

UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

Library

VOLUME 9, NUMBER 2 DECEMBER 2004

JOURNAL



The Nicest Place for Them to Go

THE MORGAN COLLECTION OF CHILDREN'S BOOKS

by Merete Colding Smith

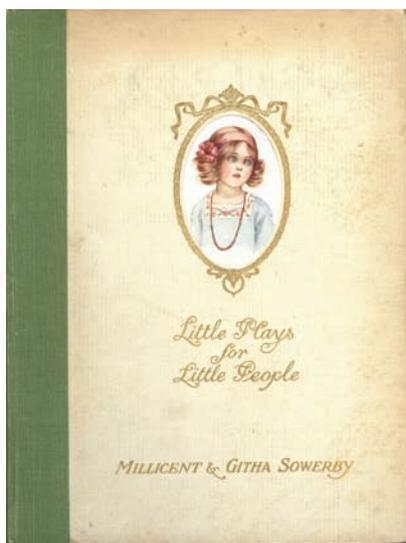
The Library Journal marks the 50th anniversary of the Morgan Collection of Children's Books at the University of Melbourne 1954–2004

This year, 2004, marks the 50th anniversary of the donation to the University of Melbourne of the Morgan Collection of Children's Books by F.C. Morgan (1878–1978), an English librarian with strong antiquarian interests.¹

Although children's books were by no means the main focus of his activities, Morgan retained a keen interest in them all his life. By the time of his donation to the University of Melbourne in 1954, he had collected more than 1000 English children's books dating from 1729 to just after 1900.² It was an extraordinarily generous gift, and correspondence with the University of Melbourne makes it clear that he imposed absolutely no conditions on its use or upkeep.

Top: 'Poor Dicky's dead! — The bell we toll, And lay him in the deep, dark hole. The sun may shine, the clouds may rain, But Dick will never pipe again! His quilt will be as sweet as ours, — Bright buttercups and cuckoo-flowers'. Kate Greenaway poem and illustration, *Under the Window: pictures and rhymes for children*, engraved and printed by Edmund Evans. (London, Routledge, 1879.)

Bottom: Githa Sowerby, *Little Plays for Little People*. (London, H. Frowde, c. 1910.)



F.C. Morgan's Life

F.C. Morgan was born in Stratford-upon-Avon on 29 June 1878 as one of 13 children and because he was born on St Peter's day he was always known in the family as 'Peter'. The Morgans lived on the premises of his father's combined bookshop, lending library and stationer's business where Peter grew up surrounded by books. He was a keen reader from an early age, and after leaving school at the age of 13 to be apprenticed to a draper, he returned home after a few years to become his father's helper in the shop and library until 1904, when he became the first librarian of the new Carnegie-built library in Stratford. From 1910 to 1925 Morgan was librarian at Malvern Public Library, interrupted by service in World War I, from 1916 to 1919. Whilst at Malvern he met and married Emma James, and their only child, a daughter, Penelope Ethel, was born in 1919. She became a librarian as well, and her father's life-long helper.

In 1925 Morgan became librarian and museum curator in Hereford and upon retiring from this position in 1945 took up the honorary librarianship of Hereford Cathedral, which became the focus of much of his life. His daughter



The King admonishes his daughter, 'He who helped you in the time of your trouble, must not now be despised!' in the classic fairytale, *The Frog Prince*, illustrated by Walter Crane. (London, Routledge, c. 1874.)

Penelope assisted him in this role from 1953 and continued as honorary librarian in her own right until shortly before her death in 1990. Owing to his lack of formal education Morgan took particular pride in an honorary M.A. which was awarded by Birmingham University in 1952.

Morgan was repeatedly honoured by the City of Hereford. He was given his own street (F.C. Morgan Close) in 1977, on his 99th birthday, and was awarded the Freedom of the City just before his 100th birthday and subsequent death in 1978, but as the ceremony did not take place in time for him to attend, Penelope Morgan accepted the honour on his behalf.

