Culture in Pieces

From 20th to 23rd September 2006 a conference was held in Oxford under the title ‘Culture in Pieces’, organised by two classical tutors at Christ Church, Dr. Richard Rutherford and Dr. Dirk Obbink. The opening and closing sessions were held in the splendid setting of Christ Church’s Upper Library; the intervening sessions took place in the Harris Lecture Theatre, Oriel College. (A special exhibition of early books and manuscripts from the Christ Church collection, as well as a selection of papyri, was organised in the Library to accompany the conference. This exhibition and the nature of the papyri found at Oxyrhynchus are further described elsewhere in the Newsletter.)

The aim of the conference was to celebrate the scholarly achievements of Professor Peter J. Parsons, FBA, just before his 70th birthday on 24th September 2006. Peter Parsons is a former undergraduate and graduate student at the House, and for many years taught generations of classicists Greek language and literature, not as a full-time tutor but as a side-interest while he was University Lecturer in Papyrology. Subsequently he was appointed Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford, arguably the most distinguished professorial chair in Greek in the world. He held that office from 1989 to 2003. Since his retirement he remains a warm and much-valued presence in the Oxford academic community.

Cataloguing the Music Collection

If you should happen to find someone in the Library poring over a volume of very old music, don’t be surprised. Christ Church has one of the most famous and important historic music collections in Britain, rich above all in English and Italian music of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. So important is the collection that it has been microfilmed in its entirety, and copies of the films are lodged in libraries around the world. Throughout the year, a steady stream of researchers calls to consult the books in person.

Important as it is, the collection is also frankly something of a muddle. Three different bequests brought all this music to Christ Church, and over the years everything has been merged together. Some items were donated by Henry Aldrich, dean of Christ Church around 1700. Some were given by a pair of eighteenth-century organists, father and son, both called Richard Goodson. And some were transferred from Christ Church Cathedral for safe keeping. Inevitably, researchers often ask about the provenance of the music they consult – how it reached Christ Church, and who owned it before we did. Partly in order to answer their questions, a major research project into the history of the collection is now in progress.

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Historiated initial in Giacomo Carissimi, *In un mar di pensieri*. (Mus. 947, ff.37r)
The results can be viewed on our new online Music Catalogue (http://www2.chch.ox.ac.uk/library/music/).

Not only does this describe the volumes themselves – their contents and their physical characteristics; it also tries to explain how each item came to Christ Church. Moreover, the Catalogue faces up to the fact that many of our music ‘books’ are in fact miscellanies, randomly assembled from loose sheets and fascicles, often by well-meaning librarians whose main concern was to protect precious papers, rather than to keep bequests separate from one another. Thus two sheets bound adjacently in a guardbook may have reached us by quite different routes. The Music Catalogue aims to investigate every item in the collection, no matter how large or small, and to tell their individual stories.

Take, for instance, two sets of books that are now placed side by side. The first, Mus. 979-83, is probably the most important item of music we own: unique handwritten copies of pieces by Tallis, Byrd, Sheppard and their contemporaries, dating from around 1580; it was given to us by Aldrich.

Or take the folder of music that’s now called Mus. 1215. It looks like a single volume, but in fact it contains eleven separate manuscripts, each of which has its own story to tell. The first is nothing less than an autograph manuscript by Henry Purcell. Beside it is a song by his friend and colleague John Blow, but this turns out to be only half of a torn sheet; the other half is bound into a completely different volume. These two manuscripts probably once belonged to Aldrich, but deeper in the folder there’s music by the elder Goodson (including a nonsense-song, ‘Hi jinko brisco alphonzo’). As so often in the music collection, materials originally from the Aldrich and Goodson bequests have been merged.

In short: making sense of the music at Christ Church is a bit like trying to solve three different jigsaw puzzles simultaneously, with all the pieces muddled together, and without pictures on the box-lids to hint at the solutions. The Online Catalogue will eventually sort it all out, but it’s a painfully slow process that calls for constant revision and refinement. And here, technology proves to be a godsend. Unlike a printed catalogue, a Web-based resource such as this one can be (and is) tweaked and updated almost daily, as new facts and interpretations come to light. Moreover, being Web-based, it can be (and is) consulted daily by researchers around the world, who send in news and views that help to refine the results.

