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► **To cite this version:**

Line Cottegnies, Gisèle Venet. More Mysteries about the Saint-Omer Shakespeare Folio: Marks of Ownership. 2015. halshs-01120682

HAL Id: halshs-01120682

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01120682>

Preprint submitted on 26 Feb 2015

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More Mysteries about the Saint-Omer Shakespeare Folio: Marks of Ownership

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Since the discovery of a copy of a Shakespeare First Folio last November in the Saint-Omer public library,¹ scholars' attention has focussed on the identity of the mysterious Nevill, whose name stares at any reader opening the book. His identification, it is assumed, must help date at least some of the annotations in the volume itself. All we can safely say, without identifying the marks of ownership present in the volume, is that the presence of the book is attested in the manuscript catalogue of the library drafted by its first librarian Jean-Charles-Joseph Aubin for which we only have a fair copy dated 1823.² This was a labour of love which took Aubin close to thirty years to complete, if we are to believe him in the dedication of his work to the local authorities. The books seized after the French Revolution from all the religious institutions in the area had been stored, apparently in terrible conditions, while waiting for a suitable venue for a public library to be created. Sadly, the inventory of the books sequestered made in 1794 by two revolutionary commissioners is lost,³ which means that we cannot be certain that the Folio was already there by 1794, and that it came directly from the English Jesuit College (which was closed first in 1762, then taken over by English secular clergy, and was seized in 1792), although it is probable. It is highly unlikely however that there would have been many English readers about after 1823 in the area, so this gives us a safe, if

¹ BASO, inv. 2227.

² *Catalogue raisonné de la plus grande partie de ces livres précieux qui ont paru successivement dans la république des lettres, depuis l'invention de l'imprimerie jusqu'à nos jours, suivi d'un catalogue de plus de neuf cents manuscrits. le tout disposé par ordre de matières et de facultés, suivant le système bibliographique généralement adopté ; avec une table générale des auteurs, une notice des livres imprimés dans le 15^e siècle, et une autre notice des ouvrages qui ont été imprimés sans indication de ville ou sans date d'année et sans le nom de l'imprimeur. par Jean Charles Joseph Aubin, ancien bénédictin de la congrégation de St maur et Bibliothécaire de la Ville de St omer. A paris chez ---- MDIII XXIII.* In spite of having been prepared for publication, the Catalogue never appeared in print, however.

³ A manuscript held at the Saint-Omer library reports the operations of the two men who were in charge of drafting a list of the sequestered books in 1794. Entitled "Journal des Opération des Citoyens Boubert et H. Spitalier, Commissaires pour le Triage et le Catalogue des Livres des Bibliothèques du District de St Omer, par Arrêté de l'Administration du dit District, en date du 11 Ventose, 2^e année de la République Une et indivisible" (<http://bibliotheque-numerique.bibliotheque-agglom-stomer.fr/collection/19040-journal-des-operation-des-citoyens-boubert-et-h/>, accessed 24/12/2014).

unhelpful *terminus ad quem* for the manuscript annotations and marks of ownership, although 1762, which is when the English Jesuits precipitously left for Bruges, leaving many of their books behind in the hands of their successors, is a strong possibility, although it appears that the English clergy in charge continued adding new books to the library, if we judge by the number of late eighteenth century books still present now in the Saint-Omer library.

Nevill was an assumed name used by many Jesuits between the XVIIth and the XVIIIth centuries, including the Scarisbrick family. Eric Rasmussen and others have suggested that this Nevill might be Edward Scarisbrick (1639-1709), who left his full name in lead in another First Folio now in the Folger Library (Folger 55).⁴ Scarisbrick was present in St Omers' College in 1653-59, 1664-65, and then again in 1691, and returned to England to take up a position in Culcheth Hall, where he signed the other Folio (with his full name) which remained in its library until the XIXth century.⁵ He died in Culcheth in 1709. 'Neville's' interest in Shakespeare was thus confirmed by his interest in another copy of the Folio. If this Scarisbrick is indeed our Nevill, it would be tempting, but perhaps unwise, to suppose that he abandoned his 'bad' copy of the Folio for the benefit of the college because he knew he would be able to find a better copy at home. For the Saint-Omer Folio misses forty-six leaves.⁶ However the other names of possessors in Folger 55 are not names of Jesuit students.⁷ In any case, it is probable that members of the English College left our copy of the Folio behind when they had to leave in a rush in 1762, because it was imperfect. The Folio could equally have been signed by any other Scarisbrick, however.

