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London pride in context: Treasures and the library treasures volume in Britain today

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Abstract

The treasures volume, showcasing rare, beautiful, or significant items, is proliferating in 21st century Britain. This is despite the alternative of the World Wide Web to provide a cheaper, quicker, easier way for libraries to publicize their choicest holdings. But what is the treasures volume really doing, and how indicative are its contents of our most valuable items? This article is based upon the author's experience of selecting 60 items for the 2012 treasures volume, *Senate House Library, University of London*. It describes the rationale behind the choices and contextualizes within the genre in the United Kingdom more widely, looking at other treasures volumes and at web displays, to generalize about libraries' presentations of themselves. It notes emphasis on unique, distinctive, and relevant items and on institutional identity, and interprets the modern treasures volume as a political document to justify libraries' existence by highlighting their distinguishing features.

Keywords

library treasures, treasures volumes, rare books, Britain

Introduction

In 'Library Brought to Book' (Brown 2010a), Iain Brown reflects upon the choice of just 162 highlights for the National Library of Scotland's treasures volume *Rax Me That Buik* (Brown 2010b). The dilemma will be familiar to all editors of the burgeoning genre of library treasures volumes. While the broad principles of selection can normally be derived from the content, the precise reasoning is less apparent. What in the 21st century defines a library treasure? The modern treasures volume is not just a showcase for the holding library, but a financial venture; how does that influence selection? How much of a dichotomy is there between what we feature in treasures volumes as permanent printed markers of what we value and what we mount on our websites, or between the contents of treasures volumes and the items we preserve with the greatest care as our most precious items?

This article is based upon the author's experience of selecting 60 books and manuscripts, with 60 contributors, for the treasures volume *Senate House Library, University of London* (Pressler and Attar 2012). It describes the rationale behind the choices

and contextualizes within the genre in the United Kingdom more widely to generalize about how libraries currently choose to present themselves.

Perceptions of treasures

Institutions can overwork the noun 'treasure' to equate with 'feature' or 'highlight', as in 'treasure of the week/month' (offered by several libraries and archives), or in such declarations as: "Treasures of the Ruskin Library focuses on some of the most interesting, as well as representative items in the collection" (Ruskin Library 2006), whereby 'interesting' and 'representative' replace 'valuable'. Notionally, a 'treasure' remains, subjectively, anything valued and preserved as precious (*Oxford English Dictionary*, meaning 2), with the nature of the judge, whether an

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individual or wider society, left open, and much depending on collection context. “A treasure, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder”, Pat Donlon noted in her preface to *Treasures from the National Library of Ireland* (Kissane 1994, vii), and: “...what about all those things that our mothers dubbed ‘rubbish’ and swept quickly into bins? It is truly a case of one man’s dust being another’s treasure” (Kissane 1994, viii). Fifteen years later Oxford’s Bodleian Library underlined this openness by introducing a debate entitled ‘What is a treasure?’ to accompany a treasures exhibition (Bodleian Library, 2011).

Our treasures must perforce depend on our holdings. Our ‘special’ books are therefore to a large extent those which private collectors of the past have valued and preserved, and which have subsequently entered libraries through the antiquarian trade or by donation. Thus institutions perpetuate earlier personal values, as suggested by the fact that C.H. Hartshorne’s title *The Book Rarities in the University of Cambridge* echoes the title of Thomas Dibdin’s 1811 catalogue of Earl Spencer’s private library (some 90 years later to become institutional in Manchester), *Book Rarities... Chiefly in the Collection of the Right Honourable George John Earl Spencer*.

