

Early Science in New College III: John Tayler, College Gardener, d. 1686, and a Library of Botanical Books

The science of plants in the early modern period was not quite modern Plant Sciences. The most common kind of serious engagement with plants was the practice of ‘simpling’, or the identification and gathering of medicinal plants. This was rooted in the work of the ancient Greek botanist and pharmacist Dioscorides, and the college owns seven early editions of his *De materia medica*, an early pharmacopeia. But there were new initiatives in the early modern period both to improve the taxonomy and to investigate the structure and physiology of plants, and in Britain these culminated in the work of later seventeenth-century scientists such as Robert Hooke, John Ray, Robert Morison, and Nehemiah Grew.

In Oxford, the study of these related areas was put on an institutional footing by the founding in 1621 of the Botanic Garden, which only acquired its own salaried Curator in the early 1640s. There was plenty of informal activity in the colleges, however, and in New College, two names have traditionally stood out: those of the simpler William Coles (1626–1662), who matriculated in 1642 but migrated to Merton as a Postmaster in 1650; and of the lawyer, churchman, and botanist Robert Sharrock (1630–1684, matr. 1650, BCL 1654, DCL 1661), who had a much longer college career, and who also served as the college librarian for the first half of the 1660s. Sharrock published a number of works in different disciplines, but his major work in plant science was *The History of the Propagation and Improvement of Vegetables*, published in Oxford in 1660, with later editions of 1666 and 1672.¹ I shall leave discussions of these men for another time, but in his *Art of Simpling* (1656), Coles recorded a vignette about Warden Pincke of New College (1573–1647) in his garden:

Dr. *Pincke* late Warden of *New Colledge* in *Oxon.* whereof I was once a Member (whose memory I very much honour) was a very learned Man, and well versed in Physick, and truly he would rise very betimes in the morning, even in his later dayes, when he was almost fourscore yeares old, and going into his Garden he would take a Mattock or Spade, digging there an houre or two, which he found very advantagious to his health.²

This note is dedicated to another, slightly later college digger, one so far as I know forgotten to history until now, and still only barely visible. This is a man called John Tayler, who was the college gardener in the 1680s. We know of him solely through three kinds of record: his matriculation record, mentions in the college accounts, and a notice in the library benefactors’ register of a monetary bequest to the college together with what the college chose to purchase with this bequest.

John Tayler or Taylour or Tayler, as he appears in different records, matriculated as a *privilegiatus* or privileged person of the university on 13 November 1685, when he was described as son of Christopher, of Shapwick, Dorset. (Shapwick is not far from Blandford Forum, home of the Ryves, a prominent New College family, and this may have provided the college connection.) He was at this date twenty-seven years of age, and his occupation was given as ‘hortulanus’ of New College (Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses*).

My thanks to Jennifer Thorp for her customary assistance in the college archives.

¹ The college owns nothing by Coles, whose botanical work is characterized by his belief in the *signatura rerum* or ‘doctrine of signatures’; but by Sharrock we have *The History of the Propagation & Improvement of Vegetables by the concurrence of art and nature* in both its first (Oxford, 1660) and second (Oxford, 1672) editions, the latter purchased in 2009. Sharrock himself was a significant donor to the library.

² William Coles, *The Art of Simpling* (London, 1656), p. [120] (misprinted as ‘96’).

Privileged persons were not academics, but tradesmen of the town whose association with the university was valued enough by either the university or an employing college to have the person matriculated as a member of the university. This gave such *privilegiati* certain legal privileges and a degree of protection, as such tradesmen no longer fell under the jurisdiction of the town. Privileged persons might be apothecaries, stationers, carpenters, painters, music masters, many other trades, including gardeners.

