

Edward Bernard (1638–1697) and New College

A further, belated contribution to our celebration of the 400th Anniversary of the Savilian Professorships in Geometry and Astronomy (2019)

When, after holding tenaciously onto his chair for over half a century, the Savilian Professor of Geometry John Wallis finally died in 1703, his son endowed the lease of the two eastern houses of the plot lying between the Cloisters and ‘Hell Passage’ (now leading to the Turf Tavern). This endowment he presented to the University in memory of his father for the use of the Savilian Professors in perpetuity. Thus was formalised a relationship between the owner of the properties, New College, and the Savilian Professors which continued until the mid-nineteenth century, when the college decided to repossess the houses, and expelled their occupants. Then, in 1882, the Professorships were reconnected to the college in a much closer relationship, for ever since the Professors in Geometry and Astronomy have been fellows of the college rather than merely its tenants.

Did New College have any earlier association with any of the Savilian professors? Wallis had leased the plot including what are now 7 and 8 New College Lane from 1672, and so several of his major mathematical works were written on college ground. But he had no significant dealings with the college in any intellectual sense. His opposite Savilian number for some of this period was Edward Bernard (1638–97, BA 1659, MA 1662, BD 1668, DD 1684; FRS 1673) of St John’s College, who held the chair in astronomy from 1673 until 1691. This note concerns Bernard, because I think it can be demonstrated that he regarded the college with a sense of both affection and duty, something which is now mainly visible through a series of book donations he made. I should say at the outset that I am still unsure exactly what tie bound Bernard to the college; hopefully some document will float out of the college archives in the future which may confirm or contradict a suggestion I shall make at the end of this note.

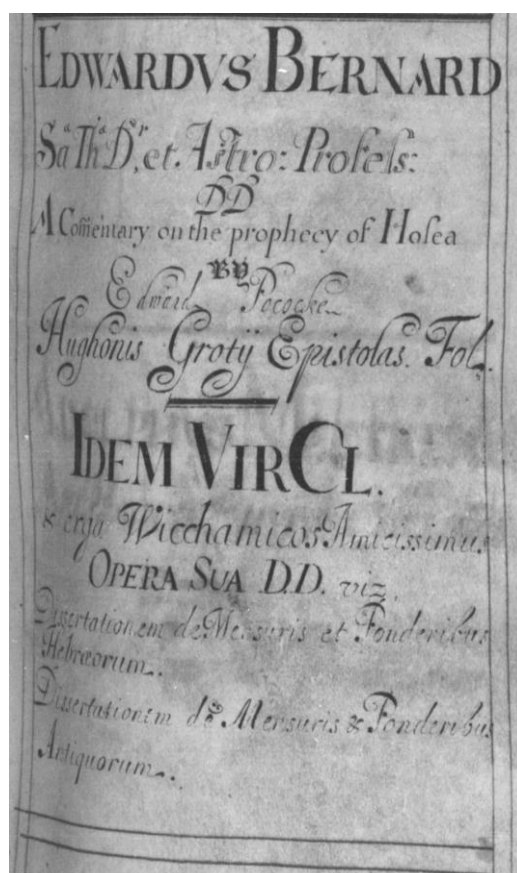
Edward Bernard was one of the most learned men of a learned age. From the late 1660s, he deputised for Christopher Wren, the somewhat absentee Savilian Professor of Astronomy, lecturing in his stead and assuming the chair itself when Wren eventually resigned it in 1673. Bernard’s Oxford patron was the all-powerful John Fell of Christ Church, and Fell worked Bernard hard, setting him various editorial tasks, some of which he completed, but most of which he did not. The most ambitious of these was a project to publish all the ancient and medieval mathematical writers of significance, a totally unrealistic dream which in its first form promised to fill twenty-one sizeable folios. But arguably mathematics and astronomy were not even Bernard’s chief interests, as he also excelled in Greek, Hebrew, Arabic, Syriac, and Coptic, and his interests extended to all sorts of then-exotic languages including Samaritan, Ethiopic, Persian, and Russian. Bernard was really a polyglot student of antiquity, and his mathematical interests were rooted in his fascination with ancient technical literature. He had a steady international correspondence too, and was one of the few English scholars of the time to have a properly continental reach, corresponding extensively, for instance, with the philosopher G. W. Leibniz and the pioneer of Ethiopic studies, Hiob Ludolph.¹

