

THE Friends of Winchester College

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Cnut's Grant

There are some other gems. The four Anglo-Saxon charters that come from Hyde Abbey are the oldest and the rarest items. Three appear to be entirely authentic: King Edmund's grant to the Abbey of the manor of Pewsey (940 AD), Cnut's grant of the manor of Drayton (1019), and the Abbey's lease for land at Chiseldon to Alfred, minister of King Athelstan (924-939). The fourth is perhaps the most interesting of all and purports to grant lands at Micheldever to the Abbey in the name of Alfred's son, Edward the Elder (899-924). It is a forgery of the late-tenth or early eleventh century and is almost certainly based on an original, genuine charter, whose terms the forger ingeniously enlarged so as to buttress the Abbey's claims to privileges and rights of jurisdiction through the whole hundred of Micheldever.



Quirister's Clerk graffiti

There are many royal letters, most of which relate to royal recommendations of boys to places as scholars and to official posts with the College.



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Design and photography by Bernard Fallon Associates.

The Bursars' Books include items of interest. A payment in 1415 to John Cowdray who brought the news of King Henry V's victory at Agincourt on St Crispin's day or the note of expenses incurred in 1642 for a night spent in College by the Old Wykehamist Parliamentarian, Nathaniel Fiennes, with his troopers. (His presence probably saved the Chapel and Chantry from the vandalism that occurred elsewhere in the city.)



Graffiti in the Exchequer Room

There is much human interest amongst the schoolboys' letters, diaries and other papers that have found their way into the archives. Best known among these are the schoolboy letters of Thomas Arnold, Headmaster of Rugby, and model for 'the Doctor' of Tom Brown's Schooldays. Perhaps the most vivid of all are those papers that give an insight into ordinary, everyday life as a boy, like the pictogram letter sent by Herbert Hope Risley (Scholar, 1864-9), and the schoolboy diary of Charles Minet (Commoner, 1817-19) covering the 1818 school rebellion.



