

The Ely Memoranda and the Economy of the Late Anglo-Saxon Fenland

Rory Naismith

ABSTRACT

Consisting of six short Old English texts written in the early eleventh century, the Ely memoranda illustrate how a major and recently refounded Benedictine abbey managed its landed endowment. Two of the memoranda relate to generous help provided by Ely to Thorney, and four concern Ely's own lands. The collection as a whole reveals much about interaction between monasteries, monastic perspectives on material resources and investment in them, the economy of eastern England, and the context of record-keeping. This article offers a new edition and translation of the texts, and surveys the contribution the memoranda make to understanding of cultural and economic history.

INTRODUCTION: DISCOVERY AND PRESERVATION

The story of the preservation of the Ely memoranda is impressive on two counts. That such an ephemeral item even survived through the Middle Ages is in the first place unusual. Written on a loose piece of parchment which was once probably a blank page or fly-leaf in a gospel-book or other high-status liturgical manuscript (a context in which many miscellaneous documents were recorded for posterity in the late Anglo-Saxon and Norman periods),¹ the memoranda consist of a set of six records made at Ely which relate to the management of rural estates in the early eleventh century. Insights into how monasteries came by such properties, and in many cases brooded over their loss, are relatively numerous, and more so for Ely than for most houses in England during the tenth and eleventh centuries² – but glimpses of how estates were actually managed after being acquired, such as the memoranda offer, are significantly rarer. The memoranda are concerned with the minutiae of running a complex agrarian patrimony: they deal with issues such as how much money went where and for what; who had charge of how many pigs, sheep and cattle, or how much cheese or bacon; and how many eels were owed to the abbey from the watery landscape of the fens, most of which would probably be sold on. Documents such as these were produced for relatively short-term needs, or possibly as an intermediary in the development of more long-term strategies of land use. They served to bolster the material position of the abbey. As recently noted by Sarah Foot in connection with a similar collection from Bury St Edmunds, collections of this kind were made ‘primarily for an internal audience of the community of monks [at Bury;] some had relevance to the tenants of Bury’s estates, but there is no wider

I am grateful to Julia Barrow, David Carpenter, Julia Crick, Chris Dyer, Matthew McHaffie and Francesca Tinti for comments, discussion and other assistance in preparing this paper, and to the organisers and audiences of two conferences at which I gave papers related to this material (at Durham University and King’s College London). Any errors or omissions which remain are of course my own responsibility.

¹ D. N. Dumville, *Liturgy and the Ecclesiastical History of Late Anglo-Saxon England: Four Studies* (Woodbridge, 1992), pp. 119–27 lists 26 gospel-books and 24 liturgical manuscripts with documentary additions made in England between the tenth and eleventh centuries, together with five *membra disiecta* possibly from a similar context, among them the leaf discussed here. Case-studies of how particular houses used their holy books for record-keeping include D. A. Woodman, *Charters of Northern Houses*, AS Charters 16 (Oxford, 2012), pp. 317–23; N. P. Brooks and S. E. Kelly, *Charters of Christ Church, Canterbury*, AS Charters 17–18, 2 vols. (Oxford, 2013), pp. 85–95 and 143–7. For further discussion of the origins of this practice, see below, pp. xxx.

² These are surveyed in S. D. Keynes, ‘Ely Abbey 672–1109’, *A History of Ely Cathedral*, ed. P. Meadows and N. Ramsay (Woodbridge, 2003), pp. 3–58, at 7–9 and 18–27.

audience beyond those directly connected with the abbey to whom they were addressed'.³ How and when the folio bearing the Ely memoranda became detached from its original volume is of course unclear. But its fate in the later Middle Ages seems to have been to serve as a testing ground for assorted scribes and scribblers who wished to hone their penmanship. Both faces of the folio carry isolated words and short phrases from the eleventh century or later, including a couple of rubricated initials, some musical notation, the alphabet, a cluster of prickings and a jaunty drawing of the head of a saint.⁴

The recovery of the memoranda in modern times is, however, by far the most astounding part of the tale. In 1902, the eminent philologist Walter William Skeat (1835–1912) was contacted by Charles Edward Sayle (1864–1924), a Cambridge bibliophile at that time preparing a catalogue of the University Library's early printed volumes.⁵ Sayle had found two narrow strips of parchment bearing text in Old English encased in the leather binding of a book held by Queens' College, Cambridge; specifically, a copy of Diophantus of Alexandria's *Arithmetica*, printed at Basel in 1575.⁶ This particular volume was donated to the college in 1626 by one James Betton, D.D., a minister from Shropshire who had been a Fellow of Queens' in the period 1611–28. Exact details of the binding are unknown, but Skeat found the two strips to be full of interest, and published a brief note on them in the *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*.⁷ From the slim material available, Skeat deduced that he and Sayle had uncovered fragments of agrarian memoranda dating to the first half of the eleventh century, and which included a record of gifts from the abbey of Ely to Thorney. It was difficult, however, to proceed much further than this. Skeat noted a number of place-names and ventured identifications for them, but in his view 'the chief interest of this specimen [was] philological', and he concluded by highlighting several words for agricultural subjects found uniquely in these fragments.

Finding two strips of previously unknown Anglo-Saxon ephemera was sensational enough; finding a third strip which more or less completed the folio must have seemed beyond Sayle and Skeat's wildest dreams. But such is what happened in 1925 when (later Sir) Frank Stenton (1880–1967) discovered the third and largest portion of the leaf in the manuscript collection of Captain William Alfred Cragg (1859–1950), a gentleman antiquary who lived at Laundon Hall in Threkingham, Lincolnshire. The background to the fragment in his possession is obscure. Papers relating to the Cragg family and its antiquarian interests were at one stage left in the keeping of the City of Lincoln Museum (now Lincolnshire Archives), but were sold off in 1960;⁸ fortunately, a file of typed copies of several letters relating to this fragment was retained.⁹ Among the letters is one from Stenton (dated 11

³ S. Foot, 'Internal and External Audiences: Reflections on the Anglo-Saxon Archive of Bury St Edmunds Abbey in Suffolk', *Haskins Society Journal* 24 (2012), 163–94, at 184. For further discussion of this Bury collection, see below, pp. xxx.

⁴ The verso has only one such addition; they are numerous, however, on the recto. These later additions are entirely conventional in nature (e.g. *in nomine d[omi]ni, omnium inimicor[um] suor[um] dominabitur*), and do not have any obvious bearing on interpretation of the earlier material on the folio. On the musical notation (which may be roughly contemporary with the Old English content), see K. D. Hartzell, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Written or Owned in England up to 1200 Containing Music* (Woodbridge, 2006), p. 232 (no. 126).

⁵ An account of Sayle's life and career may be found in J. C. T. Oates, 'Charles Edward Sayle', *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 8 (1982), 236–69. In his youth Sayle had literary aspirations, and was one of the 'Uranian' poets.

⁶ Now D.2.7 in the college's library catalogue.

⁷ W. W. Skeat, 'Two Anglo-Saxon Fragments of the Eleventh Century', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 61 (1903), 12–16.

⁸ Noted in connection with another part of the collection in M. Dolley and C. N. Moore, 'Some Reflections on the English Coinages of Sihtric Caech, King of Dublin and of York', *BNJ* 43 (1973), 45–59, at 46–7.

⁹ The file is catalogued as Cragg 3.54. It includes an eight-page typescript of material relating to the fragment, assembled by Cragg: a copy of the entry from the Sotheby's catalogue of 15 July 1920 relating to the Thorney

October 1925), recording how he had recently brought some of Cragg's collection away for study. He noted that 'the whole collection is interesting[,] but the Anglo-Saxon fragment has a place apart', and proceeded to note its similarity to the two Cambridge fragments, although he apparently could not confirm immediately that they were all part of the same folio.¹⁰ Stenton also asked Cragg whether he had any information about the prior history of the fragment. No reply is preserved, and as no further detail on this matter was recorded by Stenton's student Agnes Jane Robertson (1893–1959) when she pursued his observation that the fragments had much in common, it is unlikely that Cragg had any significant information to provide.¹¹ Robertson approached Cragg in 1935, and in the following year she brought photographs of the Queen's pieces to Lincolnshire, and made a photographic reunion of the folio. The nearly complete text and translation she produced as a result of this visit has remained the standard edition ever since.¹²

Although the stars aligned in the preservation of these three fragments, they were not to be reunited physically for many years. Captain Cragg's piece remained in his hands during his lifetime, at the family home in Lincolnshire. Four years after his death, in 1954, Cragg's son and heir William Gilliat Cragg (1883–1956) deposited it with the other two strips at Queens' College. The college formally acquired the Cragg fragment in 1978, and the next year offered the complete set for sale at auction through Sotheby.¹³ Purchased by the British Library, it has been held secure and accessible to scholarship ever since as Additional MS 61735.¹⁴ As of summer 2016, the website of the British Library provided an excellent and freely accessible online facsimile.

The texts are well known to scholarship in several respects: as a rare glimpse of localised record-keeping in Old English during the generations before the Norman Conquest,

liber vitae (see below, n. 62 and 84); a copy of Robertson's draft edition and translation; summaries of four letters from Agnes Jane Robertson, dated 1935–6; the full text of one of her letters to Cragg, written 1 June 1936 after having visited him to view the fragment; and the text of a letter from Frank Stenton, written in 1925. The file also contains photographs taken in the 1930s of both Cragg's fragment and the Queens' fragments, accompanied by a short note from the librarian of Queens' dated 7 April 1936.

¹⁰ In the EPNS volume for Bedfordshire and Huntingdonshire, published just a year after Stenton discovered this fragment, he cited the 'Cragg fragment' as a separate source for several place-names found only in this portion of the folio: see A. Mawer and F. M. Stenton, *The Place-Names and Bedfordshire & Huntingdonshire*, EPNS 3 (Cambridge, 1926), pp. 185 (Farcet), 193 (Water Newton), 199 (Stanground) and 201 (Yaxley).

¹¹ Stenton in his letter queried the 'history of your fragment before it came into your possession', perhaps implying acquisition within Cragg's lifetime. This remains the most likely explanation. However, Cragg came from a family with a long-standing antiquarian tradition, and he may have inherited the fragment from a predecessor: one ancestor, John Cragg (1762–1832), recorded details of a local Anglo-Viking coin-find in notes that were still held by W. A. Cragg a century later (Dolley and Moore, 'Some Reflections', pp. 46–7), and was visited by the diarist John Byng, 5th Viscount Torrington (1743–1813), on 25 June 1791. Byng described Cragg as 'a yeoman farmer of antiquary taste' (*The Torrington Diaries: a Selection from the Tours of the Hon. John Byng (Later Fifth Viscount Torrington) between the Years 1781 and 1794*, ed. C. Bruyn Andrews, 5 vols. (London, 1934–54) V, 339).

¹² *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, ed. and trans. A. J. Robertson (Cambridge, 1939), pp. 252–7, with notes at pp. 502–5. As noted above, a draft of Robertson's text and translation was sent to Captain Cragg in 1936, prior to the publication of this volume.

¹³ Sotheby's auction catalogue 11 December 1979, lot 25. The fragments eventually sold for £52,000.

¹⁴ *The British Library Catalogue of Additions to the Manuscripts. Additional Manuscripts 59652–61100, 61711–61890, Egerton Manuscripts 3796–3802, Additional Charters and Rolls 75845–75881, Detached Seals and Casts CCIV.1–8. New Series, 1976–1980*, 2 vols. (London, 1995) I, 266–7. See also W. P. Stoneman, 'Writ in Ancient Character and of No Further Use: Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts in American Collections', *The Preservation and Transmission of Anglo-Saxon Culture: Selected Papers from the 1991 Meeting of the International Society of Anglo-Saxonists*, ed. P. Szarmach and J. T. Rosenthal (Kalamazoo, MI, 1997), pp. 99–138, at 106 and 128.

preserved under exceptional circumstances;¹⁵ as an early source attesting the consumption of eels and management of other resources in the murky Fens over which Ely presided;¹⁶ and as a comparatively detailed witness to the practicalities of agriculture.¹⁷ The concern of the present analysis is with the memoranda as a group – a miniature collection of documents. They have much to offer, especially with regard to the nexus of thought, faith and physical practicality that a monastic landed endowment needed to be sustainable. When put alongside comparable documents from elsewhere, and other sources from Ely and its neighbours, the memoranda illustrate how a major monastery of the Benedictine reform movement enlisted its scribal and spiritual resources to vouch for the good conduct of agents across over 2000 square miles of land.

SOURCE AND DATE

The question of where the memoranda were written can be answered with relatively little difficulty. Towards the end of the first and longest section of the memoranda, it is noted that everything listed before was ‘given from Ely to Thorney’ (*geseald of Elig to Dornige*). Subsequent passages do not specify the agency which organised all the transactions or received all the renders, but most of the properties in question (among them Hauxton, Melbourn and Stretham in Cambridgeshire, Hatfield in Hertfordshire, Fordham and Hilgay in Norfolk and Brandon in Suffolk) are known from multiple sources to have been Ely estates from the late tenth century onwards. The intermingling of Ely and Thorney estates in the first two memoranda is intriguing (and is discussed below), but the balance of evidence falls strongly in favour of Ely as the institution where the memoranda were written and preserved, and from the time of Skeat onwards there has been no doubt about the Ely origin of the memoranda. Neither has their general date ever been a matter of great uncertainty. They must have been written after the foundation, around 970, of Ely and Thorney, and comments from Stenton and Robertson indicate their inclination towards a very early date soon after the houses’ establishment.¹⁸ Skeat himself proposed that the script and language of the memoranda pointed to a date in ‘the former half of the eleventh century’;¹⁹ his conclusion remains broadly acceptable, though a century of subsequent scholarship has produced a slightly more precise dating on the basis of both palaeography and content.

¹⁵ See M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066–1307*, 3rd ed. (Oxford, 2013), p. 32; Keynes, ‘Ely’, p. 6; M. P. Brown, *Manuscripts from the Anglo-Saxon Age* (London, 2007), pp. 134 and 167; D. Banham, ‘The Staff of Life: Cross and Blessings in Anglo-Saxon Cereal Production’, *Cross and Cruciform in the Anglo-Saxon World: Studies to Honor the Memory of Timothy Reuter*, ed. S. L. Keefer, K. L. Jolly and C. E. Karkov (Morgantown, WV, 2010), pp. 279–318, at 315 n. 88; M. Borrie in *The Golden Age of Anglo-Saxon Art 966–1066*, ed. J. Backhouse, D. H. Turner and L. Webster (London, 1984), p. 148 (no. 150); C. R. Hart, *The Early Charters of Eastern England* (Leicester, 1966), pp. 32 and 47; C. D. Verey, T. J. Brown and E. Coatsworth, *The Durham Gospels*, EEMF 20 (Copenhagen, 1980), p. 52.

¹⁶ H. C. Darby, *The Medieval Fenland* (Cambridge, 1940), p. 16.

¹⁷ D. Banham and R. Faith, *Anglo-Saxon Farms and Farming* (Oxford, 2014), esp. pp. 8–9; D. Banham, *Food and Drink in Anglo-Saxon England* (Stroud, 2004), pp. 9 and 68; R. Faith, *The English Peasantry and the Growth of Lordship* (London, 1997), p. 83.

¹⁸ As noted in the letters cited above, n. 9.

¹⁹ Skeat, ‘Two Anglo-Saxon Fragments’, p. 13.

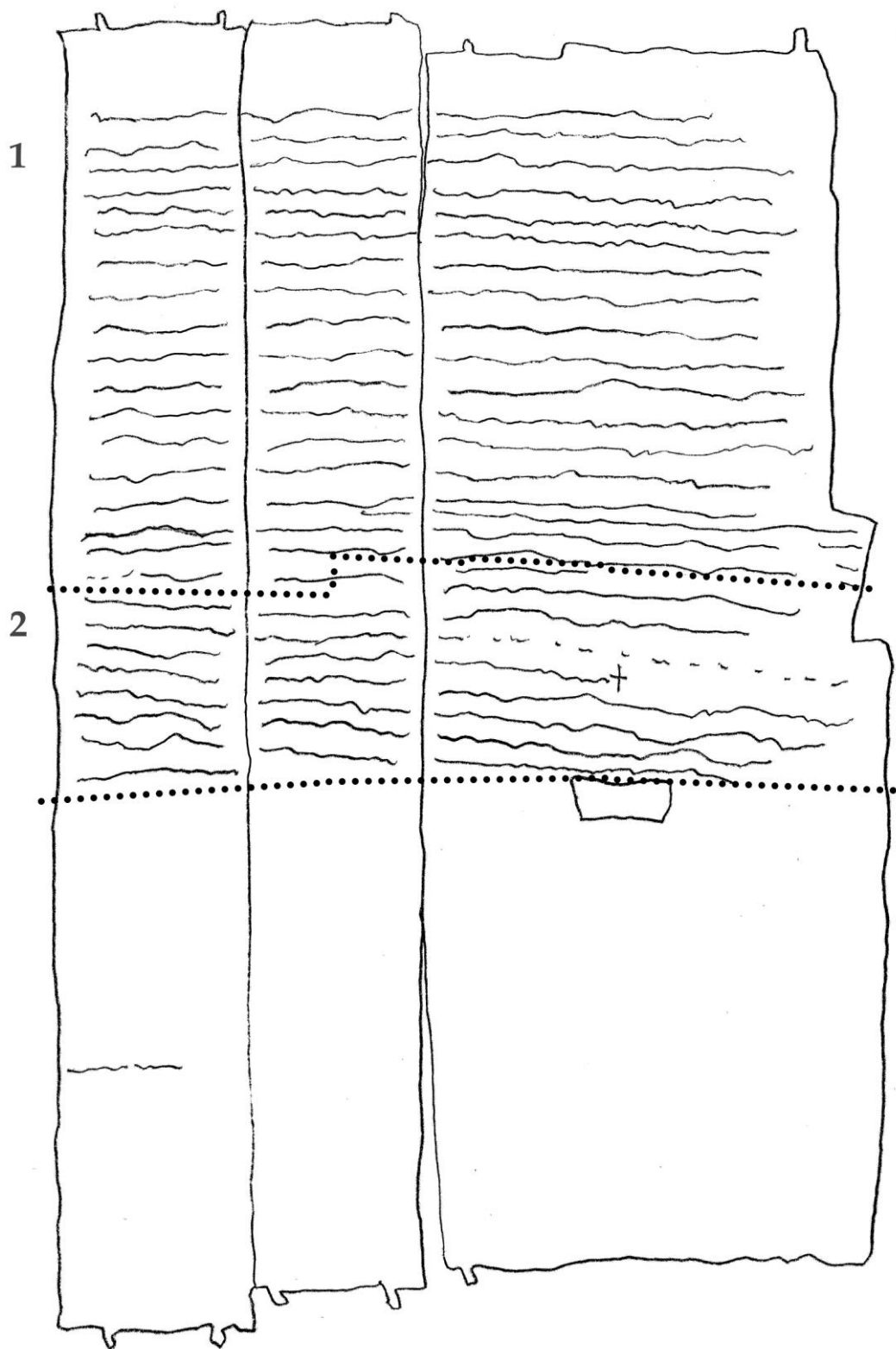


Figure 1: sketch of divisions between scribes and memoranda on London, British Library, Add. MS 61735, recto; dotted lines and numbers indicate the work of different scribes.

