

Recorda splendidissima: the use of pipe rolls in the thirteenth century*

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Abstract

The thirteenth-century English exchequer carefully retained pipe rolls and referred to them over many decades. Most writers have concentrated on the annual audit function of the rolls, but they had a much longer-term significance for the exchequer's key task, collecting cash for the government. This article examines how the rolls were used to collect debts, and the procedures which made them manageable. It is based almost entirely on examples from pipe and memoranda rolls, mainly unpublished. It also demonstrates that use of the rolls is simpler than has recently been claimed.

Thomas Madox, the great eighteenth-century authority on the exchequer, thought that its pipe rolls were, next to Domesday Book, '*recorda, omnium quae in archivis Regiis usquam vidisse me memini, splendidissima*'.¹ Some more recent historians have been less positive. Nicholas Vincent suggested that 'the pipe rolls were more or less useless as a means of calculating overall income and expenditure'.² Mark Hagger studied the compilation of twelfth-century pipe rolls, and pointed out the difficulties in their use.³ Nick Barratt has written about the ossification of procedure after 1225 and the gradual decline of the pipe rolls as an indicator of royal finance.⁴ On the other hand, David Carpenter has defended the value of pipe rolls as records of outstanding debts and their repayment.⁵

In this context, perhaps it is necessary to look in more detail at the function of the pipe rolls, and the way in which they were used by the exchequer. A significant point, which it is easy to take for granted, is the availability today of pipe rolls, often in duplicate, for nearly every year from 1156 to 1832 (as well as a single survivor from the reign of Henry I). They can be consulted at The National Archives; recently, photographs of every roll from 1225 to 1598 have been made accessible online, thanks

* The author would like to thank David Carpenter for his comments on a draft of this article, which made it shorter and clearer. Any remaining errors or obscurity are, of course, the author's own.

¹ T. Madox, *The History and Antiquities of the Exchequer of the Kings of England* (2nd edn., 2 vols., 1769), ii. 456.

² N. Vincent, 'Why 1199? Bureaucracy and enrolment under John and his contemporaries', in *English Government in the 13th Century*, ed. A. Jobson (Woodbridge, 2004), pp. 17–48, at pp. 26–7.

³ M. Hagger, 'Theory and practice in the making of 12th-century pipe rolls', in *Records, Administration and Aristocratic Society in the Anglo-Norman Realm*, ed. N. Vincent (Woodbridge, 2009), pp. 45–74.

⁴ N. Barratt, 'The impact of the loss of Normandy on the English exchequer: the pipe roll evidence', in *Foundations of Medieval Scholarship: Records Edited in Honour of David Crook*, ed. P. Brand and S. Cunningham (York, 2008), pp. 133–40, at p. 140.

⁵ D. Carpenter, "'In testimonium factorum brevium': the beginnings of the English chancery rolls", in Vincent, *Records, Administration and Aristocratic Society*, pp. 1–28, at p. 28, n. 132.

2 The use of pipe rolls in the thirteenth century

to the ever-expanding Anglo-American Legal Tradition website.⁶ There is a question which seems almost too obvious to ask: why were all these rolls preserved? It was not for the convenience of historians, 750 years later.

When the rolls were new, they were the necessary records of the routine annual audit process. When they were hundreds of years old, they were clearly important records of the past, whose value as historical evidence was already recognized by the seventeenth-century antiquaries who consulted them in the pipe office.⁷ But in between, when the rolls were not current and not yet ancient, was there a time when they were just rubbish, cluttering up some exchequer store-room? The difficulty of storing and organizing so much parchment was already producing an 'archive crisis' by the end of the thirteenth century, as V. H. Galbraith pointed out: 'Nearly all decisive action was preceded by an injunction to search the rolls, and this required not merely that the records should be safely kept, but that the whole mass should be readily available for reference.'⁸

The rolls had to be retained, because they were needed for consultation as part of the everyday working procedures of the exchequer. The evidence of their use over periods of several decades is there in the rolls themselves. Close study of the pipe rolls can help to illuminate the practices of the exchequer, and to show both what the rolls were intended to do in the thirteenth century, and what we can learn from them now. They were not meant to indicate the health of royal finances, nor to record total income and expenditure. The effort of compiling and retaining the pipe rolls must nevertheless have had a purpose, and it was simply to record debts and their payment, in cash or as authorized expenditure, in a form suitable for reference and annotation over long periods.

For example, in the pipe roll for year 18 of Edward II, 1325, there are two successive entries referring to the debts of William of Axmouth: £35 from his account for the vacant bishopric of Bath, as included in his accounts in roll forty-eight; and £284 remaining from the tallage of the Jews of England, from his account in roll forty-four.⁹ This reference to the tallage of the Jews, long after the Jews had been expelled, is itself enough to show that this must be an old debt. Rolls forty-four and forty-eight must also be old – at that time, only Henry III's regnal years had reached such high numbers. And indeed, William's debts are there, in the corresponding pipe rolls of Henry III's reign, some sixty years before. Furthermore, these entries have been annotated to refer forward to the 1325 roll. The roll for year 44 of Henry III, 1260, shows the debt of £284 for the tallage, with the added note: 'And he answers in roll 18 of king E. son of king E. in Somerset'.¹⁰ The same note appears after the Bath vacancy account in the roll for year 48, 1264.¹¹ As a matter of fact, William had died from his injuries at the battle of Lewes in 1264,¹² but the exchequer could still pursue

⁶ Anglo-American Legal Tradition <<http://aalt.law.uh.edu>> [accessed 14 Aug. 2011]. Many references below concern pipe rolls and memoranda rolls which can be seen on this website. All references to unpublished records are to catalogue numbers of documents in The National Archives of the U.K.: Public Record Office.

