

## Making History: Antiquaries in Britain

**Date :** February 1, 2012

Whilst a resident scholar at the YCBA in New Haven, I've had the privilege over the past few weeks of working in the reading room of Louis Kahn's brilliantly designed space which houses Yale University's British Art Center. On the same floor, not 10 yards away from the library entrance is the exhibition space for what will soon be the [Making History: Antiquaries in Britain](#) exhibition. Pretty much every day on the way to the staff kitchen, I've managed to sneak a peek at the curatorial progress of this forthcoming exhibition which shall be inaugurated at the YCBA by an opening lecture from the current President of the Society of Antiquaries of London.

**Wednesday February 1, 5:30 - 6:30pm**

**Opening Lecture, "Antiquaries and the British Past:**

*Locating and Recording Buildings"*

Professor Maurice Howard (University of Sussex)

[YCBA](#) Lecture Hall, 1080 Chapel St. New Haven, CT

*Making History* from February 2 to May 27, 2012 at the YCBA has been put together to celebrate the achievement of the Society of Antiquaries of London, Britain's oldest independent learned society concerned with the study of the past. It was established in 1707 with the aim of encouraging the pursuit of "the ingenious and curious" in the field of British antiquities.



---

The exhibition features 100 works selected from the Society's treasures with fifty additions from the Center's collections and elsewhere at Yale. It is organised into eight sections: *The Discovery of Britain* focuses on the period before the seventeenth century; *The Earliest Antiquaries* looks at antiquaries such as William Dugdale, who began to challenge previously held views of Britain's past; and *Founders and Fellows* considers the formation of the Society itself.

*Collecting for Britain* is the heart of the exhibition. Highlights include an early copy of the Magna Carta (ca. 1225), a medieval processional cross reportedly recovered from the battlefield of Bosworth (1485), a forty-foot illuminated "roll chronicle" on parchment (detail above), and an

extraordinary collection of early English royal portraits painted on panel. *Lost and Found* focuses on archaeological excavations of the eighteenth century, while *The Art of Recording* presents the work of artists such as J.M.W. Turner and Thomas Girtin, who were commissioned to record historic buildings, monuments and objects.

The Society has also embarked on several major engraving projects to bring its documentation work to a wider audience. *Publishing the Past* includes the recording of early paintings and magnificent decorations in the medieval Palace of Westminster before it burned down. The exhibition ends with *The Rediscovery of the Middle Ages*, featuring the art of William Morris and his circle.

The exhibition has been organised collaboratively between three institutions: the Society of Antiquaries of London in association with both the YCBA and the McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College, where it ran from Sept 9 to Dec 11, 2011.

It has been curated by Elisabeth Fairman, Senior Curator of Rare Books & Manuscripts (YCBA) and Nancy Netzer, Professor of Art History & Director of the McMullen Museum, as well as with Heather Rowland, Head of Library & Collections and Julia Dudkiewicz, Collections Manager, Society of Antiquaries of London.