These values have remained constant. Identifying private collecting values of the late 19th century, Tony West (2001:38) specified early Bibles, *editiones principes* of classics, early Italian literature, and Caxtons and other early English literature. These resemble both the values summarized by Thomas Dibdin in 1809 and those noted by the bookseller John Carter in 1970: Dibdin listed large paper copies (equated with limited editions), illustrated (i.e. extra-illustrated) copies, unique copies, copies printed upon vellum, first editions (and specifically Shakespeare’s First Folio and Greek and Latin classics), true editions (i.e. editions with variants), unopened copies, and to an extent black letter, and further noted books printed by Caxton and Wynkyn de Worde and Aldines (Dibdin 2007:56–74), while Carter wrote: “The collecting of early printed books, fine bindings and the masterpieces of typography and illustration of all periods continued strongly during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, *as it continues today*” (Carter 1970:21; my italics). In this 180-year time-span rarity, beauty, and cultural significance recur: three features picked out again in an institutional context in a German library treasures volume of 1989, in answer to the question ‘Was ist kostbar?’ (‘What is precious?’ Gattermann 1989:7). Speaking for institutions in 1882, the librarian Henry Bradshaw further identified local antiquities as treasures (Thornton 1966:133), adding a dimension of geographical identity.

The exhibition ‘Printing and the Mind of Man’ (PMM) held at the British Museum and at Earls Court London in 1963 and “arranged to illustrate the history of western civilization and the means of the multiplication of literary texts since the XV century” (Printing and the Mind of Man 1963:2), helped to define a canon of treasures in terms of intellectually transforming works, an approach reinforced popularly by Melvyn Bragg’s more selective *Twelve Books that Changed the World* (Bragg 2006). The obvious culturally transformative or otherwise noteworthy works, such as Newton’s *Principia*, the 1482 *editio princeps* of Euclid, the Nuremberg Chronicle, Shakespeare’s First Folio, the 1611 King James Bible, and the first edition of Copernicus’s *De revolutionibus*, are often not beautiful, and are not in fact rare: recent censuses record 232 known copies of the First Folio (Rasmussen and West 2012), 174 of the King James Bible (Brake and Hellstern 2011),¹ and 227 of Copernicus (Gingerich 2002), while the Incunabula Short Title Catalogue (ISTC) lists 324 copies of the 1482 Euclid and some 1,160 of the Nuremberg Chronicle, excluding fragments. Advancing in time, an ongoing census (Darwin Online 2009) had in 2009 located 275 copies of Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of the Species* (1859), in both ‘Printing and the Mind of Man’ and Bragg. A single element – rare, beautiful, or significant – may suffice to label an item a ‘treasure’.

The treasures volume: an overview

The volume *Senate House Library, University of London* does not exist in a vacuum. David McKitterick recently traced the concept of the library treasures volume, excluding glossy coffee-table associations, back at least to S.W. Kershaw’s *Art Treasures of Lambeth Library* (1873) (McKitterick 2013: 25), and if one excludes illustrations one might go back still further, to C.H. Hartshorne’s *The Book Rarities in the University of Cambridge* (1829). Various types of treasures volumes appeared in the 20th century: the collection-based volume such as that for Cambridge University Library, examining groups of books rather than single items (Fox 1998); exhibition catalogues with a few illustrations, mostly black and white, such as Elspeth Yeo and John Morris’s *Treasures of the National Library of Scotland* (1979) and Paul Quarrie’s *Treasures of Eton College Library* (1990); and books very like the 21st century treasures volume, such as *Wertvolle Handschriften und Einbände aus der ehemaligen Oettingen-Wallersteinschen Bibliothek* (Frankenberger and Rupp 1987) and *Kostbarkeiten aus der Universitätsbibliothek Düsseldorf* (Gattermann 1989). Leading up to the modern treasures volume in

Britain, with its emphasis on visual attractiveness, are such volumes as *The Brotherton Collection* (Brotherton Library 1986), albeit with black-and-white illustrations, and David Rogers's *The Bodleian Library and its Treasures* (1991), albeit with the treasures woven into a consecutive narrative.

