

**John Reynolds, Dead Poet (1614)**  
**or**  
**What Did Fellows Own When They Died In College?**

John Reynolds was one of the better-known poets of Jacobean New College.<sup>1</sup> Writing at the end of the seventeenth century, the antiquary Anthony Wood said of Reynolds (Reynolds, Raynolds, Reinoldus) that he was ‘the most noted epigrammatist, next to Joh. Owen and sir Jo. Harrington, of his time’. But we barely remember him at all today, as he wrote solely in Latin or Greek,<sup>2</sup> and his favoured poetic form, the epigram, embodies an early-modern aesthetic that can seem inert today – miniaturized, impersonal, often based on Latin puns that we can’t or are no longer willing to find witty. Reynolds was born in Toddington, Bedfordshire, in 1582, became a scholar of Winchester College in 1597, proceeded to New College in 1602, and followed a nominally legal path, taking the degree of BCL in 1607.<sup>3</sup> But he was much better known as an epigrammatist, and his poems appear in many college and university collections of the time. Indeed, he evidently developed his proficiency as a writer of Latin and Greek verse at Winchester, where there was a strong tradition of such versification, as there survives a remarkable manuscript collection of Winchester verses in which Reynolds plays a prominent role, indeed a central role, and he may therefore have been its editor.<sup>4</sup> It was compiled in around 1600 by Wykehamists in expectation of a visit to Winchester by Elizabeth I, and not only do Reynolds’ verses open and close the volume, but he also included and signed several very striking *technopœgnia* or pattern poems – a pair of wings in Greek, an ornate picture in multi-directional poetry of a crown, a chalice, a wreath, an egg, and a heart. This is especially interesting, as the first sustained appearance of (once again Latin) pattern poetry in England was Richard Willes’ *Poematum liber* of 1573, itself a rather flag-wavingly Wykehematic volume, and very plausibly therefore an influence on the young Reynolds. (Willes is accordingly the subject of a further note in this issue.)

Reynolds was one of a fine generation of New College writers, including the epigrammatist and translator John Heath (c. 1585-?, on whom see Mark Byford’s note in New College Notes 3), and the lawyer, poet, and dramatist Richard Zouche (1590-1661, on whom see ‘Fun with Grammar’, also in New College Notes 3). Reynolds’ poems appeared in many collections, in print and in manuscript, and he published three tiny sets of his own epigrams on the local Oxford press in 1611 and 1612: the *Epigrammata*, and two installments of a larger work entitled *Prima Chilias*. These are very rare books now: of the handful of recorded copies of

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<sup>1</sup> For Reynolds, see Anthony Wood, *Athenæ Oxonienses*, ed. Philip Bliss (4 vols, London, 1813), vol. 2, cols. 148-49, and D. K. Money’s article on him in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. There are also short discussions of him in Leicester Bradner, *Musæ Anglicanæ: A History of Anglo-Latin poetry, 1500–1925* (New York, 1940), and J. W. Binns, *Intellectual Culture in Elizabethan and Jacobean England: The Latin Writings of the Age* (Leeds, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> He is often said to be the ‘Iohn Raynolds’ who signed the vernacular poem *Dolarnys Primerose*, published in 1606. This long poem, in the ‘Venus and Adonis’ stanza form, is written by one who describes himself on the title-page as ‘a practitioner in poesie, and a stranger amongst poets’, which does not sound like our man.

<sup>3</sup> The standard printed sources on Reynolds offer slightly inaccurate or confused accounts. According to Sewell’s manuscript register of fellows, however, John Reynolds of ‘Teddington’ (sc. Toddington), was offered a place at the college in November 1601, and came up the following year. He became a fellow on 22 August 1602, aged 20, and stayed here until dying in college in ‘about April 1614’, when his place was given to Henry Stringer, a future warden. Sewell’s List of Commoners (NCA 3058) also recognises a ‘Johannes Raynold’, also of Bedfordshire, ‘plebei filius’, matriculating from here on 31 October 1595, aged 15. Foster in the *Alumni Oxonienses* conflated both these people, but they are very likely to be distinct. Kirby, *Winchester Scholars*, p. 158, gives a ‘John Reynolds’ of ‘Cuddington’ (misreading of Toddington? – or Cuddington in Buckinghamshire or Cheshire?), at Winchester College from 1597, aged 13, scholar of New College, fellow 1602-14, and B.D. This must be the epigrammatist, but the degree is wrong, ‘our’ Reynolds being a lawyer, not a theologian. *ODNB*’s conjectured birth date of ‘1584?’ should rather be ‘1582’, and ‘Tuddington, Berkshire’ should be ‘Toddington, Bedfordshire’! My thanks to Jennifer Thorp for tracking the archival threads of the various Reynolds.

