

A Collection Within the Collection

The Robert Illing Collection

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Dr Robert Illing, M.A., Mus.B.(Cantab), M.A. (Oxon), Ph.D.(Nottingham), Ph.D.(Adelaide), A.R.C.O., is a familiar and friendly colleague to many staff in The University of Melbourne Library. Since the generous gift of his collection to the Library, he has become a weekly visitor, working among his books and writings, now well catalogued and arranged on the shelves. Through the years the Library's gifts team has enjoyed close and regular contact with him; the team dispatches his publications from the University Library to great libraries in America and Europe, and their appreciative acknowledgments have come back to us.

Robert (he prefers to be known by his first name) was born in 1917 in London; so he is 80 this year. He went to Cambridge University as a choral scholar, and then became organ scholar of his college. He won both the university scholarship and the prize named respectively after the musical scholars John Stewart of Rannoch and William Barclay Squire, for his study of early music - to which he has devoted his life. And he graduated before he was 21. His knowledge of mathematics was put to good use during World War Two as he was engaged in the design and validation of tests of ability for sorting out recruits.

After the war Robert held positions as Director of Music at a leading



London independent school, as a lecturer in music and then in Mathematics at teacher training colleges. Before coming to Australia in 1966, he and his wife Margaret presided over the first Hall of Residence of what is now Brookes University in Oxford. During his time in Oxford he became a member of Oriel College, with which he is still closely in touch.

Since his retirement in 1972, Robert has spent his time putting in good order his many studies of early music. A copy of his 11 volumes on the *English Metrical Psalter*, printed and bound in leather by the state printer, was presented to the Pope on his visit to Adelaide,

The Illings and four friends, 1970, rehearsing Alessandro Scarlatti's *Christmas Cantata*. They are playing on the quartet of baroque string instruments now housed in the glass cabinets outside the Special Collections Reading Room in the Baillieu Library. The instruments are all recorded in the Robert Illing Collection Catalogue. (photo: Robert Illing Collection)

and these are now in the Vatican Library. His extensive study of the *Kindersinfonie*, wrongly attributed to Joseph Haydn, complements and supports parallel studies by colleagues in the Haydn Institute in Cologne and the Tyrolean Institute in Innsbruck; and copies of their studies are now with his, in the Robert Illing Collection. His preparation of many texts of seventeenth and eighteenth century music, for the instruction of his students, and the pleasure of his friends and colleagues, has involved the art of composition in the styles of German, Italian and English composers of that period — work that reflects his lifetime devotion to early music.

The Robert Illing Collection is housed in the Baillieu Library; and it is available for consultation in the Special Collections Reading Room. Among the diversity of material are a number of items which may well interest others. This includes gifts from European libraries sent in acknowledgment of gifts to them - not rare books, but unlikely to be elsewhere in Australia; a variety of lucky acquisitions that range from the unusual to the only copy in private hands; records of his daughter Rosamund, including her fascinating and informative letters when, in the 1970s she studied at the Royal Opera, Covent Garden in London, before returning to Australia to make her successful career with the Australian Opera; facsimiles and photocopies of original editions and manuscripts of early music, transcribed and prepared for study — material not otherwise easily available, and enough to keep advanced students busy for years.

Perhaps Robert's most useful contribution to The University of Melbourne Library is the labelling and arranging of his collection in the stack, and cataloguing it in five volumes. The catalogue not only describes the items, and how many of them came to the collection, but also records and tells of the students, friends and colleagues associated with performances of the music he prepared. The catalogue describes the quartet of



baroque instruments - two violins, a viola and a baroque cello, donated by Dr and Mrs Robert Illing, which are housed in the display cabinets outside the Special Collections Reading Room. The Collection also has a number of smaller instruments including the delightful toy instruments for the *Kindersinfonie*; all these were acquired and some specially made for his performances of early music. Some day Dr Illing hopes they will be used again — in The University of Melbourne Library. ✨

(The following article, "A Gift Within A Gift", features a small part of the Robert Illing Collection.)

The Mozart family; from *Schatzkammer Musikbibliothek* ("Treasure Room of the Music Library"), 1993, a gift from the Director of the Leipzig State Library (now in the Robert Illing Collection).