How to Research the History of Your House: A Kent Archives Guide
Deborah Saunders, Community History Officer

*How To Research The History of Your House* is a new 45-page colour booklet published by the Kent Archives Service, the first in a forthcoming series of Kent Archive guides. It provides a practical guide to investigate the history of your house, as well as a wide range of other buildings. It also introduces readers to the extensive archival sources that can be used to undertake such research. Particular reference is made to the archival and local studies collections held at Kent Archives, but equivalent sources can also be accessed in other county archives and libraries. This booklet can therefore be used to study both the history of houses and buildings in Kent and other parts of the country.

Researching a house’s history can be challenging with so many sources to explore and understand, so each type of document is fully explained, and an accompanying illustrative image provided. The three main aspects of house history research are covered: sources for the history of the site; sources for buildings, including public houses, Church of England and non-conformist churches and clergy houses, school buildings, and tollhouses; and sources for tracing people (owners and occupiers).

Although no single method for researching house history will work for all buildings, ‘a suggested house history methodology’ is given that will enable researchers to apply the booklet’s recommendations and undertake their own studies in a logical and systematic way. This is further enhanced by the inclusion of a case history of Fowlers Park at Hawkhurst, which uses the methodology suggested to illustrate how the sources can be explored in practice.

Gathering evidence to understand a home’s unique story is a rewarding experience, so if you have ever wondered who lived in your house, how it evolved, or how it has altered over the years, then this booklet will guide you through the process of inquiry and show you how to discover its history. Copies are available to order direct from Kent Archives at a cost of £8.95. To request a copy, please email archives@kent.gov.uk or telephone 03000 420673.
Kent Archives’ Lunchtime Talks
Kent Archives is holding lunchtime talks between 1pm and 2pm at the Kent History and Library Centre throughout the summer and autumn. Attendees are welcome to bring their lunch with them. Call us on 03000 420673 or email archives@kent.gov.uk for more information or to reserve a seat.

From Workhouse to Hospital – The Changing Role of the Workhouse – Deborah Collins
24 June 2019

The editor of a website on Kent workhouses looks at how the workhouse, both the physical buildings and the running of them, changed with social and cultural developments. Deborah Collins is a local historian specialising in the study of Kent Poor Law Unions and their interaction with the local community. She has a website on Kent Poor Law Unions and related topics.

Ypres: transforming a Belgian city into an outpost of the British Empire, 1919-1939 – Mark Connelly
15 July 2019

As soon as the war ended, visitors began to arrive. Some wanted to find out where loved ones had fought and died while others wanted to see something of the reality of the battlefields for themselves. Mark Connelly is Professor of Modern British History at the University of Kent. He works closely with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and has assisted the Department of Culture, Media and Sport with its activities during the First World War centenary.

The Orchard Family: Loss, Heartbreak and Remembrance – Liz Finn
29 July 2019

More than 740,000 British servicemen were killed or died in the First World War. The story of the Orchard family from Folkestone illustrates the human cost of the war. Liz Finn is an archivist with the Kent Archives Service, based at the Kent History and Library Centre. She currently combines her post of Community History Officer with a role as Manorial Documents Register Project Officer for Kent.

Clergy and Criminal Violence in later medieval Kent – Peter Clarke
9 September 2019

A presentation of the speaker’s current research on clergy and criminal violence in later medieval England and Wales, with special reference to pre-1500 church court records in the Rochester and Canterbury diocese archives. Peter D. Clarke is Professor of Ecclesiastical History at the University of Southampton and specialises in later medieval religious history, especially the papacy and canon law.

The White Horse of Kent – James Lloyd
21 October 2019

The White Horse is the ubiquitous symbol of the county but what exactly does it mean and for how long has it been used? James Lloyd gained a Cambridge doctorate for research into local government in Anglo-Saxon England. He currently combines roles as an archivist at the Kent History and Library Centre and librarian at Aylesford Priory.
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Kent Inn Names – Paul Cullen
28 October 2019
Paul considers fresh research in this follow-up to an earlier talk on how Kent alehouses, inns and pubs got their names. Paul Cullen is the English Place-Name Society’s editor for the Survey of Kent. His academic background is in historical linguistics, especially Old English, Old Scandinavian, and Old French. He is known to dozens as the folk troubadour, Paul Carbuncle.

