

Monastic Foundations in the Reign of King Stephen:
The East Anglian Experience

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Abstract

This thesis is a regional study of the impact of the civil war that consumed England during much of King Stephen's reign on the monastic houses of East Anglia, their benefactors and those who, during that period, founded new houses in the region. East Anglia is historically and geographically identified as the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk. The Second Crusade was also an event that influenced founders and benefactors. I have considered to what extent founders reacted to the circumstances that those events threw up and in that context, I have provided an analysis of the religious and secular motives of the founders of six of the ten monastic houses that were founded in East Anglia during the relevant period, these houses being the only ones with an extant cartulary. I have also considered the phenomenon of the increased rate of growth in monastic foundation that occurred during Stephen's reign, outstripping that of Henry I's. East Anglia, however, did not experience such expansion and I analyse the reasons. As regards the impact of the civil war on monastic houses in East Anglia, the extent to which they lost lands and liberties, contemporary accounts have little to say, their emphasis being on the more dramatic events that consumed some houses in other regions of England, such as burnings and occupations. While monastic houses in East Anglia remained free from such violent incidents, it is apparent from the writs emanating from Henry II's chancery directing his sheriffs and officers to right the wrongs suffered by religious houses '*in tempore guerre*' or 'after the death of Henry I', that many of them had suffered loss of lands and liberties. The difficulty they experienced in recovering them during Stephen's reign strongly suggests a breakdown in royal and episcopal justice in the region.

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N. Bennett, 'Religious Houses', in *An Historical Atlas of Lincolnshire*, ed. S. Bennett and N. Bennett, (Hull, 1993), 48-9. By permission of N. Bennett, p. 49.

H. C. Darby, *The Domesday Geography of Eastern England*, Cambridge University Press, (Cambridge 1971), By permission of Cambridge University Press, pp. 53, 113, 117, 167, 173.

P. Northeast, 'Religious Houses', in *An Historical Atlas of Suffolk*, ed. D. Dymond and E. Martin, (Ipswich 1999), 70-1, By permission of Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service, p. 71.

K. Skipper and T. Willaimson, 'Late Saxon Social Structure' in *An Historical Atlas of Norfolk*, 3rd edition, ed. T. Ashwin and A. Davison, (Chichester 2005), pp. 40-1. By permission of I. Ashwin, widow of and heir to T. Ashwin, p. 41.

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Abbreviations

- Ancient Charters* *Ancient Charters Royal and Private, Prior to A. D. 1200*, ed. J. H. Round, Pipe Roll Society 10 (London 1888)
- ANS* *Anglo-Norman Studies*
- ASC* *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, trans. and ed. by M. Swanton (London 2000)
- Blomefield* Francis Blomefield and Charles Parkin, *An Essay Towards a Topographical History of the County of Norfolk*, 2nd ed. (London 1805)
- Book of Fees* *Liber feodorum; The Book of Fees Commonly Called Testa de Nevill*. 3 vols., Public Record Office (London 1920-1931)
- Cal. Ch. R.* *Calendar of the Charter Rolls*
- Cal. C. R.* *Calendar of the Close Rolls*
- Cal. Docs.* *Calendar of Documents preserved in France, illustrative of the history of Great Britain and Ireland, A.D. 918-1206*, ed. J. H. Round (London 1889)
- Cal. I. P. M.* *Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem*
- Cal. Pat.* *Calendar of the Patent Rolls*
- Cartae* *Cartae Baronum*, ns. 62, ed. N. Stacy, Pipe Roll Society (Woodbridge 2019)
- Cart. Binham* *The Cartulary of Binham Priory*, ed. J. Margerum, Norfolk Record Society, vol. 80 (Norwich 2016)
- Cart. Blackborough* BL MS Egerton 3137 Cartulary of Blackborough Priory
- Cart. Colchester* *Cartularium Monasterii Sancti Johannis Baptiste Colecestria*, ed. S. A. Moore, 2 vols. (London 1897)
- Cart. Colne* *Cartularium Prioratus de Colne*, trans. J. L. Fisher (Colchester 1946)
- Cart. Coxford.* *The Chartulary of the Augustinian Priory of Coxford, Co. Norfolk*
- Cart. Eye* *Eye Priory Cartulary and Charters*, 2 vols., ed. V. Brown (Woodbridge 1992,1994)
- Cart. Eynsham* *Cartulary of the Abbey of Eynsham*, ed. H. E. Salter, Oxfordshire Historical Society, 2 vols. (Oxford 1907-1908)
- Cart. Gloucestriae* *Historia et Cartularium Monasterii Sancti Petri Gloucestriae*, 3 vols., ed. W. H. Hart, Rolls Series, 33 (London 1863-1867)
- Cart. Oseney* *Cartulary of Oseney Abbey*, 6 vols., ed. H.E. Salter (Oxford 1929-1936)
- Cart. Ramsey* *Cartularium Monasterii de Rameseia*, ed. W. H. Hart and P. A. Lyons, 3 vols. (London 1884, 1886, 1893)
- Cart. Sibton* *Sibton Abbey Cartularies and Charters*, 4 vols., ed. P. Brown (Woodbridge 1985-1988)

- Cart. Stoke* *Stoke-by-Clare Cartulary: BL Cotton Appx. xxi*, ed. C. Harper-Bill and Richard Mortimer, 3 vols. (Woodbridge 1982-1984)
- Cart. Walsingham Chronicles* *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II, and Richard I*. 4 vols., ed. R. Howlett (London 1884-1889)
- Charters Norwich* *The Charters of Norwich Cathedral Priory*, 2 vols., ed. B. Dodwell, The Pipe Roll Society (London 1974, 1985)
- Chron. Oxenedes* *Chronica Johannis de Oxenedes*, ed. H. Ellis (London 1859)
- Chron. Ramsey* *Chronicon Abbatiae Rameseiensis: a saec. x. usque ad an. circiter 1200, in quatuor partibus*, ed. W. D. MacRay (London 1886)
- Comp. Peer.* *Complete Peerage of England, Scotland, Ireland, Great Britain and the United Kingdom* by G. E. C., rev. ed. 13 vols. in 14 (London 1910-1959)
- CRR* *Curia Regis Rolls of the Reigns of Richard I, John and Henry III*, 20 vols. (London 1922-2006)
- DD* K. S. B. Keats-Rohan, *Domesday Descendants: A Prosopography of Persons Occurring in English Documents 1086–1166. Part II, Pipe Rolls to Cartae Baronum* (Woodbridge 2002)
- DP* K. S. B. Keats-Rohan, *Domesday People: A Prosopography of Persons Occurring in English Documents 1086–1166. Part I, Domesday Book* (Woodbridge 1999)
- Domesday* *Domesday Book: A Survey of the Counties of England, Compiled by the Direction of William I*, ed. J. Morris (Chichester 1983-)
- Domesday Book* *Domesday Book: A Complete Translation*, ed. Ann Williams and G. H. Martin (London 2002)
- EEA* *English Episcopal Acta*
- EYC* *Early Yorkshire Charters*
- Feudal Docs.* *Feudal Documents from the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds*, ed. D. C. Douglas (London 1932)
- First Register* *The First Register of Norwich Cathedral Priory*, trans. H. W. Saunders, Norfolk Record Society (Norwich 1936)
- Gesta Normannorum Ducum* *The Gesta Normannorum Ducum of William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis, and Robert of Torigni*, 2 vols., ed. and trans. E. M. C. Van Houts (Oxford 1992, 1995)
- Gesta Stephani* *Gesta Stephani*, trans. K. R. Potter, online edition (Oxford 2020), available at <https://uea-on-worldcat-org.uea.idm.oclc.org/oclc/1155185649>
- Gesta Regum Anglorum* William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, ed. W. Stubbs, 2 vols. (London 1887-9)
- Harley 2110 MS Harley 2110, Cartulary of Castle Acre Priory

- Historia Anglorum* Henry, Archdeacon of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum: The History of the English People*, ed. and trans. D. Greenway (Oxford 1996)
- Historia Novella* William of Malmesbury: *Historia Novella: The contemporary history*, ed. E. King, trans. K. R. Potter (Oxford 2006)
- Historiens des Gaules* *Recueil des Historiens des Gaules et de la France*, ed. M. Bouquet (Paris 1840)
- Honors* William Farrer, *Honors and Knights Fees*, 3 vols. (Manchester 1923-1925)
- Jessop Augustus Jessop, Transcript of Coxford Priory Cartulary, Norwich, Norfolk Record Office, MS 3201, 4A2
- John of Worcester* *The Chronicle of John of Worcester, Vol. 3: The Annals from 1067 to 1140 with the Gloucester Interpolations and the Continuation to 1141*, ed. and trans. P. McGurk (Oxford 1998)
- LCH* *The Letters and Charters of Henry II, King of England 1154 – 1189*, ed. N. Vincent, 7 vols. (Oxford 2020-25)
- Lewes Cart.* *The Chartulary of the Priory of St. Pancras of Lewes*, 2 vols., ed. L. F. Salzman, Sussex Record Society, vols. 38 and 40 (Lewes 1933 and 1940)
- Liber Eliensis* *Liber Eliensis, A History of the Isle of Ely from the Seventh Century to the Twelfth*, trans. J. Fairweather (Woodbridge 2005)
- Materials* William et al. *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. J. C. Robertson and J. B. Sheppard (London 1875)
- Monasticon* William Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, 6 vols. in 8, ed. J. Caley, H. Ellis and B. Bandinel (London 1817-1830)
- Monmouth* Thomas of Monmouth, *The Life and Miracles of St. William of Norwich*, ed. and trans. A. Jessop and M. R. James (Cambridge 1896)
- Norfolk portion* *The Norfolk portion of the chartulary of the priory of S. Pancras of Lewes*, ed. J. H. Bullock, Norfolk Record Society (Norwich 1939)
- NRO Coxford Norwich, Norfolk Record Office, DN/SUN/8, MC 61/1, and 507X6, Cartulary of Coxford Priory
- ODNB* *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. G. C. M. and B. Harrison (Oxford 2004)
- Orderic* *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, 6 vols. ed. M. Chibnall (Oxford 1968-1980)
- PR* *Pipe Rolls*, published by the Pipe Roll Society
- PR 31 Hen I* *The Great Roll of the Pipe for the Thirty First Year of the Reign of King Henry I, Michaelmas 1130*, Pipe Roll Society, ns, vol. 57, ed. J. A. Green (London 2012)
- Red Book Regesta* *Red Book of the Exchequer*, ed. H. Hall, 3 vols., Rolls Series (London 1886)
- Regesta* *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum*, vol. 2, ed. C. Johnson and H. A. Cronne; vol. 3, ed. H.A. Cronne and R. H. C. Davis (Oxford 1956-1968)

- St Benet* *St Benet of Holme 1020-1210: the eleventh and twelfth century sections of Cott MS. Galba E II, the Register of the Abbey of St Benet of Holme*, ed. J. R. West, Norfolk Record Society, 2 and 3 (Norwich 1932)
- Scaccarii Normanniae* *Magni Rotuli Scaccarii Normanniae sub Regibus Anglia*, 2 vols., ed. T. Stapleton (London 1840-1844)
- Top. Gen. c69 MS Top. Gen. c69, ff 72r to 89r. Cartulary of the priory of the Holy Sepulchre, Thetford
- TRE* *Tempore Regis Edwardi*
- Valor ecclesiasticus* *Valor ecclesiasticus temp. Henr. VIII. auctoritate regia institutus* (2010). Available at: <https://search-auctoritate-regia-institutus>. Available at: <https://search-direct=true&db=e000xww&AN=353056&authtype=sso&custid=s8993828&site=ehost-live>
- VCH* *Victoria History of the Counties of England*, ed. H. A. Doubleday and others (London 1900–)

Part One

Introduction

The Thesis

This thesis will examine the impact on the monastic houses of East Anglia of the civil war that dominated King Stephen's reign. To what extent did they suffer loss of possessions and liberties? How effective was the judicial system in providing a remedy for lands unlawfully seized, customs disrupted, and rights despoiled? Stephen's reign, despite its 'anarchy', or what is perhaps better described as chaos and uncertainty, saw an exponential increase in the number of monastic houses in England. Did East Anglia share in that experience, and if not, what were the factors that inhibited growth or resulted in a slower rate of increase than in other parts of the realm? This thesis will consider the factors that were peculiar to East Anglia and that likely contributed to its emergence as a region of relatively modest monastic expansion between 1135 and 1154. During that period ten monastic houses were founded in the region, of which six have extant cartularies. They are Pentney, said to have been founded *c.* 1130, but I argue early in the reign of King Stephen; Thetford Holy Sepulchre; Rudham, later known as Coxford; Blackborough; Sibton, and Walsingham. What were the motives of the founders of these houses, spiritual and secular, and to what extent were they influenced in their decision to found a religious house by circumstances created by the civil war? Each of those six houses, together with its founding family, will be considered in the light of these questions.

Scholarly studies already exist of the violence and disruption visited upon monastic houses during the civil war, of the rapid growth in the foundation of religious houses during Stephen's

reign, and of at least two of the new East Anglian houses: Sibton and Coxford. There is no shortage of commentaries on the civil war and its impact upon monastic houses, in part because the primary narratives that survive do so in cartularies and chronicles that were written by clerics, lay and regular, who very much focused upon the Church and its fortunes. Except for references to Stephen's efforts to counter Hugh Bigod's martial activities in Suffolk, and Thomas of Monmouth's detailed account of the murder of St William of Norwich, the chroniclers have little to say about events in East Anglia during Stephen's reign, let alone of how monastic houses there were impacted. All of this is reflected in modern accounts where we are hard put to find any reference to disruption specific to East Anglia. Andrew Wareham, for instance, in his paper on the Bigod family, asserted that there was very little despoilation in Norfolk during the civil war, citing as the only example of misappropriation of property the seizure of a knight's fee from the abbey of St Benet at Holme by Hubert de Montchesney.¹ The reality was far different, as my close examination of the evidence will demonstrate. Even so, the idea that East Anglia was a haven of stability and tranquillity during the civil war remains common among historians, reflected in the comment by Stephen Alsford, in his paper on towns as safe havens for unfree serfs, that East Anglia was 'peaceful'.² Jim Bradford relies upon the low level of waste reported for East Anglia in the pipe rolls of Henry II to conclude that there was little disturbance in the

¹ A. Wareham, 'The Motives and Politics of the Bigod Family, c. 1066–1177', in *ANS*, 17 (Woodbridge 1995), 223–242, p. 238.

² S. Alsford, 'Urban Safe Havens for the unfree in Medieval England: A Reconsideration', in *Slavery & Abolition*, 32, issue 3, 363–75, p. 368.

region.³ Others, when considering the impact of the civil war on people or ecclesiastical establishments, hardly if ever mention East Anglia.⁴

In other parts of the realm, the rapid expansion in the foundation of monastic houses that occurred during the reign of King Stephen has attracted widespread notice, not least in studies by David Knowles and Christopher Holdsworth. Both remark the growth of the new orders – the Gilbertines, the Premonstratensians, and by far the most significant, the Cistercians– Knowles analysing this on a county-by-county basis, Holdsworth by diocese. Yet East Anglia obtained only a passing reference from Knowles, and none from Holdsworth.⁵ This thesis undertakes a detailed analysis of monastic foundation in Norfolk and Suffolk, placing it in the context of overall growth across England and Wales.

Lastly, and given that of the houses founded in East Anglia between 1135 and 1154, only Sibton and Rudham/Coxford have been the subject of close analysis, this thesis examines the circumstances surrounding the foundation of the others and seeks to establish what motivated their founders. Both Sibton and Rudham are included as case studies, but my approach there is grounded more on motivation and the circumstances thrown up by the civil war, than on an analysis of the benefactors and their association with the founding family that characterise Phillipa Brown's work on Sibton or H. W. Saunders's on Coxford.⁶ More generally, Tim Pestell's study of the establishment of religious houses in East Anglia covers a substantial

³ J. Bradbury, *Stephen and Matilda: The Civil War of 1139 – 1153* (Stroud 1996), p. 190.

⁴ K. J. Stringer, *The Reign of Stephen, Kingship, Warfare and Government in Twelfth Century England* (London 1993), pp. 4, 86; D. Crouch, *The Reign of King Stephen, 1135 – 1154* (Abingdon 2000), pp. 1-7; D. Matthew, *King Stephen* (London 2002), pp. 123, 127-33, 149, 154, 192-3, 230.

⁵ D. Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England* (Cambridge 1963), pp. 297-8; . Holdsworth, 'The Church', in *The Anarchy of King Stephen's Reign*, ed. E. King (Oxford 1994), 207-30, pp. 216-20.

⁶ *Sibton Abbey Cartularies and Charters*, 4 vols., ed. P. Brown (Woodbridge 1985-1988); H. W. Saunders, 'A History of Coxford Priory', in *Norfolk Archaeology*, xvii (1910), 284-370.

period, c. 650 – 1200. But his thesis is focused on the Anglo-Saxon inheritance, the topographical features that were significant in deciding the location of a house, and the motivations that inspired founding patrons.⁷ Whilst there are various overlaps between my thesis with Pestell’s study as regards motivation, Pestell’s conclusions are more general and do not deal in depth with the motives of the founders active during Stephen’s reign. My study, moreover, is thus far the only such study of the impact of Stephen’s civil war on monastic houses in East Anglia and as a result fills a lacuna in regional studies so far produced. Scholarly works on monasticism and the great families have been produced for Yorkshire, by Janet Burton and Paul Dalton, for the west country, by Judith Green, for Leicester, by David Crouch, for Northamptonshire, by Edmund King, and for the Welsh Cistercians by David H. Williams, while Judith Green has offered a sweeping survey of the counties of England in her essay ‘Financing Stephen’s War’.⁸ Even Christopher Harper-Bill, that doyen of East Anglian monastic studies, in his many works made only passing references to the difficulties that East Anglian houses experienced during the civil war.⁹ In filling a gap, my thesis seeks to shed new light on the founding families, their motives, and the influence of the civil war on their patronage, as well as

⁷ T. Pestell, *Landscapes of Monastic Foundation: The Establishment of Religious Houses in East Anglia c. 650–1200* (Woodbridge 2004), p. 219.

⁸ J. Burton, *The Monastic Order in Yorkshire, 1069-1215* (Cambridge 1999); P. Dalton, *Conquest, Anarchy and Lordship. Yorkshire, 1066-1154* (Cambridge 1994), *Feudal Politics in Yorkshire, 1066-1154* (University of Sheffield 1990), ‘Ecclesiastical Responses to War in King Stephen’s Reign: The Communities of Selby Abbey, Pontefract Abbey and York Cathedral’, in *Cathedrals Communities and Conflict in the Anglo-Norman World*, ed. P. Dalton, Charles L. G. Insley, and L. J. Wilkinson (Woodbridge 2011), 131-50; J. Green, ‘Family Matters: Family and the Formation of the Empress’s Party in South-West England’, in *Family Trees and the Roots of Politics*, ed. K. S. B. Keats-Rohan (Woodbridge 1997), 147-164; D. Crouch, ‘Early Charters and Patrons of Leicester Abbey Appendix: the Charters of Leicester Abbey 1139-1265’, in *Leicester Abbey. Medieval History, Archaeology and Manuscript Studies*, ed. J. E. Story, J. Bourne, and R. Buckley (Leicester 2006), 225-287; E. King, ‘The Foundation of Pipewell Abbey, Northamptonshire’, in *The Haskins Society Journal*, vol.2 (1990), 167-78; D. H. Williams, *The Welsh Cistercians* (Leominster 2014); J. Green, ‘Financing Stephen’s War’, in *ANS*, 14 (Woodbridge 1992), 91-114.

⁹ See for instance, ‘Bishop William Turbe and the diocese of Norwich, 1146-1174’, in *ANS*, vii (Woodbridge 1985), 142-60; ‘Searching for Salvation in Anglo-Norman East Anglia’, in *East Anglia’s History: Studies in Honour of Norman Scarfe*, ed. C. Harper-Bill, C. Rawcliffe, and R. G. Wilson (Woodbridge 2002), 19-40; ‘Battle Abbey and its East Anglian Churches’, in *Studies in Medieval History presented to R. Allen Brown*, ed. C. Harper-Bill, C. J. Holdsworth, and J. L. Nelson (Woodbridge 1989), 159-172.

offering a detailed account and analysis of the impact that the civil war had on the possessions and liberties of East Anglian houses. All of this in tandem with a consideration of the failures in the administration of justice that permitted attacks on monastic property to go unremedied.

East Anglia Defined

East Anglia, the region that is the focus of this thesis, although often taken to include Essex and Cambridgeshire, and sometimes Lincolnshire, can historically be shown to be a geopolitical area delineated by boundaries that approximate to those of the modern counties of Norfolk and Suffolk. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, in its account of the English response to the Danish raids of the early eleventh century, distinguishes East Anglia from both Cambridgeshire and Essex. For example, when the Danish raiding party, led by Swein, came to Norwich in 1004 and burned it down, we are told that Ulfcytel, commander of the East Anglian forces, with the agreement of the *witan*, decided that it would be best to pay off the Danes, ‘before they did too much harm to the country, because they came unexpectedly and he [Ulfcytel] had not had time in which he could gather his army’.¹⁰ The Danes did not honour the agreement and went on to raid and burn Thetford. Ulfcytel gathered his forces and met the Danes in battle in which ‘the chief men of the East Anglian people were killed’.¹¹ In its annal for 1010 the *Chronicle* records that in May the Danish raiding party came to East Anglia and arrived at Ipswich before going on to Ringmere (probably Ringmere near Thetford) to confront Ulfcytel and his army. It goes on to record that ‘the East Anglians immediately fled; then Cambridgeshire firmly stood against [them]’. The

¹⁰ *ASC*, E 1004, p. 135.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 135.

Danes were victorious, they ‘had possession of the place of slaughter,and thereafter had possession of East Anglia’.¹² By 1011, the Danes had wreaked such havoc in the south and east of England that King Æthelred and his counsellors offered to pay them a substantial sum of money on condition that they ceased their raiding. The *Chronicle* reports that the Danes had overrun East Anglia, Essex, Middlesex, Oxfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire, half of Huntingdonshire, Kent, Sussex, Surrey, Berkshire, Hampshire and Wiltshire, here with 'East Anglia' clearly distinguished from other eastern or east-Midland counties.¹³ The earliest reference to Lincolnshire in the *Chronicle* comes from 1016, at a time when that part of England that is now Norfolk and Suffolk was still being referred to as 'East Anglia'.¹⁴ Lucy Marten points out that the extant recensions of the *Chronicle* for the period 983 – 1016 derive from a version probably written in London between 1016 and 1023, so we can be confident that these are contemporary geographical references.¹⁵ What the *Chronicle* makes clear is that East Anglia was a separate region of the east of England, distinct from the counties of Cambridgeshire, Lincolnshire, or Essex, its eastern, northern, and southern neighbours, with its major towns identified as Norwich, Thetford, and Ipswich. Whilst the names of counties familiar to us are listed when detailing the destructive course of the Danish raiders, the shires of Norfolk and Suffolk are conspicuous by their absence. Instead, it is East Anglia that is referred to: the geopolitical region within which these two counties lie. It is only when we reach 1075 that the *Chronicle* first refers to 'Norfolk' and 'Suffolk'. Here it tells us that King William gave the son of Ralph [the Staller] the earldom of Norfolk and Suffolk.¹⁶ Marten suggests that it was Cnut

¹² *ASC*, E 1010, p. 140.

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 141.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 1016, pp. 148-9.

¹⁵ L. Marten, ‘The Shiring of East Anglia: an alternative hypothesis’, in *Historical Research*, 81, issue 211, (February 2008), 1–27, p. 15.

¹⁶ *ASC*, E 1075; D 1076, p. 210.

who first shired East Anglia into the constituent parts of Norfolk and Suffolk, as an aspect of his administrative, political and religious reforms.¹⁷ Thus, the earliest authentic references to Norfolk and Suffolk are to be found in the will of Thurston, son of Wine, devised between 1043 and 1045. The testator held lands in Cambridgeshire, Essex, Norfolk, and Suffolk.¹⁸ Certainly, we find frequent references in the charters of Edward the Confessor to his thegns of Norfolk and Suffolk, and in one a specific reference to the sheriffs of Suffolk and Norfolk (‘Edward cyninge gret Ægelmar biscop and Ælfgar and ealle mine ðegnas and sciregerefan on Suthfolce and on Norðfolce’)¹⁹ That East Anglia was henceforth identified with the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk is perhaps reflected in the history of Henry of Huntingdon, writing in the middle of the twelfth century, referring to Hugh Bigod as Earl Hugh of East Anglia (‘Hugo consul de Estangle’) when suggesting that he was earl of Norfolk by the time of the battle of Lincoln in 1141.²⁰ Robert of Torigny, composing his narrative at the abbey of Bec in the mid twelfth century, was in no doubt over the geopolitical identity of East Anglia, composed of the provinces of Norfolk and Suffolk. Thus, he writes of ‘Eastangle, in quo sunt provincie que vocantur Nordfolc et Sudfolc’.²¹

The diocese of East Anglia, originally established c.630 at Dunwich, Suffolk, was in 672 divided, with the foundation of a second see at North Elmham in Norfolk.²² North Elmham then became the single seat of the bishopric, around the middle of the tenth century. With the advent of the Normans, the see was moved to Thetford by the first Norman bishop, Herfast, where it

¹⁷ Marten, 2008, p. 17.

¹⁸ C. R. Hart, *The Early Charters of Eastern England* (Leicester 1966), p. 50, no. 72, p. 70, no. 72, p. 85, no. 72; *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, trans. and ed. D. Whitelock (Cambridge 2011), p. 80, no. XXI; S1531

¹⁹ *Anglo-Saxon Writs*, ed F. E. Harmer (Manchester 1952), nos. 8, 15-18, 20-2, 24, 60, 61, 80.

²⁰ *Historia Anglorum*, p. 737.

²¹ *The Chronography of Robert of Torigni*, 2 vols. ed. and trans. T. N. Bisson (Oxford 2020), i, pp. 28-9.

²² *EEA*, vi, p. xxvi.

remained until translated to Norwich in 1096 by Bishop Herbert de Losinga. The diocese comprised the two counties of Norfolk and Suffolk, and a group of parishes in the half hundred of Exning in Cambridgeshire, itself now part of Suffolk.²³ East Anglia, therefore, both as a secular and an ecclesiastical polity was, by 1066, defined by the two counties of Norfolk and Suffolk. As a result, a study of the region's religious patronage has the advantages of both geographical and historical integrity.

The Sources

The chroniclers of Stephen's reign appear largely to have ignored East Anglia. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which in its Peterborough version records events through to the 1140s, has only three references to events in East Anglia later than 1017, namely the appointment in 1075 of the son of Ralph the Staller as earl of Norfolk and Suffolk (previously referred to), Henry I's visit to Norwich in 1121/2, and the murder of St William of Norwich, wrongly (but intriguingly) dated to 1137.²⁴ Given the importance of the region, economically and politically, and its strategic significance in the face of invasion from the western seaboard of the Continent, from Denmark in particular, this is to say the least surprising. After all, it was William I's fear of an attack from Denmark that in 1075 caused him to write to Archbishop Lanfranc, ordering him to place the east coast in a state of defence.²⁵ Of East Anglian monastic houses, only Norwich Cathedral Priory, St Benet of Holme, and the abbey of Bury St Edmunds produced any sort of chronicle material that has survived. Bury's output, at least to judge from what has come down to us, was

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ ASC, E, pp. 210, 250, 265.

²⁵ D. C. Douglas, *William the Conqueror* (London 1999), p. 233.

largely focused on the abbey's origins in the passion of St Edmund, King and Martyr, the miracles of St Edmund, and the life and works of its abbots, chief amongst them Abbot Samson, whose abbacy was chronicled by Jocelin of Brakelond and commences with the year 1173.²⁶ It is not from the annals of Bury St Edmunds that we learn of the plundering of the abbey's lands by Eustace, son and heir of King Stephen, in August 1153, but from writers such as John of Salisbury and Gervase of Canterbury, the latter writing at the end of the twelfth century.²⁷ The cathedral priory of Norwich produced eleven registers of which only the first is of foremost significance for events that occurred locally during King Stephen's reign. The other registers contain transcripts of royal, episcopal, and private charters and grants to the priory (Register II), an account of the rights and liberties of the prior, a calendar or chronicle of events in Norwich for the years 1399-1451, charters of English kings from William II to Henry IV, and confirmation charters and grants of bishops (Register III). Other registers contain further copies of the transcripts of episcopal grants, (IV), the cellarer's records (V), the chamberlain's record (VI), papal bulls (VII), deeds (VIII, IV, and XI), and the Sacrist's Register (X). The *First Register* provides us with an account of the foundation of the cathedral priory by Herbert de Losinga, mentioning the other great churches that he founded at St Nicholas in Yarmouth and St Margaret in (King's) Lynn.²⁸ Despite the chronicler's location in Norwich, there is little on events in the secular sphere of Norwich or across East Anglia more generally, with the narrative firmly centred on the history of the cathedral priory and its bishops. Even so, in the course of a description of Bishop Everard's episcopacy we are told of Everard's concern about the civil war

²⁶ See *Memorials of St Edmunds Abbey*, ed. T. Arnold (London 1890), which contains *The Passion of St Edmund*, by Abbo of Fleury, *The Miracles of St Edmund* by Herman the Archdeacon, Abbot Samson's work on the same theme and Jocelin of Brakelond's *Chronicle of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds*.

²⁷ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, trans. J. Dickenson (New York 1927), pp. 392-3; Gervase of Canterbury, *The Chronicle of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II, and Richard I*, 2 vols., ed. W. Stubbs (London 1879-80), p. 155.

²⁸ *First Register*, pp. 25, 33, 35.

that had blighted England, and the action that he took in giving away two episcopal villas to two powerful knights, in the hope of saving the rest from plunder. This supplies one of the few references we have to suggest that Norfolk suffered from the attacks of acquisitive barons during the civil war.²⁹ Bartholomew Cotton, a monk of the priory, (d. ?1322) was probably the author of the *First Register*, and certainly of a distinct chronicle, his *Historia Anglicana*, edited by Henry Luard and published in 1859 as a volume in the *Rolls Series*. The work comprises three books, the first being a history of Britain copied from Geoffrey of Monmouth, not included in Luard's edition; the second, a history of England in two parts, the first running from 455 to 1066 and the second from 1066 to 1298; the third a history of the archbishops and bishops of England. Much of what Cotton writes of the twelfth century, including of King Stephen's reign, he acquired from Roger of Wendover and Matthew Paris, with Cotton's originality confined to his account of the years 1264 to 1291.³⁰ Cotton's account of King Stephen's reign, meanwhile, is brief and highlights the main events including the Battle of the Standard, the arrival in England of Empress Matilda and Robert of Gloucester, and Stephen's capture at the Battle of Lincoln. Apart from recording the deaths of Elias, the prior of Norwich, Everard, the bishop of Norwich, and the appointment of William Turbe as Everard's successor, the only other Norwich-centered event mentioned by him is the death of the boy St William, said to have occurred at the hands of the city's Jews.³¹ Bartholomew Cotton, therefore, is of little assistance in our reconstruction of events in East Anglia during the reign of King Stephen.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 71.

³⁰ A. Gransden, 'Cotton, Bartholomew (d. 1321/2), chronicler and Benedictine monk', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 23 Sep. 2004; Accessed 3 Jul. 2024.
<https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-6409>.

³¹ Bartholomaei de Cotton, *Historian Anglicana, (A.D. 499 – 1298)*, ed. H. R. Luard (London 1859), pp. 63-7.

Nor does John of Oxenedes, (d. c. 1293), believed to be a monk of the abbey of St Benet of Holme, provide us with much further help. In recounting the events of the years from 1135 to 1154, he paints with a broad brush and with little local detail. Of matters that drew his attention to East Anglia, beyond his routine reporting of the deaths and appointments of various prelates, he mentions the murder of St William by the Jews of Norwich with the added detail that William had been crucified.³² John also calls our attention to the founding of Sibton Abbey by William de Chesney, whom he incorrectly describes as the son of Walter de Caen ('Willelmus de Cheneye filio de Walteri de Can'). In reality, William was the son of Robert fitz Walter, and therefore, Walter de Caen's grandson. John dated the foundation to 1148.³³ Clearly the murder of St William at Easter 1144 was a seminal event, not least for suggesting that a current of lawlessness existed in the city. Yet, as the more detailed account by Thomas of Monmouth underlines, John de Chesney, then sheriff of Norfolk, clearly exercised a firm grip over the city, where he was able to quell the threatened disruption, protect the city's Jews and impose his will over the ecclesiastical synod called to judge and condemn the city's Jews for the boy's murder, albeit that it might have taken a bribe from the Jewish community before he would act.³⁴ Thomas's narrative supplies evidence of the power that John the sheriff wielded, as a man to be feared: 'And so the earnestness of their devout fervour was urging all to destroy the Jews, and they would there and then have laid hands upon them, but that, restrained by fear of the sheriff John, they kept quiet for a while'.³⁵ It also provides us with an example of the lawlessness that raged in the countryside, with Thomas's account of the murder of the Jew Eleazar in 1146, allegedly at the hands of the men of the knight Simon de Noyers (*Nodariis*), a major debtor to his Jewish

³² *Chron. Oxenedes*, p. 53.

³³ *Ibid*, p. 54.

³⁴ N. Vincent, *A Brief History of Britain, 1066–1485* (London 2011), p. 167.

³⁵ *Monmouth*, pp. 36-7.

victim.³⁶ However, the value of Thomas of Monmouth's account as a source for events elsewhere in East Anglia during the reign of King Stephen is limited by Thomas's focus on the life, death and miracles of his central character, the boy St William.

John of Worcester's chronicle, a continuation of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* which extends only to 1141, whilst providing evidence elsewhere of disruption, damage to cities and of the desecration of monastic houses, has nothing to say of events in East Anglia. Similarly, the chronicles written by William of Malmesbury, Orderic Vitalis, Matthew Paris, and the *Gesta Stephani*, all of which supply accounts in whole or in part of Stephen's reign, are equally unhelpful as regards events east of the river Cam. The *Gesta Stephani*, of course, supplies an account of Stephen's efforts to rein in the territorial ambitions of Hugh Bigod in Suffolk,³⁷ and here we also learn of the failed attempt by Turgis d'Avranches to set himself up as lord of (Saffron) Walden. Turgis, placed in charge of Walden castle after the fall of Geoffrey de Mandeville, sought to transform his custody of the castle into direct territorial lordship. Having been captured by Stephen and threatened with hanging before the castle gate, Turgis surrendered the fortress.³⁸ Even so, here and elsewhere, there is no mention of Norwich, or of Norfolk and Suffolk generally, so that whatever might have happened in East Anglia beyond the deeds of Hugh Bigod and Turgis d'Avranches went unrecorded by the author of the *Gesta Stephani*. Robert of Torigny has even less to report of events in East Anglia during Stephen's reign, mentioning only Hugh Bigod's seizure of Norwich castle in 1136.³⁹ Interestingly, like Henry of

³⁶ Ibid, pp. 97-9.

³⁷ *Gesta Stephani*, pp. 166, 174, 222, 236.

³⁸ Ibid, pp. 174-6.

³⁹ *Chronicles*, p. 129.

Huntingdon, in his account of the battle of Lincoln, he styles Hugh Bigod, not as earl of Norfolk but as *consul de Estangles*.⁴⁰

This paucity of chronicle sources for East Anglian events perhaps reflects the rarity of any royal visits to the region. If the charter evidence can be relied upon, King Henry I is recorded as having visited Norwich on only three occasions, in 1104/6, 1109,⁴¹ and at Christmas 1121 when in the company of his new wife, Adeliza of Louvain, he lodged at the recently completed Norwich Castle.⁴² King Stephen seems to have been equally niggardly in his visits to Norfolk. The editors of the *Regesta*, in their attempt to reconstruct his itinerary, place him in Norwich in April 1136, May 1140, and April 1144.⁴³ Stephen's reported visits to Suffolk, meanwhile, coincided with serious threats to royal authority and will be considered later. Royal reluctance to visit East Anglia might be explained by the absence of prime hunting grounds, there being little, if anything, by way of royal forest in the region, by stark contrast to Essex, which was a county almost entirely placed under forest law. As regards Norfolk, perhaps of greater significance was the lack of safe accommodation on the road to the county, several days' journey from Westminster. The only royal castle in the county was the fortress at Norwich. In Suffolk, Stephen would have been able to stay at the abbey of Bury St Edmunds or at his castle of Eye. But after Eye, there was no staging post until Norwich itself.

Indications that East Anglia suffered during Stephen's reign can be gleaned from the early Pipe Rolls of Henry II's reign. Royal revenues for Norfolk and Suffolk from the shire farms were just under £600 for the 31st year of Henry I's reign, but hardly exceeded £300 in any of the years

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 140.

⁴¹ *Regesta*, ii, nos. 659, 661, 786-7, 875-6.

⁴² *ASC*, p.250.

⁴³ *Regesta*, iii, pp. xxxiv-xliv.

from 1155 to 1157. Some of this reduction in revenue is accounted for by alienation of the royal demesne. In particular, John de Chesney and his brother, William de Chesney, who succeeded John as sheriff of Norfolk, benefitted from Stephen's largesse. Stephen undoubtedly sought to ensure the support of this important regional family and provided John with the manor of Blythborough, valued in 1086 at £25 10s, together with the king's sheepfold for 1,000 sheep between Norwich and Yarmouth, and the king's demesne marsh pertaining to the sheepfold.⁴⁴ Stephen, however, was even more generous to John's brother William, who received the manors of Acle, Hingham, Stow Bedon and Rackheath, as well as the royal hundreds of Forehoe and Taverham.⁴⁵ Their respective values in 1086 were, £14 13s 2d, £12, £14, and £3. Bury St Edmunds received the royal manor of Beccles, valued in 1086 at £27, and the hundred of Stow, while St Benet of Hume was given the hundreds and the hundred courts of Happing and Flegg.⁴⁶ While such depletion of royal demesne would have reduced the revenue of the county farm, it is unlikely to have accounted for the full loss of £300, which at the very least points to a disruption in the administration of the counties during Stephen's reign, leading to a significant decline in income. It was only in 1158 that annual revenues returned to pre-war totals, for the first time exceeding £700.⁴⁷

Much of the evidence for disruption and illegal seizures in East Anglia has to be gleaned from the charters of Henry II, now collected in seven volumes with a comprehensive index.⁴⁸ Only a few tell us of events specifically assigned *tempore guerre*, although other phrases used, such as

⁴⁴ Ibid, nos. 174-5.

⁴⁵ Ibid, nos. 176-7.

⁴⁶ Ibid, nos. 758-9, 767 for Bury St Edmunds, no. 402 for St. Benet of Holme.

⁴⁷ G. White, *Restoration and Reform, 1153–1165: Recovery from Civil War in England* (Cambridge 2000), pp. 34-5, 223; *P R 2 Henry II*, 6-10; *P R 3 Henry II*, 75-6; *P R 4 Henry II*, 125-31.

⁴⁸ *The Letters and Charters of Henry II, King of England 1154–1189*, 7 vols., ed. N. Vincent (Oxford 2020).

‘since the death of Henry I’, make it clear that whatever mischief was the subject of a charter or writ had occurred during King Stephen’s reign. Nor can we date many of these charters to anything but a broad span of years, in many cases making it impossible to establish whether any particular charter was issued at the very beginning of the reign, or rather later. However, those of Henry’s charters that are directed to his sheriffs, to the bishop of Norwich, and others, ordering them to ensure that lands be returned, or to restore privileges and liberties, of which for East Anglia there are at least 60, do suggest that there were those in the region who had sought to take advantage of the disruption and chaos of civil war. Part of the explanation here is that there was a wider breakdown in the administration of justice in East Anglia during Stephen’s reign, which encouraged frustrated litigants to resort to self-help. In support of this conclusion, one of the registers of Bury St Edmunds contains a report of a shire-moot in Norwich that had been called by Stephen *c.* 1150 and which met in the bishop’s garden, with William Martel, the king’s steward, acting as royal justice (or more likely as local, regional ‘justiciar’). At the meeting, Hervey de Glanville is recorded as telling the assembly that he, and his father before him, had constantly attended the county and hundred court for above 50 years, and that while in the reign of King Henry ‘justice and equity, peace and fidelity, flourished in England, justice and the law were now silenced by war’. Given that this was a shire-moot meeting in Norwich, Hervey intended his remarks to apply in particular to East Anglia.⁴⁹

It is to the charters, also, that we must look for firm evidence of genealogies, estate ownership, affiliations, disputes, motives, clues as to local power relationships, and much more. Royal and episcopal charters are equally significant in that regard. Of importance for King Stephen’s reign

⁴⁹ Cambridge University Library, MS Ff.2.29, f. 60; H. M. Cam., ‘An East Anglian Shire-Moot of Stephen’s reign, 1148 – 1153’, *EHR*, 39, no. 156 (Oct. 1924), 568-71. A translation is published in Blomefield, 3 (i), pp. 28-9.

are those collected in the two volumes of *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum, 1066–1154* for Henry I and King Stephen respectively. Reference has already been made to Vincent's *Letters and Charters of Henry II*. All three works are invaluable in providing insight to the workings of royal administration, evidence of events, both secular and spiritual, the identities of royal officials, information on the king's court, spheres of influence, and territorial domination, with the latter of particular relevance to Stephen's reign. Episcopal charters for East Anglia, published in the two volumes of the *Charters of Norwich Cathedral Priory* and by Christopher Harper-Bill for *English Episcopal Acta VI*, for the diocese of Norwich, are likewise crucial for understanding the relationship between the spiritual and secular powers, for our insight into events that impacted monastic lands, liberties and privileges, for information on episcopal land holdings, donors, and for material relating to monastic foundation across the diocese.

The charter collections of the religious houses that are the subjects of case studies in this thesis are likewise significant. It is through these that we are able to distinguish motives, to identify followers and affiliations from the witness lists where available, to determine marital relationships and their relevance and significance for landholdings, and to establish genealogical descents, and the royal and baronial allegiances of our various monastic founders. This thesis centres on only those of the monastic houses founded in East Anglia during Stephen's reign for which there exists a cartulary or a collection of charters sufficiently large for us to delve into motives or circumstances. For instance, a major collection of charters for the priory of the Holy Sepulchre, Thetford, founded by William III de Warenne was re-discovered by Hugh Doherty only recently as part of the previously neglected manuscript Oxford, Bodleian Library Top. Gen. c.69 (ff. 72r – 89r). The charters remain for the most part unpublished, with those referred to in

this thesis set out in Appendix I. Dugdale, in his account of the priory published only a charter of John earl Warenne (1304-1347), confirming the grants of his ancestors to the monks. John's charter nonetheless incorporates three charters of William III de Warenne, the founder, including William's foundation charter, two issued by Hamelin, earl of Warenne, who succeeded William III de Warenne, and one charter of William V de Warenne, son and heir of Hamelin. All these charters appear in Top. Gen. c.69. Nicholas Vincent has published the only charter here issued by Henry II.⁵⁰ It goes almost without saying that the cartularies of other religious houses, both in East Anglia and elsewhere, remain important sources. There are too many of these to cite all here by name, but amongst the most crucial for the present investigation are the cartularies of the Warenne foundations at Castle Acre and Lewes in Surrey.⁵¹ The Warennes were one of the most important baronial families in East Anglia during our period, and their charters are thus of significance for demonstrating the region's lordly and knightly affiliations, land ownership, family hierarchies, and local loyalties.

⁵⁰ *Monasticon*, 6, part 2, pp. 729-30; *LCH*, v, no. 2601.

⁵¹ Harley 2110; *Lewes Cart*.

Chapter 1

The ‘Anarchy’ in East Anglia

Robert of Torigni wrote of Henry I:

‘The wise king surpassed almost all other princes of his time in both clemency and wealth. By his clemency he endowed churches, monasteries and the poor people of his land. By his infinite abundance of wealth he maintained many hundreds of soldiers in various places near his enemies, who, by force of arms prevented these people from robbing churches and the poor’.⁵²

These words, one might be tempted to suppose, were a barb directed deliberately against King Stephen who followed Henry I, contrasting Henry’s peaceful reign with that of King Stephen, to the latter’s grave detriment, and thereby blaming Stephen for the depredation and desecration of churches and church property. And no doubt that was what Robert intended, for he was hardly an independent observer, writing, as he did, during the reign of Henry II, who considered Stephen a usurper, and who only rarely referred to his predecessor as king. Robert, himself, was stalwart in his support for Empress Matilda’s claim to the crown of England, and in his *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, always referred to her as her father’s heir. Moreover, the abbey of Bec,

⁵² *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, ii, pp. 236-37.

which Robert entered as a monk in 1128, and of which he became prior *c.* 1149, was much patronised by Henry I and his daughter, the empress, of both of whom Robert wrote in glowing terms.⁵³

Chroniclers wrote much of the suffering that the population and the Church endured during the civil war that characterised Stephen's reign, popularly known as the 'Anarchy', and which lasted, with varying degrees of intensity for most of Stephen's nineteen-year reign. The Peterborough continuator of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* offers a harrowing account of those times, famously concluding his narrative as follows:

'Wretched men starved with hunger; some who were once powerful men went on alms; some fled out of the land. Never before was there more wretchedness in the land, nor ever did heathen men worse than they did. Too many times they spared neither church nor churchyard, but took everything of value that was in it, and afterwards burned the church and everything together. They did not spare the land of bishops nor of abbots nor of priests, but robbed monks and clerks..... Wherever men tilled, the earth bore no corn because the land was all done for by such things, and they said openly that Christ and His Saints slept'.⁵⁴

The chronicler paints an apocalyptic picture, almost worthy of the art of Hieronymus Bosch. And although he gives no specific examples, names no church that was burned, no abbey that lost lands, and fails to indict anyone by name for carrying out the dreadful acts that he recounts, other

⁵³ *Ibid*, pp. 245-7, 252-7.

⁵⁴ *ASC*, pp. 264 -5.

chroniclers supply such details, leaving no doubt that the Peterborough chronicler did not overstate reality.⁵⁵

To what extent did the Peterborough chronicler's description apply to East Anglia? In Suffolk the lands of the abbey of Bury St Edmunds came under attack, and in many cases the abbot and monks had to await the accession of Henry II before they were able to recover lands and liberties. A notification issued by Henry II at the very beginning of his reign, restoring to the abbey of Bury St Edmunds the manors of Coney Weston and Chippenhall, both in Suffolk, and other demesne manors taken from the monks since the death of King Henry I, suggests that the abbey had lost considerable estates during Stephen's reign.⁵⁶ Hugh Bigod was the subject of a mandate from Henry II ordering him to render the service at Norwich castle that he owed for the fee he held of the abbey. Vincent dates the mandate to early in Henry's reign.⁵⁷ Hugh was obliged to provide a guard of three knights at Norwich castle.⁵⁸ Undoubtedly this he had failed to do during some, if not all of Stephen's reign. Other evidence that there was disruption and disorder in Suffolk is to be found in a mandate issued to Abbot Hugh of Bury, ordering him to ensure Berard's possession of the land of Whelnetham, Suffolk, as granted by William of Sapiston, again dated to the early years of the reign.⁵⁹ That the writ promised that if Hugh did not

⁵⁵ For examples of the destruction and depredations to monastic houses caused throughout England during the civil war, see H. M. Thomas, 'Violent Disorder in King Stephen's England: A Maximum Argument', in *King Stephen's Reign, (1135 – 1154)*, ed. P. Dalton and G. J. White (Woodbridge 2008), 139-70; *John of Worcester*, iii, p. 277; D. Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge 1963), p. 269; *Chronicon Monasterii de Evesham ad annum 1418*, ed. H. T. Riley, Rolls Series (London 1863), pp. 100, 271; *The Letters and Charters of Gilbert Foliot*, ed. Z. N. Brooke, A. Morey, and C. Brooke (Cambridge 1967), p. 38, no. 3; *Chron. Oxenedes*, p. 48; *Chron. Ramsey*, p. 329; *Gesta Stephani*, p.165; *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, ii, p. 581; *The Letters of John of Salisbury, Volume One: The Early Letters (1153 – 1161)*, ed. W. J. Millor, S. J. and H. E. Butler (London 1955), pp. 37-41, nos. 23-4, pp. 258-61; R. Eales, 'Local Loyalties in Norman England: Kent in Stephen's Reign', in *ANS*, viii (Woodbridge 1986), 88-108, p. 101; *Cal. Docs.*, no. 1327.

⁵⁶ *LCH*, i, no. 363.

⁵⁷ *LCH*, i, no. 366.

⁵⁸ *Red Book*, i, p. 394.

⁵⁹ *LCH*, i, no. 379

do as ordered then the sheriff or the king's justices would, suggests that it was the abbot's own officers who were interfering with Berard's possession of the manor. A mandate in similar terms was issued by Henry II some time between 1155 and March 1166, directing the abbot to ensure the abbot of Ramsey his possession of his land at Lawshall, Suffolk, recorded as being held by Ramsey in 1086 and valued at £12.⁶⁰ Again, a threat of enforcement by the sheriff or the king's justices is included in the writ, perhaps indicating that, again it was the abbot's officers who were the culprits, and therefore that the abbot needed to curb their unlawful actions.⁶¹ Another writ issued by Henry II at around the same time was directed to the sheriff of Suffolk concerning the vill and the men of Lawshall. The writ ordered the sheriff to ensure quittance for the men and vill from shires, hundreds and pleas, and all other suits except murder and robbery. This exemption had first been granted by Henry I c. 1106 in writs addressed to Roger Bigod and Robert, abbot of St Edmunds.⁶² The fact of Henry's writ suggests that the sheriff or other officers were requiring the men of the vill improperly to submit to the shire and hundred courts, thus usurping the jurisdiction of the abbot of Ramsey. Ramsey appears to have suffered a loss of jurisdiction during Stephen's reign in west Norfolk where the abbey had judicial control over the hundred court of Clackclose. According to a writ issued by King Stephen, which can be dated only within the limits of his reign, he ordered the men of the hundred of Clackclose to attend the hundred court when summoned by the abbot.⁶³ Further evidence of a breakdown in royal justice in the region might be found in King Stephen's writ directed to the bishop of Norwich, his justices, sheriffs, ministers and barons of Norfolk and Suffolk, commanding that the abbot and monks of Ramsey were to hold their demesne lands of Ringstead and Holme, both in Norfolk, and were

⁶⁰ *Domesday Suffolk*, ii, 17:1.

⁶¹ *LCH*, iv, no. 2137.

⁶² *Ibid*, iv, no. 2130; *Regesta*, ii, nos.738-9.

⁶³ *Regesta*, iii, no. 668.

not to be impleaded except in the king's court. The monks had complained that suit had been taken against them by Gilbert fitz Wido, presumably before the hundred or shire court, or perhaps the court of the bishop. The liberty had been granted to the abbey by Henry I by charter issued 1109 X 1111. It was by the same charter that the abbot had been granted jurisdiction over the hundred court of Clackclose.⁶⁴ Even so, the abbot's right of wreck in Brancaster and all his other customs in Brancaster and Ringstead continued to be threatened, necessitating an appeal to Henry II, who issued a writ addressed generally, commanding that the abbot be permitted to enjoy all his customs there as his ancestors had done before him.⁶⁵

Reference has previously been made to the shire-moot that was held *c.* 1150 in the garden of the bishop of Norwich, before William Malet acting as the king's justiciar. Also present were Nigel, bishop of Ely, William, bishop of Norwich, Abbot Ording of Bury St Edmunds, Daniel, abbot of St Benet of Holme, and several of the chief men of the region. The assembly heard a complaint of treasonous behaviour by two knights, Ralph of Halsted and Roger, his brother, said to have occurred at the siege of Bedford early in 1146, accusing them of plotting to deliver the king to his enemies or to murder him. Both Ralph and Roger were knights of Bury St Edmunds, as the abbot made clear when he rose to his feet to defend the abbey's right to try them. This suggests that, in the heart of Suffolk, besides a coterie of knightly tenants of the abbot, himself a supporter of the king, there were nonetheless various others who sought to challenge Stephen's right to rule. The report tells us that the matter was subsequently heard before the abbot's court and that

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, no. 670; *Cart. Ramsey*, i, p. 241

⁶⁵ *LCH*, iv, no. 2120.

both knights were pardoned by Stephen.⁶⁶ Ralph of Halstead appears in the survey of 1166 holding a single knight's fee of the abbot.⁶⁷

The abbey had interests outside East Anglia which also came under attack. That is suggested by another mandate issued by Henry II and datable between December 1154 and August 1158, by which he ordered his barons, sheriffs, and others through whose lands and bailiwicks the ships of Bury carried stone, to ensure the peace of such ships and the abbey's men who carried or dug such cargoes.⁶⁸ Royal protection for the ships and for the men, who carried and quarried the abbey's stone, had originally been granted by Henry I c. 1132.⁶⁹ The abbey used stone quarried from Barnack, as suggested by a charter issued by Abbot Alexander (1222-6), confirming a grant by William son of Reginald of a rood in Castor (then in Northamptonshire, now in Cambridgeshire), and rights of passage to transport the abbey's stone from the quarry in Barnack by road and the river Nene to Peterborough.⁷⁰ Historically, Barnack lay in Northamptonshire as part of the Soke of Peterborough. Stone would have been taken by cart to Castor and then loaded on to flat-bottomed boats and shipped along the river Nene, joining the Great Ouse at Wisbech where it douched into the Wash until in the early thirteenth century the Nene was diverted and joined the Wash at Lynn. From the Great Ouse it was possible to sail to the River Lark, and thence to Bury's manor of Mildenhall. If the Lark was not navigable from there to Bury St Edmunds the stone would have been taken by cart for the rest of the journey, some twelve miles. The route passed through the lands of the abbeys of Peterborough, Ramsey, and Crowland, all of

⁶⁶ Cambridge University Library, MS Ff.2.29, f. 60. Printed in Cam, 1924.

⁶⁷ *Red Book*, i, p. 393.

⁶⁸ *LCH*, i, no. 360.

⁶⁹ *Regesta*, ii, no. 1733.

⁷⁰ *Carte Nativorum, A Peterborough Abbey Cartulary of the Fourteenth Century*, ed. C. N. L. Brooke and M. M. Postan, Northampton Record Society 20 (Oxford 1960), p. 193, no. 533. See A. Gransden's account of the use of Barnack stone in the construction of several religious buildings in the east of England in her *A History of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds, 1182 – 1256* (Woodbridge 2007), pp. 230-1.

which suffered depredations of lands and possessions during the civil war.⁷¹ It would appear that St Edmunds's barges and quarrymen were being subjected to interference from those seeking to take advantage of the disruption of civil war. Henry II's writ, however, was not addressed to the royal officials of a particular county but more generally. The route taken to Bury would have passed through Northamptonshire, Cambridgeshire, Norfolk, and Suffolk, so the problems afflicting the quarrying of the stone and its passage to Bury St Edmunds may have been endemic to all four counties.

Belvoir Priory, in Rutland, was the subject of a mandate issued by Henry II to Hugh Bigod, earl of Norfolk, to restore to the abbey certain of its possessions in Suffolk of which it had been unjustly disseised. These are named as Mells, Bradley, Syleham, and Yoxford.⁷² Perhaps of equal significance, Sibton Abbey, founded by William de Chesney, and supported by King Stephen, also held lands at Yoxford, granted to the abbey by William on its foundation. Henry's writ was addressed to Hugh Bigod, and to him alone, apparently to him in his personal capacity as an order that he restore to the abbey possessions that he himself had misappropriated. That is apparent from the threat contained in the writ that if Hugh Bigod did not act then 'the king's justiciar/justices will cause it to be done, that he [King Henry II] may hear no more complaint concerning it for want of justice'. Vincent dates the writ between 1155 and August 1158.

Concurrent with this was an episcopal settlement brokered by Theobald, archbishop of Canterbury, and Richard, bishop of London, between Belvoir Priory and the Bigod foundation of St Mary's, Thetford, concerning a dispute over the demesne tithes of Mells, Bradley, Syleham,

⁷¹ See E. G. Birney, *The Fenland Monasteries During the Reign of King Stephen*, unpublished PhD thesis (University of St. Andrews 2019).

⁷² *LCH*, i, no. 205.

and Yoxford.⁷³ Under the settlement the monks of Belvoir were to have two-thirds of the tithes of Bradley and Yoxford, and the monks of Thetford the same from Mells. The tithes of Syleham were to be divided equally, ‘if they can be acquired’. That caveat would suggest that at least Syleham had yet to be returned, if not the other three. The misappropriation of tithes had a long history. In 1086 all four manors had been in the hands of Robert de Tosny, lord of Belvoir.⁷⁴ It seems that he gave the tithes of the manors to his foundation, at Belvoir Priory, established *c.* 1076, as a cell of St Albans.⁷⁵ Robert’s daughter, Alice, married Roger Bigod, Hugh’s father, and served as her father’s heir for his lordship of Belvoir, following the death of her elder sister, Albreda, without issue before 1129.⁷⁶ Upon entering her inheritance, Alice appears to have disseised the monks of Belvoir of lands and tithes given by her father, as appears from a writ issued by Henry I commanding her to re-seise the monks of Belvoir, ‘especially at Bradley, and the other lands her father gave them’. Notwithstanding Henry I’s writ and a writ in similar terms issued by King Stephen, dateable to some point between 1136 and 1140, Alice continued to refuse to restore Belvoir’s lands and spiritualities. Nor was Everard, bishop of Norwich, able to move her, for Stephen’s mandate ordering the bishop to see that the monks had their tithes ‘that Alice Bigod unjustly detains’ was to no effect.⁷⁷ Hugh Bigod, her son, did not inherit her Belvoir lands,⁷⁸ but, nevertheless, seems to have misappropriated the lands and tithes of Belvoir’s Suffolk manors and which gave rise to Henry II’s writ.

⁷³ *EEA*, vi, no. 59.

⁷⁴ *Domesday Suffolk*, ii, 44:1–4.

⁷⁵ *Monasticon*, 3, p. 284.

⁷⁶ *DP*, p. 402.

⁷⁷ *The Manuscripts of His Grace, the Duke of Rutland, G.C.B., preserved at Belvoir Castle*, Historical Manuscripts Commission (Series, V 24) (London 1888), iv, p. 158; *Regesta*, ii, no. 1458; *Regesta*, iii, nos. 82-3.

⁷⁸ J. A. Green, *The Aristocracy of Norman England* (Cambridge 1997), p. 375.

The monks of the cathedral priory of Ely suffered losses of lands and privileges in Norfolk and Suffolk during the civil war, not least the manors of Mundford and Broomsthorpe, both in Norfolk, granted to Hugh Bigod by Bishop Nigel in the time of King Stephen, specifically in wartime.⁷⁹ Thereafter, successive bishops of Ely tried to recover these estates. The claim was not resolved until towards the end of the reign of Henry II and after the death of Hugh Bigod. By a settlement reached between Bishop Geoffrey and Roger Bigod, Hugh's son and heir, Roger recognised his obligation to render the service of six knights for the lands held by his ancestors from the church of Ely in Suffolk, and Bishop Geoffrey quitclaimed his rights in the manors of Mundford and Broomsthorpe.⁸⁰

Hugh Bigod, dominant in east Suffolk, had taken possession of the monks' five and a half hundreds of Wicklow which had been in the monks' possession since a division of the church's endowments made by Bishop Hervey after 1109 for the support of the monks.⁸¹ The honour of Wicklow was made up of the hundreds of Plumsgate, Loes, Wilford, Carlford, and Colneis and the half hundred of Parham, all in southeast Suffolk. Hugh Bigod's *caput* at Framlingham lay in the hundred of Leos, ideally placed to allow him to exert control over the whole honour. A writ issued by Henry II, and dated by Vincent to June or July 1155, ordered Hugh Bigod to allow the monks of Ely free possession of the five and a half hundreds of Wicklow. But Hugh appears to have undertaken only token enforcement of Henry's order, for we find Henry issuing a second writ requiring him to ensure the monks possession of all customs held in the time of Henry I in the five and a half hundreds, and in the port of Orford which lay in the hundred of Wilford.⁸² The

⁷⁹ E. Miller, *The Abbey and Bishopric of Ely* (Cambridge 1969), p. 173.

⁸⁰ *LCH*, ii, no. 834.

⁸¹ Miller, 1969, p. 284, no. IV.

⁸² *LCH*, ii, nos. 825-6.

writ concludes with an instruction that Hugh take nothing from the monks unjustly ('ita quod nichil eis auferis iniuste'). Orford was the subject of yet another mandate from Henry II concerning the monk's loss of seisin of the parish there pertaining to the church of Sudbourne. The bishop of Norwich and his archdeacons were commanded to ensure that the monks had seisin as in the time of Henry I.⁸³ Other losses in Suffolk that the monks appear to have incurred included possession of a mill in Kingston, Woodbridge, that they had built, and their supply of herrings from Dunwich, both the subject of writs from Henry II ordering that they be restored to ownership.⁸⁴ The writ concerning the loss of their supply of herrings was directed to Reginald de Warenne, and at the time of its issue the honour of Eye was under Warenne family control. The writ concludes with a warning that if the earl did not act, then the sheriff of Norfolk would, and should he fail then the king's justiciar/justices would intervene. The writ was probably issued before 1159, that being the year when Reginald de Warenne died, perhaps in the same year. Certainly, it seems that Reginald took no, or no effective action, to have the monks supply of herrings restored. The monks now had to go back to the king who issued a charter, probably between 1163 and March 1166, addressed to his ministers at Eye, the honour of Eye having by then escheated to the crown, ordering them to ensure that the monks of Ely have their herrings from Dunwich.⁸⁵ The monks' loss of herrings had been an issue early in Stephen's reign, for he had issued a charter addressed to those in command at Dunwich ordering them to restore to the monks of Ely their custom of herrings. That charter has been dated early in the reign, between 1136 and 1140, but likewise appears to have had no effect.⁸⁶ If that were the case, then it may be that, even before the disruption engendered by the civil war, the king's justice in Suffolk was

⁸³ Ibid, no. 830

⁸⁴ Ibid, nos. 828-9.

⁸⁵ Ibid, no. 831.

⁸⁶ *Regesta*, iii, no. 260.

already weakened and difficult to enforce. This in direct contrast to the reign of Stephen's predecessor, Henry I, when justice there seems regularly to have been enforced. A charter issued by Henry II and datable 1155 X August 1158 in favour of Eye Priory, directed to the bishop of Norwich, the sheriffs and others of Norfolk and Suffolk, confirming the prior and monks in their possession of all the churches in Dunwich, might suggest that the monks had themselves experienced difficulties during the civil war in exerting authority over their churches in the vill.⁸⁷ That the monasteries of both Ely and Eye experienced a loss of their liberties in Dunwich during Stephen's reign does indeed suggest a decline in episcopal and shrieval judicial authority. This might be explicable in the context of Hugh Bigod's dominance over eastern Suffolk and his campaign to vaunt his authority over that of the king and his royal officers.

Colchester Abbey in Essex lost lands and rights of warren in Wickham Skeith, Suffolk, during Stephen's reign.⁸⁸ The manor and church of Wickam Skeith had been granted to the abbey by Robert de Sauqueville, (Seine-Maritime, cant. Dieppe) c. 1150, when Robert became a monk at Colchester.⁸⁹ The manor appears to have been seized by Hugh *Pincerna*, to whom Henry's writ was directed, ordering him to restore the manor to the monks.⁹⁰ Hugh *Pincerna* does not at first sight seem to have had any connection with Suffolk, but held estates in Kent, Sussex, and Hertfordshire. His wife, Heloise, was the heiress of Jordan fitz Robert fitz Bernard whose estates lay in Somerset. His family were benefactors of Colchester Abbey, but apart from that connection it is difficult to determine Hugh's Suffolk connection.⁹¹ Another abbey from outside

⁸⁷ Ibid, no. 887. The tithes of the churches of Dunwich were confirmed to the monks of Eye by Henry I, together with lands and other liberties by his charter issued 1122 X 1125. See *Regesta*, ii, no. 1436*.

⁸⁸ *LCH*, i, nos. 654, 666.

⁸⁹ *Regesta*, iii, nos. 229-32. For an account of the Sauqueville family, see J. H. Round, 'The Essex Sackvilles', in *The Archaeological Journal*, 64 (1907), 217-26.

⁹⁰ *LCH*, i, no. 666.

⁹¹ *DD*, p. 1073.

the region that lost possessions in East Anglia was Battle Abbey. The Battle chronicle is one of the few that specifically reports attacks on church lands in the region. No doubt that was because the abbey was the victim of spoliation of two of its churches. The advowson of Mildenhall, Suffolk, was appropriated by Robert de Crèvecoeur, the lord of the manor, and given to his Augustinian foundation at Leeds in Kent. The church of Brantham, also in Suffolk, was appropriated by Alan de Beaufou, the son of Richard Beaufou ('Bellafago'), who had been archdeacon of Suffolk. Despite appeals by Abbot Walter of Battle to royal and ecclesiastical authority, the abbot complained 'justice was not to be found in the midst of iniquity'.⁹²

In November 1106, Henry I confirmed to the nuns of Malling Abbey, Kent, the Suffolk manor of Cornard, which Robert fitz Hamo with his daughter had given to the nuns for their support. The nuns appear to have lost control of the manor during King Stephen's reign, for between 1154 and August 1158, Henry II issued a mandate to the sheriff of Suffolk to guarantee the nuns possession of their liberties within the manor. Those liberties were extensive and included freedom from pleas in the hundred court, from geld and scot, with rights of soke and sac and toll and theam and infangenthef.⁹³ Henry's charter supplies yet another indication of the difficulty of obtaining justice in certain parts of the realm during Stephen's reign, and particularly so when land lay at some distance from estate holders who relied for their administration upon proxies or others not directly under their control. Amidst the uncertainties that prevailed during the civil war, there would have been much room for corrupt practices to take hold. And like many other estates holders, Malling, during the civil war, lost serfs and fugitives who took the opportunity provided by the disorder and the disruption in the administration of justice to flee to towns.

⁹² *The Chronicle of Battle Abbey*, ed. E. Searle (Oxford 1980), pp. 224, 238.

⁹³ *LCH*, iii, no. 1706.

There, in certain cases, if they were able to remain for a year and a day, they would become free men. Henry II's sheriffs were the frequent recipients of writs of 'naifty' intended to ensure the return of such fugitives. The loss of serfs from an estate caused disruption, imposing an increased burden of labour service on those who remained. It also had the effect of reducing the estate's value. It was important, therefore, to find and return those who had fled, with a significant increase in the number of writs of naifty solicited during the early years of Henry's reign.⁹⁴ Thus, we find Henry issuing a mandate to his sheriff of Suffolk, probably at some point between 1163 and March 1166, commanding him to ensure the return of serfs and fugitives from Malling's manor of Cornard.⁹⁵ Henry issued a similar writ, directed to William du Blois (d. 1159), King Stephen's second son, and by this time *iure uxoris* earl Warenne, ordering William to restore all serfs who had fled from the lands of the abbot of St Benet of Holme since the death of Henry I.⁹⁶ Nor were such problems confined to East Anglia. Estates in other parts of the realm suffered, as the writs that flowed from Henry II's chancery bear witness. However, as the twelfth century jurist, Glanvill, made clear, a villein could claim the status of free man only in a town that had been granted the privilege of receiving such fugitives.⁹⁷ Such a privilege could be granted only by royal charter. Moreover, if granted it might be qualified as to apply only in times of peace. Thus, Henry II's charter in favour of the men of Nottingham, issued at York, and datable between September 1155 and September 1166, stated 'if anyone....., lives in the borough of Nottingham for a year and a day, in time of peace, without claim, no-one afterwards shall have right in him, except the king' ('et si aliquis undecumque sit in burgo de Notting'

⁹⁴ R. C. Van Caenegem, *Royal Writs in England from the Conquest to Glanvill* (London 1972), p. 338.

⁹⁵ *LCH*, iii, no. 1713.

⁹⁶ *LCH*, ii, no. 1307.

⁹⁷ *Tractatus de legibus et consuetudinibus regni Anglie qui Glanvilla vocatur*, ed. and trans. G. D.G. Hall (Oxford 1998), p. 58.

manserit anno uno et die uno tempore pacis absque calumpnia, nullus postea nisi rex in eum ius habeat').⁹⁸ Remaining in a franchised town for a year and a day did not of itself guarantee freedom. Glanvill notes that the villein would have to have been admitted as a burgess or a member of the guild merchant before being able to claim free status.⁹⁹ In East Anglia the major towns were Ipswich, Dunwich, Bury St Edmunds, and Thetford, in Suffolk, and in Norfolk, Norwich, Yarmouth, and Lynn. With the possible exception of Dunwich, there is no evidence that any of those towns had a charter that granted residence privileges, and even if such privileges existed, it is unlikely that they would have applied in a time of war such as Stephen's reign.¹⁰⁰

The surviving corpus of charters for Henry I offers only three concerning the return of fugitives; one in favour of the prior and monks of Spalding, a second, ordering his sheriffs and servants to return fugitives to the abbey of Abingdon together with their money and chattels, wherever they might be found,¹⁰¹ and a third, wrongly attributed to Henry II, issued in favour of Worcester Cathedral Priory and commanding the general restoration of runaway serfs.¹⁰² Stephen's only surviving such writ was issued in the early years of his reign, (before the death of Aubrey I de Vere in May 1141), in favour of Ramsey Abbey.¹⁰³ Amongst the surviving charters of Henry II, by contrast, we have 26 instances, of which only three concerned lay fees, in this case of Fulk fitz Warin and William Mauduit. All but eight writs referred to serfs and fugitives who had fled 'since the death of Henry I'. Although it has not been possible to date these writs with absolute

⁹⁸ *LCH*, iv, no. 1980.

⁹⁹ *Glanvill, op. cit.*, p.58.

¹⁰⁰ For an account of the history of the privilege, see S. Alsford, 'Urban Safe Havens for the Unfree in Medieval England: A Reconsideration', in *Slavery & Abolition*, 32, no. 3. (September 2011), 363-75.

¹⁰¹ *Regesta*, ii, nos. 1375, 1799.

¹⁰² *LCH*, vi, no. 4243a.

¹⁰³ *Regesta*, iii, no. 672.

precision, nearly all are to be assigned to the early years of the reign, furnishing evidence of the disruption suffered by many ecclesiastical houses throughout the realm during the unsettling years of King Stephen.¹⁰⁴

The violence and disruption of the civil war raised concerns with Everard, bishop of Norwich, that his bishopric would be laid waste by the 'great risks of the English wars'. Such was his concern that he 'gave the two villas from his episcopal patrimony, Blickling and Cressingham, to two powerful local knights, hoping thereby to save the remainder of the episcopal estate from being plundered'. It was Everard's hope that the villas could be recovered once peace was restored.¹⁰⁵ According to the *Sibton Abbey narratio*, John the sheriff expressed a desire to found a Cistercian abbey to atone for his many sins, committed both in peacetime and in time of war.¹⁰⁶ It was to John the sheriff that Bishop Everard gave Blickling as one of his powerful local knights, while the grantee of Cressingham has never been identified. We do not know what sins John committed during the civil war, or whether those included the plundering of church lands. Nor did Everard specify the damage or losses that he claimed episcopal lands were suffering. However, these two statements, Everard's, that episcopal lands, presumably in Norfolk, were being plundered, and John fitz Robert's, that he had committed many sins during the war, might suggest that John had been the author of attacks on church lands and that in giving Blickling to him, and Cressingham to the other unidentified knight, Everard was embroiled in a knightly protection racket.

¹⁰⁴ *LCH*, i, nos. 28, 133, 265, 445, 605, 615, 650, 655, 725; ii, 878, 907, 1016, 1018, 1307; iii, 1401, 1418, 1607, 1713, 1775, 1777; iv, 1942, 2036, 2164, 2512; v, 2697, 2853.

¹⁰⁵ *Charters Norwich*, i, no. 118.

¹⁰⁶ *Cart. Sibton*, iii, no. 470.

At Blickling, Everard's hope that the manors might be recovered once there was peace were not fulfilled. The 1166 'Cartae Baronum' preserved in the *Red Book of the Exchequer* explicitly notes that, after the death of Henry I and in the time of war, Everard, bishop of Norwich, gave to John fitz Robert the manor of Blickling, which William de Chesney, his brother then held as one knight's fee.¹⁰⁷ William had three daughters, his co-heiresses. His eldest daughter Margaret married first Hugh de Cressy; Clementia married Jordan de Sauqueville, and the third daughter, Sarah, married Richard Engaine. According to Blomefield, in 1217 Jordan de Sauqueville and his wife Clementia, and Vitalis, son of Richard Engaine, and Sarah his wife, released the manor of Blickling to Margaret de Cressy.¹⁰⁸ Thereafter Margaret claimed the advowson of the church of Blickling against the prior of Norwich. The case dragged on for several years until a final concord was made before the king's justices at Westminster, on 23 June 1223, whereby Margaret recognised the advowson to be the right of the bishop of Norwich and remitted and quitclaimed it on behalf of herself and her heirs, to the bishop, his successors, and the church of Norwich in perpetuity. The bishop reciprocated by recognising the manor of Blickling, with all its appurtenances, saving the advowson, to be the right of Margaret, to be held of him, his successors and the church of Norwich for the service of one knight.¹⁰⁹ Margaret's son Roger, by her first husband, was her heir following her death in 1230, owing eleven knights' fees for the lands that he held.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ *Red Book*, i, p. 392.

¹⁰⁸ Blomefield, 6, p. 383.

¹⁰⁹ *Charters Norwich*, no. 352; *CRR*, vii, 1219, pp. 15, 82, 190-1, 240; ix, 1220, pp. 30, 250, 353, 382; xi, 1223, no. 1255.

¹¹⁰ *Excerpta È Rotulis Finium in Turri Londinensi, Asservatis Henrico Tertio Regi*, 2 vols. ed. C. Roberts (London 1835-36), i, p. 209.

As regards Cressingham, in 1086 it is recorded in the possession of the bishop of Thetford.¹¹¹ Ralph de Tosny also held a part of Great Cressingham as an outlier as well as Little Cressingham.¹¹² Ralph was married to Isabel de Montfort, and although rewarded with extensive lands in England does not seem to have been much interested in his English estates, half of which he subinfeuded. He is recorded as having visited England only once after 1066.¹¹³ By the 1140s his lands had passed to his grandson, Roger II de Tosny (d. 1157x1162), who inherited them on the death of his father in 1126. Great and Little Cressingham were still de Tosny manors as late as 1264 when they were found to be part of the estate of Roger IV de Tosny, following his death on 18 June that year.¹¹⁴ The de Tosnys were major tenants-in-chief, with interests not only in England but extensively in Normandy. It seems unlikely that Everard would have granted the bishop's holding in Cressingham to a knight other than to a Tosny or Tosny tenant.

Cressingham did return to the church, as is evident from a charter issued by John, bishop of Norwich, on 17 May 1205. By this, prior William and the monks of Norwich Cathedral Priory received the manors of Setchey and Cressingham, save the advowsons of the churches there and the knights' service owed for those villis. In return the bishop was to receive the rents, tolls and tax receipts, the saltpans and their proceeds in the town of Lynn, the fair held annually in Lynn and in the adjacent vill of Gaywood, the market held every Saturday in Lynn, a messuage near the chapel of St. Nicholas and another messuage near the bridge over the

¹¹¹ *Domesday Norfolk*, i, 10:1, 49.

¹¹² *Ibid*, ii, 22:4, 5.

¹¹³ C. P. Lewis 'Tosny, Ralph de [Ralph de Conches] (d. 1102?), baron', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 23 September 2004 Accessed 28 Jan. 2023.
<https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001/odnb-9780198614128-e-23046>.

¹¹⁴ *Cal. I. P. M.*, i, no. 588.

Purfleet.¹¹⁵ All of this to suggest that whatever else had transpired during Stephen's reign, the bishop had thereafter recovered at least part of the Cressingham estate, now employed as compensation in his settlement with the monks over the rather more significant manor of Lynn.

No charter survives to record the grants of Blickling and Cressingham although in his confession addressed to Pope Eugenius III, and written after he had retired as bishop of Norwich, so after 1145, Everard explained that he had drawn up deeds under his seal and that of his church, and that he had made these grants without reference to or consent from either his cathedral convent or the archdeacon.¹¹⁶ Perhaps Everard had been unnerved by Geoffrey de Mandeville's recent actions in wasting the king's demesne lands in Cambridge, as well as his attacks on Ely and Ramsey. Similar fears may have been raised by Gilbert de Gant's attack on the property of the monks of Norwich at Lynn, although we do not know when that occurred, or even whether it was in Bishop Everard's time. It is perhaps no wonder, therefore, that Everard acted as he did.

There is evidence that the lands of the monks of Norwich suffered because of the civil war. Reference has already been made to Gilbert de Gant who was earl of Lincoln under Stephen from c. 1149. In an act of contrition, towards the end of Stephen's reign or in the opening years of Henry II, Gilbert de Gant gave the monks of Norwich £10 of land in Scampton, Lincolnshire, in compensation for damage he had done to the monks' property in Lynn.¹¹⁷ Meanwhile, Henry de Ryes ('Ria'), who held three knights' fees in Norfolk of the bishop of Ely,¹¹⁸ appears to have disseised the monks of their Norfolk manor of Aldeby. We know this because Henry II issued a

¹¹⁵ *Charters Norwich*, i, no. 175.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, no. 118.

¹¹⁷ For the original grant by Gilbert de Gant, see C. W. Foster, *A History of the Villages of Aisthorpe and Thorpe in the Fallows* (Lincoln 1927), pp. 105-6. Henry II's confirmation is printed in *LCH*, iv, no. 1952. Bishop Robert de Chesney's confirmation charter is printed in *EEA* i, no. 200.

¹¹⁸ *Red Book*, i, p. 364.

mandate, datable 1154 X August 1158, directing Henry de Ryes to ensure the monks' possession of Aldeby and forbidding unjust disseisin. The manor had been held in 1086 by Ralph de Beaufour, whose wife, Agnes, daughter of Robert de Tosny, married secondly Hubert I de Ryes, with whom she had a son, Henry. It was Agnes who gave to the monks of Holy Trinity, Norwich, the manor of Aldeby, with its church and men, as confirmed by Henry I in 1119. Doubtless Henry de Ryes, Agnes's son, had exploited the disruption of justice that affected many parts of the realm during Stephen's reign, to disseise the monks of a manor that he probably regarded as his by right.¹¹⁹ This was the same Henry de Ryes who gave the monks of Canterbury Cathedral his Norfolk manor of Deopham, in recompense for their manor of *Mucheberdesham* (unidentified) of which he had disseised them.¹²⁰ In another mandate issued to Bishop William of Norwich and to the king's justices of Norfolk and Suffolk, Henry II instructed them to ensure the monks possession of Newton by Trowse, Eaton, and the church of St Stephen in Norwich, while yet a third mandate required the sheriff of Norfolk to ensure the monks possession of their common pasture between Bixley and Framingham.¹²¹ Newton had been the gift of Godric, *dapifer*, and Nigreda, his wife, and Ralph their son, confirmed by Henry I in 1106.¹²² Eaton, in the king's demesne in 1086, had been the gift of Alan fitz Flaad, also confirmed by Henry I in 1106.¹²³ These royal writs suggest that during Stephen's reign, Norwich Cathedral Priory suffered attacks at the hands of aggressive and acquisitive laymen, and that the monks had difficulty in obtaining justice even after 1154.

¹¹⁹ *LCH*, iv, no. 1953; *Domesday Norfolk*, ii, 20:36; *DP*, p. 330; *DD*, p. 661; *Regesta*, ii, nos. 1206, 1479.

¹²⁰ A. Saltman, *Theobald Archbishop of Canterbury* (London 1956), pp. 537-8.

¹²¹ *LCH*, iv, nos. 1953-6.

¹²² *Regesta*, ii, nos. 740, 1158*

¹²³ *Ibid*, no. 762.

The Cathedral Priory was not alone in suffering such attacks. The abbey of St Benet of Holme was threatened with the loss of lands and liberties. In one case the abbot complained that his manor of Little Melton was taken by Hubert de Montchesney, and in another, that Walter the priest of Waxham had appropriated a piece of land belonging to the abbey *tempore guerre* and incorporated it within his cemetery. The abbot lost possession of his tithes due from one Ernald, son of Roger of Ingham.¹²⁴ Perhaps the most egregious offence of all, though, was the bodily removal of the abbey's church at Ranworth to another site by Avelina de Ryes, wife of Henry de Ryes, who, we have seen, had apparently disseised Norwich Cathedral Priory of the manor of Aldeby.¹²⁵ The abbey of St Benet of Holme is exceptional amongst the monasteries of East Anglia in that its cartulary deliberately preserves almost all of its royal writs and charters, which makes it a very useful source for the events of Stephen's reign. It is from these documents that the background to Hubert de Montchesney's seizure of the manor of Little Melton emerges. The manor had originally been given to the abbey by its pre-Conquest holder, Edwin, and his wife Ingreda.¹²⁶ Edwin continued to hold it of the abbey on condition that it returned to the monks after his death.¹²⁷ After the Conquest, Godric the Steward held it,¹²⁸ and he, echoing his *antecessor*, together with his wife, Ingreda, gave the manor to the abbey, but to be held by his son, Ralph, for ten shillings yearly. Thereafter, following Ralph's death, the manor was to be held by Ralph's wife, Letselina, and, after her, by Ralph's heir who was to pay the abbey an annual rent of 40 shillings.¹²⁹ Abbot Richer's grant of the manor to Ralph, son of Godric, made sometime between 1134 and 1140, was witnessed by Hubert, son of Godric ('Hubertus filius

¹²⁴ *LCH*, ii, 1322.

¹²⁵ *St Benet*, ii, p. 196.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, i, no. 62.

¹²⁷ *Domesday Norfolk*, ii, 12:32.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*.

¹²⁹ *St. Benet*, i, no. 119.

eiusdem Godrici’), and therefore a brother of Ralph.¹³⁰ When Hubert de Montchesney agreed with Abbot William that the vill of Little Melton was the abbot’s fee to be held by him for ten shillings yearly, his charter described Little Melton as having been held by his father and his other ancestors of the abbey (‘parva Mealtone quam pater meus ceterique antecessores mei de ecclesia prefata tenuerunt’).¹³¹ The charters thus reveal the background to Hubert’s seizure of the manor, with a son of the original post-Conquest donor un-prepared to warrant his father’s gift, instead taking matters into his own hands, and ultimately reaching a settlement with the abbey that allowed him to retain the manor on terms that harked back to the pre-Conquest arrangement made by Edwin and his wife, Ingreda, albeit in return for a payment of 20 marks to enter into possession.¹³² Meanwhile, the fact that Hubert seems to have acted without due process suggests that there was a breakdown in the administration of justice in Norfolk of which Hubert took advantage.

The matter of the physical removal of the abbey’s church of Ranworth rumbled on for several years. Upon petitioning the king, Abbot William was required by Henry II to show judicially that the church had been built in his fee and transferred without judgment to the fee of another since the death of Henry I. If the abbot could establish that, then Bishop William was ordered to cause the church to be restored to its former site.¹³³ Abbot William was eventually able to prove his right and Henry II issued a further writ *c.* 1158 ordering the bishop to restore the advowson of Ranworth to Abbot William and Robert de Valognes, who had also been a party to the suit.¹³⁴

¹³⁰ Ibid, no. 135.

¹³¹ Ibid, no. 191.

¹³² Ibid, no. 192.

¹³³ Ibid, no. 23.

¹³⁴ Ibid, no. 24; ii, pp 254-5.

In another such case Richard de Calva and Geoffrey de Tresgot are recorded as having occupied the land of Barney, in north Norfolk, formerly belonging to Binham Priory. Archbishop Theobald ordered the bishops of London and Norwich to excommunicate them and place an interdict on their land unless they immediately restored possession.¹³⁵ Binham had been founded as a cell of the abbey of St Albans, itself in the diocese of London. Hence the involvement of the bishop of London. This was another case in which heirs claimed rights over lands granted to a monastic house. Thus before 1142, when he became a monk at Binham, Walter de Valognes, nephew of the founder, Peter de Valognes, together with his daughter and heiress, Agnes, and with the consent of his wife, Rose, granted the priory the land of Barney and Thursford with all appurtenances in perpetuity. The grant, as the charter of confirmation issued by Walter's lord and kinsman, Roger de Valognes makes clear, was made in the presence of the abbot of St Albans, with seisin symbolically confirmed by the placing of a knife upon the altar.¹³⁶ Although Walter's charter mentions only one daughter, Agnes, whom he designated as his heiress, Roger de Valognes's later charter, by implication, suggests that Walter had at least one other daughter. This is implicit in the reference in Roger's charter to the recently accepted doctrine of *statutum decretum*. Thus, we read that 'Agnes being Walter's heiress in respect of the land of Barney, according to the appointed law that where there is no son the daughters divide their father's land by the spindles,the elder cannot take from the younger her half of the inheritance without violation and injury'.¹³⁷ Subsequently, Walter's elder unnamed daughter married Richard de Calne, a major Valognes tenant,¹³⁸ and the younger daughter, Agnes, married Geoffrey de

¹³⁵ Saltman, 1956, no. 20; *Cart. Binham*, no. 89.

