

Popular natural history and natural philosophy of the eighteenth-century

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This collection focusses upon popular eighteenth-century western European works of natural philosophy and natural history. The books included in this collection have been selected because of their age and subject matter, although there is a particular emphasis upon natural history following the interests of the collector. Many of these works are representative of the developments and controversies in the fields of natural history and natural philosophy during the eighteenth-century. They also reflect the eighteenth-century owners and users of popular scientific texts, examples being the country gentry, clergy and some of the most prominent members of the British establishment. This collection relates to my interests in eighteenth-century natural history, eighteenth-century print culture and the individual history and provenance of each book in the collection.

The eighteenth-century was one of the most important periods in the development of natural history, particularly after the publication of Carl Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae* in 1758, in which he classified the natural world under a hierarchic binomial system. The Linnaean system inspired great controversies throughout Europe, as demonstrated by works such as my copy of Buffon's *Natural History, General and Particular* (1785). Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, remained fiercely opposed to the Linnaean nomenclature and taxonomy, preferring to observe and precisely describe the natural world, rather than order it into an artificial, hierarchic system. This controversy is also represented in Richard Brookes's *New and Accurate System of Natural History* (1763). The two volumes in this collection, *The Natural History of Waters, Earths, Stones, Fossils and Minerals* and *The Natural History of Vegetables*, illustrate both the controversies caused by Linnaean systematics and the gradual adoption of the Linnaean method by naturalists. Brookes rejected Linnaeus's system for *The Natural History of Vegetables*, in which he noted that it 'rendered the study [of plants] more difficult and more subject to error'. In comparison, Brookes commended and used the Linnaean system in the other volume, in which he named the *Scrotum Humanum*, the first valid binomial name for a fossilised bone.¹ I found this work particularly appealing and it formed the basis for my undergraduate dissertation, a piece of research which is currently being edited for publication.

I began collecting in 2007, when I purchased volumes five and six of Brookes's *Natural History* because of my interests in history, geology and natural history. Many titles in my collection are favoured over others because they emphasise a 'system' of natural history, representing the development of rational systematics during the eighteenth-century. All of the books in this collection have been purchased from second-hand book dealers for modest sums, something I intend to continue as the collection expands. I intend to extend the collection by collecting the missing volumes in the multi-volume works, particularly those of Brookes's work. I also hope to collect some works written by John Ray, to give an impression of the changes in taxonomy over the course of the eighteenth-century.

¹ William A. S. Sarjeant (ed.), *Vertebrate Fossils and the Evolution of Scientific Concepts*, (Amsterdam, Gordon and Breach, 1995), p. 186.

Works of Eighteenth-century Natural History and Natural Philosophy

Bielfeld, Jakob Friedrich von,

The Elements of Universal Erudition, Containing an Analytical Abridgement of the Sciences, Polite Arts, and Belles Letters, translated by W. Hooper, M. D. (Dublin: H. Saunders, 1772), III.

Description: Only volume III is in the collection, generally perfect condition, the original binding is holding well, a small amount of cracking in the leather on the spine.

Comments: Bielfeld's *Elements of Universal Erudition* contains a wealth of knowledge relating to natural history, natural philosophy and collecting during the eighteenth-century. Originally published in French by a German author, this particular volume covers a wide variety of different branches of natural philosophy and natural history.

Provenance: This volume was originally owned by William Petty, the second Earl of Shelburne and marquess of Lansdowne (1737-1805), something illustrated by his armorial book plate inside the front cover (Figure I). Shelburne served as a Whig prime minister following the death of Lord Rockingham on 1st July 1782 and successfully negotiated the British withdrawal from North America during the final years of the American War of Independence. Shelburne's librarian was the notable chemist and theologian, Joseph Priestly. After Shelburne's death, much of his book collection was sold at a Sotheby Auction in 1806. Bielfeld's work was brought by Sir George Douglas (1754-1781) for 11s. 6d.² Following the bankruptcy of the Douglas's in the late twentieth century, many of their possessions were sold off at auction to cover the estate's debts. During this time, it is likely that the first and second volumes formerly owned by the Earl of Shelburne were separated from the third.