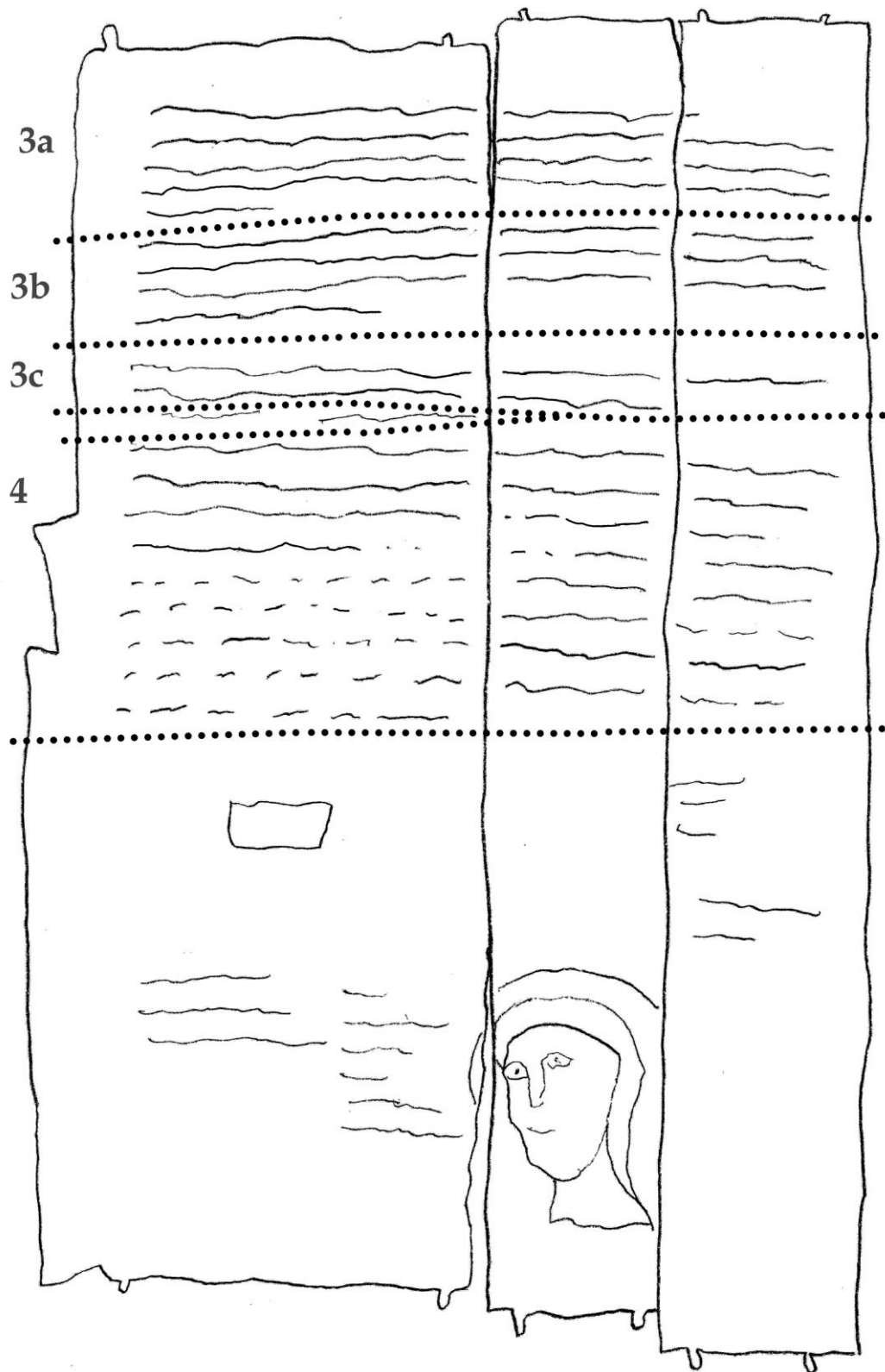


Figure 2: sketch of divisions between scribes and memoranda on London, British Library, Add. MS 61735, verso; dotted lines and numbers indicate the work of different scribes.

The memoranda are the work of four scribes, two represented on each side of the folio.²⁰ Their work is indicated and numbered in Figures 1 and 2; it should be noted that the third scribe divided his work into three separate portions, which are designated 3a, b and c. Although the face beginning with the list of assignments from Ely to Thorney (nos. 1 and 2 below) is conventionally treated as the recto, there is nothing to confirm which side was written first; as such the numbering of sections and scribes does not presume any chronology (save that scribe one wrote before scribe two, and scribe three before scribe four). All four scribes used the script known as English vernacular minuscule: a form of writing which emerged towards the end of the tenth century in circles associated with the so-called Benedictine reform movement, and which was widely practised in England until the twelfth century.²¹ The four scribes all wrote the same variant of English vernacular minuscule known to modern scholarship as Style I,²² but there are significant differences between their work. Two scribes (the first and third) appear noticeably more adept than the others, and their script compares closely with the vernacular minuscule produced by scribes at Winchester, as might be expected given the links which St Æthelwold, bishop of Winchester (963–84), forged between his bishopric and his fenland foundations at Ely, Peterborough and Thorney.²³ Ongoing research into the development of English vernacular minuscule may allow a more confident and precise stylistic dating in future, but based on available evidence, a palaeographical date of c. 990–1035 seems most reasonable.²⁴

Two details in the text seem to provide further clues to the date. Both relate to when Ely acquired properties named in the memoranda. In the first section, a payment is mentioned for three plots of land (*gegryndum*) *æt Piutforda*. Robertson presumed this to be Thetford, Norfolk, but there is no evidence of Ely having held any interest there in the pre-Conquest period.²⁵ Ely did, however, hold a hide of land by the time of Domesday Book at Little Thetford in Cambridgeshire.²⁶ Cyril Hart observed that if this identification is correct, it would place the composition of the memorandum after the acquisition of the land at Little Thetford,²⁷ which according to the *Liber Eliensis* was bequeathed to Ely in the will of a wealthy widow named *Elfara*.²⁸ This presumably equates to the Anglo-Saxon name Ælfwaru. Fuller details relating to this bequest derive from material preserved at Ramsey in relation to a woman of the same name (*Alfara*) who was probably identical with Ely's *Elfara*. No explicit date is given for *Alfara*'s bequest of various lands to Ramsey as

²⁰ P. Stokes, *English Vernacular Minuscule from Æthelred to Cnut c. 990–c. 1035* (Woodbridge, 2014), p. 209; D. Scragg, *A Conspectus of Scribal Hands Writing English, 960–1100* (Cambridge, 2012), hands 370–3.

²¹ Stokes, *English Vernacular Minuscule*; J. Crick, 'English Vernacular Script', *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain. Vol. I: c. 400–1100*, ed. R. Gameson (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 174–86.

²² D. N. Dumville, 'Specimina codicum palaeoanglicorum', in his *Collection of Essays in Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Institute of Oriental and Occidental Studies* (Suita, Osaka, 2001), pp. 1–24, at 10; developed in Stokes, *English Vernacular Minuscule*, pp. 79–97.

²³ Stokes, *English Vernacular Minuscule*, pp. 92–3 and 200.

²⁴ Cf. the dating of Neil Ker (N. R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxons* (Oxford, 1957), no. 80) to s. xi^{1/4}, and 1007×1025 in H. Gneuss and M. Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: a Bibliographical Handlist of Manuscripts and Manuscript Fragments Written or Owned in England up to 1100* (Toronto, Buffalo and London, 2014), p. 230 (no. 301).

²⁵ *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, ed. Robertson, p. 253 (and 541, for the attribution to Thetford, Norfolk in the index).

²⁶ D[omesday] B[ook] I 191v. This and other references to Domesday are based on the foliation of Great (I) and Little (II) Domesday Book, as printed in *Domesday Book*, ed. J. Morris *et al.*, 35 vols. (Chichester, 1973–86).

²⁷ Hart, *Early Charters*, pp. 32 and 47.

²⁸ *Liber Eliensis* [hereafter *LE*] ii. 61 (*Liber Eliensis*, ed. E. O. Blake, Camden 3rd ser. 92 (London, 1962), pp. 132–3; *Liber Eliensis: a History of the Isle of Ely from the Seventh Century to the Twelfth*, trans. J. Fairweather (Woodbridge, 2005), p. 159). Little Thetford is named apart from the main list of her benefactions, but there is no signal of interpolation. It may have been set apart in the document on which the *Liber Eliensis* drew, for Little Thetford is also omitted in Ely's separate list of benefactors and their gifts (J. Gerchow, *Die Gedenküberlieferung der Angelsachsen* (Berlin, 1988), pp. 343–4 (no. 24)).

recorded in that house's Chronicle,²⁹ but the general chronological context of both the Ely and Ramsey donations fits with the obit *Alfwara* recorded under the year 1007 in the Ramsey cartulary.³⁰ Assuming this chain of identifications is accurate, Ælfwaru's bequest provides a *terminus post quem* for the writing of memoranda 1 and 2.

A second, similar case concerns the first piece of land mentioned in the third memorandum: *æt Byryg*. *Byryg* represents an inflected form of Old English *burh*, a word commonly used for enclosures of many kinds, including military and urban sites.³¹ Robertson took its occurrence here as a reference to the immediate precincts of the abbey of Ely itself, following the precedent of describing some other monastic sites as a *burh* in the late tenth and eleventh century.³² There is no indication, however, that this was a general practice, or that it ever applied to Ely. But the abbey did hold land at Burrough Green, Cambridgeshire (i.e. *burh*),³³ slightly southeast of modern Cambridge, in the general vicinity of other locations named in the same memorandum (Hauxton and Melbourn, Cambridgeshire).³⁴ This property is named *Burch parvum* in the *Liber Eliensis*, which records its donation in the will of Lustwine and his wife Leofwaru;³⁵ no exact date can be assigned to this, but it must have occurred before the writing of the will of their son Thurstan (1043×1045),³⁶ and after the accession of Cnut, for in the *Liber Eliensis* the bequest is said to have occurred 'some time after' (*postmodum*) that of Leofwaru's sister, whose will was addressed to Cnut.³⁷

Combining the testimony of estate history and palaeography, a date for memoranda 3a–c of between 1016 and about 1035 seems most likely. The date of memorandum 4 is the most problematic. It must post-date 3a–c, but contains no references to individuals or estates which permit greater precision. Although Robertson suggested that it was written significantly later than the preceding material,³⁸ there are no linguistic features of the passage

²⁹ *Chronicon Abbatiae Rameseiensis a saec. X usque ad an. circiter 1200*, ed. W. D. Macray (London, 1886), pp. 84–5.

³⁰ *Cartularium monasterii de Rameseia*, ed. W. H. Hart, 4 vols. (London, 1884–93) III, 167. This chain of reasoning has recently (and cautiously) been reconsidered by Peter Stokes (*English Vernacular Minuscule*, pp. 45–7).

³¹ A. H. Smith, *English Place-Name Elements*, EPNS 25–6, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1956) I, 58–62; D. N. Parsons and T. Styles, *The Vocabulary of English Place-Names (BRACE–CAESTER)* (Nottingham, 2000), pp. 77–85; S. Draper, 'The Significance of Old English Burh in Anglo-Saxon England', *ASSAH* 15 (2008), 240–53; J. Baker, 'The Language of Anglo-Saxon Defence', *Landscapes of Defence in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. J. Baker, S. Brookes and A. Reynolds (Turnhout, 2013), pp. 65–90, at 67–75; J. Baker and S. Brookes, *Beyond the Burghal Hidage: Anglo-Saxon Civil Defence in the Viking Age* (Leiden, 2013), pp. 90–106.

³² Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, p. 504. Examples include Peterborough and Bury St Edmunds. The former was apparently already known simply as *burh* in the later tenth century (S. E. Kelly (ed.), *Charters of Peterborough Abbey*, AS Charters 14 (Oxford, 2009), pp. 36–40); the latter appears as *burh* or similar by about the reign of Cnut (cf. S 1489, 1527 and 1537 (*Anglo-Saxon Wills*, ed. D. Whitelock, pp. 68–9 (no. 25), 70–3 (no. 26) and 74–5 (no. 27))). Anglo-Saxon charters are cited according to the conventions in S. D. Keynes, 'Church Councils, Royal Assemblies, and Anglo-Saxon Royal Diplomas', *Kingship, Legislation and Power in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. G. R. Owen-Crocker and B. W. Schneider (Woodbridge, 2013), pp. 1–182, at 180–2, and on the 'Kemble' website (<http://www.kemble.asnc.cam.ac.uk/sites/default/files/files/RefsToCharters.pdf>).

³³ P. H. Reaney, *The Place-Names of Cambridgeshire*, EPNS 19 (Cambridge, 1943), p. 115.

³⁴ Domesday Book (DB I 190v) only refers to three hides held by Ely at Westley Waterless, but the *Inquisitio Comitatus Cantabrigiensis* (*Inquisitio Comitatus Cantabrigiensis*, ed. N. E. S. A. Hamilton (London, 1876), p. 19) describes the same property as *Burch 7 Westlai*, forming part of a ten-hide whole divided between several holders. These two villages, now adjacent parishes, were closely associated in several early texts: the will of Thurstan (see below, n. 36) mentions that *þat lond at Burg* is to go to his associate Ulfketel, save for half a hide at *Westle* and one hide at Dullingham.

³⁵ *LE* ii. 89 (ed. Blake, p. 158; trans. Fairweather, p. 188).

³⁶ S 1531 (*Wills*, ed. Whitelock, pp. 81–5 (no. 31)).

³⁷ Hence the dating of c. 1017×1045 assigned by Andrew Wareham (*Lords and Communities in Early Medieval East Anglia* (Woodbridge, 2005), pp. 68–74).

³⁸ Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, p. 503.

which would be incompatible with a date in the reign of Cnut,³⁹ and its script is categorised as falling within English vernacular minuscule Style I (albeit of a less neat and polished character than that of memoranda 1 and 3a–c),⁴⁰ again suggesting a date before c. 1035. All six were thus most likely produced during the period 1007/16–c. 1035, but they could in some cases (discussed below) include information from a significantly earlier time, and there is no guarantee that they were written in quick succession within these years: a similar (but significantly longer) collection of memoranda from Bury was compiled over at least five decades, between c. 1044 and after 1087.⁴¹

TEXT, TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY

The memoranda consist of six discrete sections, all written in Old English. The text of each is presented below (with 1 and 2 treated together),⁴² followed by a translation, and with comment on difficulties and points of interest. Particular challenges are posed by the lacunose state of the text. The three surviving fragments of the folio do not quite extend to everything that was set down by the four scribes of the eleventh century: gaps at both joins would have provided enough space to accommodate several letters.⁴³ There are also two areas on the verso where the surviving text is worn and damaged, and has been left either barely legible or illegible.

1

Ðys se`y`nd þa þing þe [man] gedon hæfþ to ðornige [; ær]est man bohte tpa ðusend
hæringes / myd ·xl· penegun 7 þo[nne] to beansæde ·xl· pene[ga]s ; fif oran
æpelferþe æt nipantune . / æt hys men ; tpegen or[an pæ]ron to scipe 7 to nett[um] to
fearres heafde ; 7 pyþ þrim gegrindu(m) / æt þiut forða man [dyde o]ran 7 xii ·
penegas ; 7 [a]nne pifman .v. orena pyrþe to stan / grunde ; 7 iii. ege[ðan þ]reora
orena pyrþe · a[n] man sealde to nipantune · oþer to geaces / lea . þridde to
stan[grunde 7] xv. penegas pyþ beans[æ]de to geaceslea · 7 to oþru(m) scipe to pit /
les mere 7 pið ne[ttum ... p]eniga · 7 nigon oran [p]ið anu(m) mæderperde to
huntandune / an scip to tpegra or[ena m]an sealde fra(m) elig t[o p]itlesige þ(æt) is
þonn(e) ealles feorðe healf / pund butun þritti[g pænegas.] þonn(e) dyde man æf[te]r
ðæm hund eahtatig spyna 7 þone span / fra(m) middeltune [...].ne ; þa `ge`eah`ta`de
man þa [spi]n to oðran healfan punde 7 þone span / to healfan punde ; [þonn]e ·xii·
pænas myd h[un]d eahtatigu(m) penegun ; 7 .iiii. scipa myd eahta / oran ælc myd .ii.
o[ran man] dyde to nipantune ·[oþ]er to geaceslea þridde to stangrunde / feorðe to
witles[mere ; man] sealde ælfnoþe tyn [ma]ncusa goldes to mylen oxan to
huntadune / 7 ælfsige munuce [an cal]ic on fif mancesun [go]ldes 7 spetan an pund to
mylen oxan / to geaceslea 7 to [...]e 7 `x. pund` butan þæ(m) se abbu[d s]ealde
ælfisige munuce to fyrþnunge / to þorniges are þ[ry manc]usa goldes `7 v. orena

³⁹ I am grateful to Richard Dance for advice on this point.

