

Court Books, Calendars and Prefaces

Compiled by Graham Davies, July 2016, revised 2022

1. Court Books and Calendars

Court Book transcriptions and Calendars held at the Museum, July 2016.

Beginning with the transcribed court records of 1568-74 Cyril Wanklyn produced a calendar instead of the previous verbatim copies of the earlier court records. Wanklyn writes, *These Calendars give chronological order to all the essential facts and names, matters of no importance being omitted altogether. The latter is the system adopted at the Public Record Office in its volumes of printed records. Time, cost and space all compel its adoption at Lyme Regis.* To the volumes listed here, Wanklyn added to each, a preface, index and glossary.

These duplicate volumes were permanently transferred from the Dorset History Centre to Lyme Regis Museum on January 19, 2016, and have been designated the accession number of 2016/14.

- 2016/14-1 Transcription and Translation of Court Book, 1309-1328. (Edward II, 1307-1327)
With index of persons and places; and glossary and notes.
- 2016/14-2 19 Court Records, 1437-1508 English Transcription. (Henry VI, 1422-1461)
With index of names and places; and glossary and notes. (Edward IV, 1461-1483)
(Richard III, 1483-1485 & Henry VII, 1485-1509)
- 2016/14-3 Court Book 1560-64 Verbatim Latin.
- 2016/14-4 Court Book 1560-64 Verbatim English.
- 2016/14-5 Court Book 1564-68 Verbatim Latin.
- 2016/14-6 Court Book 1564-68 Verbatim English.
- 2016/14-7 Court Book, Calendar Only, 1568-74 (Elizabeth I, 1558-1603)
With index to whole; and glossary and notes.
- 2016/14-8 Court Book Calendar 1578-1584.
With index of names, places & subjects; and glossary and notes.
- 2016/14-9 Calendar of Court Book 1592-1602.
With index of persons, places & subjects; and glossary and notes.
- 2016/14-10 Calendar of Court Book 1604-1608. (James I, 1603-1625)
With index of persons, places & subjects; and glossary and notes.
- 2016/14-11 Calendar of Court Book 1613-1627. (Charles I, 1625-1649)
With index of persons, places, subjects & freeholders; and glossary and notes.
- 2016/14-12 Calendar of Court Book 1647-1670. (Commonwealth, 1649-1660 & Charles II, 1660-1685)
With index of persons, places and subjects; and glossary and notes.
- 2016/14-13 Calendar of Court Book 1724-1765. (George I, 1714-1727 & George II, 1727-1760)
With index of persons, places and subjects; and glossary and notes.
- 2016/14-14 Calendar of Court Books 1766-1835. (George III, 1760-1820 & George IV, 1820-1830)
With index of persons, places and subjects; and glossary and notes. (William IV, 1830-37)

Court Books also in the Museum

1983/118 Calendar of Court Book 1672-92 Vol 1
1983/118 Calendar of Court Book 1692-1724 Vol 2
With index of persons, places and subjects; and glossary and notes for Vols 1 & 2.

Photocopy of Court Books, 1672-1724, with a register of Freemen, 1659-1835

Calendar of Court Books, 1672-1724
Glossary & notes from Court Book Calendar 1578-1584.

The 16 bound volumes of court books and calendars, at the Museum have been digitally transcribed (OCR) by team member Richard Wells. They are located in folder 'Court Books – Cyril Wanklyn' of this archive.

2. Prefaces

GD - Unlike the historical order of the transcriptions and Calendars listed above, these Prefaces, written by Cyril Wanklyn, are presented here in the order that the volumes were published.

This preface, written in May 1930, is found in the following transcriptions and Calendar.

