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11 Creating and Curating an Archive: Bury St Edmunds and Its Anglo-Saxon Past

Kathryn A. Lowe

Every archive tells a story, one that is just as much an act of self-conscious creation as are the more obviously constructed forms of historical writing, such as chronicles, and one equally responsive to current pressures and events. The history of an archive is therefore the mediated history of its recording institution or office, and its development both shapes and is shaped by it. In this chapter, I show how the Benedictine monastery of Bury St Edmunds created and curated its pre-Conquest archive in response to challenges to its power from rival institutions, the Crown, and rioting citizens. Such a case study highlights the invention and resourcefulness of those charged with presenting and preserving their documents to counter these and similar threats.[1]

The Pre-Conquest Archive: Introduction

While the origins of the Abbey are disputed, it is clear that reform during the reign of Cnut (d. 1035) led to the transformation of a secular minster into an enormously wealthy Benedictine community. The Abbey's success and influence rested squarely on a series of extraordinary privileges allegedly granted to it by kings Cnut and Edward the Confessor in the eleventh century, and confirmed by subsequent kings throughout the Middle Ages.[2] These privileges amounted to the right of jurisdiction

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[1] For complementary discussion of historical narratives in administrative and institutional public records, see Prescott, in this volume.

[2] I am currently completing an edition of the pre-Conquest charters from Bury St Edmunds and St Benet at Holme with Sarah Foot as part of the Anglo-Saxon Charters series (Oxford UP; British Academy/Royal Historical Society). Responsibility for the volume is two-fold; I am producing the editions and translations themselves with material relating to the history of the archive, manuscripts and language, and Prof. Foot is writing the commentaries together with the history of the foundation and its donors. For recent work on the immediate post-Conquest environment of the Abbey, see the

throughout most of western Suffolk, freedom from episcopal control, and practical exemption from royal taxation.

The Anglo-Saxon archive of Bury St Edmunds as a whole is distinctive in two ways: first, it is unparalleled in its vernacular bias, and second, a very large number of its surviving manuscripts contain copies of one or more of the Abbey's fifty or so pre-Conquest charters. Some contextualisation is necessary in order fully to appreciate these features. Of the 1,500 or so charters dating or purporting to date from the Anglo-Saxon period, as classified in Peter Sawyer's catalogue, over two-thirds may be classified royal diplomas or grants of privileges, written in (or largely in) Latin.[3] By contrast, only around 15% of Bury's pre-Conquest charters fall into that category, and a number of these are bilingual, preserving their texts in both Latin and vernacular versions. Vernacular writs disproportionately make up about a third of the total (compared with around 7% of charters across all archives), alongside an outstanding collection of Old English wills, which comprises more than 40% of the archive. This last statistic bears witness to the unusual preponderance of lay benefactors in Bury's early history. As we shall see, this wealth of vernacular material created particular difficulties for the foundation's copyists in later centuries, when knowledge of Old English fell into desuetude.

Cartularies and Registers

An archive, of course, comprises not just a series of original charters in favour of an institution but also their later collection, arrangement and transcription into manuscript volumes. Such a volume is technically known as a *cartulary*, distinct from a *register*, which contains a preponderance of other text types (such as rentals, accounts of legal proceedings, correspondence, etc.). This distinction,

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edited collection of essays by Licence, *Bury St Edmunds and the Norman Conquest*, including an article by Foot ('The abbey's armoury of charters') based on the above. Antonia Gransden has published two volumes of her history of the Abbey: *A History of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds, 1182–1256*, and *1257–1301*.

[3] See Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*.

useful though it may be to modern scholars, seems not to have obtained in the Middle Ages, when compilers cheerfully conflated these (and other) categories under the umbrella term of *registrum*. Trevor Foulds complains that the designation 'register' was indiscriminately used by antiquaries of the seventeenth century to apply both to cartularies and registers proper, but it appears that the conflation (if that is what it is) substantially predates this period.[4] Thus, in the case of Bury St Edmunds, the earliest surviving general cartulary from the Abbey, the early thirteenth-century CUL, MS Mm. 4. 19, was referred to as the 'niger registrum', the Black Register, in medieval times. In what follows, I refer to manuscripts by the descriptive title given to them by contemporary users.

