

## Parochial Libraries in Kent

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The English parochial library which is our focus at this conference is essentially a post-Reformation phenomenon.<sup>1</sup> However, it should not be forgotten that pre-Reformation parish churches often had books besides those needed for the church offices. Arnold Hunt has argued for some degree of continuity of practice between the pre- and post-medieval periods in terms of the presence of non-liturgical books in churches, noting that 'by the late fifteenth century, some parishes had built up very large collections of books'.<sup>2</sup> Michael Perkin states that 'probably most churches possessed some books other than service-books in the 15th century'.<sup>3</sup> Books of both sorts were often the result of benefactions, as can be traced in surviving Kentish wills.

Although Tenterden is not listed in the *Directory* as a Kentish church having had a library, the will of John Mower (or Mooer or Mores), perpetual vicar of Tenterden, dated Palm Sunday 1489,<sup>4</sup> provides evidence that the church did have a book collection of some sort before the Reformation. John Mower clearly owned a considerable personal collection of books. His will details nearly fifty books which he wished to bequeath to eight religious houses, to a number of clergy from neighbouring parishes, and to kinsmen. To his church of St Mildred at Tenterden, he left 'one new gradual to serve God in the south side of the choir'; this is a fairly typical sort of bequest of a book for purely liturgical purposes. He also left to his parish church (as well as money to carry out repairs) 'a book called Pupilla oculi sacerdotis to be chained in the same part of the choir' and 'a common gloss on the Gospels to be chained in the same part of the choir'.<sup>5</sup> These two bequests are noteworthy in their specification of chaining, suggesting that they were intended as reference works for common use, though probably only by his successor as vicar and any other priests serving the church. In some ways they resemble the 'desk libraries' of the later Tudor period.<sup>6</sup> In a will of 1505, John Strekymbold left 6s. 8d. 'to the repair of the books' of Tenterden Church; this might simply have been for the upkeep of the service books.<sup>7</sup> None of these books seem to have survived.<sup>8</sup>

Another pre-Reformation Kentish parochial library is that of St Dunstan's, Canterbury, as recorded in the churchwardens' accounts.<sup>9</sup> In particular, there is an inventory made in 1500 which lists over 50 books. The list starts with service books: 'A princypall mass boke ... A antyffener ... A ordinal ... A prymier ...' but it also contains a large set of saint's lives and also texts relating to the Corpus Christi plays.<sup>10</sup> An entry for 1523 records expenditure 'for claspynge byndyng and amending of bokes'.<sup>11</sup> As with St Mildred's,

Tenterden, no post-Reformation library is recorded for St Dunstan's, though a number of later entries from the mid-sixteenth-century accounts record the church's payments to comply with the requirements for books for the new Anglican liturgy.<sup>12</sup>

The obvious starting point for a review of the history and present-day survival of post-Reformation parochial libraries in Kent is Michael Perkin's *Directory*. From that, we can quickly ascertain that there are 17 libraries with surviving books, of which 9 were the so-called 'desk libraries'. The *Directory* records a further 13 libraries which do not survive. The surviving libraries (excluding the desk libraries), with dates, patrons, and the size of their holdings are shown in Table 1. We shall look in a little more detail at five of these later. The libraries whose existence has been documented but which do not survive are shown in Table 2, again omitting the desk libraries.

<i>Parish</i>	<i>size</i>	<i>donor</i>	<i>date</i>
Crundale	934 vols, 2261 titles	Revd Richard Forster	1729
Doddington	395 vols	Revd Daniel Somerscales	1743
Elham	1,338 vols	Lee Warley	1810
Graveney	41 vols (of 100+)		17th c.
Maidstone	719 vols + 3 MSS	Samuel Weller, Bray's will	16th/17th c.
Penshurst	9 vols (4 works)	several rectors	17th/18th c.
Preston	41 vols (out of 67)	Bray Trustees	1710
Smarden	13 vols (out of 69)	Revd William Bedford	1783