² Leigh and S. Sotheby, *Bibliotheca Lansdowniana, A Catalogue of the Entire Library of the Most Noble William Marquis of Lansdowne; Which will be Sold by Auction by Leigh and Sotheby On Monday the Sixth Day of January 1806 and Thirty Successive Days (Sundays and the Day on which Lord Nelson is to be interred excepted)* (London: Leigh and Sotheby, 1806), p. 23; The annotations showing the price and buyer can be found on the copy held in the Bodleian: Bodleian Library, Oxford, Mus. Bibl. III. 347.

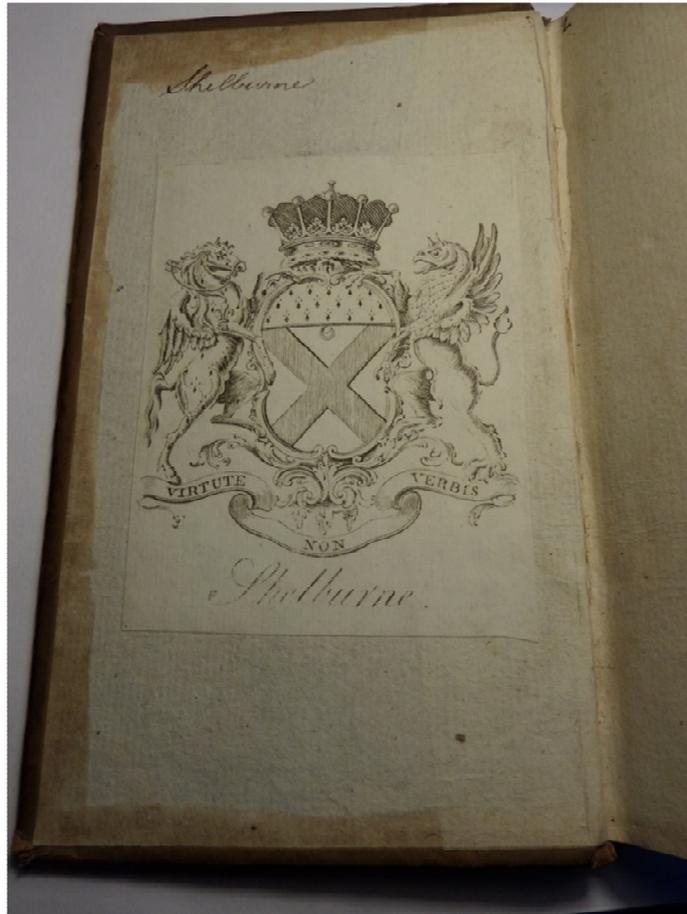


Figure I. The armorial book plate of the Earl of Shelburne in Bielfeld's *The Elements of Universal Erudition* (Dublin: H. Saunders, 1772), III.

Brookes, Richard,

A New and Accurate System of Natural History in Six Volumes (London: J. Newbery, 1763)

Condition: Only Volumes 5 and 6 of this work are currently in my possession. The spines have completely deteriorated. They still retain all of their plates, boards and pages.

Comment: These books initially inspired my interests in eighteenth-century natural history and this collection. I chose to purchase these volumes because of my interests in the history of geology, botany and the shifts in natural historical knowledge during the eighteenth-century.

Provenance: These particular volumes were formerly owned by Rev. Charles Bishop (d.1788) the curate of the Gloucestershire parishes of Elkstone and Rudford, who presented them to Joseph Bonner Cheston, a theology student at Pembroke College, Cambridge.

Brookes, Richard,

The General Gazetteer or Compendious Geographical Dictionary, 2nd edn. (London: J. Newbery, 1766).

Physical description: Somewhat worn binding that is holding well, the first few pages and last few pages of this volume are missing. Although most of the maps have been retained, a number have very badly frayed edges.

Comments: The first edition of Brookes's *Gazetteer* was published by John Newbery in 1762 and remained a prominent work for the second half of the eighteenth-century until the final edition of 1876. Brookes was a fascinating author about whom very little is known, although this appears to be one of the most comprehensive and compendious popular geographical works of the late eighteenth-century, earning it a place in this collection. This book formed the basis for my first MPhil. essay.

Provenance: This particular copy was formerly in the possession of William Guthrie, a lieutenant in the Royal Navy. Guthrie became a lieutenant on 9th August 1802 and died in 1827. On one of the maps in this book, Guthrie has plotted the naval town of Deal, a prominent nineteenth-century naval port where he was stationed during the Napoleonic Wars.

Brookes, Richard,

The General Gazetteer; or Compendious Geographical Dictionary in Miniature, (London: W. Palmer, 1806).

