

Some Notes on New College Hunters

Hunting for sport is a controversial, highly contested occupation, certainly in recent times. Since 2005 when the UK Hunting Act 2004 came into force, the hunting of most wild mammals with dogs has largely been prohibited in the UK. Historically things have been different, however, and hunting was woven into the life of our college for years.

A 1931 article on Oxford college beagle packs in *Country Life* describes how ‘At Oxford that little group which makes hunting the fox and the hare its first consideration is, perhaps, unusually isolated’—a thing apart. With the heyday of hunting already something of the past, the writer almost a hundred years ago is seeing in the Oxford hunters an historian’s desire to keep alive the past, ‘to preserve in every detail the traditions, and even the phrases and mannerisms, of bygone fox hunters’.

The New College Beagles had formed in 1896, one of several Oxford college beagle packs lasting in some form into the twentieth century, with Balliol, Christ Church, Exeter, Magdalen, and Trinity. The New College Beagles amalgamated with Magdalen’s in 1903, picking up Trinity’s too in 1912, then further amalgamating in 1950 with Christ Church’s (founded in 1874)—after those of other colleges had dropped out—until the Christ Church and New College Beagles finally amalgamated with the Farley Hill Beagles in 1971, and are now known as the Christ Church and Farley Hill Beagles. Hunting at Oxford, it is suggested, is ‘as nearly non-competitive as any occupation can be’. Yet the writer also alludes with pride to the fact it must be at either Oxford or Cambridge that England’s fastest pack of beagles is housed, and, in language that of course jars with modern sentiment, that ‘it is the ambition of every true enthusiast to kill a fox with his own hounds’.¹

Hunting has been woven into the very fabric of our college since much, much earlier days. There are sixty-two carved misericords in New College Chapel, dating from medieval times and possibly from as early as 1386; and they include one which depicts this vivid hunting scene of a stag, positioned above a hound and the wooden pales of a deer park, flanked between two decorative lion masks in foliate diamonds.²



Misericord [detail], late 14th century (wood) English School, New College Chapel, Oxford
© Courtesy of the Warden and Scholars of New College, Oxford

¹ M. F., ‘The New College, Magdalen and Balliol Beagles’, *Country Life* (28 March 1931), 402–403. See also Nicola Whittaker, ‘Traditions in Beagling: Reactions to Social Change and the Transition into the Twenty First Century’, (unpublished BSc dissertation, Oxford Brookes University, 2014), New College Archives, Oxford, NCA Acc. 2014/9.

² For a short account of the misericords, see Francis W. Steer, *Misericords at New College, Oxford* (London: Phillimore, 1973), New College Library, Oxford, OX9/STE.

What is likely the most celebrated and widely read of hunting poems, *The Chase* (1735), was penned by our alumnus William Somervile (1675–1742). He and books he wrote now held in New College Library—of which we have a fine collection—are the subject of a recent New College Note of mine. But what of other New College hunters whose writings have appeared in print? This note delineates some of the most significant.³

The Catholic poet **George Turberville** (or Turberville) (1543/4–c. 1597) hailed from Winterborne Whitchurch in Dorset of an ancient Dorsetshire family that most likely provided

Thomas Hardy with his inspiration for the d'Urberville family in the novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891). Turberville entered Winchester College in 1554 as a scholar, then became a fellow of New College in 1561 which he left for London the following year. In dedicating to Anne Dudley, Countess of Warwick his first book of poems *Epitaphes, Epigrams, Songs and Sonets* (1567), he helped establish in English poetry that genre of verses which are published for the poet's lady. Anne was a close member of Elizabeth I's intimate circle, as gentlewoman of the privy chamber. And during a decade (the 1570s) when tensions were rife between a new Protestant establishment and a very long historical legacy of Catholicism in the country, it may have been Turberville's Catholic faith that prompted Robert Jones, possibly a Puritan fanatic, to attempt to assassinate him on 26 September 1573.⁴

Turberville's final published work is his hunting manual *The Booke of Faulconrie or Hauking, for the Onely Delight and Pleasure of all Noblemen and Gentlemen* (1575), which Turberville dedicated to Anne's husband, Ambrose Dudley, Earl of Warwick. It was published the same year as another Christopher Barker imprint, *The Noble Arte of Venerie or Hunting* with which it was often bound, and that

The Second parte or booke, 75 of this collection of Falconrie.

Certayne speciall poyntes, necessarie for a
Falconer, or Ostreger, collected out of
the Italian Author.



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George Turberville, *The Booke of Faulconrie or Hauking*
(London: Christopher Barker, 1575), p. 75

³ Christopher Skelton-Foord, 'Chasing Somervile, New College's Poet of the Hunt', *New College Notes* 18 (2022), no. 6. See notably Donna Landry, 'The Pleasures of the Chase circa 1735 to circa 1831', *The Invention of the Countryside: Hunting, Walking and Ecology in English Literature, 1671–1831* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 168–94.

⁴ See Carole Levin and C. J. Krack, 'Violence in Elizabeth's England: Tudors and Turbervilles', *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* 46 (2020), 57–69.

was long attributed to Turberville, but is now known instead to be a translation by George Gascogine (1534/5?–1577). Literary critic Catherine Bates has set out a duality in Turberville’s usage throughout his poetic oeuvre of the imagery of the hunt:

[H]unting is invoked in traditional terms as the activity that, from ancient times, had been seen to embody manliness and vigour . . . the obvious metaphor for the bold and purposeful behaviour of the role-model male.

Yet at the same time, because in falconry the female bird of prey—as the larger, heavier, and of wider wingspan than the male, so the more prized—is the one to fulfil the role of hunter, the sexual dynamics of hunter and hunted thing are complicated and unorthodox, and we find in ‘Turberville’s presentations of the male lover [also] a failed or thwarted huntsman’.⁵ Replete with fine woodcuts—that depicting Elizabeth I in the 1575 edition has been replaced with one of James I for the 1611 printing (the female of the species here is supplanted for obvious reasons by the male)—the *Booke of Faulconrie* is alas not held by New College Library in either printing.

Our next hunter is **Philip Herbert** (1584–1650), first earl of Montgomery and fourth earl of Pembroke, who matriculated at New College on 9 March 1593, but spent only the briefest time (three to four months) at the university. Indeed, despite being named after his maternal uncle, the major Elizabethan court poet Sir Philip Sidney, and being a kinsman of George Herbert the metaphysical poet, Philip Herbert, ‘the great Hunter’, was not a man of any particular erudition, as John Aubrey writes: he ‘did not delight in Books, or Poetry: but . . . His Lordship’s chiefe delight was in Hunting and Hawking, both which he had to the greatest perfection of any Peer in the Realm’.⁶ Indeed, Aubrey associates Herbert’s name inextricably with the prominent role that hunting occupied in the life of the nation at that time:

It was in his Lordship’s time . . . a serene calme of Peace, that Hunting was at its greatest Heighth that ever was in this Nation . . . So that the Glory of the English Hunting breath’d its last with this Earle.⁷

Nevertheless, Herbert was a dedicatee of many works of literature, most notably—jointly with another New College man, his elder brother William Herbert, the third earl of Pembroke—of Shakespeare’s 1623 First Folio. A handsome favourite of King James I (their relationship may have been amorous),⁸ James made him high steward of Oxford University on 10 June 1615, and Herbert’s unbookish nature, contrasted with a passion and skill for the chase, is similarly pointed up by Lord Clarendon in his *History of the Rebellion* (1641):

He pretended to no other qualifications, than to understand Horses and Dogs very well, which his Master [King James] loved him the better for . . . (A rare temper! And it could proceed from nothing, but his great perfection in loving Field-sports).⁹

⁵ Catherine Bates, ‘George Turberville and the Painful Art of Falconry’, *Masculinity and the Hunt: Wyatt to Spenser* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 145–69, at pp. 147–8, 150.

