

THE AMERICAN TRUST FOR THE BRITISH LIBRARY ARCHIVE
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of
David N. Redden

THE AMERICAN TRUST FOR THE BRITISH LIBRARY
2018

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with David N. Redden conducted by Seana E. Anderson and R. Dyke Benjamin on August 22, 2018. This interview is part of The American Trust for the British Library Archive's Oral History Project.

Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose. The following transcript has been reviewed, edited, and approved by the narrator.

David N. Redden joined ATBL in 2008, was elected President in 2009, and was elected Chairman in 2018.

Transcriptionist:	Miwa Yokoyama	Session 1
Interviewee:	David N. Redden	Location: Redden's home on UES, NYC
Interviewer:	Seana Anderson (Q1)	Date: August 22, 2018
Interviewer:	R. Dyke Benjamin (Q2)	

Q1: I'm Seana Anderson, the Executive Director for the American Trust for the British Library and it is August 22, 2018. I'm here with R. Dyke Benjamin who is the President and Treasurer of the American Trust for the British Library, with Miwa Yokoyama who is the Archivist Consultant, and we are interviewing David Redden [at his home].

Redden: It's good to have you here.

Q1: Thank you. Could you just first give us a little background of where you were born, [and] sort of through Sotheby's briefly.

Redden: I was born in China, where my father was a foreign service officer for the American State Department. We had to leave rather quickly because the Red Army was coming South. We were in Canton—now Guangzhou. And the Americans—I was born in January of 1949—Americans were asked to leave Canton in May. We stayed on [with my father]. My mother and I finally left in August. My father left in September and [on] October the 1st, the Red Army swept into Guangzhou. On our way to Hong Kong—we went by riverboat—I have no memory of this—we were attacked by communists. There were bullets apparently flying overhead but anyway, we managed to escape. And then the next posting for my father was out of the frying

pan and into the fire. It was Israel just after the war of independence there. So that was a hotbed. And then after that, it was countries that were very easy to enjoy, particularly Britain and Italy, which is where we spent most of my childhood. In fact, I really didn't spend much time in America until I went to college and even then, I spent a year of college in Rome and a year of college in Paris.

But one of the things that my mother did—she was a New Zealander. My parents met in New Zealand. She was extraordinarily well read and she desperately wanted to get as far away from New Zealand as possible which she felt was on the far side of the moon. And really in the end, she told my father [that] there were only two cities in the world where she wanted to live. And those cities were London and Rome. My father spent the second half of his entire career going backwards and forwards between London and Rome where he served as Consul General in both places several times. [My mother] dragged me around every museum and every archaeological site that you could possibly get to, and because of that, it almost seemed inevitable when I went to university that I studied art history because it was so easy. I mean, I knew it all already and so I could indulge in doing other things. And then once I graduated, what do you do with an art history degree? Become a lawyer? I didn't. I had always been a collector. I love collecting. I started collecting when I was a small child. And so, it seemed to me obvious that I should go to a place like Sotheby's. I came back to America. Because I had an American passport, I couldn't really get work in Europe very easily [but] I'd spent several years after college just traveling around Europe. I came back here and went to some parties [where] people said, "Well, obviously, you [should] go and work for Sotheby's," then called Parke-Bernet here in America. And so in 1974, I applied for a job and was given it. And that was my first job and I stayed there

for 42 years. And looking back at it, I had no qualifications whatsoever, none! In fact, I'd been hired as a trainee in Asian works of art about which I truly knew nothing about [since] I'd always lived in Europe. But I think what distinguished my application was my English accent.

Q1: [Laughs]

Redden: That [may have been] my qualification quite frankly. However, I have to say, I loved working at Sotheby's and threw myself into it. And one of the areas I was involved with—[of] many, many of the areas at Sotheby's, but one area that always reported to me for nearly 40 years was books. I served as Worldwide Chairman of our Book and Manuscripts area but I was also involved in a lot of other things. Books were important [to me], and I collected books and I also managed to hold some of the most extraordinary sales in the book area in history. The sale of the Magna Carta, the sale of the first book printed in America, the Bay Psalm book. The greatest book collection, or the most valuable book collection sold in America to date, the [H.] Bradley Martin collection, which has a connection with ATBL because Bradley Martin was a cousin [of Howdy Phipps on our Council].

