

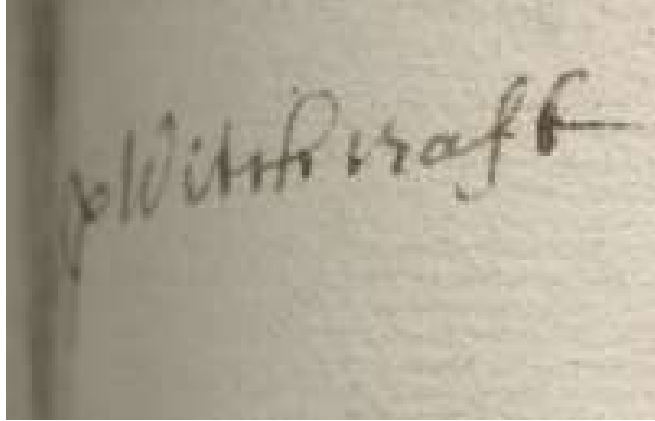
This is a page from a book of indictments to the Northumberland Quarter Sessions.

Like virtually all official documents from the time, this document is written in Latin. It is also written a type of script called "Secretary Hand", which was commonly used during the Early Modern period.

At first glance a document like this can seem almost impossible to read, but with a little bit of practice and a few pointers it isn't quite so daunting!

CLICK We'll start off with the margin – the word that has been circled is actually in English, rather than Latin. Scriveners (men whose job it was to write out documents) would often put a word or two in English so that they could easily find what they were looking for.

Go to the next slide to see this enlarged...



Witchcraft

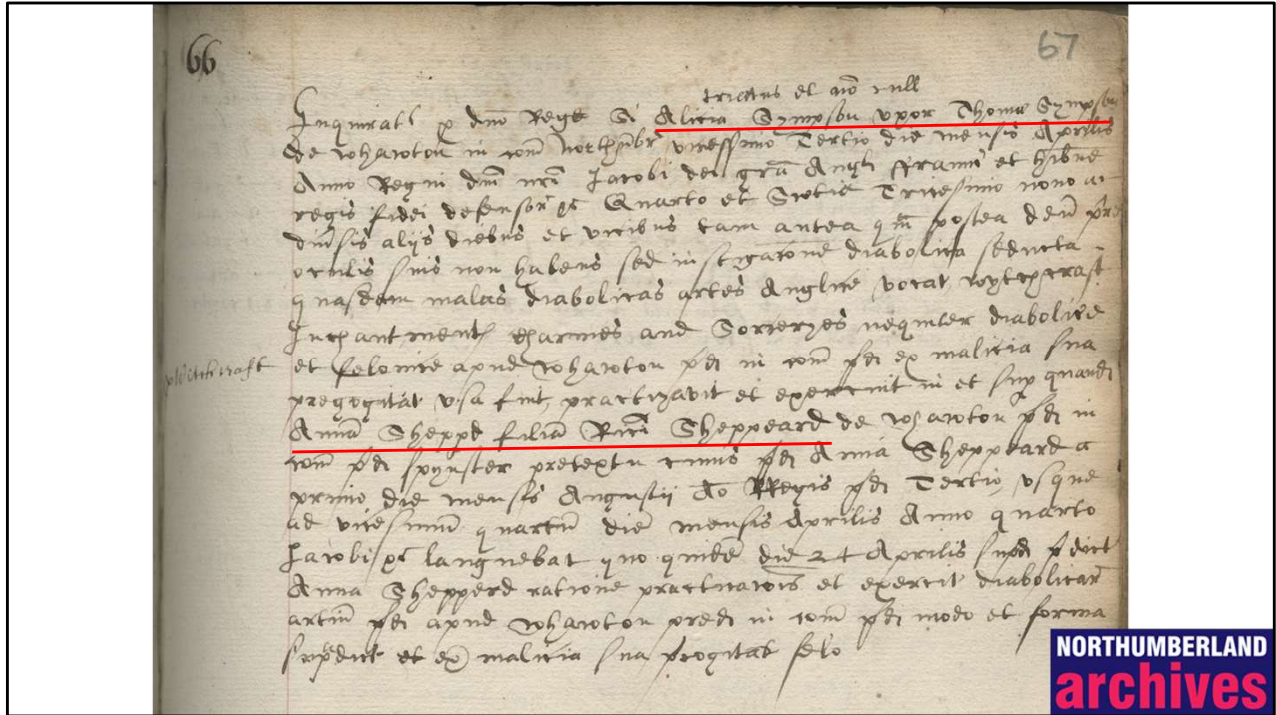
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Try reading the word (it is in English) before clicking...

