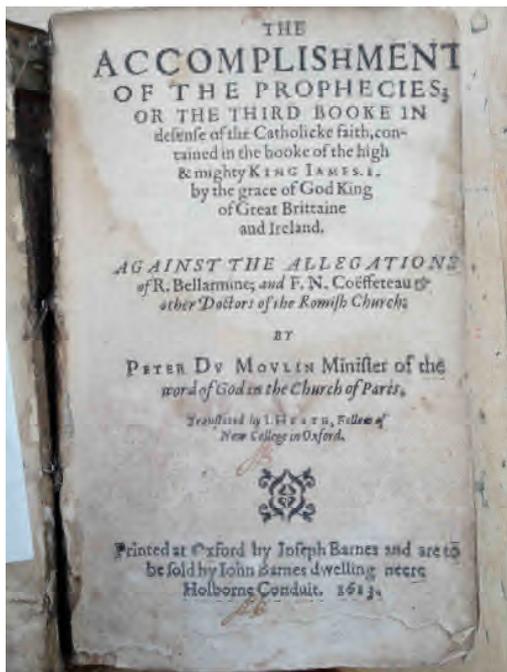


## A New Setting: John Heath's translation of *The Accomplishment of the Prophecies*, 1613, and the state of religion in New College in the reign of King James I

One of the aspects of collecting Tudor and Jacobean books that I like most is the sheer serendipity of it all. There is no way of knowing from one month to the next what will come your way. Most booksellers, even those that deal in antiquarian books, may only see a handful of pre-1625 books in English in a year. Yet equally these volumes can turn up in the strangest of places. The book featured here popped up on eBay in February last year under the catch-all heading, 'Christianity Protestant Pope French English Scarce 1613' from Tristanbooks, a dealer who specialises in 'modern first editions of Fantasy, Science Fiction, Horror, and Literature'. It was the date that caught my eye, and when I looked at the rather fuzzy picture I realised that this was a copy of an early seventeenth-century French Protestant work by Pierre du Moulin, *The Accomplishment of the Prophecies; or the Third Booke in defense of the Catholicke faith, contained in the booke of the high & mighty King James I...* translated by a New College fellow, John Heath, and printed locally by Joseph Barnes in 1613. In my ignorance, I had never come across it (or him) before, but I thought it would be fun to learn more, so I took a risk and bought it.

Once I had unwrapped it, I looked up the copy in the definitive source on such things, the British Library's *Electronic Short Title Catalogue* (estc.bl.uk). As it turns out, this copy is a previously unknown setting. The tell-tale for this is a small difference in the title pages. The two versions mentioned in the *ESTC* vary in the setting of the title page, line 17 beginning 'Translated out of French by I.Heath' in one issue, and 'Translated into English by I. Heath' in another. Line 17 in this issue simply has 'Translated by I.Heath'



As I began to study it, I wondered what this book, and whatever I could learn about John Heath, could tell us about New College in the first half of James I's reign, and its engagement in the religious developments taking place at that time.

### Heath joins the College, 1605

Looking in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, I learnt that John Heath was born in about 1585 in Bath, and matriculated as a Scholar of New College on 11 October, 1605, following some five years of education at Winchester. Interestingly it seems Heath almost missed a place in the College. We do not know how she became his patron, but it was the Lady Marquesse of Northampton who appears to have

helped him secure his place, writing in 1605 to the Warden and fellows via the Earl of Salisbury that 'she doth much affect to bring hym to the perfection of that course wherin she was his first meanes to place hym. And that yf he speed not now, there will be no hope of that purpose by reason of the Statuts of those Colleges'.<sup>1</sup> This must refer to Wykeham's Statutes which specified that no one over twenty years of age was to be admitted as a scholar.<sup>2</sup> If the ODNB has correctly identified Heath's baptism in Bath Abbey, on 7 February 1585, then this anxiety was justified, as he was in fact admitted some six months after his twentieth birthday.<sup>3</sup>