⁴⁰ Stokes, *English Vernacular Minuscule*, pp. 92–3.

⁴¹ Foot, 'Internal and External Audiences', pp. 191–3. Analysis of the linguistic features of these texts suggests that some of the earlier passages were translated from Latin: K. A. Lowe, 'Post-Conquest Bilingual Composition in Memoranda from Bury St Edmunds', *Review of English Studies* 59 (2008), 52–66.

⁴² The text follows the spelling and punctuation of the original as far as possible. Line breaks are indicated with slashes (/); interlinear additions are indicated using caret marks (^ ... ^); abbreviations are completed in brackets (...); and supplied text (from lacunae or badly faded sections) is contained within square brackets [...]. Scribe 1 and (sometimes) scribe 3 placed dots above the letter y; these are not represented here.

⁴³ The gap between the two thin strips was probably somewhat wider: it would probably have accommodated up to 4–6 characters, depending on the scribe; the second gap was perhaps half as wide. Some of the proposed readings supplied by Robertson have been amended or rejected because they appear too long or short for the available space.

p[æron] to þry(m) mylnun to isene tpegra orena pyrþ to huntandune · tpegera [to g]eaceslea [7 anes] to sta[ngrun]de´ þ(æt) is þo[nne] ealles geseald of elig to ðornige butun / hyra scrudfeo þe [man fy]lste ; on golde 7 on f[eo] syxtena punda pyrþ butun feopertigu[m] penegun / þæs þe asme[ad landum] 7 marun ;

These are the things which have been supplied to Thorney. First, 2000 herrings were bought with 40 pence. Next, 40 pence [were spent] on bean seed. Five oras [were given] to Æthelferth of [Water] Newton via his agent. Two oras were for a ship and nets at Farcet; and an ora and 12 pence were given for three pieces of land at [Little] Thetford; and a woman worth five oras [was assigned/given] to Stanground; and three harrows worth three oras [were distributed as follows:] one was given to Water Newton, another to Yaxley, and the third to Stanground. And 15 pence [was given] for bean seed at Yaxley; and ... pence for another ship and its nets at Whittlesey Mere. And 9 oras for a madder-keeper at Huntingdon. A ship worth two oras was given from Ely to Whittlesey [Mere]. All of this thus makes three and a half pounds, minus 30 pence.

Then after all that 80 swine and the swineherd were given from Milton ... the swine were valued at one and a half pound and the swineherd at half a pound. Then 12 wagons [were bought] for 80 pence, and four ships for eight oras, at two oras each: one was sent to [Water] Newton, another to Yaxley, the third to Stanground and the fourth to Whittlesey Mere. Ten mancuses of gold were given to Ælfnoth for mill oxen⁴⁴ at Huntingdon, and a chalice⁴⁵ containing five mancuses of gold was given to Ælfsige the monk, and one pound to Sweta for mill oxen at Yaxley and ... 10 pounds [in total]. And aside from this the abbot gave three mancuses of gold to Ælfsige the monk for the improvement of Thorney's property, and five oras were spent on iron for three mills: two oras' worth at Huntingdon, two at Yaxley and one at Stanground. Thus, that is all that was given from Ely to Thorney save for the money which was provided⁴⁶ for their clothing: 16 pounds less 40 pence in gold and in money,⁴⁷ as reckoned for the lands⁴⁸ and meres.

⁴⁴ What is meant by 'mill oxen' (*mylen oxan*) here and a couple of lines below is not immediately obvious. It could be an oblique reference to oxen used for ploughing – i.e. making the grain which would then be taken to a mill.

⁴⁵ Only ...*ic* is visible, but the subsequent formulation makes it clear that the missing item was an object made of gold. The suggested reading *calic* ('chalice') is based on the cups and chalices of gold or silver which occur frequently in wills (see *Wills*, ed. Whitelock, p. 236) and see also *LE* ii. 11 (ed. Blake, pp. 84–8; trans. Fairweather, pp. 107–12).

⁴⁶ The missing word here clearly ends in ...*lste*, and context indicates that it should be a verb. *Fylstan* ('to help, provide') communicates the correct sense and fits with the extant letters. Normally it was used as an intransitive verb, but one of the few examples of *fylstan* taking a direct object comes from another Ely text: the regulations for the gild of thegns in Cambridge (A. Cameron *et al.* (ed.), *Dictionary of Old English. A to G Online* (<http://doe.utoronto.ca/pages/index.html>), s.v. *fylstan*)

⁴⁷ Robertson suggested *on seolfre*, and this pairing does occur commonly elsewhere in Old English. However, the size of the gap is probably too small for *seolfre*, and the surviving first letter appears to be an f. *Feo* ('money') has therefore been supplied here. For a parallel of *gold* and *feoh* being paired in this way, see *Pet* 30(xvi).

⁴⁸ Robertson left this word as a lacuna. However, she was probably correct to read *marun* as the dative plural of 'mere', and *landum* is tentatively suggested as a plausible counterpart, given the mixed nature of the properties discussed in the text. The concluding ...*ad* for *asmead* (from *asmeagan*, 'to evaluate, examine') stands on firmer ground.

+þonne s[ip]þan `ofer þa ·xvi pund´ man sealde fra(m) hæþfelda ·xxx· / ealdra spyna ælce [ane t]o .vi. pænigu(m) ofer [...]; 7 man sealde pyþ þan `æt þæm´ smyþe / fif mancusas gold [...] 7 eadpare ; 7 man [se]alde cynesiges spystor myleneres [...] / tesha(m) geboht to [...]de ; 7 ane dægan [to] lindune to þiupan ;+ / 7 butan þisu(m) eallu(m) þ[e her] on geþriten is ma[n] sealde ærest se bisceop þriu pund to geaces / lea to fyrþrunge 7 s[pa] man sealde þriun [p]unda pyrþ goldes · þa na(m) man þærof an pund / to scrude oþer to fear[me 7 t]o dycynges . þæt þr[idd]e to fyrþrunge to geaceslea ; 7 man sealde / ælfsige munece ·lx· m[ancusa]s 7 fif pænega ge[ri]hta to geaceslea to fyrþrunge ;

+ Then, beyond the 16 pounds, 30 full-grown swine were given from Hatfield, each one worth 6 pence over ... [In return] five mancuses of gold were given to the smith for ... and Eadwear[d]. And the sister of Cynesige the miller⁴⁹ was given ...

Bluntesham (?) was bought for ... And a dairy maid⁵⁰ was given to Linden to serve.+

And in addition to everything that is written here,⁵¹ the bishop first gave three pounds for the improvement of Yaxley, and thus was given three pounds' worth in gold. Then one pound was taken from this for clothing, another for provisions and digging, and the third for improvements of Yaxley. And 60 mancuses and 5 pence of dues were given to Ælfsige the monk for the improvement of Yaxley.

These first two memoranda, written by different scribes, form a pair, and shed light on relations between Ely and its monastic neighbour at Thorney. The later tenth century saw no fewer than five Benedictine monasteries established in the Fenland region,⁵² including both Ely and Thorney, which were set up under the auspices of St Æthelwold.⁵³ Æthelwold was also behind the foundation of Peterborough,⁵⁴ while St Oswald (bishop of Worcester and archbishop of York, d. 992) and Ealdorman Æthelwine (d. 992) founded Ramsey,⁵⁵ and Thurcytel (a kinsman of Oscytel, archbishop of York (c. 959–71)) founded Crowland.⁵⁶ The exact dates when these five were founded are not clear in every case, but all seem to have come into being as bastions of the Benedictine reform in the years around 970.⁵⁷ By the time

⁴⁹ Most of this line has been badly damaged, apparently by an attempted erasure. Robertson printed *mylen* for *myleneres*, but the last four letters can be made out, even though it is conceivable that they belong to another word.

⁵⁰ On *dæge* and the evidence for its meaning 'dairy maid', see D. A. E. Pelteret, *Slavery in Early Medieval England from the Reign of Alfred until the Twelfth Century* (Woodbridge, 1995), pp. 268–9.

⁵¹ *Man* here apparently refers again to the bishop.

⁵² There were also other, smaller monasteries or cells set up in the same region in subsequent times, including a monastery at Eynesbury/St Neots established in the 970s by monks of Ely and Thorney, as well as later foundations at Chatteris and St Ives: T. Pestell, *Landscapes of Monastic Foundation: the Establishment of Religious Houses in East Anglia c. 650–1200* (Woodbridge, 2004), pp. 108–27.

⁵³ For a detailed account of Ely's refoundation c. 970, see Keynes, 'Ely', pp. 18–27. For Thorney, see S. Raban, *The Estates of Thorney and Crowland: a Study in Medieval Monastic Land Tenure* (Cambridge, 1977), pp. 8–12.

⁵⁴ For these, see Kelly, *Peterborough*, pp. 41–51.

⁵⁵ J. A. Raftis, *The Estates of Ramsey Abbey: a Study in Economic Growth and Organization* (Toronto, 1957), pp. 1–21; Pestell, *Landscapes*, pp. 107–8; M. Lapidge (ed.), *Byrhtferth of Ramsey: the Lives of St Oswald and St Ecgbwine* (Oxford, 2009), pp. xv–xx.

⁵⁶ See D. Whitelock, 'The Conversion of the Eastern Danelaw', *SBVS* 12 (1937–45), 159–76, at 174–5; Raban, *Estates*, pp. 8–12; S. E. Kelly (ed.), *Charters of St Paul's, London*, AS Charters 10 (Oxford, 2004), pp. 32–3.

⁵⁷ On all five, see Pestell, *Landscapes*, pp. 107–8. For the problematic date of Peterborough's refoundation around the late 960s or 970 see Kelly, *Peterborough*, pp. 44–6. Ely's refoundation is equally difficult to pin down within the same approximate period: Keynes, pp. 21–3. Ely, Peterborough and also Thorney are implied in the *Life* of St Æthelwold to have been established before 971 (Ely perhaps coming first): Wulfstan of Winchester, *Vita sancti Æthelwoldi*, ch. 23–4, in *Wulfstan of Winchester: the Life of St Æthelwold*, ed. M.

of the memoranda, these monasteries had become firm fixtures of local society, albeit still with only two generations of history behind them: old men and women would have been able to recall their foundation, and the troubled times some of them experienced in the later 970s which followed Edgar's death in 975.⁵⁸

In building up the endowment of three effectively new houses simultaneously, St Æthelwold spent lavishly of his own resources to acquire lands, and also attracted varying amounts of help and support from others. In the case of both Ely and Peterborough he was assisted by the local abbots who would succeed him (Brihtnoth and Ealdwulf, respectively). At Ely a range of twelfth-century sources – above all the *Libellus quorundam insignium operum beati Aedeluoldi episcopi* (usually known as the *Libellus Æthelwoldi*) and the *Historia Eliensis insule* (usually known as the *Liber Eliensis*)⁵⁹ – used lost tenth- and eleventh-century records to reveal the formation of the abbey's endowment in impressive detail. Ely and Peterborough flourished materially, attracting the patronage of locals: by the time of the Domesday survey in 1086, the lands of Ely brought in some £840 per annum, and those of Peterborough £323, placing them second and eleventh, respectively, in order of wealth out of all the Benedictine abbeys in England.⁶⁰ Thorney, on the other hand, was noticeably poorer, with an annual income from land in 1086 of £53 15s., placing it 36th in order of wealth. Its relatively humble position partly reflects the greater success of Ely and Peterborough in attracting a healthy stream of benefactions after Æthelwold's death, but if later traditions are reliable Thorney was also deliberately set up with a smaller endowment so as to preserve its small, secluded character for Æthelwold's eventual retirement;⁶¹ similar personal motivations on the part of Æthelwold might also explain Thorney's unusually rich collection of relics.⁶² But Thorney's limited resources also left it more vulnerable than its

Lapidge and M. Winterbottom (Oxford, 1991), pp. 38–43. Crowland's refoundation could at the earliest have taken place in 971: Whitelock, 'Conversion', pp. 174–5. Ramsey may have been re-established a few years earlier, at the earliest in 965 or slightly thereafter: Lapidge, *Lives of St Oswald*, pp. xvii–xviii.

⁵⁸ This reaction was targeted against specific monasteries and clerics, rather than monks and monasticism as a whole: for recent discussion see S. D. Keynes, 'Edgar, "rex admirabilis"', *Edgar, King of the English 959–975: New Interpretations*, ed. D. Scragg (Woodbridge, 2008), pp. 3–59, at 54–6; S. Jayakumar, 'Reform and Retribution: the "Anti-Monastic Reaction" in the Reign of Edward the Martyr', *Early Medieval Studies in Memory of Patrick Wormald*, ed. S. Baxter, C. E. Karkov, J. L. Nelson and D. A. E. Pelteret (Aldershot, 2009), pp. 337–52.

⁵⁹ The *Libellus* is incorporated into the *Liber Eliensis*, but also exists as a separate text. The former has been edited and translated in an unpublished study by Simon Keynes and Alan Kennedy; the latter is available in Blake (ed.), *Liber Eliensis*.

⁶⁰ D. Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England: a History of its Development from the Times of St Dunstan to the Fourth Lateran Council, 943–1216* (Cambridge, 1949), p. 702.

⁶¹ For Folcard, see R. C. Love, 'The Anglo-Saxon Saints of Thorney Abbey and their Hagiographer', *Hagiography in Anglo-Saxon England: Adopting and Adapting Saints' Lives into Old English Prose (c. 950–1150)*, ed. L. Lazzari (Turnhout, 2014), pp. 499–534, at 503–7; and R. C. Love, 'Folcard of Saint-Bertin and the Anglo-Saxon Saints at Thorney', *The Long Twelfth-Century View of the Anglo-Saxon Past*, ed. M. Brett and D. Woodman (Farnham, 2015), pp. 27–46, at 30–1. For Æthelwold's relics and retirement plans, see William of Malmesbury, *Gesta pontificum Anglorum* iv. 186.4, in *William of Malmesbury: Gesta Pontificum Anglorum; the History of the English Bishops*, ed. and trans. M. Winterbottom and R. M. Thomson, 2 vols. (Oxford, 2007) I, 494–5. See also C. Clark, 'Notes on a Life of Three Thorney Saints, Thancfred, Torhtred and Tova', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society* 69 (1979), 45–52, at 45–8; L. Rollason, 'Historical Introduction', *The Thorney Liber Vitae: London, British Library, Additional MS 40,000, fols 1–12r. Edition, Facsimile and Study*, ed. L. Rollason (Woodbridge, 2015), pp. 1–19, at 5.

⁶² Rollason, 'Historical Introduction', pp. 5–6. Thorney features prominently in the pre-Conquest *Secgan* listing the resting-places of relics (*Die Heiligen Englands: angelsächsisch und lateinisch*, ed. F. Liebermann (Hanover, 1889), pp. 15–16; D. W. Rollason, 'Lists of Saints' Resting-Places in Anglo-Saxon England', *ASE* 7 (1978), 61–93, at 91), which assign it the remains of eight saints. A longer list of the house's relics written into the Thorney Gospels (London, British Library, Additional MS 40,000, fol. 11v) in the twelfth century may give a better impression of the scale of the full collection. Its inclusion of relics of several saints associated with other

neighbours. In the early days after their foundation, co-operation with the other Æthelwoldian houses could have helped offset Thorney's weaker position. The three monasteries established (or re-established) by Æthelwold are thought to have initially operated as a group, at least to some extent, with land, relics and other resources distributed by the founder gradually;⁶³ in practice, however, surviving accounts of the formation of each house's endowment tend to stress the earmarking of individual estates from the time of their first acquisition by Æthelwold. All three monasteries had a strong incentive to portray their founder as looking after each house's specific interests, and if there was any flexibility in the early years of their history it quickly becomes difficult to separate from the rivalry which emerged in later times. Peterborough and Thorney in particular came into conflict in the tenth and eleventh centuries.

Competition between these two Fenland abbeys took several forms, including literary claims to ancient precedence over Thorney cultivated at Peterborough after the Norman Conquest.⁶⁴ Both also claimed that several of the same lands had been given to them in the days of Æthelwold. Seven estates named in the Thorney 'foundation charter' were also assigned to Peterborough according to that house's records,⁶⁵ sometimes apparently on the basis of the same underlying information about Æthelwold's acquisition, which may therefore have been available at both monasteries.⁶⁶ Some of these cases could have resulted from Æthelwold initially declining to assign the land to an individual house, but others probably reflect back-projection of later claims. One of the most complex and contentious cases relates to a pair of estates at Yaxley and Farcet which feature several times in memoranda 1 and 2. Both were probably lucrative assets, with good access to the Nene and surrounding meres; Yaxley in particular emerged as an important port on the river Nene in later times, and may have already been growing into this role.⁶⁷ The two settlements first appear in a charter of 956 by which King Eadwig granted 10 hides at Yaxley and 5 at Farcet to his thegn Ælfwine.⁶⁸ A text preserved at Peterborough describes how Æthelwold

Fenland monasteries may hint at early interaction between the institutions. For discussion, see L. Rollason, 'The Thorney Relic List, Folio 11v', *Thorney Liber Vitae*, ed. Rollason, pp. 277–83.

⁶³ Raban, *Estates*, p. 8.

⁶⁴ See S 68 (*Pet* 1A), with discussion in Rollason, 'Historical Introduction', pp. 2–3; and Love, 'Anglo-Saxon Saints', pp. 508–12, which calls attention to the earliest known copy, not used by Kelly. One version of this charter shows Peterborough asserting rights over *Ancarig*, the seventh-century predecessor of Thorney; these claims were also developed in the E manuscript of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud Misc. 636) and in Hugh Candidus' twelfth-century chronicle. Thorney in turn cultivated an alternative tradition linking it back to the seventh century through the history of St Botwulf, whose relics were held at Thorney, with no mention of Peterborough's precedence: Love, 'Folcard'.

