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A book from the collection of John Ellis (c. 1710–1776), naturalist, now in the library of Isaac Norris held at Dickinson College, Pennsylvania, USA

Patrick N. Wyse Jackson

Department of Geology, Trinity College, Dublin 2, Ireland

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1. Introduction

John Ellis (c. 1710–1776) is well-known to students of bryozoans being the author of *Natural History of the Corallines*. Recently a volume that once belonged to Ellis has been identified in a library in the USA. It is intriguing to think of how this book may have made its way across the Atlantic, why it was disposed of by Ellis, and how it got into the extensive library of the Quaker merchant Isaac Norris (1701–1766) now housed at Dickinson College, a small liberal arts college, in Pennsylvania.

2. John Ellis

John Ellis,¹ who may have been born in Dublin, Ireland spent much of his working life in London, where he was apprenticed to a clothworker. In 1732 he established his own business in the same trade and later combined his interests with those of a James Fivey. He married in 1754 but was widowed shortly afterwards when his only surviving child, Martha, was four-years old. For many years his business provided Ellis with a good income, but by the late 1750s it began to fail and early in 1760 he filed for bankruptcy. He then found work as Head Gardener on an estate in Surrey, before gaining better-paid employment as a representative for the Irish Linen Board and for the government of Dominica, and he also acted as a Trade Agent for the colony of West Florida in North

