This paper is an analysis of nine selected works decorated with fore-edge paintings, seven of which are located in the Rare Book Collection (RBC) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and the other two belonging to Duke University’s Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library (RBMSCL). The paper includes a brief history of the technique and the context of the selected items within that history. A descriptive bibliography of the works and an assessment of their place in their respective collections are also included. The paper concludes with recommendations for the development of the collections as well as final considerations on the subject.

Headings:

- Fore-edge painting
- Fore-edge painting--Specimens
- Book ornamentation
AN ANALYSIS OF THE HOLDINGS OF FORE-EDGE PAINTINGS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AND DUKE UNIVERSITY’S RARE BOOK COLLECTIONS

by
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A Master’s paper submitted to the faculty of the School of Information and Library Science of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Library Science.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina
April 2011

Approved by

_________________________________________
Charles B. McNamara
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PART I: HISTORY AND CONTEXT

Introduction

Books with fore-edge paintings on them have been described as “…books whose beauty and interest have been enhanced by the aesthetic taste and the technical skill of water-color artists, books which have come to be rightly regarded as irreplaceable treasures, books which are often designedly hidden from the eyes of idle curiosity” (Weber, 1966, p. vi-vii). A basic understanding of the common terms used to describe the anatomy of a book is necessary in order to comprehend what a fore-edge painting is. The fore-edge of a book is the edge that is opposite the spine, or the edge that opens. While the term “fore-edge painting” can technically be used to describe any decoration painted on this edge of a book, it is generally understood to mean a painted scene executed in a certain manner so that it is only visible when the pages are fanned. When the book is closed, the painting is usually hidden under gilt edges. While these works are most commonly referred to as fore-edge paintings, they have also been described as fore-edge decorations, ‘peek-a-boo’ paintings, or disappearing paintings.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze several selected examples of fore-edge paintings held by two renowned special collections in the Research Triangle area of North Carolina. The paper briefly outlines the history of the technique in order to provide a context with which to examine the works located in the collections of the University of North Carolina’s Rare Book Collection (RBC) and Duke University’s Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library (RBMSCL). While it is noted that this
practice experienced manifestations in other parts of Europe and Asia, the focus of the history given in this paper will remain on the undertakings of the technique in the United Kingdom, since it is the origin of all of the works selected for analysis. The inspection of these works is used to provide recommendations for the maintenance and further development of the collections as a significant compilation of this fascinating art form.

History

Any researcher attempting to uncover an accurate history of the technique of painting disappearing scenes on the fore-edges of books quickly realizes the difficulty behind the task. The topic is shrouded in uncertainty, controversy, and debate. It has also been comparatively ignored in modern research. The last definitive publication on the subject came from Carl Weber with his 1966 *Fore-edge Painting: A Historical Survey of a Curious Art in Book Decoration* (which appears to be a refined version of his first title from 1949, *A Thousand and One Fore-edge Paintings with Notes on the Artists, Bookbinders, Publishers and other Men and Women Connected with the History of a Curious Art*). His grandson, Jeff Weber, has recently published a few works on the topic. These are printed in limited quantities and tend to focus more on uncovering the history and identities of the artists rather than exploring the history of the technique. To the best of my knowledge, no other extensive research has been done or is being done to serve as a check against the work of the Webers, so we must take them as the present authoritative voices on the subject.

Very little is confidently known about how and when the practice of decorating edges in this fashion came to be. Although there are examples of decorated edges dating back to medieval times, the disappearing fore-edge paintings that this paper examines
have their origins in the seventeenth century, generally in England and Scotland. Several sources credit Samuel Mearne, the royal bookbinder to King Charles II of England, as the inventor of the technique. However, Carl Weber (1966) maintains that this assertion is based on the interpretations of Cyril Davenport, who wrote on the subject in several of his books published in the late 1800s and early 1900s, and who, according to Weber, “often made statements which…are vague, misleading, and untrue” (p. 20). Davenport’s claim that Mearne was the inventor of the fore-edge painting is unfounded and based on a brief statement made in a British Public Record Office document about “certain knowledge” which Mearne possessed. Davenport somehow took this to mean Mearne had knowledge of the technique of fore-edge painting, and therefore must be the inventor (Weber, 1966, p. 47).

