

Thomas Smith, Humfrey Wanley, and the ‘Little-Known Country’ of the Cotton Library

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‘One of the honorable traits of men is their will to leave their reports as witnesses’
– Czeslaw Milosz ¹

In *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, Roger Chartier explains how the rapid and prodigious flow of titles and editions afforded by the medium of print in the early modern period naturally led to the emergence of a newly energized industry of comprehensive or ‘union’ bibliography, one notable aspect of which was a great interest in compiling and publishing ‘books that contain the Catalogues of the books in the *Bibliothèques*’.² The circulation of these books meant that ‘the closed world of individual libraries could be transformed into an infinite universe of books noted, reviewed, visited, consulted and, eventually, borrowed’.³ The ‘union’ catalogue, then, could serve as a master key for opening up previously disclosed or inaccessible storehouses of knowledge, or provide a navigable path through libraries that, although open in the sense that one could visit them and gain permission to view particular texts, did not readily advertise to the broader public their complete holdings, and therefore those holdings were somewhat hidden, and even apocryphal. Such were the contents of the library of the Stuart antiquary Sir Robert Cotton (1586–1631), the presses of which held unique composite manuscripts containing the only known copies of such important medieval literary texts as *Beowulf*, *Pearl*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, a unique 5th-century Greek *Genesis*, as well as such important legal documents as two of the four surviving exemplifications of the *Magna Carta*. Although there were many handwritten, often informal, catalogues of Sir Robert’s manuscripts and books during his lifetime and in the years afterwards, the desire for an official printed catalogue which could be circulated in the public realm did not really bear fruit until

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¹ Czeslaw Milosz, ‘A Historian’s Worries’, *Road-Side Dog*, trans. Robert Haas (New York, 1998), p. 152.

² Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Cambridge, 1994), p. 69.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

the late 1600s.⁴ And when two versions finally did appear — the Reverend Thomas Smith’s in 1696 and Humfrey Wanley’s in 1705⁵ — they represented the fruits of bibliographic labours undertaken with great care and anxiety over the individual mastery of a *sumum* of texts delimited by the contingencies (social, political, economic, geographical, and otherwise) of time and place, as well as over the perceived importance of indexing and preserving a national literary heritage well before the academic disciplines of systematic bibliography, literary history or English studies even existed.⁶ What follows is an examination of those labours and anxieties — anxieties that stemmed, partly, from the belief, as Wanley himself once put it, that ‘the catalogue is *the life of a declaration* [sic] of what is contained in a library,⁷’ and also from the fact that the early modern cataloguer often worked with very little sustained patronage or institutional support.



Fig. 1. Portrait of Humfrey Wanley by Thomas Hill, 1722.

⁴ The very first printed union catalogue of manuscripts in England was compiled by Thomas James (1572–1629), first Keeper of the Bodleian Library at Oxford, and was published in 1600 as the *Ecloga Oxonio-Cantabrigiensis*. See Richard Clement, ‘Thomas James’s *Ecloga Oxonio-Cantabrigiensis*: An Early Printed Union Catalogue’, *The Journal of Library History*, xxi (1987), pp. 1–22. When Humfrey Wanley surveyed the Anglo-Saxon manuscripts held in the libraries of Oxford and Cambridge from the late 1600s to the early 1700s for his *Catalogus Historico-Criticus* (see n. 5 below), James’s *Ecloga* was one of his main reference guides — on this point, see Richard L. Harris (ed.), *A Chorus of Grammars: The Correspondence of George Hickes and his Collaborators on the ‘Thesaurus linguarum septentrionalium’* (Toronto, 1992), pp. 89–90.

⁵ Thomas Smith, *Catalogus librorum mancriptorum bibliothecae Cottonianae* (Oxford, 1696) and Humfrey Wanley, *Antiquae Litteraturae Septentrionalis Liber alter. Seu Humphredi Wanleii Librorum Vett. Septentrionalium, qui in Angliæ Bibliothecis extant, nec non multorum Vett. Codd. Septentrionalium alibi extantium Catalogus Historico-Criticus, cum totius Thesauri Linguarum Septentrionalium sex Indicibus* (Oxford, 1705), respectively. Wanley’s *Catalogus* was printed as the second volume of George Hickes’s *Thesaurus linguarum septentrionalium*, and represented a compendium of catalogues of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts held in English libraries, including the ‘Catalogus Cod. MSS. Anglo-Saxonicum Bibliothecæ Cottonianæ, quæ est Westmonasterii’, pp. 183–265.

⁶ Regarding the state and practice of bibliography during this time period, see T. A. Birrell, ‘Anthony Wood, John Bagford and Thomas Hearne as Bibliographers’, in Robin Myers and Michael Harris (eds.), *Pioneers in Bibliography* (Winchester, 1988), pp. 25–39.

⁷ Draft of a letter Wanley wrote on 16 September 1710 dispensing advice for the renovation and enlargement of the Guildhall Library at St Paul’s; reprinted in Michael Murphy, ‘Humfrey Wanley on How to Run a Scholarly Library’, *Library Quarterly*, lii (1982), pp. 152–4.

I. Mahomet Comes to the Mountain

Although it is well documented that Sir Robert's library was always known in his lifetime as an open and generous lending repository of important antique books, manuscripts, and state papers, so much so that many items he loaned out did not return,⁸ by the time of the ownership of his son, Sir Thomas Cotton (1631-62), lending practices became stricter and more regulated, and by the time of his grandson Sir John Cotton's ownership (1662-1702), the practice of taking out bonds against loans became a standard procedure, and scholars were further encouraged to view and work with articles within the confines of the library itself rather than taking them out.⁹ Because there was no formally published catalogue until Smith's in 1696, word of mouth, access to informal catalogues compiled by library visitors, and the right connections are what gave a scholar access to the Cotton library's treasures during the times of his son's and grandson's keeperships. Colin Tite has written that Smith (1638-1710) never held an official appointment nor received a salary as librarian to the Cotton family. Nor did he ever reside in Cotton House, as had Sir Robert's librarian, Richard James. Nevertheless, apparently out of friendship (Smith had tutored Sir John's son and also chaperoned him on his European travels) and mutual antiquarian interests, Smith took upon himself, when Sir John was residing at his Stratton, Bedfordshire estate, 'the task of receiving visitors at the library and answering scholarly correspondence'.¹⁰ From the correspondence of visitors to the library during Smith's tenure, it is clear that Smith was considered the library's official keeper, regardless of the lack of a formal appointment, and it was his permission that scholars sought (often with great deference and trembling) when they wanted access to the manuscript collections.

When Wanley (1672-1726), the great paleographer and Anglo-Saxonist and ultimately the library keeper for Sir Robert Harley, was interested in 1697 to have certain manuscripts from the Cotton library sent to him at the Bodleian as an aid to his project to copy the hands of all the antique manuscripts extant in English libraries at that time,¹¹ he was cautioned by both George Hickes and Arthur Charlett to approach Smith with great deference and diplomacy. In a letter dated 26 May 1697, Hickes wrote to Wanley that, when asking for the Saxon Charters (now contained in BL, Cotton MS. Augustus II) to be loaned to him, he should write to Smith 'with great earnestnesse, and sense of your obligations, and thankfulness to him, and promises to use the MS., as he shall prescribe, and that you shall

⁸ Colin G. C. Tite has written that 'as the working collection of a generous owner the (Cotton) library was always vulnerable: at a minimum, a tenth of its stock was lost by one means or another during the seventeenth century' (*The Manuscript Library of Sir Robert Cotton* (London, 1994), p. 25). For a detailed survey of eighty manuscripts that strayed from the Cotton library in the century and a half before the Cotton manuscript collections entered the British Museum in the 1750s, see Colin G. C. Tite, "'Lost or Stolen or Strayed": A Survey of Manuscripts Formerly in the Cotton Library', in C. J. Wright (ed.), *Sir Robert Cotton as Collector: Essays on an Early Stuart Courtier and His Legacy* (London, 1997), pp. 107-47. As regards the perceived importance of Cotton's library during the seventeenth century and its generous lending policies, Tite has written that 'The list of loans, which cover the years 1604 to 1667, contains well over 200 names, ranging from high officials of church and state at one end of the scale of status to a country parson at the other' ('Introduction', Thomas Smith, *Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Cottonian Library 1696 . . . Reprinted from Sir Robert Harley's copy, annotated by Humfrey Wanley, together with documents relating to the fire of 1731*, ed. Colin G. C. Tite (Cambridge, 1984), p. 6).

⁹ See Tite, *The Manuscript Library of Sir Robert Cotton*, pp. 25-9.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹¹ Wanley had actually paid a visit to the Cotton library once before in April of 1695, by way of a recommendation to Sir John from Samuel Pepys, but Smith, with his typical lack of patience with the younger scholar, had limited his visit to one-and-a-half hours. See Wanley's two letters to Thomas Tanner dated 16 April and 19 April 1695 in P. L. Heyworth (ed.), *Letters of Humfrey Wanley: Paleographer, Anglo-Saxonist, Librarian, 1672-1726* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 12-16.

let the world know by whome you received so great a benefit, and that you shall be obliged to do him any service at home, and abroad, if you ever travell to visit foreign libraries’.¹² When Wanley finally did write to Smith on 30 May 1697 to request the loan of the charters, even with his ‘ten thousand thanks’ to Smith for his correspondence and various pieces of scholarly ‘Intelligence’,¹³ Smith was still stunned by the audacity of Wanley’s request, and replied that, ‘if the Mountaine cannot come to Mahomet, Mahomet must condescend to go to the Mountaine’.¹⁴ At a later date, in 1698, when Wanley was attempting another physical foray into the Cotton library, Charlett reminded Wanley that Smith ‘neither admires nor loves you’, and that Wanley should keep in mind ‘the good effects of Humility and Submission’.¹⁵ As a student at Oxford in the 1690s, the ‘commoner’ draper’s son Wanley lived with Charlett at University College where Charlett was Master. Although Wanley never obtained a degree,¹⁶ Charlett was much impressed with Wanley’s abilities as a paleographer and was Wanley’s lifelong patron. He assisted Wanley in attaining the post of Assistant at the Bodleian in 1696, and was also influential in promoting Wanley’s talents to Edward Bernard, the Oxford professor who compiled one of the first comprehensive catalogues of antique manuscripts held in English and Irish libraries (for which Wanley provided an alphabetical index),¹⁷ and to Hickes, the famous non-juring bishop of Thetford, polemicist, and Oxford Saxonist, with whom Wanley would collaborate on one of the most important early works of Germanic and Anglo-Saxon scholarship, the two-volume *Thesaurus linguarum septentrionalium* (Oxford, 1703–5).

At the same time that Charlett helped Wanley’s career, he was often a hindrance to it as well. While it was Charlett’s permission that allowed Wanley to travel to London in the spring of 1698 in order to visit various libraries and to take specimens of handwriting in manuscripts which he was hoping to publish in a never completed preface to Bernard’s Catalogue, Charlett wrote to Wanley on 18 May 1698, ‘Your Month is expired’, and on 2 June 1698, ‘On Munday the VC [Vice-Chancellor] seemed to ask with some concern after you, intimating some had been complaining at yr long Absence’.¹⁸ Hickes also let Wanley know in a letter dated June (?) 1698 that Charlett had written to him to express frustration over Wanley’s overextended stay in London.¹⁹ Wanley’s defensive reply to Charlett’s exasperation was to argue that he conceived it ‘a part of a Library-keepers business to know what books are exstant in other Libraries besides

¹² Harris (ed.), *A Chorus of Grammars*, p. 186.

¹³ Wanley to Smith, 30 May 1697; Heyworth (ed.), *Letters of Humfrey Wanley*, p. 59.

¹⁴ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Smith 66, p. 70; quoted in Tite, ‘Introduction’, *Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Cottonian Library*, p. 7.

¹⁵ Charlett to Wanley, 1 May 1698; quoted in Stanley Gillam, ‘Humfrey Wanley and Arthur Charlett’, *The Bodleian Library Record*, xvi (1999), p. 415.

¹⁶ Regarding Wanley’s anxieties over not being able to stand for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts or of Law, and his wrangling to have a Bachelor’s degree awarded to him through the urging of ‘friends amongst the heads of high houses,’ see his letters to Charlett and Hickes in Heyworth (ed.), *Letters of Humfrey Wanley*, pp. 99–142.

¹⁷ Edward Bernard et al., *Catalogi librorum manusccriptorum Angliae et Hiberniae in unum collecti* (Oxford, 1697); hereafter referred to as Bernard’s Catalogue.

¹⁸ Heyworth (ed.), *Letters of Humfrey Wanley*, p. 97, n. 11.

¹⁹ Harris (ed.), *A Chorus of Grammars*, p. 215–16. For more details regarding Charlett’s and Wanley’s often vexed personal and professional relationship, see Gillam, ‘Humfrey Wanley and Arthur Charlett’, pp. 411–29. Hickes would often ride to Wanley’s rescue by writing letters to Charlett arguing the importance of giving Wanley leave to undertake various paleographic and bibliographic labours which Hickes saw as vital to his own Saxonist projects. Later, in 1700, when Hickes was keen to have Wanley compile a catalogue of Saxon manuscripts that Wanley himself had proposed as an addition to Hickes’s *Thesaurus*, and he had heard that Wanley had initially been denied six weeks leave to visit the Cotton library, Hickes wrote Charlett that ‘no one hand you know, sir, for many reasons (is) comparable to mr. Wanleys [...]. The Catalogue I designe depends upon mine, and mr Wanleys joint life, and health’ (Hickes to Charlett, 27 April 1700; Harris (ed.), *A Chorus of Grammars*, p. 326).

his own; and as this qualifies him the better for his place, so by that means may he prove the more serviceable knowing what Copies of such an Author is [sic] in his own Library, and where they may be found elsewhere’.²⁰ It would appear Wanley was always smartly cognizant of the need for a comparative ‘union’ bibliography — both in the sense of its practicality, as is stated here, as well as its ultimate historical value, which he would express repeatedly in later writings, such as the prospectus he wrote in 1702, addressed to Sir Robert Harley. In this prospectus, he argued for the necessity of ‘a large Volume *De re Anglorum Litteraria et Libraria*’ as a safeguard against ‘the frequent Revolutions in Kingdoms and States, besides the Accidents, which in Particular Places, are suppos’d to destroy, in times of Peace, some one Library of MSS or other’.²¹ Even earlier, when visiting the Cambridge libraries in 1699, Wanley obviously recognized the need for a comparative bibliography when he complained in a letter to Charlett that ‘he that takes the Catalogue of the College MSS. describes them as they appear to him indeed, but having scarcely ever seen any others, he makes but poor work on’t’.²² Regardless of Wanley’s bibliographical sagacity, it was not unusual for Charlett to encourage Wanley’s researches in libraries other than the Bodleian, but also rein him back to Oxford when he felt it was necessary (or when the mood struck him). Venting his frustration to Hickee regarding all the grovelling he felt compelled to engage in at Oxford, Wanley wrote that he lived ‘a servile, sneaking, precarious life: but however, I contentedly submit to Gods will’.²³

Returning to Wanley’s request in 1697 for the ‘Charters of the Saxon Kings’ to be sent to him at the Bodleian, Smith rebuffed his request on more than one occasion. Even after Wanley explained to Smith that he would gladly wait until he could travel to London, and that his main intent in viewing the charters was ‘more relating to the nature of Letters, than to the Diplomata or Charters themself[es],’²⁴ Smith continued to try to dissuade Wanley by telling him in a letter dated 3 July 1697 that, ‘as to the characters used by our Saxon ancestors, I meane the most antient, the Cottonian Library will afford you but little help. For tho’ there is there, as everybody knowes, an excellent collection of Saxon monuments, yet farr antienter are to be met with elsewhere, particularly at Cambridge [...] and in the muniment house belonging to the Cathedral Church of Canterbury’.²⁵ Continuing in this mode of somewhat hyperbolic misrepresentation, Smith wrote, ‘you are to expect no great matter, as to this designe, as you now explain it, from this library: but you are to seeke elsewhere’.²⁶ In a later letter dated 24 August 1697, Smith moved to stop Wanley in his tracks toward the library altogether, writing, ‘I hope this letter will bee so satisfactory as to put a stop to all further enquireys about these matters, unless you have some new thing to propose. For to write the same over and over, whether done by you or mee, will be altogether unnecessary, not to say tedious’.²⁷ Smith himself was planning to publish some of the charters, as well as compile a new catalogue of the loose charters as a supplement to his 1696 *Catalogus*, and it is likely that he did not want Wanley getting in his way — a point to which I will return in more detail in Parts II and III.²⁸

²⁰ Wanley to Charlett, 30 May 1698; Heyworth (ed.), *Letters of Humfrey Wanley*, p. 97.

