

EDINBURGH ABSTRACTS

1) Peter Keelan, Head of Special Collections & Archives

The range and history of the Cardiff Rare Books collection

From the 1860s onwards, with the possibility of the National Library of Wales being established in Cardiff, the city's Public Library built up a rare books collection, which is now the largest and richest humanities rare books collection in Wales. Although in 1907 the national library was established in Aberystwyth, Cardiff continued to develop its own rare books collection, into the 1950s; moreover it proudly mounted exhibitions and produced newsletters detailing its acquisitions. Since the National Library of Wales had a remit to collect mainly Welsh and Celtic materials, in Cardiff a more international remit for collection development continued in the Public Library, acquiring it a profile as one of the best British reference libraries.

The core 14,000 volumes from the humanities rare books collection, dating from the 1470s to the 1930s, have recently been acquired by Cardiff University Library, and are now accessible for scholars to use for research purposes. This paper will outline the history of the Public Library, of the development of the collections, and of the subjects covered by these volumes. Issues of provenance will be mentioned, noting the discreet collections now opened up for new research possibilities of interest to scholars. Finally, the paper will present Cardiff University's plans for future work promoting and utilizing these materials.

2) Dr Melanie Bigold, School of English, Communications & Philosophy

Dramatic Recollection: Restoration abundance in the Cardiff Collection

Dramatic texts from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries make up one of the most impressive elements of the Cardiff Library Collection. With over 800 texts, the long eighteenth-century collection features considerable holdings of most of the major playwrights of the period (Behn, Centlivre, Cibber, Congreve, Dryden, Etherege, Farquhar, Lee, Otway, Rowe, Southerne, Tate, Vanbrugh, and Wycherley, to name just a few). For the majority of these playwrights, more than one play is available and, in a number of cases, multiple editions across two centuries are present. These multiple editions offer an opportunity for collational and comparative studies of the transmission and performance history of the plays. For example, pre- and post-Collier controversy editions, or Shakespearean productions throughout the eighteenth century. Indeed, for those interested in adaptation, numerous texts trumpet their contemporaneity by making reference to their provenance in prompt books or specific productions – with some claiming to detail the lines omitted in the 'representation'. In addition, history of the book studies have taught us that, while modern readers often consult particular anthologies for specific plays, they tend to neglect the aims of the original editors and their contemporary audience. This collection, which features a number of important eighteenth and nineteenth-century anthologies, can tell us much about canonicity as well as popularity in terms of both printed text and performance.

3) Prof Judi Loach, Researcher & Graduate School in Humanities

Gregynog and beyond: The Private Press collection within the Welsh Arts and Crafts context.

The Private Press material (well over 4,000 volumes) contrasts with the other collection's other sections (largely comprising entire private libraries or items from them, i.e. collected by individuals then acquired by the city), in that it was bought directly by the city itself. As such, it embodies a deliberate policy, privileging the Arts & Crafts movement, a stance widespread throughout Britain in the late 19th and early 20th centuries but particularly strong in Wales. Moreover, Cardiff, a city primarily developed in late Victorian and Edwardian times, inevitably commissioned much from the Arts and Crafts movement, as is evident in its architecture, perhaps most notably that by its Welsh exponent John Coates Carter (but also by a couple of Voysey buildings), and by the quantity of decorative furnishings commissioned from Morris, Burne-Jones et al. The city's predilection for buying Private Press material for its library fits into this context, with some items also bearing fine bindings and some even demonstrating personal connections between Morris himself and Burges, the designer of the city's finest piece of *gesamtkunstwerk*, Cardiff Castle.

As concerns fine printing, Wales is best known for the Gregynog Press, whose works were bought by city and university alike. But this did not begin operation until 1922, long after the city began to buy private press material. A nascent, national interest in the revival of handcraft was given impetus and allied with progressive design through initiatives of the Davies sisters (remembered now for buying the Impressionists collection that forms the star of the National Museum), arguably the nation's most influential tastemakers in the early 20th century. Their vision of nurturing a Welsh Arts & Crafts movement only resulted concretely in their founding of the Gregynog Press, not the weaving, pottery, etc. workshops that they wanted to accompany it (although they sponsored the development of a collection of studio ceramic at Aberystwyth University). Within this national and civic context privileging Arts and Crafts, the Private Press collection has a particular significance, and it will also enable us to reappraise native presses, notably Gregynog.