Chetham's Library as a Cabinet of Curiosities

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> (Enter boy and boobies).
> *Boy* – "That's th' Skeleton of a Man – that's a Globe – that's a Telescope – that's a Snake – over th' snake's back's two Watch Bills – those are four ancient Swords – that with a white haft once belonged to General Wolfe – that's th' Whip that th' Snake was kilt with – that topmost's a Crocodile – that bottomost's an Alligator – that Boot once belonged to Queen Elizabeth – that's an Indian Pouch – that's an ancient Stiletto – that's part of Humphrey Cheetham's Armour – that with th' white face is a Monkey – under th' monkey's a green Lizard – side o' th' monkey's a Porpus's Skull – under th' porpus' skull's an Alligator – under th' alligator's a Turtle – those Bows & Arrows belonged to th' Indians – that's a Porpus's Head – those are various kinds of Adders, Worms, Snakes, Fishes and venomous Creatures – that Albine Piece was taken from th' dead body of a Frenchman that was killed at the Battle of Waterloo, that was fought i' th' year eighteen hundert and fifteen – those are a pair of Eagle's Claws – that Arrow belonged to one o' th' legions that fought under th' Duke of Richmond, at th' battle of Bosworth Field, in th' year 1485, when King Richard the 3rd, king of England, was slain – those Arrows once belonged to Robin Hood – that's a Sea Hen – that's a Sea Weed – that's a Unicorn Fish – that's part of an Indian's Skull – that's th' top part of it – that's part of Olliver Cromwell's Stone Tankard – those Balls are took out of a Cow – that's part of a Load Stone – those two Pieces of Wood was Almanacks before printing was found out – that's a Hairy Man – under th' hairy man's a Speaking Trumpet – side o' th' speaking trumpet's a Shark's Jaw Bone – that that's leaning 'gainst th' speaking trumpet's Olliver Cromwell's Sword – that's a Leathern Bag – side o' th' leathern bag's two Cokey Nut Shells – side o' th' cokey nut shells' a Porpus's Skull – side o' th' porpus' skull's a Pumkin – side o' th' pumkin's an American Cat – over th' pumkin's a Turtle – side o' th' turtle's a Sea Weed – that top one's a Crocodile – under th' crocodile's an Alligator – under th' alligator's a Woman's Clog that was split by a thunder bolt, and hoo wasn't hurt – side o' th' crocodile tail's a Sea Hen – side o' th' sea hen's a Laplander's Snow Shoe – that in the box is the skeleton of a nightingale – that table has as many peces as th' days in a year – this clock only strikes once a year – that's cock that crows when it smells roast beef – and that's th' way out."[1]

The above is an extract from the *Museum Chethamiense; or, A Choice of Oratorical Catalogue of the Rare and Valuable Curiosities Contained in the College Library*, produced in 1827 by (the originally anonymous) John Stanley Gregson, a bookseller and poet of Manchester. It transcribes the well-rehearsed speech given by a pupil of Chetham's Hospital, acting as a guide of Chetham's Library (hereafter Chetham's) to a group of paying visitors (the 'boobies'), and what it describes is, essentially, a 'cabinet of curiosities.'

Very little research has been conducted on cabinets of curiosities in England beyond London,[2] and no research has been published on Chetham's as a repository of such a collection. However, this paper is concerned with more than rectifying this geographic bias and consequent gap in the scholarship of curiosities. It aims to employ Chetham's cabinet of curiosities as a primary

[1] J. S. Gregson, *Museum Chethamiense; or, A Choice of Oratorical Catalogue of the Rare and Valuable Curiosities Contained in the College Library* (Manchester, 1827). Reproduced in T. Swindells, *Manchester Streets and Manchester Men*, fourth series (Manchester, 1908), 36-7.
[2] S. J. M. M. Alberti, 'Placing Nature: Natural History Collections and Their Owners in Nineteenth-Century Provincial England', *The British Journal for the History of Science*, 35, no. 3. (2002), 291-311, p. 291.

case-study in a consideration of how 'curiosity', in its various forms, was crafted throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

A Brief History of Curiosity

Curiosity is not an innate attribute. As a quality of a material item, it is not ingrained within that item, but is bestowed upon it by human agents. Curiosity is therefore a subjective, malleable trait, manufactured via engagement with said 'curious' item. We construct curiosity by perceiving an item to be odd, strange, peculiar, surprising, obscure, outstanding, marvellous – purely abstract characteristics. To put it simply, an item is only 'curious' because we think it is. And why would we think one item is 'curious' and another is not? As Daston and Park question: 'How did a miscellany of objects become and remain so emotionally charged?'.[3] These questions will be addressed by a close examination of Chetham's cabinet of curiosities.

Chetham's collection was of course not the first – nor even a major – example of a cabinet of curiosities. The *Wunderkammer* ('chamber of marvels') was a popular feature of many learned societies and prominent households across post-medieval Europe. Defined by George, 'the cabinet of curiosities was just what it said it was: odds and ends to excite wonder', whilst Cockayne describes it as a 'non-hierarchical collection of curiosities, natural specimens, miraculous objects, and the obscure, whimsical, and wonderful which defy categorical boundaries'.[4] While a full history of this fashion is beyond the scope of this paper – and has been extensively explored by others[5] – a brief overview is provided here.

The relics of saints collected and displayed by the Roman Catholic Church during the Middle Ages were the precursor to the *Wunderkammer*. Probably influenced by these exhibits of the sacred and miraculous, private individuals began to assemble their own collections.[6] These collections were first seen in royal courts, such as those of the Medici and the Hapsburgs, but, engendered by an increase in international travel and trade, they quickly spread beyond these elite circles.[7] By the sixteenth century – and throughout the seventeenth – *Wunderkammers* were being formed across Europe by collectors (self-termed 'curiosi') from various levels of

[3] L. Daston and K. Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750* (New York, 1998), p. 20.
[4] W. George, 'Alive or Dead: Zoological Collections in the Seventeenth Century' in O. Impey and A. MacGregor, *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe* (Oxford, 179-187), p.185. A. Cockayne, 'Exhibition', in *Provenance: Exhibition and Symposium,* edited by A. Cockayne (Bath, 2010), 6-7, p. 6.
[5] See O. Impey and A. MacGregor (eds), *op.cit*., K. Pomian, *Collectors and Curiosities: Paris and Venice, 1500-1900* (Cambridge, 1990); P. Findlen, *Possessing Nature: Museums, Collecting, and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Berekely, Los Angeles and London, 1994); K. Whitaker, 'The Culture of Curiosity', in *Cultures of Natural History*, edited by N. Jardine, J. A. Secord, and E. C. Spary (Cambridge, 1996), 75-90; Daston and Park; P. Mauriès, *Cabinets of Curiosities* (London, 2002); K. Arnold, *Cabinets for the Curious: Looking Back at Early English Museums* (Aldershot and Burlington, 2006); P. Grinke, *From Wunderkammer to Museum* (London, 2006).
[6] Pomian, p. 37; F. Fearrington, *Rooms of Wonder: From Wunderkammer to Museum 1599-1899* (New York, 2012), p. 17.
[7] Pomian, p. 45; Arnold, pp. 110-126.

