WILLIAM PICKERING, BOOKSELLER AND BOOK COLLECTOR

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In his monograph on William Pickering, Sir Geoffrey Keynes remarked that, although famed for the quality of his own publications, the antiquarian bookselling side of his business was of major importance and in no way subordinate to his publishing. During the course of his career he amassed a considerable collection both in his own private library and in his commercial stock. As Keynes commented, at the time of the bankruptcy sales of 1854–55, ‘the size of his second hand stock . . . was prodigious and testifies to the unabated interest which he felt in literature of the older sort’. ¹ When Pickering set up in business in 1820 the peak of ‘bibliomania’ had already passed; Dibdin’s *Bibliomania; or, Book-madness* had appeared in 1809, and in 1812 the famous Roxburghe sale marked both the culmination and the close of book-collecting in the grand manner. It also marked the end of very high prices, when the Marquis of Blandford had paid £2,260 for a copy of the first edition of Boccaccio of 1471. ² There were special conditions which had made this sale noteworthy. *Bibliomania* had had an influence; there were a number of wealthy bidders like Earl Spencer and the Duke of Devonshire; and there was a shortage of books from the continent due to the prolonged Napoleonic wars. This combination of circumstances was not to be repeated. There are indications of a sharp fall in prices in Pickering’s own catalogue of 1834 in which a copy of Herrick’s *Hesperides* of 1648 was offered at £2 12s. 6d. with a note to the effect that it had fetched £4 14s.6d. in the Bindley sale. ³ Indeed, throughout much of the period when he was active there was a positive glut of books on the market, with a marked rise in the number of sales. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the number had risen dramatically from twenty-one to sixty-one per annum, and by the early 1850s there was an average of sixty to eighty. In a letter to the Revd Philip Bliss dated 11

² This copy is now in the John Rylands University Library of Manchester.
³ Catalogue of Biblical, Classical and Historical Manuscripts and of Rare and Curious Books on Sale by William Pickering (London, 1834) (hereafter Catalogue [1834]), item 1604. Richard Heber’s collection was reputed to have cost him over £100,000 but fetched only £56,774 when sold off between 1834 and 1837.
March 1853, after mentioning all the sales coming up, he wrote, 'at present there does not appear any dearth of books for sale'.

Although the peak had passed, bibliomania did linger on. There is a notable example of it in a letter of Bliss to Pickering dated 9 June 1845:

I could not rest without Amadis de Gaule, and having ascertained from Mr. Utterson that he had no intention of becoming the purchaser I thought I might steal it away, which I did this morning whilst the owner slept, & by the connivance of a good man who was opening the shutters.

Real book enthusiasts could not resist the lure, and this was true whether they were collectors like Richard Heber, who mortgaged two estates and had many debts; writers on bibliographical topics like Dibdin who had to sell his library to cover losses in publishing The Bibliographical Decameron in 1817; or booksellers like Pickering. Furthermore, the conditions of the time did at least offer some opportunities. Prices were lower at sales, and there were still large-scale collectors in the market. Some protagonists of the Roxburghe sale like Earl Spencer and the Duke of Devonshire were still active, the former until 1834, the latter until 1858. Sir Thomas Phillipps, perhaps the greatest bibliomaniac of them all, was collecting throughout the period when Pickering was in business. There were collectors on a smaller scale such as the Revd Philip Bliss, Registrar of Oxford University, bibliophile, and editor of Anthony à Wood's Athenæ Oxoniensis and Reliquæ Hernianæ, and a friend and correspondent of Pickering; or Edward Vernon Utterson, artist and literary antiquary, who collected early English, Italian and Spanish literature; or Francis Douce whose collection was bequeathed to the Bodleian Library. Towards the end of the Pickering period new names appeared, like Henry Huth, who began to collect seriously in 1849, specialized in Bibles and early English literature, gave commissions at sales, and used to call on all the principal booksellers on his way to the city. The growing American market was also a factor. From 1845 Henry Stevens acted as an agent for collectors like James Lenox, whose interests included Americana and early Bibles. As Stevens himself put it, 'All Europe was ransacked for bibliographical rarities for Mr Lenox'. Sometimes there was the same intense rivalry. At a sale in 1847

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4 British Library (hereafter B.L.) Add.MS 34579, fo.255. Acknowledgements are here made to the British Library for permission to quote from letters in the Bliss Correspondence, the Collectanea Hunteriana, the Egerton MSS; and to the Bodleian Library to quote from correspondence in the Bliss MSS.


Stevens bid up to £500 for Lenox for a copy of the ‘Mazarin’ forty-two line Bible in Latin. Phillipps ran him up to £495 personally, although his own agents Payne and Foss were present.\textsuperscript{7}

