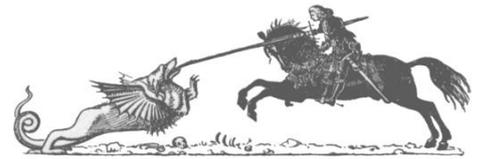


# GUILD of St GEORGE



From the Secretary, Dr Stuart Eagles  
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21<sup>st</sup> August 2015

## Re: News of the Ruskin Collection and an Appeal for Donations

Dear Companions and Friends,

Late last year, I was approached about two sets of botanical books in a private collection held (coincidentally) in Reading. They are, in fact, significant volumes from Ruskin's library, and the Directors of the Guild took the decision to purchase them, at a cost of £17,000. Clearly, this represents a considerable purchase, both as a significant addition to the Ruskin Collection, and in terms of cost.

The books are second editions of William Baxter's *British Phaenogamous Botany* (six volumes) and Smith and Sowerby's *English Botany* (bound together with a seventh edition of the *London Catalogue of British Plants*, seven volumes in all). They appear to have belonged originally to Margaret Ruskin, who has written her name at the start of several volumes. Both sets of books were annotated by Ruskin, and the plates in the Baxter have been comprehensively re-arranged and cross-referenced according to Ruskin's idiosyncratic approach to taxonomy.

We asked Companion Professor David Ingram to inspect the books for us. For many years, Professor Ingram was Lecturer, then Reader, in the Botany Department of Cambridge University and a Fellow of Downing College; in 1990 he became Regius Keeper (Director) of the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh and a Professor in the University of Edinburgh; and after that he was elected Master of St Catharine's College, Cambridge. Since his retirement in 2006, he has been an Honorary Professor in Edinburgh and Lancaster Universities and has developed a research interest in the interface between 19<sup>th</sup>-century art and plant science. Much of his work in this regard has involved research on the botanical writings and paintings of John Ruskin. He curated a notable exhibition on *Ruskin's Flora* at the Ruskin Library, Lancaster. His account of the gardens at Brantwood was published last year by the Ruskin Foundation (and is reviewed in this issue of *The Companion* by Professor Robert Hewison).

Professor Ingram's judgement of the scholarly value of these books is summed up in the following passage from the report he submitted to Directors in March this year:

The Volumes in their original form are classic botanical works of the period. Ruskin's annotations and cavalier re-ordering of the plates throw very considerable light on his evolving ideas concerning his infuriating, quasi-scientific (some would say barmy), highly controversial, yet endlessly fascinating ideas about plant classification. The volumes are, therefore, important and as a botanist with an academic interest in Ruskin's work on plants I would dearly love to be able to study them in detail.

I am glad to report that he has been doing precisely that, and we will publish an article outlining some of his findings in next year's *Companion*.

The volumes of Baxter are described in Jim Dearden's *Library of John Ruskin* (2013) and Jim writes that this set of Sowerby and Smith appears to be a third variant of that work known to have been in Ruskin's possession.

I trust that you will share our enthusiasm for this important new acquisition, and that you will take the opportunity in due course to look at the volumes yourselves. We certainly hope to exhibit them fairly soon, and in the meantime Professor Ingram has undertaken to study them further.

Having purchased these important books, we make a special appeal to you this year for contributions towards their cost. Companions and friends of the Guild have been generous in recent years, but we now ask for an extra effort. Together, we have saved these books from disappearing into another private collection, so that they can be enjoyed by all of us. They are also of immense value to students and scholars. Anything you can give towards the cost of their purchase will be gratefully received and acknowledged. We do, of course, as ever, need funds for all the other work we are doing. You will read about some of it in this year's edition of *The Companion*, the most ambitious magazine we have published to date and still distributed entirely free of charge. Do, please, give what you can.

With best wishes,

Stuart Eagles.



The botanical books recently acquired by the Ruskin Collection were annotated by Ruskin.

The charity for arts, crafts and the rural economy, founded by John Ruskin in 1871.

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