

Gregory Faux's Natural History Compendium for Youths

Background

An internet search reveals a curious book at the Kenneth Spencer Research Library at the University of Kansas. The following (edited) entry appears:

Guide to the Gregory Faux's Natural History Compendium for Youths.

Nature display'd; being a short account of such particulars of natural history as was thought most proper to excite curiosity and form the minds of youths. By Gregory Faux. Thetford, Norfolk (England), May 3, 1748.

COLLECTION SUMMARY

- Repository:** University of Kansas
Kenneth Spencer Research Library
Department of Special Collections
1450 Poplar Lane, Lawrence, KS 66045-7616
- Creator:** Faux, Gregory, ca. 1726-ca. 1794
- Title:** Nature display'd; being a short account of such particulars of natural history as was thought most proper to excite curiosity and form the minds of youths. By Gregory Faux. Thetford, Norfolk (England), May 3, 1748.
- Dates:** 1748
- Quantity:** 1 Volume
- Physical Description:** Ornamentation: Illustrations (pen and wash): mainly of animals, but some of technology (ship's rigging, wine-press, methods of fishing, etc.) Some are copied or based on Pluche. Numerous; throughout text (sometimes apparently not illustrating text). Title: (on loose title-page): Nature Display'd being a Short Account of such particulars of Natural History As were thought most proper To Excite curiosity and Form the Minds of youths. May 3th 1748. Title: (on tipped-in title-page): Nat' Display'd being a Short account of Such particulars of Natural History as was thought most proper to Excite Curiosity & form the Minds of Youths. G. Faux Delin.
- Place:** Great Britain: England: Norfolk: Thetford
- Abstract:** Compendium of natural history, physical sciences and technology compiled by Gregory Faux of Thetford, Norfolk in 1748 and intended for educational use.
- Identification:** MS C109
- Language(s):** English

SCOPE AND CONTENTS

Pages [i-vi]: title-pages, introduction

1-65: astronomy, comets, optics, chemistry, microscopes and other inventions.

66-71: key to certain figures

72-123: Nature display'd. Apparently a digest of Humphreys' 1733 translation of Abbé Pluche's *Spectacle de la nature*, 1732-1750.(C577). On insects, shellfish, birds and hawking, animals, fish, plants. (Pluche's work appeared in a number of volumes, and the Humphreys' translation which the Kenneth Spencer Research Library has covers only the beginning of it; it is likely that some of the rest of this manuscript is based on Pluche's vols 3-4 (1735, 1739) which treated earth and the heavens.)

125-139: figures

141-143: Grafting

143-145: "The origin of Arts"--on transportation and wood.

146-152: figures

153-216: Of Rivers (gold, salt, circulation of water); Mountains (reindeer, buffalo, chamois); the Sea (includes ships, trade, fisheries, shell-fish, sea-plants); the Air (includes weather, earthquakes, air-pressure, smell, speech).

216-238: geology, chemistry, mines, gunpowder, glass technology, microscope, jewels, petrefactions, metal technology.

238-245: The Physical Possibility of the Deluge (Theory that the axis of the antediluvian Earth was not tipped); the Last-Judgment will be of fire, which surrounds us presently in the form of light.

[248-260]: index.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Gregory Faux has scribbled his name over the end-sheets (once with address) and signed p. 260.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Pluche, Noël Antoine, 1688-1761. *Spectacle de la nature: or, nature display'd. Being discourses on such particulars of natural history as were thought most proper to excite the curiosity, and form the minds of youth. Illustrated with copper plates. Translated from the original French.* A translation by Samuel Humphreys of vol. 1 of Noël Antoine Pluche's 'Le spectacle de la nature'. London: printed for J. Pemberton, N. Prevost, R. Franklin, and C. Davis, 1733. C577.

So this is a quite substantial volume written, according to the cataloguer, by Gregory Faux 1726-94. This Gregory would have been only 22 years old, so could the author be his father, Gregory Faux (1696-1770), or another?

I asked how this library had received the book. They replied

“I regret to say that our records don't say when this manuscript was acquired or from whom. The only information I have found is a note from the staff member who cataloged it in 1974, saying that it may have been acquired by the University of Kansas Libraries about 1961, which was several years before Spencer Research Library opened. It could have been a purchase or a donation. It seems to have passed through the hands of a bookseller at some time, because the price £20 has been written in pencil at the top of the pictorial title page.”