Q1: Ahh.

Q2: Oh, I didn't know that.

Redden: He was a Phipps descendent also. And in fact, Anne Sidamon-Eristoff, whose brother [Howard Phipps, Jr.] of course is involved with us was an executor of the Bradley Martin estate. And there have been many other wonderful objects sold over the years. So it made sense to be deeply involved with libraries. Sorry, long answer.

Q1: No. That's wonderful. I just want to ask you. You said you started collecting as a young boy.

Redden: Yes.

Q1: Were that [sic] stamps first?

Redden: Well, I collected everything. I had a little museum when I was ten years old. But I did collect stamps. I collected stamps probably starting when I was eight. And it was ironic, as you know, Seana, that at eight years old, if I had been asked, what was the most valuable single object in the world, I would have said, "Well, it's the British Guiana stamp," which is unique because I thought of that as the most extraordinary object in the world. I wasn't really into paintings at that point. And when years later, it seemed clear that that unique stamp was going to come up for sale, I actually took it to auction. We had no stamp department [at Sotheby's], but that wasn't the point. I wanted that stamp. It actually had a colorful, storied history to it. And the most recent owner was John Dupont who was somewhat infamous. I got the stamp from his estate by saying, "Look, every stamp company in the world wanted it but you don't want to give it to [a] stamp auction house. You want to give it to someone who's going to go well beyond the

world of stamps.” And in fact, I sold that stamp, now what—4 years ago, for 9 ½ million dollars, which was at least three times more than any stamp had gone for in history. And that’s a record I’m sure will last for a very, very long time. And that stamp is actually now down in Washington, D.C. It was bought by a private collector, who is a friend of mine. But he has put it on deposit at the National Postal Museum, which is part of the Smithsonian. So, it is down there. He’s a remarkable man. His name is Stuart Weitzman and you know, he designs shoes, but he’s also a great collector.

Q1: And what about you? You said you collected books?

Redden: Yes. Books connected with the Hudson Valley. And then in that bookcase right behind you, there, is the world’s greatest collection of books by Alfred Austin, who is really obscure. Alfred Austin was the British Poet Laureate [who] succeeded Tennyson [and held that position] from 1896 until his death in 1913. He was also my great, great, great uncle and so, it really is out of family piety that I put that collection together. And it is actually, if one cares about Alfred Austin, [although] not many people do, it is superb. Among other things, I’d also have lots of Austin manuscripts, and one set of manuscripts that I have—and I think when I bought it, I bought it at Sotheby’s—it was being sold in London. And I think the competition actually was the British Library.

Q1: Ohhh.

Q2: Oh, my goodness.

Redden: It certainly cost me a lot of money. The people at Sotheby's claim that it was a strong bid from the British Library but who knows. The manuscripts were quite extraordinary— 700 pages of letters from Alfred Austin to a young woman named Violet Maxse. He was in his 60s and she was 18 years old and they are love letters. They're quite extraordinary. So, he was this fairly distinguished poet laureate and these are written in the late 1890s. There was this thing that Victorian gentlemen had these cults for young women which were presumably quite platonic. She was a very distinguished young woman. Her father had been an Admiral and was a great friend of the Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII and many other people seemed to have had cults for her including Georges Clemenceau, Rudyard Kipling, Burne-Jones, Cecil Rhodes. They were all mesmerized by her. She married the youngest son of the British Prime Minister of the time. And then when he died, she married Viscount Milner who was the Secretary of War in Britain during the first world war. Her only child, her son, was killed in the war, from her first husband. Later in life, Daphne de Maurier called her the most formidable woman in England.

