Reconstructing Nicholas Crouch

Cataloguing and conserving a seventeenth-century library

An exhibition held at
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ST CROSS CHURCH, OXFORD

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One of our best sources for Nicholas Crouch’s life is his diary, a document by turns frustrating and beguiling. Characteristically it is both precisely presented and incomplete. Many pages are neatly ruled with astrological symbols to denote each weekday but contain no entries at all. Years pass with nothing more than his residence or absence from Balliol marked or a brief note of the weather. Then all at once it blazes into life as, for example, on the half-dozen occasions he mentions dining on venison pasty (the only food he ever documents) or when he notes his purchase, on 6 December 1664, of a new winter outfit of (rather fashionable) Padua serge and on first wearing it ten days later congratulates himself on his foresight, “O Sapientia!”.

To a great extent our knowledge of Crouch is our knowledge of his career at Balliol, and the very first entry in his diary covers his arrival at the College on Wednesday 1 October 1634. The diary proper comes to an abrupt halt at the end of 1672. However the latter half of the book comprises neatly drawn tables of Crouch’s battels, his College bills, running complete from October 1654 until June 1690, the month before his death. This suggests the diary’s primary purpose is as a financial record. This would explain the persistent noting of whether Crouch is in residence in Oxford. But the details he mentions, of the places and people he visits, of the friends and family whose deaths he mentions, build a picture of his life.

Crouch, Nicholas. Diary for the years 1634–1672, with his College account for 1634-89 [Balliol manuscript 355]
Parts of Crouch’s diary show signs of being written later than the events described. Rather than an entry on a firm date, he sometimes writes “about this time”, or crosses through an entry to place it on a different date. In the opening pages he has written “1664” rather than “1634”. Perhaps like his Balliol contemporary, the renowned diarist, John Evelyn, he first used printed almanacs as pocket diaries. Even in this rough form Evelyn’s diary contrasts with Crouch’s, providing a comparatively lengthy account of his arrival in Oxford in May 1637.

None of the almanacs in Balliol’s Library annotated by Crouch relate obviously to his diary. Most of his notes are either astrological or agricultural. This may allow us a glimpse of Crouch’s life before Balliol. His father, also Nicholas, was a prosperous farmer who held the manor of Faldo and Westhey, near the village of Higham Gobion in Bedfordshire. According to his diary, Crouch frequently returned home before Nicholas Senior’s death in 1655 and he may have assisted in the management of the family property.

David Loggan’s depiction of Balliol, published in 1675, shows us the College as Crouch would have known it. We do not know whereabouts on the site he lived in the early part of his career, but entries in the College Register show that in 1652 he moved into rooms to the west of the College entrance, next to the Master’s Lodgings, and in 1657 to rooms on the other side of the front gate where he lived until his death.

There is not much evidence about Crouch’s undergraduate career. Clearly he was studious; in 1635 he was awarded a scholarship. On the other hand amongst John Evelyn’s papers in the British Library is a copy of verses composed by Crouch in Latin to the Dean George Bradshaw apologising for some transgression. Then, as now, the Dean was the College Fellow in charge of student discipline.

Crouch received his BA in 1638 and his MA in 1641. By then he had already been elected to the College’s Lady Periam Fellowship, which he held for the next half century. This recently established Fellowship had no additional financial recompense, but the holder did have to preach a sermon every year on the first of May. Unfortunately, none of Crouch’s efforts survive.
The books in Crouch’s collection show the wear and tear of centuries of use, including splits in the spine from repeated opening, splitting joints leading to detached covers, torn pages and crumbling leather caused by formerly fashionable leather dressings. Conservation work seeks to restore the functionality of each volume, allowing the books to be accessed by future generations of scholars, whilst also preserving as much of the original material as possible. In conservation, we constantly see the impact of poor-quality materials: leathers that easily split, papers that discolour and crumble, so we use materials that have withstood ageing tests whilst matching well with historic materials.

Over the course of one year, 133 items were conserved. Some of the treatments were minor, stitches in time to prevent further damage. Others required more extensive treatment. Sometimes the bindings in Crouch’s collection had split into multiple pieces, along the fault lines of many items sewn together. For example one item (Balliol shelf mark: 915 f 8) contains 40 different tracts. Both boards were detached and the textblock completely broken at two different points. The leather spine was fragmented. Conservation required lifting the leather spine in one piece, which was placed to one side. The exposed spine of the textblock was then lined with kozo-fibre paper and aerocotton (a durable textile originally developed for aircraft) adhered with wheat starch paste. Linen braids were used to consolidate the fragmented supports, and were sewn into place for mechanical support. Next, new leather was toned and pared to match the original, and this was adhered over the spine and underneath the leather on the boards. Finally, the original spine fragments were glued back in place. All the original elements of the volume were reunited, while giving it a strong spine structure to hold it together and restore its mechanical function.
During the 2016-2017 project 3620 bibliographic items were catalogued. Details of these items are now publicly accessible through the University of Oxford’s online, union catalogue, SOLO (Search Oxford Libraries Online). Not all of these books belonged to Crouch. For example, 209 items bear the provenance of George Coningesby, a later donor whose collection mixed with Crouch’s after it came to the Library.

As well as providing a bibliographic record to antiquarian standards (e.g. recording author, title, edition, variations, illustrations, subject access points etc.) the cataloguers also made in-depth copy-specific notes for each item. This allows researchers to search by and discover remotely a variety of attributes unique to the individual copy of a work.

One of the most striking features of Crouch’s library is his meticulous contents lists. On the endpapers of a book he lists the titles inside, often including their prices, the price of binding and the name of the binder. The cataloguers recorded this information in detail as a fascinating source for the history of the book trade. Crouch also annotated texts, usually with factual information: bibliographical references, corrections, calculations. The tone of his marginalia appears brisk and pedantic and the lay-out precise. He even drew pencil lines to ensure his marginal notes were level. Additional blank leaves bound into his volumes were used to inscribe longer additions to the text, or to create handwritten indexes of content that interested him.

Although Crouch seems to have bought the bulk of his books as new in his later years, his library does contain earlier works bearing signs of former ownership. These include his almanacs which contain multiple hands, and several books bearing the same, unidentified handwriting which all appear on a list of books bought from a “Mr Gurney” (pictured below), for example in this spotter’s guide to urine samples (pictured opposite).