In his seminal catalogue of medieval cartularies of Great Britain, G. R. C. Davis subdivided cartularies further into different types: general cartularies; special cartularies (such as those pertaining to a particular office, or place); cartularies of rights and privileges (often for use in disputes); chronicle-cartularies (incorporating narrative material); and the distinct category of cartularies added to gospel-books and other important works.[5] Bury St Edmunds is remarkable for the sheer number of record books surviving from all of these classes.[6] The earliest cartulary proper surviving from the Abbey is the Black Register, mentioned above, dating to the beginning of the thirteenth century. However, there are several earlier examples of the gospel-book type. A further three cartularies containing copies of Anglo-Saxon material date from the thirteenth century, six from the fourteenth, and five more from the fifteenth. In addition, two of the fifteenth-century cartularies are very large

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[4] Foulds, 'Medieval cartularies'.

[5] Davis, *Medieval Cartularies of Great Britain*, pp. xii–xiii. This work has been revised and reprinted as Davis, *Medieval Cartularies of Great Britain and Ireland*, revised by Breay, Harrison and Smith. For chronicle-cartularies elsewhere with bibliography, see Foot, in this volume, p. 000.

[6] Bury's archival material as a whole is catalogued and discussed by Thomson, *The Archives of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds*.

two-volume productions, and each part contains copies of pre-Conquest charters.[7] This represents, of course, only a small proportion of the impressive total of thirty-nine medieval cartularies and registers surviving from Bury St Edmunds, substantially more than from any other English religious house.[8] This figure excludes those record books known to have been lost from the Abbey, which may have numbered as many as forty-five more.[9]

While, then, Bury is unusual in terms of the number of record-books surviving from the archive, general surveys of cartulary production and use suggest that the foundation used and engaged with its archive in ways broadly typical of religious houses up and down the country.[10]

Creating the Archive

Of the pre-Conquest charters in Bury's archive, one is of outstanding importance. It is Sawyer 980, a bilingual grant of privileges by King Cnut (1016–35), including exemption from episcopal jurisdiction and the payment of geld. It was forged in the late eleventh century and survives as a handsome single

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[7] I exclude one fifteenth-century manuscript, which contains Bury material on its flyleaf, from the count.

[8] *Feudal Documents*, p. xix; Thomson, *Archives*, p. 5. For the broader significance of the narrative, spiritual and memorial dimensions of the cartulary, see O'Donnell, in this volume, pp. 00–00.

[9] Thomson, *Archives*, p. 6.

[10] For cartularies and record books in general, see Foulds, 'Medieval cartularies', note 3 above; Davis, *Medieval Cartularies*, note 5 above; Walker, 'The organization of material in medieval cartularies'; Ramsay 'Archive books'; Clanchy, 'The preservation and use of documents', in his *From Memory to Written Record*, pp. 147–86 and, more specifically, pp. 103–106. An interesting continental perspective is provided in Geary, 'Archival memory and destruction of the past', in his *Phantoms of Remembrance*, pp. 81–114, and, for France, Bouchard, 'Monastic cartularies: organizing eternity'. Bouchard's comments do not reflect the situation in England.

sheet.[11] It additionally survives in over thirty copies from before the end of the fifteenth century along with a very large number of antiquarian transcripts, making it the most frequently copied of all Anglo-Saxon charters from any foundation. The story of Sawyer 980 and its different manuscript versions is essentially the story of Bury's archive.[12]

Mention of Cnut's charter first appears at the climax to a lengthy dispute (begun in the 1070s) with Bishop Herfast of East Anglia (d. 1084), the first of Bury's inveterate enemies. Herfast had wished to move his episcopal seat to Bury, a direct threat to the position of its abbot, Baldwin (d. 1097). The oral testimony of witnesses asserting Bury's freedom from episcopal jurisdiction fell on deaf ears, and the matter was only resolved in Bury's favour at a court case in Winchester in 1081. The bilingual writ recording the outcome, a product of the Bury scriptorium, explains that Baldwin was able to counter the weasel words of Herfast with solid documentary evidence in the form of charters of Edward the Confessor and Cnut, brandished almost certainly with the ink still wet on them. Created to be savoured by an internal audience, the overtly partial and highly stylised Old English version, which differs markedly in tone from the Latin, reads:

> The bishop told his story very skilfully (if it had been true), but everyone
> considered it vacuous and vain [OE: 'idel & unnyt'] because he had neither
> writings nor witness [OE: 'gewritu ne gewitnesse'; Latin: 'sed scriptis et
> testimoniis omnimodo vacuum' 'completely lacking in documents and witnesses']
> …Abbot Baldwin explained very clearly that it was fifty-three years since monks
> had arrived at their glorious home and in all that time the monastery and the heads
> of the monastery had never been subject to claims or contention [OE: 'uncwid &
> uncrafod'] from any of Bishop Arfast's predecessors, and the monks had received
> their office from whatever bishop best suited them at the direction of the abbot.

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[11] Charters are here referred to by their standard numbers as set out in Sawyer, *S*. On forgery more generally, see Hiatt, in this volume.

