



An Online Exhibition of Women's History at St John's College, Oxford Trinity Term 2020

Introduction

This online exhibition showcases both the history of women at St John's College, and the women within the collections. It has drawn together the College's collections from the Library, Archive, and Pictures. The physical exhibition was planned for Trinity Term 2020 in the Library & Study Centre, to coincide with the variety of events planned to mark 40 Years of Women at St John's College. Due to the current restrictions caused by the development of Covid-19, the closest approximation achievable to a physical exhibition was this online exploration of the women in the College's collections. While this provides an overview of what would have been the exhibition, there are limits to an online exhibition. The sense of wonder and engagement with collections that is magnified when you can see the original object is difficult to capture in a digital replica. However, there are benefits to digital exhibitions: images of multiple pages within a book can now be displayed, and the exhibition can be visited at any time (and in any location) to suit you.

This exhibition is in two parts: the first examines the history of women at St John's, from the women related to the Founder to the formal introduction of women as members, and the second explores the women in the collections, who don't have a direct role in college history. The history of women at St John's spans material from Library manuscripts, to archival material and college paintings. The 'women in the collections' portion of the exhibition draws some of the Library's early printed material together to explore the history of women within English society, from the sixteenth-century (when the College was founded) to the eighteenth. It is notable that this section only

includes material from the early modern period: it shows both the new potential for women authors with the advent of the printed book, as well as the cultural contributions women could make to academic society before their admittance to universities in general.

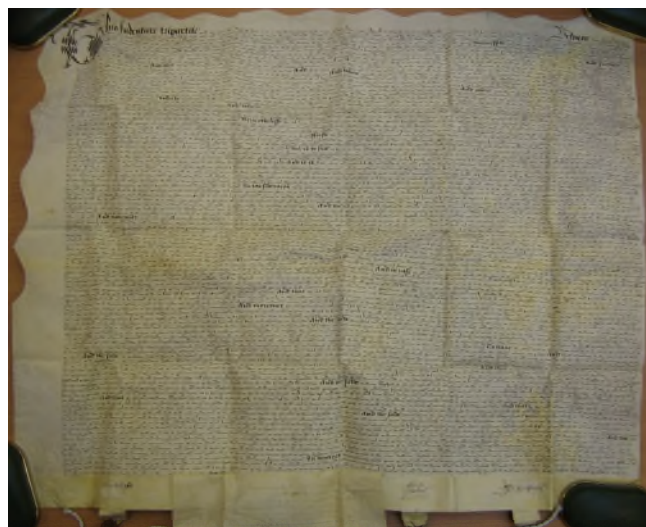
Many thanks to the College Library staff, Archivist, and Keeper of the Pictures for their help in putting together this exhibition.

History of Women at St John's College

Of St John's 465 year history, women have only formally been admitted as members for just over 40. However, the College's collection in the Library, Archive, and Pictures, shed light on the women who played pivotal roles in the College's history and life. These women have helped save the College from financial ruin, have added to its cultural assets, and contributed to general College life, each in their own way. The past 40 years have welcomed in a new co-educational era to St John's, bringing the women who have always been a part of larger society, and the College, into the mainstream everyday life of St John's.

Lady Joan White

Lady Joan White was the wife of the founder, Sir Thomas White. This deed, held in the College Archive, presents Lady White's agreement to pay instalments of money to the College, to help save it from financial ruin. She promises money to the College which was initially promised in Sir Thomas White's will. Unfortunately, the money promised by Lady White was legally forfeit to her. However, the agreement suggests Lady White had a level of visibility within the College, and was seen as an important figure in helping run the College in its early life.



From the College Statutes, written by Thomas White, c. 1567:

'Fynally upon the especiall affiaunce and truste that I have of dame Joane my wieff's vertuouse inclinacion and godly furtheraunce of this my new eerected colledge, I give and graunte unto hyr full power and authoritye that shee duryng the terme of hir naturall lyfe shall not only be taken and called after my deceasse by the name of fowndres, but alsoe shall have full power and authoritye freely and franckly to adde, renewe, chaunge and alter any thinge or things conteyned or mencioned in my sayd Statutes accordinge as shall seeame beste unto hyr for thincrease of God's glorye and furtheraunce of my sayd colledge'

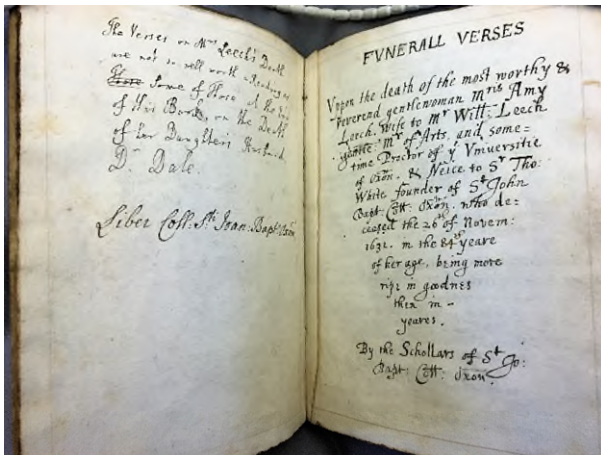
This is estimated to have been added in 1567, along with Statute 69, which limited the power of the Foundress to nominate scholars of the College. However, this addition proves the commitment that Thomas White expected his wife to have for the College, even after his death. It suggests that Lady White's power and influence in College extended beyond simply being the wife of the Founder: she was intricately connected and responsible for the College in her own right.

