

Ancient Library - New Web Page

The new web page to be found on the St Edmundsbury Cathedral website in 'History' or 'Education' gives details of our historic library of over 550 books.

The library was founded in 1595 in the parish church of St James and is the oldest parochial library in the country. Dr Nicholas Hadgraft, in his report for the cathedral in 2000, stated 'It is a collection rich in the history of the book and should be considered as a national asset.' Not surprisingly, therefore, our books appear in the three catalogues which list rare books worldwide. There are links to these on the web page.

We have nine books which are 'incunabula' (from the Latin for 'cradle', used to describe books printed before 1500). Details of the editions we hold and other libraries where they can be found in Great Britain and abroad are in the 'Incunabula Short Title Catalogue' drawn up by the British Library. The BL also manages the 'English Short Title Catalogue' which covers books printed in the British Isles before 1801. The very many early books which were printed on the continent are listed in COPAC (The National, Academic and Specialist Library Catalogue) in the 'cathedral libraries' section, which shows the holdings in all the cathedrals in the country.

There has been much more interest in our Ancient Library since we staged our 1611 Bible exhibition in May and the local television feature in the summer. More than 300 members of the public visited the library when it was open on Wednesday afternoons in August and September, and individuals and groups have since arranged their own visits to follow up particular interests. We hope that you will enjoy using this new web page which gives more information about what we actually have in our Ancient Library – a national asset.

Stephen Dart