society.[8] Although they were predominantly landowners (aristocrats and gentlemen), they also included clergymen, lawyers, university men, physicians, wealthy merchants, and apothecaries.[9] Along with historical artefacts, their collections largely consisted of objects that were, in a word, 'unfamiliar':[10] rare or unusual specimens of nature; scientific curiosities; and exotic artefacts, with their 'narratives of marvel',[11] brought back from voyages and intended as a record of their owner's travels.[12] George describes them as 'tourist junk',[13] and while 'junk' may be too negative a term, the prefix of 'tourist' can be accurately applied to the miscellany of objects brought back from the margins of the known world.[14]

Travelers on tour were invited to view private collections; published guides provided information on which collections to visit; and by the mid-seventeenth century, *Wunderkammer* catalogues were being produced to serve as models for others who wished to start their own collections.[15] It was primarily through such engagements that the culture of curiosity travelled to England. Young gentlemen, taking the Grand Tour of the Continent, were, to use Whitaker's phrase, 'trained in curiosity', returning to England as 'fully-fledged curiosi, bringing back rarities of nature and art which formed the basis of their collections of curiosities'.[16] John Tradescant (1577-1638), a botanist and gardener, was the first prominent collector of natural curiosities in England.[17] Although the *Wunderkammer* never gained the same popularity here as it did on the Continent, by the sixteenth century, London was being described by Swiss humanist scholar Thomas Platter as 'brimful of curiosities'.[18] By the end of the seventeenth century, there were more than a hundred private collections across the country.[19]

As well as private collections, the English *Wunderkammer* also found a place in academic institutions. The Universities of Cambridge and Oxford maintained collections of natural and cultural rarities during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, largely donated by benefactors and occupying an intermediate position between the private collections and public museums.[20]

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[8] S. Moser, *Wondrous Curiosities: Ancient Egypt at the British Museum* (Chicago and London, 2006), p. 12.
[9] Whitaker, p. 75.
[10] Arnold, p. 123; M. Warner, 'Contradictory Curiosity' in *Curiosity: Art and the Pleasures of Knowing*, edited by R. Malbert and B. Dillon (London, 2013), 26-39, p. 31.
[11] I. Baird, 'Introduction: Peregrine Things: Rethinking the Global in Eighteenth-Century Studies', in *Eighteenth-Century Thing Theory in a Global Context: From Consumerism to Celebrity Culture*, edited by I. Baird and C. Ionescu (Farnham, 2013), 1-16, p. 2.
[12] I. Müsch, 'Albertus Seba's Collection of Natural Specimens and its Pictorial Inventory', in *Albertus Seba: Cabinet of Natural Curiosities: The Complete Plates in Colour 1734-1765*, edited by I. Müsch, R. Willmann, and J. Rust (Köln, 1999), 7-12, p. 8; Baird and Ionescu.
[13] George, p. 183.
[14] Daston and Park, p. 14.
[15] Fearrington, p. 10.
[16] Whitaker, p. 75.
[17] Mauriès, p. 141.
[18] T. Platter, *Thomas Platter's Travels in England 1599*, edited by C. Williams (London, 1937), p. 174.
[19] Arnold, p. 13.
[20] M. Hunter, 'Cabinet Institutionalized: The Royal Society's 'Repository' and its Background', in Impey and MacGregor, *The Origins of Museums*, 159-168, pp. 159-160; Arnold, p. 260.

Other early institutional collections included the Ashmolean, the British Museum, the Royal Society's museum[21] – and Chetham's Library.

Chetham's Cabinet of Curiosities

Chetham's Library was established in 1653, along with a Bluecoat charity school known as the Hospital, by bequest of the successful Manchester textile merchant Humphrey Chetham. Endowed with a lump sum of one thousand pounds to buy books, and with the remainder of Chetham's estate, which was invested in land to provide income, the Library quickly established itself as the leading scholarly repository in the North of England. By 1684, when the Library carried out its first stock-take, it was said to contain over 3,000 volumes, amounting to a formidable body of Latinised scholarship. For the next century and a half, Chetham's was, for all intents and purposes, a rival of Oxbridge college libraries, a library of resort for the clergy, lawyers, medics, and others who were what passed for professional classes in early modern Manchester.[22]

In addition to the acquisition of printed books, the Library began to accumulate a burgeoning collection of non-book objects: a 'Museum, or collection of curiosities', as Henn described it in 1886.[23] These gifts of curios began to arrive soon after the Library opened and continued throughout the following century. The Library's first gift book (which commenced thirty years after its foundation) recorded their donation. The first, a series of paintings of puritans and sixteenth-century church reformers, was given in October 1684. The following year, Chetham's gift book lists 'a snake or serpent's skin' and a 'genealogical roll'. In 1695 the Library was given a 'pendulum watch', a 'Thermometer and Barometer' (a modest and possibly confusing description of a tall case clock standing almost three metres high) (Fig. 1), and a 'Clog-Almanack' (Fig. 2) (a second clog arrived in 1711). The turn of the century saw an increase in natural history objects: 'a skeleton of a woman with several other curiosities' (1679), 'an alligator's skin' (1702), 'a young swordfish, & the sword of an old one' (1702), a 'Flying Stag, also two Heads of the same kind' (1708), the 'Tail of a Rattle-Snake' (1708), an 'Echinus Marinus' (1712), 'loadstone' (1712), a 'stone tankard' (1712), a 'tortoise shell' (1712) and a 'hummingbird &c.' (1712). In 1713, the gift book also lists 'A large stone taken out of a woman's bladder, it weighed 14 ounces & 6 drachm'.

[21] P. F. Da Costa, 'The Culture of Curiosity at the Royal Society in the First Half of the Eighteenth Century', *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London*, 56, no. 2 (2002), 147-166.
[22] B. Love, *Manchester as it is, or, Notices of the institutions, manufactures, commerce, railways, etc. of the metropolis of manufactures: interspersed with much valuable information useful for the resident and stranger* (Manchester, 1839), pp. 128-131; J. Henn, *Memoir of Richard Hanby* (Manchester and London, 1886), pp. 73-115; Manchester Record, *The Manchester record, for the year 1868; concise diary of events of the whole year* (Manchester, 1869), pp. 187-192.
[23] J. Henn, 1886. *Memoir of Richard Hanby* (Manchester: John Heywood, and London, 1886), p.86

Figure 1 – The 'Thermometer and Barometer' (a modest description of a tall case clock standing almost three metres high), recorded in the Gift Book as having been donated to Chetham's by Nicholas Clegg, 'formerly a boy of the Hospital', in 1694. Currently on display in Chetham's Library Reading Room (Photograph by C. Houlbrook).

Figure 2 – The 'Clog-Almanack', donated to Chetham's by Henry Finch in 1694 (Photograph by C. Houlbrook).

This assortment represented the start of a collection that was to grow throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Small collections of medals were given in 1714, 1731, and 1789, paintings in 1835, and ever more items of natural history and zoology - a 'Brazilian lizard' (1732), the 'jaws of a shark' (1732), a 'strange kind of sea-weed/sea-heather' (1732), a 'shoe which the Laplanders make use of to walk on the snow' (1739), and an 'alligator' (1791). The curiosities were never formally listed but were always mentioned in the schedules of material for which successive librarians had to sign on appointment.

