

HODGSON & CO

1807 - 1967

As has already been announced, the firm of Hodgson & Co. is leaving its Chancery Lane sale-room, and the October Sale is likely to be the last held by the firm. A few notes on its history may therefore be of interest.

The firm was founded in 1807 by Robert Saunders. The earliest known catalogue is that of a sale of a "Most Valuable and Select Library of Books" held by him at Reading, and the next is of a Sale held at his Rooms, 14 Old Compton Street, Soho, in 1808. In May of that year Saunders moved to 39 Fleet Street (opposite St. Dunstan's Church) which had long been known as "The Poets' Gallery". It was there that the Library of David Garrick was sold on 23rd April, 1823, and nine following days. By 1826 Saunders had been joined by Edmund Hodgson, whose family had been closely connected with the trade since his grandfather came to London from Dent, in Yorkshire, in about 1750 and had started business as a stationer and bookseller in Marylebone.

Edmund Hodgson took control of the firm in 1828 and shortly afterwards moved to 192 Fleet Street, at the east corner of Chancery Lane. He not only developed the business of Sales by Auction to a considerable extent, but also held many Trade Sales, which continued until 1888. These were not public sales, but were usually held at the Albion Tavern, in Aldersgate Street, and were attended on invitation by members of the Trade.

In 1855 the firm moved to new premises at No.2 Chancery Lane, adjoining the previous rooms. Probably the most important Library dispersed here was that of the College of Advocates in 1861, which formed an eight-day sale of 2,456 lots. In 1863 the firm made another move, this time to its present premises at No.115. This building was specially designed as a book sale-room and stands to-day just as when first built.

Edmund Hodgson, who had been Master of the Stationers' Company in 1866-7, retired in 1867 in favour of his sons, Barnard Becket and Henry Hill. A few years later, on the retirement of Barnard in 1871, Henry Hill assumed the management of the business, and continued in that capacity up to 1900. He became Master of the Stationers' Company in 1907, the Centenary Year of the firm, when a dinner was held in the sale-room attended by several eminent bibliophiles and nearly all the leading members of the book-trade.

On his retirement in 1900, Henry Hill was succeeded by his two sons, John Edmund and Sidney, who had joined the firm some years previously, having first acquired experience of the book-trade, the former with Bickers and Son in Leicester Square, and the latter with David Nun, the foreign book-seller, in the Strand. This partnership remained unchanged for nearly 50 years, an eventful period which covered some of the most important sales in the firm's history and also both World Wars. Sales continued to be held in 1914-18, Mr. John being mainly responsible; Mr. Sidney was in the Army but was stationed near London and spent most of his off-duty hours in Chancery Lane. During the Second War there was a brief gap in sales in the Autumn of 1939, but the two partners, with only a skeleton staff, were able to resume in 1940,

and sales were continued regularly throughout the rest of the War, even during the air-raids, though reduced in frequency to about one a month.

Mr. Wilfrid Hodgson, son of Mr. Sidney, who had joined the firm in 1934 (but had been in the Army throughout the War), became a partner in 1947. Mr. John died in 1952, Mr. Sidney and Mr. Wilfrid continuing the business to the present time.

Among other interests of the partners may be mentioned the well-known Collection of Aeronautica formed by Mr. John, which is now in the Library of the Royal Aeronautical Society; his book on the History of Aeronautics in Great Britain (1924) is still considered one of the most important works on the subject. Mr. Sidney has kept up the family connection with the Stationers' Company and was Master in 1949-50 (Mr. Wilfrid is also a Liveryman). He was on the Council of the Bibliographical Society for many years and is a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries. Incidentally, Mr. Sidney held for many years the "world-record" price realised for a single book. This was in 1911, after he had been helping to catalogue the Hoe Library in New York; he was invited to take the sale on the evening that the Gutenberg Bible came up and it realised \$50,000.

The total number of Sales held by Hodgson & Co. amounts to approximately 5,500. Space will only allow mention of a very few of the most important, including those of Edward Dowden (1913), A. M. Broadley (1916-18), Joseph Conrad (1925), H. T. Butler (19M), Thomas Hardy (1938), Castle Howard (1944), the Howard Pease set of the four Shakespeare Folios (1948), Shipdham Church (1951), the Ernest Newman Music Library (1959), Lord Rayleigh (1962) and the Natural History Books from Waloot Hall (1963 and 1967).

In conclusion it is interesting to look back to a few of the more important individual items sold (with date of sale and price realised):

Weymouth's Discoverie of Virginia, 1605, £1060, in the Cassiobury Park Library (1923); Shelley's Adonais, 1821, £2000, in the Milnes Gaskell Library (1924); Bunyan's Book for Boys and Girls, 1686, £2100 (1926); Milton's Lycidas, 1638 (found in a volume of tracts), £1400 (1926); 20 volumes of MS. News-letters, 1673-1715, from Arbury Hall, £2100 (1956); Blaeu's Atlas, 12 vols., 1663, £3300 (1960); Maxiinilian's Travels in North America, 1844, £2000 (1964); The "He" Bible, 1611, £1900, and Redouté, Les Liliacées, 8 vols, 1802-16, £5200 (1967).

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Reproduced from a leaflet included with the catalogue for the sale on 26th and 27th October 1967 which was the last held by the firm before take over by Sotheby's. The property remained in the possession of Hodgson & Co but was used by Sotheby's as a book sale-room until 1981 when Wilfrid Hodgson retired. The property then became a wine bar and restaurant which is still known as Hodgson's Rooms to this day.