



the national archives

palaeography

tutorial

Document 8: Hearth Tax for Besselsleigh, Berkshire, dated 1664

(Catalogue reference: E 179/243/26 part 2 folio 114)

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About this document

This document is the hearth tax return for Besselsleigh, Berkshire, dated 1664. (Catalogue reference: E 179/243/26 part 2 folio 114)

The restoration of Charles II in 1660 was followed by the introduction of several new taxes, including the hearth tax. Established by an Act of Parliament in May 1662, the hearth tax was an annual tax of two shillings per hearth, which was to be paid in two instalments, at Michaelmas and Lady Day. Only people whose house was worth more than 20 shillings a year and who paid church and poor rates had to pay, poorer people were exempt. From 1663 all hearths, whether taxable or not, were to be listed in the returns.

The information contained in hearth tax returns includes the names of the householders, sometimes their status, and the number of hearths for which they had to pay, or for which they were exempt from paying. The number of hearths can give a rough idea of the wealth of the person.

The hearth tax was collected initially by tithing men or petty constables. Returns were made to the Quarter Sessions, with a duplicate sent to the Exchequer between 1662 and 1666 and 1669 and 1674. The Exchequer copies are now at The National Archives.

The hearth tax was collected from Michaelmas 1662 to Lady Day 1689, when it was abolished by William and Mary. During this time it was the government's major source of revenue.

This document is written in a workaday mixed hand with features from both late secretary hand and italic hand. It was probably written by the tithingman himself.

Introduction to transcribing document 8

Transcription tips - READ THESE FIRST!

This document is written in a mixed hand, it has features from both late secretary hand and italic hand.

The letters which are typical of secretary hand include:

- Capital 'C' of 'Churchwardens', **line 26**
- Capital 'T' of 'Thomas', **line 8**, and 'These', **line 21**
- the lower case 'c' used throughout, which looks exactly like a modern lower case 'r'

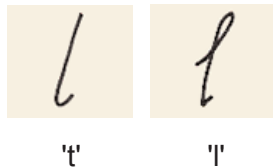
The letters which are more typical of italic hand include:

- Capital 'A' of 'Andrew', **line 13**
- Capital 'C' of Carter, **line 9**

The lack of linking strokes between many of the letters is also a feature of italic hand.

In this document you should watch out for:

- Letters
Lower case 'c' which looks exactly like modern lower case 'r'.
Lower case 't' and 'l'. The 't's are sometimes not crossed, which can make them look like 'l's'.
However, you can usually tell them apart by the fact that the 'l' is looped.



- Names can be very hard to transcribe, because you cannot work out the word from the context, and you can not guess how it would have been spelt. You simply have to go through, letter by letter carefully. If it is a list of names all written by the same person, you can see if a tricky letter appears elsewhere within the document in a more legible form. However, if it is a list of individual signatures, each one will have to be approached individually. [Tip: when working with original documents, if you get stuck on a list of names see if there is another document in the series with which you can compare the names - there might be a very similar but more legible list. For example, when transcribing this document, the name in **line 18** could be 'William Daws', but we know from comparing it with another document (E179/243/25 f. 263) that it is 'William Davis'.]
- Leave 'Berks' for Berkshire unabbreviated.

glossary

'Besseslegh' / Besselsleigh

A village in Oxfordshire, formerly in Berkshire (before 1974). Besselsleigh Manor was bought by William Lenthall, father of the John Lenthall who appears in this document, from the Fettiplace family in the early 17th century.

Churchwarden

A lay-person who assists the vicar with parochial administrative duties.

Hearth tax

Annual tax of 2 shillings per hearth introduced in 1662 and abolished in 1689. It was paid in two instalments per year, at Lady Day and Michaelmas, and was initially collected by local tithing men or petty constable.

Lady Day

Also known as the Feast of the Annunciation (the announcement by the archangel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary that she was to bear Jesus), Lady Day falls on 25 March. In England, Wales and Ireland it was one of the quarter days - one of four specified days of the year when certain payments were due. Until 1752 it was also the first official day of the year in England and Wales.

Lenthall, John (Sir)

1625-1681. John Lenthall was the only son of William Lenthall, Speaker of the House of Commons. He attended Corpus Christi College, Oxford. In 1640 he entered Lincoln's Inn and four years later was elected Member of Parliament for Gloucester. He was knighted by Oliver Cromwell in March 1658 and again by Charles II in March 1677. In January 1660 Lenthall was made governor of Windsor Castle. In the same year he was briefly MP for Abingdon but was expelled from the Commons in May 1660. By 1672 he was high sheriff of Oxfordshire. He died at Besselsleigh on 9 November 1681 and was buried in Besselsleigh church.

Michaelmas

The feast of St Michael and all the Angels, 29 September. One of the quarter days (four specified days of the year when certain payments were due) in England, Wales and Ireland.

Quarter Sessions

Court sessions held four times a year in each county of England and Wales, where justices of the peace dealt with petty offences and routine county administration.

