

Recording Provenance and Bindings in Rare Collections: A Lockdown Project

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Sydney's second major Covid lockdown arrived at the beginning of Semester 2, 2021. Although most staff were working from home, I was travelling to the library to keep an eye on things, supply scans and post items out. Around this, I had the opportunity to spend time in the rare book collection, enhancing metadata and adding note fields with additional information about provenance, bindings and references in external bibliographies. Provenance is particularly important in special collections, as the history of a book's ownership provides contextual information about the book as an object and enhances its historical significance. Unlike general library collections, where the items are standardized and (to a certain extent) replaceable information carriers, rare books are historical objects in their own right. Their bindings, inscriptions and annotations make them unique. This paper will cover the principles behind provenance documentation and the importance of linking a catalogue record to an external bibliography (such as the English Short Title Catalogue). It will also introduce the terminology used to describe early modern bindings and demonstrate how to include all of these features in a Marc record using various 5XX note fields.



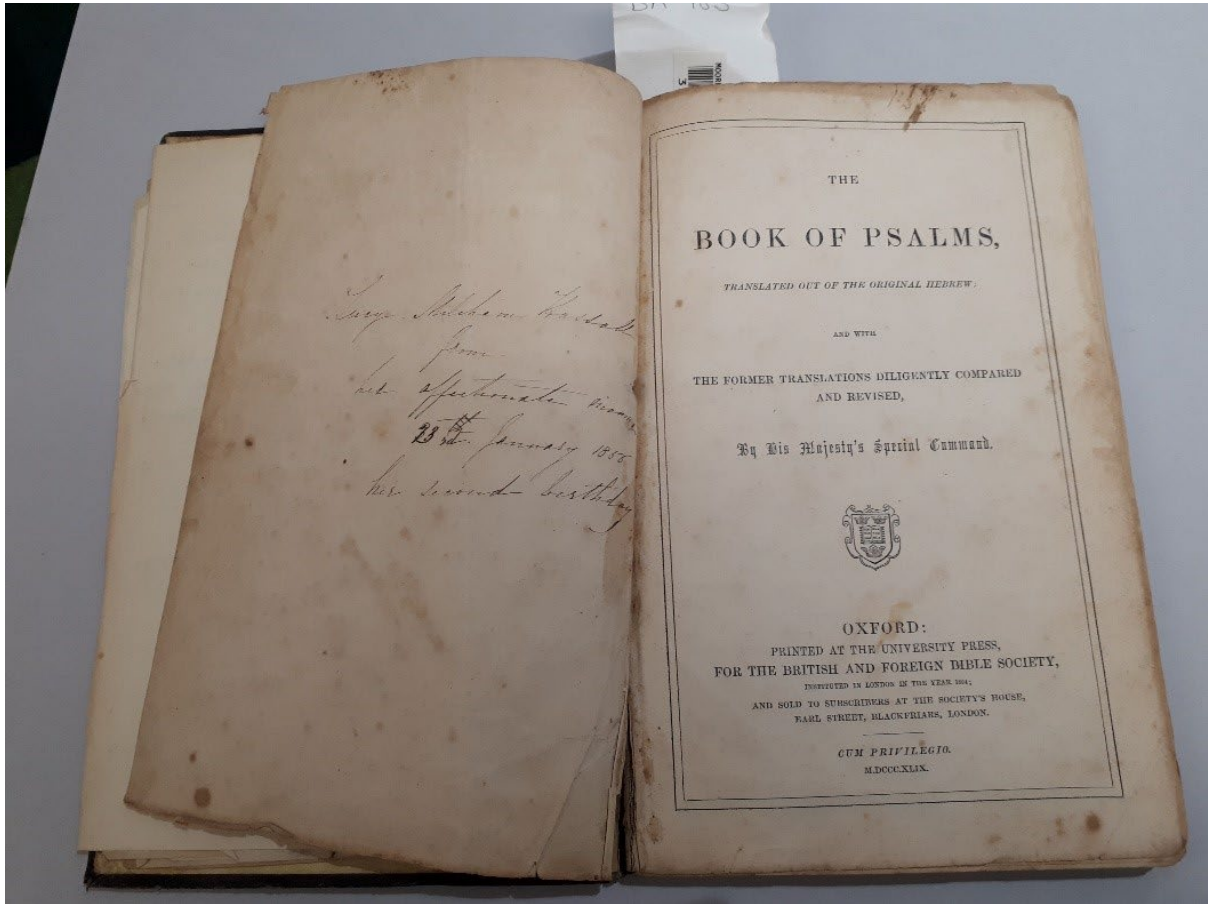
Provenance

