

## FORE-EDGE PAINTINGS - TRANSCRIPTION

This segment is about fore-edge paintings, paintings done not on the head edge or the tail edge of the book block, but on the fore-edge. Now, the fore-edge painting is typically understood as a late 18th century innovation, but there were fore-edge paintings before that. It's just that they were of a different kind. This is a fore-edge painting on Dugdale's *Baronage*. It's a compilation of the aristocracy since Saxon times. Basically what you've got here is a painted fore-edge that you can see with the book closed. The 18th century fore-edge painting is something that is hidden and only revealed when the leaves are fanned out and you'll understand that better, if you don't know already, when I show you some examples.

This is, I think, in most ways the most interesting 17th century English binding that I've ever had. We know it's by Roger Bartlett, and we know it's by Roger Bartlett because other bindings done by him and identified as being done by him have tools in common with ours. And fortunately bindings done by important binders are recorded in a number of important bibliographies, and we can match up tools and be confident, sometimes relatively confident, in this case, entirely confident, that this was a Roger Bartlett binding. He bound in London until 1666 when the great fire of London, talked about in Pepys' *Diary*, burned down his premises. Then he removed to Oxford and bound until the 1690s.

The fore-edge painting is in the style of the Lewis Brothers. We don't think it was done by them because they're not heard of after 1665 which was the year of the great plague in London, also talked about by Pepys, so we think maybe they succumbed to that, but in any case it's in the style of the Lewis Brothers.

Bartlett went to Oxford and he did important binding. We know this, because showing up in the auction records are books bound by him that are very important. The 1596 or Ortelius *Atlas*, the third folio of Shakespeare, the latter of which just sold at auction a few years ago for 420,000 pounds. If somebody were asked to do a binding for that book, that binder would have obviously been a prominent binder. Anyway, it's in lovely condition, especially for a 17th century binding, and it is the earliest fore-edge painting that I've ever owned, even though admittedly it's not quite the kind of fore-edge painting that most people think of when they hear that term.

Now we come to the firm of Edwards of Halifax, Halifax being located right in the Industrial Midlands. Edwards of Halifax is a firm that was founded by William Edwards, and a large number of his relatives participated. Thomas Edwards was the most important one, but in any case, Edwards of Halifax was responsible, if not for the beginning of certainly for the popularization of the fanned out fore-edge painting. The design feature where you fan out the pages and where you've got gilt decoration, suddenly you've got a painting of a scene. Not of flowers, but of a scene.

Edwards of Halifax bindings tend to be of two types. The first type is vellum like this with blue wash, where you've got a label here and usually a smaller label there, a band around the covers usually with what's called a Greek key roll or sometimes a pentaglyph and metope roll, often along with some other type of gilt decoration. The second kind is called Etruscan calf, and it looks like this, or it looks like this. Now, people say all the time that a fore-edge painting is by Edwards of Halifax or the binding is by Edwards of Halifax or both, and let's face it. Sometimes they're just hoping it is. Sometimes they'll be right, sometimes they'll be wrong, and most of the time they're just hoping.

This particular book, it's a Book of Common Prayer. It's a book frequently found with the fore-edge painting, has the imprint printed by P. Didot Senior in Paris, and sold by W. Edwards and Son Halifax, 1791. Well, that's a pretty good sign that this book was handled by the Edwards firm, and if it was handled by the Edwards firm and is in a binding that is typical of one of the two styles for which they're famous, and if it's got a fore-edge painting that is not atypical of Edwards' work, then I feel very confident in saying I'm pretty sure this is an Edwards of Halifax binding and fore-edge painting. Of course that makes a difference, because a fore-edge with any old painting, even if it's nice, is not as desirable as a Edwards of Halifax binding would be.

Now what we've got here, the design we've got is a ruined castle, and there's a bridge over water, and there are some trees, and it kind of has a romantic tinge to it. You know, decaying architecture from another era, and perfectly typical for the period, and it's perfectly typical of the kind of design that you'll see on an Edwards of Halifax fore-edge.