CLICK To reveal the transcript.

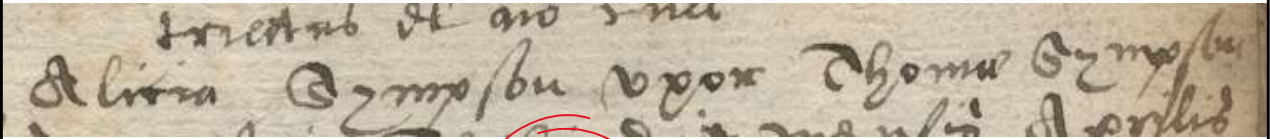
A transcript is the name used for a text that copies out the writing in an old document – it should be a word-for-word copy. A translation is a text which changes the language of a document – from Latin, for example.

Notice the shape of the letter “c” in the word witchcraft – this is typical of Secretary Hand.

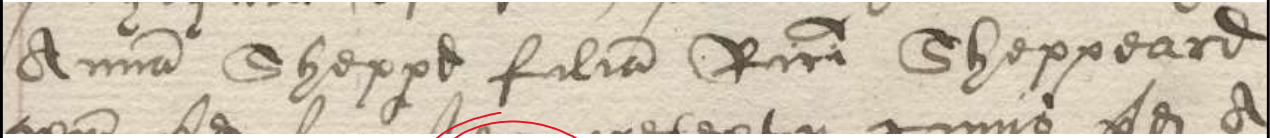


CLICK Underlined are the names of the people mentioned in this indictment. The first is the person who has been accused of a crime, the second the person that the crime was committed against...


They appear enlarged on the next slide.



Alicia Sympson uxor Thomas Sympson



Anna Sheppd filia Rici [Ricardi] Sheppard



Try having a go at reading the four names before clicking to reveal the transcripts. Remember the shape of the letter “c” – that is helpful for the first name!

CLICK To reveal the transcript.

The trickiest letter shapes here are the letter “s” in the middle of a word (as Sympson) – it has a long shape that often starts above and finishes below the line of the other lower case letters. It looks a little bit like an “f” without the cross stroke.

Also have a look at the letter “e” in the middle of words. This is often confused with the letter “o”, but the “e” has the curl at the top – compare “o” in “uxor” and “e” in “Sheppard”.