Provenance is the place of origin of something, and the process of determining and recording the history of ownership. It is an archival principle – *respect des fonds*¹ – which is very important for understanding context. You might have a first edition of a work: this makes it rare or desirable. However, if you have the copy that belonged to the author, or another eminent person, this makes it unique. Provenance is a key component of rare book librarianship, because it considers the uniqueness of the individual item, its story, past owners and readers, and the book as an object not just an information carrier. “The intent of capturing such information is to provide proof of a continuous chain of custody and therefore authenticity of the work - that the edition of x is what it purports to be. Another probably more common reason for securing such information is to highlight the prestige of the copy in hand by enumerating illustrious past owners”.² Provenance is a key component of statements of significance, which are used in grant applications and other curatorial activity. It may be determined by acquisition records of purchase or donation, bookplates and inscriptions.

My lockdown project involved documenting information from bookplates and inscriptions on the books themselves, and also cross-referencing the item with the library accession registers.

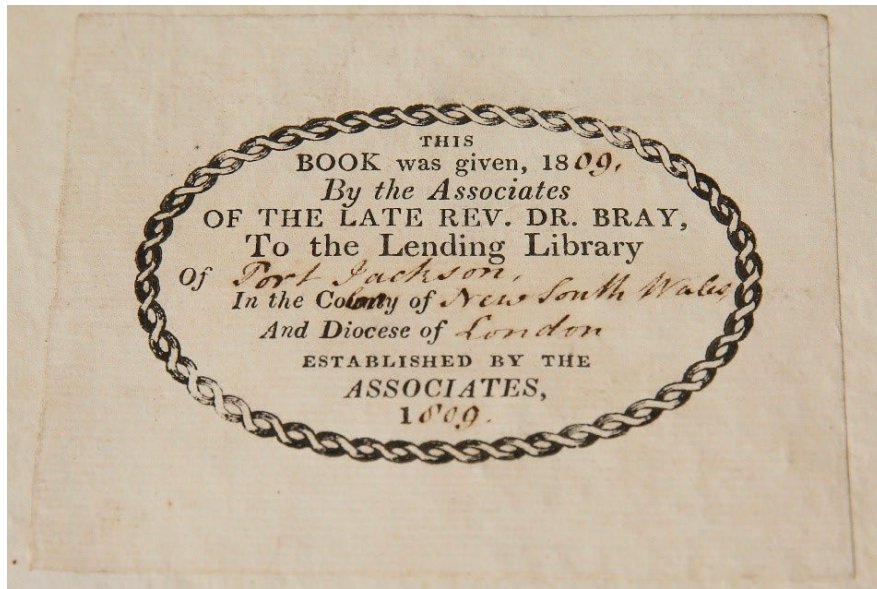
¹“The principle maintaining records according to their origin and in the units in which they were originally accumulated.” ‘Respect des Fonds’, Dictionary of Archives Terminology, Society of American Archivists, accessed 14/7/2022, <https://dictionary.archivists.org/entry/respect-des-fonds.html>

² Sweeney, Shelley. The Ambiguous Origins of the Archival Principle of “Provenance.” *Libraries & the Cultural Record*, 43, no. 2 (2008): 193.

