



Community, Identity, and the London Dutch Church Library, 1550-1650

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ABSTRACT

Libraries and archives are important tools for historians, and we often view them as neutral information repositories. It is important to remember, however, they are historical actors, too, that can be employed to convey credibility, legitimize authority or power, or construct, challenge, and reinforce group identity (Burton, 2005, 7). These institutions have their own historical narratives to tell, which is the inspiration behind this project researching the history of the Dutch Church Library in London. The goal of the study is to understand the collection founded by sixteenth-century Dutch immigrants and to explore what shaped its development during its first century. Three key forces impacted its early growth, namely the rise in English Puritanism, the Remonstrant controversy in the Low Countries, and growing political power among London's Dutch merchant community. The history of this library sheds light on how the foreigners living in London understood and adapted to the religious and political struggles of the period. The library was more than a neutral repository, serving instead as an expression of the Dutch community's political power and identity.

This project builds on the work of the Dutch Church Book Provenance Project, a research effort to identify and catalog the contents of the historic library. Project partners include the British Library, Lambeth Palace Library, and the Dutch Church, London. I wish to thank the following partners: Marja Kingma, Curator Germanic Collections (Dutch History, Culture and Literature) at the British Library, Giles Mandelbrote, Lambeth Palace Library, Diana Mercer, retired, University College London Library, and Rosalind Janssen, Elder/Trustee, Dutch Church London. I also am indebted to my colleague Mark Janzen, PhD, and the University of Central Oklahoma students who have spent time in London and Edmond, Oklahoma, working on the project: Heyley Bowman, Cade Brewer, Amena Butler, Meredith Curtis, Kevin Dooley, Brenna LaGrange, Payden Henderson, Peter Kavourgias, Katie Krumwiede, William Long, Ashley Martinez, Taylor Stober, Andreas Nowag, Trent Smith, Brian Whinery, Charles Wren, and Riley Young.

BACKGROUND

The library's history can be traced back to 1550, when King Edward VI created the London Strangers' Church for French and Dutch Protestants living in England's capital city. Ministers began to collect records and books to aid them in running the church. The collection had grown large enough by the early part of the seventeenth century that the Dutch preacher, Simeon Ruytinck, set aside new space for the library (Grell, 1989, 81). By 1863 it included about 2000 titles, and the ministers moved it to London's Guildhall Library for safekeeping. Following the Second World War, in 1954, many of the books moved again, this time to Lambeth Palace Library. This poster analyzes, for the first time, data collected by a group of scholars working on the Dutch Church Book Provenance Project, an international effort that began in 2016 to survey the contents of the 470-year-old library which, today, are held in three locations: the Dutch Church in London, London Metropolitan Archives, and Lambeth Palace Library. By studying the collection and donors who gave the texts, we can understand better this library as an historical actor.

