

DATING THE POETRY OF THOMAS FAIRFAX IN ADD. MS 11744 (BRITISH LIBRARY)

Among the lesser-known achievements of Sir Thomas Fairfax (1612–71) is his poetical output: Lord General of the New Model Army during the English Civil Wars, Fairfax also wrote verse – largely lyric translation of biblical books but also some original compositions. Fairfax’s biblical translations include the entirety of the Song of Solomon and the book of Psalms, as well as parts of eight other biblical books. He also translated secular poems by Petrarch and Saint-Amant, and composed nearly forty original poems, with both sacred and secular subject matter. This body of work is not currently listed in the *Catalogue of English Literary Manuscripts 1450–1700* (CELM), and Ian Gentles’ entry for Fairfax in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (ODNB) dismisses it as having ‘no literary merit’ – although it does, he writes show ‘a sensuous appreciation of natural beauty’ and ‘provide insight into [Fairfax’s] deeply religious nature’.¹

The status accorded Fairfax’s literary output continues, in fact, to echo Edward Bliss Reed’s comments in the introduction to his edition of Fairfax’s poetry: ‘We have . . . no discovery of a neglected genius, and there will be no call for the Complete Works of Thomas Fairfax’, he wrote, managing to undermine the value of his enterprise even as he presented it to readers. Writing in 1909, Reed no doubt had in mind a comparison with the recent discovery of Thomas Traherne’s poetry and prose, published for the first time in *The Poetical Works of Thomas Traherne* (1903) and *Centuries of Meditations* (1908). Tom Cain sought to counter similar objections to the poetry of Mildmay Fane when he compared his discovery of Fane’s manuscript poems to that of the Traherne manuscripts, not because Fane’s output is aesthetically exceptional, but because ‘[Fane’s] manuscript poetry . . . presents a largely “new” writer who was forced to confront one of the most climactic and influential sequences of events in early modern European history’: the English Civil Wars, execution of Charles I, and the Commonwealth. The ‘recovery’ scholarship that informs Cain’s edition clearly sets a precedent for engaging more seriously with Fairfax’s poetry. My dating of the poetry in Add. MS 11744 will assist attempts to do so.

¹ Ian J. Gentles, ‘Fairfax, Thomas, third Lord Fairfax of Cameron (1612–1671)’, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/9092> (2004).

Those critics and biographers who have commented on Fairfax's poetry have focused on MS Fairfax 40 as 'by far the main body of his work'.² Held in the Bodleian's collections, this 656-page collection of Fairfax's poetry, in his relatively neat autograph, opens with Fairfax's translation of the full Psalter (fols 1–388). Those attributes point to it being Fairfax's 'fair copy' of works that he had previously drafted and revised. Additional MS 11744, held by the British Library, is a small quarto of over 750 pages, containing much of the material that appears in MS Fairfax 40, though with a limited number of psalm translations that are not presented in order. Frequent crossings out and revisions indicate that the poetry of Add. MS 11744 was produced before MS Fairfax 40. In terms of physical evidence, this manuscript holds significant interest and has more to offer than MS Fairfax 40.³

Currently, the dating of Fairfax's autograph manuscripts mainly attaches to discussions of MS Fairfax 40 and relies on the contexts signalled by individual poems. For example, 'On the Fatal Day Jan: 30 1648 [i.e. 1649]' and 'Vpon the Horse w^{ch} his Ma^{tie} Rode vpon att his Coronation 1660 [i.e. 1661]' offer clear indications of their earliest possible dates of composition: 30 January 1649 and 23 April 1661. The Bodleian's catalogue entry currently dates MS Fairfax 40 to 1660–70.⁴ This range fits with MS Fairfax 40's status as a compilation but offers little sense of the compositional dates of the poems contained therein, and scholars have offered no interrogation of the processes by which they came to be there.⁵ Thus, until now, we have only really been able to date Fairfax's poetical output to sometime between 1649 and 1671 (when he died), a broad range that encompasses his retirement from leadership of the Parliamentarian forces in the early 1650s, his involvement in the Restoration of Charles II in the late 1650s, and his post-Restoration existence. Previously undocumented watermark evidence, however, reveals that the majority of the poetry of Add. MS 11744 must date to the early-to-mid

² Philip Major, "'O how I love these Solitudes": Thomas Fairfax and the Poetics of Retirement', *England's Fortress: New Perspectives on Thomas, 3rd Lord Fairfax*, edited by Andrew Hopper and Philip Major (Farnham, 2014), 173. Major follows in the footsteps of: Clements Markham, *Life of the Great Lord Fairfax* (New York, 1870), Appendix A, 415–27; M. A. Gibb, *Lord General: A Life of Thomas Fairfax* (London, 1938), Appendix, 281–91; and Edward Bliss Reed, 'The Poems of Thomas Fairfax from MS. Fairfax 40 in the Bodleian Library, Oxford', *Transactions of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 14 (1909), 250–90.