You can access the Music Catalogue from the Christ Church Library homepage. To see catalogue entries for the items discussed above, select ‘Browse’ from the banner at the top of the Web page, and under ‘shelfmark’, type in the relevant call-number (such as ‘979’ or ‘1215’). Live links are highlighted in red, and they allow you to move across a vast spider’s-web of interconnected pages, all of which ultimately lead to the Catalogue’s inner sanctum: pages-in-progress that attempt to list all the items that came from Aldrich, from the Goodsons, or from the Cathedral. To see what’s been added to the Catalogue most recently, select ‘News’ from the banner at the top of the page. Underpinning the whole project is a miracle of sophisticated software design, involving three interlinked databases. It was devised in-House by Matthew Phillips, one of our own former librarians. But that’s a story for another Newsletter....

John Milsom
He has been editor and Director of the Oxyrhynchus Papyri, a long-running British Academy project, for decades, and has done work of fundamental importance in editing and commenting on new texts, among them important finds such as Callimachus' *Aetia* and Simonides' Platanean elegies (the latter were displayed in the exhibition).

In collaboration with his predecessor in the Regius Chair, Sir Hugh Lloyd-Jones, he edited the volume *Supplementum Hellenisticum*, which transformed the study of three centuries of Greek poetry. This is not to mention his supervision of numerous graduates, or his many years of devoted service as a member of key committees in Oxford and as Chairman of the Faculty Board at a turbulent time. It was widely felt, and not only in Oxford, that he deserves the tribute of a celebratory conference and a Festschrift.

The conference assembled an international team of scholars who are either former pupils or colleagues of Prof. Parsons, and who all share a deep respect for his work.

The title of the conference, 'Culture in Pieces' (a quotation from the structuralist critic Roland Barthes), alluded to the problems of reconstitution of tattered papyri and reconstruction of historical and cultural contexts from fragmentary evidence. Many though not all contributors tackled specifically papyrological topics, but the general aim was more broadly conceived: to consider how the discovery of new evidence, especially new literary texts, has fertilised or enlarged the study of older evidence, either by setting the old in new light, or by enabling us to ask new questions.

All the papers were new; some thematic groupings (especially questions of general interpretation, the study of Menander and his contemporaries, the nature of Alexandrian poetry, and the influence of the key figure Callimachus) provided a structure for the conference, and the quality both of the papers and of the subsequent discussions was extremely high. Many members of the Classics faculty attended, as did scholars and graduate students from Oxford and elsewhere.

A high point of the conference was the celebratory dinner in the Hall of Christ Church, attended by some 70 scholars and friends. Dr. Richard Rutherford gave a eulogy of the guest of honour, and Professor Colin Austin of Cambridge (formerly a Senior Scholar of Christ Church, and a friend of Peter Parsons for 40 years) recited a poem composed by himself in ancient Greek, praising Professor Parsons as *tôn papurologôn promos* ('supreme among papyrologists').

This poem had been printed on the programme of events, but an additional surprise for the honorand was the sudden revelation that a text of it had been put on an actual piece of papyrus (shown above) in a hand imitating the lettering style of a scribe from the 3rd century AD, a period from which Peter Parsons himself has studied and published many texts. After this had been presented by the scribe, Dr. Revel Coles, Professor Parsons himself spoke with characteristic wit and elegance about his career, recalling the eccentricities and achievements of his mentors and dwelling on the debts he owed to many friends past and present. All those present will remember the occasion, and the guest of honour, with pleasure and affection.

Richard Rutherford

Exhibitions in the Upper Library

The Upper Library is not only a magnificent reading room, nearly 150 feet long and containing over 100,000 early printed books. It can also be a natural gallery bringing important, literary works to a wide audience.

In terms of exhibitions, this academic year has started on the 9 September with the launch of *Stephen Darlington - 21 Years of Music at Christ Church*, an exhibition containing manuscripts and early printed music from the collections of Christ
Church Library connected to the cathedral Choir discography.

Similar to what we did last year, we shall continue hosting a series of exhibitions showcasing some of the finest material from our unique collections. Each display will focus on one of the Library’s many treasures or an area of topical interest.

Currently on show is Culture in Pieces, an exhibition of papyri, manuscripts and early printed editions containing Greek literary texts.

This exhibition (open from 20 September) accompanied the conference celebrating the scholarly achievement of Professor Peter Parsons. The material on display illustrates problems of reconstitution of historical and cultural contexts from fragmentary evidence, especially new literary texts.

