

Found again — 1421 charter

A 1421 CHARTER confirming the borough status of Cowbridge has come to light after being missing for 300 years.

The charter, which refers to Cowbridge as Longa Villa, was discovered in the office of a Somerset solicitor — but has now been returned to Glamorgan county archivist Mrs Patricia Moore.

"I heard about the charter from my colleague at the Somerset records office towards the end of October," she said. "Thanks to his co-operation I was able to enter into negotiations with the solicitor who had the charter, and I went down to Somerset to bring the charter back to Cardiff.

By Deborah Cole

measures 2ft by just over 2ft and bears the impressive seal of Richard de Beauchamp. It is in very good condition because it was folded into a neat package measuring around 7in by 5in.

"It must have remained like that for centuries and not been exposed to the light," said Mrs Moore. "They had a very good recipe for ink which was long lasting in medieval times. Because this charter has not been exposed to the light and probably has not been looked at, it remains in good condition and probably as bright and clear as it was 562 years ago.

"Although the seal is not completely intact, it still shows the complete coat of arms of Richard de Beauchamp. The charter was given in Cardiff on the first day of May in the ninth year of the reign of Henry V.

"It is very difficult to reconstruct the travelling

of the charter, but quite obviously it went across to Somerset either at the beginning of the 18th Century or late in the 17th Century. Even before that, I think it had slipped from people's view because it is not quoted by antiquarians as some other charters are."

The Glamorgan archives have two other charters, to Neath and Kenfig, which were given on the same day as the Cowbridge one.

Each one begins with Ricardus, but on the Cowbridge charter and one other the initial R has been left out. These three charters were given less than two weeks after Beauchamp's grant of a charter to Cardiff, dated April 20.

The 1421 charter confirms four previous charters dating from 1254 to a 1397 charter given by Richard de Beauchamp's father-in-law, Tomas le Despenser, Lord of Glamorgan and Morgan (Margam).

A 1340 charter given by



● Archivists Mrs Moore and Roger Bettridge with the charter.

Hugh le Despenser, Lord of Glamorgan and Morgan, gives a wide range of liberties to the burgesses in the town of Cowebrugz (Cowbridge).

It says: "They are to enjoy immunities from toll, murage, pontage, panage, terrage, quayage and picage and other customary dues through his lordship in both England and Wales."

In layman's language that means they did not have to pay a tax for the upkeep of the town walls, a toll to cross a bridge, pay their lord for the right to pasture their pigs in his

woods, pay to occupy ground at a fair or market or for the right to break ground to put up a stall. Nor did they have to pay quay dues or the dues levied at markets for the upkeep of roads and bridges.

The archives department will be making as faithful a copy of the 1421 charter as possible, and this will be presented by Sir Cennydd Traherne, chairman of the Glamorgan joint archives committee, to Cowbridge with Llanblethian Community Council.

Bangladesh politics ban

MILITARY authorities last night reimposed a ban on political activity in Bangladesh after street battles between police and demonstrators against martial law killed four people and injured about 400.

Dhaka was also under an indefinite curfew for at least three hours of the day after opposition calls for a general strike over yesterday's violence.

Package

"Cowbridge has a flourishing history society of which I am vice president, an honour I cherish. It made it all the nicer that I could be instrumental in bringing to light something so important to Cowbridge."

The charter, written in Latin on parchment skin,