¹³⁶ *Cart. Binham*, nos. 80, 94. Walter's charter, (no. 94) as it appears in the cartulary, may be a forgery or has been reworked, for it contains a warranty clause, which would be exceptional in a charter so early.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, no. 80.

¹³⁸ He held 7.5 knights' fees in 1166 of Robert de Valognes, *Red Book*, i, p. 360.

Tresgoz. The original grant, meanwhile, left it ambiguous as to whether the whole of the land of Barney and Thursford had been granted or only half of it. It was this ambiguity that led to the seizure of Barney by the two husbands, no doubt arguing that only half of the estate had been granted and that they were entitled to possession of the other half. However, there must also have been some element of duplicity here. Geoffrey de Tresgoz held part of Barney in his own right from Bartholemew of Creak which he later gave to the monks of Binham.¹³⁹ The matter of the wrongful dispossession of the monks was eventually brought before Theobald archbishop of Canterbury, before whom the monks' right to possession was agreed and the boundaries settled. However, neither Richard nor Geoffrey honoured the agreement, but continued to withhold possession of the land. Theobald, in consequence, gave them eight days to remedy their breach, or the bishops of Norwich and London would declare anathema against them and place their lands under interdict.¹⁴⁰ The threat was effective for Geoffrey confirmed the grant of his wife, Agnes, and this grant was further confirmed by their daughter, Petronella.¹⁴¹ We cannot be sure that the unlawful actions of de Calne and de Tresgoz over Barney took place during Stephen's reign, for we have no precise dates here. Walter de Valognes, the grantor, died at some time in the 1150s,¹⁴² either before or shortly after King Stephen. Agnes would then have entered her inheritance as would Walter's other daughter. Was it at this point that the monks were disseised of their land, or had the husbands acted before then? In a sense it may not matter, for their intervention, without recourse to the law, was symptomatic of a wider failure of justice in

¹³⁹ *Cart. Binham*, no. 83.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, no. 89.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, nos. 86, 82. An account of the affair is given by J. C. Holt in his 'Feudal Society and the Family in Medieval England', in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th Series, xxxv (1985), 1-28, pp. 11-14

¹⁴² *DD*, 2002, p. 760.

Norfolk at this time which no doubt continued into the reign of Henry II, only gradually eased thereafter by the Henrician law reforms.¹⁴³

St Peter's Abbey, Gloucester, seemingly lost lands, tithes, and churches in Norfolk. A writ in the name of the future Henry II, here acting as duke of Normandy before 1154, commanded William, bishop of Norwich and Hugh, earl of Norfolk to maintain the abbey in its possessions in the county.¹⁴⁴ One of those possessions was the church of St. Peter Mancroft in Norwich in the market place, granted by the Conqueror before 1087 and later confirmed by Henry I.¹⁴⁵ Nicholas Vincent dates Henry's charter between 1153 and April 1154, although, given the proliferation of forgeries at Gloucester, he also questions its authenticity.¹⁴⁶ If it is authentic, then to have had any effect it would have been issued after Stephen and Duke Henry came to terms in November/December 1153, by which Stephen designated Henry as his heir. Only under these circumstances would a charter issued by the leader of the Angevin party have had any effect in a region that had at least nominally remained under the crown's control. Another indication that the charter was issued after December 1153 is that it is also addressed to Hugh Bigod as earl of Norfolk. Stephen did not recognise Hugh Bigod's earldom until he agreed the Treaty of Westminster, and so Hugh would have had no authority to act as a royal officer before then. We have evidence of only one other charter directed to East Anglia by a leading Angevin. Again, it dates from a period of Angevin ascendancy when in 1141, after the battle of Lincoln, Stephen had been captured, imprisoned at Bristol and seemingly deposed. Within days or weeks of

¹⁴³ The introduction of the writ of novel disseisin, probably by the council of Clarendon in 1166, was effective in dealing with unlawful disseisins. For an account of the evolution of the remedy and its operation, see J. Hudson, *The Oxford History of the Laws of England, Volume II, 871 – 1216*, (Oxford 2012), pp. 609-21.

¹⁴⁴ *Cart. Gloucestriae*, ii, p. 34, no. 477.

¹⁴⁵ *Regesta*, ii, no. 555.

¹⁴⁶ *LCH*, vi, no. 3923.

Empress Matilda's success the abbot of St Benet's petitioned the empress for a confirmation of his lands and liberties, which was quickly forthcoming. Her charter, apparently authentic, has been dated between 3 and 25 March 1141, issued at Oxford.¹⁴⁷ Clearly, the empress wasted no time in asserting her power and influence over a region previously under Stephen's control, while the abbot was anxious to secure the support of the new regime.

The difficulties encountered by the monks of Gloucester in administering their distant Norfolk estate during Stephen's reign probably reflects Gloucester's own position within the Angevin zone of control. As to houses founded in East Anglia during the reign of King Stephen, our evidence suggests that only one, the Augustinian priory of Rudham, founded by William de Chesney *c.*1140, suffered any significant loss of property or liberties. This is suggested by two mandates issued by Henry II, one directing that the priory's tenants render their customary services, and a second directing the sheriff of Norfolk to ensure the canons possession of their land of Stanhoe, Norfolk, as rendered in the time of Henry I.¹⁴⁸ These two writs are themselves probably best read as indications of Henry's declared policy to 'restore ancient custom' by reversing Stephen's quitclaim to the priory of twelve pence from Stanhoe.¹⁴⁹

Amongst the East Anglian monasteries, St Benet of Holme appears to have suffered most during the civil war. This, of course, may simply reflect the better preservation by St Benet of its writs and charters, compared with other monastic houses in the region. Against that, we do have extensive cartularies from Castle Acre, Sibton, Stoke-by-Clare, Walsingham, Pentney, Binham, and Coxford, none of which contains evidence of losses on the scale of those recorded for St

¹⁴⁷ *Regesta*, iii, no. 400.

¹⁴⁸ *LCH*, i nos. 714-5.

¹⁴⁹ *Regesta*, iii, no. 249.

Benet's. If Henry II's writs issued between 1154 and 1158 can be assumed to reflect problems first arising in Stephen's reign, and the weight of the evidence suggests that they can, then St Benet's was obliged to solicit 18 such writs. In addition to those already referred to, these concerned the abbey's possessions in Yarmouth, Wraxham, Horsey, Heigham, Potter Heigham, Shotesham, and Hoveton. The abbot was to have the advowson of the church of Repps and all the churches of Caister, his mill and millponds at Shotesham and Walsham, and his right of warren as in the time of Henry I.¹⁵⁰ Ely solicited at least eight such writs for its possessions and liberties in Suffolk; Norwich Cathedral Priory at least five;¹⁵¹ Binham Priory, two, together with the charter from Theobald, archbishop of Canterbury; Ramsey and Bury St Edmunds three, and Castle Acre, one or possibly two. What such an analysis of the manors and vills affected by unlawful acts demonstrates is that most of these disputes occurred over land in east Norfolk, accounting for no less than 34 writs. Only seven relate to property in west Norfolk. By contrast, land in Suffolk accounted for twelve. Various manors were the subject of more than one writ, usually two, although for Ranworth there were three, two dealing with the church that had been physically removed to a new site and one ordering the sheriff of Norfolk to restore the abbot's land, houses and chattels at Ranworth.

Such writs issued by Henry II, shortly after he came to the throne, reflect conflicts over lands and liberties that had arisen in East Anglia during King Stephen's reign. Graeme White has suggested that the writs, with their repeated references to actions that had been undertaken 'unjustly and without judgment', and always with a reference back to lawful possession 'in the

¹⁵⁰ *LCH*, ii, nos. 1292-3, 1298, 1301, 1305-6, 1309, 1299, 1310-11, 1300, 1303.

¹⁵¹ *LCH*, iv, nos. 1952 (church at Aldeby), 1954 (common pasture between Bixley and Framlingham), 1955-6, (their manors of Newton and Eaton, and the church of St Stephen in Norwich), 1958 (their church of St John in Timberhill, Norwich).

time of my grandfather, King Henry', promoted an impression of nineteen years of illegitimate usurpation by Stephen, convenient for the new king, but not necessarily reflecting the reality of Stephen's reign.¹⁵² Certainly, it was rare for Henry to acknowledge Stephen as 'king' in his writs and charters but the writs that issued from Henry II's chancery were a response to petitions from aggrieved litigants who had been unable to achieve what they considered 'justice' during Stephen's reign. That, in Norfolk, the majority concerned manors and vills in the east of the county suggests that the administration of justice there may have been notably less effective than in the west. The east was, in effect, under the control of the sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk, operating from the Norman fortress in Norwich. West Norfolk was controlled by the earls Warenne and d'Albini, with their respective *caputs* at Castle Acre and Buckenham, the d'Albini family with a second at Castle Rising. The Valognes family, whilst in possession of many estates in Norfolk and founders of Binham Priory, had their *caput* at Bennington in Hertfordshire.¹⁵³ The Tosny family, founders and patrons of West Acre Priory, were the other major baronial family with estates in west Norfolk, but their *caput* lay at Flamstead, likewise in Hertfordshire.¹⁵⁴ There is little evidence to show Stephen's justices or county justiciar visiting Norfolk during his reign. The only such occasion that we know of for certain came with the visitation by William Martel c. 1150 when he heard pleas in the bishop's garden, referred to previously. That Stephen relied on local justices is evident from his writ issued at Norwich and directed to his justices/justiciars of the hundreds of North Greenhoe and Holt commanding that the monks of Binham hold their lands and men in peace.¹⁵⁵ Nevertheless, this particular mandate appears to have had little effect,

¹⁵² G. White, 'The Myth of the Anarchy', in *ANS* xxii, 323–37, pp. 328–9.

¹⁵³ *Cart. Binham*, p. xiv.

¹⁵⁴ C. Lewis, (2004, September 23). 'Tosny, Ralph de [Ralph de Conches] (d. 1102?), baron', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Retrieved 20 Jul. 2024, from <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-23046>.

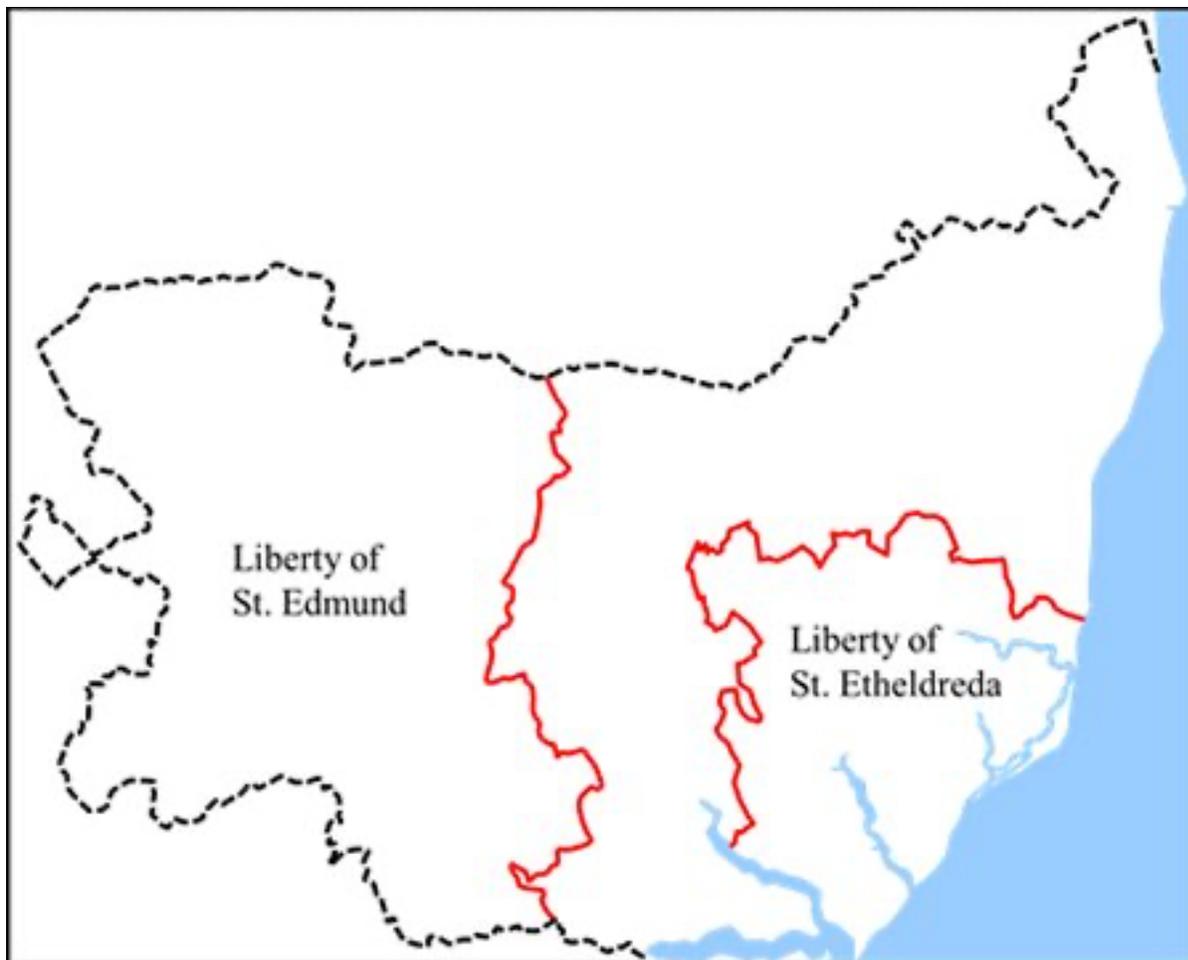
¹⁵⁵ *Regesta*, iii, no. 105.

for shortly after he came to the throne, Henry II issued a mandate addressed to his ministers of South Erpingham, Holt, and North Greenhoe, to ensure the monks of Binham possession of their lands there and of their wood at Edgefield, suggesting that the situation here had deteriorated.¹⁵⁶ The Warennes and the d'Albinis would, almost certainly, have been responsible for the administration of justice in west Norfolk during Stephen's reign, perhaps ensuring that the hundred and shire courts continued to operate effectively. This is perhaps reflected in the lower incidence of writs from Henry II for this part of the county. In Suffolk, the monks of Bury St Edmunds exercised judicial authority, both ecclesiastical and secular, over their eight and a half hundreds which extended over much of west Suffolk. The abbey of Ely Cathedral, at least in theory, controlled the vast honour of Wicklow, also known as the Liberty of Etheldreda, and also with ecclesiastical and secular judicial authority. (Map 1). Covering a large area west of Ipswich, it nevertheless ran afoul of Hugh Bigod's territorial ambitions, he, it will be recalled, having taken possession of the honour.¹⁵⁷ Royal authority was excluded from east Suffolk for much of Stephen's reign. As a result, the sheriff's writ was largely ineffective in Suffolk. It will be recalled that even the officers of the abbey of Bury St Edmunds were not shy of taking advantage of the failure of royal justice in Suffolk.¹⁵⁸ None of the royal charters of Stephen's reign addressed to Bury St Edmunds is addressed to any named sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk.

¹⁵⁶ *Cart. Binham*, no. 66.

¹⁵⁷ See *ante*, p. 43.

¹⁵⁸ See *ante*, p. 36.



Map 1 showing the Liberty of Bury St Edmunds and Ely's liberty of St Etheldreda

Under Stephen the office of sheriff was held first by John fitz Robert, (also known as John de Chesney) in succession to his father (Robert fitz Walter), from c.1140 to 1146, and then by his brother, William de Chesney, to the end of the reign. The precise dates of William's shrievalty are uncertain but he was certainly sheriff at times between 1146/7 and 1154. However, he might not have held the post immediately after his brother's death, as at the shire-moot for Norfolk and Suffolk, held in the bishop's garden and which has been referred to previously, he is recorded as being present, but not styled sheriff. On the contrary, Roger Gulafre and William Frehnei are named as sheriffs, although the narrative does not specify their respective jurisdictions. Helen

Cam suggests a date for this shire-moot in or shortly after 1148.¹⁵⁹ However, a writ, datable between 1146 and 1149 issued by Stephen and giving notice that Geoffrey the clerk was to hold his land at South Walsham from the abbot of St Benet's for the same service as his father, certainly refers to William as sheriff.¹⁶⁰ That might suggest that the shire-moot was later than Cam's suggested date of 1148. During this time two intriguing charters were issued by William de Chesney, both dated between 1150 and 1154. One was in favour of Colne Priory, by which William granted five acres of arable land in his vill of Colne. The second benefitted the abbey of St John at Colchester which received 40 shillings of land from William's manor of *Hou*. In each, William describes himself as sheriff of Norwich.¹⁶¹ That the title appears in two separate and unconnected cartularies strongly suggests that it is unlikely to be a scribal error. While this remains conjecture, it may suggest that Stephen entertained doubts about the efficacy and honesty of his sheriff and, rather than dismissing him altogether and thus risking a rebellion by a powerful regional baron who could command considerable local support, restricted the damage that William might cause by limiting his shrieval powers to Norwich and its immediate environs. That would also explain the appointment of Roger Gulafre and William Fresnei ('Frehnei') as sheriffs for Norfolk and Suffolk.¹⁶² However, at some time in either 1153 or 1154, most probably in 1154, King Stephen issued a writ addressed to W(illiam) bishop of Norwich, Reginald de Warenne, and William of Norwich, (*alias* William de Chesney), commanding them to ensure that the abbot of St Benet of Holme had possession of his hundreds of Flegg and Happing.¹⁶³ William de Chesney was thus a royal officer, and we must assume sheriff, with the authority to

¹⁵⁹ Cam, 1924, p. 569. And see the translation in Blomefield, iii, pp. 28-9

¹⁶⁰ *St Benet*, no. 145; *Regesta*, iii, no. 401.

¹⁶¹ *Cart. Colne*, no. 97; *Cart. Colchester*, i, p. 172.

¹⁶² For an account of the Anglo-Norman sheriffs, see J. A. Green, *English Sheriffs to 1154* (London 1990). The Pipe Roll for 1156 does show William Frehnei as sheriff of Suffolk. *PR 2 Henry II*, p. 8.

¹⁶³ *Regesta*, iii, no. 403. The charter names the abbot as William who replaced Daniel who died on 10 November 1153.

enforce the king's command. Reginald de Warenne was addressed in Stephen's writ in place of his brother, the earl, so that we have here a classic writ addressed to bishop, earl and sheriff. As Flegg and Happing lie some 20 miles east of Norwich, in no way as parts of the city, it would seem that William had been once again entrusted with the shrievalty of the entire county.

There is no doubt that the honesty, integrity, and loyalty of sheriffs as a group was of concern to both Stephen and to duke Henry. Ralph of Diss records that one of the elements of the treaty between Stephen and Henry negotiated in 1153 was an agreement that only those who would not abuse their office should be appointed as sheriffs.¹⁶⁴ Within his first four years as king, Henry issued a charter to the men of Norwich, no doubt in response to a petition from the burgesses, by which he confirmed the customs and liberties of the city as in the time of his grandfather, Henry I, decreeing the restoration of any customs or scot (a tax paid by the citizens to the town, rather than to the king), alienated in the time of King Stephen.¹⁶⁵

The unusual reference in this charter to Stephen as 'king' emphasises that the mischief complained of had taken place during his reign. The wording is as follows:

'And should anyone, after the death of King Henry my grandfather, in the time of King Stephen, have imposed themselves from outside on their scot and customs, I order that this should be restored to their collective and custom, together with their scot, because I have quitclaimed no-one of the same'.

What this may also suggest is that the sheriff of Norfolk was in some way implicated, either because he and his followers had not been paying their taxes or, if others had not, then because

¹⁶⁴ *Radulfi de Diceto decani Lundoniensis opera historica*, ed. W. Stubbs, Rolls Series (London 1857), i, p. 297.

¹⁶⁵ *LCH*, iv, no. 1962.

the sheriff had taken no adequate steps to ensure payment. Another possibility, of course, is that the sheriff, or others associated with him, had collected the taxes, thus withholding them from the burgesses. On the face of it, the charter suggests an indictment of Stephen's sheriffs in the rule over Norwich and Norfolk. It is clear that John and William de Chesney, as sheriffs of Norfolk, not only exerted control over Norwich, but were feared by the citizens. Each would have been responsible for the administration of justice. John's near deathbed admission that he had committed many sins, both in peacetime and war when he was sheriff, does not suggest a model of rectitude. Thomas of Monmouth, in his account of the miracles of St William, relates how William de Chesney, now sheriff following the death of his brother, took against two citizens of Norwich, Edward and his brother Robert. Being unable to find them, for they had both fled the city upon learning that he intended to arrest them, William destroyed all their property on which he could lay hands. Robert was so afraid of William, Thomas reports, that he took refuge with Richard, dean of Bedingham, a village some ten miles south of the city. Nevertheless, such was Robert's fear of William that he slept in the parish church of St Andrew each night. He was saved only by the intervention of St William.¹⁶⁶

A writ of Henry II addressed to William de Chesney and dated by Vincent December 1154 X August 1158, so when William no longer held the post of sheriff, hints at the power that William must have wielded when sheriff, underlining the extent of his authority, and, conversely, the absence of that of the crown, as well as the weakness of the authority of the bishop of Norwich, which, itself, would have been undermined by the lack of royal authority in the region. The writ commands William to observe the terms of a settlement that he had made in the synod of the bishop of Norwich with the monks of St John's Colchester over lands at Stoke-by-Clare, Suffolk.

¹⁶⁶ *Monmouth*, pp. 172-3.

Unfortunately, all record of the dispute itself has been lost or destroyed, with nothing relevant reported in *English Episcopal Acta* for the diocese of Norwich, in the charters of Norwich Cathedral Priory, or in the Colchester cartulary. Nevertheless, Henry II's writ suggests that at some point, William de Chesney occupied lands belonging to St John's, that the matter had been brought before the bishop of Norwich and an agreement reached that William would put Colchester back in possession, but that William had failed to honour that agreement. Given the date of Henry II's writ, these events probably occurred when William, himself was sheriff under King Stephen.¹⁶⁷

While ostensibly loyal to Stephen throughout his reign, John fitz Robert and his brother, William de Chesney, established a powerbase centred upon Norwich, through a network of supporters exerting control not only over the city but large parts of east Norfolk, where in effect they substituted their own authority for that of the king. The office of sheriff had indeed become a hereditary baronial sinecure. Their strength and influence came from the estates passed to them by their father, Robert fitz Walter, who, himself had inherited from his father, Walter de Caen. Walter was a major Domesday tenant of Robert Malet, lord of the honour of Eye. The lands that Walter held from Robert in Norfolk came to be known as the barony of Horsford, for which he owed ten knights' fees, and where he built a castle. Walter also held lands at Helmingham in Suffolk of Richard fitz Gilbert and the honour of Clare. Robert fitz Walter's estates were augmented by Henry I's grant of the Norfolk lands of Robert son of Rabel, which included the

¹⁶⁷ *Cart. Colchester*, i, p. 41.

manors of Moor and Filby, and brought Robert and his successors status as tenants-in-chief. The family was further strengthened by enfeoffments in east Norfolk from St Benet of Holme, including land in the manor of Filby, granted to Robert fitz Walter, and the abbey's land at Saxlingham, gifted to John fitz Robert.¹⁶⁸ Robert fitz Walter, with his wife, Sybil, had c.1105 founded the priory of Horsham St Faith for Benedictine monks from Conques in southern France, which continued to attract benefactors, as a bull of Alexander III issued in May 1163 testifies.¹⁶⁹ Stephen's patronage of the family brought them the manor of Blythborough in Suffolk for John fitz Robert, and foldage rights for a thousand sheep between Norwich and Yarmouth.¹⁷⁰ Stephen further granted William de Chesney the manor of Acle (disputed with the Bigods), situated between Norwich and Yarmouth. At some point Stephen had also dispossessed the Fitz Alan family of the manor of Mileham, in mid Norfolk, because of their support for the Angevin cause. This too he gave to John fitz Robert. After the treaty of Westminster, he was obliged to restore the manor to the Fitz Alans, but gave William de Chesney, John's heir, in exchange for Mileham, the royal hundreds of Forehoe and Taverham, together with the manors of Hingham, *Chirchebi* (unidentified), Stow, Raynham, and *Racheheda* (?Rackheath).¹⁷¹ The hundreds of Taverham and Forehoe lay north and west of Norwich and would have given William widespread authority. William de Chesney also held seven knights' fees of the honour of Boulogne, at Ashwellthorpe, Little Massingham, Anmer, Frenze, and Witchingham, all in Norfolk, and at Little Chishall, then in Essex, but now in Cambridgeshire.¹⁷² In addition, he held at total of at least five fees of other lay and ecclesiastical lords, three in Norfolk, and two in

¹⁶⁸ *St Benet*, i, nos. 121, 143.

¹⁶⁹ *Monasticon*, 3, p. 637, no. IV.

¹⁷⁰ *Regesta*, iii, nos. 174-5.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid*, no. 177.

¹⁷² *Red Book*, ii, p. 576. The scribe has mistaken Torp, Widonis, and Andigavensis for three different places. And see *Cart. Sibton*, i, p. 15.

Suffolk.¹⁷³ With Stephen's blessing William founded the Cistercian abbey of Sibton in Suffolk, c. 1150: another source of spiritual influence to add to the family's foundation at Horsham St Faith. The extent of their estates, their wealth and their status as hereditary sheriffs, thus gave the Fitz Robert family hegemony over Norwich and much of east Norfolk.

Conclusion

During the civil war East Anglia seems to have escaped the worst of the church burnings, battles, the wastage of lands and property, or sieges of towns and castles, that afflicted other parts of the realm. To the extent that there was military activity in the region, it was perhaps limited to skirmishes and localised conflicts that arose through King Stephen's responses to Hugh Bigod's efforts to assert his authority over Suffolk, briefly catching the attention of the chroniclers. There was the seizure of Norwich castle by Hugh Bigod in the early months of 1136, and his dispute with Robert, earl of Leicester, over possession of Bungay and its castle, leading in the spring of 1140 to Hugh's attack on Bungay, and thus to Stephen's armed response. There appears to have been a further rebellion by Hugh in August 1140 that brought Stephen back to Suffolk. Although Hugh withdrew his support from Stephen after the battle of Lincoln, he remained quiet thereafter, until at the end of 1143 he joined with the disgraced Geoffrey de Mandeville in attacking royal possessions, albeit now focused on Cambridge and the Fens. After Geoffrey's death in September 1144, Hugh was once again quiescent until the spring of 1145 when he began to waste Stephen's manors in Suffolk, probably in the area surrounding the castle of Eye.¹⁷⁴ Stephen quickly brought him to heel. In 1149, Hugh was once again disturbing Bedford and East

¹⁷³ *Red Book*, i, p. 365, one fee of the bishop of Ely; p. 392, one fee of the bishop of Norwich, Blickling, inherited from his brother, John; p. 393, one fee of the abbot of Bury St Edmunds; p. 410, one fee of Roger of Kentwell; p. 400, one fee of Hubert de Ria.

¹⁷⁴ King, 2010, p. 220.

Anglia, presumably via his activities in Suffolk, provoking a response from Eustace, Stephen's son, who had been previously engaged in a campaign against Henry of Anjou in Wiltshire.¹⁷⁵ Thereafter, Hugh is recorded as making no further attacks until he seized Ipswich castle in 1153. Even so, the fact that he remained, throughout this period, in possession of the bulk of his honour is itself testimony to the inability or unwillingness of King Stephen to take decisive action against even the most recalcitrant of rebel barons. Similarly, Stephen was never able to dispossess other prominent magnates who rebelled against him, such as Ranulf, Earl of Chester and Robert of Gloucester.

In Norfolk, there seems to have been little military activity, despite a raid by Gilbert de Gant on the property of the monks of Norwich at Lynn. Even so, Everard, bishop of Norwich fretted over the possible loss of episcopal lands as a result of the war, gifting the vill of Blickling and Cressingham to two powerful knights in the hope of preventing the loss of other manors. Meanwhile, what characterised East Anglia more generally was the loss of central royal authority. Norfolk, splintered, with Norwich and east Norfolk under the firm control of the Fitz Robert family as sheriffs, and west Norfolk effectively governed by the earls Warenne and d'Albini. The fact that coins were struck at several East Anglian mints, including Norwich, from defaced, altered or locally cut dies likewise, points to erosion of royal authority.¹⁷⁶

In Suffolk, for much of Stephen's reign, what judicial authority there was, emanated not from the king or his officers but from the abbot of Bury St Edmunds. Hugh Bigod's control over other parts of Suffolk, mainly in the east, excluded the authority of the sheriff, with Hugh seizing

¹⁷⁵ Atkins, 1979, p. 152.

¹⁷⁶ M. Blackburn, 'Coinage and Currency', in *The Anarchy of King Stephen's Reign*, ed. E. King (Oxford 1994), 145-206, pp. 178-80.

church lands, and disrupting customs, subsequently restored to Ely and Belvoir in writs from Henry II.

What happened in East Anglia was perhaps less dramatic but perhaps just as insidious as the destruction caused by battles and sieges elsewhere; of less interest to the chroniclers, but nonetheless wreaking havoc with the administration of justice. Monastic houses lost lands and liberties. The difficulty of obtaining justice, either because judicial process had atrophied or because litigants lost confidence in judicial impartiality, prompted some to resort to self-help, not least amongst those who believed they had a legitimate claim to family lands previously alienated to religion. One such was Hubert de Montchesney in his seizure of the manor of Little Melton. Others sought to exploit the disruption to the administration of justice by occupying church lands, and thereafter resisting efforts to restore order. Hugh Bigod seemingly interfered with the five and a half hundreds that the monks of Ely claimed to control in Suffolk as the honour of Wicklow, while Binham had difficulty in ejecting Richard de Calva and Geoffrey de Tresgot from the manor of Barney, unlawfully seized. Belvoir Priory was deprived of lands and tithes by Hugh Bigod in the manors of Mells, Bradley, Sylham, and Yoxford, all in Suffolk. Serfs took the opportunity to flee their lords' lands, seeking the presumed 'free air' of the towns: a problem not confined to the civil war, but certainly exacerbated by it. In East Anglia the estates of St Benet of Holme and of the nuns of Malling, Kent, suffered in this way. Monastic houses lost customs and liberties, as oversight and enforcement proved more difficult. St Benet's appears to have been challenged in the exercise of rights of warren in Norfolk, as was Colchester Abbey at their manor of Wickham Skeith in Suffolk. The bishop of Ely could not operate his court because those who held of the bishop in the five and a half hundreds refused to obey his summonses to attend, almost certainly a consequence of Bigod having sized the honour. The men

of Clackclose hundred ignored the abbot of Ramsey when summoned to his hundred court. Rights of advowson were in many instances challenged. St Benet's was threatened with the loss of the advowson of Ranworth when Avelina de Ryes had the church bodily removed to her fief. The abbot also lost the advowson of the church of Repps, and the monks of Norwich lost control over the churches of St Stephen and St John, both in the city Norwich. Save for the incidents arising from Hugh Bigod's opposition to Stephen, and the events surrounding the murder of the boy 'martyr' William of Norwich, none of these episodes found its way into the chroniclers' narratives, leaving an impression of a relatively peaceful Norfolk and an only marginally disturbed Suffolk. Even so, that impression is dispelled by the flurry of writs issued by Henry II demanding that lands, liberties, and customs be restored, having been lost *tempore guerre*, or since the death of Henry I. It is likewise apparent from these writs that it was in east Norfolk, that part of the county under the control of the sheriff, that various of the worst excesses occurred. Suffolk, on the other hand, suffered from an absence of royal control for much of the 1140s because of the hold that Hugh Bigod exercised over the county, particularly in its eastern half. It was not until c. 1150 that a Suffolk shire-moot was held, at a time when affairs there were more peaceful, and even then, it was held in Norwich, in the bishop's garden. It is true that Henry I issued more writs to his bishops and royal officers to place monastic houses in possession of lands and liberties, than did Henry II. However, this reflects Henry I's direct involvement in the administration of justice, his vigorous intervention in lawsuits, and the accessibility of his court to litigants.¹⁷⁷ King Stephen's reign, by contrast, saw a reduction in the availability of royal justice, which was later reflected in Henry II's writs, themselves intended to put right what should have been done by his predecessor. Yet in spite of this, and despite attacks

¹⁷⁷ J. A. Green, *The Government of England under Henry I* (Cambridge 1986), pp. 102-5.

on church possessions, just as in other parts of the realm, in East Anglia, men of both high and lesser status continued to found religious houses.

Chapter 2

Monastic Expansion During Stephen's Reign

It has frequently been observed that the years of King Stephen's reign, from 1135 to 1154, saw a rapid increase in the rate of new monastic foundations across England and Wales, outstripping the growth of religious houses in the reigns either of Henry I or of Stephen's successor, Henry II.¹⁷⁸ This was a phenomenon that had already been noticed by contemporaries. William of Newburgh, for instance, observed that more monasteries and nunneries were founded between 1135 and 1155 than in the preceding hundred years.¹⁷⁹ Much of that growth can be attributed to the establishment of the new orders in England: the Augustinians, Cistercians, Premonstratensians, and Gilbertines. Using the figures from Knowles and Hadcock's seminal census, I counted 175 houses established during the reign of King Stephen, the same number arrived at by Christopher Holdsworth in his study of the phenomenon.¹⁸⁰ We both include in our calculation small priories and priory cells, as well as the preceptories of the Hospitallers and Templars, but exclude granges, hospitals, and secular colleges. The date of foundation for most of the houses can be only approximate. The Cistercian and Savigniac houses are the only ones that deliberately preserved precise dates of foundation, because their abbatial seniority was determined by date of foundation rather than by the date of abbatial appointment. The other problem in dating is that foundation charters do not necessarily indicate the date when a house was actually founded. Many were drawn up some years after the proposal to found a particular

¹⁷⁸ *MRH*, p. 28, and the tables at pp. 488-95; Holdsworth, 1994, p. 216; Knowles, 1963, pp. 297-8, and Appendix XIII at p. 711.

¹⁷⁹ *Chronicles*, i, p. 53.

¹⁸⁰ Holdsworth, 1994, p. 216.

house began to be realised, perhaps only when a monastery was dedicated, or the monks took up residence. Thus, a monastery that is said to have been founded in 1136 may well have come into existence two or three years earlier. However, I have taken account of dates of foundation that fall within Stephen's reign starting with 1136 even though in reality a house 'founded' in 1136 would probably have been planned in the reign of Henry I, which ended on 1 December 1135. That is balanced out by my not including houses whose foundation charters place them in the early years of Henry II, but that probably had their origins in King Stephen's reign. In all cases, it seems most sensible to use the traditionally accepted foundation date as starting point. Where a date is given that spans two reigns, for example, 1152 X 1159, then the median date has been taken, which in this example would be 1155, thus placing it in the reign of Henry II. Knowles, in his *Monastic Order*, when calculating the number of houses founded during each reign, omitted preceptories and the smaller priories and cells. He there assigns 105 new houses to the reign of Henry I and 114 to that of King Stephen.¹⁸¹ Holdsworth does not supply a figure for Henry I. The figure I arrived at is 195. While Knowles analysed by county, Holdsworth compared dioceses. I have adopted a county-by-county analysis, although my focus will be on Norfolk and Suffolk, which together also represent the diocese of Norwich. Before considering the particular case of East Anglia, however, I believe it appropriate to comment on the expansion of monastic foundation across England and Wales as a whole.

Both Knowles and Holdsworth have analysed the phenomenon from a top-down perspective which provides a somewhat distorted picture of what was actually happening. Although most counties saw the establishment of religious houses during Stephen's reign, not all counties saw growth. Some counties saw no new foundations at all. Overall, as indicated above, roughly 195

¹⁸¹ Knowles, 1963, p. 711

houses were founded during the 35 years of Henry I's reign, and 175 during the 19 years of King Stephen. These figures represent respectively 5.57 and 9.26 houses founded for each year of these respective reigns, so clearly the rate of growth during Stephen's reign was much higher than that of Henry I, by a factor of roughly 66%. However, such growth was not even across England and Wales. Of the 52 counties that appear in Knowles and Hadcock, only 15 counties saw more houses founded in Stephen's reign than in that of Henry I. They were Bedfordshire with 2 more, Cambridgeshire with 3, Cheshire 1, Derbyshire 5, Devon 2, Gloucestershire 6, Hertfordshire 1, Lincolnshire 22, Northamptonshire 4, Nottinghamshire 4, Staffordshire 3, Wiltshire 1, Worcestershire 2, Yorkshire East Riding 1, and Yorkshire North Riding 2.

Therefore, one can identify both absolute and relative growth in these particular counties. Lincolnshire stands out with 22 more foundations in Stephen's reign than in Henry I's. In all Lincolnshire acquired 31 new monastic houses between 2 December 1135 and December 1154. Eleven counties experienced relative growth, although either there was no change in the number in absolute terms or fewer houses were founded in Stephen's reign than in that of Henry I, but even so there was growth that was relatively greater in Stephen's mere 19 years. These counties were Berkshire, Essex, Glamorgan, Kent, Leicester, Middlesex, Norfolk, Oxford, Rutland, Shropshire and Yorkshire West Riding. 22 counties saw growth at a rate lower than that in Henry I's reign. They were Brecknock, Buckinghamshire, Cardigan, Carmarthen, Cornwall, Cumberland, Dorset, Flintshire, Hampshire, Herefordshire, Huntingdonshire, Isle of Wight, Lancashire, London, Monmouthshire, Northumberland, Pembroke, Somerset, Suffolk, Surrey, and Warwick. In four counties, no foundations seem to have occurred in either reign. They were Carnarvon, Durham, Montgomery and Radnor. The lack of growth in some counties is readily explained by their marcher status with Scotland or Wales, in regions subject to frequent raids and

skirmishes. Such would have been the experience in Northumberland, Cumberland, Herefordshire, Flintshire, Brecknock, and Monmouthshire. Founders were reluctant or discouraged from committing precious resources that might come under attack from Scottish or Welsh raiding parties. Such was the fate of the Savigniac abbey of Calder, in Cumberland, founded by Ranulph de Meschin in 1135, but destroyed by the Scots in 1138.¹⁸² Other counties would have been problematic because of their mountainous or rugged terrain, making survival difficult. The Welsh counties were challenging in that respect, Carnarvon and Radnor seeing no foundations between 1100 and 1135, Carmarthen and Cardigan with none in Stephen's reign and Pembroke with only one. Those counties that saw both absolute and relative growth are difficult to categorise. It cannot be said that growth was a function of which side in the civil war held the balance of power, either the king or the Angevins. Three counties under the control of the empress - Wiltshire, Worcestershire, and Gloucestershire, with three, five and eight new foundations respectively - compare favourably with Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire, and Northamptonshire, where Stephen's writ ran, in which respectively three, four and five houses were founded. The swathe of midland counties - Cheshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Nottingham, and Lincolnshire - remained contested territory, Lincoln initially between the empress and Stephen, but later, with the others, between Stephen and Ranulph II earl of Chester. Cheshire had three new foundations, Shropshire and Staffordshire six, Nottinghamshire seven while Lincolnshire outpaced all others with a total of 31 new foundations, eight of them Cistercian, and ten Gilbertine. During Stephen's reign, magnates on both sides, as well as those following their own interests, continued to found monasteries. Robert, earl of Gloucester, who supported the empress, founded Bristol St James and Margam in his lordship of Glamorgan. The

¹⁸² *VCH Cumberland*, ii, p. 174.

royalist Robert earl of Leicester founded the Cistercian abbey of Garendon, and the abbey of Leicester although Robert changed his allegiance to the Angevin cause in 1153. Another royalist, Simon de Senlis, earl of Northampton and in due course Huntingdon, founded two houses: the Cistercian abbey of Sawtry in Huntingdonshire, and the Cluniac nunnery of Delapré on the outskirts of Northampton. Having finally come into his inheritance after the collapse of the alliance between Stephen and David of Scotland in 1141, Simon was probably motivated to demonstrate his lordship in each of his two earldoms. William le Gros, count of Aumâle, earl of Yorkshire, and a supporter of Stephen, was responsible for founding three houses: the Cistercian monasteries of Byland and Meaux in Yorkshire, and the Augustinian priory of Thornton, in Lincolnshire. Another senior royalist magnate, William III de Warenne, at the beginning of the reign, founded his priory for Augustinian canons of the Holy Sepulchre in Thetford, Norfolk on land given to him by King Stephen: a foundation probably driven not only by William's spiritual motives, but by Stephen's desire to counter the influence of Hugh Bigod in that part of East Anglia. That north Midlands thorn in Stephen's flesh, Ranulph, II earl of Chester, founded four houses: Kersal in Lancashire, Maltby for the Knights Hospitallers in Lincolnshire, Trentham, Staffordshire, for Augustinian canons, and Chester for Benedictine nuns. Holdsworth noted that of the thirty-three earls living in 1135 or created thereafter by Stephen, twenty were monastic founders.¹⁸³ Holdsworth suggests that monastic growth was dependent upon the presence of a sympathetic diocesan bishop.¹⁸⁴ Yet whilst that might explain the Cistercians lack of success in the diocese of Winchester, under that enemy of Clairvaux, Henry of Blois, it offers a less than satisfactory explanation overall. Certainly, the influx of new orders that were less expensive to found than the traditional Benedictine houses would have opened the market to a wider

¹⁸³ Holdsworth, 1994, p. 221.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 221.

constituency, enabling lesser land holders to emulate their lords and the greater men of the realm. The uncertainties in tenurial status, brought about by changing allegiances during a period of civil war, may also have persuaded landholders to place estates in the hands of monastic houses as a way of safeguarding lands that might otherwise be lost, but which thereby promised their donors an element of control with spiritual benefits into the bargain. Meanwhile, the upheaval and disruption to life in general that the conflict brought about for many may have incentivised a search for a more secure afterlife, with the foundation of a religious house perceived as a means of ensuring salvation and the remission of sin. Those who had the resources built spiritual castles for the protection of their souls whilst others of lesser means made offerings as best they could, in all cases hoping to rescue themselves from eternal damnation.

Monastic Expansion in East Anglia

If we now turn to the growth of religious houses across East Anglia, we find that there was hardly any change in the rate of foundation between the reigns of Henry I and King Stephen. Between 1100 and 1135, 20 houses, principally Benedictine with a scattering of Cluniac and Augustinian priories, were newly founded, whilst in Stephen's reign, only ten were established, predominantly for Augustinian canons, but also including the only Cistercian abbey in the region, located at Sibton in Suffolk. This represents 0.57 houses per annum for Henry I and 0.52 per annum during Stephen's reign, so, on the face of it, a marginally slower rate of growth between 1136 and 1154. That analysis, however, conceals the growth that did take place in Norfolk, and the near collapse in growth in Suffolk. Whilst there was no absolute growth in Norfolk, seven houses were founded in Stephen's reign against 11 under Henry I. By contrast, in Suffolk the comparative figures are three and nine. In Norfolk the respective annual rates are 0.37 for Stephen and 0.31 for Henry, whilst in Suffolk the figures are reversed with 0.15 for

Stephen and 0.25 for Henry, a significant decline for Suffolk. Nevertheless, the growth in Norfolk was modest when set against the rate of growth for the realm as a whole, 19% as against 66%. The reasons for the slower rate of growth in Norfolk and the absence of growth in Suffolk are common to both counties, and in some cases were shared with other English counties. Insecurity was the overwhelming factor here. Indeed, Suffolk may have been regarded as definitely too risky a place for spiritual investment, given the disruption caused by Hugh Bigod in that county. It might be of significance that all three houses established in Suffolk in Stephen's reign were founded after 1149, by which time Hugh Bigod was less of a threat: Sibton in 1150, the Knights Hospitallers' preceptory of Battisford *c.* 1154, and the Cluniac prior of Mendham in the closing years of the reign.

Factors to Consider

East Anglia was a region where several factors combined to inhibit the foundation of religious houses. In the middle of the twelfth century Norfolk and Suffolk together boasted the largest population of any region in England. There were more settlements per square mile, and more land under the plough, than in any other part of England, but also a substantial area which was largely unsuitable for cultivation because of its sandy soils, with heathlands and scrub more suitable for grazing and rabbit warrens. Much land was already church land: especially in the vicinity of Bury St Edmunds, Eye and the Ely estates in Suffolk, while in Norfolk, Norwich Cathedral Priory and St Benet of Holme in east Norfolk, Binham in the north and Castle Acre in the west, accounted for large holdings. East Anglia was home to a greater number of freemen who could alienate their property than in those counties that had not been part of the Danelaw. Their holdings varied in size from half an acre to the low hundreds of acres, and where they had to be bought out by a founder to provide a sufficient endowment to support his foundation, might

substantially increase the cost of the exercise. Also competing for scarce resources were parish churches, for the twelfth century saw a rapid expansion in their numbers, in Norfolk and Suffolk particularly so: a reflection of the region's greater population density and higher number of settlements. These churches needed land for buildings, glebe and cemeteries.

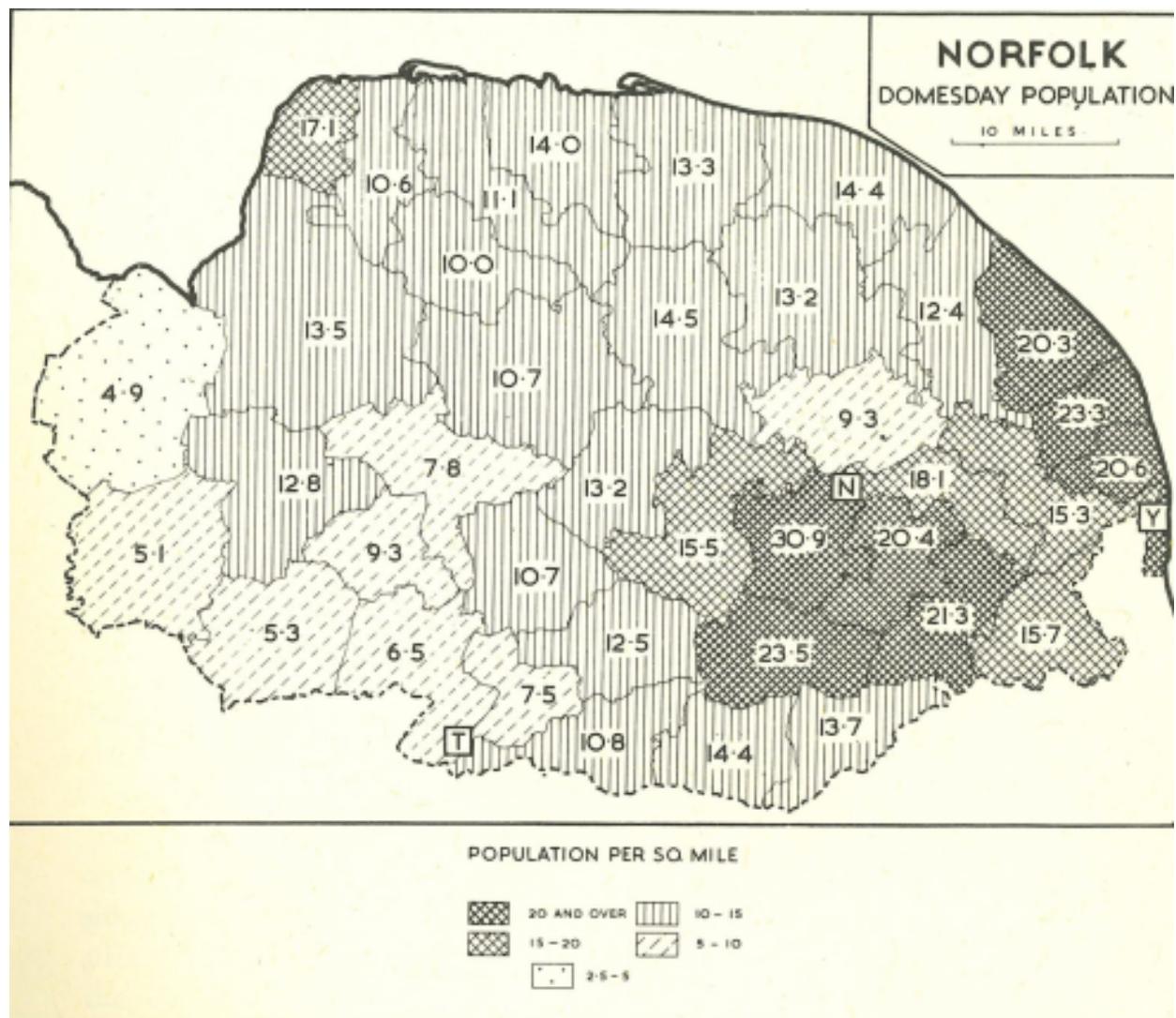
Turning first to the population of East Anglia. I have relied upon a study published in March 2011 that uses Josiah Cox Russell's benchmark estimates of population for 1086 and 1377 to create a new time series for aggregate population derived from manor-level data on tenant numbers using an appropriate weighting system.¹⁸⁵ Using Russell's analysis of the data from the Domesday survey, but weaving into the framework Harvey's assumptions that the Domesday data under-recorded or omitted small-holders and the landless, the 1086 survey's focus being more on the landed wealth of tenants-in-chief and their head tenants, the authors estimate that in 1086 Norfolk was home to 8.68 % and Suffolk to 6.65% of the population of England: a combined total of 15.33%. The only other county that came close was Lincolnshire, which in 1086 housed 8.21% of the overall population. By way of comparison, Berkshire had 2.24%, Kent 4.42%, Leicestershire 2.24%, and Yorkshire 2.6%. The extreme northern counties were sparsely populated, with Cumberland at 0.54%, Northumberland 0.72%, and Durham at 0.45%.¹⁸⁶ In terms of numbers, these figures suggest populations of 148,000 for Norfolk and 113,400 for Suffolk (rounded down to the nearest 100). By the middle of the twelfth century, these figures would have increased, the authors estimate, for Norfolk at a suggested annual rate of 0.59% and

¹⁸⁵ S. Broadberry, B. Campbell, and B. Van Leeuwen, 'English Medieval Population: reconciling time series and cross-sectional evidence', 3 March 2011, in *Reconstructing the National Income of Britain and Holland, c.1270/1500 to 1850*, available at https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/economics/seminars/seminars/conferences/venice3/programme/english_medieval_population.pdf, accessed on 13 April 2024; J. C. Russell, *British Medieval Population* (Albuquerque 1948).

¹⁸⁶ S. Harvey, 'Domesday England', in *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, Vol. II, 1042-1350*, ed. H. E. Hallam (Cambridge 1988), 45-136, pp. 48-9; Broadberry et al., 2011, pp. 4, 24.

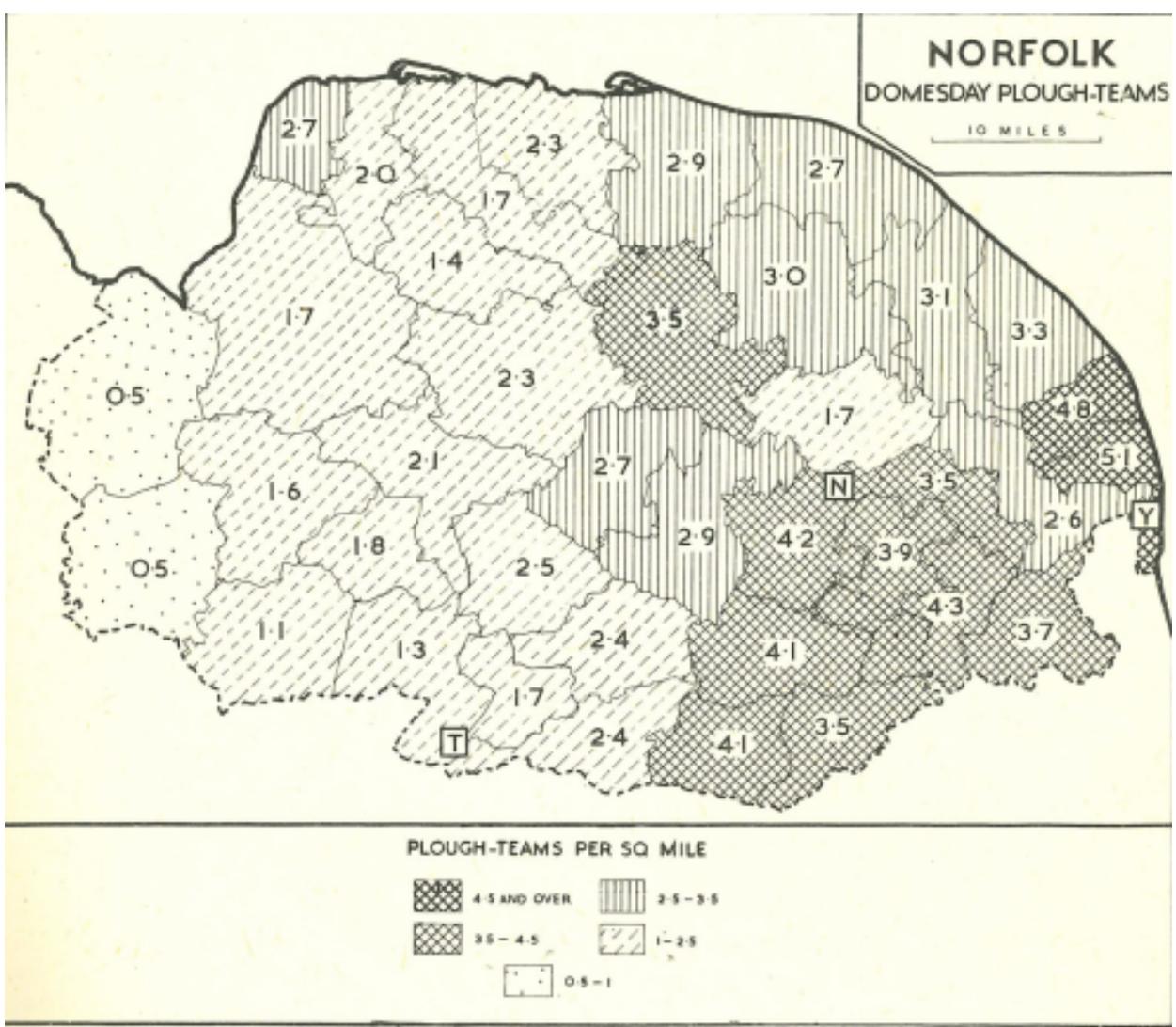
for Suffolk 0.34% (in both cases very much as guestimates).¹⁸⁷ By *c.* 1135 the population of Norfolk would thus have been roughly 200,000, and that of Suffolk approaching 135,000, a combined total of 335,000, which probably represented roughly 15% (or more than one in seven) of the total population of England, given by then a total population of approximately 2,200,000. In Norfolk the population tended to be concentrated in the east of the county with the highest densities in 1086 ranging from 20 to 24 persons per square mile. The further west, the lower the density, so that the fenland and Breckland areas probably had less than five persons per square mile. Much of the rest of Norfolk varied from 10 to 17 persons (Map 2). These figures are mirrored in the number of plough teams per square mile, the highest density areas for population recording four and over, and the fens and Breckland half a plough team per square mile (Map 3). Unsurprisingly we find a similar correlation in Suffolk, with a central belt running roughly northwest to southeast of the county being the most populous and recording the highest concentration of plough teams per square mile (Maps 4 and 5). Much land in Norfolk and Suffolk, therefore, was under occupation and cultivation, with hundreds of settlements distributed across the region, and each settlement a centre of agrarian production.

¹⁸⁷ Broadberry et al., 2011, p. 26.



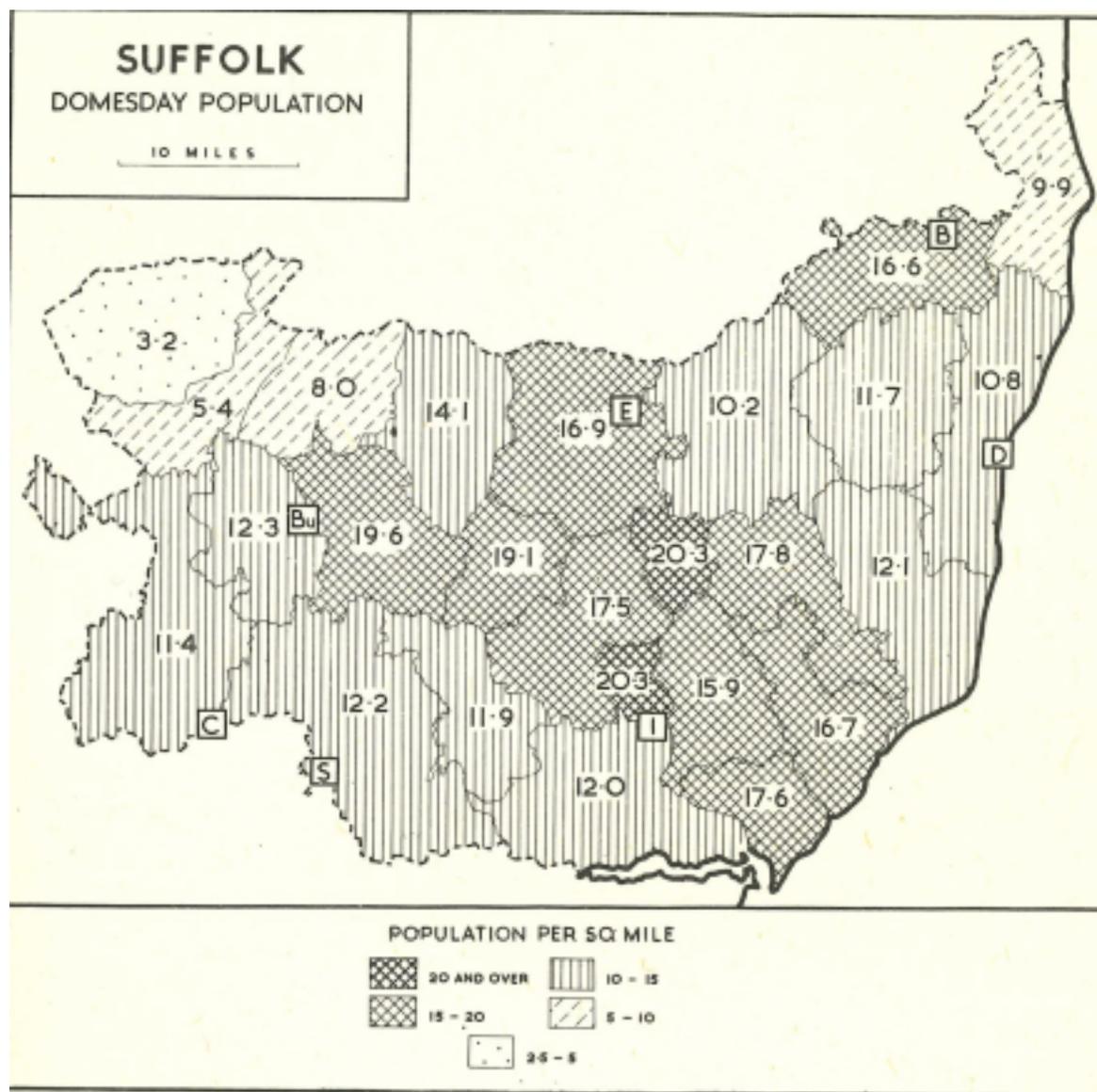
Map 2.¹⁸⁸ Norfolk Domesday population by density

¹⁸⁸ H. C. Derby, *The Domesday Geography of Eastern England* (Cambridge 1971). Map of Norfolk population densities p. 117. Those places with burgesses have been excluded from the calculation of densities. They are indicated on the map by initials: N, Norwich; T, Thetford; Y, Yarmouth; Norfolk plough teams p. 113. For Suffolk population pp. 172-3; Suffolk plough teams pp. 166-7.



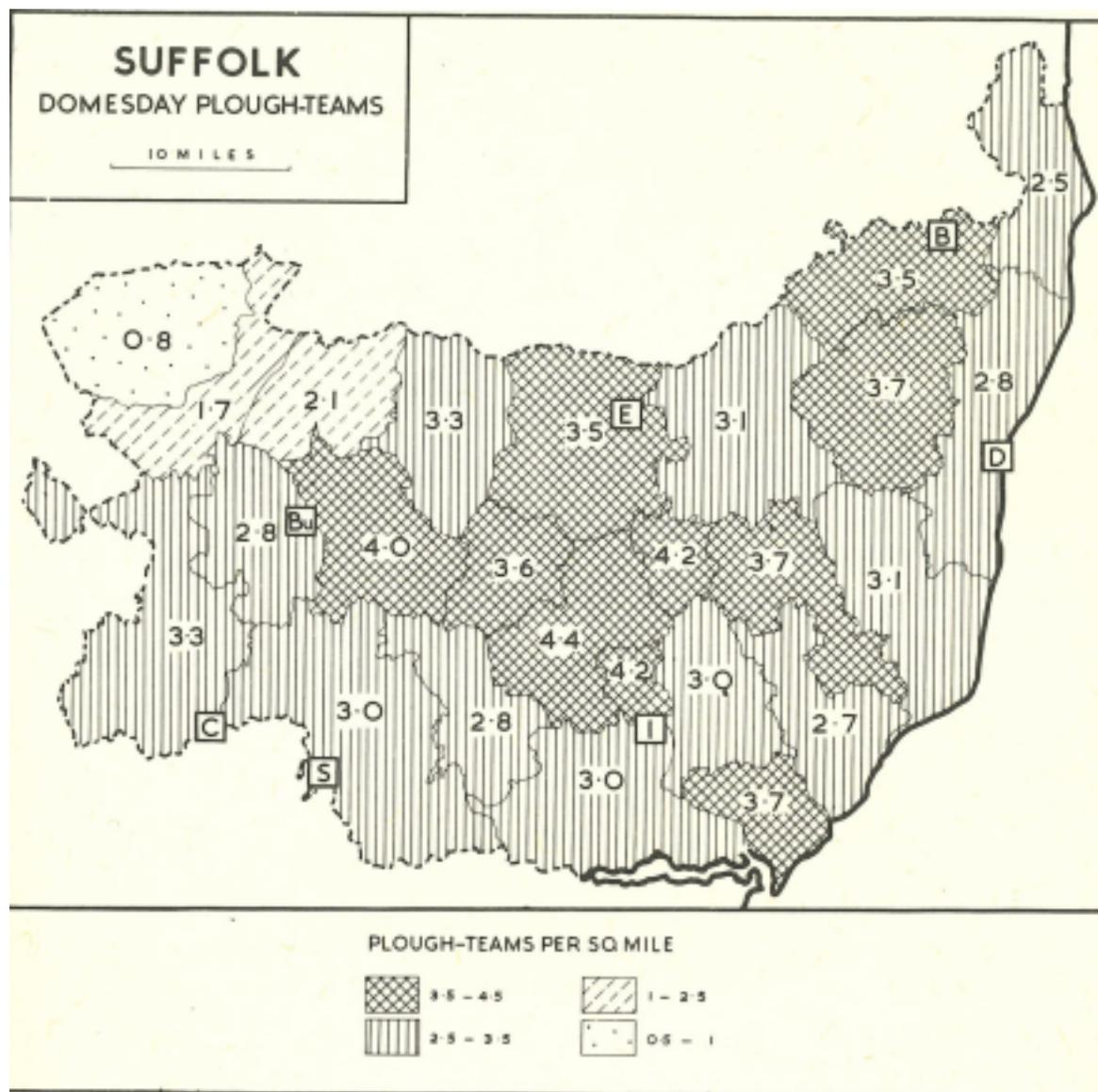
Map 3.¹⁸⁹ Domesday Norfolk plough-teams by density

¹⁸⁹ Derby, 1971, p. 113. As for Norfolk population densities, they have not been calculated for Norwich, Thetford or Yarmouth.



Map 4.¹⁹⁰ Suffolk Domesday population by density

¹⁹⁰ Derby, 1971, p. 173. Those places with burghs have not been included in the calculation of population densities. They are indicated by initials: B, Beccles; Bu, Bury St Edmunds; C, Clare; D, Dunwich; E, Eye; I, Ipswich; S, Sudbury.



Map 5.¹⁹¹ Suffolk Domesday plough-teams by density

Other factors impinged upon the availability of land. Not all land in East Anglia was capable of being cultivated or was sufficiently fertile to support the needs of a religious community. The area in East Anglia known as Breckland, covering the southwest corner of Norfolk and the

¹⁹¹ Derby, 1971, p. 167. Density calculation for population re burgesses as set out at note 186.

northwest corner of Suffolk, saw little by way of new foundations.¹⁹² The twelfth century witnessed a rapid growth in the construction of parish churches, and Norfolk and Suffolk were foremost in that movement. Between the eleventh and sixteenth centuries at least 921 churches were built in Norfolk. The Domesday survey records some 330 churches for the county, which is likely to be a considerable underestimate. The Domesday figure for Suffolk is 418. A more accurate picture for Norfolk is available from the *Taxatio* of 1291/2 which recorded 719 parish churches for Norfolk, most of them already in existence in the twelfth century. However, it did not include those churches exempt from taxation, some 114 according to the *Tanner Index*, giving a total of 833. For Suffolk the respective figures are 508 and 39, a total of 547.¹⁹³ Each church required land for its construction, a house for the priest with glebe to support him, and a cemetery, whilst local parishioners often made benefactions of land to their parish church. This was particularly so for churches that had enjoyed minster status before the Conquest, some of which held large tracts of land. Examples here include St Peter's in Ipswich with 720 acres, St Mary's Thetford with 712.5 acres, Blythburgh with 240 acres, Long Melford 240 acres, and Shimpling, 60 acres.¹⁹⁴ By the end of the twelfth century, East Anglia had over 1200 churches: more than any other region in England, and a reflection of its greater population density and relative wealth.

Imparking for deer parks by great lords was also a characteristic of 12th century East Anglia. In Norfolk, deer parks were a feature of lordly estates at Castle Rising, Castle Acre, Wormegay, Mileham, Middleton, Horsford, New Buckenham, Wymondham, Weeting, and many other

¹⁹² For an analysis of the factors affecting Breckland rendering it unsuitable for monastic foundation, see Appendix 2.

¹⁹³ *Taxatio Ecclesiastica*, available at https://www.dhi.ac.uk/taxatio/forms?context=diocese_norwich. Accessed 14 April 2024.

¹⁹⁴ N. Scarfe, 'Domesday Churches', in *An Historical Atlas of Suffolk*, Revised and Enlarged Edition, ed. D. Dymond and E. Martin (Ipswich 1999), p.52.

locations.¹⁹⁵ Most of the deer parks of Norfolk appear in a band that runs north to south from the centre of Norfolk, spreading east, and largely reflecting the area where population density was at its highest.¹⁹⁶ Suffolk, too was home to many deer parks. The abbot of Bury St Edmunds had parks at Semer and Chelsworth, while Robert Malet, chamberlain to Henry I, lord of the honour of Eye, had three.¹⁹⁷

The Prevalence of Freemen

Landholding in both Norfolk and Suffolk was characterised by the large number of freemen who held their land of a lord but with the right to alienate it. In Norfolk, together with sokemen, who, like freemen, could sell their land but owed service to their lord's soke, or court, they amounted to 42% of the population recorded in Domesday.¹⁹⁸ In Suffolk, the freemen alone accounted for 41% of the population, with sokemen only about one tenth the number of free men. Robert Liddiard has argued that the high concentration of freeholders peculiar to East Anglia was a significant contributing factor in explaining the low density of castles in a region that had the highest population density in England. Intuitively, had castles been constructed principally as a means to dominate the population, one would expect areas with the highest population densities to present the greatest number of castles. That is not the case with East Anglia, and Liddiard seeks a reason in the large number of individuals with free tenure who might have been able to object to a lord taking land for castle building, and who, even then, would have had to be bought

¹⁹⁵ Liddiard, 2000, pp. 51-6, 75-90.

¹⁹⁶ D. Yaxley, 'Medieval Deer Parks', in *An Historical Atlas of Norfolk*, 56-7. And see *ante*, pp. 79-84 re population densities.

¹⁹⁷ R. Hoppit, 'Deer Parks, 1086-c.1600', in *An Historical Atlas of Suffolk*, 66-7.

¹⁹⁸ For a discussion of the significance of freemen and sokemen in Norfolk and their respective distinguishing characteristics, see T. Williamson, *The Origins of Norfolk* (Manchester 1993), pp. 114-21.

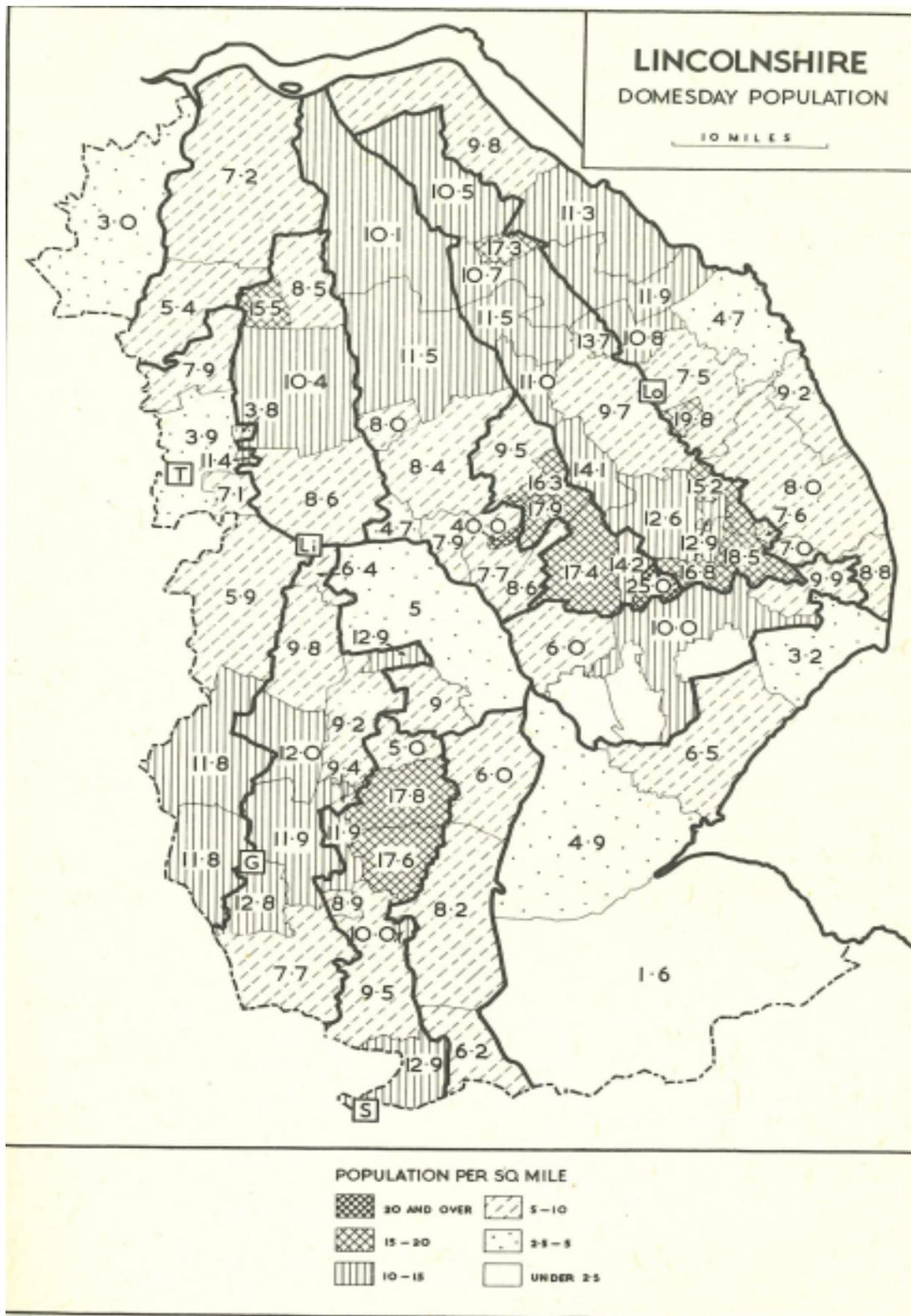
out, thus incurring additional expense. Another factor, traceable to pre-Conquest lordship relations, was the practice of commendation, whereby a freeman commended himself to a lord but retained control over his land. In Anglo-Saxon England, no link of direct service was necessarily established between lord and man. After the Conquest, that changed with the imposition of military service in exchange for land, and William's tenants-in-chief could find themselves in litigation over who had the right to land that had been held by a freeman who had commended himself to the tenant-in-chief's *antecessor*. Was it the successor to the lord of whom the freeman held, or the successor to the lord to whom the individual or their ancestors had previously commended themselves? As Liddiard points out, Domesday Book is replete with disputes over *antecessorial* succession, with 63 such cases in Norfolk Domesday alone, mainly in the southeast of the county, where the population was densest, and with a high proportion of freemen. Those factors combined to discourage castle building in Norfolk and Suffolk and, in Norfolk, directed it to the west of the county where population density was lower as was the incidence of freemen. A similar pattern can be observed, Liddiard notes, in both Suffolk and Lincolnshire, where castle building avoided those parts of the county with the highest density of freemen.¹⁹⁹

Can we advance a similar argument in relation to the slow rate of foundation of religious houses in Norfolk and Suffolk? It might well have been a contributing factor, but other elements may have assumed even greater significance. For we must contend with the exponential growth of monastic foundation that occurred in Lincolnshire, a county that was as wealthy as Norfolk and Suffolk, as densely populated as Norfolk and with a high concentration of individuals with free

¹⁹⁹ R. Liddiard, 'Population density and Norman castle building: some evidence from East Anglia', in *Landscape History*, 22:1 (2000), 37-46.

tenure, an average of 50% of sokemen. There seems not to have been a separate class of freemen in Lincolnshire.²⁰⁰ Lincolnshire's monastic growth, to a certain extent, conforms with the hypothesis thus far advanced. One of the parts of Lincolnshire that was a triangle of land in the north of the county, with a median density of between nine and twelve people per square mile (Map 6), saw seven new religious houses founded during Stephen's reign, at Thornholme, Thornton, Gokewell, Nun Cotham, Tunstal, Newhouse and Willoughton. Those parts of Lincolnshire with the highest concentration of population, a swathe in the middle of the county with between 16 and 18 persons per square mile, and an area in the south with something approaching 18 persons per square mile, saw no foundations in the former, and only Sempringham in the latter. All other houses founded in Lincolnshire during Stephen's reign, 23 in all, were founded in parts of the county, principally the east and a central belt that runs north to south, that had a lower population density and therefore a lower percentage of sokemen (Map 7).

²⁰⁰ Darby, 1957, p. 50.



Map 6.²⁰¹ Lincolnshire Domesday population by density



Map 7.²⁰² Medieval religious houses in Lincolnshire

The question must be posed, however, as to whether, and to what extent, the sokeman tenurial relationship survived into the mid twelfth century? Even in 1086 not all sokemen were free to

²⁰¹ Derby, 1971 p. 53.

²⁰² *An Historical Atlas of Lincolnshire*, ed. S. Bennet and N. Bennett (Hull 1994), p. 49.

sell or grant their land, as is evidenced by the record in Domesday for the manor of Blofield in Norfolk, held in 1086 by William de Beaufeu of the bishop of Norwich, which had 43 sokemen ‘who could neither sell nor grant their lands’.²⁰³ In Norfolk there are three other manors named in Domesday where a similar restriction applied to sokemen, four manors in which freemen needed the consent of their lord, and one, Holkham, the bishop of Norwich’s manor, where the freeman holding could neither grant nor forfeit his land.²⁰⁴ In Suffolk, the prohibition on sale and grant without consent was more prevalent, but largely confined to sokemen and various freemen who were tenants of Bury St Edmunds. I have identified four manors not held by St Edmunds where sokemen could not sell their land, and six where freemen were so constrained.²⁰⁵ Overall, however, the number of manors where the restriction applied is so small in relation to the number of manors in total as to be of little significance. Not a single manor in Lincolnshire in which sokemen held land in 1086, about half of the total, is recorded as constraining the rights of sokemen in that way. However, it seems likely that by the end of the eleventh century, many freemen and sokemen would have suffered a diminution in status as more onerous tenurial conditions were imposed upon them by their new lords in exchange for military service, or where partible inheritance had reduced individual holdings to unsustainable levels.²⁰⁶ It might be significant that Domesday records that of 20 bovates of land in Braceborough in Lincolnshire, held in the time of King Edward by Dene, Karli, and Leodflaed, two were free sokeland under Dene. By 1086, when their land was held by Robert of Stafford, the land appears to have been free of sokemen. In Carlby in Lincolnshire, Karli and Dene also held one carucate and half a

²⁰³ *Domesday Book*, p. 1116. The Phillimore edition has translated the entry as freemen, but the manuscript entry reads *soc*. See *Domesday Norfolk*, i, f. 195a.

²⁰⁴ *Domesday Norfolk*, i, 1:220; ii, 13:21; 17:9; i, 1:225; 8:137; 9:167; ii, 35:4; i, 10:13.

²⁰⁵ *Domesday Suffolk*, i. Sokemen, 6:148, 176; ii, 28:2, 31, 42; Freemen, i. 8:45; ii, 25:105; 26:1, 4; 34:2, 3.

²⁰⁶ K. Skipper and T. Williamson, ‘Late Saxon Social Structure’, in *An Historical Atlas of Norfolk*, p. 40.

bovate, of which Karli held free sokeland under Dene. By 1086 there is no reference to any part of Carlby being held by sokemen.²⁰⁷ With those examples in mind, it might well be the case that by the first quarter of the twelfth century, the existence of a large body of sokemen did not pose problems in securing land for monastic foundations, and that it was the density of population, *per se*, in combination with the extensive cultivation of land such density required, that persuaded founders to look to less populous areas. In 1139, Gilbert de Gant gave three carucates of land in his manor of Sempringham, Lincolnshire, to Gilbert of Sempringham to enable him to build his priory. The land is recorded in 1086 as having thirteen sokemen. Willoughton, Lincolnshire, in 1086 held by two lords, Waldin the Artificer and Odo the Crossbowman, records 17 and 18 sokemen in their respective manors. In the time of King Stephen, Roger de Builli founded a preceptory for the Knights Templars in one of those manors. Nocton, Lincolnshire, site of the Augustinian house founded by Robert d’Arcy in the time of King Stephen, in 1086 was held by Robert’s father, Norman, and had 26 sokemen settled on its land.²⁰⁸ The manors on which the seven religious houses were founded in the north of the county, where population densities were in the median range, were recorded in 1086 as having sokemen in the following numbers: Thornholme 31, Thornton 9, Gokewell 20, Nun Cotham 1 or 2, Tunstal 6, Newhouse none, and Willoughton 17 or 18. Where two figures have been supplied here it is because it remains unclear on which part of a manor the house was founded. Of the 31 religious houses founded in Lincolnshire in the reign of King Stephen, at least 20 had been founded on manors which, in 1086, had sokemen. In one such case, the Knights Hospitallers’ preceptory of Maltby, founded by Ranulph of Chester, there were no less than 41 such sokemen. By Stephen’s reign, the presence of sokemen on land to be gifted to a religious house did not appear to cause difficulties,

²⁰⁷ *Domesday Book*, p. 952.

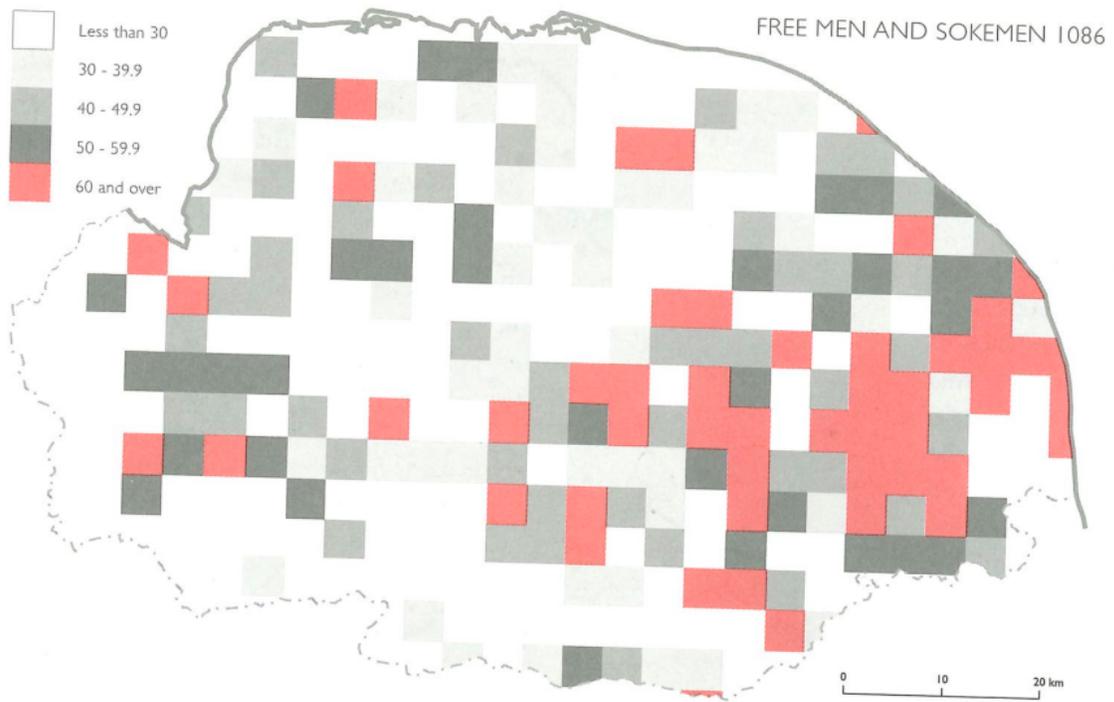
²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 924, 945, 937-8.

presumably because they were no longer a significant part of the tenorial landscape, many having disappeared altogether, joining the ranks of the villeins, or holding land on less stringent conditions than their villein counterparts, but tied to their lord, nevertheless.

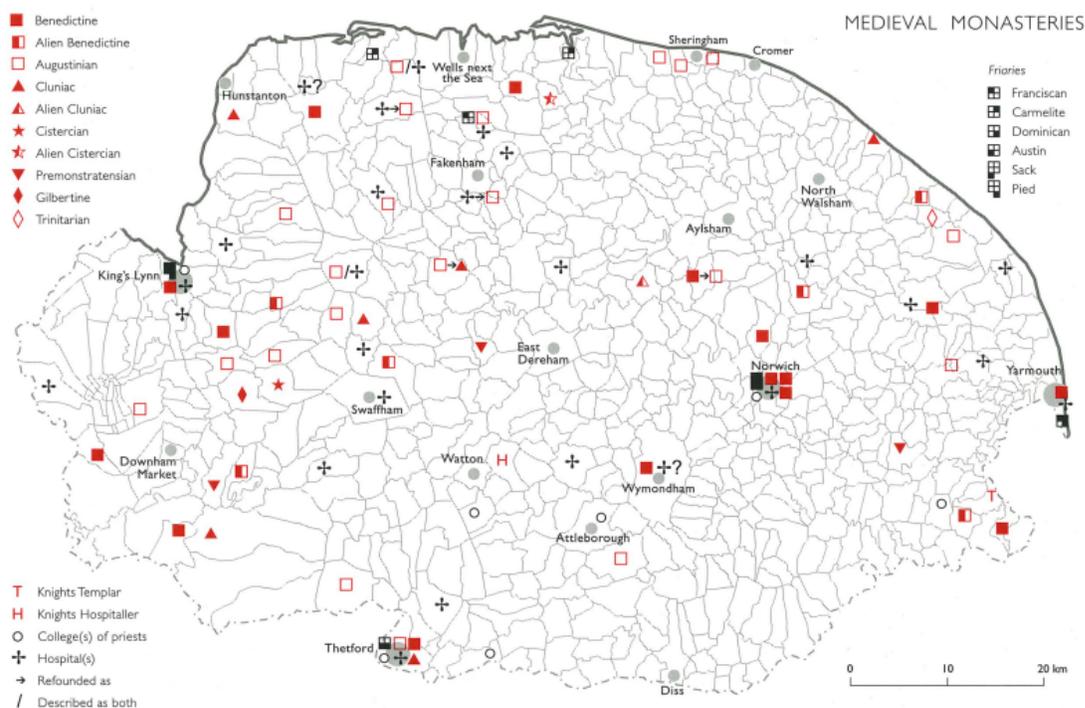
Monastic foundation in Norfolk thus follows the same basic patterns as those for castle building, and population density. The areas of Norfolk with the highest levels of population lay in the east of the county, in a band stretching roughly from North Walsham through Norwich and Wymondham to Attleborough (Map 2). In 1086, this area also had the highest concentration of freemen and sokemen (Map 8).²⁰⁹ A cursory glance at a map of Norfolk showing the location of each religious house demonstrates that most are to be found in the western parts of the county, where population densities were lower (Map 9).²¹⁰

²⁰⁹ Skipper and Williamson, 2005, p. 41.

