

# Monuments of Dust: Public Legacies in English Museums, 1683–1753

William George Burgess

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of English & Drama  
Queen Mary University of London

## Statement of Originality

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## Abstract

A cultural history of English museums between the founding of the Ashmolean (1683) and that of the British Museum (1753), a period when collections first started to describe themselves explicitly as 'public'. My primary materials are catalogues, regulations, benefactors' registers, statutory documents, collectors' wills and other textual representations of collections - these form a paratextual scaffolding which defines emerging institutions and mediates the collective identities of their objects.

My project is interested in how monumental and public identities are superimposed on the objects in collections, how these function as qualities of the meanings of objects, in relation to their physical qualities. It explores five collections and their different relationships to publicness: the Cotton Library, the Ashmolean Museum, the Royal Society's repository, the Woodwardian Museum, and Hans Sloane's collection. Comparing these I ask why the public museum emerges in England as a category at this time, how uniform is its conceptualisation, and what claims we can make about the relationships between cultures of legacy making and knowledge making. My research centres on questions about rhetorical permanence and material impermanence, the durability of object, individual and social identities, and about ownership, legacy and patrimony.

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## Acknowledgements

My supervisors, Claire Preston and Richard Coulton, have been constant in their encouragement for this project, and through their generous and thoughtful conversation they have not only helped to shape this thesis but also my sense of scholarly identity, as it has evolved over the last four years. Richard has provided consistently incisive comments on all aspects of the thesis, as well as his enthusiasm and expertise. The project was conceived in conversation with Claire, and without her encouragement – alongside the support of Jerry Brotton and the suggestions of Anne Goldgar – it would never have got off the ground. Thanks too to Rowan Boyson and Emrys Jones for supporting my decision to pursue a PhD during my MA at King's College London.

This thesis owes much to dialogue with my friends and colleagues at Queen Mary University of London. In particular, I would like to thank Alice Wickenden for her thoughts, comments and camaraderie as we each navigated the world of early modern collecting. Thanks also to Lauren Cantos, Charlie Pullen, Julie Tanner and Frith Taylor. I would like to acknowledge all those I met at conferences, seminars and beyond whose conversations provoked me to think about new and exciting dimensions for this project, in particular Rees Arnott-Davies, Janette Bright, Julian Harrison, Desmond Huthwaite, Frances Long, Madeleine Pelling, Saara Penttinen, Edwin Rose, Liam Sims and Kim Sloan.

I would like to acknowledge those involved in the tireless work of digitising print and manuscript sources, and those creating and maintaining online databases, particularly *Early English Books Online*, *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online*, and archive.org. The importance of their efforts has been underlined during the Covid-19 pandemic, and finishing my thesis during the last eighteenth months, with its restricted library access, would have been impossible without these resources.

Heartfelt thanks to my partner (soon-to-be wife) Gemma, who has sustained me during this PhD with her unfailing love, encouragement, and faith in my work. Thanks to my family for their constant belief and support, particularly Mum and Dad, without whom I would not have been able to pursue a PhD, and who are undoubtedly the source of my persistent fascination with museums of all kinds.

## Abbreviations

*EA* - C. H. Josten, *Elias Ashmole, 1617–1692*, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966)

*JHC* – *Journal of the History of Collections*

*Notes and Records* – *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London*

*ODNB* – *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*

## Introduction

### **A pinch of dust**

Among the natural and artificial curiosities listed in Ralph Thoresby's 1715 *Musaeum Thoresbyanum*, a catalogue of his personal museum, is the description of an object made curious by its physical composition:

A Pugill of the Dust (unmix'd with Earth) of a noble Countess, not easily distinguish'd from common Dust and Ashes[.]<sup>1</sup>

Thoresby describes a solitary pinch of dust, which he assures his reader is the pure human remains of an aristocratic lady, 'unmix'd with Earth'. In the same breath however, we learn that this pinch is 'not easily distinguish'd' from common dirt and ash – sight alone cannot differentiate this noble powder from other, more quotidian, types of dust. Without reading Thoresby's description, a visitor to his museum might disregard this object, ignorant of its noble character – the dust's entry in the *Musaeum Thoresbyanum* becomes its only distinguishing feature.

Of course, it is plausible that the supposed artefact Thoresby had acquired is in fact a pinch of common dirt, sold to him along with its aggrandising fiction, and then preserved in his impressive museum and its printed catalogue: a grand folio volume authorised by a Latinate title and a frontispiece portrait of Thoresby himself. In this sense the pugill of dust might recall the satirical scorn of Thomas Shadwell in his play *The Virtuoso* (1676), in which a gentleman collector – immersed, as Thoresby was, in England's scientific culture of collecting and observation – is duped into buying bottles of air and other fake scientific curios for his own museum.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, Thoresby's catalogue entry contains a kind of self-authorising power over its referent: ultimately, whether the powder was the ashes of a countess, or not, is less important than what Thoresby's catalogue says about it. Textual descriptions can aggrandise their artefacts. Attached as labels or written in accompanying catalogues, they supplement or replace encounters with objects, they are a verbal realm designed to manipulate material identities, meanings, histories and connections. They knit individual items into categories and collections, mediating power and ownership, and offer organisational and ideological possibilities that transcend the limitations of physical space.

In this thesis I map how – while Thoresby was composing his catalogue – similar kinds of textual labels exerted their interpretive power on a specific kind of collection: the public museum. Taking the Countess's ashes as microcosm, I examine the ways in which the work Thoresby achieves for his pinch of dust was conducted by his contemporaries for entire collections. As his catalogue entry prolongs a nominal and aggrandising identity for a single object, so the texts that surrounded emergent museums sought to turn private cabinets into durable monuments. Analysing texts cognate with Thoresby's printed catalogue, I ask how the

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<sup>1</sup> Ralph Thoresby, *Ducatus Leodiensis: Or, the Topography of the Ancient and Populous Town and Parish of Leeds* (London: M. Atkins, 1715), p. 431.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Shadwell, *The Virtuoso* (London: H. Herringman, 1676), pp. 31, 69

public museums that surround us today were self-authorised into being, monuments that were built to house objects, and created by texts.

The power of textual description was pervasive in the commercial culture of the eighteenth-century collection, and manipulated to great effect. James Salter, who ran Don Saltero's coffee house, produced catalogues claiming improbable and illustrious provenance for objects like 'The Pope's infallible Candle', 'William the Conqueror's flaming Sword' and 'a Piece of Solomon's Temple'.<sup>3</sup> The periodical *The Tatler* was quick to participate in the playful mingling of fact and fiction that catalogues could superimpose on otherwise unremarkable objects. Richard Steele's issue of 28<sup>th</sup> June 1709 seized on the Hispanicisation of Salter's name to authorise an imagined descent from the fictional Don Quixote:

I hereby certify all the worthy citizens who travel to see his rarities, that his double-barrel'd pistols, targets, coats of mail, his sclopetta, and sword of Toledo, were left to his ancestor by the said Don Quixot, and by the said ancestor to all his progeny down to Don Saltero[.]<sup>4</sup>

On the same page, Steele cast doubt over the provenance of Salter's other supposed rarities:

I cannot allow a liberty he takes of imposing several names (without my license) on the collections he has made [such as] a straw hat, which I know to be made by Madge Peskad within three miles of Bedford; [which he tells you] is Pontius Pilate's wife's chambermaid's sister's hat[.]<sup>5</sup>

In Steele's *Tatler*, textual descriptions of objects in collections have the potential to multiply their significances to the point of arbitrariness. Steele ostensibly berates Salter for advertising provenances 'without my license', but does so via the fictional authorial persona of *The Tatler*, Isaac Bickerstaff, whose fictionality compounds the satire. Salter may as well be descended from Don Quixote, a character whose novelistic existence famously toys with the boundaries between history and fiction, and whose relationship with material objects demonstrates the plasticity of their identities (as when, for example, a barber's basin is transformed into a mythical helmet through Quixote's act of renaming).<sup>6</sup>

Unwittingly, Thoresby's description of the Countess's dust participates in this literary realm of arbitrary identification, recalling Thomas Browne's entry for the mummified body of Father Crispin in his mock catalogue, *Musaeum Clausum* (1684). Among the contents of Browne's fictional museum, this clergyman's body is apparently preserved 'without corruption' so that his identity 'may be known very long after'. For Browne, the joke is that Father Crispin was insignificant in life, his likeness known only to those long dead – this artefact is hence identifiable to Browne not because the body is well preserved but because it is labelled, 'Ecce

<sup>3</sup> *A Catalogue of the Rarities to be seen at Don Saltero's Coffee-House in Chelsea* (London: n. p., 1731), pp. 6, 7, 11.

<sup>4</sup> *The Tatler* 34, 28<sup>th</sup> June 1709, in *The Tatler* ed. by Donald F. Bond, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), i.254. All subsequent references to *The Tatler* from this edition.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quijote* ed. by Diana de Armas Wilson, trans. by Burton Raffel (New York, NY & London: Norton, 1999), pp. 309–11.



iterum Crispinus'.<sup>7</sup> As Claire Preston observes, Browne's description of Crispin offers a 'pensive account of pitiful anonymity [...] a person of no importance is meaninglessly preserved and named [...] he contributes cynical, satirical testimony to the futility of recovery and convening in collections'.<sup>8</sup>

Thoresby's dust invites a similar cynical reading. It is an insignificant pinch of matter authorised only by its textual description among the 'Antiquities, and [...] Natural and Artificial Rarities, Preserved in the Repository of Ralph Thoresby, Gent. F.R.S. at Leeds in Yorkshire: A.D. MDCCXII'.<sup>9</sup> Unlike Browne's Crispin, the dust's authorising description is not attached to its object, and is liable to become alienated from it – today, all we have is the written description. The dust itself has been returned to pitiful anonymity. At the death of Thoresby's son in 1764 the museum was sold at auction. Objects previously enumerated by Thoresby in his 1715 catalogue were grouped together into lots, such as boxes of 'sundry odd Things', and miscellaneous household objects like 'an old key' were erroneously sold as parts of the collection.<sup>10</sup> This second catalogue, also called the *Musaeum Thoresbyanum*, demonstrated how the boundaries of the collection shifted, either in line with new priorities about the objects' value, or through a simple misunderstanding of which objects were part of Thoresby's museum. Its aggregation of Thoresby's artefacts into boxes underlined that the condition of anonymity could affect any object in the collection.

The dust's entry in the 1715 catalogue illustrates how textual descriptions arbitrate value between collectible and non-collectible objects – without an entry, the dust would become mere refuse. In turn, the dust's physical unremarkableness demonstrates that as well as arbitrating, these descriptions are themselves arbitrary: they are ultimately self-authorising like Browne's mummy or Quixote's helmet in their distinction between the valuable and the valueless. The two printed catalogues of Thoresby's collection illustrate not only that the value of collected objects is always historically specific, but that textual descriptions are crucial sites for determining, representing and preserving this value.

The practice of collecting inhabits the confluence of arbitrating and arbitrary ascriptions of value, selecting what to preserve and what to discard, what to categorise and what to cast off. While Hans Sloane was cataloguing Jamaica's flora and fauna for 'the Advancement of Natural Knowledge', Joseph Addison was dismissing natural history specimens as the mere 'refuse of nature'.<sup>11</sup> While Addison was busy with his numismatic collections, Mary Astell was mocking

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas Browne, 'Musaeum Clausum, or Bibliotheca Abscondita' in *The Works of Sir Thomas Browne*, ed. by Geoffrey Keynes, 4 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), iii.117.

<sup>8</sup> Claire Preston, 'Punctual Relations: Thomas Browne's Rhetorical Reclamations', *Studies in Philology*, 115.3 (2018), 598–614 (p. 599).

<sup>9</sup> Thoresby, *Ducatus Leodiensis*, sig.[4A1r].

<sup>10</sup> Whiston Bristow, *Musaeum Thoresbyanum* (London: n.p., 1764), p. 19.

<sup>11</sup> Hans Sloane, *A Voyage to the Islands Madera, Barbados, Nieves, S. Christophers and Jamaica*, 2 vols. (London: for the author, 1707-1725), vol.1 sig.[Ar]; *The Tatler* 216, 26<sup>th</sup> August 1710, iii.132.

virtuosi who traded their useful currency for obsolete ‘old Coins’.<sup>12</sup> In the Royal Society’s *Philosophical Transactions*, Humfrey Wanley and John Bagford were explaining the need for a palaeographic collection of scraps of medieval manuscripts, which William King satirised as ‘old pieces of linen’ that Wanley gathered from London’s less salubrious areas, his collector’s folly transforming them into ‘repositories of valuable rarities’.<sup>13</sup> In early eighteenth-century England, that is, the appetite for gathering and organising all manner of things was matched only by a reciprocal scepticism towards collecting. Matthew Prior captured this atmosphere of contention when he wrote that

The various Estimate we make as to the Value of Things cannot be better Illustrated then by the wants we find in the pursuit of our Studies, every Man adding to his heap, and desirous to compleat his Collection; Books, Pictures, Medals, nay dried flowers, insects, Cockle-shells, any thing will do [...] perhaps a little Boy Yesterday at Canterbury tore that Butterfly in Pieces, or at Dover threw the very Shell into the Sea, the Species of which were the only Ones now missing in Sir Hans Sloans Cabinet, and an Oyleman on Fish Street Hill did actually wrap up his Anchovies in the first Horace that was ever Printed.<sup>14</sup>

Prior reminds us that collecting and categorising operates at the border between the known and unknown, the preserved and the forgotten, treasure and trash. A noble countess’s ashes in one hand becomes common dirt in another, and scientific collectors were constantly reminded that the fossils, insects and plants that they pored over were seen by others as nature’s refuse. As Prior goes on to say, these examples illustrate that value depends not on qualities inherent in objects, but on the mediation and interpretation of the contexts in which we encounter them.

It is a strikingly similar argument to Mary Douglas’s classic twentieth-century definition of dirt as ‘matter out of place’, a by-product of the ‘systematic ordering and classification of matter’ that arises from the construction of socio-cultural convention.<sup>15</sup> Douglas herself admits that such a reading makes society seem more systematic than it is, but her observations have important implications for the practice of collecting, itself a concerted effort to order and classify matter.<sup>16</sup> Building on Douglas’s conceptualisation of waste, William Viney suggests that value is arbitrated by ‘legislating acts of narrative’, which determine the usefulness of an object over time.<sup>17</sup> The practice of collecting, Viney suggests, takes a particularly active approach to shaping these narratives, refiguring an object’s relegation to the realm of waste based on new parameters of preservation and study.<sup>18</sup> As I explore how objects were deliberately manipulated into collective

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<sup>12</sup> David Alvarez, ‘Poetical Cash’: Joseph Addison, antiquarianism, and aesthetic value’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 38.3 (2005), 509–31; Mary Astell, *An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex* (London: Roper et al, 1696), p. 98.

<sup>13</sup> William King, ‘An Essay on the Invention of Samplers’, in *The Original Works in Verse and Prose of Dr. William King*, 3 vols. (London: for the editor, 1776), ii.61.

<sup>14</sup> Matthew Prior, ‘Essay Upon Opinion’ in *Dialogues of the Dead and Other Works in Verse and Prose*, ed. by A. R. Waller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907), p. 194.

<sup>15</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York, NY & London, 1995), p. 36.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> William Viney, *Waste: A Philosophy of Things* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 55–6.

sites of meaning and value, Viney's concept of the legislating narrative is a crucial interpretive tool for articulating the priorities and ideologies that shaped collections into institutional museums.

It is the legislating narrative of Thoresby's catalogue that elevates his pinch of dust from the common dirt from which it is otherwise indistinguishable. The narrative is a label describing an object but distinct from it, constructing meaning textually for a thing that is otherwise merely unidentifiable matter. When separated from the object, the narrative becomes self-authorising and the object itself returns to anonymity – in this sense, the narrative lends durability to the object's identity, in that it remains readable long after the object itself is no longer recognisable. In the remainder of the introduction, I unpack the themes and questions raised by Thoresby's pinch of dust, which inform the thesis as a whole. I begin with museums (the specific kinds of collection under discussion) then outline the methodological framework I use to approach the complex interplay of text and object. This informs my deliberate positioning on the concept of publicness, before I arrive at the overarching theme of legacy. This, I argue, is the linchpin of why, when and how museums began to call themselves public.

## Museums

In the inaugural issue of the *Journal of the History of Collections*, Paula Findlen wrote that collections exist not in their material forms, nor in their textual descriptions and representations, but in the interplay between the two.<sup>19</sup> The interrelationship of text and object has hence long been recognised as a defining attribute of collections themselves, which depend on associations and connections, on deliberately ordering ideas and things to construct meaning.<sup>20</sup> That said, the connections between objects, texts and collections are not guaranteed. Nor are they inherently reliable. Just as Thoresby's once-proud artefacts became 'sundry odd Things' in the hands of the auctioneer, so objects can be mis-identified in museum catalogues, and fakes accepted as real, despite the accretion of texts that are used to understand and arrange material objects. Reconstructing the history of an object using texts is vital to the work of organisations like the UK's Spoliation Advisory Panel, employed to assess ownership claims to artefacts looted in Nazi-era Europe, but often only able to base decisions on the 'balance of probability', recognising the 'difficulties of proof' inherent in recoupling objects with written historical records.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, the process of understanding objects through texts is not always constructive (or reconstructive). Dan Hicks argues that museums must recognise that their objects contain histories of loss as well as accretion – in the case of the Benin bronzes, he observes that their display in Western anthropology museums robs them of meaning by eliding

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<sup>19</sup> Paula Findlen, 'The Museum: Its classical etymology and renaissance genealogy', *JHC*, 1.1 (1989), 59–78 (p. 65).

<sup>20</sup> Major studies that seek to centre texts in the history of collecting include Marjorie Swann, *Curiosities and Texts: The Culture of Collecting in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); Barbara Benedict, *Curiosity: A Cultural History of Early Modern Inquiry* (Chicago IL & London: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

<sup>21</sup> Donnell Deeny, *Report of the Spoliation Advisory Panel in Respect of a Gothic Relief in Ivory, Now in the Possession of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford* (London: House of Commons, 2016), p. 3

their pre-colonial history and the violence used to steal them.<sup>22</sup> While collections can position themselves as rescuing objects from anonymity, by constructing certain legislating narratives they overwrite and ignore the possibility of others.

What are the implications of this churn of identities and meanings for collections that aim to maintain stable collective identities for their objects? As this investigation shows, such aims are pervasive, but are they ever reasonable? Made up of subjective written interpretation and physical objects necessarily prone to decay and decomposition, how can any collection make claims to durability? Modern museums are a specific kind of collection that make just such claims. The International Council of Museum's (ICOM's) definition of the museum says it is

a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment[.]<sup>23</sup>

Deliberately broad, the definition nonetheless makes a number of specific statements about the public accessibility and purpose of museum exhibitions, drawing an interesting distinction between 'education' and 'study' which I return to later. Yet in defining the modern public museum, ICOM's most striking claim is that the museum is a 'permanent institution'. Steven Lubar and his co-authors take issue with this assertion, pointing out that the history of museums illustrates that they are in fact precarious assemblages of ephemeral objects, liable to loss, deaccession, destitution and destruction – 'nothing is forever', they write, 'not even museums'.<sup>24</sup>

Why, then, has the idea of permanence been so persistent in defining public museums? Lubar's article suggests that this will to permanence has been written into the museum's ideology since the nineteenth century, co-extensive with the modern museum and marking a disjuncture with earlier collections, which the article argues pre-date the advent of the concerted 'social, moral and epistemic virtues' of later institutions.<sup>25</sup> However, collections were calling themselves permanent – and public – long before they assumed these nineteenth-century characteristics. While its efforts (and willingness) to admit the public were initially patchy, the British Museum's founding act of Parliament in 1753 granted the 'publick' 'free access to view and peruse' its collections, which were vested in trustees 'for ever'.<sup>26</sup> Fifty years earlier, one of its founding collections – the Cotton family's library of manuscripts – was bequeathed to the British crown 'for publick use & advantage [...] for ever'.<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, John Woodward was attempting to install his personal collection of fossils as 'standing monuments' in a bequest to Cambridge

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<sup>22</sup> Dan Hicks, *The British Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution* (London: Pluto Press, 2020).

<sup>23</sup> The International Council of Museums, 'Museum Definition', <<https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/>>

<sup>24</sup> Steven Lubar, Lukas Rieppel, Ann Daly and Kathrinne Duffy, 'Lost Museums', *Museum History Journal*, 10.1 (2017), 1–14 (p. 1).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>26</sup> London, Parliamentary Archives, *British Museum Act 1753* (26 George II c.22)

<sup>27</sup> Parliamentary Archives, *Cotton Library Act 1701* (12 & 13 William III c.7)

University.<sup>28</sup> Seventy years before the founding of the British Museum, the Ashmolean had opened its doors in Oxford to the paying public, announcing itself as the proper home for ‘all such Rarities as shalbe hereafter given’ to the university.<sup>29</sup> Even earlier, in 1667, the Royal Society had touted its collection of objects and specimens as integral to the specific epistemic virtues of experimental philosophy it was designed to promote, as Charles II ratified its ambitions to permanence with a royal charter that granted ‘that there shall be for ever a Society [...] called [...] the Royal Society of London’.<sup>30</sup>

My thesis focuses on these five collections: the Cotton library of manuscripts, the founding collection of the Ashmolean Museum, the Royal Society’s repository, John Woodward’s fossil cabinets, and the collection of Hans Sloane, whose death triggered the creation of the British Museum. The self-authorising work exemplified by Thoresby’s and Salter’s catalogues, and satirised by Browne, was being performed on these entire collections, their owners and managers using the language of publicness and permanence to construct grand legislating narratives for their objects. I examine these specific textual configurations of futurity in relation to the physicality of the objects themselves, seeking to understand how the identities of these collections were constructed in the often-fraught interplay between text and object. I argue that the language of permanence puts specific pressure on this interplay, in its attempts to build monuments out of things whose unruly materiality resists such stability or ideological claims. Except for the Royal Society’s repository, the five collections mentioned above all persist in a recognisable physical form in the present day, and in this sense their respective claims to durability have been in some sense successful. However, as I explore in the subsequent chapters, this success is inflected by elements of self-authorisation. In the identities of collections, the notions of permanence and publicness have proven much more enduring and stable than the realities of the objects they purport to define. Like Thoresby’s dust, the label outlasts the physical object.

## Textual scaffolding

The legislating narratives that define, mediate and arrange collected objects are written in particular kinds of documents – what I call the textual scaffolding of a collection. Textual scaffolding is the medium through which legislating narratives are constructed. These documents form the source material for my investigation, including the catalogues, statutes, wills, minute books and benefactors’ registers in which collections are described, represented and manipulated. By examining these sources in the cultural, intellectual, ideological and epistemological contexts from which they emerged, I aim to conduct a critical analysis of this textual scaffolding which will facilitate a deeper understanding of where the idea of the public museum came from. Why was it that, in England, collections began to make distinctive claims to publicness during this period? What made these claims so enduring that the institutions they

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<sup>28</sup> John Woodward, *An Addition to the Catalogue of the Foreign Native Fossils, in the Collection of J. Woodward M.D* (n.p., n.d.), p. iv.

<sup>29</sup> *EA*, iv.1707.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Sprat, *The History of the Royal Society of London* (London: J. Martyn, 1667), pp. 251, 134.

created are still recognisable centuries later? By unpicking the narratives that constructed these museums, I offer a distinctive and new perspective on the founding ideologies of our modern institutions.

The documents that turned private collections into public institutions are not obscure or secret. Extracts from John Woodward's will are printed in the visitor leaflet and on the display boards of the Sedgwick Museum in Cambridge, which his collection founded. Ashmole's first statutes and the 1753 British Museum Act are quoted on their museums' respective websites.<sup>31</sup> However, the documents have rarely been read or presented critically, referred to in institutional histories for their literal conveyancing functions rather than their rhetorical dimensions.<sup>32</sup> In discussing the emergence of the public museum, historians have rarely got further than the commemorating rhetoric of Edward Edwards's *The Lives of the Founders of the British Museum* (1870), whose teleological perspective asserted that Britain owed its museum tradition to forward-thinking individuals, and 'the public spirit of private persons'.<sup>33</sup>

This trend has persisted in part because the texts under discussion are themselves resistant to critical analysis; they want to be taken at face value. Indeed, their function depends on being interpreted literally due to their legal hermeneutics – the texts themselves constitute actions. Wills bequeath objects to universities, grand folio catalogues rename groups of manuscripts, acts of Parliament appoint salaried custodians. The texts are J. L. Austin's performative utterances, a category of verbal statements that are actions in themselves, and often recognisable in documents (particularly wills) by their use of terms like 'hereby'.<sup>34</sup> John Searle has incorporated Austin's utterances into his theory of declarations, which he defines as utterances (spoken or written) that create new realities out of thin air, independently of physical referents – for example a corporation, which is written into being, is given a collectively-recognised status by a declarative utterance. Searle observes that, in our use of declarations, humans 'have the capacity to create a new reality by representing that reality as existing'.<sup>35</sup>

Public museums declared themselves into existence. Like Searle's declarations, they don't describe a pre-existing reality and nor do they merely prescribe actions, but they combine the two, using written speech acts to create new institutional identities out of nothing. Or, rather, out of private collections' pre-existing sets of social and material relations and identities. Their

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<sup>31</sup> Ashmolean Museum, 'History of the Ashmolean', <<https://www.ashmolean.org/history-ashmolean>>; The British Museum, 'History', <<https://www.britishmuseum.org/about-us/british-museum-story/history>>.

<sup>32</sup> For the Ashmolean see R. F. Ovenell, *The Ashmolean Museum 1683–1894* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986); for the British Museum, particularly the treatment of Sloane's will, see J. Mordaunt Crook, *The British Museum* (London: Allen Lane, 1972), pp.47-8; Edward Miller, *That Noble Cabinet: A History of the British Museum* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1974), pp.40-1.

<sup>33</sup> Edward Edwards, *Lives of the Founders of the British Museum; with Notices of its Chief Augmentors and Other Benefactors, 1570-1870* (London: Trübner, 1870), p. 8. The notable exception to this is the historiography of Woodward's bequest to Cambridge, which I discuss in detail in chapter four.

<sup>34</sup> J. L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*, ed. by J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), pp. 5-6, 57.

<sup>35</sup> John Searle, *Making the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 86.

existence is self-authorising, enacted in documents that become vehicles for promoting specific ideologies. For example, the first set of statutes for the Ashmolean opens with:

Because the knowledge of Nature is very necessarie to humaine life [...] I, Elias Ashmole, out of my affection to this sort of learning [...] have amassed together great variety of natural Concretes & Bodies, & bestowed them on the University of Oxford [and] I have the good, according to the Acts of Convocation [...] to appoint, constitute & ordaine as follows[.]<sup>36</sup>

Invoking another declaration (the acts of convocation), Ashmole wills into being a new institutional reality for a group of objects which he claims to have collected. In the process of constructing a legislating narrative for the collection, he subtly elides the fact that it was assembled by the Tradescant family and subsequently acquired by him, following an acrimonious court battle. Similarly, as I discuss in chapter two, his apparent devotion to promoting the ‘knowledge of Nature’ was undermined by his covetous management of the museum.

These legislating narratives, declaring identities for collected objects, are not always the work of one pen. To take another example, after the Royal Society acquired the commercially-run museum collection of Robert Hubert in 1666, its minute book entries, printed collection catalogue and books discussing the collection wrote the identity of the ‘*Musei Regalis Societatis*’ into existence. The documents constructed a new history for the objects, asserting that the collection was founded by a Society member to embody its ideals of orderly and empirical scientific observation. Although the objects remained the same, their previous incarnation as a public attraction of weird and wondrous curiosities was overwritten so successfully that the link between Hubert and the Royal Society was not unearthed until the twentieth century.<sup>37</sup> Rather than being marvelled at as ‘things of strange nature and operation’, the Society’s new legislating narrative demanded that the objects be interpreted as constituting an ‘Inventory of Nature’.<sup>38</sup>

Enacting no physical change on the objects themselves, the power of legislating narratives lies in their ability to control how collections are understood and interpreted. This power is manifested in collections’ textual scaffolding. As I have suggested in the case of Thoresby’s dust, its accompanying catalogue entry exemplifies this mediating effect, an auxiliary label that deliberately shapes how the dust is understood as part of Thoresby’s broader interpretive scheme. My decision to interpret texts like Thoresby’s catalogue using the metaphor of textual scaffolding owes much to the literary critical concept of paratexts. Paratexts function, according to Gérard Genette, at the boundary of a text as a zone of transition and transaction:

a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that – whether well or poorly understood and achieved – is at the service of a

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<sup>36</sup> Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawl D.912, f. 666r.

<sup>37</sup> David Murray, *Museums: Their History and Their Use*, 3 vols. (Glasgow: J. MacLehose, 1904), i.130-3.

<sup>38</sup> [Robert Hubert], *A Catalogue of part of those Rarities Collected in thirty years time with a great deal of Pains and Industry, by one of his Majesties sworn Servants* (n.p. n.d.), p. 26; Nehemiah Grew, *Musaeum Regalis Societatis* (London: S. Holford, 1686), sig.[A4v].

better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it (more pertinent, of course, in the eyes of the author and his allies)[.]<sup>39</sup>

Genette understands paratexts in a literary setting, describing a book's 'peritext' and 'epitext'. The peritext refers to all the elements of a book besides the main body of written material (for example the cover, the preface, the typeface), and the epitext denotes materials outside the book that nonetheless mediate its meaning for a reader (for example reviews, author correspondence, earlier drafts).<sup>40</sup> As such, a paratext need not be of the same medium as the text it accompanies. As Alice Wickenden has recently demonstrated, Genette's concept resonates beyond literary applications into the realm of collecting, where acts of classification become potent paratextual mediations of objects' identities, affecting how they can be understood.<sup>41</sup> Labelling a pinch of dust as a valuable artefact is a clear example of this process. In this broadened sense, a collected object becomes a 'text', rendered legible by the paratextual scaffolding through which it is interpreted.

As I examine the textual scaffolding of each of the collections under investigation, I do so from the point of view that the written sources that comprise this scaffolding can all be understood as paratexts for the physical objects that have been collected. In this formulation I consider texts composed by the owners and managers of a collection to be 'peritexts', and texts like visitor accounts (which have less of a vested interest in controlling the collection's interpretation) to be 'epitexts'. I highlight some of the machinations that Genette identifies in his definition – the pragmatics and strategies of influence that went into turning private collections into public museums, and which enforced specific and lasting ideologies via the creation of new institutions. Many of the sources I draw on in this thesis, such as printed catalogues and tracts, also contain more traditionally paratextual material like written prolegomena, frontispiece engravings, indexes, dedications and bindings which are equally important in determining particular identities for the collected objects under discussion. Hence my thesis will discuss both the paratexts of catalogues and catalogues as paratexts.

## Publicness

So far, I have framed the idea of publicness via its legal dimension of ownership – public collections are those owned by institutions not individuals. This framing is deliberately narrow, because although the language of publicness is ubiquitous in the paratexts of the collections under discussion, it bears no necessary relation to non-linguistic practices like public access, or to public values such as education. Just as collections' textual scaffolding can function independently of the objects themselves, so these collections' language of publicness does not

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<sup>39</sup> Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. by Jane M. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>41</sup> Alice Wickenden, 'Things to Know before beginning, or: Why Provenance Matters in the Library', *Inscription*, 1 (2020), 17–25.



map straightforwardly onto any practical use of the collection in relation to groups of people recognisable as publics.

The Ashmolean tends to be remembered as the first museum in Britain to admit the general public – that is, people who were neither known personally or by reputation to its keepers, nor of sufficient rank to gain access to the comparable personal collections of other virtuosi. For this reason it is often cited as the first public museum in Britain. However, although visitor accounts and records of ticket sales confirm that this took place, this admission of the general public was often more by encroachment than encouragement, despite the confidence of the museums' legislating narratives. The museum's second keeper, Edward Lhwyd, ordered that the museum's rules be displayed on the door in order to address the 'general contempt' and 'tumbling of things about, as if they were of no value', to which public visitors subjected the collection.<sup>42</sup> Fifteen years later, the ever-disgruntled German traveller Zacharias Conrad Von Uffenbach, complained that the crowds of countryfolk who flocked to the Ashmolean on market day had ruined his visit.<sup>43</sup> The Ashmolean's regulations presumed that there would be enough surplus income from ticket sales to cover the keeper's salary, but this proved insufficient for many years.<sup>44</sup> At the Ashmolean, the ideals of public access were hence heavily diluted. Over seventy years later, when the British Museum opened, public access was still a professed idea rather than a convincing reality. The institution promised 'free access' to the public, but Anne Goldgar has demonstrated that while it played host to a variety of social groups, its keepers still treated the general public as a nuisance, disrupting the use of the collections by more learned and genteel visitors.<sup>45</sup>

There is tension here between the frictionless language of publicness and the messy reality of dealing with the general public, exemplifying a broader historiographical problem with the period under discussion. This can be traced in the continued influence of Jürgen Habermas's theory of the public sphere, a historical panorama in which late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Britain is presented as a fulcrum between aristocratic and bourgeois control of literary and political discourse.<sup>46</sup> While subsequent historians acknowledge that the theory is a forceful account of the principles of Britain's coffeehouse culture, they recognise that it does not describe a historically-specific reality. Instead, the idea of publicness was being generated by a homosocial community of metropolitan men, self-authorised as a literary and political 'public'.<sup>47</sup> Like public museums, the very idea of a public was declared into existence.

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<sup>42</sup> Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 1820, f. 53r.

<sup>43</sup> Zacharias Conrad Von Uffenbach, *Oxford in 1710, from the Travels of Zacharias Conrad Von Uffenbach*, ed. by W. H. Quarrell and W. J. C. Quarrell (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1928), p. 24

<sup>44</sup> Ovenell, *The Ashmolean Museum*, pp. 52-3.

<sup>45</sup> Anne Goldgar, 'The British Museum and the Virtual Representation of Culture in the Eighteenth Century', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, 32.2 (2000), 195–23.

<sup>46</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. by Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003).

<sup>47</sup> See for example Nancy Fraser, 'Rethinking The Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy', *Social Text*, 25 (1990), 56–80; J. A. Downie, 'How Useful to Eighteenth-Century Studies is the Paradigm of the 'Bourgeois Public Sphere'?', *Literature Compass*, 1 (2003), 1–19;

ICOM's modern definition of the museum draws a distinction between its functions as a resource for 'study' and for 'education'. Ambiguous at first glance, the difference between the two corresponds to a long-held separation in museums between scholarly research and visitor education. Visiting the newly-opened British Museum in 1756, Catherine Talbot praised the 'comfortable apartments', 'philosophic grove' and 'physick garden' where 'learned and deserving persons' could improve their study. Yet simultaneously, the museum was a 'Storehouse of Arms open to every Rebel Hand, a Shelf of Sweetmeats mixed with Poison, set in the reach of tall overgrown Children'.<sup>48</sup> This distinction was written into the 1753 British Museum Act itself, which distinguished between the 'inspection and entertainment of the learned and the curious' and the 'general use and benefit of the publick' – although the intended use of the collection is described in vague terms here, the bifurcation of public and learned visitors is made clear.<sup>49</sup> As I illustrate in chapter one, for example, the public identity of (and access to) the Cotton Library was restricted to a small group of essentially like-minded scholars and librarians, communicating with each other across time through catalogues and inventories. The collection's publicness bore little meaningful relation to (and anteceded) any external conception of a general public.

This does not imply that the distinction between study and education, or between scholars and the public, was universal or clear cut. As early as 1661, the cleric Charles Hoole put forward the idea that the observation of particular objects, properly collected and arranged, could provide a resource for generalised learning. He suggested that schools should take their pupils to visit the Tradescants' museum in South Lambeth, 'or the like houses or gardens, where rarities are kept', where a view of the 'variety of objects' would improve their education.<sup>50</sup> This idea was distinct from existing cultures of object-based study in which, as Paula Findlen has argued, collectors were 'indiscriminate in their choice of objects' but 'highly selective in their choice of companions'.<sup>51</sup> Yet Hoole's suggestion is an anomaly. As I argue in the following chapters, the collections proclaiming themselves as public are better situated in a continuum with this early modern intellectual culture of sociable knowledge production, rather than heralding revolutionary schemes of public education and access.

In 1688, and again in 1753, two editions of Roger North's *A Discourse of the Poor* claimed that 'it is too often found that new proposals, varnished over with popular pretences, are but selfish acts'.<sup>52</sup> Although such a straightforward binary does not wholly explain the advent of English public museums, his observation is pertinent to this investigation. In a similar way to Habermas's reading of the public sphere as a whole, so 'public knowledge' is better understood as a self-authorising ideal than as a practical aspiration to social change. As John Brewer has argued, in

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Markman Ellis, ed., *Eighteenth-Century Coffee-House Culture*, 4 vols. (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2006), vol.1 pp. xiii-xvii.

<sup>48</sup> Catherine Talbot to unknown correspondent, 15<sup>th</sup> August 1756. London, British Library, MS Add 39311, f. 83v.

<sup>49</sup> *British Museum Act 1753*, f. 334

<sup>50</sup> Charles Hoole, *A New Discovery of the Old Art of Teaching Schoole* (London: A. Crook, 1661), pp. 284-5

<sup>51</sup> Findlen, *Possessing Nature: Museums, Collecting, and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), p. 15.

<sup>52</sup> Roger North, *A Discourse of the Poor* (London: M. Cooper, 1753), p. 85.

the sphere of eighteenth-century information politics the rhetoric of ‘public knowledge’ was more normative than descriptive, mobilised by special interest groups who used the language of universality to gain private advantage.<sup>53</sup> For the collections under discussion, this rhetoric of publicness becomes part of their legislating narratives in which, I illustrate, the ‘popular pretence’ of public knowledge was used to varnish the particular priorities, ambitions and identities of the collections’ owners and managers.

## Legacy

It is no coincidence that the language of publicness and the language of permanence appear so often alongside each other in the legislating narratives of these institutional collections. The central concern of Viney’s definition of the legislating narrative is the apportioning of value to objects, distinguishing them from waste matter and determining the nature and duration of their usefulness. Object by object, the narratives constructed by collections rescued shells from being thrown into the sea, rare butterflies from being torn to pieces, and editions of Horace from being used to wrap fish, to use Prior’s examples. Housed in collections, the objects took on new value as ‘extraordinarily curious and valuable things’, as Von Uffenbach commented on a visit to Sloane’s museum, noting Sloane’s ‘handsome collection of all kinds of insects’, ‘choice’ cabinet of shells and ‘remarkable’ collection of taxidermied animals.<sup>54</sup> Yet the longevity of collectibles was never guaranteed – as illustrated in the case of Thoresby’s dust, legislating narratives could become separated from their referents, their objects returned to anonymity. Despite the majesty of Sloane’s collection of fauna as it was arranged in his house, fifty years after his death the keepers of the British Museum began the wholesale incineration of his stuffed specimens, which had decomposed beyond recognition.<sup>55</sup> Beginning in 1769 the Museum sold off swathes of Sloane’s library as duplicates, and as early as 1763 Daniel Solander was engaged in overhauling what was, by then, an outdated classification system for Sloane’s botanical specimens.<sup>56</sup> Being named among Sloane’s ‘valuable things’ was not enough to save the objects or their arrangements from obsolescence or decay.

As well as legislating paratexts, the continued coherence of a collection depended on other conditions of material and ideological stability, most readily provided by the continued vitality and resources of its collector and their networks. The death of the collector is necessarily a rupture in the system of value, identity and knowledge that a collection represents. Addison dramatized this rupture in an edition of *The Tatler*, ventriloquising the widow of a collector who,

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<sup>53</sup> John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688-1783* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), p. 230. See also David Lemmings, *Law and Government in England During the Long Eighteenth Century: From Consent to Command* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2015).

<sup>54</sup> Von Uffenbach, *London in 1710, from the Travels of Zacharias Conrad Von Uffenbach*, ed. and trans. by W.H. Quarrell and Margaret Mare (London: Faber & Faber, 1939), pp. 185-7.

<sup>55</sup> Rachel Polinquin, *The Breathless Zoo: Taxidermy and the Cultures of Longing* (Pennsylvania, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), pp. 37-8.

<sup>56</sup> Edwin D. Rose, ‘Specimens, slips and systems: Daniel Solander and the classification of nature at the world’s first public museum, 1753–1768’, *British Journal for the History of Science*, 51.2 (2018), 205–237.

in his folly, had left her nothing but natural curiosities in his will. She has no use for the ‘strange Baubles’ on which her late husband squandered his estate, and seeks advice on ‘the Disposal of those many Rarities and Curiosities [...] I will sell them a Pennyworth’.<sup>57</sup> Here, objects valued as a collection of natural history specimens by the collector shed their meaning after his death – echoing the sale catalogue of Thoresby’s museum, they are mere ‘sundry odd Things’ to be sold piecemeal to the highest bidder. This was the fate of innumerable collections of all kinds during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A glance at the annotated auction catalogues in Sloane’s library shows how prolifically his enormous collection depended on the deaths of collectors from across northern Europe, as their estates were parcelled up to be sold post-mortem. Sloane’s biographer James Delbourgo notes, ‘death was the collector’s friend’, offering an opportunity by which one could absorb the life’s work of a fellow scholar into one’s own museum. At the same moment, the assimilation of one’s objects into another’s museum was a persistent reminder that death was also the collector’s nemesis.<sup>58</sup>

In the following chapters, I explore how reframing collections as public was a deliberate response to this threat of dispersal and dissolution, and how donating a collection to a university or to the state insulated it from the vicissitudes of private ownership. In the hands of an institution, a collection was less likely to be sold off by uninterested or impecunious descendants, and it was in less danger of being forgotten or neglected – though the fate of Sloane’s taxidermy and books demonstrates that this was never guaranteed. Elizabeth Yale makes the argument that part of the founding logic of institutions like the Ashmolean, the Royal Society and the British Museum was to preserve scientific papers and correspondence which, often unpublished, were otherwise exposed to embezzlement, dispersal and destruction after the deaths of their authors. In this way, she suggests, the archive was invented as a means to safeguard the intellectual patrimony of seventeenth-century scholars, its publicness invoked to perpetuate their ideas and correspondence among future generations of like-minded scientists and antiquarians.<sup>59</sup> Like the self-authorising public of Habermas’s coffee houses, Yale notes that the men who imagined the futurity of the institutional archive imagined a space that was accessible ‘to a ‘public’ that consisted primarily of themselves’.<sup>60</sup> Vesting one’s personal papers in an institutional archive was a bid to be remembered.

So too other kinds of objects. The imperative to preserve a personal collection after the death of its proprietor is an idea that frequently characterises the declarative documents of these public institutions, and the posthumous commands of wills and statutes. Collectors and custodians colour the value of these collections with the rhetoric of public benefit, attempting to insert them into a continuum of ever-expanding knowledge about how the world should be understood, arranged and classified. To disperse the collections would be a disservice to human progress, as well as to the memory of their founders. As will become clear in the following

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<sup>57</sup> *The Tatler* 221, 7<sup>th</sup> September 1710

<sup>58</sup> James Delbourgo, *Collecting The World: The Life and Curiosity of Hans Sloane* (London: Allen Lane, 2017), p. 208.

<sup>59</sup> Elizabeth Yale, *Sociable Knowledge: Natural History and the Nation in Early Modern Britain* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, p. 230

chapters, the figure of Francis Bacon looms large in this discourse about the longevity of knowledge. He advised that rulers who wished to be remembered should establish a collection of ‘whatsoever Nature hath wrought’ and study it, so that ‘when all other miracles and wonders shall cease, by reason that you shall have discovered their natural causes, yourself shall be left the only miracle and wonder of the world’.<sup>61</sup> These perpetual engines of learning promised to outlast more conventional kinds of monument like buildings, territorial conquest or the hoarding of money. Bacon elaborated this idea in his *Advancement of Learning*, addressed to the king as a petition to reform knowledge along new lines of the empirical and experimental study of the natural world. Patronising such a scheme would enable the king’s ‘fame and admiration’ to reach beyond his own time, creating a ‘fixed memorial, and immortal monument’, bearing the king’s ‘character or signature’.<sup>62</sup> As I discuss in chapters two and three, Bacon’s techniques and philosophy were invoked explicitly to support acts of public legacy construction, but the ideas of his *Advancement of Learning* percolated more widely, providing a language with which to link personal ambitions for commemoration with the good of the public in general.

### A collection of collections

Histories of collecting are complicated by the decentralised nature of collections, groupings of objects defined by their interrelations and arrangements rather than inherent qualities.<sup>63</sup> As a field of study, the history of collecting is necessarily as disciplinarily diverse as the ways in which we engage with material objects, and there are vibrant conversations about collecting happening at the confluences of archaeology, art history, book and library studies, the history of science, museology and data science.<sup>64</sup> Addressing pre-disciplinary collections adds another layer of complexity – modern categories like art, natural history, rare books and archaeology manifest in unfamiliar and unpredictable ways in these museums. Making statements about early-modern collections as collective entities relies on a host of distinct disciplinary approaches that each offer a partial viewpoint on assemblages of objects that, when experienced as a whole, were deliberately designed to dazzle, overwhelm and provoke wonder.<sup>65</sup>

This is a cultural history of institutions, not a material history of objects. Objects are at the centre of the thesis, and the manifold meanings and identities they contain form the basis of the ideas and discourses I discuss, but what interests me specifically is the process by which texts sought to make objects legible in the context of collections and collective identities. The durability and prominence of the collections under discussion means that each has generated constellations of

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<sup>61</sup> Francis Bacon, ‘A Device for the Gray’s Inn Revels’, in *The Major Works*, ed. by Brian Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 55.

<sup>62</sup> Francis Bacon, ‘The Advancement of Learning’, in *The Major Works*, p. 122.

<sup>63</sup> For the development of this approach to collections see Susan Pearce, *On Collecting: An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition* (New York, NY & London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 20-7.

<sup>64</sup> W. G. Burgess, ‘State of the Field: The History of Collecting’, in *History: The Journal of the Historical Association*, 106.369 (2021), 108–119.

<sup>65</sup> Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature 1150-1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998).

historiography, from institutional histories to studies of specific objects. But despite the current wealth of interest in material culture and museums, there exists no archivally-precise, comparative account of how these institutions originated in the historical crease between the traditionally defined early modern and modern eras. Much of the archival material I discuss here is well-known, in that it is often cited, but little discussed or analysed. Revisiting the documents in which legislating narratives were constructed for the collections under discussion has been revealing. By applying precise, literary-critical attention to their form, medium, language and composition I have found that – without wanting to overdetermine a single, trans-historical narrative for the emergence of the public museum in Britain – the collections and their paratexts begin speaking to one another.

Each collection under discussion here has developed its own significant historiography, both through works that discuss the collections (as I do) as collective entities, and those that focus on particular objects or individuals whose histories intersect with those of the collections. These historiographies are discussed in the following chapters, in the contexts of each collection, though it is worth noting a number of patterns in studies which, like mine, address multiple early modern museums. Many of these are collections of essays on individual collections, drawn together editorially to present a collective reading on a particular theme. Recent works like Arlene Leis and Kacie L. Wills's *Women and the Art and Science of Collecting* use this format to present a precise and coherent perspective on the diverse historical expertise of their contributors, while older works like Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor's *The Origins of Museums* foreground archival detail with less emphasis on broader analytical comments, a style reflected in the editors' *JHC*.<sup>66</sup>

A number of scholars have used monographs to compare multiple collections, including Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, Ken Arnold and Sean Silver, who focus on some of the same collections I discuss here. While these studies facilitate the synthesis of broader comments on the cultures of historical collecting, they tend to prioritise these (nonetheless valuable) conclusions over attention to precise archival detail – I discuss this particularly in chapters three and four.<sup>67</sup> A notable exception to this tendency is Marjorie Swann's *Curiosities and Texts*, which puts forward a textually-focused analysis of seventeenth-century English collections, foregrounding the literary and self-fashioning aspects that the culture inherited from older European modes of collecting, and subsequently contributed to modern ideas of possessive selfhood.<sup>68</sup> The closing inflection of Swann's study is in many ways a starting point for my own:

The dynamics at work in Tradescant's Ark had been nationalized; the visitor to the new British Museum would view not simply the 'wonderful' identity of an individual collector,

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<sup>66</sup> Arlene Leis and Kacie L. Wills, eds., *Women and the Art and Science of Collecting in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (London: Routledge, 2020); Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor, eds., *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).

<sup>67</sup> Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1992); Ken Arnold, *Cabinets for the Curious: Looking Back at Early English Museums* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006); Sean Silver, *The Mind is a Collection: Case Studies in Eighteenth-Century Thought* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015)

<sup>68</sup> Swann, *Curiosities and Texts*. See also Benedict, *Curiosity*.

but rather the tangible representation of both the nation's identity and the viewer's own status as a citizen[.]<sup>69</sup>

Invoking Habermas, Swann uses her study to challenge the narrative that the national public museum emerged in Britain as a state-led project to construct national identity, instead suggesting that it was a product of the self-fashioning work of early modern collectors. This is an insightful characterisation of the kinds of legislating narratives that impose particular identities onto collected objects, but by conjuring the British Museum as an 'instrument of national integration', Swann elides the precariousness of its monumental structure, built from thousands of material objects whose occasional fragility, disorganisation and anonymity failed to match the rhetorical grandeur of a national edifice.<sup>70</sup> As much as collectors sought to articulate their objects as a 'tangible representation' of a particular ideology or scientific practice, and to see them 'transformed [...] into texts', my investigation seeks to put pressure on the self-authorising narratives written for public collections, examining the dust from which the museum is made.

By addressing public legacies in English museums between the opening of the Ashmolean in 1683 and the foundation of the British Museum in 1753, I facilitate comparison between institutions, enabling me to trace the patterns of language and ideology that informed the distinctive culture of museums that emerged during the period. Nevertheless, each of the five collections under discussion has its own distinctive history, identity and objects, each demanding a unique analytical approach in order to avoid an overly prescriptive overall reading. Hence, in each chapter in this thesis, I address the five collections individually. The thesis itself is best understood as a collection of collections – five case studies which, arranged together, generate broader statements about the nature of the public museum. As heterogeneous as the objects they contain, the monumental structures and textual scaffolding of these institutions nonetheless yield a family resemblance in their commemorative functions, their self-authorised publicness, and their constructions of futurity. Considering the centrality of wills, inheritance and legacy to this process, as well as the intergenerational culture in which these collections participated, the metaphor of family resemblance is particularly important as I address each case study in turn.

In chapter one, I examine how the legislating narratives surrounding the Cotton family's library of manuscripts invested the collection with claims to national identity, public faith, and the commemoration of its founder, Robert Cotton. Addressing the parlous state of the manuscripts during their early years in public stewardship (including the Ashburnham House fire), I plot the disjuncture between monumental declarations and messy materiality as an introduction to the hybrid nature of these self-authorising public collections, constructed between text and object. Situating the Cotton manuscripts in their native landscape of antiquarian discourse I argue that, as both monument and matter, the library's meaning depends on the cyclical narratives told by antiquaries about neglect, decay, and public-spirited recovery of ancient manuscripts by heroic scholar-librarians.

The gap between text and object was both problematic and creative in shaping the public identity of the Cotton Library. In chapter two, I turn to the career of Elias Ashmole to illustrate

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<sup>69</sup> Swann, *Curiosities and Texts*, p. 200.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

how the same gap could be put to deliberate use as an opportunity for self-fashioning. Analysing how Ashmole built himself into a public figure using his alchemical and antiquarian work, I suggest that he was able to manipulate written records to articulate a new legislating narrative for the Tradescant family's collection, putting himself at its centre. I argue that the founding of the Ashmolean Museum is best understood as a manifestation of Ashmole's ambition to gain courtly recognition, and was constructed as an edifice for the permanent commemoration of himself as a public figure.

Ashmole ostensibly aligned the Ashmolean with contemporary appetites for the study of nature, as professed in its founding statutes, quoted above, which echo the knowledge project of the nascent Royal Society. However, as I discuss in chapter three, the Society's project was often hostile to edificial stasis and personal commemoration, rejecting 'slavery to dead Mens names'.<sup>71</sup> Nevertheless, the Royal Society sought permanence as a public institution, greater than the sum of its individual members. I approach the Society's repository with this in mind, as a collection whose symbolic power as a Baconian storehouse of knowledge far surpassed its practical usefulness or integrity. Through a detailed analysis of the repository's printed catalogue and its afterlives, I suggest that the collection's objects became more valuable as tokens of knowledge than as material artefacts, put to use by Royal Society members to construct a lasting textual monument for its ideas.

In chapter four, I look at the first of two ambitious bids to convert personal collections into public institutions, which hinge on the declarative power of the will as a legal document. Operating in the milieu of the Royal Society, John Woodward's collection was distinctive for its singularity of purpose. As I demonstrate, the force of Woodward's legislating narratives transforms his collection of fossils into a material manifestation of his geological theory, leading to an eccentric legacy project in which he attempted to perpetuate his own embodied scheme of scientific interpretation. Woodward has attracted charges of the kind of egotism which are observable in Ashmole's case, but I contend that what he creates is not a monument to himself but a deliberate research resource for future generations of scholars, intended to perpetuate itself through its publicness.

The second transformation of a private collection into a public edifice that I address is that of Hans Sloane in chapter five, whose will prompted the founding of the British Museum. Using the will as a focal point, I discuss how his legacy project engaged not only with constructing a durable legislating narrative for his objects, but with the public profile of collecting in general, addressing contemporary scepticism of the sort Addison humourized in *The Tatler*. Like Ashmole, Sloane displayed acute sensitivity to the power of documentary records and printed material, marshalling periodicals, archives and the genre of the printed will to construct his bid for permanent personal recognition.

In distinctive ways, each of these collections engages with how the concept of futurity can be superimposed on groups of objects, specifically using languages of publicness and permanence. Although most of the institutions founded by these collections still exist today, the objects themselves have been subject to decay, dispersal and destruction, as the resources and priorities

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<sup>71</sup> Sprat, *History*, p. 29.



of generations of custodians change over time. As Dahlia Porter suggests, examining the historical paratexts of collections (which she calls their ‘mechanisms of order’) offers a reminder of the essential entropy of collected objects, their pull towards disorder highlighted by the documents that seek to corral them towards durable collective ends.<sup>72</sup> This is the hubris of Thoresby’s catalogue entry for his pinch of dust, and it echoes through the paratexts of contemporary collections that sought to call themselves public, and lay claim to public knowledge. These monuments of dust, constructed from the particles of their assembled objects and animated by the will to achieve longevity, are only distinguished from common dust and ashes by the tangible effects of their legislating texts.

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<sup>72</sup> Dahlia Porter, ‘Catalogues for an entropic collection: losses, gains and disciplinary exhaustion in the Hunterian Museum, Glasgow’ in *BHJS Themes 4: How Collections End*, ed. by Jon Agar and Simon Werrett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 215–43 (pp. 216-8).

## 1. The Cotton Library

With awe around these silent walks I tread,  
 These are the lasting mansions of the dead;  
 The dead! methinks a thousand tongues reply,  
 These are the tombs of those who cannot die;  
 Crown'd with eternal fame, they sit sublime,  
 And laugh at all the little strife of time.<sup>1</sup>

This outburst of a thousand tongues is a rare moment of concord between the books in George Crabbe's 'The Library' (1781), which are otherwise represented as a dizzying array of clashing genres, disparate historical periods and warring religious texts, all jostling together in the poem's eponymous building. Walking its 'silent walks' with awe at the assembled knowledge of mankind, the poem's narrator moves in a kind of reverie between the library's shelves, conversing with philosophical, scientific, and legal works, histories, plays and romances. Despite their various and contradictory content, the books agree in unison that they all enjoy eternal fame, the stasis of their knowledge granting immortality to their long-dead authors as they laugh at the passage of time. Both mansions and tombs, the books present themselves as monuments to the past with continued vocal vitality.

Yet Crabbe's poem inflects this unanimous chorus with hubris, peppering his description of the library with allusions to the fundamental impermanence of written knowledge. The narrator remarks on 'yon Folio's, once the darlings of the mode [which] Now lie neglected like the birth-day ode' (73-4), and as the poem surveys each genre in turn, it emerges that once-popular ideas are invariably overwritten, their knowledge subject to the fickle whims of fashion in which works are 'now the scorn of men, and now the pride' (79). The books of the library presume their eternal fame and laugh at the passage of time, but elsewhere find themselves destroyed by it, defaced by neglect, which 'has shed / Polluting dust on every reverend head' (456-7). Everywhere, the narrator finds that the books in the library are subject to the indiscriminate destruction of 'Time's fell tooth' (78).

This is the paradox of Crabbe's library: its books simultaneously 'sit sublime' and 'lie neglected', they are 'tombs of those who cannot die' whose wisdom is both 'trite' and 'sage' (75). They announce their claims to eternity while revealing their impermanence, a duplicity which Adam Smyth and Gill Partington have characterised as the 'two-faced' nature of books: on the one hand they are totems for all kinds of values, myths and meanings, but on the other constantly remind us of their material fragility. Smyth and Partington argue that this fragility radically destabilises both the permanence of written works and the identities of the libraries they constitute. Their stance on the material instability of libraries speaks to a scholarly trend seeking to complicate Roger Chartier's *The Order of Books*, which characterises libraries as stable

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<sup>1</sup> George Crabbe, 'The Library' in *The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. by Arthur Pollard and Norma Dalrymple-Champneys, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988) i.120, lines 110-5. Subsequent reference to this text given parenthetically by line number.

repositories of knowledge.<sup>2</sup> Recognition of the material ephemerality of books has recast the permanence of libraries as ‘doomed to failure’, their conceptual frameworks ‘not at all stable’.<sup>3</sup> Assumptions that their holdings are ‘maintained and shared indefinitely’ are subverted in the context of active collection management and inevitable material disintegration.<sup>4</sup> The implication is that the library’s greatest weakness is that it is made up of books, fickle objects whose protean material forms destabilise claims to permanent collective coherence.

Crabbe’s poem offers an alternative viewpoint. In his reverie, the narrator constructs an idealised perspective of the library in which all its books’ contents can be accessed simultaneously in a survey of what he frames as the totality of human knowledge. The power of this perspective lends the library itself a ‘godlike wisdom’ (126) that transcends mortal experience by encompassing all knowledge under its ‘sacred dome’ (52). The library’s greatest strength is that it aggregates fleeting ideas and material forms into a collective identity, one that Crabbe makes manifest in an apparition, an ethereal figure made of clouds that rise from ‘dusty piles and ancient volumes’ (545). The figure is identified as ‘the Genius of the place’ (554), who at the same time embodies decay, constituted from the very stuff – dust – that marks the books’ age and neglect.

This manifestation of the ‘genius’ of the library raises questions about the extra-material qualities of a collection, the things that differentiate it from an aggregation of physical matter. In the preface to his 1728 *Cyclopaedia* Ephraim Chambers asserts that, by addressing every branch of human knowledge between its covers, his work could replace libraries, avoiding their ‘parade and incumbrance’. He suggests that a library’s goal is to provide access to the greatest amount of information, which is hampered by the inconvenience of physical books.<sup>5</sup> Chambers speaks to a long tradition of knowledge organisation in which the term ‘library’ was as often applied to textual compendia as to material assemblages of texts.<sup>6</sup> Eric Garberson has identified this plasticity in the early modern definition of ‘library’ with the etymology of *bibliotheca*, which accommodates both physical collections and lists, affording a slippage between a group of books and a virtual collection. In his study of the ‘wall-system’ library, Garberson suggests that the distinctive feature of such an arrangement (which enables a visitor to take in a library’s entire

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<sup>2</sup> Gill Partington and Adam Smyth, eds., *Book Destruction from the Medieval to the Contemporary* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 2-9.

<sup>3</sup> Alberto Manguel, *The Library at Night* (New Haven, CT & London: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 3; James Raven, ed., *Lost Libraries: The Destruction of Great Book Collections since Antiquity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 27.

<sup>4</sup> David McKitterick, *The Invention of Rare Books: Private Interest and Public Memory, 1600-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 1, 26-7.

<sup>5</sup> Ephraim Chambers, *Cyclopaedia, or, an universal dictionary of arts and sciences*, 2 vols. (London: Knapton et al, 1728), i.ii.

<sup>6</sup> The early modern blurring of ‘library’ between physical and textual space caused what Roger Chartier has called ‘complex and contradictory relations’ between the material library and its manifestation in print genres – see his *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe Between the 14th and 18th Centuries* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 69. For a full account of the complex interdependencies of compendia and physical collections in the early modern period see Ann Blair, *Too Much To Know: Managing Scholarly Information Before the Modern Age* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2010).

contents in a single vantage) is fundamental to understanding a collection, anchoring its physical space to its conceptual identity.<sup>7</sup>

The configuration of collective identity Garberson describes is strikingly similar to that of Crabbe's library: a cacophony of individual volumes whose unity as a collection is visible only at the vantage of the whole, literally visible as the ghostly 'genius of the place'. As represented by Crabbe's ethereal apparition, this extra-material quality haunts the library, a unifying force conjured from the physical particles of the collection into the very idea of a collection. Books appear paradoxically 'two-faced' as distinct objects, their claims to durability at the mercy of their unstable material conditions, but the idea of the library exists beyond these material conditions, not a single physical entity but a collective identity made up of the interrelations between physical books, the buildings that contain them, and their catalogues. Conceptualisation as a library offers books a durability that transcends the 'wider ecology of destruction' in which their paper and parchment exist.<sup>8</sup>

That is not to say that extra-material identities adhere consistently to collections of books. Studies such as James Raven's collection *Lost Libraries* have demonstrated that forces of deaccession, loss, reorganisation and decay play a critical role in the mutable identities of libraries through time, complicating any straightforward historical narratives about cumulative repositories of works.<sup>9</sup> The library's conceptual identity offers a form of unity, but this isn't uniform between collections, its durability isn't guaranteed. Robin Myers, Michael Harris and Giles Mandelbrote suggest that 'nothing can guarantee the collective survival of a group of books', but go on to suggest that 'individual libraries created by extreme wealth and the most persistent kinds of scholarship can sometimes take on a unity of form which enables them to move through time'.<sup>10</sup> The durable concept of a library, its 'unity of form', depends not on the physical matter of its constituent books but on the intellectual and financial resources that determine its management.

This entanglement of physical fragility and collective identity forms the focus of my investigation in this chapter of the Cotton Library, a collection whose history furnishes amplified examples of how these concepts interrelate. Collectively, it was made to stand as a monument to British history and national identity; physically, it was very nearly destroyed. Nevertheless, its manuscripts continue to wield a powerful 'unity of form', recognisable today by the shelf marks they were given by the collection's founder, Sir Robert Cotton, at the turn of the seventeenth century. The Cotton Library could still plausibly be identified as 'Sir Robert Cotton's collection of manuscripts' when it was listed on the UNESCO Memory of the World register in 2018, retaining a nominal identity that has enabled the collection to move through time with a rare

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<sup>7</sup> Eric Garberson, 'Libraries, memory and the space of knowledge', *JHC*, 18.2 (2006), 105–136.

<sup>8</sup> Partington and Smyth, *Book Destruction*, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Raven, *Lost Libraries*.

<sup>10</sup> Robin Myers, Michael Harris and Giles Mandelbrote, 'Introduction' in *Books On the Move: Tracking Copies through Collections and the Book Trade*, ed. by Robin Myers, Michael Harris and Giles Mandelbrote (New Castle, DE and London: Oak Knoll Press and British Library, 2007), vii–x (p. vii).

level of collective coherence.<sup>11</sup> Obeying Myers, Harris and Mandelbrote's paradigm, the Cotton Library has remained durable thanks to extreme wealth and persistent scholarship – since its inception, the collection has been characterised as a crucible for the development of British antiquarian research.<sup>12</sup>

This nominal identity has been much more durable than the collection it purports to describe. Robert Cotton's collection was made up of manuscripts, printed books, coins, medals and antiquities, and the scholarship of his antiquarian associates depended on the interrelations between these objects. Yet the 'Cottonian Library', as it was donated to the British crown in 1701, referred only to the manuscripts in Cotton's twelve presses.<sup>13</sup> This diminished collection was then subject to fifty years of what has been described as 'parsimonious and neglectful' treatment by Parliament, rotting in damp rooms, decimated by a fire and confused by subsequent conservation efforts.<sup>14</sup> This is thrown into relief by the rhetorical force with which acts of Parliament announced the permanent durability of the collection. When the remaining manuscripts were integrated into the new British Museum, its chief librarian noted that the collection was barely recognisable by the name of the Cotton Library.<sup>15</sup>

Paula Findlen has suggested that collections are constructed in the interplay between their physical objects and their textual representations.<sup>16</sup> In the case of the Cotton Library, this interplay happened in a wide gulf between precarious material conditions and language that claimed the collection as a stable repository of national identity and knowledge. Cotton deliberately assembled manuscripts containing unique records of the medieval British state, royal papers, monastic cartularies and the earliest examples of literature in English. In doing so he sought to preserve them from the threats of post-Reformation dispersal and destruction, housing them in a library at a time when libraries were becoming 'state-sponsored center[s] of national

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<sup>11</sup> United Kingdom National Commission for UNESCO, 'UK Archives awarded United Nations recognition', <<https://spark.adobe.com/page/cfV2TjfxIeenS/>>.

