

ST GEORGE'S CHAPEL ARCHIVES & CHAPTER LIBRARY



Research guides

No.5 Property Records

College properties

The College of St George was founded in 1348 by Edward III to serve the Chapel of the Most Noble Order of the Garter. The establishment was to consist of twenty-four Chaplains (one being appointed Warden) and twenty-four Poor Knights and 'other ministers'. The eventual composition, as set out in the College's 1352 Statutes, differed slightly from that initially proposed, with a Warden (or Dean) and twelve other secular Canons, thirteen Priest Vicars, four Lay Clerks, six Choristers, twenty-six Poor Knights and a Virger. To support such a substantial foundation, Edward III appropriated the churches of Wraysbury, South Tawton and Uttoxeter to the College, with the incomes provided from these forming the main part of its revenues. These donations were swiftly followed by further gifts from the King, from the other Garter Knights and from the Queen so that by 1351 the College was in possession of eleven churches. In 1352 the manors of Iver and Craswell, a weir in the Thames and nearby lands in Bray were added to its endowments.

The College derived its income from six main sources: churches appropriated to its use; manors with their associated rights; obit endowments of Windsor properties; obit endowments of property outside Windsor; revenues in kind such as the last of herrings given annually by the town of Great Yarmouth; and money grants or offerings. The value of these endowments was increased by royal grants of various profits and of exemption from numerous dues and direct taxes, such as tenths and fifteenths, as well as immunity from indirect taxes such as tolls and customary payments.

In the fifteenth century, the College was greatly enriched by further major endowments. In 1421 John, Duke of Bedford, granted to the Dean and Canons of Windsor the Priory of Ogbourne, the chief and richest Benedictine Priory in England, which formed part of the Abbey of Bec in Normandy. The properties of the Priory were extensive, including nine churches and forty portions of tithes. Moreover when Edward IV re-founded the College and began to build the present St George's Chapel, he and his Queen made a series of gifts to the College between 1474 and 1481, including eight churches, fourteen manors, a hospital and two priories. The hospital was that of St Anthony, in London, which in one year alone supplemented the College's income by £549 13s 4d. Further royal benefactions of property and churches followed in the sixteenth century, the majority bequeathed under the will of Henry VIII and known collectively as the New Dotation, making St George's Chapel one of the three wealthiest ecclesiastical establishments in the kingdom, with properties worth over £2000.

The College lands were administered by the Dean and Canons, with the Canon Steward bearing responsibility for the collection of rents. Decisions to lease or appoint tenants were made in Chapter and, where they acted as lords of the manor, the Dean and Canons of Windsor administered justice through the manorial courts. This continued until 1867, when the College was obliged to surrender its landed property and tithes to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners in return for a fixed annual sum. At this point, its property and rights to tithes lay in over three hundred parishes in thirty counties in England and Wales, some of which been held since its foundation. On 1 August 1867 the Chapter Clerk was instructed to identify relevant title deeds and documents,

numbering almost four thousand, and these were sent to the London offices of the Ecclesiastical Commission (now the Church Commission) six weeks later. Following changes to property laws and manorial jurisdiction, the documents were no longer needed by the Church Commissioners and were returned to the College Archives in 1963.

What information do we hold?

Property records form the most extensive category of documents in the St George's Chapel Archives, and are extremely rich and varied. Acquired on the transfer of the property to the Dean and Canons, some of these deeds and other manuscripts predate the founding of the College, with a number dating from the twelfth century.

1. Administration of the estates

The Canon Steward by statute was responsible for receiving the revenues of the College and caring for its estates. Prior to 1867, when the properties were acquired by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, the key documents relating to estate administration are the Steward's accounts. These detail arrears due and income received from farmers and bailiffs, payments made by the Steward on estate matters, such as repairs to buildings, and necessary expenses of the Steward such as travel and accommodation during his periodic visitations of College properties. After the acquisition of additional lands in the sixteenth century, known as the New Dotation, a second Canon Steward was appointed to administer these new properties. The rolls of the Steward of the New Dotation record income and expenditure relating to new estates and, in addition, contain details of payments to Chapter for obits and to the Poor Knights for their allowances.

The principal series of Steward's accounts are the Steward's *compoti* [account rolls], dating from 1369 to 1686 (170 in total) (SGC XV.42, 48, 49, 53 & 61); the Steward's books covering the years 1681 to 1707 (SGC XII.B.1-3) and 1712 to 1724 (SGC XII.B.4); and the bound Steward's audit sheets, from 1751 to date (SGC XII.B.5-26).

The Chapter Clerk, although not part of the original College establishment specified in the Statutes, quickly became central to the administration of the College. His principal duties were the compilation of the Chapter Acts and the writing of letters *missive*, leases and other muniments. In addition, he was sent to inspect properties or hold court, assisted the Steward in the collection of rents and acted as the executive officer of Chapter. His records therefore form an important source for each property. These include a full register of leases, commenced in 1660 and continuing in subsequent volumes until 1866 (SGC VII.B.1-24, SGC IX.B.1-8); renewal of fines books covering the years 1671 to 1820 (SGC VII.A.1-2); and alienation books, which survive from 1685 to 1865 (SGC IX.B.9-12), which contain details of licences to alienate property by Chapter tenants.

