

The Work of the Bridgwater Clerks, c.1200-1550

The grant provided for this project was intended to be devoted to the photographic recording of the instruments written by the clerks of Bridgwater in the period c.1200-1550. The purpose of this work was better to enable detailed research on the material culture of these instruments and their production, the work of the clerks in writing these instruments, and their attached seals. The research was carried out in the time available from the making of the grant to the closure of the Somerset Record Office in March 2010. The basic photographic record of c.2000 documents was completed by the time of the closure which delayed the last phase of the work which remains to be done. This will be undertaken at the Somerset Heritage Centre. Payment of £1175, for the first phase, was made to Richard Sainsbury of Delmar Studio through the SANHS Office on 7 July 2010. The residue of the grant will be used for the completion of the project and especially for detailed research arising from the findings of the first phase, e.g. illustration by means of palaeographic example of particular clerks and their work.

The research project is intended to have publication outcomes, in particular a monograph comprising work on the Bridgwater archive photographed and two or three papers on special aspects, e.g. a detailed study of one especially distinguished clerk, his life, career, and work; a study of the use of seals; the chronology and consequences of the use of paper, etc. The work on the monograph is already far advanced. So far materials derived from the project have been used for a number of public seminars and lectures for SANHS and other institutions:

1. Seminar on 'The Medieval Seals of Somerset' held in the SRO in collaboration with the staff of the Record Office, one of the county archaeologists and the historian James Skeggs (March 2010).
2. Lecture on 'The Work of the Clerks of Bridgwater, c. 1200-1340' (Blake Museum, Bridgwater, organised with SANHS).
3. Talk to the Somerset Heraldry Society on 'The Use of Seals in Medieval Somerset' (Langport, April 2010).
4. Lecture on 'The Clerk Who Lost His Boat, c. 1376-1430' (Blake Museum, Bridgwater, July 2010, organised with the Friends of Somerset Archives).
5. Day school at Dillington House entitled 'Seals and Sealmakers' (Dillington House, 28 October 2010).

As part of comparative work in other archives in Somerset, carried out as part of the Bridgwater project, I have also been looking at the Wells archives, town and cathedral. This led to the publication of an article on a rare seal in the Wells town archive in the Spring 2010 edition of the SANHS Newsletter.

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