

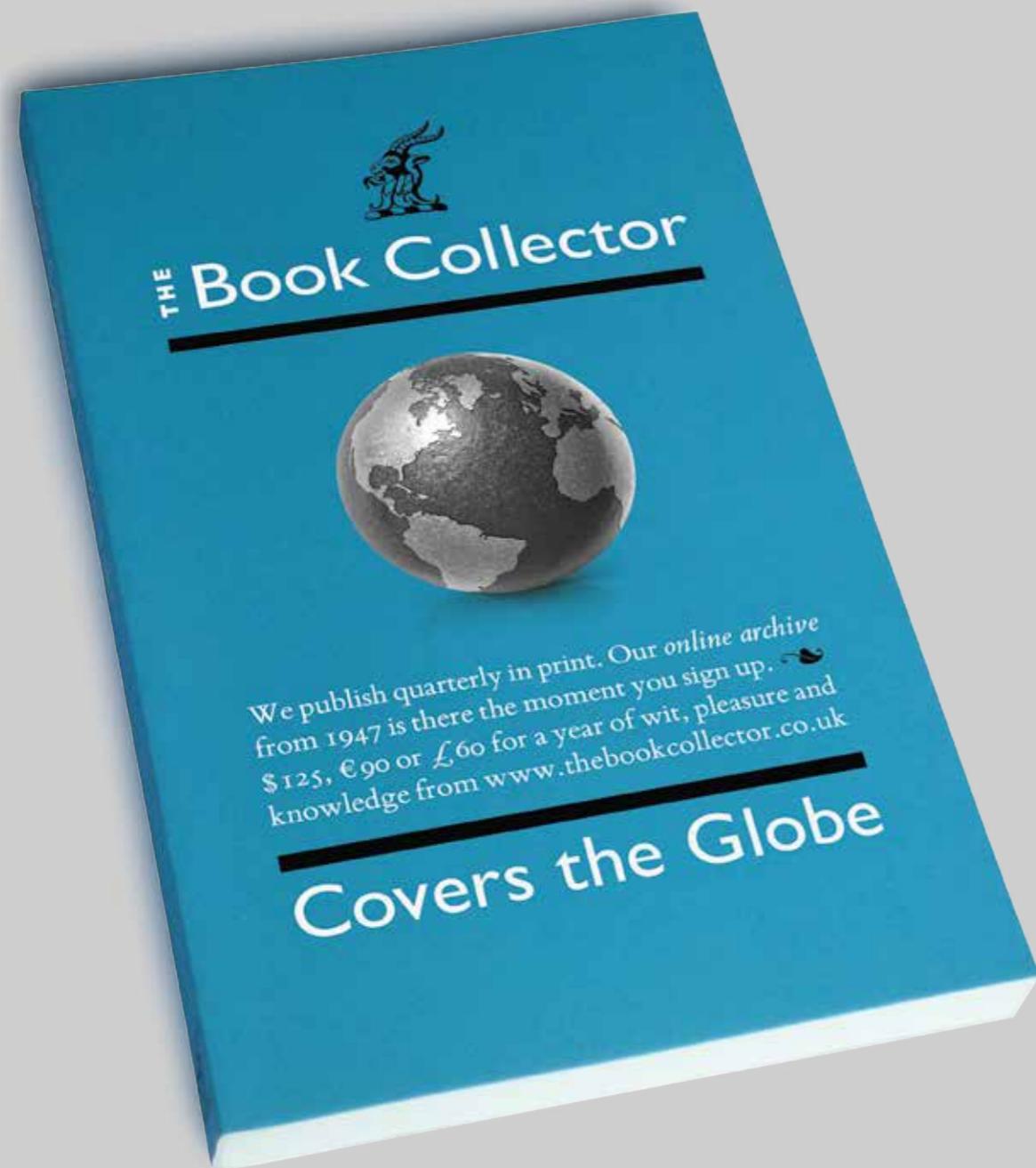
FNL

Friends of the National Libraries

Friends of the  
National Libraries:  
A Short History

By Max Egremont

Saving the nation's  
written and  
printed heritage



# Friends of the National Libraries: A Short History

By Max Egremont

This history first appeared in a special edition of *The Book Collector* in Summer 2011, FNL's eightieth year. The Trustees of Friends of the National Libraries are grateful to the publisher of *The Book Collector* for permission to reissue the article in its present, slightly amended, form.



HRH The Prince of Wales. © Hugo Burnand.



CLARENCE HOUSE

I was enormously touched to be asked to become Patron of the Friends of the National Libraries, whose work over the years has succeeded in saving so much of our priceless heritage for the nation.

It is a testament to the foresight of the Friends' founders that they should have responded with such vision and such energy to the need to ensure that the nation's literary treasures are preserved for future generations. Today, that need is as great – if not greater – than ever.

In terms of the written word, this country is fortunate to have an incomparable history. It is fortunate too, to have such Friends to ensure that great literature stays in the land in which it was created, and the great achievements of the past can continue to enrich our culture in years to come.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Charles", with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

Friends of the National Libraries has helped save the nation's written and printed history since 1931. FNL awards grants to national, regional and specialist collecting institutions enabling them to acquire rare books, manuscripts, archives and collections that might otherwise be lost to the public domain.

The Friends of the National Libraries began as a response to an emergency. On March 21 1931, the *Times* published a letter signed by a group of the great and the good, headed by the name of Lord D'Abernon, the chairman of the Royal Commission on National Museums and Galleries. The message was that there was a need for an organisation similar to the National Art Collections Fund (now called the Art Fund) but devoted to rare books and manuscripts. The reason for this was that sales of rare books and manuscripts from Britain to institutions and to individuals abroad had become a flood. The name suggested for this body was the Friends of the National Libraries.

On April 21, an inaugural meeting of this new society was held in the rooms of the British Academy in Burlington Gardens, under the chairmanship of the Judge of Appeal Lord Macmillan. A letter of support came from the Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, who wished that he could have been present, having proposed such a society himself several years ago. To Baldwin, "in these days of extreme financial difficulty there is a grave risk that the country may suffer in spiritual things as it is suffering in material things"; this included the loss to the nation of books and manuscripts that were of historical and aesthetic importance.

That day some two hundred people elected the first officers of the Friends of the National Libraries: as Chairman Sir Frederic Kenyon, as Honorary Treasurer Lord Riddell and as Honorary Secretary H.D. Ziman. Early supporters included scholars and librarians, representatives of learned societies and book-lovers such as the Master of the Rolls, George Bernard Shaw and the ex-King of Portugal. The Friends of the National Libraries came from both sides of the Atlantic; among the first benefactors was the American J. Pierpont Morgan.

