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The Linked Collections of William Bragge (1823-1884) of Birmingham and Dr. Thomas Shadford Walker (1834-1885) of Liverpool

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Abstract

The Schoenberg Database of Manuscripts can be used not only to track the provenance of individual manuscripts, but also to uncover larger patterns in multiple provenance strings of manuscripts. For example, does an individual auction sale or bookseller's catalogue have any discernable influence on the acquisitions made by a collector or institution? Or is the publication of a collection or exhibition catalogue preceded or followed by any discernable pattern of acquisition activity? This paper explores patterns of acquisition, exhibition and sale associated with the collections of William Bragge (1823-1884) of Sheffield and Dr. T. Shadford Walker (1834-1885) of Liverpool. Bragge was the largest single exhibitor in the Burlington Fine Arts Club exhibition in 1874. The sale of his library less than two years later at Sotheby's in June 1876 was only identified as the property of "a gentleman of consummate taste and judgment," but full reports in *The Times* revealed his identity to those not already in the know. Not surprisingly the London antiquarian booksellers, Bernard Quaritch, were a major buyer at the sale; its Catalogue 31 published in the fall of 1876 after the sale contains numerous items acquired there. Quaritch was also apparently bidding on behalf of the British Museum and of Dr. Walker of Liverpool. In October of the same year Walker was a major contributor to the Liverpool Fine Arts Club exhibition of illuminated manuscripts and every one of the 18 manuscripts exhibited by Walker had been purchased at the Bragge sale earlier that year.

Keywords

provenance, manuscript studies, William Bragge (1823-1884), Dr. Thomas Shadford Walker, exhibitions, 19th century, Burlington Fine Arts Club, Crystal Palace, Grolier Club, Schoenberg Database of Manuscripts, collecting, Bernard Quaritch

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The Linked Collections of William Bragge (1823–1884) of Birmingham and Dr. Thomas Shadford Walker (1834–1885) of Liverpool

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IN HIS *ENGLISH COLLECTORS of Books & Manuscripts (1530–1930) and Their Marks of Ownership*, the ever reliable and indefatigable Seymour de Ricci observed that:

In 1876 (7 June) took place the notable sale of “a magnificent collection of manuscripts formed by a Gentleman of consummate taste and judgment,” to use the auctioneer’s unpretentious language. The 491 manuscripts described in the catalogue were the property of William Bragge (1823–1884) of Birmingham, a great engineer and, at one time, Mayor of Sheffield. His taste was more for the decoration of manuscripts than for their contents. The sale brought no less than £12,500, a big buyer being Dr. Thomas Shadford Walker, of Liverpool, whose fine collection of manuscripts was sold at Sotheby’s on 23 June 1886, after his death.¹

1 Seymour de Ricci, *English Collectors of Books & Manuscripts (1530–1930) and Their Marks of Ownership* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1969 [1930]), 155.

De Ricci also recorded the donation of Bragge's Cervantes library to the city of Birmingham in 1874, though the library was destroyed by fire in 1879, and sales of his printed books in November 1880 and June 1882. There is an entry on Bragge in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, but it concentrates mainly on his engineering and business career. It does, however, record that "for some time before his death he was almost totally blind";² this might suggest a reason for the dispersal of his collections that was probably not primarily financial.

De Ricci refers the reader to Bernard Quaritch's *Contributions towards a Dictionary of English Book-Collectors* for more information on Walker, where one learns that:

In 1876, when the Bragge collection of MSS was sold, Dr. Walker was a young and enthusiastic student of art, and a specialist in a branch of the medical profession at Liverpool. He had attended the lectures of Mr. Robinson (now Sir J. C. Robinson), at South Kensington, and had sought to cultivate a knowledge of MSS and books under the guidance of his friend Mr. Newton (well known in Liverpool as a bibliophile). Through Mr. Quaritch's agency he acquired several of the Bragge MSS at the sale, and purchased others after the sale was over. Some of the most interesting things in that collection thus passed into his hands and formed the nucleus of his library. He went on buying from that time till his health began to decline, and when he died in 1886, his books were sold at Sotheby's in 422 lots. It was two days' auction on June 23rd–24th of that year and produced the sum of £4464. Dr. Walker was a reader as well as a collector, but his tastes being chiefly artistic, the chief objects of his desire were illuminated manuscripts and books in fine historical bindings.³

2 G. B. Smith, "Bragge, William (1823–1884)," rev. Carl Chinn, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezp-rod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/article/3223>, accessed 5 January 2016.

