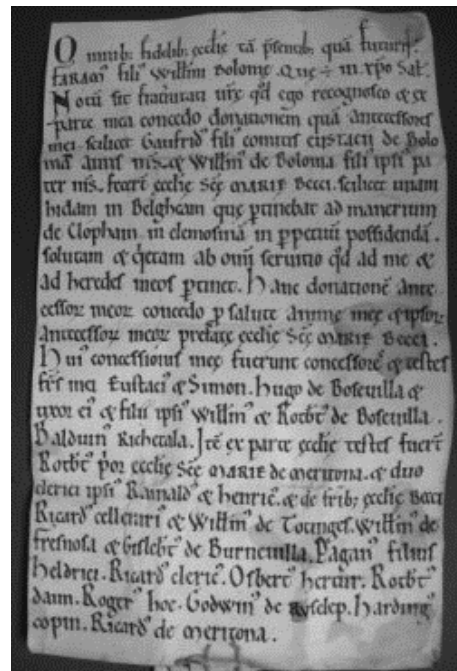


INHERITING MEMORIES - Exploring the King's College Estates Records

An artificial memory (unlike the natural memory of man) is neither personal nor mortal; if properly cared for it is undying, and can be transferred again and again from the dead to the living. Therefore when King's College assumed the archive-maker's responsibility in a score of institutions all over the country – manors, rectories and priories – it became, not only the compiler of an official memory in respect of each one of them, but as the legitimate successor to deceased lords, impropriated rectors and suppressed monks, legitimate inheritor of a score of institutional memories. As an educational institution at Cambridge our memory runs back to 1441; as English landlords, our inherited memories extend almost to the Norman Conquest.¹

Thanks to the Heritage Lottery Fund's generous support, I have begun work as project archivist at the King's College Archive Centre, engaged in the lengthy process of improving access to the College's institutional records. For many years, the College collections have played second fiddle to the archives of former Kingsmen, such as E.M. Forster, Rupert Brooke and John Maynard Keynes, which have attracted the lion's share of our readers, mostly from the academic community. Archivist Dr Ros Moad recognised the treasure trove lying dormant and undiscovered amongst the College archives, so applied for HLF funding to produce an online catalogue of the estates records – the section of the College archives which could at once be seen to be of relevance and interest to the community at large. These are the records of estates in England given to the College by Henry VI following its foundation in 1441, many of which were the lands of the so-called alien priories, the dependencies in England of foreign religious houses such as the Norman Abbey of Bec, confiscated by the Crown in 1414. These lands brought



BEC/27 Charter , c. 1160

¹ John Saltmarsh 'The muniments of King's College' *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society* Vol. 33 (1931-1932, pp. 83 – 97), p. 89.

their written memory with them in the form of charters and court records, in some cases going back to the 11th century. Although most colleges are responsible for lands outside their local area, King's lands are perhaps the most far-flung, covering 164 estates in 30 counties from Cornwall to Norfolk, Suffolk to Yorkshire.²

The records themselves vary between manors, but overall contain an impressive range of material, including court rolls and other manorial documents, deeds tracing the exchange of property among local inhabitants, wills and probate inventories and a number of royal documents, all of which deserve to be made available to a wider audience. Because many of the lands were appropriated from the alien priories, older administrative institutions in their own right, the records stretch back well before the foundation of the College, with the oldest dating from the 11th century.



Our oldest document (uncovered so far!): **WEW/23** Charter for the exchange of land in West Wretham, Norfolk, 1085

There have been previous projects to try and sort out the estates records, and my current work would not have been possible without the immense contribution of Dr Michael Stansfield, who in 1987 sorted the entirety of the College archive material and listed it on index cards. Within the time allowed (i.e. very little) he completed a somewhat Herculean task in unpleasant conditions, attacking the records store with vacuum cleaner in hand and emerging the other side with the majority of the records numbered, neatly boxed and listed. My work involves the transferring of his index cards onto a computerised archival database, which can then be made available online and printed as a catalogue. In order to successfully encourage a wider readership of the material, which is the ultimate goal of the project, my work also involves outreach activities, such as this article, to ensure the involvement of different communities and to encourage as wide a range of people as possible to visit us and see the records in person, or to use the catalogues online via our website.

