

# FRIENDS OF CHRIST'S COLLEGE LIBRARY NEWSLETTER, November 2020



## A word of welcome... From John Wagstaff, College Librarian

Our Library Friends will not be surprised to hear that this term has probably been unlike any other at Christ's College, or, indeed, at Cambridge University as a whole. We reopened to readers on 14 September, and the College libraries as a group are among the very few libraries within the university to be "open" at anything like normal levels. Many Faculty and Departmental libraries are either not open at all, or are offering only a limited range of services.

In the weeks since mid-September we have become used to using our masks, having hand sanitizer and computer screen/keyboard screen wipes to hand, and so on; and we have had to reduce the number of seats in the Working Library from around 60 to 30 in order to preserve social distancing (or, as we might prefer to call it, "anti-social distancing"). Our Old Library, alas, has remained closed since the middle of March, and the College is currently open to current members only.

The media have become used to the word "unprecedented" in regard to the pandemic, but of course Christ's College has seen other such medical crises during its long history. Thus John Milton encountered plague while in Cambridge; and the Great London Plague of 1665 caused him to move out of the capital to the house in Chalfont St Giles that is now known as Milton's Cottage, which hopefully will soon reopen. We do hope that all our Library Friends are staying well at this time, and that we will see you again soon.

## A new acquisition captures Christ's College history

Over the summer, the Library acquired two albums of Victorian photographs and caricatures. These volumes shed light on the history of Christ's, and include images taken in 1867-9 of College buildings and alumni. Now catalogued and stored safely in the archives, the albums offer a 150-year-old glimpse of the College and its inhabitants.



The Fellows' Building



Christ's College Eleven, May 1868



The Great Gate

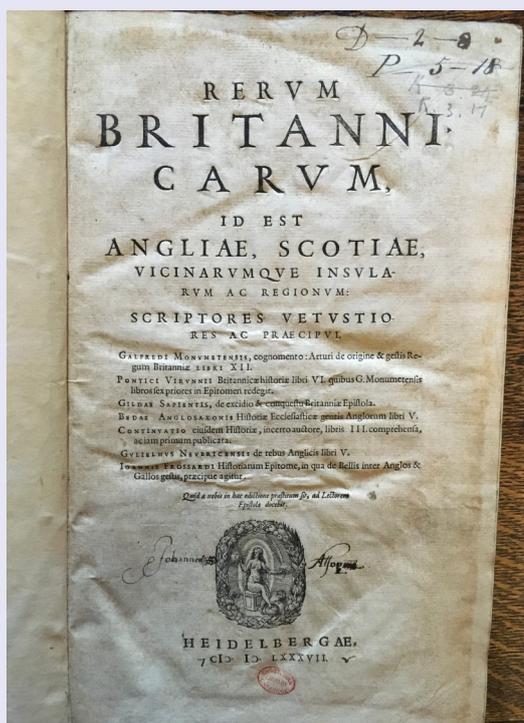


Christ's College Second Boat, Lent Term 1869



The Gardens

## In search of John Alsop (ca. 1599-1647)



Included in the College’s donor register is a five-page list of volumes donated by alumnus “Joan[n]is Alsop”, a Christ’s Fellow from 1623-40. He would thus have overlapped early on with John Milton, who entered the College in 1625 (Alsop himself had matriculated in 1617). The college experiences of the two men were probably very different, however, since Milton was a “pensioner” (meaning that he had enough funds to pay his college fees), while Alsop was a “sizar” (so did not). Like many former Christ’s students of that time, Alsop later became a clergyman, holding rectorships of two parishes in Essex.

A feature of many of Alsop’s donations is a sturdy, dark leather binding that has the College’s coat of arms, and motto (*Souvent me souvient*), stamped in gold on its front board. As far as we can tell, just one item — the 1587 *Rerum britannicarum*, now at shelfmark K.3.17 — carries any physical evidence of Alsop’s ownership, as his signature appears on its title page (left).

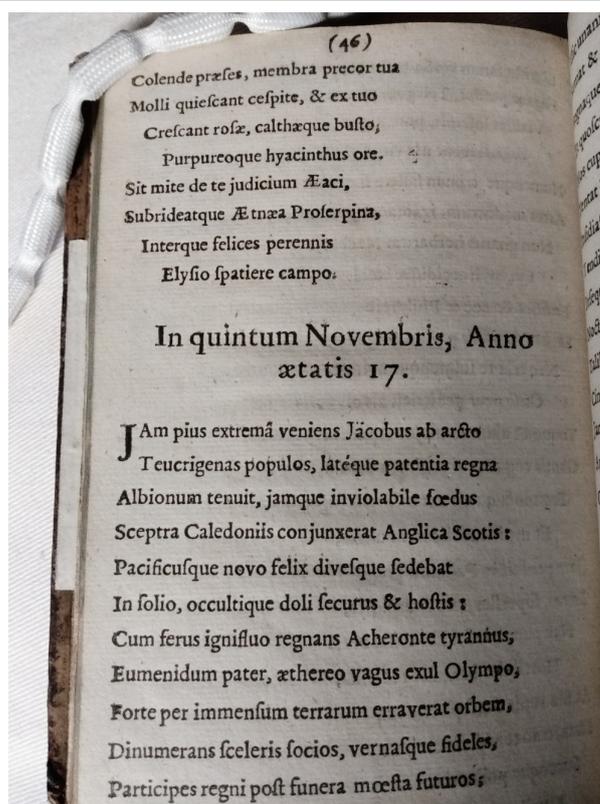
We look forward to learning more about this intriguing collection as we continue our research into it.

## Remember, remember, the fifth of November

This month, the Library is highlighting a work by one of Christ’s College’s most famous alumni. John Milton was a seventeen-year-old undergraduate at the college in 1626 when he wrote ‘*In Quintum Novembris*’, a Latin poem celebrating the twenty-first anniversary of the foiled Gunpowder Plot.

The subject was a popular one for poets of the time: only ten days after November 5, 1605, Thomas Goad, another Cambridge scholar, produced a book of poetry on the event. Francis Herring’s *Pietas Pontificia* (1606) and Michael Wallace’s *In Serenissimi Regis Jacobi . . . Liberationem* (1606) both vilify Guy Fawkes by placing him at the centre of the plot, the former depicting him as a serpent born in hell. Milton’s poem, pictured on the right, instead casts a hovering Satan as the story’s villain.

Although Milton’s poem has sometimes been dismissed as an academic exercise, the work casts light on his engagement with other writers and popular history. And as an artefact from Milton’s years at Christ’s, it offers a familiar image of a young poet at work.



Christ’s College Old Library EE.3.22

**We would love to hear from you!** If you would like to send us comments about this *Newsletter*, arrange a visit to the College Library, sponsor a book, make a donation, or simply share some memories, please contact us at [library@christs.cam.ac.uk](mailto:library@christs.cam.ac.uk); by telephone at 01223-334950; or by post at Christ’s College Library, St Andrew’s Street, Cambridge CB2 3BU.