²¹ Humfrey Wanley, ‘Paleographical Survey of English Hands from the Earliest Times’ (BL, Sloane MS. 4061, f. 268); reprinted in Heyworth (ed.), *Letters of Humfrey Wanley*, pp. 469–72.

²² Wanley to Charlett, 2 September 1699; Heyworth (ed.), *Letters of Humfrey Wanley*, p. 133. Wanley was likely referring to Thomas James’s *Ecloga Oxonio-Cantabrigiensis* (see n. 4), a stunning achievement for its time, and for whose guidance through the Cambridge libraries Wanley should have perhaps shown more appreciation.

²³ Wanley to Hickee, 12 January 1699; Heyworth (ed.), *Letters of Humfrey Wanley*, p. 114.

²⁴ Heyworth (ed.), *Letters of Humfrey Wanley*, p. 62.

²⁵ Quoted in Eleanor N. Adams, *Old English Scholarship in England from 1566–1800* (New Haven, 1917), pp. 123–4.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

²⁷ Harris (ed.), *A Chorus of Grammars*, p. 192.

²⁸ According to Tite, Smith formally embarked upon a project to catalogue all of the unbound charters in the Cotton Library in 1699, a task that, for various reasons — both personal and political — remained unfinished at the time of his death in 1710. See Tite, *The Manuscript Library of Sir Robert Cotton*, p. 74, n. 38.

Smith did finally relent to allow Wanley to look over some of the Saxon charters when Wanley was in London in 1698, but not before Wanley greatly angered him by entering the library on the morning of 29 April with only the permission of the maid. In a letter that Wanley wrote to Charlett dated 30 April 1698, he indicated that when he attempted to return to the library that afternoon the same maid informed him that ‘the Dr was in a great rage at my being there, that he had look’d into my books, and was then more angry than before: that he chid her severely for letting me into the Library, & making it Common; and vowed to write to Sir John about it that night, with much more to the purpose’.²⁹ Wanley indicated to Charlett that he had some misgivings about unduly provoking Smith by not gaining proper permission to enter the library in a more politic manner, but in what may have been typical Wanley hubris, he also decided that ‘the Dr is Jealous of my Copying Letters from MSS’.³⁰ Nevertheless, Wanley decided to make amends (most likely because he knew a stern letter from Smith to Sir John would harm his reputation and perhaps also keep him out of Cotton House for good), and he told Charlett in the same letter that by ‘summoning up all the powers of my Rhetorick’ and writing Smith ‘an humble & very submissive’ letter in which he ‘call’d the Library a Venerable place; the Books, sacred reliquies of Antiquity, &c. with half a dozen Tautologies’, that he was finally given ‘free admittance to the Place’.³¹ Although Wanley may have been brash and even self-aggrandizing in his temperament, Smith was considered by his contemporaries to have a difficult personality as well. In the letter Hickeys wrote to Wanley dated 26 May 1697 (cited above), in which Hickeys instructed Wanley on how best to approach ‘the doctour’, he compared Smith to a well-known bishop whose temper was such that he had ‘to have all the credit of the favours he loved to bestow generously soly owing to himself, and [...] he did not love that others how great, or dear soever to him should have any share in the thanks’.³² Indicating a certain fear of Smith’s disfavour as well, Hickeys requested Wanley burn his letter after reading it.³³

I have detailed here some of the antagonism inherent in Wanley’s and Smith’s early acquaintance in order to illustrate the tension that existed between them from the very beginning of their professional association until its spectacular conclusion in 1703 when Wanley was sent into the Cotton library as an Inspector for the government and Smith was finally locked out after Sir John’s death. As the younger of the two — twenty-three when he first approached the fifty-seven-year-old Smith — Wanley posed somewhat of a threat to Smith’s own antiquarian researches. In the letter Smith wrote to Wanley dated 8 June 1697 (cited above), where he let Wanley know in no uncertain terms that he would not let the book of Saxon charters leave the library, Smith also indicated that he planned on publishing some of the charters himself, and had, in fact, been intent upon this for some time: ‘you could not possibly forget, when you wrote your letter [requesting the charters], by referring to my [catalogue] preface [...] that tho’ I did not make an absolute promise of publishing those Charters, and the formes of the old letters found in them, and in other antient books; yet as I had at that time, so now at the present I have the same designe and resolution to publish them with several other pieces of antiquity, when a fit opportunity shall present itself’.³⁴ Furthermore, in the same letter, Smith let Wanley know that ‘if by the misfortune of the times I be driven out of London, or be hindered by the infirmities of my age, and the other

²⁹ Heyworth (ed.), *Letters of Humfrey Wanley*, p. 91.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Harris (ed.), *A Chorus of Grammars*, p. 186.

³³ More specifically, Hickeys wrote, ‘this letter being wholly about this secret of the doctors temper, which may look like reflection, but really is none, I desire you to burn it, because I would have nothing under my hand, which may seem to diminish the character, and reputation of so great, and worthy a man, nor have any thing of mine seen, that might give him the least offense, whome I honour from my heart’ (Harris (ed.), *A Chorus of Grammars*, p. 187).

³⁴ Quoted in Adams, *Old English Scholarship in England*, pp. 120–1.

circumstances of my life, from performing these serious intentions, I shall then readily and willingly devolve that work upon you’.³⁵ That Wanley was, indeed, aware of Smith’s intentions is evident in a letter he wrote to Charlett dated 30 April 1698, in which he shared with Charlett that Smith had explained to him in one of their encounters, ‘over & over’, that he desired Wanley ‘not to rival him in his undertakings, for he had resolved to publish some of the Saxon Charters, with the old Saxon Letters, and would by no means be prevented’.³⁶ Smith had many good reasons to feel anxious about his position and his scholarly objectives, and given Wanley’s later achievements, he was certainly a worthy rival. Interestingly, given the very collaborative nature of both Bernard’s Catalogue and Hickeys’s *Thesaurus*, Smith’s continual insistence on being allowed a clear space and body of texts — specifically, the Cotton library, and also the loose charters — within which to work unhindered by intrusion and unassisted by bright and energetic helpers such as Wanley, really distinguished Smith as the odd man out, and he may have suffered for this self-imposed isolation, both personally and professionally. He may have also put too many of his eggs in one man’s basket (Sir John’s), without stopping to consider what would happen when Sir John was no longer in the picture.

II. Kindling a Torch to Light the Way — Smith’s 1696 *Catalogus*

It was a commonplace of Smith’s commentary on his scholarly labours to depict himself as working within a hostile political climate under the duress of various undisclosed ‘infirmities’ and ‘circumstances’, and his advancing age. As an anti-Papist and non-juror, the times were indeed perilous for ecclesiastical men like Smith who lived and worked during the reigns of the Catholicizing James II and his Protestant successor William III. Full of anxiety over James II’s ‘Romish’ tendencies — he built a Roman Catholic chapel at Whitehall and ousted Anglicans from important positions in his government — yet also refusing to sign oaths of allegiance to William and Mary after James’s deposition (owing to a belief in James’s status as ‘king *de jure*’), non-jurors like Smith walked a fine line between religious dissent and political conservatism that often left their employment, whether in a deanery or university library, in peril. Smith, in fact, had lost his fellowship at Magdalen College during James II’s reign, but was lucky to find himself under the protective wing of Sir John Cotton in the 1690s.³⁷ Nevertheless, even with Sir John’s patronage, Smith still had palpable fears concerning his desire to publish his bibliographic labours, both prior to the publication of the *Catalogus* in 1696 and afterwards. When Smith finally began work in 1699 on his supplementary catalogue of the loose charters ‘and other parchment and papers, deposited in severall boxes in the Library’, he wrote a letter to Hickeys dated 13 May, in which he indicated that his ‘designe must by no meanes come to the knowledge of two or three Republican Antiquaryes, and who are as great enemyes of the true Church of England, as they are of the Civil constitution’.³⁸ There were other reasons as well for the anxiety, and even haste, with which Smith brought his 1696 *Catalogus* into print, and thereby produced a less than full accounting of the Cotton manuscript collections.

As already noted, the Cotton library did not really become publicly open until its manuscript collections were listed in the first printed catalogue compiled and published in 1696 by Smith; nevertheless, in his preface, Smith pointed to the fact that previous handwritten catalogues had rendered the library somewhat ‘open’ in the past: ‘It must not be supposed that this library is now opened for the first time, territory inaccessible and unexplored, a new literary world that has never been trodden’.³⁹ Smith’s catalogue was not the first written account of the contents of Cotton’s library, but it was the first published

³⁵ Ibid., p. 121.

³⁶ Quoted in Gillam, ‘Humfrey Wanley and Arthur Charlett’, p. 415.

³⁷ See Tite, ‘Introduction’, *Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Cottonian Library*, p. 7.

³⁸ Harris (ed.), *Chorus of Grammars*, p. 293.

³⁹ Smith, ‘To the Reader’, *Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Cottonian Library*, p. 24.

account. Sir Robert himself often compiled book lists, as did his first library keeper from 1625 to 1638, Richard James, and his close friend, the lawyer and book collector John Selden (1584–1654), as well as the Archbishop of Armagh James Ussher (1581–1656) and the historian William Dugdale (1605–86), all of whom were regular visitors to the library. In the 1670s it would appear that a new handwritten classified 'subject catalogue' was compiled (of which there are six existing copies), the purpose of which may have been to advertise the contents of the library to a broader public.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, Smith did not see his task as 'superfluous', given the fact that previous Cottonian bibliographers had not 'dealt with all the books' and also because new donations were continually flowing into the library.⁴¹ Although later cataloguers, such as Joseph Planta, would criticize Smith's catalogue for its lack of comprehensiveness, according to Tite, Smith's catalogue was valuable for two important reasons:

As the only full, printed catalogue of the Cotton manuscripts before the fire of 1731 it gave an account of volumes subsequently destroyed or damaged. Furthermore, Smith wrote for it four introductory essays, including a life of Sir Robert Cotton and a history and analysis of the library, drawing to an extent on family memories which might otherwise have perished.⁴²

Indeed, after the 1731 fire at Ashburnham House, the accounting of the damaged manuscripts requested by the House of Commons, which was undertaken by David Casley, deputy librarian, relied heavily upon Smith's *Catalogus* as a guide.⁴³ Later, some time after 1865, when a fire in a bindery destroyed more manuscripts from the Cotton collection, Frederic Madden, the keeper of manuscripts at the British Museum Library who was responsible for restoring and rebinding many of the damaged Cotton manuscripts, made extensive notes in a copy of Casley's 1732 report, and these notes indicated omissions in Smith's catalogue. Madden's notes make clear that he was rendering his own informal accounting of Cotton manuscripts by comparing Smith's catalogue with earlier and later

⁴⁰ E. C. Teviotdale has surmised that this new catalogue had as its exemplar a 'version' of a paginated 'Emperor order' catalogue compiled by Dugdale during the 1660s and 1670s. Samuel Pepys, an early patron of Wanley's antiquarian researches and career, had a copy of this catalogue, which is now housed in the Pepys library at Cambridge (Magdalene College, Pepys MS. 2427, ff. 33–186). On the classified lists compiled during this period, see Smith, 'To the Reader', p. 24; E. C. Teviotdale, 'Some Classified Catalogues of the Cottonian Library', *British Library Journal*, xviii (1992), pp. 74–87; and Tite, 'The Early Catalogues of the Cottonian Library', *British Library Journal*, vi (1980), pp. 144–57, 'Introduction', *Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Cottonian Library*, pp. 2–3, 7, *The Manuscript Library of Sir Robert Cotton*, pp. 57–70, and *The Early Records of Sir Robert Cotton's Library: Formation, Cataloguing, Use* (London, 2003).

⁴¹ Smith, 'To the Reader', p. 24.

⁴² Tite, *The Manuscript Library of Sir Robert Cotton*, pp. 71–2. In 1722, owing to Cotton House's dilapidated condition, the collections were removed to Essex House, Strand, where they remained for seven years, after which time they were moved once again to Ashburnham House in Little Dean's Yard, Westminster where, in 1731, a fire that started in a stove chimney spread throughout the house and damaged much of the library. On details regarding the history of this fire, the subsequent damage caused to the Cotton manuscripts, and the eventual efforts to repair and conserve those manuscripts, see Andrew Prescott, "'Their Present Miserable State of Cremation': the Restoration of the Cotton Library", in Wright (ed.), *Sir Robert Cotton as Collector*, pp. 391–454.

⁴³ Casley's report, titled 'An Account of such Manuscripts and other Curiosities of the Cottonian Library, as were destroy'd or injured by the late Fire at Ashburnham-House', was included as Appendix B of a 1732 parliamentary report and is reproduced in facsimile, without page numbers, in Tite (ed.), *Catalogue of the Manuscripts of the Cottonian Library*.

lists by Hickes, Wanley, Casley, Samuel Hooper, and Planta,⁴⁴ among others, but Madden clearly gave precedence to the witness of the 1703 Commissioners’ Report in which Wanley was so instrumental after Sir John’s death, and to which I will turn in Part III.

Sir John initially had misgivings about the worth and even the political appropriateness of the catalogue Smith proposed to him.⁴⁵ Smith himself admits as much in his prefatory address, ‘To the Reader’, where he writes that, for some time, Sir John outright forbade the project, ‘partly from fear of unseemly ostentation in showing off his literary wealth, partly for other reasons; first, that no such idea had come into the mind of his grandfather or father; secondly, that no catalogues had yet been printed of the manuscripts collected by the munificence of princes and magnates from every quarter of their dominions and stored in the most famous libraries of England and the rest of the world’.⁴⁶ Smith viewed the production of his catalogue as a public service to both his ‘native land and to literary culture’, and furthermore, he saw his labours in compiling it as ‘some token of respect, obedience and affection with which I am drawn as bounden debtor to the Cotton family and at the same time to kindle a torch to light the way for others interested in eliciting and revealing the antiquities and history of our native land’.⁴⁷ The real impetus for Smith’s project, which Sir John finally relented upon, was most probably a more pragmatic one: not to lag behind the efforts of other compilers led by Bernard at Oxford, who by 1694 were hard at work on their ‘national’ catalogue and were launching multiple forays into the Cotton library.

