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Gloucestershire Records

by R. Austin
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GLOUCESTERSHIRE RECORDS

by ROLAND AUSTIN, M.A., F.S.A., *President**read at Gloucester, 5 July 1939*

A PRESIDENTIAL address to this Society has some perturbing aspects. When one visualizes the long line of past Presidents since 1876, and the variety of subjects upon which they have spoken, the possibility of presenting any fresh or illuminating idea for members to consider becomes less and less. In one respect I am fortunate, for as the very latest on the list I am at any rate able to take a review of any particular subject which concerns us, and that is what I propose to do this evening. I shall endeavour to present an outline of the progress made in certain work which for many years of my life has interested me. There is another reason why I do so. Among your guests this evening, Mr Mayor, are some who are not members of this Society, but who I am sure are interested in one of the objects for which it was established. They are also the descendants—if I may use the word—of a long line of guardians of Gloucester's records extending back before the famous charter of 1483 which incorporated the city—in fact to the days of the Merchant Guild, which practically controlled the administration of its trade; and of its Reeves, who in some measure occupied the status of the later office of mayor. Therefore I may say that the members of the Corporation present this evening are the link between the present century and the far-off days of nearly 800 years ago, when the Charter of Henry II, dated by inference to the year 1155¹, was handed to the chief townsman of Gloucester

¹ *Calendar of the Records of the Corporation of Gloucester*, compiled by W. H. Stevenson, Gloucester, 1893, page 3.

for safe keeping. It lies on the table yonder as evidence of this long descent. I am glad, Sir, that those representatives are here, for it gives me the opportunity of saying something about certain measures which they have helped to sanction in recent years for the purpose of keeping these precious records under fitting conditions. I hope therefore that they will find some interest in what I may say in the course of this address.

The objects of our Society set out in its constitution of 1876 included the collection and classification of original and existing information for an improved County History, and to accumulate materials for the purpose. That object still remains as it was then described and I shall try and show how it has been assisted by our Society, and its members. I am also anxious to say something as to the progress which has been made generally, since the Society was established, in the care and preservation of Gloucestershire records by means of publication or of custody, and particularly in recent years.

In doing this I am not unmindful that thirteen years ago, our distinguished past-President, Professor Hamilton Thompson, who we are so delighted to have with us this evening, chose LOCAL HISTORY as the subject of his presidential address.² I am the first to admit that it is far beyond my power to produce one like it, full as it was of ripe experience, and, I may say, of pretty humour, using the adjective in the first sense of the meanings in the 'Oxford Dictionary'. Another past-President, Mr Claude Fry, dealt with Manorial Records, a subject upon which I shall not speak. My immediate purpose is, as I have said, one of reviewing general progress.

The first President of the Society, Sir William Guise, in an admirable exposition³ of the work which this then very new body should endeavour to achieve, said that he

² *Transactions*, XLVIII, 57-74.

³ *Transactions*, I, 45-54.

wished to point out the directions which it might usefully take in order to secure and perpetuate those memorials which, without active care and research, might especially elude its grasp altogether. He also referred to various notable collections of manuscripts in Gloucestershire, and particularly mentioned Sir Thomas Phillipps, that great collector who was a member of a Commission on Records set up early in the last century, and lived for many years at Thirlstaine House, Cheltenham, where, even today, after over a dozen sales, there remains a large part of the wonderful collections which Sir Thomas made. Phillipps wrote as follows to Lord Melbourne—⁴

‘ When I reflect on the thousand ways in which unique historical records are liable to destruction in progress of time, I feel the deepest regret that a moment should escape in which something is not done to secure what is left to us from perishing for ever ’.

This regret really meant from Sir Thomas Phillipps’ point of view his anxiety to save such records by means of the private press which he had established at Middle Hill in Worcestershire, where he printed many Gloucestershire records.

After speaking of the principal collections of records in Gloucestershire—giving by the way a very scanty reference to those in Gloucester itself, saying only that ‘ the city . . . has some curious ancient charters and deeds ’—Sir William Guise referred to the want of a good county repository for rolls, deeds and papers, which he declared to be ‘ a great public evil.’ ‘ Many valuable documents are lost altogether and many others are transferred to distant places . . . all for lack of a fit place to deposit them ’. He also spoke of the state of the Bishop’s Registry, which was not by any means satisfactory. So much for the condition of things in 1876. Within a comparatively few years from the time of this address

⁴ Ibid. p. 45.

there were signs of real awakening of interest in the records of the City and the County.