[12] For a history of this text, see Lowe, 'Bury St Edmunds and its liberty'.

After he had explained all this, he then produced King Cnut's charter and that of

Edward the glorious king. From those it was clear that the kings exempted the holy

place and granted every freedom from the control of all bishops and laymen [OE:

'fram ealra biscopa & fram ealra woruldmanna andwealde'; Latin: 'ab omni

dominatione omnium episcoporum comitatus illius' 'from all control of all bishops

of that shire'].[13]

Sawyer 980 is certainly the Cnut charter referred to here, along with Sawyer 1045, another bilingual

grant of privileges in the name of Edward the Confessor, seemingly also invented for the purpose.

The story is retold and embellished further (with unflattering detail about Herfast) in

Herman's *Miracles of St Edmund*, composed about a decade later, in which the bishop is punished by

the saint himself for his outrages against the monastery with an eye injury.[14] He thereupon confesses

his calumny, but, having been cured by Abbot Baldwin, wickedly renews his suit. Unable to voice his

lies in court, again through the action of the saint, his failure to argue his suit permits the Abbey's

privileges to be read and the liberty declared.[15]

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[13] 'se biscop tealde ful gerædelice his tale gif hit soð wære ac heo wæs eallum mannum geþuht idel &

unnyt forþi þe he næfde/ naþor ne gewritu ne gewitnesse… Se abbod Baldwine… tealde ful swutelice

þat ða/ wæs agan ðreo & fiftig geara siððan munceas þone eþelan ham gesohton. & on eallan þam

fyrste þat mynster & þæs mynstres ealdras wæron æfre un cwid & un crafod/ fram eallum Arfæstes

forgenglan. & þa munecas underfengon had of swa hwilcon biscope swa him betst gelicode be heora

abbodes dihte. Siððan he þis eall/ geteald hæfde þa brohte he forð Cnutes Kynges gewrit &

Eadwardes þæs wulderfullan Kynges. On þam wæs geswutelad þæt ða Kyngas gefreodon þa halgan

stowe & æcne/ freodom sealdon fram ealra biscopa & fram ealra woruldmanna andwealde'. Bates

(ed.), *Regesta regum Anglo-Normannorum*, p. 207; translation mine.

[14] Licence, *Herman the Archdeacon and Goscelin of Saint-Bertin: Miracles of St Edmund*, Ch. 27.

[15] Licence, *Miracles*, p. 78.

These charters had certainly repaid the time invested in their creation, and it was also fortunate that there was a gap only of sixty or so years between the purported date of the grant and the act of forgery, making the result much more credible. At much the same time, St Augustine's Abbey in Canterbury was obliged to forge considerably older documents, including the privilege of none other than St Augustine, the resulting effort being criticised at various junctures in its history for not being, in Alfred Hiatt's understated phrase, 'sufficiently antique'.[16]

Copying the Archive: Civic Unrest, Greedy Kings, and John of Northwold

Attempts to challenge the privileges granted to Bury were evident as early as the late twelfth century. In the 1180s and 1190s, for instance, Abbot Samson (d. 1211) moved quickly to counter the claims of London merchants that their exemption from market tolls across England, granted to them by Henry II, included Bury by default.[17] His fear was that the Bury burgesses would demand similar rights. The contemporary chronicle of Jocelin of Brakelond, monk of the foundation, reports Samson's response to the merchants, in which he trumped a later charter by citing an earlier one, reminding them that St Edward had granted the Abbey 'toll and team and all royal rights ['iura regalia'] before the Conquest of England', rendering the borough of Bury exempt from Henry's quittance.[18] The phrase 'iura regalia' allows us to identify the charter referred to as Sawyer 1046, likely forged at the same time as Sawyer 980 and Sawyer 1045. The Latin version of this bilingual charter (probably the original on which the vernacular was based) appears in a large number of manuscripts from the Abbey, with the key phrase highlighted by a forest of manicles, *nota* marks, and underlinings in many of the copies.

While scholars have charted a general move towards self-governance by boroughs in the thirteenth century, Bury seems an exception. M. D. Lobel's study of the origins of Bury's borough

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[16] Hiatt, *The Making of Medieval Forgeries*, p. 53. Hiatt continues by describing Thomas Elmham's response by facsimile, pp. 52–7. See also Hiatt, in this volume, pp. 000–000 and p. 000.

[17] See further, Gottfried, *Bury St Edmunds and the Urban Crisis*, pp. 215–6.