⁶⁵ One estate (Broughton, Cambridgeshire) named in the Thorney 'foundation charter' was later in the hands of Ramsey (DB I 204r). This was obtained by exchange with Bishop Æthelwold in return for the church of Wilbraham (*Chronicon Abbatiae Ramesiensis*, ed. Macray, pp. 74–5), the subsequent history of which is unclear (a partial interest in it was eventually granted back to Ely in the twelfth century (*LE* iii. 139 (ed. Blake, pp. 387–8; trans. Fairweather, pp. 479–80))).

⁶⁶ The lands in question are Barrow-on-Humber in Lincolnshire (the grant of which to Æthelwold is actually set out in a royal diploma, preserved at Peterborough and probably augmented to include a specific allocation to that house: S 782 (*Pet* 15)), along with Farcet and Yaxley, Cambridgeshire, Wittering, Oxney, Thorpe and Titchmarsh, Northamptonshire. See S 792 (*Pet* Appendix 4) and S 1488 (*Pet* 30), with Kelly's extensive commentary. Barrow passed out of Peterborough's hands at the time of Cnut's exaction of an exorbitant tribute in 1016 (*The Chronicle of Hugh Candidus, a Monk of Peterborough*, ed. W. T. Mellows (London, 1949), pp. 64–5); of the other properties, all were held by Peterborough in Domesday Book, save for Farcet and Yaxley. For the case of Whittlesey Mere, see below, n. 75.

⁶⁷ J. Masschaele, *Peasants, Merchants and Markets: Inland Trade in Medieval England, 1150–1350* (Basingstoke, 1997), pp. 190–1 and 214–15. For the medieval landscape around Farcet and Yaxley, see D. Hall, *The Fenland Project, Number 6: the South-Western Cambridgeshire Fenlands*, East Anglian Archaeology Report 56 (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 22 and 24.

⁶⁸ S 595 (BCS 940). This charter was preserved at Thorney.

exchanged lands with a layman named Wulfstan Ucea, giving him an estate at Washington, Sussex, in return for Yaxley, Cambridgeshire, and Ailsworth, Northamptonshire; these two properties were then assigned to Thorney and Peterborough, respectively.⁶⁹ In subsequent times, both Peterborough and Thorney possessed documents which claimed that Yaxley and Farcet had been assigned to them by Æthelwold at an early date.⁷⁰ Two versions of the Thorney ‘foundation charter’ give slightly different accounts of how 25 hides at Yaxley and Farcet were acquired from Wulfstan by Æthelwold through an exchange of land and passed to Thorney (or to Thorney and Peterborough).⁷¹ Peterborough, on the other hand, possessed a document purporting to record the purchase of Yaxley and Farcet by Æthelwold and Ealdorman Æthelwine, which was probably fabricated on the basis of a similar text concerning the purchase of Peterborough itself.⁷² But it also had two more incidental documents referring to 24 workers at Farcet and a list of agricultural stock held at Yaxley (not unlike memoranda 3a and 3c below), which stem either from the time of Æthelwold’s first acquisition of the land, or from a time when Peterborough temporarily asserted control over the estates.⁷³ Despite all of this, Thorney seems to have retained its interest in the lands, which were assigned to it in Domesday Book, as well as in the present memorandum.⁷⁴ Peterborough’s dogged claim to Farcet in particular probably relates to its assertion of rights to half the shares in fishing on Whittlesey Mere in the eleventh century.⁷⁵

Yaxley and Farcet illustrate how intertwined the interests of the Fenland abbeys were. Memoranda 1 and 2 reveal a further dimension of this complex interaction. Their content relates to various forms of support lavished by Ely on Thorney – more specifically on Thorney’s lands. Most of the locations named as recipients of aid in the text are known Thorney estates (Water Newton, Farcet, Stanground, Yaxley, Whittlesey Mere and Huntingdon), but some Ely estates are also mentioned. Milton, Cambridgeshire, and Hatfield, Hertfordshire, both furnished swine for Thorney, while Bluntisham, Cambridgeshire, occurs in a truncated and unclear sentence. More puzzling are the references to Little Thetford, Cambridgeshire, where money was spent on three plots of ground (?) (*gegryndum*), and Linden in Haddenham, Cambridgeshire, which received a slave. Financing work on these estates would have been of no benefit to Thorney unless they had been temporarily assigned or leased to it. Ely’s help may therefore have gone even further than memoranda 1 and 2 record. Financial assistance also seems to have come from an unnamed bishop who furnished three pounds in gold for the improvement of Yaxley. Robertson seems to have taken this as a

⁶⁹ S 1377 (*Pet* 17). This short Old English text may have been put together after 975, when Wulfstan tried to renege on his deal, and extorted another payment from Æthelwold.

⁷⁰ These claims are very difficult to unravel. For what follows, see Kelly, *Peterborough*, pp. 277–8. Hart (*Early Charters*, pp. 162–5; C. R. Hart, *The Danelaw* (London, 1992), p. 527) presents a more complex account of the history of Yaxley, based on a putative pair of estates, but this involves accepting the problematic Peterborough documentation at face value.

⁷¹ S 792 (*Pet* Appendix 4). One version of the text (E) records that Æthelwold subsequently had to pay another £40 to Wulfstan when he challenged the original deal; a second version (B) omits this detail, but states that 17 hides at Yaxley were assigned by Æthelwold to Thorney, and that 8 at Farcet went to Peterborough. This document is not a genuine ‘foundation charter’, but probably does incorporate some early material relating to the house (Kelly, *Peterborough*, pp. 374–5).

⁷² S 1488 (*Pet* 29f).

⁷³ S 1488 (*Pet* 29c and e).

⁷⁴ DB I 205r. Only Yaxley is mentioned by name, but its hidage rating (15) matches the combined hidage found for Yaxley and Farcet together in some of the earlier documentation.

⁷⁵ Domesday Book (DB I 205r) records that Ramsey held one boat and Peterborough a second, while Thorney had two boats but leased one to Peterborough along with other rights, in an arrangement that went back to the time of Edward the Confessor. These rights may well have been largely a creation of the eleventh century, including a purchase of land by Ælfsige, abbot of Peterborough, from a local layman (S 1463 (*Pet* 20)), as well as the Domesday scheme: Kelly, *Peterborough*, pp. 290–2.

reference to Æthelwold himself,⁷⁶ and he was indeed referred to simply as ‘the bishop’ in other texts from Ely and Peterborough. The reference to Little Thetford in memorandum 1, acquired in 1007 or after, rules out a date within Æthelwold’s lifetime for 1 and 2 as a whole, although it is said that the bishop gave his money ‘first’ (*ærest*) and so a retrospective reference to Æthelwold’s own expenditures some three decades earlier is possible. Alternatively, the money could have been drawn from a gift left by Æthelwold for future expenditure, or it simply refers to the gift of another, contemporary bishop who (like the abbot referred to in the same way in memorandum 1) remains obscure. Ely was of course not to become a bishopric in its own right until the twelfth century. Before the Norman Conquest, it lay within the huge diocese of Dorchester, but had close relations with a succession of bishops of North Elmham, who presided over the nearby see of the East Angles.⁷⁷ Another possible range of candidates would be the half-dozen bishops whose names appeared in the Thorney *liber vitae*, who must have had some tie to the house.⁷⁸

The donations to Thorney in memoranda 1 and 2 consist of cash in silver and gold or other commodities valued in the same terms,⁷⁹ for diverse needs: bean seed,⁸⁰ livestock, boats, slaves and agricultural equipment all occur, sometimes several times, as well as the general ‘improvement’ (*fyrþnung*) of Thorney’s lands.⁸¹ A more unusual payment was nine oras ‘for a madder-keeper’ ([*p*]ið *anu(m) mæderperde*), or possibly something clad in madder-dyed cloth,⁸² at Huntingdon. There is no uncertainty about the reading of *mæderperde*, although the reference to red dye is surprising and unusual. Madder would have been a valuable commodity for sale in a town such as Huntingdon: evidence for its use and cultivation has been found at several late Anglo-Saxon sites, most notably York.⁸³ Ely was also evidently providing financial assistance to Thorney for non-agricultural purposes, including gold for a smith and clothing (cf. *scrudfeo*, ‘clothing money’ in memorandum 1 and *scrud*, ‘clothing’, in memorandum 2). The ‘clothing money’ mentioned at the end of memorandum 1 is explicitly said not to be included in the running totals given by the text. Three of these occur in memorandum 1: the first (found about half-way through) amounts to

⁷⁶ Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, p. 503: it could lie behind her dating of the text to shortly after the foundation of Thorney.

⁷⁷ Keynes, ‘Ely’, pp. 31–2 and 35. This relationship began in the time of Æthelred II, and continued through the episcopate of Bishop Ælfwine (?×1016–1023×1029), who had been a monk of Ely and eventually chose to be buried there; the two subsequent bishops before the appointment of Stigand in 1043 are obscure, but a will of about 1022×1029 was addressed to both the abbot of Ely and Ælfric II, bishop of Elmham (*LE* ii. 83 (ed. Blake, p. 151; trans. Fairweather, p. 179)).

⁷⁸ D. Whitelock, ‘Scandinavian Personal Names in the *Liber Vitae* of Thorney Abbey’, *SBVS* 12 (1937–45), 127–53, at 131–2; Gerchow, *Gedenküberlieferung*, p. 192.

⁷⁹ For monetary units in the memoranda, see below, p. xxx.

⁸⁰ *Beansæde* (‘bean seed’) occurs only in the Ely memoranda (*Anglo-Saxon Charters*, ed. Robertson, p. 503), and is an important contribution to evidence for bean cultivation in Anglo-Saxon England: Banham and Faith, *Anglo-Saxon Farms*, pp. 33–6; D. Banham, ‘*Be Hlafum and Wyrum*: Food Plants in Anglo-Saxon Society’, *From Earth to Art: the many Aspects of the Plant-World in Anglo-Saxon England. Proceedings of the First ASPNS Symposium, University of Glasgow, 5–7 April 2000*, ed. C. P. Biggam (Amsterdam and New York, 2003), pp. 119–32, at 128.

⁸¹ On ‘improvement’, see below, p. xxx.

⁸² By analogy with *linenwerd* (*An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Based on the Manuscript Collections of the Late Joseph Bosworth*, ed. and enlarged by T. N. Toller (Oxford, 1882–98), with *Supplement* by T. N. Toller (Oxford, 1921), revised and enlarged by A. Campbell (Oxford, 1972), s.v.). A ‘madder-keeper’ might have been either a person or a specialised storage facility of some kind.

⁸³ G. R. Owen-Crocker, *Dress in Anglo-Saxon England*, 2nd ed. (Woodbridge, 2010), pp. 305–6; P. Walton, ‘Dyes of the Viking Age: a Summary of Recent Work’, *Dyes in History and Archaeology* 7 (1988), 14–20; P. Walton, *Textiles, Cordage and Raw Fibre from 16–22 Coppergate*, *Archaeology of York* 17/5 (London, 1989), pp. 397–401; and P. Walton Rogers, *Textile Production at 16–22 Coppergate*, *Archaeology of York* 17/11 (York, 1997), pp. 1766–70.

‘three and a half pounds, minus 30 pence’ (i.e. 810d.), the second (an interlinear addition) to ten pounds (2400d.), though this comes after a break between fragments and could relate to something else; and the final, largest total is given at the end of the text, amounting to 16 pounds minus 40 pence (i.e. 3800d.). These running totals indicate multiple stages of assistance and writing, which continued beyond the last total, and indeed beyond the first scribe’s stint, into memorandum 2. This mentions further gifts of swine from the large Ely estate at Hatfield, Hertfordshire, with no total, but amounting to another 2855d. (with other valuations perhaps lost). Overall, therefore, at least £27 14s. 7d. (6655d.) was given by Ely to Thorney – a very considerable sum, equivalent to more than half Thorney’s annual income in 1086 according to Domesday Book.

The circumstances of Ely’s assistance to Thorney and its lands are frustratingly vague. Thorney certainly enjoyed a degree of favour under Cnut. Its abbot, Leofsige, was made bishop of Worcester very shortly after Cnut’s accession as king. Around 1020 the names of Cnut, his family and leading bishops and laymen of the time were entered into the predecessor of the surviving *liber vitae* of Thorney.⁸⁴ After a rocky start, involving the seizure of the relics of St Wendreth which Ely monks had brought to support Edmund Ironside in his ill-fated battle at Ashingdon in 1016,⁸⁵ Cnut and his regime also showed favour to Ely with gifts of land, treasure and even (allegedly) song.⁸⁶ Leadership over the Ely monastic community was complicated in the 1020s after Abbot Leofwine was rejected by his own monks but later reinstated, by which time a second abbot (Leofric) had been appointed and consecrated.⁸⁷ The two apparently held office jointly for several years. Abbatial succession at Thorney after 1016 is murky: a ‘Leofsinus’ (for either Leofsige or Leofwine)⁸⁸ came first, followed by Oswig (d. 1049/50).⁸⁹ But there is no signal of what specific event or motive prompted Ely to give so lavishly to its neighbour – or why it kept such precise account of what was given. The records could have been kept with a view to eventual restitution from Thorney, especially if the support was being given unwillingly following some sort of slight. Other motivations are also conceivable. Stemming from a time of rationalisation and consolidation in the abbey’s resources, the memoranda could be witness to a time when Ely did not wish to risk imputing losses to its own reeves and tenants and yet was still willing to share its riches with a sister house. The massive disparity between the two houses’ resources probably fostered very different styles of estate management at Ely and Thorney, and mismanagement or any sudden crisis at the latter would have been much more

⁸⁴ London, British Library, Additional MS. 40,000, fols. 1–12r. This twelfth-century *liber vitae* evidently incorporated earlier material, but the original layout and structure of these entries is lost. For the key study see now Rollason, *Liber Vitae*, with earlier work including Whitelock, ‘Scandinavian Personal Names’; C. Clark, *Words, Names and History: Selected Papers* (Woodbridge, 1995), pp. 320–50 (two studies originally published in 1985 and 1987); Gerchow, *Gedenküberlieferung*, pp. 186–97 and 326–8; and see S. D. Keynes, ‘Cnut’s Earls’, *The Reign of Cnut: King of England, Denmark and Norway*, ed. A. R. Rumble (London, 1994), pp. 43–88, at 83–4 for the date.

⁸⁵ *LE* ii. 80 (ed. Blake, p. 148; trans. Fairweather, p. 176).

⁸⁶ Keynes, ‘Ely’, pp. 35–6.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 33–4.

⁸⁸ There were a number of pluralistic abbots in eleventh-century England, not least Leofric (d. 1066) who held no fewer than five abbacies at once (Burton, Coventry, Crowland, Peterborough and Thorney: Love, ‘Anglo-Saxon Saints’, p. 506; Kelly, *Peterborough*, pp. 57–9), and it is tempting to suggest that Thorney’s ‘Leofsinus’ was identical with Ely’s Leofwine. Holding two abbacies simultaneously may have been one factor behind the resistance Leofwine met with in Ely. However, no evidence beyond the possible coincidence of names points in this direction: D. Knowles, C. N. L. Brooke and V. C. M. London (ed.), *The Heads of Religious Houses in England and Wales 1: 940–1216*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 74 and 226.

⁸⁹ Knowles, Brooke and London (ed.), *Heads of Religious Houses*, p. 74.

threatening.⁹⁰ Famine, crop failure or the heavy burden of tribute or *heregeld* payments might all have fallen unexpectedly on Thorney in this period, prompting pleas for assistance.⁹¹ It was by no means unheard of for one abbot to call on another for financial help under such circumstances. In the 980s, Wido, abbot of St Peter's in Ghent, wrote to his old friend St Dunstan (d. 988), archbishop of Canterbury, to plead for help after the abbey's crops had failed,⁹² and a charter of the 990s relates how one of Dunstan's successors at Canterbury had to arrange an emergency lease of a large estate to the bishop of Dorchester to raise money to pay off Viking raiders.⁹³ In the case of Ely and Thorney no clue survives. However, what one can say is that the process was relatively protracted, with several successive attempts to keep an overall account as more and more of Ely's resources disappeared across the fens.

3a

+ Æt byryg .xlvi. ealdra spina . 7 . cc . geongra bu[tun] ðrim ; æt strætha(m) . xx . sugen[a ;] æt [...] / . xx. sugena . 7 . l . hogga ; æt hornungesige . xviii . [eal]de spyn . 7 . xl . hogga ; æt [...]e 7 . xliiii . hogga ; æt hafuces / tune . xxx. ealdra spyna . 7 . c . . hogga butun . i ; a[et] meldeburnan . xxiii . suge[na] ; of þære heorde þe / alfpold heold æt hæðfelda . xiii . sige . 7 lxxxiii[. ge]ongra spina ; 7 ælfnoð [of] þære oþre heorde .xliiii. / sige . 7 lx hogga ;

+ At Burrough Green, 17 full-grown swine and 200 less three young [swine]. At Stretham 20 sows. At ...⁹⁴ 20 sows and 50 hogs. At Horningsea 18 full-grown swine and 40 hogs. At ... and 44 hogs. At Hauxton 30 full-grown swine and 100 less one hogs. At Melbourn 23 sows. From the herd that Ælfwold has charge over at Hatfield, 13 sows and 83 young swine, and from the other herd which Ælfnoth has charge over 14 sows and 60 hogs.

Memorandum 3a is critical for the dating of the collection, assuming that *æt byryg* does indeed refer to Burrough Green, Cambridgeshire.⁹⁵ It is the first of three memoranda written by the same scribe, albeit in separate sections, implying that they were distinct records and possibly not all written at the same time. The passage is concerned with the disposition of swine on eight of Ely's estates,⁹⁶ categorising them as 'full grown swine' (*eald spyn*), 'younger swine' (*geongran spyn*), hogs (*hoggas*) and sows (*sige*). Indeed, as noted by Skeat, this memorandum is the only source from before the fourteenth century to use the word *hogg*, and the only known case of the genitive plural of *sige*.⁹⁷ The porcine taxonomy of memorandum 3a reinforces the known importance of pig

⁹⁰ See below, p. xxx, and also F. Barlow, *The English Church, 1000–1066: a History of the Later Anglo-Saxon Church*, 2nd ed. (London, 1979), pp. 324–5.

