

## THE COWBRIDGE LENDING LIBRARY

by Michael Wilcox

For nearly one hundred and fifty years, Cowbridge Church was the home of a lending library which has now almost entirely vanished from public view. One bookcase may remain in the church vestry and a few books may be in private hands, but the rest has been lost to the passing of time and to neglect and decay.

Established in about 1711 on the initiative of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and stocked by donations of books and money received from an appeal through the whole country, the Cowbridge Lending Library was to be one of four such, placed in each of the ancient Welsh dioceses for the benefit of the many poor parish clergy within the principality. The library was under the control of trustees drawn from the local gentry and clergy and they appointed a keeper or librarian who was usually the master of Cowbridge Grammar School. Membership was open to clergymen and schoolteachers living within ten miles of Cowbridge, to the trustees and to anyone else who gave books or cash to the value of ten shillings; its privileges were the right to use the library during the two hours it was open on each market day morning and to borrow up to two books on signing the necessary undertaking and paying a deposit of something more than the replacement value of the book.

It could be said that the library, like much of the established church in the eighteenth century, suffered from want of zeal. The trustees never met for years on end and if a subscription was launched, some would fail to contribute, although there was no regular income for books; the church roof leaked and ruined some of the books, others were borrowed and never returned. When towards the end of the century the trustees did meet more regularly, they came upon a conveniently ambiguous phrase to note that the library was 'found upon Inspection and Examination to be in as good order and condition as the trustees had reason to expect'. In fact this form of words was so convenient that the trustees used it virtually unchanged for over thirty years to record their meetings.<sup>1</sup> A meeting of the Church Vestry in 1848 resolved to reclaim the room which the books occupied and from then their fate is obscure until the early years of this century when the remnant of them was discovered stored in a cottage by the then Rector of Cowbridge and local historian, Lemuel Hopkin-James.<sup>2</sup>

It is perhaps then surprising that in the 1950s, E.O.T. Lewis was able to trace the history of the library in two articles based on records which he found scattered in public and private hands.<sup>3</sup> Among the most important of these is the library register, of which the Glamorgan Record Office has a photocopy.<sup>4</sup> It contains copies of the deed of foundation and of the appointment of the librarian, a catalogue with annotations, a list of benefactions and minutes of the trustees' meetings. To this can now be added another item deposited in the Record Office during the past year among the Cowbridge parish records. It is a catalogue of the library in 1793, apparently unknown and although printed, probably unique.<sup>5</sup>

The catalogue is a small booklet with blue paper wrappers and in twenty two pages it lists over four hundred volumes as they were arranged in nine presses or bookcases. As well as author and title, it gives the places of publication, bookseller's usual price and lending value of each book. The year of the catalogue's publication appears on its title page, but no indication of the place. Cowbridge had itself been the site of the press of Rhys Thomas from c.1770 to 1791

## IN PRESS, No. IV.

		Bookseller's usual Price.	The lending Value.	
H.		£. s. d.	£. s. d.	
1—	Kettlewell's Measures of Christian Obedience - - - Lond.	1709	0 5 0	0 6 0
2—	Joan. Arndtius De Vero Christian- ismo, Tom. 1st - - - Lond.	1708	0 4 0	0 5 0
3—	——— Tom. Posterior - - - Lond.	1708	0 4 0	0 5 0
4—	——— Vol. 2d - - - Lond.	1709	0 4 0	0 5 0
5—	Dr. Stanhope's Translation of Tho. à Kempis - - - - -	1700	0 5 0	0 6 0
6—	Dr. Hickeys's Translation of the 2d Vol. of Tho. à Kempis - - -	1710	0 4 0	0 5 0
7—	Oferwald's Nature of Uncleannefs - - - - - Lond.	1708	0 3 6	0 4 0
8—	——— Catechism - - - Lond.	1704	0 3 0	0 3 6
9—	Dr. Gastrell's Xian Institutes Lond.	1709	0 4 0	0 5 0
10—	Bp. Stillingfleet's Sermons, Vol. 1st - - - - - Lond.	1696	0 5 0	0 5 6
11—	——— Vol. 2d - - - Lond.	1697	0 5 0	0 6 0
12—	——— Vol. 3d - - - Lond.	1698	0 5 0	0 6 0
13—	——— Vol. 4th - - - Lond.	1701	0 5 0	0 6 0
14—	Bp. Beveridge's Sermons, Vol. 1st - - - - - Lond.	1708	0 4 6	0 5 6
15—	——— Vol. 2d - - - Lond.	1708	0 4 6	0 5 6
16—	Mr. Nelson's Companion for the Feasts and Fasts - - - Lond.	1707	0 5 6	0 6 6
17—	Dr. Lightfoot's Genuine Remains - - - - - Lond.	1700	0 4 6	0 5 6
18—	Doctor Horneck's Crucified Jesus - - - - - Lond.	1705	0 5 0	0 6 0
19—	Bp. Nicholson's Exposition of the Church of England's Catechism - - - - - Lond.	1661	0 1 3	0 1 6
20—	Dr. Hammond's several Sermons - - - - - Lond.	1649	0 1 3	0 1 6
21—	Dr. Cudworth's Treatise on Mora- lity - - - - - Lond.	1731		0 5 6
I.				
1—	<i>Y Bibl Cyssegr-Ian, sef yr Hên</i> <i>Deitament a'r Newydd Llundain</i>	1689	0 4 0	0 5 0
2—	Doctor Hammond's Practical Cate- chism - - - - - Lond.	1634	0 3 6	0 4 0
3—	Doctor Bright's 'Treatise of Prayer - - - - - Lond.	1678	0 2 6	0 3 0
4—	Kettlewell's Practical Believer Lond.	1683	0 3 6	0 4 6
		5—	Monro's	