[18] Butler ed., *The Chronicle of Jocelin of Brakelond*, pp. 75–6.

describes its faltering development during the period, attributing its lack of success to strong opposition from the foundation, vigilant of its rights.[19] She outlines a series of early spats between the borough and the convent, demonstrating that the underlying issue was entirely economic: the borough, increasingly pressed by royal demands for money, worked towards ending a whole series of dues levied by the convent; the foundation responded repressively against this attack on their income. The mood for revolt was exacerbated by the Second Barons' War in 1263, and the following year saw the first of several bouts of civic unrest (with others reported in 1292 and 1305) during which monks collecting tolls were assaulted and abused, workmen repairing the fabric of the Abbey stoned, the monks variously confined to the Abbey or its senior officials prevented from entering the town, and the cemetery gates broken down by rioters.[20]

It was almost certainly the 1264 uprising that prompted the making of the most comprehensive cartulary in the archive by its immensely capable abbot, John of Northwold (d. 1301). The Northwold Register has since been lost (although it survived into the fifteenth century), but its contents can largely be reconstructed from references to it in other archival books from the Abbey.[21] It contained copies of essentially all of the pre-Conquest charters in favour of the foundation, along with a series of papal bulls, later royal charters, and considerable material concerning the abbot's liberties. It seems that the manuscript was almost immediately copied (with slightly rearranged order) in the surviving Sacrist's Register (CUL, MS Ff. 2. 33), which in turn gave rise to the contemporary White Register (BL, MS Add. 14847).

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[19] See Martin, 'The English borough in the thirteenth century', and references there cited. Lobel, *The Borough of Bury St Edmund's*, pp. 118–70.

[20] On these and the 1327 riots, see Goodwin, *The Abbey of St Edmundsbury*, pp. 47–62, Gottfried, *Bury St. Edmunds*, pp. 215–36 and Lobel, 'A detailed account of the 1327 rising'.

[21] On this manuscript, see Lowe, 'The Anglo-Saxon contents of a lost register from Bury St Edmunds'. For the post-Conquest contents, see Thomson, *Archives*, p. 7.

As Foulds has shown, a threat or crisis of some kind is generally the trigger for the compilation of a cartulary.[22] To that extent, then, the production of the Northwold Register and its copies is not unusual, but even so represents a considerable achievement because of the challenging nature of its earliest texts. As noted above, Bury's pre-Conquest endowment unusually derived principally from the generosity of lay donors who remembered the foundation in their vernacular wills, rather than from estates granted by (Latin) royal diploma. Later, these wills proved difficult both to read and to understand. The only surviving cartulary containing copies of charters dating from before this period, the Black Register of the early thirteenth century, demonstrates that copying these texts was not a challenge to which many could rise. This otherwise fine production, written in a classy bookhand, shows no familiarity with Anglo-Saxon letter-forms in its copy of Sawyer 507 (fols 83v–5r), a grant of privileges by King Edmund, dated 945. Both the names in the witness-list and the vernacular boundary clause cause the scribe no end of difficulties, resulting in awkwardly shaped representations of Insular graphs. After this initial attempt, the scribe simply leaves gaps for others to fill in the Old English vernacular. By comparison, the pre-Conquest texts presented in the later (mid-thirteenth-century) Sacrist's Register are semi-modernised in terms of phonology and morphology, but generally retain their Old English lexis and syntactic constructions. Each charter was fronted by a rubric summarising the grant, a useful addition in a period when Old English presented a significant challenge to comprehension. Thus the Abbey secured accessible copies of its pre-Conquest charters in a single volume at a point before the archives were reorganised.

The Archive in Action: Bury and the Quo Warranto Proceedings

The charters that John of Northwold held in his archive proved their value during Edward I's reign (1272–1307). In the final quarter of the thirteenth century, Edward launched the Quo Warranto proceedings, at which privilege holders were obliged to show some form of proof that they had a right

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[22] Foulds, 'Medieval cartularies', p. 29.

to their liberties and franchises.[23] Antonia Gransden charts some of Northwold's frequent efforts to

protect the privileges of manors in Suffolk, which included recourse to Domesday Book, and to key

charters, including the Anglo-Saxon privileges.[24] The plea record actually quotes directly from

Sawyer 980: 'And he showed the charter of King Cnut in which is specified that "omnia jura

quarumcum[que] causarum in villis que monasterio adjacent & que adiciendae sunt" should remain

with them'.[25] Generally speaking, as Sutherland explains, a royal charter 'was a stronghold of defence

for the liberty-holder during the Quo Warranto campaign',[26] but the issue, argued in court, centred

around whether the vague wording of these ancient privileges could really be said to relate to specific

franchises. This impasse frequently led to adjournment. This stonewalling may have been what led

