

## THE HURD LIBRARY HARTLEBURY CASTLE

### 1. Introduction

The Hurd Library at Hartlebury Castle is an important part of Worcestershire's, and, indeed, the nation's cultural heritage. It is a unique example of a working library, formed by an 18<sup>th</sup> century scholar bishop of wide interests, which remains on its original shelves and in the original room built for it shortly after Hurd moved to Hartlebury Castle, as Bishop of Worcester, in 1781.

### 2. Bishop Hurd

Richard Hurd was born at Congreve, in the parish of Penkridge in Staffordshire, in 1720 and died in 1808. He was born into an age of Augustan conservatism but lived on into the new era of Romantic radicalism. He was reared in the tradition of classical orthodoxy but grew to appreciate the rather neglected mediaeval period and to contribute to the shifts of taste which characterised the closing years of the century. His book collection reflects his own tastes and interests but is immensely strengthened by its amalgamation with the libraries of three other men, Alexander Pope, Ralph Allen and William Warburton, and by the gift of a portion of the library of King George III, whose main collection laid the foundation of the British Museum Library, now the British Library.

Hurd's interests were broad as well as deep, including literature, travel and philosophy, as well as theology. He was friendly with the poets Thomas Gray and William Mason and he edited the works of Cowley. He was also friendly with Edward Gibbon, despite his criticisms of the latter's *Decline and fall of the Roman Empire*. He was a prolific and influential author. His *Letters on chivalry and romance*, published in 1762, which affirmed the power of the imagination, stimulated a revival of interest in mediaeval and renaissance English literature. He also published *Moral and political dialogues* in 1759 and *Uses of foreign travel* in 1764. His most significant book however, from the point of view of his own career, was his edition of Horace's *Ars poetica*, published in 1749, while he was still at Emmanuel College Cambridge. He had modelled this edition on William Warburton's edition of Pope's *Dunciad* and a correspondence between the two scholars began, which became eventually a close friendship.

Hurd died in 1808. He had never married, so there was no widow to be provided for, as in the cases of Allen and Warburton. He was therefore able to leave the library in its entirety to his successors. The bequest reads:

"I give and bequeath to my successors in the See of Worcester, and all succeeding Bishops of that See for the time being for ever the use of all my books which I shall have in the Library of the Episcopal House or Castle at Hartlebury at my death and also the furniture of the same Library."

### 3. The Library

Several catalogues in manuscript have been made since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in 1783, 1789, 1819, 1844 and 1909, but the first really authoritative one was compiled by Graham Cartwright as part of his M.Litt. thesis at the University of Birmingham in 1980, supervised by Dr Benedikz.. This is an invaluable guide to the library and is accompanied by a short history and appreciation of it.

The library's value as an asset, both for tourism and scholarship, lies in the richness of its provenances (signatures, inscriptions, marginal notes and bookplates), in its early printed and famous books, in the variety of its subject matter and in the sheer beauty of its appearance. There are 43 books from Pope's library, 97 from Warburton's and 103 gifts from George III, often with the royal arms on the binding. Double provenances appear in some volumes; for example, Pope's Greek New Testament, 1543, was given to him by Jonathan Swift. It would need a lengthy paper to list all the treasures, but they include, in no particular order:

One incunable – a French edition of Voragine's *Legenda aurea*, 1476 (Warburton's copy - said to be the first book printed in France)

Pope's copy of Sidney's *Arcadia*, 1599

Appian's *Romanorum historiarum*, 1551, given by Lord Sandys to Hurd in 1784. (The Sandys family still lives locally)

Works of Saint Augustine, 1569, inscribed by a former Bishop of Worcester, John Prideaux, many of whose books are in the Cathedral Library

A Breeches Bible, 1559

Bewick's *History of British birds*, 1797

Robert Burton's *Anatomy of melancholy*, 1638

Dugdale's *Antiquities of Warwickshire*, 1656

*Eikon Basilike*, 1649

Fox's *Actes and monuments*, (Book of Martyrs), 1596

Holinshed's *Chronicles*, 1587

Richard Hooker's *Laws of ecclesiastical polity*, 1594

Hugh Latimer's *Sermons*, 1578

A *Koran* of 1698 (given to Hurd by Warburton – an early example of inter-faith relations?)

