

John Russell (c. 1430–1494)
and a Fragmentary Witness to Peter Schoeffer’s 1470 edition of Jerome’s Letters

The Wykehamist John Russell was very nearly the first Englishman known to have bought a printed book. In Bruges on 17 April 1467 he purchased two copies of Cicero’s *De officiis* in the edition which Johann Fust and Peter Schoeffer had printed at Mainz only a year before.¹ As an early adopter, Russell cedes the crown only to James Goldwell, the future bishop of Norwich, who bought a different Fust and Schoeffer edition in Hamburg in 1465.² If Russell was not quite the first English purchaser of a printed book, he must be the first to have bought a duplicate: that he should have left the stationer’s shop with two copies suggests that he was planning to give one of them away. It is evidence for an open-handedness which, as we shall see, runs like a filigree through his life as a collector. As Goldwell had been, Russell was on a royal embassy when he visited in Bruges in 1467, a spring visit probably preparatory to the high-ranking peace mission of that autumn to Charles, duke of Burgundy, in which he also participated. That would be a great success, also securing a contract of marriage between Charles and the king’s sister, Margaret of York. After his spring embassy (which is otherwise unreported), Russell returned to England with his prizes, of which both survive, one in Cambridge and one in London.³ His inscription, more or less the same in each, is germane to what follows so will bear reciting here from the Cambridge copy: ‘Emptus per Johannem Ruscel archidiaconum berkshyrie apud oppidum bruggense flandrie anno 1467 mensis Aprilis 17^o die’.⁴

John Russell was a substantial book collector, and New College was the beneficiary. A Wykehamist of both foundations, he left his fellowship in 1461 a doctor of canon law and was accelerated into high promotion, taking up prebendal canonries that same year at Salisbury cathedral and at the royal chapel of St Stephen’s at Westminster. It is to be suspected that Richard Beauchamp, bishop of Salisbury and an intimate of King Edward IV’s, was Russell’s particular patron. Further ecclesiastical appointments followed and he was made archdeacon of Berkshire (1466), bishop of Rochester (1476), and ultimately bishop of Lincoln (1480). In 1483 he was appointed chancellor of England and in the same year elected chancellor of the university of Oxford.⁵ His rapid rise and continual employment as ambassador suggests patience, competence, a certain charm of personality, and a fluency in speech—indeed, he was called upon to make the oration at Ghent on 4 February 1470 when Charles of Burgundy was inducted into the Order of the Garter.⁶

I am enormously grateful to Lotte Hellinga for her comments on a draft of this note, and for her helpful discussion and corrections. Any errors that remain are, of course, my own.

¹ *GW* 6922; Rhodes 722; ISTC ic00576000.

² James Goldwell (*d.* 1499) was leading a mission to the kings of Denmark and Poland, the Master in Prussia of the Teutonic Order, and the Hanse when he bought a copy of *Rationale diuinorum officiorum* by Willelmus Durandus, printed at Mainz by Fust and Schoeffer in 1459 (*GW* 9101; ISTC id00403000). It is now in the library of All Souls College (LR.5.1.1) with Goldwell’s informative inscription inside.

³ Cambridge University Library, Inc.3.A.1.3a[12] and London, Lambeth Palace Library, MS 765 (*sic*).

⁴ The inscription in the Lambeth copy adds ‘apud sacrum Donacianum’ and gives the date in the form ‘XV Kal Maii’. The church of St Donatianus was the centre of the book trade in Bruges.

⁵ To the article on Russell by John A. F. Thomson in *ODNB* may be added the more detailed treatment by Anne F. Sutton and Livia Visser-Fuchs, ‘*VeRus celluy je suis* (True I am): A Study of John Russell, Bishop of Lincoln and Chancellor of England for Richard III’, *The Ricardian* 27 (2017), 1–75. For a summary of his ecclesiastical appointments, see the account by A. B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to A.D. 1500*, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957–9) [hereafter *BRUO*], pp. 1609–11.

⁶ Printed by Caxton at Westminster not after June 1476 as *Propositio ad illustrissimum principem Karolum ducem Burgundie super susceptione ordinis garterii* (ISTC ir00365300; BMC XI, p. 103).

