Guide to the Herbert Percy Horne Letters, 1891-1912

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Collection number: M0368

Department of Special Collections and University Archives
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Descriptive Summary
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None.
Publication Rights
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Provenance
Purchased, 1982. Collection was largely formed by San Francisco bookman, Albert Sperisen.
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Biographical Note
Herbert Percy Horne was born in the Bedford Park section of London on February 18, 1864, the son of Henry or Horace Horne, an architect and art collector, and Miss Porter of Russell Square, the daughter of a surveyor. He was educated at St. Paul's in London, completing his formal schooling at a time when the aesthetic movement was in full flower.
Following brief training as a surveyor, Horne was apprenticed in 1883 to designer/architect A.H. Mackmurdo, one of the creators of English art nouveau. Within two years, at the age of only 20, he had become Mackmurdo's architectural partner. Horne's association with Mackmurdo coincided with the development of the Century Guild, an organization of craftsmen founded in 1882 by Mackmurdo and Selwyn Image. Horne designed textiles and wallpapers for the group and was actively involved in the creation of its art magazine The Century Guild Hobby Horse. He contributed illustrations and a poem entitled The Fraise to the first trial issue of the magazine put out in 1884; and, when The Hobby Horse resumed publication
in 1886, Horne had become the magazine's joint editor, a position he held until 1892.

During this same period, Horne was active in London literary circles as a member of the Rhymers' Club with W.B. Yeats, Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson, Edgar Jepson, Arthur Symons, and others.

Though still in his twenties, Horne already enjoyed a considerable reputation in London. Bernard Berenson, who met him there in 1888 and later renewed the acquaintance in Italy, proclaimed him the successor to William Morris, the great man of the next generation, an architect, painter, poet, fine critic and editor of The Hobby Horse.

By 1890, Horne's deteriorating relationship with Mackmurdo had resulted in the dissolution of their architectural partnership. For the next several years, Horne continued his London literary and artistic activities - designing title pages for Elkin Mathews and other publishers, and producing a volume of verse Diversi Colores (1891) and the very successful The Binding of Books: An Essay in the History of Gold-tooled Bindings (1894) - but, in 1895, apparently increasingly dissatisfied with London life, Horne began to spend more and more time abroad in Italy. By 1900, he had settled permanently in Florence.

Over the next seven years, Horne devoted his energies increasingly to art history and criticism, particularly the research and writing of his massive study of Botticelli. This critically acclaimed work with photo-sculptist reproductions by Emery Walker was finally published in 1908.

While in Florence, Horne, too, continued his interest in book and type design. He collaborated with bookbinder Sarah Prideaux, designing her 1903 publication of The Elements of Architecture by Sir Henry Wotton; and designing three typefaces, all Romans based on 15th century Italian models. The earliest [UNK] - the Montallegro - was cut for Boston printer Daniel Berkeley Updike of the Merrymount Press. It was first used for The Life of Michelangniolo Buonarroti (1904), and later for Merrymount's Humanists' Library series. The Florence face, designed for Chatto and Windus' Florence Press, and the Riccardi Press type, used for books published by Philip Lee Warner for the Medici Society, were both cut on 1909.

In 1911, after more than a decade in Italy, Horne at last purchased a Florentine palazzo to house his collection of primitives, Renaissance furniture and applied art, and Old Master drawings.

Herbert Percy Horne died on April 4, 1916. The palazzo and collections which he left to the city of Florence are now the Museo Horne.

Scope and Content

The Herbert Percy Horne papers span the years 1891-1912 with the bulk of the material falling into the period 1896-1903. Horne, during this time, was devoting his energies increasingly to art history and criticism, particularly his work on Botticelli; and had begun to spend part of each year in Italy, settling there permanently in 1900.

The collection consists primarily of two series of Horne correspondence. A group of 20 letters from Horne to his friend, novelist Edgar Jepson (1863-1938) provides a vivid, if gossipy, account of life in the artistic and literary circles of the 1890s. The letters, written during the years 1896-1900, mostly from Florence, contain recurrent references to poet and fellow Rhymers' Club member Arthur Symons and Horne's Italian mistresses. A second series of 17 letters from Horne to bookbinder Sarah Prideaux (1863-1933), concerning his design of her 1903 The Elements of Architecture by Sir Henry Wotton, is a scrupulous record of one aspect of Horne's activities as a book designer. The detailed correspondence, spanning the years 1899-1903, is accompanied by Horne's original artwork and proofs. There is, in addition, an 1891 letter from Horne to Thomas Cobden-Sanderson, bookbinder and co-founder with Emery Walker of the Doves Press; an 1892 letter from Horne to writer Gleeson White (1851-1898); and a 1912 letter from Horne to poet/critic Douglas Ainslie (1865-1948).

The collection includes transcriptions of all Horne correspondence with the exception of the three single letters to Ainslie, Cobden-Sanderson, and White.

A large group of biographical and other related material -- correspondence, clippings, articles, and book reviews -- is also included.

SERIES I: HORNE LETTERS, 1891-1912

Box 1, Folder 1  Correspondence from Horne to Douglas Ainslie, 1912
Box 1, Folder 2  Correspondence from Horne to Thomas Cobden-Sanderson, 1891
Box 1, Folder 3  Correspondence from Horne to Edgar Jepson, 1896-1900
Box 1, Folder 4  Transcriptions of Jepson correspondence, 1896-1900
Box 1, Folder 5  Correspondence from Horne to Sarah Prideaux, 1899-1903
Box 1, Folder 6  Transcriptions of Prideaux correspondence, 1899-1903
Box 1, Folder 7  Correspondence from Horne to Gleeson White, 1892
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