It could perhaps be a Thomas Scarisbrick, aka the Thomas Neville who donated an eighteenth-century collection of pamphlets still held in the Library of Saint-Omer to the St Omer's College Library, as a manuscript inscription on the title

⁴ The suggestion was made by Eric Rasmussen in a New York Times article on 24 November 2014. Cf. http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/26/arts/shakespeare-folio-discovered-in-france-.html?smid=fb-share&_r=3 (accessed 24/02/2015).

⁵ Geoffrey Holt, *The English Jesuits 1650-1829* (n.l. : Catholic Record Society, 1984), p. 220.

⁶ Here is a list of the missing leaves: Preliminary leaves all missing, including portrait and title-page; ⁷A2, B4-D1, D6, ¶¶3-¶¶4, cc1, dd1, dd6, mm6, oo, x1, bbb1-bbb6. NB: E6, which must have detached itself, was re-inserted erroneously between F1 and F2. The binder's leaves are also missing (presence of stubs of three post-original leaves, with traces of manuscript annotations).

⁷ This Folio contains three other names that can be deciphered, and they are not, however, names of pupils of St Omers' College, which means that it was probably not on location. We would like to thank Georgianna Ziegler, from the Folger Library, for responding kindly to our enquiries about Folger 55. Scarisbrick also taught in Liège, Ghent, and at the College of St Aloysius and the College of St Ignatius, before taking up his position in Culcheth, according to G. Holt (*ibid.*, 220).

page specifies: ‘ex dono clarissimi viri Domini Thomas Neville’.⁸ This could be Thomas Scarisbrick (1752-1809), known as Thomas Eccleston Scarisbrick, son of Basil Thomas Scarisbrick (1707 or 1712-1789), himself a candidate for the ownership of the book. The volume is composed of twelve pamphlets which were originally published between 1701 and 1732, including the first one in the order of binding, the 1722 *Complete History of the Late Septennial Parliament*, which was heavily annotated in ink — at what date it is impossible to infer.

In a recent article published in the TLS, Jan Graffius contends, on the other hand, that a more likely candidate is Edmund Sale, also known as Nevill to the Jesuits, who, after being a student in the college, returned to St Omers’ in 1632 as Master of Poetry.⁹ Her identification relies on the necessity for the Folio to have been in Saint-Omer for Father Francis Clark to have used it for his historical plays written between 1653 and 1657.¹⁰ While the connection sounds tantalizing, the binding, which is undoubtedly ‘English’,¹¹ seems late seventeenth- or early eighteen-century and the hand for the ‘Nevill’ annotation looks to us a little later than 1630s, although to be fair the sample is insufficient to reach any certainty. There is no guarantee, therefore, that the Folio used by Clark was this particular one. More work, however, needs to be done to date with more precision the manuscript annotations.

The book possesses other distinctive marks, possibly marks of ownership, which are perhaps less prominent at first sight. On nine occasions in the volume the letters P and S appear, hand-stamped in ink at the bottom of the page, either both on the same page, or on two consecutive pages.

Fig 1 : PS on p. 100, 2 *Henry IV*. Saint-Omer, BASO, inv. 2227 (all the illustrations are reproduced by kind permission of the Bibliothèque d’Agglomération de Saint-Omer)

⁸ The volume is listed as *A Compleat History of the Late Septennial Parliament* (London, 1722), which is the first text in the collection. It is the heavily annotated pamphlet, for which we are currently preparing a transcript and a commentary (forthcoming). Apart from those two Thomases, there is also a Thomas Scarisbrick who was born in 1707 in Burscough (son of Thomas Scarisbrick from Ormskirk) and died in 1766/76, although it is not known whether he frequented St Omers’ College (<http://scarisbrick.name/pafg18.htm#179>, consulted 24/02/15).