Russell also had a scholarly life, and a reputation for learning. A generation later, Thomas More remembered him as ‘without doubt the first among the learned men of his day’.⁷ His humanistic interests may be discerned through his surviving books, of which the chief part remains at New College. Russell presented these in probably the summer of 1482, just before he was elected chancellor of the university. It may well have been the largest donation the College had in the 15th century: there is a note in the *Liber Albus* that the warden and fellows wrote in November of that year to thank Russell for the donation of no fewer than 105 volumes, described as ‘the hidden treasures of learned men and so eagerly awaited for the increase and adornment of the study of the best sciences’. There is no inventory or separate note of these books and only eight manuscripts (in nine volumes) are known to survive at the College and five printed books (also in nine volumes).⁸ They were humanistic books of classical and renaissance literature—Virgil, Pliny, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Guarino da Verona, Plutarch, Albrecht von Eyb, Giuniano Mai—and more practical books of civil and canon law: four printed volumes of the commentary on the *Codex* by Baldus de Ubaldis, articles of the Council of Basel, a *repertorium* on canon law, and the *Lectura* on the second book of the Decretals by the Paduan canonist Prosdocimo Conti (1370–1438). Twelve books have his inscription, dated 1482, of a humorous couplet, in which he was able to display his name (‘veRus celluy’) by switching from Latin to French:

‘Stirpe parum clarus, magis aptus quam bene doctus,
fraudis inexpertus, facto sermoneque *veRus celluy* Je suis.’⁹

It is the purpose of the present note to advertise one more item at the College which bears his name. It has been missed until now—unsurprisingly, since it is written on a loose leaf which has gone unnoticed in a folder of fragments.¹⁰ There are quite a number of such folders and albums at New College, containing interesting pastedowns and binding fragments lifted from the old books. They were taken from their host volumes in the mid-20th century, but no record was kept of where each had come from, so they are entirely mute as to their original context. Some of them are very interesting and would repay further attention, not least by incunabulists.

The fragments which are the focus of this note are two large vellum leaves of Imperial size, three sides of which are printed, the fourth blank, and it was on this blank page that Russell wrote his name. The discoloration at the edges shows that they were once pastedown; they may originally have been flyleaves; in either case, the verso was the natural place for an inscription.¹¹ It reads, ‘Ego Iohannes Ruscel comparavi andwerpie xxvij^o die majj 1472’.¹²

⁷ ‘Rusellus, episcopus Lincolnensis, vir et usu rerum, et vitae probitate singulari, tum in literis haud dubie sua tempestate primarius’; *The History of King Richard III*, ed. Richard S. Sylvester, *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, 2 (London: Yale University Press, 1967), pp. 24–5.