Not surprisingly we know very little about the donors of this material. Some had connections with the foundation, such as Nicholas Cunliffe, an old boy of Chetham's Bluecoat charity school, who presented the Library with the tall-case clock. Henry Newcome was another; the rector of Middleton was one of the Library's earliest and most important readers, gifting a flying stag, two stags' heads (Fig. 3), and the tail of a rattle snake. For the rest we have no knowledge of either their interest in the Library or their motives. One presumes that they had visited the Library at some point but even this is guesswork. What does seem clear is that the donors were not major collectors of natural history or of curiosities, and their gifts, for the most part, were modest. It is significant that the two most important collectors of natural history items in the region in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Charles Leigh and Sir Ashton Lever, did not donate their material to the Library. Leigh, a resident of Manchester, promised his collection to the Royal Society, whilst Lever kept his collection in his house at Alkrington Hall, to which the public had access, before opening a museum, or *Holophusikon* ('whole-nature') as he styled it, in Leicester House, London.[24]

[24] W. J. Smith, 'Sir Ashton Lever of Alkrington and his Museum 1729-1788', *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society*, 72 (1962), 61-92; S. Thomas, 'Feather Cloaks and English Collectors: Cook's Voyages and the Objects of the Museum', in Baird and Ionescu (eds.) *Eighteenth-Century Thing Theory*, 69-87, pp. 76-81.

Figure 3 – The two stags' heads, donated to Chetham's by Henry Newcome in 1708. Currently on display in the Baronial Hall, Chetham's School of Music (Photograph by C. Houlbrook).

The Library, then, did not attract these gifts simply because there was nowhere else for them to go. Manchester may have been slow to develop those other cultural institutions which provided an indication of civilized behaviour: reading rooms, scientific or literary societies and the like – institutions which could have provided an alternative home for these collections – but private collectors could look further afield when it came to choosing public institutions to house their material. Chetham's did not attract large private collections; on the contrary, it seems to have been given a single item or at most a small number of items from each donor.

Furthermore, the museum items that came into the Library, unlike the books, were entirely the result of gifts, rather than purchases. Though few in number, the museum items accounted for a considerable percentage of the total number of donations given to the Library in its first century and a half. The number of books and manuscripts presented to Chetham's was small. The Library relied heavily on its income as the basis for acquisitions, and the museum objects account for almost forty percent of the total of all gifts in the first two centuries of the Library's existence. As the collection grew, the Library attracted more and more curios, forming a relatively well-established cabinet of curiosities. Most of these items were no longer recorded in Chetham's gift books but, fortunately for us as researchers, were detailed in the written accounts of those visiting the collection.

Visitors to Chetham's included both tourists and local residents, and in the 1820s and 30s Alexander Wilson, the youngest of a family of Manchester songwriters, produced a number of ballads written in the Lancashire dialect, on the theme of Oldham visitors coming into Manchester to view its attractions. In his ballad, 'Johnny Green's Wedding and Description of Manchester College', first published in the *Manchester Guardian* in 1839, Wilson recounts the practice whereby Oldham couples would travel into Manchester on Easter Monday to marry at the Collegiate Church. Afterwards, almost as part of the nuptial arrangements, the couple and their friends, most of whom were worse for wear from drink, would tour the College:

> We seed a clock-case, first, good laws!
> Where Deoth stonds up wi' great lung claws;
> His legs, an' wings, an' lantern jaws,
> They really lookt quite feorink.
> There's snakes an' watch-bills, just loik poikes,
> 'Ot Hunt an aw th' reformink toikes,
> An' thee an' me, an' Sam o' Moiks,
> Once took a blanketeerink.[25]

Additionally, in 1867 John Harland explained the following:

> It was the custom in the early part of this century for the market people, especially females, in their red cloaks, to resort to this institution [Chetham's], probably because they were related to some of the blue coat boys. They were shown into the buttery,

[25] A. Wilson, 'Johnny Green's Wedding and Description of Manchester College', in *The Songs of the Wilsons: With A Memoir of the Family*, edited by J. Harland (London, 1939 [1865]), 57-60, p. 58.

> and asked to partake of a slice of the excellent brown bread, and to taste the brewage. Then one of the boys conducted them into the old-fashioned library, with its relics of antiquity[26]

Other visitors came from further afield, and the earliest account recorded is that of Celia Fiennes, whose visit to Manchester in 1688 was recorded in her travel writings. Of Chetham's, she wrote the following:

> Just by the Church is the Colledge [Chetham's], which is a pretty neate building with a large space for the boys to play in and a good garden walled in; there are 60 Blew Coate boys in it, I saw their appartments and was in the cellar and dranck of their beer which was very good...There is a large Library 2 long walls full of books on each side there is alsoe the globes at the end the maps, there is alsoe a lon whispering trumpet and there I saw the skinn of a Rattle Snake 6 foote long, with many other Curiositys, their anatomy of a man wired together, a jaw of a sherk… [27]

A hundred years later William Philips' journey from the Cotswolds to Lancashire resulted in the following description: 'Upstairs we saw many rooms full of books piled up...to the ceilings and many serpents, lizards, monkeys etc with many stones and balls of hair that had been taken out of cattle when killed, with skeletons of several sizes and many curiosities of different sorts, we then went down in the cellar and tasted the beer'.[28] Like Fiennes, Philips was more impressed by the boys' beer and the curios than the library books. More importantly, Philips confirms that the collection had now grown to include 'many curiosities of different sorts'.

Another early visitor's reference to Chetham's cabinet of curiosities was penned by the poet Robert Southey. In 1807 Southey published an account of a tour of England written in the guise of a Spanish traveller, Don Manuel Alvarez Espriella, who wrote a series of letters back home recording his impressions. The idea was to provide a foreign viewpoint, one that would be distinctive and fresh. Southey's account of the newly industrialized town of Manchester was uniformly unfavourable: 'a place more destitute of all interesting objects than Manchester it is not easy to conceive'.[29] The sight of children and adults employed in the cotton mills, and the condition of their dwellings depressed him, and he was glad to leave the town after only a short stay. One thing and one thing only made a positive impression: 'The most remarkable thing which I have seen here is the skin of a snake fourteen English feet in length, which was killed in the neighbourhood, and is preserved in the library of the collegiate church'.[30] Surely Southey was a little perplexed to have been informed that a native snake could grow to fourteen feet in length.

