

# Access, restrictions and readership in early modern parish libraries

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## **Access, Restrictions and Readership in Early Modern Parish Libraries**

Jessica G. Purdy

### **Abstract**

This article explores the collections and accessibility of parish libraries in early modern England and the subjects in which their readers were most interested. The period covered begins with the 1558 accession of Elizabeth I, which preceded by only a few years the establishment of the first post-Reformation parish library, and ends with the Parochial Libraries Act of 1709, which ensured that libraries could not be dismantled and dispersed without permission from the appropriate authorities. This article argues that parish libraries were established in this period to provide people of gentry rank and below with a religious education and that, despite previous historians' arguments to the contrary, the works in these collections were appropriate to the intended audience. It further contends that despite physical access restrictions imposed on these libraries by their founders, their books were read and that readers' interests focussed on four themes that were central to early modern Protestantism.

### **Keywords**

Parish libraries; accessibility; readership; marginalia; history of libraries; religious education

Parish libraries in early modern England were established primarily as repositories of Protestant religious education for clergymen and laymen of gentry rank and below. The aims and audience of parish libraries were reflected in their collections, which for much of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were dominated by religious literature, to the near exclusion of almost all other genres of text. As the seventeenth century progressed, parish library collections retained religious texts and education at their core, but expanded to include a range of secular literature as well. As W. M. Jacob has argued, works of theology, Biblical

commentaries, and church histories remained at the centre of these collections, but were joined by books on topics ranging from history, mathematics, poetry and natural philosophy to grammar books, dictionaries and encyclopaedias, and other texts on the liberal sciences.<sup>1</sup>

To demonstrate this educational purpose for early modern English parish libraries, this article focuses on the 165 repositories established between the accession of Elizabeth I in 1558 and the passing of An Act for the better Preservation of Parochial Libraries in that Part of Great Britain called England by Parliament in 1709. The Act was largely the result of efforts by the Church of England clergyman Thomas Bray and his associates in the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK), whose combined purpose was, amongst other things, to encourage the provision of libraries and the circulation of books and pamphlets, through which they could propagate Christian teaching at home and abroad.<sup>2</sup> The preamble to the Act observed that ‘of late Years, several charitable and well-disposed Persons have by charitable Contributions erected Libraries within several Parishes and Districts in England, and Wales; but some Provision is wanting to preserve the same’. It then continued to set out rules and orders that demonstrate the perceived importance of the parish libraries established in the preceding 150 years. These rules also highlight their significance as educational repositories, by ensuring that these libraries could not be disbanded or dispersed without authorisation, and by ordering catalogues to be produced and records of borrowing and donations to be kept.<sup>3</sup>

Many of these parish libraries were often, at least notionally, available to a mixed clerical and lay readership. Arnold Hunt has argued that ‘the significance of these modest collections is that they gave parishioners access to the writings of some of the leading English and continental Reformed divines’ and brought their religious and didactic messages ‘to a wider readership’.<sup>4</sup> This position was enhanced by Jacob’s statement that ‘books were an essential tool to promote a learned and godly clergy and godly laity for the reformed Church

of England'.<sup>5</sup> David Williams, however, has shown that accessing these books has not always been straightforward and that numerous libraries were subject to various access restrictions.<sup>6</sup> This article examines the intellectual and physical accessibility of several early modern parish libraries in England to demonstrate that, despite some difficulties and restrictions, these books were, in fact, read. The survival of so many parish library books supports the argument made by Andrew Pettegree that survival rates for early printed books are highest when those books were kept in libraries. This article also demonstrates readers' active engagement with these library books, through an exploration of surviving marginalia and annotations, the distribution of which supports Pettegree's contention that such books were not necessarily read widely, but were instead intended for reference as opposed to thorough reading.<sup>7</sup>

### **Parish Library Collections**

Parish libraries differed in size. Some were small collections of fewer than fifty volumes; most were repositories of between fifty and 250 volumes. A small number of parish libraries had collections that numbered over 500 books. The kinds of books that these collections comprised were usually varied and often wide-ranging. Works that provided readers with a strong theoretical education – theology, history, and the classics – were often at the core of a parish library collection irrespective of the date of its foundation. By the late seventeenth century, however, the focus of parish library collections had shifted somewhat. Whilst religious texts still maintained a central position in a library corpus, there were also increasing numbers of secular texts in the collections.

Library collections dominated by religious works are often indicative of a founder's religiously educational intentions. The library established in 1598 in St Wulfram's church in Grantham, for example, reflects the aim of its founder, Francis Trigge, to enable the 'better encreasinge of learninge and knowledge in divinitie and other liberall sciences' for the clergy

and laity of Grantham and its surrounding areas.<sup>8</sup> In a similar way, Lady Anne Harington gave the parish church of Oakham in Rutland ‘two hundred Latin and Greek Folio’s [sic], consisting chiefly of Fathers, Councils, School-men, and Divines’ for the use of ‘the vicar of that Church, and... the Neighbouring Clergy’ in 1616.<sup>9</sup> The same impetus was still strong in the mid-seventeenth century, when merchant and financier Humphrey Chetham bequeathed five parish libraries to churches in and around the area of Manchester. Chetham’s will stipulated that ‘godly English Bookes, such as Calvins, Prestons, and Perkins workes’ were to be purchased and included in the library collections, ‘for the edificac[i]on of the common people’.<sup>10</sup> His executors ensured that his wishes were followed.