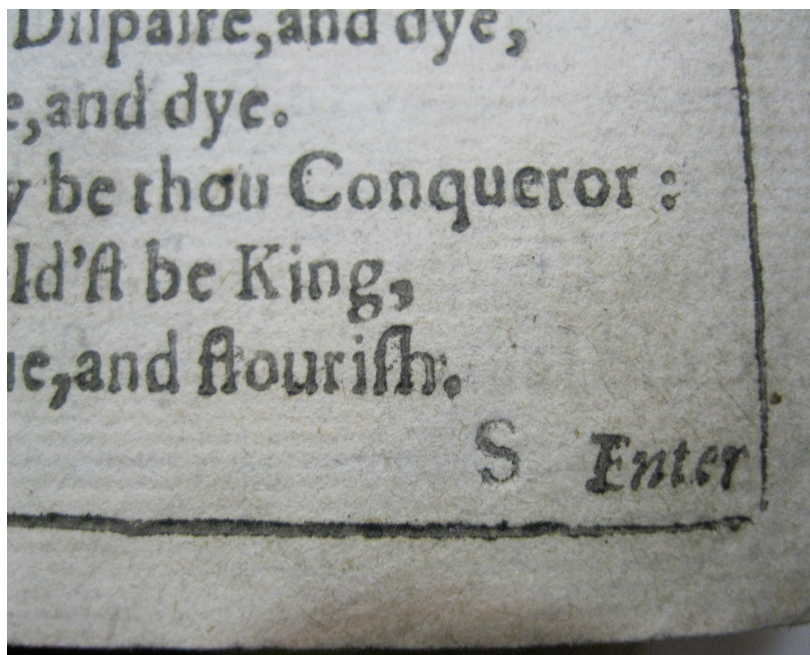
⁹ Jan Graffius, ‘A Gift from Poetry. The newly discovered First Folio in Saint-Omer’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 6 February 2015, p. 14-15.

¹⁰ Martin Wiggins, “Shakespeare Jesuited: The Plagiarisms of ‘Pater Clarcus’”, *The Seventeenth Century*, 20.1 (2005), 1-21.

¹¹ There is, to the best of our knowledge, no study of the Jesuit press at St Omers, and there is no way of knowing if they had a English binder near them. But from the bindings of the other books listed as coming from the Jesuit College in the Saint-Omer Bibliothèque d’Agglomération, which are all very different, it does not seem to have been the case.



Fig. 2. S on p. 201, *Richard III*, BASO, inv. 2227



The Folio's manuscript annotations must be seen as a palimpsest of at least five different hands, with interventions which point to completely opposed uses of the text, one that points to a pedagogical usage, another that seems to indicate a recreational usage: the annotations in *1 Henry IV*, for instance, probably in an eighteenth century hand, seem to point to a preparation of the text for a school staging ; they manifest a desire to modernize the spelling; turn the role of the hostess

into a male part (in accordance with the prescriptions of the *Ratio Studiorum* which forbade female parts), and abridge some scenes. Whole passages are crossed out. The annotations in *Henry V* seem to indicate that long passages, rather than independent scenes as in *1 Henry IV*, were selected (with annotations 'begin' and 'end' marking the beginnings and the ends of the selections), most probably to be recited in class.

Fig 3 : A page of *Henry V* (p. 81), with 'begin' and 'end' in lead, BASO, inv. 2227



