

RICHARD HURD: BISHOP AND BIBLIOPHILE

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For two hundred and thirty years, a village near Kidderminster has sheltered an outstanding survival of the Age of Enlightenment – the Hurd Library at Hartlebury Castle.

The seed for this library was sown in 1779, with the death of the Bishop of Gloucester, William Warburton (1698–1779). Warburton had been a great friend of Alexander Pope, who, on his death in 1744, left him half his library. He left the other half to Ralph Allen (1693–1764), the rich philanthropist of Bath and the model for Squire Allworthy in Fielding's *Tom Jones*. Warburton married Allen's niece Gertrude, who also happened to be his heir. In due course, therefore, Warburton became the owner of a fine library.

Warburton was not a popular man; both his scholarship and his manners were widely ridiculed, yet in 1749 he received a most gratifying compliment. An obscure young Fellow of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, had edited Horace's *Ars Poetica* and found Warburton's editorial style a useful model for his own, acknowledging his debt in the preface. 'I chuse therefore' he wrote 'to rest on the single authority of a great author ... the illustrious friend and



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A pencil drawing of Bishop Richard Hurd by William Hoare, 1764.



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Hartlebury Castle in Worcestershire, home to the Hurd Library.

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commentator of Mr Pope.' He sent a copy to Warburton, who replied ecstatically: 'I wish it was in my power to make a suitable acknowledgment for my obligations. The best thing I have to offer you is a very unprofitable friendship.' The young Fellow was Richard Hurd (1720-1808), then aged twenty-nine.

A Love of Books

Richard was a Midlands lad, born to a farming family near Penkridge in Staffordshire. From the grammar school at Brewood, near Wolverhampton, he went to Emmanuel College, Cambridge, to study for the church. After taking orders he held a curacy in Norfolk, but in 1743 the college offered him a fellowship and he remained there for the next fourteen years. For ten of those he was College Librarian.

His love of book collecting had started early. In the Hurd Library we have one of his first purchases: Richard Bentley's *Eight Sermons Preach'd at the Honourable Robert Boyle's Lecture*, 1735, which he bought aged seventeen.

Patrons and Preferments

Warburton's 'unprofitable friendship' was an understatement. He introduced Hurd to Ralph Allen and encouraged him to pursue a clerical career rather than spend his life in the comforts of Cambridge. He obtained for him a Whitehall preachship in 1750 and in 1756 the College presented him to the Leicestershire living of Thurcaston.

In 1768 Warburton founded some lectures, named after himself, and invited Hurd to give the first series, at Lincoln's Inn. They attracted large audiences and brought Hurd to the notice of George III who, in 1774, made him Bishop of Lichfield. This brought him back to the West Midlands for good.

The King, a great book collector himself, recognised a fellow bibliophile and a close friendship developed. Hurd spent much time at Windsor and oversaw the studies of the Prince of Wales. He was a particular favourite of Queen Charlotte, who kept Gainsborough's portrait of him in, of all places, her bedroom.

Buying and Building a Library

Hurd became well-known as a book collector and for attracting gifts. In 1779 the Duke of Montagu gave him a copy of the magnificent Foulis Virgil of 1778. Shortly afterwards Warburton died, leaving his library to be sold for the benefit of the Gloucester Infirmary. Hurd was a trustee of his will and decided to buy the library himself. The cost, £350, cannot have made much of a dent in the handsome annual stipend he was receiving at Lichfield - £1800 - but he soon incurred greater expense, for before he had time to move the books to Eccleshall the King promoted him to Worcester, in May 1781, hoping, he said, that Hurd would find 'Hartlebury to be a better summer residence than Eccleshall'. He did indeed; as Bishop he also had a palace in Worcester but it was Hartlebury that he loved and where he spent the remainder of his long life, assisted by his secretary, his devoted nephew, Richard Hurd junior.

Hurd paid his first visit to Hartlebury in July 1781. To his horror there was no library in the house and nowhere to put the large collection he now owned. 'This, I doubt' he wrote to Thomas Balguy on 6 August 'will put me on the expense of building. But this is only one of the many embarrassments we draw upon ourselves by accepting bishoprics'.

The only space available was above the long gallery, which had nothing but a 'cat-slide' roof over it. It faced west, which was not ideal, but he had no choice. James Smith, a minor architect from Shifnal in Shropshire, made a plan in November and building began at once, proceeding with such speed that by the end of 1782 the room was complete. It consists of a main central space, lit by a large bow window overlooking the lake, with antechambers at each end. Ionic columns of wood painted to resemble marble divide the sections and the book cases are decorated with plasterwork. Some of them still have the original shelf marks pasted on the rear and side walls. The plaster ceiling was designed by another Midlands man, Joseph Bromfield of Shrewsbury. A Worcester artist, James Ross, painted watercolours of the external elevation before and after.

