

William Smith's Biblical Notebook (1729): A Manuscript Recovered

Among New College's early printed books there is a curious double volume, undistinguished in aspect and all but forgotten until very recently. It consists of two items, the first a manuscript, the second a printed book. The combined volume arrived into the library probably in the very early twentieth century, and as the librarians receiving and eventually shelving the book evidently did not consider the manuscript portion to be worthy of more than a tacit harrumph, its existence was barely acknowledged, and then forgotten,¹ until some recent browsing chanced upon the forgotten volume.

The second, printed text is a copy of the first four books of the *Odes* of Horace, translated by Francis Wrangham (1769-1842), a clergyman from Yorkshire who was educated at Hull and Cambridge. Wrangham was an extremely prolific writer and poet, and he corresponded with many writers of the time, including Wordsworth and Byron. He was a bibliomaniac, obsessed with rare editions and books printed on coloured paper, and upon his death his vast library was split between Trinity College, Cambridge, and public auction. He had a habit of publishing his books commercially and then reprinting them privately in small runs; New College's copy of his Horace is one of these latter imprints, and was published in Chester sometime shortly after 1822.

The first item in the volume is a totally different object. It is a student notebook, signed by one William Smith and dated by him to 1729. A later owner has found a portrait of this Smith and pasted it into the front of the notebook.² Assuming the portrait is correctly matched to the scribe, this is William Smith the classical scholar (1711-87), an eighteenth-century gentleman commoner of the college. Arriving from Worcester Grammar School in November 1728 at the age of seventeen, Smith graduated BA in 1732, subsequently taking his MA in 1737, and collecting the higher degrees in theology later in his career (BD and DD both in 1758). He eventually became Dean of Chester. His literary reputation rests on his classical translations, of which the first was his *Longinus on the Sublime* (1739). This was highly regarded, and Smith's frequent parallels to and detailed discussions of passages from Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton,³ and other English and continental poets, render his commentary a significant piece of English literary criticism in its own right. When Smith left the college he donated a copy of his *Longinus* to the library, where it still is (NB.140.23); he is described in the Benefactors Register under 1739 as 'nuper capellanus', 'recently a chaplain'.⁴ Smith's *Longinus* was later followed by translations of Thucydides and Xenophon, and Smith's own *Poetic Works* appeared posthumously in 1788, prefaced by a twenty-page life of the poet.

Smith's student notebook consists solely of notes systematically taken on the meaning of words and phrases in the New Testament, in English and Latin, with words in Greek and occasionally Hebrew. Smith must have commenced his notes in his first or second year of the

¹ Not quite, though: the author of the *ODNB* article on William Smith lists under 'Archives' the sole item 'New College, Oxford, commonplace book'; this notice was derived ultimately from Paul Morgan, *Oxford Libraries Outside the Bodleian* (Oxford, 1980), p. 91. We know of no other notices of this manuscript.

² The engraving bears the legend 'Engraved by Freeman from an Original Painting in the possession of Will^m Baynes.' This is presumably one of the William Bayneses, father and son, London booksellers, who were active from 1792 to 1841; there was also a Leeds bookseller of that name in this period (British Book Trade Index).

³ In this respect we might recall too that a translation of Milton's *Paradise Lost* into Latin hexameter published on the Oxford press in a deluxe edition in 1750 (the second volume, dated 1753, was printed in London) was the work of a New College man, William Dobson.

⁴ Benefactors Book, p. 168. There is a tantalizing reference in the Warden's notebook of Orders and Resolutions of the House and minutes of College and House meetings 1770-1793 (NCA 3527) to 'Mr Smith formerly Gentleman Commoner who left ye College considerably in Debt, his Bed and Bedsted to be sold and accounted for to ye Bursars', dated 30 March 1732. The only Smith commoners listed in the 1720s were John Smith (matriculated 1722 and became a clerk at Magdalen 1725-28) and William Smith. This would seem a little early for our William, who only took the M.A. in 1737.

B.A. (depending on whether his '1729' was written according to the old or the new way of dating the New Year, i.e. from 25 March or 1 January), when he would have been a probationer fellow. Working on the New Testament, ostensibly in Greek, was a standard task for a B.A. student in the eighteenth century, as it had been in the previous century too, although we cannot be sure that Smith did not simply undertake this task on his own initiative. Smith attended New College with the famous biblical critic Robert Lowth (1710-87), with whom he remained lifelong friends, and Lowth is primarily celebrated today as a theorist and a translator of biblical poetry. (He also wrote an excellent documentary biography of William of Wykeham.) It may not be entirely fanciful to see Smith as ruminating in his undergraduate notebook issues that were to occupy Lowth, who arrived at New College in 1730, throughout his later career.

