The *Aeschylus* of Richard Porson

Among the treasures of the library of Christ Church is an edition of the seven preserved plays of Aeschylus, the earliest of the great Athenian writers of tragedy. This folio volume, published in Glasgow, 1795, by the Foulis ('fowls') Press, a distinguished publisher of classical and other works, contains the Greek text of the plays, presented in the most uncompromising manner. I propose first to describe this extraordinary volume and then to look at its place in the history of classical scholarship. The book contains a title page in classical Greek, an ancient life of Aeschylus in Greek, and 'hypotheses' or summaries of the plays, some in Greek and some in Latin. Then comes the text of all the plays, with no indication of the name of the editor and no commentary, index, or *apparatus criticus*. Importantly, the volume is printed on Large Paper. A lengthy critique of this edition appeared in *The Monthly Review*, vol. 19, February 1796, 121-136, signed 'Dr. C. B…y,' in manuscript hand, written on a copy of the journal, not in letterpress.

*continued on page 5*

**CATALOGUING ‘Z’ - EARLY PRINTED PAMPHLETS**

It is often asserted that an individual is that which they eat. Whether or not this is true in a literal sense, the diet to which one adheres has certain, predictable effects on one's physiology. As a result, the food we consume can affect our day to day life in respect to our energy levels, our size, our demeanour, and our overall health. And, also as a result, this affects how we address the world, it affects our outlook on life and how we interact with others. This is all circling back around so that I can ask the question: are we also that which we read? To an extent, a person in their early years likely does not have the monetary or intellectual freedom to choose the books in their own library, but, as with the formative meals selected by their parents, they are certainly influenced by the reading prescribed for them by others, presumably with the notion that the ideas within will mould and nourish the individual and contribute their becoming a well-rounded (and well-fed?) adult. As our hypothetical person-in-question matures, they begin to choose their own library with

*continued on page 2*
as much care as their diet (and possibly with even more care), paying closer attention to what they consume and how well or not it is, well, … digested; which, in turn, further shapes and ultimately reflects the person and their world views.

Volumes in the ‘Z’ pamphlet collection. The instrument seen on the left of the top shelf is a datalogger monitoring the environmental conditions in the room.

So, how does this simile of culinary proportions relate to the ‘Z’ Pamphlet Collection? The cataloguing of the pamphlets in the basement was originally taken on by the Early Printed Books Project with the expectations that the materials housed within were widely duplicated in other Christ Church Library collections considered to be more important.

The collection, itself, is one of the youngest at the library, a ‘catch-all’ collection, comprised of donations which did not fit logically within the more prominent collections and has been continually added to over the years. While it is true that a considerable percentage of the titles are extant in prominent collections living in the library, this collection proved to hold 61 items printed between 1641 and 1800 that are unique to Christ Church.

As well, and much more often than anticipated, it spawned an impressive number of records for items printed between 1641 and 1800 that were yet unknown to the English Short Title Catalogue (ESTC), an occurrence far less common as the ESTC, in its advanced stage, nears completion. More to the point, however, the cataloguing also yielded some surprises in terms of provenance.

Most important to Christ Church, perhaps, is the revelation of a personal collection of books once owned by William Wake. Not the Archbishop Wake for whose book collection Christ Church Library is well known, but Colonel William Wake (1628–1705), the Archbishop’s father and a staunch royalist army officer.

‘Z’ has many examples of pamphlets adorned with Wake’s signature and notes in his hand, as well as pamphlets that were mailed to him, bearing evidence of his address in Dorset.

Another personal collection of note is that of a Bodleian sub-librarian and ecclesiastical historian, Henry Cotton (1790–1879), who was a student and eventually treasurer of Christ Church. There are 26 instances of his hand at the head of pamphlet title pages, providing an introductory picture of Cotton’s personal library and, possibly, of the interests which contributed to his acquisitions.

There is also a large set of volumes contained within ‘Z’ once owned by Joseph Jekyll Rye (1760-1819) of Pembroke College, later Vicar of Dallington and Chaplain to William, Lord Cathcart, and a pamphlet bearing the bookplate of John Hollis, Duke of Newcastle (1662-1711).

More satisfying, to me at least, are the small, seemingly insignificant discoveries. One such is a unique 17th century pamphlet introducing the Penny Post to London¹. There is a devotional pamphlet by a

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¹ See John Wing’s ‘A postal Item of 1689’, pp. 4-5
widow, Elizabeth Redford, with manuscript in an unidentified hand addressing it to Archbishop Wake and marginal notes containing a description of Redford, and an appeal to the Archbishop for him to acknowledge her works, complete with directions how and where she was to be located.

Handwritten letters have been found, as well, such as one from within the pamphlet at shelfmark Z.195/15 written by Henry Mills, Master of the Croydon School, to Archbishop Wake nominating one Arthur Bedford for the position of usher of the school. The letter has been added by the archivist of Christ Church to the last volume of Wake’s letters (MS 243).

The ‘Z’ Pamphlet collection consists largely of 18th century monographs, with a much smaller percentage from the Wing era (1641-1700) and a nominal few pamphlets from the STC period (1474-1640), which is to say that most of what has been processed in this project has also been matched to records in the ESTC, and, as mentioned above, reported to the ESTC when an extant record was not found in the ESTC database.

Of the pamphlets catalogued, a large percentage have been sermons, including many preached to and published for the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. There are also numerous pamphlets relating to Huguenots in the early 18th century, the vast and ongoing debate regarding religious dissenters, the French revolution and its subsequent conflicts, and the questions of Irish independence and Catholic Emancipation nearing the turn of and on into the 19th century. The pamphlets are either bound into volumes or kept loosely in numbered archival boxes, with a widely varying number of pamphlets per binding or box. There are a few exceptions of individually bound and completely unbound items.

Though the numbering sequence runs from 1 through 361 (i.e. Z.1/1 or Z.361/14) for pamphlets which fall within the scope of the cataloguing project, there are administrative vacancies between 122 to 159, 167 to 169, 258, 262 to 269, and 330 to 349, inclusive. As matter of course, all details of bindings, bookplates, provenance, imperfections, and any other pertinent data were recorded in OLIS holdings records. As well, the information was recorded in an electronic shelflist which was compiled concurrently, based on both the former shelflist and what was found physically present on the shelves.

So, that all was dry and technical, but what of the marvellous, un-homogenized history therein? Alas, I am the bibliographer, so it is not for me to digest, as delectable a prospect as that may be. It is within my purview to find and recognize the tools of historians, and, then, to describe them in such a way that their presence and their relevance, to those whose purpose it is to digest, are apparent.

And now, I move on to the Hyperôôn collection of pamphlets to assess the parchment-bound, idea-filled diets once consumed by the likes of Church of England clergymen, Lewis Atterbury, and noted Quaker, Francis Bugg. Sounds like an interesting meal.
A POSTAL ITEM OF 1689

I was so intrigued by the handwritten ‘6’ appearing before ‘Dorsetshire’ in the illustration of Z.47/46 in Maria Franchini and David Stumpp’s excellent article ‘Habemus patrem: the lost William Wake’ that I had to examine the work.

It is *His Majesties [William III] ... Speech ... to Parliament ... 19th October 1689*. The text of the speech [A2] precedes and is still attached to the title-page [A1] on the verso of which is William Wake’s address as illustrated.

The address would have been written by the printer/bookseller and the whole then delivered to the General Post Office in Lombard Street with the last page (A2 verso) of the text of the speech facing the recto of the title-page so that the address on the verso was visible. There the receiving officer ‘S.A.’, who should be identifiable from the records at the British Postal Museum and Archive, date stamped it ‘OC 24[1689]’ and wrote ‘6’ and ‘Blanford’ by the address which indicated that the officer at Blandford Forum had to collect sixpence from the addressee on delivery. He then stamped it with his initials ‘S.A.’

Sixpence was the official rate for delivering a double-sheet over 80 miles from London. There were higher rates for Scotland and Ireland. Threepence was the rate for a single sheet over 80 miles and twopence for a single sheet up to 80 miles although within London itself, between 1680 and 1682, William Dockwra’s penny-post was undercutting the General Post Office by 50 per cent until it was curtailed for infringing the Crown’s monopoly.

For a history of the Royal Mail see *Masters of the Post* (Allen Lane, 2011) by Duncan Campbell-Smith who is a former Postmaster of Merton College. On page 8 of this work we are reminded of the story about our founder, Cardinal Wolsey, which runs as follows:

In 1507 the ageing Henry VII wanted to send an important set of papers to the Emperor Maximilian, then staying with his court in the Low Countries. The King turned to a young Court chaplain whose initiative had been highly recommended.

The young man dashed off from the English Court at Richmond-on-Thames, travelled via Gravesend, Dover, Calais to the Emperor’s entourage and then dashed back by the same route – all within eighty hours.

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When Henry emerged from the royal bedchamber for early morning Mass, he found Wolsey in the corridor and ticked him off sharply for not having left yet. He was astounded to hear the young man reply that he had been and come back. ‘The King being in a great confusion and wonder of his hasty speed, with ready furniture of all his proceedings, dissembled all his imaginations and wonder in that matter.’

But he was mightily impressed—and promptly appointed the winged chaplain Dean of Lincoln. Thus began the worldly career of the future Cardinal Wolsey.

John Wing
Christ Church Library, 1962-1995

The Aeschylus of Richard Porson
continued from page 1

The author was Charles Burney (1757-1818), a profound scholar of Aeschylus. The reviewer writes, ‘It has been stated to us that Mr. Porson, the Greek professor at Cambridge, is the editor; and, from the internal evidence, there seems no reason to doubt the information. ‘This very handsome and well printed book appears without the name of any editor in the title, without a line of preface, without a single note, without the scholia, and without the fragments.