What marks the 21st century is not the published record of treasures as such, but the proliferation of treasures volumes at a time when, as never before, the World Wide Web provides a cheap and easy alternative option for promotion, and the publication in rapid succession of lavish colour-illustration-driven volumes for libraries of various types and sizes. Volumes for the Wellcome Library for the History of Medicine and Durham University Library (Gameson) appeared in 2007. There followed the British Library in 2008 (Howard); St Andrews University Library (Reid 2010), the National Library of Scotland (Brown 2010b) and Lambeth Palace Library (Palmer and Brown) in 2010; the City of London, with particular focus on archives (Pearson 2011) and Aberdeen University Library (Beavan, Davidson and Stevenson) in 2011; Eton College Library (restricted to items acquired since 1965) in 2012 (Meredith 2012); and the library of a stately home in the possession of the National Trust, Anglesey Abbey, in 2013 (Purcell, Hale and Pearson). The trend is continuing, with volumes in preparation, for example, for Merton College in Oxford and St John's College in Cambridge, Dr Williams's Library in London (a research library for English Protestant nonconformity), Edinburgh University Library, the John Rylands Library at the University of Manchester, and (featuring exclusively incunabula) Cambridge University Library. It is pronounced enough for Alison Cullingford, in *The Special Collections Handbook*, to have mentioned independent treasures volumes as a marketing method (Cullingford 2011:128), whereas eight years earlier Daniel Traister, discussing the promotion of special collections in the United States, referred to treasures volumes purely as exhibition catalogues (Traister 2003:90). The fashion appears to be primarily British and Irish, although one volume comes from as far away as New Zealand (Jones and Matthews 2011). Reviewing the 2007 treasures volume for Durham University Library, David Pearson questioned the purpose and audience of such volumes in an Internet era, concluding that they raise the profile and make a statement about the worth of an institution (Pearson 2009:138); and in 2013 Karen Attar reflected on the benefits for Senate House Library of its treasures volume (considerations overlapping, although not identical, with purpose: Attar 2013). The items chosen may reveal particular agendas, as explored below.

Unique and distinctive

A strong desire when selecting items for the Senate House Library treasures volume was individuality; to avoid substantially duplicating other libraries' treasures volumes or holdings and thereby inviting invidious comparison. This wish to emphasize unique and distinctive items led to the selection of a high proportion of manuscripts and archives (20 items, one-third of the whole). Manuscripts ranged from obviously significant items, such as a Piers Plowman manuscript from about 1400 and an unfinished holograph canto of Byron's *Don Juan*, to the homely: a letter to ghost-hunter Harry Price from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, on the basis that Doyle is a household name; a letter from classical historian and London Vice-Chancellor George Grote's fiancée Harriet about her engagement, for romantic appeal. The drive for distinctiveness also led to a high proportion of incunabula (five of Senate House Library's 134 incunabula, accounting for 8.3 percent of the volume), because most incunabula are rare as editions, and there is considerable scope for copy-specific variation. One of the five chosen, Granollachs's *Lunarium ab anno 1491 ad annum 1550* (ISTC ig00340700), was the only complete copy known, while the others had copy-specific interest, ranging from a fine penwork initial to contemporary annotations or binding.

Some items selected were rare at the time of printing. The second issue of John Sibthorp's *Flora Graeca* appeared in 40 copies only, and Franz Michael Regenfuss's *Auserlesene Schnecken* (1758) is one of a small number of copies to have been printed for King Frederick V of Denmark and Norway to present to others, as shown by the fact that the frontispiece portrait is red, not blue. These were sumptuous publications. Two other books were rare because their form was intended to be temporary: Emilie Bertrin's *Secretair der Liebe, oder Galante Hieroglyphen* (1808), with designs meant to be cut out for use as valentines, and the original parts of the Mayhew brothers' *The Greatest Plague in Life, or, The Adventures of a Lady in Search of a Good Servant* (1847), intended ultimately to be bound. Other books chosen for rarity were common when printed and became rare because they were ephemeral, or because they were not the kind of material to be valued by the academic libraries that are the major preservers of early books. This lent a demotic flavour to the volume, with school textbooks from the 18th and 19th centuries, a badly printed early 19th century chapbook, broadsides, a 17th century duodecimo shorthand manual, what looked like a very average Victorian children's book, and 17th century pamphlets. The most common of

these items, Thomas Peedle and Thomas Cozbie's *Falacie of the Great Water-Drinker Discovered* (1650) is recorded on ESTC in five copies (three in Great Britain and two in the United States of America); several are unique.

