

THE

NATIONAL

ARCHIVES

Samuel Pepys

What does his will reveal?

Key Stages 1-3 | Early modern 1485-1750

Lesson resource



Introduction

The purpose of this lesson is to explore some extracts from the will of Samuel Pepys made in 1701 and later added to in 1703. You may have already 'met' Samuel Pepys whilst finding out about the Great Fire of London in 1666 and read his descriptions of the fire in his famous diary.

The National Archives has a huge collection of wills and they are important sources for finding out about people in the past. A will is a legal document in which a person records their wishes as to how their possessions and property are to be disposed of after their death. The document always names a particular person to ensure that people listed in the will receive what is due to them.

Through this lesson you will discover more about Samuel Pepys and the different features that make up a will.

Suitable for:

KS 1-3

Time period:

Early modern 1485-1750

Connections to curriculum:

Key stage 1 & 2:

Significant People

Contents

Introduction	Page 2
Teachers' notes	Page 3
Background	Page 5
Tasks	Page 6
Source 1	Page 9
Source 2a	Page 11
Source 2b	Page 13
Source 3	Page 15
Source 4	Page 17
Source 5a	Page 19
Source 5b	Page 21
Source 6	Page 23
Source 7	Page 25
Source 8a	Page 27
Source 8b	Page 29
Source 9	Page 31

Teachers' notes

You can find the full pages of the entirety of the will in our [Discovery tool](#)¹.

This lesson can be used to support teaching the curriculum theme Significant People, using the will of Samuel Pepys. It can also serve as a way of introducing students to original sources in order to find out about people in the past. For support on working with primary sources in the classroom, see the guidance [here](#)², found in our Significant People resource.

There are nine short extracts from Pepys's will used in this lesson, each comprising a word, a sentence or a paragraph. Teachers may choose to work on each extract together or assign different parts to small groups to work on, depending on time constraints. We have provided transcripts and simplified transcripts for all extracts of the will. Encourage your students to have a go at reading the original document first, but use both transcripts to help.

In the lesson, students examine key parts of Samuel Pepys' will and can see how a will was structured. For example, the identification of its author (the testator), their place of residence and occupation or status, a statement about their mental or physical health, a religious statement (wills were proved in ecclesiastical courts until 1858), details of bequests and their recipients, the appointment of an executor, the date, the testator's signature and signatures of witnesses.

An executor would have to swear to make sure the will was carried out in accordance with the law at the relevant ecclesiastical court (in this case the Prerogative Court of Canterbury). They would have to list all the possessions in an inventory and identify the recipients of the bequests. They might have to sell assets in order to raise money to pay debts, and they would probably have to arrange the funeral.

A testator might add one or more codicils at a later date to alter the terms of their will or to make arrangements if they had acquired further property.

Extension ideas

- Class research and create a family tree for Samuel Pepys.
- Create a timeline of the life of Samuel Pepys.
- Take a look at some extracts from [Pepys' diary](#) on key historical events: Great Fire of London, Great Plague, Coronation of Charles II.
- The Pepys Diary website site also publishes daily extracts from the diary. Find his [description of the Great Fire of London on 4th September 1666](#), famously burying his 'parmazan cheese'.

¹ <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C198027>

² <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/significant-people-collection/?show=all#teachers-notes>

³ <https://www.pepysdiary.com/>

⁴ www.pepysdiary.com/diary/1666/09/04/

Teachers' notes

- Teachers could also introduce their students to inventories as historical sources, although sadly Pepys' inventory does not survive. An inventory described the furniture and possessions found in each dwelling place. As sources, they can offer an insight into the arrangements of a particular houses and the day-to-day lives of the people who lived there. Take a look at [this one](#)¹ on the education website for the possessions of James Butcher at the time of his marriage in 1732 and after his death in 1738, catalogue ref: (DEL 8/79 f.19). All of the rooms of his house and their contents are listed and priced in value.
- Take a look at the [whole of Samuel Pepys' will](#)² if you can. See how long the real document was and where these extracts come from!

