Nulla Dies Sine Linea
‘Not a Day without a Line’

A prolific transcriber of manuscripts, documents and deeds:
Thomas Wilson of Leeds, 18th-century Antiquarian & Schoolmaster.

CATALOGUE OF WORKS
Thomas Wilson F. S. A. (c. 1702-1761)

Little is known for certain of the life of Thomas Wilson, Leeds Schoolmaster and Antiquarian. Thought to have been born around 1702 in Wragby, near Pontefract, Wilson's first recorded appearance in the Leeds area was his marriage to Martha Ingham in 1727 at St. Mary’s Church in Beeston; a year later Wilson is reported to have purchased a house in Leeds itself. Thomas and Martha are known to have had at least one child: Joseph, later a bookseller based on Kirkgate.

It is not known exactly when Wilson began teaching. However, in 1728, Wilson persuaded his ‘most intimate companion’ Thomas Kitching, dying tragically young of consumption, to bequeath two houses to the Leeds Charity School. Wilson is recorded in documents as the Master of the Leeds Charity Lower School from 1731; in 1750, he was appointed Master of both the Lower and Upper Schools on the death of the former Master, John Lucas.

It is his Antiquarian work, however, that best recommends Wilson to posterity. While this work is now little known, it was esteemed enough in his own time that Wilson was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London in 1750. Such work included transcriptions of manuscripts, deeds and documents of all kinds, including the Chartularium Kirkstallense (Charters relating to Kirkstall Abbey), the Domesday Book for the County of York, the 1610 Survey of the Manor Leeds, and a thorough annotation of Ralph Thoresby’s Ducatus Leodiensis.

Wilson was likely a deeply religious man, working as the Parish Clerk at St. Peter’s, Leeds from 1735 to 1749, where he recorded baptisms, marriages and burials, as well as annotating significant entries in previous registers. It was to the Almighty, in fact, that Wilson attributed his Antiquarian interests and abilities, writing that “It pleased God to implant in me a Genius truly historical”.

Working tirelessly and diligently at these educational and scholarly pursuits - adopting the Latin Nulla Dies Sine Linea (‘Not a Day without a Line’) as his motto - Wilson talks of suffering from ill health in the 1750s, quite possibly an early manifestation of the fever from which he would die in 1761. He is buried in the cemetery of St. John’s Church, near to the Charity School where he once worked so selflessly for the people of Leeds.
Manuscripts and Papers
Written, Transcribed and Annotated by Thomas Wilson, F.S.A.

Leeds Public Library. Email: informationandresearch@leeds.gov.uk

- Chartularium Kirkstallense. or a Collection of Papal, Royal and private grants to Kirkstall Abbey in the Parish of Leedes transcribed by Thomas Wilson
- Liber judiciarius : or, Dooms-Day-Book, being a survey of the county of York; taken by order of William the Conqueror, Anno Dom. MLXXII. Transcribed by Thomas Wilson.
- The First and Second Decree for settling the Committee of Pious Uses in Leedes. Transcribed by Thomas Wilson.
- Thoresby’s Ducatus Leodiensis: or, The Topography of the Ancient and Populous Town and Parish of Leeds. Pub. 1715. Also known as ‘The Annotated Ducatis,’ this copy was owned and heavily annotated by Thomas Wilson.
- Missale ad usum Cistercienci ordinis per que da eiusdem ordinis monachu studiosissime correctu, etc. Printed in Paris 1516. Annotated by Thomas Wilson.

The Leeds Library. Email: counter@theleedslibrary.org.uk

- Chartularium Melsense, a collection of Papal Bulls, Royal and Private Benefactions to the Abbey of Meaux, in the East Riding, Ex Bibliotheca Thorntonianæ, folio, 1746.
- The English Historian and Antiquary’s Register, containing an account of all the English Historians and their Works, manuscript and printed, also of Foreign Historians that have written of English affairs, 2 vols., folio.
- Familiæ Lancastienses, or Genealogical Descents of the Nobility and Gentry of Lancashire, from Original Records in several hands, and the MSS. Of Sir John Byron, Sir G. Booth, Mr. J. Hopkinson, R. Thornton, Esq., Ralph Thoresby, and John Lucas, folio.
- Liber Judiciarius, or Domesday Book, for the County of York, folio.
- Pedigrees and Arms of the Yorkshire Families, from the MSS of Jno. Hopkinson, gent., corrected by Mr Wilson, 4 vols., folio. (West Riding, 2 vols., North Riding, 1 vol., East Riding, 1 vol.)
- Sharp’s (Abp.) Historical account of the Silver and Gold Coins in England, Scotland and Ireland, with account of his Life, by Mr. Wilson, 4to.
Grammar School at Leeds Archives. Email: alumni@gsal.org.uk

