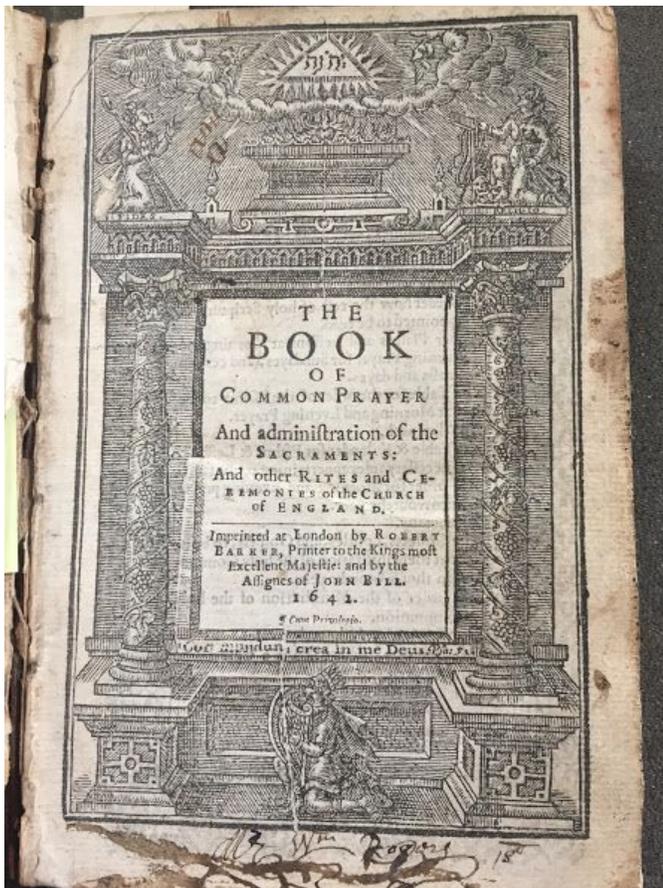
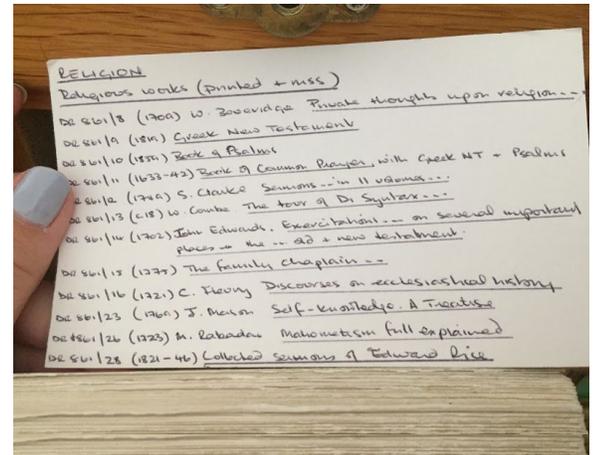


The card catalogue at the Birthplace Trust is not to be overlooked! Through the meticulous work of cataloguers, researchers are able to rediscover texts that are bound together by subject, person, or place in a way that is difficult to reproduce on a digital search. As I thumbed my way through the 'Religion' section of this drawer, I came across a 1642 edition of *The Book of Common Prayer*. This small printed book has an extraordinary history of influence beginning with Henry VIII and the establishment of the Anglican church in England. As with its first printing, this book is dedicated to King Edward VI, the only son of Henry VIII who died at the age of nine. Containing an almanac, charts



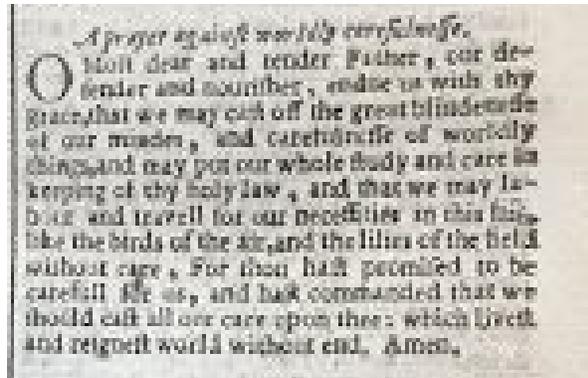
detailing which prayers to say on what feast days, psalms and special prayers, this small book would have been a fixture in many literate households in England from the mid-sixteenth century to modern day. This book was printed the same year the English Civil War began, a turning point in the tenor of religious fervor as the more radical Puritans sought to wrestle the state away from an absolutist monarchy. Only seven years after this book was printed Charles I was executed, an event that shook monarchies across Europe to their cores. Over the past few years scholars have dedicated multiple books on the transformation of this text, framing it as a character in the unfolding history of religion in England and the English empire.¹

The title page is a beautifully carved wood block print that shows a bit of wear and tear, a testament to this book's reprinting and popularity. Looking closely, you can see the line caused by the crack in the wood right in front of the king's face. The king is positioned kneeling at the bottom of the page, but

¹ See Jacobs, Alan. *The Book of Common Prayer : A Biography*. Princeton University Press, 2013. ; Church of England, and Brian Cummings. *The Book of Common Prayer : The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662*. Oxford University Press, 2011.; Turrell, J.F. "C. K. Robertson, the Book of Common Prayer: A Spiritual Treasure Chest-Selections Annotated and Explained." *Anglican Theological Review*, vol. 96, no. 3, 2014, pp. 624-624.

remains directly below the Hebrew name of God held in the pyramid above and framed by clouds. This reaffirms the direct connection between God and king. Henry VIII's break with the Catholic church depended on his establishment as both ruler and head of the new Anglican church and this imagery affirms that bond.

The final few pages of this book contain "Godly Prayers" or prayers for specific occurrences. These include "A prayer against temptation" and "A prayer for patience in trouble." Below, I have included "A prayer against worldly carefulnesse" that asks God to help focus the



supplicant's attention to trusting fully in God's plan. Through these small prayers, we can perhaps reconstruct pieces of early modern English life. What these special prayers ask for are very specific and we can imagine an early modern person, perhaps envying a neighbor's new shoes quietly reciting this to themselves. The images of "the birds of the air, and the lilies of the field" are quintessentially pastoral, leading the mind to consider natural beauty instead of man made "worldly" goods. The birds and lilies in this prayer allude to Matthew 6:26-34 and we can see how this biblical passage is repackaged for everyday use in this special prayer, a reminder of a much longer section of scripture and the lesson it imparts.