

Book Reviews

Antiquaries, Book Collectors, and Circles of Learning. Eds. Robin Myers and Michael Harris. New Castle, Del.: Oak Knoll Pr., 1996. 165p. \$39.95 (ISBN 1-884718-24-8). LC 96-29410.

This book does much to illustrate the interrelationships between scholars and libraries in England over the centuries. It achieves this by focusing on such subjects as sixteenth-century binding, and the lives of patient and assiduous eighteenth-century antiquaries. It offers the reader a brief glimpse at a very small part of the relatively untold story of the circles of learning that libraries helped to build and of which humanity has been the beneficiary. The essayists are well-known historians of the book, and the primary audience for this collection will be other scholars of the book. But academic librarians are advised to both read and share this book with their scholarly patrons.

The Unabridged Random House Dictionary (1993) defines the word *antiquary* as someone who is “an expert on or student of antiquities” and as “a collector of antiquities.” It is unfortunate that the word has become arcane because it is descriptive of scholars who have private research libraries in a way that the terms *book collector* and *bibliophile* are not.

Academic libraries were established originally in the Middle Ages as centers of learning. Over the centuries, scholars associated with these centers also have collected, and many of them have donated their collections to an institutional library upon their death or retirement. In their essays, David Pearson and Mirjam Foot analyze binding to see what it says about some of these scholar collectors. Pearson examines hundreds of bindings produced between 1550 and 1650 (and now held in Oxford libraries) to conclude that, just as it is for the typical scholar today, the utility of a book was more im-

portant than its exterior physical beauty. Foot looks at the bindings of wealthy collectors, with an emphasis on the eighteenth century, and shows that for these collectors books were bound both for utility and as art objects.

Three of the essays cover important book collectors—Andrew Ducarel (1713—1785), John Gage (1786—1842), and Richard Heber (d. 1833), two of “whose antiquarian or collecting interests led to the development of the circles of learning.” The reconstruction of the intellectual life of Ducarel by Robin Myers and that of Gage by T. A. Birrell adds much to our understanding of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century intellectual life. Ducarel was a pioneering architectural historian who developed his theories through observation, extensive research, and correspondence with other scholars. Gage was an important early medievalist. Heber did not share his scholarship, although he was one of the greatest collectors of his day. Because of the paucity of information on Heber, Arnold Hunt’s reconstruction of his life is an important contribution to library scholarship.

Two essays cover manuscripts. Janet Blackhouse details the fascinating story of how the *Luttrell Psalter*, one of the greatest of medieval manuscripts, came to be acquired by the British Museum. Her essay is an object lesson on how librarians sometimes have shaded or ignored ethical considerations so that their institutions could compete with market forces in the acquisition of materials. Christopher de Hamel reconstructs the now-dispersed manuscript collection of Edmond de Rothschild (1845—1934), “very possibly the greatest ever assembled by one man.” His is a fascinating investigation, and, I would argue, the most significant



essay in the book. Rothschild's collection included the *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*, which for many is the greatest medieval manuscript.

The title of the concluding essay by Bernard Nurse is fully descriptive: "The Library of the Society of Antiquaries of London: Acquiring Antiquaries' Books over Three Centuries." In recounting the history of the society's library, the author argues persuasively that a vibrant library will attract great collections, which in turn will attract other great collections.

The book is well edited; the essays are placed in the most logical order, which is highlighted in the excellent introduction, and there is consistency of style among the essays. The papers in the volume were presented at "the 1995 conference on the history of the book trade." It is wonderful that the front matter lists conference participants because this helps readers who may be building their own "circles of learning." The index is very useful for tracing common figures and themes across the essays. However, there are typographical errors in the footnotes, and some of the footnotes presume a devotee's knowledge.

There are other shortcomings. For example, I would have liked to know more about the conference, including its full and proper name. As someone who has had to catalog conference proceedings, I lament this omission. In terms of the general format, the editors should have insisted that the essayists use full names and give birth and death dates (where known) for every person first mentioned prominently in an essay. Such information would have been a great help to scholars.

The book is physically attractive, with a cover from a print or painting showing three eighteenth-century scholars. Yet the illustration is not credited. The text illustrations are a great help in the essays on bindings, but the quality of some of the reproductions is poor.

For librarians, one of this book's most important lessons is that scholars can be library benefactors. Anthony Rota, in "Bookselling in a Changing World," an essay in the *Encyclopedia of the Book* (1996), says that private collectors have displaced institutions as the major force in collecting since the late 1960s and that their collections are rich in areas that traditionally have been ignored by academic institutions. An active relationship with these modern "antiquaries" increases the likelihood that they will give their collections to libraries after they have stopped actively building them. An understanding of the history of circles of learning, which includes academic libraries, is necessary to further this goal.—*Charles Egleston, University of Colorado*

Tidcombe, Marianne. *Women Bookbinders 1880-1920*. New Castle, Del.: Oak Knoll Pr., 1996. 240p. \$58 (ISBN 1-884718-23-x). LC 96-31238.

This is the first major work to address women's contributions to bookbinding, a field that had been largely neglected until this publication. Although Marianne Tidcombe states in her preface, "this book is not a social history; it is a short general survey giving a brief account of the lives and work of women who started binding before the first World War," it is actually a thorough and detailed exploration of the subject. She has, however, provided a sufficient background to place the subject in its social and economic context. The author features the lives and accomplishments of Susan Treverbian Prideaux, Katharine Adams, and Sybil Pye in a comprehensive study, and also outlines the contributions of Frank Karslate to the formation of the Guild of Women Binders who ran shops in Britain. Her detailed discussion of each figure introduced includes biographical information, education and experience within the trade, and contributions to the profession.