3 Bernard Quaritch, *Contributions towards a Dictionary of English Book-Collectors* (London: Quaritch, 1969 [1892–1921]), 307.

These two biographical/bibliographical notices suggest explicitly that there was a connection between the collections of William Bragge of Birmingham and Dr. Thomas Shadford Walker of Liverpool. This paper further documents just how closely interconnected they were, using additional information available from two key exhibition catalogues for this purpose. Such exhibitions played an important role in developing the knowledge and taste of British and later American collectors and deserve continued investigation and analysis.

The Times of London for Wednesday, 7 June 1876, reported on the Bragge sale:

A collection of very rare and beautiful illuminated books and manuscripts of almost every style is to be seen at the rooms of Messrs. Sotheby, Wilkinson, and Hodge, in Wellington-street, Strand, previous to the sale, which commences at noon today, and will occupy the rest of the week, the MSS being shown each day before 1 o'clock. So complete and curious a private collection has rarely been seen in the sale-rooms of London, and besides its intrinsic value and interest to all who have made sacred palæography a study, it possesses the peculiar interest of being the result of a plain, self-taught working man's enthusiastic pursuit of the subject. It appears that Mr. W. Bragge, of Sheffield, whose practical ability had gained for him an important position in the famous Atlas Steel Works of that place, began, some 25 years ago, to form this now remarkable collection, with the simple idea of obtaining specimens of calligraphy. After travelling all over the world in search of his favourite objects, such has been the development of his taste and knowledge so great is his enterprise that he ends with a collection of about 500 books and manuscripts of first-rate excellence, most of them in fine preservation, and some in their splendid old bindings. Although the collection was exhibited at the Leeds National Exhibition of Fine Arts in 1868, and afterwards at the rooms of the Burlington Fine Arts Club [which took place in London in 1874], the present opportunity is a more advantageous one of seeing these beautiful works of an art long passed into disuse. The catalogue affords

admirable descriptions, and is altogether a model of such very useful and indispensable works.⁴

The Times article goes on to highlight twenty-four manuscripts based heavily, perhaps not surprisingly, on the descriptions in the Sotheby's sale catalogue.

The public exhibition of medieval manuscripts gathered considerable momentum in the second half of the nineteenth century in England. They were included in the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition of 1857, a northern response to the Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace in London in 1851 from which paintings of any kind were excluded. Bragge contributed at least nine manuscripts to a similar exhibition in Leeds in 1868. In these and another later exhibition in Liverpool in 1876, illuminated manuscripts were displayed as an appendix to the main exhibition of fine arts and were dependent on local enthusiasts.⁵ Private clubs were also the venue for the exhibition of medieval manuscripts. In London, the Burlington Fine Arts Club was a private club at 17 Savile Row, West, in Piccadilly. The purpose of the Club was to facilitate the study of fine art by providing a venue for members to exhibit material from their collections and to hold *conversazione* about the material. Though the Club closed shortly after the end of the Second World War, the *Burlington Magazine* lives on today. In his brief history of the Club, Robert Benson refers to English collectors "taking advantage of the opportunities afforded during the first half of the nineteenth century by the Napoleonic Wars and the revolutionary vicissitudes of 1848."⁶ Apparently the Club had simply outlived its usefulness; museums had begun to enter the age of temporary, focused, and what are now frequently described as "blockbuster" shows. In its prime, however, the Burlington Fine Arts Club hosted several major exhibitions each year on a wide variety of

4 P. 5.

5 For a general study of the role of such exhibitions, especially in the north of England, see Edward Morris, "Introduction," in Morris, *Public Art Collections in North-West England: A History and Guide* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001), 7–14.

