



ANTHONY ROBERT ALWYN HOBSON

# Anthony Robert Alwyn Hobson 1921–2014

FOR WELL OVER HALF A CENTURY, Anthony Hobson was a commanding figure among book historians, and particularly historians of bookbinding. Most of his professional career was spent in charge of the book department at Sotheby's, a post that gave him ample opportunity to see a great variety of books. Always keen to travel, and unwilling to let slip any opportunity to see a major library that might contain early examples, he was as familiar a figure in Italy or France as in London. In a succession of publications he has left authoritative work on bindings of the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries, but especially on the sixteenth and seventeenth.

Anthony Robert Alwyn Hobson was born at Rhyl on 5 September 1921, the only son of Geoffrey Dudley Hobson (1882–1949) and his wife Gertrude Adelaide Vaughan (d. 1938). The family fortunes came from cotton-broking in Cheshire.<sup>1</sup> The Hobson family home was at 1 Bedford Square, the finest house in one of London's finest squares. Until encroached on by the British Museum for the new Duveen Gallery, the garden was large enough to include a tennis court. In 1909 G. D. Hobson, originally trained as a lawyer, had joined with Sir Montague Barlow and Major Felix Warre to purchase Sotheby's.<sup>2</sup> The firm was to dominate the life of father and son alike. G. D. Hobson was not only perceptive in building up the company; he was also, like his contemporary the scholar-bookseller E. P. Goldschmidt, a pioneering historian of bookbindings. He concentrated mostly on early English examples, publishing studies of *English*

<sup>1</sup>F. Herrmann, *Sotheby's: Portrait of an Auction House* (London, 1980), p. 104.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 102–6.

*Binding before 1500* (1929, his Sandars lectures at Cambridge), *English Bindings, 1490–1940, in the Library of J. R. Abbey* (London, 1940), *Blind-Stamped Panels in the English Book Trade, c.1485–1555* (London, 1944) and drawing together a mass of papers assembled mostly by others in *Bindings in Cambridge Libraries* (Cambridge, 1929).

Anthony, an only child whose memories of holidays with his mother's family in Flintshire remained always with him, was educated at Eton (where he was an Oppidan scholar), and then from 1940 at New College, Oxford. He graduated in modern languages after a much abbreviated war-time course. His war service from 1941 to 1946 in the Scots Guards—where he attained the rank of captain and ended up working with intelligence—took him to Italy in 1943–6. Before settling down to a civilian career he spent a year travelling across southern Europe, from Greece to Spain and Portugal: he came back having added substantially to his portfolio of languages.

He joined his father at Sotheby's in September 1947, attached to the book department. Post-war business was difficult, and further complicated by restrictions on the international movement of money. Matters changed when it proved possible to persuade the British government that some of the most important volumes from the Landau library in Italy should be auctioned in London. This was Anthony Hobson's introduction to the challenges and possibilities of bringing books to a successful auction. The library had been founded by Baron Horace de Landau (1824–1903), representative of the Rothschilds to the Italian government in Turin in the 1860s, and had been substantially increased by his niece, who died in 1938. Though the sale of a selection of these books was formally managed by his father, in practice Anthony was in large part responsible, in a task made much easier thanks to his wartime familiarity with Italy. The Landau sales proved a landmark, and the beginning of post-war recovery in the international book trade.

In 1949, the year of his father's death, Anthony became head of the department and a Director of Sotheby's; he remained so until 1971, and learned much of the running of the business through Charles Des Graz (d. 1953). Then, until he resigned in 1977 when faced with changes in the company that he found unacceptable, Hobson was an Associate. At the rostrum he conducted sales with discipline and efficiency. Under his charge the book department flourished. He recruited a small team of experts whose combined skills were well suited to sellers and buyers alike. Christopher de Hamel has recorded that he was known among the staff as 'the Ant'—not just because of his name, and his jet-black hair, but also