As mentioned, the second kind of Edwards of Halifax binding is the Etruscan calf. It's calf that's decorated with acid stencils showing palmettes, and oftentimes a central panel with a classical design. Here is that pentaglyph and metope gilt roll I was talking about around the covers. The back looked like this originally. This is a replica back strip that we had done because the book was falling apart. This is a binding that's all there, and it's the same kind of design. Now, the imprint here also says "Edwards," although it's a printed for Edwards in Pall Mall in 1790, but I'm pretty sure again that this is an Edwards binding and an Edwards painting, and here's one clue. Well, two clues really. The painting is very much pastel. Edwards of Halifax paintings tend not to be rich in coloration. And the second thing is they have certain stock elements. Stately home, bridge over water, trees sort of decorating the landscape.

Another way of corroborating the claim that this is an Edwards of Halifax painting and binding is we had once upon a time another copy of this same book, and the same book had a fore-edge painting with the same basic design elements, and that painting was almost identical to another binding that was in a Maggs Catalogue where they had identified that binding as Edwards of Halifax, and in the write-up for that, they referenced still another binding with the same kind of stock design. So again, I feel perfectly comfortable in saying this was an Edwards of Halifax binding with an Edwards of Halifax painting, and despite the fact that it's not as rich in its color as I would like it to be, I'm saying that that's a good thing because we know for sure, or that's one more corroborating piece of evidence that this is the real thing.

Now, contrast that with this book. This is a copy of Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas*, and unlike the Book of Common prayer, which excuse the expression, is common, unlike specimens of English poets, which is what the content is here, which frankly is not the kind of book of compelling interest, *Rasselas* is an important work, and it was the most printed and most translated of Johnson's works during his lifetime. So we have here a book in an entirely original Etruscan calf binding that is a work of literature worth having. Now, next question is, what about the fore-edge painting? The book was printed for somebody besides Edwards, and the painting is not typical of what they normally have on their fore-edges. It's a very expansive scene, very deep, very broad. It shows an abbey in the distance, it shows picnickers in the foreground.

I'm convinced that it's old, but it seems very unlike the other Edwards of Halifax paintings, and so what we say is it's unrestored Etruscan binding like Edwards of Halifax used. Maybe it's by an imitator. Maybe it isn't. In any case, it's very uncommon to find something so well-preserved in this binding style, which is desirable. It's an important book, not a first edition, but important book, and the painting is quite pleasing, so maybe it doesn't matter.

Fore-edge paintings like the ones that Edwards of Halifax were producing were popular, were well-received, and when you have a commercial venture like that that is successful, it's not surprising that you have competitors. Edwards' chief competitor was an outfit called Taylor and Hessey, and I have two Taylor and Hessey or actually three volumes that Taylor and Hessey bound, and all three with a fore-edge painting, and almost certainly done by their artists. The Taylor and Hessey fore-edges that you see tend to be actually more attractive because they are richer in color for the most part than the Edwards of Halifax paintings are. This is a picture of probably the English countryside, possibly Swiss, but we think English where everything is as rich and pleasing almost as the day it was painted.

This is a collection of poetry by James Montgomery. It's called *A Wanderer of Switzerland and Other Poems*. That's why I said it might be Swiss countryside, but I think it's just the name of a poem, because there's much more in here besides poems on Switzerland. But anyway, we're looking at the fifth edition done five years after the first, and it's clear that that James Montgomery was a poet of some popularity at the time, and now no one's ever heard of him, and his star fell abruptly, and this is exactly the kind of volume that needs a commercial push that would predictably come if a volume were decorated with a fore-edge painting.

One curious thing, and this is a trick I play on people who come to the staff new, I say, "This binding was done by Taylor and Hessey. Can you find the proof?" And if they're a little bit experienced, they'll look in here where the binding stamp often is, and if it's not there, then they'll look here, which is the second place where it often is, and then they'll look in the back, which is the third place where it often is, and then they'll look on the base of the spine, which is the fourth place, and then they'll look for a ticket on the title page, and then they'll look for a ticket on the back of the title page, and then they'll give up. And then I'll tell them to look on the fore-edge of the boards, and Taylor and Hessey bindings are, so far as I know, always stamped on the fore-edges of the boards.

