



# ARCHIVIUM

**Blundell's School Archive Newsletter**



*Boater from the Archive collection, along with our signed copy of Lorna Doone et al*

**WELCOME TO  
ARCHIVIUM**



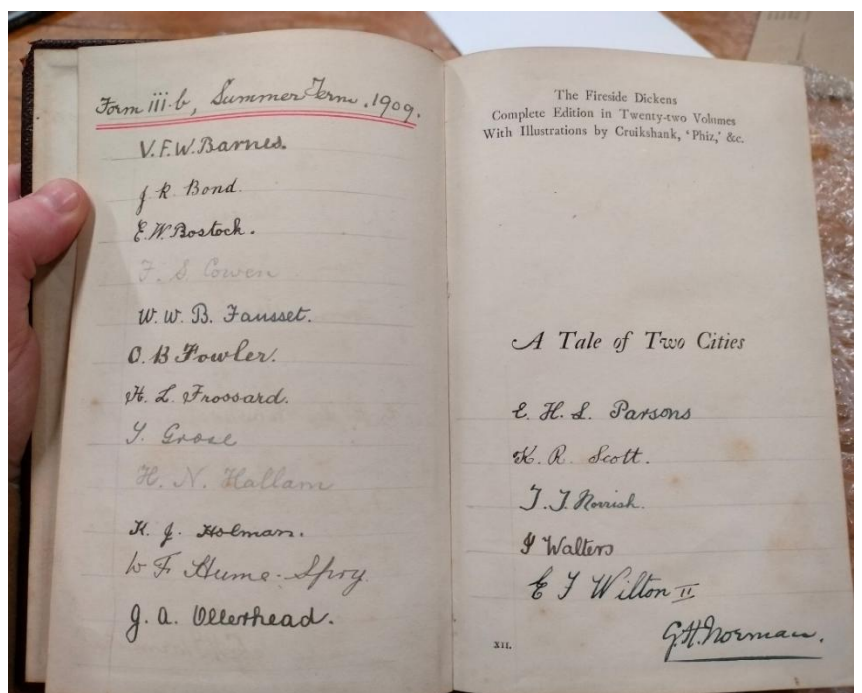
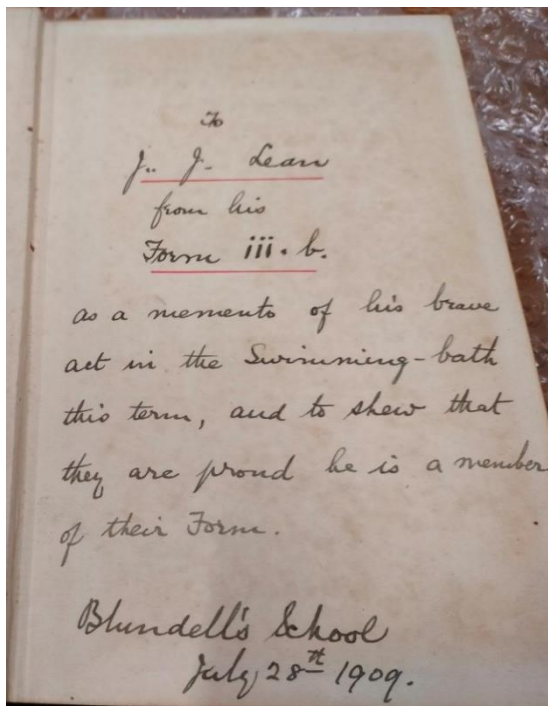
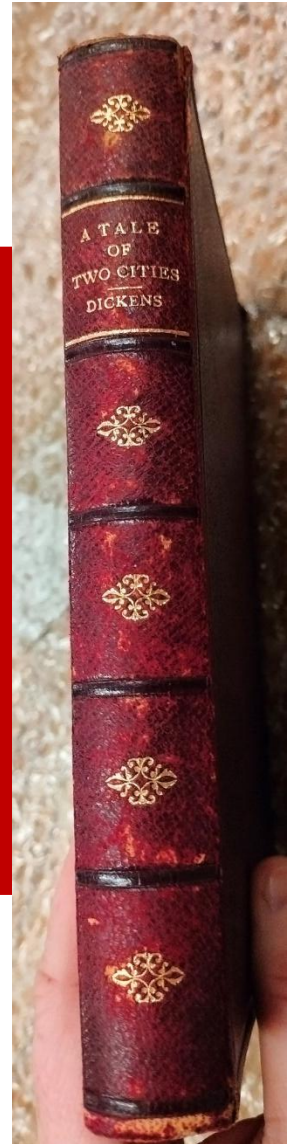
As I embark on another exciting year, it is with great pleasure that I share the progress made this term in preserving and celebrating our rich history. From meticulously ingesting new materials to maintaining our extensive collection, the behind-the-scenes routine work forms the backbone of my archival efforts. That said, there were a variety of developments as well.

