

Inheriting, Selling, and Buying Books in New College Library, 1675-1849: Warden Woodward's Register (NCA 3968)

For anyone interested in the history of education and the history of books more generally, one of the more remarkable and underappreciated documents in the archives of New College is NCA 3968, known as Warden Woodward's Register. Michael Woodward was Warden 1658-75, steering the college across difficult waters and through the Restoration (he is described in the Latin preface to this manuscript as 'Difficillimis temporibus non Impar', 'not unequal to difficult times'), and spending a good deal of his later labour as Warden organising the college archives. His register is a leather-bound folio still with a long linked iron chain attached to it, evidence that it was once fixed to the librarian's desk.¹ This was for good reason: the volume, containing leaves of vellum and not paper, was the formal record of the large bequest of books to the college by Woodward, who died in 1675, followed by lists of books purchased by the college using the £5 annuity settled on the library by Woodward, one of the first instances of a separate income provided for a college library for the purpose of acquisition.² These lists run annually from 1679 until 1757, and offer us a unique running record of what it was the college corporately thought worth purchasing for its library over almost eight decades. If we then turn this volume over and open it from the other end, we find some more lists, this time recording the sale of duplicates from the college library, and exactly what was purchased in return. According to Wykeham's statutes, the college was not allowed to sell or even to lend any books outside the college, and so when by the late seventeenth century the library (the rooms in college now known as the Founder's Library and the McGregor-Matthews Room) was filling up, the fellows petitioned the Visitor, the Bishop of Winchester, to see what could be done. He reinterpreted the statute creatively, stating that the invention of the printing press had changed circumstances in ways the founder could not have foreseen. The Visitor therefore decided that duplicates – but only duplicates – might be sold by the college, on the express condition that monies raised from such sales were to be redeployed for the sole purpose of buying new books for the college. These lists of what books were ejected as duplicates and what purchased in their place are extensive, and cover a number of bulk sales between 1690 and 1849. This whole volume in sum contains a catalogue of Warden Woodward's books, presumably the cream of his own library and as near to a catalogue of that private library as we can get;³ a list of annual purchases for around eight decades; and then a copy of the visitorial permission to sell duplicates, and a series of lists of books sold and bought on that allowance for over one and a half centuries. Moreover, the lists of books sold and bought include prices for each and every sale or purchase, and as such provide us with a record of what specific books were deemed to be worth in Oxford over a very extensive period. This register, therefore, includes three different and unique booklists of great interest, and as such this manuscript would be sure to excite people interested in this area, were it not that the register has remained almost entirely unnoticed.⁴

¹ NCA 3968. Some contemporary fellow has also drawn a jaunty picture of Woodward in pencil on the fly-leaf. Many of Woodward's activities are discussed in the chapter in the *Victoria County History* chapter on New College in *A History of the County of Oxford: Volume 3: The University of Oxford* (London, 1954), pp. 144-162; and see also Buxton and Williams, *New College*, esp. 57-8, 206, 208, 310. Several of Woodward's progress notes have been published.

² For the library records, see Paul Morgan, *Oxford Libraries Outside the Bodleian*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1980), pp. 89-95.

³ Oddly this list was not entered into the library's Benefactors Book, rendering the list here unique.

⁴ Almost – the ever-resourceful Mordechai Feingold referred to the purchase lists from duplicate sales, noting the updating of the college's edition of Locke's *Essay*, in his 'Mathematical Sciences and New Philosophies' for *The History of the University of Oxford: The Seventeenth Century*, ed. Nicholas Tyacke (Oxford, 1997), p. 425n.