The decisions of the Dean and Canons in Chapter on the appointment of tenants and leasing of property were recorded in the registers of Chapter Acts (SGC VI.B.2-19). The first extant register dates from 1596, although transcripts of some earlier Chapter Acts, 1430, 1523-1548 and 1592-1593 are contained in a memoranda book compiled in the early seventeenth century by Canon Frith (SGC IV.B.4) and, for 1523 to 1548, in Canon Evan's book compiled in 1701 (SGC IV.B.16-17). A transcription of the surviving Chapter Acts for the years 1430-1672 can be found in volume 13 of the St George's Chapel Historical Monograph series: Shelagh Bond (ed.), *The Chapter Acts of the Dean and Canons of Windsor, 1430, 1523-1672* (Windsor, 1966, whilst an unpublished transcript of the Chapter Acts for 1672 to 1684 by the Reverend M G Smith and selective indexes of later Chapter Acts (to 1986), are available for consultation in the Archives and Chapter Library.

Although many of the original records relating to the College's establishment and endowment do not survive, transcripts of most important documents were entered into the Arundel White Book (SGC IV.B.1). Begun in 1417 and continuing to 1452 it contains details of the College's early endowments, including documentation relating to the grant by John, Duke of Bedford, of the spiritualities of the priory of Ogbourne. Other cartularies include Denton's Black Book (SGC IV.B.2-3), Howel's transcript (SGC IV.B.6), Dr Derham's books (SGC IV.B.7-9) and Mr Wilson's book, a register of Chapter properties compiled between 1784 and 1804 (SGC CC 120349).

The St George's Chapel Archives contain a variety of other records relating to the overall administration of the estates, including property tax paid, timber accounts, rent ledgers and surveys. The estates were visited regularly by members of Chapter or the Chapter Clerk, and there are written accounts of these visitations dating from 1845 to 1948, which are particularly full for the Devon and Cornwall properties.

Many of the properties granted to St George's came with advowsons – the right to present a clergyman to a benefice. As a result, the College archives comprise a rich source for research on local incumbents. Particularly useful is the Livings register (SGC I.B.1*) which records details of Chapter livings, including valuations and lists of incumbents, from about 1600 to 1737. Further records, including registers and parish bundles and files maintained by the Chapter Clerk, continue this information into the twentieth century. Although its landed property was transferred to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners in 1867, the College maintains its links with its benefices, including the right of presentation, and the Chapter Office files relating to these parishes remain largely unchanged in form and content since the nineteenth century. Many decisions over the appointment of clergy are additionally recorded in the registers of Chapter Acts (SGC VI.B.2-19).

2. Records of individual properties

From the fourteenth to the late twentieth century, title deeds and related papers were stored, by property, in labelled wooden drawers in the medieval Aerary or Treasury. Transferred to the Vicars' Undercroft with the remainder of the College Archives in 1999, the Aerary muniments include:

- Title deeds of every house and field granted to the College
- Lease and counterpart leases, some containing small but detailed and exact scale plans of the property leased.
- Yearly surveys, terriers and rentals of all the properties, often with tabulated particulars of leases, fines, the condition of the farm land and houses and other details
- Annual accounts of rents received
- Court rolls and books recording the business transacted in manor courts
- Appropriation of churches
- Tithe acquittances
- Law suit records concerning property disputes
- Letters patent
- Papal bulls confirming the privileges to the College
- Records relating to enclosure
- Maps and plans of property held

For a full list of properties held by the College of St George, please refer to the printed catalogue, J.N. Dalton, *The Manuscripts of St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle*, (Windsor, 1957) pp. xxi-xxix

On-line catalogue

The property records have been catalogued electronically, and the property section of the catalogue is available via the College website (www.stgeorges-windsor.org/archives/guide-to-holdings.html)

Further reading

J.N. Dalton, *The Manuscripts of St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle* (Windsor, 1957)

A.K.B. Roberts, *St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle 1348-1416. A study in early Collegiate Administration* (Windsor, 1947)

'List of the Church Commissioners' Records, 14th-20th century, in the muniments of St George's Chapel, Windsor' (Unpublished list, 1996. Copy available in the Archives & Chapter Library)

M Morgan, *The English Lands of the Abbey of Bec* (Oxford, 1946)

Shelagh Bond (ed.), *The Chapter Acts of the Dean and Canons of Windsor, 1430, 1523-1672* (Windsor, 1966)

Shelagh Bond, 'The Return of the Church Commissioners' Documents Records to Windsor', *Annual Report of the Friends of St George's and the Descendents of the Knights of the Garter* (Windsor, 1963)

Victoria County Histories for relevant counties

For further information contact St George's Chapel Archives and Chapter Library, The Vicars' Hall Undercroft, The Cloisters, Windsor Castle, Windsor SL4 1NJ (email: archives@stgeorges-windsor.org) or consult our website (www.stgeorges-windsor.org/archives.html).