

Turning the pages of history

24/07/2009

From 24 July, visitors to the National Trust's Lyme Park in Cheshire will be able to turn the pages of a remarkable 15th century book using the latest digital technology – and to enjoy reading and relaxing in the Victorian library in which it was last displayed.

The Lyme Caxton Missal is the sole surviving copy of an exceptionally early printed prayer book, the 'Sarum Missal', published by William Caxton in 1487. The Missal was used by priests for Mass and the orders of worship from daily prayers to wedding and funeral services. It was the first book to be printed in two colours, red and black, which was cutting-edge technology at the time, and the first to use Caxton's famous woodcut publisher's device.

In Lyme Park's spectacular library, visitors will be able to view the unique Missal, with its stunning colour-plate illustrations and fascinating notes and annotations, alongside a cutting-edge digital version. This brings this amazing book to life using an equivalent to the British Library's award-winning 'Turning Pages' technology.

James Rothwell, National Trust Curator for Lyme Park said: "The Missal gives us - in the 21st century - a fascinating window through which we can look back over 500 years of English history. It's not only a religious prayer book, but a social commentary on the very 'human' stories of life – for example, the obituary inscriptions recording the deaths of members of the Legh family, and handwritten prayers to St Thomas.

The missal also invites us to 'hear' the 15th century through listening to passages from the text being sung and read. Music was an integral part of the missal rite, and the plainchant in its pages would have been said or sung by a priest. The musical staves in the book were printed and then notation added in by hand. The missal was very much a 'working' book, constantly in use – the 'internet' of its day".

The Legh family of Lyme Park** owned the missal soon after it was printed - but for many years it was hidden away, only to be rediscovered by a visiting scholar in the late 19th century when it was put on display in the library. It was removed from the house by the family in 1946, to return when the National Trust acquired it last year with the generous assistance of The Heritage Lottery Fund, The Art Fund (with a contribution from The Wolfson Foundation) and many other organisations and individuals***.

Andrew Macdonald, Acting Director of The Art Fund, said "The Lyme Missal is a beautiful work of art and it gives us an extraordinary insight into religious life in 15th century Pre-Reformation England. The Art Fund is delighted to have helped return this remarkable book to its original home in Lyme Park".

To celebrate the return of the Missal to Lyme Park, and as part of an ongoing project to make rooms in its houses more accessible to visitors, the National Trust decided to recreate the 19th

century décor of the library at Lyme Park as it would have been when the Missal was last on display. This included the re-graining of the library ceiling, and commissioning new gaufraged velvet for the upholstery and library curtains from a specialist textile company, LELIEVRE in France**** which used rollers to produce the pattern on the fabric based on the original 1840s design in the library.

The final piece in the restoration jigsaw will be the re-papering of the library walls with authentic replica wallpaper based on original fragments discovered in the room, and from imprints of the earlier design left on the wall. This will take place over the coming autumn/winter period and will be completed in time for the 2010 opening season.

David Morgan, General Manager of Lyme Park, said: "We're delighted that the Missal can now be seen and enjoyed in the splendid setting of the library. This is the culmination of careful and painstaking work over many months by a dedicated team of staff and volunteers – with the result that the library is now a really welcoming place for visitors to enjoy. Quite simply, the return of the Missal to Lyme Park has re-united an historic book with its original historical setting, and has ensured that both the book and the library are now open to the public in ways never before possible."

The gardens and park are open daily. [Find out more about Lyme Park.](#)

Notes to editors

Media/photocall: Wednesday 15 July, 10.30am at Lyme Park when there will be an opportunity to photograph the Missal in the newly restored library, and to hear the 15th century plainchant from the Missal being performed in public for the first time in over 450 years. Please park in the main car park and make your way to the Servants' Hall which is under the main archway into the courtyard and to the left along the cloister.

* The Sarum Missal. William Caxton (1422-1491) was England's first printer. The 1487 Sarum Missal (STC 16164) was contracted out by him to the French printer Guillaume Maynal, and was produced by him in Paris. This is the earliest known example of an English publisher contracting out work to an overseas collaborator, a phenomenon which later became common. It is also the first book printed in Paris in two colours – then cutting-edge technology – and the first book with Caxton's famous woodcut publisher's device.

Printed throughout in red and black, the book contains 243 of the original 266 leaves, and two full-page hand-coloured woodcuts (a Crucifixion and a God the Father enthroned). Additional decorated initials have been added by hand, though some were never completed. The Missal's nineteenth-century binding incorporates fragments of the fifteenth-century original.

The Sarum rite or use applied to the liturgical customs, rites and calendar associated with the medieval cathedral of Salisbury, which was also known as Sarum.