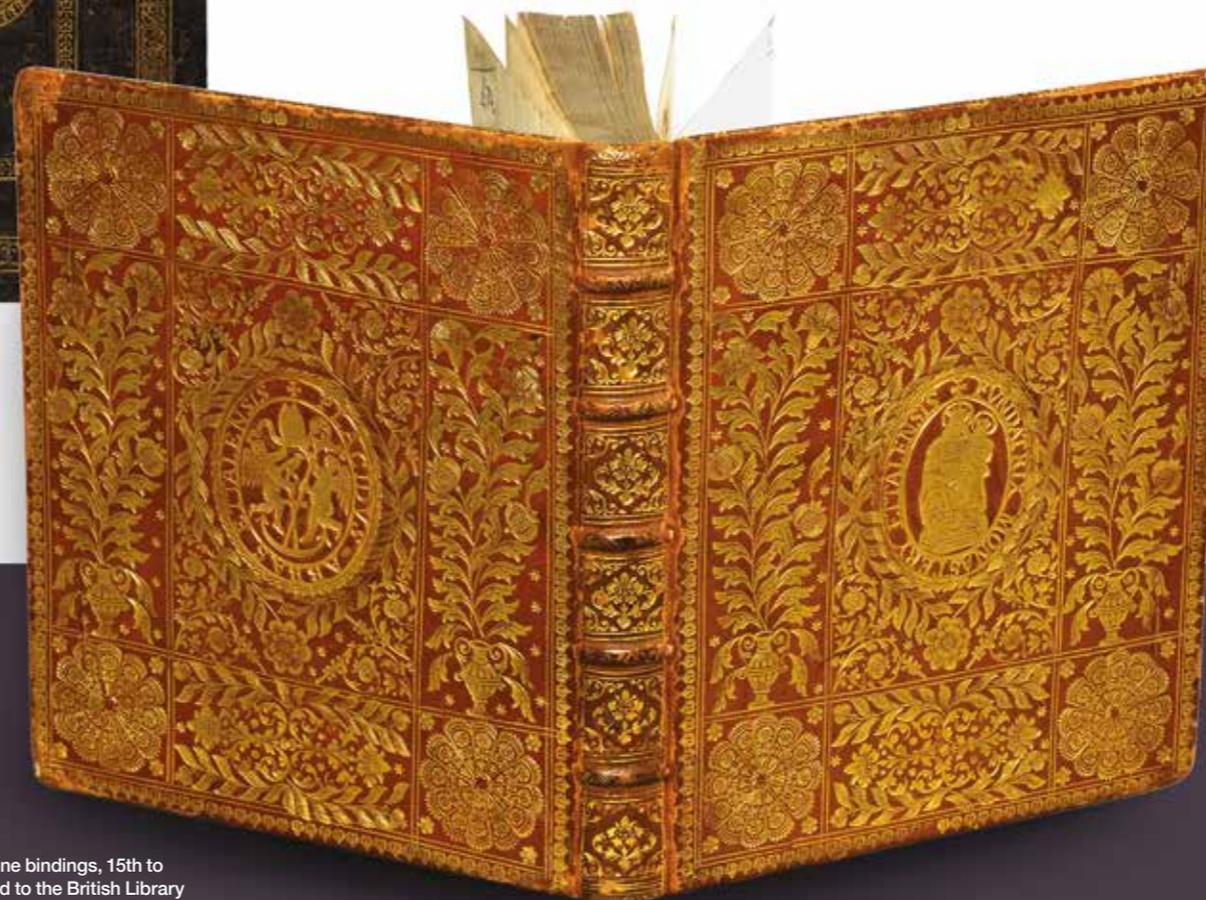


Sir Frederic Kenyon, Chairman from 1931 to 1950  
© National Portrait Gallery, London.

From the start, the Friends were fortunate in their leadership. Sir Frederic Kenyon was one of British Museum's great directors and principal librarians, a classical and biblical scholar who made his name as a papyrologist and widened the appeal of the museum by introducing guide lecturers and picture postcards; he also had literary credentials as the editor of the works of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. The Honorary Treasurer Lord Riddell, a former associate of Lloyd George, came from the world of politics and the press. The first divorced man to be made a peer (rather against the wishes of King George V), he controlled the sensational *News of the World*, saying that he would try to balance this with St Peter at the gates of heaven by putting forward his proprietorship of the more respectable *Country Life* and *John O'London's Weekly*. Riddell was a notable supporter of good causes, particularly hospitals and charities linked to the printing industry. The Honorary Secretary H. D. Ziman - known as Z - had been a journalist in Liverpool and a film critic in London before moving to the *Times* and the *Daily Telegraph* and, in the 1960s, the literary editorship of the *Sunday Telegraph*. At first in awe of the austere Kenyon, Ziman found the relationship eased when Mrs Ziman caught the great man helping himself to a third plate of strawberries and cream during an outing of the Friends at Winchester. Another early Friend Viscount Esher - who succeeded Kenyon as chairman in 1950 - was much involved with the National Trust, as well as becoming President of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings and assembling a fine collection of English first editions for his library at Watlington Park near Oxford. Lord Riddell and Lord Esher were among the most generous benefactors of the Friends.

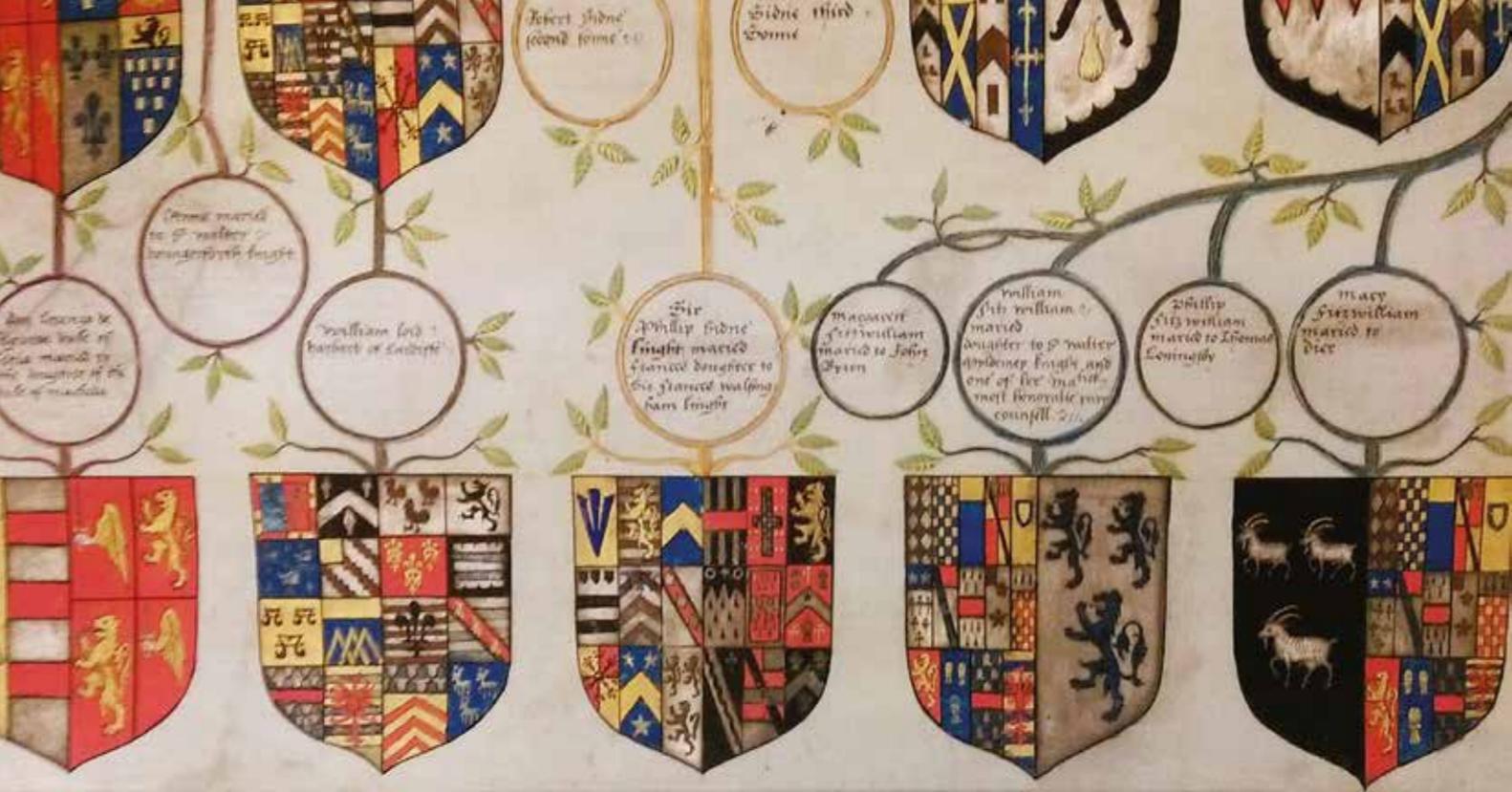
The tone was both academic and worldly, with a hint of leisured culture, balancing financial skill and awareness of the need for publicity with high standards of scholarship. But, as Baldwin had hinted, the Friends were late into the field. Throughout the 1920s, British private collections had been under siege. The art dealer Duveen had stalked impoverished country-house owners with ruthless cunning, impressing fox-hunting squires with his knowledge of the chase as he snapped up their Titians and Rembrandts. The American Dr Rosenbach pursued books with a similar zeal, persuading the Dean and Chapter of York to sell Caxtons and other works from the Minster Library; the Royal Society and the Royal Institution had also sold books; already family papers like the Shelburne archive had gone to the United States. Henry Huntington, founder of the great library that bears his name in California, bought the Hastings, Stowe, Battle Abbey and Ellesmere Collections. The National Art Collections Fund had intervened when artistic merit was obvious, as with the Luttrell Psalter or the Bedford Hours, but generally foreign buyers could expect little opposition.

