

Major archive containing hand-written letters by Elizabeth I saved for the nation

09 August 2012

Today, the future of the Westmorland of Apethorpe archive, a rare collection of papers of outstanding historical importance that includes letters signed by Elizabeth I and Oliver Cromwell, has been safeguarded thanks to a £650,000 grant from NHMF.

Image



Commission from Oliver Cromwell to Col. A. Scrope to command a Company of Foot of 100 men for the defence of Bristol, 1653

Image



Letter signed by Elizabeth I

Image



Grant of a crest to John Layke of Normanton, 1564

The grant, awarded to the Northamptonshire County Council's Record Office, fills the funding gap to reach the archive's purchase price of £760,000. Now, this outstanding collection that spans over 600 years will remain in Northamptonshire where it has been on loan to Northamptonshire County Council's record office since the 1950s.

News of the NHMF grant marks the end of a ten-month public fundraising campaign, which has raised £45,000 from a range of events in Northamptonshire's parishes most affiliated to the archive, including a very successful event at Apethorpe Hall at which historian David Starkey spoke in support of the appeal. The campaign has also received pledges of support from the J Paul Getty Jr Charitable Trust, The Friends of The National Libraries, Coral Samuel Trust, John R Murray Trust, and the Finnis Scott Foundation.

Jenny Abramsky, Chair of the NHMF, said: "This fascinating collection is of immense national and historical importance and the strength of the support from local fundraising is testament to how important it is to the people of Northamptonshire. I am delighted to announce that NHMF's grant is the final piece in the puzzle and the archive can now be secured for future generations."

Councillor Heather Smith, cabinet member for customer and community services, said: "I am absolutely delighted that enough money has been raised to save this archive and keep it in Northamptonshire where it belongs. Without the funding from the National Memorial Heritage Fund, and all the other fundraising that has been taking place, these records would have ended up on the open market for anyone in the world to buy.

“This is a great achievement and could not have been done without the fantastic work of the local community who have been campaigning tirelessly to raise awareness of the collection and encourage donations. The NHMF was very impressed with the level of local support. ”

The archive is one of the most important family collections in the UK and is based around the Northamptonshire Westmorland family whose main residence was in Apethorpe Hall (near Oundle). Family members were active at court and in national politics, especially in Elizabethan and Jacobean times, so the archive includes gems such as letters signed by Elizabeth I and Oliver Cromwell. It also contains records relating to the management of the extensive estates owned by the family from which we can learn about the lives of ordinary people in Northamptonshire communities over hundreds of years.

The process to purchase the collection can now start and it is expected that the council will be able to take legal ownership of the collection by early September.

Highlights from the archive include:

- From the papers of courtier Sir Walter Mildmay, materials relating to national administration under the Tudors including a letter signed by Elizabeth I;
- Civil War papers of Adrian Scrope, including a letter signed by Oliver Cromwell along with Exchequer papers of his decedents;
- Legal documents from Thorney Abbey, one of the great Benedictine houses of the Fens; and
- Papers relating to the domestic and family life of the medieval household of Edward, Duke of York.

Notes to editors

The archive

The archive was previously in private ownership but has been on loan to Northamptonshire County Council's record office since the 1950s.

The vendors offered the collection to the nation under the Acceptance in Lieu Scheme that is approved by the Secretary of State and HMRC. Under this scheme Northamptonshire Record Office was named as conditional allocatee. A deadline of August was set to secure the funds.

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The funding

National Heritage Memorial Fund £650,000

J Paul Getty Jr Charitable Trust £44,000

Friends of the National Libraries £20,000

Coral Samuel Trust £20,000

John R Murray Trust £20,000

Local fundraising £33,550

(some towards the purchase and some towards conservation/cataloguing)

Finnis Scott Trust (for conservation work) £5,000

Northamptonshire Record Office (NRO)

The Northamptonshire Record Office is financed and run by Northamptonshire County Council. Its aims are to preserve, conserve and make accessible the archival heritage of the county. It was established in the 1950s but with a predecessor body dating back to the 1920s. It holds over 800 years of Northamptonshire's archival heritage created by a wide range of administrations, organisations, societies, businesses, families and individuals; it is based in purpose-built accommodation in Wootton Hall Park in Northampton.

The NRO's collections are rich in family and estate papers thanks to the large number of stately homes in the county. The Westmorland of Apethorpe Archive is one of the most important of these collections and securing the archive for the county and the country is one of the NRO's key objectives for 2012.

Further information

Please contact Natasha Ley, NHMF press office, on 020 7591 6032 / natashal@hlf.org.uk.