A Royal Commission was appointed by Parliament in 1869 for the purpose of reporting on the various collections in the possession of public bodies and of private individuals, their first report and calendar being published in 1874. In course of time the records of the Corporation of Gloucester were examined, and in 1891 the report⁵ prepared by Mr W. H. Stevenson was printed, occupying some 130 pages of extracts of the more interesting matters in the Council Books. In his report Mr Stevenson stated that the records were found by him in a state of great disorder, which happily soon received attention. He remarked that as they had been calendared they would 'no doubt be better cared for now that the Corporation is aware of the value of their collection'. During his examination a number of papers and documents had been discovered in unsuspected quarters, and among them were the earliest charters of the City. Mr Stevenson states that the chief instrument in their recovery was the then Town Clerk, Mr George Sheffield Blakeway, who was Town Clerk from 1883 to 1927. I am proud to know that Mr Blakeway was one of my friends from the time when I came to Gloucester. He took a tremendous interest in the records in his charge and he spent much time in examining the books and documents and describing their contents.

In spite of the length of the report made by Mr Stevenson it by no means exhausts the interest of the City records for the Commission had to limit extracts to material which was useful in connexion with national history, and many matters of purely local concern had to be omitted. None the less the report was the first attempt to show Gloucester what a wealth of material was at hand for the purpose of

⁵ Historical Manuscripts Commission, 12th report, appendix, part 9, 1891, pp. 400-529.

illustrating the past life of the city. In some measure it is true that 150 years before the Commission reported a distinguished and learned master of the Crypt School in Gloucester, Richard Furney, had made himself acquainted with the rich stores at hand and prepared a list of the more important records. This list, though of course superseded by the Calendar to which I shall refer in a moment, still exists, for happily it is in the library of our Society, and is of value as it includes certain documents which are not now among the Corporation records. I may say that for many years I have wondered under what circumstances certain Council Books must have disappeared. As to the time when this happened I believe one can have some certainty. For example the first volume of Minutes of the Council begins with 1565. From the period covered by this volume, and the next, I think there would have been two books recording the acts of the Corporation from 1483 to 1565. That they did exist there can be no doubt from the care with which various matters connected with very early days are entered in a miscellaneous volume beginning about 1486, in which are particulars of a domestic nature, such as the names of the first aldermen, and their appointment, death, or resignation. The earliest volume of accounts begins with 1550 and I imagine there would have been two before that. If you will presently look at this first book you will see from the wonderful writing and care as to details that the Gloucester Council was served by officers who would not have omitted to record the city's doings from the very first year of its incorporation.

I have suggested that the time when these losses may have taken place can be traced. Richard Furney was appointed master of the Crypt School in 1719, and I imagine that at once his interest was aroused in the city's records, though whether the particular action taken in that year by the Corporation to secure better care of them was prompted by him I do not know.

On 3 November 1718 the following resolution is entered in the Council Book—

Whereas a Lease Booke belonging to the Hospitalls⁶ of this City is lost or mislayd Whether the Members of this House shall Purge themselves by Oath as to their having or not having thereof or knowing where 'tis or any other Writings belonging to this City or ye Hospitalls.

The voting was wholly in favour, not one being given against. There is no record of members taking their oath but next I find that on 8 March 1719–20 the Corporation agreed to ' A Scheme for the Regulating and putting in Order the Records Books and Writings belonging to the City of Gloucr. whereby to have upon any occasion a speedy Recourse '. The details are very carefully set out in the Council Book and it is evident losses had occurred. The following are the clauses, as written:—

1 That every Member of the Corporacon and other persons in whose hands any Books or other writings are Supposed to be, be sworn to bring in the same.

2 That upon Bringing in the foresd Books Two Inventorys be Imediatly made of the same the one to be entered in a Book provided for that purpose to be kept in the Treasury and the other to be in Parchmt, and delivered over every yeare from one Mayor to another, giving a Receipt and Examining the same upon delivery by that kept in the Treasury.