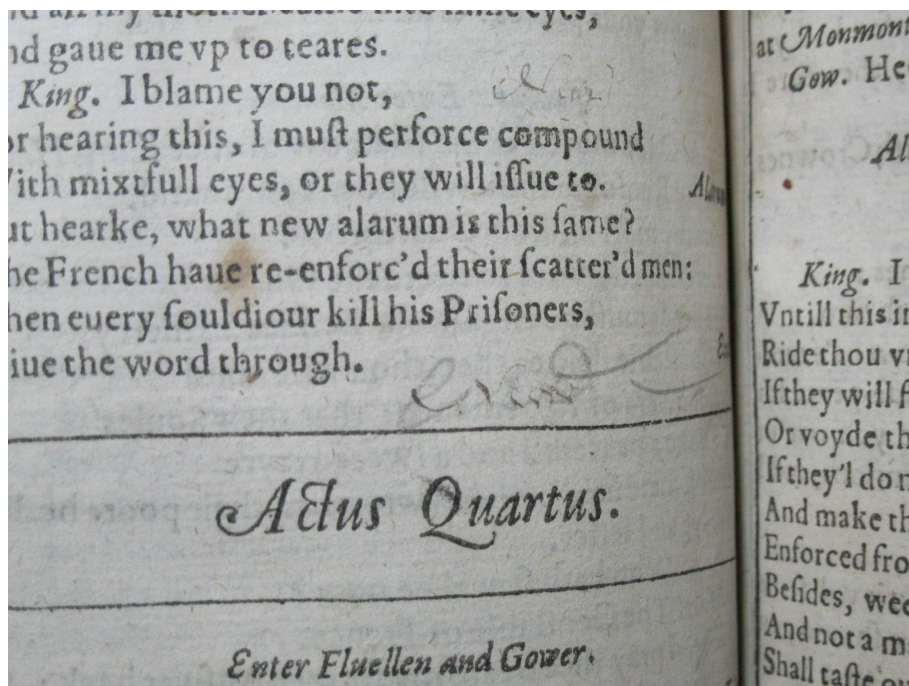
But there are also traces indicating that the text was read by young readers, who inserted doodles in lead, and there are even a few instances where very young boys wrote their initials in ink in the text.

Fig 4. : Initials m. o. (with other letters : m, n, p) in lead or pencil, *Hamlet*, p. 180, BASO, inv. 2227



There are also older kinds of annotations, as far as we can tell, which concern editorial points, such as a couple of word corrections, and even an indication that a passage is new (in ink) in the Folio text, in comparison (one assumes) with the Quarto text.

Fig. 5 : The word 'New' in ink repeated twice on p. 88, *Henry V* (the second 'New' written over with 'end' in lead. BASO, inv. 2227.



The complex, composite nature of all these annotations, compounded by the long and fraught history of the book, which led to its being deprived of its publisher's leaves, title-page, and initial and final quires, makes it extremely difficult to understand what the PS might refer to. The hand-pressed letters might have nothing to do with the name Nevill in ink which is on the first page; they might have been done at a very different time over the two centuries between the time of publication and Aubin's catalogue entry. In both the technique used—a technique which implies types used for printing or decorating binding—and where they were printed, the marks are particularly puzzling. They involve two individual letter-types, as is indicated by the varying space between the letters, and the fact that the letters are sometimes not quite straight. To the best of our knowledge, using hand-stamped letters was an extremely unusual way of marking a book; marking it *nine* times might also appear odd and somewhat excessive. In Jesuit colleges, library marks usually featured in ink on the title page, or on the fly-leaf. Individuals, on the other hand, signed their books. It was common for successive owners to inscribe their private books, and in English colleges the masters and the students had a few books of their own. It seems also to have been common practice in colleges for boys to inscribe the school-books they were lent to study. The Saint-Omer Library still possesses a moving testimony of such a practice, with a book which was once part of the English College library, *Natalis Stephani Sanadonis e Societate Jesu Carminum Libri Quatuor Lutetiae* (Parisiorum : Barbou, 1715), a collection of Neolatin poems by the French Jesuit Father Sanadon. The book contains no fewer than fifteen names of readers listed in ink on the title-page the ones underneath the others. Here the names feature all on the title page, but this was not necessarily always the case.

Hand-stamped initials are unusual. The positioning of the PS marks in the Folio is also odd, although a regular pattern seems to emerge.

