

Queen's University Library

Edward Gibbon and the Age of Quarto

Library Exhibit, 21 September - 2 December 2011

Thanks to the generosity of a donor, the Library has recently acquired a set of the first editions of Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-1788). To commemorate this acquisition, Special Collections in Douglas Library is hosting an exhibition, **Edward Gibbon and the Age of Quarto**. The exhibition illustrates the shifts in format, for the publication of new poetry, history, philosophy, etc, from folio to quarto to octavo, during the period from about 1700 to 1830.

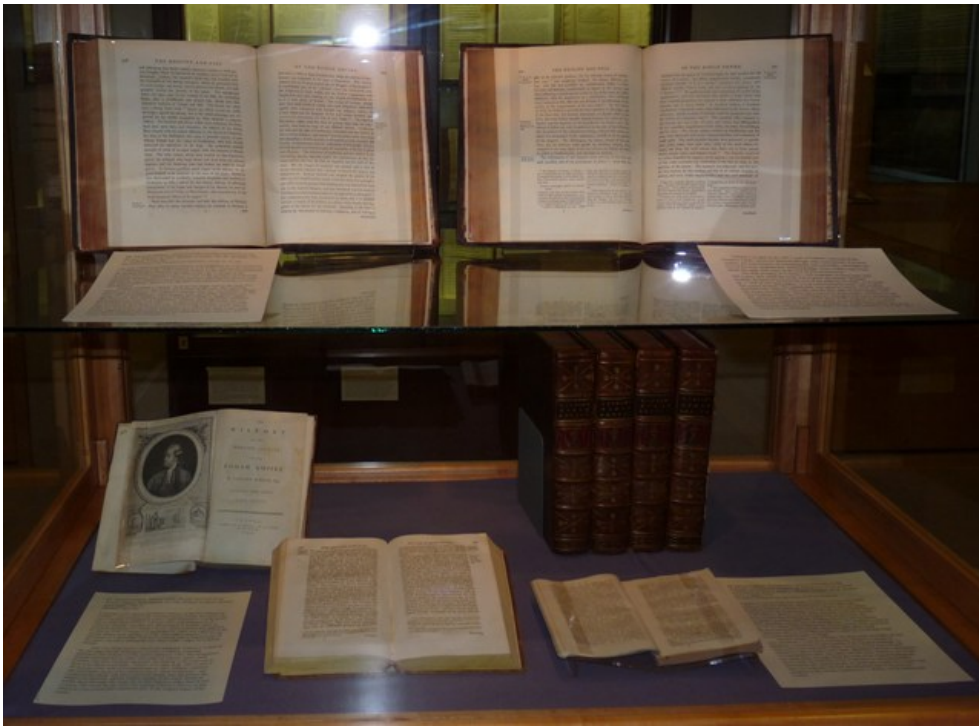


In the seventeenth century, the folio was the most prestigious format for serious books. Between 1715 and 1740, the quarto format ousted the folio, which came to seem old-fashioned and outmoded. About 1810, the quarto itself gave place to the octavo, the approximate size of the modern hardback. Examples of all these formats are in the exhibition. In many instances, the same text is shown in two formats, to show how differently they looked and how different they would have been to read.

The exhibition is in three parts:

1. At the entrance to Douglas Library, one case explains the meaning of folio, quarto, and octavo, and contains examples of the works of John Locke in the different formats.
2. In Special Collections (Douglas Library, Level 6, Floor 2), seven cases trace the rise and decline of the quarto. Case 3 (illustrated below) includes the new set of Gibbon's History.
3. The north case on the main floor in Stauffer Library uses some of Jane Austen's references to folios, quartos, and octavos to illustrate the theme of the exhibition. Included is Charles Pasley's *Essay on the Military Policy and Institutions of the British Empire*, a book that so enchanted Austen that she declared she was 'in love with the author'.

Most readers now encounter these texts in modern formats, in anthologies, in small paperbacks, or even in digitized forms. Here is a chance to see what such seminal texts as Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* looked like when they were first printed, and the book that so impressed Jane Austen.



The exhibit was curated by Fred Lock

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