In addition, the decades of the 1830s and 1840s were a period of growth for major libraries, the British Museum and the Bodleian in particular. The book purchase grant for the Museum rose from £1,084 in 1831 to £8,904 in 1846.\textsuperscript{8} The energetic Panizzi was appointed Keeper of Printed Books in 1837. Between 1827 and the year 1856, when he succeeded Sir Henry Ellis as Principal Librarian, the number of volumes had grown from 150,000 to 520,000.\textsuperscript{9} The Bodleian too was growing rapidly under the Revd Bulkeley Bandinell, appointed Librarian in 1813. By 1845 he had persuaded the University to increase the total revenue to £4,647, and there was a further £3,300 from benefactions.\textsuperscript{10} Hence the libraries provided a market in addition to the private collectors, and just as there was rivalry between individual collectors, so there was also between collectors and libraries. In 1824 at the Meerman sale, of one of the most famous private libraries in Europe, Phillipps attended in person and complained: ‘the mss sold uncommonly dear owing to 2 or 3 villainous booksellers who came over from England’.\textsuperscript{11} The Bodleian had managed to acquire some but was outbid by Phillipps for others. Bliss subsequently attempted to secure these purchases as well for the Library in return for a promise of a loan of them whenever he wanted, but Phillipps declined.\textsuperscript{12} In 1847 Henry Stevens was in competition with Panizzi over Americana. Panizzi wished to acquire a copy of the poem by Dati on the first voyage of Columbus, published in Florence in 1493, but Stevens wanted it for Lenox. ‘Tell me Mr. Stevens’, he said, ‘are you going to buy for your friend Mr. Lenox that Columbus letter in Italian against the Museum? Can you help us to the book without any injustice to Mr. Lenox?’ Stevens suggested he bought it himself and exchanged it for another item wanted by Lenox which the library held, namely Hariot’s \textit{Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia} (1590), and the Trustees agreed.\textsuperscript{13}

So, in spite of the decline of bibliomania from the dizzy heights of the Roxburghe sale of 1812, the fall in prices, the growth of the libraries, and the fact that there were still avid collectors in the market meant that there were opportunities as well as risks for booksellers, and Pickering was in a position to take advantage of them.

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., 30.
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., 162.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 37.
\textsuperscript{13} Stevens, \textit{Recollections}, 75–80.
Before considering Pickering as a bookseller and collector it is necessary to emphasize that he became part of the cult of the older book which included amongst its devotees, collectors, writers on bibliographical topics, literary historians and some booksellers. Entering the trade as he did in 1810 as an apprentice, he could not fail to be influenced by that ‘arch-priest of bibliomania’, Thomas Frognall Dibdin. The first edition of *Bibliomania* had appeared the year before; 1810 saw the publication of the first volume of his edition of Ames's and Herbert’s *Typographical Antiquities*; and in 1817 was published *The Bibliographical Decameron* in which, perhaps significantly, Pickering’s employers J. and A. Arch had a share. Many of the symptoms of bibliomania as described by Dibdin – an interest in large-paper copies, extra-illustrated copies, unique copies, copies on vellum, sumptuously bound copies, first editions, association copies, books in black letter – all these are prominently displayed in the contents of his antiquarian book stock, both in the catalogue of 1834 and in the bankruptcy sales catalogues of 1854–55. These show that he was obviously catering for collectors. The latter exhibit large numbers of items in black letter; include copies of books formerly belonging to Cowper, Coleridge, Walton, Pope, Ritson, Ugo Foscolo, Samuel Johnson, Horace Walpole and John Donne; and the works of Bewick, Bacon, Donne, Ariosto, Johnson and many others, done up in fine bindings by Francis Bedford and Charles Lewis. Pickering retained to the end a collection of Dibdin’s works. He had acquired and kept Dibdin’s own copy of the 1811 edition of *Bibliomania* with manuscript corrections, extra illustrations and autograph letters of Heber and Earl Spencer. Finally it can be added that, amongst the ‘cures’ for bibliomania, Dibdin had recommended the reprinting of intrinsically valuable works, and the editing of the best English authors. In the case of his own publications these were amongst Pickering’s chief claims to fame.

In this environment there was much overlapping between collector, publisher and bookseller. In a letter to Dibdin in 1811, William Ford, the Manchester bookseller, makes it clear that it was collecting which led him on to bookselling. ‘I have to thank you for the handsome manner in which you speak of me as a bookseller’, he wrote. 14

14 Catalogue of the Second Portion of the Extensive Collection of Valuable Books formed by the Late Mr. William Pickering . . . which will be Sold by Auction by Messrs. S. Leigh Sotheby & John Wilkinson . . . on Monday 7th of August, 1854, and Eleven Following Days (London, 1854) (hereafter *Catalogue* [1854.2]), lot 1118. This copy of *Bibliomania* is now in the John Rylands University Library of Manchester.

15 Dibdin’s influence can also be seen in Pickering’s publications, in the practice of ‘working in red’ – the use of red and black in the printing, used in his *Typographical Antiquities* in 1810. He claimed to be the first to do so since the days of the early printers (T.F. Dibdin, *Reminiscences of a Literary Life*, London: Major, 1836, ii. 603). Francis Douce questioned this claim, pointing out that he himself used it in 1807 (*The Douce Legacy*, Oxford: Bodleian Library, 1984, 66). Pickering’s array of devices on his title-pages also recalls the numerous examples from old printers recorded by Dibdin in *The Bibliographical Decameron*. 
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wrote, 'although it was my love of books, not of lucre which first induced me to become one, and I was a collector many years before I was one of the honourable fraternity'. Obadiah Rich, a former American Consul, was a collector of manuscripts and books, particularly on the early history of the Americas. In 1829 he moved to London, opened a bookshop, became an agent for American libraries and collectors, and published bibliographies. Sir Thomas Phillipps made occasional attempts to sell off parts of his collection. Between 1827 and 1832 he tried to dispose of manuscripts to the Bodleian Library. Edward Vernon Utterson held a sale of part of his collection in 1852. As well as selling off parts of their libraries, or using them as a basis for bookselling stock, collectors could indulge in small-scale literary or printing and publishing activities. Utterson had an enthusiasm for reprinting favourite pieces of ancient literature in small editions at the Beldornie Press. In 1822 Phillipps employed his own printer, and at the Middle Hill Press brought out a number of works including catalogues of his own manuscripts and books. Bliss was an editor as well as a collector, as was Heber. By the same token, those who began as booksellers could become collectors, and Pickering is an outstanding example, as the catalogue of his private library and the sheer extent of his bookstock at the bankruptcy sales testify. And as well as his extensive publishing, he, like other collectors, made his own literary contribution. His collecting interest in the literature of angling led him to compile his Bibliotheca Piscatoria, published in 1836. He influenced the editing of many of his productions and in the case of the successive editions of the works of George Herbert, he was entirely responsible for the editing himself. So there was, in this period when Pickering was active, a close web of interconnections in the world of books and scholarship in which publishers, booksellers and collectors played a part as well as scholars. The criterion was a passion for books, and this Pickering possessed in full measure.

