In spite of the importance of the Cottonian library for a wide range of literary and historical studies we know very little about its organization and development in the first century of its existence. While its unique value was widely recognized long before the death of its founder, Sir Robert Cotton, in 1631, and while the collection was cherished and supplemented by his heirs—his son, Sir Thomas, and his eldest grandson, Sir John—it remained primarily a private library throughout the seventeenth century. Scholars and family friends were able to visit it and borrow books and manuscripts from it, but not until 1696 was the first printed catalogue published—the work of Dr. Thomas Smith, librarian to Sir John Cotton. Smith prefaced his volume with a note on the library’s history and an analysis of its main subject divisions, as well as a longer essay on the Cotton family, but he was describing a long-established institution sixty years after the death of its founder and his catalogue was later to be criticized for its mistakes and omissions. However, in the eighteenth century, Parliamentary and public interest in the library grew: in 1700, by transferring ownership to a body of trustees, Sir John in effect presented the collection to the nation, while the fire of 1731 drew further attention to it. In 1753 it was removed to Montagu House to become one of the foundation collections of the British Museum, and in 1777 Samuel Hooper published another printed catalogue, a version of a late seventeenth-century manuscript catalogue of the library. All this activity culminated in the work of J. Planta who was responsible for publishing the official catalogue of the collection in 1802. Yet, after this, published studies of the library did not follow. Keepers of Manuscripts, and particularly Sir Frederic Madden, did invaluable work in preserving and restoring the manuscripts and left behind them hand-written notes of their labours, while analyses by scholars of other seventeenth-century collections have helped to throw light on the Cotton library itself; but we possess no extended account of its development and Planta’s catalogue remains the standard guide to its contents.

Yet our lack of knowledge of the Cottonian library—particularly glaring for the period before the eighteenth century—can hardly be blamed upon an absence of evidence. Many of the manuscripts survive, organized and arranged largely as Sir Robert Cotton and his heirs intended, and in some instances annotated by the library’s founder. We have, too, a series of manuscript catalogues compiled in the seventeenth century. There
is also a good deal of correspondence which, though written largely to, rather than by, the Cotton family, should, if pieced together, illuminate some dark corners. There are substantial records of loans made from the library and there are other papers, public and private, which shed light on the physical arrangement of the library as well as on the other preoccupations of the family which owned it. Indeed, part of the difficulty in explaining the early development of the collection is that the material is both extensive and disordered. A full-scale history would require a close examination of all the manuscripts in the library, as well as of those known to have escaped from it, together with analysis and dating of the other surviving material. While this task might not be impossible, it would be formidable and could hardly be embarked upon without preparatory studies of parts of the evidence. However, although such forays are bound to be incomplete and their conclusions tentative, unless they are made, no over-all picture is ever likely to emerge.

Among the surviving pieces of evidence, the early manuscript catalogues of the library offer one of the best possibilities of beginning the reconstruction of the story. From the century before Smith’s printed catalogue of 1696 there survive about fifteen of these lists of the library’s contents. Only five of them carry a date, but it is possible to date the remainder with some degree of accuracy and, in certain instances, to establish the relationship of one list to another. They vary in scope: some are select lists, others appear to be more complete. They also vary in arrangement: the very familiar organization of the library by Roman Emperors did not exist at the time of the earliest of the catalogues and comparisons between them can therefore yield evidence of the rearrangements made in the collection by Sir Robert and his heirs. In order to examine them, they may conveniently be divided into three broad chronological groups: one containing three lists and dating from Sir Robert’s lifetime; another consisting of five main catalogues of which two were either made or completed shortly after his death in 1631; and a third comprising six closely related lists, three of which are dated 1674.

The first group consists of a brief list, British Library, MS. Cotton Faustina C. II, some fragmentary lists in Add. MS. 35213, and the so-called 1621 catalogue, MS. Harley 6018, which is the best known of all the manuscript catalogues, because of its length and the extensive record of loans which follows it. The Faustina C. II list occupies fols. 204–6 of the manuscript and is headed ‘Calender or Cataloge of M’ Cotton’s 4 booke A B.C.D. of Treaties Actes & monuments 1600’. There then ensues a rudimentary list of the contents of each of the books which consist mainly of sixteenth-century diplomatic instruments and merchant negotiations. If the books were bound, which seems unlikely, they were later split up as some of the items listed in Faustina C. II are now to be found in other Emperor volumes. It is more probable that these four ‘books’ were, in fact, folders of some kind, especially as we know that by no means all the material in the library during Cotton’s lifetime was bound. The list itself was not made by Cotton but his hand appears as recording additions to it and his signature ‘Rob: Cotton’ is at the top of fol. 204.

