

**ACCOUNTS OF THE PRIORY OF
WORCESTER, FOR THE YEAR 13-
14 HENRY VIII: A.D. 1521-2 AND A
CATALOGUE OF THE ROLLS OF
THE OBEDIENTIARIES**

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Catalogue of the Rolls of the Obedientiaries by James Maurice Wilson & J. Harvey Bloom &
Sidney G. Hamilton

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ACCOUNTS OF THE PRIORY OF
WORCESTER

FOR THE YEAR 13-14 HENRY VIII.
A.D. 1521-2.

EDITED FOR THE WORCESTERSHIRE HISTORICAL SOCIETY,
BY THE REV. JAMES MAURICE WILSON, D.D.,
Canon of Worcester.

AND A CATALOGUE OF THE
ROLLS OF THE OBEDIENTIARIES

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1907.

PREFACE.

THE historical documents, which have been in the care of the Dean and Chapter of Worcester since the Dissolution of the monastery, are numerous and varied. Those charters and letters which possess obvious historical interest have been, for the most part, long ago published by antiquaries and historians. But there remain many documents, still unread, which may be of use to students of mediæval and monastic history, and may possess a wider interest. I do not possess the knowledge requisite to trace the past history of these documents, or to indicate the various volumes in which those which have been published may be read. That must be done by some one else. The object of this preface is only to put on record some account of what has recently happened to them, and to state what is their present condition.

In the fourteenth Report, Appendix, Part VIII., of the Historical Documents Commission, 1895, Mr. Reginald Lane Poole has given the following outline:—"The Records of the Prior and Convent," he writes, "and of their successors the Dean and Chapter of the Cathedral Church of St. Mary, Worcester, are preserved in a room adjoining the Bishop's Registry in the Gateway Tower, to which they were removed in recent years from the long chamber over the south aisle of the nave of the Church, where is now the Cathedral Library. The muniments have in past time suffered considerably from damp and the ravages of mice. At present there is no danger of damp since fires are constantly kept in two or three of the adjoining rooms, and both in January and in April I have found the documents in a satisfactorily dry condition." Mr. Poole notes, however, that the shelves are not high enough for the books to stand upright, and that the charters require to be laid out flat, and numbered, and so arranged that any one can easily be found.

As to the place from which the documents were removed to

the Gateway or 'Edgar' Tower, it seems to me possible that Mr. Poole misunderstood the information given him. It is a small matter, but not without interest. In the triforium over the south aisle of the nave of the Cathedral there are, and must always have been, two rooms, separated by a stone wall. One is over the two western bays; the other, higher by five steps, over the seven eastern bays of the south aisle. The former of these two rooms is the antechamber to the latter; and the latter is 'the long chamber where is now the Cathedral library.' The spiral staircase by which the library is approached leads up the south-western turret of the aisle into the antechamber; and another spiral staircase leads up the south-western turret of the nave from the antechamber into the clerestory, and thence to the roof of the nave. It was, I think, in the short antechamber, not in the long chamber or library, or possibly in one of the compartments into which the long chamber was then divided, that the documents were housed in those recent years to which Mr. Poole refers.

For, in the first place, Alderman Noake, writing in 1866 (*Monastery and Cathedral of Worcester*, p. 410), says explicitly that he consulted the documents "in the triforium over the two western bays of the south side of the nave."

And, in the next place, a former member of the Cathedral choir school, now a respected clergyman in the diocese, lately told me how, at about this date, he and another choir-boy used to get into the Cathedral by night, while some repairs were going on. He pointed out to me a window in the west staircase of the north aisle of the nave by which at that time it was possible to enter. On one occasion they went up to the roof of the nave, crossed the vaulting, and descended, by the staircase I have mentioned, into the southern triforium, and there, in the small antechamber, they found themselves among the documents. He selected a stout and large one, as suitable for a drum, and carried it off. But it was unfortunately discovered by the Headmaster, who ascertained that it had come from the muniment room, and ordered him to replace it. The Headmaster does not seem to have enquired how the muniment room was entered, nor whether his orders to replace the document were carried out.

These two testimonies are, I think, conclusive that in the middle of the nineteenth century the documents were stored, at any rate

in part, in the antechamber to the library, over the two western bays of the south aisle.

It may be possible to go back one step farther in their history. In 1827 a chapter order was made that "The chapter records and documents now kept in the muniment room be divided, and all which are not necessary for immediate reference to be placed in the new muniment room, and the latter to be transferred to the lower presses of the Chapter Library, with new keys in triplicate for the Dean, the Receiver, and the Treasurer."

If this was carried out it seems probable that the 'new muniment room' here spoken of is identical with the antechamber to the library; but there is nothing to shew what room is referred to as 'the muniment room' in which up to that date the documents were kept.

