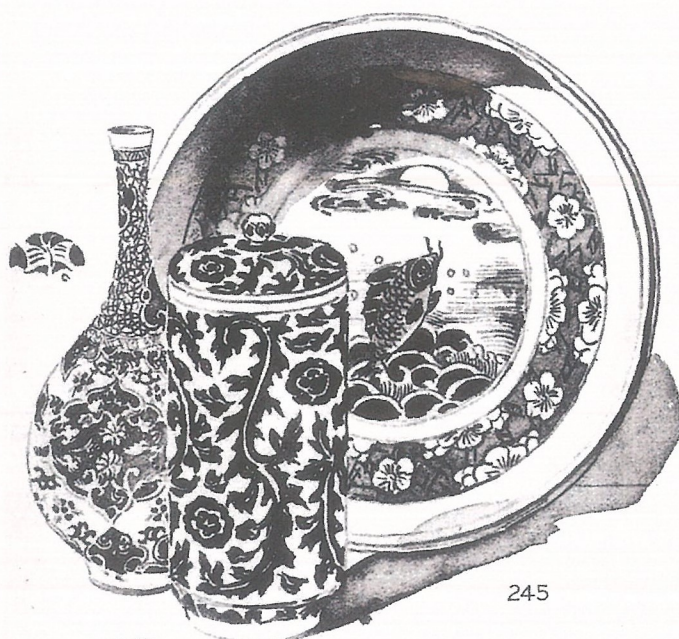


Private Collecting, Exhibitions, and the Shaping of Art History in London

The Burlington Fine Arts Club

PLATE XXIV.



STACEY J. PIERSON

Private Collecting, Exhibitions and the Shaping of Art History in London

The Burlington Fine Arts Club was founded in London in 1866 as a gentlemen's club with a singular remit – to exhibit members' art collections. Exhibitions were proposed, organized, and furnished by a group of prominent members of British society who included aristocrats, artists, bankers, politicians, and museum curators. Exhibitions at their grand house in Mayfair brought many private collections and collectors to light, using members' social connections to draw upon the finest and most diverse objects available. Through their unique mode of presentation, which brought museum-style display and interpretation to a grand domestic-style gallery space, they also brought two forms of curatorial and art historical practice together in one unusual setting, enabling an unrestricted form of connoisseurship, where new categories of art were defined and old ones expanded. The history of this remarkable group of people has yet to be presented and is explored here for the first time. Through a framework of exhibition themes ranging from Florentine painting to Ancient Egyptian art, a study of lenders, objects, and their interpretation paints a picture of private collecting activities, connoisseurship, and art world practice that is surprisingly diverse and interconnected.

Stacey J. Pierson is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Art and Archaeology at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. Her areas of specialization include ceramic history (China) and the history of collecting and display. Her most recent publication was *From Object to Concept: Global Consumption and the Transformation of Ming Porcelain* (Hong Kong University Press, 2013).

The Histories of Material Culture and Collecting, 1700–1950

Series Editor: Michael Yonan

University of Missouri-Columbia, USA

The Histories of Material Culture and Collecting, 1700–1950 provides a forum for the broad study of object acquisition and collecting practices in their global dimensions. The series seeks to illuminate the intersections between material culture studies, art history, and the history of collecting. It takes as its starting point the idea that objects both contributed to the formation of knowledge in the past and likewise contribute to our understanding of the past today. The human relationship to objects has proven a rich field of scholarly inquiry, with much recent scholarship either anthropological or sociological rather than art historical in perspective. Underpinning this series is the idea that the physical nature of objects contributes substantially to their social meanings, and therefore that the visual, tactile, and sensual dimensions of objects are critical to their interpretation. This series therefore seeks to bridge anthropology and art history, sociology and aesthetics.

For a full list of titles in this series, please visit www.routledge.com/The-Histories-of-Material-Culture-and-Collecting-1700-1950/book-series/ASHSER2128

- 7 **Manufacturing the Modern Patron in Victorian California**
Cultural philanthropy, industrial capital, and social authority
John Ott
- 8 **Craft, Community and the Material Culture of Place and Politics, 19th–20th Century**
Edited by Janice Helland, Beverly Lemire, and Alena Buis
- 9 **British Models of Art Collecting and the American Response**
Reflections across the pond
Edited by Inge Reist
- 10 **Textiles, Fashion, and Design Reform in Austria-Hungary before the First World War**
Principles of dress
Rebecca Houze
- 11 **William Hunter's World**
The art and science of eighteenth-century collecting
Edited by Geoffrey Hancock, Nick Pearce, and Mungo Campbell
- 12 **Materializing Gender in Eighteenth-Century Europe**
Edited by Jennifer G. Germann and Heidi A. Strobel
- 13 **Silver in Georgian Dublin**
Making, selling, consuming
Alison Fitzgerald
- 14 **Private Collecting, Exhibitions and the Shaping of Art History in London**
The Burlington Fine Arts Club
Stacey J. Pierson