One of the cataloguers’ most useful discoveries was that Crouch had his own system of shelf marks in the form [format] [capital letter] [number]. This breakthrough allowed the project to identify books with no other traces of Crouch’s provenance. The shelf marks may also give clues to how Crouch arranged his personal library.

The cataloguers described all these signs of provenance to build a picture of the reader history and traces of textual reception contained in each item.

The bindings in Crouch’s collection were probably commissioned by Crouch himself, from an Oxford binder. There are clear stylistic similarities throughout the collection. For example, Crouch commissioned edge colouring to help demarcate the tracts in many
of his bound volumes. However, among the common features there is still a great deal of variation: from the tool of the corner fleuron used, to the material of the sewing support and the colours of the end bands. The cataloguers described each binding. All volumes that visited the conservation studio had their bindings recorded in detail in order to build up a body of data and begin to trace a timeline of when, where and how they were bound.

The cataloguing revealed that identifying Crouch’s books is not straightforward. There are three categories of book with Crouch provenance in Balliol Library:

1. Items that appear on the list of his 1690 bequest in the Donation Register. To complicate matters, not all 319 of the volumes on this list are still in the Library.
2. Items not on the Donation Register that nevertheless contain Crouch’s personal shelf mark and/or contents list with prices.
3. Items that contain Crouch’s handwriting but probably never belonged to Crouch. For example, the volume given to the College by John Harris’ widow, discussed on pages 7–8 for which Crouch wrote a contents list perhaps because he was administering the Library.

This is not to mention a fourth category of Crouch’s books; those that exist on manuscript book lists but are themselves no longer in the Library.
The list is Nicholas Crouch’s quintessential literary form. Amongst his papers and annotations in his books we find many painstakingly assembled indexes, as well as lists of French verbs, Anglican Bishops, distances between towns, inventions, square numbers, eclipses until the thirty-first century, and events since the creation of the world.

One of the most exciting discoveries of the project is a slim volume previously identified only for an index of a medical work by Johann Georg Schenk, but which also contains a plethora of lists and information about Crouch’s books. This includes lists of books he desired to buy, books he did buy from booksellers in London and Oxford in the 1650s and 1660s complete with prices, books he bought for other people, a list of more than a hundred medical books purchased from the unidentified “Mr Gurney” and a long list of books loaned by Crouch between 1653 and 1689.

The latter records more than 130 loans to around 60 individuals. It casts a fascinating light on the intellectual pursuits of Oxford Fellows and on Crouch’s network of friendship in Oxford and beyond. He loans undergraduates books of elementary maths, distinguished physicians medical works and his fellow Fellows books of cutting-edge science and light reading. Combining the glimpses of Crouch’s life in these lists and elsewhere we can begin to build up a picture of his relationships.
John Harris was an unusual Fellow of Balliol in several ways. Elected in 1631, he was one of the first Balliol Fellows not to have been an undergraduate of the College (he took his BA at Merton). In 1656, his life took a very different turn from Crouch’s. He resigned his Fellowship, took up the lease of College property in Old Woodstock and Wotton and married Jane Sandys, the sister-in-law of Henry Savage, the Master of the College. In 1672, he was appointed the Steward of Balliol, “the grandest non-academic post in the College hierarchy . . . with functions somewhere between those of the . . . Bursar and the College Solicitor.”

His life intertwines with Crouch’s repeatedly. Crouch twice moved into College rooms vacated by Harris. His lending list records several loans to Harris, ranging from scientific works by Descartes to the Cavalier poetry of Alexander Brome. Crouch’s diary reveals frequent visits to the Harrises, spending Christmas with them three years running from 1658. On 2 December 1665 he records his presence at, and possible assistance with, the birth of their daughter, Elizabeth (pictured above).

Harris died in 1676. Crouch was one of the witnesses of his will which left nothing to Balliol. However an elaborate entry in the Library Donation Register (pictured below) records the presentation of some 27 items by his widow in 1679. But this is not quite the generous gift it appears. All 27 are bound into a single volume, possibly at Crouch’s instigation.
In this volume, alongside sermons by Harris’s brother-in-law and former colleague Henry Savage, sits a more striking item: *Chorea Gigantum* by the physician and natural philosopher Walter Charleton (1620-1707). Charleton took issue with Inigo Jones’s suggestion that Stonehenge was a Roman temple, arguing instead it had been erected by the Vikings for the election and coronation of kings. Charleton based this apparently outlandish suggestion on a careful comparison of Stonehenge with Danish monuments described by the Danish antiquary Ole Worm. Crouch took a more traditional view; a detailed chronological listing of world history he drew up notes the construction of Stonehenge in the fifth century AD as a memorial to Britons treacherously slain by the Saxons, an idea deriving from the medieval writer Geoffrey of Monmouth.

John Harris’ daughter, Elizabeth maintained a connection with Balliol all her life. She and her husband Sir Robert Sheppard took over the leases of the College lands formerly held by her father. In his diary for 25 January 1701 Balliol Fellow Jeremiah Milles records visiting her and her sister Jane Hodges. Milles’ diary is far more detailed than Crouch’s, giving a good impression of the day-to-day life of a Fellow in the period.
Friends at Balliol

THE SAVAGES

Henry Savage was appointed Master of Balliol in 1651 by the Parliamentary Visitors who had taken control of the University. It was only after this appointment that Crouch seems to have felt comfortable returning to Oxford permanently, having been a sporadic presence at College during the turbulent second half of the 1640s.

During Savage’s Mastership, the College faced severe financial problems. It was mostly in the hope of raising money from benefactors that Savage embarked on his major work Balliofergus, the first written history of a college derived from original documents. It is during this period that Crouch too became interested in Balliol’s records and started to take a part in College administration. He worked closely with Savage. They travelled together several times on College business. Recently some of Crouch’s papers (a carefully worked-out chart of Solar and Lunar eclipses covering 1500 years, pictured below [Balliol manuscript 429]) were found amongst Savage’s manuscript notes for Balliofergus.

