

MS 86 of the Fellows' Library, Winchester College:  
Mixed-Use, Mixed Hands, and a Mystery

Though it would be nice to say, with Lucia Dacome,<sup>1</sup> that the eighteenth-century notebook currently shelved as MS 86 in the Fellows' Library of Winchester College was a model of the mind, it is in fact a mess, provoking instead reflections on the many different types of writing which cannot be included in the idea of the commonplace book, however generously you interpret the term,<sup>2</sup> and showing that the frequent essays of advice on record-keeping and indexing

emotions. A passionate poem, beginning plaintively 'Still are you only mine?' and ending 'My world's epitome is you', is footnoted 'By a Gentleman to a Lady, on a slight Acquaintance', but the original subscription is crossed out: so far I can only read 'by a Young Spark', which sounds dismissive, but less so than the crushing verdict of 'a slight Acquaintance'. It is interesting that here the idea of creating a miscellany, or private anthology, has led the writer naturally to follow the

published in 1707: 'When I survey the wondrous Cross, / On which the Prince of Glory died, / My richest gain I count but loss, / And pour contempt on all my pride'.

The user of the notebook who inverted M. H. Hallows' cyphering practice and started from the other end seems to have been primarily preoccupied by religion, in particular, the idea of conversion and salvation. This is most strongly suggested by the careful transcription of the five letters which Anne, Dowager Countess of Rochester, and protective mother of her famous libertine son, wrote to her sister-in-law, Lady St John, describing his last illness and dramatic repentance. Jeremy Treglown in his edition of Rochester's correspondence made his transcription of them (in Appendix II) from a manuscript in the British Library (MS Add. 6269, fol. 33), but it appears that the mid-eighteenth



entry on Rochester, which appears to be anonymous.<sup>20</sup> The 1886 , however, has another candidate, who brings us back to the more Methodist tenor of the hymns of MS 86: Thomas Broughton, divine, secretary to the SPCK from 1743 until his death, in 1777, in— where else?— Hatton Gardens, at the Society's house there.

The 'acknowledged character' of the keeper of this part of the notebook can nevertheless still only be the subject of conjecture. The inclusion of a 'Hymn of St Bernard's to the Holy Jesus', alongside 'Prince Eugene's Prayer', the Rochester conversion letters, and what appear to be some self-penned hymns, suggests a conventional participant in the new religious enthusiasm of the time; some pages of carefully blocked and delineated Hebrew perhaps a desire for deeper biblical study. But these are fitted around the two sets of accounts, as if the writer began and then neglected orderly financial record-keeping, and later, finding some pages conveniently blank, set to work on a new project. This is however clearly not a waste-book, in Francis Bacon's use of the term,<sup>21</sup> as the seventeenth-century documents have been carefully laid-out and, as I suggest, copied with an eye to their photographic preservation. R