⁶ *Aubrey’s Brief Lives: Edited from the Original Manuscripts and with an Introduction*, ed. Oliver Lawson Dick (London: Secker and Warburg, 1950), p. 146.

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ See for instance the comment that Herbert was ‘a man *carressed* by King James for his *handsome face*’, in Francis Osborne, *Traditionall Memoyres on The Raigne of King Iames* (London: Thomas Robinson, 1658), p. 72. Michael B. Young cites this in his *King James and the History of Homosexuality*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Fonthill Media, 2016), concluding ‘There were three males who almost certainly had sexual relations with James (Lennox, Somerset, and Buckingham), and a minimum of four others who may have (Alexander Lindsay, the Earl of Huntly, Philip Herbert, and James Hay)’, p. 172.

⁹ Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, *The History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England, Begun in the Year 1741*, 3 vols (Oxford: Printed at the Theatre, 1702), I, 47, New College Library, Oxford, NB.104.1.

But his temper was far from rare—he was quarrelsome and belligerent—and his loyalty to the crown would wane. He played a significant role in the coronation of James's son Charles I, and he enjoyed Charles's early favour. Herbert's relationship with the new king, however, deteriorated towards the end of the 1630s—his Puritan sympathies left him at odds with the queen's Catholicism—and a violent altercation on 19 July 1641 with Henry Howard, Lord Arundel provided the king with the pretext needed to dismiss Herbert from his post as Lord Chamberlain.

He had been elected chancellor of Oxford University on 6 July 1641, and he appears in print in this capacity answering with a rebuke *A Letter Sent from the Provost Vice-Chancellor of Oxford, To the Right Honourable the Earle of Pembroke Lord Chancellor of Oxford* of 1642—the vice-chancellor at that time the royalist and New College fellow and later warden Robert Pinck (1573–1647).¹⁰ His university chancellorship was revoked in 1643 after the king had relocated his court to Oxford a year earlier, though Herbert would be reinstated as chancellor in March 1648, and then hold the position until his death. Increasingly siding with the Parliamentarians, he was fiercely satirised in several royalist publications, which were at pains to lampoon in particular his love of the hunt. An 'Elegie on the sometimes honourable Philip Herbert' published in 1650 repudiates him thus:

No honest men grieve, when *Rebells* doe fall,
God dam him, he dy'd, and so they must all.
 In Hunting and Hawking was his chiefe delight,
 Would Bowle, drink, and drab too, rather then fight.
 When he was advanc'd by his King very high,
 Turn'd *Traytor*, and help'd pull downe *Monarchie*.

And the earlier 'Will and Testament' portion of the same publication has Herbert request that 'my *Body* be decently interred at *Hide-Park* Corner, (because in my Life I delighted much in hunting) or if the State shall think fit, in any Parke or Chase of my owne, or the late Kings, with the full cry of all my pack of Dogs, whether in *Bark-shire*, *Wilt-shire*, or elsewhere'.¹¹ Indeed, while he had still enjoyed the favour of the king, Herbert would host Charles I at his magnificent rural ancestral seat, Wilton House in Wiltshire, for an annual hunting expedition; (he pursued his passion for the chase reputedly at an expense of £18,000 per year).¹²

In similarly vicious satirical vein, another publication, also printed after his death, records Herbert having a discourse with Charon during his voyage to Hell:

Cha. There are Hounds (and please you Sir plenty) which will barke and baule to purpose when your Lordship comes a little neerer.
Ph. Dam mee, I like the noyse deerely; I alwaies lov'd Hunti•g well: But preethee what stinke of Brimstone and Burning is this?¹³

Another political satire had lampooned him, posing the question, 'why should we send this Fellow thither to make Mouthes for three Weekes, and talke of Dogs and Hawkes?', and then putting this speech into Herbert's mouth:

¹⁰ Robert Pinck and Philip Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, *A Letter Sent from the Provost Vice-Chancellor of Oxford, To the Right Honourable the Earle of Pembroke Lord Chancellor of Oxford. Together with his Lordships Answer To the said Letter* (London: Printed by L. N. for E. Husbards and J. Franck, 13 September 1642).

¹¹ *The Last Will and Testament of Philip Herbert, Burgess for Bark-shire, Vulgarly called Earl of Pembroke and Montgomery . . . Also, His Elegy* (Nod-nol [i.e. London]: Printed in the Fall of Tyranny, and Resurrection of Loyalty, 1650), pp. 6, [1].

¹² David L. Smith, 'Herbert, Philip, First Earl of Montgomery and Fourth Earl of Pembroke (1584–1650)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (26 May 2016) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/13042>> (Accessed: 28 July 2023).

¹³ *The Life and Death of Philip Herbert, the late infamous Knight of Barkshire, once Earle of Pembroke, Mounomerie, Etc . . . Likewise A Discourse with Charon in his Voyage to Hell* ([London]: Printed in the first yeere of Phil. Harbert's infernall-captivity, and (I hope) the last of state-tyranny, [1650]), p. [5].

My Accounts for last yeares expence came to fix and twenty thousand pounds, that's faire you'l say, and when you have chosen me your Knight, I'll carry you every Mothers Son, the whole County, into *Wiltshire*, and we'll be merry, and Hunt and Hawke, and I'll be as free as an Emperour.¹⁴

If a man's passion for hunting is here represented as thus precluding his possessing an intellect—Herbert is characterised as both buffoon and traitor—a similar device would not have been convincing in any way for our next New College hunter, **Peter Beckford** (1740–1811).¹⁵ Following early schooling at Westminster School, and after a period of education with a private tutor, Beckford matriculated at New College, Oxford on 12 April 1757, though left Oxford that same year. Well-travelled through continental Europe, multilingual, a devotee of the arts—he was a patron of the young Muzio Clementi, Italian composer and pianist—both Beckford's skill as a hunter and his mastery in foreign languages are praised by Sir Egerton Brydges in a perceptive review of Beckford's most celebrated book, *Thoughts on Hunting* (1781):

Never had fox or hare the honour of being chased to death by so accomplished a hunter . . . never was huntsman's dinner graced by such urbanity and wit . . . He would bag a fox in Greek, find a hare in Latin, inspect his kennels in Italian, and direct the economy of the stable in exquisite French.¹⁶