In 1654, Savage married the sister of one of his pupils William, Lord Sandys. This was the first time that a Master’s wife had lived in College and the arrival of a young family must have had quite an impact. Crouch seems to have been close to them. His diary records the birth of several of their seven children. He stayed at Savage’s family home in Dobshill, Gloucestershire and at the Sandys family seat at Mottisfont in Hampshire. His diary for August 1660 records a trip to London with Mary Savage and her sisters, and he also escorted her on several other journeys.

Growing strains on Balliol’s finances created rifts in the College in the 1660s. Grievances were particularly directed at the Master’s wife who was accused of selling College positions and encouraging the embezzlement of benefactions. In 1670 William Fuller, the Bishop of Lincoln, who was the College Visitor placed Balliol under official investigation. Henry Savage died suddenly in June 1672. Crouch had recorded in his diary the birth of the Savages’ youngest child Thomas only a month earlier. Savage’s widow and their five surviving children were described as being in a “desolate condition” by the new Master Thomas Good in a letter to the College Visitor that October. Anthony Wood records her death in “an obscure house in St Ebbe’s” in May, 1683.
Crouch kept in touch with the Savage family in some fashion. In November 1683 he lent John, the Savages’ third son, his copy of Francis Willughby’s *Ornithology*. Originally posthumously edited by the naturalist John Ray and published in Latin, this is one of the foundational texts of scientific ornithology. It revolutionised ornithological taxonomy by organizing birds according to their physical characteristics. The authors undertake to present the reader “only with what properly relates to . . . Naturall History” ignoring the etymological, allegorical and moral speculations of earlier works.

**Willughby, Francis and Ray, John.**
*The Ornithology of Francis Willughby of Middleton in the County of Warwick Esq; Fellow of the Royal Society* (London, 1678)
[Balliol shelf mark: 30 f 94]
It is easy to imagine this book’s organisation appealing to the tidy-minded Crouch who produced a similar taxonomy of academic subjects (pictured below [Balliol manuscript 455.04]). He paid 16 shillings for his copy making it one of his more expensive purchases. Crouch maintained his scientific interests to the end of life: in February 1690 he bought a companion volume by Willughby on fishes, the Icthyographia or De Historia Piscium, one of the last books he purchased before his death.

The later lives of the Savage children are rather obscure but Lady Elizabeth Sheppard, nee Harris, dying in grander circumstances in 1718, left money to her Savage cousins’ children to purchase their way into apprenticeships.¹⁵
Many close friendships at Oxford form in colleges, but people also meet in the University through special interest groups, from the Jazz Orchestra to the Rocketry Society. So it was for Nicholas Crouch; his lending list signals the close personal ties he formed with contemporaries at Balliol. Intermingled are the names of fellow members of the Philosophical Society of Oxford.

The Philosophical Society met on Tuesday afternoons at the newly opened Ashmolean Museum to discuss natural philosophy. From the first meeting on 26 October 1683 until the minutes cease in 1690, the Society’s members reported on a wide range of topics. Investigations in which Crouch was involved include cures for gout and the possibility of producing purple dye from periwinkles found on the south coast. Unfortunately, practical experiments found that the latter could only produce an unfashionable shade of pink.

William Musgrave (1655–1721), the Society’s secretary from its inception, appears in Crouch’s lending list on 3 March 1685, borrowing *Medicina Curiosa*, the first ever medical journal. Originally from Somerset, Musgrave attended New College, Oxford on a scholarship from 1675 and later became a Fellow there. He received medical degrees from Oxford and practiced in the city until moving back to the West Country in 1691. He was also a member of the Royal Society and the Royal College of Physicians and published on digestion and arthritis.

*Medicina Curiosa* aimed to give readers a summary of existing medical texts rather than publishing new work. It only ran to two issues. Crouch’s library contains both.

Another connection that Crouch may have made through the Philosophical Society is Scottish thinker, George Dalgarno (c.1616-1687) to whom he lent books in 1680 and 1687. In 1685 Dalgarno gave a paper to the Philosophical Society of Oxford about his long-term project to create a philosophical language, ending with a declaration that he was ready to hand on his papers to anyone worthy of continuing his work. He died two years later.

On first coming to the city in the 1650s, Dalgarno had to take “the advyce of an old Skool-fellow who was then the only acquaintance [he] had in Oxford” to find people with whom he could discuss his interest in universal language. He was introduced to the Vice-Chancellor, John Owen who introduced him to Seth Ward who in turn put him in touch with John Wilkins who was working on the same subject. Wilkins and Dalgarno fell out over the basis of their universal language and both rushed into print with their ideas. Wilkins, with help from the Royal Society, overshadowed Dalgarno and left him feeling that the difference between the two ideas had not been acknowledged and his scheme underestimated.

On 4 December 1680, Dalgarno borrowed George Sinclair’s *Hydrostaticks* from Crouch. In common with Dalgarno, the author was a Scot of humble origins who felt hard used by members of the Royal Society. When he arrived in London in 1662, Sinclair presented to the Royal Society a manuscript of the ideas which later formed his books on hydrostatics. Although his manuscript was not returned for two years, the verdict of this early peer review was that his ideas were nothing

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**Basset, Thomas. Medicina Curiosa: or, a Variety of New Communications in Physick, Chirurgery, and Anatomy (London, [1684])**
[Balliol shelf mark: 915 f 6 (8)]

**Sinclair, George. The Hydrostaticks or, The Weight, Force, and Pressure of Fluid Bodies (Edinburgh, 1672)**
[Balliol shelf mark: 470 a 17 (1)]
new and his work was not registered by the Society. It is possible that Sinclair’s manuscript inspired the writings of Royal Society members Robert Boyle and John Wallis, also in Crouch’s library, but if so, Sinclair went unacknowledged. He was credited by Johann Sturm who references his work in his description of a diving bell12 (pictured bottom right).

