

The Ancient Library: Every Book Tells a Story

One of the books which people found most interesting during our public openings in June was our copy of the first printed Latin edition of the Koran (Zurich, 1543). They were surprised at its early date and also that it had a preface by Martin Luther.

Investigation of the inscriptions in this copy of the Koran, which has been in the library since at least 1599, gives an interesting insight into personal life in Tudor times.

The book once belonged to George Blagge, a royal servant who was saved from being burnt for heresy in 1546 by the personal intervention of Henry VIII. In the reign of Edward VI he and his friend, Richard Goodrich, gave evidence against Bishop Stephen Gardiner, who had been educated at the monastic Grammar School in Bury.

When George died in 1551, his friend Richard divorced his wife so that he could marry George's widow, Dorothy (whose brother, Thomas Badby, owned the site of Bury Abbey). Richard's name or that of his son, of the same name, also appears in the book. When Richard died, Dorothy moved to Suffolk for her third marriage to Sir Ambrose Jermyn of Rushbrooke, which may explain why the name 'Thomas Jermyn' is crossed out at the top of the title page.

As if this isn't complicated enough, research shows that Dorothy's two children and her step son married three children of Sir Ambrose by his first wife. The most notable of these, his successor, Sir Robert Jermyn, gave 15 volumes of the works of Calvin to the library when it was founded in 1595.