

Archive of irreverent miscellanies put online

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Books of miscellanies from the Harding Collection. Credit: Bodleian Libraries

The world's largest collection of miscellanies is being collected and put online by researchers from the Faculty of English Language and Literature with the support of the Bodleian Libraries curators.

Dr. Abigail Williams, who is leading the project, has received a three-year Leverhulme Research Grant to set up the Digital Miscellanies Index. The Index will create an online database of the contents of 1000 poetic collections, or miscellanies, which are part of the Harding [Collection](#) owned by the Bodleian Libraries.

The collection has turned up a number of interesting items, including a crude poem which is attributed to John Milton but unlikely to have been written by him, called *An Extempore upon a Faggot*.

This was rediscovered by Dr. Jennifer Batt in the Oxford and Cambridge Miscellany of 1708, part of the Harding Collection, and reopens the debate concerning authorship and Milton's reputation among his

contemporaries which was initially rehearsed in *Notes and Queries*, an Oxford journal, in 1869. Previously the verse has also been attributed to Rochester (in a Chetham manuscript and in *Familiar Letters (Of Rochester)*, 1705) and to other authors including John Dryden and Sir John Suckling. Revisiting the poem opens scope for further scholarly research.

Dr. Batt said: 'To see the name of John Milton, the great religious and political polemicist, attached to such a bawdy epigram, is extremely surprising to say the least.

'The poem is so out of tune with the rest of his work, that if the attribution is correct, it would prompt a major revision of our ideas about Milton. It is likely that Milton's name was used as an attribution to bring scandal upon the poet, perhaps by a jealous contemporary.'

The archive contains other irreverent works including *Dirty dogs for dirty puddings* (1732), *Laugh and be fat: or the merry companion* (1795) or *Ebrietatis encomium: or the praise of drunkenness, by Boniface Oinophilus* (1723).

The Digital Miscellanies Index is a three-year Leverhulme Research Project grant, led by Dr. Abigail Williams, and based at the University of Oxford. It will create an online database of the contents of 1000 poetic collections, or miscellanies, published over the course of the 18th Century.

The Harding Collection was given to the Bodleian Library by Walter Harding, a ragtime musician born in Britain but living in Chicago, where he amassed a huge collection of printed poems and music collections from the nineteenth and eighteenth centuries. The collection also includes, amongst other things, vast numbers of opera scores, song sheets and music hall songs.

Walter Harding died in December 1973 and the collection arrived in the Bodleian in 1975. It was brought to England by air and weighed 22 tonnes.

Provided by Oxford University

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