Perhaps this book stayed in the family for a time before being sold or donated to a book shop in England, the book being purchased by someone who eventually emigrated to the USA. A librarian at the University of Kansas says:

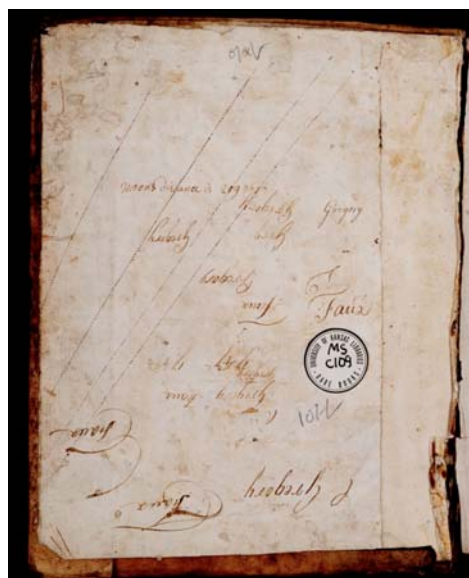
“The text is written in the same hand throughout. There are numerous illustrations, some drawn in pen and some in pen with ink wash shading. They are nicely drawn but some representations of animals, fishermen, etc. seem unsophisticated.”



A sample illustration kindly supplied by the University of Kansas Kenneth Spencer Research Library. The scanned images sent by the University are in very fine resolution (69 MB in size each file) and have been compressed (resulting in reduced quality) for the purpose of this document.

The book was credited to Gregory Faux because he has signed and/or dated it (1748) in numerous places, but the Library does not know how Gregory Faux (1724-1790) was assumed to be the author. The pages of most interest are:

1. Front end paper: numerous pen trials of his name and 2 dates, 1747 and 1748

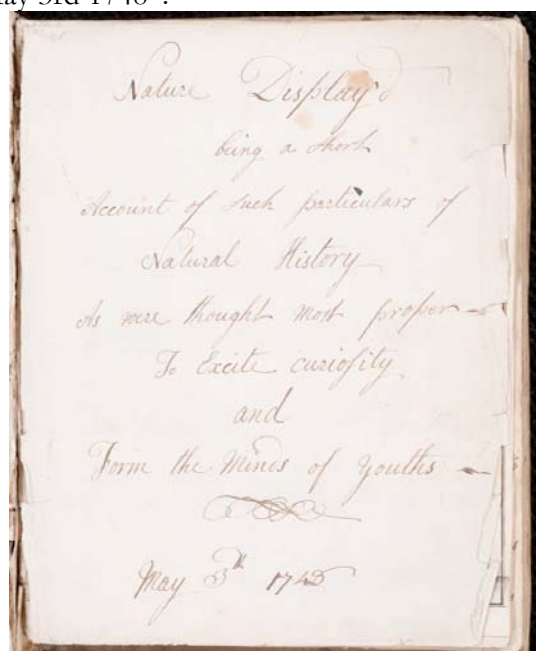


2. Back end paper: amid various pen trials there is the inscription “Gregorius Faux Eius Liber Del. [i.e. delineator or delineavit] Anno 1748 Thetford Norfolk”



A web site (<http://www.nls.uk/privatelivesofbooks/inscriptions.html>) says that authors often wrote their names and other information about themselves in books and also often preferred to write in Latin. “Eius Liber” means “his book” and “Del” means “drawn by”. So this is, without doubt, a book owned and produced by a Gregory Faux of Thetford.

3. Page [1]: written title page reading: “Nature Display’d being a short Account of such particulars of Natural History As were thought most proper To Excite curiosity and Form the Minds of Youths May 3rd 1748”.



4. Page [3]: pictorial title page reading: "Nat. Display'd being a Short account of Such particulars of Natural History as was thought most proper to Excite Curiosity & form the Minds of Youths. G. Faux delin." The title is surrounded by floral ornament above which there is a sun (?) with a man's face sending out rays of light.