Amy Leech

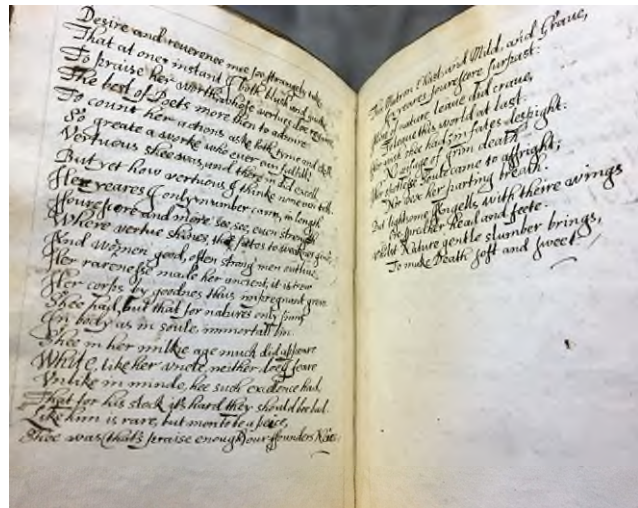
The Founder's niece, Amy Leech, was another woman who played an important part in the early history of St John's College.

As with most women of the time, Amy is perhaps best known for her male relatives. Her husband, William Leech played an important role in the college, as he was key in helping the College to acquire Bagley Wood in 1583. He is also recorded in the Bursars accounts as having regularly donated to the College. In 1595, the Leeches' house was 'taken down, removed and translated to the said Colledge...for the building and erecting of the said library'. While all accounts of the Leeches' incredibly generous financial assistance to the College are in William's name, it is suspected that it was Amy who had a "Founder's interest", and encouraged this help. She is named as Thomas White's niece in a 1602 inventory, when she donated some 'old superstitious church ornaments' [fifteenth-century Founder's vestments] to the College President. These vestments had most probably been protected at the Leeches' house during the

Dissolution of the Monasteries. The funeral verses written by the scholars of St John's at her death strengthen Amy's connection with the College, placing her as an important figure in both College life during the late sixteenth-century, and College History overall.



MS 213: Verses on the death of Amy Leech, written by the scholars of the College. They celebrated Amy as a 'most worthy and revered gentlewoman', who died in her 86th year 'more ripe in goodness than in age'. This manuscript contains 20 poems written by St John's scholars: 16 are in English, and the remaining 4 are in Latin.



Mary Bridgman and Jane Austen

One of the College's most loved manuscripts is a collection of letters written by Jane Austen to her niece Anna, as well as a letter from Jane's father offering a publisher the manuscript of what would become the novel *Pride and Prejudice* - this letter was rejected by post.

Jane's father, and two of her brothers attended St John's College. Her brothers attended as Founder's Kin Scholars, due to their familial connection to the Founder on their maternal side. Sir Thomas White's sister, Mary Bridgman, was the maternal grandmother (seven times removed) of Jane Austen and her siblings. Given this connection, and that her father spent thirteen years as a scholar at the College between 1747 and 1760, St John's would have been the closest university affiliation to Jane. It is not unreasonable to speculate that had women been allowed to be members of Oxford, Jane would have attended St John's. This serves as a potent reminder of the missed potential that could have had a deeper connection to the College had universal education been advocated for much earlier in our society.

Austen's connections to St John's College therefore run deep on her maternal side, and are present on her paternal side. The letters were donated to the College by Austen's niece Anna's granddaughter, Mary Isabella Lefroy, in 1939, completing the College connection. It is particularly fitting that this chain of women with a strong familial College connection spanning several centuries, contributed to the College's special collections before women were even admitted into the College.

Mary Bridgman, sister of Sir Thomas White, and ancestor of Jane Austen





Charlton Wednesday Aug. 10.
I am quite ashamed to find that I have never
answered some quarters of yours in a former note. I hope
the note on Juniper is not to be of a perfect kind, without
that it is like the name which is the flower? very
well & I dare say shall give to like it very much in time
but "Balthazar" was something so very superior that
very common. The name appears to be a disadvantage. I am
not sensible of any Abundance about Balthazar. The book
was particularly pitiful & wretched 12 years ago & not likely
to have any body's publications. There is no such title
at Exeter - either among the Books, Magazines, &c.
& accounts in Paris. - There were your enquiries. -
I will now thank you for your envelope, received this
morning. I hope Mr. D. will come. I can send to
enquire Mr. D. may be very like a profigate young
man - I am sure the book will be longed every thing
your Aunt says - to be well pleased with it, I believe
I am delighted with the idea of seeing Balthazar again.
Wednesday 17 - We have just finished the 1st of the 3
Books I had the pleasure of receiving yesterday. I send
it along - I am in all very much obliged, & like the
book quite as well as ever - I depend upon getting

