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The Paper Museum

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civic pantheon in the domestic interior, just as the well-governed family was often said to be a kind of scaled-down model of the state. It was made possible by the commodities that remediated pantheonic monuments at a more convenient size and price. Buying and displaying these commodities helped to furnish a home but also helped its occupants to feel at home in the Reformed nation.

Notes

- 1 For the Staffordshire figures of Byron, see Pugh figs. 17–21, 27, 28 (492–95); for Scott, see figs. 54, 57 (493, 500–01). For Byron figures in Parian, see Atterbury 93, 135, 186, 228, 230–31; for Scott, see 96, 126, 186, 198, 202, 233, 246.
- 2 As Beaton shows, Wellington was a popular subject for these kinds of artifact.
- 3 For a selection, see Miller 369–71.

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The Paper Museum

DEBORAH LUTZ

THIS PAGE of a souvenir album, created by an anonymous Victorian in the mid-nineteenth century, represents a visit to "the home of Charlotte Brontë," as reads the caption on the oval scrap, showing the parsonage in Haworth (fig. 1). The traveller pasted a snippet with the signature of Patrick Brontë, still living here at the time, underneath, and arranged two

leaves—described in pencil as “ivy leaves from the rectory, Haworth, 1859”—along the bottom (Anonymous souvenir album). Mostly a travel album, the volume commemorates the places the compiler visited, and, as a whole, attempts to capture and keep experience.¹ What Geoffrey Batchen would call a “hybrid object,” the book multiplies layers of representation, using varied means of grasping time and place (48). The visual—the published sketch, possibly from a souvenir pamphlet or stationery—somehow didn’t suffice to store or evoke engagement, to prove that the traveller had been there, seen that, met him, touched this. She needed to include the “hand” (with the signature a metonym for the body) of the local celebrity (himself metonymic of Charlotte Brontë, now dead and out of reach). The plants that grew there express the place itself. Here in this book she displays the living hours; she curates a memory shrine.

Many Victorian albums performed as personal museums. They sat in the parlour, ready to be paged through with visitors, often accompanied by a verbal narrative.² Autograph or friendship albums, for instance, contained the drawings, sayings, and copied quotations of one’s friends and attested not only to a social group but also to time and place: the contributor added the date and where she lived or happened to be just then.³ Compilers of amateur



FIG. 1: Anonymous souvenir album, BPM E 2013.2.

By permission of Haworth, Brontë Parsonage Museum.

botanical albums often pencilled the date and location of the specimen gathering, and sometimes with whom.⁴ Albums with “scraps” had pasted to their leaves printed menus for special dinners, theatre programs, lecture flyers, and the like—means of tracing one’s movement through space and hours.⁵ Like proper museums, then, these volumes were displayed to others and represented history—an autobiography in objects—with a chronology and attention to the local, like wall texts. Differently from a case, box, cabinet, vitrine, or museum, the album allowed one to assemble artifacts not only on the face of a sheet but also as part of the paged-through sequence of a volume. The page itself became part of the artifact, especially when the maker embroidered onto a leaf or used stitches to attach paper objects to it, something like a house museum, where every object, room, wall, and the space itself are meant to evoke the famous inhabitant and the body once there.⁶ Victorian parlours and other domestic interiors often exhibited crafted or found objects—taxidermy, wax flowers, needlepoint—under or behind glass (Logan). The album was a space holding things within the parlour with its artifacts, which was itself a room opening out to other domestic chambers. Similarly, a museum involves spaces within spaces. For instance, the British Museum contains a room with a jewelled reliquary that protects what is reputed to be a sliver of the True Cross. Comparable to this fragment of wood, its rich encasement, the room where it resides, and the larger space of the museum building, the album in the Victorian parlour collected between its boards lacy valentines, moss, feathers, and hair, creating a tactile heart within the parlour, itself within the larger space of the house.⁷

Albums shared other qualities with museums, serving as pointers to what museum-goers had lost as the nineteenth century advanced. The original British museums were private collections of the wealthy, usually amassed in grand country houses. In the eighteenth century, most museums still preserved features of the personal hoards from which they grew, and visitors were encouraged to touch the items displayed (Classen 275–77). In 1786, for instance, a woman at the British Museum slipped her hand into an ancient Greek urn to finger the ashes: “I pressed the grain of dust between my fingers tenderly, just as her best friend might once have grasped her hand” (qtd. in Classen 277–78). Captain Harry Lane Fox gathered art, tools, and ceremonial objects from many cultures, encouraging those who viewed his artifacts (now comprising the Pitt-Rivers Museum) to “hold in their hand an idea expressed by the hands” (qtd. in Briggs 29). Albums were meant always to be touched—they couldn’t be opened without the fingers, of course, and sometimes they were placed in laps to be looked through. They often had hand-tooled leather covers, containing locks, ribbons, and other embellishments, that invited the caress. Their haptic quality included the folding out of large items pasted to pages, whether they were letters or envelopes with seals—sewn to the paper and closed with ribbons in bows—or long

items such as menus, programs, or newspaper cuttings, which needed to be opened to be read.