Somehow 2024 whizzed past super-fast, and thus I present a bumper issue this term, with various interesting bits of news, which I am delighted to share with you below.

CELF

## NEW ACQUISITIONS

We have been grateful for several new items since the last Archivium, including a swagger stick from the 1910s with our crest on it, the golfing archives of the 1960s-90s (thank you Nick Swarbrick) and a collection of NC memorabilia. A rare purchase on behalf of the archive was made by myself last year. A Dicken's tome appeared at auction for a very low price which was irresistible. The book was presented to, OB, J.J. Lean in 1909 as 'a memento of his brave act in the Swimming Bath this term' and was signed by all of his form as well as his tutor G.H. Norman. A bit of digging in my own time has revealed that John Jennings Lean was exactly the sort of Blundellian of which the school is so proud. The Blundellian reveals that he saved a member of his form from drowning. As well as this heroic act, he captained the First XV before serving as a bombing officer in France with the Highland Light Infantry during the Great War. He was reported missing in August 1916, before being found four days later with a gunshot wound to the ankle. Once he had recovered from this injury, he returned to the front and went on to have an illustrious military career, rising to the rank of Major. He died in 1955 aged 58.





# NEWS FROM THE ARCHIVE

## Japanese Lunch:

Over the past year, the School Archive has been at the heart of several significant projects and events, fostering engagement with both the school community and beyond. Early in the year, an impromptu visit to the archive by EAL students sparked a discovery about the school's first Chinese and Japanese students, leading to a successful Japanese lunch celebration. The first Japanese student had arrived from Kani City some 40 years ago. And so, approaching our new Head of the International Committee, Ms Argiros, with the idea of putting together some form of celebration, we put on the most wonderful lunch for our Japanese students and their friends highlighting the rich international heritage of the school and strengthened cultural ties.



## Educational Outreach Circuit

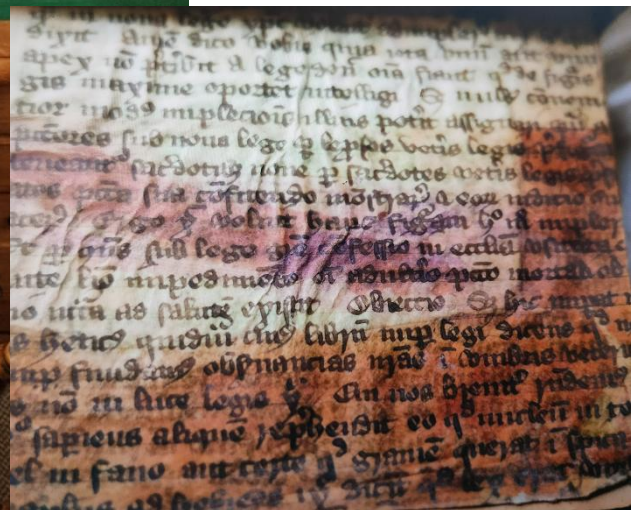
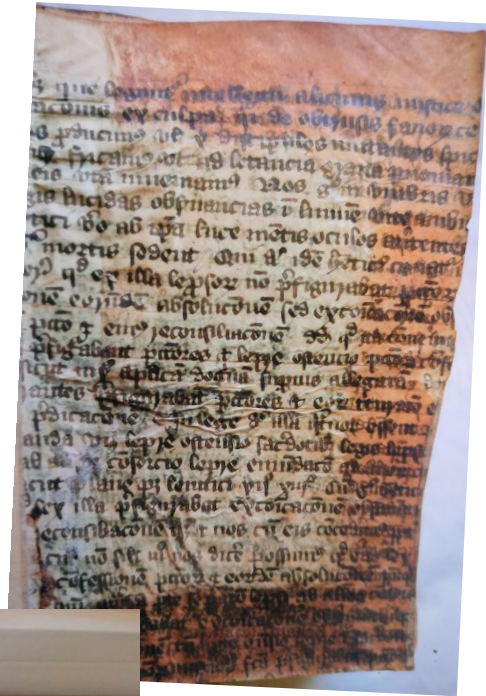
The 2024 outreach circuit began with 'Echoes of Eternity: Blundell's School and the long seventeenth century' a talk delivered to the wonderful history society in Uffculme, in which I discussed the early years of the school, with a focus on the Civil War period and the lives of two alumni: Peter Sainthill, the royalist MP for Tiverton who took part in the Council of Oxford before dying in exile on the continent; and rogue and self-proclaimed king of the Gypsies, Bamfylde Moore Carew. I also discussed the life and times of Headmaster Samuel Wesley for whom we hold some important items including a pencil drawing (recently examined by a professor in Oxford) and some of his poetry.

