

VISIT TO GERMANY

OCTOBER 2007

The CATHOLIC ARCHIVES SOCIETY overseas visit was to Hildesheim in Germany, where, following the pattern established in earlier years, some members spent a week looking at archives and places of historical interest.

Hildesheim is in the State of Lower Saxony, where the state records for the German Federal State area of Lower Saxony and its predecessors are held in seven locations: Hannover (capital of the Federal State Lower Saxony), Aurich, Bückeberg, Oldenburg, Osna-brück, Stade, and Wolfenbüttel. The Zentrale Archivverwaltung (central archive administration) and the Hauptstaatsarchiv Hannover (main state archive) are located in Hannover. All seven state archives in Lower Saxony were made into a unified service in 2006. There are no national standards similar to BS5454 in Germany because of the federal structure; the Niedersächsisches Archivgesetz (Lower Saxony law concerning archives) determines how archives should be administered and the inspection service operates regionally.

All Catholic Archives Society visits are to regions with links with English Catholicism and for Hildesheim this was Lamspringe, an attractive small town nearby. Here, the abbey was home to English Benedictine monks from 1644 to 1803. They established a school, mainly for English boys from recusant families, and by the French Revolution Lamspringe was the largest and richest house of the English Benedictine diaspora. It was suppressed in 1803 by Prussian forces as part of the secularisation of religious houses and property and boys from the school became founding members of the Benedictine school at Ampleforth. We were taken round what remains of the school buildings, now local government offices.



The first archive we visited the Hildesheim Diocesan Archives where the Director, Dr Scharf-Wrede, explained that he holds the archives of the cathedral, bishops and chapter, plus parish records. The archives are in both onsite and in offsite storage, with those for the Hannover area in Hannover. The building was well equipped and the archive seemed well funded. The Director explained that he has both paid employees and volunteers, and active programmes of digitisation and transcription, the latter in conjunction with local genealogical societies. A wide-ranging discussion included fire detector systems, disaster planning provision for freeze drying and the absence of atmospheric controls.

Above, Arms of the see of Hildesheim

Left, Lamspringe Abbey

The archives include those of the Bishopric of Hildesheim from the mid-18th century, some of which are the only examples of their kind in Germany. Parish records are actively collected and the archivists visit parishes to encourage them to deposit. The German Bishops' Conference has agreed a single closure rule of 120 years for baptism registers and 100 years for marriages registers for all dioceses. A number of parish libraries and collections of sermons have also been deposited.

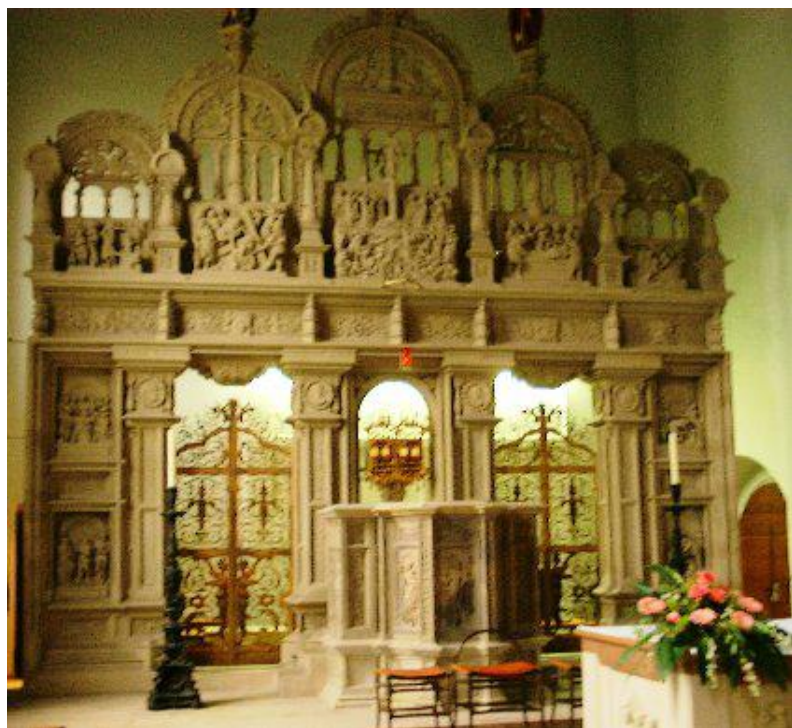
Next, we saw the Hildesheim Cathedral Library, the oldest in north Germany. This is in an attractive modern building, following the German tradition of circular buildings. The collection dates back to 815 and includes the St Alban's Psalter, a richly decorated 12th century manuscript, prepared for the anchorite Christina of Markyate and probably brought by Benedictine monks to nearby Lamspringe in the 17th century. A facsimile edition is in preparation.

