

PROCEEDINGS

OF THE

Cambridge Antiquarian Society,

LENT TERM. 27 JANUARY—16 MARCH 1908.

WITH

Communications

MADE TO THE SOCIETY.

No. L.

BEING No. 3 OF THE TWELFTH VOLUME.

(SIXTH VOLUME OF THE NEW SERIES.)



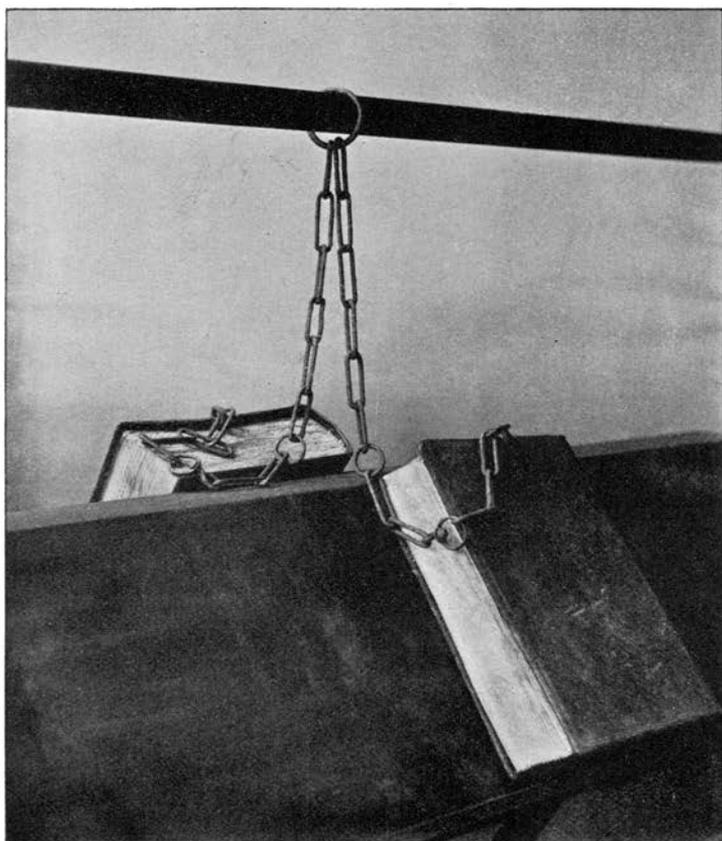
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Chained books found in the Church of S. Benedict, Cambridge.

ON TWO BOOKCOVERS, WITH CHAINS, FOUND IN THE
TOWER OF ST BENEDICT'S CHURCH, CAMBRIDGE.

BY J. W. CLARK, M.A.

The book-covers, with their chains, which I now exhibit, were found by the Reverend William Greenwood, M.A., Vicar of S. Benedict's, among some lumber stored away in the upper storey of the tower of the Church, where they had probably lain unnoticed for many years—and in fact, might never have been noticed at all, had not Mr Greenwood been moved, soon after his appointment as vicar, to make a detailed examination of every portion of his church.

The books have long since been torn out of their covers—and no indication of their titles has survived. The covers themselves are not uniform. One, of rough calf, may be dated about 1700; the other, of smooth calf with slight blind tooling, may be dated about 1685¹; but the system of chaining belongs to a much earlier period. I have shewn elsewhere that "this method of protection, which began in a remote past, was maintained, with strange persistency, down to modern times²," a church-library at Liverpool (among other instances) having been chained so late as 1815³.

Mr Greenwood very kindly allowed me to have the books replaced by sheets of blank paper, so that the volumes have once more resumed their original appearance; and before the photograph (Plate XIII) was taken I had a temporary desk constructed, in order that they might be seen in what I imagine to have been their original position.

The method of chaining employed offers some peculiarities which I have not met with elsewhere, and which are rather difficult of explanation.

¹ For this determination I have to thank my friend, C. E. Sayle, M.A., of St John's College.

² *The Care of Books*, ed. ii. p. 261.

³ *Ibid.* p. 263.

The chains are of a normal type, measuring respectively $22\frac{1}{2}$ inches and $23\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length. The links are of hammered iron, with a swivel to prevent twisting, and also a small ring, the use of which is not evident. The arrangement of the links, swivel, and ring, is not quite the same in both chains. In one, starting from the book, we find 3 links, swivel, 2 links, small ring, 6 links; in the other 4 links, swivel, 2 links, small ring, 6 links. Each chain is attached to the volume by a strip of hammered iron, passed round one of the boards, and roughly riveted to it in such a manner as to leave a loop wide enough to admit the last link of the chain. The points here enumerated may all, I hope, be recognised in the photograph (Plate XIII): Care has been taken to arrange the chains in such a manner that the swivels and rings may be readily examined.

In all cases of chaining which have come under my notice each chain is attached to a ring, which is threaded upon an iron bar. Here, on the contrary, both chains are attached to the same ring, the diameter of which is unusually large, measuring nearly two inches. I suppose that the books must have lain one on each side of a desk, as shown in the photograph; but why a single ring should have been used, is to me a mystery. Again, why are the chains so long? As a general rule, when books are chained to a desk, the chains are quite short, and in fact, the presence of a short chain attached to a book may usually be regarded as a safe guide to the way in which it has been treated in former times. A typical instance of this system—which I have termed the lectern-system—is to be seen at Zutphen, and has been figured in *The Care of Books*¹. The chains there are about 12 inches long. The only explanation I have to offer is that the desk may have been unusually lofty and ornamental, and the bar placed at a considerable distance above the sloping part of the desk. Such a piece of furniture was in use in the old library attached to Lincoln Cathedral².

¹ Ed. ii. pp. 149—153; Figs. 54, 55, 58. Compare with these Fig. 61, which shows a volume from a Dominican House at Banbury, with two links only to the chain.

² *Ibid.* p. 155.

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