<sup>12</sup> Graham Parry, *The Trophies of Time: English Antiquarians of the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Jennifer Summit, *Memory's Library: Medieval Books in Early Modern England* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

<sup>13</sup> Colin Tite has argued that the reference to 'written books' in the act does not refer to printed books, which he suggests were deemed less valuable than the manuscripts and remained in the Cotton family until the demise of its baronetcy in 1752. See Colin G. C. Tite, 'The Printed Books of the Cotton Family and Their Dispersal' in *Libraries Within the Library: The Origins of the British Library's Printed Collections*, ed. by Giles Mandelbrote and Barry Taylor (London: British Library, 2009), 44–51.

<sup>14</sup> Matt Kuhns, *Cotton's Library: The Many Perils of Preserving History* (Lakewood, OH: Lyon Hall Press, 2014) p. xiii.

<sup>15</sup> London, British Museum, Original Letters and Papers 1, f. 66r.

<sup>16</sup> Paula Findlen, 'The Museum: Its classical etymology and renaissance genealogy', *JHC*, 1.1 (1989), 59–78 (p. 65). See also Marjorie Swann, *Curiosities and Texts: The Culture of Collecting in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); Barbara Benedict, *Curiosity: A Cultural History of Early Modern Inquiry* (Chicago IL & London: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

history'.<sup>17</sup> When the manuscripts were gifted to the British crown at the beginning of the eighteenth century, their preservation became a matter of 'publick faith'.<sup>18</sup>

In this chapter I examine the paratexts of the Cotton Library – the catalogues, statutes, and acts of Parliament that sought to define it – in the context of its physical precariousness, mapping its fractured identity. In view of the collection's status as Britain's first nationally-owned library, I consider how discussions about its organisation and access changed during the eighteenth century, paying particular attention to the fact that the majority of the extant sources for this period are written by and for the library's keepers and trustees. What claims to 'publick use & advantage' can be made when so little attention was afforded to the practical use of the library?<sup>19</sup> The collection was created in a milieu of antiquarian scholarship, which has continued to participate in shaping the library's identity since its inception. Beginning the chapter with a discussion of how Cotton's contemporaries started to construct a mythos for the manuscripts, I conclude by suggesting that ever since – just like the 'genius' of Crabbe's library – the value of the texts as a durable monument has been conjured from the fact of their impermanence and the marks of their decay.

### **Building the Monument**

The long title of John Speed's *Historie of Great Britaine* (1611) announced its project to encompass, in a folio volume of 745 pages, the 'successions, lives, acts, and issues of the English monarchs, from Julius Caesar, to our most gracious soveraigne King James'.<sup>20</sup> It was a herculean undertaking, one that drew on a lifetime of antiquarian expertise and a host of historical sources from manuscripts to ancient coins and ruins – it sapped Speed of his wits, according to his proem. The *Historie's* pagination is a continuation of its twin volume *The Theatre of the Empire of Great Britain* (1611), in which the dedication to the king calls James I & VI the 'inlarger and uniter of the British Empire; restorer of the British name; establisher of perpetuall peace, in church, and commonwealth'.<sup>21</sup> This monumental work participated in a developing tradition of grand chorographical works including William Camden's *Britannia* (1586) and Raphael Holinshead's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Irelande* (1577) which were sites where British identity was constructed topographically, historically and politically. In its dedication to the king, Speed's work associated itself with the unification of Britain, positioning chorography as integral to

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<sup>17</sup> Jennifer Summit, 'Monuments and Ruins: Spenser and the problem of the English library', *English Literary History*, 70.1 (2003), 1–34 (p. 2). See also Summit, *Memory's Library*, p. 138.

<sup>18</sup> *A Report from the Committee Appointed to View the Cottonian Library* (London: House of Commons, 1732), p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> London, Parliamentary Archives, *Cotton Library Act 1701* (12 & 13 William III c.7).

<sup>20</sup> John Speed, *The History of Great Britaine under the conquests of ye Romans, Saxons, Danes and Normans* (London: W. Hall and J. Beale, 1611).

<sup>21</sup> John Davies, 'To the right well deserving Mr John Speed the author of this worke' in John Speed, *The Theatre of the Empire of Great Britaine* (London: W. Hall, 1611), sig.[¶]2r].

circumscribing the nation in ‘perpetuall peace’ through unprecedented historical scope and geographical range.<sup>22</sup>

In 1611 Speed could not have been aware of the irony of this gesture to lasting amity, but the *Historie* suggests that its hubris was not lost on him. Describing the work’s process of compilation, he notes that ‘the records of Great Britaine are eaten up with Times teeth’, and suggests that even the national records of great civilisations like Rome, ‘kept with a stronger guard’, have been similarly laid waste by time.<sup>23</sup> Speed structures the *Historie* around the conquests of the Romans, Saxons, Danes and Normans, narrating the successive triumphs and declines of empires and creating a sense of the inevitable cyclicity of civilisation. As the conclusion notes, ‘the Fates have erected, polished and puld downe, the supporting pillars of Great Britaines Theatre’.<sup>24</sup> The overall message is of inescapable decay at the mercy of ‘Time’s teeth’, under which even Julius Caesar is at risk of becoming a ‘forgetfull [i.e. forgettable] person’.<sup>25</sup>

Yet in the midst of this atmosphere of inevitable decay are hints towards a countermeasure. Referring to Moses’ insistence that the history of his people be written down, Speed points out that ‘empires, kingdomes, commonweales and cities do end and perish, yet the histories thereof do remaine and live’.<sup>26</sup> Hope, he implies, lies with the historian, whom Speed’s commendatory verses paint as a heroic reclamer of Britain’s identity, and hence its glory. The leaves of the *Theatre* and *Historie*, one poem reads, are raised ‘above all ending things’ by a scholar whose name shall be remembered ‘till Death be dead’.<sup>27</sup> The hyperbole is conventional, but the idea of the antiquarian enterprise as a foil for death is an important one, especially when we consider that Speed, as a writer and compiler of historical sources, was not working alone. He makes this clear in his ‘Summary Conclusion of the Whole’, a note at the end of the *Historie* containing a list of acknowledgements. Afforded the most praise is Sir Robert Cotton, who for Speed becomes a ‘worthy repairer of eating times ruines [...] another Philadelphus in preserving old monuments, and ancient records, whose cabinets were unlocked, and library continually set open to my free accesse’.<sup>28</sup>

No doubt influenced by his teacher at Westminster, William Camden, Robert Cotton started collecting medieval manuscripts while he studied at Middle Temple in 1588, and became closely associated with the nascent Society of Antiquaries. He mobilised his antiquarian knowledge both to build an extensive network among prominent collectors, and to further his political career as an expert adviser on matters of legislative precedent. Far from ambitions towards a universal library, Cotton’s became a selective and deliberate assemblage of works related to the civilisation,

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<sup>22</sup> The *Theatre*’s maps were the first to cover Scotland and Ireland in more than cursory detail. See Sarah Bendall, ‘Speed, John (1551/2–1629)’, *ODNB*.

<sup>23</sup> Speed, *Historie*, p. 153.

<sup>24</sup> Speed, *Theatre*, ‘Summary Conclusion of the Whole’.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Speed, *Historie*, p. 152.

<sup>27</sup> Davies, ‘To Mr John Speed’.

<sup>28</sup> Speed, *Theatre*, ‘Summary Conclusion of the Whole’.

culture, genealogy and governance (both monastic and state) of the British Isles. Utilising this collection in his work for the crown meant it was intimately tied to ideas of national and regnal identity, so much so that the library cut short Cotton's political career after Charles I feared it contained powerful, seditious material related to the British constitution. Cotton was among the early advocates of a state-owned library, and when his proposals fell through his own collection became a surrogate, open to anyone who (like Speed) numbered among Cotton's intellectual circle and had a legitimate claim to its use. During his political exile, Cotton composed an indenture in 1629 that commanded his library be kept 'for the use of posterity' after he died, in his will leaving it to his son Thomas.<sup>29</sup>

Jennifer Summit has argued that libraries like Cotton's became powerful symbols which, by transforming medieval texts into archival sources, denoted both a clean break from Britain's monastic past and an effort to rebuild a new sense of national identity, offering 'material encounters' with manuscripts that constituted the textual patrimony of the state.<sup>30</sup> Robert Cotton's advocacy of a national library, his use of his manuscripts in service of public office, and his indenture settling his collection 'for the use of posterity' suggest that his library of manuscripts was deliberately imbued with a sense of national identity. It was situated at Cotton House in the Palace of Westminster, positioned (as Cotton saw himself) at the heart of government. This was reinforced by scholarly works like Speed's, which credited Cotton with the ability to hold back the ravenous teeth of time and which used sources from the collection to craft monuments to the newly-unified British state. As a commendatory note to the *Historie* remarks, 'the glory of our nation being almost buried in the pit of obscurity, is herein revived'.<sup>31</sup>

Speed was not alone in utilising Cotton's collection for his scholarly endeavours – surviving loan records indicate that while the library was in the hands of the Cotton family there were at least 270 individual borrowings.<sup>32</sup> John Selden and John Weever were among the writers whose works explicitly acknowledged debts to the Cotton manuscripts during Robert Cotton's lifetime, while Henry Peacham claimed that 'not onely our Brittain but Europe herselfe' was in debt to this collector.<sup>33</sup> Borrowing from the library slowed following the death of Robert Cotton in 1631, though scholars continued to deploy the reputation of the 'famous Cottonian Library' to reinforce their publications.<sup>34</sup> During the Interregnum, fears of renewed Protestant iconoclasm intensified hope among antiquaries that written records would prove more durable than stone

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<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Colin G. C. Tite, *The Panizzi Lectures: The Manuscript Library of Sir Robert Cotton* (London: British Library, 1994), p. 20. For a concise account of Robert Cotton's career and collecting activities see Tite, *The Panizzi Lectures*, pp. 1-25. A more detailed discussion can be found in Kevin Sharpe, *Sir Robert Cotton 1586-1631: History and Politics in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).

<sup>30</sup> Summit, *Memory's Library*, pp. 3-7.

<sup>31</sup> Richard St George Norrey, 'in favour of this worke', in Speed, *Theatre*, sig.[¶]2r].

<sup>32</sup> Colin G. C. Tite, *The Early Records of Sir Robert Cotton's Library: Formation, Cataloguing, Use* (London: British Library, 2003), p. 3.

<sup>33</sup> Henry Peacham, *The Compleat Gentleman* (London: F. Constable, 1622), p. 163; John Selden, *The Historie of Tithes* (London: n.p., 1618), sig.[a2r-a3r]; John Weever, *Ancient Funerall Monuments* (London: T. Harper, 1631), sig.[\*3v].

<sup>34</sup> Peter Heylyn, *Ecclesia Restaurata* (London: H. Twyford, 1660) p. 48; Gilbert Burnet, *The History of the Reformation of the Church of England* (London: R. Chiswell, 1679), sig.[b2v].



monuments. William Dugdale transcribed the monuments in St Paul's Cathedral so that 'by Inke and paper [they] might be preserved for posteritie, forasmuch as the things themselves were so neer unto ruine'.<sup>35</sup> In this environment the Cotton library took on an ark-like quality, capable of sheltering written traces of Britain's past in isolation from political or religious conflict.

When Thomas Smith proposed compiling the first printed catalogue of the Cotton manuscripts in the 1690s, he was equipped with nearly a century of antiquarian writing which had valorised the library as a heroic refuge from the teeth of time. Antiquarian practices also implied that, through diligent transcription, the durability of monuments could be transmuted into paper records. This enabled Smith to construct a powerful new identity for the manuscripts, both in and as the *Catalogus Librorum Manuscriptorum Bibliothecae Cottonianae* (1696). At the time Smith was de facto keeper of the manuscripts at Cotton House in Westminster, while John Cotton (Robert's grandson) was living at the family seat at Conington, in what is now Cambridgeshire. He bestowed on Smith 'the same liberty which my father gave to the learned Mr Selden' in cataloguing his manuscripts, an endeavour which Cotton considered a 'great honour' for the family, 'propagating our memory and reputation to posterity'.<sup>36</sup> Smith's replies indicate he was similarly committed to honouring the memory of his patron's grandfather.

The catalogue hence had to fulfil a dual representative function. Firstly it had to attest to the scholarly significance of the collection, which Smith achieved in his prefatory 'The Life of Sir Robert Cotton, Knight and Baronet' by emphasising the importance each category of manuscripts had to the knowledge of the nation – studied together, he suggested, the categories represented the sum total of Britain's historical identity.<sup>37</sup> Secondly the catalogue had to stand as a monument to its founder's achievement, and in this respect Smith's characterisation of Robert Cotton resonates with Speed's, as he insisted that Cotton and his contemporaries were motivated by 'the glory of imperial Britain', using the virtues of their learning to 'rescue from decay, oblivion and extinction the glory which our nation had earned in the past by outstanding deeds'.<sup>38</sup> Both of these functions – the library as an unparalleled resource and as a monument to Cotton – depended on constructing for it an identity as a complete, coherent collection.

The catalogue itself is an attempt to achieve this, a grand naming of the library which by the act of printing deliberately transformed it from a resource for a small group of antiquaries into a public edifice. As Smith wrote to John Cotton, his catalogue would call the library the 'Bibliotheca Cottoniana, by which name it will be known and distinguished for ever'. In the same letter, Smith explained that his friend Edward Bernard was petitioning him to add his Cotton catalogue to what was to become Bernard's *Catalogi manuscriptorum Angliae et Hiberniae* (1697), a grand work surveying the manuscripts in a number of prominent British collections. However,

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<sup>35</sup> William Dugdale, *The History of St Pauls Cathedral in London* (London: T. Warren, 1658), sig.[A3v]

<sup>36</sup> John Cotton (3<sup>rd</sup> Bart.) to Thomas Smith, 1<sup>st</sup> April 1693, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Smith 48, f. 269; idem, 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1693, f. 271.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas Smith, 'The Life of Sir Robert Cotton, Knight and Baronet', trans. Godfrey Turton in Thomas Smith, *Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Cottonian Library 1696*, ed. by C. G. T. Tite (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1984), 47–58. Smith also prefaces his catalogue with a selection of quotations from seventeenth-century scholars, praising the library's usefulness.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. pp. 47, 55.

Smith insisted that to merge the Cotton catalogue with that of any other library would do no honour to Robert Cotton's memory.<sup>39</sup> It was imperative that the Cotton manuscripts be recorded separately and completely, so as not to diminish their founder's importance.

Reinforcing the national significance of Cotton's library, Smith suggested that 'the Cotton library belonged not to a single family but the whole nation'.<sup>40</sup> This is the catalogue's most explicit mark of distinction from previous efforts: Smith intended it to 'be of use to my native land and to literary culture' in contrast to earlier unpublished catalogues that were made 'merely to serve a personal need'.<sup>41</sup> To underline this distinction, Smith points out that these previous catalogues are 'imperfect, teeming [...] with a thousand errors', a fault that his work purports to remedy, furnishing a 'plainer and fuller understanding of the books'.<sup>42</sup> The emphasis on accuracy is important in the construction of a coherent identity for the collection, implying that the items described in the catalogue's pages are the totality of the Cotton Library. While, for scholars like Speed, Cotton's coins and artefacts were of equal importance to the material in the Caesar presses, Smith excludes these other objects from his Cottonian edifice, demoting them to an 'honourable adjunct to [Cotton's] library', 'second in value' to the manuscripts.<sup>43</sup>

In the prefatory essays to Smith's catalogue, the manuscripts underwent a transformation. Until 1696, references to their value had focused on the unique knowledge contained within them and their utility as a resource, assembled in one place, for the advancement of historical study. What Smith added to this was a recognition of the physical manuscripts themselves, combined with their national significance and memorial function, which elevated the material texts to an explicitly sanctified status. The manuscripts became 'sacred parchments, relics of the ancient past', 'sacred heirlooms' that commanded 'sacrosanct authority', turning the library itself into a 'shrine of sacred antiquity'.<sup>44</sup> Smith suggests that the greatest sin is to destroy, alienate or otherwise disrespect these relic-like objects, claiming that theft is 'bordering on sacrilege'.<sup>45</sup> He leverages what Jonathan Sawday and Neil Rhodes have called the 'quasi-mystical power' of encountering manuscripts in an age of print, their uniqueness as cultural artefacts demanding that they not become objects for mere consumption.<sup>46</sup> A crucial part of memorialising Cotton and transforming his library into a national edifice was the sanctification of the objects that make up his collection. As a means of monumentalising the library, imbuing the manuscripts with a kind of protective holiness helped Smith to tackle a number of issues. On an ideological level, it

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<sup>39</sup> Thomas Smith to John Cotton, 18<sup>th</sup> August 1694, Bodleian Library, MS Smith 59, ff. 221-2.

<sup>40</sup> Smith, *Catalogue*, p. 23.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 23, 24.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* p. 43.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 23, 25, 28.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* p. 25. Turton's translations reflect similar sanctifying descriptions in Smith's original Latin, see Thomas Smith, *Catalogus Librorum Manuscriptorum Bibliothecae Cottonianae* (Oxford: Sheldonian Theatre, 1696), sig. [¶]3r-4v].

<sup>46</sup> Jonathan Sawday and Neil Rhodes, 'Introduction' in *The Renaissance Computer: Knowledge Technology in the First Age of Print*, ed. by Jonathan Sawday and Neil Rhodes (New York, NY & London: Routledge, 2000), 1-16 (p. 3).

allowed him to defuse his potentially incendiary claims that works from pre-Reformation monasteries constituted ‘literary treasure’ by resituating the value of the manuscripts away from their Catholic content into their uniqueness as national material inheritance.<sup>47</sup> On a more practical level, it was a response to a cluster of interconnected issues that threatened the continued existence of the Cotton Library, with which John Cotton had entrusted him.

Although Smith’s catalogue promoted the library as the totality of Robert Cotton’s collection, after a century of lending and inevitable theft a number of manuscripts were missing – as Smith regretfully notes, the alienated manuscripts would be obvious to any reader by the gaps in his catalogue.<sup>48</sup> As suggested by his correspondence, the catalogue was designed in part to restore lost texts to the library by kindling ‘a sense of justice, honour and honesty’ in those individuals who, by the generous lending practices of Robert and Thomas Cotton, had manuscripts from the collection in their possession.<sup>49</sup> Turning the manuscripts into quasi-sacred objects added weight to this design. Smith claims that ‘mere possession however acquired [cannot] create a right against the claims of the true owner’ implying that each text is (to rework his phrase) much more than a ‘mere possession’, its parchment integral to the splendour of the Cottonian monument.<sup>50</sup> The sense of completeness in the catalogue was intended to restore the physical library to comparable completeness.

With the shelves of the Cotton collection depleted, Smith’s catalogue was the only version of the library that he considered complete, in the sense that it represented the totality of Robert Cotton’s achievement – the work became (and remains) the reference point for the contents of the collection pre-1731. As well as the responsibility to honour the library’s founder, the accuracy of Smith’s undertaking was in part motivated by a fear that, as he wrote to John Cotton, ‘some officious men, to call them by no worse names, will make good their threate, and print an imperfect faulty catalogue’.<sup>51</sup> The publication of a faulty or incomplete catalogue would be fatal to Smith’s mission to create a coherent, definitive identity for the collection, but Smith’s fear speaks equally to a pressing material concern about the future survival of the library. In the prefatory essay to the *Catalogus*, we learn that the ‘officious men’ Smith describes in his correspondence to John Cotton are in fact unscrupulous booksellers.<sup>52</sup>

John Cotton was in his seventies when Smith started compiling the catalogue. He had remarried and also outlived his son, complicating the disposal of his legacy between two branches of the family. At his death in 1702, the baronetcy passed to his grandson John, who also received Cotton House in Westminster, though this inheritance was immediately disputed by John’s siblings. As a later memorandum of the library’s trustees described, in the hands of the warring

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<sup>47</sup> Smith, *Catalogue*, p. 23. On Smith’s careful handling of the issue of interpreting monastic texts see *ibid.* pp. 27-8.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* p. 24. Colin Tite has estimated that around 10% of the collection was lost during the seventeenth century – see Tite, *The Panizzeji Lectures*, pp. 24-5.

<sup>49</sup> Thomas Smith to John Cotton, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1697, Bodleian Library, MS Smith 59, f. 265.

<sup>50</sup> Smith, *Catalogue*, p. 25.

<sup>51</sup> Thomas Smith to John Cotton, 5<sup>th</sup> May 1694, Bodleian Library, MS Smith 59, f. 217.

<sup>52</sup> Smith, *Catalogue*, p. 23.

branches of the Cotton family, the library would have been ‘broke[n] open, rifled and plundered’.<sup>53</sup> As John Cotton’s confidante and tutor to his grandchildren, Smith was intimately aware of this threat, describing how his patron’s ‘two illiterate grandsons [...] used to talke in his life time of selling’ the library.<sup>54</sup> Smith’s ‘ability in judging of the worth of MSS’ made him sought after as an agent for buying and selling manuscripts, and also meant he was highly attuned to the endangered survival of an aristocratic library following the death of its owner.<sup>55</sup> Vesting a collection in a public institution had been shown to be an effective way to keep a collection together: as John Evelyn intimated, Henry Howard’s gift of his library to the Royal Society in 1667 was merely to preserve it from embezzlement.<sup>56</sup>

In crafting a coherent identity for the Cotton Library in a public forum, Smith was not only honouring the memory of its founder or its importance to scholarship, but was trying to prevent its imminent dispersal, while at the same time imagining for it a standard of completeness. Imbuing the material manuscripts with a sense of sanctity was instrumental to this, the basis of an edifice that Smith and his patron John Cotton were attempting, via the published catalogue, to manoeuvre into national patrimony and away from the custody of those who would sell it off. As Smith argued in his prefatory essays, the library ‘deserves to be accounted an asset of national wealth no less valuable and useful than the fortifications and ships by which the majesty of England is asserted and assured’ – a material resource of national importance whose integrity should be safeguarded.<sup>57</sup>

In 1701, Smith’s hint that the collection properly belonged to ‘the whole nation’ was realised in an act of Parliament that agreed to take ownership of the manuscripts when John Cotton died. It solidified into statute what Smith had set out in the *Catalogus*, decreeing that the library was ‘of great use and service for the knowledge and preservation of our constitution both in Church and State’, and that it ‘should be kept and preserved by the name of the Cottonian Library for publick use & advantage’.<sup>58</sup> The act gave stewardship of the library to a group of trustees: four members of the Cotton family (conspicuously not John Cotton’s grandsons) and Robert Harley, the speaker of the House of Commons. These trustees were obliged to appoint a library keeper, who must within six months of their appointment draw up another catalogue and swear an oath to stop any part of the library from being ‘given away, aliened, disposed, or otherwise imbezelled’.<sup>59</sup>

It has been suggested that the act was not a simple fulfilment of Robert Cotton’s 1629 indenture, but it does appear to have fulfilled the vision John Cotton and Thomas Smith constructed for the collection’s future.<sup>60</sup> The library’s integrity was to be enforced, its founder to be remembered,

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<sup>53</sup> Cambridge, Cambridgeshire Record Office, 588DR/Z10 (b).

<sup>54</sup> Thomas Smith to Sir Robert Cotton (5<sup>th</sup> Bart.), 24<sup>th</sup> July 1703, Bodleian Library, MS Smith 53, f. 295.

<sup>55</sup> Narcissus Marsh to Thomas Smith, 4<sup>th</sup> April 1706, Bodleian Library, MS Smith 52, f. 129.

<sup>56</sup> John Evelyn, *The Diary of John Evelyn* ed. E. De Beer 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), iii.472-3.

<sup>57</sup> Smith, *Catalogue*, p. 56.

<sup>58</sup> Parliamentary Archives, *Cotton Library Act 1701*.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Tite, *The Panizzi Lectures*, p. 33.

and its significance to be recognised by law. Nearly a century earlier John Speed had claimed that Robert Cotton's library had the power to repair 'eating times ruines', and in 1701 it was invested with the rhetoric of permanence and perpetuity, designed to fend off theft, miscataloguing and imminent dispersal and assume a durable identity, 'settled, limited and vested in the trustees [...] for ever'.<sup>61</sup>

### Preservation and Disorder

That Smith's efforts (and those of the 1701 act) were a success is evident in the persistence of the manuscripts' collective public identity. In the British Library's *Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms* exhibition (2018-19), around a quarter of the manuscripts on display bore a Cotton shelf mark; the collection was referred to a number of times in the gallery space, and it was an integral reference point for the online supplements to the exhibition.<sup>62</sup> On permanent display too, unmissable in the library's atrium, is a bust of Robert Cotton. When the manuscripts were listed on the UNESCO Memory of the World register in 2018, the collection was referred to as 'Sir Robert Cotton's Collection of Manuscripts' which included 'many of the most famous historical and literary treasures of the United Kingdom'. UNESCO's press release also highlighted that 'ever since the collection was formed, the Cotton manuscripts have been made available for consultation by scholars worldwide', pledging that inscription on the Memory of the World register ensured the collection would be 'fully preserved and protected and be permanently accessible to all'.<sup>63</sup> The representation of the Cotton Library today bears many of the hallmarks prioritised by Smith and John Cotton: the manuscripts' unparalleled significance to medieval British history, their value as a memorial to Robert Cotton, and their continued accessibility as a scholarly resource. Smith and Cotton would, no doubt, be pleased with the durability of the collection's identity.

However, the period immediately following the library's acquisition by the crown is a notorious episode in its history. When the manuscripts were transported to the new British Museum in 1757, the museum's chief librarian Gowin Knight described them:

The Cottonean Library, as it now stands, does not make so respectable an appearance when shewn, as to equal the expectation, which the fame of this justly celebrated collection has raised in the minds of all those who have not seen it before.<sup>64</sup>

Knight identified a gulf that had opened between its physical condition and its collective identity: the idea of the library as a national monument was durable, but evidently the manuscripts themselves were not. In the space of sixty years the mouldy, scorched and disorganised presses

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<sup>61</sup> Parliamentary Archives, *The Cotton Library Act 1701*.

<sup>62</sup> Julian Harrison, 'Fire in the Library', 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2018, <<https://blogs.bl.uk/digitisedmanuscripts/2018/10/fire-in-the-library.html>>.

<sup>63</sup> United Kingdom National Commission for UNESCO, 'UK Archives awarded United Nations recognition', <<https://spark.adobe.com/page/cfV2TjfxIeenS/>>.

<sup>64</sup> British Museum, *Original Letters and Papers 1*, f. 66r.

of paper and parchment no longer lived up to the textual monument of Smith's *Catalogus*, and the collection's identity had become de-anchored from the manuscripts it claimed to represent. To a great extent, the enshrining of the Cotton manuscripts' identity in statute protected them from external forces of dissolution, but Knight's observations demonstrate that threats to the collection's integrity could (and did) originate from inside the library's walls.

The most dramatic instance of this was a fire of 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1731, which tore through Ashburnham House and the room where the manuscripts were then being kept, damaging around two-fifths of the codices. Andrew Prescott called this 'perhaps the greatest bibliographical disaster of modern times in Britain'.<sup>65</sup> Reports suggest that volumes were thrown from windows in an effort to minimise the destruction, then doused with water to extinguish the fire – this exacerbated the fire damage and wrought havoc on the organisation of the manuscripts. The immediate conservation effort, led by William Whiston, involved the unbinding and drying of individual leaves, a process which inevitably caused leaves to go missing or to get reinserted into the wrong bindings.<sup>66</sup> The fire and subsequent conservation radically destabilised the physical integrity of the library, suddenly dislocating the group of manuscripts from their configuration in Smith's textual monument which, as Prescott observes, was 'reduced [...] overnight to the status of a historical document'.<sup>67</sup>

Most manuscript volumes retained their original shelf marks, but many of the tracts Smith had catalogued within them were suddenly unrecognisable: completely burnt or left as loose and fragmentary leaves. Accounting accurately for the physical manuscripts after the fire was rendered impossible by concurrent, contradictory viewpoints on what could or could not be salvaged. The chart in fig.1 compares six accounts of the manuscripts that were drawn up in the immediate aftermath of the fire. The sources vary in their level of detail and specific vocabulary, but they agree on three basic categories to describe the extent of the fire damage: undamaged texts, partially damaged texts, and texts that were either missing or so damaged as to be useless. These are the categories into which the descriptions of individual manuscripts have been aggregated in fig.1. The sources consist of:

- (1) **MS Add 4696** – annotations to a handwritten inventory of 1718
- (2) **Jan 1732 (Carte)** – a letter written by Thomas Carte in January 1732
- (3) **Jan 1732 (Casley)** – a handwritten inventory composed in January 1732 by David Casley, deputy keeper of the Cotton Library
- (4) **Feb 1732 (Casley)** – a detailed inventory by Casley, composed in February 1732 and printed in a report of May 1732

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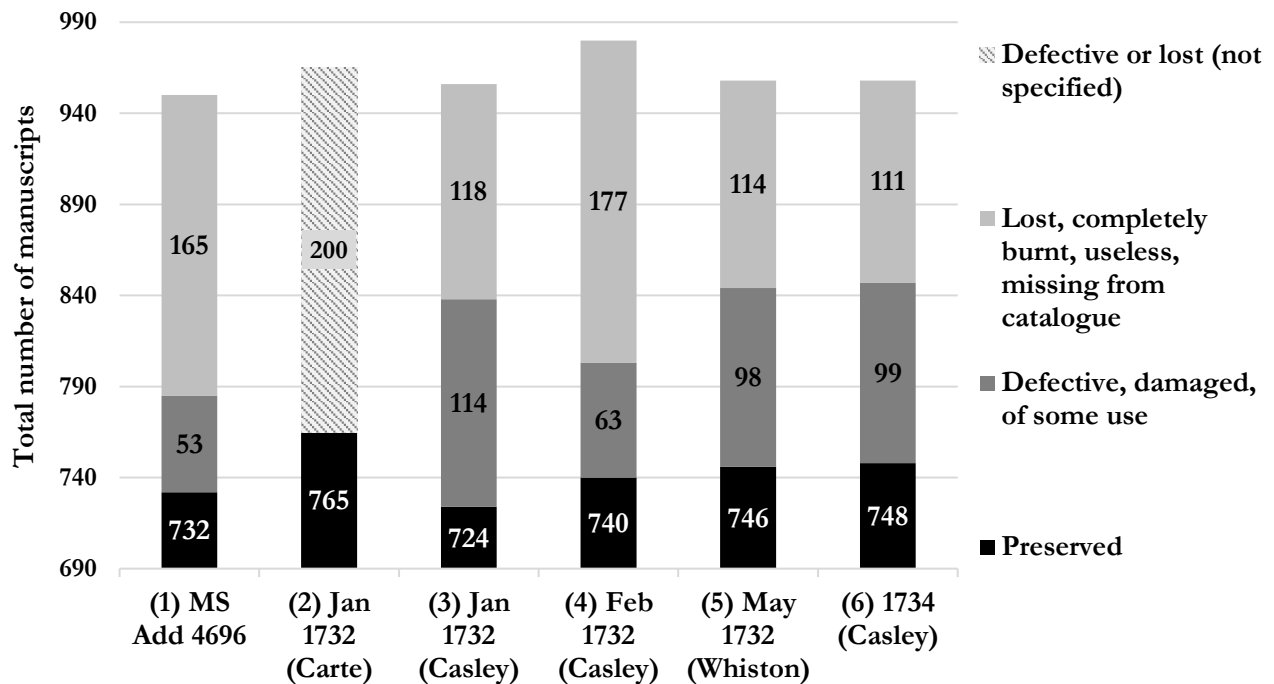
<sup>65</sup> Andrew Prescott, 'Their present miserable state of cremation': the restoration of the Cotton Library' in *Sir Robert Cotton as Collector: Essays on an Early Stuart Courtier and his Legacy*, ed. by C. J. Wright (London: British Library, 1997), 391–454 (p. 391). My account of the fire has been informed indispensably by Prescott's work.

<sup>66</sup> Joseph Planta, a later cataloguer of the collection, remarked that many of the damaged manuscripts had been 'bound up with much irregularity and disorder', the early conservators 'having thrown them into great, and in many instances irretrievable, confusion'. *A Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Cottonian Library, deposited in the British Museum* (London: Hansard, 1802), p. xiv.

<sup>67</sup> Prescott, 'Their present state', p. 431.

- (5) **May 1732 (Whiston)** – figures accompanying William Whiston’s account of the immediate conservation, also in the May 1732 report
- (6) **1734 (Casley)** – an inventory appended to Casley’s catalogue of the King’s library manuscripts<sup>68</sup>

**fig.1 - inconsistencies among the post-fire inventories of the Cotton manuscripts**



The sources were composed over a short chronology by a small group of individuals with knowledge of the collection. (2) and (3) are dated within nine days of each other. (1), (3), (4) and (6) can be attributed to Casley, and (3) is in the same format as (6), perhaps an earlier draft. (4) and (5) appear in the same publication, a report on the fire to Parliament. The accounts differ slightly in their total number of manuscripts, but broadly agree on the proportion of the library preserved from the blaze, between 75% and 79%. Yet considering the homogeneity of the sources the data are strikingly inconsistent. The proportion of codices that were deemed

<sup>68</sup> (1) London, British Library, MS Add 4696. My figures are taken from marginal annotations where ‘+’ denotes manuscripts that survived the fire, ‘-’ indicates partial damage, and no mark denotes loss or damage beyond repair by the fire. Casley is likely the annotator – see n.75 below. A label also indicates the roll came to the British Museum trustees via Casley’s widow.

(2) Thomas Carte to M. Kynaston, 20<sup>th</sup> January 1732, British Library, MS Add 21500, f. 62r-v.

(3) Cambridgeshire Record Office, 588DR/Z10(c)

(4) and (5) *A Report from the Committee Appointed to View the Cottonian Library* (London: House of Commons, 1732) pp. 15-139, 4.

(6) David Casley, *Catalogue of the Manuscripts of the King’s Library* (London: for the author, 1734), pp. 313-317.

salvageable varies wildly, doubling between (1) and (3), before dropping sharply a month later in (4). Even simultaneous publication was no guarantee of consistency, the 1732 parliamentary report offering two different assessments of the damage: Whiston suggests 98 of 212 damaged codices were reparable, but Casley's catalogue says only 63 of 240 could be saved.

It is important to note that although the surveys are all concerned with an entity called the Cotton Library, they are not surveying a stable group of manuscripts. The rough format of (1) suggests it could have been an early assessment of the damage, estimated while the library lay in confusion before conservation work had begun – this would account for its relatively high proportion of manuscripts deemed irrecoverable. Ongoing conservation efforts were gradually able to re-identify some of the anonymous matter left by the fire, some manuscripts previously branded as 'lost' later appear as 'part burnt' or even 'preserved'; others described as 'burnt crusts' or 'burnt lumps' in earlier accounts are then reassessed as reparable in the right hands.<sup>69</sup> More surprising is the handful of manuscripts listed as 'preserved' or 'damaged' in (3) that then become variously 'destroyed', 'shrivelled', 'useless' or 'lost' in later accounts.<sup>70</sup> These post-fire inventories represent a library that had been plunged into a protean chaos, in which material texts could be both ruined and salvageable, present and missing, sometimes simultaneously.

Prescott's claim that the fire reduced Smith's catalogue to a 'historical document' overnight gives a fair sense of the seismic effects of October 1731. However, it ignores the equally significant (but less dramatic) processes which had already caused the physical collection to de-anchor itself from the collective identity Smith had galvanised for it. Like all catalogues, the 1696 *Catalogus* must always be approached as a historical document, a textual representation of a collection in a specific personal and political context. This became apparent for Smith's work shortly after the Cotton manuscripts were donated to the crown, when a committee was commissioned by Parliament to survey the collection in 1703. Although donating the library to the crown ensured its survival, doing so prevented Smith from continuing his work as its unofficial librarian – as a non-juror, he was ineligible for the newly-created official role, and became increasingly bitter.<sup>71</sup> A member of the 1703 committee, Humfrey Wanley, wrote to the principal library trustee that Smith was impeding the survey, preventing the committee from viewing any of the charters, and curtailing their examination of the specific tracts in each manuscript volume.<sup>72</sup> As Kevin Kiernan has suggested, Smith had no intention of helping Wanley humiliate him by pointing out the flaws in his 1696 catalogue, and the result was an incomplete 1703 survey whose representation of the collection was forced to depend on Smith's text, rather than an examination of the manuscripts.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Compare for example the accounts of Otho C.vi, Otho E.vii, Galba D.ix, Vitellius A.i, or Tiberius D.iv-v given in (3) and (6). In (2) Carte writes that the Cotton volumes were 'hurried away to the new dormitory, where they still lie in heaps, so that they can't tell as yet but they may still find some MSS that are missing & thought to be burnt', British Library, MS Add 21500, f. 62v.

<sup>70</sup> See entries for Caligula E.xi-xii, Vitellius A.ii, Vitellius E.iii, Otho E.vi.

<sup>71</sup> Theodor Harmsen, 'Smith, Thomas (1638–1710)', *ODNB*.

<sup>72</sup> Humfrey Wanley to Robert Harley Earl Oxford, British Library, MS Harley 7055, f. 21.

<sup>73</sup> Kevin Kiernan, *Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1984), p. 92. See also Simon Keynes, 'The Reconstruction of a Burnt Cottonian Manuscript: The Case of Cotton MS Otho A.i', *British Library Journal*, 22.2 (1996), 113–160 (p. 127).



This pattern persisted through the eighteenth century, the monumental scale of Smith's work meaning that subsequent efforts to catalogue the collection relied on it, for lack of time and resources, repeating and amplifying its errors. In the 1703 report, Wanley noted that the *Catalogus* was lacking in places, but admitted that it would be a 'work of time' to correct it. 'Our time being short', Wanley's final report to the trustees was an annotated copy of Smith's catalogue, adding only condition notes to the 1696 version.<sup>74</sup> Similarly, the catalogue compiled by William Hanbury in 1706 made few modifications to Smith's, and Richard Bentley's 1718 inventory repeated the lacunae of the *Catalogus* as 'deest in catalogo'.<sup>75</sup> Later printed catalogues of the manuscripts illustrate a similar pattern, Samuel Hooper's of 1777 identifying the 'many defects in the catalogue of the Cottonian Library published by Dr Smith in 1696' but compiling a list based not on an examination of the physical manuscripts but on Smith's text combined with later, partial, emendations.<sup>76</sup> It was not until Joseph Planta's 1802 printed catalogue that the omissions and errors of Smith's *Catalogus* were explicitly and methodically addressed.<sup>77</sup>

What Smith had created was not a safeguard for the integrity of the physical manuscripts but a textual monument to the idea of the Cotton Library from which the material collection drifted further away, as successive generations of cataloguers with too little time were forced to rely on his extensive but flawed work. A report of 1756 by the British Museum's first keepers of manuscripts reveals the extent of the issue – Matthew Maty and Henry Rimius wrote that 'for want of time' they would prepare 'simply a general survey', which necessitated ignoring items of 'too little consequence'.<sup>78</sup> It would take 'more time than we could spare', they said, 'in looking for them amidst the rubbish of bits of parchment, or of paper scorch'd by the fire, or consumed by old age'.<sup>79</sup> Their general survey noted that the manuscripts had 'suffered no less by the carelessness of those that have been the first employed in preserving them, as well as by the extraordinary moistness of the place', which had transformed the collection into 'lodging and food to numberless shoales of worms and other insects'.<sup>80</sup> Maty and Rimius's observations reveal that not only were Smith's cataloguing mistakes being repeated, but the physical collection was neither static nor stable, portions of it consumed by time and neglect and transformed into anonymous matter, 'bits' and 'rubbish' fit only for worms.

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<sup>74</sup> British Library, MS Add 46911, f. 1-1v.

<sup>75</sup> Hanbury's catalogue is British Library, MS Add 4996 – it omits items from Claudius, Galba, Vespasian, Titus and Faustina A.x as Smith does. Bentley's schedule is British Library, MS Add 4696, which repeats these omissions. Some of these manuscript volumes were listed by Bentley as 'codices MSS nondum in loculis repositi' at the foot of his roll, and a later annotator has re-identified some of them as Galba A.xx-xxi, E.xiii; Vespasian A.xxv, D.xxiii, xxv-xxvi, F.xv; Titus C.xx; Faustina A.x; Claudius A.xiv, C.xii. The annotator is likely to have been the deputy library keeper David Casley, who later published these corrections as an appendix to his *Catalogue of the Manuscripts of the King's Library*, pp. 318-330.

<sup>76</sup> Samuel Hooper, *A Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Cottonian Library* (London: S. Hooper, 1777), p. v. Hooper relies on Casley, *Catalogue*, and manuscript notes on the charters lent by William Widmore.

<sup>77</sup> Planta, *A Catalogue of the Manuscripts*, p. xiv.

<sup>78</sup> British Museum, Trustee Committee Meeting Minutes C1, ff. 103, 111

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.* ff. 111.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.* ff. 105, 106.

In January 1732 Robert Cotton, John's son, wrote to the library's trustees regarding the recent fire, 'most greivous [sic] for me to mention', and the damage '[of] all which the publick are already become most sensible'.<sup>81</sup> This assertion that the public at large were already aware of the disaster is unlikely to have been true. The news was afforded only a minor note in *The Gentleman's Magazine* of October 1731, and was not recounted in any printed works, aside from those later composed by the library's keepers and custodians – namely the committee report of May 1732 and the appendix to Casley's 1734 catalogue of the King's Library.<sup>82</sup> If we take Robert Cotton's 'publick' in a more restricted sense (England's community of antiquarian scholars) it is still by no means certain that the news travelled far. The fire was not recorded in the minute books of the Society of Antiquaries, nor those of the Royal Society. The news travelled to the Spalding Gentleman's Society, where an account was read in November 1731, but this can be attributed to close ties between its members and the Cotton Library, whose keeper and deputy keeper were themselves corresponding members.<sup>83</sup> Knowledge of what had happened to the Cotton manuscripts in October 1731 was confined to the close interpersonal relationships of the collection's custodians.

Indeed, the Society of Antiquaries, founded in 1717, was premised on similar values to those that had been instilled in the Cotton Library since the early seventeenth century. Recognising that the majority of Britain's antiquities were 'in the custody of private gentlemen, or lying in obscurity', the Society sought to build on the efforts of earlier generations of antiquaries, to 'collect and print all accounts of antient Monuments that come to their hands', so that 'knowledge of them may become more universal'.<sup>84</sup> However, the two institutions seldom interacted. The Cotton manuscripts were known to the Society, its fellow John Thorpe using them to make notes for his research on the antiquities of Kent, and the Society itself commissioned the transcription and printing of a tract from Julius B.xii.<sup>85</sup> Yet discussion of the Cotton collection is absent from the Society's meetings, references confined to the accessions of the printed 1732 committee report and Casley's catalogue of the King's Library.<sup>86</sup> The Society's register book records that in 1747 Martin Folkes inspected the coins in the Cotton collection, using a magnifying glass to re-evaluate how Speed had presented images of the coins in his 1611 *Historie*. His detailed scrutiny of the coins themselves, Folkes suggests, corrects mistakes in Speed's account that have 'mised Bp. Nicholson Mr Thoresbye and others'.<sup>87</sup> The reference to recent antiquaries here recalls the pattern by which Smith's cataloguing mistakes were repeated through the early eighteenth

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<sup>81</sup> Cambridgeshire Record Office, 588DR/Z10 (a).

<sup>82</sup> *The Gentleman's Magazine*, October 1731; John Breval makes a passing remark on the fire in his *Remarks on Several Parts of Europe* (London: Lintot, 1738), p. xii.

<sup>83</sup> Spalding, Spalding Gentleman's Society, Minute Book 2, f. 54v. I am grateful to Liam Sims for this reference. The account is William Bogdani's, and is reprinted in Adam Fox, *John Mill and Richard Bentley: A Study of the Textual Criticism of the New Testament 1675–1729* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1954), pp. 149-50.

<sup>84</sup> London, Society of Antiquaries, Minute Book 1, ff. 1-3.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. f. 22. Thorpe's notes are in Society of Antiquaries, SAL/MS/185, ff. 143-161; they form the basis of Thorpe's posthumously published *Registrum Roffense* (London: Richardson, 1769). The tract from Julius B.xii was printed as Roger Gale, *Registrum Honoris de Richmond* (London: R. Gosling, 1722).

<sup>86</sup> Society of Antiquaries, Minute Book 1, f. 283; Minute Book 2, f. 12.

<sup>87</sup> Society of Antiquaries, SAL/MS/262, ff. 165r-166r.

century – it is suggestive of an overreliance on printed accounts (i.e. Speed's), caused by a lack of attention paid to the Cottonian objects themselves, or a lack of accessibility to the library.

This news of the fire spread through the interpersonal networks of a small group of individuals either directly involved in the library's care, or in the management of London's other repositories of public records. This suggests that the eighteenth-century Cotton library had inherited a pattern of use from its time in the hands of the Cotton family the previous century, when access to and knowledge of the collection depended on personal and professional acquaintance. It was by no means certain that vesting the collection in public hands and framing it as indispensable to British identity had raised its profile or augmented its access beyond the interest of a small number of individuals involved in or associated with its management.

The 1701 act of Parliament declared that the Cotton manuscripts were to be preserved by Parliament for 'publick use & advantage'.<sup>88</sup> This language was reiterated in an act of 1706, which affirmed that the manuscripts were 'for the publick service', and the 1732 report aligned the Cotton library with Britain's other public records as it sought to improve the conditions in which they were kept, so that they may be 'more useful to the publick'.<sup>89</sup> However, besides two printed catalogues and handful of mentions in antiquarian texts, the ostensibly public identity of the Cotton collection was in fact played out in conversations and interactions between successive generations of librarians, from Robert Cotton's contemporary John Selden to Joseph Planta at the turn of the nineteenth century. Until the eighteenth century, the knowledge ecology of the Cotton collection hence remained reliant on the interpersonal networks of its owners and managers, which were bound up in structures of aristocratic patronage and deference. Accounts suggest that borrowing from the Cotton library lost momentum after Robert's death in 1631, and while it remained an important resource for scholars through the seventeenth century, visitors waned as Robert's grandson John retired from London and Smith busied himself with his Hebrew scholarship.<sup>90</sup>

Handing ownership of the library to Parliament awkwardly disrupted its century-old system of interpersonal access, as can be seen in an act of 1706. The 1701 act stipulated that the manuscripts remain in Cotton House in Westminster, and that the house be bequeathed to John's grandson John. The act of 1706 pointed out that this made the now-public manuscripts effectively inaccessible for 'reading or using' inside a private dwelling, and resolved to purchase Cotton House.<sup>91</sup> Meanwhile, John Cotton's heirs made up the majority of the library's trustees, ensuring that the values of patrilineal ownership were upheld concurrently with national ownership. In 1740 Thomas Carte wrote to John Hinde Cotton, then in line for the post of principal trustee, asking him to overrule the *ex officio* trustees to appoint a library keeper:

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<sup>88</sup> Parliamentary Archives, *Cotton Library Act 1701*.

<sup>89</sup> Parliamentary Archives, *Cotton Library Act 1706* (6 Anne c.30); *Report from the Committee*, p. 6.

<sup>90</sup> Tite, *Early Records*; Thomas Roebuck, 'Antiquarianism in the Near East: Thomas Smith (1638-1710) and his Journey to the Seven Churches of Asia', in *Beyond Greece and Rome: Reading the Ancient Near East in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Jane Grogan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 132–162.

<sup>91</sup> Parliamentary Archives, *Cotton Library Act 1706*.

the great officers were only added to make the regulations & acts of the rest [of the trustees] of greater authority: but they have been so far from answering this end that they have quite defeated it; for no regulations have been made at all, no meetings have been had at the library, no care has been taken of it [...] those officers of state will be apt ever to exert their influence for their own views, even when contrary to that of the family[.]<sup>92</sup>

In his efforts to secure an appointment for his brother, Carte was no doubt pandering to the Cottonian heir, but nevertheless his ability to manipulate the evident tension between state and family control speaks to a collection not fully committed to public utility. Indeed, Carte suggests that parliamentary officials were only made trustees in order to lend state authority to the decisions of the family – they forwent more substantial control by their failure to write statutes or organise meetings. The lack of care taken over the collection’s management, vividly highlighted by the 1731 fire, could hence be manipulated to make the case that the ‘heir to the founder’ should retain executive control.<sup>93</sup>

In terms of access, management and use, the public nature of the library remained contested. Yet following the intentions of Smith and John Cotton, vesting the manuscripts in Parliament’s hands demanded public responsibility for their preservation – as a parliamentary committee noted, safeguarding the Cotton library was a matter of ‘Publick Faith’.<sup>94</sup> The act of 1706, as well as purchasing Cotton House, pointed out that the manuscripts were ‘in danger of perishing for want of due care’ in their current room, which was ‘damp and improper for preserving the books’.<sup>95</sup> It ordered that a new room be constructed, which ‘shall for ever be called and known by the name of the Cottonian Library’.<sup>96</sup> However, when Christopher Wren was commissioned to survey Cotton House for the purpose, Parliament was considering the possibility of amalgamating the Cotton manuscripts with the Royal Library and the library of Gresham College. Wren’s survey concluded that timbers in the house’s lower rooms were ‘rotten’, and that the whole building must be ‘new ripped’ if it were to house these three public collections.<sup>97</sup> John Cotton’s command that the library remain at Cotton House came into direct conflict with protecting its manuscripts from decay.

Nothing was done, and in 1719 the antiquarian and heraldic scholar John Anstis raised the point again, imploring the Lord Chancellor to relocate the collection to rooms at St Paul’s, despite the terms of John Cotton’s original bequest.<sup>98</sup> In 1722 the manuscripts were moved to Essex House in the Strand, before returning to Westminster and the ill-fated Ashburnham House in 1729.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Thomas Carte to John Hinde Cotton, 12<sup>th</sup> January 1740, Cambridgeshire Record Office, 588DR/Z10 (d).

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> *Report from the Committee*, p. 7

<sup>95</sup> Parliamentary Archives, *Cotton Library Act 1706*.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> Sir Christopher Wren to Sidney Godolphin Earl Godolphin, 15<sup>th</sup> December 1706, British Library, MS Facs. Suppl. II (d)(1).

<sup>98</sup> John Anstis to Thomas Parker Earl Macclesfield, 5<sup>th</sup> March 1719, British Library, MS Stowe 748, f. 118v.

<sup>99</sup> Keynes, ‘The Reconstruction of a Burnt Cottonian Manuscript’, p. 113.

Following the fire, a Parliamentary committee was ordered to report on the extent of the damage to the Cotton manuscripts, and this was printed as *A Report from the Committee Appointed to View the Cottonian Library and such of the Publick Records of this Kingdom as they think proper* (1732), a comprehensive review of London's scattered repositories of public records. The *Report* was not the first to assess the condition of the public records; Charles Montagu, 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Halifax chaired a parliamentary committee in 1702, and White Kennett led similar efforts in 1718.<sup>100</sup> Public ownership subsumed the Cotton collection into the already fretful landscape of record preservation in London, a Sisyphean task pitted against the city's conditions. As the German traveller Zacharias Conrad Von Uffenbach wrote in 1710, 'one hardly dares touch [the books] for smoke and dust; indeed, whenever I look at books in London, I get my cuffs black with coal'.<sup>101</sup>

The same problem was emphatically described by the keeper of the court records in Westminster chapter house, John Lawton, in the 1732 *Report*, where he claimed that to preserve the 'law and the history of the nation' it was necessary to 'preserve the records from their greatest enemy – dust'.<sup>102</sup> Lawton asked Parliament for the resources to draw up a universal index, print transcriptions of court records, and rebind his state papers chronologically. His account is one of eighteen in the *Report*, written by record keepers across London in response to the committee's question: 'what is necessary to be done to make [your records] more useful to the publick?'.<sup>103</sup> Most of the keepers identify the need for repair, rebinding, and cataloguing, and also that their current rooms are poorly suited – Lawton notes that the chapter house is 'too ruinous to be repaired', its records threatened by a damp floor, broken windows, and the acrid smoke from a painter's shop next door.<sup>104</sup> The *Report* concludes that, because the public records are scattered across London, searching them is 'uncertain, expensive, and often fruitless' and that they have been effectively 'concealed from the publick notice'.<sup>105</sup> The committee recommends that a union catalogue be drawn up of all public records, and that an 'edifice' be constructed to house the Cotton manuscripts in order to better 'to perpetuate the memory' of the Cotton family's munificence.<sup>106</sup> The family and the manuscripts should be upheld as 'inseparable and perpetual blessings to the nation'.<sup>107</sup>

The contents of the Cotton manuscripts, as related to the 'law and history of the nation', overlap with the records and state papers in Westminster chapter house, and both collections suffered from improper storage conditions. Yet the *Report* differentiates the Cotton library from the rest

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<sup>100</sup> William Nicholson, *The London Diaries of William Nicholson, Bishop of Carlisle, 1702-1718*, ed. by Clyve Jones and Geoffrey Holmes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 40; Daniel Woolf, *The Social Circulation of the Past: English Historical Culture, 1500–1730* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 158.

<sup>101</sup> Zacharias Conrad Von Uffenbach, *London in 1710, from the Travels of Zacharias Conrad von Uffenbach*, ed. and trans. by W.H. Quarrell and Margaret Mare (London: Faber & Faber, 1934), p. 78.

<sup>102</sup> *Report from the Committee*, p. 143.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.* p. 6.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 4-5.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.* p. 7.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.* p. 10, 9.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.* p. 211.

of London's public records on the basis that it was donated by the Cotton family, drawing an interesting distinction: 'as the Publick Interest is concerned in providing more secure decent repositories for the Records of the Kingdom, the Publick Faith is engaged for the better Reception and Preservation of the Cottonian Library'.<sup>108</sup> In this sense, 'interest' reflects the practical utility of the records: they should be organised and catalogued to facilitate easier searching. On the other hand, 'faith' recalls Smith's *Catalogus*, eager not only to attest to the utility of the Cotton collection but to sanctify both its manuscripts and the contract implied by the 1701 act to preserve the collection as a monument to Cotton's generosity. Constructed in the paratexts of the Cotton library, these extra-material identities created material imperatives for the public custody of the collection – it was not enough merely to preserve the manuscripts, they must be housed in an appropriate 'edifice'.

The conception of such an edifice has a history as old as the Cotton library itself. Robert Cotton and his fellow antiquaries had petitioned Elizabeth I to construct a national library, starting with Cotton's collection.<sup>109</sup> The proposal was unsuccessful, Cotton's manuscripts acting instead as a de facto national library during the reign of James I before Cotton fell out of favour under Charles I, and his son inherited the collection. Meanwhile, Gabriel Naudé's influential *Advis pour dresser une bibliothèque* (1627) conceived of a library 'consecrate[d] to the publick use' which would 'render an eternal lustre to [its owner's] memory'.<sup>110</sup> While Naudé's discussion of the edifice of such a collection is brief, John Evelyn's dedication to his English translation (1661) is an extended appeal for funding to support the nascent Royal Society, and the construction of a learned college in England. The opportunity to rebuild London following the 1666 fire and the construction of new architectural edifices saw proposals for a national library focused less on the collection's contents and more on the grandeur of its building. *A Proposal for Building a Royal Library* (1697), for example, suggested an institution decorated with marbles and bas reliefs which would stand as evidence of 'great advancement of learning and honour to the nation'.<sup>111</sup> The disjuncture between a national library's building and its texts was underlined by Wren in his survey of Cotton House. If the structure was to be remodelled as the seat of the nation's historical manuscript collection, and the collection itself must be adapted to suit the building, 'purged of much uselesse trash' in order to fit the shelves. This work, Wren sneered, 'must be the drudgery of librarians'.<sup>112</sup>

A purpose-built library became an attractive option to house the Cotton manuscripts, not only a solution to its problems of storage and preservation but a means to set in stone the monumentalising imperatives of Smith's 1696 catalogue, and the 1701 act of Parliament. As Thomas Carte wrote to the library's trustees, 'publick buildings have been always deemed part of the grandeur of a nation; & publick libraries must be allowed to be so too, & not unworthy of

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid. p. 7.

<sup>109</sup> British Library, MS Cotton Faustina E.v, ff. 88r-90v. See Sharpe, *Sir Robert Cotton*, pp. 50-1.

<sup>110</sup> Gabriel Naudé, *Instructions Concerning the Erecting of a Library*, trans. by John Evelyn (London: G. Bedle and T. Collins, 1661), pp. 87, 4-5. For Naudé's discussion of the library building see pp. 70-4.

<sup>111</sup> [Richard Bentley], *A Proposal for Building a Royal Library* (n.p., 1697). Attributed to Richard Bentley in the British Library catalogue, shelfmark 816.m.12.(32).

<sup>112</sup> British Library, MS Facs. Suppl. II (d)(1).

publick care'.<sup>113</sup> Carte's recommendation was composed after the fire of 1731, but it also addressed the wider issues facing London's public records which 'lie on a damp floor covered with dust' and are 'exposed to the weather [...] rotting every day'. He proposed a building 'secure from fire', which would house the Cotton collection alongside Britain's other neglected record repositories, and the printing of an 'exact catalogue' of the whole which would facilitate easy searching to rival the national records in France. A new library with proper storage conditions would encourage the benefaction of more private libraries, tending to the 'perfection' of this national collection which, if properly catalogued, would provide a research resource better 'than is to be found in any other country'. In support of his proposal, Carte invoked the importance of the public records to English law, in order to put forward ideals of access. He asserts that these documents are 'records which it is the right of every man in England to see', but that they are currently 'useless and debarred from them by the vast expence & uncertainty of a search'. A purpose-built institution, alongside an exact *catalogue raisonnée*, would make the use of the records 'agreeable, easy & cheap'.<sup>114</sup>

Another memorandum, presented to the trustees after the fire, argued similarly for a new building in which to house the Cotton manuscripts, though unlike Carte's this new building was not to amalgamate but to separate particular collections.<sup>115</sup> It pointed out that John Cotton's wish was to preserve the manuscripts 'in the distinct name and Character of the Cottonian Library', contrary to their current cohabitation with the Royal collection – this was properly the King's property, while the Cotton texts were entrusted to 'the whole people of England'. To prevent 'the throwing of this into the Bodleian', the memorandum suggested purpose-built rooms where the Cotton collection could be managed by a salaried custodian. It endorsed a 'Building of some Grandeur and Magnificence' in order to properly honour the Cotton family and the nation, to encourage the nobility and the gentry to donate their collections, and to 'answer in some measure the publick libraries abroad'. The cost of construction would be worthwhile because 'poor Workmen will be employed & their families fed by it'.<sup>116</sup>

These two proposals approach the construction of a Cottonian edifice with different priorities. The memorandum imagines a structure that would fulfil the obligations of 'publick faith' created by John Cotton's bequest; Carte's proposal instead focuses on the facilitation of study. Both position their institutions in relation to those abroad, Carte eager to outdo the French, and the memorandum emphasising that the fabric of the building and the labour of its construction would be 'the product of our own soile [...] of our own Growth'.<sup>117</sup> It is in relation to these questions of national identity that both proposals gesture to notions of publicness: Carte refers to the right to access public records, and the memorandum suggests that even illiterate labourers would benefit from the library, through construction work. Nevertheless, both texts are saturated with the preoccupations of a small group of individuals directly involved in the Cotton library's management and use. Carte's is the proposal of a frustrated researcher, confounded by

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<sup>113</sup> Cambridgeshire Record Office, 588DR/Z10 (e).

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Cambridgeshire Record Office, 588DR/Z10 (b).

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

the ‘the difficulty of finding any that you have occasion to search for’ among the scattered and poorly-attended archives of London. Although he promotes universal access to records, he draws the distinction between ‘learned men that search for the use of the world’ (like himself), and those that ‘search to clear up any claim contested in the way of law’. Like Robert Cotton’s proposal, Carte’s institution is a centre around which antiquaries can gather. He suggests that the national library would encourage the donation of transcripts to replace the texts lost in the Ashburnham House fire – a practice he identifies with a tradition of scholarship going back to Selden, Dodsworth, and William Dugdale.

The management of the Cotton library following its donation to Parliament in 1701 demonstrates the complexity of enacting a public bequest. Although the decision succeeded in creating a durable public identity for the library, vested with the imperatives of preservation, commemoration and access, the history of the manuscripts reveals that this identity was primarily textual – a grand label affixed haphazardly to an unstable and partially ruined gathering of material manuscripts. Although the language of public benefit was frequently invoked, reinforcing the scaffolding of national ownership that supported the idea of the Cotton library, more often than not it was an appeal to authority designed to further personal ambitions or uphold a version of the collection that was never truly embodied in its physical paper and parchment.

### **An Antiquarian Mythos**

Calls for a national, universally accessible library came from within antiquarian circles, the same circles that saturated the discourse about the Cotton manuscripts with the language of national, public reverence, and that valorised Robert Cotton as a heroic repairer of time’s ruins. However, during the seventeenth century the practices of antiquaries attracted an increasing amount of satirical scorn.<sup>118</sup> As early as 1603, Thomas Dekker wrote that ‘An Antiquary might have pickt rare matter out of his Nose, but that it was worme-eaten (yet that proved it to be an aucient Nose)’.<sup>119</sup> In 1628, John Earle characterised the ‘Antiquarie’ as one who ‘hath that unnaturall disease to bee enamour’d of old age, and wrinkles, and loves all things [...] the better for being mouldy and worme-eaten’. Earle’s antiquary

loves no Library, but where there are more Spiders volums then Authors, and lookes with great admiration on the Antique worke of Cob webs. Printed bookes he contemnes, as a novelty of this latter age; but a Manu-script he pores on everlastingly, especially if the cover be all Moth-eaten and the dust make a Parenthesis betweene every Syllable.<sup>120</sup>

Here the material site of the manuscript’s value is comically inverted: the ‘unnaturall disease’ of the antiquary means that he loves not the book’s writing but the dust, cobwebs and traces of moths and worms that render it less than complete. The works most valued by the antiquary are

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<sup>118</sup> Daniel Woolf, ‘Images of the Antiquary in Seventeenth-Century England’ in *Visions of Antiquity: The Society of Antiquaries of London, 1707–2007*, ed. by Susan M. Pearce (London: Society of the Antiquaries of London, 2007), 11–43.

<sup>119</sup> Thomas Dekker, *The Wonderfulfull Yeare* (London: T. Creede, 1603), sig.[F1r–v].

<sup>120</sup> John Earle, *Micro-cosmographie* (London: R. Allot, 1628), sig.[C1v–C3r].



those whose physical deterioration blurs their comprehension, parentheses of dust interfering with their written content. In the 1660s, Samuel Butler's caricatured antiquary confounded understanding by appearing to live his life in reverse: born out of decay, walking backwards into antiquity. Devouring manuscripts 'with greater relish than worms and moths do', Butler's antiquary 'may truly say to dust and worms you are my father, and to rottenness thou art my mother'.<sup>121</sup>

The thrust of Butler's caricature is comic, but by drawing attention to the birth of the antiquary he highlights a truth about the discipline: without dust, worms and rottenness, antiquarian collecting and scholarship would be conceived along wholly different lines. The antiquarian mythos of the seventeenth century – as constructed in prefatory lives, poems and dedications – was predicated on the heroic recovery of fragmentary objects and texts from the oblivion of history, inspired by a pantheon of pioneering scholars including John Leland, William Camden and Robert Cotton.<sup>122</sup> Nowhere is this more apparent than in Edmund Gibson's 1695 edition of Camden's *Britannia*, expanded from the original to include a biography of Camden, whose contemporaries 'knew of no title great enough' for him.<sup>123</sup> The new translation reiterated Camden's mission to 'renew the memory of what was old [and] illustrate what was obscure', claiming that the force of Camden's own genius was constantly compelling him to seek 'entertainments which he relish'd above all [else], stately Camps and ruinous Castles, those venerable monuments to our Fore-fathers'.<sup>124</sup> As it was expressed in its most elaborate textual monuments, antiquarianism's *raison d'être* depended on a historically-repeating dialectic of decay and restoration.

This pitting of antiquarian efforts against time's destruction has an ahistorical and symbolic dimension, the threat of oblivion imagined as a constant adversary – recall Speed's observation that Roman, Anglo Saxon, Viking and Norman records are all equally liable to decay. This was most eloquently expressed by Thomas Browne in *Hydriotaphia, Or Urne Buriall* (1658), when he characterised the antiquary's profession,

Whose study is life and death, who daily behold examples of mortality, and of all men least need artificial memento's, or coffins by our bed side, to minde us of our graves[.]<sup>125</sup>

But antiquarianism also has a historically specific, didacticizing dimension, homing in on deliberate textual destruction as a heretical incursion into the sanctity of preservation. Smith's 1696 *Catalogus*, for example, calls the Reformation iconoclasts 'ignorant and impious robbers', while the salvage work of Dugdale and John Aubrey is haunted by the wanton destruction and

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<sup>121</sup> Samuel Butler, *The Genuine Remains in Verse and Prose of Mr Samuel Butler*, ed. by R. Thyer, 2 vols. (London: J. Tonson, 1759), ii.94-6. The preface asserts that Butler's characters were 'chiefly drawn up from 1667 to 1669'.

<sup>122</sup> Parry, *The Trophies of Time*, pp. 1-21.

<sup>123</sup> Edmund Gibson, ed., *Camden's Britannia, Newly Translated into English* (London: F. Collins and A. Swalle, 1695), sig.[A2r].

<sup>124</sup> Ibid. sig.[f2v], sig.[b1v].

