. Lord William Howard was one such individual but so too was Sir Walter Raleigh to whom Cotton lent books during his time in the Tower. The borrowing of material was a common thread of aristocratic libraries until relatively recently.²³

A notable contemporary of Sir Robert Cotton was Sir Nathaniel Bacon, of Stiffkey, Norfolk, who was the half-brother to the celebrated Sir Francis Bacon (Viscount St Albans). Nathaniel Bacon

appears to have been a serious bibliophile. However, his collection remains somewhat obscure because the inventory was compiled around 1625 (after Sir Nathaniel's death) when the books were in the possession of his grandson, Sir Roger Townshend. Some 286 books are listed in the Townshend inventory and it is thought likely that they had been inherited from Bacon (who died in 1622) rather than being Townshend's own collection. Although some, such as *Epistolae* (Ambrogini, 1542), evidently belonged to Bacon because they are inscribed with his somewhat gothic signature. As PLRE says "that the entire collection may have been Townshend's personally accumulated library is not considered likely".²⁴ This is almost certainly the case because Roger Townshend was then still a relatively young man. The Townshend family were well-established in Norfolk and their principal seat was (and still is) at Raynham Hall.²⁵ The inventory of 1625 is notable for the fact that all books are treated equally. This is particularly useful for few of the extant catalogues from this period have had compilers who took the trouble to list 'less' important works like *Tobacco Tortured, or the filthie fume of tobacco refined* with as much care as educational, devotional or instructive texts.²⁶

The seventeenth century marked an expansion in book-collecting by the nobility and gentry. Although still modest at this period, it is important to stress the fact that there were collectors and bibliophiles rather to dwell than the fact that it was not widespread throughout all reaches of the aristocracy. Lawrence Stone highlighted several of the key collectors of the time: the 11th Lord Cobham had 722 volumes; the 4th Lord Paget had 1,555 volumes; the 3rd Earl of Southampton had 2,200 volumes.²⁷ Sir Thomas Knyvett,²⁸ a Norfolk squire, had somewhere around fourteen hundred volumes (Stone suggests 1,870), including a copy of Lily's *Chronicon* with autograph signature and the date, 12 December 1597 and a copy of Bilson's *The Survey of Christs Sufferings* similarly autographed and date March 1604. At this time bibliophilia was often an inherited trait: the 1st Earl of Salisbury (the younger of Lord Burghley's son) had a collection of 1,094 volumes. Another Burghley connection, Sir Edward Dering, Bart. (1598-1644) was a distinguished collector. Dering belonged to an old Kent family and even claimed a somewhat dubious descent from the pre-Conquest Kings of Deira (Kent). His first wife was Elizabeth the daughter of Sir Nicholas Tufton (later Earl of Thanet) and Frances Cecil, the daughter of Lord Exeter (Burghley's elder son).

Dering spent heavily on his collection and built up an impressive library of books and manuscripts. His principal interests were in history, genealogy and heraldry, the classics, law, literature (English and Continental), natural history and botany and, inevitably, theology and divinity both Roman Catholic and Reformed. As PLRE points out, the exact size of his collection is unknown but it must have been extensive and all indications seem to point in the direction of

around two thousand items.²⁹ Indeed, when the collection was moved by his son (in 1661) it was noted that twenty-two wagon loads of books had been transported. By the standards of the time this was an extremely large collection. Dering himself was very generous with his collection and, indeed, he presented many important charters to Sir Robert Cotton including the copy of Magna Carta. This characteristic was shared by his heirs who frequently granted access to historians and writers, particularly those researching Kent and its history.³⁰

Sir Edward Dering's son noted that he had put the collection "into the closet in the long chamber, putting up in chests those which I do least use".³¹ This raises the question of where the aristocratic book-collector of the time housed their collections. Evidence on this tends to be somewhat limited. Most early collectors had no need for a separate room in which to store books as their collections were relatively small. No records survive telling us where Burghley and Lumley housed their collections. Most frequently books would be kept in the nobleman's closet. Sometimes, however, theological works appeared to have been kept in the chapel or in its ante-room. Indeed, at Langley Marish in Buckinghamshire, Sir John Kederminster actually attached a library to the parish church; here he housed his books which he later bequeathed to the church. The collection included the Kederminster Gospels (1150) which is now in the British Museum, the family's manuscript pharmacopolium and a *Basle St Ambrose* (1492). Similarly, Vincent Munby at Markeaton Hall had fifteen volume in total; nine of which he kept in his closet and six of which were housed in the chapel.³² It appears that the closet was the favoured location for books from the first half of the sixteenth century although concrete evidence on this remains relatively scarce.