Visitors and tourists to Manchester were increasingly directed to take a tour of Chetham's and to view these objects. The last quarter of the eighteenth century saw the emergence of guidebooks and handbooks of Manchester; attempts to describe the town for the ever-increasing numbers drawn to this new phenomenon of Cottonopolis. The first such book, by a

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[26] J. Harland, *Collectanea relating to Manchester and its Neighbourhood, at various periods*. Volume 2 (Manchester, 1867), p. 194.
[27] C. Fiennes, *The Illustrated Journeys of Celia Fiennes 1685-c.1712*, edited by C. Morris (London, 1982), 184.
[28] Cited in L. D. Bradshaw, *Visitors to Manchester: A Selection of British and Foreign Visitors' Descriptions of Manchester from c1538 to 1865* (Swinton, 1987), p. 20.
[29] R. Southey (1807) cited in *Letters from England*, edited by J. Simmons (Gloucester, 1984), p. 213.
[30] Southey, p. 213.

former fustian weaver and poet James Ogden, in 1783, describes Chetham's as follows: 'The resort of strangers to view the Hospital and library, which contains some curiosities, is great, and sometimes, interrupts students; but this inconvenience can weigh little against the exhibition of such a noble collection, to gratify the curiosity of strangers, and perpetuate a memorial of the Founder's charity'.[31] Ogden's account is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, it evinces the high number of visitors going to Chetham's in order to view the curios. Secondly, we see a distinction being drawn (and tensions arising) between the students consulting books and the strangers viewing the curiosities.

Joseph Aston's *Manchester Guide* of 1804 expanded Ogden's description of Chetham's, explaining that besides the books and manuscripts there were several natural and artificial curiosities.[32] According to Aston, these were exhibited to visitors by a man servant or other attendants,[33] while later sources make clear that this task fell on the pupils of the Hospital who, according to the Manchester Record for 1868, 'are duly trained by their own fraternity, to the right performance of their functions'.[34] In 1867 John Harland described how 'one of the boys' would conduct visitors into the library and provide a tour of the curiosities and the Manchester Record for 1868 describes a 'juvenile cicerone [being] summoned by a bell' when visitors request a guide.[35] Nearly two decades later, in 1886 Booth recalls being guided by a 'long-robed, clean-looking, bare-headed lad';[36] whilst Henn, in his *Memoir of Richard Hanby,* librarian at Chetham's from 1829, explains that 'waiting-boys', who were '[w]ell up in their vocation as 'show-men'', were 'always in attendance in a certain rotation to show visitors over the Library and Museum'.[37]

Despite the curiosities constituting the primary attraction for visitors, the librarians and governors of Chetham's were largely indifferent about this collection. In the case of the librarians, the museum was essentially outside their responsibility. There was no attempt at taxonomy: the collection was not listed or catalogued and the tours of the Library were conducted by Hospital servants or school boys. The governors too showed little interest in the curiosities – until 1860, when Thomas Jones raised the issue of the collection in his annual report to the Feoffees. For the first time in years, the Library had been cleaned and painted. But the ornamentation was jeopardised if everything was put back where it belonged. As Jones asserted:

> There is no library in the kingdom exposed to the same accumulation of dust, because no other is filled with this worthless mural furniture from which every puff of wind disperses the dust collected theron. We want walls and other attractions within instead of crocodiles and alligators. [37]

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[31] J. Ogden, *A description of Manchester: Giving an historical account of those limits in which the town was formerly included, some observations upon its public edifices, present extent and later alterations* (Manchester, 1783), p. 20.
[32] J. Aston, *The Manchester Guide: A brief historical description of the towns of Manchester & Salford, the public buildings, and the charitable and literary institutions* (Manchester, 1804), p. 148.
[33] Aston, p. 148.
[34] Manchester Record 1869, p. 141.
[35] Harland, p. 194; Manchester Record 1869, p. 141.
[36] W. Booth, 'Chetham College Curiosities', *Manchester Notes and Queries*, 6 (1885-6), 301-302, p. 301.
[37] Henn, p. 86.

The numbers coming in to see the collection had declined over the years. Jones saw this as 'evidence of the contempt with which people now regard the Exhibition', but it was more likely a result of the fact that by the middle of the nineteenth century, working-class visitors to Manchester had many alternative destinations to go, such as the zoological gardens at Belle Vue.

The proposal was made to disperse the majority of the collection to the new museum at Peel Park, Salford – a proposal which the Feoffees approved.[38] In 1882, James Croston, in his work *Nooks and Corners of Lancashire and Cheshire*, wrote the following:

> Until late years this gloomy corridor [of Chetham's] was at once a library and a museum. High up on the ceiling, on the tops of bookcases and in the window recesses, were displayed a formidable array of sights and monsters, as varied and as grotesque as those which appalled the heart of the Trojan Prince in his descent to hell ... Formerly at Easter and other festivals crowds of gaping holiday folk thronged the college and gazed with vacant wonderment at the incongruous collection. But the quietude is no longer broken by these inharmonious chantings – the strange collection has been transferred to a more fitting home[39]

A more fitting home, perhaps, but not one that was necessarily more welcoming. In 1886 William Rylance wrote a letter to the *Manchester City News*, in which he claimed that some of the items sent to Peel Park had already been destroyed.[40] Disappointingly, attempts by this paper's writers to locate any of the curiosities re-housed at Peel Park have invariably failed.

A few items were retained by Chetham's. These are listed in Rylance's letter as follows:

> … two watch-bills, six swords, the two colours carried by the Manchester Volunteers at the siege of Gibraltar in 1782, a gun taken from the dead body of a Frenchman at the battle of Waterloo, Oliver Cromwell's stone tankard, a boot that once belonged to Queen Elizabeth, two pieces of wood that were almanacks before printing was invented, a piece of Roman pottery, and part of a shield found in Castlefield in 1728.[41]

Of the items listed in Chetham's gift book, the only items still there today – as far as is known – are the swords, the thermometer and barometer set in a tall clock case, the clog-almanac, and the stags' heads (Figs. 1-3). It is unsurprising that Chetham's cabinet of curiosities has been almost completely dismantled over time. Disassembly and dispersal awaited most collections, with the virtually complete *Wunderkammer* of John Bargrave at Canterbury and the Tradescant collection in the Ashmolean Museum being the rare exceptions.[42]

Chetham's Classic Curiosities

Chetham's collection met a typical ending, but was it typical in other elements? The average cabinet of curiosities was a private collection, assembled by an individual or group via travel

[38] Henn, p. 86n; T. Swindells, *Manchester Streets and Manchester Men* (Manchester, 1908), p. 38.
[39] J. Croston, *Nooks and Corners of Lancashire and Cheshire* (Manchester and London, 1882), p. 163.
[40] W. Rylance, 'Chetham College Curiosities', *Manchester Notes and Queries*, 6 (1885-6), 300-301, p. 300.
[41] Rylance, p. 300.
[42] P. Grinke, *From Wunderkammer to Museum* (London, 2006), p. 16.

or trade. Chetham's, however, was more akin to a museum: an accumulation of gifts, accrued randomly by donation rather than by design. Chetham's was atypical in that it did not consciously collect curiosities. It was, however, formed as a result of the conscious collecting of others: donors who had deemed certain objects worthy of retention and believed Chetham's to be a suitable repository for them – and these objects were certainly typical 'curiosities'. For example, with a gift book featuring an 'alligator' (1791); a 'skeleton of a woman' (1679); and a 'Brazilian lizard' (1732), Chetham's unequivocally adhered to George's claim that '[n]early every collection had crocodile skins or skeletons and dried chameleons'.[43]

Forshaw writes that the average *Wunderkammer* included items which could be divided into four categories: 'Antiquities', 'Artificialia', 'Ethnographica', and 'Naturalia'.[44] Chetham's cabinet of curiosities was no exception, proffering a collection which was archetypal in its range of objects. To take the first category, 'Antiquities', Chetham's gift book listed 'Roman pottery found in Castle Field' (1839) – Henn and Rylance add to this 'part of a Shield, found in Castle Field in the same year'[45] – and the 'hand of a Theban Princess found at Thebes' (1838). The latter, donated by a J. Watson, is undoubtedly the 'hand of an Egyptian Mummy' referred to in the list cited by Henn and Rylance.[46] According to Moser, Egyptian objects in the eighteenth century were 'iconic curiosities…a sought-after addition for every worthy collection',[47] featuring in the cabinets of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Cardinal Flavio Chigi, Peter Paul Rubens, Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc, and the University of Leiden.[48] The popularity of the Egyptian mummy partly stemmed from the belief held in the Middle Ages that the *mummia* (the powder of bitumen used for embalming) held medicinal properties, but it can also no doubt be explained by the mysterious and culturally exotic status of Egyptian antiquities.

