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## Weekend Courses 2024-25

### A window on past lives: reading historical documents

**Start date:** 25 April 2025                      **End date:** 27 April 2025

**Venue:** Madingley Hall  
Madingley  
Cambridge  
CB23 8AQ

**Tutor:** Dr Heather Falvey                      **Course Code:** 2425NRX040

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#### Tutor biography

Heather Falvey's main historical interests are personalities and communities in early-modern England. Her PhD thesis was on participation in particular enclosure riots that took place in Derbyshire and Cambridgeshire in the mid-17th-century and she has published several articles and chapters in edited collections based on that research. She has worked as the researcher on two academic projects which spanned the 17th to 19th centuries. She has published several editions of historical documents including: a volume of medieval wills (1461-1474) published by the Suffolk Records Society; a memorandum book by two early-modern Hertfordshire vicars, published by the Hertfordshire Record Society; a collection letters written between members of the family of Humphry Repton, the landscape gardener, published by the Norfolk Record Society; and pre-Reformation wills from Rickmansworth parish, published by the Rickmansworth Historical Society. Thus, over the years she has read a great many original documents.

She teaches local and social history at Masters level at ICE and also at Diploma and Masters level at the University of Oxford's Department of Continuing Education. She is reviews editor for *The Local Historian* and editorial assistant for the *Economic History Review*.

**Summary of content:**

The initial session will introduce you to the letters, numerals and abbreviations used in documents from the 16th century onwards. It will be demonstrated that, perhaps surprisingly, some 16th- and 17th-century hands are relatively easy to read as they are much more uniform than modern handwriting. You will also be shown how to lay out a transcript so that it is both legible and accurate.

Since palaeography is an essential research tool, this will be a practical course using copies of various types of documents, written in English. Before beginning to read and/or transcribe each document, they will be set in context: why they were produced, who wrote them and for whom, and what they reveal (and conceal). This will facilitate transcription because although the writing itself may be unfamiliar, if the purpose and approximate content of a document is known it is easier to read.

**Aims:**

This course aims to:

- enable you to recognise earlier forms of the letters of the alphabet, both lower and upper case and of numerals, both Roman and Arabic
- enable you to recognise the contents of various types of documents and to set documents in the contexts of their production and purpose, since an understanding of the nature of their contents facilitates transcription
- enable you to transcribe such documents

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## Course sessions

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### Friday

Please plan to arrive between 16:30 and 18:30. You can meet other course members in the Terrace Bar which opens at 18:15. Tea and coffee making facilities are available in the study bedrooms.

19:00	Dinner
<b>20:30 – 22:00</b>	<b>Introduction: forms of letters and numerals</b>
22:00	Terrace Bar open for informal discussion

### Saturday

07:30	Breakfast (for residents only)
<b>09:00 – 10:30</b>	<b>Probate records: wills</b>
10:30	Coffee
<b>11:00 – 12:30</b>	<b>Probate records: inventories</b>
13:00	Lunch
14:00 – 16:00	Free time
16:00	Tea
<b>16:30 – 18:00</b>	<b>Parish records: parish registers and parish lists</b>
18:00 – 18:30	Free time
18:30	Dinner
<b>20:00 – 21:30</b>	<b>Parish records: churchwardens' accounts and various papers</b>
21:30	Terrace Bar open for informal discussion

### Sunday

07:30	Breakfast (for residents only)
<b>09:00 – 10:30</b>	<b>Miscellaneous parish documents</b>
10:30	Coffee
<b>11:00 – 12:30</b>	<b>Manorial documents &amp; miscellaneous papers</b>
12:45	Lunch

**The course will disperse after lunch**

**Presentation of the course:**

As this is essentially a practical course, it will be presented by means of reading and/or transcribing copies of documents which will be supplied as handouts. Initially we will read through the documents together, discussing the more difficult words (both spelling and meaning) but as the course progresses it is hoped that you will have the confidence to work on your own.

Following each session, transcripts of the documents for that session will be distributed so that you will not have to write out a rapid transcript as we go along but will be able to annotate the more difficult words or letters in the documents, in the knowledge that you will receive a transcript later.

NB: Please bring paper and pens/pencils for transcribing the documents. You may also find it useful to bring a magnifying glass. You can also bring an iPad or laptop if you wish.

**Learning outcomes:**

As a result of the course, you will gain a greater understanding of the subject and you should be able to:

- recognise particular classes of documents
- identify the typical content of those documents
- read earlier handwriting (with or without the aid of reference sheets)
- produce a legible, well-ordered transcript

NB: If you have (one or two) documents of your own that you have been having trouble reading and/or transcribing, you are very welcome to bring them along. I will be happy to look at them during the weekend and try to help you to read them. It would be helpful if you could bring two copies of the documents in question.

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## Reading and resources list

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**There are no compulsory readings for this course.**

**However, listed below are several texts that would be of interest for future reference, but do not need to be bought (or consulted) for the course.**

Durie, B, *Understanding Document for Genealogy and Local History* (Stroud: The History Press 2013)

Forrest, M, *Reading Early Handwriting 1500-1700* (British Association for Local History 2019)\*

Forrest, M, with Watt, H, *Manors and Manorial Documents after 1500* (British Association for Local History 2022)\*

Jarvis, C, *Teach Yourself Palaeography: A guide for genealogists and local historians* (Cheltenham: The History Press 2022)

Marshall, H, *Palaeography for Family and Local Historians* (Chichester: Phillimore 2004 or 2010)

Munby, L, *Dates and Time - A Handbook for Local Historians* (British Association for Local History 1997, reprinted 2021)\*

Raymond, S, *Words from Wills and Other Probate Records 1500-1800: A Glossary* (Bury: Federation of Family History Societies 2004)

\* books published by the British Association for Local History are available directly from the BALH at: <https://www.balh.org.uk/shop/shop-local-history-books>

### **Online resources:**

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/palaeography/>

**Note:** Institute of Continuing Education (ICE) students are entitled to 20% discount on books published by Cambridge University Press (CUP) which are purchased at the Press bookshop, 1 Trinity Street, Cambridge (Mon-Sat 9am – 5:30pm, Sun 11am – 5pm). A letter or email confirming acceptance on to a current ICE course should be taken as evidence of enrolment.

*(Information correct as of April 2024)*