Bernard’s Catalogue, published at Oxford in 1697, involved the labours of a wide array of scholars, including Wanley, Hickes, and Charlett, all working under Bernard’s supervision. Bernard had been Savilian Professor of Astronomy at Oxford for eighteen years and his catalogue, which came to include surveys of manuscripts extant in libraries throughout England and Ireland, began as a comprehensive survey of manuscripts in the Bodleian in 1692 and grew in scope after that. According to David Douglas, Bernard’s Catalogue was

one of the major achievements of the Oxford school of Saxonists, and it gave great impetus to medieval, and in particular to Old English studies. One of the chief difficulties of all previous investigators into the early medieval history of England had been that any proper comparative study of their chief sources was impossible for them owing to their ignorance of what MSS. existed, and where they were to be found [...] it was thus that *Bernard’s Catalogue* introduced a new period in the comparative study of Anglo-Saxon texts.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Samuel Hooper produced *A Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Cottonian Library* (London, 1777), arranged not by Emperor sequence but by subject headings, which included corrections made to Casley’s catalogue in a 1756 report submitted to the Museum by two Museum officers, Matthew Maty (first Keeper of Printed Books and eventually Principal Librarian) and Henry Rimius. Joseph Planta, Keeper of Manuscripts at the British Museum from 1776 to 1799, began a catalogue of the Cotton manuscripts in 1793, which was finally published in 1802 as *A Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Cottonian Library, deposited in the British Museum*. See Prescott, “‘Their Present Miserable State of Cremation’”, pp. 397–8, 400–2, and Tite, ‘Introduction’, *Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Cottonian Library*, pp. 9–10.

⁴⁵ In a letter dated 30 June 1687, just prior to James II’s deposition and the subsequent accession of William III, Sir John Cotton wrote to Smith concerning his proposal to publish a catalogue: ‘Truly, Sir, we are fallen into so dangerous times, that it may be more for my private concerns, and the public, too, that the library should not be too much known. There are many things in it, which are very cross to the Romish interest, and you know what kind of persons the Jesuits are’ (quoted in Adams, *Old English Scholarship in England*, pp. 118–19). Smith first proposed the catalogue to Sir John in a letter dated 23 June 1687 (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Smith 59; S.C. 15666, p. 181).

⁴⁶ Smith, ‘To the Reader’, *Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Cottonian Library*, p. 23.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ David C. Douglas, *English Scholars, 1660–1730* (1939; reprint London, 1951), p. 112.

When Smith finally began compiling his catalogue on 13 April 1694, it had been almost seven years since he had first proposed the project to Sir John, and it would be barely two years later that it reached print at Oxford.⁴⁹ Given the sheer volume of manuscripts and loose state papers in the Cotton library, as well as Smith’s daily obligations to library visitors, and the threatening image of Bernard’s assistants attempting to infiltrate one of England’s greatest collections of antique texts, one can imagine that Smith might have rushed a bit in his cataloguing labours. If we take Smith at his own word in his preface, his bibliographic labours were accomplished within the span of only a few months, which, given the library’s contents, does not seem a long enough time for the most thorough work. In that preface, Smith wrote,

Armed with [...] [Sir John’s] authorisation I applied myself eagerly to the laborious task, examined the manuscripts all and sundry with as much care and judgment as I could, and in spite of anxieties on the way proceeded with steady if slow steps along the course till in a few months all was accomplished.⁵⁰

Tite has observed that many of the errors and omissions of Smith’s catalogue are likely due to his dependence upon ‘the previous handwritten catalogues as well as on the contents tables which some of the manuscript volumes carry’,⁵¹ indicating that where Smith perhaps felt he did not have the time to look through all of the manuscript volumes, individual text by individual text, he was willing to assume the thoroughness and precision of previous cataloguers. Smith admits as much in his preface, where he writes, ‘as an honest man not seeking glory on the cheap I must acknowledge with gratitude the great debt I owe to the industry of others, especially Richard James, James Ussher of Armagh and William Dugdale’.⁵² Additionally, Smith pointed out that the value of his catalogue — of its additions to and corrections of the descriptions of texts in previous catalogues — would ultimately have to be judged by those who compared his catalogue ‘with another of which copies are to be found in the hands of men of repute eager for information of any sort about the Cotton treasure’.⁵³ Finally, in his preface to the *Catalogus*, Smith disclaimed responsibility for listing the contents of the library in its entirety, especially as regarded the charters and other

⁴⁹ In his Introduction to his edition of Smith’s 1696 *Catalogus*, Tite indicates that Smith probably began work on his catalogue some time after the launching of Bernard’s project in 1692, which would mean that Smith’s cataloguing efforts would have spanned four years (*Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Cottonian Library*, pp. 7-8). However, in her article on the handwritten classified catalogues of the Cotton library, Teviotdale cites an item in Smith’s own papers (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Smith 59; S.C. 15666, p. 232) that indicates he did not formally begin work on his catalogue until 13 April 1694 (Teviotdale, ‘Some Classified Catalogues’, pp. 86-87, n. 65). I follow Teviotdale’s lead in assessing how much time Smith spent on his catalogue.

⁵⁰ Smith, ‘To the Reader’, *Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Cottonian Library*, p. 24.

⁵¹ Tite, ‘Introduction’, *Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Cottonian Library*, p. 8.

⁵² Smith, ‘To the Reader’, p. 24.

⁵³ *Ibid.* These ‘men of repute’ are most likely the owners of the six classified catalogues conjectured by Tite to have been compiled some time in the early 1670s, and which may have had as their exemplar a catalogue compiled by William Dugdale (see n. 40), and this exemplar may be the ‘another’ catalogue Smith refers to in his preface. The owners of the copies of this catalogue included William Sancroft (Archbishop of Canterbury), Edward Stillingfleet (Bishop of Worcester), Thomas Gale (High Master of St. Paul’s School), and Samuel Pepys (on the identification of the owners of these catalogues, see Teviotdale, ‘Some Classified Catalogues’, pp. 78-9). According to Tite, although no two of these catalogues are identical, they all list the manuscripts under categories such as ‘Libri Historici’ and ‘Of Civil and Canon Law’, provide descriptive entries of the manuscripts, and, with the exception of one list, they all append Emperor references, which would have helped library visitors locate a particular book on the shelves (‘The Early Catalogues’, p. 151).

legal documents:

But you must not expect a detailed account of all the charters, diplomas, letters and other documents contained in monastic records and other collections, of which so vast a supply exists dealing with affairs both domestic and foreign that a thick volume would be needed to enumerate their bare titles. No man could accomplish such a task single-handed unless he devoted many years to it.⁵⁴

Smith refers to Bernard's project in his preface with high admiration. Nevertheless, perhaps in an effort to set himself apart and also to protect the Cotton library from too much outside intrusion, Smith writes that what ultimately set his catalogue into motion was the fear, on the part of Sir John, that 'some unscrupulous bookseller with more regard for profit than equity should take advantage of the impunity on which such dishonesty usually can count to thrust on the literary world even in his lifetime an unauthorised edition incomplete in many places and crammed with the foulest errors'.⁵⁵ Furthermore, Smith indicated that it was Sir John himself who insisted that the catalogue 'should be published separately, unconnected with any other, and should not be added as an appendix to another's work'.⁵⁶ In this way, Smith smartly expressed deference to the work of other cataloguers while also insisting upon his stature as the most fit cataloguer of the Cotton collection, and upon the status of the library as a unique entity unto itself. We know, in fact, that in addition to getting his catalogue into print a year before Bernard's, Smith was also doing his best to impede Bernard's assistants from drawing upon his work, for he only allowed Wanley, in April of 1695, a brief glance at one leaf of 'the latter part of his accurate Catalogue of the Cotton MSS',⁵⁷ and he would not allow Charlett to make use of his work-in-progress at all; consequently, there is no inclusion of Cotton manuscripts in that volume.⁵⁸ Furthermore, when Wanley first gained entry into the Cotton library on 19 April 1695, three days after his initial meeting with Smith in which he glimpsed that 'one leaf' of Smith's catalogue-in-progress, he noted in his letter to Thomas Tanner, dated 19 April 1695, that 'Dr Smith [did not] bring his Catalogue along with him'.⁵⁹ Clearly the territory of literary history was something worth guarding and staking a claim upon, even while the chief cataloguer could insist on the necessity of his task as simply the logical extension of a library that already belonged 'not to a single family but to the whole nation'.⁶⁰

As historically significant as the publication of Smith's *Catalogus* was and as valuable as it is even today in helping us to trace the history of the Cotton library and its manuscript collections, it still possessed enough flaws and omissions to make it incomplete and therefore to render certain texts, by virtue of their omission or mis-description, inaccessible and even invisible (*Beowulf* is one such example of a text Smith failed to list, which I will address in Part IV). According to Planta, in his preface to his 1802 catalogue, the number of articles listed in Smith's catalogue 'does not much exceed 6,200 which [...] is not a fourth part of the contents', and further instances of omissions 'greatly diminish the utility of the

⁵⁴ Smith, 'To the Reader', p. 24.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 23. Tite has written that Sir John 'was persuaded to agree by the threat of an unauthorised, and doubtless inadequate, publication of one of the privately-owned classified catalogues of Cotton manuscripts. Such a publication was made the more likely because of the cataloguing of other collections which was then in progress and which appeared in print in 1697 over the name of Edward Bernard' (*The Manuscript Library of Sir Robert Cotton*, p. 71). And I would argue that Smith himself perceived Bernard's project as somewhat of a professional threat; it was therefore a sharp spur to Smith's bibliographic labours from 1694 to 1696.

⁵⁶ Smith, 'To the Reader', pp. 23-4.

⁵⁷ See Wanley's letter to Thomas Tanner, 16 April 1695 (Heyworth (ed.), *Letters of Humfrey Wanley*, pp. 12-13).

⁵⁸ See Heyworth (ed.), *Letters of Humfrey Wanley*, p. 12, n. 4.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 14.

⁶⁰ Smith, 'To the Reader', *Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Cottonian Library*, p. 23.

Catalogue’.⁶¹ When Smith compiled his catalogue, the Cotton manuscript collection numbered 958 volumes and when the 861 surviving volumes were brought to the British Museum shortly after its foundation and establishment at Montagu House in 1753, many of those volumes were lost or damaged.⁶² According to Prescott, early estimates overstated the actual damage, since many of the manuscripts originally listed as lost or burned or spoiled were simply ‘beyond the reach of eighteenth-century conservation technology but were successfully restored during the nineteenth century’, and ‘only thirteen manuscripts were utterly destroyed in the Cotton fire, mostly from the Otho press’.⁶³ Nevertheless, the fact that Smith did not document even a quarter of the documents bound within 958 of the Cotton manuscript volumes is certainly a telling indication of the gaps in Smith’s catalogue, some of which, as I have noted above, Smith willingly admitted as deficiencies to be remedied later. It should be noted, too, that some of Smith’s omissions were purposeful and intended to indicate items that had gone missing. In his preface, Smith wrote to his readers, ‘You will share my regret and be both amazed and distressed to find, as is easily apparent from gaps in the catalogue, that many books today are missing, but frequent precedent shows that even literary treasure is vulnerable to threat [...]. If only the borrowers or their heirs into whose hands the books came had the honesty to make amends!’⁶⁴ Nevertheless, even with these admissions, Smith’s catalogue leaves something to be desired by way of comprehensiveness and detail of annotation. But, as Tite has indicated, Smith’s catalogue was the first attempt at a full account to appear in print prior to the 1731 fire and therefore provided an invaluable record of volumes subsequently damaged or destroyed. Further, Planta’s catalogue contains many of its own omissions in relation to Cotton manuscripts that, in 1802, were recoverable but still in need of restoration, yet were listed by Planta as ‘lost’, and therefore, as Tite reminds us, ‘For a knowledge of Planta’s omissions, Smith’s catalogue is [...] essential (amended in the specific instance of destroyed Anglo-Saxon manuscripts by Wanley’s vital work in Hickes’s *Thesaurus*)’.⁶⁵

Many of the omissions in Smith’s catalogue can most likely be attributed to natural oversights due to the library’s overcrowded arrangements, the sheer number of manuscript codices and volumes of (often disordered) state papers, and the fact that some codices contained hundreds of discrete items, as well as to Smith’s flagging physical energies and the pressure he must have felt to complete his project somewhat speedily (perhaps, too speedily). Perhaps sensing the criticism that would inevitably come his way, Smith did complain in a letter to Hickes, dated 27 June 1696, that he wished he had never sent his ‘papers’ to Oxford, for ‘Some of which they have altered and mangled; and the rest they have printed very carelessly and uncorrectly, suffering several gross mistakes to pass, contrary to the plaine writing of the copy: an index of which I shall bee forced to print for my own vindication’.⁶⁶ Smith’s *Catalogus* was nevertheless a stupendous achievement, especially when we consider that in addition to compiling his bibliography, he was chiefly responsible for overseeing, without an official appointment or monetary compensation, the day-to-day upkeep and operations of the library, which included attending to the needs of

⁶¹ Planta, *Catalogue*, p. xiv.

⁶² According to the ‘Narrative of the Fire which happened at Ashburnham-House, Oct. 23, 1731, and of the Methods used for preserving and recovering the Manuscripts of the Royal and Cottonian Libraries’, compiled by the Rev. William Whitson the younger, the clerk in charge of the Westminster Chapter House records, ‘The number of Manuscript Volumes, which the Cottonian Library consisted of before the late Fire, was 958: Of which are lost, burnt, or intirely spoiled, 114, and damaged, so as to be defective, 98’ (this narrative is included as Appendix A of a 1732 parliamentary report and is reproduced in facsimile, without page numbers, in Tite (ed.), *Catalogue of the Manuscripts of the Cottonian Library*).

⁶³ Prescott, ‘“Their Present Miserable State of Cremation”’, in Wright (ed.), *Sir Robert Cotton as Collector*, p. 392.

⁶⁴ Smith, ‘To the Reader’, *Catalogue of the Manuscripts of the Cottonian Library*, p. 24.

⁶⁵ Tite, ‘Introduction’, *Catalogue of the Manuscripts of the Cottonian Library*, p. 11.

⁶⁶ Harris (ed.), *A Chorus of Grammars*, p. 162.

regular visitors. Furthermore, he managed at the same time to devote some of his spare vigour to writing and publishing polemical pamphlets, such as *A Discourse concerning Divine Providence, in Relation to National Judgments* (London, 1693) and *Two Compendious Discourses, the One concerning the Power of God, the Other about the Certainty and Evident of a Future State* (London, 1699), as well as scholarly works, such as *De Graecae ecclesiae hodierno statu epistola* (London, 1698). Finally, flawed though it may have been, Smith’s *Catalogus* provided an invaluable starting point for such future cataloguers as Wanley and Planta,⁶⁷ who would be instrumental in correcting some of Smith’s oversights and thereby opening up the collection even further. In this sense, Smith contributed in an important way, if even unwittingly, to the nascent project of comparative ‘union’ bibliography for which Wanley would spend much of his career arguing strenuously. Smith himself indicated that ‘dull and crude though it be and hastily put together’, the readers of his catalogue would find in it ‘literary treasures beyond price exceeding all their hope and expectations’,⁶⁸ and in this claim, he was not entirely mistaken.

