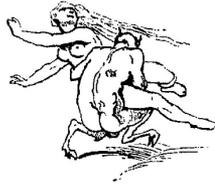


WILLIAM ROBERTS

A PORTRAIT  
OF  
HOLYWELL STREET  
&  
ITS ENVIRONS

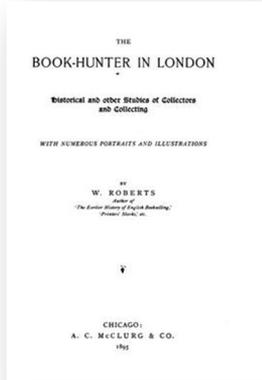


SCISSORS & PASTE BIBLIOGRAPHIES

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2019

# NOTE

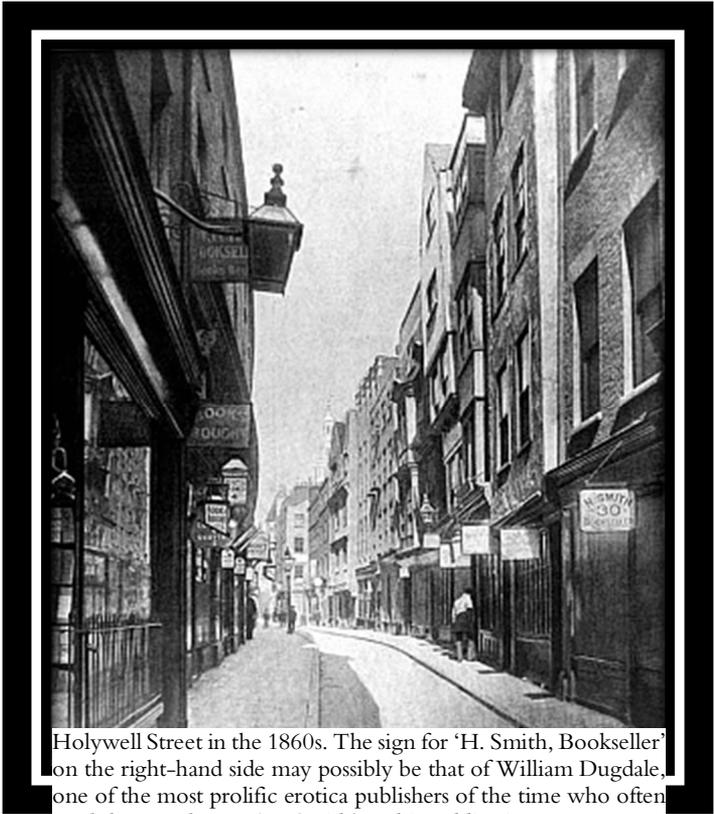


The following paragraphs are extracted from the edition of William Roberts' *The Book-Hunter in London* published in Chicago, 1895, by A. C. McLurg & Co.; the original edition was, I believe, first issued in the same year at London by Elliot Stock.

The area around what is now the Aldwch, at the juncture of the Strand, Fleet Street and Kingsway, was, in the nineteenth century, the centre of the London pornography trade. This fact is only hinted at in Robert's splendid book, and yet the author provides a vivid and entertaining portrait of one of the most notorious districts in the history of bookselling and publishing, which was swept away as part of the Aldwych Development Scheme of 1902.

William Roberts was an English publisher and bibliophile, and was an editor of *The Bookworm*, a literary and bibliographical periodical.

# HOLYWELL STREET



Holywell Street in the 1860s. The sign for 'H. Smith, Bookseller' on the right-hand side may possibly be that of William Dugdale, one of the most prolific erotica publishers of the time who often used the pseudonym 'H. Smith' on his publications.

