

The Bible – what is special about yours? – *by Rod Pierce –*

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1683, an eventful year, perhaps? The Rye House Plot against King Charles, The Turks invade Austria and are beaten at the Battle of Vienna, The first German settlers arrive in Philadelphia, USA, and the existence of bacteria is claimed.

In Guildford, 1683 is the date on the iconic clock at the Guildhall, and at Holy Trinity church, still some 16 years before the parish was joined to that of St Mary's, it seems a newly printed service Bible was bought.

I find it fascinating to look at the detail of old books such as this one. It's had a hard life, and the cover and spine are damaged. It has lots of engraved illustrations, but It's not just a Bible, it's a Book of Common Prayer too, and I delight in finding some extra prayers immediately after the psalms, for instance:

A "form of prayer, to be said yearly upon the fifth day of November; for the happy deliverance of the King, and the three estates of the realm, from the most traitorous and bloody intended massacre by Gun-powder", and the even more interesting "forms of prayer, to be used yearly on the second of September, for the dreadful fire of London".

This Bible, like several others has been kept in the church for many years after being used regularly, and like many of them, eventually found itself in a bookcase tucked away out of sight.

A shame? Well, perhaps. The Bible was written and printed in English to be read and heard in our own language. That was the whole point, because until the early translators got to work, our forebears had to make do with the Word in Latin, which, of course, for most of the population, was incomprehensible. But, in English, it could be understood by everybody. It was often thought to be unlucky to throw one away, or deface it, so even old editions are still common.

Over the next few hundred years, many families who could afford one, bought and handed down a family Bible to the following generation. In many homes it was the only printed book, and on Sundays, father would read from it to the family. In many cases, the names of family members were written on the flysheet, including details of births, marriages, and, all too often, deaths at an early age.

Others, especially later in the late Victorian age and into the early 20th century were presented to our great,great grandfathers or mothers for good attendance at Sunday school or as a first prize at school, and if we are really lucky, we'll find one that was given to an ancestor who was ordained as a priest, or commissioned as a missionary in Africa.

Such records are often the catalyst and stepping stone to family history research, and many a budding genealogist has started their journey through finding such information in the family Bible.

This week, instead of asking people what has inspired them in the Bible, we would love people to share their family Bibles with us, and tell us what is fascinating about the book itself. I'm quite sure that for many of us, that family Bible is still there in a bookcase, gathering dust, perhaps, but possibly the oldest book in your home, with a fascinating story to tell, if it could speak.

Do look it out and bring it to church for display on Sunday 15th October, our 'Bring a Bible to Church' Sunday (Now there's a new idea!). It doesn't have to be old. It doesn't have to be worn, or threadbare or that has stayed in your family for generations. It doesn't have to have been awarded to someone special. It could just be your Bible, a birthday present from a favourite Aunt, presented to you at your confirmation or one you bought yourself, that you take with you everywhere,

Please if you can, type out some of its story on a sheet of paper to display with it, and let us know what Your Bible means to you and your family.

Rod Pierce