



Article: Lord Fitzwilliam's Print Albums as Evidence

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Lord Fitzwilliam's Print Albums as Evidence

INTRODUCTION

The Fitzwilliam Museum houses one of the world's most important print collections. At its core is one of its great treasures, the 198 print albums compiled by the museum's founder, Richard, 7th Viscount Fitzwilliam (1745–1816) (fig. 1). Containing approximately 40,000 prints collected over 50 years, the albums are a rare survival of an extensive print collection amassed from the end of 18th and into the 19th century. The bound volumes of prints fall into two categories: those that Lord Fitzwilliam acquired fully assembled from disparate sources, and those compiled by him from scratch, which form the majority.

In 1832, before the collection had a permanent home, an article in Arnold's *Library of the Arts* magazine reported, "For the last twenty years of his life [Lord Fitzwilliam] lived in almost complete seclusion [in his house in Richmond, London], not even seeing his former most intimate friends, and absorbed in the pursuits of high taste and learning' (Arnold 1832, 178). Fitzwilliam wrote his will in August 1815, leaving his collection and funds to build a museum to house it, to the University of Cambridge. Shortly afterward he fell from a ladder in his library and broke a knee; he died on February 4, 1816. His collection was moved from Richmond to various locations in Cambridge before it was transferred to the new museum site in 1848. There, as had been the case in his own house, the print albums formed part of the larger library (Burn 2016, 17–27).

It is uncertain when Fitzwilliam started collecting prints. He had a habit of adding his name and the year to the front of his books and print albums, and the appearance of early dates suggests his interest was lifelong. One of the earliest annotations appears in an 18th-century edition of the *Iconographie* by Anthony van Dyck (1599–1641), which Fitzwilliam bought ready-bound when he was 20 and signed *R. Fitzwilliam* above

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the date, 1765 (Van Dyck 1720, 30.H.8). In contrast, the annotations in the volumes he compiled are more likely to be post-1800; we can better understand these as binding dates rather than dates of acquisition. The peak of binding activity occurred in 1813, but Fitzwilliam continued collecting single prints up until the end of his life.

Fitzwilliam was interested in prints as objects in themselves, not as facsimiles of other artworks: he reveled in their "printy-ness"—in counter-proofs, progressive states, and unusual supports. He tried to be consistent in his approach to grouping, arranging, and mounting his collection, but the sheer volume and variety of the acquisitions he was making, as well as the long period over which he was making them, led to inevitable anomalies and compromises.

In March 1816, shortly after Fitzwilliam's death, an inventory of the print albums was drawn up by Samuel Woodburn (1780–1853). Woodburn came from a family of picture framers and bookbinders, and he went on to become one of the most successful picture dealers of his day. Binder's tickets on some of the volumes in the library show that Fitzwilliam was one of the family's customers, and we know that Samuel was acting as Fitzwilliam's agent at auctions as early as 1809 (Ling 2010).

Woodburn was one of four expert advisers contracted to itemize Fitzwilliam's collection for the inventory. He listed 198 albums and four portfolios, including the number of prints contained within each binding. The inventory separated the print albums from the bulk of the rest of the library, including the illustrated books, which Fitzwilliam had included in his own fuller list of the print collection (note 1). The albums vary dramatically in size, with a number small enough to hold in one hand containing a dozen or so prints, and other large volumes that require two people to maneuver them.

The founder's will stipulated that once the museum was constructed, objects from the bequest should not leave the premises. The largely well-preserved state of the albums is at least partially a result of the prohibition on loans. It is also probable that the sheer size of the collection and the space that would be required to store sheets mounted individually are key reasons behind the survival of the albums. This article draws on evidence found in the albums, which are much

greater than a sum of their parts, to present information that would certainly have been lost had they suffered the fate of so many other similar collections.