III. When He Was Found to Differ, He Had Seen Them — The 1703 Inspection

Wanley, always a prodigious and ambitious schemer of grand projects, in addition to working on Bernard’s Catalogue while an assistant at the Bodleian, also spent a good portion of his early career compiling his own catalogue of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts extant in English libraries, which led to more forays into the Cotton as well as other libraries in the late 1690s and early 1700s, and ultimately resulted, as noted earlier, in his *Catalogus Historico-Criticus*, published in 1705 as Volume Two of Hickes’s *Thesaurus*.⁶⁹ Wanley’s aspirations as a paleographer and scholar were many — at various times he contemplated producing an edition of the Anglo-Saxon Bible, translating Old English scriptures, publishing a new edition of Edmund Gibson’s *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, compiling all the different alphabets of the world, writing a history of printing, and even composing the life of Cardinal Wolsey. But perhaps his most ambitious, never fully realized, plan was to write a *Res Diplomatica* for England (Wanley’s famous ‘Book of Specimens’ — now Longleat House, MS. 345).⁷⁰ In a letter written to Smith dated 20 June 1697, Wanley explained that he had initially been so assiduous in requesting permission to view the Saxon charters in the Cotton library because he wanted ‘to trace the Greek and Latine letters from the oldest Monuments of antiquity now extant, as the Marbles and Medals to the MSS. and so down to the present age [...]. I am not in hast with my design, which I know will co[st] many years time, and the trouble of a personal view of every bo[ok] in Capital letters in Europe, &c. yet after all, if nobody shal in that time have prevented me, I may have a second vol. de re

⁶⁷ According to Tite, Planta’s catalogue ‘is still, for want of a successor, the standard guide available to the modern scholar’ (‘Introduction’, *Catalogue of the Manuscripts of the Cottonian Library*, p. 9). According to Prescott, however, Planta’s catalogue, as well as Smith’s, ‘had both, within fifty years of their publication, ceased to be accurate guides to the collection they describe. The 1731 fire reduced Smith’s catalogue overnight to the status of a historical document: an indispensable guide to the contents of the collection before the fire but no longer an up-to-date working catalogue. Planta’s inadequate treatment of burnt and missing manuscripts was a glaring deficiency in his work. An even more serious fault, however, was his failure to distinguish between manuscripts lost in the fire and those already noted (by Wanley) as wanting in Smith’s 1696 catalogue. Some of these were lost to the Library as a result of loans and exist elsewhere. Others may simply have been phantoms which never existed’ (‘Their Present Miserable State of Cremation’, p. 432).

⁶⁸ Smith, ‘A History and Synopsis of the Cotton Library’, *Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Cottonian Library*, p. 56.

⁶⁹ Wanley’s 1705 *Catalogus Historico-Criticus* has been reproduced in facsimile as volume 28 in the series *English Linguistics: 1500–1800* (Menston, 1970).

⁷⁰ On Wanley’s ‘Book of Specimens,’ see Simon Keynes, ‘The Reconstruction of a Burnt Cottonian Manuscript: the Case of Cotton MS. Otho A. P’, *British Library Journal*, xxii (1996), pp. 113–60.

Anglorum diplomatica'.⁷¹ Although Wanley often professed a desire to travel throughout Europe, he never left the confines of England. His *Catalogus Historico-Criticus*, undertaken with Hickeys's blessing, was one of his greatest achievements.

In a letter written to Charlett on 19 October 1699, Wanley laid out his original plan for the *Catalogus Historico-Criticus*:

In one word, if Dr Hicks will accept from me a Catalogue of all the Saxon MSS that I know of in England, I will do my endeavor to restore many (hitherto) Anonymous Tracts to their proper Authors; will specific particularly, whatever has been printed & what not; with a multitude of Remarks & Observations that I have not met with in the former Edition of his book. With this Catalogue, I shall annex the Specimens of the Characters of the most Considerable MSS. of the languages of the Northern Nations, as the Gothic, Francic, Langobardic, & Islandic, besides the Saxon, with Specimens of MSS. in Welsh, Cornish, Scotch & Irish.⁷²

Hickeys did accept, with enthusiasm, and Wanley would begin with a survey of the libraries closest to home, at Oxford and Cambridge, and then, after Hickeys wrote several letters to the Bodleian essentially begging and pleading for Wanley to be given a six-week leave,⁷³ he moved on to the Cotton collections, where he would labour, off and on, from August of 1700 through July of 1701, returning again in 1702 to view the charters. Through all of this, Wanley was always struggling with Smith's tight control of the presses' contents. In fact, the structure of Wanley's inventory of Cotton manuscripts in his catalogue would seem to indicate that there were numerous constraints upon Wanley that made it impossible for him to produce a bibliography of Cotton manuscripts following the usual Emperor pressmark sequence, although he did provide a 'Syllabus Bibliothecarum' that listed the manuscripts (in all the libraries he surveyed) in their usual shelflist order, with page numbers designating where they could be located in his catalogue.⁷⁴ One reason for this structure might have been the pressure placed upon Wanley by Hickeys and one of his chief overseers on the *Thesaurus*, Edward Thwaites (Queen's College, Oxford), who preferred to print sheets of the *Catalogus* as soon as they were written, and oftentimes would not even allow Wanley the time he wanted to make corrections.⁷⁵ According to Harris, 'As the printing of the *Catalogus* was begun before the manuscript reached completion, and because of the financial need for the printer, Edmund Bush, to keep working, the press tended to devour more copy than Wanley could produce'.⁷⁶ In addition, Hickeys would often write to Wanley while he was in London to request favours that, although scholarly in nature, did not

⁷¹ Heyworth (ed.), *Letters of Humfrey Wanley*, p. 62. Wanley is referring here to Mabillon's *De re diplomatica*.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 140.

⁷³ See Harris (ed.), *A Chorus of Grammars*, pp. 323–8.

⁷⁴ For the connections between the most probable reconstruction of the arrangement of the presses in Cotton's library at Westminster and the pressmark ordering of the contents of the pre- and post-1696 catalogues of that library, see Tite, *The Manuscript Library of Sir Robert Cotton*, pp. 83–99.

⁷⁵ During the time of the inception and compilation of his *Thesaurus* (1690s to 1700s), Hickeys, as a non-juring episcopal priest, was, on occasion, a wanted man, especially after Queen Mary's sudden death in 1694, and therefore he lived a mainly 'fugitive existence, hiding at times in London and then again in the country houses of conservatives or occasionally Jacobites' (Harris, 'Preface', *A Chorus of Grammars*, p. xi). Hickeys relied heavily upon 'antiquaries' at Oxford, such as Charlett and Thwaites, to oversee the compilation of the *Thesaurus* for him and to shepherd it into print. On this point, see Harris, 'Introduction', *A Chorus of Grammars*, pp. 31–52.

⁷⁶ Harris, 'Introduction', *A Chorus of Grammars*, p. 92.

directly contribute to the catalogue.⁷⁷ The somewhat pell-mell ordering of the Cotton manuscripts catalogue (pp. 183–265 in the *Catalogus Historico-Criticus*), where Wanley begins with the Julius press (A, C, and E shelves), then moves to Caligula (A shelf), followed by Otho (B shelf), Tiberius (A shelf), Faustina (A shelf), Cleopatra (B shelf), Vespasian (D shelf), Vitellius (D and C shelves), then back to Otho (C shelf), then over to Nero (A shelf), and then back to Tiberius again (B shelf), indicate that Smith, and not Wanley himself, was likely prescribing (and even hampering) Wanley’s movements through the collections.⁷⁸ That Wanley’s *Catalogus* is as comprehensive and fully annotated as it is, despite everyone’s best efforts to distract him, bears testament to Wanley’s bibliographic and cognitive powers (a point to which I will return in Part IV), but it would not be until Sir John’s death in 1702 that Wanley would finally be accorded some of the respect he deserved as an expert bibliographic scholar, while at the same time, he was still pulled back.

As I have already indicated, Wanley had visited the Cotton library several times prior to its closing upon Sir John Cotton’s death in 1702, and he had taken note of the Anglo-Saxon manuscripts he viewed while there, as well as copying out portions of them — initially out of a general antiquarian curiosity to view the collections, then as part of his interest in the paleography of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, and later as part of his efforts to compile his *Catalogus Historico-Criticus*. But it was only after Sir John’s death that the library really became fully accessible to him, when he was commissioned in 1703, along with Matthew Hutton and John Anstis, by the Parliamentary-appointed Trustees of the Cotton library (one of whom was Robert Harley) to inspect and report on the library’s holdings. Their subsequent report, completed on 22 June of the same year, amounted to an emendation and slight enlargement of Smith’s 1696 *Catalogus*. Smith himself, having always refused as a non-juror to take oaths of allegiance, and having lost his patron, was essentially alienated from the Trustees, and shortly after he helped to bury Sir John at the family seat in Conington in Huntingdonshire, a warrant was served upon him by two of the Trustees to give up his keys to the library. Smith did not initially give up the keys, and for a time he assisted in the Commissioners’ inventory, all the while lobbying the Trustees to consider retaining him as keeper. Eventually, he was locked out.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ On the continual requests to hurry his sheets for the press, as well as Hickeys’s piling on of additional chores while Wanley was in London, see the letters between Hickeys, Wanley, Thwaites, and William Elstob in Harris (ed.), *A Chorus of Grammars*, pp. 333–51.

⁷⁸ The pressmark order that Smith followed in his catalogue, and that would have been most conducive to producing a guide, not only to the collection’s contents but also to the location of those contents within the architectural space of the Westminster library itself, was: Julius, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero, Galba, Otho, Vitellius, Vespasian, Titus, Domitian, Cleopatra, and Faustina, with miscellaneous codices deposited in various locations being listed last (see Tite, *The Manuscript Library of Sir Robert Cotton*, pp. 83–99). As noted previously, it was Thomas James, first Keeper of the Bodleian, who, with his *Ecloga Oxonio-Cantabrigiensis* (1600), produced the first printed ‘union’ catalogue in England, but because he also organized his catalogue in shelflist order, while at the same time providing a series of classified lists and indices, he also produced the first printed catalogue in England that allowed a reader the means to find a manuscript both by author and/or subject and also by shelf location (see Clement, ‘Thomas James’s *Ecloga Oxonio-Cantabrigiensis*’, pp. 13–19). In this sense, his 1600 *Ecloga* is an important, often unacknowledged, predecessor to Wanley’s 1705 *Catalogus Historico-Criticus*, and given the leisure James had to progress through the shelves at Cambridge at his own pace, his *Ecloga* is actually more orderly than Wanley’s (although it has to be admitted that no one surpassed Wanley for comprehensiveness or comparative detail).

⁷⁹ Regarding the matter of the keepership of the Cotton library after Sir John’s death (a position in which Wanley was also keenly interested) and the machinations surrounding the ultimate decision to award it to William Hanbury, husband of Sir John’s granddaughter and one of the Trustees, see P. L. Heyworth, ‘Thomas Smith, Humfrey Wanley and the Cottonian Library’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 31 August 1962, p. 660.

According to Tite, the commissioners essentially supplemented Smith's catalogue in three distinctive ways: they 'included a brief list of manuscripts added to, recovered by and missing from the library since the publication of Smith's catalogue. Secondly, they counted the number of folios in all the manuscript volumes, correcting the numbers given in the volumes themselves; and thirdly, they drew up a handwritten list of charters and coins as, in effect, an appendix to Smith's catalogue'.⁸⁰ One could argue that Wanley's annotations of Smith's catalogue in 1703 amounted to a revised catalogue of the Cotton collection, while also constituting an important component, as regards Cottonian Anglo-Saxon materials, of his 1705 *Catalogus Historico-Criticus*.⁸¹ Wanley was an inveterate bibliographer of the Cotton collection, for even on his first visit to the library in April 1695, before the publication of Smith's *Catalogus* and his acquaintance with Hickes, he had noted the omission of a book in the catalogue of Saxon manuscripts in the Cotton library that Hickes had appended to his *Institutiones grammaticae Anglo-Saxonicae* (Oxford, 1689).⁸²

As with all of his projects, Wanley envisioned a much more comprehensive accounting of the contents of Cotton's library than he was able or even allowed to undertake at the time. According to Heyworth, 'Wanley concerned himself deeply with this inspection, and differed from his colleagues, and especially Smith, over the question of how detailed it should be. Wanley was in favour of an inspection so minute that it would have amounted, in fact, to a recataloguing'.⁸³ In a letter he wrote to Harley dated 19 May 1703, Wanley expressed his anxieties over producing a less than full survey of Cotton's manuscripts, and also laid out his own plan for how he believed the survey should be handled: it would include a more detailed accounting of the loose charters and coins and also incorporate anything and

⁸⁰ Tite, 'Introduction', *Catalogue of the Manuscripts of the Cottonian Library*, pp. 10–11.

⁸¹ An original copy of Smith's *Catalogus* that belonged to Robert Harley can be found in the Bodleian Library (Add. MS. D. 82; S.C. 30308), and this is the copy upon which Wanley and his two associates based their work (which work they also entered into two other copies of Smith's printed catalogue: now BL, Add. MS. 46911 and BL, Department of Printed Books, shelfmark 125.1.11). Wanley's own copy of Smith's *Catalogus*, dated 17 April 1698, can be found in the Bodleian Library (Gough London 54; S.C. 18041), as can Smith's own working copy with corrections in his hand (Smith MS. 140; S.C. 15738). I am indebted to Tite's edition of Smith's 1696 *Catalogus*, which is reprinted from Harley's copy, for these details.

⁸² Wanley to Thomas Tanner, 16 April 1695 (Heyworth (ed.), *Letters of Humfrey Wanley*, p. 13). Interestingly, Hickes lamented the fact that his listing of Saxon manuscripts in the Cotton library appended to his *Institutiones* had been undertaken without benefit of an actual visit to the library 'at an appropriate time for examining the collection', and therefore his catalogue was 'uncompleat' (Harris (ed.), *A Chorus of Grammars*, p. 85). According to Smith, in 'A History and Synopsis of the Cotton library', one of the four prefatory essays included in his *Catalogus*, Hickes's 'imperfect list' was 'taken from a faulty copy' (*Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Cottonian Library*, p. 48). Further, Smith wrote that Hickes 'would have thrown a more accurate light on these books if he had been able to handle and cast an eye upon them. But at the time that he visited London to compile a careful inventory the noble (Sir John) Cotton was absent in the country, and as the religious duties to which he had to attend did not permit a longer stay in town he was unable to get even a glimpse of the treasure and was obliged to his grief to return home from the ill-fated journey without accomplishing the purpose he had at heart' (ibid.). Hickes most likely attempted a visit to the Cotton library in 1688, when he was at Oxford working on his *Institutiones*, and Smith might not have yet been asked by Sir John to receive library visitors when he was in the country, although he and Sir John had been associated, both personally and professionally, since at least 1687, if not sooner (see Harris (ed.), *A Chorus of Grammars*, pp. 24–7 and Tite, *The Manuscript Library of Sir Robert Cotton*, pp. 70–2).

⁸³ Heyworth, 'Thomas Smith, Humfrey Wanley and the Cottonian Library', p. 660.

everything Smith had omitted — an immense undertaking. Regarding his concerns, he wrote:

If the Books in the Library were to only have their Leaves Number'd and to be Compar'd with Dr Smith's Catalogue (as some of the Inspectors do Apprehend) the work will be at an end, as soon as they can find all things in their Places, which the Doctor ha's specified. But I understand your Honors Commands otherwise: it seem'd to me, as if your Honors could do nothing till you knew justly the Number & Quality of all that is Vested in You by the Act of Parliament; and this cann[ot] be known but by correcting the Errors in the Doctors Catalogue (if any such be found) and by supplying all that is *wanting* therein.