The fact that Chetham's housed only the hand of a mummy is unsurprising. Complete mummies were rare in British collections and the hand alone was widely believed to hold certain folk-medicinal properties.[49] Other cabinets of curiosities held similar appendages, a fashion no doubt stemming from the Church's designation of saints' hands as relics. John Tradescant's *Museaum Tradescantianum* (1656) listed the hand of a 'mermaid' amidst Tradescant's collection[50] – which Cockayne theorises was probably fashioned from the limb of a manatee.[51] The collection of John Bargrave, a seventeenth-century canon of Canterbury Cathedral, included the finger of a Frenchman from Toulouse.[52] While Ralph Thoresby's collection held a fragment of an Egyptian mummy together with the hand and arm of the

[43] W. George, p. 181.
[44] G. Forshaw, 'The Wunderkammer Style of Display and its Influence on Contemporary Art', in Cockayne (ed.) *Provenance*, 74-85, p. 77.
[45] Henn, p. 88; Rylance, p. 301.
[46] Henn, p. 88; Rylance, p. 301.
[47] Moser, pp. 41-42.
[48] Moser, p. 42.
[49] Moser, p. 56; O. Davies and F. Matteoni, ''A Virtue beyond All Medicine': The Hanged Man's Hand, Gallows Tradition and Healing in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century England', *Social History of Medicine*, 28, no. 4 (2015), 686-705.
[50] Fearrington, pp. 79-80.
[51] Cockayne, p. 26.
[52] Impey and McGregor, p. 154.

Marquis of Montrose which, according to *Musaeum Thoresbyanim* (1713), 'seems really to have been the very Hand that wrote the famous Epitaph … for K. Charles 1st'.[53]

As well as 'Antiquities', Chetham's held several items which can be classified as 'Artificialia', such as the 'Thermometer and Barometer' (1694); the 'Clog-Almanack' (1694); the 'pendulum watch' (1694) (Figs. 1-2); and the 'artificial eye' (1704). The latter was donated by a George Pearson and is in keeping with the 'Artificialia' collected by others; for example, Heinrich Bytemeister, a professor of theology at the Academia Julia, Helmstedt in Lower Saxony, accumulated a collection of scientific instruments during the 1700s which included a selection of artificial eyes.[54]

Chetham's also included some fairly typical 'Ethnographica': artificial objects acquired on exploratory voyages which could, as Thomas observes, 'function as representative embodiments of other cultures and peoples, while evoking scenes of encounter that stirred the imagination'.[55] For example, the gift book lists a 'shoe which the Laplanders make use of to walk on the snow', donated in 1739 by a Joseph Goddard, as well as two 'American shoes', donated in 1843 by a Wilson Broker, and later identified as 'American Snow Shoes' by Henn and Rylance.[56] This shows an interest in exotic garments – an interest that was ubiquitous in the collections of the time, with Duke Frederick III's cabinet at Gottorp in Schleswig containing Eskimo costumes from Greenland;[57] the Royal Society in England possessing snow-shoes from Greenland;[58] and the Sloane Collection containing snow-shoes from French Canada. As Crozier notes, eighteenth-century voyages to Canada, Greenland, and Alaska resulted in the inclusion of Eskimo-Aleut 'souvenirs' in many collections.[59]

It was, however, in 'Naturalia' where Chetham's collection – along with most other cabinets of curiosities[60] – excelled. It contained, for example, a 'loadstone', donated by a Richard Moss in 1712. The naturally magnetised loadstone, usually shaped into a rectangular block, was considered a precious item in many cabinets, where it would often be mounted in decorative casing. One was held, for example, in the sixteenth-century collection of Veronese apothecary Franceso Calzolari and another in the 17th-century collection of Jesuit scholar Athanasius Kircher.[61] As Fara notes, the popularity of the mounted loadstone in collections came from its 'threefold reflection of value. It simultaneously advertised its purchaser's wealth, represented

[53] Cited in K. Whitaker, 'The Culture of Curiosity', in *Cultures of Natural History*, edited by N. Jardine, J. A. Secord, and E. C. Spary (Cambridge, 1996), 75-90, p. 85.
[54] Fearrington, p. 62.
[55] Thomas, 'Feather Cloaks', p. 69.
[56] Henn, p. 88; Rylance, p. 301.
[57] Fearrington, p. 39.
[58] Grinke, p. 84.
[59] B. Crozier, 'From Earliest Contacts: An Examination of Inuit and Aleut Art in Scottish Collections', in *Souvenirs: The Material Culture of Tourism*, edited by M. Hitchcock and K. Teague (Aldershot and Burlington, 2000), 52-71.
[60] P. Findlen, *Possessing Nature: Museums, Collecting, and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy*. (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1994); Daston and Park.
[61] Daston and Park, p. 154; Findlen, p. 84.

the fascination of natural rarities, and symbolized the monetary cost of labor-intensive craftsmanship'.[62]

Another popular natural curiosity was the bezoar: a hair ball taken from a cow's stomach. When William Philips visited Chetham's in 1792, he listed 'many stones and balls of hair that had been taken out of cattle when killed',[63] whilst Gregson includes 'balls took out of a cow' in his recitation of the collection.[64] The bezoar was commonly found in cabinets of curiosities, such as in the collection of the Duke of Berry and Calzolari,[65] because they were considered to possess magical properties and antidotes to poison.[66]

Animal-life featured prominently in Chetham's collection, as it did in many others. For example, sea-life: the gift book lists a 'Flying-Stag, also two Heads of the same kind' (1708), a 'young swordfish, & the sword of an old one' (1702), a 'strange kind of sea-weed/sea-heather' (1732); the 'Jaws of a shark' (1732); and a 'Collection of Fish' (1795). Later sources detailing the collection also list the 'fin of a Shark'; 'part of a Whale's bone'; a 'Dog-fish';[67] a 'porpus's skull'; a 'sea hen'; and a 'unicorn fish'.[68] Such items commonly featured in other cabinets. The sixteenth-century illustration of Ferrante Imperato's collection in Naples features a seal suspended off the edge of a shelf along with a puffer fish,[69] while the collection of Thoresby, described in his *Musaeum Thoresbyanim* (1713), included the 'Pizle [penis] of a Whale, in Length a Yard and a Quarter'.[70] Of the thirteen collection-inventories detailed by George, nine include sawfish.[71] The jaws and teeth of sharks – known in medieval times as 'serpents' tongues' – were also popular curiosities, probably because they were believed to reveal poison by sweating in its presence.[72]