declined by Return of Post.
Sir
I have in my possession a Manuscript Book,
comprised in three Vols about the length of Miss Burney's
Sensibility. As I am well aware of what consequence it is that
work of this sort should make its first appearance under a respec-
table name I apply to you, that be methought, therefore, if
you will inform me whether you chuse to be concerned in it,
what will be the expense of publishing at the Author's risk,
& what you will venture to advance for the Property of it,
if on a perusal it is approved of.
Should you answer give me encouragement I will
send you the work.
I am, Sir, &c. of the noble Lord
Geor. Kebleton.
St. Auston near Dorset
Hants
1st Nov^r 1797.

The letters which the College are in possession of include several letters dated 1814 from Jane to her niece Anna, as well as a letter from Jane's father to Thomas Cardell (the publisher), offering the manuscript of what would become the novel *Pride and Prejudice*. Cardell returned (and thereby rejected) Austen's offer by return of post. All six letters are currently kept together in a blue guard book, excepting one letter to Anna Austen, which was separated from the rest for the Michaelmas 2019-20 Library Exhibition, Special Collections Today and Tomorrow, which celebrated the opening of the new Library & Study Centre.

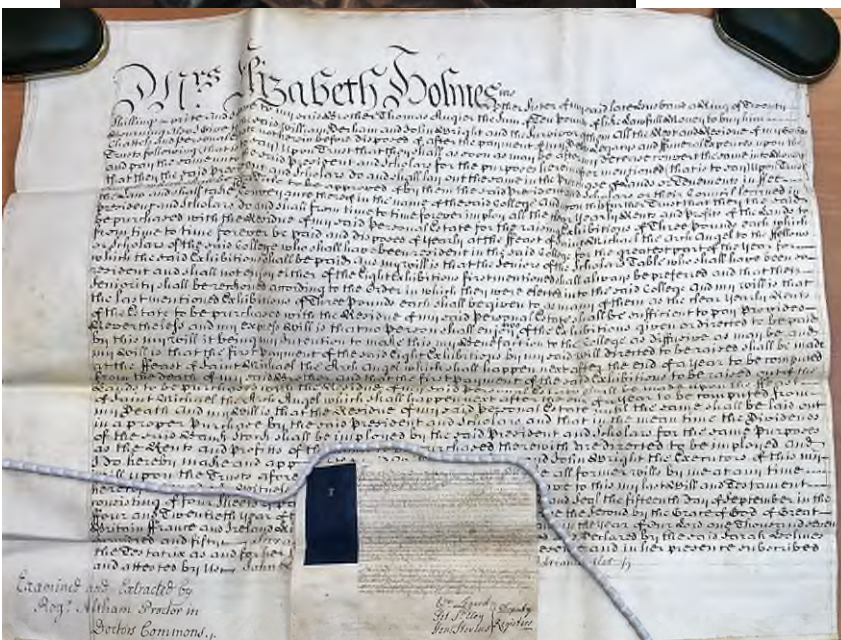
Sarah Holmes

Another woman who was pivotal to the running of the College was Sarah Holmes, wife to William Holmes. William was the President of St John's between the years of 1728 and 1748. College records showed she played a vital role in supporting her husband's running of the College. Her encouragement led to the building of the Holmes Building, and she was responsible for the erection of the monument to William in the College chapel.

Sarah's will and probate is kept in the College Archive, and she is known for giving money intended for scholarships to the College.



Sarah Holmes, painted by Enoch Seeman the Younger.



Sarah Holmes' will and probate declaring her benefaction to the College. Her benefaction provided money to the College to go towards scholarships.

Henrietta Maria

Henrietta Maria, the wife of King Charles I and mother of Charles II, has a particular connection to the St John's Library and Canterbury Quad, through her relationship with Archbishop Laud. Her support for the Classical Renaissance style can be seen within the building of the Quad, and her attendance at the extravagant opening ceremony for the "new library" of 1636 demonstrates an influence within the artistic and creative realm allowed her as Queen Consort.

The nature of Henrietta Maria's connection with Archbishop Laud has been contested - some argue for their deep friendship, while others claim they crossed swords due to Henrietta's ardent Catholicism (and support for Catholicism within a Church of England realm). Either way, it is clear that the two were connected, and much of what is attributed to Laud's relationship with King Charles I was actually mediated via Henrietta.



Henrietta Maria, by Anthony
van Dyck

Canterbury Quad was constructed between 1631 and 1636, and the French sculptor Hubert le Sueur constructed the bronze statues of Charles I and Henrietta Maria that are situated on the east (Charles) and west (Henrietta) sides of Canterbury Quad. Henrietta's statue commands the Western view of Laud's Quadrangle. This speaks to the influence that Henrietta had not just as the wife of the current King, but also to the cultural influence she held in spite of her different religion and nationality to the rest of England. As a French Catholic, Henrietta Maria was not popular. The English Civil War of course emphasized this unpopularity, and le Sueur's statues of both Henrietta and Charles would not have been safe during the Civil War and the time of Cromwell's Republic – it is thought that they may have been buried during the War and restored at the Restoration.

