

Record number of visitors to the Ancient Library

The Ancient Library has been open to the public on nine afternoons between May and September and received a total of 337 visitors. Many thanks to our library volunteers Jill de Laat, Sue Hollis, Valerie Moore and John Robson who have made this possible.

As is fitting on the centenary of women getting the vote in 1918, a number of books displayed during the Heritage Open Days in September featured women.

The library was founded in the reign of Elizabeth and, as you might expect, a number of books were dedicated to her. However, *A journal of the House of Commons* (London, 1693) by Sir Simonds D'Ewes of Stowlangtoft, has the Speaker exhorting the queen to consider marriage and the queen's prevaricating answer. Ten years earlier volumes of Moses Pitt's *The English Atlas* were dedicated to Charles II's queen, Henrietta Maria, and to the Duchess of York, wife of the future James II, and have very fine full-page engravings of them both.

There were also business women: Charlotte Guillard (c1487-1557) a printer who was responsible for nearly 200 publications from her premises at the sign of *The Golden Sun* in the Rue Sainte-Jacques, Paris, and Joan Lowyn who supplied '8 planks of Oke' to be used in the building works at the royal palace of Enfield in 1547 (the accounts are bound into our volumes of the works of Luther).

Inscriptions show that women owned and donated books on a surprising range of topics: Mrs Susannah Russell gave a history of France in 1718 and Mary Lloyd once owned an early travel book – Richardson's *Of the state of Europe* (Oxford, 1627). Margareta Boldero, whose family owned Fornham Priory, now the site of the Priory Hotel, gave a book by the Jesuit, Vasquez, and Mary Batteley, from the Bury family of apothecaries and preachers, gave a book by Thomas Brightman, who believed the Pope was anti-Christ. Mrs Ashfield even gave a volume by Aelianus Tacticus (Zurich, 1556) which has detailed diagrams of the ways Alexander the Great deployed infantry to defeat cavalry.

As always there are a few visitors who hope to see the Abbey Library which was dispersed at the Dissolution in 1539 but are nonetheless intrigued that some of the earliest printed volumes in our Parish Library of 1595 have medieval manuscripts strengthening their bindings. This time we displayed a volume by Durandus (Strasburg, 1486) which has a page of manuscript dating from the thirteenth century – at least 700 years old.

Stephen Dart

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