It was the crocodile or alligator, however, that was by far the most quintessential element of a cabinet of curiosities – and Chetham's housed a few. According to the gift book, an alligator's skin was donated to Chetham's in 1702 by a donor referred to as Pemberton; in 1791 an alligator (presumably whole) was donated by a Patrick McMorland; and by 1827, Gregson lists two crocodiles and three alligators on display.[73] The crocodile or alligator appeared in early church collections, for example in the Cathedral of Seville and the sixteenth-century chapel of the Chateau of Oiron, and was a prominent feature of many notable collections.[74] However,

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[62] P. Fara, *Sympathetic Attractions: Magnetic Practices, Beliefs, and Symbolism in Eighteenth-Century England* (Princeton, 1996), p. 48.
[63] Cited in Bradshaw, p. 20.
[64] Gregson, cited in Swindells, p. 36.
[65] Daston and Park, pp. 75, 155.
[66] C. J. Sheehy, *Cabinet of Curiosities: Mark Dion and the University as Installation* (Minneapolis, 2006), p. 3; J. Knuth, 'Student Curators Reflect on Cabinet of Curiosities: The Bezoar', in Sheehy (ed.) *Cabinet of Curiosities*, 57-58, p. 57.
[67] Henn, pp. 87-91; Rylance, p. 301.
[68] Gregson, cited in Swindells, p. 36, p. 37.
[69] Moser, p. 16.
[70] Cited in Whitaker, p. 85.
[71] George, p. 181.
[72] Daston and Park, p. 75.
[73] Gregson, cited in Swindells, pp. 26-37.
[74] Daston and Park, pp. 84-85. Other examples include the crocodile or alligator in the cabinets of Ferrante Imperato, Naples (Fearrington, p. 19); Basilius Besler, Nuremburg (Fearrington, p. 24); Peter

the crocodile or alligator was more than just pervasive; it was iconic. It became the centrepiece of many collections.[75] Mauriès describes it as 'undoubtedly the most symbolic of the cabinet',[76] to the extent that many published guides of cabinets or advertising flyers featured crocodiles or alligators on their title pages.[77] The crocodile or alligator was thus the chief classic curiosity, and its inclusion in Chetham's collection clearly demonstrates an alignment with other cabinets of the time.

Chetham's was therefore a typical cabinet of curiosities insofar as the items it housed were typical curiosities. However, further questions must be considered to shed light on the crafting of curiosity. What was it about these objects that instilled curiosity, designating them 'curiosities' and, by association, Chetham's as a 'cabinet of curiosities'? What did these classic curiosities – the crocodile, the sawfish, the bezoar, the loadstone, the snow-shoe, the artificial eye, the hand of an Egyptian mummy – have in common?

It was stated above that we construct curiosity by perceiving an item to be odd, strange, peculiar, surprising, obscure, outstanding, marvellous. Curiosities are, according to George, 'odds and ends [that] excite wonder', and according to Cockayne, 'the obscure, whimsical, and wonderful'.[78] They are the 'unfamiliar':[79] specimens of nature that are rare or unusual (be it through size, colour, composite parts, etc.); scientific curiosities; and exotic artefacts brought back from voyages of exploration. The items housed by Chetham's certainly fit such descriptions. However, Chetham's also housed another category of items not yet considered – the decidedly uncurious.

Recrafting the Curious

Listed amongst Chetham's curiosities were a stone tankard, a whip stock, several swords, boots, arrows, a woman's clog, and a table. These are not items generally perceived of as odd, strange, peculiar, surprising, obscure, outstanding, marvellous. They do not 'excite wonder';[80] they are not 'the obscure, whimsical, and wonderful';[81] they are not the 'unfamiliar'. They are not, by definition, curiosities, and yet they are included in Chetham's collection. Why? Because they have been recrafted as curiosities.

It was claimed above that curiosity is a human construction. It is therefore subjective and malleable – just as an object is. As anthropologist Nicholas Thomas asserts, a thing 'is not

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the Great, St Petersburg (Fearrington, p. 53); William Bullock, Liverpool (Fearrington, p. 86); M. Gallois, Paris (Fearrington, p. 97); Ralph Thoresby, London (Whitaker, p. 85); and Athanasius Kircher, Rome (Moser, p. 29).

[75] Moser, p. 17.

[76] Mauriès, p. 232.

[77] Fearrington, pp. 24, 86.

[78] George, p. 185; Cockayne, p. 6.

[79] Arnold, p. 123; Warner, p. 31.

[80] George, p. 185.

[81] Cockayne, p. 6.

immutable'.[82] An object must be analysed for what it has become – how it has been appropriated and re-contextualised – not simply for what it was made to be. Just as a person's biography can take an unpredicted turn, so too can an object's. And the museum has a particularly potent ability to de- and re-contextualise an object, partly by ensuring that it is no longer used in its original fashion but also by placing it in new physical and interpretational environments.[83] As Hoare writes, collected and curated things 'are turned into something entirely other by the process itself. Set apart on green baize, they await new labels, new forensics, new diagnoses'.[84] The meaning of an object can change simply through its transference from personal ownership to institutional possession or public display[85] – a transference that the curiosity undertakes when it is donated to a collection such as Chetham's.

However, the de- and re-contextualisation of an object is not always an incidental consequence of its collection, donation, or curatorship. Sometimes it is deliberate, with the collector or curator (or, indeed, the viewer of a displayed object) purposefully altering the meaning of an object. This enables the conscious crafting of curiosity, which – in the case of cabinets of curiosities – occurs via two primary processes: optimistic curatorship and captivation.

Optimistic Curatorship: Mythologizing the Mundane

All objects have biographies; they do not exist in isolation.[86] However, it is impossible to deny that some objects simply have more interesting biographies than others. They have particularly compelling stories to tell, and it is the function of museums and collections to narrate these stories, just as it is their stories – their 'anecdotal potency', to use Arnold's phrase[87] – that cause objects to be valued by collectors and curators. Some curiosities are therefore prized for the stories attached to them, a fact which leads Dillon to conjecture that the cabinet of curiosity was a pretext for the written inventory itself; that it was the description of objects rather than the objects themselves that interested people.[88] As Whitaker asserts, 'Even ordinary objects could become noteworthy curiosities if they were associated with strange and wonderful stories'[89] – stories which justified an object's designation as 'curiosity'.

