

Henry III FINE ROLLS PROJECT

A Window into English history:

1216 – 1273

<http://www.frh3.org.uk>

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An article entitled 'The Development of the Fine Rolls' has now been published:

Paul Dryburgh and Beth Hartland, 'The Development of the Fine Rolls', in Thirteenth Century England XII.



A fine in the reign of King Henry III (1216–1272) was an agreement to pay the king a sum of money for a specified concession.



The rolls on which the fines were recorded provide the earliest systematic evidence of what people and institutions across society wanted from the king and he was prepared to give.

They open a large window onto the politics, government, economy and society of England in the hinge period between the establishment of Magna Carta at the start of Henry's reign and the parliamentary state which was emerging at its end.

This Project, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, makes the rolls freely available to a wide audience while at the same time, in the Fine of the Month feature, providing regular comment on their historical interest.

THE NATURE OF THE FINE ROLLS

The fine rolls are the earliest surviving rolls compiled by the English royal chancery.

There is an almost complete sequence of these from 1199, and they are preserved in The National Archives at Kew. There is one for each year of the reign of King Henry III (1216 – 1272).

There are fifty-six rolls, written in Latin on parchment. Each roll is composed of separate membranes that have been sewn together and the membranes measure roughly 50 cm long by 35 cm wide.

Henry's reign began on 28 October 1216, and therefore each roll runs from 28th October of one calendar year to 27th October in the next.

Over the course of the reign the rolls expanded greatly in length, and many actually have 12+ membranes and contain over 30,000 words.

They are a vital resource for the history of England in the period between the establishment of Magna Carta (early in Henry's reign) and the parliamentary state (emerging at its end).

A fine was essentially a promise of money to the king in return for a concession or favour, and the first purpose of the fine rolls was to record the money that was offered in this way.

1. They are essential for the study of royal patronage, the relations between the monarch and his subjects, and structures of families and their histories.

Barons and knights gave money to succeed to their inheritances on the death of their immediate ancestors.

Money was offered by magnates and ministers for the right to marry heiresses and widows, and, conversely, by widows to control the lands and marriages of their children, and to be allowed themselves to stay single or marry whom they wished.

2. The rolls are equally significant in other areas:

They record the purchase of an ever-growing number of writs, from wide sections of society, to initiate and prosecute law cases, and so are central to the study of the early common law.

They have numerous fines for permission to set up new markets and fairs, thus revealing the rapid commercialization of England.

Also, resonating from top to bottom of society, they throw light on the rising standard of living of the nobility, the changing structure of the gentry and the growing aspirations of peasant communities. This is because they contain fines from nobles to be allowed to construct private parks for hunting, from members of the gentry to be exempted from knighthood, and from peasant communities to secure protection from their lords.

3. During Henry III's reign, the rolls came to include a large amount of new material unrelated to fines. These include rates of debt repayment (by which the king could either punish or placate), and the seizure of lands into the king's hands in times of political crisis.

This data makes the rolls a key source for the 1258-1267 Montfortian period of reform and rebellion.

The rolls have likewise information about taxation levied on towns and royal manors (hence their value for local historians) and also taxation levied on the Jews, taxation which destroyed their wealth and prepared the way for their expulsion from England in 1290.

The changing nature of royal revenue revealed by the fine rolls is absolutely key to understanding the impact of Magna Carta and the development of the parliamentary state.

Henry was a son of King John and reigned for 56 years. Henry had been born in 1207 and so was only nine years old when he came to the throne in 1216. His was the longest reign in medieval history – the Queen has now overtaken him!



Henry has a magnificent tomb in Westminster Abbey (see left).

His reign was marked by serial misrule leading, eventually, to rebellion. In 1258 the baronage forced Henry to accept the Provisions of Oxford which placed the government in the hands of a feudal oligarchy. Henry, at the first opportunity, attempted to avoid the agreement.

Henry had granted his younger brother Richard, Earl of Cornwall the manor of Isleworth, which then included Twickenham, in 1227. It was here that he built a house and the barons camped nearby in 1263 attempting, unsuccessfully, to make the king reaffirm his acceptance of the Provisions of Oxford. In the ongoing strife the house was sacked when the rebellion broke out the following year.

The Battle of Lewes

On 12 May 1264 he was brought to battle, defeated and taken prisoner by a group of barons, at Lewes.

Richard fought in this battle and had to take refuge in a nearby windmill where he too was captured. The barons were led by the king's brother-in-law, Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester.

