

Print collecting in provincial England prior to 1650 The Randle Holme Album

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The increasing popularity of print-collecting in 17th-century England was a reflection of, and manifested itself in, the expansion of English printmaking and the London print trade over the century. The diversification of print stock and the extension of the trade into the provinces – through the publication of print-sellers's catalogues – certainly encouraged print collecting in Restoration England.¹ The two most familiar, and probably most important, English print collections of the century remain the troves of Samuel Pepys (1633-1703),² and John Evelyn, both working principally from London in the latter half of the century.³

These two monumental collections reflect attitudes which had become common among print collectors by the second half of the century: that prints were more than aesthetic additions to the domestic environment. They served as important vehicles for the communication of information, and as such were kept as part of libraries. Their display contributed to the social, cultural, and intellectual legitimization of their owners. Although the aesthetic qualities of prints were increasingly appreciated by such collectors, for many who engaged in collecting, their didactic function continued to dominate. Evelyn recommended the use of prints to teach children, adolescents, and princes,⁴ and to communicate scientific discoveries – particularly among gentlemen like himself. He dedicated his book on printing, *Sculptura*, to the scientist Robert Boyle, explaining that he had written it in response to Boyle's request that he produce a treatise on chalcography:

... as you are pleased to judge it useful for the encouragement of the gentlemen of our nation, who sometimes please themselves with these innocent diversions...and especially, that such as are addicted to the more noble mathematical Sciences, may draw and engrave their schemes with delight and assurance.⁵

Yet the greater incidence of print-sellers in London, the greater survival rate of prints kept in library albums, and the familiar London-based examples represented by Pepys and Evelyn in the Restoration era, appear in several ways to have distorted our understanding of print-collecting in 17th-century England. So vivid are those examples in our minds that they overshadow evidence of such activity outside the London metropolis, or amongst those below the ranks of the aristocracy and court circle, or at an earlier time. The generation or so before Pepys and Evelyn began their collections – especially the late Elizabethan and early Stuart years – remain something of a dark corner in the history of English print production and collection. This is even more true for the provincial scene than for London, and for the middling rather than the upper ranks of society. Those 'middling sorts of people' attracted to print-collecting in those earlier times had not yet attained the level of material culture which would blossom, despite the intrusion of warfare and political upheaval, in the mid-century and after.⁶

We do know of course that the great collectors of the late Elizabethan and early Stuart eras, including Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester; John, Lord Lumley; and both the Earl and Countess of Arundel, collected prints as well as paintings and drawings. We know that several English engravers of prints were at work by 1600, and that the first specialist print publishers, John Sudbury and his nephew George Humble,



1 Captain John Smith by Simon van de Passe, 1616. British Library Harleian MS 2001, image no. 32. Copyright British Library Board. All Rights Reserved

opened their shop at the sign of the White Horse, Pope's Head Alley near Newgate, in 1603.⁷ And, as Antony Wells-Cole has shown, English embroideries, painted cloths for walls, decorative carvings, and even portraits reveal the familiarity of their makers with continental prints.⁸ These men must have owned print collections, or had access to them. Yet the collections, and the identity of their collectors (below the very conspicuous ranks of the aristocracy and outside the London metropolis) remain elusive. Indeed, the entire question of the cultural relations between London and provincial centres has become more contentious for this period, as traditional assumptions about London as the invariable hub and the provinces as the invariable recipient of metropolitan styles and fashions now come into question.⁹

These factors enhance the importance of a small but highly instructive collection which has come to light, deriving not from London, and not even from one of the provincial centres favoured by an affluent and sophisticated, continentally proximate gentry community such as one might find in, eg, Norwich. Nor does it derive from collectors of anything like

aristocratic standing. It derives instead from the more remote city of Chester, with its relatively impoverished 'cultural hinterland' of Cheshire, north-west Flintshire and southern Lancashire.¹⁰ This is the album of collected prints and drawings in the British Library, catalogued as Harleian 2001, whose contents were acquired by the Cestrian herald painters Randle Holme the Elder (1570/1-1655) and his son, Randle Holme the Younger (1601-59), chiefly in the first third of the 17th century. While there is not enough space here to discuss this rare survival in full detail, the Holme Album has much to say about the relationship between provincial painters and the visual culture of the wider world – specifically London and continental Europe – in the generation before Pepys and Evelyn began their labours. It speaks as well to the emergence of connoisseurship among the middling ranks of people at a protean time in English cultural history.

The Holmes emerged from respectable but distinctly modest social origins in and around Chester and rose through their own efforts to the ruling elite, first of their local 'Guild of Painters, Glasiers, Embroiderers and Stationers', and thence eventually to the mayoral ranks of their native city. Randle Holme the Elder was born c1571. A blacksmith's son with connections to the minor gentry of Cheshire and Flintshire, he apprenticed from 1578 with Thomas Chaloner (d 1598), deputy to the Norroy King of Arms, and eventually married Chaloner's widow. From these modest beginnings Holme worked his way between 1600 and 1618 to a post as deputy herald for the Chester area, covering Cheshire, Lancashire and North Wales, and thence to higher office in that city: sheriff in 1628, alderman in 1629, and mayor in 1633. After surviving the siege of Chester by a Parliamentary army (1645-46), and an outbreak of the plague, Holme died in 1655 aged 84. Randle Holme the Younger apprenticed with his father and followed a very similar career pattern: deputy herald for Lancashire in 1627, Chester city treasurer in 1633, and Royalist mayor of Chester in 1643-45. As mayor, he defended Chester against a Parliamentary siege before being dismissed from his posts upon the fall of the city.¹¹ He died in 1659.¹²

The main work of both Holmes related to heraldry: organizing and recording funerals for armigerous families in the area, painting hatchments, and collecting fees payable to the heralds. In addition they took on the broad range of work associated with the 'painter-stainers' of their time. Payments to them are recorded for such diverse tasks as painting a sword-rest in St. Olave's Church in 1606 (and again in 1609),¹³ and painting a trumpet-banner in 1627.¹⁴ They may well have painted a number of conventional portraits, and were perhaps even more likely to have painted the family trees common in the period at hand, on which miniature portraits of family members drooped like apples from the various branches of the subject family.¹⁵ But along with others like themselves, the Holmes would not usually have signed their work, making it impossible thus far to identify any actual surviving portraits as their own.