<sup>4</sup> MS Lat. misc. e 23. This manuscript was acquired by the Bodleian in 1890.

the *Epigrammata* (1611), all but two are in Oxford college libraries – but not that of New College! – and most are fragmentary; the *Prima Chilias* (both parts, 1612) is rarer still, with the Bodleian having managed to acquire only in recent times (1975) what is the now the sole copy in the public domain of the two published sections of this work. The *Epigrammata* is a small book, consisting of 111 couplets on British kings and queens, starting with the mythical Brutus. It is prefaced by a manifesto for Reinolds' multi-volume plan: he will produce a 'chilias' or a thousand poems, divided into ten classes, starting with kings, and then moving down through bishops, barons, academic doctors, knights, graduates, armigers, scholars, respectable but not aristocratic types ('generosi'), and finally 'generalia'. This first installment covers the first class, the kings (and queens). If he completed the remaining nine parts of his ambitious scheme, they have not come down to us, and this has not proved a matter of wide lamentation. The *Prima Chilias* booklets are similar: the Bodleian copy consists of two distinct parts with separate title-pages, but signed as if they were to be stacked, the first (both are headed *Prima Chilias*) subtitled 'Theographa', and consisting of one hundred couplets on theology, and the second subtitled 'Angelica', comprising again a hundred couplets on angels and devils.<sup>5</sup> Both consist of a single printer's gathering, with the last page of each featuring a woodcut of the arms of the college, flanked by Wykeham's initials.<sup>6</sup> Presumably Reinolds intended to write a further eight hundred epigrams in a further eight one-gathering installments.

In the early-modern period, when a member of the university died, the will of that person and any inventory taken of their goods would be submitted to the Chancellor's Court of the university. Such members included 'privileged persons', i.e. people who were not academics but local tradesmen who had been matriculated in order to place them under the legal protection of the university. Therefore as we turn over the various wills and inventories in the university archives today, we encounter not just students and scholars, but cooks, porters, butlers, builders, carpenters, bakers, gardeners – anyone whose professional life was wrapped up more with 'gown' than 'town'. Among these records we encounter many New College personages of the period, and elsewhere in this issue as a piece of comparison I have presented the chattels list of the Warden in the time of Reinolds, George Ryves, who died in the lodgings in 1613. In future issues I hope to present some more of these interesting lists as insights into the lives of various characters around college – Frape the butler, for instance, who died in 1632.

Reinolds died in college in 1614; he will therefore have been around thirty. As was the custom, an inventory of his goods was taken down, in this case by Dionyse or Denis Edwards, a local stationer and so able to price books, and Richard Reade, the Yeoman Beadle in Law, and they did this on 25 May 1614.<sup>7</sup> Edwards probably did the actual work, as one of the two copies of this list is in his hand and signed solely by him.<sup>8</sup> (Incidentally, Edwards, also Edmonds in the records, had a B.A. from Brasenose and lived in Beef Hall; and Reade held a B.Mus., and sang in Christ Church choir.<sup>9</sup>) Below I set down the meagre goods and chattels of this dead poet, as they are in most cases typical of the time, and give us a sense of what New Collegians owned – surprisingly little, in most cases. The valuations will have been estimates by the two men

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<sup>5</sup> Both pamphlets, like the *Epigrammata*, advertise projected subdivisions into 'Decades'. For the 'Theographa' Reinolds promises 'Unitas', 'Antithei', 'Trinitas', 'Polythei', 'Pater', 'Antipater', 'Christus', 'Antichristus', 'Pneumatici', and 'Pneumatomachi'; for the 'Angelica' there were 'Seraphin', 'Schedim', 'Cherubim', 'Sehirim', 'Archangeli', 'Archidæmones', 'Evangelii', 'Cacodæmones', 'Elohim' and 'Baalim', in both cases actually just the titles or subjects of the first ten epigrams of each set.

<sup>6</sup> This woodblock had been used before, e.g. for the title-page of Barnes's printing of the New College volume *Encomion Rodolphi Warcoppi ornatissimi* (Oxford, 1605), and must have belonged either to Barnes or to the college.

<sup>7</sup> OUA, Hyp/B/14, *sub nomine*.

<sup>8</sup> OUA, Hyp/B/20, fol. 36v.

<sup>9</sup> For Edmonds/Edwards, see David Pearson, *Oxford Bookbinding 1500-1640* (Oxford, 2000), p. 131; and for Reade see Joseph Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses* (London, 1891), s.n.

drawing up the inventory, who express sums in the money of the time, being pounds ('li', for *libri*), shillings ('s', for *solidi*), and pence ('d', for *denarii*), where £1 = 20s = 240d.