Tithing man

Tithing men and petty or parish constables were local men appointed to help keep the peace and undertake a number of administrative duties in the parish, such as collecting national taxes.

William and Mary

William III King of England, Scotland and Ireland 1689-1702; Mary II Queen of England, Scotland and Ireland 1689-1694. Mary was born at St James' Palace on 30 April 1662. She was the daughter of James II and Anne Hyde. In 1677 she married her cousin William, son of William II, Stadtholder of the Netherlands, and Mary Henrietta, the daughter of Charles I of England. After the Catholic James II was deposed, the Protestant Mary and William jointly ascended the throne of England on 13 February 1689. Mary was the actual heir but William insisted on being king rather than consort. Mary died of smallpox at Kensington Palace on 28 December 1694 and was buried in Westminster Abbey. William reigned alone after Mary's death until he died in at Kensington Palace on 8 March 1702. He was buried at Westminster Abbey. Since William and Mary had no children, they were succeeded by Mary's sister, Anne.

how to use the interactive transcribing exercise

Help - using the interactive transcribing exercise

Step 1: Study the line of text from the document image

Step 2: On the document image, use the interactive magnifying glass to zoom in/out of image by clicking on a particular word

Step 3: Using the textbox below the document image, type in your transcription

Step 4: When you have finished the current line of text, click on the Submit button

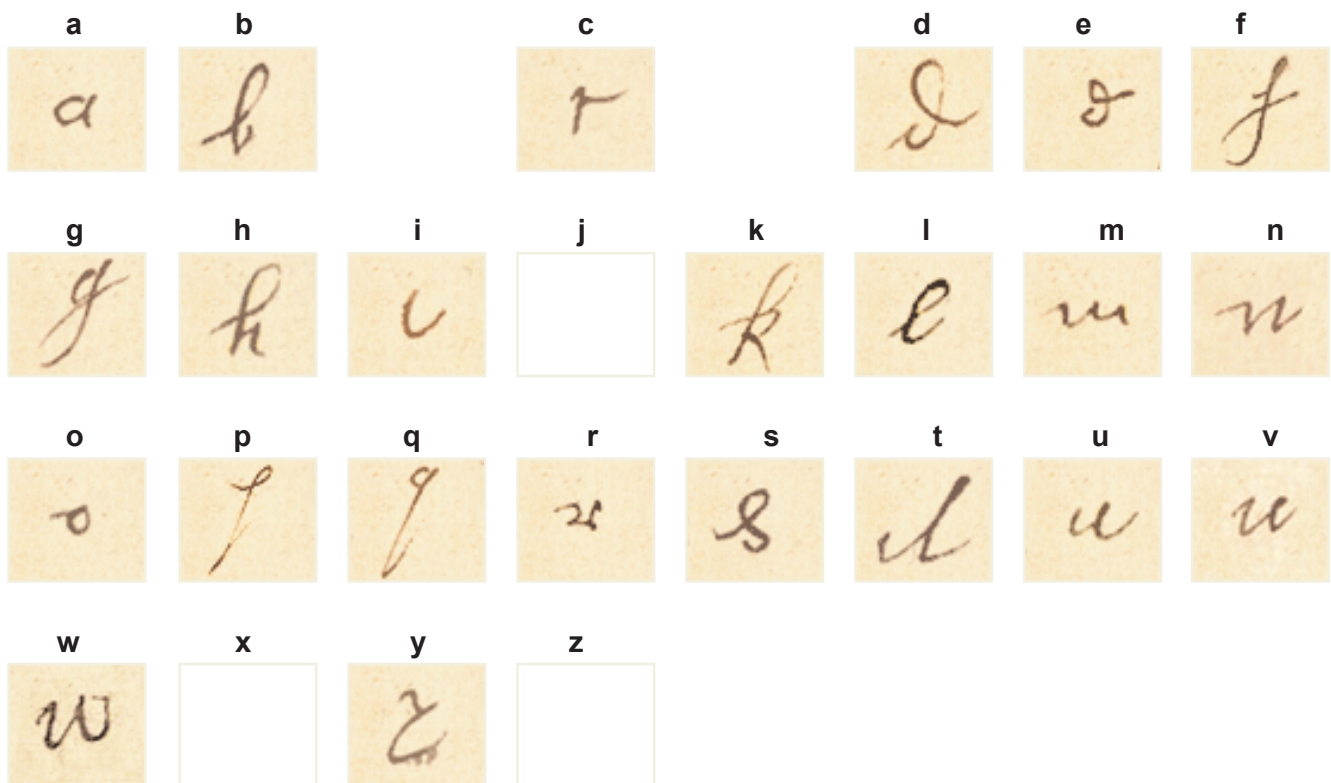
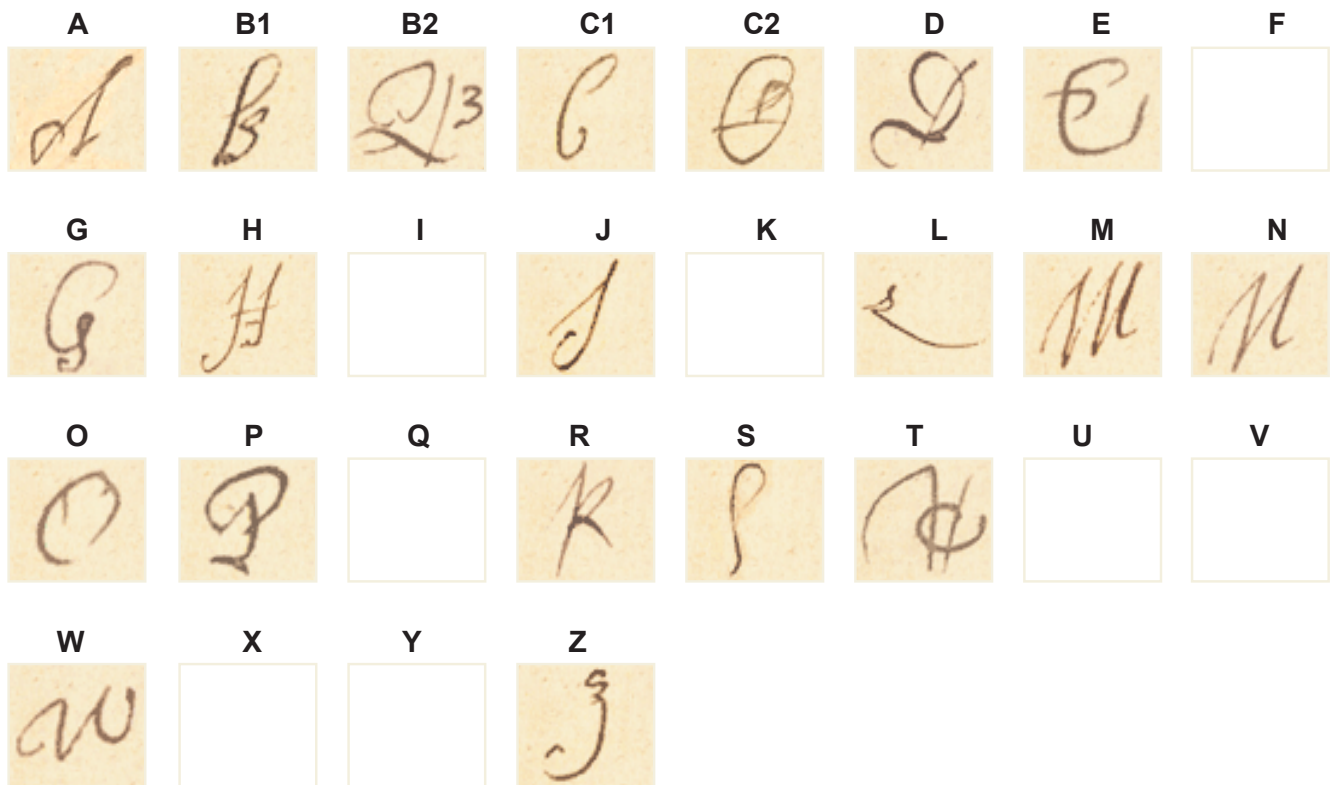
Step 5: The results will be shown and will give you the option to either retry or move onto the next line of the current document.