The volume which we refer to as the Holme Album here is but one of well over 200 volumes of Holme manuscripts in the British Library (catalogued as Harleian 1920-2180). Almost all the other volumes are devoted more or less exclusively to heraldic drawings and notes, but Harleian 2001 is not a heraldic reference tool. Rather, it contains over 150 prints and drawings covering a range of subject-matter, pasted or drawn on 72 pages. Though it has proved impossible to ascertain whether they were bound together at a later time or by the Holmes themselves,¹⁶ it is none the less clear that much of the contents of the Album were collected by Randle Holme the

Elder and his son. Most of the items in it are labeled either '*rb i*' or '*rb ii*'. This may have been done as a protection against theft, as a declaration of pride in ownership, in emulation of collecting practices seen elsewhere – or as a combination of more than one of these motives. But it certainly does indicate that the Holmes considered these prints valuable possessions, and reflects an obvious desire to connect the importance and quality of the images with the persona of their collector.

Most of the prints are engravings rather than woodcuts. They would have been issued as independent prints or as part of a set of prints, although a few appear to have been cut from books. The earliest print so far identified is represented in the Album by a drawing (after a Lucas van Leyden print of c1514); the latest, from the 1680s (25 years after the death of Randle Holme II). Such late prints must have been acquired by subsequent Holmes, possibly by Randle Holme III, himself a compiler by nature (see n11 here). Most of the prints which can be dated, though, derive from the 17th century. Almost nothing in the Album has been labelled by its compilers, though we have been able to identify nearly all the prints (and several of the drawings after prints) from standard reference sources. Leaving aside most of the Album's drawings for future consideration, we turn our attention here to the prints (along with several drawings closely reproducing prints), and then to a consideration of the nature, function and significance of the collection as a whole.

We can only speculate about where the Holmes acquired the prints in question, but the possibilities are worth considering. The obvious assumption is that they would have been purchased from dealers in London. As a deputy herald intermittently from 1600, the elder Holme was required to make occasional trips to London to report to the College of Arms. He probably did so a number of times up to the early 1620s. His appointment to the higher post of deputy to the College of Arms for Cheshire and North Wales in 1619 would have required visiting London more often. But a painful hernia incurred around that time forced him to delegate any long-distance travel to others. Even his required attendance at the coronation of Charles I proved too much for Randle Holme I, and he was fined for not coming.¹⁷ Under these circumstances we cannot rule out a provincial or even local provenance for at least some of the prints. Though Chester apparently had no resident booksellers even into the early decades of the 17th century,¹⁸ and though we still know little about print availability in the area, Holme's guild included stationers as well as painter-stainers, glasiers and embroiderers, and those stationers may well have provided prints as models for these decorative arts. Randle Holme II served as clerk to the Stationers in 1641, and Randle Holme III was the Stationers' steward in 1656.

Then, too, as most of the prints were produced, as we will see below, either in England or in northern European workshops, it remains possible that some Netherlandish prints at least came directly from their place of production to the port city of Chester. Research into the use of continental prints in Elizabethan and Jacobean decorative arts indicates that such prints were more plentifully used in areas near ports.²⁰ Though Chester merchants only very rarely traded with northern European ports directly, France, Spain, and Ireland being the preferred destinations, Dutch and especially Flemish prints could readily have come from Habsburg Spain.²¹ These are of course nothing more than possibilities, but they are also nothing less. They do little to support the assumption that cultural dissemination in England was a one-

way process, a simple matter of London exporting innovation to the provinces. The reception by provincial English society of fresh visual information was far from a passive or indiscriminating acceptance of everything novel that came its way. Instead, received notions from London seem to have blended in some proportion or other with well established local traditions of visual craftsmanship, a process to which the evidence of the Album certainly attests.

However they were acquired, the prints in the Album suggest a wide range of interests on the part of the collectors, and one which was by no means exclusively locally-oriented. They also suggest that their collectors had a keen eye for, and an effective means of acquiring, the relatively obscure and new as well as the familiar and commonplace. We find, for example, an engraved portrait of *Captain John Smith* (1616 or earlier), an impression of the first state of a portrait print by Simon van de Passe (Pl 1).²² It was neatly cut from the corner of a map, the cutter choosing to slice along the lines 'framing' Smith's portrait, thereby discarding the last section of the verses praising Smith by the poet John Davies (inscribed underneath Smith's image), as well as the rest of the map – an early map of New England. Only the portrait itself – a fine image of a gentleman wearing body armour – found its way into the Album, perhaps as a useful model for painters of gentry portraits. As heralds and heraldic painters, the Holmes would have been in close contact with many of the gentry families within and well beyond the cultural hinterland of the Cheshire/Lancashire/Flintshire region, and may well have been expected to supply similar portraits. The map of New England was of little professional use to them, but the image of a well-known explorer may well have been of interest. So, for that matter, might a figure in ceremonial body armour at a time when many landed gentry were attempting to gild the lily of their ancestry by adopting visual references to chivalric culture.

Though the Album doesn't exhibit the same concentration on portrait images as Pepys's print collection, and is of course nowhere near as large, it does indeed hold portraits aside from John Smith's. Most of these depict English monarchs, including some rarities. One is a battered impression of William Rogers's celebrated full-length portrait, *Queen Elizabeth standing in a room with a latticed window* (Pl 2).²³ This fine engraving would have been a relatively expensive print, compared with the cheaper woodcut portraits of the queen which once abounded.²⁴ This impression is of the first state of the print, with the Queen depicted full-length. (The plate was cut down to a half-length portrait for the second state, issued by Sudbury and Humble in 1603 or later. A third state was sold by Peter Stent, before the cut-down plate was reworked for the fourth state.)

