

SOMERSET ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 1989

The Annual General Meeting of the Society was held at Bishop Fox's School, Taunton on Saturday, 6 May 1989. 57 members attended and there were apologies from 17 members. Professor B.W. Cunliffe M.A., Ph.D., D.Litt., F.B.A., F.S.A., was unanimously elected President of the Society for 1989/90 and Vice-Presidents as listed on the previous page were elected. The Society's financial accounts for the year to 31 December 1988 were presented and adopted by the meeting. The accounts are printed on pages 271-3 below.

The Honorary Secretary reported a total membership at 31 December 1988 of 715 individuals and schools and 23 Associated Societies. In addition there were 82 institutions at home and overseas subscribing to the Society's *Proceedings*. 29 new members were elected during the year; losses through various causes amounted to 67.

The chairmen of their respective committees each gave a report on the previous year's activities. The Executive Officers and the Hon. Legal Adviser, as listed on the previous page, were elected. The following members were elected to fill the vacancies on Council: Dr. R.W. Dunning, Mr. R.J.E. Bush, Mr. J.V. Carrington and Mr. B. Watkin. The members of the subject Committees were elected 'en bloc', Messrs Albert Goodman & Co. were appointed auditors.

It was agreed that the Society should assume responsibility for the administration of the Maltwood Fund for Archaeological Research in Somerset.

Following the close of the meeting, Mr. S. Hobbs presented the report of the Somerset Record Society.

The retiring President, Mr. Derek Shorrocks, gave the Presidential Address.

THE ROLE OF THE SOCIETY IN THE PRESERVATION OF THE
COUNTY'S ARCHIVE HERITAGE

It has been my privilege to be the Society's President for the past year, but I have been conscious throughout that by virtue of your selection procedures for this office I have found myself, as a simple former record keeper, sandwiched between an eminent natural historian and an archaeologist: both singularly appropriate choices for a society which enshrined as the prime factors of its original constitution 'the cultivation and collection of information on archaeology and natural history in connection with the county of Somerset'.

In researching my subject, I have been looking at the first 100 years of *Proceedings* and, in particular, the often neglected section, Part I. I was re-assured to find that many of my predecessors, who were often selected from the locality where the AGM was to be held, played to their own strengths, limiting themselves to their own neighbourhood, but sometimes giving their remarks a wider application if they were more directly involved in the Society's administration. As my title indicates, I propose to follow the example of this second group and to try to demonstrate what led the Society to adopt such a role; how it sustained it; how successful it was; and whether I can be critical (a) as an archivist and/or (b) as a user. Until a year ago I was County Archivist and had spent over 30 years in the Somerset Record Office. In 1957 it seemed to me, by comparison with most county record offices, which were post-war creations, that Somerset's office had existed for a long time, but 30 years on the perspective is changed and it does not seem so very long ago. In fact, it is not easy to suggest which of several possible dates could be selected as most appropriate for its establishment as a multi-purpose repository

offering the full range of services and accepting all categories of local records beyond those of its own official county archives. Thus, in 1929 the county had an honorary archivist in the person of Sir Matthew Nathan, former colonial administrator, Chairman of the County Records Committee and local historian. Two years later, in 1931, he was instrumental in securing approval for the designation of the office as a repository for manorial documents, which permitted the widening of its scope by allowing it to receive private archives. At the same time the Society's strongroom was similarly designated, possibly as a means of regularising the *status quo*, for happily, as will emerge, the Society had not allowed such legal niceties as the lack of previous approval to inhibit its activities. In 1935 Sir Matthew's efforts were supplemented by the appointment of a professional archivist with support staff and a more active role was undertaken in the acquisition of records, only to be thwarted four years later by the outbreak of war, the dismissal of the archivist and the closure of the office for the duration. A fresh start was made in 1946 with the appointment of my predecessor, Ivor Collis, a long and devoted servant of this Society. There are, thus, several likely dates, with 1935 as possibly the strongest candidate, and if I appear to labour this point it is to underline the fact that the Society had already existed for 85 years, during which time the awareness of the value of original local records had been increasing: a good thing if that awareness is exercised under corporate control, but potentially dangerous if dissipated in private and individual hands.