The 100th birthday of F.C. Morgan on 29 June 1978 was naturally cause for special celebrations and invitations were sent far and wide, even to the Librarian at the University of Melbourne. The Friends of the Baillieu Library commissioned Walter McVitty to write a

booklet on the Morgan Collection of Children's Books. A copy reached Morgan for his birthday, just a few weeks before his death and it gave the old man and his daughter, Penelope, a lot of pleasure to know that their collection of children's books, donated in 1954, was being appreciated in Australia.³ Unfortunately Morgan was taken ill a few days before his birthday and was unable to attend the celebrations in person but he enjoyed the presents and telegrams from his hospital bed before he died three weeks later, on 16 July 1978. F.C. Morgan, his wife Emma, who died in 1967, and Penelope are all buried in the Hereford Cathedral Close.

The Australian Connection

Initially it appears surprising that Morgan should donate his collection to an Australian library. Morgan had never been to Australia and had no family

connections here. Morgan was very strongly involved in the history and cultural life of the area of England where he lived, bounded by Stratford-on-Avon, Malvern and Hereford. He was particularly attached to Hereford, and inscriptions in many of the children's books he collected show that they were collected in and around Hereford.

When Morgan decided in 1954 to donate his collection he was in his 70s, and as he was not in good health he was anxious to find a good home for his collection of children's books. He felt that Britain had a wealth of such collections and decided instead to give his to a Commonwealth country. He was inspired by the example of another English librarian, his acquaintance Edgar Osborne (1890–1978), who had then recently (in 1949) given his substantial collection of children's books to the Toronto Public Library in Canada. The Osborne Collection had



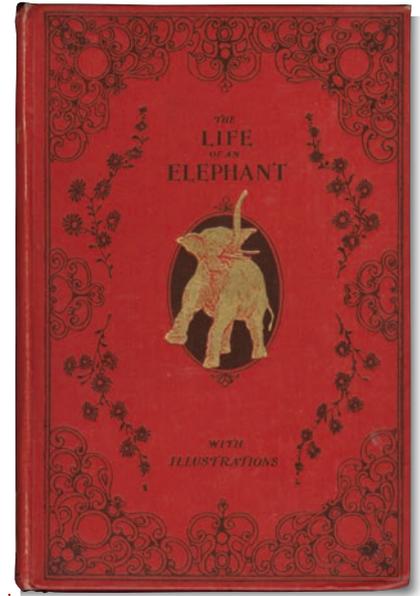
Above, left: 'Saw the children of earth and the tenants of air' is the caption to this delightful illustration in the children's story, *The Butterfly's Ball and the Grasshopper's Feast*, by William Roscoe. (London, J. Harris, c. 1807.)

Above, right: The cover of S. Eardley-Wilmot's *The Life of an Elephant* is a good example of the type of cloth cover that was popular in the 19th century, of which there are many in the Morgan Collection. (London, Seeley and Co., 1901.)

Right: 'She reached the Garden, trampled on the flowers'. Maria Elizabeth Budden, *Right and Wrong Exhibited in the History of Rosa and Agnes*. (London, J. Harris, 1815.)



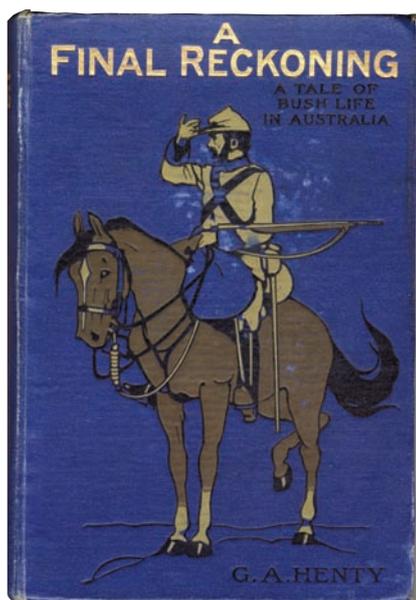
quickly become famous as unique in a Commonwealth library, and Morgan was inspired by this gift to donate his own, similar but smaller, collection to another part of the Commonwealth. The links between Australia and England were particularly strong in the 1950s, during the Menzies era, both with respect to trading and migration. In particular, the coronation of the young Queen



Elizabeth II in 1953 and her tour of Australia in 1954 brought on a rush of patriotic feeling in Australia as well as in England.

