

Early Donations to the Ancient Library (1595-9)

Miles Mosse, the founder of the library, was a local man. Son of the vicar of Chevington, he was educated at Bury Grammar School and Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge. When preacher at St James' he gave seven titles to start the library and his signature is in several books which were donated by others, no doubt with his encouragement.

Other local clergy gave books: Nicholas Bownde (Norton), Henry Dawson (St John's, Stanton), Robert Pricke (Denham), Anthony Rous (Hesset) and Jacob Wallais (Stowlangtoft). So also did Laurence Chaderton, master of Emmanuel College, Cambridge and William Branthwayte, a fellow of the same college.

The most sizeable donations, however, came from the 'godly gentry'- and mainly from the Jermyn family. Sir Robert Jermyn of Rushbrooke, who was their acknowledged leader, gave fifteen volumes of the works of Calvin, all embossed on the front and back with the Jermyn arms. His brother, William, gave six titles, and his half-brother, Henry Blagge, the MP for Sudbury, gave eleven titles. Even Sir Robert's servant, Richard Smith, gave a copy of the Statutes in English. Other local gentry who gave books were Robert Ashfield of Stowlangtoft, Thomas Crofts of Little Saxham and Leonard Tillot of Wortham.

The elite in Bury itself who gave books included William Alman, the notary public, and Roger Barber and Thomas Goodrich, both of whom were feoffees and governors of the grammar school. Grammar school teachers Richard More, John Mosse and John Wright were also donors.

Local tradesmen also contributed volumes and many, like Henry Bryght and Thomas Bright, were involved in the cloth industry. St Mary's parish was represented by Thomas Bennett and John Lansdale, both clothiers, and St James' parish by maltsters John Bye and Augustine Gouche; the clothier Henry Hamond; and John Man a grocer and one of the wardens who drew up the inventory of books in October 1599.

The library itself was housed at the east end of the north nave aisle in St James' Church, and the inventory shows how the 200 books were arranged. To the right were ten classes of Church Fathers including Augustine, Aquinas, Athanasius and Chrysostom. On the left were Bibles; the Continental Reformers (Calvin, Melancthon, Erasmus, Bucer among others); and three classes of more general books. Many were theological, but there were dictionaries, a Euclid, Polydore Vergil's History of England, Holingshed's Chronicle (as used by Shakespeare), a Koran, a Chronicle of the Turks and a cosmography.

Although most of the books are in Latin, some, like Calvin's Sermon's on Deuteronomy, Peter Martyr's Common Places, Dodoen's Herbal, and Jewel's Apology, are in English. The library was for the townspeople as well as the clergy