The fruits of Beckford's observations during his foreign travels he published as another epistolary work in 1805, *Family Letters from Italy*, which touches on the author's experiences of hunting in Italy, and a copy of which the library acquired last year in a fine contemporary binding and with extensive contemporary manuscript annotations.¹⁷

Dog breeding and fox hunting were early passions for Beckford, growing up on his family's Stepleton House estate in Dorset, where his father Julines Beckford acquired a pack of beagles for his son when Peter Beckford was only thirteen years old, ones he would have followed on foot. Soon, Beckford was breeding and purchasing a different type of hound, the fox-beagle, suitable for horse-mounted hunting. In 1779, recuperating at Bristol Hotwells after a hunting fall, Beckford began to write what would become one of the seminal treatises on hunting, therein bemoaning the paucity of existing literature on hunting, citing only the example of William Somervile—who had proceeded to New College some sixty-three years before him, and whom Beckford fervently admired and referenced frequently throughout the *Thoughts on Hunting*.¹⁸

New College Library holds first edition copies of both William Somervile's *The Chase* (1735) and Thomas Beckford's *Thoughts on Hunting* (1781). And it seems that, in its inclusion of an engraved frontispiece of Diana preparing for the hunt by Francesco Bartolozzi (1727–1815) after Giovanni Battista Cipriani (1727–1785), Beckford's book is purposefully paying homage to and recalling Somervile's, with the latter's engraved frontispiece depicting the poet presenting his lyre to Diana, goddess of the hunt, by Gérard Jean-Baptiste Scotin (1698–1755) after Hubert-François Gravelot (1699–1773).

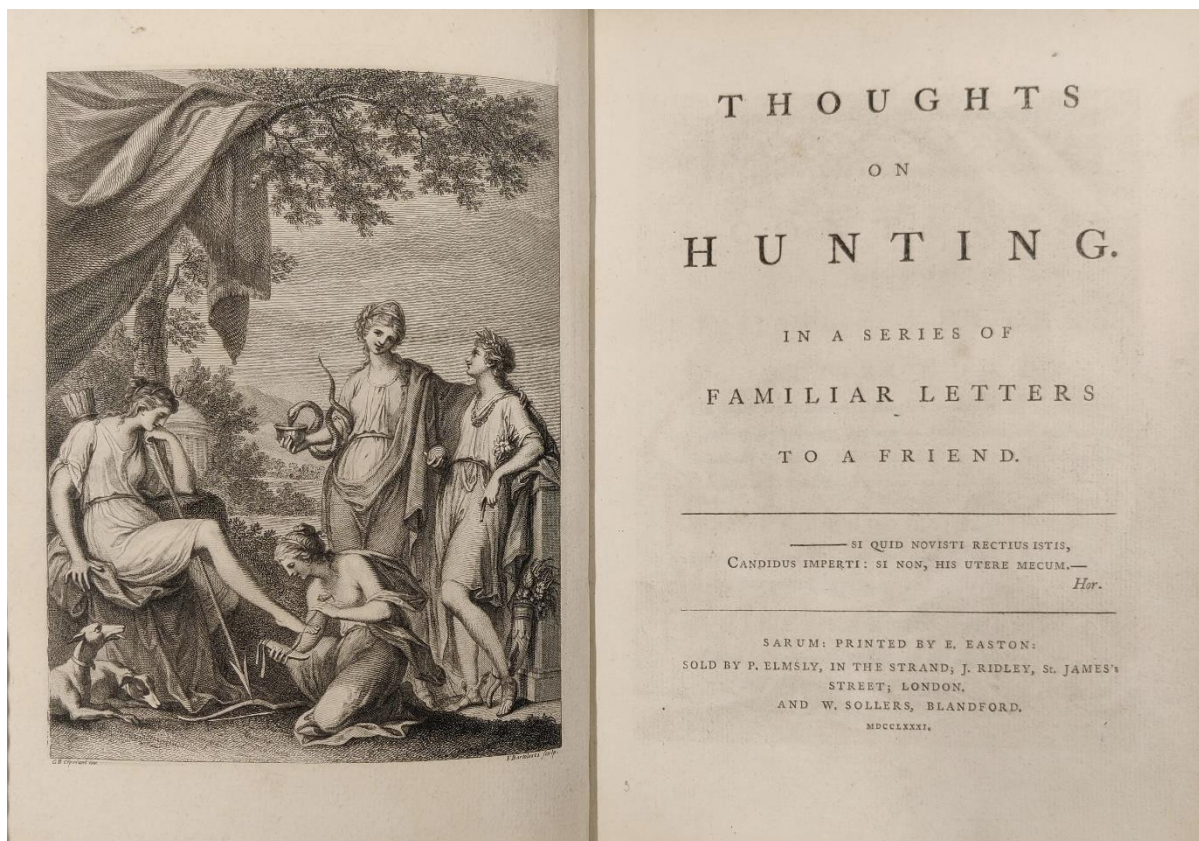
¹⁴ *The manner of the Election of Philip Herbert . . . for Knight of the Shire for Bark-shire* ([London], 1649), pp. 1, 4.

¹⁵ See A. Henry Higginson, *Peter Beckford, Esquire, Sportsman, Traveller, Man of Letters: A Biography* (London: Collins, 1937), New College Library, Oxford, NC/BEC, for biographical detail.

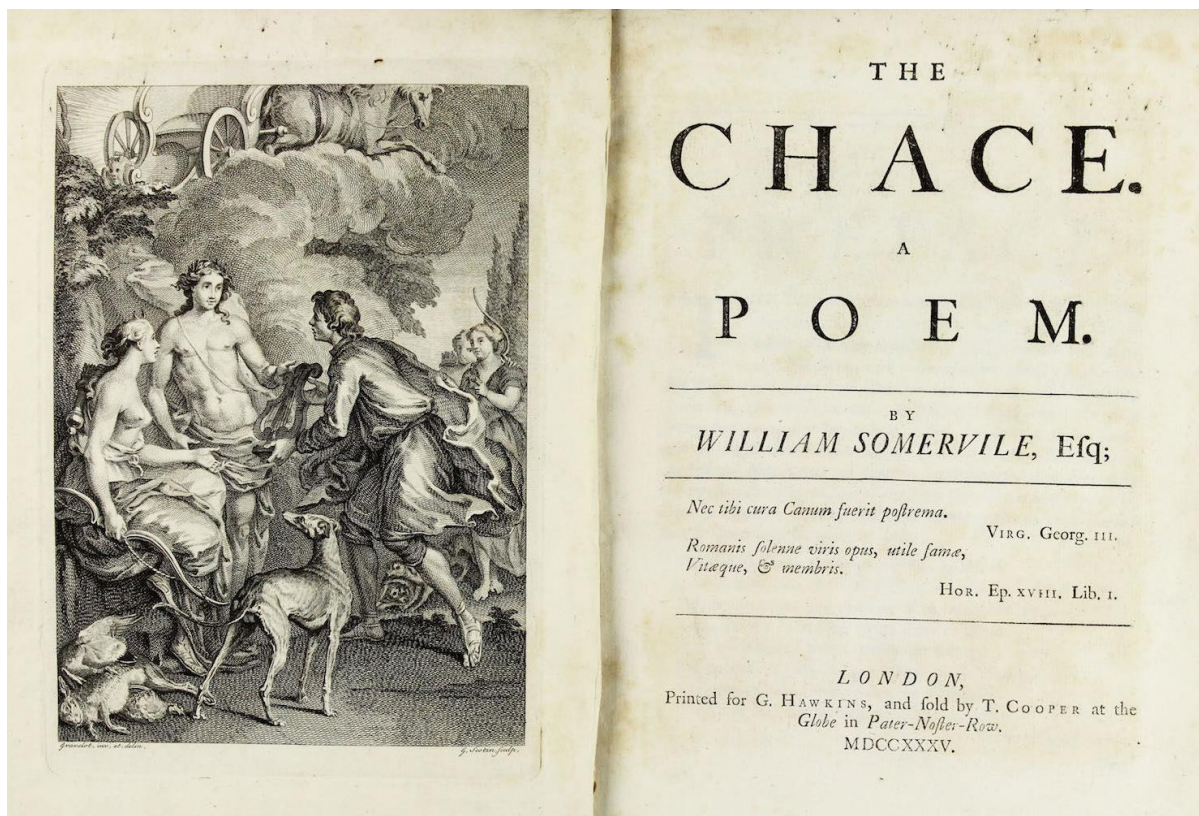
¹⁶ 'Beckford's *Thoughts on Hunting*', *The Retrospective Review* 13 (1826), 230–247, at p. 231.

