

## AN AUSTRALIAN COUNTRY-HOUSE LIBRARY: THE MACARTHURS OF CAMDEN PARK\*

ELEVEN YEARS AGO PROFESSOR KIRSOP, later the founding President of the Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand, addressed the Friends of the University of Sydney Library on 'The Australian Book Trade', modestly sub-titled 'Prospects for a History'. He talked about many of the things which had been done elsewhere but barely been attempted for the history of book-buying in Australia. One matter he touched on very lightly, in the context of Christopher Brennan and Sir Charles Nicholson; this was the importance of reconstructing the contents of a dispersed private library, and he remarked that 'we must know too what was read, bought, borrowed and destroyed by more ordinary mortals.'<sup>1</sup> This too has interested me in my more amateurish way and I have for some time had a curiosity about a type of phenomenon ignored by Professor Kirsop in that otherwise magisterial survey, the large private library of the nineteenth century still largely intact in Australia.

My professional, historical and archaeological interest in Elizabeth Farm, the Parramatta home of John Macarthur and his wife Elizabeth from 1793 onwards, led me to realise what I should have known already – that at the great country seat of the Macarthurs, Camden Park at Menangle, there survives a unique Australian library.<sup>2</sup> It is unique because of its uninterrupted history, and its reflection of a whole series of generations of what is arguably the most significant landed family in Australian history. It is unique because the Macarthurs have preserved an uncommonly fine family archive, now in the Mitchell Library, including two mid-nineteenth century catalogues of the books, and a great deal of ancillary information, not least a scattering of accounts for the purchase of books from the 1820s to the 1840s. It is unique because many of the books are still in the same presses built for the library as it existed in 1835 when Camden Park was completed. And because of the generous hospitality of Quentin and Antonia Macarthur-Stanham I have been able to handle the collection freely and, using the manuscript card-catalogue at the house made some years ago by a former Mitchell Librarian, in conjunction with my own card-catalogue prepared from the 1854 inventory and other information, I have begun to piece together some tentative thoughts about the Macarthur library.

The first physical context of this library was Elizabeth Farm House, Parramatta, where, in the simple rectangle building built in 1793 on the foundations of the 1827-ish reconstruction which is the core of the house today, John and Elizabeth kept the basis of the collection. Some books remained at Elizabeth Farm at least until Elizabeth's death in 1850 and a substantial collection of 563 titles (nearly 1500 volumes) was temporarily there in 1854 when an inventory was made by the tenant, William Allport.<sup>3</sup>

But nearly twenty years earlier, in 1835, the lovely house of Camden Park had been built out in the Cowpastures, in the heart of what is still Macarthur Merino country. The house has been largely unchanged over 140 years. The two principal rooms lie at the back of the central rectangle, the drawing-room and the library, each with two exquisite French windows opening out on to a verandah supported by twelve sandstone columns. The internal woodwork is very fine at Camden Park. The library as built in 1835 occupied four bays in four arched recesses, two at each narrow end of the room. As the number of books increased, these bookshelves were raised so that the

\* A revised version of a paper read to members of the Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand, Sydney, 23 August 1976.

arch became rather insignificant: also bookshelving, flat against the wall, was erected flanking the French windows and finally two very large new cases on either side of the fireplace. The date of these additions is not known to the owners or to me yet, but is certainly nineteenth-century and probably 1860-ish I should guess. A corridor running westwards in this part of the house was also made into book-storage by the installation of high shelving running its full length on both sides: this probably came rather later in the nineteenth century. And books were also scattered, as they still are, in many corners of the mansion.

Now many of the books bear Macarthur bookplates. There are four bookplates which concern me, although their evidence is not as helpful as might superficially appear. First in time, there is a plain Macarthur plate which is said to have been used by the founding John who died in 1834, the year before Camden Park was completed. Then there are two bearing the joint names of his sons James and William. There are two different versions: a simple one engraved by Clint and a more elaborate one printed by J.G. Austin. Of the four sons of John and Elizabeth who survived to manhood, only James had a family. His only child (born in 1840) was a daughter named Elizabeth after her grandmother, and she married Captain Arthur Onslow. Long after the death of her father (in 1867) and her uncle William (in 1882), Elizabeth Onslow, early this century, changed her name and that of her family to Macarthur-Onslow: both this Elizabeth and her eldest son James were book-acquirers and the Macarthur-Onslow bookplate appears in many volumes. Curiously, on the bookplate the arms of the two families are transposed, Macarthur above the name Onslow, Onslow above Macarthur.

