

Some *Schismatis Anglicani* Printings of Nicholas Sander (c. 1530–1581)

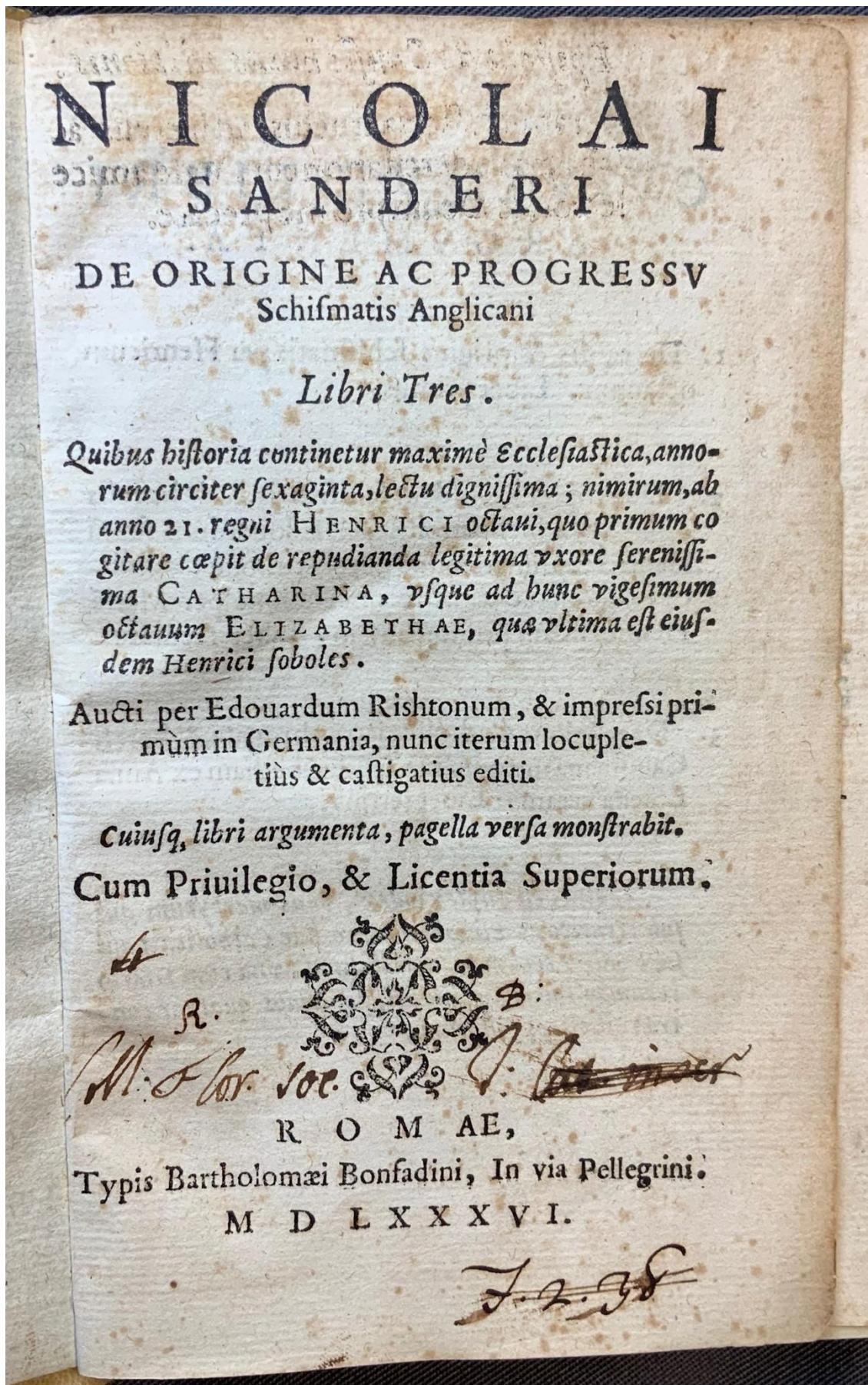
If ever there were a portentously influential history book whose publishing history provides almost as absorbing a narrative as its content itself, then *De origine ac progressu schismatis Anglicani* (generally known in English as *Rise and Growth of the Anglican Schism*) is such a one. This year the library has acquired three copies of this veritably trendsetting work, the core of which was written probably around 1572–3, two in 16th-century imprints, one a 17th-century imprint—and the content alone is indeed electric. It tells of a once noble and righteous prince, Henry VIII, whose fatal flaw, his *libido*, is not only his undoing, but the undoing of a nation, as he overreaches to such a heedless extent as to fashion a church from within himself, ending up a monster. That church he creates, with himself as supreme head, enables him to annul three of his six grotesquely sequential and horrifyingly self-serving marriages, executing two of his wives along the way, and, seemingly, also allows him to threaten the stability and unity of Christendom itself. It is a tale of lust, adultery, incest, cruelty, pride, apostasy, almost total depravity, in fact. But above all it identifies Henrician *libido*, and nothing of genuine theological matter, as the origin of an English schism from the Catholic Church, one that would progress to its hideous apogee under Elizabeth I. So we might paraphrase Wykehamist and New College fellow Nicholas Sander and his unfinished work, penned likely in Rome (not Madrid, as long supposed), surviving in the sole known manuscript copy, which is held by the Venerable English College, Rome.¹

