An Antiquarian's Crypt at Corpus Christi College: The Collection of The Rev S S Lewis

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The presidential address by T M Hughes to the Cambridge Antiquarian Society in 1891 began with the mention of members who had recently died. The Rev. Samuel Savage Lewis had died earlier in the year and was named as having held an 'exceptional position' in the Society as Secretary. Hughes reflected upon Lewis' 'very marked personality' and his 'kindly helpful spirit', as well as his life and works. If Hughes had wanted to, he could have given more concrete examples of Lewis' importance to the Society, for it had been Lewis who had increased the membership from a mere 18 to over 300, thereby ensuring the Society's continuation (Thompson 1990, 33–35, 87). Lewis' success as Secretary was no doubt a result of his celebrated 'antiquated salutations' and eccentric manner which endeared him to those he met. It was not only his congenial character that would be missed, but his dedication to archaeology. In his presidential address to the Numismatic Society in 1891, when speaking of Lewis' contribution to numismatic studies, John Evans also credited him with fostering the taste for "archaeological studies" at Cambridge. Other references to Lewis over the past 100 years have tended to focus upon his unfortunate nickname of 'Satan Lewis' and his unusual physical appearance (e.g. Bury 1952, 219, Price 1897). More recently however, interest in Lewis has concentrated on his habit of collecting and also his Bible scholar wife, Agnes Smith Lewis (Spier and Vassilika 1995, Soskice 2010). This article offers a contextualised history of the display of Lewis' antiquarian collection, from its first incarnation in his rooms at Corpus Christi College to the controversial loan to the Fitzwilliam Museum in 1991. This is intended to highlight the unique character of this collection and its place in the history of Cambridge collecting. The paper begins with a short introduction to the man behind one of Cambridge's earliest 'museums' (Fig. 1).

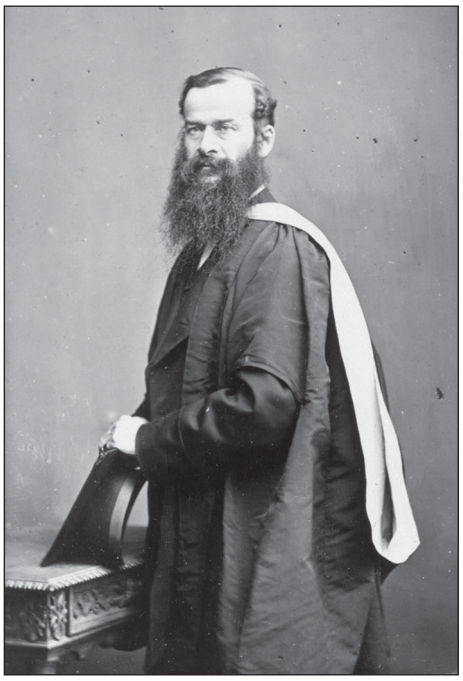

Figure 1. *Samuel Lewis, date unknown. Reproduced by kind permission of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society and the Cambridge University Library.*

The Rev. Samuel Savage Lewis

Samuel Lewis was born at Spital Square, London in 1836 and attended the City of London School from 1844, entering St. John's College, Cambridge as a pensioner in 1854. An unexpected interruption of ten years to his studies came as a result of problems with his eyesight. His alternative career as a farmer took the unhappy Lewis to Shepreth and as far afield as Canada, before he returned to undergo a series of risky but successful eye operations (without anaesthetic). He was able to return to his studies in 1864, obtaining a BA in Classics from Corpus Christi College in 1869, the same year he became a fellow, and an MA in 1872. He was ordained as deacon at Ely, becoming a priest in 1873, and he was to be Librarian at Corpus Christi from 1870 until his death. He lectured in Classics and has subsequently been described as one of "the few distinguished scholars" at Corpus Christi of the Victorian period (Bury 2002). This passion for Classics ran in his family, as his half-brother, Bunnel Lewis, Professor of Latin at Queen's College Cork, established there the first university museum of classical antiquities in Ireland in 1860 (Souyoudzoglou-Haywood