¹ Bernard’s biography was written by his close friend and Oxford ally, the non-juring scholar Thomas Smith of Magdalen College, the *Vita clarissimi & doctissimi viri, Edwardi Bernardi* (London, 1704), but as a result Smith is too partial to his subject. The most penetrating modern remarks on Bernard can be found in G. J. Toomer’s *Eastern Wisdom and Learning: The Study of Arabic in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996). I have discussed Bernard’s editorial work for Fell in *John Fell’s New Year Books* (Oxford: Oxford Bibliographical Society, 2018), and for his project to edit the mathematicians, including an edition of a rare Chinese map, see my ‘Edward Bernard’s Chinese Map’, *The Seventeenth Century* 35 (3) (2020), 363–88. For Bernard’s linguistic work—he hypothesized that most European languages had evolved from a parent language spoken around the Caspian—see now Michael C. Carhart, *Leibniz Discovers Asia: Social Networking in the Republic of Letters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019).

And yet Bernard was a disorganised man, probably because his interests were so many, as were the pressures on his time, such that like many a scholar before and since, he found it easier to start projects than to finish them. His unforthcoming edition of the Jewish historian Josephus became something of a joking matter, and the few projects he did manage to bring to publication still exude a sense of mental clutter and constipation, such as his handbook on ancient weights and measures, which we shall encounter below. Bernard's other patron was Peter Mews, head of house of Bernard's own college, St John's, and then from 1672 Bishop of Bath and Wells; and when Mews presented Bernard with the rich living of Brightwell, just outside Oxford, Bernard, who with his very High Church sentiments had probably found the Williamite Revolution of 1688 a strain on his conscience, at once resigned his professorship, and embraced the quiet life.

What of Bernard and New College? The first evidence of direct contact we have is an interesting entry in the college's fragmentary lending register from the period: 'Jan. 19. 1674.5 Mag: Bernard è societate Joh: Baptis: habet *Homerum* in M^{ss}'. I have explained the significance of this technically extra-statutory allowance elsewhere—Bernard was, we can infer, helping Fell edit the *Iliad*, of which an Oxford edition appeared in 1676, and it is pleasant to reflect that the first Oxford edition of any part of Homer in Greek was assisted by a New College manuscript.²

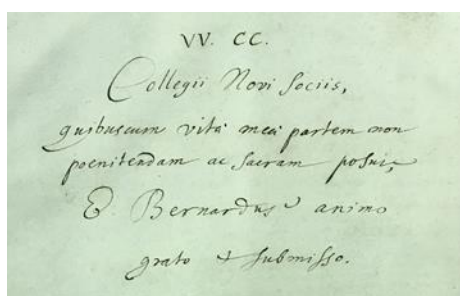
Bernard's next appearance in the college's records comes from the Library Benefactors' Book. Under 1686 we find the entry: 'EDWARDVS BERNARD | *Sanctae Theologiae Doctor*, et *Astronomiae Professor* | DD | A Commentary on the prophecy of Hosea | by | Edward Pococke | Hugonis Grotij Epistolas. Fol. | IDEM VIR CLARISSIMUS | & erga Wicchamicos Amicissimus | OPERA SUA D.D. viz. | Dissertationem de Mensuris et Ponderibus Hebraeorum. | Dissertationem de Mensuris et Ponderibus Antiquorum.'