Physical Description: This book has recently been rebound and the only vestige of the original binding it retains is the label on the spine. Besides this, all of the pages are in perfect condition and it retains all of its maps.

Comment: This 'Pocket' edition of Brookes's *Gazetteer* was published in 1806. It was immensely popular and printed by a number of different publishers in Britain and North America. This book highlights the great discoveries made between the publication of the second edition in 1766 and 1806, earning it a valuable place in this collection.

Buffon, Georges Louis-Lecerc,

Natural History, General and particular, by the Count De Buffon, Translated into English. Illustrated With above 300 Copper Plates, And Occasional Notes and Observations by William Smellie, member of the Antiquarian and Royal Societies of Edinburgh (London: W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1785), IX.

Physical Description: The front cover is missing, the title page is badly ripped and the back cover is loose. All signs of ownership have been lost with the front cover. In the back, there are six good quality plates which illustrate fossilised teeth studied by Buffon.

Comments: This work is by one of the most eminent French naturalists of the eighteenth-century, Georges-Louis Leclerc, the Comte de Buffon (1707-1788), famous for his fierce opposition to the Linnaean system of classification. This particular volume, edited and annotated and translated by William Smellie (1740-1795), a noted encyclopaedist and critic of Linnaeus.

Dufieu, Jean Ferapie,

Traité de Physiologie (Lyon: 1763), I.

Physical Description: The back cover is missing. Volume 1 only.

Comments: This is a very interesting late eighteenth-century physiological work, contributed to by a number of different authors, examples being doctors at the Sorbonne and a number of the chief administrators at *l'Hôpital-Général de Notre-Dame du Pont du*

Rhône and Grand Hôtel-Dieu de Lyon. On pages 228-229 there is a very interesting description of a human cow hybrid, baptised in Lyon in 1759. This book provides a great insight into southern French medical practice during the eighteenth-century.

Provenance: Signed in the front by Pierre Gassie.

Fitz-Adam, Adam,

The World (London: J. Dodsley, 1772)

Physical description: The title page is in very poor condition and both of the boards are completely detached from the spine which is cracked.

Comment: Adam Fitz-Adam was the pseudonym of Edward Moore (1712-1757), a distinguished playwright and dramatist. This particular work was written as a set of weekly periodicals, published in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, and was designed to give an impression of the model traveller. This book embodies the natural philosophy of the eighteenth-century, for instance, Moore regularly mentions Baconian philosophy and ancient writers such as Pliny, illustrating how authors drew on ancient texts during the eighteenth-century.³

Provenance: The most recent book-plate on the front cover appears to be a nineteenth-century label for the 'Library of the Halifax Literary and Philosophical Society'. There are two eighteenth-century book-plates underneath this, although without suitable scanning technology, it is impossible to discover the complete history of the ownership of this book.

Formey, Johann Heinrich Samuel,

Abregé de Toutes les Sciences, a l'usage des Enfants, Nouvelle Édition (Berlin: J. Pauli, 1772).

Physical Description: A good quality leather binding on this thin volume. Some loose pages and there appears to be some corruption in the printing process which has caused the paper to weaken, particularly on the plates in the back of the book.

Comments: Formey's *Abregé de Toutes les Sciences, a l'usage des Enfants* (Abridgement of all the sciences for the use of children) was a widely read book of the late eighteenth-century. Johann Heinrich Samuel Formey (1711-1797) was a German author who wrote in French. Although its content was not exclusively natural historical or natural philosophical, Formey's work provides an insight into the increasing popularity of scientific pursuits as a pastime for polite society by the middle of the eighteenth-century. This work reached multiple editions and was immensely popular throughout Western Europe.

Provenance: Signed in the front by Elizabeth Clemens, March 24th 17--. On the first blank leaves, there appears to be a child's French lessons schedule. There are also small annotations throughout.

³ Adam Fitz-Adam (Edward Moore), *The World* (London: J. Dodsley 1772), p. 11.

Goldsmith, Oliver,

A History of the Earth and Animated Nature, A New Edition (Liverpool: Nutall and Dixon, 1811).

Physical description: Both front and back covers are detached. Volume II only.

Comments: This was an immensely popular work by Oliver Goldsmith, one of the best known authors of the eighteenth-century, which was originally published by F. Newbury and T. Carnan in 1774. It remained in print until the mid-nineteenth-century.

