

University Library, Special Collections & Archives
Highlight for July 2011

Miss Docker's Album 1830: pre-Victorian scrap-booking

The fashion for creating scrap-books is nothing new, as shown by a recent donation of an early 19th century example.

The leather-bound volume has an elaborate copperplate inscription (signed J. Harding) on the first page: 'Miss Docker's Album 1830' and the cover has a tooled label: 'H.H. Docker 1829'. A cut-out image of robins above the inscription suggests that this album may have been a gift for Christmas 1829.

The album would originally have had blank pages (the paper is watermarked with the date 1824) many of which have been decorated with trompe-l'oeil watercolour borders enclosing quotations of poetry, prose and scripture (usually initialled), a collection of riddles, and painted facsimile visitors' cards.

The scrap-book also contains watercolour sketches, some signed by H.H. Docker; drawings; coloured transfers; paper-lace greeting cards and Valentine's cards, many coloured by hand; stick-on cut-outs, depicting animals, birds, flowers, etc; and lithographs, including scenes from the Isle of Man by Day & Haghe after A.F Watts, from *Ashe's Views of the Isle of Man* (set of four, 1837), a lithograph of Princess Victoria celebrating the reduction in the stamp-duty on newspapers from 4d to 1d in 1836 (from *The News*), and 'The Sisters of Bethany' from *The Amulet* (1830). There are particularly colourful costume cut-outs of Chinese nobility from 'Whampoa' (Huangpu District, Guangzhou) sent by 'dear Fred' in September 1854.



Clues to the local Liverpool origins of the scrap-book include extracts from the poetry of Felicia Hemans, the lithograph of Edward Whitley (MP for Everton) from the *Liverpool Courier*, and the many local names and places on the autograph pages, including Tranmere, Holt Hill, Cheshire, Everton, Liverpool, Birkenhead, and Waterloo.

The contents of the scrap-book are dated 1830-1895 and closely reflect the contents of the popular 19th century literary annuals and gift-books, of which the Library also holds a collection:
<http://sca.lib.liv.ac.uk/collections/collDESCS/litann.html>

The sentimental nature of the Valentine's cards (see bottom of page) is in contrast to the last piece of text written out for the album, a two-page contribution entitled 'Secret Correspondence' with the heading 'A young lady newly married being obliged to show her husband all the letters she wrote sent the following to an intimate friend.'

my almost bursting heart I tell you my dear husband is the most amiable of men I have now been married seven weeks and have never found the least reason to repent the day that joined us. My husband is both in person and manners far from resembling Ugly . Cross . Old Disagreeable and jealous Monsters. who think by confining to secure a wife - it is his maxim to treat as a

The 'key' to the hidden message of what appears to be a eulogy to marital bliss is given at the end of the 'letter', instructing the reader 'to read the first and then every alternate line'.

Scrap-book (Liverpool University Library MS.29) kindly donated by Helen Pickavance.

References:

University of Liverpool, Special Collections & Archives website:
<http://sca.lib.liv.ac.uk/collections/index.html>

Literary annuals: <http://sca.lib.liv.ac.uk/collections/collDESCS/litann.html>

Album of Victorian Christmas cards at SPEC K.11.14:
<http://library.liv.ac.uk/record=b1506389~S3>

Selected images from SPEC K.11.14 (SC&A advent calendar 2009):
<http://sca.lib.liv.ac.uk/collections/highlights/h0912calendar/h0912adventcalendar24.htm>

