John Wesley’s Reading:  
Evidence in the Kingswood School Archives  
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In the previous issue I detailed the list of books in the Kingswood School library recorded by Cornelius Bayley around 1775, and noted that Wesley helped procure most of these books. Indeed, Wesley appears to have donated much of his personal library to Kingswood. How do we know this? Because of Wesley’s signature on the flyleaf, or other markings in his hand, in many of the books that remain today in the Kingswood School archives from that initial collection.1

It is a matter of great regret that only about one third of the books on Bayley’s list remain at Kingswood (now in the Wesley Centre archives). There is a tradition that two cartloads of books were lost during the move of the school from Bristol to Bath in 1851. Whether this is true or not, it is significant that at Bath the books were placed in an open reading room and remained there until at least 1936. This means they were quite accessible to visitors through the celebration of the centennial of Wesley’s death in 1891 and the bicentennial of his birth in 1903. These anniversaries created great interest in collecting Wesley memorabilia, and the Kingswood collection felt the impact. Several of the books that remain have the corner of the fly leaf where Wesley’s signature likely was present cut or torn off. And there is little doubt that other signed volumes simply disappeared. In 1937—likely as he was preparing for the upcoming bicentennial of Aldersgate—W. G. Ingram, the librarian at Kingswood, sensed the magnitude of this loss. He published two letters in the Times Literary Supplement pleading for anyone with knowledge of the missing volumes to assist in their return.2 There is little evidence that Ingram’s plea yielded fruit, but the remaining books were apparently placed in a more secure area. Their security was further upgraded in 1988 with the creation of the Wesley Centre at Kingswood.

As should be expected, a number of the books now in the archives of the Wesley Centre are early editions of Wesley’s own publications. Frank Baker provides reference to these in his catalogue of extant copies of Wesley’s works.3 The following list will be limited to books present in the collection by writers other than Wesley, with a particular interest in evidence that Wesley was personally aware of the book. I begin with those titles present

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1I would acknowledge again my debt to David Brown, Director of the Wesley Centre at Kingswood School, for providing me an initial list of holdings in the Centre and then hosting my visit to peruse the collection, in order to determine which books might be traced back to Wesley. Mr. Brown and Gary Best, current Head Master of Kingswood, also provided some of the background on the collection summarized in the following paragraph.


that were contained in Bayley’s 1775 catalogue. Since the publication of this catalogue in the previous issue marked (with an asterisk) every volume still present, I include below only those volumes by other writers with contain some evidence of direct connection to Wesley (almost two-thirds of the relevant titles!). Next I list other volumes in the collection, not on Bayley’s list, that evidence direct connection to Wesley. Then I turn to volumes in the collection which lack direct evidence (such as a signature), but which we know by other means were known to Wesley. Finally I list any remaining volumes which may have been known to Wesley, but for which the only evidence I have found so far is their presence in this collection.

In the first two sections, bold material within quotation marks is in Wesley’s handwriting. The authenticity of each inscription was supported by Frank Baker in notes he took on each book, and I have verified their continuing presence. In the third section I typically list only one external reference for evidence of Wesley’s knowledge of each book. Abbreviations of published sources are standard. Manuscript sources are all found in the Coleman Collection of the Methodist Archives at the John Rylands Library, Manchester. Besides Wesley’s “Oxford Diary,” these include a list of readings he assigned his students in the years 1730–31 (in Coleman VII) and an inventory of his library on Michaelmas 1731 (Coleman XVIII, pp. 114–17). I am indebted to Richard Heitzenrater for help in confirming Wesley’s references to readings in the Oxford Diary.

Let me close with just one sample of the insights this list can provide to Wesley scholars. While all acknowledge that Wesley showed special interest in some patristic writers from the “Eastern” branch of Christianity, it has been unclear what interest or knowledge he had of more contemporary Eastern theologians. From this list we can show that Wesley owned and placed in the Kingswood collection two books by relatively contemporary Eastern writers (Mohyla and Meniates), in addition to a volume on the Greek Church listed in Bayley’s catalogue that is no longer present.6

4Baker’s notecards are now in the possession of Richard Heitzenrater, who kindly gave me access to them.

5Works refers to the Bicentennial edition, while Works (Jackson) is the earlier edition edited by Thomas Jackson. The other source is Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, from the First, held in London, by the Late Rev. John Wesley, A.M., in the Year 1744 (London: John Mason, 1862).