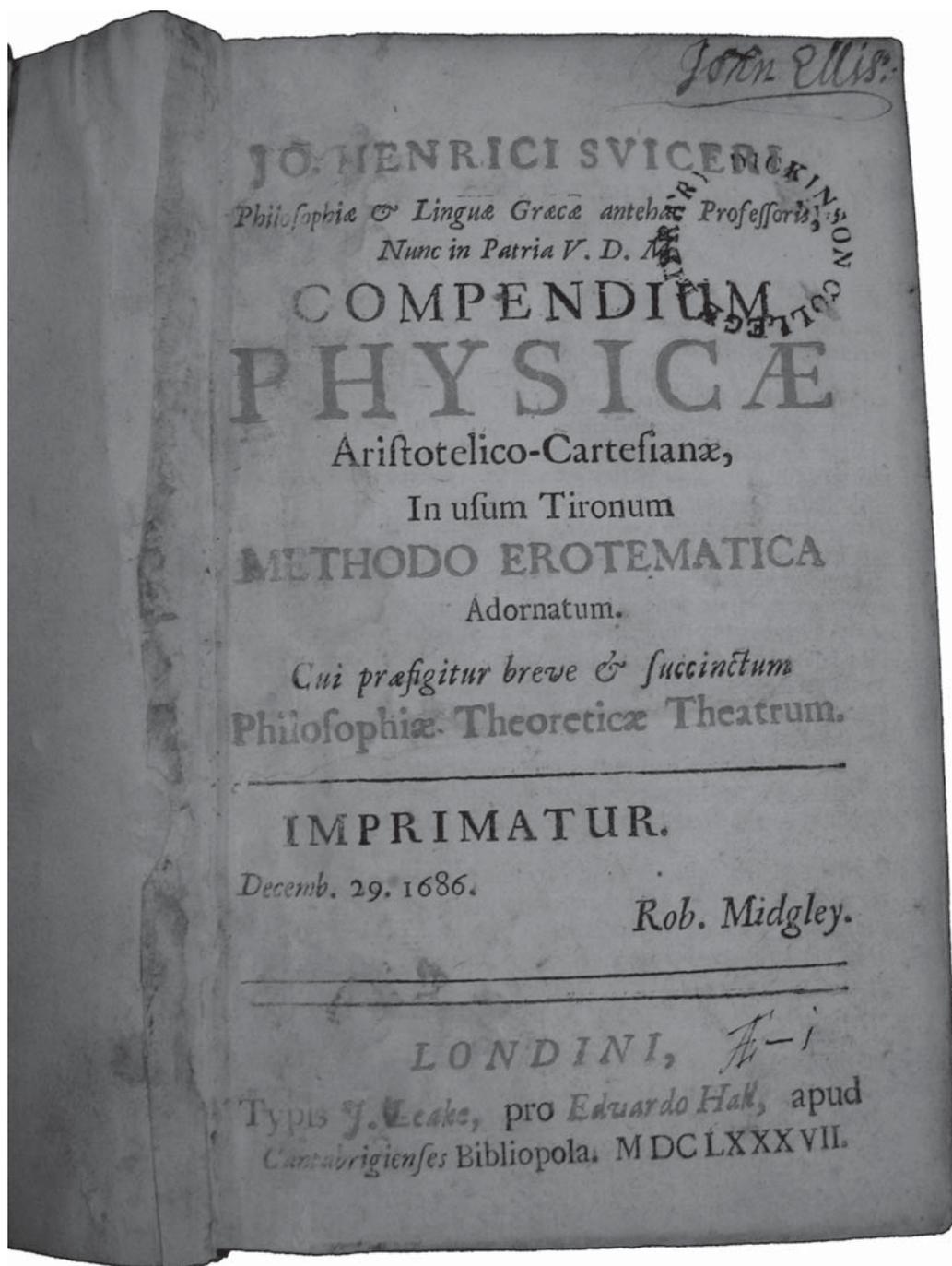


Figure 1. John Ellis' copy of *Compendium Physicæ*, now in Dickinson College, Carlisle, Pennsylvania, USA (photograph courtesy of Special Collections Department of the Waidner-Spahr Library, Dickinson College)

America.²

Prior to being declared bankrupt Ellis was wealthy enough to be able to indulge in his passion for natural history and was elected in due course a Fellow of the Royal Society. He had his attention to a study of the various marine animals including crinoids, sponges and corallines. The latter group was zoologically diverse and included the organisms recognised today as bryozoans. His most note worthy publication was *An essay towards a natural history of the corallines*, which was published in London in 1755; a French and Dutch edition appeared in the following year,³ and several years later an unauthorised edition was published in Germany.⁴ Ostrovsky has pointed out that “The first author who described ovicells in cheilostomes was John Ellis ... [who] noted and figured ovicells in several species of the genera *Bugula*, *Bicellariella* and, probably, *Flustra*, and called them ‘Balls’, ‘testaceous Spherules’, or ‘testaceous Figures’.”⁵ Ellis also worked with Daniel Solander who was to accompany James Cook on his first voyage in 1768. Following Ellis’ death and then that of Solander in 1782 the manuscript of *The natural history of many curious and uncommom Zoophytes* was retrieved by Joseph Banks and given to Ellis’ daughter Martha and published in 1786.⁶

In the last seven years of his life Ellis focussed on agriculture and botany and he produced a series of publications dealing with the preservation and transportation of seeds. His broadening of research is hardly surprising given his financial interests in the North American colonies. At this time he also wrote on coffee and also on breadfruit (*Artocarpus*). It was during the transportation of a consignment of breadfruit from Tahiti bound for the West Indies that Captain Bligh was ejected from his ship the *Bounty* in 1789.

Although Ellis was bankrupt at one point in his life, he managed to maintain a reasonable lifestyle. It is possible that he withheld some of his assets from his creditors⁷ in 1760. On his death he left his daughter a considerable amount of money,⁸ and no doubt other effects. His library was sold ten years after his death at auction at the same time as that of Solomon Dayrolles.⁹ The auction contained 8,975 lots but from the catalogue it is impossible to determine how many had belonged to Ellis.

3. Isaac Norris

Recently a book that once belonged to Ellis (Figure 1) has been identified in the library holdings at Dickinson College, Carlisle, Pennsylvania, USA (Figure 2). It forms part of a Library assembled by the Quaker merchant Isaac Norris junior (1701–1766). The book undoubtedly belonged to Ellis as it carries his signature on the title page (Figure 1); comparison of this signature with verified signatures on manuscripts held in the Linnean Society in London confirm this ownership.

