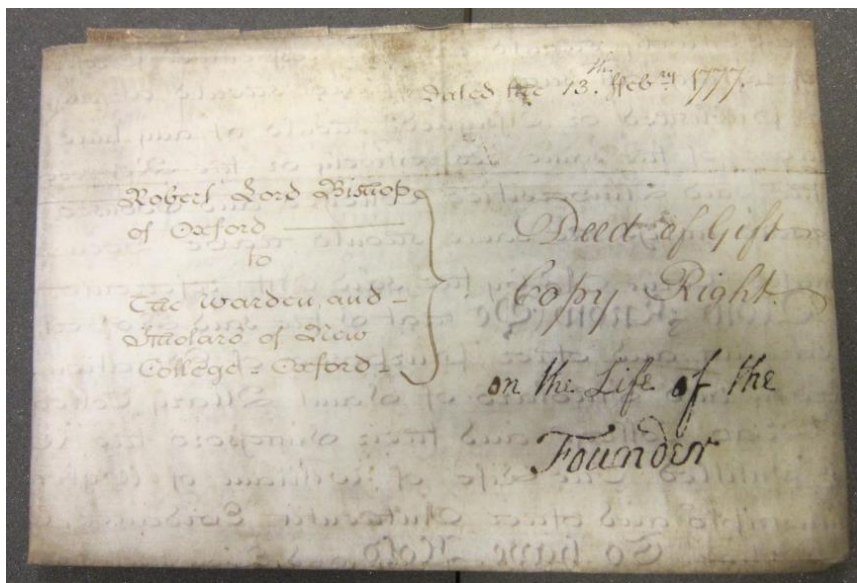


Identifying the ‘Rev^d. Rob^t. Lowth’ in J. Sturges’s Letter to M^r. Cadell

In the winter 2020 issue of *New College Notes*, the librarian of New College, Oxford, Christopher Skelton-Foord notes how thrilled he was upon receiving what has meanwhile come to be referred to as the ‘Keynes Collection’.¹ Over 200 books had been donated to the library by Randal Keynes (*b.* 1948), the conservationist, author, and great-great-grandson of Charles Darwin, and also a former student at New College. The primary object of the collection is Robert Lowth (1710–1787), one-time bishop of Oxford and subsequently bishop of London from 1777 until his death, and educated at New College as well, and at Winchester College before that.

Lowth is ‘best known among literary scholars’ (as I wrote in an article published in 2003) ‘for his *De sacra poesi Hebraeorum praelectiones* (1753) . . . and among religious scholars for *Isaiah, a New Translation* (1778)’.² For linguists like myself, however, he is best known for his *Short Introduction to English Grammar* (1762), a grammar which appeared in many editions and reprints, and which set a standard for many English grammars to come. Both educational institutions attended by Lowth as a student, Winchester College and New College, had been founded by William of Wykeham (1324–1404), and Lowth published a biography of William of Wykeham as well (1758), in his own eyes possibly his most significant work. His grammar probably sold most copies—34,000 by his own calculations—but he did not hold on to its copyright, unlike in the case of *The Life of William of Wykeham*.³ Eventually, he donated the book’s copyright to New College, which possesses ‘a deed of gift’ to this effect dated 13 February 1777, the year in which he was to leave Oxford because he had been nominated bishop of London.⁴



New College Archives, Oxford, NCA 803

This and the following image © Courtesy of the Warden and Scholars of New College, Oxford

¹ Christopher Skelton-Foord, ‘[Some Notable Acquisitions and Associations from 2020](#)’, *New College Notes* 14 (2020), no. 8.

² Ingrid Tiekens-Boon van Ostade, ‘Robert Lowth: ‘A Loving, More Loving, Most Loving, Father’ in *Living in Posterity: Essays in Honour of Bart Westerveel*, ed. Jan Frans van Dijkhuizen, Paul Hoftijzer, Juliette Roding, and Paul Smith (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2004), pp. 275–85.

³ Ingrid Tiekens-Boon van Ostade, *The Bishop’s Grammar: Robert Lowth and the Rise of Prescriptivism in English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 60, 66.

⁴ Lowth’s nomination is dated 12 April 1777, but he must have known about it earlier than that. There is in any case a letter dated 7 April of that year in which he informs his curate in Durham and Sedgefield, William Longstaffe (1733–1806), that ‘His Majesty has been pleased to nominate me to the Bishoprick of London’, New College Archives, Oxford, NCA PA/LOW 1/26. The letter is part of a collection of letters that was also recently acquired by New College Library and Archives, Oxford.