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2007, 155). Although not prolific in terms of publications, Lewis did write with interest and enthusiasm on local archaeology, including a paper 'On a Roman lanx found at Welney, Norfolk' (Lewis 1870), and a 'Note on the Knapwell Find', which reported the discovery of 24 coins, which were exhibited at the 1877 May meeting of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society (Lewis 1877). In his article of 1881, 'Description of an Inscribed Vase, Lately Found at Guilden Morden, Cambridgeshire', published in the Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society (Lewis 1881), Lewis demonstrates his excellent knowledge of regional finds and the contents of other collections. He was also a member of the Fitzwilliam Museum Syndicate and campaigned unsuccessfully for that institution to increase its collection of coins. With his prominent role in the Cambridge Antiquarian Society and his place on the Fitzwilliam Syndicate, it is little surprise that Lewis had a strong influence in the establishment of the Museum of Classical and General Archaeology on Little St. Mary's Lane, Cambridge, in 1884, later to become the Museum of Classical Archaeology at the Sidgwick Site.

The loss of the majority of Lewis' personal correspondence and diaries during subsequent clear-outs at Corpus Christi following his death mean that we are indebted to the biography written by his wife (Smith Lewis, 1892). Not even his marriage to Agnes Smith in 1887 could draw Lewis away from his rooms at Corpus Christi. Smith Lewis recalls that he would spend five out of seven nights in his college rooms (Smith Lewis 1892, 124). They lived first at Harvey Road, Cambridge, along with Margaret Gibson, Smith Lewis's twin sister, until they moved to Castlebrae, Chesterton Road, Cambridge, which is now in use by Clare College (Fig. 2).

The Collector

Upon his marriage to Agnes Smith, Lewis' habit of collecting antiquities largely stopped. He had been collecting since 1868, spending up to £1000 per year amassing over 4,000 objects from the classical world, Jewish and Christian history, ranging from coins to gems, pottery to figurines, and many other objects besides. He collected during his frequent travels to Italy, Greece, Turkey and the Far East, and also bought from dealers in London and Paris without even seeing the objects. In the 1880s he had a particular interest in Tanagra figurines, purchasing five all at the same time from a dealer in 1882, which were to be followed by several others in subsequent years. These mould-cast Greek terracotta figurines of apparently demure females were very popular in the Victorian period, leading to a market in imitations and copies. One of these figurines has been found to be a later copy, which would have disappointed Lewis, whose limited correspondence on his collections points to a preoccupation with its authenticity (Loan Ant.103.57) (Fig. 3).

Lewis was not averse to paying the asking price, which could often be high, particularly for coins.

He came to own 2,000 coins from the ancient and modern world, and many of his carefully handwritten coin tickets survive, recording find spots from Cambridge to Pompeii. One of these coins, with the head of Vespasian on the obverse, is marked as being bought from Naples in 1876 (CM.LS.3301-R) (Fig. 4). Dated to AD 77–78, this coin would certainly have been in circulation until the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in AD 79 and the impact of the eruption is evident in the heavy discolouration on the coin, consistent with intense heat. It is easy to see why Lewis

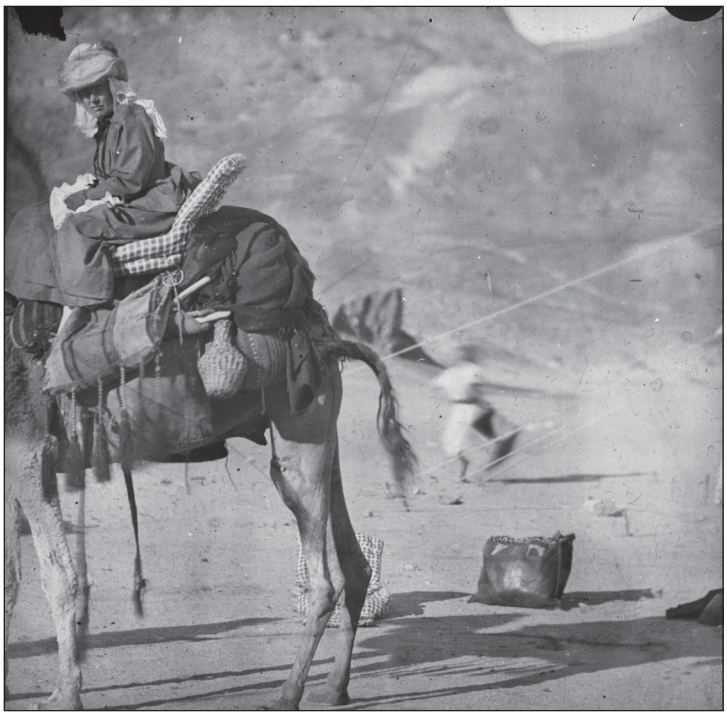

Figure 2. *Agnes Smith Lewis on a camel, 1892. Reproduced by kind permission of Westminster College.*