Isaac Norris¹⁰ was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, son of an English merchant of the same name who had settled there, and who had made a fortune engaged in an export and import business. Isaac senior mainly sent tobacco and food from America and imported manufactured goods and slaves.¹¹ He assembled an estate of some 16,000 acres and built a large house, Fair Hill, for himself and his family. He entered political life and



Figure 2. Dickinson College in 1811. This building is known as ‘Old West’ and is listed on the United States Register of historic buildings.

served in the Pennsylvania Provincial Assembly and for a year was Mayor of Philadelphia. He was also an executor of William Penn’s will and was a trustee of Pennsylvania. On his death his son Isaac junior inherited the estate and business,¹² and soon he immersed himself in politics and like his father served as Speaker of the Pennsylvania Provincial Assembly. In 1739 he married Sarah, daughter of James Logan, the secretary of William Penn who had established the colony of Pennsylvania.

Norris was responsible for ordering in 1745 a large bell from the Whitechapel Bell Foundry in London. After its delivery it was erected in a temporary belfry in 1753 but immediately cracked when rung with the clapper. Subsequent repairs allowed it to function adequately until 1846. This bell is now known as the Liberty Bell and is one of the major heritage artifacts in the United States.

Following the death of his wife in 1744, after only five years of marriage, Norris turned his attention to his library which had been begun by his father, and he began to expand its holdings by purchasing volumes from London and elsewhere. Following his death his daughters Mary and Sarah inherited the collection which remained at Fair Hill until the house was destroyed by the British during hostilities in 1777.

Part of Isaac Norris’ library, comprising 1750 volumes, was given by his daughter Mary to Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania in 1784.¹³ She had married John Dickinson (1732–1808), a prominent lawyer for whom the College had been named on its foundation in 1783 by Benjamin Rush (1745–1813). Both Dickinson and Rush were signatories of the Declaration of Independence, and Dickinson was successively President of Delaware and Pennsylvania.

Dickinson College (Figure 2) was the first college to be founded in the United States of America, which itself had been formed after the Treaty of Paris of 1783. It is the 16th oldest educational establishment in the country (fifteen others pre-date the Treaty).

4. *Compendium physicae Aristotelico-Cartesianae*

The volume owned by Ellis and then by Norris was written by Johann Heinrich Schweitzer (1644–1705) who is named and described on the title page of the book *Compendium physicae Aristotelico-Cartesianae* as *Jo. Henrici Sviceri, Philosophiae & Linguae Graecae antehac Professoris, Nunc in Patria V.D.M.* This indicates that he was a retired Professor of Philosophy and the Greek Language, who was serving as a cleric (*V.D.M.* = *Verbi Dei Minister*) in his homeland.

The Dickinson copy is a small volume measuring 3³/₄ inches wide by 6¹/₄ inches high (cover size),¹⁴ written entirely in Latin, and comprises 232 pages: 16 pages of introduction, 211 pages of the main text and a five page index, bound in brown calf with some ornamentation at the corners of the cover. The full title reads: *Compendium physicae Aristotelico-Cartesianae, in usum Tironum methodo erotematica adornatum. Cui praesigitur breve & succinctum philosophiae theoreticae theatrum.* [= *Compendium of Aristotelean and Cartesian physics, in one decorated volume laid out according to the Erothematic method. It features a short and succinct theatre of theoretical philosophy.*].

The book contains a series of short questions on various subjects which are answered in a paragraph usually no more than ten lines long printed immediately below. The range of subjects tackled include *Argentum* [Silver]; *Herba* [Herbs/Plants]; *Homo* [Man]; *Luna ejus Eclipsis* [Lunar eclipses]; *Mineralia* [Minerals]; *Planetae* [Planets]; *Plantae* [Plants]; *Stellae* [Stars]; *Sulphur* [Sulphur], and *Terra mineralis* [Earthy minerals]. It is in essence a dictionary of natural philosophy and science and would have been precisely the sort of volume that one would have expected to be contained in the library of a man with the range of research interests as had John Ellis.