The library predates the diocesan archives and holds large numbers of mediæval manuscripts, while other items of interest include a diary of the Reformation in Hildesheim by a penitent of Martin Luther and a detailed diary of the Thirty Years War by a former librarian. It is also the main historic library in Hildesheim. During the Second World War, many of the books and manuscripts were stored in the countryside, in mines and in local safes and very little was lost.

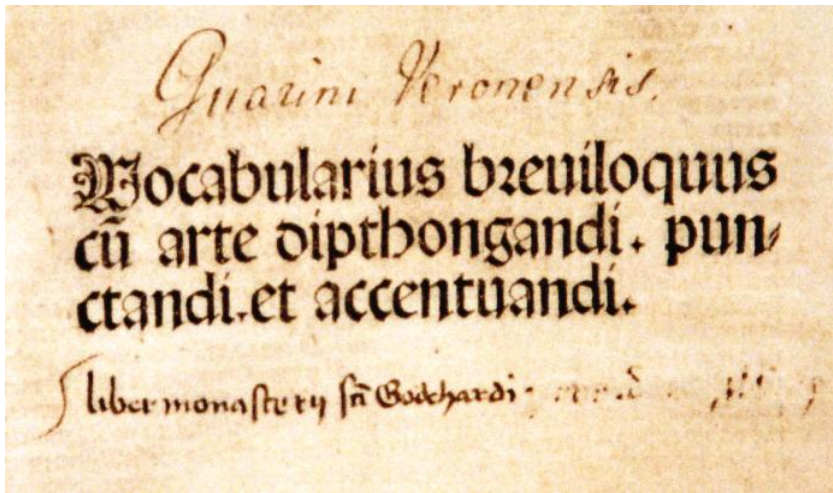
The oldest records of the Brunswick Duchy are in the Staatsarchiv Wolfenbüttel, in premises built for the purpose in 1955, the first of its kind. The archive also holds Lutheran church records for Brunswick up to 1875 when German civil registration of births, deaths and marriages began. There is a programme of micro-reproduction and digitisation but funding and staff cuts are a problem. As elsewhere, the challenge for the Lower Saxony archivists is to educate the legislators to the importance of archives.

The documents displayed for us included a treaty of 1202 between Otto and King John of England, and a contract of 1721 between George I and the Duke of Brunswick for troops. We also saw a report from a German general reporting his military successes with the British against rebels in the USA, detailing flags captured, and a spy's report listing the names and number of guns carried by RN ships of the period.

Our visit to the Brunswick State Archives took us to the most recently constructed archive building in Germany, opened in June 2007. Plans for a shopping mall on the site of the Brunswick Palace were approved on condition that the façade of the palace was rebuilt and part of the building was used for cultural purposes, including a library and archives. The 16 kilometres of shelving offer space for about 30 years, providing an intense weeding procedure is maintained. There are between two and three thousand users each year and one of the most used resources is the photograph collection, of about 200,000 photographs.