Figure 3. *Tanagra figurine, the Lewis Collection. Reproduced by kind permission of the Fitzwilliam Museum.*

bought this coin (Fig. 5). Lewis also invested considerably in beautiful cabinets for his coins. Each cabinet is worthy of note – one, made in 1844, is shaped like the temple of Antoninus and Faustina in Rome, with a secret tray that opens when the eagle's head is turned. Another is made out of wood from the partly destroyed York Minster, with key plates of its bell metal. A third, and to me the most beautiful, is the unique 'sliced urn' cabinet, made in Cambridge about 1880 by C P Bulstrode who had a cabinet shop on Sidney Street. The urn shape is sliced through to form trays for coins, each tray having to be removed individually from the top down to the bottom, making it completely impractical to use (Fig. 6). This preference for aesthetics over practicality does suggest that Lewis had an interest in the visual impression of his collection, aiming to thrill a visitor before they had seen one coin. And it was coins that Lewis seemed most keen to enter into correspondence about. He wrote to the prolific numismatist Percy Gardner to order copies of coins from the British Museum and discussed the prices of coins charged by Ottoman officials with friends in Turkey.

His regular correspondence with local collectors and academics, such as Charles W. King, who was a close friend and advisor when he made acquisitions, demonstrates Lewis' engagement with the academic community. He was directly involved in the publication of the catalogue of King's gems, which makes it perhaps surprising that he did not appear to have of-

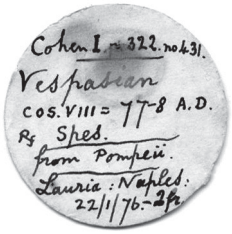

Figure 4. *Lewis's coin ticket for the Pompeii coin CM.LS.3301-R. Reproduced by kind permission of the Fitzwilliam Museum.*

Figure 5. *Pompeii coin (. CM.LS.3301-R) with head of Vespasian on obverse. Reproduced by kind permission of the Fitzwilliam Museum.*

Figure 6. *Lewis' sliced urn coin cabinet. Photograph K A Beats 2015.*

ficially catalogued his own collection in his lifetime. *The Lewis Collection of Gems and Rings in the Possession of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge* was written by John Middleton and published in 1892 (Middleton 1892). C D Bicknell published several of Lewis' Greek vases in the *Journal of Hellenic Studies* (Bicknell 1921). Although apparently chosen by Lewis at random, there had already been interest in his collection of vases by Cambridge academics, most notably by Jane Harrison, one of the first women to make a career out of academia. As lecturer in Classics at Cambridge, specialising in myth and ritual, Harrison included one of Lewis' Greek vases in *Prolegomena*, published in 1903. She probably saw the vase at Corpus Christi after his death, after she returned to Cambridge to take up a Fellowship in 1898, rather than when she was a student. Further demonstration of the fame and importance of Lewis' vases outside Cambridge was the interest shown by the pioneering archaeologist of the 20th century, Sir John Beazley. After seeing the Athenian red-figure *skyphos* at Corpus Christi, Beazley declared this the key piece of work by an unnamed artist from ancient Athens who also produced eighty other extant vases. Beazley then named the painter after its most recent owner. The vase by the Lewis Painter is a beautiful example of Late Archaic Athenian vase painting, produced in approximately 470 BC. (Loan ant.103.19) (Fig. 7). Purchased by Lewis in 1884 from a dealer in France, 640 francs was paid for the vase, equal to £75 at the time. This vase is currently on display in the Fitzwilliam, as are several others from his collection, including one *kylix* which still has Lewis' handwritten label on its stand, noting the place and date of purchase.

