Introduction

Here’s Miscellanies in this Book compris’d
of Theologie, Law, History, Epitomis’d:
and various Subjects gather’d, some Devis’d;
by the Compiler, both in Prose, and verse,
which he did sometimes write: sometimes Reherse:
O what a pleasure tis, and Sweet Delight,
to read, to Contemplate, and sometimes write.¹

Peter Beal, from whose essay ‘Notions in Garrison’ I have taken that verse, went on to say that Saffin’s commonplace book (the source of his quotation) and others like it were ‘not merely ephemeral productions but were seriously valued by their owners, regarded as monuments to their own personal taste and learning and bequeathed to others as sources of both pleasure and usefulness’.²

Beal was speaking of commonplace books, which are a special case of the manuscript miscellany, tending as they do towards instruction, moral and factual, and away from the merely frivolous, and having in general some systematic organisation of their contents.³ But the true miscellany, scattered and disorganised, mixing the serious and the trivial, is just as much a monument to its compiler’s taste and learning, and a source of both pleasure and usefulness. John Donne wrote of

² Ibid., p. 3.
³ This definition of ‘commonplace book’ follows broadly the description given in Peter Beal, A Dictionary of English Manuscript Terminology, 1450–2000 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 82. The later use that he describes, for ‘a jumble of snippets [...] in no particular order’ (p. 83), is to be deplored.
The Burley manuscript

... those lerned papers which your hand
hath stord with notes of use & pleasure to
from which safe tresury you may command
fitt matter whether you will write or do.

As Victoria Burke remarks, the 'men and women who compiled miscellanies [produced] a type of writing which can give us insight into what they read, what they chose to record from their reading, how they recorded it – in short, how they participated in their culture'.

If miscellanies reflected the cultural participation of their owners, it is not surprising that their contents are indeed truly 'miscellaneous'; there was, says H. R. Woudhuysen,

no strict division between what might or might not be included: the private collector could copy his or her own compositions, or material from printed books or from other manuscript sources. While some texts were habitually copied together or in groups, private miscellanies were precisely that, and might mix genres and types of writing quite indiscriminately; prose, verse, sermons, even drama could appear in the same book as business accounts, medical recipes, or notes on farming.

Woudhuysen goes on to note that 'material from printed books was copied for a variety of reasons, and that these reasons might be 'more or less admirable': on the one hand making part of a bulky book portable, or preserving a rare or suppressed work or on the other hand presenting as one's own a work by another. He might have added, as we shall see, that the same variation in moral standards holds for material copied from manuscript sources: not all of it, in Burley's case, seems to have been freely given or exchanged by another manuscript collector, or to have been remembered or composed by the compiler.

Woudhuysen there endorses an emphasis already placed by Steven May on the great variety of entries in such collections:

A Tudor gentleman's private manuscript might also contain censored religious and political satires, unprintable verse slander of well known public figures, scripts of plays [...] and specimens of the compiler's own poetry and correspondence. Along with lyric poetry, hand copies of poetic epitaphs, riddles, moral maxims, panegyrics and epigrams circulated widely. Prose speeches, by the Queen, members of Parliament, or such condemned

favourites as Essex and Ralegh were very popular, as were sermons, decent and indecent jokes, and narrative accounts of almost any public ceremony [...] This enormous volume of privately transcribed works remains largely unstudied in the extant manuscripts, yet it represents a vast literary substratum with much to add to the corpus of Renaissance English Literature, and much to reveal about the tastes and thinking of the age.7

Beal, Burke, Woudhuysen, May, and many others are not wrong to speak as they do of the manuscript miscellany as if it were something like a ‘cabinet of curiosities’, a collection to be resorted to (and perhaps gloated over) when reduced to one’s own company or when wishing to interest or impress friends. But the manuscripts themselves were more than mere reflections of a culture: they were part of it. Despite the developments in printing since the fifteenth century, early modern society – and specifically the society of the apparent period of Burley’s compilation, 1597–1641 – was a society still operating in a culture of manuscripts. State papers and speeches, declarations of love and of loyalty, libels and lyrics, accusations and confessions, all were committed to manuscript, copied for safety, and reproduced and circulated in manuscript for reasons edifying and base. Manuscripts mattered; the manuscript letter was the only way of communicating with someone with whom one could not come face-to-face (and, given the difficulty of travel, that meant anyone more than a few miles away). The manuscript poem was, perhaps because of what J. W. Saunders, in a famous phrase, calls ‘the stigma of print’,8 for many poets the principal means of publication of their work. (I say ‘perhaps’, recognising Steven May’s carefully researched and witty demolition of the notion of the ‘stigma of print’ as a social or moral norm).9 It remains true that, for whatever reason, very few of the poems in the Burley manuscript were printed in their authors’ lifetimes, and that some, indeed, are printed for the first time here. Together with word of mouth, manuscripts were the usual way of transmitting news, and – *littera scripta manet* – the way in which news became record. It is small wonder that the care, copying, and collection of such important artefacts were so significant in the culture of the literate classes.

