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Gloucestershire records: the clerks and custodians

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By BRIAN S. SMITH

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In the Presidential year in which the Gloucestershire Record Office has celebrated its jubilee it is appropriate to direct the Society's attention again to the history of record keeping in the county. In the first Presidential Address delivered to the Society in 1876, Sir William Guise, describing the neglect and inaccessibility of the official records of the city, county and diocese, declared 'The want of a good county repository for rolls, deeds, and papers, is a great evil'.¹ Sixty years on Roland Austin, successively first Gloucester city librarian (1900–35) and first county records officer (1936–48) was able to report on the notable progress made over that period, culminating in the foundation of the county record office in 1936 through the sustained interest of Sir Francis Hyett, chairman of quarter sessions 1904–29 and of the county council 1918–20.² A generation later Austin's successor, Irvine Gray, addressed the Society in 1968 upon the subsequent remarkable flow of historical records into the record office.³ That flow has, of course, continued over the last twenty years, reinforced, a full century after Sir William Guise's observation, by the concentration of the county, city and diocesan records in the new record office in 1979. But rather than repeat the story of these more recent developments already published in the record office's annual reports and jubilee history, it seemed more interesting to examine today some of the events of the previous three or four centuries which had led to the situation so deplored by the first President in 1876.

In a year in which we have also been celebrating that foundation of English record keeping, Domesday Book, commanded by William I from here in Gloucester, it is hardly necessary to recall that the whole purpose of making and keeping records was to defend rights and establish precedents. The post-reformation growth of literacy and the multiplication of both the types and the quantities of records emphasised this essential function. John Smith of Nibley, the Berkeley steward, and his contemporaries in late Tudor and early Stuart Gloucestershire referred to deeds as evidences. The trustees of Bell's grammar school at Newland required their schoolmaster to undertake his obligations in writing.⁴ Conversely, in an illiterate countryman's contrary manner, when asked by John Smith why he was selling off lands that his family had held for a hundred years, Thomas Selwin of Slimbridge replied 'Why, what should I keepe such land, when no man could read my deeds they were growne soe old'.⁵

In the paper wars in which Smith was so endlessly involved on behalf of the Berkeleys, he marshalled his evidences with the skill of a general. During the great 38-year battle over the lordship of Wotton under Edge he raged at the folly of Lord Henry Berkeley's solicitors burning a great bundle of court rolls, accounts and other records as being hurtful to the Berkeley title when to anyone, like himself, who knew how to handle such weapons they were strong defences. He triumphantly recovered a large cloakbagful of some 400 deeds and leases, called in by the Earl of Warwick's solicitors from the tenants of the estate, from the rooms in Lincoln's Inn of one of the earl's disaffected counsel and restored them to the evidence house in Berkeley Castle.⁶ He

himself deployed some 500 deeds to win the case in 1610 but even that army of records was outnumbered by the forces he put together to prove his own and the Berkeleys' rights over the New Grounds in Slimbridge in 1637, when the delivery in court of more than 1000 documents took over eight hours. Small wonder that the Crown withdrew its case that the New Grounds were part of the river bed, rather to Smith's disappointment, 'never hearinge one peece of Evidence which I had before them in 2 trunkes and 3 baggs, besides plotts of the river, Rockes, and Channels; And printed Mapps both in generall and in perticular'.⁷

John Smith's belief in the value of records extended beyond their purely legal purposes. He assumed, for instance, that his clerk, William Archard, would prudently have kept details of the expenditure on his house in North Nibley, and he applauded Lord Henry Berkeley's practice of keeping meticulous estate accounts.⁸ In the stewards' account book for that period are to be found the frequent charges for searching the public records, the reams of papers and skins of parchment, the sealing wax and messengers' expenses, the presents to judges and legal bills of which one entry for 1606 may serve as an example:

'Item to Mr Boyles Clarke Thos Moore for ingrossing 28 rolls on both sides of divers old accomptes and former Court rolls to preserve them to posteritie, very materiall hitherto neglected xxr.'⁹

