

Firstborn Son of the Father: Thomas Henry Lowth (1753–1778)



Louis Laguerre, Adoration of the Magi, engraved by Charles Dupuis
New College Library, Oxford, BT3.282.1 (vol. 2) © Courtesy of the Warden and Scholars of New College, Oxford

When I selected this dramatic image from an early 18th-century book in our collections to serve for New College's Christmas card of 2025, I provided what I thought might be overly long blurb to accompany it, and was pleased when it could be printed in its entirety on the reverse of the card:

This fine engraving by Frenchman Charles Dupuis of a splendid work of art by his compatriot Louis Laguerre depicts the Adoration of the Magi. It is one of the famous illustrations within John Baskett's spectacular 1716–17 printing of the King James Version of the Bible, published by Oxford's Clarendon Press, and comes at the opening of the Gospel of St Matthew. A beautiful and celebrated book, it is generally known by its sobriquet the 'Vinegar Bible'. That is on account of its notorious mistranscription of 'The parable of the vineyard' as 'The parable of the vinegar'—but one of numerous printing errors in Baskett's work, which also earned the book the nickname a 'Baskett full of errors'.

New College Library's copy of this two-volume book was once owned by New College scholar and fellow Robert Lowth (1710–1787), the biblical scholar and sometime Oxford professor of poetry, bishop of Oxford, and bishop of London. This copy of the first volume includes a dedication in Latin to Lowth's son, Thomas Henry Lowth, also a fellow here, who died at the age of twenty-four; the Adoration of the Magi appears in volume two.¹

Wordy as it is, though, this text tells only part of the story: one of both magi—and mourning. An undated draft of a letter by Robert Lowth, held in the Bodleian, to an unnamed recipient at New College (as we shall discover, its warden, the Revd Dr John Oglander, not its librarian),² explains the background to the bishop's donation to college of this copy of the costly Vinegar Bible:

¹ *The Holy Bible, containing the Old Testament and the New* (Oxford: John Baskett, Clarendon Press, 1717, 1716), New College Library, Oxford, BT3.282.1.

² Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade, in her indispensable *The Bishop's Grammar: Robert Lowth and the Rise of Prescriptivism in English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), assumes, not unreasonably, that this letter must have been written 'to the Librarian of New College Library' (p. 34).

I have taken the liberty to send . . . a Box directed to You. It contains Basket's Great Bible in 2 Vols. As I am informed, that you have nothing of y^t. kind upon y^e. Communion Table in N.C. Chapel, I thought it might be no improper ornament for y^t. place. . . . I sh^d. be ~~happy~~ glad if y^e. Coll. w^d. do me y^e. favor to accept . . . it as a small Memorial of my late dear Son . . . to explain w^{ch}. design have . . . written his Name in it.³

Today, we might wonder at 'Communion Table'. But such, and the term itself, was the Protestant alternative to 'altar'. An altar's connotations, of mystical holy sacrifice—rather than simply symbolic representation of the Last Supper—and thereby a Catholic Mass, could have jarred with a Church of England bishop and some Anglicans in England at that time. And the notion that this fine Bible might serve as an 'ornament' within the college chapel? It has instead found its permanent home within the collections of our library.

The image of the Adoration of the Magi is one of motion and light: the lively Christ Child, held securely on the lap of his mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary, is the brightest part of the picture. Light, flow, and direction come from the left of the picture, with the Star of Bethlehem shining down and across, the forward motion of the three wisemen—(from the left) successively: upright, stooping, and kneeling—before the Infant Jesus, and eyes, or a pointing hand, also directing towards him. St Joseph maintains a gesture of awe standing behind the Virgin and Child, but is otherwise comparatively in the shadows: though his role as protector and nurturer is of the highest importance, he himself, of course, is foster father (not 'father') within the Holy Family.

Robert Lowth's draft letter indeed transmuted into an actual one, penned almost certainly in April 1779. It would have accompanied his gift to college of the two-volume Bible, as Warden Oglander's gracious reply of 30 April 1779, in his beautiful hand, makes clear; that letter is held in our archives:

I have received the Honour of your Lordship's Letter, & yesterday the Books were brought to the Lodgings safe, & without any Injury. To day, We have placed them upon the Communion Table, to which They are a noble Ornament. For this new & generous Mark of your Lordships ^{^Goodness} I am desired by the Society to make their most humble & grateful thanks acceptable to you, & to assure you that your Lordship's Design in making this Present gives it a Value in our Estimation infinitely superior to its real & intrinsic Worth.⁴

The warden's language is fittingly sensitive to the heart-wrenching loss of the bishop's beloved firstborn son. It is the books as memorial to Thomas Henry Lowth, and not the volumes' innate luxuriousness, that accords them so treasured a value among the college's fellowship, Oglander assures Bishop Lowth.