¹⁷ Peter Beckford, *Familiar Letters from Italy, To a Friend in England*, 2 vols (Salisbury: J. Easton, 1805), New College Library, Oxford, NB.73.29–30.

¹⁸ 'While on hunting, all are silent; and were it not for the muse of Somervile, which has so judiciously and so sweetly sung, the dog, that useful, that honest, that faithful, that disinterested, that entertaining animal, would be suffered to pass unnoticed and undistinguished', Peter Beckford, *Thoughts on Hunting. In a Series of Familiar Letters to a Friend* (Sarum: Printed by E. Easton, 1781), p. 5, New College Library, Oxford, NB.73.25.

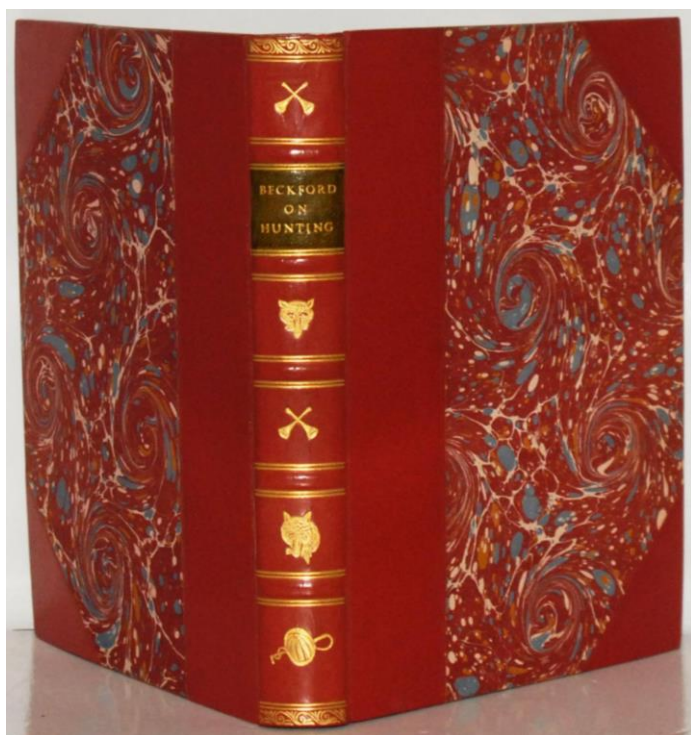


New College Library, Oxford, NB.73.25 © Courtesy of the Warden and Scholars of New College, Oxford



New College Library, Oxford, NB.66.33 © Courtesy of the Warden and Scholars of New College, Oxford

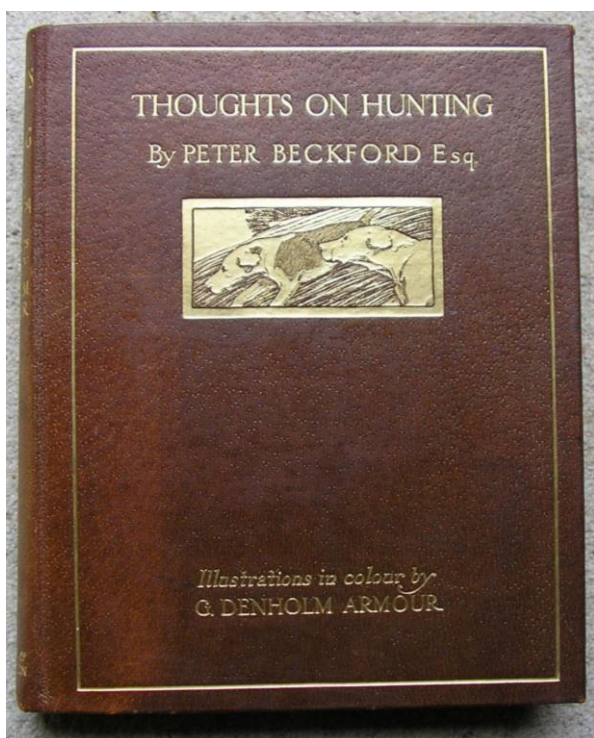
As we do with William Somervile's works, so the library holds an impressive collection of editions of Beckford's hunting manual—second, third, fourth, and later editions—some of which have bindings which pictorially reflect the subject matter of the book.



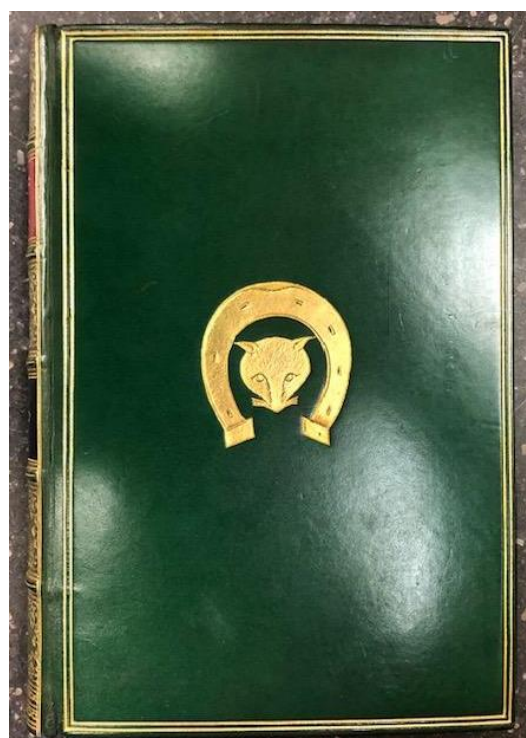
New College Library, Oxford, NB.43.19—4th edition (1802)
Rebound by Lewis & Harris (Bookbinders), Bath