When we come to Pickering's role as a bookseller it is evident that one of the major activities throughout his life was attendance at book sales. It was, moreover, an arduous one, and one to which he gave priority. In view of the rise in the number of sales and the fact that many lasted for weeks, there must have been scarcely a day that passed without the compulsion to attend. He is recorded as having been present on all forty-two days of the Hibbert sale, to have gone on occasion to three

16 Dibdin, Reminiscences, i. 317.
17 Munby, Phillipps Studies No.3, 58.
19 Ibid., 34–5.
20 Munby, Phillipps Studies No.3, 72.
21 B.L. Add.MS 24873, fo.75.
sales in one day\textsuperscript{22} and to have extended his book-hunting abroad.\textsuperscript{23} After setting up his bookshop in 1820 he made an early start by attending the sale of Spencer duplicates in 1821, which consisted mostly of incunabula, classics and Bibles. Established booksellers like Thorpe, Payne, Rodd and Triphook were present, as well as major collectors like Heber and Hibbert, who all made substantial purchases. At this stage Pickering could not compete against these names or afford expensive books, but confined his purchases to two modest items, a 1722 edition of the Venerable Bede's \textit{Historiae Ecclesiasticae Gentis Anglorum} and John Bale's \textit{Illustrium Maioris Britanniae Scriptorum} (1549), for which he paid £2 2s. and £1 14s. respectively. In doing so he gave an early indication of his preference for early English literature.\textsuperscript{24} The sales he subsequently went to included not just those of the major collectors like George Hibbert in 1829 and Sir Mark Masterman Sykes in 1824, but of famous literary figures such as David Garrick in 1823, Byron in 1827, Southey in 1844 and Thomas Gray in 1845 and 1851. It is sometimes possible to trace his purchases through to their being offered for sale, which gives an indication of the sort of profit he expected. At the Byron sale he bought a copy of Louis Moreri's \textit{Le Grand Dictionnaire Historique}, published in Amsterdam in 1740, for £3 4s.\textsuperscript{25} This item appears in his 1834 catalogue priced at £6 16s.6d.\textsuperscript{26}

By the time he published this catalogue Pickering had accumulated a substantial stock including many rare items and was obviously well established. The list reveals the range and extent of his purchases during his first fourteen years and often the source as well. At the sale of the library of the Revd Theodore Williams in 1827 they must have been very considerable and included expensive items like the Hebrew Bible in manuscript on vellum, bound by Charles Lewis, for which he was asking £120.\textsuperscript{27} His manuscript section, however, was not at this time very prominent, consisting of fifty items only, but there were 200 incunabula including John Gower's \textit{Confessio Amantis} printed by Caxton in 1493, which he priced at £31 10s.\textsuperscript{28} There were upwards of fifty productions of the Aldine press, including one of only two known copies of the first edition of \textit{Athenaeus Graece} on large paper, dated 1514, which had belonged to Erasmus.\textsuperscript{29} Predominantly, however, the catalogue displays Pickering's bias towards English history and the older English literature. By the time his stock was sold off, the

\textsuperscript{22} Victoria and Albert Museum. Letter in the Alexander Dyce Collection.

\textsuperscript{23} B.L. Add.MS 24873, fo.65.

\textsuperscript{24} \textit{A Catalogue of Rare and Valuable Duplicates from the Library of the Rt.Hon.Earl Spencer which will be Sold by Auction by Mr.Evans on Friday March 2 (1821), lots 608, 609.}

\textsuperscript{25} Munby, \textit{Sales Catalogues}, i. 248.

\textsuperscript{26} \textit{Catalogue [1834], item 2278.}

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., item 1.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., item 1426.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., item 4231.
bankruptcy sales catalogues provide the evidence of the size of the collection he had accumulated. Between March 1854 and January 1855 there were four separate sales of printed books, one devoted to manuscripts, and another to his private library. The second sale, which began on 7 August 1854 and lasted for twelve days, was particularly notable for what was described as an ‘extraordinary assemblage of English Bibles, Testaments, Psalters, Breviaries, Primers and other liturgies, such as have never before been brought to sale,’ which produced in the words of the report in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* ‘prices beyond all expectation’. 30

Pickering’s main customers for antiquarian books were collectors and libraries. Private customers included omniverous collectors like Sir Thomas Phillipps, more select ones like Francis Douce, scholarly ones with whom he was in correspondence like the Revd Philip Bliss, and authors with whom he had a connection as publisher, such as the Revd Joseph Hunter and Sir Frederic Madden. He helped to cater for the enormous appetite of Phillipps for manuscript material of all kinds, although not on such a huge scale as Thorpe. His sales to Phillipps ranged from early items such as a twelfth-century manuscript of the first six books of Virgil’s *Aeneis*, to English historical material like the letters of Admiral Rodney and others during the American war. 31 On occasion he acted as agent for Phillipps, for whom he obtained a group of Irish manuscripts from Paul Long of Cork. 32 Pickering’s dealings in manuscripts were not confined to Phillipps as Thorpe’s mostly seem to have been. To Francis Douce he sold a Florentine Book of Hours, *Officium Beatae Maria Virgines*, completed in 1507, an item he had bought at the Hanrott sale in August 1833. 33 Sir Frederic Madden was another customer in a private capacity as a collector of ballads, as well as in his public role of Keeper of Manuscripts at the British Museum. 34

