
Iveagh Manuscripts

INTRODUCTION

The Iveagh Manuscripts (until their purchase by Suffolk County Council in 1987 the richest source of archival evidence for the county's medieval history still in private hands) fall into two distinct groups, the Phillipps Collection and the Cornwallis papers.

THE PHILLIPPS COLLECTION

Sir Thomas Phillipps's collection of Suffolk manuscripts was assembled mainly between 1829 and 1859 and purchased en bloc by the first Earl of Iveagh in 1914. Even before it came into Phillipps's hands, much of the material already had a distinguished history of ownership by Suffolk antiquaries of the 17th and 18th centuries. The collection includes manuscripts owned, annotated, or written by the herald and genealogist Peter Le Neve (1661-1729) and by his amanuensis Thomas Allen; by 'Honest' Tom Martin of Palgrave, who married Le Neve's widow in 1732 to acquire his collections; and by John Ives, who in turn had access to the Le Neve-Martin manuscripts before his own early death in 1776 at the age of twenty-five. Other 18th-century antiquaries represented include Francis Blomefield (better known as the historian of Norfolk but also the compiler of notes on Suffolk churches), George Burton (rector of Elveden), William Cole, Sir John Cullum and George Ashby. Dominating the collection in terms of provenance, however, are the manuscripts of Craven Ord and William Stevenson Fitch, because these were from libraries dispersed in Phillipps's own day.

In addition to the hundreds of medieval deeds, dating from the early 12th century onwards, the collection includes records of eighteen religious houses in Suffolk before the Dissolution - from the largest foundations to the smallest. There are also the various antiquaries' collected volumes of notes and sketches on history, topography, heraldry and ecclesiology; their observations, particularly on the county's churches, record much that is otherwise lost for ever.

THE CORNWALLIS PAPERS

The Cornwallis family, descended from Thomas Cornwallis (Sheriff of London, 1378-1384), were prominent landowners in Suffolk from the early 15th to the early 19th century. Of the seventy-eight boxes in which their documents reached the Record Office, about sixty contained manorial records of the Cornwallis manors in Braiseworth, Brockford, Brome, Eye, Hoxne, Ingham, Norton, Oakley, Palgrave, Stradbroke, Stuston and Thrandeston in Suffolk, and Scole, Thorpe Abbots and Tivetshall (Norfolk), from the 13th century onwards. There are also domestic accounts and estate records from Brome from the late 16th to the mid-18th century. The family papers include such valuable historical evidence as the Indian letter-book of the first Marquess Cornwallis, Governor General of Bengal. All were purchased by the second Earl of Iveagh from a London book-dealer in 1931. Evidence suggests that they were previously inherited from the Cornwallis family by Richard Griffin Neville, third Baron Braybrooke (1783-1858) of Audley End, Essex, who in 1819 married Jane, daughter of Charles, second Marquess Cornwallis.

LOCATION AND AVAILABILITY

Although both groups are kept at the Ipswich Record Office, they are treated as two separate entities. The Phillipps Manuscripts, as a wholly artificial collection, have been classified as HD1538. The Cornwallis Papers, a naturally accumulated estate and family archive, have been given the reference HA411; they will complement the archives of the Kerrison, Bateman and Hanbury families (ref HA68), later owners of the Cornwallis Suffolk estates.

Virtually all items from the Phillipps Collection are available for study. About 15-20% of the Cornwallis material, however, is in fragile condition, and such fragile items must remain unavailable until conservation work has been carried out. In the interest of the long-term preservation of the manuscripts, it has been decided that photocopying from bound volumes cannot be permitted; photographic prints can be supplied, so long as no risk of damage is incurred. It is intended that certain items such as volumes of Church Notes, for which heavy demand for copies is anticipated, will be reproduced on microfiche, so that print-out from the fiches may be provided.

THE CATALOGUE

The definitive catalogue of the Phillipps Collection is now available at all three Record Offices. Both because it was considered important to preserve existing reference numbers which have been cited in published works, and also because in a purely artificial collection such as this it was neither necessary nor appropriate to adopt an archival scheme of classification based on record function, it was decided to retain the existing arrangement and basic numbering of the documents.

The collection and the catalogue therefore remain in two main sections. The first, comprising Iveagh MS Nos 1-107 (now HD1538/1-107), is a general section consisting of manuscripts relating either to the whole county or to a number of parishes.

All original documents bound into collected volumes have now been listed individually, and the degree of description of other items has been amplified. The second section, comprising Iveagh MS Nos 108-441 (HD1538/108-441) consists of manuscripts arranged in alphabetical order of parish. Again, each document has received a separate listing; in particular every medieval charter has been fully calendared. Section 2 of the catalogue has therefore been sub-numbered throughout. The introduction to the catalogue directs readers to related material in other collections.

Detailed cataloguing of the Cornwallis papers must await the conservation of fragile documents. In the meantime, documents may be ordered from the original summary list, obtainable from the Searchroom Supervisor, after first checking their availability from the Supervisor's list of documents requiring conservation. If available, Cornwallis documents should be ordered on the usual request forms, by the box and item numbers in the right-hand margin of the list, prefixed by HA411, eg HA411 Box 3 No 1.

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Suffolk Record Office web site: <http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/sro>

Suffolk Heritage Direct website: <http://www.suffolkheritagedirect.org.uk>