3 In order to have such speedy Recourse 'tis proper that the Abridgmt of such Records &c wch abt Two years since was taken be Examined over and fairly entered in a Book for that purpose wth an Alphebetical Index to the same.

4 That to avoid any Books being lost for the future or taken out, it be a Standing Rule that no Book or Books be lent out to any member or members of this

⁶ St. Bartholomew's and other almshouses.

Corporacon or other person, but by the Mayor only such Person giving a Receipt for the same in a Book provided for that purpose and the Mayor to be accountable for the same.

5 That the Town Clerke or his Deputy in whose hands the Lease books and others Generally lye and other members who have borrow'd any Book or Books do before the going out of the Mayor bring in the said Books that they may be Examined by the Inventory In Order to be delivered up to the succeeding Mayor.

6 And that it be a Standing Rule for the future that no Lease either City or Hospitall be signed and sealed before it be entered in the Lease Booke and Examined with the same Lease booke Counterpart and old Lease and then the Counterpart be imediately putt in the Treasury.

7 That the Mayor have power to Imploy a Person or persons to Settle the Treasury as it ought to be and to Transcribe the Abridgmt and make an Alphibeticall Index and what else is needfull and to be paid by this Corporacon.

The cost of the transcription was to be borne by the Corporation, and one Samuel Worrall, who was collector of customs, prepared the books at a charge of 30 guineas. The copy on parchment is in the muniment room.

It is rather odd that after the scheme was adopted by the Council the following mysterious Act (28 September 1720) appears :—

Whether Mr Alderman Furney shall be degraded and made the lowest of the Aldermen of this city for his saying in publicke at various times that the present mayor⁷ was a Tory.

The voting was for the motion 14 votes, against 19, so that the alderman's character was saved.

⁷ Richard Cosley.

Furney was the industrious compiler of several manuscript volumes relating to the history of Gloucester. He must have had a close knowledge of the City records and abstracted all matters of importance from them. Later historians have drawn very freely from the results of his industry—Rudder, Rudge, and Fosbrooke having copied them wholesale. The awful thought crosses one's mind whether Furney himself was the cause of the proceedings of the Council which I have mentioned. Could he have taken any volumes to his house and there they lay, and did they go with him into Surrey when he was appointed Archdeacon of that county? It is still possible that one day we may know, for it is true that many records lie on private shelves, quite forgotten, and their local interest not realized.

There are other indications that the Corporation did care for their property. Thus in 1619 there occurs an interesting record of the handing over the books from mayor to mayor, and on 11 September 1747 a special committee was appointed to inspect the Charters and all other deeds and writings, with the direction that none were to be removed from the Tolsey, an echo of the proceedings of 1718 and 1720.

I wish now to go back for a moment to the effect of the report drawn up by Mr Stevenson. As an immediate result of his examination of the City records, the personal interest which was taken by Mr Blakeway, Mr John Bellows and others, and the awakening on the part of the Corporation as to their possessions, Mr Stevenson was asked to edit the Rental of Gloucester compiled in 1455 by Robert Cole, a canon of Llanthony priory near the city, which records every house then in Gloucester. This roll is among the exhibits this evening. The full text was printed, with a translation and introduction by Stevenson, in 1890. It gives many interesting facts, one of them showing that the New Inn was built only a few

years before the roll was written, dating it indeed to about the year 1450.

The translation reads—⁸

The Abbot of Saint Peter Gloucester holds in fee a great and new inn called the ' New Inn ', lately built from the foundation by the praiseworthy man John Twinning, monk of the same place, for the great emolument and profit of the same and of their successors.

From this entry of nearly 500 years ago we know that Northgate street was always a profitable position.

Another entry of immediate interest is that of the school controlled by Llanthony priory, and by the way had no connexion with the Grammar school of which the quatercentenary has just been commemorated.