To the British Museum and the Bodleian Pickering was a major supplier. The gradual increase in grants provided a market which he was not slow to exploit. Particularly from 1846 onwards when the resources of the Museum were increasing rapidly there is evidence of substantial sales by Pickering. Indeed, in that year he was the main supplier of English antiquarian books, together with Lilly and Rodd. Rodd at that time was the official agent employed by the library to bid at auctions, and when he died in 1849 he was succeeded by Pickering, who held the position for his last four years in business. 35

30 *Gentleman’s Magazine*, September 1854, 272.
33 *The Douce Legacy*, 175.
34 B.L. Eg.2842, fo.404.
market for direct sales could be a lucrative one is not to be doubted. In 1848 he sold six editions of Cranmer's English Bible printed between April 1540 and November 1541, formerly in Lea Wilson’s collection, for £480. He shared in the market created by Panizzi's desire to acquire incunabula in this period, when over a thousand were added between 1846 and 1856. In 1851 the only known complete copy of Caxton's *The Fifteen Oes and other Prayers*, printed in 1491, was acquired from Pickering, bound up with other rare tracts, for £250. Early English liturgies could also fetch a good price. In 1852 the Museum paid him £80 for a copy of the *Book of Common Prayer* dated March 1549. In the same year he sold a copy of Dryden's translation of the works of Virgil, dated 1709, with the signatures of Pope and Gray. This he had picked up at the Gray sale the previous year. At this time the Museum was also collecting early American books. Henry Stevens had estimated that in the early 1840s there were only 1,000 in stock. By the time he himself began to supply material in 1845, this had grown to 3,600. Pickering had been the main English bookseller involved, sharing the market with the American houses of Wiley and Putnam.

Pickering's cordial relations with Bliss at Oxford helped him in his sales to the Bodleian. Items for Bandinell at the Library and for Bliss personally were sometimes sent in the same parcel, and he acted as an agent for both. In a letter of 12 September 1851 he wrote: 'I am sending a box today for Dr. Bandinell and shall put in it two books for you - one is a fine copy of Spottiswoode, price 15s., the 2nd edit. This I think must be a rare book. I have met with nearly 200 copies of the 1st edit. and this is the only one of the 2nd.' The commissions he received formed an important part of Pickering's business as well as a reliable source of income. Sometimes these were unlimited. In a letter to Bliss of 22 August 1853 he refers to a Psalter that Bliss had purchased: 'I was glad when I found that you had bought the Copland Psalter', he wrote, 'I had two unlimited commissions for it'. Usually, however, a limit was set by the client, and Pickering was not prepared to pay more than what he thought an item was worth. 'I did not get the lot 508, News out of the West', he wrote on 16 April 1850, 'It was purchased against me by Thorpe for £1 15s., worth 5s.'

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36 Ibid., 122.
37 Ibid., 121.
38 Ibid., 125.
39 Ibid., 132.
40 Munby, *Sales Catalogues*, ii. 58.
41 Harris, 'The Development', 134.
42 B.L. Add.MS 34578, fo.373 (Probably J. Spottiswoode, *The History of the Church of Scotland*, London: R. Royston, 1666). That there was friendship with Bliss is clear from a letter of 23 October 1850 when he wrote: 'My daughters desire to thank you for your very kind attentions on their first visit to Oxford, also to Mrs. Bliss, everybody was very kind to whom also be pleased to convey my best thanks'. (Ibid., fo.180).
43 B.L. Add.MS 34579, fo.405.
44 B.L. Add.MS 34578, fo.59.
In undertaking these commissions at sales, he makes it clear that he disapproved of the ‘knock-out’ system, by which dealers formed a ring, agreed not to bid against each other for certain items in which they each had an interest, and then held a private sale at higher prices afterwards. A letter to Bliss on 8 May 1849 illustrates the hazards and dilemmas of attending auctions and undertaking commissions.

I lost the volume of Hale and Skimbold today, I was asked to join but declined, from the fact that if bought cheap I should have had to have given so much more than at the sale and not liking the principle – my poor friend [Rodd] too often lost his books by so doing, or paid so enormously that I believe he charged less than they cost – that I was indulged to run the volume to £36, and Thorpe bought it for £36 10s., an expensive price in my opinion. It was the only book of rarity in the sale and I suppose he thought from my declining to join that I must purchase it. I have written to Dr. Bandinell to this effect and I hope that he will not be disappointed. Hale I have had and sold for about £10 and Skimbold I have seen at least one. Therefore all beyond 20 guineas I thought excessive. 45

Pickering’s attitude was approved of by Bandinell who wrote to Bliss about the incident:

I wrote on Thursday to Pickering and told him he had done perfectly right in letting Thorpe have the book and that if Thorpe offered me the book at the price he paid for it, I should decline. The fact is that Mr. Thorpe & Co. did not know Pickering was bidding for me, and they were very angry with him for refusing, to join their “Knock-out”. 46