If it was important for a private landowner to preserve the evidence of his rights it was no less necessary for a corporate body to protect its trustee and charitable property, answer for public monies and stifle factious criticism. The Gloucester corporation and the city guilds introduced administrative reforms and better record keeping in the mid-16th century. The city's lease registers begin in 1524 and its account books in 1550. In 1565 a new seal was engraved and the following year a book was bought in which to record the acts of the common council.¹⁰ On the other hand the medieval borough court rolls, existing in the early 15th century, had disappeared without trace by 1619, and two of the most important town charters of privileges of 1483 and 1561 were missing in 1596. They had found their way in somewhat mysterious and unexplained circumstances to the deanery. Their recovery thence throws some light on the way in which records were housed at the time, dean Lewis Griffith describing how he remembered that in a little closet over the stairs of his gallery there was a long patent box in which he had not looked although it had been there three years after his installation as dean in 1584. When he searched it he discovered the Elizabethan charter, which Thomas Atkins, the town clerk, was suspected of having placed in it.¹¹

The dean and chapter had kept registers of their own leases from within a few years of their first appointment by Henry VIII in 1541 but it was not until the installation of William Laud as dean in 1616 that the chapter formally recorded their decisions in act books. The records were kept in a cupboard in the deanery for which a key was bought in 1633–34, until in 1636, 15s. was paid to a joiner and glazier 'For boxes & shelves & repayringe the studdy over the west gate of the Church for the safe keepinge of the Recordes of the Church there'.¹² The records of the diocese, the acts, visitations and consistory courts of the bishops were kept as was usual quite distinct from those of the cathedral in the care of the bishops' registrar, of whom the most notable was John Jones, registrar to eight bishops between 1580 and 1630, three times mayor of Gloucester and member of Parliament for the city between 1604 and 1614. His monument, lifelike and approved by him shortly before his death in office, is on the west wall of the cathedral, a half-length figure with book and sealed charter in his hands, flanked by neatly pigeon-holed bundles of documents with inkstand, quill pens and other writing tools arrayed before him.¹³ He is looking down on the place where he sat in the consistory court, recording among other business the extraordinary three-year strife between bishop and chancellor in 1589–92 when rival

consistory courts were held by bishop Bullingham in the cathedral and William Blackleech in St John's church. Though ordered by the bishop not to write any act or proceeding not allowed by him, John Jones like any conscientious clerk quietly took the wise precaution of recording the chancellor's acts as well as the bishop's.¹⁴ The court records themselves describe vivid death-bed scenes of testators sending out hastily for a scribe living in another part of the town or some miles away in the country to bring pen, ink and paper and set down the will at dictation, its reading back for accuracy, and its subscription and sealing in front of witnesses.¹⁵ Doubtless it was such a scribe that the bailiff and arbitrators of the little town of Northleach had in mind when they ruled in 1576 that they should appoint annually 'one honest Inhabitant that can reasonably reade and write to be the comon Towne Clarke who shall allwey from time to time record the whole proces of everye Courte in writing'.¹⁶

Such powerful weapons could not, however, be allowed to rest unused in their safe chests and cupboards. Deeds had to be produced to prove title on the conveyance of property, wills presented for probate, and documents of all sorts shown in court to settle disputes. The Berkeley carrier took records from the castle to and from London in 1606 and again in 1609 when a trunkload relating to Kingswood was sent up and John Smith spent £3 15s. 6d. 'for ij newe trunckes to cary downe evidences to Berkeley which had for 13 yeares rested in my Custodie & for cordes to swadle them and 2 more, to porters, carmen and Cariage being 700 and od weight'.¹⁷ But the Berkeley muniments were not exceptional in going on such hazardous travels. The Gloucester city charters journeyed up and down the country to prove the corporation's privileges, to London in 1565, 1633 and 1663, and to Cirencester in 1633, while the dean and chapter paid £2 in 1660 for an iron chest apparently containing the books and ledgers sent down from London at the Restoration.¹⁸

The common law relied upon records for the precedents upon which it was based, but from Tudor times the executive increasingly demanded that records be kept for purposes of taxation and administration. When Thomas Cromwell introduced parish registers in 1538 there was an understandable suspicion that the measure was in preparation for taxation. Indeed, it is difficult to see why else the government rather than the church should have interested itself in the matter. However, apart from two brief wartime periods allowed by Acts of Parliament in 1694 and 1783 they were not used for raising revenue, and the clergy dutifully maintained them for purely ecclesiastical purposes. Moreover, they or in the larger parishes the parish clerk maintained the record remarkably well. Although particularly in small country parishes the entries may be jumbled and leaves sometimes cut out of the parchment registers in order to write the transcripts that had to be sent in to the diocesan registrar, as at Bledington and perhaps Oxenhall,¹⁹ a large number of registers survive from 1598 when they were ordered to be kept not on paper but on parchment, expensive volumes which cost Upton St Leonards 5s. and Pauntley 3s. 2d.²⁰