With the benefit of hindsight we can recognize that the Society was the only body which could have undertaken responsibility county-wide for records, but that is only in default of any other. Conversely, we can say that there was no reason why a private society, with primary objectives in the fields of archaeology and natural history, should have thought to pay any regard to historical MSS. We can only be thankful now that it did so. In fact, the signs of its interest can be seen by the first Annual General Meeting in 1850. It helped, firstly, that this Society numbered among its founder members and prime movers some of the major landed proprietors in the county, men such as vice-presidents Horner, Dickinson and Sir Peregrine Acland (great-great-grandfather to the present chairman) with extensive holdings of family records in their direct care. Secondly, the practice was established from the outset at the peripatetic annual meetings of mounting a temporary museum of local exhibits for the duration of these more leisurely occasions. In 1850, in addition to the variety of fossils, plants, stuffed birds, prints, coins, etc., there were also on display some manuscripts – medieval deeds from the Trevelyan MSS at Nettlecombe, including the original mid-12th century grant of the lordship and King Henry II's confirmation, now unhappily split between British Library and Somerset Record Office as a result of Sir Walter Trevelyan's action, and King Ina's charter to Glastonbury of 706, displayed by the Revd Hill Dawe Wickham of Frome. Finally, too, it must have helped that the Society intended from the start to be a collecting body and had secured itself a home for a museum and library. This came through the sharing of the use and rent of premises on the west side of Fore St. in Taunton, already occupied by the Taunton Literary Institution. A code of conduct was laid down for contributions to the museum, but unhappily no one thought to apply the same standards to documents until relatively recently. This is not surprising, for there was little interest generally in records, other than in the state's public records, and no move within the Society's membership to translate these vague possibilities into concrete action. Only isolated individuals showed any awareness of or interest in collecting local records, but happily, as will be shown, there were those within the county from whom the Society was to benefit. But outside the British Museum there was little of what I

would call corporate or concerted awareness: hence, Sir Walter Trevelyan's choice of the latter for his Nettlecombe charter in preference to his own Society's museum.

Within the Society, the next move came at the Annual General Meeting of 1858, at which the idea was first floated that a new county history should be produced. This was to be a recurrent theme in the Society's history over the next 40 years and one which had a strong influence on material received. For the first time, too, the Society offered itself as a home for material for such a history, promising safe custody and offering to undertake a systematic classification. One can appreciate their feelings: anyone who has compared Collinson with other similar county histories will know how sadly disappointing his work is, and it can only have rubbed salt into members' wounds to learn that work on an extended and improved version of Hutchins' *History of Dorset* was well advanced.

The first recorded acquisition of a document occurs in 1862 and was a common recovery of the 16th century relating to property in Bristol, but there is a strong possibility that a more seemly first acquisition may be credited to the Revd Mr Wickham and his 8th-century charter. Its arrival subsequently is not documented, but a *Proceedings* article in 1884 indicates that Wickham had presented it to the Society before his death in 1874. It is tempting to think that he allowed it to remain after its display in 1850. Another early benefactor was Edward Jeboult, historian of West Somerset and lover of his native Taunton, who in 1867 presented four volumes relating to the manor of Taunton Deane, which cannot now all be positively identified against other similar records in the collection, because of shortcomings in accessioning procedures before 1901 and listing practices thereafter, as will be seen.