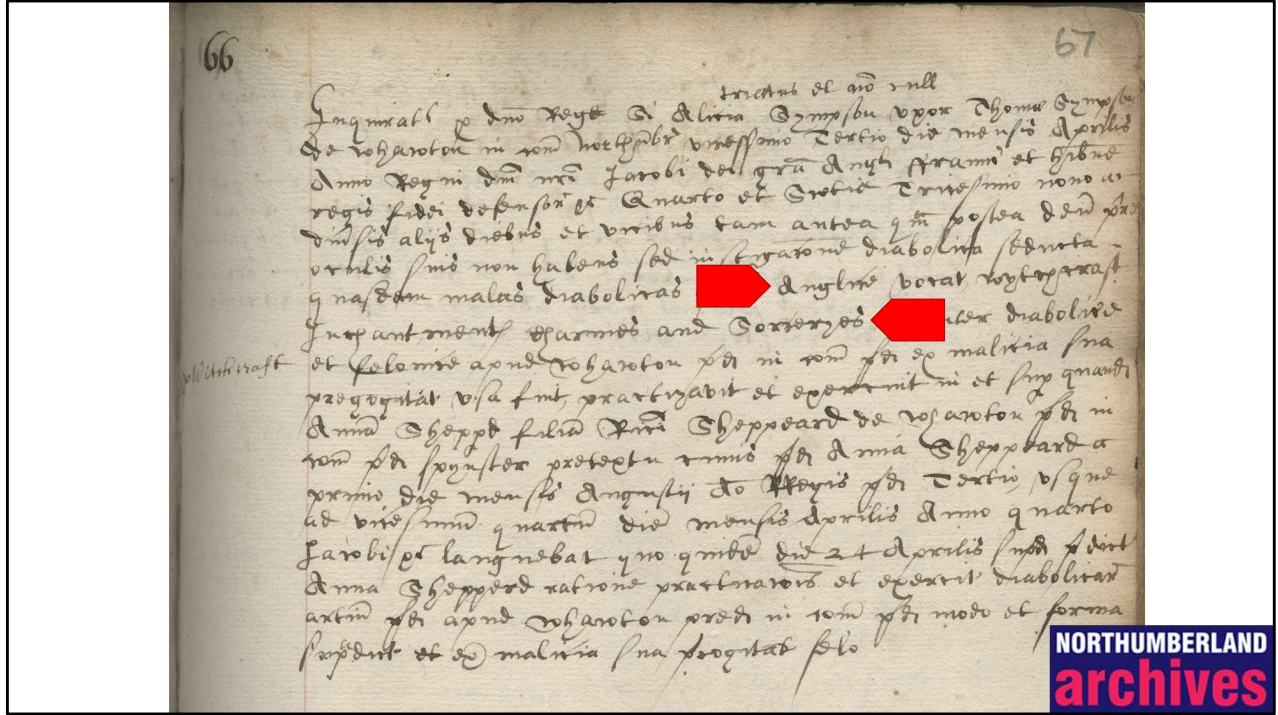
It is also worth noting the abbreviations here – this is very usual in documents of this time. Anna’s surname has been shortened to “Sheppd” but appears in the longer form “Sheppard” in other places. The curl in the tail of the second “p” shows that some letters have been left out of her name – this sign usually means that an “er” has been left out, but here “ear”. Richard appears as “Rici” – the squiggle over the top of the name shows that it has been abbreviated.

CLICK The two circled words show the relationship to Alice (Alicia is the Latin version of this name) and Anna to the two men:

uxor = wife of

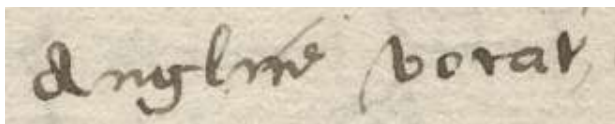
filia = daughter of

If they are unmarried, women will often be mentioned with their father and with their husband if they are married. Widows might appear with the name of their dead husband. Men are usually defined by their status or their job.



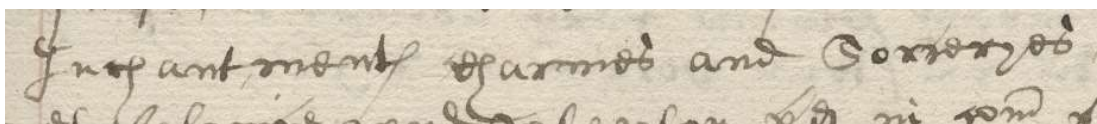
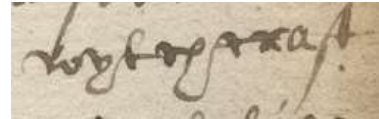
CLICK These two lines are pretty interesting. They summarise the charge against Alicia.

See next slide for this text enlarged...



