

Bawdy Book Acquired By British Library

The only complete copy of “The Wydow Edyth”, one of the rarest early English books, has been accepted by the government in lieu of inheritance tax, and given to the British Library.

First printed in 1525/6, the book tells the story of the confidence tricks played by the widow upon a series of unsuspecting men. Edyth dupes them into thinking she owns property in different parts of the country, and makes fools of them as they compete for her affections.

The author is Walter Smith, who was Sir Thomas More’s personal servant when the book was written. In fact part of it is set in More’s house in Chelsea, revealing some very lively scenes.