Northwold in 1290 to petition the king that his privileges be allowed in the Exchequer in order to

secure the judicial profits of the liberty. At that point, we learn from the account surviving in Bury's

late thirteenth-century White Register (fols 54v–5r), charters were read out in parliament in support of

the abbot's petition.[27] First was read the charter of Cnut (with its opening invocation quoted, 'In

nomine poliarchis'), then two vernacular charters of Edward the Confessor (one wonders what was

made of those!) with a notably imprecise summary of their contents: one including *sententia* (perhaps

to be understood as 'confirmation', although more likely deliberately vague), and the second, with a

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[23] For a detailed account of these proceedings, see Sutherland, *Quo Warranto Proceedings in the Reign of Edward I*. For the making of chronicles in London in response to the same threat see Shuffelton, p. 000, in this volume.

[24] Gransden, *Bury St Edmunds 1257–1301*, p. 57.

25 'Et praefert cartam Knuti Regis in qua continetur quod "omnia jura quarumcum[que] causarum in villis que monasterio adjacent & que adiciendae sunt" eis remaneant'. *Placita de Quo Warranto*, Record Commission (1818), p. 733.

[26] Sutherland, *Quo Warranto*, p. 111.

[27] This is discussed by Gransden, *Bury St Edmunds 1257–1301*, pp. 58–9, supplemented here by Latin quotations from the manuscript.

seal appended in an embroidered silk pouch ('in opere de serico facto et brudato'), concerning the grant of the jurisdiction.[28] The abbot continued by reciting further charters, of Henry I and II, both quoted in part in the narrative, and one of Edward I himself confirming charters of Henry I and John. This part of the account ends with the flourish 'there was no need to show any other charters because these were the best'.[29] These spirited attempts, among those of other franchise holders, eventually resulted in Edward I allowing charters of liberties in the Exchequer which had been allowed in or prior to 1234; later ones would need to be shown and reviewed at the Exchequer where charters couched in general terms would not be accepted.[30] This was a very important concession.

Decades later, we see this event reframed as a narrative of triumph against royal greed, with the martyred saint himself appearing before the king to warn against infringements on the Abbey's liberties: the rubric 'How St Edmund terrified King Edward because he had taken the freedom of the church into his own hand'[31] gives an indication of the temper of the account, described appropriately as 'highly coloured' by Gransden.[32]

Refocusing the Archive

According to the accounts of these disputes, John of Northwold appears to have produced the actual charters themselves in court. After 1315, however, it seems that the value as evidence of originals (or

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[28] This is likely to be a reference to Sawyer 1084 which still survives in single-sheet form, though now without its seal.

[29] Gransden, *Bury St Edmunds 1257–1301*, p. 58; BL, MS Add. 14847, fo. 55r 'De aliis autem cartis ibidem ostendum non fuerit necesse quia iste sunt meliores'.

[30] Sutherland, *Quo Warranto*, pp. 120–1.

[31] 'Quomodo Sanctus Edmundus terruit regem Edwardum, eo quod libertatem ecclesiæ in manu sua ceperat', Arnold ed., *Memorials of St Edmund's Abbey*, vol II, p. 365; translation mine. The account is from the Bury version of the *Nova Legenda*, c. 1370.

[32] Arnold, *ibid.*, p. 365; Gransden, *Bury St Edmunds 1257–1301*, p. 59.

purported originals) to the Abbey lessens with the advent of *Inspeximus* charters, which quoted the full wording of the charters within the confirmations of successive monarchs. Although this innovation appears to have been instigated by Henry III in 1227, the earliest surviving example from Bury dates to 1315, with eight subsequent confirmations to 1516. Included from the beginning was the ubiquitous Sawyer 980 (in both Old English and Latin versions) along with Sawyer 1045, Edward the Confessor's grant of privileges (in its vernacular version only), and four other vernacular writs of the Confessor relating to various liberties. These were bundled with later confirmations and further grants of liberties, with the fullest form of the resulting *Inspeximus* achieved in 1400.[33] The charters were also enrolled in the Chancery and (to 1413) in the Exchequer, providing a further safeguard against loss or destruction.

Although one might imagine that the single-sheet originals of these charters would need to be produced again when they were freshly confirmed, it seems instead that the new *Inspeximus* charter was simply drawn up using the previous one (and the texts contained within it) as its model.[34] Most copying activity at the foundation involving pre-Conquest charters in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries consists of transmitting the texts of various iterations of these *Inspeximus* charters without recourse to the single sheets themselves. In this way, the development of the *Inspeximus* charter reduces the reliance placed on the key single sheets as forms of evidence to outside parties.