Corpus Christi was not the only Cambridge college with a collection. In fact, the University of Cambridge itself began a collection of classical antiquities in 1589, when the Master of Peterhouse, Andrew Perne, bequeathed his antiquarian collection to the University. The majority of these antiquities were displayed in the Old University Library near the Senate House in Cambridge, including a large collection of Greek marbles, gifted to the University in 1803 by E D Clarke. The Clarke marbles moved to the Fitzwilliam Museum in 1865 – an action which represented the increasing centralisation of the University of Cambridge antiquarian collections. This hazy distinction between museums and libraries continued into the 20th century, making the later decision to display Lewis' collection in the Parker Library at Corpus Christi a move influenced by established practice. The Wren Library at Trinity College Cambridge is the most representative example of a combined academic library and museum. Trinity College was the first University of Cambridge institution to begin to form a collection of classical antiquities. With a history dating back to 1695, the Wren Library became the venue of choice for displaying collections and it received generous donations of antiquities from influential individuals. It was the first location for the travelling exhibition of objects from James Cook's travels. The majority of the artefacts and curiosities (ranging from an Egyptian mummy to a zebra head, coins to moth eaten hair) were cleared out during redevelopments of the Wren Library in the 19th and 20th centuries. Trinity College also provides a fascinating comparative example to Lewis with the collector Dr James Glaisher. Glaisher was a mathematician, astronomer and fellow of Trinity College, as well as an eminent collector. His collection of nearly 6,000 pieces of pottery and porcelain was amassed from the late 1880s until his death in 1928. He was also a member of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society and was elected President in 1899. Glaisher had a significant impact upon aesthetic appreciation of certain types of English ceramics and he never bought anything without seeing it first. He also began to keep a catalogue of his collection, making him a far more systematic collector than Lewis. Glaisher did however, surround himself with his collection in his rooms at Trinity College, just like Lewis, and it is probable they knew each other. Upon his death, Glaisher's collection passed to the Fitzwilliam Museum according to his wishes and he was buried in Cambridge Cemetery on Newmarket Road (Poole 2012). Girton College Cambridge provides another interesting comparative example of a college with its own museum, the Lawrence Room, established in 1936. Girton's collecting of antiquities began in 1881 as a result of excavations in the college grounds. Despite the University of Cambridge having a lively history of collecting amongst its fellows, the majority of these collections remained in private hands or were left to the Fitzwilliam Museum after the collectors' death. Samuel Lewis' collection far outshone the collections of others around him, and offered a unique experience for the visitor at a time in which the majority of the University of Cambridge collections were coming to be held centrally.

Figure 7. Skyphos *by the Lewis Painter (Loan ant.103.19). Reproduced by kind permission of the Fitzwilliam Museum.*

The Crypt

Agnes Smith's first impressions of Lewis' rooms at Corpus Christi College provide a valuable insight into the layout of the collection in the Old Court: "Cabinets of coins surmounted by Tanagra statuettes, Etruscan vases, with their scenes from a life which has quite passed away, models of ancient cities, and of pre-historic lake dwellings, figures in marble or bronze which might have formed the pride of a national collection, trays of terracotta lamps and vessels hidden down in a crypt that had once been the oratory of a monastery" (Smith Lewis 1892, 124). Smith Lewis, and others fortunate enough to have seen the collection during Lewis' lifetime, had a unique experience – so unique that an American recorded his visit in the *Christian World Magazine* in 1885, which was included in Smith Lewis' book. It is this visitor's account that provides most information here (Smith Lewis 1892, 104ff). His rooms were in the Old Court at Corpus Christi, which was built in the 1350s, and this is where he kept his private collection. Over twenty years Lewis transformed his rooms into a live-in museum; "In the centre of a large table was the model of a Lacustrine dwelling, and surrounding this on every side were piles of manuscript papers, the order of which was known only to the owner. Around the walls were ranged cases of books, and wherever there was a flat available surface it was crowded with Greek and Roman vases" (Smith Lewis 1892, 105). And this was no humble dwelling, Lewis occupied a suite of rooms with some very unusual features (Fig. 8).

The suite opens onto a large sitting room (D on Figure 9), with a 40ft Early Tudor gallery leading off to the left (C and R on Figure 9). This leads to the bedroom (A on Figure 9), and to the left, a spiral staircase with small windows looking directly out into the interior of St. Benet's' Church leads downstairs (stairs indicated on Figure 9). This part is an extension, resulting in an external doorway of the Church being inside, leading on to two smaller rooms in Lewis' suite (A on Figure 9). This was Lewis' self-proclaimed crypt, which housed the majority of his collection. This was opened to visitors by the invitation: "I think you would like to look into the crypt". Then followed a guided tour, as Lewis pointed out particular pieces of interest, enriched with anecdotes. When ready for fresh air, he would use his handy clothes brush to dust down his visitors and some were given a replica of an ancient gem as a memento. Lewis always referred to this space as the crypt, it was his visitors who came to see it more as a museum, perhaps a showcase to a man's obsession. His decision not to leave his rooms when he married starts to make more sense.