In an excellent analysis of Robert Lowth's family relationships, a foremost Lowth scholar deduces that this Vinegar Bible had been given along with a donation to college of £100.⁵ In fact, the monetary gift was made some 18 months later, as Oglander's letter to Lowth of 16 November 1780 (also in our archives) makes evident. And this later gift of the bishop's, it would appear, was made to help finance the glass painting by Thomas Jervais (*d.* 1799) of the exquisite stained glass

³ Letters to Lowth, with drafts of some letters from him (1729–1785), Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS. Eng. lett. c. 574, f. 108.

⁴ Letter from Warden John Oglander to Robert Lowth, Bishop of London (30 April 1779), New College Archives, Oxford, NCA 928/1.

⁵ Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 'Robert Lowth: "A Loving, More Loving, Most Loving Father"', in *Living in Posterity: Essays in Honour of Bart Westerweel*, ed. Jan Frans van Dijkhuizen et al. (Hilversum: Verloren, 2004), pp. 275–85, at p. 284, and reiterated in her *Bishop's Grammar*, p. 34.

of our antechapel's west window, after designs depicting the three theological virtues and four cardinal virtues as women, by the great Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792):

I have received the Honour of your Lordships Letter, with a Draught for 100£ inclosed; and I am desired by this Society, to whom I have made known your Lordships liberal Benefaction, to request your Lordship will be pleased to accept in return their most humble & grateful Thanks . . . Permit me to tell your Lordship that 5 of the Figures, Faith Hope & Charity, Truth & Justice are already put up, & that when Fortitude & Temperance are finished as we hope They will be by Christmas, M^r. Jervais is to begin the great Centre Peice [sic], the Subject of which is the Nativity.⁶

Stained glass windows had, from his youth, captured the imagination of Robert Lowth, who would in 1741 be elected professor of poetry at Oxford. While still a scholar at Winchester College, he wrote the iambic pentameter rhyming couplet poem, *The Genealogy of Christ: As it is represented in the East-Window in the College Chappel at Winchester*, published in 1729. The window's glass, depicting the Tree of Jesse, had been installed in the Winchester chapel in 1393, though some of it was later dispersed elsewhere in the college. New College Library has a copy of that printed schoolboy poem, donated in 2020, one item within our extensive Robert Lowth book collection generously presented to the library by our alumnus, the conservationist Randal Keynes (1948–2023). Tree of Jesse stained glass had been part of the original New College antechapel west window too—since replaced, as we have seen, by Reynolds's and Jervais's famous Seven Virtues and Nativity depictions. Both the Tree of Jesse glass installations, at Winchester and New College, were done by expert glass painter, Thomas Glazier of Oxford (d. 1427), whose work the colleges' founder William of Wykeham commissioned.⁷

To return to Robert Lowth's gift to college of the Vinegar Bible, and this time its first volume: therein we find this tender memorial inscription to his son, Thomas Henry Lowth, pasted to the front blank leaf preceding the engraved title-page (its English translation in italics below):

MNHMOΣΥΝΟΝ / Thomæ Henrici Lowth, / Novi Collegii Socii, Iuristæ; / Iuvenis
eximii, / Ingenio, doctrina, moribus, / probatissimis; / Qui obiit VII^{mo}. die Junii /
A. D. MDCCCLXXVIII^{vo}. ÆT. XXV^{to}.⁸

In remembrance of Thomas Henry Lowth, fellow of New College, student of law, an excellent young man, of the greatest intellect, scholarship and character; who died on the 7th day of June, in the year 1778 AD, in his 25th year.

⁶ Letter from Warden John Oglander to Robert Lowth, Bishop of London (16 November 1780), New College Archives, Oxford, NCA 928/2. Oglander misnames one of the four cardinal virtues, accompanying the three theological virtues, substituting 'Truth' for what should instead be 'Prudence', as she indeed appears on the window. This mistaking of one of the cardinal virtues, which originate from both ancient Greek philosophy and biblical teaching drawing on the Book of Wisdom 8:7, seems a little surprising in a learned Oxford Doctor of Divinity.

⁷ Robert Lowth, *The Genealogy of Christ: As it is represented in the East-Window in the College Chappel at Winchester. A Poem. By a young Gentleman of Winchester School* (London: J. Jackson, 1729), New College Library, Oxford, Keynes 81. On p. 8, it includes the lines: 'Thy Strokes, Great Artist, so sublime appear, / They check our Pleasure with an awful Fear, / While, thro' the Mortal Line, the God you trace, / Author Himself, the Heir of Jesse's Race, / In Raptures we admire thy bold Design, / And, as the Subject, own the Hand divine'. On Randal Keynes's donation, see Christopher Skelton-Foord, 'The Librarian writes . . .', *New College Record 2020* [Oxford: New College, 2021], 29–32, at pp. 31–2; on the Tree of Jesse stained glass installations at Winchester and New College, see Veronika Decker, 'In the Vineyard of the Lord: Art, Imagination, and the Stained Glass Commissions of William of Wykeham in Fourteenth-Century English Colleges', *British Art Studies* 6 (June 2017): <<https://britishartstudies.ac.uk/issues/06/william-wykeham>> (Accessed: 9 November 2025).

