

# The Librarian writes . . .



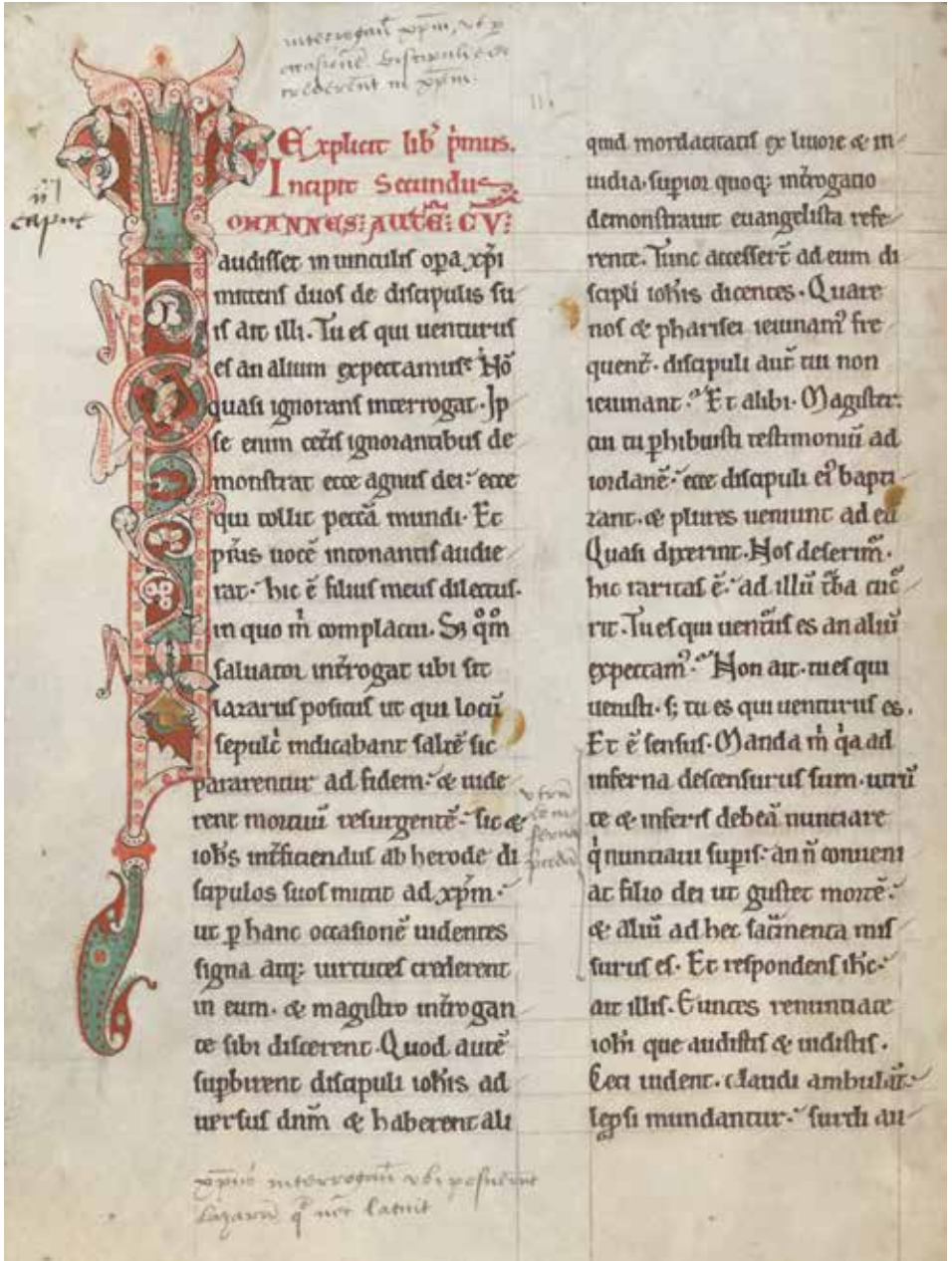
Placing the needs of our readers always at the centre of what we aim for, the library introduced a range of service improvements over the course of 2021. These included the construction of bespoke new shelving bays outside the special collections reading room to house our literature (leisure reading), student welfare, and study skills collections, alongside a new informal armchair reading area. We installed an assistive equipment station on wall racking in the entrance hall, usefully expanding our range of equipment to help readers with disabilities (and those without). A new suite of induction videos is helping our Freshers to use our key services,

promoted with QR codes to ensure easy accessibility, and we now provide portable DVD drives to ensure students can better access our DVD collection, which remains popular. We have significantly improved our induction (and its uptake) for new students this year: sessions were successfully delivered to 122 out of 123 Freshers and well-received, and we considerably increased the number of induction sessions run for our associate students too, as we responded flexibly to the needs of our partners running the Oxford Study Abroad Programme (to which New College is the principal contributing Oxford college) governed by the ebb and flow of the pandemic and its impact on studies over 2021.

