



# Inner Temple Library



## Petyt Manuscripts

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# Petyt Manuscripts

One of the best known items in the Library's collection of manuscripts, perhaps the single item most frequently mentioned, is King Edward VI's 1553 "devise for the succession". This belongs to the largest of the collection's five groups, the Petyt Manuscripts, and its citation is Petyt MS 538, vol.47 fo.317. But who was Petyt? How did the Library come to hold his manuscript collection? And what else is to be found amongst its 386 volumes?

William Petyt (1637-1707) was a member of the Inner Temple. He was a native of Yorkshire, from the village of Storiths close by the ruins of Bolton Priory near Skipton. He practised at the bar, was a writer particularly on the history and functions of Parliament, was in due course elected a Master of the Bench of the Inner Temple, and served as Treasurer in 1701-02. His legal career began, however, not in the Inner Temple but in the Middle Temple, where he was called to the bar in 1660. He was specially admitted by the Inner Temple in 1664, and thereafter clearly regarded himself primarily as an Inner Templar. Though not much is known about his legal practice, he appears to have been successful at the bar.

Petyt's five published works include *Miscellanea Parliamentaria* (1680), *Lex Parliamentaria* (1690) and the posthumously published *Jus Parliamentarium* (1739). He was a devoted parliamentarian, and it was following the success of the parliamentarian cause in the Great Revolution of 1689 that he was appointed Keeper of Records in the Tower of London. The bulk of his manuscript collection was probably assembled during the seventeen years that he held that office.

Petyt died in 1707. In his will he named six trustees who, in respect of his manuscripts and books, were to "use their utmost endeavours for preserving and keeping them safe and entire". In addition he left £150 "to buy or build a place ... for preserving and keeping them ...." The Library was duly extended to accommodate them, making it possible for the trustees to direct before the end

of 1708 that the collection "shall forever hereafter be deposited and kept in the late erected Library of the Inner Temple". In the new Library the manuscripts occupied most of the book presses numbered 502 to 538, and they have been cited ever since according to those original press numbers. The manuscript volumes in the bequest totalled fewer than 300, but somehow, mostly in the ensuing forty or fifty years, a number of volumes from a variety of other sources came to be associated with the Petyt press numbers, making a total of 386 volumes.

Almost half of the manuscripts in the Petyt bequest group are transcripts of public records, many, not surprisingly, from the Tower of London, but from a variety of other sources too, including the Rolls Chapel, the Chapter House of Westminster Abbey, Westminster Hall, the Palace of Westminster and from many private collections. To the layman these transcripts may seem less interesting than the original manuscripts in the collection, but their historical importance is considerable. Their range is wide, including Assize Rolls and other judicial records, Chancery records, Exchequer records and various parliamentary and ecclesiastical records. The parliamentary records are particularly extensive. The first Petyt press number (502), for example, is a long series of 83 volumes containing transcripts of the Journals of the House of Commons from 1604-1624 and 1660 to 1708. Some of the original documents from which Petyt made his transcripts no longer exist. Others have deteriorated since Petyt's day to the point where they are now unusable. In such instances the Petyt transcripts provide the only existing versions or the most accurate versions now available.

Most of the remaining items in the collection are original documents. One small group of volumes comprises medieval chronicles and other popular European works of the medieval period. They include an early fifteenth-century *Polychronicon* of Ralph Higden, a fourteenth-century *Speculum Historiale* of Vincent de Beauvais, and an illuminated *Historia Anglorum* of Roger de Hoveden which once belonged to the Abbey of Rievaulx and which was probably written in the Durham scriptorium about 1220. Another in this group, a manuscript of Macrobius's commentary on Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis*,

beautifully written and illuminated probably in the mid twelfth century, is thought to be the oldest manuscript in the Library.

Amongst the many legal items are some early collections and abridgments of statutes, including one printed by Machlinia and Lettou c.1481 and others printed by Machlinia c.1484 and 1485. Many other items reflect Petyt's special interest in Parliament, for example three separate drafts of Henry Elsynge's *Modus tenendi Parliamentum*, one of which is annotated by the jurist and scholar John Selden.

For many the most interesting volumes are those containing holograph letters and other documents mainly from the second half of the sixteenth century. Amongst them are letters by William Cecil (Lord Burghley), Sir Edward Coke and Sir Christopher Wren, and two letters bearing the signature of Queen Elizabeth I: the familiar, elaborately curlicued "Elizabeth R".

Most fascinating of all is a group of documents relating to the royal succession crisis of 1553. The best known of these, alluded to earlier, is a draft made in June 1553 in which the dying King Edward VI, at the instigation of his protector John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland, sets out his "devise for the succession", excluding his sisters Mary and Elizabeth in favour of Northumberland's daughter-in-law Lady Jane Grey.