⁷ D. M. Stenton, 'The pipe rolls and the historian, 1600–1883', *Cambridge Historical Jour.*, x (1952), 271–92.

⁸ V. H. Galbraith, *Studies in the Public Records* (1948), p. 81.

⁹ Pipe roll 1325, E 372/170 rot. 29d. For the sake of brevity and simplicity, unpublished pipe rolls will be identified by the initials PR, the exchequer year ending at Michaelmas to which they refer – in this case, the year to Michaelmas 1325 – and The National Archives catalogue reference.

¹⁰ PR 1260, E 372/104 rot. 1. The entries in the 1325 roll are actually under the heading for Essex and Hertfordshire, on the dorse of a rotulet, the face of which begins with Somerset and Dorset.

¹¹ PR 1264, E 372/108 rot. 15.

¹² D. Carpenter, *The Battles of Lewes and Evesham 1264/65* (Keele, 1987), p. 33.

his heirs. This fit of enthusiasm for chasing up old debts, as far back as the reign of Henry III, was part of the efforts made by Bishop Stapeldon as Edward II's treasurer to reform the exchequer and to increase revenues; it led to complaints at the parliament of 1324.¹³

There is thus evidence of the exchequer looking back at rolls from sixty years earlier, searching for unpaid debts, and marking up those rolls so that there would be a link to follow for future reference. The rolls were not filed and forgotten; they were in active use, and could be needed decades after they were compiled. This process has been little studied. Most accounts of the pipe rolls tend to concentrate on the annual audit and compilation of the sheriff's account, influenced by the existence of the *Dialogue of the Exchequer*.¹⁴ However, the *Dialogue* itself demonstrates that the exchequer in the twelfth century was accustomed to consult pipe rolls from several decades before: there is a reference to finding a precedent in a pipe roll from Henry I's reign to settle a dispute which probably took place in 1167; similarly, the author of the *Dialogue*, writing around 1180, refers to payments by weight which 'you will often find in the old pipe rolls of Henry I'.¹⁵ This contemporary recognition of the value of the information in old pipe rolls is also demonstrated in the *Red Book*, the exchequer's own compendium of useful information, compiled in the twelve-thirties, which contains summaries of the pipe rolls from 1155 to 1162.¹⁶

The survival of a document like the *Dialogue* is a remarkable piece of good fortune, but its existence has tended to skew our views of the exchequer. Even if it was accurate at the time it was written, it was evidently out of date by the mid thirteenth century, failing to cover the development of the memoranda rolls, the role of boroughs and others who paid money directly into the exchequer, the foreign accounts, and the process of pursuing and collecting debts after the pipe roll had been compiled. Despite these changes, it has often been assumed that the exchequer was inflexible and failed to modernize, and that its procedures broke down during the period of baronial reform and rebellion: 'the pipe rolls during and after the crisis are littered with blank entries reflecting debts that were unsummoned or impossible to collect.'¹⁷ There have been few detailed studies of thirteenth-century pipe roll procedure, with the major exception of C. A. F. Meekings's account of the repeated effort to remove obsolete material from the rolls.¹⁸ Little attention has been paid to the way in which debts were tracked over long periods, apart from Mabel Mills's minute scrutiny of one county's account for 1295.¹⁹ It might therefore be interesting to look in detail at a few examples of exchequer practice.

¹³ M. C. Buck, 'The reform of the exchequer, 1316–26', *Eng. Hist. Rev.*, xcvi (1983), 241–60, at pp. 247–50; M. C. Buck, *Politics, Finance and the Church in the Reign of Edward II* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 145, 172–4, 189.

¹⁴ E.g., H. Hall, 'The system of the exchequer', in *Introduction to the Study of the Pipe Rolls* (Pipe Roll Soc., iii, 1884); R. L. Poole, *The Exchequer in the 12th Century* (Oxford, 1912). Two exceptions are D. Crook, 'Pipe rolls', no. 38, in *Short Guides to Records*, ed. K. M. Thompson (Historical Association, 1997), which is very brief, as its name implies; and R. C. Stacey, *Politics, Policy and Finance under Henry III, 1216–45* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 201–5.

¹⁵ *Dialogus de Scaccario: the Course of the Exchequer*, ed. C. Johnson (1950), pp. 58–9, 42; new edition, Richard FitzNigel, *Dialogus de Scaccario: the Dialogue of the Exchequer*, ed. and trans. E. Amt (Oxford, 2007), pp. 89, 65.

¹⁶ *The Red Book of the Exchequer*, ed. H. Hall (3 vols., Rolls ser., 1896), ii, 648–705.

¹⁷ N. Barratt, 'Counting the cost: the financial implications of the loss of Normandy', in *Thirteenth Century England X*, ed. M. Prestwich, R. Britnell and R. Frame (Woodbridge, 2005), pp. 31–40, at p. 34. Similarly, N. Barratt, 'Finance on a shoestring: the exchequer in the 13th century', in Jobson, pp. 71–86, at pp. 73–6.

¹⁸ C. A. F. Meekings, 'The pipe roll order of 12 February 1270', in *Studies Presented to Sir Hilary Jenkinson*, ed. J. Conway Davies (1957), pp. 222–53.

¹⁹ M. Mills, *The Pipe Roll for 1295 Surrey Membrane* (Surrey Record Soc., xxi, 1924; repr. 1968). Like the Meekings article cited above, this study is much more wide-ranging than its title would suggest.

