

The Cathedral and Collegiate Church of St Saviour and St Mary Overie, Southwark

In 2011 the community at Southwark Cathedral joins the rest of the church in celebrating the 400th anniversary of the publication of the Authorised Version of the Bible in 1611. This new translation of the Bible into English, often called the King James Version, was a momentous occasion in our national life and part of the story was played out at Southwark.

The Cathedral has a long and distinguished history, first as a convent founded in 606, as an Augustinian Priory in 1006, as a post-Reformation parish church in 1539 and in 1905 as the Cathedral church for the new Diocese of Southwark. It was in 1618, however, that Bishop Lancelot Andrewes became Bishop of Winchester and moved into Winchester Palace (the remains of which can be seen in Clink Street) alongside the Parish Church of St Saviour.

Bishop Andrewes' name had been the first on the list of those who were appointed to compile the new Authorised Version of the Bible. The translators formed committees or 'companies' in Westminster, Oxford and Cambridge. Andrewes chaired the 'First Westminster Company' whose task was to translate the first twelve books of the Old Testament (Genesis to 2 Kings). In addition to this he acted as a general editor for the project. Bishop Andrewes remained Bishop of Winchester until his death on 25 September 1626. He was buried in the church next to his palace and his tomb is located in the Cathedral alongside the High Altar.

The connection of Southwark with the Bible goes back beyond Bishop Andrewes, however. It was in the parish of St Thomas across the Borough High Street from the Cathedral that the first complete English version of the Bible to be printed in England was completed by James Nicholson in 1537. The translation, by Miles Coverdale, had been suggested by Thomas Cromwell in 1533 and its first printing was in Antwerp in 1535. A plaque to mark this can be seen on the remaining part of the old hospital which stands on Borough High Street and which now houses the local Post Office. In addition, Prebendary John Rogers, commemorated in our High Altar Screen, undertook a translation, known as the Matthew's Bible, in the reign of Mary Tudor which resulted in a heresy trial in the Retrochoir and his martyrdom by burning at the stake in 1555.

Since those early beginnings of making the scriptures accessible to people, it has been the mission of the clergy and people of Southwark to embrace the commission given to all Church of England people to bring 'the grace and truth of Christ to this generation and make Him known to those in your care'. This is done through a commitment to preaching and teaching and the study of the Bible but also in an inclusive witness to the love of God which we find clearly articulated in its pages.

We therefore welcome you to this holy place from where the Good News of God has been made known and where together we seek to understand more fully the love of that same God for each one of us.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

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