

***Ruislip, Northwood & Eastcote Local History Society***

**Everyday Life on the Manor of Ruislip c. 1200-1500: Workshop on Manorial Records**

***Led by Dr Virginia Bainbridge: Friday 11 May: 2.30-4.30 pm:***

***The Stables, Eastcote House Gardens***

**2.30-3.00 – Life on Ruislip Manor for the medieval tenants of the Abbey of Bec: Powerpoint introduction to the manorial system and using its records as sources for local history**

### **1. Origins of the Manorial System**

The origin of the manorial system stretches back into the era long before written records. The earliest documents recording land ownership are records of royal administration: **Anglo-Saxon charters** recording grants of land, **Domesday Book** written in 1086 recording changes in ownership and property values after the Norman Conquest, and the **Pipe Rolls** written by the scribes of the Exchequer from 1130 recording taxation collected by the sheriff (shire-reeve) of each county.

### **2. What is a Manor – Lords and Peasants – The ‘Feudal Pyramid’**

From the time of the Norman Conquest, the legal fiction that the king owned all the land and granted it to his vassals governed the pattern of landholding. The great lords, the barons, abbots and bishops, held great estates from the king composed of many manors. Lesser lords, knights and gentry, held one or more manors, either directly from the king or from his barons and churchmen. By the late 12<sup>th</sup> century a market in parcels of freehold land and even whole estates had developed. Knightly families paid scribes to write **deeds** recording their exchange of property rights, both leases and sales.

### **3. Collective Memory and Manorial Records**

In Michael Clanchy's wonderful book, *From Memory to Written Record*, he describes how land transfers were originally made at public ceremonies, where the parties announced their intention in front of witnesses and sealed their transfer with the exchange of a piece of turf, or even a valuable sword or dagger. The piece of turf or dagger was a reminder of the exchange, but far more important were the people who had gathered to witness the transaction and to verify it in the future. This accounts for the long list of witnesses to early deeds, wills and other documents. As literacy advanced, a written record of the occasion was made, which came to be more important than the living memory of the witnesses.

Michael Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307* (1979, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn 1993)

here were two aspects to local government on each manor: the first was self-government by 'the community of the vill', the leading peasants who decided issues such as what crops to grow, and how to discipline their inferiors through a system of officers including stock warden, hay wardens, tithing men, jurors and constables.

W.O. Ault, 'Open Field Husbandry and the Village Community: a study of agrarian by-laws in Medieval England', *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, n.s. 55, part 7 (1965), pp. 1-102

This system was ancient, and although each manor was held by a member of the ruling elite, Anglo-Saxons generally being replaced by Norman lords between 1066 and 1086, they depended on the 'community of the vill' to help them govern.

#### **4. Manors and Estates – administration & management**

In the decades around 1200 literacy was becoming more widespread in Western Europe. Methods of administration were developing and those with power, kings, nobles, abbots and bishops, were employing professional scribes. The series of records made by royal chanceries, or secretariats, were copied by aristocrats, bishops and heads of monastic houses, and knightly families.

Manorial records written for landlords by professional scribes provided information about the value and profits of their estates. Notes of important business at regular meetings between the lord and his officials and his tenants were written down in increasing quantities in the course of the 1100s. These manorial records continued to be made in Britain until the Law of Property Act abolished the legal powers of manor courts in 1925.

The estate records which survive most frequently are those made for ecclesiastical landlords. They did not die out in the male line – their lands and records remained in the *dead hand* (*mort main*) of the church. For example the medieval estate archive of Glastonbury Abbey, now held at Longleat by the Marquis of Bath, is one of the largest medieval estate archives in Europe. The bishops of Winchester owned the entire hundred of Downton (Wiltshire), until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when the estate was finally sold.

Manorial records include:-

- Manor court records – change of tenants, minor wrong-doings, profits from fines
- Accounts – records of the lord's crops and livestock, income and expenses
- Customals – records of inheritance customs eg widows' dower

- Extents, terriers, surveys, rentals – descriptions of land, fields, tenants' holdings
- Maps – these were made in increasing numbers from c.1700

P.D.A. Harvey, *Manorial Records* (British Record Association, London 1984)

Denis Stuart, *Manorial Records: an Introduction to their transcription and translation* (Phillimore, Chichester, 1992)

Mark Bailey, ed., *The English Manor: Selected Sources* (Manchester U.P. 1993)

To find manorial records for your parish access *The National Archives **Manorial Documents Register*** to find out which records survive and which archive holds them.