It was a wonderful opportunity at the end of the autumn term to check in on our 17th and early 18th century materials which include our Great Accounts Book, The Book of Orders, leases and wills and share images of these items with a wider audience, which included at least a couple of OBs. How fortuitous it was too, to expand the scope of the Uffculme Lecture to include the early eighteenth century, as it has allowed for an exciting new discovery in the archives. Looking for materials pertaining to Samuel Wesley, the inventory made note of an Elizabethan book in the collection, which beyond some Latin travel writing in a sixteenth century hand, had been repurposed in the eighteenth century to include some of Wesley's writings.





Getting it down, I was amazed to find the fragments of two medieval manuscripts as part of the bindings. With help from my husband's colleague, and OB parent, Professor James Clarke, at the University of Exeter who runs the Lost Manuscripts of the Middle Ages project, it would appear that these are texts yet, unrecorded elsewhere. They are partial summae, or summary texts on the Book of Leviticus which would have been used for teaching purposes, most probably at the University of Oxford. The 'bastard Anglicana' script that has been used dates these two texts to the early to mid-14<sup>th</sup> century, pushing our archive collection back another century.





I also received a warm welcome from the Tiverton Archaeological Society back in April, where I had the pleasure of discussing the early history of the school. I enjoyed sharing photographs of artifacts from this period, which are not currently available to the public. Together, we delved into the source material that forms the basis of our knowledge of this early era. More recently, I gave my inaugural lecture at the Tiverton Civic Society, which was well attended by the Blundell's community, where I enjoyed showcasing various treasures from the archives and meeting new people.

**D Day:**

For D Day I was very excited to be invited by Charlie Olive, our Director of Community Partnerships, to help with his D Day celebrations. With many Blundellians taking part in this momentous event 80 years ago, many sacrificing their lives for freedom from Nazism, it was a deep honour to contribute to this celebration. I helped with the exhibition and also presented a talk on Blundell's during the Second World War. I had the greatest of fun researching this by reading nearly a decades worth of Blundellians – the waspish tone of editors speaks volumes for the way that the school took on the challenges of the period in its stride. Highlights included the concern that the first XI would not be suitably attired (– ‘If a man’s clothes are torn off in the Clifton match, must he go on playing naked and ashamed,’ laments the Blundellian, ‘because he has no coupons?’), the boys efforts to grow their own food (‘By the sweat of our brows we shall eat – vegetable pie’ said one editor) the table tennis craze ( “Why is there not a ping pong cup?” questions the Blundellian. “And why not colours? Or at least a tie?”) and Ronnie Seldon’s lordly condescension when the fire at Old Blundell’s broke out that he only attended “big fires.” Beyond having so many lovely chats with OB visitors and the jovial atmosphere, my particular highlight was getting to hang out on the Willy’s Jeep offered to the school for the event by OB, Martin Whittaker, in full vintage garb. Who would suspect that the biggest challenge of my archival year has been forming vaguely convincing





victory rolls for the occasion!

