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Guide to the Sir Nicholas Bacon Collection of English Court and Manorial Documents circa 1200-1785



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Descriptive Summary

Identifier	ICU.SPCL.BACON
Title	Sir Nicholas Bacon Collection of English Court and Manorial Documents
Date	1200-1785
Size	circa 4600 items
Repository	Special Collections Research Center University of Chicago Library 1100 East 57th Street Chicago, Illinois 60637 U.S.A.
Abstract	The Sir Nicholas Bacon Collection comprises a chronological series of English court and manorial documents spanning the period from 1200 to 1785. The core of the collection consists of the muniments of title, court rolls, account rolls, rentals, and other documents that came to Sir Nicholas Bacon (1510-1579), Lord Keeper of the Great Seal under Queen Elizabeth and father of Sir Francis Bacon, when he purchased monastic and other lands in the mid-sixteenth century.

Information on Use

Access

The collection is open for research. To request materials from this collection, please contact the Special Collections Research Center.

Citation

When quoting material from this collection, the preferred citation is: Sir Nicholas Bacon Collection of English Court and Manorial Documents, [Bacon MS#], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library

Historical Note

The Sir Nicholas Bacon Collection contains the muniments of title, court rolls, account rolls, rentals, and other documents which came to Sir Nicholas Bacon, Lord Keeper of the Great Seal under Queen Elizabeth and father of Sir Francis Bacon, when he purchased monastic and other lands in the mid-sixteenth century. While numerous families and properties are represented in the Bacon collection, the great majority of the manuscripts are concerned with the Bacons and their holdings in East Anglia and London. Preserving a fine chronological series of manorial court and account rolls spanning, in certain localities, four centuries, the Bacon collection provides an unusually detailed view of the development of English rural and agricultural society.

Much of the material relates to Redgrave Hall, Sir Nicholas Bacon's chief seat and a former manorial holding of the Monastery of Bury St. Edmunds. Other lands from the Monastery of Bury St. Edmunds acquired by Sir Nicholas were Rickinghall, Wortham, Hindercley, Burgate, and Gislingham, all in Suffolk. Other properties of the Lord Keeper were Mettingham College, Mellis St. Johns, Wiverston, Brandon, Ingham, Tymworth, Plaford in Barnhams, Bramfelde, Parham and others in Suffolk; Stanforde, Stoddy, Stiffkey and Eccles in Norfolk; Markes in Essex; Cheddar in Somerset; various London properties; Gorhamburie in Hertfordshire; and others. Records of the Gorhamburie estate left to Sir Francis Bacon do not occur in the collection, except for occasional references in the Bacon rolls, nor do any documents occur relating to the philosopher-statesman himself.

The Bacon lands, and therefore the Bacon muniments, increased with the marriage of Sir Nicholas, eldest son of Sir Nicholas the Lord Keeper, to Anne, daughter of the Tudor court physician, Sir William Butts. This marriage brought into Bacon control the Norfolk lands of Thornage, Riborough, Culford, etc., and the lands of Foxerth and Pentlowe in Essex and Reydon in Suffolk. These three latter manors had come to the Butts family by marriages with the Bures family, prominent in East Anglia during the Middle Ages. Reydon had previously come to the Bures family by an early sixteenth century marriage with the Reydon family, so that all three families--Butts, Bures, and Reydon--are well represented in the collection.

Another important part of the collection is the papers of Sir Robert Drury, the younger Sir Nicholas' son-in-law. Finally there are the title deeds connected with the breakup of the Bacon estates in the later seventeenth century, a disintegration which began with the death of Sir Edmund Bacon, the Lord Keeper's grandson, in 1649, and some papers of Sir John Holt, Chief Justice of the Kings Bench, who subsequently purchased Redgrave. Numerous other persons, families, and properties are represented in the collection, but this description accounts for the main accumulations. The great majority of the manuscripts are concerned with East Anglia and London.