Heath was entering the College at an interesting moment. In August 1605, not long after the time these (undated) letters by the Marquesse of Northampton were probably written, James I and his court had been entertained 'in great state' in New College by the Chancellor, Thomas Sackville, the Earl of Dorset. James at this point was less than two years into his reign, and still buoyed up by his early successes at the Hampton Court Conference and from his role in ending England's conflict with Spain after more than a decade of war. His personal motto, 'Beati Pacifici', 'Blessed are the Peacemakers', seemed to be triumphantly affirmed. A card-carrying intellectual, with several published works to his name, during his royal progress through Oxford that summer he confidently interrupted many of the formal academic debates and often imposed his own point of view on the matters at issue.<sup>4</sup> Yet by November that year, just a month after Heath's matriculation, James's confidence in his role as a peacemaker began to look misplaced. The Gunpowder Plot was discovered and there followed a prolonged offensive against Catholic traitors, and in particular the Jesuits. Peace was to prove more elusive than it had seemed.

### **The State of New College religion by 1605**

So where was New College on the great questions of the Reformation at the time when Heath came up to Oxford and Guy Fawkes' apprehension in Westminster once again put the loyalty of all Catholics in the realm under suspicion?

In the middle years of the sixteenth century, Winchester and New College had been centres of Catholic learning, nurturing several constellations of Catholic stars. Some of the country's leading opponents of reformed religion came from the College, including the brothers John and Nicholas Harpsfield, both outstanding Catholic scholars; Thomas Harding, great opponent in print of the indefatigable Protestant Bishop Jewel of Salisbury, author of the *Apologia Ecclesiae Anglicanae*; Nicholas Sanders, the leading Catholic historian of the English schism; and Thomas Stapleton, a prominent recusant theologian with many published works to his name. Apparently willing to conform to Henry VIII's royal supremacy over the Church in the 1530s and '40s, and thereby retain their positions, many of these distinguished talents remained in the College during the changes of religious regime in the mid-Tudor period, and through Elizabeth's accession in 1558. Nonetheless Elizabeth's reign marked a change, and conformity to the Protestant settlement was progressively enforced. As Penry Williams points out in his excellent article on this period in the College History, there was no sudden purge and the 'flexible' Warden Thomas White managed to avoid being removed altogether in a period when most other heads of houses were replaced. However, as the 1560s progressed, New College was gradually stripped of some of its most talented members, as Catholic fellows either left of their own accord and fled overseas, or were expelled during periodic visitations by the College's Visitor, the Bishop of Winchester, a post occupied from 1560 by the zealous Protestant and returned exile, Robert Horne. Despite Horne's efforts during Elizabeth's first decade, Edmund Grindal, the future Archbishop of Canterbury, was still to be convinced that the College had changed its spots. In 1568 he said of New College and Corpus Christi, that 'if that house and school be not purged, those godly foundations shall be a nursery of adder's brood, to poison the Church of Christ.'<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Calendar of the Cecil Papers in Hatfield House, Volume 24: Addenda, 1605-1668* (London, 1976), pp. 36-7.

<sup>2</sup> *Statutes of the Colleges of Oxford*, Vol I, (Oxford, 1853), New College, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> ODNB, 'Heath, John'.

<sup>4</sup> John Nichols, *The Progresses, Processions, and Magnificent Festivities of King James the First* (London, 1828), Vol I, p. 550, & pp. 530-561.

<sup>5</sup> John Strype, *The History of the Life and Acts of the Most Reverend Father in God, Edmund Grindal* (Oxford, 1821), I, 196-7.

Nonetheless, if change was slow at first, by the time of bishop Horne's third visitation of the College in 1577, New College appears to have been shaped into an essentially Protestant institution, and continued scrutiny no doubt reinforced this during the following twenty-eight years prior to John Heath's matriculation.

So if New College was no longer a hotbed of Catholic recusancy when Heath arrived there, nonetheless, the question remains: how lively was New College's Protestantism by the early seventeenth century at the time of the Gunpowder Plot? Penry Williams sees the College as pretty moribund well into the mid-seventeenth century, observing that 'a certain laxity and indolence prevailed at New College between the middle of Elizabeth's reign and the Civil War'.<sup>6</sup> One can understand what he means looking at the galaxy of Catholic talent that had previously graced the rooms in Old Quad and was now mostly in exile. However, looking through the prism of John Heath's work, and the New College regime that nurtured his talents, this judgement seems rather sweeping.

