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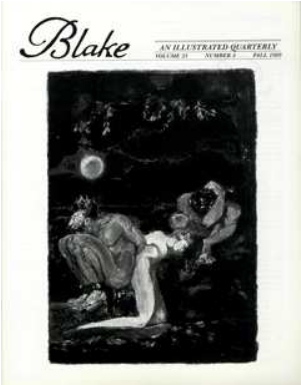

A R T I C L E

The Deterioration of the 1951 Blake Trust Jerusalem

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The Deterioration of the 1951 Blake Trust *Jerusalem*

BY DENA BAIN TAYLOR

In my dual capacity as Blake scholar and Blake bookseller, it is always a particular pleasure for me to handle the Blake Trust/Trianon Press facsimiles, especially the 1951 facsimile of the full one hundred plates of the Stirling copy of *Jerusalem*. The Stirling *Jerusalem* was the first Blake facsimile produced by the Trianon Press and the Blake Trust, and the plates were presented in two different formats: five signatures in paper wrappers (fascicles), or bound in book form. Both came in a drop-front book box. In the spring of 1988, I sold one of the bound *Jerusalem* copies (no. 399) to the University of Waterloo in Waterloo, Ontario, whose head of collections management, Stuart MacKinnon, has taken great pains over the last several years to assemble an excellent Blake research collection.

Some weeks after the book was shipped to Waterloo, I received a call from MacKinnon, asking me if I had noticed that the pages in their *Jerusalem* had begun to discolor, and asking if I could account for this. I told him that I had never noticed it. I also told him that I was at a loss to account for it, since the plates were advertised as being on a pure rag paper made to match Blake's own and therefore ought not to brown or discolor.

MacKinnon then took his copy to McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, to be tested for acidity by the head of their Preservation and Restoration Unit, John Winch. He chose McMaster because that institution has one of the most advanced and well-equipped conservation units on the continent. Using a computerized pH meter, Winch discovered to everyone's dismay that Waterloo's copy has a pH level of 4.34. McMaster's own copy tested at the same level. Since a reading of 7 indicates a neutral level of acidity, pH 4.34 is alarmingly acidic. Furthermore, Winch reported that the paper has not yet stabilized; it is still deteriorating. His estimate is that, if left untreated, the copies have a life of only approximately another twenty years. If treated with Wei T'o, a magnesium hydroxide and methanol solution, the life of the facsimile could be extended to about eighty years, at which time new advances in technology might provide a more permanent answer. The box in which the facsimile is housed is made of extremely acidic cardboard.

With this information, I contacted Richard Landon, head of the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library at the University of Toronto. That library owns two copies, one in fascicles which is in good condition and another in the bound format which is heavily used. They also had on loan to them the bound copy belonging to G. E. Bentley, Jr. The University of Toronto does not have the same sophisticated equipment that McMaster has, and their copies were tested by what amounted to an ordinary litmus test. In other words, strips of treated paper were held against the paper and then the color changes on the treated paper were read against a chart. Even by this relatively crude method, the copies tested at a little under pH 5.

At this point I contacted Jerry James, Humanities Bibliographer at the University of California Santa Cruz, since that university now owns the bulk of the archives of the Trianon Press. On the staff of the library is Maureen Carey, a fine printer and paper conservator who has been working intensively for some time on the massive amount of Trianon Press archival material; I spoke with her at length after she had a chance to test their copy, which is also bound.

Carey used the same type of litmus test that the University of Toronto had, and the result was a pH level of 5. She also noticed some "burning" or "ghosting" of the ink outlines (but not the water-color pigment) onto the facing pages of the plates. She asked whether I had seen that on any other copy; I had not. She mentioned that the library also owns about fifteen hundred sheets of overs from the edition, which are yellowing heavily and also foxing. This condition is probably due to their storage in the original book boxes in damp stone warehouses for years. They are acidic, 4.5–5.0 pH.