Archive Events 2019
Kent Archives also has several special events on offer for 2019. For further information or bookings please call us on 03000 420673 or email archives@kent.gov.uk.

Brewing and Distilling in Faversham and Maidstone
18 July 6.30 p.m. at the Archbishop’s Palace, Maidstone.
Tickets £12 with some samples, booking advisable.
Talks by John Owen (Archivist of Shepherd Neame Plc) on ‘The Brewing Business during the First World War, with specific reference to Shepherd Neame’, and Helen Vining (Proprietor of Maiden Distillery) on ‘Maidstone’s distilling heritage’.
Interval sampling of craft beers and gins in the company of Dave Berry (Head Brewer of Cellarhead Brewing) and Helen Vining (Proprietor of Maiden Distillery).

Make a Decorative Paper Notebook
August 1 – 2 p.m. at the Kent History and Library Centre.
Ticket £5 to cover the cost of material and booking is essential as places are strictly limited.
Learn to make a useful and attractive notebook in an hour.

Make a Leather Bound Notebook
19 August 1 – 2 p.m. at the Kent History and Library Centre.
Ticket £5 to cover the cost of material and booking is essential as places are strictly limited.
Make a robust and practical leather bound notebook.
“Lucit in Tenebris Veritas”: The Records of Kent’s Two Dioceses (A Day Conference)

28 September 10 a.m., Kent History and Library Centre. Ticket: £12 to include a buffet lunch, booking essential.

Kent Archives is holding a one-day conference to mark the recent consolidation of the archives of Kent’s two ecclesiastical dioceses, Rochester and Canterbury, under one roof at the Kent History and Library Centre. To promote it, we are adopting the Latin motto of the seventeenth-century notary public William Somner, whose penwork can be found in contemporary documents found among the archives. *Lucit in tenebris veritas*, meaning ‘the truth shines in darkness’, expounds the effect we hope our speakers will have: that is, by exploring some of the rich diversity of material found in these collections they will shed light – where perhaps there was previously darkness – on a range of topics relevant to people interested in different sorts of history, including family, local, cultural, and ecclesiastical. Documents from both collections will be on display.

Papers by Ken Fincham (University of Kent) on the *Clergy of the Church of England Database*, Catherine Richardson (University of Kent) on the early modern household, Timothy Brittain-Catlin (University of Kent), on Queen Anne’s Bounty, Celia Heritage (Ancestry Progenealogists) on wills and probate Records for the family historian, Sheila Sweetinburgh (Canterbury Christ Church University) on lay piety in late medieval Kent, and Paula Woolf (Trinity College, Cambridge) on the involvement of women in early modern disputes over tithe.

Maidstone on Film

9 October 7 p.m., Archbishop’s Palace, Maidstone.
Tickets £10 includes refreshments, booking advisable.

This special programme takes us on an archive film tour of Maidstone and district from the 1930s to the 1960s. The films, all drawn from the collection of Screen Archive South East, feature the parade of Maidstone Industries led by the Mayor of Maidstone Councillor G. Tyrwhitt Drake (c. 1930), auctioneers at work at the livestock market (1932), the River Medway and its course through Aylesford Bridge, Allington Lock and East Farleigh (c. 1935), a visit to Harold Potter, the miller at Chegworth Watermill (1946), the Kent Show of 1951 in colour at Mote Park, the work of the Maidstone and District Motor Services and street scenes and landmarks from the 1960s. *Many of these films have never been seen before in public*. SASE works in partnership with Kent Archives to collect, preserve, digitise, research and promote moving images made in Kent and the region. This show is presented by SASE and Kent Archives, with commentary by Dr Frank Gray of SASE.
Letters from Edwin L. Lutyens, later Sir Edwin Lutyens, and copies of replies by C. G. Dalison, May 1893-Feb 1898

Lara Joffe, Archive Collections Officer

This series of correspondence from May 1893 and February 1898 between the budding architect, Edwin Lutyens, and Charlotte Grace Dalison, provides a fascinating insight into the hard work required to obtain architectural commissions when one does not yet have a name in the profession, as well as the horticultural trends of the Arts and Crafts movement.

