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Saving the nation's written and printed heritage

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The Honresfield Library: saved for the nation

Friends of the National Libraries saves literary treasure trove for the nation in an unprecedented rescue of the UK's literary heritage

- *Friends of the National Libraries (FNL) has successfully raised over £15 million to acquire the Honresfield Library for the nation*
- *The collection includes manuscripts by the Brontës, Jane Austen, Robert Burns and Sir Walter Scott*
- *FNL will donate every manuscript and printed book to libraries and writers' houses across the UK so that they are accessible to everyone*

FNL, the leading UK charity devoted to saving the nation's written and printed heritage, is delighted to announce that it has successfully raised over £15 million to acquire the Honresfield Library for the nation. This library was formed towards the end of the 19th century by William Law (1836-1901), a Rochdale mill owner, who created an exceptional collection of English and Scottish manuscripts and printed books which had the Brontës at its heart, as well as manuscripts in the hands of Jane Austen, Robert Burns and Sir Walter Scott and a significant collection of printed books. It has been largely inaccessible for the last 80 years.

When the sale of the library in three tranches was announced in May 2021, FNL successfully encouraged Sotheby's, the agents for the vendors, to postpone the sale of the first tranche planned for July 2021 in order to give FNL the opportunity to purchase the entire collection outright on behalf of appropriate recipient libraries within the UK.

FNL has successfully raised £15.3 million, of which the purchase price is £15 million, and the balance a combination of VAT and fees. FNL's success has ensured that the collection will remain permanently in the public domain and will never be lost to overseas institutions or to private collections that are not accessible to the public.

Principal benefactor

FNL, and its consortium of libraries and writers' houses, are profoundly grateful to our lead donor Sir Leonard Blavatnik who has, with exceptional munificence, match-funded the sum raised by FNL and the consortium institutions. He has donated half the purchase price. In recognition of his great generosity the collection will henceforth be known as the Blavatnik Honresfield Library.

It is an extraordinary donation, the largest ever given to the UK by an individual for a literary treasure, safeguarding for the nation the most significant collection of manuscripts and books at risk of dispersal for many decades.

Royal Patron HRH The Prince of Wales

Chairman Georgie Greig | Hon. Treasurer Charles Sebag-Montefiore FSA FCA | Secretary Nell Hoare MBE FSA

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Other benefactors

This acquisition has also been made possible thanks to the vital and generous support of the National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF). The NHMF's grant of £4 million is the largest it has ever awarded towards the acquisition of literary manuscripts since its foundation in 1980.

Success would also not have been possible without the hugely generous support of each of the consortium institutions and of very many funders including The Prince of Wales Charitable Foundation, The Murray Family, Camelot Group, The Foyle Foundation, The David Cock Foundation, The T S Eliot Foundation, Hugh and Catherine Stevenson; Berkeley Foundation; British Library Collections Trust; American Trust for the British Library; B. H. Breslauer Fund of the American Trust for the British Library; The Ardeola Trust; The Vogel-Denebeim Family, and the Penchant Foundation.

In addition, many philanthropists, trusts and foundations contributed to our endeavour who prefer to remain anonymous, often with substantial gifts, but the FNL is equally grateful to them all. We are also enormously grateful to the thousands of individuals who made personal donations to our appeal.

Summary of contents of the Blavatnik Honresfield library

At the heart of the Blavatnik Honresfield Library lies an astonishing set of manuscripts in the hands of Charlotte, Emily and Anne Brontë, much of which has been unseen for 80 years and never properly examined. It includes seven of Charlotte Brontë's famous 'little books', each of which is a work of art; a manuscript collection of poems by Anne Brontë; some 25 letters by Charlotte Brontë; and a small but exquisite autograph manuscript diary note shared by Emily and Anne Brontë. The absolute jewel of the Brontë collection is Emily Brontë's holograph notebook of 31 poems, believed by many scholars to have been lost. This poetry notebook carries annotations in Charlotte's hand. The printed treasures of the sisters include Emily Brontë's own annotated copy of their first publication, the exceptionally rare *Poems* of 1846, and fine presentation copies of first editions of their novels in their original cloth bindings.

