



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH

News Release

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PHOTOCALL

**9.30AM, WEDNESDAY 5 DECEMBER 2018
MAIN LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
GEORGE SQUARE EH8 9LJ**

Book saved for nation among rare gems on display for first time

A unique volume of 17th century plays, a soldier's wartime escape map and a book bound in fish skin feature in a fascinating exhibition.

The display, showcasing the University of Edinburgh's vast collection of rare texts, also features one of the UK's first road atlases, a curious Victorian spinning toy and beautifully illustrated German banknotes.

The annotated book of plays by influential Renaissance dramatist Ben Jonson was acquired by the University this year after the UK Government placed an export bar on the book to prevent it being sold overseas.

It is thought to be the only edition showing how the dramas were actually performed in this significant age of English theatre. This is the first time the volume has been on display.

The silk escape map is typical of those given to Allied servicemen during the Second World War to help them if they found themselves behind enemy lines. Using silk meant that the maps could be easily hidden, made no sound and didn't disintegrate when wet.

The tiny 18th century prayer book covered in shark or ray skin – known as shagreen – highlights the variety of exotic book bindings used in publishing throughout history.

One of the UK's first road maps will also feature in the exhibition. *The "Car" Road Book and Guide* – published in 1909 – is bound in leather and features an in-built compass.

A Victorian Phantascope – a spinning toy regarded as the first widely-available form of moving image – will also be on show.

Beautifully illustrated German Mark banknotes, printed in the aftermath of the First World War, will be displayed alongside designs by students from Edinburgh College of Art, who were inspired by the historically significant originals.

Further attractions include a first edition of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, covered in 18th century graffiti; a book explaining Japanese culture to westerners from 1868; and a first edition of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, which was recently discovered in the University's archive.

Ranked among the top universities in the world

Kirsty MacNab, University of Edinburgh Exhibitions Officer, said: “The University’s Rare Books collection is vast, varied and full of the unexpected. This exhibition of fascinating treasures showcases the incredible breadth of our archive, which often leads to surprising discoveries and presents endless possibilities for new research.”

Rare Books: Expect the Unexpected runs from 10-5pm, Monday-Saturday until 2 March 2019, at the University of Edinburgh Main Library, George Square.

For further information please contact:

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