A Window on Antiquity: the Topham Collection at Eton College Library

Collecting and the Grand Tour in Eighteenth-Century England

A conference at The Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 17 May 2013

To accompany the exhibition Paper Palaces: the Topham Drawings as a Source for British Neo-Classicism

Eton College Library, Verey Gallery, 9 May–1 November 2013
Call for Papers

Consisting of 37 volumes and more than 3,000 items, the collection amassed by Richard Topham (1671-1730) is one of the most significant resources for the history of antiquarianism and for the culture and industry of the Grand Tour in Europe. This collection of drawings, watercolours and prints after antique sculptures and paintings in Rome and Italy is the largest of its kind assembled in England, surpassing in both scale and breadth those collected by other celebrated antiquarians such as John Talman, Dr Richard Mead or Thomas Coke, 1st Earl of Leicester.

Since its arrival at Eton in 1736 the Topham Collection has fascinated and served archaeologists, researchers investigating collections of antiquities and scholars of the history and reception of the classical tradition. The drawings have also attracted the attention of art historians, as Topham managed to assemble an extraordinary range of works by some of the best Italian draughtsmen of the first half of the eighteenth century, such as Pompeo Batoni, Giovanni Domenico Campiglia and Francesco Bartoli, or by artists who later excelled in other fields, including the architect William Kent. More recently it has also emerged that Francesco Bartoli’s drawings of ancient ceilings and wall elevations in the collection were extensively copied and re-adapted by neo-classical architects such as Robert Adam, James Wyatt and Charles Cameron, becoming one of the most important sources for a decorative language that would spread over Europe.

However, despite the growing body of scholarship on the Topham Collection produced in recent decades, notably the work of the late Louisa M. Connor Bulman, a comprehensive study of the whole collection and of its role in eighteenth-century antiquarian culture is still wanting.

We invite proposals for papers on any aspect of the Topham Collection. Special consideration will be given to papers examining the Topham Collection in relation to British and European antiquarian and artistic culture. Cross-disciplinary and comparative studies are particularly welcome.

The conference, jointly hosted by Eton College, The Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art and The University of Buckingham, will be held in London at The Paul Mellon Centre on 17 May, 2013. Selected papers may be published in an edited volume.

For further information please contact Dr Adriano Aymonino (University of Buckingham) or Lucy Gwynn (Eton College Library) at the addresses below.

Please email abstracts of no more than 300 words by 10 February, 2013 to:

adriano.aymonino@buckingham.ac.uk
l.gwynn@etoncollege.org.uk

The conference coincides with the opening of Paper Palaces: The Topham Drawings as a Source for British Neo-Classicism, an exhibition organised at Eton College Library, Verey Gallery, 9 May–1 November 2013.