Henrietta Maria's role in the public eye, as queen consort through her marriage to Charles I, was not viewed in a positive light during her lifetime, and history has generally not been kind to her. However on paper, she did perform the duties required of her as queen consort: she gave birth to a male heir and a spare, as well as to daughters who could be married off for alliances. While we now know of course that genetically it is the male "role" in conceiving a child which decides the genetic gender of babies, the seventeenth-century view was that the gendering of babies was a female responsibility, creating enough males to keep the family line strong, and enough females to connect their family with other powerful families. While Henrietta "performed" her duties on this spectrum, she was still not liked by the general English populace.

In spite of this, she commanded power and influence, both during her time as queen consort, and during the Civil War. She would work as Charles's proxy for much of his life. During the Civil War, Henrietta helped co-ordinate Charles' correspondence, and raise their eldest son the prince regent, and future King Charles II. This can be seen through one of the early printed books St John's College Library holds, containing much of the correspondence of Charles I's life, particularly during the Civil War. In these, we can see the affection Charles held for his wife, as well as the responsibility entrusted to her. He addresses her as 'dear heart', and alludes to his strategic plans in his correspondence during the Civil War.



Vera Ellen Poole

Vera Ellen Poole was the wife of former history tutor and President of St John's, Austin Lane Poole. She was a gifted artist who had studied art with Sickert, the post-impressionist painter. Her artistic career was active only for around eight years, as her husband disapproved of her art, and largely limited her artistic endeavors. St John's has kept several of her paintings, several of which were donated by her daughter, Catherine Dupre.

The paintings showcased here are oil on canvas, and are both based at St John's College.



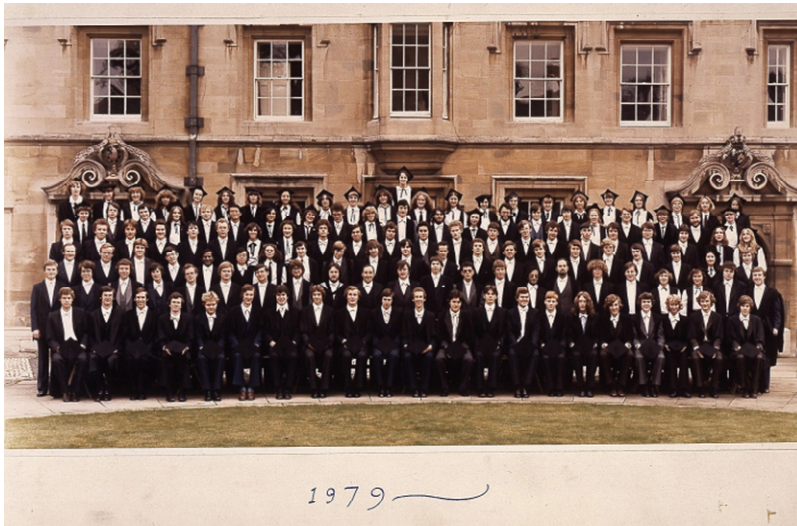
Lilies, or still life with St John's
College



St John's Forecourt

40 Years of Women

While it is clear that women have been a part of College life and history for much longer than the past forty years, women have only been formally admitted as college members for forty years. The first female junior research fellow was admitted in 1978, and the first cohort to include women was in the 1979-80 academic year. The images included here mark the first few momentous years of women being formally admitted to the College.



The 1979 matriculation photograph: the first to include women in its cohort.

The college notes (an early form of the college magazine) from the years surrounding the introduction of women as formal members of the College provide an insight into how women were received and accepted into college life.

The two extracts shown below show positive signs of inclusion, the first claiming that the overall atmosphere in College has improved with the arrival of women members, whilst the second extract applauds women being represented in the JCR. However, it is noteworthy that there is no overt welcoming of women in the 1979 Note: instead, it is merely claimed that women are helping the College overall, and making it seem more like a 'proper college'.

playing a leading part in the College during Hilary Term.
The J.C.R.—whose members must be well over 300—has also had a lively year. College charges always guarantee voluble and active discussion; and there have been other topics of the moment, 'from the merits of a soft-drinks machine to representation on the Governing Body', which have attracted attention. In general the word is that things are going well: J.C.R. finances are better, the presence of three women on the Committee of nine shows that women members (now roughly a third of the College) are playing their proper part in this side of College affairs; and the repute of St. John's as a place particularly friendly to newcomers and to entrance candidates is thoughtfully

There are undoubtedly healthy signs that the facilities and corporate life that the College offers are being appreciated and indeed developed by the present undergraduate and graduate population. More people are dining in Hall than has been usual, even for a Michaelmas Term. Members of the Middle Common Room have taken to arranging dessert after Sunday dinner, and this has proved a popular innovation. The J.C.R.'s Christmas revue and summer Pymm's Party in the gardens have also been highly successful. So, once again, was the Beggar's Banquet. And from time to time one sees the Hall lit up by the strange lights which accompany the ritual of the Disco—again, one gathers, a thorough success. More than one person has commented that this year the College has seemed more of a College in the proper sense than it has done recently. Conjecture is inclined to associate this with the advent of the first mixed intake; there are some thirty women in the first year, and the same number next October.
The comm...