Above: Sacristy Chapel, Hildesheim Cathedral



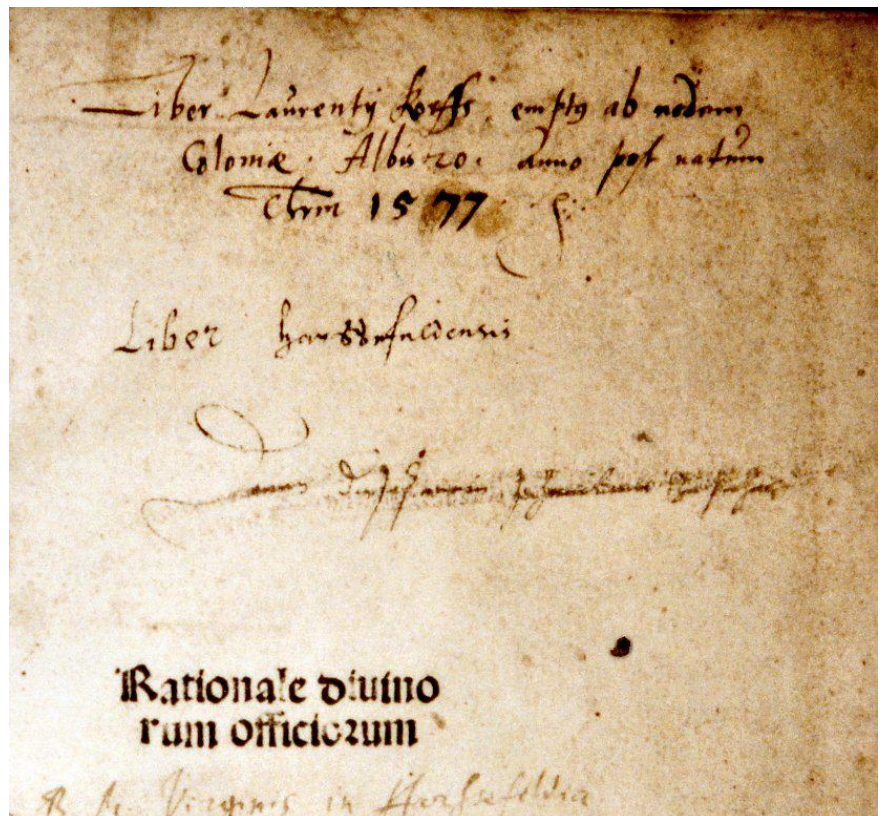
There are about 10,000 charters, from the mid 11th century onwards, over 1000 town plans and maps and over 2000 books. One feature of German archival practice is to add a sheet to files with details of who consulted them and when, which not only is a precaution against theft which but also is of interest in itself.

The archives at Hannover, the capital of the *Land* of Lower Saxony, are the largest state archive in Lower Saxony. They are in a monumental French classical-style building dating originally from 1713, which now holds the archives of the local state administration and older ministerial records covering the three former districts of Hannover, Hildesheim and Lüneberg. The archive is responsible for the appraisal and selection of local state records, and retains only approximately 1% of the total created. Despite this, it is expanding at a rate of one kilometre per annum.

The 45 kilometres of records include around 90,000 maps and plans, 14,000 photographs, and 45,000 medieval deeds, and there are also 90,000 books in the reference library going back to the seventeenth century. Ten million catalogue entries are now available in the internet, plus some digitised material, which it is hoped to expand. The archive collects records from private organisations in the locality, though most business records are in Wolfenbüttel. Local records of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church are in their own archive in Hannover.

We were shown documents relating Lamspringe, including a founding deed purporting to date from 872, now thought to be a forgery! There were also a series of beautiful coloured elevations of the church of St Michael in Hildesheim, showing alterations and damage to the fabric in the seventeenth century.

In free time, we explored Hildesheim, which is on one of the oldest routes to Moscow. Much of the town was destroyed in 1945 and we were shown the famous Rose Bush, which has survived for centuries and which sprouted again after bombs destroyed the Cathedral. The legend is that a reliquary belonging to Louis the Pious (son of Charlemagne and founder of the bishopric of Hildesheim) got caught in a rose tree and he took this as a sign that this was a suitable place to for a church.



Above & right: Two inscriptions from former Hildesheim libraries



Other non-archive visits were to the medieval convent at Wienhausen, where we saw a remarkable collection of early tapestries, one with a maiden elegantly blushing when her suitor returned from slaying the essential dragon. We also went to Brunhausen, where we were the first English-speaking group to visit a new exhibition of artefacts and documents tracing the history of the region from early medieval times to the twentieth century, including the tragic time when Brunshausen was used to accommodate slave labourers. More free time was spent in Goslar, a UNESCO World Heritage site, formerly the centre of silver mining in the Hartz mountains, and in the historic resort of Bad Gandersheim with its therapeutic springs.

The visit was organised by Professor and Mrs McClelland, who must be thanked for all the care they took in planning it and making it a success. Everyone who was there enjoyed themselves greatly.

This report is compiled from a longer report on the visit written by those who were on it. See Catholic Archives Society Bulletin, 2007.

Left: The great bronze doors of the cathedral in Hildesheim