¹ <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/georgian-britain-age-modernity/georgian-homes-ii/>

² <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C198027>

Background

Samuel Pepys wrote his famous diary between 1660 and 1669. The diary is very interesting for historians as a source to find out about how people lived in the 17th century and about some major events in the past. In it he famously described the Great Fire of London and the coronation of Charles II.

Pepys was also an important administrator for the Royal Navy. He made the Navy much more efficient and professional and reported on his work both to the King and to Parliament.

Pepys' final will was written many years after his diary ends, but he first made a will in 1660 and may have written many different versions in the time in between. In March 1660, he wrote, 'So into London by water, and in Fish Street my wife and I bought a bit of salmon for 8d. [8 pence] and went to the Sun Tavern and ate it, where I did promise to give her all that I have in the world but my books, in case I should die at sea.' He tore that will up during an argument with his wife in 1663.

The main text of his final will was written by somebody else, probably a clerk working for Pepys or for his legal advisers. The opening phrase is clearer and larger as it is the first phrase in the document and because it is a prayer to God. The clerk has left spaces in the document for Pepys to insert his name and position, the names of the people to whom he left his land and property, and various sums of money. The remaining blank spaces have been filled with dashes to prevent anybody adding any extra names or amounts.

The red wax is a personal seal of Samuel Pepys, probably created by melting sealing wax and impressing it with his signet ring. It was another way of confirming his identity, reinforcing his signature. Pepys lived to a good age (70) for the period. He was born on 23 February 1633 and died on 26 May 1703 and it is likely that his handwriting worsened in the period before his death as he became more physically frail.

According to his will, Samuel Pepys left his library of books and papers to his younger nephew, John Jackson. Pepys also wanted Jackson to complete the collection according to his wishes. The library was to be kept together and all his books numbered and catalogued to help ensure that they could be found. There were 3,000 books and manuscripts in total. Pepys made these requests because he had put so much work into building his collection and wanted them kept for posterity and so his memory would live on. On the death of his nephew, he stated in his will that the library should then be kept by one of the colleges at either Cambridge or Oxford University.

Today, Pepys' original diaries, books and papers are housed in the Pepys Library at Magdalene College, Cambridge, where Pepys studied law as a young man. The library is open to members of the public and scholars alike. These items are still kept in the original bookcases designed by Pepys in 1666.

Tasks

Look at Source 1, an extract from Samuel Pepys' will.

Extract from the will of Samuel Pepys, 1701, catalogue ref: PROB 1/9

Now you have looked at the document, have a go at reading it. Use the transcripts to help if you need to.

- Can you spot the name 'Samuel Pepys' in this document?
- Do you know who Samuel Pepys was? [If you don't, can you find out?]
- How old is Samuel Pepys when he writes this document?
- This document was made in 1701, so can you work out when he was born?
- Can you find out where he lived from the document?
- This document is part of a will. Do you know what that means? Can you find out?
- Why do you think there are different styles of handwriting in the opening lines of this will?
- Why was it important for Pepys to say he was in sound mind and memory? [Clue: 'Sound' means healthy].

Look at Sources 2a and 2b, two signatures by Samuel Pepys two years apart.

Source 2a: Signature on will of Samuel Pepys dated 2 August 1701 (catalogue ref: PROB 1/9)

Source 2b: Signature on 2nd codicil of Samuel Pepys, dated 13 May 1703 (catalogue ref: PROB 1/9)

A codicil is an extra signed document added to a will. It is used to make changes to the will, such as adding the names of other people whom you want to include in your will.

- What is the difference between these two signatures?
- Can you explain why they are different? [Look at the dates of the signatures; also note Pepys died on 26 May 1703.]
- How and why do you think the red wax was stuck next to each signature?

Look at Source 3, an extract from Samuel Pepys' will.

Extract from the will of Samuel Pepys, catalogue ref: PROB 1/9

- How many years did Pepys work for King Charles II and King James II?
- How do we know he thought that he did a good job for both kings?

Tasks

Look at Source 4, an extract from Samuel Pepys' will.

Extract from the will of Samuel Pepys, catalogue ref: PROB 1/9

- What do these words suggest about the beliefs of Samuel Pepys in this part of his will?
- How do you think a private burial would differ from a public one?