The meeting of 1871 brings to the fore the member who arguably did more than anyone to set the Society on its course of record acquisition. This was a founder member, Thomas Serel of Wells, who had been involved in collecting and rescuing documents since at least 1840. He read a paper to the meeting entitled, 'Public Records of Somerset', being moved to speak at this time by the activities in the county of the agents of the recently established Royal Commission on Historical MSS. These two, Riley and Howard, had already examined and were listing private muniments at Dunster and Montacute, corporate records at Bridgwater, Glastonbury and Wells, and ecclesiastical archives of Bishop and Dean and Chapter, so many in Serel's audience would have had first-hand knowledge of the subject. Riley, too, had had to make a second visit to the Chapter archives following the finding of a list of documents which he had not examined. The perseverance of another stalwart founder member, Francis Dickinson, led to the discovery of a large box described as 'full of rubbish', which proved to contain a thousand ancient documents. All this provided Serel with the opening to press his case and added point to his argument. As may be gathered from the amount of ground covered, the Commission's work was necessarily both summary and selective. Serel's paper, therefore, looked for expansion locally and pressed the case for the compilation of a calendar or index of 'Records' (from the context he was thinking at this stage only in terms of the Cathedral's records) as a prelude to the long-term aim for a county history, the lack of progress towards which was again regretted. In the meantime, their work could be published by increasing the number of volumes produced. To prove how necessary their efforts were and to illustrate the vulnerability of records, he cited the example of the Wells butcher he had found using an old register of wills to wrap his meat in; this must have strayed from the diocesan registry some time after 1858, when probate business was transferred from the ecclesiastical courts. He capped this with a report of the destruction of the contents of the Dean's Registry over the West Cloister, which had been used to light fires in the (Theological)

College lecture room: this has the ring of truth, as the recent history of the Cathedral places the college lectures in the same room. Finally, he spoke of the sale of the effects of the late Bishop, Lord Auckland, as waste paper, when several boxes of documents from Bishop Law's period of office were knocked down for a few shillings, a small portion of which was within a few minutes passed over to another for £15 or £16. This sounds like an eye-witness account and Serel was possibly a participant as either first or second purchaser. If so, this would not have been the first time, for he bought documents at 'Mr Prat's sale' in 1840 and operated as a bookseller in Sadler St. between 1849 and 1855 at least. Otherwise, little has come to light so far about his life: there is a single letter of 1861 addressed to him at the 'Town Clerk's Office, Wells', and prior to 1849 he had lived and worked for an indeterminate period in Glastonbury. This could have been for Messrs Prat, who were solicitors with offices in both Wells and Glastonbury and also acted as deputy diocesan registrars. In this context there is a cryptic reference in the 1933 Presidential address of Arthur Somerville of nearby Dinder, to an unnamed founder member who had been employed as a clerk in the diocesan registry and who had been a collector of documents and had sold many to a dealer in Bath. In light of what is to follow it would seem to be stretching coincidence too far to suggest that this was any other than Serel.

At any rate, his obituary in *Proceedings* after his death in 1887, aged 73, pays tribute to 'his vigilant care and unostentatious labours in rescuing a large number of valuable MSS relating to the See, the corporation of Wells, the College of Vicars Choral and the principal county families, which in many instances would otherwise have been lost or destroyed'. In fact, by the time of his death much of what he had rescued had come into the Society's hands. In 1879 a subscription list was opened and 59 members subscribed sums ranging from 5s. to 5 guineas to raise £85, which was made up to £100 with £15 from Sir Walter Trevelyan's bequest. Serel himself gave 2 guineas, effectively a discount on the asking price. For this sum the Society acquired what was vaguely described as 'about 100 volumes of MSS and printed books, original documents and papers.' Unfortunately, there is no contemporary comprehensive description of the total acquisition and every archivist will sympathise with the failure of the Society to do anything for 30 years, when that great benefactor, Charles Tite of Taunton, paid for a detailed list of part of the collection, which Alfred Munday, a Taunton solicitor with some experience of archives, produced between 1909 and 1911. His work was limited to some 63 volumes, part single originals and part composite groups of like or associated documents placed in board covers, the arrangement and binding being probably the work of Serel himself. Presumably, the remaining volumes of the original purchase total of 'about 100' are printed books to be found in the Society's library. The MS volumes include records of Wells Deanery and Wells Corporation, Cheddar churchwardens' accounts, 1612-1674, unbound and in poor condition when given to Serel, the abovementioned 'butcher's' volume of wills (actually parts of more than one original), and grangerized editions of Warner's *Glastonbury*, Britton's *Wells Cathedral* and Phelps' *Somerset*. Altogether, a valuable acquisition, but it is clear that this was not the full extent of the Serel Collection, although we cannot now re-constitute the original holding. A chance reference in the annual report of 1920 tells of the merging of the Serel collection of Somerset documents with the Society's general collection: from what will appear later about the arrangement of its holdings this can only refer to ordinary title deeds between the 16th century and roughly 1800. On top of this, in the main third element of the Society's catalogue (described below) there is a document carrying his signature and the date 1871 in a group relating to the Chapter Peculiar of Bishop's Lydeard. There are similar

