

Cataloguing medieval manuscripts through the history of Oxford's college libraries¹

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Abstract

The history and methods of cataloguers of the medieval manuscripts in Oxford's libraries represent a centuries-old institutional balancing act between detailed study and basic accessibility. Until the second half of the twentieth century, catalogues rarely include a clear statement of methodology. Many scholars use them as representing the state of knowledge of surviving medieval works, illustration, and provenance; yet it is rarely made clear how hastily some have been assembled or how dramatically approaches have evolved over the centuries. Digital catalogues have the potential to make this history more transparent, but they also risk obscuring the provenance of catalogues.

Introduction

In Britain, it is a rare town that has its own collection of manuscripts. A conurbation which has two institutions with medieval books can be considered particularly blessed. The number of cities that have a plethora of manuscript-holding institutions is severely limited and very few can claim to have as many as Oxford. The collegiate nature of its University means that the manuscripts of its scholarly community are – as also in Cambridge – still spread across many libraries, reflecting the historic process of their accumulation and use. Oxford's colleges rival the special collections of some large North American and continental European research libraries, with long histories as cohesive collections that more recent institutions cannot rival, and yet they are often still underappreciated. Among the reasons for this situation is that these collections have not historically been catalogued in a way that makes them accessible.

A University collection of books is first documented at St Mary's Church in the thirteenth century, though its ownership was contested; colleges fostered the most active medieval collections.² They became Oxford's only continuous collectors of books after the University

¹ I am grateful to David Rundle, H.R. Woudhuysen, Martin Kauffmann, Matthew Holford, and Katrin Janz-Wenig for their comments on this chapter.

² Roger Lovatt, 'College and University Book Collections and Libraries', in *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland, Volume I: To 1640*, ed. Elisabeth Leedham-Green and Teresa Webber (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 152–77, <https://doi.org/10.1017/chol9780521781947.009>; M. B. Parkes, 'The Provision of Books', in

Library's mid-sixteenth-century closure.³ Since that time, there have been competing challenges: the struggle to make these collections accessible while also ensuring that they receive adequate research and are preserved for future generations. It was therefore a cause for celebration when the Oxford Bibliographical Society launched a new 'Special Series' of catalogues of Western medieval manuscripts in college libraries in 2016.⁴

The Oxford Bibliographical Society initiative comes as the distance between the present day and the 1852 catalogue of college manuscripts by Henry Octavius Coxe (1811–81) has surpassed the century and a half separating him from the 1697 catalogue that he replaced – which he considered hopelessly outdated.⁵ Attention to these manuscripts in the twentieth century was irregular. The creators of a catalogue of illuminated manuscripts complained in 1985 that colleges had not even foliated many of the books they examined.⁶ It is still a

The History of the University of Oxford, Volume II: Late Medieval Oxford, ed. J. I. Catto and T. A. R. Evans (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 407–83, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199510122.003.0011>; Neil R. Ker, 'The Provision of Books', in *The History of the University of Oxford, Volume III: The Collegiate University*, ed. James McConica (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 441–97.

³ Kristian Jensen, 'Universities and Colleges', in *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland, Volume I: To 1640*, ed. Elisabeth Leedham-Green and Teresa Webber (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 345–62, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521781947.016>; Neil R. Ker, 'Oxford College Libraries Before 1500', in *The Universities in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Jozef Ijsewijn and Jacques Paquet, *Mediaevalia Lovaniensia*, 1st ser., studia 6 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1978), 293–311, <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12854/61647>; Neil R. Ker, 'Oxford College Libraries in the Sixteenth Century', *Bodleian Library Record* 6, no. 3 (January 1959): 459–515.

⁴ The volumes published to date are Peter Kidd, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Medieval Manuscripts of the Queen's College, Oxford* (Oxford: Oxford Bibliographical Society, 2016); Ralph Hanna and David Rundle, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Western Manuscripts, to c. 1600, in Christ Church, Oxford* (Oxford: Oxford Bibliographical Society, 2017); and Richard Gameson, *The Medieval Manuscripts of Trinity College, Oxford: A Descriptive Catalogue* (Oxford: Oxford Bibliographical Society, 2018), while Magdalen College is in preparation.

⁵ Henry O. Coxe, *Catalogus codicum mss. qui in collegiis aulisque Oxoniensibus hodie adservantur* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1852), [iii], <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001173456>, translated below.

⁶ J. J. G. Alexander and Elżbieta Temple, *Illuminated Manuscripts in the Oxford College Libraries, the University Archives, and the Taylor Institution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015017028484>, p. v: to save time, nineteenth-century cataloguers such as Coxe and M. R. James only added intermittent foliation to discern where texts began and ended, a practice that resulted in many miscounted leaves.

constant struggle to ensure that collections are fully catalogued, since such work is difficult to fund and secures little credit in contemporary research culture.

Catalogues are a key instrument for both researchers and managers of collections, and the university and colleges have sporadically coordinated efforts since the sixteenth century. Bodley's first Librarian, Thomas James (1572/3–1629), recognized the importance of cataloguing college and university collections together.⁷ Both featured in the 1697 union catalogue of manuscripts, so dated but truly published in November 1698, covering all Oxford colleges but Christ Church.⁸ At the time of its publication, ancillary disciplines for studying manuscripts such as palaeography were still nascent. Jean Mabillon (1632–1707) had completed his groundbreaking *De re diplomatica* only sixteen years earlier.⁹ Two centuries later, readers still relied on the 1697 compilation. By this time, the growth of collections and standards for description meant there was no possibility for a new union catalogue covering all Oxford libraries, colleges and Bodleian together. The 1852 catalogue of Henry Octavius Coxe nonetheless attempted this for Oxford college manuscripts, defining these collections for generations to come. For some libraries, it is still the latest word. Every historical catalogue retains importance, since they crystallize a collection at a

⁷ Thomas James, *Ecloga Oxonio-Cantabrigiensis, tributa in Libros duos; quorum Prior continet Catalogum confusum Librorum Manuscriptorum in illustrissimis Bibliothecis, duarum florentissimarum Academiarum, Oxoniæ et Cantabrigiæ. Posterior, Catalogum eorundem distinctum et dispositum secundum quatuor facultates, obseruato tam in nominibus, quam in operibus ipsis, Alphabetico literarum ordine* (London: George Bishop, John Norton, 1600), <https://data.onb.ac.at/rep/103BFAD7>; Richard W. Clement, 'Thomas James's *Ecloga Oxonio-Cantabrigiensis*: An Early Printed Union Catalog', *The Journal of Library History* 22, no. 1 (1987): 1–22, <https://jstor.org/stable/25541765>.

⁸ *Catalogi librorum manuscriptorum Angliæ et Hiberniæ in unum collecti, cum indice alphabetico*, 2 vols (Oxford: Sheldonian Theatre, 1697), <https://data.onb.ac.at/rep/107C74A1>; on its history and contributors, see Deborah Stephan, 'Edmund Gibson, Arthur Charlett and *The Catalogue of 1697* (Part 1)', *Bodleian Library Record* 32, no. 1–2 (2019): 124–54; Deborah Stephan, 'Edmund Gibson, Arthur Charlett and *The Catalogue of 1697* (Part 2)', *Bodleian Library Record* 34, no. 1–2 (2021): 85–125; R. W. Hunt, 'Historical Introduction', in *A Summary Catalogue of Western Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library at Oxford*, ed. R. W. Hunt, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), xxv–xxxv, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015010314733>.

⁹ Jean Mabillon, *De re diplomatica libri vi. in quibus quidquid ad veterum instrumentorum antiquitatem, materiam, scripturam, et stilum; quidquid ad sigilla, monogrammata, subscriptiones, ac notas chronologicas; quidquid inde ad antiquariam, historicam, forensemque disciplinam pertinet, explicatur et illustratur* (Paris: Louis Billaine, 1681), <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015046461185>.

particular moment in time before further growth – through donation or (rarely in the case of Oxford colleges) purchase; and loss through sale, theft, or destruction.

However neglectful and derisive of scribal labour the modern era was, most scholars now recognize medieval books as crucial sources for textual, visual, and material culture. Yet misconceptions often arise from superficial studies that concentrate on a minority of manuscripts, and from a lack of understanding of the history of these objects in medieval and modern collections. This chapter explores the history and methods of catalogues of the medieval manuscripts in Oxford's libraries, which represent a centuries-old institutional balancing act between detailed study and basic accessibility. Until the second half of the twentieth century, catalogues rarely include a clear statement of methodology. Many scholars use them as representing the state of knowledge of surviving medieval works, illustration, and provenance; yet it is rarely made clear how hastily some have been assembled or how dramatically approaches have evolved over the centuries.¹⁰

Medieval and early modern book lists and catalogues

Records for books before the sixteenth century are haphazard and rare survivals.¹¹ The medieval records for books at Oxford's university and colleges have now appeared as part

¹⁰ This chapter focuses on anglophone traditions of cataloguing medieval manuscripts: recent continental perspectives include Claudia Fabian, ed., *Faszination (Buch-)Handschriften im Jahr 2022: Tradition und Zukunft ihrer Erschließung in Bibliothek und Wissenschaft*, *Bibliothek und Wissenschaft* 55 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2022); Christoph Egger, 'Sisyphosarbeit und Tantalosqualen? – Vierzig Jahre „Handschriftenbeschreibung in Österreich“', *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung* 121, no. 2 (December 2013): 400–415, <https://doi.org/10.7767/miog.2013.121.2.400>; Bettina Wagner, ed., *Katalogisierung mittelalterlicher Handschriften: Methoden und Ergebnisse*, *Das Mittelalter*, 14, no. 2 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 2009); Claudia Fabian and Bettina Wagner, eds., *Katalogisierung mittelalterlicher Handschriften in internationaler Perspektive: Vorträge der Handschriftenbearbeitertagung vom 24. bis 27. Oktober 2005 in München*, *Beiträge zum Buch- und Bibliothekswesen* 53 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007).