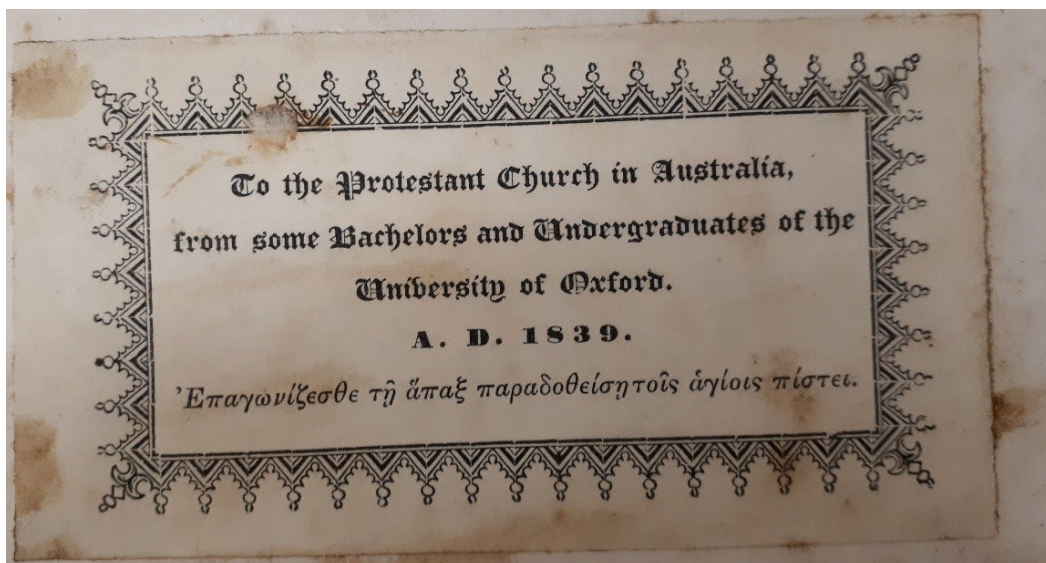


This Book of Psalms, printed in 1849, would not be particularly remarkable if it had not belonged to Lucy Mileham Hassall. Lucy was the granddaughter of Samuel Otoo Hassall and Lucy Mileham, and the great-granddaughter of Rowland Hassall, known as the ‘galloping parson’.³

³ Niel Gunson, 'Hassall, Thomas (1794–1868)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/hassall-thomas-2167/text2779>, published first in hardcopy 1966, accessed online 14 July 2022.



This bookplate was printed for books donated by the Associates of Dr Bray, an evangelical organisation which set up libraries across England, Wales and British North America.⁴ A set of books was donated to the Port Jackson Lending Library – proposed but never realised by Rev. Samuel Marsden in 1809.

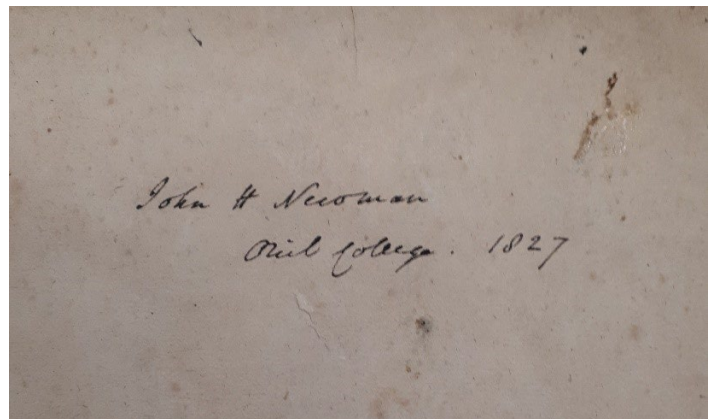
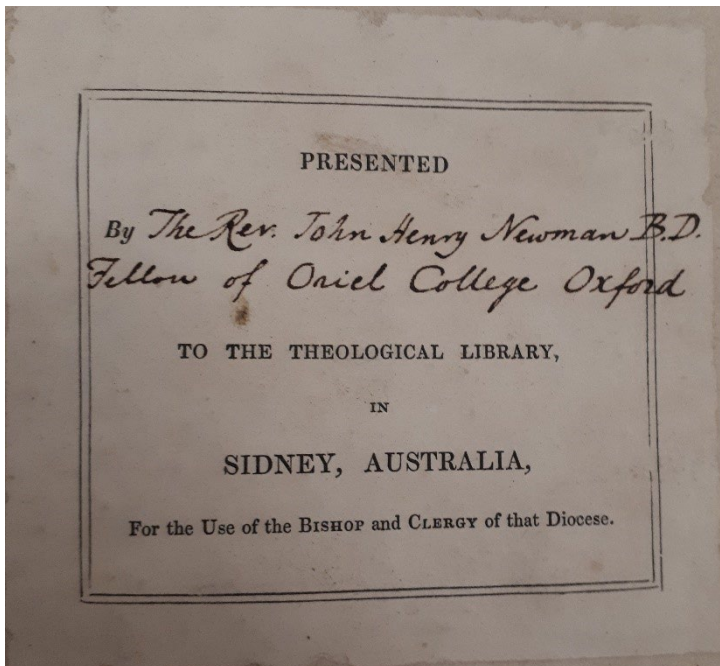


This bookplate denotes a collection donated in response to an appeal set up by Bishop Broughton in the 1830s, for books for the colonial clergy. A collection of books with a Reformed theological

⁴ ‘Associates of Dr Bray’. Encyclopedia Virginia, Virginia Humanities, Accessed 14/7/2022, <https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/associates-of-dr-bray/>

bent (for example, a 1649 edition of Luther's sermons) was donated by a group of 'Bachelors and Undergraduates' at Oxford.

