Mental Competency Inquisitions from Medieval England\(^1\) (ca. late 12th c.–early 15th c.)

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Introduction

The records below are culled from hundreds of inquisitions involving alleged “idiots” and their land held between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries in England. During the mid-thirteenth century, the English royal courts began to oversee inquisitions aimed at assessing the mental competency of people accused of being “idiots” (\textit{idiot} in Latin), and “natural fools.” While there was no standard set of practices for handling these cases, in most instances, an alleged \textit{idiot}'s interactions with the law began when Chancery received a request to examine them, generally after they inherited or alienated land. These requests could be made by anyone who could pay the requisite fees, but frequently came from people who hoped to be appointed custodians of the alleged's estate. Once Chancery received a request, it sent a writ to officials in the accused's town, village, or county, asking them to assess whether the allegations were true, and report back. If the officials determined that the person in question seemed to be an \textit{idiot} after conducting an examination or simply asking people in their community about their condition, the Crown would take their land into the king's hand, and grant their wardship—the right to manage and profit from their estates for the duration of their lives, paired with responsibility for their care—to people outside their line of hereditary succession. These practices remained largely unchanged until the Court of Wards began to handle cases involving so-called “idiots” in the early sixteenth century.

The records of these cases are significant to both the histories of disability and law because they document the earliest systematic mental competency examinations held in Europe. They also marked the first time the law distinguished between \textit{idiot}, who lacked the capacity for self-governance from birth, and temporarily mentally incompetent people (\textit{non compos mentis} in Latin), who lacked it because of temporary illness or injury. Thirteenth-century legal treatises like the \textit{Prerogative Regis, Fleta,} and \textit{Britton} asserted that “fools and idiots” differed from people with other mental disorders because their condition was present at birth, permanent, and uninterrupted by moments of lucidity. They then used this permanence to justify treating them differently than other categories of mentally impaired individuals. Specifically, the Crown could not profit from the lands of people suffering from temporary mental illnesses, but had the right to profit from the estates of people found to be “idiots” for the duration of their lives.

It is unclear why the royal courts began to administer inquisitions involving alleged “idiots.” Ostensibly, it was to prevent their lands from “being wasted or alienated” to the disparagement of their heirs, as noted in the case of Nicholas, son of the earl of Dessemond, below. By granting such individuals’ wardships to people outside their line of succession, the Crown theoretically ensured that people without the capacity to manage their own affairs would not be taken advantage of by less than scrupulous relatives.
Yet in practice, the Crown often chose their guardians for reasons other than concern for their well-being. In some instances, like those of Andrew le Merk and William Berchaud, the Crown gifted wardships to its servants to reward their loyalty. Later, it treated wardships as a saleable commodity, a practice that frequently led to protest from the accused’s relatives, less than pleased to see land leave their family’s control.

In light of the fact that the Crown had financial incentives to confirm allegations of “idiocy,” one question we should ask when reading these cases is whether the people identified as “idiots” by the royal courts would have met our criteria for intellectual disability. It is tempting to make this assumption, since if we assume that the people identified as “idiots” were actually intellectually disabled, then the records of their inquiries present the tantalizing possibility of accessing the lived experiences of people otherwise absent from the historical record. That said, there are reasons to be cautious about conflating legal terminology with medical reality.

History demonstrates that legal terminology frequently fails to reflect reality beyond the courtroom. Today, people who meet the clinical requirements for mental illness often fail to meet the legal requirements for the insanity defense, and of course, the women identified as witches in the courts of Early Modern Europe did not actually commune with the devil. However, like many women accused of “idiocy” in medieval England, they possessed land without male guardians and enjoyed a relatively high degree of legal and economic autonomy. Scholarship on the early modern Court of Wards has also emphasized that the Crown’s ability to profit from the sale of wardships created a strong incentive for it to identify mentally competent individuals as incompetent, and there is no reason not to be similarly cynical when considering the Crown’s motives in medieval “idiocy” inquiries. Finally, the royal courts only involved themselves in matters concerning alleged “idiots” when the individuals in question possessed landed wealth, so the people subject to these inquiries did not reflect the full set of people born with intellectual disabilities in medieval England. Instead, all we can know for certain is that they represented the set of people who possessed land and were deemed poorly suited to the task of managing it by people who felt they had something to gain by accusing them of “idiocy.”