[...] The learned world, indeed, have for many years been in expectation of an Eschylus [sic] from the Glasgow press, printed by Foullis, from a copy corrected by Mr. Porson. It was originally intended, if our memory be correct, to have appeared in pocket volumes, and to have contained the scholia, the fragments, and notes, besides the plays. [...] Instead of them, this folio edition of the seven plays has arrived in London, in this bare and unadorned state: an edition which cannot be used, even by scholars, without much difficulty, from the want of notes. [...] The loss of the notes is irreparable. In looking over this volume, we have discovered an infinite number of new readings; but [...] it is impossible to trace these admitted lections to their source. Indeed, we have never read a single page, nor turned to a single passage, without lamenting this deprivation.’

Burney’s complaint is well justified, for the textual tradition of Aeschylus is frustratingly imperfect, and any editor must grapple with errors and omissions. Having deplored the lack of critical notes in this edition, Burney completes his review of the book with a rather strange procedure, a minute examination of the text of a single play, the Eumenides, the third and last play in the ‘Oresteia’ trilogy. His critique includes much valuable comment on readings and interpretations by earlier editors.

To turn to the book itself. The press was now managed by Andrew Foulis the Younger (1756-1829), the son of Robert Foulis, who with his brother Andrew had founded the famous company. The press had been in rather weak financial condition and finally closed in 1800, which may well account for the remarkably low print run of this luxurious book.

Foulis printed only fifty-two copies of the regular-sized edition, which one could scarcely describe as ‘small,’ and eleven copies on Large Paper including the one at Christ Church. Regular copies have pages 36-39 cm. tall, while L.P. copies, immensely more impressive, are about 47 cm. tall and correspondingly wider.

The book that Burney reviewed was a regular copy. The type, in both regular and large paper, known as ‘double pica,’ was the same bold, virile fount earlier used by the two brothers Foulis for the printing of their complete Homer, a set often considered the masterpiece of their press. The type was the product of Alexander Wilson, who ‘applied himself to designing and producing a new fount of Greek type which was superior to anything then to be found in any printing office.’

^1 Charles Burney, a clergyman in Deptford, wrote, e.g., Testamentum criticum de metris Aeschyli (Cambridge 1809). The above mentioned manuscript note of the reviewer’s name is preserved on a microfilm of the journal, held in the library of UCLA. For details on the history of the Foulis Press, see David Murray, Robert & Andrew Foulis and the Glasgow Press (Glasgow, 1913).

^2 Iliad, 1756; Odyssey and minor poems, 1758. For details see Murray (as in n. 1), 26-28.
^4 Murray, ibid., 27.
Foulis arranged a specially elegant feature for this book. John Flaxman (1755-1826), the sculptor, had just returned from years of study and practice in Italy, and Foulis engaged him to design thirty drawings, or plates, illustrating characters and scenes from the seven plays; Flaxman also elegantly decorated the title page.

The first in the series of plates by Flaxman.

The plates, at all times suffused with the dignity and stature of classical Greek art, abound in calm and open air, even when the scene is tragic or violent. Some copies of the Foulis Homer also had subsequent illustrations by Flaxman.

Each numbered plate contains, at the bottom, one or two lines of translation, probably chosen by Flaxman, from the relevant play of Aeschylus. The words on each plate come from the first complete translation of Aeschylus into English, by the clergyman Robert Potter (1721-1804).

The translations, in stately, powerful English poetry, were still printed as standard versions even down to 1938. The first plate, for example, from 'Prometheus Chain'd,' shows the demigod being bound to a rock at the end of the world in remote Scythia by the two frightening characters Strength and Force, with the help of the forger god Hephaestus, here called Vulcan. Strength orders Vulcan, 'Bind them [chains] around his hands, with all thy force' (Prometheus, line 55), as Prometheus recoils in terror.

The thirteenth, illustrating The Persians, shows a woman, representing Asia after the defeat of Persia in the Persian War, alone and slumped in sadness, with the words, 'And Asia sinking on her knee, Oppress'd, with griefs oppress'd, bends to the earth' (Persians, line 929).

Plate 2 in the 1795 edition: Force, Prometheus, Vulcan, Strength.

These thirty plates were originally done for, and dedicated to, the Dowager Countess Spencer. Flaxman’s original drawings are bound into the Large Paper copy of Porson’s Aeschylus, now at the University of Manchester in the John Rylands Library, whose nucleus was the library of John Charles Spencer, third Earl (1742-1845), better known as Lord Althorp. His collection was deemed ‘the finest private library in Europe’ (Enc. Britannica, ed. 11). This volume is universally recognized as the supreme copy of the book and ‘is beyond doubt one of the most splendid and interesting books in Europe’ (Dibdin).

One cannot do better than quote Dibdin in his description of Flaxman’s plates: ‘In these lovely designs, in outline – and in which we fancy the spirit of ancient Greek art to be revived – we may discover all the rifacimenti of the original pencil: all that sweetness and softness which are necessarily lost in the uniform and harsher strokes of the burin.’

I have been able to discover twenty-six of the original fifty-two regular copies of the Aeschylus, including one in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, and five of the original eleven L.P. copies: at Christ Church, the British Library, the John Rylands Library in Manchester, the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, and one in the library of a collector in America.

Flaxman’s drawings of scenes from Aeschylus were the basis for engravings made, under Flaxman’s

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6 The Tragedies of Aeschylus Translated (Norwich, Crouse, ‘in the Market-Place,’ 1777).
7 On Potter, see David Stoker in ODNB.
8 The Rev. Thomas Frognall Dibdin, An Introduction to the Knowledge of Rare Editions of the Greek and Latin Classics etc. (ed. 4, London 1827) 1.242. Dibdin (1776-1847) became cataloguer of the Spencer library. His Introduction remains the bible for knowledge of older editions of the classics.
9 T.F. Dibdin, Aedes Althorpianae; or An Account of the Mansion, Books, and Pictures at Althorp etc. (London 1822) 124.
supervision, by the Roman engraver Tommaso Piroli (1750?-1824). His engravings were used to make the plates. Purchasers of the Foulis Aeschyli could buy the book with the plates in both regular and L.P. copies. Regular copies, without the plates, retailed at three guineas (I do not know the extra cost for copies with plates). L.P. copies cost ten guineas, or £20 with the plates. Before 1800 this was serious money.

The extra expense for the plates apparently deterred most buyers from ordering them. I know of nine regular copies with plates and seventeen, including the Bodleian copy, without them. Four of the five known L.P. copies, including that at Christ Church, have the plates, which are notably absent in the British Library’s L.P. copy (the BL also has two regular copies, one with plates). As one might expect, there are copies in the universities of Scotland (Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow). In America, I know of ten regular copies, including one owned by me.

The editor, as we have seen, was the Professor of Greek at Cambridge, Richard Porson (1759-1808), who ranks with Richard Bentley (1662-1742), also of Cambridge, as one of the two most celebrated classical scholars of Britain. But the history of this edition is not the simple one in which a scholar decides to edit a text and then does it.

In fact, we must discuss two editions of Aeschylus by Porson. We begin with 1806. In that year appeared a complete text of Aeschylus, in two octavo volumes, with this on the title page: Aeschyli Tragediae Septem, cum Versione Latina. Volumen I [II]. Glasgowæ. Excudebat Foulis, M. DCC, LXXXXIV. Volumen I [II]. Septem, cum Versione Latina.

The editor, as we have seen, was Porson. We begin with 1806. In that year appeared a complete text of Aeschylus, with a Latin translation, in 1794; and that copies were now sold, in 1806, in London and Oxford. Even here the name of the editor is missing, but it is universally accepted that he was Porson, that he edited the text in 1794 (but see infra) for the Foulis Press, and that (in the words of his excellent biographer M.L. Clarke) ‘probably he was not satisfied with his text, and was too indolent to complete the edition and too conscientious to allow it to be published in an imperfect state…eventually the booksellers insisted on the publication of the text in octavo, and it appeared, without Porson’s name, in 1806.’ Thus, in Clarke’s narrative, the edition was prepared in 1794, but copies were simply held back and not issued until 1806. The Latin translation, facing the Greek, without a translator’s name, was that of Thomas Stanley.

This generally agreed version of events has come under criticism. Bibliographic research by Marina Caputo has clarified the stages of Porson’s work on Aeschylus. In particular, a copy of the Greek text, printed in 1796, is in the Cambridge University Library. No editor is named, and there is no apparatus criticus. Clearly this was the work of Porson and is the edition that was finally issued in 1806. The date ‘1794’ on the title page of the 1806 edition (Signora Caputo concludes) is a misprint or a mistake: if an edition had really been printed in 1794, it is not obvious why Foulis should have prepared another one in 1796, the existence of which is known. In Gaskell’s bibliography to the Foulis Press, item 702 (p. 461) is: ‘Aeschylus, Tragedies, G[reek] and L[atin],’ with dates 1796, ‘1794’, 1806; and his punctuation, with its inverted commas around the year 1794, suggests that the purported printing of the edition of 1794 is of doubtful authenticity.

Denys Page (1908-1978), one of Porson’s successors in the Cambridge Greek chair, thus...
describes the smaller edition: ‘Such is the Aeschylus of Porson: an old plain text, nameless and noteless, incorporating a large number of conjectures; the blame is to be imputed as much to the negligence of Porson as to the impatience or dishonesty of his printer.’

