The photographs in this virtual exhibition were taken by the Morris and Elmhurst students Sophie Birkin and Lexi Lazell to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the King James’ Bible and show part of the College’s outstanding collection of early Bibles. Many of these books were first collected in the Georgian period by the Rev. John Glennie of Aberdeenshire and later left to the College in 1875 by his son, the Rev. John David Glennie, a founding member of College Council.
Right: One of the most influential books in English literary history is the translation of the New Testament carried out by William Tyndale in 1524-1525. Printed in Worms in Germany and smuggled into England, these first printed English translations of Scripture are extraordinarily rare: only three copies of the first edition are known to have survived.

Marlborough owns a later example of a Tyndale New Testament. It lacks its title page, but strong bibliographical clues point to it being the 1550 edition of Tyndale’s work, revised by the royal printer Richard Jugge. Jugge held the monopoly on Bible printing from 1568 to 1577, the year of his death.

Here we see the elegant tapering typography Jugge employed to beautify the beginning of the Gospel of St Mark. Note the black mark to the right of the text: this is an exit hole made by a bookworm.
Above and right: One of the most remarkable Bibles at Marlborough is this 1569 *La Biblia, que es, los sacram libros del vieio y nuevo testamento*, the first complete Bible in Spanish. It was printed in Basel, Switzerland and is known as “The Bear Bible” because of a woodcut on the title-page showing a bear raiding a beehive. This was the device of the printer Samuel Apiarius. The Catholic Church disapproved of vernacular translations of the Bible, which explains why this Bible was printed outside Spanish territory. The translation was overseen by Casiodoro de Reina, an itinerant scholar with reformist tendencies.

The Marlborough copy is beautifully bound in polished calf with extra gilding. This photograph shows a detail of the gilded text block. For additional ornament, the binder has used a tiny metal punch to hammer a pattern into the edges of the pages.

Photograph: Sophie Birkin
Right: A detail of the ribbed spine and gold-stamped decorations.

Photograph: Sophie Borkin
Right: An opening in Erasmus of Rotterdam’s *Paraphrase upon the newe testamente* of 1548-1549. This was an edition of the New Testament interleaved with Erasmus’ commentaries, making it an unusual specimen of sixteenth-century English Bible. A royal injunction decreed that every parish church should possess a copy of this work.

The translators of Erasmus’ text are particularly noteworthy. Chief among them was Catherine Parr, widow of Henry VIII and a woman of strong Protestant convictions. Other translations were supplied by the future Mary I, and by Miles Coverdale. The whole work was edited by the talented humanist author Nicholas Udall who is best remembered today for *Ralph Roister-Doister*, the first comic play in modern English.
Above and right: A detail of a leaf from Erasmus’ *Paraphrase.* This photograph shows very clearly the texture of early printers’ paper. Unlike modern paper, which is made from wood pulp, early paper consisted of old rags mashed in liquid and laid out to dry on trays of fine wire mesh. Centuries later, the lines of the mesh remain impressed on the surface of the paper. The typeface used in this book is known as “black-letter” and is typical of English books of the sixteenth century. Modern Roman type - used here in the title - only superseded black-letter in England in the 1590s. Both continued to appear together until well into the seventeenth century.
Right: The Tudor binding of a 1581 London edition of the Geneva Bible. This is one of the finest bindings in the College collection, consisting of contemporary blind-tooled calf laid over wooden boards and bossed with brass escutcheons. The binding also bears traces of long-lost clasps.

The identity of the Bible’s original owners is unknown, but the initials “I” (or “J”) and “K” on either side of the central boss on the upper board, and the initials “W” and “K” at the bottom edge offer some clues.
Right: This is the title page of a Hebrew Bible printed in Antwerp in 1566. Like all Hebrew books, its text reads from right to left which means the start of this book seems to be at the back of the volume.

The printer, Christopher Plantin, was one of the great publishers of the sixteenth century. His printing office, *The House of the Golden Compasses*, still stands in Antwerp today where it is a museum. Plantin was an expert at printing Bibles, and his Hebrew Bible, or more properly, *Tanakh*, gained fame as the superlative Hebrew Bible of the early modern period. His work was not only intended for Jewish readers; it was an important source text for biblical scholars and theologians. The Hebrew Bible was one of Plantin’s biggest sellers, and he issued it in unusually large print runs of 3,900. (The average print run for a literary work was 1,500). The lead typeface used for this book survives to this day.