### **Assembly outreach**



Following on from this, Head of Year 9, Pete Hayward invited me to speak to his cohort for their Tuesday assembly on the archive. Given the events of the previous week, it seemed pertinent to speak of the OB Walter Kemeys-Jenkin. I have talked of him before in these pages but for those who need a refresher, he was a talented sportsman, musician and actor, who went on to Merton College to read English before joining the Devonshires. He took part in D Day and was killed later in 1944 whilst leading a patrol to rid some woods of Nazi soldiers. The talk was not simply framed as a biographical account, but also as a didactical one - examining what lessons we can learn from his life in terms of both diligence, discipline and bravery.

### **Heritage Trails and 'Echoes of Excellence'**

Alongside Sixth Form archival volunteer, Martha Reynell, I have been diligently sifting through boxes of unsorted photographs to create a comprehensive history trail for the school. This trail will feature QR codes and images, showcasing the school's past for the enjoyment of students, teachers, and alumni alike.

I have also been working with Lisa Bush in Year 10, who has been trying to put together a garden trail, outlining the history of gardening and allotmenting in the school since the early 1900s. From digging for victory, to beekeeping and pig rearing, this should also prove to be a useful and enjoyable edition to Mr Olive's garden.



Another one of my major projects this term has been creating a short series of videos titled "Echoes of Excellence: Voices from Blundell's Archives." These videos use biographical information to present fictionalized first-person accounts, designed to share the inspirational life stories of notable Blundellians from the past. The series currently features A.V. Hill, R.D. Blackmore, Jack Hill, Bamfylde Moore Carew, Alison Booker, the Rev. John Russell, HH Yashwantrao Martandrao Muckne and the Wong Brothers.

### **OB Day Exhibition:**

After last year's postponement of OB Day, the archival exhibition "Strength and Serenity: Blundell's School Chapel" finally took place. The event was significantly enhanced by the refurbishment of the Abram Room, featuring a large screen that showcased the Blundell's Covid service from 2020 in its full glory. Additionally, several new items were included this year, such as the Rendell altar cloth, which made the exhibition even more special. Thank you to everyone who visited; I had many wonderful conversations and appreciated your enthusiasm. As always, I have received many wonderful photos and pieces of school memorabilia. However, the most impressive recent addition is a stunning Edwardian altar cloth donated during the vestry renovations. Made of silk in the school colours and adorned with gold thread, this beautiful item was initially a mystery, marked only with the initials T.F.R. and the date "the kalends of February 1901." Through some detective work, I discovered that the altar cloth was commissioned by the family of Thomas Fortescue Rendell, who tragically passed away from pleurisy in the sixth form, much to the shock and dismay of his family and the Blundell's community. A popular student, Thomas was a keen sportsman, led the debating society, and served as a school monitor. It has been wonderful to connect this significant item to Rendell, and we are now looking into restoring it for future generations.



### **Alain John Update**

In a serendipitous turn of events, a forgotten box tucked away in a Californian attic has unveiled a hidden gem. For many years, Alain John, has been one of our famous but elusive alumni attending Blundell's as a day boy between 1932-1939. His sculpture of Christ blessing the multitude is known to all Blundellians as that which sits in the niche in the clocktower entrance. Born in India in 1920 to a family of Armenian extraction, it was deemed too far for John to travel back following his acceptance for King's College, Cambridge, so the School allowed him to remain on. While with us for this additional period, he began work on a sculpture of Christ blessing the multitudes under



the auspices of his former teacher, Eric Gill who described it as the best sculpture produced in England that year. With war broken out, Alain joined the RAF and was killed in 1943, and a copy of the statue was later copied for a memorial for the Blitz at Coventry Cathedral, due to the Bishop of Coventry, Neville Gorton, being a former Headmaster of Blundell's. Keen readers of Archivium, will remember that I was trying to find an image of him among our community for a researcher who is in the middle of writing a book on Alain's life and work. The researcher in question, is a distant cousin of Alain and a recent review of the family's archive in California has uncovered box containing three photographs clipped together. One is labelled as Alain's father, one is of the sculpture itself and the final one is of a young man in RAF uniform. We know that Alain enlisted as Navigator Sergeant rather than seeking an officer's commission as he believed it would make it more likely that he could fly with his Blundell's friends and external experts have confirmed that the uniform in the picture and rank insignia on his arm are correct for a non-commissioned RAF sergeant in the 1940s. The man in the photo strongly matches a pupil in one of our day boy photos from 1937. All in all, the researcher and I are now fairly confident, that finally we have a face for Alain, whose sculpture plays such an integral part of the fabric of the school and adds a new chapter to the narrative of his life.



