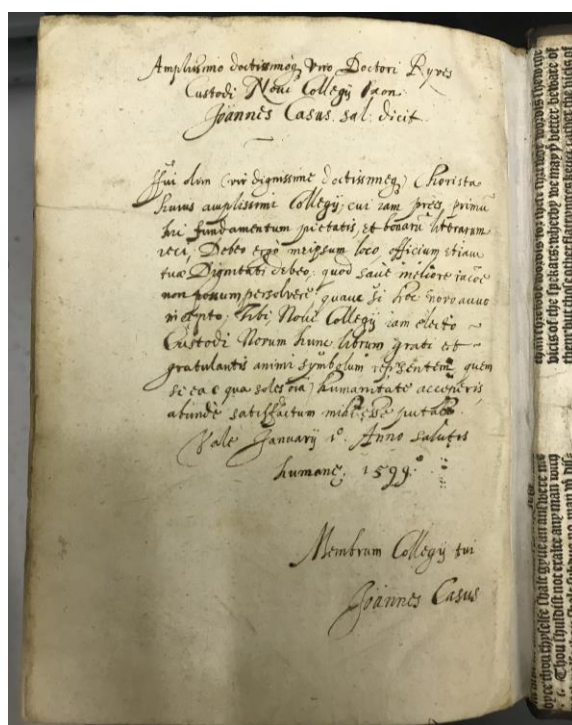


## A New Year's Gift from 1600

For much of its history, we know all too little about the daily life of New College School. 'Sixteen poor and needy boys of less than twelve years of age', as the college's statutes dictate, required to sing and serve, need not leave much of a trace: they do not matriculate or graduate, they do not get involved in squabbles over their election or their pay, and, usually, they do not even leave their names behind.<sup>1</sup>

So it was a great pleasure to open a volume of two well-known Oxford Aristotelian textbooks from the late Elizabethan period and find a surprising piece of evidence about one young chorister. This is a thick quarto, rebacked, but still in obviously Oxford boards of the period, containing the *Lapis Philosophicus* and the *Ancilla Philosophiae* (both Oxford, 1599) of the well-known Oxford teacher and logician John Case.<sup>2</sup> The final end-paper of the volume, however, contains a hand-written inscription of presentation on its verso by the author to the Warden of the college, George Ryves, who had only just been elected.<sup>3</sup> The book is presented as a New Year's gift: a new book in a new year to a new warden, dated 1 January '1599' (really 1600, as in the old calendar the year only finally changed its number on Lady Day, or 25 March).<sup>4</sup> Here is the inscription:



New College Library, Oxford, BT3.260.5

<sup>1</sup> For what we do know, see Matthew Jenkinson, *New College School, Oxford: A History* (Oxford: Shire Publications, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> The volume is now New College Library, Oxford, BT3.260.5, and for the books see Falconer Madan, *Oxford Books: A Bibliography of Printed Works Relating to the University and City of Oxford or Printed or Published There*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1895–1931), I, 45. Ryves bequeathed only his folios to the College if not already owned; but in his lifetime. For Case see primarily Charles B. Schmitt, *John Case and Aristotelianism in Renaissance England* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1983), and now Richard Serjeantson, 'Theology and the Arts Course in Late Elizabethan Oxford: An Unknown Treatise on Church Government by John Case', in *Collected Wisdom of the Early Modern Scholar: Essays in Honor of Mordechai Feingold*, ed. by Anna Marie Roos and Gideon Manning (Dordrecht: Springer, 2022).

<sup>3</sup> For Ryves (pronounced 'Reeves') and his family see my Notes in *New College Notes* 4 (2013), no. 1: '[An Early-Modern New College Dynasty: George, Thomas, and Bruno Ryves](#)'; and *New College Notes* 5 (2014), no. 7: '[Property of a Late Warden 1613 with Some More on the Ryves Family](#)'.

<sup>4</sup> We can be sure of this, for Ryves was only elected in December of 1599.

Amplissimo doctissimoque viro Doctori Ryves  
Custodi Noui Collegij Oxon  
Joannes Casus. sal: dicit.