Women in the Collections

Beyond the women that feature directly within College History in the College's collections, there is an additional world of women featuring extraordinary lives and showcasing their minds. The Library's collections of early printed books and pamphlets include women authors, printers, and donors. Many of these had some form of connection to the College, often through their male relatives, and it is largely because of their male relations to the College that the Library has achieved such a collection. These books demonstrate the active life of women both coinciding with and away from any male influence. It presents the often overlooked world of early modern women thinking, and using their minds in a productive way, as much as possible within the limits of their day.

Mildred Cecil

Two early printed books in the College's possession were donated by Mildred Cecil, a highly educated and influential member of the aristocracy in the sixteenth-century. Married to William Cecil, Lord Burghley, Mildred went from her highly intellectual Protestant family to becoming Lady Burghley. She had been taught Greek and Latin by her father, Sir Anthony Cooke, alongside her four sisters. One of her sisters became a famed translator, Anne Cooke Bacon. Mildred was also well-known for her translations, and was commended for her solid learning of Greek.

She also held significant political influence, contacting Protestant leaders in Scotland in 1559 and 1560 to solicit help for the English against the French. She combined her academic knowledge with her religious politics in 1572, collaborating with her sister to write a commendatory verse for a text by Bartholomew Sylva. It is suggested that this activity was to support Edward Dering, a radical Protestant who had got on the wrong side of the Queen.

Mildred was highly charitable, making several donations throughout her life. She died in 1589, and was buried along with her daughter Anne at Westminster Abbey. Her husband left a long Latin inscription on her grave expressing his grief.

Mildred's two donations to St. John's were a 1569 Theologica Bibliotheca, and a five-volumed 1537 copy of Galen's Works. A record of her donation is handwritten within the books.



Little Gidding

The Little Gidding harmonies refer to the biblical "scrapbooks" created by the Ferrar household at Little Gidding (in Cambridgeshire) in the seventeenth-century. The biblical harmonies were compiled primarily by two of the women in the Anglican community: Mary and Anna Collett. They created religious harmonies by cutting and pasting varying biblical passages alongside illustrations of biblical scenes. This rearranged the structure and order of the Bible, creating room for new discourses around biblical law. Mary and Anna's creation of the harmonies was seen as an activity to keep them occupied with their religion, but this was quickly taken more seriously. A female bookbinder, thought to be the daughter of the Cambridge University bookbinder, lived with the community for a year, teaching the women about bookbinding, gilding, and laying out text and illustration.



The community created a variety of harmonies, and donated them as gifts to friends of the family, and high-profile visitors and patrons, including King Charles I and George Herbert. Archbishop Laud was connected to the community, having ordained the head of the community, Nicholas Ferrar, a deacon in 1625. Laud received a harmony of the Pentateuch created by the community in 1640, bound in a beautiful gilt-decorated purple velvet binding, which he deposited at St John's College.

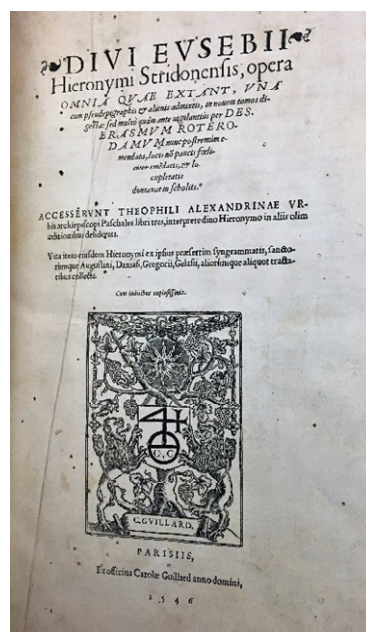
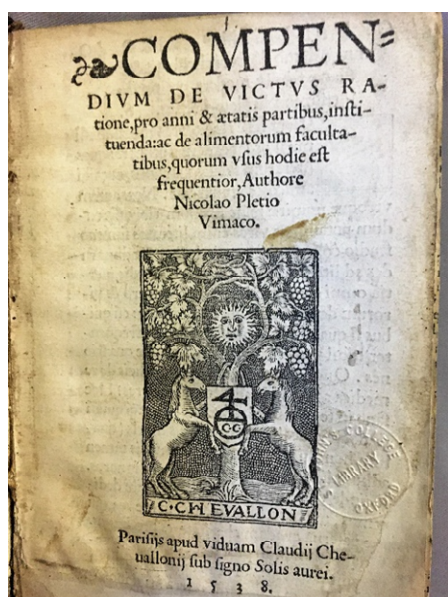
You can read more about the Little Gidding manuscript on our Special Collections blog here:

<https://stjohnscollegelibrary.wordpress.com/2020/04/18/ms-262-the-little-gidding-harmonies/>

Charlotte Guillard

Charlotte Guillard was one of the first women printers of significance, who printed successfully under her own name. St John's possesses several books printed by her in Latin and Greek.