## Wills Project, Heritage Website, and other CPD updates

Mixed collections Training at Gloucestershire Archives last February was an enriching experience where I delved into the intricacies of caring for mixed archival collections. The programme provided valuable insights into the preservation and management of diverse historical materials, equipping me with skills to ensure the longevity and accessibility of all our archival treasures. Beyond the typical paperwork that you find in our archives (registers, letters, financial ledgers, photographs) we have a number of physical items in the collection – mostly school cups and medals but also a large collection of historic school uniform. This material has now become a priority, particularly with the change in uniform.



And so, the textiles project became a long-term endeavour, involving the careful preservation of historic uniforms. Armed with rolls of Tyvek and acid free tissue, labels and the kind support from the Museum of Scotland and other archivists, I have painstakingly wrapped and labelled around 120 items, a project which has taken me on and off the best part of six months to chip away at (indeed all the Radio 4 in the world can't make this project any less dull, important as it is). The good news is that the project is nearly done which should ensure the school uniform collection can be enjoyed by the school community for many years to come.



As the custodian of Peter Blundell's Will, I had the privilege of joining Professors Laura Sangha and Jane Whittle at the University of Exeter to delve into the intricacies of early modern wills. This was part of their public outreach workshop for the Material Culture of Wills project, spanning from 1540 to 1790 (<https://sites.exeter.ac.uk/materialcultureofwills/>). I found it fascinating to learn about the composition of wills during this period and the significant differences between men's focus on property and women's emphasis on personal possessions. During the workshop, I also had the opportunity to test a new software tool being launched by the project. This tool allows volunteers to participate online in correcting transcriptions of early modern wills, which was both straightforward and incredibly engaging. Below, I offer a sneak peek of how this software operates. If you have some spare time and are interested in contributing, please consider signing up for the mailing list at this link (under stage 2):

