House of Stories

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Tales from the Chatsworth Library

Chatsworth is a house alive with stories. Its library

was accumulated by the Devonshire family over 500 years. It is home to rare first editions, lavishly decorated volumes and books annotated by past owners and readers. The beauty of books and the skill of those who created them is evident throughout the collection.

Chatsworth has long attracted writers, readers and collectors of fiction, non-fiction, poetry and drama. The collection shows the enduring love of books and reading of those who have lived and worked in the house, reflecting passions, tastes and changing fashions. Some works entered the collection when they were inherited or gifted by authors and collectors. Some works are mysteries– their histories lost over time.

The library is now cared for by the Chatsworth House Trust, the charity dedicated to preserving the house, collection, garden and park for everyone to enjoy.

For the first time, and in celebration of the UK's National Year of Reading, this exhibition brings together the library's most exciting literary treasures, featuring works by Geoffrey Chaucer, Alexander Pope, Jane Austen, Lady Caroline Lamb, Lord Byron, Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell, Charlotte Brontë, Oscar Wilde and T.E. Lawrence.

House of Stories is celebrated across a programme of events taking place throughout 2026. We are looking forward to welcoming you.

Treasures of Chatsworth

From philosophers to forgers: the hidden stories of Chatsworth's librarians

The story of the Devonshire family library also belongs to the remarkable individuals they employed to care for

the collection. The early library was shaped by its librarian Thomas Hobbes, one of the greatest philosophers and political thinkers of the 1600s.

Later, in the 1830s, the 6th Duke of Devonshire employed John Payne Collier to advise on his library. Collier was a respected Shakespearean scholar, but also (unknown to the Duke) pursued an alternative career as a literary forger.

The library's first comprehensive catalogue was compiled in 1879 by the Anglo-Italian scholar and politician Sir James Lacaita. His four-volume list of the collection remains an essential guide to the library.

In 1895, historian Sandford Arthur Strong became librarian, followed in 1904 by the pioneering Eugénie Sellers Strong.

Eugénie was Chatsworth's first female librarian at a time when women rarely held such roles in private libraries.

The best-known 20th-century librarian, Francis Thompson, arrived in 1921 and shaped the collections for more than three decades. His influence is still felt today.

The Shyppe of Fooles, Sebastian Brant (1457/8–1521), 1517

A bestseller of its day, the Ship of Fools is a lively moral satire which uses humour to criticise human shortcomings. It presents 112 ‘fools’ aboard a ship bound for the mythical paradise ‘Narragonia’.

Just as modern cartoons mock aspects of human nature, the Book Fool is pictured as a fussy collector in a fool’s cap, brandishing a feather duster. The text criticises collectors who prize rare books as trophies rather than for reading. Chatsworth’s Library includes many impressive volumes bought for display. However, it is equally rich in books valued for their ideas and stories.

Treasures of Chatsworth

A tale of two houses: our earliest library catalogues

Throughout the next few rooms, you will see treasures from Chatsworth's Library.

Chatsworth's Library began with the book collection built up at Hardwick Hall. Hardwick was the Devonshire family's primary home for most of the 1700s, and it housed their main library. The contents of libraries are usually recorded in catalogues. The oldest surviving catalogue of the book collection at Hardwick was compiled in the late 1620s by Thomas Hobbes. His catalogue reveals that by the 1620s

this was already a substantial collection containing more than 1,400 books.

The earliest catalogue of books at Chatsworth dates from the 1690s, a time when the 1st Duke of Devonshire had Chatsworth House rebuilt in a more fashionable style.

It lists only 500 works, but we know the 1st Duke was an active book collector. His bookplate – a decorative label identifying the owner of a book – survives in hundreds of books in the library today. The 1690s may mark a turning point, when more books began to move from Hardwick to the growing library at Chatsworth.

Catalogue of library books, Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), about 1628–1630s

Hobbes's catalogue organised the library by subject, assigning each book a unique shelfmark – a code to guide readers to its place on the shelves.

In scale and ambition, the Devonshire collection rivalled some of the great institutional libraries of the day. Alongside more weighty topics such as theology and politics, the collection also contained poetry and plays, including texts by medieval Italian poets like Petrarch and Dante.

Catalogue of all the books that are in the library at Chatsworth, author unknown, about 1693

The books in this catalogue are organised by language and size. The catalogue lists works by some literary giants of the 1600s, including William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson and John Milton.

Some of the featured texts can still be found in the library today. Whether these are the exact copies recorded here can be difficult to prove due to the library's long and layered history

Treasures of Chatsworth

Patronage, politics and pamphlets: poetry in the 1600s

Reading and writing poetry was very fashionable in the 1600s. However, not all poets used print to share their work. Many writers preferred to circulate their verses privately in handwritten copies shared among like-minded friends.

Members of the Devonshire family moved in these literary circles. As prominent aristocrats they were also approached as potential patrons. Poets could rarely make a living

from writing alone so they would preface their works with flattering dedications to wealthy supporters hoping for rewards such as money, gifts or career advancement. Chatsworth's Library holds many of these tributes.

As the century progressed, print culture expanded dramatically. Cheap, quickly produced pamphlets flooded the market, shaping political and religious debate. Poets also embraced this medium to reach much wider audiences. Though flimsy and disposable, several thousand pamphlets have survived at Chatsworth thanks to the practice of gathering, binding and caring for them. Some are now very rare or even unique – witnesses to a vibrant literary age.

Piscatoris poemata, Payne Fisher (1615/6–93), 1656

During a time of radical political change, author Payne Fisher was not shy in seeking patrons.