This significance may be illustrated by an anecdote. In the early summer of 1620, Sir Henry Wotton was at Court at Greenwich, gathering members for his forthcoming embassy to Vienna and other European

capitals. While there, he composed a lyric to the Queen of Bohemia, that court being one of his destinations. 10 Encountering Sir Henry Mainwaring, who was about to journey to Dover, where he was Lieutenant, Wotton asked him to carry a copy to his sister-in-law, Lady Wotton, who lived at St Augustine’s Priory in Canterbury, 11 a hospitable stopping point for the bearer. Mainwaring took an additional copy, and sent it as a dutiful gift to his employer and patron, Lord Zouche, Warden of the Cinque Ports. So, amid the bustle of a busy court with a major project in preparation, the project leader found time to copy out the poem, an administrator whose duties called him seventy miles away made a further copy or copies, and thus began the ‘care, copying and collection’ that resulted in so many copies of this lyric being inscribed in manuscripts of the period that more than seventy survive today. 12

Such copying was valued by the authors themselves. In his ‘Epigram to my Muse, the Lady Digby, on her Husband, Sir Kenelme Digby’, 13 Jonson wrote:

O! what a fame ’t will be?
What reputation to my lines, and me,
When hee shall read them at the Treasurers bord,
The knowing Weston, and that learned Lord
Allowes them? Then, what copies shall be had,
What transcripts begg’d? how cry’d up, and how glad,
Wilt thou be, Muse, when this shall them befall?
Being sent to one, they will be read of all.

(25–32)

Harold Love distinguishes three types of scribal publication: author publication, entrepreneurial publication (the copying of manuscripts for sale) and user publication, ‘the vast field of non-commercial replication whose most durable outcome was the personal miscellany or volume of “collections”’. 14 In the example above, the copy sent to Lady Wotton was clearly of the first type, and that sent to Zouche of the third – unless

10 Item 543, and see also the commentary in section 10.2, pp. 364–365.
11 The Wottons also had a family seat at Boughton Malherbe, Kent, a little off the direct route to Dover. Mainwaring, though, had visited their Canterbury home in March that year (S.P. Dom. 14/113, f. 85), and it is likely that this is where he brought the poem in June.
one chooses to regard Mainwaring’s use of it to discharge his obligation to make a gift to his patron as entrepreneurial. Most of the contents of Burley seem to be of this third type, although the text of this particular lyric may not be: it might have been dictated by the author to his acquaintance and sometime secretary, William Parkhurst, and thus be of the first.

Before discussing the reasons why Burley, of all manuscript miscellanies, is so fascinating and rewarding a collection for study, it is worth noting that the term ‘manuscript miscellany’ is used by modern commentators in two senses: some (like Love in the work just quoted) mean ‘verse miscellany’, a collection of verse not wholly devoted to the work of a single author, and some (like Beal in the work from which my opening quotation was taken) mean the term more generally, to refer to collections that, while they may and usually do contain verse, include also copies of other material such as letters, narratives of events, apopthegms, speeches, or official documents. Burley is a collection of the latter sort, and the term ‘manuscript miscellany’ is used here to denote this kind, ‘verse miscellany’ being used for the other.

Burley’s interest lies first in its unusually large size (312 folios, mostly filled on recto and verso) and – as will be seen in Chapter 3 – its great range of material. Its size, though unusual, is not unique: Robert Commaundre’s commonplace book (BL MS Egerton 2642), compiled in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, has 393 folios, and the Starkey Transcripts (BL MS Add. 4149), of the early seventeenth century, has 349. Commaundre’s book, however, has less variety than Burley, its material – apart from verse – being mostly heraldic and historical, and the Starkey Transcripts are even less miscellaneous, being entirely of state papers and political tracts, mostly relating to royal marriages. As well, Burley has a great many entries, particularly among the letters and poems (which form more than half the contents and are the major topics of this study) that have not been found in other collections. Moreover, few of the items have any authorial attribution, or a date (either of the original artefact or the Burley copy), or any ostensible indication of who did the copying. As Arthur F. Marotti remarks: ‘The manuscript system was far less author-centred than print culture, and not at all interested in correcting, perfecting or fixing texts in authorially sanctioned forms.’

15 Love, *Culture and Commerce*, for example on pp. 4 and 5.
16 Beal, ‘Notions in Garrison’, for example on p. 142.
17 The codex contains 373 folios, but 61 of these are blank.
Some of the omitted names and dates can be repaired by the student, with degrees of certainty ranging from absolute to wild guess but, when we seek, in D. F. McKenzie’s phrase, ‘to recover, from the physical evidence of a text, its significance for all those who first made it’, we are working not with McKenzie’s brilliantly clear view of the text as ‘a locatable, describable, attributable, datable and explicable object’ but with an incomplete view, uncertainly illuminated.¹⁹

Writing of the transmission and compilation of manuscripts, Marotti observes that this whole field of investigation is vast, complex, and full of undiscovered riches. It is clear also that the history of manuscript transmission should be incorporated in a more systematic way into the histories we continue to write about the literature of the early modern period and the texts we find in this nonprint environment should be taken more seriously.²⁰

This book was prompted by, and is intended to bring to light, the ‘vastness, complexity and undiscovered riches’ of one miscellany, the Burley manuscript. It may, too, offer some pointers towards the ‘systematic incorporation’ of such texts into the work of students of literature and social history.