

Short notes

Liverpool Botanic Garden's library catalogues

Liverpool's first Botanic Garden was founded in 1800 and opened in 1803. It was established by means of a private offering of shares to "proprietors" and was administered by a board of trustees. In an address delivered to the proprietors on 3 May 1802, William Roscoe (1802) set out the objectives of the institution and stated "it is also thought expedient, that a library of works in natural history, and a collection of dried plants, should be formed with all possible expedition, as appendages to the institution". The library and herbarium were housed in rooms within the lodge of the curator, John Shepherd, adjoining the entrance to the garden.¹

In 1907 the Botanic Garden's library was transferred by the City's Parks Department to the Central Library. The books were catalogued individually in the library's alphabetical index catalogue and assigned a shelf-mark, but were then stored in a reserve book stack and were not immediately accessible to users. Certain of the rarest items, such as a copy of Peter Simon Pallas's *Flora rossica* (1784–1788) which had been presented by Tsar Alexander I (reigned 1777–1825) in appreciation of the Liverpool Botanic Garden's help in supplying plants for his newly established botanic garden in St Petersburg, were kept in the Library's Oak Room which is reserved for the special collections.

Though it was possible to locate individual books from the Botanic Garden's library through the City Library's author and title catalogues, it had not previously been possible to reconstruct the contents of the library in the absence of a contemporary catalogue. The accidental discovery in the Liverpool Record Office of two lists, one (in manuscript) dating from 1859² and the second (in typescript) dating from 1907, has allowed the construction of a database containing the contents of both lists.³ As one would expect, there is significant overlap: the 1859 list contains 228 numbered items, whereas the un-numbered 1907 list has 267 items. Thirty of the items in the former list are not represented in the latter, making an overall total of 297 items.

The library was reputedly founded with a gift of books from Sir Joseph Banks, though no supporting correspondence has been traced.⁴ Rare items such as the five volumes (not just the botanical section) of Dryander's (1796–1800) catalogue of the Banksian library, dating from just before the foundation of the Garden, may have come from this source.⁵

To estimate the extent to which the Botanic Garden's library has remained intact, the books listed as folio-sized were sought in the City Library's alphabetical index catalogue.⁶ Of 50 titles so described, only seven could not be traced. The missing titles include J. Parkinson's *Theatrum botanicum* (1649), P. J. Redouté's *Les liliacées* (1802–1816) and J. D. Hooker's *The rhododendrons of Sikkim-Himalaya* (1849).

NOTES

¹ This building is illustrated in Troughton and Corry (1810: 364), "Liverpool Botanic Garden: lodges at the main entrance, N.W. view": an extra-illustrated copy with 46 topographical wood engravings is in the Liverpool Record Office (LRO Hq 942.721 TRO).

² LRO Hq 58.74 BOT.

³ This database is stored on the National Museums Liverpool server but is currently only accessible to local network users.

⁴ Neil Chambers (Banks Letters project), pers. comm., 3 February 2003.

⁵ Each volume contains a bookplate inscribed "Transferred from the Parks & Gardens Committee, 22.10.1907".

⁶ This is now (April 2003) partly available on-line at <http://www.merseylibraries.org/>.

REFERENCES

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ROSCOE, W., 1802 *An address, delivered before the proprietors of the Botanic Garden in Liverpool, previous to opening the garden, May 3, 1802. To which are added the laws of the institution, and a list of the proprietors.* Liverpool: printed by J. McCreery. Pp 60.

TROUGHTON, T. and CORRY, J., 1810 *The history of Liverpool.* Liverpool: privately published. Pp viii, vi, 389; 46 plates.

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