Nicholas Sander (often recorded Sanders) was born in Charlwood, Surrey around 1530, one of a family of twelve children. He was schooled as a scholar at Winchester College from 1540, and thereafter educated in law at what one commentator calls ‘the notoriously conservative New College, Oxford’,² which he entered in 1546, becoming a fellow two years later, and graduating BCL in 1551. He served in Oxford as a lecturer in canon law; in 1557 it fell to him to deliver a welcoming oration for the new university chancellor, Cardinal Reginald Pole, Mary I’s archbishop of Canterbury, much of whose library was donated to New College, where it remains today. (A parchment deed in our archives of 9 January 1558 bears witness to his acting in a legal capacity, recording as it does Sander’s appointment, by New College warden Thomas White, as attorney in relation to the college’s acquiring ownership of Woodperry Rectory, Oxfordshire).³ As a loyal Catholic, following Elizabeth I’s accession in November 1558 as monarch, Sander chose to resign his New College fellowship rather than take the oath of royal supremacy. He fled to the continent, initially settling at the English Hospice (now Venerable English College) in Rome, where his fellow exile the bishop of St Asaph, Thomas Goldwell (the last of the English Marian bishops), ordained him as a priest in 1561. He resettled in Louvain (Leuven), magnet location in the Low Countries for exiled Elizabethan English Catholic intellectuals, matriculating at the university there on 12 November 1564, and becoming regius professor of theology. Over the course of 1566–7 he produced three books in English, published in Louvain, which were significant contributions to the Catholic cause within the Jewel-Harding debate over the legitimacy or otherwise of a newly founded Church of England. But the best known of his works to appear during his lifetime was *De visibili monarchia ecclesiae* (1571), also published in Louvain. Very clearly and unequivocally, Sander saw the establishment of Henry’s new church for the act of personal and political expediency it was, he deplored the persecution of Catholics under Elizabeth I, and argued polemically and compellingly for a return of the English church to papal authority.

¹ Nicolai Sanderi lib. 3 de Origine ac Progressu Schismatis Anglicani Opus Manuscriptum’, Venerabile Collegio Inglese, Rome, MS Liber 1388. For a cogently argued, fresh understanding of the timeframe when Sander wrote the work, and where, see Mark Rankin, ‘The Early Manuscript and Scribal Transmission of Nicholas Sander’s Catholic History of the Reformation’, in *The Elizabethan Catholic Underground: Clandestine Printing and Scribal Subversion in the English Counter-Reformation*, ed. Earle Havens and Mark Rankin (Leiden: Brill, 2025), pp. 222–63.