Look at Source 5a and 5b, two extracts from Samuel Pepys' will.

These short extracts tell us about two of the people Samuel Pepys chose to remember in his will. His wife, Elizabeth, died just months after he finished keeping his diary on 10 November 1669, so she is not mentioned. (Catalogue ref: PROB 1/9)

- What sort of things do you think Pepys might have given to people named in his will?
- How long had he known Mary Skinner?
- Although he does not say it in his will, Mary lived with him and was treated by his friends as though she was his wife – do you think the language he uses suggests they were more than just good friends?

Look at Source 6, an extract from the first codicil to Samuel Pepys' will.

Extract from the first codicil to Samuel Pepys' will (catalogue ref: PROB 1/9)

- Why did Samuel Pepys change his mind about leaving his property to his nephew, Samuel Jackson?
- Why do you think Pepys objected to his nephew's marriage?
- When close relatives are left out of wills, this is called disinheritance. Can you think of other reasons why someone might not leave their property to their closest relatives?

Look at Source 7, an extract from Samuel Pepys' will.

Extract from the will of Samuel Pepys (catalogue ref: PROB 1/9)

- How is William Hewer connected to Samuel Pepys?
- What does his job as executor mean?
- How much money has Pepys left to William Hewer?
- Using our money calculator can you work out how much this would be worth today?
- How long has Pepys known Hewer?

Tasks

Look at Source 8a and 8b, two extracts from the first codicil to Samuel Pepys' will.

- What else did Pepys leave William Hewer?
- Why is it perhaps not surprising that Pepys had a collection of these objects? [Clue: Find out where Pepys worked.]
- What two things did Pepys leave to his servants?
- How do you think servants' mourning clothes would differ from those of their master?
- What do these bequests [gifts] tell us about Samuel Pepys?

Look at Source 9, an extract from the appendix to Samuel Pepys' will.

This appendix to the will concerns the library owned by Samuel Pepys. In his lifetime he had collected a large number of books. They were left to his nephew John Jackson (catalogue ref: PROB 1/9).

- Who had Pepys left his library to in his will?
- Why do you think he wrote down his plan for the library after the death of his nephew?
- What does the existence of such a plan tell us about Samuel Pepys?
- As Samuel Pepys was very keen on books and ships, can you design a coat of arms for him?

Source 1: Extract from the will of Samuel Pepys, 1701.

Catalogue Ref: PROB 1/9

In the Name of God Amen I Samuel Pepys of the City of
Westminster Esq. being now by Gods favour Stricken to the Sixty
Ninth yeare of my Age and in sound mind and memory doo make and ordeyne this