Their survival has largely been due to the other provision in Cromwell's order, that parishes were to house them in a locked chest with separate keys for the parson and churchwardens. A strong wooden chest was the common medieval receptacle for writings and other precious objects, although 13th-century endorsements on deeds at Berkeley Castle suggest that these were stored in lettered compartments and presses. Some parishes already possessed chests, like the great dugout ones at Awre and Kempley and the pre-Reformation boxes at Alderton and Ashleworth, but elsewhere it took some years to put the order into effect.²¹ The Stonehouse chest had no lock in 1548.²² Lechlade paid 4d. for a key to their chest in 1568 and it was not until that year that St Aldate's, Gloucester bought themselves a box to put the church writings in.²³ Occasionally other records were also kept there. When in 1561 Thomas Lord Wentworth sold the manor of Stinchcombe to the freeholders of the parish he agreed to deliver the 300 deeds to the trustees, to be kept in the church steeple in a chest with three keys for the use of himself and

the purchasers, where much to John Smith's annoyance they remained inaccessible to others in 1639.²⁴ More unusually, Joan widow of Thomas Kemys of Bedminster deposited two locked chests of her deeds for safekeeping in St Mary Redcliffe church when she moved to Devon about 1546.²⁵ The subsequent losses of parish registers and records by fire, flood or sheer neglect are too well known to repeat as is the widespread breakdown in registration during the disturbance of the Civil War and Commonwealth.²⁶

Such disturbance was not confined to the church. The early papers of the Somerset family, earls of Worcester and dukes of Beaufort, were lost in the sack of Raglan castle, and the general unease in the countryside is indicated by the curiously misguided action of the Hicks family, who buried their lease of Charfield mill with the result, as one might have expected, 'it tooke wett & is not now legible'.²⁷ It is noticeable also that the county archives do not, with one exception, survive before the Restoration. By contrast the puritan leaders in Gloucester were zealous to affirm the legality of their powers, rebuilding the Tolsey on the corner of Westgate and Southgate streets and fitting it up with shelves as a place to house the city records in 1649–51, putting the records of the charitable hospitals there under lock and key at the same time, appointing a committee to preserve their charters and liberties in 1653–54, having a new seal made in 1654, and a new press for the storage of the records of the Commonwealth committee of Gloucester in 1655.²⁸

At the Restoration the corporation remained riven by faction, and although a new seal and charter of liberties were obtained and committees appointed in 1665, 1692 and 1704 to put the records in good order,²⁹ there is a general impression of maladministration, with records lost or retained unofficially in private hands, culminating in the curious affair in 1707 when two pages of the proceedings of the common council were pasted together to conceal the election of alderman Palmer which was later disallowed.³⁰ Soon after this last event a series of resolutions were passed, beginning in 1710 with converting a room at the Tolsey into an office, where the records were to be gathered, and concluding in 1720 with the decision to draw up a scheme for their arrangement.³¹ A schedule had already been compiled in 1718, and now under the guidance of alderman Richard Furney, antiquary and master of the Crypt school, Samuel Worrall, a councillor, proctor of the consistory court and collector of customs, was engaged at 30 guineas to transcribe and methodise the records, a committee later being appointed to see that the task had been properly completed.³² The whole undertaking must have been supervised by the newly appointed town clerk, Thomas Stephens, who uniquely was also clerk of the peace for the county and registrar of the diocese.³³

Furney's and Worrall's scheme was the foundation for the archival arrangement of the city's records for the next century and a half. Unfortunately it slowly crumbled in use, perhaps especially when in 1857 the town clerk's office was moved from the Tolsey to the Corn Exchange in Southgate Street and the records placed in a fireproof records room. Moreover, Worrall's abridgement was not found by W.H. Stevenson when he came to put the records in order, rearranging them chronologically, in preparation for his report to the Historical Manuscripts Commission in 1890 and the *Calendar of the records of the corporation of Gloucester* (1893).³⁴ Worrall indicates that the most precious documents were kept in a charter box, and the volumes of proceedings, sessions books, rentals and other books were kept in the mayor's cupboard. Seventeen other cupboards, lettered from A to S (B was perhaps the mayor's cupboard and J omitted) housed the main series of deeds and leases.