The famous family of booksellers, publishers, and binders known collectively as the ‘Edwards of Halifax’ are significant figures in the history of fore-edge painting, and are sometimes credited with the invention of the art. While many fine examples of fore-edge paintings are attributed to the Edwards of Halifax, the time frame in which they were producing the paintings is inconsistent with the earliest known examples and styles of the practice. This means that neither the father William, nor any of his descendants could be the inventors, although they certainly promoted the technique and inspired others to perform and imitate it.

So who did invent the fore-edge painting? Weber presents a compelling argument in favor of the brothers Stephen and Thomas Lewis. His reasoning is based on a 1651 Bible located at the New York Public Library and the scholarship of Charles William Kellaway. Kellaway published an article in *The Guildhall Miscellany* in 1957
highlighting the brothers and several surviving examples of their work (Weber, 1966, p. 50). Their fore-edge decoration consisted of simplistic floral and coat of arms designs, very different from the landscapes that would eventually become a trademark of the practice. The most interesting aspect of their work is that some of the paintings are dated. The painting on the New York Public Library’s Bible is signed and dated “S.T. Lewis Fecit Anno Dom 1653.” Weber asserts that this example “…has the distinction of being the earliest of the dated fore-edge paintings; and until some one discovers an earlier…Stephen and Thomas Lewis must be hailed as the inventors of the art…” (Weber, 1966, pgs. 50-51).

Over time, the subject matter of the paintings evolved from floral decoration to biblical scenes, from biblical scenes to landscapes, and from landscapes to a variety of other themes. In an attempt to clarify the course and history of the fore-edge painting, I have compiled a brief chronology (Table 1.) of the development of this technique as far as the available resources and scope of this paper would allow. Because the focus of this analysis is on the art of disappearing fore-edge paintings, I have not included the history of fore-edge decoration prior to the practice of the technique in question. The following chronology provides the key dates in the practice, as well as prominent figures. These figures include some artists identified based on the work of Jeff Weber. The chronology also illustrates the discernable trends and shifts in the painting subject matter over time.
Table 1. Chronology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Interval</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1651-1653</td>
<td>Dated painting from Lewis brothers on Bible. Subjects of paintings are floral decoration, heraldic designs, or coats of arms.*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1660-1683</td>
<td>Samuel Mearne is royal bookbinder to Charles II. Subject matter expands to include biblical scenes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1775</td>
<td>William Edwards is known to be practicing the art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1768-1769</td>
<td>William Gilpin’s essay inspires the picturesque movement. Edwards shop produces picturesque landscape paintings instead of the typical floral designs. Double fore-edge paintings become popular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1808-1834</td>
<td>William Edwards dies, and his son Thomas inherits the shop. Thomas produces paintings of varied subject matter based on what the customer wants. Other shops imitate the art and produce fore-edge paintings of daily life, hunting scenes, and other events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of 19th Century</td>
<td>‘American Blight’ period, as coined by Weber, where American scenes were painted on British books to attract American buyers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920’s &amp; 30’s</td>
<td>The “Dover” painter paints scenes from Dover area (Lilly Library). C.B. Currie paints and signs works for an ‘authentic revival’ of the art (Carter p.108)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940’s &amp; 1950’s</td>
<td>The “Prolific” painter, identified as S.E. Stevens, paints “prolific and sub-standard” paintings (Lilly Library)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950’s</td>
<td>The “Thistle” painter borders paintings with thistles or floral designs (Lilly Library)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of 20th Century</td>
<td>Don Noble paints fore-edges; teaches Martin Frost the technique (<a href="http://www.foredgefrost.co.uk">www.foredgefrost.co.uk</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late 20th Century – Present day</td>
<td>Martin Frost practices fore-edge painting (<a href="http://www.foredgefrost.co.uk">www.foredgefrost.co.uk</a>)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*all information in this table comes from Weber (1966) pgs 47-106 unless otherwise noted.