4 The use of pipe rolls in the thirteenth century

The Kent pipe roll account for 1259 lists 458 debts. Of these, eighteen are shown as being paid in full and quit in 1259, and four are transferred to other counties. This leaves 436 debts carried forward to the next year, including twenty-five which had been partially paid in 1259, and forty-five with a blank space in the entry between the name and the amount owed. In 1260, ten of the debts from the previous year were recorded as paid and quit, one transferred to another county, and four debts of Bertram de Criel were pardoned. A further group of debts were paid in full but not recorded individually: the sheriff was shown as owing £24 $\frac{1}{2}m$ for the debts of several people whose names were marked with a letter 't' in the 1259 roll; there were seventeen such entries in the 1259 roll, duly adding up to £24 $\frac{1}{2}m$, which are not repeated in the 1260 roll. That leaves some 400 debts to be transferred to the next Kent account. Of these, the 1260 roll shows twenty-six as partially paid, nine with the debtor accounting for his debt but making no payment, forty-one with a blank space, and the rest simply as sums owed. The next Kent account was in 1262, when seven more debts were paid in full and marked quit (and one even overpaid by 4s 6d); one transferred to another county; four marked 't' in the previous roll and collected by the sheriff, and twenty-two marked 'ar. can.' collected by the archbishop of Canterbury's officials; and eighteen part-paid.²⁰ In addition, two debts listed in the 1260 roll had later been marked 'in pullo'; they no longer appear, having been removed to a rotulus pullorum (from *pullus*, a shoot from a plant, or a young twig, so that this is a roll of cuttings or offshoots which have been pruned from the pipe roll). The rotuli pullorum were drawn up periodically, listing debts which were not to be copied into future pipe rolls, apparently because the debts were considered irrecoverable.²¹

Over four years, then, seventy-eight debts had been paid in full out of the initial 458. This does not seem a very large proportion, but this crude measure ignores a number of factors. The debts vary enormously in size, from 7 $\frac{1}{2}d$ to £2,100. Some debts are being paid off by agreed regular instalments, and are counted as part-paid above. Some debts have been on the rolls for many years, and may have become untraceable, while fresh debts should be easier to enforce.

It may thus be helpful to concentrate on the new debts from Kent of 1259, those listed beneath the heading 'Nova oblata'.²² These are debts appearing in the pipe roll for the first time, the bulk of them deriving from three sources: the fine roll for 1259;²³ amercements imposed by Hugh Bigod's special eyre of 1258–9;²⁴ and debts to Jews which had been taken over by the exchequer. Only those in the first category are strictly nova oblata, but in this year's account there are no separate headings for the eyre or for Jewish debts. Taking them all together, there are thirty-seven Kent nova oblata, totalling £118. Three of these debts were paid in full in 1259 itself, and two part-paid, adding up to £25. The fully-paid debts included two paid by the sheriff, for £6 and nearly £8, which he had collected from an unstated number of debtors who had been amerced by the eyre; all we know of them is that their names were marked with a 't' in the estreat roll for Bigod's eyre, which does not survive. A further £25 was

²⁰ PR 1259, E 372/103 rots. 10–10d; 1260, E 372/104 rots. 6–6d; 1262, E 372/106, rots. 5–5d.

²¹ PR 1260, E 372/104 rot. 6. On the *rotuli pullorum*, see Meekings, pp. 234–5. These two debts, just $\frac{1}{2}m$ each, are the only ones from Kent to be pruned in this year, and are duly recorded in the *rotuli pullorum* (E 370/2/20 rot. 9d).

²² PR 1259, E 372/103 rot. 10d.

²³ Calendar of the Fine Rolls of the Reign of Henry III <<http://www.finerollshenry3.org.uk>> (hereafter C.F.R.), 1258–9, nos. 182, 112, 574, 597, 630, 832, 835, 860, 115, 611 [accessed 29 Apr. 2010].

²⁴ *The 1258–9 Special Eyre of Surrey and Kent*, ed. A. H. Hershey (Surrey Record Soc., xxxviii, 2004), nos. 222, 273, 396, 408 etc.

paid in 1260, when these debts had moved up the Kent account, to be listed under the 'De oblati' heading.²⁵ There is no Kent account for 1261. In the next roll, for 1262, the 1259 debts are above the 'De oblati' heading; the roll records another £4 of payments.²⁶ Collection of these debts then tails off, with nothing recorded in 1263 and less than £1 in the next Kent account, for 1265. The 1266 roll shows payments of £1 14s, and a £20 debt pardoned. This pardoned debt appeared in the 1259 roll as being owed by Peter Dagun for chattels of Elias l'Eveske, the converted Jew. (When l'Eveske converted to Christianity in 1259, his property escheated to the king.²⁷) Dagun was dead by 1266, and had left a manor to Westminster abbey; the exchequer then required the abbey to pay Dagun's debt of £20, but the king pardoned the abbey and ordered the rolls to show that the debt was quit.²⁸ Payments of other debts continued to trickle in: 5s in 1268, over £4 in 1271, nothing in 1272 and 1273, 18d in 1274, 7s 6d in 1275.²⁹ Many of these payments are for trivial amounts, but they show that debts could still be collected after fifteen years. However, the exchequer was realistic, and recognized that some debts were not worth copying over and over again into successive rolls. Under the 1270 pipe roll order, selected debts were to be marked with a 'd', and not copied into future rolls.³⁰ For Kent, the last roll previous to the order was that for 1268; six of the debts which originated in 1259 were marked with a 'd' and left on the 1268 roll (out of some 200 Kent debts in all which were marked 'd'); a further five debts were marked 'd' in 1272. However, even these supposedly dead and desperate debts were not completely forgotten. A debt of 6s, owed by Philip Kaym, was marked 'd' on the 1272 roll, and not listed in 1273 and 1274. A note in another hand was then added to the 1272 entry, next to the 'd': 'Sed vic. respondet inde in rotulo tercio R. E.' And indeed, in the third roll of Edward I, that for 1275, among the nova oblata, the sheriff answers for several debts he has collected from people whose names were marked with a 'd' in the rolls for 1268 and 1272, including 6s from Philip Kaym.³¹

Overall, by 1275, the thirty-seven nova oblata of 1259 had produced £61 of the original £118 debt, and £20 had been pardoned. Twenty debts had been paid in full, ten marked 'd' and dropped from the rolls, two transferred to other counties, one pardoned, and one seems to have disappeared from the rolls without explanation, leaving three debts still on the roll in 1275. One of these continuing debts had appeared in the rolls in every Kent account since 1259 in the form: 'Luke de Vienne [gap] for his relief . . .'. The reason why it appeared in that form, not specifying how much was owed or what was being done about it, was quite simple: in the fine roll from which this debt derived, no amount was specified for the fine – it only said that the sheriff of Kent should accept 'sufficient' security from Luke for rendering the rightful relief for the lands inherited from his father.³² Without further instructions, the exchequer had to leave a gap in this entry, year after year.