Following Thomas Stephens's death in 1723 the county also reformed its record making and keeping. It had been desperately short of funds in 1672–73 when the justices initiated a more methodical accounting system and began a new series of order books, but nearly all the other main classes of records, commissions of the peace, sessions rolls, indictments, presentments,

depositions, gaol calendars and others begin about 1726–33 during the clerkship of William James (1723–41), who leased a house on the corner of Westgate Steet and Berkeley Street in which the records were kept, the county agreeing in 1734 to pay £10 towards fitting it up.³⁵ At much the same time, in 1736, the appointment of a new diocesan registrar in succession to Thomas Stephens's son, Edward, defined the registrar's responsibilities towards the archives committed to his care, and required them to be preserved in proper and decent shelves, boxes or presses, and kept in good order and repair, reserving to the bishop the right of inspection.³⁶

The same 18th-century spirit of methodising, so essential as the quantity of parchment and paper accumulated, also prevailed among private owners. At Badminton the first catalogue of the muniments was made in 1679 and in 1711 the second duke extended the system, instructing Godfrey Harcourt on the method he was to follow in classifying the records according to their type, arranging the deeds by place rather than the name of the person from whom the property had been bought, and placing them in five presses in the evidence room lettered A to E.³⁷ Lesser men were equally careful to retain their evidences in safety and good order. The commonplace book of George Bond of Redbrook contains an unusual 'Direction of where to find the writings relating to his estate' in 1682 in which are listed the little leather boxes, drawers, pillow case and bags of deeds, leases and settlements, lying in the larger trunks and deed boxes.³⁸ More commonly, writings still remained locked away in desks or chests as in the house of Richard Wood, a prominent Gloucester citizen in 1677, or the Tewkesbury cordwainers' gild in 1746, whose chest resembled the traditional school tuckbox.³⁹ More unusually, a late 17th-century merchant in Tewkesbury hid his two little account books in the wall of his house.⁴⁰

Although documents had become common enough and many men and some women could subscribe their names to their deeds, wills and depositions, the ability to read and write was still sufficiently unfamiliar in the 17th century to retain a certain mystery, akin perhaps to the respect nowadays for those who can manipulate computers. A minority of clergy enjoyed the affectation of keeping their parish registers in Latin, William James of Elmore only abandoning the practice in 1733 with the Act that brought the use of English to the records of the law courts.⁴¹ The novelty of the art of writing made the 17th century a high water mark of scribal legibility and ornamentation, recalling the rival skills of medieval scribes. Even routine deeds recording mundane property transactions may be found written in a beautifully regular hand with restrained decorative penwork for the initial letters, of which a series of deeds dating from about 1640 to 1690 in the Clifford of Frampton papers are notable.⁴² Clergy obeying the injunction of 1598 to copy out their parish registers relieved their boredom by drawing decorative borders and faces as at Haresfield and St Michael's, Gloucester.⁴³ Many years later a Thornbury lawyer's clerk, set to make a fair copy of the tedious transactions of the manor court, relieved his chore from 1729 with flourishes and grotesques in which the association of his ideas can clearly be traced as he developed his doodles from quills to birds, peacocks and flying dragons.⁴⁴ Unfortunately, the new steward of the court, Nicholas Bedgood, brought such frivolities to an end in 1732. Most of these clerks remain quite anonymous without a careful study of the names of witnesses to deeds and wills, but a few writing masters may be identified from their wills, like John Collier of Gloucester, who died in 1688, leaving in his house his drawing table, writing table with frames, and a frame to draw knots and figures by. The skills of such calligraphers may be traced onwards in copybooks and the draughtmanship of the 18th-century estate map surveyors like Stephen Jefferys of Minchinhampton (1680–c. 1750) and Ferdinando Stratford of Gloucester (1719–66).

The 18th-century houses whose estates such men surveyed were built with muniment rooms which have since been emptied into the county record office. Most lay in the heart of the house but at Badminton the north-east pavilion, added in the mid-century, was fitted out for this

purpose in accordance with a design of 1758 by Stephen Wright. In a letter to the fourth duchess of Beaufort he wisely advised that the back of the shelving should be lined with wood to preserve the papers from damp.⁴⁵ Twenty four presses were designed to stand around the walls, Wright leaving the keeper of the papers to specify the height of the shelves. Beneath the shelves are larger openings variously called drawers and tills. Stairs lead up to a gallery with further presses, all of which have open wired doors that can be locked but allow the free circulation of air. The records installed in their new quarters were not rearranged and recatalogued until 1777, four years after the introduction of a production book to record the withdrawal and replacement of the documents used by the agent and his staff.