To return to the folio edition of 1795, which is in the library of Christ Church. Clarke says of it, ‘The text, which improved on Stanley’s in many places, was presumed to be Porson’s, and later was found to agree substantially with the smaller edition [i.e. of 1806]. But the publication was unauthorised, and Porson never assumed any responsibility for it.’ Even stranger, it is said that Porson himself never submitted his text to the house of Foulis for publication: rather, Foulis published it without his knowledge. There is evidence showing that Porson ‘certainly was not pleased with the surreptitious manner’ in which this book was printed, but he was later willing to continue work on his text of Aeschylus. This all but incredible version of events is first recorded in a satiric poem, by Thomas James Mathias (1754-1835), ‘The Pursuits of Literature: A Satirical Poem,’ Part 2, ed. 3 (London 1797), lines 275-280.

‘...Though now some high imperial critics chafe, To think not Æschylus himself is safe. Go to his text: revise, digest, compare, With Porson’s shrewdness or with Valknaer’s care, Then let the learned page once quit your sight, Some Scotch Greek swindling printer steals your right.’

In a footnote, Mr. Mathias records: ‘I allude to a transaction which seems to be unwarrantable. Mr. Porson, the Greek Professor at Cambridge, lent his manuscript corrections and conjectures on the text of Aeschylus, to a friend in Scotland; for he once had, and I hope still has, an intention of publishing that tragedian, though it may now be suspended. His corrected text fell into the hands of the Scotch printer Fowlis [sic], and without the Professor’s leave or even knowledge, he published a magnificent edition of Aeschylus from it, without notes.’ This story, clearly referring to the folio edition of 1795, is repeated by Dibdin, who cites ‘The Pursuits of Literature’ as his source. But another story about the supposedly purloined text of Aeschylus is given in a short-lived classical journal, Museum Criticum or Cambridge Classical Researches.

In a survey of editions of Aeschylus, C.J. Blomfield states: ‘The fact is, that Mr. Porson furnished Foulis with a corrected copy of Pauw’s edition of Aeschylus,’ from which Foulis produced the edition of ‘1794’ (or 1796). This edition, of whichever year, is indubitably by Porson and was thus based, at least partly, on the edition of Aeschylus by the Dutch Jan Cornelis de Pauw.

This fact may be surprising, for Clarke informs us that Porson ‘had a low opinion of Pauw.’ Indeed, Pauw brought much criticism on himself through his intemperate attacks on rival scholars. But, if Blomfield is right, Porson used Pauw’s text as the basis for his new edition of the text of Stanley. In any case, one could hardly say, with Mathias, that Porson’s text ‘fell into the hands’ of the Foulis Press. There is further evidence about the history of the Greek text. Thomas Kidd, in his collection of Porson’s writings, reports on the great volume of 1795, ‘It was printed from the text of Stanley corrected by R.P. After the proofs of the first five or six plays had been regularly sent to R.P., they suddenly stopped, and, some time after, this impression came forth.’ It seems clear that the book was published without Porson’s approval.
Thus Foulis used Porson's text to produce the sumptuous folio edition of 1795, which is in the library of Christ Church. This preceded the octavo edition of 1796, which is in the Cambridge University Library. The 1795 edition is therefore Porson's first text of Aeschylus. The later two-volume octavo edition of 1796 was probably printed in only a few copies, while the official publication and sale were delayed until 1806. The octavo edition imitates the large folio volume of 1795 in wholly lacking the name of an editor. Clarke is probably right in stating that Porson took little interest in it and allowed the world to have it (as Thomas Kidd said) 'with a sort of half-faced consent.'

Such is a brief history of the great folio of 1795. This survey of the distribution of our book is not complete: other copies must survive, but at least we may say that Christ Church has a magnificent copy, perhaps surpassed only by the one in Manchester, of a spectacular monument of Scottish publishing. The book, especially to be prized in Large Paper, is the legacy, deceptively produced or not, of a Greek scholar whose reputation qualifies him as one of the few who might dare to edit the challenging, towering works of Aeschylus.

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**Selected writings on Richard Porson**


Richard Jebb on Porson in DNB.


G.V. Morson on Porson in ODNB.


*Recollections of the Table-Talk of Samuel Rogers* [1763-1855, edited by Alexander Dyce, 1798-1869]. To which is added *Porsoniana* [by William Maltby, 1763-1854] (London 1856). Some forty pages of reminiscences of the scholar, with an index to the Porsoniana.

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Portal and his mother after receiving a decoration at Buckingham Palace, 1918 (Christ Church Library, *Portal photographic album*).

A host of appointments and promotions followed during the inter-war period: he commanded 7 Sq. and worked on the refinement of bombing techniques, he was then appointed the commander of British forces in Aden in February 1934 in which he deployed airpower against recalcitrant local tribesmen, he was promoted to an Air Commodore in...
January 1935 and then an Air Vice-Marshal in July 1937 upon his appointment to the Air Ministry as Director of Organisation. On the outbreak of war in September 1939, Portal was appointed an acting Air Marshal in his position as Air Member for Personnel.

After briefly serving as Air Officer Commanding (AOC) of RAF Bomber Command from April 1940, he was appointed to the position of Chief of the Air Staff (CAS) the following October – the position which he held throughout the remainder of the war until his retirement from the RAF in August 1945, upon which he was granted the title of Baron Portal and in January 1946 he was created Viscount Portal of Hungerford.

The Collection

According to Portal’s biographer, the history of the Portal Papers is rooted in the summer of 1945 when “at the end of his time as Chief of Air Staff he knew that Churchill was preparing his war history, and he felt that it would be historically just and useful to ensure that both sides of their exchanges, and not simply Churchill’s, were available for subsequent study”. Portal had secured Cabinet Office permission to copy such of his official correspondence as he wished, and he instructed one of his staff “to select and copy the more important letters and memoranda exchanged during the war, both between himself and Churchill, and between himself and the principal RAF commanders”. Consequently, this collection presents those wartime papers which Portal had collated and subsequently bequeathed to his former college in Oxford; in depositing them at Christ Church, the former CAS expressed the wish that this collection would “save the time of some industrious historian” who would otherwise have to trawl through the huge number of Air Ministry files that are held at The National Archives, Kew. This is indeed so.

Given the history of the Portal Papers, the collection is of a decent size and of considerable scope. Contained within it, is Portal’s correspondence with the many different branches of the wartime RAF, including the AOCs of Fighter Command, Coastal Command and Transport Command (files 7, 8 and 11), as well as the Deputy Supreme Commander, Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF), Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder (file 12). However, the amount of correspondence to these commanders tends to be less in scope when compared with Portal’s letters to the successive AOCs of Bomber Command, Sir Richard Peirse and then Sir Arthur Harris (files 9-10), which are described later.

A significant area of the collection is Portal’s regular correspondence with the Prime Minister, Sir Winston Churchill (files 1-6). This correspondence covers many aspects of Britain’s entire war in the air, including fighter command, the war against the U-boats and Germany’s large capital ships, continual updates about the strength of the German Air Force, ‘Crossbow’ operations, the North African and Far Eastern arenas, and regular reports on the American bombing effort. This correspondence clearly reveals how Churchill took a close personal interest in the bombing war throughout 1942 and 1943 – as shown by such episodes as the famous thousand bomber operations of May/June 1942 (Operation Millennium) against Cologne, Essen and Bremen, or the prime minister’s recurring advocacy of bombing Berlin. Yet, it is apparent that Portal also had to reign in some of the prime minister’s wilder enthusiasms. Such examples are: the prime minister’s suggestion on 25 September 1942 as to the possible bombing of Vichy; or his suggestion of 24 April 1943 to scatter considerable quantities of delayed action bombs throughout Berlin (Operation Braddock).

However, one of the last minutes from the prime minister to Portal – and indeed, one of the most (in)famous – concerns the prime minister’s increasing concern about the whole notion of Area Bombing. This minute to the Chiefs of Staff dated 28 March 1945, and later re-drafted on 1 April owing to Portal and the Air Staff’s stringent opposition, and written during the fallout of the now infamous attack on Dresden (an operation which Churchill had certainly encouraged only two months before)

2 On 25 January 1945, Churchill wrote to Sir Archibald Sinclair, the Secretary of State for Air, about whether there existed any plan for ‘basting the Germans in their retreat from Breslau’. Sinclair replied the following day and mentioned about plans for
effectively ordered the Air Staff to order the end of the Area Bombing. Churchill wrote: "It seems to me that the moment has come when the question of the so-called "area bombing" of German cities should be reviewed from the point of view of our own interests. If we come into control of an entirely ruined land, there will be a great shortage of accommodation for ourselves and our Allies... We must see to it that our attacks do not do more harm to ourselves in the long run than they do to the enemy’s immediate war effort.”

Just like that, Churchill had effectively switched off the bombing offensive; for the remainder of the war, RAF Bomber Command fulfilled its obligations to support the final land and sea campaigns, and then embarked on Operations Manna and Exodus. But in an effort to underline his newly-found distaste for the strategic bombing of Germany, a clearly irritated Churchill confronted Portal on 19 April by asking “what was the point of going in and blowing down Potsdam?”

The Portal Papers also contain the Bomber Command Digests (files 12-13), which were weekly operation reports compiled by the Headquarters of Bomber Command at High Wycombe.

In a typical digest, a summary was given on the operations and attacks made during the previous week, together with updates on previous attacks, as well as information of a more general nature about the overall conduct of the Bomber Offensive.