She also noticed some other very disturbing things about their copy. First, there are no watermarks on the paper (either in the bound copy or the fifteen hundred

loose sheets). In addition, the sheets have the grain of the paper running against the spine of the book page. Cutting and printing this way means that there is less waste but it is not an acceptable procedure in fine printing. A combination of inferior glue and pressure created on the binding by the horizontal grain has resulted in a tendency for the pages to pop out of the binding. Asked if I had ever seen this before, I said that in fact I had noticed it in most of the bound copies I have seen over the years. Finally, Carey found that the thickness of the sheets is inconsistent—some are nearly as thick as felt and others almost as thin as tissue paper. Carey's opinion as a fine printer was that all of these are cost-saving features and that the paper was seconds or retrees. She said that she herself would not have used it for a project of this importance. She compared the paper to glorified newsprint. As it happens, she was not far from the truth.

In the meantime, David Ouellette of the Preservation and Restoration Unit at McMaster had sent, with the concurrence of Stuart MacKinnon of Waterloo, a 6.0 by 6.5 cm sample of paper from Waterloo's copy to Gregory Young at the Canadian Conservation Institute in Ottawa. Young placed a drop of water onto the paper sample and teased fibers from both the surface and the interior of the paper matrix. He transferred portions of pulp fibers to microscope slides and applied Herzberg's iodine stain. He immediately examined the slides by polarized light microscopy and discovered that almost all the fibers had stained an intense violet color; very few fibers stained yellow. Vasicentric tracheids, fibers, parenchyma cells and vessel elements were all present. The color given by the stain and the extensive fibrillation and breakup of most of the fibers in the matrix enabled Young to conclude that the paper was made from a high quality, low yield (low lignin content), well beaten, chemical hardwood pulp. In other words, the paper is definitely not the pure rag paper it was extensively advertised to be.

Another major problem with the book form of the facsimile is the binding. Because Ouellette had to remove the plates of the Waterloo copy from their binding in order to deacidify them, he was able to examine the binding very closely. He found that the text block is in single leaf format, notched on the back and glued, with cords sunk into the notches and a cloth mull pasted over top. There is no sewing whatsoever. In his report to MacKinnon, he said that such a structure could not be expected to last very long under normal use, given the weight and stiffness of the paper. The headbanding is another questionable structural feature of the volume. The headbands are false and stuck on, as opposed to bands sewn on vellum cores found in bindings meant to last. The boards are apparently a low quality strawboard, but adequately joined to the text block by way of French groove reinforced with cloth at the outer hinges. The hollow spine was apparently made from a cheap kraft paper. Both the volume and the nicely made box are covered with a good quality linen.

The question naturally arises as to why the principals involved in producing the facsimile of *Jerusalem* used an inferior paper and binding. This first project of the Blake Trust and the Trianon Press was produced by committee, with most of the members knowing little about book production, paper, or collotype. It was a very trying experience for all concerned and just short of a miracle that the facsimile was published at all. It was, for example, because of conflicts within the committee that the facsimile was produced in two different formats, and the commentary by Joseph Wickstead, which was originally to have been included with the facsimile, was published separately. The archives of the Trianon Press provide a fascinating picture of the struggles—artistic, financial, and political—that went on during the whole period of production. In particular, the correspondence between Arnold Fawcus of the Trianon Press in France and his partner in England, Patrick Macleod, sheds light on the difficulties that had to be overcome. Unfortunately, there are no final answers, since neither man anticipated the problems of deterioration forty years later, but there are many clues.

Although Fawcus was dedicated to the idea of producing fine facsimiles, he was not himself a fine printer and initially had little knowledge of paper. In some of the letters in the archives, Fawcus asks very basic questions concerning the grain and weight of paper, things that are generally understood by people in the business. He clearly shared the general belief, at a time when there was little awareness of conservation factors, that a rag paper from a reputable mill would probably last as long as antiquarian books generally had lasted.

His role as the head of the Trianon Press was to find the various technical experts who were required; organize and coordinate their work; and—most difficult task of all—find the money to back the enterprise and the sales to make it succeed. He spent a good deal of the period in which the *Jerusalem* was being produced traveling in both the United Kingdom and the United States to raise money.

The paper had to be purchased in France, because the duties on paper coming from England were so high as to make using imported paper quite out of the question, and Fawcus and Macleod relied on the printer, Daniel Jacomet, to find a suitable source. Jacomet himself was faced with an awkward situation. He would nat-

urally have wanted the best paper possible, but both the Trianon Press and the fledgling, as-yet-unendowed, Blake Trust were operating on a shoestring. Furthermore, he had submitted an estimate to the Trust in October 1948, and he had to make sure he kept his costs low enough to stay within the figures he'd quoted and still make a profit.