The most famous bookselling locality in this district is Holywell Street, or, as it is now generally called, Book-sellers' Row. This street has always been afflicted with a questionable repute, not without cause, and much of the ill-odour of its past career still clings to it. Even second-hand bookselling has not purged it entirely. Half a century ago its shops were almost entirely taken up with the vendors of second-hand clothes, and the offals of several other more or less disreputable trades. Above these shops resided the Grub Street gentry of the period. "It was,"

says one who knew it well, “famous for its houses of call for reporters, editors and literary adventurers generally, all of whom formed a large army of needy, clever disciples of the pen, who lived by their wits, if they had any, and in lieu of those estimable qualifications, by cool assurance, impudence, and the gift of their mother tongue in spontaneous and frothy eloquence.” It was also a famous and convenient place “for literary gentlemen and others, who were desirous of evading bailiffs and sheriffs’ officers who might be anxious of making their acquaintance,” for even if they were traced to the Holywell Street entrance of any particular house, they could easily escape into Wych Street, and so slip the myrmidons of the law. It next became the emporium of indecent literature (from which charge it is not yet quite free), but much of this peculiar trade was suppressed by Lord Campbell’s Act. For nearly half a century the place has been growing in popularity as a *locus standi* of the reputable second-hand book trade. Every book-hunter of note has known, or knows, of its many shops. Macaulay, for example, obtained many of his books from Holywell Street. The late Mr. Thorns related, in the Nineteenth Century, a very curious incident which put the great historian in possession of some French *memoires* of which he had long been endeavouring to secure a copy. Macaulay was once strolling down this street, when he saw in a bookseller’s window a volume of Muggletonian tracts. “Having gone in, examined the volume, and agreed to buy it, he tendered a sovereign in payment. The bookseller had not change, but said if he (Macaulay) would just keep an eye on the shop, he would step out and get it. His name, I think, was Hearle, and he had some relatives of the same name who had shops in the same street. This shop was at the west end of the street, and backed on to Wych Street; and at the back was a small recess, lighted by a few panes of glass, generally somewhat obscured by the dust of ages. While Macaulay was looking round the shop, a ray of sunshine fell through this little window

on four little duodecimo volumes bound in vellum. He pulled out one of these to see what the work was, and great was his surprise and delight at finding these were the very French *memoires* of which he had been in search for many years."

More rare and interesting books have been picked up in this street during the past forty years than in any other locality. Rumour, which sometimes tells the truth, says that Shelley's copy, with his autograph on the title-page, of Ossian's *Poems* was picked up here for a few pence. A book with Shakespeare's autograph on the title-page was also said to have been rescued from among a lot of cheap books in this locality a few years ago. We are not certain, but we believe that the Shakespeare autograph has been proved to be a forgery. If that is so, then perhaps the honour of being the greatest 'find' ever discovered, about four years ago, in Holywell Street, pertains to a perfect copy of *Le Pastissier François*, 1655, the most valuable of all the Elzevirs, its value being from about £60 to £100. The copy in question was bound up with a worthless tract, and history has not left on record what the bookseller thought when he discovered his ignorance. A copy of the first edition of Home's *Orion*, 1843, was purchased in this street for 2d in 1886, its market value being about £2. It was originally issued at ¼d., by way of sarcasm on the low estimation of epic poetry. The Holywell Street book-seller did not appraise it at a much higher figure than the author. Scarcely a week passes without a volume possessing great personal or historic interest being 'bagged' in this narrow but delightful thoroughfare. Many of these finds, it is true, may not be of great commercial value, but they are oftentimes very desirable books in more respects than one. The present writer has been fortunate in this matter. No person would now rank James Boswell, for instance, among great men, but a book in two volumes, with the following inscription, "James Boswell, From the Translator near Padua," 1765, would not be reckoned costly at 1s., the book in question being a beautiful copy of

Cesarotti's translation into Italian of Ossian's *Poems*. David Hume's own copy of *Histoire du Gouvernement de Venise*, by le Sieur Amelot de la Houssaie, 1677, was not dear at 6d., and at a similar price was obtained an excessively rare volume (for which a well-known book-collector had been on the look-out in vain for many years), whose contents are little indicated by the title of *Roman Tablets*, 1826, but whose nature is at all events suggested by the sub-title of 'Facts, Anecdotes, and Observations on the Manners, Customs, Ceremonies and Government of Rome.' It is a terrific exposure (originally written in French), for which the author was prosecuted at the solicitation of the Pope's Nuncio at Paris. The late John Payne Collier has told of a Holywell Street 'find' as far back as January 20, 1823, when he picked up a very nice clean copy of Hughes' *Calypso and Telemachus*, 1712, for which he paid 2s. 6d. It was not, however, until he reached home that he discovered the remarkable nature of his purchase, which had belonged to Pope, who had inscribed in his own autograph thirty-eight couplets, addressed "To Mr. Hughes, On His Opera." These are only a selection from an extensive series of more or less interesting 'finds,' of which every collector has a store.

