

The Lawrence Room Book Launch – Thursday 21 February 2019

Speech from the Co-Chair of the Lawrence Room Committee

I'm delighted to introduce our book on the Lawrence Room Collections. I will briefly explain our thoughts in planning the book, then give some trailers for its contents and record a few thanks. Then we will have two short talks from contributors particularly close to the Lawrence Room. They will cover respectively earlier and later parts of its history in the College.

With this book we aimed to use Lawrence Room objects to illuminate the history of Girton, as an area and as an institution. We envisaged chapters pairing objects with an individual significant in College history. We of course wanted to highlight the three roots of the museum collection – Anglo-Saxon material from the College site in the 1880s, the arrival of the mummy Hermione in 1911 to start the Egyptian collection, and the Tanagras in 1902 as the basis of the Mediterranean collection. But we also wanted to showcase items on display only recently, and to highlight more surprising areas covered by this eclectic collection. It felt important to acknowledge items in the Lawrence Room that were not antiquities. Finally, the professionalisation of the museum itself had to be part of the story.

And here it is! All the chapters have been written by members of Cambridge University; most contributors have long connections with the Lawrence Room. We have been overwhelmed by their enthusiasm – several chapters contain original archival research. And while, in the end, our chapters do not pair objects and people one-to-one, different chapters bring out different aspects of crucial figures in Girton history and variously convey pride in the College.

My Introduction puts together from committee records and recollections a brief history of the display – look out for mention of the Great Lawrence Room Flood - with an even briefer overview of progress in object conservation, an account in which Dorothy Thompson's oven makes a cameo appearance, and current activities. The chapters proper begin with Caroline Brett's discussion of Girton's Roman and Anglo-Saxon Cemetery and its historical context. Caroline uses the typology of the Anglo-Saxon cruciform brooches to reflect on the budding cultural identity of the inhabitants of eastern England. The fact that Girton's ancient political and social networks remain elusive is noted in both this and the next chapter on the archaeological context of North West Cambridge, co-written by Christopher Evans, Craig Cessford and Rose Ferraby. This short chapter covers a lot of

ground, reflecting the work done by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit over at what is now Eddington; you will gain from it the sense of archaeological deduction and of possible Girton links yet to be discovered.

The book then turns to the development of the Lawrence Room itself, beginning with the multi-decade process of cataloguing the collections. In a moment you will hear from its author, Imogen Gunn, our dedicated cataloguer. Her remarkable chapter, the result of original archival research, is entitled 'Assembling Experts', which beautifully expresses the thread unifying all activities connected with running the Lawrence Room, up to and including the production of this book.

Next we present our earliest Egyptian and Mediterranean acquisitions. Dorothy Thompson engagingly juxtaposes the ancient and modern 'lives' of Hermione Grammatike, whose inscription, testifying to her learning, connected her with Girton. Lucilla Burn likewise illuminates the Tanagra figurines, and the important concerns about the ethics of cultural heritage collecting which are raised by the story of their rediscovery in modern times.

Moving to lesser-known items in the Lawrence Room, Marilyn Strathern focuses on the five Maori fish-hooks, literally the most far-flung objects in the Lawrence Room collections. She notes larger questions about Girton's identity as an institution, implied already when, in the 1880s it was, unexpectedly for us, the recipient of this gift. Next, Peter Sparks deserves particular thanks for taking on as a non-specialist the task of describing Egyptian death beliefs through focus on our Senet boardgame pieces. These have been on display since 2009, and are very popular with students. This is an opportunity to mention that fans of Peter's sketches and diagrams, appreciated in so many College projects, will find some lovely examples in this book.

Augusta McMahon investigates another favourite set of objects, the eye idols from ancient Mesopotamia. These were donated to the College in 2010 by Dr Joan Oates, to whom they had been given by excavator Max Mallowan as a teaching collection. We then move to the 19th century, in the skilful hands of Hazel Mills, to Lawrence Room reminders of Girton College founders, Barbara Bodichon and Emily Davies. Hazel investigates the legends of 'Barbara's Anglo-Saxon pot' and 'Emily's writing desk', elegantly sifting what we know from what we can only speculate. We end with Frances Gandy's discussion of items in the Lawrence Room which most vividly represent key moments of 20th century progress for the status of women: the microscope of Ethel Sargant and the suffrage posters which hang on the walls. This chapter, entitled 'Vision: the art of seeing the

invisible', links together insights of many academic women, not least that of Frances herself, who found an imaginative way of funding the posters' conservation.

So this is a delightfully interdisciplinary volume. The chapters, illustrated by carefully selected images, evidence multiple ways of thinking about objects and finding significance in their placement in the Lawrence Room museum. I think the book is a credit to everyone involved in its production, and I would like to end with some thanks.

This project was made possible by the generous donation of Graham Hambling to the Lawrence Room to mark his retirement from long service to the College, and by the willingness of his son Will Hambling to have his design company, Within International, undertake *pro bono* the design of the book. We are very grateful to Will's team for all their hard work and advice.

Thank you to former committee members Anne Rogerson, Frances Gandy, and especially Dorothy Thompson and Peter Sparks, whose careful records, texts of talks and recollections furnished material for the Introduction and first chapter.

Thanks to the Lawrence Room Committee, especially Caroline Brett as acting Chair, who endured their coordinator taking two periods of maternity leave during the gestation of this book. And at the sharp end of the process, thank you to Caroline, Hannah Westall and Jill Jondorf for sterling work in copyediting and proofreading, to Rose Ferraby for liaising with the printers, and, beyond the committee, to Jenny Blackhurst for help with the ISBN.

The first time Girton's antiquities were put on display, a Girton student recorded that she thought viewers were 'not sufficiently impressed'. We hope that this book will bring more visitors to the College, but we are sure that they *will* be impressed with what they find here.

Helen Van-Noorden, Official Fellow