

The Gladstone Pamphlets at the National Library of Wales

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Tracts and pamphlets are the orphans of the Victorian print revolution, and the poor relations of William Gladstone's justly famous library. Despite the fact that Gladstone read and collected thousands of shorter publications, marked them, organized them for reference, sent them to colleagues, used them routinely in developing policies, and employed them as evidence in his own books and articles, they have been seldom mentioned and never systematically examined in the study of Gladstone's thought or politics. The technological and educational revolution of the early nineteenth century may have made it into the age of the book, but as one recent study of the period has observed, if we count "what was produced" instead of what has survived, the Victorians might properly be considered "people of the tract".¹ More than 5,000 tracts once owned or associated with Gladstone are now housed in the National Library of Wales and are an invaluable source for scholars of the Victorian era. Added to the inherent value of the tracts themselves, annotations in a significant percentage of them provide scholars with kinds of evidence not generally found in correspondence, memoranda, and public papers. Working with Gary Butler at Gladstone's Library, we have begun to unravel the complicated history of the pamphlets after Gladstone's death.

Even before Gladstone's death in 1898, the British Museum had expressed interest in receiving the Gladstone Papers. But by 1921 when Hawarden Castle was inhabited by Gladstone's third son, Henry Neville (b. 1852), the four-time prime minister seemed to be of another time. The trustees of the British Museum only wanted a selection of the pamphlets, and these merely to fill in their collection. This provided an opportunity for NLW librarian John Ballinger to lobby the younger Gladstone, who served on the library's Board of Governors. As a result, Gladstone agreed to send pamphlets not wanted by the British Library to the National Library of Wales.

The pamphlets came in at least three deposits. In June 1922, Gladstone sent almost two hundred books from Hawarden Castle that Ballinger had selected during a visit the previous month. The "books" included fifty-six volumes of pamphlets bound in green buckram which had been owned by William's brother-in-law Stephen Glynne, and which now form volumes 403-459 of the bound Gladstone Pamphlets in the National Library of Wales. In the same covering letter to Ballinger, Gladstone indicated that he would soon send "as complete a set as possible" of his father's speeches, pamphlets, and articles.² These were eventually bound uniformly with the

¹ Leah Price, *How to do Things with Books in Victorian Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 150.

² Henry Neville Gladstone to John Ballinger, 8 June 1922, NLW E86.

remaining pamphlets as volumes 383-393 of the "Gladstone Pamphlets" collection. Again, these are tracts that Gladstone himself probably did not own, but which were written by him. Together, then, the first deposit of "Gladstone pamphlets" at the National Library of Wales amounted to 67 volumes of collected tracts that Gladstone himself never owned.

Toward the end of April 1923, Ballinger suggested an idea that appealed to Gladstone and led to the second deposit, eventually organized as volumes 1-382 and 394-402 in a uniform series, quarter bound in light brown leather, along with the pamphlets given in the previous year.

Thank you exceedingly for your letter about the pamphlets (or tracts as my Father called them) and I do not hesitate to say that it would be a great satisfaction to myself and all the family if the National Library will accept the whole of my Father's collection, other than that retained by the British Museum.

I need not say that the proposal to make one collection of the pamphlets, and of the books already sent from here, earmarked as belonging to my Father, gives me much pleasure. I owe you personally very special thanks for the suggestions you made in regard to the pamphlets, suggestions which have led to such extremely satisfactory results.³

Gladstone's letter of May 1 suggests that "the whole" of his father's collection would be sent to the National Library of Wales, and the Governors of the library acknowledged receipt of the pamphlets, but as there is no detailed accession record, it is impossible to say exactly which pamphlets were sent. The two collections of Gladstone pamphlets now at the NLW, focusing on the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s, suggest that these were simply the remnants of the British Museum offer, and not "the whole" of the tract collection. Almost certainly the offer was never meant to include pamphlets previously bound as books, including an extensive collection from the 1830s and 1840s; or some 500 pamphlets contained in "75 boxes of "printed materials" in the muniment room which became part of the Glynne-Gladstone manuscripts (these are now held at Gladstone's Library, Hawarden, North Wales).

The third deposit came as a result of an April 1932 Gladstone conversation with Ballinger. The venerable NLW librarian had retired to Hawarden in 1930 and was frequently consulted regarding various aspects of the administration of St. Deiniol's Library (now Gladstone's Library), which had been founded by William Gladstone during the 1890s. Since the first two deposits of 1922 and 1923, hundreds of additional pamphlets had been found at Hawarden Castle and among the papers of other family members, or donated to St. Deiniol's Library. As a result, some 14 boxes containing more than 1,000 pamphlets were dispatched to the NLW to supplement the previous donations. Today they are unbound and kept in 108 boxes labelled "Gladstone Pamphlets," though more than half of the pamphlets and papers are from other donations having nothing to do with Gladstone.

³ Henry Neville Gladstone to John Ballinger, 1 May 1923, NLW, E86.

The Gladstone Pamphlets housed at the National Library of Wales are rich as sources of Gladstone's thought and policy development. Most of the pivotal moments in his career involved public exchanges involving some combination of articles, speeches, and tracts. While his family, friends, and colleagues often urged more private methods of proceeding, Gladstone almost always chose to make use of the public forum, routinely reading and responding to the tract and periodical press. Whether engaging the nuances of Tractarian Church reform in the 1830s and 1840s, battling the Vatican or the Ottoman Empire in the 1870s, or attempting to bring justice to Ireland and the Empire in the 1880s and 1890s, he played politics with an eye toward the public. Gladstone's unique political gifts are too often represented as being almost exclusively rooted in principle, oratory and the public sphere. But when he marked pamphlets in the first flush of new revelations or ideas, he often left posterity with a very personal glimpse of his feelings, which only later would be refined and mixed into a speech, policy, or pamphlet.

One example will suffice to suggest the kinds of insights afforded by the Gladstone pamphlets at the NLW. On 8 March 1846 Gladstone read E. B. Pusey's *Entire Absolution of the Penitent*. He had long admired Pusey, having worked with him on High Church reforms pre-dating the Oxford Movement. By the mid-1840s, however, Gladstone had begun to doubt his elder colleague's judgment as they each tried to preserve Catholic traditions in the Church of England. Upon reading Pusey's cautionary footnote "to the young" regarding mortification—

See Mr. Newman's valuable Sermon, 'Dangers to the Penitent'

--Gladstone underlined "Newman's valuable Sermon" and noted in the margin: "This is hardly decent, time given".⁴ Newman had converted to Rome less than four months earlier. Reading this comment in the original pamphlet preserved at the NLW is about as close to being with Gladstone in his study and in his head as we are likely to get.

⁴ E. B. Pusey, *Entire Absolution of the Penitent: A Sermon Mostly Preached before the University, in the Cathedral Church of Christ in Oxford, on the fourth Sunday After Epiphany* (Oxford: J.H. Parker, 1846), p. xix, in "Gladstone Pamphlets," National Library of Wales, vol. 174, no. 12.