APPROACHES TO ACQUISITION

In the museum archives, only one draft letter sheds light on the way Fitzwilliam went about acquiring prints (fig. 2). The document is dated April 15, 1802, and although the space for the recipient is left blank, it is most likely addressed to John Boydell (1720–1804), the foremost print dealer and publisher in London, or someone working for him. Fitzwilliam writes:

[W]ith many thanks for your offer of service, will beg of you to bring back with you the well known engraving of Bossuet. I forget by whom and perhaps mistaken in saying that it is from



 $Fig.~1.~Charles~Turner~after~Henry~Howard,~\textit{Richard},~7th~\textit{Viscount}~Fitzwilliam~of~Merrion,~1809,~mezzotint,~plate~size~453\times313~mm,~33.A.temp.28.$

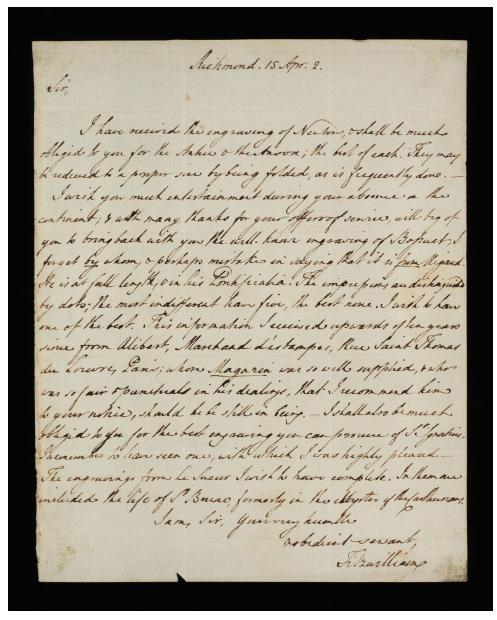


Fig. 2. Letter, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, Ashcombe Collection. © The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

Rigaud ... the impressions are distinguished by dots; the most indifferent have five, the best none. I wish to have one of the best. This information I received upwards of ten years since from Alibert, Marchard d'estampes (Burn 2016, 26)

The engraving referred to is indeed after Hyacinthe Rigaud (1659–1743), by Pierre-Imbert Drevet (1697–1739). Small marks were added incrementally from the fourth state onward after every subsequent hundred pulls, so five dots signal that an impression was printed well into the plate's lifetime. The immaculate impression supplied to Fitzwilliam and placed in the album devoted to the Drevet family is one

with no dots (fig. 3) (Petitjean and Wickert 1925, 75–79). Although short, this letter is revealing of Lord Fitzwilliam's knowledge of print shops and sellers, and his desire to acquire the best impressions.

The only other snippets of acquisition information are present in the albums themselves. The volume devoted to the French contemporary artist Jean-Jacques de Boissieu (1736–1810) contains a note in Fitzwilliam's hand that alludes to now lost correspondence with printsellers in London and Paris. The inscription reads, "a print wanting, promised to be sent to Mr Boydell / by his correspondent on the Continent in March, 1806." We believe that it is likely, due to the fact the



Fig. 3. Pierre-Imbert Drevet after Hyacinthe Rigaud, Portrait of Bishop Jacques-Benigne Bossuet, 1723, engraving, 511 × 351 mm, 34.A.1-33.

inscription is written underneath an inlaid print, that it refers to the pasted-down print on the previous page, showing that Fitzwilliam did indeed receive an impression (De Boissieu, n.d., 30.K.7).

Fitzwilliam acquired whole albums intact from various sources, including volumes that had belonged to, for example, Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792) and Thomas Gainsborough

(1727–1788). Comparing these bindings with his own shows that neatness, symmetry, and the integrity of the prints were not always important concerns for other collectors. One example is the album devoted to prints by and after Claude Gillot (1673–1722), from an unidentified, probably French, collection. The binding is an amalgamation of sewn-in whole sheets and pages that have been heavily trimmed down after



Fig. 4. Engravings by Claude Gillot album containing 384 etchings and engravings by and after Claude Gillot. 24.K.12-180-182.

the prints had been pasted. In some instances, this alteration chops off significant amounts of the prints within (fig. 4).