In the English Civil War (1642–51), Royalists fought Parliamentarians for control of the country. Fisher served with the Royalists before switching sides. He became poet laureate under Parliamentarian leader Oliver Cromwell. This book contains verses honouring Cromwell, but in this copy, he added a page in Latin praising committed Royalist William Cavendish, 3rd Earl of Devonshire. A richly painted drawing of the Devonshire arms signals Fisher's hope for favour.

Honori sacellum: A Funeral Poem, to the Memory of William Duke of Devonshire, Elkanah Settle (1648–1724), 1707/8

Once a successful poet and playwright, Elkanah Settle's fame had faded by 1700. He turned to writing celebratory poems for any event, seeking payment and noble patronage. He even stamped prospective patrons' coats of arms on the bindings in anticipation of favour.

Settle was shameless: this poem on the death of the 1st Duke of Devonshire was one of eight that he published under the same title between 1708 and 1719, each dedicated to a different aristocrat.

Manuscript verse miscellany, compiler unknown, 1600s

Many poets, particularly Royalists, chose to circulate their work privately in handwritten copies. Readers created personal collections, copying down poems that interested them.

This manuscript is one such compilation. The handwriting reveals that the poems have been copied out by several people. We don't know who its original owner was, although at least one of the poets represented was associated with Christian, Countess of Devonshire (1595–1674), a noted Royalist and patron of literature. It brings together mostly short poems, including a cluster by celebrated poet John Donne on themes of love, seduction and betrayal. Many of Donne's poems were set to music in the 1600s.

Poems written by the Right Honorable William Earl of Pembroke, William Herbert Pembroke (1580–1630), compiled 1660

Although presented as works by the Earl of Pembroke, this is a printed verse miscellany – a gathered collection of poems by

several writers. It was compiled by John Donne the younger – the son of the famous poet – who dedicated it to Countess Christian. She had been the dedicatee of many of Pembroke's poems during his lifetime, linking this collection to a long tradition of poetic exchange and favour.

A Congratulatory Poem to Her Most Sacred Majesty, on the Universal Hopes of all Loyal Persons for a Prince of Wales, Aphra Behn (about 1640–89), 1688

Aphra Behn had a brief career as a spy in Antwerp for Charles II. She used the code name Astrea. Later she became the first woman in England to earn her living by writing. She published at least

46 books and pamphlets and thrived in the lively print culture of the 1600s. Behn was a Royalist and used her work to champion Charles II and James II. In this pamphlet, she anticipates Queen Mary's longed-for son, whose birth on 10 June 1688 promised security for James II's throne. The celebration was fleeting as King James was soon swept from power.

Treasures of Chatsworth

The useful and the beautiful: literary treasures

Chatsworth's Library holds thousands of significant literary texts, collected both for reading and as beautiful, luxury objects for display.

In this room are two landmarks of English literature – first editions of John Milton's Paradise Lost and Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe. There are at least ten different editions of Paradise Lost in the library, reflecting its long-standing status as a literary classic and suggesting it was read by several generations of family members.

Robinson Crusoe was certainly read for pleasure. A family letter records Duchess Georgiana's sister Harriet reading the novel aged 16. It has a mixed legacy: an immediate bestseller, it influenced storytelling for generations. It also reflected the colonial attitudes of its time and reinforced enduring stereotypes about empire and race.

The two other books in this room were both purchased as collectors' items, not for everyday reading. They were acquired by the 6th Duke of Devonshire (1790–1858), one of the family's greatest book lovers.

Both books are printed on vellum – animal skin. This material has been associated with luxury publications since the 1400s.

Paradise Lost: A Poem in Ten Books, John Milton (1608–74), 1669, bound with other works by Milton

The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, Daniel Defoe (about 1660–1731), 1719

John Milton's Paradise Lost is an epic poem retelling the fall of Adam and Eve. An epic poem is a long poem telling a story – often with a heroic central character. The first edition has a complex publication history, and the portrait of Milton in this copy was taken from another book. Milton disliked the image so much that he instructed the engraver (who couldn't read ancient Greek) to add a Greek caption mocking his own artwork.

…have a chuckle at a caricature by a good-for-nothing artist...

Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe is a tale of adventure and survival. With its straightforward writing style, sense of realism and focus on individual experience, it shaped the modern British novel as we know it today.

Hypnerotomachia Poliphili,

Francesco Colonna (about 1433–1517), 1499

The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story, Horace Walpole (1717–97), 1791

Hailed as one of the 15th-century's most beautiful books, this is one of only three known vellum copies of Hypnerotomachia Poliphili in the world. It was celebrated

for its elegant woodcut illustrations. However, the text is a strange dream narrative in mixed languages, which baffled even 15th-century readers.

This rare vellum edition of Horace Walpole's pioneering Gothic novel, The Castle of Otranto, was printed by the renowned Italian typographer Giambattista Bodoni and created as a collector's item.

Metamorphosis, Ovid (43 BCE–17/18 CE), translated by Arthur Golding (1535/6–1606), 1603

Metamorphoses by the Roman poet Ovid has had a huge influence on Western literature and visual art. It tells the history of the world through Greek and Roman myths. The tapestries in this room draw from these stories. This edition belonged to the designer and poet William Morris (1834–96). Acquired at the sale of his library after his death, it reflects his passion for books with Gothic (or 'blackletter') typeface and woodcut decoration. Such volumes inspired both his artistic vision and the publications of Morris's own printing workshop, Kelmscott Press.

Treasures of Chatsworth

Fragments and illuminations: treasures of 14th-century poetry

These library treasures bring together two major literary voices of the 1300s: English writer Geoffrey Chaucer and Italian poet Francesco Petrarch.

Chaucer's Canterbury Tales helped establish English as a respected literary language. Before this, French and Latin were dominant. The Canterbury Tales features a varied cast of characters reflecting medieval society.