**Table 1: Surviving parochial libraries in Kent**

Ash-by-Wrotham	367 vols		19th c., sold 1970
Ashurst	68 vols	Bray Associates	1823
Deal		Thomas Bray	1699
Deptford	152 vols	Bray Associates	1832
Detling	72 vols	Bray Trustees	1710
Faversham		Canterbury D&C	1719
Gravesend		Thomas Bray	1699
Patricbourne	1,078 vols	Revd John Bowtell	1753
Thurnham	126 vols	Revd Henry Dering?	early 18th century
Westerham	'several hundred' vols		Charles West
	1756		

**Table 2: Kentish parochial libraries which do not survive**

These lists show over two hundred years of activity in the endowment of parish libraries in the county, starting with a very small number of sixteenth-century cases and extending from the late seventeenth century into the middle of the nineteenth century, at which point many of the earlier collections were being abandoned or disposed of. It is

impossible to discuss the history of these collections without taking account of the contribution played in the early eighteenth century by Dr Thomas Bray, whose name appears several times in the tables above and whose activities have been mentioned by several other speakers. But Bray was not the first to encourage the creation of libraries in the parishes and we should mention first of all two Kentish libraries which are recorded from before Bray's time. The library at Penshurst dates from before the Civil War and was formed by donations by rectors in the 1630s and 1640s, with additions in the eighteenth century.<sup>13</sup> Maidstone is even older, having its origins in the second half of the sixteenth century, when there are records of chained books (i.e. a desk library).<sup>14</sup>

Thomas Bray's activities as a founder of libraries started in Kent before his time in New England. *En route* for Maryland in 1699, he set up small libraries with book boxes in Gravesend and in Deal,<sup>15</sup> presumably while in transit from London via the Thames estuary into the English Channel for final embarkation to America. The story of his library activities there and on his return which led to the Act of 1709<sup>16</sup> establishing a scheme of protection for parochial libraries is not my concern today. Bray's initiatives were however responsible directly, or indirectly through the Bray Trustees, for the establishment of a number of other libraries in Kent. Among the first libraries to be sent out by the Trustees in 1710 were those dispatched to Detling<sup>17</sup> and to Preston next Wingham.<sup>18</sup> The Bray Associates were responsible for the establishment of at least two more Kentish libraries in the nineteenth century: Ashurst (1823, augmented in 1870)<sup>19</sup> and Deptford (1832).<sup>20</sup>

The parochial library at All Saints Maidstone had a different connection with Thomas Bray.<sup>21</sup> As mentioned above, a desk library was established there in the sixteenth century and augmented in the seventeenth. By 1716, there was a small collection of 23 works in 37 volumes within the parish church. This quickly became a much more significant collection, reaching about 100 volumes by 1730 and in 1735 augmented by the purchase of 'a large and choice collection of books' from Thomas Bray's own library under the terms of his will. A printed catalogue was produced in 1736 listing 681 volumes, which had increased to 724 volumes in a manuscript catalogue of 1810.<sup>22</sup> The Maidstone library was clearly one which was actively developed throughout the eighteenth century; a borrowers' book exists which shows fifty years of borrowing activity.<sup>23</sup>

Other eighteenth-century foundations without a direct Bray connection are

- Faversham:, established with a grant of £5 from the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury.<sup>24</sup>
- Crundale: established in 1728/9 by the Revd Richard Forster who left his personal library of over 2,000 titles 'as a parochial library under the protection of the statute of ye seventh year of Queen Ann for the use of all succeeding rectors',

showing that Forster was aware of Bray's Act and the protections which it offered.<sup>25</sup>

