

## Mary Woodforde's Book

Mary Woodforde (*d.* 1730) was born Mary Norton in a small village called Binstead in Hampshire. She was the second wife of the poet and divine Samuel Woodforde (1636-1700), as she records on the first page of what she calls her 'book': a small pocket book bound in scuffed spotted calf, which is now NCA 9507. Mary's book is a diary, kept sporadically during the years 1684 to 1690, while she was living with her husband in Hampshire. As such, it forms part of a Woodforde family tradition of journal-keeping, the best-known examples of which are the Civil War diary of Mary's father-in-law, Robert Woodforde (NCA 9502),<sup>1</sup> and the sprawling journals of her grandson, Rev. James Woodforde, which cover 1759 to 1803 and required 17 volumes when they were published in their unabridged form.<sup>2</sup> The first entry in Parson Woodforde's diary, of 21 September 1759, declares that he was 'Made a Scholar of New-College', but the connection between the Woodfordes and New College reaches back into the seventeenth century, as Mary's diary details. And the links hold fast. Mary's book was donated as part of a collection of material known as the Woodforde papers, which was given to the college in 1970 by Oliver H. Woodforde.<sup>3</sup> The family archive is now just one of the several small and personal archives which have come together with other material of various different types, to create the college's own institutional archival landscape as it exists today.<sup>4</sup>

As well as Mary and Robert Woodforde's diaries, New College also holds some of the archival remains of Samuel Woodforde. Samuel is perhaps best remembered as the author of *Paraphrases upon the Psalms of David* (London, 1667), and New College has his own personal copy of the book's 1678 second edition (NCA 9494): Samuel records on its title-page that it was 'Receiu'd from M<sup>r</sup> Martyn [the publisher]. Apr: 13 1678'. On the first of a series of plain pages inserted at the beginning of the book, Samuel has written that it is 'to be kept safely & not to be giuen away or lent to any haueng Privacys in it of my estate and family not fitt for all to see'. The book was later 'kept safely' not by Samuel, but by his wife, for on another of these pages we find Mary's hand: 'Mary Woodford her book giuen her by way of change for another of y<sup>e</sup> same; unbound, august 31 1689'. Turning to the end of the book, we find that Mary has appropriated it to her own use. On its final page, there is a single diary entry in her handwriting, dating from 19 June 1703, in which she expresses concern about a family squabble over an entail: this is the only other known diary entry made by Mary outside of her own 'book'. But in putting Samuel's book to this use, Mary was

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<sup>1</sup> See John Fielding, 'Opposition to the Personal Rule of Charles I: The Diary of Robert Woodford, 1637-1641', *The Historical Journal*, 31:4 (December 1988): 769-88; also his *ODNB* entry.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Jameson and R. L. Winstanley (eds.), *The Diary of James Woodforde*, 17 vols. (The Parson Woodforde Society, 1998-2007). There are also some abridged versions of the diary available, the handiest of which is perhaps *The Diary of a Country Parson, the Revd. James Woodforde*, ed. David Hughes (London: Folio Society, 1992); while one of particular interest to New Collegians might be *Woodforde at Oxford 1759-1776*, ed. W. N. Hargreaves-Mawdsley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969). There is also a Parson Woodforde Society, see: <http://www.parsonwoodforde.org.uk/index.htm>

<sup>3</sup> See the section on the collection in Francis W. Steer, *The Archives of New College, Oxford: A Catalogue Compiled by Francis W. Steer* (London: Phillimore & Co., 1974), pp. 112-120. Steer notes that the Woodfordes had an actual, rather than merely archival, presence in college until 1959, when Dr. Christopher Woodforde resigned from his fellowship in order to take up his appointment as Dean of Wells.

<sup>4</sup> The family have added to the college's collections in other ways for much longer than this, however. A manuscript given to New College by Mary's son John (MS 328), for example, is discussed in the first edition of *New College Notes*: see Jason Morgan, 'New College MS 328 and "Jane the Quene"'.

following her husband's example, for the plain pages at the beginning of the volume were filled by Samuel with his own 'Memoires of the most remarkable Passages of my life long since collected', and stories of his family's recent history. More than this, he annotated most of the book's printed contents, with comments on his personal situation when he made each paraphrase, giving too the reasons behind various alterations made for the second edition, revealing the way in which personal and literary demands alike affected his editing choices.<sup>5</sup>

