A brief introduction to the Stirling Maxwell Collection of Emblem Books at the University of Glasgow.
David Weston April 2011

The last forty years have witnessed an increasing interest in emblem literature as a potential key to a fuller understanding of the Renaissance and Baroque mind. At an early stage in this development the importance of the collection of emblem books formed in the 19th century by Sir William Stirling Maxwell was recognised as a major resource for anyone pursuing research in this area. With some 1200 emblem books in the collection in 1958, it proved an invaluable source of information to Mario Praz in the production of his **Studies in seventeenth century imagery**, especially the bibliography, where he frequently refers to copies seen at Nether Pollok, the country house of the Maxwell family now within the boundaries of Glasgow. Since then few works published in emblematics fail to mention the Stirling Maxwell Collection and frequently they are illustrated with prints taken from copies in the collection.

Sir William Stirling Maxwell, writer on Spanish art and history, a discerning and tireless collector of paintings, books and porcelain, a poet, politician, distinguished public figure, and last but not least, a breeder of short-horn cattle and Clydesdale horses, was without doubt a most remarkable figure. Born on the 8th of March, 1818, into the ancient Scottish family of Stirling, plain William Stirling as he was then, was educated privately in Buckinghamshire and later at Trinity College Cambridge. As the only son of Archibald Stirling of Keir, he inherited his father's estates in 1847, and subsequently, on the death of his uncle Sir John Maxwell of Pollok, he inherited the title, acquiring the additional name of Maxwell.

In public life Sir William was Member of Parliament, and Rector successively of St. Andrews and Edinburgh Universities. He was also Chancellor of Glasgow University from 1875-7.

He was married twice, first to Anna, daughter of Lord Leven, by whom he had two sons. She died in 1874, and in 1877 he married the poetess, novelist and noted campaigner for married women's rights, Caroline Norton. She was a friend of long standing, who, tragically, was seriously ill when they married and who died later the

same year. Sir William himself succumbed to a fever while in Venice, and died on January 15th 1878.

In addition to forming a substantial library he was a noted art connoisseur forming one of the strongest private collections of Spanish painting in Great Britain at the time. This interest was given scholarly expression in his book the **Annals of the artists of Spain**. First published in 1848, this extensive work can be justly regarded as pioneering on several counts. It was written in English, and for many years afterwards remained the only authoritative study on Spanish painting in that language. It was also one of the earliest works to be illustrated with photographs.

He published two further scholarly works of enduring importance, **The cloister life of the Emperor Charles V** (1852) and **Don Juan of Austria** (1883).

The acquisition of books clearly figured prominently amongst his several passions, and he purchased avidly from the major London salerooms and during his extensive travels abroad.

In 1860 he published privately **An essay towards a collection of books relating to proverbs, emblems, apophthegms, epitaphs and ana,** a catalogue of books in his collection, which in addition to 255 emblem books (less than a quarter of what he would own by the end of his life) included over 100 more proverb and ana books than were listed in the standard bibliography of Duplessis the **Bibliographie parémiologique** of 1847.

Stirling Maxwell recognised the emblem as a close relative of the proverb, the former sometimes being, in many respects, an illustrated version of the latter. His fascination with proverbs is also displayed in several articles on the subject such as 'The proverbial wisdom of Scotland' 'A few Spanish proverbs about Friars' and 'Wit and wisdom from West Africa'.

We can date the start of Stirling Maxwell's collecting of emblem books to about 1843, at the age of 25, four years after graduating B.A. from Trinity College and one year

after returning from travelling abroad mainly in the Middle East and Spain. From the provenances of his books we can determine the source of many items in his collection. He acquired volumes from the several 19th century collections of emblem books such as the White Knights Library, formed by George the Marquis of Blandford, the Reverend Henry White of Lichfield and the Reverend James Ford. Then in 1869 and 1870 respectively, two important emblem collections were offered at auction, enabling Stirling Maxwell to add considerably to his own. One of these had been formed by the Revd Thomas Corser, a friend of Henry Green the bibliographer of Alciato, containing around 227 titles. the other was that of John Wilson Rimington, perhaps the largest ever assembled prior to Stirling Maxwell's own, boasting some 358 emblematic titles, including 29 editions of Alciato.

Through his close association with Richard Monckton Milnes, Lord Houghton, with whom he founded the Philobiblon Society, he was introduced to the main literary circles of Victorian London. Amongst the people he met were the novelist William Makepeace Thackeray, the poet Algernon Charles Swinburne and several lesser known writers such as William Michael Rossetti, the brother of the painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and an original member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.

Victorian Britain witnessed a renewed interest in the emblem: this should be viewed against the background of a growing concern for symbolism and typology, not only in literature and painting, but also in the sphere of religion. Both the Tractarian Movement within the Church of England, and the Pre-Raphaelites sought to recapture something of a lost Mundus symbolicus, which resulted in a form of romanticised mediaevalism. With such a cultural milieu in mind it becomes easier to contextualise Stirling Maxwell's emblem collecting.

After Sir William's death in 1878 his estate was divided between his two sons, John and Archibald. The library at Keir House, comprising the principally of the four major scholarly collections assembled by Sir William, on the Arts of design, Emblems, Proverbs and Ana was then transferred to the Pollok estate, and remained there until Sir John died in 1956, aged 90.

As a consequence of Sir John's will, in 1958 the University Library received an addition to its holdings of some 1,200 emblem books together with ca 300 fete and ceremonial books and other illustrated books on architecture and art. Since acquired, the collection has grown by another 400 or so volumes.