NB.73.37—Albion Press (1810)
Half leather binding



New College Library, Oxford, NC/BEC—(1911)
Copy no. 67 of 350, signed by the artist

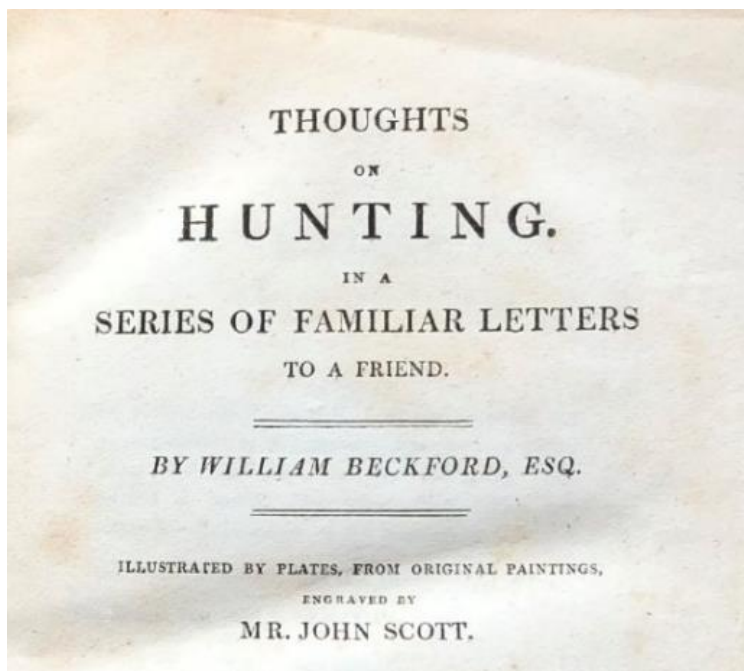


New College Library, Oxford, NC/BEC—(1931)
Rebound by Riviere and Sons

Bibliographically the most intriguing of all is an 1820 octavo, with armorial bookplates indicating ownership by three generations of Jaffray baronets of Studley in Warwickshire, which the library acquired only last year. Extra-illustrated with engraved plates dating from the 1840s, our copy has thereafter been bound in black morocco gilt, with burgundy watered-silk endpapers, and adorned with two concealed fore-edge paintings (one in each direction) depicting two different hunting scenes—a remarkable one-off.¹⁹



Double fore-edged paintings
New College Library, Oxford, NB.73.27



New College Library, Oxford, NB.73.37

The 1810 Albion Press edition we hold is also notable for crediting authorship erroneously—or might it have been a marketing ploy?—to ‘William Beckford’, a character both the antithesis and nemesis of our Beckford.

William Beckford (1760–1844) was Peter’s fabulously rich, famous—notorious, indeed—younger cousin, an art collector and the author of the novel *Vathek* (1786, 1816), an extraordinary Arabian Gothic fantasy. Where Peter was homegrown English squirearchy personified, William was all Oriental exoticism and queer transgression, and William precipitated a scandal resulting in his own ostracism from polite society and a temporary exile from

England. On 22 March 1773, Peter Beckford married renowned beauty Louisa Pitt (1754?–1791), daughter of the diplomat George Pitt; seemingly uninterested in the life of a country squire’s wife, she would embark on a passionate affair with Peter’s cousin William.

¹⁹ Peter Beckford, *Thoughts on Hunting, in a Series of Familiar Letter to a Friend* (London: Sherwood, Neely, and Jones, [1820]), New College Library, Oxford, NB.73.27.

Over Christmas 1781 William Beckford staged an opulent, spectacular three-day party at his Fonthill Splendens mansion in Wiltshire, where he embroiled both Louisa and the Hon. William ‘Kitty’ Courtenay (1768–1835)—thirteen-year-old son of the eighth earl of Devon—to take part.²⁰ William Beckford would later credit the events of the party as the inspiration for *Vathek*, and indeed it is hard not to see in the characters—the carnal potentate Vathek, the incestuous sorceress Carathis, and the young, effeminate, beautiful Gulchenrouz—representations of William, Louisa, and ‘Kitty’ themselves. Under some pressure from his family, on 6 May 1783 William Beckford married Lady Margaret Gordon, but in September 1784, when both of the Williams were at the Courtenay family seat of Powderham Castle in Devon, a liaison between William Beckford and ‘Kitty’ was seemingly uncovered. William Beckford was forced into exile in Switzerland due to what was known as the ‘Powderham scandal’, accompanied by both his wife Lady Margaret (who remained devotedly loyal) and their baby daughter; tragically, Margaret died there on 26 May 1786, shortly after the birth of their second daughter. Peter Beckford—the other injured party, so to speak—travelled to Italy with *his* wife Louisa; she died in Florence on 30 April 1791, and the monument at her grave in the British cemetery at Livorno, ‘erected as a last token of conjugal affection by Peter Beckford’, is remarkable for the tenderness and forbearance it conveys on the part of our wronged hunter.²¹

Another possible confusion over an author’s name might explain the presence in our collections of an extraordinarily rare 1804 printing of a poem, first published anonymously. ‘Billesdon Coplow’ is an eyewitness account in verse of a run on 24 February 1800 of the Quorn Hounds (hounds originally bred by Peter Beckford, coincidentally) from Billesdon Coplow, which is a landmark wooded knoll, to Enderby Gorse in Leicestershire. Possibly the oldest hunt in Britain, at that time its master of foxhounds was Hugo Meynell (1735–1808) in a position he held for almost fifty years, and the poem ends with a tribute to him:

Talk of Horses, and Hounds, and the System of Kennel—
Give me Leicestershire Nags—and the Hounds of Old Meynell!

‘By R. Lowth’ is added in ink in an early nineteenth-century hand to the title-page of our copy, which may be one of only three copies known to be extant in libraries.²² The Revd Dr Robert Lowth (1710–1787), biblical scholar, grammarian, sometime Oxford professor of poetry, and bishop of both Oxford and London, is one of New College’s most famous eighteenth-century sons. His importance to the college was amplified with the acquisition in 2020 of both a major collection of early printed books by and relating to Lowth donated by Randal Keynes (1948–2023), and also an important collection of Lowth’s autograph letters. Quite likely this rare printing originally found its way into our collections on the mistaken assumption the poem was by *this* Robert Lowth, notwithstanding the fact the poem relates to a Quorn Hounds run of 1800, i.e. thirteen years after his death. However, as another recent New College Note has likewise shown,

²⁰ For interesting accounts of the party, see Iain McCalman, ‘The Virtual Infernal: Philippe de Loutherbourg, William Beckford and the Spectacle of the Sublime’, *Romanticism on the Net* 46 (2007) <<https://doi.org/10.7202/016129ar>> (Accessed: 28 July 2023), which postulates that ‘Beckford wanted an Oriental spectacle that would completely ravish the senses of his guests, not least so that he could enjoy a sexual tryst with a thirteen year old boy, William Courtenay, and Louisa Beckford, his own cousin’s wife’, and also Donna Landry, ‘William Beckford’s *Vathek* and the Uses of Oriental Re-enactment’, in *The Arabian Nights in Historical Context: Between East and West*, ed. Saree Makdisi and Felicity Nussbaum (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 167–94, at pp. 177–85.