Marriage customarily brought estate and personal papers into a family, but at Badminton it also brought duchesses who seemed to have taken most interest in the records from the beginning, especially the fourth duchess Elizabeth Berkeley (1719–99) and the second wife of the seventh duke, Emily Smith (1800–59) who with the help of the assistant agent Richard Salter began to arrange the family papers towards the middle of the 19th century, a task which was continued by Lady Geraldine Somerset and her sister Blanche. The first press in the muniment room is named Her Grace's Press, probably after the seventh duchess, in which were set aside some of the most interesting papers.

At Berkeley Castle it was a countess, Mary Cole, wife of the fifth earl, whose reform of the estate and household management extended to a tighter control over the use of the evidence house. In 1808 a detailed schedule of the deeds of the entailed estates was written in a large foolscap leather-bound volume which also contains the rules she drew up on 20 December 1820 that 'no person excepting the Steward who keeps the Key will be suffered to go into the Evidence House and that all papers, Books, or Deeds, which it may be necessary to remove, may always be returned as soon as done with'.⁴⁶ At her request the constable and janitor of the castle, W.F. Shrapnell expeditiously compiled details of the various catalogues made in the following three weeks, which indicate the layout of the closets and shelves along the walls of the evidence house, the contents of the tin chests on top of the closets and the wooden boxes on the floor. They were sorted and classified by the type of document, the royal charters and family charters to abbeys in tin chest number 2 above the south closets, old court rolls in two wooden chests on the floor marked numbers 3 and 4, ancient small grants in seven large canvas bags hanging from the ceiling, and so on. Prominently placed over the fireplace were the rules for the evidence house, signed by the earl.

A similar sorting had been carried out a generation earlier at Dyrham by Charles Gunning, a Bristol lawyer who was steward to the Blathwayt estates. In 1772 he presented this account:

'Examining, Sorting & Methodizing the immense Number of Title Deeds & others of Mr. Blathwayts Estates . . . which were in the utmost Confusion & making a Short Abstract & Particular of the same in order to Distinguish & divide the same into proper parcells which tooke me up at least 6 Months – £105'.

The two volumes of his schedule and its index have survived but not his method of arrangement.⁴⁷

It would be tedious to recall other private muniment rooms and estate offices with their many new types of business records created in the course of 19th-century estate management or the scarce commercial records found on business premises but from the beginning of the 19th century there appears a notable new kind of storehouse for the keeping of records, from which vast quantities have been recovered. The regular employment of attorneys and the establishment from about 1800 of dynasties of solicitors' practices, like Ticehurst Wyatt of Cheltenham (c. 1811), Winterbotham Ball and Gadsdon of Stroud (c. 1816), Brookes and Badham of Tewkesbury and Mullings Ellett of Cirencester (both c. 1820) began the formation of great collections of their

own and their clients' papers, preserved in trust in the tin deed boxes that accumulated in their cellars and attics until hunted out by archivists in the last 40 years. In the 1970s many of the estate records of Williamstrip Park, for instance, were restored to the house by the county archivist from the Hicks-Beach family solicitors in Cirencester, and loads of records of Badminton and Berkeley came down to Gloucestershire from the London solicitors. A century earlier Lord Sherborne recalled to the Society how the Winchcombe cartularies, believed lost, were recovered from his father's solicitors in Cirencester about 1877. Unhappily other papers from Sherborne House were destroyed during its rebuilding in 1829–34 owing to the neglect of the vicar of Windrush to whom they had been entrusted for safe-keeping and when the survivors were returned to the house they were bundled back in confusion into the new muniment room.⁴⁸

With its own records the church was more attentive. Hardwicke's Act of 1754 to limit clandestine marriages not only put a stop to the activities of clergy like Simon Hughes, successively at Oddington (1734–37) and Hampnett (1737–54), but also introduced forms for marriage registers. George Rose's Act of 1812 extended the forms to baptisms and burials and ordered the registers to be stored in a dry, well painted iron chest, in some dry and secure place, either at the parsonage or in the church, where many remain. Littledean paid £16 16s. 6d. for theirs in 1813.⁴⁹ At Oxenhall in 1840 the vestry

'Resolved that the books of the proceedings of Vestries, Rates, Assessments, Accounts, Vouchers & other documents, writings & papers of this Parish, by the Act of the 28th Geo the 3rd directed to be kept by such person or persons as the Inhabitants in Vestry assembled shall direct, be kept by the Overseers of the Poor of this Parish, to be deposited in the Iron Chest within the Church'.⁵⁰

