

## PREFACE

This work, as my introduction indicates, grew from my interest in John Webster's role in the so-called "witchcraft debate" of the seventeenth century. I had also become intrigued by Webster whilst completing my doctorate at Swansea University (1976–80) on the subject of religious motives in medical reform in England during the Puritan Revolution. It seemed logical therefore that, having tracked down a copy of the catalogue of Webster's library in late 1985, I should attempt the daunting task of preparing an annotated transcription of the original manuscript. Initially encouraged by Mr David Harley of Oxford, who shared my interest in Webster and the catalogue, I thus proceeded on the long and laborious job of trying to make sense of the 1501 entries, many of them authorless, which together constituted the vast library of John Webster, radical divine and alchemist.

Of course, much has been written about Webster and the radical milieu in which he lived and wrote. I have profited, as have all who work in this field, by the seminal research of Christopher Hill, Keith Thomas, and Charles Webster, as well as a host of other scholars too numerous to mention. I should, however, like to pay a special debt of thanks to Dr Stuart Clark, whose scholarly encouragement and friendly advice over the last decade has been a never-ending source of inspiration.

Of those who have offered particular help and advice with the reconstruction of the library catalogue, I would especially like to thank Dr Vivian Nutton of the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine in London. I am also grateful to Dr Michael Hunter for numerous illuminating discussions, as well as his invaluable help in bringing to my notice the Webster-Lister correspondence in the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

I have used the facilities of numerous libraries and archives in the completion of this work, and would like to thank the librarians and staff of the following centres for their unfailing assistance and guidance: the British Library, the Bodleian Library, Dr Williams' Library, the Library of the Society of Friends, Nottingham University Library, and Lancashire County Record Office, Preston. In particular, I am indebted to Mr Michael Powell, the librarian of Chetham's Library, Manchester, for his invaluable help and assistance with the catalogue, and would like to express a special note of thanks to the governors of Chetham's Library for allowing me to reproduce Chetham MS.A.6.47.

Finally, I should like to thank Mr Roderick Boroughs for his help in deciphering many of the Greek and Latin items in the catalogue, and Vicky for her astonishing patience of the last eighteen months.