Additions to the Library of William Dowsing (1596-1668): A Reformation Tract Volume Reassembled

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This article identifies several volumes from the library of the seventeenth-century puritan William Dowsing (1596-1668). Dowsing is primarily known for the campaign of iconoclasm which he conducted in East Anglia between late 1643 and 1644 and for the journal in which he kept a detailed record of these activities.\(^1\) This aspect of his life has been a long-standing object of scholarly interest. More recently, the work of John Morrill has revealed that Dowsing owned a sizeable collection of books and annotated many of them.\(^2\) We find, amongst surviving volumes, evidence of the thoroughness of his reading and the strength of his religious convictions. This article contributes to this work by identifying three books from Dowsing’s library (two of them from the British Library, the other from Balliol College, Oxford)\(^3\) which originally comprised a single volume of tracts and, by using the marginalia contained in these volumes, to identify further texts which were familiar to Dowsing and which he probably owned.

Dowsing was born in Laxfield in north-east Suffolk and later moved to Coddenham in central Suffolk. In the early 1620s he married Thamar Lea, the daughter of a minor gentleman of puritan convictions, who bore him ten children before her death in 1640. It was around this time that Dowsing moved to Stratford St Mary (on the Suffolk side of the River Stour), where he lived until his death in 1668, marrying Mary Cooper in 1646 and fathering three more children. His brief but industrious career as a commissioner for the destruction of idolatrous and superstitious imagery was conducted between December 1643 and the autumn of 1644 on the authority of Edward Montagu, second Earl of Manchester, who commanded parliamentary forces in East Anglia. We know from Dowsing’s journal that, sometimes with the aid of hand-picked deputies, he visited around two hundred and fifty churches in Cambridgeshire and Suffolk, smashing stained glass, ripping up monumental brass inscriptions, destroying altar rails and steps, and pulling down crucifixes and crosses. The account of these activities which Dowsing gives in his journal is sometimes poignantly corroborated by surviving churchwardens’ accounts and by the fabric of churches themselves.

There is a compelling parallel to be drawn between Dowsing the iconoclast and Dowsing the reader. His surviving books contain numerous annotations, giving evidence of thorough reading and strong religious convictions. These annotations, although not physically destructive, appear to be the product of the same zealous energy which he exerted as an iconoclast. There are numerous emendations, copious intertextual references, and notes which challenge and rebut the printed texts. It is difficult, however, to judge the scale of Dowsing’s bibliographic activities, since our knowledge of his library is largely based on the books which survive, rather than on

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\(^1\) Trevor Cooper (ed.), *The Journal of William Dowsing: Iconoclasm in East Anglia During the English Civil War* (Woodbridge, 2001).


secondary documents. On his death, Dowsing bequeathed his library, minus duplicates and one other exception, to his eldest son Samuel, who died in 1703.  

Samuel’s executor and half-brother, also named William, sold the collection to a London bookseller named ‘Mr Huse’. It is highly likely, as Trevor Cooper has argued, that this was Thomas Huse, who became active as a bookbinder, and presumably also as a bookseller, in the late seventeenth century. This, however, is where the trail stops and there are no known sources from which to conduct a wholesale reconstruction of the library. No inventory or booklist is known to survive, nor any sale catalogue in which William or Samuel Dowsing is named. But this impediment is not insurmountable. The growing attentiveness of librarians, researchers, and specialist booksellers to the copy-specific details of books makes the identification of volumes from Dowsing’s library increasingly practicable. We already know that Dowsing’s library contained works of biblical exegesis, religious controversy, and history, both classical and modern. It will become apparent that his religious reading included more sixteenth-century religious material than has previously been recognized.

This article arises from a pair of chance discoveries in the British Library, made during the course of a larger study of sixteenth-century readers’ annotations. Two composite volumes were found to contain William Dowsing’s distinctive annotations. Although neither of the volumes

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4 Ipswich, Suffolk Record Office (SRO), Archdeaconry of Suffolk Wills, IC/AA1/98/14G. Dowsing bequeathed his duplicates to his wife to use during her lifetime and then to distribute amongst their children at her discretion. This detail (which has not been mentioned by previous scholars) hints that the library may have been somewhat larger than is suggested by our current knowledge of its contents. The other exception was Joseph Caryll’s multiple-volume commentary on the Book of Job, which Dowsing left to his wife as a remembrance.