People ultimately accused others of “idiocy” for a variety of reasons. William de Aston, for instance, claimed that he had been declared an *idiota* on account of the “malicious suit of certain enemies.” Similarly, Adam le Gayte, the king’s watchmen, requested that the court find William Berchaud to be an *idiota* and grant him his wardship, just as William was about to inherit the estate of his uncle John Danethorp, also an *idiota*, whose wardship Adam had held prior to his death. The officials who examined William undoubtedly had an incentive to support his claim, since Adam was a favored servant of the king, who had held John’s wardship by the “king’s gift,” and he claimed that without William’s wardship, he would be unable to support himself. More broadly, the initial findings of these inquiries were frequently overturned, and even when they were upheld there was no consistent criteria for determining whether someone was an *idiota*. For even as legal treatises held that “idiocy” was a permanent and congenital condition, many of the people accused of “idiocy” had previously been mentally competent, like Robert de Corbrigg who became an *idiota* only after going to Oxford, or Margery Anlauby, who was declared an *idiota* after the death of her husband.

Nevertheless, whether the legal “idiots” of medieval England were intellectually disabled or not, the records of their inquiries offer insight into how mental incompetency was defined and treated before intellectual disability emerged as a medical category during the early modern period.
Bibliography

——. “Town and Country: A Comparison of the Treatment of the Mentally Disa-
And whereas it sometimes happens that the heir is an idiot from his birth whereby he is incapable of taking care of his inheritance, we will that such heirs, of whomsoever they hold, and whether they be male or female, remain in our custody, with all their inheritances, saving to every lord all other services belonging to him for lands held of him, and that they so remain in our wardship as long as they continue in their idiocy. But this rule shall not hold with regard to those who become insane by any sickness.

Mental Incompetency in the Prerogativa Regis (ca. 1324)

The King shall have custody of the lands of natural fools taking the profits of them without waste or destruction, and shall find them their necessaries from whose fee soever the lands be holden; and after the death of such idiots he should render [it] to the rightful heirs, so that such fools shall not alien, nor their heirs be disinherited. Also, the King shall provide, when anyone who previously had memory and understanding should become of unsound mind as certain people are through lucid intervals that their lands and tenements may be safely protected, without waste and destruction, and that they and their household may live and be reasonably sustained from the profits of the same, and the residue beyond their sustenance be preserved for their use, to be delivered to them when they regain their memory so that such lands and tenements shall in no way be aliened within the aforesaid time; The King should not take anything from the profits for his own use, and if the party should die in such a state, then the residue should be distributed for his soul at the advice of an ordinary.

Andrew le Merk, an “Idiot of Unsound Mind” Entrusted to the King’s Tailor (1285)

To the justices in eyre in co. Essex. As the king is given to understand that Andrew le Merk is an idiot and of unsound mind, so that he is incapable of administering his lands and goods, the king orders the justices to cause Andrew to come before them in their eyre, and to examine him carefully, and if it appear clearly to them that he has been an idiot from his birth and is still, so that the custody of his body and lands ought to pertain to the king, they are to deliver such custody to Adynettus, the king’s tailor, to be held during the king’s pleasure, so that he may cause suitable necessaries to be administered to Andrew, his wife, and his household.

William Berchaud, The Nephew of an “Idiot,” Accused of “Idiocy” by the Man who Held his Uncle’s Wardship (1302)

2 August 1302. Westminster. Commission of enquiry to the escheator north of the Trent to discover whether William Berchot is an idiot. By petition of council.

