



University
of Victoria

Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

EMMA HUGHES

BA Hons (University of Manitoba, 2012)

“A Perfect Catalogue of all the Rarities”: Nehemiah Grew's *Musæum Regalis Societatis* and Cataloguing Culture in Late Seventeenth-Century England”

Department of History

Monday, August 24, 2015

1:00 P.M.

Clearihue Building

Room B215

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Andrea McKenzie, Department of History, University of Victoria (Supervisor)

Dr. Mitch Lewis-Hammond, Department of History, UVic (Member)

External Examiner:

Dr. Erin Campbell, Department of Art History and Visual Studies, UVic

Chair of Oral Examination:

Dr. Monica Prendergast, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies

Abstract

The late seventeenth century was the golden age of the printed descriptive catalogue. Nehemiah Grew's 1681 catalogue, *Musæum Regalis Societatis* printed for London's Royal Society, exemplifies this elaborate published genre of early museum literature during a particular moment in time when collecting and ordering were methods of understanding the world. This thesis explores the importance of ephemeral texts in historical study by analyzing the prose used in Grew's catalogue. *Musæum Regalis Societatis* opens a window onto late seventeenth-century English culture, providing insight into Grew's opinions about contemporary religious and political debates and illustrating trends within scientific thought; most, notably the influence of Francis Bacon's new empirical methods on Grew's object descriptions. This results in a densely descriptive catalogue with vivid object descriptions, creating a virtual guide to the Repository. However, with the eighteenth-century development of museums as sites of leisure and the rise of experts and professionals in the burgeoning scientific disciplines, there is a noticeable decline in this genre of descriptive catalogue. Thus, Grew's catalogue exemplifies a critical moment in the late seventeenth century in which scientific catalogues were published for a broad general public.