2016/14-3 Court Book 1560-64 Verbatim Latin.
2016/14-4 Court Book 1560-64 Verbatim English.
2016/14-5 Court Book 1564-68 Verbatim Latin.
2016/14-6 Court Book 1564-68 Verbatim English.
2016/14-7 Court Book, Calendar Only, 1568-74

(GD - It should also be noted that Cyril Wanklyn subsequently writes in 1933 and 1935 that his suggestion that none of the Court Records prior to 1560 had survived was inaccurate.)

This is the first of a series of Court Books, extending (with certain small gaps) from September 1560 (the second year of Elizabeth) to December 1835, (the sixth year of William IV). Up to the latter year, Meetings of the Borough Council were always held in camera, members of Council retained office for life (if they so desired) and the surviving members filled up all vacancies. There was thus no system of public election. The Municipal Reform Act of 1835 swept away this state of things. These Court Books, therefore, contain no record of the proceedings of the Borough Council. What they record are:

- (1) The weekly meeting of the Hustings Court established by Edward I's Charter of 1285, and occupied principally with commercial cases.
- (2) The Court Leets held twice a year, just after Easter and just after Michaelmas, when a jury of Freemen sat in judgement on everyone from the mayor downwards for their shortcomings towards the community.
- (3) The meeting held once a year, i.e., on the first Monday after St Bartholomew's Day (August 24) for the election by the Freemen of a new Mayor.
- (4) Sometimes, but too infrequently, the election of a Member of Parliament.

The present volumes cover the period from 1560 to 1574. The original Court Book, which accompanies them is in medieval Latin, except that a few Court Leets towards the end are written in the old English script. From 1733, Latin fell out of use.

In starting on this first Court Book it was thought advisable to present a large portion of it verbatim, both in Latin and English, so that this might serve as a sample of the class of business recorded in other Court Books to be transcribed later on. 318 pages, therefore, covering the years 1560-68 have been transcribed verbatim. The remaining 83 pages, covering the years 1568-74, have been treated in the form of a calendar or precis. These Calendars give chronological order all the essential facts and names, matters of no importance being omitted altogether. The latter is the system adopted at the Public Record Office in its volumes of printed records. Time, cost and space all compel its adoption at Lyme Regis.

It may be asked what is known of any Court Books prior to 1560? Fortunately this question can be answered so far as concerns the period of the last 146 years. An information in the action of Rex v Luther dated July 29th, 1784, is in the Town Hall. This action is one of the many fought out between 1778 and 1785 when the borough was trying to free itself from the influence of the Fane family. John Luther was related to and an adherent of the Fanes and the information in his case states that in 1784 there existed:

- (1) A very imperfect and mutilated Court Book of Edward II (1307-27).
- (2) Some separate parchment rolls of Henry VI (1422-61), Edward IV (1461-83), and Henry VII (1485-1509).
- (3) One Court of Henry VIII.
- (4) One Court of Edward VI.
- (5) A regular series beginning with 1560.

It will thus be seen that (1), (2), (3) and (4) have all vanished, and, if these probably flimsy documents were being bandied about between the offices of various solicitors from 1778 to 1785, it is not surprising that they did not survive. Folios 10 and 11 in the portfolio of Fugitive Pieces 1 contain a few scraps of Court Books prior to 1560, but these are brands snatched from the burning. It is, of course, conceivable that other scraps of older Court Books may yet be discovered. Subject to this, however, we begin today, as we should have begun 145 years ago, with the 2nd year of Queen Elizabeth, i.e., 1560.

The lettering at the back of each volume will describe its contents. Three very full indexes are added to the last volume. i.e., of Names, of Places, of Subjects. In all these the number of the page given is that of the original Court Book and these numbers will be found on the left-hand margin of the folios. To these indexes are added a glossary in which various obsolete or unused words will be found explained.

Suggestions are also offered for throwing light on certain obscurities, but very little effort has been made to deal with any nice points of medieval law which may arise out of the record.