Then came the Wall Street Crash of 1929. Yet there was little cause for smugness in Europe. The economic slump may have diminished the power of American purchasers but its effect was world-wide, hitting government support for the arts and museums. Lord Esher could euphorically announce at the Friends of the National Libraries' first Annual General Meeting on June 6 1932 that his nephew, the buyer for an American library, had abandoned his annual British book-hunting trips and Lord Riddell might say (referring to the United States) that "it is always satisfactory to know that someone has even more troubles than we ourselves have here"; but material from Britain was still flooding on to the market. When private and ecclesiastical owners needed money for repairs of buildings or to recoup investment losses, rarely looked-at books and manuscripts were often what they sold.



The Davis collection of fine bindings, 15th to 18th centuries. Presented to the British Library via FNL by Henry Davis in 1968. © British Library Board (Davis643 and Davis389).

The first acquisitions to which the Friends of the National Libraries either gave donations or channelled gifts from sometimes anonymous donors set a high standard. The British Museum Library – a part of the museum until the creation of the British Library in 1973 – received manuscripts from the collection of the 18th century antiquarian Bishop Percy that included a 1598 edition of Chaucer annotated by Gabriel Harvey, the friend of Spenser; also letters from Oliver Goldsmith and a previously unknown letter from Dr Johnson. An unpublished letter from David Hume went to the National Library of Scotland. Letters from John Wesley and a collection of letters and papers of the playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan (donated by the Duke of Bedford) went also to the British Museum Library, as did a rare satire of 1551, *The Fable of Philargyrie the Great Giant*, from which the Friends still take an illustration of a man shovelling gold into a sack as the frontispiece for their annual report. Campbell Dodgson, Keeper of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum, presented to the museum through the Friends a French translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Lausanne 1931), illustrated by Pablo Picasso.



The Pedigree of Sir Philip Sydney by Robert Cooke, Clarenceux King of Arms, c1580. FNL grant to the Bodleian Library, 2010. © Bodleian Libraries.

Among libraries helped were the National Library of Wales, the Bodleian Library, the Cambridge University Library, the libraries of the Natural History Museum in Kensington and of Leeds University, the Public Libraries of Birmingham and Newcastle on Tyne. In those early days, there was an imperial reach as well, to Christ's College, Christchurch, New Zealand (a 19th century anthology of poetry called *The Chertsey Worthies' Library* – in fourteen volumes) and to Ireland, a country that wished to have nothing to do with the empire, which received a book of *Thirteen Spanish Ballads*, presented by Dr Henry Thomas through the Friends to the Library of Trinity College, Dublin. Lord Moyne – the politician and heir to a Guinness fortune – continued the Irish connection. In 1935 it was reported that Moyne, through the Friends, had given books from his own collection – including a notable group of civil war pamphlets – to libraries in the north and south of Ireland.

A year later, the number of members had increased from 504 to 566. Sir Frederic Kenyon mentioned what is still a heartening feature: the hospitality offered to the Friends by collectors and libraries. He reported on visits to the home of King Manuel of Portugal at Fulwell Park to see the King's early Portuguese books only a few days before the death of this tragic figure who lived much of his life in exile; to Eton College; to Lloyds' of London (where the librarian had assembled a Nelson collection); to the house of St John Hornby, the founder of the Ashendene Press and owner of incunables, manuscripts and private press books. Sir Frederic Kenyon's oratory soared. The British Museum and its library, he declared, was "appreciated more abroad. Next only to the British Navy, the reputation of our country stands highest in the British Museum." As if in recognition of this, the annual report for 1932-3 recorded that the Munich booksellers Messers Jacques Rosenthal had given through the Friends to the British Museum Library three early printed books with British connections: John Foxe's *Commonplace Book* (Basel 1557), James 1's speech on the Gunpowder plot (Amsterdam 1606) and *Cursus Theologicus* (Geneva 1620) by John Sharp of St Andrews, a divine who was banished from Scotland and subsequently from France for his religious views.

The following year there was the same wide spread of institutions, the same reach to the empire (this time to the University of Witwaterstrand in South Africa as well as to Christchurch in New Zealand), the same gloom about the economic times. Yet startling items had been saved: the manuscript of Trollope's *Autobiography*; the Muchelney Breviary, the York Missal (both for the British Museum Library) and the Bangor Missal (for the National Library of Wales) – all from the sale of the liturgical books of the armaments manufacturer author of the novel *Moonfleet* J. Meade Falkner; editions of Thomas and Henry Vaughan for libraries in Wales; children's books for the Victoria and Albert Museum; a Coleridge letter for the Bodleian.

Bernard Shaw, a Friend since the beginning, spoke at the Annual General Meeting in June 1933, dazzlingly lit for his performance was filmed. Shaw mentioned, among other things, the need to save civilisation. "I suggest that this organisation may be the beginning," he declared. "It is not a very large organisation at present, but if it does not save the world, I cannot tell you who is going to do so, because there does not seem to be anyone else."



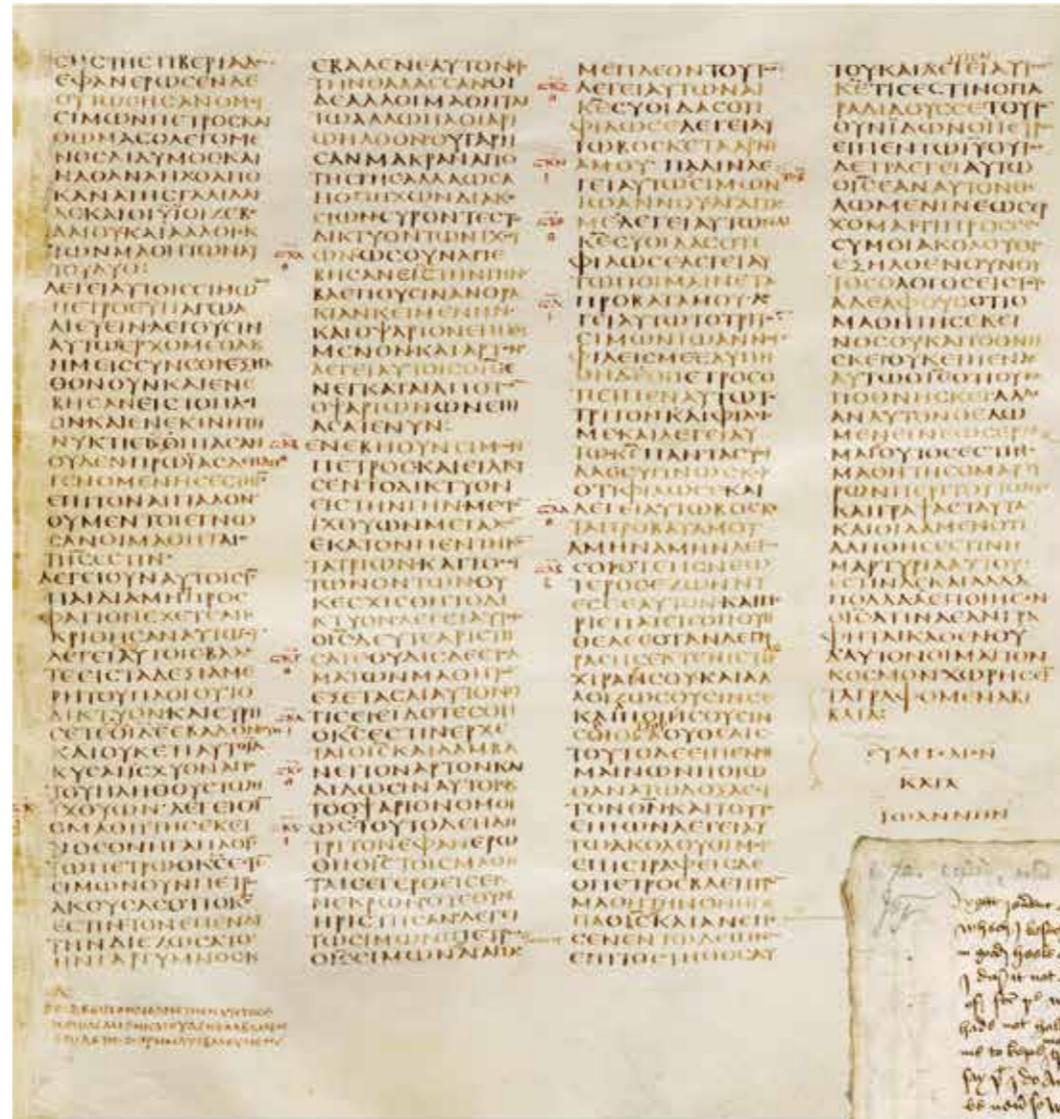
July 1<sup>st</sup> 1916.  
 Sat<sup>y</sup>. 7.30. a.m. Last night was cloudless & starry & still<sup>2</sup> – the bombardment went on steadily. ~~at~~ We had breakfast at 6. – The morning is brilliantly fine – after a mist early. Since 6.30 there has been hell let loose. The air vibrates with the incessant din – the whole earth shakes & rocks & throbs – It is one continuous roar – machine-guns tap & rattle – bullets whistling over head – small fry quite outdone by the gangs of hooligan-shells that dash over to. need the German lines with their demolition parties. The smoke-cloud is cancelled as the wind is wrong since yesterday. Attack should be starting now, but one can't look out as the m.g. bullets are skimming. Inferno – inferno – bay – surreal !! 