⁸ *The Holy Bible*, New College Library, Oxford, BT3.282.1.

Thomas had been Robert's firstborn son, much beloved, and in many ways a model of his father: a son in whom the bishop would have invested high hopes. Born on 18 December 1753 in Chilbolton, Hampshire, Thomas was the first of seven children (two boys, five girls) born over an almost 12-year period to Robert's wife, Margaret ('Molly') Lowth (*née* Jackson, 1730–1803), whom Robert had married on Boxing Day 1752. Parish registers record his baptism taking place 18 days after his birth, his relationship to his well-known father to the fore (his mother is unmentioned): "Thomas Henry the Son of the Reverend Mr. Robert Lowth Arch Deacon of Winton was baptized Jan^{ry}. 5th.⁹ Thomas excelled at Winchester College, as had his father, thence proceeding to Oxford, though to Christ Church (matriculating 14 January 1772), and not St John's College and New College as Robert had, before he was admitted to a fellowship at New College, thus following in his father's footsteps. Subsequent to his ordination in 1777 as a Church of England cleric, he was

instituted on 5 January 1778 as Rector of St James the Great, Thorley, in Bishop's Stortford, and also collated to a Wiccamical prebendary stall at Chichester Cathedral on 4 February of that same year. But both appointments were, sadly, short-lived, and on 7 June 1778 he died. When the funeral then takes place on 13 June 1778 in Fulham of the Reverend Mr Thomas Henry Lowth, the burial record essentially defines Thomas, once again, in respect to his famous father.¹⁰ He is recorded as 'Son of The Lord Bishop of London'. And, from that same record, we read how two of his sisters had who predeceased Thomas—the beloved firstborn son—are then reinterred in the family vault with him at All Saints Church graveyard, Fulham that same day.

Burials on Fulham Side 1778.	
Mary Wife of Richard Tovey	7 May
M ^r Ann Dennis from London	8
Jane Brasset	20
Richard Son of Richard & Sarah Yarley	22
George Son of George & Sarah Hall	30
Elizabeth D ^r of John & Mary Griffin	3 June
Edward Willshire	7
Henrietta D ^r of Thomas & Sarah Frances	7
John Willson	8
Alice Clarkson	9
Thomas Son John & Mary Woster	10
The Reverend M ^r Thomas Henry Lowth Son of The Lord Bishop of London	13
Margaret and Charlotte two of his Lordships Daughters who had been buried at St James's Church were brought from thence and deposited in the same Vault with M ^r Lowth	13

Page [detail] recording the burial record for The Reverend Mr Thomas Henry Lowth, 13 June 1778 in a volume labelled 'Register for Baptisms and Burials ... Henry Holland, Church Warden' Composite Register: Baptisms and Burials, All Saints, Fulham, The London Archives, P77/ALL/003

⁹ Hampshire, Church of England Baptisms, Marriages and Burials, 1536–1812, Parish Registers, Chilbolton, 1722–1773, Hampshire Record Office, 55M70/PR2: <<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/62421/records/239912>> (Accessed: 6 October 2025).

¹⁰ London, Church of England Baptisms, Marriages and Burials, 1538–1812, Composite Register: Baptisms and Burials, All Saints, Fulham: Church Gate, Fulham High Street, Hammersmith and Fulham: Jan. 1755–Dec. 1789, Baptisms and Burials on Fulham Side, The London Archives, P77/ALL/003: <www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/1624/records/922640088> (Accessed: 6 October 2025).

The tribute in New College Library's Vinegar Bible is not the only textual memorial to Thomas, nor the only one to relate as much to Robert his father as to himself. A poetic elegy 'In Memory of The late Rev. Thomas Henry Lowth, Son of the late Bishop of London' was penned by another Winchester scholar (1736), Oxford man (University College, matriculated 1741), and Anglican clergyman, namely the Revd Richard Clarke (1723–1802). Clarke had emigrated to Charleston, South Carolina, where he became renowned for radical doctrines and prophecies; the poem was printed in a 1792 collection of his works.¹¹ What begins as a memorial to Thomas—'Short was thy race, but yet 'twas nobly run, / And Faith's bright crown by Christian virtues won'—develops into deep empathy for the father left to grieve the untimely loss of his son:

In thy green age, divine impressions took
An early root, which ne'er thy breast forsook:
Parental love bestow'd its noblest care,
And heav'n's best gift was won by earnest pray'r;
. . . But when death calls, and bids a Son depart,
Child of our love, how bleeds the parent's heart?
Nature will feel; affection will lament,
Tears bring relief, while giving Sorrow vent.
I feel thy loss, that loss has oft been mine,
My heart still echoes to a grief like thine.¹²

