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THE NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF THE THOMAS FISHER RARE BOOK LIBRARY

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## Thomas Fisher, The Halcyon, and The Fisher Library

by Sidney Fisher

The Rare Book Library at the University of Toronto is named after my great-grandfather, Thomas Fisher. An earlier Thomas Fisher of distinction was a London publisher with a shop in Fleet Street, who in 1600 published the First Quarto of William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In the *Registers of the Stationers' Company*, vol. C-3, folio 65 verso is his entry for this play in the year 1600:

8. octobris

Thomas ffysshher Entred for  
his copie vnder the handes of  
master Rodes / and the Wardens. A  
booke called A mydsommer nightes  
Dreame. vj<sup>d</sup>

Quartos derive their name from the fact that four pages of text are printed on each side of the sheets of paper which make up the book, and these sheet are folded twice to form gatherings of four leaves or eight printed pages. Sheets of Elizabethan paper ranged in dimension from 11" x 16" to 16" x 22", so that the dimensions of a quarto page could vary between approximately 5" x 7" and 8" x 11". Quartos were usually sewn pamphlets with paper covers, and several copies of Fisher's book still exist. It is thought that he printed about five hundred copies which sold for sixpence each.

Nothing else is known of Fisher except that he entered the play *Antonio and Mellide* by John Marston (1576-1634) in the Stationers' Register in 1601.

As one can see from the title-page reproduced here, Fisher used the kingfisher as his emblem in 1600; my bookplate includes a representation of the American kingfisher as painted by John

Audubon in the nineteenth century; [Editor's note: and this newsletter is named of course after the same bird].

The Thomas Fisher after whom the Fisher Library was named was my great grandfather. The son of John and Mary (Colley), he was born in Pontefract, Yorkshire, in 1792. After receiving a good education at York, he entered his father's cotton firm in Leeds, and by 1819 he was in New York, acting as the firm's agent. Thomas Fisher was however a man of irascible temperament, and the war of 1812 was fresh in his memory. He could not get along with Americans and went to Toronto, then "Muddy York", apparently

drawn by the familiar name. In 1821 he took a lease on the government mill on the Humber River at Bloor Street, in the area now called Old Mill. He developed the property and built a splendid Georgian house where the subway station now stands; the ruins which are nearby are those of a much later mill, Fisher's mill having burned down earlier.

Fisher prospered and had a wide circle of friends among the families of the Humber Valley — Gamble, Baby, Cooper, Scarlett, Denison, and so on — many of whose names are now recorded in Toronto street names. He had a son Thomas, who died young, and a grandson

Thomas, my uncle. The next generation included one more Thomas, and the following, two Thomases, both today young and vigorous, both Canadians, so the name seems likely to persist here.

The Thomas who came to North America in 1819 built grist and saw mills at Bloor Street, water-driven of course. In 1834 he sold these mills to William Gamble, and moved a mile upstream to the west side of the river at Dundas Street, where he built another splendid Georgian house, "Millwood", and a grist mill. The mill was ruined by the great flood of 1878, but the house survived; I bought it in the 1960s but it was then ruinous, and my brother Charles and I were unable to make it a library for our Shakespeare, Hollar and other collections, as we had originally intended. In 1973 much of these collections were placed in the keeping of the University of Toronto, and went to the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, while other material was housed in the library of the Faculty of Music, the Canadian history section of the Metropolitan Toronto



## A Midfommer nights dreame.

As it hath beene sundry times pub-  
lickely acted, by the Right honoura-  
ble, the Lord Chamberlaine his  
seruants.

Written by William Shakespeare.



Imprinted in London, for Thomas Fisher, and are to  
be sold at his shoppe, at the Signe of the White Hart,  
in Fleetstreet. 1600.

Title-page of the First Quarto published by Thomas Fisher in 1600.

Library, Montgomery's Tavern at Dundas and Islington in Toronto (now a museum, this was built about the same time as "Millwood"), and to other historical repositories.

Thomas Fisher was interested in music, and owned a number of string and woodwind instruments. He must also have had a considerable library, for about two hundred of his books survive and are now housed at the Metropolitan Toronto Library, including a copy of the first English edition of *Don Quixote* with Thomas's signature. With them is a complete archive of the milling families of about 44,000 pages, some original deeds, journals and letters, including some copies from the National and Ontario Archives.

