

COMMENTARY

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Proper genealogy requires documentation. Oral genealogy is limited, very often wrong, and subject to invention. In England the increase in documentation from the 16th century onwards, notably the introduction of parish registers, allows more scope for detailed genealogical research. Documentation did, of course, exist in the medieval period, but it was more limited in its coverage and survives to a lesser extent. One positive aspect of the paucity of material makes it possible to compose databases of all surviving names and families in the Anglo-Saxon period, available on the internet in PASE, and the early Norman period, available in books published by Dr Keats-Rohan. There is perhaps more scope for other databases. Because of language and writing difficulties, the documentation that survives has not been fully examined or published. Much pertains to the ruling elite and concerns property and rights of inheritance but that is not the full extent of it, by any means.

It is not correct, as is usually assumed, that all surviving medieval documentation has already been reviewed by the previous generations of historians and genealogists. There is still plenty of new material to find and some of the old material needs to be revised. Information is available not only for the elite property owners but also for more ordinary folk. Articles in this journal have used surviving tax returns on aliens and in this issue manorial documents to illustrate the names and genealogies of some families. Manorial documents have been rather overlooked in the past. Where they survive, they can yield a wealth of information. Other important documents are found in the livery companies' archives. Recent research has enabled the maiden name of Alice Perrers, mistress of Edward III, to be determined (it is Salisbury) and a putative family tree developed along with more details on her first husband Janekyn Perrers. The material is out there in record offices and family archives, and who knows what discoveries await.

¹ Dr Bierbrier was a founder member of the FMG and has recently joined the Executive Committee.