³ I include images and transcriptions from both autograph manuscripts on my website, at <http://rosamundpaice.com/Fairfax/index.html>.

⁴ MS Fairfax 40, 600, 612, and 593; "'The Imployment of my Solitude. T[homas, lord] F[airfax]'", written in about 1660–1670 by lord Fairfax', Bodleian Archives & Manuscripts catalogue. Retrieved 17 May 2023 from https://archives.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/repositories/2/archival_objects/206544.

⁵ MS Fairfax fols 593 and 612. The former appears in Add. MS 11744 as 'Vpon the new building att Apleton' (48r).

1650s, a significantly narrower date range that will allow scholars to examine those poems within the context of the early years of the Commonwealth.

The pages from the start of Add. MS 11744 to the end of folio 79 have a distinct watermark. Its components, as categorized by the International Association of Paper Historians (IHP), are: a central stylised bell (O2/2); columns with capitals (K2/2) to the left and right; and stylised grapes organised in groups of fifteen (above the bell), three (on top of each column, and beneath the cartouche bearing the papermaker's initials), two (centre, bottom), and one (either side of each column) (H3/2/3).⁶ These have been brought together with other stylised elements (not listed by the IHP) to create what Thomas Gravell categorised as the 'Columns' watermark.⁷ The same watermark type appears in Edward Heawood's study of 'Paper Used in England after 1600' as '*Posts, Two, with grapes, letters, &c. between*';⁸ and as 'Pillars' in the list of 'Watermarks and Types' provided by Andrew Ashbee, Robert Thompson, and Jonathan Wainwright in the *Viola da Gamba Society Index of Manuscripts*.⁹ The papermaker's initials within the watermark of Add. MS 11744 are 'CC'.

The poems written on folios 1–78v of this paper – almost all of the poetry in Add. MS 11744 – can therefore be treated as a discrete artefact. They comprise a number of translations from the Bible, including a translation of the whole of the Song of Songs and eight psalm translations (Psalms 22, 24, 27, 30, 42, 77, 103, 129, and 137); 'The Christians Warfare'; Fairfax's translation of Antoine Girard de Sant-Amant's 'La Solitude'; and various other poems 'Morall', 'Elegiacal', 'Facecious', and 'Satyrical'.¹⁰ Two of the poems are directly connected to events in the late 1640s and very early 1650s: 'Vpon the 30 of January' clearly signals the 1649 execution of Charles I; and 'Vpon the new building att Apleton' (retitled 'Vpon the new-built House' in MS Fairfax 40) signals the completion of Appleton House (a building project begun

⁶ International Association of Paper Historians, *International Standard for the Registration of Papers With or Without Watermark*, Version 2.1.1 (2013), pp. 58 and 80.

⁷ *The Thomas L. Gravell Watermark Archive*, edited by Daniel W. Mosser and Ernest W. Sullivan II. Retrieved, 17 May 2023 from <https://memoryofpaper.eu/gravell/>. Although C. M. Briquet's *Les Filigranes* includes a 'Colonnes' descriptor, this column and grape/circle combination is not listed there, suggesting that it was very uncommon before 1600.

⁸ Edward Heawood, 'Paper Used in England after 1600', *Library* 4th ser., 11, no. 3 (1930): 286–288.

⁹ Andrew Ashbee, Robert Thompson, and Jonathan Wainwright, 'Appendix I: Watermarks and Types', *The Viola da Gamba Society Index of Manuscripts Containing Consort Music*, Vol. 2 (The Viola da Gamba Society, 2014), pp. 292–295.