A more specific reason for choosing Australia, and in particular the University of Melbourne, to receive the collection, was Morgan's friendship with Francis James Rennell Rodd, Second Baron Rennell of Rodd (1895–1978), diplomat, merchant banker and explorer and member of the House of Lords. He was a long-standing friend of both Morgan and Sir John Dudley Medley, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Melbourne from 1938 to 1951. Rennell had extensive trade connections with Australia and lived in the Hereford area, where both he and Morgan were interested in local history, archaeology and natural history. Rennell had been to Australia several times where he spent extensive periods. He therefore suggested to Morgan that the University of Melbourne might be a suitable place for his collection and Morgan, trusting his judgement, was more than happy for him to act as intermediary.

In February 1954 Rennell wrote a letter to Medley suggesting that Morgan,

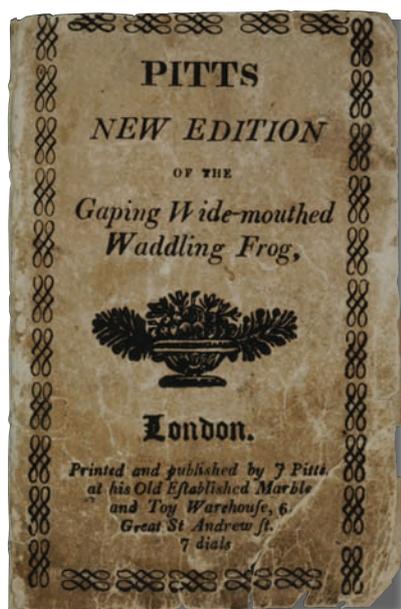


a friend of his, might be willing to donate his substantial collection of children's books to the University of Melbourne, saying that he had suggested this to Morgan as, 'perhaps the nicest place for (the books) to go'. A sample list of 160 books, which had been part of a travelling exhibition in Britain the previous year, was included with the letter.⁴ The initial offer was of children's books from 1729 to 1900 with a few later additions.

In Australia Medley forwarded Rennell's letter along with the list of books to the new Vice-Chancellor, G.W. Paton (Vice-Chancellor from 1951 to 1968). Paton was enthusiastic, as was the librarian Leigh Scott. By August 1954 the collection had arrived in the University of Melbourne Library, ready for processing, the shipment having been facilitated by Rennell via his shipping connections.

The Collection

Morgan collected children's books from an early age and the sample list sent to the University gives a good impression of the nature of the collection. It was gathered, however, in two main stages.



These were the books read by Morgan as a child and owned by him and his family and the books collected by him in adulthood, that is, mainly the early publications. The childhood books were those published after about 1865; they included children's picture books, in particular many by Walter Crane,⁵ Randolph Caldecott⁶ and Kate Greenaway.⁷ In addition, boys'

Above, left: One of many Australian titles in the Morgan Collection, *A Final Reckoning: a tale of bush life in Australia*, by G.A. Henty. (London, Blackie and Son, 1910.)

Above, right: Samuel Foote, *The Great Panjandrum Himself*, illustrated by Randolph Caldecott. (London, Routledge, 1885.)