When at Bloor Street, Thomas Fisher supported Christ Church, Mimico, and

after he moved to Dundas Street, he built St. George's Church-on-the-Hill. He was a munificent supporter of St. George's and a great friend of its Rector, whose son in due course married one of Thomas's grand-daughters. The church still stands, a monument to urbanity, learning and generosity.

[Editor's note: Thomas Fisher's life and career are described in a book published in 1986 by NC Press of Toronto, *The Merchant-Millers of the Humber Valley*, by Sidney Fisher. Mr. Fisher has generously given a number of copies to the Friends; any member who wishes to read more about Thomas Fisher and this fascinating period of Toronto's history should contact me for a copy of the book: first come, first served.]

## Further Gifts from Our Friends

Donations of gifts-in-kinds—books, manuscripts, drawings and occasionally, other items—continue to be a major component of the Fisher Library's acquisitions programme. During 1989 we received over one hundred gifts from eighty-seven donors, the value of which exceeded three quarters of a million dollars. Many donors were old friends, in that they have donated books and manuscripts in previous years and it is especially pleasing to acknowledge their consistent commitment to developing many of the Fisher Library collections.

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## Meetings of the Friends 1989-90

Our sixth year started in October with a reception to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the founding of the Friends, graciously hosted at the house of the University's President by President George Connell and Mrs Sheila Connell. Members obviously appreciated the opportunity to talk with friends in such lovely surroundings, and the torrential downpour which struck during the evening seemed to succeed only in encouraging members to stay and enjoy the occasion for as long as possible! The year ended in April with a talk by Barry McKay on "English Writers on Marbled Paper". Mr. McKay, an English bookseller, writer and private press printer, had been persuaded to extend his trip to the US by a visit north to Toronto, and his fascinating illustrated lecture was much appreciated.

Perhaps the most successful event of the year was the Open House held in the Fisher Library on 19 January 1990. Members were encouraged to bring interested guests, and attendance was estimated to have reached almost 300! The Library was open from 6:00 pm to 10:00 pm, and special events included a slide-talk by Richard Landon on the "Treasures of the Fisher Library" heard by more than two hundred people jammed into the west reading room; and eight pre-arranged "behind the scenes" tours of special areas and collections, each given twice. In University Archives there was an exhibition of some of the fascinating documents

and publications relating to the history of the University; while in the Fisher display area was an exhibition of selected highlights of "Gifts from Our Friends" 1984-89, for which an illustrated catalogue was produced. Refreshments were served throughout the evening.

From all the comments received during and after the event, it seems that the occasion was very much enjoyed, and there have been many calls for an early repeat. The evening did of course take a lot of time and energy to arrange. Many

thanks are due to the organizing skills of Katharine Martyn and Sandra Alston in particular, and to all members of the Fisher Library staff for the many "extra curricula" activities necessitated by the event, and for preparing the tours so thoroughly and making them so interesting. By the end of the evening, all the staff were exhausted but were also happy that they had been able to reveal so much more of the Library than is normally seen by Friends.



*The Open House—Katharine Martyn and Cynthia King show a "treasure" in the Shakespeare collection to members and guests.*

Louis Melzack once again enriched both our manuscript and printed book collections in several subject fields. Most outstanding in his 1989 donation is four volumes of *The Quebec Gazette*, containing the first four hundred issues published in Quebec between 1764 and 1772. Bound in with the issues of the newspaper are a series of very rare broadsides, several of which had been recorded in Tremaine's *Bibliography of Canadian Imprints, 1752-1800*, but never located. Mr. Melzack's gift also contributed an equally rare, but very different, work of English literature. This is a three-decker novel called *The Foster-brother*, written by Thornton Leigh Hunt and published in 1847. The first edition of 1845 is known in several copies but this re-issue, with cancel title-leaves, is unrecorded in any of the standard reference sources. To say that a book is unique in dangerous, but one can safely say that this one is rare and it will join a collection, newly established, of books published by Thomas Cautley Newby, an obscure but very interesting English publisher.

In 1989 Professor T. Venkatcharya gave the Fisher Library a most unusual but very important collection. This consists of some sixty Sanskrit manuscripts written on palm leaves in the traditional Indian manner, containing literary and philosophical works. This collection provides a research resource unique in Canada and adds another facet to the diverse Fisher Library collections.

Hugh Anson-Cartwright, a member of the Friends Steering committee, together with his daughter Sarah and her husband William Beddoe, added substantially to the collection of Penguin books he established some years ago. The fifty-nine shelves of volumes, representing thirty-five different Penguin series, advances the collection towards its ultimate goal; a complete run of Penguins published between 1935 and 1970, representing one of the most successful and influential publishing ventures ever undertaken. The research potential of the collection is almost infinite in range and diversity.