Chaucer never finished the Canterbury Tales and no copies from his lifetime survive. This fragment was probably reused as a binding for another early book. It may have been collected by the 6th Duke. The work is so important that even an incomplete section like this is highly significant.

Petrarch was celebrated across Europe and crowned poet laureate in Rome. He achieved enduring fame for his love poetry. The volume on display contains many of his most admired sonnets dedicated to his muse, Laura. It was a treasured possession of Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, who received it as a gift from her brother.

Fragment of The Canterbury Tales, Geoffrey Chaucer (about 1340–1400), about 1425–50

Chaucer's work was widely copied in handwritten manuscripts like this one. The language and letter forms used in this copy point to a scribe from the Northeast Midlands.

This places its origins not far from here, although much of its history is unknown.

This fragment is part of the 'Man of Law's Tale'. It recounts the travels and hardships of a virtuous princess. Its narrative is shaped by an English, Christian perspective.

Il Petrarcha, Francesco Petrarch (1304–74), 1514

This text is printed on fine vellum and richly illuminated – that is, decorated by hand. The volume was a luxury object, small enough to carry like a precious jewel. It is thought to have been made for a member of the Medici family. The Medicis were a powerful banking family from Florence who were influential in politics and as patrons of the arts.

Comus and his Train Inigo Jones (1573–1652)

1618

pen and brown ink

Hercules’ Bowl Bearer Inigo Jones (1573–1652)

1618

pen and black ink

Hercules, Daedalus and Mercury Inigo Jones (1573–1652)

1618

pen and brown ink, grey wash

Welsh Dancers

Inigo Jones (1573–1652)

1618

pen and brown ink, brown wash

Pope’s Dunciad: An Ape and Three Men in Conversation

William Kent (1685–1748)

about 1730–35

pencil, pen and brown ink, brown wash

Pope’s Dunciad: Two Apes and a Man Smoking and Drinking William Kent (1685–1748)

about 1730–35

black chalk, pen and brown ink

Alexander Pope in his Grotto William Kent (1685–1748)

about 1730

pencil, pen and brown ink, brown wash

Alexander Pope Seated Before a Book with a Monkey on His Shoulder William Kent (1685–1748)

about 1730

pencil and brown wash

Alexander Pope Writing William Kent (1685–1748)

about 1730

pencil, pen and brown ink, brown wash

Profile Sketch of Alexander Pope Playing Cards at Chiswick William Kent (1685–1748)

about 1730

pencil and brown ink

Alexander Pope in his Grotto William Kent (1685–1748)

about 1730

pencil, pen and brown ink, brown wash

Pope’s Dunciad: Dullness and Tibbald, King of Dunces William Kent (1685–1748)

about 1730–35

pencil, pen and brown ink

Writers and Artists

Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue: a masque for James I

The relationship between writers and artists is explored in this space.

Playwright and poet Ben Jonson, a contemporary of Shakespeare, was acclaimed for the spectacular court masques he created for James I. Masques were a form of lavish entertainment that combined music, dance and poetry. Architect Inigo Jones designed elaborate costumes, scenery and stage machinery for them.

Chatsworth holds the largest surviving body of masque designs produced by Inigo Jones. The collection includes a series of costume designs for Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue, displayed around the room.

Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue was performed at court on Twelfth Night 1618. Its text survives only in a 1640–41 printed edition and in the manuscript shown here, written by professional scribe Ralph Crane. Probably produced as a keepsake for a performer or spectator, it uses different scripts to distinguish speeches, songs and stage directions.

It may have belonged to William Cavendish, the 1st Earl of Devonshire or his son, also William, the 2nd Earl.

Writers and Artists

Alexander Pope: creativity and controversy

Alexander Pope, a leading English poet of the 1700s, grew up in a Catholic family during a time of religious persecution.

In 1716, he moved to Chiswick, where his friend and patron Richard Boyle, 3rd Earl of Burlington, offered support

and protection.

Pope later settled in a house in Twickenham, where he built a fantastical grotto lined with shells, fossils and sparkling crystals. Conceived as a place for inspiration, he celebrates it in the verse on display here.

In 1728, he published The Dunciad, a poem that publicly ridiculed his real-life literary rivals and critics. It sparked heated debate, and 'keys' were published – pamphlets which attempted to identify the writers on whom Pope's characters were based. You can still see this happen in popular culture today, like the gossip writer Lady Whistledown

in Bridgerton.

Architect, painter and designer William Kent was a protégé of Lord Burlington (1694–1753), and shared his house in Chiswick. There he developed a close relationship with Pope, captured in the sketch portraits displayed around the room. Kent's illustrations of characters from The Dunciad are also shown.

Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue, Ben Jonson (1572–1637), scribal manuscript in the hand of Ralph Crane (active 1589–1632), 1618

‘On the Grotto at Twickenham’, Alexander Pope (1688–1744), believed to be in the hand of Dorothy Boyle,

Countess of Burlington (1699–1758), 1740

The Dunciad: An Heroic Poem, Alexander Pope (1688–1744), 1728

A cylinder bureau, David Roentgen (1743–1807), 1780–1785, mahogany, gilt-bronze and brass

A desk armchair, David Roentgen (1743–1807), 1780–1785, mahogany

An oval writing table, David Roentgen (1743–1807), 1780–1785, mahogany and gilt-bronze

Smokey quartz, Switzerland, collected in 1793 by Duchess Georgiana Cavendish

The Devonshire Family As Readers, Writers, Patrons And Collectors

Two duchesses and their literary lives

These rooms explore the literary legacies of the Devonshire family as readers, patrons, writers and collectors.

Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire (1757–1806), was an enthusiastic collector and added a significant number of books to Chatsworth's Library. She was also a gifted and prolific writer, producing novels, poetry, plays and songs. The archives at Chatsworth contain a manuscript play and many unpublished poems by the Duchess – an extraordinary record of her creativity.

