

THE GUILD OF ST GEORGE
CURATOR'S ANNUAL REPORT 2016 -17

One year ago, after more than a year away, I found myself jumping feet first back into the Ruskin Curator's role. I have spent this year working on plans that look forward to celebrating Ruskin's bicentenary in 2019 in a big way, whilst maintaining a full programme of displays and collections access in the interim period. For the first few months I continued to be supported by Hannah Brignell who so ably looked after the collection whilst I was on Maternity Leave, and who curated an excellent display in the Gallery on the theme of Ruskin in Colour in her final weeks with the collection.

In July, Museums Sheffield (MS) was named as one of Art's Council England's (ACE) National Portfolio Organisations (NPO), securing funding of £600,000 per year from 2018 through to 2022. The new NPO funding stream complements the service charge MS receives from the City Council and will enable the organisation to provide a vibrant exhibition, event and learning programme over the next four years.

MS has also secured an additional £200,000 each year to support new collaborative working between itself and Sheffield Industrial Museums Trust, providing greater access to the city's collections, enhanced opportunities for community participation and promoting health and wellbeing. The two organisations will also work together on a co-produced creative programme that celebrates the life of the city across multiple sites and community settings, as well as range of comprehensive and diverse volunteering opportunities.

While ACE funding gives a greater degree of stability in the next four years, the impact of government austerity measures and rising employment costs means that the charity is operating in an increasingly challenging financial environment. Plans for the next few years include a renewed focus on delivering a high-quality experience, understanding and developing audiences, growing philanthropic income and increasing commercial enterprises.

1. Collections Management and Cataloguing Project

Soon after my return to work, MS submitted to the Arts Council our Accreditation return, which includes a forward plan for the Collections Management of all collections under our care. This includes the Ruskin Collection and sets out my cataloguing and digitisation targets annually to 2021.

Much of the principal Ruskin Collection is now catalogued to a good standard (some 7500 records). The remaining works include about 5500 works in the Eyton Collection of ornithological illustration and the numismatics collection (c. 150 pieces). In addition, the Bunney Collection (Acceptance in Lieu and the new acquisitions) and mineral collections are inventoried but require full cataloguing on our TMS system (representing another c. 2500 objects). With the full Eyton

collection excepted, it is anticipated that the basic catalogue should be complete by 2026.

It is my intention to work at elements of each of these collections each year; our intended targets reflect my expected workload outside collections management, such as years in which I am working on large-scale exhibitions. This year (to March 2018) my target is 750 objects from the Eyton, Bunney and Mineral collections, whilst next year (April 2018 to March 2019), reflecting the 2019 exhibition programme the target is 450 objects.

This financial year, I have continued to focus on cataloguing the Eyton Collection, with further work expected to take place on the numismatics and mineral collections in the coming months. With some funds raised from reproduction licencing I have also managed to have digitized another 52 works from the Eyton collection which are now available online; over 1200 works can now be viewed publically online.

A new volunteer, Companion Frances O'Connor, who has a particular interest in the Venetian elements of the collection, has assisted me this year.

2. The Ruskin Collection

The Gallery has had its usual two redisplays since last November. The first, curated by Hannah Brignell, concerned Ruskin's interest in colour.

Along with showing examples of Ruskin's writings on colour in *Laws of Fésole* and elsewhere, the displays included copies of Old Master paintings and the use of natural pigments, works pertaining to sky, cloud and more traditional landscape, and elements explaining Ruskin's teaching on tone and the monochrome in the *Elements of Drawing*.

These displays were augmented by a selection of works by Ruskin and Arthur Severn from the collection of the Ruskin Foundation (Ruskin Library, Lancaster University), mostly relating to the study of clouds and a watercolour by JMW Turner from the Museum Sheffield Collection.

Hannah also continued our regular practice of mounting a small display reflecting events taking place through Ruskin in Sheffield. This time she focussed on the old Ruskin Museum at Meersbrook Park (where the collection was displayed 1890-1953), the centrepiece of which was a large mosaic of a peacock which was made by local residents and which will soon be on permanent display in the old Museum building.