The Faustina C. II list is probably the earliest catalogue we have which details
manuscripts in Cotton's possession. However, Add. MS. 35213 contains further early
evidence. The first thirty-two folios of this manuscript consist of a catalogue of printed
books and manuscripts which belonged to John Dee, followed by a catalogue of
manuscripts owned by Henry Savile of Banke, but the remainder is a collection of
miscellaneous material, much of which is relevant to the Cottonian library. For
the present purpose, two items among this material are of significance. The first occupies
fol. 35–6v and is a list, side-headed ‘Bibliotheca Ro: Cotton’, of fifteen volumes carrying
numbers between 38 and 73. These numbers relate exactly to the similarly numbered
volumes in the Harley 6018 list. Similar errors appear in both lists and the somewhat
fuller entry for the volume numbered 42 in the Harleian list suggests that this is the later
version, though it is conceivable that the Add. MS. 35213 list is an extract made
from it. The second significant item among the material in Add. MS. 35213 is a list,
written by Cotton on half-sized sheets, of further numbered volumes, which do not,
however, coincide with the equivalent volumes in Harley 6018. This list starts with
a series of folio volumes, numbered from 25 to 36, followed by a group of quarto
volumes, numbered from 1 to 13. It concludes with an apparently random list of
volumes. Some of the numbered volumes can be identified with entries bearing different
numbers in Harley 6018, and others should be capable of identification, but the date
of the list as a whole cannot yet be established. Nevertheless, its rather haphazard
character suggests that it precedes Harley 6018: it is difficult to see what purpose would
have been served by making such a list, with its own numbering, after the more orderly
Harleian catalogue had been compiled. One possibility is that it is not a list of Cotton's
books at all but rather a note of someone else's books which interested him, yet several
of the descriptions are much more ample than in other Cotton lists of this type. The
chances are that it is a fragment of a Cotton catalogue made some time before 1621.

The catalogue in Harley 6018 is the major list among those surviving from Cotton's
lifetime. It is titled, on fol. 3, ‘Catalogus. Librorum Manuscriptorum in Bibliotheca.
Roberti Cottoni 1621’ and is a substantial and well-known record of the contents of
the library in the early 1620s. The catalogue itself occupies 146 folios and is followed
by a further forty-four folios recording loans. Within the catalogue, entries are
numbered from 1 to 413. They are in four different hands, including Cotton's, and
there are amendments and additions by others. In many ways it is more of an accessions
register than a catalogue, though one made after many of the manuscripts had been
acquired, and it is difficult to see what assistance it can have been in finding books in
the library, although it was clearly used as a working list. It also seems certain that
while it was no doubt begun in 1621 it was not completed during that year. One piece
of evidence for this is the dating of the change in ownership of the Lives of the Abbots
of St Albans, now MS. Cotton Nero D. VII. According to a note in Cotton's hand in
this manuscript, it was given to him by Francis Bacon in 1623, yet it is listed as no. 326
on fol. 119v of the Harleian catalogue. Another piece of evidence is more circumstantial.
In a letter of 26 March 1622 to James Ussher, Bishop of Meath, Cotton promised to
send him ‘as soon as it is perfected . . . a Catalogue of my Books’. In any case, the
library continued to grow both in the 1620s and later, and although the Harleian catalogue is the fullest list we have of the manuscripts in the collection during Cotton’s lifetime, it is not complete even for the early 1620s. We possess a list made by Cotton in April 1621 of books then out on loan;\(^2^0\) and of six identifiable items two are not recorded in the 1621 catalogue so far as can be established.\(^2^1\) Cotton had had one of these since the death of Arthur Agard in 1615.\(^2^2\) Furthermore, while we do not know how many manuscript volumes Cotton possessed when he died, Harley 6018 lists less than half of what became a library of over 950 volumes.\(^2^3\)

The catalogues in Faustina C. II, Add. MS. 35213, and Harley 6018 are the only lists which can, with certainty, be dated to Cotton’s lifetime. The two important lists which follow them—Add. MSS. 36682 and 36789—present a variety of dating problems, and while the former, the first Emperor catalogue, may have been begun before Sir Robert died, the latter, which is not in Emperor order, is described as a catalogue of his son’s library. Together, they form the basis of the second group of catalogues with which this article is concerned and it is possible that they are closely linked with the closure of the library in 1629. In November of that year there was discovered in the library a treatise describing how a monarch might acquire absolute power. Cotton and five associates were arrested and brought before the Council for questioning, and the library was sealed.\(^2^4\) Shortly afterwards they were released to await prosecution in the Star Chamber but the library remained closed to its owner except when accompanied by a clerk of the Council.\(^2^5\) Star Chamber proceedings were stayed after the birth of Prince Charles on 29 May 1630 but six weeks later commissioners, headed by the Lord Privy Seal, were appointed to search the library for records and state papers belonging to the King.\(^2^6\) Cotton died in May 1631, his library still denied to him, and at once the new owner, Sir Thomas, petitioned for its restitution. In reply the King ordered the preparation of a catalogue of its contents,\(^2^7\) and a Mr. Boswell and a Mr. Dickenson were employed successively on this work which seems to have been completed during the summer of 1632. A further petition of Sir Thomas’s, probably in 1633, records that the catalogue had yielded evidence of no property apart from the petitioner’s and the library was reopened probably soon afterwards.\(^2^8\)