Preface to Court Book Calendar 1578-1584

Written By Cyril Wanklyn, June 1932

This is the second of a series of Court Books extending with gaps from September, 1560 (the second year of Elizabeth) to December, 1825 (the sixth year of William IV). It covers the period from October 6th, 1578, to October 3rd, 1684, and at the end (pp. 108-115) are certain formulae, records and regulations, to some of which no specific date can be assigned.

The work of the transcription has been done, as before, by J R Crompton, of the Public record Office, London, and for reasons set out in the preface to the previous Court Book (1560-1574) is in the form of a calendar. It is hoped, however, that no item of material interest has been omitted and meetings of the Court Leet and the annual meetings for the election of a new Mayor are (except for certain cross

references) transcribed in full. In this way much useless lumber has been dropped in the shape of interminable and uninteresting proceedings for the recovery of small debts and the vain repetition of legal forms. The last Court Book transcribed ended on July 20th, 1574. There is thus an unbridged gap of 4¼ years between the two. Whether the original of the missing period will ever be found, or not, is uncertain at present. The usual full indexes are at the end of the volume together with a 'Glossary and Notes'. The latter may often be consulted with advantage. It should be noticed that the numbers given in the indexes refer to those at the bottom of each typed page and that no effort has been made to index the many cross-references that occur in the course of the transcription. Numbers in the margin of the typed pages refer to the folios of the original Court Book.

Preface to 19 Court Records, 1437-1508 English Transcription

Written by Cyril Wanklyn, January 1933.

These are the earliest known Court Records of Lyme Regis - nineteen separate parchments in all, extending (of course with many gaps) from August 26th, 1437 to October 2nd, 1508. In all, during these 71 years, we have the proceedings of 50 Courts some of which are very short. This shows that much has been lost. In any case two meetings of the Court Leet were held each year, as well as one meeting for the election of the mayor and other officials, which means that the proceedings of 213 Courts should have come down to us, apart altogether from what took place at the Weekly Mayor's Court. It will thus be seen that the suggestion in the Preface to the Court Book of 1560-1564, viz., that none of the Court Records prior to 1560 had survived, is happily inaccurate. In fact, with the exception of the Court Book of Edward II (1307-27) most of the other parchments seem to have been discovered. Thus, we have in this volume 17 Courts of Henry VI (1422-61), 5 of Edward IV (1461-83), and 28 of Henry VII (1485-1509) making up the total of 50 Courts. To complete those Courts set out in the Preface referred to above, the one court of Henry VIII may possibly be found at folio 13 of Fugitive Pieces II and the one Court of Edward VI at Folio 11 of Fugitive pieces I. But it is impossible to speak with certainty on this point. Other fragmentary Courts of Henry VII (all referring to the business of the Mayor's Court) may be found at Folio 6 of Fugitive Pieces II. Mr Crompton is of the opinion that all the parchments transcribed into this volume were written at the time and not compiled for any special purpose later. It was the mysterious fact of the 18th Century transcript of the Latin version of these 19 documents which led to the search for and discovery of the originals, all of which may now be accounted for, except the Court Book of Edward II. That in all probability has not survived. In the case of one very faded original (No.2) the 18th Century transcription has been invaluable. Other parchments as well are both faded and torn

Preface to Transcription and Translation of Court Book 1309-1328

Written by Cyril Wanklyn, April, 1935.

In the Preface of 1930 to the Elizabethan Court Book of 1560-1574 it was stated that a very imperfect and mutilated Court Book of Edward II had been sworn to as belonging to the Corporation of Lyme Regis in 1784, but had since disappeared. Three other items among Lyme's archives seemed then (in 1930) to

have vanished in a similar manner, but have since been recovered and transcribed. These are all now in the Museum.

It was not till November 1934 that by a happy accident this extremely valuable document of the reign of Edward II was run to earth. It was then found to be one of the tens of thousands of manuscripts owned by the British Museum, having been presented to that institution in 1880 by William Maskell, a well-known 'medievalist'. Consequently it is now no longer in Lyme's Town Hall or Museum, but is merely 'British Museum; Additional MSS. 31223'.

