



THE EARLIEST LANCASHIRE SESSIONS ROLL, 1590

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THE COUNTY RECORD OFFICE, PRESTON.

Contributed by R. Sharpe France, F.R.Hist.S.,

THE convenient term *County Records*, as applied in the case of the County Palatine of Lancaster, requires a little definition. There are two groups which could equally be called County Records, (i) the records of the County Council and its predecessor the Court of Quarter Sessions, together with the records of the Court of Quarter Sessions as now constituted, and (ii) the records of the Palatinate of Lancaster. It is with group (i) that the County Record Office is essentially concerned, group (ii) being housed in the Public Record Office in London.

Prior to 1889 the administration of the County, outside the boroughs, was in the hands of the Court of Quarter Sessions, a voluntary body with very few paid servants, which managed things very well. This is not the place to examine the variety of functions of the Sessions; that is done in the pages of the Webbs' *English Local Government*.

The passing of the Local Government Act of 1888 brought into being the modern County Councils which took from the Courts of Quarter Sessions the great majority of their administrative duties, leaving their penal and judicial functions. A number of new duties have been placed on the County Councils, particularly as regards education and public health.

From the above it follows that there is a definite division of the County Records as to whether they are pre-1889 or post-1889. So far as historical purposes are concerned consideration can be given only to the former. Included with these is the class of documents emanating from

independent authorities such as the School Boards, Turnpike Trusts and Boards of Guardians, whose duties have been transferred to the County Council.

Any subdivision of the Records can at the best be an artificial one, as the various functions of the Sessions overlapped considerably, but classification can be attempted on the following functional framework :—

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|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| A. The Court in Session. | D. Depository Functions. |
| B. Judicial Functions. | E. Executive Functions. |
| C. Administrative Functions. | F. Penal Functions. |

Any further subdivision is a matter for the cataloguer rather than the reader of this account, so I propose to indicate the scope of the official documents among the County Records under the above heads. The dates are those of the documents preserved.

A. The Court in Session

Annual General Session Minutes	1798-1888
Commissions of the Peace	1598-1780
Finance Committee Minutes	1842-1888
Militia Storehouses Committee Minutes	1855-1880
Sessions Minutes	1788-1895
Order Books	from 1619
Petitions ¹	from 1624
Recognizances	from 1623
Sessions Rolls	1590-1749
Sessions Accounts	1811-1832
Sessions Bill Papers	1798

B. Judicial Functions

Calendars of Prisoners	from 1808 ²
Convictions	from 1823
Cut Bills	from 1800
Debtors' Insolvency Papers	1675-1824
Estreats	17th & 18th century.
Indictments	from 1606

¹ These bundles contain, *inter alia*, matter relating to poor relief, coroners' expenses, highway diversions, bridge-repair expenses, church-briefs, bastardy, removal of poor, and militia baggage-warrants.

² There are some earlier among the petitions.

C. Administrative Functions

Bridge Books	1806
Lancaster Asylum Accounts	1811-1818
Lancaster Castle Committee Proceedings	1783-1848

D. Depository Functions

Association in support of William III	1696
Building Society Bonds	1797-1862
Contracts for erection and repair of bridges	18th century
Deeds Enrolled ¹	from 1588
Enclosure Awards	1725-1896
Memorials of Charities	1813-1844

Oaths :

Abjuration, Transubstantiation, Allegiance, and Settlement	1673-1805
Not to Injure the Church of England	1833-1844
of Grain Inspectors	1789-1791
Papists' Warrants of Attorney.	1717-1729

Plans :

Bridges	from 1813
Canals	from 1791
Docks and Harbours	from 1810
Markets	from 1822
Railways	from 1822
Roads	from 1807
Water Works	from 1798
also Piers, Gasworks, Electricity Works, Town Improvements, Tramways, and Light Railways.	