² Spencer J. Weinreich, ‘Introduction’, to *Pedro de Ribadeneyra’s Ecclesiastical History of the Schism of the Kingdom of England: A Spanish Jesuit’s History of the English Reformation*, ed. Spencer J. Weinreich (Leiden: Brill, 2017), pp. 1–110, at p. 20.

³ New College Archives, Oxford, NCA 4886/7.



What has proved to be Nicholas Sander's most influential work, however, first appeared in print posthumously in 1585. *De origine ac progressu schismatis Anglicani* was published at Jean Foigny's press in Rheims, northern France (with a false Cologne imprint) four-and-a-half years after Sander's death, which had taken place, sometime in the spring of 1581, during the second Desmond Rebellion (1579–83) in Ireland, where he had been sent in 1579 as papal nuncio to Gregory XIII to promote an invasion of England to restore Catholicism to his native land. The earliest published account of the English schism from the Catholic Church written from a recusant Catholic viewpoint, it has since generally held up well as a historical and ecclesiastical chronicle, though from its inception it attracted fierce criticism and derision from Protestants.

Sander's rhetorical address to Henry VIII, quoted here in its 1877 English edition by David Lewis (the book was late to be translated into the English vernacular), powerfully addresses what Sander sees as the purely self-regarding, non-theological nature of the king's actions in separating himself, and his people, from their mother church. It reaches its inevitable damning conclusion:

We all know, O king, that thriving and glorious Church which you have abandoned and left: the Church founded by the great apostles Peter and Paul, which has prospered and endured under two hundred and thirty successors of St. Peter, which the bishops, the kings, and people of all Catholic nations have confessed and honoured, which shuns and condemns the impious teachings of all heresies and all heretics, which abounds in fathers and doctors that cannot be numbered, and which is made glorious by the works of God truly marvellous and unceasing. But tell us, we adjure you by that supreme authority which you have assumed, whither did you go when you went out of the Roman Church? For if you would remain a Christian, you cannot do so without being in some Church. . . . But you, O king, when you deserted the Roman Church to what other Church did you go? Did you go to the Greek Church? Certainly not, for you have not denied the Procession of the Holy Ghost from the Son. Did you go to the Æthiopic Church? No, for you have not submitted to the rite of circumcision. Did you go to the Armenians? No, for you have not denied original sin, nor, as they do, the salvation of all who died before the Passion of Christ. But at least, then, you went to Wicliffe, Luther, Zuinglius, or Calvin? Well, if you found any in your kingdom holding the errors of these men, you persecuted them with fire and sword. Whither, then, did you go when you went out of the Roman Church? Whither, indeed? It was to yourself.⁴

Henry's obsession with lust and progeny does indeed all come back to—himself. But the book's most salacious and memorable detail, that Anne Boleyn was Henry VIII's own illegitimate daughter, is where Sander's account is at its most implausible. There had been contemporary rumours of an affair between a young Henry and Anne's mother, Elizabeth Boleyn (*née* Howard)—and certainly Anne's own sister Mary was one of Henry's mistresses. But Sander's repetition of sensationalist gossip about Anne's parentage, presenting it as fact—and, of course, a fact which makes the schism seem all the more 'illegitimate', all the more abominable, as a crime of incest—is one reason why it has been easy for some to dismiss his account entirely. Notably, and now almost proverbially, the staunch Anglican cleric and historian, Peter Heylyn, in his *Ecclesia restaurata* of 1660, referred to 'Dr. Nicholas Sanders, (never more truly Dr. Slanders . . .) in his pestilent and seditious Book, Entituled *De Schismate Anglicano*'.⁵

It was the missionary priest Edward Rishton (1550–85) who brought Sander's unfinished manuscript to the press in Rheims in 1585, having edited and expanded the work. Rishton was

⁴ Nicolas Sander, *Rise and Growth of the Anglican Schism*, trans. David Lewis (London: Burns and Oates, 1877), pp. 105, 106.