6 Robert Benson, "The Burlington Club: Its Early Members and Mr. Holford," in Benson, *The Holford Collection: A Catalogue of Twelve Illuminated Manuscripts at Dorchester House and One Hundred and Seven Pictures at Westonbirt in Gloucestershire* (London: Medici Society, 1924), 19.

subjects, including paintings, drawings and prints, silver, porcelain, textiles, glass, and oriental art; its often meticulous and well-written catalogues are still used as major reference works today. Its exhibitions of medieval manuscripts in 1874, 1886, and 1908 can be seen to have acted as important landmarks in the history of collecting of this material. In New York there were similar exhibitions of medieval manuscripts at the Grolier Club in 1884 and again in 1892.⁷

William Bragge was the largest single exhibitor by a considerable factor to the Burlington Fine Arts Club exhibition of illuminated manuscripts in 1874. He contributed 85 objects to an exhibition of 161 manuscripts and 52 single leaves and cuttings. The next largest contributors were the Trustees of the late Sir William Tite with twenty-six entries; the Rev. J. Fuller Russell, who exhibited twenty-six manuscripts; and perhaps now the best known collector, Henry Hucks Gibbs, later Lord Aldenham, who exhibited ten manuscripts.⁸ The labels were written by the owners of the manuscript and might charitably be described as fairly imaginative in their ascriptions to known artists; they depended heavily on the descriptions of the dealers from whom they were acquired.

The catalogue included a very brief introduction which read, in part:

7 The first is E2 and P4, the second is E30 and P31; George Ong and Eric J. Holzenberg, *For Jean Grolier & His Friends: 125 Years of Grolier Club Exhibition and Publications, 1884–2009* (New York: The Grolier Club, 2009).

8 On Tite, see de Ricci, *English Collectors of Books & Manuscripts*, 154; Quaritch, *Contributions towards a Dictionary of English Book-Collectors*, 288–92; William Younger Fletcher, *English Book Collectors* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1969 [1902]), 392–95; S. P. Parissien, “Tite, Sir William (1798–1873),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/article/27479>, accessed 5 January 2016. On Russell, see de Ricci, *English Collectors of Books & Manuscripts*, 161; Peter Kidd, “Revd John Fuller Russell (1813–1884),” in *Apocalipsis Yates Thompson (MS 10): Book of Studies*, ed. Daron Burrows, Patricia Stirnemann, Nigel J. Morgan, Peter Kidd, and Gregorio Solera (London: British Library, 2010), 38–40; Thompson Cooper, “Russell, John Fuller (1813–1884),” rev. Ellie Clewlow, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/article/24327>, accessed 5 January 2016. On Aldenham, see de Ricci, *English Collectors of Books & Manuscripts*, 166; Martin Dauntton, “Gibbs, Henry Hucks, First Baron Aldenham (1819–1907),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/article/33386>, accessed 5 January 2016.

The magnificent collection of Mr. Bragge, which fills five entire cases and part of a sixth, forms the nucleus of the Exhibition, and should be separately noticed. It may be mentioned, to assist those who use the catalogue, that Mr. Bragge's books are placed separately, and as far as possible, chronologically, except the Bibles, which are in the Case devoted to that class. . . . The contributions of Mr. Gibbs are also apart, but the rest have been placed in the order in which they came to hand.⁹

The result, and perhaps even the intention of the exhibition, was that any viewer or reader of the catalogue, could easily understand and appreciate the scope of Bragge's collection. There is surely a connection between the exhibition and the sale of Bragge's collection less than two years later. It might be argued that Bragge used the exhibition, as a vehicle to generate interest in medieval illuminated manuscripts and, perhaps, in his collection in particular, although as we have seen his sale was only a qualified success for his heirs. A little less than a week after the Bragge sale on Tuesday, 13 June 1876, the *Times* reported more fully on the results:

The dispersion of the remarkable collection of illuminated manuscripts formed by Mr. W. Bragge, to which we drew attention, at the rooms of Messrs. Sotheby, Wilkinson, and Hodge, was a sale of the greatest interest, although perhaps the prices realized were not altogether a fair indication of the great excellence of all the finer examples. Had the political and commercial atmosphere been clearer, collectors would have been more disposed to add to their treasures in this very valuable department of art study. This state of things, however, was so far fortunate that it enabled the British Museum to acquire some important manuscripts at prices which were generally considered to be extremely moderate. Very few of the great Continental dealers attended the sale, the only foreign pur-