APPROACHES TO ARRANGEMENT

Woodburn's posthumous inventory suggests that Fitzwilliam kept his prints loose in portfolios until he felt that his representation of a particular artist was complete, or sufficiently complete. With the help of his valet's son, Thomas Key, the prints were pasted by their edges onto one side of sheets of English plain wove drawing paper. The Earl of Pembroke noted in 1816 that "he [Thomas] always lived in the house and Lord F was in the habit of employing him in the arrangement of his books and his prints" (Burn 2016, 26). In general, it is clear that Fitzwilliam paid great attention to the decorative effect of the finished sheet: neatness, symmetry, and elegance are characteristic qualities across all his albums, especially for pages displaying numerous smaller prints (fig. 5). Pale-yellow wash was often applied to the recto of the album pages to better unify the prints and their mounting. Sorting or mounting numbers in Fitzwilliam's hand have been found on the versos of some prints lifted from album pages, which correspond to matching numbers written beneath.

One of the portfolios Fitzwilliam used to compile his collection survives. The title page is dated 1810 and contains 55 engravings by the Swiss artist Jacob Frey (1681–1752) adhered to English wove paper (Frey, n.d., 34.A.13). There are some Whatman sheets, but the majority are paper made by Joseph Ruse at Tovil Mill in Maidstone, dated 1803 and 1806. Watermark evidence suggests that these are from larger sheets cut in half.

Fitzwilliam then sent the mounted sheets to bookbinders in London. We know the names of three: the French émigré binder, the Comte de Caumont (1743–1839), a German, C. Meyer (d. 1809), and H. Woodburn (active 1808–1810), a relative of Samuel Woodburn. Erased graphite instructions to the binders have been recorded on title pages of three albums—indentations are legible in raking light. They have been observed on the album devoted to Adam Elsheimer (1578–1610) (see the following) and that of Allart van Everdingen (1621–1675). The third inscription, in the Paulus



Fig. 5. Engravings by Etienne De l'Aulne album containing 169 engravings by Étienne Delaune. 22.I.11-6-28.

Potter (1625–1654) album, is written in a combination of English and French. In translation it reads, "Engravings by / Paul Potter / Complete / hot pressed / Portrait wanting, in half-Russia, yellow-tinted pages, three blank sheets added at the front and at the back, and the word 'Potter' for the spine" (Potter, n.d., 30.I.6).

Fitzwilliam's preferred style of binding made use of tanned calfskin with an impressed diamond pattern known as "Russia" calf, which was popular in the early 19th century. The albums have marbled endpapers with leather joints, blind and gold tooling to the spines and boards, and gilt or pigmented paste decoration to the edges of the leaves. Recessed cord sewing was typical of these bindings, which are structurally very weak, and the elaborately colored frontbead endbands are also decorative rather than structural. Where raised bands occur, they are generally false. The spines were heavily glued and lined, making them firm to tool on but very inflexible. As a result, all the stress of opening the albums is focused on the joints. Unfortunately, "Russia" calf also degrades quickly through acid-catalyzed hydrolysis of the fibers ("red rot"), so the combination of heavy boards, decaying leather, and the mechanical damage to the joints results in detached boards. Some volumes have also been forced to open flatter, resulting in splits to the spines, and there is significant shelf wear to the edges of the boards. Evidence of rebacking is common. Mention should also be made of the significant reduction in the quality of the paper used for the album pages from 1815.

On occasion, Fitzwilliam added to an album after it had been bound, which disrupted the symmetry of the page. More rarely, he moved the prints around, or even had an album rebound with new pages inserted. Fitzwilliam's three albums devoted to Robert Nanteuil (1623–1678) are a clear example of the latter. In 1788, Fitzwilliam purchased two albums, containing 232 prints on numbered pages, from the collection of the Duc de Mortemart (1681–1746). He had the original pages rebound into three volumes, ignoring Mortemart's page numbering, and supplemented the contents with variant states he had purchased elsewhere (Griffiths and Hartley 1994).