Sir, I am fearful that there may arise some difference in Opinion among the Inspectors, as to what is *Wanting* in Dr Smith's Catalogue. [...] and I shall reckon (till I see Your Honors judge otherwise) the passing over of the Particular Charters in the Chartularies, and the particular Letters, Records, &c. in very many other Volumes, to be another great Omission, in that elaborate Work.⁸⁴

Barely two weeks after composing this letter, Wanley drew up a draft of a proposal to the Trustees, dated 29 May 1703, in which he outlined in even more detail his plans for cataloguing the library's contents (a plan that would not really bear full fruit until Wanley's *Catalogus Historico-Criticus*).⁸⁵ Clearly indicating his anxiety (again) that the inspection would not be thorough enough, Wanley wrote that ‘the said Wanley humbly craves leave, before such Inspection be begun, to lay before their Lordships a Scheme or Method conformable to which he supposes the said Catalogue may be made compleat [...]. This Catalogue, as ‘tis humbly conceived, ought to be so carefully & exactly compos'd, as to make for the Honor of Personages of their Dignity & Distinction’. As regards his ‘Scheme’, Wanley proceeded to lay out eleven major tasks (see Appendix A), which included numbering the leaves of each manuscript, writing out the first and last words of individual treatises numbering over four pages (which would allow for comparative searching of multiple copies of particular works), describing each manuscript ‘as whether it be in Folio, Quarto, & whether [it] is written upon Parchment or Paper; whether the language be English, Saxon, Latin, French, etc.’, taking special note of whether or not certain manuscripts were remarkable for their antiquity, who owned them and which other libraries they belonged to previously (to help prevent forgery), listing the title and date of each deed, charter, and legal document, cataloguing all the transcripts of public records as well as all the letters ‘written by Sovereign Princes, Nobles, Statesmen, scholars’, and sorting through the loose charters to separate them by ‘Original, Copies, or Counterfeite’, among other tasks.

Ultimately, the Trustees, as well as Wanley's associate commissioners, saw and felt otherwise, and Wanley had to satisfy himself with the Commissioners' making brief mention in their very short report of items wanting or missing in Smith's catalogue,⁸⁶ as well as making handwritten annotations in the margins of Harley's copy of Smith's *Catalogus* in order to indicate the number of folios in each manuscript volume (these annotations are in Wanley's hand) and appending a list (not even close to exhaustive) of loose charters and other miscellaneous items not included in Smith's 1696 *Catalogus*. Wanley must have been sorely disappointed, for he had been intent for a long time upon improving Smith's catalogue. In a letter of introduction for Wanley that Hickes wrote to Harley in 1701, two years prior to Wanley's pleas to Harley and the Trustees above, Hickes mentioned that Wanley would be carrying to Harley a copy of Smith's catalogue, and Hickes particularly

⁸⁴ Heyworth (ed.), *The Letters of Humfrey Wanley*, pp. 213–14.

⁸⁵ This draft proposal can be found in BL, Harley MS. 7055, ff.19r–20v, and is reproduced here as Appendix A.

⁸⁶ This report, without page numbers, is reproduced in facsimile in Tite (ed.), *Catalogue of the Manuscripts of the Cottonian Library*.

wanted Harley to notice, in Wanley’s handwritten amendments to Smith’s work, a ‘specimen of his [Wanley’s] skill, and not to detract from the Doctor’s performance, for which the world hath been very much beholden to him. I wish he [Wanley] might be encouraged to take a catalogue of the whole library, as he hath taken a part of it for me, and that indeed would be a catalogue truly worthy of it’.⁸⁷ Even before Sir John’s death, then, and barely five years after the publication of Smith’s catalogue, there is already a perception, on the part of an expert in matters of early English bibliography, that Smith’s catalogue is not as ‘full’, complete, or precise as it could be, and Wanley is presumed to be the better bibliographer.

Wanley himself was not averse to making such a claim on his own behalf, for in a letter he wrote to Harley (dated ? January 1703) regarding advance sheets of his *Catalogus Historico-Criticus* that he had dedicated to Harley, he wrote, ‘I know, Sir, that you will compare this Catalogue, not only with Dr Smiths, but with the Great Cat. Printed at Oxford [Bernard’s], & with Dr Hicces’ in the first Edition of his Grammars. And do humbly intreat you to believe, that when I am found to differ from them, that I had seen them, but actually having the MS in my hands, I thought it better to put it as it is’.⁸⁸ What we also see here is that Wanley was not averse to claiming that other cataloguers (specifically, Hicces, Bernard, and Smith) had, perhaps, skimmed in their duties to actually lay their hands on each and every manuscript that they had catalogued (and therefore relied, too often in Wanley’s opinion, on previous handwritten catalogues, or even hearsay). Wanley’s faith in his own prodigious bibliographic powers can be seen even earlier, in the draft of a proposal he made in 1700 (? May or June) to Samuel Pepys requesting funding to travel to the libraries of France, Italy, and Germany in order to inspect and give an account of their holdings of valuable manuscripts. Wanley must have been well aware that many catalogues and encyclopedic compendiums of these libraries already existed, but he was bold enough to assert that there was no one book that gave an overview of all the libraries of ‘every Countrey of Europe’, and what catalogues did exist, Wanley asserted, were ‘vastly imperfect, by reason of want of Diligence or Judgement in those who undertook to describe them’. Furthermore, he asserted that previous traveller-cataloguers did not take the time to assess the true condition of a library’s holdings, so much as they relied upon the accounts of ‘their Keepers, or as they found them described, tho’ injudiciously, in other Writers: so that the Accounts we have of them, are still extreamly lame and defective’.⁸⁹ Although Pepys was committed to Wanley’s scheme, and other influential patrons, such as Hans Sloane, were in favour of it, the trip was never undertaken, possibly because Hicces did not want to lose his best assistant on the *Thesaurus*. According to Kenneth Sisam, Hicces was originally supportive of Wanley’s prospectus but later opposed it because ‘he was afraid England would lose a genius to France’.⁹⁰ Wanley’s appetite for projects of encyclopedic bibliography was clearly voracious, and the discouragement of his desire for a thorough inspection of the holdings of just one library in his own backyard must have been extremely frustrating for him.

It would appear that, in addition to his fellow commissioners and even Harley, Smith was also an impediment to Wanley’s desire for the fullest possible accounting of the Cotton collections, for in a note dated 31 May 1703, Wanley wrote that Smith ‘would Agree that we should Inspect the Books: that is, compare the Numbers inscribed in them, with his Printed Catalogue; but would not then permit us to Examine the Books, as to the Tracts they comprehend, or allow any access to the Charters at all, saying that the former would take up more time than his hea[l]th would permit, & that the Latter ought not to be done ‘till a Library-keeper be appointed’.⁹¹ Of course, Wanley had been agitating to get access to the

⁸⁷ Harris (ed.), *A Chorus of Grammars*, p. 349.

⁸⁸ Heyworth (ed.), *Letters of Humfrey Wanley*, p. 206.

⁸⁹ Humfrey Wanley, ‘Visiting Foreign Libraries’ (draft), BL, Harley MS. 5911, f. 2; reprinted in Heyworth (ed.), *Letters of Humfrey Wanley*, pp. 473–5.

⁹⁰ Kenneth Sisam, *Studies in Old English Literature* (1953; reprint, Oxford, 1962), p. 265.

⁹¹ Quoted in Kevin S. Kiernan, *Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript*, rev. edn (Ann Arbor, 1996), p. 92.

charters well before his role as inspector for Harley, and Smith probably believed that Wanley’s interest in cataloguing the charters had as much to do with Wanley’s collaboration with Hickes on the *Thesaurus* as it had to do with simply fulfilling an obligation to Harley or to Parliament. Moreover, Wanley’s interest in having an annotated catalogue of the charters directly threatened Smith’s own scholarly ambitions. In a letter to Hickes, dated 24 April 1702, written after Hickes had asked Smith several times if Wanley could be allowed into the Cotton library to inspect ‘the Saxon, and Latin-Saxon charters in the drawers to Henry II time’,⁹² Smith rebuked Hickes for assuming that he had already promised to let Wanley look over the charters, and with a certain amount of hurt, Smith replied: ‘How ready I have been to assist you in your present studyes and designe, as to what concernes the Library so farr as I could, or ought, without prejudicing myself, and letting your Clerk or Amanuensis runne away with that credit, more or less, which is onely and wholly due to my discovery, I leave you seriously and conscientiously to reflect upon’.⁹³ In the same letter, Smith indicated that he had already given himself the ‘great trouble of looking over the old parchments and papers and digesting them into a Catalogue, in order to print it with other things, as a Supplement to a more full and correct edition of my printed Catalogue of the MSS. books’.⁹⁴ Smith considered it ‘an unreasonable demand to let Wanley ransack in the boxes by himselfe at pleasure, and take a list of every thing there, which was valuable in order to print it in your booke’.⁹⁵ Smith did relent to let Wanley view the Saxon charters, but he did not think it prudent to let him view the Latin charters, as he considered those to belong more rightly to his own survey.

After Hickes requested to come to the library a second time in the spring of 1702 to take an account of Saxon charters that he believed were missing during the previous visit, in a letter dated 27 May 1702, Smith agreed to the return visit with the following codicil: ‘I have reserved to myselfe, in my collection of Charters, which hereafter I intend to publish, two or three Charters of K. William I. and II. and one of St. Edward the Confessor that I may deserve somewhat well of the neighbouring Abbey-Church and give a jure proffe of my industry [...] to the Trustees especially, and indeed to the world, according to the obligation I layd upon myselfe in my preface to the printed Catalogue’.⁹⁶ Indicating either dead seriousness or duplicity regarding the charters which Hickes apparently had claimed Smith had shown him at some earlier date but had not been able to produce on his and Wanley’s prior visit, Smith wrote in the same letter: ‘I write this at large to prevent any new disgust or dissatisfaction, if I cannot at present comply with your desire of transcribing the two or three Charters abovementioned [the charters of William I and Henry I]: which if I did shew to you formerly, as you say, I have shewed them to none in England besides’.⁹⁷

Wanley did manage, as noted earlier, to add an appendix to the Commissioners’ 1703 report that included a listing of loose charters and other miscellanea, such as coins — this listing, however, was not comprehensive or detailed, a fact due, we can be fairly certain, to time constraints placed upon the commissioners by the Trustees and by Parliament. Kevin Kiernan has written that ‘both Wanley and Smith had to bend a little’, for the books, charters, coins, and other antiquities ‘were all duly inspected, despite Smith, but the other inspectors managed to rein Wanley’s more elaborate plans for perfecting Smith’s catalogue’.⁹⁸ Indeed, they reined in his plans so tightly that the ultimate usefulness of the appendix is compromised by the fact that the listing of loose charters is completely lacking in any kind of detail of annotation, for the commissioners saw fit only to mention ‘the Name

⁹² Hickes to Smith, 22 April 1702; Harris (ed.), *A Chorus of Grammars*, p. 365.

⁹³ Harris (ed.), *A Chorus of Grammars*, pp. 364–5.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 365.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 370.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 371.

⁹⁸ Kiernan, *Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript*, p. 93.

of the Person granting the Charter (for to have been more particular would have taken up a longer space of time) & if he was a King of England, we say so and no more, lest that in hast we should mistake in saying which William, Henry or Edward it was, the Charters themselves not shewing it’.⁹⁹ Complicating the question of the appendix’s ‘fullness’ even further is the delightful image of Smith hastening off to his private rooms with loose charters under his arms, for the commissioners also noted that Smith ‘w[as] pleas’d to own, that he has carried off to his own Lodgings those [charters] which he found to be of the greatest value, for their Security & better Preservation, where he now keeps them safely by him’.¹⁰⁰ We can imagine that, in addition to considering the safety of the charters, Smith was also wanting to hold in private reserve the primary texts for the ‘volumes of analects’ of ‘unexamined and inaccessible’ papers he had promised to publish in the preface to his 1696 *Catalogus*.¹⁰¹

In the machinations and anxieties surrounding the inspection of Cotton’s library after Sir John’s death, there was obviously a great deal at stake — politically, professionally, and otherwise. As Harley was an avid and voracious bibliophile as well as a key player in Queen Anne’s government (Speaker of the House of Commons from 1701 to 1705, Secretary of State from 1704 to 1708, and Lord Treasurer from 1711 to 1714),¹⁰² it is likely he had a special interest in a less than detailed inventory of antique manuscripts and state papers that he may have been hoping to eventually acquire for his own library, the first block purchase for which was made in 1705 when Harley acquired for £450, with Wanley’s assistance, Simonds D’Ewes’s collection of books and manuscripts on English history.¹⁰³ It had been well known for a long time that Cotton’s library held important state papers and documents relating to domestic and foreign affairs, and when a supposedly seditious tract was discovered there in 1629, Sir Robert himself was briefly jailed and then locked out of the library until his death in 1631.¹⁰⁴ The Cotton collections, therefore, would have always been deemed invaluable by someone as invested as Harley was in public affairs, both in front of and behind the scenes. Adding to the mix of politics and librarianship that pulled the directive for an inventory in different directions, Hanbury, Smith, and Wanley were all wrangling behind the scenes for the keepership, and both Smith and Wanley had deeply vested publishing interests in the collections as well. Finally, Wanley would have recognized in Harley the most powerful patron with whom he had yet been connected, and the one person best situated to help him achieve his most grandiose ambitions; therefore, Wanley would have been very keen on impressing Harley with his skills as a consummate librarian

⁹⁹ Matthew Hutton, John Anstis, and Humfrey Wanley, ‘Letter’ (appended to parliamentary committee report, dated 22 June 1703); reproduced in facsimile, without page numbers, in Tite (ed.), *Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Cottonian Library* (this letter is in Wanley’s hand, according to Tite).

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Smith, ‘To the Reader’, *Catalogue of the Manuscripts of the Cottonian Library*, p. 24.

¹⁰² On Harley’s role as a key player in Queen Anne’s government, as well as his role as a closet advisor to Anne, see Brian W. Hill, *Robert Harley: Speaker, Secretary of State and Premier* (New Haven, 1988) and Geoffrey Holmes, *British Politics in the Age of Anne*, rev. edn (London, 1987), pp. 185–216, 322–44, 440–2.

¹⁰³ See Murphy, ‘Humfrey Wanley on How to Run a Scholarly Library’, pp. 149–50 and C.E. Wright, ‘Humfrey Wanley: Saxonist and Library-Keeper’, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, xlvi (1960), pp. 109–10.

¹⁰⁴ See Tite, ‘Introduction’, *Catalogue of the Manuscripts of the Cottonian Library*, pp. 5–6. As regards the volume of state records held in the library, in his ‘synopsis’ of the Cotton library that Smith included as one of his prefaces to his *Catalogus*, he wrote that ‘kings, councillors, magnates and other men of the highest nobility employed as magistrates, in embassies or on other public service emptied their shelves and desks willingly to share their treasures with Cotton on the fair terms that he offered’ (‘A History and Synopsis of the Cotton Library’, *Catalogue of the Manuscripts of the Cottonian Library*, p. 56). Further, according to Smith, they ‘emptied their shelves and desks’ of the original letters of emperors, kings, and princes ‘sent to England at various times,’ the personal letters and wills of English kings and queens, treaties and agreements, matrimony contracts, and ‘items concerning the whole apparatus of political affairs’ (*ibid.*).

and manuscript expert. When Wanley became Harley’s first full-time library keeper in 1708, these ambitions, if not always fully realized, did have a broader field of play, and Wanley was finally, as Michael Murphy has written, ‘in his true *métier*’.¹⁰⁵

IV. I Can Find Nothing Yet of Beowulph — Wanley’s 1705 *Catalogus Historico-Criticus*

Both before, during, and after the tasks associated with the 1703 inspection of Cotton’s library, Wanley was always hard at work on his *Catalogus Historico-Criticus*, and one can assume that Wanley’s entree into the library as an Inspector was one of the most important factors in that catalogue’s comprehensiveness as regards the Cottonian Saxon materials. Indeed, to this day, Wanley’s catalogue as a whole inspires a certain wonder. In the Introduction to his *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon*, N. R. Ker called Wanley’s catalogue ‘a book which scholars will continue to use, or neglect at their peril. His opinion on any given matter will always be worth knowing’. Further, Ker wrote that ‘Less than a dozen manuscripts containing a considerable amount of OE [Old English] have been found in English libraries since Wanley wrote’.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, Wanley’s insistence on a comparative bibliography, to be undertaken by one hand (and we might add, one mind), combined with Hickes’s patronage of the scheme, led to the production of one of the greatest achievements of English union bibliography. It would not be overstating the case to say that, without Wanley’s catalogue of Cotton manuscripts, the field of *Beowulf* studies, to cite just one example, might have turned out very differently.

