“The papers will transform the way we look at the early period. There are many discussions of issues of economic development and political controversies, as well as fascinating new material on relations with neighboring Indians.”

Professor Karen Ordahl Kupperman
Department of History
New York University
This is an essential source for the study of the Atlantic World and Early Colonial Period. It documents the founding and economic development of Virginia as seen through the papers of the Virginia Company of London, 1606-1624. It then shows the continuing interest of the Ferrar family in the settlement of North America from Jamestown to the Bermudas.

This collection provides a rich source for the study of trade between Britain and America. There is valuable evidence on the ethnic and gender composition of Virginia and new evidence of tensions amongst the colonists and of early relations with Native Americans.

It is also a crucial source for London’s economic history and will be welcomed by religious and social historians of Early Modern England. The Consultant Editor for this project is Dr David Ransome, who has been central to the discovery that the Virginia Company Archives in the Ferrar papers are far more extensive than previously supposed.

THE PROJECT OFFERS:
# Previously unpublished transcripts by Dr David Ransome of around 500 documents from the Virginia Company Archives. These are fully searchable and are linked to the original manuscripts.
# The complete Ferrar Papers from Magdalene College, Cambridge, together with a fully searchable listing linked directly to the manuscripts.
# An extensive contextual introduction to the Ferrar papers, family trees, and items on the life of Nicholas Ferrar.
# Settlement maps, a gallery of illustrations, a slideshow viewer, a bibliography and chronology.

THE SCOPE OF THE FERRAR PAPERS, 1590–1790:
The collection began as a business archive, consisting of the papers of Nicholas Ferrar (c1544-1620) and those of the Virginia Company of London and its subordinate, the Somer Islands Company. Both Nicholas Ferrar’s two sons (John and Nicholas) held key positions until its demise in 1624. Kingsbury’s Records of the Virginia Company listed 80 documents relating to Virginia, but this was before the discovery of further Ferrar papers at Magdalene College in the late 1970s. Recent work has shown that there are some 500 documents of direct interest.

In addition the archive contains much material for the period after 1624 describing the business and commercial interests of the family, who continued to be interested in the fate of the American colonies.

There is, for instance, a list of women sent to the colony to be wives c1619-20. These have always been characterized as the sweepings off the streets, but the lists in the Ferrar papers indicate that they were selected with as much care as were those who went to the puritan colonies. Every woman was recorded with her pastor’s recommendation, her parents’ condition, and her own skills.

The papers contain similar lists of men. They also contain a census that mentions a substantial number of Africans, almost equally split between men and women, living in Virginia - this is independent of the emblematic first arrival of Africans in 1619.

Detailed lists of provisions and bills reveal the extent of involvement by London traders in the venture. The venture in Virginia has often been regarded as inept and a failure, but there are many papers in this collection which document the range of enterprises pursued by the colonists, such as plans for an ironworks, glass-making, and the production of tobacco. This eventually became the staple crop and success of the colony.

The papers also have a strong social and religious content with family letters, including many from women.

Finally, the collection contains many documents concerning the Native American population. This ranges from a warrant of payment for Pocahontas and John Rolfe, to less well known cases of relations between the colonists and indigenous people, such as the young English boys who were sent to live with the tribes and act as interpreters.

Scholars have been awaiting the publication of this material eagerly and it is fitting that it will be published in the year of the 400th anniversary of the Jamestown settlement.

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