Throughout his life Thomas was known as much for being his father's son as for the boy and the man he himself was. The Revd Washbourne Cooke (1744–1804), dean of divinity at New College the year that Robert Lowth donated the Vinegar Bible—so perhaps it was indeed Cooke who carried out the initial placing of the volumes on the chapel's 'Communion Table' on 30 April 1779?—was a good friend of fellow Wykehamist and New College man, the Revd James Woodforde (1740–1803).¹³ In the 1 September 1772 entry in his famous diary, Parson Woodforde (as we recall him nowadays) records details of New College's election week, referencing Thomas:

At Five o'clock we all set forth for Winton Coll: except Pitters, to the Election, which begins this Night We got to Winton Coll: about 6. o'clock, where we were rec^d. by the Warden & Fellows At the Lodgings and after paying proper Compts to them went to the Middle Gate & heard a Declamation spoke by Lowthe the Sen^r. Boy of the School and Son to the Bishop of Oxford, who is also a Superan It was a very handsome Speech to the Electors indeed.¹⁴

A couple of years earlier, in June 1770, Thomas had been a prize-winner at school, and the *Annual Register* duly recorded: 'annual medals given by Lord Bruce to the students of Winchester-college, were adjudged this year to the following gentleman: The gold one, for the best copy of Latin verses, to Thomas Henry Lowth, Esq; the Bishop of Oxford's son'. Evidently, his Latin was deemed strong: later, while at New College, he won the Oxford Chancellor's Latin Prize for Verse

¹¹ On Clarke, see Richard C. Cole, 'Richard Clarke and the Royal Literary Fund', *Notes and Queries* 45 (1998), 82–6, and Lyon G. Tyler, 'The Gnostic Trap: Richard Clarke and His Proclamation of the Millennium and Universal Restoration in South Carolina and England', *Anglican and Episcopal History* 58 (1989), 146–68.

¹² Richard Clarke, *A Series of Letters, Essays, Dissertations, and Discourses, on Various Subjects*, 2 vols. (London: R. Hawes, 1792), 1 349, 350, 351.

¹³ On the friendship between Cooke and Woodforde, see on the website of The Parson Woodforde Society an account of 'Washbourne Cooke (1744–1804)': <www.parsonwoodforde.org.uk/features-yarmouth-visit-1775-cooke.html> (Accessed: 6 October 2025). I am grateful to New College, Oxford's archivist Dr Michael Stansfield for confirming that Cooke was dean of divinity in 1779.

¹⁴ *The Diary of James Woodforde: Volume 5: 1772–1773*, ed. R. L. Winstanley ([S. l.]: Parson Woodforde Society, 1988), p. 67.

in 1773 for his *Rei nauticae incrementa*. This poem is signed and dated at the end, ‘Tho. Hen. Lowth, Coll. Nov. Scholaris. 1773’, and a printed copy of it was given to New College Library as part of Randal Keynes’s donation.¹⁵ Three years later, Thomas would win the Chancellor’s English Essay Prize for his *An Essay on Architecture* (1776), and that is signed and dated: ‘THO. HEN. LOWTH, Civilian, and Fellow of New College. 1776’. Just over a century later, when Winchester College reports staging an architecture-themed library exhibition which features their copy of this book, Winchester’s college magazine again references the 1776 *Essay* in respect to its author’s father: the book is ‘by the Wykehamist and Fellow of New College, Thomas Henry Lowth, son of Robert Lowth, Bishop of London’.¹⁶ Shortly after Thomas’s death, however, his near contemporary from Winchester and New College, the Revd Dr George Isaac Huntingford (1748–1832), quoted from the 1776 *Essay*, footnoting it with a tribute to Thomas that on this occasion has no mention of the famous father. Instead, Dr Huntingford—warden of Winchester from 1789 till his death, bishop of Gloucester and Hereford successively, but trenchant opponent of Catholic emancipation—gives a heartfelt indication of great promise unfulfilled on account of so premature a death:

THOMAS LOWTH, late fellow of New college, Oxford; whose accomplishments and amiable temper endeared him to all who knew him when alive, and whose untimely death will ever be lamented by his friends and acquaintance. The literary world was deprived of a shining ornament by the loss of him, as he was well versed in every branch of polite learning, and particularly well skilled in the HEBREW language.¹⁷

What unique insights can archival holdings from Wykeham’s two educational foundations reveal of the relationship between Thomas and his father Robert? In December 2020, I purchased from Sotheby’s a remarkable collection for the library of 32 original autograph letters, along with transcripts or partial transcripts of others, most of which written by Robert Lowth to the Revd William Longstaff (1733–1806). Robert had been appointed in 1755 to a prebendal stall at Durham Cathedral and to the valuable living of a rectory at Sedgefield (ten miles from Durham). In due course Longstaff (or ‘Longstaffe’) was made curate at Sedgefield (1758–71), later vicar of Kelloe (1771–1806), and was administering ecclesiastical and estate matters for Robert up in County Durham. These letters indicate Robert was both a friend as well as a senior colleague of Longstaff, who hailed from Westmorland and had been educated (BA 1758, MA 1762) at Magdalene College, Cambridge. One letter, of June 1774, is of especial interest because, though addressed in Robert’s hand, the letter itself is written by Thomas, conveying administrative matters on behalf of his father, who had been incapacitated due to illness (‘so long ill . . . so weak’). Evidently Robert was already entrusting to his firstborn, only 20-years-old at the time, capacity to carry out matters both business and personal on his behalf. Then, almost four years later (13 May 1778), Robert writes to Longstaff (in another from this cache of letters we acquired) with the ominous news that:

My Son has been very ill with a Fever between five & six weeks: he has been confined to his bed almost the whole time; & has been only out of his chamber into the next room for three or four days. He is not perfectly free from his disorder yet; but we hope it will end at last in a perfect recovery.¹⁸

¹⁵ ‘Chronicle’, in *The Annual Register, or A View of the History, Politics, and Literature, for the Year 1770* (London: J. Dodsley, 1771), p. 122; Thomas Henry Lowth, *Rei nauticae incrementa* [Oxford, 1773], p. 10, New College Library, Oxford, Keynes 97.

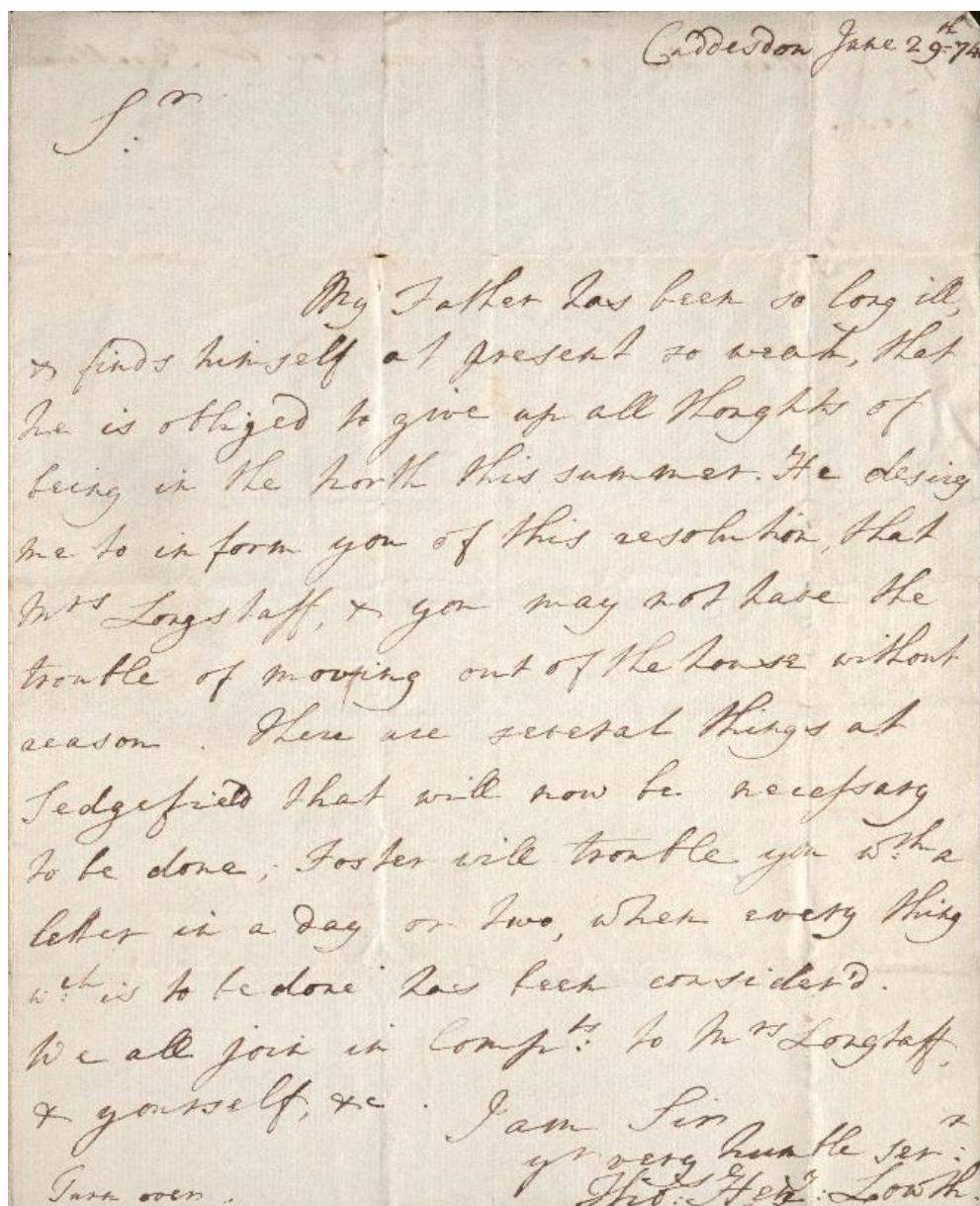
¹⁶ Thomas Henry Lowth, *An Essay on Architecture* [Oxford?, 1776], p. 21. Thomas’s fair copy, autograph manuscript version of this is held by the Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS. Eng. misc. e. 1323; Paul Yeats-Edwards, ‘Warden & Fellows’ Library’, *The Wykehamist* 1266 (21 June 1978), 186–7, at p. 186.