Wanting rarity also meant a certain focus on translations, because translations into languages other than English are not the standard fare of libraries in English-language countries. The third Italian translation of Fénelon's *Aventures de Télémaque* (the only recorded copy in any English-speaking country) came into this category, as did the French translation of George Grote's acclaimed *History of Greece*. Included in the drive for rarity was the choice of items distinguished by copy-specific features: *Theatrum Geographiae Veteris, Duobus Tomis Distinctum* by Petrus Bertius (1618–19), with hand-coloured maps and a royal Stuart binding; Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* annotated by Thomas Carlyle; Walter de la Mare's *Peacock Pie* marked up by its author for a new edition.

The publishing context

To an extent the choice was influenced by what had already been given prominence elsewhere, excepting censuses on account of their specialized audiences. Senate House Library's copy of the first edition of Copernicus's *De revolutionibus* (1543) would have been an obvious 'treasures' candidate for the annotations of its immediate former owner, the mathematician Augustus De Morgan (1806–1871), as explained by De Morgan on the title page: "Aug. 4, 1864. I have this day entered all the corrections required by the Congregation of the Index (1620) so that any Roman Xtian may read the book with a good conscience". Yet precisely for that reason it featured in David Pearson's *Books as History* (Pearson 2008:131), intended for the general reader who might conceivably also read the treasures volume, and was therefore excluded; the same applies to Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*, inscribed to his friend Aubrey Beardsley as "the only artist, who, besides myself, knows what the dance of the seven veils is, and can see that invisible dance" (Pearson 2008:137).

Especially relevantly, the volume *Senate House Library, University of London* appeared just a few months after a booklet *Director's Choice* (Pressler 2012), featuring 30 books and manuscripts at Senate House Library. The remit of the two publications differed: *Director's Choice* was intended as a personal selection of items that appealed, with quirkiness as its major criterion. Yet several items which might otherwise have appeared in *Senate House Library*,

University of London had already been chosen for *Director's Choice*: William Caxton's translation and printing of Jacobus de Cessolis's *Game of Chess* ([1483]), popular for its woodcuts and therefore often requested for display purposes; a copy of Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* (1872) inscribed by Marx to fellow-emigré Peter Imandt; the first edition of Terry Pratchett's *The Carpet People*, one of fewer than six copies in which Pratchett hand-coloured and signed the full-page illustrations. Repetition between the two was eschewed repetition between books in case it led to the supposition that the Library had nothing else worth highlighting.

Institutional identity

Several items were selected for their particular significance for Senate House Library as a corporate body or for the University of London more widely, to convey a sense of institutional identity (cf. Bradshaw). Items from the University Archive in particular fell into this category: the University's first charter, from 1836; an early degree certificate for a woman, because the University of London was the first in England to grant women full degrees; a photograph album capturing the construction of the Senate House in Bloomsbury, because the central University's move from obscurity in South Kensington to a contentious and iconic building in Bloomsbury was a milestone in its history; an early examination register, because the University of London was unusual in functioning for the first 70-odd years of its existence purely as an examining body, and because it pioneered long-distance degrees. A German National Socialist register of British firms and individuals of interest for when it had conquered Britain also entered the treasures volume on the basis of institutional identity, as a gift after the Second World War from the Ministry of Information, which had co-existed with the Library in Senate House during the war. Printed books reinforced the emphasis on identity: a landmark of early music printing as part of a small collection given in connection with the University's decision to establish a music faculty; the Gregynog Aesop above any other attractive private press book (such as an obviously valuable Kelmscott Press publication) because a set of specially bound Gregynog Press books had been donated by Professor Sir David Hughes Parry, a University Vice-Chancellor and the founder and Director of its Institute of Advanced Legal Studies.

One item contributed to the Library's sense of its purpose within the University. *Ihesus. The Floure of the Commaundementes of God*, an exposition of the Ten Commandments printed by Wynkyn de Worde in 1521, is a defective copy. The University was,

however, eager to purchase it in 1951 for the sake of the printer, at the time holding no other work by any of England's first three major printers (William Caxton, Richard Pynson and Wynkyn de Worde). Archival documentation about the relationship between the University Library and the libraries of the University's colleges made clear that the purchase of early printed books should distinguish the University Library from the college libraries.

