

Cambridge in Carlton

Dr Pierre Gorman and the Collection of Books on Cambridge in The University of Melbourne Library

At a recent seminar on resources for European studies in Canberra in 1996, Professor Paul Mosher, Vice Provost and Director of Libraries of the University of Pennsylvania, commented that the great research collections are those which have been initiated by the libraries themselves. This may be true, and certainly the image of the proactive library, anticipating and catering for scholarly research is a tempting one for a librarian to believe in. There is no doubt, however, that what adds a special lustre to a great library is special collections, made up of the once private libraries of individuals. The first major collection, and one of the most interesting ones, acquired by The University of Melbourne Library is the bequest of a baker of the small Victorian town of Maldon, George McArthur, who lived from 1842–1903.

After showing his collection in the early months of 1903 to the University's Professor of Geology and Mineralogy, who was leading a party of students on an excursion to examine the gold-bearing deposits of the area, McArthur commented that "he was so pleased with Professor Gregory's learning and urbanity that, if that was the sort of men the University professors were, they should have his books".

It was a collection of which the University, then only 50 years old, could be very proud indeed, and the bequest came into effect after McArthur's suicide just a few months later, on 18th

This is an edited version of a paper delivered to the Australasian Modern British History Association Conference, Perth, 3–5 February, 1997

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October, 1903. Among its two and a half thousand-odd volumes, it contained four incunabula, three manuscripts, twenty-three 16th century printings, eleven from the 17th century and one hundred and thirty-four from the 18th century. The range of the collection was extraordinarily great, with strengths in the history and art of the book and voyages and travels.¹ It was, in other words, a diverse and well-chosen collection which formed the basis for a wide-ranging and useful research resource.

In 1903, The University of Melbourne Library was not so well provided with books that one would have expected much debate would have been needed to decide whether or not to accept such a bequest, but even then, questions were raised as to whether the space could be found and whether such an acquisition was necessary for a university library. Life is even less simple now, and the acquisition of a collection of only half the size of McArthur's requires a good deal of thought. We have even less space to put books in, we are very conscious of the money needed to repair, catalogue and maintain them, and simply because our collections are already large, we have to consider whether what we are being offered duplicates what we already have. We are

also far less optimistic about being able to embrace the whole universe of recorded knowledge in our libraries and more inclined to ask how a particular collection enhances the resources our particular user-community requires.

And although we do not necessarily, in real terms, have less money for acquisition than we had at the turn of the century, we certainly have to watch what we buy.

It was, therefore, with some little apprehension that I first listened to Dr Pierre Gorman's suggestion that The University of Melbourne Library purchase his collection of books on Cambridge, which at the time, in 1993, amounted to some 600 titles.

When I came to work in The University of Melbourne Library in 1978 I knew that it held many collections of the calibre of the McArthur Collection. What I did not foresee, however, was the extent to which it was still attracting private libraries and the involvement that their collectors would have with the Library. Orde Poynton, Sophie Ducker, Ian McLaren, Clem and Nina Christesen are just some of the notable collectors with whom we deal regularly on matters relating to their collections. Dr Gorman's approach brought

me into protracted negotiations and regular contact with another Library benefactor.

Pierre Gorman has had an extraordinary career by any standards. There is a more detailed account in the biography of his family, *No Music by Request*, published in 1980.² The only son of Sir Eugene and Marthe Gorman, Pierre was born totally deaf and became the first such person to take the degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Cambridge, having previously graduated as a Bachelor of Agricultural Science and Bachelor of Education from The University of Melbourne. He was the foundation Librarian and Information Officer of the Royal National Institute for the Deaf in London, building during his 12 years a resource of international importance, combining the latest publications with archival materials and museum pieces relating to the history of all aspects of deafness.

After his time in London, Dr Gorman returned to Australia in 1969, working first as director of a policy investigation project with the Victorian School for Deaf Children and subsequently as Lankelly Foundation Scholar on the historical development of the Paget Gorman Systematic Sign Language. From 1972–1983 he held a variety of academic positions at Monash University in the Faculty of Education. During this time and after his retirement from academic life, Dr Gorman has continued to serve on many committees concerned with all aspects of education of people with disabilities and is a director of The Gorman Foundation, a non-profit charitable trust which exists “to assist, develop and improve the social relations between disabled people and other members of the Australian Community.”