Husband and wife were in the habit of sharing books. Or at least, Mary was more than once the recipient of one of Samuel's: the notebook in which she wrote her diary was also first used by him. At the back, Samuel has written a series of notes in a mixture of English, Greek, and shorthand, dated to 'February 16. 1672/3', and there are a few words in his hand on fols. 1r and 3v as well, which Mary – with some sense perhaps of their individual integrity as part of the book's familial history – has left untouched. She was not always the recipient of hand-me-downs, however: her diary entry of 15 February 1688/9 records that 'I had a new larg Bible brought from Oxon'.<sup>6</sup> Mary goes on to ask that 'God giue me grace & his holy spirit to guid me in y<sup>e</sup> reading of it to his glory & y<sup>e</sup> profitt of my own soul', and the way in which she writes of its arrival suggests strongly that it was her own personal Bible, rather than one for the family: an instance in which individual was to be preferred over familial ownership. This is in line with the private displays of devotion which Mary practiced; or, occasionally, forgot to practice, as she sheepishly admits in her entry for 4 July 1689: 'I cannot call to mind that I was in my closet to perform my own priuate prayers, o Lord I beseech thee impute it not to me as a willfull sin, but pardon it to me what euer name it deserues'.

Mary ends this request for forgiveness 'Amen. Amen', and it is only one of many instances in the diary which are written in the form of prayer.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, writing her diary was in part a spiritual activity, as Mary makes continual requests for guidance for herself and her family, and records her gratefulness to God on several occasions.<sup>8</sup> As with Samuel's conflation of the autobiographical, the spiritual, and the literary in his handwritten annotations to his *Paraphrases upon the Psalms*, even more so for Mary the written record of her personal experiences becomes an integral part of her religious routine. The use of the diary as a devotional aid is however only one aspect of Mary's journal-keeping. She uses it not only as a form of written prayer, but also to detail various everyday occurrences. News on every level is an important part

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<sup>5</sup>Although this copy of Samuel Woodforde's book was to be 'kept safely' as a personal and familial document, he also used his book as a record and vehicle of more public relationships. Another copy of the second edition – Bodleian Library 4<sup>o</sup> R 77,78 Th. – is inscribed by him to 'his very Dear & most honoured Friend', the mathematician and Arabist Edward Bernard (1638-97), 'From the Author (tho too unworthy of his respecte & acceptacion)'. Some of Samuel Woodforde's letters to Bernard from the late 1680s and 1690s also survive in the Bodleian: MS Smith 45, fols. 187, 199, 203, 209.

<sup>6</sup>This was most likely *The Holy Bible, containing the Old Testament and the New; newly translated out of the original tongues* (Oxford: at the Theater, 1689).

<sup>7</sup>Most of these prayer-like sections were removed when the diary was edited by Dorothy Heighes Woodforde and printed as part of the *Woodforde Papers and Diaries* (London, 1932). Mary Woodforde's diary and a brief introduction to it can be found on pp. 3-25, although the transcription has many mistakes and omissions aside from those just mentioned.

<sup>8</sup>On diary-keeping as a means of devotion, see Effie Botonaki, 'Seventeenth-Century Englishwomen's Spiritual Diaries: Self-Examination, Covenanting, and Account Keeping', *Seventeenth Century Journal*, 30:1 (1999): 3-21.

of the diary, as the entries cover everything from Mary's own spiritual concerns to events of national importance. Several entries discuss family news. There is a record that 'y<sup>e</sup> noate of what I promise to Brother Brooke is in y<sup>e</sup> cedar box in my closet', later stricken through in a way which suggests the 'promise' has been fulfilled: the diary as a form of account book. Medical issues abound, both those afflicting Mary ('I was let blood by Mr Kelsy of Farnham by Dr Speeds order') and her children. Especially prevalent are stories relating to the accidents and illnesses experienced by her sons while they were away at school at Winchester, and then later at Oxford and Cambridge. An entry relating that 'this euening we had a letter from poor Sams Tutor [at Cambridge] which tells us he has a dangerous cut in one of his fingers which makes them feare a gangrin' is followed a few weeks later by the relief that 'We had a letter from Mr Brown which giues us great hopes my poor Sams finger is in a good way of curing', and finally by the news from 'Sam which tells me his finger is quite healed but altogether useless'. We hear much of the unfortunate Robin (Robert), who 'now has y<sup>e</sup> smal pox', and later 'a great cough & all his armes & leggs full of pimples'. Double-checking against Samuel Woodforde's memoirs we find that Robin's health has long been a cause for concern: '1 Aprill 1675 My Son Robert was born & imediatly Christened, the whole company of women who were with my Wife despayring of his life. But blessed bee God he imediatly recovered & is now a lusty child'. Mary's stepchildren – Samuel Woodforde's children by his first wife – feature too. Mary records her stepdaughter Alice's frequent visits to Charles Beale and his wife Mary – the portrait painter – in London (relations through Alice's own mother), giving a sense of the wider cultural and social world of which the Woodfordes were a part. Local news features regularly, too, such as the report on 19 July 1686 that 'About 5 of y<sup>e</sup> clock at night there happened a fire at y<sup>e</sup> Parsnige house at Shalden which hath burnt down all y<sup>e</sup> hous except y<sup>e</sup> Chimneys'.