From at least the 1680s onwards, however, the educational motivations of those establishing parish libraries expanded. Whilst the library established at Wimborne Minster church had originally been composed of only religious texts, a later augmentation brought a significant number of secular works into its collection as well. William Stone donated approximately ninety works by the Church Fathers to the parish church in his hometown of Wimborne Minster in Dorset in 1685. Many of the most commonly-cited Church Fathers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, including Augustine, Cyril, and John Chrysostom, appeared in Stone’s donation. Such a collection of patristic works strongly suggests Stone’s participation in the seventeenth-century collecting practices that saw learned men and dedicated scholars acquiring a broad religious understanding, appropriate to his role first as a clergyman and then as Master of New Inn Hall at the University of Oxford.<sup>11</sup> The collection was augmented a decade later by Roger Gillingham, an acquaintance and possible friend of Stone’s. Gillingham’s donation to the parish library included works on agriculture, gardening, winemaking, philosophy, natural history, and household literature, as well as several biblical commentaries, classical texts, and works of history.<sup>12</sup>

A similar collection, established by a single individual, exists in More parish library in Shropshire. In 1680, Sir Richard More established this library by providing a gift of both religious and secular books from his own collection, reflecting his desire to educate and encourage a preaching minister in the area and also More's own religious, academic, and general reading interests.<sup>13</sup> The religious texts in this collection varied in age and confessional identity, suggesting a 'range of subtle ecclesiastical distinctions' in More's reading habits and his belief in the importance of providing a broad theological education for his readers. Alongside this religious collection, More also included works of poetry, geography, and mathematics, intended to provide a more rounded education.<sup>14</sup>

As well as demonstrating their founders' educational motives, parish library collections reveal the vitality and reach of the continental book trade in England and the strength of the English domestic book trade. Pettegree has noted that 'English libraries and collectors availed themselves freely of the easy and long-established connections with the continent to obtain the best books that continental suppliers had to offer'.<sup>15</sup> Continental books were readily and easily available in England in the sixteenth century and the continental book trade maintained its prominence in England until the middle of the seventeenth century. At this point, the increased demand for books fuelled by contemporary events from the 1640s onwards, and the shift towards printing 'cheap works of controversy and polemic', forced the English print industry to improve, as Joad Raymond has shown.<sup>16</sup> Many of the continental books surviving in English parish libraries were printed in cities such as Basel, Antwerp, Paris, and Cologne, which formed part of the 'steel spine' of European printing in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The proliferation of these cities in the imprints in collections across England shows France and Germany to be 'by far the most important' territories in early modern Europe, 'both intellectually and in terms of book production'.<sup>17</sup>

The city of London was at the heart of the English printing and book trade in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and continued to be so even into the eighteenth century and beyond, despite an increase in provincial presses. In *The Carriers Cosmographie* (1637), John Taylor listed the various carriers and wagons that travelled along the trade routes and road networks of early modern England, enabling journeys to take place between London and over 200 English and Scottish towns.<sup>18</sup> Whilst by no means all of the parish libraries in England contained books printed in Europe, the distribution of continental books across this trade network is evidenced by their survival in libraries as far distant from London as Yorkshire, Lancashire, Lincolnshire, and Norfolk. Continental works can also be found in counties closer to London, such as Kent, Cambridgeshire, and Buckinghamshire, which is home to the unique Kedermister library in Langley Marish, a significant portion of which comprised Latin and continental books.<sup>19</sup>

The Francis Trigge Chained Library (1598) in Grantham provides an early example of a parish library that includes continental books. Francis Trigge was a Church of England clergyman who in the late sixteenth century gave money to purchase ‘books of divinitie and other learninge to the value of one hundredth poundes or thereaboutes’.<sup>20</sup> The majority of books in the original collection of this library were purchased second-hand in Cambridge, though by whom they were purchased is unclear.<sup>21</sup> Although Grantham was itself a market town, in which continental books were likely available, the trip to Cambridge to purchase these books suggests that they were not available in the quantities required to establish the library at this time. The books for the Trigge library might have been purchased in Cambridge, but most of them (249 out of the original collection of 263 books) were printed on the continent, in one of the main centres of printing in either France, Germany, or Switzerland. Not only does this collection demonstrate, therefore, the movement of books around England – from Cambridge to Grantham, in this instance – it also evidences the strong

Anglo-European book trade that was responsible for the importation of large numbers of books into England in this period.<sup>22</sup> The similar movement of books, both between England and the continent and within England itself, is evident in the Ripon Minster parish library, established in 1624 by the will of Anthony Higgin, dean of Ripon. Higgin's role as a clergyman often gave him occasion to travel to some of England's major centres of the book trade and the notes he made on the title pages of several of his books indicate that he purchased volumes primarily in York, Cambridge, and London. Basel, Paris, Antwerp, and Cologne – in addition to London – were the four most common cities of publication for the surviving titles in Ripon Minster parish library, indicating the continued strength of the continental book trade in England in the first half of the seventeenth century.

However, continental books could also come to be in English parish libraries through much more personal connections. The library of Swaffham in Norfolk, for instance, contained continental books that were initially acquired by its founders on the continent and held in their personal library collections before being donated to the parish library. Established by Clement Spelman in his will of 1679, the parish library was comprised of Clement's collection of books as well as those of his father, Sir Henry, and his elder brother, Sir John Spelman. Clement himself seems never to have visited the continent, but Sir Henry was known to be in contact with European scholars and Sir John made several trips abroad, including to Paris in 1619 and to Italy in 1628-29.<sup>23</sup> The continental books in their collections, later donated to Swaffham, were therefore most likely the result of these direct, personal relationships with continental scholars and booksellers.