Recording the Archive: The Riot of 1326 and the List of Benefactors

From 1315, then, the Abbey was potentially less vulnerable to loss of or damage to their original charters of liberties. It was probably just as well: growing hostility from the town towards the Abbey culminated in the full-scale riot of 1327 and led to its sacking.[35] Monks were imprisoned in town, the

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[33] These are discussed in detail in Lowe, 'The Exchequer, the chancery, and the abbey of Bury St Edmunds'.

[34] Lowe, *ibid*., p. 18.

[35] On this and the earlier riots, see note 20 above.

abbot kidnapped, horses rustled, wine drunk, and gold and silverware looted as the rioters ransacked the monastery. The lively contemporary account of the riot, the *Depredatio abbatiae*, reports the plunderers taking charters which held no financial value for them, but which they knew constituted the source of the Abbey's wealth:

> They broke down the gates and doors of the storeroom and pulled out the taps from the flasks and poured out the beer and totally wasted it and carried off whatever they could. Then, once they had entered the cloister, they broke into the book-chests (*cistulas*), that is desks (*caroles*), and small cupboards (*armoriola*), and carried off books and likewise everything found in them… Next entering the prior's room, they bore off a chalice, gold and silver, vessels and valuables with them [the narrative continues with report of the kidnap and incarceration of the prior and the third prior]…They broke into the sacristy and seized the strongboxes and everything that was locked, they stole gold and silver, books, registers, and silver vessels and drank immeasurable amounts of wine. They took away the sacrist's registers and documents and charters, and a horse worth 10*l*… [they continued through the infirmary, taking everything of value, and pestering the sick; the following day they imprisoned another nine monks]. Afterwards, they entered the treasury of the church, and from there they stole gold and silver, florins and valuables, many silver vessels and precious stones, kings' charters, papal bulls, and took off other documents relating to the privileges with them.[36]

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[36] Arnold, *Memorials*, vol. II, pp. 330–1; translation mine. 'Portas et ostia subcellariæ fregerunt, et clipsedras de doleis extraxerunt, et cervisiam effuderunt et totaliter perdiderunt, et quicquid poterant asportaverunt. Deinde claustrum ingressi, cistulas, id est caroles, et armoriola fregerunt, et libros ac omnia in eis inventa similiter asportaverunt. Postea cameram prioris intrantes, unum calicem, aurum et argentum, vasa et jocalia secum tulerunt… Sacristiam fregerunt, cistas et omnia clausa diruperunt,

Just a few years later, the monk Walter Pinchbeck (*fl.* 1330–1339), likely responsible for the *Depredatio* himself, itemises the materials lost during the riot in his register, which allegedly included three charters of Cnut, four of Harthacnut, and one charter of Edward the Confessor.[37]

Nothing from the archives supports the loss of any Cnut or Harthacnut charters, let alone a total of seven of them. Indeed, this is indicated by the Pinchbeck Register itself, which includes a much-expanded version of the benefactors' list of donors to the Abbey from an earlier version. This major undertaking summarises the grants to the Abbey and includes reference to lost charters: there is no mention here of the Cnut and Harthacnut cache.

The Organisation of the Archive

Time and again in the archive we see scribes returning to the Northwold Register, rather than to the single sheets, as the source for their copies of or references to pre-Conquest material. Indeed, the descriptions of the surviving charters in the Pinchbeck Register's benefactors' list mentioned above derive from the rubrics to the charters in Northwold, and uniquely quote the opening line of each of the pre-Conquest charters from that source (or its copy in the Sacrist's Register). Together the Pinchbeck and Northwold Registers mediated access to the archive through the use of their summarising rubrics and convenient format.

While Bury scribes demonstrably seem to have had no interest in consulting the originals of the texts they copied, doing so would have been difficult in any case because of the lack of order in the archive. This was rectified between 1378–81 by John of Lakenheath (at that point Keeper of the

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aurum et argentum, libros, registra, et vase argentea sustulerunt, et vinum ultra modum consumperunt. Registra et munimenta et cartase sacristiæ, et unum equum pretio .x. librarum abduxerunt… Postea ingressi sunt thesauriam ecclesiæ, et inde aurum et argentum, florenos et jocalia, multa vasa argentea et lapides pretiosos, cartas regum, paparum bullas, et alia munimenta libertatum secum abstulerunt.'

[37] Hervey (ed.), *The Pinchbeck Register,* vol I, p. 150.

