

Michael Hunter, *The Boyle Papers: Understanding the Manuscripts of Robert Boyle*. With contributions by Edward B. Davis, Harriet Knight, Charles Littleton and Lawrence M. Principe. Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007. Pp. xiii + 674. US\$139.95/£70.00 HB.

The publication by Michael Hunter of this revised edition of the catalogue of the Boyle Papers contributes admirably to the renaissance in Boyle studies which has taken place over the past decade and a half. Robert Boyle (1627–91), arguably the most influential British scientist of the late seventeenth century, was a pioneering experimenter, profound thinker, and figure-head of the new science in its early years of development. This volume brings together the materials necessary for understanding the Boyle archive, one of the most important archives from this period, which has been at the Royal Society since 1769. It was not until the 1980s that this archive began to be explored with the intent to make its contents more readily available to researchers. Since then it has been closely scrutinized and its contents have contributed to the publication of the definitive editions of Boyle's *Works* (14 volumes, 1999–2000) and *Correspondence* (6 volumes, 2001), both published by Pickering & Chatto. This volume includes a completely revised version of the catalogue of the *Boyle Papers, Letters and ancillary manuscripts*, which takes up more than half of the present volume, and is based on the catalogue of the archive published for the first time in 1992 by University Publications of America. This archive is comprised of forty-six volumes of the *Boyle Papers*, a series of thirty-one separately bound manuscripts, and seven guard books of Boyle's correspondence. The archive contains manuscript material collected by Boyle on a broad range of ideas and topics. The material is classified under the headings Theology, Philosophy, Science, Physiology, and Miscellaneous. Included are notes on experiments, drafts of published treatises, unpublished writings, writing fragments, juvenilia, Latin translations, and much more. A high proportion of the archive comprises manuscript material overlapping with Boyle's published writings. Only where the manuscript version has material not included in the published text is it transcribed in full. While the catalogue tabulates all of this detail, for a substantial part of the archive it redirects readers to the edition of Boyle's *Works* for its elucidation. What the catalogue does therefore is identify those sections of the archive comprised of as yet unpublished material of Boyle's. It is this material that has received the bulk of attention in terms of publishing activity over the past decade. The revised version of the catalogue of the *Boyle Papers* has been necessary because its initial publication in 1992 led to extensive work being carried out on the archive. This included identifying new material and linking it with Boyle's published works, and, where appropriate, publishing it. The new version of the catalogue offers the definitive guide to all sections of the collection and its content.

Chapter 1 of the volume is a revised version of the introduction which accompanied the 1992 version of the catalogue. It opens with a brief account of Boyle's life and writings, together with a summary of modern writings on him, and a discussion of the history of the archive. The next section deals with dating the core section of the archive, the Boyle Papers, by means of the analysis of the different handwritings to be found within the archive. The miscellaneous content of the collection, some sections of which were randomly ordered, lacked any specific indication of the dates when the material was written. Handwriting analysis made it possible to chronologically order this material, allowing not only its more

effective use, but also the allocation of distinct phases in Boyle's intellectual development. The remainder of this chapter details the content of the archive, which includes both material of Boyle's and material by others, and outlines the main holdings of Boyle manuscript material in other repositories, or what little there is. Chapter 2 assesses the degree of manuscript material left by Boyle at his death in 1691 that has not survived. This chapter, written in conjunction with Lawrence M. Principe and originally published in *Annals of Science* in 2003, gauges the scale and attempts to identify these losses. Chapter 3 presents a specific component of the archive which is referred to as Boyle's 'workdiaries'. The term, which was not used by Boyle, has been coined by combining Boyle's description of certain of them as 'diaries', with the usage of his contemporary, Huygens, who bequeathed to posterity a series of 'work- books'. The 'workdiaries' are comprised of Boyle's own records and notes on his experiments and observations, and on data given to him by others. These documents were until recently unknown, largely because they were scattered so widely and randomly through the Boyle Papers. In fact they were spread through over 20 separate volumes of the Boyle Papers, in no significant order. They have now been reassembled and transcribed in full as Boyle's 'workdiaries', including a key to Boyle's references to his own works. This chapter is written in conjunction with Charles Littleton and originally published in *Notes and Records of the Royal Society* in 2001, and it gives an account both of the nature and content of this source, and of the history of the project for making it available online. *The Workdiaries of Robert Boyle*, Michael Hunter and Charles Littleton (eds.), are available on the website of the *Centre for Editing Lives and Letters* at <<http://www.livesandletters.ac.uk/wd>>. Chapter 4 offers an account of an ambitious project by Boyle to make available the profuse data that he had accumulated in the workdiaries and comparable compilations. He gave this project the appropriate title *Paralipomena*. This chapter, which is written in conjunction with Charles Littleton and Harriet Knight, offers an assessment of Boyle's objectives in *Paralipomena* and the extent to which he succeeded in realising them. Chapter 5, the last chapter in the volume before the catalogue, demonstrates how to put the material from the Boyle archive to good use. It examines Boyle's characteristic method of composition of his manuscripts, which involved largely dictation, and assesses the effect this had on the structure and presentation of his writings. It then applies these findings to Boyle's *Free Enquiry into the Vulgarly Receiv'd Notion of Nature* (1686). The result being that the various sections of the work, both published and unpublished, are more precisely contextualised in relation to the specific intellectual debates of his day than before. This study presents itself as emblematic of the kind of exploitation of the Boyle archive that is now possible since it has been opened up to proper scrutiny.

In addition to being made available in this volume, the revised catalogue of the *Boyle Papers* is now available online. It has been uploaded into the CALM database used for *The Royal Society's* archive as a whole, which means that it is fully searchable. An interface to the database is available online on the website of *The Royal Society* (www.royalsociety.ac.uk/library); it is also available through *Access to Archives* (www.a2a.org.uk).

The publication of this volume is just one component of a broader project, entitled 'Robert Boyle for the twenty-first century', which is a joint initiative between *Birkbeck* (University of London), *The Royal Society* and *Access to Archives*. The other two components of this

initiative include the creation of digitized images of the entire content of the core volumes of the Boyle Papers and the publication of these on the World Wide Web, some as illustrations to the updated edition of the workdiaries; and the provision of introductory material on Boyle aimed at schools on the Boyle web-site at Birkbeck.

This new edition makes a major contribution to the resources available to historians of science and other scholars interested in Boyle and in early modern thought, and serves to encourage scholars to investigate Boyle's unpublished work far more thoroughly than they have done to date.

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