

JESUS COLLEGE OXFORD

JC:PI98 LETTER FROM FREDERICK ROLFE (“BARON CORVO”)

Frederick William Rolfe (1860-1913), author, who later styled himself Baron Corvo, is best known today both for such novels as *Hadrian the Seventh* and *The Desire and Pursuit of the Whole*, but also for his extraordinary life, and his bad temper and remarkable ability to alienate those around him.

In the early years of the 20th century Rolfe spent some years working for Ernest Hardy (F. 1875-8 and 1896-1921; P. 1921-5), reading to him as Hardy’s sight deteriorated (it seems that they had first met when Hardy was headmaster of Grantham School, where Rolfe was briefly a teacher). It says much for Hardy that he remained one of the few people who did not fall out with Rolfe.

Because the arrangement between Hardy and Rolfe was a strictly private one, no material about it had been preserved in the College’s archives, and this letter is now the only document here relating to it.

The letter was purchased from Maggs Brothers and presented to the archives in August 2019 as Accession No. 582. Nothing is known of its earlier provenance, but it has been suggested that it might have come from the collection of Alan Clodd (1919-2002), an Irish publisher and collector.

Catalogued in August 2019.

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3 Dec 1905

Letter from Frederick Rolfe (no address given, but written on Jesus College notepaper) to an unnamed addressee, identified by Maggs Brothers as his solicitors, Barnard and Taylor. Rolfe asks for some money, as he has been in hospital. He reports that Vice-Principal Hardy’s eyesight has deteriorated, and he might need to take a term’s leave. He is therefore waiting to hear what his own situation will be, having worked with Hardy for six years. Rolfe also alludes to his “Borgiada”, a genealogical scroll about the Borgia family, and asks about the progress of an unspecified legal case.