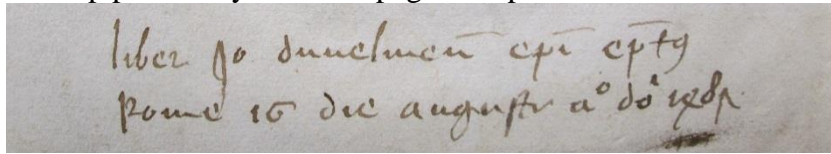


On the art of building

There are many treasures in the College's library collection. Created by donation and bequest, ours is a library of libraries. These individual collections reflect the intellectual interests and collecting fancies of Corpus' founder, Richard Fox, and its presidents and fellows as they contributed to our collection.

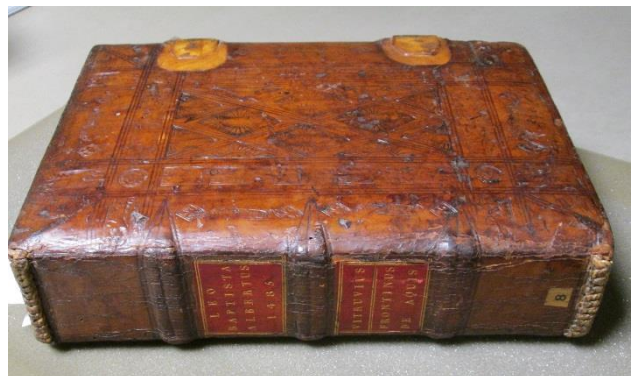
The core of the Founder's gift is a collection of printed books, bought mainly in Rome in the late fifteenth century by Fox's predecessor as bishop of Durham, John Shirwood. These titles reflect Shirwood's main interests in classics (especially Cicero) and history, along with some poetry and, as befits a bishop, a little theology. Preserved at Corpus for half a millennium, it is a collection of books bought and read by an English bishop just as printing enabled the development of extensive personal libraries.

These Corpus copies are also essential for book historians. Shirwood wrote his name, and the date and place of purchase, in his books. Incunabula (texts printed before 1500) lack the publication data we take for granted today. Shirwood's purchase date therefore often provides a *terminus ante quem* for particular editions. This provenance information also confirms a clear line of ownership practically since the pages left printers.



One highlight of Fox's donation is a beautiful blind leather stamped volume, shelfmark phi.F.5.4, containing three texts on architecture printed in the 1480s. These three titles, bought by Shirwood in Rome on 16 August 1487, reflect the emergence of the new renaissance learning, and its foundations in antiquity. Classical works are represented here by a first century AD report on the aqueducts of Rome, Frontinus' *De aquis que in urbem influunt*, (printed at Rome before 16 Aug. 1487); and the first print edition of Vitruvius', *De architectura*, (printed at Rome between 1486 and 16 Aug. 1487).

The first work bound in this volume is the earliest treatise on architecture of the Italian Renaissance, Leon Battista Alberti's, *De re aedificatoria* (printed at Florence, 1485). Alberti was a true renaissance man. A humanist and accomplished classicist with interests in art, architecture, engineering, mathematics, music, grammar, moral philosophy, surveying, astronomy and cryptography, he might even have given the average Corpus undergraduate a run for his or her money. Alberti enjoyed exploring the use of mathematical principles to serve the arts and sciences. His 1435 treatise *Della pittura* [*On painting*] introduced the science of perspective for the representation of three-dimensional images in two-dimensional form.



Medieval architects were master craftsmen who learned through experience. Through *De re aedificatoria*, Alberti established a professional role for the architect in society. For him, the architect should be able to apply disciplined theory and method to practical work. He should organise material and events to satisfy social requirements and, if successful, create beauty. Alberti felt that buildings should be stout, strong, functional, and delightful to the eye; beauty would come from the harmonious combination of each part into a single whole. The architect's beautiful designs should have a direct positive impact on society. Alberti's treatise offered guidance to the patrons of projects, elevating the status of architecture to an art.

Alberti's work had been prompted in the 1430s by his patron's suggestion that he should restore Vitruvius' *De architectura* (the second text bound in this volume). Unable to agree with all Vitruvius' theories, and even some of his definitions, Alberti studied further ancient texts, including works by Plato and Aristotle. Alberti stressed the use of mathematics and observation in architectural practice. He studied the ruins in Rome and geometric forms in nature. His treatise exploring the duty of the architect was completed by 1452, and the first printed edition appeared in 1485.

Alberti's text, and its author, is the new learning brought to life: a study of ancient texts for a new era; its author a scholar who studied and theorised, but who also made practical use of his ideas. A staple text until the eighteenth century, *De re aedificatoria* was translated into Italian, Spanish, French and English. Some readers will perhaps remember seeing the Corpus' copy of *De re aedificatoria* in 2009 when was featured in an edition of Channel 4's *Time Team*. The programme explored the work's influence on the design of Henry VIII's palaces, another example of its wider impact.

Like the buildings that Alberti envisaged, this composite volume's significance is much greater than its historically important parts. Given by the College's founder, it exemplifies the commitment of both Fox and his college to the new learning. Featured in a twenty-first century television programme, it demonstrates the importance of Corpus' continuing commitment to the preservation of its treasures for the benefit of its own members and of society generally. Preserved by the Library since the College's earliest days, it gives Corpuscles of all generations a tangible link to their founder and the many generations who have understood the need to preserve a heritage which was theirs and is now ours. In sum, the book is not only a beautiful object, but a significant resource for historians and a key element in the College's identity.

Joanna Snelling
Librarian

