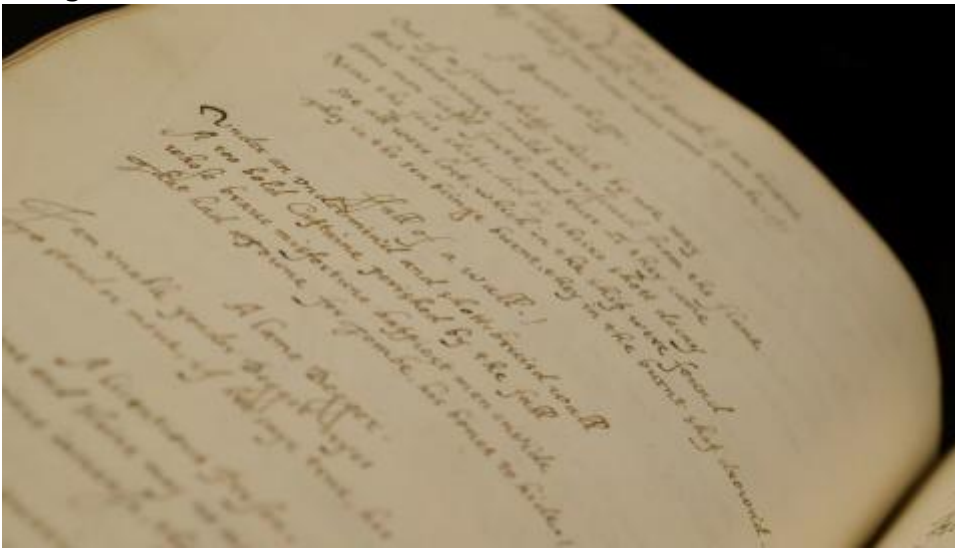


British Library acquires rare 17th century manuscript by poet John Donne

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Recently discovered manuscript constitutes one of the largest and earliest surviving groups of Donne's verse which has yet to be studied

Image



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John Donne Melford Hall manuscript

The British Library has acquired the Melford Hall manuscript, a rare 17th-century volume of poetry by John Donne (1572 – 1631), one of the best known poets of the late Tudor and early Stuart periods.

Discovered in Melford Hall, Suffolk in 2018, the manuscript comprises more than 130 poems by Donne and is one of the five largest collections of scribal copies of Donne material. Encompassing the whole range of Donne's works the collection is of outstanding importance to the nation's heritage.

The Melford Hall manuscript includes famous verse such as:

- *The Calme,*
- *To his Mistress Going to Bed*
- *The Breake of Daye*
- *Sunn Risinge*

Contemporary of William Shakespeare

A contemporary of William Shakespeare, Donne's works were written in manuscript copy for circulation among select social groups rather than for publication.

In 2019, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport announced a temporary export bar on the work in a bid to save it for the nation.

The acquisition

The British Library's acquisition was made possible with a grant from the National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF) and funding from the British Library Collections Trust, the Friends of the National Libraries and the American Trust for the British Library, with thanks to Paul Chrzanowski and Patrick Donovan.

Dr Alexander Lock, Curator of Modern Archives and Manuscripts at the British Library, said: 'The British Library's mission is to make our intellectual heritage accessible to everyone and the discovery of this collection of poems presents a major new resource for scholarship. The Melford Hall manuscript provides evidence as to how Donne's poetry was written, copied and circulated, as well as helping to further shape our understanding of his audiences and patrons.'

Gilt-edged paper

Created in the early 17th century, the 400-page volume features text written in iron gall ink on gilt-edged paper and is bound in a quarto gilt panelled calf binding with an oval centrepiece.

René Olivieri, Interim Chair of the NHMF, said: "Following its discovery in Suffolk in 2018, the National Heritage Memorial Fund is delighted to support the British Library in the acquisition of this rare manuscript of John Donne's works. In the year that marks the 40th anniversary of the NHMF we are proud that this important piece of scholarly heritage is among the wide range of iconic artefacts that NHMF has played a vital role in saving for the nation."

The Melford Hall manuscript is [available online for everyone](#) and will be available to researchers through the British Library's Reading Rooms in 2021.