- Doddington: established in 1743 by the executor of the Revd Daniel Somerscales (c. 1659–1737) with 364 books from his library. Somerscales had previously been involved as a subscriber to the purchase of Bray's library for Maidstone. There were some nineteenth-century additions.<sup>26</sup>
- Patribourne, known from an inventory of 1757, was bequeathed by the widow of the Revd John Bowtell (d. 1753) from her husband's library. It contained over 1,000 items.<sup>27</sup>
- Westerham: several hundred volumes given by Charles West in 1756.<sup>28</sup>
- Smarden: the gift of the Revd William Bedford (1701–1783).<sup>29</sup>

There were other religious libraries founded in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries besides Anglican parochial ones. The Independent Congregational Church in Canterbury (founded in 1645) established a library in its new chapel in Dancing School Yard (off Guildhall Street) in about 1696. Books to establish the library were given by the Canterbury booksellers, Rest Fenner senior and junior. The books in question, about 30 in number, are almost entirely standard texts dating from the earlier years of the presbyterian movement in the mid-century.<sup>30</sup>

Another non-parochial library established in Canterbury was a small library of some 78 volumes which had been set up by 1740 in the Eastbridge Hospital, Canterbury, where the local antiquarian Revd John Lewis (1675–1747) had been appointed Master in 1718. Use of this library was specified as for 'Religious Societies and other well disposed persons',<sup>31</sup> which seems to relate to Lewis's evangelical Anglicanism and his support for the activities of the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge.<sup>32</sup>

There was one major founding of a parish library in the nineteenth century, the Elham Parish Library, which also was not parochial in origin. Its history dates back to the later sixteenth century as the personal libraries of the Oxinden and then the Warly families, especially Henry Oxinden of Barham (1609–1670), his grandson John Warly (1674–1732), a Canterbury surgeon, and the extensive library of his son Lee Warly (1715–1807), a Canterbury lawyer, who left the accumulated 1,338 volumes to the parish of Elham 'for the whole and sole use of the inhabitants thereof'. Printed catalogues were published in 1808 and 1845.<sup>33</sup>

To conclude this survey, I shall report briefly on the current situation of five of these libraries which I have been able to visit recently.

Part of Lee Warly's Elham Library was deposited at the Cathedral Library in Canterbury in 1912 and the rest in 1970 on permanent deposit. It was catalogued as part of the Cathedral's computer-based catalogue of printed books which can be consulted via the

University of Kent's OPAC.<sup>34</sup> The collection has been studied in detail by Sheila Hingley, formerly the Cathedral Librarian at Canterbury.<sup>35</sup> The Elham Library is a rich historical and bibliographical source and is now securely housed at the Cathedral and available for study.

The library of Preston-next-Wingham is also on deposit at the Cathedral Library in Canterbury (since 1983) and its books are also catalogued and accessible there. The collection is still housed in its original travelling bookcase as dispatched from London by the Bray Trustees. Michael Perkin describes it as follows: 'The travelling bookcase, normally unpainted, was painted white after receipt at the church, with the letters "Dr Bray's Parochial Library for the use of the vicars of Preston" picked out in black. A copy of the printed 1709 Act originally pasted inside the door has now been removed for conservation.'<sup>36</sup> What appears to be the original shelf list is still pasted on the inside of the door. Altogether, this is a wonderful survival from the time of Thomas Bray.

The books from the library of All Saints, Maidstone, are currently housed at the Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone (the county archives) and will probably move from there to the planned Kent History Centre in 2012. In the 1990s an unsuccessful attempt was made to set up a Trust to manage the library along similar lines to the Cranston Library at Reigate.<sup>37</sup> As part of this initiative, a MARC catalogue was prepared in 1996–1997 but the records are not publically accessible. The library is securely housed and its conservation needs are professionally managed but it is not really usable because of the unavailability of its catalogue.

The Doddington Parochial Library with four of its original travelling cases was deposited at the Fleur de Lis Heritage Centre in Faversham in the custody of the Faversham Society in 1983. Some grants have been obtained for repair and conservation work. It is housed in an attic of a delightful half-timbered building now used as the local museum. It is being enthusiastically looked after by the Librarian of the Faversham Society, together with the library of the Marlowe Society, also on deposit, but its environmental conditions cannot be described as ideal and its long-term future is unclear. There is no modern catalogue publically available.