Q2: Wow.

Redden: Anyway, so I have 700 pages of letters to her. None from her!

Q1: [Laughs]

Redden: I don't know whatever happened to those. But they are an amazing insight into a kind of Victorian dialogue about art, and music, and poetry all designed to try and captivate this young woman. And he traveled a great deal. Alfred Austin had inherited a lot of money from another uncle of mine and he had a beautiful house in Kent where he had a garden that he was very proud of and he wrote many books about [it]. His most famous book is called, *The Garden that I Love*. And then he would spend his winters in Florence. And he would send a rose to Queen Victoria every week from Florence. I don't know what Queen Victoria thought of it. It would have been a particularly bizarre thing, anyway, he did [it]. He was also a politician which is I think how he became poet laureate because he was a great friend of Lord Salisbury, [the Prime Minister, one of] whose sons, [ironically,] married Violet Maxse. So, it's all rather incestuous. So, in fact, the one time I went to the Reading Room at the British Library, was in order to really go through and see what Austin was there. Now, you can do it quite easily, you can look online. But this is many years ago.

Q1: In the old Reading Room?

Redden: In the old Reading Room, in the British Museum. And I was only twenty years old or something, maybe even a teenager. And I thought to get a reading ticket for the Reading Room, you had to be very distinguished. And so, I asked a cousin of mine who actually has a title—he's Lord Gifford—if he would please write a letter for me for the Reading Room and he did and I was allowed in. But I knew the British Library much earlier. I had been to the British Library before I was 12. So, I remember vividly the wonderful mahogany cases in which you could see some of

the great manuscripts of the English language. Keats, Wordsworth, and all these extraordinary people laid out there. And ah, I remember that with actual great vividness.

Q1: Wow.

Q2: That's really exciting. And what was your first exposure to ATBL? With your love of books, you have such a perfect background for it. Who was your—

Redden: The connection with ATBL was actually Bill Golden.

Q2: Oh, okay. Who was one of my heroes.

Redden: Bill Golden, I knew quite well because back in the early 90s, there was a great controversy up where we have our house in Cornwall. Well, you know.

Q2: Yes, I've been there.

Redden: Because there's a 4,000-acre research forest there called Black Rock Forest, which had been given by the Stillman family in 1949 to Harvard. Harvard had already a forest in Massachusetts and didn't really need Black Rock Forest and so really didn't do anything with it until I guess the late 80s when they suddenly realized that 4,000 acres of land, only an hour from

New York City is quite valuable. And very beautiful land, because it's quite rugged with lakes and hills, rather like Tuxedo Park. And ironically enough, it had been bought by the Stillman family, who live[d] only one block away from here on 72nd Street in the rather grand Beaux-Arts house now used by the Emir of Qatar. And actually that house had been rented by Joseph Pulitzer while this place was being built. Anyway—all a small world.

Q2: Interesting.

Redden: The Stillman of the late 19th Century, early 20th Century, had decided to create his own Tuxedo Park, [from which he, or a friend, had apparently been] blackballed. It's rather like the story, of why [certain] clubs here in New York were created, because someone was blackballed from another club.

Q2: [Laughs]

Redden: So he bought up all of these hilltop farms, which would have been hardscrabble farms and then when he died, it was inherited by his son Ernest. And Ernest actually, a [doctor] , was not interested in real estate, and decided to turn this extraordinary property into a research forest and he did it very seriously. Again, small world. His house here in New York City was on 75th Street between Park and Madison, which is now the Hewitt School, which is where my daughter went to school. And it has a great big spiral staircase. Ernest Stillman had a fascination with fire engines and he had a firepole [installed] all the way down five stories [of stairs] from the top

down to the bottom. So, you could slide down. The school does not have that today! Anyway, Ernest Stillman really created a serious research forest. He was inspired by Gifford Pinchot, the great forester and landscaper, who worked particularly for the National Forest Service and for the Vanderbilts. And he produced, out of Black Rock Forest every year, a serious scientific paper, quite elaborately done. When he died in 1949, he left the forest to Harvard with a substantial endowment. Quite a lot of money. And then Harvard decides in the late 80s, let's get rid of this forest and let's monetize it. And all hell broke loose. It really was an extraordinary moment. Scenic Hudson, which I later chaired, the organization that looks after the Hudson Valley, had not received the enormous donation it got ultimately from the Wallaces of Reader's Digest. Several hundred million dollars. Whatever it had, it was prepared to bankrupt itself to save Black Rock Forest.

