

## The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire

Edward Gibbon stood five feet tall, had a large head, and until he became fatter – when he must have looked like one of the dwarfs in a Velázquez painting – was quite thin. While unprepossessing in appearance, he did have the romantic attention of Suzanne Curchod (who later became Madame Necker, wife of the French finance minister, and mother of the famous salon doyenne, Madame de Staël). Born in 1737, he was the oldest of seven children, and the only one to survive infancy. His mother – no doubt exhausted by her many deliveries – died when Edward was ten. In 1752 he attended Oxford's Magdalen College, then went to Europe and spent five years under the tutelage of a Calvinist minister in Lausanne. Summoned back to England by his father, he served as a captain in the Hampshire militia for two years, then went on an extended tour of the European continent.

It was while musing among the ruins of the Eternal City that Gibbon conceived the idea of his *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. The work, which trickled out in six volumes, began publication in 1776. Gibbon wrote during the Age of Enlightenment, and although his readers were no longer so credulous and naive, they received his offering with great enthusiasm. According to Gibbon, Rome's demise was due to the growing luxury and degeneracy of its citizens, the barbaric invasions, and the growth of Christianity. (He must have had a tough time culling through the early Church's goings-on, since they were attributed to divine intervention.) His work begins in AD 98 with the Antonine emperors, and ends with the fall of the western Empire in the fifth century, and the eastern a millennium later.

In 1774, Gibbon secured a seat in British Parliament. For eight years he served as an MP for the United Kingdom without once giving a speech. Initially supportive of his nation in its American War of the Revolution, Gibbon later became convinced that Great Britain had royally screwed up. He died in London in 1794.

– essay by Bill Lounsbury

*KRL has several copies of the Gibbon's great work in book and audio formats*

## Zak Recommends

Manchester Librarian Zak Sherman tells us:

"The best book I've read this summer is an older one, set in WWII, in Poland, called *Night Never Ending* by Eugeniusz Andrei Komorowski. It's about a Polish officer in WWII, captured by the Russians and taken to a POW camp, who escapes to freedom."

### Wanted: Vintage photographs and stories of Manchester!

Do you have archives of old photographs or vintage postcards? Are you knowledgeable about your local history? Would you like to help preserve your community's fascinating history?

The Friends of Manchester Library are currently compiling a photographic history of **Manchester** and are looking for your help! **The Friends** are assembling historic images of **Manchester** and the stories that go with them to include in an upcoming book to be published by Arcadia Publishing, the nation's leading publisher of local and regional history. To share your photographs and stories or to join the Community Publication Committee, please contact **Ron Rada** at 871-5439 or [rjrada@wavecable.com](mailto:rjrada@wavecable.com) as soon as possible.

*Help keep local history alive!*

Especially needed are photos of Manchester in the 50s through the present.

#### In Memoriam

June 9<sup>th</sup>, cancer claimed my favorite author, Iain M. Banks – whose *Culture* series created a rich, intricate and unique far-future science fiction universe. Born in Scotland in 1954, I expected Banks to be writing his series forever. If you haven't read any of his books, start with *Consider Phlebas*, the first of the ten books set in this universe. – *The Editor*

#### FALL BOOK SALE AT MANCHESTER LIBRARY

Saturday, November 2<sup>nd</sup>

9 AM – 3 PM

Please Donate Some Special Books

#### KRL Events: Fall at the Mall Series

at the Silverdale mall every Saturday beginning Sept 7 through October 26

#### BOOK WORMS September Book

*The House at Sugar Beach: In Search of Lost African Childhood* by Helene Cooper

Book Worms meets 7 pm the third Tuesday of each month.