Metal Works

Works from an English assay office’s impressive library make this March sale special.

On March 26 at 10:30 a.m. GMT, London-based Forum Auctions will host a sale to distribute the fine books, manuscripts, and works on paper from the library of the Birmingham Assay Office. Rupert Powell, deputy chairman and international head of books at Forum Auctions, said the Birmingham Assay Office— one of four government offices in England dedicated to authenticating precious metals—has built up an extensive collection of written works from the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries on a variety of subjects, including but not limited to metallurgy, mining, chemistry, alchemy, and topography.

One of the most notable items at the auction is a first edition account by John Harrison, written in 1765, regarding the success of his newly invented chronometer—a clock that could, for the first time, accurately measure longitude at sea—which helped bring maritime navigation into a new era. Harrison’s writing is an early narrative of the works of Geoffrey Chaucer, of which just 245 copies were printed. The book was collaboratively produced in 1666 by William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones and is considered a masterpiece of the English private press. Powell said the book carries an estimated value of £20,000-30,000 (€24,000-35,000).

The Birmingham Assay Office Library

Founded in 1773, the Birmingham (UK) Assay Office is responsible for assaying (testing) and the hallmarking of precious metals, as required by the Hallmarking Act. The Library is rich in books from the 16th to 19th century on metallurgy, mining, design and ornament, but also covers chemistry, alchemy, numismatics, jewellery, horology and British topography.

Full auction catalogue and further details available at forumauctions.co.uk

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Today, it’s easy to take for granted the importance of the Constitution of the United States, but in 1787, its fate was uncertain. Though its contents had been agreed upon by the Federal Convention, the Constitution still had to be ratified by state electorates, which still needed convincing. As a result, the collection of essays, written today as The Federalist, was written and published in newspapers under the pen name “Publius” in order to sway the public in favor of the Constitution so state legislatures would vote to ratify the document.

Though it is now commonly known that these essays were written by the Founding Fathers Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, it wasn’t until 1818 that the essays were attributed to their authors in published form. So early editions of The Federalist in book form still used the pen name. Yet some select individuals were let in on the secret before 1818, as evidenced by a two-volume, scarce “thick paper” first edition of The Federalist that will be offered in Heritage Auctions’ March 4 sale. While the essays in this printing were still attributed to “Publius,” this copy was personally gifted by James Madison to James Maury, the son of a Virginiaan educator and Anglican reverend who taught Thomas Jefferson. By 1816, Maury, along with James Maury Jr., owned a rare near-presentation copy of The Federalist.

This extremely rare near-presentation copy of The Federalist was gifted to James Maury by James Madison. The auction estimate is $250,000+.

Jefferson, also named James Maury. Close to several of the Founding Fathers, the younger James Maury served as one of the United States’ first overseas consuls. While the two volumes are not inscribed by Madison, Maury included a note on the front flyleaf of each volume telling how he came to posses his copy of The Federalist. “This copy of The Federalist is so important because it identifies by name one of the authors of this anonymous publication, so it is significant that Madison would identify himself to James Maury,” said James Gannon, Rare Books director at Heritage Auctions. “It suggests Maury’s own importance to the Founding Fathers and indicates how vital Maury was in representing the young nation and its political values overseas.”

Because of the authors’ anonymity, there are no true presentation copies of the first edition of The Federalist. But, as one of only two copies known to have ever been personally gifted by one of the authors, this is the closest one can come to such a treasure, as the other copy, gifted by Hamilton, is owned by the Pennsylvania Historical Society and is housed at the Library Company of Philadelphia. Maury’s copy, estimated at more than $250,000, is the only near-presentation copy ever to be offered at auction.

“This is the most important copy to come on the market, second only to the George Washington copy sold as part of the H. Bradley Martin sale in 1954 for $1,500,” Gannon said. “Only about 200 cop- ies [of the first edition of The Federalist] are believed to have been printed, and the fact that this one was presented by one of the authors as a gift makes the demand for it far greater. Because the only other known copy is housed in an institution, this is the only copy like it that ever existed—and likely ever will—be made available to the public.”

Peggy Caruthers lives in California and is the content manager at Journalists Inc. She attended the University of Missouri and majored in journalism.

**Editor’s note:** This essay appeared in the Spring 2020 issue of Fine Books & Collectibles, a quarterly magazine published by Heritage Auctions. The Spring 2020 issue is available by subscription or online at https://finebooksandcollectibles.com/subscribe.
An Exceptional Year

Hindman Auctions’ sales shatter record prices.

Last year was a record-setting year for Hindman Auctions. Not only did sales for the Books and Manuscripts department total more than $5.5 million, but three items sold for world record auction prices.

The first was a very fine copy of the first edition of Charles Darwin’s _On the Origin of Species_, sold in Hindman’s “Library of a Midwestern Collector” sale on November 5, 2019. Though a copy of such an important work in such fine condition is an exciting find for collectors, this copy was one of only eight printed on vellum. It also contained the signatures of William Morris, founder of the Kelmscott Press, and his private secretary, English littérateur Edward William Cockerell, and was previously owned by socialite Edith Rockefeller McCormick. This copy was one of only eight copies printed on vellum to appear on the market at auction, setting a new world auction record of $150,000, a world auction record.

The second record-setting item was a copy of _The Birthplace of the Garden_ by William Morris, sold in Hindman’s Fine Books auction in April 2018. This copy was one of five copies printed on vellum, but sold for $55,000 due to its rarity and provenance.

The very fine Mellon-Garden copy of _The Origin of Species_ (1897), one of eight copies printed on vellum by the Kelmscott Press, was estimated at $120,000–$180,000, but sold for $162,500, surpassing the previous world auction record of $150,000, set in April 2018.

“We were incredibly lucky to have the opportunity to offer some truly extraordinary books, manuscripts, and maps in 2019, including many great rarities at auction,” Hause said. “Many of these were in incredibly fine condition with notable provenance and were objects rarely seen at auction. In 2020, we’re anticipating another busy sale season this year, with an expanded schedule for buyers, and we’re thrilled to have the chance to bring more extraordinary objects to market this year in both our Chicago and Cincinnati sale rooms.”

Peggy Caruthers lives in California and is the auction content manager at JournalsInc. Inc.
For the Love of Early Books

Swann’s new specialist uses passion to drive new collecting trends.

T
his year, Devon Eastland joins the Swann Auction Galleries team as a senior specialist in Early Printed Books, bringing decades of experience in historical books, and more recent credentials as an auctioneer. In this role, she will be responsible for English and Continental books ranging from medieval times through 1800, as well as travel, medicine, and science books of any origin.

Eastland is replacing Tobias Abeloff, who retired after thirty-eight years at Swann. Her career in auctions began at Skinner, where she worked as director of the book department from 2012 until transitioning to Swann in January.

“It’s been a very good transition, and it’s wonderful to be here at Swann among other book-minded people,” Eastland said. “We can bounce ideas off each other in order to value or research items.”

One collaboration she is particularly excited about is Swann’s second Pride sale, scheduled for June. “Swann’s ability to adapt to new trends and see where collecting is going is incredibly exciting, and I’m happy to contribute one item to the upcoming

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