¹¹ Richard Sharpe, *Libraries and Books in Medieval England: The Role of Libraries in a Changing Book Economy. The Lyell Lectures for 2018–19*, ed. James M. W. Willoughby (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2023), 25–58; Richard Sharpe, 'Dissolution and Dispersion in Sixteenth-Century England: Understanding the Remains', in *How the Secularization of Religious Houses Transformed the Libraries of Europe, 16th–19th Centuries*, ed. Cristina Dondi, Dorit Raines, and Richard Sharpe, *Bibliologia* 63 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2022), 39–66, <https://doi.org/10.1484/m.bib-eb.5.128477>; Richard Sharpe, 'Library Catalogues and Indexes', in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, Volume II: 1100–1400*, ed. Nigel J.

of the Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues,¹² providing tantalizing glimpses of the collections to which scholars had access. The material collected in the Corpus volumes provides book lists which served one of two purposes: some were inventories designed for security or for valuation, while others were simple finding aids for users of a library; these can be supplemented by notes of a visitor as such the proto-antiquary John Leland, who recorded those volumes that happened to interest him. At a minimum they provide a brief description of a book's contents, whether as simple as (say) 'Biblia' or giving a sequence of works in a broader anthology. Systematic lists occasionally provided shelfmarks, furnishing crucial evidence for subject classification, numbers of books, and physical spaces. Entries never attempted detailed physical descriptions, instead relying on the inclusion of the opening words of a second folio to identify a specific copy, meaning for example that a loaned book could not be substituted for another with the same contents but of lesser value.¹³ Where manuscripts still survive and are known to come from a particular library, it is often possible to identify them in such lists, but many that can be associated with a specific college do not appear in those lists, amplifying the problem that surviving evidence cannot provide anything approaching a complete picture of books in Oxford. This situation continues to pertain even when we introduce the additional references – rich for some colleges, not for others – provided by archival records such as accounts.¹⁴

Though many college libraries hold books predating the Reformation, by no means all were within the institution that now owns them in the Middle Ages. Indeed, of the pre-1500 foundations, only six keep a significant proportion of their medieval collections and even those have suffered losses and – as with all the other colleges – gained acquisitions from the sixteenth century onwards. This period also saw the beginnings of systematic cataloguing.¹⁵ Thomas James (1572/3–1629) understood the residual value of medieval

Morgan and Rodney M. Thomson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 197–218, <https://doi.org/10.1017/ch019780521782180.013>.

¹² Rodney M. Thomson, *The University and College Libraries of Oxford*, 2 vols, Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues 16 (London: British Library, 2015).

¹³ James Willoughby, 'The *Secundo Folio* and Its Uses, Medieval and Modern', *The Library*, 7th ser., 12, no. 3 (September 2011): 237–58, <https://doi.org/10.1093/library/12.3.237>.

¹⁴ Richard Sharpe, 'Common Carriers in Medieval England: Evidence from Oxford Archives', *Oxoniensia* 81 (2016): 27–61, <https://oxoniensia.org/volumes/2016/Richard%20Sharpe%20revised.pdf>.

¹⁵ Richard Ovenden, 'Catalogues of the Bodleian Library and Other Collections', in *The History of Oxford University Press, Volume I: Beginnings to 1780*, ed. Ian Gadd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 279–92, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199557318.003.0010>; I. G. Philip, *The Bodleian Library in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 10–16.

bibliographical scholarship, publishing an edition of Richard of Bury's *Philobiblon* in 1598 with an appendix of authors to be found in Oxford manuscripts.¹⁶ He was chosen as Bodley's first Librarian in 1599. His *Ecloga Oxonio-Cantabrigiensis*, which appeared in 1600, provided a listing of manuscripts in Oxford and Cambridge college and university libraries. His preface cites as inspiration Henry de Kirkestede (c. 1314–1378 or later), John Leland (c. 1503–1552), and John Bale (1495–1563).¹⁷ Those earlier authors did not aim to list codices systematically but instead were intent on more focused research efforts to discover writers and their works.¹⁸ James presents his own labour as assembling material that demonstrates the falsity of papist positions from the most ancient sources.¹⁹ Like medieval book lists, James's catalogue gives little more than authors and titles, with occasional comments when a book is imperfect or impressive. James crucially dealt only with manuscripts in *Ecloga*, though not all libraries placed them in a separate category from printed books. Christ Church, for example, kept precious books of all kinds in its 'archive'.²⁰ Thomas Bodley himself was adverse to physically separating the Bodleian's manuscripts and printed books, and the catalogues produced under James in 1605 and 1620 list printed and manuscript books together.²¹ James attempted to shelve the manuscripts

¹⁶ Thomas James, *Philobiblon Richardi Dunelmensis sive De amore librorum, et institutione bibliothecæ, tractatus pulcherrimus. Ex collatione cum varijs manuscriptis editio jam secunda; cui accessit appendix de manuscriptis Oxoniensibus* (Oxford: Joseph Barnes, 1598), <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb10164966-0>.

¹⁷ James, *Ecloga Oxonio-Cantabrigiensis*, [iii]; Clement, "Thomas James's "Ecloga Oxonio-Cantabrigiensis", 3–4.

¹⁸ The compilations to which James refers are Richard H. Rouse and Mary A. Rouse, *Henry of Kirkestede. Catalogus de libris authenticis et apocrifis*, Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues 11 (London: British Library, 2004); James P. Carley, *John Leland. De uiris illustribus/On Famous Men*, British Writers of the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period 1 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2010); John Bale, *Scriptorum illustrium maioris Brytanniæ, quam nunc Angliam et Scotiam uocant: Catalogus*, 2 vols (Basel: Johannes Oporinus, 1557–1559), <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.31822038212262>.

¹⁹ Paul Nelles, 'The Uses of Orthodoxy and Jacobean Erudition: Thomas James and the Bodleian Library', *History of Universities* 22, no. 1 (2007): 21–70; Neil R. Ker, 'Thomas James's Collation of Gregory, Cyprian, and Ambrose', *Bodleian Library Record* 4, no. 1 (April 1952): 16–30; G. W. Wheeler, 'Thomas James, Theologian and Bodley's Librarian', *Bodleian Quarterly Record* 4, no. 40 (24 January 1923): 91–95, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.b2912444>.

²⁰ Hanna and Rundle, *Christ Church*, 60.

²¹ Thomas James, *Catalogus librorum bibliothecæ publicæ quam uir ornatissimus Thomas Bodleius Eques Auratus in Academia Oxoniensi nuper instituit; continet autem Libros Alphabetice dispositos secundum quatuor Facultates* (Oxford: Joseph Barnes, 1605),

and printed books separately in 1611 and 1613, failing on both occasions; his successor John Rouse (1574–1652) finally accomplished this in the late 1620s.²² James' catalogues, however, were achievable through a focused aim and by following an established, simple method.

It was a continual challenge to strike a balance between undertaking original research on manuscripts and publishing descriptions of them on a large scale. James' planned catalogue dedicated to Bodleian manuscripts never advanced beyond handlists.²³ A 1635 supplement to the 1620 catalogue continued to combine printed and manuscript books. In the 1640s–50s, Gerard Langbaine (1608/9–58), university archivist and provost of Queen's College, envisioned a catalogue of Oxford's college manuscripts and started on collections in Bodleian, All Souls, Balliol, Lincoln, Magdalen, Merton, New College, Oriel, Queen's, and University. In addition to listing titles, he took steps towards supplying precise physical descriptions of the manuscripts. This did not reach print in the form he conceived it, but many of his notebooks survive and were used in the creation of the 1697 catalogue.²⁴ They came into the hands of Thomas Barlow (1608/9–91), a subsequent provost of Queen's and later bishop of Lincoln, who himself wrote descriptions for a detailed catalogue proposed in 1686, but this also was never published. The tension between making a catalogue available to contemporaries and ensuring its longevity would arise repeatedly.

In 1691, Edmund Gibson (1669–1748), bishop of London, and Arthur Charlett (1655–1722), master of University College, spearheaded what eventually became known as the 1697 catalogue, initially as a catalogue of Bodleian manuscripts.²⁵ It is traditionally cited, however, under the name of Edward Bernard (1638–97), who wrote in a letter of 18 June 1692, the year after he resigned as Savilian professor of astronomy: 'The Catalogus MSS. Bodleianorum stops because they would be more curious, and research the books againe:

<https://data.onb.ac.at/rep/103BFB1F>; Thomas James, *Catalogus universalis librorum in bibliotheca Bodleiana omnium Librorum, Linguarum, et Scientiarum genere refertissima, sic compositus; Ut non solum Publicum per Europam Universam Bibliothecis, sed etiam Privatis Musæis, aliisque ad Catalogum Librorum conficiendum usui esse possit. Accessit Appendix Librorum, qui vel ex munificentia aliorum, vel ex censibus Bibliothecæ recens allati sunt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1620, 1635), <https://data.onb.ac.at/rep/103BFBo6>.

²² Stephan, 'The Catalogue of 1697 (Part 1)', 127–29.

²³ G. W. Wheeler, *The Earliest Catalogues of the Bodleian Library* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1928), 8–20.

²⁴ Bodl. MSS. Langb. 1–21 and MSS. Wood donat. 1–9; Hunt, 'Historical Introduction', xviii–xxv; Kidd, *Queen's College*, 25–29.