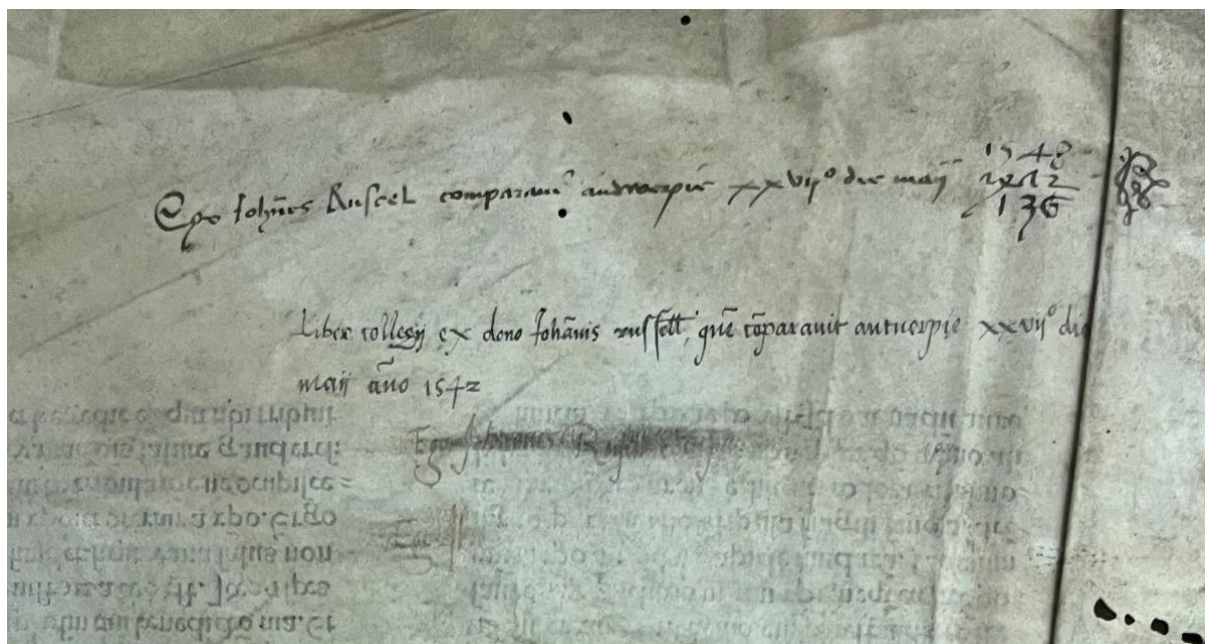
⁸ A handlist of surviving manuscripts and printed books owned, used, written by, and dedicated to Russell is given by Sutton and Visser-Fuchs, ‘Study of John Russell’, pp. 63–72. There is also a summary list by Emden, *BRUO*, pp. 1610–11. In addition to the books now at New College, there are four manuscripts at the British Library—two in the Royal collection and two in the Cottonian—and one at Lambeth Palace, and for printed books there are two at Cambridge University Library and one at Lambeth.

⁹ ‘Of undistinguished stock, trained up more than learned / In deceits untried, in deed and word true, that is who I am.’

¹⁰ New College, Oxford, LPF3/2, f. 47 (previously: MS 391, folder 2, no. 47).

¹¹ The current binding is by Robert Barnes of Oxford (d. 1631). He was a notably conservative binder and habitually reused the flyleaves that he found with the volume, often pasting down the outer flyleaves if they were tough enough. So it may be that what he found here as flyleaves became pastedowns, presumably one in front and one on the back board, when he applied the new binding in the early 17th century. However, the fact that one leaf was inverted may suggest that they were pastedowns from the outset (see further below).

¹² Directly above ‘1472’ a later hand has written ‘1548’, which may have been his own year or may have been an attempt to construe the medieval Arabic numerals. Directly below these is written ‘136’ by a further hand, which appears to be a jest, taking ‘136’ to be the total after subtraction of 1472 from 1548, reading the 7 as a 1. A separate entry beneath all of this was made by a neat italic hand of the later 16th century: ‘Liber collegii ex dono Iohannis



John Russell's inscription on the second of two fragmentary flyleaves
New College Library, Oxford, LPF3/2, f. 47 [detail]

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The thing that Russell bought in Antwerp on 27 May 1472 must be the book which this leaf once accompanied. It will be noticed immediately how closely the inscription resembles the wording from 1467 in the Mainz Ciceros, quoted above. And Russell was indeed in Flanders in 1472: he had received a twin commission in that year to treat with Charles of Burgundy for a perpetual peace and league, and with the Hanse over the many commercial grievances the League had with England. He reached Bruges on 2 April with the ambassadors William Hatclyf, who was the king's physician and secretary, and John Pickering, consul of the English merchants in the Netherlands.¹³ Hatclyf remained in Bruges until 1 July, the negotiations with Charles stalled; Russell went on further into Flanders to treat with the Hansards—a frustrating experience for him as it turned out—and that was how he found himself in Antwerp on 27 May with time to spend in a stationer's shop. He recorded details of his purchase in his customary way on the leaf which is the fragment before us now.

Knowing something of the context of this book's purchase in Antwerp in 1472 makes the question as to what it might have been all the more interesting—and all the more regrettable that no record was made when these preliminary leaves were taken out. Fortunately, there is a leading candidate in the library. Before naming it, it will be necessary to describe these two fragments more carefully. They are leaves on vellum from the edition of the letters of St Jerome completed by Peter Schoeffer at Mainz on 7 September 1470.¹⁴ They are unreported and unknown to ISTC. The leaves are not cognate and are imperfect in different ways: both will have been discarded as waste. The first is printed on both sides, but what is presented as the recto in the guardbook (it is a verso where it stands in the edition) is too heavily inked and not easily read. It comes from *Distinctio* M, giving the end of the edition's *ep.* 197 and the start of *ep.* 198.¹⁵ The second leaf is printed on one

russell' quem comparavit antuerpie xxvijº die maii anno 1542º. But this reader has also misconstrued the medieval forms of the numerals for 4 and 7.