Often, these stories were excuses for name-dropping. Many objects were supposedly once owned or used by well-known historical characters.[90] For example, a reliquary owned by French archaeologist Vivant Denon contained the signature of Napoleon, a lock of his hair, and a bloodstained fragment of the chemise he had been wearing upon his death.[91] Similarly, the

[82] N. Thomas, N. *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1991), p. 28.
[83] Arnold, p. 167.
[84] P. Hoare, 'Provenance', in Cockayne (ed.) *Provenance*, 10-13, pp. 12-13.
[85] N. H. H. Graburn, 'Foreword', in Hitchcock and Teague (eds.), *Souvenirs*, xii-xvii, p. xv.
[86] I. Kopytoff, 'The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as process' in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in cultural perspective*, edited by A. Appadurai (Cambridge, 1986), 64-91.
[87] Arnold, p. 88.
[88] B. Dillon, 'Essays at Curiosity, or Eight Ways of Looking', in Malbert and Dillon (eds.) *Curiosity: Art and the Pleasures of Knowing* (London: Hayward, 2013), 14-23, p. 18.
[89] Whitaker, p. 78.
[90] Impey and MacGregor, p. 3.
[91] Mauriès, p. 200.

collection of the Bodleian included Guy Fawkes' lantern;[92] the collection of Horace Walpole contained James I's gloves and William III's spurs;[93] and the British Museum displayed Oliver Cromwell's watch and a brick from the Tower of Babel.[94] As Mauriès writes, what we see here is 'a passion for relics, essentially secular in nature'.[95] In other cases, the stories speak of remarkable provenances. For example, curiosities presented to the Royal Society throughout the eighteenth century included: a piece of bone that came out of a woman's throat; some bones found in the human heart of a person who died of a shortness of breath; and a worm taken out of the guts of a hog.[96] Other objects were purely fantastical: Tradescant's 'hand of a mermaid'; Ulisse Aldrovandi's 'dragon';[97] and the 'unicorn horns' (i.e. narwhal horn) and 'griffin claws' (i.e. bison horn) that appeared in such collections.[98]

In these cases, the objects are only considered curiosities because of the stories attached to them. The lantern is worthy of a place in the Bodleian's collection because it purportedly belonged to Guy Fawkes whilst the pieces of bone only attracted the Royal Society's attention because they were supposedly taken from a human heart. The words 'purportedly' and 'supposedly' are of significance here. Did the lantern *really* belong to Guy Fawkes? Did the bones *really* come from a human heart? Are these details factual or examples of optimistic curatorship? It is not the purpose of this paper to prove or disprove such claims, but to consider why such claims, whether true or false, were made at all. The answer is simple: because it cemented their status as curiosities. Embellishing an object's biography serves to transform it from a mundane, everyday item to a curiosity worthy of collection and display. Such processes of mythologizing the mundane are evident at Chetham's.

Above, the 'uncurious' items in Chetham's collection were listed: a stone tankard, a whip stock, several swords, boots, arrows, a woman's clog, and a table. Each of these items, however, had stories attached to them. Again, the trend appears to have been name-dropping. For example, the tankard, donated in 1712 by a Richard Moss and recorded in the gift book simply as 'stone tankard', accrues an interesting biographical detail over time. By 1827, Gregson was describing it as 'part of Oliver Cromwell's stone tankard', a description adopted by later writers.[99] One of Chetham's swords is also later associated with Oliver Cromwell, with James Crossley describing it as 'Oliver Cromwell's sword. This last great acquisition, now laid up in peace, may, indeed, exclaim that Time has made it acquainted, with strange bed-fellows. Yet is considered a trophy of no small consequence in the place'.[100] Later sources confirm the

[92] M. Hunter, 'The Cabinet Institutionalized: The Royal Society's 'Repository' and its Background', in Impey and MacGregor (eds) *The Origins of Museums*, 159-168, p. 161.
[93] Grinke, p. 89.
[94] Moser, p. 48; Fearrington, p. 83.
[95] Mauriès, p. 200.
[96] Da Costa, p. 151.
[97] Findlen, p. 18.
[98] Impey and MacGregor, p. 3; Daston and Park, p. 69.
[99] Gregson, cited in Swindells, p. 36; Wilson, pp. 57-60; Henn, p. 87; Rylance, p. 301.
[100] J. Crossley, 'On the Cheetham [*sic*] Library', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 9 (1821), 299-305, p. 302.

establishment of this association, with only Harland claiming that it was, instead, the 'sword of a dragoon, accidentally burned to death in a house close by'.[101]

Oliver Cromwell again proves popular with the biographical embellishment of a pair of boots. In the recorded Minutes of the Governors of Chetham's Hospital and Library, 1 October 1860, the boots are described as follows: 'Stated by the donor to have been in the possession of his family for 70 years who believed them to have been Oliver Cromwell's'. Nearly thirty years later, it is clear from Henn and Rylance that the boots' association with Cromwell was being presented as fact by the guides of Chetham's: Rylance writes, 'I have a dim recollection of seeing what were called Oliver Cromwell's boots'.[102] The other boot in the collection was presented to visitors as 'once [having] belonged to Queen Elizabeth', whilst the arrows were owned by Robin Hood.[103]

Other objects in Chetham's collection may not have been associated with famous figures, but they still had interesting stories attached to them. The table in their collection was no simple table, but was composed of as many pieces as there are days in the year.[104] The woman's clog was no simple clog, but was 'a woman's clog that was split by a thunder bolt, an' hoo wasn't hurt',[105] although as Harland wryly notes, the boy-guide who applied this description to the clog 'did not inform his visitors whether she had the clog on when it was split: she might have been dancing at her younger sister's wedding in her stockings, for aught we know'.[106] The skeleton held in their collection was no simple skeleton, but was the skeleton of 'a man who was a Highway Robber'.[107] And the whip stock was no simple whip stock, but was 'the Haft of a whip that killed the snake'.[108] What snake? The 'snake that drank the Boys' milk'.[109] Are these 'Boys' the pupils of Chetham's Hospital, and this the same snake that, according to Southey, was 'fourteen English feet in length, which was killed in the neighbourhood'?[110]

Clearly the pupils of Chetham's Hospital had some legends of their own – their 'folklore' – which they applied to the more mundane items in Chetham's collection. Their role as guides probably resulted in an embellishment of the facts, their monotonous listing of the items on display – which the Manchester Record for 1868 notes would have been passed down orally by their fellow pupils[111] – being turned, over time, into a more playful, imaginative recital. As Dillon notes, the cabinet of curiosities could be 'merely an idea on which to hang, or in which to deposit, the products of a fanciful imagination'.[112]

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[101] E. Waugh, *Sketches of Lancashire Life and Localities* (London, 1855); Harland; Croston; Henn, p. 88; Rylance, p. 301.
[102] Rylance; Henn, p. 89.
[103] Gregson, cited in Swindells, p. 36; Henn, p. 88.
[104] Crossley, p. 302; Gregson, cited in Swindells, p. 37; Wilson, p. 58; Henn, p. 89; Rylance, p. 301.
[105] Gregson, cited in Swindells, p. 37.
[106] Harland, p. 195.
[107] Henn, p. 89.
[108] Rylance, p. 301.
[109] Henn, p. 88.
[110] Southey, p. 213.
[111] Manchester Record 1869, p. 141
[112] Dillon, p. 18.

In 1827, the recitation of the collection was itself turned into print, in Gregson's *Museum Chethamiense*. This oratorical catalogue listed the objects as if they were described by a boy guide (see above), ending with a brief conversation between two visitors and the guide, written in dialect, which played on the word Chetham to suggest that Humphrey Cheat'em was the founder of the lies that were perpetuated by the boys. The work was intended to provide an ironic commentary on the gullibility of visitors to the collection, who were described as 'boobies', edified and astounded by what they saw, and open mouthed with amazement at what they heard.

