

Ancient Library: Manuscript Pastedowns

John Aubrey, the antiquarian, recalled that when he was at Latin School in 1633 the Rector, William Stump, said nothing did so well as the manuscripts he had from Malmesbury Abbey to stop up the bung-hole when he brewed a barrel of his special ale.

There were plenty of spare manuscripts around after the dissolution of the monasteries in the 1530s. Some were used in strips as bookmarks, as in *The Commonplaces of the Christian religion* by Musculus (London, 1578), a book you may have seen last autumn in the Cathedral Treasury exhibition 'Queen Elizabeth's Successor: The Tudor Dilemma'.

Over eighty of the books in the Ancient Library have medieval manuscripts used as pastedowns to attach the main body of the book (the text block) to its boards during the process of binding. Some are quite small pieces, but others are whole pages, many have plainchant and others exquisite illuminated capitals. The pastedowns are a study in themselves. Some are unique and have attracted the interest of scholars.

You can see a good example in the present exhibition of books in the Treasury. The volume of Plato (Basle, 1534), presented by Samuel Aylmer before 1599, contains pages from a fourteenth or fifteenth century Antiphonal. The words 'Stephanus' and 'Sancte' (which have blue capitals) suggest it is part of the liturgy for the celebration of St Stephen's Day (26th December).

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