Not only did Pickering dislike the system, he was also known to have taken steps to defeat it on occasion. When taking a commission from Stevens, he managed to get detailed information about the lots in a forthcoming sale. Stevens describes the occasion: ‘My old friend William Pickering showed me a catalogue of Lord Mountnorris’s library to be sold at Arley Castle and intimated that we might perhaps indulge ourselves in some rare sport in burking a projected knockout among the London booksellers, of which he got wind’. Stevens went up and obtained an order from the auctioneers to examine the books, and estimated the value of every lot. Returning to Pickering with the information, they both went through the numbers, fixing a low limit on unwanted items and a higher one on the desired lots. Craven, Pickering’s accountant, was instructed and left for Arley to procure about 100 lots. If the trade ‘ran him on’ on these, he was to bid on all lots to a limit of two-thirds the market value. ‘The Philistines did bid against him’, went on Stevens, ‘but he did win his lots and made the rest of the trade pay, playing them at their own game but let them have all he was told not to procure. This spoiled the beautiful knockout, so

45 B.L. Add.MS 34577, fo.457.
46 Ibid., fo.458.
that their dividend among above twenty hardly paid for their grog'.

Although Pickering disapproved of the ‘knock-out’, it would appear that he indulged in another somewhat dubious practice in making up perfect copies of rare books from imperfect ones, albeit with the knowledge of the customer. In a letter to Revd Joseph Hunter of 10 July 1828, he wrote: ‘I have been much longer in executing your order than I ought, but it was owing to an accident, the Shakespeare after I had purchased it was found to want a sheet which I have had some trouble in getting, but it is now quite perfect’. The practice is deplored by Lea Wilson in his catalogue of Bibles because of possible confusion. In a note about four editions of Cranmer’s Bible printed between 1540 and 1541 he said: ‘The desire to make perfect copies out of several imperfect has caused extreme confusion by uniting portions of different editions without true regard to their identity, the text differing, though beginning and ending alike’.

With his objections to the ‘knock-out’ Pickering might appear to be at odds with many London booksellers, as he was in 1832 with regard to currently published works in the ‘Booksellers’ Monopoly’ affair. He seemed to have a poor opinion of Thorpe as he revealed by a critical comment at the time of Thorpe’s bankruptcy in 1837. In a letter to Bliss of 8 November he wrote: ‘I do not know how Thorpe is likely to get thro’ his difficulties and fear he cannot do it with credit to himself’. A former baker, Thorpe was no scholar, regarded books and manuscripts as mere commodities, bought in huge quantities and went to almost any lengths to retain the custom of Sir Thomas Phillipps. More congenial to Pickering were Payne and Foss, and Thomas Rodd. Rodd, with his remarkable memory and knowledge of books ‘not confined to mere title pages’, had a reputation for honourable and straightforward dealing. He was held in high esteem by Madden. Pickering’s regard and friendship is revealed at the time of his death in 1849 in a letter to Bliss on 30 April:

I saw his widow yesterday, and was fearful from her extreme grief that her state was doubtful, however, today I have again seen her and am pleased to say that she is much better, the necessity of explaining her late husband’s circumstances and papers appears to have aroused her . . . I purpose to watch her for my late friend’s sake, and if I can afford it and am spared, I will do what I can. My kind neighbour Mr. Foss will I feel assured do the like.

47 Stevens, Recollections, 167–70.
48 B.L. Add.MS 24873, fo.65. Dibdin had noted that there was a great temptation to ‘make up’ with the early folio editions of Shakespeare owing to the high prices they fetched. In 1824 he noticed that Pickering had had a set marked at £100 with the title page genuine ‘but inlaid’; T.F. Dibdin, The Library Companion (London: Harding, 1824), 816.
51 B.L. Add.MS 34572, fo.273.
52 Obituary of Rodd, Athenaeum, 28 April 1849, 437.
53 B.L. Add.MS 34577, fo.452. Further details of Pickering’s antiquarian bookselling
As has been said, the line separating collectors and antiquarian booksellers was blurred, and there is evidence to suggest that Pickering was as much a collector as a bookseller. This is not confined to the fact that he had his own private library. There are indications that many items even in his bookstock were acquired for a purpose and not just to sell. As Dibdin observed in his dedication to Payne the bookseller in *The Library Companion*: ‘The gratification of a legitimate taste in the cultivation of literature . . . cannot be accomplished without the acquisition of a library’. Of the collector Francis Douce it has been said of his interests in ancient customs that ‘in order to pursue them he had to amass his own library simply because the material was not elsewhere available on a scale sufficient for his needs’. Pickering too was a collector partly because he had to be. In order to pursue his purpose of publishing new editions of the older English literature and neglected authors, it was necessary to acquire early editions and related material as a basis. Although the major libraries were growing the growth was slow in Pickering’s early years. In 1820 the funds for the purchase of printed books at the Museum were ludicrously small, amounting to £200–300 per annum. The staff were few, consisting mostly of elderly clergy and retired physicians. Panizzi did not become Keeper until 1837. That access was difficult and catalogues inadequate is well documented by scholars like the Revd Joseph Hunter and Sir Harris Nicolas. In his correspondence with Bliss, Pickering makes it clear that he had difficulty in getting the material he wanted and was constantly on the lookout for it.