The Duchess published very little during her lifetime and generally opted for anonymity – choosing not to publicly acknowledge works widely assumed to be hers.

Lady Elizabeth Foster (1758–1824) was Georgiana's closest friend and also her husband's mistress. After Georgiana's death, she became Duchess of Devonshire herself.

A cultured and influential patron, Duchess Elizabeth spent her final years in Rome. She commissioned sumptuous editions of classic poetry by Horace and Virgil, illustrated by contemporary artists and well received by critics.

The Sylph, 2nd edition, Georgiana Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire (1757–1806), 1779

The Passage of the Mountain of Saint Gothard: A Poem, Georgiana Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire, about 1816

‘To Myself’ with other manuscript poems, Georgiana Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire, November 1779 and other dates

Chatsworth holds no first edition of Duchess Georgiana’s novel The Sylph, published anonymously. Among thousands of letters in the archives, there is only one passing reference to the publication.

This posthumous edition of her poem The Passage of the Mountain of Saint Gothard is illustrated with lithographs taken from drawings by Duchess Elizabeth.

‘To Myself’, one of many unpublished poems in the archives, offers a more intimate glimpse of Georgiana, reflecting on the tension between her public role and private self.

L’Eneide di Virgilio, Virgil (70–19 BCE), translated into Italian by Annibale Caro (1507–66), volume 1, 1819

Duchess Elizabeth not only funded the publication of this luxury Italian edition of Virgil’s epic poem, the Aeneid – she oversaw every aspect of its production. She rejected traditional illustrations showing scenes from the poem. Instead, she commissioned contemporary artists to paint real locations linked to the text, personally selecting each site. These works were then engraved by Domenico Marchetti. Keen to promote her patronage, she placed her own portrait – engraved after a painting by Sir Thomas Lawrence – at the front of the first volume.

Portrait of Georgiana Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire, as Cynthia from Spenser's Faerie Queene, Maria Cosway (1759–1838), 1781–82

The Faerie Queene, Edmund Spenser (about 1552–99), 1751

Maria Cosway paints Duchess Georgiana as Cynthia, the moon goddess in Spenser's Faerie Queene, the first English epic poem.

Cynthia is described in the text as seated on an ivory throne 'environd with tenne thousand

starres around'. Mutability, daughter of the Titans, challenges her power. When Cynthia refuses to yield, Mutability halts the moon, plunging Earth into darkness.

The long 's' – resembling an 'f' – in this 18th-century edition is an early handwriting convention.

The Beauty of the Book

The lives of books: production and personalisation

Books are more than the texts they contain – they are objects with stories of their own. In this space, we shift the focus from literature to books as unique artefacts and examples

of craftsmanship.

These volumes show the skill of those involved in producing books and how techniques have developed over time. They also reveal how people have chosen to personalise their books, making them unique to the owner.

For centuries, readers have marked ownership and expressed taste in different ways: an inked name, a hand-painted decoration, a specially commissioned binding or an armorial stamp proclaiming status. Books were sometimes received as gifts, elegantly bound for presentation.

Book binding styles and techniques have evolved over time, and the examples shown here span more than 300 years.

They reveal changing fashions as well as patterns of use. Some were created for famous Renaissance collectors. Others were acquired or commissioned by the Devonshires. Some books were richly decorated – bought for show rather than to be read. Others were plainly bound and kept in private rooms – valued for use rather than display.

1. **Historia naturalis, Pliny the Elder (23/24–79 CECE), 1476)**

2. **Epistolae ad familiares, Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 BCEBCE), 1472)**

With the arrival of print in the 1400s, collectors were offered an alternative to handwritten books. Early printers tried to mimic the style their customers were familiar with, relying on professional illuminators to add rich colour and decoration by hand. This lavish volume was decorated for a wealthy patron.

Other publications were embellished by their owners. Look at the margins of this book. A 15th-century reader has added remarkable drawings of real creatures and fantastical beasts.

3. **Eunuchus, Terence (about 195/185–about 159 BCE), about 1497–99**

4. **Perspectiva, Roger Bacon (about 1214–92), 1614**

For cost and convenience, printers and bookbinders sought to avoid waste, often reusing paper and parchment in their bindings. Many early printed works survive only through such fragments of ‘binding waste’, preserved by chance in later books.

This London-printed edition of Terence’s comedy *The Eunuch* is one of only two known copies in the world. In this copy, the text was stitched into a fragment of a religious manuscript from the 1100s.

The binder of Bacon’s *Perspectiva* used a printed text from a century earlier to line its cover.

5. **Poems by the Most Deservedly Admired Mrs. Katherine Philips the Matchless Orinda, Katherine Philips (1632–64), 1667**

6. **Primitive Christianity Reviv'd, William Whiston (1667–1752), 1711**

An 18th-century marriage brought the Devonshires a rich inheritance from the Boyle family. This included books bearing marks of ownership. The volume by poet Katherine Philips bears an inscription to Elizabeth Boyle, Countess of Burlington, revealing the Countess's active participation in literary culture.

The binding of this book by William Whiston displays a gilt crest with the letter B and an earl's coronet. These features link it to the Countess and her husband, the 1st Earl of Burlington.

7. Fasti consulares, Carlo Sigonio (1520/4–84), 1609

William Cavendish, 1st Earl of Devonshire, was an active book collector. He mostly acquired books to read rather than antiquarian treasures which which might be used used for display only.

Collectors often showed their ownership of a book with a bookplate – a decorative label – or an armorial binding stamp. Armorial binding stamps were marks of ownership stamped onto the cover of a book.