Crouch also lent Sinclair’s Hydrostaticks to Henry Clements (d. 1721), an Oxford bookseller, whose shop was probably in the area where Hertford College now stands.23 Clements was for a time the sole purveyor of The Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society edited by the leading light of the Philosophical Society of Oxford, Robert Plot.24 Clements’ connection with Balliol endured into the eighteenth century. We see him borrow books from the College Library in a surviving lending register of 170625 and for many years he paid the College interest of £5 on a loan of £100.26

It may seem obvious why Musgrave, a doctor, wanted to borrow a new medical journal. Less apparent is the interest of Dalgarno or Clements in a book on the physics of fluids. George Sinclair’s entry in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography describes his 1672 work as, “a gallimaufry of practical and theoretical physics”.27 Gallimaufry seems also to describe the heterogeneous nature of science as Crouch knew it, as represented by the disparate subjects that were covered in meetings of the Philosophical Society and the wide reading of Crouch’s borrowers. Natural philosophy could create networks that crossed class boundaries; William Musgrave, a third son on a scholarship could become a well respected medical professional and George Dalgarno could arrive in Oxford almost without connections and be introduced to the nucleus of the Royal Society. As Dalgarno and Sinclair experienced, those networks could dissolve in the heat of intellectual competition, revealing the elite social bonds beneath.
Many of the sparse entries in Nicholas Crouch’s diary record the places he travelled to and the names of his travelling companions. The majority of these journeys took the road from Oxford through Buckinghamshire to his native Bedfordshire and sometimes on to Cambridge. Tantalisingly his diary does not detail the purpose of his trips. Visits to friends and family seem to have prompted many journeys: the Harris family in Woodstock; his brothers-in-law in the Milton Keynes area: Richard Ansell in Wooffton (Woughton on the Green) and Hugh Chibnall in Walton; his family home at Faldo and connections in the surrounding Bedfordshire area; the Napier family at Lindford and Luton Hoo. Occasional visits to London and Lincoln could be business related. His visit to Lincoln in June 1670 for example is almost certainly connected to the Visitation of Balliol. Travelling the south of England was not without its risks. On 24 April 1656 Crouch records in his diary the loss of his luggage on a journey to Bedfordshire: “Lost Hawk:=Bag & Linnen”.

Crouch’s copy of the first-ever road atlas is missing the Oxford to Cambridge map that takes in his most frequent journeys. John Ogilby’s 100 strip road maps, which were the first to use a standard rather than a local mile and to introduce a scale of one inch to the mile (1/63360), were published after Crouch’s diary ends. Crouch would have already known these roads well but it is tempting to imagine that he removed the map to take with him, following the roads and marking corrections and additions, like the central figures on horseback on Britannia’s engraved title page, holding a map and pointing out features in the landscape or the road they are to follow.

Ogilby, John. Britannia, Volume the First. Or, An Illustration of the Kingdom of England and Dominion of Wales (London, 1675) [Balliol shelf mark: 30 g 3]
Britannia’s title page is a celebration of developments in travel. The depictions of a well-made road, a surveyor’s wheel and Ogilby’s ribbon maps, allude to improvements in domestic travel, whilst the cartographers with a globe and mapmaking instruments in the foreground and the ships at sea in the background suggest advances in foreign travel. There is currently no evidence that Nicholas Crouch ever went abroad. He seems to have been something of an armchair traveller as his collection includes many travelogues as well as books on foreign geography and how to travel. The latter include James Howell on the best route around Europe, including miscellaneous travel tips and socio-political digressions. This may also reflect Crouch’s interest in language as it promises to help the reader “arrive to the practicall knowldg of the languages” of each country they visit. Crouch leant this book to his friend John Lowther sometime between 1658 and 1664. Lowther was a Fellow Commoner at Balliol from 1657 and on 19 November 1658 was Crouch’s travelling companion on a journey to Wickham.
For Elmer’s wife lying in

CROUCH AND MEDICINE

Thomas Gibson’s Anatomy of Human Bodies Epitomized is one of many illustrated anatomy books published during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Although the images are not of as high a quality as some of the big folio anatomies, Gibson’s is a much more portable quarto size. This image shows a body with the sternum cut away to reveal the lungs and diaphragm.

An inscription inside records Nicholas Crouch’s purchase of this book from another Fellow of Balliol College, John Haycroft. Since it was published in 1682, Crouch must have owned it for fewer than eight years before his death so may not have made much use of its portability, let alone engaged in practical human dissection. Though on 19 January 1685 he did inform a meeting of the Philosophical Society of “7 gallons of a watery humour” found in the abdomen of “Mr Hodges” who “lately died of a dropsie”, suggesting he may have attended an autopsy.

Anatomy does not seem to have been the focus of Crouch’s medical interest. A 1648 list of books recording some he took from Oxford during the Civil War and some he left at Balliol with John Good are mainly on medical subjects. Those he took with him were mainly onalchemy and chemical medicine, in particular the works of Daniel Sennert. He left behind some plays and Jean François Fernel’s influential work on physiology, which coined the name of the discipline. Perhaps Crouch was more interested in the body’s chemistry than its systems.

Thomas Gibson had the sort of education which we might imagine for a seventeenth-century physician: study at Cambridge and Leiden, a medical degree, membership of the Royal College of Physicians. In contrast, Crouch’s Library rather than his career attests to his interest in medicine. Around a quarter of all the titles in Crouch’s Library instead of bound pamphlets are medical, compared to 2% of titles in other roughly contemporary bind-ups in Balliol Library.

The ingredients of a julep, “a pleasant potion, as is vulgarly used by such as are sick”, that Nicholas Crouch prescribed for “Elmer’s wife lying in” i.e. during or after giving birth. Some of them are common plants such as mint and mugwort, others such as Theriac and the Confectio de Alchermes mentioned in a second julep on the page were more complex preparations with many, exotic ingredients.

This manuscript shows Nicholas Crouch as one of the millions of people who practiced medicine in early modern Europe, few of whom had medical qualifications. Medical practice at this time began at home where family, friends and neighbours would suggest remedies. Sir Robert Napier (1602–1661), for whom Crouch
prescribes the second julep here and also on the same day a broth and a sleeping syrup, was Crouch’s neighbour in Bedfordshire, owning the manor of Luton Hoo just down the road from Crouch’s family farm. Robert’s brother, Richard Napier (1607–1676) inherited their uncle Richard’s medical practice at Great Linford in Buckinghamshire. Both Richards are known for the astrologically aided medical practice documented in their casebooks. Nicholas Crouch’s diary shows frequent visits to Luton Hoo and Great Linford which might have stimulated and directed his medical interests.