Plato's works, printed in Paris by the Estienne family, 1578

Palladio's four books of architecture, 1738

Vitruvius. *De architectura*, 1649

Nash's *Collections for the history of Worcestershire*, 1781-2

Pope's copy of Spenser's *Faerie Queen*, 1611

Newton's *Opticks*, 1730

A Cicero, 1772 and a Pufendorf, 1758, given to Hurd by his two royal pupils, the Prince of Wales and Prince Frederick

A New Testament printed by John Oswen of Worcester in 1550

The Baskerville printing of Juvenal, 1761

Camden's *Britannia*, 1600

Castiglione's *Il libro del cortegiano*, 1528

Babington's *Sermon*, 1591 (printed by Richard Field from Stratford-upon-Avon, a neighbour and friend of Shakespeare)

A Book of Common Prayer, 1552, bearing the Stuart royal arms on the binding

The 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> editions of Johnson's Dictionary

William Mason's *Poems*, 1764 (given to Hurd by the author)

Thomas Chatterton's *Poems*, 1782

Other subjects which interested Hurd include medicine ( e.g. James Johnstone of Kidderminster's *Essay on the use of the ganglions of the nerves*, 1771); social matters (e.g. reports on the Shropshire and Staffordshire infirmaries, 1789 and 1790); science (e.g. Sprat's *History of the Royal Society*, 1667); travel (e.g. Chardin's *Travels into Persia and East Indies*, 1686); botany (e.g. Curtis's *Flora Londinensis*, 1777-8); country life (e.g. Walton's *Complete angler*, 1784); Methodism (e.g. John Wesley's *Letters*, 1791); Arabic (e.g. writings by Grignor, 1750 and Muhammad Ibn Zakariya, 1766); and art (e.g. Gilpin's *Observations relative chiefly to picturesque beauty*, 1786). The library also contains, of course, Hurd's own publications, his personal manuscripts, letters and commonplace books and other documents; those relating more specifically to the Diocese were transferred to the Diocesan Record Office in 1996.

That the library, which now contains about 4,500 volumes, representing about 2,050 separate titles, remained a live collection long after Hurd's death is demonstrated by the inscriptions in later volumes.

#### **4. The future of the Library**

There has never been a better time to exploit the attractions of rare and fine books and manuscripts in wonderful settings. Over the last 20 or so years librarians of such collections have worked patiently to catalogue, display and promote the treasures in their care and to overcome the widespread perception, regrettably often encouraged by their predecessors, that rare books must not be handled, except occasionally by eminent scholars, and that rare book librarianship was an ivory tower, far outside the main stream. Special collections now publicise their holdings and enthusiastically welcome visitors. Students are excited to find scope for dissertations and extended essays and teachers can freshen up their classes by taking pupils to see the original sources for their lessons.

There is the opportunity for all this at Hartlebury. An online catalogue would clearly be desirable but even without one it will be possible to introduce students to the collection and its potential. For example, work can be done on the life of Richard Hurd, perhaps studying his commonplace books and marginalia, to build up a picture of his role as a literary critic, exploring how he chose his books and how they influenced him. His notes in an edition of the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher show how he spotted sources for some of Pope's lines. The provenances need much more work and are a subject in themselves. Bindings, fine printing, and books with illustrations can be studied and displayed.

*Rachel Johnson - Taken from a paper by Christine Penney 10 Feb. 2008*

***To arrange a visit for research or interest please email Virginia Wagstaff on [v.wagstaff@hartleburycastletrust.org](mailto:v.wagstaff@hartleburycastletrust.org)***