5 SRO, Archdeaconry of Suffolk Wills, IC/AA1/133/79. Our knowledge of the sale is derived from a second-generation copy of Dowsing’s journal, which was made for the Suffolk antiquary Thomas Martin of Palgrave (1696-1771) and was based on the (no longer extant) copy made by the Revd Edward Leedes in 1704. The copy reproduces a note, originally written by Leedes, which states that the journal ‘was found amongst the sayd Mr William Dowsing’s books sold by his son Mr William Dowsing to Mr Huse a bookseller at Exeter Change in the Strand, London Sept’ 1704’. SRO, HD 1538/435/1/1. See Trevor Cooper, ‘The History and Nature of the Journal’, in The Journal of William Dowsing, pp. 138-47 (pp. 140-1).


7 Dowsing owned the copy of Appian of Alexandria’s An Auncient Historie and Exquisite Chronicle of the Romanes Warres (1578), which is Cambridge University Library, Syn.7.57.83. I am grateful to Jason Scott-Warren for this information.

8 Recent examples include Dowsing’s copy of The Chronicle of Fabian (1559), STC 10664, see Maggs Bros, 1324 (2002), item 37 (pp. 82-3); and a first edition Douai-Rheims New Testament (1582), STC 2884, which was sold by James & Devon Gray Booksellers (Cambridge, Massachusetts) in 2012. The former volume is mentioned in Morrill, ‘William Dowsing and the Administration of Iconoclasm in the Puritan Revolution’, plate 4a.


11 The first volume, British Library, C.115.n.73, contains three publications: The Reformation of Religion by Iosiafh (1590?), STC 14815; William Tyndale, The Supper of the Lorde (1547?), STC 24470; and A Faythful and most Godlye Treatise Concernyng the most Sacred Sacrament (1548?), STC 411, issued with The Order that the Churche and Congregation of Christ in Denmarke doth Vse. There are three pages of densely formulated notes, written by Dowsing, at the end of The Reformation of Religion by Iosiafh. These begin on sig. D3v and then cover both sides of what the STC describes as a cancelland. The second volume, British Library, C.21a.29, contains a further two publications: A Brife and Faythfull Declaration of the True Fayth of Christ (1547), STC 1034.7; and Henry Brinkelow or Robert Crowley, A Supplication of the Poore Commons (1546), STC 10884, issued with a reprint of Simon Fish, A Supplicacyon for the Beggers (first printed 1529), STC 10883.
contains Dowsing’s signature, the hand and the style of annotations enable a positive identification to be made. The absence of a signature probably explains why these volumes have not previously been connected with Dowsing.

Dowsing annotated these volumes by numbering the individual works and their pages, a feature which enables us to identify a further item from his library. The Reformation of Religion by Iosiah, which appears at the beginning of the first volume, is numbered twice, the numbers running 1-27 and 65-91. All of the other works in the two volumes are numbered once. In the first volume these run 97-168, 3-68, 69-96 and in the second they run 265-309, 310-328, 233-264. In addition to adding these numbers, Dowsing also marked the title page of each of these works with ‘tre’ (i.e. ‘treatise’) and a number: the numbers in the first volume run 3-1-2 and the numbers in the second volume run 7-8-6. The order of treatise numbers and the page numbers correspond. It seems evident therefore that these works were originally bound together in a single volume and that they were disbound, reordered and rebound into two separate volumes at a later date. The Reformation of Religion by Iosiah presumably migrated from another tract volume in Dowsing’s possession, about which nothing else is currently known.

The evidence of Dowsing’s page numbering suggests that two ‘treatises’ originally numbered ‘4’ and ‘5’ (including the possibility of a single publication with two discrete parts) and paginated by Dowsing 169-232 (i.e. sixty-four pages or thirty-two leaves in total) were part of the original volume, but are now missing.

