

B20 Bancroft Was for Playes

Notes. This is perhaps the most clearly Puritan and anti-Catholic of the four libellous epitaphs written on the 1610 death of Richard Bancroft, Archbishop of Canterbury.

“Another [epitaph on Archbishop Bancroft]”

Bancroft Was for Playes

Lean Lent and holy-dayes¹

But now under-goe’s their Doome:²

Had English Ladies store

Yet kept open a Back dore

To let in the Strumpet of Rome.

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Source. BL MS Harley 3991, fol. 126r

Other known sources. Bodleian MS Ashmole 1463, p. 13; BL Add. MS 70454, fol. 22v

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¹ *Bancroft Was for Playes...holy-dayes*: Bancroft’s alleged support for stage plays—a frequent object of Puritan censure—is here conflated with his alleged support for Catholic Lenten fasting and the Catholic calendar of holy days.

² *But now under-goe’s their Doome*: the poet’s apparent perception that plays, Lent and holy-days have suffered a “doom” comparable to that of Bancroft himself is a little baffling. It is possible that he might be referring to a (temporary) closure of the theatres, as occasionally happened in times of plague.