As far as I can tell, there were ample stocks of the earliest bookplate and it was still being put into books long after John Macarthur's death (for example, it appears in the copy of the catalogue of the 1855 World Fair at Paris). On the other hand, most of the books which I have seen (and there are too many which I have not handled – some are highly inaccessible without furniture removal, and my time has been limited) sustain the belief of Quentin Macarthur-Stanham that this was John's bookplate. It appears, for example, in all three volumes of the 1806 edition of the Countess of Hartford's letters. But, and this is salutary to contemplate, there is also a set of the 1805 edition given as a present in 1808 by W.T. Davidson to the fifteen-year-old Elizabeth Macarthur, John's eldest daughter, and in this set bookplates were inserted later, volumes 1 and 2 with John's, volume 3 with the first form of James-and-William's. Other inscribed books in which the early bookplate appears include the eighteen-volume set of Bell's 1788 edition of Shakespeare which surely came out in 1790 with John and Elizabeth. There is also a three-volume set of *Adèle et Théodore ou Lettres sur l'Education* (Maestricht, 1782), given in 1803 by a Miss Farquhar to Elizabeth Macarthur (John's wife, I think, for Elizabeth his daughter was only ten or eleven) and this bears the early bookplate. John Macarthur seldom signed his books, but he did sign the 1793 Bell's edition of Charles Churchill's poems, which also bears this bookplate. One significant set, however, which one would expect to have been purchased by John and Elizabeth, bears no bookplate or other mark of ownership, the Rees *Cyclopaedia* of 1819–20 in 45 well-bound volumes.<sup>4</sup>

The use of the James-and-William plate is clearly for general acquisitions during the long period of the brother's partnership and beyond into the fifteen years after 1867 by which William survived James. The second form is used, for example, in the charming series of Lucy Aikin's *Court Memoirs* given to James's wife Emily Stone in

1838 before the couple returned to Australia after their marriage in London: her sisters each gave her matching two-volume sets of the *Memoirs of Elizabeth* (from Amelia), of *James I* (from Mary) and of *Charles I* (from Suzannah), all brought safely to New South Wales, inventoried at Elizabeth Farm in 1854, book-plated and installed in the Camden Park library, where they are still neatly together. On the other hand, this plate was also added to books certainly bought by the original John: John bought Alexander Henderson's *History of Ancient and Modern Wines* (London, 1824) for £1.18s.0d and spent another 9s.6d having it bound in calf,<sup>5</sup> but it contains the book-plate of James and William.

The Macarthur-Onslow *ex libris* was similarly added to books acquired long before: for example, Roger North's *Life of Lord Guilford*, published in 1819 and acquired before 1854, or the presentation copy from the Hon. Algernon Herbert of William Herbert's poem *Helga*, published in 1820.

The library now in the house is rather smaller than it was early in this century. A series of settlements as the house passed first to the Onslows, then to the Stanhams, meant that many of the acquisitions, particularly of James Macarthur-Onslow, went to other branches of the family, principally to Sir Denzil Macarthur-Onslow at Mount Gilead near Campbelltown and to Mrs Rothe in Point Piper. These divisions had little effect, as far as I can tell, on the pre-1880 acquisitions.

More recently still, however, the present owners have sold more than two thousand volumes. The largest group of these was acquired by the University of New South Wales Library in 1970 and is still held as a lot awaiting processing: the wise intention, I understand, is to retain it as a special collection. This decision would be welcome in any case if the books were merely those of which a list is available. The books listed are 33 titles (40 volumes) of monographs, mostly Australiana, and including James Macarthur's *New South Wales: its Present State and Future Prospects* (London, 1837), and 52 titles (818 volumes) of mainly nineteenth-century periodicals, including the *Edinburgh Review*, the *Quarterly Review*, the *Saturday Magazine* and long runs of British and New South Wales parliamentary publications. The preservation of the collection as a collection is, however, important because of the other section purchased in 1970, about 1000 volumes found in the attic at Camden Park and containing, I am told, a great many nineteenth-century school-books with Macarthur family signatures. I hope to examine this potentially exciting collection of unlisted miscellanea later in 1977.