Anglicane vocat –
is called in English

wytchcraft



Inchantmentes Charmes and Sorceries

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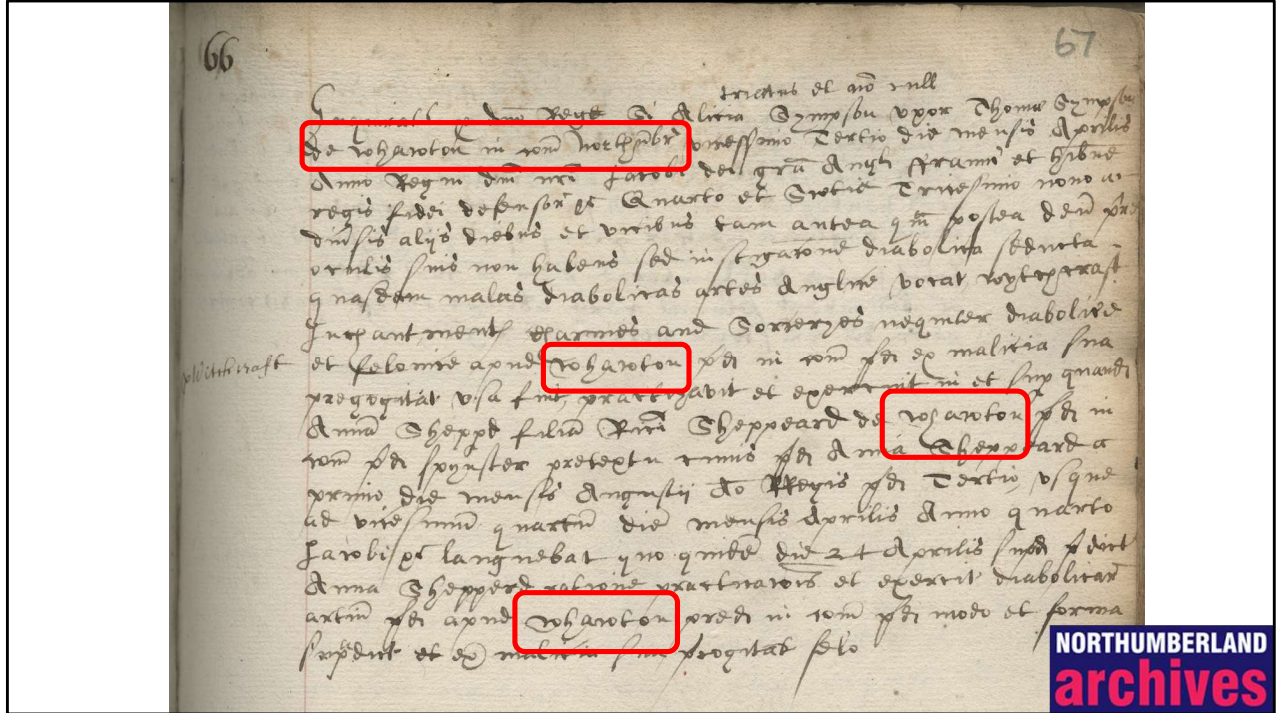
CLICK The phrase that appears here “Anglice vocat” (literally English calls) means that the next part will be in English.

CLICK To see next part of the text – the bit in English.

Have a go at reading these five words before clicking for the transcript.

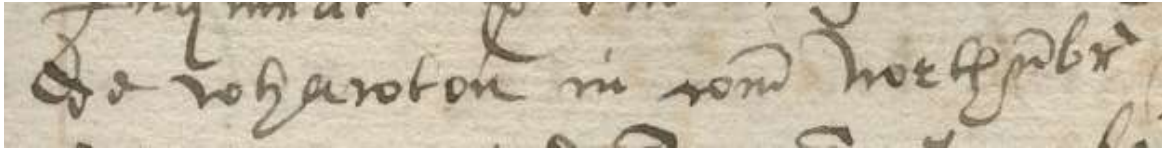
CLICK x 2 for transcripts

Where two letters are written together in one movement, they can look quite different to the two letters written separately. Where two letters are linked together in this way it is known as a “ligature”. Notice the lower case “ch” ligatures in witchcraft and Inchantmentes – these are typical. In “Charmes” the ligature is with a capital “c”. The “h” in these cases has a tail which descends below the line (like a “g”, “y” or “p”). This is typical for Secretary Hand.