Jacomet chose to recommend that the Trust purchase the paper from the Papeteries de Renage in the town of Voiron, about ten miles from Grenoble. In his estimate of 18 October 1948 he stated that (in the English translation provided for the members of the committee):

> The paper which approaches the original most closely is Velin Chiffon de Renage. The price of this paper is lower than that of Rives, which is also too light weight. Renage paper can be delivered in two months from the date of ordering.

The committee had been very concerned about selecting suitable paper, and there is a significant item in this regard in the minutes of the July 1949 meeting at which the committee accepted Jacomet's October estimates:

> Mr. Fawcus showed a sample of "RENAGE" paper which M. Jacomet had considered might be suitable. This paper did not appear to have a pure rag content, nor to be sufficiently "colle." It was therefore suggested that further samples should be obtained at once, and that if possible Mr. Goyder should visit France to assist in the selection of paper. It was stressed that paper selected should be treated against "foxing."

George Goyder did in fact visit France for this purpose (a letter from Jacomet to Macleod refers to the visit), and a sheet—now sadly yellowed and foxed—of the *Jerusalem* paper in the archives contains Fawcus's penciled notation, "Accepted by George Goyder." Clearly, Jacomet and/or the people at Renage had managed to convince the less knowledgeable Goyder that the paper was suitable. On 14 November 1948 four days after the letter from Jacomet that referred to Goyder's visit, a letter from Macleod to Renage confirms the order for paper Pur Chiffon Blanc and encloses an actual sample of the paper from the original *Jerusalem* to assist Renage in making as close a match as possible.

Renage, now defunct, was a small paper mill; Carey could find no references to it other than its charter. At a loss to understand why Jacomet chose such an insignificant mill over one of the larger, better known mills, Carey could only suggest that there may have been personal, political, or economic factors involved. He may have had to pay a debt by giving work to some friend or relative who was involved with Renage; or he may have been forced by the French Fine Printing Society (now also defunct) to give Renage the job in order to spread around what printing work there was; or he may simply have been offered such a good deal on the paper that he couldn't turn it down.

As for the paper itself, the financial state of the book trade in France at the time, and the physical conditions under which the paper was manufactured, may have been two of the major factors contributing to its poor quality. Money was, of course, very tight in postwar France in general, and in the book trade in particular. Many had no money for food, let alone for books. Producers needed to bring in as much money as possible for as small an outlay as possible. Cost-cutting was almost certainly on the minds of everyone involved.

The physical conditions under which the paper was manufactured must have been anything but ideal. The area in and around Grenoble is heavily industrialized, producing steel, hemp, cloth, paper, silk, and a number of other products. The town of Voiron itself is on a major river that services many towns in the area, and the amount and nature of pollutants being pumped directly into the river must have been appalling. In addition, as a heavily industrialized area, it was likely bombed during the war. All of this means that the water used in the manufacture of the paper was drawn from what amounted to a chemical sewer, putting who can say what kind of impurities into the paper itself.

Finally, there is the further issue of who physically made the paper. The Renage mill may well have been short of skilled labor, for a lot of reasons—the ravages of the war; the inability of a small, struggling mill to pay well; the necessity for skilled laborers to move to the larger mills where the work and the money were. The paper may have been sized improperly, or some chemical used for the sizing which has ultimately contributed to the deterioration. The workers' possible lack of skill would account for the remarkable differences in paper thickness.

Whatever factors were involved in the deficiencies of the manufacturing process, it seems inconceivable to me that experienced people like Jacomet and the owners of Renage could not recognize that the product they were selling the Blake Trust and Trianon Press was greatly inferior to what they had been contracted for, not to mention that it was not rag paper in the first place. Jacomet, indeed, seems on a number of occasions to have been working at cross-purposes to the Trust. Clearly, from his point of view, time was money and the more time spent on the project by people working for him, the less he would make. On 28 August 1950 Fawcus complained to Geoffrey Keynes about the number of in-

accuracies in Jacomet's work and the "delicacy" of approaching him to correct them by hand. On 29 December 1950 Macleod wrote:

> I was amazed to read about Jacomet cutting the pages. Why? Surely this has to be done by the binders. Or is it a question of giving one straight edge which he has balled up.