Neither Hutchins nor Roberts knew anything of this Court Book, which has never been transcribed before. The present transcription has been done at the Public Record Office, London, from a photostat, and the latter will be found in a companion volume to this transcription. As work proceeded, the transcription has been checked with the original. Not only are 6 new Mayors of Lyme Regis added by this record to the lists of Mayors given by Hutchins and Roberts, but fresh particulars come to light of no less than 14 of Lyme's earliest representatives in the House of Commons. These names include those of the two first, viz., William de Tholuse and Geoffrey le Keu. The note of the transcriber (Mr J R Crompton) on pp. 1-2 calls attention to the extreme value of the original as an example of the early use of paper in England instead of parchment for such documents.

A transcription of the Latin original is given (pp. 4-31) as well as an English translation (pp. 32-59) of the Latin. The rest of the volume is taken up with the usual indexes and notes. A figure in red ink set against any word in the text refers the reader to the corresponding figure against each item in the Glossary (pp. 65-76). The above remarks must be read in conjunction with the transcriber's note (pp. 1-2).

Preface to Calendar of Court Book 1592-1602 with Indexes

Written by Cyril Wanklyn, July 1935.

GD -This volume also contains three sheets of foolscap paper containing hand-written notes by Cyril Wanklyn.

This Calendar is that of a Court Book of Lyme Regis which covers the years 1592-1602.

The work of transcription has been done, as before, by Mr J R Crompton of the Public Record Office, London. The last Court Book transcribed ended with 1584 and no book covering the years 1584-1592 has been found. There is thus an unbridged gap of 8 years in the records.

The usual indexes and Glossary will be found at the end of the volume. The numbers of the pages given in the indexes etc., refer to those at the bottom of each typed page. Numbers in the margin of the typed pages refer to the folios of the original Court Book. Numbers in red ink in the text refer to the corresponding numbers in the margin of the Glossary (pp 67-83).

Preface to Calendar of Court Book 1604-1608 with Indexes

Written By Cyril Wanklyn, November 1935.

This is the first Lyme Court Book of the Stuart period, and the Calendar of it runs from February 1603/4 to April 1608. The work of the transcription has been done by Mr J R Crompton of the Public Record Office, London. There is a small but unimportant gap between this and the Previous Court Book.

The usual Indexes and Glossary will be found at the end of the volume. The numbers of the pages given in these indexes refer to those at the bottom of each typed page. Numbers in the margins of the typed pages refer to the folios of the original Court Book. Numbers in red ink in the text refer to the corresponding numbers of each item in the Glossary (pp 52-62).

Preface to Calendar of Court Book 1613-1627 with Indexes

Written by Cyril Wanklyn, November 1936.

The original of this Court book, which extends from 1613 to 1627, is in two parts, viz., and a large volume covering the period mentioned, and a smaller book for part only of the period (1613-1619). The smaller book is clearly a note-book from which the larger book was written up, but it contains certain entries which are of more interest to us than they were apparently to the men of that time.

The Calendar of these two books has been done by Mr J R Crompton of the Public record office, and it will be noticed that pp. 1-54 concern themselves with the larger, and pp. 55-59 with the smaller of the two originals. It may be added that pp. 54-59 contain only such entries of importance as had not already found their way into pp. 1-54.

There is a small gap between this Court Book and the previous one, which reached the year 1608.

The usual indexes a glossary will be found after p.59 and the numbers of the pages there given refer to those at the bottom of each typed page. At pp. 86-99 will be found a special Appendix. The numbers there given refer to the folios of the original Court Book. Numbers in the margin of the typed pages refer to the folios of the original Court Book. Numbers in red ink in the text refer to the corresponding numbers of each item of the Glossary, pp. 73-85.

Preface to Calendar of Court Book 1647-1670 with Indexes

Written by Cyril Wanklyn, June 1937.

