

## ‘Shepilinda’ on New College in 1738

In 1738 a local writer calling herself ‘Shepilinda’ compiled some irreverent ‘Memoirs of the City and University of Oxford’. These comprised a tour of the colleges and of some of the halls, concluding with remarks on the Bodleian, the custom of horn-blowing on May Day, the penance ritual performed on St Scholastica’s Day, and finally some miscellaneous poems.

Shepilinda’s account survives today as Bodleian MS Top. Oxon. d. 287. In the early twentieth century it was loaned to John Magrath, Provost of Queen’s, for use towards his monumental history of that college; and in 1930 McGrath presented the manuscript, which he had had by him all that intervening time, to the Bodleian, in the hope that it would be published. It was not. But when the manuscript later came to be catalogued, ‘Shepilinda’ was identified on internal evidence to be Elizabeth, daughter of William Sheppard of Hart Hall, the Hall that once stood on the site of what is now Hertford College. Little attention has subsequently been paid to this fascinating piece of social history until recently, when Geoffrey Neate of the Bodleian Library transcribed the manuscript in its entirety and assembled materials towards its elucidation.

Shepilinda at the time of writing was probably in her twenties. She refers throughout her *periegesis* of Oxford to a female companion, ‘Scrip’, who was presumably a real Oxonian girl too. Shepilinda’s remarks on the various colleges are genuine enough: she clearly had access to almost wherever she liked in Oxford, and when she provides specific local detail it can often be verified. She was most concerned to describe the look and feel of colleges and of their occupants, and she had an eye to buildings, an ear to music, and a taste for edible heads of house. (Bar that of Wadham, whom she correctly suspected not to be the marrying type.)

Shepilinda could be vicious about certain colleges, especially All Souls, the fellows of which she found illiterate, though apt enough to beer and song. Easily her favourite college was New College, ‘the College of Colleges’. The following description is taken from Neate’s text of the manuscript, and annotated where pertinent. The text occupies fols. 28v-30r:

Now for the College of Colleges New College I mean; in this Sweet mansion is every thing agreeable – the Garden is elegant the Mound is very high & is a Considerable ornament; at the Bottom of which grow two Yew Trees the finest I ever saw cut in Square Pillars of a vast height; behind the Mount is a Sweet Walk in which the most piercing Beams of the Sun could never yet penetrate – between the Mount & the Iron Gates & Pallisadoes that Separate the College from the Garden are four parterres; in one is a Dial laid out in Box which once in a day goes right – in another Parterre which answers that, is something I dont know what though – in the third is the Kings arms blazond properly with particolour’d Gravells & smiths Cinders enclos’d with Box with the Garter motto round it in the fourth & last parterre is the founder W<sup>m</sup> of Wichams arms which are 3 red Roses blazon’d properly with the Same Materials as that I last mention’d & round it the Motto Manners Maketh Man<sup>1</sup> – which good precept is Follow’d by most of the Members of the College especially the polite M<sup>r</sup> Dobson<sup>2</sup> – the Chapell is very Fine the Windows Curiously painted but by the long

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<sup>1</sup> Compare a 1684 account of the garden, from Bodleian MS Rawl. D 810 (collections of Thomas Baskerville, son of Hannibal Baskerville the antiquarian), fol. 21r: ‘Some new building are now erecting on the Eastside of this College, and they have in their Garden 4 Curious knots of Box in severall quarters, in which are cut, the Kings Arms, y<sup>e</sup> College Arms, the Founders Arms & a Diall. There is also cast up in this garden, a fair mount & on the top on’t to which you ascend by winding walks a diall resembling a bundle of Books.’

<sup>2</sup> William Dobson, LLB. He is best known now for having translated Milton’s *Paradise Lost* into Latin verse, published in two handsome volumes on Oxford University Press in 1750. It was commissioned by William Benson the politician and architect, who reputedly paid Dobson £1000 to do so (*ODNB*, s.n. ‘Benson, William’).

course of time they have been there the Couloours are sunk 2 of them have been lately revived & by Judges of painting are Said to be very accurately Done & so they had need for they Cost a hundred pounds a Window<sup>3</sup> – Here is a very fine organ here<sup>4</sup> the Organist M<sup>r</sup> Richard Church<sup>5</sup> who plays well; Mince the Quirister<sup>6</sup> sings here sweetly; Scrip & I went up the Mathematical Stairs<sup>7</sup> Into the organ loft where M<sup>r</sup> Church play'd an Anthem & Mince sang; then our Scrip sat down like a Fairy Queen in a Cowslip & she sang & play'd most harmoniously – but hold I was going to break of a little abruptly & not tell you what a fine Bowling green there is, Most nicely kept; & over look'd by Edmund Hall<sup>8</sup> – you must know that the Fellows Bowl here to get them stomachs to relish their 12 & 6 a Clock Comons – This College is govern'd by a Youngish kind of a Warden one D<sup>r</sup> Coxhead<sup>9</sup> who has lately taken unto him a fine fat Wife with a great Fortune I fancy he hopes to be Warden of Winchester<sup>10</sup> My Couzen Mill<sup>11</sup> is a Gentleman Commoner of this College his lodgings are pretty & neat; only he wants a Scutching to one of his Cupboard locks, which my Cozen Philadelphia & I pulled of – M<sup>r</sup> Harris<sup>12</sup> of this College loves Cold Duck & Cucummers for breakfast; and I fancy the Hall of this College is fine tho' I never saw it; but as it belongs here, it must be fine –