Holding her orb and sceptre, symbols of her monarchy, Elizabeth wears an elaborate, jeweled farthingale gown (an English court fashion of the 1590s), ropes of pearls and a pearl coronet. At right, a prayer-book lies open at Psalm 35: *Plead thou my cause... and stand up to belp me!* Its position, on a cushion placed across the arms of the Queen's chair of state, associates the Queen's rule with Divine protection. The impression in the Album is reduced on all sides, with losses at upper left and at lower left and right. Although it has lost much of the cloth of honour behind the Queen's chair of state (including the letters 'DIEV'), the print retains the inscription at bottom identifying its maker as William Rogers ('*Willms Rogers sculp.*'), as well as the cartouche with its laudatory verses hailing Elizabeth as 'Th'admired Empresse through the world applauded...'. As Hind has pointed out, these verses address the Queen as a living monarch, indicat-



2 *Queen Elizabeth I standing in a room with a latticed window* by William Rogers, c1590-1603. British Library Harleian MS 2001, image no. 10. Co. British Library Board. All Rights Reserved

ing the print was issued during her lifetime. To left and right of this cartouche are the Queen's badges, in oval frames: a Pelican in its piety and a Phoenix rising from flames – representing Elizabeth's self-sacrificing and unique role as a female monarch.²⁵

For deputy heralds like the Randle Holmes, this magnificent image of the Queen was probably the finest and most up-to-date portrait affordable: a superb model for any portraits of Elizabeth they might have been commissioned to produce. As painters, they would have appreciated Rogers's handling of the fall of light through the glazed window at left (inspired by Dürer's *St Jerome in his Study*, an engraving of 1514).

As Elizabeth's heir James I reigned during the prime years of Randle Holme the Elder, there are also a number of images of the king and his family. Though Holme may not have been able comfortably to travel to London by the latter years of James's reign, he may well have seen James closer to home. The King visited Cheshire in 1617, staying at Vale Royal on August 21 and spending a few hours in Chester. Holme, as 'servant to Henry the most illustrious Prince of Wales', may well have attended upon the King during this visit.²⁶ His son, who had no disabilities so far as we know, was even more likely to have seen James – and Charles as well. Another portrait of James in the Album is an impression of Renold Elstrack's *James I and Anne of Denmark*: one of three large engravings of the King and his family created by Elstrack in the early 1610s. It was published by John Sudbury and George Humble, then the leading London print publishers.²⁷

The Album also includes a royal portrait print made abroad for the English market: a double full-length allegorical portrait of *Frederick V and Elizabeth of Bohemia with four lions* (Pl 3) identified by their combined arms at upper left, and further enhanced by the inclusion of the Bohemian Protestant martyr, John Hus.²⁸ This intrinsically polemical image would have catered to common English loyalties at the time of Frederick's disputed accession to the throne of Bohemia in 1618, and to the fortunes of his wife Elizabeth, the daughter of James I, in the year 1618-19. Its inscription, 'Printed at Dort by *Abrabam van de Sloote*', identifies it as part of the vast amount of printed material (books and prints) produced in the Netherlands for export to England. These publications were often written or designed by Puritan preachers serving the English Nonconformist communities in Holland. Financed by their congregations, the printed material was shipped to England with the aid of English merchants. Such a congregation flourished at Dort, where this print was made, and at least one of the congregation's members doubled as a printer.²⁹

The image depicts Elizabeth and Frederick standing at centre, wearing their coronation regalia. The Queen holds a palm of victory. The lions of England and the Palatinate prow the foreground. In the left background are the Protestant leaders Calvin and Luther. They place their hands on a Bible held by Hus. A peaceful scene of ploughing is visible beyond. In the right background is a scene of violence, terror, and Divine intervention in favour of the Protestant cause in Bohemia. As devils fly overhead, Catholic clergy and an army flee from a rain of lightning and millstones. The soldiers have abandoned their cannon, though not before using them: corpses lie scattered on the ground. In the distance is a city engulfed in flames, with a steeple toppling from a burning church. At the centre top of the print, over the royal regalia of the Protestant monarchs, appears the Hebrew letters representing Jehovah, inscribed on a radiant sun. A line from Psalm 118 is inscribed above Frederick and Elizabeth's heads: 'Factum est, et est mirabile'.³⁰ The Protestant rejoicing expressed in this print proved premature, as Frederick lost his kingdom to Catholic Imperial forces only a year after gaining it, and was unable to regain it. The 'Winter King' and 'Winter Queen' spent the rest of their lives in exile, mostly at The Hague.

Despite the obviously religious tone of this print, the Holmes do not seem to have been overly concerned with partisan religious issues or religious imagery in general. This overtly Protestant print co-existed in the Randle Holme album with Catholic prints, among them Lucas Vosterman's engraving after a painting by Rubens (Kunsthistorischesmuseum, Vienna) *St Mary Magdalen trampling on a box with all her valuables*, c1622/23.³¹ What seems primarily to have attracted the interest of the Holmes in assembling or copying prints was the potential value of certain images as a source of visual information which might come in handy for their own work. The Album, through these prints, and the accompanying life drawings (to be considered in a later study), reveals that the Holmes's painterly ambitions surpassed heraldry and traditional head-and-shoulders portraits. The Lucas Vosterman print reproduced an artwork by Rubens, an important artist at the London royal court. A full-length depiction of a seated human figure, elaborately draped, it gave the Holmes an image of a woman in an intense emotional state – something at which Rubens excelled. Other prints offered the Holmes the chance to study (and perhaps copy) naked men or women (Maarten van Heemskerck's *The Pblegmatic Temperament*, 1566,³² or the human figure seen in unusually twisted poses (Hendrick Goltzius's *Standard-Bearer, Facing Left*³³ and *Standard-Bearer, Facing Right*,³⁴ both dating from the 1580s.

Indeed, it is striking how many of the Holmes Album prints depict the full-length human figure in action or undress. To some extent, the Album constituted a reference tool for a dynasty of working painters interested in learning how to depict the human figure naturalistically or dramatically. Its contents are evidence that this particular dynasty of provincial painters aspired to share some of the professional skills acquired by continental artists at institutions like the Académie Royale de Peinture et Sculpture, founded in Paris in 1648.