<sup>125</sup> Thomas Browne, *Hydriotaphia, Or Urne Buriall* (London: H. Brome, 1658), sig.[A3v].

dispersal of monastic libraries, echoed during the English Civil War.<sup>126</sup> Inflecting the antiquarian enterprise in this way is symptomatic of the ‘myth-making’ impulse that James Raven attributes to retrospective treatments of book destruction. The original instance of this, which Raven examines in detail, is the loss of the ancient Library of Alexandria. Because its contents are unknowable, they are effectively boundless, freed from physical limitations in an imagined past. As Raven suggests, ‘in the imagination, a lost library might have contained a written, real truth and those who destroy book collections undermine the basis of civilisation’, providing a powerful ideological rationale for moralising the destruction of libraries.<sup>127</sup>

The kind of moralising was not restricted to deliberate acts of destruction. In 1670, the Danish physician Thomas Bartholin transformed the accidental burning of his library into a mythical drama, a victory of the ‘violence and tyranny of destructive Vulcan’ over the ‘guidance and auspices of Minerva’.<sup>128</sup> Ben Jonson’s poem ‘Execration Against Vulcan’ (1640), similarly turned the burning of items in his own library into an ideologically driven catalogue of destruction, which bore little resemblance to the physical extent of the damage.<sup>129</sup> This is an example of why Raven suggests that ideological mediation often obscures the realities of lost collections. Taking the destruction of the Royal Library in the 1755 Lisbon earthquake as an example, he says that ‘detailed evaluation of the loss [...] was overwhelmed by a torrent of moralising’, which has rendered the collection ‘barely visible to subsequent historians’.<sup>130</sup>

As I have suggested, the Cotton fire of 1731 inspired little immediate attention beyond its stewards and their associates, but the fire has not been immune to moral or didactic interpretations. A poem by Thomas Fitzgerald casts ‘imperious Fate’ as the reason for the ‘fatal Blaze’, a symbolic reading dimly echoed in the continuing temptation to note the apparent nominal determinism of Ashburnham House.<sup>131</sup> More vociferous have been didactic judgements on the fire. For Maty and Rimius, the Cotton manuscripts as they arrived in the British Museum in 1757 were ‘valuable, though hitherto much neglected’ by earlier keepers. They say that the manuscripts in the Vitellius press

suffered no less by the carelessness of those that have been the first employed in preserving them, as well as by the extraordinary moistness of the place. The great

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<sup>126</sup> Smith, *Catalogue*, p. 47; Dugdale, *St Pauls*. For Aubrey’s reflections see Elizabeth Yale, *Sociable Knowledge: Natural History and the Nation in Early Modern Britain* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), pp. 205-7.

<sup>127</sup> Raven, *Lost Libraries*, pp. 12-21, 31. See also Partington and Smyth, *Book Destruction*, p. 7; Edward Wilson-Lee, *The Catalogue of Shipwrecked Books: Young Columbus and the Quest for a Universal Library* (London: William Collins, 2018).

<sup>128</sup> Thomas Bartholin, *On the Burning of His Library*, trans. by Charles D. O’Malley (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1961), p. 5.

<sup>129</sup> Adam Smyth, *Material Texts in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 63

<sup>130</sup> Raven, *Lost Libraries*, p. 8. See also Angela Delaforce, *The Lost Library of the King of Portugal* (London: Ad Ilissum, 2019).

<sup>131</sup> Thomas Fitzgerald, ‘Upon the Burning of the Cottonian Manuscripts at Ashburnham House, MDCCXXXI’, in *Poems on Several Occasions* (London: J. Watts, 1736), p. 54.

humidity, together with the extension of that glue, which the fire extracted from the volumes wrote on vellum, [has] rotted the edges of most of them[.]<sup>132</sup>

While the report does not imply any direct blame for the fire itself, it situates the event in a broader causality of dereliction, started by the ‘carelessness’ of previous custodians. The fire compounded and exacerbated existing patterns of neglect, in turn contributing to the ‘extraordinary moistness’ of the library via the water used in its immediate aftermath. The two librarians’ judgement was printed in Hooper’s 1777 catalogue, where Hooper added that the ‘laudable management’ of the new British Museum has ‘rendered this invaluable treasure of learning of much greater utility to the public than it has ever been at any former period’.<sup>133</sup> In his 1802 catalogue, Joseph Planta similarly bemoaned the ‘irretrievable confusion’ of the manuscripts, a direct result of their neglect during the first half of the eighteenth century.<sup>134</sup>

The most pronounced acts of moralising were those of Frederic Madden, the British Museum’s keeper of manuscripts from 1837 to 1866. Following his appointment as assistant keeper in 1828, under Josiah Forshall, Madden coordinated extensive conservation and reorganisation work on the Cotton library. His appointment as keeper was clearly a personal watershed; as he noted in his diary in April 1837, with his new powers of access he was immediately able to find a cartulary which he had ‘so often and so fruitlessly inquired after’ as an assistant – ‘is not this very disgraceful of the keepers of the MSS from the middle of the last century to the present day?’<sup>135</sup> The entry marked the beginning of Madden’s career of indignance as manuscript keeper, as he later bemoaned:

so much for the zeal of messrs. Douce, Ellis and Forshall! For my part, I am determined not to suffer a scrap to be put away which I have not thoroughly examined and I am resolved to rescue from oblivion every paper of the least value[.]<sup>136</sup>

Robert Nares and Francis Douce served as manuscript keepers between Planta and Forshall, and following Planta’s printed catalogue they attempted no extensive work on the Cotton collection, which had remained largely untouched since the immediate conservation work in the 1730s. In this diary entry from November 1837, Madden’s sense of his own role in the Cotton library’s history begins to emerge, a mission to ‘rescue from oblivion’ every burnt, neglected fragment of the manuscripts, which he found in a ‘sad state of dust and confusion’.<sup>137</sup> Later in his career, following the unprecedented work he carried out on restoring the manuscripts, Madden proudly proclaimed how he ‘rescued from dust and oblivion’ many neglected tracts, and at his retirement he wrote ‘after the lapse of more than twenty years, I may claim, without egotism, the title of the Restorer of the Cottonian Library’.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> British Museum, Trustee Committee Meeting Minutes, C1, ff. 103-6.

<sup>133</sup> Hooper, *Catalogue*, p. vii.

<sup>134</sup> Planta, *A Catalogue of the Manuscripts*, p. xiv.

<sup>135</sup> British Library, MS Facs. \*1012, 17<sup>th</sup> April 1837.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.* 24<sup>th</sup> November 1837.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.* 30<sup>th</sup> October 1837.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.* 10<sup>th</sup> March 1864, 12<sup>th</sup> July 1866.

The terms in which Madden cast his position in the history of the manuscripts match almost exactly the language used to describe Robert Cotton, Speed's 'worthy repairer of eating times ruins' who for Smith was able to 'rescue from decay, oblivion and extinction' the glory of Britain's past. Amongst the antiquaries' historically specific, moralising judgements about decay and loss is a transhistorical, cyclical narrative about the repeated recovery and methodisation of neglected documents and fragments. Madden's self-styling as the 'Restorer of the Cottonian Library' demonstrates that this cyclicity is not reserved for post-Reformation salvage or hunting through forgotten libraries, but can be re-enacted on collections already preserved and recognised in a national repository. Similarly to Cotton, Madden's self-conception has proved enduring, twentieth-century biographies suggesting his palaeographic skill was 'unmatched by any scholar before him and by very few since', and that 'no labour was too great for him to undertake for the public service'.<sup>139</sup> In his detailed study of the restoration of the Cotton library, Andrew Prescott says 'the story of Madden's forty-year struggle to restore fully the Cotton Manuscripts is a heroic one, with, perhaps, a whiff of tragedy in its conclusion' – a judgement that not only participates in the process of antiquarian myth-making but enacts explicitly its narrative qualities.<sup>140</sup>

More broadly, scholarship on early modern antiquarian practices has tended to frame its subject matter in similar ways to how antiquaries approached their own work – as Daniel Woolf puts it, modern scholars share a 'family resemblance' with their seventeenth-century counterparts.<sup>141</sup> The introduction to Graham Parry's *The Trophies of Time* illustrates that, in this resemblance, the antiquary's narrative of historical salvage is particularly persistent. After identifying the 'heroic quality' with which seventeenth-century antiquaries described each other's work in 'opening up the remote past', Parry says:

these volumes, which contributed so much to the intellectual vitality of the seventeenth century, now lie, for the most part, dusty and neglected on library shelves. It was a desire to retore these remarkable works of scholarship to modern awareness that first caused me to undertake this book[.]<sup>142</sup>

This echo of the antiquarians' own enthusiasm shows how enduring is the obsession with dust, (re)discovery, and rescue from oblivion. In a similar vein, Angus Vine makes explicit the 'urge to resurrect' that his study, *In Defiance of Time*, shares with his early modern antiquarian subject matter.<sup>143</sup> Rosemary Sweet's *Antiquaries* includes an observation that the antiquary's business 'to collect what is dispersed' is very much akin to the work of the modern historian.<sup>144</sup> Both Sweet's and Vine's books open with defences of the antiquary against satires like Earle's, enacting similar kinds of reclamation and dusting-off of antiquaries' reputations.

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<sup>139</sup> Robert W. Ackerman, 'Sir Frederic Madden and Medieval Scholarship', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 73.3 (1972), 1–14 (p. 9); Michael Borrie, 'Madden, Sir Frederic (1801–1873)', *ODNB*.

<sup>140</sup> Prescott, 'Their present state', p. 422.

<sup>141</sup> Woolf, *The Social Circulation of the Past*, p. 1.

<sup>142</sup> Parry, *Trophies of Time*, p. 1.

<sup>143</sup> Angus Vine, *In Defiance of Time: Antiquarian Writing in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 201

<sup>144</sup> Rosemary Sweet, *Antiquaries: The Discovery of the Past in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New York, NY & London: Hambledon & London, 2004), p. xiv.

Common to this repeating story of forgetting and recovery is dust, both as substance and as symbol. For satirists like Earle and Butler dust epitomised the antiquary's fixation. For visitors to and keepers of London's records in the eighteenth century, dust was books' 'greatest enemy', and once the Cotton library was accessioned by the British Museum dust came to symbolise the neglect with which the collection had been treated. For Parry at the end of the twentieth century, 'dusty' and 'neglected' are synonyms. Yet in Crabbe's 'The Library', the apparition of the collection's soul is made of dust – a commanding cloud representing the 'genius of the place'. Addressing his burnt library in 1670, Bartholin implored it to 'go swiftly, lest the dust may be moved and vainly offend my eyes which occupied themselves so pleasantly with the dust of these books before they were ashes'.<sup>145</sup> Dust is hence both abject decay and powerful antiquity. As Carolyn Steedman points out in her study *Dust*, dust is not a straightforward manifestation of decay – it is instead a token of material circularity, a reminder that things, however forgotten, cannot truly disappear into oblivion.<sup>146</sup> Dust creates a dialectic in which decay is both the eternal adversary and the necessary precursor for antiquarian work. As Butler observes, the antiquary 'may truly say to dust [...] you are my father'.

In the case of the Cotton manuscripts, this dialectic is both cause and effect of the publicness of the collection. It was made public in order to save it from dissolution in the hands of John Cotton's uninterested descendants, then its publicness was held up as a standard of permanence from which to attack the collection's neglectful treatment. Making the collection public heightened the rhetorical force of calls for its permanent preservation, but as I have suggested this force was rarely more than rhetorical in relation to the issue of public access or utility. The most striking intersection of these different antiquarian and public identities is in the collection's commemorative function as a monument to Robert Cotton – not only was this one of the most emphatic motivations of John Cotton and Thomas Smith's project to transfer the library to public ownership, but it has remained one of the most stable facets of the manuscripts' identity as a collection.

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While Smith was composing his prefatory 'Life of Robert Cotton' for the 1696 catalogue, he asked John Cotton about Robert's monument in the family church in Conington. John replied that 'the inscription upon my grandfather's monument, [...] was writ by my father; I only added out of Lucan, 'communis mundo superest Rogus''.<sup>147</sup> The line is taken from Lucan's *Bellum Civile*, and relates to Caesar gloating over the unburied corpses of Pompey's army after the battle of Pharsalus – a contemporary translation has it as 'the World one common Lot shall have', though 'rogus' refers specifically to a funeral pyre.<sup>148</sup> As David Howarth notes, the line is an incongruous choice, at the foot of a largely conventional funerary monument, and he suggests that its fatalistic message could be John's comment on his grandfather's unjust and acrimonious exile from his

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<sup>145</sup> Bartholin, *On the Burning of His Library*, p. 21.

<sup>146</sup> Carolyn Steedman, *Dust* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), p. 164.

<sup>147</sup> John Cotton to Thomas Smith, n.d. [1695], Bodleian Library, MS Smith 48, f. 291

<sup>148</sup> Henry Baker, *Medulla Poetarum Romanorum: Or, the most beautiful and instructive passages of the Roman poets*, 2 vols. (London: Midwinter et al, 1737), ii.444-5.

library and Charles I's court after 1629.<sup>149</sup> In Parry's *Trophies of Time* Geoffrey Turton, the twentieth-century translator of Smith's *Catalogus*, has the line as 'his pyre survives to light the world', a more optimistic take in line with Parry's focus on Cotton's antiquarian legacy.<sup>150</sup>

In this commemorative context the line's exact meaning is ambiguous. Is it a defiant coda against the honour denied to Robert Cotton in his final years, or a hopeful recognition that the light of his knowledge will illuminate future generations? Ominously, its focus on fire as a transformational force seems to foreshadow the Cotton library's fate in 1731. At the same time, its ambiguity accommodates a reading of the antiquarian dialectic of loss and recovery. In Lucan, the line tells us that the common fate of death awaits all things, but repurposed on the monument of the Cotton library's founder, it is full of posthumous possibility – Robert Cotton's figurative funeral pyre is both an ending and a beginning, transforming his personal library into a nationally-recognised legacy.

Robert Cotton's identity sits like dust on the manuscript volumes of the Cotton library, and as with Crabbe's 'genius of the place' it is both distinct from their materiality and constituted from it. It was a haunting presence: following the 1731 fire, Richard Mead wrote to Edward Harley that, when speaking with the library keeper Richard Bentley, 'Dr. Bentley says that this calamity is the Nemesis of Cotton's ghost to punish the neglect in taking due care of his noble gifts to the public'.<sup>151</sup> As well as participating in the didacticizing of book destruction, Bentley's spirit of Robert Cotton evokes the imaginative power of breaking the covenant of public ownership, and ignoring the imperative of permanent preservation enshrined by the language of the 1701 act – for fear of the ghost (or the trustee committee) Bentley left London in early 1732.<sup>152</sup> In the next chapter, I turn to Elias Ashmole and the founding of the Ashmolean Museum, a public legacy which paid much more deliberate attention to the possibilities of inscribing personal identities onto collections, manipulating objects and their textual representations to create institutional covenants and archival memory devoted to the preservation of Ashmole's reputation.

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<sup>149</sup> David Howarth, 'Sir Robert Cotton and the Commemoration of Famous Men', *British Library Journal* 18.1 (1992), 1–28 (pp. 20-1).

<sup>150</sup> Parry, *Trophies of Time*, p. 94 n.36.

<sup>151</sup> Quoted in Craig Ashley Hanson, *The English Virtuoso: Art, Medicine, and Antiquarianism in the Age of Empiricism* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 170.

<sup>152</sup> Cambridgeshire Archives, 588DR/Z10 (b).

## 2. The Ashmolean

The entry for Elias Ashmole in John Campbell's *Biographia Britannica* (1747) draws heavily on an autobiographical source, which in 1717 had been published as Ashmole's diary. The manuscript, now in the Bodleian as MS Ashmole 1136, is Ashmole's fair copy of notes detailing the circumstances of his life, from his nativity in 1617 to the year 1687. Ashmole made progress elsewhere towards an account of his life in continuous prose – this manuscript is made up of brief entries dealing with Ashmole's whereabouts, health, and social interactions. Consequently, Campbell suggests that Ashmole

never intended it for publick inspection. But why so? Did he set down his father and mother's names for fear he should forget them? or is it not more probable, that he committed these particulars to writing, that they might be preserved and read?<sup>1</sup>

Here Campbell touches on the central concern of life writing: the interplay between the writing self and the written self, between lived experience and literary form.<sup>2</sup> The way he frames Ashmole's notes polarises their purpose into personal remembrance or public record, Campbell's appeal to the latter premised on his assessment of Ashmole as 'eminent', a figure whose life is a matter of public interest – this teleological reading collapses historical distinctness.<sup>3</sup> It is true that Ashmole took pains to construct an identity for himself as a public figure. He commissioned frontispiece portraits for his publications, secured civic and heraldic appointments, and founded the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford – as long as that institution stands in his name, 'he shall never die', according to Campbell.<sup>4</sup> Ashmole's gift to the University of a collection of natural and artificial rarities instantly earned him a reputation as an 'excellent and publick-spirited Gentleman'.<sup>5</sup> This has been galvanised since because, more recently, the Ashmolean has earned a claim to being the 'first public museum in the country', thanks to its accessibility by the paying public.<sup>6</sup> Ashmole acquired the Ashmolean's founding collection from the Tradescant family, who had been displaying it with a similar access policy at their house in South Lambeth since around 1629. While historians like Martin Welch and R. F. Ovenell agree that this suggests that the Tradescants might have operated Britain's first public museum, Ovenell asserts the Ashmolean is properly the first, in a 'stricter and more modern' sense of 'museum'.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Campbell, *Biographia Britannica: Or, the Lives of the Most eminent Persons who have flourished in Great Britain and Ireland* (London: William Innys et al, 1747), p. 223.

<sup>2</sup> Adam Smyth, ed., *A History of English Autobiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016) pp. 3-4.

<sup>3</sup> Campbell, *Biographia*, p. 223.

<sup>4</sup> Translation from Ashmole's epitaph, *ibid.* p. 235.

<sup>5</sup> Edward Chamberlayne, *Angliae Notitia: The Second Part of the Present State of England, Together with divers Reflections upon The Antient State thereof* (London: Sawbridge, 1684), p. 326

<sup>6</sup> Arthur MacGregor, 'Collectors and Collections of Rarities in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries' in *Tradescant's Rarities: Essays on the Foundation of the Ashmolean Museum 1683, with a Catalogue of the Surviving Early Collections*, ed. by Arthur MacGregor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 70–97 (p. 97).

<sup>7</sup> Martin Welch, 'The Foundation of the Ashmolean Museum' in MacGregor, *Tradescant's Rarities*, 40–58 (pp. 40-1); R. F. Ovenell, *The Ashmolean Museum 1683-1894* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 29-30.

Such wrangling over what should or should not be called Britain's first public museum quickly becomes a blind alley in scholarship on the history of collecting, vexed most obviously by the question of where to situate publicness. In chapter one, I illustrated how the ideas of publicness that were superimposed on the Cotton manuscripts were primarily concerned with ownership and preservation rather than access. The collection became the first nationally owned library in 1701, but little evidence survives about how widely it was used beyond interpersonal networks of antiquaries. In the new British Museum, access to the Cotton collection was similarly limited; as a feature on tours of Montagu House its drab spines (alongside the Harley and Sloane libraries) were less interesting to visitors than Hans Sloane's more outlandish natural curiosities and antiquities.<sup>8</sup>

Equally vexed is the question of what constitutes a museum. By contrast to the nationally owned Cotton collection, the 'Tradescants' assemblage of plants, animal specimens and curiosities was a popular public attraction in the mid-seventeenth century, collected, owned and managed by an artisan gardener to the royal family, John Tradescant the Elder. While access was indiscriminate, the house and garden at South Lambeth bore more resemblance to an early modern raree-show than to contemporary museums, which were associated with private scholarly studios or aristocratic displays of wealth.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, in 1656 the collection announced itself as the 'Musaeum Tradescantianum' in a printed catalogue of the same name, an act of aggrandisement by which, eventually, it was transformed into the Ashmolean Museum. The first statutes of this new institution were similarly aggrandising, asserting that the collection represented 'knowledge of Nature' which was 'very necessarie to happiness, life, health and the conveniences thereof'. Making sure the objects were 'safe & well conditioned' was a matter of public interest.<sup>10</sup> Like the Cotton Library, the Ashmolean was less concerned with actual people than with an abstracted idea of commonwealth. In this chapter and the next, I trace the development of two public attractions which, despite little alteration to their physical composition, were transformed by verbal descriptions into institutional collections imbued with intellectual and public values.

Suggesting that the Ashmolean was the first English public museum uses a similar teleology to Campbell's biography of Ashmole, with which I opened this chapter. It uses the present to explain the past, superimposing the modern museum onto seventeenth-century Oxford, just as Campbell assumes that Ashmole was diarising for future historians. Lorraine Daston was the first to point this out in a review of Ovenell and Welch's work, suggesting that it relied on a 'present-pointed vector' to frame its subject matter as a precursor to modern museum practice.<sup>11</sup> In this chapter, I argue that this oversight is particularly easy to make in the case of Ashmole because he was so deliberately engaged in the process of constructing his own posterity, compiling and manipulating records in order to control historical narratives and reputations. I suggest that this propensity for archival self-fashioning emerged from Ashmole's work as an

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<sup>8</sup> Anne Goldgar, 'The British Museum and the Virtual Representation of Culture in the Eighteenth Century', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, 32.2 (2000), 195–231 (pp. 211, 201–5).

<sup>9</sup> Paula Findlen, 'The Museum: Its Classical Etymology and Renaissance Genealogy', *JHC*, 1.1 (1989), 59–78 (p. 60).

<sup>10</sup> Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawl D.912, ff. 666r–667r.

<sup>11</sup> Lorraine J. Daston, 'The Factual Sensibility', *Isis*, 79.3 (1988), 452–467 (p. 455).



antiquarian compiler, and became crucial not only to how the Ashmolean Museum was conceived but how Ashmole seized control of its founding collection from Hester Tradescant. I consider how public identities were superimposed on the Tradescant collection as a coherent group of objects, particularly in its printed catalogue (a work bankrolled by Ashmole) which aligned the museum with the knowledge culture of scientific virtuosi.

Ashmole's biographer C. H. Josten suggests that his life bore an 'egocentric tendency', but that the work he did 'collecting, preserving, and transmitting to posterity the treasures of the past also belong to a personality which has transcended the narrower aspirations of selfishness'.<sup>12</sup> I challenge the assumption Josten makes here that founding a public museum and an egocentric tendency are mutually exclusive. I suggest instead that the Ashmolean represents Ashmole's aspirations towards personal recognition and commemoration, which extended beyond his own lifetime. Considering Edward Lhwyd's bid to become Ashmolean keeper during the final years of Ashmole's life, I conclude by suggesting that the museum struggled to maintain its professed value as facilitating 'several parts of useful and curious Learning' due to Ashmole's insistence on preservation, commemoration and stasis.<sup>13</sup>

Ashmole enacted his fixation on personal commemoration through written documents, not only manipulating and carefully editing his own personal archival footprint but using texts to mediate the identities of his collected objects. This must be understood in the context of his intense interest in astrology and alchemy, branches of early modern knowledge in which occult power could be contained in acts of specific naming and inscription.<sup>14</sup> Ashmole plotted nativities for his friends, and cast horoscopes to inform significant decisions like buying property and remarrying. He also demonstrated his belief in the literal power of inscription through his use of sigils and talismans, objects imbued with magical power through acts of engraving. Ashmole's alchemical work *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* (1652) includes accounts of the 'Naturall powers [that] Sigills, &c. Graved or Imprest with proper Characters and Figures, and made under certaine perculiar Constellations may have'.<sup>15</sup> Paul Kléber Monod claims that Ashmole was 'addicted' to the use of such charms: by carving talismans and placing them on his threshold, Ashmole attempted to rid his house of rats in 1678 and 1681.<sup>16</sup>

Although scepticism regarding natural magic was growing during the seventeenth century, these practices were by no means unusual – Charles II claimed to have cured cases of scrofula between 1660 and 1685 via the 'Royal Touch', by which engraved amulets were placed around the necks of the afflicted.<sup>17</sup> It is important nonetheless to identify Ashmole's personal belief in the power of recording specific times and dates and inscribing objects. Not only was this important to the

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<sup>12</sup> *EA*, i.303.

<sup>13</sup> Chamberlayne, *Angliae*, p. 326.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Kléber Monod, *Solomon's Secret Arts: The Occult in the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven, CT & London: Yale University Press, 2013).

<sup>15</sup> Elias Ashmole, *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* (London: N. Brooke, 1652), p. 463.

<sup>16</sup> Monod, *Solomon's Secret Arts*, p. 35; *EA*, iv.1624, iv.1697-8.

<sup>17</sup> Simon Werrett, 'Healing the Nation's Wounds: Royal Ritual and Experimental Philosophy in Restoration England', *History of Science*, 38.4 (2000), 377–399.

management of Ashmole's household and personal affairs, but it informed his broader epistemology. He noted in an early work that to attain natural knowledge one must discover the 'first and true impressions, which Nature hath stamped upon [...] things', imagining natural objects as sigils engraved with information.<sup>18</sup> I argue that this commitment to the power of inscription is not only a guide to how Ashmole understood the natural world through his collections, but is observable in his archival practices of compilation, and also analogous with his demonstrable belief in the power of writing to construct reputations and identities.

Ashmole's pronounced antiquarian interests were another facet of this belief. As I suggested in chapter one, the English antiquaries of the seventeenth century were deeply affected by the possibility of losing history and identity, either by the teeth of time or the destruction of monuments, during the dissolution of England's monasteries and as collateral damage of the Civil War. Ashmole's manuscripts contain volumes of descriptions and sketches from frequent tours of England's churches with his friend William Lilly, part of a commitment to documenting ecclesiastical and genealogical history in the shadow of the interregnum. This commitment motivated William Dugdale, Ashmole's future father-in-law, to take 'a speedy veiw of what Monuments I could [...] to the end, that by Inke and paper, the Shadows of them, with their Inscriptions might be preserved for posteritie'.<sup>19</sup> The Ashmolean was conceived in an intellectual environment fixated on the preservation of identity on paper and in stone.

When Lilly died Ashmole composed an epitaph for his tombstone, which mentioned the fact that it had been paid for by 'Elias Ashmole, armiger', Ashmole later did the same for the monument of his friend John Booker.<sup>20</sup> Through financial intervention Ashmole hence bound his own identity to the memories of his friends, exercising his authority and emphasising the public stature with the honorific 'armiger'. In this chapter, I argue that these epitaphs are typical of Ashmole's career spent organising and compiling identities into printed texts, manuscripts, and ultimately the Ashmolean Museum, onto which he inscribed his own parameters of personal memorialisation. Challenging the view that the museum was founded to further natural knowledge, I suggest that the paratexts of its collection perform inscriptive functions on its objects, together representing a field of contested ownership, power, and collective identity. Considering the collection's considerable overlap with the Tradescant museum, I examine its printed catalogue, Chancery documents disputing its custody, and statutes and descriptions of its new incarnation as the Ashmolean Museum. I suggest that by inscribing its objects with textual identities, Ashmole attempted to subsume their history into his own carefully managed legacy project, in the process hindering their participation in the cultures of natural philosophy with which they were purportedly associated.

### **'Any thing that is strang'**

In July 1625 John Tradescant the Elder wrote to Edward Nicholas, Secretary to the Navy, petitioning him to 'Deall with All Marchants from All Places' in gathering together materials for

<sup>18</sup> [Elias Ashmole], *Fasciculus Chemicus: Or, Chymical Collections* (London: J. Flesher, 1650), sig.[A7v].

<sup>19</sup> William Dugdale, *The History of St Pauls Cathedral in London* (London: T. Warren, 1658), sig.[A3v].

<sup>20</sup> Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 1137 f. 80r; MS 1136, f. 45a.

George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham's cabinet of rarities. The letter lists many kinds of natural specimens, asking specifically for objects from 'the Virgine & Bermewde & Newfound Land'; Tradescant emphasised the duke's appetite for the novel in the final item on the list: 'Any thing that is strang'. Tradescant articulates the desiderata (which include elephants' heads, dried plants, and flying fish skins) with phrases like 'All Maner of', 'Divers kinds' and 'all sorts'; he asks for birds in 'all there strang sorts' that 'be Rare or Not knowne to us'.<sup>21</sup> These phrases do not indicate a lack of knowledge – in many cases the list specifies particular species, indigenous tools, or localities – but instead suggest a considered curiosity for objects on the frontier of European discovery. Such a letter, written on behalf of one of England's 'foremost arbiters of fashion', reveals a desire among the country's elite for collecting the new, the diverse, and the strange.<sup>22</sup>

The phrases Tradescant uses to construct his list anticipate those of Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1627). In Bacon's utopia, merchants return from their voyages with 'divers' and 'many new' specimens, 'such variety' and 'all manner' of things, which contribute to their society's perfected store of natural knowledge.<sup>23</sup> Similarly too, Bacon makes clear that these assembled treasures exist beyond the frontiers of European knowledge. The Father of Salomon's House (a utopian institution of science) emphasises that his collection contains 'divers mechanical arts, which you have not', 'divers instruments of music likewise to you unknown', and 'such variety of plants and living creatures more than you have in Europe (for we know what you have)'.<sup>24</sup> To own these technologies and natural historical specimens was to understand them, and to understand them demonstrated knowledge superior to that of one's peers. In his *Gesta Grayorum*, Bacon offered advice for princes to assemble a 'goodly huge cabinet' with which they could secure their fame: 'when all other miracles and wonders shall cease, by reason that you shall have discovered their natural causes, yourself shall be left the only miracle and wonder in the world'.<sup>25</sup>

This notion, that collections of rarities were durable displays of power, was late to reach England at the turn of the seventeenth century.<sup>26</sup> Over the previous hundred years in other regions of Europe, particularly the Italian principalities and republics, sophisticated cultures and networks of collecting had developed alongside new courtly social values such as *virtù*, the nurturing of civility in the court; this became the etymological root of 'virtuoso', a label which during the early modern period was synonymous with collecting.<sup>27</sup> In *New Atlantis*, Bacon's House of Salomon is discovered by English sailors 'in the midst of the greatest wilderness of waters in the world', and

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<sup>21</sup> London, National Archives, SP 16/4, ff. 155-6.

<sup>22</sup> MacGregor, 'Collectors and Collections', p. 84.

<sup>23</sup> Francis Bacon, 'New Atlantis' in *The Major Works* ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 481-5.

<sup>24</sup> Bacon, 'New Atlantis', pp. 483-5.

<sup>25</sup> Francis Bacon, 'Gesta Grayorum' in *The Major Works*, p. 55.

<sup>26</sup> Arthur MacGregor, 'The Cabinet of Curiosities in Seventeenth-Century Britain', in *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe*, ed. by Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 147–158.

<sup>27</sup> William Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature: Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 223-5; Paula Findlen, *Possessing Nature: Museums, Collecting, and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994).

similarly Tradescant's list of instructions addresses 'All Marchants from All Places' – these collecting cultures were entangled with expanding networks of global travel and trade.<sup>28</sup> Collecting and displaying the obscure and the rare in one's personal collection demonstrated command of these networks, crucial to courtly self-fashioning.<sup>29</sup> From its beginnings, European collecting was bound up with narratives of global mastery, displays of power, and self-commemoration.

Yet for natural history in particular, collecting was not necessarily dependent on wealth – as Paula Findlen has shown, one of the unique attributes of this kind of collecting during the European Renaissance was that it functioned across a wide social spectrum – patricians, scholars, merchants and artisans all participated.<sup>30</sup> This mingling of ranks introduces an ambiguity to Tradescant's letter – was he writing more for Buckingham or himself? Prudence Leith Ross claims that the letter's list of specimens represents Buckingham's 'latest whim', while Arthur MacGregor suggests that Tradescant was making use of Buckingham's name in order to fulfil his own collecting ambitions.<sup>31</sup> Tradescant worked as a plantsman and gardener for Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury, then Cecil's son William, Edward Lord Wooton, Buckingham, and eventually Queen Henrietta Maria. During this time, his expertise enabled him to collect rarities on behalf of his patrons, while simultaneously developing his own impressive botanical, zoological and anthropological collections, working with what Ken Arnold calls the 'excesses of courtly conduct and consumption'.<sup>32</sup> Tradescant's career as a collector and artisan demonstrates that the value of gathering and displaying rarities was not confined to the English court.

Travelling abroad on behalf of the Duke of Buckingham, and utilising his correspondence networks, Tradescant built up a collection which he began displaying at his house in South Lambeth shortly after the Duke's death in 1628. The collection contained an impressive variety of foreign plant species, as well as a museum of strange and rare objects donated by Tradescant's patrons, or siphoned off as duplicates from their collections. This process allowed Tradescant to develop renown as what Marjorie Swann calls a 'collector-entrepreneur'. She suggests that the collecting and public display of Tradescant's collection in South Lambeth was in some ways analogous to the practices of the aristocracy, but in others (specifically the charging of an entry fee) Tradescant challenged the assumption that curiosity cabinets were the preserve of the court.<sup>33</sup> The scale and popularity of the museum earned contemporary comparisons between

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<sup>28</sup> Bacon, 'New Atlantis', p. 457.

<sup>29</sup> Jay Tribby, 'Body/Building: Living the Museum Life in Early Modern Europe', *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric*, 10.2 (1992), 139–63.

<sup>30</sup> Findlen, *Possessing Nature*.

<sup>31</sup> Prudence Leith Ross, *The John Tradescants: Gardeners to the Rose and Lily Queen* (London: Peter Owen, 2006), p. 86; MacGregor, 'The Cabinet of Curiosities', p. 150.

<sup>32</sup> Ken Arnold, *Cabinets for the Curious: Looking Back at Early English Museums* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p. 19.

<sup>33</sup> Marjorie Swann, *Curiosities and Texts: The Culture of Collecting in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), pp. 27-37.

‘John Tredeskin’s Ark in Lambeth’ and ‘the Archives of sundry Princes and private persons’.<sup>34</sup> Managing what became a famous public attraction, John Tradescant the Elder and his son designed an unregistered coat of arms which they used on their wills, the family tomb, and the printed catalogue of their museum, a *de facto* recognition that collecting had improved their standing.<sup>35</sup>

However, this did not constitute an ambition to enter the gentry – Tradescants Elder and Younger retained their social rank as skilled artisans, and their museum had a very different character. Unlike aristocratic collectors, who were ‘indiscriminate in their choice of objects [but] highly selective in their choice of companions’, Tradescant’s museum was open to any stranger for an entry fee of sixpence, and there is evidence to suggest items were available for sale there, probably plants.<sup>36</sup> Such an access policy allowed the fame of the Tradescant collection to spread beyond the family’s immediate network, and the museum was often used as a shorthand for the rare and the strange by writers including Robert Herrick, John Cleveland, Thomas Flatman, and John Oldham. While the South Lambeth museum was compared to the collections of ‘sundry Princes’, Oldham counted ‘Tradescant’s Rarities’ alongside ‘any choice Device at Barthol’mew’, suggesting the collection was equally cognate with the cheap thrills and raree-shows on display at Bartholomew Fair.<sup>37</sup> This suggests a fascination with rarities that pervaded all ranks of English society, and also to Tradescant’s ability to profit from his diverse associations. Herrick’s reference to the museum at South Lambeth occurs in an unflattering description of a woman whose fingernails ‘match Tradescant’s curious shels’, while Cleveland uses it to deride Sir Thomas Martin as a ‘whimsey’ of nature who ‘out-vies / Tredeskin and his ark of Novelties’.<sup>38</sup> Common to the collection’s references in the sense of it being a novel spectacle, clashing with conventions of civility and beauty but (like Bartholomew Fair) providing ready amusement.

Tradescant the Elder died in 1638, and the collection passed to his son John. It has been suggested that John the Younger curtailed paid access to the museum. In the collection’s catalogue – the *Musaeum Tradescantianum* (1656) – his portrait engraving says that he ‘displayed [...] to his friends’ the treasures he had inherited, and Thomas Flatman complained that he ‘starves our greedy eyes, / By boxing up his new found Rarities’.<sup>39</sup> However, the chronology is confusing. Flatman’s poem was composed in the final year of Tradescant’s life (1661-1662) by which time the rarities had been in his possession for over two decades, they were not ‘new

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<sup>34</sup> Thomas Powell, *Humane Industry, or a History of most Manual Arts* (London: H. Herringman, 1661), p. 186.

<sup>35</sup> Ross, *The John Tradescants*, p. 116.

<sup>36</sup> Findlen, *Possessing Nature*, p. 15; Ross, *The John Tradescants*, p. 101.

<sup>37</sup> John Oldham, *The Works of Mr. John Oldham, Together with His Remains* (London: J. Hindmarsh, 1684), p. 77.

<sup>38</sup> Robert Herrick, ‘Epigram upon Madam Ursly’ in *Hesperides* (London: J. Williams and F. Eglesfield, 1648), p. 273; John Cleveland, ‘Upon Sir Thomas Martin’ in *Poems* (n.p., 1651), p. 6.

<sup>39</sup> Ovenell translates this Latin portrait inscription and suggests this reading in *The Ashmolean Museum*, p. 5; Thomas Flatman, ‘To Mr. Sam. Austin’ in *Poems and Songs* (London: B. Took, 1674), p. 89.

found'.<sup>40</sup> In June 1661, responding to a charge that South Lambeth had been operating as an unlicensed attraction, the King decreed that the museum was 'of very harmless import', general admissions having 'continued, uninterruptedly, by him [John the Younger] & his Father [...] for many years past'.<sup>41</sup> When John the Younger inherited the collection, its shape was roughly the same as when it entered the new Ashmolean Museum forty-five years later, though the *Musaeum Tradescantianum* also notes that he 'both preservest, & augment'st' his father's goods.<sup>42</sup> After Tradescant died in 1662, his widow Hester sold some objects from the collection, though by this point it was already slipping out of the family's control thanks to a deed of gift, written in December 1659, which signed the museum over to Elias Ashmole.<sup>43</sup>

Ashmole's first recorded encounter with the Tradescant collection was a visit to South Lambeth in June 1650, but his influence over it first became apparent in the *Musaeum Tradescantianum*.<sup>44</sup> The work was a printed catalogue of the Tradescants' plants and rarities which Ashmole funded, helped to compile, and apparently pushed for: Tradescant claims in the address to the reader that it was only 'by the perswasion of some friends' that the *Musaeum* came to fruition.<sup>45</sup> The catalogue was the most visible statement of the collection's public identity before it was subsumed into the Ashmolean Museum, and was one of the first English examples of a genre that was already popular in the rest of Europe. Claire Preston has noted that by the seventeenth century, a number of catalogues (including those of Ole Worm, Ulisse Aldrovandi, and the dukes of Saxony) were already familiar to the learned as records of 'celebrated collections' produced in 'gorgeous formats'.<sup>46</sup> In content the *Musaeum Tradescantianum* is cognate with these works, containing frontispiece engravings, dedicatory epistles, the (spurious) Tradescant coat of arms, and a list of illustrious benefactors. In form however, neither the 1656 nor 1660 editions could be described as 'gorgeous' – they are scruffy octavo volumes. The works are similar in form to Robert Hubert's catalogues of the 1660s which were designed to advertise his museum near St Paul's Cathedral, open on weekdays to the paying public.<sup>47</sup> Like the collection it describes, the *Musaeum Tradescantianum* blended the realms of prestige aristocratic collecting and public spectacle.

Although some objects in the museum and nearly all the plants are described in Latin, Tradescant explains his decision to use English where possible 'for the ready satisfying

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<sup>40</sup> 'To Mr. Sam Austin' responds to Samuel Austin's *A Panegyrick on His Sacred Majesties Royal Person* (London: William Miller, 1661).

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Ross, *The John Tradescants*, p. 133-5

<sup>42</sup> John Tradescant, *Musaeum Tradescantianum*, sig.[A6r].

<sup>43</sup> Hester Tradescant sold to collectors including William Courten, see Sachiko Kusakawa, 'William Courten's lists of 'Things Bought' from the late seventeenth century', *JHC*, 29.1 (2017), 1–17 (p. 3)

<sup>44</sup> *EA*, ii.530.

<sup>45</sup> Tradescant, *Musaeum*, sig.[A8v].

<sup>46</sup> Claire Preston, 'Punctual Relations: Thomas Browne's Rhetorical Reclamations', *Studies in Philology*, 115.3 (2018), 598–614, (p. 600).

<sup>47</sup> [Robert Hubert], *A Catalogue of part of those Rarities Collected in thirty years time with a great deal of Pains and Industry, by one of his Majesties sworn Servants* (n.p. n.d.), p. 25.

whomsoever may desire a view thereof.<sup>48</sup> This phrase captures the ontological slippage of the catalogue – a sense that reading the work affords a ‘view’ of the objects, a virtual visit to South Lambeth.<sup>49</sup> This slippage represents an important facet of the catalogue genre, written descriptions which have the power to fulfil a dual representative function. On one hand, catalogue descriptions can supplement a view of a physical collection, as finding aids or auxiliary labels. On the other, they also contain a more fully representational function, serving as substitutes for viewing a physical collection. In chapter one for example, Smith’s catalogue of the Cotton manuscripts was both finding aid and self-contained representation of the collection – as the library’s subsequent custodians discovered, it offered a perfected description of what was, in reality, a less-than-complete collection. This dual function of catalogues is important to bear in mind as we encounter other examples of the genre, throughout this investigation.

Alongside claims to offer a ‘view’ of the South Lambeth collection, the representational function of the *Musaeum Tradescantianum* is further suggested by the catalogue’s composition. Within the division of natural and artificial curiosities, categories are less enumerative than expressive, beginning with specific specimens before trailing off into ‘many severall sorts’.<sup>50</sup> This structure places some objects in the foreground before gesturing to others, less distinct in name and location, at a greater distance from the reader-viewer’s perspective. The catalogue’s specific use of English adds a linguistic dimension to this representational strategy – specimens ‘as yet unfitted with apt English termes’ are immediately ‘lesse familiar’, their names instead preserving non-European origins.<sup>51</sup> In these cases, Tradescant blends sensory with nominal description for his European reader: the ‘Guara of Marahoon Brasil’ has a ‘beak like a Poland sword’, and the ‘Matuitui’ is ‘the bigness of a Thrush, [with] short neck and legges’.<sup>52</sup> In its descriptive strategies, the *Musaeum Tradescantianum* reflects Bacon’s *New Atlantis*, as well as John the Elder’s collecting practice. It recalls Tradescant’s lists of desiderata that begin with requests for known specimens, moving through Anglicised ‘River horsses’ and ‘Seacowes’ before venturing into the unknown realm of ‘strang sorts’ that ‘be Rare or Not knowne to us’.<sup>53</sup>

As a printed book, the catalogue reproduces a visual impression of the collection, but it also situates the objects in the textual realm of European natural historical discourse. Tradescant’s references to specimens without English (or Latin) names advertise the pioneering scope of the museum, but elsewhere the catalogue is explicitly built on existing works of European natural history, its descriptions based on ‘their agreements with severall Authors compared’.<sup>54</sup> Just as the *Musaeum*’s list of benefactors authorises the social status of collection and collector, so this scaffolding of citations lends intellectual authority to its descriptions, underlining that its compilers are working at the forefront of European scientific knowledge. In its descriptions of

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<sup>48</sup> Tradescant, *Musaeum*, sig.[a3r].

<sup>49</sup> For a discussion of other seventeenth-century texts as virtual visits, see Preston, ‘Punctual Relations’.

<sup>50</sup> Tradescant, *Musaeum*, p. 2.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* sig.[a2v].

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 2-3.

<sup>53</sup> National Archives, SP 16/4, f. 156.

<sup>54</sup> Tradescant, *Musaeum*, sig.[a1r-v].

specimens, the catalogue stages an unwillingness to move beyond the authority of existing textual accounts. However, the absence of existing accounts often serves to advertise the collection's rarity and strangeness, much like Bacon's *New Atlantis*. The catalogue's categories gesture to 'other severall forrain sorts, not found in any Author' and 'severall sorts of clawes of other strange birds, not found described by Authors'.<sup>55</sup>

Prior to the publication of the *Musaeum*, the Tradescants' collection was celebrated as a public attraction displaying the rare and the strange, and in some respects the catalogue's descriptive techniques echo this celebration. Yet textualising the collection as a catalogue afforded other opportunities to craft new, public identities and purposes for its objects. As Tradescant wrote in the address to the reader,

The enumeration of these Rarities, (being more for variety than any one place known in Europe could afford) would be an honour to our Nation, and a benefit to such ingenious persons as would become further enquirers into the various modes of Natures admirable workes[.]<sup>56</sup>

As a paratext to the catalogue, this statement asserts a place for the Tradescant museum among Europe's pre-eminent collections, demanding that its enumerative lists should be read as constitutive of England's global status. I have illustrated how the *Musaeum* emerged from the culture of collecting in seventeenth-century England, representing the Tradescant family's collected objects in distinctive ways to advertise and promote the museum as a public attraction. Tradescant's claims in the address to the reader highlight another facet of the printed catalogue's function, one that recalls the aggrandising work of Smith's catalogue of the Cotton manuscripts, discussed in chapter one. In its paratextual positioning, the *Musaeum* asserts the national significance of the collection, its unparalleled variety articulated as a testament to England's superior taste, knowledge and global exploration. By situating the collection as a resource for the study of 'Natures admirable workes', the catalogue synthesised John Tradescant the Elder's desire for 'any thing that is strang' with increasing interest in empirical principles of scientific observation, espoused by philosophical clubs of Oxford scholars and the networks of Samuel Hartlib, which flourished during the interregnum.<sup>57</sup> The *Musaeum* added greater intellectual heft to a collection that had been compared to 'any choice Device at Barthol'mew', deliberately reframing the South Lambeth attraction as a resource for natural historical study, as well as claiming its importance to national narratives of knowledge and power. In these respects, the catalogue is a precursor to the collection's absorption into the Ashmolean Museum, not least because the *Musaeum* was also orchestrated by Elias Ashmole.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid. pp. 1, 3.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. sig.[A8v-a1r].

<sup>57</sup> Mark Greengrass, 'Archive Refractions: Hartlib's Papers and the Workings of an Intelligencer', in *Archives of the Scientific Revolution: The Formation and Exchange of Ideas in Seventeenth-Century Europe*, ed. by Michael Hunter (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1998), 35–48.



### Mercuriophilus Anglicus

As Swann points out, the *Musaeum Tradescantianum* blurs the identity of John Tradescant the Younger between writer of the catalogue and owner of the collection, a distinction weighted with the power of ownership and authority of authorship. It ties the text into one of her book's central questions: 'is the creator of a catalogue an 'author' as well as a collector? Is the writer who gathers the texts he has produced within the bounds of a printed book legitimized as an 'author' because he is a collector?'.<sup>58</sup> The catalogue genre allows for this kind of porousness, exacerbated by another category implicit in Swann's formulation. A writer could not only gather the 'texts he has produced' but also those produced by others, becoming a compiler whose textual production afforded opportunities to imprint an authorial identity on a collection of written sources. The compiler is both collector and author, their editorial priorities controlling the remediation of texts and (in the specific case of the catalogue) objects too. In the *Musaeum Tradescantianum*, this knot of authority is inhabited by a number of figures: John the Elder, who built the collection and whose records were used to compile the work; John the Younger, owner of the collection and cataloguer of the plants; and Elias Ashmole and Thomas Wharton, the friends alluded to in the catalogue's preface who helped to compile the catalogue and finance its publication. Of the four, it was Ashmole who had, by 1656, already demonstrated an ability to manipulate the textual identity of an author-collector-compiler to his advantage.

The first publication Ashmole was associated with was the *Fasciculus Chemicus: Or, Chymical Collections* (1650), a collection of extracts from alchemical texts which announced itself as a digest of the 'secret hermetick science', suited to beginners as well as adepts.<sup>59</sup> He was at two removes from this historical source material, which had been gathered and published by Arthur Dee and then translated by Ashmole from Latin into English. Nevertheless, via a long, discursive preface he was able to construct a distinctive authority for himself under the anagrammatical pseudonym 'James Hasolle'. Ashmole articulated the work of the *Fasciculus* as alchemical in itself, transfiguring the writings of hermetic philosophers, previously 'huddled up in a deformed chaos', into a plainly written compilation of 'comeliness and order'.<sup>60</sup> His address to the reader is replete with metaphors for the work of the compiler, describing the book as a selection of the choicest flowers picked from the garden of knowledge, now 'bound up in one compleat and lovely poesie'.<sup>61</sup> Ashmole suggests that, 'if seriously perused', the works of alchemists

are much like Drawers, that lead to some choice and secret Box in a Cabinet, (one opening the way to the rest) which if heedfully revolved, the satisfaction you miss of in one Author, will be met with in another, and all perhaps may at length discover such pregnant and sublime Secrets[.]<sup>62</sup>

Here Ashmole emphasises the seriality of a search into these authors, one leading to another, while at the same time insisting that their 'sublime Secrets' can only be understood via a

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<sup>58</sup> Swann, *Curiosities and Texts*, pp. 39, 11.

<sup>59</sup> [Ashmole], *Fasciculus*, [title page]

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. sig.[\*\*3r].

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. sig.[\*\*1r].

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. sig.[\*\*3v].

synchronic view of the whole corpus, works ‘heedfully revolved’ in relation to one another, a privation of meaning in one source supplied by its neighbour. Alchemical knowledge is presented both spatially as a group of objects, and temporally via a scholarly journey through them. The *Musaeum Tradescantianum* invites its readers to experience its museum by representing it textually, and similarly the *Fasciculus Chemicus* invites its readers to arrange, manipulate and absorb its written source material as collected objects. Ashmole’s simile is a puzzle box, a cabinet whose parts – through judicious manipulation – reveal a ‘secret Box’, just as the alchemical works provide clues to grasping the true nature of the universe. The language of boxes inside drawers inside cabinets, of understanding through new juxtapositions and rearrangement, is strongly reminiscent of the practices of collecting, and the physical furniture in which collections were stored and displayed. There is a latent sense (in textual compilations, puzzle boxes, and the Tradescants’ museum) that correct spatial arrangement can shed light on the secrets of nature.

Explaining alchemy through these kinds of metaphor – the poesie and the puzzle box – associated the widely distrusted hermetic arts with fashionable images of literary and virtuoso curiosity. Unlike contemporary alchemical writers, Ashmole directed his publications towards an elite, lay audience.<sup>63</sup> This was not the use that Dee had intended for the *Fasciculus*, and he remained incredulous as to why Ashmole would bother translating it: alchemy was already vilified by scholars, ‘how then can yt any way be aduanced by the vulgar?’<sup>64</sup> The rationale becomes clear in Ashmole’s preface. Addressing critics who claim that alchemy’s discoveries are ‘meer Chimeraes’, Ashmole gestures to the many ‘occult, specifick, incomprehensible, and inexplicable qualities [...] in Nature’. Somewhat disingenuously, he suggests that the study of these was instrumental in discovering gunpowder, the printing press, and navigational technologies – seventeenth-century metonyms for human progress. To dismiss alchemy with the ‘Diabolical Arts’ is to benight oneself to knowledge and to progress, because ‘there is nothing incredible either in divine or human things’.<sup>65</sup> Ashmole wanted to revitalise alchemy as a legitimate branch of scientific enquiry.

Alchemy was a contested arena of knowledge production during the seventeenth century, as popular and widespread among natural philosophers as it was controversial. Its fascination among Royal Society figures is well documented, and vindications of alchemy as a kind of experimental practice were frequently attempted.<sup>66</sup> Having acquired a copy of Bacon’s *Advancement of Learning* in 1649, Ashmole’s perspective on alchemy in the 1650 *Fasciculus* chimes with Bacon’s, who treats its pedigree ambivalently.<sup>67</sup> Along with astrology and natural magic, Bacon says that alchemy had ‘better intelligence with the imagination of man than with his reason’, its erroneous goal to link the divine and the terrestrial was ‘full of error and vanity’,

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<sup>63</sup> Monod, *Solomon’s Secret Arts*, p. 33.

<sup>64</sup> Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 1790, f. 66.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. sig.[\*\*5r–\*\*6v].

<sup>66</sup> Monod, *Solomon’s Secret Arts*, pp. 95-105. See also Daniel Jütte, *The Age of Secrecy: Jews, Christians, and the Economy of Secrets, 1400-1800* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2015).

<sup>67</sup> Vittoria Feola, ‘Elias Ashmole’s collections and views about John Dee’, *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, 43 (2012), 530–538 (p. 531).

which its adepts ‘sought to veil over and conceal by enigmatical writings’.<sup>68</sup> Yet alchemy’s error is not in its practice but in its discourse – Bacon acknowledges its experiments have yielded some useful inventions, despite their pretensions to mystery, and although some practices are ‘frivolous’ (such as physical rejuvenation or the transmutation of base metals) most are ‘strange rather by disguisement than in themselves’.<sup>69</sup>

Ashmole’s work addresses this criticism. True alchemy is a ‘pure and heroick Science’ marred by ‘dross and corruption’, and the *Fasciculus* aims to cut through the discipline’s historical obscurity and the ‘Ænigmaes, Metaphors, Parabols, and Figures’ of the ancients.<sup>70</sup> Explicitly linking the study of nature to the study of alchemy, Ashmole asserts that those familiar with the ‘laborious difficulty of joyning [Nature’s] letters, and spelling her syllables’ will be able, through diligent investigation, to discover comparable wisdom in alchemical works.<sup>71</sup>

Ashmole’s identification of alchemical study with a Baconian programme of natural enquiry became more pronounced in his second publication, the *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* (1652), whose composition echoed Dee’s *Fasciculus*, assembling extracts from alchemical sources into a history of the discipline in Britain. Ashmole drew directly on the *Advancement of Learning* to open the *Theatrum*’s address to the reader, borrowing Bacon’s metaphor that ‘Past Ages have like Rivers conveied downe to us, (upon the floate,) the more light, and Sophisticall pieces of Learning; but what were Profound and Misterious, the weight and solidity thereof, sunke to the Bottome’.<sup>72</sup> For Bacon, this metaphor illustrates the contrast between the survival of popular and profound knowledge; for Ashmole it evokes the ultimate secrets of the alchemical discipline, and the difficulty of dredging them up. These two works demonstrate Ashmole’s efforts to establish alchemy as a legitimate branch of scientific enquiry, promoting its further study by ‘Collecting All (or as many as I could meete with) of our own English Hermetique Philosophers, [...] to make them publique’.<sup>73</sup>

Ashmole also aligns his *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* with the practices of contemporary antiquarianism, the ‘*Theatrum*’ of its title claiming a sense of comprehensive authority for the work, evoking a collection or encyclopaedia.<sup>74</sup> Unlike Dee’s *Fasciculus*, the *Theatrum* is explicitly concerned with alchemy as a facet of British learning and identity, a branch of knowledge of which ‘no Nation hath written more, or better’, Britain always playing ‘schoole-mistris to France’.<sup>75</sup> Ashmole designs the *Theatrum* to circumscribe and unify British alchemy into a single, authoritative collection. He also makes use of antiquarian narratives of historical neglect, praising John Leland for rescuing manuscripts after the destruction of monastic libraries, and claiming

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<sup>68</sup> Francis Bacon, ‘The Advancement of Learning’ in *The Major Works*, p. 143.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 143, 201-2.

<sup>70</sup> [Ashmole], *Fasciculus*, sig.[\*\*4v, \*\*1v].

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* sig.[\*\*4v].

<sup>72</sup> Ashmole, *Theatrum*, sig.[A2r]; Bacon, ‘Advancement of Learning’, p. 145.

<sup>73</sup> Ashmole, *Theatrum*, sig.[B2v].

<sup>74</sup> Findlen, ‘The Museum’, p. 64.

<sup>75</sup> Ashmole, *Theatrum*, sig.[A2v–A3r].

that he himself has saved works that were otherwise ‘almost quite shrouded in the dust of antiquity, and involved in the obscurity of forgotten things’. Ashmole’s labour of gathering and printing saved them from the ‘jaws’ of ‘silent ruine’.<sup>76</sup> Legitimising alchemy depended as much on writing it into the nation’s history as it did on associations with the scientific study of nature.

Ashmole colours his role as compiler of the *Theatrum* with a modesty similar to Tradescant in the *Musaeum Tradescantianum*, claiming his work was motivated by ‘the encouragement of some that are Industrious after publique benefit’.<sup>77</sup> Yet Ashmole is far from agentless in the text which, like the *Fasciculus*, provides evidence of his deliberate self-fashioning. His pseudonymous ‘James Hasolle’ is introduced on the *Fasciculus*’s title page as ‘Mercuriophilus Anglicus’, a textual persona designed to integrate alchemy into a sense national identity. The name’s root is Mercury, the astrological planet and the alchemical element, in both disciplines signifying versatility, a catalyst or agent of change. As Ashmole’s twentieth-century editor C. H. Josten puts it, ‘as heavenly Mercury is among the gods, metals, and planets, such is the translator and editor [...] on earth’, a conduit through which knowledge could flow.<sup>78</sup> Although in the *Fasciculus*’s written paratexts Ashmole uses this identity to emphasise humility, its elaborate frontispiece asserts his authority over the work. The frontispiece is dominated by a bust on a plinth inscribed ‘Mercuriophilus Anglicus’, the bust’s face obscured by an astrological chart depicting Ashmole’s nativity. It is flanked by two columns covered with objects – the left all associated with astrology and alchemy, the right military equipment – representing Ashmole’s hermetic study and his career as a royalist soldier.<sup>79</sup> The association between heavenly Mercury and Ashmole’s work on earth is depicted using a scroll that reads ‘Quod est superius est sicut inferius’ [‘as above, so below’], linking Mercury’s symbol in the sky to a rebus for Ashmole’s name, an ash tree with a mole at its base.

Although neither author nor compiler, his name only appearing pseudonymously, Ashmole’s personal identity and hermetic self-conception is nonetheless emphatically inscribed on the work: translated into English, made his own. This developed through his subsequent printed works, the *Theatrum*’s title page describing Ashmole as ‘Mercuriophilus Anglicus’, and a frontispiece engraved for his *The Way To Bliss* (1658) depicting a bust of himself, its plinth inscribed with Mercury’s symbol and the heavenly twins, signifying Ashmole’s nativity.<sup>80</sup>

In his analysis of Ashmole’s affinity to Mercury, Josten argues that Ashmole believed he was bestowed with

the gift of his most subtle and extraordinary versatility, governed [by] mercury, a mysterious universal medium, never clearly defined, a volatile and semi-material

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid. sig.[B3v–B4r].

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. sig.[B2v].

<sup>78</sup> *EA*, i.64.

<sup>79</sup> *EA*, ii.524–6.

<sup>80</sup> Elias Ashmole, *The Way to Bliss* (London: J. Grismond, 1658). Ashmole paid William Faithorne £7 for the engraving in 1656 (see *EA*, i.114, ii.692), though it has since been attached to a copy of the *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* at London, British Library, 239.k.6.

substratum [...] that penetrated all other substances [...] the necessary vehicle, or catalyst, of all changes[.]<sup>81</sup>

Through the character of Mercury, Ashmole positioned himself as a semi-visible organisational force, as egoless as he was fundamental to the distillation, arrangement and mediation of knowledge. He enacted this identity as a compiler, less interested in the practical business of alchemy than he was in articulating its philological dimensions. The *Theatrum* is fundamentally a work of antiquarian scholarship, leading Vittoria Feola to characterise Ashmole as a ‘Baconian-bent antiquary’, not simply interested in Bacon’s natural philosophy but seeking to imitate the rhetorical mode of his *Advancement of Learning*.<sup>82</sup> Ashmole’s identification with Mercury allowed him to appear self-denying while reinforcing his power as a ‘mysterious universal medium’, a dialectic which Kevin Dunn identifies in Bacon’s *Advancement*. Dunn situates Bacon’s work in the context of Britain’s ‘bureaucratic vision’ of empire, which was suspicious of personal aggrandisement. In Bacon’s prefaces, Dunn argues, he becomes the ‘self-denying public man’, a prefatory voice displaying personal agency without admitting personality or apparent private interest – Bacon constructs this in his paratexts and infuses it into his principles of scientific observation. Dunn suggests that this submergence of private interest nonetheless afforded Bacon substantial personal authority: it became a ‘powerful weakness topos’ through which the author could inscribe an immanent personal authority onto texts that were defined as monuments to the public good.<sup>83</sup>

Ashmole borrowed elements of Bacon’s rhetoric to restore the reputation of alchemy, and he also took aspects of Bacon’s self-fashioning as an ostensibly disinterested compiler. His identification with Mercury manifests the same topos that Dunn ascribes to Bacon, a ‘powerful weakness’ that effaces itself in deference to its subject matter, while making itself indispensable as a conduit for specific branches of knowledge. While Bacon put this to use in his conception of natural philosophy, Ashmole was able to range beyond alchemy thanks to his self-fashioning as the infinitely adaptable substrate Mercury.

In his *Way To Bliss*, Ashmole announced that he would be prioritising antiquarian over alchemical work, because it was easier to manage alongside court battles with his wife, Lady Mainwaring.<sup>84</sup> Although he described antiquarianism as ‘harsher’ than alchemy, it afforded him much greater opportunity to exercise his self-styled mercurial associations to improve his social standing.<sup>85</sup> Ashmole’s printed declaration of his commitment to antiquarianism coincided with a commission by the Bodleian Library to draw up a catalogue of its collection of coins and medals, which Ashmole had been undertaking since 1656. The project enabled Ashmole to associate himself with a prestigious institution and its objects, work for which he was keen to be credited.

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<sup>81</sup> *EA*, i.64.

<sup>82</sup> Feola, ‘Elias Ashmole’s collections’, p. 537.

<sup>83</sup> Kevin Dunn, *The Pretexes of Authority: The Rhetoric of Authorship in the Renaissance Preface* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp. 103-17.

<sup>84</sup> Ashmole, *Way To Bliss*, sig.[A3r]. This taxing court case was also blamed by Tradescant for the delay in publishing the *Musaeum Tradescantianum*, see sig[a1r-v].

<sup>85</sup> The note is in Ashmole’s copy of his *Way to Bliss*, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 537.

When Anthony Wood published his *Historia et Antiquitates Universitatis Oxoniensis* (1674), Ashmole was allegedly displeased that Wood had failed to acknowledge the cataloguing, a ‘very laborious worke’ which Ashmole ‘most valued’.<sup>86</sup>

Before the publication of the *Musaeum Tradescantianum*, Ashmole was already committed to producing serious antiquarian work, and to using that work to advance his career. In 1655 he began to collect material for what was to become his *Institution, Laws and Ceremonies of the most Noble Order of the Garter* (1672), another magisterial act of compilation in which fragmentary historical sources would be ‘digested into one body’.<sup>87</sup> The work was designed to further specific personal goals, establishing Ashmole as the authoritative historian of the Order. He sought to formalise this by petitioning the King to create for him the position of ‘Historiographer and Remembrancer of the Order of the Garter’ in 1662. Although the King signed the petition, it was rejected by the Order’s Chancellor Henry de Vic, who argued that Ashmole’s ‘unknowne and [...] Illiterate penn’ could only provide a poor copy of work already achieved by William Camden and Francis Bacon.<sup>88</sup> For de Vic, this attempt to create a new office of the Order was the latest in Ashmole’s self-interested campaign to establish himself in positions of power. Ashmole ‘never did any service to the publick’, and de Vic thought he would not be satisfied

unlesse hee may have all the partes of thee play hee must act Pyramus and thisbee [...] he must putt all the officers of the order out of their places assume to himselfe the honor that is due to all the noble Companions nay indeed play the soveraigne and bee made dictator of this noble Order[.]<sup>89</sup>

It was a powerful indictment of Ashmole’s character, not least because of its attack on his commitment to the ‘publick’, which was the ostensible driving force behind the *Fasciculus* and the *Theatrum Chemicum*, and the cornerstone of his Baconian self-fashioning. It demonstrates that while Ashmole’s biographers – from Anthony Wood to Josten – have been quick to praise the variety of his intellectual pursuits and his mercurial adaptability, some were sceptical of his efforts to insert himself into circles of institutional power. De Vic’s comments demonstrate that although we must now read into Ashmole’s own printed works to discover his enterprise of self-effacing self-promotion, his grasps for power were more obvious to contemporaries. The perception of Ashmole as a kind of cuckoo in the Order of the Garter, unlearned and self-interested, is perhaps indicative of how courtiers like de Vic treated his social rank. Born to a Lichfield saddler from a once-prominent family, Ashmole gained wealth through his marriages, particularly his second to the three-times widowed Mary, Lady Mainwaring, and through his successful legal practice. His bid for an official role at the Order of the Garter was audacious, and clearly caused concern that he was seeking to monopolise its power and gain influence with the king.

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<sup>86</sup> *EA*, iv.1394.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.* i.112; Elias Ashmole, *The Institution, Laws and Ceremonies of the Most Noble Order of the Garter* (London: J. Macock, 1672), [title page].

<sup>88</sup> *EA*, iii.845-6.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* iii.846-7.

As discussed above, the European tradition of collecting natural and artificial rarities transcended social ranks, figures like Buckingham and Tradescant the Elder seeking similar kinds of objects but for very different ends: English curiosity cabinets existed on a continuum from courtly displays of power to the commercially-run raree-shows at Bartholomew Fair. While the South Lambeth museum increased their fame, the Tradescants did not use their collection to alter their social rank, and while the *Musaeum Tradescantianum* claimed an aggrandising national purpose, this was a work masterminded by Ashmole. In the context of Ashmole's career up to 1656, such aggrandisement through the collections of others seems to have been his stock in trade. As 'Mercuriophilus Anglicus', he leveraged the compilation work of Arthur Dee, the writings of historical English alchemists, the Bodleian's coin collection, and the history of the Order of the Garter in order to improve his social standing and further his courtly aspirations. Ashmole's sophisticated use of printed works to inscribe his identity onto textual collections (both collections of texts and descriptions of physical collections) is one facet of a self-fashioning enterprise that also incorporated the manipulation of archival sources.