Private Collecting, Exhibitions and the Shaping of Art History in London

The Burlington Fine Arts Club

Stacey J. Pierson

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
NEW YORK AND LONDON

Bib. 600005745
Item..... 100007516
Barcode..... 00001000 8427
Call no. N5245
 P54
 2017
Date..... 26. 7. 0. 61

First published 2017
by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

and by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 2017 Taylor & Francis

The right of Stacey J. Pierson to be identified as author of this work has been asserted by her in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

A catalog record for this book has been requested

ISBN: 978-1-138-23262-4 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-31193-7 (ebk)

Typeset in Sabon
by Book Now Ltd, London

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	vi
<i>List of Plates</i>	vii
<i>Preface</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xv
PART 1	
Introduction	1
Introduction: A New Gentlemen's Club for London	3
PART 2	
Exhibitions	25
1 Paintings and Prints in Europe and Britain	27
2 Ceramics East and West	66
3 Persia, Egypt, and India	101
4 Indigenous and Primitive Art	130
PART 3	
Epilogue	157
5 The Club, its Legacy, and the Historiography of Collecting and Display	159
<i>Appendix A: List of Special Exhibitions Mounted by the Club with Visitor Numbers (where Available) from 1869</i>	164
<i>Appendix B: Biographical Index of Active Members and Contributors</i>	169
<i>Bibliography</i>	187
<i>Index</i>	209

Figures

P.1	Song stoneware, plate from Burlington Fine Arts Club, <i>Illustrated Catalogue of an Exhibition of Early Chinese Pottery and Porcelain</i> , London, 1911	ix
I.1	<i>The Royal Academy Conversazione</i> , 1891, G. Grenville Manton	5
I.2	Photograph: interior view of the Burlington Fine Arts Club at 17 Savile Row, London, February 1921	7
I.3	Photograph of a display in the Illuminated Manuscripts exhibition of 1908, Case B	11
1.1	<i>Self-portrait in cap and dark cloak: bust</i> , Rembrandt van Rijn	31
1.2	<i>The Card Players</i> , Lucas van Leyden	36
1.3	<i>A Young Woman Seated at a Virginal</i> , Johannes Vermeer	38
1.4	<i>The Annunciation with Saint Francis and Saint Louis of Toulouse</i> (middle right panel), Cosmè Tura, Ferrarese	43
1.5	<i>The Crucifixion</i> , Bernardo Daddi	54
2.1	Oil flask (<i>lekythos</i>), The Thanatos Painter	75
2.2	Bowl with silver gilt mounts, China, Wanli period, 1573–1619	80
2.3	Bowl, Qing dynasty, eighteenth century, China	83
2.4	Ewer, Song or Liao, tenth–eleventh century, China	90
2.5	Jun ware <i>zhadou</i> . Plate XIX from Burlington Fine Arts Club, <i>Illustrated Catalogue of Early Chinese Pottery and Porcelain</i> , London, 1911	92
3.1	Carpet, Kerman province, Iran (possibly), 1600–1700	104
3.2	Bowl, Iznik, Turkey (probably), c. 1545–1550	105
3.3	Jug, Iznik, Turkey (probably), 1560–1590	107
3.4	Left hand of a female mummy with rings, Saqqara, Egypt, Roman period	113
3.5	Painting, cat thief, Kangra, India, c. 1810	123
4.1	Lintel 25, the Yaxchilan Lintels, Chiapas, Mexico, c. 725–760	134
4.2	(a) and (b) <i>Codex Fejérváry-Mayer</i> , Mixteca/Aztec, Central Mexico, before 1521	136
4.3	The Fenton vase, Nebaj, Guatemala, Late Maya, 600–800	138
4.4	<i>Moai Kavakava</i> (human figure), Easter Island, 1800s	144
4.5	Figure of a man, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria	147

Plates

- 1 The Morrison Triptych, Master of the Morrison Triptych (Flemish, active about 1500)
- 2 *Portrait of a Youth Holding an Arrow*, Giovanni Antonio Boltraffio
- 3 *Miracle of the Deacon Justinian*, Fra Angelico (Guido di Pietro)
- 4 *The Hunt in the Forest*, Uccello (Paolo di Dono)
- 5 Drinking cup (*kylix*), painter: Onesimos, potter: Euphronios. Greek, Late Archaic Period, 490–480 BC
- 6 Dish, Qing dynasty, Kangxi period, 1662–1722, with Chenghua mark
- 7 Tile, Kashan (Iran), c. 1270–1275
- 8 Statue of Amenemhat II, Egypt, Aswan, reign of Amenemhat III, c. 1831 BC–1786 BC
- 9 Shiva Nataraja, Madras, India, Chola period, 1100–1200
- 10 Copies of frescoes at Chichen Itza, 1902; 1917, Adela Breton