The history of publishing in Canada is represented by our largest corporate donation of 1989. Copp, Clark Pitman Ltd. gave to the library a very large collection of file copies of books published by Copp, Clark from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. This gift will contribute substantially to the resources available for the study of the history of the book in Canada, a topic of increasing academic interest.

Professor Stillman Drake, whose donations to the Fisher Library extend back over the decades and include many of our most important works in the history of science, in 1989 gave us a collection both unique and important. Very few collectors can confidently claim that they have assembled the most complete collection in existence of an author, but this claim can certainly be made for Prof. Drake's collection of works by and about Alexander Bryan Johnson, a nineteenth-century American banker and philosopher, whose *Treatise on Language* of 1836 has recently been recognized as a pioneering work of semantic philosophy. Prof. Drake has also the distinction of having "re-discovered" A.B. Johnson, one of the more exciting aspects of serious book collecting.

Another major donor who can make the same claim is Professor John Slater, whose definitive collection of Bertrand Russell was given to the library in 1985. In 1989 Prof. Slater further enhanced it with the addition of many bibliographical variants, translations etc. He was also able to add the very rare first edition of the Russell debate with John Cowper Powys, "Is modern marriage a failure?" (1930).

The President of the Friends of Fisher is, naturally, an important collector and donor. In 1989 Ron Peters gave us a collection of nineteenth and twentieth century English literature which contained, among other gems, Edmund Gosse's *Firdansi In Exile* (1885), one of a limited edition of sixty copies with a letter by Gosse tipped in. Ron Peters' active participation in the development of our collection is very much appreciated.

Robert Finch, poet and, for many years Professor of French at the University of Toronto, gave us his large and diverse library, the result of many years collecting. The most appealing, if not, perhaps, the most valuable book in the collection, is a presentation copy of Alfred de Vigny's *Cinq-Mars ...* (1859). It was acquired by Prof. Finch in Paris in the 1920's by selling his overcoat to Dudley Poore and using the money to buy this volume, which he then had bound by Douglas Duncan, the art collector and dealer. Duncan's very important collections of books and manuscripts came to the library after his death in 1968.

Another "old friend" gave a major collection in 1989. Professor Harvey Olnick, for many years a member of the Faculty of Music, donated a large collection of books and manuscripts on the history of music, including several part-books of the early eighteenth century.

These will enhance the historical collections in the Faculty of Music that Prof. Olnick was instrumental in developing many years ago.

A collection with a particularly appealing association was donated last year by Hugh Morrison. In 1931 and 1932 Mr. Morrison attended Oxford as a Rhodes scholar and his tutor at Merton College was the poet Edmund Blunden. Thus began his life-long interest in the work of Blunden and many of the copies in this important collection are inscribed from Blunden to Hugh Morrison.

In 1988 Professor Richard Handscombe donated his virtually complete collection of the works of John Cowper Powys. Last year he added equally fine collections of the other two Powys brothers, Theodore F. and Llewellyn. These collections will further enhance the Endicott collection of modern British literature, one of our largest and most used collections.

The Fisher Library received many outstanding gifts of individual works in 1989. The most spectacular was given by the Morawetz family in memory of Richard Morawetz; a copy of Ulrich von Richental's *Conzillium zu Constencz*, published in 1483 and containing a first-hand account of the Council of Constance (1414-1418). Important as its text is, however, this book has long been renowned as one of the most spectacular examples of early woodcut illustrations. Their effect is heightened in this copy by their having been coloured in a contemporary hand. This great acquisition was acknowledged with a reception and the book was featured in the *Gifts from Our Friends* exhibition. It is described in more detail in the exhibition catalogue.

Although published four hundred and fifty years later, the twelve portfolios of the *Denkmaler des Theaters*, given by Herbert and Melisande Irvine, are also spectacular. The hundreds of coloured plates provide the theatre historian and anyone interested in the history of costume with a superb research resource. Complete sets of this work, which was issued over a number of years, are rare.

Another unusual donation, but one that complements one of our important collections, was given by Professor Malcolm Westcott. It is a small collection of bookbinders' finishing tools, all American and dating from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many years ago the library acquired the famous Birdsall collection of binding tools, a collection used by our conservation section. It, of course, consists of English

tools and it is useful to add some American examples.