In the second part of Michaelmas term we plan an exhibition on Books of Hours. Beautifully illuminated and cherished by kings, well educated and poor people alike, these prayer books were genuine bestsellers, and as a consequence they can reveal a great deal about the times and people who created them.

To see what’s on, keep an eye on the posters in the library. For details about each exhibition, as ever, you will find explanatory leaflets.

We look forward to your visits.

Cristina Neagu

Opening hours: 9am - 12pm; 2pm - 5pm.

PAPYRI IN ‘WASTE PAPER CITY’

The University of Oxford is home to the largest collection of papyri in the world. More than 100,000 fragments of ancient books and documents, published and unpublished, are housed in the Papyrology Rooms adjacent to the Sackler Library. This article gives a brief account of the fascinating story of their discovery.

By the time of the Middle Ages the use of papyrus as a writing material was largely forgotten. So much so, that the word ‘papyrus’ was used to denote the writing material most familiar to us today: paper.

The discovery of several hundred ancient papyrus rolls in the site of Herculaneum (modern Ercolano) in Italy in 1752 caused a stir in Europe.

The discovery was fascinating as it was frustrating. The rolls had survived because they were buried in ash during the eruption of Vesuvius in AD 79. For the same reason they were carbonized and could not be unrolled without breaking to pieces.

Isolated discoveries of papyri from Egypt made their way to Europe later in the 18th century. But the scale of the finds reached a new level in the later 19th century, when the sites of ancient settlements began to be dug up by Egyptian farmers and their soil removed to be used as fertilizer. While digging for fertile earth (sebakh), the farmers came across fragmented papyrus manuscripts, for which they found there was an eager market. Papyri such as the ones bearing Aristotle's Athenain Politeia and the poems of Herodas, published by F. G. Kenyon in 1891, come from this early stage of recovery.

It was not until the winter of 1895/6 that the first organized excavation for the recovery of papyri took place. With the financial support of The Egypt Exploration Fund (now Egypt Exploration Society), B. P. Grenfell and A. S. Hunt, both of Queen’s College, Oxford, set out to excavate for material from Graeco-Roman Egypt.

They started work in the Fayum, an area that had yielded important finds in the previous years. The rewards were plenty, but in the next year they moved to the site of ancient Oxyrhynchus, on the edge of the western desert 120 miles south of Cairo.

They knew Oxyrhynchus to have been a nome capital in antiquity and thus likely to have been the abode of people rich enough to own libraries of literary texts. Moreover it was an early centre where Christianity had thrived, and thus expected to yield manuscripts of Christian literature earlier than the fourth century AD, the date of the earliest codices of the New Testament.

After initial disappointment with the remains of the town and the cemeteries, Grenfell and Hunt turned to the ancient rubbish-mounds. Although reluctant at first, they were quickly met with a flow of papyri that
soon became 'a torrent it was difficult to keep pace with'. One of the first pieces to turn up was a sheet of papyrus containing the famous 'Sayings of Jesus', published as P.Oxy. I 1. For a number of years Grenfell and Hunt worked at a phenomenal rate, excavating in Egypt in the winter, deciphering, translating and commenting on the texts for the remainder of the year. The first 17 volumes of *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* (1898–1927) bear the names of one or both of them. Their work inaugurated a new era for Classical scholarship, with the recovery of many literary and theological pieces that were otherwise lost.

Grenfell and Hunt left Egypt in 1907 with the intention of returning in 1909. But the winter of 1906/7 turned out to be their last season of excavation. Grenfell became ill in the following year and the excavation was abandoned. Hunt continued to produce editions of the papyri discovered until 1927 and was succeeded in the effort by E. Lobel, C. H. Roberts, E. G. Turner and P. J. Parsons. As Turner has remarked: 'the papyrological posterity of Grenfell and Hunt can only wonder at the speed with which publications on such a scale and of such authority were issued, especially when it is recalled that between 1891 and 1907 in only one year (1897/8) were Grenfell and Hunt not excavating in Egypt throughout the winter'.

Pelaghia Strataki
Classics Centre, Oxford

## Early Printed Books Cataloguing

**Update**

The cataloguing of the Wake Collection has continued through the summer, and with it, various things of interest have come to light. While there have been no provenances as illustrious as John Dee, whose books I reported last time, there are some more closely associated with Archbishop Wake himself. These include a letter of dedication and a letter of recommendation, each bound with the work being presented.