** The Sarum Missal and Lyme Park. The Missal was removed from Lyme Park when the Legh family left in 1946. Many country house libraries lost many of their best books in the difficult period after the war, often sold to America. At Lyme the pattern was different. In the late 1940s there was no intention that the Library would ever be open to the public, so the more ordinary books were

dispersed, and the most important retained by the Legh family. In recent years the Missal has been held for safe-keeping in the John Rylands University Library in Manchester, while other parts of the historic library have returned to Lyme. There was general agreement in Manchester, at the Trust and from the Legh family that the Missal should not only stay in the north-west, but it should also go on display in its historic home.

The many annotations and notes which have been added to the printed text of the Missal make clear that this was very much a working liturgical book, used to say Mass. It was not a trophy or a collectable. The annotations are in several different hands, and it is hoped that future research might reveal to whom they belong. It is possible that the original owner may have been the priest Sir Piers Legh (ca.1455-1527), who founded nearby Disley church as a chantry chapel. If so the Missal could have been at Lyme Park ever since it was printed, as Sir Piers was the first member of Legh family to make his principal residence there. It has certainly been in the hands of the Legh family since at least 1508. The next earliest continuous ownership of a book printed by Caxton dates back only to about 1530.

The Missal was rediscovered at Lyme in 1874 by William Brenchley Rye, of the British Museum, and was displayed in a glass case in the Library in late Victorian times. This book is the only near-complete copy of the first edition of the Sarum Missal to survive. Only fragments of one other copy survive, at Durham University.

*** Funding Partners. The following organizations and individuals supported the acquisition of the Lyme Sarum Missal:

The Heritage Lottery Fund, independent charity The Art Fund (with a contribution from The Wolfson Foundation), Royal Oak Foundation, The Friends of the National Libraries, The Foyle Foundation, The Pilgrim Trust, The Robert Gavron Charitable Trust, Eric Nilson and S. Jeffrey Mostade, in memory of Donald and Carol Campbell, The Peak District Centre, (a Voluntary Association of National Trust Members).

The Missal was acquired in 2008 at a net cost of £465,000. The total cost of purchase, conservation, display and re-presentation of the library is £669,000.

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported more than 28,800 projects, allocating over £4.3billion across the UK, including over £480million to the North West alone.

From conservation to communities - celebrating 15 years of lottery investment. This autumn the National Lottery celebrates its 15th anniversary. Thousands of people regularly buy a lottery ticket which generates £25million every week for good causes. It's thanks to lottery players that the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has been able to support nearly 30,000 projects - to the tune of £4.3billion - the biggest concentrated investment ever made into the UK's heritage. These include national institutions, historic houses, public parks, wildlife and traditional skills.

The National Trust has benefited from over £65million of HLF money over the years for a wide range of exciting projects including: Tyntesfield, one of the country's most spectacular Victorian treasures; Birmingham's 19th-century courtyard of working people's houses - the 'Back-to-Backs'; and Belfast's famous backdrop of Divis and the Black Mountain.

The Art Fund is the UK's leading independent art charity. It offers grants to help UK museums and galleries enrich their collections; campaigns on behalf of museums and their visitors; and promotes the enjoyment of art. It is entirely funded from public donations and has 80,000 members. Since 1903 the charity has helped museums and galleries all over the UK secure 860,000 works of art for their collections. Recent achievements include: helping secure Titian's Diana and Actaeon for the National Galleries of Scotland and the National Gallery, London in February 2009 with a grant of £1 million; helping secure Anthony d'Offay's collection, ARTIST ROOMS, for Tate and National Galleries of Scotland in February 2008 with a grant of £1million; and running the 'Buy a Brushstroke' public appeal which raised over £550,000 to keep Turner's Blue Rigi watercolour in the UK. The Art Fund is a Registered Charity No. 209174. www.artfund.org

The Wolfson Foundation is a charitable foundation set up in 1955. Grants are made for the advancement of science and medicine, health, education, the arts and humanities. As a general policy, funding is provided to back excellence, to act as a catalyst and to provide for promising future projects which may currently be underfunded. Last year the Foundation distributed some £40 million. www.wolfson.org.uk

**** The original stamped velvet used in the 19th century library was found on chairs situated in Lyme's Entrance Hall. This provided useful information when it came to replicating the pattern and colour for the library curtains and upholstery. This work was carried out by specialist textile company LELIEVRE. For further details about the project please refer to LELIEVRE press release in your media pack.

Lyme Park is set in 1400 acres of moorland, woodland and parkland on the edge of the Peak District. Originally a Tudor House it was transformed by the Venetian architect Leoni into a stunning Italianate palace. It was acquired by the National Trust from the Legh family in 1946. The opulent 17-acre Victorian garden is surrounded by a medieval deer park, whilst the house contains superb Mortlake tapestries, woodcarvings attributed to Grinling Gibbons and an important collection of English clocks. Lyme appeared as 'Pemberley' in the 1995 BBC TV adaptation of Jane Austen's 'Pride & Prejudice' starring Colin Firth.

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Further information

Debbie Peers, National Trust Press Office on 0161 925 4341 / 07887 935 814 or debbie.peers@nationaltrust.org.uk