One way of tracing the missing leaves would be to examine the provenances of the two volumes. The first volume, containing the works by Calvin and Tyndale, was acquired for the British Library by Bernard Quaritch Ltd., who brought it for £600 (roughly twice the estimate of £200–£400) at the auction of part of the collection of George Goyder (1908–1997) at Sotheby’s in 1979. Goyder, whose bookplate is now at the front of the volume, acquired it following the sale of the library of the Labour politician John Burns (1858–1943) at Sotheby’s in three portions during 1943–44. Burns marked the volume with his signature and the date 22 September 1939. This is as far back as its provenance can be traced. The second volume, containing the two supplications and A Brife and Faythfull Declaration of the True Fayth of Christ, entered the British Library at a much earlier date. It was acquisitioned on 3 August 1839 and had been bought, according to the Library’s Register of Acquisitions, from the

12 The numbers in the outside top of each page were probably written first: they occupy a more usual position for page numbers and they seem less cramped than the numbers placed between the running title and the top of the page. The cramping does not seem to be an illusion created by page-cropping. The fact that both sets of numbers are in Dowsing’s hand suggests that he was responsible for having this item moved and rebound at some stage.

13 Dowsing counted as a treatise anything which possessed its own title page, even if it was printed as a constituent part of another publication.

14 It is notable in this respect that The Reformation of Religion by Iosiah was published considerably later than any other work in the two volumes.

15 Sotheby and Co., Catalogue of Valuable Printed Books Mainly Relating to the Reformation in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries (London, 2 April 1979), lot 164 (p. 59). The volume is described as containing ‘old marginal annotations’. The volume does not appear in any of the most probable Quaritch sale catalogues (i.e. nos 990, 995, 1002, 1004, 1016, 1025) and is therefore likely to have been sold directly to the British Library.

16 The book appears amongst the second of these portions and was bought by McLeish and Sons for £22. Sotheby and Co., Catalogue of the Famous Library of the Late Right Hon. John Burns, P.C., M.P. (London, 7–8 December, 1943; 14 March 1944; 24–26 April, 1944), 14 March 1944, lot 275 (p. 32). It went on sale later that year for £27, McLeish and Sons, Catalogue of Rare Books and Manuscripts, no. 137 (1944), item 75 (p. 11). McLeish and Sons were at this time located at 22 Little Russell Street. For a description of the business during the year 1942, see William Rees-Mogg, Memoirs (London, 2011), pp. 271–2. See also Frank Herrmann, ‘The Role of the Auction Houses’, in Giles Mandelbrote (ed.), Out of Print and Into Profit: A History of the Rare and Secondhand Book Trade in Britain in the Twentieth Century (London, 2006), pp. 3–34 (p. 29).
bookseller and publisher, William Pickering, along with 133 other items, for a total of £77 1s 6d.\textsuperscript{17} Nothing is known of its previous whereabouts. This information is insufficient to resolve our investigation; neither the sale catalogues for John Burns’s collection, nor the list of books bought from William Pickering, contains anything which is a likely candidate for the missing tract(s) or which extend the provenance history further back into the past.

Another approach is to try to work out which tract(s) are missing, based on those which have already been identified. There are three factors to consider. First, the missing leaves contain two ‘treatises’ which total thirty-two leaves. Second, since everything which has been found is from 1546-1548, the missing leaves are also likely to date from these years. Third, all of the works in the two British Library volumes have been conjecturally attributed to the printer and bookseller John Day, who sometimes worked in collaboration with William Seres, and it would therefore be wise to begin our search by considering other works printed by Day in these years. Though Day printed a handful of works with fewer than thirty-two leaves, some combination of which could have comprised the missing tract(s), the only publication which meets all the criteria by itself is \textit{Wycliffe’s Wicket}. There were two printings of the work, both by Day: the first, in 1546, occupied twenty leaves; the second, in 1548(?), which was overseen by Miles Coverdale, occupied thirty-two leaves. Both printings contained two works with separate title pages which Dowsing would have numbered as separate treatises: the eponymous Wycliffite sacramental treatise and \textit{The Testament of Master Wyllyam Tracie}.\textsuperscript{18} The former work’s discussion of Eucharistic theology makes it thematically similar to several of the tracts which have already been located. It is a reasonable conjecture, therefore, that the missing thirty-two leaves comprised a copy of the second printing of \textit{Wycliffe’s Wicket}.