Although this technique has persisted over the years, the height of the trend is generally regarded to be the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, during the Edwards of Halifax era. In the twentieth century it became common to execute paintings on earlier books so as to deceive collectors and sell books for more than they were worth. John Carter (2006) explains that “some of these pastiches are remarkably skillful, so that it is often very difficult indeed to decide whether an individual fore-edge painting was
executed in 1790 or 1970” (p.108). Booksellers also began applying fore-edge paintings to books that were hard to sell, so as to create more interest in them and get rid of them faster. Carter mentions in his *ABC for Book Collectors* that this facilitated the longing for an “authentic revival,” which triggered a “series of fore-edge paintings, signed and dated…executed by Miss C.B. Currie for Sotheran’s of London between the two world wars” (p. 108). Today examples of Miss Currie’s work are valued by collectors and institutions, and can be more expensive than works from the golden age of fore-edge painting. The art is most notably carried on in the present day by Martin Frost of the United Kingdom, whose work is becoming more and more sought after by collectors and libraries. Frost has been working since 1970 and has produced over 3,000 paintings (Frost, 2009, Fore-edge Painting).

As a preface to the examination of this method of fore-edge decoration, it is important to briefly describe the process by which these paintings were and continue to be created. It is generally accepted that historically the binder and the artists were not the same person in most cases (Ansley, 2006, Fore-edge Styles Change). Therefore, after the book was bound by the bookbinder, it was handed over to the artist to apply the fore-edge painting. The text block was fanned to the right and secured in place with clamps. Fanning the pages this way meant that the paint was actually being applied to the flat side of the page rather than exclusively to the edge. Using watercolors as dryly as possible, the painting was executed on the edges of the book. After the painting was completed, it was left to fully dry. The edges were then gilt to hide the painting when the book was closed in its natural position (Ansley, 2006, Technique). This is the same basic technique used by artists to create the paintings in the present day.
Context

Given their historic and monetary value, books with fore-edge paintings on them are likely to be collected by or placed under the care of an institution’s special collection or rare book collection. The number of fore-edge painting examples in any given collection tends to be very small. A search on AbeBooks.com, AddAll.com, or other similar online used and rare book resources reveals a number of fore-edge paintings priced anywhere from $300 to near $20,000, with the finer examples on the upper end. There are a few notable large collections in the U.S., including the Boston Public Library’s Albert H. Wiggin Collection. With 258 specimens, this is the largest number in a public collection. (Figenbaum, 2011, The Albert H. Wiggin Collection). A collection of this magnitude is exceptionally large, and is by no means the standard size for an average repository. It is more common for an institution to have one or two examples in its holdings.

With ten items the University of North Carolina (UNC) has a respectable number of examples in their Rare Book Collection (RBC). Considering the fragility of the items and the continued preservation and safety needs of the works, it was decided in collaboration with the conservator that only seven of the ten would be used for this analysis. Duke University had only two specimens available for use in this analysis. The combined nine titles from both collections range in date of publication from 1676 to 1860. All were published in the United Kingdom, the majority in London. No two books of the nine titles were published or printed by the same firm. It might be tempting to jump to the conclusion that these paintings are from the golden age of the technique described in the previous section based on the publication dates. However, it must not be assumed
that the date of publication and the date the painting was executed are contemporary with each other. It has been mentioned that in later eras it was common for artists to apply paintings to older books, particularly books from the Edwards of Halifax era, in an attempt to give them more value or to deceive collectors. With this in mind and in consideration of the styles of the paintings in question, which will be discussed later, it appears that none of the items examined here are the product of the Edwards of Halifax, although some may certainly come from the same era. An ordering of the nine titles used in this analysis by their publication date is as follows:

- *The Vicar of Wakefield*, Oliver Goldsmith, London: 1843

The book with the earliest date of 1676, *The Rule of Faith* (Fig. 7) by John Tillotson, contains a fore-edge painting of a coat of arms. Indications in the catalog information identify it be to that of Sir John de Grailly, a famous military leader from the middle ages. Based on the information already given about the early fore-edge paintings being floral designs and coats of arms, it can be assumed that this painting is either contemporary with the publication of the book or it is a later painting attempting to imitate the early style. Duke’s 1795 copy of *Paradise Lost* (Figs. 8 & 11) is an interesting case. The fore-edge painting is very similar to one painted on a copy of *Paradise Lost* (Fig. 10) in the Wiggin Collection at the Boston Public Library, although the artist of the Wiggin copy far surpassed the artist of the Duke copy in skill. These books and the
plausibility of these possibilities will be discussed in greater detail in the following section.