A rival donation of a distinctly Anglo-Catholic nature was given by notable figures in the Oxford Movement. This 3-volume set of the works of St Jerome was printed in Frankfurt in 1684. It is well worth owning in its own right, but this particular copy was owned by the leading Anglo-Catholic and later Roman Catholic theologian John Henry Newman. This particular collection features a bookplate with the text *Presented by ... to the Theological Library of Sidney, Australia, for the use of the Bishop and Clergy of that Diocese.*

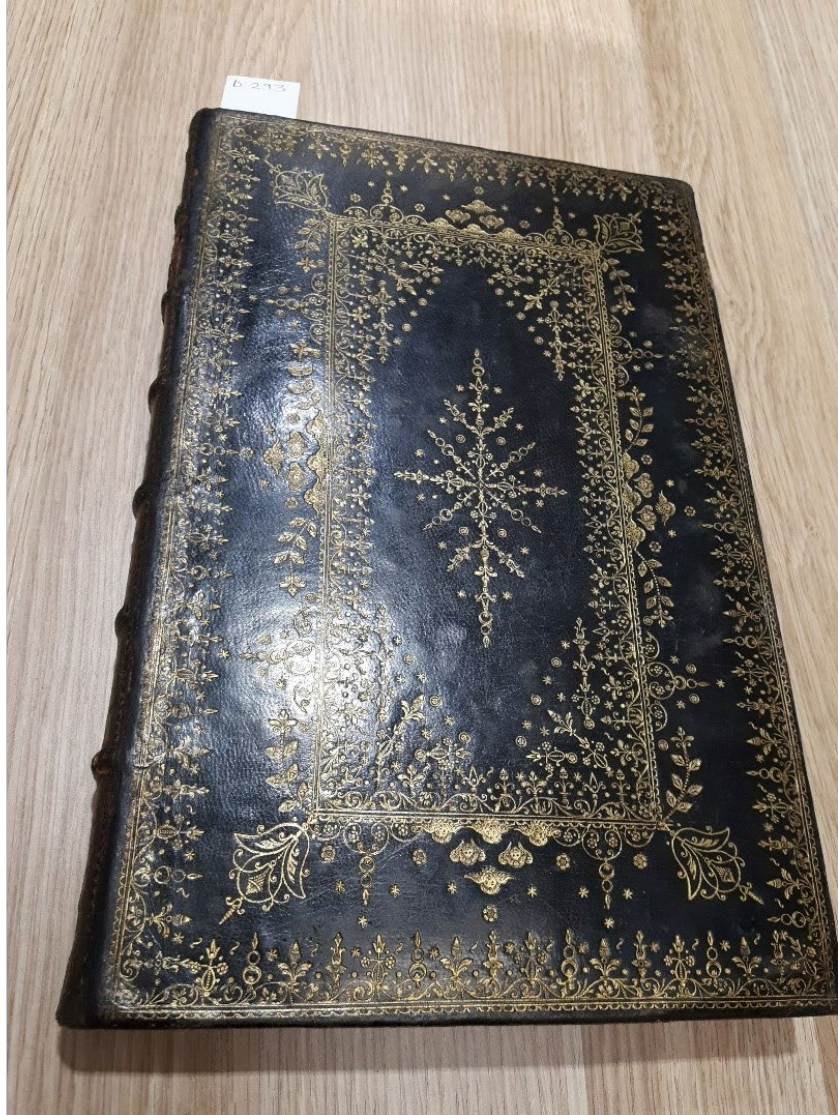


Provenance is recorded in a 561 field – Ownership and Custodial History note. Previous owners may also be given a 700 Added Name Entry field, with the relator term *former owner, donor*, etc. A 541 note can also be used: Immediate Source of Acquisition.