Richard Forster's rectorial library at Crundale had been housed in Godmersham vicarage after the parishes were united; it was deposited at Wye College (University of London) in 1976. Following the closure of Wye College in 2009, the library has been moved to Godmersham Park House where it is in the care of the Godmersham and Crundale Heritage Centre. It is being securely housed and responsibly looked after, with advice available from staff at Canterbury Cathedral Library and Archives, but once again its longer-term future is uncertain. A modern catalogue was prepared by volunteers while the collection was still at Wye; copies are available at Godmersham and at the Cathedral Library.

The Elham and Preston collections are the most satisfactorily housed, as they are in the care of professional staff with modern catalogues available on the internet and modern facilities where researchers can work. Maidstone is in a slightly less good situation as it is not being held in a library environment; there is no anxiety about its physical condition and security in the care of the Kent archives service but the lack of a publically available catalogue makes it more-or-less invisible for researchers. Doddington and Crundale suffer the same drawbacks but more so, as they do not have immediate professional staffing and are in the care of curators where continuity cannot be guaranteed in the medium to long term. Overall, the immediate situation of these five Kentish survivors of the parochial library movement can be assessed as reasonably good to very good.

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- <sup>1</sup> This is a revised and augmented version of the paper given at the conference on ‘Parochial Libraries: past, present & future’ in the Great Hall, Lambeth Palace, London, Monday 26 April 2010.
- <sup>2</sup> Arnold Hunt, ‘Clerical and parish libraries’, in: *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland*, Volume I to 1640, edited by Elisabeth Leedham-Green and Teresa Webber (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 400–419 (p.412).
- <sup>3</sup> Michael Perkin, *A Directory of the Parochial Libraries of the Church of England and the Church in Wales*, (London: The Bibliographical Society, 2004) p. 30. See also Sarah Gray and Chris Baggs, ‘The English Parish Library: A Celebration of Diversity’, *Libraries & Culture*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (Summer, 2000), pp. 414–433 (p. 416).
- <sup>4</sup> National Archives, PROB 11/8 [P.C.C. 20 Milles]. Further information about Mower’s ecclesiastical career can be found in A.B. Emden, *A biographical register of the University of Oxford to A.D. 1500: vol. 2. F.-O.*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, , 1958) pp. 1326–7.
- <sup>5</sup> ‘Item lego eidem eccl[es]ie vnu[m] Gradale nouum ad deseruiend[um] deo in choro eccl[es]ie ex p[ar]te australi eiusdem. Item lego eide[m] eccl[es]ie librum dictum pupilla oculi sacerdotis cathenand[um] in choro p[re]dict<sup>o</sup> et ex p[ar]te p[re]dict<sup>a</sup>. Item lego eide[m] eccl[es]ie [commun]em glosa[m] sup[er] eu[an]gelia cathenand[am] in choro p[re]dict<sup>o</sup> ex p[ar]te predict<sup>a</sup>.’
- <sup>6</sup> For desk libraries, see Perkin, *Directory*, pp. 30–31.
- <sup>7</sup> Arthur Hussey, *Testamenta Cantiana: A series of extracts from fifteenth and sixteenth-century wills relating to church building and topography. East Kent* (London: Mitchell, Hughes and Clarke, 1907) p. 336, giving the reference ‘P.C.C., 39, Holgrave’. The Index (*s.v.* ‘Books’) gives references to other bequests of books to Kentish churches.
- <sup>8</sup> Neil R. Ker, *Medieval libraries of Great Britain: a list of surviving books* (London, 1964) and *Supplement* by Andrew G. Watson (London: Royal Historical Society, 1987); Neil R. Ker, A.J. Piper, Andrew G. Watson, *Medieval manuscripts in British libraries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969–2002).
- <sup>9</sup> J.M. Cowper, ‘Accounts of the Churchwardens of St Dunstan’s, Canterbury, A.D. 1484–1580’, *Archaeologia Cantiana*, XVI (1885/6), pp. 289–321 and XVII (1887), pp. 77–152; also published separately (London: Mitchell and Hughes, 1885 [*i.e.* 1886]).