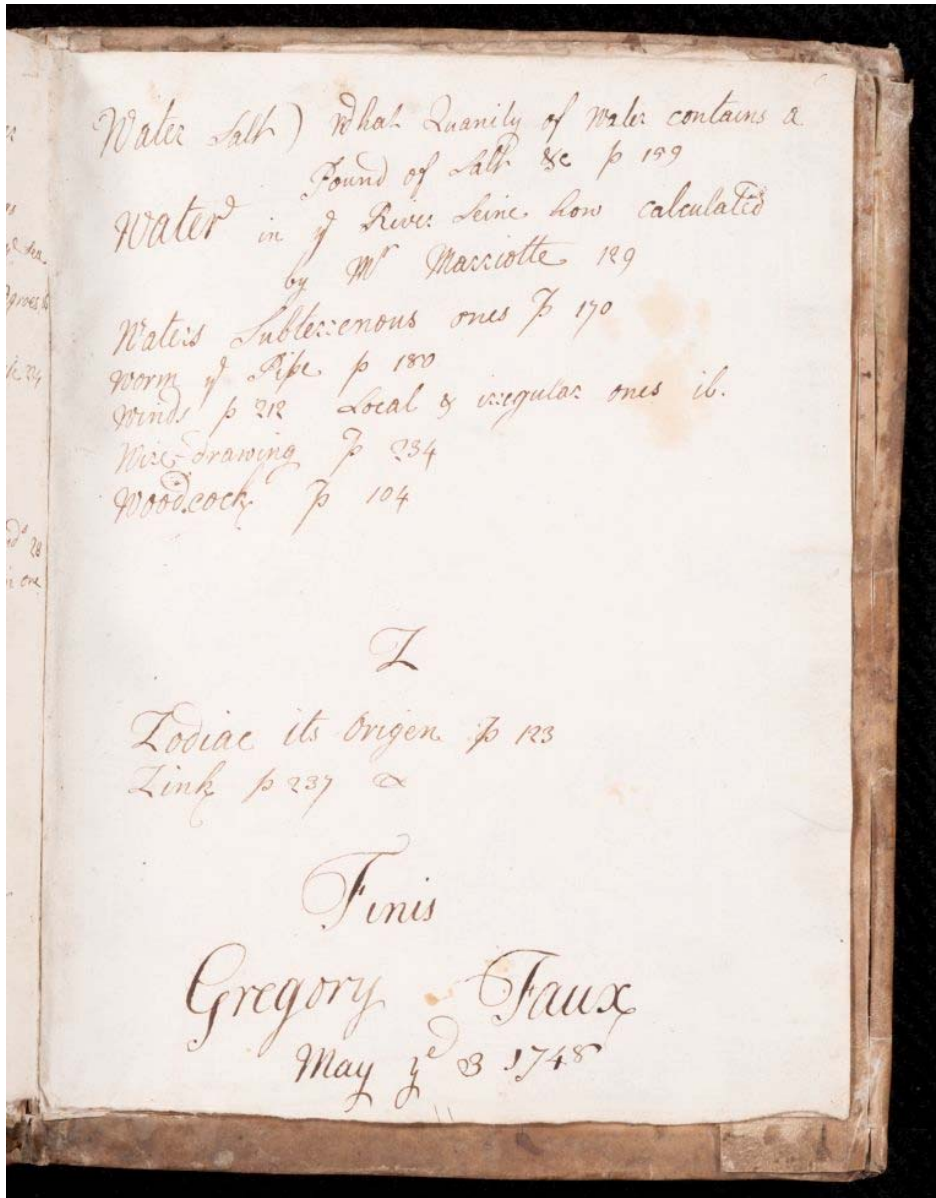


Was the face a self-portrait?

5. Last blank page before the index: signed at the top.

A close-up of a handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Gregory Faux". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background.

6. Last page of index: signed at bottom of page: "Finis Gregory Faux May ye 3 1748"



Purpose of the Book

This book appears to have been written for educational use. To place this in context we need to examine the way children were education in the 18th century.

Education in rural schools was free to all children and funded by taxes. Boys and girls generally attended a winter session and a summer session in single room schools. School supplies such as books, quills and ink often had to be provided by the families. Lessons consisted of rote memorization and practicing penmanship and the teacher was rarely a trained instructor but, despite this, most children learnt to read and write.

Some students from the middle/upper classes were able to continue their education past the primary schools. Here, lessons were designed to "expand the mind and the social skills of young men and women". A classical education, science and mathematics were typically taught to the young men. Young women learned the classics, painting and needlework.

Students were taught using recitation. It would seem that Gregory Faux's Compendium would have been used for this age group.

Who was the author?

Was Gregory Faux a teacher? The difficulty is not clear which "Gregory Faux of Thetford" was the author. Although the Library record clearly ascribes the work to Gregory Faux of Thetford (1726-1794) it is not known how this conclusion was reached and could this work be due to a 22 year old?

Remarkably, there were four "Gregory Faux of Thetford" who were alive in 1748, all of whom left Wills which are now recorded at the Norfolk Record Office in Norwich.

1. Gregory Faux (1696-1770) "the Elder" married Mary Miller (whose mother lived to 106) and was a Carpenter/Joiner (according to his Will).
2. Gregory Faux (1726-1794) "the Younger" was the previous Gregory's son and was also a Carpenter/Joiner. He has one son, John Burrell Faux, who became Mayor of Thetford on several occasions.