The sheets from the Mortemart collection are made of French laid paper with the Pierre Gourbeyre countermark, on which the prints are laid down and double sheets have been beautifully inlaid and attached on thrown-out guards (fig. 6). Prints on the additional sheets have been adhered in Fitzwilliam's usual manner on English wove paper with "J Ruse 1802" countermarks. Although many of the sheets are laid down, four of the prints have visible Pierre Mariette II signatures, and it is highly probable that the Mortemart collection was supplied, arranged, and constructed by the preeminent Parisian firm.

Fitzwilliam's print albums are, with relatively few exceptions, arranged "by printmaker"; that is to say, the person who made the print. The names on the album spines usually correspond to the work of the person, or family of artists, contained within, regardless of who designed the image. This method of arrangement gained currency during Fitzwilliam's lifetime, and so his approach was in tune with the scholarly emphasis of recent publications dedicated to prints and in auction house catalogs. The new breed of collector eschewed the former encyclopedic functions of a collection, and aspired to a path dominated by close observation and selective acquisition. Fitzwilliam was interested in a broad spectrum of prints: engravings and etchings by

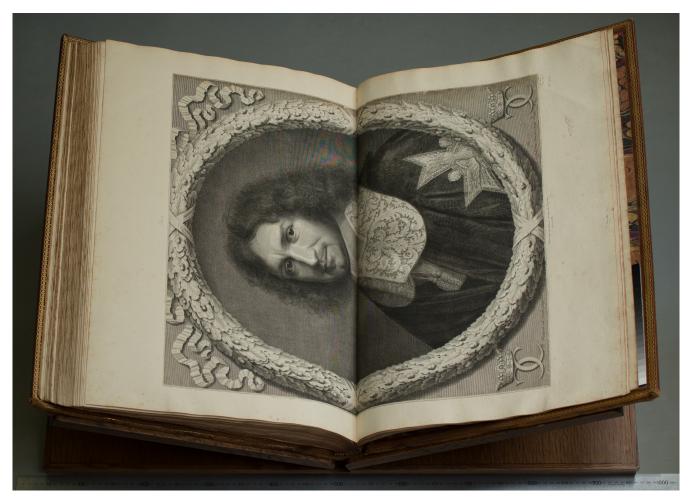


Fig. 6. Robert Nanteuil Portrait of Jean Baptiste Colbert, 1670, engraving, 640 × 545 mm. 23.K.8-344. Inlaid and attached on thrown-out guard.

well-known artists, as well as more unfashionable types of print sometimes called *reproductive*, by printmakers who translated the designs of other artists. Fitzwilliam treated all printmakers in the same way: he clearly wanted to represent all schools.

The challenge in arranging collections in this manner was the dearth of information on what printmakers had produced. One influential and transformative publication was *Le Peintre Graveur* (Bartsch 1803–1821), the work of the Viennese scholar and Keeper of the Imperial print collection, Adam Bartsch (1757–1821). Only 15 of the 21 volumes of Bartsch's opus were published in Fitzwilliam's lifetime, but the work exerted a considerable influence on Fitzwilliam's efforts to arrange his collection. Bartsch separated out the work of individual printmakers, using clear numerical sequences, and assigned a title and often a brief description of what could be seen in each image, including printed inscriptions or the form of an artist's monogram.

Published catalogs offered their readers the opportunity to aspire to own a printmaker's entire oeuvre; we find evidence for this in Fitzwilliam's albums where several title pages feature the word "Complete" in addition to his name and date. In 1803, the year the first of Bartsch's volumes was published, Fitzwilliam signed and dated print albums of two of the featured artists: Anthonie Waterloo (1609–1690) and Karel Dujardin (1626–1678). Their contents reveal that Fitzwilliam not only referred to the catalog to ascertain that he had an impression of every print, but that he arranged the contents exactly to Bartsch's ordering.