Indeed, the Album has a strong continental component. In general, prints by Netherlandish printmakers dominate the collection, outnumbering even the English prints perhaps because of their more sophisticated artistic qualities as much as their availability.³⁵ Griffiths and Gerrard have pointed out:

So slight was the native production by comparison with the Continental that the gap was filled with a flood of imports. Anyone going to a London printseller, particularly in the first two-thirds of the century, must have seen far more imported prints than English ones, and every printseller... must have had a very large number of imported prints.³⁶

We can only assume that this same predominance of foreign over English-produced prints applied, perhaps even more strongly, to prints available in the provincial areas of the realm. Though English prints were available to the Randle Holmes, their limited number in the Album testifies to their generally poorer design and execution, reflecting the less sophisticated art training available to English printmakers in the first half of the 17th century – and the difficult position of engravers in the London print trade. Habitually poorly paid, the English had little incentive to produce high-quality work, ensuring that foreign-trained engravers, particularly Netherlanders, dominated the trade.³⁷ The Album bears ample evidence of inferior English (and Netherlandish) printmaking. At folio 3 recto (image 2) we find a copy – probably Netherlandish – of Thomas Cross's *memento mori* print, *Memorare Novissimatua* (Pl 4). The copyist (whose name, only partly legible, includes a 'van' indicating that he was Flemish or Dutch) simplified Cross's design and (perhaps inadvertently) reversed it – but only partially. He seems to have been insufficiently familiar with the effect of copying a print from an impression rather than from the original plate. In consequence, he has successfully imitated the major elements of the print, but overlooked the less important areas.³⁸

And, although the English work remained poor in the face of foreign craftsmanship, the origins of such imports were not indiscriminate. Despite the growing acceptability by the 1620s of Italian models in contemporary architecture and other visual media, the Album's emphasis remains on northern European examples. Italian artworks are represented in the album only by drawn copies, or by reproductive engravings – some by Netherlandish printmakers – for example, Jacob Matham's engraving after *Cbild Playing a Tambourine*,³⁹ which bears an inscription identifying the painting it reproduces as by Titian, a very prestigious name. By far the most impressive copy of an Italian artwork is a somewhat clumsy drawing⁴⁰ of Cornelius Court's engraving, after Titian's painting *The Adoration of the Trinity (La Gloria)*. Court's engraving, considered one of his finest prints, was greatly admired – and much copied.⁴¹

The Album contains a number of subjects, including impressions of some of the same prints, which were also drawn upon by other professionals working in the visual arts in England at this period. A case in point emerges in a print of *Mabomet*, probably from a set of prints of the *Nine Worthies*.⁴² This was a popular subject from about 1575 to 1625 in English visual, musical and literary culture. Different

3 *King Frederick V and Queen Elizabeth of Bohemia with four lions* by Abraham van de Sloote, c1618-19. British Library Harleian MS 2001, image no. 66. Copyright British Library Board. All Rights Reserved

4 *Memorare Novissimatus* after Thomas Cross, c1644-82. British Library Harleian MS 2001, image no. 2. Copyright British Library Board. All Rights Reserved

versions of the 'Nine Worthies' survive in wall paintings, embroideries, prints, pageants, painted wall-cloths, and – most famously – in lines from Shakespeare's *Love's Labours Lost* (Act V, scene II, lines 574-578, written c1594-95). Thomas Trevelian's drawings of the 'Nine Worthies' for his *Miscellanies* albums (1608 and 1616), and 'Nine Worthies' figures at Montacute House, Somerset and Wiston, Sussex, further demonstrate the appeal to English painters and embroiderers of this particular set of Phillips Galle prints.⁴³ They formed part of what Heather Wolfe has described as a 'common vocabulary' drawn upon by English painters and craftsmen at this period: a visual culture made up of gleanings from Bibles, almanacs, pattern books, imported prints, broadside ballads and husbandry manuals.⁴⁴ Trevelian incorporated the 'Nine Worthies' into his books alongside the 'Nine Muses', 'Seven Deadly Sins', 'Seven Virtues', and 'Seven Liberal Sciences', a time-line of history, a calendar, astronomical diagrams and lists of English counties. The 'Worthies' functioned for him as an intrinsic part of a larger corpus of cultural information conveyed through texts and visual images triggering emotional responses or supporting memory. In contrast, the Holmes retained from the 'Nine Worthies' only the image of Mahomet – a notably foreign Worthy in unfamiliar garb. Their collection was very different from Trevelian's, its very different function reflected in its far more random arrangement. The Album constitutes an assemblage of clippings and copies, presented without concern for such niceties as painted borders or elegantly-arranged pages. As a sourcebook for professional painters, it contains little text. Even where the Holmes chose to retain pages from books, they selected only titlepages with interesting visual elements.

As already mentioned, the Holmes owned the first state of a print after Maarten van Heemskerck's design: *The Phlegmatic Temperament* (folio 2 recto, image 1).⁴⁵ It comes from a set of Heemskerck prints of 'The Four Temperaments' (1566) by Herman Jansz Muller.⁴⁶ Another print from the set inspired the maker of a painted cloth from about 1600 at Hardwick Hall. This example of a form of wall-covering popular in Tudor and Stuart times is by the well-named John Painter. He took his design partly from *The Choleric Temperament*, incorporating details from the print – and from three other sets of prints – into painted cloths at Hardwick.⁴⁷

As we have seen, the Holmes valued accomplished print-making and artistic expertise. They were interested, for example, in Lucas van Leyden – a printmaker whose works were highly sought-after by contemporary collectors. (The great collector Michel de Marolles, abbé de Villeloin (1600-1681), listed his Lucas van Leydens along with the prints of other artists 'whose works are esteemed above all others', eg, Dürer, Callot, Parmigianino (and Raphael reproductions).⁴⁸ Though the Holmes seem not to have found, or been able to afford, an original Lucas van Leyden for their far more modest collection, they did own a drawn copy of van Leyden's small engraving of *The Annunciation* (c1514).⁴⁹ The unknown copyist (perhaps one of the Randle Holmes) reproduced it in a large drawing, which was cut in two, presumably to fit it into the album. The draughtsman was evidently trying to reproduce Lucas's delicate hatching, using pen and ink to copy a



tiny print on a much larger scale. He lost patience while copying the angel's wings, rendering them with bolder, clumsier lines and failing to notice that the lower section of the angel's wing at left touched the left margin of the original engraving. Similarly, the Holmes owned two copies of prints after Parmigianino, original prints being unobtainable or beyond their means. The inclusion of very detailed copies of prints alongside original engravings in the Album testifies to the Randle Holme's determination to acquire prints beyond their reach – and their desire to study the techniques of hatching and cross-hatching.