Photograph: Sophie Birkin
Right: Plantin was a canny businessman, and he managed to serve different audiences with his Hebrew Bible. On the one hand, the text was sufficiently accurate to meet the needs of Jewish readers, some from as far away as Morocco, where Plantin kept an agent. Probably his larger market, though, was the constituency of Christian theologians, biblical scholars, and priests. Interest in the original languages of the Bible rose sharply in the wake of both humanism and the Reformation, and no library of theological works was deemed complete without a copy of the Hebrew Scriptures.

The Marlborough copy seems to have been originally owned by a Christian scholar who drew up tables showing the names of the biblical books in the Jewish and Christian traditions.
**Right:** This landscape format book with the curled up binding is a very rare example of an Elizabethan music book. It was printed in London in 1579 and was the first English book to provide musical scores for the Psalms. The melodies are thought to have been borrowed from German Lutheran settings. The book’s editor, William Damon, hoped that his work would be used by “the godly Christians for recreating themselves, in stede of [with] fonde and vnseemly Ballades”.

Music books often suffered rough handling, so comparatively few of this vintage survive. The College’s Psalm Book is in remarkable condition, preserving even its title page, often the first leaf to be lost. The book is bound in its original vellum covers, and its leather ties have survived the centuries too.

Photograph: Sophie Birkia
Above and right: This splendid title-page, printed in black and red ink, is from a Geneva Bible printed by Christopher Barker in 1599. Barker enjoyed the monopoly on printing Bibles, a privilege granted him by Elizabeth I. He succeeded Richard Jugge in this role. It is estimated that Barker produced in excess of seventy editions of the English Bible between 1575 and 1599. The College has two examples, an edition of 1581 and this one, which was probably his last, as Barker died in 1599. The licence to print Bibles stayed in the family until 1709, and it was Barker’s son, Robert, who produced the first King James’ Bible in 1611.

The Geneva Bible is also sometimes known as “The Breeches Bible”, a reference to a peculiarity of translation in the passage in Genesis 3 where God meets Adam and Eve just after they have eaten the forbidden fruit. The story relates that Adam and Eve were suddenly conscious of their nakedness and sewed fig-leaves together to cover themselves. The Geneva Bible rather implausibly describes these makeshift garments as “breeches”. The King James’ translation was not notably better: there we read that Adam and Eve hid their shame under “aprons”.

Photograph: Simon McKeown
Right: A detail of the title compartment on the spine of the 1599 Geneva Bible. The binding for this Bible is approximately 200 years younger than the book within.

Photograph: Lexi Lazell
Bibles were expensive items in early modern England, and were very often the only book owned by a family. For this reason, and because of the text’s holy stature, it became common for families to record births, marriages and deaths on blank pages in their Bibles. The 1599 Geneva Bible has several pages of family records, beginning with those of a certain John Craven who was born in 1618 and married Joane in 1641. The manuscript entries record the birth of nine children to the couple - and the sad fact that the first three died in infancy. Oddly to our eyes, two of their later children were named after their predeceased brothers. In fact, this was not unusual practice in the 1600s. The Cravens lived in the parish of St Michael’s, Cornhill in the City of London (called Mickell Cornehill in the manuscript); although they also spent time in Joane’s native village, Cocking, near Midhurst in Sussex.

A century later, the same Bible was used by another family as its historical record. This was the family of John Giles of Lewisham. His year of birth is given as 1750, and he goes on to note his marriage to Elizabeth in 1779 and the birth of two children, Thomas Hollier in 1780, and John Frederic in 1781. John Frederic lived for less than three weeks.
Above and right: A real Marlborough treasure is a copy of a Dutch Bible dating from 1628. Exceptionally, its boards are wrapped in an embroidered binding of wonderful vigour and colour. The two sides of the book show a family, with the father on the upper board, the mother on the lower, and two children, both male, being held by the hand. The spine of the book is decorated with panels showing, among other things, a squirrel, a rose, and a hound.

Embroidery was an important pursuit for women of quality, as it testified to both their patience and capacity for innocent leisure. Many examples of stump-work pictures or embroidered cushions or valances survive from the first half of the seventeenth century, but book-bindings are comparatively rare: the greatest collection of such material in the UK counts only one example. Embroidered work was typically English or Scottish, so the presence of such an embroidered binding around a Dutch book presents a puzzle.

It is very likely that the mother depicted on the lower board was the needlewoman responsible for the work. She has executed the binding in canvas work with metallic thread details. All of the faces are stitched in silk thread and the hair is loosely looped to resemble curls.

Photograph: Sophie Birkin
Right: We leave the last word to the author of the Gospel of St Mark, seen here in the Tudor typography of the Tyndale New Testament – FINIS.
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