



The Boyle Papers: Understanding the Manuscripts of Robert Boyle

By Michael Hunter



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Robert Boyle (1627-91) was the most influential British scientist of the late seventeenth century. His huge archive, which has been at the Royal Society since 1769, has only recently been explored, leading to a new understanding of many aspects of Boyle's thought. This volume brings together the essential materials for understanding the Boyle Papers. It includes a revised version of Michael Hunter's fundamental study of the archive, first published in 1992, which elucidates its history and the way in which handwriting evidence can be used to identify chronological strata within it, thus making it possible to trace the development of Boyle's ideas. Other chapters deal with such components of the Papers as Boyle's 'workdiaries' and his projected *Paralipomena*; another uses material from the archive to illuminate the making of a key work by Boyle, his *Free Inquiry into the Vulgarly Receiv'd Notion of Nature*; while another illustrates that, large as the archive is, it is only a part of what existed in Boyle's lifetime. Parts of the content have been published before, but they are here presented in revised and fully indexed form. Lastly, the volume includes a completely revised version of the catalogue of the Boyle Papers, Letters and ancillary manuscripts originally published in 1992, updating it by tabulating the extensive use of the archive made in recent years in connection with the publication of the definitive editions of Boyle's Works and Correspondence (1999-2001). In all, the volume will be indispensable to anyone with a serious interest in Boyle.

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Editorial Review

Review

'The Boyle Papers is an indispensable work for anyone interested in Robert Boyle, early experimentation, or the history of the Royal Society. By making this large, complicated set of seventeenth-century documents more accessible, Hunter performed a huge service to future scholarship. In compiling this authoritative and easy-to-use volume, Hunter has ensured that others will benefit from decades of this own hard work with these materials. At last there are clear paths through the labyrinth of the Boyle papers for others to follow.'

Renaissance Quarterly 'The volume also contains a revised catalogue of the Boyle Papers, which completely supersedes the catalogue published in 1992... But the volume is much more than a descriptive account of and navigational tool for one of the richest scientific troves to come down to us from the early modern period. For The Boyle Papers includes a set of studies of the contents of the archive that together furnish us with an exemplary model of how scholars can quarry a mass of over twenty thousand leaves in order to glean new and important insights into the intellectual development of a leading scientist and his methods of work... In all, the Boyle papers is an important and timely publication... One hopes that other substantial early modern archives will soon be subjected to the same level of expert scholarly analysis.'

Isis 'Scholarship on Boyle's life and work has flourished in recent years, owing in large part to Michael Hunter's publications... Just as the title implies, this volume contains the necessary material for a full understanding of the Boyle archive and provides scholars with an invaluable resource on this towering figure in the history of science and early modern thought.'

Chemical Heritage 'Hunter's new catalogue of the Boyle papers will certainly be appreciated amongst Boyle specialists and 17th century scholars interested in the organisation of archival material from this period.'

Metascience '... a superb landmark work, one which demonstrates an immense depth of scholarship and the close attention to detail given by its authors. Additionally, it has the rare merit, that of transmitting to the reader, an infectious enthusiasm for its subject areas. This is a volume which will be indispensable...'

Ambix

About the Author

Michael Hunter is Professor of History at Birkbeck College, University of London, UK. He is the author of many books on science and its milieu in late seventeenth-century England, and is also the editor-in-chief of the *Works and Correspondence of Robert Boyle*.

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