CLICK Highlighted are the place names mentioned in the text. As you can see, the same place name is mentioned in several places. There are no other places recorded here – both Alice and Anna were from the same village.

On the next slide the first highlighted section can be seen in detail.



de Whawton in com northubr

of Whalton

comitatus
- county

Northumbria –
Northumberland

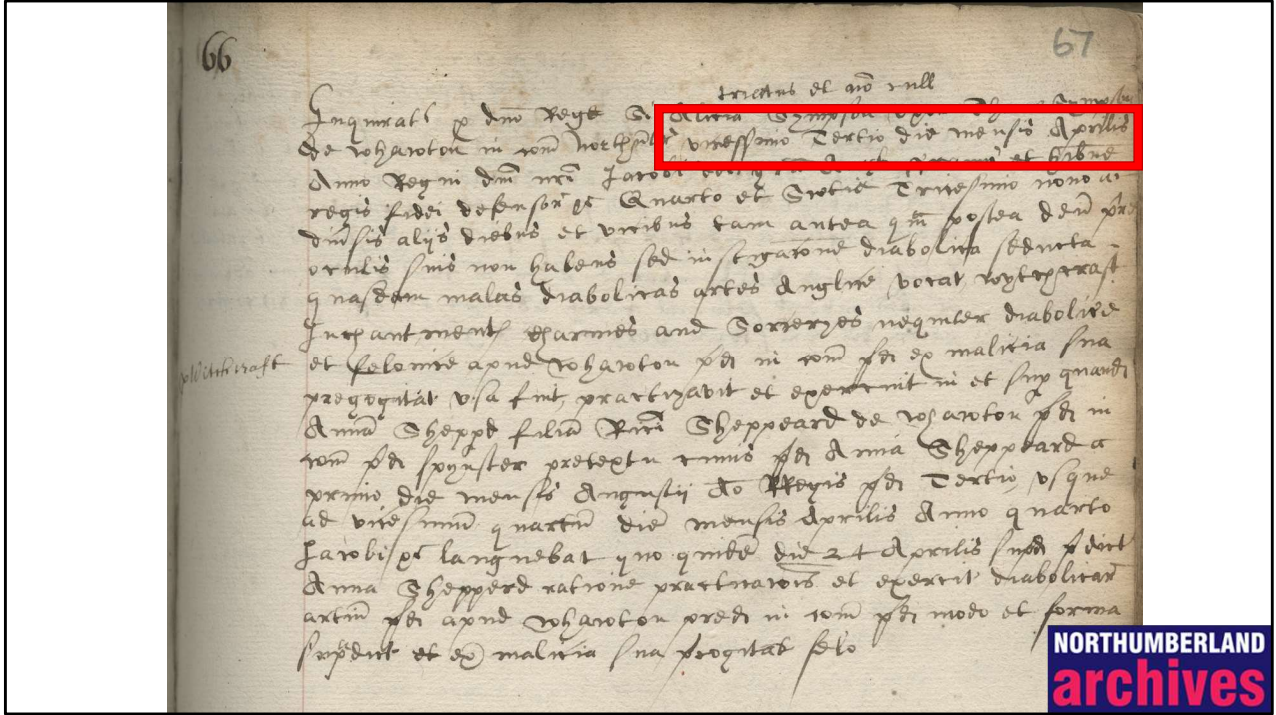
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CLICK This is a transcript of the highlighted section. This is how it appears letter for letter.

CLICK All of the people mentioned in the indictment are “of Whawton” – they live in the village of Whalton. Notice that the spelling of the place name has changed. Many place names have had several variations – often one letter or sound changes.