The continued foundation of parish libraries in the second half of the sixteenth century and throughout the seventeenth century demonstrates their sustained importance as repositories of religious education. It also reflects the shift in focus in the later decades of the seventeenth century as secular volumes became more numerous in their collections. Parish



library collections are also a testament to the strength of the continental and English book trades in this period. Their proliferation across the hinterlands of England demonstrates the importance of the role played by England's road and trade networks, which made it possible for books to travel between London and its peripheries.

### **Intellectual Accessibility**

'The printing of books in Britain expanded gradually during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries', Raymond has argued, as imported books were 'gradually displaced by domestic production'.<sup>24</sup> However, for most of the sixteenth century, at least, and arguably even beyond, England was very much a peripheral market in the European book trade. Its book production was predominantly vernacular and intended for local consumption.<sup>25</sup>

England failed to 'establish a substantial part in the production of books for the international Latin trade', Pettegree has shown, which left the English book trade heavily reliant on its continental counterpart to provide it with, in particular, the Latin texts of Christian and humanist scholarship that were a key part of the Latin trade.<sup>26</sup> The importation of foreign books into England had been a significant, and extremely effective, feature of the English book trade since the fifteenth century, as testified by the large numbers of continental volumes in England, and in many parish libraries.<sup>27</sup>

The language of a book naturally dictates its readership. Most surviving continental books in parish libraries are written in Latin, a language that has traditionally been seen by historians as one known only to the highly educated laity and clergy. Anna Bayman has argued that 'learned works in Latin especially, but also in the Continental languages, remained beyond the scope of most non-elite readers'.<sup>28</sup> If this was the case, it would significantly limit the number and range of people able to read the vast majority of parish library books, particularly in the older libraries in which scholarly Latin religious works

dominate the collections. The Grantham library, for example, has already been shown to contain primarily continental books and this pre-eminence correlates with the number of Latin works in the corpus. Only six of the 263 surviving volumes in this collection were written in English, the remaining 257 were written in Latin. Likewise, Higgin's collection in Ripon Minster also included a significant number of Latin texts printed on the continent, reflecting the collection's original role as Higgin's personal working library during his career as a clergyman. This would seem to support Bayman's and others' arguments in favour of Latin texts being the preserve of clerics and the well-educated. So, too, do the corpuses of books donated by Thomas White, Bishop of Peterborough, to St Mary Magdalene church in Newark-upon-Trent, and to the library in Wimborne Minster church by Stone.<sup>29</sup> Half of the more than a thousand volumes in the Newark library are in Latin, and after their arrival at Wimborne Minster, Stone's Latin patristic texts were available to be read by those members of the clergy and laity with the ability to do so.

However, recent work by Jennifer Richards has demonstrated that Latin would actually have been familiar to any literate male with a grammar school education.<sup>30</sup> General literacy and educational provision was increasingly occupying the thoughts of the 'middling sorts' of people from the mid-sixteenth century onwards. Christopher Brooks has shown that members of London companies and guilds began to make bequests for general educational initiatives, with some specifically choosing to establish grammar schools.<sup>31</sup> These people were financially independent and, as the opportunities presented themselves, began to learn to read and write in significantly larger numbers and to use a portion of their disposable income both to acquire books and to send their children to school, as Ian Green has argued.<sup>32</sup> As such, more literate people of middling social status than previously thought may have had a higher degree of competency in Latin and some continental languages. Of course, this has important implications for the intellectual accessibility of a significant proportion of parish library

books: they should no longer be seen as texts for the exclusive use of the clergy and the well-educated laity. Therefore, the Latin Biblical commentaries, theology texts, and works of religious and church history in the Grantham library; the Latin patristic texts and Biblical commentaries in the Wimborne Minster library; the Biblical commentaries and works of theology written in Latin and housed in the Ripon Minster parish library; and the plethora of other religious texts in these and other parish library collections were intellectually accessible, at least, to anyone allowed physical access to the books.

### **Physical Accessibility**

The types of people allowed access to the parish libraries of early modern England were not homogeneous across the different repositories. They were often defined in the foundation documents, whether indenture or will, of individual libraries. The level of restriction was often linked to the intended audience of a parish library. Collections for general readership were often housed in the more public parts of the church whilst those intended for clerical use were usually housed in a more private part of the church or sometimes in the vicarage or parsonage attached to the parish church. There were other accessibility considerations: depending on the size of the parish library collection, whether its books were stored in book chests or cupboards for smaller collections of around fifty volumes or on bookshelves (often chained) for collections of larger than fifty volumes.