²⁵ Stephan, 'The Catalogue of 1697 (Part 1)', 124–26.

so that I fear our pittance of life will not obtaine that sight.²⁶ Within the year, Bernard was named editor. This work abbreviated the descriptions produced to date, often in a mechanical manner that removed helpful information.²⁷ It proceeded with such success that it was possible to include Oxford colleges as well (excluding Christ Church) and quickly expanded its scope to include other cathedral and school collections in libraries around the country, in an attempt to create a nationwide union catalogue. The catalogue's numbering scheme became a lasting reference: the Bodleian *Summary Catalogue* extended them and collections such as Magdalen also retained them.²⁸ Supplemented by handwritten lists for later donations, the catalogue was the primary means for readers in Oxford to find manuscripts until the later nineteenth century.²⁹

Oxford did not print a new catalogue of its manuscripts for the duration of the eighteenth century, though researchers produced new works in the field. Humfrey Wanley (1672–1726) contributed to the 1697 catalogue and wrote his own to assess every book containing texts in Old English, an innovative comparative work that understood the value of applying documentary evidence to underpin palaeography.³⁰ His work later inspired the catalogue of the Parker Library's manuscripts by James Nasmith (1740–1808), though it does not reach the same standard.³¹ In an echo of James' attachment to Leland and Bale, Thomas Tanner (1674–1735) set out to verify their bibliographies of British writers using manuscript

²⁶ Bodl. MS. Smith 47, fol. 111r, also quoted in Hunt, 'Historical Introduction', xxxi.

²⁷ Hunt, xxv–xxxv.

²⁸ Hunt, lxiv.

²⁹ Hunt, xl–xlii; H. H. E. Craster, *History of the Bodleian Library, 1845–1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), 22–23, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015036907098>.

³⁰ Humfrey Wanley, 'Librorum Vett. Septentrionalium, qui in Angliæ Biblioth. extant, Catalogum Historico-Criticum; nec non multorum Vett. Codd. Septentrionalium alibi extantium notitiam, cum totius operis sex Indicibus', in *Linguarum Vett. septentrionalium thesaurus grammatico-criticus et archæologicus*, ed. George Hickes, vol. 1, 2 vols (Oxford: Sheldonian Theatre, 1705), part 2, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435031477540>; Orietta Da Rold, 'Tradition and Innovation in Cataloguing Medieval Manuscripts', *Anglia* 139, no. 1 (April 2021): 33–35, <https://doi.org/10.1515/ang-2021-0003>; Neil R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), xiii–xiv; Kenneth Sisam, 'Humfrey Wanley', in *Studies in the History of Old English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), 259–77.

³¹ James Nasmith, *Catalogus librorum manuscriptorum quos collegio Corporis Christi et B. Mariæ Virginis in academia Cantabrigiensi legavit reverendissimus in Christo pater Matthæus Parker, archiepiscopus Cantuariensis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1777), <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/gri.ark:/13960/to7x1hcos>.

evidence, in a work that he originally called *Bibliotheca Britannica*, building on the 1697 catalogue.³² It was widely known that Tanner was at work on the book, but he lost interest in it, and it was not published until more than a decade after his death.³³ The Bodleian's next manuscript catalogue only appeared after its 1804 acquisition of books once belonging to Jacques Philippe D'Orville (1696–1751).³⁴

Coxe's catalogue of college manuscripts

Bulkeley Bandinel (1781–1861) became Bodley's Librarian in 1813, and the following year proposed a new, complete catalogue of manuscripts and printed books. He hired Henry Octavius Coxe (1811–81) as a sublibrarian in January 1839.³⁵ Coxe had been a student at Worcester College, after which he moved to London in 1833 to work in the British Museum's Department of Manuscripts, while also acting as curate in chapels within poorer districts of the parishes of St James, Piccadilly, and the neighbouring St Martin-in-the-Fields. Biographers remember him as much for his pastoral work as his librarianship.³⁶ After moving to Oxford, he married Charlotte Esther Turner (1804–95) in April 1839, the second daughter of General Sir Tomkyns Hilgrove Turner, who bought them a house at 17 Beaumont Street, and there they raised five children. Charlotte herself produced a remarkable collection of 2,400 drawings of English baptismal fonts, now in the Bodleian

³² Richard Sharpe, 'Thomas Tanner (1674–1735), the 1697 Catalogue, and *Bibliotheca Britannica*', *The Library*, 7th ser., 6, no. 4 (December 2005): 381–421, <https://doi.org/10.1093/library/6.4.381>; R. W. Hunt, 'Tanner's *Bibliotheca Britannico-Hibernica*', *Bodleian Library Record* 2, no. 28 (February 1949): 249–56.

³³ Thomas Tanner, *Bibliotheca Britannico-Hibernica: sive, De scriptoribus, qui in Anglia, Scotia, et Hibernia ad saeculi XVII initium floruerunt, literarum ordine juxta familiarum nomina dispositis commentarius*, ed. David Wilkins (London: Bowyer, 1748), <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb10633320-4>.

³⁴ Thomas Gaisford, *Codices manuscripti, et impressi cum notis manuscriptis, olim D'Orvilliani, qui in bibliotheca Bodleiana apud Oxonienses adservantur* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1806), <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.hxg91z>.

³⁵ Mary Clapinson, *A Brief History of the Bodleian Library*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2020), 147–61; Hunt, 'Historical Introduction', l–liv; Craster, *History of the Bodleian*, 30–45.

³⁶ Mary Clapinson, 'Coxe, Henry Octavius (1811–1881), Librarian', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/6534>; John William Burgon, 'Henry Octavius Coxe', in *Lives of Twelve Good Men*, vol. 2, 2 vols (London: Murray, 1888), 122–48, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.l0063140669>.

(MSS. Top. eccl. b. 2–22). Coxe eventually served as Bodley’s Librarian from 1860 until his death.³⁷

When Coxe began, contemporaries deemed the Bodleian’s collections fundamentally inaccessible, which at this time would have become more apparent by comparison with the growing British Museum and Bibliothèque nationale. His colleague William Dunn Macray (1826–1916) looked back on the situation in lively terms:

For many years, while the doors of the Bodleian had stood open, a somewhat narrow exclusiveness, which had come by inheritance from the last century rather than from any more recent origin, had given little encouragement to entrance. It was ever the library of the real scholar, the studious theologian, the man of established reputation; all these found its stores placed willingly and unreservedly at their disposal. But beginners were looked upon suspiciously; anxious, nervous tyros had to pass through an ordeal of inquiry and criticism, and sometimes even of positive rebuff. A just dread of those mere idle purposeless readers who simply use libraries as a lounge for wasting time, and who are the torment of popular libraries and their librarians, led to the regarding the great Bodleian too often as a kind of literary preserve, in which the favoured few might enjoy excellent shooting, while the many were looked upon as little better than poachers.³⁸

Coxe developed an ambitious routine for publishing catalogues and critical editions. His former British Museum colleague, Sir Frederic Madden (1801–1873), had predicted that Francis Douce (1757–1834) was leaving a splendid collection to ‘neglect and oblivion’ at the Bodleian.³⁹ Coxe was determined to prove him wrong: he began to catalogue the newly acquired Douce collection in April 1839 and finished a draft of the manuscripts, charters, and drawings in four months; it went to press by the end of the year.⁴⁰ The catalogue

³⁷ Craster, *History of the Bodleian*, 39–41.

³⁸ William Dunn Macray, ‘Mr. Coxe’s Work at the Bodleian’, in *Transactions and Proceedings of the Fourth and Fifth Annual Meetings of the Library Association of the United Kingdom* (London: Chiswick Press, 1884), 13–14, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.hnziad>.

³⁹ Joby Topper, ‘Saved from “Oblivion”: The Organization and Management of the Douce Collection at the Bodleian Library and the Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, Oxford, 1834–1934’, *Library History* 20, no. 3 (November 2004): 184–85, <https://doi.org/10.1179/lib.2004.20.3.183>.

⁴⁰ Henry O. Coxe, *Catalogue of the Printed Books and Manuscripts Bequeathed by Francis Douce, Esq., to the Bodleian Library* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1840), <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/chi.73330782>.

included four lithographic facsimiles to communicate the initials and scripts represented. Coxe's diary (surviving as extracts by his son Hilgrove) indicate the speed with which he assessed manuscripts, as in his entry for 14 January 1841: 'Bodley 1-3. B[ulkeley] B[andinell] ill, so alone all day. Catalogued [MSS. Canon. Class. Lat.] 226-250 !!! eighteen between 1- $\frac{1}{4}$ 3, the greatest number I ever did in one day, all Ciceros.'⁴¹ Coxe was also a critical editor, publishing eight volumes of Latin, Anglo-Norman, and Middle English texts between 1840 and 1850, after which he became increasingly responsible for the Bodleian's operations in Bandinel's absence.

Coxe began to catalogue the Oxford college manuscripts in June 1841, beginning with All Souls.⁴² This volume appeared the following year, with a title and preface in English rather than Coxe's more usual Latin.⁴³ Initially, he looked for work with colleges as a means to supplement an insufficient income from the Bodleian.⁴⁴ He took commissions simultaneously as a cataloguer and copyist, referring to it in his diary as 'private work'.⁴⁵ During the summer, he was often at work by five in the morning, as in the entry for 4 August 1845: 'Transcribing at 5 for Warden New College. 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ -9 S. John's. 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ -10 transcribing. Bodley 10-1 $\frac{1}{2}$.; $\frac{1}{2}$ -2 transcribing; 2-4 Bodley 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ -5 $\frac{1}{2}$. 7 $\frac{3}{4}$ -9 $\frac{3}{4}$ transcribing.'⁴⁶ He split his duties differently depending on the season: for example, he was at Balliol from 9.30am-2.30pm on 12-16 November 1849.⁴⁷ During the winter, the temperature inside libraries regularly fell below freezing, as Coxe frequently noted in his diary, recording a particularly frigid 12°F (-11°C) at 7am on 14 March 1845.⁴⁸ In 1844-51, Coxe catalogued every manuscript in an Oxford college library written in Greek, Latin, and related vernaculars; the results appeared in print in 1852.⁴⁹ Only Christ Church and Pembroke did not feature in this publication. Christ Church aimed to showcase the breadth of languages in their

⁴¹ Oxford, Bodleian Library, Library Records d. 1745, fol. 13r.

