

# State Papers Online

a review by Paul Ayriss

## Introduction

Tudor historians have been immeasurably enriched by the launch of *State Papers Online (SPO)* from Gale, Cengage Learning. The Tudor State Papers are pivotal for any researcher, student or learner with an interest in sixteenth-century politics, religion, economics or social history.

Tudor State Papers, by their nature, are not easy to track down. They are split among several archives, and this makes the task of a historian challenging. As a research student in the 1980s, working on Thomas Cranmer's Register at Lambeth Palace, I well remember travelling to the Public Record Office in Chancery Lane, and now to The National Archives at Kew, and to the British Library to look at relevant contextual materials; important material for this period is also available at Hatfield House.



## Content

The appearance of digital facsimiles of the Tudor State Papers is, therefore, a wonderful event for Tudor historical research. The first part of *State Papers Online* was launched at the Guildhall on 18 November 2008. Gale envisages the publication of these crucial materials in four stages:

- **Part 1: The Tudors: Henry VIII – Elizabeth I (1509-1603).** State Papers Domestic, containing material from The National Archives, the British Library's Lansdowne Collection Burghley Papers; calendars to the above series and the Haynes/Murkin transcriptions of the Cecil Papers at Hatfield House
- **Part 2: The Tudors: Henry VIII – Elizabeth I (1509-1603).** State Papers Foreign, Ireland, Scotland, Borders and Registers of the Privy Council, containing material from the National Archives and from the Cotton, Harley and Yelverton collections in the British Library
- **Part 3: The Stuarts: James I, Charles I, Interregnum, Charles II, James II, William & Mary, Anne (1603-1714).** State Papers Domestic, containing materials from the National Archives and from the Coke Papers in the British Library
- **Part 4: The Stuarts: James I, Charles I, Interregnum, Charles II, James II, William and Mary, Anne (1603-1714).** State Papers Foreign, Ireland, and Registers of the Privy Council, containing materials from the National Archives and from the Harley Manuscripts at the British Library

Part 1 is the first part of the corpus to be made available with 380,000 facsimile manuscript documents linked to fully searchable calendar entries.



## Interface

The interface to the digital facsimiles has been specially constructed by Gale and allows basic and advanced searching and browsing. The materials also come with a toolset which helps users understand what they are using – e.g. with links to the *Dictionary of National Biography*, and links to tools such as the Archaeology UK's Placename Finder. The creation of this workspace is an interesting development and is in its infancy. *State Papers Online* will surely become embedded as the place to look at, and work on, Tudor documents. Once this is the case, the creation of virtual communities of scholars, the use of Web 2.0 tools, and the possibilities for text and data mining all need to be explored. It is an exciting prospect.

## The significance of the documents

The ability to undertake detailed study of the Tudor State Papers in this presentation pays dividends. One small example will suffice. On 11 April 1533, a matter of days after his consecration in March, Archbishop Thomas Cranmer wrote to King Henry VIII concerning the annulment of the king's marriage to Catherine of Aragon. The letter survives in two forms in the archbishop's hand, both of which appear to have been sent. In one version of the letter, Cranmer asks:

... because I wolde be right lothe  
and also it shall not becom me (forasmoche as your grace ys my  
prince and sovereigne) to entreprise any parte of my office in  
the saide weightie cause without your grace's favour obteigned and  
pleasure therin first knowen, it may please the same to acerteyn  
me of your grace's pleasure in the premisses, to th'entent that the same  
knowen, I may procede for my discharge afore God to th'execution  
of my saide office and duetie according to His calling and yours;  
beseching your hieghnes most humbly uppon my kneyes to pardon  
me of thes my bolde and rude lettres, and the same to accepte  
and take in good sense and parte.

— TNA, SP 1/75, fol. 80-v.

However, this version of the letter was not explicit enough for the king and advisers, probably because Cranmer merely asked Henry to let him know how he, the archbishop, should proceed. Word clearly went back to Lambeth that the letter did not hit the mark and so, on the same day a second

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The Government of Britain, 1509-1714

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Results for Basic Search EE (Cranmer 153...)

Calendar: Manuscript Full Citation

Calendar Entry Number: Titus, B. 1, 8

Calendar Entry Title: Thomas (Cranmer) Archbp. of Canterbury; his sentence of divorce between Henry VIII...