Some items appeared in the treasures volume for their position within the named special collections which constitute a significant part of Senate House Library's special collections overall. Sir Edwin Durning-Lawrence's copy of Shakespeare's *Second Folio* (STC 22274b) is less fine than the two issues of the *Second Folio* which later entered Senate House Library as part of Sir Louis Sterling's collection (STC 22274 and 22274a), and was in contemporary financial terms less valuable than Durning-Lawrence's copies of the other early *Folios*; but Durning-Lawrence, a prominent Baconian, valued it for what he argued was its proof that Sir Francis Bacon wrote the plays of Shakespeare. As such it is a cornerstone of Senate House Library's earliest literary special collection. Dionysius Lardner's *Railway Economy* (1850) is intrinsically neither rare nor financially valuable: a search on AbeBooks on 28 January 2014 yielded a copy for GBP5.87. But one of the Senate House Library copies contains an inscription by the economist Herbert Somerton Foxwell (1849–1936) explaining how he bought the volume, at the suggestion of fellow-economist William Stanley Jevons, and stating: "This purchase was the first step in the formation of my economic collection" – the alleged foundation of an internationally renowned collection which transformed the University Library upon its receipt in 1903 and remains the Library's largest and most important special collection.

Finally, it was important to represent each major named special collection and donation, to exemplify the increase and diversity of 'treasures'. Politically, it was particularly desired where possible to incorporate items from recent benefactions to indicate appreciation to living donors.

Pragmatics

Pragmatic considerations stamped choice in several ways. Each treasure needed to inspire interesting and readable text. This consideration joined lack of rarity to militate against the choice of 'Printing and the Mind of Man' books, as to say anything new and arresting about them is difficult unless copy-specific features allow discussion from a fresh angle.

Matching contributors and books was another consideration: the selection could only feature books about which somebody appropriate was prepared to write. The initial list of treasures included a rare 44-page quarto trigonometrical pamphlet, *Canon sinuum ad decempedam accomodatus, pro trigonometria geodaetarum* (Würzburg, 1625), enhanced by a note by De Morgan. But expecting an academic to read an unknown Latin work in order to write 400 words for a publication which would not benefit the contributor was unreasonable, and the item had to be discarded from the list. It was further wished to include Josiah Tucker's *The Elements of Commerce* (Bristol, 1755), although the ESTC records seven copies, because University of London Library Committee minutes record an amusing story of a reader objecting when permission to borrow the book was withheld; however, approaches to academics to write about the book were unsuccessful, and a scarce late-Victorian periodical was substituted. Occasionally the choice of a contributor preceded that of objects, and items had to be found to match individuals' interests.

Furthermore, choice depends on knowledge of library collections, gleaned from staff awareness and from documentation. At the University of London, Library Committee minutes recorded the acquisition of collections. Until about 1940 the records included full descriptions of collections, which frequently highlighted the most important items within them; in later years, records were merely brief acknowledgements. Thus items from collections acquired in the first half of the 20th century were easier to access than later ones. Rarity could be, and in the final instance was, established on an item-by-item basis by looking up records on union catalogues, especially COPAC. But it was most easily ascertained by running reports on the library management system to establish what catalogue records had not been derived from external databases, and this swayed the pool of candidates towards books which had been catalogued online. Serendipity in the form of a user query had pointed us several years earlier to the rarity of one of the treasures, Claude Hollyband's *Italian Schoole-Maister* of 1597, the Senate House Library copy of which preserves gathering D in an early, 'scurrilous' state. Another form of serendipity was responsible for the inclusion of an exposition of the Decalogue attributed to Sebastian de Granadilla (1607). It earned its place for apparent uniqueness and as the sole representative of the Eliot-Phelips Collection, a collection of early Spanish works described when it entered public ownership as unrivalled outside Spain (Anonymous 1928:13). Only some months after the publication of the treasures volume, when

Table 1. Summary of contents of some British treasures volumes.