records of other Peculiars scattered through the Society's holdings, plus original wills and inventories, all of which, from their form and condition, must have come from the Diocesan Registry, from where I am confident they passed directly or indirectly into Serel's hands. The Serel Collection, thus, is doubly significant to my theme: it set the Society firmly on the path of document acquisition and, although not containing individual treasures in terms of monetary value, cumulatively it remains the largest and most important group in the Society's MSS. We may not now be able to identify all that came from Serel, nor can we do anything other than speculate by what means he came to acquire them, but we can echo the obituary writer a century ago and be grateful to him for his action and example.

Not that there is much direct evidence of others following his example in the following years. Occasional acquisitions are noted in the annual reports in *Proceedings*, but these may not tell the whole story: there is, for example, a substantial holding of Warre material, which Mrs Rawlins used in the 1940s when editing the correspondence of her Harbin ancestor to his relative, Margaret Warre Bampfylde. She suggests that this was bought by the Society at the Hestercombe sale, but there is no reference to its acquisition. In view, however, of improved recording procedures introduced from 1901, this negative evidence could support a 19th-century arrival. Perhaps it is only of importance to the archivist: as local historians we can again only be grateful for its survival.

We can be thankful, too, that the Society's concern for the general safe-keeping of records and its implicit acceptance of its role persisted. In 1886 a circular was received from the Society of Antiquaries drawing attention to the need to preserve court rolls and deeds, both in public and private archives. The Society responded positively by circulating local secretaries to the various societies and individuals having the custody of manorial records, repeating its willingness to take charge of any records worthy of preservation. It also made a separate approach to influential inhabitants of the small boroughs of Axbridge, Ilchester and Langport, which had recently lost their corporate status under the 1883 Municipal Corporations Act, offering the Castle as a safe home, sagely recognizing how vulnerable records can be in the immediate aftermath of the abolition of powers. In the event, they all retained their records, but the Society secured representation on the charitable town trusts created and, I like to think, played its part in safeguarding the records.

Support for that hardy annual, a new county history, was again raised in Henry Hobhouse's Presidential address of 1890, and he referred back to the earlier abortive attempts, but the lack of an editor continued to thwart progress. Parish records have an unfortunate tendency to stray from custody, as Serel's rescue efforts showed, and several reached the Society's hands from different quarters, including records of the two Taunton parishes and Pitminster, towards the end of the century and, significantly, the Society felt itself duty-bound to express its concern at the disappearance of a single 16th-century volume of churchwardens' accounts for Banwell from parish custody; happily, this absence must have proved shortlived. The renewed interest in a county history prompted the donation of compilations of records. Thus, the Society received the 34 volumes of Brown's will abstracts, and Mrs Hugo bequeathed the collected papers of her late husband, the Revd. Thomas Hugo, the ecclesiastical historian, whose work on monastic houses dominates many of the early volumes of *Proceedings*. Sadly, he had himself bequeathed his original MSS to the British Museum, including an early volume of parish records for my home parish, Staplegrave.

The new century brought a new broom and significant changes to the management of the Society's affairs generally, with the appointment of the legendary St. George Gray to the joint offices of Assistant Secretary, Curator and Librarian. He

immediately established a more professional approach to the registration of acquisitions and backed this with more detailed reports in *Proceedings*, which followed the same divisions by categories. Unfortunately, for present purposes, Gray's MSS division quickly restricts itself to maps, engravings, drawings, photographs, etc. while documents appear under 'additions to the library', at least in *Proceedings*. A Museum Accession Register exists, but a parallel Library Register cannot now be found. The loss, however, is off-set by Gray's practice of docketing accessions (other than deeds) with the name of the donor – hence the inference in the case of the Warre MSS above.