Here, then, is evidence of a fresh catalogue, dating from 1631–2 and made for a particular purpose, and we need to consider whether it survives. In the introduction to his catalogue of 1802 Planta suggested that a large vellum roll—Add. MS. 8926—was the result of the work ordered by the King.\(^2^9\) The roll is elaborately produced and divided into systematic classes, and Planta’s suggestion was an attractive one. Yet, as Sir Frederic Madden pointed out in the last century, the mention in the roll of the edition by Watts of Matthew Paris’s *Historia major* means that it cannot be earlier than 1640\(^3^0\) and, as will be shown later, other similar types of evidence establish a dating in or after 1652. Indeed, it may well not have been made until the 1670s, but in any case it cannot be the catalogue compiled in 1631–2. The much more likely candidate is Add. MS. 36789, and the description of this manuscript in the *Catalogue of Additions to the Manuscripts* says that it is probably a copy of the official catalogue made to the King’s
order. Add. MS. 36789 is a shelf-by-shelf listing of the contents of the library, detailing first the presses (scrinia) on the right-hand side of the room and then those on the left (and for the sake of clarity I shall refer to it as the scriinia catalogue). Some of the language used indicates that the catalogue was not being compiled merely for the use of the library's owner and his friends, and the intention may have been to provide directions to, for example, royal officials engaged on further searches. The appearance of the catalogue is not that of a copy, however. The presentation is not uniform throughout and the section on fols. 57–94 shows every sign of having been separately compiled and bound in with the remainder of the manuscript only later, a feature helping to confirm the connection between this manuscript and the catalogue ordered by the King, which we know was compiled by two men working separately. There is every chance that this is the only manuscript to have been produced in response to the King's command, even if it may have been intended as a draft of a more handsome version which was never begun.

There is another interesting aspect of the scriinia list and one which leads on to a consideration of Add. MS. 36682, the first Emperor catalogue. J. P. Gilson noted long ago that the arrangement of books indicated by the scriinia catalogue foreshadows the Emperor system. He pointed to the predominance of volumes later to be found under the seven Cotton Emperors from Nero to Domitian in the seven presses listed in the catalogue as on the right-hand side of the library and the preponderance of Claudius, Caligula, and Tiberius material in the first three presses on the left. The description of the scriinia catalogue in the Catalogue of Additions to the Manuscripts states that it was utilized when the Emperor catalogue, Add. MS. 36682, was compiled, observing that in the interval between the compilation of the two lists the books had been 'new plac[ed]. It is certainly true that books were rearranged in this interval: as Gilson noted, the correlation between the contents of the presses in the scriinia catalogue and the later Emperor arrangement is by no means exact. The Add. MS. 36682 list seems therefore to follow on naturally after the scriinia catalogue and to be datable, together with the inauguration of the Emperor system, to a period in the mid- or late-1630s. But is this correct? The evidence does not point all one way.

The Catalogue of Additions to the Manuscripts says that the Emperor system was probably first adopted in 1638. Its evidence is the loans list in MS. Cotton Appendix XLV, article 13, where Emperor classifications first become an integral part of entries in a loan dated 17 January 1639. A broadly similar terminal date for Add. MS. 36682 can be established from evidence in the manuscript itself. Few loans are noted in the margin of the catalogue but one, towards the end of the manuscript, is to 'S' Tho Cannon'. Cannon, a burgess and mayor of Haverfordwest, made his will in October 1638 and was dead by Christmas 1639. Obviously the catalogue predates his death and, given its length of 200 folios, it must have been under construction for some time before this. However, finding a starting date for it presents greater difficulties, yet this must also be linked with the decision to reorganize the library on the Emperor basis.

We have no firm proof that the Emperor system was in operation before 1638 but
this is not to say that the plan for it was a recent invention—of Sir Thomas Cotton rather than of his father. Although Sir Robert left behind him very little about the organization of his library, an important note in his hand does survive among the miscellaneous material in Add. MS. 35213. This is a single sheet headed ‘A not of such Books and Bundells of paper in the Lower Study that ar not inserted in the Catalogd’ and the short list that follows is divided into two sections, entitled ‘Iulius’ and ‘Augustus’.39 The note is undated but it is clear evidence that Sir Robert Cotton had devised and was implementing the Emperor scheme before his death in 1631. By the time of the note, too, some sort of new catalogue reflecting the new arrangement must have existed, at least in draft form: it would hardly make sense for Cotton to list, in Emperor order, material omitted from a non-Emperor catalogue, such as Harley 6018 or the *scrinia* list. But, in any case, the existence of a new catalogue is confirmed by a marginal note, almost certainly in Cotton’s hand, against entry no. 2 in Harley 6018: ‘This is not in the new Catalodg it must be [?] entred Claudius A.I.’40 Now the list which most readily offers itself as the new catalogue is, of course, Add. MS. 36682 but the Claudius A.I entry, which it contains, shows no sign of having been added as an afterthought. However, this list is written in two main hands and a few scraps of paper among the Cotton Fragments have established conclusively that the second hand was sometimes employed to rewrite parts of the catalogue originally in the first hand. The section of the catalogue containing the Claudius A.I entry is written in the second hand,41 and could therefore perfectly possibly be a redraft of the section from which this entry had at first been omitted. Another clue to a starting date for Add. MS. 36682 is contained in the catalogue itself. Some of the pages are signed at the foot by Robert, Thomas, and—occasionally—John Cotton, and it is tempting to assume that these are the signatures of the successive owners of the library, the first three baronets.42 Of these signatures, Thomas’s is virtually certainly that of the second baronet while his eldest son and heir, John, who was born in 1621 and therefore only ten when Robert died, could have signed later before the manuscript was bound up. Unfortunately some doubt surrounds Robert’s signature. It is not indisputably that of the library’s founder, nor does it include the familiar—though not invariable—‘Bruceus’.43 Furthermore, an alternative identification of it exists: the *Catalogue of Additions to the Manuscripts* suggests that it may be the signature of Sir Thomas Cotton’s second son. However, this Robert was the second son of Sir Thomas’s second marriage which did not take place until about 1640. He must therefore have been at least twenty years younger than his half-brother John, and as the library was not to pass to him it is curious that his signature should appear at all, let alone more frequently than John’s.44 For these reasons it is probably safe to conclude that the signature is indeed Sir Robert’s, in which case the first draft of at least some parts of the catalogue, together with some rearrangement of the library, must have been completed before 1631.45