What was Tayler's job, and how much was he paid? We can answer these questions by turning to the college's bursarial accounts for the periods, which survive as series of 'long books' and 'rolls', the former usually more detailed (and easier to handle) than the latter. Here, under the heading for servants' wages, we find that the gardener in the period was paid £1 per annum, not a bad wage in context – the college manciple and senior cook were each paid twice that, and somewhere between them came the 'barber' (perhaps the porter, who at least in the medieval period acted as the college barber too). Under 'Horti' or 'gardens' we find the kind of expenses incurred by the college gardens in the Restoration: in the academic year 1683/4, for instance, Tayler himself was paid 11*d* 'for nails & binding twigs', and a further 10*s* 6*d* was spent by the college on 'a weeding woman'. The next year, Tayler oversaw some significant work in the gardens, as £7 1*s* was spent on gravel, a further 19*s* 6*d* for wheeling it into the gardens, 3*s* for levelling the upper walk, and 6*s* for removing the 'Arbors'. Clearly the upper paths around the garden were relaid and gravelled at this time, and presumably to this end two wheelbarrows were also bought for 14*s*. There was work at this time on the Mound too, with rails costing £3 8*s* 3*d*; and both rails and seats painted for a further £1 8*s* 3*d*.³ These are major expenses when we consider that the gardener himself was only salaried a fraction of these sums.

Tayler, unfortunately, did not last as long as Warden Pincke with his mattock. He first appears in the college accounts in for the year 1679/80, where several payments were made to 'John Taylour', e.g. 'for 2700 holly plants and 550 thorns'; the previous year such payments had been made to one 'Stubbs', so it is likely that our Tayler entered the college's employ in 1679/80, when he was around 21.⁴ For the next several years he thereafter received his £1 per annum. But in the benefactors' register for the college library, we find under the year 1686 the note that 'John Tayler, gardener [once again *hortulanus* in the Latin] of this college' had died, leaving the college a bequest of five pounds, a sizeable sum for someone in a manual trade on a fifth of that as his annual salary. Either he left no will or it has not survived—or at least it was not proved in the Chancellor's Court, as was the usual custom for deceased members of the university.

Splendidly, the college decided that the gardener's five pounds would be used to buy books on plants for the college library. These were duly entered under Tayler's name in the register, and they form what was probably the first initiative by the college to build up a stock of books in this subject. Tayler's bequest, in other words, might be thought of as the unofficial foundation of the subject of Plant Sciences in New College.⁵

³ NCA 4233, 4234 (long books), under 'Horti'. By 1686/7, a 'Mr Holloway' was being salaried £2 as gardener (NCA 4235).

⁴ NCA 7700, 7701 (rolls).

⁵ The library holds other early works of relevance, however, e.g. Nicolaus Winckler, *Chronica herbarum, florum, seminum, fructuum, radicum, succorum, animalium, atque eorundem partium* (Augsburg, 1571) [BT3.230.2(1)], from the bequest of Thomas Hopper, d. 1624; Rembert Dodoens, *Purgantium aliarumque eo facientium, tum et radicum, convolvulorum ac deleteriarum herbarum historia libri IIII* (Antwerp, 1574) [BT3.227.10]; Rembert Dodoens, *A New Herball, or History of Plants* (London, 1595) [BT1.134.9], previous (seventeenth-century) owner 'Leonard Corkey'; John Parkinson, *Paradisi in Sole Paradisus Terrestris, or a Garden of all sorts of pleasant flowers* (London, 1629) [BT1.31.13], gift of Thomas Hacket in the Benefactors' Register, under 1662; John Gerard, *The Herball* (London, 1633) [BT3.201.1], but with presentation inscription of William Porter to John Smith of Winchester, 1777; Nicholas Culpeper, *Pharmacopoeia Londiniensis* (London, 1653) [BT3.250.5];