Q2: Oh really?

Redden: And the New York State Attorney General stepped in and everybody stepped in and Harvard retreated rather quickly. And a famous article by George Trow appeared in the *New Yorker*—endlessly long, very, very long—about Black Rock Forest which was then published separately. George Trow became a sort of cult writer. And this is one of his extraordinary exercises and he really took Harvard to task. And so Harvard said, “Ok, look, let's strike a deal. We'll keep the endowment—thank you very much—and we'll pass on the forest to someone else.” Which is kind of [like] saying, we'll take the money and anything that costs money, like maintaining a forest, somebody else can take that on. Anyway, along came Bill Golden.

Q2: Interesting.

Redden: One of my neighbors, a man named Steven Duggan, was desperate to try and find someone to take on Black Rock Forest, and Steve, who was a Harv... in fact, all of my neighbors were Harvard graduates and Steve particularly had a bit of a hold over Harvard because he controlled a foundation which could only give money to Harvard. Harvard had to make a presentation about how it would use the money and if he didn't like how it was going to be used, he wouldn't give it. Anyway, Steve knew Bill Golden, knew Bill had a great interest in science, [he was then or shortly thereafter, the Chairman of the American Museum of Natural History] and he contacted Bill. Steve didn't want it to go to the New York State Parks [Department] because it was next to his property too—and he didn't want lots of people running around next to his property. So, he contacted Bill. Bill became greatly intrigued because in essence, he had a foundation, and he loved the general area. He had a house in Olivebridge in the Catskills, part of the New York City watershed with 2,000 acres.

Q2: Wow.

Redden: And here was 4,000 acres essentially for free. And so, he said okay. So, he took it on. Harvard actually sold the forest to him for \$400,000 but then gave back to the Forest as a kind of token endowment a hundred or two hundred thousand dollars. It was all very token. And suddenly, Bill had this forest. And I was deeply involved with Scenic Hudson and he had to figure out what to do with it. He came up with a completely bizarre idea which looked like it had

no chance of success, [to enlist] members of the Forest—academic institutions—who can then use the forest for their own research. Well, Bill of course had extraordinary connections so he could kind of inveigle people into doing this. So, Columbia University, Barnard, the American Museum of Natural History, Dalton School, many of the private schools around here. They all became members of the Black Rock Forest Consortium and that's the way it's been run ever since. But anyway, in the process of all of that, I got to know Bill really very well. And I admired him enormously. I had to at one point get involved in some negotiations. Scenic Hudson and Bill were involved in possibly purchasing a property and his negotiation skills were so unbelievably wickedly strong.

Q2: [Laughs] He was a smart guy.

Redden: I know. I sort of sat back and it was like watching Shakespeare write *Hamlet*. He was truly brilliant and left everybody else in the dust.

Q2: It was nice that he did it. He was a nice gentleman that he did these things.

Redden: He was extremely clever. Interestingly enough, Bill had wanted to be a scientist and that never worked out. He realized what he could do more for science is to make a lot of money and to give it to science, which is what he did. The Golden Foundation, which he set up, gave money primarily to scientific projects of various kinds. I said I knew about ATBL because of Bill. But by the time I joined, Bill may have just passed away. I knew his daughter. Bill really was a

phenomenal person. He was actually the first Scientific Advisor to a President. He was Truman's Scientific Advisor. He was very proud of that and when I visited him in his office, he would bring out these memoranda books from his White House years. He had an extraordinary story about the hydrogen bomb. He was in Florence and suddenly there was the news that Russia had set off an atomic bomb. The question was, should America then develop the next stage, the hydrogen bomb? Bill had to write a lengthy memorandum on the subject sent from the Consulate General in Florence which nobody there could read because [the issue] was much too sensitive. His point of view was, yes, America should develop a hydrogen bomb.

