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Monastic records and the Dissolution: a Tudor revolution in the archives?

Revolutions in government normally imply major changes – if not revolutions - in the archives of government, whether in response to the initiation of new departments, activities, or enterprises on the part of government itself, or as a consequence of new attitudes and practices in record-keeping. G.R.Elton's 'Tudor revolution in government', located in the 1530s and the ascendancy of Henry VIII's chief minister Thomas Cromwell, comprised changes in all sections of the administration: 'new principles were indeed at work and profound reforms undertaken'.¹ The bureaucracy of government expanded and diversified, and the records they created and retained multiplied. The shadow this revolution casts over previous reigns is one of the major challenges facing historians seeking to trace continuities and changes between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Henry VII's reign (1485-1509) has been seen as liminal, even 'medieval', as far as the records of government go, with earlier staples of administrative history petering out and new record series only incipient;² Henry VIII's reign (1509-47) seems to mark a watershed in the evolution of modern government, reflected in its surviving archival record.

The expansion of government record-keeping can be illustrated by the number of archival series beginning or increasing in volume in the first half of the sixteenth century. New taxation assessments, a greater level of bureaucratic and diplomatic activity, more attention to preserving the record of judicial process, all contributed to this. Major formal record series continued, but these were complemented by a growing volume of other kinds of documentation. The new series now known as State Papers contains 246 volumes for the reign of Henry VIII alone. The inception of the series of Journals of the proceedings of the House of Lords (1509) and of the House of Commons (1547) suggests a new interest in creating a permanent and authoritative record. Long-existing courts such as Chancery expanded their activities, as did the comparatively new courts of Star Chamber, Requests, and High Commission, each supported by its own rapidly accumulating archives.³

Many of Cromwell's reforms in the practice of government were to do with efficiency and accountability, removing or bypassing structures which were perceived as cumbersome or unfit for purpose, redirecting flows of information and resources. However, the motive for administrative reform was not simply an abstract desire for improved efficiency, but also the

¹ G.R.Elton, *The Tudor revolution in government: administrative changes in the reign of Henry VIII* (Cambridge, 1953), p. 5; Coleman, C., and Starkey, D. (eds.), *Revolution reassessed. Revisions in the history of Tudor government and administration* (Oxford, 1986).

² Steven Gunn, 'Henry VII in Context: Problems and Possibilities', *History* 92 (2007), 301-16.

³ *Calendar of Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII* (HMSO, London, 1864-1932); *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, Edward VI, Mary, Elizabeth and James I* (HMSO, London, 1856-72). For online editions of these records see British History Online (<http://www.british-history.ac.uk>). For the State Papers series (SP), and the records of Chancery (C), Privy Council (PC), Requests (REQ) and Star Chamber (STAC) see The National Archives (TNA) Discovery Catalogue (<http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk>). All citations are to the online edition, unless otherwise stated; all online sources including British History Online and The National Archives Discovery Catalogue were last accessed 20-26 June 2015.

urgent need to manage and remain in control of new areas of activity and responsibility, and the documentation they entailed.

One of the largest of the new responsibilities taken on by Henry VIII's government was the valuation, closure, and annexation of all the property of the monastic houses of England and Wales. In the 1530s, the king and Cromwell embarked on a project with momentous implications for all aspects of English life: the assertion of the king's supremacy over church as well as state, with a view in the short term of authorising the annulment of his first marriage, and in the longer term of reforming the church and coincidentally enhancing royal finances by harnessing the church's wealth. These plans entailed visitation and a national survey of the religious houses, the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* of 1535, followed by an Act of Parliament mandating the closure of the lesser religious houses, deemed to be unable to discharge their liturgical function effectively. But the Act provided for larger houses to surrender voluntarily, and considerable pressure was applied to them to do so; a further Act was passed in 1539. Over 200 surrendered in the first phase, another 180 soon after, and the remaining 200-plus by 1540. Some houses, or their heads, resisted 'voluntary' surrender; many of these were then forfeited on the attainder of the abbot or prior. By 1540 almost all English and Welsh religious houses – abbeys, priories, convents, friaries, some hospitals and collegiate foundations, nearly 600 in all – had been surrendered to the Crown, along with all their real and movable property and all their evidences of title and estate management.⁴

This huge access of real estate certainly transformed the royal finances, more than trebling the crown's average annual income over the next decade. It also transformed the crown demesne or estate from a comparatively limited holding with management and accounting systems appropriate to its modest size, to an enormous one that necessitated new approaches to the management both of the estates and of their documentation..

This essay focuses on the archival implications of that particular project: how and when the records of nearly 600 religious houses were transferred to the centre, and what then became of them.⁵ This thus becomes partly an exploration of institutional history, focusing on the sixteenth century but extending into the twenty-first. The interplay of administrative need and archival management is a key theme; as the evidential value of the records declined, so did the respect with which they were treated. An important concern is how the discrete archives of many smaller institutions were absorbed and assimilated into a much larger one, and whether they can still be detected. Archival integrity was lost, for good practical reasons, at an early stage, but later rearrangements reflect changing attitudes to the historical record and new visions of best, or better, practice. The paper has three parts – the practicalities of dissolving the monastic houses, the records that it generated or involved, and the longer-term storage and fate of the archive. In the end, while it is not clear that the accession of the

⁴ W.C.Richardson, *History of the Court of Augmentations, 1536-54* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1962), pp. 31, 40.