**Letter from Elizabeth I to Archbishop Matthew Parker, 1571**

The other documents from this period include a letter from Lady Mary, later Queen Mary (written by another but with additions in her own hand), to her brother Edward VI on 16 May 1553 expressing concern for his health; a letter dated 9 July 1553 in which Mary, under signet and sign manual "Marye the Quene", announces to Sir Edward Hastings the death of Edward three days earlier; and finally a letter dated 18 July 1553 in which Lady Jane Grey, under signet and sign manual "Jane the Quene", writes to two of her supporters, just a few hours before her arrest and the end of her nine day reign.

Of the 134 "Petyt" volumes which derive from sources other than the Petyt bequest, perhaps the most notable are the fourteen volumes of papers of Sir Martin Wright, who was a King's Bench judge from 1740 to 1755. There are papers on over a thousand cases heard by the judge during that period, together with precedents, proceedings and notes. These provide much detailed information on the law and legal procedure of the time. A portrait of Sir Martin Wright hangs near the Library entrance. Other items amongst these 134 volumes include Year Books for the period 10-17 Edward III (i.e. 1336-1344) and an illuminated manuscript of Walter Hilton's *Scala Perfectionis* dating from the first half of the fifteenth century.

Besides his books and manuscripts Petyt also left a further £50 to purchase additional books. In addition to the completion of the new building, the year 1708 saw the appointment of the Inn's first Librarian, Samuel Carter. By 1713 Carter had completed the first known catalogue, and in the same year there is the first record of an annual allocation (initially £20) being made for the purchase of books, at the discretion of the Treasurer and four other Masters of the Bench - in effect the first Library Committee. The Library's existence is first documented in 1505, but the Petyt bequest of 1707, with the direct and indirect consequences that followed over the next few years, was arguably the single most important development in its subsequent history.

