Ancient Library: Roland Taylor, Protestant Martyr

The most used book in the Ancient Library is Foxe's Book of Martyrs (London, 1570), which contains a detailed account of the life and martyrdom of Roland Taylor. Taylor was the rector of Hadleigh from 1544 until his death and was appointed Archdeacon of Bury St Edmunds in 1548. The library also has four volumes of Conrad Pellican's Bible Commentary (Zurich, 1533 to 1540) which belonged to him. These are particularly interesting because Taylor annotated them extensively and there is evidence that he may have had them with him in prison after his trial. His notes, in a mixture of Latin, English and his own code, have been studied by Professor John Craig.

Taylor had been appointed domestic chaplain of Cranmer in 1539 and was the Archbishop's trouble shooter in the reign of Edward VI so it is perhaps not surprising that he refers to Protestants as 'the tuinable nyttinggall and swett mavys (song thrush)' and to Catholics as 'cormorants, piis (magpies) and puttokes (kites)'. He also has harsh words ('Tomshax the kew pott') for Nicholas Shaxton, a reformer who recanted, and as a suffragan to the Bishop of Ely passed judgement upon Protestants in the reign of Mary.

Taylor felt that 'preachars must be bowld and not mylk mowthed'. He rejected transubstantiation as making Christ a 'cake-god' and denounced the Roman church as 'the purpld sprituall hore, the gowdin gyltyd harrand drab'. He was burnt at Aldham Common, just outside Hadleigh, on 9 February 1555.