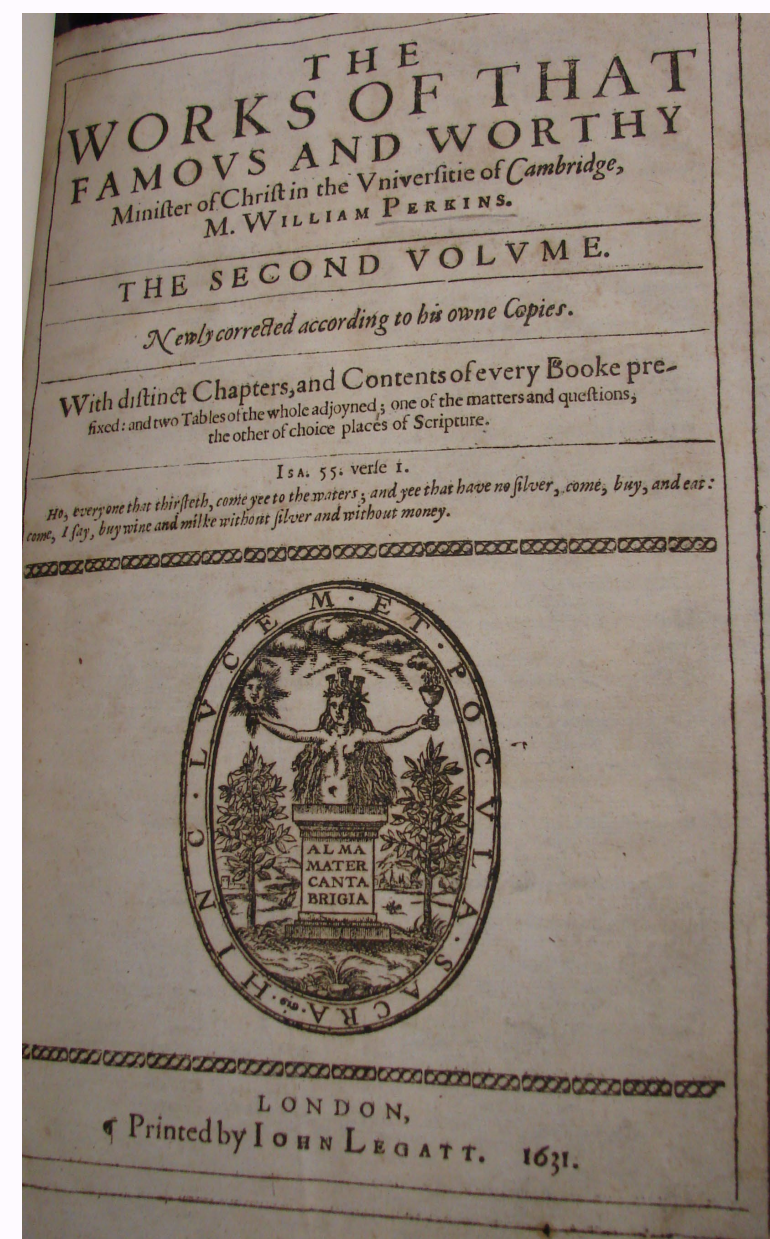


UCO students (L to R) Ashley Martinez, Katie Krumwiede, and Cade Brewer inspecting a sixteenth-century book by Martin Luther. Dutch Church Library, London, 2019. Photo courtesy of Michael S. Springer.

FINDINGS

The library's contents hold clues about how the Dutch community navigated the English Civil War and Restoration in the seventeenth-century. Ministers were attracted to English Puritan ideas and added to the library between 1642 and 1647 at least 109 printed books of Puritan sermons. The texts comprise the largest thematic category in the collection, even surpassing Bibles, the second largest group. Other Puritan works were added to the library, too, including John Milton's polemical tract defending Cromwell's protectorate, *Defense of the People of England* (London, 1651), and the well-known English Puritan Christopher Love's *The Combate Between the Flesh and the Spirit* (London, 1654), in both English and Dutch. The library acquired Sir Roger Twysden's *Ten Writings on English History* (London, 1652), a collection of medieval chronicles and histories that the author employed to argue for limitations on monarchies, which provided a counter-balance to the overtly Puritan writings of the 1640s and may indicate one way the church leaders reacted to the changing political circumstances as England transitioned from Cromwell's Republic to the restored Stuart monarchy. The Puritan works collected by the church reflect the Calvinist roots and identity of the Dutch community, and at the same time provide some insight into how the church members were adapting to the political and religious changes they encountered in England.

Title page from *The Works of That Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ in the University of Cambridge*, volume 2 (London, 1631). Perkins (1558-1602) was a moderate Puritan minister, and this book is among the many Puritan texts added to the Dutch Church Library in the 1630s and 1640s. Lambeth Palace Library. Photo courtesy of the Dutch Church Book Provenance Project.