Elsewhere in the Album are other drawings: sketches after and, probably, designs for portraits or portrait prints, and a succession of life drawings, some accompanied by drawn copies. We hope to consider these – and the other prints in the album – more fully on another occasion but, suffice it to say here, the presence of these life drawings indicates that the Album functioned as more than a repository for the Holmes's most cherished prints. Though the drawings are not highly accomplished, they suggest that the Holmes aspired to levels of technical competence in draughtsmanship closer to conti-



mental standards than to those of most provincial English painters in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. This in turn suggests that the Holmes' concept of what a painter should be was something closer to French, Netherlandish or Italian ideals than might have been expected from Chester painters at this time. If this is so, the prints in the album would have functioned not only as a source of design details to be closely copied in one project or another, but as an inspiration for the Holmes' entire production. It is true that we are as yet unable to identify artworks by the Holmes. However, there are clues in the nature of the Album collection indicating the artistic aspirations of this dynasty of Chester herald-painters, and their own ideas about what a painter could, and should be. It is noticeable that the Album abounds in both printed and drawn images of the human figure, especially seen full-length, depicted in vigorous action or in unusual positions of repose. The *lacunae* of the print collection are also interesting: there are no flower prints, no emblem prints, few 'celebrity' portraits except for royalty, no costume prints or topography, and none of the sheets of noses, ears and eyes conventionally published for students to copy early on in their training.⁵⁰

These lacunae suggest that this was not a collection for use by beginners, or even a portfolio of cheap prints for students' copying such as that kept by the Dutch artist Caspar Netscher.⁵¹ The Holmes seem to have reserved most of the Album for their treasures, but when they bought prints it was at least in part with an eye to what could be useful to them as professional painters, or perhaps simply what inspired them. The Album's incidental inclusion of scraps depicting bells, cardinal's hats, an armillary sphere, an anchor, a horse, a boar's head, a crowned lion, a sun, a coat of arms, an armillary sphere and a tiny castle, clustered on one page (Pl 5),⁵² and,



5 Various images clipped from a printed sheet or sheets issued by Sudbury and Humble, anonymous, c1602-13. Harleian MS 2001, image no. 2. Copyright British Library Board. All Rights Reserved

6 Sir Thomas Aston at the deathbed of his wife by John Souch, 1635. Manchester Art Gallery. Copyright Manchester Art Gallery

on others, of academic drawings of nude men, demonstrates how the visual world of this family of Chester herald-painters was expanding during the 17th century.

Another aspect of this collection's significance undoubtedly lies in the Holmes' role as masters of their guild who took on apprentices on a regular basis, and in the likely use of these images as models to be emulated by the next generation. This application seems more than the usual model-work which lay at the heart of apprenticeship to contemporary crafts, because the prints and drawings in the Album allowed the masters to teach styles which, at least in the elder Holmes's case, had not been part of his own apprenticeship. Thomas Chaloner the herald painter no doubt taught Randle Holme the Elder the elements of heraldic painting, a long-standing and traditional form of English vernacular painting. But by using these images as his models, Holme was able to teach his apprentices, and they theirs, styles and perspectives which were entirely new and novel. In the process they elevated their metier from artisanal craft to 'art' in the course of one or two generations.

Proof of this pudding does not yet lie in any surviving work of the Holmes themselves, for none has been able to be identified. But it does seem to lie in the work of the former apprentice to Holme the Elder, and contemporary and friend of Holme the Younger, John Souch (1594-1645). Following his apprenticeship with Randle Holme the Elder between 1607 and 1617, Souch became a well known and well-patronized painter of portraits for the regional gentry and middling elites of the Chester hinterland, over a dozen of which survive to the present day.⁵³ It is hard to imagine that Souch, who remained close to both Holmes for most of his life, did not benefit from the very same sorts of images which the latter were collecting, and some at least of which probably found their way into the Album before us.

Souch's *Sir Thomas Aston at the Deathbed of his Wife*, of 1635 (Pl 6) reflects the training the painter received from his master. Souch was a mature artist when he painted this group portrait. He was fully capable of rendering lifelike human figures and capturing the nuances of different textiles. He had real difficulty, though, in placing his figures naturalistically in

relation to one another, and in recreating a visually convincing, illusionistic interior. Not only does Sir Thomas lean towards the left, but the cradle, the bedcurtains and the bed itself are oddly angled. One has only to consider what Rubens might have made of a similar composition to recognize that for all its power and sophistication, *Sir Thomas Aston* reveals the limitations of its creator's English provincial training. Evidently Randle Holme was able to teach his pupil how to paint people (and coats of arms), but architectural perspective was beyond him, or of little interest to him. And indeed, the Randle Holme Album is singularly lacking in prints suggesting any serious interest in perspective or architecture. It is hard to believe that no such prints were available, given that is already in the Album. Admittedly, the Holmes may well have accumulated architectural prints in a different album, or relied on architectural books. However, Souch's difficulties in *Sir Thomas Aston* point to something else: to ignorance or disinterest in one aspect of contemporary continental art on the part of the Holmes.