- Catalogue of Gentry, Barons, Knights of the Shire, and an Alphabet of Surnames ending in Son by R. Glover. Plus other MSS transcribed from the originals by Thos. Wilson, S.S.A.
- Collectanea, vel compotus Feodorum in honore Pontefracti: ab anno 1274 ad annum 1545 im. per Ricardo Barnard. transcribed T. Wilson, 1757
- A survey of the Manors of Leedes and Leeds-mainriding, taken anno dom. 1610. With addenda of Several Papers purchased among the collections of Mr. R. Thoresby, by T. Wilson, 1740.
- A Short Memorial of the Northern Actions during the War there from 1642 to 1644 by Thom, Lord Fairfax transcribed from the Originals by Thomas Wilson.
- The Letters Patents of King Charles II for the Incorporating the Town of Leedes in the County of York. Transcribed from the Original.
- A survey of Cumberland and Westmoreland by Daniel Fleming, taken in the year 1671, (by Thos. Wilson, 1735,) in 8vo.
- The Memorials of Thomas Lord Fairfax. Also the journal of Brian Fairfax. Collected by T. Wilson, F.S.A., quarto.
- A short account of the Foundation and Dignities of the Cathedral Church of St Peter, in York, by Wm. Pearson, D.D., with an account of the sale of the Archbishop’s Manors during the Usurpation of Oliver Cromwell, by T. Wilson, F.S.A.

Brotherton Library. Email: specialcollections@library.leeds.ac.uk

- MS 723. Miscellanea Pontefracti collected from records and manuscripts by Thomas Wilson of Leeds.

York Minster Library. Email: library@yorkminster.org

- The Diary and Journal of his Grace Toby Matthew, Lord Archbishop of York, from 3rd September, 1583, to the 23rd Sunday after Trin. 1622. transcribed from the original MS. in the library at Bishopthorp. With additions by Thomas Wilson.

British Library. Email: mss@bl.uk

- British Library MS Additional 33770. The Examinations & Confessions of the Persons concerned in the noted Plot at Farnely Wood in the Parish of Leedes and County of York; with Historical Remarks by Tho. Wilson.
West Yorkshire Archive Service – Morley. Email: leeds@wyjs.org.uk

- Thomas Wilson, Leeds, antiquarian papers. Re John Harrison, copies of Leeds Borough Charters, Leeds Pious Uses Committee and other charities. WYL160/204
- Leeds St Peter’s Parish Registers. 1735-1749. Registers written by Thomas Wilson, including annotations of earlier entries.

Houghton Library, Harvard University. Email: houghref@fas.harvard.edu


Beinecke Library, Yale University. Email: beinecke.library@yale.edu

- Thomas Hearne’s A Vindication of Those Who Take the Oath Of Allegiance (1731). At the back of this copy Wilson has written, following a complete copy of Hearne’s will, notes on Hearne’s character as an antiquary, long passages from the testament of Richard Rawlinson, and comments concerning Rawlinson’s and his own collections.

John Rylands Library, Manchester. Email: uml.special-collections@manchester.ac.uk


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There is little doubt that Wilson was responsible for producing more items than are listed here. Evidence for two of ‘the lost items’ is to be found in A Catalogue of the Library collected by Miss Richardson Currer, at Eshton Hall, Craven, Yorkshire, 1833.

- An Account of all the Charters, Patents and Escheat Rolls in the Archives of the Tower of London; collected by John Burton, M. D. 1746; with compleat indexes of persons and places. Transcribed by Thomas Wilson. M.DCC.XLVII.
- Adversaria, in MS, by Thomas Wilson of Leeds, Collectiones ad Historiam famosissimi Coenobii Glastoniensis concinnandum etc.

The catalogue also suggests Thomas Wilson annotated a manuscript copy of Sharp’s Historical Account of the Silver and Gold Coins etc. This is possibly the MS that Wilson made his own copy from. Here Wilson also annotates a copy of Humfrey Lhuyd’s Breviary of Britayne.

Further evidence is given by Wilson himself. In his letters to Richard Richardson, both father and son, he alludes to a number of manuscripts that he has transcribed, of which —as yet— there is no trace.
Further Sources for Wilson

Along with the material featured in this catalogue, Wilson was also responsible for annotating a copy of Ralph Thoresby’s *Ducatus Leodiensis*, now held at the Central Library. You can read more about these marginalia on our blog: secretlibraryleeds.net/treasures/ducatus-leodiensis

A note made by Wilson on a 16th-century Cistercian Missal, also now held at the Central Library, has allowed researchers to trace the provenance of this liturgical book to the pre-Dissolution Library of Kirkstall Abbey. Read more about this fascinating story: secretlibraryleeds.net/treasures/cistercian-missal

Contact us:

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Located in the Information and Research Library of Leeds Central Library, the Special Collections department boasts a wealth of rare books and items dating from the fifteenth century until the present day. The collection includes over 17,000 items.

To access any of the special items at the Leeds Central Library we would generally require at least 24 hours’ notice, one form of identification and also proof of address, i.e. a bill, bank statement or an official letter.