²⁵ PR 1260, E 372/104 rot. 6d.

²⁶ PR 1262, E 372/106 rot. 5.

²⁷ R. C. Stacey, 'Eveske, Elias l' (d. in or after 1259)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, Sept. 2004; online edn., Jan. 2008) <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/52245>> [accessed 1 Apr. 2010].

²⁸ *Close Rolls 1264–8*, p. 261.

²⁹ PR 1263, E 372/107 rot. 2d; 1265, E 372/109 rot. 8; 1266, E 372/110 rot. 6d; 1268, E 372/112 rot. 23d; 1271, E 372/115 rot. 6; 1272, E 372/116 rot. 3; 1273, E 372/117 rot. 8; 1274, E 372/118 rot. 13d; 1275, E 372/119 rot. 24.

³⁰ The order of 12 Feb. 1270 is printed by Madox, ii. 170–1. It was effective in cutting the size of the rolls: the 1269 roll took 20 rotulets to cover 12 counties' accounts; the 1271 roll 19 rotulets for 16 counties (Meekings, table on p. 253).

³¹ PR 1272, E 372/116 rot. 3; 1275, E 372/119 rot. 24d.

³² C.F.R., 1258–9, no. 611.

At first sight, the Kent account for 1259, and the story of the *nova oblata* over the following years, confirm the view that the exchequer was failing: there are many blank spaces in entries, many debts were just copied from one year to the next with no sign of any attempt to enforce them, and some debts were simply abandoned and removed from the rolls. In particular, during the troubles of the twelve-sixties, there were years when the exchequer failed to audit the accounts of Kent and many other counties, although it did catch up with them in subsequent years.

Such failings were not confined to the period of baronial rebellion, however. Gaps in the accounts and uncollected debts had long been a feature of the pipe rolls, and are not necessarily evidence of a collapse in exchequer procedure. The gaps may have been the consequence of the way the rolls were drafted. The *Dialogue* gives the impression that in the twelfth century the pipe rolls were written from dictation on the spot, during the audit of the sheriffs' accounts.³³ It seems likely that thirteenth-century rolls were drafted in advance, copying uncollected debts from the previous year's roll, and leaving gaps to be filled in when the sheriff reported success or failure in his task. The differences in order, wording and spelling between the pipe rolls and their duplicates, the chancellor's rolls, also indicate that the rolls were prepared separately, by copying from their equivalents of the previous year, rather than being written simultaneously. In many entries where there had been gaps, changes in handwriting or ink indicate that either 'r.c. de' or 'debet' was added to fill such gaps, presumably during the audit process. This was not something new during the troubles of the twelve-fifties and sixties, but can be found throughout rolls from earlier decades, and was discovered by Mabel Mills in the roll for 1295. As she pointed out: 'the impression given at first sight is that the whole system is extraordinarily confusing and unbusinesslike: that no money was ever paid off, and that the exchequer at this date had broken down badly in its attempts to collect the king's revenue and to audit the royal accounts. This is misleading.'³⁴

The rolls may seem to show a system on the brink of collapse, but this was their normal state: the 1259 Kent account contained forty-five entries with a gap, as noted above; the Kent account for 1239, twenty years previously, contained over ninety entries with blank spaces. The 1239 *nova oblata* were not collected any more effectively than those for 1259: there were initially thirty-eight debts, totalling £292 (including two fines for £100 each); by 1246, £122 had been collected, with twenty-three debts paid in full, one debt of 40*m* pardoned, two transferred elsewhere, one which cannot be traced, and eleven debts still on the roll.³⁵ There had been much the same progress over seven years from 1259, with eighteen debts out of thirty-seven paid in full, and nearly half the initial debt collected. In both examples, the bulk of the cash coming in to the exchequer was received in the first few years, with further payments reduced to a trickle after three or four years. There are some differences between these sample years: there were no missed audits in the twelve-forties; neither were hopeless debts being removed from the rolls. But it seems that the exchequer was just as effective in chasing Kent debts in the twelve-fifties and sixties as it had been twenty years earlier.

One point that has become plain from these examples is that the exchequer was reluctant to abandon hope of collecting payment. Even when debts were removed from the pipe rolls, they could still be paid years later. Many debts seemed inactive, simply repeated year after year with a gap in the entry rather than an indication that

³³ *Dialogus de Scaccario*, pp. 28–31; new edn., pp. 45–8.

³⁴ Mills, p. xxi; also pp. xiv, lxxii ('as much as possible of the writing was done beforehand').

³⁵ PR 1239, E 372/83 rot. 10d; 1240, E 372/84 rot. 10d; 1241, E 372/85 rot. 9d; 1242, E 372/86 rot. 8; 1243, E 372/87 rot. 5; 1244, E 372/88 rot. 2; 1245, E 372/89 rot. 5d; 1246, E 372/90 rot. 10.

the debtor accounted for the debt, or that he was noted as owing it. Such debts could still be brought to life after many years of neglect. A further example from Kent may demonstrate the exchequer's long-term persistence. It also illustrates the reason why the pipe rolls were preserved for reference over many decades.