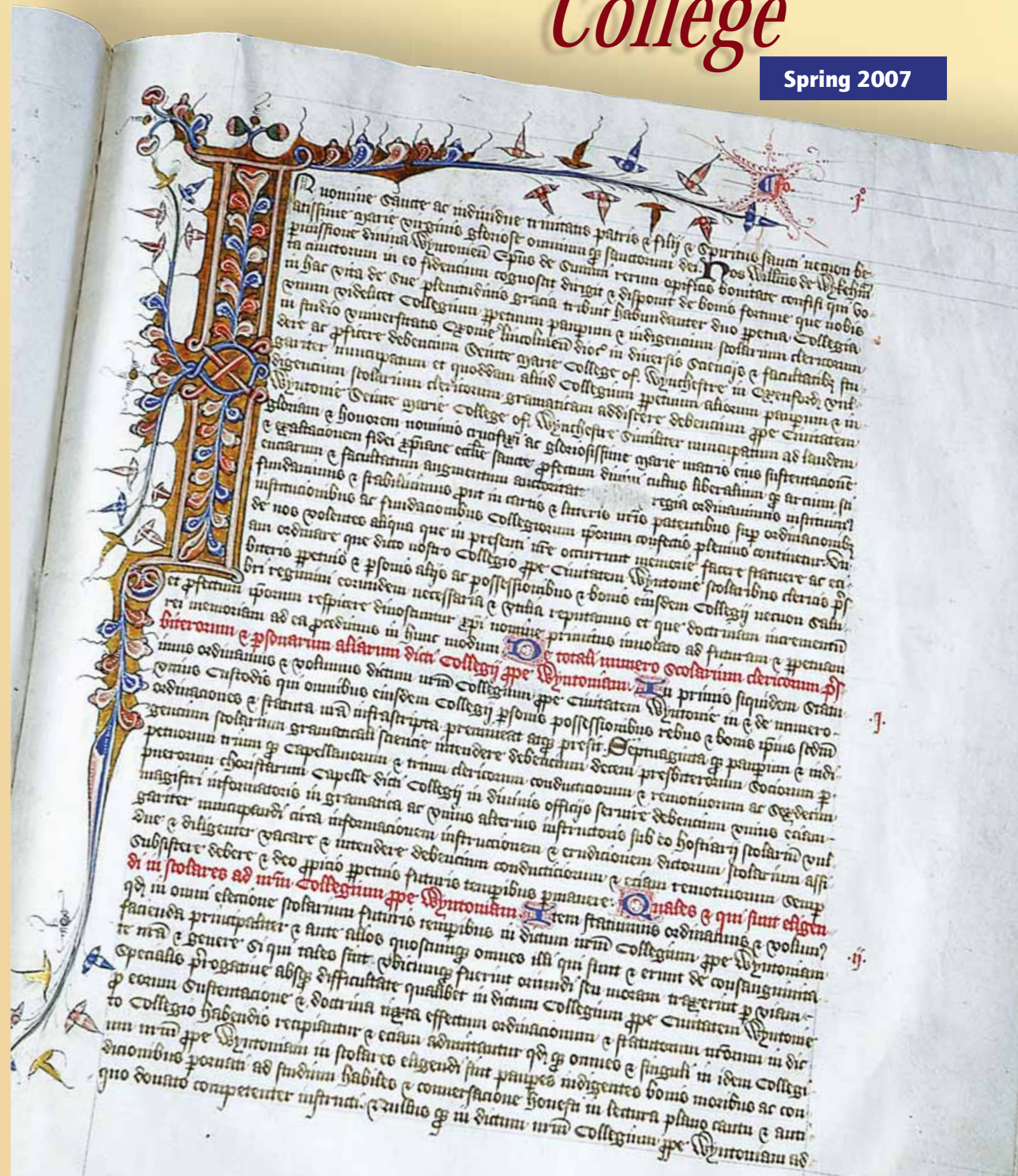
Charles Minet's Diary



Herbert Hope Risley's pictogram letter

What makes the muniments of Winchester College so remarkable and unusual is the completeness and the time span, from the late-fourteenth century down to the present day. In this brief article it is impossible to give more than a fleeting impression of the variety and interest of the record that they constitute.

The archives are open by appointment for consultation by researchers and any enquiries should be addressed to the archivist, Suzanne Foster (email: sf@wincoll.ac.uk).



The Archives

In the south east corner of Chamber Court stands what is called the Muniment Tower. From the Vestry at its foot, a spiral staircase leads up to the two 'muniment rooms' which house the College archives. These rooms, with two others, house a truly remarkable archive, an effectively unbroken record of the management of the school and its estates from the foundation to the present day. The only English school archive that is comparable is that of Eton, and that is a full fifty years younger.

William of Wykeham wished to ensure that the College records should be carefully conserved, as his statutes reveal. Individual rubrics in the statutes enjoin the keeping of records of the College's estate accounts and leases, the



Muniment Tower

The Lower Muniment Room, the 'Treasury' of the Statutes, is a handsome vaulted chamber, with a medieval tiled floor. The corbels supporting the vaulting ribs are decorated with four symbolic sculpted figures, representing respectively a king, a bishop and an abbot; the fourth is St Michael, perhaps because the accounts ran from Michaelmas to



Linen fold drawer

Michaelmas. The furniture of the room includes two heavy, iron bound oak chests, which have been there since 1396, a 16th century cabinet with 'linen fold' drawers and a modern oak cupboard.

The Upper Muniment Room is plainer with a beamed wooden ceiling at the level of Chapel roof and contains two more oak chests, moved from the room below, and other storage cupboards. It is not entirely clear what the original purpose of this upper room was, but in Wykehamist lore it came to be known as Bogey Hole.