What we can safely say is that by his influence we have from 1901 a growing number of significant documentary accessions and this continued through much of the next 40 years. It would be both long and pointless to attempt to itemize the whole collection: catalogues and indexes can be consulted in the Record Office and I prepared a guide to the bulk, which can be found in volumes 113 and 114 of *Proceedings*. Suffice it now to give a flavour of the sort of material received and the sources from which it came. Professional men, like R.H. Goddard, surveyor and successor to Easton, last surveyor to the Taunton Turnpike Trust, gave the Trust's records and similarly local solicitors, Dodson, Channer and Villar, gave items from their inherited holdings. Private owners, like Lord Hylton, made gifts from their family muniments, but how William Upham, a Taunton tailor and draper, came into possession of the 1623 Visitation of the Archdeaconry of Taunton, subsequently published by the Record Society, I cannot imagine. Again I am thankful, as virtually all of the rest of the Archdeaconry records have vanished, victims, I am sure, of the closure of the Taunton office. Society members were responsible for buying significant groups of medieval manorial records as the collections of Sir Thomas Phillippus came on the market – Braikenridge for the manor of Wrington and Henry Gibbs of Barrow Court for North Petherton, both from the 13th century, and for good measure Gibbs had the latter repaired and calendared by PRO staff. Towards the end of the first decade came a clutch of medieval cartularies, both private and institutional, for Gaunt's Hospital, Buckland Priory and the Beauchamp, Moleyns and Hungerford families. If anything, the pace quickened in the second decade, particularly in the war years, perhaps because of salvage drives or their prospect. Ever mindful of the county history project, Henry Hobhouse gave 14 notebooks of the compilations of his grandfather, a 19th-century archivist and keeper of the state papers. Charles Tite continued to be a major benefactor, purchasing deeds and securing the 21 volumes of material accumulated and compiled by the Wincanton historian, George Sweetman. But there were less obvious benefactors, such as the puzzling figure of Arthur Marks. In 1919, when he presented court rolls and deeds for the bishopric manors of Banwell and Westbury, he was described as one who had from time to time added considerably to the collection and he continued to do so over the next few years, a veritable one-man Records Preservation Society. He was not a resident of Somerset, nor was he a member of the Society until 1923, by which time he had emigrated to New Zealand. My wife eventually discovered that he lived in Finchley, and that his only link with Somerset was a 17th-century parson claimed as an ancestor. The Banwell and Westbury records, incidentally, must have strayed from official custody in Wells at least 50 years previously, that is before the transfer to the Church Commissioners; one wonders if the hand of Serel was involved?

The combination of Gray's professional approach and the marked increase in acquisitions called for the provision of a fire and burglar-proof strongroom and this in turn drew attention to the total lack of knowledge of the MS holdings. The Serel MSS, as previously reported, were the first and obvious candidates for listing and as