<http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/manor-search>

## 5. The Earliest History of Ruislip

According to Hugh Braun, Ruislip developed on a patch of gravel, a fertile area on the edge of the London clay, at a crossing of the *Pinn Brook* and on routes through ancient forest. There is evidence of Prehistoric settlement on the site where later an Anglo-Saxon hall stood. Before the Norman Conquest the manor of Ruislip was held by Ulward Wit, a thegn of King Edward the Confessor, who held considerable estates. Predictably between 1066 and 1086 he had been replaced by a Norman, Ernulf of Hesdin, an important follower of William I. Ernulf built his castle on the site of the Anglo-Saxon hall. As he had no male heirs, Ernulf de Hesdin granted Ruislip to the Abbot and convent of Bec-Hellouin (Normandy), in c. 1087. Their manor house and estate buildings took the place of Ernulf's castle.

Eileen M. Boulton, *The Goodliest Place in Middlesex: A History of the ancient Parish of Ruislip from the Domesday Book to modern times* (Hillingdon Borough Libraries 1989)

Hugh S. Braun, 'Earliest Ruislip', *Transactions of London and Middlesex Archaeological Society*, 7, Part 1, (1933), pp. 99-123

*Victoria County History of Middlesex*, Vol. IV: 'Ruislip, Manors and other estates', pp. 134-137: <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/middx/vol4>

## 6. Ownership by the Abbey of Bec c. 1087-1404 – the problem of Alien Priories

Bec enjoyed possession of Ruislip, one of its richest English manors, during the 12<sup>th</sup> century. However, by the reign of King Henry II (1154-89), the English kings were struggling to retain control of Normandy and their other duchies in France. There followed several centuries of warfare between the kings of England and France. Because taxation from the English estates of Bec, as one of the so-called *Alien Priories* flowed to its mother-house in France, the money funded the war efforts of

the French king. This led to regular confiscations of Bec's English property, firstly in 1211 by King John. Thereafter Ruislip was frequently in royal hands, and almost permanently by the reign of Richard II.

Marjorie Morgan, *The English Lands of the Abbey of Bec* (Oxford, Clarendon Press 1946, 1968)

Marjorie Chibnall [née Morgan], ed. *Select Docs. of the English Lands of the Abbey of Bec* (Camden Soc. 3<sup>rd</sup>. ser. Vol. 73, London 1951)

Laurence E. Morris, 'A Customal, and Customs of the Manor of Ruislip', *Transactions of London and Middlesex Archaeological Society*, 19, part 1 (1958), pp. 22, 25

## **7. From Royal Property to Ownership by Kings College, Cambridge 1404-1441**

In 1404, the Bec properties were finally confiscated by Henry IV. He granted Ruislip to his third son John, duke of Bedford with reversion to the Crown. On his death in 1435, Ruislip reverted to the Crown. Henry VI leased Ruislip Manor to his chancellor John Somerset as part of a land-bank in preparation for his foundation of a Cambridge college. In 1441 Henry VI founded his college of St Mary and St Nicholas, now known as Kings College.

## **8. Kings College Archive and selected records from Ruislip: summary of 5 documents**

The estate records of the Abbey of Bec were transferred to their new owners, Kings College, Cambridge, who produced further records until the College estate was sold in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The records are still carefully preserved in King's College Archive.

A selection of 5 court rolls and 2 surveys were chosen for this project because they related to other surviving records.

### **A. COURT ROLLS**

#### **1) COURT ROLL, 1247/8 [32/33 Henry III] KCAC CATALOGUE ENTRY: BEC/02**

The earliest surviving court roll of the Abbey of Bec's English estates.

Ruislip, on m3 r, 3<sup>rd</sup> entry, continued on recto: many court cases and names written in legible handwriting in dark ink.