⁹¹ For the weight of these payments and methods used to raise them, see S. Keynes, 'The Historical Context of the Battle of Maldon', *The Battle of Maldon AD 991*, ed. D. Scragg (Oxford, 1991), pp. 81–113, at 101–7; R. Naismith, *Medieval European Coinage, with a Catalogue of the Coins in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. Vol. 8: Britain and Ireland c. 400–1066* (Cambridge, forthcoming), ch. 10.

⁹² S. Vanderputten, 'Canterbury and Flanders in the Late Tenth Century', *ASE* 35 (2006), 219–44, at 219–25 (with edition and translation of the relevant text at pp. 237–8).

⁹³ S 882 (*CantCC* 134).

⁹⁴ There is apparently a blank space at this point, where one assumes the name of an individual or estate would subsequently have been filled in.

⁹⁵ See above, p. xxx.

⁹⁶ The first has either been erased or, more likely, was never written into a blank space at the end of the first line; the second has apparently been lost.

⁹⁷ Skeat, 'Two Anglo-Saxon Fragments', pp. 15–16.

farming in Anglo-Saxon England,⁹⁸ a practice particularly suited to wooded areas which might explain the prominence of Hatfield – a large and heavily forested estate which was particularly valued by Ely as a source of wood.⁹⁹

3b

Of þæm feo þe æþelflæd sealde man sealde to sceapu[m] to bromdune . lx .
p(ænegas) ; 7 ea[...]e . lx . p(ænegas) ; iii. oran / leofrice æt strætha(m) æt his corne
; x . `p(ænegas)` ufan . æt hi[s la]nde ; 7 .x. p(ænegas) þæm sceaph[yrð]e . healf
pund . þæm / abb(ode) ; healf pund byryhtmære 7 pulfrice ; 7 . [...] oran . æt .i. pife
æt stræ[tham 7] æt tpa(m) peru(m) þær to ; / 7 .iii. mancusas hyringmannu(m) ;

From the money which Æthelflæd gave, 60 pence have been given to Brandon for sheep; 60 pence to ...; 3 oras to Leofric of Stretham for his corn; 10 pence to Ufa for his land; and 10 pence to the shepherd; half a pound to the abbot; half a pound to Beorhtmær and Wulfric; and ... oras for a woman at Stretham, and also for two men there; and three mancuses for the hired men.

This memorandum departs from the content of 3a. Instead of listing current holdings of livestock, it explains how an individual gift or bequest of money has been spent. The donor is named as Æthelflæd. At least two women by this name are recorded as making gifts to Ely in the *Liber Eliensis*: the first of these is definitely too early to be the individual named in memorandum 3b; the second probably so, though she was (according to the *Liber Eliensis*) still active into at least the late 990s.¹⁰⁰ A third, otherwise unknown Æthelflæd is more likely.

In all, the portion of Æthelflæd's donation in memorandum 3b amounts to at least 690d., with some values missing.¹⁰¹ Her gift was spent on diverse uses which all contributed to the economic wellbeing of the abbey, and reveal the degree of agricultural micro-management which the monks of Ely could engage in with partners (some of them quite probably tenants) across their patrimony: sheep were bought for the estate at Brandon; corn was acquired from a man on the abbey's estate at Stretham; land from a man named Ufa; and three slaves or *geburas* (one female and two male) were bought for Stretham. Perhaps most striking is the final item – three mancuses for the *hyringmannum*, best interpreted as hired men. The significance of this will be discussed below in relation to other economic dimensions of the memoranda.¹⁰²

3c

⁹⁸ U. Albarella, 'Pig Husbandry and Pork Consumption in Medieval England', *Food in Medieval England: Diet and Nutrition*, ed. C. M. Woolgar (Oxford, 2006), pp. 72–87; Banham and Faith, *Anglo-Saxon Farms*, pp. 97–100. The importance of the terminology in this passage was noted immediately after the discovery of the first two fragments by Skeat (see n. 7) and also in M. Förster, 'Keltisches Wortgut im Englischen', *Texte und Forschungen zur Englischen Kulturgeschichte. Festgabe für Felix Liebermann zum 20. Juli 1921*, ed. H. Boehmer *et al.* (Halle, 1921), pp. 119–242, at 132.

⁹⁹ *LE* ii. 7 (ed. Blake, pp. 79–80; trans. Fairweather, pp. 103–4).

¹⁰⁰ One was the wife of Leofric who (with her sister) sold land to Ely after her husband's death (*LE* ii. 8 (ed. Blake, pp. 80–4; trans. Fairweather, pp. 104–7)), all apparently within the lifetime of Bishop Æthelwold; the second was the widow of Ealdorman Æthelstan (*LE* ii. 64 (ed. Blake, pp. 136–7; trans. Fairweather, pp. 163–4)), whose will survives at Bury (S 1494 (*Wills*, ed. Whitelock, pp. 34–7 (no. 14))) and can be dated to 962×991 – though this conflicts slightly with the account in *LE*, which has her create the will after a meeting with Abbot Ælfsige (acc. 996×999).

¹⁰¹ This total allows that each plural word for a lost number of units represents at least two. For the treatment of monetary units in the memoranda, see below, p. xxx.

¹⁰² See below, pp. xxx.

Þa man betæhte ælfnoðe þone folgað æt haðfel[da] þa pæs .xl. oxana . [...] þrydde healf / hund sceapa .xlvii. gata · 7 xv. cealfra · cc ·[cy]sa butun ·x ; xliii· flicca [...] ;

When the herd at Hatfield was entrusted to Ælfnoth, then there were 40 oxen ..., 250 sheep, 47 goats and 15 calves; 200 cheeses less ten; 43 flitches [of bacon] ...

Memorandum 3c returns to much the same territory as 3a: Ely's current livestock held at individual estates. For the third time Hatfield is named as the land in question, and indeed one suspects that the Ælfnoth referred to here is identical with the Ælfnoth entrusted with a herd of swine at Hatfield in 3a. If so, he had in the meantime come to hold slightly different responsibilities. 3c refers to no swine, unless their presence can be inferred from the bacon he was entrusted with. According to 3c, Ælfnoth had charge over oxen, sheep, goats, calves, cheese and bacon – a substantial quantity and range of items, implying that he occupied a position of some responsibility, perhaps as a master herdsman or reeve. The large number of sheep could have served a multitude of purposes, including the provision of wool during life as well as skin after death.¹⁰³

4

þis is þes fænnas hyre æt fordham [7] æt hyllingye þe [...]get eadgares sunu / 7 æt pulfsie þ(æt) sent ·iiii· ðusend · of ða[m e]ast fenne ·ii· ðuse[nd ...]pole xx snasa · / of tynadpere 7 of forperde x s[na]sa · of soþan ea 7 g[...] xx snasa · / of ladpere þusend · of burhpere · [...]ð]usend · of mudecan[...]f 7 [...]peper 7 of ðæm / dypu(m) sticcan ·i· þusend · of sceld[...] xiiii snasa · of h[...]pere oðer healf ðusend / of pratpere ·ii· ðusend · of bolingge[...]x· snasa · of batlin[...]ð]usend · of brade / sealde xx · snasa · of pulfgaringpere x [sn]asa · of heanrices [...] . of norþpere xx / snasa · of osgoding .i. ðusend · of p[...]pere .ii. ðusend · of [...] s .i. ðusend / [þi]s synd xxvi ðusend 7 xi sticcan·

This is the rent of the fen at Fordham and at Hilgay which ... Edgar's son and from Wulfsige – that is, four thousand [eels]; two thousand from the east fen; 20 sticks [of eels from] ...pole; 10 sticks [of eels] from the fenced weir and from in front; 20 sticks [of eels] from the true/southern stream and from g...; a thousand from the path-weir; ... thousand from the *burh*-weir; ... from *mudecan* weir ... and ...weir and a thousand from the deep sticks;¹⁰⁴ 14 sticks [of eels] from shel... ; 1500 from *wrat*-weir; 2000 from *bolingge*...; ... sticks from *batlin*; ... thousand from *bradsealde*; 20 sticks [of eels] from *Wulfgaring*-weir; 10 sticks [of eels] from Heanric's ...; 20 sticks [of eels] from north-weir; a thousand from Osgoding; 2000 from p...weir; 1000 from ... These make 26 thousand and 11 sticks.

The final memorandum is the most damaged and difficult to evaluate, yet is clearly similar to 3a and 3c in some respects. It lists the rent (*hyre*) from the fen at Fordham and Hilgay in Norfolk, north of Ely. This consists exclusively of eels, which are counted up at the end of the memorandum to a total of 26,000 and 11 'sticks' (*sticcan*). Assuming these are the same as the *snas* measures used earlier in the text, and that both equate to the traditional 25-eel

¹⁰³ R. Gameson, 'The Material Fabric of Early British Books', *History of the Book*, ed. Gameson, pp. 13–93, at 14 n. 5.

¹⁰⁴ The words in this badly damaged part of the folio are extremely difficult to read. *Dypum sticcan* at the beginning of the line is especially tentative.

stick,¹⁰⁵ this would bring the final total of eels to 26,275. At least 19,350 are actually accounted for in the extant portions of the memorandum,¹⁰⁶ meaning that it is entirely credible that this total would have been reached with the missing numbers included. It should be stressed that this represents just the rent: a significantly larger number, perhaps double or larger, was being caught in total.¹⁰⁷ Such a large quantity of eels – presumably an annual render – finds parallels in the 16,000 eels expected from fisheries at Wyllan and Elm in the Thorney ‘foundation charter’,¹⁰⁸ or the 10,000 eels from Well donated to the monks of Ely by Edgar in that house’s alleged ‘foundation charter’.¹⁰⁹ Smaller renders comparable to the individual weirs in memorandum 4 are attested in connection with individual properties in the *Liber Eliensis*.¹¹⁰

At Fordham and Hilgay, the supply of eels depended on at least 22 weirs. All were apparently rented out in return for a given number of eels. Four weirs seem to be tied to individuals, and eighteen others are specified descriptively; some of the latter are only partially legible and so could be personal names, or are of unclear interpretation, like the ‘*wrat weir*’ (*pratpere*) and ‘*mudecan* (weir?)’. The high concentration of fishing at these two villages must owe to the presence of two rivers in the vicinity: the Great Ouse and the Wissey. These and other rivers were widely exploited for fishing in Anglo-Saxon England.¹¹¹

THE ELY MEMORANDA AND THE LATE ANGLO-SAXON FENLAND ECONOMY

The memoranda paint a vivid picture of the Fenland economy; one marked by the very different landscape of the Middle Ages, long before substantive drainage operations began in the nineteenth century. Marshes, meres and other waterways were ubiquitous; Whittlesey Mere was the largest lake in lowland England.¹¹² In the words of Felix, who eloquently described the remote desert to which St Guthlac retreated in the eighth century,

‘there is in the midland district of Britain a most dismal fen of immense size ... now consisting of marshes, now of bogs, sometimes of black waters overhung by fog, sometimes studded with wooded islands and traversed by the windings of tortuous streams’.¹¹³

¹⁰⁵ R. E. Zupko (*A Dictionary of Weights and Measures for the British Isles: the Middle Ages to the 20th Century* (Philadelphia, PA, 1985), pp. 389–90) shows that a stick has consisted of 25 eels since at least the early thirteenth century. Cf. Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, p. 505.

¹⁰⁶ This number is based on figures given in full, and assumes that in the several cases where just ‘thousands’ or ‘sticks’ (i.e. in the plural) can be read, the unit in question was at least two.

¹⁰⁷ The customs of the estate at Tidenham, Gloucestershire, for example (*Bath* 24 (pp. 147–8)), allow that half of all fish caught will be given to the lord, along with any unusual fish. See also Banham and Faith, *Anglo-Saxon Farms*, p. 188.

¹⁰⁸ S 792 (*Pet* Appendix 4).

¹⁰⁹ S 779 (KCD 563; *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, ed. Robertson 98–103 (no. 48)).

¹¹⁰ E.g. a weir of 1,000 eels at Doddington, Cambridgeshire: *LE* ii. 21 (ed. Blake, p. 96; trans. Fairweather, p. 119).

¹¹¹ D. Hooke, ‘Uses of Waterways in Anglo-Saxon England’, *Waterways and Canal-Building in Medieval England*, ed. J. Blair (Oxford, 2007), pp. 44–54. For a plan of medieval Hilgay, emphasising its location surrounded by marsh and with the Wissey nearby, see R. J. Silvester, *The Fenland Project, Number 4: Norfolk Survey, the Wissey Embayment & Fen Causeway*, East Anglian Archaeology Report 52 (Dereham, 1991), p. 45.

¹¹² D. Hall and J. M. Coles, *Fenland Survey: an Essay in Landscape and Persistence* (London, 1994), esp. pp. 1–24. See also Darby, *Medieval Fenland*; S. Oosthuizen, ‘Culture and Identity in the Early Medieval Fenland Landscape’, *Landscape History* 37 (2016), 5–24, which focuses on an earlier period.

¹¹³ ‘Est in medietullaneis Britanniae partibus immensae magnitudinis aterrima palus ... nunc stagnis, nunc flactris, interdum nigris fusi vaporis laticibus, necnon et crebris insularum nemorumque intervenientibus flexuosis rivigarum anfractibus’. Felix, *Vita sancti Guthlaci*, ch. 24 (*Felix’s Life of Saint Guthlac*, ed. and trans. B. Colgrave (Cambridge, 1956), pp. 86–7). See also Bede (*Historia ecclesiastica* iv. 19, in *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), pp. 394–5, who remarked

For some this damp and isolated environment proved profoundly forbidding,¹¹⁴ and it was for this very reason that from as early as the seventh and eighth centuries it attracted pious souls eager to withdraw from worldly interests like St Æthelthryth, St Guthlac and St Æthelwold. Abbo of Fleury (d. 1004) was moved by his visit to Ramsey in 985–7 to laud its monks and their home in verse: ‘o noble throng of Ramsey, secluded by spreading waters ... the vast fen, abounding in fish, yields its secrets so that new confinements of the wilderness may be found for you’.¹¹⁵ William of Malmesbury likewise recognised the attraction of the landscape when he visited Thorney about 150 years later, describing the monastery as:

‘the image of paradise, and its loveliness gives an advance idea of heaven itself. For all the swamps surrounding it, it supports an abundance of trees, whose tall smooth trunks strain towards the stars. The flat countryside catches the eye with its green carpet of grass; those who hurry across the plain meet nothing that offends. No part of the land, however tiny, is uncultivated. In one place you come across tall fruit trees, in another fields bordered with vines, which creep along the earth or climb high on their props. Nature and art are in competition: what the one forgets the other brings forth ... A vast solitude allows the monks a quiet life: the more limited their glimpses of mortal men, the more tenaciously they cleave to things heavenly’.¹¹⁶

Both the monastic and lay population of the Fenland proved fully capable of turning these conditions to their advantage. The 26,275 eels expected from Fordham and Hilgay translated to almost 72 a day for a year: enough to test the stomachs of even a large monastic community, especially if one considers that this was almost certainly just a fraction of Ely’s annual income in eels. England at the turn of the first millennium was experiencing what has been termed the ‘fish event horizon’: the rise of large-scale exploitation of marine fish, particularly cod and herring, alongside freshwater and migratory fish, including eel.¹¹⁷ This was probably driven more by burgeoning demand among the elite and aspiring elite rather

that St Æthelthryth’s foundation at Ely was ‘surrounded on all sides by waters and marshes’ (‘undique ... aquis ac paludibus circumdata’).

¹¹⁴ For the difficulties of overland navigation in the Fens, see A. Cole, ‘The Place-Name Evidence for Water Transport in Early Medieval England’, *Waterways*, ed. Blair, pp. 55–84, at 66–9.

¹¹⁵ ‘O Ramesiga cohors, amplis que claudere stagnis ... Vasta palus, piscosa nimis, sua dindima pandit, ut noua sint heremi claustra reperta tibi’. The poem is found in Byrhtferth, *Vita S. Oswaldi*, iii. 18, *Byrhtferth of Ramsey: the Lives of St Oswald and St Ecgbwine*, ed. and trans. M. Lapidge (Oxford, 2009), pp. 92–3; it also circulated separately in a *vita* of Abbo and in collections of verse. For discussion of Felix, Byrhtferth and other texts on the fens, see C. A. M. Clarke, *Literary Landscapes and the Idea of England, 700–1400* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 31–3, 45–7 and 80–9.

¹¹⁶ ‘Paradisi simulacrum, quod amenitate iam caelos ipsos imaginetur. In ipsis paludibus arborum ferax, quae enodi proceritate luctantur ad sidera. Aequorea planities herbarum uiridantibus comis oculos auocat, currentibus per campum nullus offensioni datur locus. Nulla ibi uel exigua terrae portio uacat. Hic in pomiferas arbores terra se subrigit, hic pretextitur ager uineis, quae uel per terram repunt uel per baiulos palos in celsum surgunt. Mutuum certamen naturae et cultus, ut quod obliuiscitur illa producat iste ... Solitudo ingens ad quietem datur monachis, ut eo tenatius hereant superis quo castigatius mortales conspicantur’. William of Malmesbury, *Gesta pontificum Anglorum* iv. 186.1–2, ed. and trans. Winterbottom and Thomson, pp. 492–5.

