

PROSPECTUS

HOLKHAM LIBRARY



A HISTORY AND DESCRIPTION

D.P. MORTLOCK

WITH A FOREWORD BY
THE EARL OF LEICESTER

For presentation to members of the
ROXBURGHE CLUB
BY LORD LEICESTER



I remember, when we were foxhunters and a long day's sport had rather tired than satisfied us, we often passed the evening in reading the Ancient Authors, when the Beauty of their Language, the Strength and Justness of their Thoughts, for ever glowing with a Noble Spirit of Liberty, made us forget not only the pains, but the pleasures of the day.

from Henry Spelman's *The Expedition of Cyrus* dedicated to Thomas Coke

HOLKHAM HALL IS at the heart of a great estate of over 25,000 acres and lies close to the sea on the windswept coast of North Norfolk. For nearly three hundred years it has been the principal home of the Coke family



All the statuary, most of the pictures, and much of the furniture was acquired in the eighteenth century, and are appreciated today not only by the family who live there, but by the thousands who visit the Hall every summer. There is, however, one treasure that tourists can only glimpse briefly and that is the library. Holkham possesses one of the world's finest private libraries, a magnificent and in some respects unique collection, but apart from the four ranges of massive folios in the South Tribune, the remainder of the ten thousand or so volumes of printed books and manuscripts are housed in separate libraries in the private apartments to which access is necessarily restricted. Virtually the entire collection was acquired by the builder of Holkham, Thomas Coke, 1st Earl of Leicester (1697–1759) (except for those books formerly in

the library of the great lawyer Sir Edward Coke [1552–1634] and now held at Holkham). Thomas Coke was an avid participant in all country pursuits, but from a very young age he applied himself to and much enjoyed the classics. His scholarly bent was reflected in his purchases: he bought books and manuscripts for their intellectual interest and not necessarily their beauty. He studied architecture in Rome, and while he was there he bought a first edition of Palladio's *I quattro libri dell'architettura*. That interest and his liberal education found their ultimate expression in the building of Holkham with all its classical allusions.

In this volume D. P. (Sam) Mortlock writes a thorough and entertaining description of the library, its history and its collections. Beautifully illustrated in full colour with 56 reproductions of pages from selected titles, it shows the astonishing range of books in the three main libraries of one of Britain's most glorious houses. It also give a very rare glimpse of the jewels sitting on the shelves of a library that began in the seventeenth century and is still being added to today.

A 1630s French Royal binding: François Véron Responses aux livres des quatre ministres de Charenton Virgil, with miniature by the Luçon Master, c. 1410

que nascitur inter capre et hircos in cetera cunctis amara
 horribilior non capris: Amara id est ad rem sapientem, nec
 capris dulces sunt: A rura id est manna quia non viscerant
 aut morderunt: Salsura id est manna antiquiora sunt mol
 les id est manna: Et periti id est ceterum lac manna emilla
 aut cetera firmiora id est ad suspensum ad ceteram precipitandum
 manna id est dupliciter regnum: umbra vox inuict.



Somolum pastor: condon tuncque alicui
 Delicias dñi: nec quid spernet habebat:

Tantum inter densas umbrosa cacumina fagos
 A stue nemebat: ibi rex in corda solus
 A duntibus et silvis studio iactabat manam:

Saudelis alexi nichil mea carmina quis
 N il nostri miserat: non me deniq: cogis;
 Nunc etiam pedes umbras: et fragos: caprant.



The Long Library

Presented to the Roxburghe Club by Lord Leicester, March 2006
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