

The Birth of the Ancient Library

At last we have a precise date for the founding of the Ancient Library – 20th July 1595. The evidence comes from the 1716 Catalogue which is in the Norfolk Record Office. That day was a Sunday and the catalogue states that the library was ‘granted by the publick consent of the inhabitants of the Parish’. So it is likely that the launch of this major undertaking - it is, after all, the earliest parish library in the country – took place at the vestry meeting after a service.

The catalogue also states that books were subscribed by ‘neighbouring Gentlemen, Inhabitants and Clergy’. Donors’ plates in the books give us details of their names which include Miles Mosse, the preacher, who we think founded the library as a resource for the combination lectures held each Monday as in-service training for clergy, and John Mosse, who is described in the catalogue as his brother.

Even more significantly, this catalogue identifies Thomas Bright as one of the churchwardens in July 1595. He was a leading citizen of Bury, who became alderman in 1599 and was instrumental in obtaining the borough’s charter in 1606. We knew that he had employed Miles Mosse as a tutor for his son, Walter, but this is the first evidence that such an influential man was involved establishing the library. His portrait hangs in the Guildhall.

Remarkably most of the books in the 1716 catalogue are still in the library, as is a book which was written by Francis Hutchinson, the minister at that time. His *An historical essay concerning witchcraft* (London, 1720) reflects his interest the conduct of the trials of witches in Suffolk in the seventeenth century. He came to the then controversial opinion that the evidence of children was often unreliable. In 1721 he left Bury to become the Bishop of Down and Connor, where he published pamphlets on the need for a national bank in Ireland, bog reclamation and fisheries.