Other interesting possibilities include identification of the artists. Examinations of images from the online exhibit of Indiana University’s Lilly Library reveal several similarities between the paintings of the artist identified as the “prolific painter” and the fore-edge painting on UNC’s copy of *The Excursion* (Fig. 6). The hunting scenes painted on the three Joshua Reynolds volumes have been attributed to Don Noble. If this attribution is correct, they were most certainly painted long after publication and are examples of paintings from the last half of the twentieth century. For purposes of illustration, an attempt to arrange the books in chronological order according to when their respective fore-edge paintings were possibly painted, rather than when the book was published, is as follows:

*The Rule of Faith*, John Tillotson, London, 1676  
*The Vicar of Wakefield*, Oliver Goldsmith, London: 1843  

From this exercise it is clear that the date of publication is not a reliable source with which to determine the date of the application of the painting, and there are some examples, such as *The Course of Time* (Fig. 1) and *The Vicar of Wakefield* (Fig. 2), for which this information may never be uncovered. While fore-edge paintings do not always relate in subject matter to their respective work, two of the examples of the set used in this analysis appear to have a connection to the work on which they are painted.

According to indications written on the inside cover of the works, *The Vicar of Wakefield*
painting offers a view of a house where Goldsmith once lived, and *Paradise Lost* (Figs. 8 & 11) contains a portrait of the author between scenes of his hometown. Weber credits Thomas Edwards and his ability to address the demands and wants of the customers for the popularity of these types of scenes relevant to the author (Weber, 1966, p. 83). With this in mind it is easy to imagine these two examples being produced in the Edwards era, most likely by one of the many imitators of the Edwards.
PART II: DESCRIPTIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY

Descriptive Bibliography

The format for the descriptive bibliography of the works examined for this paper is based on the format followed by the Boston Public Library in the online exhibit of its fore-edge paintings, “On the Edge” (http://foreedge.bpl.org/). A brief descriptive identification of the painting is given in bold to identify each work, followed by an image (courtesy of UNC RBC and Duke RBMSCL), basic bibliographic information, and a written description of the fore-edge decoration. The direction the pages are fanned in order to view the painting is included as well. Much of the information was gathered through a collation of the works, as well as through consultations with the respective library catalogs. The first seven items are located in the University of North Carolina’s RBC. The last two are located in Duke University’s RBMSCL. For the purposes of this bibliography, the three-volume set of Sir Joshua Reynolds’s works are treated as three separate items.
Figure 1. View of St. Paul’s Cathedral and Tower of London

Book Title: *The Course of Time*

Pollock, Robert.


PR5189.P2 C6 1860

12mo, bound in calfskin, gilt edges, gold tooling.

On the inside cover it reads, “From the Library of Mrs. S. Westray Battle presented by her daughter Mrs. Robert S. Pickens.” Also includes an inscription that reads, “To Arthur, with Sarah Anne’s love on his 21st birthday. England, July 22nd, 1861”

With a fore-edge painting of a London cityscape from the river Thames with a view of St. Paul and the Tower of London with three boats visible in the foreground.

Fore-edge/fanned to the right.
Figure 2. View of Canonbury House, Islington

Book Title: *The Vicar of Wakefield*

Goldsmith, Oliver.

*The Vicar of Wakefield: with thirty-two illustrations by William Mulready*

London: John Van Voorst, 1843

PR3490 .A1 1843

8vo, bound in light green morocco, gilt edges, gold tooling on covers.

Includes the bookplate of Samuel Davies. Illustrations engraved by John Thompson.

The catalog describes the fore-edge painting as simply a “village scene.” However an inscription on the inside cover indicates that the house on the river as Canonbury House in Islington, London, where Goldsmith lived for a time.

Fore-edge/fanned to the right.
Figure 3. Fox Hunting Scene, Three Riders and Hounds

Book Title: The complete works of Sir Joshua Reynolds, vol. 1

Reynolds, Joshua, Sir

The complete works of Sir Joshua Reynolds, vol. 1, First President of the Royal Academy: with an original memoir, and anecdotes of the author. Printed for Thomas M'Lean, 26, Haymarket. 1824.