There are several examples of small parish library collections housed in book chests or cupboards in the more public parts of the church. These were also the collections intended for a primarily lay audience. Some of these are still *in situ* in their original church and some are now housed in their original chests but in new locations. The Gorton Chest parish library (1653), for example, is still stored in its original carved almy chest, but the chest itself is now housed in the Reading Room of Chetham's Library in Manchester. The Gorton Chest

was one of five parish libraries established in the will of the Manchester merchant and financier Humphrey Chetham. The will explicitly stated that the libraries were for the use and education of ‘the common people’ and ordered his libraries to be placed in ‘convenient places’ within the parish churches Chetham nominated, presumably for ease of access.<sup>33</sup> A year earlier, in Wootton Wawen in Warwickshire, George Dunscomb, the rector of St Peter’s church, ‘gave some good books for the use of the parishioners’ upon his death in 1652.<sup>34</sup> These books were originally placed in the vicar’s house for safekeeping and the ability of the parishioners to access them in that location seems to have been difficult. The parishioners requested the books be moved to the church itself, where they were ‘chained to a desk in the south isle of the church, April 11<sup>th</sup> 1693’.<sup>35</sup>

There are several instances of parish libraries established for the sole use of the clergy, usually for the incumbent minister and his successors. These libraries were often situated in the more private parts of the parish church or, towards the end of the seventeenth century and into the eighteenth century, the associated parsonage or vicarage. One of the earliest examples of a parish library established exclusively for the clergy is that of Ipswich, founded in 1599 by a local draper, William Smarte. Smarte bequeathed to St Mary-le-Tower church both his printed and his manuscript books, which he intended ‘towards one librarye... to be used ther by the com[m]on preacher of the sayd towne for the tyme beinge or any other precher mynded to preache in the saide p[ar]ishe church’. Smarte evidently had a clerical audience in mind, which is reflected in his stipulation that the library was ‘to be kepte in the vestrye of the parishe church’, a space traditionally inaccessible to the laity.<sup>36</sup>

A century and more later, the practice of establishing a parish library and limiting access to it to the clergy was still prevalent. Between 1690 and 1704, three parish libraries were established by testamentary bequest at Assington, Milden, and Lawshall. All three were founded by clergymen for clergymen and ordered to be kept in the parsonages attached to

their parish churches. Reverend Thomas Alston's 1690 will gave his books 'unto the vicar incumbent of Assington... and to his successors in the said vicaridge for ever for and towards a standing library'.<sup>37</sup> Thirteen years later, in 1703, William Burkitt, who had been rector of Milden since 1678, died. His will, dated 1 January 1700 and proved after his death, gave 'my Library [of] Books... for the benefit of succeeding incumbents'. The document explicitly states that the library was to be housed 'in the study at Milding parsonage', enforcing its restricted accessibility, except at the potential invitation of the incumbent.<sup>38</sup> A year after Burkitt's death, a library was established by Stephen Camborne, rector of Lawshall from 1681 until his death in 1704. Camborne's will gave 'all my Library of Bookes to my Successor in this living of Lawshall to continue here forever'.<sup>39</sup> Camborne's will did not stipulate where these books were to be housed, but his executors seem to have decided that, considering Camborne's successor was to be the only person allowed access to the books, the parsonage would be an appropriate location for them. The books remained there until 1957, when they were removed to the University of London Library and finally deposited in Bury St Edmunds Public Library.<sup>40</sup>

It was perhaps more common for a parish library in early modern England to be intended for a combined clerical and lay readership, which impacted on their physical accessibility. The library established by Trigge in St Wulfram's church in Grantham was, according to its foundation indenture, for the use of the 'cleargie and others being inhabitants in or nere Grantham and the souke thereof'. It also stipulated a suitable location for this generally accessible collection: 'a verie convenient place in a chamber over the Sowth porch of the said church'.<sup>41</sup> A similar joint clerical and lay readership seems to have been Gillingham's intention when he augmented the collection of patristic texts donated to Wimborne Minster by Stone. Gillingham's 1696 will explicitly stated that the books he donated (and presumably Stone's books too, as he intended for them to be housed together)

were to be used and read by ‘the clergy... but alsoe... the Gent shopkeepers and better sort of Inhabitants in and about the Towne of Wimborne’.<sup>42</sup> The churchwardens at Wimborne Minster paid out considerable sums of money to convert the former Treasury into a library when Stone’s books arrived and Gillingham was apparently content to allow the books to stay in this nominally accessible space. The books are still in the former Treasury today.<sup>43</sup> Spelman’s intention for the Swaffham parish library is less clear. In his will, Spelman gave ‘to the Towne of Swaffham all my Bookes to the end a Librarie may be constantly kept there’, which does not suggest the exclusion of either clergymen or the laity.<sup>44</sup> However, the books were housed first in the Priest’s Chamber above the vestry in St Peter and St Paul’s church before being transferred to the vestry itself in the eighteenth century. Neither room was accessible to the laity.<sup>45</sup>

An intended mixed readership of clerics and laymen may have led to books being placed in parts of the parish church presumably accessible to both groups. In practice, there were often other barriers to access, largely to protect the collection and the books from being damaged or permanently removed. Both the Grantham and the Wimborne Minster libraries, established almost a century apart, were ostensibly housed in rooms that were generally accessible. However, both were situated in upper rooms accessed only by narrow spiral staircases, potentially causing problems for the elderly and the physically disabled. Furthermore, Trigge’s foundation instructions for the Grantham library specifically required ‘one good locke & four keyes to be provided’, to ensure that the door would be kept locked. As a result, whilst the library was nominally accessible, assuming a reader was able to climb the stairs, reading the books was still granted by *de facto* permission of one of the four keyholders – the alderman, the two vicars, and the schoolmaster of Grantham.<sup>46</sup> Once access had been gained, any reader of the Grantham collection would also find its books ‘continually

bownd with convenient chaines to the staples devised', ensuring the security of the books and preventing their removal from the library.<sup>47</sup>