For example, Bomber Command Digest No. 83 (for the Week Ending Sunday 14 November 1943) states — albeit rather optimistically — that the damage caused to German cities throughout 1943 was equivalent to the destruction of three-quarters of the built-up areas of Glasgow, Liverpool, Sheffield, Leeds, Hull, Birmingham, Manchester, Edinburgh, Bristol and Bradford. Overall, these Digests are very useful to the historian of British bomber operations during the Second World War as they illustrate the type of targets attacked, the numbers of aircraft involved, and the bomb-loads carried including the ratio between High Explosives (HE) and Incendiaries. Indeed, from such statistics, one can then work out the type of target system attacked: given the RAF’s continued commitment to area bombing, a bomb-load for a city centre target nearly always contained a higher proportion of incendiaries than HE; in contrast, communication targets (such as...
railway centres or marshalling yards), oil refineries, or special targets such as the V-weapons site at Peenemünde saw the bomb-loads consist overwhelmingly of HE because these targets needed blast bombs for their destruction rather than the fire-effect needed to incinerate city/town centres.

The Highlights

*The Portal-Harris correspondence, February 1942-March 1943: The Preliminary Phase of the Bomber Offensive*

In many ways, the correspondence between Portal and the C-in-C Bomber Command, Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Harris throughout 1942 and early-1943 reflects the many different priorities of the bomber war during that year. Consequently, the correspondence includes some of the following topics:

1. Attacks on French targets, such as the Le Creusot works and the U-boat bases in the French Atlantic ports;
2. Disputes with the Admiralty over attacks on Germany’s capital ships, especially the *Scharnhorst*, *Gneisenau* and *Prinz Eugen*;
3. Specific raids on Germany, including the ‘Thousand Bomber Plan’, and possible attacks – refused by Harris in August⁵ – on Berlin;
4. Public Relations issues, including press and public criticism of bombing policy;
5. Bomber Squadrons, including the proportion of British and other Commonwealth squadrons in Bomber Command, together with the Formation of the Pathfinder Force.

A substantial amount of correspondence is devoted to technical issues. This is no surprise given that Harris himself labelled the period from February 1942 to March 1943 as the “preliminary phase”, in which Bomber Command was substantially strengthened, both in terms of quality and quantity of which Bomber Command was substantially.

Harris later wrote that ‘At long last we were ready and equipped. Bomber Command’s main offensive began at a precise moment . . . ’, and this began with the attack on Essen on 5/6 March 1943⁸. From this point onwards, the Portal Papers contain some particularly fascinating letters.

An especially good example is Harris’ reply to Portal’s letter of 16 June, in which the CAS had asked the AOC of Bomber Command about his methods for target selection. Harris stated that the choice of target was limited by the short hours of darkness during the summer months, the range of his ‘weaker brethren’ aircraft (the Stirlings and Wellingtons), bombing marking techniques, and the restricted range of the *Oboe* blind-bombing and target marking device. However, in that distinctive writing style, Harris concluded that: “As the nights lengthen out we hope to have dealt sufficiently severely with the Ruhr . . . We will then go progressively further into Germany in I hope sufficient strength to be able to leave behind us, as we progress, a state of devastation similar to that now obtaining in the Ruhr; if the Boche waits for it. We shall then have available to us more plums in the way of objectives such as the complete destruction of Hamburg, and a really hearty hammering of Berlin”¹⁰.

Such letters about Bomber Command’s aircraft continued throughout the winter of 1942/3; indeed, this author believes that Harris was in fact taking the opportunity to highlight the weaknesses of his bomber aircraft precisely at the time when Churchill, the War Cabinet and the COS, together with Portal and the Air Staff, were pushing for the bombing of Berlin (to particularly coincide with the imminent German disaster on the eastern front at Stalingrad). For Harris, what better way to get pressure placed on the Ministry of Aircraft Production to abandon the Stirling and Halifax in favour of sole production of the Lancaster than using the Berlin operation – which clearly many people wanted – as a way of achieving this switch in aircraft production⁷. A Berlin operation also allowed, in Harris’ view, a concentration back on purely German targets. A letter dated 21 October 1942 clearly indicates Harris’ concern over ‘the ever increasing dispersion of our bombing effort by piece-meal instructions’ – and in many ways this letter sets the tone for the C-in-C Bomber Command’s frequent outbursts against what he later termed were the “diversionists”, “panacea mongers”, and “the oily boys”⁸.

*The Portal-Harris correspondence, March 1943-March 1944: The Main Offensive*

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Within this part of the Portal collection, there exists a plan for what would have been an intriguing operation had it been sanctioned by Churchill and

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⁵ Portal Papers, File 9, Harris – Portal, 29 Aug. 1942. See also Harris Papers, H81. Harris in this letter wrote that: ‘I am as keen as anybody to bomb Berlin, but I am certain that when we do this we must make a good job of it’. He then cited that city’s heavy flak defences and searchlights, together with his command’s lack of heavy bombers, as his reasons for not attacking Berlin during summer 1942.


⁹ Harris, Bomber Offensive, p. 144.

the War Cabinet. On 11 July, Harris had informed Portal of an audacious plan that, if sanctioned, would surely have gone down in legend in the same way as the “Dambusters” raid has subsequently done so—and this involved the dispatch of Lancasters from 617 Squadron on a mission to assassinate Benito Mussolini through the bombing of the Italian dictator’s home and offices in Rome, before the aircraft then flew on to land in North Africa. Harris, despite his traditional and deeply-rooted dislike of low-level precision attacks and “diversions” from attacking German targets, was very much in favour of this operation—possibly as a quick way of getting Italy out of the war and thereby stopping his command from being forced to divert from Germany on to the bombing of Italian cities (which did indeed happen throughout August 1943).

The Portal Papers contain a Bomber Command Operation Order for this proposed attack but the entire operation was vetoed especially as foreign secretary, Anthony Eden, doubted the wisdom and effectiveness of the attack, to which Churchill agreed. As one might expect, technical subjects also dominate the Portal-Harris correspondence during this time. Again, Harris lamented about the quality of the aircraft under his command—and also the lack of technical subjects also dominate the Portal-Harris correspondence during this time. Again, Harris lamented about the quality of the aircraft under his command—and also the lack of Lancasters that were fitted with the MkII radar aid for navigation and target identification. On 7 September, in an effort to draw Portal’s attention to the weaker aircraft within Bomber Command, Harris sent the CAS a letter about the losses for various types of aircraft in operations against Berlin prior to September 1943. The Halifax had a casualty rate of 8.05%; the Stirling 9.4%—whilst both aircraft had nowhere near performed the same number of sorties as the Lancaster. The message was clear: these Lancasters that were fitted with the aircraft under his command—and also the lack of this time. Again, Harris lamented about the quality of technical subjects also dominate the Portal-Harris correspondence during this time. Again, Harris lamented about the quality of the aircraft under his command—and also the lack of Lancasters that were fitted with the aircraft under his command—and also the lack of this time. Again, Harris lamented about the quality of technical subjects also dominate the Portal-Harris correspondence during this time. Again, Harris lamented about the quality of airmen’s home at the Villa Torlonia and office at the Palazzo Venezia; and File 4, Portal – Churchill, 13 Jul. 1943; Eden – Churchill, 14 Jul. 1943.

11 Portal Papers, File 10, Harris – Portal, 11 Jul. 1943. See also the Bomber Command Operation Order 162, 3 Dec. 1942, which makes for fascinating reading: the two targets were Mussolini’s home at the Villa Torlonia and office at the Palazzo Venezia; and File 4, Portal – Churchill, 13 Jul. 1943; Eden – Churchill, 14 Jul. 1943.

12 Portal Papers, File 10, Harris – Portal, 7 Sept. 1943. The Lancaster loss rate was 4.6% from a total of 1534 sorties against Berlin up to September 1943. Harris wrote that ‘the Halifax is approaching the same situation [as the Stirling] and that we can consider the Halifax out of court for deep penetration strategic [sic] bombing certainly before next summer’. Throughout this letter, the C-in-C Bomber Command consistently hit out at the chairman of Handley-Page, Sir Frederick Handley-Page, and stated that: ‘He is not an aircraft manufacturer, he is just a financier, with all that that implies, and more’, and concluded the letter: ‘until Handley Page is kicked out we shall get nothing but unfilled promises and clandestine obstruction’. As if to underline the point about the Halifax’s inferiority, Harris then added a small postscript to this letter which detailed the casualty figures from the previous night’s operation against Munich: the Halifax had a 9% loss rate compared to the 1.1% for the Lancaster. According to one document found by this author, these losses—together with strikes at those factories producing Lancasters—caused Harris to postpone the Battle of Berlin at this time until October 1943, though in reality this offensive actually began on 18/19 November. See Buxton Papers, Churchill College Cambridge, D. B. Ops – ACAS (Ops), 22 Sept. 1943.

13 Portal Papers, File 10, Portal – Harris, 14 Sept. 1943.


16 Harris informed Portal that ‘it is no exaggeration to say that many of our failures in clear dark weather, and we are having far too many shows of the Hannover and Kassel variety which partially miss the boat, are due to the lack of this essential store [Hooded Flares] as a backer-up to H2S’, Portal Papers, File 10, Harris – Portal, 4 Oct. 1943.
all: the Battle of Berlin. This campaign against the German capital began on 17 November – and represented Harris’ attempt to end the war through airpower alone by breaking the German capital17.

The Battle of Berlin was of course a strategic gamble and given this fact it is little surprise that letters on the actual strategic direction of the Combined Bomber Offensive (CBO) emerge in the Harris-Portal correspondence during autumn 1943. An example of this was Portal’s letter of 7 October, in which the CAS explained that the Air Ministry had been conducting a review as to whether one of the primary goals of the Pointblank Directive – namely the reduction of the German fighter force and its associated industry – had actually been achieved.

The answer, according to Portal, was that “we have fallen far short of what we hoped to accomplish”18. This ultimately lead to pressures over the winter of 1943/4 for a change in the Pointblank Directive towards a specific directive that was much more focused on the destruction of the Luftwaffe – which had long been considered as a necessary precondition for Operation Overlord.