These two items, the Smith notebook and the Wrangham translation, were not casually thrown together, as the fore-edges of both volumes have been stained a uniform red in order to make the resulting object look consolidated. But why were these two rather different items bound together? We cannot be sure, but one possibility is that an early owner recognised that Smith's main claim to fame was as a classical translator, and binding his notebook next to the classical translation of Wrangham might give at least some intellectual coherence to the volume at the level of authorial biography, if not of type of text. Both men were also relatively prominent churchmen in their time, as the label on the spine suggests: it bears 'Dean Smith' followed by 'Archd. Wrangham'.

We can be sure too that the volume was on the open market at one point, for in the front end-papers there is a pencil price of 21/- (priced as containing both components). The earliest college mark on it is a library stamp, inside which 'Sewell Desk: S.' has been written. At the top of the college bookplate on the front paste-down of the volume, the phrase 'Sewell Collection' has been added in ink in the same hand, itself later cancelled by the hand that then supplied the volume's first proper shelfmark, when the volume was placed in the long-discontinued 'Omega' classification. This second hand is that of R. L. Rickard, who worked in the library in the mid twentieth century. Among his many acts of zeal we may include the editing of New College MS 325, an Elizabethan guide to the complex system of legal courts, for the Camden Society (1953); he was also an enthusiastic user of the biro. Rickard's shelfmark has in turn been cancelled and replaced by its modern locator, BT 1.135.33. This suggests a line of provenance. The book may have been acquired by the college, but it is much more likely that it was a personal purchase by Warden Sewell, head of house from 1860 to 1903, who will have been attracted to the book because of the college connection. This supposition is strengthened by the fact that Sewell has in a number of places added his own exegetical notes, treating the manuscript as his own property (see below). Sewell was an antiquary, and spent most of his term of office busying himself among the college muniments and, so the conventional college history goes, at least not obstructing the wider reforms going on around him in college and university. His particular obsession was past fellows of the college, and 'Warden Sewell's Register', his thick manuscript index of all former New College scholars and fellows, is still the first port of call when dealing with modern enquires. (Smith appears in Sewell's companion register for Gentlemen Commoners.) Sewell's antiquarian engagement with Smith's manuscript is demonstrated by the brief bio-bibliography of Smith in Sewell's hand in the front end-papers, concluding with the observation that this manuscript must date from Smith's undergraduate days. Now Sewell was notorious for carrying off archival material to the lodgings, and after his death much of it was repatriated to the archives, where it was located inside ('stuffed into', says the present archivist) the Sewell Desk, a high sloping desk on long legs at which one stood to read, itself perhaps from the lodgings. In time the 'Sewell Desk' archival materials were properly redistributed, but this volume, being half-printed, and not really an archival item, was evidently sent to the library. There its printed portion was

catalogued, and it was shelved, and subsequently slipped out of mind. But the first item is a manuscript of value to modern scholars of the history of teaching and learning in the universities. This manuscript therefore deserves recognition in the college's manuscript sequence, and it is now New College MS 394.

Smith's notebook is a quarto of 130 folios. It is possible that it had an earlier, abortive use, as a (child's?) hand has written, somewhat cryptically, 'Life Shakespears Macbeth' or parts of that phrase a number of times (fols. 1r, 37r, 84r, 111r, 123r). Smith then signed and dated his book on the verso of the first page. As noted, a later owner has mounted an engraved portrait of Smith on the recto of the facing page, possibly but not inevitably cut from a printed book. This may have been done by Sewell. Sewell has added his own notes to the commentary in at least five places (fols. 37v, 55r, 61v, 70r, 106r); among other things he had been reading Joseph Warburton's *Divine Legation of Moses* (1737-41), which he cites.