Conclusion

Taken in all, the Home album offers a snapshot of the growing interest of regionally-based herald-painters and painter-stainers, artists/craftsmen working very much in the English vernacular tradition, within a wider visual culture. The Album shows how one family of such painters gathered prints and drawings of both domestic and foreign provenance to learn about how to convey contemporary styles and subjects in a more avant-garde visual language than that traditionally available in provincial England. Many of these images, drawings as well as engravings, seem to have been intended in a very broad sense as didactic models: not perhaps for the gentlemen amateurs to whom Evelyn referred and certainly not for children. Not either as patterns to be copied by apprentices: there were already drawing manuals designed for that purpose. But they appear to have served as sources of inspiration, for the Holmes themselves and perhaps their advanced apprentices or fellow guildsmen such as Souch, from which to appreciate and understand a higher level of

draughtsmanship and design than was yet available to a native, vernacular, English School painter of the day. In this sense images like this will have inspired and encouraged the leap from the world of Thomas Chaloner and Holme the Elder to that of the latter's apprentice John Souch: a world expanding beyond the traditions of English vernacular portraiture, moving from anonymous work to signed work, and from craftsman to artist.

The Album therefore affirms that the Holmes were more than producers of visual images and masters to their apprentices. The very act of collecting these items, and of providing them with personal initials which surely must mark the pride of ownership rather than authorship, identifies the Holmes also as consumers. To go even further, the aesthetic quality of many of the items in the Album, and the contemporary reputation of some of those virtual virtuoso of their times who produced them, allows us to see the Holmes as early but genuine and self-conscious connoisseurs. To some considerable degree, the Album represents a collection of prints that were admired, enjoyed and hence preserved, not chiefly for their religious or political subject-matter, which seems relatively random, but for their design and aesthetic qualities and for the contemporary reputation of their producers. Though the Holmes's decidedly middling status and income must have placed numerous coveted works out of their reach, many of these prints are nevertheless of fine quality. One or two, certainly including Goltzius's *Standard-Bearer, Facing Right*, are real prizes and would have been assets to any European print collection of that time.⁵⁴ The Holmes's acquisitions became 'their' Titians, 'their' Maarten van Heemskerck, 'their' Goltziuses, and 'their' Lucas van Leydens. When some prints were beyond their power to acquire, they either drew copies of such prints themselves, or acquired drawn copies of them. In that regard the material footprint of the Album speaks to the development of a fashionable material culture, not simply in the great metropolis, but also in relatively remote regions of the realm, and fixes that arrival at a full generation before Pepys and Evelyn set about their labours in London.

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1 The earliest print publisher's catalogue was brought out by Peter Stent in 1654. See Antony Griffiths and Robert A. Gerrard, *The Print in Stuart Britain 1603-1689* (British Museum, 1998), p17, n20. For Peter Stent's catalogues, see Alexander Globe, *Peter Stent, London Printseller, c. 1642-1665, being a catalogue raisonné of his engraved prints and books with an historical and bibliographical introduction*, University of British Columbia, 1985.

2 Pepys's collection survives (almost intact) as part of his library at Magdalene College, Cambridge and has been the subject of more than one study. See Arthur W. Aspinall, *Catalogue of the Pepys Library at Magdalene College, Volume III Prints and Drawings Part I General*, general editor Robert Latham, Woodbridge, 1981, reviewed by Jan van der Waals, in *Strotolus*, vol. xix, 1984, pp143-147; and Eric Chamberlain, *Catalogue of the Pepys Library at Magdalene College, Volume III Prints and Drawings Part II Portraits*, Cambridge, 1994, reviewed by Antony Griffiths, 'The Pepys Library', in *Print Quarterly*, vol. XII,

no. 4 (December 1995), pp409-412. See also Jan van der Waals, 'The Print Collection of Samuel Pepys', in *Print Quarterly*, vol. I, no. 4 (December 1984), pp236-257.

3 Although the print collection of Pepys's friend John Evelyn was dispersed before 1799, there is an unpublished description of it at the end of Evelyn's manuscript collection of his books, now in the British Library. See Griffiths, 'The Pepys Library', p411. Griffiths also records other seventeenth-century British print collections. Sir Philip Sydenham of Brympton in Somerset filled an album with 323 portrait prints (British Museum 1994-5-15-3), at about the same time as Pepys was collecting. Elias Ashmole's collection of portrait prints, described by Anthony à Wood, burned in a fire at Ashmole's London rooms in 1678. The Parliamentarian general Thomas, Lord Fairfax owned a volume of about 150 portraits of the famous foreign soldiers of his time, described by Ralph Thoresby (1658-1725), who later acquired it. Thoresby published a catalogue of his own collection, *Musaeum Thoresbyanum*, as an appendix to his *Ducatus Leodierensis* (1715). See Griffiths, *ibid*, at pp28 and 411-412.

See also the Brownlow family album of 61 mezzotint portraits, mostly after Lely and Van Dyck, by the mezzotinter Alexander Browne (Heinz Library and Archive at the National Portrait Gallery, London).

4 John Evelyn, *Sculptura, or the history and art of chalcography...*, first published 1662; 2nd edn (London, 1769), pp120-124.

5 John Evelyn, dedicatory letter to Boyle in Evelyn's *Sculptura: or, the History and Art of Chalcography and Engraving in Copper; with An ample Enumeration of the most renowned Masters and their Works...*, 2nd edn, (London, 1755), p2.

6 See Edward P. Chayney, *The Evolution of English Collecting: Receptions of Italian Art in the Tudor and Stuart Periods*, London and New Haven, 2003, esp pp38-61. The abundant scholarship on the 'consumer society' of the pre-industrial era, dating it to the long eighteenth century, takes its lead especially from Nell McKendrick, John Brewer and JH Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society, the Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England*, Cambridge, 1982, though the more recent work especially of Malcolm Smuts and Linda Levy Peck places such a burgeoning at least a half century

earlier, in the mid-seventeenth century. See R. Malcolm Smuts, 'Material Culture, Metropolitan Influences and Moral Authority in Early Modern England' in Curtis Perry, ed, *Material Culture and Cultural Materialisms in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, Turnhout, Belgium, 2001, pp203-224, and Peck, *Consuming Splendor, Society and Culture in Seventeenth-Century England*, Cambridge, 2005, *passim*.