The \textit{English Short-Title Catalogue} records eighteen known copies of the second printing of \textit{Wycliffe’s Wicket}. A survey of these copies has revealed that the missing thirty-two leaves are located in Balliol College, Oxford (fig. 1).\textsuperscript{19} This copy of \textit{Wycliffe’s Wicket} contains an assortment of Dowsing’s distinctive annotations, including, most importantly, the additional pagination in the upper margin and the numerical separation of the work into two discrete treatises. The copy entered the college, along with around two thousand other volumes, through the bequest of the Herefordshire antiquary, George Coningesby (c. 1692–1766).\textsuperscript{20}

The final question in reconstructing this tract volume is whether there were originally any works bearing higher page numbers than Fish’s \textit{A Supplicacyon for the Beggers}, which currently comes last in the sequence. We can be confident, however, that no further tracts await discovery. It was conventional for Dowsing, once he had finished reading a book, to record, in a heavily abbreviated format, the details of his reading. Just such an inscription can be found on the final leaf of \textit{A Supplicacyon for the Beggers}. This tells us that Dowsing began reading the volume on 7 February 1621, read forty leaves in four hours each day, and finished

\textsuperscript{17} British Library, Corporate Archive, DH52/6. The individual sum paid for the volume was £2 2s.

\textsuperscript{18} This latter work contained the last will of the evangelical gentleman, and former sheriff of Gloucestershire, William Tracy (d. 1530), which had become infamous for its rejection of all works and prayers in the attainment of salvation. The will was refused probate by the Prerogative Court of Canterbury and was condemned by Convocation. It soon began circulating in manuscript and was then printed in Antwerp in 1535, where it appeared with edifying commentaries by William Tyndale and John Frith. See John Craig and Caroline Litzenberger, ‘Wills as Religious Propaganda: The Testament of William Tracy’, \textit{Journal of Ecclesiastical History}, xlv (1993), pp. 415–31. Though Tracy’s will became an influential model for other Protestant wills, it does not appear to have influenced the content of Dowsing’s will.

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Wycliffes Wicket} (1548?), STC 25591a, Balliol College, Oxford, Arch.C.8.22.

\textsuperscript{20} I am grateful to the staff of Balliol College library for this information. Coningesby received his BA from Wadham College, Oxford, in 1714 and his BD and DD from Balliol in 1739.
Fig. 1. WICKLIFFES WICKET (1548?), STC 25591a, sig. a1r. Balliol College, Oxford, Arch.C.8.22. Reproduced by kind permission of the Master and Fellows of Balliol College.
on 10 February.\textsuperscript{21} The date indicates that Dowsing read the volume during his mid-twenties, which places it amongst his earliest known acquisitions.\textsuperscript{22} With this final section now in place, we can reconstruct the original volume as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item no.</th>
<th>Library / Shelfmark</th>
<th>STC no.</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>MS. Pagination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>British Library / C.115.n.73 [3]</td>
<td>4411</td>
<td>A Faythfull […] Treatyse Concernyng the most Sacred Sacrament</td>
<td>1548\textsuperscript{3}</td>
<td>[1-2], 3-68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>British Library / C.115.n.73 [3]</td>
<td>4411</td>
<td>The Order that the Churche and Congregation of Christ in Denmarke doth Vie\textsuperscript{23}</td>
<td>1548\textsuperscript{2}</td>
<td>69-96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>British Library / C.115.n.73 [2]</td>
<td>24470</td>
<td>The Supper of the Lorde</td>
<td>1547\textsuperscript{?}</td>
<td>97-168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Balliol College / Arch.C.8.22</td>
<td>25591a</td>
<td>Wycliffe's Wicket</td>
<td>1548\textsuperscript{3}</td>
<td>169-194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Balliol College / Arch.C.8.22</td>
<td>25591a</td>
<td>The Testament of Master Wylyum Tracie\textsuperscript{24}</td>
<td>1548\textsuperscript{3}</td>
<td>195-232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>British Library / C.21.a.29 [1]</td>
<td>10884</td>
<td>A Supplicacyon for the Beggers\textsuperscript{25}</td>
<td>1546</td>
<td>310-328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>British Library / C.115.n.73 [1]</td>
<td>14815</td>
<td>The Reformation of Religion by Iosiah</td>
<td>1590\textsuperscript{3}</td>
<td>1-27 / 65-91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The works contained in this tract volume were the product of the initial and highly productive phase of John Day’s career, during which he was able to establish himself, through