I installed the second redisplay of this year in August and it will be on display until spring 2018. Three themes reflect aspects of nature, architecture and Ruskin's art teaching. The 'nature' theme is devoted solely to the smaller birds of Audubon's *Birds of America*. It seems that whilst the larger, more dramatic or celebrated images of birds of prey are often displayed, the smaller bird images which have their own form of drama and beauty are often forgotten, yet it is these that seem

to best reveal Audubon's wonder and passion for the natural world (albeit his passion for shooting the birds too!).

The architectural element comprises watercolours and engravings showing the marble intarsia of buildings in Florence, Lucca, Pisa and Bergamo, together with the kinds of marble and other coloured rock used in producing the decoration. The mineral collection is rich in specimens of these; some are samples on their rough or polished form, others are pilfered from restoration projects and some were given to Ruskin by like-minded conservators. They do not get so much display as some of the more delicate, colourful or dazzling specimens but show with particular pertinence alongside the architectural watercolours.

The third aspect of the current display celebrates Ruskin's art teaching with particular reference to close observation and his teaching by correspondence of two of the Guild's more prolific copyists, Frank Randal and William Hackstoun (the subjects of this year's Guild of St George Annual Lecture). Also in this area is a case relating to The Big Draw (previously known as the Campaign for Drawing) and the events Ruskin in Sheffield is carrying out in partnership with them in different areas of Sheffield.

Perhaps the case currently attracting the most attention is the mineral case. In the current display it takes its inspiration from Ruskin's comment that 'splendour and magnificence' would be necessary to attract workers, who had so little time to spare. Within sparkling groups of minerals, the bright jewel-colours of several medieval manuscripts and various zoological illustrations show to great advantage to create a particularly enticing display.

3. Ruskin Bicentenary Exhibitions

Detailed work is now taking place in planning celebratory exhibitions for the bicentenary of Ruskin's birth in 2019. Meetings have, and will continue to take place between Museums Sheffield, the Guild of St George and Two Temple Place, London, a magnificent venue that works with regional collections to produce an annual exhibition each winter.

We are planning to create an exhibition led by works from the Guild's Ruskin collection that explores the work of John Ruskin and his legacy. The exhibition will be held at Two Temple Place between January and April Of 2019, and will then be seen in slightly different form in Sheffield's Millennium Gallery May - September 2019 to reflect our different audiences and previous Ruskin related exhibitions.

Over the summer, I have been researching different collections of interest and have been deeply involved in the curatorial aspects of the exhibition. We hope that a full exhibition synopsis for each venue will be confirmed in early November 2017 and that a full object list will be in place soon after Christmas. Our plan is to examine Ruskin's life and legacy through our collection, loans of historic artworks by Ruskin or connected to him, and several contemporary works and new commissions.

In Two Temple Place, there will be more emphasis given to Ruskin's biographical history and legacy as well as exploring why the collection was amassed for the working people of Sheffield. We plan that his later work in social politics and education will take a key role. We hope to extend that area of his work, and particularly his work in the natural sciences in the Sheffield exhibition, as this will form a direct link to the permanent Ruskin Collection space and other collections within Museums Sheffield.

I feel that the two exhibitions promise to provide a fitting and very beautiful celebration of Ruskin's birth.

4. Additions to the Collection

Donations accepted for the Guild study room collection and other archival material include new publications from Companions and others working in the Ruskin field:

Société d'Études d'Avallon; Histoire, Sciences, Lettres et Arts, Edition 2016.
Including an article: *John Ruskin: un Anglais à Avallon en 1882* by Cynthia Gamble and Matthieu Pinette

Ruskin's Botanical Books: Re-Ordered and Annotated Editions of Baxter and Sowerby by David Ingram

The Guild's own publications have been added to the collection and we are also very grateful to the Ruskin Library, Lancaster for their continued support in sending copies of the Ruskin Bulletin and other material to the collection.