### Manipulating the Archive

In his five-volume *Elias Ashmole (1617-1692)*, C. H. Josten compiles 1,589 pages of short extracts from manuscripts, correspondence and printed contemporary sources that represent Ashmole's archival footprint. He describes the project as a

chronicle of Ashmole's life [...] composed of many very small and many fragmentary pieces of information [...] all those pieces which seemed to have any significance for an understanding of Ashmole's life and work have here been assembled for the benefit of those who prefer facts to generalities and the inimitable shades of quotations to the pale smoothness of modernized versions.<sup>90</sup>

Josten's editorial decisions show his efforts to avoid the 'pale smoothness of modernized versions', as he preserves seventeenth-century typographical conventions and offers minimal commentary. However, as in Ashmole's own works of compilation, Josten takes on a quiet but omnipresent authority over the material he has collected. His work is in fact remarkably smooth, replacing the material traces of its archival sources with a uniform typeface in five uniformly bound volumes, its reproductions of portraits, engravings and manuscript pages scaled down onto glossy paper. While Josten describes some text 'scribbled out' in his sources, their interlinear revisions and additions (so telling of Ashmole as a fastidious editor) are not indicated. The sources, already 'small' and 'fragmentary' by Josten's admission, are fragmented even further in his chronological structure. Ashmole's own autobiographical record (the Bodleian's MS Ashmole 1136) is scattered through the work's chronology in single lines, and the material coherence of other sources is disrupted by transcriptions split across multiple volumes. Josten enacts the smoothness of modernisation through an unobtrusive but persistent editorial voice, using footnotes to reinforce the judgements in his biographical essay.

Josten's work demonstrates that, even unwittingly, the process of compiling is inherently a process of archival smoothing. In his own compilations and translations, Ashmole was much less

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<sup>90</sup> *EA*, i.302.

apologetic for his acts of editorial intervention, his works not only acknowledging but premised upon modernising heterogeneous bodies of historical sources in order to improve their accessibility to a learned English readership. I argue that Ashmole applied similar principles of smoothing and regularising to his own personal archive, in the notes about his own life and particularly in the record of his seizure of the Tradescant collection. The surviving sources for this episode, all deliberately managed or edited by Ashmole, are made to suggest his inheritance of the museum was inevitable and frictionless, belying its intensely contested ownership and diminishing the voice of Hester Tradescant, John the Younger's widow, in order to promote Ashmole's reputation during his own lifetime and in the historical record.

Ashmole's handling of Henry de Vic's criticism illustrates how sensitive he was to the power of editing and smoothing an archive as he built his career as a public servant. Ashmole met Charles II less than a month after the King first sat with Parliament, and within a year he had petitioned successfully for three government appointments. Although de Vic denied Ashmole's bid to become the Order of the Garter's official historian, Ashmole added further titles to his portfolio of bureaucratic influence over the next ten years.<sup>91</sup> De Vic's slur that Ashmole 'never did any service to the publick' must therefore have been particularly stinging, and its potency can be inferred from the actions of Seth Ward, a long-time friend of Ashmole's who replaced de Vic as chancellor of the Order of the Garter. In 1674, Ward asked the King's permission to remove de Vic's speech from the Order's records on the grounds that it was 'injurious' to Ashmole's reputation. The King agreed, and 'thereupon the Chancellor cut out the Leaves in his Booke where Sir Henry de Vic had entred them'.<sup>92</sup> It was an act of archival smoothing bound up in Ashmole's concerns as an increasingly public figure.

The episode chimes with the archival practices of Hans Sloane, a generation later, which I discuss in chapter five. As Elizabeth Yale has illustrated, in his dealings with the Royal Society Sloane attempted to smooth his own archival record, exerting control over the organisation's minute books and redacting material that was potentially damaging to his reputation.<sup>93</sup> In the 1730s the septuagenarian Sloane began accessioning his own correspondence into his collection of manuscripts, a decision which Arnold Hunt argues is evidence that he was preserving himself as part of his collection, with a view to posterity.<sup>94</sup> Similarly, Ashmole's attempted erasure of de Vic's criticism in May 1674 was followed shortly by the earliest hint that he was considering using his own collection to found a public museum. On 18<sup>th</sup> September Ashmole wrote to the Lord Chancellor of Denmark to thank Christian V of Denmark for the present of a gold medal

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<sup>91</sup> Ashmole first met Charles II on 16<sup>th</sup> June 1660. On 18<sup>th</sup> June he was appointed Windsor Herald, and on 3<sup>rd</sup> September he became Comptroller of the Excise. In February 1661 he became Secretary and Clerk of the Courts for Surinam, Controller of the White Office in 1664, and Treasurer and Registrar of the College of Arms in December 1668. See *EA*, ii.780, ii.789, iii.811, iii.989, iii.1132

<sup>92</sup> *EA*, iii.848n1.

<sup>93</sup> Elizabeth Yale, 'Playing Archival Politics with Hans Sloane, Edward Lhuyd, and John Woodward' in *Archival Afterlives: Life, Death, and Knowledge-making in Early Modern British Scientific and Medical Archives*, ed. by Vera Keller, Anna Marie Roos, Elizabeth Yale (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 173–193 (pp. 188–92)

<sup>94</sup> Arnold Hunt, 'Sloane as a Collector of Manuscripts' in *From Books to Bezoars: Sir Hans Sloane and His Collections*, ed. by Arthur MacGregor, Michael Hunter, Alison Walker (London: British Library, 2012), 190–207.



and chain ‘which whilst I liue I will preserve by me [...] and when I dye, bequeath it to a publique Musaeum’.<sup>95</sup> Josten (and later Martin Welch) infer that, as no such museum existed, Ashmole must have been contemplating founding one himself.<sup>96</sup> Although such a reading is symptomatic of the teleological impulse in many studies of Ashmole, it is true that 1674 was a watershed in Ashmole’s collecting interests, as he took greater control of the Tradescant collection in the context of his intensifying campaign for public authority. In October, he bought a property adjoining the Tradescants’ in South Lambeth, and shortly after began moving objects from the museum into his own house.<sup>97</sup>

All histories of the founding of the Ashmolean Museum are obliged to recount the events of 1656 – 1674 that led to Ashmole’s procurement of the Tradescant property, including its gardens and collection of rarities. In short, after striking up a friendship with John and Hester Tradescant, Ashmole acquired a deed of gift for the collection from John in December 1659, signed under dubious circumstances, which ruled that the collection would be kept by John and Hester in trust until their deaths, after which it would pass to Ashmole. John then changed his mind, writing a will that left the collection to Hester, who (in the absence of any surviving children with John) was obliged to bequeath it to Oxford or Cambridge University.<sup>98</sup> Following John’s death in 1662, Ashmole contended that the 1659 deed of gift was still legally binding, and entered into extended and acrimonious litigation with Hester.<sup>99</sup> Successful in Chancery, Ashmole then bought the house adjoining Hester’s. Their relationship was tense, and although Hester provided safety for Ashmole’s library during the 1666 fire, she later accused him of stealing her family’s legacy. Ashmole threatened to kill her if she prevented him seizing the collection. Their fraught proximity came to an abrupt end in April 1678, when Hester was found drowned in her pond.<sup>100</sup> Afterwards, Ashmole took Hester’s executors to court over rarities that were allegedly missing from the museum, but by 1679 construction had begun on the Ashmolean Museum to house the collection in Oxford.

Beyond this basic chronology, the historical record of the Tradescant collection during this period (in keeping with its numerous appearances in court) is riddled with conflicting accounts and uncertainties. Some historians, addressing the subject in passing, ignore the conflict between Hester Tradescant and Ashmole, or merely summarise the key events, as above.<sup>101</sup> However, the majority of scholars have exacerbated the contested ownership of the Tradescant collection by siding with Ashmole or with Hester. It was not until the mid-nineteenth century that accounts of

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<sup>95</sup> *EA*, iv.1395.

<sup>96</sup> *EA*, iv.1395 n.4; Martin Welch, ‘The Foundation of the Ashmolean Museum’, pp. 40-1.

<sup>97</sup> *EA*, iv.1397

<sup>98</sup> John’s will is transcribed in Ross, *The John Tradescants*, pp. 138-40.

<sup>99</sup> National Archives, C7 454/1. This complaint and answer contain details of the 1659 deed of gift (which is no longer extant).

<sup>100</sup> See *EA*, iv.1607.

<sup>101</sup> See for example Campbell, *Biographia Britannia*, p. 235; F. H. W. Sheppard, *Survey of London: Volume XXVI, The Parish of St. Mary Lambeth, Part Two, Southern Area* (London: Athlone, 1956), p. 74; Malgosia Nowak-Kemp, ‘The Oxford Dodo, Part 1: The Museum History of the Tradescant Dodo: Ownership, Displays and Audience’, *Historical Biology*, 29.2 (2017), 234-47.

the history of the collection began to acknowledge ‘Mrs Tradescant’ at all, choosing when they did so to paint her as a ‘defenceless, childless widow’ at the mercy of the ‘rich and powerful’ Ashmole, and to implicate him in her death.<sup>102</sup> In 1966 Josten contended that these accounts made claims ‘without a shred of evidence’, and he instead told a story in which Ashmole’s lifelong ‘moral ambiguity’ could be excused by his mercurial alignment, his persistent ‘honesty and fairness’ obstructed by the ‘erratic and unbalanced’ Hester.<sup>103</sup> This reading was reinforced during the surge of interest in the origins of the Ashmolean after its tercentenary in 1983, when Welch rebutted suggestions that Ashmole had used his legal training to trick the Tradescants out of their museum, and suggested that Hester merely ‘felt herself gravely wronged and persecuted by her new neighbour’.<sup>104</sup> In his history of the Ashmolean, Richard Ovenell compounded this sentiment to claim that the 1662 Chancery case was a ‘mean and undignified altercation between Ashmole, the great courtier and influential man of affairs, and the almost certainly hysterical, and possibly semi-literate widow’.<sup>105</sup>

Disagreeing over the particulars of an ambiguous historical episode, accounts have shared a tendency to minimise Hester Tradescant’s agency, either in service of paternalistic notions of sympathy or to dismiss her complacently as a victim of ‘hysterical’ passions in contrast to Ashmole’s apparently self-evident composure as a ‘man of affairs’. At the same time as Ovenell was writing, Leith Ross went some way to nuancing Hester’s stewardship of the collection, pointing out that her management of the rarities (including sales to collectors like William Courten) might indicate a more active interest in the collection than that of her late husband.<sup>106</sup> However, Leith Ross goes on to suggest that Hester was ‘prone to exaggerate her feelings about her overbearing neighbour’, on the grounds that she ‘began to make public accusations’.<sup>107</sup> This knot of historiography, largely untouched since the 1980s, makes assumptions about Hester Tradescant’s character based on the most minimal of archival traces: a single sheet of paper in Ashmole’s hand, signed by Hester in September 1676 as a confession ‘that I have very much wronged Elias Ashmole [...] by severall fals scandalous & defamatory Speeches’.<sup>108</sup> Ashmole made himself the author of his adversary’s supposed confession, ensuring that (as in the case of de Vic) he could control the framing of statements that would otherwise cause ‘the diminution and blemishing of his Reputation & good name’.<sup>109</sup> The minimisation of Hester Tradescant’s agency, exacerbated by historiographical trends, was a controlled and deliberate act of archival

<sup>102</sup> William Chambers and Robert Chambers, ‘Early English Naturalists’, *Chambers’s Edinburgh Journal*, 359 (1850), 311–314 (p. 313); Goldthorn Hill, ‘The Tradescants’, *Sharpe’s London Magazine*, 29 (1859) 211–216 (p. 215); H. H. Montgomery, *The History of Kennington and its Neighbourhood* (London: H. S. Gold, 1889), p. 79.

<sup>103</sup> *EA*, i.305, i.126-8, i.209.

<sup>104</sup> Welch, ‘The Foundation of the Ashmolean Museum’, p. 43.

<sup>105</sup> Ovenell, *The Ashmolean Museum*, p. 11.

<sup>106</sup> Ross, *The John Tradescants*, pp. 145-7; Carol Gibson-Wood, ‘Classification and Value in a Seventeenth-Century Museum’, *JHC*, 9.1 (1997), 61–77 (p. 62).

<sup>107</sup> Ross, *The John Tradescants*, p. 149.

<sup>108</sup> Bodleian Library, MS Rawl D.912, ff. 668r-v. A notable, more recent engagement with this episode is Swann, *Curiosities and Texts*, pp. 46-50.

<sup>109</sup> Bodleian Library, MS Rawl D.912, f. 668r.

manipulation on the part of Ashmole, as he sought to control his own narrative and the narrative of the collection he was trying to appropriate.

Beyond this confessional sheet, historians of the Tradescant collection have worked, either first or second hand, from the same group of well-thumbed and often-transcribed archival sources whose composition, survival and material existence have yet to be treated critically in relation to the emergence of the Ashmolean Museum. Since the last extensive work on the early Ashmolean in the 1980s, scholars have begun to recognise documents like these as objects that reflect, construct and preserve ideological and cultural imperatives, and that cement highly subjective narratives into histories.<sup>110</sup> Crucial to understanding the emergence of the Ashmolean, as an idea as much as a physical repository, is an awareness of Ashmole's identity as a compiler, as author of his own life, and his role in the ideological construction of a personal archive.

The most extensive source for information on Ashmole's life is MS Ashmole 1136, now at the Bodleian, which contains autobiographical notes from his birth in 1617 to 1687, arranged chronologically. Each side is headed by a year and most contain multiple entries, their specific dates recorded in the margin. Ashmole's enthusiasm for astrology and horoscopes means many of the entries are marked not only with a specific calendrical date but a time of day as well. These notes were published as Ashmole's diary in 1717 and 1774, but as Josten suggests they cannot properly be considered a diary, as the majority of MS Ashmole 1136 was recorded retroactively, perhaps in preparation for an autobiography – the manuscript itself states that on 26<sup>th</sup> December 1678 'I began to make my collection for occurrences and accidents for my life'.<sup>111</sup> Folios 1 to 98 contain these autobiographical notes, and 140 to 176 are 'Historicall Notes' on contemporary national history, 'taken out of some of my loose pages'.<sup>112</sup> Ashmole's reference to this process of collection (as well as the specificity of the manuscript's information) suggests that it was a fair copy compiled from volumes of rough notes, formatted with margins and dates for the purpose, in which the 62-year-old Ashmole began collecting autobiographical notes and historical details.

In the construction of his personal archive, Ashmole takes his cues from an existing tradition, again involving Francis Bacon. Bacon advocated the humanist practice of using a commonplace book in which to collect and methodise loose, fragmentary notes. Angus Vine suggests that Bacon was taking inspiration from a specific mercantile practice of writing up rough day book notes into a fair ledger – this was a merchant's public document, 'on view for all to see', which spoke to its compiler's good character.<sup>113</sup> Vine identifies this technique with a rhetorical strategy

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<sup>110</sup> Liesbeth Corens, Alexandra Walsham, Kate Peters, eds., *Archives and Information in the Early Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp.1-27.

<sup>111</sup> *Memoirs of the Life of that Learned Antiquary Elias Ashmole, Esq.* (London: Roberts, 1717); *The Lives of Those Eminent Antiquaries Elias Ashmole Esquire and Mr. William Lilly* (London: Davies, 1774); Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 1136, f. 183r.

<sup>112</sup> Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 1136, f. 140r.

<sup>113</sup> Angus Vine, 'Commercial Commonplacing: Francis Bacon, the Waste-book, and the Ledger' in *English Manuscript Studies 1100–1700: Manuscript Miscellanies c.1450–1700*, ed. by Richard Beadle and Colin Burrow (London: British Library, 2011), 197–218, (p. 206). See also Jacob Soll, 'From Note-Taking to Data Banks: Personal and Institutional Information Management in Early Modern Europe', *Intellectual History Review*, 20.3 (2010), 355–75; Angus Vine, *Miscellaneous Order: Manuscript Culture and the Early Modern Organization of Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

put forward by Cicero: ‘day-books last for a month, ledgers for ever [...] ledgers attest the good faith and conscientiousness which ensure a man’s reputation for all time’.<sup>114</sup> Ashmole’s account of his own life was retroactively compiled from rough notes, collected and presented as a unified chronology: it was constructed with a clear sensitivity to posterity.

Via its vellum binding, MS Ashmole 1136 has acquired the incidental appearance of the ‘pale smoothness’ of Josten’s ‘modernized versions’; beyond its cover the manuscript’s evidence of compilation bears some of the same kinds of editorial unification as the 1966 *Elias Ashmole*, and acts of archival manipulation similar to the erasure of de Vic’s speech and the composition of Hester Tradescant’s confession. Ashmole’s rough notes do not survive, but their very absence demonstrates the function of MS Ashmole 1136 to replace an unruly miscellany of accreted information with a uniform record written by Ashmole when he was an established holder of public office, and in the process of founding his own museum. The manuscript does bear some traces of diaristic immediacy, more so from November 1680 when Ashmole’s entries (thenceforth written in ‘real time’) become shorter, perfunctory comments on his declining health. Sometimes these were at the expense of recording significant contextual details, entries for 23<sup>rd</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> July 1684 noting ‘I went toward Oxford’ and ‘I returned home’, with no mention that this marked his first visit to the Ashmolean, following an extended period of gout.<sup>115</sup>

In fact, mentions of the Tradescants’ collection are few, most dealing with Ashmole’s acquisition of the objects or occasions on which he showed his friends round the museum when it was still in Hester Tradescant’s custody. Ashmole’s account of the deed of gift spans three consecutive entries for 1659, the first of which asserts that on 12<sup>th</sup> December

Mr: Tradescant & his wife told me they had been long considering upon whome to bestow their Closet of Rarities when they dyed, & at last had resolved to give it unto me[.]<sup>116</sup>

The addition of this information, not mentioned in the 1662 Chancery case between Ashmole and Hester Tradescant, gives the impression of considered and measured intent on the part of the Tradescants, reinforced by Ashmole’s second entry for 14<sup>th</sup> December in which the Tradescants ‘gave their Scrivener instructions to draw a deed of Guift’, followed by the 16<sup>th</sup>, when Ashmole claims that at ‘11.30 P.M.’ both John and Hester ‘sealed & delivered’ the deed of gift to him.<sup>117</sup> Besides an acknowledgement of his Chancery case on 14<sup>th</sup> May 1662, Ashmole’s subsequent references to the Tradescant collection suggest an amicable process of acquisition: Hester ‘being willing to deliver up the Rarities to me’ on 26<sup>th</sup> November 1674, ‘I carried seuerall of them to my House’.<sup>118</sup> MS Ashmole 1136 provides no record of the litigation Hester Tradescant’s executors brought against Ashmole on 17<sup>th</sup> June 1679, nor of his alleged threats to

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<sup>114</sup> Vine, ‘Commercial Commonplacing’, 206.

<sup>115</sup> Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 1136, f. 80v.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid. f. 34v.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid. ff. 37r, 51r.

Hester's life.<sup>119</sup> The date given for the beginning of MS Ashmole 1136's compilation, at the end of 1678, is important in this regard. It sits mid-way between Hester Tradescant's death on 4<sup>th</sup> April that year, and the laying of the Ashmolean's first stone on 15<sup>th</sup> May 1679.<sup>120</sup> The creation of a fair copy of Ashmole's biographical notes at this time was therefore not only a physical consolidation of miscellaneous papers but a consolidation of the narrative of the Tradescant collection on Ashmole's terms, following the death of a potentially conflicting witness. The printing of MS Ashmole 1136 over the subsequent century cemented Ashmole's account into history.

Aside from MS Ashmole 1136, the sheet of Hester Tradescant's confessions demonstrates further efforts on Ashmole's part to control the archival record. Its survival seems almost incidental, a loose sheet tucked inside the Bodleian's MS Rawl D.912 between two numbered folios. It is an awkward trace of Ashmole's fractious relationship with Hester Tradescant which he might have wished forgotten – not preserved, as it is now, amongst draft Ashmolean statutes and institutional praise of Ashmole's donation as 'egregiae benevolentiae'.<sup>121</sup> Dated 1<sup>st</sup> September 1676, the confession constitutes Hester begging 'publique forgiveness' from Ashmole for transgressions he has recorded.<sup>122</sup> Besides the confession's composition on Ashmole's terms, it contains inconsistencies that call its veracity into question. Ashmole made Hester confess that she accused him of having 'taken away 250 foote of my Ground, when he built his Garden wall', and that she had let a 'great heape of Earth & Rubbish' sit against the wall, via which thieves had entered Ashmole's yard and stolen thirty-two chickens 'on the sixt day of August last'. Allegedly, the mound of earth remained 'untaken away above six weeks after [Ashmole] was so robbed'. The confession was signed on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1676, fewer than four weeks after the 6<sup>th</sup> August that year. 'August last' may instead refer to 6<sup>th</sup> August 1675, but on that date Ashmole did not yet occupy his South Lambeth house, and had begun marking out his garden wall only three weeks previously on 15<sup>th</sup> July 1675.<sup>123</sup> The date of the alleged robbery is hence unclear, explained away by Josten as an 'error or [...] generalizing'.<sup>124</sup> However, this is uncharacteristic of a man who recorded the exact time on which he received his deed of gift to the Tradescant collection. In the confession Ashmole revised his account of this robbery, claiming firstly of the mound of earth that 'by the help thereof Thieves got over', later adding the interlinear hedging phrase 'it is strongly presumed'.<sup>125</sup> Whenever (or if) the robbery occurred, it is plausible that the thieves gained access via the earth left over from Ashmole's own garden wall excavation, deposited on Hester Tradescant's side.

The sheet of confessions and Ashmole's entries in 1136 manifest a wider power dynamic in which he took control not only of the Tradescant collection but of its historical record. His

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid. f. 59r.

<sup>120</sup> Anthony Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, ed. by Philip Bliss, 4 vols. (London: Lackington et al, 1820), iv.358.

<sup>121</sup> 'extraordinary beneficence' – Bodleian Library, MS Rawl D.912, f. 665v. See also ff. 670r-1v, 674r-5r.

<sup>122</sup> Bodleian Library, MS Rawl D.912, f. 688r.

<sup>123</sup> Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 1136, f. 53r.

<sup>124</sup> *EA*, iv.1451 n.3.

<sup>125</sup> Bodleian Library, MS Rawl D.912, f. 668v.

profession as a lawyer made him more aware of the legal authority of a deed of gift than John Tradescant, who erroneously thought it could be voided by breaking its seal.<sup>126</sup> Ashmole's legal training provided him with extensive experience in Chancery, particularly the litigation against his second wife's family during which, allegedly, there was 'not so much as a bad word' proved against him in eight hundred sheets of depositions.<sup>127</sup> When Hester Tradescant answered Ashmole's bill of complaint on 14<sup>th</sup> May 1662, she was confronted with an opponent who had experience of manipulating the apparatus of the court and who was well acquainted with the presiding judge. Ashmole had met Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, in October 1660, subsequently calculating his nativity and corresponding with him regarding his own attempt to become Historiographer to the Order of the Garter.<sup>128</sup>

During the case, Hester Tradescant defended her claim to ownership of the collection on the grounds that, when her husband had signed the deed of gift on 16<sup>th</sup> December 1659, he had come home 'distempered' with Ashmole and four other strangers, and that she had signed and witnessed the deed 'inadvisedly'.<sup>129</sup> The following morning, she described the contents of the deed to John who said it was 'contrary to his intencon' and that it had always been his desire to bequeath the museum to a public institution where it could not be 'imbezilled and made away' as easily as in private hands.<sup>130</sup> A draft of John's will (intended by him to supersede the deed of gift) had initially promised the collection to the King, but he had subsequently altered this for fear that 'some private person might begg the same of his Majestie so as they should not bee preserved to posterity, hee did alter that Will', asking that Hester instead bequeath the collection to Oxford or Cambridge.<sup>131</sup> This alteration to John's will suggests his awareness of how vulnerable royal assent was to the whims of ambitious figures like Ashmole who, at the same time as the Chancery case, was disappointed that Charles II had not intervened on his behalf to secure his appointment as historian of the Order of the Garter.<sup>132</sup>

Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, ruled in Ashmole's favour in May 1664. The ruling claimed that the deed of gift was 'fairly gained and well executed' by Hester and her husband 'with the intention to be irrevocable', that Hester must preserve the collection from 'spoyle and imbezellment' during her lifetime, and that William Dugdale (Ashmole's future father in law) and Edward Bysshe (who had granted Ashmole's coat of arms) were to audit the collection against the *Musaeum Tradescatianum*.<sup>133</sup> However, as illustrated above, the 1656 catalogue was no inventory – its gestures to 'many severall sorts' curtailed its usefulness as a means of enumerating or circumscribing the physical collection. It hence became a locus of disagreement in the Chancery case, Ashmole alleging that Hester and John had sold off items since the deed of gift, Hester

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<sup>126</sup> *EA*, ii.770.

<sup>127</sup> Campbell, *Biographia Britannica*, p. 229.

<sup>128</sup> Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 826 f. 75r; MS Ashmole 332, f. 19v; MS Ashmole 1139, ff. 41v-42r.

<sup>129</sup> *EA*, ii.769.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.* ii.770.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.* ii.771.

<sup>132</sup> Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 1139, f. 41v.

<sup>133</sup> National Archives, C33 221/744.

countering that they had acquired new items that were not covered by the deed, and Ashmole claiming that those new things were in fact ‘the same individuall things which were conteyned in the said Catalogue, Collection or Abstract’.<sup>134</sup> The plasticity of the *Musaeum*’s textual representation was the source of a debate as to how far the boundaries of the physical collection corresponded to the boundaries of the written catalogue.

As Ashmole’s complaint suggests, he was keen to treat the ‘Catalogue’ and ‘Collection’ as a single unified whole, the *Musaeum Tradescantianum* directly supporting his authority over the rarities at South Lambeth. Not only did the catalogue’s expansive, vague entries allow him to claim that the entire physical collection pre-dated 1659, but the work represented his sole justification for John signing the collection over to him. His complaint asserted that the deed of gift was in recognition of his ‘former paines, care and charge’ in producing the *Musaeum*, and that John and Hester had seen fit to entrust him with the collection because his cataloguing work was testament to how much he ‘valued the same’.<sup>135</sup> In Ashmole’s personal archive, his copy of the *Musaeum* is unrecognisable from its original printing. Bound in red leather with gold tooling, its original octavo pages were glued onto quarto leaves with red fore edges and decorated boards. The text itself has been interleaved: usually for the purposes of extra annotation or revision, the interleaves of Ashmole’s *Musaeum* are completely blank, his only annotations to the work indicating that he is one of the friends Tradescant names in his address to the reader.<sup>136</sup> The lack of visible engagement with the text suggests that this reformatting was a matter of presentation, similar to his copy of his *Way To Bliss*.<sup>137</sup> Ashmole has turned the catalogue into a much grander object, altering its stature in his library to create a textual precursor more fitting to his ambitions for creating the Ashmolean Museum.

The record of the 1662 Chancery case is preserved in the National Archives as C7 454/1, Ashmole’s complaint on a single side of parchment and Hester’s defence on another half sheet. The parchment itself is badly damaged, sections missing in the corner of both sheets, and the ink (described by Josten in the 1960s as ‘much damaged’) has now faded to the point of near illegibility.<sup>138</sup> In relation to the ownership of the Tradescant collection, this document is one of the only remaining in which Hester Tradescant’s testimony is unmediated by Ashmole. The fact that its iron gall ink is susceptible to degradation under changing humidity, as well as cumulative exposure to light, means that each time her words are read, their life expectancy is shortened.<sup>139</sup> The case’s physical deterioration demonstrates the contingency of archival survival, dependent not only on deliberate personal manipulation and redaction but on the effects of time. It also demands that we read Ashmole’s more durable, deliberately managed records critically, sensitive to his ideological interventions and those of subsequent editors.

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<sup>134</sup> *EA*, iii.853.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.* ii.768.

<sup>136</sup> Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 1007.

<sup>137</sup> Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 537.

<sup>138</sup> National Archives, C7 454/1; *EA*, ii.768.

<sup>139</sup> Conservation detail from private correspondence with Helen Mayor, Conservator at the National Archives, October 2020.

## Honouring Ashmole

The first official set of statutes for the Ashmolean were issued by Ashmole in June 1686, including a preamble which read

the knowledge of Nature is very necessarie to humane life, health & the conveniences thereof, & [...] that knowledge cannot be soe well & usefully attain'd, except [by] the inspection of Particulars [...] I Elias Ashmole, out of my affection to this sort of Learning, wherein my selfe haue taken, & still doe take the greatest delight; for wch cause alsoe, I haue amass'd together great variety of naturall Concretes & Bodies, & bestowed them on the University of Oxford[.]<sup>140</sup>

Aside from the slightly disingenuous implication that Ashmole personally had ‘amass’d’ the objects in the Tradescant collection, this articulation of the Ashmolean’s founding principles resonates with the claims that his alchemical compilations made. Like the *Theatrum*, the Ashmolean gathered together and arranged items, the inspection of which would yield ‘knowledge of Nature’ and benefit human existence. The preamble also evoked the language used to describe the Royal Society’s repository, recorded in Thomas Sprat’s *History of the Royal Society* (1667) as ‘a General Collection of all the Effects of Arts, and the Common, or Monstrous Works of Nature’. In Sprat’s utopian vision of the Society, the collection of natural specimens was one of the ‘Principal Intentions’ of an institution intent on the ‘certain observation of the senses’ in the name of national, public improvement.<sup>141</sup>

Collections function as compilations, gathering together and making accessible particular kinds of objects and knowledge. This provides a powerful locus of value by which they could lay claim to durability and national significance – something the *Musaeum Tradescantianum* had taken advantage of. The catalogue brought together in one place more rarities ‘than any one place in Europe could afford’, displaying them in print as ‘an honour to our Nation’. Catalogues like the *Musaeum* intertwined the identity of the collector with the collective identity of their objects as a monument to learning: the *Musaeum* turned the Tradescants into champions of the global knowledge their museum contained. This dynamic held for textual compilations too, as Ashmole’s persona ‘Mercuriophilus Anglicus’ made a host of alchemical and antiquarian sources durably accessible to a contemporary British readership.

By the time Ashmole acquired the Tradescant collection, there was a convincing set of precedents to show that these collector-compiler identities (especially when aligned with national interest) were durable beyond individual lifetimes. In chapter one, I showed how texts describing Robert Cotton’s collection of medieval manuscripts cast him in a heroic role as the ‘worthy repairer of eating Times ruines’, echoed by later generations of antiquarians.<sup>142</sup> In Oxford, Henry Howard had cemented his family’s reputation as patrons of learning through the donation of the

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<sup>140</sup> Bodleian Library, MS Rawl D.912, f. 666r.

<sup>141</sup> Thomas Sprat, *The History of the Royal Society of London, For the Improving of Natural Knowledge* (London: J. Martyn, 1667), pp. 251, 82.

<sup>142</sup> John Speed, *The History of Great Britaine under the conquests of ye Romans, Saxons, Danes and Normans* (London: W. Hall and J. Beale, 1611), ‘Summary Conclusion of the Whole’.



Arundel marbles, and for decades the Bodleian's catalogues had functioned as a carefully-managed ideological record of its benefactors' generosity.<sup>143</sup> The process of drafting statutes for the Ashmolean reveals how deliberately this kind of commemoration was written into the identity of the new institution and its collected objects – in fact, Ashmole received a copy of the Bodleian's regulations to serve as a guide.<sup>144</sup> Yet in the Ashmolean's statutes, the unproblematic relationship between natural knowledge and personal commemoration belied a growing tension in the perceptions and practices of collecting, which developed during the early years of the Ashmolean's existence. As I suggest in the rest of this chapter, the growth of new, dynamic ideas about the nature of natural knowledge undermined Ashmole's bid for personal permanence, by partially obsolescing the identities he had helped to create for the Tradescant collection.

In an undated note, Obadiah Walker, the Master of University College, gave advice on how Ashmole should write the Ashmolean's statutes. Out of Walker's nine suggestions, eight emphasise Ashmole's executive control of the institution. Of those eight, three deal specifically with how to ensure Ashmole received

all the honoure & respects done to any other founder; or what new ones can be rationally proposed in confirming which I verily beleieve there will be no hesitancy in the University, but rather great forwardness[.]<sup>145</sup>

In particular, Walker recommends that the 'Musaeum & Professor be called Ashmolean', and that the new institution house all the 'rarities in the Anatomy schole [...] & all hereafter given to the University'.<sup>146</sup> These suggestions were taken up by Ashmole in his draft statutes, which were presented to John Fell, Bishop of Oxford, in September 1682, acknowledging Walker's contribution. The museum was hence set up primarily to gain honour for Ashmole, and this was to be secured firstly by gathering together the university's existing rarity collections and secondly naming them after him, under the aegis of the Ashmolean. This gathering and naming process was extended indefinitely into the future too, as the statutes mandated that all subsequent donations be housed in Ashmole's museum 'as soone as bestowed'.<sup>147</sup>

Ashmole's ambition to gather all existing and future Oxford collections under his own name recalls the observations of de Vic, that Ashmole 'must putt all the officers [...] out of their places' and 'assume to himselfe the honor that is due' to all of them. The terms under which the Ashmolean was conceived suggest a continuation of Ashmole's dealings with Hester Tradescant, which were driven by a similar imperative not only to gain control of the collection but the Tradescants' property and the historical narratives surrounding the episode. Like his works of literary compilation, Ashmole used the inscription of his name and personal identity onto groups of materials, both textual and physical, as a way to appropriate them and secure his good name as

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<sup>143</sup> See Robyn Adams and Louisiane Ferlier, 'Building a Library Without Walls: The Early Years of the Bodleian Library', in *Libraries, Books, and Collectors of Texts, 1600–1900*, ed. by Annika Bautz and James Gregory (London: Routledge, 2018), 1–18.

<sup>144</sup> *EA*, iv.1492-3.

<sup>145</sup> Bodleian Library, MS Rawl D.912, f. 674r.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.* ff. 674r-v.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.* f. 670r.

a public figure. The energy with which Ashmole pursued this goal is the same energy that de Vic distrusted, borne out of anxieties about his social standing. Ashmole's middling background meant he had to work much harder to fulfil his courtly ambitions, and achieve a lasting reputation as a nationally significant illustrious gentleman. Building the Ashmolean around the principles of personal commemoration was meant to safeguard for Ashmole the 'honour & respects done to any other founder'.

Ashmole's anxiety about his own authority over the museum, even after these statutes had been submitted, is illustrated clearly by his interaction with Thomas Barlow, Bishop of Lincoln, in 1684. Ashmole had heard that Barlow was considering donating a box of coins to Oxford, and he sought Barlow out to show him the covenant by which all rarities that 'were given to the University (pro futuro) shou'd be placed among his'. Writing to the Vice Chancellor, Barlow said that 'I doubt not but you will gratify [Ashmole] in this particular he having (which he shew'd me) many MSS & other things of good value which he intends for the University'.<sup>148</sup> Ashmole leveraged the possibility of future donations to ensure that the university gratified his requests. By seeking Barlow out, Ashmole actively inserted his eponymous museum into the regular workings of institutional benefaction.

As Swann suggests, the Ashmolean was designed to 'guarantee the perpetuation of an individual's identity which was rooted in the textualization, ownership, and display of a collection of objects'.<sup>149</sup> In this sense, the Ashmolean inherited a collective textual identity from its predecessor, the Tradescant collection, its benefactors' register embodying the same values as the *Musaeum Tradescantianum*. Swann points out that the royalist leanings and obsolete ranks of the *Musaeum's* benefactor list turns 'both the catalogue and the collection into monuments of a vanished social and political order'.<sup>150</sup> April London observes that the list preserves the networks of the Stuart court and Tradescant the Elder's relations within them, as part of the collection.<sup>151</sup> The Ashmolean's first book of benefactors achieves similar work, not only honouring its donors by bearing 'witness to their piety and virtue', but shaping the identities of the objects that entered the institution.<sup>152</sup> For example, in 1683 Gervase Wilcox donated a 'so-called Protestant flail', which the benefactors' book says will be displayed in the Ashmolean 'as a perpetual cause of shame and reproach' to those who sought to subvert the monarchy, church and universities. The entry for Theophilus Leigh describes a silver medal commemorating the sinking of a Spanish ship off Jamaica, accessioned 'in order to ensure that this noble feat was not forgotten'; and John Colvil's gift of a gallstone removed without incision is preserved 'to pass down to posterity the truth of the event'.<sup>153</sup> In each of these cases, the value of each object lies less in its material form

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<sup>148</sup> *EA*, iv.1736

<sup>149</sup> Swann, *Curiosities and Texts*, p. 54.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.* p. 40.

<sup>151</sup> April London, 'Musaeum Tradescantianum and the Benefactors of the Tradescants' Museum' in *Tradescant's Rarities*, 28–35.

<sup>152</sup> Gloria Moss, trans., 'Book of Benefactors', in *Manuscript Catalogues of the Early Museum Collections, 1683-1886*, ed. by Arthur MacGregor, Melanie Mendonça, Julia White (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2000), 1–12 (p. 2).

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.* pp.4, 6.

than in the specific ideological, historical or medical narratives attached to it. Furthermore, the benefactors' register is a unique site for the preservation of these narratives, which are neither apparent in the museum's gallery nor in its early catalogues which, as Arthur MacGregor observes, record only 'rudimentary' detail designed to distinguish objects from one another.<sup>154</sup>

It is also in the benefactors' register that the institution's sense of itself emerges. Donors of model canoes and ships decide 'to anchor [them] in this most beautiful of places' or 'this safe harbour'.<sup>155</sup> The gift of a Hindu idol is accessioned 'as if to a fitting shrine', and a 'precious fragment of the Holy Cross' is 'devoutly deposited within this Museum (as within a shrine)'.<sup>156</sup> Presiding over this sanctified repository is the entry for Ashmole's bequest, describing the founder as a 'man whose merit is beyond praise':

It was he who most fully equipped this Museum for public use, as a treasure-house of Nature and the history of Natural Science, with its collection of whatever inhabits the sky, air, water and earth, and also of various curiosities, after he himself had learned enough about these things [...] the most noble Ashmole graced this museum as much with his own name as with the artefacts from all over the world.<sup>157</sup>

While this language is conventional, the praise heaped upon Ashmole in the benefactors' register gives the impression that his knowledge is universal. Manifested in this universal collection, he becomes a kind of Adam describing each object before passing it down to future keepers of the museum. The register's language and chronology situate the Ashmolean's donations and donors in an accretive harmony, with a common goal to preserve and record material objects in a shrine or safe harbour of knowledge.

However, as in the case of the Cotton manuscripts, this officialised narrative in which sacred collection objects were held in perpetual trust belies less harmonious processes of benefaction, management and display. Robert Plot, the first Ashmolean keeper, told Ashmole he was donating an 'Arabick Monument' to the museum and ordered his assistant Edward Lhwyd to 'enter it in ye Book of Donations', when in fact Plot was paid for the artefact by Oxford's vice chancellor.<sup>158</sup> Martin Lister was nearly promised his own room in the Ashmolean – the 'Musaeum Listerianum' – but the written suggestion was 'violently obliterated' by another pen, perhaps in anticipation of Ashmole's jealous promotion of his own name above all other benefactors.<sup>159</sup> There is also little evidence to suggest that the university gratified Ashmole's request to amalgamate its existing rarity collections into the Ashmolean. Since the 1620s, the Anatomy School had served as a loosely-defined repository for Oxford's donations of natural rarities, and inventories show that this collection continued to grow irrespective of the

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<sup>154</sup> Arthur MacGregor, 'Preface', in *Manuscript Catalogues of the Early Museum Collections, 1683-1886*, ed. by Arthur MacGregor, Melanie Mendonça, Julia White (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2000) i – iv, (p. ii).

<sup>155</sup> Moss, 'Book of Benefactors', pp. 5, 11.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 7, 6.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.* p. 3.

<sup>158</sup> Edward Lhwyd to Martin Lister, 17<sup>th</sup> January 1690-1, Bodleian Library, MS Lister 36 f. 8v.

<sup>159</sup> Bodleian Library, MS Lister 35, f. 60r; *EA*, iv.1714 n.3; Ovenell, *The Ashmolean Museum*, p. 36.

Ashmolean into the early eighteenth century.<sup>160</sup> As Michael Hunter has pointed out, in 1710 a visitor to the Anatomy School even suggested that some of its objects would be better suited to display in the Ashmolean.<sup>161</sup>

In display, the collection Ashmole had donated did not match the stature with which it was described in the museum's founding documents, or the benefactors' register. The objects inhabited the top floor of the Ashmolean building, above a lecture theatre, with a laboratory in the basement. Edward Chamberlayne's account of the institution praised its facilitation of 'several parts of useful and curious Learning', with lectures focused on 'Natural Bodies [...] their Natures, their Qualities and Virtues, their effects [...] their several mixtures and preparations in Tryals and Experiements, with the entire process of that Noble Art'. Its laboratory was 'one of the most beautiful and useful in the World, furnished with all sorts of Furnaces, and all other necessary Materials, in order to use and practice'. By contrast, the description of the Ashmolean's uppermost room is notably brief: 'properly the *Musaeum Ashmoleanum*, where an Inferior Officer always attends, to shew the Rarities to Strangers' – here sits the Tradescant collection, displayed to the paying public by a nameless steward, isolated from the idealised knowledge project being conducted downstairs. When Chamberlayne later returns to the collection, he provides only an echo of its benefactors' register, listing early donations to the collection by 'several worthy Persons'.<sup>162</sup>

This description, which marginalised the scientific importance of the collection of rarities, held considerable influence during the Ashmolean's early years. Martin Welch suggests that it was written by Plot as an official prospectus for the museum, pointing out that many other contemporary accounts of Ashmolean visits are derivative of Chamberlayne's.<sup>163</sup> The Oxford historian Anthony Wood also copied Chamberlayne's description verbatim in his diary.<sup>164</sup> The museum's reception among Oxford's scholars was icy, some viewing the rarities on display as 'ba[u]bles', though as Wood suggests they were not sympathetic to the 'new phil[osophy]'.<sup>165</sup> Several months before it opened the museum was dubbed 'the Knick-knackatory', a nickname it had failed to shed eight years later when Lhwyd wrote that 'the generality of the People in Oxford doe not yet know, what the Musaeum is; for they call the whole Buylding ye Labradary or Knackatory, & distinguish no farther'.<sup>166</sup> Lhwyd's impression is that Ashmolean visitors were

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<sup>160</sup> R. T. Gunther, ed., *Early Science in Oxford*, 14 vols. (Oxford: for subscribers, 1925-1939), iii.258-74.

<sup>161</sup> Michael Hunter, 'The Cabinet Institutionalized: The Royal Society's 'Repository' and its Background' in *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe*, ed. by Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 159 – 168 (p. 161)

<sup>162</sup> Chamberlayne, *Angliae Notitia: The Second Part*, pp. 325-8.

<sup>163</sup> Martin Welch, 'The Ashmolean as Described by its Earliest Visitors' in *Tradescant's Rarities: Essays on the Foundation of the Ashmolean Museum 1683, with a Catalogue of the Surviving Early Collections*, ed. by Arthur MacGregor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 59–69 (p. 60). Welch takes his suggestion from R. T. Gunther, *Early Science in Oxford*, iii.308.

<sup>164</sup> Andrew Clark, ed., *The Life and Times of Anthony Wood, Antiquary, of Oxford, 1632–1695, Described by Himself*, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1891), iii.54-6.

<sup>165</sup> *EA*, iv.1721.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.* iv.1718, iv.1880.

distinguishing ‘no farther’ than a general impression of the building, an institution containing a miscellaneous collection of objects, designed around the promotion of natural knowledge but contributing to it in no specific way.

This perception, Lhwyd discovered, was shared by the museum’s founder. Serving under Plot since 1684 and cataloguing the Ashmolean’s fossil collection, he saw an opportunity to be promoted to keeper when Plot married in August 1690 – while marriage did not disbar Plot from office, he had hinted that it would signal his resignation. Lhwyd contacted Lister, who had worked closely with the museum since its inception, and received the following advice ahead of an audience with the aged Ashmole:

You cannot better please Mr Ashmole, than by frequent Letters telling him al things are very clean & neat kept & likewise to acquaint him with evry little addition to ye Musaeum [...] if you intend at any time to be absent 2 or 3 or more dayes in your curious searches, take your owne time & keep your owne counsel [...] I could wish [...] that there was a travalling Stipend [...] but you must not soe much as mention it, because [...] it would be taken in an ill sorte by the old Gentleman[.]<sup>167</sup>

The picture Lister paints of the Ashmolean founder is a man confined in ill health to his house in South Lambeth, fixated on the condition of his objects and covetous of reports of ‘evry little addition’ to the museum. Lister says that Ashmole demands uninterrupted supervision of the collection, and that he refuses to endow a stipend for further natural historical research – Lhwyd should keep quiet about his ‘curious searches’ and extensive geological fieldwork, ensuring instead that the Ashmolean be kept ‘clean & neat’, well-catalogued, and unaltered. In his response to Lister, Lhwyd suggests that although Ashmole demanded ‘constant attendance at the Museum’, ‘constant Enquiries after Natural Productions would be farre more usefull towards the advancement of knowledge’. However, he noted that if someone should endow the museum with a travelling fellowship ‘we may reasonably suspect [...] it may loose ye title Ashmoleanum’.<sup>168</sup>

The exchange between Lister and Lhwyd displays a tension between personal commemoration and the advancement of knowledge that dogged the museum until Ashmole’s death. On one hand the museum could remain a monument to its founder, aiming to preserve current and future donations in a stasis of accretive generosity and sanctified objects. On the other it could sponsor the active study of nature in the world beyond the ‘great variety of naturall Concretes & Bodies’ which Ashmole had fixed there in 1683. Lhwyd’s point is that it could not do both, and that Ashmole – eager as ever to ensure the continuance of his good name – would sacrifice the latter to preserve the former. The contrast between the two extremes drawn by Lhwyd demonstrates the extent to which Ashmole had inscribed the Ashmolean’s objects with his own identity – if the museum’s keeper were to do anything other than stand in solemn watch over its original bequest, the whole institution would be obliged to lose Ashmole’s name from its title.

Despite Lhwyd’s protestations, the fact that Ashmole refused to sponsor the fieldwork of the Ashmolean’s keeper did not in itself preclude the use of the museum for generating natural

<sup>167</sup> Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 1816, f. 82.

<sup>168</sup> Bodleian Library, MS Lister 36, f. 15v.

knowledge. Responsible for the lectures that Chamberlayne had praised, Lhwyd's predecessor Plot also orchestrated the cataloguing of the museum's collection and actively augmented its collection, particularly its fossils, using his influence as secretary of the Royal Society. He also made the Ashmolean the regular meeting place of Oxford's philosophical club.<sup>169</sup> However, under Lhwyd's stewardship it became obvious that these efforts depended on the personal vigour and interests of Plot – the Philosophical Society lost momentum shortly after he moved to London. Lhwyd remained resentful of his duties as Ashmolean keeper, instead choosing to pursue his fieldwork without fear of reprimand once Ashmole died in 1692. Lhwyd was less diligent in keeping the benefactors' register up to date, and despite communicating with William Cole regarding a potential major bequest, the transaction never came to fruition.<sup>170</sup> By prioritising his studies over his stewardship, Lhwyd partially vindicated Ashmole's demand for 'constant attendance' when a number of objects were stolen from the museum in September 1691.<sup>171</sup>

The fate of the early Ashmolean underlines that its collections and importance as a site of scientific enquiry depended on the personal priorities of its keepers. The focus of the institution's statutes on personal commemoration also created a structure in which Ashmole retained autocracy over its administration, particularly the appointment of the keeper. This codified the museum's management using Ashmole's interpersonal relationships – although a committee of *ex officio* visitors was appointed, they only became responsible for appointing the museum's keeper once Ashmole and his wife, Elizabeth Dugdale, had died.<sup>172</sup> From its founding, there was no trustee structure to diversify control of the institution, its objects, or objectives, beyond the whims of two or three individuals.

Meanwhile, the pursuit of augmenting natural knowledge was increasingly recognised as a collective practice. The concept behind the Royal Society, as popularised by its evangelist Thomas Sprat, was that its voluntary association of members had 'freed our understandings from [...] a slavery to dead Mens names', and that even the pre-eminent works of Francis Bacon showed how 'a single [...] hand can never grasp' the whole design of reforming knowledge.<sup>173</sup> Correspondingly, the Royal Society's repository – a collection whose composition was not dissimilar to the Tradescants' museum – was not invested in commemorating its benefactors or (as I discuss in the next chapter) in preserving its specimens beyond their use as tokens of information.

It is important to remember that, in practice, the Royal Society did not live up to Sprat's idealised vision: it was an often under-resourced and over-determined group of individuals with disparate ideas about the advancement of knowledge. Neither did the Society revolutionise collecting.

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<sup>169</sup> Ovenell, *The Ashmolean Museum*, pp. 36-48, 55-6; Arnold, *Cabinets for the Curious*, pp. 50-2.

<sup>170</sup> Ovenell, *The Ashmolean Museum*, pp. 64-83; Anthony Turner, 'A Forgotten Naturalist of the Seventeenth Century: William Cole of Bristol and his Collections', *Archives of Natural History*, 11.1 (1982), 27-41.

<sup>171</sup> Edward Lhwyd to William Charleton, 25<sup>th</sup> September 1691, British Library, MS Sloane 3962, ff. 288r-290v.

<sup>172</sup> Bodleian Library, MS Rawl D.864, ff. 187-9.

<sup>173</sup> Sprat, *History*, pp. 29, 35-6.

However, under its aegis emerged more calls for a systematic approach to assembling and categorising the natural world. The Royal Society had commissioned Christopher Merrett to produce the *Pinax Rerum Naturalium Britannicarum* (1666), a ‘catalogue of the natural things of England and of the rarities thereof’, and Merrett also moved that the Society begin its repository collection not with the strange or rare but with common domestic species.<sup>174</sup> This suggestion was mocked in 1666 by some Society members, who thought it absurd to collect domestic species, but by the year of the Ashmolean’s founding the idea of collecting and studying quotidian specimens had gained traction.<sup>175</sup> Nehemiah Grew’s *Musaeum Regalis Societatis* (1681), a catalogue of the Society’s repository, described its mission to create an ‘Inventory of Nature’ wherein ‘it were also very proper, That not only Things strange and rare, but the most known and common amongst us, were thus describ’d’.<sup>176</sup>

Ashmole’s mission to enshrine the objects he had acquired wholesale from the Tradescants’ public attraction was out of step with this new culture of collecting. Visitors had been impressed by the dizzying variety of the museum at South Lambeth, but by 1683 the objects and their arrangement, premised on John the Elder’s ‘any thing that is Strang’, clashed with the Ashmolean’s apparent goal to promote natural knowledge. Similarly, inheriting the Tradescants’ access policy to admit anyone for a fee alienated the experience of the museum from England’s other learned collections. In a famous account of 1710, the German traveller Zacharias Conrad Von Uffenbach expressed distaste at the ‘country folk’ who on market day were ‘grabbing at everything’ on display at the Ashmolean.<sup>177</sup> Swann’s suggestion that the Ashmolean was designed to guarantee the perpetuation of an individual’s identity is apt, and it chimes with contemporary imperatives of antiquarianism, but becomes problematic in the context of the museum’s natural historical collections, whose value depended more on dynamic study than on stasis or commemoration.

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On 17<sup>th</sup> July 1690, Ashmole visited his museum for the last time before his death, and dined there with great ceremony. Wood provides two accounts of the event, the first in his diary:

30 or thereabouts dined in the upp house of the Musaeum where the rarities lay – Mr Ashmole was carried in a chaire or sedan was placed at ye end of that place & the Doctors standinge about him[.]<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Thomas Birch, *The History of the Royal Society of London for Improving of Natural Knowledge, from its First Rise*, 4 vols. (London: A. Millar, 1756), i.138

<sup>175</sup> William Balle to Henry Oldenburg, 4<sup>th</sup> April 1666, in *The Correspondence of Henry Oldenburg*, ed. and trans. by A. Rupert Hall and Marie Boas Hall, 13 vols. (Madison and Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965-1986), iii.90.

<sup>176</sup> Nehemiah Grew, *Musaeum Regalis Societatis. Or a Catalogue & Description Of the Natural and Artificial Rarities Belonging to the Royal Society And preserved at Gresham Colledge* (London: W. Rawlins, for the author, 1681), sig.[A4v].

<sup>177</sup> Zacharias Conrad Von Uffenbach, *Oxford in 1710, from the Travels of Zacharias Conrad Von Uffenbach*, ed. by W. H. Quarrell and W. J. C. Quarrell (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1928), p. 31

<sup>178</sup> *EA*, iv.1873.

The second in his *Athenae Oxonienses*:

in July 1690, [Ashmole's] body being then much out of order and brought very low by divers indispositions contracted together in it, he came with his wife to Oxon, was received there with great observance [...] and was sumptuously entertained by the [vice chancellor]. And heads of houses at a noble dinner in the long room of rarities[.]<sup>179</sup>

Wood's sketches provide a vivid sense of honour and decrepitude, combined amongst the objects of the Ashmolean and centred in Ashmole's body. The sumptuous and noble dinner is offset by the image of the 73-year-old founder, confined to his chair and host to 'divers indispositions' which gather together in his body as if compiled, their collective effects laying him low. Unable to move, the mere identity of this body as Elias Ashmole is sufficient to warrant great observance by the vice chancellor, attendance by high-ranking university officials, and a dinner costing £84 11s 6d.<sup>180</sup> Here, Ashmole's body becomes an unruly container for his own identity, in contrast to the stability of the museum itself in which, his epitaph tells us, Ashmole's name 'nunquam moriturus'.<sup>181</sup>

The epitaph on Ashmole's tomb in St Mary's Church in Lambeth was composed by John Aubrey, who paid Elizabeth Dugdale's second husband, John Reynolds, for the work – Reynolds worked as a stonemason.<sup>182</sup> Recalling Ashmole's desire to inscribe himself onto the tombstones of his friends, and his belief in the power of inscription, it is notable that his own epitaph was etched by his widow's new husband. By the mid-nineteenth century this epitaph was 'very nearly effaced', but the same was not true of Ashmole's name – in 1761 Reynolds's descendants, inhabiting the house at South Lambeth, were erroneously claiming Ashmole (who had no surviving children) as an ancestor.<sup>183</sup> By the 1740s, Campbell's biographical account had omitted any trace of Ashmole's decrepit body from the description of the 1690 feast, where Ashmole was simply 'received with all imaginable honour'. This elision is an effective precis for the majority of subsequent historical treatments which, as we have seen, Ashmole deliberately manipulated through his archival interventions.<sup>184</sup>

Using his skilful self-fashioning as a compiler of alchemical and antiquarian texts, Ashmole appropriated the Tradescant collection into his mission to improve his social standing. He inscribed it firstly with values of national identity via the *Musaeum Tradescantianum*, then with his own identity via the 1659 deed of gift, and ultimately the Ashmolean Museum. Ashmole's acts of archival manipulation and his fixation on preserving and augmenting the collections of his museum reflect anxieties about the instability of the authority he had created for himself, and while they ensured the longevity of his good name, they undermined the museum's function as a site for the production of scientific knowledge. In the next chapter I turn to the repository of the

<sup>179</sup> Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, iv.359.

<sup>180</sup> *EA*, iv.1873 n.9.

<sup>181</sup> 'will never die', *EA*, iv.1897 n.4.

<sup>182</sup> *EA*, iv.1897 n.3; Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, iv.363.

<sup>183</sup> 'Tomb of the Tradescants', *Notes and Queries*, 5.126 (April 1852). Andrew Ducarel, *A Letter from Dr. Ducarel, F.R.S. and F.S.A. to William Watson M.D. F.R.S.* (London: W. Bowyer and J. Nichols, 1773), p. 9.

<sup>184</sup> Campbell, *Biographia Britannica*, p. 233.



Royal Society, a collection with a similar heritage to that of the Ashmolean which was also aligned with the values of the Baconian study of nature: as with the Ashmolean this was partly disingenuous, I argue. In contrast to the collections I have discussed so far, the Royal Society's repository was less concerned with the preservation or commemoration of particular individuals; it was rather an extension of the organisation's public, corporate body.

### 3. The Royal Society's Repository

In the royal charter which summoned the Royal Society into being, Charles II declared that 'we, out of our special Grace',

Do by these presents give and grant for us, our Heirs, and Successors, That there shall be for ever a Society, consisting of a President, Council, and Fellows, which shall be called by the name of the President, Council, and Fellows of the Royal Society of London, for and improving of Natural knowledge[.]<sup>1</sup>

This extract gives a clear sense of the Society's institutional priorities, securing the perpetuity of its operations 'for ever' and establishing a clear administrative structure, the elaboration of which takes up the majority of the rest of the charter. The most striking thing about this document is the date by which it was ratified – 15<sup>th</sup> July 1662, when the Royal Society was barely eighteen months old. The Society also paid £35 10s for the charter, a substantial investment in formalising the constitutional structure of a voluntary organisation. Michael Hunter suggests that this decision was borne out of an immediate 'quest for permanence', the desire to distinguish the Society from England's other philosophical clubs, whose existence was wholly dependent on the whims (and survival) of particular individuals.<sup>2</sup> By asserting its existence under Charles and all his 'Heirs and Successors', from its beginning the Royal Society was reaching for an intergenerational scientific community to improve natural knowledge.

In chapters one and two, I explored how two collections of objects were reconceptualised as public in order to ensure their longevity and to enshrine the memories of their former owners. The case of the Royal Society and its museum is more complicated. Although the Society chartered itself as a public body for similar aspirations to longevity, it sought durability for its ideas and methods rather than its objects, or the memorialisation of its founders. Ashmole's whim to preserve the Ashmolean as a static collection, which had frustrated Lister and Lhwyd, was actively avoided in the nascent Royal Society. That is not to say that the Society had a straightforward relationship with the idea of commemoration, even that of its spiritual founder, Francis Bacon. The Society's earliest evangelist, Thomas Sprat, noted in his utopian vision of the Royal Society that 'there should have been no other Preface to [this] *History of the Royal Society* but some of [Bacon's] Writings'.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, Sprat made clear that Bacon's work should not be taken as gospel; he 'had not the strength of a thousand men [but] I do also allow him to have had as much as twenty'.<sup>4</sup> Like all pioneers, Bacon was limited by the span of his own life and finite personal resources – something that the public, corporate nature of the Royal Society

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<sup>1</sup> This English translation appears in Thomas Sprat, *The History of the Royal Society of London* (London: J. Martyn, 1667), p. 134. The original Latin is transcribed in Thomas Birch, *The History of the Royal Society of London for Improving of Natural Knowledge, from its First Rise*, 4 vols. (London: A. Millar, 1756), i.88-96.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Hunter, 'First Steps in Institutionalization: The Role of the Royal Society of London' in *Solomon's House Revisited: The Organization and Institutionalization of Science*, ed. by Tore Frängsmyr (Canton, MA: Science History Publications, 1990), pp. 14-5.

<sup>3</sup> Sprat, *History*, pp. 35-6.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 36.

sought to overcome.<sup>5</sup> Thanks to early pioneers, natural philosophy has freed itself from the ‘slavery to dead Mens names’, and now the Society does ‘not regard the credit of Names, but Things: rejecting or approving nothing, because of the title, which it bears’.<sup>6</sup>

The Royal Society’s notion of publicness bears some of the same hallmarks as those surrounding the Cotton manuscripts and the Ashmolean, particularly in the rhetoric of its charters, which associate the welfare of the Society with the ‘welfare of [...] our Territories and Dominions’, safeguarding it as a ‘Body corporate, to be continued under the same name in perpetual succession’.<sup>7</sup> However, starting with its motto (‘nullius in verba’), it is clear that the memorialisation of ‘dead Mens names’ was less integral to the Society’s identity as a public body than it was to the collections discussed in chapters one and two. The Society was sceptical of preserving the legacies of individual members, instead crafting a publicness of dynamic and collaborative natural philosophy, a perpetual system ensured by the public authority of the English crown. In this chapter I argue that this complicated its attitudes to preserving objects in its own museum, which the Royal Society dubbed its ‘repository’. The Cotton manuscripts were sanctified with Britain’s material past, and the Ashmolean collection bore testament to Ashmole’s bid to accrue social status, but the Royal Society had neither the means nor the interest in indefinitely hoarding specimens for its museum. The reasons for this, I demonstrate, become evident in an examination of how the term ‘repository’ and the ontology of physical collecting were used as metaphors for the Society’s knowledge-gathering enterprise. For some members, like John Evelyn, this enterprise became an intellectual temple made of collected knowledge, bearing eternal witness to the collective genius of its members.<sup>8</sup> For others, like Robert Hooke, this enterprise was best imagined as a book of endlessly renewing scientific information.<sup>9</sup> The Society’s museum itself sat awkwardly in this context, its materiality refusing to conform to such neat metaphorical representations, part seventeenth-century virtuoso cabinet and part Baconian storehouse of knowledge.

Key to understanding this dynamic is an understanding of the constellations of metaphor that Royal Society members used to articulate the institution’s professed system of gathering and interpreting knowledge from the natural world. While Sprat’s *History of the Royal Society* offers no reliable guide to the Society’s practices (or to the Baconian ideas on which it is based) it contains ample material for how the Society could be represented textually. For example, its prefatory poem, Abraham Cowley’s ‘To The Royal Society’, demonstrates the diversity of metaphorical figures available for describing the Baconian reform of knowledge. In just 187 lines, natural philosophy is described as a stunted youth, a prisoner, an orchard, wine, a painting, Moses, and

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 35.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. pp. 29, 105. Sprat’s advocacy against slavish imitation echoes Abraham Cowley’s contemporary theories of poetic translation. See Felicity Henderson, ‘Translation Theory and Practice at the Early Royal Society’, *Notes and Records of the Royal Society*, 67.2 (2013), 101–122 (pp. 105–6).

<sup>7</sup> Sprat, *History*, p. 134.

<sup>8</sup> John Evelyn, *Sylva, Or a Discourse of Forest Trees* (London: J. Martyn, 1679), sig. [A2v-A4r].

<sup>9</sup> Robert Hooke, ‘General Scheme, or Idea of the Present State of Natural Philosophy’, in *The Posthumous Works of Robert Hooke*, ed. by Richard Waller (London: S. Smith and B. Walford, 1705), p. 64.

military conquest.<sup>10</sup> Amid this flurry of metaphors, the poem misses the irony of describing Bacon's greatest achievement as leading our minds away from 'Words, which are but Pictures of the Thought, [...] To Things, the Minds right Object'.<sup>11</sup> As well as oversimplifying its Baconian source material, Cowley's poem (in this respect a microcosm of Sprat's work) shows that ultimately, only words can explain the paltriness of verbal knowledge.

This apparent friction between content and form in the works of the early Royal Society has attracted a considerable amount of scholarly attention. Discussing the dynamic between the practices and the rhetoric of the seventeenth-century Society, studies have framed the subject variously using the early modern image of the 'book of nature', constructivist perspectives on the history of science, discussions of the verbal-visual technologies of knowledge transmission, and claims to the essentially rhetorical character of the Society's knowledge reform project – to name but a few approaches.<sup>12</sup> In this chapter, I am concerned with the profusion of rhetorical figures available to seventeenth-century Royal Society members for articulating the institution's parameters for gathering and interpreting information. In particular, I explore the use of the term 'repository' in this ecosystem of metaphor, and how it related to the physical collection of natural history specimens, artificial rarities and artefacts that the Society referred to as its repository. Characterising the written works of Robert Hooke, Frédérique Ait-Touati uses the figure of a 'vast store-house', Hooke's texts forming 'a vast collection of samples of nature', whose 'spatial and material aspect' allows his oeuvre to be understood as objects displayed 'in various and beautiful store-houses: printed books, memory, and museums'.<sup>13</sup> Ait-Touati's figure exemplifies the strong metaphorical links to be drawn between collections of words and of physical objects which, I suggest, not only shaped the Royal Society's verbal knowledge project but informed the management of its museum.

The Society's repository was purchased from a commercially-run museum near St Paul's Cathedral, analogous to the Tradescant's public attraction, so from its beginnings the collection sat awkwardly in the ownership of an institution premised not on the superficial awe of material curiosities, but on analytical engagement with the knowledge that objects contained. Examining how repositories were deployed as metaphors in the works of Robert Hooke, John Evelyn and Robert Boyle, I suggest that elaborate rhetorical engagement with the idea of a repository belies the incidental way in which the physical collection was treated. In this environment, Nehemiah Grew's magisterial museum catalogue, the *Musaeum Regalis Societatis* (1681), is particularly intriguing. Via a detailed analysis of the catalogue's composition and its afterlives in the early

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<sup>10</sup> Abraham Cowley, 'To The Royal Society' in Sprat, *History*, sig. [B1r–B3v].

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* sig. [B2r].

<sup>12</sup> See respectively Peter Dear, 'Totius in Verba: Rhetoric and Authority in the Early Royal Society', *Isis*, 76.2 (1985), 144–61; Jan Golinski, *Making Natural Knowledge: Constructivism and the History of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Alexander Wragge-Morley, *Aesthetic Science: Representing Nature in the Royal Society of London, 1650-1720* (Chicago IL & London: University of Chicago Press, 2020); Tina Skouen and Ryan J. Stark, eds., *Rhetoric and the Early Royal Society: A Sourcebook* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), p. 32.

