

A THREAT TO A LOCAL ARCHIVE: The Cartwright Papers

Deborah Hayter and Jeremy Gibson

The archives of the Cartwright family of south Northamptonshire consist of 85 boxes of part-listed material and 8,518 documents which have been individually listed, dating from c.1250-1954. The papers have been deposited at the Northamptonshire Record Office for many years and are much consulted by local historians. Our own Society has greatly benefited from the archive, from the work done by Marjorie Kennedy in the 1960s (sponsored by Miss Elizabeth Watt of The Pediment, Aynho) on the history of Aynho village, eventually revised by Nicholas Cooper and published in 1984 as a much-lauded narrative history as our record volume 20. In fact they are the primary source for those studying the south of the county, where the Cartwright' holdings were very extensive.

However they are still owned by a descendant of the Cartwrights, who no longer lives in the county, and now wants to sell them. She would prefer them to remain in the Record Office (where they have, without charge, been housed, preserved and to a considerable extent catalogued) if possible, but at a price of £300,000, to match an 'independent' valuation, which the Record Office would have to raise (there are no county council funds to support this). An American institution (interested on the grounds that they acquired the library from Aynhoe House many years ago) has already offered the full amount, and the whole archive will go there at the end of this year unless the money can be raised to keep them in this country, and in this county, with which the Cartwright family was so intimately involved for nearly four hundred years.

The Cartwrights were landed squires who lived in the extreme south of Northamptonshire from 1615 until 1960. The archive includes all the records of Cartwright estates at Aynho and many other villages (such as Deddington in Oxfordshire) for the whole of this period. There is also much documentation about political life, as the Cartwrights sat in Parliament as Knights of the Shire, in conjunction with the Knightleys of Fawsley, in almost unbroken line from the 1690s to the late nineteenth century. The papers include fascinating accounts of the often bitterly fought election campaigns of the late eighteenth century. In fact the family was so closely associated with the political map of Northamptonshire that the part of the county which borders on Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire was familiarly known as 'Mr Cartwright's Corner'.

In the Civil War the family were supporters of Parliament, being closely related to Fairfax. They had to leave the house at Aynho and retreat to London. The house was destroyed by Royalist troops fleeing to Oxford after their defeat at Naseby. The