because of his relentless hard work and long hours put in at the office. During these years Sotheby's dominated the auction market for manuscripts and printed books. The major sales of medieval and Renaissance manuscripts included those of C. W. Dyson Perrins (1958–60), for which Hobson wrote the catalogues himself, and Sir Alfred Chester Beatty (1968–9). The series of sales of the library of C. E. Kenney in 1965–8 aroused new interest among collectors in the history of science and engineering. In 1965 the first sale, devoted to bindings, was held of the books of Major J. R. Abbey. Much of the highly detailed catalogues for the Abbey sales drew on the published work of Anthony and his father, with contributions by H. M. Nixon of the British Museum on some of the English and French examples. Quite differently, the Boies Penrose sales of 1971 brought a major collection of travel and exploration to the rooms. Amidst all these came a flow of sales—by no means all duplicate copies—from institutions including the Library of Congress, the Folger Shakespeare Library, the Newberry Library in Chicago, the Pierpont Morgan Library, the Royal Medical Society of Edinburgh and Chetham's Library in Manchester.

Above all were the sales of the manuscripts and other books of Sir Thomas Phillipps, the most voracious of all Victorian book collectors. Following his death in 1872, Phillipps's vast collection passed eventually to trustees, who began the long process of dispersal.<sup>3</sup> Quite apart from a considerable library of early printed books, it was the largest and richest collection of manuscripts ever assembled by a private person. There were some early sales to institutions and individuals, and a series of auctions at Sotheby's from 1886 onwards. These ended in 1938, and in 1946 the whole of the still huge residue, mostly unexamined, was sold to the bookselling brothers Lionel and Philip Robinson. After another auction in 1946 raised over half what they had paid for the collection, and some further auctions, the Robinsons offered more in their own catalogues until they retired in 1956. By then most of the library, known to be of considerable value but still only partly explored, was housed in an anonymous house in Barnet, north London. This was the unfinished business into which Hobson was invited in 1964, and which was to dominate much of the rest of his career. He later recalled how, when visiting, he was instructed by the Robinsons to leave his car further down the road, and then walk to the house, lest someone suspect that it contained things of value. In November 1965

<sup>3</sup>A. N. L. Munby, *The Dispersal of the Phillipps Library* (Phillipps Studies no. 5) (Cambridge, 1960).

Sotheby's launched a new series of sales. Most of the cataloguing, until his untimely death in spring 1975, was by Andreas Mayor, formerly of the Manuscripts Department in the British Museum. Henceforth the medieval manuscripts were catalogued by Christopher de Hamel. The dispersal lasted until 1982, when the still appreciable residue was sold to the New York bookseller H. P. Kraus, who had been an active and prominent buyer at the auctions.<sup>4</sup>

Both in his work at Sotheby's and in his contributions on the history of bookbinding, Hobson inherited the interests of his father. They were firm bases on which to build. To them he added an ever-strengthening sense of the contributions that the history of bookbinding could make to wider historical disciplines, and an eagerness to learn about the history of book collecting.

Hobson's first book, in 1953, was in a mould that had been long adopted by historians of bindings: a series of essays accompanied by representations of each binding discussed. The study of *French and Italian Collectors and their Bindings* (Oxford), illustrated from examples in the library of J. R. Abbey, was Abbey's contribution to the Roxburghe Club. The project, as originally put to G. D. Hobson, had once been much larger: nothing less than a book on collectors and their bindings, of all ages and all countries. It was suggested by Sir Sydney Cockerell, formerly secretary to William Morris, Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum until 1937, and no mean collector himself. Geoffrey Hobson had died having only collected some notes, and the project was inherited by Anthony. In his hands it took its more modest and more practical form, and followed the model of his father's book on the English bindings in Abbey's collection, published in 1940. The essays on each of the bindings chosen were prefixed by a long and widely informed summary of the history of decorated binding in France and Italy from the fifteenth century onwards. In France's case this reached briefly into the twentieth century. In the case of Italy, especial attention was paid—no doubt at the owner's behest—to Italian gilt-decorated bindings of the nineteenth century: an appendix listed nineteen craftsmen known to have practised this in the first half of the century. Inevitably the bibliophile Jean Grolier (1479–1565) dominated much of the first part of the book, where Anthony was able to draw on work by his father: six bindings were featured in the selection. Rather more than half of all the books discussed in the volume were French, but