In one of the several letters Hickes wrote to the Bodleian on Wanley’s behalf in 1700, he argued how essential Wanley’s assistance was to ‘the Catalogue of the old Septentrionall MSS in the Cotton library’, and how he viewed it as ‘the good Providence of God to me [...] when the help of such a person, was to be had, the like of whom perhaps is not in any other place of the world’.¹⁰⁷ In the same letter, Hickes further made the case for the sagacity of Wanley’s proposed method (and also represented himself, perhaps disingenuously, as its co-conceiver):

We have consulted much together about it, and agreed upon certain rules in making of it, which cannot be observed, unlesse the severall particular Catalogues be taken all by one hand. One rule is to make it a relative, or Compared Catalogue of all the particular Catalogues, as for Example. We shall observe that the Saxon Heptateuch, which my learned freind Mr. Thwaites published from the Bodleian MS, once belonged to the Cotton Library. That some part of St Lukes, and Johns Gospell, which once belonged to those of Matthew, and Mark in the Cotton Library, but now are in the Bodleian, are now at Bennett College Library, and that in the publick Library at Cambrige, is the remaining part of St Chads Book in Lychfeild [...]. Another rule we have agreed on is to compare MSS. that have the same, or the like titles to see whether they are the same, or different, if they are the same which is the ancients, the perfecter, the nobler and to note the differences of hands, in which they are written¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Murphy, ‘Humfrey Wanley on How to Run a Scholarly Library’, p. 148.

¹⁰⁶ N. R. Ker, ‘Introduction’, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford, 1957), p. xiii. Given the fact that Ker’s *Catalogue* (reprinted with a supplement in 1990) is still considered an essential reference guide to Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, his statements regarding the worth of Wanley’s catalogue are still germane.

¹⁰⁷ Hickes to (?) Martin, 26 April 1700; Harris (ed.), *A Chorus of Grammars*, p. 323).

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 324.

This letter had an immediate effect, as it was followed the very next day by a letter from Lord John Somers (Vice-Chancellor at Oxford) to Charlett, urging him to convince the Bodleian curators 'to dispense with Mr Wanleys absence in order to promote this learned design'.¹⁰⁹ These curators, as indicated earlier, did not acquiesce immediately, prompting more letters from Hickes, but by June, Wanley was lodged in Westminster.

Although Hickes had indicated in a letter to Charlett dated 27 April 1700 that part of the urgency in Wanley obtaining his leave from the Bodleian was that 'our finishing the Catalogue of the Septentrionall MSS [...] must be ready for the presse in 3 moneths or els the presse must stand still',¹¹⁰ Wanley's catalogue would not actually reach the stages of its final printing for another four-and-a-half years, mainly because, wherever possible, despite the pleas from Hickes and Thwaites to hurry, Wanley took his due time, but not without suffering for it.¹¹¹ Barely three weeks after arriving in London, Hickes was pressing Wanley for the sheets for his prior cataloguing work at the Bodleian and Cambridge libraries. In a letter dated 21 June 1700, Hickes wrote:

Sir it would be a great ease to my mind, and make me study, and sleep better, could I hear that you were preparing for the presse. I have a fresh call from mr. Thwaites, if the presse stand still you undo me, you have promised both by word, and writeing it shall not wait for you, and it is not without reluctance to my nature, and to the great opinion I have of your probity, and freindship that I am so presseing from time to time and particularly now.¹¹²

In the same letter, Hickes also asked Wanley to visit him to 'delineat' a forged charter, to take a copy in the Cotton library of a Saxon account of all the hides of land in England, and to locate the desk in the Cotton library where the old register of Ely could be found. It would seem that, regardless of Hickes's continual praising of Wanley's talents and also his bibliographic methodology, both to Wanley himself and to others in high places, he did not fully appreciate the actual labours involved in such a comprehensive comparative project, which, in addition to Wanley's individual researches, also involved the assistance of young scholars such as William Elstob (Fellow of University College, Oxford), whom Wanley had conscripted to check the printed sheets against his copy, and to collate variants between the Bodleian and Cambridge manuscripts. Despite the constant harangues, Wanley's stubborn genius prevailed, and he sent his 'copy' when he was good and ready to send it, despite occasional assurances to the contrary. In a letter Hickes wrote to Wanley, dated 6 August 1701, Hickes admonished, 'Mr. Thwaites complains of you in a letter, I received yesterday, for not sending the copy you promised to send immediately to the presse'.¹¹³ We can imagine he may have also occasionally rushed things to the press in order to get some of the screaming monkeys off his back, and also felt cheated as a result. After receiving yet another

¹⁰⁹ Somers to Charlett, 26 April 1700 (Harris (ed.), *A Chorus of Grammars*, pp. 325-6).

¹¹⁰ Harris (ed.), *A Chorus of Grammars*, p. 327.

¹¹¹ It would appear, too, that Wanley often lay low when Hickes was in town looking for him, for there are many letters from Hickes to Wanley complaining that Wanley is never where he apparently claims he is going to be when Hickes comes calling. These letters indicate either one of two things: that Wanley was indeed, as Hickes often claimed, derelict in his already agreed-upon obligations to wait upon Hickes, or, that Wanley was avoiding Hickes in order to spend more time on his catalogue. Given the finished work itself, I would argue for the latter interpretation. On this point, see Hickes's letters to Wanley in Harris (ed.), *A Chorus of Grammars*, pp. 334, 381, 392-3.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 333.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 351.

letter from Thwaites, dated 17 June 1703, urging more copy, Wanley wrote this to himself in the margins of Thwaites's letter:

Here once for all, I shall putt down a few Words. When Dr. Hickes desired me to make that Catalogue, he promised me 3 pounds p Sheet, as Printed. I had not (to the best of my Remembrance) any more money than 65 pounds of Him [...]. As to the Continual Clamor I had from Dr. Hickes & Mr Thwaites for more Copy, more Copy. I observe, 1 They seldom, if ever, were at such a stand for want of Copy, as was pretended. 2 Mr Thwaytes sent not up the Sheets of the Catalogue, as they were printed off, which he promised to do. This Neglect disabled me from making the References necessary in many places. A Defect easily visible in the Catalogue. 3. Although my Copie was own'd to have been written as fairly & distinctly, as any Copie that ever came to the Theater-press; they have printed my Catalogue very uncorrectly; indeed, with Thousands of Faults of their own making. I wrote therefore for my Copie, in Order to giving the Errata, that the Careful Reader might amend the same in his own Book: but after about Fourty several Demands, could not receive so much as one Line.¹¹⁴

Regardless of Wanley's own misgivings about his catalogue, a brief glance at his entry for Cotton Vitellius A. XV, the tenth-century manuscript which contains *Beowulf*, alongside Smith's entry for the same manuscript (see figs 2, 3) reveals the rich benefit we have received from Wanley's dogged zeal for comprehensiveness, and therein also lies a tale within a tale.

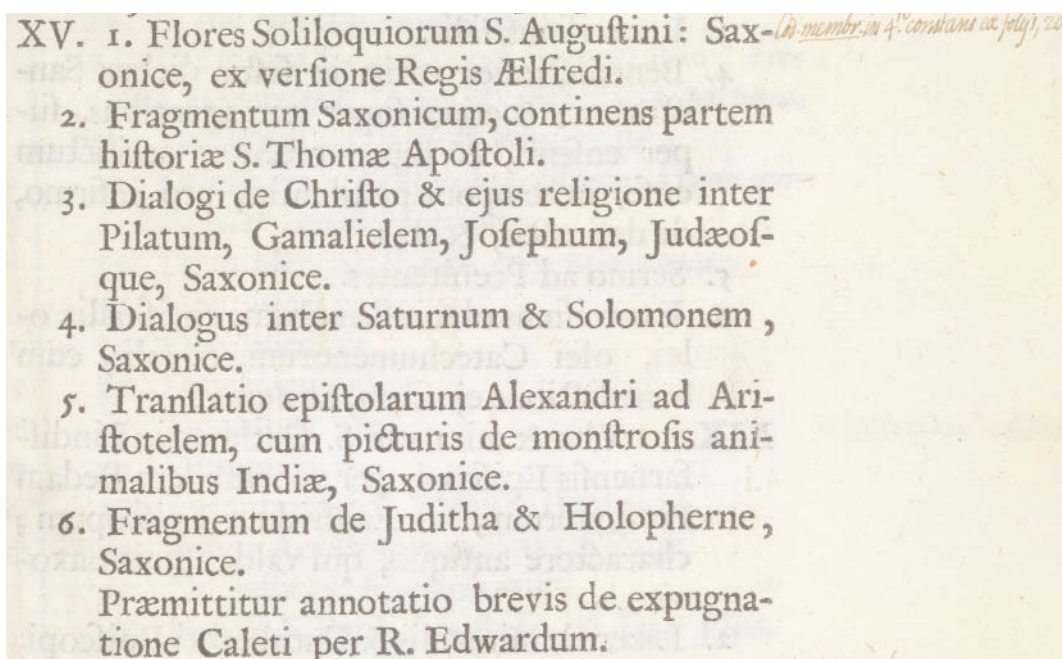


Fig. 2. Thomas Smith, *Catalogus librorum manuscriptorum bibliothecae Cottonianae* (Oxford, 1696), p. 83, entry for the *Beowulf* manuscript (Cotton MS. Vitellius A. XV). Manuscript note by Wanley.

¹¹⁴ Harris (ed.), *A Chorus of Grammars*, p. 383.

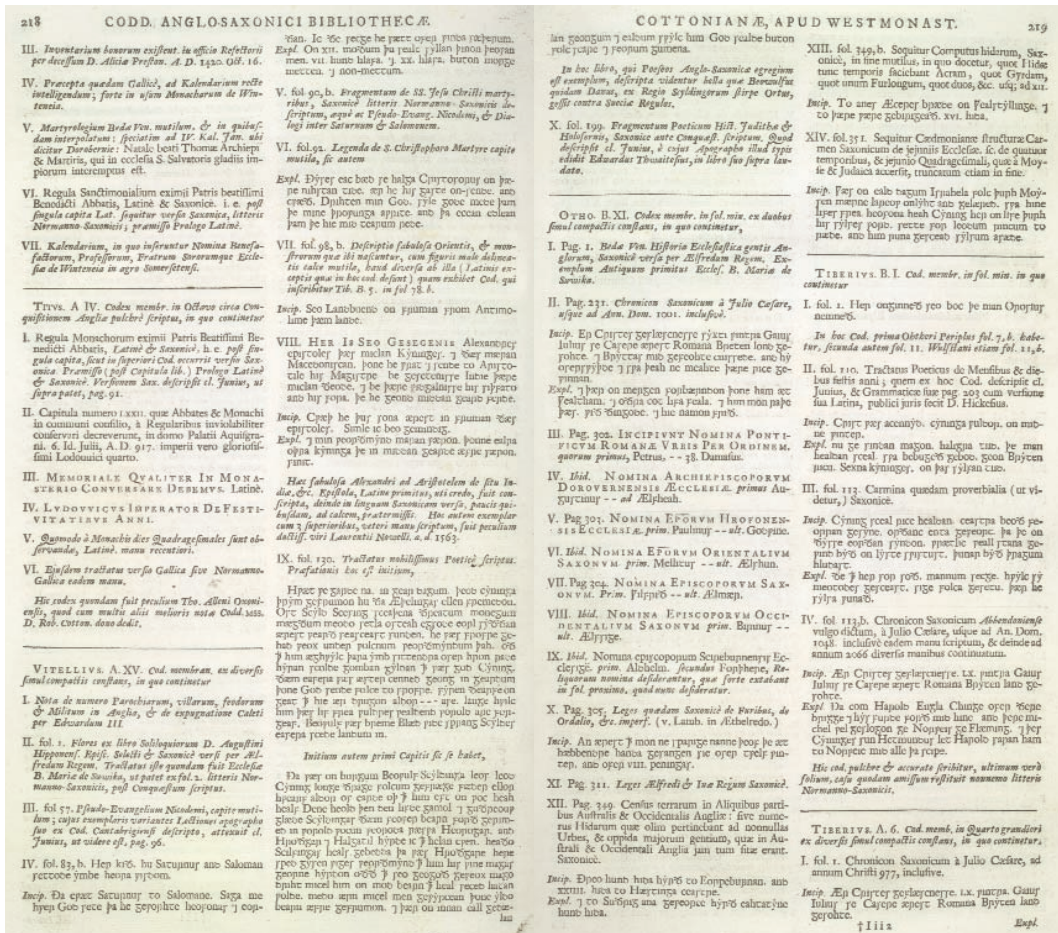


Fig. 3. Humphrey Wanley, *Antiquae Litteraturae Septentrionalis Liber alter. Seu Humphredi Wanleii Librorum Vett. Septentrionalium, qui in Anglice Bibliothecis extant, nec non multorum Vett. Codd. Septentrionalium alibi extantium Catalogus Historico-Criticus, cum totius Thesauri Linguarum Septentrionalium sex Indicibus* (Oxford, 1705), pp. 218–19, entry for the *Beowulf* manuscript (Cotton MS. Vitellius A. XV).

In what is considered the first ever mention of *Beowulf* in English letters, Hickeys noted to Wanley while Wanley was hard at work in the Cotton library in 1700, 'I can find nothing yet of Beowulph'.¹¹⁵ It was Wanley who first noted that Smith had omitted mention of *Beowulf* in his description of Cotton MS. Vitellius A. XV. This was an omission that may have been unavoidable, given Smith's reliance to a certain extent, as earlier noted, upon catalogues written by previous library keepers, such as Richard James, who had appended to Vitellius A. XV a table of contents, 'Elenchus contentorum,' that omitted direct mention of *Beowulf*, but which left a gap between '6. Defloratio siue translatio Ep[isto]larum Alexandri ad Ar[istote]lem cum picturis prodigiosorum' and '8. Fragmentum Saxon: de Iuditha et Holoferne', which is exactly where the text of *Beowulf* is situated in the manuscript today.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Hickeys to Wanley, 20 August (?) 1700; Harris (ed.), *A Chorus of Grammars*, p. 337.

¹¹⁶ Kiernan has written that the gap indicates that James 'had failed to describe a text that appeared at this point' and that 'Either James had no idea how to describe Beowulf or the poem was temporarily out of the codex' (Kiernan, *Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript*, pp. 73–4). Kiernan's supposition that *Beowulf* might have been a separable codex-within-a-codex (see *Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript*, pp. 133–50) has been highly contentious among scholars of the Vitellius A. XV manuscript. See, for example, the essays collected in Colin Chase (ed.), *The Dating of Beowulf* (Toronto, 1981), and Richard Clement, 'Codicological Consideration in the Beowulf Manuscript', *Essays in Medieval Studies*, i (1984), pp. 13–25.

