

# English Origins and Sources IV

By George Redmonds

I spent the month of August last year in Kansas, working on English documents which are vital to an understanding of local and family history in the part of West Yorkshire where I now live. In fact, with the library's help, I was able to locate and transcribe many hundreds of deeds which formerly belonged to the Kaye family of Woodsome Hall and which, with a few exceptions, have no known counterparts in England. The earliest items in the collection date back to the thirteenth century, and the latest to the 1700s, but the vast majority are title deeds from the Tudor and Stuart periods.

The collection is housed in the Spencer Library in Lawrence, the rare books, manuscripts, and archives library of the University of Kansas. It is located in the Department of Special Collections, which is a broad-based rare books and MSS library with an international reputation. The manuscripts division contains about 300,000 items, primarily from Europe (including Britain), Latin America, and the US, and it concentrates on the humanities and natural history. Few of the manuscripts have been published. They are seen by the library as primary sources for use by researchers: all readers are welcome in the library, but the manuscripts must of course be used within the Department. Among the sample of 'broad subject areas' listed in a brief introduction to the Department's holdings are the following tantalizing headings: (1) British family papers (letters, legal documents, financial accounts, diaries, etc.) largely 17th to 19th centuries, and (2) Several thousand miscellaneous British deeds, 14th to 19th centuries.

Among those miscellaneous deeds are two categories temporarily entitled The Yorkshire Deed-Box Collection and Huddersfield Area Deeds. These were the items that had first attracted my attention, and a brief explanation of how they came into the University's possession is a help to intending researchers. A paper prepared by Ms. Ann Hyde, the Department's Curator of Manuscripts, tells how in 1969 the Department bought two groups of British deeds and estate papers from the English book-dealers Hofmann-Freeman. One consisted of about 5,000 unsorted and supposedly miscellaneous items, the other, containing about 4,000 roughly sorted deeds, was from Kirtling Tower, a seat of the notable North family, who had extensive estates in the south of England.

The entire shipment arrived in the United States in parcels, made up it seems by the book-dealer. Once in Lawrence they were classified as 'H-F' and 'North' and a student gave the contents temporary numbers, providing scratch cards for all the items. These cards contained the temporary number, and bare details of the date, the parties involved and place names, where possible. The librarian's impression was that material from 'North' had somehow found its way into 'H-F' and vice-versa. An English archivist was hired to handle the collections and worked on them between 1982 and 1985. As a result there was some re-arrangement and re-boxing, but apparently it is not now always clear which items she handled, and some may have been misplaced. Work on classifying these deeds continues.

It was Ms. Hyde who first realized that a significant number of deeds related to places in and around the West Yorkshire parish of Huddersfield, although not to Huddersfield itself, and she informed the West Yorkshire Archive Service of the collection in 1991. Because the office was then short-staffed, Ms. Hyde's letter was sent to me, and I was asked if I could help. It was immediately clear to me that the deeds had to do with the estate of the Kayes of Woodsome and were likely to provide the key to several important chapters in the history of the family and the estate. And so it proved this last summer, when the research carried out in Lawrence was finally analyzed. The Kayes may not have been major landholders in the national context, but the search produced significant material for no fewer than twenty townships in West Yorkshire, clarifying the history of numerous farms and hamlets.

Moreover there proved to be even more valuable genealogical evidence in the deeds than I had dared to hope. I had of course expected that new light would be thrown on the various branches of the Kayes in and around Almondbury parish, and on the gentry families with whom they were directly linked. But there were also among the deeds marriage settlements, inquisitions post mortem, testamentary documents, copies of court roll and much else, all with direct evidence relating to the families who were tenants or neighbours of the Kayes. The total of such families or individuals comes to more than fifty, and includes such significant names as Saltonstall, Copley, Armitage, Dean, Lockwood, Crosland, Ramsden and Nettleton.

Since returning from Lawrence I have been able to compile a detailed calendar of the Yorkshire deeds, complete with place-name and surname indexes. Now it will be possible to make this particular section of the British collection in Kansas more widely available. Two things should not be forgotten, though. First, there are significant complementary collections for the Kayes's estate in England, both at the estate office of their successors, the Earls of Dartmouth, and in the Leeds section of the West Yorkshire Archive Service. Second, the Kaye material in Kansas amounts to no more than six or seven percent of the full British collection. No doubt there are still many exciting disc