Nicholas Crouch owned at least 19 books about women’s health and childbirth. These were mainly works of natural philosophy in Latin. The Doctresse, in English, is the exception. Its author promised to communicate the most useful cures for “women’s diseases” observed in his practice, and in doing so to be “somewhat indulgent…to [women’s] capacity in writing in our mother tongue”. He wrote in English because he hoped to reach a wide audience including women whose opportunities for education were more limited.

Crouch’s selection of books suggests that his interest in gynecology and obstetrics was mainly academic. Before the eighteenth century it was unusual to have a man deliver a child but Crouch’s diary for 2 December 1665 suggests that he may have been present at the birth of his friends’ child alongside the parents and a midwife. As well as the remedy for Elmer’s wife in his prescription book, he also prescribes for an unnamed 10-year-old girl.

A practical guide to chiromancy, or reading a horoscope from the lines and bumps on the hand, is bound with nine other texts on mineral waters at Bath, life-giving elixirs, medical astrology, a chemist’s catalogue, scrofula cured by the royal touch, and preventing the plague. In the eighteenth or nineteenth century a curator gave the volume a smart, red spine label declaring that these are miscellaneous tracts. Crouch, who chose to bind these titles together, would probably not have seen the selection as miscellaneous but broadly medical. This would not have been an unusual view for the seventeenth century when alchemy was as much a part of natural philosophy as anatomy and successful doctors like the Napiers were diagnosing using astrology.

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Crouch, Nicholas. An alphabetical register of medical prescriptions [Balliol manuscript 339]


Rothmann, Johann. Tabulae Chiromanticae, Lineis Montibus et Tuberculis Manus Constitutionem Hominum, & Fortunae Vires Ostendentes (Frankfurt am Main, 1613) [Balliol shelf mark: 910 I 7 (10)]
You may plainly observe

CROUCH AND SCIENTIFIC EXPERIMENTATION

In Cometa, one of the essays in this collection, Robert Hooke describes his observations of a comet on 21 April 1677. It is supplemented by his earlier Royal Society Lectures on comets in 1664 and 1665 and includes his correspondence on the topic with noted astronomers such as Edward Halley and Giovanni Domenico Cassini. Building on his observations he speculated that a comet must have a solid nucleus and anticipated Newton by positing that they are effected by “a kind of gravitation by which planets are attracted toward the sun”. Hooke does not just describe the comet to the reader; but also suggests an experiment by which they can experience it themselves:

“Take a very clear long cylindrical glass, which may hold about a quart of water; fill it three quarters full with water, and put into it a quarter of a pound of Oyl of Vitriol [sulphuric acid], and in the midst of this suspend a small silver wire, a small wax ball, rould [i.e. rolled] in filings of iron or stell, and you may plainly observe a perfect representation of the Head, Halo and Beard of the Comet . . .”

Crouch seems to have been keenly interested in new scientific discovery; around a fifth of all the surviving monographs in Crouch’s collection are on scientific topics apart from medicine. This particular item is bound with six other works by Hooke as well as the Philosophical Collections he published from 1677–1682–3 during a hiatus in the production of the Royal Society’s Philosophical Transactions.

Hooke, Robert. Lectures and Collections Made by Robert Hooke, Secretary of the Royal Society (London, 1678) [Balliol shelf mark: 910 i 2 (5)]
“Experiment. i. I tooke a small quantity of Gutta Gamba. Dissolved in Gum-water and put to it a like quantity of blew smalt, and it produced this colour”.

Here we see Crouch actually engaged in a practical chemical experiment. He has produced a green pigment by dissolving resin of the gamboge tree in a liquid made by boiling Gum-Arabic and water (“gum-water”), then mixing it with ground cobalt glass. The same list includes recipes made using more familiar ingredients; a purple ink can be made by mixing saffron and egg yolk in gum water.

The list is bound at the end of De Atramentis, a treatise on the origins and uses of inks and pigments by the Venetian physician and philosopher, Pietro Maria Canepario. Crouch has produced a comprehensive volume by including with Canepario’s text, not only the list of ink recipes but a handwritten index and an advert for “Vernon’s Cake-Ink for Records, or Carriage”, a portable ink block of recent invention (pictured opposite).

As well as theoretical science, Crouch’s library also shows an interest in practical applications. For example he owned a work on glassmaking by another Venetian Antonio Neri, as well as works on distillation and calculating the volume of brewers’ casks. A fragment amongst the papers collected in Balliol manuscript 455 shows him calculating the volume held by various silver tankards donated to the College by students (pictured left).
From these he has his education

CROUCH’S PASTIMES

The books in Crouch’s library range far and wide beyond the sciences. Some of the more eccentric give an idea of what he might have done to pass time. Crouch owned literary works, including a manuscript of contemporary poetry, and a novel set in Persia, which are still at Balliol, and books of music by Playford and Hilton which are only known to us through his lists. He also bought books about languages and wordplay.

Crouch purchased John Playford’s *Musical Ayres* from the Oxford stationer Robert Blagrove in July 1652. The entry in his lending list in which he loans it and another book of songs and rounds to the Balliol Fellow Robert Hawkins conjures an image of academics entertaining themselves with communal singing.41

Bowling, tennis, handball (game of fives), and boating were all popular sports in Oxford in the seventeenth century.42 Crouch did not leave evidence of whether or not he was a keen sportsman, although his diary for 10 May 1666 records a boat trip to Binsey with the Master, Fellows and other members of College, notable because they were out in a thunderstorm. A wealthy man’s education also included dancing, fencing, vaulting (modern gymnastics), and riding.43 It is not clear that Crouch was wealthy but he certainly owned a manual by a famous, Oxford based vaulting teacher.

“His father sent him thither because he heard that there were the best fencing and dancing schooles and from these he has his education”. John Earle’s prose portrait of “a meere young gentleman of the [Oxford] Universitie”44 pokes fun at fathers who were drawn to send their sons to Oxford by the prestige of its dancing schools, which also taught fencing, vaulting and riding. The most prominent school, the Bocardo in Cornmarket Street opposite St Michael’s Church, was at one time run by William Stokes who wrote *The Vaulting Master*.45

This illustrated manual takes the reader through several athletic moves on a horse, including “the Hercules Leap” which involves leaping from one side of the horse to the other and “the Mistress Command” which shows a slightly concerned gentlewoman seated side-saddle at the rear of the horse, watching the vaulter’s leg coming towards her supposedly on its way into the saddle “without molesting her”.