Charlotte Dalison’s husband, Captain Maximilian Dudley Digges Dalison, was killed in the Sudan in 1885 and she was keen to hire Edwin Lutyens to design a chancel at Plaxtol church in memorial to him. Charlotte Dalison was living in Apartment 32, a large grace and favour apartment at Hampton Court Palace and sought advice from Lutyens on planting ideas that she could use. Interestingly, Lutyens’ reply of 29 May 1893 is from Munstead, Godalming, the home of Gertrude Jekyll, whose house he was designing, and with whom he worked on many projects. Jekyll’s expertise in plants complemented Lutyens' architectural skills and they were both firm proponents of Arts and Crafts ideals.

Lutyens suggests obtaining three paraffined tubs and cutting them in half to produce the six required. After boring holes in the base for drainage, he advises to ‘paint them a nice green made of Lamp Black and Yellow Chrome – principally chrome’. Jekyll favoured a colour in her planting schemes called ‘invisible green’ – a natural and unobtrusive hue that blended into the background – and it is possible that the colour mixing that Lutyens describes was the paint recipe that Jekyll devised for achieving this. Lutyens suggests planting the barrels with Laurustinus, box, bay and Osmanthus ilicifolius, now Osmanthus heterophyllus:

If you want plants that ramble and if annuals will do – nasturtiums are the best – otherwise – Ec-cremocarpus scaber – (a very quick growing climber with scarlet and orange flowers in clusters) handy with slight protection at the roots required. Cobea scandens – this, the last named I could send you plants of…You might have a green set for the winter of box – yew and laurustinus in couples – and you could no doubt get leave to put them elsewhere in the summer. [U1250/F89/3]

Did Gertrude Jekyll help him with these planting ideas, as well as suggesting the colour scheme?
Whoever the author of the plans was, Charlotte Dalison must have been excited by these planting ideas because in Lutyens’ letter of 3 June 1893 [U1250/F89/4] he says that he is sending her the plants and gives very detailed advice, with small drawings, about the barrels. As an afterthought, he adds, ‘Did I leave a pair of gloves in your drawing room?’

Through these early letters there is a constant refrain enquiring if the Plaxtol Church design had progressed. In his letter of 13 July 1893 [U1250/F89/6], Lutyens reports having come up against Mr Cazalet of Fairlawn and expresses horror that ‘he had never heard of my name or that I had done any work’. Though his design for the chancel can be found at the RIBA, his plan was not executed.

By 15 November 1893 [U1250/F89/11], Lutyens was designing a memorial cross for Charlotte’s late husband at Hampton Court Palace Chapel in copper gilt with a nimbus effect in the junctions of the angles of the arms of the Cross. In his letter of 25 November 1893 [U1250/F89/12], it is apparent that Lutyens had clashed with the Rev. Ingram who was chaplain in ordinary to the Queen at the palace since 1893: ‘Mr Ingram is not of an artistic temperament and objects to copper gilt because all the crosses and work he has seen in Churches have been brass…I will design you a copper gilt cross and he doesn’t know the difference between brass or gold or tin and silver – that the first are yellow and the others are white is about the extent of his knowledge of the Crafts’. Five years later, Charlotte Dalison apologised in a letter of 4 February 1898 [U1290/F89/18] that the project went so badly and that ‘you were taken advantage of for want of experience etc. etc.’. Lutyens was finally paid £5 for his design of the cross.

The Dalison family continued their association with Lutyens in later years. In 1926, the next generation of Dalisons commissioned him to remodel The Grange at Plaxtol, and finally, in 1929, he was commissioned to carry out a memorial cross in the churchyard at Plaxtol.