<https://sites.exeter.ac.uk/materialcultureofwills/volunteers/>

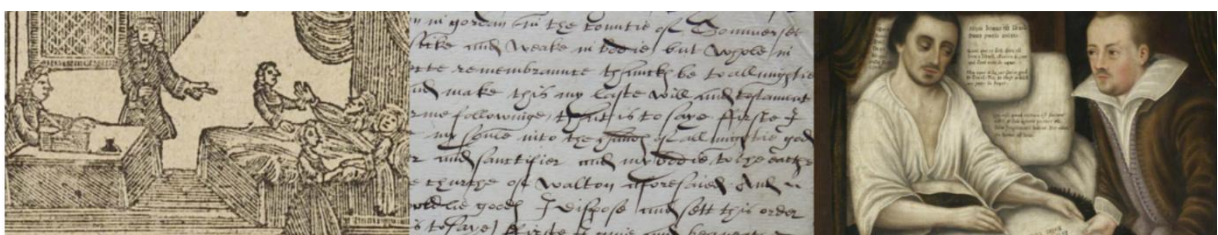


**The Material Culture of Wills, England 1540-1790**

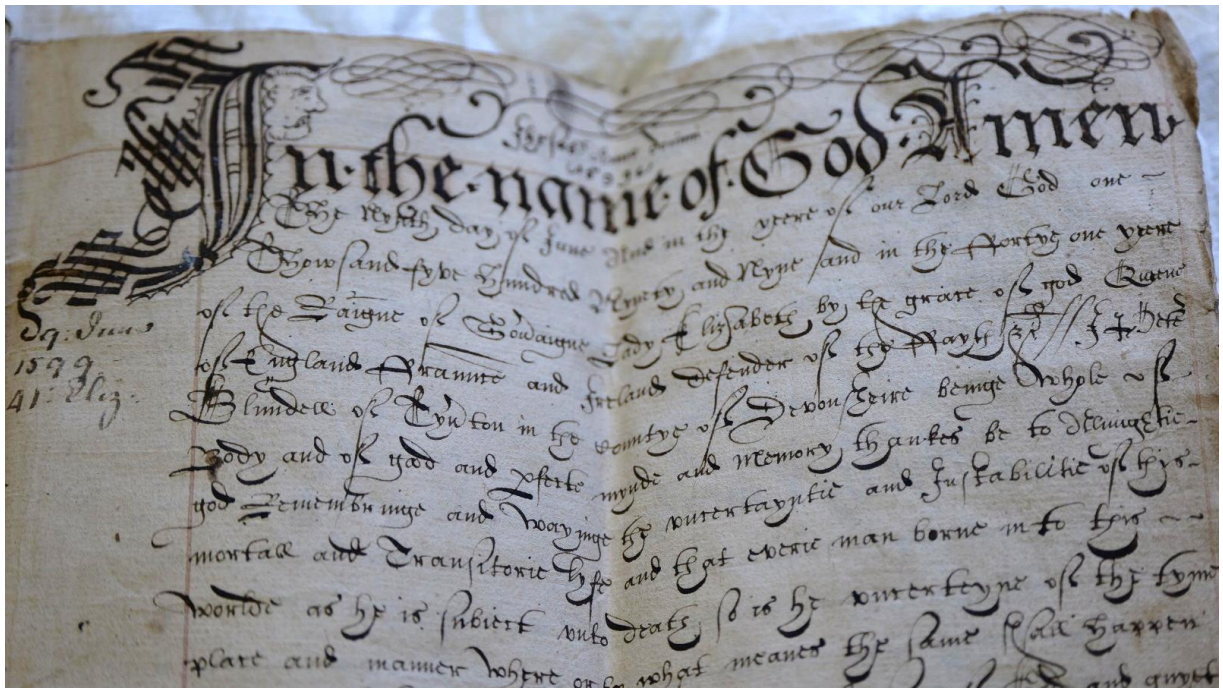
Generously funded by the Leverhulme Trust

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## The Material Culture of Wills, England 1540-1790








Talking of workshops, I have been busy working with archivists from Cheltenham Ladies, Bromsgrove and Dean Close to secure funding for a series of workshops in 2025 on digital preservation for school archivists led by expert Archives Consultant, Simon Wilson. The program concludes with an in-person workshop in Birmingham, resulting in benchmarking collections and a digital asset register. Aligned with The National Archives and DCMS Framework (Sections 1, 4, and 6), it will focus on continued custodianship, digital transformation, and long-term preservation. In a nut shell for the uninitiated, after two and a half years of meetings, training, and funding bids, it seems that we finally have lift off, for getting some systems in place to better preserve our digital and online materials.

One of the big updates I have for you is the upcoming heritage website for the school community. The work is being done by SDS, a specialist digital records company who work with 500 schools and small collections across the UK including Eton, Harrow, Wellington College, Charterhouse, Cheltenham, Canford and Clifton. With 20 years of experience, and a very generous grant from the Ted Crowe Will Fund, the inaugural website should be in place by the end of 2025, showcasing photos and documents from the archives. This will be an organic website with new contributions being added every year to be enjoyed by alumni, researchers and current students alike.

## PRESERVING THE FUTURE

### DIGITAL SKILLS FOR SCHOOL ARCHIVISTS



A series of monthly online workshops, led by expert Archives Consultant Simon Wilson, will run from January to June for School Archivists, supported in part by SARA funding. The program concludes with an in-person workshop in Birmingham, resulting in benchmarking collections and a digital asset register. Aligned with The National Archives and DCMS Framework (Sections 1, 4, and 6), it will focus on continued custodianship, digital transformation, and long-term preservation.

