

A well-rounded man : Sir David Salomons and the Collecting Bug

David Wakefield raises an interesting question about the collecting habits of Sir David Salomons

The Spring issue of the Newsletter contained a fascinating article by Caroline Auckland about the Salomons family and their respective collections. I would like to contribute a few additional details.

The second baronet, Sir David Lionel Salomons, early motorist, photographer, electrician and mayor of Tunbridge Wells, is best known for his interest in all forms of science and engineering. His collection of watches, especially Breguets, formed the basis for a book, written by Sir David in the 1920s, on this master watchmaker. It remained the standard work on the subject until the mid 1970s.

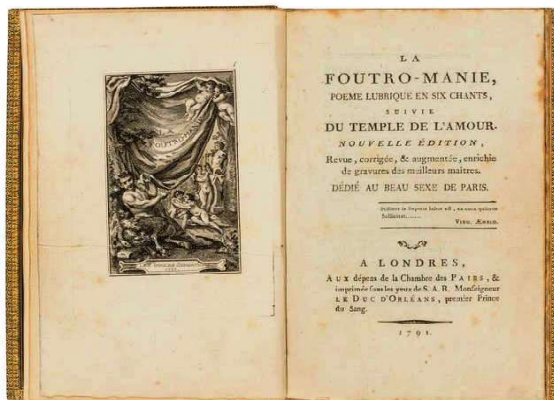
What is not so well-known, is that Sir David was also a collector, amongst other things, of erotica. Most collectors come to this esoteric subject through paintings of the female nude: our art galleries show thousands of examples of this; but Sir David's interest was, perhaps, aroused through his collection of watches, or

rather, through automata. Usually, automata show birds, flapping their wings and singing, but some later automata show the most intimate and exciting of relationships that can exist between men and women. There is no need to illustrate the point: members of this Society can well use their own imaginations.

Vera Salomons, Sir David's daughter, decided to sell the collection of erotica at the same time as the watch collection. It was in the mid 1960s and Christie's acted on her behalf. I now greatly regret that, though I did attend the watch sale, I did not attend the sale of the erotica. The watches sold for £73,283; it is not clear how much the erotica raised. (The catalogues for the watch sales are themselves now collectors' items - a set was recently advertised at \$750.)

Caroline tells us that Vera collected postcards, and I was interested to learn that she was interested in codes – what,

one wonders, did she have to hide? A collection tells us so much about a person. I already knew something of Sir David, but Caroline has opened my eyes further to both him and his daughter. **DW**



La Foutro-manie. In French, but printed in London in 1791. From the collection of David Lionel Salomons.

David Salomons' New
Library (1912/13)
*Pic Courtesy of the
Salomons Museum*



Editors note: I should perhaps add a little comment - not so much as editor of the Newsletter, but as curator of the Salomons Museum. David Salomons did indeed have a collection of erotica, though it is not clear that his interest grew out of exotic automata. It might simply have been part of his enormous collection of books, particularly those of the French eighteenth century. He inherited some of these from his uncle, the first David Salomons, but expanded the collection greatly over the next forty years. In 1912/13 he built a new library to house them - what is now called the Dining Room. He also printed a fourth edition of the library catalogue which listed 5,492 items (about twelve thousand individual volumes). Of these only 140 were identified as erotic.

In the preface Salomons talked of 'the microbe of the disease "to Collect"', a 'vanity' which cannot be eradicated from the party so afflicted. It seems to have afflicted the mathematically-inclined Sir David in a particular way. In the preface to the 3rd edition (1909) he calculated the rate of increase in the library between

the 1st and 2nd editions (1903-06) at 330 volumes (£1,500) per year. Between the 2nd and 3rd editions (1906-09) the rate of increase grew to 400 vols (c£2,000) per year, and that rate must have increased again prior to the 4th edition. But he wasn't just buying books by the yard - quality (rarity) meant more than quantity.

While I am not saying that Sir David might not have had more basic reasons for collecting erotica, the collecting 'microbe' could be explanation enough. Those 140 entries in the catalogue, for example, include ten editions of *La Pucelle* by Voltaire, from between 1757 and 1822. It is a rather seedy re-telling of the Joan of Arc story. But if the attraction was just to look at 'dirty pictures', to search down ten editions on one particular book - one of them valued at £101 - would seem a little unnecessary. Rather, perhaps, it was the satisfaction gained from achieving mastery of an esoteric subject - as with the Breguet watches - or the status to be claimed by displaying that erudition.

I should stress that none of these books is in the present collection. **CJ**