¹¹⁷ J. H. Barrett, A. M. Locker and C. M. Roberts, ‘“Dark Age Economics” Revisited: the English Fish Bone Evidence AD 600–1600’, *Antiquity* 78 (2004), 618–36. See also A. J. Frantzen, *Food, Eating and Identity in Early Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 2014), pp. 232–8; D. Banham, *Food and Drink in Anglo-Saxon England* (Stroud, 2004), p. 68; and R. Lennard, *Rural England, 1086–1135: a Study of Social and Agrarian Conditions* (Oxford, 1959), pp. 248–52.

than by the traditional association of fish with fasting.¹¹⁸ Hence it is likely that most or all of the eels rendered from Fordham and Hilgay would have been passed on for sale. The market for such products was evidently strong. Ely was buying as well as selling: memorandum 1 refers to 2000 herring bought for 40d., which must have come from the coast. The fisherman imagined in Ælfric's colloquy stated, as if it were as plain as day, that he sold his catch (including eels, *anguillae*, or *ælas* in the Old English gloss) 'in town' (*in civitate*) and that he 'was not able to catch as many as [he] could sell'.¹¹⁹ The Old English poem *Seasons of Fasting* referred to gluttonous priests (again, possibly in a town) who wore themselves out 'eating oysters and other fish from the waters' (*etan ostran eac and oþerne fisc on flode*).¹²⁰

Even allowing for some literary license, the fens would have been a rich source of diverse fish for growing towns in the vicinity. The islands and edges of the fens were also productive as both arable and pasture, and it was on the fertility of properties here and further afield that Ely's wealth was built. Some impression of what this meant in practice is conveyed by the memoranda. Details of productivity flowed freely across the endowment as a whole, reflecting the comings and goings of many individuals between Ely and its lands, including many well beyond the fens. Such movements were watched with care and closely controlled: Ely at one point around the late tenth century produced a list of *geburas* associated by ancestry with the large estate at Hatfield, even though some had moved up to 17 miles away.¹²¹ These *geburas* may have been enticed rather than coerced into moving. Slaves, on the other hand, had no such freedom of movement: in memorandum 2 a dairy maid was sent to Linden 'to serve [as a slave]' (*to þiupan*), while in memorandum 1 a swineherd from Milton and a woman sent to Stanground were assigned a monetary value just like other commodities (five oras and half a pound, respectively). Slaves – including such dairymaids, shepherds, swineherds and others trained for important specialised tasks – could be moved between inland or demesne properties in the same manner as other material resources.¹²² The position of the other men and women mentioned in the memoranda is less clear. A woman and two men in memorandum 3b were either bought or paid to come to Stretham; if the former, they might have been slaves in a similar position to the dairymaid and swineherd; if the latter, they could have been *geburas* or of some other condition with freedom of movement.¹²³ But the same memorandum also refers separately to 'hired men' (*hyringmannum*), perhaps tipping the balance in favour of their being slaves. Hired workers may have laboured under much the same conditions as servile tenants, albeit for money rather than out of obligation. Early medieval charters, polyptychs and other sources for the rural economy did not accord much attention to this element of the rural workforce, and indeed there was no standard term for describing hired labour in Latin texts.¹²⁴ But wage labour for agricultural and other purposes was becoming commonplace in the tenth and eleventh centuries. The money set aside in memorandum 1 for provision and digging (*to fearme 7 to dycynge*) may have been at least

¹¹⁸ Frantzen, *Food, Eating and Identity*, pp. 238–45, with R. Fleming, *Britain after Rome: the Fall and Rise, 400–1070* (London, 2010), pp. 298–9; and R. Fleming, 'The New Wealth, the New Rich and the New Political Style in Late Anglo-Saxon England', *ANS* 23 (2001), 1–22, at 5–7.

¹¹⁹ 'Non possum tot capere quot possum uendere'. Ælfric's *Colloquy*, ed. G. N. Garmonsway (Exeter, 1978), p. 27.

¹²⁰ *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, ed. E. van K. Dobbie (New York, 1942), p. 104; with a translation of this passage in Frantzen, *Food, Eating and Identity*, p. 248 and discussion on pp. 246–55.

¹²¹ D. A. E. Pelteret, 'Two Old English Lists of Serfs', *MS* 48 (1986), 470–513, at 475–83.

¹²² Faith, *English Peasantry*, pp. 59–70 and 84–8; Pelteret, *Slavery*, pp. 116–17. For dairymaids as one example of specialised tasks with which slaves were particularly associated, see also J. A. Raftis, 'The Trends towards Serfdom in Mediaeval England', *Report of the Canadian Catholic Historical Association* 22 (1955), 15–25, at 20–1.

¹²³ Pelteret, *Slavery*, p. 180 interprets the text as referring to purchase.

¹²⁴ L. Feller, 'Le vocabulaire de la rémunération durant le haut Moyen Âge', *Rémunérer le travail au Moyen Âge. Pour une histoire sociale du salariat*, ed. P. Beck, P. Bernardi and L. Feller (Paris, 2014), pp. 154–64.

partially intended for hired labour. *Hyrmnen* were under the direction of the reeve in the eleventh-century tract *Gerefa*.¹²⁵ Even *villani* of early-twelfth-century Peterborough had hired labourers (*undersetes*),¹²⁶ and Richer of Rheims mentions casual day-labourers who received cash payments for building work in tenth-century Francia.¹²⁷ Hired men could have supplemented labour services called upon to operate the many demesne ploughs in Domesday Book which had no allocation of slaves.¹²⁸

It was not just men and women who moved to work or bear information across the broad expanse of Ely's lands. The memoranda also attest to the transfer of livestock over substantial distances. Swine from Milton and Hatfield were apparently sent to Thorney (about 30 and 70 miles, respectively).¹²⁹ Such movements of swine could have been frequent, for purposes of pannage as well as occasional transfer between estates and for eventual slaughter. But the journey from Hatfield to Thorney was unusually long, and there were other properties located at a similar or further distance from the monastery. Even if many estates were farmed out or their food renders commuted into cash, there must still have been frequent travel between these locations and Ely. Altogether, these activities add up to a mechanism of considerable complexity, driving a diversified economic operation with many interlocking networks of supply and demand.¹³⁰

Lubrication for all of this distribution and redistribution came in the form of a dynamic monetary component to the economy, which facilitated exchange between varied and otherwise less closely connected elements in society.¹³¹ The memoranda are highly specific about the sums and nature of monetary expenses. They constitute the primary interest of memoranda 1, 2 and 3b. All are as clear as could be hoped for about the distinction between actual expenditure of cash and distribution of goods rated with the same units, among them boats, harrows, swine and slaves. Money was coming into the hands of minor local landowners and peasants such as Leofric of Stretham, who received three oras for corn, and an unnamed shepherd who received ten pence, as well as an unspecified group of 'hired men' (*hyringmannum*) who were paid three mancuses for their labour. Four different monetary units occur in the memoranda. Three relate to silver coin: the penny, the pound and the ora (a fraction of the mark). The first two are relatively uncontentious, the pound consisting of 240d. The ora, however, is less transparent: different sources rate it at either 16 or 20 pennies. Nothing in the memoranda confirms which reckoning was used, although the totals offered in memorandum 1 are reached more closely by surviving entries with 20d. to the ora instead of 16.¹³²

¹²⁵ *Gerefa* ch. 6, in *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, ed. F. Liebermann, 3 vols. (Halle, 1903–16) I, 454. For further discussion see Faith, *English Peasantry*, pp. 75–6.

¹²⁶ *Chronicon Petrobургense*, ed. T. Stapleton, Camden Society o.s. 47 (London, 1849), p. 166. For discussion, see Pelteret, 'Two Old English Lists', p. 481.

¹²⁷ Richer of Rheims, *Historiae* iii. 8, in *Richer of Saint Rémi: Histories*, ed. and trans. J. Lake, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA, 2011) II, 10–13. Cf. Naismith, 'Social Significance', p. 27.

¹²⁸ For selected discussion of slaves in relation to demesne and ploughing, see H. C. Darby, *Domesday England* (Cambridge, 1977), pp. 96–106; Pelteret, *Slavery*, pp. 203–35; D. Roffe, *Decoding Domesday* (Woodbridge, 2007), pp. 226–33.

¹²⁹ It is not said explicitly in memoranda 1 and 2 that the swine are being sent to Thorney itself, but most of Thorney's estates were clustered quite close by.

¹³⁰ They bear comparison with the large-scale monastic economies of ninth-century Francia as revealed in the polyptychs: see J.-P. Devroey, 'L'espace des échanges économiques. Commerce, marché, communications et logistique dans le monde franc au IX^e siècle', *SettSpol* 50 (2003), 347–95 and other references there cited. See also below, n. 145–51.

¹³¹ R. Naismith, 'The Social Significance of Monetization in the Early Middle Ages', *Past & Present* 223 (2014), 3–39.

¹³² For further discussion of units of account in Anglo-Saxon England, see Naismith, *Medieval European Coinage*, Appendix 2.

Alongside the pound, ora and penny, the mancus was used specifically for gold, commonly rated at 30d. As elsewhere, the mancus of gold could refer interchangeably to a gold coin, the equivalent weight or value in gold, and also possibly 30d. in silver or other commodities. Mancuses of gold are mentioned seven times in total (seven in memoranda 1 and 2, once in memorandum 3b):¹³³ twice these are said explicitly to be of gold, and twice the mancuses are contained in an object or given to a smith, again strongly indicating that they consist of precious metal (presumably gold). In some cases, not least the gold given to the hired men in 3b, it is not possible to ascertain what kind of mancus the scribe had in mind, but in the clearer cases in memoranda 1 and 2 gold appears with striking frequency. It occurs commonly in other Anglo-Saxon land transactions, which generally relate to the elite,¹³⁴ but the memoranda shed light on the broader circulation of gold in purchases of oxen and for other agricultural expenses. Widespread availability of gold in the late Anglo-Saxon Fenland contrasts with (for example) the situation in southwest France around the same time, where a poor man found a small piece of gold hidden in ashes, left over from the goldsmiths' work near the church of Sainte-Foi, and rejoiced 'as a person who had never owned any gold'.¹³⁵

Behind this extensive use of money, there was a well-developed market for all sorts of goods, including (probably) demand in Huntingdon for madder grown on monastic estates, and elsewhere for the vast quantities of eels supplied to Ely. The prices recorded in the memoranda are collected in Table 1:¹³⁶

<i>Product</i>	<i>Quantity</i>	<i>Price</i>	<i>Price per unit in d.</i> ¹³⁷
<i>Memoranda 1 and 2</i>			
Bean-seed		40d.	
Clothing		£1	
Harrow	3	3 oras	16/20
Herring	2000	40d.	0.02 (i.e. 1d. for 50 herring)
Iron for mills		5 oras	
Land (<i>gegryndum</i>)	3	1 ora 12d.	9 ¹ / ₃ /10 ² / ₃
'Madder-keeper'	1	9 oras	144/180
Mill oxen		10 mancuses	
Mill oxen		£1	
Provision and digging		£1	
Ship	1	2 oras	32/40
Ship	4	8 oras	32/40
Ship and nets	1	2 oras	32/40
(Slave) woman	1	5 oras	80/100
Swine	80	£1 ¹ / ₂	4 ¹ / ₂
Swine (full-grown)	30	6d. each	6
Swineherd	1	£ ¹ / ₂	120
Wagon	12	80d.	6 ² / ₃
<i>Memorandum 3b</i>			
Corn		3 oras	

¹³³ There is also one reference to pounds of gold in memorandum 2.

¹³⁴ R. Naismith, 'Payments for Land and Privilege in Anglo-Saxon England', *ASE* 41 (2012), 277–342, at 308–13.

¹³⁵ 'Sicut qui numquam aurum habuerat'. Bernard of Angers, *Liber miraculorum sanctae Fidis* i. 25, in *Liber miraculorum sanctae Fidis*, ed. L. Robertini (Spoleto, 1994), p. 180; and *The Book of Sainte Foy*, trans. P. Sheingorn (Philadelphia, PA, 1995), pp. 92–3.

¹³⁶ The table excludes payments to individuals which are unlikely to have been a purchase.

¹³⁷ The two alternative prices offered in some cases allow for the possibility of either a 16 or 20 pence ora.

Hired men	3 mancuses
Land	10d.
Sheep	60d.

Table 1: prices in the Ely memoranda.

The more plentiful records preserved from the later Middle Ages show that prices for most goods had tripled or quadrupled since the eleventh century.¹³⁸ Herring cost 3¼ or 3½d. for 50 in one mid-thirteenth century source;¹³⁹ a pig 2s. 2d. (i.e. 26d.) in another text from late-thirteenth-century Wellingborough.¹⁴⁰ The wagons in the memoranda look comparatively cheap next to some later medieval counterparts, though there was a great deal of variation in the value of wheeled transport depending largely on whether iron was used for the tyres; recorded cases in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries range from a shilling or two up to 10s. or 18s.¹⁴¹ There was also probably enough variation between ships to make comparison between those of the memoranda and later examples meaningless – but it is striking that the same price was paid for ships in several separate transactions in the memoranda, implying a degree of standardisation and demand for ships on the great meres. The harrows in the memoranda seem expensive next to those of the later Middle Ages.¹⁴² Assuming an iron tool, probably to be drawn by oxen or horse, it may be compared with the cost of the iron parts of a later medieval plough, typically about 2s. (one mid-fourteenth-century case put the value at 5d. per foot of iron).¹⁴³ A certain amount of other evidence points to iron and ironworking being relatively rare and expensive in the later Anglo-Saxon period:¹⁴⁴ iron was mentioned as a specific commodity bought for the making of mills in memorandum 1, and a large payment of five mancuses to a smith in memorandum 2 may have been related to ironworking (though lacunae obscure exactly what the smith was being paid for). Any evidence for prices in the eleventh century is scarce, making the details in the memoranda especially valuable, if also difficult to set into a background. But the texts do shed a small shaft of light onto what was evidently a well-developed local market economy.

The most striking aspect of the outlay enumerated in these texts, however, is how all of the actions listed in memoranda 1 and 2 are encapsulated with the abstract term *fyrþrung* ('furtherance', 'improvement'). *Fyrþrung* (and the related verb *fyrþrian*) in other texts carried a general meaning of growth or advancement, including in spiritual and metaphorical

¹³⁸ For the larger context of price evolution in the Middle Ages (which is only traceable in detail from the later twelfth century) see N. J. Mayhew, 'Prices in England, 1170–1750', *Past & Present* 219 (2013), 3–39; C. Dyer, *Making a Living in the Middle Ages: the People of Britain 850–1520* (New Haven, 2002), p. 230. I am particularly grateful to Chris Dyer for discussion of prices in the memoranda and in later sources.

¹³⁹ *Household Accounts from Medieval England*, ed. C. M. Woolgar, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1992–3) I, 153.

¹⁴⁰ *Wellingborough Manorial Accounts, A.D. 1258–1323: from the Account Rolls of Crowland Abbey*, ed. F. M. Page, Publications of the Northamptonshire Record Society 8 (Kettering, 1936), p. 4. Note that the memoranda pigs of 4½–6d. are substantially cheaper than the compensation of 10d. quoted for a *swyn* in VI Æthelstan ch. 6.2 (ed. Liebermann I, 176). More expensive pigs are also recorded in the later Middle Ages: *Household Accounts*, ed. Woolgar I, 153 puts pigs at between 3s. 4d. and 4s. 6d.

¹⁴¹ C. Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages: Social Change in England c. 1200–1520* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 171.

¹⁴² For the (limited) evidence for harrowing in Anglo-Saxon England, see Banham and Faith, *Anglo-Saxon Farms*, p. 58. Not all of the word interpreted as *ege[ðan]* ('harrows') is visible, but the reading is persuasive and appropriate to the context.

¹⁴³ Dyer, *Standards of Living*, pp. 170–1.

¹⁴⁴ See H. R. Loyn, *Anglo-Saxon England and the Norman Conquest*, 2nd ed. (Harlow, 1991), pp. 104–5 for the limitations of late Anglo-Saxon ironworking. There was also a tradition at this time of ceremonial deposition of hoards of iron objects, sometimes associated with the destruction of buildings: for discussion prompted by an example found at Bishopstone, Sussex, see G. Thomas and P. Ottaway, 'The Symbolic Lives of Late Anglo-Saxon Settlements: a Cellared Structure and Iron Hoard from Bishopstone, East Sussex', *ArchJ* 165 (2008), 334–98, at 357–93.

contexts.¹⁴⁵ This, however, appears to be the only surviving document in which *fyrþrung* is used in quite this way, as an abstract term for the improvement of land's productive capacity, overseen by a monastic expert. The monks of Ely may have had in mind scriptural passages on God's role in growth, such as Jeremiah 1.10 – a verse popular with monastic reforms spelling out how God has promised to root up, pull down, lay waste and destroy in order to build and plant (*aedifices et plantas*)¹⁴⁶ – or I Cor. 3.6–7, in which St Paul explains how although anyone might plant or water crops, it is God who grants increase (*incrementum*). Although this stands out as an unusually clear display of the Ely monks' approach to material resources, it had widespread precedents elsewhere in the monastic world of early medieval Christendom, particularly in the tenth and eleventh centuries, and looks forward in some respects to the activities of the Cistercians in the twelfth century and after.¹⁴⁷ There was a strong tradition of professionalism and expertise in material matters in monastic settings extending back to the times of St Benedict and other foundational figures, based on the *discretio* which monks honed through a strictly regulated life.¹⁴⁸ Later, Adalhard of Corbie (d. 827) in 813 called upon profound expertise in evaluating the value and productive capacity of land in order to facilitate a land transfer between two monasteries in northern Italy,¹⁴⁹ while during the tenth and eleventh centuries Benedictine houses across western Europe intensified their exploitation of agricultural resources. Attempts to restore and invigorate regular Benedictine life by charismatic monastic leaders, not least St Æthelwold, frequently also brought a fresh approach to material resources guided by the same principles;¹⁵⁰ new techniques of land management and closer engagement with markets were among the results.¹⁵¹ The outstanding contribution of the Ely memoranda to this tradition is

¹⁴⁵ See Cameron *et al.*, *Dictionary*, s.v.

¹⁴⁶ See in particular J. Barrow, 'The Ideology of the Tenth-Century English Benedictine "Reform"', *Challenging the Boundaries of Medieval History: the Legacy of Timothy Reuter*, ed. P. Skinner (Turnhout, 2009), pp. 141–54, at 149.

¹⁴⁷ C. H. Berman, *Medieval Agriculture, the Southern French Countryside, and the Early Cistercians. A Study of Forty-Three Monasteries*, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society 76.5 (Philadelphia, PA, 1986), esp. pp. 23–4 and 86–92.