With the approach of the law of Property Act of 1924, the Holt-Wilson family, descendants of Sir John Holt, placed the above described manuscripts for sale with Bernard Quaritch, Ltd., the London book-seller. The collection was listed in Quaritch catalogue No. 380 (December, 1923) as lots 213 and 214. A list made by the antiquary Edmund Farrer formed the basis for the description in the catalogue. Professor C. R. Baskerville of the University of Chicago English Department persuaded the University to acquire the collection and Martin A. Ryerson generously provided funds for its purchase. Professor John M. Manly, Edith Rickert and Lillian Redstone were active in the purchase negotiations. Portions of the Holt-Wilson collection also were acquired by the British Museum, and by Edmund Farrer. Further information on the provenance of the collection may be found in C.R. Bald, Donne and the Drurys (1959).

The tin muniment boxes formerly used for storage at Redgrave Hall arrived with their contents at the University in 1924, and the work of cataloguing was undertaken by Edith Rickert and

other members of the English Department who were working concurrently on the Manly-Rickert edition of the *Canterbury Tales* and the Chaucer life-records. Nearly all of the deeds had been indexed by Rickert by the time of her death in 1936. After her death the collection saw little use for nearly fifteen years until Professor C. R. Bald of the English Department stumbled on a John Donne holograph while searching for an example of sixteenth century handwriting. This discovery led to revived interest in the collection, several books, Ph.D. dissertations, Master's theses, and the present catalogue.

Scope Note

When the Puritan pamphleteer William Prynne (1600-1669) was sorting documents during his imprisonment in the Tower of London (1634-1640) he complained that he had only divided them into "separate confused heaps." In the present arrangement of the Bacon manuscripts, the heaps are neat enough; the only problem is that essentially unified groups of manuscripts have been separated. Because the original organization of the documents could not be reconstructed, the method of organization here adopted is an artificially systematic one, based on the type of document and chronology, rather than on clusters of documents relating to the same transaction.

The collection has been divided into two main series. Series I contains primarily manorial records, while Series II includes mostly manuscripts which pertain more to individuals, such as title deeds, letters, and acquittances.

Series I: Manorial Records

Series I is subdivided into three categories by physical format: rolls, books, and single sheets. The manuscripts in these sub-sections are further classified by the type of document (court roll, compotus roll, rentals, etc.) and finally by manor. The order in which the manors are represented was determined for the most part by the amount of material in the collection for each manor. Thus Redgrave, Wortham, Hinderley, and Burgate with large numbers of records come first--or, generally speaking, the Suffolk manors--followed by manors in Norfolk, Essex, and other counties.

The types of documents in Series I include:

a) Court Records.

These are the records of the various manorial courts (Court Baron, Court Leet, etc.) which were held by the Lord of the Manor or his bailiff. They were written on parchment membranes, with a varying number of membranes comprising each year's record of court proceedings. Membranes for several years were then rolled together into a bundle. The manuscript description in the

inventory gives the dates of the rolls, first regnal, and then chronological. The rolls for the Monastery of Bury St. Edmunds, the Bishop of Norwich (Thornage) and the Bishop of Ely (Brandon) are dated by the year of the Abbot of Bury St. Edmunds until the Dissolution, and by the year of the bishop until the fifteenth and fourteenth centuries respectively. They are also dated by the regnal year as are all other rolls in the collection with the exception of those from the years of the Commonwealth and Protectorate, 1649-1659. The regnal, abbatial and episcopal dates are given in the second column, and the interpolated calendar dates are in the third column. Rolls not on parchment and other exceptional features of a given roll are noted at the end of the description.

b) Compotus Accounts.

