

Bindings in the Ancient Library

Until this year I had paid little attention to the bindings of the books in the library: spending more time on cataloguing; the condition of the books and the donors. However a day course at Lambeth Palace library in May and a recent visit to our library by David Pearson, who has written several books on identifying bindings, has given me some small insight into the riches that the Cathedral has.

Our earliest books from the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries have wooden boards covered with leather, most of the others are bound in brown leather and a few have the much cheaper limp vellum bindings. Although most of our books were printed on the continent, a law of 1534, which forbade the import of bound books to protect the livelihood of English bookbinders, means that practically all have been bound in this country. The main centres were London, Oxford and Cambridge.

David Pearson was able to identify, from looking at the stamped or rolled decoration on the covers, that we have many more Cambridge bindings than are found in most libraries. The most spectacular is the gold inlaid stamp on Peter Baro's *In Jonam prophetam praelectiones* (London, 1579). However it is difficult to identify particular binders because their tools were often shared and then handed on to others.

Most unusual is the handwritten inscription 'Thomas Cantuar' on Dionysius' *In quatuor Evangelistas* (Cologne, 1533), a book bound in London just after it was printed. Could this really have once belonged to Thomas Cranmer? We are in touch with David Selwyn, the expert on Cranmer's library, and hope for news shortly.

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