	Bodleian	Durham	British Library	St Andrews	NLS	Lambeth Palace	SHL
% of manuscript / archival / artefactual material	57.5	52	65	62	49	67	33
% of unique items / one of 2 known copies (printed items)	28.5	12.5	9.5	5	0	10	27
% with stated copy-specific relevance	53.5	46	7	47	13	65	(20)

seeking an early cookery book to show a distinguished visitor who enjoyed cookery, was the first recipe book printed in Catalan, Roberto de Nola's *Libro de cozina* (Toledo, 1525) found to be in the same collection. It was only a little less rare than the Granadilla (copies at Harvard and Spain's Biblioteca Nacional) and was more attractive, with a modern but decorative and relevant binding: a significant factor, given that a 21st century treasures volume is a coffee-table volume relying on skilful layout, and in turn on illustration. Had the distinguished visitor come a year earlier, de Nola, not Granadilla, would have featured in the treasures volume.

For appeal value, choice was based partly on what visitors and students were known to like: Victorian part-publication, with its advertisements for such unrelated goods as ironware and wigs; 15th century woodcuts. Research value and hence library relevance also played a role. The book acknowledged the new value placed through recent academic interest in the history of reading on books containing any kind of annotation or clear provenance, renowned or not, most obviously by including a 19th century Bible which, albeit very ordinary as printed, was personalized by a devout reader's copious annotations.

The broader context

Driving forces appear to differ to an extent between treasures volumes. That for Eton College celebrates the continuation of valuable acquisitions, apparently with regard to actual and potential donors, whereas the volume for Anglesey Abbey gives the impression of having been written to persuade its owner, the National Trust, that the Trust's libraries are an asset rather than a mere adjunct to furniture, pictures, and fine gardens. The volumes for the National Library of Scotland and the London Guildhall have a clear eye to the tourist industry and use books and archives to illustrate Scottishness and the history of London respectively; the former of these may be contrasted with Yeo and Morris (1979), which, while also leaning towards books important for the history and culture of Scotland, was designed to show the riches of the National Library of Scotland more widely. The

British Library (financed directly by the taxpayer) presumably wished to popularize the library and demonstrate general value in its volume, which stands out for having been written by a journalist, not a curator, as was a later book describing the British Library's holdings in chapter form (Leapman 2012).

The factors which influenced Senate House Library's choice are present in the other British 21st century treasures volumes. Most comparable with the Senate House Library volume as *catalogues raisonnés* of single works or groups of works across entire institutional library holdings are the volumes for the Universities of Durham and St Andrews (both 50 items), the British Library (120 items), the National Library of Scotland (162 items)² and Lambeth Palace (60 items).

Table 1 summarizes the contents of treasures volumes comparable with that for Senate House Library. It includes Rogers's volume on the Bodleian Library (66 items) to expand the sample. High as the proportion of manuscript and archive material seemed to be for the Senate House Library volume in terms of its holdings, at 33 percent of the total it was low compared with other libraries, where such material ranged from 49 percent of the total selection (79 items, including photographs) for the National Library of Scotland to 62 percent of the total selection (31 items) for St Andrews. Among the printed items, uniqueness or extreme rarity of the item irrespective of copy-specific features was a stated consideration in all volumes except that for the National Library of Scotland, accounting for between 5 (St Andrews) and 28.5 percent (the Bodleian Library) of any given volume (cf. 27 percent of the Senate House Library volume); the figures rise if one recalculates to include items stated as 'rare' without further precision, or to include slightly less rare items (for example, one of three copies known (no. 28 of the St Andrews selection); one of 12 copies printed (Anna Atkins's *British Algae*; no. 13 of the British Library selection). Adding manuscript/archival and printed items together for rarity yields percentages of between 49 percent for the National Library of Scotland and 86 percent for the Bodleian Library, with a mean of 67 percent (St Andrews) and an average of 68 percent.

To determine the amount of copy-specific relevance bestowed by provenance, extra-illustration, annotations or bindings can be surprisingly difficult. In Senate House Library's case, provenance contributed to most choices, but the significance of that provenance can be subjective. The association value of a presentation copy of a book from Charles Lamb to Robert Southey, or a book owned by an English monarch, is clear; but how much do manuscript notes by Herbert Somerton Foxwell or even Augustus de Morgan contribute to value that would be meaningful outside the institution housing their libraries? In a collection with one or more major bases, such as Bishop Cosin's books at Durham, John Selden's in the Bodleian Library, and the Royal Library within the British Library, how much significance do those provenances bestow in the particular context of a treasures volume? To the extent that copy-specific relevance was emphasized in descriptions, it ranged from three of the 42 printed items (7 percent) for the British Library to 13 of the 20 printed items (65 percent) for Lambeth Palace. There was a clear distinction between the emphasis given to copy-specific features by the two national libraries with treasures books (7 percent and 13 percent) and the others, with a jump from the National Library of Scotland's 13 percent to the University of Durham's 46 percent.