Instead of commissioning a bookplate or armorial stamp, the Earl bought books ready bound, although still fashionably decorated. He then personalised them with stamped initials – W.C. as seen here, or W.D. after receiving his earldom in 1618.

8. **De finibus bonorum et malorum, Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 BCEBCE), 1471), 1471**

Until the mid-1600s, books were stored quite differently from today. The fore-edge – the outer edge of the book's pages – rather than the spine was displayed facing outwards. Books were often laid horizontally. To identify books, owners would write titles directly onto the page edges, as seen here, or use paper labels. These markings offer a fascinating glimpse into early reading habits and library practices.

9. Pride and Prejudice, Jane Austen (1775–1817), 1813

In the 1800s, many novels were published in three volumes like this copy of Pride and Prejudice.

They were often sold in blue boards with a paper spine label. Many were subsequently rebound, like this one. However, this binding is very practical in nature: simple blue paper over boards with a cheap leather spine and corners. This is still very much a reading book rather than a treasure.

Chatsworth's other copy of this novel is far more luxurious, perhaps intended for show in the library. In many country houses, grandly bound volumes belonged in the family's formal library, while everyday reading books might be kept in more private spaces such as private sitting rooms or bedrooms.

1. Views of Egypt, Luigi Mayer (about 1755–1803), 1801–4

This book contains engravings based on Luigi Mayer's vivid drawings of Egypt. Look closely at the binding. Inspired by the subject matter, it features Egyptian motifs – including a sphinx, a mummy and hieroglyphs. These were created with specially cut tools.

This spectacular binding was made for Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, by leading binder Charles Hering. The GD monogram, topped with a ducal coronet, marks it unmistakably as Duchess Georgiana's copy.

2. Hypomnemata mathematica, Simon Stevin (1548–1620), 1608Simon 1608

This huge volume formerly belonged to famous Renaissance book collector Jacques August de Thou. It is bound in a style known as *à la grecque*. Books in these bindings were produced in Italy in the 1400s-early 1600s but were designed to mimic the Greek-style bindings of an earlier era. Look at how this book is fastened. These plaited strands of leather, with a ring which fits over a pin on the opposite cover, are typical features.

3. The Whole Book of Psalmes, Thomas Sternhold (d. 1549), John Hopkins (1520/21–70) and others

4. Orden de las oraciones cotidianas, 1668Orden 1668

Bookbinders have sometimes turned to unexpected materials to create luxurious volumes. These two examples show an embroidered binding and a tortoiseshell binding. The tortoiseshell volume also has ornate ‘gauffered’ edges. This is achieved by adding gold leaf and then pressing a pattern into the page edges with tools.

Such richly crafted bindings were often used for religious works. They showed respect and devotion,

as well as displaying the wealth of the owner.

Here, an English-printed book of Christian psalms

sits alongside a Jewish text printed in Amsterdam, each transformed into a precious object through its striking cover.

5. The Righteous Mans Evils, and the Lords Deliverances, Gilbert Primrose (about 1580–1642), 1625

Authors seeking patrons often presented them with finely bound copies of their work. In the 1600s, these were frequently bound in white parchment like this example.

Its gold tooling includes symbols such as the flaming heart – signalling Christ's love and humanity's gratitude – reflecting the book's themes of evil and redemption.

6. Juvenalis; Persius, Decimus Junius Juvenalis (about 50/60–127/30) and Aulus Persius Flaccus (34–62), 1501

By the late 1400s, bookbinders had adopted labour-saving decorative techniques. Heated metal rolls created borders in a single sweep, while engraved panel stamps impressed entire covers at once with intricate scenes.

This volume features a panel stamp of real and imaginary animals within a leafy vine. Many bindings of this period were later altered, with the original panels lifted and re-laid onto modern covers, as seen here.

7. **L. Apuleio, translated by M.M. Boiardo, Lucius Apuleius (born about 124), 1544, from the library of Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle (1517–86)**

8. **Arcadia, Jacopo Sannazaro (about 1458–1530), 1534, from the library of Jean Grolier (about 1490–1565)**

9. **De imitatione Christi, Jean Gerson (1363–1429), 1561, from the library of Pietro Duodo (1554–1611)**

10. **In Somnium Scipionis; Saturnaliorum, Ambrosius Theodosius Macrobius (about 370–about 430), 1585, from the library of Étienne Baluze (1630–1718)**

The books on this shelf belonged to some of the greatest book collectors of the Renaissance – their libraries later broken up and dispersed. Many of these books were bought by other collectors and found their way to libraries like Chatsworth's.

These books display innovative binding techniques: gilt tooling, which originated in Italy in the mid-1400s, and coloured goatskin leathers, imported into Europe from the Islamic world in the 1500s.

The first two bindings are Italian, the other two French. The second binding was made for the famous collector Jean Grolier, whose exquisitely decorated books were much sought after. Chatsworth holds 25 of them.

The Devonshire Family as Readers, Writers, Patrons and Collectors

Rooms filled with stories: the 6th Duke of Devonshire

The following rooms explore the 6th Duke's enduring literary legacy.

William George Spencer Cavendish, 6th Duke of Devonshire (1790–1858), was pivotal in shaping Chatsworth's Library. He created the magnificent library space you will see today. He brought together the family's book collections and expanded them with remarkable enthusiasm. He bought at major book sales, acquiring entire libraries, and competing in the early 19th-century cult of 'bibliomania', when aristocratic collectors vied to secure rare early books. His efforts shaped one of the UK's greatest private libraries here at Chatsworth.

The Duke was not just a collector. A passionate and perceptive reader, he befriended leading writers of his day, who looked to him as a patron, critic and companion. He also wrote himself. In these rooms, you will find writers who continue to captivate readers today, such as Byron, Dickens, Gaskell, Brontë and Austen.