Writ to the escheator to enquire whether the said William is an idiot or not &c. 2 Aug. 30 Edw. I. Cumberland. Inquisition made at Carlisle on Tuesday before St. Matthew, 30 Edw. I.

Alenburgh. The jury know nothing of the person of the said William or whether he is an idiot or not because they have never seen him for he has dwelt in Holdernesse since his birth, but they have heard say that he has been
an idiot from his birth. John de Danethorp who was an idiot from his birth, was uncle of the said William, and the said William, son of Alice his sister, and Joan, daughter of Margery another sister, who is of full age and discretion,° are his next heirs. The king committed to Adam le Wayte the wardship of the said John's lands in Alenburgh, which by his death have been taken into the king's hand, viz.—a messuage,° 145a. land, 14½ bovates let to farm to divers tenants, a toft° and 1 bovate° of land which were of John Ravene, 14½ a. meadow, rents of cottars° and herbage° in a place called Alenbank, a custom called ‘bremale,’ a water-mill, and works, held of Sir Thomas de Lucy by cornage° and service of 5s. yearly.

York. Inquisition made at Hedone on Thursday the eve of St. Bartholomew, 30 Edw. I. Outteneuton. The said William is an idiot from his birth. He holds 12 l. of land, of the inheritance of Geoffrey Berchaude his father, of the king in chief,° as of the honour of Albe- marle, by knight's service, which John Berchauud holds by the king's commission for the sustenance of the said William, rendering 12 marks yearly at the king's exchequer.°

Danthorp. The said William, son of Alice one of the sisters of John de Danthorp, and Joan, daughter of Margery another sister, who is of discretion, are heirs of the said John, and by his death have in Danthorp 7 bovares and two parts of a bovare of land, a moiety of a close° containing 2a., tofts called Abbitoft and Dundraghecroft, and tofts and land held by divers tenants (named), held of the king in chief as of the honour of Albe-marle, service unspecified; also a capital messuage containing 4a., a moiety of a close called Milncroft, 8 bovates of land, and a toft and 2a. land which William the smith holds, held of the provost of Beverley, rendering 10s. yearly; and a toft containing 3½a., held of John de Melsa rendering 10s. yearly. All the above have been in the king's hand from the day of St. Nicholas last, by the death of the said John de Danethorp.

Memorandum (from the escheator?)° that he has personally examined the said William and finds that he is manifestly an idiot, and has been so from his birth, nor does he enjoy lucid intervals,° but, as he has heard, at lunations° is worse and raves with madness. (Undated.)

Petition to the king from Adam le Gayt to grant him what William Berchot is heir of, for what he had of the other fool his uncle has been loyally expended in the king's service, and he cannot otherwise maintain his estate.

Margery de Anlauby, who became an “Idiot” after the Death of her Husband° (1279 and 1289)

Writ of certiorari° to Thomas de Norman- vill, the king's steward, 9 Sept. 7 Edw. I.

York. Inq. The octave of St. Michael, 7 Edw. I.

Anlauby. Land (unspecified), worth 13 marks yearly, excepting 4s. held of the abbot of St. Mary's, York, by service of 2 marks

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full...discretion the age of legal adulthood  
messuage a dwelling with outbuildings and land  
toft site of a house  
bovate the amount of land that could be ploughed by one ox, usually 15–20 acres  
cottars tenant farmers  
herbage pasture land  
cornage payment on beasts at 2 pence per head  
of...chief land held directly from the king  
exchequer government office responsible for royal finance  
moiety...close portion of land  
escheator a royal official who handled transfers of property to the Crown  
lucid intervals periods of sanity  
lunations the period of time from one new moon to the next, referencing the contemporary belief that mental competency waxed and waned with the moon’s cycles  
Writ of certiorari written order to review a previous finding
yearly as a free farmer for all services, excepting two suits at the abbot’s court on reasonable summons; and the said Margery fell ill a fortnight before the Purification last and is so infirm that she is not of sound mind; after which date came Robert de Stotevyll of Cotingham, of whom the said Margery held nothing, and without any authority took away John her son and heir, and still unjustly detains him.

