

JESUS COLLEGE OXFORD

JC:P205 PAPERS OF BROWNE WILLIS (1682-1760), ANTIQUARIAN

Browne Willis (1682-1760) was one of the leading antiquarians of his day, being best known for the books he published on cathedrals in England and Wales, and on his native Buckinghamshire. Among his books was *A Survey of the Cathedral Church of St. David's, and the Edifices belonging to it, as they stood in the Year 1715* (London, 1717).

Two documents relating to Willis are in the archives of Jesus College, namely a letter to Humphrey Owen (matr. 1718; F. 1726-45; P. 1763-8; Bodley's Librarian 1747-68) from 1757 and a notebook of his collections on the history of the cathedral and diocese of St. Davids. These documents were stored in the College Library for some years, before the letter was catalogued as MS 245, and the notebook as MS 244. The letter was transferred to the Archives at an unknown date, while the notebook was transferred there in September 2018 as part of Accession No. 507.

Willis was never a member of Jesus College, and there is nothing in the notebook to explain its presence here. Perhaps the likeliest explanation is that Willis himself presented or even bequeathed his notebook to Owen, whom he clearly knew well, because he thought it appropriate to offer his notes on the most important cathedral in Wales to a member of Oxford's Welsh College, not least because Jesus's true Founder, Hugh Price, had been Treasurer of the Cathedral.

Catalogued in November 2019.

JC:P205/C1 - LETTER

JC:P205/C1/I

30 Sep 1757

Letter to from Browne Willis (address, Whaddon near Fenny Stratford) to Humphrey Owen. Willis discusses various antiquarian matters, such as a monument to Sir Simon Bennet (d. 1631; a benefactor to University College), and urges Owen to visit him. He also hopes to visit Oxford himself.

JC:P205/MS1 - NOTEBOOK

JC:P205/MS1/I

c. 1719-23 & 1751

Notebook (160 pages) with notes compiled by Browne Willis on the diocese and cathedral of St. Davids. It composes the following sections:

pp. 1-6: Blank.

pp. 7-22: Historical notes on the cathedral, and descriptions of the buildings and its monuments.

pp. 23-66: Lists of archbishops and bishops of the diocese, precentors, chancellors, treasurers, archdeacons of St. Davids, Brecknock, Carmarthen, and Cardigan, prebendaries of the Cathedral, and the succentors.

pp. 67-78: Lists of the parishes contained within each archdeaconry and deanery, their patrons and their incumbents.

pp. 79-82: Notes on the numbers of bells exceeding two in churches in the diocese.

pp. 83-106: Transcriptions of medieval statutes and other documents relating to the diocese.

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- pp. 107-10: Lists of cathedral personnel taken at various times between 1504 and 1719.
- pp. 111-14: Notes on the cathedral's lands and their value.
- pp. 115-18: extracts from wills of Bishops of St. Davids.
- pp. 119-26: Miscellaneous notes on the history of St. Davids, taken from various sources.
- pp. 127-34: A description of St. Davids made in 1720 by Joseph Lord of Carmarthen.
- pp. 135-38: Notes on the prebends of St. Davids.
- pp. 139-42: Copy of a petition sent by the gentry and inhabitants of Pembroke, 1661.
- pp. 143-50: Copy of a letter from the Bishop of St. Davids to Thomas Cromwell, 1539 or 1540. At some point this document was sent to Thomas Tanner with a covering note from Willis.
- pp. 151-4: Copy of an estimate, dated 23 Sep 1719, for the costs of repairing the cathedral. This was likewise sent to Tanner.
- pp. 155-160: Blank.

The pages are written in several hands, including Willis's, and it would seem that Willis assembled them from various sources to have them bound into this book.

The book was compiled after the publication of Willis's book on St. Davids in 1717, because there are several pieces of information (not least on the lists of precentors and chancellors, for example) which are not included in his book. Furthermore, many of the lists of cathedral and diocesan personnel seem to have been compiled in 1722 and 1723, and the list of bells was compiled after 1719. Most of the book was probably compiled around this time, but there is a note on p. 38 dated 1751, which was probably added much later.