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Journal Item

How to cite:

West, Susie (2013). An architectural typology for the early modern country house library, 1660-1720. Library, 14(4) pp. 441-464.

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Version: Accepted Manuscript

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1093/library/14.4.441>

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An architectural typology for the early modern country house library, 1660-1720

By

Susie West

In a recent issue of *The Library*, David Pearson offered an overview of our current understanding of the seventeenth-century English private library, in which he proposed the formation of a directory of book owners.¹ Pearson's proposal provides an opportunity to amplify some aspects of the material culture of the seventeenth-century library by outlining a series of questions that flow from the need to understand the 'landscape of book ownership', including problems of design and storage, and a general sense of how books were regarded. The present article will argue that these questions, by virtue of their acknowledged place within the social history of books, are fundamental to an understanding of social practices of the time.

The history of reading, as described by Pearson, represents perhaps the most significant area of social investigation within the field that we call book history. In the investigation of material culture, it is the relationship of the practice of reading, as historically contingent, to the material traces of an otherwise intangible act that has been the focus of much recent scholarship. Away from reading, other practices around books (what to buy, where to buy, and how to store and retrieve, display, admire and compare) are more elusive. Beyond the didactic literature, private individuals rarely committed their mental processes to the archive: documentary evidence in the form of the recorded thought processes behind an owner's decision to fit out a handsome

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¹ David Pearson, 'The English Private Library in the Seventeenth Century,' *The Library* XIII, 4 (2012), pp. 379-99.

library room, or that debates whether to invest in a freestanding glazed case as seen in Mr Pepys's chambers are few and relatively rare. We merely observe the results, as physical survivals, typically in the form of book collections or more frequently as archival artifacts in the form of design drawings, book lists and annotated sale catalogues. For historians of the book, it is the book as object that has received the most attention. Pearson's 'landscape of book ownership' seeks to reposition the early modern book, from a bibliographic attention to the text and its uniqueness towards a more general social life, viewing books in their habitats.

The inevitably cited example of the library room at Ham House, Surrey, of 1674, holds our attention because it survives as an intact interior, a small room lined with bookshelves and built-in furniture, and it has come to stand for the habitat of the later seventeenth-century private library. As an exemplar, it is slightly problematic, from the exceptional social status of its owners and from the secondary status of the house as a semi-rural villa rather than as the great house on a principal landed estate. Ham House was twice modernised and extended from its early seventeenth-century form, in the 1630s and again in the 1670s, to become a sumptuously furnished home (one of several) for the Duke and Duchess of Lauderdale. The contents of the Ham House library are not intact; the books were sold (the Duke's books in the 1690s; the Dysart family collection in 1938 and 1947) and since 1991 the shelves have been filled with an unrelated bequest of historic volumes.² Nonetheless, this small,

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² Nicholas Barker, 'The rise and fall of the country house library', in *Treasures from the Libraries of National Trust Country Houses*, ed. by Nicholas Barker (New York, 1999) pp. 1-11; Mark Purcell, 'The library at Ham House' (National Trust Libraries; 2), *Book collector* 55, 2006.

relatively plain room survives as the first extant early modern private library room in England. The history of the Lauderdale collection at Ham House library (see also Lauderdale House in Highgate and Thirlstane Castle in Berwickshire), has most recently been traced by Giles Mandelbrote.³ Thanks to the extremely complex pattern of dispersal, through at least four sales, the nature of the Ham House collection has not been easy to reconstruct. Without this understanding, the historic environment of the room is rather hollow; a signifier for books, but without the contexts for interpretation. It may even be this lack of content that makes the room so easy to attach to discussions of early modern culture.

The seventeenth-century Ham House library may now be ready to be written up as a prototype entry for Pearson's directory: its principal collector, something of the scale and scope of the collection, and markings in known survivors, can be summarised. However, I wish to argue for an additional data field, and that has to be the material contexts for the books and the owners. J.C. Clark called this the 'care of books' in his survey of medieval arrangements for housing books, an evocative phrase but perhaps 'material contexts' might be acceptable as a twenty-first century portmanteau term.

As part of the wider discussion, in seeking to join up the history of the book with the history of the book room, the problematic relationship of the study/library to the closet has to be teased out, with particular reference to the role of the female

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³ Giles Mandelbrote, 'The library of the Duke of Lauderdale (1616-82)' in *Ham House, 400 Years of Collecting and Patronage* ed. by Christopher Rowell (New Haven and London, 2013), pp. 222-31.

closet. The invisible book room is in the background of all recent vibrant accounts of networks of literary and political exchanges, mothers and daughters reading and writing, newsbooks and pamphlets being digested. A reconsideration of the study as both ubiquitous and a household resource is an essential component of this picture.

‘The care of books’ as material contexts

That the Ham House library room is apparently the sole survivor of the rooms that housed a thriving culture of book collecting and ownership, in the period brought to life by Samuel Pepys’s diary entries, suggests an overwhelming historical problem of understanding the relationship between the history of the book in England and art and architectural histories of the house. This section looks again at Pearson’s suggested fields for the directory, identifying their potential to address material contexts for book ownership: ‘contents’, ‘destruction and loss’, followed by ‘design and storage’, which leads on to the substance of this article.

Although Pearson draws attention to book ownership, which transcends the boundaries of metropolitan and rural, ecclesiastical and secular, gender and age, and to a more limited extent status and income, my contribution concerns the owners of English country houses. These major residences at the centres of landed estates hold the historian’s attention because they were the centres of political power away from the English court, representing regional cultural investment, and the relative stability of ownership and inheritance. Landed owners made up the English social classes of the gentry and nobility; while they may have periodically leased town houses or maintained palatial London seats according to their rank and ability to spend, the country house remained the enduring nodal point of family identity. How families

distributed their collections between residences, particularly London and the principal landed seat, is not well understood; the movement of books is something else that requires consideration.

Contents

When a bibliographer writes about the contents of libraries, it is to discuss the intellectual scope evoked by the nature of the texts themselves. When a historian of visual culture turns to library contents, it is as an art curator might, to consider them in relation to a range of non-book objects and the nature of display. The two approaches are not incompatible but, coming as they do from specific disciplinary methods and understandings, they are rarely conjoined. The recently published multi-author survey of the material riches of Ham House offers one model of a house biography, but still does not offer a unified approach to the library as a built environment for collections.⁴ I have recently attempted this approach to the library room at Narford Hall, Norfolk, created from 1718 and thus falling outside the scope of this article. Prompted by the survival of an *in situ* portrait sequence, I considered the relationship of Sir Andrew Fountaine's gallery-like space for books, its varied contents of portraits, cabinets and objects of virtue, and the significance of themes of personal memory and English identity. It is an interpretation of the room, as assembled over the owner's lifetime, rather than an investigation of his intellectual range, an attempt to suggest what Sir

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⁴ Christopher Rowell, *Ham House, 400 Years of Collecting and Patronage* (New Haven and London, 2013).