The Corporation showed its appreciation of Mr Stevenson's work by undertaking a much larger commitment in cost, for he was asked to prepare a Calendar of the City Charters and of the large collection of Early Deeds. The substantial volume of nearly 600 pages, which was printed in 1893, contains full translations of some of the Royal Charters from 1155 to 1672, and abstracts of the purport of others less in importance but full of information. Altogether particulars of 82 are given. Another most valuable part of the Calendar is the abstracts of Deeds dating from 1175 to 1690, and over 1200 in number, about 700 being before the year 1300. These Deeds are of immense interest, and form a corpus of material for the social life of Gloucester for some 500 years. The references to streets, the names of witnesses, the purport of the deeds, all make most fascinating study and might well form an interesting article if one of our members has the inclination to undertake it. Added to the volume is a list of Council Books and other records and I am hoping that before long it may be possible to prepare another list as a separate publication. Some books of importance

⁸ *Rental*, p. 85.

escaped being included, and personally I should like to see a much fuller description, which would give a better idea of the contents of each book.

The Corporation did a great service in the publication of the Rental and Calendar but a considerable time elapsed before steps were taken to put the Charters, Deeds and Books in order. Town Clerks have far too much to cope with in ordinary administration to be able to devote the necessary time and attention needed for the records in their custody, and I am bold enough to put forward a suggestion that a keeper (honorary or otherwise) of records should be an appointment made by every Corporation. Hitherto they have relied upon individuals interested in historical studies, and who have spent time in abstracting for publication the material which is so important for local history, and often for its importance in a wider sense. What is wanted is to ensure that there is some one, who perhaps for the pleasure of filling such a post, will undertake to keep an eye on the records.

Some 20 years ago attention was drawn to the condition of the Council Books but only a few were repaired. Exactly 20 years later I was asked to prepare for the Estates Committee a report which should cover all matters relating to the records—repair, binding, proper accommodation and other details. The report was submitted at the meeting of the Committee 17 June 1935 and all the suggestions made were accepted, and later adopted by the Council. The repair of the Charters was entrusted to the Public Record Office, with which I am glad to say I have friendly relations. The expert binders there are permitted to do such work out of office hours. They are supervised by the officers of the Record Office and anything done there may be relied upon as being the very best workmanship. The Charters were taken up by me a few at a time, and I may say the outward journey was less inconvenient than the return one. Hitherto the Charters had been kept folded in stout envelopes so that

they were easily handled, but such poor protection was very much to their detriment. After treatment, flattened, and placed in a special folder such as you will see this evening, their form became of a very different nature. This led to some caustic remarks from inspectors at Paddington, who could not see why I needed the whole side of a first-class carriage for my packets, and callously proposed they should be removed to the guard's van. When it was pointed out that these were the evidences for the privileges of the City of Gloucester, and could not be placed near mere parcels, a different view was taken.

A special cabinet was planned and made, so that for the first time since the Charters were granted they could be placed in a respectable manner on movable trays, which will take the largest of them, measuring $37\frac{3}{4}$ inches across and 26 in depth.

After completing this part of the report attention was given to the record books, their condition being far from satisfactory. They were entrusted to Messrs. Maltby of Oxford, experts in such work, and I have reason to know that the way in which the volumes were repaired and bound has given every satisfaction. It has taken time, but all the most important volumes have been dealt with. A special strong room has been set apart for the Records.

I have dealt with this matter at some length for it is to the great credit of the Corporation that they have been willing to undertake the not inconsiderable cost involved, and I venture to say that their records are now housed in a manner which cannot be surpassed elsewhere ; indeed in most places it is not equalled. I would like to add how much the confidence shown by the Town Clerk, the legal custodian of these records, in my coming and going over a number of years, is appreciated, and to mention also the friendliness shown by his office staff.

As one more step to complete the scheme for their preservation the Council have recently approved my suggestion that all the more important charters shall be

photographed, so that if any untoward accident befell them at any rate the text of each will be preserved. This is being further ensured by having three sets made, one of which will be offered to the Bodleian Library at Oxford and another set will be placed in the Gloucester public library. When one thinks of the long years through which these Charters have escaped destruction it is hoped, in spite of the evil dangers which civilization has brought us, that they will be preserved for many centuries yet.

So much for the part the City has taken. What has been done by the County Authority?

I have mentioned the remarks in 1876 of Sir William Guise as to his hope that a county repository might be secured, and he also asked for a printed catalogue and better accommodation, for he remarked that searchers were confined to 'a narrow crib' if they wished to examine any document. In 1939 it can be said that the hopes envisaged by our first President have been realized, and there is a prospect that even further improvement may be made some day.