Q2: David, was there a project in the [Black Rock] Forest that particularly attracted Bill? Was there one, did he have one, that stood out in his mind, a scientific project?

Redden: I don't think so. I think what he wanted to do was prove that he could make this work. That you know, somehow, he could create a situation where this big piece of real estate could be used for useful purposes and not cost his foundation a lot of money. But the way Black Rock Forest worked is that the consortium members had to pay dues, but they never covered the true cost of the Forest. The Forest would also raise money from donors and at the end of the year, there would always be a deficit. The deficit probably represented as much as 20% of the budget and the Golden Foundation would make it up.

Q2: I see.

Redden: And in fact, the irony is, years later, Sibyl Golden...I had joined the Board of Black Rock Forest. When Sibyl Golden became ill with ALS, she asked me if I would Co-Chair the Forest with her. Of course, I said yes. Then, she died so I became Chair of Black Rock Forest and still am although I've now requested a Co-Chair for me. But what we've just done at Black Rock Forest, which would make Bill feel wonderful, is that we've raised nearly 10 million dollars.

Q2: Oh wonderful.

Redden: For an endowment. So that it's not dependent on the Golden Foundation.

Q1: Which no longer exists.

Redden: Which no longer exists. Although Black Rock actually will get some more money from Sibyl when her estate is finally closed. But she left us a lot of money to begin with. But a lot of other people were very generous too.

Q2: Is the 10 million for the continuation of the scientific projects plus keeping the natural beauty?

Redden: Here's what we've done. We've endowed two positions. A master teacher and a post-doctoral position in the Forest. And we have given an easement over all of the trails in the Forest

to the Palisades Park System, of which Jeannette [Redden] is a Commissioner. And there are restrictions [that] it could never be developed. We can certainly build dormitories and things like that in the forest but it could never be [otherwise] developed. And the easement we gave is a perpetual easement, so it's always available to hikers and walkers at least. And so, Bill's legacy, one of many legacies, is the preservation of that forest which is the largest privately-owned tract of land in the Hudson highlands.

Q2: Wow. What a story.

Q1: Well, since Bill had been [with ATBL] from the beginning of ATBL, but then he was no longer there, what was your motivation for coming on [board]?

Redden: Well, I can't remember whether it was Bill who asked me to get involved. It probably was, I suppose. And, if Bill asked you to do something, you did it. And it certainly fit in, obviously, with my background. At that point the person that I dealt with the most, apart from you, Seana, was Lansing [Lamont]. And Lansing was a wonderful human being. So it was an incredibly congenial place. I guess the other part of it was The Century Association because that's where meetings took place, and everybody was a member of The Century. In fact, the reason I was a member of The Century is that I had no choice. When we bought our house up in Cornwall all our neighbors were members of the Century. And they said, "You've got to join The Century." So, I did. Which was not a bad decision. And Lansing was very much, very deeply involved with the Century.

Q2: Yes.

Redden: He founded the Archives Committee. He then founded the Façade Preservation Committee which competed with the Archives Committee. Still does.

Q2: The Façade is tax deductible.