The closet was an integral part of the private apartments, often just off of the nobleman's bedchamber. Here would be kept all his personal items. One of the first indications of the use of the closet for housing books comes with the inventory of Loseley in Surrey, home of Sir William More, which provides a useful picture of what these proto-libraries looked like.³³ Sir William possessed 273 books – including a volume of Boccaccio and *Old Fables* – however, the collection was mostly political, religious, classical, legal and medical as well as some maps, and the closet contained a desk, two chairs, a coffer, scissors, pens, seals, a rule, a slate to write on, an ink-stand and a counting board. As Wormald and Wright point out, Loseley was probably not typical, not least in the fact that More possessed a higher than usual number of books in English. No closet-libraries from this period survive; the nearest thing to it is that at Ham House in Surrey. The Ham closet, however, dates from the 1670s, a century later than the description of that at Loseley and is very sophisticated in comparison. It was not until the eighteenth century that the closet finally gave way to the library, when that word finally came to mean a room *as well as* a

collection of books. One of the most significant being the library at Wimpole Hall in Cambridge. The Earl of Oxford commissioned James Gibbs in the late 1720s to create a suitable home for his one thousand volumes which had hitherto been located at the Earl's London residence. It was to take the work of men such as James Gibbs, William Kent and Robert Adam, working in partnership with discerning patrons, to create country house libraries as we know them today, not simply rooms with books but architectural and aesthetic statements.

That, however, lay in the future. No house built before the Restoration had a library *per se* included in the design. More important in the discussion of the aristocratic proto-bibliophiles is to have some indication of what these people bought and why. As Dering's collection demonstrates the breadth of coverage in the larger libraries was particularly good. However, as early as 1566 the collection of Sir Thomas Smith, a representative of the up-and-coming gentry not the nobility, contained sixty works on a wide range of subjects (including theology), fifty titles on civil law, one hundred titles on history, seventy titles on philosophy, fifty titles on mathematics, twenty titles on medicine and sixty on grammar and poetry. This was typical in all categories except theology, which was unusually barren. Smith's collection on theology was only one seventh of the whole, whereas in the collections of Salisbury and Paget it amounted to a quarter.³⁴ Lord Paget's catalogue of 1617 was classified into sections on theology, law, history, philosophy, medicine and chemistry, mathematics (including architecture), grammar and vocabulary, rhetoric, logic, poetry, war and fortification, letter-writers and miscellaneous.³⁵ Listing these disciplines may be regarded as labouring a point, but there is one vitally important reason for doing so. That reason is the simple fact that Paget's collection represents the subjects which have, throughout the ages, made up many of the smaller country house library collection in every part of the British Isles. Paget's collection, later supplemented by works on travel, local history and genealogy, could easily have formed a small country house collection of the eighteenth, nineteenth or twentieth centuries. Larger collections may also have had these subjects at their core but often could additionally boast large collections on particular subjects and, more importantly, bibliographic treasures such as works by Caxton and the other early presses.

Inevitably, there were some exceptions to the this polymath heaven and this returns the debate to the point about instruction over entertainment, exemplified by the dominance of theological works. Puritans like the Duchess of Suffolk and 2nd Earl of Bedford³⁶ maintained very strong theological collections. The Earl possessed an interesting collection of books, many dedicated to him, ranging from Calvin's *Catechism* and *The Forme of Prayers and Ministrations of the Sacramentes, etc. used in the English Church at Geneua, approued and receiued by the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh: Robert Lekprevik, 1565) to *A Treatise of the Sufficiencie of English*

Medicines (1580) and Walter Carey's *Caries Farewell to Physicke* (1583). He did, curiously, also possess a love of all things Italian and had a number of Italian works, including *Historia di Pietro Bizari Della guerra fatta in Ungheria* (1569), which was in fact dedicated to the Earl.

