

AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY

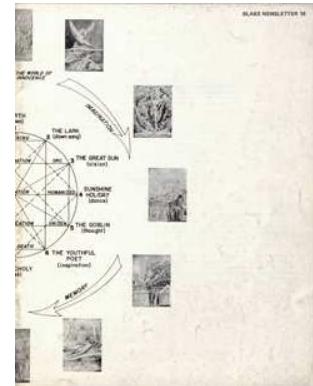
BLAKE

N E W S

British Blake News

Michael Phillips

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NEWS AND WORKS IN PROGRESS

RECENT BLAKE SALES

Warren Howell of John Howell--Books, San Francisco, writes that his firm recently secured copy P of the *Songs* for a private collector in the East. The Howell firm paid £12,000 for the copy.

Mr. Howell also says that copy C of *Urizen* (see the last issue of the *Newsletter* [#15], pp. 69-70) was sold at Sotheby's on 29 March 1971 for £24,000 (£27,000 according to *The Times*: see "British Blake News" below). The Howell firm was the underbidder. *Poetical Sketches* sold for £3800 to John Fleming of New York on behalf of The Pierpont Morgan Library.

On June 15 the Blake-Varley Sketchbook was broken and sold page by page at Christie's, with "Ghost of a Flea" most likely to win high-price honors. The drawings seem to have sold at about the prices expected. Robert Essick bought the "Head of the Dying King Harold Pierced by an Arrow" for \$4065.60. Zeitlin & Ver Brugge bought the standing archer.

On June 24 Sotheby's sold the pencil, sepia, and watercolor preliminary drawing for "Joseph Ordering Simeon to Be Bound" (in the Fitzwilliam Museum). The drawing was formerly in the possession of Mrs. B. Clarke. It measures 13 1/4 x 19 inches and is reproduced in the sale catalogue. The sale price of the drawing was \$6720, considerably below the estimates.

Our thanks to Robert Essick for the last two items.

For more on copy C of *Urizen* and on the breaking and selling of the Blake-Varley Sketchbook, see "British Blake News" just below. For more on the Britwell Court Library copy of *Poetical Sketches*, see "Blake's Corrections in *Poetical Sketches*: A Supplement" by Michael Phillips, below in MINUTE PARTICULARS.

BRITISH BLAKE NEWS

From Michael Phillips, our Associate Editor at the University of Edinburgh:

On 15 June 1971 the Blake-Varley Sketchbook is to be broken up and sold at auction at Christie's. And Jeudwine, the purchaser of copy C of *The First Book of Urizen* at the Britwell Court Library sale at Sotheby's 29 March 1971 (see above, and see the last issue of the *Newsletter* [#15], pp. 69-70), is also threatening to break up that work in order to enhance its re-sale value. The following account appeared in *The Times* Wednesday, 19 May 1971:

Scholars and art historians are becoming disturbed by the growing practice among dealers and owners of dismembering works of art for which they cannot find

a market when intact.

Sketchbooks, hand-printed books, and even paintings are being "broken" or cut down for sale because they often fetch more nowadays as separate items than if sold whole.

The latest case to arouse scholarly concern is that of the celebrated Blake-Varley sketchbook, which is due to be sold as 30 separate lots at Christie's on June 15. This important William Blake work, which contains his famous "Ghost of a Flea" drawing and his visionary head of Job, was discovered four years ago in Scotland. It had been missing for nearly a century. It contains drawings by Blake's close friend, the water-colourist Varley.

It had to be "broken" for exhibition at the Tate and its owner, Mr. David Clayton-Stamm, decided to sell it as a series of separate drawings. These could fetch anything up to £50,000, considerably more than if sold intact.

One Blake scholar, Miss Kathleen Raine, the poet, yesterday described the breaking and selling of the individual drawings separately as "shocking." She said it ought to be kept as one work. She was far less concerned about its being lost to Britain, as a result of auction, than about its being broken up. She hoped there might still be time to save it.

Mr. Clayton-Stamm defends his decision on the ground that a facsimile edition of the sketchbook has been published, and also because small museums and collectors who could not otherwise afford to buy original works by Blake will now be in the market for them.

Sir Geoffrey Keynes, another authority on Blake, said he thought it was already too late to save this particular work, since drawings had been removed in the past. However, he thought it would be "monstrous--like demolishing an historic house"--if Blake's *First Book of Urizen*, another work by the visionary poet and artist on the market, were to be broken up. The owner, who paid £27,000 for it at Sotheby's recently, has said that if he cannot find anyone to buy the complete book, hand-printed and hand-painted by Blake, it will have to be broken and sold in separate lots.

These two examples, which highlight the question of breaking up, promise to bring to a head controversy over the ethics and wisdom of this growing practice.

Hundreds of printed books containing hand-coloured engravings are being broken up by print sellers for framing and selling individually. The economics of book-selling make this an inevitable temptation. A book for which an antiquarian book dealer expects £50 may contain 50 colour plates which can be sold for anything up to £5 each.

The result is that these books, once abundant, are rapidly disappearing from the market, making it increasingly difficult for specialized libraries and collectors to obtain them. Many antiquarian booksellers who feel strongly about the practise refuse to sell to known print sellers, except where the book is already deficient.

I shall record the outcome of the sale at Christie's of the Blake-Varley Sketchbook and the eventual fate of copy C of *The First Book of Urizen* in a forthcoming issue of the *Newsletter*.

Recent publications in Britain of interest to Blake scholars include a splendidly illustrated and documented catalogue of the Tate Gallery collection of Blake drawings, paintings, and associated items. The Tate Gallery catalogue, substantially revised by Martin Butlin, together with the Fitzwilliam Museum catalogue of their Blake collection place at the disposal of Blake scholars accurate and detailed reference to two of the major Blake collections in Great Britain. A review of the Fitzwilliam Blake Exhibition and Catalogue will appear in the *Newsletter*.

TEACHING BLAKE AT BUCKNELL

From Professor Michael Payne, Bucknell University:

Bucknell is now offering a student-initiated course on Blake. Last fall two students decided they wanted to study Blake's poetry more systematically than they had been able to do on their own. They approached ten other students and seven faculty members--four in the English Department, two in the History Department, and one in the Philosophy Department--all of whom agreed to participate in a semester-length seminar. The students, who are receiving credit for an Independent Projects course in the English Department, have handled the administration and organization of the course. The faculty members, who are receiving no teaching credit for the course, are learning to appreciate, among other things, the ironies of the first of the Proverbs of Hell: "In seed time learn, in harvest teach, in winter enjoy."

BLAKE UNDER THE HOUSE

According to a recent issue of *The Book-of-the-Month Club News*, Blake is the pivot on which the plot turns in *Crawlspace*, a novel by Herbert Lieberman:

Albert and Alice Graves, a retired, childless couple, live in a quaint 18th-century farmhouse in New England. One fall day they are visited by a personable young man from the fuel oil company, whom they ask to stay for dinner and who, before leaving, is allowed to borrow a rare edition of William Blake. A few weeks later, the young man, Atlee, returns without the Blake, but is allowed to borrow more books. Not long after that, Mr. Graves discovers that someone is living in a crude nest in the crawlspace under the house. He also finds some well-gnawed animal bones and the missing Blake. A call to the oil company reveals that Atlee has not worked there for months. . . . It all ends with the Gravesses living in terror of both Atlee and a marauding band of neighborhood toughs. There is murder, vandalism and finally a blood thirsty manhunt. Here, then, is a chilling story--a thoughtfully chilling story--in the tradition of *Night Must Fall* or even *The Collector*. Not at all recommended for retired couples who live on remote farms. [David W. McCullough]