

## A Fifteenth-Century Bookman

William of Wykeham made a Founder's gift of books to New College: two hundred and forty-six volumes and a room to keep them in, the first purpose-built library-room of any college in Oxford. Wykeham expected that the reading-needs of his fellows at St Mary's College at Winchester would be rather different: promoted from fellowships at New College to the more lucrative benefices at Winchester, freed from the demands of the schools, their reading might never be so intensive again. So at Winchester, no library was included in the building plan and the Founder gave his fellows six books only, texts to help in the ministry rather than those aimed at the higher faculties of study. To that extent, Wykeham had nodded—a rare thing for that master planner. A common collection of books quickly began to build at Winchester and space for it had to be found, first in what is now known as Audit Room, a narrow chamber next to the Exchequer in the muniment tower, and after that in a lofted space above Fromond's Chantry, a free-standing chapel that had been fitted into the cloister garth and which was finished in 1446. Even so, the common collection at Winchester in the first half of the fifteenth century would have been a slight affair next to the sister library at Oxford, a situation that at least one of the fellows worked hard to change.

Robert Heete was a native of Woodstock in Oxfordshire, who arrived at Winchester as a scholar in 1400 and went on to New College in 1405, taking his fellowship three years later. He was admitted to the degree of bachelor of civil law around 1415, and in 1418 began to gain benefices. He returned to a fellowship at Winchester on 13 February 1422. That was probably the moment when he made the first of his gifts to the society, joining with Nicholas Oselbury, the warden of New College, in presenting six silver spoons. During his time at Winchester he served terms as second bursar, first bursar, and three stints as subwarden, and in what turned out to be a very enlightened appointment, in 1423 he became the first of the College's notaries. The work seems to have suited him. He was an able administrator, and in the capacity of notary he was responsible for much of the organisation of the Liber Albus, with its register of fellows and inventory of the library (a superior achievement to the equivalent produced at New College), and the Registrum Primum, with its register of scholars, and he had a new, reference copy of the statutes produced, still at Winchester and known as 'Heete's Statute Book'. Also to Heete, on the basis of its survival in the Liber Albus, has been attributed the earliest known account of the life of William of Wykeham (fols. 9r–11r; there is another, fragmentary copy at the front of Heete's Statute Book). The rubric to the Life states that it was written (*editus*) in 1424, 'twenty years after the death of that father', and it includes a dedication to the fellows of both colleges, addressed as 'karissimi socii'.

A Wykehamist to his fingertips, Heete was nobly generous towards Winchester. According to Blackstone's Book of Benefactors, he gave to the chapel a rich array of precious ornaments, furnishings and vestments; but it may have been his gift to the library that kept him foremost in the minds of his colleagues. In the absence of any great founding gift, it is Heete who can be named as the College's great early donor of books, no fewer than thirty-eight of them. While his various books of sermons would have been a continuing resource for

a college of priests with parochial cure, his gift also included significant patristical material that would have helped to fill some of the more obvious holes, and, as might be expected, there was a fine suit in canon and civil law. It was a typical, well-rounded clerical collection. The meticulous thought that lay behind the gift is striking. The titles are known from his own catalogue in the Liber Albus and from the indenture dated 29 September 1432 by which he formally made his books over to the College: some had already been accessioned; in others he reserved an interest so long as he was a fellow; others were given specifically to be available for loan to other fellows, provided that suitable indentures had been exchanged between the borrower and the warden. It is clear from the different stints of writing in the Liber Albus that some of these books had been gifted on Heete's first taking up his fellowship, and that he went on giving them, perhaps as he acquired them, until the very end of his life. Final entries were made by a later hand and presumably list books that came by bequest.

None of these books is known to survive today. Instead, it is New College that holds the principal cache of books that once belonged to Robert Heete. Two books may be a poor remnant of what was once a significant collection, but it is a tenacious remnant, for the evidence is that Heete gave to New College these and only one other, his breviary, long since lost. It is a reminder that New College, replete with books and readers, did not stand in the same need of books at this time as did Winchester. The first survivor, MS 192, grants an insight into the donor's activities while at Oxford: it contains Heete's own lectures on Books I and V of the Decretals that he gave at the schools in 1415–16; he wrote the manuscript himself and presented it to the College for the use of the law fellows. (His normal handwriting used a tidy, notarial secretary with some anglicana graphs, but the anglicana elements could become more pronounced in the more informal grades of writing that he used, and in this book, MS 192, the effect is really quite scruffy.) The other book, MS 105, is a handsome thirteenth-century copy of the Lombard's Sentences which Heete had purchased for twenty shillings from the executors of Mr Thomas (*recte* John) Hassley (fol. 1r). As with MS 192, this book was given for the use of the fellows, this time the theology fellows; in each case the book was available for loan 'according to the discretion of the warden or, in his absence, the subwarden'. They are similar terms to those that were later ordained at Winchester for certain of Heete's books: his missal, his bible, his glossed psalter, his *Pupilla oculi*, two *repertoria* and a breviary, this last given specially for the use of fellows travelling on College business. The inscriptions in both the New College books describe Heete as 'nuper socius', which suggests that they were parting gifts made when he vacated his fellowship for the one at Winchester. Heete died, still a fellow, on 27 February 1432/3 and was buried in the entrance to College Chapel, although, as we see, his physical memorial remains now only in the sister house.

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