Preface

In 1910, an exhibition opened in London which introduced visitors to a new category of Chinese ceramics: Early Chinese Pottery and Porcelain. The exhibition was presented by the Burlington Fine Arts Club and included over 480 club members' objects, ranging from Han pottery to Ming porcelain. The ceramics were lent by prominent collectors and specialists, such as George Eumorfopoulos (1863–1939), R. L. Hobson (1872–1941), and W. C. Alexander (1840–1916). A total of 3548 visitors (excluding Club members) saw the show and among these were local potters who noted that the exhibition introduced them to a new aesthetic.¹ Prior to this, exhibitions of Chinese ceramics had tended to focus on more recent works of the later Ming and Qing periods (sixteenth–nineteenth centuries). Here for the first time visitors could see something entirely different: Han pottery (second century BC–second century AD) and Song stoneware (eleventh–thirteenth centuries) (Figure P.1). 'Early Chinese Pottery and Porcelain' was not a museum exhibition, however, but rather a display that was organized by a group of private collectors who belonged to an unusual social club in London.

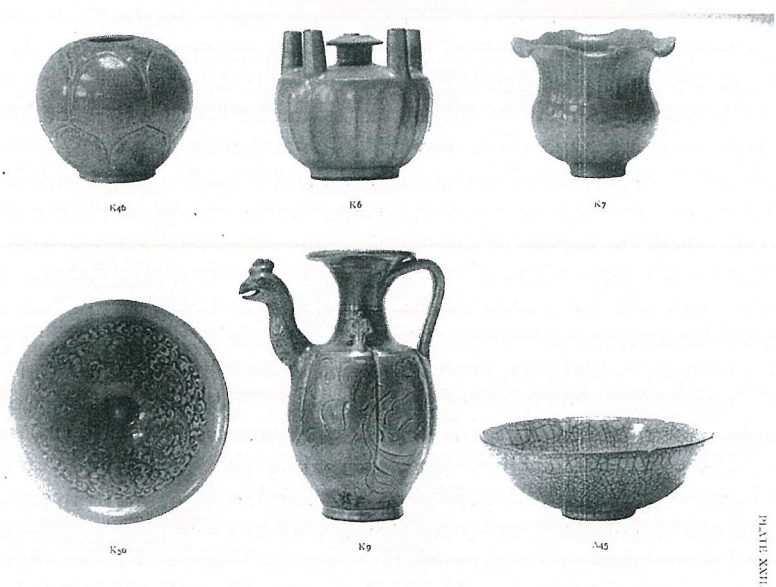


PLATE XII

Figure P.1 Song stoneware, plate from Burlington Fine Arts Club, *Illustrated Catalogue of an Exhibition of Early Chinese Pottery and Porcelain*, London, 1911

The Burlington Fine Arts Club was founded in 1866 as a gentlemen's club with a singular remit – to exhibit members' objects in both ordinary and biannual 'special' exhibitions, the latter usually being accompanied by a catalogue. Both types of exhibitions were proposed, organized, and furnished by members of the Club, and special exhibitions were further open to the public by invitation. The Club was founded by a small group of private collectors, politicians, and museum curators and its exhibitionary activities made it unique both among gentlemen's clubs in London in the nineteenth century and exhibition spaces. Their exhibitions were entirely privately funded and organized within their own premises in Mayfair. This was, therefore, a significant venue for art displays in London that was not attached to a publicly-funded institution or an artists' society. In consequence, the exhibitions reflected the members' personal and collective interests in art and objects at that time. Their interpretation of these collected items also reflected the members' and associated specialists' views of connoisseurship, art history and thematic display.

The Club members were not restrained in their exhibition work by the politics or economics of an institution in the same way as one of the national museums or other exhibition spaces, such as the Royal Academy, for example. Exhibition themes and contributors were agreed by the Club's executive committee and members normally would volunteer to organize the show and write the catalogues, which began to be produced from 1868. Perhaps because of a lack of institutional constraints, much of their exhibition work can today be seen as innovative. Essentially, they could display what they wanted, when, and how. They also had an early interest in what is today called 'world art' and within this they chose to define a wide range of objects as 'art'. With its frequent, curated exhibitions, featuring an unusually broad range of members' objects, the Club therefore played a significant yet unacknowledged role in reflecting and shaping art history, collecting, and exhibition culture in London in its time. The legacy of these exhibitions is still felt today as some art historical themes and categories were first presented to (and defined for) the public by the Club – including Persian art, Chinese ceramics, and Egyptian art. The objects included in the exhibitions further gained recognition and a recognizable provenance.