Redden: Yes. Well, so is Archives too. Yes, they were two tax-deductible foundations. I would have lunch with Lansing at least once a month at the Century. Always the same table. In the corner in the members-only room. And Lansing really was a joy to work with and was lovely to be with. And everybody involved was nice. And so, to have people that you already knew or enjoyed involved with ATBL made it a very easy [organization] to join. I was involved with a number of other libraries. I served on the Visiting Committees for The Morgan Library for Printed Books & Bindings and Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts. And also on the Visiting Committee for the New-York Historical Society Library and for many years, I was on the Board of The Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington which has a strong relationship with the British Library. So, there are other library connections. And I have to say, ATBL wasn't wildly demanding. I mean, there are Boards that one gets involved with, which have meetings every two weeks and they become really quite tedious after a while. Well, I guess another place that I was involved with and, of course, you are too, Dyke, was the Grolier Club, which was a nexus [for the world of books]. And you [were] on the Council there. And I was on the Council. That was

another point of connection between quite a number of people. It was a nice cause to be involved with. And visiting the BL every year was great fun. And Seana always organized wonderful events around *[phone rings]* those—

[INTERRUPTION]

Q1: Well, thank you for saying about the trips and the—

Redden: Oh, no, no. Fabulous. What was interesting though was how things developed. When I first became involved with the ATBL, the BL really didn't depend very much on outside contributions. You know, 96% of its budget came from the UK government. That's changed in a way that I think the BL is still trying to understand. The amount of [government] money that's come to the BL has declined over the years really quite substantially. And it has declined not just in the amount of pounds, but there's [been] no [adjustment] for inflation. So, the BL has been told it has to try and raise money privately. For so many other European organizations the streets are paved with gold in America. And so, they set up supporting organizations [here]. What was interesting about the ATBL was that it was already here. Now the ATBL is really a very unusual supporting organization because it has an endowment. That makes it almost unique. Most supporting organizations are totally creatures of whatever they are supporting. The ATBL is different because, for instance, Seana's salary doesn't come from the British Library. It comes out of our own funds and we are, in that sense, quasi-independent. Now, in essence, the U.S. tax code likes to see supporting organizations as being somewhat independent. In a quite

extraordinary way, the US subsidizes organizations all around the world by allowing supporting organizations to be set up in America and Americans to take tax deductions for giving to places in Kathmandu, or wherever. And, to quantify that, I think, would show that America—the generosity of America—is truly unbelievable. It's hundreds of billions of dollars going all over the world. And to try and keep track of all of the supporting organizations is extremely difficult-- to try and keep track of how many come from England alone. I mean, if you don't have a supporting organization, what are you doing?

Q1: [Laughs]

Redden: I remember I was in London about ten years ago and fell suddenly [seriously] ill. I had to go to Guy's Hospital and spent the night there. By the next day everything was fine. And as we left, we said, "Where do we pay?" And they said, "There's no charge." I felt really awful. They'd looked after me very well. They had been wonderful people. They deserved to get something. So, I searched around and worked with the hospital and finally found a supporting organization here in America to which one could give money that it could be directed, and it was directed to the hospital. So, then they called me up and said, "Would you consider setting up a supporting organization for us?" And I said no, no, no. I mean. I have done my bit. But you know, they were amazed that an American felt some sort of obligation to do something for them. And since that is a hospital, where you go if you fall ill in the middle of London, they must have lots of foreign patients. And so not to have a supporting organization is actually [missing an opportunity].

Q2: Well, one thing that came out during our recent trip to Oxford, was that—sort of in a rarely precedented way—Christ Church asked us, the ATBL, to give to Christ Church. And I said well, we don't do that directly like that. But we're perfectly at liberty to do it ourselves. And so, Jon Lindseth who wasn't there but believes in Christ Church [can] give to Christ Church. But that's perfectly alright. Yes, so we can help.

Redden: Well, in fact, Oxbridge have the biggest fundraising operations in America of everybody. Cambridge in America, I know well because of Gurnee Hart who is an old friend. And you know, they have a staff of what, twenty people or something. It's a sizeable operation. And Oxford is in even better shape because of all of the Rhodes scholars here. So, they've got a sort of built-in cadre of Americans they can go to. And Americans, you know, all fall over dead when they see Oxford and Cambridge because it's so beautiful.

Q2: It is beautiful. David, if you took a long view of the American Trust for the British Library, where would you see us in ten years in terms of endowment and membership and outreach?