Provenance: inscribed with the name 'R. Breffitt 1882' inside the front cover. There is also a large amount of pencil graffiti on the first and last blank pages.

Hill, John,

The Family Herbal (Bungay: C. Brightly and CO, 1812).

Physical description: Title page, contents, preface and first seven pages of the introduction are missing. Many pages are very dirty. The back cover is also missing. Over 44 coloured plates, 90% of which are in very good condition.

Comments: Sir John Hill M. D. (c. 1714-1775) was a botanist and fierce critic of the Royal Society after they failed to elect him as a fellow following his numerous and highly commended lectures and array of publications. This particular work was originally printed in 1754 and Hill failed to gain the recognition for it he deserved. It was very popular, despite the expensive coloured plates (Figure II).

Provenance: George P. Stather inscribed within the front cover.



Figure II. One of the many coloured plates from John Hill's *The Family Herbal*, 2nd edn. (1812).

L'Academie Royale des Sciences

Historie de L'Academie Royale Des Sciences Anne'e M. DCC—MDCCXXIX (Amsterdam: Gerard Kyyper, 1706-1733)

Physical Description: Five volumes in total, of the dates 1700, 1704, 1713 and 1729. All are in fairly good condition and the binding is holding well. However, they have suffered from worm damage and some of the plates are missing.

Comment: *Historie de L'Academie Royale Des Sciences* was the official journal of the French Royal Academy of Science, founded in 1666 by Louis XIV. The main reason why these journals add to this collection is because they chart the developments of French natural history and natural philosophy for the first decades of the eighteenth-century, covering a wide range of different subjects. These include: general physics, anatomy, chemistry, botany, geometry, astronomy, geography, optics, acoustics and mechanics.

The Edinburgh Review, or Critical Journal, July—October 1819, 32 (1819).

Condition: The top of the Spine is detached from being roughly pulled off a shelf and the rest of the spine is cracking down the sides.

Comment: This Journal reflects the increasing popularity of journals and periodicals throughout the eighteenth-century. It fits into this collection because of articles concerning travel and exploration. This particular volume contains two examples: 'A Statistical, Historical and Political Description of the Colony of New South Wales, and its Dependent Settlements in Van Diemen's Land' by W. C. Wentworth and an article entitled 'Tracts on the polarisation of Light' by David Brewster F. R. S. Naturally, the scientific article and that concerning global travel during the early part of the nineteenth-century appealed directly to the collector, a reason why this is contained within this collection.

Provenance: This book was formerly owned by Pierce Wynne Yorke (1784-1837) of the Dyffrin Aled Estate, Llansannan, Denbighshire. The estate passed through the Wynne-Yorke family until the mid-twentieth-century when it was later sold and demolished.

Pluche, Noël-Antoine,

Le Spectacle De La Nature, ou Entretiens sur les particularités de L'Histoire Naturelle (Paris: Estienne, 1737).

Condition: Very fine condition apart from the top of the spine which has been torn off.

However, the leather and gold binding is very fine and all of the pages and plates are strong and intact.

Comment: Noël-Antoine Pluche (1688-1761) was a French cleric, who is best known for this popular work, *Le Spectacle de la Nature* (1737). This work was widely read in Western Europe and contains a large number of plates. Although this work was read by a number of naturalists, it was commonly thought of as a popular work and contained very few new natural historical developments. This is evidenced by the somewhat simplistic language, lack of detailed description and the number of very fine, but not always accurate, plates.

currently holding all of the pages and cover sufficiently, although it is in very poor condition. Only Volume II remains.

Comment: The main reason why I have included this book is because the first section contains a geographical essay written by R. Forster which gives a significant amount of background information regarding Xenophon's *Expedition of Cyrus*, illustrating how ancient texts were being used and interpreted by eighteenth-century geographers and naturalists.

Provenance: This book has two armorial book plates just inside the front cover, the first being that of Thomas Patten of Bank Esq. and the second being a nineteenth-century bookplate of Earl Winmarleigh, wealthy landowners in the Warrington area of Derbyshire. Thomas Pattern was responsible for commissioning James Gibbs to design Bank Hall in 1750, a house that can still be seen today. The second bookplate is that of John Wilson-Patten, 1st Baron Winmarleigh, a Conservative M.P.. Winmarleigh died with no direct heirs in 1892 and his possessions were sold off. Much of the Patten's former property is now in public ownership.