⁵ Peter Heylyn, *Affairs of Church and State in England During the Life and first eight years of the Reign of Queen Elizabeth* [which is a part of: *Ecclesia restaurata, or, The History of the Reformation of the Church of England*] (London: Printed for H. Twyford, 1660), p. 122.

encouraged in this undertaking, he records in his preface to Sander's book, by a (fictional) Dr Jodocus Skarnhert, quite probably William Allen (1532–1594), the leading English Catholic exile who founded the English College at Douai, and was a cardinal from 1587 until his death. New College Library has acquired a copy of the second edition of *De origine ac progressu schismatis Anglicani*, published by Bartolomeo Bonfadino in Rome in 1586, the best-known version of Sander's book, and the one extensively revised by Allen and his friend Robert Persons (1546–1610), the Jesuit priest (who might also conceivably have been 'Skarnhert').⁶

We know our copy was formerly held by the General Theological Seminary Library, New York. But more interestingly, 'Coll. Flor. Soc.', inscribed in ink in an early hand to the title page, suggests the book may sometime before that have belonged to the Jesuit college in Florence (and the Persons connection could account in part for why a Jesuit library might want to hold it). This version of Sander's book closes with added martyrological reports of Catholics imprisoned by Elizabeth I in the Tower of London, a 'Diarium rerum gestarum in Turri Londinensi', once assumed to be Rishton's but now believed to be by the Jesuit priest John Hart (d. 1586). Harrowing accounts of Catholic suffering could have been appended by the book's editors, Allen and Persons—to what is already a powerful and persuasive text—purposefully to strengthen feeling among a European readership that Catholic continental powers should feel it their duty to bring about regime change in England. (The Spanish Armada, already in preparation, would set sail in 1588.)

This year we also acquired a copy (likewise formerly of the General Theological Seminary Library) of one of the two French translations that first appeared in 1587, *Les trois livres du docteur Nicolas Sanders, contenant l'origine & progrès du Scisme d'Angleterre*; ours is by an anonymous translator.⁷ These were the earliest translations of *Schismatis Anglicani* into the vernacular, but German, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese versions would follow. Of course, a French translation produced at this time would also have played a propagandist role amidst a Catholic French readership on the continent. Following her long captivity by Elizabeth I that had inflamed Catholic sympathies in England and abroad, a former queen of France and a Catholic with a strong claim to the English throne, Mary Queen of Scots, would be executed in February 1587. And in France itself at this time, Henri III's toleration of the Huguenots was also alarming many French Catholics.⁸ There were good reasons to circulate French-language copies, and reasons why those copies might be most ardently consumed. In some quarters, certainly, Sander's book became a *succès de scandale*.

A later Latin edition we have acquired of 1628, *Vera et sincera historia schismatis Anglicani, De eius Origine ac Progressu*, is notable for a number of reasons. Contained in vellum over boards, it is

⁶ On the identity of Skarnhert, see Victor Houlston, 'Fallen Prince and Pretender of the Faith: Henry VIII as Seen by Sander and Persons', in *Henry VIII and History*, ed. Thomas Betteridge and Thomas S. Freeman (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 119–34, at p. 121; Rankin, 'Early Manuscript', pp. 229–30; and Freddy Cristóbal Domínguez, *Radicals in Exile: English Catholic Books During the Reign of Philip II* (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2020), p. 30.

⁷ Nicholas Sander, *Les trois livres du docteur Nicolas Sanders, contenant l'origine & progrès du Scisme d'Angleterre* ([Louvain?], 1587), New College Library, Oxford, BT1.12.3.