Bindings

Bookbinding is a highly skilled craft and books printed in the hand press era (pre-1800) are works of sometimes extraordinary craftsmanship. Moore College Library uses 1840 as a general cutoff date for deciding to place a book in the Rare collection. Books in the early modern period were not always bound at the printers, they were often sold with a plain paper binding so that the buyer could get their own style of binding according to budget or preference. The codex format allows for extensive decorations to the boards and spine, as well as the edges of the text block. Books were bound in the skin of the animal most commonly eaten! In Britain this was sheep, the French and Italians preferred calf, and Germans were fond of pigs. Skins may be tanned (treated with vegetable

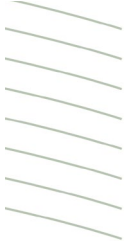
tannins), or alum-tawed (prepared in an aqueous solution of a double salt of aluminium and potassium sulphates). Pigskin bindings are generally alum-tawed; this allowed for elaborate stamping or tooling.



William Cave (1637-1713) *Apostolici, or, The History of the Lives, Acts, Death, and Martyrdoms of Those Who Were Contemporary With or Immediately Succeeded the Apostles*. London: printed by A.C. [i.e. Andrew Clark] for Richard Chiswel at the Rose and Crown in S. Paul's Church-yard, 1677. Black morocco [goatskin] binding with gilt scroll and stamp decoration to covers and spine.



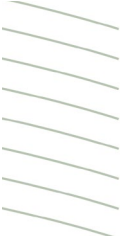
Missale ad usum Diocesis Coloniensis a bariis mendis ad lima redactum. Cologne: Atque impensis Francisci Byrckman in alma Parisiorum Academia a Wolfgango Hopylio impressum, 1520. Alum-tawed pigskin, tooled in blind.



Thomas Pierce (1622-1691). *The Sinner Impleaded in His Own Court*. Third edition. London: Printed by R.N. for R. Royston, 1670. An example of gauffered edges – the edge of the text block is used as a surface to receive decorative stamping.



Henry Hammond (1605-1660). *The VVorkes of the Reverend and Learned Henry Hammond D.D.* London: Printed by Elizabeth Flesher for Richard Royston and Richard Davis, 1674. An example of the permanent damage that sticky tape can cause to paper.



Bindings are documented in a 563 Binding note field: this can also be used to document the lack of a binding, or the state of the binding. The Language of Bindings website is a handy thesaurus of terms <https://www.ligatus.org.uk/lob/>, as is the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section's controlled vocabulary of binding terms⁵

External references

Rare book bibliography relies heavily on references in the major short title catalogues. These began as reference books, using only abbreviated metadata to save space. The best known are A. W. Pollard and G. R. Redgrave, (eds): *A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland and Ireland, and of English Books Printed Abroad 1475–1640*⁶, and *Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and British America, and of English Books Printed in Other Countries, 1641–1700* by Donald Goddard Wing.⁷ The English Short Title Catalogue⁸ is an online database, hosted by the British Library, covering 1473–1800 (and incorporating and updating the STC and Wing). The Universal Short Title Catalogue⁹ (USTC) is designed to incorporate and improve upon national bibliographies such as the ESTC, as a metadata aggregator similar to Trove. Editions and printings of the Bible are recorded in the *Historical Catalogue of the Printed Editions of Holy Scripture in the Library of the British and Foreign Bible Society*, compiled by T.H. Darlow and H.F. Moule¹⁰ – known as ‘Darlow and Moule’.

Short title catalogues not only list distinct editions, but also distinct printings, which are determined by errors or peculiarities in the text. This is very important for books printed on a handpress, where the typesetting was prone to human error. It also helps determine scarcity, as the online versions maintain holdings records, so the number of copies worldwide can be established to a certain extent. Each separate entry has a unique identifier which can be added to your catalogue

⁵ ‘Binding terms’, RBMS Controlled Vocabularies, Rare Books and Manuscripts Section, accessed 14/7/2022, https://rbms.info/vocabularies/binding/alphabetical_list.htm

⁶ Pollard, A.W. and G.R. Redgrave, ed. *A short-title catalogue of books printed in England, Scotland, & Ireland, and of English books printed abroad 1475-1640* (2nd ed.), (London: Bibliograph. Soc., 1976).

⁷ Wing, Donald Goddard. *Short-title catalogue of books printed in England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and British America and of English books printed in other countries: 1641-1700*. (New York, NY: Modern Language Assoc. of America, 1972).