Andrew might have used that space for, when not using books for their textual contents alone.⁵

A directory of book ownership might then include reference to known non-book contents. Such knowledge is more likely after Pearson's cut-off date of 1710, regrettably but inevitably. However, the rise of scholarly research on individual country houses, helped by recent partnerships between owners and university departments may add more from primary sources such as household inventories.⁶ Penshurst Place, Kent, offers strong inventory evidence for the non-book contents of the main library and subsidiary studies around the house during the seventeenth century.⁷ Luxury and innovation in specialised furniture for reading and writing, as well as the provision of art objects for contemplation, link the seventeenth-century library room to wider historical discussions about elite patterns of living and the intellectual culture of the country house.⁸ A better understanding of the range of non-book collections would also support some of the questions invoked under Pearson's

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⁵ Susie West, 'Life in the library' in *Placing Faces, The Portrait in the Country House, 1650-1850* ed. by Gill Perry, Kate Retford, Jordan Vibert and Hannah Lyons (Manchester, 2013) pp. 63-95.

⁶ Recently completed PhD theses include Edward Town, 'A House Re-Edified, Thomas Sackville and the Transformation of Knole, 1605-8' (unpublished DPhil thesis, University of Sussex, 2010) and Hannah DeGroff, 'Textual Networks and the Country House: the Third Earl of Carlisle at Castle Howard' (unpublished PhD thesis, University York, 2012).

⁷ Susie West, 'Studies and status: spaces for books in seventeenth-century Penshurst Place, Kent', *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, 12 (2002), 266-92.

⁸ See for example books and collecting discussed across chapters in *The Intellectual Culture of the English Country House, 1500-1700*, ed. Margaret Dimmock, Andrew Hadfield and Matthew Healy (Manchester, in press).

‘motives for book ownership’; I have argued elsewhere that the humanism of the literary English Renaissance would profitably be seen in the material contexts of the private houses where it was produced and consumed.⁹

Destruction and loss

The loss of books printed or used during the seventeenth century is, as Pearson notes, increasingly recognised, covering the quotidian destruction of worn out school room books as well as infamous fires or the depredations of war and sequestration. Of course these same causes have similar effects on library environments. Stephen Porter has estimated that 150-200 country houses were destroyed as a direct result of the Civil Wars.¹⁰ Dispersal of the household coupled with economic sanctions means that the wider impact on gentry books can be only conjectured.¹¹ A further cause of architectural loss is the pattern of rebuilding of country houses, regardless of war. In England, the country houses of the gentry and aristocracy survive in far greater numbers than the town houses of the same families, mainly because of their function as the symbolic and administrative centres of landed estates. Despite the longevity of many families, periodic rebuilding of the main house means a periodic change in the

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⁹ Susie West, ‘Penshurst Place and Leicester House’ in *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Sidneys (1500-1700)*, vol. I Lives, ed. Margaret Hannay, Michael Brennan and Mary Ellen Lamb (forthcoming).

¹⁰ Stephen Porter, *The Blast of War, Destruction in the English Civil War* (Stroud, 2011), p. 66.

¹¹ William Younger Fletcher, *English Book Collectors* (London: Kegan Paul, 1902); Ian Roy, ‘The libraries of Edward, 2nd Viscount Conway, and others: an inventory and valuation of 1643’, *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 41 (1968), 35-46.

form and interior of the library. Heritage houses that put their library room on display as *the* library are usually showing the most recent library frozen at a moment in time.

Finally, there is the scale of loss of country houses during the twentieth century, sold off for the price of salvage or simply abandoned, in advance of the Listed Building process and without formal record beyond an earlier appearance in *Country Life*. The current estimate for country house losses after 1800 is 1,888, with a peak in the 1950s, and that, it seems reasonable to assume, also represents 1,888 lost library rooms, a significant proportion of which would date to before 1750.¹²

The result of the last three centuries of the loss and destruction of private library environments means that our sense of the seventeenth-century space for books is lacking in visual evidence. We can consult institutional survivors, but how closely does a Jacobean stall system, still using chained books, in a medieval upper hall, as found in Oxford and Cambridge colleges, provide a useful guide to the Jacobean private study? On which note, I propose to turn to a consideration of what Pearson calls ‘design and storage’ as a way in to my main discussion.

Design and Storage

Interior schemes for pre-1700 private libraries aren’t unknown (see Bishop Ken’s library at Longleat, Wiltshire, and the Old Library at Petworth, Sussex, for example), but the English visual sources are rare. This is partly a historical quirk of the slow adoption in England of the genre of artist’s views of interiors, compared to Continental examples. Even the Huguenot architectural designer Daniel Marot (1661-1752), who worked for the royal household between 1694-7, left few sources for his

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¹² *Lost Heritage, a Memorial to the Lost Country Houses of England*, <http://www.lostheritage.org.uk/> [accessed 9 August 2013].

English designs.¹³ There are a few architectural drawings as designs for library interiors, notably the institutional commissions for Sir Christopher Wren's office and exceptionally the work of the gentleman architect Roger North, discussed below. Wren's interior for the library of Trinity College, Cambridge, or the galleried library at St Paul's Cathedral, London, demonstrate the virtuoso end of the spectrum, but are hardly representative of the resources available to county-level gentry. Thus the absence of a visual history of the English country house library room is unsurprising, and beyond Girouard's pioneering attempt, it is largely unaddressed.¹⁴

The problem of a dearth of evidence, as noted from the poor survival rate of library rooms and their design drawings, is compounded by a lack of documentary references to book collections within family archives. My survey of the county of Norfolk in search of private library rooms and collections identified sixteen houses with evidence for book collections before 1700, and four with presumed ownership of books. I have argued elsewhere that using a wide variety of archives from gentry and aristocratic families suggests that one in two may reveal a book collection but only one in four may produce evidence for which the architectural historian is looking.¹⁵

The design of environments for books, and the associated material culture, remains under-researched. However, as Pearson has pointed out, the absence of

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¹³ Peter Thornton, *Seventeenth-century Interior Decoration in England, France and Holland* (New Haven and London, 1978).

¹⁴ Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House*, (New Haven and London, 1978).

¹⁵ West, 'Looking back from 1700' in *Intellectual Culture of the English Country House*.

research methodologies hinders our sense of what we have and where we might direct future research. I have suggested that a directory, valuable for providing the scaffolding of a research infrastructure, should be enhanced by attention to the material environments for books. Contributions necessarily come from primary research, and these too require methodologies for overcoming the problems attendant on the nature of the evidence. The following discussion offers one such methodology for working with documentary references to book rooms.

The evidence in one English county, Norfolk, for country house library rooms, 1660-1720, is presented here. The results are proposed as a model for understanding the material form of the early modern library in the English country house. This, as the opening discussion of Ham House has suggested, is a material form that is not easily recoverable yet the Norfolk results challenge the absence within the household that is the missing library room. Offering a methodology for recovering these ‘missing rooms’ has several benefits, the most immediate being an invitation for new research in other county archives to provide comparative material. Just as Pearson’s work addresses the need to investigate book ownership, I suggest that some of the answers may be found in showing how the material contexts of ownership (and reading) can relocate the book collection, as part of the life of the country house. Finally, in the third part of this article, I propose to discuss the ‘landscape of book ownership’.

The early modern country house

The evolution of the English country house, while it evokes a sequence of aesthetic periods, can be usefully charted through the complex interaction of social behaviours

and the physical organisation of space.¹⁶ The resulting chronology for the country house tracks change in the layout and provision of rooms (plan forms) and their changing functions (social uses). The seventeenth century brought with it a significant shift in English architecture, which turns from the hybrid uses of classical and gothic styles, and an arrangement of space inherited from medieval precedents for elite houses, towards an Italian classicism and newly compact house plans. The research presented here applies to the period 1660-1720, taking the Restoration as a cultural break that reintroduced stylistic leadership from Court patronage and signalled the return to and reinvestment by exiled landowners in their landed estates. It also represents a pragmatic response to the archive, which currently is more productive for post-1660 library rooms. Ham House is a welcome exception, having an earlier library entered from the long gallery which was dismantled when the present room was created from 1673.

