

Smith Estate Papers

SEP

General Introduction

The Rt Hon W H Smith (1825-91) was partner with his father in the firm of W.H. Smith & Son from 1846 to 1857, and thereafter sole owner until his death. The family newsagency had started at the end of the 18th century, and W H Smith Snr. (1792-1865) gave his son a prosperous start. The Rt Hon W H Smith's widow was created Viscountess Hambleden in 1981 and their son, W F D Smith (1868-1928), became the 2nd viscount in 1913. His son, the 3rd viscount, lived from 1903 to 1948, and his son, the 4th viscount, was born in 1930.

During the 1860's the Rt Hon W H Smith widened his interests, admitting in 1864 a first outside partner, W Lethbridge, who increasingly took over the day-to-day direction of W.H. Smith & Son. In 1868 he was elected to the House of Commons where he remained until his death in office as Leader of the House and First Lord of the Treasury. And between 1866 and 1890 he bought five estates in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Devon, Hertfordshire and Suffolk. In general the documents relative to his political life are contained in the Hambleden papers, those relative to his business life in the Records of W.H. Smith, and those relative to his landed property in the Smith Estate Papers. All these accumulations are kept in Swindon.

The five estates mentioned above were:

- a) Oxhey & Wiggenhall in Hertfordshire, bought in 1866, sold in 1872 or 1877.
- b) Greenlands (in Bucks) and Remenham (in Berks), bought in 1871.
- c) Hundon & Thurlow in Suffolk, bought in 1877, sold in 1906 or 1907.
- d) Silverton & Rewe in Devon, bought in 1878, sold in 1919.
- e) Moretonhampstead in Devon, bought in 1890, sold in 1928.

There were of course other tidying-up purchases and sales over more extended periods, notably the acquisition of Culham Court (Berks) in 1894 and of Hambleden Manor (Bucks) in 1922.

The Hertfordshire properties were simple investments, bits being resold as building lots. The Devon and Suffolk properties were partly of sporting interest; Great Thurlow Hall was occupied from time to time and the Manor House at North Bovey (now the British Rail hotel) built by the Hon W F D Smith in 1906-07. The Buckinghamshire property was, and remains, the principal country seat of the family.

The Rt Hon W H Smith and his descendants were advised on property matters by a number of firms and individuals:

- a) Solicitors:
(London) Rogerson & Ford up to 1873 becoming
Harvey, Oliver & Capron in 1881
Harvey & Capron in 1885
Harvey & Speed in 1893
Harvey & Varley in 1900

Bircham & Co from 1901
- b) Land Agents:
(Country) Messrs J & H Drew, Exeter for land in Devon
Sedgwick & Son, Watford for land elsewhere
- c) Private Secretaries:
(London) J M Pattison from 1880
A E J Legge/H Sharpe
E Knollys
G Kirk
- d) Private Agent:
(Yewden) W F Holt Beever

It would appear that the deeds were kept mainly in the town house at 3 Grosvenor Place from 1880 to 1930 (*but see WHS A.302 (1901)*), possibly also at 31 Belgrave Square after 1930. Latterly they were held by Bircham & Co at 46 Parliament Street. When that firm moved to 1 Dean Farrar Street in 1969 most of the present accumulation was passed to the British Records Association. It was there listed briefly under No 1633 and then transferred to W.H. Smith & Son Ltd in 1971. To these papers have been added a final series covering the Rt Hon W H Smith's Settled Estates as a whole. This series, mainly trustee correspondence, was transferred from the strong room of the Company Secretary of W.H. Smith & Son Ltd in 1976. The entire archive was transferred to the University of Reading in 2011 and given the reference "SEP".

The accumulation is thus now divided into seven sub-fonds:

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| 1) | SEP BER/1 - BER/10 | Berkshire Properties |
| 2) | SEP BUC/1 - BUC/29 | Buckinghamshire Properties |
| 3) | SEP DEV/1 - DEV/29 | Devon, Moretonhampstead Estate |
| | SEP DEV/51 - DEV/72 | Devon, Silverton & Rewe Estate |
| | SEP DEV/91 | Devon, Terrier of both estates |
| 4) | SEP HER/1 - HER/34 | Hertfordshire Properties |
| 5) | SEP SUF1 - SUF/46 | Suffolk Properties |
| 6) | SEP VAR/1 - VAR/10 | Misc Properties (Mddx, Oxon, Somerset) |
| 7) | SEP XCT/1 - XCT/195 | Settled Estates generally |

6 April 1977 (Tim Baker-Jones) revised 5 July 2011 (Guy Baxter)