²¹ On Louisa’s illness and death, see Higginson, *Peter Beckford*, pp. 266–7, and for an image of the inscribed monument, from the ‘Leghorn Merchant Networks’ website, see <<https://leghornmerchants.files.wordpress.com/2010/10/louisa-rivers-beckford-02ax.jpg>> (Accessed: 28 July 2023).

²² Robert Lowth, *Billesdon Coplow, February 24, 1800*. Editio altera, emendatio et correctio; cum notis non variorum (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1804), p. 14 and title-page, New College Library, Oxford, RS4862. The other two copies are held at the British Library, 11602.f.16.(1), and the University of Virginia Library, SK287.G73 Q83 1804.

mixing up our Lowth with his son (1762–1822)—also a Revd Dr Robert Lowth and a clergyman—is an understandable oversight.²³ Robert (*b.* 1710) stipulates in his will that some books from his library were intended for Robert (*b.* 1762), one of only two of his seven children to survive him, and the longest-lived: ‘I give to my Son Robert such Books as will be most useful to him’.²⁴

Like his father, Robert (*b.* 1762) went to Winchester College, but then Christ Church rather than New College; (he had an elder brother, Thomas Henry Lowth (1753–1778), who had likewise preceded him to Winchester and then Christ Church, though Thomas went on to hold a fellowship at New College.)²⁵ He hunted with the Hampshire Hunt (the HH), and subsequent printed editions of his poem would acknowledge his authorship. With New College Library’s renewed focus on all things relating to Lowth (*b.* 1710) and his circle, earlier this year we acquired two more printings of *Billesdon Coplow*: a very nice copy of the first edition, as well as a fine 1845 printing, in the publisher’s decorative paper wrappers, with a bookplate recording the former ownership of HRH Prince Henry, Duke of Gloucester (1900–1974), himself a keen huntsman, shot, and angler, who assembled a notable sporting library of over 1,500 volumes.



New College Library, Oxford, RS5333

²³ Christopher Skelton-Foord, ‘The Librarian writes . . .’, *New College Record* 2020 [Oxford: New College, 2021], 29–32, at pp. 31–2; Ingrid Ticken-Boon van Ostade, ‘Identifying the ‘Revd . Robt . Lowth’ in J. Sturges’s Letter to Mr. Cadell’, *New College Notes* 18 (2022), no. 7.

²⁴ Will of The Right Reverend Robert Lowth or Lord Bishop of London, Doctor in Divinity (17 December 1787), The National Archives, PROB 11/1160/180, ff. 198r–201r, at f. 198v, cited in Ingrid Tien-Boon van Ostade’s excellent monograph *The Bishop’s Grammar: Robert Lowth and the Rise of Prescriptivism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 47.

²⁵ The library holds a short verse work by Thomas Henry Lowth, *Rei nauticae incrementa* [Oxford, 1773], signed and dated at the end: ‘Tho. Hen. Lowth, Coll. Nov. Scholaris. 1773’, p. 10, New College Library, Oxford, Keynes 97.

This 1845 edition includes a brief memoir of the author, Robert Lowth (*b.* 1762), touching upon his sporting interests, and is evidently also very rare. Our copy appears to be the only one recorded in a library in the British Isles; two 1845 copies, apparently with a variant imprint, are also recorded in academic libraries in the United States.²⁶ So, ‘Billesdon Coplow’ is a poem by someone who is not quite a New College hunter—but was perhaps once thought to be.

From our viewpoint today, it is easy—though lazy—to dismiss Warwickshire landowner, fox-hunter, and politician **Richard Greville Verney**, 19th baron Willoughby de Broke (1869–1923), as a man of bygone days disinterested in and unmoved by moral objections to the cruelty inherent in hunting; the excellent account in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* notes: ‘To those who did not know him Willoughby de Broke appeared flippant, the archetypal fox-hunting, reactionary peer. Those close to him, however, recognised a serious and imaginative man’.²⁷ Following Eton College, Verney, a proud Tory, proceeded to New College in 1888, where the bursar Alfred Robinson, a Liberal, sought gently to persuade him to take his studies seriously. But Verney knew how much doing so would mean time away from his principal passion, fox-hunting. He wrote about it in *The Passing Years* (1924), an autobiography shot through with an elegiac tone of regret about the changes to society and the countryside he was witnessing at the end of his life:

How was I to hunt if I were to read seven hours a day? Alfred Robinson did not know anything about hunting, and did not in the least realize the hold that it has over its devotees.²⁸

Of course, hunt he did, as well as concentrate on living the good life at Oxford—and he ended up with a Third in law. His other writings include *Hunting the Fox* (1920), which the library holds in its first illustrated edition of 1925, and the splendidly attractive *The Sport of Our Ancestors* (1921), a numbered limited edition carrying Verney’s signature, which we also hold. He devotes a chapter in the latter to Thomas Beckford, astutely commenting on his two New College predecessors that Beckford’s language ‘if not quite blank verse, contains at least as much poetry as the lines of Somervile whom he quotes so freely’.²⁹ He also contributed prefatory introductions to his father’s *Advice on Fox-Hunting* (1906)—Henry Verney the 18th baron, was, like his son and his own father, master of foxhounds of the Warwickshire Hunt—and to the 1922 colour-illustrated edition of an important earlier hunting treatise, Colonel John Cook’s *Observations on Fox-Hunting* (1826).

Verney’s assessment in 1920 suggests he had little truck with those who opposed hunting (and he would willingly misrepresent their views), and that he saw nothing but what is good and honest and true in English hunting. He writes, in crusading spirit:

²⁶ *Billesdon Coplow, Hunt. Monday, February 24th. 1800* ([Melton Mowbray]: Clementson, printer, Melton, [1800?]), and *Billesdon Coplow, A Poem, Descriptive of a Remarkable Day’s Sport in Leicestershire, On Monday, February 24th, 1800: By the Rev. Robert Lowth* (London: D. Bogue; Stamford: H. Johnson, 1845), held at New College Library, Oxford, NB.88.11 and RS5333, respectively. The United States copies, both listed in catalogues as having a London: Houlston & Stoneman imprint, are those held by Princeton University Library, SK31 .xL69 1845, and the Beinecke Library at Yale University, In L956 800i. The imprint of our copy also does not match that of the 1845 printing (London: Ackermann and Co.) listed in the foremost bibliography of hunting literature, C. F. G. R. Schwerdt, *Hunting, Hawking, Shooting: Illustrated in a Catalogue of Books, Manuscripts, Prints and Drawings*, 4 vols (London: Privately printed for the author by Waterlow & Sons, 1928–37), which does however note ten other issues, I, 321–3.