In addition, another strategic subject of crucial significance also cropped up throughout December 1943 and January 1944: the actual use of RAF Bomber Command in the Overlord operation. Bomber Command’s role became clearer after a meeting of the Allied air-force commanders on 25 March, which ultimately endorsed the transportation plan of Tedder and Professor Solly Zuckerman19.

The correspondence between Portal and Harris during this phase of the bomber war opens with a spat between the two men that was conducted through a series of letters – all of which are contained within the Portal Papers.

The dispute begins with Harris’ strong criticisms of the Air Ministry as being “defensive minded” and this accusation drew a strong rebuke from Portal who replied: “I hope that on reflection you will decide to take what I should regard as the only proper course, namely to withdraw your letter and send it in again with the offensive paragraphs removed . . . [In doing this] it will help to re-establish the good relations and mutual understanding between your Command and the Air Staff which are so essential to efficiency”.

The letter brought a reply from Harris three days later which proceeds to discuss the whole issue of loyalty – and then offers his resignation20.

In several ways, this dispute represents a precursor to the serious dispute between Portal and Harris of the following autumn (described below). But undoubtedly this dispute also reflects – as simultaneous correspondence further reveals – Harris’ increasing frustration and dislike of the Director of Bomber Operations at the Air Ministry, Air Commodore Sidney Bufton.

The disagreement had festered since the formation of the Pathfinder Force in August 1942, for which Bufton had been a keen advocate much to Harris’ chagrin. Now the issue re-opened in spring 1944, as Harris now wished to adopt his original idea, namely “a Pathfinder element in each [Bomber] Group”, and indeed this idea would become a reality for 5 Group under Air Vice-Marshal Ralph Cochrane, which began to operate independently from Bomber Command’s Main Force from this time.

It perhaps should be said that a considerable reason for 5 Group’s new found independence was because of the ‘testy’ relationship between Cochrane and Bennett who, in Harris’ words, “often fail to see eye to eye, and both are difficult personalities”. But the issue of personal relationships was also notable in another respect: Harris’ missives at this time soon launched on to severe criticism of Bufton whose “ideas on Pathfinders, as on other matters, have always been and still are rammed down our throats whether we like them or not . . . [and]”.

Bufton, Harris stated, had to “rid himself of his idee fixe that he can have the fun of running the Bomber Offensive his way while I [ultimately] take the responsibility”. It perhaps should be said that Portal never truly formulated a harmonious working relationship between Bomber Command and the Air

17 On 3 November 1943, Harris wrote his now famous memorandum to Churchill, which ended with the oft-quoted line: “We can wreck Berlin from end to end if the U.S.A.A.F will come in on it. It will cost between 400-500 aircraft. It will cost Germany the war”. This paper sees Harris optimistically claim that 19 German towns could be classified as “Virtually Destroyed”, another 19 as “Seriously Damaged”, and a further 9 as “Damaged”. See Portal Papers, File 10, Harris – Churchill thru Portal, 3 Nov. 1943. This theme of a combined Anglo-American offensive against Berlin is also apparent in an earlier letter. See Portal Papers, File 10, Harris – Portal, 30 Oct. 1943.

18 Portal Papers, File 10, Portal – Harris, 7 Oct. 1943.

19 Portal Papers, File 10, Portal – Harris, 20 Mar. 1944. The Transportation Plan of Tedder and Zuckerman advocated the destruction of 74 key rail centres in France and Belgium. Privately, Harris disliked this plan considerably. In a personal letter to Robert Lovett, US Assistant Secretary for the Air Force, he wrote: ‘Our worst headache has been a panacea plan devised by a civilian professor [i.e. Zuckerman] whose peacetime forte is the study of the sexual aberrations of the higher apes. Starting from this sound military basis he devised a scheme to employ almost the entire British and US bomber forces for three months or more in the destruction of targets mainly in France and Belgium’. See H. Probert, Bomber Harris: His Life and Times (Greenhill Books Edition, London, 2006), pp. 291-2.

20 Portal Papers, File 10, Portal – Harris, 12 Apr. 1944; Harris – Portal, 15 Apr. 1944; and Portal – Harris, 16 Apr. 1944.
accounts24 and therefore, for reasons of space, this

The rest of the correspondence between Portal and Harris during this period of control by the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) consisted of a variety of personnel issues, though there is a very interesting letter by Harris on 1 July 1944 which laments the lack of credit given to the strategic air-forces for the success of the Allied landings in Normandy22.

On 25 September, RAF Bomber Command was released from the control of SHAEF: Harris (together with his American counterpart, General Carl Spaatz) were now back under the joint-authority of Portal and the Air Ministry together with the American air chiefs.

The Portal-Harris correspondence, October 1944-May 1945: The Final Defeat of Germany

After a period of two months in which comparatively few letters passed between them, the correspondence between Harris and Portal started again on 10 October, after the CAS sent a copy of a paper by Bufton on the effect of the Combined Bomber Offensive on the advancement of the allied armies towards the Rhine.

The rest of October is taken up largely with more technical matters, such as the possible extended range of the Spitfire (so Bomber Command could then conduct daylight operations), as well as the production of the Tallboy and Grand Slam bombs and specially modified Lancasters for use on such targets as the Tirpitz.

However, it is in November 1944 that some of the most significant correspondence between Portal and Harris commences; a series of 16 letters about bombing strategy during the final phase of the war23. These letters have been quoted in many secondary accounts24 and therefore, for reasons of space, this

author will not go into a microscopic study of each missive (which is a topic for further study in its own right).

This series of correspondence began on 1 November when Harris sent his comments to Portal about Tedder’s paper on ‘Notes on air policy to be adopted with a view to rapid defeat of Germany’. From this start, numerous authors have cited these letters as representing a real schism between Portal and Harris on the strategic role of Bomber Command: for the former, attacks on oil plants were now the priority whilst for the latter area attacks were still the fundamental means of striking Germany25.

The dispute rumbled on throughout the winter of 1944/5 and saw Harris offer his resignation again, which Portal refused to accept. After Portal’s final letter in this series of correspondence on 25 January 1945, the correspondence between the two men shifted from tactical/strategic issues and on to the possible visit of Harris to Moscow (which he refused) and also the question of medals and awards for Bomber Command aircrew.

On this topic, there is a letter in the Portal collection which has as much relevance now as it did then in mid-1945: on 1 June, Harris wrote a missive about the possibility of a campaign medal for Bomber Command servicemen and in a further letter two weeks later – expressed his bitterness over the lack of a distinctive Bomber Command campaign medal and the absence of wider recognition over the part played by Bomber Command in defeating Germany26.

This was a subject that continued to disappoint Harris for the rest of his life (he died in 1984) and

eruption of built-up tensions and exasperation that had accumulated over the years of the war. Portal and Harris wrestled over power, authority, loyalty, and mutual respect. Indeed, the debate was even about personal style, and – to some extent at least – class, as the refined, restrained, Oxford-trained Portal squared off against the blunt, outspoken Harris”, p. 246.

21 In fairness to Harris, his view about the need to continue area attacks seemed to have been backed by two things: the first was (not for the first or last time) the mischievous intervention of the prime minister who, in response to a letter from Harris on 30 September, had replied: “I am all for cracking everything in now on to Germany that can be spared from the battlefields”. See Churchill College Archives, PREM 3/12. In addition, the HURRICANE Directive of 14 October placed a considerable emphasis on the use of Area Bombing specifically against the undamaged city areas of the Ruhr. In addition, Harris had no doubt been alarmed by the losses of Bomber Command during the “mini-campaign” against oil plants during June 1944. The first operation, against Gelsenkirchen on 12/13 June, saw a loss rate of 6.1%; against Sterkrade on 16/17 June a loss rate of 9.8%; against Wesel on 21/22 June an absolutely staggering loss rate of 27.8% for 5 Group and on the same night a further loss rate of 6.7% from the Main Force against the Schloven/Buer synthetic-oil plant.

22 See for example, Richards, Portal of Hungerford, pp. 317-332; Probert, Bomber Harris, pp. 307-12. For a more recent analysis of this dispute, see T. Davis Biddle, Rhetoric and Reality in Air Warfare: The Evolution of British and American Ideas about Strategic Bombing, 1914-1945 (Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 2002), pp. 245-52. Biddle writes that this dispute was “an
also the scores of Bomber Command veterans – though a campaign by the Bomber Command Association and The Daily Telegraph has finally succeeded with the unveiling in Green Park on 28 June 2012 of a permanent memorial to the 55,573 airmen who died in the Second World War.

**Summing Up**

The correspondence between Portal and Harris ends on an amusing note. On 23 June 1945, in one of the last official letters between the two men, the CAS sent a letter to the C-in-C Bomber Command about “a serious complaint from the University authorities at Oxford concerning persistent flying over Oxford, much of it at low altitudes. The Vice Chancellor reports that this is so persistent as seriously to interfere with the academic studies and activities of the University and cause undue suffering [...] I need not stress the importance of maintaining the high reputation of the Royal Air Force particularly in University Centres, on whose co-operation and help we will be so dependent in the future for the recruitment and training of a considerable number of our officers”.

Despite fighting the costliest and most violent conflict in human history, it seems that peace and tranquility in the city of Portal’s former alma mater was now deemed an urgent ‘strategic’ priority! Harris’ reply, if one even exists, has not been found by this author — but it would no doubt have been written in that blunt, barbed and aggressive style that was characteristic of much of the former C-in-C’s letters (especially against issues or personalities that he disliked strongly), as shown by some of the correspondence in this wonderful collection.

Overall, the Portal archive represents an impressive collection of papers relating to the history of both the Royal Air Force and, more widely, the Second World War. The collection contains many fascinating letters — a small fraction of which have been highlighted here.

