

SUMMARY: In the excerpt below from his biography of Sir Thomas Smith (1513-1577), John Strype (1643-1737) states that Oxford was one of Smith's pupils while Smith was at Queen's College, Cambridge. Strype published his life of Smith in 1698, and according to *The Dictionary of National Biography*, he has attracted criticism from historians for his methods:

*Yet by providing valuable transcriptions of manuscripts now lost or never printed elsewhere Strype has inevitably channelled the interests of historians who in recent times have begun to remark on his neglect of chronology, his want of critical sense, and his transcriptions which were often silently abridged or poorly referenced. Strype followed the contemporary practice of arranging his materials by year, writing in the form of annals. His habit of gathering and including irrelevant material, together with his lack of critical analysis of his sources, were in keeping with the historiographical practice of his time.*

The excerpt below offers evidence of Strype's neglect of chronology. He assigns Smith's 'breeding up' of Oxford 'in literature and good manners' to 1542, eight years before Oxford was born. Moreover he assigns Smith's tutoring of John Ponet to 1542 as well. However, according to *The Dictionary of National Biography*, Ponet has already proceeded MA by 1535:

*Ponet, John (c.1514–1556), bishop of Winchester and religious controversialist, was a native of Kent. Nothing else is known of his life before early 1533, when he graduated BA from Queens' College, Cambridge. That year he was elected a fellow of the college, and he proceeded MA in 1535. A student of Thomas Smith (1513–1577), who had three years' seniority on the fellowship, Ponet showed great promise as a scholar, especially in Greek.*

However in the same paragraph, Strype notes correctly that Oxford and Edward Manners (1549-1587), 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Rutland, were in Sir William Cecil's household in 1563 as royal wards. Strype also mentions a letter written by Cecil in that year asking Smith, who was then ambassador in France, to engage a French-speaking attendant and a riding instructor for the two young earls. This letter has unfortunately since been lost, but the detail provided by Strype makes it clear that he saw it. He says that in the letter Cecil told Smith that Oxford had 'learned to understand French very well'. That Oxford was proficient in written French in 1563, when he was thirteen years old, is attested to by a letter he wrote in French to Cecil on 19 August 1563 (see BL MS Lansdowne 6/25, f. 79). There is also other evidence which establishes that Oxford was Smith's 'scholar' at some time prior to 1562, when Smith left for France.

It is particularly noteworthy that Strype, who was born only 40 years after Oxford's death, states that Oxford 'afterwards proved of excellent abilities and learning'. Part of the credit for that must of necessity be given to his tutor, Sir Thomas Smith, who Strype says was 'the best scholar' of the University in a wide field of subjects, and 'one of the three there that were the great masters of the English tongue'.

The excerpt below is taken from Strype, John, *The Life of the Learned Sir Thomas Smith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1820), pp. 18-20.

#### Travels to Italy

From France our scholar [=Smith] proceeded forward towards Italy, and settled himself at Padua, studying there for some time in the civil law to qualify him for state affairs (for which the King designed him), and went out in the same University Doctor of that faculty.

A.D. 1542

Made Regius Professor of the Civil Law

Coming home, he retired to his old college a very accomplished person. In the year 1542, being now thirty years of age, he took the degree of Doctor of the Civil Law in Cambridge, and was made the King's Professor in that faculty, Wiggin being then the King's Professor of Divinity, Cheke of the Greek tongue, Wakefield of the Hebrew, and Blyth, who had married Cheke's sister, of Physic.

A general scholar.

As Smith has sufficiently showed himself a Grecian and an orator, so his large mind prompted him to make himself master of all other kinds of useful learning. And he was reckoned the best scholar in the University, not only for rhetoric and the learned languages, but for mathematics, arithmetic, law, natural and moral philosophy, as one of the same University before mentioned [=Gabriel Harvey], and that was not long after him in time, sets out the common vogue he bore there:

A.D. 1542,

Hen. VIII

Musar. Lacrymae

*Quis primus rhetor? Smithus. Quis maximus Hermes Linguarum? Smithus. Geometres? Smithus et idem. Summus arithmeticus? Smithus. Legumque peritus Ante alios? Smithus. Physicus celeberrimus? Ohe! Smithus multiscius. Morumque vitaeque magister Optimus? Et Smithus.*

Chancellor to the Bishop of Ely

Remaining in the University, he became Chancellor to Goodrich, Bishop of Ely, who being himself a learned man and a favourer of the Gospel, chose such officers about him. Such another was Dr. Cox, who was his chaplain, the same that was the first instructor to Prince Edward, and after dean of Christ Church in Oxford, and Chancellor of that University, and at last, Bishop of Ely under Queen Elizabeth

Breeds up pupils

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Whilst Smith lived in the college, he spent not his time in sloth and ease, nor indulged himself to a lazy unprofitable life, but made himself useful and serviceable to the University in many respects. One was in breeding up young men in literature and good manners, being his pupils, many of whom were of the best rank and quality. He was tutor to Edward, Earl of Oxford, a nobleman who afterwards proved of excellent abilities and learning, but too much addicted to prodigality. Sir William Cecil, Master of the Wards and Liveries, took this young nobleman, being a ward, under his peculiar care, and in the family with him was also another Earl, namely of Rutland, being also a ward. And when in the year 1563 Dr. Smith (then a knight) was the Queen's ambassador in France, the said Cecil wrote him how the former Earl, whom he styled *his scholar*, had learned to understand French very well, and that he was desirous to have an honest qualified Frenchman to attend upon him and the other Earl, for the exercise and speech of the tongue. He directed Smith that he should be one honest in religion, civil in manners, learned in some science, and not unpersonable. And if he were worthy fifty or sixty crowns by year, he would be ruled by him, the said Smith. And withal he prayed him to provide some good rider for these noble wards (which riders in those days commonly were Italians) and he would give him twenty pounds by year if Smith should so judge him worthy. And Sir Thomas was glad to be thus employed, to contribute to the generous education of all noble youth, for the good of the commonwealth, as well as of the Earl that once had been his pupil. Under him also was bred John Ponet, that learned man, who wrote many excellent books, mathematical and other, became chaplain to Archbishop Cranmer, and was preferred by King Edward VI to be Bishop of Rochester, and after of Winchester.

#### Refines the English writing

Smith was also, during his residence in Cambridge, a great refiner of the English writing, which to these times was too rough and unpolished, and little care taken thereof, as may be seen by such as converse in the writings of men even of learning in those days. He was noted to be one of the three there that were the great masters of the English tongue.