New College Library, Oxford, Benefactors' Book, p. 129

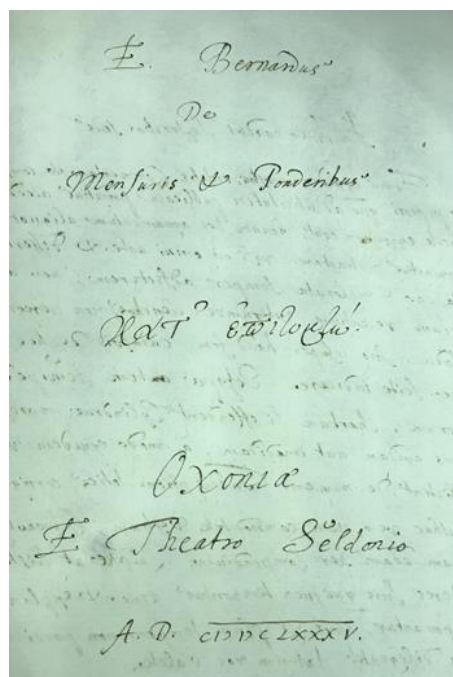
² William Poole, 'Book Economy in New College, Oxford, in the Later Seventeenth Century', *History of Universities* 25 (2010), 56–137.

As so frequently with this register, the details are not quite accurate, and the whole entry cannot truly belong to 1686, but is rather a composite of several donations, the first probably indeed made in 1686, the following ones later. Bernard presented Pococke's commentary because it featured an appendix by Bernard himself, his first attempt at a study of ancient weights and measures. If we turn to the volume itself, still in the collections today, we find rather ornate material by Bernard inserted before his own appendix. First, he places a dedication inscription: 'VV. CC. [i.e. Viris Clarissimis] | Collegii Novi Sociis, | quibuscum vitæ meæ partem non poenitentiam ac sacram posui, | E. Bernardus animo | grato & submisso' ('To those distinguished men the fellows of New College, with whom I have placed a part of my life not to be repented of, and holy, Edward Bernard, with a grateful and humble soul').



Edward Pococke, *A Commentary on the Prophecy of Hosea* (Oxford, 1685)
New College Library, Oxford, BT3.141.5

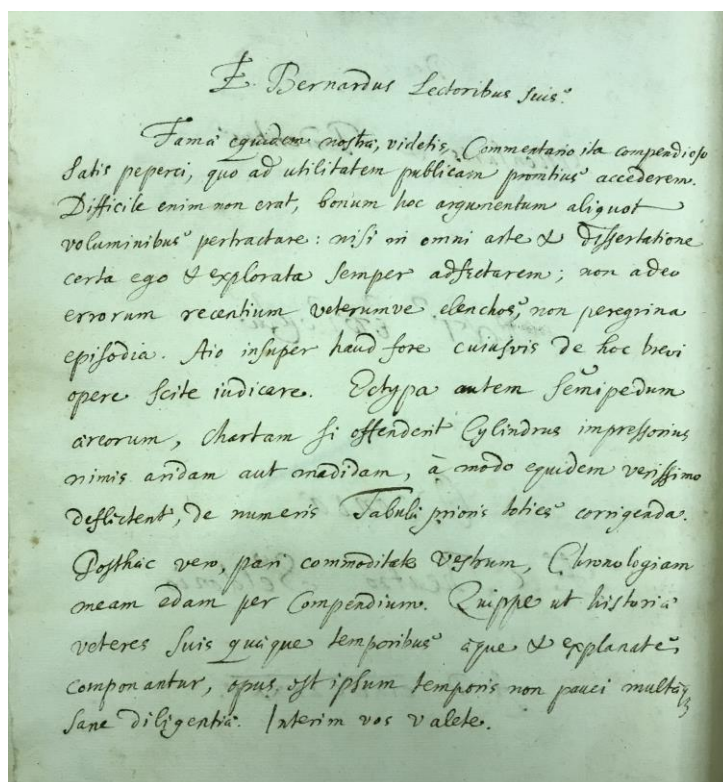
Facing this, Bernard penned a mock-title page:



New College Library, Oxford, BT3.141.5

(The Greek is κατ'ἐπιτομήν, 'in the manner of an abridgement', and the date, using 'turned' capitals, is 1685.) On the other side of the leaf Bernard has placed a manuscript epistle to the reader, as in some other presentation copies of this work I have encountered:³

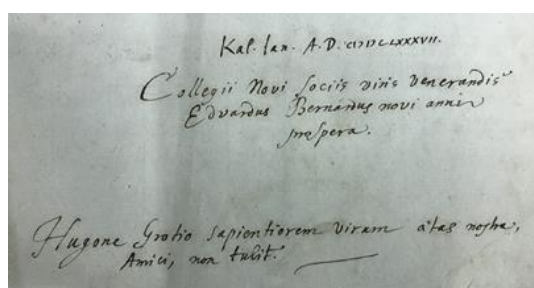
³ E.g. St John's College, H.2.16, Bernard's presentation copy to his own college; Bodleian, Bliss B 410, for John Fell; and British Library, 602.i.30(1), probably for the scholar and natural philosopher Theodore Haak.



New College Library, Oxford, BT3.141.5

This epistle ends with a typical Bernard promise: he will shortly set out ‘per Compendium’ (‘in concise form’) his world chronology co-ordinating ancient cultures presumably in tabular form, yet another project that was much anticipated and unforthcoming.

The next book mentioned is the Amsterdam folio edition of Grotius’s *Epistola* (Amsterdam, 1687), marked in Bernard’s hand ‘Kal. Ian. A.D. MDCLXXXVII. Collegii Novi Sociis viris venerandis Edvardus Bernardus novi anni prospera’, so a New Year’s gift (1687/[8]) to the college, with the comment ‘Hugone Grotio sapientiorum virum ætas nostra, Amici, non tulit’ (‘Friends, our age has shown no man wiser than Hugo Grotius’). We may note that Bernard’s continental correspondent J. G. Graevius had been keeping him informed of the progress of this edition in letters between 1685 and 1687.⁴

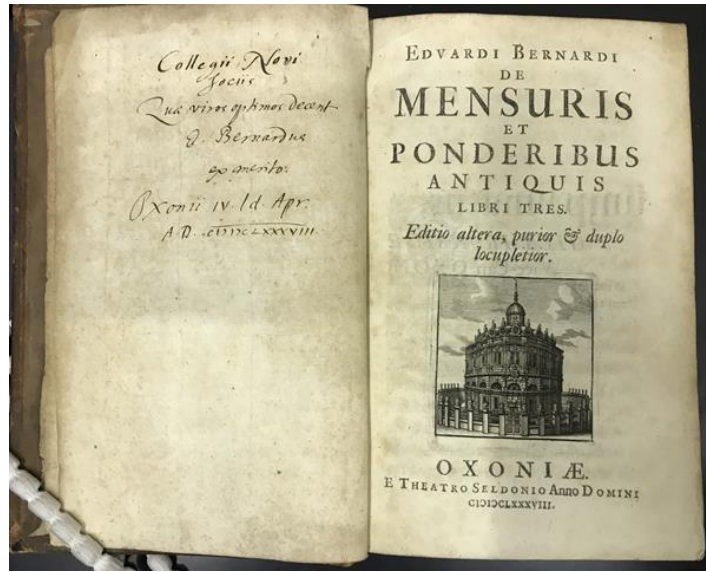


New College Library, Oxford, BT3.269.9

This imposing edition of Grotius is none the less not a happily conceived venture for the reader, for after almost one thousand pages of bare transcripts of letters, we find no index to guide us. Bernard, who probably thought nothing of devouring such a book in two sittings for pure fun, obviously thought it an appropriate gift for the college, and so it was.

⁴ Bodleian, MS Smith 5, pp. 67–72; MS Smith 72, pp. 13–16.