His time at Cambridge was obviously happy, stimulating and fulfilling as well as being academically successful. He retained from his years there an enormous affection for and interest in the University and his own College,



Item No. 497 in *Cambridge in Books* —The cover of *The Granta*: “a college joke to cure the dumps”, Nos. 67–91, 1892–92.

Corpus Christi in particular, affection and interest which led him to build a collection, which, when combined with the pre-existing holdings of The University of Melbourne Library, form a resource unparalleled in this country. Books and pictures had always been important to him and in his collection of material relating to Cambridge he demonstrates a real discernment, coupled with the tenacity, not to say obsession of the true collector.

Although this paper is concerned mainly with the collection of printed material bought from Pierre Gorman, the collection of pictorial representations of Cambridge, which he gave to The University of Melbourne Library 12 months after we had bought his books, is of equal importance. It includes engravings, prints, maps and other representations of the county, town and University of Cambridge, but its special and exceptional strength is in depictions of Dr Gorman’s beloved Corpus Christi College. Indeed, Pierre Gorman went so far as to commission a series of watercolours by Derek Abel of parts of the College which he believed had either never been painted or not depicted satisfactorily. The collection is of enormous interest to students of

architecture, art history and printing history as well as to anyone simply seeking a picture of a particular aspect of the built environment of Cambridge.

As neither the University Library nor the University’s Museum of Art had the space to display so many art works it is a special pleasure that over 65 of them are now displayed in the Graduate Centre of the University, in the 1888 building of the former Melbourne Teachers’ College. Some are in the recently dedicated Pierre Gorman Room, others in various parts of the building.

Dr Gorman had already listed his book collection when he offered it to the Library. Once we agreed to purchase the 600 or so titles, he set about creating a complete bibliographical listing which would encompass the Library’s total resources on Cambridge. The fourth edition of *Books on Cambridge* was published in 1997, in time for the meeting of the Australasian Modern British Historians Association in Perth. It is an impressive document — an author listing of about 1,500 titles, giving the location of each within the Library’s many collections. Compilation of the catalogue has involved checking all the Library’s various catalogues, both machine-based and on cards and Dr Gorman has personally inspected almost every item, which in turn has involved trips to 20-odd locations.

Dr Gorman is manipulating this listing to produce a version arranged by year of publication. An earlier version of this proved very useful to people wishing to discover quickly which editions of a work are held, or, more generally, the chronological spread of the collection. A third version, by subject, is also in course of preparation.

And there’s more. The University of Melbourne Library, of course, continues to buy new books on Cambridge and Dr Gorman, having sold us the original collection at a price which could only be described as advantageous to the purchaser has continued to present scarce,

valuable and interesting items to us. In addition, we have discovered, in a very extensive private library on geology which we recently purchased, a significant number of books on Cambridge and individuals associated with it. The Cambridge Collection is thus constantly growing as new material is published and old material becomes available.

In 1995, while revisiting his old College, Dr Gorman was given the chance to inspect the duplicates collection of the Cambridgeshire Libraries' Local Studies Section. He spent several weeks literally on his knees in the cramped stacks choosing additions for the Melbourne collection and was successful in persuading the Local Studies Librarian to present some 250 titles to us, including a complete run of the *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society* from 1895 to 1988, which neatly supplements our existing set which began with 1989.

It is worth stating clearly at this point the enormous benefit which a library derives from the work of the passionate private collector. Notwithstanding the usefulness of the Cambridge Collection as a resource for research and teaching at Melbourne, it must be said that the Library could not afford to devote the time or money to its development or listing that Dr Gorman has done. If we had had to buy the books Dr Gorman collected at their market price, we would not have done so. We would not, either, have devoted the time he has to the painstaking pursuit of elusive titles, nor would we have been able to spare a cataloguer to list the collection. Valuable as the Cambridge Collection is, we would have said that the Library and indeed the University had other priorities. Because of Dr Gorman's generosity with his money and his time, the collection has not only been acquired, it has been made accessible.