The challenge to the architectural historian is to answer three simple questions. Where was the seventeenth century library room? What did it look like? What was kept within it? The first question, that of the location within the country house, has been generally answered in terms of its association with the owner's bedchamber (Ham House library was discreetly accessible from the Duke's apartment on the floor below). While the early modern great house plan is understood in general terms, architectural historians Andor Gomme and Alison Maguire have investigated diverse examples in their recent monumental survey of the changing domestic plan. For this period, they warn that 'it is probably safe to say that no two gentry or aristocratic

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¹⁶ Girouard, *Life in the English Country House*.

houses were built in precisely the same way', owing to the experiments of architects, builders and clients in their negotiation of 'the crucial divisions of social use.'¹⁷ The second and third questions can usually only be answered where the survival of a household inventory that records the fixtures, fittings and portable goods has survived in sufficient detail. Even then, rooms full of books could often be omitted from the main inventory or, where only partial inventories survive, taken for a widow's reserved goods but not for the entire contents. Taken singly, inventories have their own methodological challenges, but as a class of documents they are invaluable.

In endeavouring to present research based on a series of case studies we can at least begin to propose some general characteristics of the emergent study/library. I would argue that this is a methodology that avoids the otherwise slender evidential base for the early modern library room, and suggests that a systematic sampling of family records can substantially flesh out the numbers of libraries (collections and lost architectural spaces) for this elusive period.

Architecturally, the county of Norfolk offers the full range of social variation expressed in the country houses of the landed classes built up to 1720, from the rebuilt palatial eighteenth-century houses such as Holkham and Houghton on older sites, substantial seats of the nobility and gentry at Raynham and Blickling, and a range of gentry houses, many with Jacobean or earlier origins, such as Felbrigg and Oxburgh. William Kent (1685-1748) and his circle are notable for their work on Norfolk houses, and provide further insights into the larger national context. What is more,

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¹⁷ Andor Gomme and Alison Maguire, *Design and Plan in the Country House, from Castle Donjons to Palladian Boxes* (New Haven and London, 2008), p.140.

Kent's early work fits within the model here proposed for the 1660-1720 library, to be discussed below. A survey of Norfolk archives for architectural and bibliographical evidence relating to the long eighteenth century (1660-1830) yields results for thirty-four houses with evidence for books and libraries.¹⁸ Some of the more substantial case studies for 1660-1720 are summarised here. The 1664 Hearth Tax is used as a simple way of ranking houses by approximate size (with the caveat that the number of heated rooms should probably be multiplied by a factor of up to three for actual rooms).¹⁹

The panelled room, 1660-1720

In proposing a typology for the English library room, salient characteristics have had to be selected from quite a diversity of ways in which scale, fittings and location within the house have been treated historically. There are however distinct chronological patterns for changes in these three fields across the period 1660-1830.²⁰ For the date range 1660-1720, the most characteristic elements seem to relate to fittings. In contrast with the rise of the bookcase as a design feature after 1720 (presented as an architectural component of the interior, distinct from the wall surface), pre-1720s library rooms tend to incorporate shelving within the treatment of walls, in which recessed bookshelves and wall surfaces are unified through the use of wooden panelling. Consequently, the typology presented here proposes that it is the

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¹⁸ Susie West, 'The Origins and Development of Private Libraries in Norfolk Country Houses, 1660-1830', (unpublished PhD thesis, University of East Anglia, 2001).

¹⁹ *Norfolk Hearth Tax Assessment, Michaelmas 1664*, ed. by M. Frankel, P. Seaman and P. Palgrave-More, Norfolk Genealogy 15 (Norfolk and Norwich Genealogical Society, 1983).

²⁰ A chronology for the development of the library up to 1830 will be set out in Susie West, *The Country House Library, 1660-1830*, (Toronto, forthcoming).

panelled-room type of library room as the dominant style for 1660-1720. Virtuoso treatment of wood for interiors is of course celebrated in the designs of Christopher Wren, the carving ability of Grinling Gibbons and their respective followers.

The panelled-room type of library or study can be seen in terms of three scales.²¹ The first is the small rectangular room associated with the owner's bedchamber and often called a study or closet. In accordance with the new classical style of the seventeenth century, this room would be lit by one tall window (this is the period where window technology changed from casements to sash frames in the 1670s). In the language of architecture, it would be one bay wide (using the 'invisible grid' of the proportions of a classical façade). The second type is a larger square room, comparable to a parlour in scale, independent of the bedchamber. Its proportions allowed two windows, and so it is termed a two-bay library in this discussion. Larger, three-bay, libraries are also known: their generous scale may reflect the presence of a range of art and other antiquities, as well as of books.

Where known, the fittings suggest that panelled walls around fitted shelves were the norm, and that the freestanding cases exemplified by the Pepys library were less typical. Although inventory makers noted panelling (wainscot) as moveable goods during the sixteenth century, by the end of the seventeenth century this practice was abandoned. This relative silence on the presence of wood fittings accounts for some of the invisibility of the fitted libraries in inventories. This panelled room type remained a typical choice for a library until at least the 1720s. Shelves were usually

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²¹ There are of course larger library rooms in the seventeenth century, but these are exceptional. See West, 'Studies and status', 266-92.

fixed and immovable. The Norfolk evidence includes the houses that two gentleman architects of national repute (Roger North and Roger Pratt) created for themselves, which lends extra weight to the choices they made in planning their space for books. The following section discusses five Norfolk examples of the one-bay study, including that of Pratt.

One-bay studies

Sir Roger Pratt at Ryston Hall

Sir Roger Pratt (1620-1685) designed a one-bay study for himself when he drew up the plans for Ryston Hall between 1669-72. Ryston Hall in its original form is an example of the new classical country house seen in England from the 1630s: compact in plan, at least two rooms deep, with a hipped roof. Most obviously, it is a symmetrical house, entered by a central doorway. Each window, proportioned for tall casements or, after the 1670s in England, sashes, represents one bay in the geometry of design. In considering Sir Roger's own design for his study, it is helpful to refer to his practical notes on building. These include his detailed calculations for fitting out his own study with shelving at Ryston, but without reference to the intended location of the room.²² The chambers of Sir Roger and his wife were to be found in the central block on the upper (first) floor. Sir Roger's original study is the current dressing room facing north, although no seventeenth-century joinery survives, and next to his own

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²² *The Architecture of Sir Roger Pratt* ed. by Robert T. Gunther (Oxford, 1928, repr. New York, 1979).

chamber.²³ Both rooms, in my reconstruction, face the formal gardens behind the house.