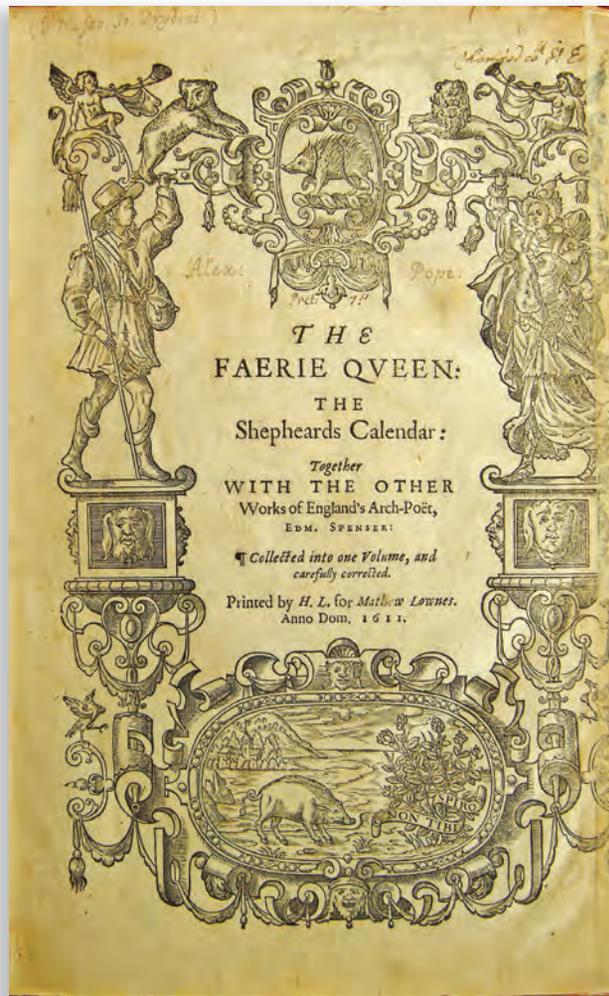
There is no record as yet discovered of the cost, but in January 1783 Hurd wrote to the new Bishop of Gloucester: 'You will be glad to hear that my library is finished and what is almost incredible, paid for. But you will judge how poor it has made me; so that I have nothing now to do but to hide my head in London.' Two months later it nearly went horribly wrong, for the Archbishop of Canterbury died and the King offered the primacy to Hurd. With well-concealed horror and his usual impeccable courtesy he declined. The King, who had begun giving him books months before the library was completed, did not hold it against him and visited him in 1788, taking breakfast in the library with Queen Charlotte.

A Treasure-house of Books

To paraphrase Henry James's comment on *Middlemarch*: the library is a treasure-house of details and a far from indifferent whole. Setting and content are in perfect harmony and its amazingly varied stock (reflecting the differing tastes of its four creators: Pope, Allen, Warburton and Hurd himself) provides an unsurpassed insight into the eighteenth-century mind.

The books from Pope's library are full of annotations in his hand. His copy of the 1611 Spenser belonged formerly to John Dryden and a 1543 Greek and Latin New Testament was given to him in 1714 by Jonathan Swift. There are examples of printing from the presses of Aldus, Froben, Stephanus, Foulis, John Baskerville and Shakespeare's fellow Stratfordian, Richard Field, together with items printed locally in Dudley, Kidderminster and Worcester. Classics, theology and philosophy are well represented, as one would expect in the library of a clergyman, but they sit alongside works on medicine, travel, gardening, linguistics, drama, poetry, history, law, local studies, zoology, science, mathematics – there is something for everyone. A recently compiled subject index has turned up books on insects, flagellation, suicide, happiness, laughter, marriage and Tibet.

Over a hundred books were given by George III, including many on foreign travel. Gifts from Hurd's neighbours show that book-collecting was flourishing in Worcestershire. Donors include Lord Sandys of Ombersley Court, Henry Cecil of Hanbury Hall, the local historian Treadway Nash, the Rector of Grimley, the Dean of Worcester and Hurd's own chaplain, Richard Kilvert (his father's cousin and great-uncle of the diarist).



Alexander Pope's copy of Edmund Spenser's *Works*, 1611.

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Of particular interest are the notes Hurd made, both in his books and his three commonplace books, begun in 1744, all of which are now subjects of study in their own right. Letter books hold letters to Hurd (including a poem in the handwriting of Thomas Gray) and copies of many he wrote himself.

Preserving the Library

Hurd left the use of all his books to his successor and all subsequent bishops of Worcester for ever. The library has remained in its original room and on its original shelves ever since his death in 1808, the only example of an Anglican Bishop's library to do so, cherished by every succeeding Bishop and a succession of honorary Hurd Librarians.

The Bishop now lives in Worcester and the castle (though not the library) is for sale. Since 2007 the library has had the great advantage of an active body of Friends, who, in 2009, founded the Hartlebury Castle Preservation Trust. This has recently been successful in a Stage 1 application

to the Heritage Lottery Fund. Work is now under way on Stage 2. If this succeeds, the Trust will be able to purchase the castle and keep the library *in situ*.

Already, thanks to the Friends and the Trust and the support of the present Bishop, the Right Reverend John Inge, the library is becoming more widely known and used than Hurd could ever have imagined. ●

Chris Penney is the current Hurd Librarian.

Further Reading

Graham C. Cartwright, *A Catalogue of the Hurd Library, Hartlebury Castle: with an introductory essay* (unpublished M.Litt. thesis, University of Birmingham, 1980).

Richard Hurd, *The Early Letters of Bishop Richard Hurd, 1739-1762*, Sarah Brewer, ed. (Church of England Record Society, 1995).

Francis Kilvert, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Right Rev. Richard Hurd* (Richard Bentley, 1860).

Nicholas A.D. Molyneux, 'Hartlebury Castle, Worcestershire: an architectural history of a bishop's residence', *Transactions of the Worcestershire Archaeological Society*, Third series, vol. 22, 2010.

Christine Penney, 'A bishop and his books', *The Book Collector*, vol. 60, no. 3, autumn 2011.

William Warburton, *Letters from a Late Eminent Prelate to One of his Friends* (T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1809).

thehurdlibrary.tumblr.com

www.hartleburycastletrust.org