<sup>4</sup>A. R. A. Hobson, 'The Phillipps sales', in G. Mandelbrote (ed.), *Out of Print & into Profit: a History of the Rare and Secondhand Book Trade in Britain in the Twentieth Century* (London, 2006), pp. 157–64.

it was early Italian binding that was to become Hobson's forte. The essay format provided an ideal vehicle for a young man who was already impressively well read in his subject, and whose more general knowledge was displayed in the same year when he shared in the selection for an exhibition of Italian books from 1465 to 1900 at the National Book League.

In 1954 he saw into print a substantial article left amongst his father's papers on German renaissance patrons of bookbinding.<sup>5</sup> In his own work, the more general history of collecting began to emerge in articles for *The Book Collector*: on the elaborately painted fore-edges of books in the sixteenth-century library of the Pillone family in 1958, on the Rothschild collection at Waddesdon in 1959 and—a joint article with their mutual friend, A. N. L. Munby—on Major John Roland Abbey in 1961.<sup>6</sup>

There was no further book until 1970. In appearance, with its colour plates and dozens of others in monochrome, the new one seemed not unlike a coffee-table book. Even the title suggested how it might be marketed and browsed through. But *Great Libraries* was more than this.<sup>7</sup> The pictures had been chosen with care in order to provide a reference work and an archive, part of the history of the book's subject. Though others similar followed by other writers, there was at this time no other book anywhere that covered its field so generously, across two hemispheres. In thirty-two libraries, from the early foundations of Verona and St Gallen to the twentieth-century University of Texas at Austin, Hobson included five in the United States and the rest in Europe: there was nothing in other parts of the world. While in no way intended as a comprehensive history of its subject, it was—and remains—an authoritative guide to the formation, presentation and even modern management of libraries. Much was inevitably derivative, but the book was enhanced by Hobson's reading of archives and correspondence that made it more than a mere *rechauffage*. By including the Harry H. Ransom Center at Austin, he was able to write about twentieth-century authors, touching on current controversies over the export of literary manuscripts from Europe to North America. The whole was structured as a series of essays, a form that suited him, but these were longer than hitherto, and covered a considerable variety of

<sup>5</sup>G. D. Hobson, 'German Renaissance patrons of bookbinding', *The Book Collector*, 3 (1954), 171–89, 251–71.

<sup>6</sup>A. R. A. Hobson, 'The Pillone library', *The Book Collector*, 7 (1958), 28–37; A. R. A. Hobson, 'Waddesdon Manor', *The Book Collector*, 8 (1959), 131–9; A. R. A. Hobson (with A. N. L. Munby), 'John Roland Abbey', *The Book Collector*, 10 (1961), 40–8.

<sup>7</sup>Published in London by Weidenfeld and Nicolson; it was published in German in 1970 and French in 1971.

material. Themes emerged, such as the secularisation of libraries, and in part the book was a plea for libraries themselves, already facing transformation as microforms and computers became increasingly important. As a trade book, it enjoyed a wide circulation and was accordingly influential. He was drawing on what had by now become years of travel.