\textsuperscript{21} The inscription reads ‘I R this B in 4.d. I R 40 l a d yt is 4 h in a d I began m 12 d.7 & end d.10: a.20. Ilmdng a.20.m.12.d.13wr’ (i.e. ‘I Read this Book in four days. I Read forty leaves a day, that is four hours in a day. I began 7 February and ended 10 February: 1620’ (i.e. 1621)). It is possible that it was ‘wr[itten]’ on 13 February, three days after he had finished reading the volume. The heavily abbreviated form which it adopts, in which March is counted as the first month of the year, is similar to his inscriptions in other books. The final phrase, which contains a compressed form of Dowsing’s name, shows the influence of shorthand (in which vowels were commonly omitted), a skill which he probably learned for the purpose of taking down sermon notes. See John Blatchly, ‘Dowsing’s Collection of Parliamentary Sermons’ in The Journal of William Dowsing, pp. 327-33 (p. 329).

\textsuperscript{22} Morrill, ‘William Dowsing and the Administration of Iconoclasm in the Puritan Revolution’, pp. 7-8. It is evident that Dowsing returned to the volume in later life, since some of his annotations specifically cite the 1641 edition of Foxe’s Acts and Monuments (see fig. 1).

\textsuperscript{23} This edition was issued with A Faythfull […] Treatyse Concernyng the Most Sacred Sacrament but counted separately by Dowsing.

\textsuperscript{24} This edition was issued with Wycliffe’s Wicket but counted separately by Dowsing.

\textsuperscript{25} This edition was issued with A Supplication of the Poore Commons but counted separately by Dowsing.
the Edwardian relaxation of press scrutiny, as one of London’s foremost Protestant printers.26 He began his career by specializing in octavo pamphlets, perhaps because of the comparatively quick financial return on such works. We know that the books which John Day printed were sold at five shops around London, operated by Day, Seres, or by Seres’s second partner, Anthony Scoloker, in addition to the premises of other booksellers.27 The fact that all of the works in Dowsing’s tract volume were printed by the same printer makes it highly likely that they were bound together at one of these five premises, either before sale or in accordance with a customer’s specifications. Whilst the evidence for such practices amongst English booksellers is limited, it is widely believed that French booksellers laid their pamphlets out in baskets so that customers could make their own selections.28 Tract volumes of this kind were already popular at the beginning of the sixteenth century and were often the products of enterprising collaborations between booksellers and bookbinders.

We now turn to consider the annotations contained in this reassembled tract volume. Numerous, often very concise, interventions can be found on most pages. The majority of these involve marginal scriptural citations. In some cases, Dowsing expands the printed citations, which, because they were printed before the Geneva Bible (1560) had introduced a standardized system of verse numbers, provide only chapter references.29 Elsewhere, he makes fresh additions, sometimes citing several books and several different chapters, and often providing long strings of verse numbers, so as to juxtapose the printed text with the most fitting biblical sources which he could muster. He also corrects the printed marginalia. Where, for example, in Tyndale’s Supper of the Lorde, during a discussion of heavenly manna, the adjacent marginalium cites Psalm 7 (in which manna is not mentioned), Dowsing changes the citation to ‘Psalm 7:23, 24, 25 (which is correct) and supplements it with the appropriate chapter and verse (16:15) from Exodus (sig. A6r). The other text to which Dowsing frequently refers is John Foxe’s Actes and Monuments, a work which he owned in at least three different editions30 and which he cited by giving both the date of publication and the page number. In these cases, Dowsing can be seen connecting individual episodes in the English Reformation – particularly the circumstances surrounding the origins of the different tracts – with the most authoritative history of those events which he had at his disposal.