The relationship of the private collector to his suppliers is also different from that which normally exists between a library and bookdealer.

Dr Gorman's long personal friendship with Michael Petty, the Cambridgeshire Libraries' Local Studies Librarian, was obviously instrumental in procuring their large gift. Dr Gorman has also been lucky in his booksellers. Without emulating the characters in *84 Charing Cross Road*, he has established with the firm of G. David a relationship remarkable for its professionalism and mutual respect. Offers of material are made with a clear knowledge of what is likely to interest Dr Gorman, what he may consider marginal or over-priced and what he already has. The firm is not a large one. They don't even have a computer, but unlike other, more technologically advanced and larger enterprises, they answer queries quickly and to the point and they don't make mistakes.

Recently Dr Gorman has made the acquaintance (by fax) of an American lawyer, who is doing research of his own on Cambridge and who travels all over the country, picking up material, especially from provincial book fairs. Having heard of Pierre Gorman through David's, he is enthusiastically bombarding him with offers of titles he knows to be lacking from the collection.

Through him, Dr Gorman has been able to add over a dozen college histories to the existing collection of about 200 already listed in *Cambridge in Books*. These latest works include accounts of colleges not previously covered at all, such as Lucy Cavendish and Homerton, as well as expanding the coverage of institutions with several histories to their credit.

Obviously, college histories are a strength of the collection, as are general histories of the University. There are also strong holdings relating specifically to the governance of the University, including poll books for the election of various officers during the 19th century. The Calendar is held almost complete from 1797–1865 and it was a special joy to discover the 1808 edition in the large geology collection mentioned earlier, as this is one of the three issues lacking from Dr Gorman's set.

There are over two dozen histories of various clubs and societies, with a heavy concentration on the rowing clubs, nine or ten books on the Cambridge spies and half a dozen on academic dress.

The built environment is extremely well-covered, with books on the architecture of specific buildings and colleges, as well as others on specific architectural features displayed over a number of sites within the University and the Town. This aspect of the collection is enhanced by the presence of reports of local government instrumentalities, inquiries into various aspects of planning and conservation and reports from the Cambridge Preservation Society. There are several flora of Cambridgeshire as well as general and specific histories and descriptions of Cambridge gardens. Histories and detailed descriptions of churches and chapels abound, as do works on the antiquities of Cambridgeshire, including archaeological reports.

The college histories and various registers provide a rich biographical resource, which is expanded by large numbers of books on, for example physics and physicists at Cambridge, the Cambridge apostles and several works on publishing and bookselling in Cambridge, dealing not only with the Cambridge University Press, but also with Heffers and Gustave David. And, of course, there are several dozen general pictorial books and maps as well as a number of directories such as Kelly's *Directory of Cambridgeshire*.

The question of what for want of a better term we call "creative literature" — poems, plays and novels, has been the subject of much discussion between Dr Gorman and myself. In general, the collection includes such material if Cambridge is an integral part of the work but not if the author just happens to be a Cambridge man or woman. As an example, C.P. Snow's *The Masters*, *The Light and the Dark* and *The Affair* are all included, while his London novels are not. Elizabeth George's *For the*

Sake of Elena is included; the rest of her books are not.

Finding novels set in Cambridge has proved interesting and I was fortunate while I was on leave to go into Heffers bookshop last October when they had mounted a display of "Cambridge Crime". I was able to pick up almost a dozen titles not previously held in the Cambridge Collection and since The University of Melbourne (unlike Sydney) does not specialise in crime novels, they were not already held in the general collection. These nicely supplement the half dozen or so already in the Cambridge Collection and give a pleasingly circular illustration of one of its possible uses. Presumably anyone wishing to write a Cambridge mystery would find valuable factual information there.