Smith's notebook covers the entire New Testament, in order. It is not an easy notebook to navigate, as Smith seldom troubles to add the names of either biblical books or even the chapters to which he is referring, usually specifying only verses, and even then not always in order – a contents list for the manuscript may be found as an appendix to this Note.⁵ Smith's biblical text is the Bible in English, in the King James version, but his notes employ English, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew where appropriate. The notes are not or at least seldom original comments but are rather drawn from a number of printed sources. His main sources, both cited hundreds of times, are 'Ham' and 'Menoch', that is Henry Hammond and Johannes Stephanus Menochius. Hammond (1605-1660) was an Anglican theologian of immense reputation, whose *A Paraphrase and Annotations on All the Books of the New Testament* (1653, many subsequent editions) evidently remained a first port-of-call for students such as Smith well into the eighteenth century.⁶ New College holds the second (1659) and fifth (1689) editions of Hammond's work (BT3.255.8; BT3.101.10). Menochius (1575-1655), on the other hand, was a Jesuit biblical commentator, whose vast *Brevis Explicatio Sensus Literalis Sacrae Scripturae optimis quibusque Auctoribus per Epitomen Collecta*, itself a collection from prior authors as its title states, first appeared in Cologne in 1630, and was frequently republished, reaching eight editions by the time Smith was writing. New College holds the 1679 Antwerp edition (BT3.110.13). When Smith is citing from Hammond's English work his notes are in English; and when citing from Menochius's Latin work his notes are in Latin. Smith also quotes with some frequency 'Dr Scott' and 'Dr Clagett'. 'Dr Scott' is the Church of England clergyman John Scott (1638/9-1695), and the work from which Smith culled many notes is Scott's popular *The Christian Life*, published from 1681.⁷ Portions of this text, published in several instalments, are held in the college library, and other volumes may once have been present.⁸ These citations start in the

⁵ Smith makes hardly any notes on Mark; and only on the twentieth chapter of Revelation.

⁶ 'This 1000-page folio, modelled on the commentaries of Grotius and Ussher, was Hammond's response to the popular demand for English expositions and was later imitated by Richard Baxter among others. Hammond's painstaking composition had begun with a Latin interpretation, in two large manuscript volumes, and a new English translation based on his collation of Greek manuscripts. He took [Gilbert] Sheldon's advice, however, and printed the authorized translation, with his own variants in the margin. The paraphrase is printed in a parallel column, and the extensive annotations follow at each chapter's end. Hammond defended his annotations against the Independent John Owen and others in *Deuterai phrontides* (1657).' – ODNB.

⁷ 'Scott's importance lies in his legacy as a devotional writer whose works discussed godly living and prayer. His main work was *The Christian life from its beginning to its consummation in glory: together with the several means and instruments of Christianity conducing thereunto, with directions for private devotion and forms of prayer, fitted to the several states of Christians* (1681; expanded second edition 1683-7, two volumes each published in two parts; 9th edition 1729-30).' – ODNB.

⁸ New College Library holds part 3/vol. 4 (1696) [BT3.91.16], vol. 5 (1700) [NB.155.18], and *The Works*, 2 vols., 1st vol. only (1718) [NB.170.12]. On the few occasions where Smith specifies location carefully – e.g. 'D. Scot. Part 2. pag. 10. (fol. 91v) – it is evident that he is not referencing the text as it appears in the (continuously

section on Acts, usually naming ‘part 2’ of the work. ‘Dr Clagett’ is the Anglican clergyman and controversialist William Clagett (1646-1688), and Smith excerpts from his *Paraphrase* of the Gospel of John. A portion was published in 1686, and a further instalment in 1693.⁹ New College holds two copies of the former publication (BT3.166.2(17); BT3.165.8(4)), and the third edition (1704) of the latter (NB.54.23, missing its title-page), as well as many other works by Clagett. Citations from Clagett dominate the section on John’s Gospel.¹⁰ There are also individual citations among Smith’s notes from ‘Wilk’ (fol. 71v), possibly John Wilkins, Bishop of Chester (1614-72), ‘Whichcot’ (72v), i.e. Benjamin Whichcote (1609-1683), the Cambridge Platonist, and from ‘Limborch’ (78r), i.e. Philipp van Limborch (1633-1712), the Dutch Remonstrant theologian. The college still holds several works by these writers.