Although the king was not actually deposed, De Montfort effectively became king for the next 15 months until his defeat and death at the battle of Evesham. His Westminster Parliament to which two knights from every shire and two burgesses from each of certain towns were summoned, marked the starting point of the later House of Commons. This work was carried forward by Edward I, Henry's son.

Henry III's reign saw civil war and political upheaval. Henry divides opinion – was he benevolent and benign or fickle and foolhardy?

The fine rolls are legal financial documents. They are stitched end over end and then rolled up. The first was 1216 – written during the Civil War. There are rolls for the time of King John that have been studied but those from Henry III's reign have been somewhat neglected as far as study is concerned.

There is a myriad of entries relating to the great families of the time. Almost 90% of the fine rolls are concerned with other matters though.

The original Patent Rolls pre-date the Fine Rolls. *The Patent Rolls (Calendarium Rotulorum Patentium, Rotuli litterarum patentium) are primary sources for English history, a record of the King of England's correspondence, starting in 1202.*

They record the letters patent, or royal letters issued unsealed, and were started under the Chancellorship of Hubert Walter. This was during the reign of King John of England, and the patent roll was started in order to keep track of letters that had been issued by the government. Instead of keeping the records in a register or book form, they were written on sheets which were stitched together into long rolls to form a roll for each year.

The aim of the Fine Rolls Project is to make the wealth of material derived from the documents accessible to as large a readership as possible. Each volume is fully indexed. Each volume is £100.00 but the full text of each and the index is currently available on the Project website at no charge - as well as extra research data and articles.

Navigation is via the side bar on the left and then there are sub-menus etc. The full list contains one volume for each of the years of Henry's reign. Each roll is divided into membranes and paragraphs.

Dates on which entries were witnessed are given in bold – and it is possible to navigate straight to a specific month.

Within each entry, personal and place names are modernised where possible. The theory is that more people are likely to search on the modern name rather than an ancient unknown variant. They seek to be as faithful to the original Latin as possible with a glossary also provided.

The Jewel in the Project's Crown are the digital scans of the original rolls.

Initially a thumbnail will come up and this is expandable at different levels. The quality of the images is so good that you can zoom to individual pen strokes and also to the hair follicle marks on the parchment! Each page can also be printed out.



Basic project information is also available re the team and the progress of their work.

The commentary and Fine of the month shows what is the situation regarding the 90% of unknown material so far discovered.

There is also a technical introduction to the wizardry behind the project.

The Fine of the Month gives users a greater insight and a deeper depth – there are short discussion pieces of both general and academic interest. There is a great variety of topic – the roll of women, Kidworth (Michael) etc.

The Fine of the Month for November 2006 and for June 2010 each discuss the history of the Bassett family in the 13th century with particular reference to their Wiltshire lands.

Frequency	Female first names recorded in the Fine Rolls for the years 1216-1242
140	Alice
138	Matilda
76	Agnes
69	Margaret
62	Joan
60	Isabella
37	Emma
34	Beatrice
33	Mabel
32	Cecilia
30	Christiana
29	Hawise
27	Juliana
25	Sibyl
21	Rose
16	Sarra
15	Helewise
14	Avice, Eleanor, Eva, Lucy
13	Leticia
12	Felicia
11	Isolda, Margery, Petronilla
10	Ascelina, Edith
9	Phillippa
8	Amice, Elena, Katherine, Mary, Sabina
7	Basilia, Muriel
6	Albrea, Amabilia, Denise, Eustachia, Idonea, Olive
5	Ada, Agatha, Alina, Gunnilda, Gunnora, Hilary
4	Amy, Egidia, Ela, Goda, Milicent, Petronella
3	Clarice, Clemencia, Edelina, Lecia
2	Adelina, Albreda, Alda, Amphelisa, Annora, Avegaya, Barbata, Belina, Berta, Comitessa, Constance, Ermintrude, Florencia, Floria, Frethesenta, Helena, Ida, Ivetta, Lauretta, Nesta, Susanna, Wulveva, Wymarca
1	Aca, Acilia, Alcis, Aldusa, Alexandria, Aleys, Alveva, Alvona, Ang', Angaretta, Antigonina, Anura, Arniun, Auda, Aude, Azalia, Berengaria, Bertrada, Blitha, Bloye, La, Botilda, Bruncosta, Burgia, Cassandra, Cecily, Celecestr', Chera, Claremunda, Constantina, Cundy, Cuntessa, Custania, Daya, Dereina, Dervorguilla, Desiderata, Deulecresse, Dulcia, Edilda, Edina, Egelina, Elicia, Elizabeth, Elvina, Emecina, Emelina, Ermengard, Esterota, Eugenia, Euphemia, Flandrina, Flora, Flura, Fluria, Gena, Godhus', Godina, Godith, Goldcorn, Goldina, Grecia, Guinda, Gundrea, Gundreda, Gunilda, Gymma, Hakelna, Helen, Henna, Huwelina, Imenia, Joye, Kamilia, Langusa, Laurencia, Lesianda, Leuca, Levina, Lina, Liveva, Livinia, Lora, Lye, Mabba, Maciana, Mariota, Mascelina, Maszelina, Maud, Mazelina, Meisenta, Melcana, Mina, Mirabel, Mirabella, Nest, Nichith', Nicholaa, Nicola, Nisand, Olencia, Olenta, Orabil, Orient', Oriolda, Pelaga, Pinc', Quenilda, Quenina, Richelda, Rosamund, Sarotha, Scula, Sema, Serena, Simunda, Sinolda, Slima, Theda, Truca, Wiviva, Woburg, Ymanea, Yselia