Pratt's notes indicate that the dimensions of his study room were 10ft by 16ft (3.04m x 4.87m). This is closely comparable to another one-bay study he designed, now remodelled, for Sir Ralph Bankes at Kingston Lacey, Dorset, measuring approximately 11 ft by 17ft (3.35m x 5.18m).²⁴ The Kingston study (called a closet) was however on the ground floor, next to a withdrawing room, and it remained there until the 1780s when it took over the space of the withdrawing room, to become the present library. Pratt calculated the shelving for his books in a great square case 10ft by 10ft by 14in deep (3.04m x 3.04m x 30.04cm), holding ten shelves of diminishing height. He allowed for c.40 folio volumes 'comprehended upon one shelf'; in total, up to 500 volumes could have been shelved. This estimate of the collection housed should be borne in mind for other one-bay studies of the period. Additional books were to be housed in shelves under his desk, which he wanted to be 5ft 6in long and 3ft deep (1.67m x 0.91m). By 1672 he was specifying two tables with drawers for his study.²⁵

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²³ Sir John Soane's Museum, E.R. Pratt Accounts, 1787. NB the interior of Ryston has been reconfigured twice, see West, 'Norfolk Country Houses', Chapter Three, for full reconstruction.

²⁴ Antony Cleminson, 1988, 'The transition from Kingston Hall to Kingston Lacy', *Architectural History*, 31 (1988), 120-35 (132). In modern terms, it is somewhat larger than a modern single bedroom. Sir Ralph Bankes owned c.2000 books, Yvonne Lewis, 'Sir Ralph Bankes (1631-1677) and the origins of the library at Kingston Hall', *Library History*, 18 (2002), 215-24.

²⁵ Gunther, *Architecture*, pp. 173, 302-4. The probate appraisal of the contents of the study is illegible, although Sir Roger's son Edward used the existing collection of books as a bribe in his will to ensure his own son's compliance with bequests: TNA

The identification of the original study space at Ryston Hall provide hints of how a collection of choice books could be incorporated into a compact house, retaining the small scale of the closet and its relationship to the owner's bedchamber on the first floor, by a leading architect of the time. The following Norfolk houses lack a surviving study room, but extant archival evidence nevertheless suggests where such a one-bay study might have been, following the Ryston model.

The Hobarts of Blickling Hall

The Jacobean house built at Blickling from 1619-1629 was built by Sir Henry Hobart (c.1560-1625), a remodelling of the moated courtyard house of c.1390. Blickling was the largest house in Norfolk in the 1660s, to judge by the Hearth Tax return of 53 hearths. A rather long, thin house of two internal courtyards, with stylistic similarities to Hatfield House, Herts, it stands in contrast to the classical houses post-1660, yet the uses of the rooms kept up with evolving contemporary practice. Blickling is famous now for the book collection housed in the long gallery, although this was the library of Sir Richard Ellys which came to Blickling in 1745. The first archival reference to books is to be found in a stationer's bill for 23 books in 1661. These purchases presumably contributed to the collection catalogued after around 1676 of approximately 380 titles, organised on eight shelves.²⁶ A wall-full of 380 books would suit a one-bay study (Ryston's great wall case could hold c.500, above). It was

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PROB 4/17358, *Sir Roger Pratt of Riston [sic] 1686*; Norfolk Record Office PRA 503, 580x7, *Will of Edward Pratt 1708*.

²⁶ Norfolk Record Office 16001 31 f9, *Stationer's bill May 10th 1661*, transcribed as Appendix 3A in West; Norfolk Record Office NRS 13586 29 c 4 *A catalogue of books in the Green Roome n.d.*

probably on the first floor of the west side of the house where it is likely that Sir John Hobart, owner at that date, had his bedchamber.²⁷ In 1683, the next heir, Sir Henry Hobart, wished to have the books catalogued and valued, possibly for sale. None of these proposals seems to have been fulfilled. When the books were valued for probate in 1700 for the next heir, Sir Henry Hobart, the collection was of 1,100 volumes (perhaps not many more titles than the 380 of 1676) and there were included scientific instruments. The study was richly furnished with gilt leather on the walls, damask-upholstered seats, walnut book stands and a reading desk. The presence of gilt leather wall coverings suggests that the walls were probably panelled below dado height. Sir Henry's study, his chamber and his lady's closet remained on the west side of the house.²⁸ This side, containing family apartments, was rebuilt after 1765 and the functions of all the rooms were changed considerably.

Felbrigg Hall before the Gothic library

Felbrigg Hall (1610-24) is a much smaller gentry house (assessed for 17 hearths) of a similar date to Blickling, enlarged with a new wing in 1675-87. It carries the same problem of a surviving book collection housed in a later library room, the result of a further remodelling of 1752. The home of the Windham family, the presence of books at Felbrigg Hall is known since 1668, when a small collection was left by the builder of the house, Thomas Windham. Thereafter, as a result of a family dispute, the books

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²⁷ The 1629 plans of the house have been reconstructed and it is suggested that few structural changes had taken place by the late seventeenth century: Caroline Stanley-Millson and John Newman, 1986, 'Blickling Hall: the building of a Jacobean mansion', *Architectural History*, 29 (1986), 1-42.

²⁸ The inventory of 1700 and the location of the study are discussed fully in Susie West 'An overlooked inventory for Blickling Hall, Norfolk', *Library History*, 19 (2003), 143-5.

left the house. A compensatory payment of £10 might represent as many as 200 volumes, at a shilling each (but noting the huge variation in valuations possible). Thomas's heir, William I, built up his own collection and commissioned a bookplate. His wife Katherine Ashe noted titles of her books, which included practical and devotional reading and the latest plays and fiction.²⁹ A library list of around 1710 gives 721 titles, in six presses of six shelves each, plus one shelf of pamphlets and additional law books.³⁰ As well as suggesting that these were fitted shelves rather than free-standing cases, only six shelves of diminishing height suggests that these were not particularly tall presses, perhaps allowing for the hanging of pictures above.

The room use of the pre-1752 layout of the house is suggested by the annotations to a ground plan of February 1675 showing Samwell's west wing and the old house.³¹ The ground floor shows a new closet attached to a little parlour in the new wing. It is doubtful that these new secondary rooms behind the completed dining room and drawing room were executed. In any event, the ground floor closet is too small, with two doors, window and corner chimneypiece, to function as the household library room. It is marked as 'my closet' by Windham, and would be more suitable as a business room. However, the first floor of the new wing is a good candidate for the incorporation of a new study. The new wing was designed with the help of a neighbour and gentleman architect William Samwell, a friend of Sir Roger Pratt (Samwell also extended Ham House for the Lauderdale). The first floor comprised a

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²⁹ Robert W. Ketton-Cremer, 1986, *Felbrigg, The Story of a House*, (1962, repr. London, 1986), pp. 45, 49, 51.

³⁰ Ketton-Cremer, *Felbrigg*, p. 80; National Trust Felbrigg house archive n.d

³¹ National Trust a, *Felbrigg Hall, Norfolk* (London, new edition 1995), p. 14.

sequence of chambers leading away from the new great stairs, terminating in a one-bay room. This room could have contained the six presses. After the new Georgian gothic library by James Paine was created in the Jacobean great (dining) chamber at the front of the house, the putative study was transformed into a Chinese bedroom (the single window blocked and a bay window created).³² A single overdoor painting, detached from its panelled room, survives at Felbrigg, as a solitary reminder of seventeenth-century panelled interiors, dismantled in the great remodelling of 1752.³³

Earle of Heydon Hall

Smaller than Felbrigg, assessed for 12 hearths in 1664, the Elizabethan Heydon Hall was by 1660 the country house of Erasmus Earle, a retired lawyer, and his wife Frances Fountaine, both from old Norfolk families. Their son married Sarah, daughter of Sir John Hare of Stow Bardolph (see below). Erasmus is likely to have owned a small library of law books as well as the collection typical of a minor gentry family. The collection was enough to justify being identified as a library and the room housing it as a study, however modest. When Frances died in 1671, the inventory takers noted 51 volumes found in the ‘study where [the] Libbrary is’. The study seems to have been on the first floor near the expensively furnished parlour chamber and the nursery. Frances herself owned clothes, a bible and ‘a few other small books’ all worth £60.³⁴ Heydon Hall’s study fits the model of a one-bay study, close to the

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³² National Trust b, *Felbrigg Hall, Norfolk*, (London, revised 1987) p. 34.