¹³ Cora L. Scofield, *The Life and Reign of Edward the Fourth, King of England and France and Lord of Ireland*, 2 vols (London: Frank Cass, 1967), II, 30–33; Visser-Fuchs & Sutton, 'Study of John Russell', p. 5.

¹⁴ ISTC ih00165000; GW 12424–5; Bod-inc H-086 (b).

¹⁵ The text on the first recto is from what is now *ep.* 19 (*De uera circumcisione*) c. 3: 'circumcisio aperte subiaceat, ne merces operis pene eos sit—proditur de sermone quo cavet' (PL 30. 190B–192C); the verso goes from the end of *ep.* 13 (*Virginitatis laus*) c. 15, 'quia scriptum est: Maledictus homo qui facit opus Dei negligenter', into the beginning of

side only and was inverted when pressed into service as a flyleaf or pastedown, for it is on the dorse of this leaf that Russell wrote his purchase note. That it should have been inverted does rather suggest that from the outset it was intended for a pastedown. In this edition it comes from Dist. M, ep. 178. Both leaves represent the first pull only, both clearly printer's waste.



The over-inked fragment on vellum from Peter Schoeffer's 1470 edition of Jerome
New College Library, Oxford, LPF3/2, f. 47

The 1470 Jerome is one of the most impressive editions to emerge from the early Mainz press. In a series of valuable essays, Lotte Hellinga has revealed the minute dealings of Peter Schoeffer as he assembled this monumental edition.¹⁶ If Gutenberg is the father of printing then

ep. 19, down to c. 3, 'Nec sane a nobis magnopere desiderandum est, ut contemplationi omnium' (PL 30. 175B–190B). In other words, what is now affixed in the guardbook as a recto and verso should properly be reversed. The leaf is degraded and damaged on the left-hand edge. The second leaf is printed on only one side, the text from ep. 3 Ad Marcellam, cc. 2–7: 'Propter quod, inquit, ter Dominum rogavi, ut recederet a me: et dixit mihi—praeter quod aliud fundamentum nemo potest ponere in consummandum auro' (PL 30. 51D–54A).

¹⁶ Lotte Hellinga, 'Editing Texts in the First Fifteen Years of Printing', in *New Directions in Textual Studies*, ed. Dave Oliphant and Robin Bradford (Austin, TX: Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, 1990), pp. 127–49; also 'Peter Schoeffer and the Book-Trade in Mainz: Evidence for the Organization', in *Bookbindings & Other Bibliophily*, ed. Dennis E. Rhodes (Verona: Edizioni Valdonega, 1994), pp. 131–84; and her latest and fullest treatment of the subject, 'Peter Schoeffer and his Organization: A Bibliographical Investigation of the Ways an Early Printer Worked', *The Georg Svensson Lectures, 1993, 1994 & 1995* (Biblis Yearbook 1995–96), ed. Gunilla Jonsson (Stockholm: Föreningen för Bokhantverk 1995), pp. 67–106.

