

If offering such a caution leaves me a “dinosaur,” then so be it. But those who launch into desktop publishing without due consideration of its profits and pitfalls might find themselves orbiting aimlessly without a flight plan.

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## ***English County Record Offices and Quarter Sessions Records***

Before it becomes part of the mythology of archives may I correct the statement which appears in Douglas Hay, “Archival Research in the History of the Law: A User’s Perspective”? (*Archivaria*, 24 (Summer 1987), p. 37)

As recently as the period after the Second World War the newly formed county record offices in England were preparing to throw out most of their quarter sessions records, now the most used series of documents in many of their reading rooms.

When I decided to become an archivist in July 1944 there was no formal training available in England, so I gained experience by working voluntarily in as many record offices as I could. In all the county record offices which I knew, the quarter sessions records were the most carefully preserved series. In some counties (Hertford and Buckingham spring to mind first) their publication had begun before 1939; in others (e.g. Sussex) they were the first records to receive conservation treatment.

Any losses to quarter sessions records which occurred (e.g. Cornwall) happened *before* the county had a record office and an archivist. These losses were a direct result of World War II:

1. At the beginning of the war Air Raid Precautions (later called Civil Defence) instructed everyone to get rid of inflammable material. Many records — not only from quarter sessions — perished in this manner.
2. Later we were urged to send paper to help produce munitions, and even more was lost. In one badly bombed city I once estimated that more historic records were lost in this way than by German bombs.

Some records were also lost because the Public Record Office in 1916 issued a destruction schedule for quarter sessions records, but it was not widely used. Anyone wishing to pursue this further should see Hugh M. Waltor, “Destruction Schedules: Quarter Sessions’, Magistrates’ Courts’ and Coroners’ Records,” *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, 3 no. 2 (1965), pp. 61-74.

By the Fifties I knew every county archivist in the country and I never heard one discuss the possibility of “throwing out most of their quarter sessions records.”

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