Amongst numerous examples it is in connection with his own editions of the works of George Herbert that his search for available material and his collecting activities can be most clearly demonstrated. His first edition of *The Temple* and *The Remains*, published in 1835–36 as *The Works of George Herbert*, was the first time the writings of this author had been collected together, and in his later editions extra material was added, either discovered from his own purchases or failing that by borrowing, especially through Bliss. During the preparation of his second edition, which included the poem *The Synagogue* by Christopher Harvey in imitation of Herbert, he wrote to Bliss on 26 October 1837:

In The Synagogue I am desirous of stating the little that is known of the author . . . whom I have no doubt is Christopher Harvey . . . have you in Bodley’s Library a copy of *Schola Cordis*, or the heart of it selfe gone away from God . . . London, 1647 – other editions 1674, 1675, 1676 – but of this I can find no copy in London . . . I have a


4 The Douce Legacy, 64.
55 Miller, *That Noble Cabinet*, 81.
memorandum which says that this work was written by the author of The Synagogue annexed to Herbert’s poems.\textsuperscript{57}

Pickering went on publishing editions until 1853, and by that time he had managed to acquire for himself copies of the first and second editions of \textit{The Synagogue}, of 1640 and 1647. On 3 October 1839 he wrote again, informing Bliss of additional material he had discovered: ‘A few days since I happened to look into a book entitled Epistolary Curiosities by Rebecca Warner of Bath & have found the first thing 3 letters of G. Herbert which I did not know of, nor has any of my learned friends pointed out’.\textsuperscript{58} He had obviously acquired his own copy of this item, for it was still in his stock fourteen years later.\textsuperscript{59} Pickering’s collection of the early editions of Herbert’s works is most impressive. The second sale of his stock in August 1854 shows that he had retained a superb copy of the first undated edition of \textit{The Tempk from the libraries of Brandt and Heber with the autographs of these former illustrious owners.\textsuperscript{60} The same sale reveals multiple copies of all the subsequent editions up to the twelfth of 1703, one copy of which was noted as having ‘bibliographical memoranda by Mr. Pickering inserted’.\textsuperscript{61} There was also a copy of the 1652 edition of \textit{The Remains}, including \textit{Jacula Prudentium, or Outlandish Proverbs, Sentences, etc.}, copies of the second, third and fourth editions of \textit{A Priest to the Temple}, a copy of the first edition of the \textit{Life of Herbert} by Izzaac Walton of 1666 with Herbert’s autograph inserted,\textsuperscript{62} and finally the author’s original manuscript of the \textit{Epigrammata Latina}.\textsuperscript{63} This was a striking collection on which to base his own editions.

Many more examples could be cited of Pickering collecting as a basis for republication, but one must restrict mention to just two, Robert Burns and Thomas Fuller. In his preparations for the Aldine edition of Burns, he had actually advertised for manuscript letters and poems. The 1854 sales catalogues again reveal his possession of copies, often duplicated, of editions of the poems from 1787 to 1824, including a copy of the first collected edition of 1787 with pencil notes by Sir Harris Nicolas, his editor.\textsuperscript{64} It seems probable that this was borrowed from the publisher. In the preface to the second Aldine edition of 1839 it is stated that ‘the possession of so many of Burns’s manuscripts has enabled the publisher to print a few of the poet’s effusions for the first time, with extracts from the letters in the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{57} B.L. Add.MS 34572, fo.265.
\item \textsuperscript{58} B.L. Add.MS 34573, fo.151.
\item \textsuperscript{59} Catalogue [1854.2], lot 3672.
\item \textsuperscript{60} Ibid., lot 1770.
\item \textsuperscript{61} Ibid., lot 1811. Another example of Pickering’s annotations is the 1730 edition of Thompson’s \textit{The Seasons}, ‘with manuscript notes and variations by W. Pickering’ (Ibid., lot 3404).
\item \textsuperscript{62} Ibid., lot 1820.
\item \textsuperscript{63} Ibid., lot 1555.
\item \textsuperscript{64} Ibid., lot 702.
\end{itemize}
Memoir'. These were still in Pickering's possession in 1854 when most of them were bought by Henry Stevens.\(^{65}\) In the case of Fuller, he had collected, in this case in his private library, an extensive set of early editions including those works which he himself republished: *Good Thoughts in Bad Times*, *Good Thoughts in Worse Times* and *The History of the Holy War*. Many were duplicated in his bookstock.\(^{66}\) In 1838 he had sold a copy of the anonymous *Life of Fuller* of 1661 to Bliss,\(^{67}\) but he still retained copies both in his private library and his stock.\(^{68}\)

Pickering also had a number of unfulfilled projects in mind for which he was actively collecting. One author whom he probably intended to republish was Richard Brathwaite, a royalist poet of the seventeenth century. On 8 November 1837 we find him writing once again to Bliss for an item he had not been able to trace: ‘Have you Brathwayte’s Whimzies, or a new cast of characters, 1631’.\(^{69}\) On 17 October the following year he loaned, but significantly declined to sell to him, another of Brathwaite’s works which he did not name:

By 1854 Pickering had accumulated a number of his works such as *A Survey of History or a Nursery for Gentry* (1638) and *The English Gentleman* (1633). Another example was Francis Quarles, again a seventeenth-century royalist poet, and like Pickering, an enthusiastic angler. On 29 October he wrote again to Bliss: ‘I think I shall next take up Quarles. I met with a little tract of his “Verses on the death of his Brother Wheeler” & I saw at Trinity College Camb. “Verses on the death of Lady Marsham” – both these I think are unknown to his biographers’. By the time of his bankruptcy he had collected the early editions of Quarles including a fine copy of his principal work, *Emblems*, of 1635.\(^{71}\)

Keynes, in his memoir, remarked that ‘it may be noticed how much he was influenced by the contents of the older books that passed through his hands, both as to the material that he chose to publish and as to the style which his own publications displayed’.\(^{72}\) But in the course of time his attitude became much more positive, as the above

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\(^{65}\) Stevens, *Recollections*, 176. They included *Auld Lang Syne* and *Scots wha ha’ wi Wallace bled*.

\(^{66}\) A *Catalogue of the Valuable and Unique Private Library of Mr. William Pickering*. which will be Sold by Auction by Mr. G. Robinson . . . on Monday, March 13th, 1854, & following days (London, 1854) (hereafter *Catalogue* [1854.1]), lots 349–79.