Schoeffer, as Hellinga has argued, may be considered the father of publishing.¹⁷ His oversight of the work of his press was total, from typesetting to illumination, binding, distribution and marketing. In the case of the Jerome edition, it was offered at several levels of cost and completion: on paper or on vellum, undecorated or with decoration ranging from simple penwork to full illumination. (Vellum copies are considerably rarer than paper copies: of the eighty-nine copies known, only sixteen are on vellum.) Textually too, the edition was significant, the largest collection of letters yet assembled. There had been four earlier editions of the letters, printed between 1468 and 1470: three from Rome, representing a textual tradition of their own, and one of 1469 by Johann Mentelin in Strassburg. Schoeffer's was entirely independent of these, and offered the largest number of letters yet: where the Rome editions had 180 letters and the Strassburg recension 130, Schoeffer printed 200, arranged thematically.¹⁸ These were brought together, as a printed advertisement for the edition states, after a diligent investigation in the libraries of many monasteries, churches and cathedrals.¹⁹ The editor was Adrianus Brielis (*d.* 1472), a Benedictine monk of the monastery of St Jacobsberg near Mainz. Not only did he enlarge the printed corpus of Jerome's letters, but he also oversaw, as is emphasized in the advertisement, a thorough programme of corrections to the text. Two issues of the edition resulted and have long been recognized. Lotte Hellinga was able to show that corrections were being made even as printing was taking place. Some 150 of 408 leaves, most in the second half of the book, were re-set to incorporate corrections, and further manuscript corrections were made to the re-set sheets. It is as if Brielis were standing in a corner of the printing shop scrutinizing each sheet as it came off the press.²⁰

Our second leaf, which bears Russell's inscription on the dorse, seems to derive, as Lotte Hellinga suggests to us, from a trial pull, not even a proof, done early as part of the preparation for the production process. It is from Dist. M *ep.* 178, in which the words 'Propter quod inquit' occur halfway down the column; in the first issue, these are the first words on the page, and the second issue consistently replicates the first, line for line. So both of our leaves interact rather interestingly with Peter Schoeffer's known practices as printer and publisher. They represent different forms of waste: the first leaf was discarded because it was fouled; the second because it was a trial. Schoeffer must have had many such waste leaves lying in his baskets. He found uses for them, as Vera Sack showed in an insightful article on the early German book trade.²¹ She demonstrated that Schoeffer had at least some of his books bound before sale incorporating printers' waste from his workshop, identifying by this means at least two Mainz binders who were given employment by Schoeffer. She counted a total of ninety-eight bindings (enclosing 133 editions and four manuscripts) associable by their stamps with these men for the years between 1465 and 1510. Some of these contain waste sheets from Schoeffer's printing house.²²

This brings us to the question of which book it was that once had our fragments for pastedowns or flyleaves—which book was it that John Russell purchased in Antwerp in 1472? Peter Schoeffer's known practice of reusing his waste sheets would mean that the obvious place to look in the college library would be among other Schoeffer imprints. And that quickly settles the question, since in the library there is only one, and it is a copy of the very same edition of Jerome's *Epistolae*.

¹⁷ Hellinga, 'Peter Schoeffer and his Organization', esp. pp. 98–9.

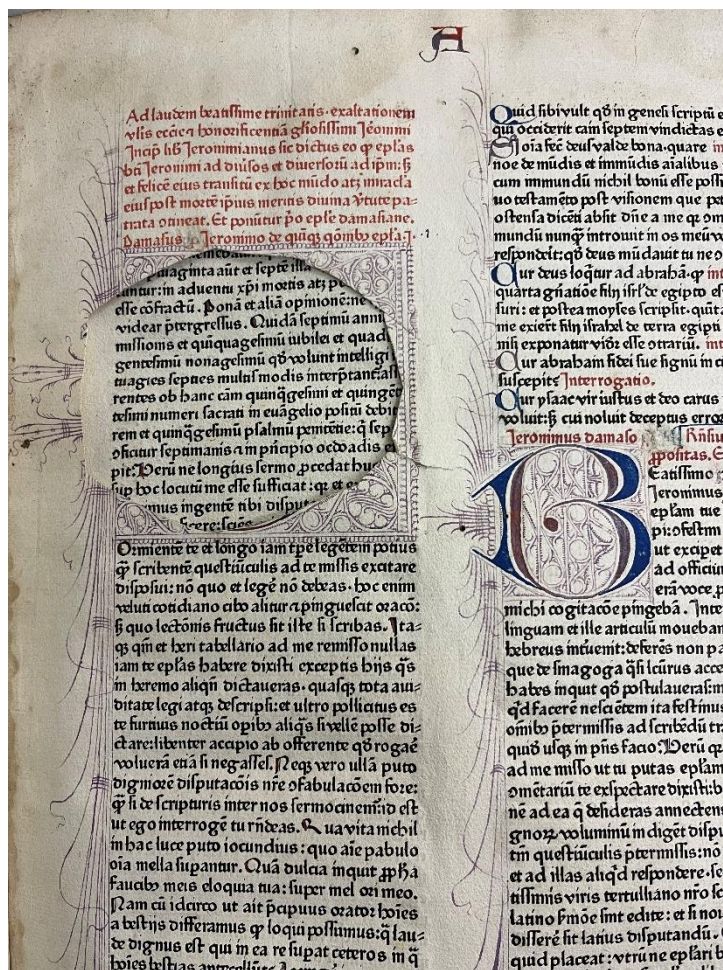
¹⁸ Hellinga, 'Editing Texts', pp. 141–2.

