

THE CRUNDALE RECTORIAL LIBRARY  
(a collection at Wye College)

In addition to the modern working collection of books and journals relating to the new core areas of study, Wye College also houses a unique parish library, the Crundale Rectorial Library.

The Library, totalling 934 volumes (about 2000 items), was the private collection of the Rev. Richard Forster, Rector of Crundale, Kent, from 1698 to his death in 1729. In his will, Forster bequeathed the library to his successors as rector of Crundale. The parish of Crundale was merged with Godmersham in the 1940's and the library was moved to the Vicarage at Godmersham. The books were housed at Wye College in 1976 and just before his resignation in 1977 Canon Brade-Birks, the last Vicar of Godmersham and Rector of Crundale, deposited them permanently with Wye College.

The collection is both the working and the private library of an early eighteenth-century Anglican clergyman. It contains much theological material in Latin and English, editions of the early Fathers in Greek and Latin, works on church history and European history and a considerable quantity of controversial pamphlets on the political topics of the day, particularly on the Revolution of 1688 and its aftermath. There is also material representing Forster's leisure reading, a collection of textbooks from his University days, and some interesting scientific and mathematical material. Most of the books bear Forster's signature and many of them have a note of the price and sometimes of the place and date of purchase.

A small number of volumes shelved with the library were added after Forster's death. Some belonged to his friend and colleague, Samuel Pegge, vicar of Godmersham.

Forster's Will

In his will, made on 15 November 1728 (Maidstone County Record Office Archdeaconry Court of Canterbury, PRC 17 Bk 87, f.14 photocopy and transcription at Wye College Library), Forster 'bequeathed my Body to the Ground to be buried in the Church Yard of Crundale in a little Vault I have provided for it'. Because the revenues of the living of Crundale were so small 'that they are not like to enable an Incumbent decently to maintain

himself and Family, and likewise purchase dispos'd of, with my Chronological-Tables as a Parochial-Library under the Protection of the Statute of ye Seventh Year of Queen Ann for the Use of all succeeding Rectors'. To his tenants James and Ann May he gave 'my Family-Bible in Folio', and to his servant Thomas Burch 'my Quarto Bible of the last translation'.

Catalogue of the Library

An official copy of the catalogue of the Crundale Library was made on Forster's death and was deposited in the Archdeaconry records at Canterbury Cathedral so that 'every succeeding Rector' could certify that 'the said books are all remaining in the said Library, or else which of them are wanting'. This check would take place at the induction of a new incumbent or on a subsequent Archdeacon's visitation. The Rector himself was also to have a copy made. Cathedral Library Y. 4.30 is the Archdeaconry copy of this catalogue (photocopy at Wye College). It was 'exhibited 8 May 1729 to Mr Archdeacon by Mr Silas Drayton Rector of Crundale' (Forster's successor) and at the end we find Drayton's subscription witnessed on 29 April 1729 by Edward Lunn, Rector of Denton, and J. Clough, Vicar of Ashford. Two books were missing and Drayton later notes that one had since been found.

The extant catalogue is hand-written, in single columns, giving in shelfmark order details of the author, title, place and date of each item. There follows an alphabetical index, giving names and shelfmark references. The collection is still housed at Wye College according to the system of shelfmarks in this catalogue, which presumably represents the way the books were shelved in the last years of Forster's life.

A modern catalogue of the collection was undertaken by the late Miss Helen Greer, former Librarian of Wye College. Continuing work on this is being coordinated by Dr David Shaw of the University of Kent at Canterbury. This catalogue is being produced as a computer-based catalogue, using the same methods as for Canterbury Cathedral Library's own catalogue of pre-1801 printed books, with which it will be merged to form the basis of an East Kent union catalogue of early printed books. A separate catalogue of the Crundale library will also be printed.

Dr David Shaw,  
Darwin College,  
The University of Kent

Mrs Mary Lucas,  
Librarian,  
Wye College