²¹⁰ T. Pestell, 'Monasteries', in *An Historical Atlas of Norfolk*, 66-67, p. 67.



Map 8. Freemen and Sokemen in Norfolk in 1086



Map 9. The Medieval Religious Houses of Norfolk

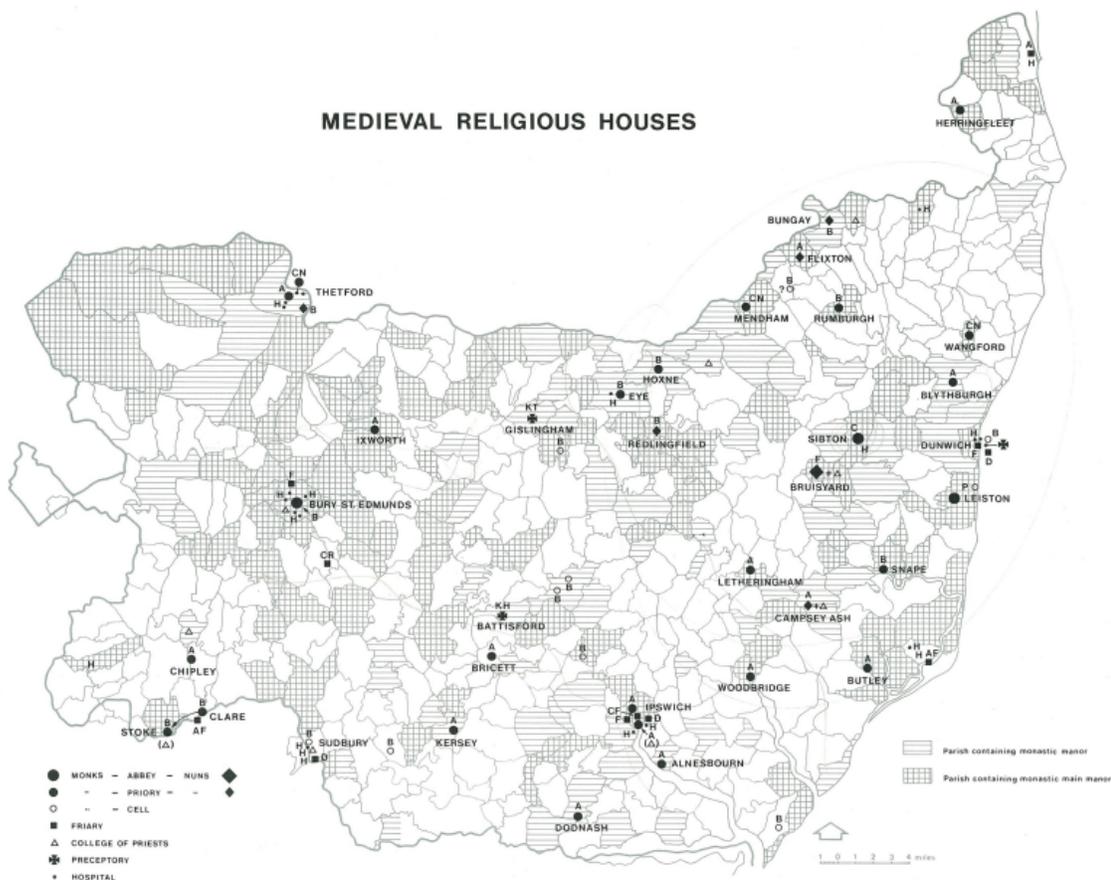
Of the seven monastic houses founded in Norfolk between 1136 and 1155, four were established in West Norfolk, three in the Nar valley, at Pentney, Rudham/Coxford, and Blackborough, and the fourth at Walsingham, 25 miles further north. The other three lay at Thetford, in the south of Norfolk, New Buckenham, 17 miles southwest of Norwich, and at Carrow in Norwich itself. In 1086, the manor of Pentney was held by Robert de Vaux of Roger Bigod and is recorded as having ten freemen holding 72 acres. Rudham, the original site of the priory, moved to Coxford late in the twelfth century, in 1086 had 25 sokemen holding one and a half carucates of land. Blackborough was founded by Robert de Scales and his wife Muriel on their manor of Middleton, held in 1086 by Aethelwold of Hugh de Montfort. Domesday records the manor as having 2 sokemen holding 84 acres who, the text tells us, were able to sell their land. Great and Little Walsingham, held by Reginald son of Ivo in 1086, was host to 29 freemen who held 84 acres between them. Geoffrey de Faverches gave his vill of Little Walsingham for the foundation

of his priory 1145 X 1153.²¹¹ As in Lincolnshire, the presence of free men on these manors in 1086 thus tells us nothing about their suitability or availability for dedication for monastic use 50 years later, but it does tend to signal that population density was more of a concern for founders, with land in less densely populated areas being less intensively cultivated, and so providing greater potential resources to sustain monastic foundations without encroaching upon what was required to support settlements and towns located in more densely populated areas.

In Suffolk the distribution of monastic houses also follows population density (Map 4), with more houses located in areas of low population than in those regions where density was higher. It is also clear that the presence of an ancient and wealthy house with substantial estates, as was the case of Bury St Edmunds, with its eight and a half hundreds lying in west Suffolk, discouraged the foundation of any new houses in its vicinity. The area northwest of Bury is thus devoid of any religious house, the land there rapidly declining in fertility as it becomes sandier and characterised by heath and scrub, merging into the region known as Breckland (Map 10).²¹²

²¹¹ *Domesday Norfolk*, i, 9: 2, 8, 108; ii, 23:11; 21:24.

²¹² P. Northeast, 'Religious Houses', in *An Historical Atlas of Suffolk*, 70-71, p. 71.



Map 10. The Medieval Religious Houses of Suffolk

Thus, we find that most monastic houses in Suffolk were founded in the east of the county, avoiding the more heavily populated land that ran from mid-north of the county, southeast to Ipswich and the coast. Of the three houses in Suffolk founded during Stephen's reign, only Mendham, founded by William of Huntingfield 1150 X 1155, can be shown to have had any free men in 1086, and then only one. Perhaps of significance, and testifying to the disruption of tenurial relationships, even at the lowest level, engendered by the Conquest, the manor of Sibton, later held by William de Chesney, who founded his Cistercian abbey there, in 1066 had five and a half freemen holding between them one carucate and 142 acres of land. By 1086 they had

disappeared.²¹³ This lends further support to the suggestion that free men, including sokemen, 50 years after the 1086 survey, were a dying breed and can probably be discounted as a major factor in determining the siting of religious houses, population density being far more significant. Both Mendham and Sibton were sited in areas of low population density, with Battisford on the cusp between high and low-density areas. That only three houses were founded in Suffolk during King Stephen's reign, and all in the last five years, perhaps reflects Hugh Bigod's martial activities in the county during the first half of the 1140s, as noted above. This aspect is given further consideration in the chapter below dealing specifically with Sibton.

The factors discussed above might be said to be the existential determinants that a founder in East Anglia would have had to account for or which constrained his choice of site for his house. The motives peculiar to the founder, and the history of his and his family's relationship to the lands that were used to endow his foundation, need now to be considered. Of those houses founded in East Anglia during Stephen's reign, only those with an extant cartulary have been treated in detail below, for it is principally through the charters that we are able to discern the motives and history of founders and benefactors, thus recreating a picture of relationships and associations that may place a monastery and its patrons in their appropriate historical context.

²¹³ *Domesday Norfolk*, i, 6:90.

Part 2

The Monasteries

Chapter 3

Priory of the Holy Sepulchre, Thetford

Abstract

The Augustinian priory of the Holy Sepulchre, Thetford was founded by William III de Warenne, it is said *c.* 1146, on land gifted to him for that purpose by King Stephen. By his foundation charter, William gave to the canons a carucate of land in the fields adjoining Thetford, his churches and tithes and all his interest in Thetford with its men, and lands, and folds, and pastures, as King Stephen had held them and gave them to him. William also granted the canons sake and soke, and theam and infangenthef and two fairs, one on the Discovery (*inventio*) of the Holy Cross and the second on the Exaltation of the Holy Cross.²¹⁴ The priory was sited on the southern bank of the Little Ouse and opposite the Bigod Cluniac foundation of St Mary on the northern bank, founded by Roger Bigod 1103/4. With its foundation date assumed to be *c.* 1146, William's motives in founding the priory have been associated with his taking of the Cross at Vézelay on Palm Sunday 24 March 1146, and hence with his departure with Louis VII of France for the Holy Land in June the following year, thus linking the foundation to William's enrolment as a holy warrior. However, I will argue that recently discovered charters establish that William founded his monastery no later than 2 February

²¹⁴ *Monasticon*, 6, part 2, p. 729 where it is part of an *inspeximus* issued by John, earl of Warenne, at Methwold on 4 April 1315. The foundation charter is also printed in *EYC*, viii, p. 93, no. 45

1141 and that when he founded it, he contemplated a journey to the Holy Land as a peaceful pilgrim, not as a crusader. I will further argue that the charter evidence previously referred to supports the contention that William, in founding his priory, did so, not only for pious motives for the salvation of souls and the remission of sins, but to establish a royal presence in territory where Hugh Bigod had a substantial interest and as a counter to Bigod's influence in the strategically important burgh of Thetford. The evidence advanced will demonstrate that by the date of its foundation, it had become clear to King Stephen that Hugh Bigod posed a regional threat which Stephen sought to mitigate by placing the borough of Thetford in the hands of the powerful Norfolk magnate and loyalist, the earl of Warenne.

The Warenne Family Benefactions

William, the third earl Warenne, titular earl of Surrey, who founded the priory of St Sepulchre, Thetford, came into his inheritance on the death of his father, the second earl, in 1138. He may still have been a minor at this time, and if so, the lands would have passed in wardship to the king, although not for long as William III likely came of age in 1139 and certainly by 1140. He was son and heir of William II de Warenne, earl of Surrey, by Isabel, daughter of Hugh de Crépy, count of Vermandois, younger son of Henry I, king of France.²¹⁵ From his father he inherited extensive lands: some 472 manors distributed across nine counties, with Norfolk, Suffolk, Sussex, and Yorkshire most prominent here. William's grandfather, William I de Warenne, had founded the Cluniac priory of Lewes, Sussex, c. 1078, and some ten years later, the priory of St. Mary for Cluniac monks, dependant on Lewes, at the family *caput* of Castle

²¹⁵ *Comp. Peer.*, xii, part i, p. 496.

Acre, in west Norfolk. Nevertheless, William III de Warenne felt impelled to add a third religious house to the family's portfolio, hence his foundation of the priory of the Holy Sepulchre in Thetford. Not yet of age, William was with King Stephen in Normandy in June 1137, being one of the 'hot-headed youths' who deserted Stephen's army following a violent quarrel between the men of Normandy and Flanders. Nearly four years later, on 2 February 1141, William, together with his half-brother, Waleran of Meulan, was among several senior magnates to flee the field at Lincoln, the panic having been started by William de Ypres with his Flemings, and Alan and the men of Brittany, who ran away in the face of an overwhelming Angevin force.²¹⁶ Between those dates, King Stephen had granted William III de Warenne the borough of Thetford where William founded his priory for the Augustinian canons of St Sepulchre.

As has been noted William's foundation charter is printed in the *Monasticon* as recorded in an *inspeximus* issued by John, earl of Warenne, at Methwold on 4 April 1315. The *inspeximus* also recites two charters issued by earl Hamelin de Warenne (d. 1202), an illegitimate son of count Geoffrey of Anjou who married Isabel de Warenne, countess of Surrey and widow of William de Blois (d. 1159), King Stephen's son, together with a charter issued by William VI de Warenne (d. 1240), son and heir of Hamelin, identified by the reference in his charter to his wife, Matilda.²¹⁷ It further recites a second charter issued by William III de Warenne, addressed to his brother Reginald. There is also a fourth charter in the name of an unspecified William earl Warenne, granting ten shillings annually from his mill of Brendmilne.²¹⁸ No other person is named in the body of this last charter and the only witness given in the *Monasticon* is named as Ralph de Plaiz. A Ralph de Plaiz was a prominent Warenne tenant, and his name appears as

²¹⁶ *Orderic*, iv, pp, 486, 542.

²¹⁷ *Comp. Peer.*, xii, part 2, p. 502.

²¹⁸ *Monasticon*, 6, part 2, pp. 729-30. The foundation charter is also printed in *EYC*, viii, p. 93, no. 45.

witness to charters of William III de Warenne,²¹⁹ of the earl's brother, Reginald,²²⁰ and to charters of the Countess Isabel and her husband.²²¹ Ralph de Plaiz had a son, Ralph, who succeeded him, but Ralph I was still alive in 1185 when father and son witnessed an agreement between Ralph de Clare and the prior of Lewes.²²² Ralph II de Plaiz attested charters of Hamelin de Warenne, of the Countess Isabel and of their son, William VI de Warenne.²²³ The presence of Ralph de Plaiz as a witness, therefore, cannot help us to determine which William de Warenne it was who issued the charter. However, there is another copy of the charter that has a more comprehensive witness list, forming part of MS Top. Gen. c.69, the recently re-discovered series of transcripts for the priory of the Holy Sepulchre, Thetford, previously mentioned.²²⁴ The witness list of the Bodleian Library copy names the witnesses after Ralph de Plaiz as Anker de Fleschevill, and Richer de Trunchet, seneschal. Both can be found attesting a charter of William the sixth earl of Warenne, Anker as witness to a charter the earl made confirming the gift which Reiner son of William Fleming had made to Kirklees Priory, dated between 1202 and 1210.²²⁵ Anker appears in the Pipe Rolls for 12 John as holding one knight's fee of the bishop of Chester, and the following year was pardoned three marks in scutage.²²⁶ He was dead by November 1216, when he was succeeded by his son Ralph.²²⁷ Richer de Trunchet appears as a witness to a charter issued by Isabel countess de Warenne, for the soul of her husband Hamelin, to the priory of St Katherine, Lincoln. That charter has been dated to 1202. Richer is next to be found testifying as

²¹⁹ *Lewes Cart.*, i, pp. 23, 28, 61; Harley 2110, f.4v, no.16.

²²⁰ *Lewes Cart.*, ii, pp. 21, 25.

²²¹ *Idem*, i, pp. 57, 65-6.

²²² *Idem*, ii, pp. 52-3.

²²³ Harley 2110, ff. 6r, nos. 35-6, 38-40, 43; BL Add. 24634, 24635, i; G. Duckett, 'Additional Materials towards the history of the priory of St Pancras at Lewes', in *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, xxxv, (1887), 101-26, p. 115.

²²⁴ See ante, p. 33.

²²⁵ *EYC*, viii, no. 89.

²²⁶ *P R 12 John*, p. 59; *P R 13 John*, p. 129.

²²⁷ *Comp. Peer.*, v, p. 575, n. a.

steward for the sixth earl's Norfolk lands, to a charter issued by William VI de Warenne by which he gave to Castle Acre Priory the isle of Slevesholme. This has been tentatively dated 1222 X 26.²²⁸ Almost certainly, therefore, the charter in the John de Warenne *inspeximus* in the name of William earl Warenne, witnessed by Ralph de Plaiz, must be attributed to William VI de Warenne and hence to a period long after our particular survey.

Motives and Location

The Dating of the Foundation

If William founded his monastery at the very beginning of the 1140s rather than the middle of the decade, *c.* 1146, as has been assumed, then the argument that William's motive was a spiritual act made to honour his vow to participate in the Second Crusade and to ensure his safety as a crusader falls apart. It is important, therefore, to consider whether the evidence now available supports that date or leads us to a different time frame that allows for a fundamentally different perspective as regards William's motive in founding his monastery. After setting out his endowments and stating that he made these gifts for the remission of his sins, for the salvation of the soul of his father, and the remission of the sins of his mother, Countess Isabel, his brothers, Ralph and Reginald and his ancestors, William concluded his charter by commanding that his new foundation be protected by the burgesses, his friends, and his brother pilgrims ('*palmiferi fratres mei*').²²⁹ The reference to brother pilgrims has been taken to link the foundation of the

²²⁸ *EYC*, viii, nos. 85, 98, p. 243.

²²⁹ *Monasticon*, *op. cit.*

priory by William with his answering Pope Eugenius III's proclamation for a Second Crusade.²³⁰

That provides the rationale for the supposed date of foundation of c. 1146. However, it is almost certain that he founded the priory before February 1141, and thus well before December 1145, when Eugenius issued his call. That is the inevitable conclusion that arises from a previously unpublished charter that purports to have been issued by a King Henry, and that appears as part of the series of charters copied into MS Top. Gen. c.69. The charter in question granted to the priory a footpath in the king's demesne, money and resources. It was witnessed by Everard, bishop of Norwich, Richard Basset and Aubrey de Vere, and was issued in Thetford.²³¹

The charter commences 'Henri(cus) rex Angl(orum) ep(iscopu)s Norwic(ensi) et iusti(cia)r(iis) et vic(ecomitibus) et o(mn)ib(us) baronibus et fidelibus suis de Norf(olchia) et Sudf(olchia) salut(e)m'. As the priory was founded on land granted to William by King Stephen, who, of course, succeeded Henry I, it cannot possibly have been issued by Henry I. That the grantor intended that his gift was for the church of the Holy Sepulchre, Thetford, is clear from the text: 'Sciatis me dedisse et concessisse in p(er)petuu(m) Deo et ecclesie S(anc)ti Sepulcri de Tedfordia'. As the charter was witnessed by Bishop Everard it must have been issued between 22 December 1135 and 1145.²³² The King Henry of the address clause, therefore, cannot be Henry

²³⁰ *VCH, Norfolk*, ii, p. 391; J. C. Dickinson, 'English Regular Canons and the Continent in the Twelfth Century', in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, i, 1951, 71–89, p. 73; T. Colk, 'Twelfth-Century East Anglian Canons: A Monastic Life?', *Medieval East Anglia*, ed. C. Harper-Bill (Woodbridge 2005), 209–24, p. 211; E. King, *King Stephen* (New Haven and London 2010), p. 233 and n.132; E. M. Rose, *The Murder of William of Norwich: The Origins of the Blood Libel in Medieval Europe* (Oxford 2015), p.51, n.24; T. Martin, *The History of the Town of Thetford in the Counties of Norfolk and Suffolk* (London 1779), p.174; J. N. Hare, 'The Priory of the Holy Sepulchre, Thetford', in *Norfolk Archaeology*, 37, (1980), 190-201, p.190; Pestell, 2004, p. 177 and n.80, although he prefers to retain the widest dating possible, 1139X1148, whilst conceding that a date in the mid 1140s is likely.

²³¹ Top. Gen. c69, f. 74v, no. 9. See Appendix 1 for a copy of the charter. William III de Warenne's foundation charter, which accords with the charter issued by John, earl of Warenne, is the first of the charters at fol. 72r.

²³² Everard resigned his office at some point in 1145, his last public appearance in England being in the spring of 1145 in the company of Imar of Tusculum, the papal legate. C. Harper-Bill, 'Everard [Eborard] (d. 1147), bishop of Norwich', in *ODNB*, xviii, p. 779.

II who did not ascend the throne until December 1154. If the charter is genuine, it must have been issued by King Stephen, with the *Henr(icus)* of its *intitulatio* a copyist's error for the *S* of *Stephanus*. Considering, now, the other witnesses to the charter, Aubrey II de Vere died in May 1141, killed in a riot in London. If the witness is he, then the charter must have been issued before 2 February 1141 for on that date, Stephen was captured at the battle of Lincoln, remaining a prisoner until his release in November that year. On the other hand, if the witness were Aubrey III de Vere, son and heir of Aubrey II, and 1st earl of Oxford, then the charter should be dated after May 1141. However, this Aubrey III defected to the empress in June 1141 and was made earl of Oxford by her in July that year. There is a possibility that he returned to Stephen's camp, after the king's release from captivity.²³³ But, if so, it was a brief reconciliation, for Aubrey then joined his brother-in-law, Geoffrey de Mandeville, in plotting against the king in 1142, and was arrested with Geoffrey in September 1143, surrendering his castle at Canfield to regain his freedom.²³⁴ After the death of Geoffrey de Mandeville in September 1144, it is likely that Aubrey remained neutral for a while, although he must have returned to Stephen by early 1145, for he witnessed a charter issued by the king at Bury St Edmunds in favour of Lilleshall Priory, in which he is styled *comes*. The charter was also witnessed by Imar of Tusculum, the papal legate.²³⁵ The attestation of the Thetford charter by Everard, bishop of Norwich and Aubrey III de Vere, if it were he, would thus put the probable date early in 1145. However, the second witness to the charter is Richard Basset, who, if he is the same Richard Basset II referred to by Keats-Rohan,²³⁶ was dead by 1144, when the empress and her son, Henry, restored to Geoffrey

²³³ D. Crouch, 'Vere, Aubrey de, count of Guînes and earl of Oxford (d. 1194), magnate', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 23 Sep. 2004; Accessed 2 July 2022 at <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-28204>.

²³⁴ *Comp. Peer.*, x, p. 202.

²³⁵ *Regesta*, iii, no. 460.

²³⁶ *DD* p. 166.

Ridel II, Richard's son, all his inheritance in Normandy and England.²³⁷ Cronne and Davis, the editors of Stephen's charters, note that Henry's first visit to England ended in March 1144, which would mean that Basset died before the end of March of that year.²³⁸ Richard Basset does not appear as a witness to any of Stephen's charters listed in the *Regesta* save for a spurious instrument issued in favour of Exeter Cathedral supposedly between April and 21 November 1136.²³⁹ This suggests that if Basset attended Stephen's court it was only at the beginning of his reign, and even then, infrequently. Basset was a prominent figure in Henry I's administration and acted as a royal justice in Hertfordshire, Norfolk, and Suffolk. He is also recorded hearing pleas in Sussex, Leicestershire and Lincolnshire in 1129/30. Together with Aubrey II de Vere, in the same year, he was appointed sheriff for eleven English counties as part of a drive to improve the revenues received at the Exchequer.²⁴⁰ Basset frequently attested documents issued by Henry I before the king's final departure for France in 1133, and his name often appears there together with that of Aubrey II de Vere.²⁴¹ He is not known to have been employed as a sheriff or a justice by King Stephen.²⁴² Aubrey II de Vere, by contrast, was in regular attendance at Stephen's court and attested many of his charters up to the time of his death in May 1141: in at least 45 instances to judge from the materials reported in the *Regesta*. In other words, the evidence accumulated here suggests that the Thetford charter was issued before 2 February 1141. In summary, this must be the case because

²³⁷ *Regesta*, iii, no. 43.

²³⁸ *Ibid*, note to no. 43.

²³⁹ *Ibid*, no. 284.

²⁴⁰ J. A. Green, 'Basset, Richard (d. in or before 1144), justice', in *ODNB*, iv, p. 271.

²⁴¹ *Regesta*, ii, nos. 1477, 1715, 1736, 1742, 1761-5, 1794*, 1795, 1854, 1954.

²⁴² Green, *op. cit.*

1. Everard, bishop of Norwich, the first witness, had resigned his office no later than the autumn of 1145.
2. Richard Basset, the second witness, was dead by early 1144 so could have witnessed the charter only between 1139 and 1144.
3. Aubrey III de Vere, from June 1141 until the end of 1144 was not aligned with King Stephen, so would not have witnessed any of Stephen's charters during that time.
4. Aubrey de Vere, who appears as the third witness, must, therefore, be Aubrey II de Vere who was killed in London in May 1141.
5. King Stephen was captured at the battle of Lincoln on 2 February 1141.

It therefore follows that the charter was issued by Stephen before his capture at Lincoln and that William III de Warenne must have founded his priory at Thetford no later than January 1141.

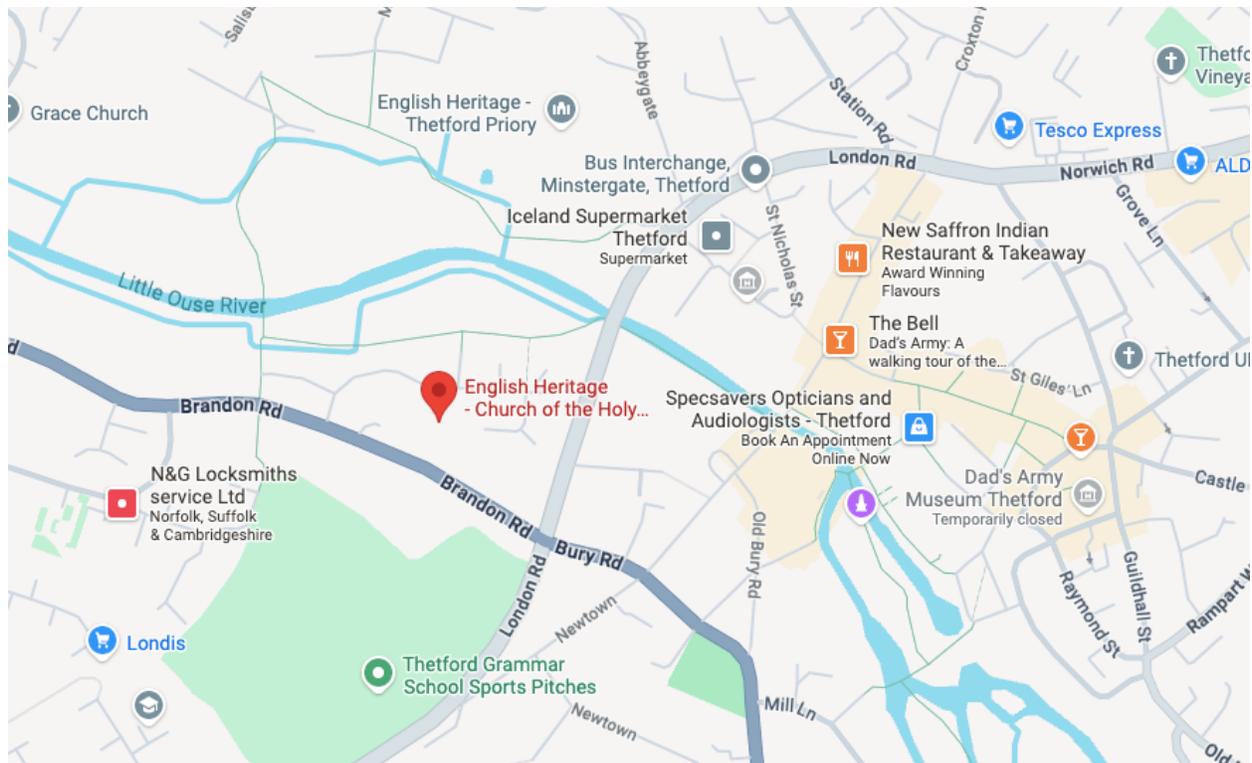
What might have been Stephen's motives in granting William the borough of Thetford to enable him to found his priory there? By 1140, Stephen's kingship was under challenge from the Angevin forces of Empress Matilda, led by her half-brother, Robert of Gloucester, who had landed in England at the end of September 1139 and established his base at Bristol. Earlier in the year, in June 1139, Stephen had arrested Roger, bishop of Salisbury, and his two nephews, Alexander, bishop of Lincoln, and Nigel, bishop of Ely. They were suspected of colluding with the empress, amidst rumours of the imminent arrival in England of the Earl of Gloucester from Normandy together with his half-sister. The bishops were released upon the surrender of their castles and a guarantee of their men's loyalty. In January 1140, Nigel, bishop of Ely, smarting over his treatment and that of his uncle, and angry that his loyalty had been called into question, rebelled against Stephen. The *Liber Eliensis* reports how he constructed a strong fortress at Ely against the king, as well as another at Aldreth, north of Cambridge. Stephen, upon learning of

this, assisted by local men who guided his army through the Fens, took the castle of Aldreth, although by then the bishop, together with three companions, had escaped to the empress.²⁴³ Ely lies some 30 miles to the west of Thetford. Although bishop Nigel's rebellion might seem to have been rapidly suppressed, Stephen found it necessary to visit Suffolk both at the end of May 1140 and again in August, to deal with Hugh Bigod, a powerful regional magnate, who had taken up arms in a dispute with Earl Robert of Leicester over Bungay castle. Although in August the king came to terms with Hugh Bigod, he may nevertheless have been unnerved by Hugh's actions, based as he was in east Suffolk with his *caput* at the castle of Framlingham, some 35 miles east of Thetford. Thetford was an ancient town, formerly the county town of both Norfolk and Suffolk in Anglo-Saxon times. After the Conquest it briefly housed the bishopric, transferred from North Elmham in 1071 by the new Norman bishop, Herfast, and only moved by Herbert de Losinga to Norwich *c.* 1095. Thetford straddled the principal road from Cambridge to Norwich and so in effect guarded access to Norfolk from both the west and south. It was well defended from both its eastern and western extremities, both approaches being guarded by fortifications which enhanced the natural protection afforded by the rivers Little Ouse and Thet and their surrounding marshland. Although by the middle of the twelfth century its political and commercial significance had diminished, it remained an important strategic town for the defence of the region.

Were Hugh Bigod to have taken control of Thetford he would have been difficult to dislodge, presenting a threat extending out of Suffolk into both Norfolk to the north and Cambridge to the west. By placing the defence of Thetford in the hands of William III de Warenne, Stephen may

²⁴³ *Liber Eliensis: a History of the Isle of Ely from the Seventh Century to the Twelfth*, trans. J. Fairweather, (Woodbridge 2005), p. 389; King, 2010, p. 125.

thus have sought to create a barrier to any ambitions that Hugh Bigod harboured to extend his power into Norfolk. The gift of Thetford to William to found his priory, therefore, is most likely to have been made in the second half of 1140, in the light of the threat posed by Bigod. With Thetford came the castles that William would now command. The construction of his priory on the opposite side of the river from the priory of St Mary, in effect supplied a spiritual castle to counter the influence of the Bigod foundation. Stephen issued his charter confirming William's foundation very soon after William's. In taking what was a defensive action, ensuring the support of William III de Warenne, the most powerful magnate in Norfolk, Stephen was acting preemptively, just as he had done when in June 1139 he had arrested the three bishops, and again, later, in September 1143, when he arrested and deprived the over-mighty Geoffrey de Mandeville of his lands, castles and titles, in each instance acting against perceived threats before it became too late.



Map 11 showing the respective locations of the priory of the Holy Sepulchre (referred to in the map as ‘Church of the Holy...’) and the Bigod foundation of St Mary, Thetford, separated by the Little Ouse River.

Further support for a date of 1140 for the foundation of the priory of the Holy Sepulchre comes from the neighbouring hospital of the Holy Sepulchre, founded *c.* 1139. The hospital was almost certainly founded by William III de Warenne, in conjunction with his priory, both dedicated to the Holy Sepulchre, with the hospital committing the canons to a degree of pastoral care frequently associated with the Augustinians elsewhere. For example, in 1123 Rahere, King Henry I's minstrel, had founded a hospital, priory, and church in Smithfield, dedicated to St Bartholomew, for Augustinian canons. Rudham Priory, in Norfolk, founded by William de Chesney *c.* 1140 under the rule of St Augustine, later moved to Coxford towards the end of the twelfth century, acquired control over the hospital of Boycodeswade, founded by Hervey Belet *c.*

1181, with Hervey gifting the canons of Coxford his manor of Rudham and other lands for the support of the hospital. The Augustinian priory of Conishead in Lancashire, founded c. 1154 by Gamel of Pennington, was originally a hospital, while at some time between 1163 and March 1166, Robert de St Remy granted land to the palmers of the priory of the Holy Sepulchre, Nottingham, for the foundation of a hospital.²⁴⁴

Peregrinus or cruce signatus?

William's decision to dedicate his priory to the Holy Sepulchre, under the order of Augustinian canons of the Holy Sepulchre is significant. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem was and remains in many ways the most holy site in Christendom, believed to be the location of Christ's crucifixion, burial and resurrection, in the Middle Ages reputed the centre of the world.²⁴⁵ The Church in Jerusalem had been completely rebuilt following its destruction in 1009 by Al-Hakim, the 'mad' Fatimid caliph. Work was started on the building of the new church by Emperor Constantine Monomachus around 1042, and it was consecrated in 1048. Additional works and rebuilding were carried out by the Crusaders from 1099, the church there being rededicated on 15 July 1149 (the fiftieth anniversary of Jerusalem's seizure by the First Crusade).²⁴⁶ The Church contained chapels commemorating Christ's crowning with thorns, his being dressed in the purple robe, the place where his garments were ripped from him and then shared out, and a third site where he had been bound to a column for flagellation. A fourth location was advertised as that in which Christ had been imprisoned. Another was constructed on

²⁴⁴ Thetford, *MRH*, pp. 335, 398; J. Burton, *Monastic and Religious Orders in Britain 1000 – 1300* (Cambridge 1994), pp. 49-50; St. Bartholomew, *MRH*, pp. 165, 372; Boycodeswade, *MRH*, p. 345; *Monaticon*, 6, part 1, p. 369, no. III; Conishead, *MRH*, pp. 155, 354; Nottingham, *MRH*, pp. 169, 382; *LCH*, iv, no. 1978.

²⁴⁵ R. Ousterhout, 'Rebuilding the Temple: Constantine Monomachus and the Holy Sepulchre', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 48, no. 1, 1989, 66–78, p. 66.

²⁴⁶ J. Wilkinson, J. Hill and W. F. Ryan, *Jerusalem Pilgrimage 1099–1185* (London 1998), p.33.

the place where Empress Helena was reputed to have discovered the True Cross. In this context, it is noteworthy that William, by his foundation charter, gifted his priory at Thetford two fairs celebrating the Holy Cross, one on the Discovery (*Inventio*) of the Holy Cross on 7 May and the second on 14 September celebrating the Exaltation of the Holy Cross.²⁴⁷ Because of the importance of the church of Jerusalem in Christian theology and imagery, and the events there commemorated, it remained the most important pilgrimage destination in Christendom.

Theoderic, a German monk, considered Jerusalem to be holier than any other place because 'it is illuminated by the presence there of our God and Lord Jesus Christ and of his good Mother, and the fact that all the patriarchs, prophets and apostles have lived and taught and preached and suffered martyrdom there'.²⁴⁸

The Austin Canons of St Sepulchre were installed in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem to provide hospitality for pilgrims making their way to the Holy Land and to solicit alms and lands for their support, from western Europe. With the dedication of his priory at Thetford to the Holy Sepulchre, placed under the order of Austin Canons of Jerusalem, William de Warenne's foundation, on land gifted to him by Stephen, and at a date at least five years before the preaching of the Second Crusade, perhaps suggests an intention on his part to undertake a peaceful pilgrimage to the east. This view is supported by the fact that William also made a gift of 40s. yearly to the Knights Templars from his rents at Lewes. Beatrice Lees dates this charter to 1139/40 on the grounds that one of its witnesses was Pain de Montdidier, master of the Templars in France, who appears to have been in England c.1139.²⁴⁹ The Knights Templar

²⁴⁷ Top. Gen. c69. f. 72r no. 1.

²⁴⁸ *Theoderici Libellus de locis sanctis, editus circa. 1772*, ed. T. Tobler (Paris 1865), pp. 5-6.

²⁴⁹ B. A. Lees, *Records of the Templars in England in the Twelfth Century: The Inquest of 1185* (London 1935), p. 231, no. 5, p. 236, n.1; *EYC*, viii, p. 94, no. 46.

were themselves established to provide protection for pilgrims on their dangerous journey to the Holy Land. In particular, the roads from the coast and the countryside around Jerusalem were unsafe for unarmed pilgrims, who began to arrive in increasing numbers after 1099, but who were easy prey for robber bands and brigands. In 1119, a group of pious knights, led by Hugh de Payns and Godfrey de Saint-Omer, came together to form an armed brotherhood to provide protection for pilgrims travelling to Jerusalem and Jericho. They adopted the rule of the canons of the Holy Sepulchre, swearing vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience, and relying upon charitable gifts for support. They established their headquarters in what had formerly been the Al-Aqsa Mosque, but which under the Franks was known as the Temple of Solomon, providing them with their name: the Order of the Temple of Solomon, more commonly abbreviated to 'Templars' or 'Knights Templar'.²⁵⁰

In his foundation charter for Thetford William refers 'to my brother pilgrims' ('palmiferi fratres mei').²⁵¹ The dedication to the Holy Sepulchre, the pilgrim reference, his gift of fairs celebrating the Holy Cross, and the gift to the Templars collectively suggest that William founded his priory as part of a wider vow to make pilgrimage to the east, apparently not as a *crucesignatus*, armed with sword, shield and lance, but as a peaceful *peregrinus*, with purse and staff. That he populated the priory with Augustinian canons of the order of St Sepulchre strengthens that view. Elsewhere, his family's religious patronage had been chiefly directed towards the Cluniacs. Thus, William I de Warenne (d. 1088) had founded the first Cluniac priory in England at Lewes, the family *caput*, between 1078 and 1082. He went on to found a priory for Cluniac monks at Castle Acre, the centre of his Norfolk lands, between 1087 and 1088. His heirs and successors

²⁵⁰ C. Tyerman, *The World of the Crusades* (New Haven 2019) pp. 152-3.

²⁵¹ *EYC*, viii, p. 93, no. 45; *Top. Gen.* c69, f. 72r, no. 1

continued support for these two priories, confirming charters of their predecessors and making gifts of their own.²⁵² William, the third earl, followed suit.²⁵³ Meanwhile, his foundation at Thetford became only the second such priory in England at this time with a deliberately Jerusalemite dedication, the other being the priory of St Sepulchre Warwick founded in 1109 by Henry de Newburgh, first earl of Warwick.²⁵⁴

Whether William de Warenne had taken vows to visit Jerusalem as early as 1140 is not known, although the founding of his priory itself must be considered a strong statement of intent. In the end, of course, he went as an armed pilgrim, as part of Louis VII's army, itself summoned in association with pope Eugenius III's bull *Quantum praedecessores*, issued on 1 December 1145, and Bernard of Clairvaux's preaching in support of a Second Crusade following the fall of Edessa. Particular factors operating on William de Warenne here may have included the support for a Second Crusade offered by his maternal half-brother, Waleran of Meulan, who, according to some sources, led the Anglo-Norman contingent on the Second Crusade.²⁵⁵ His cousins, Roger de Mowbray, Drogo II of Mouchy-le-Châtel, and Hugh II de Gournay, also took the Cross, as did his wife's brother, Guy count of Ponthieu. Amongst this group, Roger de Mowbray was also a

²⁵² *EYC*, viii, *passim*; Harley 2110, *passim*; *Cart. Lewes*, *passim*.

²⁵³ *EYC*, viii, nos. 32-41, for Lewes Priory; Harley 2110, f. 4v, (i) grant of 20s of land, no. 19, (ii) grant of land at Witton, no. 20, (iii) grant of land at Witton and Snettisham, no. 21, (iv) grant of land at Massingham, no.22.

²⁵⁴ *MRH*, pp. 144, 178.

²⁵⁵ D. Crouch, 'Waleran [Waleran de Beaumont], count of Meulan and earl of Worcester (1104–1166), magnate and soldier', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Retrieved 23 Jul. 2022, from <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-1887>) although Geoffrey White casts doubt on that assertion, pointing out that he is not even mentioned in the account of the English force given in *De Expugnatione Lyxbonensi*. G. H. White 'The Career of Waleran, Count of Meulan and Earl of Worcester (1104-66)', in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, vol. 17, (1934), 19–48, p. 39; *De Expugnatione Lyxbonensi*, ed. and trans. C. W. David (New York 1976), pp. 55, 57.

generous donor to the Templers,²⁵⁶ as was Waleran of Meulan.²⁵⁷ All told, pilgrimage and crusading to Jerusalem were very much family traditions within this group.²⁵⁸

William's presence at Vézelay at Easter 1146, when he took the Cross, must also have had Stephen's blessing. He would presumably have known from the foundation of the priory at Thetford of William's interest in making a journey to the Holy Land, but doubtless would have preferred to keep him by his side in the face of the Angevin threat to his crown. Despite William having failed Stephen at the Battle of Lincoln when he had fled the field, he had redeemed himself later that year by his capture of Robert of Gloucester at Stockbridge in flight from Winchester, and, later, by his stubborn defence of Rouen, entrusted to him by King Stephen when it came under attack from Geoffrey of Anjou, in January 1144. William was also with Stephen in Suffolk in the spring of 1145, when Stephen brought his army to defang Hugh Bigod.²⁵⁹ By 1146, the empress's campaign was faltering. Stephen's taking of Robert of Gloucester's castle at Farringdon the previous year enhanced his prestige and deterred the lesser magnates and knights of the region from siding with the empress.²⁶⁰ The *Gesta Stephani* asserted that by this victory Stephen's enemies 'were more and more disheartened',²⁶¹ while

²⁵⁶ Lees, 1935, p. xxxvii, pp. 33, 99, 111, 122, 125, 128, 132.

²⁵⁷ Ibid, pp. cxxxv, 62, n. 8.

²⁵⁸ J. Riley-Smith, 'Family Traditions and Participation in the Second Crusade', in *The Second Crusade and the Cistercians*, ed. M. Gervers (New York 1992), 101-108, p.103; *Comp. Peer.*, xii, p. 497; K. Thompson, 'William Talvas, Count of Ponthieu, and the Politics of the Anglo-Norman Realm', in *England and Normandy in the Middle Ages*, ed. D. Bates and A. Curry (London 1994), 169-84, p.173; J. Phillips, *The Second Crusade, Extending the Frontiers of Christendom*, (London 2010), p.100; *A Data Base of Crusaders to the Holy Land: 1095-1149*, compiled by J. S. C. Riley-Smith, J. Phillips, A. V. Murray, G. Perry and N. Morton, available at <https://www.dhi.ac.uk/crusaders/person/?id=1004&kw=Hugh+II+of+Gourney&n=92&nav=0&total=152>, accessed 4 August 2022.

²⁵⁹ *Regesta*, iii, no. 460.

²⁶⁰ D. Crouch, *The Reign of King Stephen, 1135-1154* (Abingdon 2013), p. 217.

²⁶¹ *Gesta Stephani*, p. 184.

Henry of Huntingdon saw it as a turning point in the war.²⁶² The victory was made even sweeter by the defection to Stephen's cause of Robert of Gloucester's son, Philip, angered by his father's refusal to come to his aid while under siege at Farringdon, who then campaigned vigorously on Stephen's behalf.²⁶³ Philip, in due course, having recovered from a serious illness and abjuring 'the spirit of cruelty that had possessed him', himself vowed to go on pilgrimage to Jerusalem and to visit the Holy Places.²⁶⁴ The editor of *De Expugnatione Lyxbonensi* suggests that Philip took the cross and joined the expedition of King Louis of France, a speculation accepted by both Christopher Tyerman and David Crouch.²⁶⁵ With the Angevin threat receding, Stephen's qualms against allowing William de Warenne to fulfil his pilgrimage to Jerusalem may well have receded.

The Charter Evidence

In addition to William's foundation charter that appears in both the *Monasticon* and the Bodleian manuscript, we know of at least one other charter issued by William, reported only in the Oxford transcripts.²⁶⁶ Elsewhere, we find him making gifts and confirmations in contemplation of a journey to the Holy Land in favour of the other Warenne foundations. Three charters issued by him on the same occasion, in favour of the priory of St Pancras at Lewes, the family *caput* in Surrey, confirming grants to the priory, have been dated to 1147 and so were probably made in settling his affairs prior to his departure for Crusade in June that year. In one such charter,

²⁶² *Historia Anglorum*, p. 748.

²⁶³ *Gesta Stephani*, pp. 187-8.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 192.

²⁶⁵ *De Expugnatione Lyxbonensi*, p. 6; C. Tyerman, *England and the Crusades, 1095–1588* (London 1988), p.33; Crouch, 2013, p. 219.

²⁶⁶ Top. Gen. c69, f. 72r, no. 1; f. 74v, no11. See Appendix 1.

tentatively dated on or shortly after 25 April 1147, William confirmed the priory in all its lands, churches and tithes of his fee.²⁶⁷ Issued on the same occasion, as is apparent from the witness lists, was a confirmation to Lewes Priory of the church of Conisborough with all its dependent churches, chapels, lands and tithes.²⁶⁸ It was at much this same time that the new conventual church at Lewes was dedicated in a ceremony conducted by Theobald, archbishop of Canterbury. He was joined by Henry, bishop of Winchester, Robert, bishop of Bath, Ascelin, bishop of Rochester, as well as the abbots of the royal foundations of Reading and Battle, Edward and Walter.²⁶⁹ William endowed the church with a tenth penny of his rents and the gift was secured by hair from his own head and that of his brother, Ralph de Warenne, ceremoniously cut by Henry, bishop of Winchester, before the altar. Among the thirteen lay witnesses to this were William d'Aubigny, earl of Chichester, and William de Warenne's brothers, Reginald and Ralph.²⁷⁰ This was clearly a valedictory ceremony conducted prior to William's departure for the Holy Land. It must, therefore, have assumed great importance, with the charter recording it dated to 25 April 1147 or shortly thereafter.

Of William's grants to Castle Acre Priory, there are several that, in their wording, suggest preparation for his departure to the Holy Land. In one charter, in which William confirms all the gifts that he and his ancestors had made to the priory, he specifically states that he is doing so because he desires to go to Jerusalem: 'Sciunt presentes et futuri quod ego W(illelmus) comes de Sudregia, Jerosolimam ire desiderans ...'.²⁷¹ It remains uncertain whether this charter was made concurrent with his founding of Holy Sepulchre Thetford or at a date coincident with his

²⁶⁷ *EYC*, viii, no. 33, and see Clay's note to the charter.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid*, no. 34.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid*, no. 32.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid*, no. 32.

²⁷¹ Harley, 2110, f. 4r, no. 16.

departure for crusade. William did, however, issue another charter specifically dated to the time of his departure for Jerusalem, granting St Pancras at Lewes half his land of Rottingdean, (Sussex) with men and pastures and all appurtenances, ‘as it was apportioned in the year I went to Jerusalem.....in which year I made this gift’.²⁷² This may suggest that the Castle Acre Priory charter was issued around the same time.

In another charter William commanded Robert de Frievill and all his barons in Norfolk that the monks of Castle Acre Priory hold whatever they had in Massingham as freely as on the day that William granted the vill to Robert de Frievill the younger. William’s younger brother Reginald was to do justice should anyone cause injury to the monks.²⁷³ That William nominated his brother to enforce protection suggests that this precept was issued in preparation for his departure to the Holy Land, so probably in 1146 or 1147, issued by William in the knowledge that he himself would not be present to enforce its terms.

Reginald was again nominated to do justice should anyone cause injury to the monks in a charter by which William confirmed fourteen grants of varying types, from the wood that Roger de Tosny had granted the monks, the mill called ‘Middllemelna’ at Pentney granted by Robert de Vals/Vaux, and eight acres with a rent of 26s. from Tuche the smith. William’s men were instructed to maintain this confirmation.²⁷⁴ A similar injunction occurs in a charter of confirmation, made by William at the request of Walter de Herbercurt, of grants that Walter and

²⁷² *Lewes Cart.*, i, p.37, vij/D. f. 22.

²⁷³ Harley 2110, f. 5r, no. 24; *EYC*, viii, no. 43.

²⁷⁴ Harley 2110, f. 4r, no. 15.

his father had made to the priory. This concludes with an order that Reginald de Warenne, William's brother, and all his ministers, French and English, should enforce its terms.²⁷⁵

That Reginald was nominated to administer the Warenne estates, the youngest of the three Warenne brothers, rather than Ralph who was the second eldest, might suggest that Ralph accompanied his brother on the Second Crusade.²⁷⁶ That proposition is strengthened by the fact that, just like his elder brother, a lock of Ralph's hair was cut and placed on the altar on the occasion of the dedication of the new conventual church at Lewes. Moreover, Ralph no longer appears in the record after 1147 so may well have met the same fate as his elder brother, dying on crusade.

The other charter for Holy Sepulchre issued by William and preserved in the Bodleian manuscript, occurs again later as part of Earl John's *inspeximus* published in the *Monasticon*. It commands William's brother, Reginald, to protect the gift of land and services made to the canons of Holy Sepulchre by Thurstan son of Algar. Although no witnesses are given it must have been made at the same time as the other confirmation charters referred to in which Reginald was appointed to administer William's estates during his absence in the Holy Land.²⁷⁷

Finally, there are two charters whose witnesses include William, bishop of Norwich, and thus issued sometime between late 1146 and William de Warenne's departure on crusade before June 1147, bishop William having been consecrated either late in 1146 or early in 1147. In the first Earl William granted the church of St Mary of Acre to Castle Acre Priory and confirmed the

²⁷⁵ Ibid, f. 5r, no. 28.

²⁷⁶ Ralph was the second son of William II de Warenne, Reginald the third. In charters where both Reginald and his brother Ralph appear, Ralph is always in the senior position. *EYC*, viii, pp. 10, 26, 84-5, 94; *Cart Lewes*, i, pp. 28, 63; ii, p. 37.

²⁷⁷ Top. Gen. c69, f. 74v, no. 11; *Monasticon*, 6, part 2, p. 730.

grants to the monks made by his grandfather, his father, his barons and himself. He then went on to cite and confirm numerous grants made by lesser benefactors.²⁷⁸ In the second, addressed to his brother Reginald and all his barons and men, clerics and lay, he confirms land of his fee granted to the monks of the priory by Osmoda, wife of Philip de Candos.²⁷⁹ The writ addressed to his brother Reginald suggests, once again, preparation for William's absence on crusade. Another unusual feature here is that William made his confirmation for the salvation of his soul *and his body* (my italics), 'pro salute anime mee et corporis mei': phrasing that occurs in no other known charter of William's, as if reflecting the enormity of the adventure upon which he was embarking and the dangers that he faced, up to and including death.

In each of these cases there is evidence to suggest that these charters were made in contemplation of, or in preparation for, a journey to the Holy Land. This is particularly so in the case of the charter in which he expresses his desire to go to Jerusalem. The dating of the charters witnessed by William bishop of Norwich, after William had taken the Cross at Easter 1146, is strong evidence that they were made with his forthcoming expedition in mind. As regards the others, the fact that he took steps to ensure that his grants and confirmations were properly policed, designating his brother Reginald to do justice, and instructing his men to protect and maintain his family foundations, suggests that he envisaged prolonged absence from his estates. William, in effect, passed the administration of his English lands to his brother. In the aftermath, we find Reginald de Warenne issuing charters in which he qualifies the grant as being dependent upon his brother's return from the Holy Land. In a charter by which he gifted a hide of land to Lewes Priory, confirming the grant of a certain Ralph de Angieus, he concludes by stating 'So,

²⁷⁸ Harley 2110, f. 4v, no. 14.

²⁷⁹ Ibid, f. 5r, no. 26; *EYC*, viii, no. 44.

know that if our Lord Jesus Christ brings back my lord, the earl of Warenne, we shall certainly cause him to grant this'.²⁸⁰ In another charter, issued shortly after the earl had departed for the Holy Land, in which Reginald restored the burgesses of Lewes to their merchant guild with the consent of the prior of St Pancras and the earl's men, he likewise promises that, should the earl return, he will do his best to ensure that his brother makes a grant to the burgesses on the same terms.²⁸¹

Whilst there are other charters confirming grants made by his tenants and men, as well as grants that William made himself, none of these can be dated with any narrow precision. By contrast, the charters noted above in favour of Lewes and Castle Acre suggest the imminent departure and impending absence of their grantor, unlike William's foundation charter for Holy Sepulchre Thetford that suggests no such urgency. There William simply exhorts his fellow pilgrims, the burgesses and his faithful friends, to support and promote his foundation: 'Necnon palmiferis fratribus meis, burgensibus, et omnibus fidelibus amicis meis precor et precipio ac volo ut istam meam elemosinam et suam pro posse suo fideliter manuteneant et exalcent'.²⁸² Nor does William depute protection to any designated person, thus reinforcing our impression that the priory was founded at a time well before the promulgation of the Second Crusade, when a *peregrinatio* was merely a distant aspiration for William.

Another aspect of the charters that can be dated to 1146/7, is that with one or two exceptions they are confirmations of grants made by others or the earl himself, probably requested by their beneficiaries in the knowledge that their lord was about to embark on a dangerous expedition from which he might not return. The charter confirming the gift of Walter de Herbercurt is a case

²⁸⁰ *Lewes Cart.*, i. p. 55. vj/f.

²⁸¹ *Lewes Cart.*, ii. p. 25, xxviii/R.

²⁸² Top. Gen. c69, f, 72r, no. 1.

in point.²⁸³ Acquiring confirmation of gifts of lands, tithes, privileges and liberties was a prudent measure against an uncertain future.

King Stephen's Patronage

The new Holy Sepulchre charters from the Bodleian demonstrate a willingness by Stephen to support William's foundation. The manuscript offers us four charters that commence 'Henricus rex Angl(ie)', for the most part in fact issued by King Stephen. The early modern copyist perhaps assumed that they should be attributed to Henry II. Reference has already been made to one of them, in demonstrating that the priory must have been founded before 2 February 1141.²⁸⁴ A second charter, numbered 8 in the manuscript, grants the canons sixty acres of the grantor's demesne lands in Thetford.²⁸⁵ The editors of the *Monasticon*, published between 1817 and 1830, summarising the history of the priory, state that Henry II was the benefactor, perhaps here following Thomas Martin in his history of Thetford.²⁸⁶ Here as a new addition to the first edition of the *Monasticon*, compiled by William Dugdale and Roger Dodsworth, published in 1661, from which the charter is entirely absent.²⁸⁷

The witnesses prove that these are not, in reality, charters of Henry II. One such, abbreviated to 'R. de Cusn', may be the Richard de Courcy who attested several of Stephen's charters but none

²⁸³ Harley 2110, f. 5r, no. 28.

²⁸⁴ Top. Gen. c69, f. 74v no. 9.

²⁸⁵ Top. Gen. c69, f. 74r no. 8.

²⁸⁶ *Monasticon*, 6, part 2, p. 728; T. Martin and R. Gough, *The history of the town of Thetford, in the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk, from the earliest accounts to the present time* (London 1779), p.175, and see *LCH*, iv, no. 2601, Thetford, St Sepulchre; *VCH Norfolk*, ii, p. 392 and n.1 also makes the same assertion, relying on Thomas Martin.

²⁸⁷ W. Dugdale and R. Dodsworth (1585-1654), *Monasticon Anglicanum*, vol. 3 (London 1661), pp. 574-75.

of Henry II.²⁸⁸ Another witness is named as Robert fitz Walter, who was father of William de Chesney, and who served as sheriff of Oxford during the reign of Henry I and as sheriff of Norfolk under King Stephen, until at least 1136. His date of death is unknown, although various such dates have been suggested. Cronne and Davis state that he was dead by 1140,²⁸⁹ while Philippa Brown asserts that he was probably dead by 1138.²⁹⁰ He was the addressee of a writ from Stephen soon after 1135, ordering him to restore to the abbot of Gloucester the church of Chipping Norton.²⁹¹ Jessop and James, in their introduction to the life of William of Norwich, assert that Robert fitz Walter was sheriff of Norfolk during the opening years of Stephen's reign and was succeeded by his eldest son John, appointed in or by 1143.²⁹² As the king would not have left the important post of sheriff of Norfolk vacant for any length of time are we to assume that Robert fitz Walter died *c.* 1143? Probably not, for he appears as a witness to another of the King 'Henry' charters in the Bodleian manuscript, witnessed by William, bishop of Norwich, who was consecrated by early 1147 at the latest.²⁹³ However, a Robert fitz Walter witnessed Duke Henry's charter detailing the arrangements for earl Ranulf of Chester's payment of £30 in compensation to Lincoln Cathedral for the damage that he had done to the church, issued on 31 August 1153 at the siege of Stamford.²⁹⁴ Vincent identifies him as Robert fitz Walter, father of William de Cheney.²⁹⁵ However, that is probably incorrect. For Robert fitz Walter to have witnessed a charter of Duke Henry, assuming he was still alive in 1153, would mean that he had changed sides from Stephen to the Angevins, which, of course, is possible, but if so, would make

²⁸⁸ *Regesta*, iii, nos. 114, 413, 442, 624, 803, 981, 985. And see *LCH*, Index, p.225 and entry for 'Courcy'.

²⁸⁹ *Regesta*, iii, note to no. 15.

²⁹⁰ *Cart. Sibton*, i, p. 9.

²⁹¹ *Regesta*, iii, no. 354.

²⁹² *Monmouth*, p. xxxiv; J. H. Round, 'The Early Sheriffs of Norfolk', in *EHR*, 35 (Oct. 1920), 481-96, p. 486.

²⁹³ Top. Gen. c69, f.74v, no. 12.

²⁹⁴ *Regesta*, iii, no. 492.

²⁹⁵ *LCH*, Index, p. 334 under Fitz Walter, Robert.; vi, no. 3946.

him the only member of a staunchly royalist family so to do. It is more likely that the Robert fitz Walter who witnessed Duke Henry's charter was one of Ranulf's household knights or otherwise part of his affinity. A man of that name occurs as witness to one of Ranulf's charters, issued c. 1150, notifying his grant of the church of Repton in Derby to Lincoln Cathedral in restitution for damages done: in other words, a grant very close in terms to that of Duke Henry.²⁹⁶ This or another Robert fitz Walter also witnessed a charter by one Simon de Tuschet, granting the farm of the mill of Quarndon to Henry, son of Hugh, in the time of Henry II, also witnessed by Nicholas, Robert's brother.²⁹⁷ A charter issued by one Simon de Chanci in favour of Lincoln Cathedral confirming his father's gift of 15s of land at Boultham in Lincoln, was witnessed by Simon, son of Walter and his brother Robert, but can be dated only very broadly to the 12th century.²⁹⁸ The Robert here referenced is probably the same Robert who occurs in the two charters of earl Ranulf and thus cannot be Robert son of Walter, father of William de Chesney, who had no brothers named either Nicholas or Simon, so far as we know.

By a third charter, number 12 in the Bodleian manuscript, the grantor gave and confirmed all the tenements which the canons of Holy Sepulchre had within and outside the borough of Thetford together with their appurtenances. The canons were further provided with free and unfettered access to grazing for their animals. This charter is attested by William, bishop of Norwich and Robert fitz Walter and so must date after late 1146.²⁹⁹ That is the last occasion when Robert fitz Walter, father of William de Chesney, appears in the record, and he was almost certainly dead

²⁹⁶ *The Regestrum Antiquissimum of the Cathedral Church of Lincoln*, ii, ed. C. W. Foster (Hereford 1933), no. 316.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid*, iii, no. 750.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid*, ii, no. 328.

²⁹⁹ Top Gen. c69, f. 74v, no.12.

before 1154. As the style of address is the same as in the other three charters falsely attributed to Henry II, it is likely that this one falls into the same category.

In the fourth 'Henry' charter, number 14 in the manuscript, the grantor confirms gifts that William III de Warenne had made to the priory and the grant of the two fairs he had given them as provided for in his charter of foundation. This is attested by William Martel and Fulk d'Oilly.³⁰⁰ William Martel was steward to King Stephen and attested over 180 of his charters. He briefly served Henry II but only six charters attested by him survive and none after August 1158. Fulk d'Oilly was a frequent witness to King Stephen's charters but appears only once under Henry II, in a charter itself considered spurious, elsewhere given in *Regesta* iii, as if a charter of Stephen rather than Henry II.³⁰¹ The Bodleian manuscript's copyist errs even further, ascribing this to neither Stephen nor Henry II, but to King Henry I: 'Iste Henricus primus confirmavit donationes Willelmi Warennie primi fundatoris'.³⁰²

As to their attribution to Henry II, their failure to use Henry II's full title, 'Henricus rex Angl(orum) et dux Normannorum et Aquitanorum et comes Andegauorum', is surely conclusive, not least because inserted into this series, in one instance only (number 10), we do indeed find a charter of Henry II granting the priory twenty shillings of arable land of his fee, witnessed by Thomas Becket as chancellor (i.e. before 1162) and Joscelin de Baliol, both of them amongst the more frequent witnesses at Henry II's chancery. After the death of Stephen and the accession of Henry II, many monasteries were reluctant to use their charters issued by King Stephen, especially as Henry II refused to acknowledge Stephen as King of England, instead, in his coronation charter issued shortly after 19 December 1154, confirming the status *quo ante bellum*,

³⁰⁰ Top. Gen. c69, f. 75r, no. 14.

³⁰¹ *LCH*, ii, no. 815, and cf. *Regesta*, iii, no. 876 and note.

³⁰² Top. Gen. c69, f. 75v.

including all concessions, gifts, liberties and freedoms that King Henry (I) his grandfather had granted and conceded.³⁰³ Here, no reference was made to King Stephen whose awards were thus rendered potentially ineffective.³⁰⁴ In an unpublished paper Nicholas Vincent has noted that of some 3000 charters of Henry II that survive there are only a handful in which Stephen is styled King of England. Vincent refers to two in particular, issued in favour of Faversham and Cluny, both issued shortly after Henry II became king, and each involving the renewal of confirmations made during the Westminster Council of November/December 1153 at which Stephen agreed to recognise Henry as his rightful heir. The Cluniac priory of Faversham was founded by Stephen's queen, Matilda, who was buried there as was Stephen's eldest son, Eustice, and in due course Stephen himself. Even on the rare occasions elsewhere, when Stephen is referred to by Henry II, it is at least once as 'count Stephen', citing his pre-1135 status as Count of Boulogne and Mortain.³⁰⁵ Like his great grandfather before him, William the Conqueror, who always referred to the time of Edward the Confessor as a base line in charters and documents, treating Harold II as a usurper, Henry II treated Stephen's reign as an illegitimate period of usurpation. The misattribution of the Holy Sepulchre charters undoubtedly misled Thoma, a respected antiquarian, whose history of Thetford referenced the charter gifting 60 acres of land to the priory as having been issued by Henry II, citing an unspecified charter in the collection of the Duke of Norfolk.³⁰⁶ Others have followed suit without question, no doubt relying upon Martin.

³⁰³ *English Historical Documents, 1042 – 1189*, ed. D. C. Douglas and G. W. Greenaway (London 1953), p. 407; *Select Charters and other Illustrations of English Constitutional History: from the Earliest Times to the Reign of Edward the First*, ed. W. Stubbs and H. W. C. Davis, 9th ed. (Oxford 1921), p. 158.

³⁰⁴ G. Garnet, *Conquered England: Kingship, Succession, and Tenure, 1066–1166* (Oxford 2007), p. 300.

³⁰⁵ N. Vincent, *Sixteen New Charters of Henry Plantagenet Before his Accession as King (1149–1153)*, unpublished paper, pp. 5-7 and n.20.

³⁰⁶ See *ante*, n.286.

Even if he had not seen the charter, he was relying upon the account of others who had, and who, therefore, had been taken in by the misattribution.

As to why the confirmation charter issued by Stephen, number 13 in the Bodleian manuscript, has not been similarly misattributed, the answer must be that it includes a reference to King Henry as Stephen's uncle, therefore confirming Stephen as author. In all, Stephen issued at least five charters in favour of the Thetford Priory between January 1140 and December 1154, testament to the importance that he placed on William's foundation. Of the ten houses founded in East Anglia during Stephen's reign and of which we have records, apart from the Holy Sepulchre, we have evidence of only three others benefitting from Stephen's protection: the nuns at Carrow, Norwich who were granted land on which to build a church, Coxford with two charters, and Sibton with only one.³⁰⁷ Of all the 51 or so monastic houses in East Anglia, Stephen is known to have patronised only thirteen, with only Bury St Edmunds receiving more grants and confirmations (17 in all) than Thetford Holy Sepulchre.³⁰⁸ That probably reflects the importance of the abbey to Stephen not only spiritually, but economically, since it controlled one of Stephen's mints, and politically was aligned with the crown in a region dominated by Hugh Bigod, Stephen's enemy. Bury's control over much of west Suffolk was an important factor in maintaining a royal presence in Suffolk in the face of Hugh Bigod's aggression. With one fewer charters than Thetford Holy Sepulchre, the venerable abbey of St Benet of Holme was probably favoured more than most because its Abbot Hugh (c.1141-1145) was Stephen's nephew.³⁰⁹ That William III de Warenne's otherwise obscure priory should emerge as the beneficiary of five charters from Stephen suggests the particular value that the king placed upon his relations with

³⁰⁷ *Regesta*, iii, nos. 247, 248 for Coxford, 615 for Carrow, 822 for Sibton.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, nos. 754-65, 768-70, 772-3.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, nos. 399, 402-3, 405.

the Warenne family, in a region politically and strategically important for the overall defence of Stephen's realm.

Concluding Remarks

From the outset, it seems clear, William de Warenne intended to make a journey to Jerusalem.

His founding of the priory of the Holy Sepulchre in Thetford was a manifestation of that desire and reveals an intimate knowledge on William's part of the history of the Holy Land and the part that Jerusalem played in Christian theology and iconography. Whether at the time of the foundation the idea of a pilgrimage was an aspiration or a settled intent we cannot know.

Certainly, William did not found the priory on the immediate eve of his crusade in 1146/7. At the time of its foundation between 1139 and 2 February 1141 the crusade had not even been called, its summoning being delayed to December 1145 and Pope Eugenius III's bull *Quantum praedecessores*. That it has been possible to establish the date of foundation as pre-2 February 1141, thus contradicting the orthodox attribution of c. 1146, is because of the re-discovery of a manuscript in the Oxford Bodleian Library containing a collection of grants made to William's Thetford foundation. An analysis of the charters so revealed has allowed new light to be cast, not only on William's motives for founding the monastery, but perhaps more important, on Stephen's reasons for granting Thetford to William at the time when he did, 1140, by then already wary of Hugh Bigod's ambitions in the region. The number of charters issued by Stephen in favour of Holy Sepulchre Thetford, at least five in all, is testament to the strategic importance that Stephen placed on Thetford and William III de Warenne's role in defending it and so discouraging attacks from Hugh Bigod as well as strengthening royal presence and influence in the area. At the same time, the emergence of these charters only through the detective work of Hugh Doherty, within the past twenty years, suggests the ways in which our overall appreciation

of the evidence for the reign can be skewed by new discoveries, some of which perhaps remain still to be made.

Chapter 4

Pentney Priory

Abstract

The date of the foundation of Pentney Priory is generally given as *c.* 1130, placing it unambiguously in the reign of Henry I. Its founder was Robert de Vaux, a tenant of Hugh Bigod, with manors in Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex. In establishing his monastery, founded for Augustinian canons, Robert gave the canons his vill of Pentney with all its appurtenances, and all things pertaining to it in men, lands and rents including waters, marshes, fishponds, enclosures, pastures and mills. He gave them two salt pans, one in Lynn and the other in Wootton, several of his men together with their land, rents and mills and the assart of Wolney (not identified). In addition, Robert gave the canons the advowsons of the churches in his lands, named as Ketteringham, Shotesham St Botolph, Shotesham All Hallows, Thurston (*Thorston*), Chediston and Houghton. The priory was located on an island known locally as Eya which Robert also gave to the canons.³¹⁰ It was a substantial donation from land that his father before him, also known as Robert de Vaux, had held, and from lands brought to him by his wife, Agnes, daughter of the Domesday Bigod tenant, Ranulf fitz Walter. The donation was warranted by Robert and his heirs and made for the usual spiritual motives, for the salvation of his soul, and that of his wife and all his ancestors ('et omnium parentum meorum'). As a wealthy knightly tenant, its foundation can also be explained as a public expression by Robert of his and his family's wealth and status. However, although Robert de Vaux was a Bigod tenant, yet he chose to place his monastery in one of his manors, the vill of Pentney, which was in the heartlands of the earls Warenne in

³¹⁰ *Monasticon*, 6, part 1. p. 69, no. I.

Norfolk, and where his lord, Hugh Bigod, held very few estates. It will be argued in this chapter that there is no evidence to support a foundation date in the closing years of the reign of Henry I, that the priory was probably founded c. 1141, and that Pentney was chosen because Robert had by then aligned himself with the earls Warenne, Robert by then wishing to distance himself from his lord, Hugh Bigod, who, by then, was an enemy of the king. It will also be argued, in the light of Hugh Bigod's claim made after the death of Robert, that he had not agreed to Robert having the vill of Pentney following his father's death, that, nevertheless, Robert de Vaux gave it to his canons hoping to put it out of reach of his lord.

The Founder and his Family

The foundation charter appears as the first charter in the cartulary, probably made in the sixteenth century, now held by the Norfolk Record Office.³¹¹ As to Robert's identity, this is set out in a *Memorandum de fundatoribus*, composed not earlier than 1441, contained in the cartulary, and printed in the *Monasticon*.³¹² The *Memorandum* asserts that Robert de Vaux, the first founder, came into England with William duke of Normandy, and names his three sons as William, Oliver, and Henry. From other sources, it is known that Robert had a fourth son, Ralph, and a daughter Agnes, named for his wife, Agnes, daughter of Ranulf fitz Walter. Like Robert, Ranulf had been a major tenant of the Bigod earls.³¹³ Robert de Vaux, perhaps named from Vaux-sur-Seulles (Calvados, arr. Bayeux), appears in Domesday holding from Roger Bigod (d. 1107) thirty manors in Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex, including the vill of Pentney in Norfolk. He

³¹¹ Norwich, Norfolk Record Office, FEL 31, 546X7

³¹² *Monasticon*, 6, part 1, p. 70, no. III.

³¹³ *Ibid*, p.143; *DP*, p. 354.

also held three manors of William d'Ecouis, three of the abbots of Bury St Edmunds, one of Robert Malet, and another of King William.³¹⁴ The priory is generally considered to have been founded c.1130,³¹⁵ although I will argue that it was founded after 1135 and possibly as late as the early 1140s. The foundation date, even at c. 1130, makes it unlikely that the Robert de Vaux, who came to England with the Conqueror, was the same Robert de Vaux who, some 64 years later, founded Pentney. The founder is more likely to have been the 1086 Robert's son.

Nevertheless, the foundation story has been accepted by later historians. For instance, R.S. Ferguson, in his essay 'The Barony of Gilsland', published in 1880, attributed the founding of the priory to Robert de Vaux the Domesday tenant.³¹⁶ More recently, Katherine Keats-Rohan has accepted the case that the Robert de Vaux, who features in Domesday was the same person as the Robert de Vaux who founded Pentney.³¹⁷ She concedes that he must have been a very young man in 1086, and proposes a candidate for Robert's father, one William 'de Partenai' (?Parthenay, in Poitou), who appears in Domesday as the holder of manors in Suffolk and Norfolk.³¹⁸ Keats-Rohan suggests that 'Partenai' is an error for 'Pentenai' (Pentney) and that William took his name from the de Vaux manor of Pentney. From this she concludes that this William was a William de Vaux who fathered not only Robert de Vaux, the founder of Pentney priory, but this Robert's brothers, Gilbert and Hubert.³¹⁹ William de Vaux, alias 'de Partenai', Keats-Rohan's suggested founder of the Vaux family, obtained the manors of Stanton,

³¹⁴ *Domesday Norfolk*, i, Bigod manors, 9:2-4, 46-7, 53, 56-7, 64, 66, 68, 99, 116, 229, 233, 234; *Domesday Suffolk*, i, 7:14-17, 19, 24, 40, 44, 49, 50, 54; *Domesday Essex*, 43:4-5; d'Ecouis manors, *Domesday Norfolk*, ii, 19:38; *Domesday Suffolk*, i, 6:84; 9:3; Bury St Edmunds manors, *Domesday Norfolk*, ii, 14:40; Malet manor, *Domesday Suffolk*, i, 6:84; King William manor, *Domesday Suffolk*, i, 1:22.

³¹⁵ *MRH*, p.143.

³¹⁶ R. S. Ferguson, 'The Barony of Gilsland and its Owners to the end of the Sixteenth Century', in *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society*, iv (1880), 446-485, p. 454.

³¹⁷ *DP*, p. 382.

³¹⁸ *Domesday Norfolk*, ii, 34:1, 17; 66:88; *Suffolk*, ii, 76:8-12.

³¹⁹ *DP*, p. 478.

Knettishall and Bardwell, both in Suffolk, previously (before 1066) held by Abbot Baldwin of Bury St Edmunds. In Norfolk he held four manors as a tenant of the barony of Peter de Valognes: two in Babingley, one in Barney, and one in Shernborne.³²⁰ Yet in all this he appears as a minor tenant with no connection to the de Vaux family or their lords, the earls Bigod. The manor of Stanton, by 1331, was held by Hervey de Stanton of Edmund, earl of Kent.³²¹ Bardwell, by 1259, was in the hands of William of Pakenham who, on 12 May of that year, was granted free warren in his demesne lands of Thorp and Bardwell (*Berdewell*) by Henry III in return for a fine of five marks.³²² In 1362, it was still in the hands of the Pakenham family, held of the king in chief by service of a hundredth part of a knight's fee.³²³ By 1249, Babingley was held by Robert of Tattershall of the king in chief by knight service.³²⁴ Margaret, the wife of Robert of Ufford, earl of Suffolk, was recorded as holding the manor of Babingley as widow of Thomas de Cailly, her first husband, on her death on 4 April 1369.³²⁵ At some point before 1142 the manor of Barney had passed into the hands of Walter de Valognes, a nephew of Peter de Valognes, from whom, it will be recalled, William 'de Partenai' had held the manor in the 1080s. In 1142, Walter, and his then unmarried daughter, Agnes, with the consent of his wife Rose, granted Barney to Binham Priory in perpetuity.³²⁶ William of Pakenham, at his death in July 1305, was found to be in possession of one acre and three roods of land in the manor of

³²⁰ *Domesday Suffolk*, ii, 76:8-12; *Norfolk*, ii, 66:88. The patronage of the church of St Peter and St Paul, Shernborne is shown in the 1291 *Taxatio* to belong to Pentney Priory.

³²¹ *Cal. I. P. M.*, vii, no. 300, p. 222.

³²² *Cal. Ch. R.*, ii, p.17.

³²³ *Cal. I. P. M.*, xi, no. 155, p. 152

³²⁴ *Cal. I.P.M.*, i, p. 35, no. 145.

³²⁵ *Cal. I.P. M.*, xii, no. 251, p. 238.

³²⁶ *Cart. Binham*, p. xli, and no. 94.

Shernborne, held of Geoffrey Yethan by service of 1d yearly.³²⁷ John de Vallibus, (otherwise de Vaux) who died in 1287, at his death, was in possession of most of the estates held by the Robert de Vaux of Domesday, as well as those held by Robert, the founder of Pentney Priory, which had come to him through his wife Agnes. By contrast, he held not a single manor that in 1086 had been held by William 'de Partenai'.³²⁸ The proposition that William 'de Partenai' was the father of the Robert de Vaux of Domesday, that he was founder of the English de Vaux family and lord of Pentney, thus has no evidential support and can be confidently dismissed. Instead, we arrive at a situation in which the Pentney Priory founding narrative seems most implausible, whilst Keats-Rohan's conclusions are built on speculation and supposition rather than evidence. Let us therefore return to our suggestion that, given the timescale, it is more likely that the Robert de Vaux of Domesday was the father of the Robert de Vaux who founded Pentney Priory.

A man named Robert de Vaux certainly gifted the Bigod foundation of St Mary, Thetford all his churches and land in Pentney (*Pantney*), Tharston (*Terston*), Thurton (*Turtin*),³²⁹ Chediston (*Chedston*), Wenham, Belchamp, and ?Ramsholt (*Ramdon*), together with a mill at Holme's ford, and the alder grove below it. He also gave his body to be buried in the church 'as with all the earl's men'.³³⁰ Several points arise from this. In the first place, it appears that Robert de Vaux gifted Thetford St Mary all his churches and land in the named manors. This would be inconsistent with the gifts made by the Robert who founded Pentney Priory, who endowed this

³²⁷ *Cal. I. P. M.*, iv, no. 293.

³²⁸ *Cal. I. P. M.*, ii, no. 653, pp. 402-4.

³²⁹ Dugdale renders Turtin as Tunstall in Suffolk, but I think that it is more likely to be Thurton in Norfolk, which Robert de Vaux held of Roger Bigod in 1086. *Domesday Norfolk*, i, 9:64. Tunstall, in 1086, was not a de Vaux manor. It was shared between Roger of Poitou and William de Warenne, who had enfeoffed respectively, Albert Grelley and Nicholas of Kennet. *Domesday Suffolk*, i, 8:58; ii, 26:6.

³³⁰ *Monasticon*, 5, p. 143. The entry is part of a listing by Thomas Martin who had access to Cotton Vitallius F IV before it was burnt in the fire of 1731 and copied by Dugdale into the *Monasticon*.

new foundation with his entire vill of Pentney with all its appurtenances:³³¹ an impossibility, of course, if the manor had already been granted to Thetford St Mary. The matter is clarified by the Thetford charter of William Bigod, by which he confirmed Robert's benefaction. Here William states that Robert de Vallibus (*alias* Vaux) had endowed the priory with all his churches and the tithes of their land ('omnes ecclesias et decimas de terra sua'), naming the churches as referred to above.³³² Confusingly, in a version of the Register of St Mary of Thetford, the donation is recorded with no mention of the church of Pentney, and the gift is qualified to last only until the churches become vacant.³³³ Here, one of the churches is named as 'Lurton', although no such place can be identified. It is probably a scribal error for Thurton. The error does place us on notice that we have to view these manuscripts with caution. There are three extant versions of the Thetford register known to us, each of which was created in the seventeenth century. Doubtless they are copies of copies, and with a succession of copies being made over many years, errors will inevitably creep in. Unfortunately, the original charters have been lost or destroyed and the original register is not available to us. There also exists a very comprehensive charter in the name of Henry I that confirms Thetford St Mary's possessions and liberties, including Robert's donation, described as all the churches of his lands with their tithes. Although the charter is considered spurious, it nevertheless cites donations and benefactors that are recorded in William Bigod's charter: evidence, therefore, that it reflected benefactions derived from authentic instruments.³³⁴ It appears, then, that Robert still retained the vill as opposed to the church or tithes of Pentney, with the vill later given to Pentney Priory.

³³¹ *Monasticon*, 6, part 1, p. 68; Norwich, Norfolk Record Office, FEL 31, 546X7 f. 1.

³³² *Monasticon*, 5, no. II, p. 149.

³³³ BL MS Sloan 1301, f. 392v.

³³⁴ *Regesta*, ii, p. 339.

William Bigod's confirmation charter was witnessed by William Malet who was exiled at Pentecost 1110 [29 May] by Henry I for rebellion.³³⁵ Robert de Vaux's original gift was perhaps made within the lifetime of Roger Bigod, Thetford St Mary's founder, so before 1107. Just as Robert gave his body for burial at the priory, another major Bigod tenant, Ranulf fitz Walter is recorded doing likewise, in company with his wife, Matilda.³³⁶ Such a benefaction was more likely to have been made when Roger was still alive, as a public demonstration of loyalty and support for his lord.

However, the most interesting aspect of Robert's gift to Thetford is that two of the churches (Wenham and 'Ramdon') hereby disposed of lay in manors not themselves recorded in Robert de Vaux's possession in 1086. It seems unlikely that he could have disposed of these two churches with their tithes without also holding their manors, particularly given his status as a subtenant, rather than as a tenant-in-chief. There is no place name easily identified with 'Ramdon' in Norfolk, Suffolk, nor in Essex, where Robert also held two manors. Blomefield assumed 'Ramdon' to be Ramsholt, in Suffolk, on the other side of Ipswich from Wenham, with Ramsholt in 1086 divided between Ralph, the man of Robert Malet, and Ralph de Beaufour as tenant-in-chief.³³⁷ Wenham at this time was divided between several tenants, including five freemen who between them held 74 acres. The rest of the manor was held by Roger Bigod of Odo of Bayeux, with Ermengot holding of Count Alan, and Robert son of Corbucion holding as tenant-in-chief.³³⁸ There were several ways in which Robert de Vaux could have acquired these manors. He might have annexed them or received them by way of a distribution following their escheat

³³⁵ *Historia Anglorum*, p. 457; C. W. Hollister, *Monarchy, Magnates and Institutions in the Anglo-Norman World* (London 1986), pp. 132-3.

³³⁶ *Monasticon*, 5, p. 142.

³³⁷ *Domesday Suffolk*, i, 6:177; 11:3.

³³⁸ *Domesday Suffolk*, i, 3:67, 84; ii, 16:36, 40; 40:3.

into the king's hands, or a wife might have brought them to him by way of *maritagium* or inheritance, or any combination of such routes. As a major tenant of Roger Bigod, it is unlikely that he would have annexed lands to which his lord claimed superior title. Such an action would be inconsistent with his proclamation of loyalty and support in bequeathing his body for burial at his lord's monastic foundation 'as all the rest of the earl's men'. The most likely explanation is thus that Robert de Vaux came into possession of Wenham and 'Ramdon' through marriage. If that were so, then it raises the question of the relationship between the Robert of Domesday and the Robert who gifted the churches together with other properties to Thetford Priory.

There is evidence that a Robert de Vaux was in England in the early years of William I's reign. He appears there as a witness to a charter of the abbey of Bury St Edmunds recording that Peter, a *miles* of King William, had become the 'feudal man' (David Douglas's translation, better rendered as 'fee man') of Abbot Baldwin by the permission of the king and with the consent of Bury's monks. This has been dated early in the reign of the Conqueror, so likely before 1072.³³⁹ Robert, as a witness to an important charter, with substantial landholdings in East Anglia, holding of five lords, including the king, was clearly a man of considerable substance. To have received such favour from Roger Bigod, one of the leading magnates of the realm, he was presumably either an experienced warrior or an administrator, or both. Bigod may have come to know Robert when, in c.1055, he became lord of a subtenancy in the Calvados region from which region the de Vaux family probably originated. It is unlikely that Robert would have been in the first flush of youth when he came to England, and he probably followed Roger Bigod as one of his household knights. Given the likely age of the Robert recorded in Domesday by 1086,

³³⁹ *Feudal Docs.* no. 168.

the Robert who gifted churches and land to St Mary's Thetford, and his body to be buried there, may not have been the Robert of Domesday, but a son and namesake who, by then, no later than 1107, had inherited his father's estates.

Robert de Vaux of Pentney married Agnes, daughter of Ranulph fitz Walter, contemporary Domesday tenant with Robert of Domesday. She might have been in her early teens at the time, perhaps as young as fourteen or fifteen. Chronologically, it is more likely that she married a son of Robert of Domesday than a grandson. This, therefore, supports the hypothesis that the Robert who patronized Thetford St Mary was the same as the Robert of Pentney. Yet there is little in Agnes's family background to suggest that she could have brought the manors of Wenham and Ramsholt to the marriage. Her father was not in possession of either manor in 1086, nor is there evidence to suggest a connection between these lands and the estate of her mother, Matilda (Maud) de Lanquetot. Matilda was a daughter of Ralph de Lanquetot who was a tenant of Walter Giffard.³⁴⁰ Ralph de Lanquetot is not recorded as having had any interest at either Wenham or Ramsholt.