### Heath the Epigrammatist

As yet I have found little that informs us directly about how Heath spent his undergraduate days in New College. However it is clear that having by some lights scraped in, he was diligent enough to complete his studies successfully. In 1609, after four years there Heath was admitted as a perpetual fellow and received his BA, and just a year later he published his first and best-known book, *Two Centuries of Epigrammes*. These mostly short, pithy and witty poems give us some clues about Heath's first twenty-five years, and by extension about the sort of students that Winchester was now sending up to New College. Heath's epigram about the Gunpowder Plot, *In proditores puluerarios*, literally 'On the powder traitors' shows someone well-versed in Latin and Greek; actively, not passively, protestant; and very much at home in producing the sometimes strained puns mixing these different languages that were at the heart of the epigram as an art form. He argues that if the plot had succeeded, the protestant Puritans may have been blamed but in fact those responsible were 'Papist-Puritans', quite literally 'πυρ-itans' ['fire-itans', πυρ being the Greek for 'fire'], that is they were Catholic Jesuits, 'Ignatians' [*ignis* being the Latin for fire] inspired by their leader, Ignatius Loyola to focus on setting alight King James and his parliament:

*If that most horrid, execrable deed  
Wherein so many were design'd to bleed  
Had sped, then Puritans had forth-with bin,  
Blazed for th'actors of that damned sinne.  
And Puritans they were, I graunt it free:  
But Papist-Puritans, as Iesuites bee.  
Or otherwise thus: they were Puritans:  
From the Greek πυρ, to wit, Ignatians.  
Iesuitae, sic dicti ab Ignatio Loiola.<sup>7</sup>*

While Ben Jonson appears to have found Heath's examples of the epigrammatist's art more popular than artistically appealing ('Heath's epigrams...have their applause', he wrote rather sourly), nonetheless their popularity reflects a level of skill and confidence in this twenty-five-year-old's work which many of us would have been happy to emulate at a similar stage. For the reader trying to get closer to Jacobean New College they shed tantalising shafts of light on the breadth of education that a young fellow could be expected to deploy. In his *Epigrammes*, Heath shows that he has been exposed amongst other things to Latin and Greek literature, to reformation theology, to aspects of history, of the law and of philosophy, to the science of optics, and developments in warfare. He appears to have inclined towards the Puritan end of the spectrum, criticising some of the behaviours that they found particularly offensive, such as the painting of

<sup>6</sup> John Buxton and Penry Williams, eds, *New College, Oxford, 1379-1979* (Oxford, 1979), p. 51.

<sup>7</sup> Heath, *Two Centuries of Epigrammes* (London, 1610), Century Two, No. 55.

faces (make-up), the reading of fortunes in men's palms, Sabbath breaking and visits to the London theatre, to wit the Globe, the Fortune, and the Curtain. That said he does seem to have enjoyed himself and was not immune to a playful joke against his fellow fellows when they ate too much, drank excessively or did not wash ('...of all the Authors common here with us, It seemes he ne're heard of Go-clenius').<sup>8</sup>

### **Thomas Bilson's role in shaping New College's student intake, 1572-1616**

What Heath's *Epigrammes* underline in my view is that by the beginning of James's reign, Winchester was more than nominally conformist but was able to produce actively protestant and talented scholars in a steady stream that fed the fellowships in New College. There were some individuals like Henry Garnet, one of those executed for involvement in the Gunpowder Plot, who emerged as committed Catholics from the school (a 'saint of straw' according to Heath). However these had become rare throwbacks from the Colleges' past rather than the norm.