Two of the earliest and best-known of the more important Holywell Street booksellers passed away some years ago. 'Tommy' Arthur, who made a respectable fortune out of the trade, and whose shop and connections are now in the possession of W. Ridler, who is a successful trader, and a man of considerable independence as regards the conventionalities of appearances. (Our artist's portrait of this celebrity in his brougham, indulging in the extravagance of a clay pipe, had not arrived at the time of going to press, so it must be held over until the next edition of this book.) Joseph Poole was another Holywell Street bookseller of an original type, with his quaint semi-clerical attire. This bibliopole's relatives still carry on business in this street, school-books being with them a speciality. The doyen of

the street is Mr. Henry R. Hill, whose two shops are at the extreme east end of the street. Mr. Hill has been here for about forty years, and has seen many changes, not only in the general character of the street, but also of the tastes in book-fancies. Mr. Hill's shops, with Mrs. Lazarus's three hard by, are full of interesting books, priced at very moderate figures. The latter has been established here for about fifteen years. Messrs. Myers, who also occupy three bookshops in this street, were for some years with Mrs. Lazarus; and Mr. W. R. Hill acquired a great deal of his book-knowledge at Reeves and Turner's. Mr. Charles Hindley has been long established in this street.

The step from fifth-rate book-making to second-hand bookselling is not a great one, and just as Holywell Street sheltered the Grub-writers of half a century ago, so Drury Lane and its immediate vicinity was their recognised locality in the earlier part of the last century. It is impossible to associate respectability, to say nothing of fashion, with this evil-smelling, squalid thoroughfare. And yet there can be no question about its having been at one time an aristocratic quarter. Until within the last few years, the Lane itself, and its numerous tributaries, contained many second-hand bookshops. The most celebrated, and, indeed, almost the only one of any interest, was Andrew Jackson, who made a speciality of old and black-letter books. Nichols tells us that for more than forty years he kept a shop in Clare Market, and here, "like another Magliabecchi, midst dust and cobwebs, he indulged his appetite for reading; legends and romances, history and poetry, were indiscriminately his favourite pursuits." In 1740 he published the first book of *Paradise Lost* in rhyme, and ten years afterwards a number of modernizations from Chaucer. The contents of his catalogues of the years 1756, 1757, 1759, and one without date, were in rhyme. He retired in 1777, and died in July, 1778, in the eighty-fourth year of his age. Charles Marsh, another literary bookseller, was for some time a friend and neighbour of Jackson's. Marsh (who

afterwards removed to a shop now swallowed by the improvements in Northumberland Avenue, Charing Cross) was situated at Cicero's Head, in New Round Court, off the Strand, and is described by one who knew him as being afflicted with "a very unhappy temper, and withal very proud and insolent, with a plentiful share of conceit." He wrote a poem entitled "The Library, an Epistle from a Bookseller to a Gentleman, his Customer; desiring him to discharge his bill," 1766. He was originally a church-clerk. The only catalogue of this celebrity which we have seen is a bulky one, over 100 pages octavo, enumerating 3,000 books, 'among which are included the libraries of the Rev. Mr. Gilbert Burnet, Minister of Clerkenwell, and an eminent apothecary, both lately deceased.' The date is May 7, 1747. Some of the prices in this catalogue can only be described as absurd; for example, Lydgate's *Bochas; or, The Fall of Princes*, 1517, 5s. ; a collection of old plays and poems, two volumes, 1592, 6s.; Tusser's *Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry*, 1574, 2s. 6d. ; and black-letter books by the score are here offered at sums from one to three or four shillings each. The neighbourhood has for many years ceased to be a bookselling locality, for although book-hunters prefer side-streets and quiet thoroughfares for the prosecution of their hobby, the pestiferous vapours of Drury Lane would kill any bibliopolic growth more vigorous than a news-vendor's shop.