Title of play	signature	page number	position in the play
<i>Comedy of Errors</i>	l2 ^v (P S)	p. 100	end of the play
<i>As You Like It</i>	R3 ^v (P) and R4 (S)	p. 200-201	beginning of act 4
<i>Winter's Tale</i>	Cc2 (P S)	p. 303	end of the play
<i>2 Henry IV</i>	k4 ^v (P S)	p. 100	end of the play
<i>Richard III</i>	s6 ^v (P) and t (S)	p. 200-201	beginning of act 5

<i>Henry VIII</i>	x4 (PS)	p. 232	end of the play
<i>Timon of Athens</i>	hh5 ^v (PS)	p. 98	end of the play
<i>King Lear</i>	rr4 ^v (P) and rr5 (S)	p. 300-301	beginning of act 4
<i>Cymbeline</i>	aaa6 ^v	p. 388	end of the book (play incomplete)

As this chart reveals, six (out of nine) of these marks feature on the final page of a play. Seven fall on pages that carry round figures (or almost do, as is the case with 98 and 303 – for plays in which the end of the play was close enough to a round figure). It seems that the compulsive marker aimed at marking the book on pages with round pages numbers, but thought it more seemly (perhaps) to aim for the ending pages of the plays concerned, perhaps because of the attractive decorative tailpieces, which also left more room for the letters themselves than was the case on text-crammed pages. The regularity was also made difficult by the erratic page numbering of the folio, which meant that there was, for instance, no p. 200 in the tragedies (200 in fact becomes 300 due to multiple errors in the pagination). The fact that the marker stamped the last page of the *Cymbeline* in this copy (p. 388), also allows us to conclude that he most probably had in his hand the book in the imperfect state that we see it in today, and that *Cymbeline* was already missing its last pages — which represent a full quire (eee1-eee6). The odd one out in this pattern, however, is the stamp on *Henry VIII*, which could appear as an exception to the pattern we have tried to describe, but it is followed by *Troilus and Cressida*, an obvious afterthought in the section of the histories, which was not numbered.

The presence of the letters PS raises many questions. What could have driven anyone to want to mark a book at regular intervals? The regularity of the marking (but for the exception) excludes the possibility that these marks might have something to do with censorship or control.¹² It could be, perhaps, a library mark, although highly unusual under this form.¹³ Unfortunately, to this day no other instance of a similar

¹² We examined the possibility that P S might stand for *Permissu Superiorum*, which was the *imprimatur* for Jesuit books, especially in Saint-Omer in the early seventeenth century, and would have indicated an intervention on the parts of a Jesuit authority, but the numerical regularity of 8 out of 9 of the marks allows us to rule out this hypothesis.

¹³ In 1812 was created in Saint-Omer a short-lived ‘Petit Séminaire’ (which would be a convenient PS), a new institution imagined by Napoleon to train future priests, which depended on the generosity of its neighbours for its new library, but why would one of its books have found its way back to the public library by 1823? The Petit Séminaire was closed down as such in 1835 to become the Collège Saint-Bertin. Cf. A. Lehemble, *Le Petit Séminaire de Saint-Omer (1812-1835)*, Tourcoing: J. Duvivier, 1913.

marking has emerged, either in the Bibliothèque of Saint-Omer, or in that of Stonyhurst College, but this does not mean that it will not. There are other possibilities, and the number of hypotheses is almost limitless. Could it be that a Prefect of Studies, a function which implied the responsibility of the students' reading, decided to make this book available to a group of students, but repeatedly marked the Folio with a PS (for Prefect of Studies or Praefectus Studiorum) as a reminder to the boys of the status of the book? As a matter of fact, we have almost too many PS's for comfort: the first Edward Scarisbrick mentioned above returned to Saint-Omer in 1675 precisely to take up the position of Prefect of Studies in the English College, before returning to England in 1680. As it was customary for Jesuit priests to latinize their names, could the letters stand for Pater Scarisbric(k)us? This would reinforce Eric Rasmussen's initial hypothesis. However, if a Prefect of Studies, whoever he was, had stamped one book for the benefit of his students in this manner, chances are high that there would be other books with the same marks to be identified somewhere. Yet, in spite of our efforts, no other example has so far emerged. Research is made difficult by the fact that the St Omers College library was dispersed, and the Saint-Omer public library itself only lists a few books that can be identified as coming with any degree of certainty from the old English College library, as ownership and library marks were almost systematically erased and destroyed, at the expense of much cutting and mutilating when the books were integrated into the new library. When those marks survive, it is almost miraculous.