³³ National Trust a, *Felbrigg*, 35.

³⁴ The National Archive, Kew, PROB 5/1869.

owner's chamber. After 1762, the interior of the house was transformed and the great hall swept away; no trace of the Elizabethan rooms survives.

Hare of Stow Bardolph

No trace remains of the great Elizabethan mansion at Stow Bardolph. Built by 1589 for Sir Nicholas Hare, Stow Bardolph Hall was almost as large as Blickling, taxed for 43 hearths in 1664. The Hare family ranked with the Hobarts of Blickling, and might have had similar levels of book ownership; they certainly appreciated the value of a library. Sir Nicholas's son endowed St John's College, Cambridge with an endowment towards building their new library. By the time of the death of Sir Ralph Hare, 1st Baronet, in 1671, a small 'library of bookes' was valued at £20 in his closet (twice the value allowed for the Felbrigg books in 1668). Using the shilling per volume as a maximum valuation, this suggests no more than 400 volumes. The closet next to his bedchamber would fit the model of a one-bay study, albeit with Jacobean proportions. This is confirmed for a later generation, through an inventory taken in 1721. The closet next to the owner's bedchamber contained 'one glass case for books'. The glazed case would not hold 400 volumes, but may have been the only unfitted, and thus portable, bookcase in the room. Decorated in the similar manner to the study at Blickling, this was a richly furnished room with red and gold silk hangings. Lady Hare's closet in 1672 also held a 'parcel of books' (unvalued). This was a larger room with two windows, whose contents totalled £13.10.6. Indeed, there were at least two more rooms called studies by the inventory takers at Stow, one for

the chaplain and another in the gatehouse, of low value and probably a household official's office.³⁵

Sir Roger Pratt mentioned the Stow books in a letter from around 1663 to his friend Sir Horatio Townshend of Raynham Hall, brother-in-law to Sir Ralph Hare. Pratt lightheartedly requested a position (not necessarily for himself) as the library keeper at Raynham, an office that existed at Stow Hall.³⁶ Since Raynham apparently contained 'the unexhausted literature of your Ldshps numerous great volumes', this is quite a compliment to pay to Stow Bardolph.³⁷

Two-bay and three-bay libraries

Following the sample of five one-bay studies discussed above, larger book rooms are known for this period in Norfolk worthy of consideration, two with good architectural evidence, including that of Sir Roger North, who treated his books and other collections on a rather more generous scale than that attempted by Sir Roger Pratt.

Sir Roger North of Rougham Hall

The two-bay square form of library was the choice of the second distinguished gentleman architect who built his home in Norfolk: Roger North (1653-1734) settled at Rougham in 1690. Sir Roger was the youngest son of the 4th Lord North, who

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³⁵ Norfolk Record Office Hare 5644, 224x5, *An Inventory of the Goods and Chattels of Sr Ralph Hare bart., made eighth day of August 1672*; Norfolk Record Office Hare 5542, 223x6 *Inventory: An Account of the Household Goods at Stow Hall, 1721*.

³⁶ Gunther, *Architecture*, p. 132.

³⁷ Ryston Hall, Folio f.2, cited in Gunther, *Architecture*, p. 132-3.

served Mary of Modena as her Attorney-General. The 4th Lord North himself was a scholarly man, writing from his family seat at Kirtling, Cambridgeshire, that ‘those Families enjoy a great advantage in the way of satisfaction, which are furnished, and enriched with plenty of good Books’.³⁸ Sir Roger grew up to have keen intellectual interests, including Cartesian philosophy, natural philosophy and architecture, and wrote extensively (although not for print publication). His manuscript essays on architecture were written between around 1687 and 1698, elucidating general principles and illustrating them with his experiences and observations. Known collectively as ‘The Treatise on Architecture’, it has since been hailed as ‘probably the most detailed account of the planning and building of a seventeenth-century house in English architectural literature’.³⁹ He retired to Norfolk in 1690, with the purchase of a Tudor house and estate at Rougham. The house posed him many problems, being an eclectic mixture of building phases and materials, altered piecemeal. Consequently, he gave it a uniform classical exterior and remodelled the interior.⁴⁰

The rooms in the west wing seem to have evolved into a private suite for Sir Roger’s own use. He placed his library upstairs next to a staircase that led down to a parlour ‘intended for my owne absolute retirement’ and a closet that he intended to embellish. The deliberate choice of west facing rooms took advantage of the western formal gardens, giving a quiet outlook for ‘retired uses’ away from the family

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³⁸ [Dudley, Lord North], *Observations and Advices Oeconomical* (London, 1669), pp.116-7.

³⁹ *Of Building: Roger North’s Writings on Architecture* ed. by Howard Colvin and John Newman, (Oxford, 1981), ix.

⁴⁰ Gomme and Maguire, *Design*, p. 285.

rooms.⁴¹ North's business room was in the east side of the house, next to his bailiff's closet. The library, then, was in the expected position up on the chamber floor, but with no direct access to other rooms and away from the owner's bedchamber in the east. Nothing is known of the interior of this room beyond the eighteenth-century survey of the house (the house was demolished in the 1780s), which reveals a square room with a corner fireplace, lit by three windows.

Amongst North's manuscripts, an architectural design for a villa-sized house shows a room fitted out with glazed shelves over cupboards recessed into the walls.⁴² This room is also square, with a window centred on two sides, under a deeply coved or even domed ceiling. North's plan can be compared to similar interiors by Daniel Marot, whose designs were published in 1703. Marot, exiled from France, came to England with William III and worked as the royal architect. Although little is known of his output, the prints in particular sum up 'a new kind of vocabulary of designs for decoration', for the unification of architectural space, interior decoration and the lavish creations of the newly prominent upholsters (creators of soft furnishings).⁴³ The sophistication of North's villa interior is close to Marot's published design for a library from around 1700: square proportions, centred chimney and window, under a shallow dome, fitted out with architectural bookcases. This similarity suggests that North was familiar with Court styles and influenced by Marot, working to integrate books into the architecture of the room.

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⁴¹ Colvin and Newman, *Of Building*, p. 83, plans xxviii, xxix.

⁴² Colvin and Newman, *Of Building*, Pl. 6, from British Library Add. Mss 23005.

⁴³ John Cornforth, *Early Georgian Interiors* (New Haven and London, 2004), p. 77.

