A preface to

*Early Yorkshire Charters*

The ‘Extra Series’ of ten volumes published between 1931 and 1965

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William Farrer and the origins of the *Early Yorkshire Charters* sequence

The *Early Yorkshire Charters* published by the Yorkshire Archaeological and Historical Society (YAHS) in ten volumes between 1935 and 1965 had its origin twenty years earlier. In 1916, William Farrer decided to abandon his work on his study, *Early Yorkshire Charters*, after publishing the third of a proposed six volumes. William Farrer (1861-1924), a Lancashire scholar, was a country gentleman, living on a private income at Over Kellet, near Carnforth and later at Witherslack, Westmorland, but like many such men in Lancashire and Yorkshire, his origins lay in the world of commerce rather than in landed society.

He was the second son of William Farrer Ecroyd (1827-1915), a Burnley businessman and Conservative M. P. for Preston, Lancashire, from 1881 to 1885. Farrer had been educated at Rugby, but was then seemingly destined to join his father in the family’s textile business. He was rescued from a career in commerce by a wealthy great-uncle, William Farrer, a Liverpool merchant, whose money he inherited in 1896 and whose surname he adopted. Now with the leisure to do as he pleased, he decided to take up an interest in the history of his native county. He began by buying the library and papers of Lancashire historian, J. P. Earwaker, following his death in 1895 and then spending large sums on further purchases to widen their scope. He taught himself palaeography and diplomatic but, having done so, never darkened the doors of the British Museum or the Public Record Office (now the National Archives) again, preferring to use his resources to employ a cadre of record searchers who produced transcriptions for him on a scale far greater than he could have achieved unaided.

He wrote extensively on the history of Lancashire, but then turned his attention elsewhere, firstly to Yorkshire. His translation of the Yorkshire section of Domesday Book for the *Victoria History of Yorkshire*, led him to research in a new field. The paucity of official archives in the twelfth century, between Domesday and the survival of continuous series of royal chancery and exchequer records at the beginning of the thirteenth century, gave private records, particularly charters, considerable importance in the study of local history because of their topographical and genealogical value.
Farrer organised the production of a corpus of Yorkshire charters, arranging them by the ‘fees’, or feudal tenancies, of the county that existed in this period and, between 1914 and 1916, published at his own expense, the three volumes of *Early Yorkshire Charters*, which one reviewer described as his greatest achievement. The first volume contained 644 pre-Norman charters followed by those of the archbishop, religious houses and corporation of the city of York followed by five fees arranged in alphabetical order of the names of the holders. Volumes two and three continued the alphabetical arrangement, reaching the fee of Mortemer. He had initially intended to complete the work in four, and then in six volumes, but after volume three he turned his attention elsewhere. In part he was deterred by the cost of the venture, but more significant was the development of his own research priorities.

He found the county format he had adopted too restrictive, not least because the land holdings of the barons had generally been granted by the Crown in more than one county, to prevent the concentration of ownership and so the emergence of a local power-base. He turned instead to a national study of honours (lands granted to the king’s tenants-in-chief) and knight’s fees, a project that saw only three volumes completed before his sudden death abroad at the age of 63. The members of the YAHS had, naturally, been disappointed that Farrer had abandoned his Yorkshire researches, but in May 1931 this regret became alarm when Colonel John Parker, the president of the Society, received the news that Farrer’s widow was disposing of her late husband’s library. Parker wrote to Charles Clay, librarian of the House of Lords, who had become joint editor of the Record Series in May 1929, to warn him that ‘it looks as if the MS of the “Yorkshire Charters” will be thrown away’ unless they acted to save the contents of the intended subsequent volumes. Six months later, the society had secured both his Yorkshire manuscripts and the remaining 490 copies of the printed volumes.