<sup>13</sup> Frédérique Ait-Touati, 'The Spirit of Invention?: Hooke's Poetics for a New Science in An Attempt to Prove the Motion of the Earth by Observation' in *Rhetoric and the Early Royal Society*, 185–201 (pp. 195, 199).

eighteenth century, I shed light on a group of objects trapped between parallel existences as material and textual tokens of knowledge. The catalogue itself is in many ways a textual monument to the collection. In its perfected arrangement, cross-referencing and description, it becomes more like the repository the Society wants than the repository itself, with its messy, mutable materiality and the complex and contradictory histories that inhabit its objects.

### **‘Things of uncertain Use’**

The earliest record of a repository in the Royal Society’s minutes is on 19<sup>th</sup> October 1663, when Robert Hooke was appointed its keeper and it was granted space in Gresham College’s west gallery.<sup>14</sup> Later that month, a resolution was made that Hooke should ‘affix some note to the things in [the repository], by which it might be known what they are, and by whom they were presented’.<sup>15</sup> In November, the Society’s treasurer was ordered to compile a list of ‘things belonging to the society’, including objects in the custody of Jonathan Goddard, at whose lodgings the Society sometimes met, and to give the list to Hooke in his capacity as repository keeper.<sup>16</sup> The following spring, Christopher Merrett and Walter Charleton began composing a list of desiderata, recommending the appointment of ‘a collector of the curiosities of England, as to plants, birds, and fish’.<sup>17</sup> The allocation of a physical location and a named custodian hence enabled the start of a formalised recording, acquisition and consolidation process. However, in the year following Hooke’s appointment the collection grew only sporadically, through occasional donations by Royal Society council members.<sup>18</sup> In December 1664 a star chart was withheld until the Society ‘should have a fit repository to keep instruments in’ – Gresham’s west gallery was not a respected space for depositing objects of natural philosophical interest.<sup>19</sup>

In January 1666 the Society’s secretary, Henry Oldenburg, wrote to Robert Boyle to tell him that ‘Those of ye Society, yt are now in London, doe endeavour to gett a good Collection of Naturall and Artificiall Curiosities for ye Societies repository; and they hope, to make shortly an acques of a very good stock of yt kind’.<sup>20</sup> The stock Oldenburg referred to was the museum of Robert Hubert, a commercial collection of natural history specimens that had been open to the paying public ‘at the West end of Pauls’, with private tours available to any ‘Nobleman or person of quality’ for an additional fee.<sup>21</sup> Little is known about the collection’s origins, or Hubert himself,

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<sup>14</sup> Birch, *History*, i.316.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* i.322.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* i.332.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* i.403.

<sup>18</sup> For example Birch, *History*, i.324, i.374, i.384.

<sup>19</sup> Birch, *History*, i.510.

<sup>20</sup> Henry Oldenburg to Robert Boyle, 27<sup>th</sup> January 1665/6, in *The Correspondence of Henry Oldenburg*, ed. and trans. by A. Rupert Hall and Marie Boas Hall, 13 vols. (Madison and Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965-1986), iii.32.

<sup>21</sup> [Robert Hubert], *A Catalogue of part of those Rarities Collected in thirty years time with a great deal of Pains and Industry, by one of his Majesties sworn Servants* (n.p. n.d.), [title page], pp. 25-7. Four editions of this catalogue

except that it was gathered over thirty years (according to Hubert's catalogue), and that Hubert could have been a music master due to the collection's location 'at the place formerly called the Musique House'.<sup>22</sup> In May 1662 Hubert had petitioned Charles II to serve as Queen Catherine's groom, and was granted the position of gentleman usher after impressing the king with the 'sight or part of his collection of rarities'.<sup>23</sup> He was actively deploying his collection to gain commercial, social, and courtly success.

Nearly all the information about the collection comes from Hubert's own series of printed catalogues printed between 1664 and 1666, which saturate the collection with wonder, prestige and unusual spectacle. The catalogues pick out 'Several sorts of Rare shells of great Princes', a 'monstrous Catt, with two bodies', as well as nests, sticks and fruit 'grown like the secret parts' of men and women.<sup>24</sup> As textual representations of the collection they are cognate with John Tradescant's *Museum Tradescantianum*, designed similarly to convey a sense of the abundance, variety and rarity of the collection's objects, as well as their illustrious origins. Like Tradescant, Hubert included a list of benefactors. Individual entries also detail objects' provenance among the courts of Europe, and an address to the reader proudly proclaims that amongst the rarities 'you may see [...] things that hath been seen by Emperours, Empresses, Kings and Queens, and many other Sovereign Princes'.<sup>25</sup> Hubert's museum offered the chance to share the sights of the nobility, marvel at their treasures, to be immersed in a culture where royal persons were just as collectible as his monstrous cat. When Hubert met Charles II, he praised the queen consort as 'one of the choicest rarities of her sex in this our age'.<sup>26</sup>

As discussed in chapter two, such collections and catalogues recall an early modern paradigm in which collections of rarities often participated in cultures of aristocratic power, exchange, and displaying one's virtuosic status – as William Eamon puts it, collections were primarily 'ornaments betokening the man of means'.<sup>27</sup> In Eamon's view, the early Royal Society actively drew its cohesion from this virtuoso culture, while carefully distinguishing itself from the flamboyance of aristocratic display and the secrecy of earlier private cabinets.<sup>28</sup> This is also the view of Michael Hunter, who suggests that Hubert's museum was 'typical of virtuoso cabinets of

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survive. This is the earliest (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 967) and will be referred to as Catalogue 1 in subsequent footnotes.

<sup>22</sup> Hubert, Catalogue 1, [title page]; John Hawkins, *A General History of the Science and Practice of Music*, 5 vols. (London: T. Payne, 1776), iv.379.

<sup>23</sup> 'Charles II - volume 55: May 28-31, 1662', in *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Charles II, 1661-2*, British History Online, <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/domestic/chas2/1661-2/pp382-395>>.

<sup>24</sup> Catalogue 1, pp. 10, 19, 24; Robert Hubert, *A Catalogue of many Natural Rarities, with Great Industry, Cost, and thirty Years travel in Foreign Countries Collected by Robert Hubert, aliàs Forges* (London: T. Ratcliffe, 1664) [henceforth referred to as Catalogue 2], pp. 3, 9, 36, 55.

<sup>25</sup> Catalogue 1, p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> 'Charles II – volume 55', *Calendar of State Papers Domestic*, British History Online.

<sup>27</sup> William Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature: Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 304.

<sup>28</sup> Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature*, pp. 337, 355. See also Michael Hunter, *Establishing The New Science: The Experience of the Early Royal Society* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1989), pp. 135-6.

the day'.<sup>29</sup> This assessment accurately reflects the collection's contents and aspects of its self-presentation, but it misses the ways in which Hubert's successive catalogues mediated the collection between commercial spectacle and natural philosophical storehouse of knowledge

As Marjorie Swann has demonstrated with reference to the Tradescants, commercial collections had the power to subvert the elite paradigm of collecting and viewing collections as status markers, even as they participated in it.<sup>30</sup> In Hubert's case, illustrious benefactors and visitors were turned into promotional tools, and later editions of his catalogue suggest he was similarly sensitive to the commercial value of his rarities as natural historical knowledge. In the second edition, there are attempts at deliberate textual reorganisation of the collection. The earliest catalogue is arranged via a seemingly random succession of categories, but the second edition employs an Aristotelian arrangement, organising them outwards from human resemblance, beginning with human rarities followed by land creatures, birds, fish, serpents and so on.<sup>31</sup> Nehemiah Grew later made this the explicit rationale behind his organisation of the *Musaeum Regalis Societatis*.<sup>32</sup> In Hubert's second and subsequent catalogues, new specimens added to the collection are not appended to the ends of categories but integrated into them, again suggesting deliberate rearrangement, and while most descriptions are lifted from earlier editions, some have been altered, downplaying their illustrious provenance in favour of expanded natural historical detail. For example, in the first edition of the catalogue Hubert's penguin appears as:

A strange sea Fowl as big as a Goose, it is a kind of Pinguin[.]<sup>33</sup>

In the second edition this becomes:

A strange Sea-fowle as big as a Goose, it is called the Sea Pinguin, it cannot fly, for his wings are like finnes, and is so thick of feathers that one cannot shoote him, unlesse behind against the growth of his thick down or feathers, he is found threescore leagues from the Coast of Canada[.]<sup>34</sup>

While this was still undoubtedly a collection intended for spectacle, the subtle changes in the catalogues suggest new intended readerships with greater scientific interest.

Indeed, Hubert was sensitive to new ways to monetise his museum. At the end of his first catalogue, he promised to show 'thousands of other Rarities of Nature besides the things

<sup>29</sup> Michael Hunter, 'The Cabinet Institutionalized: The Royal Society's 'Repository' and its Background' in *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe*, ed. by Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 159 – 168 (p. 163).

<sup>30</sup> Marjorie Swann, *Curiosities and Texts: The Culture of Collecting in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), p. 37.

<sup>31</sup> Paula Findlen, *Possessing Nature: Museums, Collecting, and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), p. 59.

<sup>32</sup> Nehemiah Grew, *Musaeum Regalis Societatis. Or a Catalogue & Description Of the Natural and Artificial Rarities Belonging to the Royal Society And preserved at Gresham Colledge* (London: W. Rawlins, for the author, 1681), sig. [A4r].

<sup>33</sup> Catalogue 1, p. 11.

<sup>34</sup> Catalogue 2, p. 7. Hubert also abridges references to courtly provenance, compare for example the entry for 'black Feathers' in Catalogue 1, p. 12 with the same object listed in Catalogue 2, p. 10.

aforementioned, to those that are more curious, and will be at some more Charge', before detailing the museum's weekly opening times.<sup>35</sup> In subsequent editions, the abundance of these uncatalogued curiosities is inflected towards potential buyers: Hubert removes the detailed opening times, instead noting that

if the owner of this collection of Rarities does not sell them to any Noble minded party, he then, God willing, will write at large a more ample declaration to the expressing of each thing in particular, to honour that vertuous person that shall buy them[.]<sup>36</sup>

Here the catalogue is presented as a means of aggrandising the collection itself, a 'more ample' and more 'particular' account honouring not only the objects but their 'Noble' and 'vertuous' future buyer. As a promotional tool, the catalogue has changed from targeting visitors to targeting a buyer for the whole collection. The final edition appends 'A Catalogue of the Rarities that are shown to the Curious, in the University-garden, at Leyden in Holland', meant 'to shew the difference of both collections'.<sup>37</sup> Aligning his museum with one of Europe's premier scholarly collections, Hubert reframes it for a buyer who might value it beyond its wonder and spectacle.<sup>38</sup>

The purchase of Hubert's museum for the Royal Society was orchestrated by Thomas Povey, who in 1663 had been appointed chair of the Society's committee for correspondence. Povey was a collector, owned an impressive house in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and was well known for court gossip – an archetypal virtuoso.<sup>39</sup> He had an existing relationship with Hubert, having donated a number of snakes to his museum, and was named in the earliest catalogue's list of benefactors.<sup>40</sup> Although Povey's correspondence committee (like a number of early committees) was not to last, at its only recorded meeting in August 1664, Povey was asked to 'treat with Mr Hubbard [Hubert] about his Collection of Curiosities'.<sup>41</sup> The outcome of these negotiations was the acquisition of the entire Hubert collection in early 1666 for the bargain of £100, money donated to the Society by Daniel Colwall. As Hunter suggests, the acquisition of Hubert's museum undoubtedly provoked a clash between more traditional cultures of collecting and the Royal Society's Baconian sensibilities.<sup>42</sup> In a thinly-veiled insult to the acquisition Robert Hooke wrote that 'a Collection, tho' very great, made at a venture must [...] prove a great Obstruction and Confusion' to the progress of knowledge.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Catalogue 1, p. 25.

<sup>36</sup> Catalogue 2, p. 59; Robert Hubert, *A Catalogue of many Natural Rarities, with Great Industry, Cost, and thirty Years Travel in Foreign Countries* (London: T. Radcliff, for the author, 1665) [henceforth referred to as Catalogue 3], p. 68.

<sup>37</sup> Catalogue 3, pp. 72, 76.

<sup>38</sup> Hunter, *Establishing the New Science*, p. 134.

<sup>39</sup> Barbara C. Murison, 'Povey, Thomas', *ODNB*.

<sup>40</sup> Catalogue 1, pp.13, 28-33.

<sup>41</sup> Printed in Hunter, *Establishing the New Science*, p. 120.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 135-6.

<sup>43</sup> Hooke, *Posthumous Works*, p. 330.



Just as Hubert's collection did not fit straightforwardly into virtuosic paradigms, so the Royal Society presented no coherent will towards establishing a Baconian collection. In 1664, Christopher Merrett had suggested building the repository on rigorous principles of observation, beginning with the 'beasts, birds, fishes, vegetables, minerals &c' of England.<sup>44</sup> But Merrett's suggestion was criticised by fellows as a bizarre tangent from traditional modes of collecting, a Society fellow noting that 'when some were moving yt all ye curiosities of our owne land should bee first gotten others laughed att itt as too voluminous, to have ducks geese & hens &c'.<sup>45</sup>

These tensions between Baconian and virtuosic collecting remained active, evident in the wrangling over the repository's identity and its origins. The Society's minutes record that Daniel Colwall was to be named among its benefactors following the purchase of Hubert's museum, and in John Wilkins's *Essay Towards a Real Character* the repository is referred to as 'that Collection, so generously begun of late, by that bounty of Mr Daniel Collwal, a worthy Member of this Society'.<sup>46</sup> The first time the repository is mentioned in the *Philosophical Transactions* it is described as 'that considerable Collection of Curiosities, lately presented [...] by that Publick-minded Gentleman Mr. Daniel Colwall'.<sup>47</sup> Colwall's funding of the purchase of Hubert's museum was hence immediately used to obscure the collection's previous identity as a commercial museum. The collection's origin was instead attributed to Daniel Colwall, one of the Society's own – a 'worthy Member', complicit in its (and Wilkins's) taxonomic programme. This was cemented in Grew's catalogue of the repository, where Colwall's portrait appeared opposite the frontispiece with the inscription '*Musaei Regalis Societatis Fundator*'.<sup>48</sup> When Christian Erndtel visited the repository in 1707, he believed that Colwall himself had gathered the collection from the West and East Indies.<sup>49</sup> This mistaken provenance was no accident; it was the result of a deliberate attempt to overwrite the collection's origins. Hubert's name is anglicised as 'Hubbard' in Society correspondence, and it was not until the twentieth century that the repository's indebtedness to the 'many Natural Rarities' at the West end of St Paul's was rediscovered.<sup>50</sup>

The Royal Society's use of the term 'repository' was equally part of an effort to manipulate the ideological associations of its collection. Hunter argues that 'repository' was simply an equivalent to the Latin word 'museum', and that it was used because 'museum' was yet to catch on in English.<sup>51</sup> Arguing for the equivalence of 'repository' and 'museum', Hunter cites a Society council meeting in which Nehemiah Grew was ordered to take up the 'care of the repository'

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<sup>44</sup> Birch, *History*, i.393.

<sup>45</sup> William Balle to Henry Oldenburg, 4<sup>th</sup> April 1666, in Oldenburg, *Correspondence*, iii.90.

<sup>46</sup> Birch, *History*, ii.72; John Wilkins, *An Essay Towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language* (London: S. Gellibrand & J. Martyn, 1668), sig. [a.v].

<sup>47</sup> *The Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*, 1 (London: J. Martyn, 1665-6), p. 321.

<sup>48</sup> Grew, *Musaeum*, [frontispiece].

<sup>49</sup> Christian Heinrich Erndtel, *The Relation of a Journey into England and Holland* (London: Morphew, 1711), pp. 35-6.

<sup>50</sup> David Murray, *Museums: Their History and Their Use*, 3 vols. (Glasgow: J. MacLehose, 1904), i.130-3.

<sup>51</sup> Hunter, 'The Cabinet Institutionalized', p. 168.

under the name *'praefectus Musei regalis Societatis'*.<sup>52</sup> This indicates an equivalence between 'repository' and 'museum' as labels for the collection, but only in the specific context of official Latin naming: Grew's monumental printed catalogue refers to the collection as the *'Musaeum Regalis Societatis'* but other, less formal Latin contexts tell a different story. In 1672, Oldenburg thanked Jan Swammerdam for his gift to the Society's 'penum philosophicum'; elsewhere Oldenburg refers to the collection as a 'philosophical store-house', 'penum' in this instance adding the specific connotation of domestic storage.<sup>53</sup> The twentieth-century editors of Oldenburg's correspondence translate 'penum' as 'repository', demonstrating that there is as great a fluidity between 'repository' and 'storehouse' as there is between 'repository' and 'museum'.<sup>54</sup> Contrary to Hunter's hypothesis, the use of 'repository' by Royal Society fellows reveals how the collection was shaped by specific values and ideas about what collections should be in the context of this corporate, public body.

In the printed work of Royal Society figures, the literal sense of a repository as a domestic or commercial storehouse predominated. John Evelyn, whose diary is one of the earliest sources to name the Royal Society's collection the 'repository', uses the term to refer to butts of water in cider making.<sup>55</sup> Robert Hooke's *Micrographia* (1667) and Grew's *Anatomy of Plants* (1682) both use the term to denote storehouses in the natural world, such as seed pods, and Robert Boyle refers to the 'little Granary or Repository' of the ant, where it stores corn.<sup>56</sup> Wilkins's *Essay*, which announces its taxonomic tables as 'a very good method for [the Society's] Repository', defines the term as a synonym for 'laying up', 'Treasuring, Preserving, Stow, Hoord, Store'.<sup>57</sup>

Aside from the formal, Latin context of Grew's *Musaeum* (which I address later), using 'repository' put useful distance between the Society's collection and the virtuosic curiosity cabinet, and it simultaneously allowed a closer association between physical collecting practices and Bacon's conception of gathering knowledge. In Bacon's *Novum Organum*, he stresses the metaphor of domestic storage:

We must constantly repeat the point that we are merely building a warehouse or storage space; not a place in which one is to stay or live with pleasure, but which one enters only

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<sup>52</sup> Michael Hunter, *Establishing the New Science*, p. 125; Birch, *History*, iv.171.

<sup>53</sup> Henry Oldenburg to Jan Swammerdam, 19<sup>th</sup> December 1672, in Oldenburg, *Correspondence*, ix.367. For references to the 'philosophical store-house' see for example *Correspondence* ix.311. See also Claire Preston, 'Commerce, Credit, and Transaction: the Rhetorical Origins of Big Science' in *The Poetics of Scientia in Early Modern England: Devices of Fancy*, ed. by Subha Mukerji and Elizabeth Swann (Palgrave: forthcoming, 2022).

<sup>54</sup> Oldenburg, *Correspondence*, ix.368.

<sup>55</sup> John Evelyn, *The Diary of John Evelyn*, ed. by E. De Beer, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), iii.334; John Evelyn, *Pomona, or an Appendix concerning Fruit-Trees, In relation to Cider* (London: J. Martyn & J. Allestry, 1670), p. 62.

<sup>56</sup> Robert Boyle, *Occasional Reflections upon Several Subjects, Wherein is premis'd A Discourse About such kind of Thoughts* (London: H. Herringman, 1665), p. 18; Robert Hooke, *Micrographia: Or some Physiological Descriptions of Minute Bodies made by Magnifying Glasses: with Observations and Inquiries thereupon* (London: J. Martyn, 1667), p.193; Nehemiah Grew, *The Anatomy of Plants, with an Idea of a Philosophical History of Plants* (London: for the author, 1682), pp. 85, 130, 168.

<sup>57</sup> Wilkins, *Essay*, sig.[a.v], p. 42.

when necessary, when something has to be taken out for use in the work of the Interpreter[.]<sup>58</sup>

Bacon's warehouse of knowledge – a 'horreum' (barn or granary) in his original Latin – is explicitly opposed to the kinds of empty rhetorical adornment which he disdained in scientific study.<sup>59</sup> In this formulation the warehouse is an active space, it is entered 'only when necessary', its contents 'taken out' in order to be put to use; the stasis of 'stay or live' is to be avoided. This is echoed in Boyle's 'little Granary or Repository' of the ant, a literal store of food that Boyle, characteristically, deploys as a didactic figure. As opposed to the 'Industrious Bee', the selfish ant secretes 'ready form'd' resources, contributing nothing to the 'Production or Improvement' of the plant. This is Boyle's analogy for the gathering of knowledge: the ant and the bee are, respectively, '[he] that but takes up Instructions in books of Morality and Devotion, and [he] that by Occasional Reflections derives them from the Book of Nature'.<sup>60</sup> By avoiding the uncritical absorption of morality from books, the natural philosopher (like the bee) is participating in and hence perpetuating an ecology of useful knowledge. The use of a repository, in this case, is something to be treated carefully – a potentially obstructive hoarding of unexamined information.

Wilkins's list of synonyms captures this ambivalence: 'Treasuring, Preserving' twinned with 'Stow' and 'Hoard'. The idea of a repository had to be articulated carefully in relation to conceptualising the Royal Society's project of useful information gathering, and in this context the metaphor of the domestic storehouse came into its own. In Hooke's posthumously published 'General Scheme, or Idea of the Present State of Natural Philosophy', he advocated the gathering of facts as if they were 'Timber for a building, hewing off all the Superfluities and trimming it to be fit for the Repository; we should lay [them] up in the place of things of uncertain Use'.<sup>61</sup> Here, although the usefulness of the facts is not apparent at the moment of collection, they are not gathered indiscriminately: superfluities must be trimmed before they are fit for preservation. Like good quality timber, they have a definite potential usefulness, legitimising the repository as a site of 'things of uncertain Use'.

Hooke's metaphor for gathering knowledge is an echo of Bacon's 'horreum' – the repository not an end in itself but an active space of potentialities. It also reflects how Hooke put the Royal Society's physical repository to use during his time as keeper, often facilitating the use of specimens from the collection during Royal Society meetings as reference points for discussions.<sup>62</sup> Hooke also noted that for the 'proof' of his theory of fossils he had 'no better

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<sup>58</sup> Francis Bacon, *The New Organon*, ed. by Lisa Jardine and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 226.

<sup>59</sup> Francis Bacon, 'Parasceve, ad Historiam Naturalem, et Experimentalem' in *Instauratio Magna* (London: J. Billium, 1620), p. 11.

<sup>60</sup> Boyle, *Occasional Reflections*, p. 18. Boyle's figure of the ant and bee is informed by Bacon's *Novum Organum*, see Bacon, *New Organon*, p. 79.

<sup>61</sup> Hooke, *Posthumous Works*, p. 35.

<sup>62</sup> See for example Birch, *History*, ii.392, iii.420, iii.430. Most individual donations to the repository were discussed in Royal Society meetings, before being accessioned.

means than to have recourse to [...] an excellent Collection in the Repository of our Society'.<sup>63</sup> Referring to the Society's collection as a repository hence performed significant ideological work in positioning its objects not as a museum (a display of status or wealth) but as a collection of potential building materials of knowledge, stored away for future use.

### The Repository as Metaphor

The literal sense of 'repository' as a useful storehouse aligned the Royal Society's collection with Baconian knowledge gathering, distinguishing it from contemporary virtuoso cabinets and its own origins as a commercial museum. In parallel, the term 'repository' had a rich existence as a metaphor in works that sought to expound the mission of the Royal Society in the first decades of its incorporation. The significance of metaphors in the rhetorical project of the Society has been much discussed, how they permeated the ostensibly plain style promoted by its fellows, and assisted the transmission of natural historical observations – in Tita Chico's formulation, natural philosophers 'drew on a repository of metaphors to represent their findings'.<sup>64</sup> Most recently, Alexander Wragge-Morley has reiterated that natural philosophers' commitment to sensory experience as the basis of knowledge meant that rhetorical comparison (as a basic type of metaphor) was a necessary tool 'to make invisible or otherwise imperceptible things intelligible'. Wragge-Morley's investigation shows that natural phenomena which were impossible to represent directly were often compared to 'common, medium-scale objects' such as carpenters' files, cows horns, and fruit.<sup>65</sup> I would argue that 'repository', in its sense as a domestic storehouse, was deployed as exactly such a common object in order to articulate the Royal Society's more abstract knowledge gathering enterprise. As well as describing the physical collection of objects at Gresham College, the term 'repository' became a metaphorical figure for the collection of ideas, in which the ideas themselves took on a kind of rhetorical materiality.

The practice of collecting was at the core of the Royal Society's professed function to gather together scattered information and organise it into a coherent public body. Sprat's *History* repeatedly stressed the need for the Society's information gathering to be founded on 'constant universall intelligence', a perfected global knowledge infrastructure made up of the contributions of many agents, subsequently brought together and organised by individual Society fellows in London.<sup>66</sup> Like Bacon and Hooke, Sprat evokes an agrarian domestic storage space to communicate this: gathering a harvest requires the work of many labourers, but once brought to the barn it takes only a few to organise it. Once knowledge has been gathered, the mind of a single individual is better suited to 'order and fashion the heap of matter'.<sup>67</sup> In Sprat's *History*, the

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<sup>63</sup> Hooke, *Posthumous Works*, p. 337.

<sup>64</sup> Tita Chico, *The Experimental Imagination: Literary Knowledge and Science in the British Enlightenment* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018), p. 18. See also Andrew Benjamin, Geoffrey Cantor and John Christie, eds., *The Figure and the Literal: Problems of Language in the History of Science and Philosophy, 1630–1800* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987).

<sup>65</sup> Wragge-Morley, *Aesthetic Science*, pp. 145-7.

<sup>66</sup> Sprat, *History*, p. 20. See also pp. 73, 98-9.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* p. 20.

heterogeneity of observation (of the ‘heap’) is essential to successful deductive reasoning – in its first seven years of operation, the Society had been purposefully unsystematic in collecting information, so as not to overdetermine its experiments or conclusions.<sup>68</sup>

When interpreting Sprat’s work, it must be remembered that he was not a natural philosopher, nor was he engaged in the practices of the early Royal Society. Much scholarly attention has been given to situating Sprat’s authorship in relation to the broader project of the organisation, but he was essentially functioning as a paid propagandist – although it includes many allusions to Bacon’s *Advancement of Learning*, Sprat’s *History* is largely an elaboration of the views of his mentor, John Wilkins.<sup>69</sup> Wilkins’s mission, described in his *Essay*, was the taxonomic arrangement of all things, an enterprise of collecting and organising that he acknowledged was ‘a very hard task for any one to attempt’; he asked to be excused for ‘being so sollicitous about the assistance of others in these matters’.<sup>70</sup> The preface to Wilkins’s *Essay* goes on to explain that for his taxonomic scheme, Francis Willughby assisted with the definition of animals, John Ray with plants, William Lloyd drew up the dictionary, and the whole work was conceived in conversation with Seth Ward.<sup>71</sup> The *Essay* hence introduces itself as an instantiation of the gathering and ordering of information imagined in Sprat’s *History*.

The ways in which the printed works of individual Society members framed themselves yields further evidence that the whole enterprise functioned as a kind of collection – of ideas, people, and objects. In Wilkins’s dedication, addressed to Society’s president William Brouncker, his use of pronouns oscillates from ‘your Institution’ to ‘this Society’, from ‘our number’ to ‘their thoughts’.<sup>72</sup> This equivocation creates the impression that the significance of individual members (like collection objects) is both distinct and inseparable from the corporate identity of the Society as a whole. The dedication to Hooke’s *Micrographia* offers a different, complementary perspective: its dedicatee is the Royal Society itself. Wilkins advertised the fact that he conducted his work at the request of the Society, but here Hooke declares that his own ‘conjectures’ were

not done by YOUR Directions. For it is most unreasonable, that YOU should undergo the imputation of the faults of my Conjectures, seeing YOU can receive so small advantage of reputation by the sleight Observations of YOUR most humble and faithful Servant[.]<sup>73</sup>

Using the dedication’s convention of bilateral address, Hooke personifies the collective of the Royal Society, drawing on the fact that it was already his patron, in effect. Firstly, this disrupts the traditional acknowledgment of aristocratic patronage with reference to this new public

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid. pp. 115-6.

<sup>69</sup> For a recent reading of Sprat’s author function see J. Ereck Jarvis, ‘Thomas Sprat’s ‘Mix’d Assembly’: Association and Authority in The History of the Royal Society’, *Restoration*, 37.2 (2013), 55–77. On Sprat’s association with Wilkins see Michael Hunter, *The Image of Restoration Science: The Frontispiece to Thomas Sprat’s History of the Royal Society (1667)* (London: Routledge, 2017).

<sup>70</sup> Wilkins, *Essay*, sig.[a.v]-[a2.r].

<sup>71</sup> Ibid sig.[b2.r]-[c.r].

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. sig.[a.v].

<sup>73</sup> Hooke, *Micrographia*, sig.[A2.v].

institution, and secondly it draws a clear line between his own accountability and that of the Society: ultimately, the Society is not responsible for the work (or mistakes) of its fellows. In legitimising printed works, the Society and its fellows functioned symbiotically, personal and institutional prestige mutually generated by acts of collective branding. For example, the title page of *Micrographia* is faced by an order from the Society's president Brouncker, authorising its publication, including the date on which the council met to discuss it.<sup>74</sup> Hooke's apparent humility regarding his 'conjectures' is also an institutional intervention, the minutes of the Royal Society Council specifying that 'Mr. Hooke give notice in the dedication [...] that though [the council] have licensed it, yet they own no theory', and that Hooke must acknowledge that his 'several hypotheses and theories [...] are not delivered as certainties, but as conjectures'.<sup>75</sup> The interplay of individual and corporate authority (as communicated by Sprat, Wilkins, and Hooke) are the outcomes of complex negotiations within a collective institutional structure that prided itself on being greater than the sum of its parts.

Sprat's *History* declares that the construction of a repository, a 'General Collection of all the Effects of Arts, and the Common, or Monstrous Works of Nature', was one of the Society's 'Principal Intentions'.<sup>76</sup> However, this claim should not be taken at face value. This paragraph is the only mention of the repository in the whole work and, characteristically, Sprat's description bears little relation to the actual state of the collection in 1667, instead offering an idealised Baconian fantasy in which Society members 'have already drawn together into one Room, the greatest part of all the several kinds of things, that are scatter'd throughout the Universe'.<sup>77</sup> After this bold statement, Sprat immediately defers to Wilkins's taxonomic project, according to which he claims the repository has been perfectly arranged. While Sprat's work cannot be taken as a guide to the Royal Society's practices, in this instance his decision to subsume the repository into an idealised epistemological structure reflects a wider tendency to diminish the significance of the physical collection in favour of the idea of a collection, which permeated the Society's knowledge project.

An example of this kind of treatment appears in Hooke's 'General Scheme, or Idea of the Present State of Natural Philosophy', where the term 'repository' slips from indicating a physical storehouse of objects to a textual arrangement of ideas. Hooke's work is structured around a plan for a 'Philosophical Treasury', a dynamic compilation of all branches of practical, empirical and experimental knowledge that would 'assist a Natural Historian in the collecting of the Materials for a Philosophical Supellex, to fill up the Repository of the Memory'.<sup>78</sup> The process by which this compilation should be gathered follows two steps, cognate with Sprat's harvest analogy: firstly the mind should be furnished with collected information, and secondly it should be systematically organised and investigated.<sup>79</sup> Hooke concurs with Sprat by acknowledging that

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid. sig.[\*v].

<sup>75</sup> Birch, *History*, i.491.

<sup>76</sup> Sprat, *History*, p. 251.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Hooke, *Posthumous Works*, pp. 7, 18.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. pp. 6-7.

the first step cannot be undertaken by ‘the single Endeavours of any one Man’; it in fact requires a great deal of ‘Ships, and Men, and Money’.<sup>80</sup> This process would form a ‘great Store’ of ‘Natural and Artificial Operations, Actions and Effects, ranged in a convenient Order’.<sup>81</sup> This store, as noted above, is made up of ‘Things of uncertain Use’: the investigator must refrain from making axioms and judgements until this ‘Repository be pretty well stored with choice and sound materials’.<sup>82</sup>

In the ‘General Scheme’, Hooke never makes a clear distinction between things and words – all the apparent objects in his plan are in fact rhetorical, merely pieces of information. Hooke does not elaborate on the practical business of gathering information, besides the metonymic ‘Ships, and Men, and Money’. This renders the materiality of the ‘materials’ in Hooke’s repository unclear. He writes repeatedly of ‘sound and good Materials’ as well as ‘curious and precious things’, and the ‘Physical Properties’ and ‘Propriety, Nature and Texture’ of the substances to be assembled in his philosophical repository, but the first sixty-three pages of the ‘General Scheme’ give no indication that Hooke envisions a collection of physical objects.<sup>83</sup> Instead these ‘things’ represent units of information, ‘Experiments and Secrets’ and ‘Circumstances’ which Hooke animates with spatial metaphors: they are ‘to be found scattered up and down in Mens Practices’ and ‘ought to be sought out and collected and rang’d into their proper Places’.<sup>84</sup>

On page sixty-four, Hooke gives the first clear explanation of the physical form of his envisioned ‘Philosophical Treasury’: a ‘Book, which for Brevity’s sake I will call a Repository’.<sup>85</sup> The book itself would contain histories and descriptions of trades, experiments and natural historical observations, each history confined to a single sheet, sheets which can be rearranged, edited or replaced in accordance with the dynamic progress of knowledge. Superseded sheets should be kept in a separate archive, and any doubtful information should be written in a different colour ink. The book’s size should be the usual dimensions of those codices made ‘for keeping Prints, Pictures, Drawings, &c.’ so that each history could be read ‘all at one view’.<sup>86</sup> Although Hooke’s illustration of the information gathering process has only a metaphorical relationship with its materiality, this description of the physical composition of the philosophical treasury demonstrates that he was attuned to the practices of organising and using information in distinctly material ways. The final detail – the desire to take in a history ‘all at one view’ – recalls the encyclopaedic principles common to textual compendia and early modern wall system libraries.<sup>87</sup> Similarly, it takes its cues from the techniques with which collectors were beginning to display their objects, arranging natural historical and antiquarian specimens in trays to facilitate

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid. p. 20.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. p. 18.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. pp. 21, 18, 27.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. p. 27.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. p. 64.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Eric Garberson, ‘Libraries, memory and the space of knowledge’, *JHC*, 18.2 (2006), 105–36.

comparison and categorisation.<sup>88</sup> Hooke's 'General Scheme' is dependent on the strategies and ontology of physical collecting; it deploys them rhetorically to construct an idealised knowledge project associating ideas, people and objects.

Considering this ontological indebtedness to the principles of physical collecting (and the very real indebtedness of the Royal Society's repository to Hubert's museum) Hooke makes remarkably little reference to the importance of a physical collection to the work of the Society. The only substantial endorsement of such a collection occurs in his 'Discourse on Earthquakes':

It were therefore much to be wisht for and indeavoured that there might be made and kept in some Repository as full and compleat a Collection of all varieties of Natural Bodies as could be obtain'd[.]<sup>89</sup>

This passage has been quoted to suggest straightforwardly that this was Hooke's ideal version of the Society's repository, but such a reading takes the statement out of context.<sup>90</sup> The passage is a digression from Hooke's discussion of fossils, caused by his frustration with the 'Defect or Imperfection' of natural history texts, where 'the Observations for the most part are so superficial, and the Descriptions so ambiguous' that the investigator is unable to gain proper knowledge of the object 'without an ocular Inspection and a manual handling, and other sensible examinations of the very things themselves'.<sup>91</sup> The physical collection is absent from Hooke's 'General Scheme', and here it is presented only as a last resort. In Hooke's ideal world, language holds the superior power to deliver facts. Having to maintain a set of material objects is an impractical and somewhat cumbersome way to access information, only necessary in the case of imperfect verbal and pictorial description which, unfortunately, pervaded extant natural history works. Indeed, Hooke goes on to describe how an investigator might utilise the repository he describes, where

he might peruse, and turn over, and spell, and read the Book of Nature, and observe the *Orthography*, *Etymologia*, *Syntaxis*, and *Prosodia* of Natures Grammar, and by which, as with a *Dictionary*, he might readily turn to and find the true Figure, Composition, Derivation and Use of the Characters, Words, Phrases and Sentences of Nature[.]<sup>92</sup>

The guiding metaphor of this passage – reading the 'Book of Nature' – has been much discussed.<sup>93</sup> However, its proximity to Hooke's promotion of a physical repository, and its

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<sup>88</sup> Glenn Adamson, 'The Labor of Division: Cabinetmaking and the Production of Knowledge' in *Ways of Making and Knowing: The Material Culture of Empirical Knowledge*, ed. by Pamela H. Smith, Amy R.W. Meyers and Harold J. Cook (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 244–65.

<sup>89</sup> Hooke, *Posthumous Works*, p. 338.

<sup>90</sup> See for example Hunter, *Establishing The New Science*, p. 138.

<sup>91</sup> Hooke, *Posthumous Works*, p. 338.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> Dear, 'Totius in Verba'; Paula Findlen, 'Empty Signs? Reading the Book of Nature in Renaissance Science', *Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science*, 21 (1990), 511 – 518; Ernst Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. by William R. Trask (Princeton, NJ & Oxford: Princeton University Press, (1953), pp. 319-26.



elaborate and insistent emphasis on the linguistic metaphor, suggests that just as the repository is a substitute for verbal and pictorial representations, so its specimens must be converted back into linguistic units in order to be examined, organised, and comprehended. This recalls Hooke's 'General Scheme', the ultimate goal of which is a written philosophical treasury, and where books are referred to as 'Collections of real things'.<sup>94</sup> The emphasis on verbal structures is complicated by the General Scheme's assertion that 'the Philosophical words, of all Languages [...] seem to be for the most part very improper Marks, set on confused and complicated Notions'.<sup>95</sup> However, there is an obvious distinction to be made here between the imperfect, abstract, 'philosophical' language of humankind and what Hooke presents as uncorrupted 'Natures Grammar' as a readable source of information. Within his system of knowledge transfer and gathering the base units are, consistently, words rather than objects.

A similar pattern appears in Evelyn's apologia for the Royal Society, prefaced to the third edition of his *Sylva, or a Discourse of Forest Trees* (1679). Rather than a methodological scheme, Evelyn's work is an attempt to defend the Society from its critics, summarising the institution's mission to 'enlarge the Empire of Operative Philosophy [...] by the Real Effects of the Experimental; Collecting, Examining, and Improving their scatter'd Phenomena's [sic]'.<sup>96</sup> The two-stage process of gathering and analysing knowledge recalls Sprat's and Hooke's models, but Evelyn is initially more explicit in his delineation of physical and cognitive assembly: while Solomon oversaw the 'Building of the Material Temple' devoted to knowledge, the Royal Society's temple is to be 'Intellectual'.<sup>97</sup> This temple of the intellect would become 'a plentiful, and well-furnish'd Magazine of true Experiments [which] may in time, advance to solemn, and established Axioms' – a familiar repository-like space containing 'innumerable Experiments, Histories and Discourses'.<sup>98</sup> As with Hooke, the raw materials for constructing and expressing the Royal Society's enterprise are textual, either explicitly ('Histories and Discourses') or implicitly, records of the experiments.

The textual nature of the raw materials is crucial to how both Hooke and Evelyn understand the temporal dimensions of the Society's project. Although Hooke's scheme presents knowledge gathering in largely synchronous and spatial terms – a network of 'Ships, and Men, and Money' with London at its centre – the removable pages of his philosophical treasury anticipate cutting-edge knowledge in constant flux. For Evelyn too, the Society's 'Body of real and substantial Philosophy' is constituted from its textual 'Journals, Registers, Correspondence, and Transactions' which are 'so ample, so worthy and so useful a Collection' to transmit to posterity.<sup>99</sup> Yet Evelyn conceives of the collection's textual durability in terms radically different to Hooke – for him, the Society's records are 'so many Monuments' to its 'Experiments, and

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<sup>94</sup> Hooke, *Posthumous Works*, p. 21.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.* p. 10.

<sup>96</sup> Evelyn, *Sylva*, sig.[A1.v].

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.* sig.[A2.r].

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.* sig.[A3.r]. 'Magazine' also denotes a commercial warehouse in this context.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.* sig.[A2.v].

Publick endeavours'.<sup>100</sup> The Society had ensured the immortality of Charles II through printed works (and their dedications), and would do so for any new benefactors.<sup>101</sup> Its collection of written records 'should never succumb to time, but with the ruines of Nature and the World it self'.<sup>102</sup>

Here we are reminded that Evelyn describes the temple of the Society as 'Intellectual' as opposed to 'Material' – a collection of pure ideas, expressed in writing but somehow able to cheat corruptible materiality, to become coterminous with Nature itself and testify to the munificence of the Society's patrons. For Hooke, only fossils could boast this kind of duration as 'Monuments of Nature' that 'far antedate [sic] all the most ancient Monuments of the World'.<sup>103</sup> Hooke's textual collection, premised on the churn of information, recalls the Baconian idea of the information warehouse: a transient space, purposefully unadorned. Evelyn on the other hand presents a monumental edifice of written knowledge, attesting to the glory of its founders and the permanence of its contents. The former is born of the discourse surrounding the Royal Society's repository, the latter recalls the rhetoric of the public museum we have encountered in chapters one and two. Both imagine textual manifestations of familiar practices of physical collecting.

The metaphor of the repository allowed Hooke and Evelyn to transform words into collectible objects that could be organised in space and time, becoming the base units of the Royal Society's knowledge edifice. For Hooke, this edifice was best represented as a working textual compilation; for Evelyn it more closely resembled an everlasting written monument to scientific endeavours. Both schemes borrowed from the ontology of physical collecting to construct accounts of a corporate, institutional identity built of the associations between people, ideas, and objects. It is important to remember that these writers were not advocating collections of words *separate* from things, but words built *of* and *around* things. Imagining a prelapsarian nominalism, Sprat described his ideal system of communication as a 'primitive purity [...] when men deliver'd so many things, almost in an equal number of words', and Hooke's and Evelyn's works rely on a similar correspondence: a fluidity between words and things that treats both of them, ultimately, as tokens of knowledge to be gathered, arranged and analysed.<sup>104</sup> In the following section I show how their distinct deployments of collecting metaphors manifested in the textual and material identities of the Royal Society's physical repository, specifically Grew's *Musaeum Regalis Societatis*.

### **The *Musaeum Regalis Societatis***

It is easy to accept Sprat's claim that the Royal Society's repository was one of its 'Principal intentions', because the ownership and management of such a collection of material knowledge chimes with the institution's epistemological ethos. For example, Michael Wintroub suggests that

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid. sig.[\*2.r].

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. sig.[A4.r-v].

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. sig.[A2v].

<sup>103</sup> Hooke, *Posthumous Works*, p. 335.

<sup>104</sup> Sprat, *History*, p. 113.

this collection of the ‘hard and fast materiality of nature’ was ‘the centrepiece of the Society’s program of linguistic reform’, the necessary basis for practical natural knowledge.<sup>105</sup> However, there is little evidence to suggest that the repository was ever such a centrepiece. While Hooke used its objects to illustrate theories, his ‘Discourse on Earthquakes’ suggests that the storage of, and reference to, physical specimens was a cumbersome last resort, only necessary when linguistic description faltered. The resources of the Royal Society were in fact focused much more on perfecting techniques of written and pictorial representation. As Carol Gibson-Wood suggests, images could display species’ features like colour and growth habits better than dead specimens, conveying information more effectively than verbal descriptions when no actual examples were available.<sup>106</sup> During Hooke’s tenure as repository keeper, the resources of the collection were invested less heavily in preserving material objects – the ‘hard and fast materiality of nature’ – than in recording the knowledge they contained, converting them into words.

Nevertheless, there is some evidence to suggest that the early Royal Society made efforts to assemble a physical museum. In February 1666, enthused by Christopher Wren’s design for a purpose-built scientific college, Oldenburg told Boyle that the Society was engaged in ‘ye Collecting of a Repository, ye setting up a Chymicall Laboratory, a Mechanicall operatory, an Astronomicall Observatory, and an Optick Chamber’.<sup>107</sup> As Wren’s design was never built, the repository was the only viable project from this list, but that does not imply that it was central to the Society’s programme of linguistic reform. Owning a natural history collection complemented the Society’s work, but the purchase of Hubert’s museum also took advantage of the collector’s desire to sell, an opportunistic acquisition for a discount price.

The repository indeed represented the ‘hard and fast materiality of nature’, raw materials for experimental philosophy that were gathered from the Society’s interpersonal networks. But while the act of gathering was notionally unproblematic, the issue of storage raised more difficult questions. On an ontological level, the indiscriminate collection of objects would align the Society with Boyle’s hoarding ant – to avoid this, objects in the repository must be properly studied and documented. On a practical level, the preservation of objects was challenged by the Society’s lack of permanent premises. Although Gresham College had granted space for the collection in 1663, this was contingent on the Gresham appointments of Goddard and Hooke, who stored part of the collection in his own chambers. The precariousness of this accommodation was underlined when the building was temporarily co-opted for the Royal Exchange following the Fire of London in 1666. The lack of institutional fixity was a cause for concern for Oldenburg, who suggested that a permanent headquarters would ‘establish our Institution, and fixe us (who are now lookt upon but as Wanderers, using precariously the lodgings of other Men) in a certain place’.<sup>108</sup> He started a fundraising campaign (wryly dubbed

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<sup>105</sup> Michael Wintroub, ‘The Looking Glass of Facts: Collecting, Rhetoric, and Citing the Self in the Experimental Natural Philosophy of Robert Boyle’, in *Rhetoric and the Early Royal Society*, 202–236 (pp. 203, 214).

<sup>106</sup> Carol Gibson-Wood, ‘Classification and Value in a Seventeenth-Century Museum’, *JHC*, 9.1 (1997), 61–77 (pp.67-8). See also Wragge-Morley, *Aesthetic Science*.

<sup>107</sup> Oldenburg to Boyle, 24<sup>th</sup> February 1666, in Oldenburg, *Correspondence*, iii.45.

<sup>108</sup> Oldenburg to Boyle, 21<sup>st</sup> January 1667/8, in Oldenburg, *Correspondence*, iv.116.

the ‘Committee of Beggars’), petitioning fellows to contribute towards building Wren’s purpose-built college.<sup>109</sup>

It was not until 1711 that the Society gained its own premises at Crane Court in the Strand. Until then it was largely a virtual institution, its council meeting in borrowed spaces, sustained by networks of scientific correspondence and the *Philosophical Transactions*, a more public version of that same correspondence.<sup>110</sup> In 1666, Boyle described this virtual institution as a ‘vast [...] Fabrick’ made not only of ‘large and wel squar’d stones & Timbers’ but ‘Sparrs & Laths and smaller Stones, and even irregular Fragments’, all of which had their role to play in the Society’s ‘Solid and useful Philosophy’.<sup>111</sup> Hunter suggests that the Society rapidly realised that its desire to assemble a universal repository of knowledge could only be achieved through written collections, not collections of physical specimens.<sup>112</sup> Boyle’s comments about the Society’s correspondence transform a paper network of individuals into a brick-and-mortar edifice, recalling Hooke’s dynamic ‘philosophical treasury’ and Evelyn’s ‘intellectual’ temple, pointing to a textual solution to the Society’s function of accretive and perpetual knowledge gathering.

It was with this backdrop of the possibilities of textual longevity that Nehemiah Grew launched his project to produce a printed catalogue of the Royal Society’s repository. On 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1680, at a meeting of the Royal Society Council, Grew read a proposal to gain subscriptions for ‘a catalogue of the natural and artificial curiosities of the Society’.<sup>113</sup> The proposal itself promised an edition ‘upon very good Paper, in Folio’, which would contain twenty-five half sheets of copperplate engravings. Grew charged subscribers ten shillings for the volume, but ‘at the usual and ordinary price, of Books of this nature, it will be worth about Eighteen shillings’.<sup>114</sup> The format and stature of the *Musaeum Regalis Societatis* was hence a far cry from the collection’s earlier catalogues, Hubert’s modest octavos. The work opens with an engraved portrait of Daniel Colwall, who is also the subject of the dedication in which Grew praises his commitment to furthering the ‘Publique Good’, calling him a ‘Benefactor to all Ingenious Men’.<sup>115</sup> The ‘cleer and full Descriptions of Things’ that Grew promises in his text are aimed towards constructing an ‘Inventory of Nature’, putting the collection in dialogue with a tradition of natural history catalogues dating back to Pliny, both in the *Musaeum*’s preface and in the marginal citations throughout the text. After smaller volumes like the *Musaeum Tradescantianum* and Hubert’s catalogues, Grew’s was one of the first English works to fully embrace the celebratory and scientific possibilities of Europe’s tradition of grand collection catalogues.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid. p. 112.

<sup>110</sup> Michael Hunter, ‘Promoting the New Science: Henry Oldenburg and the Early Royal Society’, *History of Science*, 26.2 (1988), 165–81.

<sup>111</sup> Boyle to Oldenburg, May/June 1666, in Oldenburg, *Correspondence*, iii.146.

<sup>112</sup> Hunter, ‘First Steps in Institutionalization’, p. 23.

<sup>113</sup> Birch, *History*, iv.16.

<sup>114</sup> Nehemiah Grew, *Whereas a book intituled, Musaeum Regalis Societatis...* (London: n.p., n.d.).

<sup>115</sup> Grew, *Musaeum*, sig.[A3r].

<sup>116</sup> Claire Preston, ‘Punctual Relations: Thomas Browne’s Rhetorical Reclamations’, *Studies in Philology*, 115.3 (2018), 598–614, (p. 600).

The iterations of Hubert's catalogue demonstrate how, despite little physical change, textual representation could transform the collective identity of a group of objects rhetorically, to suit the priorities of its author. The collection Grew's catalogue describes is a version of Hubert's, altered through fourteen years of donations and losses but cognate enough for David Murray to have identified Hubert's objects in Grew's text.<sup>117</sup> Like the Royal Society's minutes and Wilkins's *Essay*, Grew erased Hubert from the repository's origins by claiming Colwall as its founder, to serve as an example to others who 'may from [Colwall], learn, To use the redundant part of their Estates' to charitable ends.<sup>118</sup> Grew also erased the provenance of certain objects: the only name common to Hubert's and Grew's lists of benefactors is Thomas Povey.<sup>119</sup> Grew's list exclusively concerns donations made to the collection after it was acquired by the Royal Society in 1666. It is arranged alphabetically rather than hierarchically, and includes corporate benefactors, such as the East India and Royal African companies. In a departure from Hubert's courtly preoccupations, the *Musaeum's* benefactors' list illustrates a repository drawn from a pan-European scientific community, managed by a public body in dialogue with other royally chartered organisations.

More pronounced however is Grew's positioning of the catalogue in the genre of early modern natural history writing, his preface is peppered with references to the works of Ulisse Aldrovandi, Conrad Gessner and Ole Worm. As Grew explains, for a European readership these descriptions were the most widely known accounts of unfamiliar fauna, but were often faulty or incomplete. The purpose of the *Musaeum* was firstly to

rectify the mistakes of such as are given us by other Hands. Secondly, not to Transcribe any; as is too commonly done [...] Thirdly, where there is no Description at all, or that is too short, or the faults therein many, to give one at large[.]<sup>120</sup>

Hence the *Musaeum* is deliberately situated in the tradition of European natural history writing, respectful of its authority but keen not to repeat or exacerbate its errors. Grew's most common addition to descriptions of particular specimens is their size and colour, 'much neglected by Writers of Natural History' but crucial for the 'cleer and evident distinction of the several Kinds and Species'.<sup>121</sup> This reflects Grew's priorities as a cataloguer, tasked primarily with distinguishing one specimen from another, and also his taxonomical approach – the descriptions he offers in the *Musaeum* are designed to contribute to a complete 'Inventory of Nature, wherein [...] nothing should be wanting'.<sup>122</sup> Taking issue with existing schemes of categorisation that arrange species alphabetically or by their utility, Grew aligns his catalogue with the taxonomic principles of his mentor John Wilkins. He asserts that the 'Names of Things should always be taken from something more observably declarative of their Form, or Nature', wishing that 'every Name were a short Definition' of its referent object, and hence echoing the nominative approach of

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<sup>117</sup> Murray, *Museums: Their History and Their Use*, i.130-3.

<sup>118</sup> Grew, *Musaeum*, sig.[A3v].

<sup>119</sup> Hubert, Catalogue 3, pp. 69-71; Grew, *Musaeum*, sig.[Ddd2v].

<sup>120</sup> Grew, *Musaeum*, sig.[A4r].

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Grew, *Musaeum*, sig.[A4v].

Wilkins's *Essay*.<sup>123</sup> When describing the repository's collection of shells, Grew offers seven different taxonomies but suggests that a 'Reduction of all which to the Order of Nature' is outside the *Musaeum*'s scope; it cannot 'be perfectly done here, because as yet the Collection it self is not perfect'.<sup>124</sup> The cataloguing project aims not only to recount what is in the repository, but to weave its objects into a universal scheme of classification.

It is important that Grew associates the *Musaeum* with works like Aldrovandi's *Quadrupedum omnium bisulcorum historia* (1621) and Gesner's *Historia animalium* (1551–1558) – these are natural history texts at large, rather than collection catalogues specifically. This affects how he represents the repository's objects, rendering them as particular material specimens and simultaneously as sites of verbal information in the corpus of printed natural historical knowledge. Grew's entry for the musk deer, for example, is typical of his extended descriptions.<sup>125</sup> He opens with a summary of the species' representation in existing natural history literature, which he finds 'faulty', 'absurd' and 'defective', this necessitates a full description. Grew then provides detailed anatomical measurements of the repository's specimen, drawing comparisons with British species ('his Nose [...] like that of a Grey-Hound. His Ears like a Coneys') and domestic objects (its teeth 'may not unfitly be liken'd to a Sithe'). This is followed by conjectures on the deer's behaviour inferred from the specimen's physical characteristics, such as the 'softness and rarity' of its fur to keep it warm, tusks used for fighting, and ears able to detect predators. In the case of the musk deer Grew's empirical observations are reasonable, though often his conjectures are taken from older written sources, and become more outlandish. For example, he includes a theory that the flying squirrel 'sits on some light piece of Barque for a Boat, and erecting his Tail for a Sail, he makes his Voyage'.<sup>126</sup>

Grew's 'cleer and full' description of the musk deer offers a comprehensive account of the species at large, but we are only reminded that he is describing a particular specimen on two occasions: when he notes that the deer's 'hinder feet are wanting', and when he finds that its musk gland has been 'cut open', impeding observation. Whether this mutilation was conducted before or after the Royal Society acquired the specimen is unclear, and it is also unclear exactly what form the specimen takes. The East India Company donated the 'whole skin' of a musk deer to the repository in 1673, and if Grew is not basing his description on this particular object, it is unaccounted for in the catalogue.<sup>127</sup> Grew dwells at length on the creature's fur, and most of his measurements and observations could have been drawn from such a 'whole skin', if it was accompanied by a skull.

However, the catalogue description hints at a more complete, three-dimensional animal when Grew measures the position of the musk gland 'swelling out from [its] Belly one and ½. Standing

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<sup>123</sup> Grew, *Musaeum*, sig.[A4v]. For a discussion of Wilkins and naming see James Dougal Fleming, *The Mirror of Information in Early Modern England: John Wilkins and the Universal Character* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2017).

<sup>124</sup> Grew, *Musaeum*, pp. 150-3, 124.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid. pp. 21-3.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid. p. 20.

<sup>127</sup> Birch, *History*, iii.76.

before [its] Groin as much'. If it wasn't a dried skin, the repository's musk deer might have been a taxidermied specimen. Taxidermy was in common use among contemporary collectors. In 1683 John Ray was expecting the delivery of a stuffed bird, accompanied by a painting of it from the life, but he later noted that the picture 'would give you a better insight than these skins, which are a little broke and changed'.<sup>128</sup> Seventeenth-century techniques of lifelike preservation left much to be desired, stuffed animals in European cabinets were often 'grotesquely distorted', and although Boyle was beginning to experiment with preserving smaller specimens in alcohol, the continued failure of precise and durable taxidermy was still being discussed in the *Philosophical Transactions* nearly a century later.<sup>129</sup> If Grew's musk deer was taxidermied, his measurements were optimistically exact. Another possibility is that Grew was describing an animal that had very recently died. Although animals often died on the journey to Britain, living animals were occasionally presented to the Society – a chameleon spent a month there in 1661 before being dissected, and in 1698 Edward Tyson described an opossum that was 'kept alive in their Repository for some time'.<sup>130</sup> Yet references to these living specimens are few – the repository, as Grew catalogued it, was no menagerie. To enter the repository in 1681, armed with a copy of the *Musaeum*, one would have to speculate on what exact material form the remains of the musk deer took – the catalogue was not a finding aid.

The fact that Grew's description raises more questions than it answers about the materiality of the musk deer speaks to the hybridity of the catalogue's descriptions – part physical inventory, part natural history encyclopaedia. In the quadruped category, descriptions of a monkey, a sloth, two black bears, an anteater, and an otter set a pattern of entries which offer accounts of animals' habitats and behaviour without specifying the specimens' material forms.<sup>131</sup> These descriptions become syntheses of catalogue entries, natural historical accounts, and dissection notes, using the repository's specimens metonymically as exemplars for entire species. In this mode, many of the *Musaeum's* descriptions blur the boundary between material and verbal natural knowledge, representing the collection as a space where words and things become indistinct categories.

Grew's catalogue harnesses the repository's largely miscellaneous collection of objects, using its representational strategies to integrate them thoroughly into the Royal Society's ecosystem of written knowledge. This is most explicitly evident in his frequent references to the *Philosophical Transactions*, which Grew uses to contextualise specimens with added scientific observations. In

<sup>128</sup> John Ray, *The Correspondence of John Ray*, ed. by Edward Lankester (1848), pp. 132-3, 147.

<sup>129</sup> Wilma George, 'Alive or Dead: Zoological Collections in the Seventeenth Century' in *The Origins of Museums*, 179–187 (p. 184); Rachel Polinquin, *The Breathless Zoo: Taxidermy and the Cultures of Longing* (Pennsylvania, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), pp. 22-32; Karl Schulze-Hagen, Frank Steinheimer, Ragnar Kinzelbach, Christoph Gasser, 'Avian Taxidermy in Europe from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance', *Journal für Ornithologie*, 144.4 (2003), 459–478; Paul Lawrence Farber, 'The Development of Taxidermy and the History of Ornithology', *Isis*, 68.4 (1977), 550–66.

<sup>130</sup> Birch, *History*, i.47; Evelyn, *Diary*, iii.302; Edward Tyson, *Carigneya, seu Marsupiale Americanum* (London: S. Smith & B. Walford, 1696), p. 1. Hans Sloane attempted to bring back several living animals from Jamaica in 1689, but they all died during their Atlantic crossing. He records 'Thus I lost [...] all my live Creatures, and so it happens to most People', Hans Sloane, *A Voyage to the Islands of Madera, Barbados, Nieves, S. Christophers and Jamaica*, 2 vols. (London: for the author, 1707–25), ii.346-7.

<sup>131</sup> Grew, *Musaeum*, pp.10, 11, 14, 16.

his account of the repository's minerals Grew includes a long description of how to produce glowing phosphorous, echoing a contemporary preoccupation of the Society, and similarly he weighs in on the intensifying debate about the nature of fossils.<sup>132</sup> His descriptions of the repository's insects are notable for their vividness and manipulation of scale to facilitate comprehension, for example a beetle with 'Teeth like polish'd Steel' or a Peruvian lanternfly whose proboscis is likened to a tailor's needle.<sup>133</sup> As Wragge-Morley has suggested, these kinds of rhetorical techniques were developed in tandem with the visual technologies of Hooke's *Micrographia*.<sup>134</sup>

The interdependence of text and object in Grew's *Musaeum* embodies what Jennifer Thomas has identified as a consistent trend throughout the repository's history, that 'object and text were mutually defining'. Thomas observes that donations of objects to the repository were couched in textual apparatus – accompanied by letters and recorded in the Society's Journal Book – and that objects and written records depended on each other to generate meaning. She suggests that, in view of this, it is ironic that in most cases 'the literature intended to comprehend and to communicate the Society's objects has outlasted the objects themselves'.<sup>135</sup> It is in fact less than ironic that paper records proved more durable than their physical referents. As the work of antiquaries demonstrates, this idea was uncontroversial in the seventeenth-century. This was also the case for natural history collections: the Ashmolean's statutes included an order that its 'Birds, Insects, Fishes or the like, apt to putrifie & decay with tyme, shalbe painted in a faire Velome Folio Booke'.<sup>136</sup> Ray and Willughby similarly recognised that natural historical knowledge was better recorded on the page, through the interrelationships of words and pictures, than accumulated and imperfectly preserved in museums.<sup>137</sup> Meanwhile Boyle was praising the durability of the *Philosophical Transactions*, and Evelyn conceived of the 'Journals, Registers, Correspondence and Transactions' of the Royal Society as the basis of its intellectual temple 'which should never succumb to time'.<sup>138</sup>

The proponents of the early Royal Society often evoked a physical collection of objects as a productive analogy for their knowledge gathering enterprise. However, they very rarely asserted the ideological or epistemic importance of the Society's actual collection of objects. The irony Thomas perceives is an example of how scholarship has tended to miss this distinction in its eagerness to situate the repository at the heart of the Society's Baconian pretensions as a 'key

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<sup>132</sup> Grew, *Musaeum*, pp. 353-7, 153-4; Jan Golinski, 'A Noble Spectacle: Phosphorus and the Public Cultures of Science in the Early Royal Society', *Isis*, 80.1 (1989), 11–39.

<sup>133</sup> Grew, *Musaeum*, pp.165, 158.

<sup>134</sup> Wragge-Morley, *Aesthetic Science*, pp. 90-1.

<sup>135</sup> Jennifer Thomas, 'Compiling 'God's great book [of] universal nature': The Royal Society's collecting strategies', *JHC*, 23.1 (2011), 1–13 (p. 6).

<sup>136</sup> Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawl D.912, f.666v.

<sup>137</sup> Nick Grindle, 'No other sign or note than the very order': Francis Willughby, John Ray and the importance of collecting pictures', *JHC*, 17.1 (2005), 15–22; Sachiko Kusukawa, 'The *Historia Piscium* (1686)', *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London*, 54.2 (2000), 179–197 (p. 186).

<sup>138</sup> Evelyn, *Sylva*, sig.[A2v].



part of the Society's work'.<sup>139</sup> Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, for example, integrates the repository into her Foucauldian reading of early modern collecting by quoting from Hooke's 'General Scheme', but she does not address the fact that the 'repository' he discusses is a textual one bearing little relation to the physical collection under his care.<sup>140</sup> Similarly, Ken Arnold suggests that the scientific museum was a logical necessity for the pursuit of natural philosophical enquiry. He observes that Wilkins owned a collection and donated a 'stock of casual gifts' to the Royal Society's repository while working on his universal language project, speculating that Wilkins deliberately designed the museum as a harmonious facet of his taxonomic enterprise. Arnold's eagerness to jump from a 'stock of casual gifts' to a 'sizeable, well-ordered cabinet [which] had become a generally held priority for the Society' is an extreme example of a wider scholarly tendency.<sup>141</sup>

The *Musaeum Regalis Societatis* recognises the potential of the catalogue genre to synthesise text and object into a framework of natural historical knowledge. It hence realises the potential utility of the 'Things of uncertain Use' that make up the actual repository, and that characterise the Baconian idea of a storehouse of knowledge. It is only in the catalogue that the collection can properly achieve its status as this kind of storehouse: as exemplified by the musk deer, the techniques of textual representation can draw attention to the information specimens contain while eliding their unruly materiality. Reassessing the sources that discuss the repository, I have suggested that the significance of constructing a lasting collection was primarily textual, and that preserving a physical collection of objects was awkwardly ancillary to how the Royal Society articulated its programme of knowledge production. In the final section of this chapter I return to a discussion of the Society as a public institution in the early eighteenth century, considering the afterlives of Grew's catalogue in the context of an escalating tension in the collection's management between personal and corporate identities and legacies

### **'abstracted from the Learned Dr. Grews Account'**

Hunter has suggested that Grew's catalogue 'reified the [repository] collection in book form', and in doing so promoted the repository to a wide European audience, in a similar manner to the printed works of Worm, Gesner and Aldrovandi.<sup>142</sup> In support of this Hunter cites the 1710 account of Zacharias Conrad Von Uffenbach, who says that the *Philosophical Transactions* and Grew's *Musaeum* had given the collection an 'exalted' reputation in his native Germany. Von Uffenbach's own visit to the Royal Society offers a stark contrast to this printed reputation – he found the collection's objects 'not only in no sort of order or tidiness but covered with dust, filth and coal-smoke, and many of them broken and utterly ruined'. When Von Uffenbach enquired after particular specimens, the repository keeper, Henry Hunt, replied that they had been stolen

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<sup>139</sup> Thomas, 'Compiling 'God's great book'', p. 1.

<sup>140</sup> Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp.145-54

<sup>141</sup> Ken Arnold, *Cabinets for the Curious: Looking Back at Early English Museums* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 21-3, 199.

<sup>142</sup> Hunter, *Establishing The New Science*, p. 123.

or ‘corrupted or broken’.<sup>143</sup> Von Uffenbach is reticent about the surviving objects, which are ‘all described in detail in the works to which I have referred, especially in that of Grew’.<sup>144</sup>

This account illustrates an important facet of the repository’s identity in the early eighteenth century. Not only was Grew’s textual representation more famous than the collection itself, but it corresponded meaningfully with the physical objects thirty years after its publication, despite the decay, loss and continual accession of objects to the collection. Even in the act of discovering the disparity between the *Musaeum* and the physical state of the collection, Von Uffenbach collapses the gap between the objects and Grew’s representations, referring his reader to descriptions from 1681. I have already discussed the deliberate collapse of the gap between text and object that shaped what ‘repository’ meant to early Royal Society practitioners, and in this final section of the chapter I examine the implications of this collapse in the case of a specific text (Grew’s *Musaeum*) and specific objects (the repository’s collection) during a period of renewed Society interest in cataloguing its museum.

