



Press Release

20 July 2005

Harry Potter not needed

Technology has turned a thousand sheepskins into a single CD-ROM

No novel ever written is as colourful and brutal as the records of medieval Parliament. The 1000 sheepskins that the original records were written on would stretch out for a mile if laid out end to end. They are now accessible to everyone on their PC thanks to a new CD-ROM called PROME (Parliament Rolls Of Medieval England).

The CD-ROM teems with accounts of forced marriages, murders and betrayal in the English Parliament. It also contains details of tortures and punishment of those convicted of high crimes such as treason.

One of the most grisly of such spectacles was the 1399 trial of a valet called John Hall, who was convicted of being a party to the murder of the king's uncle, the duke of Gloucester, two years earlier. Gloucester had been smothered with a 'featherbed' in the back room of a hostel in Calais while awaiting trial. Parliament concluded that since Gloucester was such a great person, Hall 'merited the harshest death to which he could possibly be sentenced.'

Hall was sentenced to be drawn on a hurdle from Tower Hill to Tyburn Forks, disembowelled and his entrails burned before him, then hanged until he was almost dead before being cut down, beheaded, and his body cut into four quarters which would be displayed in prominent places. 'And so it was done that same day' says the file.

The person who was really responsible for ordering the Duke of Gloucester's death was almost certainly his own nephew, King Richard II.

The painstaking process of translating the four million words has been undertaken since 1998 by a team of seven editors and five research assistants and the final result is a 21st century retelling of the historical records on CD-ROM. The guide is a fully searchable multimedia tool which is aimed at the home PC user, scholars, libraries, schools and academic institutions. It will be later published in hard copy, with the 9 million words expected to go into 17 volumes.

The Leverhulme Trust funded the project which will be launched at the Houses of Parliament on Wednesday 20 July 2005.

Note to editors:

For further information and images:
Contact Jonathan Stampton on 020 83925277 or email
jonathan.stampton@nationalarchives.gov.uk

Samples of PROME can be found at www.sd-editions.com/PROME and you can purchase the CD-ROM from The National Archives by phoning 020 88763444

The General Editor of PROME is Professor Chris Given-Wilson of the University of St Andrews.

The volume editors are Dr. Paul Brand (All Souls College, Oxford), Professor Anne Curry (University of Southampton), Dr. Rosemary Horrox (Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge), Professor Geoffrey Martin (Former Keeper of the Public Records), Professor Mark Ormrod (University of York) and Professor Seymour Phillips (University College Dublin).

The PROME project was funded by a major grant from the Leverhulme Trust and sponsored by the National Archives at Kew, and by the History of Parliament Trust. The CD-Rom of PROME is published by Scholarly Digital Editions; hard copy will be published by Boydell and Brewer.