And on 6 January 1951 Macleod reported to Fawcus that the binding of the bound volume was satisfactory, but that the "fascicles present some problem owing to discrepancy in printing by Jacomet."

However, one characteristic of the paper that Maureen Carey supposed to have been a cost-cutting measure turns out to have been the responsibility of the Trust, and that is the lack of a watermark. Jacomet had passed on to the Trust the information that Renage would allow them to include a watermark as a courtesy, but by the time the Trust got the design to Renage, the papermaking process was too far advanced for it to be included.

The attractive drop-front box in which the *Jerusalem* is housed can only have contributed to the problem. Not only does the box create an unventilated environment for the book within, but the highly acidic cardboard from which it is made may easily have further contaminated the paper within. On the other hand, as David Ouellette pointed out, the fact that the box was so well constructed has surely saved the binding of the heavy but relatively flimsily constructed volume from disintegrating.

It is difficult to understand how such a poor binding came to be used. The letters between Fawcus, Macleod, and Keynes between November 1950 and April 1951 are filled with details of their problems and frustrations in deciding on binding methods and binders. It was during this period too that they nearly lost the original Stirling *Jerusalem*, when an overzealous French customs officer impounded it. It is also clear from their letters that they had not only to make crucial decisions to ensure the strongest, most durable binding possible, but that they also had to deal with a divided and somewhat captious committee. The result, despite the scrupulous agonizing that comes through clearly in the letters, was not only two different formats but, sadly, a weak and inadequate binding.

Whatever the original causes of the problems with the paper and the binding, these problems are very much with us today and certainly will not go away on their own. The McMaster Preservation and Restoration Unit performed the following salvage operation on the University of Waterloo's copy: to strengthen the paper, after deacidifying it with Wei T'o, and to create a traditional sewing structure, McMaster conservators backed each print with fine quality Japanese paper, leaving an extension along the back edge to be folded like a center fold. Four prints were then gathered per section and center sewn onto linen ribbons. The volume was then bound in the durable "Library style," with split boards lined with buffered card, linen reinforced French joints, headbands sewn on by hand on vellum cores, hollow spine made with buffered card, and chieftain goatskin leather on the spine and corners. The original cloth spine and sides were added overtop and the original box repaired and modified to accommodate the larger size of the restored volume. The conservators also recommended that future users wear gloves. The time involved to perform these operations was approximately one hundred forty hours, but they are expected to add at least sixty years to the life of the facsimile.

It is doubly distressing that it should be the *Jerusalem* to which this has happened. The *Jerusalem* was the first, the most ambitious, and the most impressively accurate of the series. After the *Jerusalem*, Fawcus and Keynes collaborated, worked out a project, and presented it to the Trust. The guidelines as to how exact the Trust and Trianon could afford to be were set with the production of the *Jerusalem*; the projects that followed, although very exact, were considered finished when the essence of the water color was reached, not necessarily when it matched the original.

It also seems tremendously unlikely—given our present technology and the costs of facsimile reproduction—that the Stirling copy of *Jerusalem* should ever be reproduced again by the cooperative work of individual artisans. After all, we need only look at the example of the recent Manchester Etching Workshop edition of the *Songs*, a much simpler work to reproduce than *Jerusalem*. It had originally been the intention of the Workshop to produce a whole series of facsimiles, much as the Trianon Press and Blake Trust had, but the time, labor, and expense involved quickly made the principals realize the impossibility of such an extended project.

Fortunately, it is increasingly likely that the Blake Trust will soon be embarking on a collected edition of the illuminated books that will reproduce the plates from the best available copies, using newly taken photographs. If this project is successfully launched, the *Jerusalem* will be among the first of the volumes to be issued. Even this, however, cannot serve to mitigate the impending loss of the 1951 *Jerusalem*, and it is painfully obvious that it now falls to the individuals and institutions who own copies of the *Jerusalem* to display the same sort of commitment Stuart MacKinnon has shown in preserving the University of Waterloo copy.