7 Leonie Rostenberg, *English Publishers in the Graphic Arts, 1599-17600, a Study of the Printsellers and Publishers of Engravings*, New York, 1963, pp1-2. Sudbury was in business by 1598, and went into partnership with Humble in 1603. They specialized in portrait prints until 1618, when Sudbury retired. Humble later focused on maps. See Griffiths, *op cit*, pp14, 39.

8 See Antony Wells-Cole, *Art and Decoration in Elizabethan and Jacobean England*, New Haven and London, 1997.

9 The classic statement may be found in FJ. Fisher, 'The Growth of London as a Centre for Conspicuous Consumption in the Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries' *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 4th ser., 30 (1948) pp37-50 and is echoed for cultural

- history by almost the entire traditional body of scholarship on, for example, the history of English drama. But the many published volumes of the Records of Early English Drama project have thoroughly destroyed that working model for the dramatic arts, and others have begun to assail it from other directions. See a summary of its impact in A Douglas and S MacLean, *REED in Review, Essays in Celebration of the First twenty-Five Years*, Toronto, 2006, and also, more generally, Smuts, 'Material Culture, Metropolitan Influences and Moral Authority'.
- 10 The concept of the cultural hinterland or 'province' derives from Charles Phythian-Adams, *Societies, Cultures and Kinship, 1580-1850, Cultural Provinces and English Local History* (Leicester, 1993) especially pp9-18, in which this area is labelled the cultural province of the 'Irish Sea'.
- 11 The next generation produced Randle Holme III (1627-1700), another painter specializing in heraldry and bitten by the collecting bug. A recent compilation based upon his enormous encyclopaedia of heraldry and of everyday life and work in Stuart England, *The Academy of Armory*, Chester, 1688 et seq., was reprinted by the Scolar Press in 1972. See also the compilation based on the *Academy* by NW Alcock and Nancy Cox, *Living and Working in Seventeenth Century England...* (British Library CD-ROM, 2000).
- 12 For information on the lives of Randle Holme I, Randle Holme II, and Randle Holme III, see Anthony RJS Adolph's article on them in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford, 2004 (hereafter ODNB), vol 27, at pp774-775.
- 13 *Victoria History of the Counties of England, Chester*, V, pt. ii, Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2005 (hereafter VCH, Chester), p147.
- 14 Chester Record Office MS. Z G172, 'Accounts of the Painters, etc. Company', unpaginated, for 1627.
- 15 ODNB, vide Holme, Randle. John T Hopkins speculated whether a Chester painter – perhaps Randle Holme I – might be responsible for the portrait of *The Cholmondeley Sisters* (London, Tate Britain). See Hopkins, 'Such a twin likeness there was in the pair: an investigation into the painting of the Cholmondeley Sisters', *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire for the year...* vol. 144 (1991), pp26-27.
- 16 The current binding dates only from 1968 as indicated by a stamp on the back cover. A note in the original Harley catalogue of 1808 identifies the last Randle Holme as the one who bound hitherto loose pages together. This may or may not be an accurate assertion as no source is given for it, and as the volume had already been in the British Museum Collection since 1753, well before the catalogue made his notes for the 1808 catalogue. Our thanks to Michael St John-McAllister, British Library Curator, for his clarification of this point.
- 17 ODNB, vide Holme.
- 18 VCH, Chester, V, pt I, p108.
- 19 Adolph, op cit, pp774-775.
- 20 Wells-Cole, *Art and Decoration* ppbx.
- 21 WB Stephens, 'The Overseas Trade of Chester in the Early 17th Century', *Transactions of the Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 120 (1968), pp23-24; DM Woodward, *The Trade of Elizabethan Chester*, Hull, 1970, *passim*, and Woodward, 'The Overseas Trade of Chester, 1600-1650', *Trans. Historical Soc. Lancs. And Cheshire*, 122 (1970), pp250-42.
- 22 Harleian MS 2001, image 32, fol15r.
- 23 Harleian MS 2001, image 10, fol8r. On this print see FM O'Donoghue, *A Descriptive and Classified Catalogue of Portraits of Queen Elizabeth*, London, 1894, Engravings (161); Arthur M Hind, *Engraving in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: A Descriptive Catalogue...*, Cambridge, 1952, vol I, pp265-7; and Roy Strong, *Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I*, Oxford, 1963, p114, E.30, plate XVI; FM O'Donoghue, *A Descriptive and Classified Catalogue of Portraits of Queen Elizabeth*, London, 1894, Engravings (161) (cited by Strong, *ibid.*). Hind and Strong both reproduce the only other impression of the Rogers engraving hitherto known (Dept of Prints and Drawings, British Museum).
- 24 The cheap woodcuts were marketed, along with popular ballad sheets, by street hawkers and peddlers, and are now rare. For an example of such a woodcut, printed on the same sheet as verses, see the portrait of *Queen Elizabeth I*, c1590 (British Library, Huth Collection no. 11) reproduced in Tarnya Cooper, 'The Queen's Visual Presence', in David Starkey, *Elizabeth: the Exhibition at the National Maritime Museum*, ed Susan Doran, exh cat. (National Maritime Museum, London), 2003, p178.
- 25 Queen Elizabeth used varying interpretations of the Pelican and Phoenix as her reign progressed to address contemporary anxieties about her gender, marital status, and – in the absence of a declared heir – her approaching death. For Crispin I de Passe's earlier portrait print of the Queen, in which the Pelican and Phoenix are prominent, see Anne Thackray, 'Elizabeth as Empress: A Portrait Engraving in the National Gallery of Canada', *National Gallery of Canada Review*, Ottawa, 2003, vol IV, pp15-19.
- 26 Hopkins, 'Such a twin likeness...', p27.
- 27 Harleian MS 2001, image 63, fol27r. This is the first state of the print. In the second, the plate was altered to update James I's face in keeping with a new standard portrait by Simon van de Passe (1616/1618). See Griffiths and Gerrard, *The Print in Stuart Britain*, p48, cat. no. 6 (repr.).