Schweitzer's book was issued at least eight times in various countries. It was first published in 1685, both in Amsterdam in the Netherlands by Henricum Wetstenium (and reprinted there with corrections in 1695) and in Basel in Switzerland by J.P. Richter (and reprinted in 1691). Twice in 1687 and 1694 it was printed in London. Later editions were published in 1709 in Frankfurt am Main, Germany, and in Skara and Linköping in Sweden in 1714 and 1725 respectively.¹⁵

Publication of books in London in the late 1600s was undertaken only on the issuing of a licence. Robert Midgley (1654/5–1695),¹⁶ who was born near Leeds and educated at Cambridge, was a physician, writer, and translator who lived in London, and he assumed responsibility for issuing book licences in 1686 and for a number of years following. He issued one for Schweitzer's book on 29th December 1686. The volume was printed by John Leake (c.1660–1720), probably at his works on Jewen Street, London (which he had set up in 1687)¹⁷ on behalf of the Cambridge bookseller Edward Hall. It was the usual practice at the time that books were printed for booksellers–book publishers as we know them today didn't exist at that time. The title-pages of both London issues carry the same licence date of 29th December 1686 but different issue dates–1687 and 1694. The copy owned by John Ellis and Isaac Norris is an example of the 1687 London issue, as is a second copy also in the Norris Collection at Dickinson.¹⁸

5. Ellis—Norris link

Given Norris had died ten years before Ellis and twenty years before the dispersal by auction of the latter's library it is perhaps surprising that the book which had been owned at one time by both men should now be found in the collections at Dickinson College in the USA. One possible explanation as to how this occurred can be traced to the timing of the death of Sarah Norris in 1744 and Ellis' bankruptcy in 1760. Norris began to expand his library from the time of his berevement and certainly purchased from booksellers in London. Quite possibly Ellis decided in 1760 to dispose by sale of some, but not all, of his library at a time when his financial standing was perilous. No copy of *Compendium physicae Aristotelico-Cartesianae* was listed in the auction list¹⁹ of Dayrolles and Ellis' books in 1786 which is evidence that he had indeed sold it during his lifetime. If these assumptions are correct then one can place the acquisition of Ellis' copy of *Compendium physicae Aristotelico-Cartesianae* by Norris at some time in the six-year period preceding his death in 1766.

6. Acknowledgments

This research was commenced during my tenure as an International Visiting Scholar at Dickinson College, Pennsylvania in the latter half of 2004 and completed during a short return visit in October 2005. I am most grateful to my host Professor Marcus M. Key, Jr. for providing excellent facilities and convivial company during my visits, to Brian Whalen for logistical support, and to James Gerencser of the Special Collections Department of the Waidner-Spahr Library for allowing me to study this book and for providing the image reproduced herein. Gina Douglas, Librarian of the Linnean Society of London, kindly provided me with a copy of John Ellis's handwriting for comparative purposes. I thank Mary Spencer Jones (Natural History Museum, London) for stimulating and beneficial discussions on John Ellis and his work. I am most grateful to Vanessa, my wife, for her assistance with translations.

Notes

- 1 For authoritative information on John Ellis see J. Groner and P.F.S. Cornelius, *John Ellis* (The Boxwood Press, Pacific Grove, California, 1996) and P.F.S. Cornelius and P.A. Cornelius, 'John Ellis (c. 1710–1776)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004) from where most of the biographical information given here has been drawn.
- 2 See R.R. Rea, 'The King's Agent for West Florida', *Alabama Review* **16** (1963), 141–153; R.A. Rauschenberg, 'John Ellis, FRS: eighteenth century naturalist and royal agent to West Florida', *Notes and Records of the Royal Society* **32** (1977–8), 149–164; R.A. Rauschenberg, 'John Ellis, Royal Agent for West Florida', *Florida Historical Quarterly* **62**/1 (1983), 1–24.
- 3 J. Ellis, *An essay towards a natural history of the corallines, and other marine productions of*