Redden: Dyke, the answer to that is that I would love to see the ATBL, more and more involved in exhibitions of BL property in America because that's how you raise money too. And if you want Americans to give money to the ATBL to have some quid pro quo, such as exhibitions that you can point to in America, would be immensely fruitful. One would like to see the ATBL raising much more money, but quite frankly, it really ought to be done for a reason that benefits America. It shouldn't just be a one-way street. And so, with ATBL's money we've always tried

to say, “Please, projects that might be of interest to Americans.” Having great objects come to America—whether it’s *Alice’s Adventures Underground* or the manuscript for *Jane Eyre*— those sorts of objects are exceedingly useful in providing a focus. One of the best fundraising exercises I ever saw was for Cambridge. And I was deeply involved in it. I offered to host a dinner at Sotheby’s and the Vice Chancellor of the university came over with one of the great science historians [at] Cambridge, together with Newton’s own copy of *Principia*. The dinner was [organized] around the copy of *Principia*, [with Newton’s own annotations,] which was there and the historian who described its significance. It was all designed to really inspire one person at that dinner, a man who had the brilliance or the good fortune to be the creator of Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel. But anyway, that’s an example of how an institution used one single object to—

Q2: It’s good advice.

Redden: —create a real story and some excitement for one or two targets. There’s another example which I think didn’t work, with which I was also deeply involved, and that was the 400th anniversary of the Bodleian Library at Oxford. And there was a big benefit which we held at Sotheby’s for the Library. But what the Bodleian decided to do, which must have driven the librarians at the Bodleian nuts, was to bring over 40 of their greatest treasures.

Q1: Forty?

Redden: Forty. Forty of their greatest treasures.

Q2: Oh, my goodness.

Redden: And for this party. And it was, quite frankly, ridiculous because first of all, nobody really understood how exceptional this extraordinary array of material was. If they had one object, it would have been, “Wow. There’s the manuscript for *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*.” You know? Or, “There’s one of the great Shakespeare’s First Folios.” But when you bring it all... they had their amazing manuscript [of] *The Decameron*, with the most beautiful illuminations. It was too much! It was perfume in the desert air. But one object. I keep saying that what the BL needs to do is bring over the Codex Sinaiticus. The Codex Sinaiticus is probably the single greatest object in the Library. It is the earliest version surviving of the New Testament. And you can take that around the Bible Belt, and everybody will be falling all over themselves.

Q2: That’s a good idea.

Redden: Every time I say it, they sort of smile and say, “Inconceivable.”

Q1: [Laughs]

Q2: Sometimes, it’s the inconceivable idea that works.

Redden: Look, I mean. *Mona Lisa*, when I was a child, traveled to Washington. And I remember the lines around the National Gallery to go and see it. You know, everyone takes it for granted at the BL, but you bring it here and it suddenly becomes a ravishing and extraordinary phenomenon.

Q1: Did I see the *Pietà* at the [1964] World's Fair? Could that have been true?

Redden: I don't know.

Q2: I think you did.

Redden: So, these things do travel. It is possible. And in fact, the international agreements make it much easier because America indemnifies the institutions that send the material. There are other objects like the Codex Sinaiticus. Just bring one. And then you can do some special things around it. Have a party at somebody's house. When I was selling the Bay Psalm Book, I took it to Cleveland where it was exhibited in the Cleveland Public Library and also took it to Jon Lindseth's house.

Q2: Oh, you did?

Redden: For a special private party. It was extraordinarily successful. You got a ton of publicity, and then you got to a place where there were real—in my case I wasn't looking for it but—

donors. I was looking for the buyers. But the BL would be looking for [serious] donors. And someone like Jon loves showing off his house which is quite fabulous and he's a good host. If you think about it, in every city in America, there are [potential supporters].

Q2: That would do well in Dallas.