Who was responsible for this? Purchasing was normally done by the *bibliothecarius*, and we can work out who the college librarians were in this period by consulting the bursarial rolls, where we find that Nathaniel Pelham (1680–87), and then Robert Sewster (1687–96) were the fellows paid to be the college *bibliothecarii* for the periods indicated. If direction was needed from a more informed figure in the college, then the obvious candidate is William Musgrave (1655–1721; matr. 1675, BCL 1682, MB 1685, MD 1689). He was elected FRS in 1684, and also appointed second secretary to the Royal Society in the same year, hence editing several numbers of the London society's *Philosophical Transactions* from New College. In 1685 he was one of the founders of the Philosophical Society of Oxford, a kind of off-shoot of the London Royal Society, which held its meetings in the newly-opened Ashmolean Museum. Given the high number of 'Royal Society' books among those bought using Tayler's bequest, Musgrave sounds like our man, although the virtuoso Ralph Bohun, who specialised in meteorology, and perhaps the physician Walter Harris, are other names in the college at this time we might also consider. At any rate, the library paid for the books in advance of receiving Tayler's bequest, for in the accounts for 1687/8 we read: 'For Books *that* were bought with John Taylors Leagasy', £5.

What kinds of books did the college purchase with this bequest? First, only two of the texts acquired were printed abroad. The first was the Jesuit Honoré Fabri's *Tractatus duo* (Nuremberg, 1677), of which the first tract was on plants and the generation of animals, and the second on man, so this was only partially a botanical book. (Fabri famously claimed in the latter tractate to have anticipated Harvey's discovery of the circulation of the blood.) The second continental book was René Rapin's poetic *Hortorum libri, Eclogæ, Liber de carmine pastorali, Odaë* (Leiden, 1672), a collection of Neo-Latin verse on various subjects, chiefly gardens, and also containing Rapin's critical reflections on pastoral poetry, the *Dissertatio de carmine pastorali*. This finds a good companion text among the 'Tayler' books in the form of the contemporary English poet Abraham Cowley's *Poemata Latina ... sex libri plantarum* (London, 1668), a series of eclogues accompanied by Cowley's own commentary, as well as a biography of the poet by Thomas Sprat. This book was published by John Martyn, the printer to the Royal Society of London, and Cowley and Sprat were both FRSs. Martyn is a name we shall now encounter repeatedly. A further Latin work was John Ray's large folio *Historia plantarum* (London, 1686), being the first of the three volumes of this classic work; the other two would appear in 1688 and 1704. The final Latin book in the set is Marcello Malpighi's *Anatome Plantarum* (London, 1675), a work its author dedicated to the Royal Society, and which was once again published by John Martyn. Turning to the English books, there are Nehemiah Grew's *An Idea of a Phytological History Propounded* (London, 1673), and the same author's *Comparative Anatomy of Trunks* (London, 1675), works published by different men but probably both printed, yet again, by Martyn. The first was dedicated to the Royal Society, and the second, published at the Society's order, to the reigning monarch, Charles II. Another Martyn book was John Evelyn's *Sylva*, the first book to be published by the Royal Society under its own imprimatur, in 1664, and here represented in its third edition of 1679. All these authors—Ray, Malpighi, Grew, and Evelyn—were once again FRSs. The complexion of this set of books so far is therefore obvious—Royal Society books, published or printed (or indeed both) by the Royal Society's printer John Martyn, and conceivably purchased directly from him by the college.

The remaining books strike perhaps a more practical note, although it is present too in Evelyn's *Sylva*. First, there is a local book, Francis Drope's *A Short and Sure Guid in*

Robert Morison, *Plantarum historiae universalis Oxoniensis* (Oxford, 1680) [BT3.185.2], purchased directly by the college (see the bursarial Long Books).