At first sight, of course, this conclusion conflicts with the dating of the pre-Emperor *scrinia* catalogue, Add. MS. 36789, to 1631–2. If the Emperor system was already in being before 1631–2 why does not the *scrinia* list reflect this exactly, instead of apparently
foreshadowing a later arrangement? I believe that the answer may well lie in the closure of the library in the four years or so from 1629. If Sir Robert Cotton had started work on the rearrangement and on its accompanying catalogue, as has been suggested, this would have been interrupted by the closure and could not have resumed until well after his death. During these years the collection would have remained frozen in a state of partial rearrangement and, with access denied to both Robert and Thomas, work on the new Emperor catalogue would also have stopped. Such a half-way stage would fit very well with the order described in the *scrinia* catalogue. The arrangement there is quite different from that of the catalogue of the early 1620s, Harley 6018, but is not yet that of the Emperor system. 46 Then, when the library was reopened, the rearrangement would have been completed and the new Emperor catalogue (probably the second draft) finished. The inclusion of Emperor references in loans lists in 1639 shows that the new system was in full operation by then, and also agrees well with the timetable suggested.

Add. MSS. 36682 and 36789 are the two most important catalogues in the second of the three groups discussed here. 47 However, something must be said briefly of two other catalogues in this group, both of which give every appearance of being based on Add. MS. 36682, and of a third which provides some assistance with dating. The first two are in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MSS. Barlow 9 and Rawlinson D. 901. 48 The Barlow catalogue is a select, rather than a complete list, as its title indicates: ‘Manuscripts of the History of England in Sir Tho. Cottons Library under the effigies of the Emperors following’. It faithfully follows the order of Add. MS. 36682, which it describes—correctly—as a catalogue in two volumes, and it includes no Emperor volumes not entered in Add. MS. 36682. It does, however, omit any reference to the block of volumes, Vespasian D. XVI–XXII, which were entered in Add. MS. 36682 by Sir Thomas Cotton. Given the compiler’s intention of enumerating manuscripts relating to English history, he should certainly have been interested in some of these volumes, 49 and it can therefore probably be assumed that he made his selection before Sir Thomas added this block to the Add. MS. catalogue. In the light of this a fairly early date can tentatively be ascribed to the Barlow catalogue. 50 The same cannot be said of the Rawlinson catalogue. This again follows the order of Add. MS. 36682 51 and originally seems to have been fairly similar to it, but numerous additions of entries and sometimes of whole pages have been made in a separate hand, so that the result is a fuller and doubtless much later catalogue than Add. MS. 36682. 52 Another indication of a late date, perhaps much later, for this catalogue may be provided by a note which follows the main catalogue and which is written in the hand used for additions to the main list. This note is headed ‘Libri Manuscripti Bibliothecae Cottonianae’ followed by a sub-heading ‘Codices M.S.S. Nondum in Loculis repositi’ and a list of twenty-six volumes. 53 It is an exact copy of the similar list at the end of Smith’s printed catalogue of 1696 and it may, in fact, be part of the manuscript of his work, although other sections of Rawlinson D. 901 in the same hand are not identical with the version Smith published. Finally, further guidance in dating the Rawlinson catalogue may be obtained.
by comparing it with one of two Cotton catalogues among the Petyt manuscripts. There is a fairly full list in Emperor order in London, Inner Temple, MS. Petyt 538/41. It is not an exact copy of the Rawlinson catalogue but the similarities are sufficiently great for it to be likely that both were completed at much the same time. Now, this Petyt manuscript is not dated but the second Petyt catalogue is. This is in MS. Petyt 538/40, and is one of the lists bearing the date 1674 and belonging to the third group of catalogues yet to be discussed. This catalogue is arranged on different principles from that in MS. Petyt 538/41, but both belonged to William Petyt himself and contain similar indexes and contents tables. The chances are that they are broadly contemporary and that therefore the Rawlinson catalogue, in its expanded form, dates from the mid-1670s or a little later.