Writ of certiorari, concerning the state of the said Margery, whose custody with that of her lands and goods the king sometime committed to William de Beverlaco, deceased, 25 May, 17 Edw. I.


The said Margery is an idiot, not from her birth, but she has been so continuously since the death of her husband nine years ago. William de Beverlaco had her wardship and that of her lands, viz.—of 10½ bovates for eight years, and similarly for a year of 4 bovates which she had by escheat by the death of Alan le Moyn of Hesel; she had also 25s. 3d. rent of assize, and 3s. from cottages; out of all which she paid 2 marks yearly to the abbot of St. Mary’s, York, and, by the grant of her father, 10s. to Josiana her sister, a nun in Swyn, as long as she should live. All the goods arising from the said lands beyond the sustenance of the said Margery, her four children, and household, came to the said William.

The Children of Geoffrey Berthald, All “Idiots” of “Unsound Mind” (1290)

January 24, Westminster. To Thomas de Normanvill, escheator beyond Trent. Order to deliver to John Berthald of Holdernesse the custody of the lands that belonged to Geoffrey Berthald, tenant in chief, in Out Newton in Holdernesse, as it is testified before the king that Geoffrey’s children are idiots and of unsound mind, so that they are insufficient for the rule of themselves and their things and the lands of Geoffrey, which are in the king’s hands by reason of his death, and the king, wishing to provide for the estate of the children lest dilapidation of the lands should be made by their ignorance and fatuity, has granted the custody of the lands to John Berthald during pleasure, so that he may maintain the children reasonably in all necessities and shall render to the king 10 marks yearly for so long as he shall have the custody, and shall cause Juliana, Geoffrey’s daughter, when she come to marriageable years, if she be fit for marriage, to be married out of the issues of the lands, the costs whereof the king will cause to be allowed to him in payment of the ferm.

Joan de la Chaumbre, Found to be an “Idiot” by a Corrupt Escheator (1316)

October 12, 1316, York. To Master John Walewayn, escheator beyond Trent. Order to restore to Joan de la Chaumbre of Whitruckkesmed her lands, and the issues of the same, which were taken into the king’s hands by John Abel, late escheator beyond Trent, who delivered them to the present escheator, pretending that they were in the king’s hands by
reason of the madness of Joan, as it appeared by inquisition taken by John Abel that she was an idiot and mad woman, the present escheator having returned that he had gone in person, by virtue of the king’s order, to her place of residence, and that he had seen and examined her, and that he found that she was not an idiot and had not been at any time from her birth.

Writ of plenius certiorari, the (late) escheator having returned that the lands &c. of the said Joan were in the king’s hand by reason of her idiocy, 4 May, 9 Edw. II. Endorsed by the escheator, that he cannot find any cause in her for being reputed an idiot.

Somerset. Inquisition. Friday after SS. 9 Edward II.

The said Joan is not an idiot nor ever has been.

Whittokesmede. A messuage, 1½a. meadow, 18a. arable, and 2a. wood, descended to her after her father’s death, and are held of Elias Cotel, knight, by service of ½d., and suit at his court of Camelerton.

Alexander Tothe, who Lost his Memory on Account of “Malign Spirits” (1318)

October 26, York. To Master Richard de Clare, escheator beyond Trent. Order to cause John de Northgrave, son and heir of Alfred de Northgrave, tenant in chief of the late king, to have seisin of his father’s lands, as he proved his age before Master John Walewayn, late escheator beyond Trent, and the king has taken his homage.