In addition to the members' wide-ranging tastes and collections, the members themselves were equally diverse (apart from being all men). From its founding, the Club was joined by people across the social categories, ranging from Members of Parliament, wealthy landowners and aristocrats, to bankers, artists, art critics, diplomats, and museum professionals. A survey of the membership over its nearly 100-year history reveals an interesting congregation of often prominent members of British society who today are not known to have been associated with each other or in some cases to have been art collectors. It also reveals collaborative work between these various individuals, for whom, in many cases, exhibitions and curatorship were not part of their professional work or daily life. It is this remarkable mix of people and their collections that ultimately made the Club so creative in its exhibitionary work and so fortunate in having the best works of art readily available for study and display.

The Burlington Fine Arts Club's (BFAC) history has yet to be told from the perspective of either a gentleman's club or a venue for and originator of art exhibitions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Fortunately a nearly complete archive of the Club's activities survives, along with its published catalogues. These enable us to formulate a picture of a significant yet unstudied source of art historical, exhibitionary, and collecting activity in London. BFAC exhibitions are consistently cited in histories of art

historical themes and in the exhibition histories of specific art historical categories and objects, yet the activities of the Club are only noted in passing, with reference to other groups, exhibitions, or individuals. The collective power and impact of the Club, as a private collectors' exhibiting space, will be explored here for first time, therefore. This study will also introduce a members' club that had a different approach and broader scope than other clubs at the same time – one which focussed on art and concentrated on comparative exhibitions. This book therefore will enable the Club to be situated in the wider history of art collecting and exhibitions in nineteenth- to twentieth-century London and will demonstrate through a survey of what was exhibited that the so-called 'global turn' in art history began to take place well before the mid-twentieth century. This book will paint a picture of private collecting activities and art world practice that is somewhat different from what the studies of individuals and institutions have suggested. It is the association of the Club's members and their desire for display that makes it an ideal model for a comparative study of collecting and exhibitionary activities, as well as the impact of these activities on art historical practice.

In order to characterize and position the activities of the Club in the history of collecting, exhibitions, and art history in London, the structure of this book will be thematic and organized around exhibition subject areas. These have been selected from over 100 exhibitions to characterize major thematic categories and developments. In each chapter the discussion will cover a progressive chronological period in the Club's history to show how the exhibition category in focus developed and was presented over time. Representative objects and object categories presented in the exhibitions will be discussed to illuminate aspects of contemporary connoisseurship and critical responses. In conjunction with this the biographies of key individuals associated with the exhibitions will also be explored in order to contextualize their participation as well as their collecting activities. The approach is essentially art historiographical but within a socio-historical framework.

This book begins with an introductory chapter which presents a general history of the club as an institution, its activities, and some of the prominent and more active members of the group. The social and cultural background of the members is an important contributing factor in the Club's ability to access and present an unusually wide range of very high quality objects and art works. The Club's history foregrounds an analysis of its impact, raising some interesting questions about the supposed boundaries between the different aspects of art collecting practice and the London art world at that time. The main chapters which follow the introduction will examine the mechanics, significance, and legacy of key thematic categories of art and objects and the related exhibitions devised, mounted, and published by the Club. Within this, each exhibition selected for discussion will be presented and analysed in detail, including participants and objects, and will be situated in the context of the time and place in which it was mounted. For the most part, the exhibitions were defined by the Club in either material or cultural terms so this will be the broad categorization adopted here, for example 'ceramics', 'paintings', 'primitive art', etc. From 1878, geographical and national categories also come into play and will necessitate a discussion of this approach to object classification and its implications for the development of art history and the related field of art historiography. Certain materials, particularly ceramics, played a prominent part in the Club's collecting and exhibition activities, which seems unusual when considered against the usual narrative of art history in this time period, but not, as we will see, that of collecting in England. A number of hitherto

unrecognized but influential and illuminating ceramics exhibitions therefore will be considered in a dedicated chapter (Chapter 2) that will provide a noteworthy contrast to the chapter on paintings and prints (Chapter 1), a category of art that is normally assumed to have been the benchmark for art collecting in the time period covered by this book. On the surface, interest in paintings and prints seem to be what united many of the Club's members but in fact this subject area was only treated in about half of the Club's special exhibitions, as we will see.