It relates to Ruislip Customal c.1230-47, printed in:-

Marjorie Chibnall [née Morgan], ed. *Select Docs. of the English Lands of the Abbey of Bec* (Camden Soc. 3<sup>rd</sup>. ser. Vol. 73, London 1951), pp. 74-84

## **2) COURT ROLL, 1290-2 [19-21 Edward I] KCAC CATALOGUE ENTRY: BEC/10**

For Ruislip entries see Recto & Dorso. Comparisons may be made with two other documents,

i) The 1288/9 Pipe Roll for Bec estates, containing entries for Ruislip, printed in:-

Marjorie Chibnall [née Morgan], ed. *Select Docs. of the English Lands of the Abbey of Bec* (Camden Soc. 3<sup>rd</sup>. ser. Vol. 73, London 1951), pp. 125-45, at pp. 130-1

ii) The 1294 Extent of Bec estates, containing entries for Ruislip, as part of the survey of the property of Alien Priories:-

The National Archives, PRO, E 106/2 (1-6), extent of 1294; see extracts and discussion in:-

Eileen M. Boulton, *The Goodliest Place in Middlesex* (1989), pp. 45-9

## **3) COURT ROLL, 1383/4 [7 Richard II] KCAC CATALOGUE ENTRY: RUI/52**

This shows Ruislip in the decades after the Black Death epidemics of 1348/9, 1360/2, 1369.

It is close in date to Poll Tax records 1377-81, although lists of names have not survived:-

The National Archives, PRO, E 179/242/63, various counties, writ and list of collectors; E 179/196/34, various counties, receipts

It is also close in date to court rolls of 1377, following confiscation by the Crown:-

The National Archives, PRO, SC 2/191/14-31, Harmondsworth manor with Ruislip, Court rolls (18) 1377-1531: Crown lands and estates

## **4) COURT ROLL, 1434/5 [13 Henry VI] KCAC CATALOGUE ENTRY: RUI/58**

This shows management of Ruislip manor by John, Duke of Bedford (d. 1435). It relates to:

The National Archives, PRO, SC 6/917/26 – Reeve's accounts, 1434-36

The National Archives, PRO, SC 6/917/26-28 – Reeve's account, 1442

## **5) COURT ROLL, 1446/7 [25 Henry VI] KCAC CATALOGUE ENTRY: RUI/58**

This shows management of Ruislip Manor by Henry VI, and his Chancellor John Somerset, who held the manor in preparation for the foundation of Kings College, Cambridge.

## **B RENTALS**

### **1) RENTAL, 1375-1400 [48/9 Edward III] KCAC CATALOGUE ENTRY: RUI/190**

The earliest rental in good enough condition to be copied. Sadly, earlier membranes have sustained water damage and are in fragments displayed in cellophane. Later membranes are in good condition. Large clear handwriting describes each holding in a separate paragraph marked out by a large bracket. It may be compared with:-

- i) Item 3) RUI/52, court roll, 1383/4
- ii) The National Archives, PRO, SC 2/191/14-31, Harmondsworth manor with Ruislip, Court rolls (18) 1377-1531: Crown lands and estates

### **2) RENTAL, 1435 [14 Dec, 14 Henry VI] KCAC CATALOGUE ENTRY: RUI/187**

Long (7 membranes), with closely-written paragraphs in good clear handwriting. This document was written following inheritance of Ruislip from John, Duke of Bedford (d. 1435), by his nephew Henry VI. Rentals and surveys were often made when estates changed hands to provide the new lord with accurate information. Henry VI also appointed a new steward, William Broughton. This rental was made not long after the 1421/2 rental, and may have been primarily an update, hence the less formal lay-out. It may be compared with RNELH Society's partial transcript of the 1421/2 rental:-

- i) KCAC, RUI/186, rental 1421/2
- ii) London Metropolitan Archives, 446/M/98/5, court roll with Harmondsworth, including list of tallages and services, 1416

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### **3.00-3.30 – Discussion: Bring your ideas on 3 main topics in manorial records (see book list below)**

1. Landlords and Tenants: organising everyday life
2. Working the Land: landscape, properties and buildings
3. Families: men, women and inheritance

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**3.30 – Tea break**

**3.45-4.30 – Exploring documents from King’s College Archive: Help with Latin and Palaeography**

3 x groups of 6-7 – 10 copies of all documents