Woodward's own library was evidently expensive and extensive, a reminder that some Oxford academics who left very little evidence of what intellectual life they had – no publications, no reputation as a teacher or preacher – might nevertheless have been keen scholars or at least book collectors. Woodward's books are here arranged A-Z, and although we can guess that the collection only represents the higher end of Woodward's library, his reading was eclectic and includes many of the modern vernacular classics, such as Francis Bacon's *Henry VII*, Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, George Hakewill's *Apology for the Power and Providence of God*, John Donne's *Sermons*, and Sir Thomas Browne's *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*. Scholarly bibliophilia is shown in Woodward's ownership of a set in 18 volumes of the Parisian *Corpus Byzantinum*, an expensive and recent series of large folio editions of the Byzantine historians and theologians. (Incidentally, the blind poet John Milton also collected this series.) Woodward read some modern political philosophy, including Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* and the complete works of John Locke; and there is some evidence of what we would call modern science (Walter Charleton on Epicurean physics) and modern philology (Skinner's English *Lexicon Etymologicum*, a book also recommended by John Locke). Woodward possessed a great many religious books, of course, including some at the hotter end of the spectrum, for instance the dangerous theology of Faustus Socinus, whose works Woodward owned in two volumes.

Woodward's annuity of £5 was spent by the college as it chose, but in practice the choice was probably left to the *bibliothecarius*, usually a young fellow paid to oversee the library.⁵ The list of purchases only commenced in 1679, and was kept up annually until 1757. The very first entry, for two books, shows the eclecticism of the age: an edition of the classic church historians in four volumes (Paris, ed. Valesius), and Nani's *History of Venice* in the English translation of Sir Robert Honywood (1673). Over the subsequent years a great deal of legal and theological work was purchased, but there are interesting signs of contemporary engagement: John Wallis's *Algebra* was purchased in 1684, for instance, and in some years, for instance 1687, almost the whole list consists of modern scientific and on occasion rather heterodox works (in this year we purchased books by Descartes, Borelli, more Wallis, and also the posthumous works of the philosopher Spinoza).⁶ Indeed, it is in this register that one can see a decisive interest in mathematics sweeping the college. Transcribing from the register verbatim, the thirteen books bought in 1690, for instance, were:

De la Hire Sectiones Conicae. Fol.
 Leybournes Art of Dialling. Fol.
 Leighbournes Surveyor. Fol.^o
 Newhouse of Navigation. 4^{to}.
 Barrow Lectiones Optic. & Geometric. 4^o.
 Strood of Dialling. 4^{to}.
 Ralphson's Algebra. 4^{to}.
 Honorati Fabri Optica. 4^{to}.
 S^r. Jonas Moor of Fortification & Artillery.
 Archimedes. Apollonius & Theodosius per Barrow.
 Everard of Gauging.
 S^r. Samuel Moreland of Interest.
 S^r. William Petty of Duplicate Proportion.

⁵ See 'Book Economy in New College, Oxford, in the Later Seventeenth Century', *History of Universities* 25 (2010), pp. 56-137, at p. 71 for a partial list.

⁶ The Spinoza was possibly considered to be too hot stuff for unsupervised reading as it was placed in the librarian's closet in 1695, alongside Barclay's *Apology* for the Quakers (Poole, 'Book Economy', p. 81).

What is particularly interesting about that year's mathematical purchases is the emphasis placed on practical (or 'mixed', as it was called) mathematics: the fellows, or their librarian, evidently wanted to know how to make sundials, survey, and navigate. Another important development was the purchase of journals, a kind of publication that had been created in 1665 when the Royal Society of London and the Parisian Academie des Sciences began to publish regular collections of reports on experiments and book reviews. New College was relatively quick to respond to this new form of scholarly dissemination: a series of the *Acta Eruditorum* of Leipzig from 1682 to 1691 was bought in that latter year, and the college's run of the *Philosophical Transactions* was topped up in 1694, and joined by a matching set of the *Journal des Sçavans*; these runs were kept up-to-date in subsequent years, and indeed Woodward's annuity was often called upon in the eighteenth century to make sure that journal runs remained complete. Statistics arrived at the college in the form of Sir Samuel Morland's *Doctrine of Interest* (1679) noted above, and this was soon joined by John Graunt's *Observations upon the Bills of Mortality* and Sir William Petty's *Political Arithmetic* in 1692. Modern travel writing was acquired: the Parisian virtuoso Melchisedech Thevenot's collections of narratives were purchased in 1692, for instance, followed by de la Vega on Peru in 1693, and John Fryer's voyages to Persia and 'Indosthan' in 1698. The most comprehensive bibliography of oriental books, the *Bibliothèque Orientale* of Barthélemy d'Herbelot was bought in 1696 (proleptic publication date of 1697, so the college purchased fast),⁷ and other first-rate reference works acquired include the Oxford *Catalogi Manuscriptorum Angliae et Hiberniae* (1698), Harris's *Lexicon Technicum*, Bayle's *Dictionary in English* (1713), and Chambers's *Dictionary* (1729). An interest in the older forms of English is shown by the purchase of Hickes's grammar of Old English in 1709 and Urry's edition of Chaucer in 1722; and the new antiquarian sciences of palaeography and diplomatic could be learned from Montfaucon's *Palaeographia Graeca*, bought in 1724, and Rymer's *Foedera* acquired over a number of years in twenty volumes between 1742 and 1747. Purchasing in what we would consider the sciences slacks off somewhat in the eighteenth century, in line with the general trend in tertiary education, but at least Isaac Newton's *Optics* came in 1716. A great deal more might be made of these lists.