Of course, there is a degree of speculation here, but it is clear that a Robert de Vaux was in possession of those churches and their tithes, and therefore the manors of Wenham and Ramsholt, and the most likely route by which he came by them would be through his wife. Yet it is not inconceivable that the Robert of Domesday either married late, after 1086, or married for a second time, and that Robert of Pentney was the fruit of that second marriage. Unfortunately, we have no information about whom Robert of Domesday married. In contrast with what we can

³⁴⁰ *DP*, p. 333.

recover of family history from the later twelfth century and thereafter, the records that have come down to us through to 1150 or so leave many gaps unfilled. In these circumstances we are forced to draw what inferences we can from the scant records that are available. Interestingly, Robert had a brother, also called Robert, known as Robert Pinguis (the Fat). The existence of two brothers sharing the same given name was not unusual: intended as a means of ensuring the continuation of a family name in the event that a sibling failed to survive to inherit. Might Robert Pinguis have been the son of Robert of Domesday and his first wife? When Robert of Pentney gifted Castle Acre Priory his mill called Middelmelne in his vill of Pentney by a charter which must have been made before he founded his priory, he stated that he made the gift for his and his wife's salvation and the salvation of his sons and for the souls of his father and mother and his brother, Robert Pinguis, and his other brothers, Gilbert and Hubert ('pro salute mea et uxoris mee filiorumque meorum, et pro anima patris mei et matris mee fratrisque mei Roberti Pinguis et ceterorum fratrum meorum Gilberti et Huberti').³⁴¹ The language here suggests that Robert's brothers, Robert Pinguis, Gilbert and Hubert, may have been dead by the time the charter was made. The use of the term *pro salute*, 'for the salvation of', in reference to himself, his wife and children, clearly all still alive, is in contrast to the *pro anima* clause, 'for the soul of', used to refer to his brothers. The evidence is not conclusive, but it is open to the interpretation that Robert of Pentney was the son of Robert of Domesday by a second wife, his brothers Robert Pinguis, Gilbert and Hubert, being half-brothers from an earlier marriage. However, another piece of evidence tips the scales in favour of Robert of Domesday being the benefactor of Thetford St Mary. One of his gifts was the church and tithes from his manor of Belchamp in Essex. By 1122 at the earliest, Belchamp had come into the hands of a Hervey de Vaux who is

³⁴¹ *Monasticon*, 5, p. 52, no. XV.

recorded as giving three acres of the manor to Earl's Colne Priory, as noted in a confirmation charter issued by Robert de Sigillo, bishop of London, (1142 –1150), dated to 1148.³⁴² Hervey's gift does not, however, appear in the confirmation charter issued by Ralph d'Escures, archbishop of Canterbury, between 1114 and 1122.³⁴³ As a result, his gift can perhaps be dated 1122 X 1148. A Hervey de Vaux appears as a witness to the Pentney foundation charter in the copy held by the Norfolk Record Office. Almost certainly this is the same Hervey de Vaux who held Belchamp and who must have received it from the Robert de Vaux of Domesday. That being so, it is more likely that the Robert de Vaux who made gifts to Thetford St Mary was Robert of Domesday, and that Hervey de Vaux was his son either from a marriage or from an illicit relationship.

Robert de Vaux is also mentioned in the foundation charter of Thetford St Mary, issued no later than September 1107, before the death of the founder, Roger Bigod. This charter also mentions Aitard de Vaux, (*Echardus de Vallibus*), who, like Robert de Vaux, is recorded as having gifted two parts of the tithes of his lands.³⁴⁴ Aitard duly appears as a Bigod tenant in 1086, with nine manors as well as another held of King William.³⁴⁵ The list of Thetford benefactors as set out in the *Monasticon*, mentions the gift by Aitard de Vaux, describing it as two parts of his tithes in Keswick, Norfolk.³⁴⁶ A second charter by Roger Bigod, issued in favour of Thetford Priory, concerning the gift of land for the new site for the priory on the north side of the river, was also witnessed by Aitard as well as by Robert de Vaux.³⁴⁷ Both Robert and Aitard occur as witnesses

³⁴² *Cart. Colne*, p. 13, no. 23

³⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 5, no. 9.

³⁴⁴ BL MS Lansdowne 229, f. 147v.

³⁴⁵ *Domesday Norfolk*, i, 1:122; 9:26-28, 94, 140, 165, 198; *Suffolk*, i, 7:4.

³⁴⁶ *Monasticon*, 5, p. 143.

³⁴⁷ BL MS Lansdowne 229, f. 148.

to two charters to Thetford Priory issued by William Bigod, who succeeded his father in 1107. One such confirmed the gifts of his father and other benefactors, including Aitard de Vaux, and the second, as preserved, is incomplete and vague but was issued for the remission of the sins of William's parents, and the salvation of his soul, and the souls of his brother, Hugh, and his sister, and for the soul of his lord King Henry, and the stability of Henry's realm.³⁴⁸ These charters were both also witnessed by William Malet, so must date before Pentecost 1110. Thereafter, there are no surviving charters issued or witnessed by Aitard de Vaux, while the next charter in which the name Robert de Vaux features as witness describes him as *iunior*, 'the younger', and dates no earlier than 1130, at least twenty years later. This in a charter issued by Hugh Bigod, confirming to Thetford St Mary the gifts of William de Burnaville and his sons and his daughter, Avice, datable between 1130 and 1140, to be discussed in more detail below.³⁴⁹

Aitard may well have been a younger brother of the Robert de Vaux of Domesday. Aitard's line appears to have descended to Alexander de Vallibus, who in 1166 is recorded as holding half a knight's fee of Hugh Bigod.³⁵⁰ Alexander granted Norwich Cathedral Priory an acre of land known as *Squalpescrofte* in the same manor of Keswick in 1086 held by Aitard, in a charter datable only vaguely to the last quarter of the 12th century.³⁵¹ Meanwhile, we find a Hubert and an Alexander de Vaux (*sic*) granting Thetford St Mary lands in Horham, as listed by Martin and printed in the *Monasticon*.³⁵² No date is given, but if this gift was made by Hubert de Vallibus,

³⁴⁸ *Monasticon*, 5, pp.148-9; BL MS Cotton Vitellius F IV, f. 176; BL MS Lansdowne 229, f. 148.

³⁴⁹ *Sir Christopher Hatton's Book of Seals*, ed. L. C. Loyd and D. M. Stenton (Oxford 1950), no. 284.

³⁵⁰ *Cartae Baronum*, CCXV/50.

³⁵¹ *Charters Norwich*, ii, no. 233.

³⁵² Martin, 1779, p. 126; *Monasticon*, 5, p. 142.

lord of Irthington, then it must date before 1165.³⁵³ Horham, in 1086, was shared between Robert Malet, the abbot of Bury St Edmunds, Bishop William of Thetford, Hugh de Montfort, Judicael the priest and King William.³⁵⁴ In 1086, Aitard de Vaux was recorded as holding Denham in Suffolk, of Roger Bigod. Part of this holding, 40 acres held by a sokeman, lay in Horham, and it must be from these lands that the gift to Thetford was made.³⁵⁵ Hubert, therefore, must have inherited the estate from Aitard, and came to share it with Alexander de Vaux, probably his younger brother.

At a date unknown, Robert de Vaux, the Pentney Priory founder, married Agnes, the daughter of Ranulf fitz Walter, with whom he had four sons: William, Oliver, Henry and Ralph, and a daughter, Agnes.³⁵⁶ However, in her charter issued to Thetford St Mary, probably after the death of her husband, confirming all her gifts to the priory, Agnes mentions only sons named William, Oliver and Ralph. Perhaps Henry was dead by then, for there is no further mention of him save in Pentney Priory's *Memorandum de fundatoribus*.³⁵⁷ Ranulf fitz Walter appears in Domesday holding eighteen manors of Roger Bigod.³⁵⁸ He was dead by 1130, for at Michaelmas that year, Robert de Vaux rendered an account to Henry I's exchequer of £53 6s. 8d. fined (presumably some years before this) that he might have the land of 'Houghton', his wife's inheritance.³⁵⁹ This suggests that Ranulf fitz Walter had died some time before 1130, when a fine almost certainly in a round figure such as 100 marks or £100 was offered for part of his estate. At Michaelmas

³⁵³ Hubert was dead by September 1165. See *LCH*, v, no. 2698n; *PR 11, Henry II*, 54.

³⁵⁴ *Domesday Suffolk*, i, 6:309, 316-7; 14:161; ii, 19:4, 6; 31:4; 64:3; 75:3.

³⁵⁵ *Domesday Suffolk*, i, 7:4.

³⁵⁶ *Monasticon*, 6, part 1, p.68; *Monasticon*, 5, pp. 142-3.

³⁵⁷ *Monasticon*, 5, p. 143; BL MS Lansdowne 229, f. 146r; *Monasticon*, 6, part 1, p. 70, no. III.

³⁵⁸ *Domesday Norfolk*, i, 7:20-1, 124; 9:6, 11, 24, 32, 45, 80, 82, 95, 161-4, 197; 66:71-2.

³⁵⁹ *Pipe Roll 31 Henry I*, p. 73.

1130, for instance, we find Robert and Roger de Raimes each accounting for £50, towards a total of £100, for the lands of their father.³⁶⁰ The advowson of the church at 'Houghton' was one of the gifts made by Robert to Pentney in his foundation charter together with the advowsons of the churches of Ketteringham, Shotesham St Botulph, and Shotesham All Hallows. Both Shotesham and Ketteringham had been held in 1086 by Ranulf fitz Walter. Houghton, in Brothecross hundred, in 1086 was held by an otherwise unidentified Simon, as a tenant of William de Warenne. Our attention must thus focus instead on Houghton (St Giles) in North Greenhoe hundred, which, in 1086, was part of the king's demesne. Then it consisted of four carucates, one in demesne and three shared among the tenants, five villagers, and five smallholders. It had grazing for 1,000 sheep, three acres of meadow and two mills.³⁶¹ Blomefield writes that the family of de Vallibus or de Vaux, was early enfeoffed of the manor,³⁶² and we have established here that it came to Robert through his wife Agnes, so it must have been her father, Ranulf fitz Walter, who was first enfeoffed with it. As at Houghton, Robert presumably held the manors of Shotesham and Ketteringham *iure uxoris*, as his wife's inheritance or *maritagium*.

According to the *Memorandum de fundatoribus*, the Robert who founded Pentney was succeeded by his eldest son, William. This is borne out by a charter issued by William de Vaux in favour of Castle Acre Priory by which he confirmed his father's gift to the priory of the *Middelmele* mill in Pentney. This was witnessed by, among others, his brothers Oliver and Ralph, and Simon his uncle, who must have been his mother's brother.³⁶³ The *Memorandum* also informs us that William's progeny were Robert, Adam, and William, who became prior of Pentney in the time of

³⁶⁰ *P R 31 Hen. I*, p. 43.

³⁶¹ *Domesday Norfolk*, i, 1:33.

³⁶² Blomefield, 9, p. 244.

³⁶³ Harley 2110, f. 91/85r, no. 680; *Monasticon*, 5, p. 142.

Henry II.³⁶⁴ The pedigree set out below is intended to show the descent of the two branches of the de Vaux family, from Robert de Vaux and Aitard de Vaux, the Domesday tenants:

Suggested de Vaux Pedigree

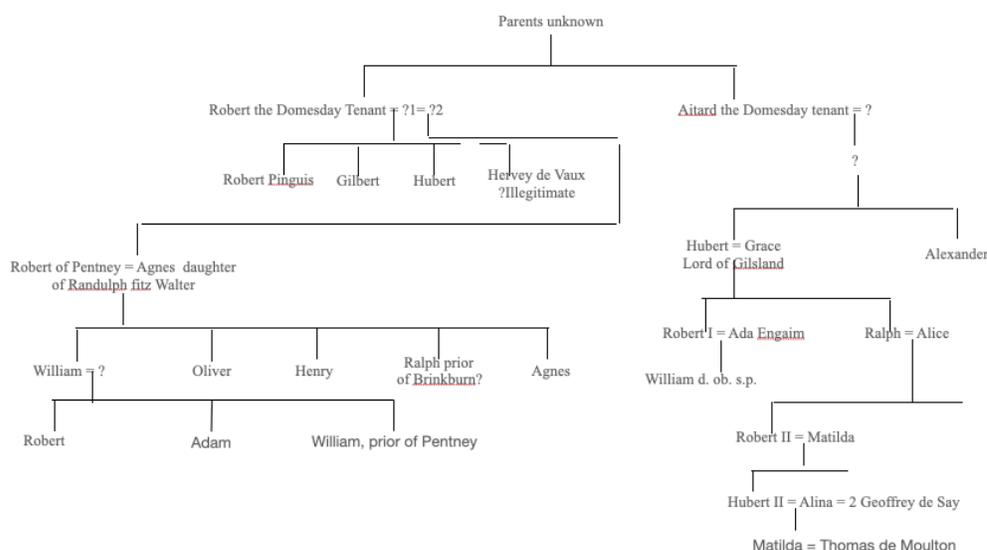


Figure 1. Suggested pedigree of the de Vaux family

Notes: Hubert and Alexander de Vaux gifted land in Horham to Thetford Priory. Aitard de Vaux held land in Horham in 1086. Alexander also gifted one acre of land in Keswick, Norfolk, to the Church of the Holy Trinity, Norwich after 1175. Keswick was held by Aitard de Vaux of Roger Bigod in 1086, so Hubert and Alexander were almost certainly descendants of Aitard de Vaux. Hervey de Vaux, active in the 1130s, and a witness to the foundation charter of Pentney Priory, held Belchamp, Essex, of Hugh Bigod which in 1086 was held by Robert of Domesday, so probably his descendant. Robert I, son of Hubert and Grace, founded

³⁶⁴ *Monasticon*, 6, part 1, pp. 69-70, no. III.

Lanercost Priory *c.* 1169. Robert II, son of Ranulph and Alice was a witness to the foundation charter. Alina, following the death of her first husband, Hubert II, married Geoffrey de Say, whereupon Alina and Geoffrey jointly sued Matilda and Thomas de Moulton for lands they claimed as Alina's dower. The jury found that Matilda was descended from Aitard de Vaux. It therefore follows that Hubert de Vallibus, Matilda's great-great-grandfather was descended from Aitard de Vaux.

Motives and Location

Just as with the case of the Holy Sepulchre, it will be argued here that the foundation date is inextricably linked with Robert's motives in establishing his priory. That Robert located his priory in his manor of Pentney in the heartlands of the Warenne estates rather than placing it in one of his manors in Suffolk where his lord held sway, it will be argued, suggests a rift with his lord that was rooted in Hugh's opposition to the crown and his denial of the vill of Pentney to Robert upon his father's death. That, together with other evidence strongly suggest a foundation date at the beginning of the 1140s.

The Date of Foundation

The Augustinian priory of Pentney was founded by Robert de Vaux at a date generally reckoned as *c.* 1130 and certainly before 1135.³⁶⁵ This date has been fixed chiefly by reference to the foundation charter of Brinkburn Priory in Northumberland, said to have been founded in the time of Henry I.³⁶⁶ J.C. Dickinson noted that little is known of the origins of Pentney Priory, whilst accepting the link with Brinkburn, concluding that Pentney 'almost certainly existed in the reign

³⁶⁵ *MRH* p. 70; *DP*, p. 382; J. C. Dickenson, *The Origins of the Austin Canons and their Introduction into England* (London 1950), p. 125, n 2; Pestell, 2004, p. 209.

³⁶⁶ *Monasticon*, 6, part 1, p. 331; *MRH*, pp. 138, 149; *The Chartulary of Brinkburn Priory*, ed. William Page, Surtees Society, vol. 90 (Durham 1893), pp. ix, xiii.

of Henry I'.³⁶⁷ The land for the foundation of Brinkburn Priory was provided by William Bertram, baron of Mitford, and his charter states that he had given it to Osbert Colutarius, who built the priory for Ralph, the first prior, and his brethren, brought there from the monastery of St Mary 'de Insula', a name by which Pentney Priory was also known.³⁶⁸ As noted by William Page, the Brinkburn chartulary lists Ralph as the first prior describing him as priest of the monastery of St Mary de Insula 'in the time of Henry I' ('Radulphus, presbyter monasterii Sanctae Mariae de Insula, temp. Hen. I').³⁶⁹ In reality, this list of priors is incomplete, and seems to have been compiled at some point after 1536. Thus, for instance, the list makes no mention of prior Nicholas, who by 1149 X 1152 had succeeded Ralph, as is apparent from Nicholas's attestation to a charter of confirmation issued by Robert Bertram, the son of the founder, of a gift of the church of Stainton, near Barnard Castle, to the abbey of St Mary York, datable 1149 X 1152.³⁷⁰ As proof of the date of Brinkburn's foundation, the attribution to prior Ralph to 'the time of Henry I', can hardly be considered firm evidence. Brinkburn's supposed date of foundation, 1130 X 1135, is thus supplied, by means of a circular argument, from by the arrival of its first prior from St Mary 'de Insula', *alias* Pentney priory, here according to the entirely self-sustaining conjecture that Pentney was itself founded 'in the time of Henry I'. William Bertram, who gifted the land for the foundation of Brinkburn, died between 1149 and 1152,³⁷¹ so could have founded his priory much later than 1135, during the reign of King Stephen. Furthermore, there is charter evidence to support a foundation date for Pentney Priory in the late 1130s, perhaps as late as 1140, thus pushing forwards the foundation date for Brinkburn to the late 1130s or early 1140s.

³⁶⁷ Dickinson, 1950, p. 125, n.2.

³⁶⁸ *Monasticon*, 6, part 1, p. 332.

³⁶⁹ *The Chartulary of Brinkburn Priory*, p. xiii.

³⁷⁰ *EYC*, i, p. 446, no. 566.

³⁷¹ Sanders, 1960, p. 131.

A charter issued by Hugh Bigod confirming to Thetford St Mary's the gifts of William de Burnaville and his sons and his daughter Avice, already referred to, has been dated between 1130 and 1140 by reference to the witnesses Robert de Raimes and Bartholomew of Creake.³⁷² Robert de Raimes succeeded to his father in (or slightly before) 1130.³⁷³ In that year, together with his brother Roger, he paid relief for the barony of his father, William, each brother rendering an account of £50.³⁷⁴ The family held extensive estates in Essex, Suffolk, and Norfolk.³⁷⁵ Bartholomew of Creake witnessed a charter of Stephen of Brittany in favour of the abbey of Bury St Edmunds which has been dated 1135 X 1136.³⁷⁶ The Bigod charter was also attested by Robert de Vaux (*de Vals*) styled 'the younger' (*iunior*), almost certainly the same Robert de Vaux who later founded Pentney Priory, here styled *iunior* to distinguish him from his father. The charter's 1140 *terminus ad quem* is determined by Hugh Bigod styling himself *comes* from 1140 onwards. This places the foundation of Pentney Priory after 1130 and perhaps as late as 1140.

As we have seen, Robert de Vaux, founder of Pentney, also made gifts to its near neighbour, Castle Acre Priory, a Warenne foundation that sat adjacent to the Warenne Norfolk *caput*.³⁷⁷ The Warenne family rivalled that of Bigod in the county of Norfolk and would have been the dominant lords in west Norfolk where the manor of Pentney lies, some five miles from the Warenne *caput*, but around 60 miles from that of the Bigods at Framlingham. So, it was no doubt prudent for Robert to patronise the Warennes' Norfolk foundation. Moreover, Robert de Vaux

³⁷² *Sir Christopher Hatton's Book of Seals*, no. 284.

³⁷³ Sanders, 1960, p. 139.

³⁷⁴ *P R 31 Hen. I*, p. 43.

³⁷⁵ *Open Domesday*, ed. Anne Powell-Smith. Available at <https://opendomesday.org/name/roger-of-rames/>. Accessed 14 May 2024.

³⁷⁶ *Feudal Docs.*, no. 173, n.10.

³⁷⁷ Harley 2110, f. 91/85r, no. 679; *Monasticon*, 5, p. 52.

held five other manors, all located within a few miles of Castle Acre.³⁷⁸ His charter to Castle Acre was almost certainly issued before he founded Pentney, for by it he gifted Castle Acre the mill in Pentney called Middle Mill (*Middelmele*) with its adjoining meadow. When Robert later founded his own priory, he endowed it with his vill of Pentney with all its appurtenances including mills, but presumably excluding that already gifted to Castle Acre.³⁷⁹ Robert's Castle Acre charter was witnessed by, among others, William de Walton, whose father, Reginald de Walton, gifted various other lands to Castle Acre, themselves confirmed by Robert.³⁸⁰ Keats-Rohan dates this Castle Acre charter to c.1135 which places the foundation of Pentney no earlier than the very end of the reign of Henry I.³⁸¹ In all likelihood, therefore, we can place the foundation of Pentney priory at some time between 1135 and 1140.

As for the claim that the founder came over with the Conqueror, this fits a longstanding myth common to many other institutions and families after 1066. By associating the founder of Pentney Priory with William the Conqueror, the year of whose invasion of England served as a chronological benchmark, the intention here was to place the origins of the priory in time immemorial, creating the impression of a venerable and ancient institution. As a result, the Pentney foundation story, as proclaimed in the *Memorandum de Fundatoribus* has been, in the words of J. H. Round (referring to the history of the barony of Gilsland as set out in the *Chronicon Cumbriae*) 'a special source of error'.³⁸²

³⁷⁸ Flitcham, 10 miles; Grimston, 9 miles; East Winch, 8 miles; Gayton Thorpe, 6.6 miles and East Walton, 5 miles.

³⁷⁹ *Monasticon*, 6, part 1, p. 69, no. I.

³⁸⁰ Harley 2110, f. 91/85r, no. 679.

³⁸¹ *DD*, p. 774.

³⁸² J. H. Round, 'Randulf, called Le Meschin, Earl of Chester (d. 1129?)', *Dictionary of National Biography* (London, 1921), xxvi, p.727.

Location



Map 12. The remains of Pentney Priory can be seen at the bottom left section of the map. The village of Pentney is located at the top right of the map.

The priory was originally situated in the Nar valley. It stood on a low ridge, which, in medieval times, was hemmed in by fen to the west, south and east, thus forming a peninsula, or in local telling 'island'. The location of the monastery did indeed provide the monks with a level of

insulation from the secular world. Unlike Castle Acre Priory, which was located close to a secular community, Pentney sat a mile and a half from the village of Pentney in what is even today, an isolated position. Water on three sides provided both a measure of security and as a means of transporting goods and people into and out of the monastery by way of the river Nar.

The topography here followed a pattern that had become established in Anglo-Saxon times in East Anglia and the Fenlands. Marshland or fenland settings frequently provided sites for monastic houses. Ramsey Abbey, founded towards the end of the tenth century, stood on an isthmus extending out into the surrounding fen. Crowland and Thorney Abbeys, in Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire, supply further examples of such sites, as do both Eye and Ely. The abbey of St Benet of Holme, Norfolk, supposedly founded c. 1019 by King Cnut, also presents an example of a religious house located in an isolated position in marshland, situated by the river Bure, and accessed by a causeway. Its northern approach was defended by an earthwork ditch or bank that has since been ploughed out, but which, when extant, would have afforded a degree of protection. To the west of the abbey, the river Ant flows into the Bure, while its eastern flank was protected by the river Thurne. The riparian topography thus created an isthmus providing security, as well as river access.³⁸³ Interestingly, Brinkburn Priory in Northumberland, populated by canons from Pentney, suggesting a fraternal link between them, was, like Pentney itself, built in a secluded location, hemmed in on three sides by a deep U bend formed by the river Coquet.

The manor, centred on the village of Pentney, was surrounded by water. The Domesday survey records it as having eleven villagers, fourteen smallholders, and six slaves. There were three carucates in demesne, and three amongst the tenants, twenty acres of meadow, three mills and

³⁸³ Pestell, 2004, pp. 132-8.

one third of a salt house. The church was endowed with thirty acres. East Walton was a berewick attached to Pentney, with one carucate of land in demesne, six smallholders, and two slaves.

There were ten sokemen with seventy-two acres. In 1066, it was worth £5. In 1086, £7.³⁸⁴

Pentney was Robert's most valuable manor by far. Elsewhere, the average value of each of his Norfolk manors where a value has been given in the 1086 survey was just under £1. The average value of his Suffolk estates was 7s. 8d., and whilst he held two manors in Essex, which had been valued in 1086 at £4 and £3 4s. respectively, they were both tenanted by freemen which might have made it more difficult to found a monastery there. Pentney apparently had no freemen, unlike its berewick at East Walton. Even so, as has been demonstrated, the presence of freemen and sokemen on estates in 1086, did not necessarily mean that they were still a presence, or present to the same extent, 50 or 60 years later. Moreover, their tenurial rights to alienate their property might well have changed, rendering them dependant on a lord, and no longer free. In any event, no doubt Robert wished to be seen as a generous patron, and he would have wanted the founding of his monastery to have enhanced his status and prestige in the community. By gifting what was by far his most valuable estate together with other rich gifts, Robert would have established his credentials as a pious and munificent benefactor and ensured that his soul and the souls of his family members would be accepted into God's heavenly kingdom. The priory would also stand for ever as a monument to the founder and his family, ensuring salvation for Robert and his descendants.

Another motive for the choice of Pentney as a location might have been bound up with rivalry between the Warenne and Bigod families. Robert de Vaux was Bigod's man, yet whilst Robert had several manors in west Norfolk, all of them held of Hugh Bigod, Bigod himself had little in

³⁸⁴ *Domesday Book*, p. 1097.

the way of demesne territory in that region. The manor of Narborough, which was adjacent to Pentney and in 1086 was valued at £8, was an isolated exception here.³⁸⁵ By establishing a monastic house in the midst of what was, in effect, Warenne territory, Robert may have been making a statement on behalf of his lord: a vicarious expression of Hugh Bigod's authority as well as his own. At around this time, William earl Warenne founded his new monastery, the priory of the Holy Sepulchre, on the opposite side of the Little Ouse River from the Bigod foundation, the priory of St Mary, Thetford, in what was in essence marcher territory lying between the Bigod and Warenne spheres of influence. This had been done with the help of King Stephen, who had provided William with the land with which to found and sustain his monastery, no doubt with the intention of establishing a presence intended to counter Hugh Bigod and his expansionist ambitions. As is suggested below, however, Robert's motives at Pentney may have been even more closely associated with his own family interests, amidst a crisis over inheritance that did not come to a head until the 1160s, after Robert's death.

Bigod's seizure of the vill of Pentney

Far from being supportive of Bigod family interests, Robert's founding of the house at Pentney may supply evidence of a rift between Hugh Bigod and Robert de Vaux, which would also account for Robert's benefaction to the Warenne foundation at Castle Acre.³⁸⁶ For in about the year 1164, Hugh Bigod reclaimed the vill of Pentney, which Robert had gifted to the priory and evicted the canons there. He argued that he had never consented to Robert's grant, either directly or indirectly, and asserted that Robert's son and heir, William, who claimed Pentney as part of his inheritance, had no right to the manor, because his father had never legitimately possessed

³⁸⁵ *Domesday Norfolk*, i, 9:70.

³⁸⁶ Harley 2110, f. 91/85r, no. 679.

it.³⁸⁷ As Robert had come into his lands as his father's successor, it seems odd that Hugh Bigod waited some 30 or so years before taking action. The dispute with William de Vaux suggests that the Robert de Vaux who founded Pentney had died *c.* 1160, for it is almost certain that the dispute there erupted soon after his death. It is a matter of record that the Robert de Vaux of Domesday held Pentney. For Hugh Bigod's argument to have had any substance, Hugh must have attempted to prevent the vill of Pentney from being passed on to Robert, the founder of Pentney Priory, upon his father's death. Whereby, according to Hugh's logic, Robert's gift of the vill of Pentney to the canons of Pentney could have had no effect.

By the time of the death of Robert de Vaux, the benefactor of Thetford, his son, Robert, the founder of Pentney, clearly considered that his father's lands constituted a heritable estate. Yet, earlier in the twelfth century, it was by no means established that possession of land across generations created any inalienable right to hereditary title, which remained still, albeit to an increasingly limited extent, subject to seignorial whim.³⁸⁸ The heir of a tenant required the consent of his ancestor's lord to inherit. Possession of a fief was awarded in return for homage and service, and when a tenant died, the fief, in theory at least, came to an end and the land reverted to the lord who had granted it. He could take it into his hands and expel the heir, grant the fief to another tenant, or accept the heir's homage and grant him the lands in return for services traditionally or newly stipulated. The heir might offer a payment or a relief, or indeed, the lord might require one to be paid to permit the heir to enter his inheritance. In most cases the most practicable solution was to allow a son to succeed the father, but all that was granted was life tenancy. Should it be the lord who died, with his tenant still living, then homage would be

³⁸⁷ *Materials*, vi, p. 548.

³⁸⁸ J. C. Holt, *Colonial England, 1066 – 1215* (London 1997), p. 202.

offered to the lord's successor, but again, the new lord was not bound to accept it. This was the situation at the beginning of the twelfth century. By the 1150s, however, by which time lands in many cases had passed from father to son and then to grandson without any break, there was an expectation of hereditary right, or at least of continued possession. Over time, this weakened the lord's rights to reversion. Clearly Hugh Bigod argued for the earlier interpretation of lordly right. Set against this, Robert of Pentney claimed and managed to possess most, if not all that his father had held, passing on this estate to his son and heir, William, who in 1166 was recorded as holding of Hugh Bigod and owing the service of 30 knights' fees.³⁸⁹

In making a grant in free alms to the canons of Pentney, Robert would have required his lord's consent. For the granting of land to a religious house in free, pure, and perpetual alms ('liberam, puram, et perpetuam elemosinam'), as appears to have been the case with Robert, was to alienate the land forever, so that Hugh Bigod could never reclaim it or extract services there beyond those originally stipulated. As a result, gifts to the Church might run contrary to an overlord's rights to service or jurisdiction, as well as reducing his claims to escheat, wardship, marriage, and relief. The continuation of services was often of primary interest to the lord, and where confirmation of a grant was made it was frequently made with a clause deliberately saving services.³⁹⁰ An example in Hugh's case is the confirmation that he made of a grant of land in Eastwell by William, count of Aumale, to Garendon Abbey, to be dated between 1141 and 1166. Hugh confirmed the grant of four carucates of land with all their appurtenances, *save for* the service that William owed him.³⁹¹ Aumale held five knights' fees of Hugh Bigod in 1166.³⁹² On the

³⁸⁹ *Cartae*, CCXV/2.

³⁹⁰ Hudson, 2012, pp. 363-4.

³⁹¹ Historical Manuscripts Commission Rutland iv (HMSO 1905), p. 5.

³⁹² *Cartae*, CCXV/62.

other hand, seignorial consent might explicitly free a grantee from services previously owed.

Thus, when Roger II Bigod confirmed a grant by Walter de Shadingfield of land in Bruiseyard to Sibton Abbey, the charter freed the abbey from all earthly services and from all forms of secular exaction ('sicut Walterus eis dedit et sua carta confirmavit, ut eas habeant bene et in pace in perpetua elemosina libere et quiete ab omni penitus terreno servicio et ab omnimoda exactione seculari').³⁹³

For Robert's grant of the vill of Pentney to his priory, there is no surviving confirmation charter from Hugh Bigod, nor is there any reference to one in any surviving record. A lord's consent was sometimes achieved merely by his attesting the charter of gift. Robert de Vaux's foundation charter was attested by two witnesses whose family name was Bigod or, as written in the charter, 'Bigott': Henry and Simon.³⁹⁴ But neither feature as a prominent member of the Bigod family. A Simon appears as a son of Roger Bigod ('Simonis filius ducis'), as witness to two versions of the foundation charter of Thetford Priory, issued between 1103/4 and 1107.³⁹⁵ He was most probably an illegitimate son of Roger. An essay by J. R. Planché, published in the *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* for 1865, lists four sons of Roger Bigod, but none by the name of Simon.³⁹⁶ In both the Thetford charters Simon appears some way down the witness list, after the prelates, Ranulf the chancellor, and Eudo dapifer, the king's steward, but before the important baron William Malet. The third witness listed, Henry 'Bigott', appears in no other charter so far

³⁹³ BL Additional MS 19082, fol., 75v [Sibton Cartulary], dated between 1177 and 1189.

³⁹⁴ NRO. FEL, 31,546X7, f. 2

³⁹⁵ BL MS Lansdowne, 229, f. 147v; BL MS Cotton Vitellius F IV, f. 175v.

³⁹⁶ J. R. Planché, 'The Earls of East Anglia', in *The Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, (1865), 91–103, p. 94.

discovered. Nor do Susan Atkins, Andrew Wareham or Mark Morris,³⁹⁷ each of whom has carried out a detailed study of the Bigod family across the years 1066 to 1306, make mention of a Henry Bigott or Bigod. Roger had a brother, William, so Henry may have been a nephew.³⁹⁸ Even so, a Bigod/Bigott family member attesting the charter was no substitute for the lord himself.

What we know of Hugh Bigod's claims over Pentney derives from the letters of Gilbert Foliot, bishop of London, (1163-1187) who was required by Thomas Becket to impose an interdict on Hugh's lands and to ensure his excommunication. Several letters passed between Pope Alexander III, Gilbert Foliot, Henry II, and the prior of Pentney.³⁹⁹ Hugh Bigod was eventually excommunicated for his stubborn refusal to restore the canons of Pentney to their possessions. His excommunication was then quashed by a royal council in 1169,⁴⁰⁰ presumably after an agreed settlement with the priory. The author of the Norfolk Victoria County History notes that the canons continued to hold the vill of Pentney.⁴⁰¹ Yet it is clear that there was considerable hiatus and confusion. In 1287, the prior of Pentney is recorded as holding one knight's fee in Gayton Thorpe and East Winch as a tenant of John de Vaux who had died that year on 7 September.⁴⁰² Both villas were held by the Robert de Vaux of Domesday from Roger Bigod,

³⁹⁷ S. J. Atkins, 'The Bigod Family and its Estates, 1066 – 1306, Ph.D. thesis (Reading University 1979); A. Wareham, 'The Motives and Politics of the Bigod Family, c. 1066 – 1177', in *ANS*, xvii, ed. C. Harper-Bill (Woodbridge 1995); M. Morris, *The Bigod Earls of Norfolk in the Thirteenth Century* (Woodbridge 2015).

³⁹⁸ *Comp. Peer.*, ix, p. 578, note. c.

³⁹⁹ See Raymonde Foreville, *L'Église et La Royauté en Angleterre sous Henri II Plantagenet (1154 – 1189)* (Paris 1942), pp.206-9, for an account of the affair.

⁴⁰⁰ A. Wareham, Bigod, 'Hugh, first earl of Norfolk (d. 1176/7), magnate', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Retrieved 3 November 2022, from <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-2376>,

⁴⁰¹ *VCH Norfolk*, ii, p. 389.

⁴⁰² *Cal. I.P. M.*, ii, no. 653. The manor of Thorpe included 40 acres of land in *Bokeswell* and *Fransham* as is apparent from an inquisition postmortem for one Thomas Bardolf, who died on 30 December 1329 and from whom the prior of Pentney then held the manor for the service of a knight's fee. See *Cal. I. P. M.*, viii, no. 243, p. 178.

valued respectively at 12d and 60s.⁴⁰³ Neither was included amongst Robert the founder's recorded gifts to the canons of Pentney.⁴⁰⁴ However, it becomes clear that the vill of Pentney passed into the possession of John de Vaux. His inquisition postmortem records that when he died, he held the manor of Therston (*sic*), Norfolk, the extent of which was said to be given but not set out in the record, and which he held of Roger Bigod, earl of Norfolk, for 31¾ knights' fees.⁴⁰⁵ John's heirs were his daughters, Petronilla and Maud, aged 28 and 26 respectively. Maud married William de Ros, who was the eldest son of Robert de Ros (d. 17 May 1285) of Helmsley, Yorkshire, by Isabel d'Aubigny, daughter and heiress of William d'Aubigny of Belvoir, Leicestershire, and granddaughter of William d'Aubigny.⁴⁰⁶ Petronilla married William of Narford (d. July 1302). John divided his estate between his two daughters.⁴⁰⁷ The vill of Pentney was subsequently held jointly by William de Ros, his wife Maud, and Petronilla, of Roger VII Bigod, earl of Norfolk and Marshal of England, as is apparent from the inquisitions postmortem carried out following Roger's death in December 1306. The relevant entry expands upon the entry for John de Vaux's tenure at 'Therston' (Tharston?), here rendered as 'Thirston', naming Pentney as a dependent manor as well as *Wadeton* (Watton?), Shotesham, Appleton, Trowse, Ketteringham, Shimpling and *Wyssingsete*, all held by John's heirs from Roger Bigod for a total of 31¾ knights' fees.⁴⁰⁸ Much later, by 1370 the prior and convent of Pentney were once again in possession of the vill of Pentney, for in October of that year, by the special grace of King Edward III, they were granted free warren in all their demesne lands in West Bilney, Pentney and Gayton Thorpe.⁴⁰⁹ They continued to hold the vill until the Dissolution, as is

⁴⁰³ *Domesday Norfolk*, i, 9:2, 3.

⁴⁰⁴ *Monasticon*, 6, part 1, p. 69, no. I.

⁴⁰⁵ *Cal. I. P. M.*, ii, no. 653.

⁴⁰⁶ *Comp. Peer.*, xi, pp. 96-7.

⁴⁰⁷ *Cal. C. R.*, 1279 – 1288, pp. 497, 530.

⁴⁰⁸ *Cal. I. P. M.*, iv, no. 434, p. 302.

⁴⁰⁹ *Cal. Ch. R.*, v, p. 217.

recorded in the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* where Pentney, taken together with *Ashewood*, was found to be worth £26 13s 7d.⁴¹⁰

As for Hugh Bigod's interventions in the 1160s, debate here has focused principally on the dispute's connection to conflicts between Henry II and the Church over the question of who had the right to judge disputes concerning ecclesiastical land and fiefs. Little or no attention has been paid to Hugh Bigod's motives in his attack on the canons, which nonetheless raises interesting questions. If, as Hugh Bigod claimed, he had not confirmed the grant of the vill of Pentney to the priory, then it suggests that Robert de Vaux made the grant without first obtaining his lord's consent. There is a paucity of evidence here, so that reasonable inferences must stand in place of hard facts. If Hugh Bigod had refused to grant to Robert de Vaux the vill of Pentney upon his father's death, but apparently was content to agree to Robert having the rest of his father's lands, there must have been a strategic reason behind his refusal. We do not know when Robert's father died, only that it was almost certainly before 1130. That must be the case because by then Robert was married to Agnes and had the resources to meet the fine required to have her inheritance as referred to previously. Hugh's refusal to put Robert in possession of Pentney, therefore, would have happened during the reign of Henry I. Yet it remains a mystery why Hugh should have agreed for Robert to have his father's west Norfolk possessions other than Pentney. One can only surmise that Hugh saw some advantage in retaining Pentney in a region where he had a minority presence as against his regional rival, the Warenne earls. At the time, it might have been a decision that Robert de Vaux accepted without demur. Robert's possessions in west Norfolk were encircled by Warenne estates and he might have found comfort in an additional

⁴¹⁰ *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, iii, p. 393. Available at <https://uea-on-worldcat>. Accessed 16 December 2022.

neighbouring estate being in his lord's demesne.⁴¹¹ If that were so, it seems that later, with Hugh Bigod's violent opposition to King Stephen, Robert had a change of heart and looked to the Warenne earls for protection. Disillusioned with his Bigod lord, Robert de Vaux may have decided to found his monastery with a grant of the vill of Pentney, hoping to put it out of Hugh Bigod's reach. This scenario would tend to place the founding of Pentney Priory in the early 1140s, a date not inconsistent with the subsequent founding of Brinkburn. William Bertram, Brinkburn's founder, died at some time between 1149 and 1152. If Robert made his grant early in the 1140s, he did so at a time when advantage was being taken of the chaos and uncertainty generated by the civil war across many parts of the realm. Christopher Holdsworth has pointed out that during this period many houses acquired lands to which their benefactors had dubious title, giving rise to endless subsequent litigation, both costly and time consuming.⁴¹² William de Vaux, Robert's son and heir, issued a charter confirming his father's grant of the vill of Pentney and his other benefactions as well as making a gift of his own, of a rent charge of four shillings annually from land in Wootton to be paid by William the priest of Wootton and his heirs.⁴¹³ His charter, however, refers specifically to no other grants, and neither the copy printed in the *Monasticon*, nor the copy held by the Norfolk Record Office, supplies a witness list, so it is impossible to date. As with his father's charter, the confirmation and gift were made in free, pure and perpetual alms: phraseology to be discussed below. It is also odd that William's charter confirms the gifts of no other benefactor, as one might expect of a confirmation charter by a newly established patron. What is of note is that the Norfolk Record Office and the Duke of Rutland each have copies of Robert's foundation charter and William's charter of confirmation,

⁴¹¹ See Map 12, p. 164, for an illustration of the distribution of Warenne, de Vaux and Bigod estates in west Norfolk.

⁴¹² Christopher Holdsworth, *The Piper and the Tune: medieval patrons and monks* (University of Reading 1991), p. 23.

⁴¹³ *Monasticon*, 6, part 1, p. 70, no. II; NRO. FEL 31, 546X7 f. 2r.

but in neither case with any mention of a charter of Hugh Bigod. Presumably, there never was one. If Robert acted as if possessing title to the vill of Pentney, even though his lord had declined to put him in possession following the death of his father, then when the prior came to Hugh Bigod requesting a confirmation charter, after the death of Robert de Vaux, the deception would have been revealed. William's confirmation would have had no effect, save for the grant concerning the Wootton rent charge. In this scenario, Hugh Bigod, upon discovering what had happened, then evicted the canons from the vill and reclaimed it for himself. William de Vaux, seeing an opportunity, claimed it as part of his inheritance. Indeed, it might be the case that William was complicit in his action with Hugh Bigod. This would fit a wider pattern since, as appears from a list of benefactions set out in the *Monasticon*, when William's mother, Agnes, granted the monks of St Mary Thetford, part of her demesne land in Wedleton, William disseised them of it and his mother had to recover it by suit, whereupon she regranted the lands to the priory. Afterwards, William made a grant to the priory of lands and rents in Griston and Wootton, (*Wadeton*), perhaps as an act of contrition.⁴¹⁴

That there may have been something fundamentally wrong with Robert's grant of Pentney to the canons is suggested by the foundation charter in Robert de Vaux's name, preserved both in the cartulary held by the Norfolk Record Office and in copies now at Belvoir Castle, one of which is printed in the *Monasticon* (and neither of which could be located, on a visit to Belvoir in June 2025). William de Vaux's confirmation charter is also suspect. It seems likely that both are forgeries, albeit derived from authentic instruments, perhaps produced by the canons in response to the rival claims to the vill from Hugh Bigod and William de Vaux. Certainly, the foundation charter seems unlikely to be a product of the 1130s or even the early 1140s. The language used is

⁴¹⁴ *Monasticon*, 5, p. 142.

that of the 1160s or 1170s at the earliest. And if it was the canons' contention that Robert's charter was followed shortly thereafter by his son's confirmation charter, then that, too, is a forgery. Both charters include a warranty clause. Robert's reads 'Et ego dictus Robertus, et heredes mei warrantizabimus omnia predicta', William's 'et ego dictus Will(elmus) et heredes mei warrantizabimus predictam villam cum pertinentiis, advocacionibus ecclesiarum etc'. Warranty clauses first appear in the first half of the twelfth century, and only become a regular feature of charter diplomatic in the middle years of the reign of Henry II,⁴¹⁵ from roughly the late 1160s onwards, at much the same time as the litigation over Pentney between Hugh Bigod and William de Vaux. The other suspect phrase in both charters is the reference to 'libera, pura, et perpetua elemosina'. This is a formula that did not appear in charters of gift to religious houses until after the middle of the twelfth century, and probably not until after the Constitutions of Clarendon in 1164. It represents an attempt to ensure that gifts of land to the religious came both free of secular services and in perpetuity. Gifts to religious houses made in free alms before the middle of the twelfth century, even if citing perpetual intention, 'in perpetuum', did not usually link or conceptually associate the concepts of 'free and pure alms'. There was no consistency of practice here in the writing of charters, with scriptoria and scribes in different locations adopting their own terminologies for whatever was agreed between grantor and grantee.⁴¹⁶ The charters in Robert and William's names may thus well be fabrications, invented by the canons in pursuit of their claims both against their founder's family, and their principal lord. Alternatively, they could have been manufactured to support the priory's claim to the advowsons of two churches,

⁴¹⁵ P. R. Hyams, 'Warranty and Good Lordship in Twelfth Century England', in *Law and History Review*, 5 (1987), 437-503, p. 474. And see also, David Postles, 'Gifts in Frankalmoign, Warranty of Land, and Feudal Society', in *Cambridge Law Journal*, 50, (1991), 330-346.

⁴¹⁶ Benjamin Thompson has set out an analysis of the development of free alms tenure in his paper, 'Free Alms Tenure in the Twelfth Century', in *ANS*, vi, ed. M. Chibnall (Woodbridge 1994), 221-224.

Tharston in Norfolk, and Chediston in Suffolk, that Robert, the founder of Pentney, was supposed to have granted to his foundation, but which had themselves been gifted earlier to Thetford Priory by Robert's father.⁴¹⁷ If so, the *Taxatio Ecclesiastica* records that by 1291/92 both churches were safely in the hands of the canons of Pentney.⁴¹⁸

Hugh's actions in evicting the prior and canons from the vill of Pentney caused them to bring the matter before the papal curia. Following intervention by Gilbert, bishop of London, and Henry II, the canons were able to return temporarily to their possessions. Henry II, at his Oxford court in December 1165, proposed a compromise: Hugh Bigod should have the vill of Pentney but in exchange should offer another property to the canons. The prior agreed to the compromise, but the community of canons rejected it, saying that they preferred exile to the alienation of a church consecrated to God and confirmed by pontifical privilege, whatever money, land, or any other compensation might be offered in its place.⁴¹⁹ R. W. Eyton's account of the dispute claims that the root cause was that the prior had alienated possessions of his church to Hugh Bigod, earl of Norfolk, and to William de Vaux, without the consent of the canons, which gives the impression that the problem was all of the prior's making.⁴²⁰ That the prior was prepared to accept other lands in lieu, suggests that Hugh Bigod had never provided a charter confirming Robert's gift of Pentney to the canons, for if he had done so, no doubt the prior would have been able to produce it, and Hugh's case would have collapsed there and then. Hugh Bigod's claim, therefore, that he

⁴¹⁷ *Monasticon*, 6, part 1, p. 70 no. I, for the Pentney Priory foundation charter setting out the gift of the advowsons, *Et advocaciones ecclesiarum terrae ma; scilicet de Thorston, de Cheddeston*; *Monasticon*, 5, p. 143, for Robert de Vaux's gift to Thetford Priory, recorded in English, 'Robert de Vaux gave all his churchesin Terston [and] Chedston'. *Thorston* must be Tharston, which in 1086 was held by Robert de Vaux of Roger Bigod as was Chediston. Dugdale has taken *Terston* to be Thurston in Norfolk, but Thurston is a village in Suffolk and in 1086 it was shared between Bury St Edmunds and the king.

⁴¹⁸ Jeff Denton et al. *Taxatio*. Published by The Digital Humanities Institute, Sheffield of Sheffield; 2014. Available at: <<https://www.dhi.ac.uk/taxatio>> Accessed 16 May 2024.

⁴¹⁹ Foreville, 1942, p. 206-7.

⁴²⁰ R. W. Eyton, *Court, household, and itinerary of King Henry II* (London 1878), p. 95, n.4

had never granted the vill of Pentney to Robert de Vaux, appears to have been justified. Hugh's confirmation to Thetford Priory of the gifts of William de Burnaville has been referred to previously.⁴²¹ Robert is recorded as witnessing it as Robert de Vaux *junior*, so would have been well aware of the need to obtain his lord's consent to any grant of lands that he wished to make. Since Geoffrey, the prior of Pentney, seems to have been unable to produce any such charter issued by Hugh Bigod, it becomes easier to explain his readiness to agree a compromise.

If that is so, then Robert de Vaux's gift to Castle Acre Priory of the Middelmelne mill, with its adjoining meadow in the vill of Pentney, also failed. William de Vaux's charter of confirmation of his father's gift to Castle Acre was issued after his father's death, as is apparent from the witness list. Both of William's younger brothers, Oliver and Ralph, attested the charter, describing themselves as brothers of the lord, 'frat(res) domini'.⁴²² Given that many years later William's descendant, John de Vaux, is recorded as holding the manor of Pentney of Roger VII Bigod, it seems that Hugh Bigod, having successfully resisted the Church's efforts to have him return it to the canons of Pentney, granted it to William de Vaux who then went on to confirm the gift of the Middelmelne mill to the monks of Castle Acre. The evidence might suggest that William was complicit with Hugh Bigod in challenging the monks of Pentney over possession of the vill. William had also suffered excommunication under the same papal injunction directed at Hugh Bigod. That William de Vaux was firmly back among Hugh Bigod's *familiares* is clear, not only from William's holding of 30 knights' fees of him, but also from his witnessing Hugh's charters. For example, he is to be found attesting Hugh's charter to Thetford Priory, 1168 X 1174, granting his body for burial at the priory, as well as the church of St Andrew, at Saham.⁴²³

⁴²¹ See *ante*, pp, 142, 148.

⁴²²Harley 2110, f. 91/85r, no.679.

⁴²³ BL MS Cotton Vitellius F IV, f. 159v.

If I am correct in positing that Pentney Priory's foundation took place in the early 1140s and not the 1130s, the grant of Thetford to William III de Warenne, as well as Hugh's withdrawal of support from King Stephen, may have had something to do with it. That would not have gone unnoticed by Hugh's men, including Robert de Vaux. We do not know what Robert's allegiances were, for he does not seem to feature in either of the rival camps claiming the crown of England. However, his purported gift of a mill in the vill of Pentney to the Warenne foundation of Castle Acre, does suggest that he was loyal to the crown, since William III de Warenne, the then earl of Surrey, was a supporter of King Stephen. Robert might well have made his gift to Castle Acre concurrent with his endowments of the canons of Pentney. Robert's gift of Pentney, taken together with the evidence of Hugh Bigod's subsequent denial that he had put Robert in possession of the vill, and Robert's benefaction to Castle Acre priory, does strongly suggest that Robert had left Hugh's affinity, if not *de iure*, then *de facto*, and had aligned himself with the earls Warenne. While it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions simply because many of the extant charters issued by Hugh Bigod now lack their witness lists, of those issued during the lifetime of Robert de Vaux, Robert appears as a witness only once. This in the charter that confirmed the gifts of William de Burnaville and which has already been referred to. Robert's apparent absence from Hugh's court adds weight to the suggestion that Robert had transferred his allegiance from Hugh Bigod to the earls Warenne.

That Robert sought the protection of the Warenne earls is hardly surprising. Robert's possessions in west Norfolk, eight manors in all, as the map of lordship in west Norfolk in 1140 demonstrates (Map 13) were dominated by William de Warenne, whose estates extended across much of the region, with almost all of Robert's manors clustered around the Warenne *caput* at Castle Acre. Robert's west Norfolk possessions were also overshadowed by four castles in addition to the

Warenne *caput* at Castle Acre. Castle Rising was the west Norfolk seat of the other dominant Norfolk magnate, William d'Aubigny, another supporter of King Stephen, who also had a castle at Old Buckenham, some 20 miles south of Norwich. Wormegay, held by Hermer de Ferrers in 1086, by the 1130s/40s, was in the hands of his grandson, William of Wormegay, whose daughter, Alicia was married to Reginald de Warenne, the third son of William II de Warenne, the family member responsible for administering William III de Warenne's Norfolk estates when William left for the Holy Land.⁴²⁴ Mileham had been held by the Fitz Alans but they had lost their lands when they sided with the Angevin cause, when the manor was given by King Stephen to William de Chesney, sheriff of Norfolk.⁴²⁵ The castle at Middleton was probably a motte and bailey structure, and might not by the 1130/40s have been in use. It appears originally to have been constructed by the Domesday tenant-in chief, William d'Ecouis, although by the late eleventh century the manor had passed to the Clare family, with portions there for other families, including the de Scales, who could have had responsibility for the castle.⁴²⁶ Even so, the de Scales were supporters of the king, holding many of their estates of Robert de Vere, the king's constable. As further evidence of the Scales family's allegiance to the crown, Gilbert de Gant, created earl of Lincoln by King Stephen in 1147, granted Roger de Scales the land of Wetherden in Suffolk.⁴²⁷ In choosing the vill of Pentney on which to site his priory, Robert de Vaux was therefore placing his foundation, an act of considerable spiritual, personal and social importance, in territory dominated not by his lord, Hugh Bigod, an enemy of the crown, but by those who supported the King.

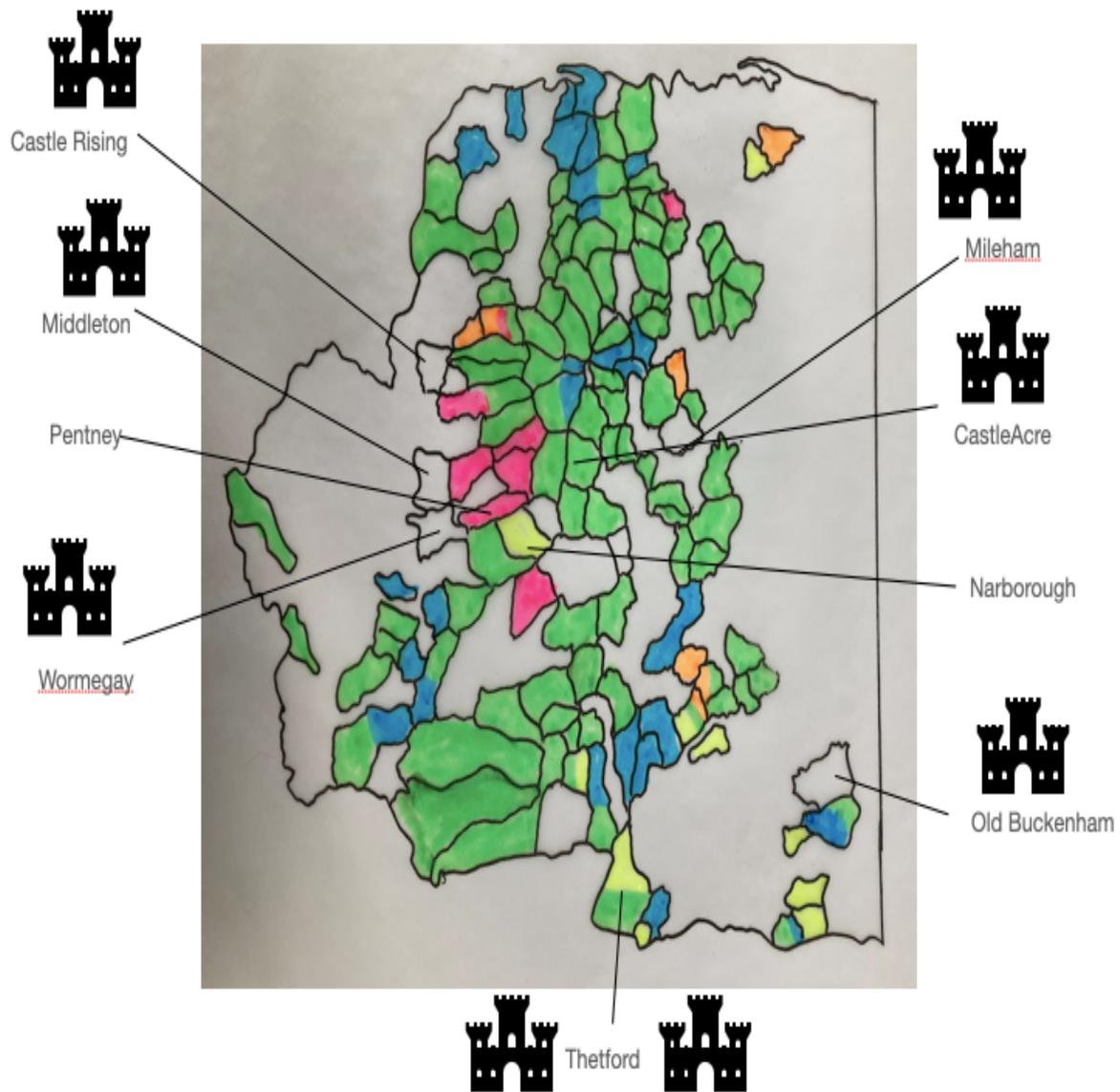
⁴²⁴ *EYC*, viii, pp. 10, 26.

⁴²⁵ *Regesta*, iii, no. 177.

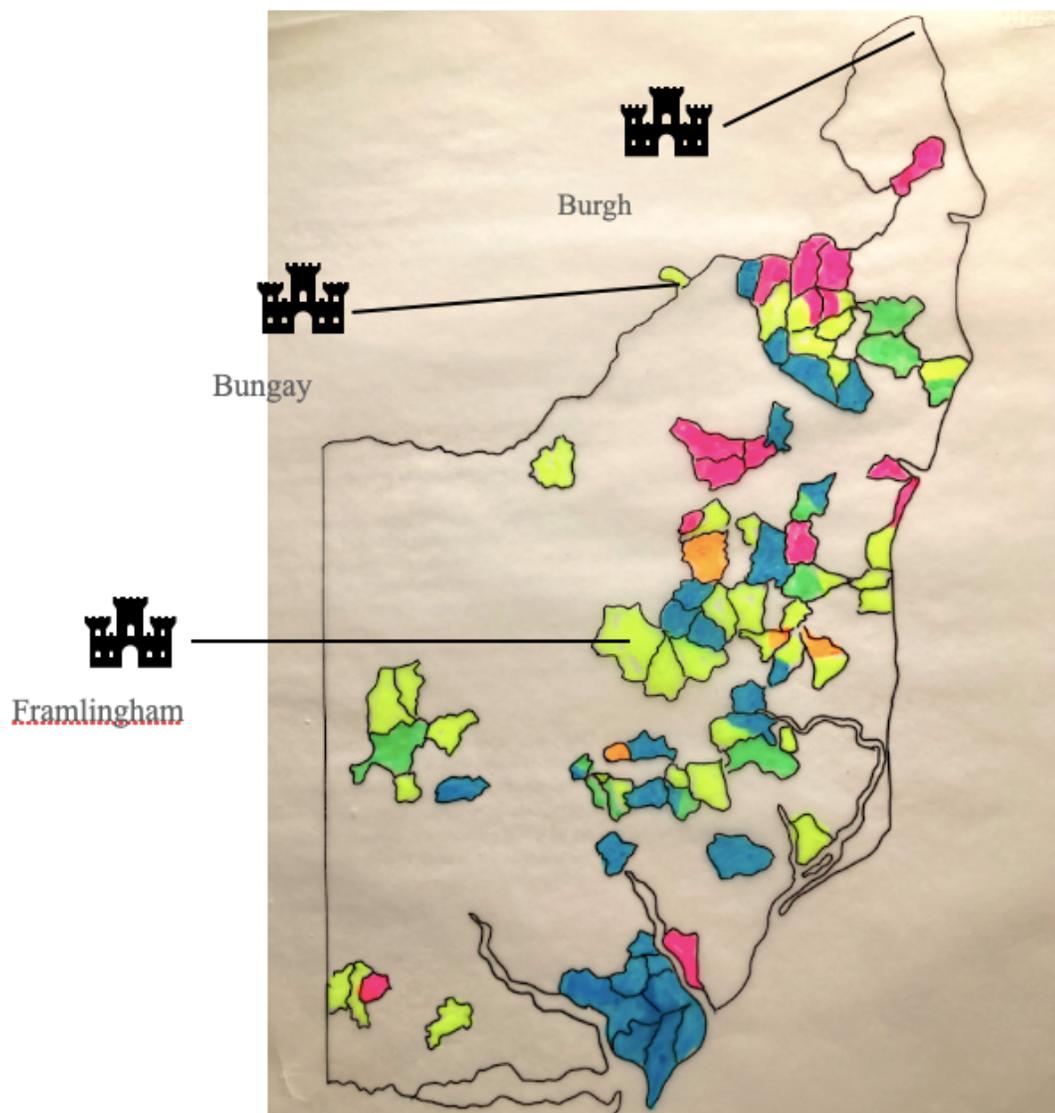
⁴²⁶ R. Liddiard, "*Landscapes of Lordship*": *Norman Castles and the Countryside in Medieval Norfolk, 1066–1200* (Oxford 2000), pp. 33-5, 82-5.

⁴²⁷ Stafford, Staffordshire RO D641/4 (Stafford-Howard) Topographical Bundle for Wetherden Bundle 1 no. W136.

A map of lordship and castles in east Suffolk as at 1140 (Map 14) illustrates Robert de Vaux's holdings in Suffolk. He held no estates in the west of the county. Not surprisingly, his estates, particularly in the northern parts, were swamped by the estates of his lord, Hugh Bigod, several of which Hugh held in demesne. A second tranche, three manors in all, just south of his majority holding, were abutted by only one Bigod estate, while the rest, individual holdings, sit in conjunction with those of Hugh Bigod. In founding a monastery, Robert would have expected protection and support from his lord. That would have been more easily forthcoming and effective in east Suffolk, where Hugh Bigod was dominant with his *caput* at Framlingham, as well as having control of the castle at Bungay, which he had seized from Robert of Leicester in 1140. That Robert chose to found his house at Pentney, a manor situated in the heart of Warenne territory in west Norfolk, does lend support to the argument that Robert had abandoned Hugh Bigod, perhaps because of Hugh's enmity against King Stephen, instead looking to the earls Warenne for protection.



Map 13. Lordship and castles in west Norfolk, 1140



Map 14. Lordship and castles in east Suffolk, 1140

Key

- Green** Warenne manors
- Blue** Bigod manors
- Yellow** Bigod manors in demesne in 1086
- Pink** de Vaux manors
- Orange** Fitz Walter manors in 1086
- Multicoloured where shared

In many cases these estates were shared with other tenants. Only those relevant to this discussion have been illustrated. Some manors can no longer be identified. In those cases, an approximation as to locality has been made by reference to manors still identifiable and assumed to have been

conjoined to the lost estates, as well as information gleaned from 17th and 18th century maps and 19th century Ordnance Survey maps.

Reasons for Hugh Bigod's Delayed Action

If it is indeed correct that Robert de Vaux gifted the vill of Pentney to the priory, despite not being lawfully in possession of it as Hugh Bigod later asserted, then one must account for Hugh's lack of action until the early 1160s. If the foundation of Pentney Priory took place, as has been argued here, c. 1141, at a time when the realm was becoming engulfed in a civil war, Hugh Bigod's attention may well have been diverted from the administration of his estates, particularly in that part of Norfolk furthest from his *caput* of Framlingham. Hugh spent most of the 1140s at war, not least amidst his two rebellions against King Stephen in 1140 alone. Although after August of that year he supported Stephen, following the King's defeat and capture on 2 February 1141 at the battle of Lincoln, Hugh defected to the Empress. Thereafter he continued to make trouble in Suffolk, where he sought to strengthen his own position in pursuit of his own regional ambitions. With his energy focused on this, there is good reason to believe that the possessions of a small religious house in western Norfolk were not uppermost in his mind. But more importantly, having from 1141 sided with the Angevin cause, even if he had he been aware that Robert had made a gift of the vill of Pentney to the canons, there was little that he could have done about it. As an enemy of King Stephen, he would not have been received before the *curia regis*. Nor was he likely to receive a favourable audience from the Pope, for the Church continued to support Stephen for much of his reign. Even after Henry Plantagenet became king in December 1154, Hugh might not have felt secure in his position. He remained at odds with William of Blois, King Stephen's son, over his authority in Norfolk. Whilst Henry II had confirmed Hugh as earl of Norfolk and his right to the third penny of pleas, the usual prerogative

of an earl, Henry had not insisted that William of Blois surrender the castle of Norwich, and William continued to hold the county of Norfolk as agreed in the treaty made between Stephen and Henry at Westminster in November/December 1153. These continued tensions might well have threatened the peace of the realm. Certainly, Henry II, upon his return from France in the spring of 1157, concerned about the threat to peace in East Anglia, in May, deprived both Hugh and William of their castles, in the case of Hugh at Framlingham and Bungay.⁴²⁸ Although Hugh was thereafter a presence at Henry's court, indeed in 1163 was one of twelve hostages that Henry offered to the count of Flanders as part of the treaty negotiated between them that year, it seems that it was not until 1164 or 1165 that Hugh acted against the canons of Pentney. His continued delay, after 1154, assuming that Hugh was aware of Robert's *ultra vires* gift, might be explained by a decision to leave the canons in possession until Robert's death.

That a foundation date for Pentney Priory in the very early 1140s is more likely than *c.* 1130, as I have argued here, is suggested by the absence of any action by Hugh Bigod to recover the vill of Pentney between 1130 and 1140. For if Robert de Vaux had made over the vill of Pentney to his foundation *c.* 1130, a vill that according to Hugh Bigod, Robert was not lawfully in possession of, almost certainly Hugh Bigod would soon have come to be aware of the unlawful disposition of his demesne manor and would have taken appropriate action to recover it. This would have been a time of relative peace in England, the closing years of the reign of Henry I and the opening years of King Stephen's and a time when Hugh Bigod was within the king's peace. That Hugh Bigod was cognisant of events that might impact his interests, that he was protective of his interests and pursued them vigorously, is evidenced by his actions in seizing Norwich Castle in 1136 upon a rumour of King Stephen's death and in 1140 his attack on Bungay, then in

⁴²⁸ W. L. Warren, *Henry II* (London 2000), p. 67.

possession of Robert of Leicester, and which Hugh sought as within his territorial sphere of interest. Given Hugh's aggressive response where he considered his interests were being challenged, it is unrealistic to suppose that he would have done nothing at the time to recover the vill of Pentney had it been given to the monks *c.* 1130.

Postscript

By way of a postscript, there came a time when the relationship between Robert de Vaux and his feudal lord, Hugh Bigod, appears to have been restored, as an entry in the Thetford register appears to suggest. It reads 'Ego Rob(ertus) de Vallibus et Agnes uxor mea, concedente domino nostro comite H(ugone), d(o)n(amu)s ecclesie beate Marie et mon(achis) de Thetf' Thurchillum diaconum de Thurston' cum tota ter(ra) sua et ecclesia et hominibus etc T(este) Rog(ero) de Turlauilla etc'.⁴²⁹ [I Robert de Vaux and my wife Agnes, with the consent of our lord earl Hugh, give to the church of the blessed Mary and the monks of Thetford Thurkil, deacon of Thurston with all his land and church and men. Witnessed by Roger de Turlaville]. The witness here was almost certainly a descendant of Ralph de Turlaville, who held in eight manors of Roger Bigod in 1086, all but one in Suffolk, the exception being Ringstead in Norfolk.⁴³⁰

The styling of Hugh Bigod as earl suggests that the charter dates after the Treaty of Westminster in November/ December 1153, when Stephen recognised Hugh as earl of Norfolk. It is most unlikely that Robert de Vaux would have referred to Hugh as earl before then, with Hugh an enemy of the king and recognised as earl of Norfolk only by the empress and her followers. The donation does not appear in the comprehensive Thetford St Mary confirmation charter of Henry

⁴²⁹ BL MS Cotton Vitellius F IV, f. 156v.

⁴³⁰ *Domesday Suffolk*, i, 7:73, 98-101, 145-48; *Domesday Norfolk*, i, 9:8.

II, the authenticity of which is not in doubt, and which has been dated 1155 X August 1158.⁴³¹ Henry's charter does refer to Robert de Vaux's gifts of the churches of Pentney (Panteneia), Tharston (*Terstuna*), Thurton (*Tortona*), Chediston (*Chedeston*), Wenham, and Belchamp (*Beltham*) and ?Ramsholt (*Ramdon*), together with a mill at Holme's ford, and the alder grove below it. It also mentions Robert de Vaux's gift of ten shillings from his manor of Thurston (*Turston*).⁴³² Almost certainly, therefore, the gift of Thurkil with his land, church, and men was made after August 1158, by which time Robert de Vaux appears to have been reconciled with his lord Hugh Bigod who was now within the king's peace. Perhaps of equal significance is the gift that Agnes, Robert's wife, made to Thetford St Mary of Ketteringham and its church, a gift made for her soul and the souls of her lord, Earl Hugh and his countess, Gundreda. Again, Agnes's gift does not appear in Henry II's confirmation charter, so it was probably made after August 1158, following the death of her husband. She did not include her husband in her *pro anima* clause, nor for that matter, any of her children, although in a confirmation of all her gifts, they joined with her, save for Henry, who might have been dead as he makes no further appearance in the records. In making a benefaction to the Bigod monastic foundation, almost certainly after the death of her husband, Agnes may have been signalling her loyalty and support for Hugh Bigod in circumstances in which she might have felt insecure, not least in light of the dispute over the vill of Pentney.⁴³³

⁴³¹ *LCH*, v, no. 2600.

⁴³² *Ibid*, v. no. 2600, lines 61-3, 96.

⁴³³ BL MS Lansdowne 229, f. 146r; *Monasticon*, 5, pp. 142-3.

Chapter 5 Rudham Priory, later Coxford

Pedigrees

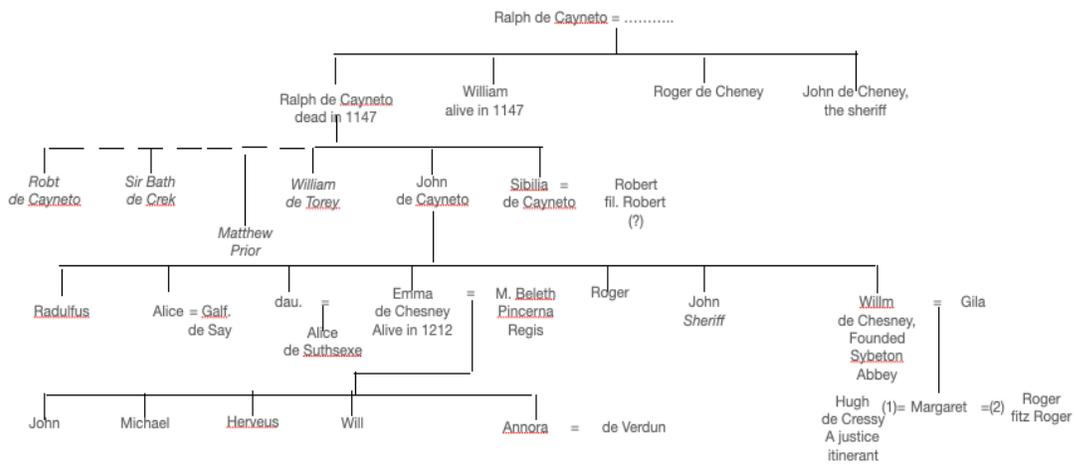


Fig. 2. False Genealogy of the Chesneys as set out by H. W. Saunders in his 'A History of Coxford Priory', *Norfolk Archaeology*, xvii (Norwich 1910), 284-372. p. 352.

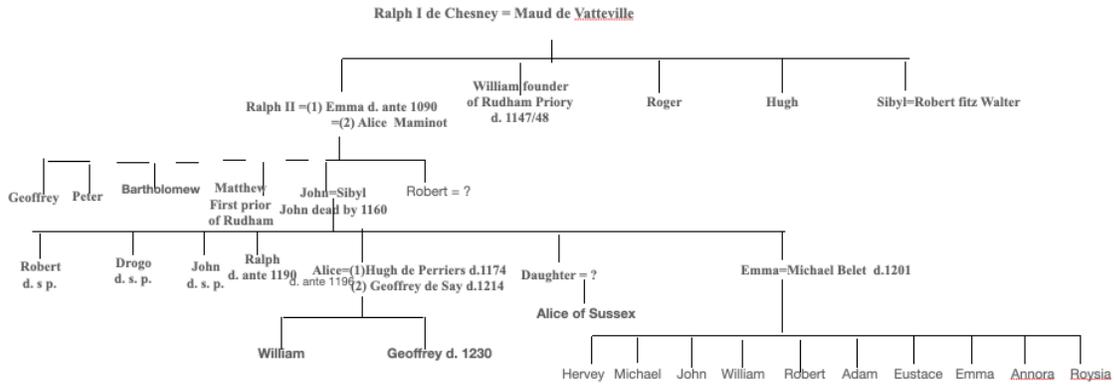


Fig. 3. Ralph I de Chesney pedigree constructed from various sources referred to in the present text.

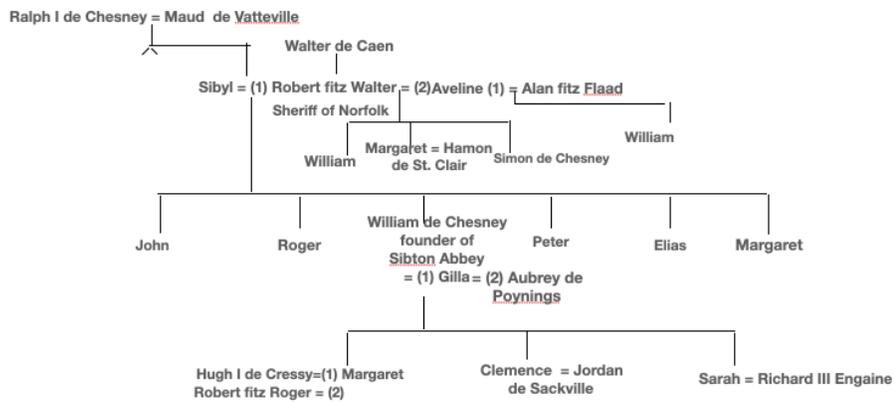


Fig. 4. Pedigree of Sibyl and Robert fitz Walter

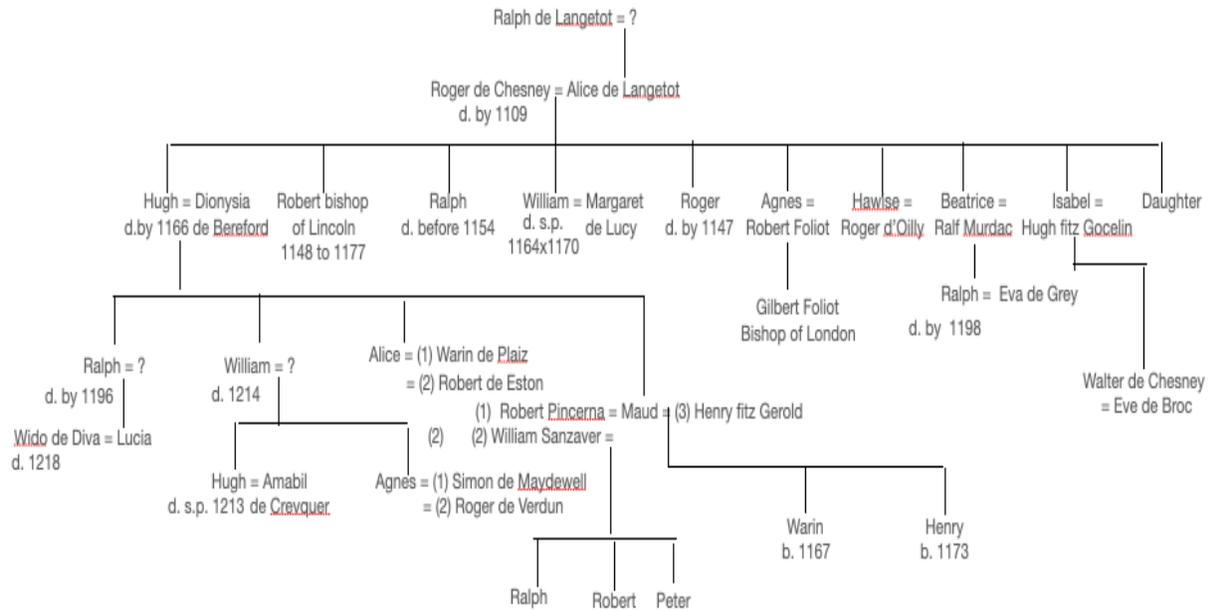


Fig. 5. Oxfordshire Chesney pedigree constructed from material in the *Cartulary of the Abbey of Eynsham*, 2 vols., ed. H. E. Salter (Oxford 1907), i, Appendix I, 'The Family of Chesney', pp. 411- 423, and 'Sussex Domesday Tenants. IV. The Family of Chesney or Cheyney', L. F. Salzman, *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, lxxv (1924), 19-53

Abstract

The Augustinian priory of Coxford, formerly known as Rudham, is said to have been founded c. 1140 in the church of St Mary, East Rudham, Norfolk, by William de Chesney, the second son of Ralph I de Chesney and Maude de Vateville. Ralph I de Chesney was a significant Domesday Warenne tenant with manors in Norfolk and Sussex. William is not to be confused with William de Chesney, son of Robert fitz Walter and Sibyl de Chesney, William's sister. As will be apparent when considering Sibton Abbey, William de Chesney fitz Robert adopted his mother's name to avoid confusion with a younger brother with the same given name. William de Chesney fitz Robert, who founded Sibton Abbey, was, therefore, a nephew of William de Chesney who founded Rudham. Nor should the family be confused with the Oxford de Chesneys, descended,

not from Ralph I's son, Roger, as suggested by Phillipa Brown, relying upon Salzman,⁴³⁴ but, as I demonstrate in the chapter on Sibton Abbey, from Roger de Chesney, a Domesday tenant of Robert d'Oilly, holding the manors Heyford and Ducklington, both in Oxfordshire, and Wicken in Northamptonshire.⁴³⁵ As a bull issued by Pope Lucius and dated 4 April 1144 confirmed, William gave to the canons the church of St Mary together with the church of St Peter at Rudham, the lay fee which the priests Bruno and William had renounced, the gardens of 'Freche', Godwin and Lambert, a mill with its fisheries, presumably in Rudham, and land at Tokeswood and Stanhoe. If William issued a charter setting out these endowments, then it has not survived. William appears to have issued a second charter in favour of the priory, made sometime in 1147 and probably made in contemplation of his death. It was addressed to William, bishop of Norwich, and, of significance, his nephew John de Chesney, and was more extensive than his first. Here he gave an additional mill and fishery, at Thorpe, while exchanging the mill and fishery at Coxford for the one the canons had previously at Rudham. He provided meadow and heath, as well as half a wood at 'Besefen'; the services of Godwin and his brother Ulvingus and all their land together with the land of Godwin the scribe, and the land of Almarus of Gayton (*Gaitona*) which Moyses held. Finally, he granted the land in Marham, which his father had held in 1086. As expressed in his second charter, William made his endowments for the souls of his father and mother, his brother Ralph and all his brothers and sisters. He makes no mention of a wife or children, and the fact that John de Chesney, his nephew and son of his brother, Ralph, took on the patronage of the priory immediately after William's death suggests that he was unmarried and that he had no legitimate offspring. As for William's motives, beyond the spiritual

⁴³⁴ *Cart. Sibton*, i, p. 10; Salzman, 1924, pp. 21, 29, 32-3. B. D. Hill has also suggested that the two families were connected. *English Cistercian Monasteries and their Patrons in the Twelfth Century* (Urbanal 1968), p. 31.

⁴³⁵ *DP*, p. 402; *Domesday Oxford*, 28:12, 20; *Domesday Northampton*, 28:1.

they appear to fall within the category of a wealthy local knight seeking the status and influence that the founding of a religious house could bestow on its founder. William de Chesney remains largely a mystery, while his nephew, John de Chesney, who became patron of the priory upon William's death, and who can be ranked with William as a founder, has left a more illuminating record. While a study of Coxford Priory already exists in the form of a monograph by H. W. Saunders, published in 1910 in *Norfolk Archaeology*, relying upon a transcript of the priory's cartulary made in 1886 by Augustus Jessop,⁴³⁶ despite its thoroughness in many respects, Saunders tells us virtually nothing of the Chesney family affiliations and connections, nor of the other baronial families, apart from the earls Warenne, with whom they were associated, nor which religious houses they patronised, nor whether any member of their family held high office. This is particularly significant in respect to William and John de Chesney, the founders of Rudham/Coxford. It is the purpose of this chapter to examine such aspects of this branch of the Chesney family and, where possible, to distinguish its members from other branches of the family active in the twelfth century

The Founder and his Family

In his paper Saunders surveyed the various grants made to the canons, identifying benefactors, and noting that early in the priory's existence, before the end of 1145, William III de Warenne, William de Chesney's lord, confirmed the founder's grants.⁴³⁷ The first prior, we are told, was

⁴³⁶ H. W. Saunders, 'A History of Coxford Priory', in *Norfolk Archaeology*, xvii, (1910), 284-370. The cartulary is now Norwich, Norfolk Record Office, DN/SUN/8 and MC 61/1, 507X6, with Jessop's transcript *ibid*, MS 3201, 4A2.

⁴³⁷ Saunders, 1910, p. 288.

Matthew de Chesney,⁴³⁸ who was perhaps an illegitimate son of Ralph II de Chesney. This latter assertion is made by Farrer, quoting Dugdale, citing Matthew as an illegitimate son alongside other such; Robert de Chesney, Bartholomew of Creak, knight, and William de Torcy.⁴³⁹ The charters that Saunders printed in full include William's second charter and John de Chesney's charter of confirmation, made when he became patron of the priory. His endowments largely repeated those of his uncle and he added all the land that is between Caldewelle (not identified) and the water of Tatersett, all *Ketellesmere* and all *Noremete* (neither identified), one fold for 300 sheep, the service of Sumerled the priest and his land which had been given to him by William and John, and Ralph the son of Wimar and all his land, Ailwin the son of Aluric and all his land, and Aluric the son of Wimar and all his land. John went on to grant that the men of the vill and of all the soke may grind whenever they wish at Thorpe mill freely and without any prohibition as they were accustomed in the time of his uncle, William de Cheyney, and the works which the men of that village were accustomed to do to repair the pond of the aforesaid fishpond. These benefactions were made in alms for the soul of his grandfather, Ralph de Chesney and his wife, and the souls of his parents and William de Chesney his uncle, and Roger and their sister and Waleran de Rochefford and all his ancestors and for himself and his wife and all his brothers and sisters. Among the witnesses were Peter *de Caineto* and Matthew his brother, both illegitimate sons of Ralph II de Chesney, with Matthew probably being the first prior.⁴⁴⁰

Saunders's paper also supplies a genealogical table of the family of Ralph I de Chesney ('Cayneto', 'Querceto') taken, with certain variations, from the Cotton manuscript Vitellius F

⁴³⁸ Ibid, p. 289.

⁴³⁹ *Honors*, iii, p. 316. And see Jessop's transcript of the Register of Coxford, f. 14v, *De fundatoribus domus de Cokesford*.

⁴⁴⁰ Op. cit., pp. 331-2. See the pedigree, Fig. 3, p. 175.

XII.⁴⁴¹ However, there are errors in this pedigree that render it unreliable. Thus, John, who in the pedigree is styled ‘sheriff’, and his brother, William de Chesney, described as the founder of Sibton Abbey, are there shown as sons of John de Cayneto, son of Ralph II de Cayneto.⁴⁴² Saunders has accepted this descent, in grave error, for it has now been established that John fitz Robert, who was sheriff of Norfolk, and William de Chesney, his brother and founder of Sibton Abbey, were the sons of Robert fitz Walter de Caen and Sibyl, daughter of Ralph I de Chesney. As we have seen, William took his mother’s family name of ‘de Chesney’, probably to avoid being confused with a younger brother who had also been given the name William and who would have been known as William, son of Robert. Saunders’s pedigree also has a John de Cheyney (*sic*), a son of Ralph I de Chesney, and so brother not only to Ralph II, but to Roger, and to William, founder of Rudham Priory. This John is also styled ‘the sheriff’. Although Saunders does not say of which county, this was presumably Norfolk and Suffolk. Here once again we find confusion with the John fitz Robert, son of Robert fitz Walter, who was sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk from 1141 to 1146/7. Moreover, there is no evidence that Ralph I de Chesney had a son named John. Whilst Sibyl de Chesney’s marriage features in Saunders’s pedigree, her husband is named there as Robert fitz Robert rather than as Robert fitz Walter, son of Walter de Caen, whom she actually married. Saunders’s entry has been marked with a question mark as to their issue. These errors are relatively easily spotted, with later commentators supplying more accurate pedigrees of the family. In these, the descent of the

⁴⁴¹ Ibid, pp. 354, 355-68, 352-53

⁴⁴² See Fig. 2, p. 174.

family through Sibyl de Chesney and Robert fitz Walter has been clearly delineated and separated from the descent through Ralph II de Chesney.⁴⁴³

We know very little about the founder, William de Chesney, if indeed it were he who founded the priory and not his nephew, John, son of William's elder brother Ralph II de Chesney.⁴⁴⁴ Both were benefactors. But Round considers John de Chesney the true founder.⁴⁴⁵ Regardless of this, it seems incontrovertible that the priory started in the church of St Mary at Rudham and that it was William de Chesney who gifted the church of St Mary as well as the church of St Peter, two of the three churches then existing in Rudham. According to the charter of Everard, bishop of Norwich, who retired towards the end of 1145, the church of St Mary was granted so that it might be used for the needs of a congregation of canons living regularly. But the bishop here referred only to William de Chesney, acknowledging that the church of St Mary was of William's fee. The bishop also named the first prior, Matthew.⁴⁴⁶

Ralph I de Chesney, William's father, was a Domesday tenant of William de Warenne, holding manors in Norfolk and Sussex. In Norfolk, he held in Marham, Gayton, Rudham, Houghton, Barmer, Syderstone, Helhoughton and Thorpe Market. Farrer includes Stinton and Kerdiston, for both of which in Domesday Ralph (if it is indeed, he) appears simply as 'Randolf'.⁴⁴⁷ In Sussex he was a Warenne tenant at Saddlescombe, Brighton, Newtimber, Streat, Hamsey and

⁴⁴³ See for instance L. F. Salzman's pedigree of the Norfolk Chesneys in his paper 'Sussex Domesday Tenants. IV. The Family of Chesney or Cheyney', in *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, 65 (1924), 20-53, p. 27. Unfortunately, in recounting the history of the Oxfordshire branch of the Chesney family, he has assumed that they were descended from Roger de Chesney, son of Ralph I de Chesney, which I have shown in my chapter on Sibton Abbey to be wrong. See page 21 of Salzman's paper. See also Farrer's pedigree in *Honors*, iii, p. 314, which lacks mention of William de Chesney fitz Robert's wife Gilla, and omits reference to Robert fitz Walter's second wife, Aveline, widow of Alan fitz Flaad, but is otherwise accurate in its descent. And see Fig. 4.