In any case, it's a lovely little binding, absolutely contemporaneous of beautifully decorated in gilt and blind, and worth having, even if you don't know that there is a fore-edge painting underneath. In fact, I have to say that fore-edge paintings are a special . . . I have a special fondness for fore-edge paintings because they have elicited one of only two gasps that I've ever experienced in my life as a bookseller. I was doing a presentation at a retirement center and showing books, and I did my little presentation where I said, "Okay, here's the book. Very pretty, early 19th century. Good condition. Probably worth maybe \$200, maybe \$250, but instead it's worth six, seven times that much. And that's because there's a hidden treasure."

Sometimes I let them guess and of course they never do guess, and depending how much time I have, and then eventually I reveal, "Look at that." And this woman sitting in the front row, she gasped. It was a good thing she was seated. Now the other time somebody gasped, the person who was standing up. She almost fell over. That was because it was an institutional client and I was doing an appraisal, and I told the person how much this book they owned was worth. Anyway, the woman who gasped when I showed this fore-edge painting now has a world-class collection of fore-edge paintings.

Two other volumes by Taylor and Hessey. Both signed on the fore-edge of the boards, both like this one in contemporary Morocco. Very pretty. Nicely decorated. Well-preserved. These are the works of Alexander Pope. He lived in Twickenham, west of London, near Windsor, and these fore-edge paintings show us scenes from Twickenham and from Windsor, and unlike a lot of fore-edge paintings, the content of the text or at least an association with the text, when it's appropriate, is reflected in the paintings. As I mentioned, there were certain stock elements in the Edwards of Halifax paintings. Ruined

castle, a stately home with a bridge over water. What's that got to do with the text? The answer is sometimes, in fact often, very little, and I think it's a plus when you have paintings that do relate directly or even indirectly to the text.

People ask me all the time, "How do you know how old a fore-edge painting is? When was the fore-edge painting done?" And the truth is that in most cases, with most fore-edge paintings, you don't know. The majority of cases, you don't know. The ones that I've talked about relating to Taylor and Hessey or Edwards of Halifax, I can make pretty confident assertions or at least educated guesses, and with some modern painters, I can tell you pretty precisely when something is done, but a lot of times because no fore-edge paintings basically, except for very recent ones, are signed, you have to use inferences. Sometimes the content, the subject of the fore-edge is identified. "Rosslyn Castle, Edinburghshire," written here on the front. That's what's along the fore-edge. Well you look at that handwriting and you say, "Well, is that 19th century or is that 20th century? Or is that 20th century pretending to be 19th century?" Sometimes you feel comfortable identifying the time of the handwriting and sometimes you don't.

This is a fore-edge painting where we know when it was done. This is a fore-edge painting that was done by a painter who is identified as the Dover Painter by a man named Weber, who's the grandson of the Carl Weber who wrote the great book on fore-edge decoration, and the Weber grandson is essentially the person that you turn to if you want definitive advice or commentary about fore-edge paintings. Anyway, the Dover Painter has clear stylistic elements in his scenes, and if you can't recognize them in a kind of instinctive way, after seeing a half a dozen of them, you can simply say, I can simply say to you, "Look at the sky. The way he does his clouds. They're very puffy, and they're very blue, and you can't miss it." His paintings are very impressionistic, almost like dappled. It's like he puts the painting on not in what shall I say, in broad areas, but in little tiny, almost pointillistic areas, and it's extremely attractive and very adept.

He was a painter working in the first part of the 20th century, and he worked for an outfit called Marks and Company in London, and the Marks company sold books to a couple of booksellers in Los Angeles, and Estelle Doheny, whose bookplate is right here, bought fore-edge painting, after fore-edge painting, after fore-edge painting from these Los Angeles dealers. And Estelle Doheny, amassed the largest collection of fore-edge paintings, almost all of which were very good, the largest in history. If you see her book plate and you see a painting with puffy blue sky, you know it's got to be the Dover Painter. It's a very well done painting. It's not as old as the book, but as long as everybody knows what's being sold, you know, this is not Edwards of Halifax, then it's perfectly happy transaction.