⁵ The implications of Reformation and dissolution for the libraries and other archives of the religious houses, largely apart from the records of title and estate management, are well discussed in Nicholas Popper, 'From abbey to archive: managing texts and records in early modern England', *Archival Science* 10 (2010), 249-66.

monasteries' archives itself provoked a revolutionary change in archival management at the centre, it certainly played a part in the important, even radical, changes in practice. The varied histories and present scattered disposition of the archives of England's medieval religious houses reflect those changes and illuminate attitudes towards the use and value of the records from the sixteenth century onwards.

Managing the Dissolution of the monasteries⁶

The volume of activity and documentation that the project of dissolution entailed would have overwhelmed existing structures of accounting and record-keeping, and Secretary Thomas Cromwell was clearly aware of this and anticipated it. The same parliament (February-April 1536) that passed the initial dissolution statute also passed a statute establishing a new institution to handle the mass of real and movable property expected to flow to the Crown.⁷

The new department of government established in 1536 was called 'the Courte of thAugmentacions of the Revenues of the Kinges Crowne', with a chancellor, treasurer, attorney, and solicitor, and a staff that included a clerk, a keeper of the records, an usher, and a messenger, and a large number of viewers, receivers, auditors, and visitors in the provinces.⁸ Its remit was to survey, value, and take possession of the estates of the religious houses, and to take possession of their movable goods, from plate to bells, to the lead on the roofs; to pay the houses' debts and to provide pensions for their former members or employees; and over time both to manage the estates and account for their revenues while they were in the king's hands. It was also tasked with the disposal of the estates and other goods; most of the lands had been sold or granted away within a decade.⁹ It was a formidable task, and for the two decades of its existence Augmentations became the prime financial department of the crown, the value of its business greatly exceeding that of the original Exchequer. It handled by far the largest proportion of royal revenues; its total net receipt (from land and property sales as well as rents) from 1536 to 1547 was £1.3m.¹⁰

It seems clear that Cromwell wanted to bypass the cumbersome procedures of the medieval Exchequer and make the new Court to be more responsive to himself and the king's

⁶ See <http://nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/research-guides/dissolution-of-the-monasteries.htm> and <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C569>. Key sources for what follows, in addition to Elton, *Tudor Revolution*, esp. pp. 203-19, are W.C. Richardson, 'Records of the Court of Augmentations', *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 1:6 (1957), pp. 159-68; idem, *Augmentations*; A.J. Slavin, 'Lord Chancellor Wriothesley and the reform of Augmentations. New light on an old court', in idem (ed.), *Tudor men and institutions: studies in English law and government* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1972), pp. 49-69; G.R. Elton, ed. *The Tudor Constitution. Documents and Commentary* (Cambridge, 1972); HMSO, *Guide to the Contents of the Public Record Office*, vol. 1, *Legal Records, etc.* (London, 1963), pp. 80-5; David Knowles and R.N. Hadcock, *Medieval religious houses, England and Wales* (place?, new edn., 1971).

⁷ Richardson, *Augmentations*, pp. 31-2.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 39, 45.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 33, 90-1; Elton, *Tudor Constitution*, no. 71.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 77

needs. The Exchequer handled the Crown's traditional revenues, together with parliamentary and other taxation, but it was not well-suited either to coping with a vast increase of business or to managing landed estates on a large scale. Augmentations, however, could be designed to fit the purpose. Its administrative procedures were modelled on the practices of the Duchy of Lancaster, a large administrative department that managed the estates that came to the crown in 1399.¹¹ Cromwell staffed the new court with career government servants whom he knew and trusted, including Sir Richard Rich as its chancellor and Thomas Pope as treasurer.¹²

The Court of Augmentations continued to function effectively after Cromwell's fall in 1540, but the volume of its business declined after the flush of confiscations and land sales; 1543-4 was the peak year of income and expenditure.¹³ And after some years of creating new departments and developing new procedures for new resources, it began to seem necessary to amalgamate and streamline. In 1547 Augmentations was united with another large government department, the Court of General Surveyors.¹⁴ This Court had responsibility for lands forfeited or escheating to the crown; originally these were lands of (lay) traitors, rebels, etc., but by 1540 they also included the estates of religious houses closed by the attainder of their abbot or prior such as Fountains, Jervaulx, Kirkstead, and Glastonbury. Also, as the reign progressed, monastic estates that had passed through Augmentations and been sold to courtiers and currently favoured individuals might return to the Crown as forfeitures – for example, Cromwell's own estates formerly belonging to the priories or convents of Lewes, St Osyth, Launde, and other religious houses.¹⁵ There was considerable duplication of personnel and effort across the country, so it made sense to merge the two courts or departments, to facilitate a more unified accounting for the crown's landed revenues, though it is not clear that there was any great financial saving in the short term since any redundant officials had to be pensioned off at favourable rates.

During Edward VI's reign, 1547-53, when government was in the hands of the council, this second-phase Court of Augmentations continued, dealing with a new but smaller-scale flood of confiscations with the suppression of the chantries. However, the court seems increasingly to have suffered from poor accounting practice and insufficient oversight, allowing officials to go on from year to year without rendering account or being audited, so that the incentives to good housekeeping and the active pursuit of arrears were absent. W.C. Richardson sees this as the natural result of corruption at the top of government – a self-seeking, self-serving factionalised council.¹⁶ But at any rate, before the end of the reign, there were plans for reform and revision, perhaps also involving further government departments

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 33, 42, 44

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 111-159; Slavin, 'Lord Chancellor Wriothesley', pp 49-69.