Munday's catalogue was nearing completion Gray was stressing the need for the proper arrangement and listing of the remainder. Prebendary Bates Harbin made a timely start at sorting the contents of the strongroom in the early years of the War and rudimentary listing began in earnest through two volunteer members in 1919. Their efforts concentrated on the deed element of the collection, then estimated as containing 2,000–2,500, 'independently of those forming part of the Serel Collection' (the first evidence that such existed), relating to over 250 parishes (or just over half the number in the old county). Initially they did not go beyond what was described as sorting, bundling, docketing and the preparation of an alphabetical list of parishes. Work continued over the years, when the Serel deeds were merged and the card index begun. By 1926 the deeds had grown to 'over 5,000 for 320 parishes' and for the first time the inadequacy of storage for an open house policy had to be accepted. This year another retired member, Colonel Phipps of Milverton, took charge of listing operations and corrected and extended the existing calendar entries. He also let slip two general pieces of information, which I had come to suspect: that the Society did not generally accept deeds after 1800 and that the collection of deeds had not been kept as received, but had been bundled artificially by parishes and, within parishes, re-sorted in chronological order. This, of course, is completely counter to modern accepted archive procedures, but our criticism should be tempered to some degree, not only by the state of knowledge of the time (I can think of a non-Somerset archivist who acted in the same way), but also by the particular circumstances affecting the Society. Thus, the provenance of many of the early acquisitions had not been recorded and much, anyway, had been acquired by the Society itself or individual benefactors artificially, by way of the saleroom. What is disappointing is the break-up and dispersal of an original archive, like the deeds relating to the Society of Friends Somerset Charities, received during the very period of calendaring. The various lists and indexes produced by the Society originally, or latterly by the Record Office, will allow ready access to the particular parish historian, but there will be problems, for example, in disentangling charity from non-charity properties in the example quoted.

The 1930s bring the overlapping of Society and Record Office, but it is interesting to note that even so the Prison Commissioners presented certain old gaol records to the former in 1930 when Shepton Mallet gaol closed, although the latter existed and already held other gaol records with the official archives of the court of Quarter Sessions. For the Presidential address of 1933 Arthur Somerville took as his theme 'Records and their Preservation', indicative that they could be thought to be sufficiently in the mind of the Society to be given this distinction, but he was clearly tentative, acknowledging that he might be dubbed 'professor of dry as dust' and reminding us how tenuous was the acceptance of the value of records.

His particular concern was with parish records: he commended the establishment of the county record office, regretted the lack of provision for diocesan record offices and the limited application of the 1929 *Measure of General Synod* and added another to the list of lost parish records, the serious example from the next-door parish of Croscombe, from which the medieval volume of churchwardens' accounts had disappeared since being edited for volume 4 of the Somerset Record Society. On a more flippant note, he identified another hazard to the survival of documents other than their use for lampshades and for drums: he pointed an accusing finger at clergy wives who used parish papers for jam-pot covers. On a more constructive note he ended, no doubt by agreement with Sir Matthew Nathan, with a proposal for a comprehensive survey of all parish records in the county, not only registers, but also other records, civil and ecclesiastical. This mammoth undertaking came to fruition in 1938 with the appearance of that excellent work, colloquially known as

King's *Inventory*, a happy example of three-way co-operation between county, Diocese and Society. Both Somerville and Sir Matthew, who responded, were less than fair to the Society in suggesting that preservation of documents was a new subject of interest to it. If they had researched the volumes of *Proceedings* over the previous 80 years, I hope that they would have come to the conclusions I have reached.

Two years previously, although not reported in *Proceedings* at the time, the general principle had been accepted that the Society should begin to transfer its documents to the Record Office as soon as an archivist was appointed. Miss Harding was appointed in July 1935 and to the Society's great credit the first transfer was made in November. Undoubtedly, the Society had been the victim of its own success in securing documents over the last 35 years. Demands on storage were becoming an embarrassment and restricting its activities in its primary role as a museum, and several series of large, rolled, maps received in recent years presented particular storage problems and were early candidates for transfer. Gray, too, was worried about conditions in the strongroom and the lack of expert repair provision. He had already noted in the Accessions Register in 1930 that Withiell's map of the Quantocks of 1688, only received in 1919, had become almost ruined by damp – although, to be fair to the Society, this was an exceptional case. That all said, as an archivist who has negotiated with owners and custodians over many years and who has seen the reaction of colleagues when faced with a comparable situation, I can best appreciate the magnitude and selfless nature of the Society's decision.

