

## Alan Bell's transcripts of Sydney Smith letters

New College Oxford is very proud to take into its care the large collection of transcripts of its Wykhamist scholar and fellow Sydney Smith's correspondence, which has been amassed over many years by Dr Alan Bell. The transfer has been effected by the Association's current chairman, Jeremy Cunningham, and has Alan Bell's blessing.

It is an extraordinary collection; not only those letters already published in Nowell C. Smith's two-volume edition of *The Letters of Sydney Smith* (1953), now corrected and further edited by Alan Bell, but also full transcripts of over twelve hundred letters hitherto unpublished. The originals of these letters are widely scattered throughout the UK and overseas, some in private hands, others in academic and national libraries, some already at New College. By bringing together in one place transcripts of all of them they become a hugely important and easily accessible archive relating to Sydney Smith's work, the circles in which he moved and the times in which he lived. Anyone who has ever used Alan's transcripts will know how accurate they are, and the archive also contains his own research notes and his correspondence with private and institutional owners of the originals. It is hoped that one day a complete edition of all known Sydney Smith papers will be put in hand, and the hunt is on for the right sort of editor, but in the meantime the archive of transcripts at New College (known as PA/BSS, the Bell-Sydney Smith collection) may be consulted alongside such originals as New College itself holds (PA/SMS, the Sydney Smith collection).

Thanks to an outline list prepared by Jeremy Cunningham, we can see that the PA/BSS Archive, covering letters dating from 1794-1844, contains such gems as the wonderful letters to the Scottish political writer and politician Sir James Mackintosh in Bombay, whom Sydney regales at one point with news of the mysterious 'Sloperilla', who "continues impenetrably cold to the advances of her numerous lovers. If I had been unmarried, I should certainly have made her an offer or marriage, not from any particular affection but because everybody does" (March 1805); several letters discussing the difficult relationship Sydney had with his father; a request to Lady Morpeth to "pray tell me how you are going on in the Gout Line and in the Line of Measles" (January 1821), and significant letters revealing Sydney's views on dissenters, catholics, poverty in his own parish, travel, local industry; the list seems endless and will add to the evidence already available in published letters. There is also an invaluable notebook, compiled by Alan Bell, which reveals the chronology of Sydney's activities, day by day, as represented by the letters.

Detailed listing and indexing of the transcripts will take quite a while yet, but we hope ultimately to make a searchable catalogue available, along with digital scans of the transcripts, on the New College website. In the meantime, volunteers who might like to help with that work by preparing brief descriptions and index entries of small batches of the letters, or who can add information from their own research on topics or places referred to in the letters, are invited to get in touch with Jennifer Thorp, the New College Archivist; and anyone wishing to consult the PA/BSS or PA/SMS collections of course may do so by contacting [archives@new.ox.ac.uk](mailto:archives@new.ox.ac.uk) for further information.