

For my MA LIS dissertation in 2014 I researched women as book collectors in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Saint-Smith, 2014). Book collecting was highly fashionable at that time, and the male book collectors of the era (known by their contemporaries as the "bibliomaniacs") are well documented. The historical view of women as collecting for sentimental or decorative reasons, not understanding the value of the objects and therefore not really collecting in any meaningful way at all, has obscured the history of female collectors in general and book collectors in particular. Their collections are not preserved and there is a limited amount of documentary evidence or prior research into them.

My dissertation was based around a chapter of *The Book Hunter In London* by W. Roberts on women as book collectors (1895). Roberts argues that there is no such thing as a true female bibliophile, but suggests some women who may qualify, and some others who possessed interesting collections. From his list of fifteen I selected four who lived over a similar period of time and whose sale catalogues were easily available. Frances Mary Richardson Curren (1785-1861) is one of the few female book collectors who is well known. Lady Frances Vernon Harcourt (1805-1872) was a member of the Harley family who inherited the majority of her family estates towards the end of her life. Lady Sydney Morgan (1778-1859) was a famous Irish author. Miss Margaret Bothwell Drummond (1795-1862) was the descendant of a notable Scottish family, but there is next to no information about her other than the basic biographical facts. I studied their habits as book collectors using David Pearson's framework for the study of seventeenth century libraries which proposes evaluating five categories: Contents, Acquisition, Design and Storage, Motivation and Destruction and Loss (Pearson, 2012).

Each of these women's collections were sold posthumously via Sothebys auction house, so there is a catalogue that details at least part of their collections (Sothebys, 1873, 1863, 1862a, 1862b). In addition, Richardson Curren had a private catalogue made of her collection in 1833 (Stewart and Richardson Curren, 1833). The analysis of these catalogues formed the basis of my research. I elected to use Curren Richardson's private catalogue for quantitative analysis as it contained records of more of her collection than the sale catalogue and was presented as she had chosen to present it, although I used information from the sale catalogue as part of my discussion.

The main requirement from working with these catalogues was to have a data set that I could easily manipulate to draw conclusions about the collecting habits of these women. I was looking for quantitative data to both provide a profile of their collections and to interrogate specific statements e.g. that one of the things that made Curren Richardson's collections special was the large number of natural history books she inherited from her great-grandfather, physician and botanist Richard Richardson (1663-1741).

I transcribed the contents of the catalogues from copies of the originals at the British Library and, in the case of Curren Richardson, online at archive.org into an Excel spreadsheet (see Fig. 1). I used the same fields that were present in the nineteenth century catalogues, explicitly (title, author, place of publication, publisher/printer, binder, date, size and number of volumes) and inexplicitly (language). I mostly recorded the data in each field as it appeared in the original catalogue in order to save time and to make referring back to the original catalogues easier if required. The only fields that were different were place of publication and the names of publishers or printers, which needed to be uniform to be of any use and also were not always populated fields, requiring less time to check and alter. I utilised the CERL Thesaurus for authorised terms. If I had a longer time frame for the project I would have used an authority list for the authors as well.

Figure 1.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
	Title	Author	Language	Place of Publication	Publisher/Printer	Binder	Date	Size	Volumes	Subject	Subject 2	Subject 3
1	Scritti Vari ordinati	Gallio, Galilei	Italian	Florence	-	-	1864 8vo	-	23	Philosophy	Mathematical Philosophy	Astronomy
2	Journey to Katmandu	Oliphant, L.	English	-	-	-	1852 8vo	-	6	History	Historical Prolegomena	Voyages and Travels, including Foreign
3	I Contemporanei Italiani, 69 Nos. Rurs of Sacred and Historical Lands	-	Italian	Turin	-	-	1861 8vo	-	1	History	Historical Prolegomena	Foreign Topography
4	British Housekeeper	Walsh, J. H.	English	-	-	-	1860 8vo	-	11	Arts	Economic Arts	Domestic Economy
5	Memoures de Motteville, Mme.	-	French	Maastricht	-	-	1782 8vo	-	6	History	Biographical and Monumental History	Biographical History
6	Ranotadi Lettere sulla Pittura	Botari, M. G.	Italian	Milan	-	-	1822 8vo	-	8	Arts	Fine Arts	Architecture
7	Rivoluzioni d'Italia	Denina, C.	Italian	Turin	-	-	1829 8vo	-	4	History	Modern History	History of Italy
8	Orlando Furioso	Ariosto, L.	Italian	London	-	-	1822 8vo	-	1	Literature	Poite Literature	Poetry
9												Italy

The Richardson Currer catalogue uses T. H. Horne's classification system (Horne, 1825) so I recorded this as part of the transcription and also classified the other three catalogues using this system. Horne's system is complicated with many subdivisions couched in early nineteenth century language but it had the advantages that, firstly, the largest of the four catalogues (Currer Richardson's) was already done, and, secondly, that it was a classification system of the time and so is more useful when discussing collections of the nineteenth century as it matches up with contemporary writing.

Once I had the dataset I was able to breakdown each catalogue and produce descriptive statistics for the following categories: Subject, Language, Place of Printing, Printer/Publisher, Physical Features and Date of Creation. My sample size was not large enough for inferential statistics, and it wasn't my intention to arrive at a reductive notion of a 'typical' nineteenth century woman's library. I established that each woman's library had a very different character, although there were some commonalities - each collection was mostly in English, for example, with significant numbers of books in Italian, French and Latin.