Astley of Melton Constable Hall

The home of the Astley family was rebuilt in the 1660s, with interiors finished in the 1680s. It was of a typical size and type for a member of the county gentry, and not intended for a bibliophile but an average, reading, gentry family. The new house was begun after 1664 and probably completed by 1687, in the fashionable style of a modified Dutch classicism: red brick, sash windows, hipped roof with access to a viewing platform. The house survives, but emptied of its contents, which were largely dispersed by sales in the twentieth century.⁴⁴ The original plan can be derived from Roger North's description, the present house, and from the remarkable survival of the wooden model of the house.⁴⁵

The ground floor retained an old-fashioned screens passage entrance to an off-centre great hall, but also had a fashionable range of reception rooms with doors arranged enfilade. The first floor was much more up to date, with four 'capitall chambers' as Roger North commented approvingly, and their associated closets. North does not mention the library. The first floor plan shows the usual bedchambers with associated closets, the latter lit by one window each. The 1660s library took the central three windows of the east side, over the chapel. While the location of the library on the first floor is conventional for the date, it is unusually large, with three

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⁴⁴ Christopher Hussey, 1928a, 'Melton Constable, Norfolk, the seat of Lord Hastings', *Country Life*, Sept 15, Sept 22, 1928, 364-370, 402-9.

⁴⁵ Colvin and Newman, *Of Building*, pp. 74-5; drawn plans from model, English Heritage National Monuments Record BB81/2110 ground floor, BB81/2111 first floor; Gomme and Maguire, *Design*, p. 180, present annotated plans which agree with my suggestion for Sir Roger's apartment but using a different, uncited, source for room names. NB Entrance moved from south to north in eighteenth century.

windows along one wall. The best bedchambers and their supporting closets were ranged across the north entrance front, and it is only through one of these bedchambers that the library could be entered. This nearest bedchamber is also the only one with two good sized secondary rooms (dressing rooms) and a closet, which would create a luxurious owner's apartment. Access to this apartment was also possible via the secondary stairs, which went from basement to attics, creating a family shortcut through the house. The library remained upstairs until a reorganisation of room functions (perhaps after 1760). By 1829, the library had been moved to the ground floor eating parlour.⁴⁶

The builder of the house, Sir Jacob Astley, owned enough books to make it worthwhile to commission a bookplate; examples of some of his books with his signature and bookplate survive elsewhere.⁴⁷ Little is known of the books, or other collections beyond the portraits, although 'a very fine collection of prints, many curious and valuable books' were said to be kept there by 1808.⁴⁸

The last panelled-room libraries

These fragmentary examples of later seventeenth century libraries suggest that a position on the chamber floor next to the owner's bedchamber is important, but that there is more variation in scale than might be expected from adhering too literally to

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⁴⁶ John Chambers, *A General History of the Country of Norfolk Intended to Convey all the Information of a Norfolk Tour* (Norwich, 1829), p. 789.

⁴⁷ Wolterton Hall, Norfolk, library contains two Astley books, identified by Sir Jacob Astley's signature and bookplate.

⁴⁸ Richard Beatniffe, *The Norfolk Tour; or Traveller's Pocket Companion*, 6th (Norwich, 1808), p. 345.

the idea of a study-closet for this period: they range from one bay to three bays wide. They all have fitted shelving, and we should expect the available wall surface to be covered with unpainted wood panelling, unless the inventory evidence records a different treatment (expensive gilt leather or silk hangings at Blickling and Stow Bardolph). The emphasis on joinery in these rooms leads me to call these the ‘panelled room’ type of libraries, a form which continues into the early eighteenth century. A very late version of this type survives at Dunham Massey, Cheshire, from the remodelling of the interiors in the 1720s and 1730s for George Booth, 2nd Earl of Warrington (1675-1758). His father owned a collection of books valued at £300 at his death in 1694, and he called the book room his study.⁴⁹

Two exquisite examples of William Kent’s approach to this form of library room in the 1720s come from Norfolk houses, the new library at Raynham Hall and the library in the new house at Houghton, both of the two-bay size. Raynham Hall is an example of an early seventeenth-century house influenced by the new classicism of Inigo Jones, begun in 1619 but not completed until 1662. It had a library room which was replaced by the present room from 1724; the location of the first room is untraced. The new room was created for Charles, 2nd Viscount Townshend, with the aid of his friends Sir Andrew Fountaine of Narford Hall and Thomas Coke, Lord Lovell (future Earl of Leicester) of Holkham Hall. William Kent was involved through his friendship with the two latter and through his work at Houghton Hall for Townshend’s brother-in-law, Sir Robert Walpole. Between them, the friends agreed

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⁴⁹ Ed Potten, ‘“A great number of Usefull books”: the hidden library of Henry Booth, 1st Earl of Warrington (1652-1694) *Library and Information History* 25 (2009), 33-49. The date of the surviving interior of the library is later than that given in Cornforth as 1706-16.

to knock together a ground floor bedchamber, stairs and closet, blocking two windows and leaving two windows facing south, opposite the chimney wall. The library was panelled in oak, with two doors opening into document cupboards, and Kent's designs for a pier glass and table, and the overmantel on the chimneybreast. The room survives with its collection, although the pier glass, table and overmantel have been replaced by extra shelving. The impact of the symmetrical design centred on the chimneypiece, the dark tones of the oak and leather, and the enveloping unity of crisply carved wood is memorable.

Houghton Hall was built from 1720, replacing the Walpole family's house on that site in favour of a monument to the emerging Palladian revival style and to Sir Robert Walpole's financial exploitation of his political offices. William Kent was involved from 1725. The library in the new house held an inherited family collection (particularly from his father) and Sir Robert's own purchases of rare books and luxury editions. The room is fitted out in mahogany, imported free from duty at that time, in a more architectural scheme than at Raynham. Square in plan, with a Venetian window, the window motif is repeated in the joinery, with each section filled with shelving. The pilasters that define each section are also hollow and filled with shelves. Even the spaces above the doors, usually filled by paintings, are filled with shelves. Below dado height, doors (now removed) covered drawers for portfolios. The only space for non-book display is for the great portrait of George I over the chimneypiece; other decorative objects could be placed on the three tables present in 1745, when the inventory takers called this room the study. This handsome room is immediately adjacent to Sir Robert's bedchamber and on the family side of the house, away from the state rooms.

These examples, then, come at the end of a ‘long seventeenth century’ of panelled libraries. Although late instances, they are at the beginning of Kent’s second career (after painting) as early examples of his approach to designing complete rooms.⁵⁰ Kent and his patrons would abandon the panelled-room model shortly afterwards, demonstrated by the long library in the new Holkham. One of the key differences between the older panelled-room types and the direction that the fittings in Holkham’s library showed is the transition from polished wood to painted wood. However, Raynham, Houghton and indeed Holkham (built from 1734) respect the seventeenth-century pattern of living, keeping the main library away from the state rooms, a pattern that would shift significantly by the 1740s. Style and plan thus work together, in a period when the library was a room for the family, as much as the common parlour was the daily eating room, while the state rooms were for intermittent display.

