3. The Collection - Books, Art and Marbles which were Housed in Marbury Hall

Building the Collection

As a youth, James Hugh Smith Barry’s interest in antiquities was fostered by family friend Charles Townley. To be a collector of Antiquities was very much the mark of a cultured and civilised gentleman in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As was fashionable at the time, James Hugh Smith Barry undertook a Grand Tour, which lasted from 1771 until 1780 and included Greece and the Levant, as well as lengthy stays in Rome and Naples.

The wealthy ‘Milordi’ were encouraged to purchase ancient marble sculptures to take back to their country houses as souvenirs of their visit. Most of these sculptures came from excavations in Rome or its neighbourhood, or were acquired from older Italian collections which were now being broken up. Before being dispatched abroad, they were usually restored in the workshops of the many Italian neo-classical sculptors, such as Cavaceppi or Albacini, who derived a fine living from this enterprise. The middlemen and agents in this trade tended to be expatriate Britons, and at the time of Smith Barry’s visit, the market was dominated by Gavin Hamilton (1723-98) and Thomas Jenkins (1722-98).

Gavin Hamilton was born in Scotland and educated at the University of Glasgow. He studied in Rome in the 1740’s under the master Agostino Masucci. After a brief visit home he returned to Rome in 1756. Most of his paintings were of classical Greek and Roman subjects. He is more widely remembered for his hunt for antiquities in the neighbourhood of Rome. Thomas Jenkins was a British antiquary and minor painter who was born in Rome and studied painting in England. He returned to Rome accompanying the English landscape painter Richard Wilson about 1750 and remained behind.

Jenkins established himself as a Cicerone (guide showing antiquities to visitors) and sometime banker to the visiting British. Among the antiquities that passed through his hands was the ‘Discobulus’ discovered in Hadrian’s Villa, which he sold to Charles Townley (family friend of Smith Barry): the ‘Townley Discobulus’ is now in the British Museum. More privately, Jenkins acted as an unofficial spy for the British Government, keeping watch on the comings and goings of visitors with Jacobite sympathies, giving him a shady reputation, particularly among Scottish visitors. It is said that Jenkins also acted as banker to Smith Barry ‘with disastrous effect’.
Whilst in Rome, James Hugh Smith Barry made expensive purchases, largely through Hamilton and Jenkins, who supplied him with his sculptures. These were originally some 45 in number, consisting as was usual of a mixture of statues large and small, portrait busts mostly of Roman emperors and empresses, cinerary urns from tombs, and decorative sculptures in relief, of the variety used by Romans to decorate their villas both in ancient times and in the Renaissance.

The 1770’s were a fortunate time for sculpture collectors. Large numbers of good quality statues and busts had flooded onto the market from some distinguished old collections, far more than the Popes of the day were able to accommodate in their own growing museums. The remainder went into the hands of the dealers and were soon available for export to England. Among the sources for the Marbury hall sculptures are such famous names as the Villa d’Este, many of whose works had come from Hadrian’s Villa at Tivoli, and the Villa Mattei on the Caelian Hill in Rome.

The Mattei Collection was rightly considered one of the finest in Italy on account of the quantity and quality of its ancient sculptures. It had been formed by Ciriaco Hasdrubal Mattei in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and an inventory was made in 1614, in accordance with Ciriaco Mattei’s will of 16 July 1610. His will by fedecomesso forbade his heirs to alienate any of the contents of the family villa.

Ciriaco’s descendent, Don Giuseppe Mattei, fell into such severe debt in 1770, that he was forced to seek the permission of the then Pope, Clement XIV, to sell the treasured marbles. The Pope overruled the fedecomesso on condition that he had first pick of the highly valued pieces. As a result, thirty four pieces, including the ‘Pudicity’ were sold to the Pope by Don Giuseppe Mattei in September 1770 and, by 1774, the ‘Pudicity’ was placed in the Museo Pio-Clementino (now part of the Vatican Museums). The rest of the treasured marbles passed into the hands of Hamilton and Jenkins and were soon spread throughout the private and public collections of Western Europe. Apart from the sculptures which went to Smith Barry, a good many went to Henry Blundell’s collection at Ince Blundell Hall (now in the Liverpool Museums), while several others passed to the Louvre.