Dowsing was a scrupulous corrector of mistakes. Though none of the tracts was issued with an errata list, he carefully corrected spelling mistakes throughout. He also went to the extraordinary length of amending letters which, either because of damaged type or because the type was poorly inked, were imperfectly rendered. These repairs take the form of small

27 Seres had two shops, one at Ely Rents (in Holborn) and one at Peter College (at the west end of St Paul’s Churchyard), and shared two further shops with Scoloker, one in the parish of St Botolph’s without Aldersgate and one in Savoy Rents without Temple Bar. Meanwhile, Day himself was based in the parish of St Sepulchre at the sign of the Resurrection from 1547-49, after which he moved into the gatehouse of Aldersgate, where he then remained for the rest of career. See King, ‘John Day’, pp. 185-6.
30 These editions, as Morrill has shown, are those of 1576, 1610 and 1641, ‘William Dowsing and the Administration of Iconoclasm in the Puritan Revolution’, pp. 5-6 (and note).
pen-strokes, sometimes more than a dozen on a page. In other places, usually after making the same alteration several times, he would issue a blanket rejection of a spelling of which he disapproved: during Calvin’s *Faythfull and most Godlye Treatys*e, for example, he underlines the word ‘moch’ and writes in the margin ‘where you find this word moch [sic] again read it much’ (sig. E2r). There are six revisions of this kind, most of which concern themselves with such orthographic niceties.

These varieties of annotation, which are present throughout the tract volume, do much to confirm the ‘bureaucratic’ mentality which Morrill has described. But we should also consider in detail the instances in which Dowsing registers a difference of opinion with the text, since these provide the best insight into his religious beliefs and attitudes. These disputatious notes mostly occur near the beginning of the volume as it was originally arranged and are all supported by numerous scriptural citations. During Calvin’s *Faythfull and most Godlye Treatys*e Dowsing responded to the phrase ‘all ioyes and pleasures that chance to the heade’ with the assertion that ‘all come by gods providence which comfort ye godly’ (sig. B2r). He seems to have been otherwise content with the theology which Calvin expressed, though he was dissatisfied with the observances which the appended treatise attributes to the Protestant Church in Denmark: he objected to the term ‘sundaye’, which he describes as a ‘heathinish name dedicated to ye sun which god forbid his people to have in their mouths’ and suggests ‘lords day’ and ‘Sabbath’ as scripturally tenable alternatives (sig. E4v). He also rejects the action of kneeling to receive communion, arguing that the ‘use in ye primitiue Church & Christ’s time was siting’ (sig. E8v), the convention of appointing godparents, which are ‘a huma[n] devise, at ye best’ (sig. F2v), and the practice of allowing women to baptize infants *in extremis*, arguing that ‘Women are forbidden to speake in ye publique Assembly: much les to do yt action[n] w[hich] is peculier to a pastor lawfully caled, in ye face of ye church’ (sig. F3r). Annotations such as these are especially important to our understanding of Dowsing’s theological convictions because, whilst he read and annotated avidly, he does not seem to have written treatises of his own.

The remaining tracts in the volume appear to have received a more congenial response. The annotations which accompany Tyndale’s *Supper of the Lorde* contain just one criticism, which concerns the term ‘laye men’. Dowsing describes this as a ‘popish distinction[n] taken out of Joh[n] 7.49’ and instead contends that ‘all men are carnal or spiritual, se 1 Cor[inthians] 3.3-4: Ro[mans] 8.4.5-9’ (sig. B7v). There was nothing in Wycliffe’s *Wicket* or in *A Brife and Faythfull Declaration* which attracted his criticism and only one such detail amongst the two supplications which concluded the tract volume. Where, during *A Supplication of the Poore Commons*, Henry VIII is addressed as ‘the supreme heade immediatlye nexte vnto him, by whose mighty hand you have hytherto vanquished your enemies’, Dowsing writes that ‘Christ is only head of ye faith of ye church’ and observes that ‘This titl [sic] was giuen to him for writing against Luther in defence of works [which were] reproved by Latimer pag[e] 1592.2’ (sig. C6v). This reference matches one elsewhere on the page and refers to the second column of page 1592 of the 1610 edition of Foxe’s *Actes and Monuments*, where a letter from Latimer to Henry, dated 1530, is reproduced, in which the bishop argues that the faith ought to be defended by the Word of God, rather than through the exercise of temporal power.