In spite of the Club's diverse membership and collections, there is as yet no publication which addresses both the history of the Club and its activities. Such a study has never been written, except by the Club itself at various times, for its members, and these internal histories are not critical studies of methodology or impact. There is a brief history of the Club's predecessor (the Fine Arts Club, FAC) in the *Journal of the Decorative Arts Society* (Eatwell 1994) but this does not cover the later history of the FAC or its new offshoot, the BFAC. It is also therefore not a study of the work of the Club, its activities, impact, or legacy, discussions of which appear only in passing references to the BFAC in related studies on other subjects (e.g. Griffiths 1996; Haskell 2000; Yallop 2011). With reference to what is identified as the main and most influential activity of the BFAC, display, there are survey histories of art exhibitions in general during this time period but these necessarily address the art exhibition as a particular type of exhibiting activity (e.g. Taylor 1999; Altschuler 2008). There are also selective, canonical histories of 'key' survey exhibitions in this period, such as the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition of 1857 (Pergam 2011) or themed displays such as the 1931 International Exhibition of Persian Art (Wood 2000) but nothing in the current literature discusses exhibition work through the prism of a physical and conceptual exhibiting space, which the Club represents. Furthermore, studies of exhibitions organized by private groups (non-institutional, non-governmental) such as artists' societies or galleries in this time period (e.g. Denney 2000; Helmreich 2012) do not include the Club, even though, as this book will demonstrate, their work often intersected. In terms of critical frameworks, Haskell's influential art historical study of old master pictures considered the role of an art-collecting category in exhibition practices (Haskell 2000) and this has inspired similar studies on other categories such as Mexican art in Britain (Locke 2002). The social-historical context of the Club has been considered with reference to the histories of gentlemen's clubs and clubs in London (e.g. Lejeune 1979; Field 2009; Milne-Smith 2011) as the Club was modelled on these and their administration but does not feature in such histories. The Club is also considered as a locus for the intersection of various aspects of the London art world, drawing on socio-geographical studies such as Helmreich (2012). The fact that there was a gentlemen's club whose main activity was exhibiting, and by extension, classifying collected art, is essentially unacknowledged in any field however. In one exception, the BFAC was noted in the University of Glasgow research project on 'Exhibition Culture in London, 1878–1908' and included in its database² suggesting at the very least that it merits further investigation as a contributor to this regional display phenomenon. The BFAC was essentially a club for art collectors in London, and the role of collectors' clubs in general and of collectors within the wider London art world is not itself well studied. Nonetheless, with increasing attention being paid to the commercial aspects of collecting and the art market (e.g. Westgarth 2012; Helmreich and Fletcher 2013), the interrelationships between the various parts of the art world are becoming more apparent.

Thus, this book will bring the significant and influential activities of a unique gentlemen's club to light for the first time. It will also form the only published history of this Club, calling attention to the role of sometimes very prominent members of British society in art world practices, which in many cases is unknown at present. Through this, it will demonstrate the surprising way in which many of these people were known to each other, sharing a common interest in and shaping cultural life in London. We will also see how multiple facets of the London art world and art historical practice intersected in the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries through the lens of a single and indeed singular group of connoisseurs and experts who collected, presented, and interpreted a wide range of objects as 'art'.

Notes

- 1 See Stacey Pierson, 'The Sung Standard: Chinese Ceramics and British Studio Pottery in the 20th Century', in Stacey Pierson, ed., *Song Ceramics: Art History, Archaeology and Technology*, Colloquies on Art and Archaeology in Asia, no. 20. London, December 2004, p. 90.
- 2 University of Glasgow research project, 'Exhibition Culture in London, 1878–1908'. Available at: www.exhibitionculture.arts.gla.ac.uk/gall_exhlist.php?gid=226 (accessed 22 Dec. 2015).

Acknowledgements

This book began with a study of the work of a single collector whose activities did much to shape my professional life. In researching his area of interest, Chinese ceramics, it became clear that the subject itself had an interesting history as a collecting category. One name that consistently arose in references to collectors and exhibitions of Chinese ceramics was the Burlington Fine Arts Club. After putting it aside for many years, I decided recently that it was time to pay attention to this group and its archive in the National Art Library (NAL).

The archive is extensive and therefore both a blessing and a curse but I am grateful to the staff of the NAL for making it available to me and cheerfully answering my many questions about the material. In any archival study, decisions have to be made about how to manage, organize, and interpret the material so I am especially grateful to the anonymous readers of this manuscript who pointed me in a direction I had not considered and therefore made this a much more lucid and comprehensive study.

Finally, I wish to thank SOAS for the period of sabbatical that provided the time to concentrate on this study and the many people behind the scenes who support my work in general. In particular my sister, Dr Patricia Pierson, deserves special mention for bringing unusual yet vital sources to my attention, especially those on subjects that are far beyond my area of expertise, such as mummy culture.