The development of the repository’s eighteenth-century identity was shaped also by tensions between individual and committee management. For Von Uffenbach, these tensions accounted for the collection’s sorry state, exemplary of the fate of public societies in general:

for a short time they flourish, while the founder and original members are there to set the standard; then come all kinds of setbacks, partly from envy and lack of unanimity and partly because all kinds of people of no account become members; their final state is one of indifference and sloth[.]<sup>145</sup>

The Royal Society’s corporate structure was deliberately designed to outlast the span of individual natural philosophers’ lives but, as Von Uffenbach has it, this is a common hubris – such organisations are effective only as long as the zeal of their original members survives. The interplay between the individual and the collective was always a complex one for the Society as a corporate public body.<sup>146</sup> On a practical level, the lack of premises meant that the management of the Society’s archives depended on (and was imperilled by) the sporadic efforts of individuals.<sup>147</sup> This was true also of the repository under Grew, who stopped actively contributing to the Society shortly after the publication of the *Musaeum*, when he began to focus on his medical practice.<sup>148</sup> The collection had no full-time keeper until Henry Hunt was

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<sup>143</sup> Zacharias Conrad Von Uffenbach, *London in 1710, from the Travels of Zacharias Conrad von Uffenbach*, ed. and trans. by W.H. Quarrell and Margaret Mare (London: Faber & Faber, 1934), p. 98.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.* p. 101.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.* p. 98.

<sup>146</sup> Jarvis, ‘Thomas Sprat’s ‘Mix’d Assembly’. On the productive tension between individual initiative and institutional authority see Hunter, *Establishing The New Science*, pp. 38-40.

<sup>147</sup> Mordechai Feingold, ‘Of Records and Grandeur: The Archive of the Royal Society’ in *Archives of the Scientific Revolution: The Formation and Exchange of Ideas in Seventeenth-Century Europe*, ed. by Michael Hunter (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1998), 171–184 (p. 175).

<sup>148</sup> Michael Hunter, ‘Early Problems in Professionalizing Scientific Research: Nehemiah Grew (1641-1712) and the Royal Society, with an Unpublished Letter to Henry Oldenburg’, *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London*, 36.2 (1982), 189 – 209 (pp. 202-4).

appointed in 1696, though his most active engagement with the collection occurred in the 1670s under Hooke, when he drew up a catalogue (since lost).<sup>149</sup>

After the repository's relocation to Crane Court in 1713, the Society began forming committees to better address the management of the collection, a more pressing matter after 1722, when Hans Sloane orchestrated an annual donation of fifty dried plants from the Society of Apothecaries in lieu of the rent they owed him for the Chelsea Physic Garden – a total of 2,950 specimens over the next fifty years.<sup>150</sup> Grew's catalogue became a working document for these committees, who were also tasked with drawing up a benefactors' register for the repository, compiled retrospectively from entries in the Society's minute books. Here, I explore how the concept of personal commemoration was discussed alongside the repository, seemingly at odds with the Society's original rejection of 'dead men's names' but increasingly palatable in an intellectual environment dominated by the legacy-making potential of private collections, which I discuss in chapters four and five. I suggest that the ultimate failure of the repository was, to borrow Von Uffenbach's phrase, a 'lack of unanimity' in its management, which inhered in the Society's corporate nature. While a decentralised institution offered durability for a set of scientific principles beyond individual lifespans, it obstructed the will to permanence which sought durability for material artefacts and the preservation of private collections.

In 1984, A. D. C. Simpson characterised the eighteenth-century inventories of the Royal Society's repository as presenting 'an incomplete, confused and somewhat inconsistent view of parts of the collection', which had not attracted enough scholarly attention.<sup>151</sup> My original intention in this section of the chapter was to investigate these manuscripts in the Society's archive, alongside the minute books, to determine how they constructed an afterlife for Grew's *Musaeum* in the early eighteenth century. These sources comprise Royal Society MSS 413–417 and 419, a mixture of inventories, catalogues and benefactors' registers.<sup>152</sup> However, due to ongoing archive closures during the Covid-19 pandemic, I have been unable to access these documents. The account that follows is therefore reliant on existing scholarship, informed predominantly by Simpson's article but unable in many cases to range beyond it. Simpson's narrative of the repository is one of negligent individual keepers punctuated by the restorative, organisational work of committees in 1723, 1729–1733 and 1763 – my suspicion is that this needs complicating. For example, G. S. Rousseau and David Haycock's detailed account of Emmanuel Mendes da Costa's collecting and natural history interests has demonstrated that Simpson's sketch of da Costa as merely 'negligent' and 'dishonest' requires some revision.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> A. D. C. Simpson, 'Newton's Telescope and the Cataloguing of the Royal Society's Repository', *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London*, 38.1 (1984), 187–214 (p. 190); Hunter, *Establishing The New Science*, p. 141.

<sup>150</sup> Thomas, 'Compiling 'God's great book'', p. 6.

<sup>151</sup> Simpson, 'Newton's Telescope', p. 188.

<sup>152</sup> Keith Moore and Mary Sampson, *A Guide to the Archives and Manuscripts of the Royal Society* (London: The Royal Society, 1995)

<sup>153</sup> G. S. Rousseau and David Haycock, 'The Jew of Crane Court: Emanuel Mendes da Costa (1717-91), natural history and natural excess', *History of Science*, 38 (2000), 127–170.

Without access to the Society archives, the research presented in the remainder of this chapter is unfortunately but necessarily incomplete.

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On his travels to London, Von Uffenbach was informed by Edward Hatton's *New View of London* (1708), which includes a twenty-page account of the objects in the Royal Society repository, 'mostly abstracted from the Learned Dr. Grews Account, and the rest as I find them in the Repository'.<sup>154</sup> Hatton's account follows the same categories as Grew's catalogue and lists specimens in the same order, though it fails to mention a large number of objects. Unlike Grew, Hatton numbers the specimens in continuous numerical sequence (from 1 to 323), and it is therefore tempting to read his work as offering a sense of completeness, describing the totality of the repository. This reading is supported by the kinds of objects Hatton describes: he most often records bones, teeth and hair, while omitting most of the soft tissue specimens present in Grew's work, suggesting that these more perishable objects had decayed prior to 1708. In its descriptions, copied and paraphrased from the *Musaeum*, Hatton's account shows that Grew's catalogue retained meaning as a work of natural history, despite the differences that had emerged between the collection and its textual representations.

Other accounts of the repository were not as diligent as Hatton in differentiating Grew's descriptions from their physical referents. John Strype's 1720 edition of John Stow's *Survey of London* uses Grew's catalogue to gesture to the 'many Thousands of great Rarities' which 'there be [in the repository] (as they are digested by the aforesaid Doctor)'.<sup>155</sup> Similarly, John Houghton's *Collection for the Improvement of Husbandry and Trade* (1727) says that 'Dr. Grew tells us, that in the repository of the Royal Society [...] there is gold oar of Herngrunt'.<sup>156</sup> Boldly, both texts use a forty-year-old catalogue to refer to specimens in the present tense. The most pronounced example of this is Ralph Thoresby's *Musaeum Thoresbyanum* (1715), where he compares repository specimens to those in his own collection. Thoresby says that his polar bear foot measures 'eight Inches broad, which is two inches larger than that in the Repository of the Royal Society', and he also notes a hen's egg 'in the Repository of the Royal Society' which is larger than his own.<sup>157</sup> Thoresby's source for these comparisons is Grew's catalogue, thirty-four years remote from a group of objects which, according to their keeper, had been much altered through decay and embezzlement. This gap seems of little concern to Thoresby who, in common with contemporaries, uses Grew's catalogue to describe the Royal Society's repository in an extended present tense. In the same way that Grew used his sources, these works use his catalogue to situate objects in a continuum of printed natural history knowledge which, although based on physical objects, is not bound by their impermanent existence in collections.

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<sup>154</sup> Edward Hatton, *A New View of London*, 2 vols. (London: J. Nicholson, 1708), ii.666.

<sup>155</sup> John Strype, *A Survey of the Cities of London and Westminster* (London: A. Churchill et al, 1720), p. 159.

<sup>156</sup> John Houghton, *A Collection for the Improvement of Husbandry and Trade*, ed. by Richard Bradley, 4 vols. (London: Woodman & Lyon, 1727), ii.157.

<sup>157</sup> Ralph Thoresby, 'Musaeum Thoresbyanum', in *Ducatus Leodiensis* (London: M. Atkins, 1715), pp. 432, 436.

Hunter's account of Grew's career suggests that his *Musaeum* and *The Anatomy of Plants*, published in 1682, had a sense of finality about them – Hunter quotes a letter of Grew's in which he says 'I am now about to print one more Book; & then it will be time to have done'.<sup>158</sup> Like Sprat's *History*, the *Musaeum* was the final result of multiple overlapping projects – before Grew, Hooke, Hunt and John Aubrey were working to catalogue the repository, and although Aubrey's work was completed in 1674, it no longer survives.<sup>159</sup> As recent scholarship on Sprat's *History* has suggested, its subsequent use as a definitive reference point for the practices of the early Royal Society belies the heterogeneity of the Society's shifting corporate subject matter.<sup>160</sup> In a similar fashion, Grew's positioning of his *Musaeum* as final or definitive belied the susceptibility of his subject matter to change, as did the new editions of his catalogue printed in 1686 and 1694, which described the collection as though it was unaltered.<sup>161</sup> An iteration of a catalogue represents a single moment in the life of a collection, but (as I highlighted in chapter one using Thomas Smith's catalogue of the Cotton manuscripts) printed catalogues are often heavily invested in providing definitive, monumental and durable descriptions of collections despite the collections' propensity to change. Grew's own sense of the *Musaeum*'s finality, along with its treatment in the early eighteenth century, are examples of this fallacy.

Materially, the Royal Society's MS 416 is a striking contrast to Grew's monumental printed work. This is the benefactors' list, retrospectively compiled by the repository committee of 1729–1733, entitled 'A Complete Catalogue of the several Donations of manuscripts, printed Books, naturall Curiosities, machines and antiquities'. It opens vertically, sewn along its top edge in a manner that suggests it was a working inventory, designed for day-to-day use.<sup>162</sup> However, the content of the inventory is informed by Grew's catalogue, its account of donations following the same arrangement of natural historical categories as the 1681 *Musaeum*. This decision complicated the compilation of the inventory on two fronts. Firstly, it caused immediate problems of categorisation, the first category ('Natural Curiosities: Animals: Parts of Human Bodies') awkwardly including Colwall's donation of £100 for the purchase of Hubert's collection. Secondly, when the committee divided between them the work of trawling old minute books for donations, they did so chronologically, tackling the period 1660 to 1731 in sections of around six years. Each category in the inventory hence contains separate sheets written by each compiler, covering each six-year period. Once these sheets were bound together, the addition of future entries was impeded. With no extra sheets provided for donations going forward from 1731, the inventory's arrangement by category effectively proscribed the effectiveness of the document as an ongoing benefactors' register.

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<sup>158</sup> Hunter, 'Early Problems', p. 203.

<sup>159</sup> Simpson, 'Newton's Telescope', p. 189.

<sup>160</sup> Michael Hunter, *The Image of Restoration Science*; Tina Skouen, 'Science versus Rhetoric?: Sprat's *History of the Royal Society* Reconsidered', in *Rhetoric and the Early Royal Society*, 237–264; Jarvis, 'Thomas Sprat's "Mix'd Assembly"'.

<sup>161</sup> Nehemiah Grew, *Musaeum Regalis Societatis* (London: S. Holford, 1686); idem, *Musaeum Regalis Societatis* (London: H. Newman, 1694).

<sup>162</sup> London, Royal Society Archives, MS 416, <<http://ttp.royalsociety.org/ttp/ttp.html?id=a462fb18-54c3-4173-8ce2-67509f3532b7&type=book>>; Louisiane Ferlier, 'Back catalogues', 28<sup>th</sup> January 2020, <<https://royalsociety.org/blog/2020/01/back-catalogues/>>

Adopting categories from Grew afforded extra scientific taxonomy, but it stopped the benefactors' register from continuing as a working document. Unlike the chronologically-arranged register of the Ashmolean, few donations were added after the committee had completed its work in 1731. This is symptomatic of the broader work of the repository committees in the early eighteenth century. While the committees' existence indicates that the Royal Society Council was concerned about the state of the repository, the inventories of the committees that were formed 1723 and 1733 became end products, works treated as complete which did little to recognise the ongoing, active work of tending to an expanding collection of natural history specimens. Simpson suggests that the work done by committees ameliorated the overall condition of the repository, but their outputs indicate bounded acts of auditing, not of continuous management.

In contrast to the repository, the personal collections of Royal Society members like Sloane, James Petiver, Richard Mead and Ralph Thoresby were being managed with great success – in 1733 the repository committee held Sloane's up as a model for their own work.<sup>163</sup> When Von Uffenbach wrote his account of visiting London's natural history collections, it is easy to see why that of the Royal Society pales alongside the immaculately presented museums of the city's virtuosi, and how he arrived at his conclusion that the institution had drifted away from heroic individuals to be blighted by a 'lack of unanimity'. Indeed, Thomas's work on the repository puts the collection in direct competition with the private collections that flourished around it, the repository's own accessions dependent on the enthusiasm of individual fellows.<sup>164</sup> More recently, Alice Marples has challenged the paradigm that institutional and private collections were competing for resources, analysing Sloane's administrative work at the Society to suggest that, in this period, the longevity of the Society was ensured by a 'productive ambiguity' between personal and institutional resources, making the institution a locus for the frictionless flow of material knowledge between fellows.<sup>165</sup> Marples recasts the eighteenth-century Society as a network of interpersonal connections orchestrated by Sloane, who wielded its institutional prestige to solicit contributions for the *Philosophical Transactions* and expand the Society's web of potential donors. In this system, members of the Society became a collection in themselves, to be called upon by correspondents for specialisms, connections and resources.<sup>166</sup>

In Marples's reading, the repository represents the accumulated material 'credit' of the Society's productive brokering of material knowledge.<sup>167</sup> This builds on interpretations like Adrian Johns's, which argue that the repository was treated as analogous to the Society's register books and *Philosophical Transactions*, another facet of its knowledge gathering enterprise whose material forms stood as evidence for members' contributions – like its printed analogues, the repository was a

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<sup>163</sup> James Delbourgo, *Collecting The World: The Life and Curiosity of Hans Sloane* (London: Allen Lane), pp. 306-7.

<sup>164</sup> Thomas, 'Compiling 'God's great book''.

<sup>165</sup> Alice Marples, 'Scientific administration in the early eighteenth century: reinterpreting the Royal Society's repository', *Historical Research*, 92.255 (2019), 183–204 (p. 195).

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 190-7.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.* p. 198.

site for building prestige.<sup>168</sup> Grew's *Musaeum* was put to use as a reference point of natural history, but it was also instrumental as an interface between personal and institutional prestige – Thoresby's catalogue identifies his objects with those in the repository in order to further the reputation of his collection, and as Von Uffenbach tells us the *Musaeum* had afforded the repository an 'exalted' reputation in Germany. David Thorley has demonstrated that John Evelyn used his copy of the *Musaeum* to incorporate himself into the Society's institutional history, annotating entries for his own donations.<sup>169</sup> Bound up in the *Musaeum*'s wrangling of text and object are the issues of appropriate preservation and personal reputation that the Society had, at least officially, treated with scepticism since its outset.

Evelyn's inscription of personal identity onto Grew's catalogue chimes with the vision of the Royal Society's eternal intellectual temple, which he sets out in the 1679 *Sylva*. The Society, as Evelyn saw it, was languishing due to a host of derisive satires that misrepresented the intellectual nobility of natural philosophers. He hoped for a 'bold and Gallant genius' to 'deliver us', a benefactor whose name would 'out-last the Pyramids' because 'the propagation of Learning, and useful Arts, [has] always surviv'd the Triumphs of the proudest Conquerors'.<sup>170</sup> Evelyn is vague about the kinds of benefaction this messianic figure would provide, but he is specific about how the Society would ensure the individual's fame: by way of precedent, Evelyn draws attention to the host of panegyrics Charles II had attracted from all quarters of the learned world. 'Witness', he declares, 'the many accurate Treatises and Volumes of the most curious and useful Subjects [...] dedicated to His Majesty as Founder'; 'witness, the Letters and Correspondences from most parts of the habitable Earth'; 'never had the Republique of Letters so learned and universal a Correspondence as has been procur'd and promoted by this Society alone'.<sup>171</sup> Here, Evelyn not only highlights the commemorative power of paratextual acknowledgements, but repurposes the entire textual apparatus of the Royal Society as a monument to the munificence of its royal founder, Charles II. Not only do the written records of the Society build a 'Body of real, substantial Philosophy' but they stand as cumulative testament to the honour of its members.

This gambit was used often by Oldenburg as he sought to expand the Society's correspondence network and solicit contributions by promoting the organisation as a scientific brotherhood that would welcome new knowledge and ennoble its correspondents.<sup>172</sup> This rhetoric became particularly apparent during Oldenburg's efforts in 1668 to glean financial contributions for the building of permanent Society premises, during which time he promised that 'Contributors will have their Names registered as Benefactors, in a Book [...] and thereby perpetuated to all posterity'.<sup>173</sup> These plans for permanent institutional premises entailed the possibility that the

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<sup>168</sup> Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago, IL & London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 476.

<sup>169</sup> David Thorley, 'Nehemiah Grew's aims for the *Musaeum Regalis Societatis* and how the text was used', *The Seventeenth Century*, 33.3 (2018), 337–361 (p. 346).

<sup>170</sup> Evelyn, *Sylva*, sig.[A4r].

<sup>171</sup> Ibid. sig.[A4v].

<sup>172</sup> Michael Hunter, 'Promoting the New Science', pp. 171-3.

<sup>173</sup> Oldenburg, *Correspondence*, iv.133.

names of contributors could be physically commemorated, as Oldenburg pledged that written scientific contributions would be ‘deposited in the Royal Society’s archives, and in this way the names of all of you who dedicated your efforts to improving the researches of the Royal Society will be handed down to posterity’.<sup>174</sup> Although these architectural plans were never realised, the Society’s printing enterprise took on similar commemorative functions for Oldenburg, as he wrote to Martin Lister that a letter of his would be ‘laid up in the Books of the R. Society, as well as preserved by ye presse in the Phil. Transactions’.<sup>175</sup> At the same time, the Royal Society Council ordered that ‘an inscription of letters of gold be set up in some convenient place’ to honour Henry Howard’s donation of the Arundel library.<sup>176</sup> From its early days, the Society’s collections were coloured by an imperative to enshrine the names of benefactors as well as to accumulate objects and texts as material tokens of knowledge.

This extended to the repository too. The *Philosophical Transactions* from 1666 noted the Society’s

Collection of Curiosities [...] to which Repository whatsoever is presented as rare and curious, will be with great care, together with the Donors names and their Beneficence recorded, and the things preserved for After-ages, (probably much better and safer, than in their own private Cabinets)<sup>177</sup>

Considering the subsequently parlous state of the repository during the ascendancy of private scientific collections, there is a certain irony in this assertion of care and safety. It is also worth noting that, in the *Philosophical Transactions*, this does not appear as a discrete or official appeal for donations but is appended to a brief discussion on petrification, later attributed to John Beale.<sup>178</sup> In 1665-6, Beale had been working on a defence of the Royal Society; in the end it was never printed, superseded by Sprat’s *History*, but both projects were considered viable – internal evidence suggests that the frontispiece of Sprat’s *History* was originally printed to fit Beale’s broadsheet design. Beale was hence intimately involved in representing the Society’s identity in print, his letters to Evelyn demonstrating a sensitivity to the rhetorical potential of print, which can also be observed in Sprat’s work.<sup>179</sup> Yet in the *Philosophical Transactions*, his assertion that repository donations would be ‘preserved for After-ages’ along with their donors’ names is explicitly framed as the voice of a single Society member, not speaking for the institution as a whole. As Oldenburg makes clear in his dedicatory epistle to the volume, the *Philosophical Transactions* are intended as ‘Rude Collections, which are onely the Gleanings of my private diversions in broken hours’. Addressing the Royal Society itself, he adds that ‘no man can from these Glimpses of Light take any just Measure of Your Performances’.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid. iv.137.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid. viii.257.

<sup>176</sup> Birch, *History*, iii.451.

<sup>177</sup> *Philosophical Transactions*, 1, p. 321.

<sup>178</sup> Paul Henry Maty, *A General Index to the Philosophical Transactions* (London: L. Davis & P. Elmsly, 1787), p. 377.

<sup>179</sup> Hunter, *The Image of Restoration Science*, pp. 3-20.

<sup>180</sup> *Philosophical Transactions*, 1, sig. [\*r-v].



The complex negotiations between individual and corporate responsibility complicated Beale's assertion of the repository's imperative of preservation, just as the Society's lack of permanent premises complicated his claims of the secure stewardship of objects. Oldenburg's appeals to posterity in his correspondence demonstrate that the prestige of the Royal Society was constituted from its ongoing interpersonal networks. Although he proposed a formal benefactors book, without permanent premises the survival of this book would have depended on the individual in whose care it was left, and their continued involvement in the Royal Society. As Mordechai Feingold has illustrated, when Oldenburg died he alienated huge amounts of correspondence that we now treat as part of the Society's early archive, and similarly many Royal Society papers have been preserved in the collections of Sloane and Isaac Newton, associated with the historical reputations of these individuals, before that of the institution.<sup>181</sup> Arnold Hunt suggests that the decision to rearrange Sloane's letters chronologically, rather than by correspondent, has rendered him a 'pre-eminent figure, the central fixed point around whom the rest of the learned world appears to revolve'; it flattens the landscape of intellectual sociability in which they were produced.<sup>182</sup>

Hunt's observation shows how archival patterns of preservation can make it easier to centre histories on individuals than on the connections between them, and the early Royal Society is littered with examples of the singular outlasting the collective. The dedications to Charles II in Royal Society monographs are more durable than the countless letters from which Evelyn says they were constituted. Claiming that the repository was collected by Colwall was easier than accounting for its heterogeneous courtly origins. Grew's catalogue quickly became a more widely used account of the Society's collection than the collection itself. Although the Society was premised on the idea that a public institution could outlast, and therefore augment, the work of private natural philosophers, expressions of its will towards preservation centre on commemorating the individual – specifically wealthy individuals, whom Von Uffenbach and Evelyn thought could rescue the vagrant Society from dissolution.

Hooke's role in housing the repository at Crane Court appears to be exactly this kind of personal financial intervention. Lisa Jardine argues that Hooke funded the new museum building by proxy – although he died intestate, she makes the case that, at his death in 1703, Hooke gifted large sums of money to Henry Hunt and Richard Waller, to be invested in the new repository. Hooke's orchestration of the Crane Court repository, along with his care of the collection and the fact it was kept in his lodgings at Gresham College, leads Jardine to claim that the repository might legitimately be called the 'Hookean Museum'. The only reason Hooke's benefaction has not been commemorated, Jardine suggests, is that the Society's president Isaac Newton harboured an animosity towards him. In her reading, the elision of Hooke from the repository's

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<sup>181</sup> Feingold, 'Of Records and Grandeur', pp. 175-8.

<sup>182</sup> Arnold Hunt, 'Sloane as a Collector of Manuscripts' in *From Books to Bejewels: Sir Hans Sloane and His Collections*, ed. by Arthur MacGregor, Michael Hunter, Alison Walker (London: British Library, 2012) 190–207 (p. 204).

history illustrates that every museum depends on the ‘personal obsession of an individual – the more or less haphazardly accumulated remnants of private interest and idiosyncratic pursuit’.<sup>183</sup>

As I have demonstrated above, some of the texts collected in Hooke’s *Posthumous Works* (1705) suggest a decidedly ambivalent attitude to the Royal Society’s repository. The *Posthumous Works* was bankrolled by Hooke via his gift to Waller, who in his prefatory life of Hooke makes little mention of the repository, instead commemorating Hooke through the series of inventions and experiments he contributed to the Society. Waller acknowledges that Hooke intended his wealth to go towards the establishment of a ‘handsome Fabrick for the Societies use’ which includes a repository but must also contain a laboratory and library. However, Waller notes that this design was merely an ‘airy Phantom’ after Hooke died intestate.<sup>184</sup> Whether this should complicate Jardine’s reading of the repository as Hooke’s ‘personal obsession’ or not, her argument that museums are driven by ‘private interest and idiosyncratic pursuit’ is useful for conceptualising the Royal Society’s rarities.

The objects in the repository were indeed haphazardly accumulated, preserved and catalogued. The Society’s epistemological imperatives prevented them from leading a fully realised existence as either words or things, their awkward materiality refusing to render them either useful tokens of knowledge to be stored in a warehouse, or accumulated evidence of the institution’s global influence to be displayed in perpetuity. The impulse to dub the collection the ‘Hookean Museum’ or refer to it metonymically via the catalogue of ‘Dr Grew’ is symptomatic of the issues of personal commemoration that were bound up in the repository, and which echoed the knottiness of managing the objects themselves – to borrow Marples’s phrase, they were subject to an ‘internal muddle of personal and institutional responsibilities’.<sup>185</sup>

In the next chapter, I examine the personal collection of a single Royal Society fellow, John Woodward, and further explore the interactions between personal commemoration and knowledge production in a scientific collection. In many ways Woodward’s career and fossil collection reads as an embodiment of Jardine’s ‘private interest and idiosyncratic pursuit’, though his ability to manipulate his legacy project into a public museum demonstrates a synthesis of memorial and science that the Royal Society’s corporate structure was unable to achieve for its own collection. If the absence of Hooke’s will turned his posthumous designs into an ‘airy Phantom’, Woodward’s elaborate testamentary apparatus riveted down his desire for permanence into a fully embodied scientific legacy.

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<sup>183</sup> Lisa Jardine, ‘Paper Monuments and Learned Societies: Hooke’s Royal Society Repository’ in *Enlightening the British: Knowledge, Discovery and the Museum in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. by R.G.W. Anderson, M.L. Caygill, A.G. MacGregor, L. Syson (London: British Museum Press, 2003) 49–51; idem., *The Curious Life of Robert Hooke, the Man who Measured London* (London: Harper Collins, 2003), pp. 315–9.

<sup>184</sup> Richard Waller, ‘Life of Robert Hooke’ in *Posthumous Works*, p. xxvii.

<sup>185</sup> Marples, ‘Scientific administration’, p. 184.

## 4. John Woodward

Thomas Sprat's idealised depiction of the early Royal Society uses a patrimonial analogy to emphasise the institution's will towards innovation:

There are two principal Ways of preserving the Names of those, that are pass'd: The one, by Pictures; the other, by Children: The Pictures may be so made, that they may far neerer resemble the Original [...] yet all Mankind choose rather to keep themselves alive by Children[.]<sup>1</sup>

One's own generation of natural philosophers should not slavishly memorialise the ideas of its predecessors – not even Francis Bacon's, as Sprat explains.<sup>2</sup> Rather, it should carry the same intellectual 'blood' and animate this with its own, unique life: the scientific production of new ideas as intellectual 'Children'.<sup>3</sup>

The physician, antiquary and natural philosopher John Woodward was an active fellow of the Royal Society, committed to its principle of converting first-hand experience into codified forms of knowledge – as Woodward put it, 'Evidence of Sense' was 'the highest Certainty'.<sup>4</sup> Pamela H. Smith has suggested that this emphasis on experience and observation demanded that scientific practitioners 'engage bodily with nature', and in this sense Woodward was no exception.<sup>5</sup> As he gathered, catalogued and studied his collection of fossils (numbering over nine thousand at his death), he depended on extensive fieldwork. He built entire systems of classification on smelling, touching, tasting, burning and breaking specimens, a scheme of embodied engagement verging on eccentricity for which Woodward was satirised – he was unable, it was said, to identify a fossil without holding it under his nose.<sup>6</sup>

Yet studies of Woodward have consistently positioned him in opposition to Sprat's image of innovation. Focusing on his meticulously crafted legacy, in which he bequeathed his fossil collection to Cambridge University to form the Woodwardian Museum, scholars have insisted that Woodward's attempts to preserve his own identity post mortem were obsessed with the

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Sprat, *The History of the Royal Society of London, For the Improving of Natural Knowledge* (London: J. Martyn, 1667), p. 51.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 29, 35-6.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 51.

<sup>4</sup> John Woodward, *An addition to the catalogue of the foreign native fossils in the collection of J. Woodward M.D.* (n.p., n.d.) p.iv. This catalogue forms part of the cataloguing enterprise Woodward and his assistants undertook shortly before his death, printed 1728-9 and numbering seven titles. Initial references to each volume will identify its title, followed by an abbreviated designation by which it will be identified in subsequent footnotes – this is 'Catalogue L'. These designations follow David Price's system, see Appendix 1 of 'John Woodward and a Surviving British Geological Collection from the Early Eighteenth Century', *JHC*, 1 (1989), 79–95 (pp. 93-4).

<sup>5</sup> Pamela H. Smith, *The Body of the Artisan: Art and Experience in the Scientific Revolution* (Chicago, IL & London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 18.

<sup>6</sup> *Tauronomachia: or a description of a Bloody and Terrible Fight Between two Champions, Taurus and Onos at Gresham College* (London: T. Bickerton, 1719), p. 3.

‘permanent commemoration of himself’, bespeaking a ‘monstrous self-importance’.<sup>7</sup> This self-commemoration has been used to suggest Woodward was actively obstructing further research on his collection, isolating his specimens and scholarship so that, in Sprat’s analogy, they ‘may far neerer resemble the Original’ after Woodward’s death. Sean Silver has addressed the bequest in these explicit terms of resemblance, focusing his study on the portrait of Woodward that still overlooks his fossils in the modern Sedgwick Museum; he suggests that Woodward designed the museum ‘autogenetically to reproduce himself in a series of mirror images’.<sup>8</sup> In this sense, Woodward chose to keep himself alive via image rather than children, running contrary to Sprat’s ‘all Mankind’.

Characterised by fierce and violent disagreements, Woodward’s career as a physician, natural philosopher and collector was exceptionally contrarian, and provides ample material for charges of egotism: accounts from visitors to his museum suggest specimens were jealously guarded, and his writings give a powerful sense of his own uniqueness. Woodward was a lifelong bachelor, a requirement of his teaching post at Gresham College in London, that nonetheless attracted charges of homosexuality from his intellectual opponents. It also meant he fathered no children. Silver’s account of the Woodwardian Museum prolongs a discourse begun during Woodward’s lifetime which conflates these biographical details, suggesting that the collection’s autogenetic function enabled the museum to act as a surrogate for children in light of Woodward’s ‘well known’ homosexuality.<sup>9</sup> In Sprat’s analogy this rejection of children, the desire to reproduce oneself, opposes Woodward to ‘all Mankind’: it is the root of a prevailing historical perspective linking Woodward’s peculiarity to a notion of queerness.

This binary of prolonging oneself either in image or as children bifurcates the Woodwardian Museum between its collector’s identity and its collection’s value. In chapter three, I illustrated how a version of this bifurcation occurred in the Royal Society’s repository, where value inhered neither in the objects nor in their textual representations, nor their function to symbolise the generosity of their donors. By contrast to this vacuum of value, Woodward loads his objects heavily with material, textual, and personal significance, demanding that we approach them as an entanglement of his body, collection, and scholarship that emerges from his distinctively embodied collecting practice. By re-evaluating the discourse that has conflated Woodward’s childlessness with a notion of queerness, I resituate his apparent eccentricity in the wider culture of scientific bachelorhood which characterised the contemporary Royal Society. I propose that casting the public museum as an alternative to heteronormative progeny sheds subtle and productive light on the collector’s will to perpetuate the identity of his collection.

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<sup>7</sup> John Willis Clark and Thomas McKenny Hughes, *The Life and Letters of The Reverend Adam Sedgwick* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1890), p.185. This is repeated verbatim in V. A. Eyles, ‘John Woodward FRS, FRCP, MD (1665-1728): A Bio-Bibliographical Account of His Life and Work’, *Journal of the Society of the Bibliography of Natural History*, 5.6 (1971), 399–427 (p. 416); Roy Porter, ‘John Woodward: A Droll Sort of Philosopher’ *Geological Magazine*, 116.5 (1979), 335–417 (p. 340).

<sup>8</sup> Sean Silver, *The Mind is a Collection: Case Studies in Eighteenth-Century Thought* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), p. 83.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

## The Singular Collector

As well as bequeathing his fossils to Cambridge to be displayed, free of charge, in purpose-built cabinets, Woodward's will also created a lectureship to superintend the collection and continue his geological scholarship. Fifty years after Woodward's death, the position became vacant for the fourth time when the incumbent Samuel Ogden died, triggering an election.<sup>10</sup> To determine the proper procedure for this election Samuel Peck, a fellow of Trinity College, revisited the will, transcribing it and offering his commentary on how to interpret its instructions.<sup>11</sup> However, Woodward's testamentary imprecision complicated Peck's task. Woodward seemed to 'know the legal style of the University', but was let down by a 'want of precision & knowledge' when it came to specifying the electors for Ogden's replacement.<sup>12</sup> In order to better interpret the 'doubtful, impracticable, or mistaken' instructions, Peck noted that

Here, the Testator appears to sit, or perhaps to lie in a bed of sickness, in anxious meditation how to secure that honor and care for his writings and fossils, that the labors of his life, as he tells us, had compeled and delighted in[.]<sup>13</sup>

For Peck, this vivid reconstruction of the physical and psychological circumstances of the will's composition is necessary to unpack its meaning. The 'anxious meditation' and illness he imagines for Woodward are the reasons for the obscurity of the will's prose, but they also reveal the core of its testator's intention: a fear of his own mortality and the fate of his 'writings and fossils' after his impending death. Woodward's antidote, according to Peck, was to vest his collection and his scholarly work in an institution that, by its corporate nature, would 'never die'.<sup>14</sup>

Framing the university as a corporate body is crucial to Peck's solution to the problem of vote allocation in the election of a Woodwardian professor. He suggests that because Woodward's only personal encounter with the senate was when it awarded him his MD in 1695, he would have conceived of it as acting 'simply as one Body and as one voice', and therefore its majority decision should be counted as a single vote, alongside the single vote of the other individual electors.<sup>15</sup> Peck's commentary is crowded with bodies and their interrelations; both individual and corporate, physical and metaphorical. It mediates between bodies *in* the senate, the body *of*

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<sup>10</sup> Ogden was the fourth Woodwardian Professor and had been appointed in 1764. Under the terms of Woodward's will, the lecturer was to be appointed by his executors and their survivors. The last of them (Colonel Richard King) had died in 1771, making the 1778 vacancy the first at which the election of the lecturer fell to the *ex officio* electors that Woodward's will specified.

<sup>11</sup> Cambridge, Cambridge University Archives, UA/0265/GEOL/1(1). The item attributes the commentary to 'Mr. Peck' and it is signed off 'Trin: Coll: Cam: 8 April 1778'. The author is almost certainly Samuel Peck, a long-standing fellow of the college. See John Venn and J.A. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses; a biographical list of all known students, graduates and holders of office at the University of Cambridge, from the earliest times to 1900*, 4 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1924), Part I, iii.333.

<sup>12</sup> Cambridge University Archives, UA/0265/GEOL/1(1), ff. 1, 4. The numbered leaves begin with Peck's commentary, following his transcription.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* ff. 3-4.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

the senate, Cambridge University as univocal and collective body, the bodies of the electors, their positions *ex officio*, and the dying body of Woodward. Organising these bodies, Peck implies, is necessary to interpreting the fault in Woodward's will (a slippage between describing an individual body and a corporate body) which Peck could only solve by trying to reimagine Woodward's body in the act of composing the will. The legacy, in other words, was impossible to interpret without these acts of re-embodiment.

Although Peck's attempt to read the will using its author's eyes is speculative, its embodied method of interpretation resonates with Woodward's lifelong approach, and that of his contemporaries, to recording and classifying the natural world. Recent scholarship on embodied practices in early modern science has emphasised self-experimentation, the translation of first-hand experience, and the roots of science in artisanal practices in order to disrupt long-standing dualisms of practical and abstract knowledge, foregrounding the body of the scientific practitioner in the processes of knowledge-making.<sup>16</sup>

Although Woodward's epistemology was in this sense typical of contemporary English collecting culture, as a man and as a scholar he was profoundly unusual: notorious for being ejected from the Royal Society council, fighting his intellectual rivals in the street, mocked in verse and on stage for his slight frame and high-pitched voice. Visiting London in 1710, the German traveller Zacharias Conrad Von Uffenbach compared the typical hospitality and tours of important collections with Woodward's rather different behaviour. After four unsuccessful attempts, Von Uffenbach finally gained an audience with the 'high and mighty doctor', who refused to show his fossils but invited Von Uffenbach to stay, he assumed, to serve him chocolate. A servant produced a jug and cloth, but to Von Uffenbach's astonishment this 'was only for the purpose of shaving, so that we might be favoured with this sight'.<sup>17</sup> The description is dominated by Woodward's mannerisms: 'rolling eyes', a stiff posture, 'ridiculous airs and graces', 'affected gestures', and continual glances at himself in the many mirrors hanging in every room.<sup>18</sup> Woodward's body dominates Von Uffenbach's account through its distinctive movement, its affected ceremony and orchestration, and its image that (as Sean Silver has noted) becomes part of his collection in every mirror.<sup>19</sup> When Von Uffenbach describes Woodward's collection, it has already been overshadowed by its owner, whose peculiar disregard for polite hospitality are more distinctive for Von Uffenbach than the majority of his specimens.

By contrast, Sir Hans Sloane greeted Von Uffenbach 'with vast politeness; in a very different manner from that coxcomb, Dr Woodward'.<sup>20</sup> The two collectors were both physicians, neither was educated at the English universities, and both lacked substantial inherited means. They were

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<sup>16</sup> For a survey of older studies on this topic see Jan Golinski, *Making Natural Knowledge: Constructivism and the History of Science* (Chicago, IL & London: Chicago University Press, 1998). More recent work includes Smith (2004) and Pamela H. Smith, Amy R.W. Meyers and Harold J. Cook, eds., *Ways of Making and Knowing: The Material Culture of Empirical Knowledge* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2014).

<sup>17</sup> Zacharias Conrad Von Uffenbach, *London in 1710, from the Travels of Zacharias Conrad Von Uffenbach*, ed. and trans. by W.H. Quarrell and Margaret Mare (London: Faber & Faber, 1939), pp. 172-3.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 172, 178.

<sup>19</sup> Silver, *Mind is a Collection*, p. 81.

<sup>20</sup> Von Uffenbach, *London in 1710*, p. 185.

both nodes in a network of knowledge production that cultivated and prized politeness, yet as Lisa Wynne Smith has observed, Sloane exploited conventions of modest sociability to further his career while Woodward promoted himself as a singular ‘genius’ figure (with mixed results).<sup>21</sup> His printed scholarship, like his capricious treatment of Von Uffenbach, emphasised that collector and collection were inseparable. Woodward criticised those who would have natural history collections ‘restrain’d wholly to observations, without ever proceeding further’.<sup>22</sup> This, he said, was tantamount to amassing building materials without building a house, a ‘fantastic and extravagant’ activity.<sup>23</sup> Woodward’s alternative, the ‘only proper end of collections’, was ‘building a structure of philosophy’ out of one’s collected objects, crafting a universal theory by which human knowledge could benefit.<sup>24</sup> Woodward’s printed catalogues enact this dialectic: descriptions of physical specimens attest to a universal theory, which becomes the ‘structure of philosophy’ through which the specimens can be understood.

Restricting the interpretation of a collection ‘wholly to observations’ was a useless activity, but equally Woodward scorned the drawing of conclusions from too little physical evidence, disparaging the work of Martin Lister on these grounds.<sup>25</sup> In his first major geological tract, *An Essay toward a Natural History of the Earth* (1695), Woodward dismissed the popular theory that despite their resemblance to living flora and fauna, fossils were *lusus naturae*, spontaneous productions of nature in rock. This interpretation, he said, relied on a ‘transient and perfunctory examination of things’, not ‘rigorous scrutiny’ which would reveal that fossils were the remains of animals and plants, not merely coincidental resemblances.<sup>26</sup> Woodward called these kinds of fossils ‘extraneous’: containing animal and plant forms, in contrast to the ‘native’ fossils which would today be classified as simply rocks or minerals. His fossils facilitated ‘ocular Demonstration’ of this: he kept seeds, coral, and bones taken from living species, ‘ready to shew any one that might happen to [...] Doubt’.<sup>27</sup> In Woodward’s strategy of display, as in his printed catalogues, specimens were organised according to principles of ‘rigorous scrutiny’ to support a structure of philosophy.

This ‘rigorous scrutiny’ is evident in how Woodward assembled and classified, as well as displayed, his collection. In 1696 he published a guide on collecting, labelling and packaging natural history specimens from overseas, and later Woodward developed these instructions into a fossil collecting manual that he gave to his agents on their travels around England. This was published as part of *Fossils of all Kinds Digested into a Method* (1728), which stipulates affixing a written number to each specimen ‘in a continual arithmetical series’, as well as keeping journal

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<sup>21</sup> Lisa Wynne Smith, ‘Remembering Dr Sloane: Masculinity and the Making of an Eighteenth-Century Physician’, *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 42.4 (2019), 433–53 (p. 445).

<sup>22</sup> John Woodward, *An Attempt towards a Natural History of the Fossils of England* (Catalogue A), p. xiii.

<sup>23</sup> Catalogue A, pp. xiii–xiv.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* p. xiv.

<sup>25</sup> John Woodward, *A catalogue of the English fossils in the collection of J. Woodward M.D.* (Catalogue B), p. 5.

<sup>26</sup> John Woodward, *An Essay toward a Natural History of the Earth* (London: Wilkin, 1695), p. 8.

<sup>27</sup> Catalogue B, pp. 3, 109.

entries of where the specimen was found, at what depth, and what matter surrounded it.<sup>28</sup> These entries, Woodward notes, should be written *in situ*, ‘for fear of Mistakes, or Failure of Memory’.<sup>29</sup>

Implementing this kind of rigorous scrutiny in the collecting process was Woodward’s guard against mistaken conclusions. His printed catalogues contain an entry for a sample of lime collected at Lansdown, near Bath, which in 1659 Edmund O’Meara took to be the cause of the hot springs in the town.<sup>30</sup> This ‘abstruse and difficult’ interpretation, Woodward points out, was due to the fact O’Meara had failed to note the context of his find in a ploughed field, where Woodward says it was common practice to use lime as a fertiliser.<sup>31</sup> Woodward cautions that O’Meara’s abstract reasoning, without reference to ‘obvious and common’ physical circumstances, is the cause of ‘Errors without end’ in natural history writing, and future scholars should bear in mind ‘how far they rely upon a vast number of both Observations and Reasonings’ to supplement their first-hand knowledge.<sup>32</sup> As he reminds us elsewhere in his catalogue, ‘Evidence of Sense [...] is the highest Certainty’.<sup>33</sup>

According to Woodward the scope for error in observing and classifying fossils was much greater than in other areas of natural taxonomy. In *Fossils of All Kinds* he wrote that animals have received greater classificatory attention because interspecies difference is ‘so manifest and apparent [and] may be discerned with Ease, and almost first sight’.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand minerals need to be excavated, cleaned, and often broken apart – even then varietal differences ‘do not immediately fall under the Senses’.<sup>35</sup> When examining fossils, first sight is insufficient: we must consider how they ‘affect the Organs of Sense, the Smell and the Taste; as also the Touch’.<sup>36</sup> Consequently the taxonomy in *Fossils of All Kinds* includes categories of minerals that do or do not stick to the tongue, taste sharp or pungent, feel harsh or smooth, burn easily, can or cannot be polished, dissolved, or melted.<sup>37</sup> This gives an impression of Woodward’s frantic activity, experiment, and multi-sensory engagement with his specimens. Recognising the fallibility of ‘observations and reasonings’, he insists on first-hand experience and detailed contextual information for each specimen. The collector becomes an embodied interpreter, essential to his collection, who must see, taste, handle, weigh, break, burn, dissolve and scrutinise his specimens

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<sup>28</sup> John Woodward, *Fossils of all Kinds Digested into a Method, Suitable to their mutual Relation and Affinity* (London: William Innys, 1728) [second pagination], p. 93. This volume contains two paginations – subsequent footnotes will indicate where citations originate.

<sup>29</sup> Woodward, *Fossils* [second pagination], p. 104.

<sup>30</sup> J. Childrey, *Britannia Baconica; Or, the Natural Rarities of England, Scotland & Wales* (London: H.E., 1660), pp. 40-1.

<sup>31</sup> Catalogue A, p. 242.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Catalogue L, p. iv.

<sup>34</sup> Woodward, *Fossils* [second pagination], p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* p. 4. Woodward says that the traditional classification of gemstones by colour is an example of this, often mistaken by failing to take impurities into account (see Woodward, *Fossils* [first pagination], pp. 26-7).

<sup>36</sup> Woodward, *Fossils* [second pagination], p. 22

<sup>37</sup> Woodward, *Fossils* [first pagination], pp. 1-56.



in order to animate them into a useful taxonomy and a universal theory of the earth. Woodward transforms his scholarship and his collection into an indivisible singularity, governed by his own autocratic sensing and thinking body.

In its breadth and multivalence of observation, this embodied, multisensory method facilitated a deeper understanding of nature, but it also made Woodward's conclusions harder to communicate remotely, to his own exacting standards. By identifying that knowledge about fossils was hard to achieve merely visually, Woodward echoes Robert Hooke's frustration (explored in chapter three) that only a physical collection of fossils would do – drawings and verbal descriptions in print tended to be inadequate.<sup>38</sup> However, disseminating Woodward's universal theory depended on converting his observations into these visual media, and of the two he favoured written description. Writing to Johann Jakob Scheuchzer, who produced the only authorised translation of Woodward's work during his lifetime, Woodward instructed: 'express my sense as fully & diffusively as may be. Where that can not be done in few words, tis better to use many than leave ye thing obscure'.<sup>39</sup> Woodward's own catalogue entries are more thorough than verbose, as can be seen from his description of a sample of clay:

a.6. *Argilla Clay*, of a pale Ash-Colour. From *Thurston, Northumberland*. The Bed of it is about 3 Foot thick, and lies under several *Strata*, and particularly one of Coal. 'Tis used for making the Pots employ'd for melting the Glass-Metal at *Newcastle*: endures the Fire to admiration, and is probably the best for that purpose of any in *England*.<sup>40</sup>

Here we can see that, true to his instructions on taking field notes, Woodward focuses on the circumstances in which the specimen was found – the depth of the clay, how deep it lies, and what it is used for. This is prioritised over extensive description of the physical object in Woodward's collection, we learn only that it is 'a pale Ash-Colour'. The function of this entry, typical of Woodward's fossil catalogues, is starkly different to Grew's long descriptions of specimens' measurements and textures, which become perfected substitutes for viewing the objects themselves. Woodward's description of the clay is more label than representation, meant to be used in conjunction with the physical object, and associated with it through the designation 'a.6.', corresponding to a tag affixed to the specimen. Woodward may agree with Hooke that verbal descriptions cannot stand in for physical encounters with fossils, so in his catalogues he instead embraces the possibilities of written information to supplement multi-sensory examination, adding information inaccessible to immediate view.

If his catalogues were meant to be used in conjunction with his specimens, the need for pictures was diminished, and Woodward refrained from extensive pictorial representations of his specimens in print.<sup>41</sup> Engraving was lauded by figures like John Ray, who claimed that his *Method and History of Insects* (1705) would be 'blind and useless' without illustrations, but many natural

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<sup>38</sup> Robert Hooke, 'Discourse on Earthquakes' in *The Posthumous Works of Robert Hooke*, ed. by Richard Waller (London: S. Smith & B. Walford, 1705), p. 338.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Melvin E. Jahn, 'A Bibliographical History of John Woodward's *An Essay toward a Natural History of the Earth*', *Journal of the Society of the Bibliography of Natural History*, 6.3 (1972), 181–213 (p. 183).

<sup>40</sup> Catalogue A, p. 4.

<sup>41</sup> Price, 'John Woodward', p. 91 and Appendix 2.

historians worried that pictures were liable to be misunderstood without careful verbal annotations.<sup>42</sup> This was particularly concerning for Woodward, who knew from personal experience that engravings were vulnerable to an unruly multiplicity of interpretations, easily severed from mediating written description. In 1696 a review of Agostino Scilla's richly illustrated *La Vana Speculazione Disingannata dal Senso* (1670) appeared in the *Philosophical Transactions*, showing that the Italian artist had concluded that fossils were the remains of ancient flora and fauna, 25 years before Woodward made the same claim in his *Essay*. Accused of plagiarism, Woodward's defence (written by his friend John Harris) was that the reviewer had drawn mistaken conclusions based on Scilla's illustrations alone, and failed to understand Woodward's claims.<sup>43</sup> When Woodward eventually acquired Scilla's collection, he noted in Scilla's own copy of *La Vana Speculazione* that its drawings were best interpreted as 'an appendix' to his catalogues of foreign fossils.<sup>44</sup> Coupled with Woodward's distrust of sight alone as an adequate means to identify fossils, this encounter suggests why he printed only a small number of engravings of his collection, and these more diagrammatic than representative of particular specimens.<sup>45</sup> During his 1710 visit to Woodward's collection Von Uffenbach recalled a volume in which Woodward's shells were 'tolerably well drawn', though this never made it into print, perhaps not sufficiently integrated into Woodward's intensely micro-managed interpretive scheme to be deemed publishable.<sup>46</sup>

Woodward's knowledge project was obsessed with its own indivisible uniqueness. Failing to acknowledge his sources in the 1695 *Essay*, the 'haughty arrogance and dismissiveness' of his prose, and their irreconcilable disagreement about the nature of fossils, caused Martin Lister to challenge Woodward to a duel in 1697.<sup>47</sup> On the Royal Society Council Woodward was aggressive towards Hans Sloane, and one member wondered whether their antipathy would be settled 'by the sword or by the pen'.<sup>48</sup> In 1719 Woodward again came to blows in a sword fight with Richard Mead outside Gresham College, following a vicious pamphlet war over competing

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<sup>42</sup> John Ray to Hans Sloane, 9<sup>th</sup> August 1704, in *The Correspondence of John Ray*, ed. by Edwin Lankester (London: Ray Society, 1848), p.448. For a discussion of the interplay of words and images in the Royal Society's technologies of representation see Alexander Wragge-Morley, *Aesthetic Science: Representing Nature in the Royal Society of London, 1650-1720* (Chicago, IL & London: University of Chicago Press, 2020), pp. 106-134. See also Sachiko Kusakawa, 'Picturing Knowledge in the Early Royal Society: The Examples of Richard Waller and Henry Hunt' *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London*, 65.3 (2011), 273-94; Felicity Henderson, Sachiko Kusakawa and Alexander Marr, eds., 'Curiously Drawn: Early Modern Science as a Visual Pursuit', *Huntington Library Quarterly* 78.2 (2015).

<sup>43</sup> For a full account of Scilla's impact on Woodward's career, see Paula Findlen, 'The Specimen and the Image: John Woodward, Agostino Scilla, and the Depiction of Fossils', *Huntingdon Library Quarterly*, 78.2 (2015), 217-61.

<sup>44</sup> Cambridge, Sedgwick Museum of Earth Sciences Archive, DDF 857.

<sup>45</sup> Woodward, *Fossils* [first pagination], pp. 28-9. See Price, 'John Woodward', p. 91.

<sup>46</sup> Von Uffenbach, *London in 1710*, p. 177.

<sup>47</sup> Findlen, 'Specimen and Image', pp. 239-40.

<sup>48</sup> John Thorpe to Edward Lhwyd, 25<sup>th</sup> November 1708, quoted in Joseph M. Levine, *Dr Woodward's Shield: History, Science and Satire in Augustan England* (Berkeley, CA & London: University of California Press, 1977), p. 90.

theories of medicine.<sup>49</sup> This habit of pugilistic encounter (perhaps another means for Woodward to embody his theories) hardened the isolation of his practice, few in London daring to disagree with a scholar who, in the words of James Petiver, ‘suddenly designs to proclaim war, and damn all such as have medled with his province’.<sup>50</sup>

That Woodward’s embodied interpretation depended on the autocracy of his own body is most strikingly illustrated by Christian Erndtel, a German visitor to Gresham College, who was not allowed to touch the collection’s specimens, not even ‘with the tip of your Finger, neither look into his Books except he hold ‘em to you in his own Hands’.<sup>51</sup> This was a stark departure from a collector’s customary hospitality to learned guests, who would often be invited to handle objects – in an intellectual environment of bodily engagement with material knowledge, sight alone was often an impoverished way to experience an object.<sup>52</sup> When taken in conjunction with Von Uffenbach’s account of his own visit (during which Woodward recited his theories ‘ad nauseam’, punctuating them with encomiums to himself) a vivid impression emerges of a collector who refused to relinquish control, physically or intellectually, of his embodied ideas.<sup>53</sup>

In common with contemporary natural history collectors, the fossils assembled in Woodward’s cabinet were a collaborative enterprise that depended on carefully nurtured networks of correspondents, instructions to servants and agents, and discussion with other scholars – by some estimates Woodward’s correspondents numbered four hundred, though comparatively few of Woodward’s letters survive.<sup>54</sup> His printed catalogues note that a number of specimens were gifted to him, in *Fossils of All Kinds* he alludes to scholarly collaborators and servants who assisted his collecting, and extant notebooks show a number of different hands at work, amassing specimens and ideas.<sup>55</sup> Yet despite this evidence, the collector present in the catalogue prefaces, the one who constructs his legacy, is one for whom the work of unification and organisation was a solitary enterprise. By contrast, Woodward’s contemporary James Petiver used his printed catalogue to advertise the breadth and illustriousness of his collecting networks, recalling the benefactors lists of older catalogues like Hubert’s and Tradescant’s.<sup>56</sup> Woodward’s emphasis on gathering physical evidence twinned with his insistence on the exceptionality of his own

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<sup>49</sup> For accounts of the fight with Mead and Woodward’s quarrelsome relationship with the Society’s members see Levine, *Woodward’s Shield*, pp. 16-7 and pp. 84-92 respectively.

<sup>50</sup> James Petiver to Richard Richardson, June 1702, quoted in Eyles, ‘John Woodward FRS’, p. 401.

<sup>51</sup> Christian Heinrich Erndtel, *The Relation of a Journey into England and Holland, In the Years 1706, and 1707* (London: Morphew, 1711), p. 37.

<sup>52</sup> Constance Classen, ‘Museum Manners: The Sensory Life of the Early Museum’, *Journal of Social History*, 40.4 (2007), 895–914. See also Miles Ogborn and Victoria Pickering, ‘The World in a Nicknackatory: Encounters and Exchanges in Hans Sloane’s Collection’, in *Curious Encounters: Voyaging, Collecting and Making Knowledge in the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Adriana Craciun and Mary Terrall (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 113–137 (p. 127).

<sup>53</sup> Von Uffenbach, *London in 1710*. p. 178.

<sup>54</sup> Price, ‘John Woodward’, pp. 81-2; Levine, *Woodward’s Shield*, pp. 96-9.

<sup>55</sup> Cambridge University Archives, Add MS 9386.

<sup>56</sup> Petiver’s *Musei Petiveriani* (London: S. Smith & B. Walford, 1695-1703) is peppered with lists of ‘collections received’.

interpretation resonates with the span of his career between a Boylean and a Newtonian Royal Society. While the former had sought verification in discursive public display, for the latter external agents were increasingly a potential source of corruption and distortion.<sup>57</sup> Woodward's collecting enterprise was an extreme manifestation of this, crystallised when his fossils were donated to Cambridge University in 1728, and the Woodwardian Museum announced itself as 'got together by the Industry of one single Man'.<sup>58</sup>

### Constructing a Legacy

Woodward's formulation of embodied observation fuses the scholar and the specimen into an indivisible unit of natural knowledge. In the context of his collection and its structure of philosophy he makes it clear that only *his* body possesses the authority of empirical interpretation. To this, Woodward's mortality represented a single point of inevitable failure, and his will wrangles with it across seven probate pages of intricate conveyancing, invocation and instruction. His embodied method lends special significance to even its most conventional of introductory phrases: 'being (tho infirm in body) sound in mind'.<sup>59</sup> This bifurcating phrase is transformed from a straightforward assertion of autonomy into a statement that highlights the forced dualism of the testamentary form, the splitting of a physical individual into an intangible legal authority and a decaying body, entombed here in parentheses. The will enacts the process of post-mortem disembodiment, in Woodward's case dismembering the triptych of collector, collection and scholarship integral to his method of interpreting nature. His death became an insurmountable obstacle to perpetuating a fully realised understanding of his objects and ideas, though an obstacle that Woodward nevertheless attempted to overcome.

Because it split mind from body, the testament was also a crucial instrument for constructing post-mortem identity. As Karen Sneddon has noted, the will form contains a radical capacity for 'individualised [...] representation' and a huge variety in content and intent, its language imbued with a unique power.<sup>60</sup> The legal historian Lawrence Friedman has commented on wills' 'half-mystical phrases' like 'I give and bequeath' and 'I hereby will and order' that contain autonomous authority, a 'kind of magic'.<sup>61</sup> The 'magic' Friedman evokes is intertwined with the will as a performative utterance: its bequests and conveyances are enacted by the words themselves.<sup>62</sup> Only authoritative after the death of the uttering body, this utterance takes on another quality: it constitutes the testator's identity, re-embodying their authority and ownership of their personal

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<sup>57</sup> Steven Shapin, 'The Mind Is Its Own Place': Science and Solitude in Seventeenth-Century England', *Science in Context*, 4.1 (1990), 191–218 (p. 206).

<sup>58</sup> Woodward, *Fossils* [first pagination], p. x.

<sup>59</sup> London, National Archives, PROB 11.622.25. All subsequent quotations taken from this copy.

<sup>60</sup> Karen J. Sneddon, 'The Will as Personal Narrative', *The Elder Law Journal*, 20.2 (2013), 355–410 (p. 409).

<sup>61</sup> Lawrence Friedman, *Dead Hands: A Social History of Wills, Trusts, and Inheritance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009). pp. 69, 63.

<sup>62</sup> J.L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*, ed. by J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975).

estate. A proxy for the testator's presence, in the case of the collector a will becomes a crucial mechanism of resistance against the threat of a collection's dissolution or dispersal after death.

Woodward's career as a collector, from 1688 to 1728, spanned a period when institutional museums were gaining legitimacy alongside the continued proliferation of private collections among the scientific communities all over Europe. In Britain the Ashmolean had been founded in 1683 to consolidate the university's existing museum collections and house future donations, and was actively courting collectors for their specimens – Woodward himself donated a number of fossils in 1717.<sup>63</sup> Yet guaranteeing the implementation of a legacy was nearly impossible, especially among scholars whose museums, libraries and notes (constructed by collaborative knowledge networks and shared among them) were vulnerable after their owner's death, liable to be sold piecemeal by uninterested offspring or misinterpreted by former friends. As Elizabeth Yale has shown, the institutional museum offered a semblance of security for individual legacy, an ostensible adherence to a set of values that would protect the bequeathed objects, along with their meaning, beyond the lifespan of contemporaries.<sup>64</sup> Yale demonstrates that in the late seventeenth century, institutional collecting had yet to fully realise its associations with permanence, but as Samuel Peck's comments suggest, by 1778 the idea that a corporate body could 'never die' made it a more attractive beneficiary for one's personal, intellectual estate.

The legal rhetoric of wills solidifies the distinction between impermanent individual bodies and perpetual corporate bodies, especially in relation to the construction of institutional museums. Woodward's testament wraps his collection in the language of 'forever' and 'every year', generalising the trustees of his museum from specific individuals to *ex officio* positions, bishops and chancellors who were perpetual tokens of the University of Cambridge and the Church of England. Likewise, the will cements both specimens and scholarship in universal values: 'setting forth the wisdom of God in the worke of nature, to the advancement of usefull knowledge, and to the profit and benefitt of the publick'. For Woodward, who bound up his personal identity so closely with his objects and ideas, the dissolution of his collection would mark the dissolution of himself. He composed his will with meticulous care, evident in Peck's comments on the document's deployment of the 'legal style' of Cambridge University, and also in a letter Woodward wrote to Arthur Charlett, the Master of University College, Oxford, enquiring after 'the proper legal style and title given to the university in settlements, deeds, or other like instruments', at a time when he was considering bequeathing his collection to Oxford.<sup>65</sup> The letter to Charlett also reveals the end to which this legacy crafting was intended – 'wholey to the promotion of vertue and learning'.<sup>66</sup> The emphasis on wholeness, Woodward directing his objects towards a single purpose, echoes the collection during his life: a complete structure of philosophy greater than the sum of its individual artefacts.

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<sup>63</sup> For details of this gift see Woodward's correspondence with Arthur Charlett, Master of University College Oxford, at Cambridge University Archives, Add MS 7647, ff. 87-9; and Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ballard 24, f. 81.

<sup>64</sup> Elizabeth Yale, *Sociable Knowledge: Natural History and the Nation in Early Modern Britain* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

<sup>65</sup> John Woodward to Arthur Charlett, 18<sup>th</sup> August 1720, Bodleian Library, MS Ballard 24, f. 85.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

The symbiosis of specimens and scholarship is manifested in the will's demands, which stipulate that two cabinets of Woodward's fossils be donated to Cambridge and the other two be sold at auction (along with his books, antiquities, and other personal effects). Woodward ordered that the proceeds from this sale should be used to purchase a piece of land, the rental income of which should be used to pay a lecturer who was to deliver four lectures per year on subjects dealt with in Woodward's printed scholarship, as well as managing the two cabinets of English fossils, showing them to 'curious and intelligent persons' free of charge. Meanwhile, Woodward gave the publishing rights to his works to the university, on the conditions that they never went out of print, and were never priced so high as to hinder their sale.

Woodward hence orchestrated a complex transmutation of his material goods (including part of his fossil collection) that first were liquidated via sale, then became land, rental income, and finally a salary to sustain the vitality of his scholarship in the person of the lecturer. A portion of his goods then became fossils again, as £10 per annum was set aside to augment the collection. Just as Woodward's printed catalogues represent the textual knitting together of his specimens into a universal theory, this transmutation of goods shows a collection manipulated, trimmed and streamlined into a single, unified entity. The construction of this entity was a higher priority than transmitting all specimens and papers to posterity. Woodward was willing to sacrifice two cabinets of fossils via sale in order to establish the lectureship: by his own admission these areas of his collection (the foreign and additional English fossils) were the least assimilated into his overall structure of philosophy.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, Woodward asked that his personal papers be burnt after his death – the museum and associated lecturer were the totality of his legacy, an entity which, as closely as possible, replicated the closed system of embodied self-reference he promoted during his lifetime.

As a facet of this entity, the terms of the lectureship have attracted a lot of scholarly attention. Only bachelors could be chosen, lest 'the care of a wife and children should take the lecturer too much from study and the Care of the lectures', and they must maintain correspondence with other scholars 'on the subjects directed to be treated of in the lectures'. In the museum, the lecturer 'himself shall be alwaies present when they [the fossils] are shewne'. The demands construct a proxy physicality for Woodward himself, mapped closely onto his own habits of communication, research, and lifelong bachelorhood. The resemblance between Woodward and this *ex officio* successor has prompted charges of egotism, Roy Porter claiming the 'monstrous self-importance' of Woodward reduces the lecturer to 'a priest performing solemn masses for the departed', prevented from advancing geological knowledge.<sup>68</sup> Porter echoes a sentiment popularised by John Clark and Thomas Hughes in 1890, who suggested that 'Woodward's primary object in this foundation was the permanent commemoration of himself [...] Geology was not, in his eyes, more important than Medicine or Botany', provided his collections remained intact.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Catalogue L, pp. iii-iv.

<sup>68</sup> Porter, 'John Woodward', p. 340.

<sup>69</sup> Clark and Hughes, *Life and Letters*, p.185.

These comments highlight the motivations of personal aggrandisement behind the foundation of a public museum; they correlate with Woodward's eccentricity, his failure to deploy self-effacing sociability with the same subtlety as contemporaries like Sloane.<sup>70</sup> Yet addressing the bequest in these terms overlooks how the Woodwardian Museum and its associated lecturer emerged from the distinctive theory and practice of Woodward's collecting. Clark and Hughes's suggestion that geology was incidental to Woodward's legacy ignores the meticulous craft that he devoted to his specimens and catalogues; it rehearses the nineteenth-century perspective (propagated by Charles Lyell) that pre-1800 geology lacked scholarly rigour or scientific value due to its pre-disciplinarity.<sup>71</sup> Despite the growth of a less dismissive approach in the mid-twentieth century, Woodward's apparent eccentricity has made Clark and Hughes's opinion particularly persistent.<sup>72</sup> Only recently have the intricacies of Woodward's bequest begun to garner more subtle scholarly attention, Sean Silver offering a Baudrillardian account of the lecturer as manifesting the 'autogenetic function' of the Woodwardian collection, its ability to sustain itself as a closed system of self-reference in which Woodward himself is continually reflected in the lecturer's research and correspondence, echoing the mirrors in Woodward's Gresham rooms.<sup>73</sup> However, Silver goes on to suggest this could be read as a facet of Woodward's 'well known' homosexuality, and in this respect prolongs a discourse begun by Woodward's contemporaries that erroneously conflates his childlessness with his sexual preferences.<sup>74</sup> In the final section of this essay, I combine my analysis of Woodward's collection and legacy management to critically reappraise this discourse, insisting that childlessness must not be conflated with queerness and that maintaining this distinction is instrumental to understanding the character and conceptualisation of the early public museum.