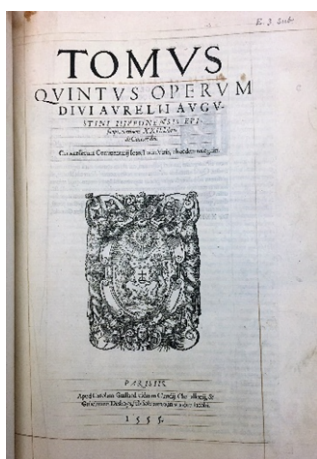
Guillard was a remarkable woman, whose business acumen allowed her to run one of the most prestigious printing houses in Paris. Her first husband, Berthold Rembolt, established the Soleil d'Or printing house on the Rue St Jacques in Paris, which Guillard took over upon Bertold's death in 1518. She continued to run the printing house until her own death in 1555. From 1518, she worked as a single woman, printing a few publications (estimated at around seven), before marrying the bookseller Claude Chevallon in 1521. During her marriage to Chevallon, they printed around 50 books together. Although her name wasn't included in these editions, she added the Rembolt trademark to signify her input. After Chevallon's death in 1537, Guillard's printing output increased dramatically, and she printed at least 158 editions in her own name between 1537 and 1555. The majority of her texts were theological and legal texts in Greek and Latin, which were printed primarily for the scholarly community in Paris. Her woodcut device at the start of most of these texts features a form of her name, alongside the sign of the Soleil d'Or, or "Golden Sun" printing shop.



In the sixteenth-century, France printed the most Greek texts in Western Europe, with Greek literature, classical religious and scientific books, as well as dictionaries, being produced. The founding of the College de France in 1530 and the Imprimeur Royal pour Grec in 1538, particularly increased demand for Greek texts. While Guillard mainly printed Latin editions, she catered for the newfound demand for Greek, publishing the first editions of Justin Martyr and Proclus of Constantinople in France in 1539. She had a long-standing

connection with the Carthusian monk Goderei Tilmann, who specialized in translating the Greek Fathers into Latin, and she used this to her advantage. One of her largest undertakings was the complete ten-volume works of St Augustine. She enlisted the help of her nephew, Guillaume Desboys, for these volumes, and his name appears in the title page alongside Charlotte's (as seen in the image of St John's copy to the left).

St John's holds ten of Guillard's printed books (if grouping different volumes together as one text), spanning her printing career from 1518 to 1555.

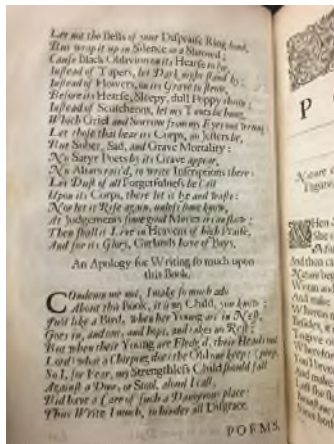


Margaret Cavendish

Henrietta Maria held a role in college history and its collections, as mentioned earlier, and this is also due to her patronage of women writers and creatives. One of these was one of her ladies in waiting, Margaret Cavendish, better known in her time as “Mad Madge”. Cavendish was first sent to wait on the queen consort while the court was in Oxford, and she left England with the Queen during the Civil War.

Cavendish is particularly notable for her literary persona, and the range of works she wrote. She managed to span poetry, philosophy, and science in her works, whilst introducing the concept of a developing authorial persona and a relationship with her readers. Cavendish donated many of her books to various colleges in both Oxford and Cambridge – even including letters addressed to the two universities as part of her preface in some books.

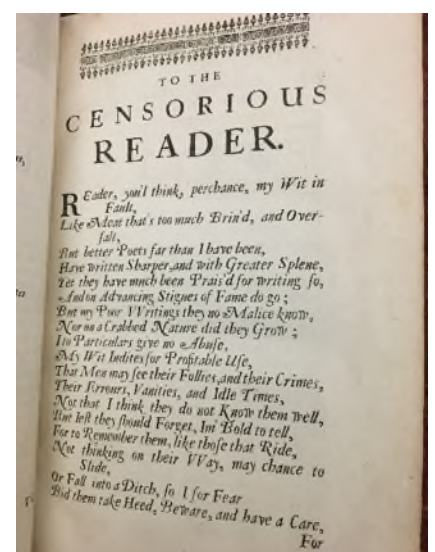
Cavendish's extended prefaces included letters written to her husband, letters from her husband supporting her writing, dedicatory letters to patrons and universities, as well as notes to her general readers, and occasionally directly to her female readership. This both addresses, and almost shuts down, the stigma which was attached to women in the book industry in the seventeenth-century, which suggested that women "selling" themselves for financial gain was crude and unbecoming for women. Cavendish's authorial persona deals with this by creating a new realm of literature, in which she treats her books as her home, with the readers as her guests, within this world. This brings the commercial realm into her domestic realm, "feminising" it for those who could not cope with a woman author. Another way in which she sidestepped the "prostitution" analogy was through her preference for the printed book rather than manuscript transmission, as the printed book did not allow for anything to be