¹⁵ Richardson, *Augmentations*, p. 275.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 162-3.

set up to manage new revenue streams. In practice, reform was postponed until Mary's reign, but in 1553 an enabling act of Parliament was passed, under which Augmentations, and the Court of First Fruits and Tenths, which handled ecclesiastical revenues formerly directed to Rome, were annexed to the Exchequer. Augmentations remained a department or office of record within the Exchequer but its independent function was curtailed.¹⁷

Inter-departmental rivalry may have played a part in this annexation, since it is not obvious that Augmentations was any less efficient or more corrupt than the Exchequer, and Augmentations' business was far more valuable than the Exchequer's. But as a move to centralise accounting, and ultimately to facilitate efficiency, it was probably helpful. Some of Augmentations' more modern practices were adopted, and reform of the Exchequer later in Elizabeth's reign benefited all departments it now contained.¹⁸

There are two ways in which the history of the Court of Augmentations is crucial to the history of its archives.

The first is simply the consecutive mergers, which brought together two land revenue departments and subsequently sank their identity in the larger identity of the Exchequer. The merger of the original courts of Augmentations and General Surveyors in 1547 brought together most of the lands and records of the dissolved religious houses but blurred the ways in which they came to the crown, as well as adding lands which came from other sources; the disappearance of Augmentations as an autonomous court in 1554 meant that over time, the archival identity of the crown estate that accrued between 1536 and 1554, deriving largely from the dissolution of the monasteries, was lost among the documentation of later acquisitions and grants. Augmentations survived as an Office within the Exchequer, and its archive retained some identity until the nineteenth century, but in the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries new documents were added to its original records, and some of the latter were removed for business purposes and never restored. And Augmentations had been downgraded in status, from a major government department in its own right to a mere office within an older one; it also looks as if the quality of personnel and oversight declined.

The second and perhaps more important point is that Augmentations instituted a new management structure for the estates under its control. The practice of the crown had long been to manage estates that came to it by escheat, inheritance, forfeiture, etc. in their original landholding units, however widely scattered the properties belonging to that unit were. So for instance, the estates in numerous counties that had come to the crown with Henry IV, heir on his mother's side to the duchy of Lancaster, were not merged with the existing crown estate but constituted a separate government department with its own records, procedures, and practices.¹⁹

¹⁷ Richardson, *Augmentations*, pp. 160-213, 246-7; Elton, *Tudor Constitution*, no. 73.

¹⁸ Richardson, *Augmentations*, pp. 436-74

¹⁹ *Guide to the Contents of the Public Record Office*, vol. 1, pp.183-6.

The larger and longer-lived religious houses usually had endowments made up of lands in many counties, the result of foundation gifts and later benefactions. The priory of St Bartholomew in London, for example, held lands in the city of London, Middlesex, Hertfordshire, Essex, Suffolk, and Buckinghamshire. Syon Abbey in Middlesex had been endowed with estates formerly held by several alien priories or cells, and at the dissolution had lands or assets in Middlesex, Essex, Cambridgeshire, Buckinghamshire, Kent, Sussex, Wiltshire, Gloucestershire, Somerset, Dorset, Devon, Cornwall, Lincolnshire, and Lancashire.²⁰ Once these monastic holdings passed wholesale to the crown, the traditional way would have been to account for them under the headings of the former owning houses. However, Augmentations, reasonably enough for its own administrative purposes, split the holdings up by county, appointing receivers in each county or group of counties who accounted for the properties within their purview irrespective of the original owner, an important and perhaps characteristic break with precedent in the interests of efficiency.²¹

Breaking the monastic estates up into component parts by geography helped accounting over all, and reduced duplication of personnel, particularly when the Court of General Surveyors was merged with Augmentations in 1547. It made it easier to sell off different manors or lands from a former unified estate, especially outlying ones, to different purchasers; it may also have helped, intentionally or not, to make the dispersal of the monastic estates permanent by ensuring there was no longer any easily-identifiable 'Syon' estate or similar.²² But it also broke up the archive of any one estate, and rendered its original order redundant. Since archive order reflects the process of acquisition, and the records of management (cartularies, surveys, registers, accounts) embody the organic unity of an estate, we lose sight of these earlier unities; the records of their histories are at equal risk of dispersal among different locations.

Augmentations and the monastic archives

The history of the Court of Augmentations has been written up with scholarly care and detail by W.C. Richardson, but the immediate physical history of the monastic archives still has to be pieced together from catalogues and publications of the Public Record Office and The National Archives, reports of the Historic Manuscripts Commission, contemporary records of government (state papers), and from the surviving monastic records themselves; inevitably it is rather patchy. In what follows, a systematic search for references to monastic archives, records, and evidences in the online version of the Letters and Papers of Henry VIII is complemented with sampling information on monastic houses and their estates from TNA's

²⁰ Victoria County History (VCH) London, vol. 1 (1909): <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/london/vol1/pp475-480>; VCH Middlesex vol. 1 (1969): <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/middx/vol1/pp182-191>.

²¹ Richardson, *Augmentations*, pp. 5-6, 47-50, 277.

²² This was not the only obstacle to refounding and re-endowing monastic foundations under Mary, but it served to make the possibility even more remote.