Barony, later Abbot), when the foundation's charters were press-marked.[38] The charters were divided into three broad types: papal bulls, royal charters, and a very large group of 'abbot's charters', those manors administered by the abbot. All the charters seemed to have been stored in the vestry in large chests (*cophinus* or *cophina* sg.) with boxes or drawers (*cista* or *cistum* sg.) dividing them further; examples survive from Durham, Ely, and Norwich, although the terminology varies from archive to archive.[39] Charters were press-marked with a letter followed by a number. Several surviving single sheets still have their pressmarks on their dorses. At the same time, John of Lakenheath compiled what amounts to a finding-list of the charters in his register (BL, MS Harley 743).[40] His prologue is revealing both of his intentions and the reasons for the work:

> Seeing that our monastery was destroyed by robbers and fire, and the registers of the abbots and other muniments were stolen stealthily without return—the thin ears of corn behind the backs of the reapers had hardly remained from such an abundant harvest of evidence for the church—I, Brother John Lakenheath, have somehow arranged from various registers a kind of calendar. In it, I have laid out in alphabetical order the names of certain manors about which I have discovered any documentary evidence, in order that the evidence may more openly be accessible to future generations, that within and beyond their liberty, the abbot and convent may have the power to proclaim their royal rights and other liberties more confidently ('infra libertatem et extra iura regalia ceterasque libertates Abbas et Conuentus uendicatum securius ualeant').[41]

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[38] See further, Thomson ed., *Archives*, pp. 25–33.

[39] Thomson, *Archives*, p. 31. For the system at Lincoln cathedral, see Foulds, 'Medieval cartularies', pp. 18–19.

[40] Thomson, *Archives*, p. 25.

[41] Text and translation by Dunning, 'John Lakenheath's rearrangement', p. 67.

The resulting index, which stretches from fols 3v–51r of the present compilation, is a hotch-potch of detail, in which evidences for each manor are supplied together with details of press-marks, or else provided with a folio reference to a later copy. Around a dozen separate cartularies are mentioned within the index as a whole. Not infrequently for the early vernacular grants Lakenheath is content simply to refer readers to the summary information contained in the Pinchbeck benefactors' list rather than to the single sheet or to full copies elsewhere, suggesting a lack of sustained effort to identify these charters systematically.

Even where the press-mark was known, scribes continued to reach for a handy cartulary copy rather than rifle through the chests looking for the original. The rubric to the fifteenth-century copy of Sawyer 995 in the first volume of the mammoth Cellarer's Register provides an example (CUL, MS Gg. 4. 4, fol. 95v): 'Moreover, the charter of the said king Harthacnut is kept in the vestiary among the kings' charters, chest A, press-marked ['supertitulato figura carte'] A 3, a copy of which is included in the John of Northwold Register, fol. 30 and in the Red Register of the Treasury, fol. 68, 69, and in the Black Register of the Vestry', fol. 87, 88, 89f'. Despite this level of precision in identifying the whereabouts of the single sheet, textual evidence demonstrates that the scribe copied from the Black Register.

Imitating the Archive

The information derived from the Lakenheath Register, imperfect though it was, was used and reworked by later compilers. In the second quarter of the fifteenth century, an extraordinary series of cartularies relating to individual (or small groups of) abbot's manors was produced during the reign of William Curteys (d. 1446). Seven of these survive, but as many as twenty-five might originally have been produced.[42] The cartularies present the evidences for the early history of manors using the summary in Lakenheath, but augmented by copies of the early donations. Two manuscripts include

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[42] Thomson, *Archives*, p 38.

texts of Anglo-Saxon charters, copied in a semi-imitative hand that mimics the script of the original;[43]

one of these is immediately followed by a further copy of the same text, 'in modern script',

'secundum scripturam modernam' (BL, Add. MS 45951, fol. 1v). This implies that even this sanitised

Anglo-Saxonesque script was likely to cause problems to readers. One might ask why the scribe went

to the considerable effort of producing a facsimile copy of a text that he essentially acknowledged was

difficult to read, but the very point of it was to advertise the antiquity of the grant by the use of this

olde-worlde script, rendered comprehensible (unlike the single sheet itself) by a rubric that provided

all that was needful to know. My findings here chime with those of Julia Crick, whose important work

on archaising script in the Anglo-Saxon period itself allows her to conclude, 'Imitative script certainly

demonstrates the importance of archives not just as a textual resource, but also as a scribal resource. It

serves as a reminder of the visual importance of the written word'.[44]

Two aspects of the Anglo-Saxon material appear to have made transmission of their contents

problematic. The challenge of the vernacular was rendered more difficult still when the text was

copied from the original script. The foundation seems in fact to have relied on what amounts to

specialists to decode these texts: in the thirteenth century, this was the scribe or scribes responsible for

the Northwold Register; in the fifteenth it was those set to transcribe documents in semi-imitative

style—always, it seems, with some reliance on an intermediate source to help them understand the

contents of what they were reproducing.