Calendar Volume Title: A Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Cottonian Library deposited in the British Museum, 1744-1827. Ed. Joseph Planta. London: Record Commission, 1800.

Calendar Page Numbers: 516

Document Ref.: Cotton Titus B.1.8.74

Date: [no date]

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Results for Basic Search TH (Cranmer 153...)

Calendar: Full Citation

Calendar Entry Number: 6148, 1

Calendar Entry Title: Copies of Letters of Archbishop Cranmer to the King (earg; others. f. 1. 18. N. B

Calendar Volume Title: A Catalogue of the Harleian Manuscripts, in the British Museum: With Indexes of Persons, Places, and Matters. Ed. Robert Nares, Stebbing Shaw, Joseph Planta, Francis Douce, and T. H. Home. London: Record Commission, 1800.

Calendar Page Numbers: 331

Date: [no date]

Gale Document Number: MCA319113207

A Catalogue of the Harleian Manuscripts, in the British Museum: With Indexes of Persons, Places, and Matters. Ed. Robert Nares, Stebbing Shaw, Joseph Planta, Francis Douce, and T. H. Home. London: Record Commission, 1800

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Calendar Volume Title: A Catalogue of the Harleian Manuscripts, in the British Museum: With Indexes of Persons, Places, and Matters... Entry Numbers 6148, 1. Date: [no date]

Gale Document Number: MCA319113207

6148, 1. Copies of Letters of Archbishop Cranmer to the King & others. f. 1. 18. N. B

1. Copies of Letters of Archbishop Cranmer to the King & others. f. 1. 18. N. B. These letters are contained in the same bound, with very few interpolations, from f. 18 to 20, and are many of them curious. Particularly that in f. 21, where writing in "Marian Handwriting" enters under the Emperor's court, the whole details of the state of the time, the divorce of Queen Katherine, the marriage of Q. Anne Boleyn, &c.

letter was despatched by the archbishop which made the point that Cranmer explicitly sought the king's licence to proceed in the annulment:

... because I wold  
be right lothe, and also it shall not becom me (forasmoch as  
your grace is my prince and soveraigne) to entreprise any  
parte of my office in the saide weightie cause touchinge your  
hieghnes without your grace's favour and licence obtieined  
in that behalf; it may please therfore your most excellent  
majestie (considerations had to the premisses and to my  
moost bounden duetie towards your hieghnes, your realme,  
succession and posterite and for th'exoneration of my con-  
science towards Almightye God) to licence me according to  
my office and duetie to procede to the examination, fynall  
determy nation and judgement in the saide grete cause tou-  
ching your hieghnes. Eftsones as prostrate at the feete  
of your majestie, beseching the same to pardone me of  
thes my bolde and rude lettres and the same to accept  
and take in good sense and parte, as I do meane, which  
calling our Lorde to recorde, is onlie for the zele that  
I have to the causes aforesaide and for none other  
intent and purpose.

— SP 1/75, fols 78r-79v; printed (with modernised spelling) in *Miscellaneous Writings and Letters of Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, Martyr, 1556*, ed. for The Parker Society by J.E. Cox (Cambridge, 1846) pp. 237-8.

That the second of these letters is the final version is shown by the fact that this is the version of the letter which Ralph Morice, the Archbishop's secretary, copied into his copybook of Cranmer's letters in British Library, in Harleian MS. 6148. Henry VIII, moreover, in his reply to Cranmer on 12 April, explicitly licensed Cranmer to proceed in his case, thus echoing Cranmer's own wording in his second letter to the king.

## Conclusion

The appearance of *State Papers Online* has the power to transform Tudor Studies and the availability of texts to the researcher and student. **No good academic library can afford not to subscribe.**

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UCL (University College London)

## About the Author

*Dr. Paul Ayris has been director of University College London (UCL) Library Services since 1997, as well as coordinator of their senior management team and UCL copyright officer. He is a member of the LIBER (Ligue Internationale des Bibliothèques Européennes de Recherche) and SPARC Europe boards. Dr. Ayris chairs LIBER's access division, and the OAI organizing committee for the Cern workshops on scholarly communication. He chairs the UK's SHERPA management group and is deputy chair of the JISC's repositories and preservation advisory group. He is a member of the JISC's journals working group, of SCONUL's health strategy group and of the CURL/SCONUL joint scholarly communications group. Dr. Ayris has a Ph.D. in ecclesiastical history and publishes on English reformation studies.*

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