The Scottishness pervading *Rax Me That Buik* has already been mentioned. All libraries except Lambeth Palace (the smallest, most focussed collection) selected items which contributed to their particular institutional or local identity. The British Library's identity emerged mainly through demonstration of the sheer range of holdings, from ancient manuscripts to a philatelic stamp, but was also apparent from the choice of an admissions register including Karl Marx. The Bodleian Library's choice included its 1604 benefaction register, the first book received under its 1610 deposit agreement with the Stationers' Company, and a rare cancel leaf of its 1620 printed catalogue. St Andrews featured a matrix of an early 15th century university seal and library receipt books and borrowing registers; Durham's, 'The Undergraduate', a portfolio of sketches by a Durham graduate. The sense of identity extended beyond the institution to local authorship, provenance, or relevance for the local region, such as a manuscript of Thomas Wright's *New Theory of the Earth* because he was a Durham man; the first large-scale map of County Durham; Oxford fly-sheets from Oxford antiquary Anthony Wood's library; and, for St Andrews, photographs of several Scottish subjects, such as a gas mask fitting at St Andrews in 1939. The desire to foster a sense of identity is not exclusively British: straying

a little further, *Treasures from the National Library of Ireland* has a strong Irish flavour, including for example Gaelic manuscripts, prints and drawings of Irish subjects, Irish newspapers, proclamations and ballads of Irish interest, photographs by Irish photographers or with Irish themes, and Ireland's first telephone directory (Kissane 1994).

These Irish examples indicate not merely Irishness, but the same demotic or ephemeral element that is present in the Senate House Library volume with its choice of school textbooks and broadsides. Selection of ephemera characterizes primarily the treasures volumes for the national libraries, with several newspapers, a handbill, a poster, and children's books in the British Library, and with a poster, a manuscript trade card, diplomas, and a peep-show among other items in the National Library of Scotland.

The volumes for Lambeth Palace and the British Library both include the Gutenberg Bible (Palmer and Brown 2010:64; Howard 2008:20), and Durham includes an unexceptional copy of the Nuremberg Chronicle (Gameson 2007:84). Generally, however, culturally iconic items must earn their place in treasures volumes for additional copy-specific reasons, such as copies of the Nuremberg Chronicle owned by Henry VIII at Lambeth Palace (Palmer and Brown 2010:82) and by Robert Fabyan, a 15th century London alderman and chronicler who annotated his copy, at the London Guildhall (Pearson 2011:28). The British Library is an exception, including among the printed items Dante's *Inferno*, Johnson's Dictionary, the Kelmscott Chaucer, and Shakespeare's First Folio – possibly reflecting the selecting journalist's predilection for familiarity and sense for public taste.

Beyond the treasures volume: Internet perceptions

As an alternative means of promotion, web displays are an obvious comparator with treasures volumes. Some criteria remain constant across media. As initial presentation on the World Wide Web is likely to be by a picture gallery; visual impact is an evident if unstated prerequisite in the web context as it is for modern treasures volumes. Rarity continues to be emphasized, such that in deliberately limited selections of treasures, the British Library (no date), the Bodleian Library (2011) and Leeds University Library (2014), the three major British libraries found with 'treasures galleries', all have a high proportion of manuscripts. Leeds, in the web context, defines treasures by "their value, rarity or distinctiveness", and the British Library ([2013]) selected for smartphone and tablet apps "over 100 unique or rare items".