Part 1

Introduction

Introduction

A New Gentlemen's Club for London

Chapter Contents

- History and a Description of the Club, its Activities, and Functions
- Location and Permanent Premises
- Exhibitions
- Membership
- Taste in Collecting and Display
- Conclusion

Burlington Fine Arts Club, 17, Savile-row, W. — Is intended to bring together amateurs, collectors, and others interested in art; to afford ready means for consultation between persons of special knowledge and experience in matters relating to the fine arts; and to provide accommodation for showing and comparing rare works in the session of the members and friends. To provide in the reading room periodicals, books, and catalogues, foreign as well as English, having reference to art. To make arrangements in the gallery and rooms of the club for the exhibition of pictures, original drawings, engravings, and rare books, enamels ceramic wares, coins, plate, and other valuable works. To hold, in addition to the above, once in the year or oftener, special exhibitions which shall have for their object the elucidation of some school, master, or specific art. Members to have the privilege of introducing friends to these special collections. To render the club a centre where occasionally conversazioni may be held of an art-character. Members to have the power of introducing two visitors, ladies or gentlemen. To provide, in addition to the above art objects, the ordinary accommodation and advantages of a London club. The club possesses a valuable library of books of reference on art. The entrance fee is £5 5s., and the subscription £5 5s. The power of election is vested in the committee, and is by ballot.

Charles Dickens (Jr.), *Dickens's Dictionary of London*, 1879

History and a Description of the Club, its Activities, and Functions

The Founding of a New Members' Club

In April 1866, a group of gentlemen got together to found a new club for art collectors.¹ It was modelled on their favourite gentlemen's clubs and was designed as a counterpoint to a group founded earlier, which was perceived as having lost its direction. Most of the founder members of the new club were members of the earlier group, which was

4 Introduction

called the Fine Arts Club and had been founded in 1856. The Fine Arts Club began as the Collector's Club and was founded by the first curator (called 'superintendent') for Art Collections at the new South Kensington Museum (later the Victoria and Albert Museum, V&A), John Charles Robinson (1824–1913), who was an instrumental figure in the Museum's early history, helping to define its collecting and display remit.² The Collector's Club was based in the museum and included among its members the V&A's founder, Henry Cole (1808–1882), as well as Baron Marochetti (1805–1867), a sculptor and diplomat,³ and the Marchese d'Azeglio (Vittorio Emanuele Taparelli, 1816–1890), who had been the Sardinian Ambassador to London.⁴ The formation of the Collector's Club was announced in the *Art Journal* in 1857:

The Collector's Club. A new society of amateurs of *vertu* has just been formed under this title; consisting solely of such gentlemen as collect for their own tastes, objects of antiquity and are not dealers therein ... Baron Marochetti gave the use of his studio for the preliminary meeting, at which a large assemblage gathered and Sir A. Fountaine's antique majolica formed an important point of attraction.⁵

The new club stated that its purpose was: 'to hold regular conversazione where objects of art were to be exhibited'.⁶ As its historian Ann Eatwell noted:

These exhibitions would form unparalleled opportunities for viewing private collections that had rarely been seen before. The unlocking of specimens from rich private sources and the meeting of collectors at gatherings where information could be exchanged, comparisons drawn and expertise and knowledge of objects gained were the real if unspecified intentions, behind the club's formation.⁷

The term 'conversazione' was a peculiarly nineteenth-century one which in England at that time was used to describe society gatherings or 'soirées' associated with the arts and sciences.⁸ One such event was depicted in a famous painting in the National Portrait Gallery: 'The Royal Academy Conversazione, 1891', by G. Grenville Manton which shows just how formal yet social such events were (Figure I.1).

The Fine Arts Club (FAC), as the Collector's Club was known from later in 1857 onwards, while clearly social, had two undeclared additional functions: to provide a venue for the development of interest in and knowledge of decorative arts (none such existed before its founding) and to support the development of the future V&A, as Robinson needed to cultivate collectors and promote the subject areas with which the museum was concerned.⁹ The FAC should be seen as supporting these aims, even though its existence (and that of its successor) inherently contradicted the public educational aims of the new museum. Robinson, and Henry Cole, believed it was a national duty to encourage collecting and that museums were in the service of this, as well as education in taste.¹⁰ The fulfilment of such aims required objects and collectors, so Robinson used the new club as a tool to support the museum. Through its successor, the club became much more than that, however.

