

08.10.13, Dryburgh and Hartland, Calendar of the Fine Rolls

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Dryburgh, Paul and Beth Hartland. *Calendar of the Fine Rolls of the Reign of Henry III Preserved in the National Archives. 1216-1224. Vol. 1.* Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell, 2007. Pp. lix, 557. ISBN: 978-1-84383-337-6, 978-1-84383-337-9.

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British historians are blessed and cursed by the amazing abundance of primary sources available to them from the Middle Ages. Not only are British archives--national, local, diocesan, and private--stuffed full of manuscripts, they are also easily accessible and have been for the last 150 years. Getting to the archives and working with their sometimes arcane catalogues and confusing rules can deter many a researcher, however, and the need to be proficient in medieval Latin, Norman French, and medieval chancery book hands makes these documents impenetrable to students and enthusiasts. These people often turn to the numerous volumes of sources that have been abstracted, calendared, and printed in both Latin and English translations by the predecessor of The National Archives, The Public Record Office, by local record societies, by the Record Commission, and in the famous "Rolls Series." Although these printed editions are welcome and many are easily accessed, mining them can be as frustrating sometimes as using the originals. Arcane translations and abbreviations; idiosyncratic indexing; lack of quality control: all are problems that crop up for the researcher using such sources in print. This first volume of what promises to be a long-term project and collaboration between Boydell and The National Archives aims both to expand upon the massive output of printed calendars produced by the Public Record Office in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and also to improve upon the basic structures of those same calendars.

The panel involved in the project, which includes not only the editors but also David Carpenter (who wrote the historical introduction) and David Crook of The National Archives, decided to produce a calendar that is both more user-friendly and more complete than those produced in the past. In addition, they made the radical decision to produce both print and online versions of the Fine Rolls, which led me to decide that I should discuss both media in this review.

The Fine Rolls record not only promises relating to various kinds of "fines" (agreements) made between the king and an individual. Financial transactions between the Crown and individuals who required items from the chancery or the court, such as payments "made" for writs, writs "*pone*" (these moved a plea from a local court to the king's court), the recording of debts, the payment of debts, and the release of lands and dower also begin to appear in larger numbers beginning in the reign of Henry III. According to Carpenter, though, the transactions listed in the rolls did not usually involve the payment of actual cash, but were rather, "monies merely promised to the king, which still had to be collected" (p. xiii).

The Fine Rolls, which are different from the *Pedes Finium*, the "Feet of Fines" that were the chancery's copy of final concords, deeds, and chirographs made between two parties, have not been the subject of extended study before this time. Although the Record Commission produced an edition of the Fine Rolls of King John's reign (*Rotuli de Oblatis et Finibus in Turri*

Londinensi asservati tempore Regis Johannis, edited by T. D. Hardy in 1835), they did not do the same for subsequent reigns and produced only selected extracts from the later rolls in the volume *Excerpta e Rotulis Finium in Turri Londinensi asservatis Henrico Tertio Rege AD 1216-1272* (ed. C. Roberts, 1835-36). According to the introduction, this amounted to only about ten percent of the total number of entries in the rolls. The Public Record Office (now the National Archives) then decided to make calendars of the rest of the medieval Fine Rolls, but they began their volumes with the reign of Edward I, deciding not to complete the Record Commissions work on those of the reign of Henry III. Thus, the bulk of the Fine Rolls for the thirteenth century were largely unavailable to scholars until this new edition. The editors felt that this series of documents deserved to be accessed by many more scholars than can utilize them in their original state, and so embarked on this project. As someone who has attempted to use the original manuscripts in years past, I can attest to both the difficulty in manipulating them (they are still rolled up and it becomes difficult to keep them flat, for one thing), and they contain so many small entries that it makes it difficult to search for any but the most general subjects. People searching for entries relating to royal debt, for example, would find it helpful to include the Fine Rolls in their research agenda. Those working on family histories or trying to find specific subjects for the thirteenth century experience a much more frustrating search.

The frustrations, I must say, are now lessening significantly--at least for those whose work can be contained in the first two decades of the reign of Henry III. The print editions of the Fine Rolls that have been produced so far--Volume I covers 1216 to 1224, Volume 2 covers 1224 to 1234 (this just came out in June 2008 and is priced the same as Volume 1)--are really superb. The historical, editorial, and technical introductions are comprehensive; the choice to make fuller translations of the entries, and to include the witness lists, means that far more information is provided by the editors than in other calendars. The indices are actually useful and accurate and there are good "roadmaps" instructing readers on how to use them and explaining editorial choices made about naming conventions, and so on. For one used to the highly idiosyncratic indexing that exists in many PRO calendars (especially the Patent and Close Rolls), this is a truly welcome change.