Wanley’s correction of Smith’s oversight was not without its own blind spots, albeit these blind spots, generously amplified in Wanley’s annotations, led directly to the poem’s recovery. It was Wanley’s somewhat misleading descriptive entry for *Beowulf* as an Anglo-Saxon poem about Danish and Swedish wars¹¹⁷ that ultimately brought the poem to the attention of the Danish antiquary and archivist Grímur Jónsson Thorkelin, who was responsible for at least one of two transcripts of the poem made in the late 1700s which record close to 2,000 letters since lost to the original owing to the crumbling edges of the manuscript.¹¹⁸ In a letter he wrote to the Swedish scholar and theologian Erik Benzelius (1675–1743), dated 28 August 1704, Wanley mentioned that ‘some years ago I found a Tract in the Cottonian Library (omitted in Dr Smiths Catalogue) written in Dano-Saxon Poetry, and describing some Wars between Beowulf a King of the Danes of the Family of the Scyldingi, and some of your Suedish Princes’.¹¹⁹ *Beowulf* was not the only text omitted by Smith in his description of Vitellius A. XV. Kiernan has noted that ‘The Nowell Codex, the part of Cotton Vitellius A. XV containing *Beowulf* [...] consists of five items: a *St. Christopher* fragment, *The Wonders of the East*, *Alexander’s Letter to Aristotle*, *Beowulf*, and the *Judith* fragment. Yet Smith’s catalogue records only two items: *Translatio epistolarum Alexandri ad Aristotelem, cum picturis de montrosis animalibus Indiæ* and *Fragmentum de Juditha & Holopherne*’. Further, Kiernan writes that it is ‘not surprising [...] that Thorkelin failed to include Cotton Vitellius A. XV when he first prepared the list of manuscripts he wanted to study at the British Museum. Fortunately, he later supplemented his list by reference to more reliable sources than Smith’.¹²⁰ Those ‘more reliable sources’ were Wanley’s *Catalogus Historico-Criticus* and Casley’s *A Catalogue of the Manuscripts of the King’s Library: An Appendix to the Catalogue of the Cottonian Library* (1734).

Kiernan has pointed out that there was yet another Danish antiquary who had taken note of *Beowulf* before Thorkelin, the eighteenth-century National Archivist Jakob Langebek (1710–75), whose *Scriptores Rerum Danicarum Medii Ævi* entailed extensive research trips to Sweden, Finland and Russia, as well as England. According to Kiernan, ‘Langebek twice cites Wanley’s catalogue description of *Beowulf* in Volume I of *Scriptores Rerum Danicarum*, the second time marveling that no Englishman has yet produced an edition’. Although Thorkelin saw his own antiquarian researches as an extension of Langebek’s work, Kiernan has asserted that ‘there is decisive evidence that Thorkelin first learned about the poem the same way Langebek did, by reading Wanley’s catalogue’.¹²¹ Thorkelin was also responsible for the *editio princeps* of the poem, published in 1815 as *De Danorum Rebus Gestis . . . Poëma Danicum Dialecto Anglosaxonica*, an edition which can be said to have helped launch the international scholarly juggernaut of *Beowulf* criticism which, in turn, ultimately came to serve as one of the foundations of modern academic English studies.

¹¹⁷ Specifically, Wanley wrote, ‘In hoc libro, qui Poeseos Anglo-Saxonicae egregium est exemplum, descripta videntur bella quæ Beowulfus, quidam Danus, ex Regio Scyldingorum stirpe Ortus, gessit contra Sueciæ Regulos’ (*Catalogus Historico-Criticus*, p. 219).

¹¹⁸ When Thorkelin first travelled to England in the late 1700s, he was Regius Professor of Antiquity at the University of Copenhagen and Keeper of His Majesty King Christian VII’s Privy Archives. Christian VII (1766–1808) had granted Thorkelin a stipend in 1785 so that he could ‘travel through Great Britain, Ireland, and the Isles, for two years in order to collect and record all the extant Danish and Norwegian Monuments, Deeds, and Documents [...] on his promise to deliver on his homecomings to Our National Archive and the great Library all the Collections he in such manner may procure’ (Kevin S. Kiernan, *The Thorkelin Transcripts of Beowulf* (Copenhagen, 1986), p. 2). Although Thorkelin was granted leave to travel for two years from 1786 to 1788, he actually stayed abroad until 1791, and it was during this time that he would have worked with the *Beowulf* manuscript (*ibid.*, p. 4).

¹¹⁹ Heyworth (ed.), *Letters of Humfrey Wanley*, p. 239.

¹²⁰ Kiernan, *The Thorkelin Transcripts*, pp. 5–6.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 2–3.

V. A Spring From Which to Quench Our Thirst — Conclusion

What is ultimately of greatest interest in the relationship, often fractious, between Smith and Wanley is the productive convergence of the efforts of two bibliographers, both aiming for comprehensiveness within the framework of a specific place and genre, yet both also limited by the very human impossibility of achieving total control and mastery over the archive of manuscripts in question. Nevertheless, when Smith’s and Wanley’s catalogues are taken together as a collation, the contents of Cotton’s collection are more fully realized, and once-invisible texts are revealed to the gaze of the journeying scholar who then carries that text into the larger world. Likewise, the convergence of various projects of encyclopedic compendia — specifically, Langebek’s *Scriptores Rerum Danicarum*, Thorkelin’s journeys to Europe as National Archivist of Denmark to collect ‘Danish and Norwegian Monuments, Deeds, and Documents’ (inspired and compelled by Langebek’s example), and Wanley’s *Catalogus Historico-Criticus* (with Smith’s catalogue as prototype for the Cotton collection) — created a situation whereby the first transcripts and printed edition of *Beowulf* were made possible, without which modern *Beowulf* scholarship would be a very different animal indeed. And when Smith’s and Wanley’s catalogues were collated with each other and with later catalogues, as they were by such bibliographers, scholars, and librarians as Casley, Hooper, Planta, Josiah Forshall, and Madden, they had the effect of revealing even more texts that had earlier been somewhat hidden by poor cataloguing or had been deemed lost or mislaid.¹²² Moreover, when these particular texts then came to the attention of antiquaries and historians who were interested in producing scholarly editions of antique literatures (such as John Mitchell Kemble, who produced the first English edition of *Beowulf* in 1833), those editions often had the subsequent effect of preserving manuscripts that, owing to inadequate storage and handling and even neglect, were in a continual state of decay and always under the threat of crumbling altogether. In fact, Vitellius A. XV, which was badly burned along its outer edges in the 1731 fire, remained extremely vulnerable to damage caused by physical handling until the middle of the nineteenth century when Madden and his assistant Henry Gough gave it a new binding and framing.¹²³

¹²² According to Prescott, Hooper’s catalogue was deemed ‘of limited assistance to readers grappling with Smith and Casley’, and that is why the Trustees asked Planta to investigate the matter, which led to the production of his new catalogue in 1802 (“‘Their Present Miserable State of Cremation’”, in Wright (ed.), *Sir Robert Cotton as Collector*, p. 400). Forshall, while Assistant Keeper of Manuscripts at the British Museum Library in 1826, was eager to try and restore the ‘mere lumps of wax and cinder’ that Planta had locked away with the Harley charters in a garret room close by his study, having marked the damaged manuscripts either ‘deest’ or ‘desideratur’ in his 1802 catalogue. According to Prescott, ‘Forshall’s work led to the recovery of a number of important Anglo-Saxon manuscripts which were described by Planta as either lost or unusable’ (ibid., p. 405). Among Forshall’s discoveries were the unique manuscript of Alfred’s prosimetrical translation of Boethius (Cotton MS. Otho A. VI), 131 leaves from the Old English translation of the *Pastoral Care* (Cotton MS. Tiberius B. XI), and two eleventh-century manuscripts of Aelfric’s Homilies (Cotton MS. Vitellius C. V and D. XVII). Madden, Keeper of Manuscripts at the British Museum Library from 1837 to 1866, was responsible in 1837 for making a list of all the Cotton manuscripts damaged in the fire of 1731, with special attention being paid to the ‘fragments’ remaining in ‘the old Charter Room’ that had basically been neglected by previous Keepers, even Forshall. According to Prescott, Madden’s inventory was ‘masterly’ and ‘more comprehensive than any previous survey of the manuscripts, since he described all the volumes damaged in the fire, not just the worst affected’ (ibid., pp. 410–11).

¹²³ According to Prescott, Vitellius A. XV may have received a new binding in the 1790s under Planta’s supervision, a binding, moreover, that may have further damaged the brittle manuscript, and which did not provide protection for the fire-damaged edges of the vellum leaves. It was not until 1845, when Madden and Gough unbound the manuscript, inlaid each vellum leaf in a paper frame, and rebound the codices, that the *Beowulf* text was finally preserved against the decay caused by its physical handling in the Manuscripts Students’ Room. On more particular details regarding Madden’s and Gough’s methods, see Prescott, “‘Their Present Miserable State of Cremation’”, pp. 409–19.

According to Kiernan, 'the charred and brittle outer edges of Cotton Vitellius A. XV. were left unprotected for over a century, and many letters and words continued to crumble off from the time of the first transcripts in the late 18th century until the 19th-century binding prevented all further losses'.¹²⁴

Both Smith and Wanley, I would argue, instinctively understood the value of bibliographic collation even as they strove — often mightily — to claim the cartography of the territory of the Cotton library as most rightfully their own. Smith, as we have seen, acknowledged his debt to previous, handwritten catalogues when compiling his 1696 *Catalogus*. And even though Smith's account of the manuscripts did not meet Wanley's exacting standards, it was the path laid out by the series of Smith's omissions that Wanley would have needed to follow to execute the plan he originally presented to Harley, for if the books in the library were *only* to be compared with Smith's catalogue in order to see that the manuscripts Smith had identified were indeed 'in their Places', then, as Wanley had indicated to Harley, the work would soon be at an end. The best catalogue, for Wanley, could only be realized in the identification of the places where Smith's catalogue and the library's holdings did not agree. In other words, the key approach would be to look at all the manuscripts that could be found and note which ones had been omitted in Smith's published inventory, which meant a fresh, yet also historically-mindful inspection to be undertaken in the messy borderland between the library whose collections were always in a state of somewhat disorderly and rundown flux¹²⁵ and the catalogue that was always 'in progress'. That Smith also understood this is clear in one of his catalogue's prefatory essays, 'A History and Synopsis of the Cotton Library', where he concluded that it happens sometimes with territory recently discovered or traversed with light foot and fleeting eye that the traveller is fired with desire for fuller knowledge and reaches eagerly for a history of the little-known country to describe to him — however roughly and imperfectly — its situation, charms, advantages, fields, woods, streams and manners of its inhabitants, till at last, instead of taking on trust what he has read as the truthful evidence of an eyewitness he conducts a more careful and diligent exploration in person and learns more than he ever conceived in his mind. The same, I have no doubt, will apply to students of ancient history, men of talent and judgement impelled by love of British antiquities, if they pick up and follow the guidance of this synopsis, dull and crude though it may be and hastily put together, unworthy, as I willingly admit, of the dignity of the library.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Kiernan, *Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript*, p. 68. It was Kiernan who first drew attention, with help from Assistant Keepers at the British Museum Library, to the identity of Henry Gough as Madden's helper in the repairing and rebinding of Vitellius A. XV in 1845, which had at one time been erroneously dated between 1860 and 1871 (see Kiernan, *Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript*, p. 69, n. 7). Although Madden's and Gough's paper frames for the Vitellius A. XV manuscript were expertly done, they also had the unfortunate effect of covering over certain letters at the furthest ends of the *Beowulf* text, letters which have since been discerned by Kiernan's and the British Library's use of fibre optic light and medical imaging technology. See Kiernan (ed.), *The Electronic Beowulf* (London and Ann Arbor, 1999).

¹²⁵ By the time of Smith's keepership, Cotton House was in a greatly run-down condition, and when Wanley inspected the library in 1703, he reported that the books, manuscripts, and charters had 'already suffered great hurt, & will be utterly spoiled if care be not taken of them' (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Add. MS. D. 82, f. iii; quoted in Kiernan, *Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript*, p. 67). After commissioning Sir Christopher Wren in 1705 to survey Cotton House and its grounds regarding their suitability as an acquisition by the Commonwealth, the House of Lords reported to Queen Anne in March, 'The place wherein the Library is contained, is a narrow little Room, Damp and Improper for preserving the Books and papers. There is only one Window at each end, and the Arch over one of them in a Ruinous Condition, and ready to fall, as is also the Arch upon which the Room is built' (quoted in A. T. Bolton, 'The House, Library and Garden of Sir John Cotton', *Wren Society*, xi (1934), p. 54).

¹²⁶ Smith, 'A History and Synopsis of the Cotton Library', *Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Cottonian Library*, p. 58.

For both Smith and Wanley, the complete catalogue was always a conceptualization of perfection that lay just out of reach. For Smith, the contents of just one library were overwhelming enough in number to render a truly complete catalogue beyond the individual compiler’s grasp, especially when that compiler lacks an official commission and tenure, and feels harried by both political uncertainties and the threatening intrusions of younger, more vigorous bibliophiles. Further, Smith was understandably reluctant to share his labours for fear of losing his scholarly purview over particular manuscripts and papers, and later, of having to cede his position to another library keeper. Smith, then, worked always against the tide of time and entropy and other, would-be Cotton librarians, but he never pretended, as noted earlier, to be offering in his *Catalogus* a complete listing of the entire contents of Cotton’s collections; instead, he let his readers know that, ‘For the present you can only point a finger at the spring from which to quench your thirst’.¹²⁷ While highlighting his own humility and shortcomings as a cataloguer in his prefatory remarks to his readers, Smith also played down Sir Robert Cotton’s voracious collecting activities by writing that ‘Cotton did not intend to found a universal library: his chief, if not his sole, interest was to obtain books and documents tending in any way to clarify native antiquities, but if by happy chance anything of great value and extreme antiquity, although of different relevance, came his way he did not scorn it’.¹²⁸ As regards the antiquities of England, however, Cotton was certainly aiming for comprehensiveness, just as Smith, regardless of his rhetorical litotes, was certainly aiming to write, on the heels of other, more informal handwritten accounts, the true Cottonian catalogue. One could argue that although Smith’s bibliographic ambitions were never as large as Wanley’s, he continually placed before himself and articulated the goal of a more complete catalogue and thereby suffered all the anxieties attendant upon such a task, anxieties that may have even led him to purposefully hide and withhold documents when other bibliographers were in the library. We can only imagine the personal grief and professional disappointment with which Smith must have viewed Wanley’s re-entry into the library in 1703 as a government inspector and the subsequent loss of his keepership.

Wanley’s desire to survey the Anglo-Saxon manuscripts extant in English libraries (and even, in all of Europe) was initially handicapped by his occupational duties as Assistant at the Bodleian Library and later as Assistant to the Secretary of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and by the shortfalls in his income, such that he did not possess the leisure or capital required for the venture. In the summer of 1700, as noted earlier, Wanley proposed a scheme for visiting the libraries of France, Germany, and Italy in order to ‘examine their manuscripts, collate important texts, take specimens of handwriting, and search for works — particularly cartularies and other monastic records — bearing on English history’ and he ‘solicited and got the approval of nearly a dozen influential people, including the Vice-Chancellor of the University [Oxford], Bodley’s Librarian, four Heads of Houses, Samuel Pepys, and Hans Sloane’.¹²⁹ It could be said that Wanley’s proposal was a unique and valuable prospectus for a kind of national *bibliothèque* of cultural origins; nevertheless, his plans were not realized, and the sting of his obligations was always upon him.¹³⁰ In a letter sent to Arthur Charlett on 19 October 1699 when he was working in the

¹²⁷ Ibid. Edmund Bolton once wrote that Cotton’s library made Paulus Jovius’s library look like a charnel house (quoted in Kevin Sharpe, ‘Introduction: Rewriting Sir Robert Cotton’, in Wright (ed.), *Sir Robert Cotton as Collector*, p. 38, n. 245). Moreover, Tite has written of Cotton’s extensive book collecting activities, which ran not only to acquiring manuscripts that related to English antiquity (out of a general antiquarian interest), but also to vast amounts of state papers and documents, and even to continental and Asian manuscripts, which suggests, in Tite’s mind, that Cotton felt the need ‘to supply the absence of a national library’ (*The Manuscript Library of Sir Robert Cotton*, p. 101).