Another Puritan but of a later generation who collected theology, pamphlets, polemical works was John Robartes, Earl of Radnor. He built up an interesting collection at his seat, Lanhydrock in Cornwall. Roman Catholics such as Viscount Montagu used their collections as a source of inspiration for their faith. Later, other Recusant families such as the Throckmortons of Coughton, the Arundells of Wardour or the Annes of Burghwallis would maintain collections which reflected their Catholic heritage. The Arundell collection in particular contained many interesting works including European incunabula such as Nivis's *Declamatio de conceptione intemerate Virginis Marie* (Leipzig: Kachelofen, ca. 1489). Additionally, the collection had a fine copy of Machiavelli's *The Act of Warre* (W. Williamson for John Wright, 1573) and a Caxton leaf from Higden's *Polycronicon* (1482).³⁷ There was, however, one group which collected professional libraries - lawyers. The Earl of Marlborough, Lord Coventry and the Earl of Manchester all had first rate legal collections. Yet these were seldom maintained by inheritance, rather they were bequeathed to suitable legal or educational establishments.

It is difficult to assess how typical these libraries were at the time. Although the great libraries of grandees tend to dominate this period it is clear that lesser collectors took considerable pride in their books. Yet the emphasis firmly lay with libraries being defined as a collection of books as opposed to a specific room housing them. As useful indication of the period is the mention made of books in the wills of the gentry or nobility. Lucy Lady Latimer was the first of the aristocracy to mention books in her will of 1582, but this was quickly followed by a succession of others.³⁸ Viscount Grandison catalogued his collection by his own hand and bequeathed them in his will as heirlooms, beginning the trend of the entailment of bibliographic and manuscript works, which was to become a considerable inconvenience to descendants who wished to sell in centuries to come.³⁹

It cannot be argued that these collectors were purely bibliophiles and the founders of what later became country house libraries yet these collectors of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries performed an important function. While the group was too small to be typical of the aristocracy as a whole, it was large enough and significant enough to promote book-collecting, among this particular social *milieu* on a wider scale. These aristocrats primarily collected books which were of practical use to them in their daily lives and only later would the bibliophile (in the true sense of that word) emerge more generally. They also highlight the

fundamental reasons behind collecting: education, learning, culture, scholarship and, generally, all of these held good for the next three hundred years. More importantly, however, they set a definitive example for other, later noblemen who did, very definitely, form their collections into country house libraries. It is, perhaps, unnecessary and, indeed, unsatisfactory to draw a distinction between book-collections and libraries, but in most cases the room has become as integral a part as the books. Although perhaps not the *de facto* founders, people like Burghley, Lumley, Smith, More and Paget and all the others were certainly the *de jure* progenitors of country house libraries.

By the time of Viscount Grandison's will in 1630 the concept of virtuosity had become the established creed of the cultured nobleman. The virtuosi were brilliant and talented amateurs, aristocrats to a man (or woman). For them wealth and status were not an end in themselves, but they were the means to the end. With wealth and status came the ability to indulge in the arts, in literature and in scholarship. This indulgence would be viewed by the civilized world as the responsible and cultured use of aristocratic time and power. Much of this credo harked back to the ethos of Burghley, but it also owed much to that most cultured, and most misguided, of monarchs, King Charles I. Stone articulately synthesises the definition of virtuosity when he says:

he is a gentleman of leisure whose ambition is to deepen his appreciation of the arts and to build up a famous collection.⁴⁰

This concept influenced far more than bibliographic collecting, but it did also help to boost it. Virtuosity relied on knowledge and, then as now, books were the repositories of knowledge and learning. In addition, virtuosity started the trend of filling great country houses with magnificent treasures, beginning with paintings, continuing with furniture and eventually, in some cases, bibliographic wonders.