Sassoon's journal entry for 1st July 1916, the beginning of the Battle of the Somme (MS Add.9852/1/7, ff. 10r). FNL Larkin Fund grant to Cambridge University Library, 2009. © Siegfried Sassoon by kind permission of the Estate of George Sassoon.

Far Left: Photographic album (Lysidinam) of pioneering photographer Mary Dilwyn, c 1853. FNL grant, 2002. © National Library of Wales (mar00016 5r).

Left: The Laws of Hywel Dda, 14th century. FNL grant to National Library of Wales, 2012. © National Library of Wales (NLW MS 24029A).

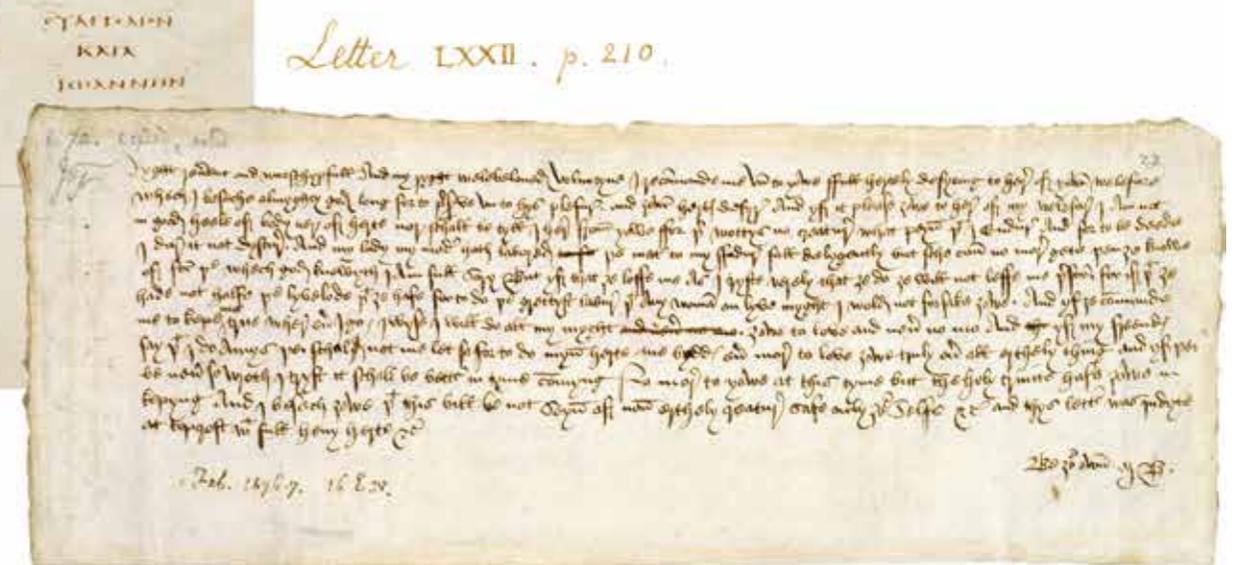
The 1934-5 report had three of the most remarkable items with which the Friends have been involved. To have helped with the purchase of the Paston Letters – that extraordinary record of English medieval life – would have ranked as a great achievement; when this was combined with the *Codex Sinaiticus* – a fourth century manuscript of the Bible in Greek – and the poetry manuscripts of Wilfred Owen, the work of the Friends of the National Libraries seemed suddenly of immense national importance. The campaign to raise the £50,000 asked by the Soviet government for the *Codex Sinaiticus* had been controversial, opponents claiming that the manuscript was a forgery and grossly overpriced. The Friends gave some £3,000 to ensure a triumph in what became known as “the battle of Sinai”. With Wilfred Owen, the Friends were in new territory – the manuscripts of a contemporary writer, killed at the age of 25 during the last week of the war. Owen’s friend and mentor Siegfried Sassoon arranged the purchase of the manuscripts by the British Museum through the Friends, giving £100 anonymously towards this; other donations came from Lord Esher, the novelist Hugh Walpole, the poet Walter de la Mare, the civil servant and patron of the arts Edward Marsh and Owen’s publishers Chatto & Windus. Sir Frederic Kenyon’s description hints at the ambiguity with which these unvarnished depictions of war’s horror were already seen, some thinking them unpatriotic and subversive; the Friends’ chairman praised Owen’s courage as a holder of the Military Cross, declaring that the poems were “of a very high order, full of sympathy with all the piteousness of war but without any of the querulous and grumbling which characterize a great many of the writings of other War Poets.”



Above: Codex Sinaiticus, 4th century. FNL grant to the British Library, 1933. © British Library Board (Add. 43725 f.260).