The name of the room

Throughout this discussion, the room for books has been variously named as the study or library, following contemporary usage, particularly within inventories. However, there is a further term associated with books and reading, the closet, and it is this room that has attracted considerable attention from literary historians. The early modern closet features within literary studies as a genre of devotional literature, intended for private meditation, sometimes specifically aimed at female readers. However, a slight misunderstanding has arisen among scholars, based on the

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⁵⁰ Cornforth, *Early Georgian*, p. 137.

assumption that the use of devotional books in a closet implies that all books were kept in the closet. The existence of a household study, coeval with the uses of personal closets, tends to be ignored. The closet as a site of reading has been the focus for studies of early modern concepts of privacy and the self, based on the interpretation of literary texts rather than architectural or household sources.⁵¹ Despite the acknowledgement that ‘the variety of uses of early modern domestic spaces complicates any easy equation of space and practice’, literary historians have, not unreasonably, been reluctant to extend the range of sources beyond the textual closet and its associated space, the bedchamber.⁵² Without inventory evidence and attributions of ownership, historically attested uses of closets must remain elusive.⁵³

The identification of the practices of devotion with an architectural space called the closet does not diverge from a conventional architectural history of the uses of the closet in the early modern house. Sixteenth-century inventories tend to refer to ‘inward rooms’ as subsidiary spaces to the main chamber, but by the seventeenth century the term closet is more established. Roger North’s father, Dudley, 4th Lord North, wrote wistfully of the peace provided by ‘inward Rooms, and of Closets, with other little retiring places’.⁵⁴ Roger North, writing as a critic of contemporary building practice in the 1690s, expected a gentleman’s house to have bedchambers with

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⁵¹ Recent scholarship summarised in Heidi Hackel, *Reading Material in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 35-42.

⁵² Hackel, *Reading Material*, pp. 35, 37.

⁵³ Cf. Richard Rambuss, *Closet Devotions* (Durham N.C. and London, 1998), p. 172, n. 35: ‘it remains unclear, however, whether these rooms served as the strictly devotional retreats called for... or whether they were “all purpose” closets.’

⁵⁴ [Dudley, Lord North], *Observations*, p. 93.

closets, ‘to retire for devotion or study, whilst the chamber is cleaned, or company present’.⁵⁵ North treats the association of bedchambers with closets as relatively recent; it was the compact plan of the classical seventeenth-century house that allowed the convenient provision of subdivisions of spaces off main chambers. Roger Pratt’s house at Ryston had ground floor master’s and mistress’s closets off the withdrawing room, and upstairs two bedchamber closets for his wife’s bedchamber as well as ‘my study’.⁵⁶ Closets could be distributed around the house, having no exclusive association either with bedchambers or with book collections.

If it is possible to extend the uses of the closet around the household, it is also clear that the nomenclature for the study was not stable during the seventeenth century: Pratt also refers to ‘my chamber to be finished with its Clossett for my Bookes etc.’ but in his accounts settles on ‘study’.⁵⁷ There was certainly some elision in contemporaries’ minds about a study and a closet (the Kingston Lacey ground-floor study was named as a closet). The Earl of Clarendon’s Oxfordshire house, Cornbury Park, was enlarged with a south wing from 1666. His steward, John Cary, gave instructions about ‘the businesse of his Lordships Study [...] the same shelves that were in his former Closett may be put up in this’. The same letter makes it clear that the new study was on the ground floor with two doors from the parlour and the

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⁵⁵ Colvin and Newman, *Of Building*, p. 134.

⁵⁶ Norfolk Record Office, MC 186/117, M3 *Tracing of plans at Ryston c.1670 and as altered by Soane by A.B. Wittingham, 1963*

⁵⁷ Gunther, *Architecture*, p. 173, entries for 1671 and 1672.

terrace, and therefore distinct from his lordship's bedchamber and its associated closet.⁵⁸

It is hoped that this article has demonstrated that it is time to clarify the relationships between closets and studies. These are both spatial and social relationships: the place of the rooms within the house plan and the uses of the rooms themselves. The scholarship on studies/libraries and closets needs to be reintegrated, rather than proceeding along separate tracks. Both spaces were present in most gentry and aristocratic houses, suggesting that they performed different functions according to the scale of the household and the extent of the collections. This article has already noted the presence of several studies named in the inventories for Stow Bardolph Hall and the same is true for seventeenth-century Penshurst Place. The solution may be found in the idea of social hierarchy implied by the personal associations with different rooms: the family, their upper servants, and the distinctions within those groups.

These social distinctions, recognisable in inventories, are eroded by the amalgamation of different collections within the single historic libraries that have survived to the present day. The familiar evidence of provenance from wives, children and ancestors found in a collection at a point in time signifies prior claims of personal ownership, and suggests the material movements of books from elsewhere. This latter point requires the books to have been kept elsewhere, in accordance with the changing

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⁵⁸ John Newman, 'Hugh May, Clarendon and Cornbury' in *English Architecture Public and Private, Essays for Kerry Downes*, ed. by John Bold and Edward Chaney (London, 1993), p. 87, citing TNA C104/109, 1 August 1667.

spatial distribution of books around the house. Frances Egerton, Countess of Bridgewater, had her collection catalogued in 1627: her London house held 241 titles, kept ‘distinct from her husband’s library’ and ‘presumably in a book closet.’ After her death, her son, the 2nd Earl inherited some of her books and maintained a library in the London house.⁵⁹ The female closet vanishes from this point in the story, since the books were removed into the next Earl’s library. The distinction may have been valid from the point of view of the inventory takers who recorded the portable goods of the deceased, but legal ownership is not the same as quotidian use. It may be more precise to suggest that the Countess kept her library of books that had a unique association with her within her own closet, while her husband also had a library, which may have included inherited collections and functioned as a household rather than a purely personal resource: this main library passed to their son, who followed the pattern of adding his mother’s books to it.

The example of the Countess of Bridgewater is an attempt to rethink attitudes towards books, ownership and spaces. Personal collections may have been stored around a large house, but there was often a dominant collection in the name of the head of the household in one of the book rooms (even in the small gentry house of the Earles at Heydon Hall, there was the library and the widow’s books). It is to this dominant collection that other personal collections migrated if they were not sold or bequeathed away on their owner’s death. These patterns are well known to historians of the book working with provenance data but have often been overlooked in the

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⁵⁹ Hackel, *Reading Material*, pp. 240-53.

consideration of spaces for books, which I argue here is an essential component for the ‘landscape of book ownership’.

Returning to the archive, Nicholas Cooper has noted that names for rooms in a period of rapid change and experimentation in house plans appeared to confuse contemporaries charged with taking inventory lists; any sense of a formulaic ideal plan derived from synthetic accounts is rapidly eroded by close scrutiny of individual case studies.⁶⁰ I want to suggest that the closet is more prevalent as a name for a room (which might contain books) than study or library (which should contain books) in inventories and on house plans. This prevalence demonstrates that contemporaries deployed this multipurpose name for multifunctional small rooms; it is down to our judgement of the associated named owner and the room’s contents whether a closet might qualify as a study and whether that study might house the main household library. Without attending to the evidence for the contents of the closet and the reasons for listing the ownership of goods, single source discussions of the closet tend to ignore the rest of the house. A further benefit of considering the study and the closet together comes from reopening the gendered nature of both, and reconsidering the problem for the ‘landscape of book ownership’ of women’s ownership of books within the household.