Chaining books was still a common practice in the mid-seventeenth century, as exemplified by the parish library established at Southampton by John Clungeon in 1640. Clungeon ordered that his books were to be kept 'chaned with iron chanes and kepte in an iron grate' for security purposes.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, Chetham's 1653 will ordered that his books, placed in 'convenient places' within the nominated churches, should be 'chained upon deskes, or... fixed to the pillars'. This was, as Chetham's will also noted, to ensure 'that none of the said books be taken out of the said librarie att anie time'.<sup>49</sup> This also meant, however, that in both collections the books could not be moved very far from the shelves they were placed on and so the reader would have been forced to stand at the reading desk attached either to the bookcase or chest in which the books were housed. The Wimborne Minster library, established towards the end of the seventeenth century, was not kept locked, but the books were chained to their shelves. Gillingham's 1696 will ordered that both his books and Stone's should be chained to their shelves, for which purpose he provided £10 towards the purchasing of the chains.<sup>50</sup> At the beginning of the eighteenth century, parish library founders were still ensuring that their books were chained to their shelves to provide for their security and to restrict readers' use of the books. In 1703, Edward Smith, vicar of Sleaford, gave to his parish church a small collection of approximately fifteen books. The nineteenth-century antiquarian Edward Trollope notes that Smith gave to the Sleaford parish church of St Denys 'a collection of books of Divinity, each of which is fastened to a rod by a chain sliding upon it, long enough to allow of its being placed on any part of the desk above, but intended to prevent its abstraction'.<sup>51</sup>

## **Readership Marks**

William H. Sherman has argued that ‘the more heavily a book was used, the more vulnerable it was to decay’.<sup>52</sup> Inversely, the less frequently a book was used, the more likely it is to survive in a reasonable condition. This argument would seem to be borne out by the survival rates of books in parish libraries established in early modern England between 1558 and 1709. Of the 165 parish libraries founded in this period, ninety-one contain at least one surviving book. Twenty-six of those have between a hundred and five hundred books remaining, seven have between five hundred and a thousand books remaining, and a further twelve have over a thousand books still in their collections. Most of the books in the Grantham, Ripon, Gorton, and Wimborne Minster collections (used as case studies here and elsewhere in more detail) are in a reasonably good state of repair; they bear no signs of extreme wear and tear that cannot be attributed to their age. Had these books been read more often or more thoroughly, a higher level of stress on the bindings, and the spines in particular, might be expected. This supports Pettegree’s assertion that early modern library books were not necessarily widely read; that, in fact, ‘many such books were primarily intended for reference rather than consecutive reading’, and that this has allowed them to survive in considerable numbers and often in reasonable condition.<sup>53</sup>

It must be noted, however, that there is a difference between being read and being read to destruction. Reading was central to early modern Protestantism. Green and Andrew Cambers have separately demonstrated that the act of reading varied according to time and place, literacy rates, social status, and situation, but it remained prevalent across these distinctions.<sup>54</sup> Many of the books in early modern English parish libraries were read, at least in part. These readings are attested to by the plethora of articulate marginalia and other, inarticulate marks of readership: underlinings, asterisks and other marginal symbols, and folded corners, amongst others. Sometimes it is possible to tell who has annotated these volumes. A significant proportion of the volumes of patristic and Early Christian works



donated to Wimborne Minster by Stone, for example, include annotations in Stone's own hand, whilst one book in the Grantham library bears the ownership signature of a William Higginbotham in a hand that matches the marginalia present throughout the volume.<sup>55</sup> Most of the time, however, because many books were purchased second-hand for these libraries, it can be difficult to tell who was responsible for the marks in these books, and indeed when the marks themselves were made.

Readers' marks in books in the four parish libraries of Grantham, Ripon, Gorton, and Wimborne Minster centre around four key themes that reflect readers' interests: anti-Catholicism; the importance of Scripture; the interconnected beliefs around sin, repentance, and salvation; and godly living and dying.<sup>56</sup>

Anti-Catholic annotations emphasised the errors, changes, and corruptions of the Roman Catholic Church since the apostolic era. They highlighted Protestants' belief in the pope – and by extension the papacy – being the Antichrist, a belief that Peter Lake argued 'served to bolster the Elizabethan church'.<sup>57</sup> The Gorton copy of Thomas Brightman's *Workes*, for example, includes a marginal annotation adjacent to a passage in which the clergyman argued that the name Antichrist referred 'not [to] particular men, but a certain kingdom and succession', whilst a page on which Francis White stated similar beliefs surrounding the corruption and fall of the pope, in his *A Replie to Jesuit Fisher*, was likewise marked by a reader.<sup>58</sup> This conflation of the pope, the papacy and Antichrist was believed by Protestants to be the cause of the corruption of the Catholic Church. A reader of the Grantham copy of Martin Chemnitz's *Examinis Concilii Tridentini*, for example, underlined Chemnitz's assertion that 'there is no doubt that the Church after the apostles added certain other rites for the purpose of edification, order and decorum'.<sup>59</sup> These corruptions were believed by Protestants to include the practice of selling indulgences, false worship, the veneration of images and idols, and the doctrine of purgatory, as demonstrated by another annotation in the

Grantham copy of Chemnitz's *Examinis* that asserts that 'the papalists carry their opinion about purgatory to Scripture, and do not get it from there'.<sup>60</sup>