Apart from a long supplement of additions and corrections to his father's *Les reliures à la fanfare*, published to accompany a reprint in 1970,<sup>8</sup> there was to be another pause until 1975. But it was worth the wait. *Apollo and Pegasus: an Enquiry into the Formation and Dispersal of a Renaissance Library* (Amsterdam, 1975) was a milestone in the subject. In form, it was Hobson's first monograph. In subject, it addressed a long-standing mystery. A group of sixteenth-century Italian bindings characterised by a central plaquette on each cover depicting Apollo and Pegasus had puzzled historians since at least the early nineteenth century. By the end of the century the question was becoming ever more muddled. His father addressed it in *Maioli, Canevari and Others* (Boston, 1926), and in his Roxburghe Club book for Major Abbey Anthony had followed then current thought, attributing ownership to an unidentified member of the Farnese family. But, as Howard Nixon sagely remarked, there was little firm evidence for this attribution. By 1975 the known tally of these bindings had risen from 115—the figure Hobson had quoted in 1953 in his book for Major Abbey—to 169 works in 144 volumes. Many of the new examples had been identified by another close friend, the Italian bookseller, collector and bibliographer Tammara de Marinis (1878–1969). In *Apollo and Pegasus* Hobson showed conclusively that the bindings had been made for Giovanni Battista Grimani (c.1524–c.1612), a member of a Genoese family, and that they came, in the first part of his life, from a small number of workshops in Rome. In lectures organised with a fine sense of drama, as detective stories, Anthony presented his findings first at Harvard and then to the Bibliographical Society in London. In unravelling past confusions and speculations he was able to deploy his interests in the history of collecting, of family dynasties, of antiquarian collecting in a wide sense, of decoration, of art and architecture. He always began with the books concerned, but by work in archives, by understanding the relationships between members of the book trades and by considering wider contexts, he arrived at conclusions based on evidence rather than hearsay and tradition. In all this, he recaptured most of a library that had been

<sup>8</sup>G. D. Hobson, *Les reliures à la fanfare: le problème de l'S fermé* (1935). Reprinted with a supplement by A. R. A. Hobson (Amsterdam, 1970).

dispersed in various places and at various times since the eighteenth century. Moreover, he demonstrated that this was an ideal library, not one that—like Grolier's—was designed to grow indefinitely. The epithet of 'book historian' that he used for himself in *Who's Who* was justly chosen. This was much more than solely the history of bookbinding.

In retirement from Sotheby's, he quickened his pace of reviews and articles. He was the advisor on bibliographical books for the *Times Literary Supplement*, for which he was occasionally permitted to write under the pseudonym of Robert Vaughan. Under his aegis, readers were kept abreast of major foreign contributions to the history of bookbinding. For his Sandars lectures at Cambridge in 1974–5 he had chosen to speak on 'Some book collectors, booksellers and binders in sixteenth-century Italy'. This was work in progress.<sup>9</sup> Then in 1989 came another monograph, *Humanists and Bookbinders: the Origins and Diffusion of the Humanistic Bookbinding, 1459–1559* (Cambridge, 1989). He had hoped that this would be published by Oxford University Press, but when this proved impractical he turned to Cambridge, and so to the press that had published his father's works.

This new work was based on his Franklin Jasper Walls Lectures delivered in the Pierpont Morgan Library, but it harked back to the work of E. P. Goldschmidt in the 1920s. Among other opinions, Goldschmidt had been convinced that gold-decorated binding in Italy originated in Naples. In turn, Tammaro de Marinis demonstrated that it was not practised there until the 1470s. In a magisterial survey, Hobson showed that the technique had been known in Italy since the first quarter of the fifteenth century, and that the circle of Paduan antiquaries including Felice Feliciano and Bartolomeo Sanvito were the first to exploit it. Here he took his investigations back to Mamluk work of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and connections between the eastern Mediterranean and Venice. He furthered his work on plaquette and medallion bindings, begun in *Apollo and Pegasus*, and now extended it to links with filigree decoration. From Italian examples it was a natural step to France, which readily absorbed these traditions. The earliest gilt-tooled bindings in France appear not to be before the first four or five years of the sixteenth century, but the style did not catch on immediately. With the accession of François I in 1515 and the development and enrichment of the royal library at Fontainebleau, this changed. The last long chapter of *Humanists*

<sup>9</sup>Typescript copies are in Cambridge University Library (850.b.183) and the British Library (Ac.2660.m(25)).



and *Bookbinders* provided for the first time in English a satisfying introduction to the elaborately decorated books at Fontainebleau, linking them to some of their contexts. The chapter was to prove prescient, for it lay behind two substantial exhibitions that were to take place in France within Anthony's own lifetime, on major decorated bindings in the sixteenth-century royal library at the Bibliothèque nationale in 1999 and at Fontainebleau itself in 2013.<sup>10</sup>

Characteristically, at the end of his book Hobson added a census of the books known to him from which his study had been selected, this time of 145 plaquette and medallion bindings. He also took the opportunity to tidy up work on Jean Grolier's bindings, the subject of an authoritative exhibition by Howard Nixon at the British Library in 1965.