The third group of catalogues is the simplest to deal with. It consists of six lists: Add. MS. 8926 which is the vellum roll already mentioned; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Tanner 273; a further catalogue in the previously discussed Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Rawlinson D. 901; a list in MS. Harley 694; the catalogue already referred to in London, Inner Temple, MS. Petyt 538/40, and part of a manuscript volume in the Pepys library at Magdalene College, Cambridge. All these are classed catalogues in which manuscripts are listed in categories such as Libri Historici, Libri Theologici, Vitae Sanctorum, Of Civil and Canon Law, Of Particular Towns of England, and Of Universities and Colleges. The number of categories varies from manuscript to manuscript and no two catalogues are identical either in style or content, though they have many similarities. All provide descriptive entries of the manuscripts and—except for Add. MS. 8926—append Emperor references to these and could therefore have been used for finding a particular type of book on the shelves—not an obvious characteristic of their predecessors. Three of the catalogues—Harley 694, the Pepys and Petyt manuscripts—are dated 1674 and are otherwise closely related in having contents tables whose listed headings do not coincide with the categories that follow and in miscounting the number of folios in the catalogues. Tanner 273, which has a similar contents table, is a fair copy written in one hand only and with ‘W: Cant.’ on the first folio. It belonged to William Sancroft, who was Archbishop of Canterbury from 1677 to 1690. The list in Rawlinson D. 901 bears no evidence of date or ownership, and has fewer categories than the other catalogues. Similarly, the vellum roll, Add. MS. 8926, carries no date or mark of ownership, but it is carefully prepared and written in formal script on twenty membranes, with three seals, now badly oxidized, attached at its foot. It is easy to understand why it was first thought of as the schedule prepared during the library’s closure after 1629 but, as has already been noted, Madden established that it could not have originated before 1640. In fact, references within the roll to the publication in 1652 of the work of the medieval historians and chroniclers, Ralph de Diceto, Henry Knighton, and John Brampton, require a dating after that year and, given its similarity to the five catalogues just mentioned, it may belong with them to the 1670s. What purpose was intended to be served by the roll is not clear. It may have been the original from which the other classed catalogues were derived, though the
absence of Emperor references must surely have been a disadvantage. Perhaps Sir Thomas Cotton or his son and heir, Sir John, felt that the library required an elaborate, if rather useless, record of its contents. When, in the reign of William III, Parliament legislated to preserve the library by vesting it in trustees, the statute declares that the ‘Manuscripts Written Books Papers Parchments Records and other Memorials . . . are particularly mentioned and named in a Schedule . . . remaining in the said Library . . .’. This schedule may be the roll and it may even have been prepared for the purpose, though no evidence has so far come to light. What is clear, however, is that in the late seventeenth century closely similar catalogues of the library’s contents were being prepared, to provide bibliophiles other than its owners with a record of its riches. The publication of Smith’s printed catalogue in 1696, the appointment of trustees by William III’s statute, and the Crown’s purchase in Anne’s reign of the building housing the library were further important steps in providing for public access to the collection—a process begun when Sir Robert Cotton first started lending his books to his friends.

It is unfortunate that only one of the catalogues discussed in this article remains in the Cottonian collection. Had more done so, we might have had a better knowledge of the relationship between them. Further study may show the extent to which successive catalogues were compiled from their predecessors rather than from the books on the shelves: this certainly happened sometimes as the repetition of errors demonstrates. More detailed analysis of the catalogues, in conjunction with examination of the manuscripts themselves, may help to show when volumes were acquired or when loose papers were bound together: the later catalogues naturally list more volumes than the earlier ones. But the chief value of the manuscript catalogues examined here is to provide a framework within which the organization and development of the Cottonian library in its first century may be studied.

1 Dr. Andrew Watson very kindly read this article in draft and it has benefited from his valuable and illuminating comments. I am most grateful to him for advice and encouragement in numerous ways.


4 Hope Mirrlees, A Fly in Amber (London, 1962), the only full-length biography of Sir Robert Cotton, is entertaining but idiosyncratic and says very little about his major achievement, the formation of his library. Valuable studies of aspects of the early history of the library dealing inter alia with Cotton’s habits as a collector, with his more important manuscripts, and with his circle of fellow antiquaries, are to be found in C. E. Wright’s essay, ‘The Elizabethan Society of Antiquaries and the formation of the Cottonian Library’, F. Wormald and C. E. Wright (ed.), The English Library before 1700 (London, 1958), and in F. Smith Fussner, The Historical Revolution (London, 1962). To these works should now be added Dr. Kevin Sharpe’s recent book, Sir Robert Cotton 1586–1631. History and Politics in early modern England (Oxford, 1979), which has a valuable chapter on the library. Dr. Sharpe and I have arrived at our conclusions independently but he kindly allowed me to read his book in page proof and I was able to take account of his findings during work on the final draft of this article.
Dr. Sharpe has shown very effectively the use that can be made of this evidence in building up a picture of Sir Robert Cotton's circle.

Cotton refers to unbound material in a note in Add. MS. 35213, fol. 42.

Dr. K. Sharpe, op. cit., p. 53, considers that the list was originally compiled by Bartholomew Cotton of the Exchequer and acquired from him, together with some transcripts, by Sir Robert. If so, it is not safe to assume that all the items listed were in Sir Robert's possession but clearly some were, even though the year 1600 may refer to the date of Bartholomew's, rather than Robert's, ownership.

The folios in Faustina C. II have been re-numbered. The modern foliation, which I use, is in pencil at the foot of each page. One folio in Cotton's list has been misplaced in rebinding the manuscript: fol. 206 should precede fol. 205. Faustina C. II is a miscellaneous volume; other items in it have been annotated by Sir Robert Cotton.

The Savile catalogue in Add. MS. 35213, together with that in MS. Harley 1879, were used by A. G. Watson in his work on The Manuscripts of Henry Savile of Banke (London, 1969). Dr. Watson has established (p. 14) that Cotton owned the Harleian list: he recorded at fol. 10 "Books I want" and was probably responsible for other marks in the manuscript indicating desirable acquisitions. Dr. Watson also notes the appearance in this manuscript of the clover-leaf mark and the astronomical sign of Venus. Similar marks are to be found both in the Cotton catalogue of 1621 and in the other Savile catalogue in Add. MS. 35213, and it seems likely that Cotton had access to this Savile list as well, if indeed he did not also own it: see C. E. Wright, op. cit., p. 199. Another connection between this Savile catalogue and Cotton may be noted. Against item no. 20 in the Savile list is noted 'My lord William [Howard] has borrowed this book': the volume is what later became MS. Cotton Claudius D. VII: Watson, pp. 15, 20. In MS. Harley 6018, where the same volume is entered on fol. 120, Cotton has recorded in the margin 'Lent this book to my lord William Howard to [sic] Naworth'. The loan in Savile's list may also be in Cotton's hand.