So long ago as 1804 a committee appointed by Gloucestershire Quarter Sessions reported on the County records, but of this no copy seems to have been kept, and not until 1870 was any further progress made. Then another committee was appointed and of the four members the names of two were in the first list of members of our Society. Their full report seems to have been accepted and forgotten, until in 1893 yet a third committee—this time of three members—was asked 'to consider and report as to the best plan for the better preservation and convenient inspection of the County Records'. It is of interest to note that each of the three members was a member of this Society, and that one, Sir Francis Hyett, is still living. He was chairman of the committee and himself undertook the examination of all the records at the Shire Hall, and was responsible for the printed catalogue which was published by the

County Council in 1899. This includes all the more important books and papers.

Long before the establishment of County Councils, Parliament had provided by the Act for the Regulation of Parish Vestries, passed in 1818, for the responsibility of preserving parish documents, though it must be feared little attention was given to the matter. The Local Government Act of 1894 made more particular provision as to custody, and empowered County Councils to inquire from time to time as to the care taken of such local records, and to make orders in cases where it was considered necessary. Such an inquiry was made in Gloucestershire in 1895.

In 1933 the County Council resolved to take active measures for the more careful preservation of Quarter Sessions records, and of its own papers, as well as to encourage the gift and deposit of other records concerning the County. At the same time provision was made for extra muniment rooms in the extension of the Shire Hall then being considered. The Records Committee invited me to prepare a report for their consideration, and this was submitted in 1935. Shortly after I was co-opted on the Committee and in 1936 I was invited to undertake the position of Records Officer. Since June 1936 the work of the Committee has made rapid progress and they have received by gift and on deposit a considerable number of valuable and interesting county records, which include manor rolls, ancient deeds, and documents of all kinds. In 1939 the first report of the Records Committee was printed, showing what had been accomplished. The County Council, on the recommendation of the Committee, has this year instituted an Inquiry as to the safe keeping of Parish Records, and this is yielding useful information.

The Records Committee realize that there is much material relating to county administration, long before the establishment of County Councils, which requires

proper custody for its preservation. Owners may deposit records with the understanding that access is given at any time, and that should they wish to have them returned this would be done at once. Every document is carefully catalogued, and some of the more important are transcribed. This has already been appreciated by owners, who in some cases were not aware of the purport of the records which they possessed. A large number of ancient deeds have been presented and placed on deposit.

Gloucestershire is not alone in the measures for preserving records. Most counties have taken similar action, some with more enthusiasm than others, but all are alive to the importance of such work and to their responsibilities in relation to it. Among such authorities, Bedfordshire, Somerset, Essex, Kent, and Warwick may be mentioned. The City of Bristol established a Record Office some time ago and finds that many inquiries are made for information from its large collection of city records. There is no doubt that the influence of County Authorities in this important work will gradually become better known, and the usefulness of the Record Offices which so many of them have established be realized. It is an interesting point with regard to the Gloucestershire Records Committee that 10 of its 13 members are members of our Society.

For a moment I should like to refer to Ecclesiastical Records, and particularly to the work done by a former member of our Society, to whom we owe a most important share in securing a more orderly condition of things for those of the Diocese of Gloucester. For many years they had lain neglected and in disorder but in 1908 Mr Frank Step Hockaday, of Lydney, was interested in securing information as to the administration of the Diocese from its formation in 1541, with a view to establishing a record society for Gloucestershire. It cannot be said that these records were lost, but it is true that