The year 1999 brought publication of the last of his trilogy on collectors of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Entitled *Renaissance Book Collecting: Jean Grolier and Diego Hurtado de Mendoza, their Books and Bindings*, and again published by Cambridge University Press, this returned to some very old themes, and one new to most people. It was founded on his Lyell lectures delivered at Oxford in 1991. Grolier's bindings had been collected since at least the eighteenth century. Hurtado de Mendoza was less familiar, and Hobson was able to introduce this diplomat from one of the wealthiest and most powerful families in Castile, born in 1503 or 1504, who took full advantage of his postings in Venice and (to a lesser extent) in Rome to assemble a library that seemed to share some characteristics with that of Grolier but that was in its content far more ambitious. By the end of the 1540s, the library had contained 259 Greek manuscripts according to a catalogue compiled at the time by Jean Matal. Printed books remained in the Escorial, part of his bequest to Philip II; and after many weeks' work there Hobson was able to present a list of 1,180 surviving examples. At first his search was hampered by the extremely limited opening hours of the Library, a particularly expensive and irritating feature for a visitor from abroad working on a prolonged task such as this. When, after his protests at the highest level, the hours were extended, he was accordingly able to make faster progress.

As the closing words of his ambitious, deeply researched and pioneering trilogy, the final paragraph of *Renaissance Book Collecting*

<sup>10</sup> M.-P. Laffitte and F. Le Bars, *Reliures royales de la Renaissance; la librairie de Fontainebleau* (Bibliothèque nationale de France, 1999); *Le roi et l'artiste: François Ier et Rosso Fiorentino* (exhibition catalogue, Château de Fontainebleau, 2013).

might almost be taken as the summation of what had preoccupied so many of his energies and interests:

The 1550s, which witnessed the death, disappearance or departure of all these binders, marked the end of the great century of Italian bookbinding. For much of that time Italy had led Europe in binding design and Italian fashions had been imitated in many countries. Even in its latest phase Andrea di Lorenzo's stylistic innovations had inspired emulation in France and Germany. Marc Lauweryn in the Netherlands and Thomas Mahieu in Paris owned books bound by the Fugger Binder. After the 1550s the flow of influence was always in the opposite direction, from North to South, and Italy never again produced a binder of European stature.<sup>11</sup>

Thus he recorded his considered opinion, and his emphasis on the importance of decoration rather than the details of binding structures. Thus, too, he justified what had—ever since he was in his twenties, when he worked on the bindings of Major Abbey—been the chief of his primary interests.

Of long-proven authority, and now almost an *éminence grise* save that for years his appearance seemed barely to change, he was increasingly called on by others for advice, for introductions to books and exhibitions, and sometimes greater collaborations. Among these was work on the collection of Aldine imprints at the University of California, Los Angeles (1989), a volume written with Paul Culot on Italian and French sixteenth-century bindings in the Bibliotheca Wittcockiana in Brussels (1990),<sup>12</sup> on Roman baroque bindings (1991) and on bindings in the Folger Shakespeare Library (1992). For an exhibition catalogue at Bologna in 1998 he contributed a characteristically thorough account of the history of bookbinding in the city from the late fifteenth century to the mid-sixteenth, singling out the years 1520 to 1555 as 'il momento della massima diffusione e del massimo splendore delle decorazioni sulle legature bolognesi'.<sup>13</sup> It was the more a pity that so few bindings could be attributed to named individuals rather than to anonymous workshops.

In 1989 he had remarked that much remained to be discovered concerning Bartolomeo Sanvito. He made this comment in the context of a

<sup>11</sup> A. Hobson, *Renaissance Book Collecting: Jean Grolier and Diego Hurtado de Mendoza, their Books and Bindings* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 138.

<sup>12</sup> A. Hobson and P. Culot, *Italian and French 16th-Century Bookbindings* (new revised edition) (Brussels, 1991).