In a brief preface, the catalogue was dedicated without permission to the Governors and Feoffees of Chetham's, in the hope that the rare and valuable curiosities in their collection were deserving of a speedy transfer to the British Museum. Whilst Gregson's *Museum Chethamiense* thus sought the dissolution of the collection, by undermining the objects and by exposing in print the ridiculous claims made for them, it actually had the opposite effect. By creating a printed record of what had only circulated hitherto in oral form, Gregson served to validate the collection by providing the museum with its first printed catalogue and guide. Indeed, it is clear that from the late 1820s onwards the boys of the Hospital would learn their imaginative recital no longer from each other but from the printed oratorical catalogue. Later accounts of the tour confirm that the recital was almost word for word that printed by Gregson.[113] By creating a written record of the collection's 'folklore', Gregson cemented the mythology of these crafted curiosities in print.

Crafting Captivation

We have seen how the objects of Chetham's collection were crafted as individual curiosities. However, a cabinet of curiosities was more than its constituent parts; it was the collection, when viewed as a whole, that was designed to provoke wonder. As Warner writes: 'The collector's item seems a piece of a larger whole, a fragment … for all the particular treasure's luxury and superfluity'.[114] Indeed, the processes of collecting and accumulating serve to transform individual objects into something else: something that is part of a larger whole. In fact, Murray and Mill, who work on the archaeology of cache accumulations in the US Southwest, believe that the clustering of objects – caching – is 'a means of infusing objects and spaces with agency'.[115] In the case of the cabinet of curiosities, it infuses the collected items with the agency to provoke deeper wonder.

However, it was not simply the quantity of curiosities that provoked wonder; it was how they were displayed. No engravings have been identified which illustrate how Chetham's curiosities were exhibited, but Gregson's transcription of the boy-guide's recitation paints a clear image of haphazard clutter: 'over th' snake's back's two Watch Bills…under th' monkey's a green Lizard – side o' th' monkey's a Porpus's Skull – under th' porpus' skull's an Alligator – under th' alligator's a Turtle… under th' hairy man's a Speaking Trumpet – side o' th' speaking

[113] Harland, pp. 194-195; Henn, pp. 86-93; Rylance, pp. 300-301.
[114] Warner, p. 34.
[115] W. F. Murray and B. J. Mills, 'Identity Communities and Memory Practices: Relational logics in the US Southwest', in *Relational Archaeologies: Humans, animals, things*, edited by C. Watts (London and New York, 2013), 135-153, p. 136.

trumpet's a Shark's Jaw Bone – that that's leaning 'gainst th' speaking trumpet's Olliver Cromwell's Sword…' and so on. This was no museum collection, where objects were systematically classified, organised, labelled, and displayed in orderly cases. The objects at Chetham's seem to have been arranged according to no system whatsoever. However, this disorder was not incidental. It appears to have been integral to the display of curiosities.

A sense of cultivated chaos, of carefully crafted disorder, pervades the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century cabinets. Curiosities were deliberately displayed in dense, non-hierarchical clusters to showcase the vast variety of the collection.[116] The sheer volume of a collection, together with the density and complexity of its display, has the agency to draw people in; to entice them. Anthropologist Alfred Gell terms this process 'captivation'.[117] Writing of the 'technology of enchantment and the enchantment of technology',[118] Gell maintains that it is an observer's failure to understand exactly what they are seeing – what he terms 'cognitive stickiness'[119] – that reels the observer in. Chetham's curiosities, arranged in a condensed, confounding jumble, were clearly designed to confuse, overwhelm, and captivate the viewer.

In order to foster this sense of overwhelming density, every available space was utilised; not just shelves, but walls and ceilings. Displaying objects on the ceilings was a practice employed by churches from medieval times, and was enthusiastically adopted by collectors of curiosities.[120] The engraving of Imperato's collection, in *Dell'historia natural libri xxviii*, shows a crocodile hanging from the ceiling, a feature that was so widely imitated by later collectors that a hanging or floating large reptile became the iconic symbol of the cabinet of curiosities.[121] This was a sensationalist style of exhibition, aimed at generating an emotional response, rather than an intellectual one, from the viewers.[122]

Curiosities were also arranged in such a way – with natural and artificial objects crammed together with little or no distinction – so as to foster seemingly irrational juxtapositions between certain objects.[123] As Whitaker observes, 'Widely diverse objects were brought into close proximity in collections so that their variety was emphasized and the contrast between them could be better appreciated'.[124] This is evident at Chetham's: 'that's a Hairy Man – under th' hairy man's a Speaking Trumpet – side o' th' speaking trumpet's a Shark's Jaw Bone – that that's leaning 'gainst th' speaking trumpet's Olliver Cromwell's Sword…'. This showcasing of contrasts and blurring of categories was therefore a further facet of the sensationalist mode of display, aimed at captivating the viewer.

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[116] C. J. Sheehy, 'A Walrus Head in the Art Museum: Mark Dion Digs into the University of Minnesota', in Sheehy (ed.) *Cabinet of Curiosities*, 3-28, p. 3.
[117] A. Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford, 1998), 68ff.
[118] A. Gell, *The Technology of Enchantment. In Gell, A. (ed.) The Art of Anthropology: Essays and Diagrams* (London, 1999), p. 167.
[119] Gell, *Art and Agency*, pp. 85-86.
[120] Daston and Park, pp. 84-86; Moser, p. 18.
[121] Mauriès, p. 232; Moser, pp. 28-29; Fearrington, p. 9.
[122] Moser, p. 27.
[123] E. B. Robertson, 'Curiosity Cabinets, Museums, and Universities', in (ed.) *Cabinet of Curiosities*, 43-54, p. 48; Mauriès, p. 66; Forshaw, p. 82.
[124] Whitaker, p. 87.

Conclusion: Curiosity Crafted

It was the aim of this paper not only to consider Chetham's collection within the broader context of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century cabinets of curiosities, but also to consider how 'curiosity' was being crafted at this time. It was posited at the beginning that curiosity is not an innate attribute, ingrained within an item, but is bestowed upon said item by human agents. An examination of Chetham's collection has revealed various methods of curiosity construction.

Certain items – such as the crocodile, the sawfish, the bezoar, the loadstone, the snow-shoe, the artificial eye, and the hand of an Egyptian mummy – are perceived of as curious because they are unfamiliar to the viewer: specimens of nature that are rare or unusual; scientific curiosities; and exotic artefacts brought back from voyages of exploration. For other items, a healthy dose of optimistic curatorship is employed. The stone tankard, the sword, the boots, and the arrows were designated curiosities because of their (real or imagined) association with well-known historical characters. Whilst other objects – the whip stock, the woman's clog, the table – are 'curious' because of the stories attached to them. The mundane is thus mythologised and displayed alongside the exotic and unfamiliar in a deliberately confounding, carefully-styled disarray, designed to captivate the viewer – and, ultimately, to craft curiosity.