⁴² Hunt, 'Historical Introduction', liii-liv gives a full chronology.

⁴³ Henry O. Coxe, *Catalogue of Manuscripts in the Library of All Souls College* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1842), <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044048602403>.

⁴⁴ Craster, *History of the Bodleian*, 32.

⁴⁵ For example, Bodl. Library Records e. 609, fol. 70r.

⁴⁶ Bodl. Library Records e. 609, fol. 42r, also quoted in Craster, *History of the Bodleian*, 32.

⁴⁷ Bodl. Library Records e. 609, fol. 69r.

⁴⁸ Bodl. Library Records e. 609, fols. 37v-38v.

⁴⁹ Coxe, *Catalogus*.

collection and dealt with their manuscripts independently, following Coxe's format though with less detail.⁵⁰

Coxe provides brief statements on his approach to college cataloguing in his prefaces. He acknowledged that his work was in places no more than summary: for All Souls, he said, 'to describe each particular article would have far exceeded the limits allowed to the present compilation'.⁵¹ He signals an interest in manuscript history including both origin and provenance; and the attribution of texts to authors. His Latin letter to the reader in the 1852 catalogue has not previously been translated and is worth quoting in full:

A list of the handwritten codices kept in the libraries of the Colleges and Halls of Oxford became public domain in the *Catalogue of Manuscripts of England and Ireland*, which was published at Oxford in 1697 in two large-format volumes. Since, however, this book rarely appears in booksellers' shops today, and moreover is plagued by many shortcomings – for it never lays out the character and age of manuscripts, is somewhat careless in presenting the titles of writings, and passes over many things that should not have been left behind without great loss to the literary world – we thought it would be worthwhile to recreate it with new attention, so that, by correcting its faults and supplying what was lacking, it would be useful for the benefit of scholars, as far as possible. Therefore, after diligently searching through the bookcases of libraries, we have examined all the codices anew, and at last, after the passage of ten years, we bring the fruit of our labour into the light.

Now a few things remain to be said about the rationale of our undertaking. First of all, we have made an effort to present before the reader's eyes the number of leaves of each manuscript, the material on which it is written, its size, age, and ornaments, if any; then to provide the contents of each at length, accurately listing the names of the writers, and, wherever they are lacking, to search for them as far as possible, and to indicate the unpublished ones here and there. Finally, to provide easier access for those seeking something, we added a general index at the end, arranged in alphabetical order, in which, in addition to the

⁵⁰ G. W. Kitchin, *Catalogus codicum mss. qui in bibliotheca Ædis Christi apud Oxonienses adservantur* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1867), <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044080270259>; discussed in Hanna and Rundle, *Christ Church*, 70–73; Pembroke's manuscripts first appeared in Neil R. Ker, *Medieval Manuscripts in British Libraries*, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969–2002), iii, pp. 669–693.

⁵¹ Coxe, *All Souls College*, v.

names of writers, we have included the contents of each book. Enjoy these, and if you find anything unpolished or faulty, kindly forgive it.⁵²

This follows the order of elements in Coxe's entries. He gave the date of manuscripts, usually to the century, within the context of physical details. He noted the presence of double columns and sometimes decoration, describing manuscripts with basic phrases such as 'quoad literas initiales pictus et auratus' ('painted and gilded as regards its initials').⁵³ Names of former possessors are usually quotations of ex libris inscriptions (for each college, an opening page listed donors). Coxe was strong in recognizing patristic texts and does not state when his identifications differ from rubrics, but fortunately gives incipits, often for each part of a text. Though Coxe presents himself as an 'editor' in the All Souls preface, and his name does not appear on the title page, the 1852 publication credits him with 'confecit' ('composed' or 'compiled'), the style that his Greek, Canonici, and Laudian catalogues also give. (Modern cataloguers likewise prefer to be considered

⁵² Coxe, *Catalogus*, [iii]:

Codicum manu exaratorum, qui in Bibliothecis Collegiorum atque Aularum Oxoniensium custoditi sunt, index publici juris factus est in "Catalogo Manuscriptorum Angliæ et Hiberniæ" qui prodiit Oxonii a. 1697, duobus voluminibus formæ maximæ. Quum vero iste liber hodie in tabernis bibliopolarum perraro compareat, et preterea multis defectibus laboret, quippe qui codicum indolem et ætatem nunquam exponat, in scriptorum titulis exhibendis parum diligenter versatus sit, multaque omittat non sine magno rei litterarie dispendio in preteritis relinquenda, operæ pretium videbamus facturi, si eundem novis curis instauraremus, ita ut prava emendando et quæ defecerant supplendo studiosorum commoditatibus, quoad ejus fieri posset, prospiceretur. Itaque perlustratis sedulo bibliothecarum forulis codices omnes denuo excussimus, ac tandem post denorum annorum decursum laboris nostri fructum in lucem proferimus.

Nunc pauca restant de instituti nostri ratione monenda. In primis igitur operam dedimus ut foliorum uniuscujusque codicis numeri, materies in qua scriptus est, magnitudo, ætas, ornamenta, si qua sunt, ob oculos lectoris proponerentur, tum ut singulorum argumenta fuse exhiberentur, scriptorum nomina accurate proderentur, et sicubi desunt pro virili indagarentur, inedita passim indicarentur. Denique quo facilius quærentibus aliquid fiat aditus, in fine communem indicem adjecimus ordine alphabetico digestum, in quo præter scriptorum nomina consignavimus librorum singulorum argumenta. His frui, et si quid inconditi aut mendosi inveneris, pro tua benignitate ignoscas.

⁵³ Coxe, *All Souls College*, 1, describing MS. 2.

authors.) Coxe's work left many desiderata and has yet to be replaced for some colleges, yet 'it is better to have almost any catalogue than to wait for a perfect one.'⁵⁴

Coxe's catalogue appears on shelves as a two-volume mass and might give a reader unfamiliar with Oxford the impression that it represents a unified collection. Though the full work was published under the title *Catalogus* in the singular and concludes with a general index, it is more accurately a collection of catalogues, each with a half-title and separate pagination, ordered by date of college foundation. The catalogue opened college collections in new ways to readers unaware of their contents. It is unclear whether it had any influence in a later movement for colleges to deposit their manuscripts in the Bodleian, which began with University College in 1882 and gained new impetus with the need for wartime safekeeping.⁵⁵

This result contrasts with Cambridge's college libraries, for which M.R. James (1862–1936) toured the institutions and published larger volumes for each of them, as well as for the Fitzwilliam Museum, of which he was sometime Director (1893–1908).⁵⁶ These volumes are more colourful than Coxe's, reflecting James' personal interests and opinions, particularly art-historical. He was heavily influenced by working with medieval book lists, some of which he published: Richard Pfaff argues that James aimed with his cataloguing 'to construct a kind of *bibliothèque imaginaire*'.⁵⁷ James was indebted to Henry Bradshaw (1831–1886) for his methods, who in many respects took a more advanced approach than Oxford's. Bradshaw paid greater attention to material details such as collation, and used technical knowledge of subjects such as liturgy to improve dating and provenance.⁵⁸ James took a discursive and speculative approach that can appear deceptively modern, especially

⁵⁴ Hunt, 'Historical Introduction', xlii.

⁵⁵ Robert J. Bruce, 'Deposits in the New Bodleian During the Second World War', *Bodleian Library Record* 26, no. 1 (April 2013): 59–82; Hunt, 'Historical Introduction', xlvi.

⁵⁶ Lorenzo DiTommaso, 'Pseudepigrapha Notes II: 3. The Contribution of the Manuscript Catalogues of M.R. James', *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 18, no. 2 (December 2008): 83–160, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0951820708098808>; A. J. Piper, 'Cataloguing British Collections of Medieval Western Manuscripts, 1895–1995', in *The Legacy of M. R. James: Papers from the 1995 Cambridge Symposium*, ed. Lynda Dennison (Donnington: Tyas, 2001), 53–64; Richard W. Pfaff, *Montague Rhodes James* (London: Scholar Press, 1980), 172–208, 262–91.

⁵⁷ Pfaff, *Montague Rhodes James*, 172.

⁵⁸ Richard Beadle, *Henry Bradshaw and the Foundations of Codicology: The Sandars Lectures 2015* (Cambridge: Langham Press, 2017), 25–63.

in a draft essay on assessing the material of books.⁵⁹ Later assessments of his scholarship have sometimes been dismissive: Andrew Watson viewed James' work as that of 'a gentleman amateur who played the game for pleasure and not to a degree that would involve disagreeable effort'.⁶⁰ James was certainly less forthcoming than Coxe about the gaps left in his descriptions, and this sometimes had the effect of closing research prematurely rather than making way for future scholars. It was this model of dedicated catalogues for each college collection that Oxford would eventually imitate.

College collections in the twentieth century

The groundwork of Coxe's catalogue addressed the problem of basic accessibility for manuscript collections in Oxford's colleges, leaving room for scholars to address collections as research problems in themselves. Medieval manuscript studies evolved significantly during the twentieth century through integrating interdisciplinary approaches including palaeography, diplomatic, and art history, providing a more comprehensive understanding of manuscripts and their context. The expanded study of manuscripts in their full material and cultural context is sometimes called codicology, though some researchers approach this as encompassing aspects of manuscripts apart from study of the script.⁶¹ Leonard Boyle called the revolution in medieval book history 'integral palaeography'.⁶² The later twentieth century brought a renaissance in what one might call integral cataloguing.

In parallel to his catalogue of college manuscripts, Coxe also laboured on the new Bodleian 'quarto catalogues', a series intended to recatalogue the library's full collections. The first

⁵⁹ Richard W. Pfaff, 'M. R. James on the Cataloguing of Manuscripts: A Draft Essay of 1906', *Scriptorium* 31, no. 1 (1977): 103–18, <https://doi.org/10.3406/scrip.1977.2821>.