**Charles Travis Clay and his editorship of *Early Yorkshire Charters***

Clay consulted F. M. Stenton, professor of history in the University of Reading and produced a memorandum in October 1932 outlining a possible course of action. He recommended the production of an index to Farrer’s volumes and the use of Farrer’s materials as the basis for a series of volumes based, as before, on feudal fees. As Clay was then working with Lewis Loyd (1875-1947) on the Richmond fee as part of a new edition of G. E. Cockayne’s *Complete Peerage*, he suggested that the work should begin there. The Record Series committee agreed to this and entrusted the work to Clay. It also decided that the successor volumes should be uniform in appearance with that of Farrer’s volumes but, since this was different from the style long established for the other volumes in the Record Series, it was decided that *Early Yorkshire Charters* should be classed as an ‘Extra Series’ although issued routinely to subscribers to the Record Series. In fact, the Extra Series was greatly superior in in typography and design to Farrer’s self-financed volumes, and also featured plates illustrating original charters. This higher standard of production was initially possible because of a generous bequest to the Society by W. T. Lancaster, its former honorary librarian. Their growing acclaim ensured that later volumes received grant aid from other sources.

Charles, later Sir Charles, Clay was the son of J. W. Clay (1838-1918), the inheritor of a long-established firm of worsted manufacturers, who became a prominent member of the YAS, serving as editor of the Record Series from 1897 until his death. After a false start with a mathematical scholarship from Eton, Clay read history at Oxford and obtained a first-class degree. He then served as private secretary to Lord Crewe and then found a post as assistant librarian to the House of Lords, succeeding to the principal librarian’s post in 1922, despite the machinations of Edmund Gosse. Clay inherited from his father an interest in both deeds and the genealogy of the landed classes, editing of a volume for the Record Series in 1911 and in
1922, he was asked by the committee to continue the series of volumes of Yorkshire deeds and edited four further volumes in the following fourteen years. Anticipating what was to be his life’s work, in volume 7 of Yorkshire Deeds, published in 1932, he wrote of ‘the entertaining task of endeavouring to assign an approximate date’ to deeds and explained some of the means by which this could be done. This made him the ideal person to work on the new project.

Over the course of the following three decades and in ten volumes, Clay continued the work, always described on the title page as ‘based on the manuscripts of the later William Farrer’. Mornings at the House of Lords were spent on assisting the peers of the present day and afternoons were often devoted to researching the barons of the Anglo-Norman realm, both for the YAHS and the Complete Peerage, of which he became a trustee. What emerged unhurried over these years was a publication which displayed many facets of Clay’s immaculate scholarship. Whereas Farrer had published the texts of 1,897 charters in three years, Clay’s volumes contained 1,194, about a third of which had already been published elsewhere. In other respects, Clay notably improved on the methods of his predecessor. He paid proper attention to indexing, which was indispensable to the research value of the work. Farrer’s abandoned work had contained no index, and so volume four was devoted to a consolidated index to Farrer’s three volumes by Charles and his niece Edith Mary Clay. All the other volumes contained indexes whose comprehensiveness was the subject of continually-approving reviews. Clay also extended the covering dates of his work, extending his documentation into the thirteenth century: to 1240, on the death of the sixth earl, for the honour of Conisbrough and to 1274, on the failure of heirs, for the honour of Skipton. The range and scope of the contextual material was also greatly enhanced, which in part reflected the benefits available through the growth of medieval scholarship over the twentieth century, a development witnessed by the acknowledgements in the introductions to Clay’s consultations with the leading medieval historians of the day. However, the most important single advance made by Clay over his predecessor was his meticulous refinement in the dating of charters of the twelfth century. These are almost always without dates, and therefore had to be dated by internal evidence, usually through their witnesses. The basis for his conclusions is described in his notes to the individual charters.

Clay’s work was received with considerable academic acclaim amongst medievalists. Edmund, (later Sir Edmund) Craster, the Oxford historian and later the head of the Bodleian Library, achieved the remarkable record of reviewing all the ten volumes that appeared between 1915 and 1957 in the English Historical Review. He was uniformly laudatory, if once hinting that on occasion the quality of the scholarship exceeded the intrinsic value of the subject, as when Clay’s minute description of the widely-ramified branches of the Stuteville family was, he thought, ‘exhaustive; indeed, one almost regrets the amount of labour that must have been spent on it.’ Likewise, the doyen of early medieval scholars, Sir Frank Stenton, wrote of volume 8 that it was ‘for the moment the last number in the finest series of Charters now appearing anywhere in the world’, and Sir Richard Southern praised it as a work of ‘all but impeccable scholarship’. Both these views appeared in the Proceedings of the British Academy in 1950, and it was to the Academy that Sir Charles was elected in that same year.

