



St Botolph's Church

The Parish Library has a long history and Peter Coleman continues our series by delving deep into the volumes.

Words: Peter Coleman Photographs: Boston Stump

Few people realise that the room above the South Porch contains one of the best and largest parish libraries in the country.

Containing 1,200 books (1,700) volumes it was established by Archbishop Laud's edict in 1634 and is still housed in its original setting. The Archbishop's Commissary, Sir Nigel Bent, admonished the clergy after he found the church 'much in decay' and ordered that it be tidied up. The churchyard was to be fenced, the seating to be orderly arranged, the bells to be re-hung and 'the room over the porch of the said church shall be prepared and decently fitted to make a library to the end that in case any well and charitable disposed person shall therefore bestow any books to furnish the same and they may be safely preserved and kept to and for the furtherance and help of such ministers as shall preach in the said church and other who shall repair thereto.'

There must have been some attempt before then to establish a library because The Assembly Book of Boston Corporation for the 12th December 1610 states:

'ITEM, at this assembly it is agreed that the room over the south porch of the church of this Borough shall be prepared and made ready at the charge of this Borough fit and meet to make a library in'

By 1635 the library had received its earliest books-

gifts from the clergy in neighbouring parishes and from the people of Boston, all recorded by the Vicar, Dr Anthony Tuckney. He also gave many books from his own collection. Over the next few years, the mayor and six aldermen added to the collection and Sir Anthony Irby, from the wealthy local family gave £10 towards the purchase of books to be selected by

Tuckney. Then on the death of Vicar Edward Kelsall the corporation purchased his books for £50 and presented them to the Parish Library.

Little is known of the later history of the library, there must have been a leaking roof in 1766, for an order was issued that the lead roof be repaired, the books thoroughly cleaned and piled up – did that mean that there were no shelves?

In 1819, Archdeacon Goddard of Lincoln ordered a catalogue to be made, listing about 1,500 books. We do not know what the books were at this time and he threw out many books that he considered 'trash', that were then sold: though some have been found in recent years. From 1948 to the mid 1960's some lecturers and curates produced catalogues, checking titles against various national biographies.

Some of these have been lost and some incomplete.

It was the lack of a modern definitive catalogue and the poor condition of a large number of volumes that led to the late Pauline Napier to bring together a group of volunteers to oversee the complete



In next month's issue...



Old school

Carre's Grammar School in Sleaford has a long and fascinating history – Josie Thurston joined the boys to find out how it all began.



Necessity is the mother of invention

Mother-of-two Sarah Steel has grown The Old Station Nursery Ltd into a successful business.



Through the Keyhole

Life goes behind the scenes at Burghley House, near Stamford



DR MORE'S WRITINGS AND LINCOLNSHIRE CHURCHES

restoration and conservation of the books. Between 1996 and 2006 over £135,000 was raised by the committee including a substantial grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. This enabled 700 volumes to be repaired and conserved, display boards and cases put into the church and a catalogue to be published. This catalogue is available from the Stump Shop in hardback, paperback, and CD Rom.

Originally, the library was established so that there was a fine and important collection, mainly from the seventeenth century, of the kind which the clergy and other educated people might use. There are also some books printed before 1500.

Amongst the books, there are

important works including a copy of the 1549 prayer book and early editions of Foxe's Book of Martyrs - John Fox was born in Boston in 1517. The library also contains

books printed in Europe by Gryphius, Stephanus and the Elzevirs.

The Parish Archives are housed in the Library except for the documents over 100 years old which are in

the care of the Lincolnshire Archive Office in Lincoln although the library holds microfilm of them.

The library welcomes groups (of no more than six at a time) but as access is difficult it is quite inaccessible for anyone with mobility problems.

If you wish to visit contact the Parish Office 01205 354670 or e-mail parish.office@virgin.net