Stokes, William.  
*The Vaulting Master: or The Art of Vaulting*  
(London, 1641)  
[Balliol shelf mark: 915 h 1 (30)]
On a piece of paper bound at the front of his copy of *The Vaulting Master*, Crouch has written out William Cartwright’s poem, “On Mr Stokes”. William Cartwright (1611–1643) matriculated from Christ Church College, Oxford in 1632. His father and uncle were both members of Balliol College. Cartwright’s plays were performed at the University for academic and aristocratic audiences whilst Crouch was a student. These included *The Royal Slave* performed at Christ Church on the 30 August 1636 for the entertainment of the King and Queen. In common with Crouch, Cartwright was a Royalist. He died at an early age, contracting fever in Oxford overcrowded with the King’s followers during the Civil War. Some of Cartwright’s poems were printed in volumes of occasional verse published by the University and owned by Crouch, but Cartwright did not prepare his poems for publication. They circulated widely in manuscript copies and were only collected in print posthumously.

One of Crouch’s notebooks started life as a catalogue of medical books but this seems to have been aborted and the book economically turned around and reused from the opposite end for copying poetry. It is not unusual for Crouch to have consumed poetry in hand-written form; early modern texts existed in a mixed economy of print and manuscript circulation.

Five out of the 13 poems in Crouch’s book are by Katherine Philips (1632–1664), whose own royalism is coded into her tribute to William Cartwright in the preface to his *Poems* (1651). Philips’ poetry often takes friendship as its theme. Her own circle addressed each other by coterie names taken from French pastoral romances. Opposite the poem, “Syndænia”, Crouch has written a list of members of the circle and their coterie names. Katherine Philips is Orinda. Cratander is the nickname of “J.B.” or John Birkenhead, another of Crouch’s contemporaries at Oxford. It has been suggested that Palaemon, “F.F.” or Francis Finch was Crouch’s source for Philip’s poems as he was for a time a Gentleman Commoner of Balliol. The Library’s Donation Register records Crouch’s gift of the first collected edition of Philip’s poems (1664) but it is no longer at Balliol.

Crouch also noted down an unattributed satirical ballad, “Scurrilous Libells”, about John Dolben (1625–1686), another Royalist and Oxford contemporary, who later became Archbishop of York. The poem is about an accusation of pederasty with 22-year-old Charles, Baron Mohun in 1667 when Dolben was Archdeacon of London. This verse was never published, perhaps for obvious reasons demonstrated by the selection pictured.
Following the outbreak of civil war in 1642, Oxford became the Royalist capital. The court was billeted across the colleges, the King himself at Christ Church, the Queen at Merton and around thirty courtiers in Balliol. The world in which Crouch had ensconced himself was turned upside down. On Good Friday 1644, a month before the first Parliamentary attempt to besiege Oxford, Crouch records that he “left of House at Bal[liol] Coll[lege]”. After this our knowledge of his movements becomes sporadic. He was still in Oxford, if not in College, in December 1645, when he left for Bedfordshire. He records the final fall of the city to Parliamentary forces in October 1646. His diary not only has no entries but is completely unmarked for the rest of 1646 and 1647.

In June 1648 we find him travelling to Manchester via Coventry, the furthest north he ever seems to have gone, perhaps to avoid facing the Parliamentary Visitors before whom he was summoned to appear on the 14 July. It is unclear precisely what happened next. Crouch seems never to have been formally expelled from the University and in October he was actually elected to College office as Praelector of Rhetoric (one of the two Fellows actually responsible for teaching students). In January 1649 the situation was transformed by the execution of Charles I. Crouch tersely recorded the execution in his diary: “Rex Barbare capite Truncatus” (the barbarians cut off the King’s head).

Following the King’s execution, Crouch left Oxford again, as shown by a list of books taken with him from Oxford and some left with John Good, a Balliol Fellow, on 16 May 1649. This is the earliest dated list of Crouch’s books, and the ten medical books on it the earliest sign of Crouch’s interest in medicine. It is possible he was planning to study or even practise medicine while away from Oxford. Another Balliol Fellow, James Thickenes, a close friend of John Evelyn, practised medicine in Essex after he was expelled from the University in 1648.
More political is the other item on the list, *Eikon Basilike, The Pourtrraicture of His Sacred Majestie in His Solitudes and Sufferings*. This volume, which purported to record the thoughts and prayers of Charles I as he waited for execution, first appeared in print ten days after his death and went through 35 editions before the end of the year. Its elaborate frontispiece explicitly portrays the King as a Christian martyr.

A diary entry for June 1649 announces Crouch "set up house keeping again at Bal: C.", but an addition to the list in manuscript 458 has him leaving again with an armful of medical books in November of the same year. According to the diary he had been elected Junior Bursar the previous month, although notably the College Register has Edward Newton, one of the Fellows imposed by the Parliamentary Commissioners, in the role rather than Crouch.

Crouch does not seem to have felt safe to finally 'come home' to Balliol until after the election of Henry Savage as Master in 1651. In 1652 he records that he was "resiant again" after an absence of eight years and three weeks.

Crouch recorded the restoration of Charles II as laconically as he recorded the death of his father, noting the first time prayers were said for the King in the University Church of St Mary's and the official proclamation of his return several days later. His diary has more references to historical events in the 1660s than at other times. He mentions the days of fasting that were decreed during the plague of 1665, several battles of the Second Anglo-Dutch War (1665–1667) and on 2 September 1666, the Great Fire of London.