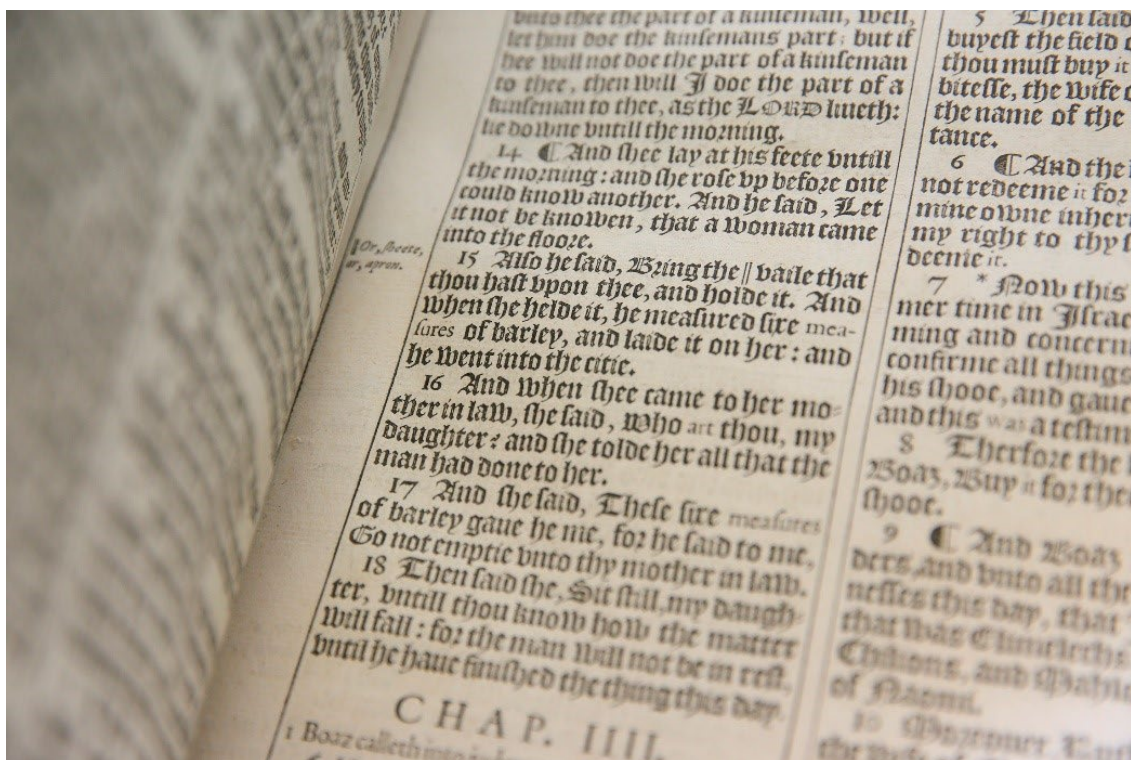
⁸ ‘English Short Title Catalogue’, British Library, accessed 14/7/2022, http://estc.bl.uk/F/?func=file&file_name=login-bl-estc

⁹ ‘Universal Short Title Catalogue’, accessed 14/7/2022, <https://www.ustc.ac.uk/>

¹⁰ British and Foreign Bible Society, T. H. Darlow, and H. F. Moule. *Historical catalogue of the printed editions of Holy Scripture in the library of the British and Foreign Bible Society*. (London: Bible House, 1903).

record to assist scholars to identify exactly which printing or edition of a work you hold. References are catalogued in a 510 field – Citation/References note.

The first printing of the Authorized Version of the Bible in 1611 featured a minor typographical error in Ruth 3:15 – “he went into the city”. In fact, it is Ruth and not Boaz who goes to the city, so the verse was corrected in another printing that same year, to read, “she went into the city”. The specific print run can be identified using Pollard and Redgrave’s *Short Title Catalogue* and the English Short Title Catalogue. Moore College Library holds the “he” version.



Conclusion

Rare books are artefacts of the printing and binding trades, and many carry the stories of their past owners within them. As well as carriers of the textual content, they bear many layers of meaning and context within the object itself. Documenting provenance information found in inscriptions and bookplates helps researchers understand how the book’s readers and past owners used it and interacted with it. Binding is a highly skilled art reflecting the book’s geographic and temporal origins, and reflects the value placed on it by past owners. External bibliographies are crucial for labelling exact editions and print runs, not only allowing precise identification, but also enabling the work to be situated within the wider context of the development of the printed word.



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