All four of Lowth's published books are part of the Keynes Collection, and, amazingly, in multiple editions and reprints, posthumous ones included: there are as many as 31 copies of the grammar, 13 each of *De sacra poesi* and *Isaiah*, and four copies of *William of Wykeham*. It was to have a look at the grammars that I visited New College Library in July of this year.⁵

But the Keynes Collection contains much more than those 200 or so books, and one particular if mysterious little gem is an undated letter by J. Sturges addressed to 'M^r. Cadell, Strand, London'. The letter itself reads as follows:

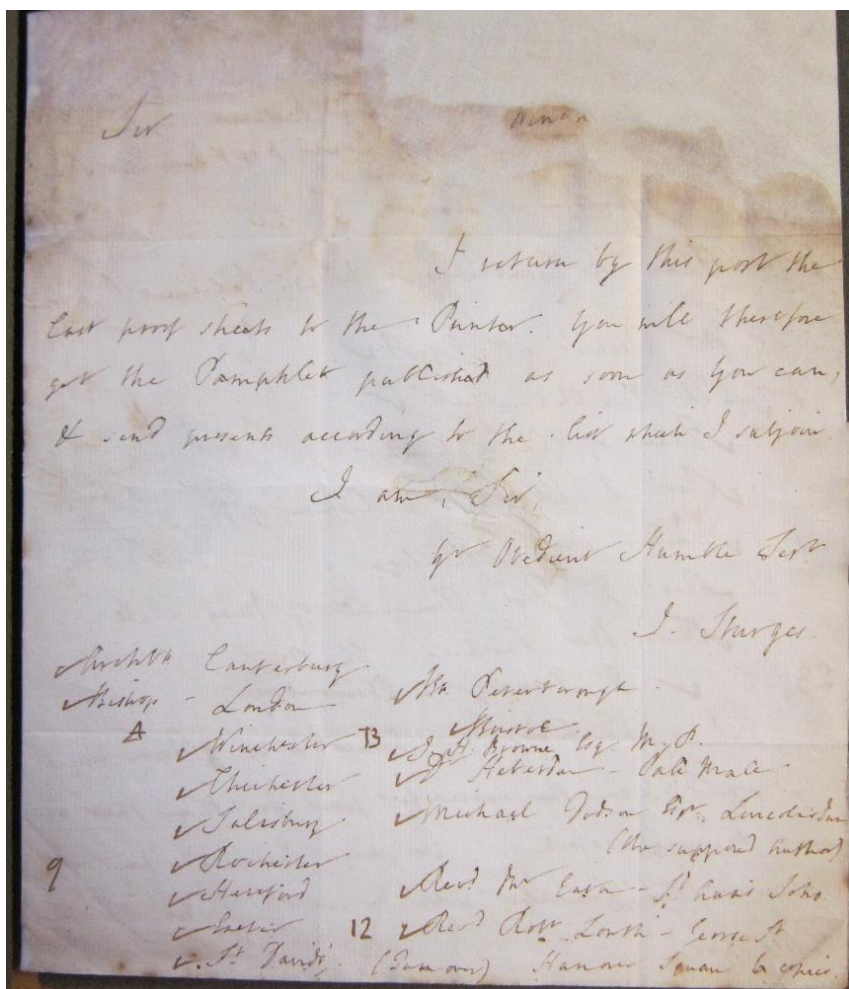
Sir

I return by this post the
last proof sheets for the Printer. You will therefore
get the Pamphlet published as soon as You can,
& send presents according to the list which I subjoin.

I am, Sir,

Y^r Obedient Humble Ser^t.

J. Sturges.



New College Library, Oxford, Keynes 98

⁵ I should like to express my gratitude to Christopher Skelton-Foord and his colleagues in New College Library and Archives for allowing me unlimited access to all the material in the Keynes Collection, catalogued as well as uncatalogued.

Following the letter there is a list of the intended recipients of the 'presents' or presentation copies of the pamphlet that was to be printed, and that would be published by Cadell. Apart from the archbishop of York and a number of bishops (though not the bishop of Oxford) the list includes the name 'Rev^d. D^r. Lowth—George S^t.'. The Warden of New College was to receive a copy, too (see the reverse page of the letter itself). As the image above shows, all names were ticked off, which suggests that Sturges's request had been seen to. The letter may have survived because it was added to the publisher's file to serve as a record for later use.⁶

The problem with the letter is not merely that it is undated. To start with, there were two eighteenth-century publishers called Cadell: Thomas Cadell the Elder (1742–1802) and Thomas Cadell the Younger (1773–1836).⁷ But there were also two Rev^d. D^r. Lowths: Lowth's son Robert (1762–1822) was a clergyman, too. The identity of J. Sturges at least is clear: John Sturges (1735–1807) was Lowth's sister Margaret's son, and he was a clergyman as well.⁸ So if we could find a date for the letter, we would also be able to identify the publisher of the pamphlet as well as which Robert Lowth would be the intended recipient of a copy of it.