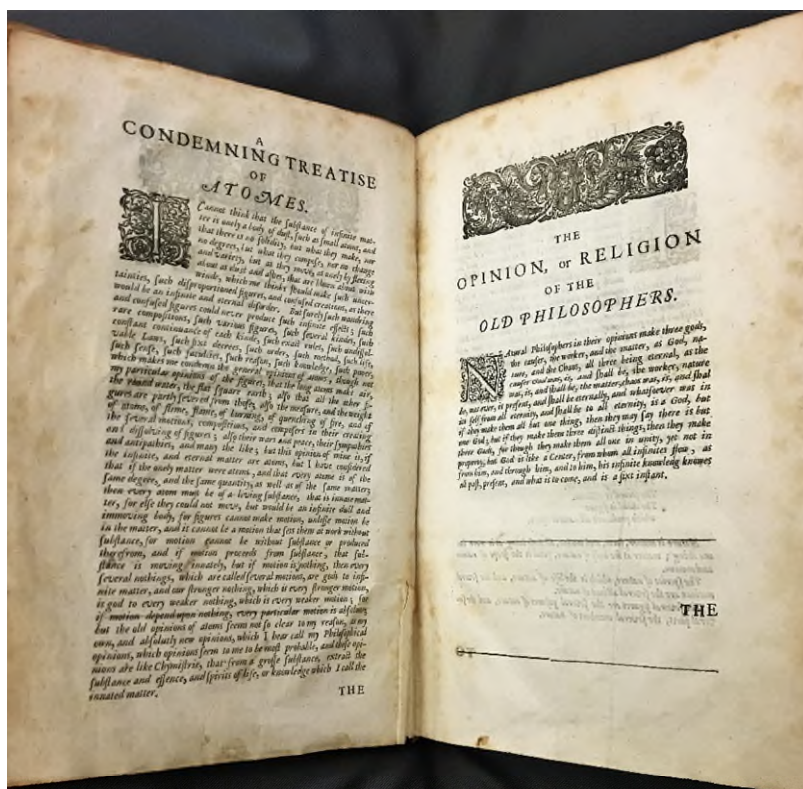
passed under her name which she had not written. This allowed her to keep a tight control over what was circulated as being written in her name (as well as allowing for a much larger readership). Her husband's letters in the prefaces of many of her texts also helped to legitimize her as a serious author.

Cavendish's texts all included multiple prefaces, constructing her literary persona and helping her reputation for personal virtue. She viewed her books as material objects beyond simply what she wrote in them, and her long prefaces thus provide a fascinating insight into the book trade for women and female identity in the seventeenth-century. The way in which she saw herself and presented her authorial identity to her readers developed throughout her authorial life, and this can be traced through her book publications.

Her first published book asks her readers to forgive her, while later books present herself as a commanding figure, more of a matriarch or Queen, within the world she constructed within her texts. This translated into her real life, where she was fast becoming one of the first literary celebrities. She is recorded in Pepys' diary in 1667 as having throngs of fans follow her throughout London.

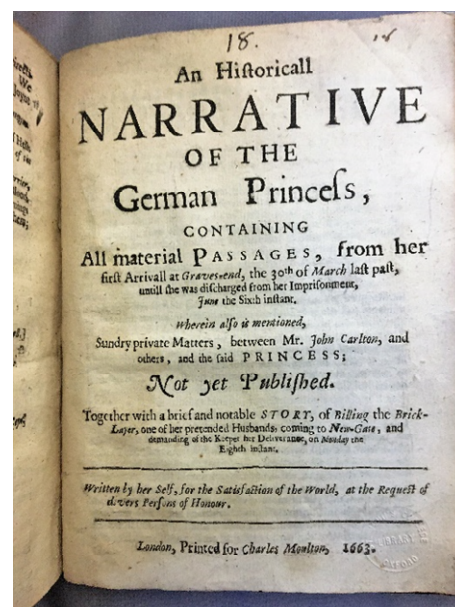
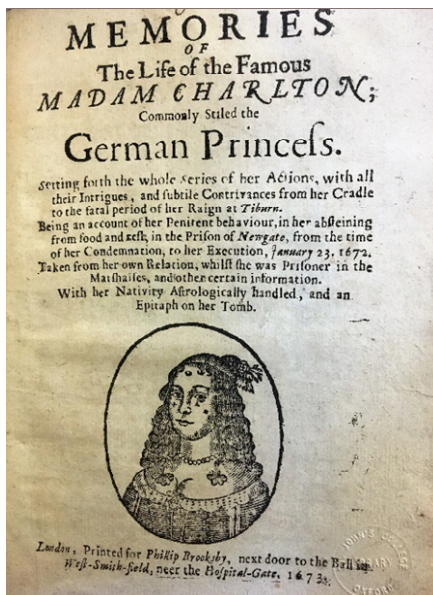


Cavendish published 13 texts overall. Her books anticipated many growing arguments on a variety of subjects, from philosophy, to science, to gender studies. She wrote about gender equality, inspecting whether it was due to true inequality, or simply disproportionate opportunities and expectations between men and women. Her theory of atomics within *Poems and Fancies* was incredibly inventive for her time, and she was one of the first proto-science fiction novelists. Pepys described her in his diary as ‘mad, conceited and ridiculous’, and yet she was one of the most published women of the seventeenth-century, and was the first woman to attend a Royal Society meeting. She was also actively involved in helping to restore and run the Cavendish lands after the Restoration of the Monarchy. In spite of this, her reputation as “Mad Madge” lasted over and above the depth of her writings. In the past century, however, her writing was picked up and lauded during the various feminist movements, and book historians have found interest in her views and use of the book as an object of transmission.