6Wesley probably owned Mohyla from 17 Jan. 1734, when the Oxford Diary records him reading the volume. The other book in Bayley’s list is Thomas Smith (1638–1710). An Account of the Greek Church, as to its doctrine and rites of worship. London: Richard Davis, 1675. [102].
I. Books on Bayley Inventory still in collection, with signature or possible marks


“J.W. 1747”


“J.W. 1748” “Kingswood”


*corner of fly leaf cut off, likely for autograph*


“Kingswood” in Wesley’s hand, area of possible autograph removed


*Wesley’s abridgement marks in volume*


the inscription “John Wesley” likely not by Wesley, but others marks possibly are


“Kingswood”


“J.W. 1760”


“J.W. 1757” “The Gift of Mr. Walker of Edinburgh”


Daubuz, Charles (1673–1717). *A Perpetual Commentary on the Revelation of St. John, with a preliminary discourse concerning the certainty of the principles upon which the said revelation is to be understood*. 2nd edition: Abridged, and rendered plain to the meanest capacity, by Peter Lancaster. London: Innys, 1730. Top corner of fly leaf cut off, but “E.A.P.J. Nov. 14, 1733” remain, so surely had “J.W.” (C. Wesley on title page) Note: Monthly Ledger (Nov. 1733)


Florus, Lucius Annaeus. *Rerum Romanorum libri IV*. Amsterdam: Daniel Elzevir, 1664. fly leaf cut off where autograph likely

“J.W. 1761”

Fulke, William (1538–89) et al. *The Text of the New Testament of Jesus Christ; translated out of the Vulgar Latin by the Papists of the traitorous seminary at Rhemes ... pretending to discover the corruptions ... whereunto is added a translation out of the original Greek commonly used in the Church of England*. Enlarged edition. London: Thomas Adams, 1617.

“Kingswood”


“Kingswood”


“Kingswood 1771”


“J.W. 1766” “The Gift of Mrs. Woodrow” “A good man, though I do not at all agree with his notion of faith” “Kingswood”

Hales, Stephen (1677–1761). *Statical Essays. Vol. I: Vegetable staticks, or, An account of some statical experiments on the sap in Vegetables; being an essay towards a natural history of vegetation; also, a specimen of an attempt to analyse the air, by a great variety of chymio-statical experiments. Vol II: Containing Haemasticks, or, An account of some hydraulick and hyydrostatical experiments made on the blood and blood-vessels of animals. Also an account of some experiments on stones in the kidneys and bladder*. 3rd edition. London: W. Innys & R. Manby, 1738.

“J.W. 1747” on Vol. 1

“J.W. 1745”


“J.W. 1762”

Horneck, Anthony (1641–97). *The Happy Ascetic; or the best exercise, to which is added a letter to a person of quality, concerning the holy lives of the primitive Christians*. 5th edition. London: Henry & George Mortlock, 1711.

“Kingswood”


“J.W. 1760”

Hutcheson, Francis (1694–1746). *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue; in two treatises, in which the principles of the late Earl of Shaftesbury are explained and defended against the author of the Fable of the Bees*. 3rd edition. London: J. Knapton, 1729.

“J.W. 1772” “A panegyric upon Mankind, pity but it were true!”


“Gift of John Perowne 1769” in Wesley’s hand


“J.W.”


“J. Wesley 1747” “Kingswood” partially rubbed out


“J.W. 1752” “Kingswood”

“J.W. 1750”


“J.W. 1750”


corner torn off cover, almost certainly for autograph


“Kingswood 1768”


“Kingswood” and cut out on title page where autograph possible


“J. Wesley 1759”


“Kingswood”

Oetinger, Friedrich Christoph (1702–82). *Inquisitio in Sensum Communem et Rationem*. Tübingen: Johann Christoph Loffler, 1753.

“J.W. 1759”


“J.W. 1750” “6 vols. 55”
“J.W. 1749”

“1771 Kingswood The Gift of John Wotton”

“J.W. 1759”

“Kingswood School 1768”

“Kingswood 1750”

“J.W. 1760” “I think he fully proves his point”

“J.W. 1754”


“J.W. 1765” “The gift of Mr. Hunt. 1765. Kingswood”

\(^7\)This portion is missing.