N7445.2 .R4 1824 v.1

12mo, bound in imitation morocco, gilt edges.

Bookseller's sticker for "Berkelouw Bookdealers" (Sydney, Australia) pasted on inside front cover board. “Presented by the William A. Whitaker Foundation” is indicated on inside cover.

A nice fore-edge painting of a fox hunting scene with three men on horseback and five distinguishable hounds. The painting has been attributed to artist Don Noble.

Fore-edge painting/fanned to the right.
Figure 4. Fox Hunting Scene, Two Riders and Hounds

Book Title: The complete works of Sir Joshua Reynolds, vol. 2

Reynolds, Joshua, Sir


N7445.2 .R4 1824 v.2

12mo, bound in imitation morocco, gilt edges.

Bookseller's sticker for "Berkelouw Bookdealers" (Sydney, Australia) pasted on inside front cover board. “Presented by the William A. Whitaker Foundation” is indicated on inside cover.

With a fore-edge painting of a hunting scene. Two horses and riders with hounds.

Fore-edge painting/fanned to the right.
**Figure 5. Fox Hunting Scene, Two Riders**

Book Title: *The complete works of Sir Joshua Reynolds, vol. 3*

Reynolds, Joshua, Sir


N7445.2 .R4 1824 v. 3

12mo, bound in imitation morocco, gilt edges.

Bookseller's sticker for "Berkelouw Bookdealers" (Sydney, Australia) pasted on inside front cover board. “Presented by the William A. Whitaker Foundation” is indicated on inside cover.

With a fore-edge painting of two horses and riders crossing a stream with hounds.

Fore-edge painting/fanned to the right.
Figure 6. Fisherman by a Tree

Book Title: The Excursion

Wordsworth, William

The Excursion, being a portion of the recluse, a poem, by William Wordsworth.


PR5858 .A1 1814

4to, bound in dark green morocco, gilt edges.


A fishing scene at a pond where one fisherman lounges under a large tree on the left and another sits in a boat in the distance. Style is similar to that of the “prolific painter”.

Fore-edge painting/fanned to the right.
Figure 7. Coat of Arms

Book Title: *The Rule of Faith*,

Tillotson, John

*The Rule of Faith, or, An answer to the treatise of Mr. I. S. entitled, Sure-footing, &c. by John Tillotson ; to which is adjoined a reply to Mr. I. S. his 3rd appendix, &c. by Edw. Stillingfleet*. London: Printed by H.C. for O. Gellibrand..., [1676]

BX5132. T5 R8 1676

8vo, bound in black leather, red speckled edges.

Second edition. “Presented by the William A. Whitaker Foundation” is indicated on inside cover.

Fore-edge painting of a coat of arms, a yellow shield with a black cross, decorated with shells. The shield is carried by a creature with a man’s face and with bull horns. Catalog indicates this to be the coat of arms of Sir John de Grailly. Inscription along the bottom is indecipherable.

Fore-edge painting/fanned to the right.
Figure 8. Milton Portrait and House

Book Title: *Paradise Lost*

Milton, John


A-18 M662PL c.1

8vo, bound in gold-tooled full red leather, all edges gilt and discretely gauffered. In a Clamshell box. With the armorial bookplate of Sir Thomas Hesketh, Bart. and the inscription: “Sophia E. Hesketh from my dear Father, 1838.”

With a fore-edge painting in three parts: on the left a view of Torthill Fields, Milton's house for a time. In the center a portrait of Milton, and on the right a view of St. Giles, Cripplegate.

Fore-edge painting/fanned to the right.
Figure 9. Magdalen College

Book Title: The Book of Common Prayer

Church of England

The book of common prayer, and administration of the sacraments, and other rites and ceremonies of the church, according to the use of the Church of England: together with the Psalter or Psalms of David, pointed as they are to be sung or said in churches: and the form or manner of making, ordaining, and consecrating of bishops, priests, and deacons. Oxford: Printed by W. Jackson and A. Hamilton, printers to the University, and sold by W. Dawson ... London, 1790

E q#2151 c.1

4to, bound in dark green morocco, all edges gilt.

With Earls' armorial supralibros and bookplate, the latter for Emo Park Library.