In 1270, the exchequer in its judicial form, the exchequer of pleas, heard a case brought by David, earl of Atholl and his wife Isabel. They denied responsibility for the debts of Isabel's grandfather, Richard of Chilham. These debts were £100 for taking a whale, £87 12*d* for various prests and £25 for two scutages for the fees of Fulbert (or Fobert) of Dover, Isabel's great-grandfather.³⁶ The oldest of these debts had been incurred by Fulbert, and passed to Richard together with Fulbert's estates, which had then descended to Isabel and David. This debt can be traced back nearly seventy years.

In 1202, the pipe roll account for Kent had a section near the end, after the nova oblata, headed 'De prestitis'. The first entry records that Alexander Arsic owes 10*m* for a prest – an advance payment or a loan from the king. The second reads: 'Fulbertus de Dovra debet xx m. de eodem'.³⁷ In 1203, Fulbert is again second in the list of entries under 'De prestitis'. In 1204, these debts move into the general list of debts in the main part of the Kent account, underneath various entries referring to Rochester. Fulbert's debt stays in the same relative position, immediately after Arsic, in the list of debts below the heading for Rochester, until 1208. As other debts are paid off and removed from the roll, including Arsic's debt, Fulbert's debt gradually moves towards the top of the Kent account. In 1211 and 1212, it is in the group of debts immediately following the corpus comitatus, the part of the account concerned with the sheriff's responsibility for the farm of the county, profits, and expenditure on the king's behalf.³⁸

There are few Kent accounts from the confused years at the end of John's reign and the beginning of Henry III's. In some years there was no roll at all, in others the Kent section was omitted or reduced to just the sheriff's account. Fulbert's debt is recorded in 1214, then it appears again in 1219, as the first Kent entry after the corpus of the county and the farm of Rochester, and it is repeated near the beginning of the Kent account each year until 1223.³⁹

In fact, Fulbert had been dead for many years by then. His estates had been inherited by his daughter, Rose of Dover, who married Richard, the illegitimate son of King John. Richard was known as Richard of Chilham, from the chief manor in Rose's estate. As her husband, he became legally responsible for the liabilities, such as scutage, imposed on her manors, and for the debt inherited from Fulbert. In the rolls from 1220 to 1223, there are entries noting that Richard son of King John was liable for the first scutage from the fees of Fulbert of Dover (the first scutage was imposed in order to pay the indemnity promised by Henry III's minority government to Louis of France).⁴⁰ The scutage and the prest are brought together in a single entry in 1224, the

³⁶ *Select Cases in the Exchequer of Pleas*, ed. H. Jenkinson and B. E. R. Formoy (Selden Soc., xlviii, 1932), case 121, pp. 61–2. See also R. Cassidy, 'Rose of Dover (d. 1261), Richard of Chilham and an inheritance in Kent', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, cxxxii (2011), 305–19.

³⁷ *The Great Roll of the Pipe for the Fourth Year of the Reign of King John*, ed. D. M. Stenton (Pipe Roll Soc., new ser., xv, 1937), p. 215. Hereafter, references to the rolls published by the Pipe Roll Society will be abbreviated to the regnal year and page number (in this case, *Pipe Roll 4 John*, p. 215).

³⁸ *Pipe Roll 5 John*, p. 25; *6 John*, p. 214; *7 John*, p. 114; *8 John*, p. 49; *9 John*, p. 32; *10 John*, p. 98; *11 John*, p. 11; *12 John*, p. 118; *13 John*, pp. 236–7; *14 John*, p. 12.

³⁹ *Pipe Roll 16 John*, p. 29; *3 Henry III*, p. 145; *4 Henry III*, p. 157; *5 Henry III*, p. 201; *6 Henry III*, p. 57; *7 Henry III*, p. 95.

⁴⁰ *Pipe Roll 3 Henry III*, p. 150; *4 Henry III*, p. 162; *5 Henry III*, p. 205; *6 Henry III*, p. 61; *7 Henry III*, p. 97.

first item in the Kent account after the corpus and the farm of Rochester: 'Richard of Chilham [gap] 20m for Fulbert of Dover for a prest. And 18m for the king's first scutage from the fees which belonged to Fulbert'.⁴¹

For many years thereafter, Richard of Chilham's debt stayed at the beginning of the Kent account, after the entries which recurred every year for the sheriff's farm, the farm of Rochester and the sheriff's payment for small farms. There were occasional payments from and additions to the debt, such as 20m which King Henry paid on Richard's behalf in 1228, to repay money borrowed by the latter when he was on crusade in the Holy Land in 1220. In 1229, Richard's debts were rolled together, and continued to appear near the top of the Kent account in subsequent years as £37 7s 8d owed by Richard of Chilham for the three debts contained in the 1228 roll.⁴²

From time to time, Richard and Rose incurred other debts, for loans, amercements, fines or taxation, some of which were paid fairly rapidly and disappeared from the rolls,⁴³ while others lingered year after year. Richard had to pay more taxation on the estates which Rose had inherited: £14 for the scutage of Elvey on the fourteen fees of Fulbert of Dover, in 1232. There was also £5 for a prest for the Brittany campaign, enrolled in 1234.⁴⁴ These appeared as separate entries in the following years. In 1239, Richard and Rose seem to have made an effort to pay some of their debts: the £37 7s 8d debt from 1228 and the debt for the scutage of Elvey were each reduced by payments of 5m.⁴⁵

A further payment in 1240 reduced the 1228 debt to £30 14s 4d, and it stayed at that level for several years, until a small payment in 1245 reduced it again, to £28 12d.⁴⁶ Separate entries also continued for other debts: the scutage of Elvey, reduced to 1m by a payment of £10 in 1242, and the prest of Brittany, 100s. In 1243, a new debt appears. In that year the Kent account ends with three sections headed respectively 'De oblati', 'De amerciamentis per W. de Ebor', and 'Nova oblata': Richard of Chilham appears in this final section with prests from the treasury of 20m and £40.⁴⁷ In 1244, these new prests, added together to make £53 ½m, are under 'De oblati', and in 1245 and the following years this debt appears in the general mass of entries above 'De oblati' and following the section headed 'De amerciamentis per W. de Ebor'; it is described as £53 ½m for prests as contained in roll twenty-seven (the roll for 1243).⁴⁸

⁴¹ *Pipe Roll 8 Henry III*, p. 145.