This Calendar extends from 1647 to 1670. There is thus a gap of 20 years between it and the calendar of the previous Court Book. This Calendar is chiefly made up from two originals, viz,

- (1) A vellum-bound volume of about 500 pages, the front of which is contained in pp. 1 to 60 of the typed Calendar, and the reverse of which is given to proceedings at General Sessions of the Peace, which fill up pp. 61 to 85 of the typed Calendar.
- (2) Roll of a Draft Court Book (i.e., notes from the main Court Book) covering the years 1668 to 1670. This has now been made into a separate volume.

But since this Calendar was bound, another Draft Court Book, containing notes for the years 1665 to 1668 only, has come to light. The three new pages of Calendar derived from this source are inserted as nearly as possible at the appropriate dates, viz., after pp. 47, 53 and 55. The Draft Book has now been placed in a separate case.

The work of transcription has again been done by Mr J R Crompton of the Public Record Office.

The usual indexes and glossary will be found after p. 85. Numbers in the margin of the typed pages refer to the folios of the originals. Numbers in red ink in the text refer to the corresponding numbers of each item of the Glossary.

Preface to Calendar of Court Book 1672-1692 Vol I Calendar of Court Book 1692-1724 Vol II with Indexes

Written by Cyril Wanklyn, March 1939.

This Calendar extends from 1672 to 1724. For the purpose of convenience it has been divided into two volumes, the pages running consecutively. The first volume ends at p. 188 (Oct 1692 and the second volume includes pp. 189 to 341 (March 1724). After p. 341 will be found the usual indexes and notes. The whole has been compiled out of seven principal or subsidiary Court Books of Lyme Corporation. The work of transcription has been done by Mr D B Wardle of the Public Record Office.

The references in the indexes are to the bottom of each typed page. Numbers in red ink in the text refer to the corresponding numbers in the Glossary and Notes at the end of Vol II.

Preface to Calendar of Court Book 1724-1765

Written by Cyril Wanklyn, April 1940.

This Calendar extends from 1725 to 1765. It has been compiled from an exceptionally large vellum-bound register, which was in very bad condition, and three smaller sets of memoranda which are preserved together in one case.

The work of transcription has been done by Mr D B Wardle of the Public record Office.

Two important changes, which affected all England alike, occurred during the period of this Calendar. The first change was the Act of 1731, by which English instead of Latin, became the official language of Corporations and other public bodies. The Act was adopted by Lyme Regis in 1733.

The second change was the adoption in 1752 of the Gregorian instead of the inaccurate Julian Calendar. This is referred to on p. 75.

At pp. 137-164 will be found the usual indexes and notes. The references in the indexes are to the numbers at the bottom of each typed page. A number in red ink in the text refers to the corresponding number in the Glossary and Notes at pp. 151-164.

Preface to Calendar of Court Books 1766-1835 with Indexes

Written by Cyril Wanklyn, December 1940.

(GD - In the pocket at the back page of this volume will be found family trees of the Henleys etc.)

This Calendar extends from January 1766 to December 1835, when Lyme's old Court of Hustings was abolished by the Municipal Reform Act of that year.

It has been compiled by the undersigned from originals consisting,

- (1) 4 vellum bound volumes covering the following years, viz., 1766-1779. 1779-1783, 1788-1802, and 1819-1831.
- (2) Paper-covered note-books which record the proceedings of the two missing periods, viz., 1802-1819. and 1831-1835.

The vellum volumes were in very bad condition and have been restored. The paper-covered note books, the contents of which were intended for permanent volumes, have been bound to be in keeping with the rest.

There is much re-iteration of formulae in these books. All this has been omitted, but it is believed that every relevant fact appears in the Calendar.

The pages after p. 137 are taken up with indexes and notes. A number in red ink in the text refers to the corresponding number of 'Glossary and Notes' at the end of the volume.