The majority of emblematical works stem from the Renaissance and Baroque periods, however, there are also many from the 18th and early 19th centuries. These latter demonstrate the demise of the genre- from the level of literature with serious pretensions to that of pedagogical tool for the inculcation of moral and religious values, or devotional texts within Dissenting circles. In the Victorian period, however, works by John Leighton, James Ford, employing wood engraving and the Holbein Society reprints, using the latest photolithographic techniques, testify to the significant resurgence of interest in the emblem as an expressive form and growing awareness of its importance to the study of earlier literature, which took place in 19th century Britain.

Of the 170 or so separate editions of Andrea Alciato's **Emblematum liber** identified by his 19th century bibliographer, Henry Green, Glasgow possesses 88, 65 of which were printed in the 16th century, 46 of these in Latin. Copies of the first and second editions of Augsburg 1531, issued within six weeks of each other by Heinrich Steyner are present.

The early humanistic emblem books are well represented by eight sixteenth century editions of the **Emblemata** of Hadrianus Junius, seven sixteenth century editions of the **Emblemata** of the Hungarian born Joannes Sambucus, and several works by the German Nicholas Reusner.

Editions of almost all the early French emblem books are present in the collection, and apart from two items, Glasgow possesses the full corpus of the French 16th century output. Whereas in Italy and France the emblem had taken firm root by around 1560, England, (as in much associated with the Renaissance), had to wait a native product to emerge.   This came in 1596 in the form of Geffrey Whitney's **A choice of emblemes**, printed, however, at Antwerp by Plantin.

The collection also holds what appears to be the only surviving copy of the first edition of Thomas Combe's translation of La Perrière's, **Le theâtre des bons engins** of 1593. A comparison of the Stirling Maxwell copy of **The theater of fine devices** with a facsimile of the only known copy of the 1614 edition, has revealed two discrete settings of type.

Of the other early English emblem writers we have George Wither's Collection of emblemes, the Jesuit Henry Hawkins' **Partheneia Sacra**, Henry Peacham's **Minerva Britanna**, Christopher Harvey's School of the heart and **Emblemata amatoria** of Phillip Ayres. Before leaving the English scene, it would be inexcusable not to mention our 26 editions of the perennially popular **Emblemes** of Francis Quarles, ranging from the first edition of London 1635.

From 17th century Germany there are 17 editions of works by Georg Philipp Harsdörfer including the first edition of his **Stechbüchlein**. The German Baroque is also represented by several works by the Catholic preacher Abraham à Sacta Clara, the poets Martin Limburger, Georg Neumark, Johann Michael Dillherr and the Rosicrucian inspired **Emblematum ethico-politicorum centuria** by Julius Wilhelm Zincgref.

In an article by Karel Porteman (formerly of Leuven University) he stated that the Dutch language section of the Stirling Maxwell Collection is impressive in its coverage. Amongst the many rare items held are translations by marc Anthonius Gillis of both Sambucus and Junius published by Plantin in 1566 and 1567 respectively. In the Netherlands in the 17th century the emblem book found especially fertile ground, the works of Roemer Visscher, De Brune, Luyken and of course Jacob Cats, parallel Dutch genre-painting in their handling of the commonplace, scenes from everyday life and proverbial wisdom. Another peculiar contribution of the Low Countries to the emblem corpus, the liefdesembleem, or love emblem is exemplified in the work of Daniel Heinsius, Otto van Veen, P.C. Hooft and many others.

The strong religious complexion of the period is also reflected in the many Jesuit emblem books. According to Richard Dimler S.J., in the Flemish Province alone between 1587 and 1710, the Society was responsible for 64 emblem books). Many of these are in the collection, including two of the most influential, the **Pia desideria** by

Hermann Hugo, which we possess in 31 different editions, and **Typus mundi**, issued by the Jesuit College at Antwerp in 1627. Both these works formed the basis of the highly successful, English emblem book by Francis Quarles.

Present too are 30 editions of the most seminal of Spanish emblem books - the **Idea de un principe politico-christiano** by a prominent figure of the late Counter-Reformation, Don Diego Saavedra Fajardo. This collection of political emblems was first published at Munich in 1640, while Don Diego was at the court of Maximilian, Duke of Bavaria. It was subsequently translated into six languages, including English in 1700.

Twenty-three of the thirty-four Spanish emblem writers identified by Pedro Campa in his annotated bibliography, **Emblemata Hispanica** are represented in the collection. Also present is an extremely rare item, un-recorded by Campa, an edition of the **Emblemas morales** of Juan Horozco y Covarrubias, published at Agrigenti in Sicily in 1601.

Of the more exotic emblem books in the collection, mention should be made of the emblematic encyclopaedia published at the behest of Peter the Great, in 1705 at Amsterdam, **Symbola et emblemata**; it has texts in Russian and seven other languages. A later version of this work was issued in 1788, edited by a certain Ukrainian doctor called Nestor Maksimovich-Ambodik. It figures in Turgenev's novel 'A nest of the gentry' as the boy Fyedya's Sunday afternoon entertainment.

In addition, the collection has two further emblem books with Russian texts, Jean Baptiste Boudard's **Iconologie** of Moscow, 1803 and an extremely scarce and hitherto unidentified Russian translation of Johann Saubert's **Duodekas emblematum sacrorum**, published at Moscow in 1743.

No emblem books printed in North America were originally in Stirling Maxwell's collection. This situation was altered in 1990 when a copy of the **Religious emblems** by William Holmes and John Barbour (Cincinnati 1851) was acquired. Three more, one German and two English editions of **The heart of man, either a temple of God or a habitation of Satan represented in ten emblematical figures** were added earlier

this year. All published in Mennonite region of Reading in Pennsylvania they testify to the continuing popularity of the emblematic genre amongst pietistic circles.