Much of the early modern closet debate invokes female reading and the nature of privacy as experienced within the female closet. The absence of women in library history remains a challenge, and indeed the nature of the evidence presented in this

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⁶⁰ Nicholas Cooper, *Houses of the Gentry 1480-1680*, (New Haven and London, 1999) p. 274.

paper may be read as the history of male ownership. The inventories here have distinguished between husband's and wife's closets (with books) and valuations have tended to confirm a difference in scale of collections. Contemporary authors undoubtedly thought of closets as spaces for female devotional reading: Anne Sadleir was the dedicatee of a manuscript copy of a sermon by Thomas Newcomen, who referred to 'those many excellent volumes (wherewith your closet is more enriched, than the closettes of other Ladyes are, or can be, with the rarest pictures, or the richest porcelaine)'.⁶¹ Sadleir was the daughter of Sir Edward Coke, of old Holkham Hall, Norfolk, a scholarly and pious woman who was an active collector of coins, manuscripts and curiosities, and who made bequests of these to academic and the Inner Temple Library. Her own books went to the Inner Temple and to the vicars of her parish, Standon Lordship, Herts. The house at Standon was a large late medieval courtyard house, but her husband's post-mortem inventory of 1660 does not help to locate either a main library (a 'Library or books' worth £10 was found in the Back Chamber to the Chapel) or a lady's closet.⁶² Further female dedicatees in the Norfolk houses noted above include France Hobart (1603-64) of Blickling Hall and Lady Elizabeth Hare, of Stow Bardolph, both characterised as using closets for devotion.⁶³

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⁶¹ Arnold Hunt, 'The books, manuscripts and literary patronage of Mrs Anne Sadleir (1585-1670)' in *Early Modern Women's Manuscript Writing, Selected Papers from the Trinity/Trent Colloquium*, ed. by Victoria Burke and Jonathan Gibson (Aldershot, 2004), p. 211, citing Inner Temple Library MS Petyt 530D.

⁶² Arthur Clifford ed., *The State Papers and Letters of Sir Ralph Sadler, Knight Banneret*, (Edinburgh, 1809), II, p. 590.

⁶³ Hackel, *Reading Material*, p. 20, citing J. C[ollinges], *Par Nobile, Two Treatises*, (London, 1669), p. 268.

In his observation, Newcomen was using a contemporary trope about female behaviour and morality, in which the space of the closet figured as a site of anxiety about unmonitored female behaviour.⁶⁴ The consumption of luxury, in the form of pictures and china, could be pointedly contrasted to the consumption of godly reading. The early modern ladies' closet was an established point of reference in the magazine debates of the early decades of the eighteenth century, a space where women of the landed classes were expected to write their correspondence and the poetry that was becoming increasingly common from the pens of female authors. It has been interpreted as the female (solitary) equivalent of the male (sociable) coffee-house, a space from which to participate, albeit at a distance, in the debates of the day.⁶⁵ There is no doubt that the closet assigned to the lady of the house, separate from the dressing-room in the larger houses, was used as a day room and for the storage and display of personal collections. At Ham House, the Duchess of Lauderdale's 1670s closet survives, a one bay room on the ground floor terminating the range of apartments the Lauderales added to the Jacobean house.⁶⁶

When modern scholars have attempted to account for the often invisible relationship between women and books, the existing trope of the female closet has provided a representative site in which such a relationship was enacted. The most commented on female reader of the seventeenth century, Lady Anne Clifford (1590-

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⁶⁴ Sasha Roberts, 'Shakespeare 'creepes into the women's closets about bedtime': women reading in a room of their own' in *Renaissance Configurations*, ed. by Gordon McMullan (London, 1998), p. 39.

⁶⁵ Emma Clery, *The Feminization Debate in Eighteenth-century England*, (Basingstoke, 2004), pp. 132-5.

⁶⁶ Gomme and Maguire, *Design*, p. 171.

1676), left a diary entry that made it clear that she and her then husband read in their separate closets.⁶⁷ Lady Anne's note directs attention to the existence of two personal collections, assembled by husband and wife respectively. Yet in the nomenclature of the inventories and of the scholarly literature, it is the male study that has become the principle location and the female closet the more diminutive setting. It hardly helps that even today the term closet has multiple meanings associated with being hidden, including the mundane level of walk-in storage.

As librarians understand, book collections can be made more or less accessible by how they are stored. I want to suggest that, given the 'closed' associations of 'closet', the latter term tends to refer to the personal space of a single individual (alongside their bedchamber or as their household office) while the study/library refers to a potentially more open and accessible space, placed for the convenience of the household. This is not to deny the historically specific pattern that has been presented here of associating studies/libraries with the family rooms rather than the state rooms, before around 1740. It does however make sense of the patterns of provenance observed, namely that satellite collections get drawn in by the stronger gravity of the main book room: the household room for books. Eventually, it is the study/library that goes on to win greater space and architectural investment within the country house during the eighteenth century, while the closet transforms into a dressing room, next to a bedchamber, or an office near an entrance.

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⁶⁷ Hackel, *Reading Material*, p. 230.

The reconstruction of a range of studies using all sources of evidence presented here suggests that the presence of a study was the norm by 1660. The foregoing account of the female closet endorses the gendered nature of the study: the male head of the household had both this space and his own closet, as inventory takers recognised. In the hierarchy of degrees of personal space, it is the closets of both master and mistress that should be considered to be the most private retreats. Inventory takers also named the owner of a closet (mistress or master) but did not attach personal names to studies, any more than dining rooms or parlours were personal spaces. The varied contents of family libraries, beyond the jurisdiction of the serious scholar, make it clear that they were a household resource. This relatively open quality is further demonstrated from the varied provenance of books within the main collection: personal book collections, when not bequeathed away, tended to end up within the main collection.

If owners, their books and their rooms are taken together, it is possible to reassemble a 'landscape of book ownership' within households. I would argue that this allows scholars to work more imaginatively with the problem of the absence of evidence (which still tends to be taken as the evidence of absence). For the history of female book ownership, rather than writing history based on exceptional cases (the interest of women with the resources and opportunities to assemble their own collections is not to be denied), a wider narrative that begins with the household study/library can allow us to break out of exclusive assumptions about the female closet. Women without books listed in inventories must increasingly be thought of as not without books, but as living in a house with books which circulated from the study.

Conclusion

An understanding of the English seventeenth century country house library is only one, though major, instance of the spaces for books that can operate as a resource for future scholarship. To which end, this article has made a case for the ubiquity of country house library rooms after 1660. It has offered a methodology based on archival research and a typology for identification, in accordance with a hierarchy of architectural scale from one to three bays and a characterisation as the panelled-room type. In so doing, these tools give spatial form to the social practices of book ownership in this historic period. Country houses where book rooms are tantalisingly absent at the date when a collection is known to exist, can thereby be reinstated using the balance of probability, the kind of judgement that history frequently requires. The underrepresentation of women as owners and readers can also be reconsidered, seeing the presence of personal closets as likely spaces for book collections, while still regarding these spaces as part of the more dynamic movement of books around the household. The dominant assumptions about the male ownership of the study also need to be more carefully nuanced, insofar as the household book room can be seen as an open resource rather than a personal domain. This is a call to move beyond ideas of private ownership (appropriate for intellectual biographies) towards shared use, to think about book plates that denote personal provenance as on a par with engraved silver coffee pots or armorial dinner services, all contributing to family identity, arguably a more culturally significant object for book history than the laws of property ownership.

The Norfolk results suggest that such a systematic archival methodology creates an increased awareness of the number of early modern study/library rooms, defining a stronger context for singular examples such as Ham House. Using a county framework for research carries the additional advantage of examining a group of households who intermarried and knew each other's houses, addressing the problem of how singular case studies can shed light on local social practices. The later seventeenth-century rooms whose shadows are glimpsed behind the surviving architecture and the contemporary shelf lists offer a model of the fully fitted library room which remained dominant until cumulative cultural changes from the 1720s.

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