A prominent case in the Friends exhibition contained a few examples from our Thoreau MacDonald Collection, based on the collection of Margaret E. Edison, with additions from Carl Schaefer and E.R. Hunter. Last year Mrs. Edison again donated some examples of Thoreau MacDonald's work, including a beautiful watercolour sketch.

Our annual reports over the past half dozen years have always features a section describing the generous donations of botanical art and books made by Dr. Daniel Lowe. Last year was no exception, as Dr. Lowe gave us eighteen beautiful watercolours of plants painted by master Indian artists for William Roxburgh of the East India Company.

An unusual donation of manuscripts, which formed the subject of our Friends November lecture, came from Professor William Blissett. In 1954 Professor Blissett wrote to every prominent British American and Canadian poet soliciting their views on Edmund Spenser as a poetic influence. He received fifty-nine replies from poets as diverse as Walter De La Mare, Robert Graves, E.E. Cummings, Marianne Moore, Ezra Pound, Louis Dudek and Robert Finch, and the results are informative and often amusing.

Every year we add to our collections of Canadian writers' papers, often by donations from the authors themselves. David Solway and Don Bailey both enhanced their own collections, as did Professor Phyllis Grosskurth, with research materials for her biographies of Margaret Mead, Melanie Klein, Havelock Ellis and S.A. Symonds. Margaret Farmer donated an important series of letters from Ernest Buckler to the Buckler Collection.

The J. B. Collip Papers, described in some detail in *Gifts from Our Friends*, received a further addition from Dr. Collip's daughter, Dr. Barbara Collip Wyatt, of the medals and awards presented to Dr. Collip.

The past year has produced gifts for the Fisher Library of the quality and diversity we have come to expect. They all help to maintain the greatest research resource of its kind in Canada.

Richard Landon, Director  
Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library



**HALCYON**

University of Toronto Library  
Toronto, Ontario M5S 1A5

## Plans for 1990-91

A programme of talks, receptions and other events is being arranged for the Friends of the Fisher Library. The following outline is subject to confirmation and/or change, and further details will be available shortly.

### Monday 24 September 1990

Opening of an exhibition on Sir Winston Churchill

### Saturday 13 October 1990

U of T Day—visit the special events in the Library!

### Tuesday 23 October 1990

Marie Korey (recently of the Library Company, Philadelphia, and the Free Library, Philadelphia) will speak on "Les Femmes Bibliophiles"

### Wednesday 12 December 1990

Nick and Joy Hunter will give readings of Christmas as described in literature

### January 1991

Dr. Howard Collinson (Assistant Curator, European Department, Royal Ontario Museum) will talk on early woodcuts

### March 1991

Guy Debenham will talk about the making of wood engraved book-plates

### April 1991

Opening of an exhibition on the work of Eric Gill (British stonemason, typographer and wood engraver), and a talk on Gill by Joshua Heller, antiquarian bookseller from Washington D.C. and specialist in private press books and illustrated books



## Notes from the Editor

I am delighted to announce that the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries has recognized the Fisher Library with a special award of merit for its exhibition catalogues. The Exhibition Catalogue Awards Committee was "impressed with your library's distinguished series of exhibition catalogues entered over the past five years. These 23 catalogues, distributed at no cost to the public, show a consistently impressive scholarly achievement with permanent reference value."

Thanks go once again to Veronica Fisher (no family connection!) for the layout of this issue and for seeing it through the press; and to Philip Ower for the photographs.

Please send comments about this issue or suggestions for future issues to the Editor, Alan Horne, Director, Development and Public Affairs, University of Toronto Library, Toronto, Ontario M5S 1A5 (416-978-7644).



## Note from the President

At a recent meeting of the Friends' Steering Committee, it was agreed that the basic membership fee should be raised. It has remained at \$25 since the group was established in 1984, and our programmes have grown considerably since that time. An individual membership will in future cost \$50 per annum, though for \$25 of that amount a tax receipt will be provided; and new membership categories for University of Toronto students and U of T Library staff have been created at a fee of \$25. Other membership categories are unchanged: Supporting Member \$100; Associate \$1000; Patron \$5000.

I hope members will agree that the benefits of membership are worth the increased price. These benefits now include an enlarged programme of meetings and receptions, receipt of the *Halcyon* newsletter twice each year, and (for those who live or work in the Toronto area) a University Library card which offers access and borrowing privileges to the largest library in Canada.

Ron Peters