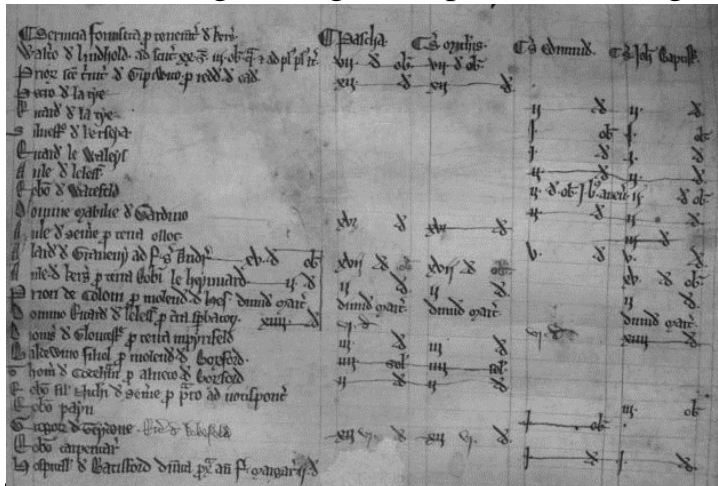
² A complete list of the estates covered can be found on the project website – <http://www.kings.cam.ac.uk/library/archives/college/hlfproject/estates/>

USING THE ESTATES RECORDS

A major factor in the accessibility and use of the records is the method by which they have been arranged – the estates catalogues are being compiled according to the categories originally decided on by Michael Stansfield (in turn prompted by F.W. Steed's catalogue of the archives of New College, Oxford). These categories essentially split the records of each manor into three main groups, ecclesiastical records, manorial documents and estate records. Within these main divisions, the papers are then divided by type of material, e.g. receipts, accounts, deeds, surveys. These document types can help indicate useful starting points for the different groups of readers who we are hoping will be interested in the documents.

Family Historians

Evidence for genealogists is plentiful among the estates records. Within



KER/630 Early rental for Kersey, Suffolk, 1264

the collection for most of the manors, **rentals** have survived, which list the names of tenants living on the manor, and describe the amount each would have paid in rent for their homes.

Perhaps the most common documents among the records are

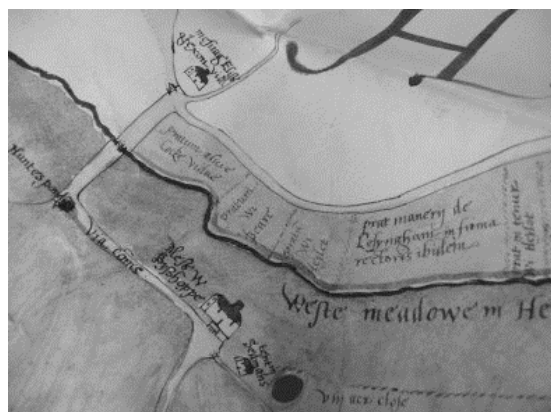
title deeds and **leases** – these can pinpoint more exactly who bought or leased which lands from whom, and when, although they are by nature more limited than rentals and other documents which deal with the whole manor, as they describe only a single transaction.

We are lucky to have some **testamentary records** among the estates collections, including a number of wills as well as several, rarer, probate inventories – these can provide truly fascinating accounts of the minutiae of a person's daily life, family relationships and even physical details about the layout of their home. All of the more substantial collections include a number of **court rolls**, recording proceedings of the manorial courts which were the principal means of local administration, from property exchange to punishment. They always included a list of jurors and usually mentioned any bailiffs or other officials who played a part in

proceedings. **Accounts** regularly turn up among the manorial documents, including those for stewards, receivers, servants and other officials of the manor. Any **early charters** among the collections will also feature witness lists, which may help a genealogist pinpoint ancestors once they have narrowed down their search to a particular area.

Local Historians

For those interested in the development of a geographical area, or the changing landscape or boundaries surrounding a particular property, there are a good many **terriers** among the collections, with a substantial number from the 18th to the 19th centuries. These often provide a very detailed topographical description of the area surveyed, and were often used as evidence in legal disputes over land rights between the College and local landowners. Along similar lines, there are many **surveys** and **valuations** of land and property belonging to the College. Often, surveyors produced maps of the areas surveyed, and there are some beautifully-drawn and very detailed estate **maps and plans** among the collections, the earliest of which dates from 1599. The maps are a great asset to the collection – only recently we helped a reader who was tracing an ancestor who had lived in a mill which once stood on one of the King's estates, and happily we were able to produce a map showing its precise location.