Early transfers concentrated on the *post-medieval* deeds, which Phipps, etc., had sorted and listed in the manner previously described, and at regular intervals up to the outbreak of war, resumed again after Mr. Collis's appointment, a succession of transfers was made, governed equally by the amount that Gray could carry from Castle to Shire Hall and the amount that Miss Harding could assimilate at any one time. As with all its accessions, the Record Office has kept to these divisions, although they have no meaning except as a form of receipt and a reminder of the Society's arrangement. Not surprisingly documentary acquisitions declined after 1935, but they did continue, even into the 1960s and the Society's concern was not diminished. Thus, it was the Society and not the Record Office which purchased Richard Locke's Survey of Somerset – a contemporary and complementary history of the county to that of Collinson – at the sale of the effects of the last Miss Easton at Rumwell. It also purchased a grangerized edition of Savage's *History of Taunton*, two final gestures in its 80 year campaign towards a county history. In 1942 with no-one in the Record Office to act officially, it was the Society which circulated solicitors in the county when salvage drives were again threatening local records, and in 1945 someone was sufficiently far sighted to stress the urgent need to watch against the indiscriminate destruction of World War II records.

With the exception of the Serel volumes, the later deeds and the series of estate and parish maps (transferred unlisted), the bulk of the Society's holdings remained untouched and this was remedied by another of the Society's volunteers, R.C. Innes Winstanley, who must have given a great deal of time to this task between 1947 and 1949. He worked to general guidelines laid down by Mr. Collis and arranged the collection into 18 broad categories, based partly on donors/collectors, partly topographical, but mainly subjectival, with such general titles as 'Church', 'Family', 'Parish Documents', while the extensive 'Taunton' class contains a hotch-potch of everything relating to the town in no sort of order. This may have been a misunderstanding of the Record Office mnemonic system under which each accession of records is assigned its own unique letters of identification and is

distinguished from all others, but it had the effect of extending the artificial arrangement begun with the deeds to all the Society's holdings. To be fair to Winstanley it may be that all question of provenance had already been lost, but it is a source of irritation, for example, that documents obviously from the Diocesan Registry (?by way of Serel) are dispersed through at least four different Winstanley categories.

Happily mirroring the 1935 transfer, this extensive 'Winstanley' element was handed over shortly after the opening of the new premises at Obridge. This was followed by the last major unit in the Society's hands, the Arthur Hull Collection from Chard, untouched and in the original trunk in which it had been received in 1916. Since then there have been many lesser deposits, often found by Society members or Museum staff hidden away in drawers or corners of the Castle, like the medieval market charter for Nunney, which reached St. George Gray in the early days of World War II and remained hidden for 47 years in the drawer in which he placed it for temporary safe-keeping. This has now been repaired and placed in a protective cover, indicative of the way in which the Record Office is carrying out its stewardship and an expression of its appreciation of the Society's past endeavours.

The Society's holdings, built up over 100 years by the generosity of many individual owners, custodians and benefactors or by the conscious, collective, actions of the Society itself and handed over piece-meal to the Record Office through 50 years, can rightly be termed a record office in miniature. An overview of the whole will be found in print in *Proceedings* volumes 113, 114 and several subsequent volumes, and more detailed lists and indexes based on original Society arrangements, corrected and extended, are available in the Record Office. That these records have been enabled to survive and are available is to the Society's credit in that it sustained its concern for the documents of local history through long periods when the world at large held them of little value. It is even more to its credit, because harder to accept, that it was immediately prepared from 1935 onwards without any subsequent regret or change of heart, to acknowledge that a more appropriate body was available to inherit its records and its concern. As one who can stand with a foot in either camp, as both archivist and user, I may regret that past deficiencies have lost much of the pure archival significance of some of the collection, but equally as a realist I can recognize that these shortcomings have little relevance to the user today. Both groups owe a continuing debt to the Society that this vast and varied holding has been preserved and can be used.

D.M.M. SHORROCKS

[This is an edited version of the Presidential address delivered to the Annual General Meeting in Taunton on 6 May 1989. It was accompanied by a display of documents from the Society's holdings to provide their general flavour. It included a photocopy of Ina's charter, the Nunney crown grant, the earliest locally held Taunton deed, c.1240, examples from parish, diocesan and family records, the 'butcher's' will volume from Serel, Locke's MS History, an 18th-century estate map and Taunton Election material.]