

AN ANALYSIS OF A COLLECTOR—HERBERT DRUITT (1876-1943)

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INTRODUCTION



By the time of his death, Herbert Drutt had amassed one of the biggest private collections in the south of England. He had filled three substantial buildings in the small port of Christchurch, Hampshire (in Dorset since 1974), literally from floor to ceiling, with local flint implements, pottery, fossils, shells, coins, birds' eggs, prints, watercolours, books, pamphlets and many other objects of local and historical interest. His diverse collection eventually formed the core of The Red House Museum, Christchurch, which opened its doors permanently to the public in 1951, eight years after Drutt's death. It began as an independent trustee museum but has been managed by the Hampshire County Museums Service since 1972.

This paper will attempt, firstly, to identify which phase Drutt belongs to in the history of collecting and secondly, to distinguish the intellectual or psychological mode of collection formation that dominated his work.

DRUITT'S PLACE IN THE HISTORY OF COLLECTING

Drutt only catalogued a small proportion of his collection and published even less. Most of the information available is in his diaries, miscellaneous papers, and press cuttings, or one catalogue of archaeological material put together by local historian, Bernard Calkin, after Drutt's death. It is apparent even from this piecemeal evidence, that the way in which he dealt with the various classes of material places him in the phase of 'classical collecting' but aspects of his activities are reminiscent of the 'early' phase of collecting.

FEATURES OF CLASSIC COLLECTING

1. Scientific Principles

Examination of Drutt's treatment of his archaeological material reveals that certain scientific principles are adhered to in his work. A catalogue of some of his flint implements survives, in which some of the objects have been classified according to the Three Age System and then by tool type within each period (HCMS a). In Drutt's only publication that refers to archaeological objects in his collection (Drutt 1934), he demonstrates further knowledge of typology by drawing parallels between one of his bronze spear-heads and a similar example from Cambridgeshire. He also quotes Abercromby, the well-known archaeologist, who appears to have examined one of his beakers and used both its form and decoration to compare it with examples from elsewhere in Europe in order to give it a date. An understanding of stratigraphy is also revealed by a small number of annotated archaeological section drawings that survive in Drutt's diaries (RHM a).

Although less well documented, Drutt's approach to the classification of his natural history material shows a similar understanding of scientific principles. His labels for geological specimens, for example, include their stratigraphic nomenclature.

2. Access to the Truth

In common with other 'classic collectors', Drutt considers that it is possible to make objective interpretations of evidence. In a letter to the Mayor of Christchurch, in which he was trying to persuade the Borough to establish a museum, Drutt lists one of the requirements of a museum to be labels that are of an '*instructive*[my emphasis] and accurate character' (RHM b).

FEATURES UNTYPICAL OF CLASSIC COLLECTING

There are two features of his collecting that make Druitt an untypical example of a 'classic collector', one of which is more reminiscent of the 'Early' phase of collecting.

1. Unsystematic Collecting

Druitt did not appear to collect in order to demonstrate a particular intellectual concept.

2. Holistic Collecting

The diversity of his material suggests that he planned to create a collection that was more characteristic of the 'Early-period of collecting, a microcosm of the universe, with particular reference to the area around Christchurch! He aimed to bring together all of the elements listed by Francis Bacon in *Gesta Grayorum* (Impey and MacGregor 1985), including the garden but excluding the live animals. His collection embraced works of art and curiosities both natural and artificial.

DRUITT'S PSYCHOLOGICAL MODE OF COLLECTION FORMATION

Features of a Fetishistic Collector

Herbert Druitt exhibits many of the characteristics of a fetishistic collector,

1. Samples not Examples

The most obvious of these features was the desire to bring together an enormous quantity of similar objects, demonstrated most strikingly by his collections of archaeological material and books. He appeared to make no attempt to systematically select samples of particular classes of objects to demonstrate a particular intellectual concept, but to collect more and more examples of the same things, many of which were unlabelled and unlisted or catalogued. For example, when Calkin sorted through the archaeological collection after Druitt died, he found 140 unlisted neolithic flint arrowheads, in addition to the 161 examples mentioned in Druitt's papers. Calkin threw away lorry loads of unlisted prehistoric flint flakes and pottery sherds, and about 1500 fossil echinoids from the local gravels (HCMS b).

2. Quality of the Collection

In spite of the unsystematic nature of Druitt's collecting, the result of his work is, to quote the current Keeper of Archaeology, 'the most amazing collection of Prehistoric flint and pottery' (Allen pers. comm.).

3. Public or Private?

The second most obvious trait of fetishistic collecting detectable in Druitt was the tension surrounding the showing of his objects to the public. His enthusiasm for the creation of a regional museum based on his material is well documented (RHM b, HCMS b-press cutting) and yet Calkin records Druitt's extreme reluctance to allow others access to the collections.

H. D. was most secret about his local archaeological material, & jealous of other collectors. I first met him on May 21st 1924, & subsequently after many rebuffs & disappointments was able to see the RHM [Red House Museum] collection on about a dozen occasions and to see round the other houses about six times. I used to make notes on my return home. (HCMS b).

The virtual absence of published work by Druitt referring to his collections is further testament to his unwillingness to share his treasures with others. He does not appear to have been very enthusiastic about providing the contribution which was to be the only published reference to his archaeological material. His editor, S. Watson Smith, went as far as to record this reluctance in an appreciation of Herbert Druitt:

His contribution to the "Book of Bournemouth" was a fine achievement, though extracted with some difficulty by the editor of that production ... (Bournemouth Daily Echo, 1943).

The lack of this type of publication is made remarkable by the fact that Druitt published widely on a range of other subjects from local history to medieval monumental brasses.

4. Financial Problems

Financial problems are often a feature of the fetishistic collector and Druitt seems to be no exception. He bought many of his objects from local workmen, other collectors and at auction and, despite being from a wealthy family, he claims to have been a poor man (RHM b). Further research would be necessary to establish whether it was his collecting that led to his declared poverty.

CONCLUSION

Herbert Druitt demonstrated a knowledge of the scientific principles of several disciplines whose source material he collected and yet showed no apparent desire to use his knowledge to promote particular intellectual concepts. Instead he focused on the objects themselves. It was important for him to assemble as many of them around him for his own personal use. There is evidence (Bournemouth Daily Echo 1943, HCMS b-press cutting, RHM a) to suggest he was a complex man whose purpose for collecting in this fetishistic manner was probably to fulfil an emotional need that only a psychoanalyst would be in a position to identify.

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