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# Notes on American Bookbindings

## AN ANDREW BARCLAY BINDING OF DISTINCTION

A volume of sermons of Mather Byles is inscribed on its half title: 'Catherine Byles, the Gift of her Father.'<sup>1</sup> Acquired by the American Antiquarian Society in 1969, it is in the handsomest binding of the emigrant Scottish craftsman Andrew Barclay discovered to date. Strangely enough, the book does not contain Barclay's engraved Chippendale tradesman's ticket which is even more famous than the bindings it adorns.<sup>2</sup> A study prompted by examination of the few ticketed bindings extant has made Andrew Barclay and his work better known than any other Boston bookbinder of his time.<sup>3</sup>

This binding has been identified as Barclay's from a comparison of tools with those on a ticketed volume at Bowdoin College—Sir John Temple's copy of the *Charter* and the *Acts and Laws of the Massachusetts Bay*, 1759 and 1765. This folio

<sup>1</sup> For notes on the acquisition of this binding and other items of Byles association at the Society see 'The Report of the Council,' *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 80(1970):13, and John H. Edmonds, 'An Account of the Mather-Byles Portraits, *ibid.*, 33(1923):285-90. The volume contains the following sermons: *The Glories of The Lord of Hosts*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Thomas and John Fleet, 1769); *The Flourish of the Annual Spring*, 2nd ed., (Boston: Thomas and John Fleet, 1769); *A Discourse on the Present Vileness of the Body*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Thomas and John Fleet, 1771); *A Sermon on the Nature and Necessity of Conversion*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Thomas and John Fleet, 1771); and *Pious Remains of a Young Gentleman Lately Deceased* (Boston: Richard Draper, Jr., 1764).

<sup>2</sup> George Francis Dow, 'Trade Cards,' *Old-Time New England* 26(April 1936), front cover and pp. 116, 118, Barclay's two labels; Scott Graham Williamson, *The American Craftsman* (New York: Bramhall House, 1940), facing p. 153, one label only; Hannah D. French, 'Early American Bookbinding by Hand, 1636-1820,' *Book-binding in America*, ed. Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt (Portland, Maine: Southworth-Anthoensen Press, 1941), facing p. 29, both labels on one plate; Marshall B. Davidson, *Life in America*, 2 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1951), 1:123, both labels; Marcus A. McCorison, 'Book Trade Labels at the American Antiquarian Society,' *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 82(1972):35, small label only.

<sup>3</sup> Hannah D. French, 'The Amazing Career of Andrew Barclay, Scottish Bookbinder of Boston,' *Studies in Bibliography* 14(1961):145-62.

is lettered on the front cover: GIIIR / Massachusetts-Laws / Surveyor-General / and it contains a plain printed Barclay ticket with a border of printers' flowers, while a copy of the same title and edition presented to Harvard College by the Province of Massachusetts-Bay bears Barclay's large engraved label. The Temple copy of olive-green morocco has its covers bordered by two decorative rolls as does the Byles volume. The inner, wider roll is identical in both volumes. A familiar chevron decorates board edges of both and is used more fully at the heads and feet of the two spines. The spines of both volumes are divided into six panels ornamented by fleurons within St. Andrew's crosses in the style common to the several Scottish binders at work in Boston at the time. The fleurons within the crosses of the Byles sermons are simpler and smaller to fit the narrower spine. Its workmanship is notable. Barclay spared no pains on this fine red morocco volume carefully tooled in gold, with its combed marbled endpapers, three extra flyleaves front and back, wide squares, board edges and all page edges gilt, and embroidered headbands. Why, then, did he not place inside the cover one of his engraved labels as he did on a very plain binding of John Tillotson's *Sermons* (London, 1681), also in the Society's library?

The style of the Byles volume is further distinguished from that of earlier Barclay bindings. The usual panel within a panel with fleurons at the panel corners is here succeeded by a central decorative ornament on its covers, built up from small tools. This feature was new in the 1770s and continued to be popular throughout the rest of the eighteenth century. It gave binders an added opportunity to exhibit their skill. On this volume Andrew Barclay shows himself one of the most skillful masters of the new vogue. This presentation binding has a most appropriate place in the Society's library where a portrait of Mather Byles faces the readers from behind the readers' services desk.

Hannah D. French



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