Exchequer Room



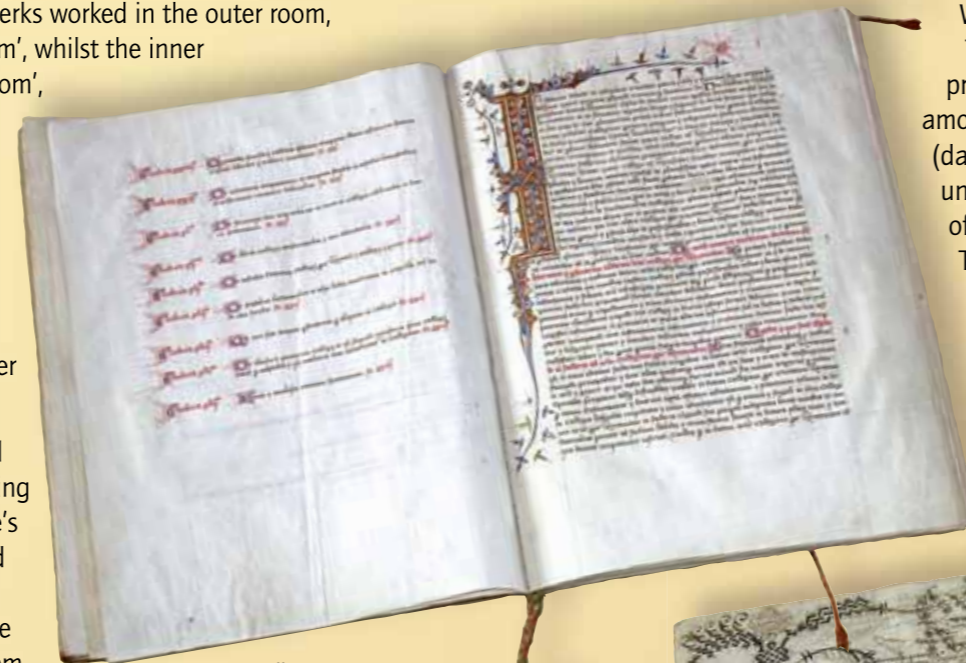
St Michael

The more modern archives are now stored in two rooms which are reached by a spiral staircase leading from the south west corner of College Hall. It was from these rooms that many of the documents now in the Muniment Tower originated. From an early time the Bursars and their quirister clerks worked in the outer room, 'Exchequer Room', whilst the inner room, 'Audit Room', is where the

annual audit took place, on St Simon and St Jude's day. It is a decidedly handsome room with a floor paved with medieval Flemish tiles, decorated with lions, griffins and other devices.

The Founder's statutes laid responsibility for maintaining and preserving the College's records on the Warden and the two Fellows appointed annually as Bursars. For the most part, these duties seem to have been discharged conscientiously, but there were occasional lapses and some records and documents found their way to cupboards and cubby-holes in the Warden's Lodgings, where for a time they were lost. Four Anglo-Saxon charters, the oldest documents among the College's archives, strayed this way until they were found in 1926 in the bottom of a drawer in a bedroom in the Warden's Lodgings, wrapped in brown paper. A unique

Lower Muniment Room



College Statutes



Liber Albus in chemise binder

manuscript of Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* was discovered in 1932 and as late as 1962, a bundle of papers, some of them dating back to the seventeenth century, turned up unexpectedly in the Warden's study. In 1977 the oldest private letter in English among the archives (dated 1487) was found under the floorboards of Election Chamber. There may be yet more to come.

The 1976 catalogue lists and numbers all the muniments up to 1873. There are more



Henry VI's Licence

than 30,000 entries and we can look at only a few in the space that we have available.

The documents concerned with the College's foundation rank as some of the most prized treasures: the Founder's charter; the original statutes, with their



Foundation Charter

marvellous illuminated initial folio; the *Liber Albus* of (Fellow, 1421-33) the life of the original statutes the Treasury on The illuminations

of other early documents make them objects of rare beauty such as Henry VI's licence to the College to acquire new estates (1443) with its lovely illuminated initial depicting the Annunciation. Some of the seals on the early muniments are also very interesting. A special rarity is a letter patent of Henry V of 1422, exempting the College from the levy of purveyance which is under his seal as 'King of England and Heir of France'; this seal was cut after Henry's marriage to Catherine of France in 1420, and his recognition by her father, King Charles VI, as his heir.

In 1380 William of Wykeham set about acquiring the estates which would assure it a regular income from land. He was concerned that his College's title to these lands should be sure. As a result the deeds deposited in the Muniment Tower included many documents dating from long before his foundation, tracing back the descent of the title of the acquired estates.

Amongst these is a charter

of Ilbert de Lacy of c. 1090, granting the church of Tingewick to St Catherine's monastery at Rouen, witnessed with a rather crude cross by way of attestation by William II – *William Rufus, his mark*.

The Charter of Ilbert de Lacy, witnessed by William Rufus