Among the other religious bodies, whose membership records and minutes were of the first importance, the Quakers were outstanding in maintaining from the mid 17th century careful records of their monies, disciplinary affairs and sufferings at the hands of the law, some of which were kept in chests in their meeting houses both in 1749 and 1827, while other remained in private hands. Alone among the nonconformist churches they made copies of their registers before sending the originals for deposit in the General Register Office in London as statutorily required in 1840.⁵¹

The thought that old records might have a historical interest as well as a purely practical value developed slowly. John Smith's *Lives of the Berkeleys*, for example, had a practical and moral purpose rather than strictly historical. The Daglingworth churchwardens who copied out their accounts about 1675 for the satisfaction of posterity had it in mind that it was 'not onely to prevent theyre utter losse but to be a president to futurity'.⁵² It was altogether more unusual that Peter Dore, *Richmond Herald*, should have had the early Windrush parish register rebound in 1764 'out of regard for antiquity and for the sake of posterity'.⁵³ The contrast in attitude may perhaps be seen most sharply in the response of two committees of county magistrates appointed to report on the county records at the beginning and end of the 19th century.

The first, in 1805, was prompted by the inquiry of the Select Committee on Public Records in 1800 at a time when the influence of continental historians in research upon original sources led to an examination of the nation's public records. The committee emphasised the great use of the ancient records to the county and the suitors of the court and being 'impressed with a strong Sense of the Utility which may arise from the Precedents and Information that are to be found in these Books, have prepared for your approbation an Index of such Entries in them as appeared to be of importance'.⁵⁴ Towards the end of the century, in 1871, the second committee, whilst still having regard to the practical usefulness of the county records to establish public and private rights, also recognised their historical value for those whose aim was diligently to learn from

genuine sources about antecedent institutions and manners, and that not only did they contain much authentic information about the history of the county but were in themselves interesting and with important signatures.⁵⁵

Between the two dates statutory and bureaucratic requirements had greatly increased the number of records committed to the clerk of the peace's care. Just as for centuries the Crown's lieutenant in the counties who also bore the resounding title of *custos rotulorum*, keeper of the rolls, had delegated that routine job to the clerk, so now at the beginning of the 19th century the clerk's post became a sinecure for the Berkeley family and it was the deputy clerk of the peace who recorded the county business and looked after its archives. Edward Bloxsome, a solicitor from Dursley and deputy clerk from 1801 to 1852, was responsible for the creation of more indexes and also for issuing orders to the parishes to carry out rating valuations.⁵⁶ Some had already made their own sometimes splendid rating surveys, like Randwick in 1809 or Minchinhampton, where the survey had been referred to so often that it had become damaged and in 1808 the vestry ordered an exact copy to be made for consultation while the original was to be locked safely away in the church chest.⁵⁷

In the same century which witnessed the building of the first part of the Public Record Office in 1851–6 and the British Museum reading room in 1857, better physical protection was also given to local records. The construction of the Shire Hall (1813–20) allowed the county records to be removed from the clerk of the peace's house into a new long room on the east side of the Shire Hall, which later in the century was subdivided into a small seventeen-foot strong room fitted with iron fireproof shelving, the clerk's office, his writing clerks' room and a large search room containing further wooden presses and a railed off area with a table for searchers.

As anyone familiar with record offices will appreciate, this apparent spaciousness did not last long. There were in practice few searchers. In 1805 one search a month had been reported, and more were hardly encouraged by being confined in a crib at a table already preoccupied with papers. The lack of indexes raised 'too great an absence of expectation of being able to find Documents in the Office to induce many Inquirers to come and search there for what they want'. The Committee in 1871 accordingly declared

'Record Offices should be large enough to allow of a proper staff of Officers and proper and safe Repositories and convenient accommodation for searching etc. But when those requisites can be secured, the claims of provincial over Central deposit are considerable, and it seems wrong to lend to the movement for transferring local Collections to Central Offices the aid which is furnished by manifest neglect or indifference of local keepers to the objects of their charge'.⁵⁸

