

A New Year's Gift from 1600

For much of its history, we know all too little about the daily life of New College School. 'Sixteen poor and needy boys of less than twelve years of age', as the college's statutes dictate, required to sing and serve, need not leave much of a trace: they do not matriculate or graduate, they do not get involved in squabbles over their election or their pay, and, usually, they do not even leave their names behind.¹

So it was a great pleasure to open a volume of two well-known Oxford Aristotelian textbooks from the late Elizabethan period and find a surprising piece of evidence about one young chorister. This is a thick quarto, rebacked, but still in obviously Oxford boards of the period, containing the *Organon* and the *Metaphysics* (both Oxford, 1599) of the well-known Oxford teacher and logician John Case.² The final end-paper of the volume, however, contains a hand-written inscription of presentation on its verso by the author to the Warden of the college, George Ryves, who had only just been elected.³ The book is presented as a New Year's gift: a new book in a new year to a new warden, dated 1 January '1599' (really 1600, as in the old calendar the year only finally changed its number on Lady Day, or 25 March).⁴ Here is the inscription:

New College Library, Oxford, BT3.260.5

¹ For what we do know, see Matthew Jenkinson, *The Choirboys of New College* (Oxford: Shire Publications, 2013).

² The volume is now New College Library, Oxford, BT3.260.5, and for the books see Falconer Madan, *The Bodleian Library*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1895–1931), I, 45. Ryves bequeathed only his folios to the College if not already owned; but in his lifetime. For Case see primarily Charles B. Schmitt, *John Case* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1983), and now Richard Serjeantson, 'Theology and the Arts Course in Late Elizabethan Oxford: An Unknown Treatise on Church Government by John Case', in *Theology and the Arts Course in Late Elizabethan Oxford*, ed. by Anna Marie Roos and Gideon Manning (Dordrecht: Springer, 2022).

³ For Ryves (pron

Amplissimo doctissimoque viro Doctori Ryves
Custodi Noui Collegij Oxon
Joannes Casus. sal: dicit.

Fui olim (vir dignissime doctissimeq) Chorista huius amplissimi Collegij; cui iam prees primu hic fundamentum pietatis, et bonaru literarum cepi; Debeo ergo meipsum loco, officium etiam tuæ Dignitati debeo; quod sanè meliore ratio e non possum, persolvere; quæue si hoc novo anno incepto; Tibi, Noui Collegij iam electo Custodi Novum hunc librum grati et gratulantis animi symbolum representem quem si eas qua soles omnia humanitate acceperis, abundè satisfactum mihi esse putabo.

Vale Januarij 1^o Anno salutis humanæ 1599^o

Membrum Collegij tui

Joannes Casus⁵

[To the most distinguished and learned man Dr Ryves, Warden of New College, Oxford, John Case presents his greetings.

I was once, most worthy and learned man, a choirboy in this most distinguished college which you now lead, and here I received the first foundation of my faith and of good learning. I ought therefore on my own account, indeed I ought in duty to your worthiness, to render what is due, e hich 0.149 0.149 0.137 RG[(V)-2(a)-3(le)-3(Janua)-4(rij 1)] TJETQ0.000008866 0 594.96 t0.1438,peefo0d n

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