Indulgences, the veneration of images and idols, and purgatory were opposed by Protestants because they do not appear in the Bible, which Protestants believed contained everything necessary for faith. A reader of the Gorton copy of John White's *Workes* deliberately folded the corners of pages on which White elucidated 'the illumination of Gods Spirit' and the 'vertue and power that sheweth it self in euery line and leafe of the Bible' as methods by which to understand the truth of Scripture.<sup>61</sup> Annotations focussed on Scripture as the Word of God in these libraries' books also focus on the perceived importance of Scripture and correct Scriptural understanding. This was achieved, according to a marked passage in the Gorton copy of Francis Roberts' *Clavis Bibliorum*, by being 'well acquainted with the 1 Order, 2 Titles, 3 Times, 4 Penmen, 5 Occasion, 6 Scope, and 7 Principal Parts of the books, both of the Old and N. Testament'.<sup>62</sup> Carl Trueman has noted that correct interpretation of Scripture by early modern Protestants required them 'to believe it in a saving sense for oneself'. This was achieved through a sense of devotion and the assistance of the Holy Spirit, which itself was channelled through Bible reading.<sup>63</sup> For early modern Protestants, the main benefits of Scripture consisted in its ability to teach and improve its readers and in the regulation of Christian life. As Higginbotham noted in his copy of John Calvin's *Sermons Upon the Booke of Job* now in the Grantham library, 'we most [sic] imbrace one another in a godly manner'.<sup>64</sup> This also seems to have extended to conversion attempts, as shown in a marked passage of John Dod's *A Plaine and Familiar Exposition on the Ten Commandements*, in which the divine stated that 'he that can thus convert his brother from going astray, hath done the part of a good man, and loving friend'.<sup>65</sup>

Such an effort was also viewed as the kind of good work that underscored a godly life, along with regular prayer to God and patience and trust in Him. Regular prayer was

extremely important to early modern Protestants, but Alec Ryrie has argued that the Biblical precedent for prayer seven times a day was largely impractical, and so many practiced daily prayer instead.<sup>66</sup> This is reflected by readers of parish library books and is exemplified by the annotation in the Grantham copy of Saint Cyprian's *Epistles*, which underlines the patristic author's exhortation to 'be constant as well in prayer... now speak with God, now let God speak with you'.<sup>67</sup> The importance of trusting in and being patient with God was a recurrent theme in parish library annotations, and can be encapsulated by Higginbotham's marginal comment in the Grantham copy of Calvin's *Sermons* that says simply, 'let us be thankful for the care that god has for us', and his underlining of Calvin's own exhortation to his readers to 'refuse not the correction of the almighty'.<sup>68</sup> A good death was made through active preparation for the event and through seeking the advice of divines on how best to undertake that preparation. Early modern Protestants' preoccupation with death is highlighted by a folded page of the Gorton copy of Arthur Hildersham's *CLII Lectures upon Psalm, LI*, which explained that thinking about one's own death would distract the mind from focussing on the worldly pleasures that had been sacrificed for God, lest they should draw a person into sin.<sup>69</sup>

Readers frequently highlighted the internal and external temptations that manifested in sinful actions committed by individuals on a daily basis. The Puritan theologian William Perkins, on a marked page of the Gorton copy of the second volume of his *Workes*, for example, highlighted sins of infirmity, caused by the passions of men that included grief, anger, sorrow, and other, similar emotions, and sins of presumption, which arose from emotions like pride, arrogance, and wilfulness.<sup>70</sup> If sins such as these were committed, they needed to be repented, and readers of parish library books were deeply concerned with what Ryrie has shown to be the complex process of repentance, which functioned as the pathway back to God.<sup>71</sup> Biblical scholar and Hebraist, Joseph Mede, on two marked pages of the Gorton copy of his *Diatribæ*, outlined a three-step self-examination process for readers to

follow to determine whether they were a true penitent that was ready to repent of their sins.<sup>72</sup> Salvation and eternal life could be achieved through faith and righteousness and through a life lived in service to others. The final sentence of the Ripon copy of Saint Athanasius's *Contra Gentes*, in which Athanasius asserted that 'immortality and the kingdom of heaven is the fruit of faith and devotion towards Him', in a passage underlined by a reader, highlights the importance of this belief.

## **Conclusion**

Parish libraries were an important element of religious education in early modern England. Their collections were originally focussed almost entirely on religious and theological texts but gradually expanded outwards to encompass works of secular literature on a variety of educational topics. The Latin nature of these religious texts was not as prohibitive to the general readership that many library founders envisaged as previously thought and, in fact, were nominally available to be read by anyone with at least a grammar school education. Parish library books in early modern England were read, some in some depth. This detailed, but often thematic, reading is evidenced by numerous instances of marginalia and annotations, only a sample of which has been presented here, that highlight the subjects that piqued readers' interests in these texts. These patterns of readership focussed primarily on anti-Catholic sentiments around the corruptions of the Catholic Church that were rooted in Protestants' belief in the importance of Scripture and the idea that it contained everything necessary for salvation. Scripture emphasised the importance of good works, which included the use of the Bible as a tool for teaching and conversion, both of which were a crucial part of living the godly life necessary for salvation. Salvation was possible if sin was committed, but only if those sins were repented of, and the significance of this to early modern Protestants, as well as advice on how to repent, was likewise emphasised in the marginalia of the parish

library books. Restrictions on physical access to these books, which ranged from locked doors to narrow spiral staircases to chains on books that prevented their removal, thus did not stop them being read and their messages were held in high regard by early modern Protestant users of these educational repositories.