The other landmarks in this movement may be charted more briefly. In 1869 the Historical Manuscripts Commission had been appointed to enquire into the existence and whereabouts of privately owned papers of public interest, and in the course of its early investigations was invited to inspect and publish reports on the papers at Berkeley Castle (1874), the Smith of Nibley papers at Condover Hall, Shropshire (1876), the records of the corporation of Gloucester, the dean and chapter and the Beaufort family (1890–91), and the diocese (1914, 1917).⁵⁹ The invitation in 1888 to report on the Gloucester city records which were about to be removed to the new Guildhall in 1892 was only accepted on the understanding that they were to be put in order first, a condition which led directly to the engagement of W.H. Stevenson to sort, calendar and publish them. A catalogue of the county records was published in 1898, two years after the Shire Hall was extended and the records rehoused.⁶⁰ Earlier at Tewkesbury, the corporation had scheduled their records in 1859,⁶¹ and at about the same period the dean and chapter had their ancient deeds mounted and guarded in ten large volumes by the Bodleian Library's binders.⁶²

They were calendared in 1910 but not published, unlike the calendars of the muniments at Berkeley (1892) and Sherborne (1900).⁶³ The diocesan records remained totally neglected until 1908 when F.S. Hockaday persuaded the bishop and his registrar to allow him to remove them to a strongroom built onto his house at Lydney where he could more easily work on arranging and indexing them.⁶⁴

All these events, in most of which members of this Society took a leading part, are well recorded and have taken this account past the point described in earlier presidential addresses and published in its *Transactions*. Several rather uncomfortable conclusions may be drawn from this story of general neglect punctuated by spasmodic genuine efforts at safekeeping. First, that records are made and retained for severely practical purposes. When they cease to be useful they may be safely destroyed. In these circumstances it is remarkable not how much has been lost, but how much has survived. Second, their retention has depended less on careful decision than the fortuitous factors of ample space and a disinclination to turn out rubbish. From these often chance survivals can be traced the growing awareness of their historical interest, beginning with the old antiquaries and running through the century-long inspections of the Historical Manuscripts Commission for uncovering and publishing these hidden riches, and the work of preservation by the county record office over the last half century, culminating in the whole modern industry of historical research, professional and amateur. There remains one more sobering final conclusion. Having garnered these great collections into the security of record offices in recent years many are at greater risk of becoming worn out by excessive handling for research than previously by centuries of neglect in their former homes. The cause for the Society now to espouse if these records are to survive for future generations is that of conservation, transcription, microfilming, publication and other safeguards for their long-term protection.

Notes

1. *TBGAS* 1 (1876), 46–47.
2. R. Austin, 'Gloucestershire records', *TBGAS* 61 (1939), 30–49.
3. I.E. Gray, 'Gloucestershire records: a retrospect', *TBGAS* 87 (1968), 5–13.
4. Glos R.O., D34/2/1.
5. Sir John Maclean, *The Berkeley manuscripts . . . a description of the hundred of Berkeley . . . by John Smyth* (1885), 249.
6. *Ibid.*, *The lives of the Berkeleys* (1883) Vol 2, 314–325.
7. *The hundred of Berkeley*, 330–346.
8. *The hundred of Berkeley*, 287; *Lives of the Berkeleys* Vol 2, 373, 412.
9. Berkeley Castle, General series, bound book 110.
10. Glos R.O., GBR F4/3, ff 107, 113, 113v.
11. Glos R.O., GBR B2/1, ff 163–167, 234.
12. Glos R.O., D936 A1/1; A1/2. St Mary's Gateway was again converted in 1960–61 for the storage of the dean and chapter records, and so used until 1979. In 1961–63 it served as the main searchroom of the record office during the extension of the Shire Hall.
13. I. Gray, 'The monument of John Jones at Gloucester', *J Soc Archivists* 3 (1969), 488–9.
14. F.D. Price, 'Bishop Bullingham and chancellor Blackleech', *TBGAS* 91 (1972), 175–198.
15. For example, Glos R.O., GDR 221, 27 Sept 1671, 14 Mar 1675/6, 12 Sept 1676.
16. Glos R.O., D398/1.
17. Berkeley Castle, General series, bound book 110.
18. Glos R.O., GBR B3/2, pp 19, 56, 194; GBR F4/3; D936 A1/2.
19. Glos R.O., P51 IN 1/2; P241 IN 1/4.
20. Glos R.O., P347 IN 1/1; P246 IN 1/1.
21. D. Verey, *The buildings of England: Gloucestershire*, 2. *The vale and the forest* (1970), 80, 89, 93, 280.
22. W.E. Tate, *The parish chest* (1946), 41.
23. Glos R.O., P197 CW 2/1; P154/6 CW 1/1.
24. Berkeley Castle, General series, bound book 110.