⁸ See Chelsea Reutcke, 'A Coordinated Catholic Press: The Editing and Dispersal of Nicholas Sander's *Schismatis Anglicani*, 1580–c. 1600', in *Early Modern Catholicism and the Printed Book: Agents – Networks – Responses*, ed. Justyna Kiliańczyk-Zięba and Magdalena Komorowska (Leiden: Brill, 2024), pp. 52–74. Reutcke, in effect, refers throughout to the other French translation of 1587 (also without publisher details), *Les trois livres de Nicolas Sander, touchant l'origine et progrès du schisme d'Angleterre . . . Traduits en François, selon la copie Latine de Rome, par I.T.A.C.* (1587). This one, notably, is: 'maintenant imprimé par le commandement de Monseigneur illust. & reuerend. Cardinal de Vaudemont, à la requeste de certains gentilzhommes Anglois refugiez pour la foy Catholique'. She suggests a Paris imprint is likely.

Other useful studies to consider the publishing and textual history of the *Schismatis Anglicani* include: Christopher Highley, "A Pestilent and Seditious Book": Nicholas Sander's *Schismatis Anglicani* and Catholic Histories of the Reformation', *Huntingdon Library Quarterly* 68 (2005), 151–71, Victor Houlston, 'The Missionary Position: Catholics Writing the History of the English Reformation', *English Studies in Africa* 54 (2011), 16–30, and Gerard Kilroy, "Some terrible dream": Pole's Legacy to Harpsfield and Sander', in *Reformation Cardinal: Reginald Pole in Sixteenth-Century Italy & England*, ed. James Willoughby (Oxford: New College Library & Archives, 2023) pp. 115–27, at pp. 121–6.

telling which other works it has been bound with, for both of them concern Mary Queen of Scots (as does Sander's book, though far more obliquely). All three are published by Peter Henning in Cologne.

One is an anonymous report on reasons, *Summarium rationum*, for Elizabeth I's condemnation of Mary, which led to Mary's execution; the other is a hagiography of the Scottish queen, written by exiled English Catholic priest and intellectual Robert Turner (d. 1599), and whose title alone exults and exonerates her, *Maria Stuarta, Regina Scotiae, dotaria Franciae, haeres Angliae et Hyberniae, martyr ecclesie, innocens à caede Darleana*.⁹ The copy is of interest too for its provenance, bearing the book label and shelfmark of the Jesuit former Heythrop College Library.

Its additional content, too, is most significant. Sander's book is a work of many iterations and different editorial versions. One of the best known and most influential is *Historia ecclesiastica del scisma del reyno de Inglaterra*, the translation-cum-adaptation by the Spanish Jesuit Pedro de Ribadeneyra (1527–1611), published in Madrid in 1588, with a second part appearing in 1593, and from 1595 thereafter coming out in editions combining both parts.¹⁰ This 1628 Latin edition the library now holds of the *Schismatis Anglicani* reveals on its title page that the book indeed incorporates content from Ribadeneyra, 'Nunc postremū Appendice ex R.P. Petri Ribadeneirae libris, aucta & castigatius edita'. Mary Queen of Scots had been executed by the time Ribadeneyra's 1588 edition appeared; indeed, that first part of his *Historia ecclesiastica* ends with Mary's execution. And that book makes much of that martyrdom to appeal to yet greater Catholic sentiment for Philip II of Spain, and justification for his Spanish Armada against Elizabeth I, something a Spanish vernacular version could also more easily achieve. By the time Ribadeneyra's second part of 1593 appeared, the Spanish invasion attempt had of course failed, and so now he is writing of English Catholics persecuted and martyred under Elizabeth I. It is still partisan, then, but with a different emphasis and purpose, and the content therefrom makes its way into this *Schismatis Anglicani* version of 1628.

These newly acquired Sander printings of the *Schismatis Anglicani*, we should note, add to and enrich those the library already held, namely two copies of the 1610 printing, also published in Cologne by Henning, and incorporating Ribadeneyra. One of those copies, in boards with evidence of chaining, we know the library had likely acquired by the 1620s, because Thomas Man (d. 1648), the first person in college remunerated to run the library, has listed it in the catalogue of theology books he drew up probably at some point that decade.¹¹

