

Documents and Deeds in the Library at Taunton Castle

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THE Society possesses over 5,000 documents and deeds, referring to some 320 Somerset parishes. About 4,600 of these consist of Charters, Leases, etc., of land, Marriage Settlements, Wills (proved at Wells, Taunton, or P. C. C.), Abstracts of Title to lands, copies of entries in Parish Registers, and presentations to Livings.

An Index, without which such MSS. lie unused, was begun in 1919 by Miss Masey, and is now completed. It is severely compressed, showing only the chief parties (sometimes not all of them) to the Indenture, etc., and their parishes, without any description (i.e. yeoman or gentleman). I hope in time to make good this defect, and to add other interesting extracts.

Most of the documents have been bundled according to the parish in which the land concerned lay, or in which the testator lived. The Index has been typed on the card system, by parishes, except that in such a case as Bath the heading covers all the parishes in that city. Some 900 cards are used in forming this Index.

The parish of any person named is that of the heading of the card, unless otherwise shown, and each place named is in Somerset, with the same exception. Parishes have been filed in order, as now named, i.e. South Cadbury under South, and thus we avoid the unnecessary searchings caused by inversion of names.

As far as possible, deeds have been typed in order of date,

but owing to corrections of dates and to accessions, every card should be looked at.

Many in Somerset are now interested in their parish history, and more in the records of Somerset families, especially the less well known ones. I advise these, as well as persons interested in other counties, to search our deeds, as they may give the clue to some information long sought for. Beginners should remember that a deed may be of late date and so appear uninteresting, but that the recital contained in it of former deeds may take one back a long way. For instance a Lyncombe deed of 1723 begins in 1593; a Glastonbury abstract of title of 1785 goes back to 1636; and a lease to a tailor begins with a reference to Lady Capell (Baroness Dow) in 1716.

Again, a searcher for, say, Cox of Wrington, may not find the family there, but it may be mentioned frequently under the heads of other parishes.

Some are interested only in deeds dated before 1560, and of such we have few. There are many who have traced back a Somerset descent only to some date in the eighteenth century, and it is these whom, in indexing deeds, I am anxious to assist.

Beginners do not realise that it is useless to think that without practice they can read correctly names in legal documents, even of 1800. If they do think so, they may produce such results as 'Keate' for 'Neale' and 'Largons' for 'Parsons', and so on. One way to learn, is to get a gazetteer containing every parish and hamlet, and work out from the deed where the parties lived, which in deeds after 1550 are not likely to be places now unknown, and thus to learn, letter by letter, the style of writing peculiar to the period of the deed.

Often, far down a long deed, one finds that a marriage is 'by God's grace about to be solemnized between . . .'. In some deeds I have found enclosed scraps of papers of extracts from parish registers, and I suspect there are many more, as some twenty boxes of MSS. still remain to be examined and indexed. The ideal method of dealing with deeds is to put each deed in an envelope, and to write outside the name of every person mentioned, and then to 'slip' every name in a card index. But this involves a vast number of decisions as to the grouping of various spellings, of apparently

the same name. I have found also on checking many hundreds of our deeds, so many grave corrections to be made in the Index as typed, that it would be useless to index names yet. Such deeds as I have checked myself I have initialled on the parchment, and marked in red on the cards. As to the others, reference must at present always be made by a competent person to the deed itself. Those who find errors, are invited to leave a written note with the Curator for me, and not to amend the Index themselves.

Some parishes, such as Yeovil, are poorly represented, considering their importance. It is hoped that many will follow the example of other donors, and present their old deeds, thus securing their preservation, whilst benefiting those interested in genealogy. Otherwise, sooner or later, deeds decay in evil store-places, or some vandal burns them, or sells them for a few pence to desecration by the toy drum maker.

The practice of our Society is as a rule to pass on to other Societies deeds relating to property outside Somerset. The other practice of not keeping deeds of a later date than about 1800 is unfortunately due to want of storage room.

The next best collection of Somerset deeds, easily accessible, is to be found at the Society of Genealogists, 5 Bloomsbury Square, W.C. 1.

We have no ordered method of helping our fellow-searchers. If members will let me know their 'interests', I will note on their 'interest' cards any references in newly-arrived deeds, but they must not expect the ever busy staff to find ancestors for them. I have lively memories of American visitors to a London Society who, before sailing next day, expected to find ready-made a descent from 'a Stewart of Scotland'!

There are of course many references to old Somerset families among our documents, such as Brent, Bampfylde, Clarke of Chipley, Luttrell, Lyte, Malet, Musgrave, Oldmixon, Phelps, Popham, Rock, Tynte, and Wyndham. References to families in other counties (besides those too numerous to mention in Devon, Dorset, and Wilts) are as follows: *Cornwall*: Goode, Fortescue, Hoskins, Pender, Sawle. *Berks*: Blount, Blagrave. *Bucks*: Fuller, Verney, Scudamore. *Cheshire*: Bullock. *Bedford*: Hayne. *Derby*: Curzon, Godbeare, Griffith, Simp-

son. *Essex* : Cambell, Holloway, Peter, Southcott, Weston. *Glamorgan* : Pughes, Willis. *Gloucester* : Sandford. *Hants* : Dance, Dummer, Stewkeley, Wallop. *Herts* : Mann, Strange. *Hereford* : Tylee. *Hunts* : Abell. *Kent* : Austen, Farewell, Hales, Raymond, Waldegrave. *Leicester* : Danvers, Wollaston. *Middlesex* : Spiller. *Monmouth* : Adams, Floyer. *Norfolk* : Bridish. *Northants* : Holman, Jones, Style, Wills ; and concerning Greatworth Rectory. *Oxon* : Gore, Holbeck, Lacey, Stonor, Style. *Pembroke* : Kymer. *Rutland* : Mackworth. *Salop* : Ottley. *Stafford* : Astley. *Suffolk* : Robinson. *Surrey* : Spiller, Whitfield, Wyatt. *Warwick* : Brawne, Clopton, Keyte. *Worcester* : Hickes. *York* : Goodricke, Keyte, Lane.

There are also mentions of Deane of Ireland, Emery of Jamaica, Russell of St. Kitts, Alexander of New York, Lane of Virginia.

The following names found in deeds are all represented by the names of some of our members :

Baker in Butleigh, Bellett in Sampford Arundel, Bennett in Lyng, Billing in Butleigh and East Coker, Butler in Swell, Clarke in Fifehead, Chaffey in Stoke-sub-Hambdon, Cogan in Somerton, Daniell in Wayford, Fisher in Somerton, Fry in several parishes, Gifford in Walcot and Witham Friary, Gooden in Martock, Hippisley in Charlton Mackerel, Helyar (several), Ireland in Brislington, Lance in Somerton, Pope in Street, Malet in Thorne St. Margaret, etc., Radford in Ubley, Whiting in Timberscombe.

Those who look for titled names will find George III, Aylesbury, Buccleugh, Buckingham, Carnarvon, Chandos, Cornwallis, Devonshire, Egremont, Essex, Orrery, Poulett, Northampton, Somerset, Waldegrave, Weymouth.

Among over a hundred deeds just presented, referring to Brompton Regis (Barlynch Abbey), Dulverton, Dunster, and Bampton, I have found a pedigree of the Truckwell family of Elworthy, with entries from the parish register from 1580 to 1676. The present register (according to A. M. Burke) begins only in 1685.