The Library, Chatsworth, William Henry Hunt (1790–1864), about 1827, watercolour

Portrait of the 6th Duke of Devonshire (1790–1858), Sir Edwin Landseer (1802–73), 1831–32, oil on canvas

The Old Library, Chatsworth, William Henry Hunt (1790–1864), about 1827, watercolour

Portrait of the 6th Duke of Devonshire (1790–1858), Sir Edwin Landseer (1802–73) 1831–32, oil on canvas

The Devonshire Family as Readers, Writers, Patrons and Collectors

Documenting Chatsworth: the 6th Duke's legacy

The Duke's Handbook of Chatsworth and Hardwick, published in 1845, takes the form of a personal letter to his sister. It was intended only for family and close friends. Reading it feels like touring the house in his company. He reflects on rooms, acquisitions, and the transformations he made with warmth, wit and affection for his home and its collections. One of the library's best-loved works, it is still a go-to source for staff and researchers today.

The Handbook sparked a rich tradition of family responses. Lady Louisa Egerton created a monumental extra-illustrated version – one volume is shown here. Duchess Evelyn also wrote a much-loved – though unpublished – handbook in the 1920s. It offered a personal view of the house and the changes she made. Duchess Deborah continued the legacy, publishing books that remain essential reading for anyone fascinated by Chatsworth. Together, they show how each generation added its own voice to Chatsworth's story.

Handbook of Chatsworth and Hardwick, William Cavendish, 6th Duke of Devonshire (1790–1858), 1845, extra-illustrated copy created by Lady Louisa Egerton (1835–1907)

Only about 12 copies of the 6th Duke's Handbook were printed, and this is a particularly special one. He planned to create an 'extra-illustrated' copy, with engravings and watercolours, but never realised the project. Decades later, Lady Louisa Egerton, daughter of the 7th Duke, took it on.

Expanding one volume into six, she inserted sketches, engravings and paintings – including originals by artist William Henry Hunt, and her own highly accomplished original watercolours.

Letter to William Cavendish, 6th Duke of Devonshire, from Charles Dickens (1812–70), 10 October 1851

Letter to William Cavendish, 6th Duke of Devonshire, from Caroline Norton (1808–77), about 1845

The Duke shared copies of his Handbook with trusted friends, including writers Charles Dickens and Caroline Norton, both of whom wrote to him in response. Dickens praised the Duke's writing style, noting that 'some things in it…would require a very nice art to do as well in fiction'. Norton delighted

in its 'tenderness, & quaint gentle pleasantries, and wit, and anecdote', calling it 'the perfection of the gossip style'.

The Devonshire Family as Readers, Writers, Patrons and Collectors

‘Mad, bad, and dangerous to know’: Lady Caroline Lamb and Lord Byron

This room explores some of the 6th Duke’s intertwined literary relationships and Chatsworth’s place at the centre of literary society.

Lady Caroline Lamb was an adored cousin of the Duke. He was heartbroken when she married William Lamb in 1805. He remained a loyal friend throughout her turbulent life.

Lamb became a prolific writer but is best remembered for her explosive affair with the author Lord Byron in 1812. After reading Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage, she sent Byron an anonymous fan letter. Within weeks they were lovers.

The affair was short-lived. When he rejected her, her obsession became painfully public, and she took her revenge by fictionalising him as the villainous Glenarvon in her bestselling novel of the same name. She is credited with coining the famous description of Byron as ‘mad, bad, and dangerous to know’.

The Duke sympathised with his cousin but remained intrigued by Byron. Their shared schooling and social circles meant that their paths sometimes crossed, and he followed Byron's work closely.

Portrait of Lady Caroline Lamb (1785–1828), Thomas Philips (1770–1845), 1813, oil on canvas

Glenarvon, Caroline Lamb (1785–1828), 1816

Published anonymously, the Gothic novel Glenarvon caused a sensation. Its two central characters were thinly veiled portraits of Caroline Lamb and Lord Byron. Readers eagerly connected the story with their affair. Byron had ended the relationship in 1812 with a curt letter – now lost – sent in an envelope bearing the coronet of his new lover, Lady Oxford. The letter featured in Glenarvon is thought to be based on this and another of his parting notes.

‘Mourning book for Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire’, Caroline Lamb (1785–1828), date unknown

This volume was created to commemorate Duchess Georgiana after her death. It contains poems by or addressed to her with illustrations by Lady Caroline Lamb. It also contains the unfinished draft of a novel by Lamb. Gothic and melodramatic in nature, the novel features a Byronic figure called Lord Belfont.

Pride and Prejudice, Jane Austen (1775–1817), 1813, on loan from Jane Austen's House, Chawton

Austen and Lamb were contemporaries. There is no evidence they met, but this well-used first edition shows that Lamb read Austen's work.

Published soon after her disastrous affair with Byron,

Pride and Prejudice may have offered her welcome escape:

a world where misunderstandings are resolved and a happy ending is still possible.

Letter to Lady Georgiana Morpeth, from William Cavendish, 6th Duke of Devonshire (1790–1858), 23–25 October 1813

In this letter to his sister, the 6th Duke describes a recent dinner attended by Lord Byron. Probably influenced by Byron's treatment of their cousin, Caroline Lamb, he confesses to an 'abhorrence' of the poet. He adds that Byron 'looks as if he was at the point of death and has something devilish in his countenance' – a description worthy of a Byronic hero.

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage. Canto the Fourth, George Gordon Byron, Baron Byron (1788–1824), 1818

Diary, William Cavendish, 6th Duke of Devonshire (1790–1858), 1822

The 6th Duke followed Byron's work with interest, if not always with admiration.