⁶⁰ Andrew G. Watson, review of *Montague Rhodes James*, by Richard W. Pfaff, *Archives* 14, no. 64 (Autumn 1980): 249, <https://proquest.com/docview/1293297655>.

⁶¹ Javier del Barco, 'From the Archaeological Turn to "Codicologie Structurale": The Concept of Codicology and the Material Description of Hebrew Manuscripts', in *Jewish Manuscript Cultures: New Perspectives*, ed. Irina Wandrey, *Studies in Manuscript Cultures* 13 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 3–28, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110546422-002>; François Masai, 'Paléographie et codicologie', *Scriptorium* 4, no. 2 (1950): 279–93, <https://doi.org/10.3406/scrip.1950.2308>; Alphonse Dain, *Les manuscrits*, 3rd ed., *Collection d'études anciennes* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1975), 76–93.

⁶² Leonard E. Boyle, *Medieval Latin Palaeography: A Bibliographical Introduction*, *Toronto Medieval Bibliographies* 8 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), xv.

volume covered its Greek manuscripts.⁶³ Coxe and others published more of these volumes throughout the century, but progress was slow, leaving parts of the collection untouched. This became an international embarrassment for the university when a library attendant mistakenly delivered MS. Auct. T. 2. 26 to a visitor from Austria, Heinrich Schenkl (1859–1919), which he identified as an unknown fifth-century copy of Jerome’s translation of Eusebius.⁶⁴ In opposition to Edward Nicholson (1849–1912), Bodley’s Librarian, Falconer Madan (1851–1935) championed a summary approach based on the French tradition of *Inventaire sommaire* catalogues.⁶⁵ He was particularly inspired by the work of Henri Omont (1857–1940) on Greek manuscripts.⁶⁶ Nicholson saw this as a step backwards from the quarto series. The difference in opinions can be seen in their answers to a committee on cataloguing in 1890. Asked to state the aims and audience of a catalogue, Nicholson returned:

To supply the wants of the non-resident scholar: and aid him by every means to identify or differentiate the particular MS.: the student of palaeography, of illuminations, of music, of bindings, of the history of libraries, will all demand different details: the staff desire information on the history and characteristics of each MS.⁶⁷

He could not say how long it would take to write such an entry. By contrast, Madan allowed only twenty-five minutes to freshly describe a manuscript, or fifteen minutes for one that the 1697 catalogue had included, describing as his purpose:

⁶³ Henry O. Coxe, *Catalogi codicum manusccriptorum bibliothecæ Bodleianæ pars prima, recensioem codicum Græcorum continens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1853), <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/gri.ark:/13960/t4mk9qcoc>.

⁶⁴ Theodor Mommsen, ‘Die älteste Handschrift der Chronik des Hieronymus’, *Hermes* 24, no. 3 (1889): 393, <https://jstor.org/stable/4472197>; E. G. Hardy, ‘The Bodleian MS. of Jerome’s Eusebian Chronicle’, *The Journal of Philology* 18, no. 36 (1890): 277, <https://doi.org/10.1017/cb09781139523714.021>; Andrew Clark, *The Cataloguing of Mss. in the Bodleian Library: A Letter Addressed to the Members of Congregation by the Outgoing Junior Proctor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1890), 27, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015033918205>.

⁶⁵ Armando Petrucci, *La descrizione del manoscritto: Storia, problemi, modelli*, 2nd ed., *Beni culturali* 24 (Rome: Carocci, 2001), 40–42, 105–7; Hunt, ‘Historical Introduction’, lvii–lix.

⁶⁶ The first of several volumes is Henri Omont, *Inventaire sommaire des manuscrits du supplément grec de la Bibliothèque nationale* (Paris: Picard, 1883), <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015028850546>.

⁶⁷ Hunt, ‘Historical Introduction’, lxvi.

To give the minimum help which a scholar has a right to demand: by supplying a Student who has not as yet handled the volume with brief but precise information as to what he may expect to find.⁶⁸

Nicholson's submission is closer to what scholars would now expect of a manuscript description, but the committee sided with Madan out of a desire for timely completion.

The brief descriptions that Madan promoted meant that even with the disruptions of war, the resulting *Summary Catalogue* was complete in under sixty years.⁶⁹ Yet without a formal folio-by-folio enumeration of a book's contents, many texts went unnoticed, while information on material aspects and decoration was intentionally sparse. It dominated manuscript description at Oxford in the early twentieth century. As it did not leave space for the systematic creation of detailed description, it also did not prompt calls to update catalogues of college manuscripts.

Madan was recognized for his abilities with both manuscripts and printed books, and was among the founders of the Oxford Bibliographical Society in 1922.⁷⁰ Bibliography in this period almost exclusively concentrated on printed books, and it may have been with his influence that the society's original constitution set out the first of its general objects as 'The discussion and elucidation of questions connected with books, printed or manuscript.' Heading a list of more detailed subjects is 'College Libraries: their treasures, catalogues, and schemes of co-operation.'⁷¹ In practice, the society gave far more attention to printed books than manuscripts, but it successfully galvanized new interest in college libraries.

By the early twentieth century there was a growing awareness of the need to study the history of libraries themselves for understand their collections and readers, and tracing lost books. This was the first strand of attention that scholars gave to Oxford's college libraries in the twentieth century. The Oxford Bibliographical Society's first volume of publications includes an overview and history of Worcester College Library, beginning

⁶⁸ Hunt, lxvii; see also Falconer Madan, 'Treatment and Cataloguing of Manuscripts', in *Books in Manuscript: A Short Introduction to Their Study and Use*, 2nd ed. (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1920), 153–66, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc2.ark:/13960/t7pn92p34>.

⁶⁹ R. W. Hunt et al., *A Summary Catalogue of Western Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library at Oxford*, 7 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1895–1953), <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000375043>.

⁷⁰ See William Whyte's chapter in this volume.

⁷¹ 'Objectives of the Society, Rules, Council, List of Members', *Oxford Bibliographical Society Proceedings and Papers* 1, no. 1 (1922): 4–5.

with its medieval origins and including both manuscript and print holdings. The article indicates the low levels of use that the collection received:

The college libraries of Oxford and Cambridge are, on the whole, little known. Important collections such as the music and the drawings of the old masters in Christ Church, and the Parker Manuscripts in Corpus Christi, Cambridge, are famous; but few people, even those most interested, would be able to give any useful account of what is to be found in the less-known libraries. A truthful bibliographical map of Oxford would show the Worcester Library as a sort of Sahara or Baffin Land, a blank with a few names written in the middle or round the edge, the result of the work of a few explorers.⁷²

This was the first of several studies of college collections published during the twentieth century. An article on Magdalen College appeared three years later, but most of the piece is dedicated to listing books printed before 1641 found in the college but not the Bodleian, for these were not yet covered by a union catalogue.⁷³

The most innovative work of scholarship on Oxford's manuscripts in this period was arguably Maurice Powicke's book on the medieval library of Merton College.⁷⁴ It is formed around editions of booklists and a summary catalogue of the college's manuscripts, not meant to replace Coxe but extending his work with records of the evidence relevant to tracing the books' history in the college, while also providing corrected information in some cases. This book demonstrated what could be achieved through combining documentary and material research. Powicke's relatively brief analysis did not fully bring out the significance of the material edited, but Julia Walworth's recent history of the library has again demonstrated the validity of his method in a far more accessible format.⁷⁵ Though Neil Ker (1908–82) planned to edit surviving booklists for every Oxford collection, his vision was only realized in 2015.⁷⁶ In the meantime, other brief library histories were published under the auspices of the Oxford Bibliographical Society and elsewhere for

⁷² C. H. Wilkinson, 'The Library of Worcester College', *Oxford Bibliographical Society Proceedings and Papers* 1, no. 4 (1926): 263.

⁷³ G. R. Driver, 'Magdalen College Library', *Oxford Bibliographical Society Proceedings and Papers* 2, no. 3 (1929): 145–200.

⁷⁴ F. M. Powicke, *The Medieval Books of Merton College* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931).

⁷⁵ Julia C. Walworth, *Merton College Library: An Illustrated History* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2020).

⁷⁶ Thomson, *The University and College Libraries of Oxford*, vi.

Jesus,⁷⁷ Corpus Christi,⁷⁸ University College,⁷⁹ All Souls,⁸⁰ St John's,⁸¹ and New College.⁸² Some of this scholarship added notes on manuscripts that Coxe had not seen, but Powicke's approach was necessarily unique, since Merton preserves a unique wealth of evidence for its medieval books.

The catalogue of Balliol College's manuscripts by Roger Mynors belongs to the same period as Powicke's work, though it published decades later. It was the first attempt to replace Coxe's catalogue for a college collection but was created for the specific reason of understanding the medieval character of the collection: a question that Coxe simply had not asked. Mynors began work on the project in 1926; he became college librarian in 1929 and finished a draft by 1940. He moved to Cambridge in 1944 and was bitterly disappointed not to be elected as master of Balliol in 1949; the catalogue (with updated engagement with recent scholarship) was not published until 1963, after years of reminders from Oxford

⁷⁷ C. J. Fordyce and T. M. Knox, 'The Library of Jesus College, Oxford, with an Appendix on the Books Bequeathed Thereto by Lord Herbert of Cherbury', *Oxford Bibliographical Society Proceedings and Papers* 5, no. 2 (1937): 49–115.

⁷⁸ J. R. Liddell, 'The Library of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, in the Sixteenth Century', *The Library*, 4th ser., 18, no. 4 (1938): 385–416, <https://doi.org/10.1093/library/s4-xviii.4.385>; Rodney M. Thomson, *The Fox and the Bees: The Early Library of Corpus Christi College, Oxford. The Lowe Lectures 2017* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2018).