⁴⁴⁴ See Fig. 3.

⁴⁴⁵ J. H. Round, 'The Origin of the Stewarts and their Chesney Connection', in *The Genealogist*, ns 18, 1902, 1-16, p.9.

⁴⁴⁶ Saunders, 1910, p. 332; Jessop, no. 14; *Cart. Coxford*, no. 14; Add. 47784, no. 14.

⁴⁴⁷ *Honors*, iii, p.314; *Domesday Norfolk*, i, 8:1, 2.

Allington.⁴⁴⁸ Loyd suggests that the family originated from Le Quesnay (Seine-Maritime, arr. Neufchâtel-en-Bray, com. Saint-Saëns). By contrast, Vincent suggests nearby Le Quesnay (cant. Gournay-en-Bray, com. Mauquenchy).⁴⁴⁹ Le Quesnay in Saint-Saëns stands on the river Varenne, from which the Warenne family took its name, and is only five miles from Bellencombe, the *caput* of the earls Warenne for their Norman lands. Mauquenchy is only a few miles further to the southeast.

Ralph I was married to Maud (Matilda), as is evident from a list of benefactors of Lewes Priory printed in the *Monasticon* where it is recorded that ‘Ralph de Cheyney (*sic*) senior gave a hide of land at ‘Elintune’ for the soul of Maud his wife’.⁴⁵⁰ ‘Elintune’ is Allington, Sussex, held by Ralph I de Chesney of William de Warenne in 1086.⁴⁵¹ Maud (*alias* Matilda) was probably a daughter of William de Vatteville, a tenant-in-chief, who, in 1086, is recorded as holding part of Brighton of William de Warenne, with another portion of this fee held by Ralph I de Chesney.⁴⁵² A confirmation charter from William II de Warenne for Lewes refers to the gifts made by Ralph I de Chesney of the church of Keymer (*Kimera*) with one virgate of land, and tithes, and the church of Barcombe (*Bercamp*) together with its glebe.⁴⁵³ The manors of Keymer and Barcombe were both held by William de Vatteville in 1086.⁴⁵⁴ Ralph must have come into possession of the churches that he gave to Lewes Priory through his wife, Maud, who would have brought the relevant manors to him as part of her *maritagium*. In turn, by Matilda/Maud, Ralph I had issue:

⁴⁴⁸ *Domesday, Norfolk*, i, 8:15, 24, 107-8, 122; *Domesday Sussex*, 6:1, 12, 13, 33-4, 40, 49, 50.

⁴⁴⁹ L. C. Loyd, *The Origins of Some Anglo-Norman Families* (Leeds 1951), pp. 27-8; N. Vincent, ‘New Sayings: Further Evidence for the Say-Mandeville Dispute’, unpublished paper, p.5 and n23.

⁴⁵⁰ *Monasticon*, 5, p. 3.

⁴⁵¹ *Domesday Book*, f. 27v, Sussex, p. 66.

⁴⁵² *Ibid*, f. 26v, Sussex, pp. 63-4.

⁴⁵³ *Lewes Cart.*, i, p. 17.

⁴⁵⁴ *Domesday Book*, f. 27, Sussex, p. 65; f. 27v, p. 66.

Ralph II, William, Hugh, and Sibyl, who married Robert fitz Walter de Caen.⁴⁵⁵ He might also have had a son named Roger, for in his charter to the canons of Rudham, John de Chesney made his gift for, among other family members, ‘William de Chesney my uncle, and Roger and their sisters’.⁴⁵⁶

Ralph II de Chesney married Emma, as is clear from a charter for Lewes Priory. This notes that Ralph de Chesney gave the church of the vill of Brighton (*Bristolmestona*) and the tithe of all he had in the same vill for the soul of his wife Emma.⁴⁵⁷ It seems that Emma was dead by 1090, for William I de Warenne issued a charter in favour of Lewes Priory, generally dated *c.* 1090, by which, *inter alia*, he confirmed the gift of a hide of land ‘in Aldrintona that Ralph the younger Caysneto had made for the soul of his wife’.⁴⁵⁸ Keats-Rohan identified this Emma as a daughter of Hugh Maminot.⁴⁵⁹ Hugh, himself, was the son of Gilbert Maminot, bishop of Lisieux and physician to William I. The family almost certainly originated from the vicinity of Caen, where the Bayeux Inquest of 1133 records the Maminot fee as rendering service of five knights from a variety of locations, all in the modern département of Calvados: Surrain (arr. Bayeux, cant. Trévières), Bazenville (arr. Bayeux, cant. Ryes), Feugères, (arr. Bayeux, cant. and com. Isigny), Thaon, (arr. Caen, cant. Creully), Noyers (arr. Caen, cant. Villers-Bocage), and ‘Froigneium’ or ‘Floeneium’ juxta Laceyam (i.e. Lacey, arr. Vire, cant. Condê-sur-Noireau).⁴⁶⁰ Gilbert was a Domesday tenant-in-chief with holdings in Dorset, Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire and Wiltshire. He also held West Greenwich of Odo of Bayeux, which his son, Hugh, held after him following his father’s death in 1101, subsequently treated as

⁴⁵⁵ *DP*, p. 331; *Monasticon*, 5, p. 14, no. VI.

⁴⁵⁶ Saunders, 1910, p. 332; Jessop, no. 3; *Cart. Coxford*, no. 3; NRO *Coxford*, no. 3.

⁴⁵⁷ *Monasticon*, 5, p. 14.

⁴⁵⁸ *Lewes Cart.*, i, p. 40.

⁴⁵⁹ *DD*, pp. 369, 1027.

⁴⁶⁰ Loyd, 1951, p. 57.

a barony in chief following bishop Odo's disgrace and forfeiture.⁴⁶¹ Hugh was married to Emma, sister of William Peverel of Dover, who, together with his brothers Pain and Hamo, was a *familiaris* of Henry I of whose charters they were all frequently witnesses.⁴⁶² The family held land in Lower Normandy as is evidenced by the charter of Stephen, count of Mortain, later king of England, by which he confirmed the gift of William Peverel of Dover, made with the consent of his brothers, Hamo and Pain, of the church of Le Buat (Manche, arr. Avranches, cant. Isigny-Le-Buat) and the vill of Lire to the abbot and monks of Bec.⁴⁶³ In 1086, Hugh was recorded as holding Rodmarton, Lasborough, and Little Sodbury in Gloucestershire, all as a tenant of his father.⁴⁶⁴ The obituary of the cathedral church of Canterbury records that Hugh Maminot gave to the church eleven 'mansure' together with the church of St. Mary Queningate.⁴⁶⁵ The grant was confirmed in a charter datable between 1109 and 1114, issued by Henry I, confirming to the monks of Canterbury Cathedral a grant of land made by Hugh Maminot, his wife and heirs, to enlarge the monks' cemetery.⁴⁶⁶ Hugh was one of the sureties for Henry I's treaty with his brother Robert Curthose, dated 10 March 1101.⁴⁶⁷ He died before c. 1130 when his wife, Emma, is recorded (in the 1130 Pipe Roll) as granted relief for 10 shillings of danegeld from the county of Sussex.⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶¹ Gilbert 17, *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England*, <http://www.pase.ac.uk>, accessed 5 August 2023; Sanders, 1960, p. 97.

⁴⁶² *Regesta*, ii, as William Peverel, nos. 680, 800, 877, 1019, 1021, 1196, 1245, 1276, 1981, p. 399, no. 314c; William Peverel as William of Dover, nos. 516, 595-6, 684, 791, 829, 868, 988, 1015a, 1031, 1048, 1062, 1087, 1101-02, 1183, 1184, 1187, 1295, 1320, 1381, 1446, 1451, 1550, 1556, 1585, 1609, 1674, 1776; Hamo Peverel, nos. 828, 868, 1051, 1062, 1101, 1245, 1295-7, 1299, 1609; Pain Peverel, nos. 626, 707, 828, 939, 1048, 1050, 1102, 1260, 1371, 1451, 1556, 1585, 1587, 1609, 1776.

⁴⁶³ *Regesta*, ii, no. 1547.

⁴⁶⁴ *Domesday Book*, Gloucestershire, p. 459.

⁴⁶⁵ BL MS Cotton Galba E III, printed in J. Dart, *The History and Antiquities of the Cathedral Church of Canterbury*, (London 1726), Appendix VIII, p. xxv.

⁴⁶⁶ *Regesta*, ii, no. 1077.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid*, no. 515.

⁴⁶⁸ *P R 31 Henry I*, p. 53.

Hugh and Emma had a son and heir, Walkelin Maminot, and at least two daughters, one of whom was named Alice. Ralph II de Chesney married a daughter of Hugh Maminot, but not Emma as Keats-Rohan asserts. The cartulary of Merton Priory makes it clear that Ralph married Hugh's daughter Alice (*Aeliz*), although it is apparent from the Lewes cartulary that he had a wife, Emma, as previously indicated, and who would have thus been his first wife. The Merton cartulary states that Ralph de Chesney (*Caisneto*) married Alice, the daughter of Hugh Maminot and his wife Emma, and that the manor of Petham⁴⁶⁹ was given to Alice as part of her *maritagium*, which she then took to Ralph de Chesney as her husband.⁴⁷⁰ The manuscript is quite clear in the rendition of the name *Caisneto*, which is an often used latinised version of Chesney. (See Fig. 6 below). The suggestion that the Ralph in question was Ralph de Cahaignes, as contended by Alfred Heales in his translation of the Merton cartulary, is undoubtedly false.⁴⁷¹ It was by reason of Ralph II de Chesney's marriage to Alice de Maminot that Geoffrey de Say, second husband of Ralph's granddaughter, Alice, daughter of Ralph's son John, came into the Maminot lands as will be established later in this chapter.

That Ralph II had two wives, the first Emma and the second Alice, is supported by the fact that his son, John, named two of his daughters Emma and Alice. Hugh Maminot's other daughter may well have been named Emma after Hugh's wife and is presumably the daughter who is recorded as marrying Ralph de Cahagnes or 'Kaines': member of a family that originated from Cahagnes (Calvados, arr. Vire, cant. Aunay-sur-Odon).⁴⁷² The *Book of Fees* records that the

⁴⁶⁹ This is almost certainly Peckham in Surrey which Gilbert, bishop of Lisieux, Hugh Maminot's father, held in 1086 of Odo, bishop of Bayeux. See *Domesday Book*, p.75 under Brixton Hundred.

⁴⁷⁰ BL MS Cotton Cleopatra C VII, ff. 60 – 204, The Cartulary of Merton Priory, ff. 60-204, no. 69; Salzman, 1924, p. 21.

⁴⁷¹ Alfred Heales, *The Records of Merton Priory in the County of Surrey* (London 1898), pp. 28-29. See Appendix 3 for an analysis of Heales's account of the marriage of Hugh Maminot's daughter, Alice, to Ralph de Chesney.

⁴⁷² Loyd, 1951, p. 52.

manor of Tarent (i.e. Tarrant Keyneston) with all its appurtenances in Dorset was held in chief by William de Cahagnes (*Kaines*) for the service of three knights' fees. It had been given to Ralph de Cahagnes (*Kaines*) in marriage with the daughter of Hugh Maminot by King Henry I. The daughter is not named.⁴⁷³

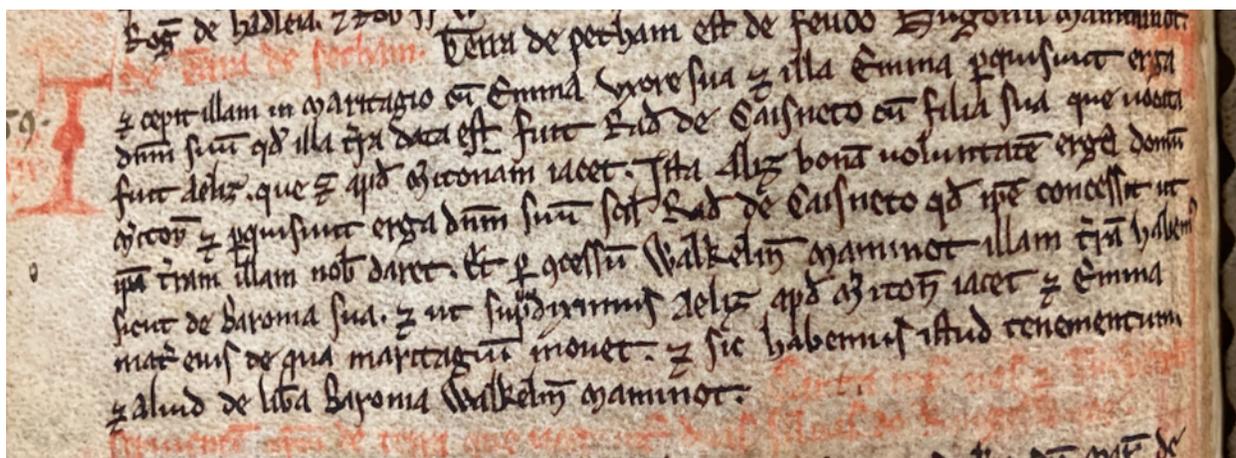


Fig. 6. Entry in the cartulary of Merton Priory re Ralph de Chesney. Ralph de Chesney's name appears as *Rad de Caisneto* in the fourth and sixth lines down.

In 1166, Ralph de Cahagnes is recorded as holding manors in Dorset, Wiltshire, and Gloucestershire, all of them acquired with the *maritagium* of the daughter of Hugh Maminot: Yatton Keynell and Somerford Keynes in Wiltshire, Tarrant Crawford, Preston in Tarrant Rushton, Tarrant Keyneston, and Coombe Keynes in Dorset, and in Gloucestershire, Rodmarton,

⁴⁷³ *Book of Fees*, i, p. 87. David Crouch notes that Ralph de Cahaignes (*Kaines*), lord of Tarrant Keynes, had a younger son called William who was probably the Willaim de Cahaignes who captured King Stephen at the battle of Lincoln. See Crouch, 2013, p. 142, n.25. *VCH Dorset* erroneously states that it was William de Cahaignes who had married the daughter of Hugh Maminot. See *VCH Dorset*, ii, p. 132-3. Keats-Rohan cites the entry in *Testa de Nevill* in support of her assertion that Ralph II de Chesney's wife, Emma, was a daughter of Hugh Maminot. See *DP*, p. 271. That would suggest that she has confused *Kaines* with *Caisneto*.

Lasborough, and Little Sodbury.⁴⁷⁴ The manors in Wiltshire and Dorset had all been held in 1086 by Gilbert, bishop of Lisieux (d. 1101) and the Gloucestershire manors had been held by Hugh.⁴⁷⁵ None of these estates is to be found in association with Ralph II de Chesney or his heirs. Thus, in 1242-3 Milo 'de Kaignes' is recorded as holding half a knight's fee of William 'de Kignes' of the honour of Somerford, Wiltshire, while Hugo Painel held the same vill of William who, himself, held it of the king. In Gloucestershire, again in 1242-3, William of Rodmarton is recorded as holding three parts of a knight's fee in Rodmarton of William 'de Kaines'.⁴⁷⁶ I set out these details at such length, in an attempt clearly to establish distinctions between the otherwise easily confused families of Chesney and Cahagnes/Keynes.

William de Chesney, Ralph II de Chesney's younger brother, appears not to have married, or if he did, had no surviving issue. Certainly, his foundation charter makes no mention of a wife. William here states that he had made his endowment for the souls of his father and mother and for his brother Ralph, which suggests that when he issued the charter, datable between 1145 and 1148, all three were dead. The charter itself is collectively addressed to William bishop of Norwich, to Chesney's lord, William III de Warenne, and to his nephew, John de Chesney.⁴⁷⁷ William Turbe was elected bishop of Norwich probably in 1146 or early in 1147, following the resignation of his predecessor, Everard, in 1145. John de Chesney's charter bestowing lands and liberties on Rudham Priory, issued in 1148, is worded in such a way to make clear that, by then,

⁴⁷⁴ *Cartae*, XXXI, and see note to no. VII.

⁴⁷⁵ *Domesday Book*, p. 167, Wiltshire, vi, 1-2; p. 204, Dorset, vi, 1-4; p. 459, Gloucestershire, xxx, 1-3.

⁴⁷⁶ *Book of Fees*, ii, pp. 736, 738, 781.

⁴⁷⁷ Jessop, no. 1; *Cart. Coxford*, no. 1; NRO Coxford, no 1.

William de Chesney was dead. John renewed his charter before William, bishop of Norwich on 19 May 1148.⁴⁷⁸

John de Chesney, described in the cartulary as Rudham's true founder ('verus fundator'), married Sibyl with whom he had four sons: Robert, Drogo, John, and Ralph, all of whom died without issue, and of whom probably only Ralph survived his father. Ralph's existence and descent is revealed in the Coxford cartulary through one of the five charters in his name. By this, Ralph agreed that he was bound to pay the canons of Rudham 4s ³/₄d as rent for land held in East Rudham, and 21d of silver for the fee of his falconer. Saunders described this Ralph as of the 'illegitimate line'. Yet in the charter itself, Ralph describes himself as the son and heir of John de Chesney, with no reference to illegitimacy ('Ego Radulfus de Cheney de Est Rudham filius et heres Joh(ann)is de Cheney de eadem').⁴⁷⁹ Had he not been John's legitimate heir, surely he would not have described himself as such? Illegitimate children, under the laws of twelfth century England, had no right to inherit. The treatise known as *Glanvill*, written in the latter part of the twelfth century, states that 'no one who is a bastard or not born of a lawful marriage may be a lawful heir'.⁴⁸⁰ So, it appears that Saunders was wrong to describe Ralph as a bastard. Saunders dates the charter and, indeed, all five issued in the name of Ralph de Chesney, to 1196, which, for reasons that will become apparent, cannot be correct.⁴⁸¹

It was via John that the family estates descended to his daughters, Alice and Emma. Alice married, first, Hugh de Perriers, (d. 1174), and second, Geoffrey de Say, (d. 1214). Emma

⁴⁷⁸ *Monasticon*, 6, part 1, p. 369.

⁴⁷⁹ Jessop, no. 113; *Cart. Coxford*, no. 113; NRO Coxford, no. 11.

⁴⁸⁰ *Glanvill*, p. 87, para. 13.

⁴⁸¹ The other four are nos. 25, 87, 101 and 112. *Cart. Coxford* numbers them 25, 101 and 113, and no. 87 has been attributed to Robert de Chesney (Kayneto), but the version in NRO Coxford is clear that the issuer was Ralph de Chesney, (*Rad[ulfu]s de Keyneto de Estrudh[a]m*); Saunders, 1910, p. 296.

married Michael Belet (d. 1201), butler to Henry II and itinerant justice from 1176. Michael held four knights' fees in Northamptonshire of Robert Foliot, Wroxton in Oxfordshire and lands in Lincolnshire.⁴⁸² Emma brought to her marriage various of the Warenne lands as part of her *maritagium*. She had land in Rudham, for she gave the monks at Rudham 40 acres of heath from her manor of Rudham at the request of her son, Hervey (Belet), a gift made for the salvation of her soul and the souls of her sons.⁴⁸³ Her son, Hervey, when he succeeded to the family estates, gave Rudham Priory land in Rudham, Gayton ('Geitun'), Marham, and Syderstone ('Sidersterne'), all of them manors held in 1086 by Ralph I de Chesney of William de Warenne. Emma's charter was dated by Saunders to 1210.⁴⁸⁴

Vincent suggests that Alice and Emma were half-sisters, born to different mothers. He argues that both claimed the inheritance of John de Chesney, their father, but that it was Alice alone who succeeded to the Maminot barony. This, Vincent contends, indicates that John de Chesney was not the son of a Maminot heiress.⁴⁸⁵ The Maminot barony descended through Alice Maminot, second wife of Ralph II de Chesney. Hugh Maminot was dead by 1131 and was succeeded by his son, Walkelin I, who died before 1157. He in turn was succeeded by his son, Walkelin II, who died without issue c. 1190. His heir was Alice, who, according to I. J. Sanders, was his paternal aunt, daughter of Hugh Maminot.⁴⁸⁶ She, it is said, married the second son of William de Say, Geoffrey, who died in 1214 leaving a son and heir, Geoffrey II de Say.⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸² J. Boorman, (2004, September 23), 'Belet, Michael (d. 1201), justice and administrator', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Retrieved 15 Aug. 2023, from <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-1986;Cartae, CLIV/1>.

⁴⁸³ Jessop, no. 21; NRO Coxford, no. 21.

⁴⁸⁴ Jessop, no. 51; NRO Coxford, no. 51; Saunders, p. 356.

⁴⁸⁵ Vincent, 'New Sayings', p. 3 n. 27.

⁴⁸⁶ Sanders, 1960, p. 97.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p. 98.

However, Sanders is mistaken, for it was Alice de Chesney, daughter of John de Chesney by his wife Sibyl and widow of Hugh de Periers, who married Geoffrey de Say.⁴⁸⁸ It was by reason of Ralph II's marriage to Alice Maminot, daughter of Hugh Maminot, that Geoffrey de Say inherited the lordship of West Greenwich, for it came to him through his wife, Alice de Chesney, co-heiress of John de Chesney, with her sister Emma. Alice Maminot, wife of Ralph II de Chesney and aunt of Walkelin II, was Walkelin II's heir. That being the case, Ralph de Chesney, who describes himself as son and heir of John de Chesney in his charter to Rudham Priory, and who, therefore, must have been a brother to Alice and Emma, must have been dead by 1190 and have died without issue. This also disproves Saunders's dating of Ralph's charters, for they must all have been issued before 1190.

John de Chesney predeceased his wife Sibyl, as is borne out by Sibyl's charter to Rudham Priory by which she confirmed the gifts made by her husband. She went on to grant that the men of the vill of Rudham and of the whole soke might grind their grain at Thorp mill as they did in the time of her lord, John de Chesney, and William his uncle. Saunders dates this charter to *c.* 1160.⁴⁸⁹ John de Chesney, therefore, died sometime between 1148 and 1160, although he does not appear in the record after *c.* 1150.⁴⁹⁰ If he had two wives, then Sibyl must have been his second. In any event, had John two wives, and daughters from each, both daughters necessarily would have been descended from Alice Maminot. In fact, there is scant proof that John de Chesney had two wives. The charter evidence mentions only Sibyl. If John was the issue of

⁴⁸⁸ *Honors*, iii, p. 318.

⁴⁸⁹ Jessop no. 123; NRO Coxford, no. 123; *Cart. Coxford*, no. 123; Saunders, 2010, p. 293.

⁴⁹⁰ The latest charter which he attested, one issued by Reginald de Saint Ledger in favour of Lewes Priory, has been dated *c.* 1150, *Lewes Cart.*, i, p. 153.

Ralph II de Chesney and Emma, who was probably his first wife, then the Maminot inheritance could not have descended through him to any of his daughters.⁴⁹¹ Only as a son of Ralph II de Chesney and Alice Maminot could he have inherited such a claim. The cartulary of Coxford Priory states that John de Chesney had three daughters, but names only Emma, who, it records, married Michael Belet. If the order of these three daughters as noted in the cartulary follows the order in which they were born, then the first referred to must have been the daughter who begat William de Say, therefore identifiable as Alice who married Geoffrey de Say. The second daughter is referred to only as she from whom dame Alice of Sussex ('Suthsex') came. Emma is the last-mentioned daughter.⁴⁹² All three would have had claims to John's estate after the death of John's son and heir, Ralph, who was likely still alive in 1174, and possibly as late as 1185, as appears from evidence to be discussed below. The laws of inheritance at this time, in respect to heiresses, had recently undergone change.⁴⁹³ From the time of William I, female descent had, almost without exception, been through a single heiress; partition amongst several daughters was only rarely attempted. Hudson points to a possible example in the reign of Henry I,⁴⁹⁴ and Green highlights two instances of division between daughters. In one example, that of the lands of William d'Arques, his Norman estates went to his daughter, Maud, who married William de Tancarville, whilst his daughter, Emma, received his estate at Folkestone. In the case of Robert

⁴⁹¹ The Coxford cartulary does contain a charter issued by John de Chesney, son of Emily de Chesney of East Rudham. However, it is clear from the body of the charter that it is John, son of Emily de Chesney and Michael Belet, and grandson of John de Chesney and Sibyl. Jessop, no. 111; NRO Coxford, no. 111.

⁴⁹² *Honors*, iii, p.316, Farrer citing Dugdale's notes from Dugdale MS Bodleian 39, f. 103.

⁴⁹³ The following analysis of female inheritance laws in England in the twelfth century relies upon J. C. Holt's account in *Colonial England, 1066-1215* (London 1997), pp. 251-3. An interesting analysis of why in the twelfth century baronial hereditary rights prevailed against at royal pleasure can be found in 'What Happened in Stephen's Reign' by R. H. C. Davis in *History*, vol. 49, no. 165, pp. 1-12.

⁴⁹⁴ J. G. H. Hudson, *Land, Law, and Lordship in Anglo-Norman England*, (Oxford 1994), p. 112, n. 20.

de Rumilly, there was a slight variation in that one daughter received the Normandy estates together with a single manor in England, and the other inherited the remaining English estates.⁴⁹⁵ Holt points out that in England, where baronies descended in the female line in at least twenty instances by 1130, they did so through a single heiress. The Pipe Roll for 1130 has twenty-seven fines for wardship and/or marriage. There is no indication that in any of these the inheritance was divided in the female line. This assumes, of course, that in each case these were not sole daughters, so in that regard the evidence is unsatisfactory. However, Holt refers to several cases that he considered settled the issue beyond reasonable doubt. I mention only two. Thus, in the case of Countess Judith, niece of William I, who left two daughters, Maud and Adeliza, it was Maud, the elder, who received the lands that became the honour of Huntingdon. That Adeliza had possession of Walthamstow, Holt explains, as the result of a marriage portion. In another example, the lands of Robert fitz Hamo who had three daughters, were all brought by just one of these daughters, Mabel, to her husband, Robert, illegitimate son of Henry I.

The position on female inheritance appears to have changed in the middle of the twelfth century, as first evidenced in a charter issued by Roger de Valognes, which Green dates *c.* 1141 but which Stenton assigned to 1145, and which has been referred to previously.⁴⁹⁶ Here we find the confirmation of a gift to Binham Priory made by Roger's kinsman, Walter, namely half of Barney, the inheritance of Walter's daughter, Agnes. The charter refers to a 'statutum decretum', according to which, where there was no son, daughters were to share their father's lands equally,

⁴⁹⁵ J. A. Green, *The Aristocracy of Norman England* (Cambridge 1997), pp. 377-8.

⁴⁹⁶ See *ante*, p. 55.

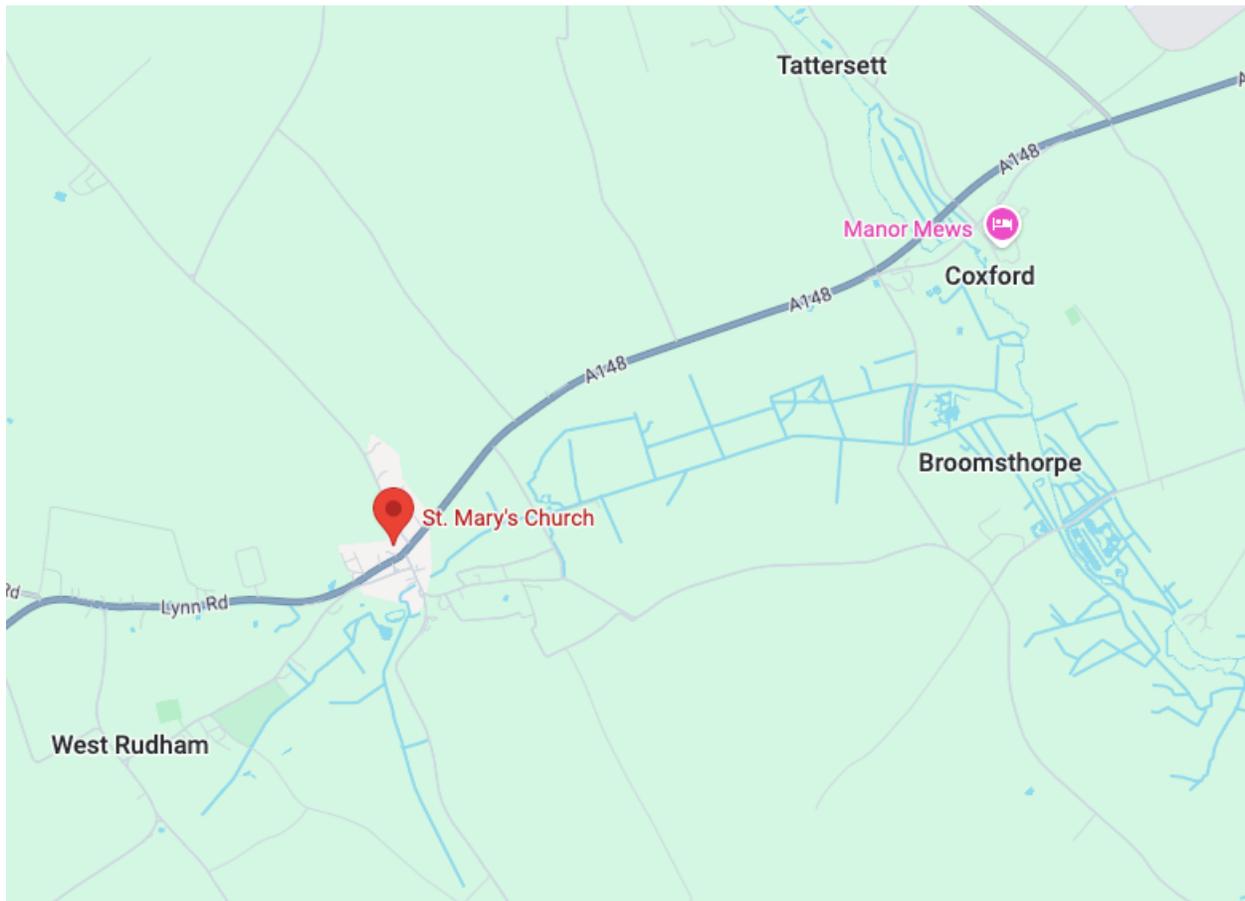
‘nor can the elder take from the younger half of the inheritance without violence and injury’.⁴⁹⁷ Thereafter, division between co-heiresses became more common. Holt, for example, refers to *Glanvill*’s insistence that where there were no sons, inheritance should be divided between the daughters, with the caveat that the eldest daughter was to receive the chief message. The likely outcome upon the death of Ralph de Chesney, therefore, was that Alice, being the eldest, received the Maminot barony as well as some Warenne lands, whilst her sisters had a share of the remainder. The Warenne Normandy lands that Alice brought to Geoffrey were a knight’s fee at Bellencombres (Seine-Maritime, arr. Dieppe, cant. Neuchâtel-en-Bray), another of the honour of Breteuil, at ‘Til’ and ‘Thieville’, probably Thil-Manneville (arr. Dieppe, cant. Luneray), half a fee at Fresnay-le-Long and at Humesnil in Saint-Victor-l’Abbaye, (both arr. Dieppe, cant. Luneray), and half a fee at Le Quesnay ‘that Matheus de Chaumont held of the king’s gift’.⁴⁹⁸ Walkelin II died c. 1190, by which time Ralph II de Chesney, Alice Maminot, his wife, and heir to Walkelin II, Ralph II’s son and heir, John, and his son and heir, Ralph, were all dead. Alice, wife of Geoffrey de Say and the heiress of Alice Maminot, her grandmother, predeceased her husband who commemorated her by gifting to Rudham Priory forty pence annually from his mill ‘in the wood’ (‘de bosco’) to pay for a lamp burning before his wife’s tomb. Saunders has dated the charter to 1196.⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁹⁷ Green, 1997, p. 378; Hudson, 2012, p. 353. For a discussion on inheritance where there were no surviving sons, only daughters, see Green, 1997, pp. 377- 383. For a discussion of the Valognes charter and the background to it, see Holt, 1997, pp. 254-6.

⁴⁹⁸ *Recueil des Historiens des Gaules et de La France*, ed. M. Bouquet and others, 24 vols (Paris 1738-1904), vol. 23, 640b. Either Le Quesnay, cant. Neuchâtel-en-Bray, com. Saint-Saëns, or Le Quesnay, cant. Gournay-en-Bray, com. Mauquenchy. Vincent favours the latter. ‘Say versus Mandeville,’ p. 3. And see F. M. Powicke, *The Loss of Normandy, (1189–1204), Studies in the History of the Angevin Empire* (Manchester 1963), p. 351 for the Norman possessions of Geoffrey de Say (Sai).

⁴⁹⁹ Jessop, no. 4; NRO *Coxford*, no. 4; Cart. *Coxford*, no. 4.

Motives and Location



Map 15 showing the location of St Mary's church, Rudham where William de Chesney sited his priory and Coxford to where it was moved at the end of the twelfth century.

William founded his priory in the pre-existing church of St Mary East Rudham. His father, Ralph I de Chesney, had held [East and West] Rudham of William de Warenne, in company with other tenants. In 1086, Peter de Valognes is recorded holding part of Rudham as a tenant-in-chief, but his holding was in the hands of five freemen, one of whom had half a carucate and the others six acres between them.⁵⁰⁰ Count Alan was another tenant-in-chief with an interest there, but limited

⁵⁰⁰ *Domesday Norfolk*, ii, 34:11.

to half a carucate which was sub-tenanted to one Phanceon.⁵⁰¹ Lambert de Rosay, another Warenne tenant, held a carucate of land in Rudham. He derived from Rosay (Seine-Maritime, cant. Bellencombres) and was a benefactor of his lord's foundation at Castle Acre.⁵⁰² Rudham, as held by Ralph I de Chesney in 1086, amounted to three carucates of land as well as one and a half carucates held by 25 freemen. There were outliers in Houghton, Barmer, Syderstone and Helhoughton. The manor was home to three churches, presumably including the churches of St Peter and St Mary, both gifted to the priory, and one other, unidentified.⁵⁰³ St Mary's church lay on the pilgrimage route from West Norfolk to the shrine of Our Lady at Walsingham, which might have influenced William in his choice of location, although the availability of a church as a ready-made structure to house the canons, so lessening the financial burden involved in foundation, was probably a more important consideration. The shrine at Walsingham seems not to have attracted pilgrims in numbers until later in the twelfth century. The settlement of [East and West] Rudham as at 1086 consisted of 67 households, with the church of St Peter in West Rudham and that of St Mary in East Rudham, less than a mile from each other. In terms of population, Rudham itself ranks in the top 20% of settlements recorded in Domesday. The priory, therefore, began life in a populous setting, unlike many other monastic houses, often distant from other human habitation. Saunders suggests that upon taking possession of both churches, the monks abandoned or demolished St Peter's, perhaps to rob stone for their new priory buildings.⁵⁰⁴ Set against this, Blomefield notes that Hervey Belet, John de Chesney's

⁵⁰¹ Ibid, i, 4:17.

⁵⁰² Loyd, 1951, p. 86; *Monasticon*, 5, p. 50, no. III; Harley 2110, f. 1r, no. 2.

⁵⁰³ *Domesday Norfolk*, i, 8:107-8.

⁵⁰⁴ Saunders, 1910, p. 288.

grandson, granted the church of St Peter, West Rudham to Coxford Priory, a gift that Saunders dates to 1210.⁵⁰⁵

William's motive in founding the priory must be deduced from his charter issued between 1145 and 1148. Addressed to William, bishop of Norwich, his lord, William III de Warenne, and his nephew, John de Chesney, this post-dates William's original grant of the churches of St Peter in West Rudham and St. Mary in East Rudham, made to enable the canons to establish their priory, and said to have been made *c.* 1140. This date has been inferred from the charters of William III de Warenne and Bishop Everard confirming William's gifts.⁵⁰⁶ William III de Warenne's charter is addressed to Everard, bishop of Norwich, who retired from his bishopric towards the end of 1145. Thereafter, as noted previously, Pope Lucius II issued a bull by which he sanctioned and confirmed the founding of the priory, and in which he set out William's endowment. The charter is precisely dated 4 April 1144.⁵⁰⁷ As for motives, besides the obvious pious intention, and the likely bolstering of William's status and local standing, and by contrast to other contemporary foundations considered here, there is no evidence of any dispute over contested territory or encumbered inheritance. The neighbouring manors to East and West Rudham were largely held by Warenne under-tenants; Houghton by the Chesney family, Tatterset by the family of Grandcourt, Tattersford as Warenne demesne, and Broomsthorpe as part of the demesne of the abbey of Ely. Nor does it seem that William was in dispute over lands with his lord, the earl Warenne, that might have caused him to place lands in the hands of religious, and so out of his lord's reach. William founded his priory early in the 1140s, having himself played no recorded

⁵⁰⁵ Blomefield, vii, p. 161; Jessop, no. 51; NRO Coxford, no. 51; Saunders, 1910, p. 357.

⁵⁰⁶ Jessop, no. 14; NRO Coxford, no. 14; Saunders, 1910, p. 288.

⁵⁰⁷ Jessop, no. 17; NRO Coxford., no. 17; Saunders, 1910, p. 289.

role in contemporary hostilities, so it seems unlikely that the foundation was made to atone for any sins of civil war. William's second tranche of endowments, as set out in his charter addressed to William, bishop of Norwich, was more extensive than his first.⁵⁰⁸ His endowments were made for the souls of his father, mother, and brother, Ralph, as well as his other brothers and sisters. Of his siblings, William names only his elder brother Ralph, in conjunction with his father and mother. Since father and mother were both dead, we may infer that so too was Ralph. His brothers, Roger and Hugh, by contrast, were still living, as was his sister Sibyl, who had married Robert fitz Walter. Of his other sisters we have no information. William does not reference the salvation of his own soul in his charter: a formula frequently found in charters of gifts to monastic houses. Of course, he may well have done so in his foundation charter, but we have no way of knowing. It may be of significance that William included his nephew, John de Chesney, as one of the addressees in his charter. For it is clear from John's charter in favour of the priory, issued after William's and no later than 19 May 1148, that by then William himself was dead, having probably died sometime in 1147. It seems likely therefore, that William de Chesney issued his charter knowing that he was close to death. The absence of any reference here to a wife or children suggests that William had neither, so that the address to John supports the suggestion that John was William's designated heir and successor, not least as patron of the priory.

William de Warenne's 1147 Lewes Charters: John de Chesney and Brighton

While the Chesneys seem to have been important Warenne tenants, the charter evidence suggests that they were only infrequently present at their lord's court. That they were a family of some

⁵⁰⁸ Jessop, no. 1; NRO Coxford, no. 1; *Cart. Coxford*, no. 2; Saunders, 1910, pp.330-1.

standing is evidenced by the appearance of Ralph I de Chesney (d. c. 1100) among the witnesses to an important charter issued by William Rufus confirming to Lewes Priory the manor of Heacham which William de Warenne, the first earl of Surrey, had given, together with other lands. This has been dated to the summer of 1088. Ralph's name here appears before those of other notable Warenne knightly tenants: Hugh son of Golde, Geoffrey de Pierrepont, and Hugh de Wanci, members of whose families are frequently found witnessing Warenne charters.⁵⁰⁹

Ralph I de Chesney witnessed his lord's charter by which the earl gave three hides of land in Moulescoomb, Surrey, to Lewes Priory. Here his name appears second in the list of witnesses after the earl, and a Ralph, son of Ralph, so probably Ralph II de Chesney, also appears as witness. In a charter issued by William II de Warenne confirming the gifts of his father and his men and followers to the priory of St Pancras at Lewes, datable 1091 X 1097, Ralph I de Chesney is cited as having gifted a hide of land in Aldrington (*Aldrintona*), and the tithes of all he possessed in Hangleton. Ralph's sons, Ralph II and Hugh, made gifts to Lewes Priory, Ralph II, with the consent of his father, granting a hide of land at *Wocham* (not identified), and Hugh, the tithe of Saddlescombe (*Sadelscumba*).⁵¹⁰ Of all members of the family associated with the Warenne earls, Ralph de Chesney, son and heir of John de Chesney, was probably the most closely involved, witnessing seven charters of Lewes Priory made by the earl or his men.

Meanwhile, John de Chesney's standing among the Warenne tenants is emphasised by his presence in the last week of April 1147 at the dedication and consecration of the new conventual church of Lewes Priory, which the earl had dedicated and endowed with a tenth penny of his rents. Almost certainly this was part of William III de Warenne's final preparations before his

⁵⁰⁹ *EYC*, viii, no. 5.

⁵¹⁰ *Lewes Cart.*, i, pp. 13, 17-8.

departure to join Louis VII of France's crusading army. Mention of this event has previously been made in the chapter on the priory of the Holy Sepulchre.⁵¹¹ There reference was made to William's charter by which he confirmed to Lewes Priory all its lands, churches and tithes of his fee, including the Yorkshire church of Conisborough with its other churches, chapels, lands and tithes, and the churches of Wakefield and Dewsbury.⁵¹²

Of immediate significance for present purposes is the fact that that the confirmation charter refers to a benefaction made by John de Chesney of half the land which he had in Brighton (*Brillelleston*), and a meadow by Hamley (*Hammes*) called *Wildebroc*.⁵¹³ John's charter recorded the gift as comprising half of the land that Ralph his father had held in Brighton on the day that Ralph was alive and dead, with all the men belonging to that land, specifying five virgates of land, and four cottars, and a meadow by Hamley (*Hammes*).⁵¹⁴ Of the seventeen witnesses who attested John's charter six, all lay, had attested William III de Warenne's charter concerning the dedication and consecration of the new priory church. A second document issued by John, which must have immediately followed the first, recorded an agreement by which John granted the priory the other half of his land in Brighton, which the monks were to hold freely for a term of seven years, retaining all its produce, on payment to John of sixty marks.⁵¹⁵ This agreement was dated 25 April 1147. Of its twelve witnesses, nine had attested John's first

⁵¹¹ *Ante*, pp. 117-18.

⁵¹² *EYC*, no. 33. The charter is published in full in *Lewes Cart.*, ii, pp. 20-3, albeit without the witnesses, wrongly attributed to the second earl and dated c. 1095

⁵¹³ *Lewes Cart.*, i, pp. 20-1.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid*, ii, p. 46.

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid*, ii, pp. 46-7.

charter, including his brother Robert. Six of the twelve also attest William de Warenne's charter.⁵¹⁶

John's first charter, when analysed, suggests that the transaction recorded was a sale of the land rather than a gift. The charter contains an undertaking by John that he would 'acquit the monks from [his] own land against the earl and all men in all things'. Nevertheless, to ensure that the grant might be stable and free and quit forever, the monks gave John 100 marks for relief of the land against the earl, notwithstanding that William III de Warenne had already confirmed the grant.⁵¹⁷ The agreement set forth in the second charter by which John gave the monks the second half of his Brighton manor for seven years on payment to him of 60 marks, has the appearance of a loan secured by a mortgage on the land. By disposing of his land in Brighton, one half by what looks like a sale, and the other half by way of a mortgage under the guise of a lease for a term of seven years, John raised 160 marks. Farrer has tentatively suggested that, in disposing of his interest in Brighton in this way, John might have been raising funds for William de Warrenne's crusade.⁵¹⁸ Certainly, the measures taken by John were, in the first half of the twelfth century, a

⁵¹⁶ Farrer summarises both charters and gives the witnesses for each. *Honors*, iii, p. 315. Robert de Freville witnessed both charters and after his name in the charter by which John gave half of his Brighton manor appear the following witnesses 'Robert his son and Drew the latter's brother'. *Cart Lewes*, ii, p.46. Farrer has concluded that the Robert and Drew referred to are the sons of John de Chesney, the grantor. The scribe has placed the witnesses Robert and Drew in order immediately after Robert de Freville, describing Robert as 'his son' and Drew as 'the latter's brother.' That usually indicates that the witness referred to as a son is the son of the witness immediately preceding. If Robert was the son of John, no doubt the scribe would have described him as such, for when he wrote in the name of the last witness, Robert, John de Chesney's brother, the scribe described him as 'Robert brother of John' [de Chesney]. In John's charter, whereby he leased the other half of his Brighton manor to the monks of Lewes, the witnesses include Robert de Freville and Drew de Freville, separated in the list by Ralph de Plaiz. No description is assigned to them, so we do not know if they are father and son or brothers. Although John de Chesney had sons named Robert and Drew, so did Robert de Freville, as is clear from his charter recording his gift to Castle Acre Priory the title of Foulden that Simon his chaplain held, Harley 2110, f. 55r. He had at least three sons, Ralph, Robert and Drew, of whom Robert and Drew attested his charter in which they are described as *filiis meis Roberto et Dragone*. There can be little doubt, therefore, that the Robert and Drew referred to as sons in John's first Brighton charter are the sons of Robert de Freville, and probably it is they who both witnessed the second Brighton charter.

⁵¹⁷ *Lewes Cart.*, i, p. 28; ii, p. 48.

⁵¹⁸ *Honors*, pp. 315-6.

popular means of raising funds to fulfil a vow to take the cross and travel to the Holy Land to fight the infidel. Crusading was an expensive business for a knight, requiring at least a palfrey, a packhorse, and a destrier, armour for himself and his war horse, weapons, including a sword, a mace and a battle axe, and silver coin to purchase food and other necessities to support himself and a squire. He might also have to provide for several of his men. Of course, the accoutrements for a knight, the horses and weapons, would be things of which he would already be in possession, although renewals and spares would likely have been needed. Journeying to the Holy Land as a peaceful pilgrim, or, indeed, to other pilgrimage destinations such as Rome or Santiago de Compostela, would also have placed a strain on resources, requiring a tidy sum to meet the day- to-day expenses of such a journey. Ready cash was not always available in the quantities required, but monastic houses were, in the main, ready to lend money secured on a knight's lands either through lease or purchase.

Richard earl of Hertford raised 30 marks from Stoke-by-Clare Priory towards his journey to Jerusalem. In return, Richard granted to the priory his wood of 'Litlehei' (possibly Little Wood, near Ousden). In effect, Richard sold his wood to the priory. This charter has been dated between 1185 and 1188, but if Richard planned to go with Richard I to free Jerusalem, then after 1187. In an earlier grant, a Clare tenant, William son of Cuniger, gave the priory 26 acres of his demesne land with an adjacent meadow in return for four marks and five shillings for his son Peter who was then going to Jerusalem. The charter has been dated to the late eleventh or early twelfth century.⁵¹⁹

⁵¹⁹ *Cart. Stoke*, i no. 40; ii, no. 264.

In Norfolk, Abbot Hugh of St Benet of Holme provided Philip of Postwick with fifteen marks so that Philip might join the king of France and other barons on the Second Crusade. In exchange the abbot leased from Philip the marsh of Fuleholm for five marks a year. The abbot made a hefty profit on the transaction, for he was relieved of paying any rent for seven years, representing a profit on the deal of twenty marks.⁵²⁰ Hugh was also concerned to protect the abbey lands when there was a risk that they might be lost through the death of a tenant while on pilgrimage overseas. Thus, when William of Oby declared his intention to visit the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, but was reluctant to return the land of Oby to the abbey together with buildings and stock before he left, Hugh appealed to Theobald, archbishop of Canterbury, who, in turn, ordered William, bishop of Norwich, to see that the land was restored.⁵²¹ Geoffrey de Faverches may also have raised funds towards the cost of his journey to Jerusalem, by granting his manor of Massingham to the monks of Castle Acre in return for six marks. This transaction will be explored further in a later discussion of the foundation of Walsingham. Some houses were prepared to meet the cost of a pilgrimage in recognition of a benefactor's contrition in returning wrongly appropriated lands. Thus, when Baldwin Blondel, son of Hermer, restored the monks of Mont-Saint-Michel to the farm of the fee of 'Estolleia', the monks granted Baldwin the confraternity of the community and the cost of a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.⁵²²

If it had been John de Chesney's intention to follow his lord to the Holy Land, for whatever reason, he did not fulfil that ambition. Alternatively, and more likely, John's need for funds at this time might be better linked to the costs and responsibilities he faced following the death of William de Chesney, his uncle, and John's succession as his uncle's heir, as William's charter

⁵²⁰ *St Benet*, i, nos. 92, 155.

⁵²¹ *Ibid*, i, no. 27.

⁵²² *The Cartulary of the Abbey of Mont-Saint-Michel*, ed. K. S. B. Keats-Rohan (Donington 2006), p. 161, no. 86.

suggests. That being so, it seems probable that John disposed of his Brighton estate so as to raise funds to pay William de Warenne whatever relief had been demanded for his inheritance from William, his uncle. William III de Warenne, about to embark on an expensive expedition to the Holy Land, was no doubt seeking whatever funds could be raised. If this is correct, then William de Chesney died before 25 April 1147. Only afterwards did John make any benefactions to Rudham Priory. Nor, after his first gift, is there any evidence of further giving. That John's charter of endowment was not issued until the spring of 1148 is not inconsistent with his uncle, William de Chesney, having died a year earlier.⁵²³ John, having taken on the patronage of the priory, would have been expected to make an appropriate endowment. That would have involved negotiations with the canons of Rudham. No doubt he would also have had discussions with his wife, Sibyl, and his heirs, for by giving up lands and liberties to the priory he would be depleting his estate. For the avoidance of litigation in the future, it would have been politic to obtain general agreement. As has been set out earlier in this chapter, John's grant included the lands of certain of his tenants, as well as the tenants themselves. He also endowed the monastery with the service and land of Sumerled the priest, Ralph son of Ulmar, Godwin Scriptor, Alwin son of Aluric, Aluric son of Wilmar and all their lands: a collection of names that once again reminds us of the substantial continuity of English naming patterns in East Anglia, long after the Conquest of 1066. Doubtless John would also have sought the consent of his lord, William III de Warenne, with his Brighton settlement perhaps indicative of agreement between them. William, bishop of Norwich, appears to have been consulted as is suggested by John renewing his charter before him on 19 May 1148. All these discussions, consultations and negotiations would have

⁵²³ John renewed his charter in favour of Rudham Priory before William bishop of Norwich on 19 May 1148: *Monasticon*, 6, part 1, p. 369.

taken many months, so it is not surprising that John's charter for Rudham was not issued until a year or so after William de Chesney's death. King Stephen, meanwhile, confirmed the grants of William de Chesney, but there is no surviving royal charter confirming John's gifts.⁵²⁴ We do not know when John died. Even so, after his death, his wife, Sybil, confirmed the grant made by her uncle by marriage, William de Chesney, of the mill and fishpond at Thorp, allowing the canons to hold them as they had in the time of her husband, John, and William his uncle. Saunders has suggested a date *c.* 1160 for this charter which, in the cartulary, is copied without witnesses.⁵²⁵

The Family's Monastic Endowments

What other monastic houses did the family of Ralph I de Chesney endow? The charter evidence demonstrates that overwhelmingly they directed their spiritual support to the monastic foundations of their lords, the earls Warenne, and almost exclusively to the priory of St Pancras, Lewes. Only one charter was issued by the family for Castle Acre Priory: John de Chesney's quitclaim to the priory of the homage of Geoffrey, brother of Matthew prior of Rudham, dated to the middle of the twelfth century and witnessed by John's brother, Robert.⁵²⁶ To Horsham St Faith, established *c.* 1105 by Ralph I de Chesney's daughter, Sybil, with her husband, Robert fitz Walter, there is no mention of any de Chesney family member descended from the male line of Ralph I de Chesney in the list of benefactors in Dugdale's entry in the *Monasticon*, nor in the confirmation bull issued by Pope Alexander III in 1163.⁵²⁷ Even so, William de Chesney, son of Robert fitz Walter, confirmed the canons in land and the church at Houghton granted by his

⁵²⁴ *Regesta*, iii, no. 247.

⁵²⁵ Jessop, no. 123; NRO Coxford, no. 123; *Cart. Coxford*, no. 123; Saunders, 1910, p. 293.

⁵²⁶ Harley 2110, f.33v, no. 269.

⁵²⁷ *Monasticon*, 3, pp. 635, 637, no. IV.

parents, himself adding the advowsons of the Norwich churches of St Martin in the Bailey and St Michael Ber Street (*alias* St Michael at Thorn).⁵²⁸ The Cistercian abbey of Sibton, founded by this same William de Chesney, son of Robert fitz Walter and Sibyl, sister of Ralph II and aunt to John de Chesney, received no benefactions from Sibyl's siblings or nephews. No Chesney features either as a benefactor or as a witness to William III de Warenne's foundation of the Holy Sepulchre, Thetford, established *c.* 1140.⁵²⁹ Even so, we find Chesneys endowing Norman monastic houses. A Ralph de Chesney and his son, John, are recorded in a confirmation charter issued by Henry II in favour of the Cistercian abbey of Beaubec (Seine-Maritime) which Vincent dates between 1156 and May 1165 at the latest.⁵³⁰ A Hugh de Chesney appears with others in association with a gift of land at Roncherolles.⁵³¹ Finally, a John de Chesney, with the permission of his wife Sibyl and their children, gave to the abbey the land that he held of Hugh de Gournay.⁵³² This was the Norman Hugh IV de Gournay, son of Gerard and Edith de Warenne, daughter of earl William I.⁵³³ Hugh IV, with his second wife, Millicent, also founded a nunnery *c.* 1150 at Gaillefontaine, Gournay-en-Bray, shortly thereafter transferred to Clair-Russeil, to which they gave the churches of Mapledurham (Oxfordshire) and Kimberley (Norfolk), and 2 ½ marks of silver annually from Caister (Norfolk).⁵³⁴ Mapledurham was held by William de Warenne in 1086 and doubtless came to Hugh through his father's marriage to Edith, sister of William, the second earl de Warenne. John de Chesney made his gift to the abbey with the

⁵²⁸ BL MS Harley Charter 47.H.44.

⁵²⁹ Top. Gen. c69. ff. 72r to 89v.

⁵³⁰ *LCH*, i, no. 163.

⁵³¹ *Ibid*, lines 41-43

⁵³² *Ibid*, lines 91-94.

⁵³³ *EYC*, viii, pp. 6-7; D. Gurney, *Record of the House of Gourney*, (London 1848), and for Hugh de Gournay's tenure, see *Red Book* ii, p. 628; 'Scriptum de servitiis militum, quae debentur Duci Normannie', in *Historiae Normannorum Scriptores Antiqui*, 2 vols., ed. A. du Chesne, (Paris 1619), ii, p. 1046. The descent of the Lords Gourney is given in Gurney, *Record*, at p. 22.

⁵³⁴ *Honors*, iii, p. 421; Gurney, 1848, pp. 112, 118-19.

consent of his wife and children. The assent of John's children to the gift would have supplied the abbey with added security, and Sibyl's consent would have been necessary only because she had an interest in the property, either as her dower or as her *maritagium*, almost certainly the former, for it is unlikely that she brought the manors to John as *maritagium*, given that they appear to have been in the possession of Ralph II de Chesney, John's father, before him. Ralph II de Chesney, as the son and heir of Ralph I de Chesney, almost certainly inherited his father's Norman lands. William de Chesney, Ralph I de Chesney's second son, appears to have inherited most of the English lands. Even so, his brother, Ralph, was in possession of some English estates as he gave a tithe of his land at 'Wocham' (unidentified) and a hide of land at Allington to Lewes Priory. Hugh, another of Ralph I de Chesney's sons, also held English estates, granting Lewes Priory the tithe of his land at Saddlescombe.⁵³⁵ Upon the death of Ralph II de Chesney and his brother William, Ralph II de Chesney's son John, reunited the Norman and English estates. The Chesneys mentioned in Normandy here are almost certainly Ralph II de Chesney, his brother, Hugh, and Ralph II de Chesney's son, John, and his wife Sibyl. Beaubec Abbey lies some twenty-four kilometres from Le Quesnay, Seine-Maritime, from which the Chesney family took their name, itself eight kilometres from Bellencombe, the Warenne family *caput* for their Norman lands. Ralph I de Chesney was a Domesday tenant of William de Warenne. It is not clear how the Chesney family came to hold land of Hugh de Gourney. By marriage is the most obvious route, perhaps via Ralph II de Chesney's wife Emma, whose background remains obscure. His father, Ralph I de Chesney, was married to Maud de Vatteville, who brought him Warenne manors from her father, William de Vatteville, himself a Warenne tenant originating either from Vatteville-la-Rue (Seine-Maritime) or Vatteville (Eure). There is no evidence that

⁵³⁵ EYC, viii, no. 6; *Cart. Lewes*, i, p. 38.

William de Vatteville/Watville held of the Gournays, nor that he was donor to Gourney monastic foundations. Ralph II de Chesney's second marriage to Alice brought him Maminot lands as part of Alice's *maritagium*, Alice's father being Hugh Maminot, whose English lands lay principally in Kent, and Gloucestershire. Beaubec, meanwhile, continued to receive patronage from later generations of the Chesney family. Thus, Alice de Chesney, daughter of John de Chesney by his wife Sibyl, with her second husband, Geoffrey de Say, and the consent of their sons, William and Geoffrey, granted to the monks 80 acres of land at fee farm, including 60 acres in the wastes of Cantecoq, first granted by Hugh de Gournay. Vincent dates this charter 1182 X March 1183.⁵³⁶ We can place some of these Chesney gifts within a timeframe by reference to other Beaubec charters. Thus, in 1142 Hugh, archbishop of Rouen, issued a general confirmation charter to the abbey.⁵³⁷ There is no mention here of the gift of Ralph de Chesney and his son John. Nor does John's benefaction feature, made with the consent of his wife Sibyl and their children. However, there is cited a gift by Ralph de Chesney (*Chaisneto*) and Hugo 'de Bovellis' of land 'beyond (the monks') ditch' ('que est citra fosatta vestra').⁵³⁸ This is perhaps the same gift that Ralph de Chesney and his son John are said to have made together with Hugh 'de Hautville' and his son Geoffrey, referred to in Henry II's confirmation charter.⁵³⁹ In any event it suggests that Ralph de Chesney held land in La Rosière where the abbey was sited. The endowment made by Hugh de Chesney, together with Ralph Bordun and Matthew, his son, of land at Roncherolles-en-Brai (Seine-Maritime, cant. Gourney-en-Bray) is also referred to.⁵⁴⁰ Roncherolles-en-Brai lies some

⁵³⁶ Vincent, 'New Sayings', charter no. 11, p. 14; Charter is in BL MS Additional 27982 f. 20r (17r), copy by Richard St George, c.1610.

⁵³⁷ Gurney, 1848, pp. 104-7.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 106.

⁵³⁹ *LCH*, i, no. 163, lines 22-24.

⁵⁴⁰ Gurney, 1848, pp.106-7.

twelve miles southeast of Bellencombre, the Warenne *caput*. It also sits only six miles or so southwest of Beaubec-la-Rosière. However, a detailed confirmation charter of Hugh de Gournay, dated by Daniel Gurney *c.*1147, makes no reference to any of those gifts, so perhaps Hugh's charter was made before 1142, a point conceded by Gurney.⁵⁴¹ It does cite a gift by a Geoffrey de Chesney (*Quesneto*) of the entire field of 'Spinz' ('totum campum de Spinz'), who also attests the confirmation and may have been one of Ralph II de Chesney's illegitimate sons. It will be recalled that a Geoffrey, brother of Matthew de Chesney, prior of Rudham, was the subject of John de Chesney's charter quitclaiming Geoffrey's homage to the monks of Castle Acre.⁵⁴² Beaubec Abbey is said to have been founded on 1 November 1128. Between that date and 1142 Ralph II de Chesney, with Hugh de Boville, granted land to the abbey, and his brother Hugh made his gift at Roncherolles-en-Brai. But the other Cheney benefactions must have been made after that date, albeit that the endowment by Ralph II de Chesney, together with his son John, must have been made before 1148, since, as we have seen, Ralph almost certainly died *c.*1147.

A Hugh de Chesney (*Caisnet*) features in a charter issued by Henry II in favour of the priory of Sainte-Barbe-en-Auge (Calvados, comm. Mézidon Vallée d'Auge) confirming the priory's possessions and liberties.⁵⁴³ Beyond his name, there are no clues as to his identity. Sainte Barbe-en-Auge is situated in the diocese of Lisieux and located some 160 kilometres southwest from the Warenne lands centred around Bellencombre where Ralph I de Chesney and his family had their roots. At first blush, there seems no reason why Hugh de Chesney, son of Ralph I de Chesney, should be found endowing the abbey. Even so the abbey is located close to the lands of the d'Oilly family, and Roger de Chesney, who married Alice de Langetot, and who was a

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid*, pp. 97-103

⁵⁴² Harley 2110, f. 39v, no. 269.

⁵⁴³ *LCH*, iv, no. 2332, lines 182-90.

Domesday tenant of Robert d'Oilly, had a son named Hugh, perhaps the Hugh de Chesney of the Sainte Barbe-en-Auge charter. Hugh's brother, Ralph II de Chesney, by his marriage to Alice Maminot, came into lands in the department of Calvados, since, as previously noted, the Bayeux Inquest of 1133 records that the Maminot family had substantial estates in the department of Calvados. Geoffrey de Say, in 1204, following the loss of Normandy, lost his Norman lands, including those of his wife, Alice, granddaughter of the Alice Maminot who had married Ralph II de Chesney. These included half a fee at Eterville and Fontaine-Etoupefour as well as the manor of Les Moulineaux, all in the department of Calvados.⁵⁴⁴ That being so, Ralph could have put his brother Hugh into possession of some of those lands thus providing him with the resources to make the benefaction. The evidence here, however, remains perilously thin. What emerges, nonetheless, is a portrait of family patronage in which the religious of Normandy featured significantly, long before the foundation of Rudham (*alias* Coxford). It should also be noted that with the loss of Normandy to Geoffrey of Anjou in 1144, those with lands in both sides of the Channel had to choose to which lord they owed fealty. Where a family's main focus was to their English lands, to get around this, lands in Normandy would be placed with lesser family members. This appears to explain the Norman possessions in the hands of minor members of the Chesney family, albeit that with the death of William de Chesney *c.* 1147, his nephew, John, William's heir, reunited possession of the English and Norman lands.

⁵⁴⁴ Powicke, 1913, pp. 511-12, citing *Recueil des Historiens des Gaules et de la France*, ed. M. Bouquet and others, 24 vols. (Paris 1738-1904), xxiii, 621a.

Concluding Remarks

Ralph I de Chesney (d. c. 1100) was a significant under-tenant of William I de Warenne, and his descendants continued to rank among the more important Warenne military tenants, even after the male line died out with the death of Ralph de Chesney, son of John de Chesney, sometime before 1190. Thereafter, the family estates were inherited by John de Chesney's daughters, of whom he appears to have had three, only two of them, Alice and Emma, properly documented. The Chesneys demonstrated their support for their lord and solidarity with their peers by endowing Warenne monastic foundations. With one exception, in England, their benefactions were directed to Lewes Priory, with only John de Chesney issuing a charter in favour of the Warenne Norfolk foundation at Castle Acre. That latter as a quitclaim of the homage of his man, and probably illegitimate half-brother, Geoffrey, brother of Matthew, prior of Rudham. Here we observe what was most likely a mere tidying up exercise, perhaps settling the relationship between the canons of Rudham and the monks of Castle Acre. It was at about this time that an agreement was reached between the two houses as to the payment of rent for land in Rudham belonging to Castle Acre.⁵⁴⁵ Elsewhere, we find that Ralph I de Chesney endowed Lewes Priory with land in Aldington and Allington, with the tithes of his land in Hangleton and Brighton from which manor he also gave five churches and a meadow in Hamsey (*Hammes*), as well as houses in Lewes. His son and heir, Ralph II de Chesney, confirmed those gifts. Ralph II's son, John, disposed of his lands in Brighton together with two churches. All these lands and churches, where they can be identified, lay in Sussex, for the most part clustered around Lewes. The Domesday value of the Chesney estates in Norfolk was £33 18s 3d, but for Sussex £50 2s. Of their manors in Sussex, three were valued at £10 or more (Brighton, Saddlescombe, and

⁵⁴⁵ Harley 2110, f. 39v, no. 269; Jessop, no. 25; NRO Coxford, no. 25; Saunders, 1910, p. 291.

Hamsey), while of their Norfolk manors only Rudham fell into that category, at £10 exactly.⁵⁴⁶ With their spiritual focus upon Lewes Priory, it seems more than likely that the Chesney *caput* was originally in Sussex.

The family also held estates in Normandy of Hugh de Gourney, and just as they had patronized the Warenne monastic foundation at Lewes, so they demonstrated their loyalty and support for their lord in Normandy by endowing Beaubec Abbey, a Gourney family foundation.

The Chesneys were only occasional witnesses to Warenne charters. Where the names of witnesses are preserved, we find that Ralph I de Chesney appears on only four occasions, and one of these four is generally identified as a forgery.⁵⁴⁷ Ralph I's son, Ralph II was an equally infrequent witness, with only three attestations, including the fabricated charter previously mentioned.⁵⁴⁸ William de Chesney seems to have witnessed only three,⁵⁴⁹ while John de Chesney, Ralph II de Chesney's son and heir, attested six.⁵⁵⁰ Only Ralph III, son and heir of John de Chesney, with at least seven attestations, can be described as a frequent Warenne witness, active between 1159 and 1185.⁵⁵¹ Contemporaries such as Robert de Plaiz, the family of Pierrepont, and Robert de Freville, were more prominent in the Warenne affinity. Amongst charters associated with Warenne monastic foundations, Ralph de Plaiz is to be found attesting at

⁵⁴⁶ Estate values available on opendomesay.org created by Anna Powell-Smith using Domesday data created by John Palmer and George Slater of the Hull Domesday Project and accessed 24 August 2023.

⁵⁴⁷ *Lewes Cart.*, i, p. 20, fabricated charter, p. 31, the Moulescoomb charter; *Norfolk portion*, no. 68 re Grandcourt grant; *EYC*, viii, no. 5, King William II's confirmation of the gift of Heacham.

⁵⁴⁸ *Lewes Cart.*, i, pp. 20, 31; Harley 2110, f. 5, no. 24.

⁵⁴⁹ *Lewes Cart.*, i, p. 61; *Norfolk portion*, nos. 3, 4.

⁵⁵⁰ *Lewes Cart.*, i, pp. 23, 30, 62, 153; ii, p. 29; *EYC*, viii, no. 36.

⁵⁵¹ *EYC*, viii, no. 111; *Lewes Cart.*, i, p. 56; *EYC*, viii, nos. 54, 67, 68; *Lewes Cart.*, i, p. 66.

least twenty-one,⁵⁵² William de Pierrepont twelve,⁵⁵³ and Hugh de Pierrepont, who may have been William's brother, sixteen.⁵⁵⁴ Both William and Hugh witnessed John de Chesney's Brighton charters. Robert de Freville attested at least fifteen charters for the Warennes and was also a witness to John de Chesney's Brighton charters.⁵⁵⁵

Nor did any of the Chesney family, from Ralph I de Chesney to Ralph III, son and heir of John de Chesney, attain high office, either in the earls' administration or in royal government. All told, as members of the knightly class and military tenants of the earls Warenne, the Chesneys do not appear to have played any prominent role in regional or national administration, albeit that the family held substantial estates. Their standing and importance in the region are confirmed, though, by the status of the husbands that were secured for Chesney daughters. Sibyl, daughter of Ralph I de Chesney, married Robert fitz Walter, sometime sheriff of Norfolk and, with Audrey de Vere, county justiciar under Henry I.⁵⁵⁶ Alice, elder daughter of John de Chesney, married first Hugh de Perriers, who brought her in dower the manor of Ditton Priors, Shropshire, devised to Much Wenlock Priory to hold after Alice's death.⁵⁵⁷ Hugh was regularly with Duke Henry (the future King Henry II) and attested several of his charters.⁵⁵⁸ He was clearly one of Henry II's *familiares*. When Duke Henry became king, Hugh was a continuing presence at court, not

⁵⁵² *Lewes Cart.*, i, pp. 23, 28, 57, 61, 65-6; ii, pp. 21, 25, 52-3, 75; Harley 2110, ff. 3v, 6r, nos. 35-6, 38-40; *EYC*, viii, nos. 32, 39, 54, 67.

⁵⁵³ *Lewes Cart.*, i, pp. 23, 30-1, 62; ii, pp. 21, 46-7; *EYC*, viii, nos. 32-3, 35, 39, 52.

⁵⁵⁴ *Lewes Cart.*, i, pp. 23, 28, 33, 62, 74, 119, 121, 161; ii, pp. 21, 25, 46-7; *EYC*, viii, nos. 32-3, 39, 46.

⁵⁵⁵ *Lewes Cart.*, i, pp. 28, 61, 63; ii, pp. 37, 46-7; *EYC*, viii, nos. 23, 30, 32, 44; Harley 2110, f. 2r, nos. 5, 8; f. 3r, no. 11; f. 5r, no. 26; f. 5v, no. 30.

⁵⁵⁶ *Regesta*, ii, nos. 987, 1306, 1346, 1551, 1714.

⁵⁵⁷ *Honors*, i, p. 318; *Cal. Pat. Edward III, 1348 – 1350*, (London 1905), p. 189; *LCH*, iii, nos. 1887-8.

⁵⁵⁸ *Regesta*, iii, nos. 104, 306, 362b, 363a, 363b, 495-96, 841, 1000; *LCH*, vi, no. 3995.

only in England but in Normandy, where he is to be found attesting many royal charters.⁵⁵⁹ Following Hugh's death in December 1175, Alice married Geoffrey de Say, second son of William de Say (d. 1155) who was brother-in-law and ally of Geoffrey de Mandeville. To Geoffrey de Say she brought the Maminot inheritance, following the death of Walkelin II de Maminot without issue *c.* 1190.⁵⁶⁰ Geoffrey attested several charters of Henry II.⁵⁶¹ He also had land near Arques (Seine-Maritime) brought to him by Alice, his wife.⁵⁶² In 1198 he was bailiff of Arques, but this was lost to him, as were all his other Norman manors, when Philip Augustus confiscated Normandy.⁵⁶³

Emma, the other daughter of John de Chesney, married Michael Belet, butler to Henry II, and itinerant justice from 1176. By him she had at least ten children, seven sons and three daughters, whose names are set out in the foundation charter of Wroxton Priory, founded by Master Michael Belet, her second son, *c.* 1217.⁵⁶⁴ Michael Belet held four fees of Robert Foliot, including Wroxton in Oxfordshire and lands in Lincolnshire.⁵⁶⁵ He is recorded as witness to forty of Henry II's charters,⁵⁶⁶ and was sheriff of Worcestershire from Michaelmas 1175 to Easter

⁵⁵⁹ *LCH*, i, nos. 229, 290, 504; ii, nos. 891, 1022 at 'Fideliam' possibly Falaise, 1073 at Le Pré (near Rouen), 1162, 1237, 1252 at Paris; iii, nos. 1551, 1584 and 1585 at Le Vaudreuil, 1778; iv, nos. 1936, 2027 at Argentan, 2069; v, nos. 2577 at Argentan, 2281 at Rouen, 2303 at Quevilly; v, nos. 2789, at Rouen, 2829.

⁵⁶⁰ *DD*, 2002, p.681.

⁵⁶¹ *LCH*, i, nos. 255, 420; ii, nos. 853, 1117a; iii, nos. 1642, 1644; iv, no. 1933.

⁵⁶² *Scaccarii Normanniae*, i, p. 90.

⁵⁶³ *Ibid*, ii, pp. cxxix to cxxxii.

⁵⁶⁴ *Monasticon*, 6 part 1, p. 485

⁵⁶⁵ *Cartae*, CLIV; J. Boorman. 'Belet, Michael (d. 1201), justice and administrator', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 23 Sep. 2004; Accessed 2 September 2023 at

<https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-1986>

⁵⁶⁶ *LCH*. i, nos. 32, 63, 168, 224, 253, 307, 324, 349, 638, 700, 705; ii, nos. 802, 838, 869, 928, 1125; iii, nos. 1395, 1419, 1429-31, 1765; iv, nos. 1990, 1993, 2212, 2220, 2518-19, 2541, 2572; v, nos. 2720, 2777, 2790, 2792, 2833, 2877, 2891-92, 2927, 2957.

1185, and sheriff of Leicestershire and Warwickshire from Easter 1185 to Michaelmas 1189. He died in 1201, survived by his wife Emma.⁵⁶⁷

William de Chesney, the founder of Rudham Priory, has left only a faint footprint. Beyond his charter issued 1145 X 1148, by which he made extensive grants to the canons of Rudham, we have no information as to what motivated him to found his priory. His gifts were made for the souls of his father and mother and Ralph his brother and all his other brothers and sisters, none of them named. The dedication suggests a pious mind, but really tells us nothing about William's deeper motives. Was he approaching death at the time? That one of the addressees was his nephew, John de Chesney, who in 1148 issued a charter repeating the grants made by William, his uncle, and who became the priory's patron, possibly suggests as much. But by founding his priory, was William seeking to atone for past sins? Unlike his cousin, John fitz Robert, son of Robert fitz Walter by his wife, Sibyl, William's sister, William left no deathbed confession of a sinful past.⁵⁶⁸ Christopher Harper-Bill has pointed out that survival in the highly competitive world of the late eleventh century necessitated acts that the Church condemned as sinful. The Church repeatedly reminded transgressors that evil deeds required indulgences for the remission of sins, or else a warrior's hopes for eternal salvation were slim indeed.⁵⁶⁹ The first half of the twelfth century was no different. However, if William de Chesney was involved in any military activity, in the carrying out of acts of violence in the defence of his or his father's fiefs, there is no surviving record of it. William does not appear amongst those who fought for Henry I or against him. If he was involved in the early battles of the civil war that engulfed England from

⁵⁶⁷ Boorman, 2004.

⁵⁶⁸ *Cart. Sibton*, iii, no. 470.

⁵⁶⁹ C. Harper-Bill, 'The Piety of the Anglo-Norman Knightly Class', in *ANS*, ii (Woodbridge 1980), p. 64.

September 1139, again we have no record one way or the other. Yet, knightly monastic foundations were very often linked to a desire to atone for sins committed in the course of knightly duties, not least in trampling upon the rights and property of others. A case in point was that of Thomas de Saint-Jean who had wasted three of the woods belonging to the abbey of Mont St Michel to obtain timber for the construction of his new castle. Upon learning that the monks had prayed to God to avenge the wrong Thomas, horrified, hurried to the monastery and enquired of the monks as to why they were condemning him before God. On being informed that it was because he had destroyed their woods and wrongfully occupied their lands, Thomas and his men asked for forgiveness and reconciliation. Thomas and the monks came to an agreement by which he quitclaimed the land on which the woods stood, made grants of land to the monks, and, together with his family, received the confraternity of the house.⁵⁷⁰ Thomas of Cuckney founded his abbey at Welbeck for Premonstratensian canons in 1153, in part, for the spiritual benefit of all those whom he had unjustly robbed ('et eorum omnium quibus ego suis iniuste diripui'), regretting his actions committed during the civil war.²³³ When he was gravely ill, Nigel d'Aubigny requested intercession and pardon from Ranulph, bishop of Durham, and the congregation of St Cuthbert, when he restored two manors to St Cuthbert, as he lay in dread of what might happen to him in the afterlife for what he had done ('quia Deus omnipotens sua iusticia gravi me infirmitate corporis percussit, et hic jaceo graviter vexatus, nesciens quid michi amodo evenire debeat').⁵⁷¹ If it was to atone for ill deeds of this sort that William de Chesney founded his priory, we have no way of knowing. It was only his act of founding his monastery that has rescued him from obscurity. For the rest, his life remains shrouded in darkness.

⁵⁷⁰ *Cal. Docs.*, no. 724.

⁵⁷¹ *Charters of the Honour of Mowbray, 1107 – 1191*, ed. D. E. Greenway (London 1972), no. 4.

Chapter 6

Walsingham Priory

Abstract

Walsingham Priory, for Augustinian canons, dedicated to the Virgin Mary, was founded by Geoffrey II de Faverches, son of Geoffrey I de Faverches and his wife Richeldis. Geoffrey founded his priory, it will be argued, before June 1147, but probably no earlier than 1145. His foundation charter states that he had given and granted to God and St Mary and Edwy/Edwin his clerk ('Notum sit vobis me dedisse et concessisse Deo et sancte Marie et Edwio clerico meo') the chapel that his mother had founded in Walsingham in honour of the 'Everlasting Virgin Mary'. In addition to giving the chapel that his mother had founded, Geoffrey also endowed his foundation with the church of All Saints in Great Walsingham with its appurtenances, both in lands and in tithes, and rents and men, 20 shillings to be paid annually from his demesne, and the land of Snoring (*Snaringes*) which Hawise gave to the chapel, namely half an acre in the vill of Snoring, which lay next to the land of Tovy, and eight acres in the field of the same vill with parts of the appurtenant meadow. In 1086, Little Snoring was shared between three lords: Ralph Fatatus held of Peter de Valognes, Rainer held part of William de Warenne, and the remainder was in the king's demesne.⁵⁷² Great Snoring was solely in the king's demesne.⁵⁷³

Goffrey made his endowments for the salvation of his soul and those of his parents and friends. These endowments were made, as the charter tells us, on the day that Geoffrey journeyed to Jerusalem. Geoffrey's actions in founding his priory and his departure to Jerusalem coincide with

⁵⁷² *Domesday Norfolk*, ii, 34:7; i, 8:101; 1:16.

⁵⁷³ *Ibid*, i, 1:92.

Pope Eugenius's call in December 1145 for a Second Crusade. Yet, as will be argued here, the evidence does not support that Geoffrey journeyed to the Holy Land as a crusader, but more likely he went as a peaceful pilgrim for purely spiritual motives. The date of the founding of the chapel has traditionally been given as 1061, with the priory said to have been founded soon after, but as will become abundantly clear, that foundation date does not stand up to scrutiny. And it is important to demonstrate that, because the foundation of the priory is closely linked chronologically to the foundation of the chapel. For that reason, I commence with an interrogation of the evidence surrounding the foundation dates respectively of the chapel and the priory.

The date of Foundation

Of all the four houses of Austin Canons founded in Norfolk during the reign of King Stephen, Walsingham is perhaps the most enigmatic. This because its foundation cannot be separated from that of the chapel dedicated to the Virgin Mary, otherwise known as Our Lady of Walsingham, said to have been established by Richeldis, the mother of Geoffrey II de Faverches, himself reputed the founder of Walsingham Priory. Early commentators have asserted that Geoffrey de Faverches's foundation was made soon after the Conquest, endowing the chapel with the church of All Saints, and its appurtenances in lands, tithes, rents, and services on the day he went to Jerusalem.⁵⁷⁴ As for the chapel, it is said to have been founded by Geoffrey's widowed mother, Rychold or Richeldis, in 1061, the authority for that very precise date being a popular ballad first

⁵⁷⁴ Blomefield, 9, p. 274.

published by Richard Pynson c. 1496. The alleged date of foundation is spelled out in the first verse:

Of this chapell se here the fundaycon
 Bylded the yere of crystes incarnacyon
 A thousande compleet syxty and one
 The tyme of sent Edward Kyng of this regyon

The third verse identifies the founder of the chapel in the following words:

A noble wydowe somtyme lady of this towne
 Called Rychold in lyving full virtuous
 Desyred of oure lady a petycyowne
 Hir to honoure with some werke bountyous
 This blyssed virgyn and lady most gracyous
 Graunteed hir petycyon as I shall after tell
 Unto her worsgyp to edefye this chapell

Thereafter, confusion abounds, with William Page claiming that the ballad states that Richeldis, Geoffrey II de Faverches's mother, was the widow Lady Rychold de Faverches.⁵⁷⁵ However, the poem mentions no other name beyond Rychold, and then only once. Blomefield, in his account for his *History of Norfolk*, contends that the founder of the shrine was the 'widow lady of Ricoldie de Faverches', so not Richeldis, but the unnamed widow of a man by the name of 'Ricoldie de Faverches'.⁵⁷⁶ In more recent times the 1061 foundation date for the shrine of Our

⁵⁷⁵ *VCH*, Norfolk, ii, p. 394

⁵⁷⁶ Blomefield, 9, p. 274.

Lady of Walsingham has been accepted by no lesser authorities than David Knowles and R. Neville Hadcock. In their seminal work, *Medieval Religious Houses, England and Wales*, their entry for Walsingham Priory opens with the words: ‘The famous pilgrimage chapel of Our Lady of Walsingham, built before the N(orman) C(onquest) on the model of the Santa Casa at Nazareth, was incorporated in the priory of Augustinian canons which was f(ounde)d by Geoffrey de Faverches’.⁵⁷⁷ Yet they also give the foundation date for the priory as 1153 or c. 1169, the former being that which J. C. Dickinson arrived at in his study of the Walsingham shrine, the latter as given by William Page in the *Victoria County History for Norfolk*.⁵⁷⁸ If it is correct that Walsingham Priory was founded by Geoffrey II de Faverches, son of the widow Richeldis, who, it is said, founded the chapel to the Virgin Mary at Walsingham, then the foundation dates, 1061, in the case of the chapel, and 1153 or c. 1169 in the case of the priory, are glaringly incompatible. Geoffrey II de Faverches, immediately before he departed for Jerusalem, is said to have provided land and possessions to his clerk, Edwy, to enable him to found a priory of regular canons. The charter evidence, which will be considered shortly, suggests that this must have occurred before 1153, probably sometime in the mid to late 1140s. Geoffrey, in his charter of endowment, referred to his mother having founded the chapel in Walsingham in honour of the ‘Everlasting Virgin Mary’, which he in turn gave to Edwy, his clerk. He did not name his mother, but a charter issued by earl Roger de Clare, Geoffrey’s lord, addressed to William, bishop of Norwich, by which he confirmed Geoffrey’s endowments, does indeed name Richeldis, mother of Geoffrey, as the founder. Roger's charter has been dated c.

⁵⁷⁷ *MRH*, p. 177.

⁵⁷⁸ J. C. Dickinson, *The Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham* (Cambridge 1956), p.4. However, the actual reference to Dickinson given by Knowles and Hadcock is to Dickinson’s work, *The Origin of the Austin Canons and their Introduction into England*, the Church Historical Society (London 1950), p. 298, in which Dickinson references the foundation date as it is in *VCH*, namely c. 1169; *VCH, Norfolk*, ii, p. 394.

1153. Later, John bishop of Norwich, either John I (c. 1186 - 2 June 1200), or John II (24 September 1200 - c. 1207), confirmed the canons of Walsingham in their possessions, referring to Richeldis and Geoffrey de Faverches, her son, as founders of the church of St Mary ('ecclesiam sancte Mariequam Ricaldis et Gaufridus de Favartiis filius fundaverunt').⁵⁷⁹ Richeldis, it is said, was a widow when she founded her chapel, and even if Geoffrey was only one year old in 1061, it is virtually inconceivable that he could have survived to the late 1140s, by when he would have been in his late 80s and unlikely to have been able to make the arduous journey to Jerusalem. It might be argued that Richeldis had remarried. Indeed, she did, for the Pipe Roll 31 Henry I informs us that at Michaelmas 1130, William of Houghton accounted for ten gold marks to marry the widow of Geoffrey de Faverches (*Fervaques*) with her land and to have custody of her son until he became a knight.⁵⁸⁰ Richeldis's son could not yet have been 21 in 1130, so was born at the earliest in 1110. If Richeldis had founded her chapel in Walsingham in 1061 as a widow, then assuming that she was aged fifteen, by 1110 she would have been 64, long past child bearing age.⁵⁸¹ The inescapable conclusion is that Richeldis, mother of the Geoffrey II de Faverches, who is said to have founded Walsingham Priory sometime in the mid to late 1140s, had been married to his father, also called Geoffrey; that Geoffrey I de Faverches had died before Michaelmas 1130, and further, that between the time of Geoffrey's death and her marriage to William of Houghton, Richeldis founded her chapel in Walsingham, dedicated to the Virgin Mary, on land which her deceased husband held, either as a tenant-in-chief or undertenant. The chapel, therefore, was probably founded in the late 1120s. J. C. Dickinson has

⁵⁷⁹ *EEA*, vi, no. 440.

⁵⁸⁰ *P R 31 Henry I*, p. 74.