Other albums devoted to printmakers featured in the 1803 volume were bound years later, suggesting that Fitzwilliam realized the need to make further acquisitions. The small album devoted to Joseph van Aken (ca. 1699–1749) contains only 22 prints, but it was bound as late as 1814, complete except for one impression (Van Aken, n.d., 23.I.12).

By following *Le Peintre Graveur*, the symmetry-conscious collector was afforded flexibility in mounting prints. The albums reveal that in many instances Fitzwilliam left blank spaces where he hoped to insert a missing print at a later date (fig. 7). Bartsch also described different states of a given

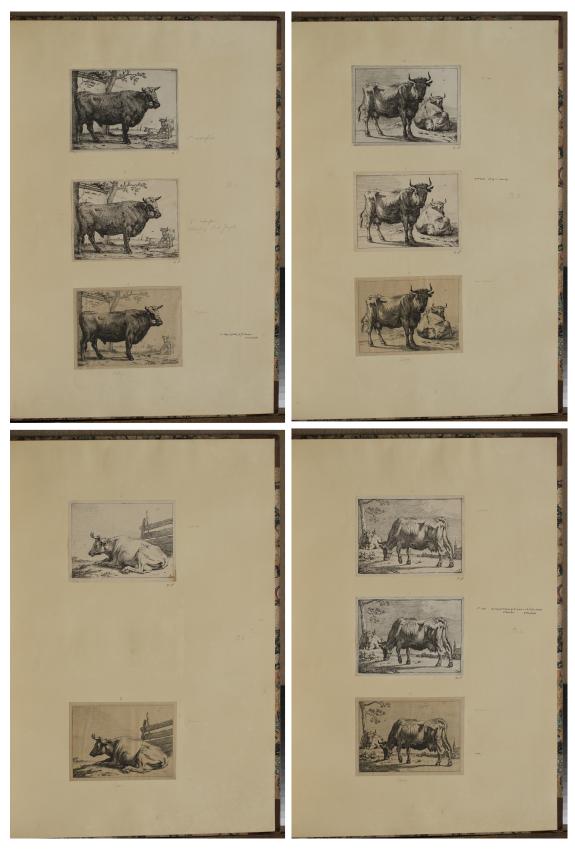


Fig. 7. Gravures de Paul Potter album containing 56 etchings by Paulus Potter. 30.I.6-2–12.

plate as well as known copies to help prevent collectors being deceived by imitations.

Many of the printmakers featured in *Le Peintre Graveur* produced only very small numbers of prints, which posed a problem for collectors compiling albums devoted to individual printmakers. In many cases, Fitzwilliam solved this by placing these prints in a large "Miscellaneous" album, but in one instance he combined the work of two printmakers into one volume. In the album labeled "Saftleven," containing etchings by Herman Saftleven (1609–1685), we also find prints by another artist, Jan Almeloveen (1656–1684). The explanation is found in Bartsch's introduction to the latter artist where he states, "[Almeloveen] has so beautifully captured the essence of Saftleven that we could take them for engravings made by this very artist" (Bartsch 1803, 287).

Further evidence of Lord Fitzwilliam's close attention to the catalogue raisonné is revealed in other albums: in the Herman van Swanevelt (1603–1655) album, the etchings are arranged by Bartsch, but toward the back of the album, a considerable number of prints are separated out, preceded by a triumphal inscription on the facing page: "The engravings which follow are not in the catalogue of The works of Swaneveldt (sic)," meaning they are not in, and therefore not known to, Bartsch (Van Swanevelt, n.d., 31.I.9).

HISTORIC ALTERATIONS TO THE ALBUMS

For their current inventory or accession number, each album is referred to by the old pressmark from their former position in the museum's library. For example, for 23.K.5, "23" is the press number, "K" is the shelf position, and "5" is the place along the shelf from left to right. Each print within the album is numbered consecutively, and this becomes a suffix (e.g., 23.K.5-76 is the 76th print in 23.K.5). Although the number reveals this much, it does not provide full context: for instance, one cannot tell from a print's number the exact position on a page, or what prints might surround it. This is important when we consider albums that have been altered or disbanded entirely and information has been lost.