To Robert de Sapy, escheator this side Trent. Order to deliver to John de Yucflete and Joan his wife, mother of Alexander Tothe, son and heir of James Tothe of Middleton, the lands of the said Alexander, which cannot descend to them by right of inheritance, as his nearest friends for his maintenance and profit, the escheator having taken the lands into the king’s hands because he understood that Alexander was a madman and an idiot from his birth, as the king learns by inquisition taken by the escheator that Alexander is not an idiot from birth, that he was of good memory for three years after his birth, and that he was afterwards impaired by malign spirits so that he lost his memory for two years, after which time he recovered his good state, so that he was sufficient for the rule of himself and his lands and chattels had he been of full age, and that he enjoys lucid intervals in the new moon, and that he holds lands in Middleton of divers lords by various services, and that he does not hold of the king, and that he is aged fourteen years.

Robert, Son of Hugh, Son of Ascelin de Corbrigg, who became an “Idiot” after going to Oxford (1333)

Writ to the escheator to enquire whether the said Robert is an idiot, and whether he has alienated any lands, &c., 23 May, 6 Edward III.

August 20, Stow Park, 1333.

To John de Louthre, escheator in cos. York, Northumberland, Cumberland and Westmorland.

Order not to intermeddle with two messuages, 30 acres of land and 4s. rent in Corbrigg, which he had taken into the king’s hand because of the idiocy of Robert son of Hugh son of Ascelin de Corbrigg, restoring
the issues," but to permit the near friends of Robert, to whom the said tenements ought not to descend or remain, to have the custody of them, so that they may answer for the issues thereof for the benefit of Robert, as the king has learned by inquisition taken by that escheator° that the said Robert is an idiot, of unsound mind, and unfit to govern himself or his lands and goods, and that he was not an idiot from his birth but only for the last 16 years, and that he enjoys no lucid intervals," and that the said messuages, lands and rent which Hugh son of Ascelin gave to the said Robert his son and to William, Robert’s brother, deceased, and the heirs of their bodies, with reversion to the said Hugh and his heirs, are held of Henry de Percy by the service of rendering 11s. 7d. to him yearly.

Writ to the escheator to enquire whether the said Robert is an idiot, and whether he has alienated° any lands, &c., 23 May, 6 Edward III.

Northumberland. Inq. 10 June, 6 Edward III.

The said Robert is an idiot, but was not so from his birth, for 17 years ago he left Corbrigg for Oxford of sound mind and memory, and when he returned 16 years ago he was an idiot, and from that time has remained so, and has not enjoyed lucid intervals, and if he alienated any lands, he did so in that state. The aforesaid Hugh son of Ascelin, father of the said Robert, gave two messuages, 30a. land, and 4s. rent in Correbrigg to the said Robert and William his brother, to hold to them and the heirs of their bodies, with reversion to himself and his heirs, which William died ten years ago: the said tenements are held of Henry de Percy by service of rendering 11s. 7d.

William, son of Hugh de Correbrigg, and John, son of Thomas de Wyrton, are next heirs in blood to the said Robert, and of full age. The said Robert was examined in person by the escheator in the presence of the jury.

Thomas heir of Griffin de Grenestede, Found to be Sane because he Could Count Money and Measure Cloth° (1341)

11 May, 15 Edward III. Writ to the escheator in cos. Southampton, Bedford etc. to enquire whether the said Thomas is an idiot, and whether he has alienated a great portion of his lands and tenements in Kerdyngton, co. Bedford, or not, and who is his heir etc. 11 May, 15 Edward III.

Endorsed by the escheator that he went in person to Kerdyngton and examined the said Thomas in every way he could as to his state, and that he found him of good mind and sane memory in word and deed, counting money, measuring cloth° and doing all other things.

John atte Berton, Who Lost his Memory from Terror and Grief° (1345)

November 17, 1345. Westminster.