¹⁴⁸ V. Toneatto, 'Pour une histoire de l'expertise économique-administrative: *peritia* et *disciplina* monastiques', *Experts et expertise au Moyen Âge: consilium quaeritur a perito. XLIIe congrès de la SHMESP (Oxford, 31 mars–4 avril 2011)* (Paris, 2012), pp. 189–99. See also J.-P. Devroey, *Puissants et misérables: système social et monde paysan dans l'Europe des Francs (VIe–IXe siècles)* (Brussels, 2006), esp. pp. 426–41 and 591–607; L. Feller, 'Accumuler, redistribuer et échanger durant le haut Moyen Âge', *SettSpol* 56 (2009), 81–110.

¹⁴⁹ F. Bougard, 'Adalhard de Corbie entre Nonantola et Brescia (813): *commutatio*, gestion des biens monastiques et marché de la terre', *Puer Apuliae. Mélanges offerts à Jean-Marie Martin*, ed. E. Cuzzo, V. Déroche, A. Peters-Custot and V. Prigent (Paris, 2008), pp. 51–67, esp. 58–61.

¹⁵⁰ R. Naismith, 'Turpe Lucrum? Wealth, Money and Coinage in the Millennial Church', *Money and the Church in Medieval Europe, 1000–1200: Practice, Morality and Thought*, ed. G. E. M. Gasper and S. H. Gullbekk (Farnham, 2015), pp. 17–37, at 20–2. In the case of Æthelwold, appointment to new offices at Abingdon and Winchester, and later the establishment of new monasteries at Ely, Peterborough and Thorney, was thought by a hagiographer of 996 or after to have led to lavish material enrichment in land: Wulfstan of Winchester, *Vita Æthelwoldi episcopi*, ch. 11–12 and 23–4 (*Wulfstan of Winchester: Life of St Æthelwold*, ed. and trans. M. Lapidge and M. Winterbottom (Oxford, 1991), pp. 18–25 and 38–43).

¹⁵¹ A. Wilkin, 'Communautés bénédictines et environnement économique, IXe–XIIe siècles. Réflexions sur les tendances historiographiques de l'analyse du temporel monastique', *Ecclesia in medio nationis. Reflections on the Study of Monasticism in the Central Middle Ages/Réflexions sur l'étude du monachisme au Moyen Âge central*, ed. S. Vanderputten and B. Meijns (Leuven/Louvain, 2011), pp. 101–50, at 122 and 135–43; L. Kuchenbuch, 'Ordnungsverhalten im grundherrlichen Schriftgut vom 9. zum 12. Jahrhundert', *Dialektik und Rhetorik im früheren und hohen Mittelalter. Rezeption, Überlieferung und gesellschaftliche Wirkung antiker Gelehrsamkeit vornehmlich im 9. und 12. Jahrhundert*, ed. J. Fried (Munich, 1997), pp. 175–268, esp. 181–93; F. G. Hirschmann, 'Klosterreform und Grundherrschaft: Richard von St. Vanne', *Grundherrschaft – Kirche – Stadt zwischen Maas und Rhein während des hohen Mittelalters*, ed. M. Escher, A. Haverkamp and F. G. Hirschmann (Mainz, 1997), pp. 125–70, esp. 152–9.

as a reflection of the clear and explicit view that the monks' acts amounted to 'improvement'. Other references to agricultural investment in the early Middle Ages tend to be much more targeted, as in the ninth-century polyptych of Saint-Germain: new vines and forests at a few specific locations are said to have been created by the current abbot.¹⁵²

Use of a generalised language of improvement for agricultural processes at Ely may indicate a more ambitious process, especially if the total level of investment in Thorney's lands mentioned in memoranda 1 and 2 is measured against that abbey's income in Domesday Book: almost £28 was spent in total, which amounted to more than half Thorney's annual income in 1086. This compares favourably with the weak levels of investment thought to have been characteristic of later medieval aristocratic landlords, typically 5 per cent or less of annual revenue.¹⁵³ However, it is far from clear that all of the monies in memoranda 1 and 2 were spent in one year, and the total expenditure is a much smaller fraction of Ely's annual income (about 3 per cent). How much Ely spent on its own lands is unclear, but memorandum 3b records investment in livestock and labour for several Ely estates. The Fenlands presented special possibilities for investment in the drainage of land and the building of canals, which it is thought the rich abbeys of this area supported in the late Anglo-Saxon period; *dycyng* ('digging/ditching') in memorandum 2 might attest to construction of drainage channels or dykes.¹⁵⁴ There was, in addition, an unusual level of expertise to call upon. Among the most remarkable elements of the memoranda are the references to a monastic expert in agricultural improvement: a figure mentioned three times in memoranda 1 and 2 named Ælfsige the monk.¹⁵⁵ Ely directed immense sums towards his work directing the 'improvement' of Thorney lands, and whether this constituted payment or funding for the work is not clear.¹⁵⁶ Ælfsige received a chalice (?) worth five mancuses, three more mancuses from the abbot and a final, larger payment of 60 mancuses and five pennies;¹⁵⁷ in total these amounted to the equivalent of 2045d.

Despite all of this, it should not be assumed that 'improvement' or investment was unique to reformed Benedictine monasteries at this time. Other religious establishments may have been seeking to augment the productivity of their lands, and laymen may have done so too: a land market for lower-level landholders, including peasants, was emerging in the tenth and eleventh centuries, based on generation of money through agricultural surplus.¹⁵⁸ This

¹⁵² Devroey, *Puissants et misérables*, pp. 374 and 459–62.

¹⁵³ M. M. Postan, 'Investment in Medieval Agriculture', *Journal of Economic History* 27 (1967), 576–87, at 579; E. Miller and J. Hatcher, *Medieval England: Towns, Commerce and Crafts, 1086–1348*, 2nd ed. (London, 1995), p. 232; C. Dyer, *An Age of Transition? Economy and Society in England in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 126–72; M. Stephenson, 'Risk and Capital Formation: Seigneurial Investment in an Age of Adversity', *Town and Countryside in the Age of the Black Death: Essays in Honour of John Hatcher*, ed. M. Bailey and S. H. Rigby (Turnhout, 2012), pp. 175–212.

¹⁵⁴ Postan, 'Investment', p. 583; J. Bond, 'Canal Construction in the Early Middle Ages: an Introductory Review', *Waterways*, ed. Blair, pp. 152–205, at 177–82; C. Taylor, 'Fenlands', *Rural England: an Illustrated History of the Landscape*, ed. J. Thirsk (Oxford, 2000), pp. 167–87, at 173–5.

¹⁵⁵ For one example of the expertise an individual like Ælfsige may have possessed, see J. Blair, 'Grid-Planning in Anglo-Saxon Settlements: the Short Perch and the Four-Perch Model', *ASSAH* 18 (2013), 18–61, at 22 and 54.

¹⁵⁶ It might be thought that the money given to Ælfsige was for him to carry out improvements, rather than payment for having done so. This may have been the case with the second amount given to him in memorandum 1, but the payment in memorandum 2 seems to have been distinct from money given by the bishop for 'improvement'.

¹⁵⁷ The final payment is followed by another word, partially mutilated by the gap between two of the fragments, which may have been *geriht*, 'of rights'. This may mean that Ælfsige's last payment would be taken out of the income generated by Yaxley.

¹⁵⁸ R. Naismith, 'The Land Market and Anglo-Saxon Society', *Historical Research* 89 (2016), 19–41, esp. 35–7. For cases of laymen who seem to have been successful in improving the value and output of lands in the

may have been what was going on with the livestock and grain sold to Ely in memorandum 3b. But ecclesiastical, and above all monastic, thought on the economic dimensions of agriculture is far better articulated in extant sources from the earlier Middle Ages, and did include distinctive elements. As a major monastery, Ely was particularly well placed to 'further' its property thanks to its massive wealth, the impetus generated by a large sedentary community, and the institutional culture and stability needed to cultivate and pass on specialist skills.¹⁵⁹ Crucially, this last quality made a monastery like Ely especially likely both to produce and preserve relevant records. Some of what makes Ely appear unusual or precocious can be imputed to the unlikely survival of an exceptional set of documents. These stand as part of a distinct tradition of entering records concerning property into sacred books in late Anglo-Saxon England.

THE ELY MEMORANDA, DOCUMENTS AND MONASTIC LAND-MANAGEMENT

Management of a rich and sprawling landed endowment was a difficult task, and Ely's holdings were among the richest and most sprawling in England. In the decades before the Norman Conquest, it had demesne properties at 116 locations in six counties bringing in some £900 per annum.¹⁶⁰ Remarkably, the large majority of this endowment had been built up in a period of about fifty years, from around 970 to 1020.¹⁶¹ The tenurial geography of eastern England was transformed during this time by the assertive presence of St Æthelthryth's monastery and her earthly servants – and the equally swift establishment of several other substantial monastic houses nearby only compounded the process.¹⁶² Reactions among landowners varied as they sought to reach an accommodation with the new monastic neighbours. The death of St Æthelwold's leading patron King Edgar in 975 prompted a backlash against the new monasteries (especially Ely and Peterborough) from some who felt they had been treated unfairly by the bishop, or who perhaps simply wished to take advantage of his vulnerability;¹⁶³ other families, however, stood by the abbeys, and continued to cultivate close relations into the eleventh century, such as the kin of Byrhtnoth, ealdorman of Essex, who remained staunch supporters and benefactors of Ely.¹⁶⁴

Because these relations led to the build-up of an endowment essential to the support of the monastery and the glory of its saintly patrons, the institutional memory of Ely preserved relatively plentiful details of its gains in land. Much less clear, however, is how the new abbey itself adapted to the acquisition of landed property. Ely was a young foundation, and the quantity and configuration of its estates was changing rapidly. Its abbots and monks could not have predicted the location or scale of all incoming benefactions, or where opportunities to exchange and purchase might arise. Consequently there must have been a good deal of reconfiguration as Ely's material situation developed. New properties were

aftermath of the Norman Conquest, see S. Harvey, 'Domesday England', *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, vol. 2: 1042–1350, ed. H. E. Hallam (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 45–136, at 118–20.

¹⁵⁹ The measured and rationalised laying out of settlements seems to have had a resurgence in the time of the Benedictine reform and after, presumably on the basis of monastic expertise: Blair, 'Grid-Planning', pp. 22 and 54. The Fenlands also saw a number of new watercourses built in the late Anglo-Saxon period, for both transport and drainage, usually thought to have been masterminded and funded by the local abbeys: J. Bond, 'Canal Construction in the Early Middle Ages: an Introductory Review', *Waterways*, ed. Blair, pp. 152–205, at 180–2.

¹⁶⁰ E. Miller, *The Abbey & Bishopric of Ely: the Social History of an Ecclesiastical Estate from the Tenth Century to the Early Fourteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1951), p. 16. He also notes the large number of Ely's dependants, situated in over 200 villages and numbering more than 1200.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 23–4.

¹⁶² See above, p. xxx.

¹⁶³ See above n. 58.

¹⁶⁴ Miller, *Abbey & Bishopric*, p. 22. Cf. Keynes, 'Ely', pp. 28 and 32–3; Wareham, *Lords and Communities*, pp. 61–77.

sometimes consolidated, in order to produce the most coherent, productive and accessible holdings as possible. This could involve both adjustment to the range of landholdings through acquisition, and investing to improve the security and productive capacity of existing estates. The *Libellus Æthelwoldi* and *Liber Eliensis* preserve a tradition that during its early years Ely did both. St Æthelwold and his heirs indulged in extensive negotiation with neighbouring landholders to acquire plum estates and round off holdings in strategic locations.¹⁶⁵ During the time of Abbot Byrhtnoth (d. 996×999), the abbot shared responsibility for the material affairs of the abbey with a *praepositus* named Leo,¹⁶⁶ celebrated for his good character, munificence and especially his work on cultivating gardens and crops in the immediate vicinity of the monastery and in the Isle of Ely more widely – including the creation of a great ditch marking the boundary of monastic property, the digging of which was observed by a gathering of all the locals.¹⁶⁷ It is difficult to place much weight on this twelfth century record, which says little about how Byrhtnoth and Leo dealt with other estates, though a focus on the productive capacity of the area close to the monastery would be entirely credible, especially as the endowment as a whole was still taking shape.

A quite different policy is said to have been adopted in the time of Abbot Leofsige (1029–c. 1044) at the behest of King Cnut. Leofsige allegedly limited entry into the monastic community to men of learning and high birth, in order to encourage rich donations, and he also ensured that any such donations were shared among the brethren. Outside the monastery, he imposed a new form of organisation on the house's extensive landholdings. A total of 33 estates were designated for food-rent to sustain the monastery over the year, supplying 56 weeks' worth of food in total. The surplus presumably constituted a buffer, and a much larger safety net was provided by the Isle of Ely itself, which was set aside to meet any shortfall.¹⁶⁸ Leofsige's network of supply reflects what might be done once the main growth period had settled down, and a more stable situation could be foreseen. He probably took inspiration from Benedictine houses elsewhere in western Europe which had adopted a similar arrangement of temporally-based food supply, especially from the tenth century onwards.¹⁶⁹ But there was still much room for flexibility. Leofsige is said to have only included rents 'chosen from among the villages and lands which, by their more than usually abundant sweetness and exceptionally rich turf, are recognised as productive of crops'.¹⁷⁰ He left more than two thirds of the other estates to one side; these could in principle take up the position of any of the 33 chosen for food-rent, and might otherwise have supplied their rents in cash, or in some cases in specialist local goods, such as wood from Hatfield or salt from the Norfolk marshes.¹⁷¹ Decisions about which estates were distinguished by 'more than usually abundant sweetness and exceptionally rich turf' must have depended on direct experience, frequent (oral) communication with those responsible for individual properties and, perhaps, records of productivity that could be compared year on year. Data of this sort presumably flowed into

¹⁶⁵ Naismith, 'Land Market', pp. 24–32; Miller, *Abbey & Bishopric*, pp. 16–25.

¹⁶⁶ Although explicitly called *praepositus* (provost), Leo seems to have fulfilled the role normally associated with a cellarer in charge of material affairs: see D. Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England: a History of its Development from the Times of St Dunstan to the Fourth Lateran Council, 943–1216* (Cambridge, 1940), pp. 427–8 and 430–9.

¹⁶⁷ *LE* ii. 54 (ed. Blake, pp. 123–6; trans. Fairweather, pp. 148–51).

¹⁶⁸ *LE* ii. 84 (ed. Blake, pp. 152–3; trans. Fairweather, pp. 179–81).

¹⁶⁹ Organisation based on months (*mensata*) rather than weeks was more common, especially after being adopted by Cluny in the tenth century. See J.-P. Devroey, 'Corvées de labour et prestations de travail des paysans en Pays mosan de part et d'autre de l'an Mil', *Évêque et prince: Notger et la Basse-Lotharingie aux alentours de l'an Mil*, ed. A. Wilkin and J.-L. Kupper (Liège, 2013), pp. 93–120, at 119–20; G. Duby, *Hommes et structures du moyen âge* (Paris, 1973), pp. 385–6.

¹⁷⁰ 'Electe de vicis et arvis que abundantiore dulcedine et uberiori cespitate segetes creare noscuntur'.

¹⁷¹ Miller, *Abbey & Bishopric*, pp. 37–9.

the abbey on a virtually daily basis. The close management apparent from the memoranda suggests that the Ely lands mentioned in these texts were demesne or inland, rather than put out to rent under lease or similar, as may have been more common in eastern England.¹⁷² One possible exception might be the land of Leofric at Stretham, from whom the abbey bought three oras of corn, but if 3b records an exceptional set of expenditures from a bequest, this might be a portion of the surplus generated by Leofric above and beyond what was owed by him to the lord.

However, all of this lies at some remove from the general approach to property as presented in the Ely memoranda. Only four of the estates mentioned in the six texts are among the 33 said to have been set aside by Leofsige for the *firma* (OE *feorm*, ‘food-rent’) of the abbey. Of these, the role of Bluntesham (in a damaged portion of memorandum 2) is unclear, but the other three (Hauxton, Horningsea and Melbourn) all occur in memorandum 3a, treated in exactly the same terms as properties which were not included in the list. Assuming the *Liber Eliensis* account of Leofsige’s administrative reforms is accurate, the memoranda most probably predate them, and could indeed have been part of the background work and record-keeping which went into such reforms. The underlying aims of the memoranda are also seemingly at cross-purposes with those of the rationalised *Liber Eliensis* list. There is no indication that the memoranda in themselves were ever part of a systematic collection of records or accounts. On the contrary, they are devoid of many details (not least dates) that would have been essential to an archival initiative. They also differ significantly from charters and some other texts which were occasionally entered into a monastery’s holy books on behalf of some external individual or institution for safe-keeping.¹⁷³ Rather, the memoranda seem to have stemmed from short-term internal needs which might or might not feed into long-term plans.¹⁷⁴ Their relationship to processes of organisation such as that undertaken by Abbot Leofsige is at best indirect. Details mattered for the scribes of the memoranda, but not as part of a programmatic written account of the abbey’s lands.

If anything unites the six memoranda, it is their situational nature: a focus on current conditions and acts. They give some impression of the assorted day-to-day business of a major landlord, and form part of a tradition of entering documents into holy books visible at several other late Anglo-Saxon Benedictine monasteries; a practice which stemmed from precedents in both western Britain and Carolingian, and especially post-Carolingian, Francia.¹⁷⁵ Parallel cases of detailed but highly targeted record-making include a pair of lists

¹⁷² For such arrangements see Faith, *English Peasantry*, pp. 15–88.