Marcantonio and the Scultori family

In 1824, two albums devoted to Marcantonio Raimondi and the Scultori family were disbanded and their contents added to when Samuel Woodburn was given £1000 to purchase prints from the spectacular sale of the politician Mark Masterman Sykes (1771–1823). Woodburn bought 200 prints by Marcantonio, his circle, and the Scultori family. The museum's syndicate body authorized the dismantling of the two relevant albums and the integration of the new acquisitions. This action was carried out by Woodburn according to Bartsch's numbering, and the new support sheets were

annotated below the prints with "S" or "F" to denote their provenance (fig. 8). The original order and layout of Fitzwilliam's prints is irrevocably lost (note 2).

German, Dutch, and Flemish Old Masters

In the 1870s, the Fitzwilliam Museum acquired significant numbers of Old Master prints by bequest, transfer, and purchase: in 1872, 56 volumes of engravings were bequeathed by Reverend Richard Edward Kerrich, comprising the collection of his father, librarian Thomas Kerrich (1748–1828); in 1876, 19 albums of unknown provenance, 17 of them containing prints, were transferred from the Cambridge University Library; in the same year, authority was given by the University Senate to purchase prints at the sale of Karl Eduard von Liphart (1808–1891) in Leipzig. These acquisitions prompted a more thorough rationalization of the Fitzwilliam print collection by the director, Sidney Colvin (1845–1927) (note 3).

Prints of the Early German and Netherlandish Schools, including those by Rembrandt and Dűrer, were removed from the albums and sent to the British Museum for conservation and mounting on "sunk mounts" of a standard Royal size (559×406 mm), with gilded edges; on their return, they were stored in 30 solander boxes. The album numbers were retained and printed on the new mounts. It is possible that the prints' arrangement on the new mounts imitated their appearance on the album pages, but we cannot be sure.

Of the albums that were dismembered at this time, the binding and album pages of the one devoted to Rembrandt are still intact. Lord Fitzwilliam's collection of 490 Rembrandt prints was considered second only to Clayton Mordaunt Cracherode's collection at the British Museum (Dibdin 1817, 329). Looking through the now-blank pages is curiously enthralling; it reveals information that cannot be gleaned from the separately mounted prints and allows the arrangement to be re-created digitally. In the example shown in figure 9, with the impressions of *The Entombment* (ca. 1654), we know that additions to the left-hand page were added after binding in 1804.

Mezzotints

In the first decade of the 20th century, the mezzotints from four of Fitzwilliam's 12 oversized albums were removed, probably to prevent further damage the album format was causing to their delicate surfaces. The album pages were cut out, the inventory numbers were noted next to the prints, and the sheets were overmounted. Puzzlingly, the corresponding numbers were erased from library reference material, meaning that it was no longer evident from which album a particular print had been taken or its position within the binding. Recent work to free the prints from the acidic mounts has revealed some original album numbers, but in many instances the pages were trimmed extensively and the



Fig. 8. Marco Dente after Raphael, Venus Wounded by a Rose's Thorn, 1515, engraving, 267 × 174 mm, P5364-R & P5365-R.

numbers are lost. We do not know the numbers of around 60 of the 370 mezzotints.

The Hogarth Album

Fitzwilliam's album devoted to William Hogarth (1697–1764) contained 114 prints mostly by Hogarth, plus a small number of copies. The prints were removed from the binding at an unknown date, possibly for exhibition in 1964. The binding was discarded, but instead of lifting the prints, the album pages were folded to fit inside the new mounts, so the order of the prints is visible. The album pages feature rare annotations in Fitzwilliam's hand where he identified some of the figures.

