

Friday Sermons 1593

These were given by Miles Mosse who was Lecturer at St James Church (now the Cathedral) from 1586 to 1597. He published them in 1595 and the volume is particularly interesting because he gives a list of the authors he used for reference. Books by fourteen of these authors, including St Augustine and Melancthon, appear on our Ancient Library list and have his signature in them, so we may well still have the very books that he used when writing the sermons. By the time the wardens John Man and William Briggs drew up a list of library books in 1599 another thirty one of the authors used by Mosse, including works by Calvin, Erasmus and a volume of English Statutes had been given by others.

Mosse was the driving force behind the setting up of the library in 1595 and it seems that it was used as a resource for the Monday exercises in which clergy from nearby villages came for 'in-service training'. A number of these, like Nicholas Bownd, Rector of Norton, and Robert Pricke, Pastor of Denham, were donors as was Sir Robert Jermyn MP and other godly gentry. There is clear evidence in the books that the library was also used by the townsfolk and that they even borrowed them. They also attended the weekly lectures on Wednesdays and Fridays and the six sermons were delivered on Fridays between 19 March and 2 July 1593.

The theme for the sermons was 'usurie'. It is clear that they were controversial. Mosse writes in his introduction: 'Others have foraged and stormed at me since the preaching of these sermons' & 'I have been bitten and backbitten.'

Mosse took a hard line. He believed that charging interest of any sort was usury, even though the law at the time stated that 1% was acceptable. He told the people of Bury that usury caused suffering for people and children and that their denials only proved that 'every man that doeth evill hateth the light'. Maltsters that bought standing corn for 5 shillings a coombe which was worth 12 or 13 shillings a coombe when harvested were guilty as were those who lent money on condition that the borrower bought something like an old gown at an inflated price.

He condemns those who commit usury in thought. He states that men who talk of taking 'usance, or interest or consideration' are usurers who 'dare not call a spade a spade' for being a usurer is more shameful than being a scavenger who removes sewage from the streets. To him the matter is clear cut – 'to visit a usurer is as disreputable as going to the common stews (brothel)'. He opposes it 'tooth and nail' and urges all, including the magistrates, to follow his lead.

Each 30 page sermon would have lasted at least an hour.