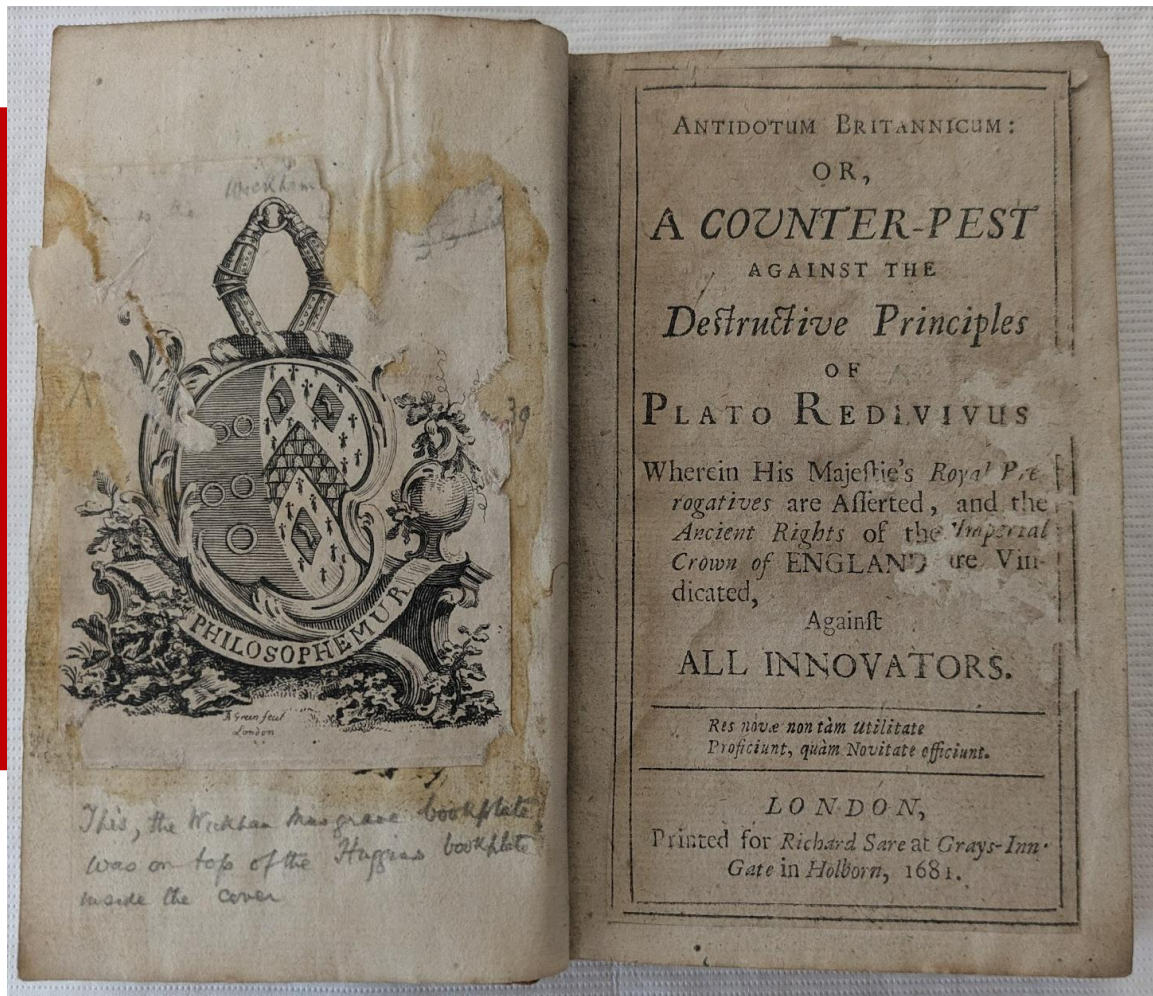
**Cost: £40**

**For more information:** please see the SARA notice board ([link here](#))



# CURIOSITY OF THE MONTH

## Antidotum Britannicum, 1681



Finally, let me show you this fascinating volume: *Antidotum Britannicum*, printed in 1681. It's a response to Henry Neville's controversial *Plato Redivivus*, which argued the monarchy should voluntarily reduce its power to appease the growing landowning class. While the book itself is intriguing, its history is even more captivating.

I came across it a few years ago after relocating some old materials from storage. Time constraints meant I only noted its title and shelved it. Preparing for this talk gave me the chance to properly investigate, and what a journey it's been! Pencilled inside was "From Newton's Library." Newton's library? As in *Isaac Newton*? Intrigued, I spotted an *ex libris* bookplate for Reverend Charles Huggins of Chinnor. A quick search revealed Huggins inherited Newton's collection from his father, John, who purchased it for just £300 after Newton's death. Huggins passed the books to Dr. James Musgrave, whose family later moved them to Barnsley Park. Sure enough, Musgrave's bookplate and a Barnsley shelf mark were inside.