Transcript: Source 1

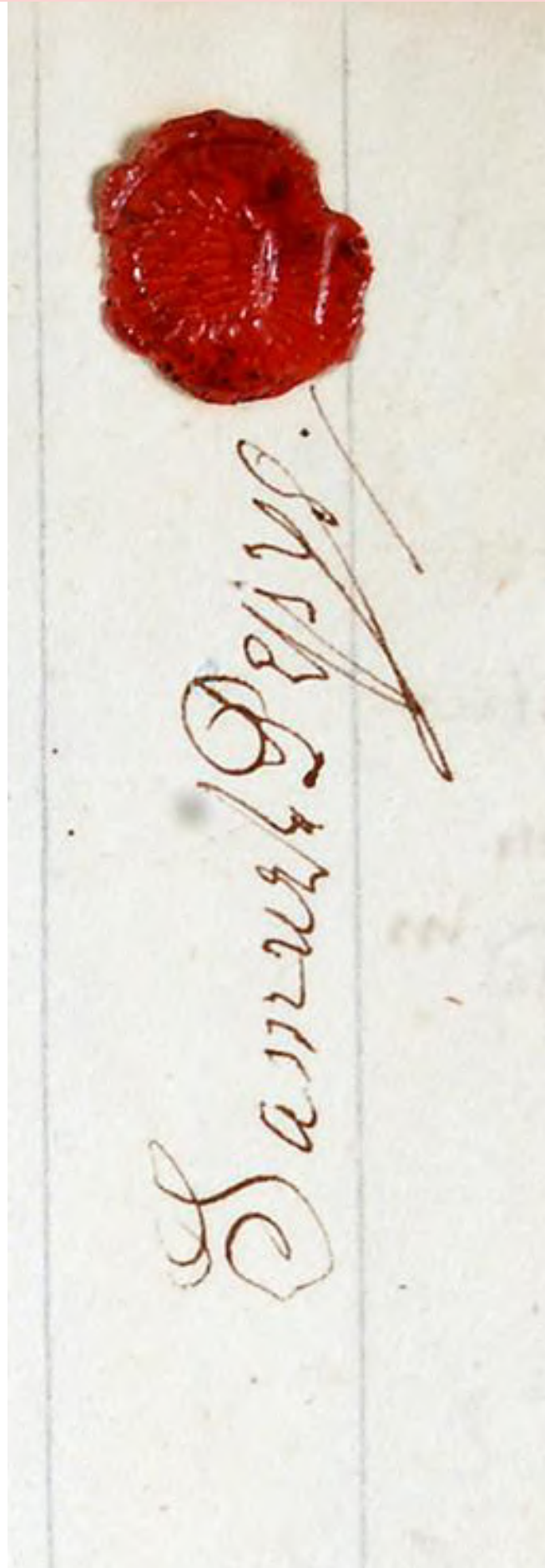
In the Name of God Amen I Samuel Pepys of the City of Westminster Esqr. being now by God's favour Arrived to the Sixty Ninth Yeare of my Age and in sound mind and memory...

Simplified transcript

I, Samuel Pepys, living in Westminster (London), thanks to God's kindness am between my 68th and 69th birthdays and have a healthy mind and memory...

Source 2a: Signature on will of Samuel Pepys dated 2 August 1701.

Catalogue Ref: PROB 1/9



Transcript: Source 2a

Samuel Pepys

Source 2b: Signature on 2nd codicil of Samuel Pepys, dated 13 May 1703. Catalogue Ref: PROB 1/9



Transcript: Source 2b

S Pepys

Source 3: Extract from the will of Samuel Pepys.

Catalogue Ref: PROB 1/9

after my moneys shall be paid and Twenty thousand pounds and
pauitull seruice faithfully performed to the Crowne under my late Majesties
King Charles and King James the second.

Transcript: Source 3

...after my more than Fower and Twenty Yeares publique and painfull Service faithfully performed to the Crowne under my late Roiijal Maisters King Charles and King James the Second.

Simplified transcript

...after more than twenty four years of public and diligent service carried out faithfully for the Crown, working for their royal majesties, King Charles II and King James II.

Source 4: Extract from the will of Samuel Pepys.

Catalogue Ref: PROB 1/9

God bless my Soule unto -
The hands of his blessed Creature, and my Body to be decently (but privately) Buried