⁴² PR 1225, E 372/69 rot. 12d; 1226, E 372/70 rot. 9 (Kent), rot. 2d (Essex); 1227, E 372/71 rot. 8; 1228, E 372/72 rot. 13d; 1229, E 372/73 rot. 3d.

⁴³ E.g., the 1229 prest of £40 to cover their expenses in settling a lawsuit over Rose's rights to the manor of Lesnes (PR 1229, E 372/73 rot. 3d). It was finally repaid in 1239 (see C. Voth and R. Cassidy, 'Rose of Dover, Richard of Chilham and the duel for a manor', *Fine of the Month*, Aug. 2008, Henry III Fine Rolls Project <<http://www.finerollshenry3.org.uk/content/month/fm-08-2008.html>> [accessed 29 Apr. 2010]).

⁴⁴ PR 1232, E 372/76 rot. 6d, and S. K. Mitchell, *Studies in Taxation under John and Henry III* (New Haven, Conn., 1914), pp. 195–9 (scutage of Elvey); PR 1234, E 372/78 rot. 6d (prest). The prest is described as 'de prestito Britann', and is presumably related to Richard's involvement in Henry III's Brittany campaign: he is included in the 1229 muster roll (I. J. Sanders, *Feudal Military Service in England* (1956), p. 124) and among those receiving letters of protection in 1230 (*Calendar of Patent Rolls 1225–32*, p. 361).

⁴⁵ PR 1230, E 372/74 rot. 6d; 1231, E 372/75 rot. 6d; 1232, E 372/76 rot. 8; 1233, E 372/77 rot. 5; 1234, E 372/78 rot. 6; 1235, E 372/79 rot. 12d; 1236, E 372/80 rot. 6d; 1237, E 372/81 rot. 1; 1239, E 372/83 rot. 10d.

⁴⁶ PR 1240, E 372/84 rot. 10; 1241, E 372/85 rot. 9; 1242, E 372/86 rot. 8; 1243, E 372/87 rot. 5; 1244, E 372/88 rot. 2; 1245, E 372/89 rot. 5.

⁴⁷ PR 1243, E 372/87 rot. 5.

⁴⁸ PR 1244, E 372/88 rot. 2; 1245, E 372/89 rot. 5d.

This sum stays in the same relative position in the Kent account, following the debts for amercements by William of York, in each year until 1255.

Three new debts appear in 1246. Under 'Nova oblata', Richard appears owing £100 'because he took a whale on his own authority'. In the next section, for the aid granted for the marriage of the king's daughter, Richard owes £14 for the fourteen fees of Fulbert of Dover. And in the next and final section of the Kent account, for the scutage of Gannoc, Richard accounts for £28 from these fourteen fees.⁴⁹ The new debts move into the 'De oblatis' section in the following year, when Richard pays £17 towards the scutage of Gannoc. Richard died at about this time,⁵⁰ but his debts continue to appear in the pipe roll under his name. In 1248, the debts from 1228, plus the scutage of Elveyn and the prest of Brittany, are consolidated into a sum of £33 14s 4d, near the top of the Kent account. The £100 for the whale, the aid and the scutage of Gannoc are just above the 'De oblatis' heading, and all move further up the list of Kent debts in the following years. In 1251, in the 'Nova oblata', there is a new entry for Rose of Dover: a 100m fine 'ut possit se maritare cui voluerit' (she married William of Wilton, a judge, who, coincidentally, was killed at the battle of Lewes, like William of Axmouth). Rose paid this fine in 1253. The remaining debts for the aid and the scutage of Gannoc were consolidated in 1251 as £25 'for two scutages', and the debt for the whale and the prest of 1243 were similarly brought together in 1254 and combined as £153 ½m 'for two debts' in 1255, still below the heading for amercements by William of York. That apart, Richard's debts were simply repeated each year.⁵¹ From time to time, the memoranda rolls show that the sheriff of Kent was instructed to collect these debts by distraining Richard, or the holders of his lands, but nothing was received.⁵²

By 1259 Richard's debts had been grouped into two entries in the Kent account: one entry covers £33 14s 4d for several debts contained in the roll for year 39 (1255) and £153 ½m for two debts from year 38 (1254), which would in turn refer one back to year 31 (1247); the other is for £25 for the two scutages on the fees of Fulbert of Dover, contained in roll twenty-four (1240). A further consolidation took place over the next few years, in 1260 adding together the £187 12d of the debts in the first entry, and a final grouping in 1262 so that all Richard's debts were finally brought together, as £212 12d for the several debts from year 44 (1260). This single figure for all Richard's debts was then repeated in each Kent account until its final appearance in 1268.⁵³

When Rose of Dover died in 1261, the wardship of Rose's lands and of her heir, her grandson Richard of Dover, was granted to Queen Eleanor. Rose's lands in Kent alone were worth £180 a year. They descended to Richard the grandson, who died

⁴⁹ PR 1246, E 372/90 rots. 10–10d. For the aid and scutage, see Mitchell, pp. 241–6.

⁵⁰ Rose did homage in June 1246 for all the lands Richard had held in chief from her inheritance (*Close Rolls* 1242–7, p. 435).