We can also examine the annotations for evidence of other works which Dowsing is likely to have owned, though the fact that some annotations were added in or after 1641 should make us cautious about the dates at which Dowsing acquired these other works. There are two simple instances of this, and one that is more complex. First, where Dowsing contests the term ‘laye men’ he cites ‘Cowper on Ro[mans] 8.9. Pag[e]’. The omission of a page number in this instance suggests that Dowsing intended to add this detail later, but forgot. The author of the work is William Cowper (1568–1619), a minister at Perth, and the work cited is *Heaven*

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31 John Foxe, *Actes and Monuments* (1610), STC 11227, sig. 7N3v (p. 1592).

32 Morrill cites another from 1620 in which Dowsing uses Cowper’s text to contest the distinction between the clergy and the laity, ‘William Dowsing and the Administration of Iconoclasm in the Puritan Revolution’, p. 8.
Opened, which first appeared in 1609 and was heavily reprinted before Dowsing’s death in 1668. The lack of a page number makes it difficult to identify the edition which he was using. The STC records more than sixty copies of the various quarto printings and almost as many copies again of Cowper’s folio Workes (1623; 1626; 1629), any of which Dowsing might have used. Another intertextual reference occurs at the beginning of A Supplicacyon for the Beggers, where Dowsing alludes to ‘Iohn frith his works in folio p.4’ (sig. c7v). This refers to The Whole Workes of W. Tyndall, Iohn Frith, and Doct. Barnes (1573), in which, on page four of the Frith section, there is an allusion to the Supplicacyon. We can be confident about the work specified, but there is little immediate hope of identifying the copy which belonged to Dowsing. More than eighty copies of this work are known to survive and it would be laborious (and perhaps futile), in the absence of more detailed provenance information, to survey these copies in pursuit of Dowsing’s distinctive marks of ownership.

The final case arises during The Order that the Churche and Congregation of Christ in Denmarke doth Vse and is more complex. Where godparents are mentioned, Dowsing asserts that: ‘This is a huma[n] deuice, at ye best, if not by pope hingius [sic]. As Sabellicus, Polydorus & docto[r] Barnes writ[e]; Anno 143’ (sig. F2v). The belief that godfathers and godmothers were devised by Pope Hyginus (136/138-140/142) was fairly widespread during the seventeenth century. The allusion to Robert Barnes is explicable through the folio Workes mentioned above and the reference to Polydore Vergil is also reasonably straightforward: the origins of godparents are discussed in his De inventorisibus rerum, which Dowsing could perhaps have encountered in John Langley’s heavily abridged (and Protestantized) translation. The reference to Sabellicus is more abstruse: his works were not available in English and, though Dowsing could read Latin, the books which he owned seem overwhelmingly to have been printed in English. Sabellicus was frequently cited in English historical texts (including Foxe’s Actes and Monuments), but we ought also to consider the possibility that all three authorities were in fact lifted together from a single common source. A little searching reveals that this is indeed the case. They are cited by Thomas Becon in The Relikes of Rome (1560; 1563), under the heading ‘Of Baptisme’. Further confirmation can be found where Dowsing attacks the suggestion that women might, in extremis, baptize infants: ‘Gratianus, Polidorus, Fasciculus te[m]p. D. Barnes, these do writ[e] Anno 198 Victor Primus ordaysd wom[en] to Batise [sic]. It mayntayne ye heresy of children dyng vnbaptised to be dam[n]ed’ (sig. F3r). The sources to which Dowsing was referring are the Decretum Gratiani (a legal textbook, compiled by Gratian, a twelfth-century Franciscan friar in Bologna), the Fasciculus temporum by Werner Rolewinck, and the works of Robert Barnes. The fact that these were also cited in the baptism section of Becon’s The Relikes of Rome confirms that this work was the source of Dowsing’s information. It was printed in 1560 and 1563 and was reprinted in the folio Workes of Thomas Becon in 1564. It is possible, though by no means certain, that one of the fifty-six copies of these three editions which the STC records will turn out to have belonged to Dowsing.