Figure 8. *Lewis's former rooms at Corpus Christi College ('D' in Fig. 9), with the current occupant, Prof Nigel Simmonds. Photograph K A Beats 2015.*

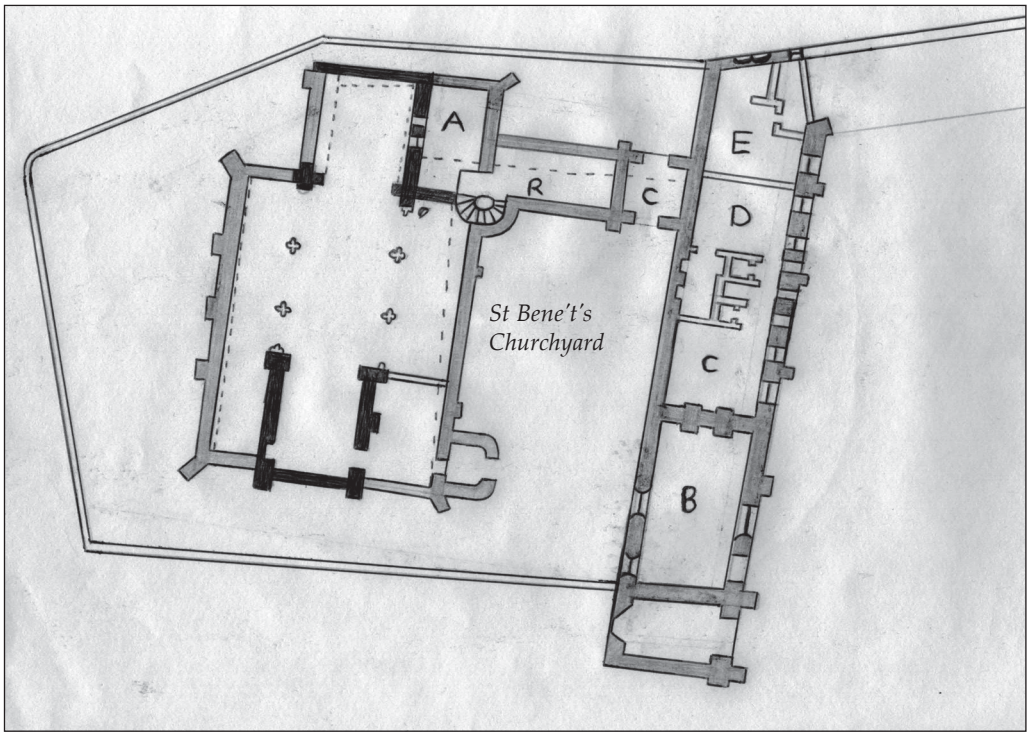

Figure 9. *Plan of the Old Court, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, drawn by D. Beats 2016 based on 'Figure 1, Old Court' in* The Architectural History of the University of Cambridge and of the Colleges of Cambridge and Eton Vol IV *by J Willis and Clark.*

A. The Crypt; C. and E. rooms belonging to other Fellows; R. Early Tudor gallery; D. sitting room.

A Generous Bequest

After rushing to catch a train to Oxford on 31st March 1891, Lewis had a heart attack and died in the carriage with Smith Lewis at his side. He was 55 years old and his death was sudden and unexpected. He had, however, written a new will after his marriage, leaving his large collection to Corpus Christi College and £4000 for student scholarships.