⁵¹ PR 1247, E 372/91 rot. 8; 1248, E 372/92 rot. 6; 1249, E 372/93 rot. 7; 1250, E 372/94 rot. 10; 1251, E 372/95 rot. 13; 1252, E 372/96 rot. 12; 1253, E 372/97 rot. 8; 1254, E 372/98 rot. 12; 1255, E 372/99 rot. 17; 1256, E 372/100 rot. 13; 1257, E 372/101 rot. 14; 1258, E 372/102 rot. 13. For Rose of Dover's fine to marry, see PR 1251, E 372/95 rot. 13; also in *Cal. Pat. Rolls* 1247–58, p. 71. Carpenter, *Battles of Lewes and Evesham*, p. 33. PR 1253, E 372/97 rot. 8d.

⁵² E.g., in the 1248 memoranda roll, E 159/24 m. 11d; in 1258, E 159/31 m. 19d: 'distrain the holders of the lands which were Rose of Dover's'; in the 1260 memoranda roll, E 159/33 mm. 24d and 25, the sheriff is ordered to distrain William of Wilton, Rose's second husband.

⁵³ PR 1259, E 372/103 rot. 10 (the reference back to year 38, rather than year 31, is due to a clerical error in an earlier roll); PR 1260, E 372/104 rot. 6; this grouping is echoed in the 1261 memoranda roll, E 159/34 m. 32d; PR 1262, E 372/106 rot. 5; 1263, E 372/107 rot. 2d; 1265, E 372/109 rot. 9d; 1266, E 372/110 rot. 6.

without issue in 1266.⁵⁴ The next heir was his sister, Isabel of Dover. As noted above, Isabel was married to David, earl of Atholl, and the barony of Chilham, and its debts, passed into his hands.⁵⁵

In January 1267, Henry III granted Queen Eleanor all Richard of Chilham's debts to the king on the day he died (many years before, in 1246). The exchequer was ordered to collect the debt, and to let Eleanor have the proceeds.⁵⁶ In the 1268 pipe roll, there is the final clearance of Richard's debts: 'Ricardus de Chilleham r. c. de cc xij li. xij d. de pluribus debitis sicut continetur in rotulo xliiij. In thes. nichil. Et A. [Eleanor] Regine cc xij li. xij d. de dono R. per breve R. Et quietus est'.⁵⁷ The debt was no longer owed to the king, and no longer appears in the pipe roll. Similarly, the Kent account in the 1269 memoranda roll is marked up: 'That debt is given to the queen'.⁵⁸ Richard of Chilham's debts had been outstanding for over twenty years since his death, and one may wonder how much the gift of such a debt was worth. However, after years of apparent inertia, the exchequer evidently sprang into action, to collect the debt on the queen's behalf. In Easter term of 1269, the king ordered the exchequer to check on the debt by scrutiny of its rolls:⁵⁹

R. volens super debitis que ab antecessoribus Isabelle uxoris David comitis de Aceles et sororis ac heredis Ricardi de Doveve nuper defuncti qui de Rege tenuit in capite sibi debentur certiorari, mandat Barones quatinus scrutatis rotulis scaccarii, ipsum citra festum Pentecoste proximo futurum certient quot et cuiusmodi debita ab antecessoribus predictae Isabelle R. debentur ibidem.

These efforts resulted in the court case before the exchequer of pleas. The case was decided in the exchequer's favour, on the grounds that David and Isabel now held Roses's estates, which Richard had enjoyed as her husband, and they were thus responsible for the debts Richard had contracted as lord of Chilham. In the Easter term of 1270, Earl David swore to pay the £212 12d he owed for Richard's debts, and in the recognizances for that term there is David's undertaking to pay £200 to Queen Eleanor (she had let him off the odd £12 12d), at £50 a year.⁶⁰

Either Eleanor of Provence was more effective and determined as a debt collector than the exchequer and the sheriffs had been, or Earl David was setting his affairs in order. The case was heard just as David was preparing to go on crusade. In April 1270, David and Isabel were given licence to let their manor of Chingford, as David was going to the Holy Land, and they then leased the manor to the Knights Templar.⁶¹ David joined Louis IX's disastrous final crusade to Tunis, where he died of disease in August 1270.⁶²

⁵⁴ Wardship granted to Eleanor, Feb. 1261; then to Henry de Montfort, Aug. 1264; and to Guy de Marchia after the defeat of the de Montforts, June 1266 (*Cal. Pat. Rolls 1258–66*, pp. 141, 341, 532). Several of the manors in Kent were seized by others during 1264–5 (*Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous, Chancery, 1219–1307*, nos. 730, 734, 740, 765). Valuation of Rose's estate in the inquisition post mortem, C 132/47/17.

⁵⁵ Atholl granted respite for debts, Michaelmas 1266 (memoranda roll 1267, E 159/41 m. 1).

⁵⁶ *Close Rolls 1264–8*, p. 286; E 159/41 m. 4d. No reason is given for this gift. The grant was made before the death of Peter of Savoy in May 1268, which prompted the grant of lands in compensation for Eleanor's claims to his inheritance (M. Howell, *Eleanor of Provence: Queenship in 13th-Century England* (2nd edn., Oxford, 2001), pp. 242–3).

⁵⁷ PR 1268, E 372/112 rot. 23.

⁵⁸ Memoranda roll 1269, E 368/43 m. 23d. The other memoranda roll for that year does not have this annotation in the Kent account (E 159/43 m. 17).

⁵⁹ Memoranda roll 1269, E 159/43 m. 10. Also, more briefly, in E 368/43 m. 10.

⁶⁰ Memoranda roll 1270, E 159/44 mm. 7, 13.

⁶¹ *Cal. Pat. Rolls 1266–72*, pp. 422, 423.

⁶² *The Complete Peerage*, comp. G. E. Cokayne (14 vols., 1910–59), i. 305–6.

