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SN 6574 - London Sheriffs' Court Records, 1320: Detailed Case Index

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Data overview

This data is a detailed index of entries and cases appearing on the city of London's only surviving medieval Sheriffs' Court roll; covering Trinity term, 1 July - 26 September, 1320. The Sheriffs' Court of London was the court of first resort for most medieval Londoners wishing to initiate a lawsuit in matters of trespass, debt, account, surety of peace ('de minis'), breach of contract and a variety of other principally 'civil' disputes. Although notably, property-ownership disputes, such as disseisin, were not heard in the Sheriffs' Court. The entries on the Sheriffs' Court roll pertain to cases at all stages of legal proceedings, from mesne process - the process of bringing a defendant before the court to join issue - to the pleading of cases before the court and ultimately to final process - whereby the judgments were executed. Original-document entries contain cursory to full details of the dispute (depending on the stage of legal proceedings), the litigants and sureties first and last names and, additionally, often persons occupation or location of residence. The data deposited here is a '.tab' file export of a MsAccess table, listing, for each court roll entry [excepting appointments of attorney]: a full document reference (including document membrane number); the date of the court session at which the entry was recorded; the surname/s of the plaintiff/s and defendant/s; the writ-type (indicating what kind of case it was, e.g. debt/trespass/contract/etc.); the entry type (e.g. order to arrest/essoins/pleaded case/judgment/etc); an indication of whether the case involved a female litigant; and, where applicable, further notes about entry. Each entry in the deposited data also contains a unique entry ID number and metadata field with a 'Case ID' number, allowing the collation of entries pertaining to each of the more than 500 individual lawsuits, or 'cases', recorded on the roll.

Data content

This data draws, from London's only surviving medieval Sheriffs' Court roll, all court session dates, litigants' surnames (sometimes with occupation or location of residence), litigants' dispute types, and individual court roll entry types. It adds to the original data tagging of entries by case, so as that all entries pertaining to any one case may be collated and court process and procedure may be studied, and tagging of cases involving female litigants, so that female court usage may be studied. Only court roll entries for appointment of attorney have been excluded from data collection, as these were not explicitly part of the litigation process. The study of cases by writ-type, e.g. frequency of

debt cases or debt cases involving women, also has potential socio-economic value. This data may prove of exceptional importance in the study of medieval women, due to the relative frequency with which female litigants, a typically under-represented group, are recorded as having appeared before the Sheriffs' Court.

Deposited data, MsAccess 'Field List' and field content definitions

Field	Field Name	Data Type	Description
a	entry_id	AutoNumber	AutoNumber primary key. This is a 'Replication ID'.
b	archive	Text	Archive where the document (Sheriffs' Court roll) is held.
c	document_reference_no	Text	Archive document (Sheriffs' Court roll) reference number for citation.
d	membrane_no	Text	Membrane number of the document (Sheriffs Court roll) membrane on which the entry appears.
e	case_id	Number	Manually assigned case ID. All entries identifiable as pertaining to the same court case have been assigned a single case ID so as to allow the collation of court roll entries pertaining to any one case. Note; not all entries pertaining to the same case necessarily name all plaintiffs and/or defendants (for example, in cases with multiple plaintiffs and/or defendants, an essoin by a single litigant will often not name that individual's co-plaintiffs of co-defendants).
f	date	Date/Time	Date of the court session at which the entry was recorded.
g	plaintiff_surname	Text	Surnames of all plaintiffs recorded in the entry, separated by forward slashes.
h	defendant_surname	Text	Surnames of all defendants recorded in the entry, separated by forward slashes.
i	writ_type	Text	This describes the legal action in terms of the closest correspond group of Common Law actions. Data was input using a look-up list of: ' Account '; ' Debt (other) '; ' Detinue; Other '; and ' Trespass (other) '. The stand-alone 'Other' tag has been applied to the minority of entries where either the action on which the case was brought is unclear, or the action does not fall into another tag-category. Where, in round brackets, the word '(other)' follows the 'Debt' and 'Trespass' tags, this is because it was originally envisaged that further specificity of debt and trespass types might be derived from the records; however, ultimately, this was not possible.
j	entry_type	Text	This describes the general content of entry. Data was input using a look-up list of: ' Change of venue ' – the case was removed to a different jurisdiction; ' Cognition ' - one party has formally acknowledged his/her debt or obligation to another; ' Def default Judgement ' – the defendant has failed to appear and so is in default, leading to a judgement against the defendant; ' Essoin ' – formal excuse for non appearance ; ' Judgement ' – judgement in a case; ' Jury respited / summoned ' – a jury is summoned to hear a case, or, having been summoned but having failed to appear, is

			<p>respired to the following court; 'Loveday' – a day has been granted for the litigants to meet outside of court in an attempt to resolve their dispute; 'Order to Arrest' – a defendant (or sometimes plaintiff) has been failed to appear in court when required, and so is to be arrested and made to appear at a future court; 'Other' – a minority of entries not fitting into any other category; 'PL default Judgement' - the plaintiff has failed to appear and so is in default, leading to a judgement against the plaintiff; 'Pleaded Case' – entry reflects the arguments and counterarguments of the plaintiff/s and defendant/s, both parties being represented before the court; 'Surety de minis' – a suit, particular to London, in which a plaintiff seeks that a defendant find sureties attesting to his future good conduct towards the plaintiff..</p>
k	involves_woman	Yes/No	<p>Does this case involve a female litigant? Note; all entries relating to a unique case involving a female litigant have been tagged 'yes', even where the female litigant may not be explicitly named in that entry.</p>
l	woman_is	Text	<p>This field indicates whether the woman (or women) in this case appears as a lone plaintiff or defendant, or appears in court chaperoned by a male co-litigant. Data was input using a look-up list of: 'Alone-plaint' – woman in case is a plaintiff acting alone, litigating against one or more men; 'Alone-def' – woman in case is a defendant acting alone, litigating against one or more men; 'Chap-plaint' – woman in case is a plaintiff together with, and chaperoned by, a male co-plaintiff in a case against one or more men; 'Chap-def' – woman in case is a defendant together with, and chaperoned by, a male co-defendant in a case against one or more men; 'WvW Alone-vAlone' – this is a 'woman versus woman' case in which a lone female plaintiff is litigating against a lone female defendant; 'WvW Chap-v-Alone' – this is a 'woman versus woman' case in which one party (plaintiff <i>or</i> defendant) is comprised of a woman co-litigant chaperoned by a male co-litigant litigating against woman (plaintiff <i>or</i> defendant) acting as a lone litigant; 'WvW Chap-v-Chap' – this is a 'woman versus woman' case in which at least one woman plaintiff appears as a co-plaintiff with, and chaperoned by, one or more men litigating against a group of co-defendants including at least one woman co-defendant, appearing with and chaperoned by male co-defendants.</p>
m	notes	Memo	<p>Further details regarding the entry. Note; these notes use the abbreviations 'pl' for plaintiff and 'def' for defendant.</p>