James Hugh Smith Barry’s collection was originally housed at Belmont Hall (now Cransley School), but after his death in 1801, Belmont Hall was sold, and the collection was moved to nearby Marbury Hall. Under the terms of his will, the collection was to be housed in a special gallery at Marbury Hall, but his heir, John Smith Barry, failed to build this.

In 1814, a catalogue was published for the use of visitors. At that time, the collection comprised “325 pictures, 21 statues, 19 busts, 10 vases, 15 bas reliefs and other miscellaneous antiquities”. In 1837, Moule described the interior of Marbury: “the hall is filled with antique vases, statues etc, and the salon is embellished with many of the finest works of art”.

It eventually fell to John Smith Barry’s son, another James Hugh Smith Barry, to extend the house and, after the house had been rebuilt by Salvin, a large arcaded, but somewhat low-ceilinged and dark sculpture gallery was added, in which the sculptures were displayed.

The 45 pieces of Greek and Roman statuary in the collection included part of the Parthenon Frieze, a greater than life size (81.5 inches (207 cm) high) Roman marble statue of Zeus, a bust of Livia, described by Susan Walker of the British Museum as an "outstanding" portrait, and marble busts of several Roman emperors, including Marcus Aurelius, Antoninus Pius, Lucius Verus and Septimius Severus. Some of these pieces were purchased from Gavin Hamilton, a well-known archaeologist and antiquities dealer, including a statue of Antinous for £1000, then the highest known price of any antiquity imported to Britain from Rome. James Hugh Smith Barry also collected numerous paintings by Old Masters, including a self-portrait by Anthony van Dyck and Venus disarming Cupid by Parmigianino.

The collection has been described as one of the most important British collections in private hands and was maintained by the family for just over 150 years.
Researching the collection throws up some interesting facts of which the following extract from the London News of November 30, 1850 is an example:

**Fragment of the Parthenon Frieze**

“We have been favoured by Mr George Scharf, Jun., with a copy of his Sketch, made at Marbury Hall, of the fragment of the Parthenon Frieze which he discovered, last month, in the collection of J. Smith Barry Esq.

The fragment is now restored to the original slab in the British Museum – No 35? Black, 36? Red – and may be easily distinguished by the striking contrast of colour. The recent acquisition has retained its freshness and purity of tint, and affords a serious proof of the injurious effect of our atmosphere upon these Phidian treasures since their deposit in the British Museum.

Marbury Hall, near Northwich, in Cheshire, deserves to rank high among the private collections of works of art, both in painting and statuary, in this country. It rivals the famous collection at Ince Blundell, near Liverpool, and contains more celebrated works of ancient art than that known formerly as the Museum Worsleyanum. The mansion stands away from the usual track of sight-seers, and has, moreover, always been difficult to access: the present discovery is, therefore, mainly owing to the privilege of admission as a visitor.

Dallaway, in his “Anecdotes.” p.254?, enumerates several of the important statues treasured here, but much has been added since his time. The collection was begun in 1771, at Rome, by the Hon. J. Smith Barry, at the same time that Messrs. Towneley and Blundel, with the assistance of Jenkins, the English banker, were enriching their galleries from the excavations of Gavin Hamilton: and, among the statues and relieves, are to be recognised several valuable works, known by former Italian publications, but which were since lamented as lost. The present owner is about to construct new galleries, more favourable for their display, but this must necessarily be a work of considerable time.

The Parthenon Fragment was found neglected in a corner, together with another admirable torso of a youth in spirited action; but no traces can be discovered of records of the time when they came into the collection, or through whose hands. So portable a fragment might easily have been brought to the Pyrenees and shipped to Italy, where dealers were in all parts anxious to satisfy the demands of the market in Rome.