their existence had been forgotten, and it was due to Hockaday, who was a great friend of mine, that they were traced. Fortunately he enjoyed the confidence of Bishop Gibson, who permitted him to remove the entire collection to Lydney, where a fire-resisting room was provided and in that room the best part of Hockaday's later life was spent arranging, indexing and abstracting the Act Books and other records, which number several hundred. It was a task that only one who was intensely interested, and possessed stout determination, could have carried through. Hockaday set out not only to extract useful facts from the diocesan books but he included in his scheme references from printed works, and other manuscript sources which related to the diocese. This information was embodied in nearly 500 files, and I may say that I had a considerable part in these files and papers being given to the public library in Gloucester, where they form a rich quarry for all who wish to know something of ecclesiastical affairs in the Diocese. I hope that all who use the result of Hockaday's labours will remember to acknowledge what they owe to him, for I am sorry to say I have known one or two cases of neglect to do this. On his death in 1924, the Act Books, with the consent of Bishop Headlam, due partly to my own position as the honorary secretary of the Archaeological Society, were removed to the care of the Gloucester public library, though I may say quite frankly that the accommodation which it was possible to give was not adequate, nor from a record point of view is it satisfactory. I hope that the time may come when with general goodwill this may be remedied. So far little has been done to continue the work which Hockaday began. It is a colossal task. Mr G. Baskerville some years since used the files for his valuable article in our 'Transactions' on the Dispossessed Religious of Gloucestershire (XLIX, 63-122). For the last volume (LIX, 61-185) our member, Mr Douglas Price, contributed an excellent article on the

Commission for Ecclesiastical Causes for the Diocese of Bristol and Gloucester, 1574, which was prepared entirely from the original Act Books. He has also made further studies of the administration of the Diocese in the time of Bishop Hooper, which will be printed in the volume now in course of preparation.⁹ Mr Hockaday's own valuable article on the Consistory Court was printed by the Society after his death (volume XLVI, 195-287).

The Society itself has not been behind in encouraging the publication of material relating to the history of Gloucestershire. It was very fortunate in its first editor, Sir John Maclean, who in turn was fortunate in having a virgin field so far as publication of this kind was concerned. He had a wonderful flair for records and the first general index of our 'Transactions' shows the wide extent of his researches. Under his editorship too, the Society published¹⁰ the 'Lives of the Berkeleys', compiled by John Smyth of Nibley, who I regard as among the greatest of the noted men of Gloucestershire. He is probably one of the least known. If sufficient time is given me I hope one day to prepare an account, already partly drafted, from the collection of his papers which I had the good fortune some years ago to secure for the Gloucester public library. One must also refer to the work of another editor, Rev. Charles Taylor, a well known authority on Domesday: the Rev. David Royce, and Rev. E. A. Fuller, who were authorities on special aspects of Gloucestershire history, and to whom we owe many valuable contributions to our 'Transactions'.

Among notable publications issued privately is the descriptive catalogue of the charters and muniments preserved at Berkeley Castle,¹¹ which informs us of the wealth of material there waiting to be published. Lord

⁹ Volume LX, 51-151.

¹⁰ In three volumes, 1883-5.

¹¹ Edited by I. H. Jeayes, 1892.

Sherborne in 1900 printed privately a calendar of the charters, rolls and documents in his muniment room at Sherborne. Another of his contributions to Gloucestershire history is his 'Memoirs of the Dutton family of Sherborne,'¹² of which only 25 copies were printed. Both Lord Berkeley and Lord Sherborne were members of our Society.

The Gloucester Corporation, in respect of part of the cost, was responsible for the publication in 1928 of the Catalogue¹³ of the Gloucestershire Collection in Gloucester public library, a stout volume of 1248 pages. Though closely concerned with its production I hope I may be excused for speaking of it in this address, if only for one reason. It had long been my wish to see such a catalogue in print, though I realized that for a library which then had to be administered under the closest economy the cost was almost prohibitive. In a happy moment it occurred to me to approach the Carnegie Trustees, through Colonel Mitchell, their secretary. Some interesting correspondence passed, and though at first there was doubt as to the result, a fortunate phrase in one letter turned the scale and then came the pleasing intimation that a grant up to £300 would be made. This was, up to that time, the only instance of such an application being granted. I will say nothing about the catalogue except that as a guide to published and unpublished matter concerning Gloucestershire it is a definite contribution to record work. In other ways it may be said that the public library has been an active agent in the accumulation of historical information and for 36 years no pains have been spared to make the Gloucestershire collection as complete as possible.

Hitherto I have referred to Gloucestershire, but I do not forget that so far as the influence of the Society is concerned a great part has been taken by the City of Bristol,

¹² Printed in 1899.

