

**A British Book Collector: Rare Books and Manuscripts in the R.E. Hart Collection, Blackburn Museum and Art Gallery**

**Cynthia Johnston (Editor)**

Review by Mike Millward

Those of us lucky enough to attend the conference at Blackburn College on the Hart Collection in November 2017 (yes, it was that long ago) heard a number of international scholars talk about various aspects of the Hart Collection. It was the culmination of a series of events encouraged by Cynthia Johnston of the School of Advanced Studies, London University, whose interest in the Collection began in 2012 and has since resulted in 2 exhibitions each in London and Blackburn, 3 conferences, publications, and even a dramatic production about Edward Hart's life performed in the semi-derelict and freezing cold Blackburn Cotton Exchange. For me, having known the Hart Collection for my entire working life, all this attention is a source of great pleasure, even if tinged with a little envy.

Most of the chapters in this book were first presented at the Blackburn conference. The length of time that has elapsed since is no doubt partly due to the pandemic, but also, I suspect, to the difficulty of getting a diverse group of academics to produce the goods. The results have been worth waiting for: the list of contributors is impressive, all their offerings make excellent reading and the book is beautifully illustrated.

This article is hardly a review – I wish I had sufficient scholarship to attempt a review of the work of so many distinguished academics. It is merely a brief summary by one who has been closely involved with the Hart Collection for more than fifty years.

After an introduction by Cynthia Johnston, we are treated to David McKitterick's examination of Hart's motives as a collector and benefactor. This is followed by Nigel Morgan's masterly discussion of the English 13th century Blackburn Psalter and its place in English



*The Archangel Michael, from The Flemish Book of Hours by The Master of Edward IV (Hart MS 20884)*



*The Deposition from The Blackburn Missal (Hart MS 20918) with the arms and possibly a portrait of Antonio Pancera (1350?-1431)*

manuscript production. I well remember Prof. Morgan's first visit to the Museum in 1979, and realising we had been contemporaries on the same course as undergraduates. (His subsequent career was rather more successful than mine). Indirectly that visit ultimately led to Cynthia Johnston's involvement with the collection and so to this publication.

Roman scholar Francesca Manzani, while shining fresh light on the influences at work in the production of the spectacular Italian Missal of 1400, shows its early owner to have been Antonio Pancera, correcting a 16th century mistake which was still causing confusion until recently.

Scot McKendrick's thorough reappraisal of the Blackburn Hours, a work of the Master of Edward IV, calls for further research into this remarkable and important manuscript.

An entertaining and absorbing discussion by Eric White demonstrates how much can be learned from three apparently insignificant fragments of the earliest substantial books printed in Mainz, the cradle of European printing.

Cleo Cantone speculates whether the devout Hart's motivation in assembling his small collection of Oriental manuscripts was perhaps to make "a virtual pilgrimage."

Cynthia Johnston presents the results of her research into the extent, methods and background of book collecting by Hart and his contemporaries in Preston, Blackburn and Burnley; collections which are now in our local museums and libraries.

The final chapter is Rebecca Darley's persuasive discussion of the complex value of collections like Hart's, making a strong case for keeping and caring for them where they are: ". . . it is in the national interest to support, protect and cherish the treasures of museums like Blackburn. It is of global relevance that they be known, published and explored." Strong words indeed.

In conclusion, I beg you all to remember that Edward Hart made a most generous, carefully considered, conscious decision to leave his collection to the people of Blackburn. Local government is currently in a parlous financial state, and the pandemic is not helping. There may come a time when local council leaders come to value the collection in a different light, and we must be on our guard against any assault on Hart's intentions.

I will allow Eric White, a librarian from Princeton University, thousands of miles away in the United States, to sum up Edward Hart's contribution to his home town:

"Clearly, Hart's decision to acquire the three fragments under discussion was a wise and foresightful one. Together, they preserve specimens of three of the earliest typefaces used in Europe, and they represent the first three substantial books printed with moveable types in the west. Only five libraries worldwide - in Paris, Berlin, London, Manchester and Princeton - own integral bound copies of all three books, and hardly any other private libraries have ever included fragments from all three . . . . Although nothing can substitute for the study of complete copies of great books, a collection that has made room for such fragments is one that has pursued the most practical and the most noble of instincts."

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*Introduction. A British book collector: rare books and manuscripts in the R.E. Hart Collection, Blackburn Museum and Art Gallery;*

David McKitterick, Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge and emeritus honorary professor of historical bibliography at Cambridge: *The loyalties of a collector;*

Nigel J. Morgan, emeritus honorary professor of the history of art, University of Cambridge: *The Blackburn Psalter and the William of Devon group;*

Francesca Manzari, professor of the history of medieval art at Sapienza University of Rome: *Rome and Florence at the beginning of the fifteenth century: the different models in the illuminations of the Pancera Missal (Blackburn), and a new hypothesis on penflourishing in the Acciaiuoli Missal (Cambridge);*

Scot McKendrick, head of Western heritage collections at the British Library: *Contextualising the art and innovations of the Master of Edward IV in the Blackburn Hours;*

Eric Marshall White, Scheide Librarian and assistant university librarian for special collections, rare books and manuscripts at Princeton University Library: *Fragments of early Mainz printing in the R.E. Hart Collection;*

Cleo Cantone, independent researcher of Islamic art history: *Journey in the mind's eye: the virtue and value of virtual pilgrimage;*

Cynthia Johnston, lecturer in the history of the book and communication at the Institute of English Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London: *Book collecting in context: Hart and his contemporaries;*

Rebecca Darley, senior lecturer in medieval history, Birkbeck, University of London: *The value of the past: heritage between local, global and national.*

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