⁷⁹ R. W. Hunt, 'The Manuscript Collection of University College, Oxford: Origins and Growth', *Bodleian Library Record* 3, no. 29 (January 1950): 13–34.

⁸⁰ H. H. E. Craster, *The History of All Souls College Library*, ed. E. F. Jacob, All Souls Studies 6 (London: Faber, 1971); Neil R. Ker, *Records of All Souls College Library, 1437–1600*, Oxford Bibliographical Society Publications 16 (Oxford: Oxford Bibliographical Society, 1971); Andrew G. Watson, 'The Post-Medieval Library', in *Unarmed Soldiery: Studies in the Early History of All Souls College. The Chichele Lectures, 1993–1994*, ed. Jeremy I. Catto (Oxford: All Souls College, 1996), 65–91; Ian Maclean, *All Souls Library, 1438–2008: Buildings, Collections, Donors. A Brief Illustrated Guide* (Oxford: All Souls College, 2008).

⁸¹ R. W. Hunt, 'Donors of Manuscripts to St John's College, Oxford, During the Presidency of William Laud, 1611–1621', in *Studies in the Book Trade in Honour of Graham Pollard*, ed. R. W. Hunt, I. G. Philip, and R. J. Roberts, Oxford Bibliographical Society Publications, n.s., 18 (Oxford: Oxford Bibliographical Society, 1975), 63–70.

⁸² R. W. Hunt, 'The Medieval Library', in *New College, Oxford, 1379–1979*, ed. John Buxton and Penry Williams (Oxford: New College, 1979), 317–45; William Poole, *New College Library Through Time* (Oxford, 2018).

University Press.⁸³ In the meantime he also began and completed a catalogue of Durham Cathedral's manuscripts, similarly focused on understanding the character of Durham Priory.⁸⁴ He later described his aim as 'a catalogue in three dimensions, not just the bibliographer's flatland'.⁸⁵ He credited M.R. James as the inspiration for the catalogue, but named Richard Hunt (1908–79) and Neil Ker as the main influences on his approach⁸⁶. Together with Christopher Cheney (1906–1987), these figures were responsible for initiating the Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues and *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain*, combining all types of evidence to associate surviving manuscripts with medieval collections.⁸⁷ Mynors systematically collected information on physical evidence that Coxe had ignored, such as collation, layout features such as ruling, script, colophons, and marginalia, all of which he combined into narratives on the provenance and use of books within the medieval college, reflected in the unprecedentedly full introduction Mynors provided. The Balliol catalogue is a more fully realized version of Powicke's vision for research on collection formation, but made without the benefit of Merton's detailed documentary evidence.

The end of the Second World War brought the opportunity to reassess the situation of college manuscripts: the *Summary Catalogue* was complete and most college collections were deposited centrally in the New Bodleian Library. Edmund Craster (1879–1959) gave a paper for the Oxford Bibliographical Society in 1947 reflecting on the society's dedication to college libraries. Among a range of opportunities for collaboration he highlighted the

⁸³ Bethany Hamblen, Naomi Tiley, and Stewart Tiley, 'Messing about with Manuscripts': R.A.B. Mynors and Balliol's Medieval Library. An Exhibition Held at Balliol College Historic Collections Centre, St Cross Church, Oxford, Michaelmas Term 2020 (Oxford: Balliol College, 2020), 1–3.

⁸⁴ R. A. B. Mynors, *Durham Cathedral Manuscripts to the End of the Twelfth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939).

⁸⁵ Michael Winterbottom, 'Roger Aubrey Baskerville Mynors, 1903–1989', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 80 (1993): 379, <https://britac.ac.uk/publishing/memoirs/pba-80/mynors-roger-aubrey-baskerville-1903-1989>; Peter A. Stokes, 'Holistically Modelling the Medieval Book: Towards a Digital Contribution', *Anglia* 139, no. 1 (1 April 2021): 6–31, <https://doi.org/10.1515/ang-2021-0002> considers implications of applying this digitally.

⁸⁶ R. A. B. Mynors, *Catalogue of the Manuscripts of Balliol College, Oxford* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), v, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015034760655>.

⁸⁷ Sharpe, *Libraries and Books in Medieval England*, xi–xii, 3–13; James Willoughby, 'Medieval Libraries of Great Britain: MLGB3', in *How the Secularization of Religious Houses Transformed the Libraries of Europe, 16th–19th Centuries*, ed. Cristina Dondi, Dorit Raines, and Richard Sharpe, *Bibliologia* 63 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2022), 521–27, <https://doi.org/10.1484/m.bib-eb.5.128502>.

need for an updated version of Coxe's catalogue, while questioning the depositing movement:

Coxe compiled this catalogue in his spare hours, particularly the hours before breakfast, and his work, which is now a century old, has lasted well. But no one can deny that it could now be much improved and brought up to modern standards of cataloguing; that very many anonymous pieces are now capable of identification; and that much greater attention requires to be paid to illumination than Coxe devoted to it. Seven of our colleges have deposited their manuscript collections on loan in the Bodleian, those of Corpus and New College being the most considerable. Should the rest follow their example? I am not so sure of the answer as I once was.⁸⁸

Craster implied that accessibility is better achieved through improving catalogues than centralizing collections. In 1947 the number of college deposits at the Bodleian had yet to reach their peak. Even during this period of centralization, no college took up Craster's call to rewrite Coxe in the immediate post-war period, perhaps because his unified volumes now reflected the reality of their storage. By the end of the twentieth century, the illusion of a unified Oxford manuscript collection disappeared as Corpus, New College, and Magdalen College withdrew their holdings due to overcrowding and environmental hazards in the New Bodleian, which was in danger of losing its status as an approved repository.⁸⁹

One of Neil Ker's ambitious projects was *Medieval Manuscripts in British Libraries*, which he began to develop in 1953. He aimed to provide a comprehensive guide to the public collections holding medieval manuscripts throughout the British Isles, with new descriptions where a satisfactory catalogue did not already exist. He developed a list of 'sixteen points' that became influential in anglophone scholarship.⁹⁰ For Oxford colleges, he mostly filled in acquisitions since Coxe's time.⁹¹ Ker died before completing the work, and the index volume, compiled under the guidance of Andrew Watson (1924–2017), was

⁸⁸ H. H. E. Craster, 'Co-Operation Between College Libraries', *Oxford Bibliographical Society Publications* n.s., 4 (1952): 48.

⁸⁹ Richard Ovenden, 'The Creation of the Weston Library', in *Transforming the Bodleian*, ed. Michael Heaney and Catriona Jeanne Cannon, Current Topics in Library and Information Practice (Berlin: De Gruyter Saur, 2012), 177–78, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110289398.175>.

⁹⁰ Ker, *Medieval Manuscripts in British Libraries*, i, pp. vii–xiii; Ralph Hanna, 'Manuscript Catalogues and Book History', *The Library*, 7th ser., 18, no. 1 (March 2017): 49–50, <https://doi.org/10.1093/library/18.1.45>.

⁹¹ Ker, *Medieval Manuscripts in British Libraries*, iii, pp. 584–735.

published twenty years after his death. Ker did not feel sufficiently confident of his abilities in art history to give extensive treatment of illustration.⁹² Yet he was far more thorough than Coxe, and his documentation is now invaluable. Some of the small collections he saw have since been sold off amid the decline in British public institutions, often leaving manuscripts untraceable. This has thankfully been insignificant in Oxford, but many of his descriptions are still unreplaced.

Keble College was founded two decades too late to be included in Coxe's catalogue. Malcolm Parkes (1930–2013), the English Faculty's professor of palaeography and a fellow of the college, used the opportunity to describe a new collection of manuscripts without a long history together to develop the genre of the manuscript catalogue itself.⁹³ He considered how the diversity of script, illumination, and textual content in medieval manuscripts impact the cataloguing process, and proposed different approaches to address this challenge. Within his area of expertise of Western medieval manuscripts, he put forward the results as ideal manuscript descriptions. They closely reflect his personal research interests, with particular attention given to the topic of punctuation which was later to become the subject of one of his highly regarded monographs.⁹⁴ For Greek and non-Western manuscripts, he provided only summary descriptions. The catalogue was the first of its kind to include extensive reproductions of the manuscripts it described, which later became one of the most important feature of such books.

A number of specialist catalogues appeared in the second half of the twentieth century to address specific research needs that earlier catalogues had mostly ignored. The most obvious gap in research on Oxford's manuscripts was in art history. Though the Bodleian had once housed England's first public art gallery on its upper floor, the library's focus had long been textual. Following the rise of National Socialism in Germany, Otto Pächt (1902–88) came as a refugee to London and then Oxford, demonstrating the artistic importance of Oxford's collections.⁹⁵ His survey of decoration of all types resulted in a catalogue of illuminated manuscripts finished by Jonathan Alexander (1935–), followed by a volume dedicated to Oxford libraries beyond the Bodleian with another displaced scholar, Elżbieta

⁹² A. I. Doyle, 'Ker, Neil Ripley, 1908–1982', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 80 (1991): 355–57, <https://britac.ac.uk/publishing/memoirs/pba-80/ker-neil-ripley-1908-1982>.

⁹³ M. B. Parkes, *The Medieval Manuscripts of Keble College, Oxford: A Descriptive Catalogue with Summary Descriptions of the Greek and Oriental Manuscripts* (London: Scolar Press, 1979), <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015002134081>.

⁹⁴ M. B. Parkes, *Pause and Effect: An Introduction to the History of Punctuation in the West* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 1992).

⁹⁵ Martin Kauffmann, 'Otto Pächt in the Bodleian Library', *Art Libraries Journal* 38, no. 4 (2013): 37–42, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0307472200018782>.