¹⁷ George Isaac Huntingford, *An Apology for the Monostrophics which were published in 1782. With a Second Collection of Monostrophics* (London: Printed for the Author, by J. Nichols, 1784), p. 207.

¹⁸ Letter from Thomas Henry Lowth to the Revd William Longstaff (29 June 1774), New College Archives, Oxford, NCA PA/LOW/1/17; letter from Robert Lowth to Longstaff (13 May 1778), NCA PA/LOW/1/31.

Alas, the earnestly hoped-for perfect recovery of Robert Lowth's son was not to be, and this proved to be Thomas's fatal illness. We might, indeed, deduce that Thomas's health had been causing disquiet since from some point in 1777, if not earlier. On 24 December 1777 (Thomas's final Christmas Eve, as it turned out), Robert was writing to 'My dear Tom' in tones of paternal concern, in a letter now held in the Bodleian:

I saw Dr. Addington yesterday & told him of Your complaints: he says, he is very clear as to y^e. Nature & cause of them; that they are owing to some bad matter in your health, perhaps y^e. remains of some former illness, w^{ch}. must be thrown off . . . But he says, You must have patience.¹⁹



Letter from Thomas Henry Lowth to the Revd William Longstaff (29 June 1774)

New College Archives, Oxford, NCA PA/LOW/1/17

© Courtesy of the Warden and Scholars of New College, Oxford

¹⁹ Letter from Robert Lowth to Thomas Henry Lowth (24 December 1777), Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS. Eng. lett. c. 574, f. 29.

Perhaps, in fact, Thomas's health had been of some concern throughout his life. Robert was corresponding with his wife back home while he was away in Ireland on an extended trip in 1755, during which period he was offered the bishopric of Limerick (which he declined). He wrote to her, 'My dearest Molly', a letter of 28 October 1755, now held in the Bodleian, at which time Thomas was just 22 months old. Thomas, his son, had fallen so gravely ill that Robert had evidently been preparing himself for the worst. Both his recriminations at himself for not having returned home immediately, and his enormous sense of relief at learning that Thomas might now be 'out of danger' are clear from his letter, and might resonate with any parent:

Your Letter of the 23^d. has somewhat reviv'd ^me after having been in the greatest affliction on receiving yesterday y^e. Dean's Letter. I had given up my poor dear little Boy for lost. You give me hopes of his recovery: pray God they may not be disappointed. . . . I have now read it over & over, & I do not wonder that I drew this conclusion from it. I wish I had gone directly to you. I had rather go ten times from Winchester to Durham & back again, than suffer what I have done since yesterday noon. . . . Please God to spare our dear Child.²⁰

Spared, of course, the young Thomas Henry Lowth was. The dean whose letter is mentioned here was the Revd Dr Thomas Cheyney (1694–1760), another Winchester scholar and New College man, and the dean of Winchester Cathedral from 1748 till his death; he was also son of Thomas Cheyney, Sr, Winchester College's headmaster (1700–1724).²¹ Dean Cheyney was, as well, a kinsman of Lawrence Jackson, father of Molly, Robert Lowth's wife. And Molly Lowth (who was also Cheyney's ward), along with her and Robert's son Thomas Henry Lowth, were two named beneficiaries in the dean's complicated set of wills and testamentary papers drawn up over many years. (Several times, seemingly, the dean anticipated his imminent demise.)

I revoke hereby what I have given in any other paper to my kinswoman Mary Lowth (late Jackson) and instead thereof order that 3 thousand pounds be vested in the hands of D^r. Robert Lowth and his Brother Will^m. Lowth, for the sole use and benefit of her Son Thomas-Henry Lowth.²²

£3,000 represented of course a sizeable inheritance, perhaps equivalent to around £300,000 today: Such beneficence is no doubt explained by the fact that Thomas Henry was Dr Cheyney's godson (and kin).