For our purposes, it is interesting to note that the court case was brought to recover three separate debts: the £100 Richard owed for taking a whale; £87 12*d* for several prests; and £25 for two scutages from the fees of Fulbert of Dover. When the king ordered the exchequer to examine its rolls, to find out how much was owed by Isabella's ancestors, it looked beyond the last appearance of the combined debt of £212 12*d* on the pipe roll, and tracked it back through several stages of consolidation. The exchequer had clearly checked back at least to the early twelve-fifties, before Richard's debts were added together. Indeed, the reference to the £87 12*d* as relating to prests might suggest that the exchequer had gone back even further to find the origin of these debts – although not necessarily as far back as 1202.

Even today, it is usually possible, if laborious, to follow a debt from one roll to the next.⁶³ For those who wrote the rolls and worked with them day in, day out, it would have been even easier. In the Chilham case, at the beginning of 1270 the latest complete pipe roll would have been that for 1268 (the roll for the year which had ended at Michaelmas 1269 would not be completed until the summer of 1270). In the 1268 roll, an exchequer clerk would have found that Richard owed £212 12*d* for debts contained in the roll of year 44 (1260). The 1260 roll would refer back to 1259, for £187 12*d* of the total. In its turn, the 1259 roll would show that £33 14*s* 4*d* of the total referred to several debts from 1255, where there is a further reference back to 1247. That roll breaks the debt down again, linking £28 12*d* of it to three debts from 1228, where there is a reference to the debt owed for Fulbert in the roll of 1226, and so back to 1224, where we find the debt of 20*m* for Fulbert's prest. It can then be followed back through the rolls to 1202. The same process would uncover the initial entries for each of the component parts of the debt which Richard of Chilham left behind him.

While the story of Richard of Chilham's debts has been set out chronologically above, because that is the way we are accustomed to tell historical tales, when the rolls were in use by the exchequer they must have been read in the other direction, looking backwards. The exchequer needed to know how debts had arisen, how much had been paid already, and whether they should be pursued or abandoned. The rolls contain the information to make it feasible to track debts in either direction. By and large, a debt stays grouped with other debts which entered the rolls in the same year. Such groups remain in the same position relative to the occasional headings which break up the long list of debts between the sheriff's farm at the top and 'De oblatis' near the bottom of the county's account. When debts are consolidated, the rolls note their origin, so that the source of each component can still be traced. Such tracing shows the value of the headings as signposts through the mass of entries.

For example, the heading for amercements by William of York has been mentioned above. These amercements relate to the eyre of Kent in June 1241, and they first appear in the pipe roll for 1242, at the very end of the Kent account, after the nova oblata, with the heading 'Amerciamenta per W. de Ebor' et socios suos'.⁶⁴ In 1243, the previous year's nova oblata entries are listed under 'De oblatis', still followed by the amercements, headed 'De amerciamentis per W. de Ebor', and then by the current year's nova oblata, including Richard of Chilham's debt for prests. As new debts are added to the end of the account, and old debts are paid or removed, the Kent account

⁶³ For another example of a debt being tracked from one roll to another, over a rather shorter period, see R. Cassidy, 'Rolls and ransoms in the March of Wales', *Fine of the Month*, Apr. 2010, Henry III Fine Rolls Project <<http://www.finerollshenry3.org.uk/content/month/fm-04-2010.html>> [accessed 29 Apr. 2010].

⁶⁴ D. Crook, *Records of the General Eyre* (P.R.O. handbooks no. 20, 1982), p. 103. PR. 1242, E 372/86 rot. 8d.

follows a consistent pattern, with Chilham's debt in a group of entries a little below the heading for William of York's amercements.⁶⁵ Long after Chilham's debt for the 1243 prests had been merged with his other debts, and the amercements from the 1241 eyre had all disappeared from the rolls, the heading remained, still serving to break up the long list of debts and to provide a handy way of finding the approximate position of entries which appeared nearby. The retention of headings could perhaps be carried too far: the pipe roll for 1306 still includes a heading for amercements by William of York, but there are no entries beneath it; instead, in a single line across the roll are the headings for amercements by William of York, Henry of Bath, Gilbert Preston, Nicholas Tower and Roger Seaton, the relics of eyres long ago.⁶⁶

Despite such oddities, and the bureaucratic inertia evident in the retention of uncollectable debts and the repetition of the county farms in the rolls until the reforms of 1284,⁶⁷ the key point about the pipe rolls is that they were produced for a practical purpose. They were not decorative, or a mere matter of routine. The exchequer had the job of collecting debts due to the king, which included ensuring that they were not forgotten. When necessary, it could also demonstrate that its claims were justified, by referring back to past rolls. The evidence of this continuing use of the rolls can only be found by means of the detailed study of individual debts over a period of years, as was first done by Mabel Mills. The examples above may help to show why the pipe rolls were preserved, as the long-term memory of an institution which, while sometimes slow and inefficient, could also sometimes be surprisingly persistent and determined to keep track of what it was owed. For that reason, the rolls survived, and can now be used to illustrate the working practices of the exchequer. What Mabel Mills wrote in 1924 is still true: 'Once the system is understood, it is not difficult to reconstruct any account . . . The system is, however, in itself extremely difficult to unravel completely, and some problems still remain unsolved.'⁶⁸

⁶⁵ PR 1243, E 372/87 rot. 5; 1244, E 372/88 rot. 2; 1245, E 372/89 rot. 5.

⁶⁶ PR 1306, E 372/151 rot. 18. This use of headings as signposts within long lists of debts seems a helpful aid to navigation around the rolls, rather than a source of confusion, as has been suggested for the 12th-century pipe rolls (Hagger, pp. 61–5).

⁶⁷ Meekings, p. 244.

⁶⁸ Mills, p. xxi.