To enhance its effectiveness, the FAC expanded rapidly to include around 100 members (up to 200 in the 1860s), mostly men, as was the custom at that time, and its programme of meetings and activities was established early on.¹¹ Members were expected to exhibit their objects for discussion where the meetings were held and many loaned them to other exhibitions, including at the South Kensington Museum, most notably the Loan Exhibition of 1862 which attracted over 900,000 visitors, thus

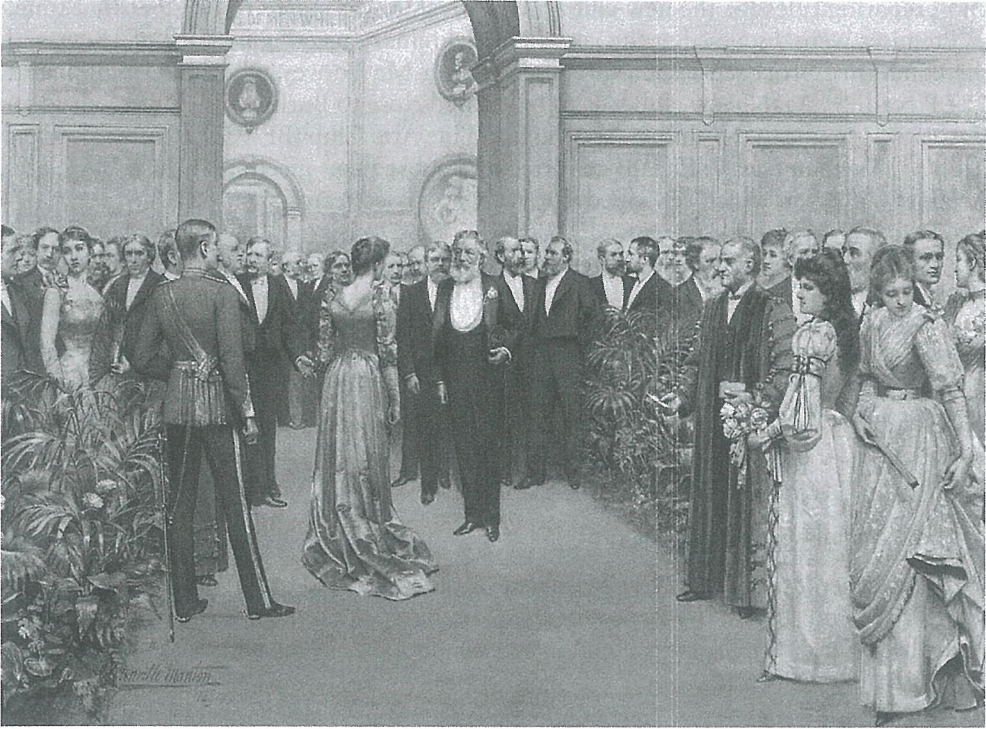


Figure I.1 The Royal Academy Conversazione, 1891, G. Grenville Manton, 1855–1932, Pen, ink and gouache. 45 × 61.4 cm, NPG 2820

Source: © National Portrait Gallery, London.

demonstrating the vital role of the club for Robinson. Members of the Club were on the exhibition committee and Robinson was its director and organizer.¹²

He was clearly not satisfied with the club's potential, principally because, as Eatwell noted, the FAC 'became a victim of its success'. Its meetings were very popular, took place during the London season, and were increasingly attended by large numbers of non-members, thus impeding its original stated purpose. It also had no permanent premises so members themselves were obliged to host the large-scale, fashionable events.¹³ Along with Robinson, a number of key members of the FAC became dissatisfied and decided to set up a new, more focussed and 'serious' club with premises, using the gentlemen's club model. In 1866, therefore, in response to the seemingly frivolous and ineffectual nature of the FAC, a preliminary meeting was held in April to discuss the formation of a new club, which was agreed by those who attended.¹⁴ A provisional committee was created at this meeting and this was followed by a first general meeting in June of 1866, at 49 Lower Grosvenor Street, London, the home of one of the members. The provisional committee consisted of five members, one acting as chair: J. C. Robinson, Ralph Wornum (1812–1877), the print collector Richard Fisher (1809–1890), who was then closely associated with the Print Room of the British Museum, and William Smith (1808–1876), who seems to have resigned shortly afterwards.¹⁵ The chair was the Marchese d'Azeglio.¹⁶ At the first general meeting in

June, a permanent committee was elected,¹⁷ and was tasked with choosing a name and preparing rules for the new club.¹⁸ Membership was stated to be 79 at that time.