The other sale of significance was in 1969 when 206 volumes were sold to the Black Mountain Library of the CSIRO in Canberra. I have located 164 of these volumes (21 titles) in the CSIRO catalogue and inspected all of them. All save one, a run of the *Bulletin de la Société Impériale Zoologique d'Acclimatation* from 1854 to 1875, are of botanical significance and are on loan to the CSIRO Herbarium nearby. Of the 21 titles which I inspected, eight have no Macarthur identification plate or signature, five have the simple (Clint) James-and-William plate, one William Macarthur's signature, six the Macarthur-Onslow plate and one James Macarthur's signature. The collection, which filled important gaps in the CSIRO library, begins in time with Curtis's *Botanical Magazine* and includes the twenty volumes of Hooker's successive *Journals of Botany* (1842–57), the sumptuous twelve volumes of Loddige's *Botanical Cabinet* (1817–26), which James and William owned, Lindley's *The Vegetable Kingdom* (1847), owned by William, the three major encyclopaedic volumes published by J.C. London, on Gardening (1822), Agriculture (1835) and Plants (1836, with a supplement in 1841), the

earliest and the latest owned by James and William, who also had *Sweet's Hortus Britannicus* (2nd ed., 1830) and Herbert's fine *Amaryllidaceae* (1837), which however they acquired second-hand from an earlier Sydney owner. James Macarthur owned the only foreign book in this botanical collection, F. Parlatore's *Le Specie dei Cotoni*, published in Florence in 1866.

It is important to know of this sale, for the botanical works round off the country-house library aspect of the Macarthurs' continuing purchases over the years. Whereas the normal political and literary interests reflected in the books sold to the University of New South Wales are also reflected in part in the library still at Camden Park, the well-chosen botanical collection sold to Canberra leaves the library particularly empty of standard botanical works. Despite these sales, and with this exception of botany, there is a true and undisturbed country house library intact at Camden Park.

Out of the 563 titles listed in 1854, I have been able to identify on the shelves at Camden Park today 252 and a fair number of the 300-odd missing items are too imprecisely described to be recognisable. It is difficult to talk with too much confidence of changes in the character of the library. There are a number of reasons for this lack of confidence. For one thing, the presence of the earliest bookplate is not a sure indication that the book was purchased by John or his wife. For another, date of printing is no help at all, since a surprisingly large number of volumes seem to have been acquired second-hand: for example, the matching sets of the history of England by David Hume, Smollett and Joel Barlow published in 22 volumes in London between 1793 and 1796, which bear the name of Phillip F. Elsley as owner in 1795-6, have no Macarthur bookplate, but were all in the spare room at Elizabeth Farm in 1854. Also in that room were 57 of the 59 volumes of Samuel Johnson's edition of the poets (London, 1779), owned by Thomas Timms in 1782. Yet another general reason is that books came with marriages: there are books belonging to James Bowman (e.g. *Instructions for the Royal Naval Hospital at Haslar and Plymouth*, 1808, in Elizabeth Farm dining-room in 1854) which came later through Bowman's marriage to John's second daughter Mary, and many books came from the Onslow family towards the end of the century (particularly those now in an exquisite cabinet in the drawing-room). The book bills in the archives demonstrate this diversity of origins: one small bill of John Macarthur himself, whose eldest son Edward ordered books at the cost of £14.3.0 from David Walther of 42 Piccadilly, London, around 1830;<sup>6</sup> a group of Bowman accounts for newspapers and books covering the years 1832 to 1845;<sup>7</sup> and W.S. Macleay's dealings in books and periodicals with Jones and Yarrell from 1837 to 1841.<sup>8</sup> Curiously the book-bills of neither of the brothers, James or William, seem to survive, although a good deal of James's dealing with Italian art-dealers is in the collection and he did import books from Rome to Belgrave Square in London in 1863.<sup>9</sup>

The net result of this diversity of origin is that one cannot say 'here is John Macarthur's library, here James-and-William's.' But the character of the library in the first two generations (which span 90 years) is quite clear.

This was a well-used library, bought for use and pleasure, not for public show nor for lining a great room with costly bindings. When James Macarthur died in 1867, schedule 4 of his will described the nature of his library: 'Books about 3000 volumes, mostly old, many unbound and a considerable number of merely nominal value, but say £500.'<sup>10</sup> This is a severe description — the books are not as tatty as that suggests —

but it does give the right impression of books for use, not for display.