This expanded knowledge of the books which Dowsing is likely to have possessed has implications for our understanding of the circumstances surrounding the sale of his books in the early eighteenth century. It now seems likely that whoever conducted the sale chose to disbind some of the tract volumes in the collection and to rebind them in new combinations, either at the request of his customers or at his own discretion. This would explain the presence of a tract from another volume in the three volumes with which we have been working. The application of such a binding-intensive method of sale is consistent with the belief that Thomas Huse (whose main business to date had been as a bookbinder) was directly
involved in the sale of the collection. It is also noteworthy that two of the three volumes which comprise our tract volume have eighteenth-century bindings. Though there are no matches in the designs which these bindings display, and whilst these designs cannot be attributed to a particular binder (and this mode of reasoning is anyway error-prone when applied to large urban centres like London), it nevertheless seems probable that the current bindings are those into which the tracts were rebound.

The additions which this study has made to the known contents of Dowsing’s library make a small, but significant, contribution to speculations about whether the sale of the collection is partly or wholly recorded in any surviving sale catalogues from the period. It has been tentatively suggested by Trevor Cooper that some of Dowsing’s books appeared in a 1704 catalogue for the bookseller Richard Smith. As Cooper explains, the hypothesis rests largely on the presence in this catalogue of some ‘Sermons preached before the Long Parliament’, which may correspond to the six-volume compilation of Parliamentary sermons which Dowsing owned and annotated. Smith, moreover, had connections with Huse and may have sold a portion of Dowsing’s books on his behalf. The hypothesis is weakened, however, as Cooper also notes, by the absence from the catalogue of many of the less common works which Dowsing owned. We can add to this that the absence of anything resembling the tract volume, anything by Thomas Becon, and the folio works of Tyndale, Frith and Barnes further reduces the strength of this conjecture – or at least, reduces the size of the portion of Dowsing’s books which the catalogue might possibly capture. Whilst we are, therefore, no closer to effecting the wholesale reconstruction of Dowsing’s library, we can continue, through care and vigilance, to do things piecemeal.

The picture which we have of Dowsing, and which is continuing to emerge, is interesting in several respects. First, the rediscovery of this tract volume shows us that William Dowsing, even from his early adulthood, was well versed in the controversial writings of the sixteenth century and that his reception of these works was closely informed by the writings of John Foxe, whose martyrology served him as an authoritative guide to the events of the previous century. Second, our growing knowledge of the scale of Dowsing’s achievements as a reader makes it increasingly difficult for his iconoclastic campaign to be viewed as a product of ill-informed thuggery. It is evident that he had some knowledge of Church history and Roman history, had informed views about churchmanship, and possessed an encyclopaedic knowledge of Scripture. Third, the extent of Dowsing’s reading is noteworthy in someone who was neither a priest nor a scholar and who lacked the motives for reading which accompanied these and other learned professions. It seems likely instead that he perceived reading as constitutive of his life as a Christian, as a source of knowledge about how to live and as a means of equipping himself for (now irrecoverable) acts of oral disputation. There is, finally, something striking about the consistency with which Dowsing read and annotated the books in his possession, extracting all that he could from his modest collection. Though readers then, as now, were capable of buying more books than they had time to read, Dowsing does not seem to have suffered from this affliction. To this extent, his activities inversely resemble those of the ‘book fool’ (popularized in Sebastian Brant’s Ship of Fools), who surrounds himself with impressive-looking volumes, yet is incapable of understanding their contents. Dowsing, it seems, read everything which he owned – and thoroughly too. It is perhaps appropriate that someone so singularly disenchanted with physical appearances and so divorced from any academic interest in maintaining a visually impressive library should have read so many of the books which he owned.