In *Observations… Upon the Burning of London* the pseudonymous Rege Sincera gives a detailed description of the course of the fire, followed by reflections on the causes of the event. He notes for example, the role played by tinder-dry wooden buildings and combustible material on the docksides in spreading the fire. However in an annotation glued onto the page Crouch draws a conclusion much more startling to modern sensibilities: "That the Papists & Jesuits did Designe the Firing of the City, and now at this time Effect it; is more than Probable". He does seem to have later reconsidered this accusation, crossing out the note. A handwritten page inserted into another pamphlet alleging Catholic conspiracy to burn the city, refutes the allegation as "a contrivance" and attributes it to "3 or 4 booksellers over a bottle of wine".
The fire was a disaster for Balliol, which suffered huge loss of income from the destruction of property.\textsuperscript{59} The entry in the College Register detailing the losses is in Crouch’s hand and he also authored a proposal, sent to the College Visitor, to save money by keeping vacant two Fellowships.\textsuperscript{60}

In March 1681 government returned to Oxford. Charles II summoned Parliament to meet in the city. His hope was that by meeting in the former Royalist stronghold, he could frustrate efforts by the Commons to pass a bill excluding his Catholic brother James, Duke of York, from the line of succession; however the meeting was prorogued when it became clear that the bill would be presented again and Parliament did not meet for the rest of Charles’ reign.

Stephen Colledge, a joiner and Whig political activist, also travelled to Oxford, handing out blue ribbons reading “No popery! No slavery!” and performing his satirical ballad “the Ra-ree show”, a dialogue between “Leviathon” (Charles II) and “Topham” (John Topham, the Commons Sergeant at Arms).\textsuperscript{61} A ra-ree show was a puppet show and the printed version of the ballad depicts a two-faced Charles carrying Parliament on his back. Colledge was arrested for treason in July 1681, but a grand jury in London declined to prosecute. The government argued that as he had committed the offence in Oxford, he could also be tried there. After a dramatic trial he was convicted and executed at Oxford Castle. His alleged authorship of the ballad was the centrepiece of the government’s case.\textsuperscript{62}

Crouch has inserted a handwritten copy of the ballad into the printed account of the proceedings. Differences between the printed version and those that circulated in manuscript were important in the trial, but this one follows the printed broadside.\textsuperscript{63} The proceedings are part of a large volume of state trials, but Crouch shows a particular interest in this case, annotating it with cross references to other accounts and indexing the witnesses.

Crouch seems to have been very engaged with the political crises of the 1670s and 1680s. Two of the largest bound volumes in the collection, each containing more than 40 items, are wholly given over to the ‘Popish Plot’ (an alleged and completely imaginary Catholic plot against the government) and the crisis surrounding the possible succession of the Duke of York to the throne.

\textit{Colledge, Stephen. The Arraignment, Tryal and Condemnation of Stephen Colleague for High-treason (London, 1681) with manuscript version of the ballad “The Ra-ree show” by Stephen Colledge}

[Balliol shelf mark: 585 d 2 (32)]
Crouch’s distinctive, clear handwriting is conspicuous throughout Balliol’s seventeenth-century archives. He held the office of either Bursar or Notary Public for 30 of the 38 years from 1652, when he returned to College after the Civil War until his death. There is also evidence that he took part in the administration of the College Library. Balliol’s dire financial straits, caused by “maladministration and imprudence…compounded by bad luck” brought down upon it a visitation by the Bishop of Lincoln. The various stages of the visitation are noted in Crouch’s diary, although the diary ends before the process is completed. It is imaginable that Crouch abandoned his diary due to the stress of the visitation coupled with the deaths of several people close to him including Henry Savage and his own mother.

The visitation found many faults with the way the College was run and prescribed tighter administration all round. Many Fellows were admonished and even Crouch whom Thomas Good thought “honest and ingenuous”, “with a candide disposition” was made to pay back £6 he had accepted for a scholarship and put an equal sum from his own pocket into the Treasury. The experience of the visitation might have prompted Crouch’s attempts to consolidate Balliol’s financial documentation in the 1680s and the frustration with previous laxness that he sometimes expresses, for example in his introductory notes for a list of renters of a tenement in Sleyne Lane, Oxford:

“What should move the Master and Fellows to take soe small a Fine, I know not; For I was absent when this Lease was Lett”.

A yeoman beadle (administrative assistant at the University), a tailor, a bookseller, a Fellow of Merton College and Rector of Cuxham in South Oxfordshire, and an apothecary: successive tenants of 109 High Street, Oxford as recorded by Nicholas Crouch in a lease log book now in Balliol’s archives.

The earliest record on this page is dated 1589, 29 years before Crouch was born. This book represents his administrative drive to collect the College’s rents together in one place, probably during the 1680s when he held the office of Bursar several times. Below Crouch’s entries, later, messier hands continue his work, the first in 1692, two years after his death.
or, A Description of that Wonder of the World…Built by K. Phillip the IIId of Spain (London, 1671) in which he converts the dimensions of the Escorial palace into different systems of measurement.

It is clear from Crouch’s acerbic prefatory paragraphs that his purpose in compiling a lease log book was to give an overview of past management of College property and create a system for future administrative improvement. Inadvertently, he has left behind a rare social document of who lived and worked where in early modern Oxford as well as a glimpse of his own character.

The traits that made Crouch an able administrator are also displayed in annotations in his printed books. One such work, Artificial Versifying, makes big claims; own it and you will be able to generate poetry in Latin without knowing a word of the language or anything about writing verse. Here Crouch takes exception to the enormity of the book’s boast that it can produce “Six hundred thousand different Latine Verses”. He disproves it in a note that will not fit in the margin: “That is, there may be made 531,441 verses, which is the Cube-cube of 9, and noe more, I suppose”, and goes to the trouble of having the note inserted when the book is bound.

Peter, John. Artificial Versifying: a New Way to Make Latin Verses. Whereby any one of ordinary capacity, that only knows the A.B.C. and can count 9 (though he understands not one word of Latin, or what a verse means) may be plainly taught (and in as little time, as this is reading over) how to make thousands of hexameter and pentameter verses which shall be true Latine, true verse, and good sense (London, 1678)
[Balliol shelf mark: 910 d 2 (3b)]
Nicholas Crouch died on 23 July 1690. Balliol College's Latin Register of important events and decisions, records his death, his burial in the College Chapel, the reallocation of his room and the appointment of a new Notary Public to replace him. In his will, proved on 28 July 1690, Crouch gave the College choice of all his books for the Library. It is not clear who made the selection of his books but there is a list of those chosen in the Library’s Donation Register. Some, such as Katherine Philips’ published poems, seem to have been disposed of soon afterwards, as they do not appear in Library catalogue from the early eighteenth century. Crouch left £50 to the College to “be held by the Bursar as a working float”, perhaps because he felt the need for ready money during his time in the post. He also allowed the College to keep the income (down payment for furnishings) he had made on his lodgings in College and the worth of any improvements he had made on the condition that the lodgings “may be income free for ever”. The sometimes substantial income charges levied when Fellows moved from one room to another caused ill feeling and occasional hardship. Crouch’s gift was the first step towards abolishing this system. This might also have lessened the need for Fellows to make money from renting out the space around their lodgings, a practice which was open to abuse.