“J.W. 1756” “Kingswood”


“J.W. 1751” “The gift of Mr. Bowles. Kingswood”

Wilkins, John (1614–72). *A Discourse concerning the Gift of Prayer ... whereunto may be added ... A Discourse concerning the gift of Preaching*. London: S. Gellibrand, 1674.

“Kingswood”


“Kingswood”


“Kingswood”


“J.W. 1747”

II. Volumes with Wesley’s signature not on Bayley (i.e., added after 1775)


“Kingswood 1782”


“Kingswood 1782” (on vol. 1)


“Kingswood 1788”

“Kingswood”

Cicero, Marcus Tullius. *M.T. Cicero de Oratore; or, His three dialogues upon the character and qualifications of a orator*. Translated by William Guthrie. London: T. Waller, 1742.

“Kingswood School”

Davies, John (1569–1626). *Historical Relations; or, a discovery of the true causes why Ireland was never entirely subdued, nor brought under obedience of the crown of England, until the beginning of His Majesty’s happy reign*. Dublin: S. Hyde & J. Dobson, 1733 [ bound with Davies, *Poem*].

“J.W. 1760” “Kingswood”


“Kingswood 1766”


*vol 1: “Given by Mrs. Berkeley” “Kingswood” corner of fly leaf cut off, where autograph likely appeared; vol 2: “Half right, half wrong 1777”*


“J.W. 1771” “Admirably well wrote” “Kingswood 1782”

“J.W.”


“J.W. 1760” “Kingswood”

[Meniates, Elias, Bishop of Kernitses & Kalavryton (1669–1714).] *Petra tou skandalou etoi diasaphesis ...[Greek]. Lapis offendiculi sive expositio originis et caussae discidii duar. orient. scilicet et occident. ecclesiarum cum quinque controversiis*. London: J. C. Haberkorn, 1762. [Note: this edition was republished by Erasmus Aulonita, bishop of Arcadia (Crete), who was currently in London—his signature appears on the third opening page. Erasmus apparently personally gifted Wesley with this copy.]1

“J.W.” “Kingswood 1779”


“Kingswood 1779 J.W.”

Rothes, Christian Adoph (fl 1770). *The Real Views and Political System of the Regency of Denmark fully explained ... tracing the true causes of the late revolution at Copenhagen* (text in both French and English). London: reprinted for S. Bladon, 1772. Bound with M., Th. *Letters from an English Gentleman on his Travels through Denmark, serving as a confutation to the many false accounts ... particularly [Rothes]*. London: s.n., 1772.  

Wesley’s comment on title page “A pitifull Romance”

Sarpi, Paolo (1552–1623). *The History of the Council of Trent, in eight books; in which (besides the ordinary acts of the Council) are declared many notable occurrences, which happened in Christendom during the space of forty years and more, and particularly the practices of the Court of Rome to hinder the reformation of their errors*. London: Samuel Mearne, John Martyn & Henry Herringman, 1676.

“J.W. 1779” “Kingswood”


“J.W. 1746” “The gift of Mr. Bowles. June 21”

1The date of publication has been corrected and the note added after the published article appeared.
III. Works not on Bayley, or signed, but other evidence they were known to Wesley

Addison, Joseph (1672–1719). *Notes upon the Twelve Books of “Paradise Lost”; collected from “The Spectator”*. London: Jacob Tonson, 1719.

read: Oxford Diary (2–11 Mar. 1730)


read: Oxford Diary (26–28 Aug. 1725)


assign: Oxford Reading List (1730–31)

Allestree, Richard (1619–81). *The Practice of Christian Graces; or, the Whole Duty of Man laid down in a Plain and Familiar Way for the Use of all, but especially the meanest reader*. London: Norton, 1675. (this copy noted to have belonged to Lady Mansfield)

read: Oxford Diary (13 Feb. 1731)


comment on: *Journal* (29 Nov. 1755), Works 21:33


cite: Complete English Dictionary, Preface, Works (Jackson) 14:234

Bunyan, John (1628–68). *The Pilgrim’s Progress from this World to That which is to Come*. London: Nathaniel Ponder, 1672 (2 copies of mixed editions of the three parts).