the Practice of Raising and Ordering of Fruit-Trees. Francis Drope (1629?–1671), born in Cumnor, in the vicarage, was a fellow of Magdalen (BA 1647; MA 1660; BD 1667), expelled by the Parliamentary Visitors, and restored to his fellowship at the Restoration. Francis's younger brother Edward saw this treatise through the press after the author's death. His elder brother John had an almost identical career, also writing a poem on the Oxford Physic Garden in 1664.⁶ The book is a little octavo, quite different from the imposing Latin folios discussed above, although the poetic works of Cowley and Rapin were also in smaller formats. Finally, there are the two presumably very new works of John Worlidge in their most recent editions, his *Systema agriculturae: The Mystery of Husbandry Discovered* in its fourth edition (London, 1687), and his *Systema Horti-culturae: or the Art of Gardening in three books* in its third edition (London, 1688), the former a folio, the latter again an octavo. Worlidge (d. 1693) was a Hampshire man; his *Systema agriculturae*, first published in 1669, has been called 'the first systematic and comprehensive treatment of arable and livestock husbandry'; and his *Systema Horti-culturae*, first published in 1677, stressed the 'benefits of cultivating vegetables and fruit, both to the gentry who made greater profit from their land, and to the populace whose diet was thereby improved' (ODNB).

Thus the 'Tayler bequest' was used to buy an interesting range of genres impacting on gardening, botany, plant science, and more generally the good practice of horticulture and agriculture. There were Latin works, tending to the taxonomic and analytical; and there were works in the vernacular, tending to the practical tasks of cultivating both fields and gardens. Finally, there was poetry—gardening was, for this generation as for most others, also a literary activity.

William Poole
Fellow Librarian

⁶ For the Dropes, see Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, vol. 3, col. 941; Madan, *Oxford Books*, no. 2925; Gunther, *Early British Botanists*, pp. 80–3; ODNB.

Appendix:

Below I present a list of the books bought with Tayler's bequest in the style we have established for editing the college library's benefactors' register (see [New College Notes 6 \(2015\), no. 7](#)).

[Benefactors' Register, p. 131]

MDCLXXXVI

IOANNES TAYLER Hujus Coll: Hortulanus Moriens legavit Quinque libras; Quibus Empti sunt Libri sequentes.

Donor: John Tayler or Tylour, described here as the college 'hortulanus' or gardener, matriculated as a *privilegiatus* or privileged person on 13 November 1685, when he was described as son of Christopher, of Shapwick, Dorset, aged 27, and again as 'Hortulanus' of New College (Foster). Taylor evidently did not survive long in the job. It is possible that the placing of this entry is awry, as one of the books below was published as late as 1688; perhaps however the books were not all purchased at once. See also NCA 4236, the bursarial Long Book for 1687/88, where under library expenses we read: 'For Books *that* were bought with John Taylors Leagasy', £5.'

Malpighij Anatome Plantarum.

Malpighi, Marcello. *Anatome plantarum*. London: John Martyn, 1675. 2°. BT3.216.5. Aleph system no. 013788117. Rebacked and with modern end-papers. Boards blind-tooled with simple frames. Once chained from upper right fore-edge. Pen-trials on the title-page, but otherwise clean.

The copy in Queen's College was once owned by Henry Oldenburg, Secretary to the Royal Society, and came to Queen's in Joseph Williamson's bequest, 1701; the copy in All Souls was donated by the Artists' Bursar Peter Prideaux in 1679.

Faber de Plantis.

Fabri, Honoratus. *Tractatus duo: quorum prior est de plantis et de generatione animalium; posterior de homine*. Nuremberg: heirs of W. M. Endterus and J. A. Endterus, 1677. 4°. BT3.259.2. Aleph system no. 019334317. Rebacked and with modern-endpapers; boards blind-tooled with simple frames and fleurons; once chained from upper right fore-edge. Bookseller's pricemark ('2-6') on title-page, but otherwise clean.

Ray Historia Plantarum.

Ray, John. *Historia plantarum species hactenus editas aliasque insuper multas noviter inventas & descriptas complectens*. London: Mary Clark for Henry Faithorne, 1686. 2°. BT3.216.8. Aleph system no. 013413918. Rebacked. Boards blind-tooled with inner and outer frames and fleurons. Once chained from upper right fore-edge. Unmarked.