Fui olim (vir dignissime doctissimeque) Chorista huius amplissimi Collegij; cui iam prees primū hic fundamentum pietatis, et bonarū literarum cepi; Debeo ergo meipsum loco, officium etiam tuæ Dignitati debeo; quod sanè meliore *ratione* non possum, persolvere; quæue si hoc novo anno incepto; Tibi, Noui Collegij iam electo Custodi Novum hunc librum grati et gratulantis animi symbolum repræsentem quem si eas qua soles *omnia* humanitate acceperis, abundè satisfactum mihi esse putabo.

Vale Januarij 1° Anno salutis humanæ 1599°

Membrum Collegij tui

Joannes Casus<sup>5</sup>

[To the most distinguished and learned man Dr Ryves, Warden of New College, Oxford, John Case presents his greetings.

I was once, most worthy and learned man, a choirboy in this most distinguished college which you now lead, and here I received the first foundation of my faith and of good learning. I ought therefore on my own account, indeed I ought in duty to your worthiness, to render what is due, which indeed I am not otherwise able to do than if, in this New Year, I might present to you, newly elected Warden of New College, as a token of gratitude and of a grateful mind, this new book, which if you accept it with all your accustomed kindness, I shall consider myself amply rewarded.

Farewell, on 1 January AD 1599[/1600],  
A member of your college,  
John Case]

Case did not have long to live when he wrote this dedication—twenty-three days to be precise. His gift for a fresh year came from a dying man, and he knew it: the prefaces to each of the two works he presented are sombre, and recognize that the end is nigh for the author. Case had been born in perhaps 1540 or 1541, and so probably sang at New College and attended the school at some point later in that decade or early in the next one. I remarked in an earlier Note that Case had some New College friends, as we can tell from the liminary verse he supplied for publications by two major Elizabethan writers of the college, the Hebraist William Thorne, and the translator Richard Haydocke.<sup>6</sup>

Case, however, was not a fellow of the college, nor indeed a fellow of any college, for he was a recusant, that is to say a Roman Catholic, and so someone living in official terms rather uncertainly on the margins of the university. Yet Case, despite his religion, was one of Oxford's most famous teachers. Throughout the Elizabethan period he ran in effect a private hall, and his writings gained the status of almost official textbooks in the university. As Serjeantson comments, 'Case was the first author to be published from the new university press set up by Joseph Barnes in 1585, and from then until the end of his life he was the only author in late-sixteenth century

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<sup>5</sup> In the inscription I have treated Case's 'reci' as a slip for 'cepi', and emended.

<sup>6</sup> *New College Notes* 4 (2013), no.1, p. 5; and for the literary and intellectual scene of the college in the period, see Richard Zouche, *Fallacy/The Sophister (c. 1614): A Wykehamist Play*, ed. by William Poole (Oxford: New College Library & Archives, 2021), pp. 28–33.

Oxford whose publications in philosophy might stand alongside the productions of Italian universities or Jesuit Colleges. Indeed, this quality was recognised by the rapid piracy of his books at Frankfurt following their appearance from Barnes's press at Oxford'.<sup>7</sup>

Now Ryves was Warden of what was now a thoroughly 'Protestantised' college, the intellectual tone of which was set and monitored in these years by Thomas Bilson, sometime headmaster of Winchester College and now Bishop of Winchester, and a major theological architect of the emerging Anglican edifice. By the later Elizabethan period there was no longer any truth to the notion that New College was some nest of crypto-Catholics.<sup>8</sup> For Case, now an old man, to salute his old college and its new warden in what he recognised were his dying days, was an irenic gesture, and perhaps an indication of how collegiate loyalties and simply the business of good education could cut across or even override confessional divides. Case thanks Ryves, twenty years his junior, for an education he received before Ryves had even been born—and he praises the college for providing him with his foundations in not just learning but also religion. In an age, we are told, where confessional loyalties and divides mattered to people more than almost any other consideration, this little dedication, tucked away at the back of a book, affords us a glimpse of a complementary world, one where institutional and educational ties bred and sustained affection and toleration.

William Poole  
Fellow Librarian  
New College, Oxford

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<sup>7</sup> Serjeantson, 'Theology and the Arts Course in Late Elizabethan Oxford'. Serjeantson also presents decisive evidence that Case was indeed a Roman Catholic, as was commonly known at the time, but which has been doubted by some modern scholars.

<sup>8</sup> Zouche, *Fallacy/The Sophister*, p. 29.