¹³ Reviewed by Sir Francis Hyett in *Transactions*, XLIX, 362-4.

where it was first thought of, and established. Our members living in that City have made important contributions in the 'Transactions' to the records relating to its history. The muniment room and Records Office established by the City Council are functioning in a most satisfactory manner. Then the work of the Bristol Record Society, established in 1929, has been responsible for the publication of 10 volumes of first-rate matter, prepared under the best auspices. There is ample material left for many more volumes, provided the necessary subscribers are forthcoming, and under the present high standard of editing there is good return for the modest subscription asked.

Bibliography renders useful service in all historical research and the extraordinary work of a veteran member of the Society must be mentioned. Sir Francis Hyett's three volumes, entitled the 'Manual of Gloucestershire Literature',¹⁴ compiled with the co-operation of Canon Bazeley, who for so many years was the 'hub' on which this Society revolved, is well known as a model for such work. Some years after it was published Sir Francis and I completed it with a Biographical Supplement¹⁵ relating to Gloucestershire Men and Women, which stands alone in its form and content, for any county. I may say that Sir Francis is still interested in hearing of the work of the Society.

Much has been written in recent years about the preservation of Manorial Records. In 1925, in view of the coming into force of the Law of Property Act, the Society drew particular attention in its 'Transactions' for 1925 as to the effect of the Act and the importance of caring for manorial rolls and the life. Further reference was made in the next volume, so that it may claim to have lost no time. In the same way the Gloucester

¹⁴ Published 1895-7.

¹⁵ 1915-16.

public library took care to see that its claim to be accepted as a recognized depository was sent to the proper quarter, with the result that it was one of the first to receive such recognition. Since then the muniment rooms of the County Council have also been declared a depository for the purpose of the Act, and some valuable manorial records have been received.

I have spoken chiefly of local activities, but it would not be right to close my paper without reference to the British Records Association, established in 1932 and one of the most successful Societies ever formed. Until then there had been no organization which took as its purpose the interests of institutions and persons concerned with record work. The aims of the Association are to serve as a link between all those interested in the custody, publication and study of records and to make itself a centre of information on these matters. By means of a special section it disposes of documents sent to it for distribution to the localities to which Deeds and other material may refer, and I am glad to say that the County Records Office has received a considerable quantity from this source. The membership of the Society has increased in an extraordinary way and includes every institution and local authority of any standing. By its influence the Association has already exerted a decided advance in the general desire to place this country in as favourable a position as that of foreign nations, where hitherto greater attention has been given to the preservation and care of records.

The fascination of handling and studying original records is a wonderful experience. There is a human side even to Deeds, which by so many people are held in small esteem, but supply the evidence for the ownership of property. The pleasure of owning a house of some age is much enhanced if the deeds showing succeeding ownership are possessed, for therein lies the history when no other source is known. The mere fact of placing your

hand on a document signed with a name which has a local interest is a real pleasure to be experienced. Or it may be the discovery of information which completes a link in the history of places or persons. Very recently I have had this happen. For some time I have been gathering information about the Gloucester school which yesterday [4 July 1939] completed a series of celebrations connected with its 400th year, and so far the name of the first master of the school was unknown. By chance I learnt of the existence of some legal papers connected with a Chancery suit in the middle of last century and when turning them over without much hope of learning anything fresh, a much older paper caught my eye, and I saw that it was an original statement prepared for a case in 1550 which concerned the school lands. On a careful reading of the 30 pages I discovered through the statement of a law clerk, who referred to certain events in 1540, the name of the master who from the context could be none other than the first, the school building having been completed in 1539. Not only was the master present at the livery of seisin of the lands to the Mayor and Burgesses of Gloucester, which ever since have been owned as part of the endowment of the school, but it is carefully noted that his scholars were there as well. Yet another interesting piece of information is a description of Dame Joan Cooke, the wife of the founder of the school, whom it appears was so 'unweldy' that she could not ride to the site of Podsmead to give seisin herself, and had to find substitutes in her place, one of them being the very master.¹⁶

It is in such pursuits that one can reap the real sweets of life, and it is partly on that account that I have tried to illustrate the importance and pleasure of encouraging the preservation of local records, and making the history which can be gleaned from them available for general information.

¹⁶ Recorded in *The Crypt School, Gloucester, 1539-1939*, by Roland Austin. (John Bellows Ltd.)