*Adrian Blunt retired as Deputy Librarian in 2006.*



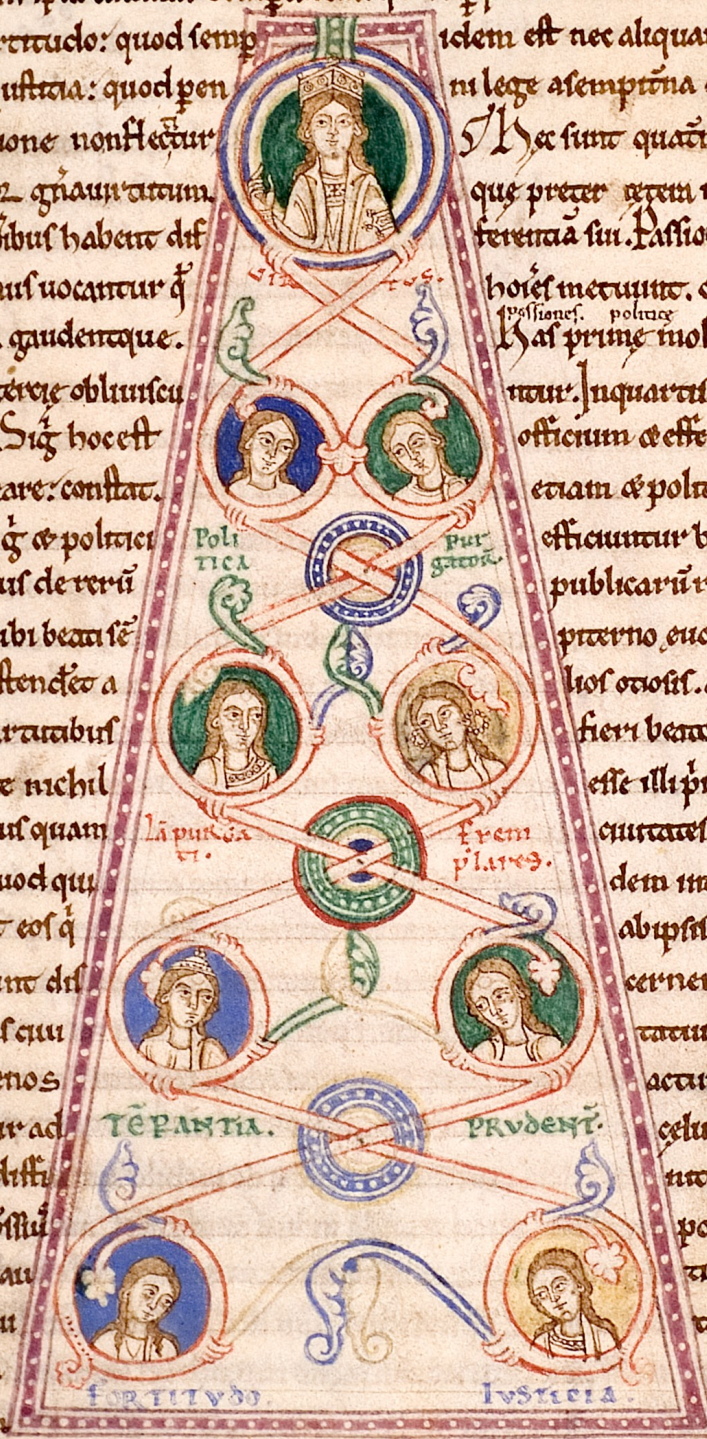
M<sup>rs</sup> the Queene

Trusty and wel beloved we greet you well. By cause we  
doubt not but that I most hartely possession of the crowne  
in fewe fewe tenent of the nobilitie of our Realm and other  
the states of the same is both generally knowne and also  
is a most loving subjecte, therefore we do not verily  
the same out more most hartely will and require to be  
that you our most honorable mustre and other all the  
words we can possibly make of you for the same  
offered us for the same as for the same as for the same  
the more trusty and more wel beloved of our Realm  
of the same as for the same as for the same as for the same  
And as the same to require us all possible means  
to bring us to the same as for the same as for the same  
tumults and rebellions made here against us and our Realm  
by certain persons men for the suppressing of the same  
same as for the same as for the same as for the same  
of the same as for the same as for the same as for the same  
in order to the same as for the same as for the same  
but yet have the same as for the same as for the same  
appointed for the same as for the same as for the same  
people not remain for the same as for the same as for the same  
to about the same as for the same as for the same  
possessors and retention as for the same as for the same  
distinction of the same as for the same as for the same  
of all men in the same as for the same as for the same  
multitude as for the same as for the same as for the same  
which hath been the same as for the same as for the same  
to the same as for the same as for the same as for the same  
to have wisdom and fidelity in the same as for the same  
we seek both in power and for the same as for the same  
in the same as for the same as for the same as for the same  
also the same as for the same as for the same as for the same  
of the same as for the same as for the same as for the same  
of the same as for the same as for the same as for the same  
at the same as for the same as for the same as for the same

Letter from Lady Jane Grey as Queen, 18 July 1553



est mens ipsa diuina. **Tempantia**: q̄ in se p̄petua intentione conūsa  
 est. Fortitudo: quod temp  
 tatur. Iusticia: quod pen  
 etiuatione non flectitur  
 quatuor q̄naūtatum  
 impassibilibus habent dif  
 ut scimus uocantur q̄  
 doletur. gaudentque.  
 auter. t̄rre obliuiscu  
 noiri. Sic hoc est  
 tum beare: constat.  
 tutes. Iq̄ & politici  
 q̄ tullius de rerū  
 dixit. ubi beati s̄  
 Qui ut ostendit a  
 tiotis uirtutibus  
 absolute nichil  
 acceptus quam  
 ierit quod qui  
 fiat. ut eos q̄  
 incipiunt dis  
 toribus qui  
 p̄teruenos  
 p̄antur ad  
 autē disti  
 quid p̄stū  
 quid cau  
 noe cui  
 quam  
 hoium  
 cetisque iure sociati quatuor  
 appellatur. Nam & seruit̄ q̄ndā  
 & gladiatoria manus concilia hoium & cetis fuerūt. sed non iure sociati.  
 Illa autem iusta sola est multitudo: cui uniuersitas in legum consensu  
 obsequium. Quod uero ait. harū rectores & seruitores hinc p̄fecti huc



idem est nec aliquando mu  
 ni lege a se p̄p̄na op̄i sui  
 Hec sunt quatuor uir  
 tus preter q̄tā maximā  
 ferentia sui. Passioes autē  
 hoies metunt. cupiuntq̄.  
 Has prime mollunt. secte  
 ntur. In quartis. nefas est  
 officium & effectus uirtu  
 etiam & politicas eē uir  
 efficiuntur beati. Iure  
 publicarū rectoribus  
 p̄terno. quo fruuntur.  
 hos otiosos. alios nego  
 fieri beatos: non dicit  
 esse illi p̄ncipi dō  
 ciuitates. sed ad  
 dem interris  
 ab ipsi celestib'  
 cernebat arec  
 tatum. quib'  
 actus ter  
 celum. Illa  
 nitione  
 potest eē.  
 tuis de  
 tatum.  
 conalia  
 inquit  
 Vn̄ autē q̄ p̄t̄cant.

Macrobius Commentary on Somnium Scipionis.  
 Mid 12th Century. Image copyright © Ian Jones