Byron's long narrative poem, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, was divided into sections called cantos. In 1817, while travelling in Europe, the Duke was shown the manuscript of the fourth canto. He wrote that its opening description of Venice 'enchanted me'. In 1822 he praised Byron's new tragedy Werner as 'the best of his works…powerful and fine'.

He later changed his mind, adding a marginal note: '! wrong judgement.'

Portrait bust of George Gordon Byron, Baron Byron, Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770–1844), about 1818–24

Bertel Thorvaldsen sculpted the original of this bust in 1817 for Byron's friend John Hobhouse; it now belongs to the Royal Collection. He later produced several copies of it, including this one which was purchased by the 6th Duke of Devonshire in 1856.

Although the Duke had once referred to Byron's 'devilish countenance', he was very pleased with this bust, declaring 'I like it very much' and placing it on the mantelpiece in one of his sitting rooms.

The Devonshire Family as Readers, Writers, Patrons and Collectors

A duke among writers: the 6th Duke's literary life

This room explores the 6th Duke's passionate support of writers and the rich literary networks he moved in.

The Duke didn't just collect rare books for the library – he was a voracious reader of contemporary literature. Many of the novels he bought are still preserved at Chatsworth.

He moved in active literary circles, befriending writers he admired and welcoming those who sought him out as a patron, among them Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell and William Makepeace Thackeray.

One of his most enduring literary friendships was with Caroline Norton. Though less well-known today, she was a powerful voice in both literature and politics. After a disastrous marriage, she campaigned for legal reforms that transformed married women's rights over their children and property. The Duke provided her with important and unwavering support.

Letter to William Cavendish, 6th Duke of Devonshire, from Elizabeth Gaskell (1810–65), 17 September 1857, enclosing letter to Elizabeth Gaskell from Charlotte Brontë (1816–55), 27 August 1850

On 12 September 1857, novelist Elizabeth Gaskell visited Chatsworth as a tourist with her daughter. Mid-tour, a servant of the Duke invited them to stay for the weekend with his other guests. Gaskell commented that she felt 'like Cinderella'.

As a thank-you, she sent the Duke one of her most treasured letters from Charlotte Brontë. In it Brontë describes life in Haworth, reflects on women's position in society, and comments on Tennyson's poem In Memoriam.

Life of Charlotte Brontë, 3rd edition, Elizabeth Gaskell (1810–65), 1857

In her letter of thanks to the Duke, Gaskell mentioned that she was having a copy of her Life of Charlotte Brontë sent to Chatsworth. It is the third, revised edition – heavily amended after Gaskell faced threats of legal action from people who felt she had misrepresented them in the book.

'Reputation', Caroline Sheridan (later Norton, 1808–77), Helen Blackwood, Baroness Dufferin and Claneboye (1807–67) and Georgiana Sheridan (1809–84), 1828

Caroline Norton had known the 6th Duke since her childhood.

In 1828, she and her sisters presented him with this volume of humorous sketches on the theme of a woman's reputation. 'Reputation' is shown as a small cherub-like figure.

Eight years later, Norton's own reputation was rocked by a very public legal trial. Her husband accused Prime Minister Lord Melbourne of having an adulterous affair with her. The trial caused a major scandal.

‘Flowers’, Caroline Norton (1808–77), 1847

Norton sent this poem to the Duke, seeking approval to publish it with the name of his cherished niece Blanche, who died at 28. Blanche was the daughter of the 6th Duke’s sister, Georgiana.

Blanche’s husband, William Cavendish, later became the 7th Duke.

The poem reflects on the fleeting nature of life and love, and the comfort offered by flowers as symbols of eternity.

Letter to William Cavendish, 6th Duke of Devonshire, from Caroline Norton (1808–77), about April/May 1851

Letter to William Cavendish, 6th Duke of Devonshire, from Caroline Norton (1808–77), about 1851

Norton's letters to the Duke are witty and often embellished with sketches; one is written on illustrated Brighton notepaper – a forerunner of the postcard.

In contrast, her more serious letters reveal the difficulties she faced as a married woman separated from an abusive husband who denied her access to her children.

Portrait of Caroline Norton, Sir George Hayter (1792–1871), 1832, oil on canvas

The 6th Duke commissioned this portrait of Caroline Norton from the respected artist George Hayter. He was disappointed with the result, remarking that 'Hayter has failed in catching anything at all like the beauty and brilliant charm of Mrs Norton's features and countenance'.

Letter to William Cavendish, 6th Duke of Devonshire from Charles Dickens (1812–70), 4 March 1851

Scrapbook relating to a performance by the Amateur Company at Devonshire House in aid of the Guild of Literature and Art, William Cavendish, 6th Duke of Devonshire (1790–1858), 1851

A friendship developed when Charles Dickens first approached the 6th Duke for permission to stage an amateur theatrical performance at the Duke's London home. Dickens aimed to raise funds for the Guild of Literature and Art. A master of flattery, he wrote 'there is no other gentleman in this land…

on whose generous attachment to letters and art I so implicitly rely'. Keen to oblige, the Duke secured the Queen's presence at the premiere. He documented the event meticulously in this scrapbook.

Bleak House, Charles Dickens (1812–70), 1853

Dickens issued many of his novels as serials in monthly parts.

A keen Dickens fan, the 6th Duke chose not to wait for the complete novel which would be published in book form at the end of the serialisation. Instead, he bought the monthly pamphlets

as they were issued and then had them bound together. This example includes the wrapper from the very first instalment.

Letter to William Cavendish, 6th Duke of Devonshire, with sketch, from William Makepeace Thackeray (1811–63), 1 May 1848

Thackeray's novel Vanity Fair appeared in monthly instalments and the 6th Duke followed it eagerly. Before the serial had concluded, he wrote to Thackeray asking for a portrait of the novel's heroine, Becky Sharp.

