



William Maxwell and the building of the collection

William Maxwell, to whom the task of managing the income of the Trust Fund was given, was born at Leith on 3 April 1873. He began his working life as an assistant in a grocer's shop in Edinburgh but soon realised that there were few prospects in this trade and so he decided to learn shorthand. When he was qualified in this subject by attending evening classes, he left the grocer's shop and at the age of about nineteen he became confidential clerk to Edward Clark. This was a little time before the death of Robert Clark, but Maxwell soon won the confidence of his employer, and his position extended at times beyond the immediate interests of the Company, as the following anecdote illustrates.

Edward Clark owned a string of racehorses which he often ran at meetings in the north of England. But as well as being an owner, Clark had earned a reputation for being a successful punter, and became suspicious that book-makers, seeing him coming, would shorten the odds. Accordingly, he despatched the young Maxwell to a race meeting in the north of England with betting instructions. Needless to say Clark's wagers were successful, but Maxwell later recalled having spent an anxious evening in a strange hotel with several hundred pounds in cash.

As Maxwell's career in the firm developed, Clark entrusted "W.M.", as he became known, with considerable powers and gave him shares in the Company. At the time of Edward Clark's death in 1926, William Maxwell was a Director and Secretary of R. & R. Clark Ltd., and in accordance with Edward Clark's Will he received a sum of money, further shares, and the Executors were instructed to make him Managing Director of the Company. He also became the prime mover in assembling the Edward Clark Collection.

William Maxwell began collecting the books as early as 1931 (or perhaps before that), but difficulties of space made it impossible to store these books at Heriot-Watt College and so the early purchases were kept by William Maxwell at his own house. It was not until the opening of the First Extension to the College in 1935 that books could be stored there and even then they could not be displayed on shelves but had to be kept in locked cupboards in the Printing Department, although from time to time, exhibitions on particular subjects were mounted in display cabinets. By the time of opening Maxwell had assembled.

"over 120 volumes selected from the work of distinguished European and other presses from the sixteenth century to the present day, including such works as a copy of Eusebius, printed by Robert Estienne in 1544 in the Greek types of Claude Garamond, a copy of the large folio Baskerville Bible of 1763 in perfect condition, and excellent examples from the Kelmscott, Doves, Ashendene and other private presses." [\[1\]](#)

The 1934-35 annual report of Heriot-Watt College, from which the quotation above is taken, also states that:

"It is hoped to make these books available for inspection by all those engaged or interested in printing in Edinburgh, and to exhibit them periodically in the display cases in the new building. The preparation of a catalogue is receiving attention." [2]

Maxwell continued to purchase fruitfully throughout the Thirties. In 1936, a leaf from the 42-line Mazarin Bible was added, as well as a copy of the great folio Jubilee Bible designed by Bruce Rogers and entirely set on the Monotype, and the Nonesuch Herodotus. Maxwell also donated his own copy of the the Kelmscott Chaucer, arguably William Morris's greatest work. By 1937, the Collection had increased to 450 items and included an un-cropped edition of the Nuremberg Chronicle, printed by Anton Koberger in 1493. The following year saw the purchase of Haebler's West-European incunabula, and Geisberg's Woodcuts from books of the XVIth century, both being large portfolios of mounted originals. Tuer's fascinating Printers' international specimen exchange in 16 volumes, containing nearly 5000 examples of display work in letter-press and lithography was also purchased.

Maxwell continued to make notable purchases into the 1940s: a fine folio Plantin Bible of 1483, the five-volume Nonesuch Bible, 1924-1927, a fine Bodoni quarto Horace of 1793, a 15th century Dutch manuscript Book of Hours on vellum, and a splendid copy of Medailles de Louis le Grand printed at the Imprimerie Royale in 1702. The College annual report for 1942-43 stated that due to Maxwell's purchases,

"This remarkable collection is now exceptionally representative from the aspect of typography [...] Attention is now being directed to the acquisition of representative examples of illustration and of bookbinding." [3]

During the Forties the collection's direction was further diversified with the addition of early scientific and mathematical books, typical "Keepsake" volumes from the 19th century, illustrated books for children and examples of present day book production. One outstanding acquisition, in 1947, was a copy of Bassandyne's and Arbuthnot's Bible, the first printed in Scotland.

William Maxwell continued to purchase material for addition to the collection up to his death on 12 October 1957, though around a year earlier the Clark Trustees had transferred responsibility for the funds of the "Printing School Trust" to the Governors of Heriot-Watt College.

In 1964 the Printing School was transferred from Heriot-Watt College to the newly established Napier College of Science, built round Merchiston Castle, once home to

John Napier, among many other things, the inventor of logarithms. The Edward Clark Collection was handed over by the Governors of Heriot-Watt College to the Board of Management of Napier College subject to the condition that items from the Library could be borrowed for the purpose of exhibition or for demonstration in classes, either by Heriot-Watt University (which Heriot-Watt College became in 1966) or by the Edinburgh College of Art.

In 1966 the opportunity arose to acquire a considerable number of books from the Library of the late Bernard H. Newdigate, who had operated the Shakespeare Head Press. This very valuable addition added appreciably to the books from Private Presses, not only from the Shakespeare Head Press but also from others. Bernard Newdigate had, in the 1930's, reviewed in *The London Mercury* books for their typographical content as opposed to their literary merit. Among the books so acquired were the copies which had been sent to him for review as well as scrap-books containing the reviews themselves, and correspondence.

In the thirty years to date Napier College became Napier College of Science & Technology, then Napier Polytechnic of Edinburgh, and is now Edinburgh Napier University. During this period the collection has remained within the institution, initially located in the Printing Department, but subsequently within the University Library, administered by Napier University Learning Information Services, with assistance from the Department of Print Media, Publishing and Communication, the latest incarnation of the Printing School.

Acquisitions have continued to be made to a collection that has not been frozen at any particular date. However, most of the recent acquisitions have been of secondary material, that is, descriptive and historical works on printing and typography. The exception has been some purchases of private press books.

Notes

[1] Heriot-Watt College. Annual report 1934-35. [Edinburgh : Heriot-Watt College, 1935] p.21.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Heriot-Watt College. Annual report 1942-43. [Edinburgh : Heriot-Watt College, 1943] p.12.