

## Preface

The Topham collection first came to my attention many years ago in a footnote to an article by M. V. Taylor, who mentioned that it contained a coloured copy of a print of the Stonesfield mosaic.<sup>1</sup> As I was familiar with other copies of the print in question it did not seem a priority, but I tucked this information away to follow up at a later date when circumstances permitted.

I eventually visited Eton College Library, where the Topham collection is held, on a bitterly cold day in early December 2004. The main purpose was to look at the print but I was curious to see what else there might be in the same album (Bm.9).

As well as two copies of the Stonesfield print – one coloured and one uncoloured – the album contained an original watercolour of the mosaic signed by William Webb, which was exciting to encounter. Taylor was aware from Thomas Hearne's diaries that a drawing of the Stonesfield mosaic had been made at the time of discovery by a man named Webb,<sup>2</sup> but her information came from Francis Haverfield's papers.<sup>3</sup> Neither Taylor nor Haverfield had studied the Topham collection themselves and seen this drawing. Although Webb's watercolour was subsequently noted by Tom Freshwater,<sup>4</sup> it had never been reproduced.

Turning the page, I saw that the next item in the album was a particularly elegant version of Richard Bradley's watercolour of part of the Great Pavement at Woodchester. This was followed by a watercolour of the birds mosaic from Caerleon, previously known only from the small and crudely drawn plate in Gibson's edition of Camden's *Britannia*.<sup>5</sup>

It was so captivating to see these records of figured mosaics, which are my main area of study, that I merely noted in passing a drawing showing a fragment of an apparently geometric mosaic with a caption written in Latin. It was not until much later that I realised this was a unique illustration of the mosaic found in the garden of the Bishop's Palace in Chichester with the hint of a possible figure.<sup>6</sup>

Two other drawings seen on the initial visit particularly caught my eye. One was a beautiful record by Bernard Lens showing four views of the well known head of Minerva found at Bath.<sup>7</sup> This made me curious to learn whether Topham had collected drawings of other Romano-British artefacts, although it turned out that he had few records of such items apart from the small collection of drawings of mosaics. The other drawing I was particularly intrigued to see was a sketch of the Rape of Europa mosaic from the Baths of Caracalla, which I discovered was thought to be the only record of it.<sup>8</sup>

The contents of the album exerted such a fascination that I have been working on the collection on and off ever since. It was my initial intention to focus on the Romano-British items and on Topham himself but I was keen to set this work into the context of the collection as a whole. I therefore made further visits to Eton to look through the entire collection of drawings and prints, with a view to identifying those relating to mosaics and to assessing the extent of Topham's interest in them.

The albums of prints form a relatively small proportion of the collection as a whole, which numbers nearly 3,000 items. Topham's main focus was on the acquisition of original drawings, many of which are known to have been commissioned by him. It might be usual in a book of this nature to focus only on the drawings but some of the prints collected by Topham are particularly important: a set of 12 items relating to tombs in Rome, four of which include mosaics, are an apparently unique survival from a failed publication project by Ficoroni.<sup>9</sup>

I was interested to know more about the man himself and began by consulting articles by Louisa Connor and Paul Quarrie, former members of Eton's staff. These were a valuable starting point. Thereafter, whenever I was visiting a library or archive for other research I would also check for anything relevant to Richard Topham. In addition, I spent some time in the public library in Windsor reading up on all the references to Topham that I could find. This was followed by many visits to the British Library to consult original material and rare books.

My aim has been to collate factual information about Topham and to assess what has already been written about him. Jeremy Potter has kindly read and commented on Chapter

<sup>1</sup> Taylor 1941, 5, n.2.

<sup>2</sup> Taylor 1941, 2, n.3, describing it as 'an inaccurate sketch'; 3, n.2.

<sup>3</sup> Then in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, and now held in the Sackler Library, Oxford.

<sup>4</sup> Freshwater 2000, esp. 6, 25, n.27, and fig.1, giving a 'family tree' of known sketches of this mosaic.