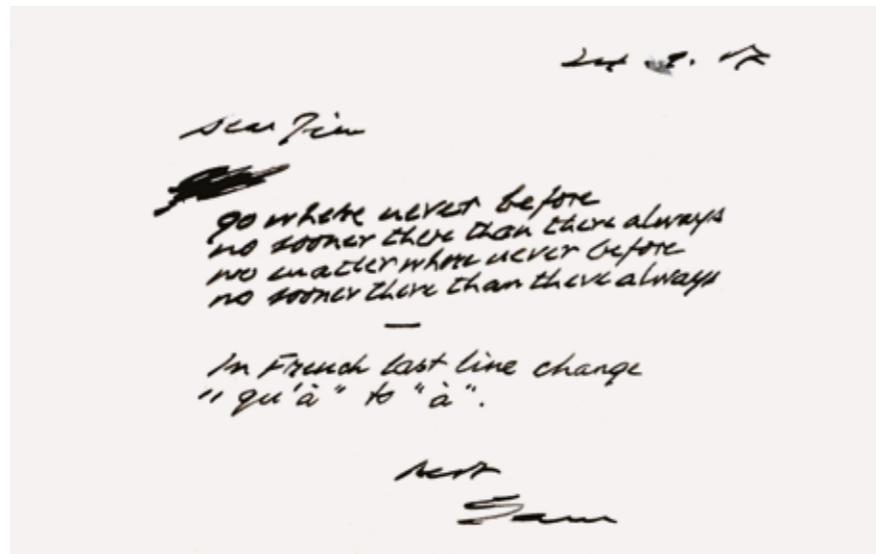
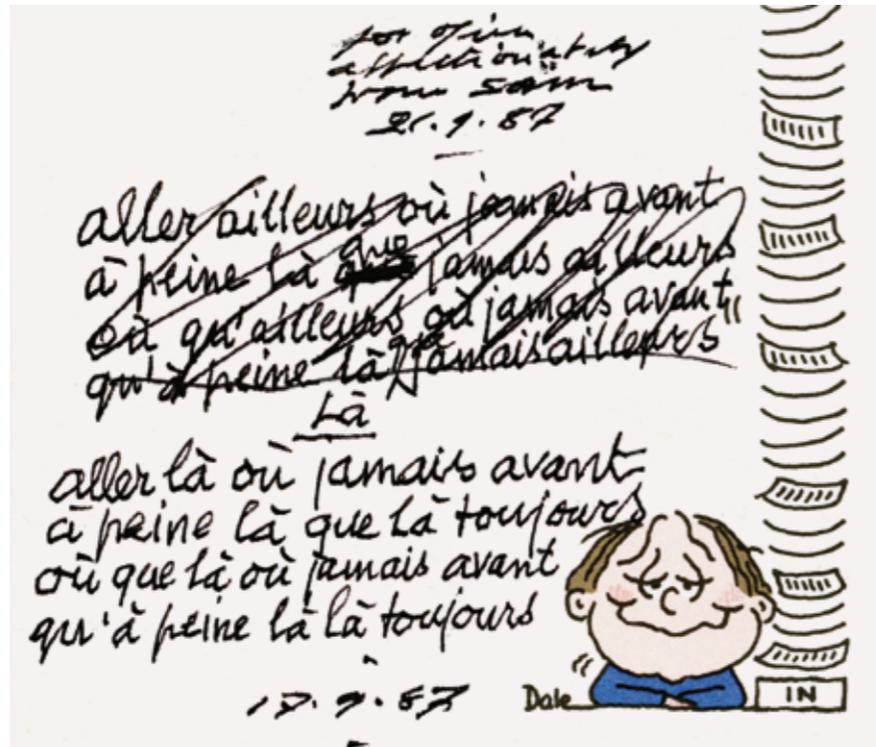
The fate of Wilfred Owen’s papers shows the scattering of an archive. His letters to his mother were offered to the Bodleian Library which said it could not afford the price, leaving them to be bought by the Humanities Research (now the Harry Ransom) Center at the University of Texas in Austin. Owen’s letters to Sassoon are in the library of Columbia University in New York – and Sassoon’s annotated copy of his dear Wilfred’s first published book of poems was bought by the American collector Kenneth Lohf who left it to the Morgan Library, also in New York. Much of this dispersal took place during the 1950s and 1960s, when there was little effort to keep modern literary papers in this country.

Below: Letter of Margery Brews to John Paston, February 1477. FNL grant to the British Library, 1933. © British Library Board (Add. 43490, f.23).



Early Annual General Meetings of the Friends were addressed by (among others) the Archbishop of Canterbury, the judge Lord Macmillan, the Attorney General Sir Donald Somervell, the Master of the Rolls Lord Hanworth, the historian Sir Richard Lodge and Sir George Hill, the director and principal librarian of the British Museum. But, no matter how grand the supporters, it was always hard to recruit new members, Lord Esher (who had become Honorary Treasurer after the death of Lord Riddell), reporting in 1935 that only six had joined during the last year. Part of the problem may have been the sedate atmosphere at the top. "I am not going to suggest that we should indulge in any sensational advertising or methods of mass suggestion," Sir Donald Somervell declared. "I am sure we should not contemplate sending a cinema van round the country featuring Sir Frederic Kenyon reading the Codex Sinaiticus with his feet on the fender."

Right: The Knowlson Samuel Beckett Collection, 20th century. FNL Larkin Fund grant to the University of Reading, 2008. © The Estate of Samuel Beckett. Image of 'Là' reproduced by kind permission of the Estate of Samuel Beckett c/o Rosica Colin Limited, London.



Above: The Sweetheart Abbey Breviary, early 14th century. FNL grant to National Library of Scotland, 2016. © National Library of Scotland.

In 1937, H.D. Ziman resigned as secretary, pleading pressure of other work, to be succeeded by Oliver Bell who, after First War service in the Royal Flying Corps (for which he was mentioned in despatches), worked for the League of Nations Union, editing its journal, before becoming Director of the British Film Institute and a magistrate in Wimbledon. Bell, a keen actor as an Oxford undergraduate, was a big man – “quite landmark” – kind also, with a great booming laugh. The membership climbed to 650 and there were some notable acquisitions as the decade came to an end: for the British Museum library, a first edition of Erasmus’s *Praise of Folly*, written in England in 1509 when the sage was staying with Sir Thomas More; for Imperial College London, the papers of the Victorian scientist Huxley; the papers of the Princess Lieven, described in the report of 1938-9, also for the British Museum.

The Lieven papers gave a sense of the turbulence that was again about to hit Central and Eastern Europe. The Lievens are a Baltic German family who served the Russian Tsars; the Princess Lieven was at the heart of the social and diplomatic world, accompanying her husband when he was Russian ambassador in Prussia from 1810 to 1812 and in London from 1812 until 1834, during which time she was said to have introduced British society to the waltz, thought by some to be an obscene expression of intimacy. The Princess’s son inherited the papers and on his death in 1886 left instructions that they should be sealed for fifty years. They remained in the archives of the nobility at Mitau in Courland (now Latvia), then a part of the Russian empire, until 1917, when it was thought they had been destroyed in the Bolshevik revolution. In fact, the archive had been caught up in the German occupation, surfacing again in 1932 in the State Library in Berlin. After the recovery of the papers, the Lieven family took them to Brussels where they were offered to the British Museum.

At the Annual General Meeting in October 1939, Sir Frederic Kenyon, in a London still ostensibly untouched by war, could calmly state that “before the invasion of Poland the Society made several important purchases”. An American wrote to renew her subscription, declaring her “keen appreciation of, and admiration for, England’s magnificent struggle on behalf of civilisation and the humanities.” Sir Frederic thought the war’s effect on the Friends’ activities had been “not so serious as might have been expected”. Among institutions helped was the Victoria and Albert Museum in its purchase of 126 letters and some papers of the artist Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

In 1940, the view was much bleaker, with a list of libraries that had been badly damaged by bombing; among these were the British Museum, Birkbeck College, the Birmingham Natural History and Philosophical Society, the City of London College, Plymouth and Shoreditch. No purchases were made during the year 1940-1 and only two in 1941- 2: the first edition of an eighteenth century French book on hairdressing for the V&A and some books on the empire from the library of the late Sir Edward Denham for various institutions. A year later there was hope; the Friends, it was said, must “take the lead in wider schemes of post-war rehabilitation of scholarship”. By March 1944, membership had dropped from 605 in March 1939 to 398. In June 1945, Sir Frederic said that “the need for the Society’s services was never greater” because of war damage to libraries. As if to show that civilised values could outlast vile regimes, purchases included seventeen Japanese woodcut books and an 1848 German revolutionary pamphlet and manuscript of a song – all for the British Museum Library.

The post-war recovery was painfully slow, with shortages of almost everything. In 1946, Lord Esher, perhaps alarmed by the financial prospects, put his entire collection of first editions up for sale. The Friends tried to keep up their work against this background of crisis. In 1945-6 some letters of David Livingstone were bought for the National Library of Scotland; in 1947-8, £27 2s (prices were now mentioned in the annual report) was given to the National Portrait Gallery to help towards the £127 2s needed to buy the drawing of Jane Austen by her sister Cassandra, the only undoubtedly authentic image of the novelist; in 1948-9, the Royal Library at Windsor received help to buy 61 small handwritten letters from King Charles 1, written while the King was a prisoner at Carisbrooke Castle on the Isle of Wight in 1648.