Valued as the other works were, Mr. Barry had no idea that his roof sheltered a portion of the most celebrated Temple erected by the Athenians; but his surprise soon gave way to a more liberal sentiment, that of renouncing the possession in restoring the sculpture to its original place, and making national property complete in the most important part of the composition. Steps were taken to identify the gap to which it belonged, and no time was lost in transmitting the treasure to the hands of the trustees of our National Museum.”

**Fragment of the Parthenon Frieze found at Marbury Hall**
Disposal of the Collection

In 1920, Robert Raymond Smith Barry returned from the USA and moved to Conock Manor, eight miles from Upavon, in Wiltshire. In 1925, he inherited the Marbury Estate from his uncle, Arthur Hugh Smith Barry. Robert continued to live at Conock Manor and, on the south-facing veranda, he placed a crowded line of marble statues, which he transferred from Marbury Hall. Over the stables, he mounted a Marbury clock and, above it, a gilded fox weathercock.

In 1932, Robert sold Marbury Hall to George Smith (who turned it into a Country Club) and the house passed out of the Smith Barry family. Following the sale of the house, the remainder of the collection was dispersed, with most pieces sold in 1933, 1946 and 1987.

From time to time, items sold from the Collection of James Hugh Smith Barry continue to come up for re-sale at major Auction Houses around the world.

1. Books

The earliest known sale from the Collection was a selection of books from the Library at Marbury Hall.

Sotheby's Book Sale, 22/23 May 1933

"Catalogue of valuable printed books, illuminated & other manuscripts, autograph letters & historical documents, etc., : comprising ... rare English books ... selected from the Library at Marbury Hall, Northwich, and sold by order of the trustee of ... Lord Barrymore ... the property of Colonel Walter Macfarlane ... a gentleman : the autograph letters, &c. comprise the property of S.H. Le Fleming, Esq., Rydal Hall, Ambleside ... Algernon Gissing, Esq. ... Capt. Victor Cazalet ... letters and papers of Lord Macaulay, [sold by order of his great-nephew and literary executor] ... : Which will be sold by auction by Messrs. Sotheby, Wilkinson & Hodge ... at their large galleries, 34 & 35, New Bond Street, W.1, on Monday, the 22nd of May, 1933, and following day."
The Marbury items were sold in 204 lots on the first day of the sale and the catalogue highlights some important pieces:

“Lot 6 - Andreae (Antonius) Quaestiones super XII Libros Metaphysicae
Folio. London, John Lettou for William Wilcock, 1480

Ver. Rare. The first book from the Press of the first London Printer. Duff records six copies only, of which three are imperfect.”

“Lot 48 – Devout Treatise. A Devout Treatyse Called the Tree and XII Frutes of the Holy Ghost
Enprynted at London in ye Fletestrete at the sygne of the rose Garland, by Robert Copland, 1534

Extremely Rare. Apparently only three other copies known, of which ONLY ONE, THAT IN TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE, IS PERFECT. Herbert says this is the first black letter book in which the comma is used.

A copy of the sale catalogue has been kindly supplied by Sotheby’s, New York.

2. Pictures

Sotheby & Co: Catalogue of The Celebrated Collection of Pictures By The Old Masters, from Marbury Hall, 21st June 1933

This was the major sale of pictures from the collection after Marbury Hall passed out of the Smith Barry family’s hands in 1932. The Sotheby’s Catalogue of June 1933 lists 146 lots, with several containing more than one item. The pictures were sold by order of the Trustees of the late Rt. Hon. Lord Barrymore.

The Preface to the 1933 Catalogue states:

‘Numerically, the principal strength of the collection lies in the Italian pictures; but it includes several examples of other Schools as well, among which latter pride of place undoubtedly belongs to six superb sketches in oil by P. P. Rubens, illustrating the life of Achilles and made for a series of tapestries.

The collection at Marbury Hall is described by Waagen in the supplemental volume, published in 1857, to his well-known work Treasures of Art in Great Britain.
Although Waagen notices a fair number of pictures he expressly states:

‘Besides these there are many pictures placed in dark passages or one over the other, among which are probably some of merit. It was not possible, however, for me to see them.’