- 28 Harleian MS 2001, image 66, fol28r.
- 29 George Waters, deacon of the English church at Dort, was a printer. See Keith I Sprunger, *Trumpets from the Tower: English Puritan Printing in the Netherlands 1600-1640*, Brill's Studies in Intellectual History, vol 46, Leiden, 1994, pp35-36.
- 30 'A Dominum factum est illud, et est mirabile in oculis nostris.' (Psalm 118, line 23: 'This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes').
- 31 Harleian MS 2001, image 3, fol4r.
- 32 Harleian MS 2001, image 1, fol2r.
- 33 Harleian MS 2001, image 30, fol15r.
- 34 Harleian MS 2001, image 34, fol16r.
- 35 See Griffiths and Gerard, *The Print in Stuart Britain*, p7: 'It would be absurd to pretend that British print production of the seventeenth century is in any way comparable with what was being produced on the Continent. The gap was enormous, and did not begin to close until the 18th century. But the development during the period was still remarkable, from one or two publishers and a sporadic production at the beginning of the century, to the boom in mezzotint at the end. The mezzotinter John Smith was the first British printmaker whose work was regarded as an essential part of any serious print collection both on the Continent and in England.'
- 36 *Ibid.*, p19. Griffiths and Gerard refer to the Little Gidding community's biblical Concordances (Bible texts illustrated with prints or parts of prints). Netherlandish prints formed the overwhelming majority of these prints, 'striking proof of how completely the London print market was supplied from the Netherlands'. *Ibid.*, p22.
- 37 Griffiths and Gerard point out that even John Payne (active 1620-39), though an accomplished engraver who could rival continental practitioners, often worked at a level well below his capabilities. *Ibid.*, pp16 and 100-104.
- 38 Compare, for example, the crown at lower left in the original print with the copy in the Randle Holme album, and the objects held and trampled by the skeletons. An impression of Thomas Cross's original print may be found in Margery Corbett and Michael Norton, *Engraving in England in the Sixteenth & Seventeenth Centuries... Part III The Reign of Charles I* (based on the notes of AM Hind), Cambridge, 1964, pp325-326, no. 143, pl 169 (b).
- 39 Harleian MS 2001, image 11, fol9r.
- 40 Harleian ms. 2001, image 120, fol72r.
- 41 Prado, inv 432. It inspired many imitations, by Hieronymus Wierix and others, despite Titian's privilege (obtained from the Venetian authorities) banning the unauthorized engraving of his works for 15 years.
- 42 Harleian MS 2001, image 31, fol15r. This print somewhat resembles a text description of a set of 'Nine Worthies' prints by Robert Vaughan: *The Fourtraces at Large of Nine Modern Worthies of the World*, which was sold in 1622 at the Globe in Cornhill near the Exchange. The individual figures in the set are described as having large shields and standing against a background of battlements and cloudy skies, with verses under each print. See Corbett and Norton, *Engraving in England in the Sixteenth & Seventeenth Centuries*, III, pp89-90, no. 114 (pls 44 a and b, 45 a and b). The other figures in the set are Tamerlane, Charles V, Henry IV, Scanderbeg, Mohamed the Great, Solyman, and William Prince of Orange. If not from this set (difficult to judge from the quality of our reproduction, but there are differences in the lettering of the verses), it is from a similar set.
- 43 Wells-Cole, *Art and Decoration*, pp279-280.
- 44 Thomas Trevelian, *The Trevelyan Miscellany of 1608*, ed Heather Wolfe, Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, 2007, p7.
- 45 Harleian MS 2001, image 1, fol2r. See *The New Hollstein Duab 6 Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts 1450-1700; Maarten van Heemskerck Part II...* compiled by Ilja M. Woldman (Roosendaal and Amsterdam, 1994), pp218ff., nos. 543.
- 46 Wells-Cole explains how Painter used details from four sets of prints in designing wall-paintings at Hardwick. See Wells-Cole, *Art and Decoration*, pp276-77, figs. 473, 477.
- 47 Wells-Cole, op cit, p294.
- 48 Robinson, 'This Passion for Prints...', p xxxix. Marolles had 600 albums of prints in his first collection, which was bought by Louis XIV in 1667.
- 49 Ellen S Jacobowitz, *The Illustrated Bartsch 12 formerly volume 7 (part 3)... Lucas van Leyden engravings and etchings...*, New York, [1981], p167, no. 35 (357).
- 50 Of course, it is possible that the Randle Holmes possessed examples of all these – but kept them elsewhere. One of the other albums in their collection contains a number of architectural images – also almost entirely absent from Harleian MS 2001.
- 51 For Caspar Netscher's portfolio of 327 prints and sketches, described in his widow's inventory as being 'van weynigh waarde, dienende voor discipline om na te seychemen' ('of little worth, serving for students to copy from'), see Abraham Bredius, 'Een en ander over Caspar Netscher', in *Oud-Holland*, 5 (1887), pp263-274, at p273 (reference and citation from William Robinson, 'This Passion for Prints...', p xxxix, n18). 17th-century English amateurs are known to have copied prints to learn how to draw. Samuel Pepys bought prints for his wife to copy, and in 1659 employed as her drawing-master Alexander Browne (fl1659-1700), who later published *Ars Pictoria; or an Academy treating of drawing, painting, limning, and etching...*, London, 1669, incorporating engraved examples by Arnold de Jode, copied from the well-known prints of Abraham Bloemaert (1564-1651), as well as other painters.
- 52 Harleian MS 2001, images 15-21, fol1r.
- 53 See National Portrait Gallery, Heinz Archive, 'John Souch' in file on 'British painters, 1625-1650'; Courtauld Institute, Witt Library, vide Souch, John; Julian Treuherz, 'New Light on John Souch of Chester', *Burlington Magazine* CXOXX (May 1997), pp299-307.
- 54 Harleian MS 2001, image 34, fol16r.