

JESUS COLLEGE OXFORD

JC:P173 THREE NOTEBOOKS OF NOTES ON SCIENCE LECTURES, MID 18th CENTURY

These three notebooks contain notes of lectures on scientific subjects delivered at Oxford in the mid-18th century. They appear to be the work of undergraduates, and shed important light on undergraduate involvement in the sciences at the time.

Unfortunately, nothing is known of the provenance of these three documents. One of them was written by an undergraduate of Jesus College, John Thomas (matr. 1755), but the authorship of the other two is unknown. They are catalogued together here because of their close relationship in content and date; presumably they had been brought together at an earlier time.

Catalogued in December 2018.

JC:P173/MSI/1

n.d. (c. 1740-60?)

Exercise book (34 ff) titled on the inside front cover “Dr Bradley’s Lectures read at the Musaeum Oxon Natural Philosophy”. It contains notes taken from Bradley’s lectures, which appear to be neat copies based on rough notes taken down during the lectures themselves. These are written on the right-hand side of an opening, with diagrams sometimes added on the facing page. It is not possible from the notes to deduce when one lecture ends and another begins, but the subjects covered include the laws of motion, attraction and repulsion, and mechanics (including levers and pulleys, and even the size of wheels for carriages).

The writer of this notebook is not named and cannot be identified.

James Bradley (1692-1762) was Savilian Professor of Astronomy from 1721-62 and Reader in Experimental Philosophy from 1729-62. In 1742 he was also appointed Astronomer Royal. More on his distinguished career as an astronomer can be found in his entry in the *ODNB*.

This was formerly catalogued as MS 166.

JC:P173/MSI/2

May 1756

Bound volume (388 ff) inscribed on the inside front cover “E libris Iohannis Thomas, Coll Iesu Oxon Scholaris. Dr Alcock’s Chymical Lectures.” On the first page is written “Chymical Lectures read by Dr Alcock at the Museum in Oxford. Begun May 12th /56.”

There are 30 lectures in all, each one given a title. The series starts with lectures on fire, air, water (including mineral water) and earth, Later subjects include, in this order, salts, sulphur, oils and vegetables, temperaments, animal juices, metals, “semi-metals”, colours, fermentation, artificial gems, metallurgy, “mercurial preparations”, poisons, and phosphorus. The notes proper are written on the right-hand side of the page. At a later date someone (presumably Thomas himself) has added some headings on the left-hand side, presumably to help guide him to particular discussions.

The neatness of the notes suggests that, like those in **JC:P173/MSI/1** above, they were written up later from rough notes taken during the lectures.

There were at least three people at Jesus College in the academic year 1755/6 called John Thomas, but the likeliest candidate is John Thomas, son of Thomas Thomas, of Ynyskinhaiarn (sic), Carnarvon, plebeian, who matriculated on 20 March 1755 aged 18, and was admitted a scholar on 18 March 1757. The

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handwriting of his entry in the College Register from that date (RE.4 p. 22) tallies exactly with the hand of this notebook. Thomas remained a scholar until 20 June 1765, when due to “long Absences and other Causes”, and his failure to respond to a citation to appear, he was deprived of it (RE.4 p. 60). Nothing is yet known of his later life.

Nathan Alcock (1709-79) had studied medicine at Edinburgh and Leiden, and then moved to Oxford, where he gave lectures on anatomy and chemistry on an entirely freelance and unofficial basis, which, thanks to his lecturing skills, proved a great deal more popular than anything offered by those holding any university posts. Thanks to the support of friends in Oxford, he incorporated as an MA from Jesus College in 1741, taking his MB in 1744 and his MD in 1749. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1749 and a Fellow of the College of Physicians in 1754. At around this time he retired to Runcorn, Cheshire. More on his career may be found in his entry in the *ODNB*.

This was formerly catalogued as MS 167, and before that as II Arch. 2.27.

JC:PI73/MSI/3

n.d. (c. 1740-60?)

Exercise book (56 ff) inscribed “Anatomy” on the front cover, containing what appear to be notes of lectures on anatomy. However these notes are much rougher than those in **JC:PI73/MSI/1-2** above, even appearing to begin in mid-lecture. It is not possible to deduce from the notes where one lecture ends and another begins. It also seems that, for the first part of the book, the writer began by taking notes on the right-hand side of each opening, and then later on filled in the left-hand sides with fresh notes. Reading the notes, one must therefore take care to read only the right-hand or left-hand openings, to understand their sense. Later on, the writer writes on both openings at the same time. The notes are so rough that they might have been taken down during the actual lectures.

The writer of this notebook is not named and cannot be identified. The hand is certainly close to that of John Thomas at **JC:PI73/MSI/2** below, but there are just enough differences to make that identification uncertain.

There is also no information about who was giving the lectures. It may be that it was Nathan Alcock, since he was known to be giving lectures on both anatomy and chemistry at Oxford, but this cannot be proved.

This was formerly catalogued as MS 168.