²⁷ Mark Pottle, ‘Verney, Richard Greville, nineteenth Baron Willoughby de Broke (1869–1923)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (3 January 2008) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/refodnb/47172>> (Accessed: 28 July 2023).

²⁸ Richard Greville Verney, *The Passing Years* (London: Constable, 1924), p. 151, New College Library, Oxford, NC/WIL.

²⁹ *The Sport of Our Ancestors: Being a Collection of Prose and Verse Setting Forth the Sport of Fox-Hunting as They Knew It*, ed. Lord Willoughby de Broke (London: Constable, 1921), p. 111, New College Library, Oxford, NC/WIL. The library’s is no. 119 of 150 copies.

Hunting . . . depends for its existence on the support of public opinion . . . A bad cause well organized may survive long enough to astonish even its own devotees. But a good cause is never lost. Fox-hunting is a good cause, if ever there was one . . . If there be any one who is temperamentally opposed to sport, and would injure it if he could, he is hardly worth considering. His whole outlook would probably be anti-social and un-English in whatever rank of life he is to be found. He can perhaps best be described as the spiritual descendant of that often-quoted band of reformers who wished to put a stop to bear-baiting not because it gave pain to the bear, but because it gave pleasure to the spectators . . . Hunting is the one field sport left in these islands . . . that in the face of modern luxury still calls for courage, endurance, decision, and nerve. Let us hand it down to those who come after us in its best and purest form.³⁰

Twelve years after his death, a *Manchester Guardian* newspaper piece on ‘Fox-Hunting: The Cruel Recreation of a Minority’ quotes Verney’s 1920 *Hunting the Fox* to set out what would, over time, become a widely held view: ‘Parliament [should] pass a bill for the prevention of cruelty to wild animals. “Sportsmen” would then be unable to torture a defenceless creature’.³¹

‘**Cyril Hare**’, or rather Alfred Alexander Gordon Clark (1900–1958), is our next—and aptly named—New College hunter. Born into a distinguished legal family, he was called to the bar of the Inner Temple in 1924, made a Surrey County Court Judge in 1950, and was a Deputy Chairman of Quarter Sessions. Alongside his high-powered legal and civil service career he wrote fiction under a penname constructed from the addresses of his Battersea home, Cyril Mansions, and his Temple chambers, Hare Court. On 5 October 1957, less than a year before his death at the age of fifty-seven, he set out a brief note of his life and career that includes the following:

Brought up largely in the country, where he was duly instructed in huntin’, shootin’ and fishin’, without becoming at all proficient in any of them.

Educated at Rugby, where he won a prize for English Verse with a perfectly dreadful poem of an old garden, and New College, Oxford, under the celebrated Warden Spooner, who informed him that he saw ‘through a dark glassy’.³²

The library holds copies, in first or early hardback editions complete with colour dustjackets, of all nine of his whodunit novels, as well as his children’s book, and the first collected edition of most of his short stories. Before he went up to New College, where he secured a First in history, issues of his school magazine *The Meteor*, edited by members of Rugby School, would record much about Cyril Hare and the nascent predilections and talents that would shape him as a man. Coincidentally carrying an obituary for Rugby alumnus Captain Edward Pennell Elmhirst (1845–1916)—or ‘Brooksby’, hunting correspondent in the 1870s and early ’80s of *The Field*, and author of books including *Fox-Hound, Forest, and Prairie* (1892)—the 19 December 1916 issue of *The Meteor* also records details of a school debate with the motion ‘That the killing of any animal for purposes of sport is to be deprecated’. Cyril Hare’s sympathies are unequivocal:

Mr. A. A. GORDON CLARK (W.N.W.) made a vigorous defence of sport. Hunting was encouraged by the Government and undoubtedly produced fine qualities. Proper compensation was given for all damage to farmers. Shooting produced the qualities of good temper and quickness. Sport had made the English character what it is and was

³⁰ Richard Greville Verney, *Hunting the Fox* (London: Constable, 1925), pp. 5, 6, 8, New College Library, Oxford, NC/WIL.

³¹ ‘Fox-Hunting: The Cruel Recreation of a Minority’, *The Manchester Guardian* (2 December 1935), 7.

³² Reproduced from the back dustjacket of *Best Detective Stories of Cyril Hare*, chosen and with an introduction by Michael Gilbert (London: Faber, 1959), New College Library, Oxford, NC/HAR.

the embodiment of the tradition of fair play. The Sportsman's Battalion was a witness of the qualities it produces.³³

The Meteor records several times how he shone in school debates. Conservative by nature it seems—one debate on the motion 'Tradition is the bane of Rugby School' sees him declare that 'tradition, and tradition alone, made a school great'—his legal career is also prefigured at Rugby School by his acting successfully there as counsel for the defence at a mock trial of 4 December 1915, where the defendant is acquitted by 86 votes to 29. His skill as a clarinettist is also referenced more than once in the school magazine's pages.³⁴

Hare's sixth detective novel *When the Wind Blows* (1949), indeed, partly turns on knowledge of the scoring of Mozart's Symphony no. 38 in D (K. 504), the 'Prague', and the fact that while that symphonic work's woodwind section features double flutes, oboes, and bassoons—clarinets are absent.³⁵ He also brought his legal knowledge to bear in probably his most celebrated detective novel *Tragedy at Law* (1942). A court circuit fiction, it drew upon Hare's first-hand experience of serving as a judge's marshal, introduced the reader to the barrister Frank Pettigrew (who would feature in four more of his novels), and drew high praise from P. D. James—doyenne of crime novels, hers featuring the fictional detective Adam Dalgliesh—who wrote that *Tragedy at Law* 'is generally acknowledged to be the best detective story set in that fascinating world'.³⁶

His final novel *He Should Have Died Hereafter* (1958), however, features a stag hunt on Exmoor and a rural hunting community, and recollections Pettigrew must explore which include his boyhood experiences of the thrill of the chase:

With the scent of the heather in his nostrils, the sound of the horn fresh in his ears, gazing across the valley at two distant hummocks which suddenly revealed themselves as the very oldest of old acquaintances, Pettigrew found his memory opening up like some monstrous flower, fold within fold . . . Had he enjoyed it? That was the very question they used to ask him at the end of the day, he remembered . . . Hunting was a thing apart—a compound of excitement and terror, discomfort and ecstasy, boredom and bliss.³⁷

But unlike the A. A. Gordon Clark in the *Meteor* of 1916, so untroubled and so sure of the virtues of hunting, the older Pettigrew harbours quite different feelings—those more in keeping with our modern-day sentiments:

Barring a miracle, the stag was doomed, though there might yet be an hour's tow-row down the water before he was booked . . . It was all of fifty years since he had last seen a hunted deer and now the sight of it had in some way dispelled the enchantment of reminiscence in which he had been living up to that moment. Willy-nilly, he found himself looking at the hapless beast through the eyes of the elderly, urban humanitarian who had somehow evolved from that small boy . . . and he felt a sudden stab of pity for the victim . . . A stag was too large to be anything but an individual, his death too difficult to be other than a prolonged personal affair.³⁸

³³ *The Meteor* 603 (19 December 1916), 164; the obituary for Edward Pennell Elmhirst is on pp. 176–7.