Redden: I did it with Harlan Crow. Harlan Crow is a billionaire with a huge house and a vast library and he loves doing these kinds of things. And I've done a number of events with him. And you know, it works socially for these people too because it's a big feather in their cap to have this fancy object showing up in their house to which they can invite all their friends. It's a very big deal. American institutions get that pretty quickly. And I remember I was hosting a dinner for Winchester Cathedral, which was trying to raise money. And they brought over the Winchester Cathedral Choir, which is one of the great choirs in England. And I prevailed on the Morgan Library to allow me to bring to Sotheby's the [Morgan Leaf from the] Winchester Bible. The Winchester Bible is one of the greatest objects, one of the greatest manuscripts in Britain. Probably the greatest surviving object, which is not a building, from the 12th century in Britain, beautifully illuminated. But it's greatest leaf, with the greatest illuminations, somehow left the Winchester Bible in the early 19th century and ultimately was bought by J.P. Morgan and is now at The Morgan Library. Much to the great distress, by the way, of Winchester Cathedral. Which actually asked me, planting the seed at one point, would [the Morgan] consider sending the leaf back? No! No, thank you. It's like asking to have the Elgin marbles go back to Greece.

Q2: Right, well, they are asking for that in Greece.

Redden: They are and they're not going. At least not at the moment.

Q2: Well, David, we really appreciate you doing this oral interview. What an interesting background from two points of view. One, for the good of the American Trust for the British Library and two, we're learning things about you, as individuals and your friends, they're amazing! So, it was a real treat to hear you speak.

Redden: Thank you, Dyke. Thank you, Seana. Thank you, Miwa. Now I think if anybody can understand my speech nowadays, it's a good exercise. And it will be fascinating, if somewhat mysterious, for people 100 years from now, I suspect.

Q2: Well, may the ATBL live for 100 years or more.

Redden: Well, there's no reason why it shouldn't.

Q2: It should. I agree.

Redden: That's one of the reasons we have an endowment. To perpetuate it. And it really does make all the difference in the world.

Q2: It does.

Redden: It gives it a solidity which other organizations can come and go like fireflies, but the ATBL will not because [of] Bill Golden, that he set it up that way, he and his [fellow founders] back then. And, it's a Bill Golden-kind-of thing to have done quite frankly. To protect the turf and give [the organization] its own life so that it couldn't evaporate on some whim.

Q2: If there were an unexpected expense or some bump in the road, the endowment is there to cushion—

Redden: Or if somebody decided, they didn't like it anymore. I do remember when I first became involved, there was a little froideur with the BL over certain things that had been asked and I'm very thrilled to say that's ancient history, very ancient history. And you know, we've had some lovely people, [Dame] Lynne Brindley—

Q1: She said to say hello to you when we saw her at Pembroke.

Redden: Roly Keating, whom we had a party for in this room. And Tessa [Baroness Blackstone]. And now we have a new one [a Chair].

Q1: [Dame] Carol Black.

Redden: Yes, I have to find out about her.

Q1: Yes, us too.

Redden: Do we know anything about her?

Q1: No, not yet. But Tessa said she would still be involved with us.

Q2: She said she would come over and help us if we need her.

Q2: And she has traveled in America and she's driven across [the] country. She spent some time at Harvard. She likes America. So—

Redden: I mean, Tessa's the kind of person who really wants to be involved all the time, I would have thought. Sitting at home, not doing anything, would undoubtedly drive her crazy.

Q2: I think so.

Redden: Yes, I think that's good.

Q1: What do you think the last question that I have is? How do you think you've contributed to the ATBL?

Redden: Oh, I've no idea.

Q1: [Laughs]

Redden: I have no idea. Now I think whatever I did was very little compared to some of the other people who have been deeply involved. I think the ATBL survived me.

Q1: [Laughs]

Q2: [Laughs] You're too modest, you're too modest. You get along very well with people on both sides of the Atlantic, and that is one of your great strengths, as well as your vision.

Redden: Well, thank you, Dyke.

[END OF INTERVIEW]