The material contained in the Fine Rolls is, like other chancery documents, both highly formulaic and generic. Taken one by one, the entries are pretty uninteresting but they provide fodder for anyone whose research methodologies include prosopography, cliometrics, or other systems in which large amounts of data can be usefully distilled into an historical analysis. Those who might be interested in the ways in which the minority government changed from the regency of William le Marshal to the justiciary of Hubert de Burgh will find much of interest. I was surprised, for instance, by the degree to which the aged Earl Marshal oversaw chancery business almost up to the day of his death. The expansion of business in the chancery in the aftermath of King John's death also suggests that those who made use of the chancery and the courts felt more comfortable doing so; the standardization of the monies promised also suggests a more consistent approach to justice and procedure that would have been welcome after the chaotic last years of John's reign.

The very usefulness of this project leads me to discuss the web site for the Fine Rolls Project (<http://www.finerollshenry3.org.uk/cocoon/frh3/index.html>). All of the material--and more--that is available in the print version is also available on line. For free. In addition, there are multiple search functions embedded in the site, including a clickable version of all the indices and a search window where the viewer can search using subject headings or keywords, personal names, and place names. When I went on the site the other day (I have been on it several times), the subject search did not work properly, but an email to the site manager resulted in the problem being fixed (with a nice thank you note welcoming such comments sent as a reply). I must say, I am thrilled with the site, and I have just begun to scratch its surface. This is the kind of electronic material that is fantastic for teaching, not just for professional research. What is more, individual entries can actually be copied and pasted into Word files, which means that building a database of Fine Roll entries is incredibly easy. One caveat: the site contains very serious copyright information; those who might find themselves neglecting to cite their sources appropriately would certainly be violating the copyrights. Nevertheless, as a tool for research, the Fine Rolls Project web site does everything the editors and creators seem to have desired.

I must admit to being puzzled, indeed, as to the choice to publish the Calendar of Fine Rolls in book as well as electronic form. While it is very true that the Boydell volumes are the kind of technology that will not be superseded by advances in web design that could render the digital site irrelevant a decade hence, it would seem to me that the project itself would take care to refresh the technology so that the web site remains contemporary and accessible. Since the site is free and the search engines are easier to use than leafing back and forth between a print index and the relevant pages, I would be surprised to see any but the most flush university libraries purchasing the print versions. It is wonderful to have it on my bookshelf and to be able to reference it at a moment's notice, but I suspect that I will be using the online version far more intensively than the book version.

For those of us whose work involves intensive research in public documents; for those of us who use public sources when teaching research methodologies; for those of us who have students whose own research is focused on public documents this is a not-to-be-missed resource. The editors, as well as Carpenter, Crook, and Co., should be proud of what they have accomplished. Let us hope their funding never runs dry!

Issue

2008 Reviews

Section

Reviews

Author Biography

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This calendar never expires because it doesn't list any holidays or days of the week. Good for recording daily temps, other vitals, birthdays, etc. Remember your anniversary this year and you won't have to sleep on the couch! Use Up/Down scroll buttons to specify the 100-year span of the calendar, and then print! Our first 10,000-Year Calendar! Use this chart to determine the day-of-week for any date in the years 1 to 10000! Not as easy to use as the 100-year calendar, but not difficult either. Created as an Excel spreadsheet, this calendar has fourteen whole-year calendars A through N and a chart showing which years 1882 through 2101 go to which letter. The print is small yet readable printed 8.5 x 11, but this was really made to print as a poster. Paul Dryburgh is the author of Mortimer history society (4.00 avg rating, 1 rating, 1 review), Calendar of the Fine Rolls of the Reign of Henry III (4.00... Discover new books on Goodreads. See if your friends have read any of Paul Dryburgh's books. Sign in with Facebook. Sign in options. Join Goodreads. Paul Dryburgh's Followers. None yet. Paul Dryburgh. Vol. 1-22: Printed under the superintendence of the keeper of public records. Vol. 1-6, prepared by A.E. Bland [and others]; v. 7-11, by M.C.B. Dawes; v. 12- by P.V. Davies. v. 1. Edward I, 1272-1307.--v. 2-3. Edward II, 1307-1327.--v. 4-8. Edward III, 1327-1377.--v. 9-11. Richard II, 1377-1399.--v. 12-13. Henry IV, 1399-1413.--v. 14. Henry V, 1413-1422.--v. 15-19. Stuart Dryburgh. Cinematographer | Camera and Electrical Department. View Resume | Official Photos ». Born If you've binged every available episode of the hit Disney Plus series, then we've got three picks to keep you entertained. Get some streaming picks. Share this page