Reading widely was, of course, central to virtuosity. For the younger sons of the gentry it was to enable them to get ahead in the professions and for the elder sons of squires and noblemen it was a

way to fit them for public service and to give them the polish needed for conversation in polite society in the age of the virtuosi.⁴¹

One of the earliest of these virtuosi was Henry Percy, 9th Earl of Northumberland (The Wizard Earl). This most cultured of noblemen had a remarkably eclectic collection covering virtually every subject, including architecture, engineering and the classics, all annotated in his exquisitely

neat hand. Northumberland was even allowed to take part of his considerable library into the Tower of London after his imprisonment when implicated in the Gunpowder Plot. However, the most important feature of the Earl's collection is the fact that they were all bound in uniform vellum (occasionally calf) bindings, each embossed with the Percy arms. This is one of the earliest examples of the trait which later became known as livery bindings. Later, livery bindings were to become one of the most important, and certainly the most charming, features of many country house libraries. Today the remainder of the collection is housed at Petworth House in Sussex. Ironically, this increase in education and scholarship, as personified by Percy, helped to doom the monarchy in the Civil War. There were too many educated noblemen and gentry to fill government offices and the titled nobility had been so inflated that many traditional aristocrats came to resent the King and his government. It has even been suggested that this was a contributory factor in the Civil War because many were less than willing to take up arms for the Royalist cause.⁴²

Following the Restoration, which has been suggested as the moment when the gentry took up reading as a serious pursuit, libraries appeared in more and more country houses. Indeed, the earliest surviving country house library (in the sense of a room as opposed to a collection) dates from the mid 1670s and is that of John Maitland, 1st Duke of Lauderdale at Ham House. Although still technically referred to as the closet, it is, to all intents and purpose, a library by the modern definition of the word. Lauderdale's library closet at Ham House was fitted up with proper shelving and a built-in cabinet and writing desk and remains little altered today although the original books have been sold off.

Many collections, however, remained small. Few aristocrats could match the position of Lauderdale who, as a member of the Cabal, was at the very centre of government (Lauderdale represented 'L' of cabal while Clifford, Ashley, Buckingham, Arlington represented the others). A more modest and typical collection was that of Nicholas Tufton, Earl of Thanet. An inventory of his collection was taken in 1664. The Tufton Manuscripts in Kent Record Office show that Thanet possessed around one hundred volumes, including chronicles and histories, a dictionary and lexicon, fifteen books of Latin and French, five of law, a book of statutes, Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, and the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher. In the words of Stone "a useful working library for a fairly cultivated man of affairs."⁴³

As the seventeenth century progressed towards the eighteenth, there became a wider recognition of the merits of possessing a library in one's country house. This was coupled with the fact that these houses themselves were steadily becoming more refined, elegant and, increasingly, grand.

The nobility and the gentry came to recognise the benefits of owning quantities of books and increasingly saw the benefits of having these in their country seats. Gervase Jackson-Stops highlighted the fact that in the country there was “the leisure to study them.”⁴⁴ Undoubtedly, this was the case, but it was only one side of the coin. Some noblemen did maintain their libraries in the London homes. Sir Richard Ellys and the Noel-Hill fall into this category and later the 3rd Duke of Roxburghe housed his splendid collection in London rather than at Floors Castle and the Fox-Strangways family had their principal collection at Holland House in London rather than at Melbury in Dorset. However, it must be remembered that, in general, London offered the nobleman far more diversions. Of course, this explanation is only partial for it was only those on the highest level of nobility who possessed London residences. Those aristocrats who were further down the ladder did not, on the whole, have houses in London, and for them there was nowhere else to keep their modest collections. Books required more work and time. By and large, it was only in the country that noblemen and squires had the time to sit and read. This was primarily a means of improving ones mind; however, it also fulfilled a social function. That function was centred around the mania for house parties. As the seventeenth century drew to a close, the possession of a tolerably good library could ensure that one could attract a wide circle or *literati*, whose erudite and witty conversation could relieve the often crushing boredom of country society.