But Mary is by no means only concerned with the familial and the local. The entry for 6 February 1684/5, towards the beginning of the diary, records with sadness that 'Our Gracious Soureign King Charles y<sup>e</sup> Second departed out of this miserable world, bewailed of all his Subjects'. Later, Mary writes of 'A Rising in the West June 1685 of Mounmoth & y<sup>e</sup> Lord Gray who were both taken, one, on y<sup>e</sup> 5 y<sup>e</sup> other on y<sup>e</sup> 6 of July & are both carried to London to receave y<sup>e</sup> due reward of such horrid Treason'. She is enough of a stickler for facts to go back to this entry later to make the macabre addition above the line that Monmouth is now 'y<sup>e</sup> late Duke'. The interest in and awareness of national events continues throughout the following years, as Mary details the invasion and later coronation of William of Orange. 'God grant they [William and Mary] may reign in righteousnes & establish it by a firm decree & make them blessing to this unhappy Land', she writes, before going on in the same entry to ask 'And good Lord bless our Late King James (whereuer he is) with all y<sup>e</sup> graces of thy Holy spirit & open his eyes to see y<sup>e</sup> ways of truth & to embrace them, before it be to late'.

The diary therefore provides a fascinating insight into not only the day-to-day life of the wife of a successful clergyman living in Hampshire, but also a window onto the reactions of such a woman to events which are usually discussed only on a grander scale. As well as providing a more unusual comment upon national events, however, Mary's diary also has a more particular interest. Samuel Woodforde attended Wadham, rather than New College, but it was during his time there that the family's first links with New College were forged, as he developed close friendships

with various New Collegians which would last for life. Amongst them was the non-juror Thomas Ken (1637-1711), whose former house in Winchester the Woodfordes moved into when Samuel was made a prebendary of the Cathedral, as Mary records with pleasure in her entry for 14 May 1685: 'We came to Winton to reside in y<sup>e</sup> Hous which was our good & Honoured friends y<sup>e</sup> Bishop of bathe & wells (Dr. Ken) tis a very pleasant hous & garden far better then euer I could hope for'. Another New College friend from Samuel's student days was Francis Turner – Andrew Marvell's Mr. Smirk – later Bishop of Ely, and Master of St. John's College, Cambridge. This latter appointment came in handy for the Woodfordes when it came to finding a college place for their son, Samuel (he of the injured finger): 'my husband had a kind letter from y<sup>e</sup> Bishop of Ely in order to carry Sam to Cambridg to St Johns Colledge to be addmitted Scholar, God blesse all our proceedings in this affair so as may be for his Glory and our Childs good', reads Mary's diary entry for 1 June 1687.

It was through another of the couple's sons that a more direct relationship with New College was forged. Mary records this in an entry for 20 September 1689 which reveals some of the more dubious entry requirements of the college in the seventeenth century: 'My son John was as I then heard sped to New Colledg in Oxon by a resignation which must cost a great deal of mony, which God enable us to pay'. Samuel too details John's entry to New College in his own memoirs, although even in this private record he rather neatly avoids mention of the 'great deal of mony' which so concerned his wife. He does however provide the name of the Fellow who conveniently resigned: '1689. September 19: My Son John child of y<sup>e</sup> Colledg at Winton vpon Mr Reynells resignation was ~~admitted~~ chosen Scholar at New College Oxon upon y<sup>e</sup> 21. admitted there'.<sup>9</sup>

It is particularly fitting, therefore, that Mary's diary – along with Samuel's book and the rest of the Woodforde papers – should have ended up as part of the New College archives, as, against the broader backdrop of the political and religious changes of the late seventeenth century, familial and collegiate history converge within its pages, in a fruitful conjunction of the personal and the institutional archive.

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<sup>9</sup> The resignation is noted in James Edward Sewell, *Registrum Custodum Sociorum et Scholarium Collegii Novi* [MS] (NCA 853), where we are informed that John Woodforde entered the college on 22 September 1689 'in loc. Joh. Reynell. A. M. resignantis', fol. 223v. Reynell's own entry in the *Registrum* (which notes that 'in the College Register, and Presentation Letters, he is called "Christopher" Reynell', fol. 217r) records that Reynell was elected 28 July 1676 and then: '1689 resignans', fol. 216v.