Temple (1909–88).⁹⁶ Irmgard Hutter produced a specialized survey of Byzantine illuminated manuscripts⁹⁷. Other specialist catalogues including college manuscripts included an Oxford contribution to the *Manuscripts datés* initiative, documenting evidence for books that can be firmly connected to specific dates to build up more precise knowledge of palaeography;⁹⁸ and a directory of Middle English prose.⁹⁹ The various catalogues produced to this point thus pushed the envelope in areas of provenance, art history, palaeography, and textual identification that later catalogues would be expected to meet.

Exactly half a century after Edmund Craster's call for new catalogues of college manuscripts, Oxford University Press published the first modern replacement for Coxe, much like Keble's illustrated catalogue. Catalogues of Western manuscripts appeared under the names of Andrew Watson¹⁰⁰ and of Ralph Hanna and Jeremy Griffiths.¹⁰¹ Just a few years later, Rodney Thomson chose Boydell and Brewer for his publisher.¹⁰² Greek

⁹⁶ Otto Pächt and J. J. G. Alexander, *Illuminated Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library, Oxford*, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966–1973), <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000468709>; Alexander and Temple, *Illuminated Manuscripts*.

⁹⁷ Otto Demus and Irmgard Hutter, eds., *Corpus der byzantinischen Miniaturenhandschriften*, Denkmäler der Buchkunst 2, 5, 9, 13, 16 (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1977–), including volumes for the Bodleian Library, Christ Church, and other college libraries.

⁹⁸ Andrew G. Watson, *Catalogue of Dated and Datable Manuscripts c. 435–1600 in Oxford Libraries*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984); Marilena Maniaci and Ezio Ornato, 'Il catalogo dei manoscritti datati: Una babele codicologica', *Gazette du livre médiéval* 41, no. 1 (2002): 1–11, <https://doi.org/10.3406/galim.2002.1571>.

⁹⁹ S. J. Ogilvie-Thomson, *A Handlist of Manuscripts Containing Middle English Prose in Oxford College Libraries*, *Index of Middle English Prose* 8 (Cambridge: Brewer, 1991).

¹⁰⁰ Andrew G. Watson, *Descriptive Catalogue of the Medieval Manuscripts of All Souls College, Oxford* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Andrew G. Watson, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Medieval Manuscripts of Exeter College, Oxford* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹⁰¹ Ralph Hanna and Jeremy Griffiths, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Western Medieval Manuscripts of St. John's College, Oxford* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

¹⁰² Rodney M. Thomson and N. G. Wilson, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Medieval Manuscripts of Merton College, Oxford* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2009); Rodney M. Thomson, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Medieval Manuscripts of Corpus Christi College Oxford* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2011).

manuscripts were often addressed separately, in works by Mark Sosower and Nigel Wilson.¹⁰³ Unlike the nineteenth century, there was no single publisher or house style for an Oxford college catalogue, and cataloguers consciously took different approaches.

‘Presentist’ cataloguing and the digital turn

The development of codicology in the twentieth century means that manuscript descriptions are now expected to communicate a far wider range of information. The detailed approach of Edward Nicholson has ultimately prevailed over Falconer Madan’s *Summary Catalogue*. The effort to give the study of manuscripts a scientific grounding, however, has not always resulted in more intelligent catalogues, as it can result in cataloguers recording details without using them to support arguments for the nature and history of collections. Ralph Hanna cautioned against this ‘presentist’ approach to cataloguing, criticizing those who write descriptions without analysing what they record, and calling on cataloguers instead to focus on ‘that dynamic development of books and their history’.¹⁰⁴ For example, he demonstrated that it is not enough to record a collation formula: a description should draw out its full significance.¹⁰⁵ He and Richard Beadle later defined manuscript descriptions focusing on a book’s creation:

Speaking generally, a formal description offers, as an ordered sequence of categories, a synthesis of numerous details that are initially observed synchronically in the process of examining a book. In doing so, the primary object of a description is to offer information that reconstructs the scribe’s activity in producing it.¹⁰⁶

Both systematically recording the full range of evidence and interpreting it within a coherent argument is the challenge that cataloguers face.

¹⁰³ Mark L. Sosower and Jane Eagan, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Greek Manuscripts at St. John’s College, Oxford* (Oxford: St John’s College Research Centre, 2007); N. G. Wilson, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Greek Manuscripts at Corpus Christi College, Oxford* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2011); Mark L. Sosower and N. G. Wilson, *A Catalogue of the Greek Manuscripts of Magdalen College, Oxford* (Cambridge, MA: Venetian Press, 2016).

¹⁰⁴ Hanna, ‘Manuscript Catalogues and Book History’, 51–58.

¹⁰⁵ Ralph Hanna, ‘The Booklet in Medieval Manuscript Cataloguing’, *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 55 (2011): 231–48, <https://doi.org/10.1484/j.nms.1.102425>.

¹⁰⁶ Richard Beadle and Ralph Hanna, ‘Describing and Cataloguing Medieval English Manuscripts: A Checklist’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval British Manuscripts*, ed. Orietta Da Rold and Elaine Treharne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 14, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316182659.002>.

It has long been the dream of those creating digital catalogues to improve researchers' ability to draw conclusions grounded in a broad base of evidence across disparate collections. This potential has yet to be met, for social reasons that have manifested themselves as technical problems. This begins at the level of the most basic technical standards. Attempts to treat manuscript catalogues primarily as collections of empirical data have led to problems because digital formats encourage binary statements by their nature. The retrospective conversion of printed catalogues entails the application of digital standards for encoding characters, dates, and language names that make it easier to use manuscript descriptions from a range of sources. The inability to express uncertainty can inadvertently change a statement from the original cataloguer's intent.

The structures developed to make sense of large quantities of information can obscure the fact that the very means of expressing information in a digital format can change its meaning. Unicode, which defines the existence of text within modern computing, has had strong involvement from medievalists through the Medieval Unicode Font Initiative (MUFI), but its standards are not always suitable for medievalists' needs.¹⁰⁷ Unicode did not include a character for the common *punctus elevatus* until the present author worked with Michael Everson to propose it in 2016. The International Organization for Standardization updated its code for dates in computing, ISO 8601, in 2019 to allow for the representation of uncertain dates spanning centuries and decades, in a movement spearheaded by the Library of Congress. A lack of involvement from palaeographers or art historians, however, means that there is no way to express the quarter-centuries common in these fields, which may force future cataloguers to jettison traditional means of dating to ensure fluent application of the notation standard. The registry of language names between which one can choose in digital contexts, maintained by the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF), includes Old French, Middle French, and Anglo-Norman; but uneven scholarly involvement means that it has no means of distinguishing between, for example, Italian dialects. Even where libraries seem to control standards, as in the case of authority control, a lack of engagement from manuscript specialists results in inaccurate indexes and other resources, since their identification of written works is often based on printed bibliographies that fail to use manuscript evidence.¹⁰⁸ These technical standards now

¹⁰⁷ Odd Einar Haugen, 'Parallel Views: Multi-Level Encoding of Medieval Nordic Primary Sources', *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 19, no. 1 (April 2004): 73–91, <https://doi.org/10.1093/lc/19.1.73>.

¹⁰⁸ Richard Sharpe, 'The Contribution of Manuscript Catalogues to Identifying Medieval Latin Texts', in *Katalogisierung mittelalterlicher Handschriften in internationaler Perspektive: Vorträge der Handschriftenbearbeitertagung vom 24. bis 27. Oktober 2005 in München*, ed. Claudia Fabian and Bettina Wagner, Beiträge zum Buch- und Bibliothekswesen 53 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007), 51–60; Richard Sharpe, *Titulus: Identifying Medieval Latin Texts. An Evidence-Based Approach*, Brepols Essays in European Culture 3 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003).

influence the creation and presentation of digital catalogues, showing the necessity of scholars engaging critically with software development.

The increased use of digital tools made it possible by the 1990s to create large-scale, accessible catalogues of manuscripts, but from the outset a lack of agreement on the terminology and structures of catalogues has made this difficult to achieve.¹⁰⁹ Some catalogues use conventions designed for archives, such as for the Bodleian's early modern manuscripts and the British Library's manuscripts.¹¹⁰ Others use variants of the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI) guidelines. Researchers at the University of Oxford were heavily involved in the creation of TEI for manuscript description, initially for studying the creation of a new Bodleian catalogue and later as part of a European Union project.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Early discussions include Agnès Guillaumont and Jean-Luc Minel, 'MEDIUM: Database for Medieval Manuscripts', *Primary Sources & Original Works* 1, no. 3-4 (July 1992): 29-38, https://doi.org/10.1300/j269vo1no3_03; Hope Mayo, 'MARC Cataloguing for Medieval Manuscripts', *Primary Sources & Original Works* 1, no. 3-4 (July 1992): 93-152, https://doi.org/10.1300/j269vo1no3_08; Rowan Watson, 'Automation and the Medieval Manuscript', *Gazette du livre médiéval* 31, no. 1 (1997): 41-46, <https://doi.org/10.3406/galim.1997.1386>; Andrew Prescott, Michelle Brown, and Richard Masters, 'The Survey of Illuminated Manuscripts', in *Towards the Digital Library: The British Library's Initiatives for Access Programme*, ed. Leona Carpenter, Simon Shaw, and Andrew Prescott (London: British Library, 1998), 130-47.

¹¹⁰ Mike Webb, 'EAD in the Department of Special Collections and Western Manuscripts at the Bodleian Library, United Kingdom', *Journal of Archival Organization* 3, no. 2-3 (10 January 2006): 55-69, https://doi.org/10.1300/j201vo3no2_05; Rachel Stockdale, 'The Retrospective Conversion of the British Library Manuscripts' Catalogues: A Description of the Project', *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 21, no. 2 (October 2000): 199-213, <https://doi.org/10.1080/713683213>.