If you are inspired by Lutyens’ suggestions and would like to recreate the Arts and Crafts period on your own terrace, then you are urged to act fast. He concludes his letter of 29 May 1893 to Charlotte Dalison with the command: ‘let me know whether you like them [his ideas] – as soon as possible – as the season is getting well advanced’. [U1250/F89/3]
Kent Archives’ Parish Registers on www.findmypast.co.uk

Sheila Malloch, Customer Services Officer—Archives and Local History

As you may have seen in the recent publicity on our website and social media, we have now completed our digitisation project with Findmypast of the parish baptism, marriage and burial registers that we hold. At present, entries from the sixteenth century up to 1919 can be accessed; these will be supplemented annually by the release of an additional year’s worth of entries (so, for instance, in 2020 the entries from 1920 will also become available). Kent Archives’ collection of registers covers most of central and west Kent, and the release of these images on Findmypast complements the already-digitised registers covering east Kent that are held at Canterbury Cathedral Archives, permitting parish record searches across most of the county.

This great resource, in addition to the other records available on Findmypast, can be accessed for free on any public computer in Kent County Council libraries, as well as here in the Archives at the Kent History and Library Centre. To search and view images at home you will need to pay for your own individual subscription, although if you live outside Kent, it may be worth enquiring at your local library or Archives if they have a similar arrangement with Findmypast.

If you wish to search Findmypast in the Archives or one of the libraries, ask a member of staff to book you onto one of the public computers. Printed instructions for searching Findmypast are available and if you need further help please just ask. Putting these instructions into words may sound confusing but once you have begun to investigate the search functions it hopefully will become second nature.

To find the Kent parish records’ sets, click the ‘search’ button in the header on the Findmypast homepage, and then select ‘A to Z of record sets’ from the drop-down menu.

Under ‘Search A-Z of record sets’, type ‘Kent’ into the search box; this will bring up all record sets covering the county, including ‘Kent Baptisms’, ‘Kent Marriages and Banns’, and ‘Kent Burials’. Once you have selected a particular record set, you will be able to enter additional details, such as the name of the individual you are seeking and the approximate date of the event that you are interested in. Checking the ‘name variants’ box broadens your search to include variant spellings, which can be very helpful for older entries when names were often spelt differently.

Starting your search from the Findmypast ‘Search’ menu on the website homepage [www.findmypast.co.uk] and selecting ‘A-Z of record sets’.
Findmypast finds relevant records as you enter your search criteria, so if your search is successful you just need to click ‘View results’ to bring up a list of the entries. Each of the entries includes a transcript and/or digitised copy of the original document, which can be accessed via the icons to the right.

If you are wanting to search the records for a single parish rather than searching for an individual, then you can do so by selecting ‘Kent County Council Parish Register Browse’ from ‘A to Z of record sets’. This allows you to search the images of an individual register for any parish as if you were browsing the original register. If you would like to do the same thing for those registers held at Canterbury Cathedral Archives, then you can do this by selecting the record set ‘Kent, Canterbury Archdeaconry Parish Registers Browse 1538-1913’. If at any point you want to start a new search or try a different record set you can go back to ‘Search’ and redefine your criteria or start anew.

Printouts can be produced of any transcript entries or images for a fee, although the procedure for printing may vary from one location to another, so please ask staff for advice. As the digitised images are superior in quality to our microfilmed copies of these records, we will shortly be removing the parish register microfilms from public access at the Kent History and Library Centre to storage. However, any microfilmed records that have not formed part of the digitisation project will still be available for public access. This includes the original registers for All Saints, Maidstone, Bethersden, Lenham and Wormshill, which remain in the care of these parishes. Kent Archives’ collection of printed parish register transcripts and indexes will also remain available to consult in the library and Archives.

A sample of the entries recorded in composite register P131/1/A/4 for SS Peter and Paul, Edenbridge, including the baptism entry for Susanah Brand on 29 Aug 1779, as displayed in the viewing window on Findmypast. The icons allow you to enlarge, rotate and move around the image, as well as moving between different pages in the same register.
Catalogue Transfer Project
Eighth update on newly transferred catalogues

The following catalogues have recently been added and will be available on our online catalogue soon:

U145: Faunce-Delaune Manuscripts, 1484-1938
U487: Title deeds, estate and legal papers concerning the oyster fisheries and other property of the Alston family, 1617-1875
U488: Tyrwhitt-Drake manuscripts, c1330-1923
U542: Deeds and maps of Selling and Sheldwich, and deeds of Reculver and district, 1657-1817
U575: Deeds of Appledore, part of Dr Cock’s collection, 1581-1960
U780: Manorial papers and deeds of Birling and Ryarsh, 1371-1923
U830: James of Ightham manuscripts, 1568-1938
U850: Hawley manuscripts, 1659-1830
U876: Deeds, mainly of the Palmer family estate in Wingham, Swingfield and other locations, 1539-1755
U905: Deeds of the Tankerton estate, 1598-1919
U918: Deeds of Tickners farm, Hawkhurst, 1627-1792
U929: Holworthy collection, 1313-1938
U934: Powell manuscripts, 1500-c1984
U984: Deeds of Yalding and Faversham, 1380-1684
U1001: Deeds of various parishes, 1651-1907
U1007: Polhill-Drabble manuscripts, 1303-1937
U1018: Deeds of Bearsted, Boxley, Ewell, Gravesend, Lower Halstow, Rainham and Upchurch, 1622-1789
U1022: Deeds and other documents of Gillingham and other parishes, 1281-1695
U1025: Title deeds and miscellaneous official papers, 1584-1933
U1066: Deeds of Boxley and Maidstone, 1540-1880
U1080: Deeds and documents of the Walter family and other families relating mainly to property in Goudhurst, Marden and Staplehurst, and to property in Sussex and Hertfordshire, 1694-1957
U1088: Miscellaneous title deeds and estate papers, including the Baldock estate at New Hythe, 1581-1947
U1108: Title deeds and miscellaneous papers, 1540-1949
U1109: Deeds and maps, mainly of the Somerhill estate, Tonbridge, 1570-1919
U1118: Deeds of the manor of Egerton and of property in Godmersham, Crundale, Waltham, Wye, Chilham, Newington-next-Hythe, Hollingbourne and Harrietsham, 1552-c1867
U1158: Deeds of various Kent parishes, 1438-1804
U1159: Deeds of various Kent parishes, 1595-1845
U1163: Gore manuscripts, 1627-1891
U1246: Deeds and documents of the Lambard and other families, 1525-1882
U1329: Records of Stowting Manor, and title deeds and estate papers, various parishes, 1690-1933
U1397: Additional Filmer manuscripts, 1733-1947
U1409: Deeds of Fairlawn estate, Shipbourne and Ightham Mote estate, 1653-1930
U1418: Deeds and sale particulars of Alkham and neighbouring parishes, 1543-1933
U1431: Deeds, maps and business papers of G. Smith, estate agent, Boughton Monchelsea, 1609-1965
U1625: Trade Union and political papers of J. H. Thomas, 1901-1950
U1830: Family papers, 1814, and photographs of Canterbury and Rochester cathedrals, 20th century
U1918: Deeds for Frant (Sussex), Gravesend, Gillingham, Rochester, Wittersham, Goudhurst, Cranbrook, Ramsgate, Lydd and New Romney, 1610-1937
U1936: Deeds of Crippenden manor, Cowden, 1616-1725
U1954: Deeds and family papers, 1422-1617
U1957: Brett and Ransley family papers, c1800-1912
U1971: Deeds of Lewisham, 1759-1878
U2035: Deeds of the Stede Hill, Harrietsham estate, and papers of the Stede, Turner and Baldwin families, 1511-1901
U2040: Settlements and other documents of the Scoones family of Tonbridge, 1736-1860
U2085: Mead family papers, 1836-1956
U2091: Deeds of Sandwich, 1653-1920
U2118: Deeds and papers of the Macknade estate, including Charing, Chartham, Chilham, Dymchurch, Herne, Reculver, Nackington, Whitstable and others, 1440-1908
U2193: Title deeds and estate papers of the Meade-Waldo family of Chiddingstone and Hever, 1741-1920
U2222: Title deeds, 1698-1914
U2224: Deeds relating to public houses in Kent, 1604-1925
The catalogue for the Wood and Warne family papers, U1390, has recently been uploaded to our website as part of the Catalogue Transfer Project. This fascinating collection captures personal experiences of living through the Victorian age and the turmoil of the First and Second World Wars, through the writings of T. J. Cleave Warne, vicar of Stoke parish in the Hoo peninsula from 1893 to his death in 1909, and those of his daughter Mary Wood (1893-1966), wife of Ted Wood of the Gravesend brewing family.