There is one important clue in the list of names, which includes the following: 'Michael Dodson Esq^r. Lincoln's Inn (the supposed Author)' (see the image reproduced above). The word 'Author' made me turn to the database Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO), where a search for Michael Dodson produced a reference to *A New Translation of Isaiah* (1790) as well as:

A Letter to the Rev. Dr. Sturges, Author of Short Remarks on a New Translation of Isaiah, by a Layman; with Notes Supplementary to those of Dr. Lowth, Late Bishop of London, and Containing Remarks on Many Parts of his Translation and Notes. By Michael Dodson, Esq. author of the new translation and notes (1791)

This title reads like a response to the pamphlet referred to in the above letter to Cadell, and indeed, searching for John Sturges as 'author' in ECCO as well produced its title:

Short Remarks on a New Translation of Isaiah, by a Layman; with Notes Supplementary to those of Dr. Lowth, late bishop of London, and Containing Remarks on Many Parts of his Translation and Notes. In a Letter to the Author. By John Sturges, LL. D. Chancellor of the Diocese of Winchester, and Chaplain in Ordinary to His Majesty (1791)

The publisher of these *Short Remarks* was Thomas Cadell, most likely Thomas Cadell the Elder, since his son would have been only eighteen at the time. The straightforward instructions in Sturges's letter suggest that he was dealing with an experienced publisher rather than with his very young son.⁹ ECCO, moreover, contains two earlier publications by Sturges that were also published by Cadell, again, given their dates, presumably the Elder:

A Sermon Preached in Lambeth Chapel, at the Consecration of the Right Reverend John Butler, LL.D. Lord Bishop of Oxford. On Sunday, May 25, 1777. By John Sturges, A. M. Prebendary of Winchester, and Chaplain in Ordinary to His Majesty. Published by Command of the Archbishop (1777)

⁶ A similar, likewise undated letter is reproduced in Bryan A. Garner's *Taming the Tongue: In the Heyday of English Grammar (1711–1851): 100 Items from the Garner Collection* (New York: The Grolier Club, 2021), p. 26. The letter in question is addressed by Lowth to Robert Dodsley, the publisher of his grammar, and it specifies a number of intended recipients of copies of the book.

⁷ Both men have an entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (ODNB).

⁸ See Tiekens-Boon van Ostade, *Bishop's Grammar*, p. 43 and elsewhere.

⁹ The directive 'You will therefore get the Pamphlet published as soon as You can' may seem rather strict to a modern reader. However, the word *please* as a possible alternative for 'you will' was not yet in general use as a politeness marker at the time. As several quotations from Lowth's letters in Tiekens-Boon van Ostade, *Bishop's Grammar* illustrate, Lowth, too, regularly used this form, along with 'be pleased to . . .'.

Considerations on the Present State of the Church-Establishment, in Letters to the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of London. By John Sturges, M. A. Prebendary of Winchester, And Chaplain in Ordinary to His Majesty (1779)

Both publications may be linked with Lowth: the consecration on the occasion of which Sturges had preached a sermon was Lowth's successor as bishop of Oxford, while the bishop of London addressed by Sturges in the second one was his uncle. The letter in the Keynes Collection may therefore be dated in the year 1791,¹⁰ by which time Lowth was no longer alive. The Robert Lowth mentioned in Sturges's letter as one of the intended recipients of the pamphlet was therefore Lowth's son.

John Sturges does not have an entry in the *ODNB*, but Michael Dodson does, and the entry confirms their differences of opinion regarding Dodson's new translation of *Isaiab*, a dispute that is described as 'long-running' but also as 'generally good-humoured'¹¹. Two small questions remain. Now that we have a date for the letter, we may identify the warden of New College at the time who is mentioned in the letter as John Oglander (1737–1794), whose period in office ranged from 1768 until his death twenty-six years later. If Oglander did receive a copy of the pamphlet, where is it today? I have been unable to locate it in New College's library. The other question has to do with the absence of the bishop of Oxford among the list of recipients of the pamphlet. At the time, this was Edward Smallwell, who had succeeded John Butler, at whose consecration John Sturges had preached a sermon, in 1788. The reason for this we may never be able to ascertain. But we do at least have a date for the letter by John Sturges to Thomas Cadell the Elder now, and this date has enabled us to identify the Rev^d. D^r. Lowth mentioned in the letter not as Lowth but as his son. The presence of the letter in the Keynes Collection is nevertheless significant, for it testifies to the drive with which Randal Keynes built his amazingly rich collection of *Lowthiana*: every mention of Lowth's name appears to have drawn his attention, even if it only occurred in the title of a grammar like John Lincoln's *An Abridgement of Dr. Lowth's Introduction to English Grammar, for the Use of Schools*.¹² Some of these grammars I had never heard of before, and I would never have learnt about them had it not been for Randal Keynes's persistent and unstinting interest in Lowth.

Ingrid Tiekens-Boon van Oostade
Professor Emeritus of English Sociohistorical Linguistics
Leiden University Centre for Linguistics

¹⁰ Strictly speaking, the letter's *terminus a quo* is 1790, the date of publication of Dodson's translation of *Isaiab*. But since Sturges's pamphlet was published in 1791 and the letter is about 'the last proof sheets for the Printer', I would propose that same year for its date. The pamphlet consists of only 40 pages altogether, which would not have taken very long to print.

¹¹ Francis Watt, revised by M. J. Mercer 'Dodson, Michael (1732–1799)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (3 January 2008) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/7759>> (Accessed: 12 December 2022).

¹² John Lincoln, *An Abridgement of Dr. Lowth's Introduction to English Grammar, for the Use of Schools* (Norwich: Printed by R. Beatniffe, in the Cockney-Lane, [n.d.]), New College Library, Oxford, Keynes 35.