Mary Carleton

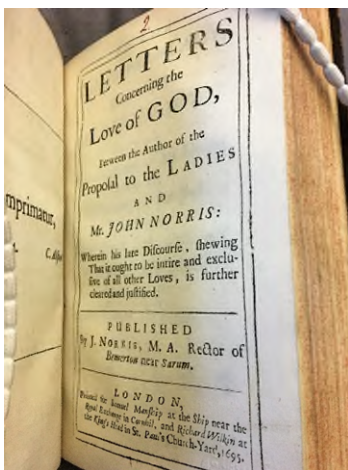
Of the many pamphlets held at St John's College, two are particularly interesting in the context of women's history within the College's collections. The two pamphlets relating to the life of "Mary Carleton" provide a fascinating insight into the roles allowed to women in the seventeenth-century. Born as Mary Moders, this woman is better known by her pseudonym Mary Carleton. At a time in which social mobility was hard to achieve for women, Mary made the most of her life, choosing the best options for herself given the limited choices available. She gave herself various identities (most famously that of a German Princess), and it is reported that she was also a fan of masculine cross-dressing. Her fictitious auto-biography, *An Historical Narrative of the German Princess*, claims to be written by herself 'for the satisfaction of the world'. She stuck with her German origin story even after it had been discredited in this "autobiography", making a bold statement about women's rights to their own identities, truths, and the right to fashion their own lives.



Mary died a criminal, having been sentenced to death for petty larceny. Her death sentence was initially commuted to penal transportation to Jamaica - which England had just captured from the Spanish. Two years after being sent to Jamaica, Mary opted to return to England, and she was hung at Tyburn on 22nd January 1673. She made the most of the choices available to her until the very end of her life, choosing death over working in the English colonies.

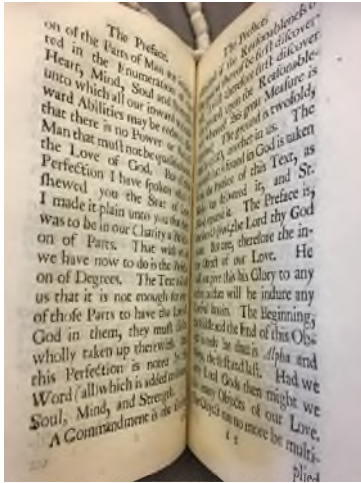
Mary Astell

Mary Astell was a late seventeenth-/early eighteenth-century philosopher, and one of the earliest protofeminists. She was a devout Christian, and combined her philosophies with her faith to argue in favour of universal education for women. St John's possesses an early printed book of her 1695 collection of printed letters with John Norris, entitled 'Letters Concerning the Love of God between the Author of the Proposal to the Ladies and Mr John Norris'. This book was one of four written by Astell - the rest of her writings are found in pamphlets. Referring to herself as the 'author of the proposal' refers to her book published a year earlier, in 1694, which argued for a female educational college to be established. She believed that women's dowries could be used to fund this academy - an idea that was stolen by Daniel Defoe in his 1697 'Essay on Projects'. While Astell's idea never came to fruition, she succeeded in setting up a school for the daughters of war veterans in Chelsea in 1709.



Her passion for the education of women came from her own need to further the academic circle for women. Having been educated by her uncle, the poetry she wrote during her teenage years expresses a deep dissatisfaction with the academic horizons for women, and the lack of opportunities available. Moving to London at the age of 20, she wrote to William Sancroft, Archbishop of Canterbury, asking for help. Sancroft helped her financially, and connected her with influential women. This led to her cultivating a wide circle of intellectual friends, with her patrons including Lady Elizabeth Hastings and Lady Ann Coventry.

Astell's wealthy female patrons allowed her to explore her philosophies against the weakness and inferiority of women's minds that eighteenth-century English society propagated. Astell used her Christian religion to argue for the strength of women's minds, as she argued that God's design of women could not be flawed. Her realising this meant that women are rational beings, who have the capabilities to improve their own rationality, thereby completing God's plan for women.



She uses these ideas in her published letters to John Norris. The letters in the book owned by St John's were written over the course of a year, beginning in 1694. The central theme of this published collection of letters was, as the title suggested, the love of God. While Norris argues in favour of the occasionalist viewpoint that humans should love God because he is the source of our pleasure, and therefore our "good", Astell argues against this, claiming it makes God's creation vain, as well as implying that God interferes in creation.