The collection also includes the complete working manuscript of Sir Walter Scott's iconic novel *Rob Roy*, part of the autograph manuscript of Scott's verse romance, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, his light-hearted travel journal of a voyage off the Scottish coast in 1814, a copy of *Border Antiquities* with extensive manuscript revisions, and an exceptional group of Scott first editions in their original condition. Other Scottish material of huge importance is an early volume of poems by Robert Burns in his own hand - containing some of his earliest recorded literary works - known as the 'First Commonplace Book', as well as individual autograph poems ('Cessnock Banks' and the 'Brigs of Ayr'), and a group of the poet's earliest correspondence, including the only extant letter to his beloved father.

Jane Austen is represented by two hugely significant letters to her sister Cassandra. One is the earliest known surviving autograph letter (dated January 1796), written on the eve of a ball where Austen anticipates the end of a love affair. Early autograph Austen letters are extremely rare: only three are held in any UK national collection, the bulk being in the Morgan Library, New York. The second letter dates from 1813 and discusses the reception of both *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*. The collection also includes rare first editions of *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma*, and *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* in their original condition.

Outline of policy on allocation

FNL will donate all of the manuscripts and printed books to relevant institutions across the country, ensuring that as many people as possible can enjoy this treasure trove of English and Scottish literature. At the end of the exercise, FNL will retain nothing and will have given every manuscript and printed book to recipient libraries.

FNL has taken a completely novel approach to this acquisition, leading a consortium of eight national, university and specialist collecting institutions to which all of the manuscripts will be donated by FNL. The c.1,400 printed books will be donated not only to the consortium members but also to a large number of institutions across the UK, spreading the benefit of the Blavatnik Honresfield Library still further.

The consortium members will receive (some as outright gifts and some via joint ownership with another library within the group) manuscripts and annotated or associated copies of printed books by the following authors:

Charlotte, Emily and Anne Brontë

The British Library, London and Yorkshire
The Brontë Parsonage Museum, Haworth
The Brotherton Library, University of Leeds

Jane Austen

The Bodleian Library, Oxford
Jane Austen's House, Chawton

Sir Walter Scott

The National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh and Glasgow
Abbotsford: The Home of Walter Scott, Melrose, Scotland.

Robert Burns

The National Library of Scotland
The Robert Burns Birthplace Museum, Alloway (National Trust for Scotland)

Details of the manuscripts that will be donated to each institution will be announced soon, as will plans for digitisation, exhibitions, education and outreach and also research projects.

Conclusion

The benefits of this endeavour are manifold. The literary cornucopia will now belong permanently to the public domain in the UK. The manuscripts and printed books which have been inaccessible for some 80 years, will now all be available for study by scholars, researchers, visitors and everyone. All items in the Blavatnik Honresfield Library will remain in selected libraries within the UK, and will thereby augment existing collections of literary works by all four principal authors. Finally, the allocation policy will principally benefit libraries outside London.

FNL is delighted to have played a part in securing this exceptional collection for the nation and to have helped to distribute its greatest items to appropriate libraries and writer's houses throughout the UK.

HRH The Prince of Wales, Patron of FNL, said: *"It is tremendous news for our country that Friends of the National Libraries, a charity of which I am proud to be Patron, has raised £15 million in just five months to save one of the most significant collections, including manuscripts by Charlotte Brontë, Walter Scott and Robert Burns. I can only congratulate the Chairman, Geordie Greig, and his team for saving the Blavatnik Honresfield Library for the nation, with its treasures now to be owned by some of our greatest national libraries across the U.K. Our literary heritage is our cultural D.N.A. and this preserves it for students, teachers, academics and ordinary readers in perpetuity."*

Culture Secretary Nadine Dorries said: *"I am so delighted by the astonishing fundraising by Friends of the National Library and the great match funding donation by Sir Leonard Blavatnik to save this literary treasure trove for Britain. £15m raised in five months is*

incredible. What makes it significant and remarkable is that these manuscripts by Walter Scott, Charlotte Bronte, Robert Burns and Jane Austen will now be returned to the places where they were written. It is a testament to the generosity of so many thousands of people giving small and large amounts that we have retained these literary Crown Jewels for all the UK"