Bernard's next gift was a copy of the revised and expanded version of his treatise on ancient weights and measures, now in Latin, and published as a free-standing octavo. The entry in the Benefactors' Book is confused here, identifying two separate works, one on Hebrew weights and measures, and one on ancient weights and measures in general. In fact, they are the same sole work, Bernard's *De mensuris et ponderibus antiquis libri tres* of 1688. Bernard presented many copies of this to friends and institutions around and beyond Oxford, all in a distinctive acid-mottled calf binding, and ours is no different. He has once again inscribed the copy itself to the fellows of New College, 'Quæ viros optimos decet' ('such things as befit the best of men'), with the Roman date of 'IV. Id. Apr.', i.e. 10 April in the modern calendar:



New College Library, Oxford, BT3.55.12

And, although not mentioned in the Benefactors' Book, a couple of years later Bernard returned to the library, this time to present a little posthumous edition he himself had seen through the press, the Hebraist William Guise's *Misnæ pars* of 1690. We know this only from the inscription on the book itself:



New College Library, Oxford, BT3.4.14

What these gifts when considered as a group show is that Bernard went out of his way between 1685 and 1690 to mark presentation copies of books to New College with inscriptions that suggest he felt grateful to the college for some service it had done him. In the Benefactors' Book he is 'Wicchamicos Amicissimus', 'most friendly to Wykehamists'. Why?

I have no certain answer to this question so far.⁵ Bernard studied mathematics for a time privately with John Wallis, who as we saw lived in New College Lane from 1672, but there is no suggestion Bernard lodged there, which might just have explained his gratitude to the college.⁶ Nor is Bernard's testament helpful in this regard: his short will states merely that his wife Eleanor is to inherit everything other than a bequest of £10 to his sister Anne Raynes and a measly one shilling to his niece Lydia Appleby.⁷ But the inscription to his 1685 Pocke gives me pause—for what can be meant by: 'with whom I have placed a part of my life not to be repented of, and holy?' *Pars vitæ* in this context sounds very much like a child, as if the New College fellows had given Bernard's son a place at the college. No young fellow with the right surname (or indeed of Appleby or Raynes if we contemplate a nephew) was elected in the period, but it is possible that the reference is to a place at the school, or perhaps in the chapel as a chorister or even chaplain if of sufficient age—we do not possess lists of such persons. But Bernard seemingly only married in 1693, after his move to Brightwell, and his testament mentions no children. It is a puzzle: one wonders if there were an earlier marriage with issue, or if another nephew is meant. *Non poenitentiam ac sacram* sounds almost defiant—albeit I cannot convince myself that a Doctor of Divinity also occupying a major university chair would make such a statement, even somewhat euphemistically, in a book presentation inscription.

Before leaving Bernard and his books, I want to point out one last Bernard item in the college collections traced so far, albeit one that entered by other means. This is a copy of the English verse translation of Lucretius by the Oxford don Thomas Creech, and published here in 1682, the first complete translation of that poet to be published in English. (When Creech hanged himself in Oxford in 1700, seemingly out of frustrated marriage plans, the malicious muttered that this was what came of translating such a notoriously impious writer.) Our copy was given to the college by the celebrated classicist and archaeologist J. L. Myers upon his retirement as Wykeham Professor of Ancient History; he himself had bought the book in Liverpool in 1908, as his inscription shows. Our copy also bears the earlier signature of Sir William Moore, Bart, of St James's Place, Middlesex. But what is most splendid about our copy is that Bernard, who had supplied a commendatory couplet for this first edition 1682 (it stands first of among the commendatory verses in this edition, on sig. (B1)r), has in this copy—I assume it can only be his doing—pasted in a little printed label expanding the published epigram from two to four lines. In the 1683 editions the same four-line epigram is found now printed in full (on sig. c2r in the second edition and sig. [A4]r of the third edition, but in both now following a dedication, life of Lucretius, and two other poems, in English), but not in the typography of this label, which suggests that Bernard had a quantity of these printed off separately between the 1682 and 1683 editions, and pasted them directly into copies of the original edition, such as this one, bearing only the two-line epigram.

