

The Friends of Thomas Plume's Library

How it all began

In February 1987, local book dealer, Mr P Young of Tillingham discovered one of Thomas Plume's Library books following the sale of the library of James Gilvarry, an American collector of books on Ireland (sold at auction by *Christies* New York in 1986). The Plume Trustees decided to try to re-purchase this first edition of Sir John Davie's '*Discovery of the True Causes why Ireland was never entirely subdued*' 1612 which was being offered for sale by London bookseller Bernard Quaritch.

A local appeal was made for help with the cost. With financial help from Christina Foyle (Beeleigh Abbey), Mrs J Jenkinson (Allbooks), Mrs Muriel Lacey (Oakwood Art Centre) Mr Frank Herrmann (of Woodham Walter), Mr Malcolm Nolan (of Woodham Walter) and Mr Peter Young, the missing book was purchased for £725. Mr Vic Grey, County Archivist at the Essex Record Office and Plume Trustee put forward the case for a more permanent supportive body in the light of the success of this local appeal. It was agreed by the Trustees that an inaugural meeting of the Friends of the Library should take place on 1st December 1987 in the Plume Library.

On Monday 11th January 1988 the Meeting of the Steering Committee of the Friends of Thomas Plumes Library was held in the Library. Those present were, Mr Frank Herrmann, who was elected to act as Chairman. Mr P Young, Deputy Chairman and Treasurer, Mrs G Shacklock Minute Secretary, Mr V. Gray Liaison Officer and Mrs M Lacey and Mrs J Jenkinson, publicity Officers. Miss Christina Foyle had accepted the Committee's invitation to act as Honorary Adviser.

The Objectives:

- (a) To help the Trustees with support, financial or otherwise without detracting in any way from the authority of the Trustees.
- (b) To raise money for specific purposes such as repairs to and conservation of books and the purchase of 17th century books to fill in any gaps in Thomas Plume's collection with the agreement of the Trustees.

It was proposed that the first monies raised were to go to the repair of the two early manuscript catalogues and the first book of Trustees minutes (1717 onwards).

How many more books were missing from Thomas Plume's bequest to the town of Maldon?

Having found that one of Thomas Plume's Library books had strayed to the other side of the world, the question was asked: How many more books were missing from the original stock?

Mrs Gwyneth Shacklock, Plume Librarian and Assistant Librarian, Mrs Olive Earnshaw set to work on a process of comparing the Library catalogues. The most recent catalogue available at that time was that compiled by Mr S.G. Deed which was published in book form in 1959. By comparing this with the manuscript catalogues compiled by the Reverend Robert Crane in 1844 and by Mr R Hay in 1761 and with the original list of books placed in the 6 "casks" that arrived from Greenwich dated November 29th 1704 (and checked by William Scarrow at Maldon) it was revealed that Mr Deed's catalogue fell far short of representing the true size of the original Plume Library.

By November 1989, after much painstaking work of checking and double checking the catalogues and the books on the shelves, the Librarians reported to the Trustees that 723 titles had been identified as missing from Thomas Plume's original bequest. The Friends had already started checking booksellers lists and auction catalogues to see if any of the missing titles were coming up for sale. By this time they had found and assisted with the purchase of 21 replacements for the missing volumes.

Twenty-five years later, the Friends, together with the Trustees have now replaced in excess of 160 of the missing titles. Five of these have been identified as belonging originally to the Plume Library.

Five titles, originally part of the Library of Thomas Plume, missing from the shelves, now found, purchased and returned to stock.

1. *A discoverie of the true causes why Ireland was never entirely subdued, nor brought under obedience of the crowne of England, until the beginning of his Maiesties happie raigne*, 1612 by Sir John Davies (1569 – 1626)

This was purchased in February 1987 with donations from generous local people who subsequently formed the 'Friends of Thomas Plume's Library' (See the section entitled How it all began)

There are two press cuttings in the Library dated January 1988 celebrating the return of the book after more than 100 years.

2. '*A letter of comfort to Richard Cromwell; alias Lord Richard, alias Richard Protector ...*' 1659 by A Servant of his late Highness

Purchased July 1990, funded by the Friends of Thomas Plume's Library and the Trustees.

3. '*The merchant, citizen and country-man's instructor ...*' 1701 by Thomas Tryon

Purchased April 1995, funded by the Friends and the Trustees.

There is a press photograph and article dated April 28th 1995 in the Library

4. '*Remaines concerning Britaine: their languages. Names. Surnames. Allusions. Anagrammes. Armories. Monies. Empreses. Apparell. Artillarie. Wise speeches. Proverbs. Poesies. Epitaphes*', 1637 by William Camden

Purchased June 1998, funded by the Friends.

5. '*The narrative history of King James, for the first fourteen years*'. *In four parts*, 1651 by Michael Sparke

Which includes 'The proceedings touching the divorce betwixt the Lady Frances Howard, and Robert Earl of Essex' a famous scandal and murder during the reign of King James 1.

A copy of this book was *purchased to replace the one missing from the original collection, funded by the Friends of Thomas Plume's Library, April 1998.*

However the original copy turned up at Beeleigh Abbey and was returned to the Library in 2001.

When and how did all these books go missing?

Plume intended his collection of books to be available for loan to the 'Gentleman and Scholars' using his Library of books. A list of rules was devised to protect the collection from damage and loss.

RULES for the Regulation of, and obtaining Books from the Theological Library, of Dr PLUME, in MALDON.

Third (of six) Any Person desirous of borrowing a Book or Books from the Library, may have the same upon depositing the Value of such with the Librarian, or giving Security, and undertaking to return the same, at the End of one Month from the borrowing thereof, in as good Plight and Condition, as when the same was lent to him, or that otherwise, he or they will pay the Value thereof, or procure another Copy, or Copies, to supply the Loss of that or those, which may be borrowed.

Between 1844 (Robert Crane catalogue) and 1959 (Mr Deed's printed catalogue) the majority of the loss appears to have occurred. In the early part of the 20th century, particularly between the two world wars and during the Great Depression, the Library opening hours were reduced and readers were invited to obtain the key from the Vicar of All Saints Church if they wanted to make use of the Library. On occasions, it would appear the Library door was left unlocked from the story of one local Serviceman, who reported that while home on leave and seeking refuge from his troubles he entered the Library and spent a peaceful afternoon reading.

With this lack of supervision it is not surprising that so many books disappeared. Sadly many of the titles will never be able to be replaced as their cost is out of the reach of even the Friends' best efforts.

Not long after the war ended the lending policy was terminated. The Library is now recognised as a precious repository of 15th, 16th and 17th century books, pamphlets and manuscripts and an important part of Maldon's heritage.

S. Swaffin Smith

Chairman, the Friends of Thomas Plume's Library

September 2012