Right and Front Cover: A drawing of Jane Austen by her sister Cassandra, 1810. FNL grant to the National Portrait Gallery, 1947. © National Portrait Gallery, London.



Autograph draft of *The Watsons*, 1803-1805. FNL grant to the Bodleian Library, 2011. © Bodleian Libraries (MS. Eng. e. 3764).

A post-1945 development is the Friends’ help for institutions outside London, particularly for County Record Offices often threatened by local government cuts. Archives featured now as much as rare books. Oliver Bell resigned as Secretary and was succeeded by John Ehrman, a distinguished young historian and Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge. Ehrman was writing part of the official history of the Second World War; his definitive biography of the Younger Pitt lay in the future. After Lord Esher succeeded Sir Frederic Kenyon as chairman in 1950, a persistent theme was that the Treasury should make it easier for individuals to sell material to the nation in transactions similar to the 1956 purchase of a collection of plays from Falkland Palace by the National Library of Scotland. The Annual Report for 1951-2 recorded that membership stood at 512, a figure that, while an increase of 3 on the previous year, “cannot be regarded as satisfactory”. At an exhibition at the British Museum to mark the Friends’ twentieth anniversary, few people had joined; “in this respect, the occasion was a disappointment.”



The Gaster Hebrew and Samaritan manuscripts, 17th century. FNL grant to John Rylands Library, 1953. © The University of Manchester.

This page: Gaster Hebrew MS 2110a. Right: Gaster Hebrew 170 leaf 11.

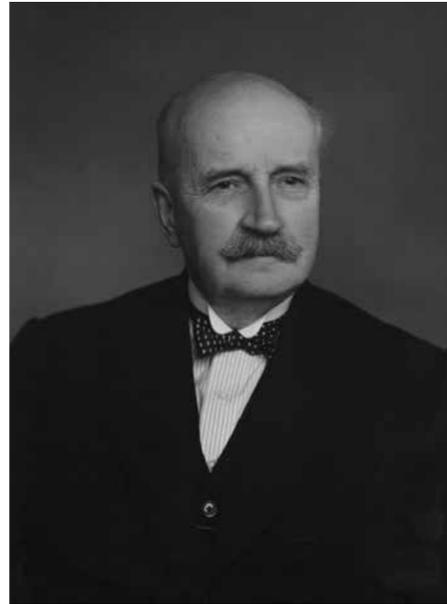


In the report of 1953-4, however, the work of the Friends was shown to good effect, perhaps particularly in the grant of £150 to the John Rylands Library at Manchester to enable it to buy the Gaster Collection of Hebrew and Samaritan manuscripts, assembled by Dr Moses Gaster who fled anti-Semitic persecution in Rumania, becoming Chief Rabbi to the British Sephardic community from 1886 to 1919. Gaster had visited Nablus, the headquarters of the Samaritan sect, famous for its hostility to Jews. Here he had persuaded the Samaritans to part with manuscripts or to provide him with copies; these, in addition to his Hebrew collection, transformed the holdings of the Rylands in that field.

In 1956-7 there was another foray into modern manuscripts with the presentation through the Friends by Sir Eric Miller to the British Museum Library of the autograph manuscript of *Maiden Voyage* by the eccentric writer Denton Welch. A grant was also given towards the purchase of an autograph manuscript of the poet Francis Thompson for the Harris Public Library in Preston, the town where Thompson was born.

At the end of the 1950s, the sale rooms came to the aid of the Friends – a welcome change from occasions in which they had seemed to be the facilitators of books and manuscripts leaving the country. At the suggestion of Anthony Hobson and John Carter of its book department, Sotheby's on June 15 1960 held a sale of books and manuscripts to raise money for an endowment fund. Some £6,000 was raised, from lots from many sources, including Her Majesty the Queen and the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester. Others sent cash – and it seemed a good result, especially as other charitable sales took place in the same year, one for the Refugees, another for the London Library. One of the items was a Wodehouse manuscript, *Well, Really, Jeeves*, bought for America; another, which went to Harvard, was the manuscript of an article by Evelyn Waugh, given to Anthony Hobson. At the Annual General Meeting that year, however, Lord Esher was again in a sombre mood, reporting how the library of John Locke had only been saved for the Bodleian because of American generosity; how the British Museum “appears to be almost as short of money as ever”; how the Church of England was disposing of yet more of its treasures with the sale of rare books from Ripon Cathedral.

John Ehrman took up office again, this time as Honorary Treasurer, having resigned as Honorary Secretary in 1958. Ehrman's successor as Honorary Secretary, T.S. Blakeney, had worked in the timber trade before travelling through pre-war Europe to what was then Ceylon where he took a job as assistant manager on a tea estate, seeing war service in the Far-East and climbing Kailas, the sacred mountain of Tibet. Returning to Britain in 1948, Blakeney wrote an unpublished biography of Queen Charlotte and served as assistant secretary of the Alpine Club. An expert of Sherlock Holmes, he was also a devotee of Gilbert and Sullivan and the Aldwych farces, showing how the officers of the Friends of the National Libraries can range far beyond the worlds of rare books and manuscripts. One is struck in the post-war reports by the generosity of supporters like John Ehrman, Lord Kenyon and T.S. Blakeney who made gifts through the Friends to a variety of institutions. Notable among these was the Broxbourne Library collected by Albert Ehrman – from which Albert's son John gave items to the British Museum, the Bodleian and to the Cambridge University Library.



Lord Esher, Chairman from 1950 to 1962.  
© National Portrait Gallery, London.



Lord Kenyon, Chairman from 1962 to 1985.  
© National Portrait Gallery, London.

In 1962 Lord Esher resigned as chairman because of bad health, to be succeeded by Lord Kenyon, a cousin of Sir Frederic. From a Shropshire landowning family and in the tradition of the gentleman scholar, Lloyd Kenyon had joined the Friends in 1932, aged fourteen. A collector of liturgical books, he held a series of voluntary appointments, including the chairmanship of the National Portrait Gallery, and had a long involvement with University of Wales, making time for all this while a director of Lloyds Bank. The number of friends was still at that date around 650; under Lord Kenyon this increased to nearly a thousand by the time he retired in 1985. In his first year, he thanked the New York book dealer Hans Kraus for a donation towards the purchase of a Drake manuscript for the Plymouth Corporation: another example of support from across the Atlantic. In 1963 the Friends helped the British Museum buy the manuscript of *Mrs Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf that had escaped from the great mass of her papers sold to the Chicago book dealers Hamill and Barker by her husband Leonard.

Lord Kenyon revived the practice of a distinguished speaker at the Annual General Meeting. In 1964, the Archbishop of Canterbury addressed the Friends at Lambeth Palace and the annual report recorded the gift through the Friends to the British Museum Library by P.G Wodehouse of the manuscript of his novel *Brinkmanship at Blandings*. Wodehouse manuscripts are rare. This one includes a mass of notes and a heavily annotated typescript showing the meticulous craftsmanship that lay behind the apparently effortless prose. A year later, modern manuscripts were represented by papers of the Second World War poet Keith Douglas, bought for £1,000 by the British Museum with a contribution of £200 by the Friends.

The Friends' role as a channel of gifts reached a spectacular level in 1968, with the businessman Henry Davis's wish that his collection of bindings (pictured pages 6 & 7)– French, Italian, Egyptian, Russian and English – should go to the British Museum library after his death; Davis also left a selection of early books to the newest of the new universities, the University of Ulster at Coleraine. Around this time, a series of papers connected to Voltaire and the Enlightenment began to go to the Taylorian Institute in Oxford, given by Dr Theodore Besterman. Living for some years in Geneva, where he founded the Institut et Musée Voltaire in what had been Voltaire's house, Besterman was not only a bibliophile but an authority on spiritualism, crystal gazing and water divining. Oxford benefitted from his disagreement with the Geneva authorities; Besterman's gifts to the Taylorian were made through the Friends of the National Libraries.