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- <sup>10</sup> Cowper, 'Accounts', XVI, pp. 313–5.
- <sup>11</sup> Cowper, 'Accounts', XVII, pp. 83 and 147.
- <sup>12</sup> St Dunstan's Canterbury is not listed in the *Directory* which records desk libraries in Canterbury for St Andrew, St Margaret, and St Mary Breadman (pp. 167–7).
- <sup>13</sup> Perkin, *Directory*, p. 317.
- <sup>14</sup> Graham Best, 'Libraries in the parish', in: *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland*, Volume II 1640–1850, edited by Giles Mandelbrote and Keith Manley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 324–344 (p. 326).
- <sup>15</sup> W.M. Jacob, 'Libraries for the parish: Individual donors and charitable societies', in: *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland*, vol. 2, pp. 65–84 (p. 74).
- <sup>16</sup> The text of the *Act for the better Preservation of Parochial Libraries in that Part of Great Britain called England* (Act of 7 Anne C.14) is given as Appendix A in the *Directory* (pp. 439–42).
- <sup>17</sup> Perkin, *Directory*, p. 194; a library of 72 volumes; allegedly sold off in around 1875.
- <sup>18</sup> Perkin, *Directory*, p. 322; 'a library of 67 volumes of which 41 survive'.
- <sup>19</sup> Perkin, *Directory*, p. 123; 68 volumes in 1823, augmented in 1870, not recorded after 1890.
- <sup>20</sup> *Directory*, p. 193; 152 volumes in 1832.
- <sup>21</sup> Perkin, *Directory*, pp. 277–9; Gray and Baggs, 'The English Parish Library', pp. 425–27.
- <sup>22</sup> Perkin, *Directory*, p. 278.
- <sup>23</sup> Best, 'Libraries in the Parish', pp. 339–340.
- <sup>24</sup> Perkin, *Directory*, p. 209.
- <sup>25</sup> Jacob, 'Libraries for the parish', p. 75, Gray and Baggs, 'The English Parish Library', pp. 423–4.
- <sup>26</sup> Perkin, *Directory*, pp. 195–6 and 278.
- <sup>27</sup> Perkin, *Directory*, p. 316.
- <sup>28</sup> Perkin, *Directory*, p. 385.
- <sup>29</sup> Perkin, *Directory*, p. 348.



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- <sup>30</sup> A single-sheet manuscript catalogue of this small collection can be found at the end of the seventeenth-century minute book of the Independent Congregational Church in the Cathedral Archives, Canterbury (CCA/U37, f.57).
- <sup>31</sup> Best, 'Libraries in the Parish', p. 325.
- <sup>32</sup> Scott Mandelbrote, 'Lewis, John (1675–1747)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); online edition, January 2008, accessed 23 April 2010.
- <sup>33</sup> Perkin, *Directory*, p. 205, Gray and Baggs, 'The English Parish Library', pp. 427–30.
- <sup>34</sup> <https://catalogue.kent.ac.uk/>. The Advanced Search menu allows searches to be restricted to the Cathedral's collections.
- <sup>35</sup> Sheila Hingley, 'Elham Parish Library', in: *The Reach of Print: Making, Selling and Using Books*, edited by Peter Isaac and Barry McKay (Winchester: St Paul's Bibliographies; Delaware: Oak Knoll Press, 1998); 'The Oxindens, Warlys and Elham parish library: a family library and its place in print culture in east Kent' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Kent, 2004).
- <sup>36</sup> Perkin, *Directory*, p. 322; Gray and Baggs, 'The English Parish Library', pp. 420–22.
- <sup>37</sup> Perkin, *Directory*, p. 327–329.