Stenton’s own work on Northamptonshire charters had influenced the society’s decision to include illustrations of the charters in the Extra Series, and reviews commented favourably upon the continuing high standard of book production with which the society complemented the high scholarly standards of its editor. In the post-war years, this quality could only be maintained through generous grants from the Marc Fitch Fund, the Pilgrim Trust and the British Academy. Although old age finally induced him to conclude his work with volume ten of the Extra Series in 1965, which was published in his eightieth year, there remained transcripts by Farrer still awaiting an editor. For the society, and for its venerable series editor, the difficulty over further volumes was that they would inevitably include a larger
proportion of charters unrelated to Yorkshire. Recognising this, Sir Charles recommended the publication of the edition the twelfth-century charters of the Honour of Mowbray prepared by Professor Diana Greenway to the British Academy, and so the history of Early Yorkshire Charters was brought to a close.

*Early Yorkshire Charters: Publication History and Contents*

Altogether there are twelve volumes in the *Early Yorkshire Charters* sequence and their numbering reflects their publication history. The first three volumes were edited and published by Farrar himself and are numbered 1 to 3. Volumes 4 to 12 were edited by (Sir) Charles Clay and published by the Yorkshire Archaeological Society as an Extra Series - that is, ‘outside’ its already existing Record Series. Consequently, their numbering does not follow that of the Record Series, instead having its own and potentially confusing identification as Extra Series volumes 1 to 10. The situation is, potentially, further confused by the inclusion of an index to Farrer’s volumes 1 to 3 as volume 4 in the Extra Series.

**The three Farrer volumes**

Volume I of *Early Yorkshire Charters* edited by Farrar prints the texts of 644 charters. After a small number of pre-Norman documents, the charters are arranged by ‘fee’, that is, barony or honour, on a feudal rather than simply a topographical basis. The greater part of volume one is concerned with the charters of the Archbishop of York, the City of York and religious houses in the city. It then prints the charters of five fees arranged in alphabetical order of the names of the holders.

Volume II of *Early Yorkshire Charters* edited by Farrar prints the texts of 619 charters arranged, as before, by feudal fees, and the charters of eleven of these are included. They help to illuminate the process of redistribution of estates made by Henry I with the aim of both consolidating the position of the Crown and increasing the military forces he could command for maintaining his position in Normandy.

Volume III of *Early Yorkshire Charters* edited by Farrar prints the texts of 632 charters arranged, as before, by feudal fees, seven of which are included in this volume. The largest numbers of charters are those that relate to the Holderness of fee of Albemarle, with 112 charters and the Lacey fee, although its 408 charters are to a great extent those of the tenants.

The three volumes edited by Farrer had no index, but a consolidated index to all three was published by the Yorkshire Archaeological Society as volume IV of its Extra Series.

**The ten ‘Extra Series’ volumes**

Vol. I *Early Yorkshire Charters Vol. IV The Honour of Richmond Pt. I* ed. Charles Travis Clay (1935), the first in the Extra Series, was edited by Charles T. Clay, as were all the subsequent volumes. The 120 charters it contains relate to the lords of the Honour of Richmond, although this also includes charters relating to the estates of the lords in other parts of England and in Brittany. The volume has an introduction by the editor, indexes of names, places and subjects and fifteen plates of the surviving original charters.

Vol. II *Early Yorkshire Charters Vol. V The Honour of Richmond Pt. II* ed. Charles Travis Clay (1936), the second volume in the Extra Series, is the second volume to deal with the feudal fees of the Honour of Richmond. It contains the text of 280 charters. The volume has an introduction by the editor, indexes of names, places and subjects and sixteen plates of the surviving original charters.

Vol. III: *Early Yorkshire Charters Vol. VI The Paynel Fee* ed. Charles Travis Clay (1939), the third volume in the Extra Series, was first published in 1939, and contains the text
of 160 charters of the Paynell Fee. The volume has an introduction by the editor, indexes of names, places and subjects and a frontispiece of Hambye Abbey in Normandy, and sixteen plates of the surviving original charters.

