

Franks Forages No 30. Music in the Library.

A few years ago I wrote some pieces entitled 'Confessions of a Room Guide' which contained some silly answers to silly questions asked by visitors. In answer to the common question asked in the Library, "How many books are there and what sort of books?" I later composed a poem, the first line of which went

'There are books on every subject under the sun'

In those days, having no idea what books were in the Library, I took a guess at the kinds of books that were there. Having recently looked at the NT Collections website, I realise that my guesswork was not far out!! 5 lines in the poem read:

'We have music scores, Bach's fugues and toccatas.

Schubert, Chopin. Preludes and sonatas.

Opera transcripts of Rossini, Donizetti and Bellini,

Music for the dance, waltz and gavotte,

You just name it; we have got the lot.

Yes, there is a lot of music in the Library, much of it transcriptions for harp and piano and sometimes other instruments of Italian operatic music from the first half of the nineteenth century; much of it by Rossini, Donizetti, Bellini, early Verdi and other lesser known composers including Mercadante, Pacini and Ricci. Operas of the period were rich in melody and the music lent itself to transcription and performance in the Drawing Rooms of country houses as evidenced by the amount of such music at Charlecote. One can imagine such after dinner entertainment in the Library or Drawing Room! Composers in that era were under pressure from impresarios to produce two or three operas a year, hence a plethora of suitable melodies!

Over the past half century there has been a resurgence of interest in opera of the early 19th century and many hitherto unknown works have been resurrected and performed; some for the first time in over 150 years. Many of these works are also available on disc. All the while, music from these rarely performed operas have been in the Library at Charlecote! During the Grand Tours to Italy, melodies from these works would have been heard played in public places or when the nobility gathered in the evenings for entertainment. Transcribed copies would be brought back to this country and performed during musical evenings in country houses.

Many of the pieces in the Library were arranged for harp and piano by Nicolas-Charles Bochsa, a French musician who became harpist to the Imperial Orchestra in 1813. In 1817 he became involved in fraud and forgery and fled to England to avoid prosecution. In 1839 he became involved with another scandal when he ran off with the soprano Anna Bishop, finally settling in Australia where he died.

As might be expected, there is music by John Thomas, the Welsh harpist who often visited Charlecote. He wrote a lot of music as well as arranging Welsh folk music and songs for piano and harp.

There is a piece of music in the Library entitled *The Pumpkin Polka* by Mrs Powlett (Pawlett?) Lane! Could this be Caroline (Carry)? There's a thought!

I include as an addendum to this forage the complete poem

Frank Storr

Confessions of a Room Guide- The Library.

I suppose that one of the most frequently asked questions in the Library is, "How many books are there in the Library?" I've always understood there to be around 3000, so the answer is fairly straightforward. However, I was once asked by a man dressed in the attire of an Imam, "what kind of books are here?" Short of telling him that he would unlikely find a Koran but plenty of Christian volumes, I replied:

*"There are books on every subject under the sun;
We have books on geology, books on psychology,
Books on biology, books on sociology.
Books on phraseology and every other -ology.
Books on topography, books on geography.
Books on oceanography and every other -ography.
Books on philosophy, books on theosophy.
Prayer books, hymn books, fat books and slim books;
Books on God and His creation;
Books on New World exploration.
There are books on every subject under the sun;*

*We have books on architecture, in particular
Saxon, Norman, Gothic, Perpendicular.
We have books on kings and queens, can you imagine it?
Anglo Saxon, Norman and Plantagenet.
With books on dukes and earls the shelves adorn
And other gentry 'to the manor born.'
Books on yeoman farmers and the land,
And there are books we do not understand.
We have music scores, Bach's fugues and toccatas.
Schubert, Chopin. Preludes and sonatas.
Opera transcripts of Rossini, Donizetti and Bellini,
Music for the dance, waltz and gavotte,
You just name it; we have got the lot.
There are books on Shakespeare, Spenser and John Donne;
"There are books on every subject under the sun.*

*There are books of fact and books of fiction;
Almanacs that tell prediction;
Books on how to forecast weather,
Books on herbs and books on heather,
Three thousand books here altogether.
There are books on veg'tables and flowers;
Minute books and a 'Book of Hours.'
We have books on jars and vases Orient;
Books on eels and lucas haurient.
Books on how to fish for tench,
Books on how to woo a wench
Books on love and books on marriages;
Books on horses and on carriages.
Books on how to seek out papists;
Books on how to deal with rapists;
Books there are here by the ton
On every subject under the sun.*

*Large books, small books, short books, tall books.
(There are some that really aren't at all books!)
We have books on myths and maths and moths;
Books on Goths and Visigoths;*

*Books in Latin, French and German.
Books on how to preach a sermon.
Books of legends, books of fables;
Books on Pietra Dura tables.
Books about the Civil War;
Edgehill, Naseby, Marston Moor.
Books on justice, books on law.
Books on silver by Paul Storr!
Books on being a Prime Minister;
Books on heraldry; most sinister.
(The terms they use might make you nervous;
If so, then please consult Chris Purvis.)*

*There are books on every subject under the sun.
On Bloody Mary and Queen Bess
And how the Tudor ladies dress.
Books on sport: On bowls and croquet
And billiards in that room so smoky!
Books on how to cook a carp
And books on how to play the harp.
Mystery books, history books,
Books on hunting and on fishing;
Books on hoping and on wishing.
Butchery, bakery and candlestick makery!
Flattery, philately and Rowland Hill,
Penny Blacks and you can get them still.
Books on family etiquette,
Books on gambling, Books on debt.
Books on how to lose your money,
Some are sad and some are funny.
Burke's and Debrett's tomes on Peers;
Books on hops and brewing beers.
I hope that gives you some idea
Of the books that we have here,
I'll finish now as I had begun
There are books on every subject under the sun
Time prevents me telling more,
The Billiard Room is through that door!"*

Thank you for your time." "A pleasure"

"Good afternoon, what a lovely room. Is this the Library? Goodness me! How many books are there in here? What sort of books?"

"There are books on every subject under the sun."

"Really?"

"Really. The Billiard room is through there."

Frank Storr 2006