The rest of Crouch’s will details gifts to family and friends. Two nephews were given £5 each, two nieces £20 each and 19 other nephews and nieces £1 each. He leaves a 20 shilling ring to Mr How of Trinity College, and repays £4 to Mr Juice, Minister of Birts Norton, Worcestershire and former member of Balliol. Another 20 shilling ring goes to “Dr Hyde of Queens Coll, in consideration of long friendship”. Dr Hyde does not appear in Crouch’s diary or lending list, a reminder of the unreliability of documentary evidence for people’s closest relationships. He pays off a debt of £1 to his sister-in-law, Mary Crouch and leaves the residue to his brother and executor, William Crouch of Barton in Bedfordshire.

The Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society was the world’s first scientific journal. Nicholas Crouch gave Balliol College its first 16 volumes, founding a subscription that the Library continued. The content covers the broad range of topics that fell within what was termed natural philosophy rather than the specialised areas of twenty-first century scientific journals. It ranges across subjects including astronomy, medicine, meteorology, archaeology, natural history, chemistry, maths and physics. Articles in this volume include “A remarkable account of a liver, appearing glandulous to the eye”, “A letter form Mr. William Cole of Bristol, to the Phil. Society of Oxford; containing his observations on the purple fish”, “A relation of an extraordinary effect of the power of imagination”, and “A catalogue of simple and mixt colours, with a specimen of each colour prefixt to its proper name”. This latter includes a surprisingly beautiful and potentially poisonous hand-coloured plate.
The Royal Society. 
Philosophical Transactions, volumes 15 and 16. (London, 1685–1687) 
[Balliol shelf mark: 1500 h 14]
his personal papers. These have survived the neglect and the care of previous curators. It gives a window into the seventeenth century and through it glimpses of individual lives, especially that of Crouch himself. Looking into it throws up myriad directions for further research, in names of local binders and their prices, in Crouch’s categorisation and indexing of contemporary texts or in traces of seventeenth-century networks. The furnishing of questions to be answered seems a fitting legacy for ingenuous Crouch, prober into natural philosophy and the College’s administrative practices.

This exhibition has sought to give an overview of Nicholas Crouch’s life and legacy as revealed by a Wellcome Trust funded project to catalogue and conserve his library. A life, not exalted, exotic or completely revealed, but rich in interest and full with people and pasties. So it seems fitting to end with the couplet that begins his diary:

For Heavens & Fortune both agree
Noe woman ‘ere should pitty mee
This is probably a rather arch pun. The 16 December was, traditionally in English use, when the first Advent antiphon was sung at evensong. It begins "O Sapientia" ("O Wisdom").

Although with typical Crouch-ian pedantry the very first page is blank except for empty entries covering the months up to October.

He was admitted as a Commoner. On the various classes of students at Balliol at this point see Oxford. Balliol Archives. Membership i.ii. Andrew Clark’s unpublished manuscript 'Balliol College, Oxford, Yearly lists, volume ii: 1621-1644', folios 2-9.

London. British Library. Western Manuscripts. Add MS 78359. 3. f. 18. ‘Two sets of elegiac verses by Nicholas Crouch’.


At times, Crouch’s ambition appears to have exceeded his energy, and we find unused blank pages or contents lists that trail off before completion. In one notable example, Crouch paid 3d to have a significant amount of blank paper bound in at the end of one of his books (Balliol shelfmark: 905 a 2). This has been methodically added to the contents list ("charta nuda"), but was never used.

See Oxford. Balliol Archives. Membership i.iii, folio 73.


For his appointment as Steward see Oxford. Balliol Archives. College Meeting Minutes, First Latin Register 1514-1662, p.265.

Jones, p.136.


Lincoln. Lincolnshire Archives. VV2/2/43. ‘Letter from Thomas Good to the College Visitor on 30 October 1672’.


Cram, (para. 3 of 5).’


Jones, p.133, footnote 60.


Gunther, Early Science in Oxford, Volume IV The Philosophical Society, p.171.


R. Shane Tubbs, ‘Anatomy is to Physiology as Geography is to History; it Describes the Theatre of Events’, Clinical Anatomy, 28, 2, (10 February 2015), <https://doi.org/10.1002/ca.22526> [accessed 2 July 2018].


The University of Oxford approved Nicholas Crouch’s medical degree at a meeting of Convocation on 9 September 1661. This was a significant enough event to be noted in his diary. But no degree was conferred on him at a further meeting three days later which conferred other degrees approved at the same time at Crouch’s. The degree, conferred by Convocation rather than Congregation, was what we would now regard as an honorary degree. Fees were usually attached so there could be a pecuniary reason why Crouch did not graduate Doctor of Medicine. Oxford. University of Oxford Archives, Bodleian Library. NEP/Supra/Reg Ta, pp. 128-131. Thanks to the Keeper of the Archives for this information. Robert Frank notes that candidates for degrees by creation needed “plausible credentials and friends in power”, Crouch had the former but not perhaps the latter. Robert G. Frank, ‘Medicine’, in The History of the University of Oxford, Volume IV: Seventeenth-Century Oxford, ed. by Nicholas Tyacke, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp.509.

Anthony Wood, in at least two documents does refer to Crouch as “Dr Crouch” (these unequivocally do refer to Nicholas Crouch as both times he is specified to be “of Balliol”), perhaps this is by way of a nickname. Several other people in Crouch’s circle show up in Wood and other sources with slightly ironic occupational names, for example the Balliol fellow John Good is “Tutor Good” and the Antiquarian Clergyman Anthony Hodges is “Parson Hodges”. For the references to Crouch see Wood, i. p.351 and Allan Pritchard, ‘According to Wood: Sources of Anthony Wood’s Lives of Poets and Dramatists’, Review of English Studies, 28, 111, (August, 1977), p.75.


Lindemann, p.127.