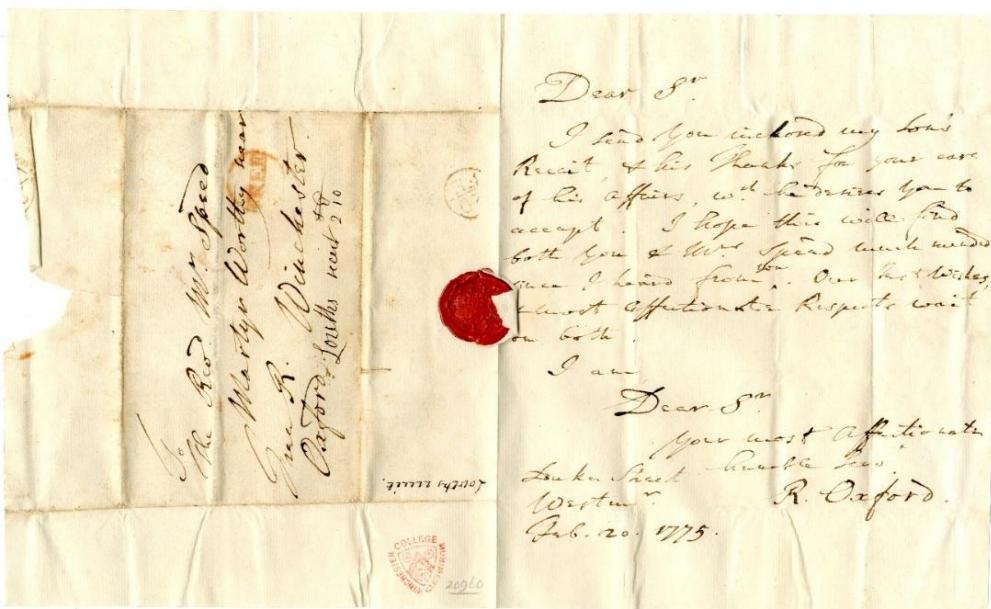
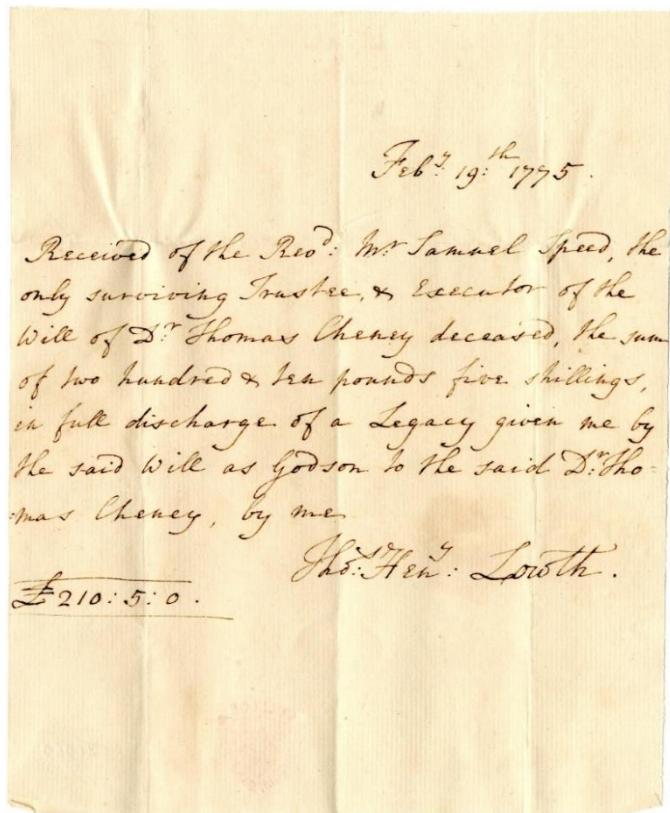
In Winchester College's archives are two documents dating from 1775 which demonstrate Thomas and Robert Lowth working with a similar closeness to that shown before, when Thomas effectively deputised for Robert, writing to William Longstaff on behalf of his ill father, in one of the letters I had acquired for New College's archives in 2020 from Sotheby's. This time, within Winchester College's holdings, we find a receipt of 19 February 1775 for £210 10s, in the hand of Thomas Henry Lowth 'as Godson', acknowledging a legacy payment from the Revd Samuel Speed (1705–1775). (Speed was executor of the estate of Dr Thomas Cheyney, he was also 'Hostiarius', or Second Master, of Winchester College from 1740 till 1755, and he had been educated at both of Wykeham's foundations.) The receipt has been enclosed within a letter, dated the following day,

²⁰ Letter from Robert Lowth to his wife Mary Lowth (28 October 1755), Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS. Eng. lett. c. 572, ff. 118r–119v, at ff. 118r, 119v.

²¹ On Dean Cheyney, see G. H. Blore, *Thomas Cheyney, Wykehamist: Dean of Winchester 1748–1760* (Winchester: Wykeham Press, 1950). New College Library, Oxford, has an author's presentation copy at its shelfmark OX1/BLO.