The researcher can either trace the overall developments of the Bomber War from 1940-1945, or they can use the papers for the study of specific themes, be it strategic and/or operational matters or technical issues. For any serious study of either Bomber Command or the RAF during the Second World War then the Portal Papers are an essential resource.

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London School of Economics

**Acknowledgements**

My thanks go to the staff of the library at Christ Church, especially Dr. Cristina Neagu, for allowing generous access and photocopying of the Portal Papers.

**New Portal documents available for consultation**

Three more Portal archives have become available this term. These were examined in detail, listed and catalogued by Mr Robert Sandell, to whom the Library staff wish to convey their gratitude. His hard work and generosity have enabled us get significant new documents ready for consultation.

The recently declassified archives contain personal diaries and letters, original documents and copies of Portal’s WW2 Minutes and other correspondence with Churchill, Harris and Mountbatten and many other British and American wartime leaders, official documents and papers relating to Portal’s WW1 combat record, inter-war appointments, and post-WW2 business career, including speeches and articles from various periods. Also photographs and press cuttings.

Separately, there are the working files used by Denis Richards for his biography of Lord Portal (Heinemann, 1977). The catalogue will be soon available for consultation online.
Thefts of and cuttings from rare books have become more common news. Less newsworthy, but potentially more harmful, is accidental damage during open days or evening events. So how does one protect a collection of rare and old books from sly manoeuvres or just simple clumsiness?

In 2009 Robert Dunton (Donald Insall Associates), the architect responsible for the restoration of the Library, approached Euronova Ltd; a company, based in Bristol, which specialises in the protection of objects worth thousands and even millions of pounds in some of the world’s leading galleries and stately homes. Since its inception in 1998, Euronova has put together an extensive range of systems. It has also built a wide client base in Scandinavia, France, the Middle East, the USA and Australia. Among the institutions for which Euronova provides protection products are the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford and The Tate.

Installing a book security system in the Upper Library at Christ Church was a challenge as the obvious technologies of infra-red beams or weight sensing are either too obtrusive or too expensive (the latter coming out at close to £10 per book). An additional constraint being that nothing can be fitted to the walls or ceiling. In fact the only fixtures not protected by listing are the floorboards, so it was under these that Euronova’s specialist sensors, the BarrierPIRs, were positioned.

The Euronova BarrierPIR works by creating a “fan shape” of proximity protection for objects on open display. In art galleries for instance, a run of sensors on the ceiling are often used to protect unglazed paintings hanging on the walls. They can be controlled by tilt and shutter functions which allow people to pass through the door and yet be detected if too close to the objects on display. Although normally deployed on the ceiling, this system has occasionally been used as a floor based system.

As expected, when it was tried out in Christ Church’s Upper Library, we were confronted with a series of difficult problems to solve, including gaps in the protection and the need to protect the sensors from damage, dust, polish and sunlight.

So, in stepped Princeton University to help identify materials which allow the 14-16 micron infra-red to pass. Sapphires are the only natural material but would have pushed the cost up of course. Fortunately however, there is a less expensive man-made material which, if pure, will allow a reasonable amount of infra-red of this wavelength through.

Samples were obtained from the USA and a trial was done on a floorboard with four sensors in a row. This was left in for three months to allow the librarians to see how the system worked in practice. Some fine tuning and further tests came up with a configuration that was acceptable and so to the task of installation proper which started in July 2011.
their computers and pager devices, instantly giving them the specific shelf reference to check.

Proximity alarms installed beneath the floorboards in the Upper Library.

We are still fine tuning the system. We noticed for instance that a few sensors are in a position where they are activated by the setting sun; so a few further experiments of different potential solutions during the University vacations and we hope this will solve the problem. On the whole, the system has worked very well, providing these special collections the protection they need in modern times.  

Clive Stevens
Managing Director, Euronova Ltd

Until now, Christ Church has only had one complete history. Henry Thompson published, in 1900, his often amusing, tremendously useful, but brief, contribution to the *College Histories* series. Other works followed, such as W.G. Hiscock’s 1946 celebratory *Miscellany* published for Christ Church’s quatercentenary, and Hugh Trevor-Roper’s stylish pocket book history which is still distributed to freshers at their college matriculation. Specialists have written on specific topics: Geoffrey Bill, Christ Church’s first archivist and Lambeth Palace Librarian, wrote a tremendous study of the system of education in the eighteenth century, and with John Mason, Librarian from 1962 to 1987, a further volume on the reform of the constitution and the provision of statutes in the nineteenth century. The architectural historian, W.D. Caröe, wrote on Tom Tower, Dr Mason and Jean Cook on the building of the New Library. Most recently, Professor Christopher Butler has edited the *Portrait*, a mixture of history, memoirs, and glorious illustrations.

But nothing has really been written about how Christ Church began and how its foundation, originally by Cardinal Wolsey in 1525, has influenced its development over the centuries. It was Wolsey’s creation, both physical and constitutional which dominated until the mid-nineteenth century and still, in many ways, does today.

This history of Christ Church is written from an archivist’s perspective, drawing primarily on the sources available within the college and cathedral muniments. As such, its focus is often different from that of other publications. It is not a potted *DNB* (over 1000 Christ Church men occupy the pages of that august publication), looking at the great and the good (and the not-so-good) who have passed through Tom Gate, but rather an account of the college’s administration and of the lives of those who studied here while they were here. Deans who have traditionally been remembered as the ‘great’ feature less than those lesser-known men such as George Smalridge and David Gregory whose overhaul of the curriculum put Christ Church at the top of the eighteenth-century tree.

The book is largely chronological in arrangement, but the chapters are interspersed with short accounts of the Meadow, of the cathedral as college chapel, of ‘Christ Church time’, and on the plumbing. Explanations are given for some of Christ Church’s oddities, not least its odd titles and expressions, particularly the use of the word ‘Student’ for ‘fellow’.

*The Cardinal’s College: Christ Church Chapter and Verse*, was published by Profile Books in March 2012 and is available through the college’s website, from Amazon, and selected bookshops.

Judith Curthoys
Christ Church
RESTORING CARDINAL THOMAS WOLSEY'S HOUSEHOLD LIST

Behind a curtain in the Manuscript room hangs a large frame containing a long parchment document. This is Cardinal Wolsey’s household list. It is quite unusual for a roll of this type to be presented in such a way.

The format of the document is, as expected, a long and narrow strip of parchment. The execution of the text however is nothing ordinary. All positions in the cardinal’s household are listed and are beautifully written in red, green, black and iron-gall inks, often with the first letters gilded.

Being such an elaborate and unusual document, the roll had been on display for some time. Its current home was a large wooden red velvet covered frame with carved decorations, likely to date from late 19th century. The document was attached directly to the paper lining of a straw backing board and in contact with the glass. Not only was the backing board unsuitable because of its high alkalinity, but it also did not provide sufficient support to the document and had become warped over time, allowing dust to enter the frame. As a result of this the roll itself was distorted and very dirty so it was decided that conservation treatment was required.

Following the initial documentation and photography the roll was removed from its frame and lifted from the backing board to which it was adhered only along the upper and lower edges. Adhesive residues were removed by scraping with a scalpel and its surface was gently cleaned with latex smoke sponges and a soft brush.

The deterioration and rusty staining of the parchment at the beginning and end of the roll suggest that the
document had spent some time rolled and was possibly stored in a metal container. The areas affected by corrosion were in a very fragile state and so to prevent further damage were supported with lightweight Japanese tissue applied to the reverse. Any losses and tears in the parchment were repaired with a combination of toned and natural Japanese papers as necessary.

The majority of the damage to the account roll was however caused by prolonged exposure to light, causing fading of the iron-gall ink to a very pale yellow brown colour, in some areas barely visible. The quality of the backing board and its fitting could have been improved to provide better housing for the document, but this did not seem to be the best possible option. It was therefore decided that to prevent further unnecessary exposure to light, the document should be housed in a window mount and be stored safely in an archival quality box protected from dust and light and yet be available to study. A facsimile of the account roll will be placed in the 19th century velvet covered frame which hangs in the manuscript room.

Katerina Powell ACR
Oxford Conservation Consortium

THE PERFECT PICTURE
THE MASSES OF WILLIAM BYRD (MUS 489-493)

This is the second facsimile edition published by DIAMM Publications using Christ Church Library sources. The first was a set of elegant manuscript partbooks,\(^1\) preserving musical works of English and European masters from the early modern period, copied around 1580 in elegant and very accurate calligraphy by Robert Dow.

In contrast with the Dow Partbooks (Mus 984-988), the latest project involves a printed source, which includes a complete set of the Byrd Masses for 3, 4 and 5 voices (Mus 489-493). No manuscript version of the Masses survives, and the printed copies in Christ Church are probably the best-preserved set of these prints.

William Byrd (c. 1540-1623) wrote three settings of the Latin mass, one each for three, four, and five voices. He published them discreetly as small pamphlets, with none of the elaborate prefatory materials found in his other books.

There are no title pages, no dedications, and no dates: the only identifying mark is the name W. Byrd printed at the top of each page. As to the dates of publication, Kerry McCarthy notes in her introduction to the facsimile edition,² these were sorted out by Peter Clulow in the mid-twentieth century. Byrd’s printer Thomas East created ornate initial letters with reusable blocks of wood, which were carved in crisp detail and wore out gradually over the years. By studying East’s other publications with the same wood-block initials, we can arrive at an approximate chronology for the three masses. The four-voice mass was printed first, in 1592-93, followed by the three-voice mass in 1593-94 and the five-voice mass in 1594-95. (They seem to have enjoyed considerable popularity: East had already produced second editions of the two smaller masses by 1600.) This was the last music Byrd published before leaving the familiar surroundings of the royal court and retiring to rural Essex to live out the final decades of his career.

