

READING FOR SERVANTS

The Archivist recently rediscovered a slim notebook whose printed label declares it to be the ‘Catalogue of Books in the Parochial Lending Library in the parish of ...’ – but the parish is unnamed, because the library in question was in fact for the use of Worcester’s nineteenth-century servants.

The library rules are written on the flyleaf, in a hand identified by the archivist as that of Hibbert Binney, the Bursar in 1849¹: ‘Every Servant of the College may have the use of these Books for himself & the Members of his Family. The Books to be given out every Monday at a stated hour & none to be kept longer than a fortnight. But any volume may be re-issued to the same person after having been returned & entered. One of the Volumes or two tracts may be had at the same time.’

It was a small collection, with fifty titles listed in the catalogue. From the short titles recorded I have been able to identify almost all of the books in the servants’ library (listed below), although none remain in today’s College Library.

Many, perhaps most, were available in editions published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, better known as SPCK and still active today. The Society had an extensive list of publications for all capacities, and it is noteworthy that the rules distinguish ‘volumes’ (indeed, some titles occupy two or three volumes) from ‘tracts’, some as short as 8 pages.

As well as publishing, the SPCK aided the distribution of religious books to schools and parish libraries. I am grateful to Alice Ford-Smith of Dr Williams’s Library for drawing my attention to the Society’s 1848 report and, in particular, a list of 53 titles headed ‘A selection of books and tracts to the value of five pounds, adapted for lending libraries’. Twenty-two of these appear in the servants’ library, suggesting it was purchased largely from the SPCK catalogue. At first sight, a title such as *Charlie Burton: a Tale* appears to be a departure from strictly theological or devotional subjects, but it is of course a morally improving story, and presumably the SPCK deemed *The Useful Arts and Manufactures of Great Britain* acceptably didactic.

Since the library was instituted for the benefit of the servants, which of them took advantage of it? Twenty names are recorded in the borrowing register: Thomas Leaver uses the library twenty-five times, W. Best (a porter) thirteen times, Taplin ten times, and George S. Langfill (book-keeper) seven times. Other names identified include John Best (a butler),

¹ Hibbert Binney (1819–1887) later Bishop of Nova Scotia.

E.L. Brockliss (a cook), James Hastings (under-porter) and Joseph Griffin or Griffiths, listed in the account book under ‘Fagots’.

In all, 113 loans are recorded from June 1849 to December 1851, a steady if not spectacular rate of borrowing. That the books were ‘to be given out every Monday at a stated hour’ suggests that there was a chance for the servants to gather together to choose books, perhaps with discussion. All but eleven of the books are recorded as having been borrowed at least once. The most popular are Burder’s *Oriental Customs* (ten loans), Hall’s *Contemplations* (eight), *A Memoir of Felix Neff* (seven), and *Useful Arts and Manufactures* (six).

It is no great surprise that the servants’ library has been dispersed. The College might have considered it superfluous after the passage of the Public Libraries Act in 1850 (although Oxford’s city lending library was not to open for another four years). Moreover, the SPCK and similar organisations such as the Religious Tract Society published literally millions of items, and ephemeral mass productions are often among the scarcest survivals in libraries. Questions that remain for the interested researcher include where the books were kept (was there a dedicated reading room?), whether there was any opposition to the library within College, and who paid the initial five pounds.

Owen McKnight

An asterisk indicates that the book appears in the 1848 SPCK list.

Bp Hall’s Contemplations (3 v.)		<i>Contemplations on the historical passages of the Old and New Testament</i> Joseph Hall
Ostervald’s Arguments of the Books & Chapters of the Bible (3 v.)		<i>The arguments of the books and chapters of the Old and New Testaments</i> J.F. Ostervald
Liturgy compared with Bible	*	Henry Ives Bailey
Help to Reading the Bible	*	Benjamin Elliott Nicholls
Trower on the Epistles	*	<i>Practical expositions of the Epistles</i> W.J. Trower
D[itt]o on the Gospels	*	<i>Practical expositions of the Gospels</i> W.J. Trower
Leighton’s Commentary (2 v.)	*	<i>Practical commentary on the first Epistle of St Peter</i> Robert Leighton

James on the Collects	*	<i>A comment upon the collects appointed to be used in the Church of England</i> John James
— Christian Watchfulness	*	John James
Horne on the Psalms	*	<i>A commentary on the Book of Psalms</i> George Horne
Secker on the Catechism	*	<i>Lectures on the catechism of the Church of England</i> Thomas Secker
Gastrell's Xtian Institutes	*	<i>The Christian institutes, or, The sincere word of God</i> Francis Gastrell
Burder's Oriental Customs		<i>Oriental customs, or, An illustration of the sacred Scriptures</i> Samuel Burder
Sutton's Learn to live		<i>Disce vivere : learn to live</i> Christopher Sutton
— Learn to die		<i>Disce mori : learn to die</i> Christopher Sutton
Last days of eminent Xtians		<i>Sacred memorials of the last days and blessed deaths of eminent Christians</i> Henry Clissold
Memoir of Felix Neff		<i>A memoir of Felix Neff, pastor of the High Alps</i> William Stephen Gilly
Churchman's Magazine 1846, 1847, 1848		<i>The churchman's monthly penny magazine and guide to Christian truth</i>
Repository Tracts (2 v.)	*	<i>Cheap repository tracts</i>
Greene's Discourses	*	<i>Four discourses on the four last things</i> Thomas Greene
Life of God in the soul	*	<i>The life of God in the soul of man</i> Henry Scougal
Guide to Xtian Families	*	<i>A help and guide to Christian families</i> William Burkitt
Principles & duties of Xtianity		Thomas Wilson
Similitudes used in Scripture	*	W.J. Trower
Gibson's pastoral letters		Edmund Gibson
Conversations on the Liturgy	*	<i>Village conversations on the liturgy of the Church of England</i> George Davys
— the Offices	*	<i>Village conversations on the principal offices of the Church</i> George Davys
Charlie Burton		J.A. Sargant
The Family Quarrel	*	

Loss of the Kent		<i>A narrative of the loss of the Kent East Indiaman</i>
Old Oak Tree		
Memoirs of Barrow &c		? <i>Eighteen sermons on various subjects</i> Isaac Barrow
Xtian guide to plain people		<i>A Christian guide for plain people</i> John Miller
Cottage Conversations		
Resolutions respecting religion		William Beveridge
Clergyman's advice to Parishioners		<i>The country clergyman's advice to his parishioners</i> William Holmes
Curate of Mersden		also <i>Marsden</i> E. & M. Attersoll
Church Catechism explained		William Beveridge or John Lewis
History of the Prayer Book	*	Edward Berens
Easy Method with a Deist	*	<i>A short and easy method with the deists</i> Charles Leslie
Seven Churches of Asia		John Aikman Wallace
History of the Plague		<i>History of the plague in London in 1665 : with suitable reflections</i> Daniel Defoe
Lessons on Houses Furniture		<i>Lessons on houses, furniture, food, and clothing</i> (<i>The instructor, v. 2</i>)
— the Universe		<i>Lessons on the universe</i> (<i>The instructor, v. 3</i>)
Useful Arts & Manufactures		Charles Tomlinson
Similitudes used in Scripture 2d Series	*	W.J. Trower
Plain Words about Prayer		
Pious Xtian's preparation	*	<i>The pious Christian's daily preparation for death and eternity</i> Richard Hele
Duty of Family Prayer		C.J. Blomfield
Apostolical Institution of Episcopacy		William Chillingworth