Scottish Culture Minister Jenny Gilruth said: *"It's important for the nation that this coveted collection of literary treasures has been saved from being sold into private hands. Once again, books which play a crucial part in Scotland's literary history were in danger of being withheld from public view. These include some of Robert Burns's earliest works and the manuscript of Sir Walter Scott's Rob Roy. The Scottish Government is pleased to support the Honresfield Library appeal by providing £400,000 to ensure these valuable books return to Scotland where our culture and heritage organisations will ensure they are cared for, preserved and made available to the public."*

Geordie Greig, Chairman of FNL, said: *"The generosity of all the donors has been incredible in saving this unique library, especially Sir Leonard Blavatnik, who wonderfully matched the £7.5m that we had raised ensuring that our campaign to save the collection was successful. There has been unprecedented public interest in this collection of manuscripts and books hidden for almost a century. Rescuing it has seemed a little like opening an Egyptian tomb to see for the first time ancient texts and treasures which are now saved in perpetuity for students, scholars and book-lovers. Thanks to FNL's successful campaign the collection will be shared by libraries and writers' houses all across our island, restoring a treasure trove of manuscripts to their birthplaces."*

Ros Kerslake CBE, Chief Executive of the National Heritage Memorial Fund said, *"We at the National Heritage Memorial Fund are delighted to have supported the campaign to save the Blavatnik Honresfield Library with £4million, the largest amount we have ever granted towards an acquisition of literary manuscripts since our formation in 1980."*

"This is truly a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to acquire such an outstanding and nationally significant collection. The NHMF is a fund of last resort, and the astonishing array of manuscripts will join over 1,000 heritage treasures saved for the nation. With the Blavatnik Honresfield Library now secured for public ownership, organisations across the UK will benefit from these literary gems joining their collections."

"I am proud that this incredible archive will be the last major acquisition we will support under my leadership, before I step down at the end of the year."

Dr Gabriel Heaton, Sotheby's English Literature & Historical Manuscripts Specialist, said: *"This is a collection like no other that has come to market in recent decades. It preserves the original words of some of our greatest writers, from Robert Burns finding his poetic voice, to Jane Austen anticipating a proposal at a ball, to powerful romantic verses by Emily Brontë. It has been a great privilege to represent the family who have been careful custodians of these remarkable treasures ever since they were collected in the late 19th century. We were amazed and delighted at the incredible ambition of the FNL's plan to acquire the whole library, and they deserve every credit for bringing their campaign to a successful conclusion. Their success is a testament to what can be achieved by the collaboration of public institutions and private collectors."*

The family of the original collectors, who had been the custodians of the library prior to the acquisition said: *"We are delighted that the Library is to remain in the UK and as the property of the nation with many of the books and manuscripts returning to their birthplaces for all to see and enjoy."*

Roly Keating, Chief Executive of the British Library, said: *"The British Library is thrilled that this rare opportunity to save such an exceptional collection of literary treasures for the nation has been successful. Friends of National Libraries has brokered a remarkable*

and unprecedented collaboration between diverse institutions across the UK, and we are proud to have been a part of it. We very much look forward to working with our partners at The Brontë Parsonage Museum and the Brotherton Library to care for the extraordinary works entrusted to us and help make them available for everyone to enjoy.”

Amina Shah, National Librarian and Chief Executive of the National Library of Scotland, said: *“Never before has a consortium worked so quickly and effectively to secure hidden literary treasures. This is a triumph for the people, for heritage and for the power of partnerships. At the National Library of Scotland we are thrilled to continue working with the Abbotsford Trust and the National Trust for Scotland, to share these Scottish literary treasures with the public and researchers – in Scotland and across the world – and we are grateful to the many supporters who helped to make this happen.”*

Richard Ovenden OBE, Bodley’s Librarian at the Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford said: *“A collection of literary treasures of this importance comes around only once in a generation. I am delighted that this unique consortium of libraries and writers houses, led by the FNL, has been able to work together so effectively in a totally new series of partnerships to acquire the Blavatnik Honresfield Library for the nation and to make it available to scholars and the wider public, now and long into the future”*