The Directors of the Guild of St George have purchased several items for the Collection:

Waiting for Spring, Bluebird, watercolour 2016 by Companion, Kateri Ewing. She kindly donated a companion piece for the work, ***Eastern Phoebe***, also watercolour, 2016

The Paper Museum of Cassiano dal Pozzo by Francis Haskell & Henrietta McBurney, published 2017

5. Loans Out

MORPHOLOGY
(Butcher Works Gallery, Freeman College)

Works from the Ruskin Collection have also been displayed in Museums Sheffield's Graves Art Gallery, and the 'What Can Be Seen' exhibition in the Millennium Gallery.

Current and Confirmed Upcoming Loans, 2017-2018

RUSKIN IN SHEFFIELD

(Meersbrook Park House, Sheffield, 10 September 2017 to November 2017 (tbc))

A group of non-collection works relating to the history of the Ruskin Museum at Meersbrook Park, including: a 1954 inventory of the collection and two handbooks to the collection, a magnifying glass, postal scales, original exhibition labels, mineral boxes, printing blocks for handbook plates, post cards of the collections and several mineral specimens.

WILLIAM MORRIS AND THE ARTS AND CRAFTS MOVEMENT IN BRITAIN

(Fundacion Juan March, Madrid, 6 October 2017 - 14 January 2018 and Museu Nacional d'Arte Catalunya, Barcelona, 22 February 2018 - 20 May 2018)

Photograph of Rouen Cathedral, detail from the North-Western Portal by Arthur Burgess

Study of an Acanthus Boss, Archivolt of the Central Door, San Marco, Venice, Italy by John Ruskin

THOMAS COLE'S JOURNEY: ATLANTIC CROSSINGS

(The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 29 January - 13 May 2018 and National Gallery, 13 June - 7 October 2018)

Turner on Varnishing Day by William Parrot

Informally we have received expressions of interest to borrow in 2019 from York Art Gallery and Abbot Hall Kendal, who are mounting an exhibition on Ruskin and Turner, and from Bewdley Museum to complement their exhibition on Ruskin in the Wyre.

With the upcoming bicentenary in mind I have, with the Guild directors consent, placed an embargo on formally agreeing to any loans out until our own 2019 exhibition object lists are completed. This will ensure that we have the full collection to choose from, and protect works from too much exposure before a long display period.

6. Enquiries, Research and Collections Access

It has been a reasonably quiet year for enquiries and collections visits. Nevertheless, once again the De Croy Book of Hours has attracted attention, as have JMW Turner's engravings from Whittaker's History of Richmondshire. One visit I particularly enjoyed was from a local Sheffield resident who wanted to see ornithological watercolours by Henry Stacy Marks. Whilst we generally seem to give access in store to visiting academic researchers, it is always enjoyable to make the collection available to the general public who simply want a closer look at something they find inspirational.

Assistance I have given to international researchers includes an academic writing on nineteenth century images of Lecco and Como, and an American academic interested in our collection of architectural medallions by Jacques Wiener.

Over the summer the Ruskin Study Room has been in regular use by Francis O'Connor who is researching the Venetian aspects of the original St George's Museum towards her MA dissertation.

Finally, I have enjoyed carrying out a good amount of detailed research myself this year, most of it towards the Guild's Annual Lecture. Along with archives regarding William Hackstoun in our own collection, further archives are to be found in Glasgow, whilst transcripts of letters regarding Frank Randal are to be found in the Bodleian Library, Oxford and in London.

I have also been researching outlines for future displays in the Ruskin Collection that would showcase works that have not been seen in a while. I am particularly interested in mounting a display taking its inspiration from Ruskin's lecture *Ariadne Florentina*. Referencing the lecture, the collections is strong in copies after artists of the Florentine renaissance, Holbein, Thomas Bewick and Albrecht Durer and in combination it would make a fascinating and eye-catching display.

7. Schools, Learning and Events

Schools and Learning

Around 4964 schoolchildren have visited the Millennium Gallery (including the Ruskin Gallery) in booked visits during the 2016-17 financial year. Of these, 411 of them have participated in a workshop that has used the Ruskin Collection for inspiration including *Printing and Pattern*, *Inventing Stories* and *Clay Sculpture* (details of which are described in the 2015/16 Annual Report).

