Made in England

Ancient Library Exhibition

Ancient Library at St Edmundsbury Cathedral
The Cathedral Ancient Library, previously the Parish Library of St James, was founded in 1595 by the preacher, Miles Mosse. It was used as a resource for the combination lectures (in-service training) for local clergy held every Monday in the church. The books were donated by local gentry, clergy, tradesmen and burgesses. Originally the library was at the east end of the north aisle (the present north transept) and it is now above the porch.

About a quarter of our 600 volumes were printed in England. William Caxton introduced printing in 1477 and the earliest English book in the library is Erasmus’ Paraphrases of 1548. Most of the books were printed in London but we also have examples from Oxford, Cambridge, Eton and even one of 1761 from Bury St Edmunds.

There is evidence that books were sometimes borrowed, which may be the reason that the inscription ‘St James Library in Bury St Eds’ was written in all the books in about 1715. You can see this in three of the volumes displayed.

The illustrations on the title pages were initially woodcut engravings carved from a hardwood such as box, cherry or apple, as seen in the copy of Foxe’s Book of Martyrs. Copper plate engraving, which is used in the other books displayed, gives finer detail and was more commonly used by the beginning of the seventeenth century.

It is common to see two names on the illustration. That of the original artist like Sir Peter Lely (1618-80), who was knighted by Charles II and his assistant Jan Baptist Caespers (1620-91). Both came from the Low Countries and made their names as portrait painters. Their work is in the volumes of Clarendon and the Prayer Book displayed.

The other name is that of the engraver (Sculpsit). David Loggan (1634-92) - in the Prayer Book - became ‘public sculptor’ to the University of Oxford and is best known for his engravings of Oxford and Cambridge colleges. Others are Michael Burghers, Thomas Cross, Laurence Johnson and Simon Passe (to be found in Clarendon, Gauden, Knolles and Bacon).
John Foxe was a Protestant who fled to the continent in the reign of Queen Mary, narrowly escaping the officers sent to arrest him by her Chancellor, Stephen Gardiner, who was himself a native of Bury and had been educated at the monastic grammar school. The Book of Martyrs concentrates on the sufferings of English Protestants but also includes accounts of earlier martyrs like St. Edmund.

The book is open at the title page of the second volume which shows the ‘blessed martyrs’ of the ‘persecuted church’ on the left and the ‘cursed Romish prelates’ of the ‘persecuting church’ on the right.

It was printed by John Day, a Suffolk man buried at Little Bradley. The book was given to the library in 1680 by Robert Plummer, a barber surgeon who lived at 5 Angel Hill (now a restaurant) and wrote inside the cover ‘Cursed be he that depriveth the church of itt.’

John Foxe Acts and monuments of the Church
(London, 1570)
Richard Knolles studied at Lincoln College, Oxford, and spent most of his life as headmaster of Sandwich Grammar School in Kent. His patron was Sir Peter Manwood, who was a member of the Society of Antiquaries and arranged for him to borrow books, reports and other source materials from Robert Cotton and others.

General histories of countries were very popular at the time and this is the first to be written on the Ottoman Empire. The chartering of the Turkey (later Levant) Company in 1581 had led to an increase in commercial and diplomatic relations with the empire. This first edition was regarded as a masterpiece and is Knolles’ best known work – it is said that Shakespeare used it as a source for Othello (ca.1603-4).

The left-hand page has been used for pen-trials probably by one of the family of John or Thomas Bettes of Halstead in Essex, who previously owned the book.
Francis (1561-1626) was a son Sir Nicholas Bacon, who was the Lord Keeper in Elizabeth I’s reign and one of the Guildhall feoffees in Bury. His uncle was William Cecil, Lord Burghley. After Trinity College, Cambridge he became a lawyer and politician rising to be Lord Chancellor in 1617. He was created Baron Verulam in 1618 and Viscount St Albans in 1621.

As a philosopher, he is credited with developing the scientific method of basing theory on observations, rather than finding evidence to prove a theory. His Great Instauration provides a systematic classification of human knowledge that was not based on religion and, as such, paved the way for rational thought.

The title page shows a galleon passing through the Pillars of Hercules (Strait of Gibraltar) suggesting a parallel between explorers finding new lands and Bacon’s new scientific method of finding the truth.

This title page has the author, John Gauden, beneath an olive tree with a sheep and Charles I beneath a mighty oak with a lion. There are slogans in Greek, Latin and English including ‘The Lord God is a Sun and Shield’, ‘The gates of hell shall not prevail’ and ‘Woe be to me if I preach not the Gospel’.

John Gauden gave the book to the library in 1655 when he was Dean of Bocking in Essex. He had attended King Edward’s Grammar School in Bury, became Bishop of Exeter and then Worcester.

Gauden initially supported Parliament but was shocked by the execution of Charles I and in his many books sought a middle way for the Church of England. He opposed the ‘illiberal, unlearned, ugly rusticity’ of Puritan preachers and wished to modify the Prayer Book rather than abolish it.
Edward Hyde (1609-74) was knighted and made Chancellor of the Exchequer by Charles I in 1643 but spent much of his time as adviser to Prince Charles, later Charles II, in exile. His relations with Queen Henrietta Maria and her secretary, Henry Jermyn (from Rushbrooke), were always strained.

Charles II created him Earl of Clarendon in 1661 and he was initially very influential at court. His overbearing attitude – Lady Castlemaine (the king’s mistress) and Buckingham considered him a ‘pompous prig’ - contributed to his impeachment and exile in 1667.

He began his History in the Scillies in 1646 but did not complete it until 1671. It was first published in 1702-04 and dedicated to his granddaughter, Queen Anne.

Although some have considered that he was biased towards the ‘Cavalier’ version of events others praise him for his clear understanding of the complexity of motives and events.
Charles II issued a new Book of Common Prayer in 1662 and this has been reprinted many times until the present day.

John Baskett, as the King’s Printer, held the very lucrative patent for printing Bibles and prayer books from 1712 to his death in 1742. This 1718 edition has the title page from his own 1714 London edition inserted. The design of the Domus Orationis (House of Prayer), which contrasts the wealthy with a beggar, was first made by Jan Caespers, who died in 1691.

Two remedies for dropsy are written inside the front cover. Dropsy was the former name for Oedema, which is an abnormal accumulation of fluid beneath the skin, or in one or more cavities of the body, that produces swelling. Digitalis (foxglove) is still used in modern treatment, but the two remedies suggested here are different, and one is distinctly less pleasant than the other.