For example, a misnumbering in volume 50 and a misspelling 'Glassonburiensis' in volume 53. But in volume 60 the Add. MS. list has 'Dunelm.' while the Harleian list has 'duneti', later amended in the margin in another hand to 'Dunelmii'. In general, the Harleian list is the better preserved of the two and some volume numbers have to be supplied from it for the Add. MS. list.

As the Catalogue of Additions to the Manuscripts points out in its description of Add. MS. 35213. It is on fol. 37-40 of Add. MS. 35213.

For example, no. 34 on fol. 38 of Add. MS. 35213 is no. 226 on fol. 103 of MS. Harley 6018, while nos. 26 and 29 in the Add. MS. list are probably respectively nos. 360 and 199 in the Harleian list. No. 36 forms part of no. 256 in MS. Harley 6018.

Among other items of interest relating to the Cotton library in Add. MS. 35213 is a classed catalogue of books printed between 1495 and 1595. This begins on fol. 47 and occupies about thirty-five folios. It consists of a series of slips which have been cut from a complete list and then stuck on the sheets which now form part of Add. MS. 35213. On fol. 46 is the title 'Catalogus librorum Robert: Cotton' in a hand which also provides headings for many of the pages in the subsequent list, while Cotton's hand appears in the list itself recording loans of books. We know nothing of Cotton's collection of printed books except that he had one: he notes in MS. Harley 6018, fol. 147, a loan of printed books to Selden. More work is needed on the catalogue in Add. MS. 35213 but it seems likely that it may be a list of his printed books.

For example, the list on fol. 10 of MS. Harley 1879.

The record is mainly of loans made by Cotton and his son, Sir Thomas, but there are some notes of books acquired by or promised to Cotton. Other loans records are to be found in the margins of the Harleian catalogue itself and in Add. MSS. 5161, 35213, 36682, 36789, MS. Cotton Appendix XLV, article 13, and MS. Harley 1879.

The Emperor classification, provided for most of the entries, is, of course, a later addition. Of the 413 entries fifteen are repeated, see C. E. Wright, op. cit., p. 198.

No doubt Cotton himself did not need assistance, but on occasion others had access to the library in his absence: see my Impeachment and Parliamentary Judicature in Early Stuart England (London, 1974), p. 82 note. In 1626 Dr. John
This list of such Books as I have before this 23 April. 1621 lent out of my Study' begins on fol. 148 of MS. Harley 6018.

A few entries in the catalogue are described so briefly that they have not been identified.

The other volume not recorded in the catalogue is MS. Cotton Tiberius C. VII.

Planta's Catalogue of 1802 lists 959 volumes by E. Wright, op. cit., p. 199.

Two examples may serve to illustrate these points. One entry in the catalogue reads: 'In the Til under the third Classe of the 3d Scrienie or boxe there are 47 Charters and other peces in parchement with Seales w'th were of the Earles of Chester and the Bruces, & doe now belong to Sr Tho Cottons family' (fol. 156). Secondly, on fol. 108 two bundles are described as letters signed by noblemen mostly of Queen Elizabeth's time and 'collected only (as it semeth) for the keping and shewing their Signatures . . .' (These may be the letters for which Cotton asked Sir Thomas Wilson in 1618. Wilson took the precaution of referring Cotton's request 'for subscriptions and signatures of Princes and great men, attached to letters otherwise unimportant, as he is collecting such for curiosity's sake' to the King, who agreed to it: Cal. S.P. Dom. 1623-5 (addenda on earlier years), p. 553; C. E. Wright, op. cit., p. 196.

It is on slightly larger sheets than the remainder of the manuscript and the first and last pages are dirtier than the rest, suggesting that they were at one time the outside leaves of a separately bound manuscript, although an earlier foliation runs from 97 to 144. It is, however, curious that this whole section starts its listing in the middle of a shelf and not, as one would expect, at the beginning of a shelf or press.

Mr. Dickenson was brought in after Mr. Boswell had been transferred to other work: Cal. S.P. Dom. 1631-3, p. 224; Cal. S.P. Dom. 1633-4, p. 370. The section on fols. 57-94 is in one hand throughout, although this hand and another predominate in the remainder of the manuscript.

In a note inside the front cover of the manuscript.

These words appear in a random entry on fol. 9 of Add. MS. 5161. The first seven folios of this manuscript are an alphabetical list of cartularies and muniments in the Cottonian library, to which have been added—in a variety of hands
including Sir Thomas Cotton's—Emperor classification marks. This list is followed by a note of loans made in the course of 1638. Between two entries has been written, in a hand different from that recording the loans, 'This booke was made since the books were new plact & therefore imperfect as to [?]| find certaine anie booke almost therefore it were very well another Alphabetical Catalogue in this kind were made'. It cannot be assumed, merely from position, that these words were written in 1638. Nor can the alphabetical list itself yet be dated despite the contention in the Catalogue of Additions to the Manuscripts that it is written in a sixteenth-century hand.