Transcript: Source 4

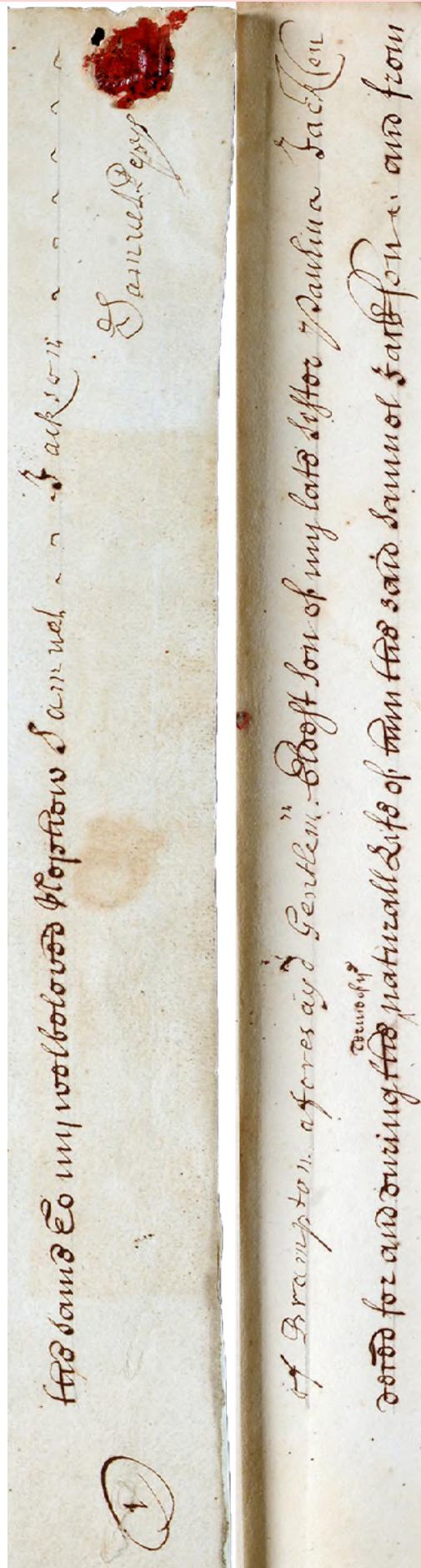
[I]...Resigne my Soule into the Hands of its blessed Creatour, and my Body to be decently (but privately) Buried....

Simplified transcript

I leave my soul to God and my body to be privately buried...

Source 5a: Extract from the will of Samuel Pepys.

Catalogue Ref: PROB 1/9



Transcript: Source 5a

...To my welbeloved Nephew Samuel Jackson of Brampton aforesayd Gentleman Eldest Son of my late Sister Paulina Jackson deceased...

Simplified transcript

...to my very beloved nephew, Samuel Jackson of Brampton, gentleman, the eldest son of my sister Paulina Jackson who has already died...

Source 5b: Extract from the will of Samuel Pepys.

Catalogue Ref: PROB 1/9

of my personall Estate every or any part thereof. Herewith I have my selfe Obliged on this Omission, to leave behind me the most full and lasting Acknowledgment of my Esteem, respect and gratitude to the Excellent Lady Quene Mary II. for the ^{many} importantt Effects of the speedy Friendship and Assistance during the whole course of my life, which the last thirty three Yeares; I doe give and devise

Transcript: Source 5b

...I hold my selfe Obliged on this Occasion, to leave behind me the most full and lasting Acknowledgment of my esteem, respect and gratitude to the Excellent Lady Mrs. Mary Skyner for the many important Effects of her Steddy friendshipp and Assistances during the whole course of my Life, within the last Thirty Three Yeares...

Simplified transcript

... I must leave a record of my admiration and thanks to Mrs Mary Skinner for her constant friendship and help over the last thirty three years...

Source 6: Extract from the first codicil to Samuel Pepys' will.

Catalogue Ref: PROB 1/9

with the said will or devising thereof for more certainty in the premises referred unto, I have
 my said will, or devising purporting to be my will, by said deposition, do hereby revoke, and
 my positive Oath and affirmations and to the same irreparable prejudice and dishonour;
 Reservations due to some all Gift of respect and impudence. **Thus sheweth** I the said Samuel Pepys (in
 the said will or devise before written and made) that I do hereby revoke and annul the said will, or devising or
 instrument before written or witnessed or intended to be made of the said will or devise in the County of

Transcript: Source 6

And whereas Since the time of my Signing and declaring my said Will, or Writing purporting to be my Will, My said Nephew Samuel Jackson has thought fitt to dispose of himselfe in Marriage against my positive Advice and Injuncions and to his owne irreparable prejudice and dishonour; I Soe thinke my selfe Obliged to Expresse the Resentments due to such an Act of Disrespect and Imprudence. And therefore I the said Samuel Pepys (in consideracion thereof) Doe by these presents Revoke Retract and make Null and void The Said Devise and Limitacion by my said Will, or Writing or Instrument before recited ...

Simplified transcript

Since I wrote my will, my nephew, Samuel Jackson has married against my advice and orders and is permanently disgraced by this. I think I should express my anger at his disrespectful and unwise action, so I withdraw the gift of property I previously left to him in my will...

Source 7: Extract from the first codicil to Samuel Pepys' will.