¹²⁸ Smith, ‘A History and Synopsis of the Cotton Library’, p. 46.

¹²⁹ Heyworth, ‘Introduction’, *Letters of Humfrey Wanley*, p. xvi.

¹³⁰ For a detailed overview of Wanley’s different career appointments, see C. E. Wright, ‘Humfrey Wanley: Saxonist and Library Keeper’, pp. 99–129.

Cambridge libraries, Wanley wrote: ‘Tis 7 weeks since I came hither, and I never wrought harder in my life for 7 weeks together, than I have now done: And yet I have not finished, nor shall I be able to finish this Journey: for Sir Thomas Bodley’s Bell begin’s to sound so loudly in my Ears, that I shall not be quiet, till I’m actually in his Library’.¹³¹

Wanley often struggled in vain to acquire posts that would have been more conducive to his paleographic and bibliographic ventures. Venting his frustration in late 1698 to Hickee concerning his hard work on Bernard’s Catalogue and the short leash on which he felt the Bodleian kept him, he wrote, ‘I have taken pains enough about Dr Bernards Catalogue; but there’s no talk about my going to London, nor do I believe I shall be permitted to set foot therein, in some years’.¹³² At various times in the late 1600s and early 1700s, he sought posts of importance in the Tower Records, the Bodleian, Worcester College, and, as previously noted, in the Cotton library itself after Sir John’s death, none of which he obtained.¹³³ Wanley did visit many libraries — from 1699 to 1702, for the purpose of compiling his *Catalogus Historico-Criticus*, he worked in three college libraries at Cambridge, in the Royal and Cotton libraries in London, in the Royal Society Library at Gresham College, and in the Dean’s library at Canterbury — and many manuscripts were lent to Hickee for Wanley’s use, and therefore, his catalogue was the most comprehensive yet assembled, and to this day is still considered an essential reference guide for the scholar of Anglo-Saxon literature. Nevertheless, Wanley felt some frustration, as earlier noted, at what he perceived as the catalogue’s shortcomings, due to the various occupational hindrances he endured while compiling it. In his letter to Benzelius, dated 28 August 1704 (cited in Part IV), Wanley wrote of his completed catalogue that ‘Some learned men here are pleas’d to like it as it is; but I assure you, Dear Sir, I could have made it much better, if I had had my Time to my self’.¹³⁴ Indeed, as earlier noted, when Wanley was in London in the spring and summer of 1700 working on the *Catalogus Historico-Criticus*, he was often harassed by Charlett

¹³¹ Heyworth (ed.), *Letters of Humfrey Wanley*, pp. 139–40.

¹³² Wanley to Hickee, 9 November 1698; Harris (ed.), *A Chorus of Grammars*, p. 253.

¹³³ Wanley did, as noted before, eventually take on the keepership of Sir Robert Harley’s library — initially part-time — in 1704. He stayed with the Harley family through Harley’s public disgrace in 1715, when he was imprisoned after the accession of George I, and his impeachment as a Jacobite in 1716 (he was ultimately acquitted). That Harley’s political misfortunes did not hamper his library – building — a task for which Wanley was his chief instrument — is evident in a letter written to Wanley on 10 September 1714 by Dr Tudway, a friend of Wanley’s: ‘I’m very glad to understand [...] that my Lord of Oxford goes vigorously on In furnishing his Library with ev’ry thing that is curious’ (quoted in Wright, ‘Humfrey Wanley: Saxonist and Library-Keeper’, p. 110). On Wanley’s accomplishments as Harley’s library keeper and bibliographer, see Wright, ‘Humfrey Wanley: Saxonist and Library-Keeper’, pp. 109–29 and C. E. Wright and Ruth Wright (eds.), *The Diary of Humfrey Wanley*, 2 vols (London, 1966). Regarding some of Wanley’s professional disappointments, see Douglas, *English Scholars, 1660–1730*, pp. 99–103; Harris (ed.), ‘Introduction’, *A Chorus of Grammars*, pp. 85–96; Heyworth, ‘Introduction’, *Letters of Humfrey Wanley*, pp. xiii–xxi; Murphy, ‘Humfrey Wanley on How to Run a Scholarly Library’, pp. 147–9; and Kenneth Sisam, ‘Humfrey Wanley’, *Studies in the History of Old English Literature*, pp. 259–77.

¹³⁴ Heyworth (ed.), *Letters of Humfrey Wanley*, p. 236.

regarding the dereliction of his duties in Oxford,¹³⁵ and Hickes not only rushed Wanley's work, but also threatened him. In a letter to Wanley dated 21 June 1701, Hickes writes:

This is the last complaint I intend to make to you, the next shall be openly to your friends [...] you know in your conscience that as much time and paines, as you have spent and taken already in [the service of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge] [...] would have finished my Catalogue [...]. It seemes I and my business am to be the sacrifice to all your other undertakeings, and the more I bear, the more I find I may.¹³⁶

Later, in 1703, Hickes employed a more subtle form of intimidation, when he wrote to Wanley, 'I pray you to [...] let me know, when you will bring the rest of your Catalogue, as you purposed to do. I am really uneasy, and afraid to go into company, I am so catechized every where about my book'.¹³⁷ In slightly less subtle tones, Hickes continued in this vein in another letter: 'I need not tell you how long you have delayd from one time to another, and what the consequence of the presses stopping will be. I have already been told by a Lord one of my most generous subscribers, that he heard you retarded the finishing of my work, and did not use me well, both which I denied'.¹³⁸ Wanley's habits of meticulous care in his bibliography and his desire for comprehensiveness in all of his scholarly undertakings (as well as his practical obligation to earn a living) clearly rubbed against the grain of those who would hurry his work, yet also expected great things from him, for which they then would sometimes even take the credit; this is evidenced in the note Wanley wrote to himself in one of Thwaites's letters demanding more copy: 'I furnished him [Hickes] with Transcripts & Citations, which he used almost all over his Book [the *Thesaurus*, vol. i], with an Air of Confidence, just as if he had seen or used the Originals Himself. In like manner, he trump'd up my Notions, as his own'.¹³⁹ The evidence would seem to suggest that when it came to the conception and articulation of the necessity for a universal comparative catalogue in the early modern period, Wanley was the chief (if often underappreciated) conscience of English bibliography.

Returning to that draft of the letter that Wanley wrote on 16 September 1710 dispensing very detailed advice for the renovation and enlargement of the Guildhall Library at St Paul's, he indicated that one of the chief functions of the library keeper should be 'compiling the catalogue and fixing the same in his memory. And as the catalogue is *the life of a* declaration of what is contained in a library, the library keeper should be the index to the catalogue'.¹⁴⁰ Here we have, finally, the image of a desire that, of necessity, always strains the seams of possibility — that the consummate librarian can be both the cataloguer of cultural *memoria*, as well as its indexical mental container, even as the physical archive itself, the library, can never hold in neat, orderly time and space the texts of that *memoria*. This is a paradoxical situation that stretches back to the ancient world where, as Christian Jacob has written, 'the library, as a compartmentalized storage space, was one of the structuring principles of human memory' and Alexandria was 'the first historical situation in which a community of scholars had to face a critical overflow of books, a textual archive whose

¹³⁵ See Gillam, 'Humfrey Wanley and Arthur Charlett', pp. 418–19.

¹³⁶ Harris (ed.), *A Chorus of Grammars*, p. 351.

¹³⁷ Hickes to Wanley, 6 December (?) 1703; Harris (ed.), *A Chorus of Grammars*, p. 391.

¹³⁸ Hickes to Wanley, 20 December (?) 1703; Harris (ed.), *A Chorus of Grammars*, p. 392.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 383.

¹⁴⁰ Reprinted in Murphy, 'Humfrey Wanley on How to Run a Scholarly Library', pp. 152–4.

universality was a factory of entropy and saturation'.¹⁴¹ Even in our electronic age, where texts have been freed from their traditional material existence as books and there is no longer an absolute connection between where texts are housed and conserved and where they are read, nevertheless, the dream of encyclopedism still has us in its thrall, while at the same time, we are still caught, much as Smith and Wanley were, in the flux between an embarrassment of textual riches, entropic decay, and the contingencies of time and place. Smith's and Wanley's cataloguing labours demonstrate that the library, or archive of texts, has always been a dynamic environment of an often overly immense scale, at least when confronted by the individual bibliographer whose quest to catalogue and index the library has, finally, the tinge of the heroic.

¹⁴¹ Christian Jacob, 'From Alexandria to Alexandria: Scholarly Interfaces of a Universal Library', paper presented at conference, 'Interfacing Knowledge: New Paradigms for Computing in the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences', Santa Barbara, California, 8-10 March 2002; <http://dc-mrg.english.ucsb.edu/conference/2002/documents/christian-Jacob.html> (cited 23 November 2002).

Appendix A

[5] 29. May. 1703. 7055. 40

The R^{ts} Hon^{ble} the Trustees by Act of of Parliamt appointed for the Security & Govern-
ment of the Cottonian Library, having been, pleas'd to lay their Commands upon the R^{ts}.
D^r Hutton, D^r Smith, W^m. Anshu Esq^r & Humfrey Wanley for the Inspection of the
Manuscripts & other Rarities extant in the said Library, & for ~~the completing~~ ^{perfecting the Catalogue}
of them, in Order to its being Enroll'd in Chancery, pursuant to the Tenor of the
Act in that behalf made: The said Wanley ~~does~~ ^{humbly} craves leave, before
such Inspection be begun, to lay before their Lordships a Scheme or Method
conformable to which, he supports the ~~said~~ ^{made} Catalogue may be ~~completed~~ ^{made} which also
he does with all Humility submit to be ~~approved~~ ^{approved}, Amended, or Rejected, as their Honors
in their great Wisdom shall think fit.

The Library being furnished with Books, Charters, Coins, Pictures, & other Rarities
to an immense Value; and ^{the} ~~the~~ ^{list or} ~~Catalogue~~ ^{Schedule} of them when Enroll'd by
their Lordships Direction being likely to bear their Honors Names, to be declar'd Authentic,
and ~~for ever hereafter~~ ^{for ever hereafter} to be Consulted & made Use of as such: This Catalogue, as his hum-
bly Conceiv'd, ought to be so carefully & exactly ^{compos'd} ~~compos'd~~, as to ^{make for the} ~~be for ever~~ Honor of Porro-
nages of their Dignity & Distinction; ^{and this} ~~and this~~ cannot be wanting, if the Catalogue is so full
& clear as to give Possority, or those who are Absent, ^{from the Library} a just or sufficient Idea, of all things
now deposited therein, and so particular as to ^{know if any} ~~discover~~ ^{any} thing hereafter (which God forbid)
shall be Taken away, or ~~Changed, or Displaced~~ ^{Changed, or Displaced}.

In Order to these Ends, his with profound Submission Propos'd,

- I. That the Number of Leaves in ~~each~~ ^{every} Book, be presently set down in every Book
wherein they are not already thus Noted.
- II. Since many of these Books do contain divers Treatises in them, independant of one
another; This humbly propos'd, that when any of these Tracts does consist of more than
four Leaves, The two first words of the second Leaf, & the two last words of the Last
Leaf but one, be expressly specified, as well as the Title: for this Observation will not only
shew who the Author, & what the Tract is, but ^{every} ~~and~~ such individual Treatise is thereby
distinguish'd from all other ^{Manuscripts or} ~~copies~~ of it whatsoever.
- III. That this be done to all ~~these~~ ^{single} Books, that contain but one ^{single} Work.
- III. That every Book & Tract be particularly described, as to its bulk, whether it be in Folio,
Quarto, &c. Whether it written upon Parchment or Paper; Whether the Language be English,
Saxon, Latin, French, &c. Particular Notice also might be taken of such books as are re-
markable, for ~~their Beauty~~ ^{regularity}, for being Written Correctly, or ^{regularly} ~~incorrectly~~ in very Good, or very
Bad Hands; for their Antiquity, if very Old: And when the Age of the Book or Tract ~~does~~ ^{is}
~~appear~~ ^{is} of any eminent Person that own'd it; or old Library to which it did formerly belong
~~it should be~~ ^{it should be} ~~carefully~~ ^{carefully} noted, because all these ~~are~~ ^{are} Marks ~~peculiar~~ ^{peculiar}
~~to these~~ ^{to these} ~~Books~~ ^{Books} ~~now~~ ^{now} described; and no ~~Auth^r Original or Antient~~ ^{Auth^r Original or Antient}
~~can be~~ ^{can be} ~~changed~~ ^{changed} for a New one, but the Cheat may be discovered.

Humfrey Wanley, draft proposal for the Catalogus Historico-Criticus. BL, Harley MS. 7055, ff. 19r-20r.

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3. That the Seals of all Charters which do still Remain entire, or in part, be freed from farther Injuries, by being fastned in Wooden Circles, (or within the Rims of little Boxes) ^{like} to those which Sr Rob. Cotton has thus secur'd, to this day.

4. That these Original Instruments, which are single, & ^{keep their} ~~have kept~~ Seals after this manner, be plac'd in Order of Time, (~~with~~ ^{with} regard to the several Nations they belong to) & then Number'd, before they are Catalogued.

5. That all these Charters, Bulls, & other Instruments, be Carefully, & Judiciously noted in the List, as Originals, Copies, or Counterfeits, there being divers of each sort.

6. That the Parties Concern'd, the Maker in brief, & the Date (if there be any) be constantly mention'd.

IX. Their Honors Pleasure is also humbly desired, Whether some Notices ought not to be taken of the Pictures painted in the MSS. especially if they be remarkable for their Antiquity, Rarity, Workmanship, &c.

X. As to the Coins & Medals, it is most humbly conceiv'd that they may not only be ^{placed according} rang'd into their several Series, of ^{as they are Roman, Greek, Greek, Greek} Imperial, Consular, Cities, Kings, British, Saxon, Popes, &c.

2. According to their ^{or} Metals ~~they are~~ ^{God} Silver, & Brass, and this ~~and~~ especially of the Roman Emperors) divided ^{into} the Orders of the 3 Magnitudes: ~~and thus described in his List;~~

3. ^{but} ~~they may be~~ Copies & Counterfeits may be distinguish'd ^{from} by the Originals: and when any of them is Dubious, no sufficient Certainty appearing on either side, they may (if your Honors shall think it most) be Noted as Suspect'd, which may be also done with ^{Dubious} ~~such like~~ Charters, to the Satisfaction of the Publick, who by this means will have a true Notion of what is theirs, and the Value of it; and to the Comfort of him (who ever he be) ^{to} whom your Lordships shall ~~not~~ entrust this invaluable Collection, ⁱⁿ since a just & ^{fair} ~~equal~~ Distinction is made by your Lordships ^{all along} between things Old & New, between things Perfect & Imperfect, & between Originals, Copies, & Counterfeits!

XI. The Heads of the Emperors, Pictures, Weapons, Images of the Heathen Gods, &c. may have each a particular Number sett on them, and so Entred into the List.