The emphasis on culturally significant landmarks redolent of ‘Printing and the Mind of Man’ is far more pronounced on the Internet than in print. Thus the British Library (2014) advertises its display of treasures in the John Ritblatt Gallery with the words: “Discover some of the world’s most exciting and significant books” and Manchester Central Library highlights, alongside early printing, fine, illustrated books and private press books in the nature of Dibdin, “early copies of ground-breaking books in science, medicine, politics and philosophy” and “important books on natural history” (Manchester City Council 2014). Small as they are, treasures displays on the websites of the British Library, the Bodleian Library and the University of Leeds are quite similar in their choice of printed books. The three printed items chosen by the British Library are the Gutenberg Bible, Tyndale’s New Testament, and Shakespeare’s First Folio, all also in its treasures book. Leeds similarly features a First Folio and the Bodleian Library the Gutenberg Bible, both absent from the respective treasures volumes. Both Leeds and Oxford select a Caxton. Other works are landmarks in their areas: for Leeds, Newton’s *Principia* and Vesalius; for Oxford, Tycho Brahe, Hooke’s *Micrographia*, Audubon’s *Birds of America* and Sibthorp’s *Flora Graeca*. (Leeds also chose a unique German pamphlet from 1520.) A smaller library, that of Christ’s College Cambridge, displays 27 items, of which 13, nearly half, are manuscripts. Of its 14 printed items, 10 are clearly landmarks, such as the 1482 Euclid, the Nuremberg Chronicle, the Erasmus New Testament, the first edition of Copernicus, and Darwin’s *Origin of the Species* (Christ’s College Cambridge 2013). While the body of available evidence is too small to be definitive, a pattern begins to emerge that the emphasis with which we present ourselves differs according to the medium of presentation.

Conclusion

The modern treasures volume functions within research and technological trends. As digitization and e-publications widen availability, libraries justify their positions and status by their distinguishing features, and special collections are seen to be distinguishing features *par excellence*. The point has been so widely made (if also challenged) as to be described in the United States as “conventional wisdom” (Waters 2009, 3), and is reflected in the United Kingdom by a “unique and distinctive” strategic strand of the activity of Research Libraries UK (2014:4, for example). Rare books and manuscripts, items with post-production copy-specific features which make

for further rarity, and items instilling or reinforcing corporate identity, are a natural part of ‘unique and distinctive’. By highlighting these, treasures volumes provide evidence for such justification.

Political concern for differential features dovetails neatly with value placed on items by research interest, as the history of reading flourishes as an academic discipline, and ‘book history’, taking into account the history of books after they leave the printer, has largely supplanted ‘historical bibliography’. The addition of research value to distinctiveness is important in an environment in which special collections must be aligned with institutional missions and priorities, as noted in a survey of special collection in the British Isles (Dooley et al. 2013:5; see also Cullingford 2014). Here, too, at least in academic contexts, treasures volumes provide documentation to shore up the justification for existence. What we regard as precious becomes what ensures our survival, without always being financially valuable (the ephemera).

In some ways the modern treasures volume remains a conservative product. The Georgian appreciation of beauty is relevant for the new coffee-table context, as it is for the World Wide Web, while the rarity which marked early 19th century taste maps easily on to ‘unique and distinctive’. But ultimately the financially valuable, beautiful and intellectually significant treasures displayed on the transient World Wide Web are more conservative. These latter embody (and, with the dialogue implicit in social media, may increasingly be moulded by) a public sense of the nature of a treasure, and probably reflect the contents of our safes and disaster plans. Modern treasures volumes strike a new line in reflecting academic and professional values and attempting to influence the reader’s values in line with what we possess. These standalone publications try to show not just what we have, but who we are and why we matter to our stakeholders. As unchangeable text, they codify treasures. Yet if we are judged as to what we consider our library treasures to be on the basis of treasures volumes, the evidence will be misleading. The agenda, some of the practical reasons behind the choice of items featured in treasures volumes, and the necessary dictates of the genre to tell a story and show a picture, sway choice too greatly for them to be reliable indicators. Ultimately our treasures volumes, like the items they feature, will become historical artefacts.³

Notes

- 1 A conservative figure, as Brake’s book excludes numerous copies recorded on ESTC (<http://estc.bl.uk>).

- 2 There are 165 entries, but one item appears twice and one three times.
- 3 I should like to thank David McKitterick, Mike Mertens and David Pearson for reading and commenting on a draft of this article. All remaining deficiencies are my own.

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