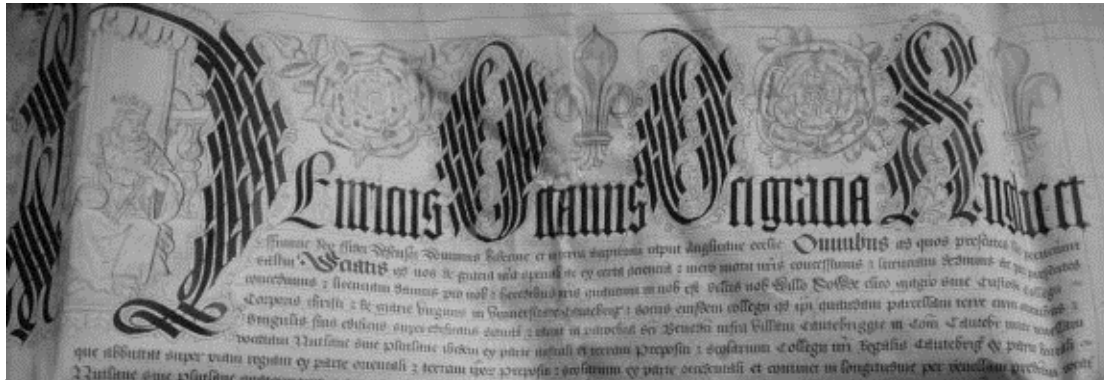


LES/35 Survey map of Lessingham, Norfolk, detail. 1599

Many of the estates collections include bundles of **correspondence**, usually between the incumbent College bursar and local tenants, from which often interesting stories emerge. For example, dated from the bursarship of John Smith (to whose concern for the condition of the muniments – not evidently a priority with the majority of College bursars throughout their history – we owe the survival of a great deal of the material), the report of the discovery of some significant roman coins in the Glebe lands attached to the rectory in West Wretham, Norfolk, by a local tenant. These kinds of ‘local interest’ stories are common among the estate papers, and would greatly repay closer study. Most of the larger estates also include papers regarding the **inclosure** act, as well as any records of legal disputes over rights or land, of interest to those looking into the history of the English landscape, or the legal aspects of land ownership.

In addition, there is a good deal of material in the records which would be useful to anyone researching the history of ecclesiastical houses, such as the priories of Kersey and Great Bricett in Suffolk, as well as the development and decline of the manorial system or, indeed, the history of King's College itself.

ROYAL DOCUMENTS



CAM/49 Royal Letters Patent of Henry VIII relating to tenements in Nut Lane, Cambridge, 1535



CAM/49
Second Great Seal of Henry VIII, front

As well as items of interest to specialist historians, the College estates collection has been particularly blessed with a generous spread of royal documents, which could be seen to be of more obvious general appeal. Unsurprisingly, there are many Letters Patent of the College founder, Henry VI, as many of his original grants of estates at the Foundation (in 1441) have survived. There are also instruments of other monarchs who had connections to the College, including these

very finely decorated letters of Henry VIII, to which a near perfect example of his second Great Seal is attached by green and white laces.

An earlier, rarer example of the Great Seal is from the estates records for Great Bricett in Suffolk. A market charter of King Stephen from 1152, granting a market and fairs to Great Bricett manor, features a remarkably well-preserved example of Stephen's second Great Seal (the first having likely been destroyed at the time of his capture at the hands of the Empress Matilda, with whom Stephen was engaged in a bitter rivalry over the English throne).



GBR/22

Second Great Seal of King Stephen,
reverse, 1152

The royal documents are often beautifully decorated, and an impressive selection of royal seals can be found in the collections, including Edward I, II and III, Richard II, Henry IV, Mary I, Elizabeth I, James I, Charles II and Victoria. We hope that these rare and unusual items will help the collections appeal to a wider audience, and images of them will be added to the project website for this purpose. This is just one method of outreach, however, and through the distribution of the printed catalogues and promotional material to county record offices and exhibition boards displaying facsimile documents in public libraries and other suitable venues, we hope to encourage more visitors to the Archive Centre.

The estates records are a wonderfully rich and diverse resource, but are only a part of the archives of King's College. The final pieces of the jigsaw will only be fitted once the Archive Centre can gather funding for the completion of the College Archive catalogue, which will include records of the College administration and a complete set of accounts and minutes stretching back to the Foundation in 1441. The completed catalogue would be invaluable to any researcher interested in the estates or the College itself, and it is hoped that work can begin on these important records in the near future.

WELCOMING NEW VISITORS

The principal aim of the project is for the material to reach a wider audience. The website for the project has been set up as a 'first port of call' for readers, which I update as I work through the records - <http://www.kings.cam.ac.uk/library/archives/college/hlfproject/>