¹⁷³ Ely itself apparently did so on a significant scale: of particular interest are the two leaves written at Ely in the tenth century now catalogued as London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius B.V, vol. I, fols. 74 and 76 (Ker, *Catalogue*, no. 22), which were originally part of the eighth-century gospel-book Cambridge, University Library, MS Kk.1.24 (E. A. Lowe (ed.), *Codices Latini Antiquiores: a Palaeographical Guide to Latin Manuscripts Prior to the Ninth Century*, 11 vols. and supplement (Oxford, 1934–71) II, no. 138). They contain an assortment of texts, including the record of a layman’s grant of land to his goldsmith, the regulations of the gild of thegnas at Cambridge and a list of serfs belonging to Ely at Hatfield, discussed with references to relevant editions in Keynes, ‘Ely’, pp. 5–6.

¹⁷⁴ S. E. Kelly, *Charters of Bath and Wells*, AS Charters 13 (Oxford, 2007), p. 149; Foot, ‘Internal and External Audiences’, p. 184.

¹⁷⁵ For the Welsh precedents, see D. Jenkins and M. E. Owen, ‘The Welsh Marginalia in the Lichfield Gospels’, *CMCS* 5 (1983), 37–66, at 61–5; together with the papers in H. Pryce (ed.), *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies* (Cambridge, 1998); and, for the bigger picture, W. Davies, ‘The Latin Charter-Tradition in Western Britain, Brittany and Ireland in the Early Mediaeval Period’, *Ireland in Early Mediaeval Europe: Studies in Memory of Kathleen Hughes*, ed. D. Whitelock, R. McKitterick and D. N. Dumville (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 258–80. For the European dimension, see J.-P. Devroey, ‘Au-delà des polyptyques: sédimentation, copie et renouvellement des documents de gestion seigneuriaux entre Seine et Rhin (IXe–XIIIe siècle)’, *Décrire, inventorier, enregistrer entre Seine et Rhin au moyen âge*, ed. X. Hermand, J.-F. Nieuws and É. Renard (Paris, 2012), pp. 53–86, esp. 67–70. Devroey shows that additions similar in character to some of the late Anglo-Saxon documents were added to existing polyptychs, or to holy books, especially between the tenth and twelfth centuries (with some polyptychs

of servile peasants put together for the churches of Ely and Rochester in the later tenth century,¹⁷⁶ and several others, of which only a selection can be mentioned here. At Dorchester (or one of its estates) shortly after the Norman Conquest (probably 1067×1072), a scribe added a set of miscellaneous notes on monetary income from various Oxfordshire holdings to a penitential collection.¹⁷⁷ A set of assorted notes written at Bury St Edmunds over a period of at least three decades during the abbacies of Leofstan (1044–65) and Baldwin (1065–97/8) shares the miscellaneous quality of the Ely memoranda. The latter include accounts of how food-rent was divided up into twelve month units (similar to Leofsige's arrangement in the *Liber Eliensis*), with a modification to one of the units; accounts of what livestock, crops and food supplies were on individual estates at a given time; an agreement about how much food-rent would be furnished from one particular individual; and also lists of church furnishings and books, and records of gifts from abbots and others. This eclectic mix of material may have been collected from one or more earlier sources into its present location as a supplementary quire added to a bilingual manuscript of the Benedictine rule.¹⁷⁸ A similar fragment dated tentatively to the early eleventh century records the resources of an unnamed estate, and is preserved in a manuscript of works by Gregory the Great later preserved at Bury but perhaps relating to land owned by St Augustine's, Canterbury;¹⁷⁹ another, mentioned above, is embedded into a larger collection of vernacular records (mostly of land acquisitions) from Peterborough, and concerns the land at Yaxley which was apparently held by Thorney.¹⁸⁰

These eclectic documents and others like them illustrate a distinct dimension of late Anglo-Saxon record-keeping. Passing details or arrangements were written down in a pre-existing book. They relate to, but are at the same time quite distinct from, systematic surveys of landed property. Indeed, the Ely memoranda and their counterparts show the kind of information that had to be gathered as a prelude to setting up a lasting regime for an estate or group of estates. Surveys such as those of Hurstbourne and Tidenham from late Anglo-Saxon

themselves being entered in Bibles, as in the case of the early-tenth-century example from Saint-Pierre-des-Fossés, written into an early-ninth-century Bible: Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 3). Pierre Chaplais ('Who Introduced Charters into England? The Case for Augustine' (1969), as repr. in *Prisca Munimenta: Studies in Archival & Administrative History Presented to Dr A. E. J. Hollaender*, ed. F. Ranger (London, 1973), pp. 88–107, at 105–6) also raised the possibility of documents being entered into gospel-books in England as early as the seventh century, though there are no examples surviving from before the tenth (save for the special case of S 1204a (*CantCC* 97), a late-ninth-century addition to a gospel-book recounting how it was redeemed from the vikings by an ealdorman and his wife). See also above, n. 1.

¹⁷⁶ Pelteret, 'Two Old English Lists'. One might compare some of the Carolingian polyptychs, specifically those listing servile peasants tied to Saint-Victor at Marseille in 814×818 and to Farfa in 799×832 (R. H. C. Davis, 'Domesday Book: Continental Parallels', *Domesday Studies: Papers Read at the Novocentenary Conference of the Royal Historical Society and the Institute of British Geographers*, Winchester, 1986, ed. J. C. Holt (Woodbridge, 1987), pp. 15–39, at 31–2).

¹⁷⁷ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 718 (s. x², southern England), fol. 179r. For discussion see J. Blair, 'Estate Memoranda of c. 1070 from the See of Dorchester-on-Thames', *EHR* 116 (2001), 114–23. Blair notes the conditions of the years around 1070 (with many incomers who possessed no familiarity with the local language or customs) were especially conducive to the production of incidental records such as these.

¹⁷⁸ Now preserved in Oxford, Corpus Christi College, MS 197, 106v–109r. The contents are printed and translated in *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, ed. Robertson, pp. 192–201 (no. 104); see also D. C. Douglas, 'Fragments of an Anglo-Saxon Survey from Bury St Edmunds', *EHR* 43 (1928), 376–82. The key discussion now is Foot, 'Internal and External Audiences', esp. pp. 177–85 (with a new translation at pp. 191–3). For the booklist, see M. Lapidge, 'Surviving Booklists from Anglo-Saxon England', *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England: Studies Presented to Peter Clemoes on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. M. Lapidge and H. Gneuss (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 33–89, at 57–8 (no. VII).

¹⁷⁹ Cambridge, Pembroke College, MS 88, fol. 167v. Stokes, *English Vernacular Minuscule*, pp. 135 and 200; a looser dating was assigned earlier by Ker, *Catalogue*, p. 125 (no. 77).

¹⁸⁰ S 1488 (*Pet* 29e).

England,¹⁸¹ the numerous larger-scale polyptychs dealing with numerous estates in the Carolingian Empire, and perhaps Domesday Book in the later eleventh century, must all have owed much to records like the Ely memoranda, and to the sworn reports that are thought to lie behind them. To enter these details into a holy book, rather than simply taking them on trust or committing them to a wax tablet or loose scrap of parchment, also underscored the spiritual, moral dimensions of the relationship between landlords and tenants. Traditions of organised and morally-charged management of economic resources were deeply embedded in Christian monasticism.¹⁸² An idiosyncratic blend of moral concern and practicality emerged in late Anglo-Saxon documents on estate management, as most famously manifested in the tracts *Gerefa* and *Rectitudines singularum personarum*.¹⁸³ The focus of these was more on individual properties and their effective running through responsible agents than on big-picture management embodied by the Carolingian capitularies and polyptychs.¹⁸⁴ A critical figure in these texts is the reeve: the man responsible for the smooth running of an estate, who served as a mediator between the landlord and his or her rights in relation to the land and its inhabitants. Some of the men whose responsibilities are named in the memoranda – such as Ælfnoth at Hatfield in 3a and 3c – might well have been reeves or local agents of lower status, and reeves might have played a role in communicating the details in the memoranda from individual estates to Ely.¹⁸⁵ The moralised presentation of the reeve's duties in *Gerefa* and *Rectitudines* speaks volumes about the interconnection between land management and the highly literate, moralistic environment of the contemporary Church,¹⁸⁶ and looks forward to the expectations of steward, bailiff and reeve expressed in *Seneschaucy* and related estate-management tracts of the thirteenth century.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸¹ For an edition of Hurstbourne, see *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, ed. Robertson, pp. 206–7 (no. 110) (S 359); for Tidenham, see *Bath and Wells*, ed. Kelly, pp. 147–51 (no. 24). The dates of these documents remain a matter of debate, neatly summed up by Kelly, *Bath and Wells*, pp. 149–50. Essentially, traditional opinion held that they belonged towards the end of the Anglo-Saxon period (F. W. Maitland, *Domesday Book and Beyond: Three Essays in the Early History of England* (Cambridge, 1897), pp. 329–32), but more recent studies have raised the possibility of an earlier date, perhaps in the tenth century (H. P. R. Finberg, 'The Churls of Hurstbourne', in his *Lucerna: Studies of Some Problems in the Early History of England* (London, 1964), pp. 131–43; P. D. A. Harvey, 'Rectitudines Singularum Personarum and Gerefa', *EHR* 108 (1993), 1–22, esp. 17–18; R. J. Faith, 'Tidenham, Gloucestershire, and the History of the Manor in England', *Landscape History* 16 (1994), 39–51).

¹⁸² See above, n. 145–51.

¹⁸³ *Gesetze*, ed. Liebermann I, 444–55; *English Historical Documents. Vol. II: 1042–1189*, ed. D. C. Douglas and G. W. Greenaway, 2nd ed. (London, 1981), pp. 973–8 (no. 172). New editions and translations of the two texts by Thom Gobbitt are available online as part of the Early English Laws Project (www.earlyenglishlaws.ac.uk). Both texts are preserved in eleventh-century copies, and since the time of Liebermann have often been viewed as an associated pair, but they may go back to separate origins at an earlier date in the tenth century. See Harvey, 'Rectitudines'; P. Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century. Vol. 1: Legislation and its Limits* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 232–3 and 387–9.

¹⁸⁴ Harvey, 'Rectitudines', p. 20. The main pre-Conquest English exception is the remarkable cartulary put together under Archbishop Wulfstan (1002–23) at Worcester (London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius A.XIII, fols. 1–109 and 111–18). This constitutes an important witness to how a major ecclesiastical endowment could be structured, and it was used as an ongoing register of tenants as leases passed down through multiple generations. See discussion in S. Baxter, 'Archbishop Wulfstan and the Administration of God's Property', *Wulfstan, Archbishop of York: the Proceedings of the Second Alcuin Conference*, ed. M. Townend (Turnhout, 2004), pp. 161–205, at 165–76; and F. Tinti, *Sustaining Belief: the Church of Worcester from c. 870 to c. 1100* (Farnham, 2010), pp. 85–125.

¹⁸⁵ R. Faith, 'Estate Management', *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. M. Lapidge, J. Blair, S. Keynes and D. Scragg, 2nd ed. (Chichester, 2014), pp. 180–1, at 181.

¹⁸⁶ J. Sabapathy, *Officers and Accountability in Medieval England, 1170–1300* (Oxford, 2014), pp. 55–60.

¹⁸⁷ *Seneschaucy*, for example, states that a steward should check on rents and services (ch. 2) and on the current extent and resources of land (ch. 12), while a bailiff should look to the improvement of the estate's capacity (ch. 18) and keep track of animals on the property (ch. 26–7). See *Walter of Henley and Other Treatises on Estate Management and Accounting*, ed. D. Oschinsky (Oxford, 1971), pp. 264–9 and 272–3.

A slightly different priority shines through from behind the memoranda and related documents. Their conception of moralised land-management in the early eleventh century seems to have revolved around individuals. Offices as such are not mentioned, and are in a sense incidental: what mattered were the names and details. Entering these into a holy book brought the current seigneurial position of the abbey into the direct sight of God and St Æthelthryth, and placed both the information and those who offered it under divine scrutiny.¹⁸⁸ The memoranda served as a guarantee of the details they expressed, and of the relevant individual's veracity at the time of entry. They also put on record the context of a particular event or payment, providing a bulwark against a one-off becoming a precedent, or vice versa. Actually writing the names or other details in a holy book would have been just one component of the exercise.¹⁸⁹ A few other such cases record how entering a record in a holy book was the culmination of (and testament to) a series of formal events.¹⁹⁰ Hugh Candidus records how a group of men swore to an agreement in the presence of the abbot of Peterborough early in the twelfth century, but omitted their names from his chronicle 'because they are written in the text of the gospel-book' (*quia in texto evangelii scripti sunt*).¹⁹¹ During the reign of Cnut, a Herefordshire landowner named Thurkil the White and his wife came out the better from a dispute over land at the shire court after the testamentary declaration of his wife's kinswoman was reported verbally to the court, and as a result Thurkil 'rode to St Æthelberht's minster, with the consent and cognisance of the whole assembly, and had it [i.e. the resultant document] recorded in a gospel book',¹⁹² which is exactly where the record survives. It is entirely possible that entering the Ely memoranda into a revered book was part of a similar series of actions that began with queries and summonses, and proceeded to ceremonial, oaths and, finally, writing.¹⁹³ A process of this kind probably stemmed from an occasion when rents were established or changed, when relevant personnel were replaced, or when there was some sort of uncertainty or dispute;¹⁹⁴ the unspecified troubles at Thorney are a good illustration of the circumstances that prompted the making of

¹⁸⁸ W. Brown, 'Charters as Weapons. On the Role Played by Early Medieval Dispute Records in the Disputes they Record', *JMH* 38 (2002), 227–48, esp. p. 229; J. Barrow, 'Demonstrative Behaviour and Political Communication in Later Anglo-Saxon England', *ASE* 36 (2007), 127–50, at 145–6; and Foot, 'Internal and External Audiences', pp. 167–8.

¹⁸⁹ H. Gittos, *Liturgy, Architecture, and Sacred Places in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 2013), p. 17; cf. D. W. Rollason, *Saints and Relics in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 191–3 on the role of relics in pledges written up in this way.

¹⁹⁰ On ceremonial in connection with charters, see Keynes, 'Church Councils', pp. 64–92; L. Roach, *Kingship and Consent in Anglo-Saxon England, 871–978: Assemblies and the State in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 78–101. For the role of books in similar situations, see N. Karn, 'Textus Roffensis and its Uses', *Textus Roffensis: Law, Language, and Libraries in Early Medieval England*, ed. B. O'Brien and B. Bombi (Turnhout, 2015), pp. 49–67.

¹⁹¹ Hugh Candidus, *Chronicon* (ed. Mellows, pp. 88–9). I am grateful to Julia Crick for this reference, which is discussed by her in connection with the administrative importance of Old English after the Conquest in a forthcoming paper.

¹⁹² 'Ðurcill rad ða to s[an]c[t]e Æþelberhtes mynstre be ealles þæs folces leafe 7 gewitnesse 7 let settan on ane Cristes boc'. S 1462 (*Anglo-Saxon Charters*, ed. Robertson, pp. 150–3 (no. 78)). For discussion see S. Keynes, 'Diocese and Cathedral before 1056', *Hereford Cathedral: a History*, ed. G. E. Aylmer and J. Tiller (London, 2000), pp. 3–20, at 16–17; P. Stafford, 'Women before and after the Norman Conquest', *TRHS*, 6th ser., 4 (1994), 221–49, at 241–2. It should be noted that Robertson was unaware of the apparent original gospel book entry (Hereford, Cathedral Library, P.I.2, fols. 134r–v (s. viii^{med}, west midlands or Wales)), and worked from earlier editions made in the eighteenth century and after. For examples of similar but more allusive references to the act of writing in a gospel book from eleventh-century Canterbury, see S 1047, 1464 and 1466 (*CantCC* 162–3 and 181).

¹⁹³ For the significance of writing in relation to oaths in the early Middle Ages, see *inter alia* R. McKitterick, *The Carolingians and the Written Word* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 73; M. Ammon, "'Ge Mid Wedde Ge Mid Aðe": the Functions of Oath and Pledge in Anglo-Saxon Legal Culture', *Historical Research* 86 (2013), 515–35.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. Foot, 'Internal and External Audiences', p. 178.

memoranda, as well as the emphasis of the resultant documents on details rather than what had happened to prompt such measures. The broader situation, together with minutiae like the date and relationships of those involved, would be well known to the scribe, the individuals involved and also any witnesses. Just as a moneyer's name on a penny was a guarantee, introduced by the cross, of the good quality of the coin, so too the memoranda were a spiritual guarantee of the duty and responsibility of the whole chain of agents who had brought that information to St Æthelthryth's abbey.

CONCLUSION

The memoranda stem from a monastic background and demonstrate how writing was used to uphold a monastery's material interests. Their very survival is owed to the monks of Ely, and latterly to the detective-work of scholars in the first half of the twentieth century. But through these texts, the economic root system of eastern England in the century before Domesday Book also comes briefly but sharply into focus. One finds in the memoranda a series of snapshots of a very distinct landscape: wet and dry land worked side by side, exploited in different yet complementary ways by tenants and landlords. Eels abounded, but so too did pigs, sheep and fields of crops. Written from a seigneurial perspective, the memoranda naturally concentrate on Ely's income and outgoings, closely guarded by a network extending from the abbot and monks down to reeves and other local agents scattered across eastern England. But in recording the monastery's interests, the memoranda implicitly reveal the undercurrents on which Ely's prosperity was based. This was a society in which the farmers and fishermen of west Norfolk owed thousands of eels in rent; it was at the same time one in which there must have been demand enough for all the eels that were not being handed over, surely amounting to many thousands more. This was a society in which herring from the deeps of the North Sea could be bought cheaply and in bulk far inland, hinting at well-developed networks of production, distribution and marketing. This was a society in which money could be used by the abbey (and presumably others) to alter the agricultural landscape by drawing on a market which could readily produce the necessary commodities and labour. This was a society in which the monastery could buy surplus corn, land and livestock – sometimes perhaps from its own tenants – to offset a shortfall or strengthen an estate's productive capacity. This was a society with close bonds between town and countryside, including a market for specialised products such as dyes. There were, in short, many cogs interlocking in the world behind the memoranda. What these texts provide is nothing less than an insight into how a major monastery negotiated the sophisticated agricultural economy and multi-tiered commercial interests of eastern England in the early eleventh century.