Discovery catalogue and the Victoria Country History, and with more detailed study of the archives of particular houses.²³

This story also begins with the dissolution. Care of the archives – key muniments or ‘evidences’ of the religious houses - was built into the provisions for dissolution. The visitors appointed to survey and subsequently to take the surrender of the houses in 1536 were required to ‘put in safe custody to the King's use all evidences and writings’, along with other valuables such as plate, vestments, and lead.²⁴ Likewise the second Act of 1539 instructed the commissioners to ‘take special regard to the sure keeping of the evidences and convent seals’.²⁵ Some were handed over directly – in April 1536 the abbot of Whitby wrote to Cromwell saying that he was sending, by his brother, ‘the evidences of the monastery, according to the commandment given me by the visitors when they were last here’,²⁶ while the prior and monks of Lewes handed over to the visitors a ‘certain book containing their foundation and the gift and grant of their founders’.²⁷ In June 1536 the commissioners taking the surrenders of the houses of Austin Canons at Huntingdon and Stoneleigh, and the Cistercian house at Sawtry, duly reported that the ‘seal, evidences and plate’ were in safe custody.²⁸

Some later commissioners itemised the records in their general reports and valuations, but for the most part these are somewhat sketchy listings. The holdings of friaries, with little or no land beyond the site of the house itself, were easily summarised – the Black Friars of Chester had only ‘10 sealed evidences, 3 unsealed, 2 in paper, 2 patents, 5 leases and a bill of debts of 15l. 16s. 4d’, while those of several other mendicant houses could be contained in a single chest or coffer.²⁹ But some of the monastic archives were very voluminous, and properly surveying them would have been an immense task, surely not one that can have been generally envisaged in the short term. Occasional inventories or lists of

²³ See above, n. 3; VCH <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/catalogue/secondary-texts>; Derek Keene and Vanessa Harding, *A survey of sources for property holding in London before the Great Fire* (London: London Record Society 22, 1986) <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/london-record-soc/vol22>.

²⁴ ‘Appendix: November 1536’, in *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 11, July-December 1536*, ed. James Gairdner (London, 1888), pp. 595-596 <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol11/pp595-596>.

²⁵ ‘Letters and Papers: June 1539, 26-30’, in *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 14 Part 1, January-July 1539*, ed. James Gairdner and R H Brodie (London, 1894), pp. 520-538 <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol14/no1/pp520-538>.

²⁶ ‘Henry VIII: April 1536, 1-10’, in *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 10, January-June 1536*, ed. James Gairdner (London, 1887), pp. 240-259 <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol10/pp240-259>.

²⁷ ‘Henry VIII: Miscellaneous, 1538’, in *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 13 Part 2, August-December 1538*, ed. James Gairdner (London, 1893), pp. 496-539 <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol13/no2/pp496-539>.

²⁸ ‘Henry VIII: June 1536, 21-25’, in *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 10, January-June 1536*, ed. James Gairdner (London, 1887), pp. 491-504 <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol10/pp491-504>.

²⁹ ‘Henry VIII: June 1538, 26-30’, in *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 13 Part 1, January-July 1538*, ed. James Gairdner (London, 1892), pp. 464-491 <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol13/no1/pp464-491>;

muniments were sent with the commissioners' reports to the court, but it is not clear if these were newly made or simply existing archive lists. The late fifteenth-century inventory of charters of Christ Church Cathedral Priory, now in TNA,³⁰ may be an example of the latter.

There was well-founded anxiety about the safety of the records if they were not carefully looked after. Dr John London wrote to Cromwell from Combe Abbey, where he had been viewing and valuing the estate, that 'To stay spoil and for the safeguard of evidences, let the surveyors come as speedily after me as may be'.³¹ There are reports of heads of houses concealing muniments from the commissioners, or of their being stolen or abstracted by other parties. The abbot of Coggeshall was accused by some of his own monks of 'secreting jewels and evidences belonging to the place, in anticipation of the King's visitation', while William Button of the abbey of Abingdon took the key to the abbey's exchequer, 'with, it is said, a coffer full of evidences of this house when it was an abbey'.³²

There was an immediate need for such documentation, to be checked against new valuations: 'making inventories of the contents of each house and conferring them with the old inventories to see how things have been administered'.³³ As this suggests, the records were seen as a live and vital resource. Once the immediate need was past, however, it is not clear what was meant to become of the archives, in particular whether they were meant to be sent to London or kept locally. On the one hand, the charters, deeds, and cartularies represented muniments of title essential to the king and important to any future purchaser; on the other, the court rolls and items such as current lease registers and counterpart leases were necessary for the county receivers who were managing the estates until they were sold.³⁴ Something of this uncertainty is revealed by the appeal in 1546 of former commissioner Leonard Beckwith for permission to return to England 'both to order my house and things in Yorkshire, ... and because I have lead, bell metal and evidences of the King's, and no warrant to whom to deliver them'.³⁵

It is certain that some archives never came to London: in 1544 the new owner of a manor in Yorkshire, formerly part of the estate of the monastery of Bridlington, was trying to get hold of the records relating to his manor, said to be in the hands of the lord President of

³⁰ TNA, E 36/138.

³¹ 'Letters and Papers: January 1539, 21-25', in *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 14 Part 1, January-July 1539*, ed. James Gairdner and R H Brodie (London, 1894), pp. 41-51 <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol14/no1/pp41-51>.