There is also a significant number of photographs of the Wood and Warne families. T. J. Cleave Warne’s diaries [U1390/F1-F23] are neat and succinct, and provide a flavour of his proactive work within the parish, his sermons, and the characters of the local religious community. They are particularly interesting as a record of his efforts to restore the church of St Peter and St Paul in Stoke, which was inherited in some disrepair from Rev. A Orne Harris, who had been dismissed for drunkenness and disorderly conduct. Cleave Warne’s enthusiasm at the outset of the clearance of the 18th century pews and three-decker pulpit is catching:

West Bros. commenced Ch[urch] Restoration by ‘gutting’ the nave. It was a grand sight to witness the demolition of the box pews and the partition in north aisle. Mary entered into the spirit of the thing as much as anyone. [U1390/F12, 13 June 1898]

He is careful to name the tradesmen and suppliers, such as Hubert Bensted, architect of the lychgate [U1390/F13], and West Bros. who, in addition to the work on the nave, undertook repairs on the vicarage and glebe buildings [U1390/Q4]. He even gives a sense of how funds were raised [U1390/Q5], how the builders were paid [U1390/Q7], and at times describes the look and style of the design features, such as new stained glass [U1390/Q10]. Photographs in the collection, such as U1390/Z25, survive to show the results of restoration, while ephemera, such as the printed forms of special services [U1390/Q11], provide insight into the activities taking place in the church, such as the commemoration of Queen Victoria in 1901, and the service to celebrate the Coronation of Edward VII. Such records nicely demonstrate how an incumbent’s personal papers can provide a useful accompaniment to the churchwardens’ accounts and vestry minutes when exploring the architectural history of a church.

Photographs of Stoke church following restoration [U1390/Z25 (c1900)].
On 21 April 1950 Mary Wood visited the Record Office [Kent Archives], where the archivist, Richard Holworthy, showed her the store and a document containing Christopher Marlowe’s signature [U1390/F72]. Marlowe’s signature appears in the Register of Depositions [DCh/PRC/39/11] in relation to the will of Katherine Benchkin (f.234).

Mary Wood’s diaries and notebooks span – with a few breaks – the period 1912-1965, and are more personal in nature than her father’s diaries. They focus on her social life, relations with friends and her love of literature, with critiques of contemporary works as well as her own short stories and poems.

Though seemingly unpublished, manuscripts for her short stories such as U1390/F138, ‘The Magic Petrol’, and U1390/F123, a story on the theme of civil defence, are intriguing reflections of the times. A significant part of her papers are devoted to a unique shared diary exchange with her close friend, Denys Burke Gill, U1390/F89, U1390/F97-U1390/F101, and their correspondence, U1390/C34.

Particularly striking are her observations about the outbreak of World War Two, her close reporting of politics and war news, and day-to-day village life in war time. U1390/F62 records how, in 1940, Mary and Ted’s Hawkhurst home, Tates, was requisitioned by the army; they would not return to the house until November 1945. In her diary for 1940, she records the construction of the family’s air-raid shelter:

> We have made an elegant shelter with three exits and a camp bed, but Mary White has put me out of countenance, hers is lovely with a carpet, cupboards, water laid on, an electric fire and a double bed! Isn’t that marvellous? [U1390/F89]

Mary’s diary entries include frequent reports of air raid damage and local casualties, whilst her increasingly disheartened tone epitomises public fear about the course of the War. On 25 January 1940 she observed that ‘Churchill sounded very gloomy in the house this aft[ernoon]’, and on 30 June 1940 she queried, ‘I wonder how long it will be before the end? Think very soon – this country will go down very quickly under determined attack’ [U1390/F62]. However, her relief at the end of the War is evident in the return of her playfulness. Overjoyed by her family’s return to Tates, Mary drily observed: ‘I had no idea I had so many beautiful things or that my taste was so remarkably good. After all these years of enduring other people’s awful colours it is bliss to get back to my own!’ [U1390/F95].