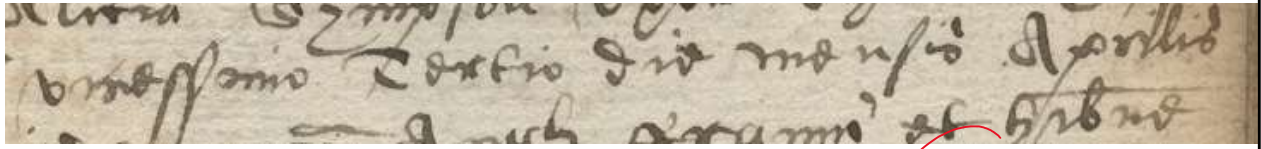
CLICK The “m” of “com” has been flicked up over the word – this is sign that the word has been abbreviated. The same is the case over the “u” in “northubr”.

CLICK



The date of this indictment has been split into two parts.

CLICK This is the first part – an enlargement of it is on the next slide.



vicessemo Tertio die mensis Aprilis

twenty-third day month of April

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This is the part of the date that includes the day and the month.

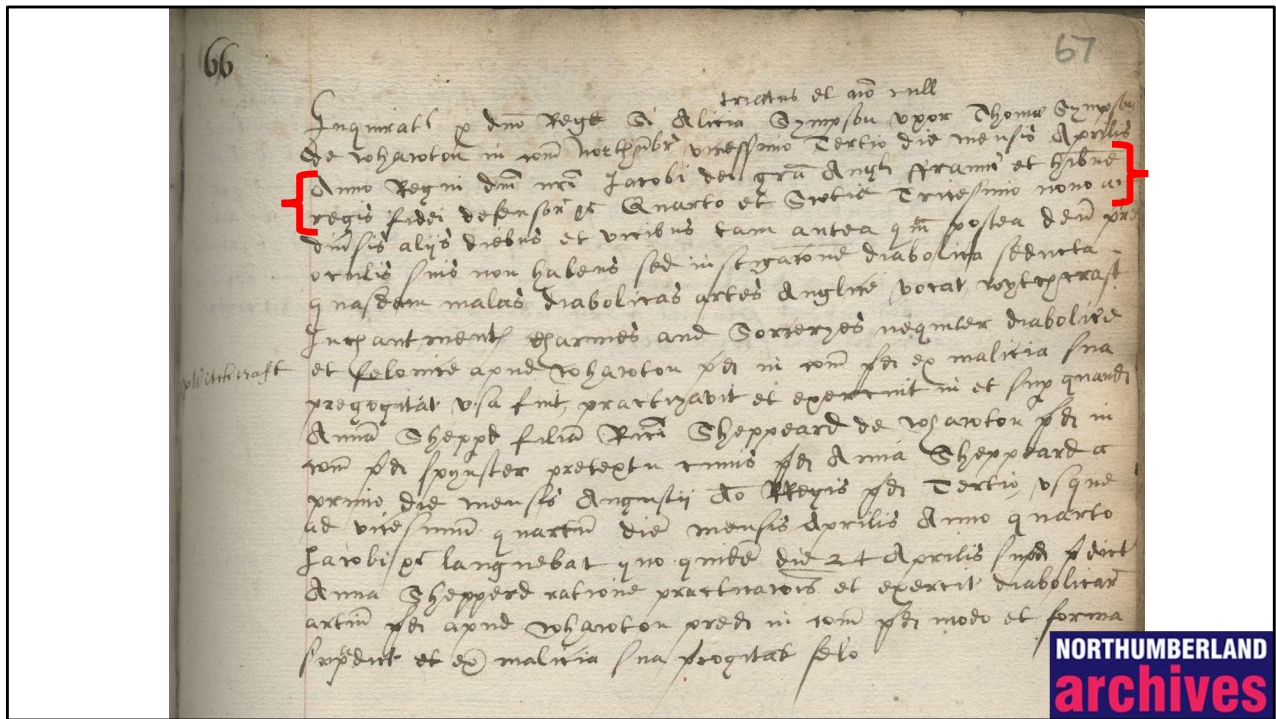
CLICK This is a transcript of what appears in the document.