\(^{67}\) Bod. Bliss MSS Autog.C10, fo.102.

\(^{68}\) *Catalogue* [1854.1], lot 376; *Catalogue* [1854.2], lot 1437.

\(^{69}\) B.L. Add.MS 34572, fo.273.

\(^{70}\) Ibid., fo.424. Dibdin considered that some works of Brathwaite needed reprinting (Dibdin, *Reminiscences*, i. 424).

\(^{71}\) *Catalogue* [1854.2], lot 2963.

examples show, of actively seeking to acquire the material he needed. His purpose became primarily one of acquisition for use rather than for sale. In many instances, as in the case of George Herbert, he produced a succession of editions and consequently held on to his purchases even though they were not part of his private library but ostensibly part of his stock for sale. Keynes goes on: ‘Pickering’s taste in literature, as shown by the works which he reprinted lay chiefly in the early poets and theologians. Most of the authors were strongly represented in his stock, so they do not seem to have found a ready sale’.

Pickering did undoubtedly sell off books and manuscripts once he had made use of them, but he also retained material in case he needed it later. His collection of Burns manuscripts certainly found a ready sale when they were eventually bought by Henry Stevens after his death.

That Pickering collected and retained manuscripts and early editions for possible future use is understandable, but for someone with such a strong interest, it would be but a short step to collect and keep for their own sake those books and authors which had become his particular favourites. The existence of his private library is sufficient proof that he was a book collector. One of its most notable features is the section on angling of over a hundred items, many of them duplicated in his bookstock, and this collecting interest was well known to his friends, who sometimes donated books to him. But there were many other books which appear in his commercial stock which he appeared to want to keep for himself. Such an item was Anthony à Wood’s *Athenae Oxoniensis, an Exact History of all the Writers who have had their Education in the University of Oxford*, edited by Bliss. In a letter to Bliss on 8 November 1837 he enquired: ‘Do you happen to know what became of the odd volume of Wood’s Athenae. I have 1, 2 and 4 and want the third. These I have picked up cheaply at different times for myself’. By 1854 he had acquired and kept the missing volume.

But it is in connection with Izaac Walton that Pickering reveals himself as a true collector. His preoccupation with Walton was well known. In his stock was a privately printed copy of *The Dove, or Some Quiet Thoughts on the Happy Practice of Angling*, by J.L. Anderdon, dated 1845. It was a presentation copy to the publisher with a letter addressed to him as ‘Mr. Izaac Walton junior at his house in Chancery Lane’, and a true collector’s item, bound in blue morocco with gilt tooling. This preoccupation far exceeded his actual needs for

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73 Ibid., 40.
74 *Catalogue* [1834], item 19.
75 An example is Mascall’s *Book of Fishing with Hook and Line*, ‘presented to Mr. Pickering by Edw. Jesse’ (*Catalogue* [1854.1], lot 271).
76 B.L. Add.MS 34572, fo.273.
77 *Catalogue* [1854.2], lot 3762.
78 Ibid., lot 31. This was published by Pickering in a commercial edition in 1847.
publishing editions of Walton’s works, and he was recognized as an authority. On 21 October 1839 Bliss wrote to enquire whether he thought Walton was the editor of the first edition of Donne’s poems published by Marriot in 1633, as he had noticed that there was a dedication in verse in a presentation copy he had examined, and concluded: ‘But I will be more particular if you have good reason for believing your valued old friend to be writer, editor, donor’. 79

Pickering replied that ‘Donne’s Poems of 1633 I have always supposed to have been edited by Walton, but I have no proof – I have a copy of the quarto 1633 . . . I have also the second edition uncut’. 80 Again, Pickering still had these in his possession in 1854, the 1633 edition with ‘Walton’s verses underneath inserted’, and the 1635 edition, ‘the edges uncut’. 81 His collection on his ‘valued old friend’ in both his library and his bookstock is again remarkable. In the case of The Complete Angler his stock included two copies of the first edition of 1653, six of the second of 1655, five of the third of 1661–64, nine of the fourth of 1668 and nine of the fifth of 1676. 82 There were further copies of all these editions in his library, all finely bound in green morocco. 83 Of the Lives of Dr John Donne, Sir H. Wotton, Mr. Richard Hooker and Mr. George Herbert his stock contained six first editions of 1670, all presentation copies signed by the author, 84 and his library another six. 85 In addition to the works, he collected associated items, including books formerly in Walton’s library such as Edward Chamberlayne’s Anglia Notita of 1682, and Robert Sanderson’s Sermons of 1656–57. 86 It seems unlikely that he ever intended to sell such Waltoniana.

One item he did not have but for which he was induced to search was Sir John Skeffington’s translation of The Hero of Lorenzo, or the Way to Eminence and Perfection, printed for Martin and Allestrye in 1652. This had an ‘address to the reader’ by I.W., believed to be Izaac Walton. Bliss had acquired a copy and wrote to inform Pickering. On 10 February 1852 Pickering wrote back saying: ‘I neither know the names of Martin and Allestrye as publishing or Skeffington as connected in any way with Walton – The Hero of Lorenzo I think I have seen but of the book really know nothing’. 87 Two days later Bliss sent it to him to examine and rebind, saying: ‘The little volume that accompanies this was for an eighteenpenny binding but in order that

80 B.L. Add.MS 34573, fo. 204.
81 Catalogue [1854.2], lots 1194, 1142.
82 Ibid., lots 71–101.
83 Catalogue [1854.1], lots 301–7.
84 Catalogue [1854.2], lots 3654–9.
85 Catalogue [1854.1], lots 853–8.
87 B.L. Add. MS 34578, fos. 512–3.
you may see it and be as convinced as I am that the notice is Izaac Walton's, I send it begging you to get a better coat put on it than I at first intended and charge to my account'. 88 Pickering wrote back immediately to confirm the attribution:

The little book you have sent me this morning is unquestionably Walton's, i.e. the 6 pages of preface . . . I have seen the book not very long since, perhaps this very copy, but knew nothing of its connexion. I shall of course keep a sharp look out for one, till I get it, which I am pretty sure to do . . . I will put The Hero of Lorenzo in proper costume. 89

On 26 February Bliss wrote again to enquire:

Have you found your Skeffington? No – then I beg you will do me the favour to place the copy I so fortunately discovered among my own unknown treasures on your own shelves, and as near to your Waltons as you think the book deserves. Believe me, I should have felt very uneasy at keeping this trifle from its proper resting place, and I have great pleasure in offering it for your acceptance. I should have said this at first but I confess I should not have been sorry had a second copy been ferreted out, and so both of us been able to boast. 90

Pickering acknowledged the gift with thanks, adding 'The book is very interesting to me, who have for forty years angled for every scrap that would illustrate Walton's life or writings. But this book I had not the remotest knowledge of, and do value'. 91 It appears in 'its proper resting place', not in his library but apparently in his bookstock in the 1854 sale, by this time in its 'proper costume' of blue morocco with gilt edges by Clarke and Bedford, with the note: 'Rare. This was edited by Izaac Walton'. 92

Another notable collection in Pickering's possession in 1854 was a striking array of early editions of the English Bible, auctioned in the second sale of 7 August. That he had developed an enthusiasm for them by 1839 is suggested by his letter to Bliss on 29 October. 'Have you ever seen Cranmer's Bible 1539 at St. John's College Cambridge upon vellum', he wrote, 'it is the finest book I ever beheld'. 93 Certainly the list of Bibles and New Testaments in his stock has the appearance of a collection. It is true that he had disposed of rare items and obtained high prices, as in 1848 when he sold six editions of Cranmer's Bible to the British Museum; nevertheless, he had retained several other copies of each of those editions. Many items he had obtained from famous collections like those of the Duke of Sussex, Dawson Turner and the Revd Theodore Williams, but the most notable source was that of Lea Wilson who published the catalogue of

89 B.L. Add.MS 34578, fo.526.
91 Notes and Queries, xi (1855), 257.
92 Catalogue [1854.2], lot 3324.
93 B.L. Add.MS 34573, fo.204.
his collection in 1845. Pickering had apparently played a considerable part in building it up, as Lea Wilson himself acknowledged. At the conclusion of the description of the so-called Cranmer version of April 1539 he remarked: 'I am indebted to the kindness and liberality of Mr. William Pickering, Bookseller, Piccadilly, whose zeal and unwearied industry has greatly contributed to the formation of my collection'.

Pickering subsequently acquired a large number of Lea Wilson's copies, and in the section of the catalogue of the second sale of his stock entitled 'Versions of the Scriptures' there are many so described with the reference numbers given. As a result his collection was on a scale which approached that of Lea Wilson, consisting as it did of 238 lots of Bibles together with 131 versions of the New Testament. Many items eventually fetched good prices, the chief buyer being Henry Stevens. On Pickering's death he had informed Lenox of the opportunity of securing rare Bibles and subsequently spent £1,763 on them, concentrating largely on the choice Lea Wilson copies. His purchases included the Parker version of 1568, number thirty in the Wilson catalogue, for which he paid £60 10s. He had begun to buy Bibles in 1845 and had frequently visited Pickering's bookshop but his chief source at first seems to have been the catalogues issued by Thorpe.

Nor was Stevens the only one seeking Bibles. Henry Huth was another, and his collection eventually included every edition prized by collectors. It seems clear that in the period from 1845 to the time of Pickering's bankruptcy, there was a market in a field in which he was building a considerable collection in his bookstock. What is surprising is that, in spite of his acquaintance with Stevens, and the fact that Stevens was no stranger to his shop, he did not sell much more to him. It was not until after the bankruptcy that Stevens was able to acquire the stock that he did. In contrast to Thorpe, Pickering does not appear to have issued a comprehensive catalogue after 1834. It is difficult to resist the conclusion that in the case of English Bibles, as with his favourite authors, Pickering's love of books became stronger than his commercial instinct. It is conceivable that his collecting activities, like the expense of some of his more elaborate publications, may have contributed to the debt which provoked the long drawn-out legal proceedings from 1845 until his bankruptcy in 1853. One cannot help speculating whether he could have saved himself if there had been an auction of his stock before rather than after the lawsuit and bankruptcy. Thorpe had resorted to this step when in financial difficulty and survived.

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95 The Wilson collection totalled 292 Bibles and 154 Testaments.
98 Munby, *Phillipps Studies No.3*, 85, 96.
There were clearly two sides to Pickering. One was the commercial bookseller and innovator; the other, as has been shown, was the book lover and collector with more than a little tendency towards bibliomania. As such, he seems to have had as much in common with men like Bliss and Utterson as with commercial publishers such as Murray, Bentley and Knight. Indeed, in many ways he helped to prolong the Dibdinian age and formed a connecting link between the old age and the new. Collecting early editions and other material was a necessity for Pickering the publisher, but his genuine love of books meant he shared the collector’s passion for them for their own sake. Heber is reported to have had the motto: ‘no gentleman can be without three copies of a book, one for show, one for use and one for borrowers’. In view of the number of duplicates and fine copies both in his library and his stock one might be justified in attributing a similar one to Pickering – in his case it would be one for show, one for use and one to sell.