³² 'Henry VIII: April 1536, 26-30', in *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 10, January-June 1536*, ed. James Gairdner (London, 1887), pp. 310-329 <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol10/pp310-329>.

³³ 'Letters and Papers: June 1539, 26-30', in *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 14 Part 1, January-July 1539*, ed. James Gairdner and R H Brodie (London, 1894), pp. 520-538 <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol14/no1/pp520-538>.

³⁴ Richardson, *Augmentations*, pp. 45, 143.

³⁵ 'Henry VIII: November 1546, 21-30', in *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 21 Part 2, September 1546-January 1547*, ed. James Gairdner and R H Brodie (London, 1910), pp. 203-248 <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol21/no2/pp203-248>.

the Council in the North, at Watton.³⁶ Possibly the archives of the northern monasteries were more likely to stay in the north rather than make the double journey to London and back. But information could be remitted as required, as when one of the local officers sent abstracts to the Court in London from the court rolls and 'a greate olde auncient bouke of reycorde' formerly belonging to Selby priory.³⁷

It does appear that manorial court rolls, which constituted a substantial and bulky part of the whole monastic archive, were intended to stay in the counties to which they related, as part of the working archive of local receivers, necessary for the defence or resolution of legal disputes concerning former monastic land. At this level, however, care was lacking, and although in 1547 it was ordered that 'court rolles and other evydences necessary for the courtes in every countie' should be gathered together in one place for the use of the county stewards and receivers, in 1552 it was alleged that the records had been permitted to 'lye very confusedly dispersed' rather than being centralised in the county administration.³⁸ And it seems clear that many were passed on to the new owners of manors: the majority of the great collections of medieval manorial court rolls are now in other public or private collections, having followed the descent of the manor (unless sold for historic interest, such as the records of the Bury manor of Redgrave, now in Chicago University Library, or the manorial records of Battle Abbey, now in the Huntington Library).³⁹ Although some manorial court rolls and records do survive in The National Archives, it is a comparatively small number – 177 bundles, files and volumes – and while that total includes some from the Augmentations Office, there are many also from other sources.⁴⁰

But the intention was probably that the evidences of title should go to London, where they would be on hand to inform the process of valuation and itemisation for sale. At least in London there was a place and a person to receive the incoming archives. The 1536 statute creating the court appointed a clerk with responsibility for recordkeeping; from Michaelmas 1538 a separate keeper of the records, Walter Farr or Ferrar, was appointed, at a salary of 4d. a day, to 'take charge of the charters and evidences of religious houses suppressed'.⁴¹ This was a modest wage, less than that of a skilled craftsman in London, though its regular nature made it more valuable, and other fees or perquisites may have been available simply

³⁶ 'Henry VIII: January 1544, 16-25', in *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 19 Part 1, January-July 1544*, ed. James Gairdner and R H Brodie (London, 1903), pp. 17-28 <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol19/no1/pp17-28>.

³⁷ 'Henry VIII: June 1544, 11-15', in *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 19 Part 1, January-July 1544*, ed. James Gairdner and R H Brodie (London, 1903), pp. 418-441 <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol19/no1/pp418-441>.

³⁸ Richardson, *Augmentations*, pp. 143, 209.

³⁹ <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/c/F135036>;
<http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/scrc/findingaids/view.php?eadid=ICU.SPCL.BACON>;
<http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/c/F124705>.

⁴⁰ <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C13520>.

⁴¹ Richardson, *Augmentations*, p. 45; 'Henry VIII: Grants in July', in *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 13 Part 1, January-July 1538*, ed. James Gairdner (London, 1892), pp. 561-589 <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol13/no1/pp561-589>.

by virtue of his being in control of a useful resource. Farr held the post until 1547, when Edward Stradbury replaced him, at the higher salary of £10 a year.⁴²

A house within the palace of Westminster was refurbished for the court's occupation in 1537, though it is not clear how or where archival records, as apposed to current ones, were stored.⁴³ It may be that they were not initially kept there at all: in 1539 one of Cromwell's agents wrote to another instructing him to ask the monks of Quarr whether 'they kept any register of their leases and what has become of it, for it is not among the other evidences at Mr. Chancellor's house by the Augustine Friars' in London.⁴⁴ This suggests also that the records were not merely retained for storage but might be subject to critical scrutiny and evaluation by Cromwell or his staff.

When the court of Augmentations was reconstituted in 1547 with the addition of the court of General Surveyors, also an archive-heavy department (it had its own house to store records on the north side of Westminster Hall), a new building to house the growing archive was granted, and the keeper was given 'the keypyng of the house where the recordes shall lie and remayne'.⁴⁵ Storage capacity was increased with the addition of ten new presses in 1550, but again there is no clue as to how the records were organised or retrieved for consultation or disposal.⁴⁶ When the Court was abolished in 1554, provision was made for the distribution of its current and future records to different departments of the Exchequer, but it appears that the static or closed monastic archive remained together.⁴⁷

What we can say about the archive in these early years is based on the records that remain in the custody of The National Archives, and those that have appeared in other collections or archives.⁴⁸

As already noted, court rolls seem largely to have passed to successor owners of particular manors or estates, for whom they had an obvious and practical value. It was also probably easier to parcel them up, as they tend to originate with and relate to single manors, rather than covering the whole estate of the monastery. Cartularies and registers of deeds, on the other hand, often relate to several disparate elements of a total monastic estate, with copies of deeds from many sources. They are likely to have come to London, valuable as

⁴² Richardson, *Augmentations*, p. 153. Farr's annual remuneration, if the daily wage was paid for every day in the year, would have been £6 1s. 8d. (£6.08).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 90-1.