The former would have been 52 when the Compendium was completed. Gregory "the Younger" would have been age 22.

3. Gregory Faux (Yeoman) produced a Will in 1764. We are not sure how he is related to other Thetford Faux's. It is possible he was a son of Thomas Faux (b 1643) and Anne Ollett whose baptism has not been found. This couple produced a series of children and it is unusual that none are named after Thomas's father, Gregory (b 1618). If so, the most likely range of birth is 1684-1690 (by which time Anne was 42) and so Gregory would have been aged 74-80 at the time he wrote his Will. This is possible.

What was a yeoman? Yeoman farmers were originally a class of British or English landholding (freehold and copyhold) farmers in the late 14th to the 18th century. The amount of land owned and the wealth of the English yeoman farmer varied from place to place. Many yeoman farmers were prosperous, mixed with the minor gentry and some even rented land to gentleman landowners. Some were entitled to be classed as gentlemen but did not pursue it, as it was cheaper to remain a yeoman. The term Yeoman Farmer was later used to distinguish them from Gentleman Farmers, who did not labour with their hands.

Sir Anthony Richard Wagner, Garter Principal [King of Arms](#), wrote that "a Yeoman would not normally have less than 100 acres" (40 hectares) and in social status is one step down from the Gentry, but above, say, a husbandman. (English Genealogy, Oxford, 1960, pps: 125-130). (Wikipedia).

4. Gregory Faux (Innkeeper) produced a Will in 1779. We do not know for certain how he is related to other Thetford Faux's. He had a wife, Rebecca (nee Bowles) and it is possible his mother was Elizabeth Miller (Mary Miller's sister) who had also married a Faux.

So, all four candidate Gregory Faux's of Thetford were reasonably well off financially, and in the middle or middle/upper classes at the time. Any one of these could have assisted the teaching of teenagers in 1748.

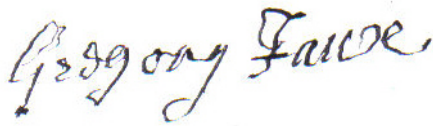
Evidence from Wills

The Compendium contains the writing of Gregory Faux and his signature. Each of the four Gregory Faux's of Thetford produced and signed a Will and so, in principle, it should be possible to compare the signatures.

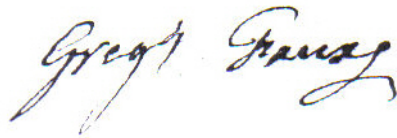
The first difficulty is that the microfiche Wills at the Norfolk Record Office are copies of transcribed Wills with the signature being that of the transcriber. The NRO, however, kindly agreed to locate the original Wills, which fortunately survive in their vaults, and to copy these so that the original Will signature could be secured.

The second issue is, of course, that the Wills were signed many years after the authorship of the book and signatures change over time. The hope was that there would be sufficient in common to firmly identify the author.

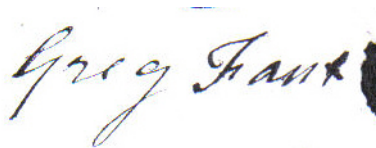
Here are the signatures:




Gregory Faux, the Elder



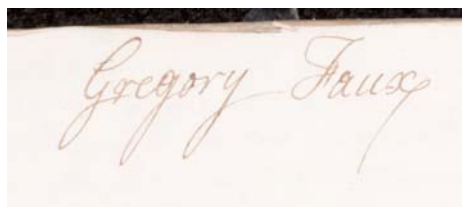
Gregory Faux, the Younger



Gregory Faux, Innholder



Gregory Faux, Yeoman



Gregory Faux of Thetford, author of the Compendium

The conclusion is clear. Gregory Faux the Elder's signature is quite different even given his poor state of health at the time of the Will. Gregory Faux, Yeoman, has a distinctive signature quite different from the book author. The key characteristic is the flamboyant and unusual tail following the "x" on both the author's and Gregory Faux, the Younger's signature. The "F" and the slope of the writing are consistent although the clarity of the main letters has diminished over the years (as is probably the case for all of our signatures). Gregory Faux, Innholder, has some similar characteristics but one must confirm that by far the closest match is Gregory Faux the Younger. The cited authorship at the Kenneth Spencer Research Library is correct!

The Compendium was completed by a 22 year old clearly of some intelligence, knowledgeable in French and Latin. He later became a Carpenter (family trade) and married Bridget Burrell. Their only child, John Burrell Faux, became a Gentleman and Mayor of

Thetford. One legacy is the introduction of the Christian name "Burrell", another legacy sits in a library in the American mid-west.