CLICK Can you guess what this word might translate as? – It is very similar to the English!

CLICK to reveal.

CLICK – As this is the date – what do you think that this part might be? **CLICK** to reveal.

Can you guess what the other two words might mean? Hint – they begin with the same letters in English. **CLICK** to reveal.



CLICK

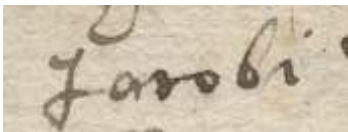
This section contains the information about the year of this document.

The next slides breaks it down.



Anno Regni = year of
the reign

~~Anno Domini~~



Jacobi = James

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CLICK to reveal transcript.

This two word phrase indicates how the year is calculated in this document.

CLICK to reveal translations into English. Like most medieval and early modern documents the year is not calculated as we would today.

CLICK to reveal “Anno Domini” and **CLICK** again for this to be crossed through!

The number that we give to the year (2021) is Anno Domini – AD 2021, The Year of Our Lord 2021 – the number of years since the birth of Christ. (Now also referred to as 2021 CE or Common Era).

Use of AD dates wasn't very common at this point in history– very often years would be measured according to the length of the reign of the monarch (regnal years). Papal documents used the length of time the pope was on the throne of Saint Peter. Documents created by a bishop or archbishop might use the length of time the incumbent had been in charge of the diocese/archbishopric.

CLICK to reveal name of the king from the document. To work out what AD year this

document was created in we need to know which monarch ruled Britain at the time.

CLICK to reveal transcript. **CLICK** again to reveal translation.

Note – historians and archivists often use C R Cheney “A Handbook of Dates” to translate regnal/papal years. This book includes handy tables!

Quarto et Scotia Tricesimo nono

fourth [year] and Scotland thirty-ninth [year]

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This is the part of the document where we find the regnal year of James – and so we can work out the AD year.

There is a formulaic phrase between James’s name and the number here – it basically says James by the grace of God King of England, France and Ireland... This is used in a very similar form in most official documents.

CLICK to show number circled. **CLICK** again for transcript and **CLICK** again for translation.

So we know that this was created in the fourth year of James I’s reign. James ascended to the English throne on 24 March 1603, dating this document to 1606.

But, there is an extra bit here! **CLICK** to show transcript of next two words. **CLICK** again for translation.

James I was also James VI of Scotland! His regnal year for the Scottish throne is also included.

CLICK for number to be circled. **CLICK** for transcript. **CLICK** for translation.

James ascended to the Scottish throne on 24 July 1567, so his English and Scottish regnal years started on different days.

What we did...	What have we learnt...?
Handwriting	Palaeography (technical name for reading old handwriting) Secretary Hand (there are others – Court Hand, Italic...) Started to understand and read letter shapes Practice makes this easier – online tutorials
Dating documents	Different way of calculating years Regnal years
Latin	Don't let it put you off! Don't need to do a complete word for word translation Learning a few words means that you can often extract meaning
Form of documents	Diplomatic – technical name The order that information appears on the page tells us a lot – which names are first? English note in the margin



Cambridge University online palaeography: <https://www.english.cam.ac.uk/eres/ehoc/>

The National Archives online palaeography:

<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/palaeography/>

Beinecke Library, Yale University, online Secretary Hand tutorial:

<https://beinecke.library.yale.edu/article/quarantine-reading-learn-read-secretary-hand>

Scottish Handwriting online tutorials: <https://www.scottishhandwriting.com/index.asp>

National Archives Latin tutorial: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/latin/>

Family Search list of Latin vocabulary for family history (includes numbers, month, days of the week): https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Latin_Genealogical_Word_List