⁴⁴ 'Letters and Papers: April 1539, 16-20', in *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 14 Part 1, January-July 1539*, ed. James Gairdner and R H Brodie (London, 1894), pp. 374-386 <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol14/no1/pp374-386>.

⁴⁵ Richardson, *Augmentations*, p. 153

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 153 n. 115

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 438-9; *Guide to the Contents of the Public Record Office*, vol. 1, p. 81.

⁴⁸ For the fate of monastic libraries, see for example Carley, James P., 'Monastic Collections and their dispersal', in John Barnard and D.F.McKenzie, eds., *Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, vol. IV, 1557-1695 (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 338-47; see also Popper, 'From abbey to archive'.

epitomes of a monastery's landholdings and rights in various places, but they seem to have been quite widely scattered within a short period, with comparatively few examples remaining in the Court of Augmentations records. Of about 1100 former monastic cartularies surviving in 1958, or known either from fragments or references to have existed at one time, only a small fraction seem to have spent the intervening centuries in the public records.⁴⁹ Some of those now there actually left the Court but were returned subsequently, including one, of Pershore Abbey, bought from a bookseller in Fleet Street in 1598 and delivered back to the Exchequer in 1620.⁵⁰

Of the remaining thousand-odd, a few seem to have been removed by Augmentations or Exchequer officers themselves. Many undoubtedly went out with the grant of particular manors or lands, such as the Bury St Edmunds cartulary acquired by the Bacon family with the Redgrave estate.⁵¹ Others took on a different value as antiquities in their own right, objects of antiquarian study. Archbishop Matthew Parker acquired at least ten cartularies, registers, or fragments, including some of Anglo-Saxon date, originating from Bath Abbey, Canterbury Cathedral Priory, St Augustine's Abbey Canterbury, St Albans, and Westminster Abbey; these are now mostly in Corpus Christi College, Cambridge (along with his copies of the Anglo-Saxon chronicle) or Lambeth Palace.⁵² The London antiquary John Stow once owned two or three London cartularies, for Clerkenwell, Holy Trinity Priory, and possibly St Augustine Papey, and one for Osney (Oxon.).⁵³ Cartularies continued to circulate among antiquarians and by far the largest collection anywhere is in the British Library – perhaps 40 per cent of the total, of which one-third are in Sir Robert Cotton's collection, put together in the early years of the seventeenth century, and a quarter in the Harleian collections of slightly later date.⁵⁴

Unless a religious house had a geographically concentrated estate and a single buyer, its cartularies are likely to have been separated. Of over thirty-five surviving cartularies, registers or similar books of statutes or evidences from Bury St Edmunds (some of them in multiple fragments in different locations), seven or eight are British Library Harleian Manuscripts, ten Additional Manuscripts, three Cotton Manuscripts (a fourth is known to have been lost in the Cottonian fire), and one a Lansdowne Manuscript; nine are in Cambridge University Library, arriving there from various sources including the bishop of Ely John Moore (d. 1714); and the rest are in Oxford, Cambridge, Bury St Edmunds, Ipswich, Long Melford, Kettering, and Douai.⁵⁵ The London hospital of St Thomas of Acre had a more modest three

⁴⁹ G.R.C.Davis, revised by Claire Breay, Julian Harrison and David M. Smith, *Medieval cartularies of Great Britain and Ireland* (rev. edn. London, 2010).

⁵⁰ Davis, *Cartularies*, no. 753; Richardson, *Augmentations*, p. 476.

⁵¹ Davis, *Cartularies*, no. 104.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 327.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 329, nos. 263, 610, 616, 731.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 303-8, 319.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, nos. 95-134.

cartularies, of which the first, concerning London lands, went to the Mercers' Company who acquired the hospital's site for their hall, and remains there; the companion volume, for country estates, may have stayed in the Augmentations records for some decades but later left, perhaps in the hands of Justinian Povey, one of the seventeenth-century auditors of the Exchequer, and then passed to Cotton; the third, an early sixteenth-century paper register, seems never to have left the Augmentations/ Exchequer archive.⁵⁶

The original charters and deeds endowing the monasteries would for some purposes have been superseded by cartulary copies, but it is evident that they were still valued at least by the monasteries, since a very large number of charters and deeds of monastic origin survive in the public records.⁵⁷ This suggests that they came in but in many, maybe most, cases did not go out again, and that new owners of lands either did not need or were not offered the original deeds pertaining to their property. The problem is both in knowing what was dispersed and/or lost, and in identifying surviving monastic muniments among the deeds of other origins in the records of the Augmentation Office – let alone of the Exchequer. It is impossible to say what proportion of the 15,000 deeds from the Augmentation Office are of monastic origin, though The National Archives' catalogue notes that 'Among the estate archives which can be identified within the series are those of ... the priories of Breamore, Canons Ashby, Langley, Stamford and the London Charterhouse, and the abbeys of Bordesley, Quarr, Ramsey and Syon'.⁵⁸ For reasons to be discussed later, there is no trace of original archive order: 'The collection has lost nearly all trace of any useful arrangement ... Sequences of pieces relating to property in particular counties (even in particular localities) are numerous but entirely unpredictable'.⁵⁹ Individual deeds may bear the distinguishing marks and endorsements of particular houses and their archival organizations, but it does not seem possible to recreate the order, if any, in which they were kept in the Court of Augmentations. That the deeds were kept at all suggests they were perceived to have some value or utility, but they were not kept well, and it must have been exceptionally difficult to retrieve any particular piece.