In 1972 at the National Army Museum, after the customary lament about membership, then standing at 675, the Friends received a bracing address from Field Marshall Sir Gerald Templar, the museum's chairman. One gift of that year would probably have been particularly approved of by Sir Gerald: that of the papers of Captain Oates to the Scott Polar Research Institute in Cambridge. Four years later the death of T.S. Blakeney led to the appointment of a new Honorary Secretary, Sir Edward Warner, a retired ambassador. Warner – an immaculate, punctilious figure in his pre-war suits – worked in harmony first with John Ehrman; then with Roger Ellis, a classical scholar, poet and former Secretary of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts who became Honorary Treasurer in 1977. In 1980 the National Trust's book expert John Fuggles, an enthusiastic and inspiring advocate of the cause, succeeded Sir Edward Warner, Lewis Golden, the brilliant accountant who transformed the Friends' finances (not least through his personal generosity), taking over from Roger Ellis in 1979. In 1985, Lord Kenyon retired as chairman and I succeeded him. The Friends of the National Libraries have had only had four chairmen: Sir Frederic Kenyon, Lord Esher, Lord Kenyon and me.

A collection of 400 letters by Captain Oates, 1899-1910. FNL grant to the Scott Polar Research Institute, 1972. Reproduced by kind permission of the University of Cambridge, Scott Polar Research Institute.

but the jungle near had lately  
 been burnt and the game had  
 left. The walking was very hard  
 work as I am so unfit and  
 I got very heat but was much  
 better for the trip when I got

SCOTT POLAR  
 RESEARCH INSTITUTE  
 MS 1016/296  
 Plymouth  
 2 June '09  
 Dear Mother  
 we have just arrived  
 here after a splendid sail from  
 Fowey. Clark has got the yacht into  
 very nice order. we don't leave here  
 until tomorrow afternoon as it  
 is very closing day here and we  
 can't buy anything we want. Jersey  
 will be the best place to wait  
 to as I suppose we shall fetch  
 up there eventually.  
 yours affectionately  
 C.E.S. Oates

yacht Saunterer  
 Dover.  
 20<sup>th</sup> June '09  
 Dear Mother

we got in here on  
 Friday night after taking 3 days  
 to come from Cherbourg the wind  
 being in the North East and a  
 lot of calm. Benjamin leaves to-  
 night I think he gets very bored  
 yachting, he is bringing you a  
 letter which I have received from  
 Charles Lupton to ~~be~~ read. Please  
 return it to me at Amsterdam  
 as early as possible as I  
 should like to

MS 1016/297  
 Mr Oates  
 Seethingthorpe Hall  
 Castle Hedingham  
 Essex

With the fiftieth anniversary in 1981, a golden jubilee appeal was launched, involving another sale at Sotheby's and an exhibition at the British Library; the appeal and the sale raised a total of £60,000 for the endowment fund and 169 new members joined. The generosity of supporters continued; two notable instances were Miss Margaret Gollancz's bequest of some £25,500 in 1982 and the donation of the reference library of Dr Esmond de Beer, editor of John Evelyn's diary and John Locke's correspondence. Among the de Beer gifts were travel books and guides: also books on mountaineering and modern English poetry collected by his sisters. Libraries from all over the country were invited to make their choice from a vast range. Institutions that benefited were the British Library, the Bodleian, the Cambridge University Library, the London Library, the Alpine Club and the libraries of the universities of Sussex, Essex and Birkbeck College, London.

Worries about sales and membership are lasting themes. In 1977 the report laments the sales of John Evelyn's library and important books from the Sion College collection. In 1987 the John Rylands Library sold material that included volumes from one of the most celebrated English collections (saved previously for the nation by Mrs Rylands): that of Lord Spencer, a founder of the Roxburghe Club in 1812 and the patron of Thomas Dibdin.

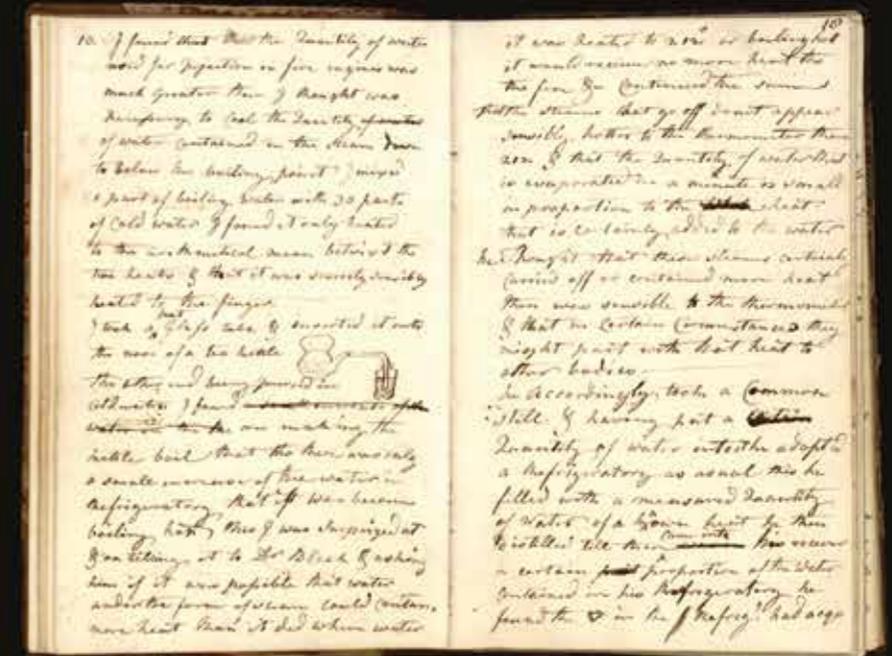
By 1990 the Friends of the National Libraries had some 800 members, still not enough. The number is slightly fewer today. The honorary officers have been the mainstay – H.D. Ziman; Oliver Bell; T.S. Blakeney; John Ehrman; Roger Ellis; John Fuggles; John's successor Ann Payne (the former Keeper of Manuscripts at the British Library); Anne's successor Michael Borrie who gave us such magnificent and learned help for almost thirty years; our present secretary Dr Frances Harris and the Assistant Secretary Howard Fox. Our treasurers have been diligent and watchful, curbing extravagance and encouraging wise decisions; since 1985, during my period as chairman, we have been lucky enough to have had Lewis Golden and then his successor Charles Sebag-Montefiore who has kept us solvent since 1990. The honorary officers have often worked under trying conditions.



Manuscript letters from Virginia Woolf to Saxon Sydney-Turner, 1908-1939. FNL grant, 1973. Image by kind permission of the University of Sussex (SxMs18-4-3a).

Lewis Golden recalls his first visit in 1979 to what was then the Friends' office above a shop near the British Museum in Coptic Street where he found "a miserable place to have to work". Later the museum provided a room in one of the wings of its building. Now we have a home in the new British Library in the Euston Road.