<sup>13</sup> A. R. A. Hobson and L. Quaquarelli (eds.), *Legature Bolognesi del Rinascimento* (Bologna, 1998). In a footnote Hobson mentioned a book by him in preparation on fifteenth-century bindings at Padua, to be published by the British Library. Due in part to escalating costs, this did not appear.

continuing interest in Italian renaissance scribes, the producers of the books whose bindings he so much admired and studied. This interest in scribes was given very practical expression in the efforts he made to see into print some of the work of Albinia de la Mare, whose pioneering analyses of the various handwritings of Italian humanists was transforming understanding of the circumstances and circles of manuscript production. Tilly (as she was known by all her friends) was unrivalled in her knowledge of the subject, but was not naturally a fast writer. It required considerable powers of persuasion on Hobson's part to see through to publication what was planned as the first fascicule of what was to be her magnum opus, *The Handwriting of Italian Humanists*.<sup>14</sup> She herself paid tribute to his 'patience, determination and organizing skill'. Anthony arranged its publication in 1973 through the Association Internationale de Bibliophilie. Tilly died in 2001 without having published another fascicule but leaving behind a mass of notes. Again Anthony stepped in. He had suggested in the 1990s that there should be a volume devoted to Sanvito and in 2009 the Association published *Bartolomeo Sanvito: the Life & Work of a Renaissance Scribe*.<sup>15</sup> Tilly's work was assembled, organised and supplemented by Laura Nuvoloni. Anthony contributed a chapter on Sanvito's bindings, drawing on his earlier work on the Paduan antiquaries.

The Festschrift organised in his honour in 1994 was appropriately published in Italy, by Edizioni Valdonega.<sup>16</sup> The introduction by Nicolas Barker had been printed in a special autumn issue of *The Book Collector* 40 (1991), marking his seventieth birthday. The contributors came from much of Western Europe.

As he advanced into his eighties the pace scarcely slackened. Enthusiastic and energetic as ever, he continued to travel and to write. His contribution in 2012 to an exhibition catalogue of bindings in the Spanish royal library was a revisiting of Hurtado de Mendoza. One of the other contributors was Nicholas Pickwoad, and the two scholars seemed to contrast with each other in their different approaches to their subject, Hobson concentrating as always on decoration, Pickwoad interested in the plainest of bindings, and how structures could contribute to the study

<sup>14</sup>A. C. de la Mare, *The Handwriting of Italian Humanists* (Paris, 1973).

<sup>15</sup>A. C. de la Mare and L. Nuvoloni, *Bartolomeo Sanvito: the Life & Work of a Renaissance Scribe* (edited by A. Hobson and C. de Hamel: Paris, 2009).

<sup>16</sup>D. E. Rhodes (ed.), *Bookbindings & Other Bibliophily: Essays in Honour of Anthony Hobson* (Verona, 1994). This includes a bibliography of his work, compiled by the editor.

of bindings and binding workshops more generally.<sup>17</sup> In the end Hobson accepted the complementary value of each of these two approaches that had for many years seemed irreconcilable.

During the last years of his life he was working on a further and more general book, on sixteenth-century Italian bindings. By the time of his death he had all but completed the text, and was assembling the illustrations—a task that he found challenging in the face of digital photography and the editorial procedures associated with it. The task of bringing the book to publication has been entrusted to Christopher de Hamel, as his literary executor.

Hobson served as President of the Bibliographical Society in 1977–9, and was awarded the Society's Gold Medal in 1992: his presidential address on appropriations from foreign libraries during the French Revolution was published in a slightly expanded form in 1989.<sup>18</sup> As President from 1985 to 1999 of the Association Internationale de Bibliophilie, a group founded in 1959, he displayed considerable skill in ensuring that a disparate but enthusiastic body of people found enjoyment in their ambitious international meetings: his wide knowledge, his social assurance, his firm opinions and equally firm authority, and his command of languages (those he did not already know were learned sufficiently for each occasion for him to be able to be courteous to hosts) made him, for many, an ideal president. It was an honour of which he felt intensely proud. Years of experience on the auctioneer's rostrum meant that he was not easily flustered, and he could carry business forward with dispatch.<sup>19</sup>

