

**THE KEY TO THE FAMILY DEED
CHEST. HOW TO DECIPHER AND
STUDY OLD DOCUMENTS; BEING
A GUIDE TO THE READING OF
ANCIENT MANUSCRIPTS**

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The key to the family deed chest. How to decipher and study old documents; being a guide to the reading of ancient manuscripts by E. E. Thoys

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HOW TO DECIPHER

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*BEING A GUIDE TO THE READING OF
ANCIENT MANUSCRIPTS*

BY

E. E. THOYTS

(MRS. JOHN HAUTENVILLE COPE)

WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY

C. TRICE MARTIN

ASSISTANT KEEPER OF U.S. RECORDS.

SECOND EDITION

LONDON

ELLIOT STOCK, 62, PATERNOSTER ROW

1903



PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

JUST ten years ago this little volume made its first appearance. Although many books on similar subjects have been written in that time, none have exactly given the same information, and this second edition has been decided upon. Additions and corrections to bring the book up to date have been made, but much still remains, and must remain, imperfect in so small a work on so large a subject, and the present pages only profess to help beginners over some of the initial difficulties they will meet with.

It has been urged that handwriting and its characteristics have nothing to do with old deeds, but careful study of every line and letter is useful, especially with regard to private letters, or when any question arises as to whether the manuscripts are genuine or forgeries. That is why the second chapter, on handwriting and descriptions of old ink, paper, and paper marks and seals, was written, for all such items *are* of great importance.

A recent celebrated trial (the Shipway case, in which an old register was altered) shows that careful attention to minute details is necessary. Parish registers have not, and are not, at the present moment protected against frauds of this kind, which are far less common than might be supposed.

Old deeds are now bought and sold; it is a trade quite as much as that in old books. Some years ago, in Edinburgh, a number of clever forgeries were sold as genuine, which if they had been so would have cleared up a historical question of great importance.

Many friends who helped me when I first wrote the book are, alas! dead; only their letters remain, and from these I have used extracts in revising this edition.

Mr. Trice Martin has most kindly read it through and criticised it, as he did ten years ago, and if mistakes still remain, I trust my readers will be lenient. It must, however, be remembered that I am writing only about the class of deeds which are usually met with in old houses, and not attempting to describe every description of charter or deed.

EMMA ELIZABETH COPE.



AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION.

IN the following pages I have tried to describe the things which puzzled me when, as a beginner, I first essayed to read and understand the old records of bygone times. Written in a language I knew not, relating to customs no longer existing, all was strange and unfamiliar. I toiled on; by degrees light dawned and the difficulties melted away. The knowledge thus gained I have endeavoured, in all humility, to write down as a possible guide and help to others who may, like myself, prefer to follow antiquarian research by means of old deeds and other manuscripts, as being the original source and most trustworthy fountain-head of knowledge, and by this means to avoid as much as possible repeating the assertions and mistakes of previous writers.

In the chapter on Paleography I have named the books which were my guides, and in these pages I have tried to supply information supplementary to what is already printed on the subject, rather than repeat what has previously been explained. The growing fashion for all kinds of antiquarianism creates a desire for books treating upon such subjects, and this has induced me to write this book.

E. E. THOYTS.

SULHAMSTEAD,
May, 1893.





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