To John de Mussenden. Order to restore to John atte Berton his lands, together with the issues thereof, and not to intermeddle° further therewith, as on it being found by inquisition taken by Thomas de Aspale, escheator in co. Southampton, that John was an idiot, the king caused his lands to be taken so that they should not suffer dilapidation and granted them to Thomas de Mussenden for rendering a certain thing at the exchequer and finding John’s maintenance, and John afterwards beseeching the king to order those lands to be restored to him, as he is of sound mind and was so before the taking of the inquisition, the king ordered the eschea-

issues profits from the estate escheator royal official who handled transfers of property to the Crown lucid intervals periods of mental competence alienated sold or given away counting…cloth customary markers of legal majority for burgesses’ sons intermeddle interfere
tor” to take an inquisition upon the matter, by which it is found that John was of sound mind from his infancy to the completion of twenty-one years of age and more, having no hope of idiocy, but by the great terror and grief caused by the death of James atte Berton, his father, he has lost much of his memory and has remained almost without memory for three years, although he enjoys certain lucid intervals, so that he was reputed an idiot at that time, but afterwards he regained his health and has preserved a good memory for more than the last five years and is at present of sound mind and not an idiot.

Nov. 18. Westminster.

To the treasurer and barons of the exchequer. Order to discharge Thomas de Mussenden of 61s. 1d., as on its being found by inquisition taken by Thomas de Aspale, escheator in co. Southampton, that John atte Berton was an idiot, the king caused his lands in Wotton and Oklee to be taken into his hands, which were worth 10s. id. yearly beyond the rents and services due thereon by extent made by the escheator, and on 8 March last the king committed them to Thomas de Mussenden for rendering 61s. id. yearly at the exchequer, wishing the remaining 40s. to be reserved for John’s maintenance, and afterwards the king ordered Thomas to restore those lands to John and not to intermeddle further therewith.

John de Heton, who had a “Fancy in his Head” (1353–1354)

Writ of pleniuss certiorari to William de Nottin, William de Fyncheden, John de Bollyng and John de Upton to ascertain whether John de Heton is an idiot or not. 4 July, 27 Edward III.

John de Heton appeared and was examined and found to be an idiot and incapable of ruling himself or his lands. From his birth, which was on the day of the Annunciation, A.D. 1324, until the feast of St. James, 22 Edward III, viz. until he was 24 years of age, he was in good sense and quite sane; and since then till to-day he has been continuously an idiot, insensible to his surroundings, having a fancy in his head, whereby he remains unconscious of his own personality and paying no heed to anything at all. He enjoys no lucid intervals.

The jurors being asked what lands of the said John de Heton have been occupied by others and of the value of his goods and chattels, say that those which he had on the aforementioned feast of St. James, viz. six oxen, price 8s. each, four horses, price 4s. each, and 40 sheep, price 40s., were used by Margaret his wife for the support of him, herself, two sons and one daughter who are under the age of ten years, and of Margery, daughter of Adam de Hop- ton, married to John, eldest son of the said John, and for the support of his household, up to the feast of St. Michael, 26 Edward III; since when the said Margaret would not dwell with her husband in the company of William de Heton, his brother, and the latter would not let his brother be away from his guardianship in that of his wife. By the mediation of friends the lands of the said John in Myrfeld,
Hopton, Estheton and Balne, with a moiety of his goods and chattels, were assigned for the support of himself, William his son and Joan his daughter, in the guardianship of the said William his brother; and his lands &c. in Estheton and Erdeslawe, with a moiety of his goods and chattels, were assigned to Margaret for her support and that of John, her eldest son, and Margery his wife, daughter of Adam de Hopton. Margaret has remained until now in the household of the said Adam, who intervened touching the lands, goods and chattels assigned to her. In the winter after the assignment all the sheep died of murrain° and there are no other goods or chattels except those which are appraised above. The lands, goods, and chattels hardly suffice for the support of the said John, his wife, sons and household.

The said John has by inheritance the following lands:

Estheton. A messuage,° 80a. land, 7a. meadow, 20a. pasture and 40s. yearly rent of free tenants, all held of Sir Edmund de Langele as of the soke of Wakefeld by service of 15s. 9d. yearly payable by the tenants beside their own rent.

Erdeslawe. Six marks rent payable by the free tenants, held of Robert de Nevyll by fealty only.