The collection of documents has suffered not only from damp, and the indiscriminate destruction by mice, beetles, and choir-boys, but even more severely by the discerning selection by antiquaries, collectors and other visitors, who appear to have had, at certain periods, easy access to the documents. For example, of the 420 charters and indentures catalogued with great care by Dr. Peter Prattinton in 1824, about 70 are now missing, as I am informed by the Rev. J. Harvey Bloom; and several of the ancient charters, referred to by historians as in our collection, are no longer to be found. Mr. R. L. Poole wrote to me on 20 May, 1907:—"The collection has indeed suffered more than most in the last two centuries. At one time it was perhaps unequalled in its store of Anglo-Saxon and Norman Charters: witness Wanley's list in Hickeys' Thesaurus. But I suspect that former Deans and Prebendaries must have been unduly generous in presenting them to their friends. It is clear that the first Lord Somers became possessed of a good many of them; and some seem to have passed into the hands of William Lambard. But no small loss has occurred within living memory. When I was working in the 'Edgar' Tower I met an old man who had formerly been a clerk in the registry. He told me of a box full of Anglo-Saxon Charters which he remembered to have been destroyed by rain coming in from the roof."

In the autumn of 1906 I looked at some of the documents in the drawers and shelves and boxes, both in the small room adjoining the Bishop's Registry and in the turret approached by step-ladder

from it, and found that they were suffering from dirt as well as from the want of room and absence of arrangement described by Mr. Poole; and with the advice of Mr. Charles Sayle, of the Cambridge University Library, who was then staying with me, I formed an outline of a plan for dealing with them. In November of that year the Chapter adopted the plan, and gave me permission to remove them to my house for cleaning and smoothing and for preliminary classification, with a view to final removal to boxes in properly constructed cases to be placed in our Cathedral library, and authorised the subsequent preparation of a catalogue by some competent person.

Our chapter clerk, Mr. J. H. Hooper, who has long been interested in these documents, and, as Deputy Steward of the Manors which passed in 1859 into the hands of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, has also the care of the Manor and Court rolls, kindly gave me every facility for the removal; and also allowed the Manor and Court rolls to be sent with the rest, for examination and cataloguing. These will remain in the library, in the possession of the Dean and Chapter, but under the custody of the chapter clerk.

The number of documents proved to be far greater than any one had anticipated, and the cleaning, pressing, and sorting of them occupied me during the first three months of 1907. In April, in pursuance of the permission granted me by the Dean and Chapter, I asked the Rev. J. Harvey Bloom, M.A., Vicar of Whitchurch, Stratford-on-Avon, who had done similar work elsewhere, to come and take entire charge of the work of preparing a Catalogue of the whole collection; the Chapter having made a grant to meet the necessary expense. He discharged the work with great promptness; and the documents are now classified under the heads shewn in the next paragraph; arranged in each class, numbered, and an abstract made of each; stamped as belonging to the Dean and Chapter; and placed in 120 cardboard boxes, similar to those used in the British Museum. Catalogues are made of each class, so that any document can be at once found. These catalogues will of course need careful revision, and then it is hoped will be indexed and published.

The classes are as follows :—

- A. The volumes of MS. arranged and numbered to correspond with Mr. Poole's numbers in the Report referred to (pp. 165—184). So far as they go, all of these are in the cases, with the exception of the volume marked XV. Of these there are 213.
- B. Charters and indentures, &c., numbering more than 1,800.
- C. Rolls and Accounts of the officers of the Convent and the balliffs of their estates. Of these there are more than 900, of which about 500 belong to the former class.
- D. Correspondence.
- E. Manor and Court rolls.
- F. Documents which appear to belong to the Bishop rather than to the Chapter, or refer to other dioceses than Worcester.
- G. Fragments.

These documents are referred to by the letter giving the class, and the number of the particular document.

During the process of cleaning and sorting the documents, and afterwards availing myself occasionally of Mr. Bloom's kind assistance, I became able to read some of them, and thought that the publication of some of the Compotus rolls, in Class C, would be of value to historical students, as an illustration of what our collection contains. The documents are far too numerous to be all printed; and I finally selected for various reasons the accounts for the year 13-14 Henry VIII. [1521-2], which are on paper, and fastened together as a volume—A xvii. in the catalogue. I subsequently discovered that these accounts exist in roll form in C. 106. The transcription of the accounts of the obedientiaries, or the officials of the monastery, for that year forms the nucleus of the paper that follows.

I am fortunate enough to be able to publish along with this a corresponding portion of Mr. Bloom's catalogue of our MSS. The portion now published is that part of Class C, about half, which contains the accounts of the obedientiaries. This will shew to all students what we possess of such records. The Catalogue was made in April and May, 1907, by Mr. Bloom, and was carefully revised by Mr. S. G. Hamilton, M.A., Librarian of Hertford College, Oxford,

in the autumn of the same year. It will be remembered that Mr. Hamilton, in co-operation with Mr. Floyer, prepared the Catalogue of the M.S. books still remaining in the Cathedral library, which formed part of the library of the monastery.

It is scarcely necessary to add that these documents are published with the sanction of the Dean and Chapter.

JAMES M. WILSON.

COLLEGE, WORCESTER.
November, 1907.