Reinventing the Archive

By the fifteenth century, then, through the combined efforts of John of Northwold in the thirteenth

century, Walter Pinchbeck and John of Lakenheath in the fourteenth, and latterly William Curteys, the

ancient contents of Bury's archive had finally been rendered useable and its most valuable muniments

[43] For this most interesting phenomenon in general, see Lucas, 'Scribal imitation of earlier

handwriting'.

[44] 'Script and the sense of the past in Anglo-Saxon England', pp. 28–29.

safeguarded. Nevertheless, threats continued during this later period, including challenges to Bury's exempt jurisdiction by the influential bishop of Norwich, William Alnwick (reigned 1426–36) and the archbishop of Canterbury, Henry Chichele (reigned 1414–43). Both Chichele and Alnwick, a member of the royal council and keeper of the Privy Seal, were powerful enemies. They met their match in Abbot Curteys, who responded in a highly imaginative way.

These disputes are catalogued in the two-volume register that bears Curteys's name, produced between 1429–36. Into the first part of the register (BL, MS Add. 14848) are copied the Anglo-Saxon charters key to confounding Bury's enemies, again copied in semi-imitative form. What follows is a *tour de force*, a translation of these charters into rhyme royal, almost certainly by the Bury monk John Lydgate. I have argued elsewhere that Lydgate was commissioned by Curteys to produce these verses, perhaps for presentation to the poet's patron, Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, on the occasion of his admission to the confraternity of the Abbey during the young King Henry VI's visit to Bury in 1433–4.[45]

Lydgate demonstrably works from Latin versions of these texts, which differ in wording from the vernacular texts. He also includes a verse translation of Sawyer 1068 at the end of Sawyer 1045, probably mistaking it for a continuation of that charter; it does not appear in the charter-texts themselves which precede each of the poems. A translation of the Latin is as follows:

> Edward, by the grace of God King of the English, sends greetings to Bishop Ælfric
> and all the nobles in the south and north. I desire you to be informed that I have
> granted the monastery of St Edmund to Abbot Ufi with everything that pertains to
> it, either in lands or with regard to special jurisdiction ('in iure regali'), as fully as
> anyone previously held it. And I wish that the liberty that King Cnut and
> afterwards King Harthacnut, my brother, granted to that same monastery be

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[45] See further Lowe, 'The poetry of privilege'. Hiatt also discusses these texts in *Medieval Forgeries*, pp. 57–62.

always unchanged, and in particular I totally prohibit that any of the bishops

should claim the monastery of St Edmund for themselves in any way.[46]

Lydgate disposes of this neatly and with a degree of additional emphasis and extra specificity helpful to the monastery:

And I Kyng Edward send helthe and welfare

to al my barons of the northe and southe,

make yow knowe, & list nat for to spare,

this is my wyl confermyd by my mouthe;

to Bisshop Alfryk I wyl this thyng be couthe

that this fraunchyse by me rehersyd thus

stonde in his strengthe to Abbot Uvyvs.

Withe al thynges that be pertynent,

rentys, londis, and in especial

within ther boundys aboute hem adjacent,

and al the lawes that callyd be royal,

that they stonde hole, nat interupt at al,

as Knut dide, and Hardecanut my brother

confermyd it first; I wyl it be noon other.

And specially oo thyng I diffende

that no bisshop be hardy in noo wyse

to take upon hym the chirche to offende

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[46] The Latin version of this charter is printed by Harmer, *Anglo-Saxon Writs*, pp. 153–4.

nor to tatempte ageyns ther fraunchyse,

but that ther fredam whiche I do here devyse

stonde incorupt and hooly undevyded,

as my predecessours and I have provyded.[47]

This extraordinary set of poems, doubtless commissioned by Curteys in his position both as abbot and known admirer of the poet, reworks and presents afresh the charters central to Bury's continued wealth in a form both suitable for, and understandable by, a courtly audience. At a stroke, Curteys widens these charters' potential range and influence by associating them with the poet whose patrons included both Gloucester and the King. Through consistency of language, metre and style, the charters are capable for the first time of being read together as a powerful, coherent narrative, a story thereby made greater than the sum of its carefully curated parts. In it, the voices of a procession of monarchs are orchestrated to proclaim and assert the ancient liberty and freedom of St Edmund's Abbey, created, achieved and maintained through its archive.

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[47] The poems are edited by Arnold, *Memorials*, pp. 215–37 (although the versification of the Henry charter is omitted). The quotation is on p. 231, corrected against the manuscript (fol. 252r).