Our exhibitions and displays this year have included those relating to Black History Month, the Booker Prize, Disability History Month, LGBT+ History Month, and Mental Health Awareness. Our Christmas books exhibition in the Upper Reading Room proved especially popular. It was run in conjunction with our online social media advent calendar, featuring visual highlights from our special collections, as well as an initiative to promote the enjoyment of reading through the provision of surprise Christmas loan books (wrapped as Christmas gifts) that more than 140 of our readers took part in, and which garnered appreciative praise. A new series of attractive bookmarks, featuring images from our celebrated manuscripts and rare books, along with an expansion to our range of quality special collections postcards, are proving popular. We put on library treasures and other displays for English Literature students, MCR Freshers - as part of an inaugural New College History tour of college - New College School pupils, and alumni attending the New College Society September garden party. The library contributed a 20-minute video presentation of some of its rare and unique items, as part of a New

College Appreciation Day initiative in February, during another year when the pandemic imposed restrictions on our services. Other outreach activities included the ongoing 'New College Reads To You' venture established last year, which concluded in April after forty-seven presentations from alumni and fellows, and having clocked up over 18,000 viewings. Later in the year, we launched 'Curators' Choice', a new video series focusing on the internationally renowned treasures and other remarkable rare books, manuscripts, and archives we care for in college.

In July, we launched an Instagram channel for the Library & Archives, focusing largely on the beauty of our collections, which by the close of 2021 had gained 422 followers and an impressive active engagement rate with our postings of over 17%. This complements our Twitter and Facebook channels, established in 2018. Across all three channels we posted interesting and engaging content over 270 times this year, achieving 288,000 impressions from our Twitter account alone - our best year on record for both impressions and 'likes'. A photograph of the library's book snowman sculpture in its entrance hall was picked up by the university's social media channels and went an Oxford college equivalent of viral, with over 13,000 'likes' in a matter of hours. While it is maybe hard to quantify explicitly the value of social media presence, it is clear that the profile and appeal of the library remain on the increase. We provided a gorgeous image from one of the library's medieval manuscript *Books of Hours* for the college Christmas card this year. We are building a critical mass of high-quality digital images from our special collections, and during 2021, helped in part by generous donations from friends and alumni contributing monetary gifts via the New College Library Fund and other means, we were able to have six more of our manuscripts digitized in full, along with two of our early printed books. One of these was our copy of the play *The Sophister* (1639), which we acquired thanks to a donation last year, and which has been one focus of the Fellow Librarian's research, and will result in another publication in the Library & Archives' own imprint. The library also worked closely with the Warden's office to assist with the publication of another book in our Library & Archives imprint, which appeared in November, celebrating the remarkable anti-racist activism of our former fellow Professor Sir Michael Dummett and his wife Ann. Work was finalised by the library for a physical exhibition on the same subject, which is now scheduled to accompany a college event in 2022. The library has published two further issues of our e-journal *New College Notes*, which is attracting articles on our collections from a notable range of eminent scholars, and gained a further increase in online accesses. We welcomed back two professors - of Chemistry and History of the Book - from Durham University to carry out further Raman spectroscopy examination of arguably our most celebrated medieval manuscript, which resulted in an article in the e-journal.



An image from a manuscript digitised in its entirety this year — Commentaries on St. Matthew's Gospel (c. 1150) by St. Jerome, the patron saint of librarians

Our key performance indicators generally recorded pleasing results. Physical access to the library during Hilary term was considerably disrupted by periods of enforced closure and restricted opening, but termly loans during Trinity and Michaelmas showed an encouraging increase over last year, resulting in an 88% increase to the total number of reader visits during 2021 over 2020, and we adapted delivery of our key services numerous times over the course of the year. Our busiest week - 5th week of Michaelmas - saw some 2,674 visits to the library. Informed by an appreciation of the responsibilities that collections of national and international importance require of us, we enabled visits by external scholars at the earliest safe opportunity, and we were gratified to be able to present 134 items from our collections for consultation to external readers, despite the restrictions on international travel. Of necessity, more time this year was allocated to providing remote research assistance to scholars needing to engage with our holdings. We also spent more time researching our own collections in order to extend the range of beautiful and interesting items we can present for display and exhibitions. We made good inroads into cataloguing the Keynes collection - the very significant donation of books relating to 18th-century fellow Robert Lowth which was so generously donated to us last year. Fifty-nine individuals and organisations kindly donated books to our collections during 2021 - the largest number of donors for many a year. Once again, we devoted more time and effort this year to purchasing notable books by our alumni, and to acquiring early printed books to build on our collection strengths and to develop where appropriate new ones - things which make our library unique and distinctive. Over fifty author-inscribed copies alone were added to the collections, and we made important purchases in the field of 18th-century English poetry by New College alumni.

A team of dedicated and hard-working colleagues has facilitated all that we have achieved over the course of this year, and the ongoing support and expertise that Fellow Librarian Dr Will Poole provides remains crucial for all our activities. We were pleased to welcome Will Shire as deputy librarian, who is making a positive impact to our operations, and, as an adjunct to our team, Dr Jack Avery, a research assistant working for a year on our major collection of Isaac Newton papers - an exciting joint initiative of college and the university's Newton Project. I am grateful to them all.

*Christopher Skelton-Foord* - Librarian

# Back cover illustration:

New College Library, Oxford, MS 242, f. 2r  
Walter Burley, *Commentaries on Aristotle's Ethics and Politics*  
England, c. 1375–1400

© *Courtesy of the Warden and Scholars of New College, Oxford*  
*Photograph by Colin Dunn*

This late 14th-century manuscript, of works by philosopher and logician Walter Burley (b. 1275), was given to New College by churchman and humanist Thomas Chaundler, who was warden of New College 1454–75. Dedicated to Burley's patron—bishop of Durham Richard de Bury (1287–1345)—the text is written out by the scribe John Balne, on parchment of Oxford manufacture.

The illumination shows a sixteen-line initial R, half blue and half violet, historiated on a gold ground with a vignette, displayed behind drawn, striped curtains, of the tonsured author in black robes presenting his book to a seated, bearded king-priest cloaked in blue and holding a crossed staff with his left hand and his right hand resting on the book.



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