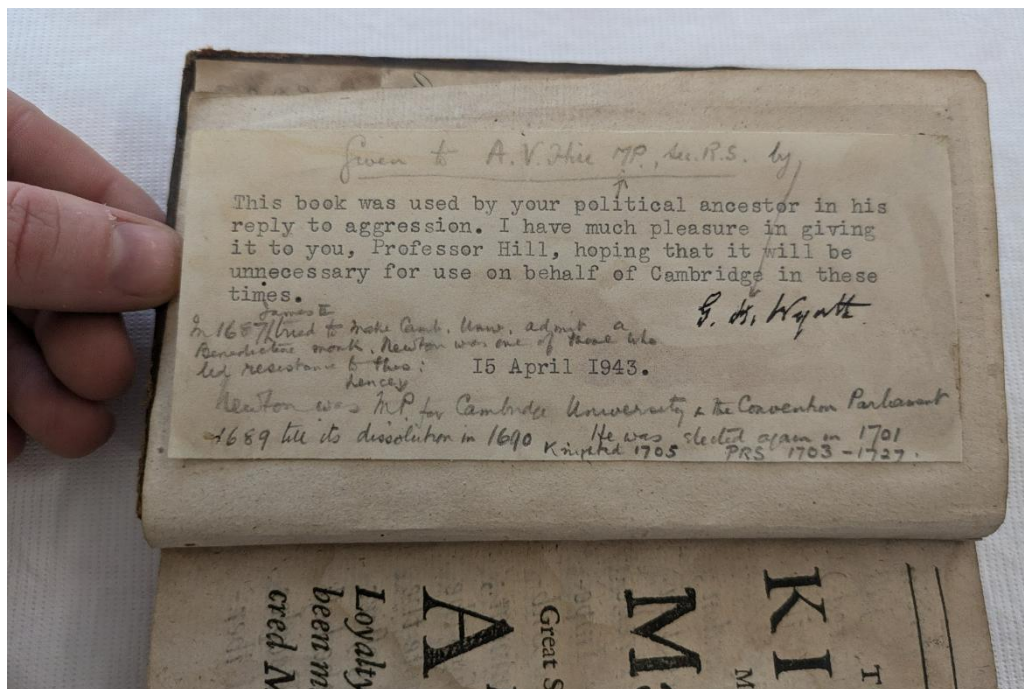
Then, a delightful twist: a typewritten note revealed the book was gifted in 1943 to A.V. Hill, a Nobel Prize-winning Old Blundellian and MP for Cambridge, by G.H. Wyatt, a Newton enthusiast. Wyatt likely acquired it after the collection was broken up in 1920. Even better, Professor Rob Iliffe at Oxford confirmed the book's authenticity and tied it to item 51 in the official Newton library catalogue, solving a long-standing academic



discrepancy about the bookplates, as well as informing the academic community of the location of this 'lost' volume.

Newton himself had marked pages on the constitution of bishops, likely tied to his role as MP. Iiffe is digging deeper into this fascinating detail.

To conclude, this book's journey—from Newton to Huggins, Musgrave, and A.V. Hill to Blundell's—highlights the enduring legacy of our collection. These artifacts are more than objects; they're living connections to our past, each telling a story of Blundell's history and its remarkable people.



## Can you help?



### CONTACT DETAILS

Catherine Flavelle  
Archivist  
Blundell's School  
Tiverton  
Devon EX16 4DN

Tel: 01884 232420

Email: [archive@blundells.org](mailto:archive@blundells.org)

With celebrations not so far away, if you have any copies photos, memories or memorabilia you would like to send in or lend to us for the 50 years of girls celebrations, our email for this is:  
[50yearsofgirls@blundells.org](mailto:50yearsofgirls@blundells.org)

All welcome but key things we are looking for:

- Early sports photos particularly tennis and hockey (1980s-90s)
- Girls relaxing (1980s-90s)
- School Trips
- Music and Drama Productions