¹⁰ These categories are the ones Henry Fairfax lists in the "Table of Soliloquys" (MS Fairfax 38, fol. 535).

in 1638) shortly before Fairfax resigned his commission on 25 June 1650.¹¹ The very last thing written on this watermarked paper is ‘Epitaph Sur La mort du Cardinal Mazarin’ (fol. 079v), a composition that could not have predated Mazarin’s death on 9 March 1661. This composition, however, follows a blank page, which signals that it was added subsequently to a body of earlier compositions that initially culminated in Fairfax’s translation of Sant-Amant’s ‘La Solitude’ (‘The Solitude’, fols 071v–078v). The epitaph is ‘Englished’ on the following page, fol. 80, which is part of a new folio that has no watermark.

The later pages of the manuscript offer little to help in terms of dating. Folios 81–110 (‘Of a fair Wife / To Coregio’, ‘Of Impertial Fate’, seven blank pages, and theological questions and answers in prose) have a watermark showing a pot with two handles surmounted by a crescent, of the style categorized by Edward Heawood as Pot B.3. Heawood records publications on this paper with a Pot B.3 watermark spanning 1630–57, but comments of the Pot watermarks in general that they are ‘perhaps the commonest mark in England in the seventeenth century’, which makes using it to date folios 81–110 a fool’s errand.¹² Folios 111–116 (prose meditations on theology and scriptural texts) have no watermark; and the final pages of the manuscript, folios 117–25 (further prose meditations), are of the same stock as folios 81–110 (Pot B.3 watermark). These parcels of paper might easily have been bound together to form what is now Add. MS 11744 in or out of the order in which they were written on.

By contrast, the ‘Columns’ watermark can help date the poems of folios 1–78v. Marius Audin states that this watermark originated in Provence with the Colonna family: ‘*le filigrane spécifique est là-bas la Colonne, sous mille formes diverses*’ (‘the specific watermark there is the Column, in a thousand different forms’).¹³ As Frans Laurentius and Theo Laurentius note, however, ‘[m]any of the watermarks common in the Angoumois/Limousin/Perigord area were copied by Norman papermakers’ (p. 8n15), and by the seventeenth century, this watermark was associated with the latter.¹⁴ Normandy was the main area from which paper was imported into England until around 1660, after which paper was predominantly imported into England from

¹¹ See Michael Powell, ‘Andrew Marvell, Sir Thomas Widdrington, and Appleton House’, *Notes and Queries* (1996), 282–283; and Major, 170.

¹² Heawood, ‘Paper Used in England’, 290 and 288. See *The Thomas L. Gravell Watermark Archive*, edited by Daniel W. Mosser and Ernest W. Sullivan II, POT.082.1 and POT.404.1. Retrieved, 8 October 2023 from <https://memoryofpaper.eu/gravell/>.

¹³ Marius Audin, *La Somme Typographique, Vol. 5: Le Papier* (Lyon: Audin Editeur, 1948), 96.

¹⁴ Frans Laurentius and Theo Laurentius, *Watermarks 1450–1850: A Concise History* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2023), 8n15.

the county of Angoumois in southwestern France.¹⁵ While changes in ink, differences in handwriting (sometimes more cramped, at other times freer, but still Fairfax's hand), and blotchiness of some of these papers, point to folios 1–79 of Add. MS 11744 having functioned as a notebook over an extended period, the precision with which subsets of the Norman 'Columns' watermarks can be dated focuses that period to the years of and directly following Fairfax's retirement from public office.

Gravell lists 'Columns' watermarks in use from 1588 (COL.057.1) to 1683/4 (COL.080.1), but disaggregating the entries produces a tighter range. The watermark of Add. MS 11744 belongs to a columns subset that presents with the combination of fifteen central grapes and three grapes on each pillar. Ashbee *et al* categorise this subset as 'Pillars II' and Heawood characterises it as the 'Medium or Large' subcategory of 'Posts'.¹⁶ Thirteen of the entries in the Gravell database have these features, with dates of use from 1651 (COL.023.1) to 1677 (COL.065.1). Again, however, distinctions can be made to narrow the range further. The columns of Add. MS 11744 are distinctly pear-shaped. The Gravell records show the columns of the 'Columns' watermark beginning to bulge in paper used in 1634 (COL.013.1), which was produced by 'CC', the same initials recorded in the 'Columns' watermark of Add. MS 11744. By 1650 (COL.029.1 and COL.029.2), we find the more rotund, distinctive pear-shaped columns seen in Add. MS 11744. Of the watermarks in Gravell that have the same grape numbers and pear-shaped columns as the Add. MS 11744 watermark, usages cluster around the period 1651–4.