9 *Illuminated Manuscripts Catalogue* (London: Burlington Fine Arts Club, 1874), iii.

chasers being M. Olivier of Brussels, M. Caspari, and M. Müller, so that Mr. Quaritch, who was, we understand, acting chiefly for the British Museum, and Messrs. Ellis and White, were the principal purchasers. From the following, which were the highest prices only, it will be seen that in some cases there was a considerable falling off from the last sales, but in that of the fine Evangelistarium (No. 155) there was a rise of more than £200. The whole sum realized for the collection, which contained many excellent examples that could not be noticed in the space at command, large as it is, could not be said to represent an investment entered into for the sake of mere pecuniary profit. The reward for having formed, by a vast expenditure of labour and enthusiastic research, such an unexampled collection was, probably, not expected to be reaped in the prices now paid for the beautiful objects.¹⁰

The “political and commercial atmosphere” mentioned was the Balkan crisis that led to Serbia and Montenegro declaring war on the Ottoman Empire on 30 June 1876 and ultimately to the Treaty of Berlin of 1878. The treaty recognized the autonomous Bulgarian principality and the independence of Romania, Serbia, and Montenegro from the Ottoman Empire. For Europe it marked the disintegration of the newly formed Three Emperors’ League of Germany, Austria, and Russia. This in turn meant the renewal and intensification of Austro-Russian rivalry in the Balkans which had started with the Crimean War. It also meant the re-emergence of Britain as an active force in European affairs after years of splendid isolation under Prime Minister William Gladstone.

An extensive report of the Bragge sale results in *The Athenaeum* for 17 June 1876 records that the sale ended by “producing the large sum of £12,272 6s, showing a profit of nearly £3,000 in excess of the sum paid by the proprietor.”¹¹ This report also includes numerous highlights and prices

10 P. 4.

11 No. 2538, p. 829.

paid. A later report in the same journal for 24 June 1876 records that “the British Museum purchased upwards of eighty lots” and that “Mr. Quaritch purchased at this sale to the amount of over £6,000 and Messrs. Ellis & White spent £3,000.”¹²

Another indication of the impact of this sale is that the Schoenberg Database of Medieval Manuscripts allows us to see that at least fifty-eight Bragge lots were listed in Quaritch’s *Catalogue 31*, which appeared only months after the sale. It is possible that an even more nuanced view of Walker’s purchases will be available through an analysis of the Quaritch Commission Book, which may reveal which manuscripts were purchased by Walker at the sale through Quaritch and which were acquired by him afterwards from the firm.

In October of the same year, less than four months after the Bragge sale, Dr. Walker was a major contributor to the Liverpool Art Club’s exhibition of illuminated manuscripts. All eighteen manuscripts exhibited by Walker had been purchased at the Bragge sale earlier in June of that year. The Liverpool exhibition and its catalogue looks remarkably like that of the earlier Burlington Fine Arts exhibition of 1874.¹³ Again, labels were written by the owners and collections were for the most part kept together in the cases. The exhibition’s Committee of Management consisted of Walker and two other major collectors, Dr. John Newton and Edward Quaile, both of whom had larger collections than Walker’s at the time. The first, Dr. Newton, described by Quaritch as the “well-known Liverpool bibliophile” in the passage from his *Dictionary of English Book-Collectors* quoted above, was a mentor to Walker.¹⁴ The second, Quaile, went on to exploit his collection further by publishing in 1897 a book on *Illuminated Manuscripts: Their Origin, History and Characteristics*, described as *A Sketch, with Twenty-Six Examples from Books of Hours in His Possession*. Quaile’s collection was auctioned less than four years

12 No. 2539, p. 863.

13 *Catalogue of a Loan Exhibition of Illuminated Manuscripts Exhibited at the Club Rooms, Myrtle Street, October 1876* (Liverpool: Liverpool Art Club, 1876).