Property Qualifications :

Deputy Lieutenants	1777-1803
Justices of the Peace	1745-1840
Militia Officers	1757-1808

Registers :

Dissenters' Meetings	1689-1852
Gamekeepers' Deputations	1705-1805
Hair-powder Certificates	1795-1797
Papists' Estates	1714-1788
Papists' Meetings, Priests, and Teachers	1791-1852

¹ These rolls contain, *inter alia*, deeds of bargain and sale, and conveyances and wills of Roman Catholics.

Returns :

Boats and Barges	1795
Freeholders	1776-1833
Freemasons' Lodges	1799-1803
Hearth Tax (Salford, Manchester, Huncoat) .	1664
Indigent Persons	1664
Land-tax	1740-1832
Navy Enlistments	1795
Poll-tax (Salford Hundred)	1678
Recusants	1716-1744
Sacrament Certificates	1673-1829
Subscription to Thirty-nine Articles	1726-1732
Tithe Awards (Cockerham, Lancaster, St. Michaels)	1824-1885
Turnpike Accounts	1823-1870
Turnpike Bonds	1798-1825
Tyburn Tickets	1765-1772

E. Executive Functions

County Constabulary Committee Minutes	1840-1888
Register of Parish Constables	1632-1652

F. Penal Functions

Convictions of Recusants	1651-1682
Gaol Reports	1823-1832
Register of Vagrants deported to Ireland	1801-1835

Miscellaneous

Abstracts of Treasurer's Accounts	from 1799
Croston Drainage Commission Minutes	from 1800
Grand Jury Minutes	from 1800
Militia Accounts and Papers	from 1797
Persons suspected of taking up arms against Parliament in 1641 (Blackburn Hundred)	1655
Quarantine Regulations	1805
Rate Rolls	from 1828
Rental of Bailiffs of Salford	1677
Takings at Atherton Toll-bar	1762-1775

In addition to the above official documents there are some 2,000 miscellaneous documents which have probably come to be among the County archives owing to the fact that in the past it was the custom to employ an attorney or solicitor as part-time Clerk of the Peace, or for the Clerk

of the Peace to depute his duties to a firm of solicitors. Doubtless these gentlemen were not always careful to keep their private papers separate from their public ones.

These miscellaneous documents have been catalogued fully, and may be said to comprise:—

23 charters of the district of Appleton and Stockton, co. Chester (with one of Formby)	c. 1220-1569
318 documents (mainly leases) appertaining to the manor of Barton in Amounderness	1704-1861
185 documents relating to the Culcheths of Culcheth and the Dicconsens of Wrightington	1522-1791
60 documents concerning properties of the Hultons of Hulton	1560-1817
48 documents of the Litchfords of Manchester and Blackley	1651-1766
92 documents of the Preese Hall estate, in Weeton with Preese	1564-1727
95 documents of the Ribbleton Hall estate	1552-1814
350 documents relating to the Standishes of Duxbury (mostly concerning Frank Hall Standish)	1742-1845
54 documents of the manor of Hoghton within Withnell	1729-1866
10 documents relating to Clitheroe Grammar School.	1554-1683

The remainder appertain to townships in every part of the county.

The first reference to the County Records which I have found is contained in the *Report of the Select Committee on Public Records*, 1800, where there is a brief indication of their scope sent by Edward Gorst, Deputy Clerk of the Peace, with a note that “the Building wherein the Records are lodged is a New Brick Building, and part of my Dwelling House, situate in the Town of Leigh, is Private Property, and held by me as Tenant from Year to Year.” This was quite in accordance with the general practice.

By 1872 (as appears from a list compiled in that year), most of the records were in the County Offices, although

some were at the Prison in Preston and certain Enclosure Awards were at Lancaster Castle. These latter were removed to Preston in 1883 and 1911. In 1907 the records were partly at the County Offices and partly at the Sessions House.