The record of manorial accounts was kept on a single continuous roll of several parchment membranes sewn together, each manor having its own roll. One compotus covered a single year from Michaelmas [September 29] to Michaelmas. During the earlier middle ages some accounts were kept for a half year, Michaelmas to Lady Day [March 25], or even from other feast days--see Hinderley Manor in this collection. The rolls are therefore arranged by regnal and abbatial years (the episcopal year was only used on the first roll of Brandon in this collection) and Michaelmas to Michaelmas is to be assumed unless otherwise noted in parentheses. Paper rolls, rolls in English rather than Latin and unusual features of these manuscripts are noted in parentheses after the regnal date. One exceptional group of compotus rolls is that of the Bacon family. The Bacon family kept consolidated accounts for all their manors, with several membranes representing several manors in each roll. Furthermore the first three Bacon account rolls (and one paper kept by them for Foxerth) from the reign of Mary are in English.

c) Receiver's Accounts.

These were a further consolidation of accounts made by Sir Nicholas Bacon, Lord Keeper, and included income from his offices as well as the manorial income found on the compotus rolls. This type of account was often kept by large magnates of the sixteenth century. [For an explanation of this type of document see: M. E. James (ed.), *Estate Accounts of the Earls of Northumberland, 1562--1637* (Publications of the Surtees Society, XXIII, Durham, 1955), xxiv-1v.]

d) Rentals, Firmals, Extents, and Surveys, and

e) Parcelas and Particulars, and

f) Extents, Surveys, Valors (Inquisitions Post Mortem).

These classes of similar documents give literal descriptions (rather than a measured plat as in modern property surveys) of pieces of property, with their boundaries and the rents and services due from them--although the rents might be omitted in an extent. Parcellas and particulars are similar in nature to the rentals, etc., but they usually contain lists of several properties pertaining to an individual or institution. The valor or inquisition post mortem is a special case of parcella or particular compiled after the death of an individual.

g) Inventories.

Similar in nature to the parcellas and particulars, they are concerned with goods and chattels rather than lands. The household inventory is a list of the possessions of a given house listed room by room.

In addition to the rolls in which the above types of documents (classes a-g) are most frequently found in this collection, there are also books and single sheets containing the same classes of documents.

h) Lists of Evidences (in Books).

These are mostly inventories of documents being used in a particular court litigation and shipped from the muniment room to the court, although they might be compiled for documents being shipped for some other purpose, such as a problem of estate management. Of particular interest in this category are the "Kalendar" made by the Lord Keeper in 1549 (MS 995) of all his rolls for his Suffolk and Norfolk lands and the "Extract of the contents of Sir Edward Bacon's Evidence Chamber at Redgrave" of 1657 (MS 1018).

i) Copies of Court Rolls (in Single sheets).

The documents in this category were commonly used to prove title from the late fifteenth through the late seventeenth centuries and beyond. They were extracts from the court roll of the manor which recorded the surrender of a piece of property by one individual and the admittance of another individual to the same piece of property in the manor or some other transfer of property recognized by the lord of the manor. Only the name of the person appearing before the court is given in the entries in this calendar, although other persons were often named in the document as being parties to the transaction recorded. Nearly all the copies of court rolls in the collection can be matched with original entries in the collection's court rolls proper.

j) Estreats of Court Rolls (in Single sheets).

These extracts for proof of title were usually made for the use of the lord of the manor rather than for the tenant.

k) Miscellaneous Manorial Documents (mostly in Single sheets).

These are mainly accounts of bailiffs or rentals or surveys. Wood sales are a particularly numerous type of account in this section. Any manuscripts which related to a particular manor, including odd scraps of computation and a "Note of Cheese" left at the Drury's Hawsted House, have been placed in this category. Of particular interest are three plats of properties (MSS 1399, 1415, and 1442). The latter is especially fine with tinted field and pasted overlays.

Series II: Manuscripts

In Series II are found the deeds and charters together with letters, bonds and acquittances, law cases and other documents which pertain more to persons than to manors. The categories of documents in Section II and the conventions used in describing them are as follows:

a) Charters and Deeds.