⁵⁸¹ In pre-Conquest England the law gave no standard age for the age of majority for boys or girls. Theodore's *Penitential* stated that a father of a girl over sixteen or seventeen could not give her in marriage contrary to her will. That suggests, though, that a girl could be given in marriage before she reached the age of sixteen, probably once she had reached puberty. In the above example I have assumed an age of fifteen as a reasonable point, given the mores of the age. See the discussion of minority in Hudson, 2012, pp. 230, 241.

argued this in greater detail in his study of the Shrine of Walsingham and on this I have placed a degree of reliance in setting out the present argument.⁵⁸² Nevertheless, despite the weight of the evidence, as recently as 2015 a study was published seeking to vindicate the original view that the chapel was founded in 1061.⁵⁸³ The foundation of Flint's arguments rest upon his assertion that the chapel was founded in that part of Great Walsingham that in 1086 was part of the king's demesne lands, held TRE by Harold Godwinson, later king of England. However, the evidence is clear that Richeldis founded her chapel on land that in 1066 was in the hands of Ketil, whose Domesday successor was Reginald, son of Ivo. He, himself, lost his lands for his rebellion against William Rufus, who then gave them to Gilbert fitz Richard de Clare. It was as a de Clare tenant that Richeldis founded her chapel.⁵⁸⁴

The Founder and his Family

Geoffrey I de Faverches

Walsingham Priory, for Augustinian canons, dedicated to the Virgin Mary, was founded by Geoffrey II de Faverches, son of Geoffrey I de Faverches and his wife Richeldis. Geoffrey I de Faverches's Norman origins probably lay at Fervaques (Calvados, cant. Livarot-Pays-d'Auge), which is 13 kilometres northwest of Orbec, the *caput* of the Norman barony of Richard fitz Gilbert, lord of Clare.⁵⁸⁵ One might expect, therefore, to find Geoffrey, in England, holding estates as a Clare tenant. However, he occurs initially in the affinity of Peter de Valognes, a

⁵⁸² Dickinson, 1956, pp. 3-7.

⁵⁸³ B. Flint, *Edith the Fair: Visionary of Walsingham* (Leominster 2015).

⁵⁸⁴ See Appendix 4 for a critical review of Flint's study.

⁵⁸⁵ Loyd, 1951, p. 41.

major Domesday tenant-in-chief with estates in Norfolk, Suffolk, Lincolnshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, and Cambridgeshire. Geoffrey I de Faverches does not appear in Domesday holding any estates, but first emerges as a witness to Peter de Valognes's foundation charter for Binham Priory, which has been dated between 1101 and 17 September 1107. This was drawn up before an illustrious group which included Richard abbot of St Albans, Robert abbot of St Edmunds, Richard abbot of St Benet of Holme, and Lambert, prior of Castle Acre. Richard abbot of St Benet of Holme was not elected until 1101, while Robert II of St Edmunds died on 16 September 1107.⁵⁸⁶ The charter was also witnessed by several of Peter de Valognes's tenants: Ralph Fatatus, his man Humphrey, William of Babingley, Hugh of Dersingham, Richard de Spineto, and Walter dapifer. Thereafter, Geoffrey attested a charter setting out the terms of an agreement between Herbert de Losinga, bishop of Norwich, and Peter de Valognes, which concerned conflicting claims over the manors of Binham and Langham in Norfolk. This concord is specifically dated to 1108.⁵⁸⁷ William of Houghton, who features as a minor figure in the antecedents of Walsingham Priory, was also a witness.

We also find Geoffrey I de Faverches as a witness to a charter issued by Ralph de Wanci, a Warenne tenant, itself cited in a charter confirming the possessions of Castle Acre Priory issued by William II de Warenne, and which has been dated only approximately 1088 X 1138.⁵⁸⁸ However, as Geoffrey I de Faverches was dead by 1130, Ralph de Wanci's charter must date before then.⁵⁸⁹ Geoffrey appeared again with Ralph de Wanci as witness to a charter of Henry I concerning the abbot of Ramsey's right of wreck at Brancaster, Norfolk. Other witnesses

⁵⁸⁶ *Cart. Ramsey*, i, p. 148, no. LXXXI.

⁵⁸⁷ D. C. Douglas, *The Social Structure of Medieval East Anglia* (Oxford 1927), Appendix, no. 35; *Cart. Binham*, no. 13, in which the name is rendered as Favarchis; also printed in *Monasticon*, 3, p. 348, no. VI and *EEA*, vi, no. 5.

⁵⁸⁸ Harley 2110, f. 1v-2r, no. 3.

⁵⁸⁹ *P R 31 Henry I*, p. 74.

included Robert fitz Walter, sheriff of Norfolk, and Ralph II de Chesney. The charter has been loosely dated between 1114 and 1130.⁵⁹⁰ Another charter by which Henry I ordered that the abbot's right of wreck at Brancaster was to be respected can be found in the *Chronicle of Ramsey Abbey* with William of Houghton, Henry I's chamberlain, as sole witness.⁵⁹¹

Peter de Valognes, in founding his priory at Binham, expected his knights to endow the house from their demesne lands. At its foundation Peter's knights granted two thirds of the tithes from their lands, and they are named in the body of the foundation charter as Ralph Fatatus, Richard de Spineto, Humphrey, Walter dapifer, William de Rudham, and Roger.⁵⁹² Ralph Fatatus, on the occasion that he became a monk at Binham, went on to make further endowments of two marks of silver to be paid annually from his mill in Ryburgh, and all the tithes from the manor, augmenting the two thirds that he had granted previously.⁵⁹³ Geoffrey I de Faverches does not feature in this particular list of knights, albeit that he was a witness to its issue. Nor do we find Geoffrey making any gifts to the priory in later years. Whatever the reason for Geoffrey I de Faverches's close association with the household of Peter de Valognes, by 1121 we are made aware that Geoffrey was by then a tenant of the Clare earls and that he was in dispute with Peter de Valognes's son and heir, Roger, over rights in the church of St Peter in Great Walsingham, which manor Geoffrey now held of earl Richard fitz Gilbert de Clare (d. 1136). The row concerned part of the church of Walsingham, which Roger had given to the monks of Binham, but which Warin, Geoffrey I de Faverches's priest, had withheld from them. Roger de Valognes had confirmed his father's gifts, making a grant of his own of the church of Dersingham, half the

⁵⁹⁰ *Cart. Ramsey*, i, p. 148, no. LXXXI.

⁵⁹¹ *Chron. Ramsey*, i, p. 228, no. 223.

⁵⁹² *Cart. Binham*, no. 1.

⁵⁹³ *Ibid*, nos. 335, 336.

church of Walsingham with a chantry, land held by his knight, Humphrey in Walsingham, and all his land in Gunthorpe and Wells-next-the-Sea.⁵⁹⁴ The matter was resolved in Roger's favour as is borne out by Henry I's charter addressed to Everard, bishop of Norwich, informing him that Roger had proved his right to part of the church of Walsingham against Geoffrey de Faverches (*Faverchis*).⁵⁹⁵

Peter de Valognes died *c.* 1109 and it may be that, with the succession of Peter's son Roger (d. 1141/2), Geoffrey I de Faverches found himself out of favour with the new regime. The dispute over the moiety of the church of St Peter, Walsingham, suggests that there was bad blood here. Warin, Geoffrey's priest, would not have detained the disputed part of the church without Geoffrey's support and encouragement, and, of course, by then Geoffrey had transferred his homage to the earls Clare from whom he by now held Great and Little Walsingham.

The Clares were not in possession of the manor in 1086, which was then held from the king jointly by Peter de Valognes, who had subinfeudated it to his man Humphrey, and by Reginald, son of Ivo.⁵⁹⁶ Reginald son of Ivo, was a substantial Norfolk landowner, holding 40 manors as a tenant-in-chief and twelve manors of other lords.⁵⁹⁷ In 1086 they had a total value of £108 12s 5d. Reginald lost his lands for his part in the rebellion of 1088 against William Rufus, who, shortly thereafter, transferred them to Gilbert fitz Richard de Clare (d. 1114 or 1117).⁵⁹⁸ At some point Geoffrey I de Faverches became a Clare tenant, probably after 1109. It has not been possible to identify the extent of Geoffrey's holdings. Clearly, he held Great and Little

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid*, nos. 2, 69.

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid*, no. 69.

⁵⁹⁶ *Domesday Norfolk*, i, 1:40; ii, 21:24; 34:18

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid*, ii, as tenant-in-chief, 21:1-37. As under tenant, i, 1:57, 61-2; 10:35, 72, 78-9; ii, 15:14; 66:44, 46-8.

⁵⁹⁸ F. Barlow, *William Rufus* (London 2000), pp. 170-1; R. Mortimer, 'The beginnings of the Honour of Clare', in *ANS*, iii (Woodbridge 1981), 119-141, p. 119.

Walsingham. He also held Salthouse, Norfolk, and a fifth of a knight's fee at Great Massingham from the Clares.⁵⁹⁹ The Salthouse holding is apparent from a charter issued by Henry II by which he gave notice of several grants made to William Barford in exchange for land of his inheritance, including the mill of Gramborough Hill in Salthouse. The mill had been granted to him by Geoffrey de Faverches and Gilbert fitz Roger (de Clare) as well as their whole land of Salthouse, ('et terram de Saltosa et molendinum de Greneberga que Galfr(idu)s de Fanarchis et Gilbertus filius Rogeri ei dederunt').⁶⁰⁰ Salthouse, in 1086, had been shared between the tenants-in-chief William de Warenne and William d'Ecouis. William d'Ecouis sold his part, with several other lordships, to Walter Giffard, first earl of Buckingham and a Domesday tenant-in-chief. He died soon after 1090. Through an heiress of the Giffard family, it came to the earls Clare, although only after 1164, following the death without issue, of Walter Giffard second earl of Buckingham. As the charter of Henry II that cites the gift of Salthouse and the mill of Gramborough Hill was issued between 1154 and 1162, it is most likely that the manor of Salthouse came to Richard fitz Gilbert of Clare through his wife Rohaise or Rose, daughter of Walter Giffard, first earl of Buckingham.⁶⁰¹

The manor of Great Massingham is recorded as having been given to Castle Acre Priory by Geoffrey de Faverches for six marks, free of all customs, apart from four shillings a year in acknowledgment of his lordship. The land was presumably that which Reginald son of Ivo had held in 1086, and after he was deprived of his lands by William Rufus, was one of the estates handed to Gilbert fitz Richard de Clare. Geoffrey I de Faverches, having become a Clare tenant,

⁵⁹⁹ The reference to Geoffrey's holding in Great Massingham is to be found in a description of Massingham in Harley 2110, f. 17, which is a later insert.

⁶⁰⁰ *LCH*, i, no. 99a; *Cal. Pat.*, 1266-1272, p.334.

⁶⁰¹ *Comp. Peer.*, ii, p. 387; iii, p. 242.

by that same route probably acquired the Massingham estate. The grant to Castle Acre appears in a charter of confirmation of the priory's possessions acquired of the fee of William III de Warenne or within the fee of others, issued by William III de Warenne shortly before he left England to join Louis VII's army on the Second Crusade, so before June 1147. That the charter was issued in the context of the earl's departure for the Holy Land is suggested by William's command that if anyone were to cause the monks of Castle Acre injury, his brother Reginald was to give them justice.⁶⁰² It will thus be argued below that it was not Geoffrey I de Faverches, but his son Geoffrey II de Faverches, who gave this manor to the priory.

Was Geoffrey enfeoffed of his lands by the Clares? There might have been a Clare family connection through lands in Normandy. As noted earlier, Geoffrey's likely Norman origins were to be found in Fervaques, close to Orbec, the *caput* of the Norman barony of Richard fitz Gilbert, lord of Clare. Or was Geoffrey one of Holt's 'landless knights' whose fortunes were immeasurably improved by a judicious marriage to the heiress of a Clare tenant?⁶⁰³ Certainly, there is no evidence that Geoffrey held any land while in the milieu of Peter de Valognes. Geoffrey married Richeldis, of whom little is known, beyond that it is said she founded the chapel at Walsingham, constructed to replicate the Holy House at Nazareth, and dedicated to the Virgin Mary, at a date after the death of her husband, which occurred before Michaelmas 1130. Neither Gilbert fitz Richard, the Domesday tenant-in-chief, or his son and heir, Richard fitz Gilbert, is known to have had a daughter named Richeldis. However, it cannot be excluded that Richeldis was the heiress of a Clare tenant and that she brought Clare lands to Geoffrey upon her marriage to him. Another possibility is that Geoffrey was the son of a Clare tenant but had

⁶⁰² Harley 2110, f. 3v, no. 15.

⁶⁰³ J. C. Holt, 'Feudal Society and the Family in Medieval England', in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th Series, xxxv (1985), 1-28, p. 1.

adopted his mother's family name. Unfortunately, we have no way of knowing, such evidence that might have informed us either lost or destroyed.

In a gesture of solidarity and support for his lord, a Geoffrey de Faverches granted two thirds of his tithes of Walsingham to the Clare monastic foundation of Stoke-by-Clare Priory, Suffolk. The gift is cited in the confirmation charter of earl Roger de Clare, issued after 1152, who succeeded his brother, Gilbert (d.s.p. c.1152). It was also cited in a confirmation charter of Everard, bishop of Norwich, issued no later than 1145.⁶⁰⁴ The gift has been dated to the early part of the twelfth century and can thus be attributed to Geoffrey I de Faverches.⁶⁰⁵

Geoffrey I de Faverches himself was dead by 1130 as is evident from the entry in the Pipe Roll recording William of Houghton's fine of £60, calculated as 10 gold marks, to have Geoffrey's widow and son in custody, the fine being paid in full.⁶⁰⁶ William also accounted for £200 for the widow of Edward of Salisbury, Adelica de Raimes, with her land, for his son Pain who, himself proffered 200 silver marks and two gold marks to marry her.⁶⁰⁷

Geoffrey II de Faverches

Geoffrey II de Faverches is almost as anonymous as William de Chesney, the founder of Rudham Priory. As we have seen, he granted Stoke-by-Clare, his lord's foundation, two shillings

⁶⁰⁴ *Cart. Stoke*, i, nos. 37xx, 70. And see also nos. 71, 72, 99, 100, 136, being respectively confirmation charters of William Turbe, bishop of Norwich, Bishop John of Oxford, a second confirmation charter by John, of Oxford, bishop of Norwich, an *inspeximus* by prior William and the convent of Norwich, and a confirmation by Theobald, archbishop of Canterbury.

⁶⁰⁵ *Ibid*, iii, p. 34.

⁶⁰⁶ *P R 31 Henry I*, p. 74.

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p. 64.

annually to be paid from his mill at Walsingham. The gift is referred to in Roger de Clare's charter of confirmation of Geoffrey's foundation endowments for his priory at Walsingham, although the charter by which Geoffrey made the gift has been lost or destroyed.⁶⁰⁸ Geoffrey does not appear as an officer in royal or baronial service. We do not know when he came of age, only that the latest that it could have been would have been 1150. However, it is more likely that he reached the age of 21 well before then, for his departure for Jerusalem referred to in his foundation charter probably took place in the mid to late 1140s, at the height of the fervour generated by Pope Eugenius III's call for a Second Crusade. Geoffrey would have needed to be of full age to have control of his estates and to make the dispositions set out in his foundation charter. Although in his earlier years, before he reached the age of 21, he had as his guardian William of Houghton, a senior member of Henry I's court, with considerable patronage and influence, Geoffrey does not seem to have benefitted from that in any appreciable way. That might be because William of Houghton fell out of favour with King Stephen, or that he died shortly after Stephen ascended the throne. As for the records of Geoffrey II that have survived, they are limited to a handful of Walsingham charters and to a grant of his lands in Massingham that he made to the monks of Castle Acre. That latter endowment may be significant in the context of Geoffrey's avowed desire to journey to Jerusalem, and hence is discussed below.

As far as we know, Geoffrey II de Faverches had no surviving legitimate offspring. However, there is a reference in the Red Book of the Exchequer to a William de Faverches (*Fauderches*) who, together with three others, (Humphrey de Sarcillis, Ralph son of Brun (*Bruni*) and Peter de Hamton (*Hamtona*), was commanded by Henry II to make recognition of the service owed by the knights of the honour of Arundel, following a dispute over service owing to the army of Wales.

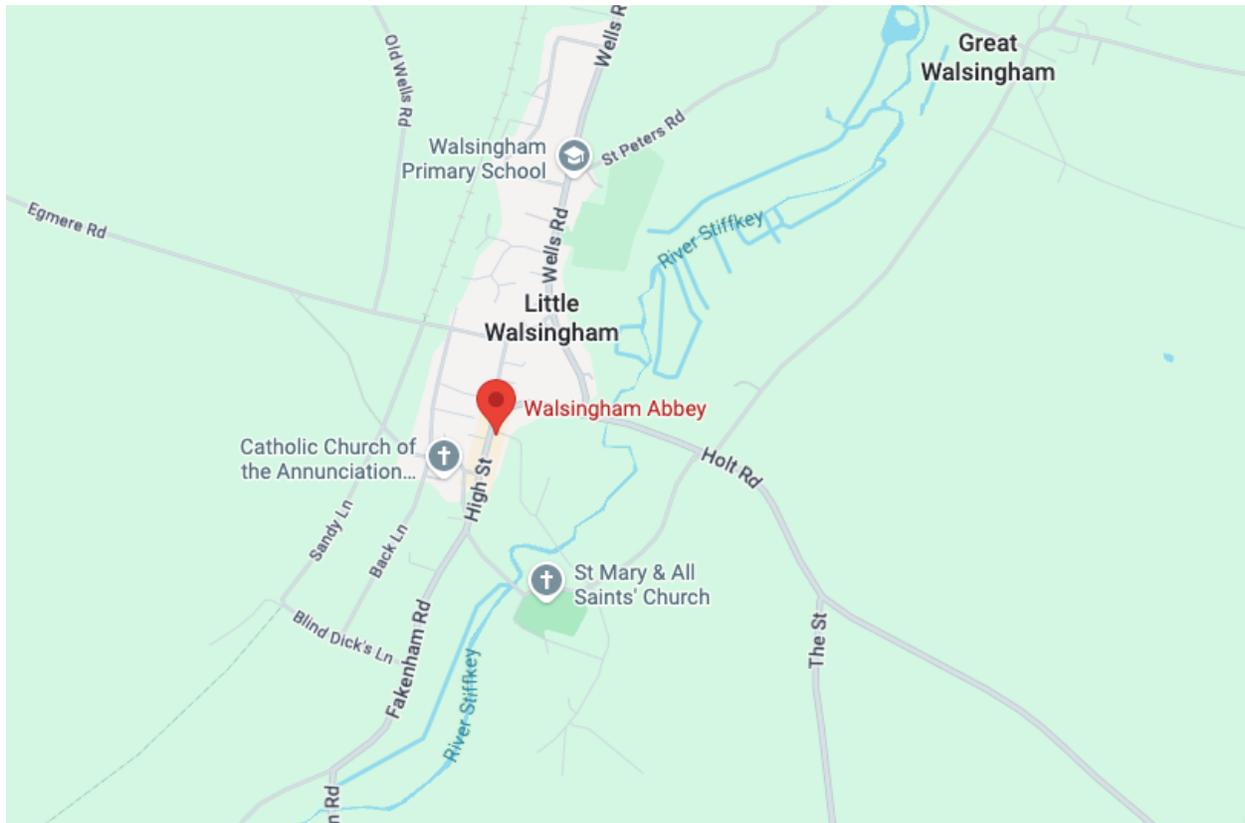
⁶⁰⁸ *Cart. Walsingham*, f. 8r (7r). Printed in *Monasticon*, 6, part 1, p. 73.

The reference to the army dates this *c.* 1165.⁶⁰⁹ In 1166, William de Faverches held a fee of William earl of Arundel.⁶¹⁰ Farrer suggests that he was a tenant of land in Walberton, Sussex, which in 1086 had been held by William, the man of Earl Roger. Was this William de Faverches perhaps a younger brother of Geoffrey II de Faverches? That seems unlikely. For if Geoffrey had died without legitimate issue, as seems to have been the case, then a younger brother would have been his heir. Or was he perhaps offspring of the union between Richeldis and William of Houghton who had adopted his mother's name? However, there is nothing to suggest that William of Houghton, chamberlain to Henry I, held Walberton, by whom the William de Faverches of 1166 could have come to inherit it. On the information presently available it seems impossible, beyond their shared toponym, to connect Geoffrey II de Faverches directly with William de Faverches.

⁶⁰⁹ *Red Book*, i, pp. 200-1.

⁶¹⁰ *Cartae*, XIII; *Honor*, iii, p. 8.

Motives and Location



Map 16 showing the location of the priory of Walsingham. The chapel, now known as the Shrine of our Lady of Walsingham, is approximately where St Mary and All Saints' Church is located.

Geoffrey II de Faverches founded his monastery and made his endowments for the salvation of his soul and those of his parents and friends. He made no reference to a wife or children in his charter, which might be expected given that he was about to embark on what was almost certainly a dangerous journey that he might not survive. That would suggest that he was unmarried and without legitimate issue. By then he was in full possession of his inheritance. Geoffrey's charter makes clear that he was gifting his mother's foundation (the chapel dedicated to the Everlasting Virgin Mary) to Edwy, his clerk, so that he might establish a community of

regular canons, which would have involved organising construction of the buildings, securing canons, and conducting negotiations with interested parties such as the bishop of Norwich and local lords. It is also apparent that Geoffrey's charter must have been issued before 1153, for his lord, Roger de Clare, issued his charter of confirmation about then, having succeeded his brother, Gilbert de Clare, who died between 1151 and 1153.⁶¹¹ Roger was created earl of Hertford by Henry II in or before January 1156,⁶¹² but as he did not style himself as such in his charter it is likely that the charter itself was issued before 1156. Geoffrey left his clerk in charge of establishing the monastery, but it appears that he did not complete his task. Perhaps he died before he could finish what was a major undertaking or proved simply not up to the job. That conclusion is drawn from Roger de Clare's charter which opens with an instruction to his clerks, Ralph and Geoffrey, to establish a regular canonical order at the foundation.⁶¹³ Roger's charter also indicates that, at the time it was issued, the chapel was in possession of lands, tithes and rents, something that was very unusual for a chapel at this time, but which suggests that the chapel had become a popular shrine for veneration of the Virgin Mary to whom it had been dedicated. The Ralph here was probably the Ralph who became the priory's first prior. Blomefield's continuator suggests that Edwin was the first prior, but the chartulary lists the priors, and Ralph is named there first.⁶¹⁴ That Edwin is not named as the first prior also suggests that he had failed in some way.

Geoffrey's motive in founding the priory appears to have been related to his desire to travel to Jerusalem. It was a last pious act made before he departed upon his journey. With the gift of the

⁶¹¹ *Comp. Peer.*, vi, p. 499.

⁶¹² *Ibid.*, p. 500.

⁶¹³ *Cart. Walsingham*, f. 7, and printed in *Monasticon*, 6, part 1, p. 73, no. III.

⁶¹⁴ Blomefield, 9, p. 277; *Cart. Walsingham*, f. 149b.

chapel, land and liberties, and instructions to his clerk to use the endowment to establish a monastic house, Geoffrey was settling his conscience before setting out eastwards. Whether he went as part of the English contingent that joined the Second Crusade, and which left England for the Holy Land in May 1147, or simply as a peaceful pilgrim, intent on visiting the holy sites and seeking absolution for his sins at the most holy of them all, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, we cannot know. It may be that Geoffrey's desire to journey to Jerusalem had been inspired by the chapel that his mother had founded, not only as a shrine to the Virgin Mary, but said to have been a direct replica of the house in Nazareth where Mary was informed by the Archangel Gabriel that God had chosen her to fulfil His Incarnation. That the chapel seems to have become of significance as a shrine to the Virgin Mary, at least locally, by the time that Geoffrey embarked upon his journey to Jerusalem, is suggested by the fact that it had received endowments from local landholders, not least from Hawise of Snoring, who is specifically referred to in Geoffrey's charter. Roger de Clare's confirmation charter indicates that, by 1153, the chapel had become the beneficiary of several such gifts, for he stated that he granted and gave the chapel that Richeldis, mother of Geoffrey de Faverches had founded, with all appurtenances in lands, in tithes, in rents and with all the possessions that the chapel itself possessed on the day that G(eoffrey) de Faverches undertook the journey to Jerusalem ('cum omnibus pertinentiis in terris, in decimis, in redditibus, et cum omnibus possessionibus, quas ipsa capella possedit die qua predictus G. de Faverches iter Ierosolimatium suscepit'). It may well be that the belief that the chapel had been built as an exact replica of the Sacra Casa in Nazareth following an angelic vision that Richeldis claimed to have experienced, had provided the shrine with an aura of greater holiness than it would ordinarily have possessed. The First Crusade, and its successors, were understood by chroniclers, and described by them, in scriptural language.

There was an umbilical link between history, theology, and biblical exegesis that allowed commentators to present the Crusades as a righteous holy war meant to defeat the infidel in the defence and expansion of Christendom. Katherine Smith has highlighted how commentators used the holy scriptures to present the crusades as a literal re-enactment of scripture. As, for example, Christ's expulsion of the money lenders from the temple taken as a prompt to expel Muslim unbelievers from the Holy Land.⁶¹⁵ Orderic Vitalis noted that he 'found many things in the pages of scripture which, if they are subtly interpreted, seem to resemble the happenings of our own time'.⁶¹⁶ No doubt such comparisons were accepted and commonplace amongst those who ventured to journey to the Holy Land. With the Walsingham chapel dedicated to the Virgin Mary as a supposedly exact copy of the Holy House in Nazareth, an irresistible parallel was drawn, locating Walsingham itself within a sacred history that began with the Annunciation and ended with the Assumption of Mary into Heaven. Such an association might well have exerted a strong influence over Geoffrey II de Faverches, the chapel's patron, in the context of the ecstatic rhetoric calling for a Second Crusade, voiced by Pope Eugenius III in the 1140s and fervently supported by his mentor, Bernard of Clairvaux.

Participating in a Crusade was an expensive business, and those who did so often raised money by mortgaging their lands, or even selling part of their estate, monastic houses being the most frequent source from which to acquire funds.⁶¹⁷ Geoffrey II de Faverches was not a tenant-in-chief with extensive landholdings, but a knightly tenant of the Clares from whom he held what was probably a larger than average size estate. This to judge from Geoffrey's successor Robert de Brucourt, who held a mere three knights' fees. Richard Mortimer's analysis of the knight-

⁶¹⁵ K. Smith, *The Bible and Crusade Narrative in the Twelfth Century* (Woodbridge 2020), p. 212.

⁶¹⁶ *Orderic*, iv, p. 229.

⁶¹⁷ See *ante*, pp. 201-2 for examples.

service owed by the tenants of Clare, places Robert de Brucourt, and so presumably Geoffrey II de Faverches, in the second division of Clare tenants, consisting of eleven men, each owing from six to three knights and accounting for 33 percent of the overall total, at 44 knights.⁶¹⁸ The most obvious monastic house from which Geoffrey might have raised funds would have been his lord's foundation at Stoke-by-Clare. But there is no record of any such transaction. Even so, we do know that a Geoffrey de Faverches raised six marks by giving his lands in Massingham to the monks of Castle Acre, the transaction mentioned in William III de Warenne's charter of confirmation previously referred to.⁶¹⁹ The endowment does not appear in any of the three confirmation charters issued by William II de Warenne who died in 1138,⁶²⁰ Geoffrey I de Faverches having died before 1130. Alice de Clermont (*Claro Monte*) issued a charter by which she confirmed Geoffrey's gift to the monks of Castle Acre, to be held as freely as in his lifetime. (*ita libere que fuit in tempore predicti G[alfridi]*).⁶²¹ From the language used here it is apparent that Geoffrey de Faverches was dead. Alice was the widow of Gilbert I fitz Richard de Clare, who was dead by 1117, whereafter she married, secondly, Burchard de Montmorency.⁶²² She was still alive in 1152, as is clear from Roger de Clare's writ issued shortly after he succeeded his brother Gilbert de Clare. By this, Roger commanded Alice de Clermont, (*de Clermunt*), his grandmother, Peter her seneschal, and her men of Norfolk, to cease demanding customs and taxes from the monks of Stoke and their men, and not to interfere in their affairs.⁶²³ She was also the subject of a writ by Henry II that Vincent suggests was issued in June/July 1155 commanding her to ensure the monks of Thorney Abbey possession of their four virgates of land in Raunds,

⁶¹⁸ R. Mortimer, 'Land and Service: the Tenants of the Honour of Clare', in *ANS*, viii, ed. R. Allen Brown (Woodbridge 1986), 177-97, pp. 178-79.

⁶¹⁹ Harley 2110, f. 3v, no. 15.

⁶²⁰ Harley 2110, ff. 1r-2r, nos. 2-4, and for the date of William's death, see *Comp. Peer.*, xii, part I, p. 496.

⁶²¹ Harley 2110, f. 18r, no. 120.

⁶²² *Comp. Peer.*, iii, p. 24.

⁶²³ *Cart. Stoke.*, p. 22, no. 32.

Northamptonshire.⁶²⁴ Massingham was almost certainly part of Alice's dower in England, derived from her first marriage to Gilbert fitz Richard. She was probably married to Burchard de Montmorency by 1119, since in August of that year Burchard was taken captive at the battle of Brémule, fighting for Louis VI of France against Henry I. Orderic Vitalis tells us that Henry released him from captivity together with Hervey of Gisors and various others, because they were vassals of both kings. Burchard is not known to have had any lands in Normandy so his vassalage under Henry I came most likely through his wife, Alice.⁶²⁵ He is recorded as having gifted an annual supply of 2,000 eels to Thetford Priory, the Bigod foundation, his only known gift to religion in England.⁶²⁶ Between them, Burchard and Alice had three sons: Hervey, Hugh, and Guy. Burchard was dead by 1132, since an act of his son, Matthew, by his first wife, Agnes de Beaumont sur-Oise, explicitly states that he had died, possibly in Jerusalem.⁶²⁷ Alice de Clermont does not appear to have remarried following Burchard's death. Her charter confirming Geoffrey de Faverches's gift at Massingham was witnessed by her eldest son by Burchard, Hervey, who would not have been of full age until 1140 at the earliest. It is most unlikely that Hervey would have witnessed were he not of full age. Another witness was Richard de Montfichet (d.1204) who was the son of Gilbert de Montfichet (d. 1186/7),⁶²⁸ himself the son of Margaret de Clare (d. 1189), Alice's daughter by her first husband, Gilbert fitz Richard.⁶²⁹ Richard de Montfichet married Millicent by whom he had a son, also Richard, who was aged

⁶²⁴ *LCH*, v, no. 2612.

⁶²⁵ *Orderic*, vi, p. 241 and n.2.

⁶²⁶ *LCH*, v, no. 2600, line 86.

⁶²⁷ K.S. B. Keats-Rohan, 'Domesday People Revisited', in *Foundations, Journal of Foundations for Medieval Genealogy*, 4, (2012), 3–20, p. 13 and n.41.

⁶²⁸ *P R 33 Henry II*, pp, 125, 127.

⁶²⁹ Harley 2110, f. 18/16r, no. 120.

about ten at his father's death.⁶³⁰ It seems unlikely that either Richard, the elder, or Hervey de Monmorency could have been of age in the 1130s. Indeed, probably not until some point in the 1140s. The witnesses, therefore, suggest that Alice's charter was issued after 1140, and quite possibly as late as the early 1150s. As noted previously, the wording of her charter indicates that Geoffrey de Faverches was dead.

It is also clear from Roger de Clare's charter confirming Geoffrey II de Faverches's endowment of his clerk, Edwy/Edwin, that at the time of its issue, *c.* 1152, Geoffrey II de Faverches was already dead. Given that there is no reference to Geoffrey's endowment in any of the confirmation charters issued by William II de Warenne, that it first appears in William III de Warenne's confirmation charter, almost certainly issued between Easter 1146 (when William took the cross at Vézelay) and May 1147 (when he departed England for the Holy Land), and that Alice de Clermont was still active as late as 1155, the evidence strongly suggests that it was Geoffrey II de Faverches who gifted the monks of Castle Acre his lands in Massingham in return for an annual rent of six marks and four shillings in recognition of his lordship. Were we to identify the donor here as Geoffrey I rather than II de Faverches, we would expect confirmation of the gift to have been made by Alice and her husband, Burchard de Montmorency, jointly, shortly after the death of Geoffrey I de Faverches, so at some point before 1130.

Whilst six marks would not go very far towards providing all that was needed by a crusader in terms of arms, horses, supplies and men, it would have made a modest contribution to anyone

⁶³⁰ N.Vincent, (2005, September 22). 'Montfichet, Richard de (b. after 1190, d. 1267), baron and forest administrator', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Retrieved 22 Aug. 2024, from <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-19044>.

bent upon a peaceful pilgrimage to Jerusalem.⁶³¹ As has been suggested, it was customary to sell or mortgage lands to monastic houses prior to departure as a crusader, and Geoffrey's actions may well suggest a man settling his affairs, and at peace with himself, before embarking upon a journey of immense spiritual importance. As a middle ranking landowner, a peaceful pilgrimage would likely have been within his financial capabilities.⁶³² For anything more ambitious, he would have been required to draw on the support of a greater man, as with the various Warenne tenants who can be assumed to have accompanied their lord on crusade. Geoffrey's aspiration to make the journey was also in keeping with a long tradition in England of pilgrimage to the Holy Land from before the time of Bede. Interest in the *iter hierosolymitanum* had further blossomed with the success of the First Crusade and the establishment of the Christian states of Outremer at the end of the eleventh century. The cult of the Holy Sepulchre that became established in England in the reign of Henry I, with the erection of monastic houses dedicated to the church such as in Warwick, Cambridge, and, as we have seen, at Thetford, further stimulated interest.⁶³³ As to when Geoffrey departed for the Holy Land, we have no secure evidence. If not as a crusader he could have left before the call for a Second Crusade, so before the end of 1145, perhaps in his mid to late thirties. Still perhaps a minor in 1130, by 1145, therefore, he would have been at most 35. The dating of William III de Warenne's charter, between Easter 1146 and May 1147, does indeed suggest a date for Geoffrey's departure, before that of those involved in the Second Crusade. Nor does the wording of Roger de Clare's confirmation charter suggest that Geoffrey went as a crusader. There is no reference to Geoffrey having taken the Cross, in

⁶³¹ A parallel example is to be found in a grant made to the monks of Clare at the end of the eleventh century or in the early years of the twelfth. William, son of Cunigar, granted the monks 26 acres of his demesne lands with an adjacent meadow in return for 4 marks and 5 shillings given by the monks to his son, Peter for his journey to Jerusalem. *Cart. Stoke*, no. 264.

⁶³² J. Riley-Smith, *The First Crusaders, 1095 – 1131* (Cambridge 1997), p. 34.

⁶³³ A. Grabois, 'Anglo-Norman England and the Holy Land', in *ANS*, viii, ed. R. Allen Brown (Woodbridge 1985), 132-141, pp. 133, 141.

contrast to the wording of many charters of this period relating to those who went on the Second Crusade.⁶³⁴ Nor is there any specific reference to crusading as, for instance, when Abbot Hugh of St Benet of Holme provided Philip of Postwick with fifteen marks ‘so that Philip might join the king of France and other barons on the Second Crusade’.⁶³⁵ Roger’s charter simply states that Geoffrey undertook a journey to Jerusalem.

There may have been another reason for Geoffrey’s endowment of the monks of Castle Acre, albeit not one inconsistent with the need to raise funds for his journey to Jerusalem. In a charter issued at the same time as the confirmation of Geoffrey’s gift at Massingham, William III de Warenne granted Castle Acre Priory all his land in Massingham with its attendant homages.⁶³⁶ William de Warenne, the first earl of Surrey, in 1086 had held land in Massingham, together with Reginald fitz Ivo. Both were small estates worth 15s and 13s 2d respectively, with Reginald claiming William de Warenne’s estate as part of his holding.⁶³⁷ This claim may well have continued to trouble Geoffrey I de Faverches and his son, Geoffrey II, the Clare tenants of what had formerly been Reginald’s Massingham estate. If so, then the transfer of William III de Warenne’s holding to the monks of Castle Acre in conjunction with Geoffrey’s endowment, both made at a time when each was contemplating and preparing for a journey to the Holy Land, may well have served as a satisfactory compromise, indeed as an astute move on Geoffrey’s part, given the power and influence of the earls Warenne. Interestingly, Geoffrey’s gift involved, in effect, only the fruits of the land, for he retained lordship over the manor, as is clear from the terms of his grant, which required the monks to pay him four shillings annually in recognition of

⁶³⁴ See for instance, *Cart. Stoke*, no. 40,

⁶³⁵ For other examples, see C. K. Slack, *Crusade Charters, 1138–1270*, trans. H. B. Feiss (Tempe, Arizona 2001), nos. 3, 5, 15, 23, 29, 30.

⁶³⁶ Harley 2110, f. 3r, no. 14.

⁶³⁷ *Domesday Norfolk*, i, 8:29.

his lordship. Later, Geoffrey's successor, Robert de Brucourt, by a charter dated to the late twelfth century, and with the agreement of his heirs, granted Castle Acre Priory the lands in Massingham which they had previously held from him at lease for 4s a year.⁶³⁸ Clearly this was the same land gifted by Geoffrey II de Faverches. The first witness to Robert's charter was John de Brucourt, presumably Robert's son and heir, who later appears in possession of the Walsingham manors when he issued two charters, one by which he confirmed a grant of land by one of his tenants to Walsingham Priory, and a second by which he gifted land to the priory.⁶³⁹

Geoffrey II de Faverches does not appear in the records again after the issue of his foundation charter, which suggests that he did not return from the Holy Land. That he was dead by 1153 is suggested by the wording of Roger de Clare's confirmation charter in which Geoffrey is referred to in the past tense. Thus, Roger granted to the priory the mill from which Geoffrey used to pay two sheaves of his tithe by giving two shillings to the monks of Clare every year. He goes on to state that the men of the same vill, and whomsoever they wished, might grind their corn at the mill freely, and without any hindrance as they had done in the time of Geoffrey de Faverches.⁶⁴⁰ As is apparent from his charter, Roger now had possession of the mill from which Geoffrey had made his annual gift to the monks of Clare, leading us to conclude that Geoffrey died without heirs and, therefore, that his lands had escheated to his lord.

⁶³⁸ Harley 2110, f. 18/16r, no. 121.

⁶³⁹ *Cart. Walsingham*, f. 12v(11v).

⁶⁴⁰ *Cart. Walsingham*, f. 8r(7r).

Concluding Remarks.

The tradition that places the foundation of Richeldis's chapel, dedicated to the Virgin Mary, as early as 1061 is demonstrably wrong. That Richeldis was the mother of Geoffrey II de Faverches is established by Roger de Clare's charter confirming Geoffrey's gifts. Roger also set his clerks, Ralph and Geoffrey, the task of completing the work of establishing the priory, for it seems that Geoffrey's clerk, Edwy/Edwin, had failed to comply with Geoffrey's request for an order of regular canons to be placed in the chapel that Geoffrey's mother had founded. Roger's charter has been dated to *c.* 1153, at around the time that he inherited his title and lands following the death of his brother, Gilbert de Clare. Geoffrey's mother, Richeldis, first married to Geoffrey I de Faverches, by Michaelmas 1130, was subsequently married to William of Houghton, the king's chamberlain. Geoffrey I de Faverches must have died sometime in the 1120s. It would seem that he was still alive in June 1123, for it was after that date that the quarrel arose over the moiety of the church of Walsingham, that Roger de Valognes had gifted to the monks of Binham. It will be recalled that Henry I informed Everard, bishop of Norwich, that Roger de Valognes and the monks of Binham were to hold their part of Walsingham church, which Warin the priest had detained from them, and which Roger de Valognes had proved his right against Geoffrey de Faverches. That charter has been dated no later than June 1123.⁶⁴¹ At the time that William of Houghton married Richeldis, Geoffrey, son and heir of Geoffrey I de Faverches, was still a minor, aged 20 at most. Richeldis is said to have been a widow when she founded her chapel. No doubt there would have been an interval of a year or so between the death of her first husband, Geoffrey I de Faverches, and her marriage to her second, William of Houghton. In

⁶⁴¹ *Cart. Binham*, no. 69, and see note to no. 64.

these circumstances, the foundation of her chapel dedicated to the Virgin Mary must have occurred at some point in the mid 1120s.

Geoffrey II de Faverches probably came of age in the 1130s and was certainly seised of his inheritance by the time that he left England for Jerusalem. Whether he travelled there as a peaceful pilgrim or as a crusader is not entirely clear. In all events, it seems that he failed to return from the Holy Land, for there is no record of him after his foundation charter, and Roger de Clare's confirmation charter makes it clear that when it was issued, Geoffrey was no longer alive. As to when Geoffrey left England, the Massingham settlement suggests a date before May 1147. William III de Warenne's charter to the monks of Castle Acre, in which is mentioned Geoffrey's arrangement over Massingham, must have been issued before William left England in May 1147 to join Louis VII's crusading army. Like many of his contemporaries, Geoffrey might well have sold his rights in the land to the church to raise funds to meet the expense of a pilgrimage. Although we do not know the extent of the resources available to him, the sum he raised from Castle Acre, six marks, does not suggest a man seeking funds to engage in a military expedition. If this reasoning is correct, then Geoffrey made his gift to his clerk Edwy/Edwin in the mid 1140s, perhaps in 1146. Certainly, it was this that set in motion the establishment of the priory at Walsingham. Even so, by his confirmation of Geoffrey's gifts, his command that his clerks institute a regular canonical order there, and his granting of a mill, Roger de Clare should henceforth be considered the priory's co-founder.

Chapter 7

Blackborough Priory

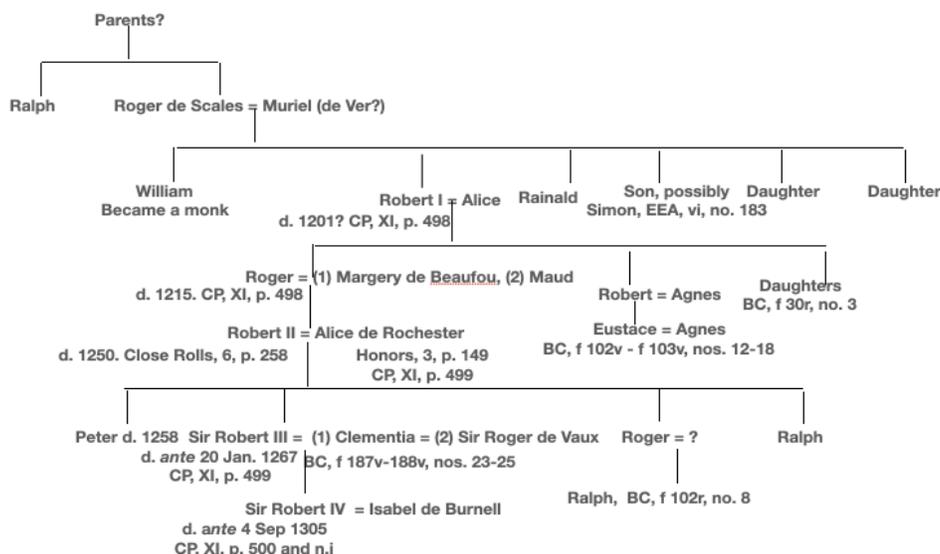


Fig. 7: de Scales pedigree

Notes: There are several family members who cannot be placed and who appear in the Blackborough cartulary. Unfortunately, there is insufficient information to date the charters in which their names appear, and/or the genealogical information does not make it clear which particular family member is being referred to. The absence of a witness list in almost every instance also removes clues that might otherwise assist in dating. The frequent occurrence of the names Robert and Roger, with no definition, other than a reference back to a father with one or other of the names Robert or Roger, renders the family pedigree incomplete. A Simon de Scales appears, active in the last quarter of the twelfth century. He does not feature in the cartulary, but is found witnessing two charters issued by Hubert, archbishop of Canterbury, and three charters issued by John of Oxford, bishop of Norwich (*Cal. Docs.* nos. 385, 1367; *EEA*, vi, nos. 183, 221, 25). What relationship he bore to the de Scales family of Middleton remains unknown. Nevertheless, I believe that the descent as depicted is accurate insofar as it shows the correct line of inheritance. Key: C P = *Complete Peerage*; BC = *Blackborough Cartulary*; *Honors and Knight's Fees*.

Abstract

Blackborough Priory was founded in 1150 by Roger de Scales and his wife Muriel for Benedictine monks, dedicated to Saint Mary and Saint Katherine the Virgin. The foundation charter tells us that the priory was founded ‘for the salvation of our souls and for the salvation of our sons and daughters, for the souls of our fathers and mothers and of all our predecessors’.

Roger de Scales and his wife were substantial landholders in west Norfolk, tenants of Robert de Vere, constable of England and held of the honour of Haughley. Their manor of Middleton was at the heart of their estates and where, almost certainly, they had a manor house, with the priory located some three miles to the south of their *caput* in the Nar valley. They endowed the priory with marsh, arable land, heath, wood and animal folds, the endowment encompassing land from Wormegay to Middleton itself, together with the holding of Ednoch, his wife, and sons and daughters.⁶⁴² The origins of the Middleton de Scales family are obscure. As will be demonstrated, the Hardwin and Brian de Scales families who appear in Domesday, who held estates in Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire, are not related and ought properly be referred to as de Scalers. What follows is a reflection on a classic case of a lesser knightly tenant, who had improved his fortunes through a judicious marriage, and who used his new-found wealth and resources to proclaim his enhanced status and social position through the foundation of a monastic house intended to stand for ever as a sacral monument to his piety and generosity. In presenting this account it has first been necessary to clarify and distinguish the origins of the de

⁶⁴² *Monasticon*, 4, p. 206.

Scales family from the like-sounding de Scalers, Latinised as *Scalariis*, but then often rendered as Scales: the source of much confusion.

The Founder and his Family

De Scales is not de Scalers

The lordship of Middleton, in 1086, was split between Ribald, brother of Count Alan, who held two carucates of Count Alan, Richard, who held one carucate of the abbot of St Edmunds, William de Ecouis, who held as tenant-in-chief, two parts, and Athelwold (presumably the only English survivor here) who held 2 carucates of Hugh de Montfort.⁶⁴³ In 1150, Roger de Scales held Middleton of the Honour of Haughley. Blomefield asserts that Roger de Scales was descended from Hardwin de *Scalariis*, lord of Waddon in Cambridgeshire from the time of the Conquest.⁶⁴⁴ Hardwin was a tenant-in-chief with substantial holdings in Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire. However, Sanders notes that Hardwin had two sons, Richard and Hugh, between whom he divided his estates. According to Sanders, Richard I de Scales (*sic*) was followed by Stephen, who died in 1167, and was succeeded by William I, who died in 1199. His son and heir, William II, died in 1222, followed by Richard II who died in 1231 leaving a daughter, Lucia, as his heir. The second son, Hugh de Scales (*sic*) was followed by Henry I de Scales (*sic*) before 1162. Henry I de Scales died before 1183, to be succeeded by Hugh II who died in 1212-1216, in turn followed by his son Henry III who died *sine prole* on crusade in 1222. He was succeeded by his brother and heir, Geoffrey.⁶⁴⁵

⁶⁴³ *Domesday Norfolk*, i, 4:45; ii, 14:5; 19:4, 6; 23:11.

⁶⁴⁴ Blomefield, 9, p. 20.

⁶⁴⁵ Sanders, 1960, p. 20.

If Roger de Scales of Blackborough was a descendant of this line, then he must have sprung from a cadet branch. The editors of the Cambridgeshire portion of the Lewes Priory chartulary, however, are in no doubt that the family of Roger de Scales had no connection to that of Hardwin de *Scalariis*, pointing out that *Scalariis* is the Latinised version of Scalers.⁶⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the name *Scalariis* is sometimes rendered as Scales, a rendition that Sanders adopted. Another egregious confusion is to be found in the *VCH* for Hertfordshire, where the editor, William Page, has charted the history of the manor of Challors, also known as the manor of Reed or East Reed. Much of the manor by 1086 was held by Hardwin de *Scalariis*, but Page renders the name as ‘de Scales’ and he continues to use that name in setting out the descent from Hardwin.⁶⁴⁷ Confusion with the Scales of Middleton is almost inevitable. There is also evidence that Hardwin had a son by the name of Robert. Robert’s son, Theobald, issued a charter in favour of the priory of St Mary Thetford, the Bigod foundation, confirming the grant by his father of Dullingham church with all its appurtenances, together with Edwy and all his land, as well as forty acres of land of his demesne with free fold. The charter was attested by other family members: Henry, Geoffrey, and Baldwin de *Scalariis*.⁶⁴⁸ Henry was probably a brother of Theobald. The Thetford Priory register contains an entry that ‘Theobald and Henry de *Escalariis*, or Scalers, confirmed their father, Robert’s, grant’.⁶⁴⁹ Dullingham was one of the manors held by Hardwin de *Scalariis* in 1086, as was Croxton, both in Cambridgeshire.⁶⁵⁰ The Thetford Priory register records that Theobald’s son, Theobald, gave the priory forty acres of land and twenty shillings rent in Croxton.⁶⁵¹ Of these grants, the only one that appears in the comprehensive

⁶⁴⁶ *The Cambridgeshire portion of the chartulary of the priory of St Pancras of Lewes*, ed. J. H. Bullock and W. M. Palmer (Cambridge 1938), p. viii.

⁶⁴⁷ *VCH, Hertford*, iii, pp. 248 – 50.

⁶⁴⁸ *Monasticon*, 5, p. 150, no. V.

⁶⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 143.

⁶⁵⁰ *Domesday Cambridgeshire*, 26:3, 43.

⁶⁵¹ *Monasticon*, 5, p. 143.

confirmation charter issued by Henry II in favour of Thetford Priory, itself datable between 1155 and August 1158, is (Robert de *Scalariis*'s) gift of the church of Dullingham, albeit that Robert himself is here not named. But the gift is certainly that of Robert, for King Henry's charter mentions Edwy and his land that Robert also gifted.⁶⁵² Given that Robert and his sons, Theobald and Henry, held lands that in 1086 had been in the possession of Hardwin de *Scalariis*, it is almost certain that they were descended directly from him. It must follow, therefore, that the Robert de *Scalariis* referred to, presumably a third son of Hardwin de *Scalariis*, or Scalers, cannot have been any relation of Roger de Scales, with his wife, Muriel, the founders of Blackborough Priory.

Other factors also point away from any descent by the Middleton de Scales from Hardwin de *Scalariis*. Keats-Rohan has argued that Hardwin de *Scalariis*'s origins are to be found in Brittany. She grounds that argument on Hardwin being a subtenant of Count Alan of Brittany for various of his lands in Cambridgeshire. One of Count Alan's tenants was Brian de *Scalariis*, who held part of Babraham, as did Hardwin. The name Brian is indisputably associated with Brittany and Brian is likely to have been a close relative of Hardwin. Two of Hardwin's tenants, who held in Little Abington, named by Keats-Rohan as Ralph de Fougères and Robert Brito (i.e. 'the Breton'), were of Breton origin, the former from Fougères (Ille-et-Vilaine). Keats-Rohan opines that Hardwin's roots lay in the hamlet of Les Eschelles in the commune of Saint-Germain-en-Coglès, Ille-et-Vilaine, Brittany.⁶⁵³ As for the Middleton de Scales, Keats-Rohan suggests that their origins can be found in the Norman settlement of Escalles-Alix (Seine-Maritime, cant. Notre-Dame-de-Bondeville).⁶⁵⁴ While it is apparent that in 1270, Robert de Scales (d. 1305) held

⁶⁵² *LCH*, v, no. 2600, lines 71-7.

⁶⁵³ *DP*, pp. 244-5.

⁶⁵⁴ *DD*, p. 704.

Barkway, Hertfordshire,⁶⁵⁵ a manor, that in 1086 was held, in part, by Hardwin de *Scalariis*, it came to Robert through his grandmother, Alice of Rochester, widow of Robert de Scales, (d. 1250). The manor was in fact that of Newsells in Barkway and was not held by Hardwin de *Scalariis* in 1086 but by Eudo Dapifer. The rest of the manor in 1086 was shared by Geoffrey de Mandeville and Edgar the Aetheling.⁶⁵⁶ Upon the death of Eudo, the manor reverted to the crown. In 1120, it was granted by Henry I to Eustace, count of Boulogne. The first known tenant of the fee was Eustace de Merc, who appears as a witness to the charter of Count Eustace by which he confirmed Barkway church to Colchester Abbey.⁶⁵⁷ The manor remained in the Merc family throughout the twelfth century. Eustace de Merc, styled lord of Newsells, is recorded holding the manor in 1190. He was also known as Eustace of Rochester and was succeeded by his nephew Ralph of Rochester. Ralph's son and heir, William of Rochester, died shortly before 24 October 1249 and was succeeded by his brother Peter, parson of Rivenhall, Essex. As Peter lay dying on the Saturday before Ascension Day 1255, he granted the manor of Newsells to his sister, Alice, widow of Robert de Scales (d. 1250) and the manor of Rivenhall to her son, Robert. Peter made his sister swear that she would provide a chaplain to celebrate for his soul, or if he did not die, that she would compensate him out of her own lands. In the event, he died on the Ascension Day following.⁶⁵⁸

The editors of the *Complete Peerage* also contend that the de Scales of Middleton had no connection with the family that descended from Hardwin de *Scalariis*. They point out that Hardwin's descendants are, with a few rare exceptions, known as de *Scalariis*, *Deschalers* or de

⁶⁵⁵ *Cal. C. R.*, ii, p. 146. The record shows that Robert de Scales and his heirs were granted a weekly market on Tuesday at his manor of Barkway, Hertfordshire, and a yearly fair on the vigil, the feast and the morrow of Saint Mary Magdalen. He was also on the same occasion granted free warren of his manor of Barkway.

⁶⁵⁶ *Domesday Hertfordshire*, 31:4; 33:9; 37:12; 38:1.

⁶⁵⁷ *Cart. Colchester*, i, pp. 47-8.

⁶⁵⁸ *VCH, Hertfordshire*, iv, pp. 27-8; *Honors*, iii, pp. 269-70.

Scalers, while the de Scales family are usually recorded as *de Scalis*, *des Escales* or de Scales. For example, in Stephen's confirmation charter in favour of Lewes Priory, when citing their gifts to the priory, the scribe refers to Hardwin *de Scalariis* and to his sons, Richard and Hugh *de Scalariis* and to Richard's son, Stephen *de Scalariis*. A charter issued by King Stephen in 1140, ordering Hardwin's son, Hugh, to restore to the monks of Ely their farm, names him *de Eschalariis*, while another charter issued by Stephen in the same year directed to Geoffrey de Mandeville, and ordering him to constrain Hugh and Stephen, uses the name *de Scalariis*. In a charter of confirmation purporting to have been issued by Henry II, which Vincent has concluded is almost certainly a forgery, but composed from authentic materials in the abbey's archives, the scribe has used the name *de Eschalers* when citing the gift made by Hardwin to the abbey of St Mary in York.⁶⁵⁹ As regards the family of 'de Scales', on each occasion in the cartulary of Castle Acre Priory, for instance, where a de Scales appears as a witness or is otherwise referred to in a charter, the name appears as *de Scales*, *de Scalis*, *de Scalys*, or *Scals*.⁶⁶⁰ As for their respective origins, the editors of the *Complete Peerage* suggest L'Escalerie, Manche, as a possible place of origin for Hardwin *de Scalariis*, while either Eschalles in Eure-et-Loir, or Escalles, dept. Pas-de-Calais, cant. Calais 1 are mooted for the de Scales.⁶⁶¹

There can be little doubt, therefore, that there was no relationship between the *de Scalariis* and the de Scales families. None of the manors held by the Middleton de Scales had been held by Hardwin *de Scalariis*. Hardwin's holdings lay in Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire, whilst the de

⁶⁵⁹ *Cal. Docs.*, no. 1391, p. 512; *Regesta*, iii, nos. 264-5; *LCH*, v, no. 2935, note and lines 85-6.

⁶⁶⁰ Harley 2110, ff. 6v, 30/24r, 31/25r, 77/71v, 80/74r, 86/80v, 89/83r, (2), 94/88r, (2), 94/88v, 114/108r-115/119r, 125/119v-126/120r.

⁶⁶¹ *Comp. Peer.*, xi, pp. 496-7.

Scales manors lay almost exclusively in Norfolk and Suffolk. The one manor that they held in Hertfordshire, Barkway, also known as Newsells, was not the portion that had been held by Hardwin *de Scalariis* in 1086, but that belonging to Eudo Dapifer. Moreover, as set out above, that manor did not come into the family until the middle of the thirteenth century. Of the tenants who held land in 1086, the one who features most often for the manors held by the de Scales of Middleton is Hugh de Montfort, who held six out of the eighteen manors later associated with the family. It was those manors that formed the core of the de Scales estate in the twelfth century with Middleton as their *caput*.

The origins of the Founder

Roger and Muriel's eldest son, William, soon after its foundation, entered the priory as a monk and Robert, their second eldest, became their heir. Roger and Muriel made further benefactions to the priory on the occasion.⁶⁶² Shortly after its foundation it also housed nuns, as is apparent from Robert de Scales's (d. ?1201) charter by which he confirmed the gifts of his father and mother, Roger and Muriel, the founders, and made a grant of his own of a marsh, lands, and 12s annually from his mill in Ridlington (*Wridlington*).⁶⁶³ By the late twelfth century, we find Robert confirming the same grants to the sisters of Blackborough, the priory by then having been assigned for the exclusive use of Benedictine nuns.⁶⁶⁴ The priory continued to be patronised by the de Scales family through the generations, as their charters testify. It attracted little in the way of royal or aristocratic patronage, Henry III's grant in 1244 of a market to be held on the vigil, the day and the day after the feast of Saint Katherine, being the most notable exception.⁶⁶⁵ It was

⁶⁶² *Cart. Blackborough*, f. 31r, no. vi. Printed in *Monasticon*, 4 p. 207, no. IV.

⁶⁶³ *Ibid.*, f. 30v, no. v. Printed in *Monasticon*, 4, p. 206, no. III.

⁶⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, f. 30v, no. iv. Printed in *Monasticon*, 4, p. 206, no. II.

⁶⁶⁵ Blomefield, 9, p. 33.

nonetheless the subject of numerous benefactions from de Scales tenants, chiefly in Norfolk, as well as from minor local landholders who would have been part of the de Scales family circle.

It is difficult to establish a Domesday origin for the family. There is no Domesday tenant by the name of de Scales, and any attempt to link the name to that of 'de Scalariis' risks merely confusion since, as has been demonstrated, there was likely no relationship between the two families. It is possible that a de Scales lurks among those Domesday tenants of a lord who can be identified only by their given name as, for example 'William, the man of Robert, count of Eu', or 'Roger, the man of Ralph de Tosny'. A de Scales might have been a landless household knight, only granted lands after 1086, or may have received lands through a judicious marriage. Roger de Scales first appears in the record as witness to a charter issued by Richard Cambreis in favour of Castle Acre Priory, datable between 1114 and 1117.⁶⁶⁶ Thereafter, we find members of the de Scales family as witnesses or otherwise referred to in thirteen of the priory's charters. The name also occurs in one charter in the Norfolk portion of the chartulary of the priory of St Pancras of Lewes.⁶⁶⁷ The family are recorded as holding two Warenne manors, Wilton and Hockwold, both in Norfolk.⁶⁶⁸ The evidence suggests, therefore, that before becoming tenants of the honour of Haughley, the Scales were probably a minor knightly family, located in West Norfolk, and holding of William earl Warenne.

Blomefield states that it was Roger's wife, Muriel, who brought him the manor of Middleton and much else. In 1086, Middleton was held of Hugh de Montfort. Blomefield contends that these lands were Muriel's inheritance, together with her sister Matilda, as daughters and heirs of

⁶⁶⁶ Harley 2110, f. 94/88v, no. 709.

⁶⁶⁷ Harley 2110, ff. 6v, 30/24r, 31/25r, 77/71v, 80/74r, 86/80v, 89/83r x 2, 94/88r x 2, 94/88v, 114/108r-115/119r, 125/119v-126/120r; *Norfolk portion*, no. 201.

⁶⁶⁸ *Book of Fees*, ii, p. 906.

Geoffrey de Lisewis (?Lisieux). Matilda, it is said, brought her inheritance to the Ingoldesthorpe family when she married Geoffrey of Ingoldesthorpe, as is apparent from their holding of the manor of South Raynham, a manor of Hugh de Montfort in 1086.⁶⁶⁹ Blomefield sought support for this view from the fact that Geoffrey de Lisewis's son, William, had founded the priories of Normansburgh in Raynham, and Crabhouse in Wiggenhall, both of which manors came into the possession of the Ingoldesthorpe family, as well as holding the manors of 'Gately, Islington, Clenchwarnton, etc. under Hugh de Montfort, the moieties of all which came about the same time to Ingoldesthorpe and Scales'.⁶⁷⁰ Blomefield's argument turns on William de Lisewis's father, Geoffrey, having daughters, Muriel and Matilda, described as co-heirs. Clearly it was William, the founder of Normansburgh, who was heir and who inherited. If there were daughters, Muriel and Matilda, who married into the Scales and Ingoldesthorpe families, then the manors referred to would have been brought as part of their *maritagium*. However, as will be argued, it is more likely that Muriel, wife of Roger de Scales, was a daughter of Robert de Vere who married Adeliza, daughter of Hugh de Montfort.

The editors of the *Complete Peerage* dismiss the idea that the Scales and Ingoldesthorpe holdings derived from those of Lisewis. They point out that Scales and Lisewis both held of the honour of Haughley (or 'Hagenet') by castle guard service at Dover and contend that the lands held in coparcenary by Scales and Ingoldesthorpe derived from Beaufou.⁶⁷¹ They are right in part concerning the lands that Scales and Lisewis held of the honour of Haughley, although the reality is far more complicated than is suggested by that observation. But the suggestion that Ralph de

⁶⁶⁹ Blomefield, 9, p. 20.

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid, 7, p. 124.

⁶⁷¹ *Comp. Peer.*, xi, p. 497; *Red Book*, ii, pp. 614, 706.

Beaufou, or Beaufour, was the Domesday tenant of the lands held by Scales and Ingoldesthorp is without foundation.

Dealing first with the honour of Haughley, sometimes referred to as 'Hagenet', and its connection with castle guard of Dover, I begin by listing various of the possessions of the respective parties, de Scales, de Lisewis and Ingoldesthorpe. (Fig. 8).

| Manor | Landholders in 1086 | Scales | Lisewis | Ingoldesthorpe |
|------------------------|---|---|--|---|
| Middleton, Norfolk | Hugh de Montfort Bury St Edmunds Abbey William d'Ecouis | Held of the honour of Haughley. <i>Book of Fees</i> , ii, p. 1464; <i>Red Book</i> , ii, p. 741 | | |
| South Raynham, Norfolk | Hugh de Montfort. Roger Bigod | Held of the honour of Haughley. <i>Book of Fees</i> , ii, p. 909 | Held by castle guard of Dover. <i>Book of Fees</i> , ii, p. 1329 | Held of the honour of Haughley. <i>Book of Fees</i> , ii, pp. 909, 1464; <i>Red Book</i> , ii, p. 741 |
| Islington, Norfolk | Hugh de Montfort Hermer de Ferrers Bury St Edmunds Abbey Ely Abbey William d'Ecouis | Held of the honour of Haughley, <i>Book of Fees</i> , ii, p. 1464; <i>Red Book</i> , ii, p. 741 | Held, but not recorded as under the honour of Haughley or by castle guard of Dover | Held of the Honour of Haughley, <i>Book of Fees</i> , ii, p. 1465; <i>Red Book</i> , ii, p. 741 |
| Lynn, Norfolk | Ralph Baynard Hermer de Ferrers Reginald, son of Ivo Bury St Edmunds Abbey | Held of the honour of Haughley, <i>Book of Fees</i> , ii, p. 1464; <i>Red Book</i> , ii, p. 741 | | |

| | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|---|
| Helhoughton, Norfolk | The king Hugh de Montfort | Held of the honour of Haughley <i>Feudal Aids</i> , iii, year 1346, p. 515 | | Held of the honour of Haughley <i>Feudal Aids</i> , iii, year 1346, p. 515 |
| Gately, Norfolk | Hugh de Montfort Peter de Valognes William, bishop of Thetford | Held, but not recorded as under the honour of Haughley or by castle guard of Dover | Held, but not recorded as under the honour of Haughley or by castle guard of Dover. Harley 2110, f. 60/54r, no. 439 | Held, but not recorded as under the honour of Haughley or by castle guard of Dover |
| Wigginhall, Norfolk | Ralph Baynard Hermer de Ferres | Held, but not recorded as under the honour of Haughley or by castle guard of Dover | Held, but not recorded as under the honour of Haughley or by castle guard of Dover | |
| Wetherden, Suffolk | Hugh de Montfort Bury St Edmunds Abbey William the Deacon | Held of the honour of Haughley <i>Book of Fees</i> , ii, p. 915 | | |
| 'Parva Willington', Kent (unidentified, possibly Wilmington?) | In 1242/43, Richard (of Chilham), son of the king | Held of the honour of Haughley and by castle guard of Dover. <i>Book of Fees</i> , ii, p. 1465; <i>Red Book</i> , ii, p. 743 | | |
| 'Scolegh', Essex (Dengie hundred, not identified) | In 1242/43, Richard, son of the king | Held of the honour of Haughley. <i>Book of Fees</i> , ii, p. 1465; <i>Red Book</i> , ii, p. 743 | | |
| 'Bedneste', Essex (not identified) | | Held of the honour of Haughley, <i>Red Book</i> , ii, p. 742 | | |

Fig. 8. Selected list of possessions of the families of Scales, Lisewis, and Ingoldesthorpe

Both de Scales and de Lisewis are recorded in the 1212 Inquest as holding two knights' fees by castle guard at Dover, repeated in a later record of 1261-2, by which time the commitment to supply a body of knights to guard the castle had been commuted to a monetary payment of ten shillings for each knight's fee.⁶⁷² The table above shows only those manors that were held of the honour of Haughley by de Scales, de Lisewis and Ingoldesthorp, and those manors where at least two of them held a portion. If a manor was held by castle guard of Dover, then it would also have been held of the honour of Haughley. Haughley in Suffolk, in 1086, was held by Hugh II de Montfort, appointed by William I as constable of Dover castle.⁶⁷³ In the 1086 survey, Hugh II de Montfort is recorded as holding estates in Norfolk, Suffolk, Kent, and Essex. He was tenant-in-chief for 168 manors, of which he had sub-tenanted 56, while being, himself, a subtenant of 15, seven of which were held of Odo, bishop of Bayeux. At some point before May 1089, Hugh became a monk at the abbey of Bec and died shortly thereafter. His Norman lands passed to his elder son, Robert, while his English estates went to his second son, Hugh III de Montfort. Robert lost his lands for treason in 1107 and died in Jerusalem between 1108 and 1111. Hugh III de Montfort, who had succeeded his father in the English lands, died before 1100 leaving a son, Robert II de Montfort, and a daughter, Adeliza. Robert II de Montfort died *sine prole* leaving Adeliza, his sister, as his heir. Adeliza married, firstly, Simon de Moulins who therefore held the honour of Haughley and the constablership of Dover *iure uxoris*. Simon was still alive in 1119,

⁶⁷² *Red Book*, ii, pp. 614, 706; Round, 1899, p. 278.

⁶⁷³ *The Gesta Guillelmi of William of Poitiers*, ed. and trans. R. H. C. Davies and M. Chibnall (Oxford 1998), pp. 182-3.

when he had custody of Évreux, but died before 1130.⁶⁷⁴ In Michaelmas of that year, Robert fitz Bernard de Vere is recorded offering £315 for Adeliza and her land.⁶⁷⁵ Robert de Vere then held the honour of Haughley and office as constable of Dover under both Henry I and King Stephen until his death *c.* 1151.⁶⁷⁶ The sum, £315, being an uneven amount, suggests only part of a larger fine previously negotiated before 1130, reduced through the payment of instalments. Thus, we find that Robert de Vere witnessed as constable a charter issued by Henry I at Winchester, dated by Johnson and Cronne to 1127. They note that Richard fitz Baldwin, sheriff of Devon and Cornwall, to whom the charter was addressed, had ceased to account as sheriff at Michaelmas 1128, and that Henry was in Normandy from August 1127 to July 1129. The charter was probably issued in May 1127 when Henry was at Winchester for Whitsuntide. It represents the earliest extant record that Robert de Vere was styled constable, and it follows that by this date he must have been married to Adeliza.⁶⁷⁷ Although there are no charters in which Simon de Moulins appears as constable, that does not necessarily mean he did not hold the office. Robert de Vere witnessed many of Henry I's charters in which he was not styled constable, even at times when the office was undoubtedly his.⁶⁷⁸ An indication that Simon did indeed hold both the office and the honour of Haughley is to be found in a charter issued by King Stephen by which he confirmed the gift of two hides of land in Leyton to Holy Trinity Priory, London, made by Simon de Moulins and his wife Adelina/Adeliza, and which afterwards Robert de Vere gave in

⁶⁷⁴ *The Domesday Monachorum of Christchurch Canterbury*, ed. D. C. Douglas (London 1944), p. 68.

⁶⁷⁵ *PR 31 Henry I* p. 50.

⁶⁷⁶ I have taken this descent of de Montfort from D. C. Douglas's introduction to *The Domesday Monachorum*, pp. 69-70.

⁶⁷⁷ *Regesta*, ii, nos. 1485-6.

⁶⁷⁸ For examples, see *Regesta*, ii, nos. 1647, 1649, 1667-8, 1736-7, 1743.

alms. Leyton, Essex, in 1086, was held in part by Hugh de Montfort, Adelina/Adeliza's grandfather and first lord of Haughley, as well as constable of Dover.⁶⁷⁹

It is apparent that of the de Lisewis estates, only South Raynham was held by castle guard of Dover, and of this de Scales was also a coparcener. The manor had been held in 1086 by Hugh de Montfort and, as the table suggests, the Scales family came to hold several manors that were part of the honour of Haughley, eight in all, against Lisewis who held only the one. In c. 1150, when Roger de Scales and his wife, Muriel, founded Blackborough Priory, they must have held those lands of Robert de Vere who had the honour of Haughley and his office at Dover by right of his wife, Adeliza de Montfort. How or when they came to hold those manors is not clear. Adeliza died *sine prole*, as did her brother, Robert II de Montfort. Clearly, as regards Roger de Scales, he did not come to these lands through marriage to a daughter of Geoffrey de Lisewis. There is thus no reliable proof of the identity of Muriel's parents, but it might be of significance that Muriel joined with her husband, Roger, when they gifted land in Middleton, in 1086 a de Montfort manor, to the monks of Blackborough. This suggests that she had a proprietary interest in the land, if not as part of her *maritagium*, then as part of her future dower.⁶⁸⁰

As we know, by his marriage to Adeliza de Montfort, Robert de Vere must have come into possession of the honour of Haughley by 1127, thereafter as a major landholder in Norfolk and Suffolk, Essex and Kent. Although Adeliza bore Robert no children, he had at least two sons, Geoffrey and Robert, by a previous marriage. This is clear from a charter issued by him in favour of Castle Acre Priory, confirming a grant made by William de Lisieux (*alias* Lisewis) of wood and land of his fee in Launditch (*Landic*), Norfolk, to be held as William's father, Geoffrey, held

⁶⁷⁹ *Regesta*, iii, no. 320.

⁶⁸⁰ *Cart. Blackborough*, f. 30r, no. i. Printed in *Monasticon*, 4, p. 206, no. I.

it. According to Blomefield and his continuator, the hundred of Launditch took its name from a long ditch and a bank that divided the two parishes of Longham and Beeston, the latter of which was held by Hugh de Montfort in 1086.⁶⁸¹ However, Launditch itself was the name of a hundred rather than of any specified manor, and William de Lisewis, Roger de Scales and Thomas of Ingoldesthorpe all had interests in the manor of Gately, one of the manors in Launditch hundred, held by Hugh de Montfort in 1086. Robert, in his charter, styled himself constable of England and referred to his wife, Adeliza, as the daughter of Hugh de Montfort ('A(deliza) filia Hugonis de Monteforte uxor sua'). One of the witnesses to this act was Robert de Vere *juvenis* and another was Roger de Scales (*Scal'*).⁶⁸² In another charter issued by Robert de Vere and Adeliza, his wife, granting their foundation at Monks Horton Priory the manor of Tiddington, Oxfordshire, datable 1140 X 1144, the first two witnesses recorded are Geoffrey de Vere and his brother Robert. It was also witnessed by Ralph de Scales (*Scalis*).⁶⁸³ Might a solution here be that Roger de Scales's wife, Muriel, was a daughter of Robert de Vere by his first marriage, and that she brought the Haughley manors to Roger as her *maritagium*? Certainly, we find members of the Scales family as witness to various of Robert de Vere's charters, including two issued in favour of Monks Horton. We also find Robert de Vere, again joined by his wife, Adeliza, confirming Castle Acre Priory in 40d rent from a messuage in Lynn, granted to the priory by Reginald de Scales, who held of Robert de Vere, and who was probably a kinsman of Roger.⁶⁸⁴ Indeed, he may have been a son, for it is clear that Roger and Muriel had sons other than William and Robert. The second charter preserved in the cartulary of Blackborough Priory was issued by

⁶⁸¹ Blomefield, 9, p. 456.

⁶⁸² Harley 2110, f. 94/88v, no. 712.

⁶⁸³ J. R. Scott, 'Charters of Monks Horton Priory', in *Archaeologia Cantiana* x, (1876), 269-281, p. 271, no. IV. And see also p. 270, no III, witnessed by Robert de Vere *juvenis*.

⁶⁸⁴ Harley 2110, f. 80/74r, no. 600.

Roger and Muriel, granting additional lands to the priory in 'Halech', 'Lendeberge', and 'Cauwel', none of which can be identified, but all in the cartulary subsumed within the opening section for Middleton. The charter states that it was made with the consent of Roger and Muriel's heirs, William and Robert, 'and all of our sons'. Lynn was a manor that Roger de Scales held of the honour of Haughley, as the table above demonstrates. It is also significant that, again, Muriel, Roger's wife, joined in this gift.⁶⁸⁵ When Roger's eldest son, William, entered the priory as a monk, Roger issued a charter granting further lands in his manor of Middleton with the permission of his wife, Muriel.⁶⁸⁶ All of this strongly suggests that Muriel brought land to Roger as part of her *maritagium*, and that she did so as a daughter of Robert de Vere by his first marriage. It also seems probable that the Ingoldesthorpe family came to hold of the honour of Haughley through the same route: by the marriage of a daughter of Robert de Ver, by his first wife, to an Ingoldesthorpe son. Robert of Ingoldesthorpe was a Warenne tenant who in the reign of King Stephen held part of the manor of Ingoldesthorpe of the earls Warenne as well as Snettisham.⁶⁸⁷

As for the suggestion made by the editors of the *Complete Peerage*, that the manors held by Scales and Ingoldesthorpe in coparcenary derived from Beaufou, as is apparent from the table above, not a single such manor was held by Ralph de Beaufou/Beaufour in 1086. It is true that Hugh II de Montfort married as his first wife a daughter of Richard de Beaufou, presumably a kinsman of Ralph de Beaufou. By their union they had a daughter, Alice, who married Gilbert de Gant/Ghent (d. c. 1095). The de Montfort line descended thereafter through Robert I de Montfort and Hugh III de Montfort, Hugh II de Montfort's sons by his second marriage, the former taking

⁶⁸⁵ *Cart. Blackborough*, f. 30r. no. ii.

⁶⁸⁶ *Ibid*, f. 31r. no. vi.

⁶⁸⁷ Blomefield, 10, p. 337.

the Norman lands and the latter, those in England. Only much later do we find Roger de Scales (d. 1215), grandson of Roger and Muriel, marrying a Margery de Beaufou, daughter and one of the co-heiresses of Fulk de Beaufou, a son of Ralph de Beaufou, the Domesday tenant.⁶⁸⁸

Margery's sister and co-heiress, Joan, married Thomas of Ingoldesthorpe at about the same time, and both would have brought Beaufou manors to their respective husbands.⁶⁸⁹ However, this occurred a full two generations after Roger de Scales, married to Muriel, and founder of Blackborough, came into possession of his Haughley estates, some of which were held in coparcenary with the Ingoldesthorpe family. In 1233 there was a dispute before the *curia regis* between Emma Beaufou, Robert de Aguilon, husband of Emma's sister, Agatha, Isabel, daughter of Philippa, another of Emma's sisters, Robert de Scales (*Escales*) and Thomas of Ingoldesthorpe, plaintiffs, and William earl of Warenne concerning four carucates of land in Wilton and three carucates in Foulden, Norfolk.⁶⁹⁰ Both manors had been held by William de Warenne in 1086,⁶⁹¹ and the de Scales family later held Wilton of the earls Warenne, while Foulden was held by the Ingoldesthorpe family. It is clear from the history of the tenancy of those estates that any interest that the family of Beaufou had here derived solely from the much later marriages of Roger de Scales and Thomas of Ingoldesthorpe to Margery and Joan de Beaufou.

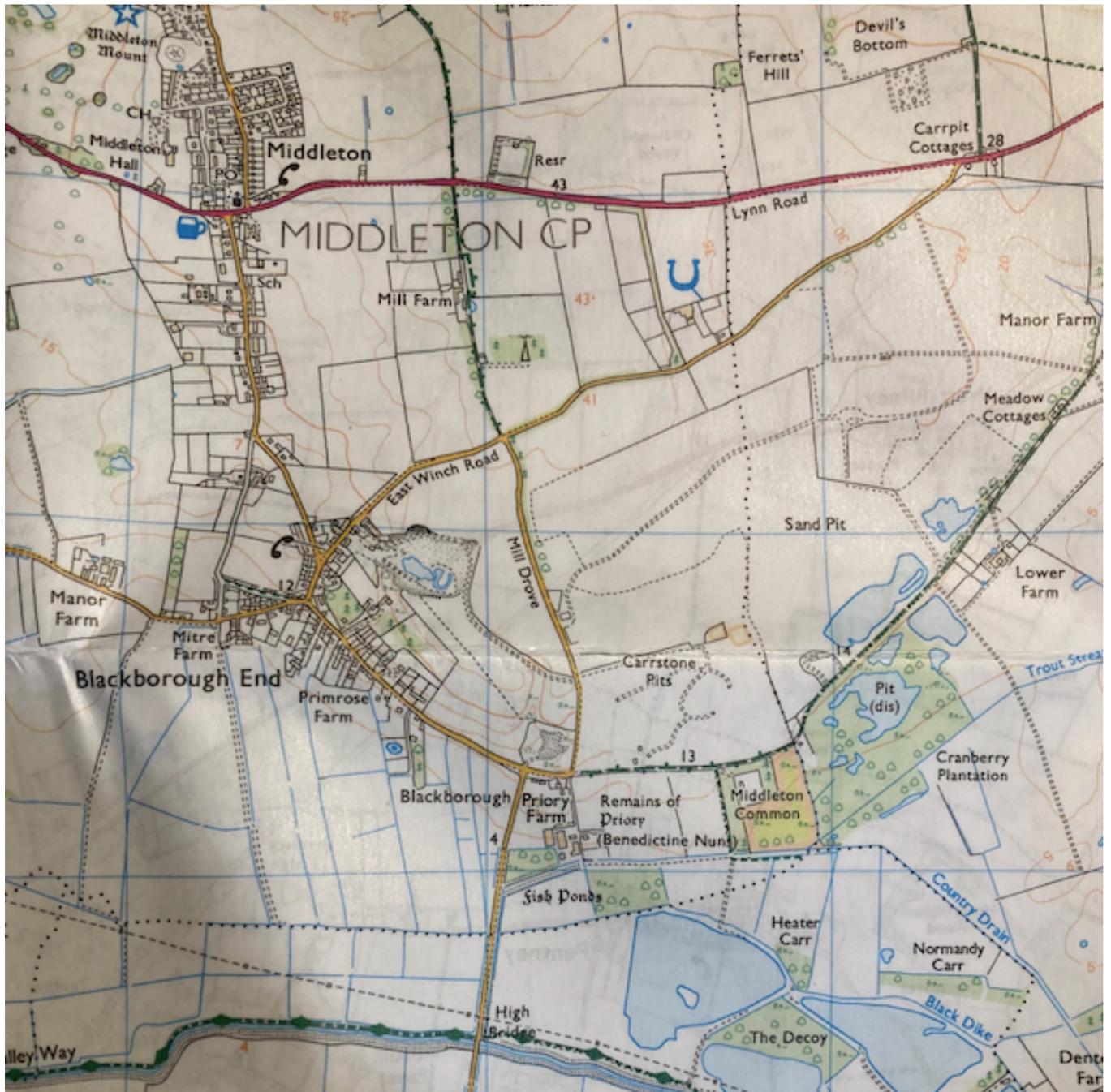
⁶⁸⁸ *Comp. Peer.*, xi, p. 489.

⁶⁸⁹ *Honors*, iii, p. 114. Farrer has incorrectly stated that Margery married Robert de Scales, who would have been the son of the Roger de Scales who died in 1215, but who married Alice de Rochester. *Comp. Peer.*, xi, p. 499 and Appendix J.

⁶⁹⁰ *Cal. C. R.*, ii, p. 340.

⁶⁹¹ *Domesday Norfolk*, i, 8:34; 8:90.

Motives and Location



Map 17 showing the location of the priory. The river Nar can be seen at the bottom of the map

Roger de Scales and his wife, Muriel, in their foundation charter, expressed their religious motives in entirely commonplace terms. Thus, their charter explains that they made the

foundation ‘for the salvation of our souls and for the salvation of our sons and daughters, for the souls of our fathers and mothers and of all our predecessors’ (‘pro salute animarum nostrarum et pro incolumitate filiorum et filiarum nostrarum, pro animabus patrum et matrum nostrarum et omnium praedecessorum nostrorum’).⁶⁹² Such concern for the souls of the patron and his immediate family can be found repeated by most founders of religious houses. Yet the Scales’ foundation charter seems to be signalling something else which, perhaps, speaks to underlying secular motives. The opening words of the charter thus include an unusual and elaborate statement that ‘The memory of events thus being committed to letters, so that saved from oblivion, the truth may in future be proved, may the present age and posterity know, let all know that I Roger Scales and Muriel my wife have given and granted to God and Saint Mary and Saint Katherine the Virgin and the brothers who serve them and are to serve in a place called Shiplade.....’ (‘Rerum gestarum memoria litteris proinde committitur ut, exclusa oblivione, in posterum inde veritas comprobetur. Eapropter noverit praesens aetas, noverit sectura posteritas, noverint omnes quod ego Rogerus Scales et Muriel uxor mea dedimus et concessimus Deo et Sancte Marie, et Sancte Katherine virgini et fratribus qui eis serviunt et servituri sint in loco qui vocatur Shiplade....’).⁶⁹³ Clearly Roger and Muriel wished to be commemorated as persons of wealth and status in their community, undertaking the expensive business of establishing and supporting a religious house, declaring to the world in general that they belonged to an exclusive group with sufficient wealth and resources to make such a commitment. Not only did this enhance the status of Roger de Scales and his family, but also of those men and their families who had done homage to him and who were within his affinity.

⁶⁹² *Cart. Blackborough*, f. 30r. no. i. Printed in *Monasticon*, 4, p. 206, no. I.

⁶⁹³ *Ibid.*

The evidence suggests that Roger de Scales was, to begin with, a minor Warenne tenant in Norfolk, whose fortunes were substantially improved by his marriage to Muriel, almost certainly a daughter of Robert de Vere, constable of England and lord of the honour of Haughley. She brought to Roger several Haughley manors, the most important of which was Middleton. Roger could not fail to have been influenced by his lord, Robert de Vere, himself a monastic founder. His other lords, the earls Warenne, had earlier been responsible for founding two monasteries: St Pancras at Lewes *c.* 1076, and Castle Acre Priory *c.* 1089, both built in close proximity to the family *caputs* in Sussex and Norfolk respectively. Although founded *c.* 1089, Castle Acre was still under construction in the 1140s and 1150s and was not completed until the 1160s. Roger and his wife, Muriel, would have been acutely aware of the progress of its construction and, both as heads of an important local knightly family and as Warenne tenants, might well have attended the ceremony of consecration which took place 1146 X 1148. Castle Acre lay some ten miles from Middleton. No doubt Robert de Scales, as a Warenne tenant, was also aware that his lord, William III de Warenne, had added a third monastic house to the family portfolio: the priory dedicated to the Augustinian canons of the Holy Sepulchre in Thetford, founded, as I have demonstrated, 1139 X 1141.