I was due to give a public lecture in July on Ruskin as a drawing master, which I had unfortunately to cancel due to illness. It has been rescheduled to spring 2018

8. Visitor Numbers in the Ruskin Collection

Visitor numbers are electronically captured. Between 1 October 2016 - 30 September 2017 the Ruskin Gallery has had 90,545 people visiting overall representing an average of 256 visitors per open day.

9. Exhibitions in the Millennium Gallery Main Space Autumn 16 - Autumn 18

Past Exhibitions

MADE IN SHEFFIELD 6 July 2016 - 8 January 2017

The exhibition formed part of *The Year of Making*, a major city-wide initiative celebrating Sheffield's international reputation for innovation and excellence in making. The exhibition explored manufacturing within the city and shows

Sheffield as a forward-looking producer with a rich history, and a name that remains an iconic brand today.

WHAT CAN BE SEEN: TIM ETHELLS & VLATKA HORVAT 8 February 2017 - 7 May 2017

Internationally renowned artists Etchells and Horvat worked with the Museums Sheffield and the Ruskin collections to explore how we attempt to understand the world through history, science, art, narrative and the act of collecting itself.

EVERYTHING FLOWS 7 June - 3 September 2017

Everything Flows brought together work by emerging and established Sheffield-based artists working with painting, sculpture, video, photography and sound. The exhibition formed part of *Making Ways*, a new programme supported by Sheffield Culture Consortium through Arts Council England to showcase, celebrate and develop the exceptional contemporary visual art produced in the city.

Current and Forthcoming Exhibitions

RAVILIOUS & CO: THE PATTERN OF FRIENDSHIP 7 October 2017 - 7 January 2018

Marking the 75th anniversary of his death, this exhibition explores the influence of Ravilious and his circle, and their remarkable impact on British visual culture during the 1930s. Comprising over 400 paintings, prints, drawings, photographs, engravings, books, ceramics, wallpaper and textiles, the exhibition examines how this close-knit group deftly bridged the gap between fine art and design. This is a touring exhibition from Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne.

HOPE IS STRONG 17 February - 10 June 2018

A new exhibition curated by Museums Sheffield concerning protest and activism in late 20th century and contemporary art. The exhibition has been programmed to commemorate the centenary of the Representation of the People Act and part of our Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund project.

VICTORIAN GIANTS: CAMERON, CARROLL, REJLANDER AND THE BIRTH OF ART PHOTOGRAPHY (working title) 30 June - 23 September 2018

An exhibition of 19th century portrait photography from the National Portrait Gallery. Full details to follow.

10. Exhibitions in the Craft and Design Gallery, Autumn 16 - Autumn 18

Past Exhibitions

HANDMADE AT CHRISTMAS 28 October 2016 - 8 January 2017

Annual Selling Exhibition

PROTEST LAB 18 March - 21 May 2017

Protest Lab provided an experimental, vocal, social space where views were shared and ideas were challenged by our visitors. The exhibition was created to

help us shape our forthcoming programme of exhibitions and events marking the 100th anniversary of the Representation of the People Act in 2018.

JOHN RUSKIN PRIZE 21 June - 8 October 2017

For the second time, Museums Sheffield worked with The Big Draw to present an exhibition of works by the artists shortlisted for the 2017 John Ruskin Prize. The 2017 Prize invited artists, makers and craftspeople from across the UK to investigate the theme of the artist as polymath, a multi-skilled master of many disciplines. Works included this year's 1st prize winner, Rosa Nguyen, 2nd prize winner, Bethan Lloyd Worthington, and Student & Graduate Award winner, Fi Smart.

Current and Forthcoming exhibitions

HANDMADE AT CHRISTMAS 27 October 2017 - 14 January 2018

LESLEY SANDERSON & NEIL CONROY 22 February - 20 May 2018

Internationally renowned, Sheffield based artists will create new work for this exhibition. Details to follow.

Louise Pullen

Curator of the Ruskin Collection

October 2017