It is perhaps more likely, however, that we are dealing here with an individual's ownership marks, initials or acronym, which might bear no direct relationship to Nevill. Collectors of prints sometimes stamped their engravings using hand-stamped letters (although using separate types for each letter was rare). A Peter Silvester, a French Huguenot who died in 1718, used a very similar mark to brand his collection of prints. Admitted in June 1693 as "licentiate of the College of Physicians" in London, after serving in the army in Flanders, he became "Commissioner of the sick and the hurt" at the court of William III. Although he was present in the Low Countries in the years 1680s (as we know from a letter of C. Huygens),¹⁴ he is not an obvious candidate for our Folio, because he was a French

¹⁴ Frits Lugt, *Les marques de collections de dessins & d'estampes. Marques estampillées et écrites de collections particulières et publiques. Marques de marchands, de monteur et d'imprimeurs. Cachets de*

speaker, and was also unlikely, as a Huguenot, to have connections with the English Jesuits—although of course books circulate in ways that are impenetrable.

If the P stood for Pater, then there might of course be some famous candidates, such as Father Joseph Simons (1593 - 1671), the famous Jesuit playwright, who was very active in St Omers between 1623 and 1631. But why would Father Simon have marked the Folio? On the already mentioned title-page of the poems of the Neolatin poet Sanadon, which belonged to the students' library (*Bibl. Schol.*), there is a name written in ink which stands out among the others, as it is, rather oddly, repeated three times: 'Paulus Simons' (twice), 'Paule Simons' (once). It is as if the boy insisted on making himself obtrusive, as his name sandwiches the names of two other Simons's: 'Edmundus Simons' and 'John Simons'. Simons (or Simmons) was the Jesuit assumed name of the Plowden family, from Plowden Hall (Shropshire), who, like the Scarisbricks, were an old aristocratic family of recusants who had been sending their sons to Saint-Omer for a century. According to the biographical index of Geoffrey Holt, Edmund Plowden aka Simons was one of the seven sons of William Ignatius Plowden (1700-1754), who had himself been schooled in Saint-Omer from around 1713. Edmund studied in Saint-Omer between 1739 and 1746; his brother John between 1741 and 1748.¹⁵ Holt only mentions five out of the seven brothers (all of whom studied in Saint-Omer in succession, and occasionally overlapped), and no Paul among them. Charles Plowden (1743-1821), the seventh brother, reached fame by becoming Provincial and Rector of Stonyhurst in 1817.¹⁶ It is not too far-fetched, given the juxtaposition of the names, to suppose that Paul could be one of the missing brothers—unless of course Paul was a nickname of one of them. Could he have wanted, perhaps in a moment of idleness, to leave more traces of his presence in the St Omers library by adorning the Folio with his initials? This is naturally very

vente d'artistes décédés. Marques de graveurs apposées après le tirage des planches. Timbres d'édition. Etc. (San Francisco: Alan Wofsy Fine Arts, 1975 [1921]), p. 391.

¹⁵ Geoffrey Holt, *St Omers and Bruges Colleges, 1593-1773. A Biographical Dictionary* (Thetford: Catholic Record Society, 1979), p. 207-09. The five brothers mentioned are, by order of birth, Edmund (b. 1727), John (b. 1732), Robert (b. 1740), Charles (b. 1743), Francis (Peter) (b. 1749). The Fr. Richard Plowden who became Rector of St Omers between 1709 and 1712, and died in 1729, belongs to a different branch of the family. Cf. Bernard, Basset, *The English Jesuits: From Campion to Martindale* (London: Burns & Oates, 1967). According to Maurice Whitehead, Richard Plowden was again rector between 1725 and 1728, unless it is a different Richard (*English Jesuit Education: Expulsion, Suppression, Survival and Restoration (1762-1803)*) (London: Ashgate, 2013), Appendix 1.