A similar study for men is currently being compiled.

The most innovative feature of the project is the search engine that relates to it – they can be subjected to various searches.

The search is linked to a thesaurus which guides you to those words only that appear in the index. All search results can be printed out if you wish.

There are 791 hits for Wiltshire within the project. There are 9,000+ entries in total. Wiltshire was one of the most frequently appearing counties within the rolls. It comes 4th in the list although the entries for 1st – 3rd are somewhat skewed because Henry spent longer periods of residency there.

Wiltshire figured prominently on the list of Henry's favourite residences:

Luggershall
Marlborough &
Clarendon

A search shows Henry to have been in Marlborough on many occasions. When the king resided in an area it had a profound affect on the local populace because of all the employment etc etc that would be generated.

Devizes – Henry visited on just 3 occasions when he was just a boy but there are 29 total entries relating to Devizes. There are over 30 references to forests in Wiltshire. There is just one reference to a deer park – that in Devizes.

It is possible to simultaneously search for two people or two criteria: "Devizes" and "gardens" etc etc.

There was a rapid increase in the fines to be able to hold markets and fairs. It made economic sense for local lords etc to pay for the right to hold a fair to attract wealth into the area.

Searching under "Wiltshire" and "Relief" brings up 31 hits. The entries can be vital to pinpoint when someone has died and their heir succeeded. "Wiltshire" and "Wardship" brings up 40 hits.



There is little direct evidence of criminality but there are 7 records that mention homicide. The importance of legalistic fines show the establishment of the early Common Law. It brought justice within the reach of all but the very poorest.

As the reign went on, some 85% of the Rolls were concerned with legalistic matters.

1231 *Ela*, countess of Salisbury, has made fine with the king by 200 m. for having custody of the county of Wiltshire and the castle of Salisbury for life, as is more fully contained in the Patent Roll, of which she is to render 100 m. to the king at the Exchequer at St. John the Baptist in the fifteenth year, 50 m. at Michaelmas in the same year, and 50 m. at Easter next following in the sixteenth year. **This was very unusual for a woman.**

The project is just one of many online facilities – for instance there is:

- the Calendar of Patent Rolls
- the Parliament Rolls of Medieval England
- Ancient Petitions Henry III – James I

In time, as more and more databases and texts are put online, it is hoped to merge databases to provide a comprehensive research facility.

At the time that the Rolls relate to, the population of England was between 4 and 6 million.

The actual translations are all done but there is much outstanding work still as far as analysing data is concerned. There is nothing that is missing as an internet user – it is the hard copy books that are lagging behind.

Henry III Fine Rolls Project

*A window into English
history, 1216-1272*

Funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, and combining The National Archives with King's College London's Department of History and Centre for Computing in the Humanities, The Henry III Fine Rolls Project is a unique and pioneering enterprise which democratises the rolls by making them freely available in English translation with a sophisticated electronic search engine, the first medieval source to be treated in this way.

This first three year project will publish the rolls down to 1248 in the following forms:

- An English translation of the rolls in electronic form on the KCL website, with a sophisticated search and analysis facility.
- Four printed volumes, published by Boydell & Brewer, with full indexes.
- Digital facsimile images of the rolls on the KCL website.

Directors: David Carpenter (KCL), David Crook (TNA), Harold Short (CCH)



[Enter the Henry III Fine Rolls website](#)