Lizzie Dunford, Director of Jane Austen's House, said: *"It has been a privilege for Jane Austen’s House to be a part of this truly ground-breaking campaign, spearheaded by inspirational individuals, to save these extraordinary literary treasures for the nation.”*

Ann Dinsdale, Principal Curator at the Brontë Parsonage Museum said: *“The acquisition of the Blavatnik Honresfield Library is a significant moment in our nation’s cultural history. The Brontë Society is immensely proud to have played a part and is very grateful to FNL, our consortium partners, funders, and our very generous donors. To display these literary treasures in the place they were written will be a privilege and the undoubted highlight of my thirty two years at the Brontë Parsonage Museum.”*

Masud Khokhar, University Librarian and Keeper of the Brotherton Collection, University of Leeds, said: *“The campaign to save the Blavatnik Honresfield Library for the benefit of the nation has been a wonderful example of collaborative working across leading cultural institutions. Making collections accessible for the benefit of the public is at the heart of the Brotherton Library and the University of Leeds Libraries vision for 2030. The addition of these outstanding manuscripts and books from the Blavatnik Honresfield Library will be celebrated and enjoyed by our communities, offering new and exciting opportunities for scholarship.”*

Giles Ingram, Chief Executive, Abbotsford Trust said: *“This is simply the most incredible achievement and we are deeply grateful to all those individuals and organisations who have made the saving of such a remarkable collection for the British public possible. To think that manuscripts written by Walter Scott in his own hand, will be returning to his homeland, many to his own home, is a triumph. The Lay of the Last Minstrel, Rob Roy and Scott’s diary of his lighthouse tour are each evocative of turning points in contemporary culture, and of Scott’s fame and fortune. Emerging from private ownership after so many years, it is heart warming to know they will be available for the public to enjoy at long last.”*

Phil Long OBE, the Chief Executive of the National Trust for Scotland said: *“The National Trust for Scotland is proud to have been part of the consortium that has secured these literary treasures for the nation. We are extraordinarily grateful to everyone who has donated to the appeal and for the support and close cooperation of our partners, especially the Friends of the National Libraries and our colleagues at the National Library of Scotland, the Abbotsford Trust, as well as the Scottish Government. In the run up to Christmas, we’re receiving a gift that is beyond all compare and it is truly a joyful moment. We hope to put in*

place arrangements over the coming months to ensure that as many people as possible are able to see and enjoy key items from the collection."

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NOTES FOR EDITORS

For more information contact: Nell Hoare, FNL Secretary: nell.hoare@fnlmail.org.uk
www.fnl.org.uk; [@FNL313](https://twitter.com/FNL313)

Social media hashtag: #BlavatnikHonresfieldLibrary

Interviews

If you would like to interview FNL, NHMF or a consortium institution about this major announcement please contact Nell Hoare on nell.hoare@fnlmail.org.uk.

Images

Images can be found here:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/o2f06d37bmx67ed/AACEwbkOr63qQAYdvoaOsScOa?dl=0>

Credit: Courtesy of Sotheby's

About Friends of the National Libraries

FNL has helped to save the nation's written and printed history since its foundation in 1931. FNL awards grants to national, regional and specialist collecting libraries enabling them to acquire rare books, manuscripts, literary archives, fine bindings and estate archives that would otherwise be lost to the public domain and, in very many cases, to the nation.

FNL's Royal Patron is HRH The Prince of Wales and its Trustees include the Directors of the leading institutions in the field, such as the British Library and the National Libraries of Wales and Scotland, as well as writers, historians, archivists and specialists.

About the Blavatnik Family Foundation

The Blavatnik Family Foundation is an active supporter of world-renowned educational, scientific, cultural, and charitable institutions in the United States, the United Kingdom, Israel, and throughout the world. The Foundation is headed by Sir Leonard Blavatnik, a global industrialist and philanthropist and the founder and chairman of Access Industries, a privately held industrial group based in the U.S. with broad strategic interests. See more at www.blavatnikfoundation.org.

About the National Heritage Memorial Fund

The National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF) was set up in 1980 to save the most outstanding parts of our national heritage, in memory of those who have given their lives for the UK

www.nhmf.org.uk

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