

**Judith Curthoys**

THE CARDINAL'S COLLEGE

Christ Church, chapter and verse

416pp. Profile. £40.

978 1 84668 617 7

Every October, Christ Church, Oxford, issues first-year undergraduate matriculants with a brief history of their new home. Written by Hugh Trevor-Roper in 1950, it tells how Cardinal Wolsey's foundation of 1525 (confiscated by Henry VIII, like Hampton Court, and re-founded in 1546) went on to produce thirteen Prime Ministers, eleven Viceroy of India, and others including William Camden, John Locke, John Ruskin and Lewis Carroll.

Judith Curthoys's book is, however, the first full-length history of "the House". Many popular myths are dispelled here: there is no evidence that the Master's Garden was won in a poker game or that members were allowed to kill swans (though there was an annual swan census). New stories take their place: from the foul death of Francis Bayly, who drowned in the Peckwater privy in 1713, to the Bullingdon Club members who smashed all the windows in Peckwater Quad after a dinner in 1892, to W. H. Auden's gift of a refrigerator to the Senior Common Room in the 1950s, to ensure that his martinis were served at the correct temperature.

As college archivist, Curthoys displays an unrivalled familiarity with the records, but sometimes seems reluctant to interrogate her sources too deeply or tarnish the reputation of her subject. There is no counterbalance to Canon Stratford's character assassination of Dean Atterbury (1711–13) or any attempt to investigate from which "well-known bank" John Bull (treasurer 1832–57) withdrew the college's money when he saved it from ruin. Nor does she question whether it was merely coincidence that Henry Chadwick resigned the deanery the year before women were admitted in 1980.

Curthoys's sound intention to avoid writing a "mini-*Dictionary of National Biography*" has resulted in regrettably brief references to some of the college's best-known figures. Trevor-Roper, for instance, is described as "researching the truth behind the death of Hitler" with no mention of his later authentication of the forged Hitler Diaries.

Curthoys has written a history of the institution, its Dean, its Canons, and its Students (Fellows), in which undergraduates are rarely glimpsed. Then, perhaps as now, they were just passing through, only making their mark on the archives when they broke the rules.

MIRANDA KAUFFMAN

---

## Food Studies

**John Prescott**

TASTE MATTERS

Why we like the foods we do

224pp. Reaktion. £20.

978 1 86189 914 9

In *Taste Matters* John Prescott, an Australian food scientist, explores why it is that we like certain foods and not others, why something found to be delicious by one person can be disgusting to another. We are all born, however, liking sweet tastes; sweet

foods generally supply energy, which a growing baby needs (mothers' milk is very sweet). By contrast, our desire for salt varies as a function of our physiological state; we crave salty foods, and the essential minerals signified by their taste, whenever our bodies need them. Sourness and carbonation, on the other hand, are acquired tastes, probably suggesting the consumption of certain overripe foodstuffs in our evolutionary past. A liking for bitterness is also acquired, perhaps counter-instinctively with many bitter foods being poisonous.

As we grow up, we often learn to appreciate these foods because of the rewards linked to their consumption – be it the alcohol in a bitter-tasting beer, or the caffeine in coffee. Peer pressure is also a driver of our likes and dislikes as are our differing responses to novelty, some pursuing new culinary experiences, while others eschew them. Our genetic make-up, Prescott argues, plays a part in all this. Around a quarter of the population are "supertasters", born with as many as sixteen times more taste buds than "non-tasters". Part of the reason why we don't all like the same foods is because we live in different taste worlds, and knowing this matters: non-tasters, for example, are more likely to be obese, preferring fatty foods, while supertasters are unlikely to enjoy their greens (Brussels sprouts will taste especially bitter).

John Prescott guides the reader through the latest research in this complex emergent field. His style is entertaining and confident, with technical language kept to a minimum. *Taste Matters* should satisfy the cravings of anyone, from the scholar wanting to get a handle on the latest findings to the parent wanting to know why their children won't eat their vegetables.

CHARLES SPENCE

---

## Religion

**Thomas de Wesselow**

THE SIGN

The Shroud of Turin and the secret of the resurrection

448pp. Viking. £20.

978 0 670 92187 4

Thomas de Wesselow argues that the rise of Christianity is only explicable because Jesus's followers believed in his resurrection, and he considers that the Shroud of Turin, which he seeks to show is the authentic shroud of Christ, played a key role in promoting that belief.

De Wesselow interprets the events on Easter Day, which underlie the New Testament accounts of Christ's resurrection, as follows. When the women went to the tomb and unwrapped Christ's body to prepare it for burial, they found the image of the crucified Jesus on his shroud. His followers took this as evidence that although his body remained in the tomb, he was spiritually alive and now had what St Paul describes as "a spiritual body". De Wesselow commends this explanation because it makes it possible for "the birth of Christianity to be integrated . . . into a purely secular history of the world". The difficulty is that the New Testament accounts were written to describe a supernatural event – the appearance of Christ to his followers after he had risen from the dead – and they

do not easily lend themselves to a secular interpretation.

