

A Seventeenth Century Benefactor

The Ancient Library's first edition of Henry Lyte's translation of *A nieuwe herball, or historie of plantes* by Rembert Dodoens (London, 1578) is interesting because of the 'vertues' given of the plants illustrated. St James worte, for example, is very good for healing 'all old woundes, fistulas and naughtie ulcers' and the 'iuyce of this herbe, gargled or gargarised, healeth all inflammations or swellings of the throote.'

The book has been in the library since at least 1599, but an inscription gives fascinating insights into life in Bury in the first half of the seventeenth century. It states: "This book belonged to the librarie found in Mr Gol' studdie & brought in again by F.P."

Firstly it shows that laymen used the library. Indeed 'Mr Gol', who may have been Mr Golding of 3 Chequer Square, had clearly forgotten to return it. 'F.P.' picked it up and took it back to the library in St James' Church.

Secondly we are intrigued to know the identity of 'F.P.'. The handwriting confirms that it is Francis Pynner, a prosperous member of the Corporation who twice held the office of Alderman (equivalent to Mayor) and died in 1639. He eventually lived on the corner of College Street and College Lane, in what had formerly been the College of Jesus and was to become the workhouse. His cellar may well be that which is incorporated in the new house which has only just been built on part of that site.

At the end of his life he was described as a 'gentleman' but he started off as a grocer in St James' parish and owned a number of inns. It is clear that he suffered very severely in the Bury fire on 11 April 1608 which destroyed over 200 buildings. Francis Pynner left £40 to the Guildhall Feoffees for a cistern in the market place to be used when there was a fire in the town.

During the Bury plague in 1637 he complained that he could get no help as his servants had deserted him. However, five people clearly did come to his assistance, as he left them land or money in recognition of their care. Other beneficiaries in his will were the poor in St Mary's parish: they were clothed and given bread, and the children were provided with horn books and primers. 'F.P.' turns out to have been quite a local benefactor.