### Instead of Children

Remaining unmarried was a condition of Woodward's professorship at Gresham College, as stipulated in the will of its founder – he had this in common with Robert Hooke, and leading Royal Society figures including Isaac Newton and Robert Boyle were also lifelong bachelors. Petiver too never married, writing to his friend David Krieg 'those that Marry doe well, but those that doe not, doe better'. Petiver's twentieth-century biographer Raymond Stearns cites this as evidence of his possible 'homosexual leanings', along with the 'intimate and unmanly salutations' with which he addressed letters to his friends.<sup>75</sup> Yet this aversion to marriage, partly institutionally mandated through the pseudo-monasticism of Gresham College and partly

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<sup>70</sup> Smith, 'Remembering Dr Sloane', pp. 433-53.

<sup>71</sup> Roy Porter, *The Making of Geology: Earth Science in Britain 1660-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

<sup>72</sup> Their pronouncement is copied verbatim by Eyles, 'John Woodward FRS', p. 416.

<sup>73</sup> Silver, *Mind is a Collection*, pp. 73-83; Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, trans. by James Benedict (London: Verso, 2002), p. 91.

<sup>74</sup> Silver, *Mind is a Collection*, pp. 73-83. Silver cites a number of contemporary sources for his argument; most are satirical pamphlets composed by Woodward's enemies.

<sup>75</sup> Raymond Stearns, 'James Petiver, Promoter of Natural Science, c.1663–1718', *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, 62 (1953), 243–365 (p. 247 n. 11).

culturally reinforced by a homosocial community of scientists, bore no necessary relation to sexual orientation.<sup>76</sup> In fact, Petiver's remarks are evidence to support Jan Golinski's view that early modern 'bachelors of science' were imagining a kind of asexual reproduction, a social-institutional world in which they could 'reproduce themselves' without women 'by initiating disciples to follow in their footsteps'.<sup>77</sup> Here are echoes of Francis Bacon's claims in 'Of Parents and Children', that 'perpetuity by generation is common to beasts; but memory, merit and noble works, are proper to men [...] the noblest works and foundations have proceeded from childless men'.<sup>78</sup> Refracted through Sprat's analogy that intellectual inheritance is best understood as a child imitating its parent ('to have their blood [...] but to add a new Complexion'), a context for Woodward's exacting legacy project, his intellectual progeny, begins to emerge.<sup>79</sup>

The homosocial culture, averse to marriage, was by no means accepted by contemporaries, and writers were quick to associate Woodward's unmarried status with his sexuality and perceived physical effeminacy. Von Uffenbach noted that 'in every respect he behaves like a female' and is 'unmarried, but *criminis non facile nominandi suspectus*'.<sup>80</sup> Insinuations about Woodward's sexual orientation intensified during 1719, when he embroiled himself in a pamphlet war with the physicians Richard Mead, John Arbuthnot, and John Freind, who took issue with his *State of Physick* (1718), exchanging *ad hominem* attacks in what Woodward's first biographer described as a 'ludicrous strain' of crude double-entendres.<sup>81</sup> These insults formed the beginning of the persistent discourse linking Woodward's sense of his own uniqueness with speculations about his sexuality. Silver's claim that the Woodwardian lecturer was part of an act of self-reproduction has its origins in these sources. Many of the pamphlets mocked Woodward's theories by doubling him through fictionalised disciples like 'Dr Tripe' or 'Dr Byfield', who wrote and thought like Woodward because they resembled him. Byfield could only understand Woodward's writing because his 'lean and delicate Constitution' and 'exterior Nature' resembled Woodward's, he could imitate the peculiar style of the *State of Physick* due to 'something very singular in our Nativities'.<sup>82</sup> The imagined Dr Tripe was presented as Woodward's sole ally in a world that

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<sup>76</sup> Naomi Zack, *Bachelors of Science: Seventeenth-Century Identity, Then and Now* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1996).

<sup>77</sup> Jan Golinski, 'The Care of the Self and the Masculine Birth of Science', *History of Science*, 15 (2002), 125–145 (p. 140).

<sup>78</sup> Francis Bacon, 'Of Parents and Children' in *The Major Works* ed. by Brian Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 352.

<sup>79</sup> Sprat, *History*, p. 51.

<sup>80</sup> 'suspected of a crime not easily named', Von Uffenbach, *London in 1710*, p. 178.

<sup>81</sup> John Ward, *The Lives of the Professors of Gresham College* (London: John Moore, 1740), p.293. See for example John Arbuthnot, *The life and adventures of Don Bilioso de l'Estomac* (London: J. Bettenham, 1719), pp. 20, 16-7; idem, *A Letter from the facetious Dr. Andrew Tripe at Bath, to his loving brother the profound Greshamite* (London: J. Morphew, 1719), p. 31; Richard Mead, *A Serious Conference Between Scaramouche and Harlequin* (London: J. Roberts, 1719), p. 15. Attributions of pamphlet authorship are taken from Levine, *Woodward's Shield*, pp. 13-5.

<sup>82</sup> *A letter to the learned Dr. Woodward By Dr. Byfielde* (London: J. Bettenham, 1719), p.4, attributed to John Freind in Ward, *Lives of the Professors*, p. 292.



considered him mad, a quixotic ‘Onos’ (‘ass’) eschewing polite discourse through claims to his own indivisibility.<sup>83</sup>

By their nature, the *ad hominem* attacks reinforced the bond between intellectual and physical identity, mocking one in terms of the other; this is most vividly realised in a pamphlet entitled *An Account of the Sickness and Death of Dr. W-dw-rd*. Its mock autopsy of Woodward’s body reveals physiological manifestations of his writerly mores: he is filled with (literal) bile, his rants escaping from him as hot air that causes him to ‘bark like a mad Dog’.<sup>84</sup> It also figures Woodward’s printed scholarship as a facet of his physical body by describing his work as his children. Figuring books as ‘Children of the Brain’ was widespread, but this pamphlet suggests that when Woodward saw his *State of Physick* ridiculed he lost ‘his indelible sort of Kindness’ for these children.<sup>85</sup> In a more extreme formulation, the *Letter from [...] Tripe* claims ‘All the Authors he has plunder’d are bound to Curse him, both as a Felon and a Murderer, for he has stole the Brat, and destroy’d it in the Delivery’.<sup>86</sup>

The scholar killing his own (intellectual) ‘Brat’, the testator satisfied only by reproducing himself in the body of the lecturer. It has been easy to oppose Woodward to Sprat’s ‘all Mankind’, associating his bachelorhood with queerness, his childlessness with a self-reflexivity that denies all futurity other than a kind of self-replication. These connections come under scrutiny in Lee Edelman’s configuration of queer identity, defined by its opposition to ‘reproductive futurity’ – the future itself as manifested in the child.<sup>87</sup> Edelman reappropriates the figure of the ‘future-killing queer’, whose egotism is so focused on the irreducibility of its individuality that it ‘admits no translation of its singularity’ into any idea of the future.<sup>88</sup> This figure resonates with how Woodward’s queerness has been perceived in accounts from Von Uffenbach to Silver, as well as depictions of him as an infanticide, an abandoner of his own intellectual children and murderer of others’ brats. Yet however neat, understanding Woodward using these paradigms has little evidential basis. Edelman’s formulation of queerness as the absence of children has been criticised for its failure to address the ‘actual meeting of bodies with other bodies and with objects’: we should reframe the discourse about Woodward in the same way.<sup>89</sup>

In today’s Sedgwick Museum, Woodward’s collection is housed in a display called the ‘Museum Woodwardianum’, a reconstruction of an eighteenth-century geologist’s study in which a desk, cluttered with papers and specimens, is surrounded by four walnut cabinets labelled ‘A’, ‘B’, ‘C’ and ‘D’ – the same furniture that is named in Woodward’s will. Woodward’s fossils are housed

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<sup>83</sup> *A Letter from [...] Tripe, Taunonomachia*.

<sup>84</sup> John Arbuthnot, *An Account of the Sickness and Death of Dr. W-dw-rd; as also of what appear'd upon opening his body. In a letter to a friend in the country* (London: J. Morphew, 1719), p. 6.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.* p.3. Jonathan Swift, *A Tale of a Tub* (London: Nutt, 1704), p. 52.

<sup>86</sup> *Tripe*, pp. 45-6.

<sup>87</sup> Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC & London: Duke University Press, 2004).

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.* p.50.

<sup>89</sup> Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC & London: Duke University Press, 2010), p. xxi.

inside these cabinets, out of sight of the general public, and the study itself is behind glass. Preserved in their 1728 scheme of classification, this historical collection is not in obvious dialogue with the present. Yet as Peck's commentary demonstrates, Woodward's legacy project is crowded with bodies interacting through time. Its purpose was to organise a physical collection into a structured forum for future generations of geological scholars, seeking to transmit Woodward's embodied methodology to new interpreting bodies. The collection's isolation today can be attributed to the same impulse that erased Woodward from the name of the Sedgwick Museum: the deliberate structuring of scientific disciplines in the nineteenth century.<sup>90</sup>

In his attempt to decode Woodward's will, reimagining the mindset of its dying testator, Samuel Peck conjectured that Woodward desired to leave his fossils

instead of children, to the fidelity of the best protectors he could find [...] he reasons and concludes in the following manner—To reposit his works and collection in a seat of learning that would never die[.]<sup>91</sup>

There is a sense that Peck is knowingly participating in the discourse that had already grown around Woodward's unmarried status, but his point is nonetheless an important one: in the stewardship of Cambridge University, Woodward could imagine a corporate existence for his fossils that would allow their identity as a collection to cheat death, left to posterity 'instead of children'. In one of the manifold prefaces to the 1728 catalogues, Woodward hints at an aspiration to fixed perpetuity for his museum, describing his specimens as 'so many standing Monuments' designed to 'give perpetual Attestation' to the study of natural history; his theories 'can need no other Proof than only a simple View of the Things set forth in the Catalogue'.<sup>92</sup> The catalogues and specimens are engineered to function symbiotically as a system of cross-reference, a perpetual structure of philosophy beyond Woodward's natural lifespan.

However, in this case a closed system does not imply completeness. In Woodward's testament, alongside the authoritative manipulation of his worldly goods, are moments of anxiety and palpable regret. In a departure from the characteristic legal tone, Woodward mentions his unpublished manuscripts:

I should have been greatly pleased that the times had favoured and my fortune and affaires permitted me to have finished and published them, in order to which I have so long studied and laboured with the utmost diligence and faithfulness, butt as things have fallen out I can now only leave them to be disposed of by my executors.

Here is the scholar who, facing death, must abandon the work to which he has devoted a lifetime – a cause of anxiety of which there are rare glimpses amidst Woodward's otherwise commanding legacy project. The prefaces to his final printed catalogues oscillate between claims to the unparalleled labour and genius of 'one single man' who orchestrated the collection, and laments

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<sup>90</sup> For an example of how this impulse affected eighteenth-century scientific collections see Dahlia Porter, 'Catalogues for an entropic collection: losses, gains and disciplinary exhaustion in the Hunterian Museum, Glasgow', in *BHJS Themes 4: How Collections End*, ed. by Jon Agar and Simon Werrett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 215–43.

<sup>91</sup> Cambridge University Archives, UA/0265/GEOL/1(1), ff. 3-4.

<sup>92</sup> Catalogue L, pp. iv-v.

of the necessary incompleteness of what Woodward was trying to achieve. He notes he was forced to leave out ‘any Descriptions at all’ of some of his specimens, and he hopes the defects in his catalogue will be supplied by those ‘into whose hands these Things shall hereafter fall’.<sup>93</sup>

This imagined future interlocutor is the key to perfecting the fossil collection, and its arrangement. For want of time, Woodward explains, in composing the catalogue entries he deprioritised the features of specimens that are ‘obvious and discernible at first view’.<sup>94</sup> In practice, this results in entries throughout the catalogues that record only the circumstances in which particular specimens were found, details not inherent to the material objects. He anticipates a reader of the catalogues who has visual access to his fossil collection, and similarly one who has ‘more Time and Incouragement’ than Woodward did, ‘to make further Observations, and draw up particular Accounts’ of the fossils he has neglected.<sup>95</sup> This statement, filled with the same tone of regret that punctuates Woodward’s will, is followed by a detailed account of what he would do, had he more time:

Would my other Ingagements permit that, I would put these [foreign fossils], and those of the former Catalogue, together; casting them jointly into the same Method [...] Then I would give the History of each [...] Next, I would note every Thing observable in the Body itself; its Colour; its Figure, Texture [...] Finally, I would bring each single Body to the Fire, to chymical Tryals, and all other Tests[.]<sup>96</sup>

This wish list of categorisation and enquiry reads as instructions, a guideline printed in the catalogue for how to continue Woodward’s cataloguing method which, characteristically, imagines Woodward’s first-person interpreting body as a generalised scientific agent, able to continue his embodied method into the future. Elsewhere Woodward notes that he has provided duplicate specimens on which to carry out his burning and ‘chymical Tryals’, instructions for which (along with how to collect, record and classify fossils) can be found in his *Fossils of All Kinds*, a compendium of instructions published alongside his catalogues, communicating with future geological scholars.

This refocuses our attention onto the Woodwardian Museum as a public one, an assemblage of fossils accessible to ‘all such curious and intelligent persons as shall desire a view of them’, for whom ‘a simple View’ would provide all the evidence they needed to believe Woodward’s universal theory, accessible in his scholarship. Considering his emphasis on multi-faceted, multi-sensory interpretation during his lifetime, for Woodward this ‘simple view’ is also a *simplified* view, the reduction of his embodied method into a one-dimensional sight of his specimens that echoes Erndtel’s experience of visiting Woodward – look but do not touch. Although it is simplified, via his publications Woodward engineers this view to be no less efficacious, supplemented by the printed catalogues, mineral taxonomy and collecting instructions published shortly after his death.

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<sup>93</sup> *A catalogue of the additional English native fossils in the collection of J. Woodward M.D.* (Catalogue C), p. iii; Catalogue B, p. 3. See also Catalogue L, p. iii.

<sup>94</sup> Catalogue B, p. 3.

<sup>95</sup> Catalogue L, p. iii.

<sup>96</sup> Catalogue L, p. iv.

Woodward's will (dated 1<sup>st</sup> October 1727) left his papers to be 'disposed of' by his executors, but on 12<sup>th</sup> October 1724 he left more specific instructions that these unpublished papers and correspondence be 'immediately burnt and consumed' after his death, despite many of them being fit for publication, according to his close friend Anthony Taylor.<sup>97</sup> Taylor's inventory of these destroyed papers reveals that they contained Woodward's correspondence, as well as miscellaneous geological and antiquarian tracts, but the most significant item is an autobiography.<sup>98</sup> The deliberate omission of a self-authored account of himself complicates claims of Woodward's fixation with perpetuating his own identity, and is perhaps emblematic of a scholar for whom the transmission of his ideas was of greater importance than the circumstances of his life.

Woodward's career was characterised by a hostility to acknowledging collaboration, and the construction of his legacy reads as a projection of his relentlessly embodied interpretation into a state of hermetic, fossilised perpetuity. However, this was not simply an act of killing the future, or curtailing the future interpretive potential of his collection by isolating it from subsequent scientific discourse and discovery. Characteristically, the perpetuity of Woodward's ideas was not conceived in the abstract, but centred in the realm of the physical, in the endlessly reiterating body of the electable lecturer, and the 'standing Monuments' of his fossils, both in the care of an institution that, in the words of Peck, would 'never die'. The Woodwardian Museum is more asexual progeny than autogenetic, not only generated by the self but envisioning and nurturing the embodied interpreters of Woodward's future.

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<sup>97</sup> Ward, *Lives of the Professors*, p. 299.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 298, 300.

## 5. Hans Sloane

Horace Walpole's 'The Entail' (1758) tells the story of a butterfly whose aristocratic pretensions turn the rose on which he sits into a lordly palace of gold thrones and silken tapestries. Contemplating 'the change of mortal things', he insists that 'Law can rivet down entails' and decides to write his will:

None but his Heirs must own the spot,  
 Begotten, or to be begot:  
 Each leaf he binds, each bud he ties  
 To eggs of eggs of Butterflies.

When lo! how Fortune loves to tease  
 Those who would dictate her decrees!  
 A wanton Boy was passing by;  
 The wanton child beheld the Fly,  
 And eager ran to seize the prey;  
 But too impetuous in his play,  
 Crush'd the proud Tenant of an hour,  
 And swept away the Mansion-Flow'r.<sup>1</sup>

The insect's attempts to rivet down his legacy in the legal apparatus of the will are swept away, along with his entire 'Mansion Flow'r', by the passing fancy of a child. There is a touch of comedy to the poem's account of a haughty insect unaware of its own fragility, but this is met with a more profound sense of tragedy, the precision with which the butterfly treats each of the rose's leaves and buds is undone instantly by an indifferent act of destruction.

It recalls the legacy construction of John Woodward who, as I argued in the last chapter, was (and has largely remained) an easy target for laughter. His quixotic fixation on a universal theory of the earth and the obsessive attention he paid to transmitting his entire intellectual project beyond the grave resonate with the butterfly's haughtiness. Although his legacy project was in no sense swept away (perhaps its opposite), Woodward's occasional melancholy reflections on the limits of his own life conjure the tragic and indifferent effects of death on his boundless intellectual ambition. As he reflected in his *Account of Some Roman Urns* (1713), in a rare moment of self-consciousness,

'tis [it] not the case, when once a Man suffers himself to grow fond of a Subject, not to be over far transported, and screw Things to a Pitch much too high for those who are only indifferent Lookers on, and not touch'd with the Passion that such a Writer may himself feel[?]<sup>2</sup>

For Walpole, 'The Entail' was a reflection on the futility of constructing a personal legacy. In a footnote, he explains that the poem was occasioned by his being asked, on the completion of his

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<sup>1</sup> Horace Walpole, 'The Entail, a Fable' in *Fugitive Pieces in Verse and Prose* (Strawberry Hill: for the author, 1758), p. 42.

<sup>2</sup> John Woodward, *An Account of Some Roman Urns, and Other Antiquities* (London: E. Curl, 1713), p. 20.

Strawberry Hill home, ‘if he did not design to entail it on his Family?’.<sup>3</sup> At the auction of his father’s collection at Houghton Hall in 1751, Walpole worried that his father’s legacy was being dissolved by piecemeal public acquisition. In ‘The Entail’ is the seed of this idea, which germinated later in Walpole’s life when he wrote ‘what is permanent? and what does not present morality and mortality to my old memory! and what a string vibrates on a *Houghton* demolished! [...] who knows how soon my playthings may fall under Mr Christie’s hammer?’.<sup>4</sup> At the time of the poem’s publication, Walpole had recently been involved in the management of another large-scale legacy project, assuming his role as a trustee of Hans Sloane’s collection in January 1753 after being named in the collector’s will.

Like Woodward’s, Sloane’s will was the primary instrument through which he mediated his collection post mortem. It constructed an elaborate system of conveyance whereby the museum at Sloane’s Chelsea manor house – numbering an estimated 50,000 books and manuscripts and 77,184 other objects at his death, and described in fifty-four volumes of manuscript catalogues – would be offered first to the British crown, then to a number of other European nations and learned societies, for the price of £20,000.<sup>5</sup> Like Woodward’s will, Sloane’s marshalled the value of this collection into statements about its attestation to ‘the glory of God, the confutation of atheism and its consequences, the use and improvement of phisic, and other arts and sciences, and benefit of mankind’.<sup>6</sup> The collection retained this identity when it was purchased by Parliament in June 1753, making it available for the ‘general use and benefit of the publick’ and recognising the usefulness of the ‘discoveries in natural philosophy, and other branches of speculative knowledge, for the advancement and improvement whereof the said museum or collection was intended’.<sup>7</sup>

Like Walpole’s butterfly, the ratification of both Woodward’s and Sloane’s testaments by public institutions was evidence of great faith in the power of law, and the will form, to ‘rivet down entails’. Also like the butterfly, Walpole saw a comic side to the process of fulfilling Sloane’s grand ideas about his collection. Writing to Horace Mann in February 1753, Walpole said

You will scarce guess how I employ my time; chiefly at present in the guardianship of embryos and cockleshells. Sir Hans Sloane is dead, and has made me one of the trustees

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<sup>3</sup> Walpole, ‘The Entail’, p. 40.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Cynthia Wall, ‘The English Auction: Narratives of Dismantlings’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 31.1 (1997), 1-25 (pp. 2, 10).

<sup>5</sup> *Authentic Copies of the Codicils belonging to the Last Will and Testament of Sir Hans Sloane, Bart. deceased* (London: D. Browne, 1753), pp. 34-5. The total of fifty-four catalogues differs from the total of forty-six given in Sloane’s will, instead corresponding to the tally given by his curator, James Empson, to the British Museum trustees in 1754. See Marjorie Caygill, ‘Sloane’s Catalogues and the Arrangement of his Collections’ in *From Books to Bezoars: Sir Hans Sloane and His Collections* ed. Arthur MacGregor, Michael Hunter, Alison Walker (London: British Library, 2012), 120–136 (p. 121).

<sup>6</sup> Hans Sloane, *The Will of Sir Hans Sloane, Bart., Deceased* (London: J. Virtuoso, 1753), p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> London, Parliamentary Archives, *British Museum Act 1753* (26 George II c.22), f. 334.

to his museum [...] He valued it at fourscore thousand; and so would any body who loves hippopotamuses, sharks with one ear, and spiders as big as geese!<sup>8</sup>

Walpole points out an incongruity between the grandeur of Sloane's bequest, the vast sum he demanded for it, and the physical objects that made up the collection. As in 'The Entail', he pokes fun at the amount of serious attention being granted to things not worthy of it, in the case of Sloane's collection both quotidian objects like cockleshells and ridiculous, outlandish rarities more suited to a moment's glance at a raree-show. The joke that collectors spent too much time and money on insignificant trifles was, by 1753, a well-worn trope in a corpus of satirical literature that scorned the natural philosopher. Both Woodward and Sloane were the targets of direct attacks, the former as the cuckold 'Dr. Fossil' in John Gay's *Three Hours After Marriage* (1717), the latter as William King's *Transactioneer* (1700).<sup>9</sup> Sloane later became Edward Young's 'foremost toyman of his time' who longs for 'one new butterfly'.<sup>10</sup>

A prolific collector himself, Walpole was engaged in this literary treatment of Sloane, annotating Sloane's name to Young's euphemistic 'S----' in his copy of *The Love of Fame* (1728).<sup>11</sup> There is a fruitful connection between Young's poem, in which butterflies are emblematic of the frivolousness of Sloane's collecting habits (mere playthings for the 'toyman') and Walpole's choice of a butterfly for 'The Entail', a proud creature that becomes a child's toy, its pretensions to legacy rendered ludicrous by its evanescence. Taken up by satirists like Mary Astell, William King, Alexander Pope and Joseph Addison, the butterfly became the perfect symbol for the folly of the natural history collector.<sup>12</sup> The insect's physical fragility, elusiveness, colourful variety and ephemeral status all symbolised the triviality and misapplication of value that characterised perceptions of the virtuoso collector.<sup>13</sup>

As I turn towards Sloane's legacy project in this final chapter, I focus on the significance of his will as a published document. Expressing some of the same ambitions as Woodward's, Sloane's will engaged more directly both with the contemporary literary discourse surrounding collecting, and with the form of the printed will, a popular form during the early eighteenth century. Near contemporaries, Woodward and Sloane shared superficially similar careers, interests and spheres of acquaintance – to the extent that it contributed to a recurring animosity between them.

<sup>8</sup> Horace Walpole to Horace Mann, 14<sup>th</sup> February 1753. Quoted in Barbara M. Benedict, 'From Benefactor to Entrepreneur: Sloane's Literary Reputation 1685–1800' in *From Books to Bezoars*, 33–40 (p. 40).

<sup>9</sup> John Gay, *Three Hours After Marriage: A Comedy* (London: Lintot, 1717); William King, *The Transactioneer* (London: n.p., 1700).

<sup>10</sup> Edward Young, *The Love of Fame, The Universal Passion* (London: Tonson, 1728), p. 70.

<sup>11</sup> Walpole's copy is now British Library, C.45.c.18.

<sup>12</sup> Mary Astell *An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex* (London: Roper et al, 1696), p. 97; King, *The Transactioneer*, pp. 35–6; Alexander Pope, *The Poems of Alexander Pope* ed. John Butt (Newhaven, CT: Yale University Press, 1963), pp. 588, 608; Joseph Addison, 'The Tatler' 216, 26<sup>th</sup> August 1710 and 221, 7<sup>th</sup> September 1710 in *The Tatler*, ed. Donald F. Bond, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), iii.133, iii.154–5. All subsequent references to *The Tatler* from this edition.

<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, lepidopterology was gaining traction in Royal Society circles thanks to the interventions of James Petiver, who attempted the first taxonomy of British butterfly species in his *Papilionum Britanniae Icones, Nomina, &c.* (London: for the author, 1717).

However, as I show in this chapter, these similarities throw their distinctly different collecting practices into sharp relief, and belie the contrasts in how the two collectors fashioned their collections into public institutions. Paying close attention to the will's central role in both these acts of conveyancing, I examine the form of the testament as a declarative mode and its analogical links to the collection catalogue. Through a precise analysis of Sloane's will as a legal and literary document that is both conventional and highly expressive, I suggest that as well as leading to the creation of the British Museum, Sloane's legacy project sought to reclaim the collector's public identity from the scorn of satire.

### ‘a Heap of any Thing, or every Thing’

Only a few years Woodward's senior, Sloane also ran a medical practice in London and, like Woodward, was not educated at Oxford or Cambridge. The two men were elected to the Royal Society eight years apart, and both became active members, Woodward appointed to the council and Sloane becoming the Society's secretary in 1693, before he was made president in 1727. Woodward started collecting fossils when he was in his early twenties, and Sloane developed an enduring fascination with palaeontology shortly after his arrival in London in 1679, aged nineteen.<sup>14</sup> The two collectors struck up a correspondence in 1689, and Sloane provided references for Woodward's admission to the Royal Society, but by 1697 an animosity had begun to develop, turning into a rivalry which came to a head in 1710 when Woodward was ejected from the Royal Society council for verbally abusing Sloane during a meeting.<sup>15</sup> As Lisa Wynne Smith points out, Woodward and Sloane's parallel careers, bound up with ideas of friendship, patronage and sociability, contained inherent tensions.<sup>16</sup>

As collectors, physicians and Royal Society fellows, Sloane and Woodward were connected, but their approaches to producing natural knowledge from material objects were radically different. Woodward was committed to the idea that a collection of natural specimens should work in symbiosis with a written, universal theory, each legitimising the other. He chastised ‘Those who would have the Study of Nature restrain'd wholly to Observations, without ever proceeding further’, calling this practice of ‘perpetually heaping up [...] natural collections’ a ‘fantastic and extravagant’ activity – like gathering together all the materials to build a house and leaving them in a pile, without laying a single brick.<sup>17</sup> Although Woodward leaves these individuals unnamed, it is feasible that this was a veiled attack on Sloane – in 1722 he had written a satirical pamphlet, *The Art of Getting into Practice in Physick*, whose object was even less oblique. For Woodward's enterprising physician,

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<sup>14</sup> Jill Cook, ‘The Elephants in the Collection: Sloane and the History of the Earth’, in *From Books to Bezoars*, 158–167 (p. 160).

<sup>15</sup> Joseph M. Levine, *Dr Woodward's Shield: History, Science, and Satire in Augustan England* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1977), pp. 85–92.

<sup>16</sup> Lisa Wynne Smith, ‘Remembering Dr Sloane: Masculinity and the Making of an Eighteenth-Century Physician’, *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 42.4 (2019), 433–53 (p. 443).

<sup>17</sup> John Woodward, *An Attempt Towards a Natural History of the Fossils of England* (London: Fayram et al, 1729), pp. xiii–xiv.



in purchasing and heaping together a Mountain of Books, 'tis no great Matter, tho' you should have the same Piece ten Times over; or whether you should ever read one of them. And if to these you should add a Heap of any Thing, or every Thing, you will then accordingly be judged to understand every Thing, and acquire the Reputation of a very Learned and Ingenious Gentleman[.]<sup>18</sup>

By 1722, this was a reasonable portrait of Sloane's collection. Unlike Woodward's decision to focus his energy on fossils alone, Sloane's enterprise seemed to be co-extensive with all fields of study. It is conceivable that this was a source of Woodward's resentment for Sloane – with access to the resources Sloane had, he may have been able to range beyond fossils to form a more generalised collection. Resentment aside, Woodward is right to suggest that Sloane owned far more books than he could ever read – since 1698, Sloane had employed a series of assistants to manage the library on his behalf. In 1722 Johann Gaspar Scheuchzer began working as Sloane's librarian, and the fact that his hand can be found in catalogues of other areas of the collection suggest that its scale was compelling Sloane to delegate more of his organisational duties.<sup>19</sup>

Beyond Sloane's library, he spent a lifetime gathering natural history specimens, cultural artefacts, prints, drawings and manuscripts from around the world. True to Woodward's comments, this collection of 'every Thing' soon earned Sloane a 'Learned and Ingenious' reputation. In 1691, two years after Sloane returned from Jamaica with a ship full of flora and fauna from the island, John Evelyn recorded that 'Dr Sloane's curiosities' constituted 'an universal collection of the natural productions of Jamaica'.<sup>20</sup> Over the next thirty years, Sloane amassed a personal fortune through an increasingly illustrious medical practice and his marriage to Elizabeth Rose, the widow of a Caribbean plantation owner. Consequently, he was able to grow his collection beyond the natural specimens of Jamaica to include scientific instruments, antiquities, coins, medals and artefacts gathered from European auctions, the estates of deceased colleagues, and a global network of correspondence which he brokered both personally and in his official role as the secretary of the Royal Society. From 1725 onwards Sloane's collection at his house in Bloomsbury attracted attention in the popular press, where Sloane himself was represented as the archetypally curious virtuoso, walking the streets of London on the hunt for rare and curious phenomena that would have the 'honour to be viewed by Sir Hans Sloane'.<sup>21</sup>

Woodward's sketch of Sloane's collecting is disparaging, but his suggestion that Sloane's library contained 'the same Piece ten Times over' comes close to articulating Sloane's distinctive approach to assembling his museum. To take one example from the library, Sloane owned fifteen copies of the *Pharmacopoeia Londiniensis*, published regularly during the seventeenth century, including five copies of the fifth edition. Three of these copies are so heavily annotated that Sloane numbered them among his manuscripts which, as Alison Walker has pointed out,

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<sup>18</sup> John Woodward, *The Art of Getting into Practice in Physick* (London: J. Peele, 1722), p. 17.

<sup>19</sup> Amy Blakeway, 'The Library Catalogues of Sir Hans Sloane: Their Authors, Organization, and Functions', *Electronic British Library Journal*, (2011), 1–49 (p. 33).

<sup>20</sup> John Evelyn, *The Diary of John Evelyn* ed. E. De Beer 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), v.48

<sup>21</sup> *The Daily Advertiser*, quoted in James Delbourgo, *Collecting The World: The Life and Curiosity of Hans Sloane* (London: Allen Lane, 2017), p. 201.

suggests that his collecting practice was attuned to the physical uniqueness of works that, bibliographically, would count as duplicates.<sup>22</sup>

The same applied to Sloane's natural history collections. In his proposal for the arrangement of Sloane's objects in the newly-founded British Museum, James Empson, Sloane's principal curator during the last decade of his life, explained to the museum's trustees that 'the late Sir Hans always protested against [...] a notion' that two or more specimens could be considered 'exactly the same'. Although such objects 'commonly are called Duplicates', 'even these will be found to be Specimens differing from each other, though passing under one and the same Class or Division'.<sup>23</sup> Here, Empson is referring to Sloane's fossil collection, the repetitiveness of which is evident in his manuscript catalogues where many specimens are listed only as 'the same'.<sup>24</sup> It gives the impression that, in Woodward's words, Sloane was 'perpetually heaping up' objects that other collectors would consider unnecessary duplicates.<sup>25</sup> However, this repetitiveness does not suggest carelessness on Sloane's part. Empson's plan for arranging the British Museum insisted that the objects be laid out in a manner comparable to their arrangement in Sloane's Chelsea manor house, to which he had retired in 1742 and of which the Swedish naturalist Pehr Kalm provided a room-by-room account of the collections' considered arrangement.<sup>26</sup> The inclusion of duplicates was a deliberate curatorial decision that stripped objects of their metonymic meanings. They did not serve as representative examples of broader categories, and hence were not properly 'specimens' but irreducible objects, speaking only for themselves.

Although there is scant record of Sloane's overall approach to collecting in his own words, this treatment of duplicates constitutes a positive statement about his attitude to the study of material objects. In chapter three, I explored the tension in the Royal Society's repository between textual and material knowledge, a collection of objects understood analogically as tokens of textual information in a way that marginalised their materiality. Drawing a contrast between this seventeenth-century approach and later collectors like Sloane and James Petiver, Claire Preston highlights how the analogical link between textual and material knowledge began to fade in the early eighteenth century, as collections grew larger and were associated more explicitly with Britain's ability to gather material riches from the rest of the world at scale.<sup>27</sup> In this

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<sup>22</sup> Alison Walker, 'Collecting Knowledge: annotated material in the library of Sir Hans Sloane', in *Archival Afterlives: Life, Death, and Knowledge-making in Early Modern British Scientific and Medical Archives* ed. Vera Keller, Anna Marie Roos and Elizabeth Yale (Leiden: Brill, 2018) 222–40 (p. 234). These observations are also indebted to Alice Wickenden's work on apparent duplication in Sloane's library, particularly his holdings of John Ray's *Catalogus Plantarum*.

<sup>23</sup> London, British Museum Archives, Original Letters and Papers 1, f. 42v.

<sup>24</sup> London, Natural History Museum, MSS SLO, Fossils, Vols. 1–6.

<sup>25</sup> For example, Ralph Thoresby donated antiquities to the Royal Society repository which he 'had duplicates of for [him]self', Ralph Thoresby, *The Diary of Ralph Thoresby, F.R.S. (1677–1724)* ed. Joseph Hunter (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1830), i.340.

<sup>26</sup> Kalm's visitor account, written in 1748, is translated in Arthur MacGregor, 'The Life, Character and Career of Sir Hans Sloane', in *Sir Hans Sloane: Collector, Scientist, Antiquary, Founding Father of the British Museum*, ed. by Arthur MacGregor (London: British Museum, 1994), 11–44 (pp. 31–4).

<sup>27</sup> Claire Preston, 'Commerce, Credit, and Transaction: the Rhetorical Origins of Big Science' in *The Poetics of Scientia in Early Modern England: Devices of Fancy*, ed. by Subha Mukerji and Elizabeth Swann (Palgrave: forthcoming, 2022).

environment, Sloane's attitude that there are no such things as duplicates – expressed by Empson – is a powerful attestation of the inherent value of gathering physical objects. For Woodward, there is nothing more futile than a pile of unused building materials; for Sloane, the pile is valuable in itself.

This was borne out in how the two collectors deployed their collections during their lifetimes. Woodward's scheme of interpretation relied on huge amounts of specialist knowledge and first-hand fieldwork, synthesised by him (and him alone) into a single, coherent body of research. Woodward took this tightly controlled personal mediation to its extreme, preventing visitors from touching his fossils, or reading from his books without his intervention; by contrast, Zacharias Conrad Von Uffenbach was invited to taste a bird's nest when he visited Sloane's collection.<sup>28</sup> Of the two, Woodward's was more unusual: customs of civility dictated that collection owners extend the privilege of handling objects to their esteemed guests.<sup>29</sup> Sloane's house in Bloomsbury became a 'study centre', visited and inhabited by scholars from his extensive acquaintance, who made free use of his objects for examining, drawing and engraving.<sup>30</sup> As a collector, Sloane's work was not primarily to interpret and research but to accumulate and organise. He did not (and could not) possess specialist knowledge about most objects in his vast collection so, in his words, the accurate arrangement and cataloguing of the museum became his 'major contribution to the advancement of science'.<sup>31</sup>

Framing the collection of objects as an end in itself accounts in part for Sloane's omnivorous collecting habits – he was interested in everything, buying libraries and collections wholesale to be absorbed into his own. James Delbourgo suggests that Sloane pursued a 'speculative natural history', scouring the world for things that appeared trivial but might prove useful in the future.<sup>32</sup> In this sense, Sloane's collection becomes a material instantiation of Robert Hooke's Baconian storehouse of information, discussed in chapter three, where facts should be stored like 'Timber for a building' as 'things of uncertain Use'.<sup>33</sup> Recalling again Woodward's heap of building materials, this pile, properly organised and stored, has definite potential usefulness. This focus on arrangement over analysis, the merging of textual and material knowledge, and the irreducibility of its constituent objects, all contribute to a sense of Sloane's collection resisting the kinds of verbal theorising that Woodward lavished on his.

However, Sloane's reticence about any overall interpretive scheme became increasingly problematic as his collection gained fame and grew in scale. Without a conventional or explicitly

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<sup>28</sup> Christian Heinrich Erndtel, *The Relation of a Journey into England and Holland, In the Years 1706, and 1707* (London: Morphew, 1711), p. 37; Zacharias Conrad Von Uffenbach, *London in 1710, from the Travels of Zacharias Conrad Von Uffenbach*, ed. and trans. by W.H. Quarrell and Margaret Mare (London: Faber & Faber, 1939), pp. 178, 187.

<sup>29</sup> Constance Classen, 'Museum Manners: The Sensory Life of the Early Museum', *Journal of Social History*, 40.4 (2007), 895–914.

<sup>30</sup> Delbourgo, *Collecting The World*, pp. 276–7.

<sup>31</sup> Hans Sloane to the Abbé Bignon, n.d., quoted in *Sir Hans Sloane*, p. 27.

<sup>32</sup> Delbourgo, *Collecting The World*, p. 163.

<sup>33</sup> Robert Hooke, 'General Scheme, or Idea of the Present State of Natural Philosophy' in *The Posthumous Works of Robert Hooke* ed. by Richard Waller (London: S. Smith and B. Walford, 1705), p. 35.

articulated intellectual purpose, the museum attracted contemporary anxieties about the bald materiality of accumulation. If Sloane was content for his objects to speak for themselves, his identity became increasingly intertwined with his possessions which, as Barbara Benedict has illustrated, presented a ‘disturbingly materialistic and unstable definition of selfhood’.<sup>34</sup> Common to the polemics and satires suspicious of virtuoso collecting was the fear that a man could squander his fortune, his morals and his household through the obsessive pursuit of trivial scraps of antiquarian or natural knowledge – as Shadwell’s virtuoso declares, ‘tis below a virtuoso to trouble himself with men and manners. I study insects’.<sup>35</sup> Matthew Prior fretted about the relativisation of value represented by collecting – with ‘every Man adding to his heap to compleat his Collection [...] any thing will do’, from cockleshells to butterflies to ancient manuscripts.<sup>36</sup> In this context Sloane’s determination to collect everything was particularly troubling, suggesting a lack of discrimination between useful and useless, valuable and valueless that perverted conventional systems of discernment. The virtuoso was a man, Mary Astell wrote, who would ‘give more for the Shell of a Star-fish [...] than for a whole Dutch Herring Fleet’.<sup>37</sup>

As collectors’ identities were bound up in their collections, Sloane’s omnivorous collecting habits gave rise to sarcastic comments, like Woodward’s, that Sloane must properly be ‘judged to understand every Thing’. William King’s satire *The Transactioneer* demonstrated that in 1700 Sloane’s acquisitiveness was already treated with suspicion. ‘He’s a great Man in every thing’, proclaimed King’s credulous virtuoso, an imagined disciple of Sloane’s; ‘he’s Universally Qualif’d: A great Botanist, a great Physitian, a great Philosopher, a great Man, and a great Naturalist’.<sup>38</sup> In King’s satire, Sloane’s cardinal sin was the corresponding credulity with which he edited the Royal Society’s *Philosophical Transactions*, diminishing the institution’s authority by publishing even the most spurious nuggets of scientific correspondence that came his way. In this role as the Society’s secretary, Sloane’s indiscriminate acquisitiveness was for information, not objects, but the effect was the same: ‘there is not an odd coloured or an ill shapen Pebble in the Kingdom, but the Secretary will manage it so as to make it contribute to the general heap of Transactions’.<sup>39</sup> Like Sloane’s physical collection, the *Philosophical Transactions* were a heap of everything through which Sloane assumed the pretension of universal wisdom, a self-regarding epistemology that King was able to mock in its own words, quoting extensively from the *Transactions*.<sup>40</sup> The virtuoso’s pronouncement that Sloane is ‘Universally Qualif’d’, for example, follows an extract which states that swallowing rocks (while therapeutic for birds) could be

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<sup>34</sup> Barbara Benedict, ‘Collecting Trouble: Sir Hans Sloane’s Literary Reputation in Eighteenth Century Britain’, *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 36.2 (2012), 111–142 (p. 113).

<sup>35</sup> Thomas Shadwell, *The Virtuoso* (London: H. Herringman, 1676), p. 49.

<sup>36</sup> Matthew Prior, ‘Essay Upon Opinion’ in *Dialogues of the Dead and Other Works in Verse and Prose*, ed. by A. R. Waller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907), p. 194.

<sup>37</sup> Astell, *Essay*, p. 98.

<sup>38</sup> King, *Transactioneer*, pp. 13–4.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* p. 16.

<sup>40</sup> King quotes from 62 articles published in the *Philosophical Transactions* between 1678 and 1700. Although his satire is aimed at Sloane’s editorship, only nine post-date Sloane’s appointment as secretary. See Richard Coulton, ‘The Darling of the Temple-House-Coffee-Club’: Science, Sociability and Satire in Early Eighteenth-Century London’, *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 35.1 (2012), 43–65 (p. 56).

deadly for humans.<sup>41</sup> By entertaining trivial truisms like these, alongside fantastical claims about a shower of fish and the surgical applications of bread and cheese, Sloane apparently sought to augment ‘the good of Mankind and his own Reputation’.<sup>42</sup> Commanding an empire of useless, miscellaneous information and objects made Sloane, for King, a ‘master of only scraps’.<sup>43</sup>

Benedict argues that the development of Sloane’s literary reputation reflected the reputation of the natural history collector more broadly through the first half of the eighteenth century, to the extent that it ‘serves as an index to the changes in the history of collecting’.<sup>44</sup> While her survey of Sloane’s appearances in contemporary literature is comprehensive and convincing, it underrepresents the extent to which Sloane was actively involved in shaping his own reputation, both among his Royal Society peers and in print. Michael Hunter notes that Sloane, despite commanding a ‘massive correspondence’, an ‘influential’ medical practice and ‘vast accumulation’ of objects, ‘remains surprisingly elusive as a personality’.<sup>45</sup> As I suggest in this chapter, Sloane’s reticence on his collecting practice and personal beliefs belies a sensitivity to and skill in manipulating his own reputation. As a facilitator and broker of information, an omnipresent proprietor of material knowledge, Sloane’s career recalls the ambitions of Elias Ashmole which I discussed in chapter two, particularly his self-identification with alchemical mercury – a universal, catalysing substrate whose lack of ego became a tool for exercising power across a wide range of fields.<sup>46</sup> Despite his antipathy to such kinds of natural magic, Sloane shared with Ashmole a talent for social climbing, a collection built on wealth from a strategic marriage, and a careful and deliberate approach to reputation and legacy crafting as a public figure.<sup>47</sup>

Sloane’s most dramatic intervention in the public reputation of his collection was his will, printed weeks after his death in January 1753, which authorised the purchase of his c.120,000 objects by Parliament, leading to the unprecedented state acquisition that created the British Museum, where Sloane’s collection joined the Cotton, Royal and Harley manuscripts. In certain aspects, the ways in which Sloane’s will dealt with his collection echoed Woodward’s: it subscribed its objects to furthering the idea of public knowledge, it stipulated that they be shown free of charge to visitors, and it conjured an elaborate system of government to ensure the integrity of the collection. In order to understand how Sloane constructed the will, and its significance to the creation of Britain’s first nationally owned museum, we must first examine the form’s legal, testamentary function as well as the specific literary context in which it operated as a printed document in the eighteenth century. Doing so is necessary to situate Sloane’s will in its context as the published will of a public figure, and the legacy apparatus of a collector.

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<sup>41</sup> King, *Transactioneer*, p. 13.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 66, 51-2, 13.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* sig.[A2v].

<sup>44</sup> Benedict, ‘Collecting Trouble’, p.112. See also her ‘From Benefactor to Entrepreneur: Sloane’s Literary Reputation 1685–1800’ in *From Books to Bezoars*, 33–40.

<sup>45</sup> Michael Hunter, ‘Introduction’ in *From Books to Bezoars*, 1–9 (pp. 3, 7).

<sup>46</sup> For a discussion of this dialectic see Kevin Dunn, *The Pretexsts of Authority: The Rhetoric of Authorship in the Renaissance Preface* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp. 103-17.

<sup>47</sup> For Sloane’s views on natural magic see Michael Hunter, *Magic and Mental Disorder: Sir Hans Sloane’s Memoir of John Beaumont* (London: Robert Boyle Project, 2011).

## The Will of a Virtuoso

Alongside the catalogues and elaborate will that made up his legacy project, Woodward described his fossils themselves as ‘so many standing Monuments, that give perpetual Attestation’ to his universal theories of the earth.<sup>48</sup> The seeming fixity of fossils lends them a monumental resonance, something that Sean Silver uses to read the Woodwardian Museum as an attempt at self-fossilisation, fixing Woodward’s identity in perpetuity through stone objects and declaratory documents.<sup>49</sup> In chapter four, I argued that Silver’s reading is compelling but slightly oversimplified, in view of Woodward’s embodied collecting practices. However, the analogical link between wills and fossils is a productive one: they both gain durable and readable authority through their impressions of permanence. Robert Hooke wrote that the ‘Impression [and] Characters’ of fossils are ‘the Medals, Urnes, or Monuments of Nature’, which will ‘far antedate [sic] all the most ancient Monuments of the World’, giving them a permanent, testificatory authority.<sup>50</sup> As discussed in chapter three, John Evelyn believed that the Royal Society’s written records could become a ‘Body of real, substantial Philosophy, which should never succumb to time, but with the ruines of Nature and the World it self’.<sup>51</sup> Woodward marshals the ‘standing monuments’ of his fossils through the will’s ability to construct a brand new institution, devoted to the pursuit of natural knowledge, and in doing so illustrates the capabilities of synthesising these forms into a collector’s legacy.

Inscription is of paramount importance to the durable authority of the will. Commenting on ‘trace fossils’ (impressions that objects have left in stone, like a dinosaur’s footprint) Robert Macfarlane calls them ‘stone memories where the mark-maker has disappeared but the mark remains. A trace fossil is a bracing of space by a vanished body, in which absence serves as a sign’.<sup>52</sup> Seizing on geologists’ use of the term ‘trace’, Macfarlane’s characterisation echoes Jean-François Lyotard’s language of the museum artefact as a ‘trace’, a fragment of an object or reminder of an event that recognises the loss of its original context, while affording that context a longevity beyond its usual duration. A trace, for Lyotard, is like a signature: it stands for a physical being but also anticipates the disappearance of that being. Through a signature, ‘the name escapes the vicissitudes of presence’.<sup>53</sup> Like the fossils of Hooke, Woodward and Macfarlane, a will represents a readable and durable attestation of its testator’s identity, in which their absence serves as a presence. Its declaratory form, ratified by a signature and seal, stands for a real individual and enables them to transmit their name, and authority, beyond the vicissitudes of their own lifespan.

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<sup>48</sup> John Woodward, *An Addition to the Catalogue of the Foreign Native Fossils, in the Collection of J. Woodward M.D* (London: n.p., 1728), p. iv.

<sup>49</sup> Sean Silver, *The Mind is a Collection: Case Studies in Eighteenth-Century Thought* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), pp. 73-84.

<sup>50</sup> Robert Hooke, *Posthumous Works*, p. 335.

<sup>51</sup> John Evelyn, *Sylva, or a Discourse of Forest Trees* (London: J. Martyn, 1679), sig.[A2v].

<sup>52</sup> Robert Macfarlane, *Underland: A Deep Time Journey* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2019), p. 79.

<sup>53</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *Postmodern Fables* trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 166-9.

Scholars of the history of the will have gravitated to the form's recognisability across time, generated by its conventional and highly ritualised language, as well as its simultaneous capacity for individual expression. As Clifton Bryant and William Snizek suggest, the will is instantly identifiable but also 'absorbing in the unusual variety of its form, content and intent'; similarly Karen Sneddon argues that the will's primary function is a synthesis of individual whims with operative legal language.<sup>54</sup> A written document that organises and distributes an individual's material possessions through authorised legal language, the will is simultaneously conventional and highly personal. In this respect it becomes a form of life writing, according to Adam Smyth's deliberately broadened definition, which seeks to challenge the long-held assumption (constructed in the nineteenth century) that life writing must be predicated on interiority, or the revelation of personal truth: for Smyth, this narrow definition ignores the wealth of life writing forms that express a self 'assembled through surfaces and things'. In Smyth's history of life writing, the generic tension he finds in autobiography is between the use of inherited conventions and the uniqueness of personal lived experience – observable also in the will.<sup>55</sup>

Both conventional and personal, the will functions as a form of life writing which, uniquely, constitutes the agency of its author rather than simply representing it. It does this through performative utterances like 'hereby', and also through its signature, a trace of the testator that imbues the document with a quality of fossilised permanence, allowing the individual to organise their possessions from beyond the grave.<sup>56</sup> Although the will has fulfilled the same legal function for centuries – its rhetorical constructions even pre-dating its written form – the early eighteenth century was particularly attuned to its richer literary possibilities.<sup>57</sup>

The testament was a familiar form for the early eighteenth-century reader – copies of the wills of at least forty-five individuals were published during the first half of the century.<sup>58</sup> The testators were mostly prominent scholars and literary figures like Matthew Prior, William Congreve, Gilbert Burnet and Jonathan Swift, or those responsible for notable public bequests, including Thomas Gresham's will of 1579 and Francis Bancroft's foundation of east-London alms houses on the site that was to become Queen Mary University of London.<sup>59</sup> In print, the wills were presented without great variation, the will text often appended to a memoir of the testator by an

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<sup>54</sup> Clifton D. Bryant and William E. Snizek, 'The Last Will and Testament: A Neglected Document in Sociological Research' in *The Handbook of Death and Dying: Volume Two, The Response to Death* ed. Clifton D. Bryant (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003) p. 927; Karen J. Sneddon, 'Speaking for the Dead: Voice in Last Wills and Testaments', *St John's Law Review*, 85 (2011), 683–754.

<sup>55</sup> Adam Smyth, ed., *A History of English Autobiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 2–4.

<sup>56</sup> For a discussion of performative utterances like 'hereby' see J. L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*, ed. by J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 57.

<sup>57</sup> For a discussion of the will's inheritances from oral tradition, Brenda Danet and Bryna Bogoch, 'From Oral Ceremony to Written Document: The Transitional Language of Anglo Saxon Wills', *Language & Communication*, 12.2 (1992), 95–122.

<sup>58</sup> *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, accessed via <<https://historicaltexts.jisc.ac.uk/>>.

<sup>59</sup> *An Exact Copy of the Last Will and Testament of Sir Thomas Gresham, Kt.* (London: n.p., 1724); *A True Copy of the Remarkable Last Will and Testament of Mr Francis Bancroft* (London: Curl, 1728).

associate, accompanying a selection of elegies, or the testator's written works.<sup>60</sup> All these features contributed to an air of dignity, respect and admiration for the testator, which was unbroken across the genre, reflecting what Joseph Addison dubbed the responsibility of memorials to be 'written with great elegance of expression and justness of thought, and therefore do honour to the living as well as to the dead'.<sup>61</sup>

However, expressing the dignity of death was not incompatible with enjoying wills as witty, literary texts. Writing as *The Tatler's* pseudonymous author Isaac Bickerstaff, Addison claimed that he had 'often read with a great deal of pleasure' the will of Francis Bacon, praising Bacon's originality in bequeathing his 'name and memory' to critics in order to claim control over his own posthumous reputation.<sup>62</sup> In another issue, Bickerstaff recalls the testament of William Noye, and 'that memorable passage in his will' in which he leaves his estate to his rakish son Edward 'to be squandered as he shall think fit' – a trick that leads Edward to reform, out of guilt and respect for his father's passing.<sup>63</sup> *The Tatler's* authors, Addison and Richard Steele, displayed a ready knowledge of the conventional features of wills, while demonstrating a repeated and familiar aesthetic enjoyment in reading wills as literary objects. Beyond Addison and Steele's periodical, a host of satirical 'mock' wills were published during the early eighteenth century. These often exploited the inherent dignity of the form to mock self-aggrandisement, used its listing structure to anatomise (and hence comprehensively ridicule) the pretensions of a particular testator, or deployed the testament's radical personal authority to reform society's morals.<sup>64</sup>

In *Tatler* 216, published 26<sup>th</sup> August 1710, Addison synthesised the form of the mock will with tropes from the existing body of satire poking fun at the natural history collector, writing the last testament of the fictional Nicholas Gimcrack, a reimagining of Thomas Shadwell's hapless title character in *The Virtuoso* (1676). In his prefatory remarks, Addison explains that fixating on the 'secrets and curiosities of nature [is] apt to alienate us too much from the knowledge of the world', by which he means human civilisation. He says that investing too heavily in 'gathering together the refuse of nature' has caused the virtuoso to 'set a greater value upon a collection of

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<sup>60</sup> Among others, John Le Neve's *The Lives and Characters of the Most Illustrious Persons* (London: Curll, 1716), printed copies of the wills of recently deceased public figures with short memoirs. The testaments of Joseph Addison (London: Curll, 1724) and William King (London: Curll, 1734) are printed alongside extracts from their writings. Alexander Pope's will (London: Corbett, 1744) is published with elegies from the popular press.

<sup>61</sup> *The Spectator* 26, in *The Spectator* ed. Donald F. Bond, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987) i.110. All subsequent *Spectator* references from this edition.

<sup>62</sup> *The Tatler* 133, 14<sup>th</sup> February 1710, ii.271.

<sup>63</sup> *The Tatler* 9, 30<sup>th</sup> April 1709, i.84-5.

<sup>64</sup> Those in the first category include *The Late King James's Last Will and Testament* (London: Jones, 1701); *A True Copy of the Last Will and Testament of an Old Deceas'd Parliament* (London: Moor, 1722). The second type includes *A Beau in a Wood* (London: Wills, 1701); *The Welchman's Last Will and Testament* (London: Bickerton, 1719). The last category includes *The Tatler* 7, 26<sup>th</sup> April 1709, i.64; *The Last Will and Testament of the Ch- of E-d*, (London: n.p., 1710). For a discussion of the will as an apparatus for perfecting society, see Crystal Bartolovich, 'Optimism of the Will': Isabella Whitney and Utopia', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 39.2 (2009), 407-32.



spiders than he would upon a flock of sheep'.<sup>65</sup> The agrarian image helps to set up the overarching joke of *Tatler* 216: instead of money, stock, deeds or other conventionally useful property, Gimcrack's will bequeaths to his family items like 'three crocodile's eggs', 'last year's collection of grasshoppers' and a 'whale's pizzle'. Addison extends the joke by reprising Gimcrack in *Tatler* 221 via a letter from his widow, who writes to the periodical desperately enquiring how she can sell Gimcrack's collection of beetles and other 'rarities and curiosities'.<sup>66</sup>

The sobriety of the will form allows Addison to convey just how seriously virtuosos take their collections, comical rarities following bathetically from its grave legal language. For example, 'to my little daughter Fanny [...] upon the birth of her first child, if she marries with her mother's consent, the nest of an humming-bird'; or 'my eldest son John [...] I do disinherit, and wholly cut off from any part of this my personal estate, by giving him a single cockle shell'. Addison also jokes with this eccentric virtuoso's conventional declaration that he is 'in sound health of mind' – in 1709, the son of the entomologist Eleanor Glanville contested her will on the grounds of insanity, citing her butterfly collecting.<sup>67</sup> *Tatler* 216 shows us how the will acts as a form of (fictional) life writing, a list of surfaces and things from which Addison's readers can infer the domestic and intellectual life of a virtuoso. It borrows the didactic capabilities of wills like Noye's, suggesting that while collecting and studying the 'refuse of nature' is all very well during one's own lifetime, in the end it becomes useless in the familial continuum of provision and inheritance. Gimcrack's sin is ultimately a selfish ignorance of the world outside his cabinet, and of the future he leaves for his descendants. His last words, reported in *Tatler* 221, are cold comfort: 'he had always been more industrious to improve his mind than his fortune; and that his family must rather value themselves upon his memory as he was a wise man, than a rich one'.

The concept of inheritance, as a facet of gentlemanly domestic management, had been used repeatedly to ridicule the figure of the virtuoso collector since Shadwell's *The Virtuoso*, in which Sir Nicholas Gimcrack (the namesake of *Tatler* 216) quixotically pursues his scientific studies and natural history collecting while his household falls apart around him. Cuckolded by his wife, Gimcrack's attempt to disinherit her fails when his entire estate is seized in order to pay off the enormous debt he has accrued in purchasing scientific equipment. At the end of the play, he is left destitute and deserted, even by his mistress who loves men 'but as far as their Money goes'.<sup>68</sup> As Tita Chico has argued, Gimcrack's experience of abandonment in *The Virtuoso* functions as part of the play's satire of natural philosophy as a 'non-generative activity', it squanders the financial resources of the virtuoso and ruins his sexual opportunities in the process. Chico suggests that Shadwell's play does not take issue with the pursuit of natural philosophy in itself, but with the arrogance of its practitioners. In the play, it is Gimcrack's arrogance that leads to his being conned out of money and exposed as a charlatan.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>65</sup> *The Tatler* 216, 26<sup>th</sup> August 1710, iii.132-3.

<sup>66</sup> *The Tatler* 221, 7<sup>th</sup> September 1710, iii.155.

<sup>67</sup> Pamela Gilbert, 'Glanville, Eleanor', ODNB.

<sup>68</sup> Shadwell, *The Virtuoso*, p. 99.

<sup>69</sup> Tita Chico, 'Gimcrack's Legacy: Sex, Wealth, and the Theater of Experimental Philosophy', *Comparative Drama*, 42.1 (2008), 29–49 (p. 38).

This trope continued into the eighteenth century, most prominently in John Gay's *Three Hours After Marriage* (1717), where Dr Fossil (a thinly-veiled Woodward) is made a fool by misapplying the values of collecting to human relationships. Referring to his wife, Mrs Townley, as 'thou best of my curiosities', Fossil's fixation on material evidence prevents him from spotting signs of her duplicitous character.<sup>70</sup> Benedict has suggested that Gay, along with his co-authors John Arbuthnot and Alexander Pope, are dramatizing the moral danger of scientific collecting, which subjects natural and cultural phenomena to equal levels of scrutiny, in the process threatening normative social relations.<sup>71</sup> Displaying his curiosities with pride, Fossil is unable to spot that one of his wife's suitors has disguised himself as a mummy in his museum, a collection which Fossil says will be a 'lasting Monument' to his learning.<sup>72</sup> His desire for posterity comes to fruition, in a sense, at the play's climax, when Townley is revealed as a bigamist and is forced to return to her estranged husband. A sailor enters with a child, Townley's from a previous affair, which Fossil is left to care for. Resigned, he picks up the child and addresses himself: 'Fossile thou didst want Posterity: Here behold thou hast it [...] thou art caressing a Child that is not thy own'.<sup>73</sup> This ironic conclusion fulfils Fossil's hubristic quest to achieve posterity through his collected objects. Playing off Fossil's blurring of people and collectibles, he initially mistakes the sailor bearing the child as 'one of my Retale Indian Merchants [...] that always brings me some odd Thing', and asks 'is the Child monstrous?' (i.e. an addition for his museum).<sup>74</sup> Fossil's acquisition of the child, forced on him by his adulterous wife, becomes his only contribution to posterity. The virtuoso's obsession with scientific objects undermines the integrity of his household to the point of ruin, and prevents him, in Gimcrack's case, from passing any meaningful wealth to his descendants.

In chapter four, I illustrated how Woodward's childlessness was seized upon by other contemporary satirists to mock what Chico calls the 'non-generative' nature of natural philosophy. Elsewhere, Edward Young took aim at the collector's dysfunctional legacy with a caricature of Sloane whose 'daughter's portion a rich shell inhances'.<sup>75</sup> In 1696, Mary Astell mocked the virtuoso whose inventory (his will, in this context) is merely 'a List of the Insects of all Countries, and the Shells and Pebbles of all Shoars', and whose time and money was wasted on subjects 'unheeded only because useless'.<sup>76</sup> Half a century later, Samuel Johnson reprised the virtuoso caricature in *The Rambler* as Quisquillius, a young collector ridiculed less for his legacy than for squandering his own inheritance, 'a small estate in land, with a very large sum of money' which he fritters away on hornets' stings and badly-drawn maps. Johnson emphasises the trope

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<sup>70</sup> Gay, *Three Hours*, p. 2

<sup>71</sup> Barbara Benedict, *Curiosity: A Cultural History of Early Modern Inquiry* (Chicago IL & London: University of Chicago Press, 2001), pp. 86-9.

<sup>72</sup> Gay, *Three Hours*, p. 46.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* p. 59.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* p. 53.

<sup>75</sup> Young, *Love of Fame*, p. 70.

<sup>76</sup> Astell, *Essay*, pp. 99, 103.

of poor domestic management through Quisquillius's decision to allow his tenant to pay his rent in butterflies, grubs and other insects.<sup>77</sup>

Addison's *Tatler* 216 was one among many works that relied on the trope of dysfunctional inheritance to satirise the collector. Representing anxieties about the virtuoso's self-authorised and unconventional systems of value, these works suggested that the non-generative aspects of collecting were doubly deviant. Firstly, the self-regard of the collector prevented procreation by jeopardising heteronormative sexual relationships; secondly, it ruptured the chain of patrilineal inheritance by squandering land, goods and money on heaping up the refuse of nature, objects that were meaningless beyond the span of the virtuoso's lifetime. The will played a crucial role in this body of satire, dramatizing the collector's folly as a form of life writing which, appropriately, was self-authorised by the collector. Recalling King's distinctive mode of satire in *The Transactioneer*, the virtuoso – isolated from sociable spheres of common sense – satirised himself.

### **'doing right to his Memory, and my own Reputation'**

However, as always, these satirists were oversimplifying the realities of their subjects for heightened comic effect. The inconvenient reality which undermined the central premise of works like *Tatler* 216 was that in contemporary London a box of beetles, a hummingbird's nest or a whale's penis could hold substantial monetary value for a deceased collector's family, if they knew the right people. On more than one occasion Sloane was approached to broker the sale of the 'treasures of a poor widow' who, like Lady Gimcrack, lacked the connections to gain a fair price for her late husband's collection of books or precious stones.<sup>78</sup> Thanks to James Petiver's friendship with Sloane, his sister made an estimated £4,000 from the sale of her late brother's entomology collection.<sup>79</sup> Contrary to Addison's belief, his city was host to a well-developed market in which the 'refuse of nature', sought from all over the world by London collectors, could fetch substantial sums.

Astell complained that although the virtuoso had 'Correspondents in e'ery part of the World', he wasted this global network on collecting insects and plants which 'serve not to promote our Luxury, nor encrease our Trade, and neither enrich the Nation, nor himself'.<sup>80</sup> Yet rather than presiding over vast, independent communication networks, collectors operated via existing trade connections and colonial infrastructure. Conducted within and between organisations like the East India Company, the Royal African Company and British political rule overseas, the flow of collectible objects into London was intertwined with systems of commercial trade, just as the

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<sup>77</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler*, (London: J Payne, 1752) pp. 96-105.

<sup>78</sup> Delbourgo, *Collecting The World*, p. 205.

<sup>79</sup> The sum is suggested by Raymond Stearns, 'James Petiver: Seventeenth-century promoter of natural science', *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, 62.2 (1952), 243–365 (p. 244).

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.* p. 97

acquisition of knowledge and the acquisition of wealth formed two complementary facets of Britain's colonial enterprise.<sup>81</sup>

Rather than useless bequests to uninterested descendants, collections more often entered the marketplace via auctions, a process hinted at in *Tatler* 221 when Gimcrack's widow describes the sale catalogue of her late husband's rarities 'with the two following words in great letters over the head of them, Auctio Gimcrackiana'.<sup>82</sup> Like the genre of printed wills discussed above, such catalogues were often prefaced with laudatory accounts of the collector's life and, like Gimcrack's 'great letters', functioned as memorials as much as adverts.<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless, post mortem auctions were a prolific means through which a collector's library or cabinet could be liquidated to the mutual advantage of their family and the European collecting community at large. Sloane owned sale catalogues for at least forty auctions that took place in western Europe during his career, many of them annotated with prices.<sup>84</sup> Delbourgo suggests that, in this sense, 'death was the collector's friend', an opportunity by which one could absorb the life's work of a fellow virtuoso into one's own museum.<sup>85</sup> Like Robert Cotton and Elias Ashmole before him, part of the reason that Sloane's collection was able to grow to such a scale at such pace was his access to collections at the deaths of their former owners.<sup>86</sup> However, as Cynthia Wall has observed, post mortem auctions were both opportunities for redistribution and threats to established social order.<sup>87</sup> In the case of collectors, the chance to acquire the possessions of a deceased friend, colleague or rival was twinned with the anxiety that one's own collection was equally vulnerable to dissolution. This dialectic was instrumental to how Sloane articulated his legacy project, and the legacies of the collections he absorbed.