Vol. IV: Index to EYC Vols. I-III ed. Charles Travis Clay and Edith Margaret Clay (1942) the Index to Farrer’s three volumes, forms the fourth volume in the Extra Series and was first published in 1943. It was prepared by Charles T. Clay and his niece, Miss Edith M. Clay. It contains a consolidated index to the three volumes published by Farrar, which is indispensable to the effective use of his work.

Vol. V: Early Yorkshire Charters Vol. VII The Honour of Skipton ed. Charles Travis Clay (1947), the fifth volume in the Extra Series, was first published in 1947. This volume deals with the Honour of Skipton, and contains the text of 179 charters, extending the period covered to 1274, the date at which the honour escheated (that is, reverted) to the Crown through want of an heir. The volume has introductory chapters on the lords and the lands of the honour, indexes of names, places and subjects and twelve plates of the surviving original charters, a map and four pedigree charts. Readers may also wish to consult The Lost Cartulary of Bolton Priory, edited by K. J. Legg, Record Series, volume 160 (2009), which prints more charters of the priory than were available when this volume of Early Yorkshire Charters was first published.

Vol. VI: Early Yorkshire Charters Vol. VIII The Honour of Warenne ed. Charles Travis Clay (1949), the sixth volume in the Extra Series, was first published in 1949. The volume is concerned with the Honour of Warenne which, in Yorkshire, comprised the honour of Conisbrough and the manor of Wakefield. The terminal date is extended to 1240, the year in which the sixth earl died, and the charters include those of the whole honour rather than those of Yorkshire alone. The volume contains the text of 172 charters. There is a chapter on the early generations of the family of Warenne, indexes of names, places and subjects, a frontispiece of Conisbrough castle, and twenty-five plates of the surviving original charters, two maps and two pedigree charts. A study of the family is to be found in L. Loyd, ‘The origin of the family of Warenne’, Yorkshire Archaeological Journal, 30 (1933).

Vol. VII: Early Yorkshire Charters Vol. IX The Stuteville Fee ed. Charles Travis Clay (1952), the seventh volume in the Extra Series, was first published in 1952. It contains two chapters on the Stuteville families and their lands, the text of 168 charters of the Stuteville Fee, indexes of names, places and subjects, eight plates of the surviving original charters, a map and four pedigree charts.

Vol. VIII: Early Yorkshire Charters Vol. X The Trussebut Fee ed. Charles Travis Clay (1955), the eighth volume in the Extra Series, was first published in 1952, with grant aid from the Pilgrim Trust. It contains two chapters on the Trussebut family and their lands, the text of 114 charters of the Trussebut Fee, indexes of names, places and subjects, eight plates of the surviving original charters, a map and four pedigree charts. As the editor at that time envisaged that he would edit no further volumes in the series, this volumes also includes a consolidated index to fees in chief, pedigree charts and notes on families in volumes one to ten of the Extra Series.

Vol. IX: Early Yorkshire Charters Vol. XI The Percy Fee ed. Charles Travis Clay (1963), the ninth in the Extra Series), was first published in 1963, with grant aid from the Marc Fitch Fund. The volume contains chapters on the Percy family and its lands, the text of 297 charters relating to the Percy Fee, indexes of names, places and subjects, twelve plates of the surviving original charters, and four pedigree charts.

Vol. X: Early Yorkshire Charters Vol. XII The Tison Fee ed. Sir Charles Travis Clay (1965), the tenth and final volume in the Extra Series, was first published in 1965 with grant aid from the British Academy. The volume contains chapters on the Tison family and its lands,
the text of 120 charters relating to the Tison Fee, indexes of names, places and subjects, five plates of the surviving original charters, a map and three pedigree charts.

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**YAHS 150th Anniversary Reprints**
To mark the anniversary of the Society’s foundation in 1863 a selection of fifty out of print titles was made available through the Cambridge University Press Cambridge Library Collection print-on-demand programme. These volumes include all of the *Early Yorkshire Charters* sequence.