The first is a letter dated December 17th, 1717, from Thomas Dawson. Dawson’s *Suspiria sacra: or, The Church of Englands memorial: with an admonition to Jesuits and their patrons, extracted out of the statute law* (WT.7.42(6)) has Wake as its dedicatee, and the manuscript letter bound with the item asks Wake’s pardon for having dedicated the work to him without asking first: “My Lord, what I now presume to lay before Your Grace, is, by far the greatest part of it, supported already by the express authorities of Bishop Stillingfleet, Dr. South, the Statute Law, & the late representation made by the Lower House of Convocation. And therefore, as I hope this will plead my excuse, in not troubling Your Grace with this matter before: so nothing else should have embolden’d me to have crav’d Your Grace’s patronage, in so publick a manner, of what is here offer’d, in defence of our excellent Constitution, by, […] Thomas Dawson.”

The second letter, from Thomas Strange, dated 15th May 1719, has been bound with an anonymous work on numerology, *The mysteries of God finished: or an essay toward the opening of the mystery of the mystical numbers in the Scriptures, by the Scriptures, without the help of human history* (WT.8.30(1)). Strange writes six pages of enthusiastic recommendation of the book to Wake, beginning: “Such momentous matters swell the following sheets, & bear such a near relation to religious concerns, that I could not think their perusall would be indiscretion in your Lordship. I shall just intimate that it contains a deep progress into Daniel’s mysterious writings […] The author seems to advance boldly into the obscure proceedings of Providence, & abstruse declarations of the will of God, which must either be accounted & ascribed to his great attainments in learning or supernaturall information.” Sadly there are no marginal annotations in Wake’s hand, so if he did read the book, he does not appear to have been quite so taken with it as Mr Strange.

Some interesting bindings have also been recorded over the last couple of months. One, in black
morocco with gilt tooling, bears the royal arms of Queen Anne (Wa.7.34). Such bindings appear to be fairly uncommon, and it was probably produced by a London binder; it seems a fitting cover for a book entitled A collection of the several statutes, and parts of statutes, now in force, relating to high treason, and misprision of high treason. A rather different style of binding has made a few appearances not just in Wake’s collection, but in other collections within the library: a distinctive swirling pattern scraped into red paint on paper, over pasteboards (Wa.7.29). This type of binding probably dates from the 18th century.

Of the many volumes of pamphlets present in the Wake collection, one recently catalogued work stands out. Printed in around 1710, probably in London, the short work by John Catel, entitled Conscientiæ equuleus: or, A faithful relation of the proceedings of the Inquisition at Granada, the chancery of Spain, concerning a man called Isaac (Wb.6.5(16)), gives a personal account of a man caught up in the Inquisition. The work is extremely rare, but also remarkable for its detailed description and intimate narration of how the author, disturbed by the sight of the execution of a fellow Protestant, confided his own faith to an acquaintance who then betrayed him. He was seized and questioned by the Inquisition, and recounts the questions put to him, together with his answers. His punishment included 200 stripes. “After they had given my my cane, hat and perrewig, I went out at the great Gate of the Inquisition all alone […]. I had much ado to walk; and tho’ I was fasting, and very sober, yet I made false steps in the streets, like a drunken man.” Following fourteen months of imprisonment in a cloister, Catel then escaped from Spain, and eventually made his way to England, where he wrote down his story.

Finally, a pamphlet with the title Essex’s innocency and honour vindicated: or, Murther, subornation, perjury, and oppression, justly charg’d on the murtherers of that noble lord and true patriot, Arthur (late) Earl of Essex, printed in 1690, is illustrated with an engraved frontispiece of the murder scene that shows the positions of the dead Earl and the razor used to commit the crime (Wb.6.2(38)).

These are just a few of the many delights that are now accessible to a wider audience as a result of being electronically catalogued. Although the Early Printed Books Project is undergoing staff changes at present, with Elizabeth Matthew having moved to New College earlier in the summer (though she remains a part of the Project at All Souls), and my leaving this month to take up a position as Assistant Librarian in Rare Books at the Bodleian, new members of staff will be joining the project in January, and will continue to unearth things worthy of wider attention.

Francesca Galligan
Early Printed Books Project

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