The considerable responsibilities for this generous bequest were felt immediately by Corpus Christi, as the report of Lewis' death was read out in May 1891, along with details of his will. The Lewis Collection Committee was made up of five individuals, including the Master, who were tasked with the "safe custody of the Lewis Collection and access to it for the purposes of study". Even Lewis took some precautions to protect his collection (which would now be known as the Lewis Collection), leaving a revolver inside one of his cases. However, as he explained to one American visitor, he would be more surprised to see a living burglar than the ghosts of monks. Safety became the primary concern of the Lewis Collection Committee, particularly as Lewis' rooms were to be reallocated. Judging by descriptions of the rooms, the business of clearing the room for reallocation would be far from simple. In the June after his death, books once owned by Lewis were to be removed from his rooms to the Parker Library, which is in New Court, the other side of Corpus Christi College. These books still carry the book plates used by Lewis to record his name and the date of purchase. A few weeks before this removal, the Lewis Collection had its first temporary move to a room underneath the Parker Library whilst the Lewis Collection Committee were putting together estimates for the cost of its redisplay. They proposed new windows, shutters and a door for the space which was referred to for the first time as the Lewis Museum. This location is unconfirmed, but it is likely to have been the room under the Parker Library which was the Librarian's office in the 1970s (Fig. 10).

At this time, the first Curator of the Lewis Collection was elected (a post still in existence), and he was responsible for the regulations of the Lewis Museum. The Corpus Chapter of February 1892 goes on to report the opening hours of the Lewis Museum, which were to be between 2pm and 3pm on Monday in full term (a similar arrangement to the Lawrence Room at Girton College, Cambridge). In October of the same year, a notice was placed on the doors of the Lewis Museum, noting the opening times, an indication of its growing popularity. Two surviving visitor books from 1902–1903 and 1928–29 provide further evidence for this. In the year 1928 there were over 2,000 visitors, which suggests an average of 95 visitors for the hour the Lewis Museum was open on Mondays – not bad for a small museum! Those who signed in ranged from curators at the British Museum and academics from Harvard University, to tourists from Athens and history groups from Stoke-on-Trent (the birthplace of

the author of this paper). At this time, Cambridge had at least three significantly larger museums, but the Lewis Museum was clearly another one worth a visit. Most poignantly, one of the earlier signatures in the visitor book of 1903 was Agnes Smith Lewis herself, along with her sister and a small group of guests, returning to see the collection over 10 years after the sudden death of her husband. In fact, Smith Lewis continued to have a relationship with Corpus, making a donation of the portrait of Lewis by Brock in 1894, adding to the Library's collection of Palestinian Syriac texts in 1898 and depositing two engraved gems in the Lewis Collection in 1901.

The changes to the location of the Lewis Collection over the subsequent decades are hard to pin down. What is certain however, is that part of the Lewis Collection made its way into the Parker Library in 1929 in two cases, although it is likely that objects of interest were already there (Fig. 11). It was not until the late 1950s that the collection was put back on the

Figure 10. *The Lewis Collection in the Librarian's Office. Reproduced by kind permission of Corpus Christi College.*

Figure 11. *The Parker Library,date unknown. Reproduced by kind permission of Corpus Christi College.*

agenda of the Governing Body. The Librarian first recommended its removal to the Fitzwilliam Museum in 1957; this was rejected, but it was decided that fellows could keep pieces from the collection in their private rooms. Ten years later, the decision regarding the location of the Lewis Collection still needed to be made. Proposals for its permanent revamp and redisplay in the New Court of Corpus Christi were put forward, including detailed plans of the room arrangement (still in K1, the Librarian's office). Arrangements were made to start work over the summer vacation and a budget was drawn up. This was still the intention in 1970, when speaking to commemorate benefactors of Corpus Christi, Mr A.G.Woodhead refers to the "worthy and commodious quarters" promised to the Lewis Collection. He also used the opportunity to speak out against earlier suggestions of moving the Lewis Collection outside Corpus Christi, with serious concerns regarding its separation; "[this] historical phenomenon… must not be placed in a larger museum … it would also destroy something which must by now be unique" (Woodhead 1970). Woodhead also provides an amusing insight into the dubious quality of certain aspects of the Lewis Collection. An Assistant Librarian, Woodhead claims, placed some 'bric-a-brac' from the Lewis Collection into a coal hole which was not rediscovered until the 1940s, when, in the words of Woodhead, it "soon proved his instincts to have been the right ones". Unfortunately, the promised rehousing of the Lewis Collection did not come to fruition and debate surrounding its fate continued. During this time, it seems as though the display of the Lewis Collection was reduced to the small room just off the Librarian's office (K1).