As a person, he was both a generous and a critical friend. He read attentively, and one could expect a corrective or disagreeing postcard if he thought it appropriate: many people treasured these notes. He gave his time apparently tirelessly. He was as committed to the well-being of parish and other ecclesiastical libraries in England, as they faced an uncertain future, as he was to matters of more international import, and he spent many hours campaigning in their defence. His membership of the Trustees of Lambeth Palace Library was but one aspect of this commitment. In

<sup>17</sup> M. L. López-Vidriero (ed.), *Great Bindings from the Spanish Royal Collections, 15th–21st Centuries* (Madrid, 2012); also published as *Grandes encuadernaciones en las bibliotecas reales, siglos XV–XXI*.

<sup>18</sup> A. R. A. Hobson, 'Appropriations from foreign libraries during the French revolution', *Bulletin du Bibliophile* (1989), 255–72.

<sup>19</sup> A. R. A. Hobson, *Some Memories of Congresses & Colloquia of the Association Internationale de Bibliophilie* (Paris, 2011).

Italy, he was appointed Cavaliere Ufficiale, Ordine al Merito della Repubblica Italiana in 1979 and in 1987 he became a Foreign Associate of the Ateneo Veneto. He was elected FBA in 1992.

Some of his own collecting was focused for many years on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century illustrated books. These were sold anonymously at Sotheby's on 10 November 1975. But his interests reached well beyond these centuries. He was a part of Cyril Connolly's wide circle of literary friends, and his marriage strengthened this with family ties. Much of his later collecting concentrated on twentieth-century authors in English, a pursuit in which he was much helped by the London booksellers Anthony Rota and 'Dusty' Miller at Frank Hollings. Margie Cohn at House of Books, doyenne of the New York world of modern literature, was a similar support. The considerable strength of his modern manuscripts and printed books was made public when a selection of some of the best was sold at auction on 28 June 1996, this time with his name attached. The sale bore witness to a considerable circle of friendships and acquaintances as well as to a determined collector's acute eye for provenance and condition. Nonetheless, for those who thought of him mostly as an historian of bookbindings, it came as a surprise when in 2001 he presented to his fellow members of the Roxburghe Club an entertaining selection of letters by Ronald Firbank.<sup>20</sup> The rest of the modern collection, along with his collection of early sale catalogues and other early bibliographical books, was dispersed at auction following his death.<sup>21</sup> His library on the history of bookbinding, established by his father and much enlarged, has passed to the Bodleian Library, together with his working papers on the subject.

In 1959 he married Elena Pauline Tanya Vinogradoff, known as Tanya. She was the daughter of Igor Vinogradoff and his wife Joy. Marriage brought deep happiness and a family life: they had a son and two daughters. Until her too-early death from cancer in 1988 Tanya was a regular companion on his travels, skilfully taking many of the photographs of books and other subjects that graced his research and publications. They settled in a Queen Anne house at Whitsbury, in Hampshire. These were halcyon years, as Hobson moved easily between the country and London, fitting this in with constant travel overseas. Though never one willing to show his feelings openly, he could not hide how much Tanya's death meant

<sup>20</sup>R. Firbank, *Letters to his Mother, 1920–1924 and La princesse aux soleils* (privately published for the Roxburghe Club, 2001).

<sup>21</sup>Christie's South Kensington 9 June 2015 (early bibliography) and 10 June 2015 (modern literature).

to him. But much seemed to continue as before, and work gave some relief. Only three months before his death he was in Sicily, relishing its Romanesque and baroque art and architecture. At home, the village of Whitsbury commanded his local affections, and apart from planting (and then tending) a wood he did much to improve the parish church. But it was a village that, as he remarked in his last days as he realised his energies were draining and he was no longer allowed to drive a car, had no facilities other than a pub and a church.

Anthony Hobson died at home in Whitsbury, Hampshire, on 12 July 2014, where he is buried beside his wife.

DAVID McKITTERICK

*Fellow of the Academy*

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