¹¹¹ Lou Burnard, Richard Gartner, and Peter Kidd, 'The Cataloguing of Western Medieval Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library: A TEI Approach' (Oxford: Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, August 1997), <https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:dad6c686-326c-4b96-b28d-c9efiaf603b2>; Thomas Stäcker and Thorsten Schaßan, 'MASTER/TEI-P5. Entwicklung eines allgemeinen Schnittstellen- und Austauschformats auf der Basis der „Richtlinien Handschriftenkatalogisierung“', in *Katalogisierung mittelalterlicher Handschriften in internationaler Perspektive: Vorträge der Handschriftenbearbeitertagung vom 24. bis 27. Oktober 2005 in München*, ed. Claudia Fabian and Bettina Wagner, Beiträge zum Buch- und Bibliothekswesen 53 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007), 71-76; Zdeněk Uhlíř and Adolf Knoll, 'Manuscriptorium Digital Library and ENRICH Project: Means for Dealing with Digital Codicology and Palaeography', in *Kodikologie und Paläographie im digitalen Zeitalter*, ed. Malte Rehbein, Torsten Schaßan, and Patrick Sahle, vol. 2, Schriften

Medieval Manuscripts in Oxford Libraries is the direct result of this work, which aims to be a new union catalogue for libraries associated in any way with the university.¹¹² TEI provides a means of assigning interpretive elements to written information such as editions or catalogue entries, turning them into structured data that can be interpreted by a machine. The consortium maintaining the guidelines has avoided the creation of standardized forms of TEI, in a laudable attempt at avoiding prescriptive approaches to scholarship. As a result, however, there is no single format for manuscript descriptions, and each project implements TEI in a slightly different manner. This has the positive outcome of allowing those who find the TEI conventions unsuitable for their purposes to take their own approaches. The lack of interoperability, however, makes the creation and reuse of TEI manuscript descriptions complex.¹¹³ Many cataloguers continue to write in a standard word processor, with specialists later converting these into a structured format. The lack of a fixed digital structure for manuscript catalogues thus encourages innovation but also results in a much higher barrier to entry for new cataloguers. Digital manuscript descriptions have yet to reach their full potential and have not made printed catalogues redundant.

The Oxford Bibliographical Society ‘Special Series’

By the end of the 2000s, many libraries were publishing catalogues electronically before they appeared in print, if they were printed at all. Some academic publishers have been willing to experiment with making the core of catalogues and critical editions available for reuse before and after publication. This has become one of the hallmarks of the Oxford Bibliographical Society’s college manuscript catalogues: from the first volume, cataloguers have had the freedom to distribute drafts available before publication in print. Descriptions for the first volume, Peter Kidd’s catalogue of the Queen’s College, was available for a decade in draft form through the college library’s website; readers of manuscripts at Magdalen College Library routinely receive draft entries from the forthcoming Society catalogue with a request for comment. The Special Series has aimed

des Instituts für Dokumentologie und Editorik 2 (Norderstedt: BoD, 2009), 67–78, <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:38-29619>.

¹¹² Bodleian Library, *Medieval Manuscripts in Oxford Libraries* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2017–), <https://medieval.bodleian.ox.ac.uk>.

¹¹³ Toby Burrows et al., ‘Transforming TEI Manuscript Descriptions into RDF Graphs’, in *Graph Data-Models and Semantic Web Technologies in Scholarly Digital Editing*, ed. Elena Spadini, Francesca Tomasi, and Georg Vogeler, *Schriften des Instituts für Dokumentologie und Editorik* 15 (Norderstedt: BoD, 2021), 143–54, <http://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:38-552318>.

to produce the best possible catalogues independent of the technologies of either print or digital publication.

During the first two decades of the twenty-first century, there was significant enthusiasm for funding the digitization of manuscripts but much less for new cataloguing and other interpretive activities.¹¹⁴ It is not uncommon to find a full set of photographs accompanied by a description written in centuries past, if the library supplies one at all. Even when a new catalogue exists, specialist knowledge of how to read a manuscript description is necessary to know which images are most significant. Few libraries have attempted guides through digitized holdings. By contrast, each Oxford Bibliographical Society catalogue is illustrated with carefully chosen photographs of each manuscript, not only of attractive miniatures but of scripts and sometimes other notable features such as bindings and repairs. These allow readers to absorb visual information that would require hours of browsing through digitized manuscripts. It is indeed possible for readers to enjoy a selection of plates without any technical knowledge of manuscripts, and the books' user-friendliness is enhanced through championing higher production values and better design than possibly any digital catalogue. Perhaps most importantly, the accessible and tangible qualities of a printed volume make it practical for a small collection to raise the funds necessary to produce a new catalogue.

In spite of its early commitment to both manuscripts and colleges, in practice neither of these had been significant features of the Society's publications before it launched its Special Series of college manuscript catalogues. Manuscripts had mostly featured in the society's publications as evidence for reconstructing collections,¹¹⁵ although a study of the books of Buildwas Abbey included attention to codicological evidence such as ruling and page layout.¹¹⁶ The series is thus a return to the society's founding principles in their insistence that bibliography should include both print and manuscript books, and their particular interest in college libraries. The development of codicology also means that

¹¹⁴ Andrew Prescott, 'Slow Digitisation and the Battle of the Books', in *Slow Scholarship: Medieval Research and the Neoliberal University*, ed. Catherine E. Karkov (Cambridge: Brewer, 2019), 143–61, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781787447042.008>.

¹¹⁵ A. B. Emden, *Donors of Books to S. Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury*, Oxford Bibliographical Society Occasional Publications 4 (Oxford: Oxford Bibliographical Society, 1968); David G. Selwyn, *The Library of Thomas Cranmer*, Oxford Bibliographical Society Publications, 3rd ser., 1 (Oxford: Oxford Bibliographical Society, 1996); Nicolas K. Kiessling, *The Library of Anthony Wood*, Oxford Bibliographical Society Publications, 3rd ser., 5 (Oxford: Oxford Bibliographical Society, 2002).

¹¹⁶ Jennifer M. Sheppard, *The Buildwas Books: Book Production, Acquisition and Use at an English Cistercian Monastery, 1165–c. 1400*, Oxford Bibliographical Society Publications, 3rd ser., 2 (Oxford: Oxford Bibliographical Society, 1997).

manuscript cataloguing fits more closely with the approaches of print-oriented bibliography than it sometimes has in the past.

The Special Series follows the basic pattern that Parkes established with his catalogue for Keble and Andrew Watson further honed for All Souls and Exeter. This broadly consists of an introduction to the collection's formation, sources, and history, drawing on evidence from buildings and documentary sources as well as the books themselves; followed by manuscript descriptions furnishing detailed evidence for the author's arguments on the collection's character, and supplying information to support research in texts, material, and provenance. Many readers now neglect indexes when it is possible to search a book's complete text, and digital catalogues often index only works, people, and places; but the society's compilers construct catalogues conscious that some researchers will be interested in features such as indexes to highlight discoveries such as *cautiones*, pecia marks, and prices in books. The catalogues close with selected reproductions of scripts and other key features that the descriptions cite. The result is a guided but open-ended tool for discovering unexpected features in a collection that one cannot browse on a shelf, and in a way that neither digital catalogues nor digitized manuscripts have yet achieved.

The creation of printed catalogues is still the most practical means of sustainably completing work in part because of structures of academic credit. As libraries conventionally attributed volumes of catalogues to individual scholars, rather than the individual entries, this translated into names not typically being attached to entries that form of a large institutional resource. Catalogues such as *Medieval Manuscripts in Oxford Libraries* now attribute each entry to the individuals that wrote it, but even where this information is available researchers tend to cite entries without their authors' names. This has the effect of this discouraging researchers from involvement in digital catalogues, especially given that the cataloguing of manuscripts, like critical editing, is often assumed already to be an uncreative task. One might note that the descriptor of 'catalogue' is relegated to the subtitle in Richard Gameson's *Medieval Manuscripts of Trinity College, Oxford: A Descriptive Catalogue*. Effectively, scholars treat digital manuscript descriptions in a similar vein to an entry for a modern printed book in a library system; but separate entries for a book in two university libraries will be almost identical (and are indeed shared between institutions), while different cataloguers of the same manuscript will produce notably different results. Though manuscript catalogues include empirical observations, they are not mere collections of objective facts. Descriptions are highly variable, based on the cataloguer's personality, temperament, knowledge, training, specialisms, and working conditions.¹¹⁷ The best manuscript descriptions are focused arguments concerning the nature of a particular object, articulated through the full range of available evidence. What appears to be an accumulation of detail without authorial intervention is better

¹¹⁷ Consuelo W. Dutschke, 'Cataloguing Medieval Manuscripts', in *The Oxford Handbook of Latin Palaeography*, ed. Frank T. Coulson and Robert G. Babcock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 980, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195336948.013.25>.

understood by both cataloguers and readers as the construction of an argument on the nature and history of a book through gathered evidence, and it is imperative to know who is making that argument.

On publishing the first and final volume of the Bodleian *Summary Catalogue*, R.W. Hunt wrote that ‘the completion of any catalogue seems more subject to unforeseen obstacles than most scholarly undertakings.’¹¹⁸ The history of manuscript cataloguing for Oxford’s colleges shows how they have used catalogues to make their treasures open to research: from medieval booklists, most of them lost; through the groundbreaking work of Thomas James, Edward Bernard, and Henry Coxe; through the development of the integral catalogues of the twentieth century; and finally to the publications now navigating ways to create comprehensive and comprehensible results from constantly growing datasets. These efforts represent the best kind of scholarship: works that open new possibilities for others. Drawing on a long tradition of cataloguing college collections that stretches back to their formation, the Oxford Bibliographical Society’s Special Series has set a consistent bar for research-led catalogues that marry textual, physical, and contextual evidence to create a window into textual communities’ intellectual lives.

Alexander, J. J. G., and Elzbieta Temple. *Illuminated Manuscripts in the Oxford College Libraries, the University Archives, and the Taylor Institution*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985. <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015017028484>.

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¹¹⁸ Hunt, ‘Historical Introduction’, lxxv.

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