The Tosny family, substantial landholders in Norfolk, as well as in several other counties, was another important baronial family with whom Roger de Scales was associated. This assertion is evidenced by Roger attesting a charter of Ralph de Tosny by which Ralph confirmed to Castle Acre the grant of his father, also called Ralph, of his wood at Herringshaw, this confirmation datable 1157 X 1162.⁶⁹⁴ Ralph's father had founded a priory in West Acre for Augustinian canons in the time of William Rufus. West Acre lies some eight miles from Middleton. Pentney,

⁶⁹⁴ Harley 2110, f. 94/88r.

only five miles from Middleton, was the location for Robert de Vaux's priory of Austin canons, founded *c.* 1140, the work of another important local knight, whose fortunes had improved by a judicious marriage, and whose family must have been known to Roger de Scales. Robert de Vaux was also a benefactor of Castle Acre, endowing the priory with his mill in Pentney and its adjoining meadow, later confirmed by his son, William.⁶⁹⁵ Although we have no evidence for contacts between Roger de Scales and William de Chesney, the founder of the Augustinian priory at Rudham *c.* 1140, it would be surprising if Roger was not aware of another Augustinian house being constructed 16 miles north of and less than half a day's journey from Middleton. Roger de Scales, therefore, watched as his contemporaries Robert de Vere, Robert de Vaux, and perhaps William de Chesney, men like himself, with substantial landholdings in the county, enhanced their status and influence through the founding of monasteries, while the lords from whom he held were founders and patrons of venerable religious houses that broadcast their patrons' piety and secular significance. The imperative for such 'new men' to impose their stamp on lands they had recently acquired, and to proclaim their newly enhanced status, was often achieved through the foundation of a monastery. They thus sought to emulate greater magnates; of whose descendants many held their lands. Whilst they were not able to achieve the levels of wealth, power, and influence achieved by their social superiors, in founding a religious house a message was being broadcast that the founder and his family were 'on the way up'. This was particularly the case if such a foundation could be combined with the establishment of a deer park, or the construction of a great manor house.

The settlement of Middleton sits on a ridge, an interfluvium, which falls away to the river Nar to the south, where the priory was located, while to the north the ground descends to another tributary

⁶⁹⁵ Harley 2110, f. 91/85r.

of the Ouse. It is in that latter location that we find evidence of a manor house that was probably the Scales's twelfth century *caput*, on a site now occupied by a significant residence known as Middleton Towers. This boasts a substantial gatehouse constructed in 1455 for Thomas, Lord Scales. Archaeological evidence suggests that Middleton Towers was the site of an earlier twelfth century manor house. Earthworks have been identified as the remains of two medieval fishponds, while other features include probably the remains of a medieval dovecote. Other evidence suggests the existence of medieval tofts, crofts and field boundaries, suggesting a settlement clustered around the manor house.⁶⁹⁶

There was also a park in Middleton, its grounds extending north and west from the location of a motte and bailey castle, the construction of which has been attributed to William d'Ecouis, one of the Middleton Domesday tenants, although there are other candidates.⁶⁹⁷ Liddiard notes that there is little evidence to suggest that the castle was other than of wooden construction, nor is it known when occupation ceased. According to Loyd, William d'Ecouis, from Ecouis (Eure, cant. Fleury-sur-Andelle), gave the church of Moreton, Essex, and the manor of Wells, Norfolk, with its appurtenances in Gayton, and its church, to the abbey of St Etienne, Caen.⁶⁹⁸ William elsewhere occurs as William 'de Scohies',⁶⁹⁹ rendered as *Scociis* in Round's *Calendar* (no. 453) and as *Scoeiis* in Delisle and Berger's *Recueil des Actes de Henri II* (i, p. 272), adapted into *Wikipedia* in the form 'Scholes', in turn tempting the unwary to accept Scholes as a corruption of Scales and so conclude that Roger de Scales was a descendant, perhaps even a son, of William

⁶⁹⁶ <https://www.heritage.norfolk.gov.uk/record-details?MNF3393-Middleton-Towers;>

<https://www.heritage.norfolk.gov.uk/record-details?MNF3395>. Accessed 31 May 2024.

⁶⁹⁷ R. Liddiard, *Landscapes of Lordship; Norman Castles and the Countryside in Medieval Norfolk, 1066 — 1200* (Oxford 2000), pp. 33-5.

⁶⁹⁸ Loyd, 1951, p. 39; *Cal. Docs.*, no. 453 ; *Recueil des Actes de Henri II: Roi d'Angleterre et Duc de Normandie, Concernant les Provinces Françaises et les Affaires de France*, ed. L. Delisle and E. Berger (Paris 1909-1927), pp. 263, 265, 272.

⁶⁹⁹ Loyd, 1951, p. 39; *DP*, p. 479.

d'Ecouis. This would almost certainly be a false inference, since an analysis of William d'Ecouis's holdings would suggest either that he lost all his manors, or that he died without a legitimate heir. Certainly, they escheated to the king who subsequently distributed various of them to other barons. Of 65 manors of which William d'Ecouis was tenant-in-chief in 1086, he held eleven in demesne. None of the thirteenth century holders of any of these manors can be identified as a descendant of William. On the contrary, no single family holding of these estates is recorded after 1200 holding in more than one manor, and all held only fractions save in the case of Moreton in Essex, which was held by William d'Avranches of the king. Of the eleven manors, five do not appear in the *Book of Fees*, which suggests that they were in the king's hands. Nor does the evidence support any claim that William's Middleton manor, in which his motte and bailey castle stood, adjacent to the Scales Middleton manor, ended up in the hands of the Scales family. On the contrary, it seems that by the end of the eleventh century the d'Ecouis Middleton manor was already in the hands of the Clare family.⁷⁰⁰ This tenancy goes unnoticed in the *Book of Fees*, in 1212 or any subsequent surveys, with all references there to Middleton describing it as a Scales manor.⁷⁰¹ On the other hand, the 1309 survey records that Hugh, son of Harvey of Gayton, Stephen, son of William of Gayton, John Lek, and several others, held in Gayton, Middleton, and Clenchwarton, of the honour of Clare.⁷⁰² That being the case, it might well be that the land on which the park of Middleton was built was held by the Scales family in the middle of the twelfth century, perhaps of the king. That a deer park would have been an aspiration of Roger de Scales and his descendants is suggested by the fact that the Lisewis family, who were lesser tenants than Roger de Scales, but with whom the Scales were closely

⁷⁰⁰ Liddiard, 2000, p. 83.

⁷⁰¹ For Clare, see *Book of Fees*, i, pp. 127, 136, 388, 603; ii, pp. 912, 907-8, 1326. For Scales, ii, pp. 909, 1464.

⁷⁰² *Feudal Aids*, iii, p. 409.

associated, undoubtedly had a deer park at their manor of Gately. This is apparent from a charter issued by Geoffrey de Lisewis by which he granted Harelwyn, son of William of Gately, all his enclosed park for 100 silver pennies and a talent that Harelwyn gave to his wife, to be held of Geoffrey and his heirs for a fifth of a knight's fee. One of the witnesses to the charter was Robert de Scales, presumably Roger de Scales's second son.⁷⁰³ It will be seen from the table above that the Scales and Lisewis families held several manors as coparceners: South Raynham, held by castle guard of Dover, and Islington, Gately and Wigginhall.

Why the Benedictines?

Roger and Muriel founded their priory for Benedictine monks at a time when other orders such as the Augustinians, Premonstratensians, and the Cistercians, had overtaken the Benedictines in popularity. The attraction of these new orders was rooted both in fashion and in the relative expense incurred in founding a religious house, with the Benedictines requiring a greater outlay than their competitors. That was an important consideration by the middle of the twelfth century, not least because the majority of new foundations were made, not by the great magnates, but by members of the knightly class; often by men who had 'risen from the dust' via royal service, thereafter keen to make a public display of their new status. The trend towards the newer orders was one that had been growing since the middle of the reign of Henry I, reflected in the choice of Augustinian canons for nearly all monasteries founded in West Norfolk during the reign of King Stephen. William III de Warenne's foundation at Thetford, William de Cheyney's priory at Rudham, Pentney founded by Robert de Vaux, and Walsingham, Geoffrey de Faverches's house

⁷⁰³ *Charters Norwich*, no. 122.

founded before his departure to Jerusalem, were all established for Augustinian canons. Even William d'Albini, who had married Adeliza of Louvain, widow of Henry I, and who was, after the earls Warenne, the most important magnate in West Norfolk with his castle and deer park at Castle Rising, founded his priory at Buckenham, in the east of the county (generally dated c. 1146, but almost certainly later),⁷⁰⁴ for Augustinian canons. Late in the reign of Henry I, Ralph de Tosny had confirmed his support for the Augustinian canons at West Acre and had taken the priory there under his protection.⁷⁰⁵ All of this almost certainly would have been known to Roger. Even so one has to reconcile that decision to patronise the Benedictine order with the view that had become common by the middle of the twelfth century that the monks of the Benedictine order had become too comfortable, worldly and wealthy, and had long since departed from the principles of the Benedictine Rule which demanded poverty and simplicity, and which extolled the benefits of manual labour. One of the attractions of the new orders besides the lower cost incurred in their foundation, but which was probably linked, was the austere lifestyle that they practised. Much value was placed by founders and benefactors in

⁷⁰⁴ The charter has been dated c. 1146 from its reference to bishop Everard, who resigned in 1145 and of whom William Turbe is described as first successor. Even so, William's charter states that he made his benefactions 'pro salute Stephani regis Anglie et Matildis reginie uxoris sue et filiorum suorum' (*Monasticon*, 6, part 1, p. 419). That is, for the salvation of Stephen king of England and Matilda his wife and their children. The language here indicates that all were alive. Queen Matilda died on 3 May 1152, so the charter was issued before then. Eustace, Stephen's son and heir, died on 17 August 1153. The charter then reads 'pro salute mea, et pro anima Athelizae reginae, uxoris mee, et pro salute filiorum nostrorum.....' That is, for my salvation and for the soul of Queen Adeliza, my wife, and for the salvation of our children. It seems to me that salute is here used to refer to those who were alive at the time of issue, but that William references his wife using a formula frequently applied when referring to someone who had passed away - 'pro anima Athelizae'- reverting to language indicating persons who were alive when referring to their children. Queen Adeliza died on 23 April 1151. If there is any doubt over the meaning of the phrase, 'pro anima', as used in William's charter, that should be dispelled by its use again in relation to William's parents, William d'Albini, pincerna (d.1139) and Matilda Bigod (died before 1129), for William concludes his dedication with the words 'et pro animabus patris, et matris mee', for the souls of my father and mother. If my analysis is correct, the foundation charter must have been issued between 23 April 1151 and 3 May 1152, with William probably founding the priory in memory of his recently departed wife.

⁷⁰⁵ *MRH*, p. 179.

supporting one of the new orders that publicly proclaimed and practised austerity, in that they considered that greater spiritual benefits would accrue than if the benefactor founded or endorsed a house of the wealthy Benedictine order. This was one of the reasons why the Cistercians attracted founders and benefactors in increasingly greater numbers in the middle decades of the twelfth century. Bernard of Clairvaux, one of the founders of the Cistercian order, was the leading critic of the Benedictines through his *Apologia ad Guillelmum Abbatem*, written in 1125, and in which he emphasised the importance of spiritual over material prosperity.

Perhaps, though, it was under the influence of his lord, Robert de Vere, that Roger was persuaded to found Blackborough for Benedictine monks. Robert de Vere and his wife, Adeliza, had founded Monks Horton Priory in Kent, as a cell to the Cluniac priory of St Pancras at Lewes: a member of a Benedictine order that adopted a more elaborate liturgy than the other 'unreformed' black monks.⁷⁰⁶ Then again, given that a greater outlay would have been required than if an Augustinian house had been founded, for instance, it might have been more important for the de Scales to publicly flaunt their wealth and enhance their status than to seek a perceived marginal increase in spiritual benefits. After all, their foundation charter made much of the fact that Roger and his wife were founding a monastery, they being keen to ensure that posterity would always remember that it was they who were responsible. Moreover, with their eldest son entering the monastery and by Roger and Muriel's additional endowments made on the occasion,⁷⁰⁷ would surely have made up any deficiency in spiritual benefit wrought by patronising the less austere order.

⁷⁰⁶ C. Butler, *Benedictine Monachism: Studies in Benedictine Life and Rule* (London 1919), p. 295.

⁷⁰⁷ *Cart. Blackborough*, f. 31r, no. vi. Printed in *Monasticon*, 4 p. 207, no. IV.

Although we find Ralph de Scales, brother of Roger de Scales, as a witness to a de Vere charter in favour of Monks Horton, the de Scales family itself seems not to have patronised their lords' foundations. Reginald de Scales, probably a son of Roger, made a grant of 40d annual rent to Castle Acre Priory from land that he held of Robert de Vere, but there is no evidence that he made any similar gifts to Monks Horton. Emma Cownie has pointed out that not all tenants patronised their lords' foundations, and perhaps less so where they held of more than one lord.⁷⁰⁸ The Scales family's reluctance to do so, however, might be attributed to their own plans to found a religious house at Blackborough for monks of the Benedictine order. The choice of order for their priory also tends to reinforce the argument that Muriel, Roger's wife and co-founder, was a daughter of Robert de Vere by his first marriage. That family connection would have reinforced the lord and tenant relationship that existed between Robert and Roger, serving as an additional factor in influencing the decision over which religious order Roger selected for his priory. We have no charter from Robert de Vere confirming Roger and Muriel's benefactions to their foundation, perhaps because Robert was dead by the time that Blackborough Priory was established. Nor do we have a royal charter of confirmation. But episcopal approval was provided by John of Oxford, bishop of Norwich (1175 to 1200) when he granted the nuns, 'in the fresh use of their settlement', the church of Middleton with all its appurtenances. The gift must have been made after 1190 and before 2 June 1200, and the charter refers to Middleton church as already being ministered to by a vicar.⁷⁰⁹ Before 1190 it had been a rector who had the ministry of the church. John of Oxford died on 2 June 1200.

⁷⁰⁸ E. Cownie, *Religious Patronage in Anglo-Norman England, 1066–1135* (Woodbridge 1998), p.175.

⁷⁰⁹ *Cart. Blackborough*, f. 131r, no. 190.

Whilst eschewing the fashion for the new orders, Roger and Muriel appear to have been caught up in the growing cult surrounding the Virgin Mary, for their foundation was dedicated to Saint Mary as one of two saints, the other being Saint Katherine the Virgin. In that dedication they were following their local contemporaries, for Pentney, Rudham, and Walsingham all included the Virgin Mary as principal dedicatee. That trend could also be observed in eastern Norfolk, where Carrow in Norwich, founded c. 1146, and Buckenham, founded 1151-2,⁷¹⁰ were both dedicated to Saint Mary, with Buckenham additionally pledged to Saint James and All Saints. Nearby Walsingham, with its shrine dedicated to the Virgin, would soon become one of the major Marian cult centres in England, equalling in renown the shrine of the Virgin Mary at Rocamadour, in the distant foothills of the Massif Central. This was a cult that also attracted adherents from the ruling houses of Europe. As Vincent has noted, both Louis IX and Alfonso X of Castille were devoted to the cult, with Henry II's itinerary devised according to important Marian feast days. Thus, when he crossed the Channel on 7 December 1154, the eve of the Virgin's Conception, to arrive in England on the day itself for his crowning as king at Westminster a few days later. He returned to Normandy for a crown wearing at Rouen cathedral on 2 February 1156, the feast of the Purification of the Virgin Mary. And finally, his crossing again to Normandy on 14 August 1158 coincided with the feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary.⁷¹¹

⁷¹⁰ See n.704.

⁷¹¹ N. Vincent, 'King Henry III and the Blessed Virgin Mary', in *The Church and Mary*, ed. R. N. Swanson (Woodbridge 2004), 126-46, p. 129; Vincent, 2011, p. 174.

Concluding Remarks

Roger's choices regarding religious order and dedication were most likely an accommodation between his ability to fund the venture, family pressures to identify with and emulate his lord's choice of religious order, a wish to proclaim his wealth and status, and his desire to indulge the growing devotion to Mary, which was locally very strong. It is also worth noting that Middleton parish church, although probably replaced by a larger building in the thirteenth century, was dedicated to the Virgin Mary. With the construction of a manor house and the probable establishment of a deer park, the founding of Blackborough Priory by Roger de Scales can be seen as an example of a knightly tenant, an important figure in his community, definitely on the rise, exercising his lordship to demonstrate his standing and wealth. The Scales family's status as lords of the manor of Middleton, is reflected in their (perhaps much later) coat of arms, preserved in a stained-glass window in Middleton parish church: a red shield with six silver scallops, technically 'gules six scallops argent'.⁷¹²

⁷¹² William Page, in his edition of *The Victoria History of the County of Hertford*, iii, p. 248, has wrongly attributed the de Scales arms to Hardwin de Scalariis and his descendants. Undoubtedly he erred here in confusing Scalariis with Scales. As has been demonstrated, the families of Scales and Scalariis, or Scalers, were entirely distinct, and there is no evidence that the Scalariis family had any connection with Middleton, Norfolk, or, indeed, with the church of St Mary the Virgin, so there would be no reason why their coat of arms would be found in the church. Underlining that statement is the fact that Robert de Scales (d. 1305), son of Robert de Scales (d. 1267), granted to the nuns at Blackborough the advowson of the churches of Middleton, South Raynham, and a moiety of the church of Wetherden, Suffolk, with all their appurtenances: *Cart. Blackborough*, f. 32r, no. xv. The Robert, son of Robert, who made the gift is identified in a modern list of those who had the right to present to the vicarage (beginning in 1191), affixed to the north wall at the west end of the church. The first year when the prioress of Blackborough Priory exercised that right is given as 1312.



Fig. 9. The de Scales arms as displayed in the church of Saint Mary the Virgin, Middleton, Norfolk.

Chapter 8

Sibton Abbey: A Spiritual Castle

Abstract

Founded in 1150 by William de Chesney, sheriff of Norfolk, for the Cistercian order, William located his abbey in the heartlands of territory dominated by Hugh Bigod, the master of eastern Suffolk, and an enemy of the king. William was the son of Robert fitz Walter, but who had adopted his mother's name of Chesney, probably to avoid confusion with a younger brother with the same given name by Robert's second marriage. William's spiritual motives for his foundation are given as being for the souls of his father and mother and his brother John, for the salvation of the souls of his wife, Gill, and himself and his heirs and all his forefathers (*parentum*) and friends, alive and dead. William endowed his abbey with all his demesne lands including churches and other interests of his fee in Sibton, Wrabton, Yoxford, Peasenhall, and Strickland (*Stikinglond*) with the land of *Katecliva* and *Manacokesacre* (neither identified) in Dunwich including woods, meadows, fields, pastures and other interests reserving the homage with rent of 18s in Strickland parish and the homage with 28s in Wrabton parish. He further gave them all of *Chuhag* and *Algareshag*, (neither identified) all escheated lands which his men whom he retains, or which other of his men have given, sold or exchanged with the abbey. He gave permission for anyone of his men to take up the religious life if they so wished and he also confirmed the exchange which they made with Robert de Raimes and with Mainard of Peasenhall or with their neighbours. The grant was made free of all services, scutage and military

service, castle guard and all aids.⁷¹³ He made a further grant in free alms in which the land of *Kattecliva* was designated for the benefit of sick monks in the infirmary, and including the land of Godwin and Weenild of the fee of Walter son of Robert.⁷¹⁴ Peasenhall, Yoxford, and Strickland were manors in which Roger Bigod had been a Domesday tenant, and which came to be held by his son, Hugh Bigod. While there already exists a comprehensive study of the Sibton Abbey cartularies and charters by Philippa Brown⁷¹⁵ which, among other things provides a detailed account of William's family, cameos of the benefactors, and an analysis of the possessions of the abbey, she does not consider the political circumstances and power dynamics in East Anglia that must have influenced the decisions of those involved in negotiating Sibton's foundation. In what follows, therefore, I shall consider the politics of the secular and spiritual landscape in the context of the armed conflict that defined Stephen's reign, forming the backdrop to and shaping the strategic decisions of the abbey's founder and his associates. It will be argued here that the abbey's foundation was not just an expression of piety by the founder, but, by its timing and location, was also a political act designed to provide a spiritual deterrent and a royal presence against Hugh Bigod's aggression and dominance within the county of Suffolk. To begin with, however, it is necessary to set out the circumstances of the foundation of the abbey and provide a history of the founder and his family. In that regard, some of what follows relies on Brown's comprehensive account.

⁷¹³ *Cart Sibton*, iii, no. 471.

⁷¹⁴ *Ibid*, no. 473.

⁷¹⁵ *Cart. Sibton*.

The Founder and his Family

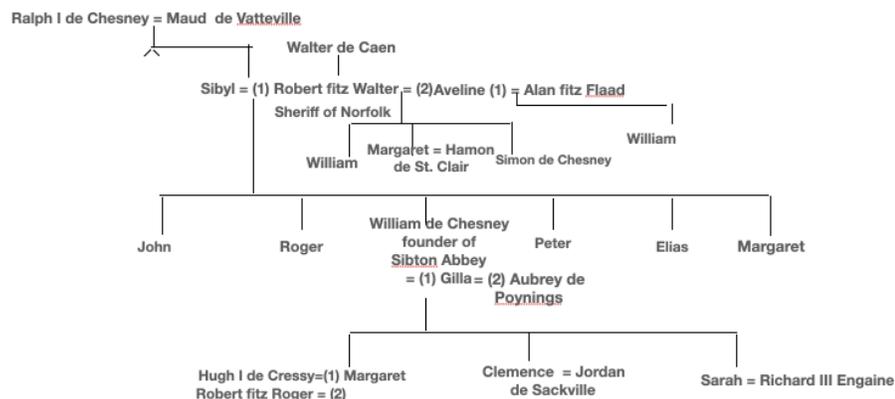


Fig. 10. Ralph I de Chesney pedigree via his daughter Sibyl

The Cistercian abbey of Sibton was founded in 1150 by William de Chesney, also known as William of Norwich and as William, son of Robert the sheriff, this being the date generally accepted by most scholars, although the fifteenth century cartulary of the abbey suggests 1149.⁷¹⁶ It was established as a daughter house of Warden Abbey in Bedfordshire, itself the earliest Cistercian house founded in that county, endowed in 1136 by Walter Espec who had also founded Rievaulx in Yorkshire.⁷¹⁷ Warden, which was the closest Cistercian house to this part of

⁷¹⁶ Ibid, i, p.1, and n.1, and see iii, nos. 470-71.

⁷¹⁷ J. Burton and R. Stalley, 'Tables of Cistercian affiliations', in *Cistercian Art and Architecture in the British Isles*, ed. C. Norton and D. Park (Cambridge 1986), p. 396.

Suffolk, colonised Sibton, the only Cistercian house in East Anglia, with an abbot and twelve monks. William was the grandson of the Domesday tenant, William de Caen, who had held estates in Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex of Robert Malet's honour of Eye.⁷¹⁸ Walter's lands in Norfolk came to be known as the barony of Horsford, where Walter built a castle, and for which he owed the service of ten knights' fees to the honour of Eye. Walter also held lands in Suffolk of Richard fitz Gilbert of the honour of Clare, at Helmingham.⁷¹⁹ His entire estate eventually passed to William de Chesney through William's father, Robert son of Walter, Walter's only known child. Robert married Sybil, daughter of Ralph I de Chesney, from whom William took his name: a fact that has led to repeated confusion with Ralph I's son and heir, also called William de Chesney, who in 1140, as we have earlier seen, founded an Augustinian priory at Rudham, later moved to Coxford. Ralph was a Domesday tenant of William de Warenne in Norfolk and Sussex, and his family were benefactors of the Warenne foundation at Lewes.⁷²⁰ Robert fitz Walter and Sybil together founded the priory of Horsham St Faith in Norfolk, c. 1105, which was apparently established at Kirkscroft, but moved to nearby Horsham following the collapse of its earlier buildings. Sybil was dead by 1126 when Robert is found confirming a grant to Gloucester Abbey with his second wife, Aveline, widow of Alan fitz Flaad.⁷²¹ This gift was later confirmed by King Stephen.⁷²²

Robert had children from both his marriages. With Sybil he fathered John and Roger, both of whom died childless, and William (de Chesney) the founder of Sibton. Robert seems also to have had two other sons by Sybil: Peter and Elias, both of whom are referred to in charters granted by

⁷¹⁸ *Domesday Norfolk*, i, 7:3, 4, 8, 12-13, 15; ii, 66:57, 61; *Suffolk*, i, 6:5, 7, 12, 90, 93, 98-9, 103, 143, 162, 165, 168-70, 173, 191, 245, 264, 285, 301, 316; ii, 33:2; *Essex*, 44:4.

⁷¹⁹ *Domesday Suffolk*, ii, 25:61.

⁷²⁰ *Lewes Cart.*, i, p. 38; ii, pp. 46-7.

⁷²¹ *Cart. Sibton*, i, p. 10; *Cart. Gloucester*, i, p.103; ii, p. 48.

⁷²² *Cart. Gloucester*, ii, p. 45; *Regesta*, iii, no. 353.

William de Chesney to St. John's Colchester. In one, by which he gifted to the monastery 40s. of land in his manor of Hoo (*Hou*), William styled himself sheriff of Norwich, making his gift for the souls of his father and mother and his brothers John, Roger, Elias, and William, and his sister Margaret. Among others it was witnessed by his brother Peter and by Henry, a monk of Sibton, so datable either between 1149 and 1154, or when he was sheriff under Henry II, between 1157 and 1163, but as will be argued, more likely during the former period. In a second charter, by which he granted Colchester a further 40 s. of rent from his lands and mill in Ling, he referred to his brothers and sister, naming them as in the previous charter. He does not style himself sheriff here, so this second charter may have been issued before he became sheriff under Henry II, so between 1154 and 1157, or alternatively, after he ceased to be sheriff, after 1163.⁷²³ The brother named William must be a son of his father's union with Aveline, their other children being Margaret and Simon. However, Aveline by her previous marriage to Alan son of Flaad (d. c. 1114) had a son called William who was her heir, so we may here possibly have a reference to him as stepbrother. However, it was customary in some families to supply sons with a name already given to an existing sibling as a safeguard to ensure that the name survived, should the elder sibling not survive. If that was the case here, it might explain why William adopted the family name of his mother, de Chesney, thus avoiding confusion with a younger half-brother who would have been known as William son of Robert. Indeed, one of the witnesses to William de Chesney's charter relating to Hoo was styled William son of Robert, so might well have been William, the son of the union between Robert fitz Walter and Aveline, and thus William's half-brother. It is significant that a William son of Robert gifted Castle Acre Priory ten shillings from his mill at Newton, in a charter to be dated c. 1166.⁷²⁴ Newton and its mill were held by Alan son

⁷²³ *Cart. Colchester*, i, pp. 172, 180.

⁷²⁴ Harley 2110, f. 29/23v, no. 193.

of Flaad, as is apparent from Alan's charter dated 1100 X 1114, by which he, together with his wife Avelina, gave to the monks of Castle Acre lands and privileges, including three shillings from his mill at Newton.⁷²⁵ As Avelina had been included in the charter, Newton was probably part either of her *maritagium* or her dower. William son of Robert by Avelina, it seems, came to hold Newton. The relationship between Simon and William son of Robert, is confirmed in a charter issued by Simon of Norfolk in favour of the monks of Castle Acre, by which he confirmed the grants of his ancestors 'since the time of Alan son of Flaad', and 'specifically the land Aveline my mother granted'. These they were to hold as on the day that Simon received the honour of Mileham, save for the mill of Newton, from which the monks had received 10 shillings by the grant of Simon's brother, William. The charter is probably of the late twelfth century.⁷²⁶

Margaret, daughter of Robert fitz Walter and Aveline, married Hamo de St Clair, sheriff of Essex in 1127, and bailiff of Colchester between 1128 and 1130.⁷²⁷ c.1150, as Margaret lay dying, she issued a charter to St John's Colchester, addressed to William, bishop of Norwich, and her brother, William de Chesney ('Willelmo de Caisneto fratri suo'), here naming her father as Robert and her mother as Aveline, so confirming her identity as Margaret, William's half-sister. The grant itself concerned land in her manor of Stoke, her marriage portion, gifted for her soul and for her body to be buried at the abbey, and referring to her brother, John, and her husband, Hamo (de St Clair). It was witnessed by her brother, Simon.⁷²⁸ Her husband, Hamo's charter to Colchester confirming his wife's gift was witnessed by Simon, brother of Margaret, as third

⁷²⁵ Harley 2110, f. 26/20r, no. 159.

⁷²⁶ Ibid, f. 26/29r, no. 160.

⁷²⁷ *Cart. Sibton*, p. 12; *Regesta*, ii, nos. 1498, 1821-2, 1824; *P R 31 Henry I*, p. 109.

⁷²⁸ *Cart. Colchester*, i, p. 159.

witness, and addressed to William de Chesney, Hamo's 'dear friend'.⁷²⁹ None of William de Chesney's charters mention a brother named Simon, who, as Simon de Caisneto, testified to Archbishop Theobald and William, bishop of Norwich, that his sister Margaret had gifted her manor of Stoke to Colchester as she lay dying.⁷³⁰

William married Gilla, of whom little is known save that she attested the two foundation charters of Sibton.⁷³¹ William had three daughters by his wife Gilla: Margaret, Clemence, and Sarah. Clemence married Jordon de Sackville, and Sarah married Richard III Engaine. Margaret, who inherited the bulk of her father's lands, married firstly Hugh I de Cressy, and then Robert I, son of Roger, ancestor of the Clavering family.⁷³²

William may have been married a second time to Aubrey de Poynings, as suggested both by L. F. Salzman and William Farrer. Both rely upon a charter in the Lewes cartulary, by which William 'de Kaysneto' and Aubrey his wife, granted the priory a virgate of land called *Wilanesdena*, dated c. 1165.⁷³³ In the 1160s there were at least three de Chesneys with the name William, a point that Saltzman concedes.⁷³⁴ Apart from William de Chesney, the son of Sibyl de Chesney and Robert fitz Walter, founder of Sibton, there was William de Chesney, son of Ralph I de Chesney who founded Rudham as a Warenne tenant. There was also William de Chesney, son of Roger de Chesney, who was governor of Oxford and a staunch supporter of King Stephen. He was married to Margaret de Lucy.⁷³⁵ No evidence exists as to the identity of the wife of

⁷²⁹ Ibid, i. p. 159; *Cart. Sibton*, i, p. 12 and n. 43.

⁷³⁰ *Cart. Colchester*, i, p. 163.

⁷³¹ *Cart. Sibton*, i, p. 13; iii, nos. 471, 473.

⁷³² Ibid, i, pp. 21-4 where a comprehensive account of the daughters' marriages and claims by Clemence and Sarah to a share of the de Chesney lands can be found.

⁷³³ Salzman, 1924, p. 27; *Honors*, iii, p. 317; *Lewes Cart.*, ii, p. 62.

⁷³⁴ Salzman, 1924, p. 27.

⁷³⁵ Ibid, p. 31. A charter given by William at Verneuil for Lincoln Cathedral was attested by 'Marg(areta) de Luci, uxor mea'. Referred to by Salter in *Cart. Eynsham*, i, p. 41.

William de Chesney, the founder of Rudham priory. As previously indicated, his foundation charter makes no reference to a wife, and as John, his nephew, appears to have been his heir, he might not have married, or if he did, his wife almost certainly predeceased him.⁷³⁶ John, in his confirmation charter, states that he had made his gifts for the souls of his grandfather, Ralph de Querceto, and his uncle, William de Querceto ('Querceto' or 'of the oak' synonymous with the name form 'Chesney'), suggesting that by this time, *c.* 1148, William was dead.⁷³⁷ There was, though, another contemporary William de Chesney, namely a nephew of William de Chesney of Oxford and son of that William's elder brother, Hugh. William and his brother, Ralph, were both witnesses to their uncle William's grant of ten acres in his demesne of Marston St Lawrence to Philip, son of William. In the charter they are styled as 'Radulfus de Caisneto et Willelmus frater suus nepotes mei'.⁷³⁸ Salzman has demonstrated that this William de Chesney was married to Sybil,⁷³⁹ who herself, as wife of William de Chesney, attested a charter of Geldewin son of Savaric (de Bohon) in favour of Boxgrove Priory. By this Geldewin granted the monks the mill of *Butheswille*, the land pertaining to it and the land of the same spring 'as Walter de Chesnei gave them'. This charter has been dated *c.* 1167.⁷⁴⁰ Aubrey de Chesney, therefore, seems more likely to have been the second wife of William de Chesney fitz Robert, the founder of Sibton Abbey.

It has been suggested that William de Chesney, son of Robert, was related to his namesake, William de Chesney of Oxford. Philippa Brown, relying upon Salzman, suggests that Roger de

⁷³⁶ Saunders, 1910, p. 330.

⁷³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 331-2.

⁷³⁸ *The Registrum Antiquissimum of the Cathedral Church of Lincoln*, ed. C. W. Foster, iii, Lincoln Record Society (Hereford 1935), p. 239, no. 894.

⁷³⁹ Salzman, 1924, pp. 33-4.

⁷⁴⁰ *Chartulary of the Priory of Boxgrove*, trans. and ed. by L. Fleming, Sussex Record Society, vol. LIX (Lewes 1960), p. 71, no. 103.

Chesney, son of Ralph I de Chesney, and younger brother to Sybil, William's mother, might have been the founder of the Oxfordshire branch of the Chesney family.⁷⁴¹ Salzman himself relied upon the entry in the relevant Sussex volume of the *Victoria County History*, where the author declares that 'Ralf de 'Caisned', who held of [William de Warenne] at Plumpton, is believed to have been named from Quesnay between St Lô and Caen'.⁷⁴² However, the *VCH* is clearly in error. Plumpton was held of William de Warenne not by 'Ralph de Caisned', but by Hugh fitz Ranulf. In 1086 it was valued at £25.⁷⁴³ If it were the case that Roger, son of Ralph I de Chesney, was the founder of the Oxfordshire branch of the Chesney family, then William of Oxford and Robert, bishop of Lincoln, would have been cousins to William of Norwich, whilst Gilbert Foliot, bishop of Hereford and later, bishop of London, would have been a second cousin.⁷⁴⁴ However, an analysis of the respective families' origins and Domesday holdings makes this unlikely. Ralph I de Chesney is not known to have held any land in Oxfordshire. All his manors were in Norfolk and Sussex, held of William de Warenne.⁷⁴⁵ Loyd suggests that the family originated from Le Quesnay (Seine-Maritime, cant. Neuchâtel-en-Bray, com. Saint-Saëns), although Vincent prefers nearby Le Quesnay (cant. Gournay-en-Bray, com. Mauquenchy).⁷⁴⁶ Salzman, though, in discussing the origins of this family, declares that they

⁷⁴¹ *Cart. Sibton*, i, p. 10; Salzman, 1924, pp. 21, 29, 32-3. B. D. Hill has also suggested that the two families were connected. *English Cistercian Monasteries and their Patrons in the Twelfth Century* (Urbanal 1968), p. 31.

⁷⁴² *VCH, Sussex*, i, p. 378.

⁷⁴³ *Domesday Sussex*, 12:42.

⁷⁴⁴ Gilbert writes in his letters that Robert, bishop of Lincoln, and William of Oxfordshire, were his uncles. *Gilbert Foliot and His Letters*, ed. A. Morey and C. Brooke (Cambridge 1965), pp. 783, 919. In another letter addressed to William de Chesney, when Gilbert was abbot of St Peter's of Gloucester (1139-1148), in response to a demand for a contribution, presumably to fund Stephen's war efforts, Gilbert writes that he is responding to his request as a nephew to an uncle and grudgingly sends him fifteen marks. Gilbert was an ardent supporter of the Angevin cause and in his letter predicted that when William died, he would hear the wailing of widows and the complaints of churches, adding that there were no saints that he had not offended. *The Letters and Charters of Gilbert Foliot*, ed. A. Morey and C. N. L. Brooke (Cambridge 1967), pp. 54-5; For Gilbert's support of the empress, see Crouch, 2013, pp. 76, 101.

⁷⁴⁵ *Domesday Norfolk*, i, 8:15, 24, 108,122. *Domesday Sussex*, 61:12-13, 33-4, 49-50.

⁷⁴⁶ Loyd, pp. 27-8; Vincent, 'New Sayings', p.5 and n.23. C. L. N. Brooke implicitly accepts that the Roger de Chesney, who fathered William of Oxford, was the son of Ralph I de Chesney, for in his biography of Gilbert Foliot

came from Quesnay ‘between St Lô and Caen’.⁷⁴⁷ Salzman must be referring here to the ancient commune of Quesnay-Guesnon in the département of Calvados, 32 kilometres east of St Lô and 33 kilometres west of Caen. However, Quesnay-Guesnon is 200 kilometres west of either of the Le Quesnays in Seine-Maritime, so part of an entirely different history. There was indeed a de Chesney family that originated from Quesnay-Guesnon, but as we shall see, it was not the family of Ralph I de Chesney. The Seine-Maritime Le Quesnays lie only eight kilometres from Bellencombte, the *caput* of the Warenne fief in Normandy, from whom Ralph I de Chesney held his lands.⁷⁴⁸ These then passed to his eldest son, Ralph II de Chesney, although he gave part of his manor of Rudham to his daughter Sybil as her marriage portion when she married Robert son of Walter de Caen. If his next youngest son, Roger, received anything, it would have been in the form of lands in Norfolk or Sussex. The Roger de Chesney who was father of the William de Chesney of Oxfordshire fame, married Alice de Langetot, daughter of Ralph de Langetot. She is probably the Aliz de Langetot who gave Eynsham Abbey three virgates of her land in Somerton, Oxfordshire. In her charter of gift, issued 1142 X 1148, and by then widowed, she declared that she made this grant for the soul of her lord, Roger de Chesney, as well as her children, and that her sons William de Chesney, Hugh, and Robert had consented to the gift in perpetuity.⁷⁴⁹ With his wife, Roger had at least ten children, eight of whom are named in Alice’s charter to

he writes that ‘Gilbert’s mother was probably a daughter of Roger de Chesney (from Le Quesnay, Seine-Maritime, Normandy) and Alice de Langetot’. As we shall see, Roger de Chesney and his wife, Alice, had at least ten children, including the William de Chesney who became William of Oxford, Robert de Chesney who became bishop of Lincoln, and a daughter, Agnes who married Robert Foliot, steward of David, King of Scots, when he was earl of Huntingdon, and who was the mother of Gilbert Foliot. C. N. L. Brooke, ‘Foliot, Gilbert (c. 1110–1187), Benedictine monk and bishop of London’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 23 Sep. 2004; Accessed 1 May. 2023. <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-9792>.

⁷⁴⁷ Salzman, 1924, p. 32.

⁷⁴⁸ Loyd, 1951, pp. 111-12; Round, 1902, p. 8. And see L. C. Loyd ‘The Origin of the Family of Warenne’, in *The Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, XXXI, (1933), 97-113.

⁷⁴⁹ *Cart. Eynsham*, no. 124.

Eynsham: Hugh, William, Roger, Ralph, Robert, Beatrice, Isabel, and Hawise. Another, Agnes, married Robert Foliot, and was mother to Gilbert Foliot, future bishop of London.⁷⁵⁰ Roger de Chesney's son Robert became bishop of Lincoln at the end of 1148. William, Robert's brother, became Stephen's director of military operations in Oxfordshire and governor of Oxford castle: 'Erat in ipso tempore Willelmus de Chamai (sic), civitatis Oxenfordia preses, regalisque militie dux et assignator'.⁷⁵¹ In 1147 William granted Oseney Abbey the island of Medley, near Oxford, for the souls of his father and of Roger his brother, and for the salvation of King Stephen, the Queen, and Eustace their son. The deed was witnessed by 'Robert my brother archdeacon of Leicester', which is the position that Robert held before being promoted to bishop of Lincoln, and Hugh de Chesney ('de Cheneto').⁷⁵²

Ralph de Langetot, father of Alice, held manors of Walter Giffard in Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, and Suffolk, as well as at Hempton in Oxfordshire.⁷⁵³ In the time of William I he witnessed a charter of Walter Giffard granting Beckenham (Suffolk) to the abbey of Bec.⁷⁵⁴ Alice de Langetot's granddaughter, Matilda, was recorded in 1186 as holding Campton, Beds., which Ralph de Langetot had held in 1086 as a tenant of Walter Giffard. This strongly suggests that Alice was indeed the daughter of Ralph de Langetot.⁷⁵⁵ Roger, whom Alice married, appears to have been a Domesday tenant of Robert d'Oilly, holding the manors Heyford and Ducklington, both in Oxfordshire, and Wicken in Northamptonshire.⁷⁵⁶ In these circumstances, he is most unlikely to have been a son of Ralph I de Chesney. According to Keats-Rohan, the

⁷⁵⁰ See note 740.

⁷⁵¹ *Chronicles*, iii, p. 115.

⁷⁵² *Cart. Oseney*, p. 87, no. 62A.

⁷⁵³ *Domesday Beds.*, 16;5-6, 8-9; *Bucks.*, 14;19, 33, 35-6, 43, 48; *Suffolk*, i, 45;1, 3; *Oxfordshire*, 20;4.

⁷⁵⁴ *Monasticon*, 6, part 2, p. 1001.

⁷⁵⁵ *Rotuli de Dominabus et Pueris et Puellis*, ed. and trans. by J. Walmsley (Tempe, Arizona 2006), no. 65; *Domesday Book*, p. 568.

⁷⁵⁶ *DP*, p. 402; *Domesday Oxford*, 28:12, 20; *Domesday Northampton*, 28:1.

Chesney family itself originated from Quesnay-Guesnon, Calvados, cant. Vaumont-l'Evente.⁷⁵⁷

Quesnay-Guesnon is near the 'berceau' of the d'Oilly family, Oilly-le-Basset, suggesting that the family of William de Chesney of Oxfordshire originated from Quesnay-Guesnon, with no connection save by name to the family of William de Chesney of Norwich which almost certainly sprang from Le Quesnay, Seine-Maritime, 200 kilometres to the east.

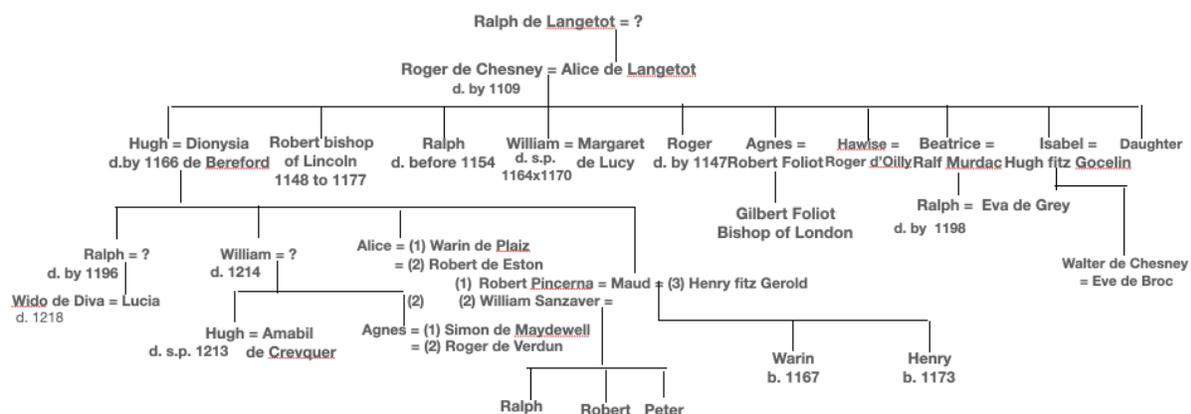


Fig. 11. Chesney-Langetot Pedigree.

The Founder's Estates

By the 1140s, the Norwich de Chesney family estates were extensive. In addition to what had been held of Robert Malet in 1086, which included lands in the manors of Sibton, Strickland and Peasenhall, they now included lands in the manors of Moor and Filby, both in Norfolk, and in

⁷⁵⁷ DP, p. 380.

Norwich, granted to William's father and his heirs by Henry I in 1111.⁷⁵⁸ William also came to hold Blickling, Norfolk, granted to his brother, John, by Everard, bishop of Norwich. He also acquired seven knights' fees of Queen Matilda's honour of Boulogne, in Ashwellthorpe, Little Massingham, Anmer, Fring (Frenge) and Witchingham, all originally in Essex, now in Cambridgeshire.⁷⁵⁹ From King Stephen, he received the manor of Acle, Norfolk.⁷⁶⁰ His other possessions included a knight's fee held from the de Rye honour of Hockering at Wroxham, Norfolk; another held from Roger of Kentwell in Suffolk; a Suffolk fee held of the bishop of Ely; another held from Bury St Edmunds, at Long Melford, Suffolk which had been granted to his father by Abbot Anselm, and the manor of Ling in Norfolk.⁷⁶¹

William as Sheriff

William often styled himself 'William the sheriff' and was sometimes known as 'William of Norwich', not a title that William, himself adopted but one used by others when referring to him.⁷⁶² Reference has previously been made to King Stephen's writ concerning the abbot of St. Benet's hundreds of Flegg and Happing, in which William de Chesney is addressed as 'William of Norwich'. A William de Chesney appears regularly at Stephen's court, attesting eighteen of Stephen's charters as assembled in the *Regesta*, one issued by Queen Matilda and one by Stephen's son and heir, Count Eustace.⁷⁶³ Many of those charters might have been witnessed by the Oxfordshire William de Chesney, as several were issued at Oxford or other Thames Valley

⁷⁵⁸ *Regesta*, ii, no. 987.

⁷⁵⁹ *Red Book*, ii, p. 576; *Cart. Sibton*, i, p. 15.

⁷⁶⁰ *Regesta*, iii, no. 176.

⁷⁶¹ *Cart. Sibton*, i, pp. 15-16; *Feudal Documents*, no. 125.

⁷⁶² See *P R 13 Henry II*, p. 32; *P R 14 Henry II*, pp. 21, 222; *P R 16 Henry II*, p. 10; *P R 17 Henry II*, p. 8; *P R 18 Henry II*, pp. 29-30; *P R 20 Henry II*, p. 43; *Red Book*, i, pp. 37, 49, 142, 365 and p. 410 where he is styled *Willelmus de Chaisneto de Norum*, *Norum* translated in the index as Norwich, p. 1139, ii, p. 576; *Cartae*, CLXXXVII/33, CCXXI, CCXXVII/2.

⁷⁶³ *Regesta*, iii, 5, 127, 131, 183, 191-2, 221-2, 297, 360, 367, 427, 455, 481, 486, 588, 612, 614, 865, 974.

locations.⁷⁶⁴ In his own charters William employed a variety of nomenclatures, but in none that we know of did he style himself 'William of Norwich'. In his foundation charter for Sibton, for instance, he styled himself simply as 'William the sheriff, son of Robert'.⁷⁶⁵ In one of his charters in favour of Colchester Abbey he styled himself 'William de Chaineto'.⁷⁶⁶ His charter issued in favour of Blythburgh Priory, datable between 1157 and 1174 (his date of death) he describes him as William de Chesney, son of Robert fitz Walter.⁷⁶⁷ If the William, who with his wife Aubrey, *c.* 1165, granted Lewes Priory a virgate of land at *Wilanesdena* (not identified) is our William de Chesney, then again he styled himself 'de Chesney'.⁷⁶⁸ Round has suggested that the style 'William of Norwich' indicated a claim to a *de facto* hereditary shrievalty, in this case linking William to the chief city of his region, in much the same way that the name Miles 'of Gloucester' proclaimed similar status elsewhere.⁷⁶⁹ That may be so. But the writ addressed to 'William of Norwich' may simply have been intended to distinguish 'our' William from William de Chesney of Oxfordshire. It is significant, nonetheless, that in two of his charters, issued 1150 X 1154, one in favour of Colchester Abbey and the second to Colne Priory, William adopts the style 'William sheriff of Norwich'.⁷⁷⁰ I have suggested that this followed the reduction of William's shrieval jurisdiction from Norfolk and Suffolk to merely the city of Norwich, Roger Gulafre and William Frehnei having been appointed as county sheriffs, *c.* 1150. Perhaps in styling himself sheriff of Norwich in those two charters William sought to proclaim his reduced but still significant local power.

⁷⁶⁴ *Cart. Sibton*, i, p. 20.

⁷⁶⁵ *Cart. Sibton*, nos. 471, 473, 478.

⁷⁶⁶ *Cart. Colchester*, p. 180.

⁷⁶⁷ *Blythburgh Priory Cartulary*, 2 vols., ed. C. Harper-Bill, Suffolk Record Society (Woodbridge 1980-1981), i, no. 42.

⁷⁶⁸ *Lewes Cart.*, ii, p. 92.

⁷⁶⁹ Round, 1920, p. 490.

⁷⁷⁰ *Cart. Colchester*, p. 172; *Cart. Colne*, no. 97.

As one-time sheriffs of Norfolk and Suffolk and castellans of Norwich castle, the Norfolk de Chesneys were a regionally significant family. Undoubtedly, they were supporters of the royalist cause. The appointment of both John and William as sheriffs of Norfolk and Suffolk, Stephen's grant of lands and privileges, their presence at his court, their role as witnesses to his charters, and Stephen's support for William's foundation of Sibton⁷⁷¹ all demonstrate that they were within the king's affinity and held to his cause throughout Stephen's reign. William, who after 1141, had William Martel, the king's steward, as his lord for his holdings of the honour of Eye, was also within the affinity of the Warenne family as were others of his kin. Not only this, but he was associated with the abbot of Bury St Edmunds, with the Clares in Suffolk, and with the de Rye family barony of Hockering, itself with close connections to the de Tosnys, another important East Anglian family.⁷⁷² After 1154, William fell into line with the regime of Henry II, who appointed him sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk at Easter 1157, a role in which he served until some time before Michaelmas 1163.⁷⁷³ During this period, he was granted the manor of Blythburgh as a single knight's fee, which his brother John had held before him, but which had reverted to the crown upon John's death in 1146/7. This may have been given to him in exchange for the manor of Acle, granted by King Stephen, but restored to Hugh Bigod, earl of Norfolk, by Henry II after 1155.⁷⁷⁴ Thereafter, William made a grant to Blythburgh Priory of lands in the manor, of a tithing of fish at Walberswick, 'and all the liberties which he as a lord can confer'.⁷⁷⁵ All of this speaks of a man who was perceived by the king, the king's family and his affinity, as a loyal supporter of the crown and an effective and trusted administrator. A powerful force in

⁷⁷¹ *Cart Sibton*, iii, no. 492; *Regesta*, iii, no. 822.

⁷⁷² *DD*, p. 661.

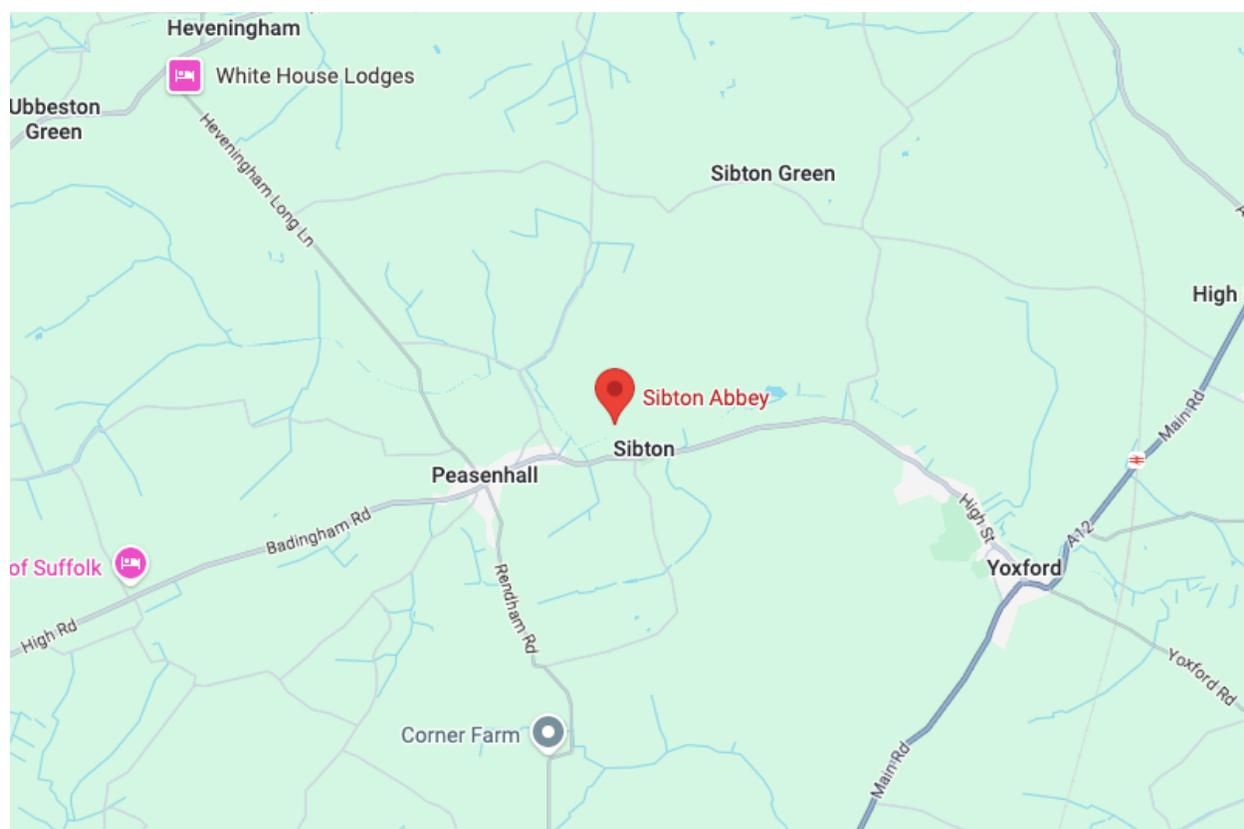
⁷⁷³ *P R 3 Henry II*, p. 76; *P R 9 Henry II*, p. 28.

⁷⁷⁴ Vincent, *LCH*, iv, nos. 1934, 1964n.

⁷⁷⁵ *Blythburgh Priory Cartulary*, i, no. 42.

Norfolk and Suffolk, William may well have seized the opportunity to enrich himself and his followers, generally abusing his office for personal and family benefit. The evidence of encroachments against the property and liberties of monastic houses in east Norfolk during King Stephen's reign, and which has been discussed previously, does indeed suggest a failure in the administration of justice that it would have been the sheriff's duty to uphold and enforce.

Motives and Location



Map 18 showing the location of Sibton Abbey

No doubt William de Chesney's decision to found a monastery came at a propitious moment. His foundation charter for Sibton has been assigned to a date at some time after 1150 and potentially

as late as 1163.⁷⁷⁶ But King Stephen issued a confirmation charter, datable 1147 X 1154 from the appearance there as witness of Reginald de Warenne, brother of William III de Warenne who had left England on crusade in May or June 1147, appointing his brother Reginald to rule his estate in his absence.⁷⁷⁷ According to the *Narratio*, William founded his monastery in response to a vow he had made to his dying brother, John.⁷⁷⁸ If this can be relied upon, then the earliest that William could have embarked upon his project would have been some time in 1146. The *Narratio* states that William received help and advice from the abbot of the Cistercian monastery of Warden, Bedfordshire. Negotiations over the land to be gifted, the lay services to be excluded, and the liberties to be granted, must have occupied months if not years.⁷⁷⁹ In any event the foundation charter in all probability came well after construction of the monastic buildings had begun and the monks and abbot were installed.⁷⁸⁰

As we know from William's charter, his lands were gifted free of all service, scutage or military obligation, castle-guard and all aids. This would have required the agreement of his lord, who at the time was William Martel, lord of the honour of Eye and the king's steward.⁷⁸¹ No doubt this too would have involved a certain amount of negotiation, as the question of who would take responsibility for such services would have to be resolved. That might well have involved consultations with Stephen, and it would be surprising if the choice of a site for the proposed monastery was not also discussed. We cannot now know why William chose the particular

⁷⁷⁶ *Cart. Sibton*, iii, no. 471.

⁷⁷⁷ *Ibid*, no. 492.

⁷⁷⁸ *Ibid*, no. 470.

⁷⁷⁹ In the case of Forde, originally Brightley, in Dorset, from having the original thought, it then took the founder, Richard fitz Baldwin, three years to see monks arrive at his foundation. C. J. Holdsworth, 'The Cistercians in Devon', in *Studies in Medieval History presented to R. Allen Brown*, ed. C. Harper-Bill, C. J. Holdsworth and J. L. Nelson (Woodbridge 1989), 179-190, p. 182.

⁷⁸⁰ Galbraith, 1934, p. 214.

⁷⁸¹ *Cart. Eye*, ii, p. 26.

location for his house, but it might be of some significance that he chose to site it in his fee of Sibton, granting to it churches, lands, and other interests, not only in Sibton but also in Yoxford, Peasenhall, and Strickland (*Stikinglond*).⁷⁸² Peasenhall, Yoxford, and Strickland were manors in which Roger Bigod had been a Domesday tenant. Yoxford TRE was held by Norman, a thane, as a manor of 100 acres. Roger subinfeudated the manor to Hugh de Corbon.⁷⁸³ Peasenhall, as two manors, was held by the same Norman TRE and thereafter, as a tenant of Roger Bigod.⁷⁸⁴ Ranulf fitz Walter, another Bigod tenant, held in Peasenhall with 60 acres.⁷⁸⁵ Ranulf's daughter, Agnes, it will be recalled, married Robert de Vaux, an important Bigod tenant and (c.1140) the founder of Pentney Priory for Augustinian canons. In Strickland, in 1086, two freemen held 80 acres as a manor of Roger Bigod, while Hugh de Corbon also held an interest there.⁷⁸⁶ (See Map 17 below, which illustrates the geographical location of the manors). Hugh Bigod presumably inherited these manors following the death of his brother, William, in November 1120. Roger Bigod, the fourth earl of Norfolk, great grandson of Hugh Bigod, who died in 1270, was recorded as holding the manor of Peasenhall as a member of Framlingham for the service of two knights' fees.⁷⁸⁷ Fordley and Darsham were Bigod manors nearby, as was Kelsale, the latter held in demesne.⁷⁸⁸

⁷⁸² *Cart. Sibton*, iii, no. 471.

⁷⁸³ *Domesday Suffolk*, i, 7:18.

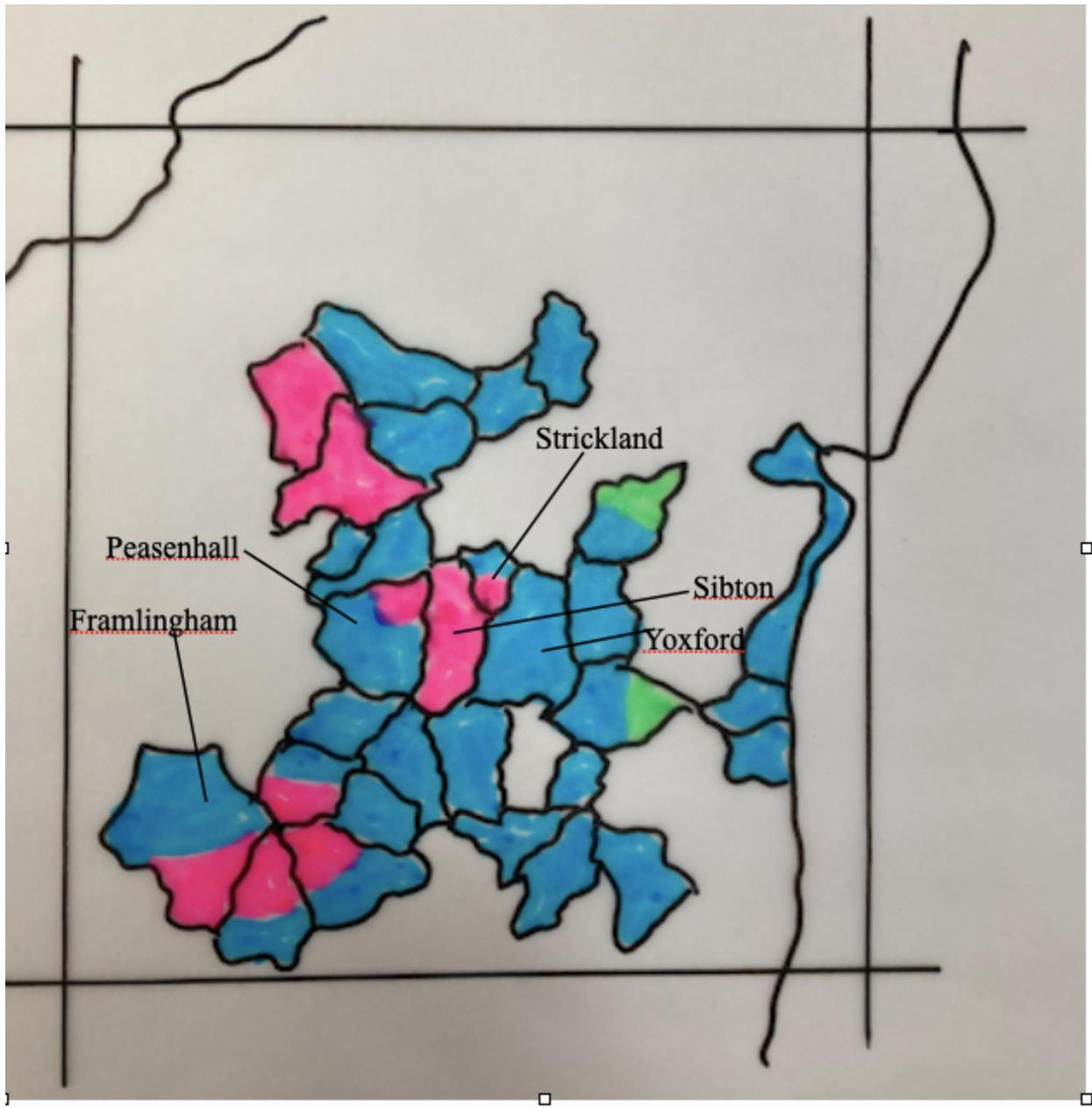
⁷⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 7:10.

⁷⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 7:20.

⁷⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 7:37.

⁷⁸⁷ *Cal. I.P.M.*, i, no. 744, p.239.

⁷⁸⁸ *Domesday Suffolk*, i, 7:30, 34, 36, 50; 7:3. And see *Cart. Sibton*, iii, no. 493, by which Roger Bigod, earl of Norfolk, (d. 1221) exchanged 21 acres and one rood of his lands for the same amount of the monks' demesne which he enclosed in his park at Kelsale. Roger Bigod was created earl in 1189.



Map 19. Part of East Suffolk showing manors held by Hugh Bigod, William de Chesney and William de Warenne

Key:

Blue: Hugh Bigod

Pink: William de Chesney

Green: William de Warenne

The *Narratio* declares that William de Chesney founded his abbey in fulfilment of a vow made by his brother, John, to endow a Cistercian monastery.⁷⁸⁹ This account is both late and far from reliable, so we do not really know if it was John's intention to found a Cistercian monastery rather than a religious house under a different order. However, William's foundation charter states that his grant was made 'to found an abbey for monks of the Cistercian order with the guidance of the abbot of Warden' ('ad faciendam abbatiam monachorum de ordine Cistercii per manum abbatis de Sartis').⁷⁹⁰ On the face of it, therefore, William planned to found a Cistercian monastery from the outset. Perhaps this choice was his rather than John's. William may have had good reasons for choosing the Cistercians over their rivals. Certainly, by the time of John's death 1146/7, England could boast nearly 50 such Cistercian monasteries, although none of them lay in East Anglia.⁷⁹¹ The order, first established at Cîteaux in the 1090s, had arrived in England in 1128 with the foundation of Waverley Abbey, growing rapidly ever since.⁷⁹² The period from 1132 through to 1150 saw the foundation of several new houses, not only in England but also in Scotland where King David founded Cistercian abbeys at Melrose in 1136 and Dundrennan in Kirkcudbright in 1142, as well as at Newbattle (1140) and Kinloss (1150), both daughter houses of Melrose. Other great lords who favoured the new order included Simon de Senlis, earl of Huntingdon, who founded Sawtry, Cambridgeshire in 1147; Gilbert de Gant, whom Stephen recognised as earl of Lincoln by 1149, who founded Rufford, Nottinghamshire, in 1143, and William de Roumare, earl of Lincoln, who founded Revesby, Lincolnshire, in 1143.⁷⁹³ The Cistercians' popularity has been attributed to several factors: that they were not expensive to

⁷⁸⁹ *Cart. Sibton*, iii, no. 170.

⁷⁹⁰ *Ibid*, no. 471.

⁷⁹¹ Pestell, 2004, p. 162.

⁷⁹² Hill, 1968, p. 5.

⁷⁹³ J. Burton and R. Stalley, 'Tables of Cistercian affiliations', in *Cistercian Art and Architecture in the British Isles*, ed. C. Norton and D. Park (Cambridge 1986), 394-401, p. 396.

found, unlike a Benedictine house; that the monks preferred wild and desolate locations with which founders were most disposed to part; and a greater availability of wealth for monastic endowments.⁷⁹⁴ Hill has challenged this view, arguing that the White Monks were awarded poor, barren, wastelands because the barons who favoured them were not prepared to offer them anything better.⁷⁹⁵ The consequences were that many foundations were hard pressed to survive, finding their land difficult to cultivate, low yielding, often marshy or lacking an adequate water supply, with an endowment inadequate to support the monks.⁷⁹⁶

One study has suggested that more than a third of all Cistercian houses in England and Wales were obliged to relocate because of inadequate sites.⁷⁹⁷ Against this, Burton and Kerr have shown that the monks themselves often selected their own sites, when invited by a founder to relocate to his land.⁷⁹⁸ One such instance involves the well-known account of the site chosen by Adam of Fountains for the abbey of Meaux. Adam was invited by the founder, William le Gros, earl of Albemarle, to survey his lands in Holderness to find a suitable spot for his abbey. Adam chose a place that was ‘well planted with woods and orchards, surrounded with rivers and waters, and favoured with a rich soil’. Amid the land was a hill named after St Mary. Adam climbed the hill, struck his staff on the ground and exclaimed “Let this place be called a palace of the eternal King, and a vineyard of heaven, and gate of life. Here be established a family of worshipers of Christ”. Unfortunately for the earl, who had already chosen this recently acquired

⁷⁹⁴ J. Burton, ‘The foundation of the British Cistercian houses’, in *Cistercian Art and Architecture in the British Isles*, 24-39, p. 34.

⁷⁹⁵ Hill, 1968, pp. 46-54.

⁷⁹⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 48-9.

⁷⁹⁷ R. A. Donkin, ‘The Site Changes of Medieval Cistercian Monasteries’, in *Geography*, 44, no. 4 (November 1959), 251-8, p. 251.

⁷⁹⁸ J. Burton and J. Kerr, *The Cistercians in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge 2011), pp. 60-62.

site to impark, Adam could not be persuaded to accept an alternative, and so William, with good grace, surrendered the whole estate to the monks for God and the blessed Virgin Mary.⁷⁹⁹

Even so, Cistercian legislation required that houses were to be established ‘in places removed from human habitation’. But it was seclusion rather than remoteness that was sought, and Janet Burton points out that most houses were close to transport links and communication routes.⁸⁰⁰ That seclusion was important in conjunction with large areas of land that remained uncultivated explains the lack of Cistercian houses in Suffolk, a county that was heavily populated and extensively cultivated, and where large tracts of the land were already in the hands of religious houses, not least by Bury St Edmunds and Ely. Sibton was the first and only Cistercian abbey to be founded in Suffolk. That is in contrast to Lincolnshire where eight Cistercian houses came to be established. This, despite that it too was relatively densely populated. However, Lincolnshire also had in abundance large areas of sparsely populated land, isolated, some of it marshy, that the monks, skilled in land management, could transform into profitable granges and sheep folds.

William had endowed Sibton with land in a river valley, so water easily obtained. The abbey, itself was sited only some 400 yards from the river Yox. The land was also fertile, but nevertheless, in one of the lesser populated parts of Suffolk with a population density of 12.1 per square mile, compared to 20.3 being the highest in the middle section of the county.⁸⁰¹ Nor is there is reason to believe that any of the land was waste, although it might have seen little in the way of cultivation. Certainly, none of the manors are so described in the Domesday survey.⁸⁰² By

⁷⁹⁹ *Chronica monasterii de melsa, a fundatione usque ad annum 1396*, ed. E. A. Bond. 3 vols. (London 1866-1868), i, pp. xiv-xv, 76-7.

⁸⁰⁰ Burton and Kerr, 2011, p.79.

⁸⁰¹ See *ante*, p.82, Map 3

⁸⁰² *Domesday Suffolk*, i, Sibton, 3,9. 6,90;93. Peasenhall, 6,92;103. 7,10;20;72. Strickland, 1,14. 6,87;98. 7,35;37. Yoxford, 7,18. 44,4.

contrast to the foundation charters of many English Cistercian abbeys, the land with which Sibton was endowed was not described as wilderness but included woods, fields, meadows, pastures, and all of William's demesne lands in Sibton, Wrabton (in Yoxford), Peasenhall and Strickland (in Yoxford).⁸⁰³ It seems clear, therefore, that the site was chosen for its fertility and longer-term sustainability. Moreover, as Philippa Brown points out, its location afforded relatively easy access to Dunwich, only seven miles to the east, and Beccles and Bungay some fifteen miles to the north, enabling the monks to attend markets there to sell their excess agricultural produce.⁸⁰⁴

Sites were sometimes offered to the Cistercians in accordance with their founder's political agenda, rather than for purely spiritual reasons.⁸⁰⁵ Butler and Kerr cite the example of the site offered by Roger de Mowbray to the monks of Old Byland, who were seeking to relocate. He gave them Stocking which he had received following its forfeiture by the Stuteville family in 1106, for their support of Robert Curthose. By 1147, however, the Stutevilles appeared to be reasserting themselves in the region and were potentially seeking to reclaim Stocking. By giving it to the monks, therefore, Roger thwarted his rivals' territorial claims.⁸⁰⁶ David Crouch cites several examples of foundations being made for political motives during Stephen's reign. For example, by Robert of Leicester, who lost Bungay to Hugh Bigod, endowing the Cistercian monasteries of Garendon and Biddlesden on contested estates, thus enabling him to maintain a degree of local influence. In the case of Garendon, founded by Robert in 1133, he was able to secure the Charnwood area of Leicestershire against the earl of Chester. The land gifted to the

⁸⁰³ Hill, 1968, p.46; *Cart. Sibton*, iii, no. 471.

⁸⁰⁴ *Cart. Sibton*, i. p. 19.

⁸⁰⁵ Burton and Kerr, 2011, p. 60.

⁸⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p. 63.

abbey had originally been held by a Chester tenant. Likewise, having deprived Robert of Meppershall of an estate at Biddlesden, Robert put it out of his rival's reach by gifting it to the abbey founded there by his steward, Ernald de Bosco in 1147.⁸⁰⁷

That the establishment of Sibton Abbey had more than spiritual meaning but was also meant as a political challenge to Bigod's regional authority, is suggested by the confirmation that William gave in his foundation charter to an exchange of lands between the monks and Robert de Raimes.⁸⁰⁸ Hugh Bigod, as we have seen, had disseised Robert's brother, Roger, of five knights' fees. It might well be that Robert, wary of suffering the same fate as his brother, had placed some of his exposed lands with the monks, so placing them beyond Bigod's reach, but receiving other lands from the monks in exchange that were less likely to receive Bigod's attention.

Unfortunately, all other records of that exchange have either been lost or destroyed. Further support for the idea that the placement of the abbey in Sibton had political implications may be had from Stephen's agreeing to provide a charter of confirmation of William's endowment.

Christopher Holdsworth points out that Stephen was not a patron of the Cistercians, having been turned against them by the support given by the abbots of Rievaulx and Fountains, together with Bernard of Clairvaux, to Henry Murdac, anti-royalist candidate for the archbishopric of York.⁸⁰⁹

By contrast the Cistercians in England came to be associated with the Angevin cause, many of its supporters being founders of Cistercian abbeys.⁸¹⁰ Of the thirty-nine Cistercian houses established in his reign, only eleven received charters of confirmation or gifts from King Stephen, of which all but two had been founded by his supporters.⁸¹¹ By providing Sibton with a

⁸⁰⁷ Crouch, 2013, p. 313.

⁸⁰⁸ *Cart. Sibton*, iii, no. 471.

⁸⁰⁹ Holdsworth, 1994, p. 226.

⁸¹⁰ Burton and Kerr, 2011, p. 41.

⁸¹¹ Holdsworth, 1994, p. 226.

confirmation charter, Stephen underlined the importance of the foundation in the context of the power dynamics of Suffolk. He also supplied an additional layer of protection to the abbot and the monks, thus represented as an outpost of royal authority and a challenge to Hugh Bigod's regional power. At some point between 1139 and 1154, Stephen granted William de Chesney the manor of Acle: a valuable manor, in 1086 part of the king's demesne, worth £14 13s 4d.⁸¹² It had later been attached to the Bigod estate, so in granting it to William, Stephen in effect deprived Hugh of the manor. The grant might well have been in compensation for the loss of Sibton and William's other lands in Yoxford, Peasenhall, and Strickland, if so, underling the political element to the foundation. Clearly William was an important baron and royal officer in East Anglia who had supported Stephen throughout his reign, but who does not appear to have been particularly well rewarded for his loyalty. The only other grant that Stephen made in his favour concerns Mileham, restored to the Fitz Alans, for which Stephen compensated William with several other manors in exchange.⁸¹³ Mileham had originally been granted to William's brother, Simon, who was presumably dead by 1154, with the Mileham charter, therefore, probably issued after the Treaty of Westminster, so after December 1153.⁸¹⁴

Despite the now generally accepted reservations as to its early centralization, as voiced by Constance Berman, by the 1150s, the Cistercian Order was increasingly tightly organised, so that although each abbey elected its abbot and had control of its own finances and property, each formed part of an international movement governed by the General Chapter that ensured unity and conformity. The General Chapter met each October at Citeaux, and attendance by each abbot was compulsory. The proceedings were overseen and directed by the most senior of the abbots,

⁸¹² *Regesta*, iii, no. 176; *Domesday Norfolk*, i, 1:151.

⁸¹³ *Ante*, pp. 66-7.

⁸¹⁴ *Regesta*, iii, no. 177, and for Simon, see above.

determined by date of foundation, which, of course, placed the abbey of Cîteaux at the head of the order. The order possessed a written constitution which detailed the customs for the monks and lay brothers, and set out the parameters governing the interrelations of the various houses and the election of all monastic officials.⁸¹⁵ By reason of their cohesion and filiation, individual communities were bound together under their constitution from which they found strength and support, as well as a ready conduit for the exchange of news, materials and personnel.⁸¹⁶ The Cistercians were also exempt from local diocesan or archiepiscopal authority, directly under the authority of the pope or papal legate. In the event of an attack on the order's possessions or liberties, it was papal assistance that would be sought with the ultimate sanction being a papal interdict on the lands of any malefactor who would himself suffer excommunication. The interrelationship and international character of the order, its cohesion and unity, and its direct relationship with papal authority, posed a considerable disincentive to anyone minded to interfere with the order's lands and liberties. These are qualities that may well have appealed to William de Chesney when deciding under which order to found his monastery, not least given the contested nature of the territory in which it was located. If its foundation was meant, in part, as a challenge to Bigod's authority in Suffolk, then William could have made no better choice of religious order. The monastery would serve not only as a 'castle of God', to employ William of Newburgh's phrase, but also as a spiritual fortress designed to counter the temporal pretensions of an over-mighty baronial neighbour. As the map illustrating the distribution and possession of the manors of Sibton and its neighbours demonstrates, William de Chesney's choice of Sibton to locate his monastery placed the house in territory dominated by Hugh Bigod and serves to emphasise the significance of William's action in siting a royal spiritual outpost in the heart of

⁸¹⁵ Hill, 1968, p. 7.

⁸¹⁶ Burton and Kerr, 2011, p. 97.

the territory of an enemy of the king, presenting a challenge to Hugh Bigod's hegemony in the region.

The Situation in East Anglia

The establishment and patronage of monastic houses in areas of contested lordship was one way of exercising influence and establishing authority in such regions. As a result, under King Stephen, such patronage became important to both warring parties. Instances can be found even before Stephen's reign. Henry I, for instance, founded the priory of St Mary at Carlisle in 1122, as a first step towards securing Cumbria for the archbishopric of York, in the face of claims from the bishopric of Glasgow. This involved the creation of a new diocese centred upon Carlisle, finally realised in 1133. Cumbria, the most northerly Norman outpost and the most difficult to control, had been under Norman rule only since 1092, and was still contested with the Scots. The creation of a new cathedral and see in Carlisle served to ensure that both temporal and spiritual authority rested with the Anglo-Norman regime. Æthelwold, Henry's former chaplain, became its first bishop.⁸¹⁷ Just as Stephen's religious patronage was often motivated by his need for ecclesiastical and baronial support, the religious houses that were founded by him were often located in areas where there was the threat of baronial challenge. His Savigniac foundation at Tulketh, Lancashire, established in 1124 and later moved to Furness, in what was his recently acquired honour of Lancaster, fits neatly within this pattern, as a spiritual presence that would also serve to protect his secular interests. Savigny itself, after all, lay in a frontier zone between Stephen's Norman honour of Mortain and the rival provinces of Brittany and Maine. In 1136,

⁸¹⁷ J. Burton, *Monastic and Religious Orders in Britain 1000 – 1300* (Cambridge 1994), pp. 51-2.

now king, he confirmed to Furness everything that he had bestowed as count of Mortain, affirming the abbey in its new royal status. There is a certain irony in the circumstances of this charter's creation in that it was issued during the siege of Exeter and was intended, among other things, to promote the stability of his realm ('et pro stabilitate regni mei').⁸¹⁸ Similarly, the foundation of Buckfast, Devon, as another Savigniac house in April 1136, may have been intended to plant a centre of ecclesiastical and royal influence in the lands of Baldwin de Redvers, the greatest landowner in the southwest and the possessor of the honours of Plympton in Devon, Christchurch in Hampshire, and the Isle of Wight. It was Baldwin who, in June 1136, irked that Stephen had yet to confirm him in his lands and, perhaps more importantly, still denied the shrievalty of Devon and the castellanship of Exeter castle, seized Exeter in an act of rebellion.⁸¹⁹ Thornholme Priory in Lincolnshire, founded for Augustinian canons, may likewise have been intended as an expression of Stephen's lordship in the face of the aggressive Ranulph II of Chester, who sought to expand and solidify his authority in the county.⁸²⁰ Thornholme lay in northern Lincolnshire, some six miles south of the Humber, itself an important trade route. Lincolnshire became the object of Ranulph's territorial ambitions early in the reign when he seized Lincoln castle in December 1140.

With his right to rule challenged by force of arms, Stephen had to pay close consideration to the political and strategic consequences of his patronage. His gift of Thetford to William III de Warenne, and William's founding thereafter of his priory on the land so gifted, supplies a striking

⁸¹⁸ *Regesta*, iii, no. 337.

⁸¹⁹ King, 2010, p. 65.

⁸²⁰ For an analysis of Ranulph's ambitions as regards Lincolnshire and his actions to achieve those ambitions, see P. Dalton, 'Aiming at the impossible: Ranulph II Earl of Chester and Lincolnshire in the Reign of King Stephen', in *The Earldom of Chester and its Charters: A Tribute to Geoffrey Barraclough*, ed. A. Thacker (Chester 1991), 109-134.

example of a gift made for both religious and strategic purposes, securing Thetford and its surrounding area from the depredations of Hugh Bigod. No doubt William's motives in founding the priory and dedicating it to the Holy Sepulchre were pious, driven by his desire to journey to Jerusalem, more probably as a pilgrim than a crusader. But Stephen's motives here must surely have been principally political and strategic.

In terms of lordship, East Anglia was dominated by the Bigods, the Warennes and the d'Aubignys. There were, of course, other important magnates: the Tosnys, the Valognes, the bishops and priors of Norwich, and the abbots of Bury St Edmunds and St Benet of Holm. The Bigod lands lay mainly in east Suffolk but included holdings along the eastern seaboard of Norfolk, as well as several manors south of Norwich. The Warenne estates dominated in central Norfolk. The d'Aubigny's in West Norfolk, although their *caput* lay at Old Buckenham, eighteen miles southwest of Norwich, but with a second castle at Castle Rising, near Lynn. Eastern Norfolk was under the control of the sheriff of Norfolk who also held Norwich castle. The honour of Eye, in Suffolk, was held by Stephen from c.1113, as gifted to him by Henry I, but probably reassigned by him to his mercenary captain, William of Ypres in 1137, possibly as a foil to the perceived threat of Hugh Bigod, and then to Hervey of Léon c.1139.⁸²¹ Hervey held the honour for no more than two years, deprived of the estates following his disgrace at Devizes when he had surrendered the castle to a local mob who had besieged it. Thereafter Stephen awarded Eye to his loyal steward, William Martel, who retained it until peace was made between

⁸²¹ C. P. Lewis suggests that Stephen's mercenary captain, William of Ypres was awarded the honour in 1135 by Stephen before he then awarded it to Hervey of Léon, but Vivien Brown contends that there is no evidence to support that, and that the suggestion is refuted by the charter evidence. However, in a paper published in 2015, J. F. Nieuws, citing a rediscovered charter of King Stephen in a cartulary of the abbey of St-Bertin, together with other evidence, has convincingly argued that William of Ypres, if he did not hold the honour of Eye between 1137 and 1139, acted as its guardian. C. P. Lewis, 'The King and Eye: A Study in Anglo-Norman Politics', *EHR*, vol. 104, no. 412 (July 1989), 569-589, p. 580; *Cart. Eye*, ii, p. 26; J. F. Nieuws, 'The Early Career of William of Ypres in England: A New Charter of King Stephen', *HER*, vol. 130, no. 544, (June 2015), 527-545.

Stephen and Duke Henry by the Treaty of Westminster in November/December 1153. Under that treaty Eye passed to Stephen's younger son, William, who was to have all that his father held before he became king.⁸²² William, Stephen's son, was then a minor and William Martel appears to have continued to hold the honour until William came of age.⁸²³

In 1086 there had been no less than 117 Bigod manors in East Anglia.⁸²⁴ Hugh Bigod inherited all his father's estates following the death of his elder brother, William, in the White Ship disaster in November 1120. He also inherited the Yorkshire estates of his aunt Albreda de Tosny (d. c. 1130) and by 1135 had at least 125 knights enfeoffed on his lands.⁸²⁵ Hugh Bigod, with his castles at Framlingham in mid Suffolk, Bungay in the north, and Walton near Felixstowe, was so dominant a county magnate as to challenge the authority of the king himself, such that throughout the 1140s the king's sheriffs were unable to exercise authority in eastern Suffolk.⁸²⁶ It might also have been the case that early in the reign Hugh controlled at least one of the castles at Thetford near where the family foundation, the Cluniac priory of St Mary, was to be found, although according to Blomefield, by 1139 King Stephen had taken the burgh of Thetford into his own hands.⁸²⁷ It is in this context that we should approach Stephen's grant of the burgh of Thetford to William III de Warenne, and William's foundation there of his priory of the Holy Sepulchre. Thetford was a strategically significant town, spanning the two counties of Norfolk and Suffolk, and not far from the county boundary with Cambridgeshire. Its grant to William de Warenne supplies an instance of Stephen rewarding loyal magnates and royal officials with

⁸²² *Regesta*, iii, no. 272.

⁸²³ *Cart. Eye*, ii, p. 28.

⁸²⁴ *Domesday Norfolk*, i, ff.152b, 173; *Suffolk*, i, ff. 330b – 345b.

⁸²⁵ A. F. Wareham, 'Bigod, Hugh, first earl of Norfolk (d. 1176/7), magnate', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 23 Sep. 2004; Accessed 12 April 2023.

<https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-2376>.

⁸²⁶ Wareham, *ODNB*, 2004.