It is important not to underestimate the social and philosophical role which these libraries had, particularly in the eighteenth century, but also earlier. From the late Elizabethan days the greatest English philosophers were, in Jackson-Stops words “habitueés of the country house”.⁴⁵ Hobbes, Locke, Swift, Prior, Pope, Gibbon and Burke were very much part of the social and intellectual scene of the country house in much the same way as Sir Walter Scott was a century later. Indeed John Evelyn was a considerable connoisseur of libraries and remarked upon every one he found in a private house. One which he found particularly agreeable was the Cottonian library in London which had effectively become a public collection. He visited Sir John Cotton (grandson of the great Sir Robert) in 1668 and remarked in his diary:

Went to visit Sir John Cotton, who had me into his library full of good MSS. Greek and Latin, but most famous for those of the Saxon and English antiquities, collected by his grandfather.⁴⁶

Contact with great men such as these encouraged learning and enquiry. Eventually, this filtered down through the various levels of country society. Even those whose primary interest was in riding to hounds and shooting partridges over their broad acres gradually took to the idea of having a library.

Here, it may be argued, the story of the proto-bibliophiles amongst the English Aristocracy comes to an end. The eighteenth century marked the *apogee* of the country house library which was a different conception altogether from the book collections of earlier times. The proto-bibliophiles largely stuck to the idea of books for instruction rather than entertainment or show. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw a merger of these concepts in the creation of aristocratic libraries. In addition, it was in the eighteenth century that the concept of the library as a room rather than a collection of books began to emerge in aristocratic circles with the developments in architecture brought about by the likes of Vanbrugh, Burlington and Kent and, later still, Adam.

Furthermore, the eighteenth century also witnessed changes in the aristocracy itself with the admission of successful merchants such as the Bouveries or the Beckfords. With vast fortunes these families could establish themselves in aristocratic circles in a way not seen since the time of the Dissolution of the Monasteries. The libraries themselves became a more central part of aristocratic existence, a point which can clearly be seen by the fact that the library tended to be included in the private, family apartments rather than amongst the state rooms. Indeed, books went to the heart of family life as the picture by Hogarth (1738) of the Cholmondeley family indicates: it shows the Cholmondeleys relaxing in their library suggesting it was at the centre of their domestic well-being. A hundred years later, an engraving of the library at Cassiobury in Essex shows not only members of the Earl of Essex's family but their pet dogs playing on the floor.

However, these changes are outside the scope of this article which seeks to highlight some of the early developments in aristocratic bibliophilia in England. It is facile to argue that the aristocratic bibliophiles of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were the founders of country house libraries. Nevertheless, the explosion of interest in the eighteenth century does have very direct links to the vital and embryonic role of aristocratic collectors of the previous two centuries.

Notes and Sources

¹ Admittedly, the Duke of Lauderdale was a Scot and was known as 'the Uncrowned King of Scotland'. However, the library at his Scottish seat, Thirlestane Castle, Berwickshire, only came into existence in the nineteenth century when the salon or dining room was converted into a library-cum-sitting room. While there were important collectors in Scotland, Wales and Ireland, this article deals with English collectors or at least collectors based in England.

² Stone, Lawrence. *The Crisis of the Aristocracy 1558-1641*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965, pp675-676. There is also excellent coverage of the library of John Tiptoft, Earl of Worcester in Weiss, R. *The Library of John Tiptoft, Earl of Worcester*. *Bodleian Quarterly Record*, VIII (1935-38).

³ *Testamenta Eboracensia* or wills registered at York: illustrative of the history, manners, language, statistics, &c. of the province of York, from the year MCCC. downwards. London: J. B. Nichols and Son, 1836. The Surtees Society, Volume IV, pp398-402. [Testamenta Eboracensia. Publications of the Surtees Society, 1836-1902; v.4, 30, 45, 53, 79, 106]. see also Girouard, Mark. *Life in the English Country House*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981, p164.

⁴ Jackson-Stops, Gervase. *The English Country House: A Grand Tour*. London. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986. p198.

⁵ Stone, *Op. cit.* p675.

⁶ Dudley, Edmund. *The Tree of the Commonwealth*. (ed D.M. Brodie). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948 p45.