Includes a fore-edge painting, an inscription on the inside cover indicating it to be of “Magdalen College with the old bridge, Oxford.” Several figures are visible, including people, horses, and a carriage on the left side of the painting.

Fore-edge painting/fanned to the right.
PART III: ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Analysis

This analysis will first consider the collections of fore-edge paintings held by UNC and Duke individually and then address them as a whole.

The volume and breadth of the holdings at UNC is an excellent foundation on which to build a significant research collection of fore-edge paintings. A considerable strength to this collection is that the items being examined are works that are important enough to stand alone in any collection, even without the presence of their fore-edge decoration. Thus they have value for both the content and for what is painted on the edges. The range in date and subject matter of the paintings also makes the collection at UNC a solid illustration of the history of the technique. It has already been mentioned that the painting decorating the 1676 copy of *The Rule of Faith* (Fig. 7) is either from the early, pre-picturesque era of the technique or an imitation of such. Weber asserts that it is more common for paintings from the Edwards era to be counterfeited, and that “…no amateur artist has gone back to the floral designs and scrolls of the days of Samuel Mearne” (Weber, 1966, p. 148). If we assume it is contemporary with the publication, it can be considered one of the high spots in UNC’s collection of fore-edge paintings and valuable as an example of this early style in the evolution of the technique. Likewise, the three volumes of *The Complete Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds* (Figs. 3-5) serve as models of the history of the technique with their paintings attributed to Don Noble. If these four books were the lone examples of fore-edge paintings held by the university, the collection...
would still be highly admired. But add to it the three remaining paintings, one of which is possibly the work of the “prolific painter” and UNC’s collection is revealed as a highly respectable example of the history and variety of the art form.

Like the titles at UNC, the works at Duke are revered items without the fore-edge decoration and might be requested by patrons based on their content alone. As mentioned earlier, Duke’s copy of *Paradise Lost* is very similar to the copy held by the Boston Public Library. It was outside the bounds of this project to execute a thorough physical comparison of the two works, but through an image provided by the Boston Public Library (http://foreedge.bpl.org/) we can compare the two fore-edge paintings side by side. As far as it can be determined from the catalog records, these books are the same editions published in the same year. The most notable similarities include the almost identical view of Torthill Fields, Milton’s home for a time, on the left side of the painting and the circle-framed portrait of Milton in the center. The images appear on the following page, with Boston Public Library’s example first and Duke’s example second.
This case raises several questions. What is the connection between these two works? The similarities between them cannot be ignored. There is no question that the execution of the Boston Public Library’s copy was more skilled than that of Duke’s copy. Is the Duke example evidence of a lesser artist copying a greater artist’s work? Carl Weber states that, “the discovery of any sizable number of copies of the same edition, all with fore-edge paintings, all done in the same style, is pretty reliable evidence that the paintings are contemporary with the book—not decoration added many years after the original publication” (Weber, 1966, p. 178). While two copies is not enough to validate the description “sizable,” the similarities between the two paintings suggest that one was consulted in the creation of the other. The difference in skill implies that the works come from two different artists. Determining definitive answers to these considerations would require research beyond the available resources and scope of this paper, but any librarians
or patrons working with these items should be aware of the similarities in the paintings held by the two institutions.

The online exhibit of Indiana University’s Lilly Library identifies several artists discovered through the work of Jeff Weber. One artist, habitually known as the “prolific painter” and later identified as S.E. Stevens, has a distinct style that is present in the fore-edge painting on UNC’s copy of Wordsworth’s *The Excursion* (Fig. 6). The strongest evidence is in the artist’s style and manner of painting figures, birds, and trees. Images could not be obtained for inclusion in this paper, but can be accessed online at the exhibit gallery website (Taylor, 2008, Prolific Painter).

As a whole, the fore-edge paintings at UNC and Duke form a valuable representation of the chronology of the art of edge decoration. With some recommendations, these collections could help in increasing interest, access, and research among patrons both within and without the triangle area of North Carolina.