⁸²⁷ Blomefield, 2, p. 58.

demesne lands, but doing so in ways that strengthened royal power and influence in territory dominated by an enemy, in this instance Hugh Bigod. Stephen's grant of Blythburgh to John fitz Robert, his sheriff of Norfolk, can be viewed in a similar light. Blythburgh lay close to the Bigod manors of Thorington and Belcamp, the latter held by Robert de Vaux, who, by the early 1140s, may have been longing to escape from Bigod domination, not least given my suggestion that Hugh Bigod had refused to allow Robert the vill of Pentney following his father's death.⁸²⁸ Norwich Castle, of course, was under the control of the sheriff of Norfolk, a position that Hugh Bigod coveted, and which his father and brother had held, but which Stephen had seen fit to award to men of lesser status. Nor had Stephen made Hugh an earl, despite creating nine new earldoms between 1138 and 1141.⁸²⁹ The reference in Henry of Huntingdon's account of the battle of Lincoln, to Hugh Bigod as *consul de Estangl* is unconvincing.⁸³⁰ The entry itself seems to be an addition made in a later hand, dating from a time after Hugh had been granted his earldom by the Empress. Any suggestion that he was awarded it by Stephen is further undermined by Hugh appearing as a witness without title to one of Stephen's charters, datable between December 1140 and January 1141, issued at Lincoln.⁸³¹ Thereafter, having been created earl of Norfolk by the Empress, confirmed by Stephen only in November/December 1153 as part of his treaty with Duke Henry, Hugh invariably styled himself as earl.⁸³² From April 1141, when he defected to Empress Matilda at the Council of Oxford, Hugh became 'an inveterate enemy of the king's cause'.⁸³³ The reasons for his defection here may well have included Stephen's denial to him of comital rank, possession of Norwich castle, or the shrievalty of Norfolk and Suffolk.

⁸²⁸ See the chapter 'Pentney Priory'.

⁸²⁹ Atkins, 1979, p. 149.

⁸³⁰ *Huntingdon*, p. 737.

⁸³¹ *Regesta*, iii, no. 114.

⁸³² See chapter 'Pentney Priory'.

⁸³³ *Gesta Stephani*, p. 223.

He may also have been alarmed by Stephen's award of the burgh of Thetford to his regional rival, William III de Warenne. Thetford lay directly on the fault line between Bigod and Warenne enclaves of power. No doubt Stephen was suspicious of Hugh's ambitions, not least following his seizure of Norwich castle in 1136. The king, of course, knew that Hugh's father, Roger, had held office as sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk as, indeed, had his brother William. But Hugh's three castles gave him control over large parts of Suffolk, posing a challenge to royal authority in the region, despite the presence of the royal castles at Eye and Haughley. By 1140, Hugh Bigod had already used his power and resources to oust Robert of Leicester from the town and castle of Bungay. It was this attack on Leicester that provoked Stephen to bring his army to Suffolk in the summer of 1140. Bungay was an outlier for Robert of Leicester, whose lands were mainly located in the central midlands. It lay in Hugh Bigod's heartlands and he, no doubt, saw his seizure of it as a consolidation of his territorial interests and an exercise in local hegemony. Bigod's disseisin of Bungay was put on a legal footing only by his marriage to Gundreda, the daughter of Roger of Warwick, who, by 1153, had obtained a claim to Bungay from his cousin, Robert of Leicester, in return for his surrender of two knights' fees in the midlands.⁸³⁴ Bungay thus came to Hugh Bigod *de iure* as part of Gundreda's marriage portion. Later, following the death of Earl Hugh in 1176/7 and her subsequent marriage to Roger II de Glanville, Gundreda and Roger founded a priory at Bungay for Benedictine nuns, endowed with five churches, including that of Holy Cross, Bungay, all parts of her inheritance from her father, earl Roger.⁸³⁵

⁸³⁴ Crouch, 2013, p. 157.

⁸³⁵ Confirmation charter of Henry II, issued at the petition of Roger de Granville and his wife, the countess Gundreda, and issued after April 1186. *LCH*, i, no. 352. The priory was founded in 1183, although both *Monasticon* and *VCH Suffolk* give the date as 1160, which is clearly incorrect as Hugh Bigod, Gundreda's first husband, did not die until 1176/7. *Monasticon*, 4, p. 338; *VCH Suffolk*, ii, p. 81. For the date of the foundation of Bungay Priory see *Chronica Oxenedes*, p. 69.

Another example of Hugh's aggression can be found in his seizure of five Suffolk knights' fees from Roger de Raimes. Roger was descended from the substantial Domesday tenant-in-chief, Roger I de Raimes, who had held 51 manors distributed over the counties of Essex, Suffolk, and Norfolk.⁸³⁶ His lands had been inherited by his son, William, who in turn was succeeded, by 1130, by his sons, Roger II and Robert, who divided the estate.⁸³⁷ It was Roger II de Raimes who was now attacked by Hugh Bigod, although both Roger II and Robert de Raimes appear as late as the Pipe Roll 5 Henry II, for 1158-9.⁸³⁸ In 1212, Roger Bigod was recorded in possession of 5¼ knights' fees of the honour of Richard de Raimes, at Stoneham Aspal (*Stanh*'), Crowfield (*Cropfeld*), *Eston*' (not identified), and Newton (*Neweton*).⁸³⁹ All were former possessions of the Domesday Roger de Raimes.⁸⁴⁰ *Eston* might be Euston, which in 1086 was held by the abbot of Bury St Edmunds.⁸⁴¹ As we have seen, Hugh Bigod was the subject of a mandate issued by Henry II to restore the manors of Mells, Bradley, Syleham, and Yoxford, all in Suffolk, to Belvoir Priory which had been unjustly disseised.⁸⁴² The monks of Ely Cathedral also appear to have suffered at the hands of Hugh Bigod, given Henry II's mandate requiring Hugh to restore them to possession of all customs in the five and a half hundreds and in the port of Orford as held by them in the time of King Henry I. That Hugh had appropriated or in some other way

⁸³⁶ <https://opendomesday.org/name/roger-of-rames/>, accessed 8 June 2024.

⁸³⁷ *P R 31 Henry I*, p. 43.

⁸³⁸ *DD*, p. 654; *P R 5 Henry II*, p. 5; Wareham asserts that it was William de Raimes from whom Hugh seized the five knights' fees, (Wareham, 1995, p. 237), but William, son of Roger II de Raimes, did not inherit his father's estates until after 1159. He first appears in the Pipe Rolls in 1164 – 1165 as owing the Exchequer ten marks of which he paid two, (*P R 11 Henry II*, p. 20). The entry in the *Red Book* indicates that Hugh Bigod had usurped five of William's fees in the time of Stephen's reign. The entry is under the heading of Roger de Raimes, but as the editor's note explains, that was a scribal error, for while Roger II de Raimes held the fief in 1135, by 1166 his son, William, was the tenant, (*Red Book*, i, pp.353-54).

⁸³⁹ *Book of Fees*, p. 136.

⁸⁴⁰ *Domesday Suffolk*, ii, 38:4, 7, 16.

⁸⁴¹ *Ibid*, i, 14:98.

⁸⁴² *Ante*, p. 40.

interfered with the liberties of the monks of Ely is suggested by this charter's concluding admonition that Hugh take nothing from the monks unjustly.⁸⁴³

Although Stephen had extensive demesne lands and at least two major castles in Suffolk, his visits to East Anglia appear to have nearly always been occasioned by crisis. He is first recorded there in April 1136, when he came to Norwich, possibly stopping off at Bury St Edmunds on the way. This would have been on the occasion that he responded to Hugh Bigod's seizure of Norwich Castle, following rumours of the king's death. Henry of Huntingdon notes that Hugh would not surrender the castle except to Stephen himself, and then did so only reluctantly.⁸⁴⁴ However, if Hugh hoped for reward in return for this show of loyalty, he was sorely disappointed. Stephen next appears in East Anglia in January 1138 when, at Eye, he issued a charter of confirmation in favour of the priory.⁸⁴⁵ The lordship of Eye was, for Stephen, an important honour, its lands sharing eastern Suffolk with those of Hugh Bigod and at this time probably in the hands of William of Ypres, with the priory its spiritual centre. On that occasion Stephen was making for Northumberland to deal with King David of Scotland's invasion of the northernmost counties of England. January 1140 saw Stephen at Bury St Edmunds again, having recently dealt with Bishop Nigel's rebellion at Ely.⁸⁴⁶ It was not long before he was back in East Anglia, at the end of May 1140, at Bungay in Suffolk intervening in Hugh Bigod's seizure of Bungay Castle from Robert earl of Leicester. Stephen made a second visit to Suffolk that year in August, the Waverley chronicler recording that the king took action against Bigod with whom a

⁸⁴³ *LCH*, ii, no. 825; *ante*, p. 41.

⁸⁴⁴ *Huntingdon*, p. 708; *Regesta*, iii, 'Itinerary of King Stephen', p. xl. Edmund King, however, suggests that it is unlikely that Stephen travelled to Norwich to require the surrender of the castle from Hugh, King, 2010, p. 64 and n. 123.

⁸⁴⁵ *Regesta*, iii, no. 288.

⁸⁴⁶ *Regesta*, iii, p. xli, and no. 265.

short-lived agreement was made ('sed non diu duravit').⁸⁴⁷ Although the language of the chronicle is ambiguous, it is likely that the August visit came in response to another Bigod rebellion.⁸⁴⁸ If Stephen had simply decided that the time had come to enter into a concord with Hugh Bigod, he surely would have summoned Hugh to his court. The *Regesta* records two charters issued by Stephen at Norwich that year. They appear to have been issued on different occasions, the only witness common to both being John, the sheriff of Norfolk. One (*Regesta*, iii, no.689) confirmed a grant to Reading Abbey, witnessed by Geoffrey de Mandeville, not styled earl, so before he was granted the earldom of Essex later in 1140. Although Round suggested a date in August 1140, it might equally have been issued earlier in the year, coinciding with Stephen's May/June visit to Suffolk. The second charter (*Regesta*, iii, no.399) confirmed the liberties of the abbey of St Benet of Holme, dated by J. R. West *c.* August 1140, here following a suggestion by Robert Eyton.⁸⁴⁹ The witnesses here included the most important Norfolk barons, William de Warenne and William d'Albini (d'Aubigny) as well as Everard, bishop of Norwich, Alexander, bishop of Lincoln, and Walter, abbot of Ramsey. Count Alan and Earl Simon also attested. Thereafter, Stephen seems to have remained absent from East Anglia until the spring of 1145, when he again was forced to deal with Hugh Bigod, who had exploited Stephen's focus on Gloucester, to attack the king's demesne lands in Suffolk. Bigod was taken by surprise. His forces were routed, some of his knights captured, and three castles were built to discourage any future aggression. The whereabouts of these castles is unrecorded.⁸⁵⁰ Evidence of Stephen's presence in Suffolk is to be found in a charter issued at Bury St Edmunds, datable early in 1145,

⁸⁴⁷ *Annales Monastici de Wavereia*, 5 vols., ed. H. R. Luard, RS, XXX (London 1865), ii, p. 228.

⁸⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

⁸⁴⁹ *St Benet*, i, no. 7; ii, p.193.

⁸⁵⁰ *Gesta Stephani*, pp. 166, 179.

in favour of Lilleshall Abbey.⁸⁵¹ One of the witnesses to this was earl Aubrey III de Vere, indicating that he had returned to the king's party. Two other charters issued by Stephen, and dated by Cronne and Davis 1144 X 1145, were likely to have been issued on the same occasion in 1145. One was issued at Bury St Edmunds, confirming the monks of Ely in possession of their land as at the time when Bishop Nigel set out for Rome in 1143 to appeal charges of sedition and of alienating church lands. The second was issued at the royal town of Ipswich, offering written confirmation of the reconciliation between Stephen and Bishop Nigel.⁸⁵² Both reflect an important moment in Stephen's efforts to wrest back control of Suffolk from Hugh Bigod. With Nigel, bishop of Ely, no longer presenting a threat to peace in the region by 'inciting the country's insurrectionists against the king, welcoming them and generally assisting them', a potential ally of Hugh Bigod had been neutralised. Nigel was obliged to pay three hundred marks of silver and hand over his adolescent son, Richard fitz Nigel as hostage, as the price for recovering the king's favour.⁸⁵³ It seems likely that the Ipswich charter was issued before that given at Bury St Edmunds, since the settlement with Nigel presumably preceded the specific guarantees to Ely's monks. Although Stephen had in effect curbed Hugh Bigod's initiatives beyond the immediate vicinity of Suffolk in the early months of 1145, Hugh still had the will and the resources to cause trouble and was never fully reconciled to the king before 1153, when Stephen returned once again to East Anglia, following Hugh's seizure of the castle at Ipswich in August 1153. Even before this, in 1149, Stephen's son, Eustace, had been obliged to divert his forces from besieging Duke Henry in Wiltshire, when Hugh Bigod attacked Bedford and once again attempted to raise East Anglia against the king.

⁸⁵¹ *Regesta*, iii, no. 460.

⁸⁵² *Regesta*, iii, nos. 266-7.

⁸⁵³ *Liber Eliensis*, pp. 409-10.

Suffolk lay between Essex and Norfolk, and while Norfolk was securely held for the king by the local magnates, William de Warenne and William d'Aubigny, from 1140 to 1145 much of Suffolk, and certainly the east of the county, was effectively under the control of Hugh Bigod. Bury St Edmunds, loyal to the crown, and exercising both temporal and ecclesiastical jurisdiction over its estates, controlled much of western Suffolk. Wareham suggests that, for Suffolk during this period the king lost control of both finance and local government.⁸⁵⁴ Essex, to the east of London, and important to the defence of that city, had initially been secured through the appointment in 1140 of Geoffrey de Mandeville as earl of Essex and constable of the Tower of London, a post that his father and paternal grandfather had both held before him. Geoffrey also held the shrievalties of London and Middlesex, Essex and Hertfordshire, as well as the justiciarships of those four counties.⁸⁵⁵ He had played an important role in the defence of eastern England when he had been despatched to Ely by Stephen, early in 1142, to deal with the supporters of Bishop Nigel and expel them from the priory. On another occasion, he was ordered to protect the monks of Colchester.⁸⁵⁶ Yet he was brought down after Michaelmas 1143, because it was said that Stephen had come to suspect that he intended to hand over the kingdom to the empress. Such an accusation, it has been suggested, was raised by various of the senior men of the country, driven by jealousy of Geoffrey's power and his close relationship with the king. Geoffrey was replaced by Richard de Lucy who acted as a justiciar in London, Middlesex and Essex and was given custody of the Tower of London. Richard remained a staunch supporter of the king throughout his reign.⁸⁵⁷ And we have seen how promptly Stephen acted to nip in the bud Turgis of Avranches's lordly ambitions at Walden, Essex, a castle important as a defence against

⁸⁵⁴ Wareham, 1995, p. 237.

⁸⁵⁵ King, 2010, p. 194.

⁸⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 194.

⁸⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 219.

the incursions of Hugh Bigod in that region. Stephen's actions during this period demonstrate the importance that he attached to the defence of London, with an emphasis on protecting the county of Essex as a bulwark against threats to London from the east. Hugh Bigod in Suffolk had presented the main danger from that direction, and notwithstanding Stephen's actions in early 1145 in curtailing Hugh's aggression, he remained a threat, as became evident when he attacked East Anglia and Bedford in 1149. The policy of containment against Hugh Bigod, therefore, remained of paramount significance to the king. That William de Chesney, the founder of Sibton Abbey, was not only an important supporter of the crown, but was also sheriff of Norfolk, would have added status and heft to the abbey. Moreover, that King Stephen himself had publicly supported the monastery with a charter of confirmation, thus draping the house with the aura of royal protection, would have attracted many benefactors who would have wanted to associate themselves with the crown and by doing so would have provided a strong royal presence in the territory of an enemy of the king.

Concluding remarks

Clearly the establishment of a religious house on contested territory, or adjacent to such, did not in itself pose any direct military threat to a rival. There were exceptions, of course. The ancient monastery of Bury St Edmunds, for instance, was extremely wealthy with sufficient holdings to ensure its abbot the same standing as any of the greater magnates of the realm. In both 1159 and 1161 the abbot accounted for a *servitium* of 40 knights' fees, with at least a further twelve enfeoffed but not accounted for in this assessment.⁸⁵⁸ The abbey's status as an important centre

⁸⁵⁸ *Cartae*, CCXIII n.

for the exercise of soft martial power is amply demonstrated by its serving as a meeting place for the baronial opposition to King John. As the resistance to John began to crystalise, on 20 November 1214 the abbey provided a meeting place for the earls and barons opposed to the king.⁸⁵⁹ Sibton Abbey could claim no such prominence but was nonetheless the foundation of a powerful baron in the region, placed under his protection, as also of that of the king who had honoured it with a confirmation charter. Direct papal protection of its possessions and liberties would also have made the abbey a safe haven for lands threatened by an acquisitive neighbour. On 1 November 1150, Eugenius III, the first Cistercian pope, issued a charter confirming the abbey's possessions, and exempting the monks from payment of tithes on lands cultivated by themselves for their own use.⁸⁶⁰ The abbey, therefore, was an expression not only of the lordship of a baron loyal to the king, but also of royal and papal authority in a territory much of which was held by an implacable enemy of the king. Once established, the abbey received endowments from the founder's men and tenants, from those who wanted to be associated with the founder and royal authority, and those who, as perhaps in the case of Robert de Raimés, wanted to place some of their lands out of reach of avaricious rivals. The abbey received endowments from William's tenants, with most of its benefactors local to the area, many of them from knightly families holding local office.⁸⁶¹ In the period immediately following its establishment the only two tenants-in-chief who it can be said with confidence served as benefactors were Roger de Clare and Rose de Mandeville, the widow of Geoffrey de Mandeville (d. 1144). Their charters have since been lost, but their gifts are referred to in two confirmation charters issued by Henry II no later than October 1163. Robert granted the heath called 'Wederiscroft', while Rose de

⁸⁵⁹ *VCH, Suffolk*, ii, p. 60.

⁸⁶⁰ *Cart. Sibton*, iii, no. 489.

⁸⁶¹ *Cart. Sibton*, i, p. 25.

Mandeville made a gift of thirteen cartloads of turves annually.⁸⁶² It has not been possible to date these gifts, save that they must have been made before October 1163. Although shortly after the abbey's establishment, peace was to be made between Stephen and Duke Henry, this would have been unknown to those responsible for planning the new foundation. Even after Duke Henry became king in December 1154, he feared conflict in the region. Thus, whilst Henry confirmed Hugh Bigod in his earldom of Norfolk,⁸⁶³ and made him sheriff of both counties in 1154–5, he relieved him of office in the following year because he did not trust him. Although confirmed in the earldom of Norfolk, Hugh had not received possession of Norwich castle, which remained in the hands of William de Warenne (d. 1159), King Stephen's son. Administrative authority for the region rested mainly with William de Warenne after 1155 and not Hugh Bigod, a situation that Bigod resented. Henry continued to be wary of Hugh and in the spring of 1157, upon his return from France, at a great council held at Bury St Edmunds on 19 May, required both Hugh Bigod and William de Warenne to surrender their castles. William was deprived not only of those he held in England but also of those in Normandy, besides several royal manors in Surrey, and the holdings in Pevensey and Norfolk granted to him under the terms of the Treaty of Westminster.⁸⁶⁴ William de Cheney, the founder of Sibton Abbey, and hereditary claimant to the

⁸⁶² *LCH*, iv, nos. 2487–8; *Cart. Sibton*, ii, nos. 29(c) and (e).

⁸⁶³ *LCH*, iii, no. 1394.

⁸⁶⁴ Elizabeth van Houts and Rosalind Love have argued that the Warenne (Hyde) Chronicle was produced as part of an appeal to Henry II and Pope Adrian IV on behalf of William de Warenne, son of King Stephen, and his wife Isabella, heiress of Warenne, to restore the lands given by Henry II to William under the Treaty of Westminster in 1153, when Henry was then only Duke of Normandy and Count of Anjou but revoked by him in May 1157. They identify the anonymous author as Master Eustice of Boulogne, William's chancellor. The chronicle is supposedly a history of the Warenne family starting in 1135 meant to demonstrate Warenne loyalty, first to the dukes of Normandy and later to the English crown. However, the chronicle takes its history no further in time than 1120. But as Vincent points out in a review of the work, the Warennes are only faintly represented, and it appears more as an Anglo-Norman history. Amongst several objections that Vincent makes, a major one is that if the chronicle was intended to serve as an appeal against Henry II's deprivation of Warenne castles and estates, why does it not take the story up to 1157? Vincent does concede that the chronicle as we have it is 'undoubtedly incomplete', but nevertheless Vincent is sceptical of the hypothesis advanced by van Houts and Love. The appeal, if that is what the chronicle was meant to be, was unsuccessful. *The Warenne (Hyde) Chronicle*, ed. and trans. by E. M. C. van Houts

East Anglian shrievalty, was once again reappointed sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk.⁸⁶⁵ Rivalry between Hugh and William de Warenne, and the fear that the stability of East Anglia might be compromised, seems to have provoked Henry to take such drastic action. Thereafter, Hugh Bigod continued to bear a grudge against Henry II, sowing the seeds of what was to sprout into the great rebellion of the early 1170s.

and R. C. Love (Oxford 2013), pp. xiii, xxvii, xxviii-lx; N. Vincent, 'Review of the Warenne (Hyde) Chronicle' in *History*, vol. 100, issue 341, (July 2015), pp. 442-3.

⁸⁶⁵ E. Amt, *The Accession of Henry II in England: Royal Government Restored, 1149–1159* (Woodbridge 1993), pp. 118-19; *Red Book*, ii, pp. 651-2; *P R 2,3,4 Henry II*, pp. 6, 8.

Chapter 9

Conclusions

During Stephen's reign the number of monastic houses in England and Wales continued to grow at a rate overall exceeding that in the time of Henry I. This despite the physical damage suffered by various of the monasteries themselves, the plundering of estates and the loss of possessions through the actions of acquisitive laymen and woman, taking advantage of the disruption to good order engendered by the civil war that divided England from 1139 to 1153. The chroniclers painted stark pictures of disruption and destruction, not only to monastic houses but to the lives of ordinary people, towns, villages and crops, all suffering the effects of warfare still pursued in essence through the harrying of resources. Yet, as this thesis has demonstrated, the chroniclers had little to say about events in East Anglia, especially in Norfolk, and even in Suffolk only when recording King Stephen's responses to Hugh Bigod's manoeuvres. Nevertheless, although there may have been relatively little physical destruction in East Anglia, there is ample evidence of a collapse in the administration of justice in the region with wrongs done to monastic houses going unaddressed until the reign of Henry II. This lack of justice was aptly expressed by Hervey de Glanville, father of the great jurist Ranulf de Granville, who, at a Norfolk shire moot, *c.* 1150, informed the assembly that he was now a very old man, that he had attended the shire and hundred courts for over 50 years, and while in the time of Henry I justice and equity, peace and fidelity had flourished in England, war had now silenced both justice and the law.⁸⁶⁶ Such

⁸⁶⁶ Blomefield, 3, p. 29. Hervey was a witness to Stephen's charter of confirmation of Eye Priory's possessions and liberties issued between December 1137 and March 1138 at Eye. *Regesta*, iii, no. 288. He also attested Robert Malet's foundation charter for Eye Priory, *c.* 1080, thus confirming that, *c.* 1150, Hervey certainly would have been of a considerable age. *Cart. Eye*, i, no. 1. A Hervey de Glanville appears in 1166 holding one knight's fee of the bishop of Ely, although that is likely to be Hervey's son of the same name, who presumably inherited it from his father. *Red Book*, i, p, 365.

sentiments were mirrored in the comments of the chronicler of Battle Abbey, complaining of the difficulty that Abbot Walter experienced in obtaining both royal and ecclesiastical justice in East Anglia over the spoilation of two churches, Mildenhall and Brantham, writing that ‘justice was not to be found in the midst of iniquity’.⁸⁶⁷ From the mandates emanating from Henry II’s chancery directing his sheriffs, the bishop, and others to place monastic houses in possession of their estates and liberties, lost *tempore guerre*, or since the death of Henry I, we obtain clear evidence of the breakdown in royal justice in East Anglia. Meanwhile, the exercise of ecclesiastical justice there appears to have been absent at worst, and dilatory at best. The failing presence of royal justice would also have served to weaken its ecclesiastical cousin. All of this reflects the influence of powerful local interests, or an increased tendency by those engaged in the despoilation of church property to ignore the strictures of bishops and their threats of interdict and excommunication. Of such wrongdoers the Peterborough chronicler wrote ‘The bishops and clergy always cursed them, but that was nothing to them, because they were all accursed and forsworn and lost’.⁸⁶⁸

The administration of justice in East Anglia during Stephen’s reign was largely the responsibility of the sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk, John fitz Walter from 1141 to 1146/7, and thereafter his brother, William de Chesney, through to the end of the reign. The evidence from Henry II’s mandates demonstrates that Norwich and east Norfolk appear to have been served badly by those responsible for the administration of justice during Stephen’s reign. As for Suffolk, certainly for the first half of the 1140s, royal government was more or less in abeyance as was the sheriff’s authority. Hugh Bigod was very much in control in east Suffolk, and even after his defeat by

⁸⁶⁷ *Chron. Battle*, p. 224.

⁸⁶⁸ *ASC*, p. 265.

Stephen in the spring of 1145, there is no evidence of a resumption of royal justice until c. 1150 when the shire court, under the auspices of William Martel, the king's steward, acting as justiciar, met in Norwich and later at Bury St Edmunds. West Norfolk seems to have been better administered, if the number of mandates from Henry II supplies a reliable indicator of the problems that had arisen over access to justice between 1136 and 1154. As the evidence shows, there were considerably fewer mandates issued over wrong doings to monastic houses in west Norfolk than in the east of the county. Responsibility for the administration and the exercise of justice in west Norfolk lay with the two dominant lordships there, both loyal to the crown: the earls Warenne and d'Aubigny. We can cite nine mandates issued by Henry II to correct wrongs that had been done to monastic houses in west Norfolk, as against 34 for Norwich and east Norfolk. The *Regesta* records that, throughout his reign, King Stephen issued a total of ten surviving writs to correct wrongs done to monastic houses in East Anglia, five each in Norfolk and Suffolk.⁸⁶⁹ Even allowing for the accidents of survival, it might be argued that the low incidence of such mandates demonstrates that justice was effective in the region. On the contrary, it tends to underline the ineffectiveness of Stephen in being able to exert royal control over the region and it does not sit well with the criticisms levied by Hervey de Granville and the Battle chronicler, both of whom bewailed the lack of justice that befell East Anglia.

The dramatic growth in the establishment of religious houses that was a remarkable feature of Stephen's reign, was not a phenomenon experienced uniformly throughout the realm. There were many regions that experienced no growth, or very little. Yet, there has been little in the way of analysis to determine why some regions saw growth while others did not. The phenomenon is usually passed over with simply a general reference to the fact. This thesis has brought to the

⁸⁶⁹ *Regesta*, iii, nos. 82-3, 105, 233, 260, 403, 668, 670, 766, 771.

fore those factors that were impactful in East Anglia and has cast light on why the region did not feature in the expansion of numbers of religious houses during Stephen's reign compared to other parts of the realm. As has been demonstrated, East Anglia as a region saw no growth with only ten houses founded in Stephen's reign as against 20 founded in Henry I's, representing a marginally slower rate of growth between 1136 and 1154. However, analysis has demonstrated that when we look at Norfolk and Suffolk individually, we obtain a rather different picture. Seven houses were founded in Norfolk between 1136 and 1154 and 11 during Henry I's reign, representing a relative growth of 21.9%, with an average of 0.39 houses being founded in Stephen's reign against 0.32 for Henry I. Suffolk saw no such growth with only three houses founded during Stephen's reign as against nine in Henry's, an annual rate respectively of 0.16 and 0.26 houses founded. The factors in East Anglia that appear to have been significant were its very high population density compared to other regions, the extent of land that was under the plough, the high number of parish churches, more than any other region of England, and each requiring land for a cemetery, a priest's house and glebe to support him, while imparking by status-conscious land holders was also a factor. And as also has been noted, East Anglia featured several venerable religious houses which, together, held substantial tracts of land. There was also in East Anglia an area of scrub, heath and poor-quality sandy soil, some 500 square miles in extent, situated at the north-west corner of Suffolk and the south-west corner of Norfolk, known as Breckland, that was suitable only for grazing and rabbit warrens, although the commercial exploitation of the region for the breeding of rabbits for the market did not begin until late in the thirteenth century at the earliest. There was, therefore, considerable pressure on land as a resource. In Norfolk the west was the least populated region, and it was here that five of the seven houses founded in Stephen's reign were located. In Suffolk, founders would have been

deterred from establishing a religious house during much of Stephen's reign by the looming presence of Hugh Bigod, a declared enemy of the king. It must be significant that the three houses that were founded in Suffolk date towards the end of the reign, when Hugh was less of a threat.

It has to be said, however, that many of these features were present in Lincolnshire which saw an unprecedented 31 religious houses established during Stephen's reign. That is particularly so as regards population densities although the number of parish churches was substantially less than in East Anglia. Nevertheless, as regards the large number of Cistercian houses founded in the region, eight in all, Lincolnshire did boast substantial areas of uncultivated land which allowed for seclusion, and which found favour with both founders and the order. While reference was made to Lincolnshire in this study by way of comparison, there was not the scope to investigate the reasons for the substantial growth in the numbers of religious houses in that county overall during Stephen's reign. What this study has also demonstrated is the need for further research in this area which would undoubtedly provide us with a more measured perspective of the phenomenon than at present exists.

The motivations of founders, patrons and benefactors, were on the face of it religious and expressed in spiritual terms. Foundations were made for the salvation of the soul of the founder, his family and friends, and sometimes for his lord or the king and his queen. A founder's ancestors were also often included in the declaration as is the case with William III de Warenne, Robert de Vaux, John de Chesney, Roger de Scales, and William de Chesney fitz Robert. All of the founders with whom we meet in this thesis were descended from those who crossed the sea with William of Normandy and either fought at the Battle of Hastings or followed soon after. Those who fought against the English on 14 October 1066 were involved in one of the bloodiest

battles of the age. A monk who reported on the scene after the battle noted that ‘the fields were covered with corpses, and all around the only colour to meet the gaze was blood red. It looked as if a river of blood filled the valleys’.⁸⁷⁰ Those of William’s army who survived the battle must have killed many of the enemy. As Vincent noted, to the majority of William’s army, the battle was a great victory, but at the cost of imperilment to their mortal souls.⁸⁷¹ Soon after the battle, the church imposed penance on all those who had taken part. The terms were that for every man that he had slain, the killer was to fast on bread and water for a year; for every man he had struck but not necessarily killed, penance was to be endured for forty days; for those unsure of how many they had slain, a day of penance in every week for the remainder of their lives. For those who fought at the battle with base motives, out of greed or the lust for killing, then they were to be treated as murderers and were sentenced to three years of penance.⁸⁷² Such penance, no doubt, would also have applied to those who came after Hastings and who had killed and plundered to seize English lands and wealth. By including in their dedication, a prayer for the souls of their ancestors, founders and benefactors were invoking family and societal memory of the carnage and killing that had taken place on the field of battle and the months following in which their ancestors most likely would have been involved. In so doing they were seeking absolution for the sins of their forefathers and a hope that they would not thereby suffer eternal damnation.

The charters issued in such cases supply evidence of the deeply held belief, permeating Christian society before the Reformation, that a relationship with a religious house and its community, through gifts and intercessory prayers, was a certain route to salvation and the remission of sins.

⁸⁷⁰ M. L. Lower, *The Chronicle of Battel Abbey from 1066 to 1176* (London 1851), p. 7

⁸⁷¹ Vincent, 2011, p. 52.

⁸⁷² H. E. J. Cowdrey, ‘Bishop Ermenfrid of Sion and the Penitential Ordinance following the Battle of Hastings’, in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 20, (2) (October 1969), 225-42, pp. 233-36

This applied to all strata of society, from kings and their tenants-in-chief, to blacksmiths, cobblers, tanners, lowly serfs, and everyone in between. People would give according to their means, and no gift was too small, for the coin gifted by a lowly field worker, unrecorded in any document, represented as much of a sacrifice, if not more so, than the twenty acres bestowed by his wealthy lord.

Yet although piety and a desire to smooth the path into heaven for the founder, his family, and friends, *pro anima*, was woven into the literary fabric of nearly every foundation charter, there were often underlying secular motives. That secular impulse often provided the singular most important reason for a founder's action in establishing a house in the first place. Pentney Priory, Blackborough, and Coxford, all in Norfolk, founded respectively by Robert de Vaux, Roger de Scales, and William de Chesney, appear to have been founded as expressions of lordship, as public displays of status and wealth by knightly tenants whose circumstances had improved. They sought the influence, privileges, and kudos that founding a religious house bestowed, besides the protection of their religious as well as their secular interests that a family priory might secure. Robert de Vaux, it has been argued, may also have had an additional motive. When he founded Pentney Priory, c. 1140, he endowed it with his manor of Pentney. In doing so his motive might have been to put it out of reach of his lord, Hugh Bigod, who later claimed that he had never granted him the manor.⁸⁷³ Moreover, his choice of the vill of Pentney as the location and major endowment for his monastery, located in the heart of Warenne territory, might also have signalled his departure from the affinity of Hugh Bigod and alignment with that of the Warenne earls.

⁸⁷³ *Materials*, no. 67. A detailed account of the case is given in the section dealing with Pentney Priory.

The Second Crusade, proclaimed by Pope Eugenius III in 1145 following the loss of Edessa to the Seljuk Turks, persuaded many to take the cross, urged on by Bernard of Clairvaux, Eugenius's main propagandist. A few, before they departed for the Holy Land, founded a religious house, while many others made benefactions to a favoured pre-existing monastery. In Norfolk both the priory of the Holy Sepulchre at Thetford, and Walsingham Priory, founded respectively by William III de Warenne and Geoffrey de Faverches, were established in contemplation of journeys to the Holy Land. William de Warenne joined Louis VII of France's crusading army but was killed on 19 January 1148 in Laodicea before he got to Jerusalem. In William's case, the evidence is now clear that he founded his priory before 2, February 1141, and did so not as part of his preparations before his departure on crusade in May/June 1147. If he was intending to travel to the Holy Land when he founded the priory, then it is more likely that he intended to go as a peaceful pilgrim. Yet, it is likely that there was another underlying motive for the foundation. Like Sibton, the Holy Sepulchre at Thetford was located in an area where Hugh Bigod was the dominant lord, and where his father had founded the priory of St Mary *c.* 1104. Thetford was an important strategic burgh which no doubt Stephen was anxious to control. By giving William III de Warenne the burgh of Thetford, apparently so that he might found his priory there, Stephen was placing the spiritual and temporal defence of that important vill in the hands of a leading baron, loyal to the crown, scion of the predominant family in Norfolk.

Mention has already been made of Sibton Abbey. Its history, as set out in the *Narratio*, declares that it was founded by William de Chesney fitz Robert in fulfilment of a vow made to his brother, John, who, when on his deathbed, swore to God that he would found a Cistercian abbey as penance for all his sins committed both in peacetime and in time of war.⁸⁷⁴ John's motive was

⁸⁷⁴ *Cart. Sibton*, ii, p. 1. no. 470.

common enough at this time. Thomas of Cuckney, declared in another contemporary foundation charter, that he established his house (at Welbeck in Nottinghamshire) for ‘my soul, and for the souls of my father and mother, and my ancestors, *and of all those whom I unjustly robbed of theirs*’ (my italics).⁸⁷⁵ The cartulary of Welbeck describes Thomas as ‘a most warlike man who followed the king (Stephen) throughout his campaigns; but when there was peace in the kingdom, in the reign of Henry II, founded the abbey of Welbeck’.⁸⁷⁶ Eustace fitz John, lord of Knaresborough and Malton in Yorkshire and Alnwick in Northumberland, it is said, founded the monasteries of Watton and Malton as penance for fighting on the Scottish side at the battle of the Standard in 1138.⁸⁷⁷ Janet Burton notes that there is no evidence in support of this tradition.⁸⁷⁸ Even so, the suspicion lingers. Sibton, it has been argued, was founded deliberately as a means of countering Bigod’s influence in the area, soon after its foundation obtaining a charter of confirmation from Stephen, attracting supporters of the crown and acting as a focus of royal influence in an area dominated by Stephen's chief local rival. Sibton is thus another example of a monastic house founded for both religious and secular motives.

All the monasteries considered in this study had their origins in both a spiritual and a pragmatic view of the world. The evidence demonstrates that while serving the founder’s spiritual needs, the founding of a religious house was also an opportunity for the display of wealth and status, and for affirmation of the founder’s importance in knightly society. The act of foundation could also signal the intentions of the founder as regards a pilgrimage, as marking out a claim to contested territories, or as a means of preventing the loss of estates to rival claimants. While in

⁸⁷⁵ *Monasticon*, 6, part 2, p. 836, no. III.

⁸⁷⁶ BL MS Harley 3640, ff. 160-161.

⁸⁷⁷ R. Graham, *St Gilbert of Sempringham and the Gilbertines: A History of the only English Monastic Order* (London 1901), pp. 36-7.

⁸⁷⁸ J. Burton, *The Monastic Order in Yorkshire, 1069-1215* (Cambridge 1999), p. 137.

most cases the religious motive is apparent from the wording of charters, the secular reason for the foundation of a house has generally to be inferred from the information we have about the founder, his circumstances, and the circumstances in which a foundation was made, social, political and economic. Moreover, as this study has demonstrated, nearly all the religious houses founded in East Anglia during Stephen's reign were founded by new or lesser men, men who had improved their status, standing and wealth. Long established tenants-in-chief had in the main, by this time, established their family house, the Bigods, St Mary in Thetford in 1103/4, the Warennes, at Castle Acre, adjacent to their *caput* in 1089, the de Valognes at Binham 1101X1107. The exceptions were two; William de Albini's foundation at New Buckenham founded between 1151 and 1152 in conjunction with the construction of his new castle in the same location, while William III de Warenne's founding of his priory of the Holy Sepulchre at Thetford c.1141 was a combination of William's spiritual expression of his desire to make a journey to the Holy Land and the creation of royal influence in territory contested with an enemy of the king, a founding that had been encouraged by King Stephen himself.

In the case of two of the monasteries that have been the subject of close consideration in this study, Thetford Holy Sepulchre and Pentney, new light has been thrown on the date of foundation of each house. A new interpretation of the foundation charter of a third, Buckenham, founded by Willian de Albini, a house that was not included as part of those subjected to detailed analysis, has produced a more likely date for its foundation, 1151X1152, than the date that has been relied upon for many centuries, c. 1146.⁸⁷⁹ That suggests that further research into the

⁸⁷⁹ See n. 704.

political, social and personal circumstances of the founders of other monasteries, where ambiguity as to a foundation date exists, might well produce a more accurate date.

Finally, the new East Anglian houses did not appear to have suffered attacks on their possessions and liberties during the civil war. I think there are a several reasons for this. Of the six houses that are the subject of my study, these being the ones with an extant cartulary, four were in west Norfolk, which, as my research has demonstrated, was an area that suffered less than any other region and which maintained an effective judicial system. That was probably because of the strong rule of the Warenne lordship, stalwart supporters of the crown. All six houses, of which only one was in Suffolk, the Cistercian house of Sibton, were founded by powerful families who maintained a strong presence in the region, or, in their absence, had the protection of a powerful lord. Thetford Holy Sepulchre was a Warenne foundation, with royal protection; Sibton was founded by William de Chesney fitz Robert, the powerful sheriff of Norfolk. It had royal protection and also, by virtue of its status as a Cistercian house, papal protection. Pentney was founded by a rising family in Norfolk, its foundational possessions local manors, and its founder, Robert de Vaux, although a Bigod tenant, having aligned himself with the earls Warenne; Rudham/Coxford was founded by William de Chesney, a Warenne tenant, and so had that family's protection. Like Pentney, its foundational possessions were local manors and liberties in West Norfolk; Blackborough was another priory founded by a rising family, the de Scales, tenants of Robert de Ver, Constable of England. Again, its possessions were localised in west Norfolk, and the founding family's *caput* was in its heartlands at Middleton. Walsingham, founded by Geoffrey de Faverches, who left its foundation to his clerk, Edwy, as he departed for the Holy Land. Like the other west Norfolk foundations, all its possessions were centred in that area, and it had the protection of the powerful earls Clare. An attack on the possessions and

liberties of those houses would have been quickly and severely dealt with by the founder and his supporters, their local presence and access to effective countermeasures surely acting as a disincentive to acquisitive and aggressive laymen.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Charters from Bodleian Library MS Top. Gen. c69 referred to in the text f 72r

No. 1. Foundation charter of William III de Warenne, printed in *Monasticon*, 6, part 2, p. 729 as part of an *inspeximus* issued by John earl Warenne (d. 1347), and also in *EYC*, viii, no. 45.

Willelmus comes Warennie omnibus baronibus suis et omnibus hominibus suis Francis et Angl(is) et amicis suis clericis et laicis tam presentibus quam futuris salutem. Omnibus vobis notum facio me concessisse et dedisse Deo et sanctissimo Sepulcro locum et sedem ecclesie sancti Sepulcri de Tefordie cum quadrugata terre infra campos ipsius ville libere et quiete in perpetuam elemosinam, pro amore domini nostril Jesu Christi ac sui sanctissimi Sepulcri, pro remissione peccatorum meorum et pro salute anime Willelmi comitis patris mei et pro remissione peccatorum matris mee Isabelle et fratrum meorum Radulfi War' et Reginaldi War' parentumque meorum vivorum ac defunctorum et omnium fidelium. Et volo et precipio ut isti canonici mei predicte ecclesie habeant saca et soca, tol et taem et infangethef, etiamque ecclesias et decimas meas de Teford' et homines et terras et faldas et pascua et omnia sua infra burgum et extra bene et in pace et honorifice cum omni ecclesiastica libertate teneant, sicut unquam rex Stephanus melius et et liberius tenuit et mihi dedit. Concedo et<iam> eis feriam duorum dierum, scilicet in invencione sancta Crucis in Maio et aliam in exaltacione, solam et quietam de omni consuetudine cunctis venientibus et ibi manentibus et redeuntibus, ill(is) mea firma pace

concessa. Siquis autem super hoc aliquid eis forisfecerit aut contumeliam ingererit cito emendetur super x. libras forisfacture. Necnon palmiferis fratribus meis et burgensibus et omnibus fidelibus amicis meis precor et precipio ac volo ut istam meam elemosinam et suam pro posse suo fideliter manuteneant et exaltent. Huius donacionis et confirmacionis hii testes sunt Radulfus War', Reginaldus War', Radulfus de Bailiol, Radulfus de Wilburvilla, Willelmus filius Ranulfi, Auredus clericus, Adam prepositus.

The witnesses after Ralph de Bailliol do not appear in the *inspeximus* but are included in the copy in Top. Gen. c69.

No. 2. Charter issued by Hamelin de Warenne (d. 1202), printed in *Monasticon*, op. cit. p. 729.

Hamelinus comes Warennie omnibus baronibus suis et omnibus hominibus suis Francis et Anglic(is) et amicis suis clericis et laicis tam presentibus quam futuris salutem. Omnibus vobis notum facio quod ego assensu et voluntate Isabelle comitissa Warenie uxoris mee et Willelmi de Warennia filii et heredis mei dedi (f 72v) et concessi et presenti carta mea confirmavi Deo et sanctissimo Sepulcro et canonicis ibidem Deo servantibus locum et sedem ecclesia sancti Sepulcri de Tetfordia cum quadrugata terre infra campos ipsius ville libere et quiete sicut carta Willelmi comitis Warennie antecessoris mei testatur, in puram et perpetuam elemosinam pro amore domini mei Jesu Christi et sui sanctissimi Sepulcri pro remissione peccatorum meorum et Isabelle comitisse uxoris mee, et Willelmi filii et pro salute anime Henrici regis fratris mei, et Gaufridi comitis Andegaue patris mei et pro animabus omnium antecessorum et successorum et parentum meorum viuorum et defunctorum et omnium fidelium. Ideoque volo et precipio quod isti canonici mei predicta ecclesie habeant saca et tol et taem et infangethef et ecclesias et

decimas totius domini mei et omnium terrarum mearum quos tradidi hominibus meis de Teffordia de dominio meo quicumque de me in villa de Tetford' teram tenuerit et coluerit, homines etiam et terras et faldas et pascua et omnia sua infra burgum h(abea)nt et in pace et honorifice cum omni ecclesiastica libertate teneant sicut unquam rex Ricardus [*?recte* Stephanus] Anglie melius et liberius tenuit et mihi debet. Concedo et<iam> predictis canonicis ferias trium dierum, unam scilicet in inventione sancta Crucis in Maio, et aliam in festivitate sancti Sepulcri et tertiam in exaltatione sancte Crucis, solas et quietas de omni consuetudine cunctis venientibus et redeuntibus et ibi manentibus, illis mea firma paca concessa. Siquis autem super hoc aliquid eis forisfecerit aut contumeliam ingererit, cito emendetur super x. libras forisfacture. Huius donationis et confirmationis hii sunt testes: Willelmus de Warenn' filius Reginaldi de Warenn', Radulfus de Plaiz, Rogerus de Kailli, Adam de Puninges, Robertus de Mortemer, Philippus de Brunham, Franc(o) frater eius, Radulfus de Banham, Robertus Acule, Willemus de Lechisham, Willelmus filius Radulfi de Tetford, Reginaldus de Hill', Gilbertus de Hill', Petrus, Iohannes, Adam filii Turstani monetarii.

The witnesses after Roger de Kailli do not appear in the *inspeximus* but are included in the copy in Top. Gen. c69.

(Brunham is probably a Latinised rendering of Burnham as there was a Philip de Burnham, a Warenne tenant, who successfully claimed the church of Burnham Thorpe against the prior of Lewes in 1198. See *EYC*, viii, p. 38. A Philip de Brunham granted twelve acres in the fields of Harpley, Norfolk, to the monks of Castle Acre. It has not been possible to date the charter. Harley 2110, f. 41/35r. no. 283. And William III de Warenne confirmed the gift that William son of Philip de Burnham made to Reginald, his brother, of his land of Harpley, That charter has been dated 1146-47. *EYC*, viii, no. 95. A *Philippo de Burneham* attested a concord between

Hugh abbot of Cluny and Hamelin earl of Warenne which is dated 10 June 1201. *EYC*, viii, no. 79).

No. 3. Charter issued by William VI earl of Warenne (d. 1240). Unpublished.

Willelmus comes Warenn' omnibus fidelibus suis et balliuis has literas visuris vel audituris salutem. Noueritis me intuitu charitatis et pro salute anime mee et Matildis comitisse uxoris mee et pro salute animarum patris et matris mee et antecessorum meorum et successorum concessisse et confirmasse Deo seruientibus tres ferias annuas, unam scilicet in vigilia et in die Inventionis sanctae Crucis, et alia in vigilia et in die festivitatis sancti Sepulcri, et tertiam in vigilia et in die exaltationis (f 73r) sancte Crucis. Et cum aliquis dies per dictarum festiuitatum in die dominica euenerit, volo et concedo eisdem canonicis ut habeant bene et in pace easdem ferias duobus diebus scilicet die veneri et sabbato proximo precedentibus, et ut mea concessio et confirmatio rata et stabilis in perpetuum perseueret presens scriptum sigilli mei appositione roborauit. Hiis testibus: Nichol(ao) de Kenet, Petro filio suo, Rogero le Bigod, Ric(ardo) de Meisner', Ric(ardo) de Thefford' capellano, Roberto de Hyl', Willelmo Caccheare, Alano Vunntario (*sic*), Willelmo le Petit, Reginaldo Cok et aliis.

No. 4. Charter issued by William VI earl of Warenne (d. 1240). Printed in *Monasticon*, 6, part 2, p. 730.

Notum sit omnibus sancte matris ecclesie filiis ad quod presens scriptum peruenerit, quod ego Willelmus comes Warennia, pro salute animarum patris et matris mee et pro salute anime mee et Matildis comitisse uxoris mee et antecessorum meorum dedi et concessi Deo et ecclesie sancti Sepulcri de Theford et canonicis ibidem Deo seruiantibus in puram et liberam et perpetuam elemosinam decimam molendinorum meorum de Theford, scilicet de Pictmulne et de

Holdenesmulne et ut hec mea donatio et concessio rata et stabilis imperpetuum perseverit presens scriptum sigilla mei appositione roboravi. Hiis testibus: Nichelao de Kenet, Petro filio suo, Remigio Hospinel, Ricardo Meisner, Petro de Marevill, Roberto Corbet, Ricardo de Teford capellano, Roberto de H... fratre suo, Willelmo Catcheare, Alano vinitario, Hugone Buche, Roberto Bude, Ricardo de Wakering, Willelmo de Petit et aliis.

The witnesses after Peter son of Nicholas do not appear in the *inspeximus* but are included in the copy in Bodleian MS Top. Gen. c69.

No. 5. Charter issued by William VI earl of Warenne (d. 1240). Printed in *Monasticon*, 6, part 2, p. 729.

Notum sit omnibus presentibus et futuris quod ego Willelmus comes Warennia dedi et concessi et hac presenti carta mea confirmavi Deo et sancto Sepulcro de Tiffordia et canonicis ibidem Deo servientibus decem solidos sterlingorum de molendino meo de Brendemilne pro salute anime mee et pro animabus patris et matris mee et animabus antecessorum meorum in puram et perpetuam elemosinam, quos decem solidos recipient dicti canonici de dicto molindino per manum Willelmi prepositi mei de Tifford ad duos terminos per annum, videlicet ad festum sancti Andre apostoli quinque solidos, ad festum beate Marie in Marcio quinque solidos. Et quoniam volo quod hec mea concessio et donatio firma et stabilis imperpetuam perseveret, presentem cartam sigilli mei appositione confirmavi. Hiius testibus: Radulpho de Plaiz, Anker de Frescheville, Phillippo de Burneham, Willelmo de Colville, Radulpho de Banham, Nicholao de Saane, Richerio de Trunchet tunc senescallo, Galfrido capellano elemosinario comitis, Ricardo de Tifford capellano et pluribus aliis.

The witnesses after Ralph de Plaiz do not appear in the *inspeximus* but are included in the copy in Top. Gen. c69.

f. 73v

No.6(i). Charter issued by William VI de Warenne. Unpublished.

Willelmus comes Warenn' omnibus et singulis tam presentibus quam futuris salutem. Sciatis me dedisse et confirmasse Deo et canonicis sancti Sepulcri de Theford' omnes terras et tenementa que habent infra burgum de Theford' et extra cum omnibus suis pertinentiis in puram et perpetuam elemosinam, libera, sola et separata absque omni calumpnia, et omnes ecclesias meas in Theford' et decimas omnium terrarum et faldarum totius domini mei in villa et campis predictis. Do etiam eis et confirmo omnes terras et tenementa sua in Fauertonefeld que habent ex dono Thurstini filii Algari, et ex dono Osberti filii Stannardi hominum eorum cum turbar(iis), pratis, pascuis et pasturis ad omnia animalia sua pascenda, et bruariam in eodem campo ad omnia necc(essar)ia sua quoquo modo voluerint radicand(am). Teste Willelmo episcopo Norwyc' et U filio Walteri.

U son of Walter remains unidentified. The phrase in the charter, *in puram et perpetuam elemosinam, libera, sola, et separata absque omni calumpnia*, suggests late 12th century at the earliest and if William bishop of Norwich is William of Raleigh who was appointed in 1239 and died in 1250, then the charter would have been issued by William VI de Warenne.

No. 6(ii). Charter issued by William VI de Warenne. Unpublished.

Noverint universi sancte matris ecclesie fillii quod ego Willelmus comes Warennie dedi et concessi et presenti carta mea confirmavi Deo et ecclesie sancti Sepulcri de Thefordia et canonicis ibidem Deo servientibus pro salute anima mee et pro animabus patris et matris mee et pro animabus omnium antecessorum meorum in puram et perpetuam elemosinam sexaginta acras terre apud Teffordia quas Willelmus filius Ade praepositus eiusdem villa de me tenuit ibidem, de quibus triginta acrae iacent ex una parte ville, et alie triginta ex alia parte ville, habendas et tenendas in perpetuum cum omnibus pertinentiis suis, et omnia mesuagia in burgo de Theffordia et extra. Dominus predictus Willelmus heres fuit habenda et tenenda bene et in pace, libere et quiete, plenarie et integritas cum omnibus libertatibus et liberis consuetudinibus ad prefatas terras pertinentibus, salvo servitio burgali. Has prenominatas terras dedi prefatis canonicis sine ullo retenemento propter solutionem decem solidorum redditus quos eis debui annuatim pro animabus Hamelini comitis patris mei et Isabelle comitisse matris mee. Ego autem et heredes mei warentizabimus predictis canonicis prenominatas terras contra omnes homines. Et quia volo quod hec mea donatio stabilis et firma in perpetuum perseveret, eam sigilli mei appositione confirmavi. Hiis testibus: Gilberto Aquilo, Ancherio de Frescheville, Phillipio de Burnham, Radulfo de Banham, Richerio de Truncet tunc senecallo, Ricardo de Tefordia capellano, Roberto fratre suo, Willelmo filio Radulphi, Ricardo filio Oppe, Willelmo filio Widonis, Gilberto de Monte, Hugone filio Remegii, Petro de Laldecotes sicut multis aliis

f 74r

No. 7. Charter of Hamelin de Warenne. Printed in *Monasticon*, 6, part 2, pp. 729-30.

Hamelinus comes de Warennia dilectis et fidelibus suis Richero de Refham et bailiuis suis de Theffordia salutem. Noveritis me intuitu caritatis et pro salute anime mee et anime Galfridi comitis Andegavie patris mei et pro anima domini mei Henrici regis Anglie, et pro animabus antecesserum meorum, et pro animabus comitum et comitissarum de honore de Warennia qui decesserunt, assensu et voluntate Isabelle comitisse Warennie uxoris mee, et Willelmi de Warennie filii et heredis nostri, dedisse et concessisse Deo et Sancte Marie et canonicis Deo in ecclesia in sancto Sepulcro servientibus in villa mea de Tedfordia, viginti solidatas redditus, quos viginti solidos attornavi dictis canonicis annuatim percipiendos de molendinis meis de Thedfordia ad tres terminos, videlicet ad festum sancti Michaelis dimidiam marcam, et ad festum Candelarum dimidiam marcam, et ad Pentecosten dimidiam marcam, et ita annuatim percipiendi sunt viginti solidi ad tres terminos quousque alias dictum redditum dictis canonicis attornavero, et cartam meam super hac donatione fecero valete.

No witnesses recorded either in *Monasticon* or in Top. Gen. c69.

No. 8 Charter in the name of King Henry. Unpublished.

Henricus rex Anglie episcopo Norwicensi et iusticiariis et baronibus et vicecomitibus et ministris et omnibus fidelibus suis Francis et Anglis de Nortfolchia et Sudfolchia salutem.

Sciatis quod do et concedo in perpetuam elemosinam Deo et sancto Sepulchro de Tedfordia et canonicis ibidem Deo servientibus lx. acras terre de dominio meo de Thedfordia et precipio quod et bene et in pace et quiete illas teneant. Testibus Roberto filio Walteri et R. de Cusy apud Burgeleiam.

f 74v

No.9. Charter in the name of King Henry. Unpublished.

Henricus rex Anglie episcopo Norwicensi et iusticiariis et vicecomitibus et omnibus Baronibus et fidelibus suis de Norfolchia et Sudfolchia salutem. Sciatis me dedisse et concessisse in perpetuum Deo et ecclesie sancti Sepulcri de Tedfordia pro Dei amore et salute anime mee semitam illam que est inter terram Tulmioram et ecclesiam ipsam, que semita erant de dominio meo, et concedo eidem ecclesie omnis pecunie et rerum mobilium quas homines Beodf' et alii ei fecerint pro Dei amore, et volo et precipio quod bene et in pace et honorifice sit illa ecclesia et omnia sua. Testibus: Eborardo episcopo Norwicensi et Ricardo Basset et Alberico de Ver, apud Thedford.

No 10. Charter issued by Henry II. Printed in *LCH*, v, no. 2601

Henricus rex Anglorum et dux Normannorum et Aquitanorum et comes Andegavorum episcopo Norwic' et omnibus iusticiis et baronibus et vicecomitibus et ministris et fidelibus suis de Norfolca et Sudf' salutem. Sciatis me dedisse et concessisse in perpetuam elemosinam Deo et ecclesie de sancto Sepulcro de Tedforda et canonicis eiusdem loci illas viginti solidatas terre in meis dominicis culturis de Tedforda quas ipsi canonici tenuerant antequam saisiui villam et castellum de Tedford' in mea manu, et volo et firmiter precipio quod illas habeant et teneant in

perpetuum bene et in pace et libere et quiete et honorifice. Testibus: Toma cancellario et Ioscelino de Baillolio apud Brantonam.

No. 11 Charter of William III de Warenne. Printed in *Monasticon*, 6, part 2, p. 730.

Willelmus comes Warennie Reginaldo de Warennia fratri suo et omnibus ministris suis de Tedford et burgensibus salutem. Mando vobis atque precipio quatenus canonici mei de sancto Sepulcro et carissimi fratres mei teneant et habeant liberam et quietam absque omni servitio terram illam de Fanercunefeld quam Turstinus filius Algari dedit predicte ecclesie in elemosinam. Quapropter prohibeo ne idem canonici ulli hominum aut femine inde respondeant vel in placitum intrent.

No witnesses given either in the copy in Top. Gen. c69 or *Monasticon*.

No. 12. Charter in the name of King Henry. Unpublished.

Henricus rex Angliae omnibus et singulis salutem. Sciatis me concessisse et confirmasse Deo et canonicis sancti Sepulcri de Tetfordia omnes libertates et tenementa quas habeant infra burgum de Tetfordia et extra cum suis pertinentiis in puram et perpetuam elemosinam libera, sola et seperata absque omni calumnia, etiam omnes libertates et tenementa sua in Favertonefeld cum turbariis, pratis, et pasturis ad omnia animalia sua pascenda et bruaria in eodem campo ad omnia necessaria sua quoquomodo voluerint radicandam. Testibus: Willelmo episcopo Norwicensi, et Roberto filio Walteri.

f. 75r

No. 13. Charter of King Stephen. Unpublished.

Stephanus rex Anglorum Willelmo Norwicensi episcopo et iusticiis et baronibus et abbatibus, ministris et omnibus fidelibus suis de Norfolcia de Sulfolcia Francis et Anglis salutem. Notum sit omnibus me concessisse et presenti carta confirmasse Deo et sanctissimo Sepulcro de Thetfordia et canonicis ibidem Deo servientibus quandam virgatam terre de dominio meo infra campos Thetfodiae libere et quiete in perpetuam elemosinam pro amore domini nostri Jhesu Christi et sanctissime Sepulcri, pro salute anime mee et pro animo Henrici regis avunculi mei et pro salute heredum meorum de quo Willelmus comes Warenne eos sanctificavit, et volo et precipio ut isti mei canonici predictae ecclesie habeant sacca et soc et tol et theam et infangenetheof, et ecclesias et homines et libertates et faldas et pasturas et omnia sua infra burgum et extra, et nominatim hagasegable bene et in pace et honorifice cum omni ecclesiastica libertate teneant. Concedo etiam eis feriam duorum dierum, scilicet ad inventionem Sancte Crucis, et aliam ad exaltacionem Sancte Crucis, solam et quittam ab omni consuetudine cunctis venientibus et ibi manentibus et redeuntibus firma mea pace concessa. Si quis autem super hoc aliquid eis forisfecerit vel contumeliam instabit, cito emendetur super xx. libras forisfacture. Huius donationius et confirmationis

No witnesses given.

No. 14. Charter in the name of King Henry. Printed in *Regesta*, iii, no. 876 as a confirmation charter issued by King Stephen, although the charter in the manuscript from which it was taken was issued in the name of King Henry. See n. 1 to entry in *Regesta*.

Henricus rex Anglie episcopo Norwicensi et iusticiariis et vicecomiti et baronibus et ministris et omnibus fidelibus suis Francis et Anglis de Norfolchia et burgensibus de Tietfordia salutem.

Sciatis quod concedo et confirmo illam donationem quam Willelmus comes Warenne fecit Deo et canonicis sancti Sepulcri de Tedfordia, scilicet de loco et sede ecclesie sue sancti Sepulcri et de una carrucata de terra infra campos ipsius ville libere et quiete possidendam in perpetuum infra burgum et extra et de ecclesiis et decimis et hominibus et faldis et pasturis et omnibus aliis rebus cum socca et saca et toll et team et infangenetheof, sicut predictus comes Willelmus hec omnia eis dedit et concessit et carta sua confirmavit. Concedo etiam eis feriam duorum dierum, scilicet in inventione Sancte Crucis in Maio, et aliam in exaltatione Sancte Crucis solam et quietam de omni consuetudine, et omnes ad feriam illam cum mercato suo venientes et ibidem commorantes et in redeuntes meam firmam pacem habeant, et prohibeo quod nullus super hoc disturbet eos iniuste super decem libras forisfacture. Testibus: Willelmo Martel et Fulcone de Oilli |

apud Bertonam (Bartam).

The following statement appears at the foot of the charter in Top. Gen. c69

Iste Henricus primus confirmavit donationem Willelmi Warenni primi fundatoris.

Appendix 2

The Problem with Breckland

Breckland is characterised by its sandy soil and large areas of heathland and scrub, which make it a difficult area for cultivation. Much of East Anglia sits on chalk, while into Suffolk the chalk is overlain with boulder clay. The soil quality of Breckland, whilst generally poor, varies according to how deep it is over the chalk base. Where it is at its shallowest, the soil tends to be more productive, the sand containing elements of chalk, flint, and clay, so better able to retain moisture and is less acidic. At its deepest the sand is up to fifteen feet over the chalk base in the area around Lakenheath, Wangford, Elveden and Icklingham, all located in northwest Suffolk. We find shallower soils at the edges of Breckland, and also in Norfolk which provides greater fertility.⁸⁸⁰ In a report on the farming of Suffolk, published in 1848, Hugh Raynbird described the deeper sandy soils of Suffolk, those referred to above, as being ‘so sterile, as to almost defy all attempts to bring [them] into a productive state’.⁸⁸¹ The climate also militates against arable cultivation. East Anglia receives less rain than other parts of Britain and Breckland particularly so. Elveden recorded the lowest rainfall on record when in 1921 only thirteen inches fell.⁸⁸² The vast areas of sand tend to produce lower nighttime temperatures in the summer, with frost recorded in 1967 as late as May and June. All these factors combine to make Breckland a difficult area for cultivation, and in the Middle Ages much of it was used for grazing and rabbit warrens, although as regards the latter application, it was only at the end of the thirteenth century that rabbit warrens began to be established on a commercial scale. It was not, therefore, receptive

⁸⁸⁰ M. Bailey, *A Marginal Economy? East Anglian Breckland in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge 1989), pp. 30-1.

⁸⁸¹ H. Raynbird, ‘On the farming of Suffolk’, in *The Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England*, 8, (1847), 261-329, p. 264.

⁸⁸² Bailey, 1989, p. 33.

land for the foundation of monastic houses. They required land that could be cultivated relatively easily, and with a good supply of fresh water nearby. There are many instances of monastic houses being founded on what later turned out to be unsuitable sites, because of poor quality land unable to sustain the religious community and those who serviced it, a lack of water, or land that was liable to flooding, and so had to be moved. Breckland, straddling the boundary of Norfolk and Suffolk, an area of roughly 500 square miles, representing around 14% of the total area of East Anglia, almost considered as wasteland, and in consequence saw little in the way of monastic foundation. What little there was, almost without exception, was inconsequential and minor in nature. Ickburgh, in southwest Norfolk, date of foundation unknown, was a hospital, founded near the river Wissey, which would have provided for more fertile lands along its banks. Another was the preceptory of Cavenham for the Knights Templars, sited some six miles northwest of Bury St Edmunds, although the latter's vast expanse of Suffolk estates, as well as its status and venerability, was also an inhibitor for the foundation of new monastic houses in that county. But Cavenham never became a wealthy house. At the time of the suppression of the Templars from 1308, its net annual income was recorded as only six pounds.⁸⁸³ Roger de Tosny, son of Ralph, *c.* 1260, founded a grange at West Wretham, Norfolk, which he later gave to the Benedictine priory of Wootton Wawen in Warwickshire in return for a palfrey and three marks and two gold unciae for his wife.⁸⁸⁴ The grange would have benefitted from being sited near Mickle Mere, a feature of West Wickham, which would have afforded reeds, fish, and waterfowl as well as providing a means to irrigate the land. A more successful foundation was the Augustinian priory of Ixworth, founded in 1170, and on the Dissolution had an annual net

⁸⁸³ *MRH*, p. 292.

⁸⁸⁴ *Monasticon*, 6, part 2, p. 995, no. IV.

income of £168.⁸⁸⁵ Ixworth was located on the southeastern edge of Breckland on the banks of the river Black Bourne which joined the Little Ouse just before Thetford. Like Thetford, Ixworth was an important settlement, with roots going back to Roman times when it guarded the route north into Norfolk. In 1086 it was recorded as having 51 households and in the top 20% of settlements recorded in Domesday. It was held by Robert Blunt as tenant-in-chief, shared with the abbey of Bury St Edmunds. It was probably a member of the Blunt family who founded the priory.⁸⁸⁶

If Thetford can be accounted as part of Breckland, then one must also mention the foundations of Roger Bigod and that of William III de Warenne, founded respectively in 1103/4 and 1139X1141. But, as in the case of Ixworth, those houses were founded in an important regional centre, in an urban setting, and located on the banks of a waterway, the river Little Ouse. Thetford, it must be said, was also the site of several hospitals, a nunnery, the Augustinian and Dominican friars, and at least one secular college.⁸⁸⁷ That, however, reflected its importance as a regional centre. Thus, all the foundations that we have considered, and which can be said to have been located in Breckland, were sited on the edge of the region and always by, or close to, a reliable source of water. Of the 53 Breckland parishes that Mark Bailey describes as central, only four were the sites of a religious foundation, namely, Ickburgh, Cavenham, West Wretham, and Thetford, and of the 44 peripheral parishes there was only one, Ixworth.⁸⁸⁸

⁸⁸⁵ *MRH*, p. 161.

⁸⁸⁶ *Open Domesday*, available at (<https://opendomesday.org/place/TL9370/ixworth/>). Accessed 7 April 2024.

⁸⁸⁷ *MRH*, pp. 335, 255, 240, 214, 418, 483.

⁸⁸⁸ Bailey, 1989, pp. 35-6 for a list of the parishes.

Appendix 3

Comment on Alfred Heales's translation of the *Records of Merton Priory*

Alfred Heales's translation of the Merton Priory cartulary records the entry concerning the marriage of Hugh Maminot's daughter, Alice to Ralph de Chesney as follows: 'In the Cartulary is entered a memorandum to the effect that the land of Fecham (sic) is in the fee of Hugh Maminot, and that he had it by marriage with his wife Emma. At her request it was given with their daughter Adeliza to Ralph de Caisneto, and Ralph, at his wife's desire, gave it to Merton'. The entry in the Register is dated 1177-1186.⁸⁸⁹ Ralph de Chesney, who was married to Emma, and secondly, to Alice Maminot, was dead by 1148 as is apparent from his son John's charter in favour of Rudham Priory, issued in 1148, and made, *inter alia*, for the soul of his father. Heales in a foot note states that 'Ralph de Cahanes or Caisneto died in 1174'. Heales can only have been referring to Ralph de Cahagnes. In 1174/75 he was recorded as owing for his lands in Dorset and Somerset 43s 4d towards the cost of the marriage of the king's daughter. (*De auxilio ad maritandam filiam regis*).⁸⁹⁰ The following year that debt had passed to his son and heir, William, which he settled.⁸⁹¹ Ralph de Cahagnes also had a son named Richard, as is apparent from two charters issued in favour of Luffield Priory. In one, issued by Ralph de Kaynes (Chaynes), and dated c. 1160-1163, he gave to the priory a virgate of land and a messuage in the village of Dodford for the safety of his soul and the soul of his son R. The second charter was issued by his son Richard de Kaynes, (Cahaignes) around the same time, and confirmed the gift by his father and mother of the church of Dodford, with the hide of Eltendon. Richard added his own gift of the mill of Heyford. Dodford, Northamptonshire, was held by William de Keynes of

⁸⁸⁹ Alfred Heales, *The Records of Merton Priory in the County of Surrey* (London 1898), pp. 28-29.

⁸⁹⁰ *P R 21 Henry II*, p.23.

⁸⁹¹ *P R 22 Henry II*, p. 155.

Count Robert of Mortain in 1086.⁸⁹² In Michaelmas 1177, Richard de Cahagnes was fined 1000 marks for the division of lands in Sussex with his brother, William, following an agreement that they had made before the king.⁸⁹³

⁸⁹² *Luffield Priory Charters*, 2 vols., ed. G. R. Elvey (Aylesbury 1968 and 1975), ii, nos. 293, 294; *Domesday Book*, p. 604, Northamptonshire.

⁸⁹³ *P R 23 Henry II*, p. 191.

Appendix 4

Bill Flint's *Edith the Fair*. Not even wrong ⁸⁹⁴

Bill Flint takes as his starting point the date of foundation of the Shrine of Walsingham being 1061 as stated in the Pynson Ballad. His arguments thereafter are predicated upon that statement being true and it therefore follows that, if that date is correct, the Richeldis described as the mother of Geoffrey de Faverches, who founded Walsingham Priory in the late 1140s, cannot be the same person as the 'noble lady.....called 'Rychold' named in the ballad as being the person who founded the chapel, which she dedicated to the Everlasting Virgin Mary, and had it built as an exact replica of the house in Nazareth where the Archangel Gabriel announced God's plan to her, and the part that she was to play in it. Flint, therefore, begins by trying to identify who the person Rychold was. Walsingham, Flint asserts, was the residence of King Harold II and cites the Domesday survey in support, for it records that Harold held Walsingham. Flint's analysis and understanding of the evidence must be in doubt when he attributes the fact of Harold Godwinson holding the manor of Walsingham, as recorded in Domesday, as meaning that he resided there.⁸⁹⁵ Harold Godwinson held more land in England than any other person apart from the king, Edward the Confessor. Domesday records 779 manors of which Harold was lord or overlord. He was the most powerful nobleman in England. That he would choose to have his *caput* in a backwater in North Norfolk when the centre of power was in Westminster, which had increasingly over the years become more important than the Wessex capital, Winchester, is unlikely. That is particularly so with Harold playing such a central role in the administration of the

⁸⁹⁴ The phrase 'Not even wrong' is taken from the title of a book on the failure of string theory by the physicist Peter Woit. It signifies a theory, or in the case of Bill Flint, a hypothesis, that is not able to provide any answers founded upon empirical observations, but which is in essence based upon the insistence of the writer that he or she knows the truth.

⁸⁹⁵ Flint, 2015, pp. xvi, 5-7.

kingdom, as well as being King Edward's most important adviser. Harold's main residence was probably at Bosham, West Sussex where his presence is certainly depicted twice in the Bayeux Tapestry: once where he is shown visiting Bosham church and secondly, afterwards, enjoying a lavish feast in a hall before departing for Normandy in 1064. It is probably also Bosham where he is depicted in the tapestry upon his return. Archaeological excavations together with other evidence at Bosham have established that a house there is almost certainly the site of a lost residence of Harold Godwinson.⁸⁹⁶

Flint continues by stating that Harold's wife, Edith, (Eadgifu) would therefore have been the 'Lady of the Manor'.⁸⁹⁷ Edith or "Edith the Fair" as she was also known, held substantial estates in England, some 270 hides of land in 248 manors in 1066, which gave rise to her nickname, Edith the Rich, so she came to be known as Edith the Fair and Rich. In Old English this would have been Eadgifu *sēo Hīwfaeste ond Rīce*.

Flint seeks to build on the nickname Rich and to argue that the Rychold referred to in the Ballad must be Edith, the widow of King Harold, and so the founder of the Walsingham chapel. Although Harold had a long relationship with Edith the Fair, they were never married in the Christian sense of the word. Edith, contrary to Flint's assertion, was not Harold's wife, but his concubine, although contemporaries recognised such unions as Danish marriages, the description referring to Scandinavian customary law which recognised a union between a man and a woman as a marriage, but one that had not gone through a Christian marriage

⁸⁹⁶ <https://news.exeter.ac.uk/faculty-of-humanities-arts-and-social-sciences/archaeology-and-history/archaeologists-find-lost-site-depicted-in-the-bayeux-tapestry/#:~:text=January%2028%2C%202025%20Andrew%20Merrington,residence%20%E2%80%94%20stands%20on%20the%20site>. Accessed 18 September 2025.

⁸⁹⁷ Flint, p. xvi

ceremony.⁸⁹⁸ It did not stop Harold, though, from marrying Ealdgyth, widow of his Welsh enemy Gruffudd ap Llywelyn, probably in 1065, and almost certainly a union made for political expediency.⁸⁹⁹ It would have been Ealdgyth, Harold's widow, therefore, who would have become the lady of the manor of Walsingham after 14 October 1066, although the manor soon rested in the hands of William, crowned king of England on 25 December 1066.

Much of Flint's analysis rests on the fact that before the Conquest, Walsingham was in the hands of Harold Godwinson and that after the Conquest, it was in the king's demesne and remained so.⁹⁰⁰ Being a royal manor, Flint contends, the construction of an ecclesiastical building, such as a chapel, and indeed a priory, after 1066, would have required the consent and confirmation of the king. As regards the Walsingham chapel, there is no such confirmation, so, Flint surmises, it could not have been founded after the Conquest. As for the priory, founded by Geoffrey de Faverches for Augustinian canons, that consent is evidenced in the confirmation charter of Roger de Clare, issued, *c.* 1153, whom Flint contends was sheriff of Norfolk at that time and who, in consequence, had royal authority to act for the king in providing royal consent. Flint's confusion over this aspect is underlined in another passage where he has commented upon the passing of title of the Walsingham shrine to the Augustinian canons, which the foundation charter of Geoffrey II de Faverches obtained. Flint wrote 'This estate of the Walsingham Shrine was conveyed and assigned to the Canons by the powers granted to the High Sheriffs, Hugh de Clare (sic) and Roger Bigot, acting in the name of the king'.⁹⁰¹ The reference to Hugh de Clare is

⁸⁹⁸ Flint, p. xx.

⁸⁹⁹ R. Fleming, (2023, September 14), 'Harold II [Harold Godwinson] (1022/3?–1066), king of England', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Retrieved 2 Nov. 2023, from <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-12360>.

⁹⁰⁰ *Domesday Norfolk*, i, 1:40; Flint, p. xxx.

⁹⁰¹ Flint, pp. xxii, xxiii, 5.

probably a mistake for Roger de Clare, for there never was a Hugh de Clare, although there was a Hugh Bigod. In a later passage Flint remarks ‘The care and maintenance of this holy place (the Shrine of Walsingham) near the Chapel of Saint Laurence in the Manor of Walsingham, was in the joint royal jurisdiction of Roger Bigot and the Earl de Clare, High Sheriffs acting for the King’. And a few pages later, ‘The Priory Charter records the Church of All Saints as part of the bequest drawn up by Edwy and assigned by the High Sheriff’s (sic) Bigot and de Clare to the Austin Canons.’⁹⁰² And finally on this theme, Flint contends that Roger de Clare’s confirmation charter was ‘signed by Roger Bigot and de Clare in 1153’, presumably in their roles as ‘High Sheriffs of Norfolk’. Roger Bigod, although a sheriff of Norfolk, was dead by 1107. Flint could not possibly have been referring to Roger Bigod, second earl of Norfolk and the only son of Hugh Bigod and his first wife Juliana, sister of Aubrey III de Vere, earl of Oxford. Roger would have been around ten years of age in 1153, so certainly not acting as sheriff of Norfolk or anywhere else. Roger de Clare was never sheriff of Norfolk. In 1153, when Roger de Clare’s confirmation charter was likely issued, that post was held by William de Chesney fitz Robert and founder of Sibton Abbey. As regards witnesses to Roger de Clare’s charter, the only witnesses recorded in the cartulary are Walter, son of Robert, and Robert, son of Baldwin.⁹⁰³ If the charter had been issued before the Treaty of Westminster it is unlikely that Hugh Bigod would have been one of the witnesses; if after the treaty then one would expect he would appear as *comte* and as the most senior of the witnesses recorded, first in the list. The same argument is relevant as regards Geoffrey de Faverches’s foundation charter, if not even more so, it probably having been issued c. 1145/6. Indeed, the first and only witness recorded in the surviving copies is Alun, priest of Thursford. The obvious answer, of course, is that Flint simply confused the names

⁹⁰² Flint, pp. 65, 67-8.

⁹⁰³ *Cart. Walsingham*, f. 8r(7r). Printed in *Monasticon*, 6, part 1 p. 73.

and probably meant to refer to Roger de Clare and Hugh Bigod. Hugh Bigod was sheriff of Norfolk only for the year 1154/5, around a decade after the foundation of the priory

As for the reference to Richeldis in Roger de Clare's charter, mother of Geoffrey II de Faverches, and described in the charter as the founder of the chapel, Flint interprets that to mean that Richeldis had the responsibility for the upkeep and maintenance of the chapel, and that it is mere coincidence that she had a name similar to the one ascribed to Edith the Fair, as Edith the Rich, the true founder of the Walsingham chapel, and founded by her in 1061.⁹⁰⁴

The assertion by Flint that the chapel, and later the priory, were founded in a manor held in 1061 by Harold Godwinson, and thereafter a royal demesne, is wrong. That being a central pillar of Flint's thesis, once knocked away, the entire edifice crumbles. Great and Little Walsingham, before the Conquest, was held by three lords; Harold Godwinson held part, Ketel held another, and Bondi, a thane, held the third part. Bondi's holding was the least valuable, at 30 shillings in 1066. Ketel's holding was valued at £4 and although Domesday does not give a value for Harold's share, in terms of resources, they were very much on a par with each other. After 1066, Bondi's estate was granted to Peter de Valognes who enfeoffed his man Humphrey. Harold's holding became part of the royal demesne and Ketel's lands went to Raymond fitz Ivo.⁹⁰⁵ After 1088, following Raymond fitz Ivo's part in the rebellion against William Rufus, Raymond lost his lands, his estates being given to Gilbert fitz Richard of Clare (d. 1114 or 1117). They included Raymond's share of Great and Little Walsingham. It was as a Clare tenant that Geoffrey II de Faverches founded his priory in his manor of Little Walsingham that had once been held by Raymond fitz Ivo and, before him, by Ketel. And it was as a Clare tenant

⁹⁰⁴ Flint, p. xl.

⁹⁰⁵ *Domesday Norfolk*, i, 1:40. *Norfolk*, ii, 21:24; 34:18.

that the widow Richeldis founded her chapel to the Virgin Mary. It was not held at the relevant time, if at all, by Harold Godwinson. Indeed, if the Ketel who is mentioned in the will of Wulfgyth, wife of Thorkell the Tall, to whom she bequeathed her estates at Walsingham is the Ketel of Domesday renown, as Flint contends, then they were never in the hands of Harold Godwinson.⁹⁰⁶ It follows from this, therefore, that Edith the Fair was never the lady of that part of Walsingham at which the chapel was founded and never had jurisdiction over it.

Flint dismisses Geoffrey de Faverches's foundation charter as merely a means by which he raised money to finance his 'taking of the cross'. But he also describes it as a means to enable Geoffrey's clerk of the shrine, Edwy, to fund any eventuality and the passing of land title to the bishop of Norwich and 'subsequently into the administration of the Augustinian Friars'.⁹⁰⁷ The charter cannot be both. And the reference to passing title to the bishop of Norwich and the 'Augustinian Friars' makes no sense. The priory was one of Augustinian canons, to be distinguished from Augustinian friars, who did not make an appearance until the middle of the thirteenth century and would have had no involvement or connection with the priory. Land title remained with the priory, not the bishop of Norwich or any other ecclesiastical entity. As for the allegation that the charter was a means of raising funds to finance Geoffrey's taking of the cross, there is nothing about Geoffrey's charter that supports that suggestion. Typically, such charters recorded a transfer of land to a monastery in exchange for money. The transaction might be a sale, or a lease granted to the house, with money for rent paid up front. In effect, in the latter case, the land has been mortgaged to the priory, as security for what was essentially a loan. There is nothing about the language used in the charter that suggests that Geoffrey received a penny for

⁹⁰⁶ Flint, pp. 132, 152-3.

⁹⁰⁷ Flint, p. xxiv.

his endowment. If Geoffrey II de Faverches raised money to defray the expenses of his journey to Jerusalem, then, as we have seen, it was by his endowment of his lands in Massingham to Castle Acre Priory in return for six marks and four shillings annually, the latter payment in recognition of his lordship. Flint makes no mention of this charter, probably because he was not aware of it.

In another comment that reveals Flint's misunderstanding of the workings of twelfth century feudalism and feudal incidents, he describes the payment by William of Houghton to have the wife of Geoffrey de Faverches and her lands, as well as the wardship of her son until the latter became a knight, as 'a classic way of raising funds by mortgage of land and property which remains entailed to the son on achieving knighthood as a Crusader'. Flint continues 'we can understand clearly how the widow of Geoffrey de Faverques became the fundholder of her son, and his guardianship responsibilities over the Shrine of Walsingham'. By this statement, Flint is suggesting that it was Richeldis who received the £60, the funds to be used in the support and maintenance of the shrine until her son became of age.⁹⁰⁸ That he considered the transaction in that light seems to be confirmed by his statement that Geoffrey's mother 'was not the Shrine's founder but a major provider of funds necessary to maintain the buildings and the pilgrims and fund the Augustinian priest who served the shrine and parish'.⁹⁰⁹ The statement is sheer gobbledegook. Clearly Geoffrey's widow, Richeldis, was a woman of substance, and with the death of her husband, held substantial estates which would become her son's estates upon him reaching full age. In such circumstances, Richeldis and her son were at disposal at the king's pleasure. William of Houghton was simply paying the king a sum of money for the right

⁹⁰⁸ Flint, p. xxv.

⁹⁰⁹ Flint, p. xxx.

to marry Richeldis and have wardship of her son, Geoffrey II de Faverches, until he became of age. In turn, this would entitle William to the profits of her lands and possessions, and those of her son, and would increase his wealth and influence. William and his son, Payne, entered into a similar transaction to enable Payne to marry the widow of Edward of Salisbury, Adelia de Rames, with her land, William accounting for £200 and Payne, himself, accounting for 200 silver marks and 2 gold marks for the right. As the Pipe Roll makes clear, monies paid went into the king's treasury.

In dismissing the suggestion that the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham was founded other than in 1061, Flint points out that Hugh Bigod had testified that Henry I had disinherited his daughter, Matilda, and had designated Stephen of Blois his successor. From that he concludes that Hugh Bigod was an ardent supporter of Stephen, that it was therefore unlikely that the shrine would have been founded during Stephen's turbulent reign.⁹¹⁰ It is something of a strawman argument. Apart from the fact that Hugh Bigod spent most of Stephen's reign in violent opposition to him, it has never been suggested that the shrine was founded during his reign which commenced on 22 December 1135. The evidence suggests a founding date in the mid 1120s, during the later years of the reign of Henry I. But by the assertion, Flint betrays a sloppiness that is repeated in some of the other mistakes that he has made, and which have been highlighted here.

In seeking authority for his reliance upon the Pynson Ballad's dating of 1061 for the foundation of the shrine, Flint calls upon John Leland (1503-1552), the antiquarian, of whom he says his work 'has rarely been questioned or found to be inaccurate'. Leland, Flint informs us,

⁹¹⁰ Flint, p. xxxix to xl.

records that the original chapel was built in 1061. Leland's entry in his *Collectanea* which, under the heading 'Walsingham', reads 'Sacellum D. Mariae inchoatum tempore Edwardi

Confessoris. Deinde tempore Gulielmi Nothi inducti sunt canonici'.⁹¹¹ Not only does Leland assert that the chapel of St Mary was founded in the time of Edward the Confessor, but he also goes on to claim that the priory was founded during the reign of William the Bastard (*Nothi*).

Upon what basis we are not told. Leland might have been relying upon the Pynson Ballad for the time when the chapel was founded, a poem that is more reflective of the popularity and appeal of the shrine than a credible historical source, and a foundation myth placing the origins of the shrine in time beyond meaning. An early fifteenth century Book of Hours, now in Cambridge University Library, contains a note, in a later hand, asserting that the chapel was founded in 1061. '*anno domino m^o sexagesimo primo capella beate marie de Walsingham*

in comitatu Norff. Fuit fundata et incepta'.⁹¹² Yet neither of these sources can be considered as reliable, for they may simply be repeating an oral tradition that has been encapsulated in the Pynson Ballad on the one hand and written down as established fact in the Cambridge Book of Hours on the other. Moreover, if Edith the Fair was the founder, why did the ballad not refer to her by that name, a name by which she was well known, rather than an obscure reference bound up in the name Rychold? The simple answer is that the name Rychold is a reference, not to Edith the Fair, but to Richeldis de Faverches, mother of Geoffrey II de Faverches and founder of Walsingham Priory.

⁹¹¹ *Joannis Lelandi Antiquarii de rebus britannicis collectanea* ed. T. Hearne (London 1715), iv, p. 29.

⁹¹² Cambridge, MS li vi. 2, fol. 71r.I.