The Lewis Collection at the Fitzwilliam Museum

Over 30 years after it was first suggested by the Librarian of Corpus Christi, discussions between Corpus Christi College and the Fitzwilliam Museum began in earnest. Several pieces had already made their way there on loan, and to the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge (MAA). The MAA received donations from Lewis during his lifetime, and several other objects arrived during the later 1880s and in 1950. The majority of these were antiquities from Britain. Two medieval tiles from the Lewis Collection are currently on display in the Cambridge case in the Clarke Gallery of the MAA. 1991 saw the transfer of almost the entire Lewis Collection to the Fitzwilliam on long-term loan. Understandable concerns relating to its integrity as a whole had been replaced by the increasingly urgent need for conservation. The effects of a damp and dusty unstable environment had started to tell on the objects.

The arrival of the Lewis Collection at the Fitzwilliam was celebrated by an exhibition; 'A Corpus Connoisseur: The Antiquities and Coins of Samuel Savage Lewis', 100 years after the death of the original owner. For one visitor, there simply had not been enough coins on display previously, which indicates what it had become known for. Many objects from the Lewis Collection have since made it into permanent display in the Greece and Rome, Ancient Egypt, Ancient Sudan and the Cypriot Antiquities galleries at the Fitzwilliam. A small representative collection was left behind and is now displayed in the Taylor Library at Corpus Christi College, opened in 2008. There are still calls for the return of the Lewis Collection to the College, and in 2003 Martland and Pattenden expressed hopes for its permanent exhibition back at Corpus Christi (Martland and Pattenden 2003, 82). This is unlikely to be realised.

A Celtic Cross at Mill Road Cemetery, Cambridge

Samuel Lewis is buried with Agnes Smith Lewis in Mill Road Cemetery, Cambridge, their grave marked with a tall Celtic cross, on a two-tier pedestal. The gravestone was carved in Cambridge, and is decorated on all four sides with Celtic patterns. The inscription itself is in Irish insular script, and recalls the language interest of the deceased. It records only basic details, 'in loving memory' of the deceased (Fig. 12).

For a final word from Lewis written in his own hand we must turn to his sermons. Now housed in Westminster College, these sermons show clear signs

Figure 12. *Lewis' gravestone, Mill Road Cemetery, Cambridge. Photograph K A Beats 2015.*

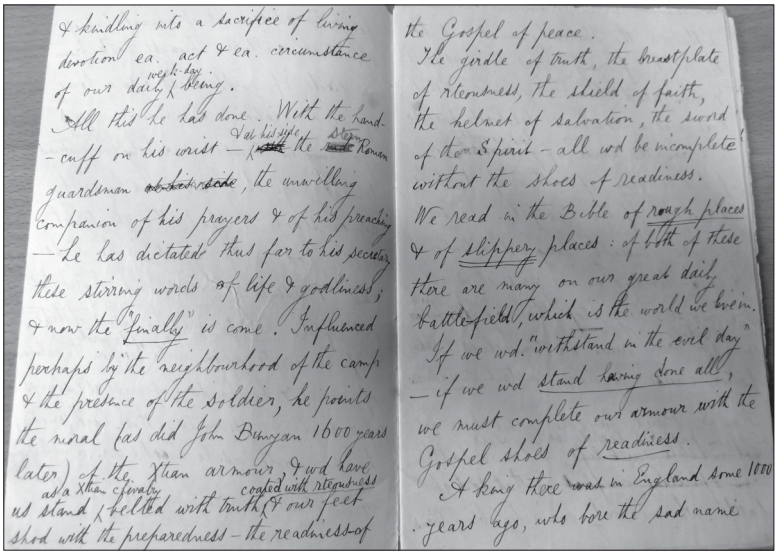

Figure 13. *Lewis' sermon on Eph V.I.15 pg.3. Photograph K A Beats 2015, reproduced by kind permission of Westminster College.*

of regular use. Each one records the date and location of its delivery, allowing us to trace his regular weekend travels across Cambridgeshire. St. Paul was his favourite Apostle and Lewis frequently referred to him during sermons on loneliness and the difficulties of life. Lewis knew many such difficulties and the passion with which he assembled his collection is not only a reflection of an eccentric Victorian gentleman, but testament to the determination of a man who was given a second chance to dedicate his life to the subject he loved; "We read in the Bible of rough places and of slippery places; of both of those there are many on our great daily battlefield, which is the world we live in … we must complete our armour with the Gospel shoes of readiness" (Fig. 13).

Acknowledgements

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For more discussion on the Lewis Collection see
http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/gallery/lewiscollection/index.html