While both Penry Williams and Patrick McGrath are rather hesitant to ascribe a root cause for these changes in Wykehamists' beliefs, Heath, by implication at least, was not.<sup>9</sup> Firstly, perhaps from piety, but no doubt with good reason, he praised the education he received from the school, stating in his epigram *Ad Collegium Wintoniense*, 'If in this booke there be one witty line,/ I utterly disclaim't, t'is wholly thine'. He describes Thomas Bilson, by then Bishop of Winchester, as his 'Maecenas and benefactor', and if there is one person who took the school beyond conformity into active protestant learning, it was surely Bilson. A fellow of New College from 1563 to 1572, Bilson then resigned to focus on his teaching at Winchester, becoming Headmaster there that year with the support of Matthew Parker, Archbishop of Canterbury. Although he resigned the headmastership in 1579 to complete his higher degrees in theology, by 1581 Bilson became the first married Warden of the school, and his son, also Thomas, was to become one of Heath's firm friends. From then until 1596 when he was called away to be bishop of Worcester and then in a matter of just four months to be bishop of Winchester, Bilson was tireless in the propagation of the new religion both in the school and through his published academic work in the wider realm. John Harington in the 1650s wrote of Bilson, that he was 'infinitely studious and industrious in Poetry, in Philosophy, in Physick, and (which his genius chiefly call'd him to) in Divinity'.<sup>10</sup> As bishop of Winchester he remained Visitor of the school and of New College, and so was able to keep his eagle eye on both institutions' affairs. As a role model, mentor and disciplinarian at Winchester throughout the forty years preceding Heath's arrival in New College, Bilson must have had a hugely important influence on the religious beliefs and academic interests of the scholars and fellows in both places.

### **The significance of Heath's translation of *The Accomplishment of the Prophecies*, 1613 & its reception by a contemporary reader**

How much more do we learn about New College, and about John Heath from his translation of French Protestant minister Pierre du Moulin's work, and from examining the specific copy I bought on eBay? The book identifies the papacy with the Antichrist as described in Biblical prophecy, and supports the case that James I had made in person against the Jesuits and others involved in, or supporting, the Gunpowder Plot, *An Apologie for the Oath of Allegiance*, first published in 1607. The translation demonstrated that Heath had gained considerable proficiency in French in addition to Latin and Greek. Clearly its confessional position was also consistent with what we have already learned of Heath's beliefs as reflected in his epigrams published three years earlier. It was evident that there was a ready market for Du Moulin's work, as the Oxford printer Joseph Barnes, who undertook the printing of Heath's translation, had by this point already printed two editions of Du Moulin's *Heraclitus* in 1609, and one edition of his *Waters of Siloe* in 1612. Over the same period another four of Du Moulin's works had also been printed in London in one or more editions.

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<sup>8</sup> Goclenius was the author of a well-known dictionary of philosophy.

<sup>9</sup> Buxton and Williams, *New College*, p. 51; Patrick McGrath, 'Winchester College and the Old Religion', in Roger Cusance, *Winchester College. Sixth Centenary Essays* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 229-280.

<sup>10</sup> *ESTC*, entry on Thomas Bilson; John Harington, *A Briefe View of the State of the Church of England* (London, 1653).

However the time taken by Heath on this translation and putting it through the press also underscored the College's active support of the established church. One wonders whether either Thomas Bilson, George Ryves the outgoing New College Warden, or Arthur Lake, Ryves' imminent successor as Warden and future Bishop of Bath & Wells, had encouraged Heath to undertake the work and bring it to fruition. All of these academic figures had been eulogised by him in his *Epigrammes* just three years earlier, and all would have felt it was important for New College actively to support the religious and political establishment. At least one of them, Thomas Bilson, had only recently finished making his own contribution to the epic effort of translation that had resulted in what we now call the King James Bible or Authorised Version, first printed in 1611. Interestingly, while this translation would later come to be seen as a major event in the history of the English church, it was initially a very low-key affair.<sup>11</sup> This is reflected in a small way in Heath's *Accomplishment of the Prophecies*, where despite Bilson's role as one of the two final revisers of the Authorised Version, his former pupil felt very comfortable continuing to use the earlier Geneva Bible as the source of all the book's Biblical quotations.

