

## The Torture and Mock Hanging of a Butler, and Latin Macaronics in Civil War New College

In 1809 one John Walker published an entertaining four-volume set of anecdotes about Oxford life and lives, *Oxoniana*. Walker, clergyman and a future proprietor of the *Oxford Herald*, was a fellow of New College, and his eye and ear perhaps fell easily on stories about his own college, one of which is the subject of this note.

Walker had spotted among Bodleian manuscripts a letter written by the eighteenth-century antiquary Thomas Hearne to Thomas Rawlinson, and he copied it out in full for his *Oxoniana*. It concerned an odd seventeenth-century poem in macaronic Latin and the torture of a Cavalier in New College in the period of the civil war, when part of New College was repurposed as a prison for royalist malcontents. This is the original letter:

Dear and Honoured Sir,

I rec<sup>d</sup> the Parcell of Books very safe, for w<sup>ch</sup> I thanke you. I will take occasion to read them over. I hope I shall find many Things in them that may be of use in my Designs. As to your Queries at num. 33. of *Rustica Descriptio Visitationis Fanaticæ Oxon.* Mr. Collier (commonly called honest Will. Collier) was strangely tortured in New-College, where he was imprisoned and condemned to be hanged, but freed after he was up the Ladder. So *Ædes non unquam senescentes* [‘the never-growing-old house’], is exactly *New-House*, or, as we call it, *New-College*, which indeed is the true way of writing it, and not *Neot-College*, as some would have it, as if it were called from St. Neot, which is a ridiculous Supposition. They may as well say *Neuburgh* and *Newbury* were denominated from the same Saint. The foresaid Will. Collier, who was a right Cavaleer, (and therefore made Yeoman Beadle, Dr. Peter Mew,<sup>1</sup> and others having a true value for his Loyalty, which made Dr. Peter Mew always use him as a familiar, as well before as after he was Bishop; I say this Will. Collier) being a hard Drinker, had a Room at the Tavern which was always called Will. Collier’s Room, and often old Collier’s Room, which nobody whatsoever was to use but himself and such as came to him. Here he constantly sat when the Business of the University was over, unless he was obliged to go to some other Place, and would drink & be very merry. And ’twas the same Thing whether he had Company or not, hither he would come, & take Possession of the Room, and sit and enjoy himself. There are many stories going about this honest old Cavaleer, several of which I have often heard from Frank Harding who died of the Stranguary about a Year since, whose Father was particularly acquainted with Will, and a suffering Cavaleer with him.

I thought upon the first Sight of your Parcell that it had been the Cutts, but my Expectation was soon deceived upon opening it. I find by your Letters that they will come as soon as done. So I acquiesce. Seventy two Pages of *Neubrigensis* are printed.<sup>2</sup> I am,

Dear Sir,

Edm. Hall Oxon.  
Dec. 20. 1717.<sup>3</sup>

Your most obliged humble Servant  
Tho. Hearne.

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<sup>1</sup> This is Peter Mews (1619–1706), Bishop of Winchester from 1684 to his death.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Cutts’ are prints; ‘Neubrigensis’ is a reference to Hearne’s edition of William of Newburgh, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1719).

<sup>3</sup> The original is MS Rawl. letters 33, fol. 400r–v, to be left for Rawlinson ‘at the Chapter-House Coffee-House in Pater-Noster Rowe’; printed thence in John Walker, *Oxoniana*, 4 vols. (London, 1809), III, 93-95;

The *Rustica descriptio* referred to is a satire on the Parliamentary Visitation of Oxford, by John Allibond (1597–1658), clergyman and sometime master of Magdalen College School. It was first published twice, anonymously, in 1648.<sup>4</sup> Allibond was a hater of puritans, and his poem, in comic rhyming Latin with the odd line in English thrown in for macaronic effect, was rediscovered and often reprinted throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As it opens:

Rumore nuper est delatum,  
Dum agebamus ruri,  
OXONIUM, iri REFORMATUM  
Ab his qui dicti PURI.

[I learn'd, by intelligence sure,  
As I lived in my rural retreat,  
That Reformers, surnam'd 'the Pure',  
Were remodelling Science's seat.]