36 In describing Add. MS. 36789.

37 On fol. 4v. Similar evidence in Add. MS. 5161, fol. 9r, is dated 25 Nov. 1638. Entries in both manuscripts made earlier in 1638 do not carry Emperor classifications. Classifications attached to loans on 21 June 1638 (in Add. MS. 5161, fol. 9r) and 4 Dec. 1638 (in MS. Cotton Appendix XLV, art. 13, fol. 4) may have been added after the entries were made.

38 Cannon's will has disappeared but in a copy of his nephew's will, dated 20 Dec. 1639, he is described as being deceased: National Library of Wales, Picton Castle item 158 (will of Morris Cannon). I am grateful to Mr. Dafydd Ifans of the National Library of Wales for help on this point. See also B. G. Charles (ed.), Calendar of the Records of the Borough of Haverfordwest, 1539-1600 (Cardiff, 1967), pp. 77, 93. The loan to Cannon in Add. MS. 36682 is on fol. 159 and is of MS. Cotton Vitellius C. IX. What is almost certainly the same manuscript is recorded in MS. Harley 6018 as on loan to Cannon in a list of borrowings outstanding at 15 Jan. 1631 (fol. 179).

39 Add. MS. 35213, fol. 42.

40 MS. Harley 6018, fol. 4. The volume did become MS. Cotton Claudius A. I. A similar marginal note—'not in the new Cataloge'—appears against entry no. 216 on fol. 100 of MS. Harley 6018. The hand may be Cotton's. The volume became MS. Cotton Tiberius D. IV. A piece of circumstantial evidence, pointing to work on a new catalogue, is to be found in a request from Dupuy to Cotton in a letter of January 1630: 'Vous m'obligererez fort de m'envoyer un Catalogue de votre Bibliotheque & papiers, que j'apprens etre fait': Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Smith 79, p. 34.

41 As is the section containing the Tiberius D. IV entry (note 40 above). The relevant Cotton Fragments are two sheets of paper containing a number of MS. Cotton Vitellius F entries. When these entries were rewritten by the second hand small changes in spelling and abbreviations were made. I am most grateful to Mr. Hilton Kelliker of the Department of Manuscripts for help in investigating the Cotton Fragments.

A fair amount of work done on comparing hands in the various catalogues has yielded few firm conclusions. Some hands appear in more than one list but, with the exceptions of Cotton, his son, and their librarian, Richard James, owners have yet to be identified.

The signatures are confined to sheets written in the first hand, though Robert's appears alone on a sheet (fol. 182) written in Sir Thomas's hand and on a final blank sheet (fol. 216). In some cases, the signatures have been partly sliced off horizontally by page trimming but there is no sign of the remains of signatures on pages written in the second hand. The loan to Cannon is on a sheet signed by Robert and Thomas.

42 It has been said that Cotton began to employ this addition to his signature after being knighted by James I in 1603, though Wright has shown that it was included in a signature dating from 1599 and omitted from one of 1608. He concludes that not too much reliance should be placed on dating based on this usage: C. E. Wright, op. cit., p. 200. 'Bruceus' does not appear in the title to MS. Harley 6018.

As for the signature itself, it differs from the style Cotton normally employed to show his ownership of manuscripts, but his hand does vary and a close examination of the two styles has virtually convinced me that they derive from the same man. I am very grateful to Mr. Arthur Searle of the British Library for his expert guidance on this subject.

44 In notes made probably early in 1644 relating to the sequestration of part of his estates, Sir Thomas Cotton refers to his remarriage about four years previously: MS. Cotton Appendix XLIX, fol. 91. See also J. Burke and J. B. Burke, The Extinct and Dormant Baronetcies of England, Scotland and Ireland (London, 1841).

45 On the evidence of the blank but signed fol. 216 (note 42 above), it is just possible that sheets were signed before entries were made on them.

The clover-leaf mark and various crosses in pencil appearing in some margins of Add. MS.
36682 are another sign that this catalogue may have existed during Cotton’s lifetime: see note 8 above.

We do not know how the books were arranged at the time of the MS. Harley 6018 catalogue, but if its numerical order is any guide there must have been much ‘new placing’ in the later 1620s.

Add. MS. 36682 was still in use, apparently as the working catalogue of the library, in the 1650s. Inserted at the beginning is a checklist of volumes entitled ‘Upon a Survey of the books, that are set up, (there being many bydes one are not) by the last Catalogue; there were found to be wanting,’ and dated ‘Jan. et Febr. 1656’ (fol. 1). The ‘last Catalogue’ is Add. MS. 36682. Why a survey was needed and why some books had not been returned to their places is not known, but the library may have been evacuated from London during the Civil Wars, see Planta’s Catalogue, p. xi.

MS. Barlow 9 is not foliated throughout. The Cotton catalogue and related notes are towards the end of the volume and have been separately foliated from 1 to 15. The numbering in MS. Rawlinson D. 901 is also fairly haphazard: there are at least two sets of figures and both do not appear all at the time. The catalogue with which we are at present concerned occupies about 250 pages in the first part of the volume, though an error after page 212 (which is followed by page 113) reduces the apparent total to 150. In the last part of the volume, numbered separately from fols. 148 to 179v, is another Cotton catalogue which belongs to the third group and which will be discussed later.


Perhaps in the late 1630s or earlier 1640s. The administration of the library was interrupted during some of the years of the Civil Wars and Commonwealth, though Sir Thomas Cotton did not die until 1662.