Augmentations may have paid more attention to current records of estate management, in the form of rentals, valuations, accounts, and counterpart leases. Examples of these survive, mostly for the sixteenth century; unlike charters and cartularies they were not evidence of title, but they were also of time-limited utility, as leases expired or were surrendered, and rentals became outdated.⁶⁰ Distinct (modern) classes of conventual leases probably represent a distinct Augmentations category, with documents grouped by location

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, nos. 621-4.

⁵⁷ Sealed deeds and charters were evidence of title, but monasteries often also preserved the paper-trail of antecedent grants and gifts before the land was granted to them, and copied these into their cartularies too. See for example W.O. Hassall, ed., *Cartulary of St Mary Clerkenwell* (Camden Society 3rd series, 71, 1949).

⁵⁸ <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C6705>.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/browse/r/h/C569>.

and within that by monastic house.⁶¹ Pre-dissolution accounts are more sporadic, but it is not clear if this is due to historic or more recent loss.⁶² Where monastic and ecclesiastical archives have remained with the successor institution, such as St Paul's cathedral and Westminster Abbey,⁶³ medieval account rolls and books can be very plentiful, so it seems likely that large quantities of monastic accounts came to the Court but have since been lost. Monastic estate rentals are also quite numerous, but there is now no trace of how they were kept and ordered during the functioning of the court of Augmentations.⁶⁴

The dynamic element of the records of the Court of Augmentations was of course the documentation of its current activity: valuations, inventories, accounts and rentals, and the itemised property schedules drawn up prior to a sale and known as Particulars for Grants – not to mention the payment of monastic pensions, the judicial activity of the Court, and the wide range of precepts and warrants that show how the crown dipped into the Augmentations revenues for multiple purposes.⁶⁵ For the historian of the Reformation as a process, or of public finances, or of any particular piece of land, these are invaluable, and are comparatively well-preserved and numerous.⁶⁶ It may well be that the Privy Council's concern for the 'records' of Augmentations focused on these, at least once the wave of surrenders and sales had passed.

The later history of the records

The last part of the story is the history of the Augmentations records after 1554, and this goes a long way towards explaining why it is not easy to reconstruct the original archive. The Court was downgraded to a mere Office within an enlarged Exchequer, but it still kept its records separately, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in a brick building adjacent to the Exchequer, in the early nineteenth in the Stone Tower near Westminster Hall. An individual keeper of the records of the Office was appointed, and some necessary care – listing, repairing, and properly storing them - went on.⁶⁷

Over the next couple of centuries the records were consulted from time to time, usually to inform legal or title disputes - the Master and Fellows of Queens' College Cambridge wrote to Burghley in 1571 'requesting permission to search among the records formerly belonging to the Monastery of Crowland, for evidence in their favour in a suit in

⁶¹ TNA, E303: <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C6682>.

⁶² <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C13524>.

⁶³ See e.g. Derek Keene and Vanessa Harding, eds., *A survey of documentary sources for property-holding in London before the Great Fire* (London Record Society 22, 1985), nos. 73, 249, online at <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/london-record-soc/vol22/pp37-65>, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/london-record-soc/vol22/pp99-110>.

⁶⁴ <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C13529>; <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C13530>.

⁶⁵ *Guide to the contents of the Public Record Office*, vol. 1, pp. 80-1; Richardson, *Augmentations*, pp. TBC.

⁶⁶ <http://nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/research-guides/dissolution-of-the-monasteries.htm>.

⁶⁷ Richardson, *Augmentations*, pp. 476-7.

which they were engaged⁶⁸ – and some may well have been borrowed by other government servants for similar purposes and not returned. During this period also occasional records in some way associated with the Crown estate were added, so that although the Court ceased in 1554 the Office's archive extends into the seventeenth century.⁶⁹

But it certainly looks as if after the later sixteenth century there was little systematic records management. Elizabeth Hallam has called the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the nadir of the art of record keeping,⁷⁰ and Richardson reserves particular opprobrium for John Caley, keeper from 1787 until his death in 1834: 'left to his own devices, John Caley probably contributed more to the deplorable neglect of the Augmentations Office than did all of his predecessors put together'. Caley's sins included both omission – it taking hours to find any particular document required – and commission, binding miscellaneous documents together, mislabelling others, separating documents from their seals, of which he made a private collection of impressions, and charging excessive fees for consultation.⁷¹

Increasing interest in the public records in the early nineteenth century brought to light the appalling conditions in which some of the Exchequer records were stored, but it was some decades before effective action was taken. Descriptions of these conditions are hair-raising, with references to damp, vermin, rot, blowing soot, 'putrid filth, stench, dirt and decomposition' and extreme disorder, with records on the floor and trampled underfoot.⁷² The records of Augmentations were dramatically but perhaps unnecessarily rescued from the Westminster fire of 1834 – as a result of which rescue, a good many were damaged further – and transferred to St Margaret's church and subsequently to a former riding academy, before at length moving to the new public record office in Chancery Lane in the 1850s.⁷³

There can be no doubt that the long period of neglect led to losses and irreparable damage to the archive over all; and equally little doubt that we shall never be able to recover a full sense of what was once there and hence an understanding of the archival practices of the early keepers of the records. That task is made harder by the well-intentioned efforts of nineteenth-century archivists who created new documentary classes or Special Collections into which they gathered some of the inherited monastic archives of Augmentations and the newly-created archive of estate management.⁷⁴ Some of the former archive of Augmentations is classified under E for Exchequer, in a range of numbered classes, but SC, for Special Collections, includes SC6, Ministers' Accounts, which contains both miscellaneous accounts

⁶⁸ 'Queen Elizabeth - Volume 80: July 1571', in *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Edward, Mary and Elizabeth, 1547-80*, ed. Robert Lemon (London, 1856), pp. 416-417 <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/domestic/edw-eliz/1547-80/pp416-417>.