Premises were discussed at the very first preliminary meeting in April of 1866, and the committee proposed leasing premises from a Mr Toovey who had a building at 177 Piccadilly. As the new club was to be located close to Burlington House, this location gave its name to the club: the Burlington Fine Arts Club (BFAC, hereafter also 'the Club').¹⁹ The name was officially reported at a subsequent meeting, in July 1866, and a report was given which described Toovey's proposed terms as:

rooms, supplies provided, refreshments, etc. Toovey to receive the amounts collected for entrance fees and annual subs (collected by him too); agreement with Toovey can be terminated if number of members falls below 100 in the 2nd year; if members exceed 150, then Toovey will only get the annual subscriptions.²⁰

The acceptance of these terms was presented in a proposed circular to members that also included a description of the new Club's terms and conditions:

The Burlington Fine Arts Club

At a general meeting of the Members of the Club held at 177 Piccadilly, on the 20th of July, 1866, the Report of the Committee appointed at the meeting of the 5th of June, 1866, was read and it was unanimously resolved, -

First, to accept Mr Toovey's offer of his premises over the ground floor at 177 Piccadilly, and to establish the club therein.

Secondly, that the rooms shall be opened for the reception of members, if possible, on the 1st of December next, or, at the latest, on the 1st of January, 1867.

Thirdly, that the members be requested immediately to pay the entrance fee of five guineas, and the first year's subscription of five guineas, to the account of the Burlington Fine Arts Club, at the London and Westminster Bank, St. James Square.

The above payment of ten guineas to entitle to all privileges of the club up to the 1st of January 1868.²¹

The objectives of the Club and the rules and regulations were defined and drafted by the committee over the summer. In the first printed set of Rules and Regulations (1866), it was stated that the new club 'is formed for the purpose of bringing together amateurs, collectors, and persons interested in the Fine Arts; and for the exhibiting and comparing the acquisitions made from time to time by the Members'.²² This dual purpose, social gatherings and the display of members' collections in organized exhibitions, a development from FAC practice, was in fact pioneering and unique, as no other private members club was doing this, including those focussing on the arts.

The nineteenth century in London was a time when a number of private clubs, mostly restricted to 'gentlemen', were opened, including the Arts Club (1863), the Athenaeum (1834), the Garrick (1831), the Langham (1830), and the Savage (1857). Many of these declared an association with the 'arts', as defined in that period, but most also had a slightly different approach to activities than the BFAC. The Athenaeum,

for example, was designed as a social club for leading artistic, literary and scientific men, and for patrons of the arts and sciences.²³ Its main activity was passive – to provide services for its members: a London address or premises, a library, dining rooms, smoking and drinking rooms, meeting rooms, etc.²⁴ Like the other clubs, the 'arts' in the Athenaeum's objectives were also mainly related to a description of members' interests or professions as artists or patrons, for example, rather than the 'fine arts' which were collected and subject to connoisseurship.²⁵

The Burlington Fine Arts Club, in contrast, had the display and discussion of artworks as an active main focus, with services provided as a secondary but essential daily function. Thus, it was, essentially, a gentlemen's club for art collectors and it is collecting that was the driving force behind both its founding and its activity focus.

Location and Permanent Premises

The presentation of exhibitions and displays at the Club, as well as essential services, was facilitated by the acquisition of permanent premises in 1870 at 17 Savile Row.²⁶ This location would situate the Club in the centre of the London art world at that time. As Pamela Fletcher and Anne Helmreich have noted with reference to the mapping of the nineteenth-century London art market, the West End, as that part of London is known, was home to the Royal Academy and other exhibition societies such as the Royal Society of Painters in Watercolours and commercial galleries such as Colnaghi.²⁷ In addition, numerous antique dealers were located here, as well as the auction houses such as Christie's, an important source for many of the items collected and displayed by Club members.²⁸ Dealers, however, were prohibited from Club membership, an interesting condition that will be discussed later in this chapter.

After refurbishment by Club member Sir Matthew Digby Wyatt (1820–1877),²⁹ the Club's permanent premises had a grand Gallery for displays as well as a morning room, a committee room, a games room with a billiard table, a library, and other essential facilities for a gentlemen's club (Figure I.2). As images of the Gallery demonstrate, the design of the space was

traditional and very much reflective of the period room phenomenon that was gaining pace at the time the building was opened.³⁰ While not necessarily aiming for a defining period style for this room beyond what Sparke *et al.* refer to as a 'representational device', the interior design was both reflective of the Club members' actual (the aristocrats) or aspirational home environments as well as a typical environment for the display of pictures and works of art in the nineteenth century both in the home and in commercial or institutional premises.³¹



Figure I.2 Photograph: interior view of the Burlington Fine Arts Club at 17 Savile Row, London, February 1921, BL25311/001

Source: © Historic England Archives.

The other aspects of the premises should not be seen as unimportant, however, as these essentially were what encouraged members to join. The Club's