None of the 'Columns' watermarks in the Gravell database is an exact match for the paper used by Fairfax: even the nearest matches, which share the pear-shaped columns and 'CC' monogram (COL.054.1, used in 1653, and COL.016.1, used much later in 1660), differ slightly in the shape of the columns and where the components of the watermark sits in relation to the paper's chain-positions. This is to be expected, as the moulds on which paper was made deteriorated and had to be replaced frequently, so we look for clear similarities rather than exact matches. The nearest matches in Gravell – and indeed most of Gravell's examples of the 'Columns' subset identified above – are from paper used by the Parliamentarian Robert Bennet

¹⁵ Ashbee, Thompson, and Wainwright, p. 96.

¹⁶ Ashbee, Thompson, and Wainwright, 294–295; and Heawood, 287, figs 74 and 75.

(1605–1683).¹⁷ Bennet’s last recorded use of paper with this watermark subset, in Gravell at least, is in 1660, but that is an outlier. Moreover, most of Bennet’s papers are short documents, which makes it hard to establish whether the paper used was fresh stock or being used some time after its manufacture.

A better parallel for the ‘Columns’ watermark in Add. MS 11744 is the ‘White Booke’ of the Guild of St Anne, Dublin, which has an almost identical ‘Columns’ watermark (though with two rather than three grapes below the stylised bell) through its 322 pages. The similarity extends to the initials ‘CC’, which sit within the matching cartouches of the Fairfax and Guild watermarks: the paper producer is the same, and the stylisation of the column and grape elements is consistent. The ‘White Book’ was begun as a record of admissions and other proceedings in 1655, and presumably paper was ordered specifically for this purpose.¹⁸ Fairfax, too, appears to have dedicated a significant parcel of ‘Columns’ watermarked paper to a single enterprise, suggesting its use earlier rather than later in the date range offered by Gravell. After all, the longer Fairfax kept paper after its delivery, the more chance there was that it would have been used for other purposes: Fairfax was an inveterate letter-writer, and used watermarked paper for that purpose. Taking a conservative estimate, then, it seems reasonable to assume that Fairfax wrote on the ‘Columns’-watermarked paper of Add. MS 11744 in the period from 1651 and 1654, when uses of paper with shared watermark characteristics cluster in Gravell, or possibly around 1655 when a large stock of paper from the same papermill and with a watermark of the same ‘Columns’ subset was put to use by the Guild of St Anne.

The fact that the eight psalm translations contained in folios 1–79 of Add. MS 11744 appear out of order and are interspersed among other poems indicates that this part of the Fairfax manuscript was composed in the order in which the poems appear. This contrasts the ordered, fair copy of Fairfax’s poetry, MS Fairfax 40. In Add. MS 11744, ‘Vpon the 30 of January’ is on folio 42r, and ‘Vpon the new building’ is on folio 48r. Since we can date those poems to no earlier than 30 January 1649 and 25 June 1650 respectively, we can also conclude with some confidence that they, and everything else before them in Add. MS 11744, were written between 1651 and 1655, and probably earlier in that range rather than later given their

¹⁷ All are held in the Folger Shakespeare Library, a key source for Gravell in compiling his watermark collection.

¹⁸ The White Book of the Guild of St Anne, Royal Irish Academy, 12 O 13. See ‘Bunch of grapes on ornamental base between two pillars’, *Watermarks in Irish Documents* project website. Retrieved 9 October 2023, from <https://watermarks.celt.dias.ie/bunch-grapes-ornamental-base-two-pillars/>

occasional nature. This draws them suggestively either into the period in which Andrew Marvell was tutor to Fairfax's daughter, Mary, or into the period following Marvell's tutorship.¹⁹ This adds to the evidence that Marvell's arrival at Fairfax's Nun Appleton estate provided the impetus for the latter's engagement in poetic activities. That this period coincides with the period immediately following Fairfax's resignation of his command makes Add. MS 11744 especially interesting in terms of what it can tell us about a largely undocumented period of Fairfax's life, and about Marvell's influence on his employer at a time when his employer – no longer at the centre of Commonwealth government – was himself in need of new employments.

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¹⁹ See Derek Hirst and Steven Zwicker, 'High Summer at Nun Appleton, 1651: Andrew Marvell and Lord Fairfax's Occasions', *The Historical Journal*, 36.2 (1993), 249.