Imprimis in ready money	xxxj <sup>s</sup> vii <sup>d</sup>	[31s 7d]
Item in bills & bands	0 – 0 – 0	[0]
Item all his wearing apparell	xvj <sup>s</sup>	[16s]
Item 3 peeces of greene bayes	ix <sup>d</sup>	[9d]
Item 4 gownes whereof 3 were ouer worne	40 <sup>s</sup>	[40s]
Item a feather bedd, a bolster, & one old pillowe, 2 coverletts & one blancket	3 <sup>li</sup>	[£3]
Item a payre of bowles	vij <sup>d</sup>	[8d]
Item all his linnen	vj <sup>s</sup>	[6s]
Item a truckle bedd 4 ioynd stooles & a turn'd chayre	iiij <sup>s</sup> vj <sup>d</sup>	[4s 6d]
Item divers small boxes	vij <sup>d</sup>	[8d]
Item a chest	xi <sup>d</sup>	[12d]
Item certayne pictures dialls wth other lumber	ij <sup>s</sup> vj <sup>d</sup>	[2s 6d]
Item certayne letters to print with	ij <sup>s</sup> vj <sup>d</sup>	[2s 6d]
Item all the books in his studdy	lvij <sup>s</sup>	[58s]
Item a little ring silver & gilt	vi <sup>d</sup>	[6d]
Summa totalis	xj <sup>li</sup> iiij <sup>s</sup> viij <sup>d</sup>	[£11 4s 8d]

Reinolds' four most valuable possessions, in descending order, were therefore his bed and bedclothes, his books, his four gowns, and then his ready cash. Following legal custom, it is carefully recorded that he had no outstanding debts ('bills & bands'; a 'band' is a bond). Apart from his four gowns (three worn out), Reinolds clearly boasted only a modest wardrobe, and the furniture in his chamber – which he probably shared with two other seniors, each with a 'studdy' in a corner – amounted to four stools, a chair, some boxes, and a chest. His 'greene bayes' (i.e. baize) may have been used as a desk-cloth; we know that in contemporary Wadham chambers, for instance, writing desks were often covered with just such green baize. These kinds of fittings were usually sold on to the next occupant. For entertainment there were bowling balls ('a payre of bowles') for use on the college's recently constructed bowling green, the area south of the Mound (see 'Bowlin Greens' in *New College Notes* 3). Reinolds' only jewellery was his 'little ring silver & gilt'. We would very much have liked to know what was in Reinolds' small library, but unfortunately from the late sixteenth century on, those tasked with taking inventories of property grew unwilling to write down titles, and instead estimated the total value of books, most probably because books were more commonly available, private libraries were rapidly growing in size, and it was easier to provide a lump value than to write down each and every title and work out a price. After about 1620, therefore, it is very uncommon to find books listed by title in such probate documents. Calculating the size of a library from its supposed value is a fool's errand for this period, but in 1652, when one John Hutton died in New College as a young B.A., his books were (unusually) listed and valued individually, with a total value of £2 18s 7d, but as eighteen were left without valuation in the list, we might push the total up to about £3 6s. He had 150 books. Hutton's books were worth roughly a quarter of his total chattels; this is about the same for Reinolds, as it is too for one earlier New College inventory I have traced, that of John Bayley, a fellow who died in 1602. Reinolds' 58s (i.e. 2s short of £3) is a little less than Hutton's c. £3 6s, so we might imagine a library of around 140 books. These need not have been large academic tomes – graduate

fellows tended to read these in the Bodleian or in their college library – but will rather have been smaller-format educational, devotional, and recreational books. All we currently know of Reynolds’ individual books is that in 1614, the year of his death, he donated a single book to his college library, ‘Scayni Periphrasin in Aristotelis Organon’ (Benefactors Book, p 50). This is Antonius Scaynus (i.e. Antonio Scaino, 1524-1612), *Paraphrasis in universum Aristotelis Organum cum quaestionibus & adnotationibus ad loca obscuriora* (Bergamo, 1599, now BT3.249.3), an octavo, with ‘ex dono Jo. Reynolds huius collegii quondam socii’ (‘from the gift of John Reynolds, sometime fellow of this college’) written on the title-page. This was a relatively popular academic text, and went through several editions; Scaino also published a complete paraphrase of the letters of St Paul. But he is best known today as the first author of a book on how to play tennis, the *Tratto del Giuoco della Palla* of 1555.

The most quirky items among Reynolds’ possessions, however, are those ‘certayne pictures dialls wth other lumber’ and the ‘certayne letters to print with’. Reynolds’ pictures, probably prints, may have hung on his wall; ‘dialls’ are clocks, watches, or even sundials, and ‘lumber’, disused articles of furniture. His ‘letters to print with’, being valued comparatively modestly, cannot have been a full printer’s fount, but they may have been a small collection of printer’s sorts, i.e. the individual pieces of metal used to print a letter or other symbol on a hand-press. If this is so, then Reynolds may have owned a small set of sorts in order to hand-stamp short phrases, or even his own name – perhaps on his own books? Or is this just possibly the stamp of the college arms that appears on so many New College books in the period? We need to find more of Reynolds’ books!

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