

KINGS' BRIEFS; THEIR PURPOSES AND HISTORY

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Kings' Briefs; Their Purposes and History by Cornelius Walford

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CORNELIUS WALFORD

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THEIR PURPOSES
AND HISTORY**

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KINGS' BRIEFS;
THEIR PURPOSES AND HISTORY.

*being a Paper read before the Royal Historical Society, and reprinted
from its Transactions, Vol. X.*

BY
ORNELIUS WALFORD, F.I.A., F.S.S., F. R. HIST. SO.,
BARRISTER-AT-LAW.

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1882.

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1. The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions and activities. It emphasizes that proper record-keeping is essential for transparency and accountability, particularly in the context of public administration and financial management. The text highlights that records should be kept in a secure, accessible, and organized manner to facilitate audits and ensure compliance with relevant laws and regulations.

2. The second part of the document addresses the challenges associated with record-keeping, such as data loss, corruption, and unauthorized access. It suggests implementing robust security measures, including encryption, access controls, and regular backups, to mitigate these risks. Additionally, it stresses the need for staff training and awareness to ensure that records are handled responsibly and in accordance with best practices.

3. The third part of the document focuses on the integration of record-keeping with other organizational processes. It argues that records should not be treated as isolated entities but rather as integral components of the overall workflow. This involves streamlining data entry, automating routine tasks, and ensuring that records are updated in real-time to reflect the current state of affairs. The text also mentions the importance of interoperability between different systems to avoid data silos and ensure consistency across the organization.

4. The fourth part of the document discusses the role of records in decision-making and strategic planning. It notes that well-maintained records provide valuable insights into organizational performance, trends, and risks. By analyzing historical data, management can identify areas for improvement, allocate resources more effectively, and make informed decisions about the future. The text also highlights that records can serve as a legal and regulatory shield, providing evidence in case of disputes or investigations.

5. The fifth part of the document concludes by reiterating the significance of record-keeping and the need for continuous improvement. It encourages organizations to regularly review their record-keeping practices, adopt new technologies, and stay updated on industry standards. The text ends with a call to action, urging all stakeholders to take ownership of their records and ensure that they are always accurate, complete, and secure.

P R E F A C E.

To readers who occasionally find relaxation in pursuing the by-paths of history the subject here treated of may, perchance, open new considerations and lead on to further investigations. I shall regard it as a favour to be kept informed of any new stores of information regarding Briefs, or to receive intimation of their application to purposes I have not yet discovered.

THE AUTHOR.

86, BELSIZE PARK GARDENS,
London, February, 1882.

KINGS' BRIEFS:

THEIR PURPOSES AND HISTORY.

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I.—DEFINITION AND PURPOSES.

KINGS' Briefs, under a variety of designations—as Kings' Letters, Orders in Council, Patents of Alms, Letters Patent, Fire Briefs, Church Briefs, Charity Briefs, Commissions, Royal

Letters, &c., &c.—have played an important part in the social history of this country, and yet our national historians have been remarkably silent concerning them ; as indeed they have been upon many other matters of great social interest. It seems hardly necessary to say that the term "Brief" has several significations. In its more common acceptation it is a short writing or epitome, as an abridgment of a law case, made out for instruction to counsel, or indeed any short statement of facts. But there are "Apostolical Briefs," being letters or written messages of the Pope, addressed to princes or magistrates, respecting matters of public concern.* It is not to these exclusively that we must look for light in the present instance. The word was, in early times, written "Breve," and Cowell, in his Law Dictionary, says, "Any writ or precept from the King was called *Breve* ; which we still retain in the name of *Brief*, the King's Letters Patent to poor sufferers, for Collection." The general title of "King's Briefs" used in England, is traceable to the fact that these documents, under whatever designation adopted, or for whatever purpose designed, were in later times issued under the direct authority of the sovereign ; at first under his personal authority, but later under the authority of the Council, through the Lord Chancellor. But it will be made clear that the Church exercised the right of issuing them, not only prior to, but apparently coeval with the sovereign at one period.

The purposes for which the briefs, of which I now propose to treat, were issued, vary considerably ; yet it may be taken for granted that the design was usually one of a charitable character, but not always so. Great calamities, either to communities or individuals, probably first gave rise to their use. By their aid the losses of the few could be relieved or mitigated by the contributions of the many. I will here

* Those Papal briefs are written short without preface or preamble, and on paper, which distinguishes them from "Bulls," which are written on parchment. Again, "Briefs" are sealed with red wax and the seal of the fisherman, or St. Peter in a boat and always in the presence of the Pope.—*Vincent*.

classify the more general of their uses, which will become developed as we proceed :

- A. *Great Calamities*, as (1) Fires ; (2) Floods ; (3) Earthquakes ; (4) Hailstorms ; (5) Irruptions of the Sea ; (6) Shipwrecks ; (7) Landslips ; (8) Plague Visitations ; (9) Restoring bridges washed away and building new ones.
- B. *Religious or Benevolent Purposes*, as (1) Building or restoring churches ; (2) Founding or sustaining Hospitals ; (3) Helping the poor and afflicted ; (4) Redeeming persons sold into captivity ; (5) Relieving communities suffering persecution for conscience' sake ; (6) Relieving persons robbed either land or by pirates at sea.
- C. *National Projects*. (1) Founding a Royal fishery ; (2) To repair damages resulting from civil war ; (3) To relieve soldiers wounded in the wars.

II.—MODE OF ISSUING BRIEFS.

The machinery by which a brief was obtained, where the occasion was not one of such an obvious character as to put the sovereign or his council in voluntary motion, appears to have been, in early times, through the interest of some nobleman or person of distinction attached to the court of the sovereign. In later times (17th century) by certificate of Quarter Sessions ; or, when in the city of London, by the mayor and aldermen (*see 1712*). I do not think it by any means follows that a petition for a brief was assented to as of course ; but no doubt the result was much influenced by the rank and position of those who certified on the merits of the case.

A Patent of Alms was another form of brief intended to be used personally, and without the organized machinery used in the case of ordinary briefs.

The direct object of the brief was always the same, viz., to obtain contributions from the charitable throughout the kingdom towards mitigating the severity of calamities happening to places or persons ; or for raising money for purposes likely