As more of the “public” (meaning the lower classes and, in some cases, women) were allowed entrance to museums, they were less likely to experience it with their hands. Curators moved objects behind glass, and guards prohibited closeness. Albums also drew away from the haptic. With the invention of the *carte-de-visite* photograph in the 1850s—easily reproduced and flatter than most of the previous photographic formats—the earlier type of album began to be mostly replaced by the photographic one, encouraging the visual over the tactile. Photos were, in a sense, moments under glass, whereas ivy leaves were the thing (and the place) itself. While some photo albums maintained haptic elements—handwriting under the photos, giving person, place, time, etc.; photo collages arranged on a page with watercolour embellishments; or supplemental artifacts such as hair, ribbon, or plants—the movement was steadily away from the hand toward the eye (Batchen; Siegel).

Yet both the haptic and the photographic album fulfilled a need to contain, arrange, classify and, simply, keep. Both attempted to answer the query: how can moments be preserved? They partook of the larger questions museums posed: how can artifacts preserve the moment, the place—in other words, the history? To give a famous example: Queen Victoria had the means to press her life—or try to—onto the leaves of several series of albums. As a girl, she created a seaweed album, and later she commissioned many keepsake albums, such as collections of mounted watercolours. She had numerous “animal albums” that pictured her pets, and her souvenir albums kept a chronological account of ceremonies she attended, events needing commemoration, and spots she frequented (Marsden 188; 135). Yet albums, like all mortal objects, body forth the depredations of time. Representing a sort of ephemerality, they have often been discarded, in part because their tactile qualities, their need to be paged through to have any meaning at all, leads to their eventual destruction (the most obvious reason, of course, for the movement of things behind glass in museums once the “crowds” were let in). Another reason many albums met destruction was that their intensely personal quality made them meaningless once the compiler, and those who stored that person and her set of moments in their memory, had died. Then the album became a kind of dead letter or unmarked grave.

Time’s passing marks the nineteenth-century albums that lasted. Botanical albums in particular rapidly decay, but even photographic ones become faded, brittle, fall into pieces—losing their chronology. One haunting quality of most albums is the way that artifacts create shadows of themselves on their opposing pages. The rot of leaves seeps into the page pressed on top of it when it is closed; the chemicals of the photograph, or of newspaper scraps, spread as they break down over time. Yet this is also their glory; meant to

tell of time, they are steeped in it, showing traces of the mortal hands that made and viewed them.

Notes

- 1 See the travel albums of Lady Emilia Hornby and Arthur Walber. Hornby and Walber visited the battlefields of the Crimean war, gathered wildflowers, and pressed them into albums. See also Pettit.
- 2 For album culture more generally, see Di Bello; Matthews, "Album"; Matthews, "Albums, Belongings, and Embodying the Feminine"; and Langford.
- 3 For British, nineteenth-century autograph albums, see, for instance, White, Edwards, Wilde, Docwra. For friendship albums, see Pearson, Strickland, Shelley, and Wagner.
- 4 For plant albums, see Wightman, the anonymous "Album of Beautiful Seaweeds, Souvenir de Torquay," Brontë, and Stovin. See also Whittingham; Armstrong and de Zegher; and Di Noto and Winter.
- 5 For scrap albums, see, for instance, Edgerlay or Strickland. Although focusing on America, Gruber Garvey has much to say about album culture in nineteenth-century Europe.
- 6 For embroidery on pages, see, for instance, Threipland. For paper sewn onto a page, including paper dolls, see Edwards.
- 7 Toller describes a Victorian album with feathers, seaweed, skeletonized leaves, pressed flowers, and valentines. See also "Album of British Mosses."

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Museum Catalogue Record: William Morris's *News From Nowhere*

MADELEINE SEYS

Object: The Utopian Museum

Material: William Morris's *News From Nowhere*; or, *An Epoch of Rest, Being Some Chapters from a Utopian Romance*

Date: 1890

HISTORY

THE VICTORIAN period saw the rise of the museum and the novel as dominant cultural and intellectual forms. Both museums and novels used reason and description to categorize and organize facts and artifacts in order to tell stories, connecting earlier events to the culture and politics of the Victorian period. Novels and museums are, alike, repositories for narrative. In Victorian museum practice, catalogues such as the British Museum's