Uniformity strictly forbade the celebration of the old Catholic liturgy in England. Those who went on cultivating it could be punished with fines, imprisonment, or, in exceptional cases, even death. What had taken place daily at every pre-Reformation altar, from the humblest parish church to the greatest cathedral, was now a rare and dangerous luxury. William Allen, an Elizabethan cleric living in exile in Rome, saw the absence of the mass as the greatest difficulty facing his fellow Catholics back in England: ‘the universal lack of the sovereign Sacrifice and Sacraments catholicly ministered, without which the soul of man dieth, as the body doth without corporal food’. The small group of Catholic priests who worked secretly in Elizabethan England did their best to provide regular masses for their flock. These were clandestine and closely guarded events. Altar furnishings were designed to masquerade as secular household goods, and hiding spaces were built to conceal the priest and his assistants in the event of a raid. An unexpected knock on the door could put everyone’s life at risk. The circumstances were, to say the least, not ideal for complex polyphony.

McCarthy also remarks that when Byrd set the mass to music in the early 1590s, he was doing something no English composer had done for thirty years. Given the political and cultural risks involved, it is surprising that he managed to do it at all. The 1559 Act of

There is a particular reason why the Byrd Masses project is special: it was the first assignment for the new Christ Church Library imaging studio.

The first facsimile project undertaken by DIAMM Publications in collaboration with the Viola da Gamba Society was of the Dow Partbooks, mentioned above, but for this project DIAMM came to the College with our own imaging equipment in 2009, and set up a mobile studio in the basement storage across the quad from the main library building. I was involved in this work, but had no idea that the interest shown by the library staff might lead to them starting to research equipment of this type in order to set up their own digitization studio. I would like to think that the images we produced of the Dow books contributed in some way to their decision to try and buy a camera like ours for the College library.

Conservation book cradle designed by Manfred Mayer (Graz University, Austria), and PhaseOne camera operated by Dr Cristina Neagu during the digitization of the Byrd partbooks.

Digital cameras have been around long enough that we are all beginning to feel comfortable with them, and the quality of the selection that is available in high street shops is exceptional. These cameras however are not suitable for work in an archive environment, even when they can produce pictures that will meet the needs of many researchers. The reason for this is that an archive-quality digital image has to be of sufficient quality to reproduce the original at the real size, and at very high quality in case the original is lost or damaged. Archive imaging must also have a conservation purpose, which means that researchers should be able to do most of their work from the images, minimizing handling of the books themselves. With one of the high-end Canon range of SLR cameras (15-20 Megapixels) this might be possible with a small book, but the Canon range captures to a compressed format (so fine detail is lost), and frankly cannot manage anything much larger than A5 at the sort of quality you would need for facsimile printing. Although we do not want to keep people away from these priceless books, their preservation depends on minimizing handling as much as possible.

My own project, DIAMM (www.diamm.ac.uk) has been working at the ‘extreme’ end of high-quality imaging since 1998, and sadly that has turned me into something of an imaging snob. All too often when a library tells me that it has set up its own imaging studio my heart sinks because usually this means they have bought a high-end consumer SLR. You may be able to imagine my surprise then, to find tucked away in a book-lined room a state-of-the-art digitization studio: one of the best cameras in the world (usually completely out of the budget range of a small library) mounted on a Mayer conservation cradle (a travelling version of which we have just purchased for DIAMM) that frankly made my mouth water.

This type of equipment is perfect for photographing documents at archive quality, particularly documents that might be damaged or in poor condition through natural deterioration or over handling, when exceptional resolution is needed to see the fine detail. The PhaseOne range is the envy of the photographic world (I once took our camera back into Jessops to find a suitable travelling case to fit it, and the assistant behind the desk nearly fainted away – actually I was quite impressed that he knew what it was). Despite some competitors producing similar equipment at a slightly lower price, every library and expert who has tested these systems side-by-side ends up buying a PhaseOne camera. Christ Church has a P45+ back – not the largest in the PhaseOne range now, but a camera that will stand the test of time. Instead of the ‘consumer’ maximum of 20 Megapixels, this will capture at 42 Megapixels, and because it captures to RAW format images can be processed to a number of different output types, and can make use of a range of complex tools in the processing software to enhance images of leaves that have suffered damage over time. This capture quality provides images for finely detailed on-screen research that is often far more revealing than looking at the original book (because of the amount of magnification possible), as well as being of suitable quality for facsimile reproduction.

To create an image suitable for archiving, for research and for publication there are a number of requirements:

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Higher dpi is extremely useful for fine-grained research, such as examining woodcuts and wooden type for the tiny changes that take place as the type becomes worn, enabling us to develop a chronology for the work of a particular printer, and incidentally one of the ways in which the chronology of the publication of Byrd’s masses was established (only possible at that time with long and tedious work with magnifying glass and tracing papers). That is just one use for high-resolution images: there are many others, including the examination of erasures, comparison of hair-follicle patterning on parchment or vellum, and digital restoration of damaged leaves.

Each image must have an industry-standard colour patch and size scale next to the page being photographed, but not touching it. The colour and size information ensures that if all else is lost this information would enable us to create an accurate-colour full-size reproduction of the page without reference to the original book. It also means that there is standardized colour information in every image that enables later users to evaluate whether there has been any colour-drift or corruption of information in the file that might not be immediately visible when just looking at the page. The patch must not touch the page because that would make the publisher’s job much harder, since we have to trim off any extraneous matter before the image is reproduced. We do however use those colour patches for our first run with the printer so that he can ensure the press colour calibration is correct. Ideally one would put the original book beside the sheets as they come off the press, so that the colour settings can be tweaked and more test sheets printed to get the reproduction perfect, but that is rarely practical, and in fact the colour patches are much easier to use for colour matching than the original document, since they have solid blocks of a good range of colours to match.

The item must be evenly lit right across the page, with no dark patches or bright spots. No lighting system will deliver a completely uniform light area, though the system on Manfred’s cradle is as close as it gets. Any remaining minor irregularity in the light pool is managed by the capture software that drives the camera, which has an electronic filter that evens out any irregularity in lighting based on a reference shot taken before the main shooting begins. I should emphasize that this unevenness is not sufficient to be visible to the eye, only electronically, but if you are going to take a good picture, why not make it a perfect picture?

Magnification and focus must be uniform between images. As you turn the pages of a book, the surface you are photographing moves further away from the camera as there are fewer pages beneath the one
you are shooting, so the shot will gradually go out of focus and the magnification of the original will change. This is also managed by the Mayer cradle, which is equipped with a number of laser spots. These are aligned at the beginning of shooting, and kept in alignment by adjusting the camera mount during shooting, so that the magnification on each page of the book, and the focus, remain absolutely consistent.

![Colour patch and size scale next to the page being photographed.](image)

The focus must be pin-sharp at the smallest level of detail. This sounds obvious, but for many imaging outfits it is not enough of a priority. In order to assess focus the image must be blown up to pixel-to-pixel resolution on the screen of the computer (which takes time with images of around anything up to 120 MB) and sometimes there is a ‘good enough’ philosophy, partly driven by production-line economics. Deficiencies in focus are sometimes compensated for by the use of an ‘Unsharp Mask’, something that unfortunately falsifies capture data, and often creates a light or dark corona around the edges of dark and light elements in the image. The mask is not intelligent, so it sharpens specks, imperfections in the paper or parchment and even dust, just as much as the writing. The only way to take a good picture is to get it in focus in the first place, and unsharp masking should always be disabled.

The P45+ has a really fine auto-focus system, and coupled with Manfred’s laser system we were able to get absolutely sharp focus which, when we blew the images up to full size on the computer screen showed even the fibres of the paper clearly, a testament to the quality of the digital sensor on the P45+ and the specialist digital lens of the camera.

The object must be straight in the picture. Why? This is because a digital image consists of millions of square pixels. If an image is crooked and you need to straighten it up, rotating it through 90 or 180 degrees is not a problem, but if you need to rotate through 4.2 degrees to get it straight, those square pixels are all going to end up being partly moved onto the area of adjacent pixels, since the digital file is still rendered in square pixels that are always square to the screen. A pixel can only be one colour, so fine detail becomes blurred and colours change if you have to rotate by anything other than 90 or 180 degrees. Getting it straight in the first place means it will not annoy you for the rest of your life by being slightly crooked when you look at it.

There are considerable storage issues to be taken into account when using cameras of this type. The images can come out at up to 120MB, depending on how they are processed, and that fills up Terabytes very fast indeed. Fortunately the library has the support of the College’s IT infrastructure, and has set up an enviably efficient system where images processed upstairs in the studio are immediately copied to a backup external hard disk and are available to Cristina on her computer down in her office. Everything seems to have been thought through and set up with great care. I should mention here ICAM Archive systems, who supply all this equipment both to Christ Church and to DIAMM,¹ and who provide unparalleled support both on the phone and in person.

![The imaging studio at Christ Church Library.](image)

The digitization studio, out of sight of most visitors in one of the upper rooms of Christ Church’s magnificent library, is a superb addition to this unique resource. I hope it is clear how much pleasure I felt to be able to work with such equipment when digitizing the Byrd partbooks. I feel sometimes like a soap-box crusader, trying to explain to people why a simple SLR is not going to take pictures of real quality, whilst at the same time accepting that simple

¹ Among the many prestigious institutions that have benefitted from ICAM’s services are also the Bodleian Library in Oxford, Cambridge University Library and Getty Institute in Los Angeles.
economics mean that for most libraries a 'real' studio is simply out of the question.