Now, this book has something going for it besides the fore-edge painting. It's a long metrical romance by a woman named Holford that frankly nobody cares about. It's very derivative from Scott's Marmion. It's forgotten, but it was owned by a guy named Wildman who was a good friend of Byron's at Harrow, where they both went to school. And when Byron was in financial trouble, Wildman bought Newstead Abbey from him for 94,500 pounds in 1817. Newstead Abbey's a 13th century building of great historical interest, and I looked on the internet and found what 94,500 pounds equates to now, and basically it's seven and a half million dollars is what that thing in today's terms cost him. And then he spent a great deal of money fixing it up. Anyway, we know this book resided in Newstead Castle, or Newstead Abbey, the ancestral home of Byron, bought by this guy Wildman and fixed up. Almost not exactly as a charitable contribution, but anyway, because of their friendship, decorated in a very attractive way, owned by Estelle Doheny.

These three volumes were also done by the Dover Painter, and we know again, simply from stylistic elements, that they have the same kind of sky, same kind of dappling, if you'll let me use that expression, the same kind of impressionistic application of paint. It's very uncommon to find a fore-edge painting on a novel. Most of the fore-edge paintings are on devotional books, like the Book of Common Prayer, on collections of poetry, like all of these, but this is a novel. It's called Hamilton House, and it's by, oh, the author of Rejected Addresses. The man that Shelley said was the only generous person he ever met who had enough money to be generous, or where it mattered. Anyway, it's the third edition, not the first printing, but it's a novel and it's a three-decker, so it's extremely uncommon to see a fore-edge painting on a novel, especially a three-decker. And finally, look at the gilt on that. I mean, this is decorated, sure, and it's very pretty. And so are all of these, but this is like encrusted with gilt. It's contemporary, contemporaneous. 1826. It's not later. It's the real thing. It's a lovely set, unusual, and in a way, as far as I'm concerned, almost irresistible.

We've spent some time talking about late 18th and 19th century fore-edge paintings that you have to fan open and some early 20th century as well. We began talking about a fore-edge painting where you could see the decoration without fanning the pages open, and now we're ending by going full circle. We're going to look at two books that are decorated by the binder Thomas Fazakerley of Liverpool, 19th century binder and into the early part of the 20th century, and what he did in a distinctive way, and nobody else so far as I know has ever done it before, he did these exquisite, I'm sorry, it's the only word, exquisite vignettes on the fore-edge of bindings where you can see a scene with the book closed. You don't fan this open. You look at it with the book closed.

The book is an anthology of poetry by Alaric Watts, not a household name. It's in a binding from the turn of the 20th century. We had lots of leaves and flowers, and it's a very pretty binding, including the very elaborately gauffered edges, but it's the little vignettes with scenes related to the content that constitute the main appeal. Fazakerley did other kinds of bindings, but this is the kind of binding they were best known for. These bindings do not show up very much. If you look into American book prices current from 1975 until 2009, there were three and only three that had multiple fore-edge vignettes like this.

Even more attractive than this beautiful, I'm sorry, it's beautiful, book, is this edition of Romola by George Eliot. It's a bigger book. It has nice leather doublures inside of the binding, which is on the outside plane, and the main thing again is that it has these vignettes on the fore-edge with scenes from the story. Now, the story of Romola is a Renaissance Florence Savonarola. He's in one of these vignettes. Four of the vignettes just show scenes from the locale, but the strap work frames set these off in a really beautiful way. Same thing over here. The strap work frames, and then the really beautiful, in this case, beautiful decoration on the binding, provide a context for these scenes, which as I mentioned are distinctive, and which are simply beautiful, sometimes breathtaking. You can see that these are in marvelous condition, and I think they're irresistible. These, as you can tell from the monograms on the cover belonged to somebody whose last name was K, and we haven't been able to figure out who that could be, but my guess is that DNK was married to MNK, and these could very well be a wedding gift.