⁶⁹ Richardson, *Augmentations*, p. 476.

⁷⁰ Elizabeth M. Hallam, 'Nine centuries of keeping the public records', in G. Martin and P. Spufford (eds.), *The records of the nation: the Public Record Office, 1838-1988* (British Record Society, 1990), pp. 23-42.

⁷¹ Richardson, *Augmentations*, p. 481.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 478; <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/browse/r/h/C565>.

⁷³ Richardson, *Augmentations*, pp. 477-80; cf. <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C13530>.

⁷⁴ <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/browse/r/r/C246>.

from the lifetime of the monasteries – not many of these - and the accounts of the receivers from 1536, or the date of surrender. SC11 and SC12 are rolls and portfolios of rentals and surveys, including monastic estates in the hands of Augmentations.⁷⁵

There is also the series of seventy-nine Exchequer Miscellaneous books, E315, some of which may date from Caley's time. Most of these are composite volumes into which large numbers of loose documents, often quite unrelated to each other, have been bound; these include documents of a wide variety of kinds from Augmentations, but also relating to much other contemporary and later business. There are certainly several volumes into which surveys and rentals or accounts from one or more religious houses are bound, a number of cartularies and rentals from, for example, Battle, Pershore, and Worcester, and five volumes of other proceedings of Augmentations.⁷⁶ Also very mixed are the 286 volumes of E36, Miscellaneous books of the Treasury of Receipt; some are composite volumes, but others are discrete and presumably came directly from the house in question, such as the fourteenth-century cartulary of St Mary Spital in London, a late fifteenth-century inventory of charters of Christ Church Cathedral Priory, and a book of miscellaneous accounts for Ramsey Priory from 1505-35.⁷⁷

The *Guide to the Contents of the Public Record Office* and The National Archives' catalogue are both critical of the way these books and collections were put together, using words and phrases such as 'artificial', 'arbitrary', 'very miscellaneous', 'no obvious order'; 'brought together ... with the idea (now regarded as mistaken) of aiding the searcher'.⁷⁸ On the other hand, it would not be possible to give even this account without the printed and online guides to the records, which do discuss the records created and kept by Augmentations and seek to identify where they may now be found. Faced with a mass of several thousand medieval deeds, what unaided premodern archivist could do more than list them 'promiscuously as they came to hand', as the 18th-century archivist of St Paul's did?⁷⁹

All this may however be changing. The availability online of many calendars and indexes, and of electronic finding aids, increases enormously the possibility of making connections and correlations, and of identifying strays and outliers. The contents of documents now widely separated in location can be compared; some of the thousands of orphan deeds in The National Archives may yet be linked to their archive of origin. This suggests that there are improving future possibilities for recreating virtual archival unities and recovering a sense of the content of individual monastic archives on the eve of the dissolution.

⁷⁵ Richardson, *Augmentations*, pp. 484-5; <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/browse/r/r/C246>.

⁷⁶ Richardson, xxx; <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/browse/r/r/C6694>.

⁷⁷ <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C6535>. The items are E36/265, E36/138, and E36/107 respectively.

⁷⁸ *Guide to the Contents of the Public Record Office*, vol. 1, pp. 57, 80-5, 111, 190-3.

Conclusion

Despite the vicissitudes they have undergone, the records of the dissolution – both the documentation of the process and the transferred monastic archives themselves – have remained a vital resource for historians. Nineteenth-century archivists may have disturbed what remained of original archive order, but they also began the invaluable process of creating and publishing calendars of the medieval and early modern archives of government, opening access to the records and stimulating the deep and dedicated archival research of subsequent generations. Elton's immersion in the documentary record of these years shaped his understanding of what Tudor government was and what it was seeking to achieve; if that particular kind of constitutional and administrative history is currently less fashionable, it nevertheless remains an exemplar of archival awareness, of knowledge of and sensitivity to the history and content of the archive.

It is perhaps surprising, however, that government archival practice in this era has not made a stronger claim on the attention of historians of literacy, print culture, texts, and even New Historicism. Study of the informational content of the archive still far outstrips interest in the materiality and textuality of the records of government in general, or in contemporary methods of archival classification and organisation. And yet the government's ability to keep accurate accounts, to assess the 'state' or balance of its finances, and to retrieve information on its rights and interests, crucial to the expansion of its competence and reach, depended on professional methods of record-keeping. The growth of the clerical professions and their engagement with this project was vital. Government's needs in this area benefited from the same rising tide of general literacy that supported the expansion of printing and popular literary production. Revolution or no, the history of the archive is central to the history and historiography of the Tudor state, but also belongs to a wider cultural story.