The bequest that has allowed Christ Church to install a world-class camera and cradle to complement their internationally-ranked collections of manuscripts and printed books is a far-sighted step in conserving them for the future: it will allow the College to photograph its finest rare documents in-house and supply researchers with images that in many cases will show them a higher level of detail than could be obtained by examining the documents in person, lessening handling which – short of flood, fire or mice – is one of the things that damages old books most.

The images of the music manuscripts and prints once made available online alongside John Milsom's exemplary online catalogue (imaging of these is the subject of an upcoming grant application) will both bring the collection to wider international notice, and could also provide the library with a sustainability income (through image sales) that will help them to maintain their web-delivery systems and perhaps upgrade the equipment in the future should they wish to.

The Fingerprint in the Picture
Two Photographs by Charles Dodgson Added to the 'Lewis Carroll' Collection

Over a period of twenty four years, Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (aka Lewis Carroll, the well-known author of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland), generated about three thousand photographic negatives.

The camera suited him well, for he had always been interested in the visual arts. His notebooks and correspondence are full of sketches and his diaries fill-in the picture even further, as they mention regular visits to museums and galleries.

Although Dodgson's drawings may be thought as rather unrefined, they reveal that he had an eye for beauty and an exceptionally good sense of composition. It is no wonder therefore that he was attracted to photography. This happened in the 1850s, the first decade when the new medium became accessible to the wider public.

The author's diaries are a treasure-trove of information. They tell us for instance that the photograph below was taken with the assistance of Alice's older sister, Lorina Liddell. On 2 June 1857, Dodgson's diary records: "Bought some Collodion at Telfer's, as Armitstead had failed in bringing any, and spent the morning at the Deanery. ... Harry was away, but the two dear little girls, Ina and Alice, were with me all the morning. To try the lens, I took a picture of myself, for which Ina took off the cap, and of course considered it all her doing".

This self-portrait is one of Dodgson's early works. He ordered his first camera in March 1856, one month after he invented the pen name Lewis Carroll. The simultaneous invention of two identities - that of photographer and lay author - can be somewhat confusing.

Things however become less problematic if we take into account the author's clearly expressed wish to keep the two separate. He was known to leave parties if his authorship of Alice was revealed and would return letters addressed to 'Lewis Carroll' unacknowledged. In his academic publications and to his friends he was C.L. Dodgson. References to the photographer should therefore be directed to their author as Dodgson, not Lewis Carroll.

Documentary evidence suggests that he was passionate about photography. Although he occasionally tackled landscapes, some architectural studies and studies of sculpture and natural history, Dodgson was particularly drawn to portraits.

Between 1857 and 1860, for example, he collated hundreds of negatives of fellow dons, churchmen and university personnel. Interestingly, a four-page list of Dodgson's photographs intended for sale was printed in 1860. The brochure included over one hundred portraits (forty-five of them Christ Church men). Tellingly perhaps, the catalogue did not include any photographs of the Liddell girls, or any studies in

composition, suggesting that these were intended to remain a separate sphere of activity.

Browsing through several albums in the Christ Church collection, one is bound to notice that his talent was widely appreciated (Dodgson had the opportunity to frequently meet and photograph leading Victorian figures) and that he could engage in long sessions of costume studies, a subject which clearly interested him. It is also obvious that Dodgson had a special gift for photographing children. One imagines his sitters were thrilled with the stories and games he designed to amuse and put them in the right frame of mind for serious picture-taking. Besides being brilliant portraits, Dodgson's photographs are also interesting experiments in design and composition, with models often wearing genuine stage costumes and posing with props and in elaborate settings.

There are several famous pictures of the Liddell children one could discuss at length (those of Alice are probably the best known). Below is just an example of what Dodgson could do with three willing models and a very good eye for composition.

"Open Your Mouth and Shut Your Eyes", July 1860s. Gold-toned print from original wet-collodion glass negative. 25.4 x 20.3 cm.

Posed in the Deanery garden at Christ Church, the three Liddell sisters enact a child's game "Open Your Mouth and Shut Your Eyes". We have to put this image into a wider context. The painter William Mulready had exhibited a picture of the same title a few years before and from the diaries it becomes clear that Dodgson had seen it at least twice before arranging the sitters for this photograph. The subject is taken from an old nursery saying: "Open your mouth, shut your eyes, and see what Providence will send you'. Mulready painted his version in 1838 and first exhibited it at the Royal Academy in 1839. Of the four preparatory drawings exhibited at South Kensington, one was dated 20 December 1814.

William Mulready (1786-1863), "Open Your Mouth and Shut Your Eyes", 1838. Panel, 31.5 × 30.2 cm.

Looking at the two images side by side one is struck by the way a photograph (which is essentially a glimpse into tangible reality) was designed to be interpreted as an allegorical image staged for the purpose of illustrating a story imported from literature or art.

This is a typical feature of photography during the Victorian era. Audiences were expected to decode the mise en scène. As it was part of their education from an early age, people carried around a huge variety of mental images based on narrative texts that formed part of a shared cultural heritage. What photographers such as Oscar Gustav Rejlander, Francis Frith and Julia Margaret Cameron practised was an emblematic portrayal of abstract ideas, where (perhaps surprisingly for the 21st century viewer) the name of the sitter was, in fact, irrelevant to the picture's meaning.

C.L. Dodgson was no exception. Let us take for instance two photographs of Xie Kitchin, the daughter of G.W. Kitchin, an Oxford don and one of Dodgson's closest friends. The photographs are a recent gift to the Library from a member of the college, now a successful Film Director and

3 See Douglas R. Nickel, Dreaming in Pictures, p. 163. For details regarding all Dodgson photographs discussed, see Ibid., 'Commentary on the Works by Edward Wakeling', pp. 160-169.
Producer, whom we would like to thank for his generosity. In terms of provenance, both images originate from the same source, i.e. the sitter's daughter. The back of the photographs is clearly marked in the previous owner's own hand: "Mum. Taken by 'Lewis Carroll'". Xie Kitchin was one of Dodgson's favourite photographic models. Again, his diaries offer plenty of details, a significant number of entries mentioning various sessions with the girl. Here are just a couple, selected from a large number: "Mrs Kitchin brought over Xie, of whom I did 3 photos", Dodgson wrote on 12 June 1869. "Concluded my photographing at Oxford for the summer […] the last being one of Xie seated, dressed in rags".4

The two newly acquired Dodgson photographs are yet another variation on the theme of emblematic portraiture. The invitation addressed to the viewer is to find the meaning of the image by identifying the subject. Let us first look at the portrait of Xie Kitchin as Penelope Boothby.

The second recent photographic gift is of "Xie Kitchin as a Dane". This is a very special image, as it appears to have been held in high regard by its author. Soon after the photograph was taken, Dodgson’s friend, Alice Emily Donkin made an oil painting based on the image, entitled “Waiting to Skate”. It hung in Dodgson’s rooms at Christ Church.

Comparing the two images, it becomes clear why Dodgson was always so particular to get the right attire for his sitters. He would write long letters to Xie’s mother, pleading for her help in acquiring a large variety of costumes. On May 7th, 1880, he wrote to her: "Would you add to your kindness, and relieve a poor shy man from another difficulty in getting female attire? i.e. to get a pair of stockings for each acrobatic dress. They will be useful for other dresses as well, as my child sitters often come in white stockings, which are dreadful in a photograph, as white always spreads, and very few young ladies like to be supposed to be suffering from gout."5 In the case of his dwelling on the Penelope Boothby theme, it is clear that Dodgson wanted to closely mirror Reynolds' painting. However, as Xie was significantly older than her painted counterpart, the need to match visually significant elements of the costume was essential in order to create the illusion.

The narrative encapsulates the essence of parental devotion, as perceived from a typically Victorian perspective. Once again Dodgson’s portrait is an interesting commentary on a painting: Xie’s pose is based on Joshua Reynolds famous depiction of Penelope.

4 For more quotes see Morton N. Cohen, Lewis Carroll and the Kitchins (New York, Morgan Press, 1980), xii.

5 Lewis Carroll and the Kitchins, p. 37.
until his death, afterwards going to the Kitchin family. This was one of Dodgson’s favourite photographs of Xie and many prints survive. The one which has now reached Christ Church however is rather unique. The note on the back of the image reveals it as the sitter’s own copy, later passed on to her daughter.

As the mark is beneath the surface-layer of the photograph (it cannot be wiped away), one is naturally tempted to ask: could the fingerprint be Dodgson’s? At first sight this looks improbable: an open and shut case of wishful thinking. However, if one takes into account the various stages and the complexity of processing a photographic image, the assumption may appear a little more solid.

To take a picture in the 1870s, the photographer had to have a darkroom right at hand where plates would be prepared by pouring collodion onto a piece of well-polished glass. In pouring collodion onto the plate the photographer had to ensure the glass was coated evenly and that no foreign specks or liquids touched it. He would then sensitize the plate by dipping it into a silver nitrate solution. That done, he would put the plate into the camera and take the shot. All had to be done quickly and with utmost precision. If the wet plate smeared against something, marks would remain forever imprinted on the glass. Once the picture was taken, the photographer had to rush to the darkroom and develop it in a carefully prepared solution, then fix it in another.

Given all the above, blemishes could easily appear, both on the glass plate negatives and later in the processing of these onto photographic paper.

If the glass plate of this image still exists, it might be worth examining it carefully to assess whether the fingerprint is on the negative. If it is not, then what looks like a modest, technically almost indifferent photograph, might be more valuable than expected. A rather moving example of an artefact rendered more significant not because it is faultless, but because it is blemished. In cases such as this imperfection is always more desirable.

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