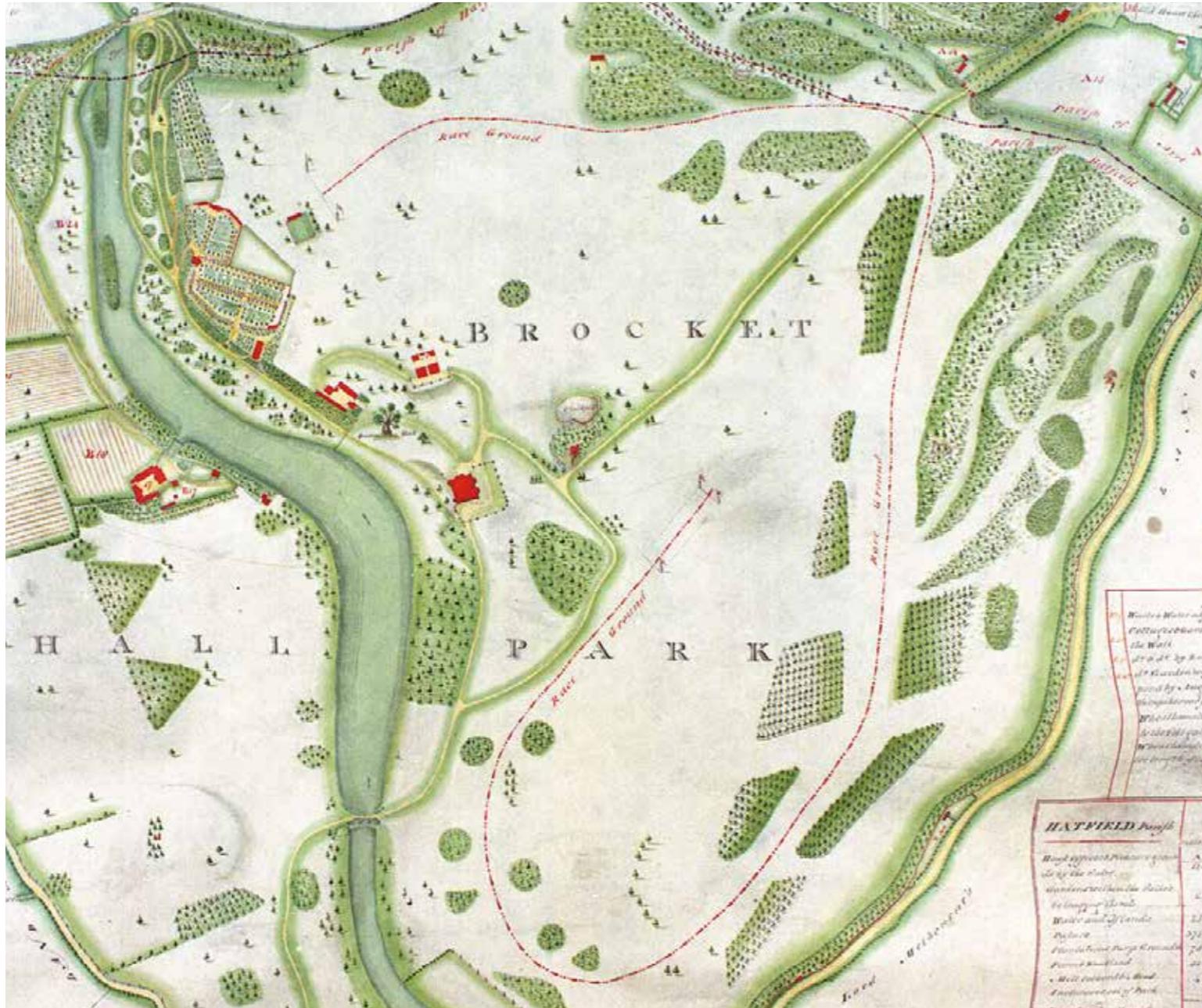
James Watt's laboratory notebook, 1765-1814. FNL grant, 2003. © Birmingham Archives and Collections (MS 3219/4/170).



We have created a fund solely for the purchase of twentieth and twenty-first century material called the Philip Larkin Fund, after the poet and librarian who worked to stop the flow across the Atlantic. An appeal for a memorial organised by Larkin's bibliographer Barry Blomfield raised £26,000, augmented since by the Royal Literary Fund's largesse from money it had received from the sale of A.A. Milne's copyrights to Walt Disney. Philip Larkin wrote that "the best place for a writer's papers is one of the libraries of his home country [because they are] more likely to be studied there and studied with greater understanding". In the last twenty years the Larkin Fund has contributed to the purchase of (amongst others) the papers of Muriel Spark, Siegfried Sassoon, Harold Pinter, Hugh McDiarmid, Andrew Motion, Edmund Blunden, Mervyn Peake, Philip Larkin, Ted Hughes and Iris Murdoch.

Archive of the Cowper family of Panshanger, 1280-1953. FNL grant to Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies, 1991:

i) Plan of Brocket Hall Park, Hatfield 1798 (DE/P/P15). © Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies.



*Into Battle* 1.  
 The naked earth is worn with spring,  
 And with green grass and waving herbs  
 Seem to be some kiss of glory;  
 And flowers in the flowing brook,  
 And life is colour and warmth and light,  
 And a striving evermore for more;  
 And he is dead who will not fight;  
 And who does fighting, has increase.

The fighting man shall from the sun  
 Take warmth and life from the glowing earth;  
 And with his light-foot wife to run,  
 And with the trees a happy strife;  
 And when his fighting shall be done,  
 Great rest and pleasure after death.

2.  
 All the trees of heaven  
 Hold him in their arms, and in their hands  
 The Dog-star and the stars of dawn,  
 Orion's belt and the plowshare.

The woodland trees had stand together  
 They stand to him each one a friend;  
 They walk, they are in the wind, they are  
 They walk to valley and ridge and end.

The kestrel hovering by day  
 And the little owl that sits by night;  
 The hawk that swoops down from the sky,  
 And the swift and keen as they,  
 As keen of soul, as the swift of sight.

3.  
 The blackbird sings to him "Brockton brook,  
 If this be the last song you shall sing,  
 Sing well for you will not sing another,  
 Sing, Brockton, sing!"

In dream, doubtful waking hours,  
 Before the brassen funeral shroud,  
 The horse show him wailing powers;  
 O patient eye, compassing hearts!

And when the turning moment breaks,  
 And all things else are out of mind,  
 And joy of battle ends, he takes  
 Him by the hand, and makes him blind.

4.  
 Through joy and hindrance he shall know  
 Not caring much to know that still  
 No lead nor steel shall reach him, so  
 That it be not the Deathless Will.

The wandering life of cattle shads,  
 And in the air the means and ways;  
 But Day shall clear his work from shads,  
 And Night shall fold him in soft ways.

J.G.  
 Belgium - April, 1915.

One example shows how we can change matters. In 1993, the Panshanger Archive came on the market, the Hertfordshire County Record Office – where the papers had been on deposit since the demolition of Panshanger House in 1953 – having been told that half a million pounds must be raised to buy it. The collection reached back to the thirteenth century, with extensive estate and manorial records, the private papers of successive Earls Cowper and of the Lamb family (including the Prime Minister Melbourne), literary and scientific manuscripts by Abraham Cowley and Sir Isaac Newton and the poet of the First World War Julian Grenfell, letters from Winston Churchill, Lloyd George, Asquith, Baldwin and Queen Mary. The Friends gave one of our largest ever grants – £50,000 – and vigorously supported the campaign. Today the archive is safe in Hertford where it is frequently used.

ii) Draft of *Into Battle* by Julian Grenfell written shortly before he was wounded at Ypres on 13 May 1915. He died of his wounds in Boulogne on 26 May. (DE/X/789/F.23). © Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies.

The Friends of the National Libraries can only do as much as its resources permit. We have, however, had a recent huge boost to our cause; the Prince of Wales has agreed to be our Royal Patron and an appeal in His Royal Highness's name is well on the way to raising £1 million. This will be added to our capital of about £2.5 million which generates recurring investment income that, taken together with members' subscriptions and donations, particularly from the B. H. Breslauer Foundation, enables us to give grants of approaching £200,000 a year. Even with the addition of the appeal money, it is not enough at this time of cuts for what needs to be done.

Perhaps this country's greatest contribution to western European civilisation is its literature. Rare books and manuscripts are the origin, the fount, of this. Estate and family papers provide records of our national past – of its turbulence and its continuity. Prices of these have increased sharply so that institutions need help to buy them, particularly at this time of cuts. It is because of this that the Friends of the National Libraries exist.



Lord Egremont, Chairman since 1985.  
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Now we seek more support  
and more members from  
among the many people  
who share our aim. This, as  
Bernard Shaw understood  
all those years ago, is  
nothing less than to ensure  
the survival of civilisation.

If you would like to become  
a FNL member, or have  
any queries contact us on  
[admin@fnlmail.org.uk](mailto:admin@fnlmail.org.uk)

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