I examined several statements regarding these women's libraries using my data. This included the idea that the inherited natural history books in Currer Richardson's catalogue were particularly key to her collection, which is a 'fact' that is repeated in numerous blog posts and biographical entries about her (Angus Library and Archive, The, 2012; Gawthrop, 2002; Lee, 2004; Yorkshire Archaeological Society, 2013). My analysis showed that, although Currer Richardson had the greatest number of works classified as natural history (204 titles), proportionally Vernon Harcourt and Drummond had more than she did (Drummond 9% and Vernon Harcourt 8% to Currer Richardson's 4%). Not only does natural history not form a particularly significant portion of her library (by way of comparison she owned 1498 works on modern history) but 166 of the 204 natural history books were published after the date of her great-grandfather's death, so could not have been part of his collection. While this does not preclude the idea that she valued her great-grandfather's collection above the rest, it does not support the often repeated idea that her great-grandfather's contribution to her collection was as important as her own.

A significant limitation of my research was the fact that sales catalogues are problematic as evidence. Their primary purpose is not to be an enduring bibliographic record - it is to sell books. They have omissions, both of records and individual pieces of data. Books are often sold in lots where not all the titles are named. They are, as any catalogue, biased in favour of what the cataloguer thought was important, so the more desirable printers and publishers are recorded, but others are not. Particularly nice bindings are recorded, but others are not. This image of a page from Currer Richardson's auction catalogue (Fig. 2 from Sothebys 1862a) illustrates the variation in information recorded. It should be noted that Currer Richardson's personal catalogue is also highly selective as to what printers, provenance and places of publication it records.

Figure 2.

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28 Anderson (C.) Annals of the English Bible, 1525 to 1834, 2 vol.
portrait of W. Tyndal and facsimiles W. Pickering, 1845

29 Anderson (J.) Recreations in Agriculture, Natural History, Arts,
 and Miscellaneous Literature, 6 vol. *plates* 1799-1802

30 Anderson (J. S. M.) History of the English Colonial Church,
 2 vol. 1845-1848

31 Anderson. Another set, 3 vol. 1845-8-56

32 Andrews (Bp.) Seventeen Sermons, modernized for general
 Readers, by Archdeacon Daubeny, *calf gilt* 1821

33 Andrews (Capt.) Journey from Buenos Ayres to Potosi, 2 vol.
calf gilt, by Mackenzie 1827

34 Anglesea (Arthur Earl of) Memoirs, with Moral, Political and
 Historical Observations, published by Sir Peter Pett
calf, g. e. for John Dunton, 1693

35 Annual Register, for 1842 to 1849, vol. 84 to 91 8 vol.

36 Anquetil Précis de l'Histoire Universelle, 9 vol. *calf Paris*, 1799

37 ANTHOLOGIA GRÆCA. Florilegium Diversorum Epigrammatum
 in septem libros diligenti castigatione emendatum
 EDITIO ALDINA TERTIA, *red morocco*, by Roger Payne
Venetiis, apud Aldi filios (at end 1551)

* * * On many pages and margins of this volume are Latin
 versions of the Epigrams by eminent Scholars, written in an
 old hand.

38 Anthologia. Analecta Veterum Poetarum Græcorum editore
 R. F. P. Brunck, 3 vol. *vellum* Argent. 1776

39 ANTIQUARIAN ITINERARY, 7 vol.—ANTIQUARIAN AND TOPOGRAPHICAL
 CABINET, 10 vol.—ANCIENT RELIQUES, 2 vol.; together
 19 vol. in 9, *several hundred illustrations by Storer, Greig,*

Additionally, the sales catalogues are merely a snapshot record of the collections at a certain point in time. Such a static record fails to reflect the changing nature of a collection. There is some provenance information - again showing what sales or previous owners the cataloguers thought were important - but otherwise it is impossible to see how the collections developed. It is also impossible to say how much of the collection is being sold - Frances Vernon Harcourt's catalogue, for example, is described as being "the remainder" of her collection, but there is no other sale catalogue of her belongings. Without other information it is also difficult to say whether items were acquired for the collections by the women in question.

All this being said, sales catalogues are very important in the study of nineteenth century female book collectors for the simple reason that in many cases they are the only record of a woman's collection. Margaret Drummond, for example, despite owning a very exciting collection that included one of Carl Linnaeus' annotated copies of his work, several Persian manuscripts and numerous rare volumes of prints and drawings, is, as far as I can tell, invisible as a bibliophile outside of her auction catalogue. We therefore have to accept the limits of the sales catalogue records. We can also learn from the selective nature of the records what was considered desirable and important at the time, although not from the perspective of the women themselves.

There has been a lot of discussion recently about quantitative analysis of the library catalogue (Welsh, 2016). My dissertation has demonstrated the value of such an analysis of sales catalogues and the value of these catalogues as a research tool. This is particularly the case with collections and collectors that were not part of the accepted elite of the time and so are not well represented in the historical record. Currer Richardson is known as a bibliophile not because her collection was interesting (which it was), or because she was highly knowledgeable about her subject (which she was). She is so well known because of her relationships with the male book collectors of the time. Quantitative analysis of women's sale catalogues enables us to investigate the bibliographical lives of other women who did not have such connections, but nevertheless managed to create wonderful collections of their own.

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