Records of Early English Drama

In Memoriam
Reginald William Ingram

We have all been saddened this summer by the death of Reg Ingram. With his death, REED has lost a wise and steady supporter who, since he joined the Executive in 1976, has made a major contribution to the shaping of the project. His was a sane and ironic voice, challenging ill-conceived proposals and unruly enthusiasms with acerbic humour. His academic obsession was the dramatic records of his native Coventry, which he published through REED in 1981. He was working on the story of Coventry’s playmaking when he died. Reg was a questing and courageous spirit. During his last year, he faced the inevitability of his slowly approaching death with great dignity. We who knew him rejoice for his life with us and mourn his loss.

SALLY-BETH MACLEAN

‘Alps on Alps arise’: new horizons for REED

The REED Executive Board has made a landmark decision that Newsletter readers may not yet have heard or read about. At the most recent Executive meeting (now over a year ago), the issue of family archives in public and private collections was addressed. REED’s first six volumes focussed on important cities where civic, guild and ecclesiastical records were of primary significance for the study of urban entertainment. With the expansion of our research to cover counties as well as cities, we have recognized the need to include the records of private households based in the counties, especially because of their importance for tracing the itineraries, performance conditions, and repertoire of travelling medieval and renaissance entertainers. Thus, Audrey Douglas, Peter Greenfield, and John Wasson edited the dramatic records of several local households in Cumberland/Westmorland/Gloucestershire and Devon, just as David Klausner will include excerpts from the papers of the Scudamores of Holme Lacey, Heref; Prior William More of Worcester; and Sir John Pakington of Westwood Park, Worc in his volume of Herefordshire/Worcestershire records forthcoming in 1990.

While agreeing to the essential contribution that these family papers make to REED county volumes, the Executive Board also recognized that there are some major private...
households that cannot easily be confined within one county’s boundaries. Some of the more prominent families were not only peripatetic, but they also had residences and large estates in more than one county as well as a base near court in the London area. The Cliffords, earls of Cumberland, furnish a good example of a major family with a large surviving collection of documents, now held at Chatsworth. The Cliffords had residences in several counties, their two chief homes being Skipton Castle in the West Riding and Londesborough in the East Riding.

While working on his edition of Derbyshire records at Chatsworth, John Wasson transcribed the Clifford household accounts which are rich in evidence for the patronage of players and musicians, and for special entertainments such as a performance of *Comus* in 1637. These records cannot be published logically with Wasson’s Derbyshire collection because the Cliffords resided elsewhere in our period, even though their papers have now migrated to a Derbyshire home. Nor should they be broken up into several volumes (Westmorland, Yorkshire East or West Riding, London) where the integrity of the collection would be lost and the patterns of Clifford patronage, local and national, political and cultural, would be more difficult to assess. In addition, it is not always possible to determine where an entertainment took place or a payment was made; records of this kind cannot be placed with confidence in any of the eligible county volumes if strict geographical boundaries are observed.

The solution proposed and accepted by the Executive Board was to edit papers of major private households (when they survive in bulk) as a unit, following the same chronological order as *REED* city or county volumes. Wasson’s Clifford records and Robert Alexander’s Percy records have been accepted as pilot projects, and others have expressed interest in the Dudley and Cecil papers.

To support research in this area, the *REED* office’s bibliographic files are being organized to include all references to MSS or printed books and articles related to family archives that we have or will find in our searches of library catalogues and printed bibliographies. We recently expanded the files with a detailed catalogue of medieval household accounts from Dr Christopher Woolgar, who kindly sent them in advance of his publication on the subject for the British Academy’s Records of Social and Economic History series.

Our current files suggest that the number of major household collections surviving that will warrant separate publication will be fewer than twenty, but it is probably premature to predict an exact figure. We also have guidelines for the editing of family records that parallel established city and county guidelines.

With family records, more than any other archive class, we are dependent on the goodwill of private owners. The research is frequently done in a home — however grand — and routine library facilities, as well as a trained librarian or archivist, are often lacking. It is not a right but a privilege to be granted access to records still in private hands. The researcher must be well prepared, to a large extent self-sufficient, and flexible, willing to work according to the convenience of the owner or the librarian in charge of the collection. Hours may be more restricted than in record offices, according to the personal schedule of the owner or the often varied responsibilities of the librarian.

It is exceptional to find a full-time librarian in charge of a private MSS collection. There is often a standard charge of £10 daily for access to larger collections such as the library at Longleat House. Although the cost may seem high, such fees do contribute to the maintenance of some of the most valuable accumulations of historic documents in the country, sometimes in their original family home. More information about private collections can be obtained from the Historic Houses Archivists Group, whose current president, Kate Harris, is the Librarian at Longleat House, Warminster, Wilts, BA12 7NN.

Any *Newsletter* readers interested in this area of research are invited to contact me at the *REED* office in Toronto for further information.