²² Will of Reverend, Doctor Thomas Cheyney, Dean of the Cathedral Church of Winchester of Saint Michael near Winchester, Hampshire (6 July 1761), The National Archives, PROB 11/866/455, ff. 107r–118v, at f. 107v.

written by Bishop Robert Lowth to the Revd Samuel Speed which is conveying his son Thomas's 'Thanks for your care of his affairs, w^{ch}. he desires you to accept'.²³



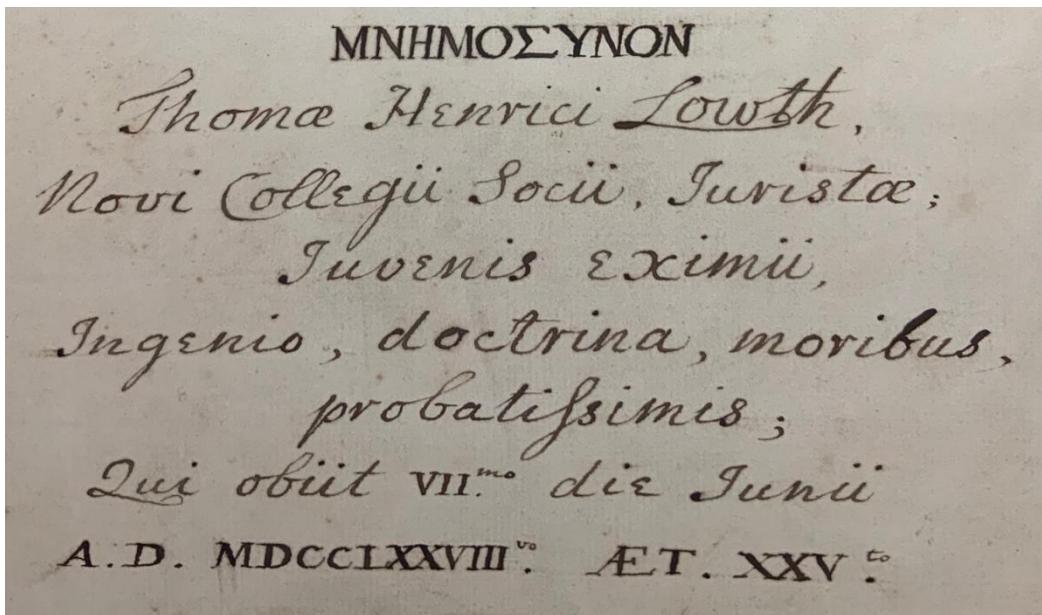
Winchester College Archives, Winchester, WCM 20959 and WCM 20960
© Courtesy of the Warden and Scholars of Winchester College

²³ Receipt from Thomas Henry Lowth (19 February 1775), Winchester College Archives, Winchester, WCM 20959; letter from Robert Lowth to Samuel Speed (20 February 1775), Winchester College Archives, Winchester, WCM 20960. I am grateful to Winchester College's archivist Suzanne Foster for supplying me with copies of these two documents. For more on Winchester's collections, see Geoffrey Day and Suzanne Foster, 'Lowth Holdings in Winchester College', *Historiographia Linguistica* 39 (2012), 107–114.

Thomas was Robert's firstborn son, indeed his firstborn child. When, probably around 1783, Robert composes a short account of his life, career, family, and publications, written over a couple of pages of paper which survive in the Bodleian Library, he lists his seven children, in their birth order. By this point in time, five of his children have predeceased Robert, and he has noted their death dates too, as well as the birth dates of all seven. But for only one of these—Thomas Henry, his firstborn—does he provide the shortest of notes of a personal, descriptive nature: 'a most excellent Youth' (How one hears the sense of loss in that short phrase).²⁴ Robert's most successful book, as these handwritten pages also attest, was his *A Short Introduction to English Grammar* (1762), a first edition copy of which the library received as part of Randal Keynes's gift. And this book, we also know, was conceived with son, Thomas, in mind: 'I drew it up for the use of my little Boy', Robert Lowth wrote to his friend James Merrick (1720–1769) in February 1762, in a letter also held by the Bodleian.²⁵ Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade has drawn attention to example sentences in the book which Robert uses to illustrate grammatical points, which refer to a 'Thomas'.²⁶ Thomas Henry Lowth was indeed Robert's beloved son, one in whom, we might say, father Robert was well pleased, and of whom he was clearly proud.

A Verb Active expresses an Action . . . "I love Thomas." . . . A Verb Passive expresses a Passion, or a Suffering, or the receiving of an Action . . . "Thomas is loved by me."²⁷

In its way, this is as fine a tribute for Thomas as the one Robert recorded in our Vinegar Bible.



Inscription to Thomas Henry Lowth, pasted to the front blank leaf preceding the engraved title-page
New College Library, Oxford, BT3.282.1 (vol. 1) © Courtesy of the Warden and Scholars of New College, Oxford

Christopher Skelton-Foord
Librarian
New College, Oxford

²⁴ Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS. Eng. misc. c. 816, ff. 126r–127r, at f. 126v.

²⁵ Letter from Robert Lowth to James Merrick (February 1762), Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS. Eng. Lett. c. 573, ff. 9r–10v, at f. 10v.

²⁶ Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 'Robert Lowth', 282, and more generally in her *Bishop's Grammar*, pp. 52–7.

²⁷ Robert Lowth, *A Short Introduction to English Grammar: With Critical Notes* (London: Printed by J. Hughs; A. Millar; and R. and J. Dodsley, 1762), p. 44. New College Library's copy of this book is held at Keynes 1.