The Turin Shroud was first attested at Lirey near Troyes in 1356. Its earlier history is not known, but de Wesselow, like some previous writers, identifies it with the Mandylion of Edessa, though historians of late antiquity such as Averil Cameron have convincingly argued that the Mandylion was not a shroud, but only a linen cloth bearing the image of Christ's face. The carbon-dating analysis of 1988, which de Wesselow rejects, assigned a date of 1260–1390 to the shroud. Although knowledge of the historical pedigree of the shroud is not essential to establishing its authenticity, it would be very difficult to demonstrate that the shroud was authentic using scientific criteria alone, because even if the linen proved to be of the right date, Jesus was only one of many men to be tortured and crucified by the Roman authorities.

BERNARD HAMILTON

---

## Film

**David Parkinson**

100 IDEAS THAT CHANGED FILM

216pp. Laurence King. Paperback, £18.99.

978 1 85669 793 4

The title of David Parkinson's book is unattractive. It sounds too broad; for many readers, range of enquiry seems untrustworthy. It seems unrealistic to expect an expansive study to be a detailed one; authority and gravity are more readily associated with specifics. But what Parkinson has achieved is the opposite of what the title suggests; *100 Ideas that Changed Film* is a gratifyingly ambitious history that is both panoramic and sharply focused, technical but engaging, and as fluent and readable as a whole as it is valuable for reference.

Of the hundred ideas that Parkinson has selected and arranged chronologically, some were devised to solve technical or commercial problems (for example, the block-booking of films or the adaptation of non-cinematic sources), others to expand aesthetic or dramatic parameters (montage, zoom and match shots). Still more emerged not from individual minds like Thomas Edison (inventor of the Kinetoscope) or Alexandre Promio (who, by placing a camera in a Venetian gondola in 1896, became the first exponent of the tracking shot), but whose significance has been realized gradually or retrospectively by film culture: concepts such as the studio system, propaganda or censorship.

There are sections on the obvious but necessary (Auteur Theory, sound, blockbusters) alongside the less ubiquitous: sections on dubbing, method acting and fan magazines are fascinating in themselves as well as for their broader relevance. Ideas never seem isolated from the whole, and each is explained with a concise lucidity that nevertheless allows for occasional, illuminating digression or anecdote. There are only a couple of odd decisions. Film Noir and Blaxploitation have their own sections, the Western does not, while the Latham Loop, a small loop of slack in the celluloid running through cameras and projectors that not only allowed much longer reels of film to be recorded and played but, thanks to patent disputes on the East Coast, also drove much of film's early

migration to California, surely warranted its own passage.

JULIAN WILLIAMS

---

## Bibliography

**Joseph R. Hacker and Adam Shear, editors**

THE HEBREW BOOK IN EARLY MODERN ITALY

336pp. University of Pennsylvania Press.

\$69.95; distributed in the UK by NBN.

£45.50.

978 0 8122 4352 9

This compact yet intellectually expansive book beautifully illuminates the many overlapping worlds of the production of – and, crucially, the reaction to – Hebrew books in early modern Italy. The period covered is expansive as well, some 300 years during which the production and reception of books reveals much about both continuity and innovation in Jewish history. And Italy was the *fons* (if not, technically, the *origo*, which distinction belongs to Spain) of Jewish print culture, home to the first dated Hebrew book as well as the first book printed in the lifetime of its author.

The essays assembled here address production and reception history in compelling ways, effectively piecing together the history of the Hebrew book via the intersections of historical, bibliographical and literary scholarship. They demonstrate the impact of print technologies on both the life of the mind and the life on the street of Jewish societies in early modernity.

The collection highlights the relationships between Jewish and Christian promulgators of print culture. Christians, for the most part, controlled print technology and censored texts, but Jews provided and corrected the texts to be printed. They could even collaborate with sympathetic Christians in order to prevent the ravaging of texts by the censors. The authors cumulatively demonstrate the ways in which in imposing particular restrictions and requirements on Jewish print culture, Christians actively shaped it, simultaneously transforming the wider Jewish culture that depended so crucially on books. This is a new and very interesting take on the mechanism of Jewish cultural transformation.

Some pieces discuss the paratextual evidence for the commission and the censorship of manuscripts in the age of print, inviting comparison with parallel paratexts. Others describe the fascinating relationship between censorship and scholarship (censors, though they were what we might term "hostile witnesses", were also, in some cases, accomplished Hebraists). Others expose the manner in which the choices of editors and new Christian "bookmen" – artisan-intellectuals such as Daniel Bomberg – actively determined the canon of interpretive "classics" thereafter available to Jewish audiences.

The editors of this volume succeed handsomely in offering "a synthesis between the history of the book and Jewish social and cultural history". This is a collection in which each essay is a labour of love, and in which one is struck by each scholar's deep interest and erudition. It is worthy of the stunning books it discusses, and of the deeply invested Jews and Christians who produced and used them.

MARC MICHAEL EPSTEIN