A rough subject classification of the 252 identified titles of 1854 supports this. There are no books in this group bought apparently as collector's pieces. History and biography top the list with 53 titles, English literature follows with 48, French literature with 30, religion a poor sixth with 16, topped by various shapes of political and economic books totalling about 20, and by what has become Australiana (19). There was a standard collection of classical authors, with an interleaved Longinus, but no Macarthur ever did any construe on the blank leaves, unlike the Reverend John McGarvie who translated Plautus's *Curculio* in a similarly interleaved copy in Sydney in 1833.<sup>11</sup> Legal books, like Blackstone, were meagrely represented; there was a handful of scientific works; and there were some significant books on agriculture and viticulture, the Macarthur's own publications such as the three pamphlets on the imported plants at Camden Park, and some basic reference books like the third Edinburgh edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1797), an 1827 edition of Johnson's *Dictionary* and that essential country house item, *Hoyles Games Improved*. There were standard periodicals in long runs, the *Edinburgh Review*, the *Quarterly Review*, the *Saturday Magazine* (from its beginning in 1832), the *Penny Magazine of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge*, and, of course, the *Annual Register*: the first three of these are now in the University of New South Wales Library.

The absence of noble folios — of the sort of county history — expensive illustrated books, special subscription publications, private presses, is very striking, and distinguishes this Australian collection from the comparable English country-house library. (The Macarthur Gould, now at Point Piper, was apparently bought by Elizabeth and James Macarthur-Onslow.)

The very real interest in European culture is also striking. The coverage of French literature is exceptionally wide, and there are sets of Schiller in German, and Dante in Italian (not to mention Milton's *Lycidas* in Italian, published in London in 1812). This is easy enough to explain. A Breton tutor, Huon de Kerilleau, educated John Macarthur's children at Elizabeth Farm up to 1809; James and William were educated in England thereafter and went on the grand tour in 1815–16; their eldest brother Edward served in the Peninsular War and his Spanish correspondence<sup>12</sup> is matched by a number of books in Spanish, while Edward had no less interest in French language and culture than his brothers, as his common-place-book of 1828 clearly shows.<sup>13</sup>

This then is the collection of books for pleasure and profit accumulated primarily in the nineteenth century by one of Australia's best approximations to a major English gentry family. It has few obvious collector's items: there is some Australiana of interest, including ephemeral material, there is the presentation copy to the author from the publishers of Leichhardt's *Journal of the Overland Expedition to Port Essington* (London, 1847), there is Campbell's *Crown Lands of Australia* (Glasgow, 1855) presented by the author to William Macarthur, given by William in 1867 to the Camden School of Arts, and then apparently retrieved. The general mediocrity of the editions of European and English literature is relieved only occasionally; William and James bought a few pleasing items like the 1628 Geneva printing of Scapula's *Lexicon* or a fine Aldine edition of Cicero's *Ad Brutum* (1546), the only book in the collection (other than the travelling library) which has been accorded the dignity of a slip-case. But these are not the determinants of this library. It has grown naturally, by purchase new or second-hand when a need was felt, it has grown by presentation, by

gift and by inheritance. None of what I have had to say is very surprising. I am only surprised that so little use seems to have been made of the evidence contained in the library for the social and cultural history of colonial society in general and of the house of Macarthur in particular.

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1. W. Kirsop, *The Australian Book Trade: Prospects for a History* (Sydney, 1969), p.20.
2. For Elizabeth Farm, see my forthcoming *Elizabeth Farm House, Parramatta* (Sydney, 1978). For Camden Park and the Macarthur family, see in particular: *Australian Dictionary of Biography, 1788–1850* sub Macarthur, Elizabeth, James and John; S. Macarthur Onslow (ed.), *Some Early Records of the Macarthurs of Camden* (Sydney, 1914; reprinted 1973); R. Roxburgh, *Early Colonial Houses of New South Wales* (Sydney, 1974), pp. 37–56.
3. Mitchell Library, AM 52.
4. The set of the Rees *Cyclopaedia* was sold to the Black Mountain Library of the CSIRO in Canberra in 1969 (see below).
5. Mitchell Library A 2973.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Mitchell Library A 4292.
8. Mitchell Library A 4309, pp. 13–37.
9. Mitchell Library A 2973, A 2976.
10. Mitchell Library D 186.
11. In my possession, formerly owned by Dorothea McKellar.
12. Mitchell Library A 2917, pp. 3–37.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 283–313.

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