<sup>5</sup> Gibson II, 75, no. 7 in the 1722 edition owned by Topham.

<sup>6</sup> These drawings are all discussed in detail in Chapter 7. They are designated Bm.9:82 and Bm.9:83 (the coloured and uncoloured Stonesfield prints), Bm.9:75 (Webb's watercolour), Bm.9:76 (Woodchester), Bm.9:77 (Caerleon) and Bm.9:78 (Chichester).

<sup>7</sup> Bm.9:72.

<sup>8</sup> Bm.9:74, discussed by Wattel-de Croizant 1995, 119, 129, n.25. During the course of writing this book I have realised that the Topham collection contains another drawing of the same mosaic, albeit with a different centrepiece (Bn.5:42).

<sup>9</sup> Bn.13:6-Bn.13:17, discussed by de Polignac 2007.

2 and has generously shared his notes. He emphasises that Topham was a pioneer in the study of classical art at a critical period in the development of knowledge of the ancient world and of modern thought. It is beyond my remit to consider in detail the sort of education Topham is likely to have acquired, the extent of his knowledge of the classical world, and how he came to be inspired to create his collection. Another area outside the scope of this book, primarily because most of the evidence is lacking, is whether Topham and other collectors of the period used the same sets of dealers/agents to acquire their drawings, and what networks might have existed between them. I hope, however, that my research will encourage others to broaden the scope of the work and to add to our awareness of the context in which Topham and his fellow collectors lived.

I have a longstanding interest in antiquarian records of Romano-British mosaics and have compared the Topham drawings of these items with those in other collections, notably the Bodleian Library in Oxford, the British Library, and the library of the Society of Antiquaries of London. This has highlighted what is special about the Topham items and has added to our understanding of the early recording of the important mosaics from Stonesfield and Woodchester.

I am able to bring more background knowledge to the Romano-British items than I can offer for the mosaics from Italy, but I hope that the observations on the latter in this book might be helpful to others. For comparative material, I took the decision early on to focus on major collections within Britain but not to attempt to visit collections abroad, especially since the most relevant material has been published comprehensively or is available online.

It was a privilege to visit Holkham Hall in Norfolk, particularly since the drawings held there are items which Topham himself had scrutinised and compared with the versions in his collection. At Glasgow University Library, the superb album of drawings by Pietro Santi Bartoli, the father of one of Topham's most prolific artists, offered invaluable background.

Before finalising this book, it had been my intention to visit the RIBA collections at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and the Royal Collection at Windsor to see their holdings of comparative material for myself. This was thwarted by the advent of Covid-19 but fortunately almost all of the key material has been published or can be accessed online. In uncertain times, it has seemed preferable to finish the work so that it is available to others rather than risk keeping it in abeyance indefinitely.

By providing a detailed discussion of one category of the Topham drawings in the context of the comparative material, I hope this book will serve as a useful complement to the pioneering work carried out by Rodolfo Lanciani and Thomas Ashby over 100 years ago<sup>10</sup> and that it will

encourage specialists with greater knowledge of the other collections to undertake further analysis.

The main aim of this book is the simple one of making the drawings and prints of mosaics in the Topham collection better known and readily accessible. Most are published here for the first time. The 14<sup>th</sup> Colloquium of AIEMA (l'Association internationale pour l'Étude de la Mosaïque antique) held in Nicosia in October 2018 provided the opportunity to introduce Richard Topham to an international audience and to give a brief introduction to his collection.<sup>11</sup> The interest it sparked on that occasion was greatly encouraging.

When I set out to write up many years of work on Topham and his collection, I anticipated that it would fit into a relatively straightforward article. It was intended to offer some light relief between lengthier, more demanding, projects. The fact that it took on a life of its own and expanded into something rather more extensive is a testament to the importance and fascination of the drawings and their collector.

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September 2021

<sup>10</sup> Lanciani 1894; Lanciani 1895; Ashby 1914.

<sup>11</sup> Witts forthcoming.