Sloane's largest single acquisition was the collection of William Courten, which Courten bequeathed to him in his will. On 10<sup>th</sup> March 1701, Courten named Sloane as his executor, to dispose of 'what goods of any sort or other personall Estate I shall leave behind me' in order to settle his debts, amounting to £240 6s, and to cover his bequests. In a codicil of 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1702, six days before he died, Courten modified this to give to Sloane 'all the rest and residue of my personall and testamentary estate', once his debts were settled, for Sloane's 'own use and

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<sup>81</sup> Kathleen Murphy, 'James Petiver's 'Kind Friends' and 'Curious Persons' in the Atlantic World: commerce, colonialism and collecting', *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London*, 74.2 (2020), 259–274; Anna Winterbottom, *Hybrid Knowledge in the Early East India Company World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Simon Schaffer, Lissa Roberts, Kapil Raj and James Delbourgo eds., *The Brokered World: Go-Betweens and Global Intelligence, 1770-1820* (Sagamore Beach, MA: Science History Publications, 2009).

<sup>82</sup> *The Tatler* 221, 7<sup>th</sup> September 1710, iii.155.

<sup>83</sup> For example, *A Catalogue of the Library, Antiquities, &c. of the Late Learned Dr. Woodward . . . Which will begin to be Sold by Auction at Mr. Cooper's, in the Great Piazza Covent-Garden, on Monday the 11th day of November, 1728* (London: n.p., 1728).

<sup>84</sup> Sloane Printed Books Catalogue, <<https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/sloane/>>.

<sup>85</sup> Delbourgo, *Collecting The World*, p. 208.

<sup>86</sup> Cotton's collection was directly augmented by the deaths of individuals like Lord Lumley, Robert Cecil and Henry Prince of Wales. See Colin G. C. Tite, *The Panizzi Lectures: The Manuscript Library of Sir Robert Cotton* (London: British Library, 1994), p. 11.

<sup>87</sup> Wall, 'The English Auction', pp. 1-25

benefit'.<sup>88</sup> By May 1702, Courten's objects lay 'all in confusion' in Sloane's house, and although Sloane devoted much energy to arranging and documenting them, he did not consistently identify Courten as a former owner when he entered the collection into his own catalogues.<sup>89</sup> Yet while the catalogues silently subsumed some of Courten's objects into Sloane's possession, visitors to Sloane's Bloomsbury house suggest that Courten's physical collection was kept separate.<sup>90</sup> Fifty years after Courten's death, Sloane made reference to his bequest in his own will, noting that it had been 'subject to several debts and legacies which have been long since satisfied and paid, and his collections kept intire'.<sup>91</sup> This is both Sloane's statement of respect to his friend, and a reminder to the readers of his will of Sloane's request that his own collection 'may remain together and not be separated' – this should be honoured, just as he has honoured Courten's.<sup>92</sup>

Another collection that Sloane was able to acquire wholesale was that of his close friend James Petiver. Before travelling abroad to an auction on Sloane's behalf in 1711, Petiver had written to him that 'in case I should dy before my return from Holland, I make you sole possessor of all my collections of natural things whatsoever'.<sup>93</sup> However, when Petiver composed his will in 1717, he made no such provision for Sloane, nor for his 'collections of natural things'. Presumably grouped under 'household goods', Petiver's extensive entomological collection was bequeathed to his sister, as his executor, along with 'all the rest, residue and remainder of my Estate'.<sup>94</sup> Shortly after Petiver's death in April 1718 Sloane bought the collection for an estimated £4,000. Although Petiver's will overwrote an earlier promise of the collection to Sloane, there is no evidence to suggest that this was acrimonious, unlike the comparable circumstances between Ashmole and the Tradescants. Nevertheless, Sloane's narrative of the acquisition of Petiver's collection somewhat glossed over this payment to Petiver's sister. In the second volume of his *Voyage to the Islands*, Sloane insisted that Petiver 'always intended if he died before me, that his collections should come into my hands, which accordingly they did'.<sup>95</sup>

Sloane's public acknowledgements of the acquisition of Courten's and Petiver's collections – in his printed will and published work respectively – contain small but significant editorial decisions that demonstrate how attuned Sloane was to the importance of a convincing public persona as a collector. His descriptions of the two bequests hint at a frictionless and amicable flow of collection objects between mutually respectful virtuosi, implying that the mechanisms of bequeathing facilitate a smooth absorption of the natural knowledge of one's predecessors.

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<sup>88</sup> London, National Archives, PROB 11/464/151

<sup>89</sup> Sachiko Kusakawa, 'William Courten's lists of "Things Bought" from the late seventeenth century', *JHC*, 29.1 (2017) 1–17, (pp. 8,10).

<sup>90</sup> Von Uffenbach, *London in 1710*, p. 185.

<sup>91</sup> Sloane, *Will*, p. 3.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> London, British Library, Sloane MS 4042, f. 295.

<sup>94</sup> National Archives, PROB 11/563/273.

<sup>95</sup> Hans Sloane, *A Voyage to the Islands of Madera, Barbados, Nieves, S. Christophers and Jamaica* (London: for the author, 1725), II.iv-v.

Sloane presents a system of intellectual inheritance along the lines of Thomas Sprat's utopian vision of the Royal Society as a scientific collective 'whose Members were not brought up at the feet of each other'; a group of scientists who build on and augment the work of preceding generations without slavish imitation.<sup>96</sup> In Sloane's words in his *Voyage*, Petiver's objects take on an agency of their own, they 'come into my hands', seemingly of their own accord. Just as he would later insist that he preserved Courten's collection 'intire' so that it might contribute to the 'benefit of mankind', Sloane promises of Petiver's that

[I] will take farther Care, that what [Petiver] hath gather'd together [...] shall not be lost, but preserved and published for the good of the Publick, doing right to his Memory, and my own Reputation[.]<sup>97</sup>

By associating the virtue of preserving Petiver's collection 'for the good of the Publick' with his own reputation, Sloane implicitly addresses the charges of self-regard and intellectual isolation King had levelled at him in *The Transactioneer*. In King's work, the pompous unintelligibility of Sloane's *Philosophical Transactions* and the Royal Society's meetings transformed the ostensibly public institution into a quarrelling private club. Sloane's subtle handling of Courten and Petiver's bequests, conjuring a Sprat-like flourish of public-oriented scientific harmony, show he could manipulate the structures of inheritance to respond to these reputational issues.

Highlighting Sloane's origins in Ulster, his lack of independent means and persistent health problems, Lisa Wynne Smith has observed that while, in these respects, he deviated from the ideals of upper-class English masculinity, Sloane's profession as a physician was nonetheless reliant on the appearance of gentlemanliness. Smith argues that Sloane's success as a gentleman physician, collector and public figure hinged on his skill at personal 'oeconomy': the management of time, estates, collections and social appointments. This, she suggests, is what distinguished the success of his career from Woodward's, whose contrasting failure at self-mastery caused him to be ejected from the Royal Society Council following his dispute with Sloane in 1710.<sup>98</sup> Although Smith suggests that Sloane's posthumous reputation waned as these qualities became devalued, Sloane has avoided the kind of historiography aimed at Woodward, in which (as I argue in chapter four) the remarks of contemporary satirists have been recapitulated. The contrast in the two collectors' reputations was evident as early as the 1770s: while Sloane's legacy was being affirmed by a host of new Chelsea street names, Cambridge University was scrutinising Woodward's will for 'doubtful, impracticable, or mistaken' instructions.<sup>99</sup>

During their row in 1710, both Woodward and Sloane were guilty of indecorous public slurs – Woodward's verbal, Sloane a series of 'grimaces very strange and surprising' – but Woodward alone bore the consequences.<sup>100</sup> Smith says that the incident is evidence that, by 1710, Sloane had built up sufficient power and professional reputation through skilful sociability to demand that

<sup>96</sup> Thomas Sprat, *The History of the Royal Society of London* (London: J. Martyn, 1667), pp. 70, 51.

<sup>97</sup> Sloane, *Voyage*, II.v.

<sup>98</sup> Smith, 'Remembering Dr Sloane'.

<sup>99</sup> Delbourgo, *Collecting The World*, p. xxi; Cambridge University Archives, UA/0265/GEOL/1(1), f. 3.

<sup>100</sup> Anonymous letter to Isaac Newton, 28<sup>th</sup> March 1710, quoted in David Brewster, *Memoirs of the Life, Writings, and Discoveries of Sir Isaac Newton*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T. Constable, 1855), ii.245.

the Royal Society Council take his side. Woodward's 'continued lack of gentility' demonstrated that he did not possess these skills to the same degree.<sup>101</sup> This is a compelling example of how Sloane could wield his existing reputation, and his subsequent handling of the event shows that, as with Courten and Petiver, he was equally concerned with how to preserve his reputation through written records. Elizabeth Yale points out that in the process of writing up the 1710 incident from rough notes into the Royal Society Council's minute book, Sloane's grimaces were reframed as a reaction, not a provocation, to Woodward's cutting remarks. Shortly afterwards, Sloane assimilated the rough notes into his own collection, and hence his own archival control. Yale situates this in Sloane's broader programme of acquiring and using the papers of Society colleagues after their deaths. She also notes that when Sloane became president of the Royal Society in 1727, he ordered the creation of a second minute book for his own collection, while moving the Society's secretary, Cromwell Mortimer, closer to his home in Chelsea.<sup>102</sup>

Yale remarks that 'for Sloane, paper was power'; he sought the papers of deceased colleagues not only for the natural philosophical knowledge they contained, but for the archival control they represented, a motivation borne out in his stewardship of the Royal Society's institutional records where he left 'only the gleaming surfaces of decisions made'.<sup>103</sup> Sloane's practices of archival manipulation, of the Woodward incident and others, recall the ways in which Ashmole deliberately smoothed his relationship with the Tradescants, replacing unruly heterogenous documents with his own singular, frictionless account. The ways in which Sloane articulated his acquisition and handling of Courten's and Petiver's collections, and his recognition of the importance of owning and controlling the archives of his colleagues, show that he was skilled at manipulating the structures of sociability in which he operated – arguably to the point of cynicism, as some of his contemporaries suspected.<sup>104</sup>

Regardless, Sloane's success is reflected in the trajectory of his literary reputation after he became president of the Royal Society, as charted by Barbara Benedict and exemplified in John Hill's *Dissertation on Royal Societies* (1750).<sup>105</sup> Half a century after King had cast Sloane as the rotten core of the Society in *The Transactioneer*, Hill's similarly scathing attack on the conceited and lethargic institution made Sloane the exception, a former 'great President' who

loved, nay, and still loves, Natural History; who favours every body, and every thing that regards it; [whose] Age and Infirmities [were] no Obstacle to his honouring it with his Name in it; [and who] at length seems to have found the Body declining in it's Reputation so fast, that it was not easy to think of any other Way to preserve his own but by quitting it.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Smith, 'Remembering Dr Sloane', p. 445.

<sup>102</sup> Elizabeth Yale, 'Playing Archival Politics with Hans Sloane, Edward Lhuyd, and John Woodward', in *Archival Afterlives*, 173–193.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. pp. 190, 192.

<sup>104</sup> Delbourgo, *Collecting The World*, p. 195.

<sup>105</sup> Benedict, 'Collecting Trouble'.

<sup>106</sup> John Hill, *A Dissertation on Royal Societies* (London: J. Doughty, 1750), p. 43.

Hill suggests that Sloane is an exemplary natural philosopher because he favours everyone who shares his interest, in doing so acknowledging a reputation Sloane had cultivated since 1700 while patronising and conversing with Europe's scientific community. Sloane's name as an amicable mediator was invoked in disputes between his peers, his agreeableness lauded by visitors to his collection, and his ample resources were shared among London's virtuosi.<sup>107</sup> As with Sloane's handling of Courten and Petiver's bequests, Hill's portrait affirms a public persona of the model sociable scientist, fulfilling Sprat's utopian vision. In the next section, I illustrate how Sloane brought this formidable reputation to bear in his will, primarily to project a version of himself beyond his death but also – in view of the will's published, literary format – to rescue the reputation of the collector more generally from the early eighteenth century's rhetoric of scorn.

### ***The Will of Sir Hans Sloane, Bart., Deceased***

In 1748, *The Gentleman's Magazine* published an account of the Prince and Princess of Wales's visit to Chelsea Manor, to view Sloane's museum. The tour was conducted by Sloane's librarian, Cromwell Mortimer, who also wrote the account, though the Prince was afforded an audience with Sloane himself, then aged eighty-eight and 'antient and infirm'. Mortimer notes the Prince's 'great esteem' for Sloane, particularly his comments that the learned world was obliged to Sloane for collecting 'such immense treasures of the valuable and instructive productions of nature and art'. At the end of the tour, the Prince and Princess were overflowing with awe at the collection, which 'surpass'd all notions and ideas they had formed from even the most favourable accounts of it'. The account concludes with the Prince's attestation that the museum was

An ornament to the nation; and [he] expressed his sentiments how much it must conduce to the benefit of learning, and how great an honour will redound to Britain, to have it established for publick use to the latest posterity.<sup>108</sup>

A decade earlier, Laetitia Pilkington had visited Sloane during a particularly cold winter. Having arrived in London months earlier after leaving her husband, she sought the charity of Richard Mead, who laughed at her literary ambitions and sent her to see his friend Sloane. Pilkington walked to Chelsea in the snow and was kept waiting for two hours, before her audience with Sloane was interrupted by him brusquely administering medical treatment to a child. Pilkington says Sloane never looked up from his papers while she spoke, and gave her only half a crown for her trouble. In characteristically acerbic prose, Pilkington's memoir suggests 'the Pope himself, in all his pontifical robes, never was half so proud'; she writes Sloane off as a 'conceited, ridiculous imperious old fool'.<sup>109</sup>

The two vignettes of Chelsea Manor, written during the last decade of Sloane's life, confirm that he remained highly attuned to the links between paper and power. Mortimer's published account

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<sup>107</sup> Kathryn James, 'Sloane and the Public Performance of Natural History' in *Books to Bezoars*, 41–47; Von Uffenbach, *London in 1710*, p. 185.

<sup>108</sup> Reprinted in MacGregor, *Sir Hans Sloane*, p. 35.

<sup>109</sup> Laetitia Pilkington, *Memoirs of Laetitia Pilkington*, ed. A. C. Elias, 2 vols. (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2016), i.196-7.



is Sloane's carefully stage-managed display of power, artefacts highlighted to demonstrate the links between Sloane's collection and national identity, its language conjuring the theatre as the Prince and Princess shift scenes between each room.<sup>110</sup> It is hard to determine how typical a visit like Pilkington's was, but nevertheless it jars with Mortimer's authorised account, demonstrating that the grand public stature Sloane had achieved in retirement could be represented in starkly contrasting ways. To some, Sloane was a 'good old gentleman', to others he was conceited old fool.<sup>111</sup> When Elizabeth Montagu visited Chelsea in 1742, she wrote that, among Sloane's collection, 'I have beheld many odder things than himself, though none so inconsistent'.<sup>112</sup> Montagu might be implying that, in person, the aged Sloane behaved differently to the public image he had crafted, or perhaps that his conversation, like his collection, had a miscellaneous quality. These glimpses of the aged Sloane are reminiscent of Walpole's butterfly: a figure surrounded by a lifetime's wealth and esteem, proud and impressive in equal measure, desirous to secure a legacy.

In a letter of 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1738, Sloane wrote 'I begin to feel the effects of age, and think of my affairs other ways than I have done'.<sup>113</sup> Resigning as president of the Royal Society in 1741, Sloane stepped back from public life and relocated permanently from his home in Bloomsbury to his Chelsea manor house, taking with him his entire collection. The 'other ways' Sloane refers to, along with a bout of illness, led him to write the first draft of his will, which was witnessed on 9<sup>th</sup> October 1739. In it, he describes his collection catalogues as 'taken generally in great haste' – perhaps an indication that Sloane was rushing to organise his collections into a suitable legacy at the end of the 1730s.<sup>114</sup> However, he survived for another thirteen years, a period of intense cataloguing activity during which time Sloane's physical decrepitude, his unsteady hand, can be traced through the pages of his catalogues.<sup>115</sup> Under the supervision of his curator James Empson, these catalogues were transformed from hasty records into 'thirty-eight volumes in folio, and eight volumes in quarto' in which his objects were 'described, mentioned and numbered, with short histories or accounts of them, with proper references'.<sup>116</sup>

Thanks to the recent revival in Sloane studies, our knowledge of his labelling and cataloguing activities is becoming increasingly detailed, and the ways in which Sloane organised and understood his collections are becoming more accessible through digitised versions of his manuscript catalogues, recently made available via the Enlightenment Architectures project.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Delbourgo, *Collecting the World*, p. 301.

<sup>111</sup> *Sir Hans Sloane*, p. 35.

<sup>112</sup> Elizabeth Montagu, *Elizabeth Montagu, Queen of the Blue-Stockings: Her Correspondence from 1720 to 1761*, ed. Emily J. Climens, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1906), i.103.

<sup>113</sup> British Library, Sloane MS 4069, f. 4.

<sup>114</sup> Sloane, *Will*, p. 5.

<sup>115</sup> Marjorie Caygill, 'Sloane's Catalogues', p. 120.

<sup>116</sup> Sloane, *Will*, p. 19.

<sup>117</sup> Kim Sloan and Julianne Nyhan, 'Enlightenment Architectures: The Reconstruction of Sir Hans Sloane's cabinets of "Miscellanies"', *JHC* (2020), <<https://doi.org/10.1093/jhc/fhaa034>>; Alice Marples and V.R.M. Pickering, 'Exploring Cultures of Collecting in the Early Modern World', *Archives of Natural History*, 43.1 (2016), 1–20; M. A. E. Nickson, 'Hans Sloane, Book Collector and Cataloguer, 1682-1698',

Similarly, while the fates of many of Sloane's objects become less easy to trace following their accession into the British Museum, the development of the museum's holdings out of the collections of Sloane and others is well documented in institutional histories, casting Sloane as a founder figure in the teleological continuum of the public museum.<sup>118</sup> But despite the volumes of scholarly attention given to Sloane's objects pre- and post-1753, Sloane's will, the textual declaration through which his collections could become national property, has become a historical blind spot. The document is as common as a coda to studies of Sloane as it is a starting point for discussions of the British Museum, but both tend to treat it glancingly. Both corpora tend to quote from the relatively short passage discussing the collection: the former uses it as a rare reflection of Sloane's on his collecting practice, the latter fixates on its reference to what has been interpreted as the principle of universal public access. Museum histories from 1778 to 1974 quote (sometimes misquote) in isolation Sloane's wish for 'all persons' to access his collection, making the passage stand for the entire document.<sup>119</sup> Following Marjorie Caygill's extended discussion of Sloane's will in 1994, subsequent studies such as David Wilson's have been more sensitive to the nuances of the document, but Sloane's ubiquitous 'all persons' passage remains the focus.<sup>120</sup> While it has been acknowledged that Sloane's will was 'meticulously prepared' and 'adroitly worded', its specific literary resonances, and its use of the will form, have gone largely unexamined.<sup>121</sup>

Constituting – rather than merely representing – Sloane's posthumous identity, the will is the legally-authorized, durable trace of his command over his legacy. It affirms that paper is power for Sloane, both as an inscribable surface for his signature, and as a raw material for printing the testament as *The Will of Sir Hans Sloane, Bart., Deceased* (1753). The significance of this publication is best highlighted via a comparison with Woodward's testament. Both documents had explicitly public consequences, but Woodward's will was written for the eyes of his small group of named executors. Although printed extracts were later circulated in Cambridge, it remained an essentially private document co-opted for these public contexts.<sup>122</sup> By contrast, Sloane's will was

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*The British Library Journal*, 14:1 (1998), 52–89; Reconstructing Sloane, <<https://reconstructingsloane.org/>>; The Sloane Printed Books Project, <<https://www.bl.uk/projects/sloane-printed-books>>; Enlightenment Architectures, <<https://reconstructingsloane.org/enlightenmentarchitectures/2020/01/02/digitised-catalogues-2/>>.

<sup>118</sup> See for example Edward Edwards, *The Lives of the Founders of the British Museum; with Notices of its Chief Augmentors and Other Benefactors, 1570-1870* (London: Trübner, 1870).

<sup>119</sup> Jan Van Rymdyk, *Museum Britannicum* (London: for the author, 1778); Edwards, *Lives*; Frank Francis (ed.) *The Treasures of the British Museum* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1971), p.11; J. Mordaunt Crook, *The British Museum* (London: Allen Lane, 1972), pp.47-8; Edward Miller, *That Noble Cabinet: A History of the British Museum* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1974), pp.40-1. Crook misquotes 'all persons' as 'all purposes'.

<sup>120</sup> Marjorie Caygill, 'Sloane's Will and the Establishment of the British Museum' in *Sir Hans Sloane*, 45–68; David M. Wilson, *The British Museum: A History* (London: British Museum, 2002), pp. 18-21.

<sup>121</sup> Crook, *The British Museum*, p.47; Caygill, 'Sloane's Will', p. 45.

<sup>122</sup> *Part of the Late Dr Woodward's Will, Dated Oct 1<sup>st</sup> 1727* (Cambridge: Archdeacon, 1778) besides being a printed extract, refers to an 'extract lately distributed' p.3. An excerpt from the will was also printed for public display in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, Cambridge University Archives, UA/0265/GEOL/1(3).

published in its entirety at his death – the will’s text on display in print and thus deliberately engaging with Sloane’s reputation as a public figure, as well as the popular genre of the printed will. While both testaments attempted to perpetuate aspects of their testators’ identities, the publication and sale of copies of Sloane’s will means that we must treat its textual construction in the broader literary context of the virtuoso’s reputation. It is my contention that Sloane’s will was an attempt to reclaim the term ‘virtuoso’ from the satirists who scorned the practices of collecting. Designed to showcase evidence of Sloane’s skilful and prudent personal economy, the will was a powerful rebuttal to perceptions of the collector’s comically non-generative Gimcrackian legacy, strengthening the case for the national purchase, and preservation, of Sloane’s collections.

Sloane died on the 11<sup>th</sup> January 1753, and in the same month advertisements appeared for ‘The Will of Hans Sloane’, to be sold for a shilling, in the *London Magazine*, the *Gentleman’s Magazine*, and the *Universal Magazine*, alongside accounts of his life, brief catalogues of his collection, and the terms of his bequest. The *London Magazine* added a physical description of his will: ‘five sheets of paper, all written in the deceased’s own hand [...] there are nine codicils to it, the third of which is two large skins of parchment’.<sup>123</sup> The third codicil is dated 10<sup>th</sup> July 1749, and deals with the conveyance of Sloane’s collection. It modifies his original 1739 will, giving the King and Parliament twelve months to decide whether to buy Sloane’s collection on behalf of the nation, for £20,000. If the king decided not buy the collection, it was to be successively offered to the academies of St Petersburg, Paris, Berlin and Madrid, with a refusal period of six months each, and if all refused, Sloane directs that his museum should be sold ‘in the most speedy and advantageous manner’.<sup>124</sup> As it happened, the trustees put Sloane’s offer before Parliament, and by 7<sup>th</sup> June 1753, the king had signed an act decreeing that Sloane’s museum should be bought ‘for the use and benefit of the publick’.<sup>125</sup>

Wilson remarks on the extraordinary speed with which the trustees of Sloane’s will were able to act on his complex and exacting requests, to present them before parliament within a matter of months. This must have been in part, Wilson suggests, due to the trustees being ‘well-briefed’ by Sloane before his death.<sup>126</sup> I would add to this that the speed at which Sloane’s will was published, and the immediate corroboration of its content and material form in the London press, is further evidence of this thorough briefing process. Alongside Mortimer’s printed, stage-managed account of the Prince of Wales’s 1748 visit, this suggests that the conveyance of the museum into public hands was not only carefully planned, but that its published narrative (including the will) was coherent and deliberate.

The published format of Sloane’s will underscores this representation of public-mindedness and the statesmanlike dignity of its testator. Footnotes in *The Will of Sir Hans Sloane* gloss errors in the text with ‘so in the original’, tracing the mistakes of Sloane’s own hand closer even than the

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<sup>123</sup> *The London Magazine* 22 (1753) pp.44, 48; *The Gentleman’s Magazine* 23 (1753) pp. 52, 55; *The Universal Magazine* 12 (1753) p. 45.

<sup>124</sup> Sloane, *Will*, p. 33.

<sup>125</sup> British Museum Act 1753.

<sup>126</sup> Wilson, *The British Museum*, p. 20.

probate copy.<sup>127</sup> Similarly, the printed version is careful to include ‘(L S)’ for ‘locus sigili’, the site of the signature – this not only affirmed that the printers had access to Sloane’s original document, but also acted as a proxy witness to his inscribed authority and the posthumous trace of his identity.<sup>128</sup> By displaying these details in print, the published will made Sloane’s demands a matter of public attention. The *Authentic Copies of the Codicils Belonging to the Last Will and Testament of Sir Hans Sloane, Bart. deceased* (1753) emphasised this point, abridging the will to focus on the conveyance of the collection. The pamphlet’s printer, Daniel Browne, had also printed Sloane’s last published work, a cure for soreness of the eyes, in 1745, and the exact tally of Sloane’s collection in *Authentic Copies* shows the close involvement between this testament printing enterprise and the orchestration of Sloane’s personal legacy project.

Until Sloane’s appeared, printed wills tended to be couched in significant amounts of paratextual apparatus, or act as appendices themselves alongside correspondence, biographies, elegies or compilations of the testator’s literary output. The printer Edmund Curll was especially active in shaping this genre of what Pat Rogers has called an early form of written collage, buying probate copies of the wills of prominent figures from the ecclesiastical courts. Curll’s publishing enterprise also sold copies of wills separately as supplements to his hastily-gathered memoirs, and he often used printed testaments to advertise the others he made available for sale.<sup>129</sup> In this landscape, it is significant that Sloane’s will has relatively few paratextual additions – it is the stand-alone declaration of a testator made to speak for itself – and also that its publishers made sure to emphasise that they were working from Sloane’s original will, not a commercially-obtained probate copy.

The twin values of authority and authenticity were important in view of the document’s specific function to persuade Parliament to purchase Sloane’s collection. Appealing to the ‘comfort and wellbeing’ of all God’s creatures, the ‘use and improvement of physic, and other arts and sciences, and benefit of mankind’, Sloane’s will transformed the preservation of his personal collection into a matter of universal importance.<sup>130</sup> Its publication in 1753 coincided with the development of a new genre of printed political material, designed to curry public favour for particular legislative interests. In his discussion of this kind of printed lobbying, John Brewer indicates the profusion of printed material discussing the 1733 Excise Bill to demonstrate that politically motivated groups were beginning to employ propagandist tactics to influence the decisions of Parliament. In what Brewer calls the most useful exemplar of later lobbying cases, appeals against the Excise Bill universalised its case by suggesting that by penalising a small

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<sup>127</sup> Sloane, *Will*, pp.4, 10. The probate version (National Archives, PROB 11/799/137) corrects ‘the duke Richmond’ to ‘his Grace the duke of Richmond’ in the text. A more conventional memoir-and-testament text appeared the following year as *A Concise Narrative of the Life, Travels, Collections, Works &c of Sir Hans Sloane, Bart., to which is added an extract of his last will*. The text of this memoir copies verbatim that in the *London Magazine* 22 (Jan 1753) pp. 6-7.

<sup>128</sup> Sloane, *Will*, pp. 15-6.

<sup>129</sup> An example of this appears in *Some Memoirs of the Life and Publick Employments of Matthew Prior, Esq* (London: E. Curll, 1722); Pat Rogers, ‘The Use of Paratext in Popular Eighteenth-Century Biography: The Case of Edmund Curll’ in *Narrative Concepts in the Study of Eighteenth-Century Literature* ed. Liisa Stansby, Aino Mäkikalli (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017) 269–87.

<sup>130</sup> Sloane, *Will*, p. 17.

group of businessmen, the bill was corroding British liberty as a whole.<sup>131</sup> Meanwhile, periodicals like Lord Chesterfield's *Common Sense* were appealing to the public as a tribunal to challenge the infallibility of Parliament.<sup>132</sup> While Sloane's will is not straightforwardly an example of this genre, its appeals to universal values and the speed of its publication following Sloane's death speak to similar kinds of lobbying tactics.

Aside from the will's most obvious conveyancing function, one paratextual feature invests the work with specific literary meaning – the name of its printer, 'John Virtuoso'. *The Will of Sir Hans Sloane* is the only record of this fictional entity, and although Barbara Benedict has referred to the name as an example of the kind of 'symbolic pseudonym' deployed by eighteenth-century printers seeking anonymity, the utility of a pseudonym is unclear in this case.<sup>133</sup> Curll made every effort to advertise his involvement with the printing of wills, and even in Sloane's specific case, subsequent printers of his testament (like Browne) were content to inscribe their names.<sup>134</sup> In the absence of any precedent for pseudonymous will publication, the symbolic function of 'John Virtuoso' becomes clearer. In keeping with the literary versatility of the eighteenth-century printed will genre, the term 'virtuoso' on the title page of Sloane's testament signposts the ways in which the work at large challenges the pejorative characteristics that had dogged him and other collectors of natural history for a century.

At the will's outset, Sloane uses the form's conventional exordium (the section before the disbursement of goods that commends one's soul to God) to establish his natural philosophy in a recognisable framework of religious devotion.<sup>135</sup> Admitting his sins, Sloane nonetheless affirms that he has tried to lead a Christian life, in particular 'striving to make this my rule, to do to others, as I thought I should desire to be done to me in the like circumstances'. The relevance of this specific virtue is highlighted shortly afterwards, when he mentions his 'ever honoured, late friend William Courten' and his collection, which Sloane has 'kept intire'.<sup>136</sup> The religious framework is hence utilised to convince Sloane's readers to respect his wishes for his own collection. This is reinforced in a famous passage introducing his objects:

Now desiring very much that these things tending many ways to the manifestation of the glory of God, the confutation of atheism and its consequences, the use and improvement of physic, and other arts and sciences, and benefit of mankind, may remain together and not be separated[.]<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688-1783* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), pp. 231-49.

<sup>132</sup> Sophia Rosenfeld, *Common Sense: A Political History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), pp. 44-52.

<sup>133</sup> Barbara Benedict, 'Publishing and Reading Poetry' in *The Cambridge Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry* ed. John Sitter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 66.

<sup>134</sup> Browne's edition, *Authentic Copies of the Codicils Belonging to the Last Will and Testament of Sir Hans Sloane, Bart. deceased* (London: Browne, 1753) is printed 'by order of the executors'.

<sup>135</sup> On exordia see Sneddon, 'Speaking for the Dead', p. 665.

<sup>136</sup> Sloane, *Will*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.* p. 3.

Having subordinated his natural philosophical enterprise to the glory of God, Sloane is able to vindicate immediately one aspect of the virtuoso's public reputation, by refuting the charges of atheism levelled at the Royal Society.<sup>138</sup>

Next, he affirms his collection's utility to the improvement of medicine, an important reminder of Sloane's pre-eminence in the field. Sloane's words, written in 1739, would have had particular resonance in 1753 following the publication of his *Account of a Most Efficacious Medicine for [...]the Eyes*, a treatise detailing a miracle eye cure, published twice before 1753, which also became a popular addition to later household compendia.<sup>139</sup> The tract itself dramatized Sloane's collecting process with a detailed account of his tenacity in tracking down the cure, and his subsequent commitment to publicising the knowledge it contained.<sup>140</sup> The recipe had been a closely-guarded 'secret' which Sloane was 'bound by a promise to conceal', but so great was its usefulness that he could keep it from the public no longer.<sup>141</sup> The reference to the improvement of physic in Sloane's will serves as a neat reminder of the useful applications of the collector's practices, in contrast to the more familiar presentation of the virtuoso's endeavours as the 'discovery of some few unheeded varieties of plants [...] unheeded only because useless'.<sup>142</sup>

Sloane's will also tackles the widely-circulated perception of the virtuoso's credulity, and his comic tendency to value the scraps of nature more than real money. While Addison's virtuoso considers his curiosities ample legacy to provide for his family, Sloane colours his will with a thorough and reasonable apprehension of his collections' real material and monetary value. After describing his collections he notes that they are 'amounting in the whole to a very great sum of money, reckoning them at first costs to at least fifty thousand pounds', before requesting that they be offered to the King 'at the rate of twenty thousand pounds' and that 'the money arising by such sale' be reserved for the provision of his surviving family.<sup>143</sup> The 1749 codicil makes this much clearer, stating that the requested £20,000 'not being, as I apprehend or believe, a fourth of their real and intrinsic value'.<sup>144</sup> Alongside the generalised 'benefit of mankind', Sloane presents his beneficence in both abstract and concretely monetary terms, demonstrating a clear appreciation of the 'intrinsic' value of his collections outside virtuoso circles.

Once Sloane had dealt with the disbursement of his collection, he devoted the remainder of his testament (aside from the 1749 codicil) to the careful distribution of his estate among his family. While this section adds nothing to the more public-facing aspects of the legacy (indeed,

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<sup>138</sup> Caygill, 'Sloane's Will', pp. 46-7.

<sup>139</sup> Hans Sloane, *An Account of a Most Efficacious Medicine for Soreness, Weakness, and Several Other Distempers of the Eyes* (London: Browne, 1745); *The Lady's Companion* (London: Hodges, 1753); *The British Legacy; or, fountain of knowledge* (London: Chandler, 1754); *The Family Jewel, and complete housewife's companion* (London: Whitworth, 1754).

<sup>140</sup> For a full discussion of Sloane's discovery of the recipe see Alison Walker, 'Sir Hans Sloane and the Library of Dr Luke Rugeley' *The Library*, 15.4 (2014), 383-409.

<sup>141</sup> Sloane, *An Account of [...] Medicine*, pp. 4, 9.

<sup>142</sup> Astell, *Essay*, pp. 102-3.

<sup>143</sup> Sloane, *Will*, pp. 3-5.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.* p. 22,

subsequent editions chose to omit it) it constitutes a printed display of Sloane's perfected household economy, demonstrating his disbursement of lands and money among his descendants and rebutting the idea that virtuosi bequeathed only useless cockleshells to their children. Sloane emphasises his judiciousness by announcing

I thus leave to my daughters, relations and friends what I have, I earnestly recommend to them the practice of moral and religious duties, as being of greater use to them than any thing I can leave them, not only in the life to come, but even in this, by helping them through the difficulties of it, with more inward quiet, satisfaction and better health than otherways, and with the esteem and respect of their friends and acquaintance.<sup>145</sup>

Sloane explicitly elevates moral, intellectual and psychological health above any material advantage, or knowledge vested in natural philosophy. His focus on duties, esteem and respect work against the stereotype of the arrogant, self-absorbed virtuoso who deigns not to 'trouble himself with men and manners', and Sloane's earnest recommendation to his daughters rebuts the dramatic convention of a virtuoso letting his household disintegrate around him.<sup>146</sup> This note on moral education exploits the testament genre's ability to offer judgment and reform, Sloane decentring his collections in favour of a more conventional sociable morality.

Here, it is important to remember the will as a form of life writing – a catalogue of the total material footprint of a life whose organisation and disbursement speaks to the construction of specific kinds of selfhood for the testator. There is a clear analogy with collection catalogues, particularly considering the homonymy of 'inventory' as a list of collected objects and 'inventory' as a last will and testament. However, the wills of Sloane's contemporary collectors tend to be simple lists with relatively little mention of their collections.<sup>147</sup> Woodward's is a notable exception, but even his complex conveyancing requires close scrutiny in order to trace its connections to his collecting project, as I demonstrated in chapter four. Sloane's will, by contrast, embraces the full autobiographical possibilities of the form. Not only does he punctuate the distribution of goods and property with comments on the moral education of his daughters, and contextualise his collecting with phrases like 'from my youth', but he uses the will to perpetuate his professional connections.

As I showed in the last chapter, the terms of Woodward's will became a topic of contention for Cambridge University in 1778 due to Woodward's 'want of precision & knowledge' about the university's structures of governance.<sup>148</sup> By contrast, Sloane's will was composed by a 'wily old man who knew his way around the corridors of power', in Wilson's assessment.<sup>149</sup> The 1749 codicil names a group of fifty trustees and thirty-two visitors to oversee the museum, a two-tiered system of governance which Caygill suggests afforded the collection a new level of grandeur. Forty of Sloane's trustees were Royal Society members, half were from the Society of

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid. p. 12.

<sup>146</sup> Shadwell, *The Virtuoso*, p. 49.

<sup>147</sup> See Petiver and Courten's wills. Another example is Christopher Merrett's will, PROB 11/429/195. All probate copies accessed via the National Archives.

<sup>148</sup> UA/0265/GEOL/1(1), f. 4.

<sup>149</sup> Wilson, *The British Museum*, p. 19.

Antiquaries, seventeen were members of Parliament, and others were churchmen, businessmen, diplomats, and military officials.<sup>150</sup> Not only did the will brandish the extent of Sloane's influence to ensure the survival of his collections, but it refuted the claims that virtuosi operated in insular, self-interested groups – here was a broad and impressive professional network from a range of ranks and backgrounds.

As suggested by Sloane's reference to the Golden Rule of 'do unto others...', his legacy was just as invested in reciprocity as was his career of buying, selling, gifting, trading, and lending objects, founded on the management of a large network of correspondents. In naming his trustees and visitors, Sloane had 'great reliance and confidence' that they would 'be influenced by the same principles' that he had been during his life, and would 'faithfully and conscientiously discharge the trust hereby reposed in them'.<sup>151</sup> Unlike Woodward's, Sloane's will is much less invested in unilateral commands, instead delegating decisions to his trustees on matters like the management of his real estate, the frequency of their meetings, and the drawing up of a list of necessary museum staff, vesting in the trustees the power to 'elect, present, nominate or appoint' officials.<sup>152</sup> Sloane's group of visitors, their virtue inherent in their public offices, had the power to police the 'defaults, neglects, or mismanagements' that the trustees may commit.<sup>153</sup>

Barbara Benedict has suggested that Sloane's will attempts, in limited ways, to rescue the reputation of the virtuoso collector, but in her assessment of the printed work she concludes that Sloane's post mortem 'micromanagement' of his collection 'confirms the defective character of the virtuoso', his mountain of codicils bespeaking an 'obsessive possessiveness'.<sup>154</sup> However, I would argue that by situating Sloane's printed will in the history of the genre, and pinpointing its specific engagements with the 'defective character' of the eighteenth-century collector, the document works hard to defuse the charges that Benedict argues it reinforces. While the terms of Sloane's will are indeed intricate, his attestations of the usefulness of collecting, the broadness of his professional network, his use of delegation, and demonstrations of competent household economy contribute to a vindication of the virtuoso's, and his own, reputation.

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The analogy between the fossil and the last will and testament is easy to maintain in some cases. Alongside his collection of physical fossils, Woodward's will and his attempt to perpetuate his intellectual project in print invite a reading of ossification, the testator fixed on paper via the impression of his signature, a readable record of identity imbued with a stratified endurance in a volume of probate records. Sloane's case, however, is more complicated: while his will fulfils these same functions, its composition for publication enacts more public ambitions for his posthumous reputation. For this reason, a straightforward comparison of the two legacy projects (often attempted) sells both short. For example, Roy Porter observes that 'while all but a handful

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<sup>150</sup> Caygill, 'Sloane's Will', pp. 45, 48.

<sup>151</sup> Sloane, *Will*, pp. 23, 25, 26.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.* p. 17.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.* p. 22.

<sup>154</sup> Benedict, *Curiosity*, p. 181.



of Hans Sloane's thousands of minerals disappeared [...] the Woodwardian cabinets survived intact and enhanced', suggesting that Sloane failed where Woodward succeeded.<sup>155</sup> Yet, as I have demonstrated, Woodward and Sloane were two very different collectors – for Sloane, the preservation of his objects was not as intimately bound up with projecting his own personal identity beyond the threshold of death.

Of course, Porter's observation is factually accurate – like many areas of Sloane's collection, his fossils have been lost or rendered unidentifiable in the museums created after his death. Sloane's decision to delegate authority to his trustees enabled a more flexible approach to enacting his legacy – for example, his stipulation that the museum be kept 'in my manor house, in the parish of Chelsea' was expediently ignored.<sup>156</sup> As Caygill points out, Sloane's list of trustees was almost immediately replaced with a new set, appointed by the British Museum Act of June 1753, when the institution adopted a 'different, corporate ethos which contrasted with Sloane's private domain'.<sup>157</sup> In order for Parliament simultaneously to take charge of the Cotton and Harley libraries, Sloane's control over his material legacy was diminished, replaced by the identity of the 'British Museum', a name seemingly conjured from nowhere in the midst of the 1753 act of parliament, out of legal necessity rather than intent. Sloane's collections have since become invisible, sold, lost, and scattered throughout the collections of the British Museum, the Natural History Museum, and the British Library; his original wish that they 'remain together and not be separated' has been extensively overwritten.<sup>158</sup>

Rhetoric like Porter's, or Benedict's claims that Sloane's will displayed obsessive possessiveness, implicitly colours the collector's legacy project with the same fatalism as Walpole's 'The Entail', dramatizing the will as a tragi-comic, futile attempt to keep a personal, material identity intact beyond the grave. The will form, with its list of autocratic orders about the dissolution of a person through their possessions, tempts such a reading. The legal historian Lawrence Friedman asserts the ultimate futility of the will by conjuring the image of a pharaoh of ancient Egypt, full of the hubris of preserving his material goods for the afterlife. 'In the long run', Friedman notes,

all this wealth and grandeur passed into the hands of looters and grave robbers; and much of what looters missed, archaeologists dug up and put behind glass in museums. In the end, even the mightiest pharaoh probably took nothing at all to the other side.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Roy Porter, 'John Woodward: A Droll Sort of Philosopher', *Geological Magazine*, 116.5 (1979), 335–417 (p.342).

<sup>156</sup> Sloane, *Will*, p. 17.

<sup>157</sup> Marjorie Caygill, 'From Private Collection to Public Museum: The Sloane collection at Chelsea and the British Museum in Montagu House' in *Enlightening the British: Knowledge, discovery and the museum in the eighteenth century* ed. R.G.W. Anderson, M.L. Caygill, A.G. MacGregor and L. Syson (London: British Museum, 2003) 18–28 (p. 19)

<sup>158</sup> A notable exception to this pattern is Sloane's herbarium, which remains intact in the Natural History Museum and is prized by historians of science as a 'rare survival' – see Edwin Rose, 'Natural History Collections and the Book: Hans Sloane's *A Voyage to Jamaica* (1707-1725) and his Jamaican plants', *JHC*, 30.1 (2018), 15–33.

<sup>159</sup> Lawrence Friedman, *Dead Hands: A Social History of Wills, Trusts, and Inheritance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 4.

Irrespective of his assertions of might and grandeur, Friedman's pharaoh is at the mercy of the material conditions of death. The futility of his 'wealth and grandeur' is the same as that of Walpole's butterfly, who composes his will to ensure that his mansion flower doesn't pass into the hands of snails and other vermin, reaching for the assurance of continuity beyond the grave but ultimately consigned to death, 'the common fate of Flies and Kings'.<sup>160</sup>

Friedman reminds us that flies and (Egyptian) kings can share another common fate, preserved posthumously as museums artefacts. Although Sloane owned a mummy, the one displayed in the British Museum shortly after its opening was donated by William Lethieullier, 'deposited in a Glass Case' in a room 'set apart for the immediate Reception of Presents'.<sup>161</sup> A 1761 visitor account says that this room for new acquisitions was situated at the top of the stairs, the next stop on the tour after viewing the 'Busto of Sir Hans Sloane' on the staircase. Before the tour continued on the first floor, the author of the pamphlet takes the opportunity to list the 'many Portraits of illustrious Personages, hung up in the several Departments of this Musaeum', afterwards describing Lethieullier's mummy.<sup>162</sup> The ancient Egyptians, the author explains, believed in the posthumous existence of the soul, and so preserved the bodies of their dead to give the soul a 'pleasing Idea of its former Union'.<sup>163</sup> The mummy becomes a kind of portrait, a ritually-preserved Egyptian likeness in juxtaposition with the ritually-preserved likenesses of the 'illustrious' Britons which adorn the walls of the British Museum. In this way, the nascent national museum becomes a tool for mediating commemoration. Displaying the portraits of figures like Francis Bacon, Robert Cotton, John Cotton, Ulisse Aldrovandi and Hans Sloane subsume these identities into the collection, while acknowledging their influence in shaping the history of collecting and the museum itself.

This is a seductive reading, but it only addresses one aspect of the museum's function. Returning briefly to Lyotard, we can see how readily his idea of the 'trace' (the static half-life of an object behind museum glass) resonates with the prevailing treatment of wills as fatalistic documents. Today, the imperative to preserve objects using a notion of perpetuity is part of ICOM's definition of a museum, but it is widely acknowledged that this function should be secondary to the institutions' role (in an ideal world) as spaces of knowledge production and transmission, of questioning and challenging identities, and of engaging critically with the material remains of the past.<sup>164</sup> By examining the construction and publication of Sloane's will, in the context of his distinctive approach to collecting and the publicly contested reputation of the virtuoso, I have illustrated that far from being a futile document grasping for permanence, it leveraged Sloane's stature and the declaratory authority of the will itself to project the intellectual dynamism of the collection into the future. Unwittingly, in his satire *Three Hours After Marriage* John Gay offers a rebuttal to Friedman's description of the hubristic pharaoh, when his parodic virtuoso Dr Fossile encounters a mummy in his own cabinet of rarities. Fossile's associate mocks the pharaoh, who

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<sup>160</sup> Walpole, 'The Entail', pp. 41-2.

<sup>161</sup> *The General Contents of the British Museum* (London: R. Dodsley, 1761), p. 6

<sup>162</sup> Ibid. p. 4.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid. p. 6.

<sup>164</sup> Steven Lubar, Lukas Rieppel, Ann Daly and Kathrinne Duffy, 'Lost Museums', *Museum History Journal* 10.1 (2017) 1-14 (p. 1).

thought that 'pyramid and pickle' would secure him immortality. 'Pardon me' replies Dr Fossile, 'the musaeum of the curious is a lasting monument. And I think it no degradation to a dead person of quality to bear the rank of an anatomy in the learned world'.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Gay, *Three Hours*, p. 46.

## Conclusion

The French geologist Barthélemy Faujas de Saint-Fond visited London in the 1780s, touring the city's premier scientific collections including the Royal Society, Kew Gardens, and the homes of Joseph Banks, John Sheldon and William Herschel. His tour also included a visit to the British Museum, where he was unimpressed with the museum's lack of organisation. Faujas de Saint-Fond lamented that

As long as this disgusting confusion is suffered to continue [...] never will the painter repair thither to see and to study animals according to nature, and to admire the different modes of colouring, and the infinite variety of shades presented by the plumage of birds, the gay attire of butterflies, and the oriental splendor of shells[.]<sup>1</sup>

The confusion in which the British Museum lay actively impeded its primary function as a resource of learning, designed to augment the arts and sciences in Britain. The ephemeral majesty of butterflies and shells (so easily destroyed, overlooked, or thrown into the sea) required careful arrangement in order to bear proper testimony to 'that immense chain which seems to connect every species of being'.<sup>2</sup> According to Faujas de Saint-Fond, the heterogeneity of the museum was its downfall, a consequence of its piecemeal accretion of objects since 1753. He notes that

This immense collection of objects was partly formed by the celebrated Hans Sloane. It is a pity that the collection was not allowed to remain as he originally left it. Had no additions been made to it, and had it been allowed to retain the modest title of *Sloane's Museum*, many would doubtless have been anxious to visit the collection of that indefatigable naturalist [...] but I am not pleased that the collection of a private individual, to which there has been since superadded a crowd of heterogeneous objects [...] should possess the title of *The British Museum*.<sup>3</sup>

Faujas de Saint-Fond suggests that the museum was suffering both from its objects' lack of classification and also from the improper classification of the museum itself. Its collection should either be circumscribed and named as the collection of a single individual, or be universal and regularised in order to reflect the progress of Britain's global knowledge. In bifurcating collections between the personal and the national, Faujas de Saint-Fond precludes the possibility that one could emerge from the other. He is speaking from his own French context, comparing the British Museum unfavourably to the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris, which he considered was 'justly esteemed superior to every collection of the kind'.<sup>4</sup> However, Faujas de Saint-Fond's claims were also a kind of propaganda, designed to smooth over a rupture in the Muséum's own identity; between Faujas de Saint-Fond's journey to Britain in the 1780s and the publication of his account, the Parisian institution he described had navigated a shift away from

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<sup>1</sup> Barthélemy Faujas de Saint-Fond, *Travels in England, Scotland and the Hebrides*, 2 vols (London: J. Ridgeway, 1799), i.89.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. i.90.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. i.86-7.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. i.91.

its previous title, the Jardin du Roi, to a more palatable republican incarnation. What is more, its collection was subject to the same charges of heterogeneity that Faujas de Saint-Fond levelled at the British Museum.<sup>5</sup>

Faujas de Saint-Fond's rationale for renaming the British Museum 'Sloane's Museum', and for paring the collection back to Sloane's original bequest, resonates across the case studies of this thesis. It is recognisable in the Cotton Library trustees' desire to preserve their collection as Robert Cotton left it, and to prevent the 'throwing of [it] into the Bodleian' where its distinctive Cottonian character would be lost.<sup>6</sup> Faujas de Saint-Fond's rationale is also visible in Edward Lhwyd's suggestion that his Oxford museum should abandon the name 'Ashmoleanum', shifting its focus away from its founder's objects in favour of a more active programme of scientific research.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Woodward's fossils are today still circumscribed within the Sedgwick Museum, cut off from the rest of the collection and displayed in their original cabinets behind glass as the 'Museum Woodwardianum'.

Echoing Faujas de Saint-Fond, Lisa Jardine suggested that the Royal Society's repository should properly be called the 'Hookean Museum' after Robert Hooke, for his career-long involvement in its management and posthumous orchestration of its purpose-built Crane Court home. She ventures that every museum, to a greater or lesser extent, represents the 'personal obsession of an individual – the more or less haphazardly accumulated remnants of private interest and idiosyncratic pursuit'.<sup>8</sup> This is the paradox of the museum as national monument. As this thesis has shown, the act of claiming institutional permanence and regularity for a collection clashes with the heterogeneous histories of objects, individuals and communities from which these museums are constituted. The five collections discussed here, each made to reflect specific notions of publicness, testify to the persistent granularity of museum identities – that is, the irreducible material forms and histories of their collections, which refuse to coagulate into any unified, concrete whole.

This granularity is what I refer to in the expression 'monuments of dust', a useful figure for articulating the essential futility of corralling objects into durable expressions of singular identity. I have illustrated this by highlighting the centrality of personal legacy to the construction of public museums. Faujas de Saint-Fond's arguments, though obtuse, highlight that so-called national collections are in fact collages of hundreds individual bequests, each with a history as complex and contested as those discussed in my preceding chapters: these are impossible to reconcile into a solid, univocal monument. Each of these bequests deals with the death of the collector. As seen particularly in chapters four and five, this is a threshold across which the meanings of a collection must travel and transform, reshaped by new ownership, resources and ideologies – in this sense, the collector's death is destructive, creative and inevitable. The

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<sup>5</sup> E. C. Spary, *Utopia's Garden: French Natural History from Old Regime to Revolution* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Cambridge, Cambridgeshire Record Office, 588DR/Z10 (b).

<sup>7</sup> Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Lister 36, f. 15v.

<sup>8</sup> Lisa Jardine, 'Paper Monuments and Learned Societies: Hooke's Royal Society Repository' in *Enlightening the British: Knowledge, Discovery and the Museum in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. by R.G.W. Anderson, M.L. Caygill, A.G. MacGregor, L. Syson (London: British Museum Press, 2003) 49–51.

emergence of public museums in England was a function of the apparatus available to those collectors who sought to manage their collections across the threshold of death, attempting to prolong specific identities and meanings through the textual scaffolding of wills, catalogues, inventories and statutes.

However, bequeathing a collection to an existing public institution (or creating a new one) was by no means inevitable. It is significant that the collections in this thesis (with the exception of the Royal Society's repository) were manoeuvred into institutional ownership at moments when the traditional structures of patrilineal inheritance broke down, or could no longer safeguard a collection's integrity. John Cotton sought national custody for his family's manuscripts to protect the collection from being 'broke[n] open, rifled and plundered' by the warring factions of his descendants.<sup>9</sup> John Tradescant the Younger was unable to bestow his father's legacy on his son, whose early death he commemorated in the *Musaeum Tradescantianum*. Obadiah Walker advised Elias Ashmole to keep a portion of his collection back from the University of Oxford in case he should have heirs, but despite three marriages Ashmole died childless.<sup>10</sup> John Woodward's childlessness came to define not only his career but his eponymous museum, founded 'instead of children'.<sup>11</sup> As discussed in chapter five, Sloane was able to combine his designs for a public bequest with financial provision for his daughters, part of his deliberate attempt to undo perceptions of collecting as incompatible with traditional inheritance structures.

The creation of public museums during this period of history has often been characterised teleologically as anticipating the values of education and access that defined later institutions.<sup>12</sup> The founding of public collections was undoubtedly bound up in concerns about futurity, but this futurity was a hybrid of positive claims about advancing material knowledge and reactive anxieties about the uncertainty of inheritance. I do not wish to suggest in this thesis that imperatives to preserve and remember through collections are always instituted in bad faith, or solely motivated by self-interested legacy construction. Rather, I want to highlight that although public museums do more than just commemorate their founders, their founders' legacies remain central to their ideological foundations. Often, claims about public access, free education, national importance and universal good can deliberately disguise the desire for personal commemoration.

Figures like Ashmole and Sloane were, as I have shown, adept at manipulating their archival reputations. By editing, controlling and managing texts they disguised certain facets of their identities and highlighted others, with a view to posterity. They were acute examples of a broader pattern in public bequests which, by manoeuvring objects or wealth out of traditional inheritance structures, make claims to beneficence which appear to minimise self-interest. Here, it is important to recall Kevin Dunn's work on Francis Bacon's construction of paratextual authority,

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<sup>9</sup> Cambridgeshire Record Office, 588DR/Z10 (b).

<sup>10</sup> Bodleian Library, MS Rawl D.912, f. 674r.

<sup>11</sup> Cambridge, Cambridge University Archives, UA/0265/GEOL/1(1), ff. 3-4.

<sup>12</sup> See for example Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor, eds., *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985); R. F. Owenell, *The Ashmolean Museum 1683-1894* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986); Ken Arnold, *Cabinets for the Curious: Looking Back at Early English Museums* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

discussed in chapter two. In Bacon's prefaces, Dunn argues, he becomes the 'self-denying public man', effacing himself and framing his texts as monuments to the public good. In doing so, Bacon disguises his personal interest while granting himself an immanent authority – he becomes the only one capable of implementing the grand public good his work describes.<sup>13</sup>

The public museum works the same way. Like Bacon's work, its foundational commitments to free access, education and notions of universal public good create a powerful sense of purpose beyond the concerns of any single individual. Meanwhile, its paratexts (or textual scaffolding) clearly advertise the individuals responsible for its creation, detailing how they should be honoured, respected and remembered for donating their material wealth to the cause of human knowledge. These texts are foundational to the museum, intertwining the identities of its founders into the institution's ability to construct meaning. The names of buildings, collections or galleries are examples of this intertwining, as well as written conditions about how bequests should be displayed or managed. While the influence of personal legacy enables institutions to enact values like public knowledge and free access, which are specified in the wills of their founders, it also tangles these values up with other more problematic aspects of founders' identities, beliefs and contexts.

For example, although Sloane was adept at manipulating his own posthumous reputation, the source of his wealth (and hence his collection) in Jamaican plantations links his bequest inexorably to the British slave economy, which has cast a shadow over his legacy since his death. This illustrates once more how, despite a meticulously crafted legacy project, the meanings of a collection are inexorably transformed following the death of its collector. Recently, this has called into question how Sloane should be commemorated by the British Museum in a way that acknowledges his collecting activity and public bequests without eliding their debt to enslaved people in the Caribbean, and the violence these people were subjected to. The Black Lives Matter protests of 2020 raised the profile of questions about how Britain was commemorating figures with links to the slave trade, focusing attention on statues as a particularly visible and unambiguous medium of celebratory commemoration. The protests prompted a number of responses from cultural institutions, including the British Museum, which relocated a bust of Sloane from a pedestal to a cabinet in its galleries. Alongside new label text, the display sought to acknowledge that 'Sloane's travels and collecting in colonial Jamaica exploited slaves and [...] the fact that his collecting was partly financed from the labour of enslaved Africans on his wife's sugar plantations'.<sup>14</sup>

Although this act of recontextualization was outwardly uncontroversial, it was mischaracterised in headlines in the British press, which suggested that the bust of Sloane had been 'removed'.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Kevin Dunn, *The Pretexsts of Authority: The Rhetoric of Authorship in the Renaissance Preface* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp. 103-17.

<sup>14</sup> Gareth Harris, 'Debate flares as British Museum moves bust of slave-owning founder Hans Sloane', <<https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/british-museum-sloane-bust>>.

<sup>15</sup> For example see Craig Simpson, 'British Museum removes bust of slave-owner founder Sir Hans Sloane', 24<sup>th</sup> August 2020, <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/08/24/british-museum-removes-bust-slave-owner-founder-sir-hans-sloane/>>; [PA Media], 'British Museum removes statue of slave-owning founder', 25<sup>th</sup> August 2020, <<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2020/aug/25/british-museum-removes-founder-hans-sloane-statue-over-slavery-links>>.

This prompted a backlash, with campaign group Save Our Statues tweeting that ‘such disrespect & ingratitude to a man whose generosity has helped preserve so much world history for millions to enjoy. To now shame him permanently is disgraceful’.<sup>16</sup> This encapsulates the continuing influence of the ideology and rhetoric of eighteenth-century legacy construction. While there are more nuanced arguments for why we should intervene carefully with our civic heritage, suggesting that the British Museum’s recontextualization of its founding bequest in the museum’s gallery space is an injustice speaks to an uncritical reverence for the power structures of the past.

Suggesting that Sloane’s bust was removed rather than relocated sensationalised the story, associating it with the removal of the statue of Edward Colston in Bristol, which made international headlines two months before. It has since been recontextualised – no longer on its plinth, the monument lies prone in an exhibit in Bristol’s M-Shed, bearing marks of protest and graffiti. The title of the exhibit is *The Colston Statue: What Next?*, and the M-Shed makes explicit that the display is temporary, ‘it is the start of a conversation, not a complete exhibition’.<sup>17</sup> Here is an alternative approach to history and futurity – rather than an accretion of monuments, the commemoration of individuals and their work can be put back into a continuum, reflecting the fact that history is not something to be erased or ignored, but will continue to be constructed through shifting attitudes and priorities.

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As I explored in chapter three, the Royal Society’s repository was in some ways an exception to the pattern of legacy construction, a collection whose identity was not based primarily on its benefactors but on recording its objects as tokens of the Society’s collective scientific knowledge. This is not to say that the Society did not develop its own distinctive legacy structures – to recall Jan Golinski’s reading of early modern ‘bachelors of science’, training the next generation of natural philosophers meant Royal Society men could ‘reproduce themselves’, embodying Francis Bacon’s idea that ‘the noblest works and foundations have proceeded from childless men’.<sup>18</sup> This rarefied version of intellectual inheritance excluded familial structures entirely, ignoring inconvenient material and interpersonal realities in ways that enabled twentieth-century scholars like Thomas Kuhn to mischaracterise the notion of a scientific revolution as wholly masculine.<sup>19</sup> The Royal Society’s uneasy relationship with the authority of the individual perhaps contributed to the eventual failure of its collection, conceived as it was along different lines from the more successful egocentric private collections that surrounded it.

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<sup>16</sup> @\_SaveOurStatues, 24<sup>th</sup> August 2020, <<https://twitter.com/SaveOurStatues/status/1298016168175861760>>. See also <<https://saveourstatues.net/>>.

<sup>17</sup> ‘The Colston Statue: What Next?’, <<https://exhibitions.bristolmuseums.org.uk/the-colston-statue/tell-us-what-happens-next/>>

<sup>18</sup> Jan Golinski, ‘The Care of the Self and the Masculine Birth of Science’, *History of Science*, 15 (2002), 125–145 (p. 140); Francis Bacon, ‘Of Parents and Children’ in *The Major Works* ed. by Brian Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 352.

<sup>19</sup> Golinski, ‘The Care of the Self’, p. 125.



Nevertheless, in his attempt to describe a founding ideology for the Society, Thomas Sprat formulated a simile that provides a powerful alternative to the values of perpetual preservation that I have so far been discussing. Describing the process of interpreting the knowledge of previous generations, Sprat says

wisdom, which [natural philosophers] fetch'd from the ashes of the dead, is something of the same nature, with Ashes themselves: which, if they are kept up in heaps together, will be useless: But if they are scattered upon Living ground, they will make it more fertile[.]<sup>20</sup>

Preserving ancestral dust by heaping it into monuments is a 'useless' activity. True to the Society's zeal for recycling and re-use, Sprat points out that, once they are released from rituals of preservation, human ashes become a potent fertiliser.<sup>21</sup> The progress of human knowledge owes less to sanctifying the remains of the dead than to participating in natural cycles of decay and rejuvenation. The same principle echoes through Walter Benjamin's work on the rags and refuse from which we construct our histories – rather than preserving and cataloguing the remains of the past, Benjamin says we must allow them 'to come into their own: by making use of them'.<sup>22</sup>

As this thesis has shown, the idea that museums can (or should attempt to) preserve their objects perpetually is as quixotic as it is pervasive in the founding ideologies of England's public museums. Heaping up the ashes of dead benefactors into monuments is integral to this idea, and as the backlash to the Colston statue's removal suggests it is still pervasive today. The media's mischaracterisation of the Sloane bust's relocation, in which renewed engagement was mistaken for removal, demonstrates that static permanence is still expected of museums' handling of their objects and legacies. Of course, the spectre of permanent preservation that still haunts museums has little to do with the practical business of collection management – as Mary M. Brooks writes, there are 'contradictions and paradoxes' between public perceptions of the work museums do and the actual work of conservators to mediate processes of physical decay.<sup>23</sup>

Brooks suggests that Western museums hold an overwhelming preference for displaying 'the whole and the smooth' – that is, objects whose material appearances do not acknowledge disruptive effects of time.<sup>24</sup> By doing this, she suggests that they (sometimes literally) sterilise objects from contexts outside the museum gallery: for example, anatomical specimens in glass jars become a less grisly or offensive spectacle in the familiar setting of a science museum gallery.<sup>25</sup> Brooks's discussion focuses on sterilising the physical effects of time, but we might

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<sup>20</sup> Sprat, *History*, pp.24-5.

<sup>21</sup> On the Royal Society's recycling of materials see Simon Werrett, *Thrifty Science: Making the Most of Materials in the History of Experiment* (Chicago, IL & London: University of Chicago Press, 2019).

<sup>22</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. by Roy Tiedemann, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 23.

<sup>23</sup> Mary M. Brooks, 'Decay, Conservation, and the Making of Meaning through Museum Objects' in *Ways of Making and Knowing: The Material Culture of Empirical Knowledge*, ed. by Pamela H. Smith, Amy R.W. Meyers and Harold J. Cook (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 377–404 (p. 377).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* p. 379.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 383-4.

think in a similar way about how museums' ideological commitment to permanence allows them to sterilise the cultural meanings of their objects too. In the case of the Benin bronzes, now held in museums throughout the Western world, Dan Hicks suggests that specific techniques of display, as well as the narratives that museums authorise for these objects, elide the corporate colonial violence that was responsible for the bronzes arriving in European and US museums at the turn of the twentieth century. This elision, Hicks argues, is not successful – instead, the attempt to sterilise objects from their contexts of accession prolongs the violence with which they were originally taken.<sup>26</sup> To address this, Hicks suggests that museums must urgently move beyond reflexivity and self-awareness, which he characterises as the 'mere re-writing of labels or shuffling around of stolen objects', and instead employ archaeological methodologies to 'dig up our ongoing pasts' and 'excavate our institutions', to reveal and rewrite their ideological foundations.<sup>27</sup> Hicks's study is an exploration of the idea that heaping up the ashes of the past into reverential monuments is more than simply useless, it actively perpetuates the cultural trauma of colonialism. Reframing the past as 'ongoing' is the first step in reforming this process.

When regarding public museums, we should not take textual claims about public access or universal good at face value, and instead engage analytically with the circumstantial and often egocentric origins of institutions like the Ashmolean or the British Museum, which we have inherited from a small group of self-authorising male collectors in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The illusory idea of permanent preservation and remembrance continues to haunt the ideology of the modern museum. It provides leverage for those who claim that thinking critically about how we remember Britain's past enacts an injustice on the people who wrote it, people powerful enough to shape the nation's future through public benefactions. Archival precise analytical research can better equip museums to tell their own histories as ably as they tell the histories of the objects they contain, to speak to visitors about the ways in which institutions conceptualise themselves, and to make the ideologies of museums more transparent. Doing so would heal the awkward disparity, identified by Faujas de Saint-Fond, between a collage of individual bequests and claims about a unified notion of national identity. It would highlight that collections are in fact made up of particles, dust and ashes of the past, which can fertilise new ideas rather than being heaped up in stale monuments.

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<sup>26</sup> Dan Hicks, *The British Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution* (London: Pluto Press, 2020).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* pp. xiii-xiv.

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