- the like kind, commonly found on the coasts of Great Britain and Ireland* (A. Millar, London, 1755). Full bibliographic details of the French, Dutch and German editions are given in Groner and Cornelius, note 1, pp. 307–308 together with a listing of all Ellis' publications.
- 4 Cornelius and Cornelius, note 1.
 - 5 A.N. Ostrovsky, The parental care in cheilostome bryozoans: a historical review. In P.N. Wyse Jackson and M.E. Spencer Jones, *Annals of Bryozoology* 2 (International Bryozoology Association, Dublin, 2008), pp. 211–245 [this volume]. Ostrovsky reproduces Ellis' image of the ovicell-bearing *Bugula neritina* as his Figure 2, page 213.
 - 6 J. Ellis and D. Solander, *The natural history of many curious and uncommom zoophytes, collected from various parts of the globe by the late John Ellis, systematically arranged and described by Daniel Solander* (Benjamin White and Peter Elmsly, London, 1786), xii, 208 (11). For a detailed analysis of this work see P.F.S. Cornelius and J.W. Wells, 'Ellis & Solander's 'Zoophytes', 1786: six unpublished plates and other aspects', *Bulletin of the British Museum (Natural History)* (historical series), 16 (1988), 17–87.
 - 7 Cornelius and Cornelius, note 1.
 - 8 Groner and Cornelius, note 1, p. 51.
 - 9 James Robson, *A catalogue, of the Library of Solomon Dayrolles, Esq. Many years the British resident, at the Court of Brussels; also of John Ellis, Esq, F.R.S. Author of the Essay on Corallines, Corals and Zoophytes, and other ingenious Publications, both lately deceased. ... Which will begin to be sold cheap, this day, 1786, ... by James Robson, Bookseller* (London, 1786), pp. 271.
 - 10 D. Sox, 'Norris, Isaac (1701–1766)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004). This contains a synopsis of the life of Norris and an outline of some of his book collecting activities.
 - 11 J.W. Frost, 'Norris, Isaac (1671–1735)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004).
 - 12 F.B. Tolles, *Meeting house and counting house: the Quaker merchants of colonial Philadelphia, 1682-1763* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1948) provides information on the setting and business activities of men in Philadelphia such as Isaac Norris.
 - 13 M.E. Korey, *The books of Isaac Norris, 1701–1766, at Dickinson College* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania, 1976). An electronic listing and brief introduction to the collection is available at the website: <http://deila.dickinson.edu/norris/>.
 - 14 This book size does not correspond to the standard book sizes adopted somewhat later. The closest match indicated in various library catalogues is 12° (duodecimo).
 - 15 The location of additional copies of the book in British libraries can be found by searching the website: www.copac.ac.uk. Copies held in libraries elsewhere are listed on the website: www.worldcat.org. An electronic version can be viewed at 'Early English Books Online' (<http://eebo.chadwyck.com>).
 - 16 A. Sherbo, 'Midgley, Robert (1654/5–1695)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004).
 - 17 T. Keymer, 'Leake, James (1686–1764)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004). This contains some information about his father John Leake, the printer.
 - 18 Korey, note 13; see also the website: <http://deila.dickinson.edu/norris/>. This particular copy once belonged to an Edward Rud. This was probably the scholar Edward Rud (1677–1727), Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge and later Rector of North Runcton in Norfolk, and

brother of Thomas Rud (1667/8–1733), librarian and Headmaster successively of the grammar schools of Durham and Newcastle (see W.P. Courtney, revised A.I. Doyle, ‘Rud, Thomas (1667/8–1733)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004). The Norris collection also contains the book by Symeon of Durham, *De exordio atque procursu Dunhelmensis ecclesiae*, Thomas Bedford (ed.) (Jacobi Bettenham, London, 1732), in which is printed a text by Thomas Rud which proved the authorship of the volume (see Courtney and Doyle, above).

19 Robson, note 9.