Catalogue Ref: PROB 1/9

same. And I pray my most approved and most dearest friend William Howel
of Captain in the County of Surrey Bequid to take the Trouble as my Executor
of seeing this my will performed and to accept of the said Summe of 2000
Pounds hundred pounde w^{ch} was as a very small Instant of my Resport
and most sensible Esteeme of this word from filiall affection and Condemnesse
Expresed forwards me through all this Continuance of my Life for forty Yeares
past unto this day. And Lastly Good thereby Revokt all former Wills by me.

Transcript: Source 7

And I pray my most approved and most deare freind William Hewer of Clapham in the County of Surrey Esquire to take the Trouble as my Executor of Seeing this my Will performed and to accept of the said Summe of Five hundred Pounds as a very Small Instance of my Respect and most Sensible Esteeme of his more than filiall affection and Tendernesse Expressed towards me through all the Occurrences of my Life for Forty Yeares past unto this day...

Simplified transcript

I ask my dearest friend, William Hewer of Clapham, Surrey, to be the executor of my will and to accept £500 as a very small mark of my respect and in recognition of the affection and tenderness he has shown me (more than a son would have done) through everything that has happened to me over the last 40 years...

Source 8a: Extract from the first codicil to Samuel Pepys' will.

Catalogue Ref: PROB 1/9

I give and bequeath to my Executor William Evelyn Esquire, my whole Collection of Shippes and other Bookes, standing in his
 house at Chelsea, where I now reside, to remaine with it to his house also, together with his whole Library be presented for
 the use of the said William Evelyn Esquire, his Heires, Assignes, and Successors forever.

Transcript: Source 8a

I give and bequeath to my Executor William Hewer Esquire my whole Collecion of Moddells of Shipps and other Vessells Standing in his house at Clapham, where I now reside, recomending it to him to consider how these also, together with his owne may be preserved for Publique Benefitt.

Simplified transcript

I leave to my executor, William Hewer, my whole collection of model ships and other vessels displayed in his house in Clapham (London) where I now live. I suggest that he thinks about how these, together with his own models, can be kept so that the public can benefit from them.

Transcript: Source 8b

I Will That my Executor doe give unto Each of my Servants that shall be remaining with me at the time of my decease, a whole Yeares Wages, over and above what shall be Severally due to them; Together with Mourning Suitable to their respective degrees.

Simplified transcript

I wish that my executor gives each of my servants who is working for me when I die, a year's wages in addition to what is already owing to them and mourning clothes which are suitable for their position as servants.

Source 9: Appendix to the will concerns the library owned by Samuel Pepys. Catalogue Ref: PROB 1/9

For the further Settlement & Preservation of my said Library after the
Death of my Nephew John Jackson. I doe hereby Declare.

Transcript: Source 9

For the further Settlement & Preservation of my said Library after the Death of my Nephew John Jackson.

Simplified transcript

My plan for looking after and keeping my library after the death of my nephew John Jackson [who will inherit it first]



Why do our hyperlinks come with footnotes?

Our resources are designed to be printed and used in classrooms, which means hyperlinks aren't always accessible digitally. We include the full link at the bottom of the page so that you can type in the address without distracting from the main text of the lesson materials.

Did you know?

The National Archives Education Service also offers free workshops onsite in Kew and online in your classroom.

Our [Onsite Workshops](#) are available for free here at The National Archives and allow students to experience genuine original documents reflecting over 1000 years of history. From Elizabeth I's signature to the telegrams of the sinking Titanic, students love the wow-factor of being able to see real history on the desk in front of them.

Our [Online Workshops](#) allow our Education Officers to teach through your projector, leading discussions and guiding students through activities based around original documents. All you need is a computer with a projector, webcam and microphone. We'll arrange a test call before your session to check the tech is working.

Find out more:

[🌐 nationalarchives.gov.uk/education](https://nationalarchives.gov.uk/education)

[✉️ education@nationalarchives.gov.uk](mailto:education@nationalarchives.gov.uk)

facebook.com/TheNationalArchivesEducationService

twitter.com/UKNatArcEdu