From the early eighteenth century onwards, parish library provision began to change. The parish libraries of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries gradually evolved firstly into libraries that were established and left in the care of trustees, like those of Maldon in Essex and Reigate in Surrey, which ‘being constituted in another Manner than the Libraries provided for’ by the Parochial Libraries Act of 1709, was altogether exempted, and secondly into the subscription libraries that would dominate the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. More work remains to be done on these libraries, both in terms of their users and their borrowing habits and reading interests. The recent development of new digital resources, such as the ‘Libraries, Reading Communities & Cultural Formation in the 18th Century Atlantic’ and the ‘Books and Borrowing 1750-1830’, databases offer unprecedented data on the circulation of texts in this period and will be invaluable for future research in these and other areas of interest.

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<sup>2</sup> Leonard W. Cowie, ‘Bray, Thomas (bap. 1658, d. 1730)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004; online ed., 2012), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/3296> (accessed 3 March 2024).

<sup>3</sup> ‘An Act for the better Preservation of Parochial Libraries in that Part of Great Britain called England’ in Michael Perkin, *A Directory of the Parochial Libraries of the Church of England and the Church in Wales*, Appendix A (London: Bibliographical Society, 2004), 439-42.

<sup>4</sup> Arnold Hunt, ‘Clerical and Parish Libraries’, in *The Cambridge History of Libraries*, vol. I: to 1640, ed. Elisabeth Leedham-Green and Teresa Webber (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 416.

<sup>5</sup> W. M. Jacob, ‘Parochial Libraries and their Users’, *Library and Information History*, 27, no. 4 (2011), 211.

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- <sup>6</sup> David Williams, 'The Use and Abuse of a Pious Intention: Changing Attitudes to Parochial Libraries', *The Library Association and Study School and National Conference Proceedings* (Nottingham, 1979), 21.
- <sup>7</sup> Andrew Pettegree, 'The Legion of the Lost. Recovering the Lost Books of Early Modern Europe', in *Lost Books: Reconstructing the Print World of Pre-Industrial Europe*, ed. Flavia Bruni and Andrew Pettegree, (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 3.
- <sup>8</sup> 'Documents Relating to the Trigge Library: Agreement', Grantham St Wulfram Par/23/1, Lincolnshire Archives.
- <sup>9</sup> James Wright, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Rutland* (London: Printed for Bennet Griffin, 1684), 52.
- <sup>10</sup> 'Last Will and Testament of Humphrey Chetham', uncatalogued, Chetham's Library, Manchester.
- <sup>11</sup> Jean-Louis Quantin, *The Church of England and Christian Antiquity: The Construction of a Confessional Identity in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), *passim*.
- <sup>12</sup> 'Will of Roger Gillingham of Middle Temple, Middlesex, 25 February 1696', PROB 11/430/238, The National Archives, Kew.
- <sup>13</sup> 'More Church Library Trust Deeds with Rules', P193/S/1/1, Shropshire Archives.
- <sup>14</sup> Conal Condren, 'More Parish Library, Salop', *Library History*, 7, no. 5 (1987), 146, 150-58.
- <sup>15</sup> Andrew Pettegree, 'Centre and Periphery in the European Book World', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 18 (2008), 118.
- <sup>16</sup> Joad Raymond, 'The Development of the Book Trade in Britain', in *The Oxford History of Popular Print Culture*, vol.1: *Cheap Print in Britain and Ireland to 1660*, ed. Joad Raymond (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 60-61.
- <sup>17</sup> Pettegree, 'Centre and Periphery', 104.
- <sup>18</sup> John Taylor, *The Carriers Cosmographie* (London: Printed by A.G. [Anne Griffin], 1637).
- <sup>19</sup> Perkin, *Directory*, 259-62.
- <sup>20</sup> 'Documents Relating to the Trigge Library: Agreement'.
- <sup>21</sup> John Glenn, 'A Sixteenth-Century Library: the Francis Trigge Chained Library of St Wulfram's Church, Grantham', in *Early Tudor England: Proceedings of the 1987 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. Daniel Williams (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1989), 66; Jessica G. Purdy, *Reading Between the Lines: Parish Libraries and their Readers in Early Modern England, 1558-1709* (Leiden: Brill, 2023), 92.
- <sup>22</sup> Pettegree, 'Centre and Periphery', 106; Margaret Lane Ford, 'Importation of Printed Books into England and Scotland', in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, vol. III: *1400-1557*, ed. Lotte Hellinga and J. B. Trapp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 183-88.
- <sup>23</sup> Perkin, *Directory*, 364-65; William Carr and Stuart Handley, 'Spelman, Clement (Bap. 1598, d. 1679)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/26102>; Stuart Handley, 'Spelman, Sir Henry (1563/4-1641)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/26104>; David L. Smith, 'Spelman, Sir John (1594-1643)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/26105> (all accessed 3 March 2024).
- <sup>24</sup> Raymond, 'Development of the Book Trade in Britain', 61.
- <sup>25</sup> Pettegree, 'Centre and Periphery', 106.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 106, 114; Alan B. Farmer, 'Cosmopolitanism and Foreign Books in Early Modern England', *Shakespeare Studies*, 35 (2007), 58.
- <sup>27</sup> Julian Roberts, 'The Latin Trade', in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, vol. IV: *1557-1695*, ed. John Barnard, D. F. McKenzie and Maureen Bell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 141-42.
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- <sup>32</sup> Ian Green, *Print and Protestantism in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 34.
- <sup>33</sup> 'Last Will and Testament of Humphrey Chetham'.
- <sup>34</sup> Burnett Hillman Streeter, *The Chained Library: A Survey of Four Centuries in the Evolution of the English Library* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1931), 292.
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- <sup>36</sup> 'Will of William Smarte of Ipswich, Suffolk, 2 November 1599', PROB 11/94/340, The National Archives, Kew.