¹⁹ For this advertisement sheet see Hellinga, 'Editing Texts', p. 141 n. 22.

²⁰ Hellinga, 'Editing Texts', pp. 140–49.

²¹ Vera Sack, 'Über Verlegereinbände und Buchhandel Peter Schöffers', in *Börsenblatt für den Deutschen Buchhandel—Frankfurter Ausgabe* 27 (1971), 2775–94; also in *Archiv für Geschichte des Buchwesens* 13 (1972–3), cols. 249–88.

²² *ibid.* cols. 252, 255, and table, 267–87. Lotte Hellinga subsequently reworked and extended Vera Sack's material to reveal the development of Schoeffer's business: see her 'Peter Schoeffer and the Book-Trade in Mainz', extended in her *Incunabula in Transit: People and Trade* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), pp. 89–125 and appendices, pp. 406–52, which includes a chronological arrangement of 205 bindings by the main Mainz binders.



The first page of the New College copy of the 1470 Jerome, showing an excised initial
New College Library, Oxford, BT1.16.1 [detail]

This copy (Rhodes 914) is kept at BT1.16.1. It is on paper and of the first issue. It lacks the first leaves and therefore does not have the tell-tale prologue addressed to ‘Omnibus ecclesiastici ordinis deuotis zelatoribus veritatis’; but the colophon has the crucial variant ‘Initiare’ where the second issue has ‘principare’. The major initial *D* has been excised; very probably it was historiated with a painted (not woodcut) image of Jerome and the lion, as is found in other copies. Each of the new distinctions lettered A–O into which Brielis divided his edition thematically begins with a large, hand-drawn lombard, done in blue and red ink with very elaborate penwork flourishing in violet ink. Other lombards are plain, blue or red, and range from three to five lines. Lotte Hellinga kindly identifies this decoration for us as ‘a splendid example of one of the main flourishes in Mainz’.²³ So this copy does not belong to that half of the output which Schoeffer left undecorated for export. We should be justified in thinking that the volume was also bound by one of Schoeffer’s collaborating artisans. The present binding of reversed calf over pasteboard is instead typical Oxford work of the early 17th century, probably by Robert Barnes (*d.* 1631), who worked on many other volumes in the library. The copy is bound as one volume, not two.²⁴ It makes a book on an enormous scale, with internal measurements of 453 × 320 × 135 mm. This Imperial format is, of course, the same for the fragments, and these were never folded. It is a further sign that the fragments and the book belong together.

²³ See further her ‘Peter Schoeffer and his Organization’, figs. 9, 14B, 19.

²⁴ Hellinga, ‘Peter Schoeffer and his Organization’, p. 101 n. 4, points out that when in a contemporary binding, the edition is bound in one volume in all but two copies. When rebound in the 18th or 19th centuries, it was invariably divided over two volumes.

Bringing these two damaged fragments back to the College's copy of the 1470 Jerome offers conclusions of unexpected value to bibliographical research. First, it advances understanding of this celebrated incunabular edition, not only in that these are unreported leaves, but they are leaves printed on vellum. Pairing them with the surviving volume brings Russell's purchase note into play and offers the earliest such note for this edition, putting a copy, impressively, at Antwerp just twenty months after publication. For the local scene, this scenario opens a prospect that other books at the College might belong to Russell's famous generosity. We have seen that he was thanked for his donation of 105 books, of which eight manuscripts and five printed books survive. It is a poor remnant, but this story encourages us to consider that other books from his gift may well still be in College ownership, unnoticed because they have lost the flyleaves or pastedowns on which he wrote his name.

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