Thackeray – a skilled artist – sent this sketch along with a letter revealing the fates of the main characters. In effect, the Duke received a sneak preview of how the novel would conclude.

The Devonshire Family as Readers, Writers, Patrons and Collectors

A brief legacy in books: the 10th Duke and Duchess Mary

Relatively few books in Chatsworth's Library can be firmly linked to the 10th Duke, and Duchess Mary, who never lived full-time in the house. This makes the surviving volumes especially significant.

Both the Duke and Duchess collected books to read, not as rare or decorative objects. Their interests focused on literature, history, travel and gardening.

Edward Cavendish, 10th Duke of Devonshire, served with distinction in the First World War and later in Churchill's wartime government. Duchess Mary's own life of public service included roles as Mistress of the Robes to Queen Elizabeth II, university chancellor, and tireless charity supporter.

The Duke died suddenly in 1950. He left instructions that his papers be destroyed. As a result, his surviving archive is small. This makes the discovery of a bundle of letters from

T.E. Lawrence (better known as Lawrence of Arabia) even more remarkable. They were found tucked inside the Duke's own copy of Charles Doughty's Travels in Arabia Desert, a book Lawrence deeply admired.

A House of Pomegranates, Oscar Wilde (1854–1900), 1911

Inside this battered volume, the 10th Duke (then Lord Hartington) wrote: ‘This book was in my dug-out on Gallipoli on the night of the blizzard, Nov. 30th 1915. I found it floating in 3 ft. of water.’ He kept it, adding his bookplate to mark it as his own.

Normally such damaged books are repaired, but this one is preserved exactly as he found it. Perhaps Oscar Wilde’s fairy tales offered an unknown soldier a moment of escapism amid the chaos of war.

Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph,

T.E. Lawrence (1888–1935), 1926

T.E. Lawrence was a reluctant participant in his own fame.

He wrote Seven Pillars of Wisdom to record his experiences during the Arab Revolt of 1916–18. He refused to publish the unabridged version publicly during his lifetime.

However, in 1926, he produced this lavish limited edition.

It was only available to private subscribers. He commissioned illustrations from leading contemporary artists and bindings from some of London's finest craftsmen.

Letter to the Marquess of Hartington (later 10th Duke of Devonshire) from T.E. Lawrence (1888–1935), 20 August 1924

In this typically self-deprecating letter to Lord Hartington, Lawrence urges him not to 'bother about' subscribing to Seven Pillars, warning: 'You see, you might try to read it, & I believe that it's unreadably dull'. Hartington wisely ignored this advice, and his subscription copy remains in the library today. It is one of only 170 complete copies produced.

Sense and Sensibility, Jane Austen (1775–1817), illustrated by Hugh Thomson (1860–1920), 1909

This illustrated edition of Sense and Sensibility belonged to Mary Gascoyne-Cecil, later Duchess of Devonshire. It is marked as a gift ‘from Mamma’ in 1910, for her 15th birthday.

Hugh Thomson created illustrations for all of Jane Austen’s novels as well as many other classics. Known for his meticulous research into period costume and settings, he brought Austen’s characters to life with charm and wit. His work helped to define the nostalgic visual world now associated with Austen’s fiction.

The Devonshire Family as Readers, Writers, Patrons and Collectors

The 11th Duke of Devonshire and Duchess Deborah: literary lives at Chatsworth

The 11th Duke, and Duchess Deborah, helped to shape Chatsworth's literary legacy.

The Duke expanded the library significantly. He acquired many 20th-century literary first editions and fine illustrated botanical books. Together he and his wife welcomed a lively circle of visiting writers – many of whom found inspiration within Chatsworth's walls.

Duchess Deborah, youngest of the famous Mitford sisters, grew up in a household alive with books and conversation. Her siblings Nancy, Jessica and Diana all became authors, and the family were compulsive letter-writers.

The Duchess continued this literary tradition, publishing several memoirs, including a tribute to her husband. Her written works reflect her deep attachment to Chatsworth. The House: A Portrait of Chatsworth offers an engaging, personal response to earlier handbooks by the 6th Duke of Devonshire, and Duchess Evelyn. With humour and warmth, she leads readers through the public splendour of Chatsworth and the private spaces behind the scenes.

House Of Stories: Tales from the Chatsworth Library

You have now reached the permanent home of many of the books you've seen today. The book collection was moved into this space when the 6th Duke had this room converted into the library you see today.

Chatsworth's book collection contains around 37,000 books. Over 17,000 of them are kept in the library and ante-library.

Manuscript of The House: A Portrait of Chatsworth, Deborah, Duchess of Devonshire (1920–2014), about 1980

This manuscript of Duchess Deborah's *The House* is very much of its time, written in biro on a notepad from a high-street stationer. The style of Duchess Deborah's writing matches the informality of this manuscript – friendly, approachable and humorous.

Summoned by Bells, John Betjeman (1906–84), 1960

Between the Woods and the Water, Patrick Leigh Fermor (1915–2011), 1986

The 11th Duke and Duchess were active patrons of art and literature and counted many artists and writers among their friends.

John Betjeman's limited-edition poem includes a handwritten dedication to the Devonshires, 'on whose writing papers & under whose roofs most of these pages were written'.

The books of Patrick Leigh Fermor – a long-standing friend of the Devonshires – are very well-represented in the collection.

A Selection of Novels by Nancy Mitford (1904-1973)

Duchess Deborah's sister Nancy Mitford was a novelist and biographer, publishing many books and articles throughout the 20th century. Mitford moved in prominent literary circles. Her semi-autobiographical novels often included characters based on her family and friends. Her work remains popular and influential to this day, and many of her books have been adapted for television and film.