In August, 1907, Mr. G. S. Veitch, M.A. made a report to the County Council on the state of the records, and as a result he was employed in re-arranging them and preparing an index. This was completed in 1910, Mr. Veitch giving his final report in April of that year. Order had been made out of chaos, but the records were still not in a very usable state. Mr. Veitch in his final report laid stress on the need for extending his pioneer work by detailed cataloguing, the co-ordinating of the various classes and the publishing of "a large selection from the Sessions Rolls and Order Books." Unfortunately no further action was then taken in the matter.

If the list prepared in 1872 can be relied upon it would seem that certain documents had disappeared by the time Mr. Veitch commenced his task. These are: the accounts of the Pennington Toll-bar, the "title-deeds to Jolly's Estate in Heath Charnock," and, most serious loss, sessions rolls for the years 1572, 1594-1597, 1599-1600, 1610-1614, 1643-1645, 1730-1735, and 1742-1743.

Owing to the records being divided between the County Offices and the Sessions House, the lack of accommodation for students, and the admittedly inadequate nature of the index, comparatively little use has been made of what is a veritable mine of Lancashire history. The Chetham Society in 1917 published the Sessions Rolls from 1590 to 1606 but although labelled Volume I nothing further has been done.

In 1937 a petition was presented to the County Council by the Preston and Mid-Lancashire Branch of the Historical Association asking for the establishment of a depository for documents of historical interest. As a result of this

the advice of the late Dr. G. H. Fowler of Bedford was sought, and following upon his recommendations the County Record Office was established in March, 1940. It has since been approved by the Master of the Rolls as a depository for manorial documents under the Manorial Documents Rules, 1926. More recently there has been constituted a County Records Sub-Committee to supervise the duties of the County Council under the Local Government Act, 1933, the Tithe Act, 1936, the Manorial Documents Rules, 1926, and the Parochial Registers and Records Measure, 1929; and also to undertake the care of County Muniments generally, including muniments of a historical character which may be deposited by private individuals or bodies. Among collections which have been deposited may be mentioned:—

160 documents appertaining to Warton in Lonsdale, 1597–1800. These cast new light on the manorial ownership of Warton, and several members of the Washington family appear;

63 documents deposited by the Management Committee of Rufford Old Hall. These are the documents, referred to in Vol. 89 of these *Transactions*, p. 152, which were presented by Lord Hesketh, with the Old Hall, to the National Trust; and

the muniments of the Faringtons of Worden. This extensive and important collection has not yet been catalogued, but it may be said to consist of, *inter alia*, charters from the 12th century relating to many localities; court-rolls, rentals, surveys, etc., from the 16th century, of Penwortham, Leyland, Ulnes Walton and Aspull; maps and estate-plans; material relating to the fisheries in the Ribble; the Easter-book of Blackburn, 1565–1569, and the detailed Easter Roll of 1586; material relating to the Earls of Derby in the 16th century (the period of the Comptroller-ship of Sir Henry Farington); a 17th century illuminated pedigree; a 16th century confirmation of arms; correspondence; letters patent; diaries of continental travel; and numerous deeds of Lancashire properties.

Perhaps a brief description of the main record room may be of interest. It is approximately 45 feet long,

41 feet wide, and $13\frac{1}{2}$ feet high, with walls 2 feet thick. The floor and ceiling are of fire-resisting construction, having brick arches supported on iron joists, beams and stanchions, and filled with cement concrete. The floor is tiled and the walls plastered. There are sash windows on two sides, fitted internally with steel shutters which are closed nightly. Heating is by means of low pressure hot-water radiators, and lighting is by electricity which can be cut off by a main switch outside the room. Accommodation is provided for students. The important task of repairing the ravages of damp, vermin, ill-usage and time is provided for by a well-equipped repair workshop.

Lists, indexes and catalogues are being prepared, and it is hoped that full use of the long-neglected material will now be made. There is no charge for research, and students are advised to communicate with the County Record Office, at the County Hall, Preston.