The college owns two complete sets of this publication in three volumes (London, 1686, 1688, 1704). The first two volumes of the second set (BT3.216.11-13) bear the same heavily deleted ownership signature and were therefore acquired later than the volume indicated here. The other set (BT3.216.8-10) is bound in the same, therefore probably later, boards.

The copy in Magdalen was bought from the gift of John Warner, Bishop of Rochester, in 1686; the copy in Queen's bears on the verso of the title-page the inscription 'Sept. 15. 1685.' Signed 'S. Pepys, Pr. R. S.', as well as the plate of Ray on the verso of second free end-paper with an MS Italian poem below and further MS inscriptions; it arrived as part of the bequest of Theophilus Metcalfe (1757).

Grew's Anatomy of Vegetables, Trunkes, &c.

Grew, Nehemiah. *The Comparative Anatomy of Trunkes*. London: J. M. for Walter Kettilby, 1675. 8°. Followed by Grew, *An Idea of a Phytological History Propounded*. London: J. M. for Richard Chiswell, 1673.

BT3.205.8(1, 2). Aleph system nos. 015528425, 013421975. Later binding, now split and damaged, later endpapers. Once chained from lower right of front board.

The latter work is more common in Oxford. Compare in New College also BT3.264.25(2), Grew's *Anatomy of Vegetables* (London, 1672), bound after Robert Sharrock of New College's own *History . . . of Vegetables* (London, 1660).

Cowley de Plantis.

Cowley, Abraham. *Poemata Latina . . . sex libri plantarum*. With Sprat's biography prefaced. London: Thomas Roycroft for John Martyn, 1668. 8°.

BT3.264.14. Aleph system no. 013544369. Later binding, but the first front end-paper still bears the original inscription 'Liber Johannis Goodwin pr. 0: 2: 0'.

Of the several copies in Oxford libraries, the Christ Church copy is from the Wake bequest.

Rapinus de Hortis.

Rapinus, Rhenatus. *Hortorum libri, Ecloga, Liber de carmine pastorali, Oda*. Leiden: Arnold Doude, 1672. 12°.

BT3.177.27. Aleph system no. 013458295. Contemporary or near-contemporary calf binding with gold-tooled frames. Once chained from upper right of front board.

Drope of Fruit Trees.

Drope, Francis. *A Short and Sure Guid in the Practice of Raising and Ordering of Fruit-Trees*. Oxford: Richard Davis, 1672. 8°.

BT3.264.26. Aleph system no. 011739968. Rebacked, with marbled paper boards.

Of the several copies in Oxford libraries, Bodleian Locke 7.274a belonged to John Locke.

Eveline of Forest Trees.

Evelyn, John. *Sylva, or a Discourse of Forest-Trees*. 3rd ed. London: John Martyn, 1679. 2°.

BT3.188.10. Aleph system no. 015703956. Rebacked, calf boards with inner and outer frames and fleurons. Once chained from upper right of front board. 'E Coll: Nov:' inked in final end-papers.

Systema Agriculturæ per Woolridge

W[oolridge], J[ohn]. *Systema agricultura: The Mystery of Husbandry Discovered*. 4th ed. London: Thomas Dring, 1687. 2°. BT3.188.11. Aleph system no. 016544333. Rebacked, calf boards with inner and outer frames and fleurons. Once chained from upper right of front board. 'Jo. Wolueridge' has been added in an early hand to the title-page following 'J. W.' Some red crayoning in margins.

Ejusdem Systema Horticulturæ.

W[oolridge], J[ohn]. *Systema Horti-culturæ, or the Art of Gardening in three books*. 3rd ed. London: Thomas Dring, 1688. 8°.

BT3.205.9. Aleph system no. 016705658. Rebacked, new endpapers, calf boards with outer frames and fleurons. Once chained from upper right and lower right of front board. 'by Jo. Wolueridge' added in an early hand facing the engraved title-page.