⁵ It is just possible that the commoner Joseph Bernard 'filius Edwardi Bernardi sacerdotis' from Stowell in Somerset (aged 17 in December 1626) is the man of that name who was the father to our Edward, but as our Edward was baptised in Paulerspury church, Northants, where his father was then curate, we would have to prove that both Josephs were the same man (see Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses*). This would not explain Edward's connection to the college in the 1680s, however.

⁶ See Smith, *Vita Edwardi Bernardi*, p. 8.

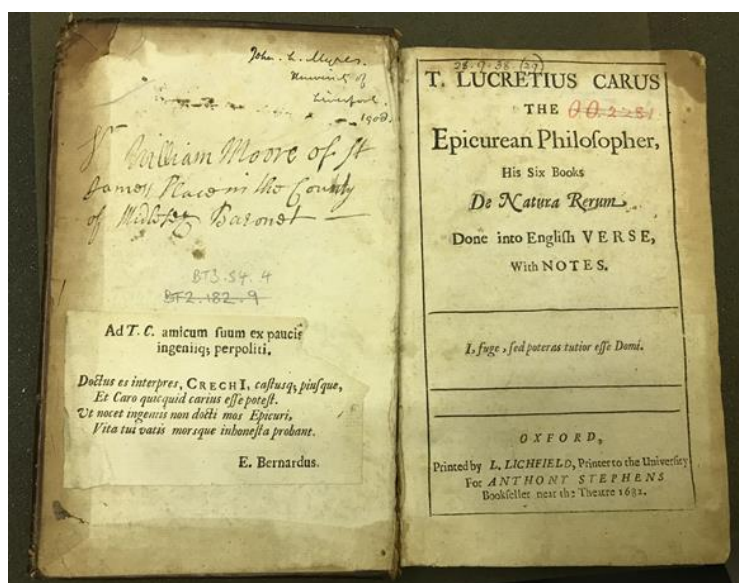
⁷ OUA Wills, Edward Bernard, 17 September 1696, proved 23 April 1697, witnessed by Richard Allanby and Elizabeth Sharpe. Bernard added that if he and his wife were to die in their voyage to Holland, wither Bernard was going to attend the auction of Jacobus Golius's renowned library, the university was to receive all his books. In the event they both survived, and the Bodleian later paid Bernard's widow the vast sum of £340 for books manuscripts, the rest of his library (almost 1500 items) going to public auction, of which the printed catalogue survives.

Ad T.C. amicum suum ex paucis
ingeniūq; perpolitū.

*Doctus es interpres, CRECHI, castusq; piusque,
Et Caro quicquid carius esse potest.
Ut nocet ingenū non docti mos Epicuri,
Vita tui vatis morsque inhonesta probant.*

E. Bernardus.

(You're a learned translator, Creech, chaste and godly;
And whatever else can be dearer than Carus.
That the Epicurean way can damage the wits of the unlearned
The shameful life and death of your prophet shows.)



New College Library, Oxford, BT3.54.4

Why would he bother? Bernard's four-line poem in its fuller form is more explicit in its condemnation of Lucretius than his initial couplet, which turns on a pun on the cognomen of Lucretius, 'Carus' (also 'dear' in Latin). But the additional couplet—quite unlike the pro-Epicurean tone of several of the other of the commendatory poems accompanying this landmark translation, notably that of Aphra Behn—hardens his stance on Lucretius, and presumably Bernard thought this important enough to print off his corrected labels. A reader of either 1683 edition will also have just turned the page from the prefaced life of Lucretius, in which we find the conventional biographical myth of the poet in life 'dissolved in Ease and Pleasure', and dying by his own hand at the age of forty-four. Bernard's added couplet responds directly to this biographical tradition, and one wonders whether, having read the more positive poems accompanying the first edition, timid Bernard felt that he needed to put some distance between himself and these other poets. Bernard after all was a conservative churchman, and although he could praise the modern translator, he must still condemn the ancient poet.

William Poole
Fellow Librarian
New College, Oxford