Let us finish with a description of a couple of the more unusual items in the Cambridge Collection. They are both manuscripts. We are, incidentally, not trying to build a collection in competition with the Cambridge University Archives. These are simply items which came our way and which we judged to be of some intrinsic interest but not so important as to make it improper for us to take them out of England.

The first is an armorial manuscript dating from 1662 depicting the arms of the Earls of Cambridge, the Chancellors of Cambridge University and the Colleges of Cambridge University. The brilliantly-coloured work was compiled for Edward Montague, 2nd Earl of Manchester (1602–1671). It bears the bookplate of his son Robert, the 3rd Earl who lived from 1634–1683. Apart from its intrinsic interest, Dr Gorman and I believe that it may be worth reproducing in facsimile for sale, especially to members of the various Cambridge Societies around the world.

The second was described in the following terms by G. David:

Album (54 x 36 cm!) of A.G. Wansbrough. Stroke in the winning rowing (boat race, Oxford v. Cambridge) 1925. The album covers

the period 1912—through Eton to Cambridge — to Wansbrough's marriage. (Late 20s?) Early school life, a few leaves — then boating c 35 pages of newspaper cuttings, illustrated by newspaper photos, maps, etc. Then 2/3 pages of invites/dinner cards etc including C.U.B.C. 1925 Ball/Third Trinity boat club dinner 1925. Theatre programmes etc., London & Cambridge. A.D.C. smoking concert 1926. 6/7 more pages of boating/boat race cuttings. Programme Camb. Women's Lacrosse Club v Ox. U.E.L.C. 1926. About 12 or so fine b/w photos of Wansbrough & crew in action rowing & photos of Wansbrough growing up and getting married. A unique collection.

Yes, indeed, but why would we want it?

Despite growing interest in the place of sport in society, this volume seemed to stand at the very margins of our collecting interests, but Dr Gorman decided to purchase and most generously presented it to the Library.

When the book arrived, Dr Gorman and I looked through it together, lamenting the almost total lack of dates on the newspaper cuttings and noting the diversity of Wansbrough's sporting and cultural interests. As well as rowing, he boxed and acted, his name figuring in the cast list in several of the theatrical programmes in the book.

The real interest of this piece of exotica and Mr Wansbrough's relevance to the Library's existing collections, however, only became evident from his entry in the 1980 *Who Was Who*. As well as being an amateur actor, George Wansbrough (1904–79), had a long career in banking, was a government adviser and consultant on numerous committees, ranging from the National Advisory Council for the Motor Manufacturing Industry to the Public Works Loans Board. He was on the Board of the Bank of England and successively a member of the St Marylebone Borough Council and the Holborn Borough Council. He stood for Parliament, too, contesting the seat of West Woolwich in 1935 for the Labour Party. He published articles in *The*

Times, *The Economist*, *The Economic Journal* and the motoring and yachting press. He was on the Council of Bedales School. He was three times married and gave his recreations as "reading, writing and arithmetic".

But most interestingly, from our point of view, he was, for two years from 1936–1937, the Joint Treasurer of the Fabian Society.

The University of Melbourne Library has a longstanding interest in the Fabians. We hold the archives of the Fabian Society and of British political parties in microform and they are a central resource for modern British history.

I have, apart from the entry in *Who Was Who*, been able to find no biography of Wansbrough. Certainly from that publication, he seems to have led an active and varied 75 years and this seemingly bizarre acquisition, therefore, is not just a curio providing a possible source of book illustrations. It will provide another insight into British social and political life in the first half of this century. Even if we are not able to get hold of any later albums, what we can offer might well set someone on the way to providing a full biography of Wansbrough himself.

This is just one possible use for the collection. A glance at the fourth edition of *Cambridge in Books* will undoubtedly suggest others. This latest edition lists some 1,500 titles, showing the location symbols in each case. There are eight colour illustrations.

The catalogue is for sale from the Administrative Services, The University of Melbourne Library for \$20 (including postage and packing).

1. Lugton, Mary E. *George McArthur of Maldon: his life and his book collection* (Melbourne, 1989. Unpublished thesis).
2. Epstein, June. *No music by request: a portrait of the Gorman family*. Sydney, Collins, 1980.