<sup>3</sup> For the agreement between 'Mr William Price of Kirby Street, Hatton Garden, Glass Painter his Executors or Assigns on the one part & John Coxed, Warden of St Mary College of Winchester in Oxford commonly calld. New College', dated 4 December 1736, see Christopher Woodforde, *The Stained Glass of New College, Oxford* (London, 1951), pp. 16-18. Work started on the south side of the Choir, and the agreed cost was £63 a window, with a £21 bonus if the work was completed within a given time. Price was indeed paid £84 per window for his first five, replaced between 27 June 1735 and 16 September 1740.

<sup>4</sup> Built by Robert Dallam in 1662-3; Dallam was interred in the Cloisters where his skill in making the *instrumentum pneumaticum quod vulgò nuncupatur organum* can still be easily discerned on the floor a few metres after one turns right from the entrance. Dallam received £443 12s 7d for his work; the case cost a further £162 12s, and its decoration £100 (Buxton and Williams, *New College*, p. 270).

<sup>5</sup> Richard Church was appointed organist in 1732, and held his post for 45 years. He 'was esteemed a good musician, but not a very brilliant player' (Buxton and Williams, *New College*, p. 273).

<sup>6</sup> 'Mince', otherwise untraced, must have been one of the sixteen statutory choristers. Note the Quirister/Cho(i)rister spellings in this account: the former is still used at Winchester College. Compare MS Eng. Poet. f. 6, fol. 26r, on the death of a New College 'Coyrister', a hint at the older pronunciation?

<sup>7</sup> Seemingly so called because of their minuscule depth: see the letter from Horace Walpole to Lady Ossory, 9 September 1783, deploring the Reynolds window and also referring to the organ loft stairs being so narrow that 'not having broken my neck I can almost believe I could dance a minuet on a tight rope': copy at NCA PA/SMA 10/3.

<sup>8</sup> Laid out in the early seventeenth century: see the Latin elegiacs written by a fellow in 1633 into the endpapers of the printed book, now New College BT 1.130.9 (commencing with the first edition of More's *Utopia*), 'Haec ego ter quinis memini mutarier annis / Aedibus Oxoniae Wiccame clare tuis'. The writer recalls, at first rather puzzlingly, that 'Si laudas globis area lata patet', surely a reference to a new bowling green (now the lawn to the south of the Mound), and not to anything more dubious.

<sup>9</sup> John Coxed, Warden 1730-4; see Buxton and Williams, *New College*, pp. 228-29 on the refurbishment of the chapel in his time.

<sup>10</sup> As indeed he became 1740-57, as was conventional; the wardenship of Winchester was considerably more lucrative than that of New College.

<sup>11</sup> Mill is Richard Mill, matriculated 15 February 1734/5, aged 18, the son of Richard Mill baronet of Woolbeding in West Sussex (Commoners List indexed from NCA 3058).

<sup>12</sup> Either John Harris who matriculated in 1723 (fellow 1725-38), William who matriculated in 1725 (fellow 1729-59), or Richard who matriculated in 1729 (fellow 1731-48) (see Sewell's register, pp. 241, 242, 244 respectively). In 1738 William (not John, as one would expect from the date) donated to the library several books including an incunable of Terence (Benefactors Book, p. 167).

New College<sup>13</sup> was founded by William of Wickham Bp: of Winchester in 1386. The Society have within some years past made great improvements to the Buildings Their Chappell is very Solemn & splendid & at the end of it is their hall which answers to the Magnificence of the Buildings they have a lofty Tower, with a Ring of 10 Bells in it;<sup>14</sup> a Library well furnish with Books; & a garden laid out in a curious form. The College has a Warden 70 Fellows and Scholars; 10 Chaplains 3 Clerks 16 Choiristers – The Visitor is the Bp: of Winchester

William Poole (New College) and Geoffrey Neate (Bodleian Library)

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<sup>13</sup> One wonders whether this postscript – Shepilinda appends a similar paragraph to all her descriptions of colleges – is from a separate reference work, but it is not from any obvious edition of Chamberlaine's *Angliae Notitia* or Ayliffe's *Antient and Present State of Oxford*, as we might suspect.

<sup>14</sup> Five bells were turned into eight first of all: see the late seventeenth-century poem 'On the Bells of new colledge in Oxon lately were molded; and from 5 were turn'd into Eight', MS Rawl. poet. 84, fols. 105r-104r (reading retrograde), also transcribed in this issue. The last two bells were early eighteenth-century additions.