Help - instructions on typing your transcription

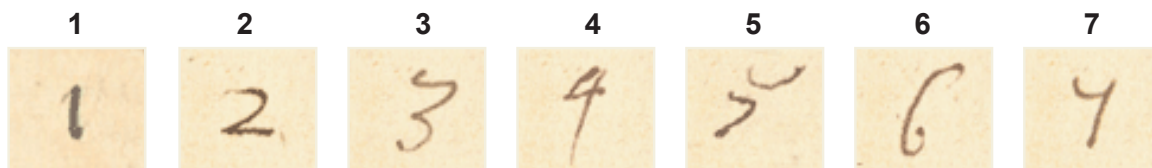
- 1) For every word you cannot transcribe, put in a dash character ' - '
- 2) Every word you transcribe should be separated with a single space
- 3) The transcribing text must match, whether it is in capital or lower case
- 4) Expand abbreviations in square brackets where necessary.

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Alphabet



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1	Dorsey 1	114
2	Returns of Bellamy of the month 2	2
3	Payable and not payable long and our 3	3
4	see day 1664 4	4
5	performances payable 5	Performances not payable 5
6	by the art 6	by the art 6
7	John Southwell Epsom 247	Thomas Badwell 18
8	M ^r Martin 2	George Stubbs 19
9	George Carter 3	Thomas Wolfe 210
10	M ^r D. Baker 2	John Crumwell 111
11	Robert Godard 2	with Dymond 112
12	Wm. Nabe 3	with Butler 113
13	Andrew Robson 214	
14	R. A. Curke 214	