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- <sup>38</sup> ‘Will of William Burkitt, Vicar and Lecturer of Dedham, Essex, 18 December 1703’, PROB 11/473/499, The National Archives, Kew.
- <sup>39</sup> ‘Will of Stephen Camborne, Rector of Lawshall, Suffolk, 29 March 1704’, PROB 11/473/499, The National Archives, Kew.
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- <sup>41</sup> ‘Documents Relating to the Trigge Library: Agreement’; For a brief description and discussion of the surrounding area of Grantham, the ‘Soke’, see Edmund Turnor, *Collections for the History of the Town and Soke of Grantham* (London: W. Bulmer and Co. for William Miller, 1806), ix.
- <sup>42</sup> ‘Will of Roger Gillingham of Middle Temple, Middlesex, 25 February 1696’, PROB 11/430/238, The National Archives, Kew.
- <sup>43</sup> ‘Account Book, 1640-1696’, PE-WM/CW/1/42, Dorset History Centre, Dorset.
- <sup>44</sup> ‘Will of Clement Spelman of Saint Mary Magdalene, Norfolk, 15 May 1680’, PROB 11/363/68, The National Archives, Kew.
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- <sup>46</sup> ‘Documents relating to the Trigge Library: Agreement’.
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- <sup>49</sup> ‘Last Will and Testament of Humphrey Chetham’.
- <sup>50</sup> ‘Will of Roger Gillingham’.
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- <sup>52</sup> William H. Sherman, *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 5.
- <sup>53</sup> Pettegree, ‘Legion of the Lost’, 3.
- <sup>54</sup> Green, *Print and Protestantism*, 25; Andrew Cambers, *Godly Reading: Print, Manuscript and Puritanism in England, 1580-1720* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), *passim*.
- <sup>55</sup> John Calvin, *Sermons Upon the Booke of Job* (Trans. A. Golding) (London: T. Dawson for G. Bishop and T. Woodcocke, 1579). Annotated copy: Francis Trigge Chained Library, shelfmark E10.
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- <sup>57</sup> Peter Lake, *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 56.
- <sup>58</sup> Thomas Brightman, *The Works of that Famous, Reverend, and Learned Divine, Mr. Thomas Brightman* (London: John Field, 1644), 614-15. Annotated copy: Gorton Chest, Chetham’s Library, shelfmark GC.1.22; Francis White, *A Replie to Jesuit Fisher’s Answer to Certain Questions Propounded by His Most Gracious Majesty, King James* (London: Adam Islip, 1624), 63. Annotated copy: Gorton Chest, Chetham’s Library, shelfmark GC.1.27.
- <sup>59</sup> Martin Chemnitz, *Examinis Concilii Tridentini, Part I* (Frankfurt: Peter Fabricius, 1585), 74. Annotated copy: Francis Trigge Chained Library, shelfmark D2. Underlined Latin passage on p. 74 reads ‘...*Ecclesiam post Apostolos pro ratione aedificationis, ordinis & decori, alios quosdam ritus addidisse*’. English translation: Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent, Part I*, tr. Fred Kramer (London: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), p. 268.
- <sup>60</sup> Martin Chemnitz, *Examinis Concilii Tridentini, Part III* (Frankfurt: Peter Fabricius, 1585), 116. Annotated copy: Francis Trigge Chained Library, shelfmark D2. Underlined Latin passage on p. 116 reads ‘*Antea aliquoties diximus, Pontificios opinionem purgatorii ad Scripturam adferre, non inde referre, sed cogere hoc videri in Scriptura dictum, quod ante lectionem praesumpserunt credendum*’. English translation: Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent, Part III*, tr. Fred Kramer (London: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), 330.
- <sup>61</sup> John White, *The Workes of that Learned and Reverend Divine, John White, Doctor in Divinitie* (London: R.F., 1624), 26. Annotated copy: Gorton Chest, Chetham’s Library, shelfmark GC.2.1.
- <sup>62</sup> Francis Roberts, *Clavis Bibliorum. The Key of the Bible, Unlocking the Richest Treasury of the Holy Scriptures* (London: T.R. and E.M., 1649), pt 1, 43. Annotated copy: Gorton Chest, Chetham’s Library, shelfmark GC.1.8.
- <sup>63</sup> Carl R. Trueman, ‘Scripture and Exegesis in Early Modern Reformed Theology’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theology, 1600-1800*, ed. Ulrich L. Lehner, Richard A. Muller and A. G. Roeber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 187; Cambers, *Godly Reading*, 16.

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- <sup>66</sup> Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 148.
- <sup>67</sup> Saint Cyprian, *Opera* (Basel: the Office of Johann Froben, 1521), 50. Annotated copy: Francis Trigge Chained Library, shelfmark F27. Underlined Latin passage on p. 50 reads '*Sit tibi uel oratio assidua, uel lectio: nunc cum deo loquere, nunc deus tecum...*'. English translation: *The Writings of Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage*, vol. I, tr. Robert Ernest Wallis, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1868), 12-13.
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