The poem works through the university and the colleges—the schools abandoned, no music at the music lecture, the Bodleian deserted, St Mary's full of dull sermons, All Souls, Corpus Christi, St John's, Christ Church, Trinity all overrun by impostors, so forth—and arrives at New College, to lament:

Mox Aedes ingredi conatus  
Non unquam senescentes  
Stupescens audio ejulatus  
Horrenda sustinentis:

Quod dulce nuper Domicilium  
Ingeniis alendis,  
Nunc merum estergastulum  
Innocuis torquendis.

[I next seek the College, whose years  
Have produc'd no effect on its name;  
That name is still New—what my fears  
When near to the building I came.

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and then partially in Thomas Hearne, *Remarks and Collections of Thomas Hearne*, ed. C. E. Doble et al., 11 vols. (Oxford, 1885–1921), vi, 121. See also Hearne, *Collections*, i, 140, and v, 335.

<sup>4</sup> For Allibond and his poem, see Wood, *Fasti*, ii, col. 69; Madan, *Oxford Books*, nos. 1993-94; *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*; Nicholas K. Kiessling, *The Library of Anthony Wood* (Oxford, 2002), nos. 369-71. There were nine editions to 1850. The first edition was published as a quarto, with a second following almost immediately as a single sheet. The Bodleian holds two copies of the 1658 quarto, of which Ashm. 1639(11) is part of a set of books once owned by the antiquary John Aubrey, and Wood 514(53), with marginal notes by Wood, was again given to Wood by Aubrey, who has inscribed it for his friend. Wood also owned two copies of the broadside version (Wood 423(28); Wood 276a(520)), likewise annotated with identifications of the persons alluded to, these all being ultimate sources for subsequent editions. Wood himself probably derived these from a manuscript copy of the poem in his possession, written onto some blank leaves at the front of his interleaved copy of Arthur Hopton, *A Concordancy of Years* (London, 1616), purchased by Wood in 1658, and now Wood 16. A further manuscript copy may be found in an Oxford Restoration miscellany, now Bodleian, MS Lat. misc. e. 38, 159v-158v, reading retrograde, which may be added to The Folger Union First Line Index of English Verse, which knows of only one manuscript, in British Library Add. 23904. The 1717 print edition includes a facing, if rather loose, translation, employed here.

I heard wretched wailings and woes,  
    In a house to the Muses so dear;  
From torture these shriekings arose—  
    The Puritans kept their racks here.]

The first stanza in both the original editions is accompanied by a side-note explaining that the ‘Ædes’ referred to is indeed New College, ‘usd then as a Prison, where among others poor *Collier* was tortured’. The 1700 edition of the poem has the information that Collier, ‘postea Bedellus . . . tortus fuerat per Chyliarch. Kelley’ (‘afterwards a Bedell . . . he had been tortured by the Chyliarch [i.e. ‘General’] Kelley’). This allows us to identify Collier as the *promus* or butler of Pembroke College, indeed later appointed sub-bedell in law, in 1666, and who survived until 1692. ‘Kelley’ is presumably a slip for Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Kelsey, the autocratic deputy governor of Oxford in this period.<sup>5</sup>

Anthony Wood, as so often, filled out the details. In addition to providing a key identifying all the people alluded to in the poem, Wood recorded that Collier was imprisoned in one of the chambers under the hall in New College formerly and subsequently occupied by the college chaplains. These were evidently turned into a detention centre in this period, and there Collier, so it was said, was tortured by having his hands tied behind him and scorched with ‘lighted matches’. It is the room that has recently been converted into an extension to the college bar, and these days it is mainly occupied by students leisurely drinking their coffee and working on their laptops. Perhaps they might spare a thought for Collier, tortured—allegedly—in their midst.

William Poole  
Fellow Librarian

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<sup>5</sup> Anthony Wood, *Life and Times*, ed. Andrew Clark, 5 vols. (Oxford, 1891–1900), I, 386; II, 95; III, 406; *The Register of the Visitors of the University of Oxford*, ed. Montagu Burrows (London [Camden Society], 1881), p. 539; *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.