25. Glos R.O., GBR B3/2, pp 19, 56, 194; GBR F4/3; D936 A1/2.
26. I. Gray and E. Ralph, *A guide to the parish records of Bristol and Gloucestershire* (1963); J.E. Gethyn-Jones, *The story of our parish registers, yours and mine*, (1957).
27. Glos R.O., D2078 (Acc 4311, box 24/8).
28. Glos R.O., GBR B3/2, pp 194, 536, 572, 747, 768, 846; GBR F4/6, pp. 4,33.
29. Glos R.O., GBR 4/6, pp 390, 408; GBR B3/3, pp 310, 527, 645; GBR B3/7 f 271; GBR B3/8 p 127.
30. Glos R.O., GBR 3/8 pp 245, 250–2, 262; Bodleian Library, MS Top. Gloucs.e.1, f 21.
31. Glos R.O., GBR 3/8, pp 362, 514, 580, 629; GBR B3/9, f 38.
32. Glos R.O., GBR 3/9, ff 38, 77, 93, 105; GBR F4/8, p 310.
33. Bodleian Library. MS. Top. Gloucs. c.5, p. 58.
34. *H.M.C. 12th report*, 46–47 and App IX 400–520 (1890–91). In the Gloucestershire Record Office catalogue of the corporation records compiled by Mrs Margaret Richards c. 1980–85 Stevenson's chronological order has been collated with Worrall's archival arrangement.
35. I.E. Gray and A.T. Gaydon, *Gloucestershire quarter sessions archives 1660–1889 and other official records: a descriptive catalogue* (1958), ix, 33, 35.
36. Glos R.O., GDR 272A Liber munimentorum, ff 33–34.
37. Ex inf the Duke of Beaufort's archivist, Mrs Margaret Richards, in 1987.
38. Glos R.O., D2026 A1.
39. C.R. Elrington, 'Records of the cordwainers' society of Tewkesbury, 1562–1941', *TBGAS* 85 (1966), 165.
40. They were discovered during alterations to a house at the north end of the High Street c. 1975. Their owner, Miss Birch, would not allow them to be borrowed for transcription or photocopying. Though damaged, they contained legible entries relating to the distribution of goods from Bristol up river towards Worcester and Stratford at the end of the 17th and beginning of the 18th century.
41. Glos R.O., P136 IN 1/3.
42. Glos R.O., D149 T1022–1081 *passim*. Some may be attributed to Joseph Haynes of Frampton.
43. Glos R.O., P163 IN 1/1; P154/14 IN 1/1.
44. Glos R.O., D108 M52–54.
45. I am grateful to Mrs Richards for this reference and the following description.
46. Berkeley Castle, General series, bound book 174.
47. Glos R.O., D1799 A58, E184; B.S. Smith, 'Blathwayt of Dyrham Park archives', *Archives* 5 (1962), 224–5.
48. *TBGAS* 12 (1887–8), 220–34.
49. Glos R.O., P110 CW 2/1.
50. Glos R.O., P241 VE 2/1.
51. Glos R.O., D1340 A1/M10; B1/M2; B2/M5.
52. Glos R.O., P107 CW2/1.
53. Glos R.O., P369 IN 1/1.
54. Glos R.O., Q/AR 1/1.
55. Glos R.O., Q/AR 2/1.
56. As at Oxenhall in 1840, Glos R.O., P241 VE2/1.
57. Glos R.O., P217 VE2/2.
58. Glos R.O., Q/AR 2/2.
59. *H.M.C. Fourth report*, xiv–xv and App 364–367; *Fifth report*, x and App 333–360; *Twelfth report*, 12–13, 46–47 and App 1–115, 397–520; *Eighteenth report*, 206–211; *Various collections*, 44–69.
60. *A catalogue of county records and of the most important books and documents relating to county administration . . . of Gloucestershire* (1898).
61. Glos R.O., TBR A1/10.
62. I.M. Kirby, *Diocese of Gloucester: a catalogue of the records of the dean and chapter* (1967), 2.
63. I.H. Jeayes, *Descriptive catalogue of the charters and muniments . . . at Berkeley Castle* (1892); *Calendar of the charters, rolls and other documents . . . at Sherborne House* (1900).
64. I. Kirby, 'Gloucester diocesan records', *TBGAS* 87 (1968), 119–130.