

## Samuel Aylmer's gift to the Ancient Library

The churchwardens' booklist of 1599 ends with eighteen books which were the 'Gift of Sam. Elmer Gent'. Samuel was the son of John Aylmer, Bishop of London from 1577 to his death in 1594. Indeed some of the books may have belonged to him, as he wrote in his will that Samuel 'was to take out of his library what philosophy books he pleased' and 'John Lond.' is written on a page in Hondorff's 'Theatrum historicum' in the library.

Bishop Aylmer was a known Greek scholar and four of the books given by Samuel are in Greek – a Homer, a Plato, a commentary on Aristotle, and Pausanias' 'The Traveller' which is an account of Greek life in the second century AD – along with a Greek dictionary which is now missing. Some of the books did not seem suitable to the clergy and wardens of St James and sometime between 1613 and 1618 they exchanged two medical books (one being the famous book on the human body by Vesalius) for a theological work. Ptolemy's 'Geography' is also missing. They kept, however, George Agricola's books on mining and on weights and measures and Buchanan's 'History of Scotland'. Other works include Adrichomius' description of the Holy Land; a history of the crusades by Poyssenotus; Peter Baro's commentary on the prophet Jonah and Zwinger's 'Theatrum vitae humanae' – a three volume early encyclopaedia which runs to over 3000 pages.

The inscription in the books 'Samuel Aylmer Armiger in comitatu Essex de Aula Mowdon dono dedit huic Bibliothecae' is further proof that Samuel was the son of Bishop John, as he left him Mowden Hall and all his lands in Essex. There is evidence that this caused Samuel some difficulty as Bancroft, a subsequent Bishop of London and later Archbishop of Canterbury, thought that Bishop Aylmer had misappropriated diocesan funds in order to enrich his family. He pursued Samuel Aylmer through the courts to try to recover £4300 and Samuel spent some time in debtor's prison rather than pay. Among the documents linking Samuel with Mowden Hall is one which shows that John Peache was hanged in 1616 for breaking into his house and stealing £24.

Samuel Aylmer also had strong links with Suffolk. He bought the manor of Claydon with his father in 1588; he lived in nearby Akenham Hall and may have built Mockbeggar's Hall in 1621. He was Sheriff of Suffolk in 1627 and in January 1634 was rather mysteriously 'buried at night' in the chancel of Claydon church. His memorial can still be seen there.

As a footnote, Samuel Aylmer had two grandsons called Brabazon, named after his second wife, Ann Brabazon, whose grandfather had been Lord Chief Justice of Ireland. One was a J.P. and lived at Mowden Hall and the other became a bookseller and publisher. The library has a copy of Isaac Barrow's 'The Duty and Reward of Bounty' published by Brabazon Aylmer in 1680 from his premises at 'The Three Pigeons against the Royal Exchange in Cornhill, London'.