The Dutch congregation also engaged with political and spiritual controversies in the Low Countries. Although the London church had theological autonomy from the Dutch Reformed Church in their homeland, its members took interest in the 1618-19 Synod of Dordrecht which addressed Arminianism and the Remonstrant controversy (Pettegree and Der Weduwen, 2019, 51-3). The synod rejected Arminian claims and reinforced Reformed doctrine, and the Dutch library in London procured two Latin copies of the *Acts of the Synod* printed in Leiden (1620) and Dordrecht (1621). Pro-Remonstrant works were added including a copy of Jacobus Arminius's *Collected Works* (Frankfurt, 1631) and Hugo de Groot's 1622 Dutch translation of his 1613 *Piety of the States of Holland and West Friesland* (Paris 1622), in which he made the case for tolerance and defended the state's ability to regulate religious affairs. The library has a considerably larger number of Contra-Remonstrant works including several by Jacob Trigland including *A Christian and Friendly Admonition to all of the Remonstrants Who Have Strayed* (Amsterdam, 1623) and *Ecclesiastical History* (Leiden, 1650). These works informed the London ministers about the debate taking place in the Netherlands, and the information may have proved useful as they addressed new immigrants arriving in London. Historian Charles H. Parker suggested another way the published debate could impact readers; the historical narratives and continuity established through the Remonstrant and Contra-Remonstrant works shaped ideas about what it meant to be Dutch and Calvinist, and provided a way to connect identities to the past and present (Parker, 1997, 57-78). This may explain why the Dutch Church Library continued to add the works to its collection thirty years after the synod had settled the debate.

Mark Janzen, former Associate Professor in Museum Studies, instructs students on how to catalog books. Pictured are: (front row, L to R) Charles Wren and Will Long; (middle row, L to R) Andreas Nowag and Taylor Stober; and (back row, L to R) Mark Janzen, Ph.D., Brenna Graham, and Haley Bowman. Lambeth Palace Library, London, 2017. Photo courtesy of Michael S. Springer.



In addition to the political and religious controversies, donors played an important role in the library's growth in the seventeenth century. Names of donors are known for approximately twenty per cent of the Dutch library books acquired before 1660, making it possible to learn about the people who shaped the collection. The church served as a center for Dutch social and economic power in London, and the donations reflected this position. Sir John Frederick, first a member of the Company of Barber Surgeons who later joined the Company of Grocers, was elected alderman in 1653. During his time in office he donated two Puritan works to the library, John Trapp's *A commentary or exposition upon all the books of the New Testament* (London, 1656) and John Forbes's *Instructions of Historical Theology: On Christian Doctrine and Different Status of Matters* (Amsterdam, 1645). The latter book was published eleven years after the author's death by three Leiden professors, Johannes Polyander, Jacob Trigland and Friedrich Spanheim, who saw common cause between English Puritans and the Dutch Contra-Remonstrant movement. Sir John Lawrence, an alderman from the Haberdashers Company who served with Frederick, gave *A guide to godlynesse: or, A treatise of a godly life* (London, 1629) by John Downames, a Puritan preacher who wrote this manual to instruct people on following a godly life. Lawrence's gift coincided with King Charles II's 1662 Uniformity Act, which reaffirmed Anglican rites and administration, and the alderman may have hoped to show his support for the Calvinist Dutch congregation through his gift. The interest of London's political leaders in the library, and the gifts they made to it, underscores the community's political power and authority in the City and the common Calvinist identity between the Dutch migrants and English Puritans that drove political reforms in seventeenth-century England.

CONCLUSION

Exploring the forces that shaped the Dutch Church collection sheds light on libraries as historical actors. The library was a product of theological and political debates, and was influenced by the interactions between the Dutch immigrants and their English hosts. People were meant to interact with the books, which reveals how the community identified and understood the religious and political struggles of the period and how they adapted and persevered. The library emerged as a locus for ideas and interaction between the ministers and congregants, between the church and the City's leaders, and between the Dutch in London and the Low Countries. The library was, indeed, more than a mere repository of interesting books, serving instead as a visible expression of the London Dutch community's political power and identity.

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