We also get glimpses of the wider war effort in her son George Wood’s surprisingly jolly letters whilst serving in Algeria, Italy and Greece [U1390/C30], and even post-war in a letter of from POW Adolf Seibel whom Mary Wood befriended [U1390/C59/20]. Mary Wood’s papers give a real feel of the local impact of a far-reaching war and would complement records such as collection U3719: Hawkhurst ARP records and the County Control War Diaries [C/Ad1/1-18].

**Wedding photograph album**

Kent Archives is hoping to reunite an album of wedding photographs with any surviving family members. The album contains photographs, cards and telegrams for the marriage of Michael John Dennis and Susan Brenda Pollard on 26 August 1961 at Holy Trinity church, Sheerness. It was sent to Kent Archives from Dorset Archives, having previously been found in an old people’s complex in Christchurch, Dorset, that was demolished in the summer of 2017. Kent Archives would be delighted to hear from any relatives of the couple who would like to reclaim the album and the special memories that it contains.
Manorial Documents Register Project Update: Decoration in Manorial Records

Liz Finn, Manorial Documents Register Project Officer for Kent

One unanticipated pleasure of working on the MDR Project has been the decorative touches in many of the documents. The following is just a very small selection of the delights to be found in manorial records.

Some volumes were bound in fragments of medieval manuscripts. The cover of the Cuxton court book for 1584-1641 [U1121/M2a] is part of a 12th century manuscript. The beautifully illuminated letter ‘D’ shows a man playing a stringed instrument, surrounded by a feather-winged dragon with a foliage-terminating tail, biting another piece of foliage! The Otham court book for 1486-1688 (U3847/M1) is bound in a leaf from an early 13th century law book. At first sight this is much more utilitarian, but it is still decorated with some beautiful blue and red pen flourishes.

Although manorial records were functional items, recording legal, financial and administrative transactions, a surprising amount of care was taken to make the documents themselves appear decorative. Many demonstrate the fine calligraphy and design sense of the writer. Early examples include a late 16th century court book for the Dean and Chapter of Rochester's manors in the distinctive handwriting of Martin Cotes [Medway Archives CCRc/M3, illustrated in Issue 11 of this Newsletter] and the many court rolls from the 1660s at Canterbury Cathedral Archives [e.g. CCA U15/13/19 for Chartham]. Even some late 19th and early 20th century documents, such as the Hol-lingbourne court book [CCA U63/452064], are masterpieces of calligraphy.

Large initial letters often tempted scribes to exercise their artistic talents. The initial R of a Glassenbury rental, copied in 1611 [U47/11/M9], includes a man wearing a giant snail, a naked man with wings wearing a plumed helmet and blowing a shell trumpet, and a cherub's head flanked by wings!

The late 15th century ministers’ accounts for the Archbishop of Canterbury's bailiwicks of Maidstone [U386/M17] and Otford [U269/M236] contain some particularly fine, not to say surreal, historiated initials. The C in the accounts for Wrotham in 1497-1498 (U269/M236) include a small male figure, or possibly a monkey, on top of a tree with large, feathery leaves; a grotesque, long-nosed, creature; a dragon with a belled collar; and a small furry creature with a coiled tail! The C of the account for Northfleet (U269/M236) shows two hairy, naked, men, one climbing a tree or vine, and the other kneeling below. I wonder what was going through the scribe’s mind? (Or perhaps it’s best not to know!)

The court rolls for Wrotham appear to have been copied in the mid-16th century for Robert Byng who became lord of the manor in the 1550s and they contain many elaborate pieces of calligraphy and some wonderful doodles. Wrotham was an Archbishop's manor until 1537 and it's interesting to speculate (although impossible to know) whether Robert Byng's scribe was inspired by some illustrations in the originals. There are many grotesque faces, including what looks like a multi-chinned monk (U55/M18) and a man with a Mohican haircut (U55/M20), and even a fox trying to steal some grapes (U55/M22).

A collection of faces in the Wrotham manor court roll [U55/M20], including—on the right-hand side—one with a Mohican!

An assortment of strange creatures appear in the Wrotham manorial accounts for 1497-1498 [U269/M236].

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If you have any comments regarding this newsletter please contact: archives@kent.gov.uk