⁷ Fortescue, Sir John. *De Laudibus Legum Angliae*. (with notes by A. Amos). Cambridge: J. Smith for J. Butterworth, 1825. 49.

⁸ Northumberland, Henry Algernon Percy, Earl of. The regulations and establishment of the household of Henry Algernon Percy, the fifth Earl of Northumberland, at his castles of Wresill [sic] and Leginfield [sic] in Yorkshire. Begun anno Domini M.D.XII. London: n.p. 1770. pp99, 101, 378, 452-453. The preface of this edition is signed T.P (Thomas Percy, Bishop of Dromore) whose name also appears on the 1827 edition (London: William Pickering) and the 1905 edition (London: A. Brown). Works of this nature are classed as a genre and usually termed Household Regulations (H.R.) and, consequently, this work is often called, synonymously, Northumberland H.R. Bishop Percy's own excellent library was bought en masse by Lord Caledon for Caledon Castle, County Tyrone at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

⁹ For details of the Paston family see Bennett, H.S. *The Pastons and their England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932, Appendix I see also *Norfolk Archaeology*. Norfolk and Norwich Archaeology Society, Volume IV, pp1-55 and Hughey, Ruth (ed). *The Correspondence of Lady Katherine Paston*. Norwich: Norfolk Records Society, 1941. Much of the Paston Deeds and Papers are in the British Libray Add. Ch. 17217-17262 and 17734-17752. An exhibition on the Pastons was held at Norwich Castle Museum in 1953.

¹⁰ Stone, *Op. cit.* p672.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p673.

¹² *Ibid.* p677.

¹³ Jackson-Stops, *Op. cit.* p198.

¹⁴ For details of the Johnsons of Glapthorn see Winchester, Barbara. *Tudor Family Portrait*. London: Cape, 1955, p113.

¹⁵ Sir John Harington owner of Exton in Rutland, had a pivotal position within the aristocracy and gentry of Middle England being related to numerous other prominent families in east central England. Four hundred years later vast numbers of the British Aristocracy are descended from him, including the majority of British Dukes. Exton is (2001) in the possession of his descendant the Earl of Gainsborough.

¹⁶ Stone, *Op. cit.* p670.

¹⁷ Jayne, S.R. *Library Catalogues of the English Renaissance*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1956. p132. The auction sale of Burghley's collection is mentioned in Pearson, David. *Provenance Research in Book History*. Rev. ed. London: British Library, 1998.

¹⁸ Private correspondence with the present Earl of Scarborough.

¹⁹ British Library, Additional MSS, 5852, folio 174, see also Cokayne, George Edward [GEC] et al. *The Complete Peerage*. Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1987. Vol VIII p279.

²⁰ Nottinghamshire Record Office, Duke and Duchess of Suffolk Records, 215/62.

²¹ Sir Robert Cotton's autograph Loans List (1606-1621) survives in the British Library in the Harleian MSS 6018 f159b.

²² The Catalogue of Henry Savile of Banke's library is in the British Library, Additional MSS 35213. The Saviles of Banke (also given as 'the Bank') belonged to a cadet branch of the ancient Yorkshire family of Savile of Savile Hall. Henry Savile of Banke is not to be confused with two of his kinsmen and contemporaries: (i) Sir Henry Savile of Methley Hall (*d* 1632) who was head of the branch of the Savile family seated at Bradley and Methley Halls and (ii) Sir Henry Savile, (*d* 1621-22) sometime Provost of Eton, who was uncle to the aforementioned Sir Henry of Methley. For details of the MSS in Savile's possession see Watson, A.G. *The manuscripts of Henry Savile of Banke*. (1969) which is based mainly on

BL Add. MSS 35213.

²³ A number of similar 'aristocratic' loans lists have survived. A particularly interesting example is that in the Grosvenor Library (of the Dukes of Westminster at Eaton Hall in Cheshire) which covers items borrowed during the first half of the eighteenth century.

