



WORTHINGTON 17th-CENTURY PROJECT

1 September 2006

THE NEXT STAGE OF RESEARCH

The present situation

Now, 11 months into Phase 1 of the Project, is a good time to take stock of what has been achieved, to check whether any lessons can be learnt and to plan for the second year.

So far, about 85 pages of indexed references have been distributed to members, but a total of 203 pages have already been gathered and edited. Of this total, 34 pages relate to the sixteenth Century and 42 to the eighteenth. In order of volume, these references have come from:

- (1) Published indexed books available in major libraries;
- (2) Material which had already been collected by members prior to the start of the Project;
- (3) Original documents at record offices;
- (4) Internet and CD ROMs.

The inflow of material from members has been excellent and continues at a satisfactory rate. It could be described as “free style”, in that each researching member has been contributing material which is readily accessible or of particular interest. This has led to geographical inequalities. For example, Maryland in USA and Lancashire in England have received intense treatment, while other American States and other United Kingdom counties have received much less. Also, published books have received much attention, while research on Wills and admons – an immense source – has hardly begun. Such inequalities have been of little importance early in the Project, but will become increasingly important as Phase 1 approaches completion.

It is difficult to forecast how much material is available, but a reasonable view is that 20 percent of it has been gathered so far. The question now arises as to how the membership should plan to gather the remaining 80 percent.

Lessons learnt

One lesson learnt from the first 10 months has been the importance of exhausting one source before moving to the next. There has been a tendency to select from a source material of greatest relevance or interest, thus leaving a need (often an unregistered need) to return to the same source later. A system is required whereby a member completes a source and declares it exhausted before moving on to the next.

Another lesson is to avoid overlapping research which has occasionally been wasteful of members' time. Although overlaps have not proved numerous so far, the potential for them will increase as Phase 1 progresses. A system is proposed whereby a member volunteering to research a source first checks with the archivist whether that source has already been adopted by another member.

A third lesson is the difficulty members have had in researching and preparing for the Register long manuscripts such as deeds, Wills and court records. That is because 3 quite different stages of work are required: (a) researching the document and obtaining a copy; (b) reading the script and transcribing it; and (c) preparing a summary for the Register. These are 3 different skills and while some researchers may wish to undertake all of them, there may be other members who have special skills to offer in transcribing or summarising. It is proposed that, in future, the responsibility (and credit) allotted to members at the ends of items in the Register of References should be divided, if appropriate, in a form such as: “Research by:; Transcribed and Summarised by:”.

Research in the coming year

A “Schedule of Sources” dated 20 August 2006 is given in a separate paper. This schedule has been developed from information provided by members, and members’ comments on it are sought. It is planned that throughout the future, the schedule should continue to develop and become more particular as Phase 1 of the Project develops.

Members able to undertake research at libraries and record offices are asked to complete Section 1 of the enclosed questionnaire by listing the sources on which they would be prepared to work. Members able to accept other responsibilities which can be undertaken at home are asked to complete Section 2.

Future of the membership

The last suggestion in Section 2 of the questionnaire is for “Membership secretary”. Although not directly related to production of the Register of References, the appointment of a membership secretary could substantially help indirectly, first by freeing the time of researchers and secondly by increasing the number of members. The role would include a certain amount of marketing – letting potential new members know about the work of the Project by Internet and other means and inviting them to join. The Project would benefit greatly from an increased membership.

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