Myrfield. A messuage, a water-mill, 140a. land in demesne,° 5a. meadow and 37s. rent from free tenants in Myrfield and Hopton. All held of Sir Henry, duke of Lancaster, as of the honour of Pontefract, by homage and fealty and by suit of court every three weeks.

Westheton. A messuage, 90a. land, 44a. meadow, 12a. pasture and 25s. 6d. rent of free tenants held of John de [Burnell] by homage and fealty only.

Polyngton in Balne. Thirteen shillings and fourpence rent from free tenants held of Sir Henry, duke of Lancaster, as of the honour of Pontefract by homage and fealty only.

The goods and chattels of the said John are in the custody of William his brother and Margaret his wife. The said William, John de Malet, who married the aunt of the said John, John de Hellay, who married the said John’s sister, are the nearest relations and friends of the said John and can best have the guardianship of him.

Nicholas, Son of Maurice, Earl of Dessemond° (1358)

8 October 1358. Westminster. To the justiciary° of Ireland. Order to cause Nicholas, son of Maurice earl of Dessemond, to come before him and to be examined, and if he find him to be an idiot, to cause all his lands to be seized into the king’s hand and extended by inquisition, and to be delivered for keeping to Ralph earl of Stafford, so that he shall answer to the king for the issues there of over and above the maintenance of Nicholas and his servants, and if necessary to make inquisition whether Nicholas has been an idiot from birth, or how long, and to send the inquisition and extent to the chancery of England° without delay, as the king is informed that Nicholas is an idiot so that he cannot suffice for the governance of himself or his lands, and it pertains to the king to provide for the good governance of the lands of idiots, that they may not be wasted or alienated. By K.

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moiety portion murrain an infectious disease messuage a dwelling with land and outbuildings demesne land attached to a manor retained for the owner’s use justiciary administrators of justice chancery of England office responsible for producing official documents
William de Aston, Accused of “Idiocy” by his Enemies° (1402)

Inquisition ex officio.° Gloucester. 16 March 1402.
William Aston of Aston Ingham has been an idiot since 9 Jan. 1400. He holds a tenement called ‘Astonescourt’ in Ley by Westbury, annual value 26s.8d. He and Alice his wife have taken the profits during this time.

July 7, 1402 Westminster
To Robert de Whitington escheator° in Gloucestershire and the march of Wales adjacent. Order to remove the king's hand and meddle no further with a messuage° and one carucate° of land at Leyghie in the parish of Wesebury in the said march called ‘Astone-scourte,’ delivering to William de Aston any issues° thereof taken; as at the malicious suit of certain his enemies, untruly averring that he was an idiot, the premises were seized into the king's hand; but he has appeared in person in chancery, and being there duly examined is found of sound mind and discretion, wherefore by advice of the justices, serjeants at law and others of the council learned in the law it is determined that the king's hand shall be removed.

Christina Goloffre, an “Idiot” who cannot tell Good from Evil° (1404)

Inquisition ex officio. Ilchester. 7 July 1404.
Christina daughter of Thomas Goloffre, son and heir of John Goloffre and Christina his wife, sister and heir of Walter Englyssh, held in her demesne° as of fee i messuage and 24 a. arable and meadow in Ashington of the lady de Sturye of her manor of Ashington by knight service, annual value 10s. She is an idiot from birth, unable to distinguish good from evil and evil from good.°
Endnotes

1 The records, which consist of inquisitions postmortem, letters of patent, letters of close, and a variety of other administrative documents, are held in the British National Archives, mostly in the C series. They are also catalogued in several publications of the British Government, specifically, Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous (Chancery), Henry III–Henry V, 7 vols. HMSO, 1916–2003; Calendar of Inquisitions Postmortem and Other Analogous Documents Preserved in the Public Record Office, 20 vols. HMSO, 1904–70; Calendar of Patent Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office, 1216–1509, 52 vols. HMSO, 1891–1901.


4 fatuorum naturalium in the original


6 sui inmemor in the original


8 discreta in the original.


13 lucidis intervallis in the original.