Smith’s notes are therefore all derivative, but this is hardly surprising. Nor should we seek too hopefully for evidence of this manuscript influencing Smith’s later published work.¹¹ These are the adept notes of a diligent undergraduate, working through his New Testament, systematically culling notes from standard authorities, and entering them in an organised fashion into a designated notebook. Smith works from an English text but he is happy enough in the three sacred languages, although there is of course only a smattering of Hebrew, copied from his sources. His two major reference texts, Hammond and Menochius, both furnished the biblical text and a gloss, followed by notes; Smith often copies out entire notes on given verses. These are chiefly philological or historical in thrust: Hammond and Menochius, and through them Smith, were concerned to work out the literal and historical meaning of the text, and were seldom distracted by doctrine. This is what enables Smith to move ecumenically between Anglican and Jesuit commentators. Hammond, for instance, often provides short historical or geographical clarifications of the text: the ‘Caesarea’ mentioned in Acts 18:22, for example, is, as Hammond explains (fol. 63r), ‘Cæsarea Stratonis, not Cæsarea Philippi, tho’ they are not far apart.’ Very occasionally Smith notes textual queries, including the theory that the last chapter of the Gospel of Mark might not be authentic, a view he ascribes to the Church Father Jerome and the Roman Catholic theologian Tommaso de Vio, Cardinal Cajetan, following a note in Menochius (fol. 32r). Clagett’s work is likewise a paraphrase: Clagett reproduced the biblical text on the left-hand side of his page, and placed on the right an extensive paraphrase in quotation marks, often followed by explanatory notes. Again, Smith lifts these wholesale into his own commentary. Apart from the one-off references, the odd man out among Smith’s reference texts is Scot’s *Christian Life*. For in genre this is a devotional work, not a commentary, and Smith could not have used it as a continuous commentary or paraphrase on the biblical text. Rather, this represents genuine devotional reading, which Smith interrupted when he encountered a comment on a New Testament passage apposite enough to be transplanted into the quite different generic context of a running commentary. The use of Scott, therefore, demonstrates a wider range of reading than simply the purpose-built paraphrases of Smith’s other three main authors.

paginated) *Works* above, but rather *The Christian Life, Part Two: Volume Two*, 2nd ed. (London: Walter Kettilby, 1687), or the same, 4th ed. (London: Walter Kettilby, 1697).

⁹ ‘Another group project in which Clagett participated was an abortive one to produce a paraphrase of the entire Bible. The only one of Clagett’s paraphrases published during the struggle was *A Paraphrase, with Notes, upon the Sixth Chapter of St. John* (1686), which attacked the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation. ... *Eleven Sermons Preach’d upon Several Occasions*, appeared in 1693, along with *A paraphrase and notes upon the first, second, third, fourth, fifth, seventh and eighth chapters of St. John.*’ – ODNB.

¹⁰ And are therefore absent from the rest of the MS, bar a few strays, e.g. on fols. 72r, 82r.

¹¹ Smith’s only published devotional writings were a series of meditations on the Beatitudes (i.e. Matthew 5:3-12; Luke 6:20-22), and although his comments there agree with the views he recorded from Menochius on the site in Matthew (fol. 5r; he passed over the parallel passage in Luke), the interpretations are not distinctive enough to bespeak debt (*Nine Discourses on the Beatitudes* (London, 1782), pp. 6-9, 52).

We do not know if Smith as a young undergraduate sat in his study-bedroom with his own copies of these books, or whether he used those in his college library: as we have seen, all but his specific edition of Scot are still present in the library, and it is very likely that they were all there by 1729 too. But Smith was a probationer at this point, and although the regulations at New College are unclear at this point, he may not have had access to the library. On balance, I think he probably owned all the books to which he refers, and so on the shelves of this freshman we should see at least a King James Bible, two substantial biblical paraphrases, Clagett's specimen chapters from John, Scot's devotional work, and a handful of other authors. In any case, Smith's notebook casts one clear beam of light upon the educational situation in the college in the early Hanoverian period, in the time of Wardens Bigg and Coxed. Most general accounts of the college and the university in this period discern only clubbable lethargy; Smith may be at least partially excused this judgement.

William Poole
Fellow Librarian

Appendix: Contents of MS 394

Matthew	3v-22v	Ephesians	93v-96r	Hebrews	107r-13r
Mark	22v-32v	Philippians	96r-97v	James	113v-15r
Luke	32v-40v	Colossians	98r-99v	1 Peter	115r-17r
John	41r-51v	1 Thessalonians	99v-100v	2 Peter	117r-18r
Acts	52r-69r	2 Thessalonians	101r-2v	1 John	118v-21r
Romans	69v-77v	1 Timothy	102v-4v	2 John	121r
1 Corinthians	77v-85v	2 Timothy	104v-6r	3 John	121v
2 Corinthians	86r-90r	Titus	106r-v	Jude	121v-22r
Galatians	90v-93v	Philemon	107r	Revelations	130r-v