14 Newton’s library was sold at Sotheby’s, London, 3 November 1908, but the sale contained only a single manuscript and not one exhibited by Newton in 1876.

later in May 1901, and the auction catalogue descriptions drew heavily on his book.¹⁵

The eighteen manuscripts once owned and exhibited by William Bragge and then owned and exhibited by Dr. Thomas Shadford Walker were much in demand by a succeeding generation of collectors. An Italian Franciscan psalter was afterwards sold through Benjamin Franklin Stevens to Robert Hoe and then sold through George D. Smith to Henry Huntington and is now in San Marino, California;¹⁶ this manuscript was no. 14 (as Bragge's) in the Burlington Fine Arts Club exhibition (1874); no. 57 (as Walker's) in the Liverpool Art Club exhibition (1876); and no. 12 (as Hoe's) in the Grolier Club exhibition (1892).¹⁷

A book of hours made for Cornelius Croesinck and his second wife, Hildegarde Jansdochter van Woude van Alkemade, was also later sold through Benjamin Franklin Stevens to Robert Hoe and acquired by the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York in 1988.¹⁸ This manuscript was no. 50 (as Bragge's) in the Burlington Fine Arts Club exhibition (1874), no. 43 (as Walker's) in the Liverpool Art Club (1876), and no. 13 (as Hoe's) in the Grolier Club exhibition (1892).¹⁹

A Dominican Processional at the Free Library of Philadelphia later passed through Maggs Bros. and Sessler and was owned subsequently by

15 On Quaille, see de Ricci, *English Collectors of Books & Manuscripts*, 177.

16 HM 1064; Seymour de Ricci and William J. Wilson, *Census of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts in the United States and Canada*, vol. 1 (New York: Wilson, 1935), 86. For a full description, see Consuelo W. Dutschke, *Guide to Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts in the Huntington Library*, vol. 1 (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1989), 332–35 and fig. 136 (reproducing fol. 17).

17 SDBM_21045.

18 New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M.1078. For a full description, see Henri L. M. Defoer, Anne S. Korteweg, Wilhelmina C. M. Wüstfeld, and James H. Marrow, *The Golden Age of Dutch Manuscript Painting* (New York: Braziller, 1990), no. 101, color plate 101, and figs. 157 and 159 (reproducing fols. 112v/113, 110 and 109v); Philip E. Webber and Johanna C. Prins, *Medieval Netherlandic Manuscripts in the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York* (Brussels: Algemeen Rijksarchief, 1991), 115–24 and 147.

19 SDBM_21046.

John Frederick Lewis.²⁰ This manuscript was no. 30 (as Bragge's) in the Burlington Fine Arts Club exhibition (1874) and no. 56 (as Walker's) in the Liverpool Art Club (1876).

The public exhibitions of private collections of medieval manuscripts—like those at the Grolier Club in New York in 1884 and again in 1892, and at the Burlington Fine Arts Club in London in 1874 and 1908 and other exhibitions—exerted considerable influence on American and British collectors and thus both directly and indirectly on public institutional collections. It may be that private collectors of this material, like William Bragge of Birmingham and Dr. Thomas Shadford Walker of Liverpool, were simply eager to display to others what they had succeeded in acquiring, but there were also clearly commercial consequences to such displays. Whatever the motivations and results of such exhibitions, they are important milestones in the history of collecting and certainly deserve continued investigation and analysis.

20 Free Library of Philadelphia, MS Lewis E 7; Seymour de Ricci and William J. Wilson, *Census of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts in the United States and Canada*, vol. 2 (New York: Wilson, 1937), 2032 (no. 45). For fuller descriptions, see Edwin Wolf, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the John Frederick Lewis Collection of European Manuscripts in the Free Library of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Free Library of Philadelphia, 1937), p. 10 and plate 3 (reproducing fol. 116v); and Consuelo W. Dutschke in *Leaves of Gold: Manuscript Illumination from Philadelphia Collections*, ed. James R. Tanis (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2001), no. 45 and fig. 45 (reproducing fol. 104v).