when it was sold to John Bird and removed to Cardiff; Carmarthen and Swansea were also established centres for printing. However, in this instance it is lucky that tucked inside the catalogue is the receipt dated 5 March 1794, from W. Routh to the Rev. Mr. Walters for £5 10s. [£5.50] 'for printing 100 copies of *A Catalogue of the Lending Library at Cowbridge* on best wove demy Octavo stitched in Blue paper with outside Title etc.' The printer is most probably William Routh of Bristol and his customer was John Walters, Rector of Llandough near Cowbridge, lexicographer and at this date, librarian of the lending library. It was he who was responsible for bringing Rhys Thomas to Cowbridge to work on his great English-Welsh dictionary but he was now forced to look further afield for his printing. The minutes of the library's trustees' meeting on 14 August 1794 show that they contributed 4s. 1d. [20.5p] towards defraying the expences incurred by printing the catalogue and for coal; also that any trustee elected in the future who desired to have a catalogue should pay the librarian 2s. 6d. [13p] for it.

The contents of the library, as revealed in the catalogue, naturally consisted very largely of theology. There were two editions of the Greek New Testament and the only Welsh book in the collection was also a Bible; it might have been studied with the aid of John David Rees's *Welsh Grammar* (1592). The Middle Ages were represented by the theologians, Thomas Aquinas and Thomas a' Kempis and the period of the Reformation by the *Adages* of Erasmus and Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* in an edition of 1576, the oldest book in the library. From the mid seventeenth century onwards the library held copies of works by contemporary British divines and Protestant authors of Northern Europe including large numbers of sermons and writings on church history, liturgy and canon law. This was a time when the established church still had to defend itself equally from the threat of popery and dissent, but there is no way of knowing how popular with borrowers were Dorrington's *Dissenting Ministry Condemned*, Dr. Featley's *Seventy Sermons* or *A short and easy method with the Deists and Jews*.

In other fields there were plenty of Greek and Latin classical authors, mostly history, Sir Walter Raleigh's *History of the World*. Clarendon on the Civil War and Hume's *History of England* in eight volumes. Literature does not seem to have been admitted to the library until the later eighteenth century, but then it acquired Shakespeare, Gay's fables, Don Quixote translated by Smollett and James Macpherson's fabricated works of the supposed medieval poet Ossian.

Considered *en masse*, what is now known to the bookdealers as 'Antiquarian Theology', representing the expenditure of enormous effort and learning in a field for which there is today little taste, may give rise to feelings of indigestion followed by depression and despair in book readers, however great their love of full calf bindings and gold tooling. But the dispersal of libraries must be a cause for regret, not only because the value of a collection is greater than the sum of the parts, but also because of the light it throws on the age and society in which it was formed. The survival of a catalogue may at least go some way to mitigate the loss.

## Footnotes

1. Glamorgan Record Office, Register of Cowbridge Lending Library, ref. D/D Xgc 288
2. *Old Cowbridge*, 1922
3. 'The Cowbridge Diocesan Library, 1711-1848' in *Journal of the Historical Society of the Church in Wales*, vol. 4 (1954) and vol. 7 (1957)
4. *see* above, note 1
5. Glamorgan Record Office, Cowbridge parish records, ref. P/8/CW/82



Do you know this bookplate?

- very rare I imagine (c 1750)

Is much known of the Society