²⁴ Fehrenbach, R.J. Sir Roger Townshend's Books. In Fehrenbach, R.J. and Leedham-Green, E.S. eds. *Private Libraries of Renaissance England*. [PLRE] Marlborough: Adam Matthew, 1992. Volume I, PLRE 3, p79.

²⁵ The Townshends are a useful indicator of how aristocratic families (in the broadest sense) gradually moved up the social pecking order. In the early seventeenth century they were prosperous members of the gentry, the archetypal knights-of-the-shires. A few advantageous marriages, a prominent role in the Restoration and a Field Marshal in the family ensured that, by the beginning of the nineteenth, they were in the upper reaches of the *nobilitas maior* as Marquesses Townshend and had become significant grandeens in their home county of Norfolk.

²⁶ For details on the Bacon-Townshend collection see the entire article on the Townshend booklist, PLRE 3 pp79-135. The book-list in question is in the Folger Shakespeare Library MSS L.d.776

²⁷ Stone, *Op. cit.* p794 (Appendix XXXVII).

²⁸ For full details of Sir Thomas Knyvett see McKitterick, D.J. *The Library of Thomas Knyvett of Ashwellthorpe c.1539-1618*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978.

²⁹ Krivatsky, Nati H. and Yeandle, Laetitia. Sir Edward Dering. In PLRE 4 *Op. cit.* p146.

³⁰ The Dering Library at Surrenden House, Kent survived intact until the middle of the nineteenth century before being dispersed in sales. The house itself remained the seat of the family until 1928; the Dering Baronetcy became extinct in 1975 on the death of the 12th Baronet.

³¹ PLRE *Ibid.* p146.

³² Jayne. *Ibid.*, p93.

³³ For details on the More collection and the closet at Loseley see Wormald, Francis and Wright, C.E. eds. *The English Library before 1700*. London: Athlone Press, 1958. p8. Evans, J. Extracts from the Private Account Book of Sir W. More. *Archaeologia*, XXXVI (1855), p284. Bennett, H.S. *English Books and Readers, 1475-1557*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952, ppxiii, xiv.

³⁴ Stone, *Op. cit.* p706.

³⁵ *Ibid.* p706.

³⁶ For details on the Bedford collection see St Clair Byrne, M. and Scott Thomson, G. My Lord's Books. *Review of English Studies*, VII(28), October 1931, p396.

³⁷ The collection of the Arundell of Wardour family (including those items mentioned here) was largely dispersed by auction in 1947. Private correspondence with the Lord Talbot of Malahide.

³⁸ Books mentioned in the Wills. The others being, Francis Earl of Bedford, 1584; Peregrine Lord Willoughby d'Eresby, 1590; Anthony Viscount Montagu, 1592; Christopher Lord Teynham, 1622; James Earl of Marlborough, and George Earl of Totnes, both 1625; William Earl of Devonshire, 1628; Oliver Viscount Grandison, 1630; Thomas Lord Coventry, 1638; Thomas Earl of Winchelsea 1639, Henry Earl of Manchester, 1641 and Thomas Lord Windsor, 1641. *c.f.* Stone, *Op. cit.* p 706.

³⁹ See references to the Settled Land Acts in the works of F.M.L. Thompson, David Cannadine, Peter Mandler &c. for discussion of this.

⁴⁰ Stone, *Op. cit.* p715.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* p690.

⁴² Stone details the inflation of honours in his second chapter. Part of the problem was invention of the Baronetcy in 1611 (for which see George Edward Cokayne's *Complete Baronetage*). See also Mayes, Charles R. The Sale of Peerages in Early Stuart England. *Journal of Modern History*, XXIX, 1957, pp21-37 and Van Eerde, Katherine S. The Jacobean Baronets: An Issue Between King and Parliament. *Journal of Modern History*, XXXIII, 1961, pp137-147.

⁴³ Stone, *Op. cit.* p707. The Thanet Collection acts as a yard stick for the origins of many country house collections.

⁴⁴ Jackson-Stops, *Op. cit.* p201.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p198.

⁴⁶ The Diary of John Evelyn. London: Globe, 1908, p262. This may be said to be praise indeed for

elsewhere Evelyn makes plain his dislike of Sir John Cotton.