Left: *The Gaping Wide-mouthed Waddling Frog* is an example of the earliest form of children's book, known as a chapbook. (London, J. Pitts, c. 1800.)

adventure stories by such authors as Henty,⁸ Kingston⁹ and Ballantyne¹⁰ were not part of the sample list, but were a substantial part of the original donation. Though he also collected such books in his later life, many of the books collected by the adult Morgan were pre-1850 publications which would have been antiquarian even in his childhood.¹¹ These included chapbooks, that is, flimsy and ephemeral story books, often containing abbreviated versions of popular stories.¹² Religious versions of such stories given out by Sunday schools were common from the 1840s onwards.¹³ There were also many early story books in the collection with attractive copperplate engravings, clearly intended for a more affluent middle-class market.¹⁴

The Morgan Collection does not end at a definite date, but the material originally sent to Melbourne was largely pre-World War I. Nowadays the collection has grown to approximately 4000 volumes, partly by further

donations from the Morgans, partly by other gifts and incorporation of sections of other collections, and partly through purchases by the library. It is one of three collections of children's books in the Baillieu Library. The other two are the School Fiction Collection of approximately 2000 volumes, consisting of mainly boys' school stories and the McLaren Collection. In addition there is a comprehensive collection of contemporary children's literature in the Education Resource Centre Library.

Merete Colding Smith, formerly Curator of Rare Books in the Baillieu Library, is now a postgraduate student in the University of Melbourne's History Department where she is working on a thesis about the Morgan Collection of children's books. This is an edited and condensed version of a talk given to the Friends of the Baillieu Library on 20 July 2004.



Image from *The Sleeping Beauty*, illustrated by Walter Crane, engraved and colour printed by Edmund Evans. (London, J. Lane, c1897.)

NOTES

- Throughout this year there has been a running display in the Special Collections Reading Room in the Baillieu Library, highlighting different aspects of the Morgan Collection.
- The original donation consisted of 1086 books. Morgan, for the rest of his long life, and his daughter Penelope, until her death in 1990, remained in contact with the University. They frequently added books to the collection and sent biographical and other relevant material. Recently the connection has been re-established to Paul Morgan, F.C. Morgan's nephew now living in Oxford.
- Walter McVitty, *The Morgan Collection of Children's Books: An Appreciation*, Melbourne, Hawthorn Press (for University of Melbourne Library), 1978. There was also an article in *The Age* to celebrate the birthday: Walter McVitty, 'Mr Morgan's Hidden Treasure', *The Age*, 29 June 1978.
- F.C. Morgan, 'Children's Books Belonging to F.C. Morgan, F.S.A. Lent to Various Libraries 1951', in *The University of Melbourne, Registrar's Correspondence*, 1958, no. 982. Folder named 'Morgan Collection of Children's Books' (Hereford, 1950).
- For example Walter Crane, *Marquis of Carabas' Picture Book*, London, Routledge, 1874. (No. 122 on the sample list).
- For example Samuel Foote, *The Great Panjandrum Himself: illustrated by Randolph Caldecott*, London, Routledge, 1885. (No. 126 on the sample list). One of the lesser known of Caldecott's illustrated books. The 'Panjandrum' is a schoolmaster with cap and gown.
- For example Kate Greenaway, *Under the Window: pictures and rhymes for children*, London, Routledge, 1879. (No. 115 on the sample list). This was Kate Greenaway's first picture book and made her reputation.
- For example G.A. Henty, *A Final Reckoning: a tale of bush life in Australia*, New edition, London, Blackie and Son, 1910. (First published 1887).
- For example W.H.G. Kingston, *Snow-Shoes and Canoes, or, The Early Days of a Fur-Trader in the Hudson's Bay Territory*, 2nd edition, London, S. Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1877. (First published 1876). This is an adventure story about Canada with fur traders, buffaloes, elks and Red Indians.
- For example R.M. Ballantyne, *The Coral Island: a tale of the Pacific Ocean*, London, J.F. Shaw, 191-?. (First published 1858). Black and white illustrations. This has a marvellous pictorial cloth cover of a British naval officer.
- By 'antiquarian' I mean old-fashioned even at the time, not current books bought new for children to read.
- For example Robinson Crusoe, York, c. 1810. (No. 3, ii on the sample list).
- For example *Ruth at Service*, London, James Burns, 184-.
- For example Mary Kilner, *Perambulations of a Mouse*, London, Marshall, c. 1790. 2 vols. (No. 8 on the sample list), and *A Pretty Book of Pictures*, London, J. Newbery, ca. 1790. (No. 11 on the sample list).



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