**Recommendations**

Although UNC has a more than an adequate number of fore-edge paintings in its collection, it is my opinion that with the careful purchase of two or three more examples it could become one of the most well-rounded collections in North Carolina. Many of the collected works of fore-edge paintings in institutions are sparse and have little continuity as a collection. Acquiring an example of an Edwards of Halifax painting or an example of a double fore-edge painting would not only add significant value to the present collection, but also connect with the other works in such a way as to offer a visual history of the development of this practice. Currie or Frost paintings would also be desirable in this effort. Examples of these are most easily found at bookseller’s fairs, from individual
booksellers, and on online auction sites such as AbeBooks.com. While general auction platforms such as Ebay often have fore-edge paintings for sale, it is recommended that sellers certified by the Antiquarian Booksellers’ Association of America (ABAA) be used for any acquisitions to ensure the authenticity of the items.

Even if additional examples cannot be obtained, there are ways in which the RBC and Duke can better use the current collection to serve patrons. The average person is unaware of the art of fore-edge painting. The ten works UNC already has could be used in collaboration with Duke’s two titles to create an exhibit highlighting the examples in question, which would introduce many to the subject and attract interest to the collections. Martin Frost, the artist mentioned earlier, has created what he calls the “Widmore Press” for displaying fore-edge paintings. These are also the devices that the Boston Public Library used in order to photograph their large collection of paintings. An image is included below, courtesy of Martin Frost (Frost, 2009, Fore-edge Painting).

Figure 12. The Widmore Press, (Martin Frost, www.foledgefrost.co.uk)
If nothing else, such an exhibit would make patrons aware of the art and teach them about the history. Ensuring that the librarians who handle the items are aware of the paintings is essential to these collections as well. These works tend to be fragile and educating staff on the proper use and handling of the paintings would promote their longevity. Given the nature of the paintings being hidden under gilt edges, how many collections have items with fore-edge paintings on them without any of the staff knowing it? Simply making librarians aware that these paintings exist would undoubtedly lead to the discovery of more works with fore-edge decoration. Identifying these hidden collections would be beneficial for any institution. Also, once identified, these items need to be correctly entered into the catalog to promote accessibility. It is very difficult to perform a concrete search for books with this type of decoration in an online catalog, mostly because of inconsistencies in the way information has been entered. For example, a search of “Fore-edge paintings” and “Fore-edge paintings—specimens” brings up two sets of very different results, which only a knowledgeable and patient searcher is able to sift through in order to find the actual examples in question. There is a disconnect in finding the items with fore-edge paintings rather than books about fore-edge paintings, and it is my recommendation that institutions should strive to make the presence of these paintings more apparent in the catalog.

In the process of undertaking research for this analysis, UNC had its holdings of fore-edge paintings photographed in high resolution for research, access, and preservation purposes. It was mentioned by the conservator that these images would possibly be used in the online catalog in the future (the images are those used in the above descriptive bibliography section). It is suggested that Duke and other institutions with books having
fore-edge paintings follow this undertaking as well. Not only is this a practical preservation endeavor, but adding images to the online catalog would be beneficial both for the researcher who is specifically looking for examples of this technique and for the patron who stumbles upon them through a casual search of the catalog.

**Final Considerations**

It should also be mentioned that a few days before the completion of this paper, Jeff Weber published a new book on the subject of Miss C.B. Currie’s paintings, entitled *Annotated Dictionary of Fore-edge Painting Artists & Binders (Mostly English & American). Part II: The Fore-edge Paintings of Miss C. B. Currie; with a Catalogue Raisonné*. Because of the time constraints in preparing this paper and because the book was published in limited quantities, it could not be consulted for this analysis. This source would prove valuable for further research on fore-edge paintings.

While we have briefly examined the past of fore-edge paintings, considering the future of the technique is also useful in their study. One question that arises is the evolution of the manner in which they are created. Will these paintings ever be executed digitally by a computer and printed before the book is bound? To the best of my knowledge, a machine-programmed image has never been attempted.

One resounding question has presented itself throughout all of the research on this subject: why are fore-edge paintings being ignored? With so much uncertainty surrounding their history, why has there been little effort to uncover what is unknown about them? Why are they still unknown to most librarians? Why has no one attempted to compile the known paintings into a searchable database? An aggregated database would facilitate more opportunities for comparison similar to the Duke and Boston Public copies
of *Paradise Lost* in the previous section. These are considerations and opportunities for future research on the subject so as to ensure that the knowledge of the art of the disappearing painting does not disappear from history altogether.
WORKS CITED


WORKS CONSULTED