A number of paintings from the Marbury Hall collection was seen at the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition in 1857; and from time to time examples from the collection have been contributed to other great exhibitions – eg the Dublin Exhibition of 1872, the ‘Old Masters’ at Burlington House in 1879 and the National Loan Exhibition at the Grafton Galleries in 1909-10. Although famous, the collection in its entirety has, however, remained comparatively little studied; and it may hence be surmised that the pages which follow will offer to collectors and students many pleasant surprises and interesting problems.’

A copy of the Catalogue was loaned courtesy of Lyn McCulloch.

**Sotheby’s Important British Pictures, London, 07 June 2006**

Another painting, formerly in the Collection, came up for sale again in 2006, with an estimate of £60,000 to £80,000:

**Jacob More (1740-1793)**

*The Eruption of Etna, with the Pious Brothers of Catalnia*

Signed and dated Jacob More, Rome 1787, oil on canvas

Acquired from the Artist’s studio by John Smith Barry, Marbury Hall

By descent at Marbury Hall until 1819; Anon sale at Christie’s, 10th April 1992

The Catalogue notes that “John Smith Barry began to acquire art voraciously, and by 1814 there were recorded to have been 325 pictures and over sixty antiquities at Marbury Hall”.

![Eruption of Etna, With the Pious Brothers of Catalnia](image)

*Eruption of Etna, With the Pious Brothers of Catalnia*

*Jacob Moore*
3. **Bronzes, Vases etc and Other Properties**

Sotheby & Co: Catalogue of Egyptian, Greek and Roman Antiquities, Thursday, the 27th July, 1933

The catalogue includes the following lots, listed as “The Property of the late Rt. Hon. Lord Barrymore, removed from Marbury Hall, Northwich Cheshire. [Sold by Order of the Trustees]

**Bronzes**  
Lots 94-101

**Vases, etc**  
Lots 102-114

Lot 113, Head of A Bearded Man, 13 in high; from an Athenian grave-relief of the 4th Century BC.

**Other Properties**  
Lots 115 – 116  
(A Marble Circular Pedestal, Roman and a Marble Life-sized Statue of Elektra or Venus Vietrix, Roman)

A copy of this catalogue was kindly supplied by Sotheby's, New York.
4. **Marbles**

The first major sale of marbles from the Collection took place in 1946.

*Sotheby & Co: Catalogue of Egyptian Antiquities also Roman Statuary, etc. The Property of the late Lord Barrymore of Marbury Hall, Northwich, Cheshire. Monday the 29th July, 1946*

The Catalogue lists Lots 139-161 from Marbury Hall and includes Plates of some of the Marbury items.

*Lot 150: A Group of the Youthful Dionysos and Lot 154: A Statue of a Poet or Philosopher*

A copy of this Catalogue was kindly supplied by Sotheby's, New York.
A portion of the original collection, 14 items of sculpture from the original collection of 45 pieces, appears to have been kept intact much longer, until a sale (by an unnamed Smith Barry descendent) at Christies London House, when ‘Classical Sculpture, formerly from Marbury Hall’, came onto the market on 10 July 1987.

The Introduction to the Catalogue says:

*This is the last substantial portion of the Marbury sculptures to come on to the market. They are important not only for their individual worth, but as a collective legacy of the days of the Grand Tour and the enduring influence of Renaissance Italy on the life and culture of England.*

The guide prices for the 14 pieces totalled £500,000 - £750,000.
One of the 14 pieces in this sale was a bust of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius.

The Catalogue describes the item as follows:

*Lot 6. A marble bust of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius (AD 161 – 180)*

*Condition: ‘detached at neck and rejoined; nose and small areas of drapery restored in the 18th Century; some areas of drapery detached’*

*Estimate: £40,000 - £60,000*

We do not know the price which was realised in 1987.

It is believed that Smith Barry bought this bust from Thomas Jenkins around 1770 for £80.

