A New Incunable for College

So firmly is the Father of English Printing ensconced in the pantheon of English Worthies that to chance upon William Caxtonôs device in an unremarked book has for long centuries been the stuff of any bibliographerôs daydreams. A new copy ought to be a newsworthy discovery, so it was with one hand reflexively stretching out towards the telephone that the present writer recently found himself halted in front of a book in the College Library. On this occasion, the work of a few breathless moments killed the phonecall to the newspapers ð although that is not to say that the book is unremarkable; far from it. It may not be an unknown Caxton but it ranks a close second, for it is a rare copy of the *Golden Legend*, translated by Caxton, in an early edition by Wynkyn de Worde. Wynkyn, the Father of Fleet Street, is usually understood to have been Caxtonôs assistant; certainly, he continued printing under Caxtonôs device from Caxtonôs shop in the precincts of Westminster abbey after the masterôs death in 1492. Our edition is dated 8 January 1498.[1] It was one of the last editions that Wynkyn printed at Westminster, for probably towards the end of 1500 he moved his shop to the Sign of the Sun in Fleet Street ð establishing a connexion with print that Fleet Street has only recently let slip ð and there he remained until his death in 1534/5.

The edition from which our copy descends was the third edition of the *Golden Legend*, otherwise known to survive in only a couple of more-or-less complete copies and a small number of others that are variously imperfect; there are also many single leaves in North American collections. The edition is dated 8 January 1498, but Lotte Hellinga has given reasons for preferring the year 1499, in that the state of the typeface used here (Type 4^{c}: 94G) does not otherwise occur in dated books until 1499, which suggests that the date 1498, given in roman numerals, might better be construed as a misprint.[2] The New College copy is fragmentary, communicating forty-seven leaves of the editionôs total number of 448. But the pages are consecutive 0 1 114.9 66t 0 0 1 84.9843I8ll

improved typeface and a better quality of printing. Although it cannot claim to own priority among the three incunable editions, it is the best looking of them.

The reason that this printed book has escaped notice for so long is that it is tucked in behind a manuscript; they are bound together as MS 320. Henry Octavius Coxe in his summary listing of New Collegeôs manuscripts (1852) fails even to mention the presence of this printed matter in the book, which lay beyond the strict definition of his own interests.[4] The manuscript portion of the present volume ð