³⁴ *The Meteor* 584 (6 April 1915), 92; 593 (18 February 1916), 15; for example, 622 (2 April 1918), 65–6, which reviews his performing the Minuet from Charles Harford Lloyd's 1914 *Suite in the Old Style for Clarinet and Pianoforte*: 'Gordon-Clark gave us a good clarinet solo'.

³⁵ As well as a copy of the first British edition, the library holds a copy of the first American one, differently titled, with a front dustjacket designed by Pauline Jackson that depicts a clarinettist: Cyril Hare, *When the Wind Blows* (London: Faber, 1949) and *The Wind Blows Death* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1950), both at New College Library, Oxford, NC/HAR.

³⁶ P. D. James, 'The Judge's Progress', *Slightly Foxed* 12 (2006), 14–18, at p. 18.

³⁷ Cyril Hare, *He Should Have Died Hereafter* (London: Faber, 1958), pp. 20–21, New College Library, Oxford, NC/HAR.

³⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 23–4.

If Hare's final whodunnit is his huntin' novel, his second *Death Is No Sportsman* (1938)—another set in the countryside, this time centring on a fishing syndicate—is his fishin' one. It is a tale of angling lore whose plot revolves around the sport of fly-fishing, and the novel's Inspector Mallett must get to grips with the nuances of fly-fishing in order to uncover the murderer. Hare is a fine fiction writer—not perhaps one of New College's most celebrated, but he warrants greater appreciation, and he is one of whom the college can be proud. Hare's own assessment of his craft, that of the detective novel writer, entailed an attractive modesty:

But is it literature at all? Not, let it be conceded at once, literature with a capital L . . . The reason why the detective story can never reach the heights of creative writing lies in its very nature . . . It is only at the very end of the book, when all is known, that you can appreciate the true nature of the characters you have been reading about, and then it is much too late. You will see at once that this is the very antithesis of the object of the “straight” novelist, whose mission is not to conceal, but to reveal.³⁹

A two-pronged attack against fox hunting—typified by and implicit in ‘The Cruel Recreation of a Minority’ subtitle of the 1935 *Guardian* article that quotes Verney—is one that is addressed head-on by **Raymond Carr** in his magisterial sociocultural history, *English Fox-Hunting* (1976), where Carr writes ‘of a general campaign against cruel sports and cruelty to animals as such. But fox hunting was also, and still is, condemned as the pastime of the “upper classes”’.⁴⁰ His book, indeed, drew praise both from the fox-hunting community and those opposed to hunting.

Our final New College hunter is the lauded Hispanic historian, Oxford Professor of the History of Latin America, and Warden of St Antony's College, Oxford, Sir Albert Raymond Maillard Carr (1919–2015), a scholar at Christ Church and later a fellow of All Souls, who then held a tutorial fellowship in history at New College from 1953 until 1964, where he was admissions tutor as well. At New College, his easy charm meant he was popular on governing body (and with the students), narrowly missing out on becoming warden there ‘in a characteristically envenomed election’, as his obituary in the *Telegraph* puts it.⁴¹ Sufficiently compelling and well-regarded to become, in his nineties, the subject himself of an excellent full-length biography, Carr, the biography records, lost out by two votes on the first ballot at New College, then withdrew from the final round of voting, before the wardenship went instead to Sir William Hayter (Carr would have a brief relationship with Hayter's daughter, Teresa).⁴²

A man of many parts, and some contradictions, his sometime student—and his friend, the New College history fellow Eric Christiansen—described him in a playful 90th birthday tribute in the *Spectator* as ‘the working-class hero, the middle-class defector, the man-about-town, the scourge of the bourgeoisie, the lapsed Marxist intellectual and the fox-hunting playboy’.⁴³

It was Carr's wife Sara Strickland, granddaughter (though not by blood) of Hugo Charteris, 11th earl of Wemyss, and a skilled rider and huntswoman, who first introduced Carr in his middle years to hunting. A passion for rural England had been with Raymond since his earliest days of boyhood (socially and financially, his was a modest background), and fox hunting became a notable and unlikely passion, as he transformed himself into the ‘hunting don’. He had been first introduced to Sara's mother, Lady Mary Charteris, while her ladyship was reclining on a sofa, in

³⁹ Cyril Hare, ‘The Classic Form’, in *Crime in Good Company: Essay on Criminals and Crime-Writing*, ed. Michael Gilbert (London: Constable, 1959), pp. 55–84, at pp. 63, 65.

⁴⁰ Raymond Carr, *English Fox Hunting: A History* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976), p. 195, New College Library, Oxford, NC/CAR.

⁴¹ [Obituary for] ‘Sir Raymond Carr: Convivial Warden of St Antony's, Oxford, who pioneered a new approach to Spanish history and became a devotee of hunting’, *The Daily Telegraph* (22 April 2015), 25.

⁴² María Jesús González Hernández, *Raymond Carr: The Curiosity of the Fox*, trans. Nigel Griffin (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2013), pp. 214, 184.

⁴³ Eric Christiansen, ‘Raymond Carr at 90’, *The Spectator* (16 May 2009), 39.

her full formal hunting attire—a creature from a world altogether different to that of Carr’s childhood.

Raymond and Sara married in 1950, and by the time he applied and was interviewed, albeit unsuccessfully, for the vice-chancellorship of Exeter University in 1972, reputedly he was doing so principally for the hunting on Exmoor.⁴⁴ By this time he had a home, Woolhanger Manor on the edge of Exmoor, which in the early part of the twentieth century had belonged to Captain Sam Slater, Master of the Exmoor Foxhounds, and Carr would keep a hunting diary from 1972 until 1978.

Carr did, though, become so much more than an aficionado of the hunt, rather, he evolved into an authority on the history of fox-hunting itself. *English Fox-Hunting* was well-reviewed, and he followed it up in 1982 with *Fox-Hunting*, an anthology, in the Small Oxford Books series, compiled with Sara of quotations and excerpts from literary and historical sources.⁴⁵ That same decade he would even supervise an Oxford DPhil thesis relating to the subject.⁴⁶ After his death, his ashes were scattered on Exmoor at Hoar Oak—a place he and Sara had particularly cherished when they would go out together riding to hunt.

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⁴⁴ González, *Raymond Carr*, p. 313. For biographical details of Carr I have drawn largely from González’s book and from the same author’s ODNB account, ‘Carr, Sir (Albert) Raymond Maillard (1919–2015)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (10 January 2019) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/odnb/9780198614128.013.110364>> (Accessed: 28 July 2023).

⁴⁵ Sara and Raymond Carr, *Fox-Hunting* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), New College Library, Oxford, NC/CAR.

⁴⁶ J. T. Williams, ‘Bearers of Moral and Spiritual Values: The Social Roles of Clergymen and Women in British Society, c. 1790–c. 1880, as Mirrored in Attitudes to Them as Foxhunters’ (unpublished DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 1987 [i.e. 1988]).