Retail prices have increased by a factor of 120 since 1770, so £80 then would cost £9,600 in today’s money.

This bust came up for sale again in New York on 5 December 2012, with an estimated price of $800,000 - $1,200,000.

The bust sold at the auction for an impressive $2,042,500.
Examples of Other Marbles from the Marbury Collection

A Marble Figure of Sophocles

1929 photograph of the Entrance Hall at Marbury Hall.

The marble figure of Sophocles is on the right between a figure of Aphrodite and a figure of Paris. The figure stands 46.5 inches (1.14m) high. It was sold from Marbury Hall at Sotheby’s, London on July 29th, 1946.

It came up for sale again at Sotheby’s in 2012, where the figure was estimated at $80,000 to $120,000 and sold for $158,200.


The photograph also shows the Jenkins Vase in the centre of the Hall and the figure of Zeus at front left. The large red Porphyry Urn in the front of the picture, together with the Altar it is standing on, came to market on 10th July 1987, with guide prices totalling £30,000 - £60,000.
Statue of Jupiter  
(The Marbury Hall Zeus)

Portrayed as a mature bearded man, Zeus sits enthroned in his role as king of the gods. This Roman statue dates from the first century A.D. Its model was a statue made by a school of sculptors based in the city of Pergamon in the 100's B.C.

Found in the 1770's in the grounds of the Villa d'Este at Tivoli near Rome, this colossal statue of the king of the gods, called Jupiter by the Romans and Zeus by the Greeks, probably once decorated the Villa of the Emperor Hadrian (reigned AD 117-38), who had a villa very near the findspot. Gavin Hamilton sold the statue to James Hugh Smith Barry, who displayed it at Marbury Hall.

The figure is greater than life size at 81 5 inches (2.07m) high. The base, feet, forearms, tip of nose, eyebrows, back of head and various drapery parts are restored in marble.

J. Paul Getty purchased the Jupiter in 1973 and it is now on view at The Getty Villa Malibu.
The Jenkins Vase

The Jenkins Vase is another noteworthy item in the collection. The original body of the vase is a Roman marble well-head, 100BC-AD, first recorded at Pozzuoli, near Naples, in 1489. The subject of the relief is the marriage of Paris, son of Priam of Troy, to Helen.

Thomas Jenkins probably bought this work in Naples in 1769. At his instigation, the well-head was mounted as a vase, by the addition of a vine leaf frieze and lip above, and cup with Satyr’s head, stem and base below.

In 1770, a papal dispensation from Pope Clement XIV enabled Jenkins and the painter-dealer Gavin Hamilton to manage the dispersal of the Mattei antiquities, which had formed one of the most visited private collections in Rome. Jenkins also dealt in modern works of sculpture and purchased Gian Lorenzo Bernini’s *Neptune and Glaucus* from the gardens of Villa Montalto. This is now conserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum and is the only Bernini sculpture in the UK.

James Hugh Smith Barry purchased what is now known as *The Jenkins Vase* whilst he was on his Grand Tour.

The vase in restored form is 68 inches (1.72m) high.
The vase was housed at Marbury in the Hall. It is uncertain whether it was removed before or after Marbury Hall was turned into a Country Club.

Removal of Jenkins Vase from Marbury

Several negatives showing removal of the vase from Marbury (including this picture) are kept in the Weaver Hall Museum and Workhouse (Cheshire West and Chester Council).

The vase was acquired by the British Museum in 1976 and is now on display in the Cardiff National Gallery.
This figure, another piece from the Collection of James Hugh Smith Barry, first appeared on the market as Lot 151 in the sale held on 29th July 1946.

The item came up for sale again at Sotheby’s New York on 4th June 2014. The catalogue description states:

*Roman Imperial, circa 1st Century A.D., with 18th Century Restorations*

*Estimate $60,000 - $90,000*

Bidding stopped at $55,000 and the figure failed to sell.

We will watch with interest to see when the next piece from the Collection comes on the market!