Cambridge, Gonville and Caius MS. 73/40, item 1 (fol. 2–12v) and Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Tanner 88, fols. 94–105, are close copies of the Barlow catalogue. The Caius list may be nearly contemporary with Barlow as it does not include items entered only as additions in the Barlow catalogue (Julius B. I, II, VI, C. IV, VIII, Domitian IX and XI), and it must in any case date from or before 1659 as it came to Caius from William Moore in that year, see M. R. James, A Descriptive Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Library of Gonville and Caius College, vol. i (Cambridge, 1907), pp. vii, 66. The list in MS. Tanner 88 is, however, later: additions to the Barlow catalogue form an integral part of the Tanner list which is in Tanner’s own hand. (Tanner was born in 1674 and was a contributor to Edward Bernard’s Catalogi librorum manuscriptorum Angliae et Hiberniae in unum collecti cum indice alphabeticum, published in 1697. D.N.B.) Both the Caius and the Tanner catalogues repeat the occasional errors in the Barlow MS. (e.g. the misdescription—partly corrected in the Caius catalogue—of the MS. Cotton Nero C. III entries as Nero E. III: MS. Barlow 9, fols 7r–8; Gonville and Caius MS. 73/40, fols. 7r–8; MS. Tanner 88, fol. 103. I am very grateful to the Master and Fellows of Gonville and Caius College for permission to consult their manuscript and to Mr. Arthur Searle for guiding me to the Tanner catalogue.

The order in Add. MS. 36682, MS. Barlow 9, and MS. Rawlinson D. 901 differs from that in the Planta Catalogue in that Cleopatra and Faustina follow the Julius entry. Add. MS. 36682 and the Barlow catalogue have no entries for Augustus; Rawlinson puts this last and it is written in the hand used for additions in that catalogue.

The description of the Rawlinson catalogue in the Quarto Catalogue says that the hand responsible for the entries as far as MS. Cotton Otho B. XI is contemporary with Sir Robert Cotton. This seems highly unlikely.

MS. Rawlinson D. 901, pp. 150–4. The manuscripts are those listed in Planta’s Catalogue as Cotton Appendices I–XXVI.

I have so far found no evidence to support this view.

I am most grateful to Professor Elizabeth Read Foster for drawing to my attention the two Cotton catalogues in the Petyt Collection, and to the librarian of the Inner Temple Library for permission to make use of these manuscripts.

Fols. 1–172 and fols. 181–9, with an index on pp. 190–205.

For the sake of completeness, another catalogue—though apparently unimportant—should be mentioned. In 1665 Sir William Dugdale compiled a list, now Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Dugdale 48, of selected manuscripts in various libraries. This includes a selection of manuscripts in the Cotton library, listed in the order of Add. MS. 36682.

For its location in the manuscript see note 48 above.

Fols. 214–88v.

For its location in the manuscript see note 55 above.

Described in M. R. James, Bibliotheca Pepysiana. A descriptive catalogue of the Library of Samuel Pepys. Part iii—Medieval Manuscripts (London, 1923). The entry is no. 2427 on p. 103. The catalogue occupies fols. 33–186 of the manuscript. I am grateful to the Master and Fellows of Magdalene College for allowing me to examine this catalogue, and to Mr. Robert Latham, Fellow and Pepys Librarian, for all his kindness during my visit to Cambridge.

Both announce this as 86. The catalogue in MS. Harley 694 is in several hands; the Pepys catalogue is in one hand throughout as, for the most part, is the Petyt catalogue. The Petyt catalogue has an index at the end.

Described in F. Madan, A Summary Catalogue of Western Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library, vol. iii (Oxford, 1895), pp. 81, 88. Tanner bought manuscripts from Sancroft’s executors. I am indebted to Dr. Andrew Watson for pointing out this connection to me.

The description of the manuscript in the Quarto Catalogue says that the leaves carrying this list did not form part of the original volume but were added to it in 1863 from Rawlinson fragments. The leaves are larger than those of the remainder of the manuscript.

On membranes 3, 18, and 19. The words used are ‘prodiit in lucem ex Bibliotheca Cott. Anno 1652’, with a minor variation in one instance. They are an integral part of the entry and cannot have been added later. The reference is to the publication in 1652 of Roger Twysden’s Historiae Angliceae Scriptores X and the phrase ‘in lucem’ is used in his title. I am most grateful to Dr. Andrew Watson for help with this point.

12 and 13 William III, c. 7.

After noting the existence of this schedule, the act provides that the librarian ‘shall cause another Schedule to be made in Parchment which shall contain not only the Names and Titles of all the said Manuscripts . . . but also the Number of the Pages and Folio's thereunto belonging and cause the same to be inrolled in the High Court of Chancery . . .’. Add. MS. 8926 does not exactly answer to this description but the possibility that it is the second, rather than the first, schedule should not be ignored.

The ‘Benefit of the Publick’ is an important theme of both acts of Parliament. Cotton House was purchased by 5 Anne, c. 30.

See note 9 above. Omissions are also repeated: part of entry no. 2 in MS. Harley 6018, fol. 4, reads ‘. . . papae ad . . . quod provocandum sit ad sedem Romanam’. These omissions reappear in Add. MSS. 36682, fol. 94v and 36789, fol. 120v. The description is of part of MS. Cotton Claudius A. I.

The vellum roll catalogue, Add. MS. 8926, lists far too many Emperor volumes to be contemporary with the first Emperor catalogue, Add. MS. 36682.