

Starting Palaeography: reading 16th- and 17th-century handwriting

Start date 10 February 2023 **End date** 12 February 2023

Venue Madingley Hall
Madingley
Cambridge
CB23 8AQ

Tutor Dr Heather Falvey **Course code** 2223NRX022

Director of ISP and LL Sarah Ormrod

For further information contact intenq@ice.cam.ac.uk

Tutor biography

Heather Falvey's main historical interests are personalities and communities in early-modern England. Her PhD thesis was on participation in particular enclosure riots that took place in Derbyshire and Cambridgeshire in the mid 17th century and she has published several articles and chapters in edited collections based on that research. She has worked as the researcher on two academic projects which spanned the 17th to 19th centuries. She has published several editions of historical documents including a volume of wills dating between 1461 and 1474 published by the Suffolk Records Society, a memorandum book by two early-modern Hertfordshire vicars, published by the Hertfordshire Record Society, and a collection of letters written between members of the family of Humphry Repton, the landscape gardener, published by the Norfolk Record Society.

Course programme

Friday

Please plan to arrive between 16:30 and 18:30. You can meet other course members in the Terrace Bar which opens at 18:15. Tea and coffee making facilities are available in the study bedrooms.

19:00 Dinner

20:30 – 22:00 Introduction: earlier forms of letters and numerals

22:00 Terrace Bar open for informal discussion

Saturday

07:30 Breakfast (for residents only)

09:00 – 10:30 Probate records: wills

10:30 Coffee

11:00 – 12:30 Probate records: inventories

13:00 Lunch

14:00 – 16:00 Free time

16:00 Tea

16:30 – 18:00 Parish records: parish registers and parish lists

18:00 – 18:30 Free time

18:30 Dinner

20:00 – 21:30 Parish records: churchwardens' accounts and various papers

21:30 Terrace Bar open for informal discussion

Sunday

07:30 Breakfast (for residents only)

09:00 – 10:30 Miscellaneous parish documents

10:30 Coffee

11:00 – 12:30 Manorial documents & miscellaneous papers

12:45 Lunch

The course will disperse after lunch

Course syllabus

Aims:

The course will allow you to:

1. recognise earlier forms of the letters of the alphabet, both lower and upper case and of numerals, both Roman and Arabic
2. recognise the contents of various types of document and to set documents in the contexts of their production and purpose, since an understanding of the nature of their contents facilitates transcription.
3. transcribe old documents

Content:

The initial session will introduce you to the letters, numerals and abbreviations used in documents from the 16th century onwards. It will be demonstrated that, perhaps surprisingly, some 16th- and 17th-century hands are relatively easy to read as they are much more uniform than modern handwriting. You will also be shown how to lay out a transcript so that it is both legible and accurate.

Since palaeography is an essential research tool, this will be a practical course using copies of various types of document, written in English. Before beginning to read and/or transcribe each document, they will be set in context: why they were produced, who wrote them and for whom, and what they reveal (and conceal). This will facilitate transcription because although the writing itself may be unfamiliar, if the purpose and approximate content of a document is known it is easier to read.

Presentation of the course:

As this is essentially a practical course, it will be presented by means of reading and/or transcribing copies of documents which will be supplied as handouts. Initially we will read through the documents together, discussing the more difficult words (both spelling and meaning) but as the course progresses it is hoped that students will have the confidence to work on their own.

Following each session, transcripts of the documents for that session will be distributed, so that students will not have to write out a rapid transcript as we go along but will be able to annotate the more difficult words or letters in their documents, in that knowledge that they will receive a transcript later.

NB: You will need to bring paper and pens/pencils. You may also find it useful to bring a magnifying glass

As a result of the course, within the constraints of the time available, students should be able to:

1. recognise particular classes of documents and to identify their typical content.
2. read earlier handwriting (with or without the aid of reference sheets).
3. produce a legible, well-ordered transcript.

NB: If students have (one or two) documents of their own that they have been having trouble reading and/or transcribing, they are very welcome to bring them along. I will be pleased to look at them during the weekend and try to help the student to read them. It would be helpful if they could bring two copies of the documents in question.

Reading and resources list

Listed below are a number of texts that might be of interest for future reference, but do not need to be bought (or consulted) for the course.

Durie, B., (2013), *Understanding Document for Genealogy and Local History* (The History Press, Stroud)

Forrest, M., (2019), *Reading Early Handwriting 1500-1700* (British Association for Local History)*

Forrest, M., with H. Watt, (2022), *Manors and Manorial Documents after 1500* (British Association for Local History)*

Marshall, H., (2004 or 2010), *Palaeography for Family and Local Historians* (Phillimore, Chichester)

Munby, L., (1997, reprinted 2021), *Dates and Time - A Handbook for Local Historians* (British Association for Local History)*

Raymond, S., (2004), *Words from Wills and Other Probate Records 1500-1800: A Glossary* (Federation of Family History Societies, Bury)

* publications by the British Association for Local History are available directly from the BALH at:
<https://www.balh.org.uk/shop/shop-local-history-books>

Online resources:

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/palaeography/>