

100,000 books on offer in Scotland's biggest charity sale 11-19 May

A rare guide to Britain's greatest duels, a "hot read" in the early 19th Century for gentlemen who still fought with pistols at dawn, goes on sale this weekend in Scotland's biggest annual charity book fair.

The book, published in 1821 by James Gilchrist, offered detailed accounts of "the principal duels" in Georgian Britain, and the "decision of private quarrels by single combat". Only a few copies are known to survive, suggesting many were left in tatters after being well-thumbed by nervous duellers looking for hints.

Highlights of the Christian Aid book sale, an annual pilgrimage for Scottish book lovers and an Edinburgh institution, range from a signed copy of Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin, to a portfolio of rare 19th Century prints and paintings discovered in an attic by the heirs to of Scotland's great paper-making families.

They were given by descendants of Alexander Cowan, the Penicuik papermaker who died in 1859 and was one of the founding figures of modern Scottish printing. With hand-painted prints by the famous illustrator Thomas Rowlandson, and stunning watercolour pictures of flowers by an unknown artist, they are expected to earn the charity thousands of pounds.

About 100,000 rare and second-hand books, prints, artworks, vintage postcards, and other ephemera on every conceivable subject fill the floors and stalls in and around the St Andrew's and St George's Church on George Street. The book sale, part of Christian Aid Week, opens on Saturday 11 May,

and then runs Monday 13 – Friday 17 May,

The growing art section of the sale is curated this year for the first time by James Holloway, the former director of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery. One of the highlights is a work donated by the artist David Michie, of Sunflowers near Avignon. “It’s the most delightful picture which would look wonderful in anybody’s collection,” Mr Holloway said.

Artists Harry More Gordon and Sandy Moffat have also given pictures, on sale along with striking works by popular artists like Victoria Crowe, Lynn MacGregor, Sam Ainsley, and Rob Maclaurin. “There are going to be great bargains,” Mr Holloway said. “We want to sell.”

The book sale celebrates its 40th anniversary this year, and has raised about £1 million in the last decade for Christian Aid, the church charity with operations world-wide from African villages to Middle East war zones.

Former Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, recently named the charity’s chairman, is visiting the city this year as patron of the sale. He said: “It’s a great annual Edinburgh event, and I’m very, very glad to have the opportunity to help a high profile in Scotland.”

A poet, theologian and academic, Dr Williams recalled his pleasure at picking up a book of letters of Lord Acton, a 19th Century hero of his, in an Edinburgh bookshop last year.

His own books include *The Lion’s World: a journey into the heart of Narnia*, on the Narnia series by CS Lewis, who died 50 years ago this year. The book sale is hoping to mark the anniversary with a large collection of Lewis books this year.

The guide to British duels was published in 1821, and promised detailed accounts of the most important duels during the reign of King George III, who took the throne in 1760 and had recently died. Dueling was still a hazard for British

gentlemen: Scotland only saw its last fatal duel in 1826, when Kirkcaldy linen merchant David Landale shot his bank manager dead at dawn, and England staged its last duel in 1845.

With a lengthy title, the book is called: "A Brief display of the origin and history of ordeals: trials by battle, courts of chivalry or honour, and the decision of private quarrels by single combat. Also, a chronological register of the principal duels, fought by the accession of his late Majesty to the present time."

It will be priced at close to £200, said American Ried Zulager, the rare books expert at the annual Christian Aid book sale in Edinburgh. "They were used up. Clearly this was a hot read in the 19th Century," he said.

Another rare work is a tiny early volume of the adventures of Baron Munchausen, dating from 1820 and just three and a half inches tall, with no other copies known to exist.

Other stand-out books this year include titles like James Gowan's "Edinburgh and its Neighbourhood in the Days of Our Grandfathers" from 1886. There are rare editions of works by Eric Linklater, among some 2,000 items from the book collection of his son, journalist Magnus Linklater.

The Penicuik papermaker Alexander Cowan revived his family's paper mill after the the Napoleonic wars. He became a wealthy man and generous patron, helping Sir Walter Scott out of bankruptcy, building a library and museum in Penicuik, and repairing the windows all down the Royal Mile when he was struck by the poverty of the Canongate area. He backed and encouraged Edinburgh-based lithographer Frederick Schenck (1811-1885), laying the foundation for a century of quality Scottish printing and mapmaking.

The rambunctious and popular engravings by Rowlandson are "clearly going to be a top item", said Mr Zulager. They include scenes like "Polish Diet with French Desert", where a

Russian officer and a bear, are turning Napoleon on a spit, printed after his Grand Armee was decimated in Russia in 1812.

“In a pub, someone would have tacked them up for humour. There’s a couple where you can see the pinhole, that was tacked on the wall. This really is the start of the mass marketing, popular culture for the masses. It was a way of communicating certain cultural perspectives in war time.”

Submitted by [Tim Cornwell](#)