Reversing Woodward's register, we find a copy of the visitorial permission to sell duplicates dated 4 March 1690 *stylo Angliae* and in the seventh year of Bishop Peter's translation: this is Peter Mews, who was translated from Bath and Wells in 1684. The copy of the visitorial instrument is then followed by *Libri duplicati venditi* between 1690 to 1696, and here is when many of the older printed books took their leave of the college. Inevitably, most were theological, and almost all in the learned languages. What is of particular importance is that the list is priced, as is the list of books purchased, and so those interested in what specific books cost in the period have rich resource: Isaac Casaubon's classic 1596 edition of Athenaeus, for instance, could still raise 16s a century after publication. A huge but imperfect edition of the church father Chrysostom (the Fronto du Duc and Commelinus text in nine volumes, but with one missing) was sold for £4 10s, the most expensive item in the first list by some margin. By 1696, the college had raised £46 1s 6d by this means, or in other words almost a decade's worth of purchasing power in comparison to Woodward's annuity.

But the real fascination lies in the books then purchased with this welcome new income. I have already suggested that the 1690s was actually a rather intellectually vibrant decade in the college in terms of book acquisition, and this trend is repeated here. To take only six examples, the college acquired by this means Sir Robert Sibbald's learned atlas

⁷ Indeed this aspect of the lists will bear further investigation, for the college *bibliothecarius* was evidently able to purchase many books as soon as they were published, and it will be interesting to investigate which Oxford and London lines of contact allowed him to act so efficiently.

Scotia Illustrata, the English translation of the *History of Siam* of Simon de la Loubère, Francis Willoughby's ornithological classic the *Ornithologia*, John Dryden's translation of Du Fresnoy on painting, the second edition of John Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding* (switched for the first!), and Newton's successor William Whiston's *Theory of the Earth*, a briefly popular work of biblical science in which Whiston argued that the Flood of Genesis had been caused by a providentially-arranged collision with a comet. The next major sale was in 1739, and here we see the ejection of duplicates including John Donne's *Sermons* and the Hebrew lexicon of Pagninus, with modern journals bought in their stead. There are 1809 sales too, and the purchases here show that even in the early nineteenth century, the college was still content to buy some by now rather old books to fill newly-opened gaps, in particular Restoration theology. But there is little to no natural philosophy, medicine, or mathematics – for those that think that science is the torch of progress, then this is a sign that the college had indeed intellectually stagnated. Perhaps this would not be entirely fair, however: the final sale in 1849 raised £46 6s, and what was purchased was the massive J. G. Graevius/Peter Burman 45-volume classical *Thesaurus antiquitatum et historiarum Italiae*, the new Paris edition of Du Cange's *Glossarium* of medieval Latin in seven volumes, and H. J. Rose's very recent twelve-volume *New General Biographical Dictionary*. These may be entirely humanistic and reference publications, but they are of a very high grade: if the college was a stronghold of what we would now call the humanities, it was not – at least in terms of book purchase – slumped in torpor, but busy buying expensive new editions. But then what we buy for our shelves and what we really read properly are of course rather different things; one can only get so far with lists.

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