Of the thirteen classes of information which the British Records Association suggested for inclusion in a description of a deed, all but one, witnesses, have been at least partially realized. The classes of information appear in the description in the following order:

Manuscript number

Regnal Date; 1. First party 2. Second party [other parties may follow]; Places and Subject of Transaction (Field names are indicated by "X"); Consideration; Description of Instrument; Endorsements [only given occasionally in this calendar] (Language, Material, and Remarks)

Date [interpolated]

Seals

When a document in Series II bears seals or seal tags, this is indicated in by a notation, such as 1*3. The first number denotes the number of seals, the second the number of tags. The symbol f*1 indicates that a fragment of a seal is attached to the manuscript; s*1 means that it has been slit for a seal but no tag is attached.

b) Obligatory Bonds.

Obligatory Bonds were used to insure payment of money and had a very distinctive format. On one side was a Latin formula reciting the parties with the essential phrase *teneri et firmi obligari* and the penalty of the bond; the penalty is given in this calendar as the first entry after the parties. On the opposite side, in English and signed by the parties, was the condition of the bond given in the calendar as the entry after the penalty. "Cancelled" indicates that the document has been voided by scoring (example: #2926 in the inventory). In the earliest bonds the format could vary and the entire bond would often be in Latin. Otherwise the entries for bonds follow the same format as that used for charters and deeds.

c) Recognizances.

Recognizances were special forms of bonds which were recorded in a court of law to give them added authority and greater surety of enforcement. A further special case of bond was the statute staple wherein the parties registered their bond before the Court of the Merchants of the Staple rather than in a law court.

d) Promissory Notes.

Promissory Notes were much more informal statements of debt, usually in English and on paper and not generally including a penalty. They might be somewhat more formal than the modern "I.O.U." but were often identical in nature.

e) Bills and Receipted Bills.

Bills and Receipted Bills in this collection are lists of items or single items purchased, often from a tradesman, or services rendered. They may run through a series of dates and were often marked paid and signed at the end by the creditor indicating acquittance of the debt. They were all in English and on paper. Many of the bills in the collection were for the trousseau expenses of the younger Sir Nicholas' daughters.

f) Acquittances.

Acquittances, documents terminating debts or obligations, follow the same format as the other documents in Section II. The first party is always the acquittor. With the exception of the earlier acquittances, they were usually in English on paper. In addition to the acquittances stipulating a specific amount of money and a specific purpose, there were acquittances in which the first party acquitted the second party of all debts and actions from the beginning of the world. These were called general acquittances.

g) Letters.

Letters were generally simple pieces of correspondence, although the medieval letters in this collection may have served as instruments of title. A short summary of the contents of the letters has been included in this catalogue.

h) Estate Administration, and

i) Wills.

Estate Administration as a category refers not to management of a landed estate but to the legal affairs arising out of the executorship of a person's will. The documents included in this section, mostly accounts rendered by executors, are arranged by the name of the person whose legal estate was being administered. Closely connected with this section is the following one, Wills.

j) Marriage Agreements, and

k) Wardship, Apprenticeship, etc., and

l) Records of Birth.

Jointures and indentures of agreement connected with marriage portions have been gathered into one group. Other personal documents such as those concerned with wardship and apprenticeship and finally three records of birth have been given separate headings.

m) Legal Affairs.

Documents directly connected with court litigation and lawyers' expenses were fairly numerous in the collection and have been joined together in one category.

n) Official Papers.

These documents pertaining to national as well as local affairs range from high matters of state connected with the careers of Sir Nicholas Bacon and Sir John Holt down to petty matters of parish administration. The original endorsement on the document has most often been used to describe the manuscript.

o) Miscellaneous.

Four items comprise the miscellany. The last item belonged properly in the previous category and the other three are of quite diverse nature.

Inventory

Descriptions of individual documents may be found in the Bacon Collection database.

Related Resources

Browse finding aids by topic.

Norfolk County, Collection of English Deeds

Subject Headings

- Bacon, Nicholas, Sir, 1509-1579
- Manors -- Great Britain
- Great Britain -- Economic conditions
- Great Britain -- Social life and customs
- Legal documents -- Great Britain
- Bacon family