The Elsheimer Album

In 1963, the album of engravings after Adam Elsheimer (1578–1610) was dismembered to display the contents in frames. The prints were cut out and mounted, and the binding and the remnants of the album pages were retained, except for a rather crucial section featuring instructions to the binder (Ling 2010).

With these exceptions, the albums are essentially intact. Between 1940 and 1984, individual prints were temporarily removed from bindings for display in the Fitzwilliam Museum's rolling program of exhibitions. Album pages were cut just outside the print margin and the sheet subsequently secured back in place using gummed paper

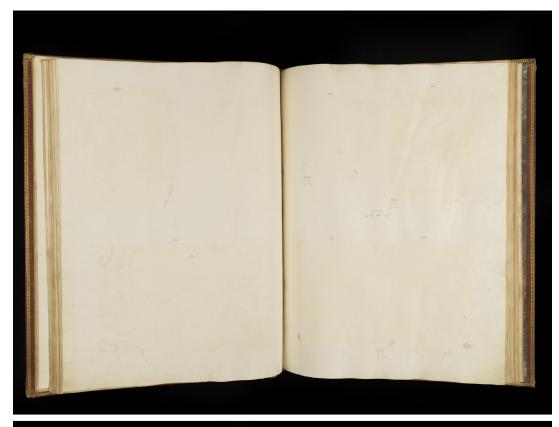




Fig. 9. Engravings by Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn. Album binding with digital reconstruction showing 23.K.5-143–148. \odot The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

tape. Some prints show evidence of repeated campaigns of removal and replacement. This work was done in a rather slap-dash manner, often with poor alignment of the cut edges. The tape adhesive can fail, and poor-quality tape has abraded and discolored areas of the facing page.

Recent repairs use two layers of long-fiber Japanese paper. Cut edges can be realigned accurately using stable materials. These repairs are more effective at restoring the structural integrity of the pages. The current guiding principle at the museum is that once the pages have been repaired in this way, prints will no longer be removed from the albums.

In 1933, the generosity of John Charrington (1856–1939), Honorary Keeper Prints, enabled the museum to build a print gallery that, crucially, since 2014, contains cases deep enough to display many of the albums. Charrington also funded an adjacent office, which is where the majority of the albums have been stored vertically ever since. Additional vertical wooden dividers and bookshoe supports were introduced in 1984. The storage is not ideal, but alterations to this now-historic interior would create several challenges.

The impulse to lift and mount the prints is understandable. Stable archival materials could be used, handling and display would be simplified, and the risk of mechanical damage would be reduced. The versos could be examined, progressive states could be compared much more readily, and the appearance of many objects could be improved in the process. But as this article hopes to have demonstrated, the album format of this collection contains vital evidence, which is easily lost.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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NOTES

- 1. An alphabetical catalogue of the Prints of the Right Hon.ble Richard, late Viscount Fitzwilliam, copied from the Catalogue in his Lordship's Hand Writing January 1819. Fitzwilliam Museum archives. This fuller list names 425 items. Three of the four portfolios in Woodburn's inventory would have been destined to become bound volumes; the fourth was a group of prints after Fitzwilliam's portrait, which he would probably have had to give to friends.
- 2. Sale of the Sykes Collection was held at Sotheby's throughout 1824, and Italian prints on May 24 and 12 following days. On July 5, 1824, the Syndics reported a total spend of £712: "[The Syndics] ... recommend that the Volumes of Marc Antonio and of the Ghisi be broken

- up, and that a fresh arrangement of the works of those Masters be made by Mr. Sam. Woodburn, who has expressed his readiness to undertake the task." Fitzwilliam Museum archives.
- 3. Some duplicates among the new acquisitions were sold at Sotheby's on April 2 and 3, 1878, to raise funds to purchase important omissions: Important and historical collection of the etchings of Rembrandt, comprising three hundred lots... being duplicates from the Cambridge University Collections... together with Aldegraver, Altdorfer, Lucas van Leyden and Martin Schongauer.

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