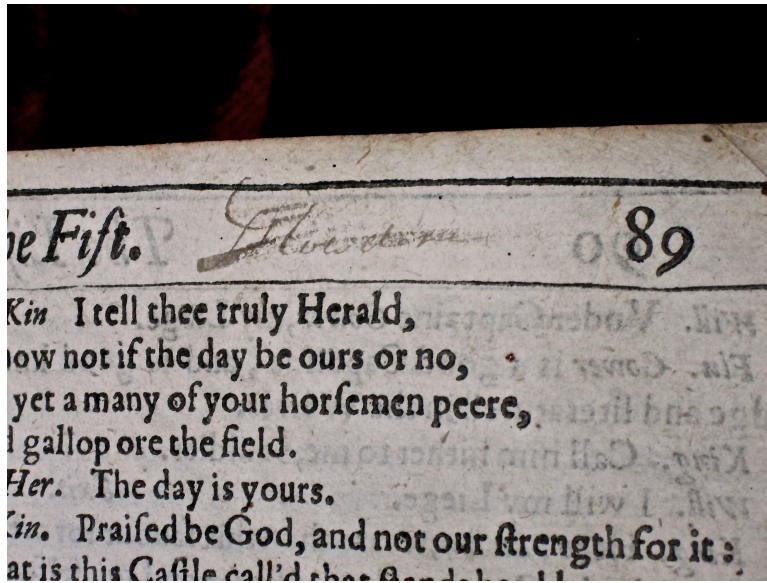
¹⁶ Geoffrey Scott, 'Plowden, Charles (1743–1821)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004n[<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/22388>, accessed 24 Feb 2015].

speculative, but it might explain the apparent irrationality of the nine marks, where an institution like a library or a college would have been satisfied with a couple.

Or more speculative still: could the letters P S refer to the ‘Plowden Simons’ combination, as a proud sign of recognition for an initiated reader? For boys whose fathers and elder brothers had been to school at St Omers to spend six years of their lives there, whose younger brothers would, over the years, follow them, and whose future sons would in turn, presumably, be expected to follow in their footsteps, could there have been a temptation of inscribing a form of dynastic presence in the College books? After all, school-books were inscribed and so were prize books. The College Library was expected to stand the test of time—and did in some respect for many years, in spite of the two fires of 1684 and 1725, until the final expulsion. If the Folio had been versed at some point into the College Library, or rather, into *one* of the libraries of the College,¹⁷ because this is one of the main questions we are confronted with, then it represented a form of permanence for boys who were just passing through, but knew other members of their families were to follow. The Folio carries more than just the one manuscript signature of Neville, proudly flaunted on the first page of the torn book—most probably that of a Scarisbrick. It includes that of a young boy, M. O., as seen above. It is not too strained to see the PS’s as belonging to the same category of branding. In fact, at the risk of being accused of seeing PS’s everywhere, could we suggest that another manuscript annotation, almost illegible because of an ink smudge, could perhaps be deciphered as a signature ‘SPlowden’, in an eighteenth-century hand?

Fig. 6: Signature (?), *Henry V*, p. 89, BASO, inv. 2227

¹⁷ We are extremely grateful to Maurice Whitehead for pointing out to us that the English College had a rich library culture, with a main library, a students’ library, a separate library belonging to the Jesuit community, and perhaps also a Sodality library. To this, of course, we must add the small collections of books possessed by individual Jesuits in their private chambers. See Whitehead, *op. cit.*, *passim*.



This page of *Henry V* is incidentally the page in which the victory of Agincourt is announced to Henry V, a nationalistic moment that many Catholics of the pro-Lancastrian Northern and Western counties would necessarily have found compelling.¹⁸ There is certainly something appealing in the hypothesis that the hand-stamped P S refers to members of the Plowden family, in response, perhaps, to a pseudonym like Nevill which evoked the presence of another family of the old Catholic gentry. More research, however, would be necessary to confirm this hypothesis, in particular to look for more of those marks, perhaps even directly in Plowden Hall library, if it is still extant, or in the Saint-Omer public library.

¹⁸ It is perhaps ironic that it was a Scarisbrick who was knighted by Henry V at Agincourt, and not a Plowden.