

A Fifteenth-Century Bookman

William of Wykeham made a Founder's gift of books to New College: two hundred and forty-six volumes and a room to keep them in, the first purpose-built library-room of any college in Oxford. Wykeham expected that the reading-needs of his fellows at St Mary's College at Winchester would be rather different: promoted from fellowships at New College to the more lucrative benefices at Winchester, freed from the demands of the schools, their reading might never be so intensive again. So at Winchester, no library was included in the building plan and the Founder gave his fellows six books only, texts to help in the ministry rather than those aimed at the higher faculties of study. To that extent, Wykeham had nodded—a rare thing for that master planner. A common collection of books quickly began to build at Winchester and space for it had to be found, first in what is now known as Audit Room, a narrow chamber next to the Exchequer in the muniment tower, and after that in a lofted space above Fromond's Chantry, a free-standing chapel that had been fitted into the cloister garth and which was finished in 1446. Even so, the common collection at Winchester in the first half of the fifteenth century would have been a slight affair next to the sister library at Oxford, a situation that at least one of the fellows worked hard to change.

Robert Heete was a native of Woodstock in Oxfordshire, who arrived at Winchester as

a college of priests with parochial cure, his gift also included significant patristical material that would have helped to fill some of the more obvious holes, and, as might be expected, there was a fine suit in canon and civil law. It was a typical, well-rounded clerical collection. The meticulous thought that lay behind the gift is striking. The titles are known from his own catalogue in the Liber Albus and from the indenture dated 29 September 1432 by which he