In some ways, much of the content of *The Accomplishment of the Prophecies* feels very unexceptional. The owner of the copy I bought, one "JB" was true to form for the more systematic seventeenth-century book owners I have come across. He initialled the title (three times) as he started reading the book, and the final page as he finished it. In between he underlined many passages throughout the work. We don't know who "JB" was, but a suspicion that he was an Oxford man is raised by his underlining of the lone phrase '*Terrae Filios*' in the midst of an interpretation of one of St John's prophecies: 'Latins cal such as get up from a little, *Terrae Filios*, as mushromes, or toadstooles that grow up out of the earth in a night...'. The *Terrae Filius* was an Oxford institution, an anonymous student speaker, a 'Son of the Earth', whose satirical speech at the annual university "Act" was often scurrilous and sometimes scandalous. Most of JB's underlinings seem to be those of someone who is using the work to marshal the most telling evidence he can find against the Catholics, and in defence of certain Protestant beliefs and practices. Arguments in support of clerical marriage are widely highlighted (was our reader himself a married cleric?). Many different scriptural, moral and historical refutations of the status and titles claimed by the Popes are underlined. And the final significant cluster of underlinings are those proofs that the Papacy is to be identified with prophetic warnings of the coming of the Anti-Christ, including the signs and the calculus indicating the likely timing of the end of all things (one of which on page 382 suggests 2015 as a possible date for the Apocalypse!).

Much of this was standard stuff, but it is the third, prophetic, element that, unsurprisingly given the work's title, is the most distinctive and important focus for the work. The tenth chapter was particularly critical, for it is here that Du Moulin focused almost entirely on the 'Prophecies scattered throughout the Apocalyps, speaking of the Pope and his seate, noted by the King of Great Brittain'. In highlighting James I's interpretations of biblical books, du Moulin, and therefore Heath as his translator, emphasised this protestant monarch's high view of his role as a 'prophet-king'. In this way, on the one hand the Pope was associated with the darkness of the Devil and all his works, while the godly James, like David in the Old Testament, was a source of light on God's purposes in the world.<sup>12</sup> Support for such elevated views of James's role clearly demonstrates how far Heath and many of his generation at New College had moved on from the recusancy of the mid-Tudor years.

### **Epilogue: Heath leaves New College**

Just three years later, in 1616, rather symbolically the year of Bilson's death, Heath resigned his fellowship. The ODNB states that at the time there was a college scandal, 'that had seen fellows alleged to be resigning in return for payment from scholars at Winchester who were waiting to join the fellowship'. It notes however that he was not personally or specifically accused.

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<sup>11</sup> See Peter McCullough, 'Andrewes and Donne: Using Bibles in the Age of Translation', in *Lambeth Palace Library Annual Review* 2011, pp. 66-88.

<sup>12</sup> James Doelman, *James I and the Religious Culture of England* (Woodbridge, 2000), pp. 39-41.

There is at least one piece of evidence from the College that suggests he was not accused because no evidence was found against him. It seems unlikely that Heath left the College under a cloud, since, true to tradition amongst respectable departing fellows, he left the library a donation, in his case a copy of Peter Ramus's magnum opus, *Scholae in Artes Liberales*, published in Basel in 1569.<sup>13</sup> This was a useful and important gift. It summarised much of Ramus's work. In particular it outlined how Ramus aimed to break away from scholastic and Aristotelian models, and redefine and simplify the core university curriculum, the liberal arts, in particular the teaching of logic, rhetoric and mathematics. A convert to Protestantism, Ramus was murdered just three years after the publication of this book in the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre in Paris in 1572, so the gift would also have underscored Heath's confessional position.

In 1619, one 'I. H. Gent' published in London, *The House of Correction: Or Certayne Satyricall Epigrams*. Reading through them it is just possible from the style to conclude that John Heath could have written them. If so the different circumstances in which he found himself meant that allusions to theology and church politics had been largely supplanted by social satire and an interest in the exploits of seamen such as Drake and Raleigh. The few specific references in the text suggest someone who was studying or practising chancery law, probably in Middle Temple. This was not an uncommon path for a New College man to take at that (or any) time, but if it is our John Heath, then given his talents it was not perhaps the destiny that his Maecenas, Bishop Thomas Bilson, who had died three years before, would necessarily have anticipated or desired.

Mark Byford, Trinity term, 2013

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<sup>13</sup> New College Library Benefaction Book (New College MS 3582), p. 51.