The other 1610 copy, this one bound in vellum, came to us much more recently. Documents in our archives record its donation, almost certainly in 1944, by Stephen Cecil Watney, a relative of Sander. Watney (who was not a college alumnus) writes on 3 April 1944 to the librarian, Sir John Myers, referring to his copy of the *Schismatis Anglicani* which he had previously given. Watney now encloses a typescript account of 'The Sanders Family' by his father Sir John Watney (1834–1923), which Stephen has edited, along with a supplement on Nicholas Sander, in Stephen's own hand. The latter refers to the censorious reception Sander's work (inevitably) received in (Protestant) England, citing a

⁹ Nicholas Sander, *Vera et sincera historia schismatis Anglicani, De eius Origine ac Progressu: Tribus libris fideliter conscripta* (Cologne: Peter Henning, 1628), bound with Romoaldus Scotus, *Summarium rationum, quibus Cancellarius Angliae et Prolocutor Puckeringius Elizabethae Angliae Regiae persuaserunt occidendum esse serenissimam Principem Mariam Stuartam Scotiae Reginam & Iacobi Sexti Scotorum Regis matrem* (Cologne: Peter Henning, 1627), and with Robert Turner, *Maria Stuarta, Regina Scotiae, dotaria Franciae, haeres Angliae et Hyberniae, martyr ecclesie, innocens à caede Darleana* (Cologne: Peter Henning, 1628), New College Library, Oxford, BT3.38.18.

¹⁰ On Ribadeneyra, see the Weinreich edition of Pedro de Ribadeneyra's Ecclesiastical History, *passim*, and Domínguez, *Radicals in Exile*, pp. 65–92.

¹¹ Nicholas Sander, *De origine ac progressu Schismatis Anglicani, Libri Tres* (Cologne: Peter Henning, 1610), New College Library, Oxford, BT3.145.11; this copy has been listed in a manuscript catalogue, dating largely from the 1620s most probably, within the library's sequence of its own historic catalogues: New College Library, Oxford, LC/7, [p. 61].

reason why his countrymen dealt so harshly with him is founded on their convictions that his authority was too great to be overturned by any means except those who some of them too readily adopted ‘scurrilous railing’.¹²

And though the letter from Watney in our archives does not explicitly make it apparent, he and Myres would have known each other since schooldays: they were at Winchester College together, which could in part explain why he gave the book to New College. Indeed, they would die within days of each other too, as a 1954 obituary in Winchester’s magazine *The Wykehamist* records.¹³

He gave up the Catholic faith for no other reason in the world than that which came from his lust and wickedness. He rejected the authority of the Pope because he was not allowed to put away Catherine, when he was beaten and overcome as he was by the flesh. He destroyed the monasteries, partly because the monks, and especially the friars, resisted the divorce; partly because he hungered after the ecclesiastical lands, which he seized that he might have more abundant means to spend in feasting on women of unclean lives, and on the foolish buildings he raised.¹⁴

Perhaps we might say, to coin two modern phrases, that Nicholas Sander saw his principal aims in the *Schismatis Anglicani* as: to call out Henry VIII and his supporters for their actions, which had such far-reaching consequences—and to speak truth to power. He has been an influential voice in historiography and Catholic historical and theological writing for over 450 years, and was a doughty and dynamic New College man. These newly acquired early printings of his most famous work now strengthen our rare book holdings, as they most fittingly find their home in our library.

Christopher Skelton-Foord
Librarian
New College, Oxford

¹² This other copy of the *Schismatis Anglicani* 1610 printing is held at New College Library, Oxford, BT3.178.18. The letter from Stephen C. Watney to Sir John Myers (3 April 1944), the 8-page typescript ‘The Sanders Family’ by Sir John Watney taken from the family pedigree compiled by Frank G. Watney, 1881, edited by Stephen C. Watney 1944, and the 3-page supplement on Nicholas Sander to ‘The Sanders Family’, written in ink in Stephen C. Watney’s hand, are together held at New College Archives, Oxford, NCA 2815. The section quoted is from p. 3 of the supplement.

¹³ *The Wykehamist* 1007 (29 March 1954), 78.

¹⁴ Sander, *Rise and Growth*, p. 162.