read: Diary (8 Oct. 1739), Works 19:410


cite: Letter to Samuel Wesley Jr. (5–6 Dec. 1726), Works 25:204


sponsor: Wesley sponsored most of Coke’s publications

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Grotius, Hugo (1583–1645). *Annotationes in Libros Evangeliorum*. Amsterdam: Johann & Cornelius Blaeu, 1641. (marked “Gift of John Catimole of Portsmouth to Kingswood”)

commended: (by father) Letter from Samuel Wesley Sr. (26 Jan. 1724/5), *Works* 25:158


read: Oxford Diary (8–16 Sept. 1725)


comment on: *Journal* (26 June 1754), *Works* 20:480


comment on: *Journal* (12 Nov. 1764), *Works* 21:494–95


read: Preface to 2nd edition of Wesley’s *Complete English Dictionary*

read/collect: Oxford Diary (20 Nov.–29 Dec. 1732)

comment on: *Journal* (1 Mar. 1766), *Works* 22:32

study: List on inside cover, Oxford Diary 1 (ca. 1726)

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Saint Juré, Jean Baptiste de (1588–1657). *The Holy Life of Monr. de Renty, a late nobleman of France, and sometimes councillor to King Lewis the Thirteenth*. Translated by E. S. London: Benjamin Tooke, 1684.
read/collect: Oxford Diary (22–29 May 1729)

own: Michaelmas 1731 Inventory

commended: (by mother) Letter from Susanna Wesley (14 Mar. 1726/7), *Works* 25:211

read: Oxford Diary (3 Dec. 1733)

read: Oxford Diary (22 Oct. 1725; 3–9 Nov. 1725)
   read: Diary (23 June 1737), Works 18:520

   read: Diary (1 Apr. 1736), Works 18:373

Whitefield, George (1714–70). The Christian’s Companion; or, Sermons on several subjects, to which is annexed a collection of forms of prayer. London: s.n., 1738.
   read: Diary (13–14 Dec. 1738), Works 19:366

IV. Works possibly known to Wesley, but no corroboration besides presence here


Amhurst, Nicholas (1697–1742). Terrae-filius; or, The Secret History of the University of Oxford in Several Essays... to which are added remarks upon a late book entitled “University Education” by R. Newton. London: R. Franklin, 1726.


Bacon, Thomas (ca. 1700–68). A Sermon preached ... for the benefit of a Charity Working School, 14th October, 1750. London: J. Oliver, 1751.


Barber, Robert (fl 1723–53). David’s harp well-tuned; or a Book of psalmody, containing a variety of psalm tunes ... with chanting tunes. 3rd edition. London: Charles Bathurst, 1753.

Bibles

   English: Geneva Bible


   The Bible, that is, the Holy Scriptures contained in the Old and New Testaments. London: C. Barker, 1607.


Hamilton, Alexander (d. 1696). *A Cordial for Christians traveling Heaven-ward; being the substance of some sermons upon the eight [sic.] chapter of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans.* Edinburgh: George Mosman, 1696.


Modestus à S. Joanne Evangelista (fl. 1690) *Das Reich Gottes in der Seele.* Franfurt: Lipper, 1690.


Playford, John (1623–86?). *The Whole Book of Psalms; with the usual hymns and spiritual songs*. 18th edition. London: John & Benjamin Sprint, 1729.


John Wesley was an eighteenth-century evangelist, writer and theologian who was a key figure in the establishment of Methodist... ~Jack Jackson, "Offering Christ: John Wesley's Evangelistic Vision" (Nashville: Kingswood, 2017), 40. John Wesley. 25 April at 10:06 Â·. A review, by Dr. Kevin Watson of Candler, of the new “Wesley One Volume Commentary” on the Bible. https://kevinmwatson.com/â€/wesley-one-volume-commentary-fiâ€/ I ordered the new Wesley One Volume Commentary from Cokesbury last week and was thrilled when it came in the mail. I remember a colleague mentioning working on commentary for one of the books for tâ€ kevinmwatson.com. Wesley One Volume Commentary: First Impressions.
John Wesley was born in 1703, educated in London and Oxford, and ordained a deacon in the Church of England in 1725. In 1726 he was elected a fellow of Lincoln College at Oxford, and in the following year he left Oxford temporarily to act as curate to his father, the rector of Epworth. The church planned new evangelical missions, developed the Kingswood School (Wesley’s foundation) and other boarding schools, and trained Christian teachers at Westminster and Southlands colleges, activities that continued through the rest of the 20th century. Its strong interest in social issues has expanded to include a wide range of national and international problems, especially those connected with race, poverty, and peace.